The Patriot

by Antonio Fogazzaro

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THE PATRIOT

(PICCOLO MONDO ANTICO)

By

ANTONIO FOGAZZARO

Author of "The Saint"

Translated from the Italian by

M. PRICHARD-AGNETTI

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
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INTRODUCTION

The Patriot (Piccolo Mondo Antico) was published in Milan in 1896, and has reached its forty-fourth edition, which is in itself sufficient proof of its popularity; for Italians do not purchase books largely, and one volume will often make the tour of a town, coming out of the campaign in rags and a newspaper cover.

Although The Patriot is not an historical novel in the true sense of the term, it certainly throws a wonderful side-light on those ten years of "deadly cold and awful silence," a silence broken only from time to time by the cries of the martyrs of Mantua, by the noise of inward strife in the Papal States, and by the weeping of mothers who saw their sons disappear behind the clanging doors of Austrian fortresses. These ten years stretched drearily from the disastrous field of Novara to the glorious days of Magenta, Solferino and San Martino (1849–59).

Antonio Fogazzaro, born in Vicenza in 1842, was a child when the battle of Novara was fought and lost; but when the French drove the Austrians from the bloody field of Magenta, he, a youth of seventeen, was ready to be fired with patriotic enthusiasm.

During those years, there was little the patriots could do save to feed the fire of hatred against the foreign oppressors, and prepare, as best they could, in secret and in constant danger of death, for the moment when Piedmont should once more give the signal of revolt.

In the night that succeeded the battle of Novara, King Carlo Alberto, who had risked all for the freedom of the rest of Italy—for it must be remembered that his own kingdom of Sardinia was independent of Austria—discouraged, mortified, and impoverished, abdicated in favour of his son, Victor Emmanuel. It was no longer possible to continue hostilities, and Carlo Alberto hoped that his son, whose wife, Maria Adelaide, was the daughter of an Austrian grand-duke, might obtain more favourable conditions from Austria for his unhappy country. On the following day the young King and Field-Marshal Radetzky met, and a peace was signed, the conditions of which Victor Emmanuel found great difficulty in persuading his parliament to ratify. But in the end Piedmont paid Austria an indemnity of seventy-five million francs.

Victor Emmanuel had not, however, abandoned the idea of United Italy, and could say with Massimo D'Azeglio: We will begin over again, and do better! Count Camillo Benso di Cavour, one of the greatest statesmen of modern times, stood by the King from the first. They immediately turned their attention towards bettering the condition of their impoverished country, and soon succeeded in rendering the little capital, Turin, one of the brightest and most prosperous cities of the Continent. The patriots, the best men in Italy, flocked to Turin from all those states where Austria or her tools held sway. The Piedmontese government granted subsidies to

some of these refugees, and found employment for others, receiving all with open arms.

Meanwhile, Mazzini and Garibaldi were working, sometimes at home, sometimes in exile, while in Mantua brave patriots, among them several saintly priests, were suffering torture and death at the hands of the Austrians. The records of their trials revealed such palpable and flagrant violation of all justice, all law, that when the Austrians were at last expelled from Mantua, they were careful to remove these to Vienna, where they are still preserved. The aged mother of one of the priests who suffered execution appealed to the young Empress Elisabeth, begging that her son's body might be restored to her, and receive burial in consecrated ground. But Elisabeth was deaf to the unhappy woman's prayers. During the long and desolate years of her own affliction, how often must the unfortunate Empress have thought of the tears of blood the mothers of Italy had shed! It was Field-Marshal Haynau of inglorious memory, he who for his cruelties in that city had been dubbed the "hyena of Brescia," who tortured these martyrs of Mantua and signed their death-warrants.

All these things were happening during those ten years of heavy silence when Fogazzaro was a child. We can fancy how eagerly he listened to the accounts of these horrors, and to the long and animated discussions his father (Franco Maironi of The Patriot) and his uncle (Uncle Piero) held with the brilliant company that assembled at Casa Fogazzaro. His father took an active part in the defence of Vicenza in 1848, while his mother, whom he has portrayed for us in the lovely character of Signora Luisa Rigey, busied herself with scraping lint and making cockades for the soldiers. These events and scenes, which so deeply impressed the child, were ever present to the mind of the man, and the long cherished project of immortalising those personages and places which were both familiar and dear to him, was at last realised in the pages of The Patriot, in which, evoking personal memories of the past, he gives us a stirring account of the petty persecutions and base meanness to which the mighty Austria stooped during that period of suspense

and anxiety. The intrigues of the rogue Pasotti, the skirmishes of the wicked old Marchesa with the adjutant of the great Radetzky himself, fill us with indignation and contempt, while we thrill with patriotic emotion when Luisa raises her glass and whispers: "Hurrah for Cavour!"—whispers the words, because in those days the very walls had ears, and in her toast there breathed sedition!

As the years passed and peace and prosperity settled over United Italy, another question, that of the religious life, began to occupy the master-mind of Antonio Fogazzaro. Intensely but broadly religious himself, he could not fail to introduce into his work the burning question of belief or unbelief which, from long contemplation and study, had become, as it were, a part of himself. The artistic motive of the book, the struggle between an unbelieving wife and an intensely religious husband, came to the Italian reader as a new revelation. Had Fogazzaro been influenced by certain works which had already excited much comment and discussion in England and America? Perhaps so; but at all events he has treated the subject differently, and in his own masterly fashion; he has spared us the long and tedious tirades of personages who are, after all, simply mouthpieces, and has given us instead two warm and palpitating human beings, who live and act in accordance with their opinions, and whose innermost souls are laid bare to us by their own deeds, their own actions. Franco and Luisa do not discuss and argue, they simply feel, feel intensely, and by a few burning words here, a few delicate touches there, our author leads us to feel with them, to understand and sympathise with their impulses, their passions, and their weaknesses.

We may not agree with Fogazzaro's conclusions, but we cannot but admire the masterly delineation of character, the unstudied and thoroughly artistic arrangement of the work, and the skilful handling of so many different elements.

The very simplicity and directness of his language give to his style a grandeur all its own, and lend a peculiar charm to his descriptions of nature, which form some of the

most fascinating pages of The Patriot. With a few broad strokes, he spreads before us a landscape of ineffable beauty, or shows us the fury of the maddened elements. How marvellous in its solemn grandeur is the picture of the struggle between the sun and the fog, which Uncle Piero witnesses from the terrace at Oria! How wonderful in its awe-inspiring realism is the story of Franco's journey across the mountains, in the darkness of a moonless night! And that glorious picture of the sunrise, when Franco's crushed and tortured soul soars upwards again with the growing light, and, inspired and comforted, he once more squares his shoulders, and takes up his heavy burden of care!

Infinite sweetness breathes from the pages which deal with the short and sunny life of dear little Maria, and there are passages full of humour and whimsical reflections that must remind the English reader of Dickens.

Perhaps when Fogazzaro wrote The Patriot, he had already planned the trilogy of which it forms the first volume, but certainly the trilogy was rather evolved than planned, evolved from the union of two such characters as Franco and Luisa; and probably, while writing the first, the author was, to a certain extent, ignorant of what the second and third volumes would contain; for Luisa and Franco, Jeanne and Piero are not puppets which have been fitted into a story, but the story is in every particular the outcome of their personalities.

Certain it is that when we read the promise contained in the closing lines of The Patriot, we look forward eagerly to the succeeding volumes of the trilogy; and when, after that marvellous scene in the gardener's house, we reluctantly bid farewell to the Saint, our first thought is a hope that the master may soon resume his magic pen and continue the struggle for the purification and regeneration of the Faith, and, through the Faith, of Mankind.

MARY PRICHARD-AGNETTI.

Berceto, Italy, October, 1906.

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Part First

CHAPTER I RISOTTO AND TRUFFLES

On the lake a cold breva [A] was blowing, striving to drive away the grey clouds which clung heavily about the dark mountain-tops. Indeed, when the Pasottis reached Casarico on their way down from Albogasio Superiore, it had not yet begun to rain. The waves beat and thundered on the shore, jostling the boats at their moorings, while flashing tongues of white foam showed, here and there, as far as the frowning banks of the Doi over yonder. But down in the west, at the end of the lake, a line of light could be seen, a sign of approaching calm, of the diminishing breva, and behind the gloomy Caprino hill appeared the first misty rain. Pasotti, in his full dress black overcoat, a tall hat on his head, his hand grasping a thick bamboo

walking-stick, was pacing nervously along the shore, peering now in this direction, now in that, or stopping to beat his stick upon the ground, and to shout for that ass of a boatman, who had not yet appeared.

The little black boat, with its red cushions, its red and white awning, its movable seat, used only on special occasions, fixed crosswise in its place, the oars lying ready amidship, was struggling, buffeted by the waves, between two coal barges, which hardly moved.

"Pin!" shouted Pasotti, growing more and more angry. "Pin!"

The only answer was the regular, constant thundering of the waves on the shore, and the bumping of one boat against another. At that moment one would have said there was not so much as a live dog in the whole of Casarico. Only a plaintive, old voice, like the husky falsetto of a ventriloquist, groaned from beneath the portico—

"Hadn't we better walk?"

At last Pin appeared in the direction of San Mamette.

"Hurry up, there!" shrieked Pasotti, raising his arms. The man began to run.

"Beast!" Pasotti roared. "It was with good reason they gave you the name of a dog!"

"Hadn't we better walk, Pasotti?" groaned the plaintive voice. "Let us walk!"

Pasotti continued to abuse the boatman, who was hastily unfastening the chain of his boat from a ring, fixed in the bank. Presently he turned towards the portico, with an authoritative air, and jerking his chin, motioned to some one to come forward.

"Let us walk, Pasotti!" the voice groaned once more.

He shrugged his shoulders, made a rough gesture of command with his hand, and started down towards the boat.

Then an old lady appeared under one of the arches of the portico, her lean person enveloped in an Indian shawl, below which a black silk skirt showed. Her head was surmounted by a fashionable bonnet, spindling, and lofty, trimmed with tiny yellow

roses, and black lace. Two black curls framed the wrinkled face; the eyes were large and gentle, and the wide mouth was shaded by a faint moustache.

"Oh Pin!" she exclaimed, clasping her canary-coloured gloves, and pausing on the bank to gaze helplessly at the boatman. "Can we really venture out with the lake in this state?"

Her husband made a still more imperious gesture, and his face assumed a still sourer expression. The poor woman slipped down to the boat in silence, and was helped in, trembling violently.

"I commend myself to Our Lady of Caravino, my good Pin!" she said. "What a dreadful lake!"

The boatman shook his head, smiling.

"By the way!" Pasotti exclaimed, "have you brought the sail along?"

"It is up at the house," Pin answered. "Shall I go for it? But perhaps the Signora here, might be frightened. Besides, here comes the rain!"

"Go and fetch it," said Pasotti.

The Signora, who was as deaf as a post, had not heard a word of this conversation, and, greatly amazed at seeing Pin run off, asked her husband where he was going.

"The sail!" Pasotti shouted into her face. She sat, bending forward, her mouth wide open, striving in vain, to catch, at least, the sound of his voice.

"The sail!" he repeated, still louder, his hands framing his mouth.

She began to think that she understood. Trembling with fright she drew a questioning hieroglyphic in the air with her finger. Pasotti answered by drawing an imaginary curve in the air, and blowing into it; then he silently nodded his head. His wife, convulsed with terror, started to leave the boat.

"I am going to get out!" said she in an agonised voice. "I am going to get out! I want to walk!"

Her husband seized her by the arm, and pulled her down into her seat, fixing two flaming eyes upon her.

Meanwhile the boatman had returned with the sail. The poor woman writhed and sighed; tears stood in her eyes, and she cast despairing glances at the shore, but she was silent. The mast was raised, the two lower ends of the sail were made fast, and the boat was about to put out, when a voice bellowed from the portico—

"Hallo! Hallo! The Signor Controllore!" and out popped a big, rubicund priest, with a glorious belly, a large, black straw hat, a cigar in his mouth, and an umbrella under his arm.

"Oh! Curatone!" Pasotti exclaimed. "Well done! Are you invited to the dinner also? Are you coming to Cressogno with us?"

"If you will take me," the curate of Puria answered, going down towards the boat. "Well, I never! The Signora Barborin is here also."

The expression of his big face became supremely amiable, his great voice became supremely sweet.

"She is devilish frightened, poor creature!" Pasotti grinned, while the curate was making a series of little bows, and smiling sweetly upon the lady, who was more terrified than ever at the prospect of this added weight. She began to gesticulate silently, as if the others had been more deaf than she herself. She pointed to the lake, to the sail, to the bulk of the enormous curate, raising her eyes to heaven, hiding her face in her hands, or pressing them to her heart.

"I don't weigh so very much," said the curate laughing. "Hold your tongue, will you?" he added, turning to Pin, who had murmured disrespectfully: "A good, big fish!"

"I'll tell you how we can cure her of her fright!" Pasotti exclaimed. "Pin, have you a little table, and a pack of tarocchi [B] cards?"

"I have a pack," Pin replied. "But they are rather greasy."

They had great difficulty in making Signora Barbara—generally called Barborin—understand the matter in hand. She would not understand, not even when her husband forced the pack of filthy cards into her hands.

For the present, however, playing was out of the question. The boat was being laboriously rowed forward towards the mouth of the river of San Mamette, where they would be able to hoist the sail. The surf, flung back from the shore, clashed with the in-coming waves, and the little boat was tossing about among the seething, foaming crests. The lady was weeping and Pasotti was swearing at Pin, who had not stood out into the lake far enough. At last the fat curate seized a couple of oars, and planting his big person firmly in the middle of the boat, bent to his work with such good will that a few strokes sufficed to send them forward and out of difficulty. Then the sail was hoisted, and the boat glided quietly and smoothly onward, rocking slowly and gently, while the water gurgled softly under its keel. Then the smiling priest sat down beside Signora Barborin, who had closed her eyes and was muttering. But Pasotti drummed impatiently on the table with the cards, and play they must.

Meanwhile the grey rain was creeping slowly towards them, veiling the mountains, and stifling the breva.

The lady's breath returned in proportion as the wind's breath diminished, and she played resignedly, calmly oblivious to her own gross mistakes, and her husband's consequent outbursts of rage. When the rain began to rustle on the boat's awning, on the lifeless waves, which in the now almost breathless atmosphere, were rolling in against the rocks of the Tentiòn; when the boatman, judging it best to lower the sail, took to the oars once more, then, at last, Signora Barborin breathed freely. "Pin, my good fellow!" she said tenderly, and began playing tarocchi with a zeal, an energy and an expression of beatitude, which neither mistakes nor scoldings could trouble.

Many days of breva and of rain, of sunshine and of storm have dawned and faded away over the Lake of Lugano, over the hills of Valsolda since that game of cards was played by Signora Pasotti, her husband, the retired controller of customs, and the big curate of Puria, in the boat which coasted slowly along the rocky shore between San Mamette and Cressogno in the misty rain.

The times were grey and sleepy, in keeping with the aspect of sky and lake, after the breva had subsided, the breeze which had so terrified Signora Pasotti. The great breva [C] of 1848, after bringing a few hours of sunshine, and striving awhile with the heavy clouds, had slumbered for three years, allowing one breathless, gloomy, silent day to follow another in those places where the scene of this humble tale of mine is laid.

The king and queens of tarocchi, the mondo, the matto and the bagatto, were imported personages at that time, and in those parts; minor powers tolerated benevolently by the great, silent Austrian empire; and their antagonisms, their alliances, their wars, were the only political questions which might be freely discussed. Even Pin, as he rowed, eagerly poked his hooked and inquisitive nose into Signora Barborin's cards, withdrawing it reluctantly again. Once he paused in his rowing, and let his nose hover above the cards, to see how the poor woman would extricate herself from a difficult position; what she would do with a certain card it was dangerous to play, and equally dangerous to hold. Her husband thumped impatiently on the little table, the big curate sorted his cards with a blissful smile, while she clasped hers to her bosom, now laughing, now groaning, and rolling her eyes from one to the other of her companions.

"She holds the matto," the curate whispered.

"She always goes on like that when she has the matto," said Pasotti, and called to her, thumping the table one more—

"Out with the matto!"

"I will throw him into the lake!" said she. She cast a glance towards the prow, and, as an excuse, remarked that they were nearing Cressogno, and that it was time to stop playing.

Her husband fumed awhile, but finally resigned himself to putting on his gloves.

"Trout to-day, curate!" he observed, while his meek wife buttoned them for him. "White truffles, grouse, and wine from Ghemme."

"Then you know!" the curate exclaimed. "I know it also. The cook told me yesterday at Lugano."

"And besides, some ladies have been invited; the Carabellis, mother and daughter. Those Carabellis from Loveno, you know."

"Indeed!" the curate exclaimed. "Is there any scheme——? There is Don Franco, now, in his boat. But what a strange flag the young man is flying! I never saw him with it before."

Pasotti raised the awning and looked out. At a little distance a boat flying a white and blue flag rose and fell in unison with the weary motion of the waves. In the stern, under the flag, sat Don Franco Maironi, the grandson of the old Marchesa Orsola, who was giving the dinner.

Pasotti saw him rise, grasp the oars, and pull away, rowing slowly towards the upper lake, towards the wild gulf of the Doi, the white and blue flag spread wide, and floating above the boat's trail.

"Where is that eccentric young man going?" said he. And he muttered between his teeth; in the strained and husky voice of a Milanese rough—"A surly fellow!"

"They say he has great talents," the priest observed.

"An empty head," the other declared. "Much arrogance, little learning, no manners!"

"And half rotten," he added. "If I were that young woman——"

"Which?" the curate questioned.

"Why, Signorina Carabelli."

"Mark my words, Signor Controllore! If the grouse and white truffles are meant for that Carabelli girl, they are thrown away!"

"Do you know something?" Pasotti inquired, his eyes flaming with curiosity.

The priest did not answer because, at that point, the bow grated on the gravel, and touched the landing-stage. He got out first; Pasotti, with rapid and imperious gestures, gave his wife some orders of unknown purport. Then he himself left the boat. Last to get out was the poor woman, wrapped in her Indian shawl, bending under the tall, black bonnet with the little, yellow roses, staggering, and stretching out her big hands in the canary-coloured gloves. The two curls, hanging on either side of her meek ugliness, gave her a special air of resignation, under the umbrella of her husband, proprietor, inspector and jealous custodian of so much elegance.

The three went up to the portico, by means of which the little Villa Maironi spans the road leading from the landing-stage to the parish-church of Cressogno. Between two happy sighs, the curate and Pasotti sniffed an indistinct, warm odour, which floated out from the open vestibule of the villa.

"Ah! risotto! risotto!" the priest whispered, with a greedy glow on his face.

Pasotti, who had a keen nose, shook his head, knitting his brows in manifest contempt for that other nose.

"It is not risotto," said he.

"What do you mean by saying it is not risotto?" the priest exclaimed in vexation. "It is risotto; risotto with truffles. Don't you smell it?"

Both stopped half way across the vestibule, sniffing the air noisily like a couple of hounds.

"Do me the favour, my dear curate, to confine your remarks to posciandra," said Pasotti, after a long pause, alluding to a certain coarse dish the peasants prepare,

with cabbage and sausages. "Truffles there are, but risotto there is not!"

"Posciandra! posciandra!" the other grumbled, somewhat offended. "As to that——"

The poor, meek lady understood that they were quarrelling, and, much alarmed, began pointing upward towards the ceiling, with her right forefinger, to warn them that they might be overheard up above. Her husband seized her uplifted arm, signed to her to sniff, and then blew into her wide open mouth the word: "Risotto."

She hesitated, not having heard distinctly. Pasotti shrugged his shoulders. "She don't understand anything," said he. "The weather is going to change," and he went up stairs, followed by his wife. The stout curate wished to take another look at Don Franco's boat. "The Carabellis, indeed!" he mused, but he was immediately recalled by Signora Barborin, who begged him to sit beside her at the table; she was so timid, poor creature!

The fumes of the pots and kettles filled the stairs with warm fragrance. "It is not risotto," the vanguard murmured. "It is risotto," the rearguard answered in the same tone. And thus they continued, ever more softly: "It is not risotto; it is risotto," until Pasotti pushed open the door of the red room, where the mistress of the house was usually to be found.

A hideous, lean, little dog trotted, barking, towards Signora Barborin, who was endeavouring to smile, while Pasotti was putting on his most obsequious expression, and the curate, entering last, his big face all sweetness, was really, in his heart, consigning the cursed little beast to hell.

"Friend, come here, Friend!" the old Marchesa said placidly. "Dear Signora, dear Controllore, and the curate!"

Her gruff nasal voice was pitched in the same calm tone to the guests and to the dog. She had risen to receive Signora Barborin, but did not move a step from the sofa, and stood there, a squat figure, with dull, torpid eyes beneath her marble forehead, and her black wig, which rounded out over her temples in the shape of two big

snails. Her face must once have been handsome, and still retained in its pallor, tinged with yellow like old marble, a certain cold majesty, which—like her glance and her voice—never varied with the varying emotions of her soul. The big curate, standing at a distance, made her two or three jerky bows, but Pasotti kissed her hand, while Signora Barborin, who felt her blood turn to ice under the old lady's lifeless glance, did not know how to move, nor what to say. Another lady had risen from the sofa when the Marchesa rose, and was staring with an insolent air at Signora Pasotti, at that poor little bundle, old within, and new without! "Signora Pasotti and her husband," said the Marchesa. "Donna Eugenia Carabelli."

Donna Eugenia hardly bowed her head. Her daughter, Donna Carolina, was standing at the window, talking with one of the Marchesa's favourites, the niece of the agent.

The Marchesa did not consider it necessary to disturb her in order to present the new arrivals, and when she had invited them to be seated, she resumed her quiet conversation with Donna Eugenia concerning mutual friends in Milan, while Friend, sniffing and sneezing, circled slowly round Signora Barborin's shawl, which smelt of camphor, or rubbed himself against the curate's calves, studying Pasotti the while, with those pitiful, watery eyes of his, but never once touching him, as if he understood that the master of that Indian shawl, in spite of his amiable expression, would have liked to ring his—Friend's—neck!

And the Marchesa Orsola talked on in her usual guttural, sleepy voice, and Donna Carabelli, in answering, strove to give her loud, imperious voice an amiable ring. But to Pasotti's penetrating glance, and cunning shrewdness it was quite clear that the two old ladies were concealing a certain dissatisfaction, which was greater in the Marchesa Maironi than in Donna Eugenia. Every time the door opened the dim eyes of the one and the dark eyes of the other were turned in that direction. Once it admitted the prefect of the Santuario della Caravina, with little Signor Paolo Sala, called el Paolin—little Paul—and Signor Paolo Pozzi, called el Paolon—big

Paul—who were inseparable companions. Again there entered the Marchese Bianchi, of Oria, a former officer of the kingdom of Italy, with his daughter. He was a noble type of the gallant, old soldier, as he stood beside the attractive and vivacious young girl.

On both occasions a shadow of vexation passed over Donna Carabelli's face. Her daughter also turned her eyes swiftly towards the door when it was thrown open, but presently she would begin chatting and laughing again, more gaily than ever.

"And Don Franco, Marchesa? How is Don Franco?" said the cunning Pasotti, in a mellifluous voice, as he offered his open snuff-box to his hostess.

"Thank you," the Marchesa answered, bending forward a little and dipping her fingers into the snuff. "Franco? To tell the truth I am rather anxious about him. This morning he was not feeling very well, and he has not appeared yet. I trust——"

"Don Franco?" said the Marchese. "He is out in his boat. We saw him a few minutes ago, rowing like any boatman."

Donna Eugenia spread her fan open.

"Well done!" said she, fanning furiously. "A most delightful pastime." Then she closed the fan with a bang, and began biting at it with her lips.

"Probably he needed the air," the Marchesa observed, in her unruffled, nasal drawl.

"Probably he needed a wetting," the prefect of the Caravina murmured, his eyes sparkling with fun. "It is raining!"

"Don Franco is coming now, Signora Marchesa," said the agent's niece, after a glance at the lake.

"That is good," the sleepy, nasal drawl replied. "I hope he is feeling better. If not, he will not speak two words. He is a perfectly healthy boy, but very apprehensive about himself. By the way, Signor Controllore, why does not Signor Giacomo make his appearance?"

"El sior Zacomo," Pasotti began, in imitation of Signor Giacomo Puttini, an old bachelor from the Veneto, who had lived at Albogasio Superiore, near Villa Pasotti, for the last thirty years. "El sior Zacomo——"

"Tut, tut!" said the old lady, interrupting him. "I cannot allow you to make fun of the Venetians, and besides, it is not true that they say Zacomo in the Veneto."

She herself was a native of Padua, and although she had lived in Brescia for half a century, still her Lombard accent was not entirely free from certain chronic suggestions of her Paduan origin. While Pasotti was protesting, with ceremonial horror, that he had only intended to imitate the voice of his beloved friend and neighbour, the door opened a third time. Donna Eugenia, well aware who was coming, did not condescend to look round, but the Marchesa allowed her dull eyes to rest on Don Franco with the greatest unconcern.

Don Franco, sole heir to the name of Maironi, was the son of the Marchesa's son who had died when only eight-and-twenty. He had lost his mother at his birth, and had always lived under the rule of his grandmother Maironi. He was tall and slender, and wore a tangle of rather long, dark hair, and this had procured for him the nickname of el scovin d'i nivol, "the cloud sweeper." He had eloquent, light blue eyes, a keen, animated and pleasing face, quick to blush or turn pale. Now that frowning face was saying very plainly: "Here I am, but I am much put out!"

"How do you feel, Franco?" his grandmother inquired, and added quickly, without waiting for an answer: "Donna Carolina is anxious to hear that piece by Kalkbrenner."

"Oh! not at all!" said the girl, turning to the young man with an air of indifference. "I did indeed say so, but then I am not fond of Kalkbrenner, I had much rather chat with the young ladies."

Franco seemed quite satisfied with the reception he had received and, without waiting for further remarks, went over to talk with the big curate about a fine old

picture they were to inspect together, in the church at Dasio. Donna Eugenia Carabelli was quivering with indignation. She had come from Loveno, with her daughter, after certain secret diplomatic transactions, in which other powers had had a hand. Should this visit be paid or not; would the dignity of the house of Carabelli permit it; did that probability of success which Donna Eugenia exacted, really exist? Such were the final questions, which diplomacy had been called upon to answer, for, notwithstanding the acquaintance of long standing which existed between Mamma Carabelli and Grandmamma Maironi, the young people had met only once or twice, and then but for a few minutes. They were being drawn together by their surroundings of wealth and nobility, of relationships and friendships, as a drop of salt water and a drop of fresh water are mutually drawn together, though the microscopic creatures, which have their being in the one and in the other be condemned to perish if the two drops mingle. The Marchesa had carried her point. It had been decided—apparently out of respect for her age, but really out of respect for her money—that the interview should take place at Cressogno; for, though Franco himself was possessed only of his mother's modest fortune, amounting to eighteen or twenty thousand Austrian lire, his grandmother was enthroned in all her calm dignity upon several millions. And now Donna Eugenia, observing the young man's conduct, was furious with the Marchesa, as well as with those who had exposed her daughter and herself to such humiliation. If, at a single blow, she could have swept away the old woman, her grandson, the gloomy house and the tiresome company, she would have done so with joy; but she must hide her feelings, feign indifference, swallow the indignity and the dinner.

The Marchesa preserved her external, marble placidity, though her heart was filled with anger and rancour against her grandson. Two years before he had dared to ask her consent to his marriage with a young girl of Valsolda, of good family, but neither rich nor of noble birth. His grandmother's decided refusal had rendered the union impossible, and indeed the girl's mother had felt obliged to forbid Don Franco

the house; but the Marchesa was convinced that those people still had their eyes on her millions. She had therefore determined to find a wife for Franco, at once, in order to avert all danger. She had sought for a girl who should be rich, but not too rich; of noble, but not too noble birth; intelligent, but not too intelligent. Having discovered one of the right sort, she suggested her to Franco who flew into a rage, and declared he had no desire to marry. The answer had a very suspicious ring, and she redoubled her vigilance, watching every movement of her grandson and of that "Madam Trap," that being the pleasing title she had bestowed upon Signorina Luisa Rigey.

The Rigey family, consisting of the two ladies only, lived at Castello, in Valsolda, so it was not difficult to watch their movements. Nevertheless the Marchesa could not discover anything. But one evening Pasotti told her, with much hypocritical hesitation and many horrified comments, that the prefect of the Caravina, while chatting with Pasotti himself, with Signor Giacomo Puttini and with Paolin and Paolon, in the chemist's shop at San Mamette, had made the following remark: "Don Franco is going to keep quiet until the old lady is really dead!" The Marchesa having listened to this delicate piece of wit, answered: "A thousand thanks!" through her placid nose, and changed the subject. Later she learned that Signora Rigey—always more or less of an invalid—was suffering from hypertrophia of the heart, and it appeared to her that Franco's spirits were much affected by this illness. It was then that Signorina Carabelli was suggested to her. Carolina Carabelli was perhaps not entirely to her taste, but with that other danger threatening she could not hesitate. She spoke to Franco. This time he did not fly into a rage, but listened in an absent-minded way, and said he would think the matter over. This was perhaps the one act of hypocrisy of his whole life. Then the Marchesa boldly played a high card, and sent for the Carabellis.

She saw plainly enough now, that the game was lost. Don Franco had not been present when the ladies arrived, and later had appeared only once for a few minutes.

During those few minutes his manner had been gracious, but not so his expression. As usual his face had spoken so plainly that—though the Marchesa immediately invented an indisposition for him—no one could have been deceived. But in spite of all this, the old lady was not convinced that she had played her cards unskilfully. Ever since she had reached the age of discretion it had been a rule with her never to recognise in herself a single defect or mistake, never wittingly to wound her own noble and beloved self. Now she preferred to believe that, after her sermon on matrimony, some honeyed but poisonous and ensnaring word had mysteriously reached her grandson. If her disappointment was somewhat mitigated, this was due to the conduct of Signorina Carabelli, whose lively resentment was but ill concealed. This was not pleasing to the Marchesa. The prefect of the Caravina was not mistaken—though he perhaps erred slightly in the form of his discourse, when he said, softly, of her: "She is Austria itself." Like the old Austria of those days, the old Marchesa did not wish for any bold spirits in her empire. Her own iron will would not tolerate others in its neighbourhood. Such an indocile Lombardy-Venice as was Franco was already too much, and the Carabelli girl, who appeared to have a mind and a will of her own, would probably prove a troublesome subject of the house of Maironi, a species of turbulent Hungary.

Dinner was announced. The footman's shaven face, and ill-fitting, grey livery reflected the Marchesa's aristocratic tastes, which, however, had been tempered by habits of economy.

"And where is this Signor Giacomo, Controllore?" she said, without rising.

"I fear he is not coming, Marchesa," Pasotti replied. "I saw him this morning, and said to him: 'Then we shall meet at dinner, Signor Giacomo?' But he squirmed as if he had swallowed a snake. He twisted and turned and at last puffed out: 'Yes, probably. I don't know! Perhaps. I can't say!—Uff! uff. Well really now, my good Controllore, indeed I don't know!—Uff, uff!'—and I could get nothing more out of

him."

The Marchesa summoned the footman to her side, and gave him an order in a low tone. He bowed and withdrew. In his longing for the risotto, the curate of Puria was rocking his body to and fro, and stroking his knees. But the Marchesa on her sofa, seemed turned to stone, so he also became petrified. The others gazed mutely at one another.

Poor Signora Barborin, who had seen the footman, and was surprised at this immobility and these astonished faces, arched her eyebrows, questioning with her eyes, first her husband, then Puria, then the prefect, until a lightning glance from Pasotti petrified her as well. "Perhaps the dinner is burnt!" she reflected, assuming an expression of indifference. "If they would only send us home! What luck that would be!" But in a minute or two the servant returned, and bowed.

"Let us go," the Marchesa said, rising.

In the dining-room the company found a new personage; a little, crooked, old man, with kind eyes and a long nose, that drooped towards his chin.

"Indeed, Signora Marchesa," he began, humbly and timidly, "I have already dined."

"Sit down, Signor Viscontini," the Marchesa replied, who, like all those who are determined to make their world bend to their own comfort and tastes, was well versed in the insolent art of feigning deafness.

The little man did not dare to answer, neither did he dare to sit down.

"Courage, Signor Viscontini!" said Paolin, who stood near him. "What are you doing here?"

"He is filling a gap!" muttered the prefect. In fact, the excellent Signor Viscontini, by trade a tuner of pianos, had that morning come from Lugano to tune the Zelbis' piano at Cima, and Don Franco's also, and at one o'clock he had dined at Casa Zelbi. Then he had come to Villa Maironi, and was now called upon to act as substitute for

Signor Giacomo, because, without him, the company would have numbered thirteen.

A brown liquid was smoking in the silver soup-tureen.

"It is not risotto!" Pasotti whispered to Puria, passing behind him. But the big, mild face gave no sign of having heard.

The Casa Maironi dinners were always lugubrious affairs, and this one promised to be more than usually so. But as a compensation, it was much finer than usual. While they were eating, Pasotti and Puria often exchanged glances of admiration, as if congratulating one another on the exquisite delight they were enjoying; and if ever Puria failed to catch one of Pasotti's glances, Signora Barborin, seated beside him, would apprise him of it by a timid touch of her elbow.

The voices which predominated were those of the Marchesa and Donna Eugenia. Bianchi's large aristocratic nose, and his shrewd but gallant and courteous smile were often turned towards the lady's beauty, which though already fading, had not, as yet, departed. Both belonged to Milanese families of the best blood, and were united by a certain sense of superiority, not only over the other middle-class guests, but over their hosts as well, whose nobility was only provincial. The Marchese was affability itself, and would have conversed amiably with the humblest of his fellow-guests, but Donna Eugenia, in the bitterness of her soul, in her disgust for the place and the persons, attached herself to him as to the only one worthy of her attention, markedly singling him out, in order, also, to offend the others. She embarrassed him by remarking in a loud tone that she did not see how he could ever have taken a fancy to this odious Valsolda. The Marchese, who for many years had led a life of quiet and retirement in this region, where, moreover, the birth of his only daughter, Donna Ester, had taken place, was, first, greatly disconcerted, for this remark was calculated to wound several of their fellow-guests; but finally he burst into a brilliant defence of the place. The Marchesa showed no feeling; Paolin, Paolon, and the prefect, all natives of Valsolda, were silent and abashed.

Then, in pompous language, Pasotti sang the praises of Niscioree, the villa belonging to Bianchi, near Oria. These praises did not seem to please the Marchese, who, himself a most loyal man, had not always found Pasotti to his liking, in the past. He invited Donna Carabelli to come to Niscioree. "You must not go on foot, Eugenia," said the Marchesa, well aware that her friend was tormented by the fear of growing stout. "The road from the Custom House to Niscioree is so narrow! You could not possibly pass." Donna Eugenia protested hotly. "It is not, indeed, the Corso of Porta Renza," said the Marchese, "but neither is it le chemin du Paradis—unfortunately!"

"That it is not! Most certainly not! You may take my word for it!" exclaimed Viscontini, heated, as ill luck would have it, by too many glasses of Ghemme. All eyes were turned upon him, and Paolin said something to him in a low tone. "Crazy?" the little man retorted, his face aflame. "Not by any means! I tell you——" And here he related how, coming from Lugano that morning, he had felt cold in the boat, and had gotten out at Niscioree, intending to pursue his journey on foot; how there, between those two walls, where the path was so narrow an ass could not turn round in it, he had met the customs-officers, who had first abused him for getting out at Niscioree, and had then taken him back to the beastly custom-house. He said that beast of a Ricevitore—the receiver of customs—had confiscated a roll of manuscript music he had with him, taking the crotchets and quavers for a secret political correspondence.

Profound silence followed this recital. Presently the Marchesa declared that Signor Viscontini was entirely in the wrong. He should not have landed at Niscioree; it was forbidden. As to the Ricevitore, he was a most worthy man. Pasotti, with a solemn face, confirmed this statement.

"Excellent official," said he. "Excellent rascal!" muttered the prefect between his teeth. Franco, who at first appeared to be thinking of something else, roused himself,

and cast a contemptuous glance at Pasotti.

"After all," the Marchesa added, "it seems to me that, in the disguise of manuscript music, there might easily——"

"Certainly," said Paolin, who played the Austrian from fear while the mistress of the house was Austrian from conviction.

The Marchese, who in 1815 had broken his sword in two that he might not be obliged to serve the Austrians, smiled saying quietly: "La! C'est un peu fort!"

"But every one knows that the Ricevitore is a beast!" Franco exclaimed.

"I beg to differ with you, Don Franco," said Pasotti.

"Nonsense; beg to differ!" the other retorted. "He is a perfect beast!"

"He is a conscientious man," said the Marchesa, "an official who does his duty."

"Then his masters are the beasts!" Franco exclaimed.

"My dear Franco!" drawled the emotionless voice, "I will not tolerate such language in my house! Thank God we are not in Piedmont!" Pasotti grinned his approval. Then Franco, lifting his plate with both hands shivered it upon the table, with a furious blow. "Holy Mother!" gasped Viscontini, and Paolon, interrupted in the laborious operations of a toothless glutton, uttered an exclamation of alarm. "Yes, yes!" said Franco, rising, his face distorted, "I had better go!" And he left the room. Donna Eugenia at once turned faint, and had to be led away. All the ladies, except Signora Pasotti, followed her out at one door, while the footman entered at another, bearing a great risotto pie. Puria cast a triumphant glance at Pasotti, but Pasotti pretended not to notice. All had risen. Viscontini, the apparent culprit, kept repeating: "I can't make it out! I can't make it out!" and Paolin, much vexed at seeing the dinner thus interrupted, grumbled at him: "What business have you to try to make anything out?" The Marchese was frowning fiercely, but kept silent. At last Pasotti, the real culprit, assuming an air of affectionate sadness, said, as if speaking

to himself: "What a pity! Poor Don Franco! A heart of gold, a good head, but such a disposition! It is indeed unfortunate."

"Alas!" exclaimed Paolin, and Puria added despairingly: "Truly a great misfortune!"

They waited and waited, but the ladies did not return. Then some one moved. Paolin and Puria, their hands clasped behind them, walked slowly towards the sideboard, lost in contemplation of the risotto pie. Puria called sweetly to Pasotti, but Pasotti did not move. "I only wished to observe," the big curate said, hiding his triumph so that it might or might not be apparent, "I only wished to observe that there are white truffles in it."

"I should say that black truffles [D] are not wanting here either," remarked the Marchese pointedly, and slightly accentuating the words.

Footnotes

[A] Breva: local name for a sudden, violent wind blowing from the north, and sweeping over the Italian lakes. [Translator's note.]

[B] Tarocchi: a game of cards once much in vogue in Italy. The "Mondo," the "Matto," the "Bagatto," which will be referred to later on, are all picture cards used in this game. [Translator's note.]

[C] The breva of 1848 means the revolution which swept over Italy in that year, after which the country sunk into apparent calm, but all the while the people, chafing under the Austrian yoke, were preparing for the mighty effort which, at last, set them free. [Translator's note.]

[D] Tartufo: often used to indicate those who are hypocritically pious. The word "black" refers to the priest's black robe. [Translator's note.]

CHAPTER II ON THE THRESHOLD OF A NEW LIFE

"Scoundrels!" snorted Don Franco, climbing the stairs that led to his room. "Silly ass

of an Austrian!" He was venting his wrath on Pasotti, as he could not hurl insults at his grandmother, and the very letters of the word Austrian served so well to grind between his teeth, as he ground his rage, crushing it and enjoying its flavour. When he reached his room his burning indignation died out.

He threw himself into a chair opposite the open window, and gazed at the lake, lying still and mournful in the cloudy afternoon, and at the lonely mountains beyond the sheet of water. He drew a long breath. Ah! how well he felt here all alone! Ah! what peace! How different the atmosphere was to that of the drawing-room! What a precious atmosphere, full of his thoughts and of his loves! He felt a great need of giving himself up to them, and they at once took possession of him, driving from his mind the Carabellis, Pasotti, his grandmother and that egregious beast, the receiver of customs. They? No, one thought alone; a thought composed of mingled love and reason, of anxiety and joy, of so many sweet memories, and at the same time, of tremulous expectancy, for something solemn was drawing near, and would come to him in the shadows of the night. Franco looked at his watch. It wanted a quarter to four o'clock. Seven hours longer to wait. He rose, and leaned with folded arms upon the window sill.

In seven hours another life would begin for him. Beyond the few persons who were to have a part in the event, not even the air itself knew that that same evening, towards eleven o'clock, Don Franco Maironi would wed Signorina Luisa Rigey.

For some time Signora Teresa Rigey, Luisa's mother, had, in all sincerity, begged Franco to bend to his grandmother's will, to abstain from visiting their house, and to think no more of Luisa, who, on her part, was content, for the dignity of the family, and out of respect for her mother, that all official relations with Don Franco should cease. She did not, however, doubt that he would remain faithful to her, and considered herself bound to him for life. His grandmother was not aware that he was now privately reading law, in order that by following a profession, he might be able

to maintain himself. But, as a result of so much anxiety, Signora Rigey contracted a heart trouble, which grew suddenly worse towards the end of August, 1851. Franco wrote to her, begging to be allowed at least, to visit her, since it was not possible for him to nurse her "as would have been his duty." The lady did not feel justified in consenting to this, and the young man, in despair, gave her to understand that he looked upon Luisa as his affianced wife before God, and that he would rather die than to give her up. Then the poor mother, conscious that her life was ebbing day by day, distressed by the uncertain position of her beloved child, and convinced of the young man's strength of purpose, conceived a great longing that—as the marriage would surely take place—it should be celebrated as soon as possible. Everything was arranged in haste, with the aid of the curate of Castello and of Signora Rigey's brother, the civil engineer Ribera, of Oria, who was in the service of the Imperial and Royal Office of Public Works, at Como. The understanding was as follows: The marriage should be celebrated secretly; Franco should remain with his grandmother, and Luisa with her mother, until such a time as they should deem it opportune to acknowledge their union to the Marchesa. Franco relied greatly upon the support of Monsignor Benaglia, Bishop of Lodi, and an old friend of the family, but before he was asked to interfere, the decisive step must be taken. If (as in all probability would be the case) the Marchesa hardened her heart against them, the young couple and Signora Rigey would take up their abode in a house in Oria, belonging to the engineer Ribera, a bachelor who was supporting his sister's family, and would now accept Franco in place of a son.

In seven hours then!

The window overlooked the landing-place and the strip of garden in front of the villa, on the lake side. When he first fell in love, Franco used to stand there and watch for the coming of a certain boat, from which would spring a slim little person, as light as air, but who never, never looked towards his window. At last, one day he had gone down to meet her, and she had waited a moment before jumping out, that

she might accept his helping hand—which, indeed, was most unnecessary. Down there in the garden he had given her a flower, for the first time, the sweet-smelling flower of the Mandevilia suaveolens. Down there, on another occasion, he had cut his finger rather deeply with his penknife, while gathering a little branch of roses for her, and she, by the anxiety she displayed, had given him a sweet proof of her love. How many excursions to the solitary slopes of Monte Bisgnago, on the other side, he had made with her and with other friends, before his grandmother found out! How many lunches and suppers at the little inn at Doi! Franco would come home with the sweetness of the many glances exchanged still lingering in his heart, and shutting himself up in his room, would recall them all, revelling in them in memory. These first emotions of his love now rushed into his mind, not one by one, but all together, from the waters and from the gloomy shores, where his fixed gaze seemed to lose itself in the shadowy past rather than in the misty present. Thus, as he neared the goal, he thought of the first steps he had taken on this long road, of the unforeseen incidents, of the aspect of this much-longed-for union, so different in reality from what it had appeared in his dreams. He looked back upon the time of the mandevilia and the roses, of the excursions on the lake and among the hills. Certainly, at that time, he did not dream he would attain his object thus, secretly, and surrounded by so many difficulties, so much pain. Still, he thought that if the wedding had taken place openly, with the customary proem of official ceremonies, of contracts, congratulations, visits, and dinners, all this would have been even more wearisome and repugnant to his love than the opposition he had met with.

He was aroused by the voice of the prefect, calling to him from the garden, to announce the departure of the Carabellis. Franco reflected that if he went down he would be obliged to offer some apologies, and he preferred not to make his appearance. "You should have smashed the plate on his face!" the prefect called up to him, his hands framing his mouth. "You should have smashed it on his face!"

Then he turned away, and Franco saw the Carabellis' boatman go down to the shore

to prepare the boat. He left the window, and returning to the thoughts which had occupied him first of all, he opened his chest of drawers, and stood absently contemplating an embroidered shirt front, where certain small diamond studs his father had worn at his own wedding, were already sparkling. He disliked the idea of going to the altar without some outward sign of festivity, but of course, this sign must not be too apparent.

In the iris-scented chest of drawers everything was arranged with that order which denotes a cultured spirit, and no one was allowed to touch its contents save Franco himself. But the chairs, the writing table, the piano, were heaped with such disorder that it would seem as if a hurricane of books and papers had swept in at the two windows. Certain law books were slumbering under an inch of dust, but not a single leaf of the little gardenia, growing in a pot on the sill of the east window, showed a speck of dust. These indications were sufficient to suggest the whimsical rule of a poet. A glance at the books and papers would have given conclusive proof of this.

Franco was passionately fond of poetry, and was a true poet in the exquisite delicacy of his instincts. As a writer of verse he could be ranked only as an indifferent amateur, wanting in originality. His favourite models were Foscolo and Giusti. He worshipped them fervently, and pillaged them both, for his genius, which was both satirical and enthusiastic, was not capable of creating a style of its own, and must content itself with imitating others. It is only fair to remark that young men in those days generally possessed a classical culture such as has since become most exceptional, and that through the classics themselves they learned to respect the art of imitation, as a praiseworthy and virtuous practice.

Franco liked to improvise on the piano with some of these verses before his eyes. Even more devoted to music than to poetry, he had himself purchased this piano for one hundred and fifty svanziche, from the organist at Loggio, because the poor Viennese instrument, belonging to his grandmother, which was always wrapped up

and must be handled carefully, like a gouty member of the family, was not adapted to his requirements. The organist's instrument, which had been thumped and banged upon by two generations of hands, hardened by contact with the pickaxe, now sent forth only a funny little nasal voice, which rose above a faint tinkling, as of many tiny glasses standing too close together. Franco was almost oblivious to this. As soon as he had placed his hands upon the instrument his imagination would take fire; the composer's enthusiasm would enter into him, and, in the heat of the creative passion, a thread of sound sufficed to permeate him with the spirit of music, and absolutely to intoxicate him. An Erard would have embarrassed him, would have left less room for fancy, would, in a word, have been less dear to him than his spinet.

Franco possessed too many talents, too many different inclinations, too much impetuosity, too little vanity and perhaps also, too little will-power to undertake that tiresome, methodical, manual labour, which is indispensable in order to become a pianist. Nevertheless, Viscontini was enthusiastic about the style of playing, and his fiancée Luisa, though she did not entirely share his classical tastes, honestly admired his touch. When, being pressed to do so, he would make the organ at Cressogno roar and groan in the approved classic manner, the good people, overwhelmed by the music and the honour, would stare at him with open mouths and reverent eyes, as they would have stared at some preacher, whose sermon they did not understand. But notwithstanding all this, Franco could not have held his own in a city drawing-room, against the majority of feeble amateurs, incapable even of understanding and loving music. All, or almost all of them would have shown themselves his superiors in agility and in precision, and would have gathered in more applause, even though no one of them had succeeded in making the piano sing as he made it sing, especially in the adagios of Bellini and of Beethoven, playing with his soul in his throat, in his eyes, in the muscles of his face, in the tendons of his hands, which seemed one with the chords of the piano.

Another passion of his was for old pictures. The walls of his room held several, most

of which were daubs. Never having travelled he had little experience. His fancy was quick to take fire, and, obliged as he was to fit his ample desires to his scant means, he was credulous concerning the alleged good fortune of other ignorant purchasers, and often allowed himself to be influenced by them, to be blinded and led into buying certain dirty rags, which, if they cost little, were worth still less. The only passably good things he possessed were a head, in the style of Morone, and a Madonna and Child, after the manner of Carlo Dolci. Franco, however, baptised these two little pictures with the names of Morone and Carlo Dolci, without further qualification.

When he had re-read and enjoyed some lines inspired by the hypocritical Pasotti, he once more hunted in the chaos of his desk, and drew forth a small sheet of notepaper, upon which he intended to write to Monsignor Benaglia, the only person who, in the future, might be able to influence his grandmother in his favour. He felt it his duty to inform him of the step he was about to take, of the reasons which had forced his fiancée and himself to resort to this painful subterfuge, of the hope they cherished that he would help them when the time came to confess all to the Marchesa. He was still reflecting, pen in hand, when the Carabellis' boat passed beneath his window. Soon after he heard the Marchese's gondola glide by, followed presently by Pin's boat. He expected that his grandmother would send for him, now that she was alone, but she did not do so. He waited some time, expecting to be summoned, then he began to think of his letter again, and reflected so long, re-wrote the introduction so many times, and got on so slowly, that before he had finished he was obliged to light the lamp.

The end was easier. He begged the old Bishop's prayers for his Luisa and for himself, and expressed a faith in God so perfect and so pure, that the most unbelieving heart must have been touched by it.

Fiery and impetuous as he was, still Franco possessed the calm and simple faith of a

little child. Entirely free from pride, a stranger to philosophical meditations, he was ignorant of that thirst for intellectual liberty which torments young men, when their senses begin to find themselves hampered by that strong curb—positive beliefs. He had never for an instant doubted his religion, and performed all the duties it prescribed without once asking himself if it be reasonable to act and believe thus. Still he had nothing of the mystic or of the ascetic. His intellect, though ardent and poetic, was, at the same time, clear and positive. Devoted as he was to nature and to art, and attracted by all the pleasing aspects of life, he would naturally shrink from mysticism. He had not acquired his faith; he had never concentrated all his thoughts upon it for any length of time, therefore it was not possible that it should have penetrated all his sentiments. Religion was to him what science is to the student, whose first thought is school, where he studies diligently, having no peace until he has done his home tasks, and is prepared for the next lesson, but who, once his duty is performed, thinks no more either of teachers or of books, and does not feel the need of regulating his actions according to scientific conclusions or scholastic programmes. Therefore it would often seem that Franco's life was influenced by nothing else than his warm and generous heart, his passionate inclinations, his lively impressions, and the impulses of his honest nature, which was offended by every kind of untruth and meanness, while he chafed under contradiction, and was incapable of deceit.

He had just sealed his letter when some one knocked at the door. The Marchesa had sent to summon Don Franco downstairs to recite the Rosary. At Casa Maironi they recited the Rosary every evening between seven and eight, and the servants were obliged to be present. The Marchesa herself intoned the prayers, enthroned on her sofa, her sleepy eyes roving over the backs and legs of the worshippers, kneeling, some in one position, some in another, some in the light best adapted to set off a devotional attitude, and others in the shadow which would favour a comfortable, but forbidden nap. Franco entered the room as the nasal voice was repeating the sweet

words: "Ave Maria, gratia plena," with that drawling unction which always inspired him with a wild desire to become a Turk. The young man flung himself down in a dark corner, and never opened his lips. It was impossible for him to answer that irritating voice with fitting devotion. He fell to imagining what the coming interview would be like, and preparing caustic answers.

When the Rosary was finished the Marchesa waited a moment and then pronounced the words consecrated by long usage—

"Carlotta, Friend."

It was the duty of Carlotta, the Marchesa's old maid, to take Friend in her arms, and carry him off to bed, as soon as the Rosary was finished.

"He is here, Signora Marchesa," said Carlotta.

But Friend, though indeed he had been there, was somewhere else when she bent down with outstretched hand. That evening old Friend was in good spirits, and determined to play at not being caught. He would tempt Carlotta, and then slip through her fingers, taking refuge under the piano, or under the table, from whence he would peer out at the poor woman with ironical waggings of his tail, while Carlotta's lips said, "Come, come, dear!" and her heart said, "Ugly beast!"

"Friend!" exclaimed the Marchesa. "That will do, Friend! Be good!"

Franco was boiling. The nasty little monster, imbued with his mistress' arrogance and egotism, paused at his feet, and Franco rolled him roughly towards Carlotta, who grabbed him, and punished him with an angry squeeze, and then carried him off, answering his whines with deceitful words of pity. "What did they do to you, poor Friend? What did they do to you? Tell us all about it!"

The Marchesa made no remarks, nor did her marble countenance betray her feelings. She ordered the footman to tell the prefect of the Caravina, or any one else who might call, that his mistress had retired. Franco started to leave the room behind the servants, but checked himself at once, that he might not appear to be running away.

He took a number of the Imperial and Royal Gazette of Milan from the mantel-shelf, and seating himself near his grandmother, began reading while he waited.

"I congratulate you heartily on the good manners and fine sentiments you displayed to us to-day," the sleepy voice began, almost immediately.

"I accept your congratulations," Franco retorted, without raising his eyes from his paper.

"Well done, my dear!" his immovable grandmother replied, and added: "I am glad that young girl had the opportunity of seeing you as you are, because, supposing she may have heard of a certain project, she will now be very glad it is no longer thought of."

"Then we are both satisfied!" said Franco.

"You cannot in the least tell if you are going to be satisfied. Especially if you still hold the views you once held."

Upon this, Franco put his paper down, and looked his grandmother full in the face.

"What would happen," he said, "if I still held the same views I once held?"

This time he did not speak in a challenging tone, but with quiet seriousness.

"Ah! That is right!" the Marchesa exclaimed. "Let us speak plainly! I hope and believe that a certain event will never take place, but should it take place, do not flatter yourself that there will be anything for you at my death, for I have already arranged matters so that there will be nothing."

"Oh! as to that——" the young man began, with indifference.

"That is the score you would have to settle with me," the Marchesa continued. "Then there would be a score to settle with God."

"How is that?" Franco questioned. "God shall come first with me, and you afterwards!"

When the Marchesa was caught in a mistake she always talked straight on as if

nothing had happened.

"And it will be a heavy score," said she.

"But it must be settled first!" Franco insisted.

"Because," the formidable old woman continued, "a good Christian is in duty bound to obey his father and his mother, and I represent both your father and your mother."

If the one was obstinate, the other was no less so.

"But God comes first!" said he.

The Marchesa rang the bell and closed the conversation thus—

"Now we understand each other perfectly."

When Carlotta entered she rose from the sofa, and said, placidly—

"Good-night."

"Good-night," Franco answered, and resumed the Milan Gazette.

As soon as his grandmother had left the room he flung the paper aside, clenched his fists, and giving vent to his anger in a sort of furious snort, sprang to his feet, saying aloud—

"Ah! It is better so! Better, better so!" It was better so, he continued to assure himself mutely. Better never to bring Luisa to this accursed house, better never to oblige her to bear this rule, this arrogance, this voice, this face! Better to live on bread and water, and look to hard work for the rest, rather than to accept anything from his grandmother's hand. Better become a gardener, d—— it! a boatman, or a charcoal burner!

He went up to his room determined to break with all obligations. "A score to settle with God!" he exclaimed, banging the door behind him. "A score to settle with God if I marry Luisa! Ah! after all, what do I care? Let them see me, spy upon me, bring her the news. Let them tell her, let them sing it to her in every key. I shall be delighted!"

He dressed himself in feverish haste, knocking against the chairs, and closing the drawers with a bang. In his recklessness he put on a black suit, went noisily downstairs, called the old footman, told him he should be out all night, and, not heeding the half-astonished, half-terrified face of the poor fellow, who was devoted to him, rushed into the street, and was lost in the darkness.

He had been gone two or three minutes when the Marchesa, who was already in bed, sent Carlotta to see who had come running downstairs. Carlotta reported that it was Don Franco, and was at once dispatched again on a second errand. "What did Don Franco want?" This time the answer was, that Don Franco had gone out for a few moments. The "few moments" was added out of kindness by the old servant. The Marchesa told Carlotta to go away, but not to put out the light. "You will return when I ring," said she.

It was past midnight when the bell sounded.

The maid hurried to her mistress.

"Is Don Franco still out?"

"Yes, Signora Marchesa."

"Put out the light. Take your knitting and wait in the ante-room. When he returns come and tell me."

Having given these orders, the Marchesa rolled over on her side, turning her face towards the wall, and leaving the amazed and ill-pleased maid to stare at that white, smooth, impenetrable enigma, her night-cap.

CHAPTER III THE GREAT STEP

That same evening at exactly ten o'clock the engineer Ribera knocked gently twice on the door of Signor Giacomo Puttini's house at Albogasio Superiore. Presently a window above his head was opened, and a little, old, clean-shaven face of "Sior

Zacomo" himself appeared in the moonlight.

"Most worshipful engineer, my respects!" said he. "The servant is coming down to let you in."

"That is not necessary," the other answered. "I am not coming up. It is time to start, so you had better join me at once."

Signor Giacomo began to puff and wink hard.

"You must pardon me," he said, in his peculiar dialect, which was a mixture of many elements. "You must pardon me, most worshipful engineer, but I really need——"

"Need what?" said the engineer, somewhat annoyed. The door opened, and the keen and yellow face of the servant appeared.

"Oh! Scior Parento! Sir Relative!" said she respectfully. She claimed I know not what degree of relationship with the engineer's family, and always addressed him thus. "At this hour? Have you perhaps been to see the Sciora Parenta? The Lady Relative?"

The "Lady Relative" was the engineer's sister, Signora Rigey.

Ribera answered shortly: "Oh! Marianna! How are you?" and went upstairs followed by Marianna, carrying the light.

"My respects," Signor Giacomo began, coming towards him with another light. "I understand and recognise the great inconvenience I am causing, but really——"

Signor Giacomo's small, clean-shaven, pink face, rose above an enormous white stock, and a lean little body, buttoned up in a great, black overcoat, and in the convulsive workings of his lips and eyebrows as well as in his troubled eyes, the most comical anxiety was expressed.

"What is the matter now?" asked the engineer, somewhat sharply. He, the most upright and straightforward man alive, had little sympathy with the hesitation of poor, timid Signor Giacomo.

"Allow me," Puttini began, and, turning to the servant, said harshly:

"Begone, you! Go into the kitchen. You will come when I call for you. Go, I say! Why don't you do what I tell you? Where is your respect for me? I command here! I am the master!"

It was the servant's curiosity, her insolent disregard for the orders of her superior, which had provoked this outburst of despotic fury in "Sior Zacomo."

"Whew! What a violent man!" she said, lifting the lamp on high. "There is no need to shout in that way! What do you think of it, Scior Parento?"

"Look here!" the engineer exclaimed. "Would it not be better for you to take yourself off, instead of standing there and jabbering?"

Marianna went away grumbling, and Signor Giacomo began to communicate his most secret thoughts to the worshipful engineer, interlarding his sentences with many buts and ifs, that is and reallys. He had promised to be present in the capacity of witness at Luisa's secret marriage, but now, when it was time to start for Castello, he was assailed by an overpowering fear of compromising himself.

He was "first political deputy," as the highest communal authority was then called. If the worshipful Imperial and Royal Commissary of Porlezza should get wind of this affair, how would he look upon it? And the Marchesa? "A terrible woman, most worthy engineer! A vindictive woman!" Besides he had so many other worries! "There is that cursed bull!" This bull, a bone of contention between the town and the alpador, or tenant of the hill-pastures, had, for the last two years, been a moral incubus to poor Signor Giacomo, who, in speaking of his troubles and trials, always began with "that perfidious servant," and ended with "that cursed bull!" In speaking these words he would raise his small face, his eyes full of pained execration, and stretch out accusing hands towards the brow of the hill which overhung his house, towards the home of that fiendish beast. But the engineer, whose fine, honest features betrayed marked disapproval and a growing contempt for this cowardly

little man, who stood wriggling there before him, exclaimed several times impatiently: "Oh, dear me!" as if pitying himself for the poor company he was in. Finally, his patience entirely exhausted, he extended his arms with the elbows turned outwards, and shaking them as if he were holding the reins of a lazy old horse, exclaimed: "What is all this? What is all this? It is absurd! This is the language of a fool, my good Signor Giacomo! I would never have believed that a man like you, a man let us say——"

Here the engineer, being really at a loss for a suitable phrase wherewith to describe his companion, simply puffed out his cheeks, emitting a long-drawn-out rumble, a sort of rattling noise, as if he had an epithet in his mouth which was so big that he could not spit it out. Meanwhile Signor Giacomo, who had turned very red, was protesting eagerly: "Enough! Enough! Pray excuse me! I am quite ready! I will come! Don't get excited! I only expressed a doubt, most worshipful engineer. You know the world. So did I, at one time, but I know it no longer."

He withdrew for a moment to reappear again presently carrying an enormously high hat with a broad brim, which had seen Ferdinand enter Verona in 1838, the so-called "emperor's year."

"I feel this sign of respect and satisfaction is fitting," said he.

When the engineer caught sight of the thing, he once more ejaculated his "What is all this?" But the little man, who had a ceremonious spirit, stuck to his point. "It is my duty, my duty!" and he called to Marianna to light them down stairs. When the servant saw her master with that immense "sign of satisfaction" on his head, she gave voice to her astonishment. "Hold your tongue!" puffed the unfortunate Signor Giacomo. "Be quiet!" and as soon as he was out of the door his wrath burst forth. "There is no doubt about it, that cursed servant will be the death of me!"

"Why don't you send her away, then?" the engineer enquired.

Signor Giacomo had already placed one foot on the first step of the narrow lane that

leads upwards on one side of the Puttini house, when he was brought to a stand-still by this pointed question, which pierced his conscience like a dagger.

"Alas!" he replied, sighing.

"I understand," said the engineer.

"Besides, what good would that do?" the other went on, after a short pause. "This is the same as that!"

This old Venetian saying concerning the unfortunate identity of the two relative pronouns, Signor Giacomo pronounced as an epilogue, and then, puffing loudly, emitted a loud breath, and once more started forward.

Puttini leading and the engineer following, they climbed steadily for a few minutes, up the steep and narrow path, dimly lighted by the moon which was hidden among the clouds. No sound was heard save their slow steps, the thumping of their sticks on the stones, and Signor Giacomo's regular puffing: "Apff! Apff!" At the foot of the narrow stairway leading to Pianca, the little man stopped, removed his hat, wiped away the perspiration with a big, white handkerchief, and glancing up at the great walnut-tree, and the stables of Pianca to which he must ascend, puffed harder than ever.

"By the body of the rogue Bacchus!" he ejaculated.

The engineer encouraged him. "Up with you, Signor Giacomo. It is all for love of Luisina." [E]

Signor Giacomo started on again without a word, and when they reached the stables, beyond which the path becomes less rough, he seemed to forget the stairs, his scruples, the perfidious servant, the Imperial and Royal Commissary, the vindictive Marchesa and the cursed bull, and began talking of Signora Rigey with great enthusiasm.

"There is no doubt about it, when I have the honour of being in the company of your

niece, of Signorina Luisina, I assure you I really feel as if I were back into the days of Signora Baratela and the Filipuzze girls, of the three Sparesi sisters from San Piero Incarian, and of many others, whose graces used to charm me, in the old days. From time to time I go to see the Marchesa, and I sometimes meet the girls of to-day there. No—no—no, they do not behave in a becoming manner. They are either sullenly silent or over-talkative. But just look at Signorina Luisina, how easy is her manner with every one! She knows how to behave with young and old, rich and poor, the servant and the priest. I really fail to comprehend why the Marchesa——"

The engineer interrupted him.

"The Marchesa is right," said he. "My niece is neither of noble birth, nor has she a penny. How can you expect the Marchesa to be satisfied?"

Signor Giacomo stopped short, rather disconcerted, and stared at the engineer, blinking his sorrowful eyes.

"How is this? You don't really mean to say she is right?"

"I never approve of acting contrary to the wishes of parents, or of those who represent the parents. But I, dear Signor Giacomo, am an old-fashioned man like yourself, a man of the time of Carlo Umberto, as they say hereabouts. Now, the world wags differently, and we must let it wag. Therefore, having expressed my opinions on this point, I said to my relatives: 'Now do as you like. But when you have decided one way or another, let me know what is to be done, and I shall be ready!'"

"And what does Signora Teresina say?"

"My sister? My sister, poor creature, says: 'If I can see them settled in life, I shall no longer dread death.'"

Signor Giacomo breathed hard, as was his habit whenever he heard that last, unpleasant word pronounced.

"But it is surely not so bad as that?" said he.

"Who can tell?" the engineer replied, very seriously. "We must trust in the Almighty."

They had reached a sharp bend where the narrow path, passing the last of the small fields belonging to the territory of Albogasio, turns towards the first of those belonging to Castello, and winds on, on the left, along the top of a jutting crag, suddenly coming in sight of a deep cleft in the mountain's bosom, of the lake far below, of the villages of Casarico and San Mamette, crouching on the shore as if in the act of drinking. Castello is perched a little higher up, and not far distant, facing the bare and forbidding peak of Cressogno, the whole of which is visible, from the gorges of Loggio to the sky. It is a beautiful spot even at night in the moonlight, but if Signor Giacomo paused there, striking a contemplative attitude and forgetting to puff, it was not because he considered the scene worthy of any one's attention, to say nothing of that of a political deputy, but because, having a weighty argument to expound, he felt the necessity of concentrating all his strength in his brain, and of suspending all other effort, even that of the legs.

"That is a fine maxim," said he. "Let us trust in the Almighty. Yes, my dear sir. But permit me to observe that in our time we were always hearing of prayers being answered, of conversions and miracles. Am I not correct? But now the world is not the same, and it appears to me the Almighty is sick of it all. The world is in much the same condition as our parish church at Albogasio, which the Almighty used to visit once a month. Now He comes only once a year."

"Listen, my good Signor Giacomo," said the engineer, who was impatient to reach Castello. "The Almighty is not to blame because the parish has been transferred from one church to another. However, we will push on, and let the Almighty arrange things as He thinks best."

Whereupon he started forwarded so briskly that presently Signor Giacomo was

obliged to stop again, puffing like a pair of bellows.

"Pardon me," said he, "if I yield, in a measure, to that curiosity which is inborn in man. Might one inquire your worshipful age?"

The engineer understood the hidden meaning of his question, and answered in a low tone, with triumphant and ironical meekness—

"I am older than you!"

And he started off again at the same cruel pace.

"I was born in '88, you know," Puttini groaned.

"And I, in '85!" Ribera flung over his shoulder, without stopping. "Now come along."

Fortunately for Puttini they had only a few steps more to go. There was the great wall that supported the consecrated ground about the church of Castello, and there was the narrow stairway leading up to the entrance of the village. Now they must turn into the dark passage below the priest's house, feeling their way along like blind men through this black hole, in which Signor Giacomo's imagination pictured so many treacherous and slippery stones, so many accursed, deceitful steps, that he stopped short, and, resting his clasped hands on the knob of his stick, spoke as follows—

"By the body of the rogue Bacchus! No, most worshipful engineer, no, no, no! Really I cannot. I shall remain here. They will surely come to church. The church is near by. I shall wait here. Body of the rogue Bacchus!"

This last "Body!" Signor Giacomo ground privately between his teeth, like the close of an inward soliloquy concerning the accessories surrounding the exceeding discomfort he was undergoing.

"Wait a minute," said the engineer.

A thread of light appeared under the church door. The engineer entered and

presently came out again, accompanied by the sacristan, who had been preparing the hassocks for the bride and groom. He now brought to Puttini's rescue the long pole with a lighted taper at the end, which was used to light the candles on the altars. Thus, standing in the church door, he moved the taper along in front of Signor Giacomo's feet as far as the pole would reach, while that gentleman, but ill-satisfied with this religious illumination, groped his way forward, grumbling at the darkness, the miserable, sacred taper, and at him who held it, until at last, abandoned by the sacristan, and seized by the engineer, he was dragged along, much like a pike at the end of a line, and, in spite of his mute resistance, was finally landed on the threshold of Casa Rigey.

At Castello the houses which stand in unbroken line on the winding hill-top, enjoying the sun and the view of the lake far below, all white and smiling on the side towards the open, all dark on the side towards that other row of less fortunate houses, which rise sadly behind them, resemble certain favoured individuals, who, brought into too close contact with misery, assume a hostile demeanour, and press close to one another that, thus united, they may hold the others in check. Among these fortunate ones Casa Rigey is one of the darkest on the side facing the poverty of the common houses, one of the brightest on the side facing the sun.

From the street door a long and narrow corridor leads to a small, open loggia, from which, by means of a few steps, one may descend to the little white terrace which, between the reception room and a high, windowless wall, stretches out to the edge of the hill, looking down into the ravines from which issues the Soldo, looking down upon the lake, as far as the green gulfs of the Birosin and of the Doi, as far as the quiet sweeps beyond Caprino and Gandria.

Signor Rigey, born in Milan of a French father, had been professor of the French language at Madame Berra's boarding school, but he had lost his position there, and most of his private pupils, because it was rumoured of him that he was irreligious. In

1825 he had purchased this little house, and retired to it from Milan, wishing to live economically and peacefully. He had, soon afterwards, married the sister of the civil-engineer Ribera. Dying in 1844 he left his wife with a daughter of fifteen, the house and a few thousand svanziche. [F]

Hardly had the engineer knocked somewhat noisily at the door, when light, swift steps were heard in the corridor. The door was thrown open and a voice neither low nor silvery, but indescribably harmonious, whispered: "What a noise, Uncle!" "Noise indeed!" her uncle replied with mock dignity. "Am I then expected to knock with my nose?" His niece placed one hand over his mouth, and with the other drew him inside; then she saluted Signor Giacomo gracefully, and closed the door. All this was accomplished in the twinkling of an eye, while Signor Giacomo himself was puffing out: "Your most humble servant! I am really delightful——" "Thank you, thank you!" said Luisa. "Pray go in, I have a word to say to Uncle."

The little man went forward, hat in hand, and the young girl tenderly embraced her old uncle, kissing him, pressing her face to his breast, and clasping her arms about his neck.

"Won't that do now?" said the engineer, almost as if to check these caresses, for in them he felt a gratitude which he feared would presently take the form of words. "There, there! That is enough! How is Mamma?" Luisa's only reply was a tightening of her embrace. This uncle was more than a father to her, he was the special Providence of the house, but, in his great and simple bounty, he never dreamed that he had the slightest claim to the gratitude of his sister and niece. Whatever would these poor women have done without him, possessing only that meagre sum of twelve or fifteen thousand svanziche which Rigey had left? As civil-engineer, employed on public works, Ribera enjoyed a good salary. He lived frugally at Como with an old housekeeper, passing his savings on to Casa Rigey. At first he had openly and heartily disapproved of Luisa's attachment for Franco, for it seemed to

him that such a union would be but ill-assorted; but the young people being determined, and his sister having consented, he made up his mind to help them in every possible way, keeping his opinions to himself.

"And Mamma?" he repeated.

"She was feeling very well this evening because she was so happy, but now she is agitated, for Franco came about half an hour ago, and told her he has had something of a scene with his grandmother——"

"Oh dear me!" the engineer exclaimed. Whenever he heard of a misfortune befalling any one else he always uttered this expression of self-commiseration.

"No, Uncle! Indeed Franco is right!"

Luisa pronounced these words with sudden warmth. "Yes indeed!" she exclaimed, her uncle having uttered a doubtful "Hm!" "He is perfectly right. But," she added in a low tone, "he says he left home in such a manner that his grandmother will probably discover everything."

"It will be better so," said her uncle, starting towards the terrace.

The moon had set and it was dark. Luisa whispered: "Mamma is here."

Signora Teresa, who was suffering for want of breath, had had herself drawn out into the terrace in her easy-chair, hoping to find relief in the open air.

"What do you say to this, Piero?" said a voice resembling Luisa's in tone, but sweeter and with a tired ring; a voice that seemed to come from a gentle heart which the world has used harshly, and which must yield. "What do you say to this? After all, our precautions will be of no avail."

"No, no, Mamma. We are not sure of that. We cannot say so yet!"

While Luisa was speaking, Franco, who was in the salon with the curate, came out to embrace the engineer.

"Well," said Ribera, extending his hand, for embraces were little to his taste. "What

has happened?"

Franco related what had taken place, softening somewhat certain too offensive expressions of his grandmother's concerning the Rigeys, concealing her threat of not leaving him a penny, and blaming his own over-susceptibility rather than the old-woman's ill-nature, and finally confessing that he had purposely let it be known that he intended to remain out all night. This could have no other effect than that of leading his grandmother to an immediate discovery, for she would question him concerning this absence, and his silence would be a confession, for he did not intend to lie about this matter.

"Listen!" Uncle Piero exclaimed, with the ringing voice and open countenance of the perfectly straightforward man who, being smothered to the point of suffocation with precautions and dissimulations, finally strikes out from the shoulder and, casting them off, breathes freely once more. "I admit you were wrong to irritate your grandmother, for, after all, old people must be respected even when they err; I see that the consequences may be serious, but nevertheless I am glad things are as they are, and I should be more glad if you had told your grandmother everything, clearly and roundly. I have never had any patience with all this secrecy, all this feigning and hiding. The honest man openly confesses his actions. You desire to marry against your grandmother's wishes? Well do so, but, at least, don't deceive her."

"But Piero!" Signora Teresa exclaimed, who, besides a delicate perception of what life should be, possessed an accurate sense of what life really is, and, being much more given to religious exercises than her brother, and standing on a more familiar footing with the Almighty, could most easily persuade herself that He would make certain concessions in the matter of form, when some substantial benefit was to be gained.

"But Piero! You don't think! If the Marchesa finds out about the marriage this way, she will, of course, refuse to receive Luisa into her house, and then what are the

children to do? Where can they go? There is no room here, and even if there were, nothing is ready. At your house it is the same. You must consider all these points. If we wished to keep the marriage a secret for a month or two, it was not in order to deceive, it was to gain time in which to win over Franco's grandmother, and if she would not yield, to prepare one or two rooms at Oria."

"Oh, dear me!" said the engineer, "Does it take two months to do that? It seems incredible!"

At this point a prolonged puff in the shadow reminded them of Signor Giacomo's presence; he was leaning against the wall in one corner not daring to move, because it was so dark.

Signora Teresa had not yet welcomed him.

"Oh, Signor Giacomo!" she now hastened to say. "I beg your pardon. I am really so very, very much obliged to you! Pray come this way. Did you hear what we were saying? Do let us have your opinion."

"Your very humble servant," said Signor Giacomo from his corner. "Really I dare not move, for with my poor sight——"

"Luisa!" Signora Teresa called. "Bring a lamp. But did you hear, Signor Giacomo? What do you think about it? Do tell us."

In his profound wisdom Signor Giacomo emitted three or four little hasty puffs which meant: Ah, this is indeed an embarrassing question!

"I cannot say," he began hesitatingly, "I cannot say at present, being in the dark——"

"Luisa!" Signora Teresa called once more.

"No, no, Signora! I mean being in the dark on so many points. I feel that in my ignorance I may not pronounce an opinion. Still I will say it seems to me that perhaps it might ... well, at any rate, I am here at your service and at the service of

this most respected family, though indeed I should not be astonished if the Imperial and Royal Commissary—a most excellent person, but very punctilious.... But enough, we will not talk of that, for here I am. But I do say, it seems to me that we might wait a little while, and our most noble friend Don Franco here might be able to wheedle and persuade.... Well, well, well. Do as you like. It is all the same to me."

A furious protest on Franco's part had caused Signor Giuseppe to face about thus suddenly. Luisa seconded this protest, and Signora Teresa, who now would perhaps have been in favour of a postponement, did not venture to oppose their wishes.

"Luisa, Franco," said she, "take me back to the salon."

The two young people pushed the easy-chair into the salon, followed by Uncle Piero and Signor Giacomo.

On the threshold Luisa, bending over her mother, kissed her hair, and murmured: "You will see. All will be for the best."

She had expected to find the curate in the salon, but he had slipped away through the kitchen.

Hardly had Franco and Luisa pushed the invalid's chair up to the table upon which stood the lamp, when the sacristan came to say that everything was ready. Signora Teresa asked him to inform the curate that the bride and groom would go to church in half an hour.

"Luisa!" said she, glancing meaningly at her daughter.

"Yes, Mamma," the girl replied, and turning to her lover, said in a low tone: "Franco, Mamma wishes to speak with you."

Signor Giacomo understood, and went out to the terrace. The engineer did not understand at all, and his niece had to explain to him that her mother was to be left alone with Franco. The simple-minded man could see no reason for this, but she took his arm and, smiling, led him away to the terrace.

Signora Teresa silently held out her beautiful hand, which was still youthful in its curves, and Franco, kneeling, kissed it.

"Poor Franco," said she gently.

Then she made him rise from his knees and sit close to her. She must speak to him, she said, and her breath was so short. But he would understand much from a few words, would he not?

In speaking these words her voice was infinitely sweet.

"You must know," she began, "that I had not intended to say this to you, but I thought of it when you spoke about breaking the plate at the dinner-table. I beg you to be careful on account of Uncle Piero's position. In his heart he feels as you do. If you only could have seen the letters he wrote me in 1848! But he is a servant of the Government. It is true his conscience is perfectly easy, for he knows that by engineering roads and water-works he is serving his country and not the Germans. But he must and will take certain precautions, and you—for love of him—must be cautious also."

"The Germans will soon be gone, Mamma!" Franco replied. "But do not worry; you shall see how prudent I will be."

"Oh, my dear! I have little more to see, I have only to see you two united and blessed by the Lord. When the Germans go, you will come to Looch to tell me of it."

Those small fields where the little cemetery of Castello is situated go by the name of Looch.

"But I had intended to speak to you of another matter," Signora Teresa went on, without giving Franco time to protest. He took her hands and pressed them, with difficulty restraining his tears.

"I must speak to you of Luisa," she said. "You must know your wife well."

"I do know her, Mamma! I know her as well as you do, and perhaps even better."

As he pronounced these words his whole being glowed and quivered in his passionate love for her who was the life of his life, the soul of his soul.

"Poor Franco!" said Signora Teresa, smiling tenderly. "No, listen to me, for there is something you do not know, of which you should be informed. Wait a moment."

She needed to rest. Her emotion made her breathing more laboured, and she spoke with greater difficulty than usual. She motioned to Franco not to move, for she saw he was about to rise, that he might do something to relieve her. Only a little repose was necessary, and she took it, resting her head against the chair-back.

Presently she roused herself. "You have probably heard many evil accounts of my poor husband, at your own home. You will have heard that he was an unprincipled man, and that I did very wrong to marry him. It is true he was not religious, and for that reason I hesitated some time before deciding to accept him. I was advised to do so because it was thought I might have a good influence over this man, who had a most noble soul. He died a Christian, and I have every hope of meeting him in Heaven, if the Lord, in His mercy, shall see fit to receive me there. But up to the very last hour it seemed as if I were not to accomplish anything. Now, I fear my Luisa has her father's tendencies in her heart. She hides them from me, but I feel they are there. I commend her to you; study her, advise her; she is gifted and has a great heart, and if I have not known how to do well by her, you must do better. You are a good Christian: see that, with all her heart, she also becomes one. Promise me this, Franco."

He promised, smiling, as if he considered her fears groundless, and were making this superfluous promise simply to satisfy her.

The invalid gazed sadly at him. "Believe me," she added, "these are not fancies. I cannot die in peace if you do not take this matter seriously." And when the young man had repeated his promise, this time without smiling, she said—

"One word more. When you leave here you will go to Professor Gilardoni's, will you

not?"

"That was my first plan. I was to have told my grandmother that I was going to sleep at Gilardoni's house, as we were to start on an excursion together in the morning. But now, you know how I left home."

"Still you had better go there. I had rather you went there, and besides, he expects you, does he not? So you must go. Poor Gilardoni! He has never been here since his fit of madness, two years ago. You know about that, do you not? Luisa has told you?"

"Yes, Mamma."

This Professor Gilardoni, who lived like a hermit at Casarico, had fallen most romantically in love with Signora Teresa some years before, and had timidly presented himself to her as a suitor. She had received his proposal with such utter amazement that he had lacked courage to appear before her again.

"Poor man!" Signora Rigey continued, "that was a most stupid action, but he has a heart of gold, and is a true friend. I wish you to cherish him. The day before he had that mad fit, he confided a secret to me. I may not repeat to you what he said, and moreover, I beg you not to mention the subject to him unless he speaks to you about it; but it is, in fact, something which, under certain circumstances, might be of great importance to you two, especially if you have children. If Gilardoni should confide in you, reflect seriously before telling Luisa. She might look at the matter in a wrong light. Consider the question carefully, consult Uncle Piero, and then speak or remain silent according to the line of action you may have determined to adopt."

"Yes, Mamma."

There was a gentle tap at the door, and Luisa's voice said: "Have you finished?"

Franco looked at the invalid. "Come in," said she. "Is it time to go?"

Luisa did not answer, but threw one arm around Franco's neck, and together they

knelt before the mother, their heads buried in her lap. Luisa tried her best to restrain her tears, knowing well that her mother should be spared all violent emotion, but her heaving shoulders betrayed her.

"No, Luisa, no, dear, no!" said her mother, caressing her bowed head. "I am grateful to you, for you have always been a good daughter dear; such a good daughter! Calm yourself; I am so happy! You will see, I shall get better. Now go. Kiss me, both of you, and then go. You must not keep the curate waiting. May God bless you, Luisa, and you also, Franco!"

She asked for her prayer-book, drew the lamp towards her, had the windows and the door leading to the terrace thrown open that she might breathe more easily, and then dismissed the maid, who was prepared to keep her company. When the young couple had left the room, the engineer came in to greet his sister before going to church.

"Good-by, Teresa."

"Good-by, Piero. Another load is laid on your shoulders, my poor Piero."

"Amen!" the engineer answered, calmly.

When she was alone Signora Rigey sat listening to the receding footsteps. The heavy steps of her brother and Signor Giacomo bringing up the rear, prevented her hearing those others, which she strained her ear to follow as far as possible.

Another moment and the sounds ceased. She realised that Luisa and Franco were going away together into the future, whither she might follow them only for a few months, perhaps only for a few days; that she could neither divine nor foresee what their fate would be. "Poor children!" she thought. "Who knows what they may have passed through in five years, in ten years." She listened again, but the silence was profound; the open window admitted only the far-away thundering of the cascades of Rescia, over across the lake. Then, thinking that they must already have entered the church, she took her prayer-book, and read attentively.

But she soon grew weary; her brain was confused, and the words of the book blurred before her eyes.

Her mind was becoming drowsy, her will-power was lost. She foresaw the approach of a vision of unreal things, but she knew she was not asleep, she understood that this was not a dream, but a condition produced by her malady. She saw the door leading to the kitchen open, and there entered old Gilardoni from Dasio, called "el Carlin de Das," father of the Professor and agent of the Maironi family, for the estates in Valsolda—he had been dead five-and-twenty years. The figure came forward, and said, in a natural voice: "Oh, Signora Teresa! Are you quite well?" She thought she answered—"Oh, Carlin! I am quite well; and how are you?" But in reality she did not speak.

"I've got the letter here," the figure continued, waving a letter triumphantly. "I've brought it here for you!" And he placed the letter on the table.

Signora Teresa saw it quite plainly. A letter, soiled and yellowed by time, without an envelope, and still bearing traces of a little red wafer, lay before her and she experienced a sense of lively satisfaction. She thought she said: "Thank you, Carlin. Are you going to Dasio, now?"

"No, Signora," Carlin replied. "I am going to Casarico to see my son."

The invalid could no longer distinguish Carlin, but she saw the letter on the table, saw it distinctly. Still she was not sure it was there; in her sluggish brain the vague memory of other past hallucinations still endured, the memory of the disease, which was her enemy, her cruel master. Her eyes were glassy, her breathing laboured and rapid.

The sound of hastening footsteps roused her, and recalled her almost completely to herself. When Luisa and Franco came swiftly into the room from the terrace they did not notice that their mother's face was distorted, for the lamp was heavily shaded. Kneeling before her they covered her with kisses, attributing that laboured breathing

to emotion. Suddenly the invalid raised her head from the chair-back and stretched out her hands, pointing to something at which she was looking fixedly.

"The letter!" she said.

The young people turned, but saw nothing.

"What letter, Mamma?" Luisa asked. At the same moment she noticed her mother's expression, and warned Franco by a glance. This was not the first time that Signora Teresa had suffered from hallucinations since her illness began. At the question, "What letter?" everything became clear to her. "Oh!" she exclaimed, and withdrawing her hands, buried her face in them, weeping silently.

Comforted by her children's caresses she soon composed herself, kissed them, extended her hand to her brother and Signor Giacomo, who did not in the least understand what had happened, and then motioned to Luisa to go and get something. It was a question of a cake and a precious bottle of wine from Niscioree, which, together with some others, had been sent some time before by the Marchese Bianchi, to whom Signora Teresa was an object of special veneration.

Signor Giacomo, who was longing to be off, began to fidget and puff, and glance towards the engineer.

"Signora Luisina," said he, seeing the bride about to leave the room. "Pray excuse me, but I was just going to take leave of——"

"No, no!" Signora Rigey exclaimed, with only a thread of voice. "Wait a little longer."

Luisa disappeared, and Franco slipped out of the room behind his wife. Signora Teresa was suddenly assailed by scruples, and signed to her brother to call him back.

"Nonsense!" said the engineer.

"But Piero!"

"Well?"

The ancient and austere traditions of her house, a delicate sense of dignity, perhaps also a religious scruple, because the young couple had not yet received the benediction of the nuptial Mass, would neither allow Signora Teresa to approve of their withdrawing together, nor to explain her views on the subject. Her reticence and Uncle Piero's fatherly benevolence gave Franco time to place himself beyond the possibility of recall. Signora Teresa did not insist.

"Forever!" she murmured presently, as if speaking to herself. "United forever!"

"You and I," said the engineer, addressing his colleague in celibacy in the Venetian dialect, "you and I, Signor Giacomo, never go in for any such nonsense!"

"You are always in good spirits, most worshipful engineer!" Signor Giacomo answered, while his conscience was telling him that in his time he had gone in for far worse "nonsense."

The bride and groom did not return.

"Signor Giacomo," the engineer continued, "there will be no going to bed for us to-night."

The unfortunate man writhed, puffed and winked hard but did not reply.

Still the bride and groom were absent.

"Piero," said Signora Teresa, "ring the bell."

"Signor Giacomo," the engineer began, composedly, "shall we ring the bell?"

"That would seem to be the Signora's wish," the little man replied, steering his course as best he could between the brother and sister. "However, I express no opinion."

"Piero!" his sister pleaded.

"Come, let us have an answer," Uncle Piero continued without moving. "What would you do? Would you, or would you not ring this bell?"

"For pity's sake!" Signor Giacomo groaned. "You really must excuse me."

"I will excuse nothing!"

The young people were still absent, and the mother growing more and more anxious, repeated—

"Piero, I tell you to ring!"

Signor Giacomo, who was dying to get away, and who could not leave without saluting the bride and groom, encouraged by Signora Teresa's insistence, made a great effort, turned very red and finally pronounced an opinion: "I should ring."

"My dear Signor Giacomo," the engineer exclaimed, "I am surprised, amazed and astonished!" Who can say why, when he was in good spirits, and had occasion to use one of these synonyms, he would always string the three together? "However," he concluded, "let us ring."

And he proceeded to ring very gently.

"Listen, Piero," said Signora Teresa. "Remember that when you leave, Franco is to go with you. He will return at half-past five for the Mass."

"Oh dear me!" Uncle Piero exclaimed. "How many difficulties! But after all, are they or are they not husband and wife?—Well, well," he added, seeing that his sister was beginning to grow excited, "do just as you like!"

Instead of the young couple the maid appeared, bringing the cake and the bottle, and told the engineer that Signorina Luisina begged him to come out to the terrace for a moment.

"Now that something good is coming at last, you send me outside!" said the engineer. He jested with his usual serenity of spirit, perhaps because he did not fully realize his sister's serious condition, perhaps because of his naturally pacific attitude towards all that was inevitable.

He went out to the terrace where Luisa and Franco were waiting for him.

"Listen, Uncle," his niece began. "My husband says that his grandmother will surely

discover everything at once; that he will not be able to remain at Cressogno any longer; that if Mamma were stronger we might all go to your house at Oria, but, unfortunately, that is not possible as matters stand at present. So he thinks we might arrange a room here—any way to get it ready quickly. We had thought of poor Papa's study. What do you say to this plan?"

"Hm!" ejaculated Uncle Piero, who was slow to take up with new ideas. "It seems to me a very hasty resolution. You will be incurring expense and turning the house upside down, for an arrangement which can only be temporary."

His one idea was to have the whole family at Oria, and this expedient did not suit him. He feared that if the young people once settled down at Castello they would remain there. Luisa used every argument to persuade him that there was no other way, and that neither the outlay nor the trouble would be great. On leaving home her husband would go directly to Lugano, and bring back what few pieces of furniture were absolutely indispensable. Uncle Piero asked if Franco could not take up his quarters at Oria, remaining there until such a time as she and her mother could join him. "Oh, Uncle!" Luisa exclaimed. Had she known about the bell she would have been still more astonished by a similar proposal. But sometimes this good man had artless ideas of this sort, at which his sister smiled. Luisa had no difficulty in finding arguments against his plan for banishing Franco, and she used them with warmth. "Enough!" said Uncle Piero calmly, though he was not convinced; and he arched his wide-spread arms with the gesture of the Dominus vobiscum, more charitably inclined, more ready to enfold poor humanity in a tender embrace than before. "Fiat! Oh, by the way," he added, turning to Franco, "how about money?"

Franco shivered, much embarrassed.

"You know he is our father!" his wife said.

"Not by any means your father," Uncle Piero observed placidly. "Not by any means, but what is mine is yours; so I shall line your pockets as well as my means will

permit."

And he suffered, without returning it, the embrace which told of their gratitude, almost as if vexed by this unnecessary demonstration, vexed that they should not accept more simply an act which to him seemed so simple and natural. "Yes, yes!" said he, "now let us go in and drink; it will be far more profitable!"

The wine of Niscioree, clear and red as a ruby, at once delicate and strong, flattered and soothed the inner-man of the impatient Signor Giacomo, who, in those years of oidium, seldom wet his lips in undiluted wine, but gloomily sipped the Grimelli wine, of watery memory.

"Est, est, [G] is it not, Signor Giacomo?" said Uncle Piero, seeing Puttini gaze with devoted eyes into the glass he held. "But here at least, there is no danger of expiring like a certain man: et propter nimium est dominus meus mortuus est."

"I feel as if I were being resuscitated," Signor Giacomo answered, speaking very slowly and almost under his breath, his gaze still fixed on the glass.

"Then you must give us a toast," the other said, rising. "But if you will not speak, why then I must do so," and he recited merrily—

"Long live he and long live she, And now we'll be off, and leave them free!"

Signor Giacomo emptied his glass, puffed loudly and winked hard, in consequence of the varied sentiments which were running riot in his soul, while the last perfume, the last flavour of the wine were fading in his mouth. He offered his duty to the "most revered" Signora Teresa, his devotion to the "most amiable" little bride, his respects to the "most accomplished" young husband. Then, gesticulating with head and arms, he declared himself undeserving of the thanks which were being lavished upon him, and taking his great hat and his stick, he started—humble and puffing, with mingled feelings of relief and regret—to follow the placid bulk of the "most worshipful" engineer.

"And you, Franco?" Signora Teresa enquired immediately.

"I am going," he replied.

"Come here," said she. "I received you so badly when you returned from church, my poor children! You see I had had one of my bad attacks; I think you understood. But now I feel so well, so peaceful! Lord, I thank Thee! it seems to me I have set my house in order, have put out the fire and said my prayers; and now I am going to sleep, so well satisfied! But not so very soon, dear, not at once. I leave you my Luisa, dear; I leave you Uncle Piero. I know you will love them very much, will you not? But you must remember me also. Ah, dear Lord! how sorry I am I shall not see your children! That is indeed a grief to me! You must give them a kiss every day for their poor grandmother ... every day. And now go, my son, but you will be back by half-past five? Yes, dear.... Good-by ... now go."

She spoke caressingly to him, as to a child who does not yet understand, and he wept silently, with tender emotion, kissing her hands over and over again, and glad Luisa was present to witness this scene, for in his immense tenderness for the mother, there was his immense joy at being one with the daughter, and an intense desire to love all that his wife loved, and in the same measure.

"Go," Mamma Teresa repeated, fearing her own increasing emotion. "Go, go!"

At last he obeyed and went out with Luisa.

On this occasion also Luisa was absent a long time, but even the holiest souls have their little weaknesses, and although the maid was constantly coming and going between the kitchen and the salon, Signora Teresa, touched by the affection which Franco had displayed for her, never once ordered her to ring the bell.

Footnotes

[E] Luisina: little Luisa, ina being a diminutive. [Translator's note.]

[F] Svanziche: a coin varying from 90 to 95 centimes. [Translator's note.]

[G] Est, est: Canon Johannes Fugger of Augsburg travelling in Italy in the twelfth

century, directed his steward to precede him, and inscribe the word Est on the door of the inn where the best wine was to be had. On reaching Montefiascone, the worthy canon found the word Est written three times on the tavern door, and indeed, the muscatel of this district proved so much to his taste that he never left Montefiascone, but ended his days there in the year 1113 or thereabouts, and was buried in the church of S. Flaviano, where his tomb may still be seen. His steward caused the following inscription to be carved upon the sarcophagus:

Est, Est, Est. Propter nimium est, Johannes de Fuc., D. meus, mortuus est.

It is said that the wine-loving prelate left orders that a barrel of the very best muscatel should be spilled over his tomb every year on the anniversary of his death, and this ceremony was faithfully performed down to the end of the seventeenth century, when it was forbidden by a certain Cardinal Barbarigi, of unconvivial memory. The best wine of Montescone is still called Est, Est. [Translator's note.]

CHAPTER IV CARLIN'S LETTER

Franco went down the hill very, very slowly, absorbed in the world of things within him, so crowded with thoughts and with new sensations. Stopping every now and then to contemplate the grey road and the small dark fields, he would touch the leaves of a grape-vine or the stones of a low wall, in order to feel the reality of the external world, to convince himself that he was not dreaming. Not until he had reached the Contrada dei Mal'ari in Casarico, and was standing before the little door of Gilardoni's tiny house, did he recall Mamma Teresa's dark words concerning the secret Gilardoni had imparted to her, and he wondered what this mystery could be, which must not be revealed to Luisa. To tell the truth the mother's advice had not satisfied him entirely. "How could I ever hide anything from my wife?" he thought as he knocked at the door.

Professor Beniamino Gilardoni, son of "Carlin de Dàas," had been educated at the

expense of old Don Franco Maironi, Marchesa Orsola's husband, an eccentric man, capricious and violent, but at the same time, very generous. When Carlin died it became apparent that Maironi's generosity had not been necessary. Beniamino inherited quite a little hoard, and this maddened Don Franco, who held him responsible for the paternal hypocrisy, turned his back upon him, and would have nothing more to do with him for the short time he survived his agent. The young man chose the career of teacher, was professor of Latin at the gymnasium of Cremona, and of philosophy at the lyceum of Udine. Of a delicate constitution, apprehensive of physical suffering, and extremely misanthropical, he resigned his professorship in 1842, and came to Valsolda to enjoy the modest fortune his father had left him. Dasio, his native village, perched just below the dolomitic rocks of the Arabione, was too high up and inconvenient for him. He sold his possessions there, purchased the olive-grove of Sedorgg above Casarico, and a small villa on the edge of the lake, in Casarico itself. It was so small as to be almost a toy villa, and from its shape he called it the "Greek II or Pi" in imitation of the "Digamma" of Ugo Foscolo. From the Contrada dei Mal'ari a short passage led to the little courtyard flanked by a tiny portico, open on the lake-side and surrounded by tall oleanders. It overlooked six miles of water, green, grey or blue, according to the hour, as far as Monte S. Salvatore there in the distance, stooping, under the burden of its melancholy hump, towards the humble hills of Carona beneath it. On the east of the little house there was a kitchen-garden, fabulously large for that part of the world, the dimensions of which Engineer Ribera was wont to define by means of the following surveyor's description: "Large field called il Campone, measuring seven tavole." Now seven tavole correspond to twenty or twenty-two square metres! The Professor cultivated it with the aid of his little servant Giuseppe, called Pinella, and of a small collection of French treatises. He sent to France for the seeds of the most highly esteemed qualities of vegetables, which sometimes came up in shameless disregard of their certificates of baptism, and indeed of any honestly baptised family.

It would then happen that philosopher and servant, stooping over the beds, their hands on their knees, would raise their eyes from these mocking sprouts, and gaze at each other, the philosopher honestly disappointed, the servant hypocritically so. In one corner of the garden, in a little stable constructed according to the most approved principles, dwelt a small Swiss cow, which had been purchased after three months of diligent study, and had turned out as delicate and fleshless as the master himself, who—in spite of the Swiss cow and four Paduan hens—often found it impossible to make himself a cup of custard in his own house. In the wall supporting the garden on the lake-side, against whose base the breva drove the swelling waves, he had made some openings in which, following Franco Maironi's advice, he had planted many American aloes, many roses and some caper-bushes, thus binding together the substantial contents of his kitchen-garden, as he was wont to say, with poetic elegance of form. And for the love of the poetic, he had left a small corner of his kitchen-garden uncultivated. The tallest of reeds had sprung up there, and in front of these reeds the Professor had erected a sort of belvedere, a lofty, wooden platform, very rustic and primitive, where, in pleasant weather, he passed many happy hours with the mystic books he loved, enjoying the coolness of the breva, and the murmuring of reeds and waves. At a distance the colour of the platform could not be distinguished from that of the reeds, and the Professor looked as if he were seated on air, book in hand, like any magician. In the little salon he kept the small collection of works on kitchen-gardening, the mystic books, the treatises on necromancy, and gnosticism. The writings on hallucinations and dreams he kept in a tiny study adjoining his bedroom, a sort of ship's cabin, into which lake and sky seemed to pour through the window.

After the death of old Maironi the Professor had once more taken to visiting the family, but the Marchesa did not please him particularly, and her son Don Alessandro, Franco's father, pleased him still less. So he ended by going there only once a year. When the lad Franco entered the lyceum his grandmother—his father

had been dead some time—begged Gilardoni to give him some lessons during the Autumn. Master and pupil resembled each other in their easy enthusiasms, in their fits of violent but fleeting passion, and both were ardent patriots. When the necessity for lessons no longer existed they continued to meet as friends, though the Professor was some twenty years older than Franco. Gilardoni admired his pupil's genius, but Franco, on the other hand, held the half-Christian, half-rationalist philosophy of his master, and his mystical tendencies, in small esteem. He laughed at the other's passion for books and theories on horticulture and landscape gardening, a passion which was entirely devoid of all common sense. But nevertheless, he loved him sincerely for his goodness, his candour, his ardent soul. Franco had been the Professor's confidant at the time of his unfortunate passion for Signora Rigey, and later, Franco, in his turn, confided in the Professor. Gilardoni was much affected by the news, and told Franco that, his heart being still full to overflowing of that unchanging devotion, he should feel as if he were, in a way, becoming Franco's father, even though Signora Teresa herself would have none of him. Franco showed little appreciation of this metaphysical paternity. This passion for Signora Rigey seemed to him simply an aberration, and he was more than ever confirmed in his opinion that the Professor's head was not worth much, but that his heart was of gold.

So he knocked at the door, and Beniamino himself came to open it, bearing a little oil lamp. "Well done," said he. "I was beginning to think you were not coming, after all."

Gilardoni was in his dressing-gown and slippers, with a sort of white turban on his head, and he exhaled a strong odour of camphor. He looked like a Turk, like Gilardoni Bey, but the thin, sallow face which smiled beneath the turban had nothing Turkish about it. Encircled by a short, reddish beard, pompously embellished in the middle by a fine, big nose, red and pimply, the face was lighted up by two beautiful blue eyes, still very youthful, and full of simple kindness and poetry.

As soon as Franco had closed the door behind him his friend whispered: "Is it done?" "It is done," Franco answered. The other embraced him and kissed him in silence. Then he took him up stairs to the little study. On the way he explained that, secundum Raspail, he had applied a compress of some sedative water to his head, for he was threatened with a headache. He was an apostle of Raspail, and had converted Franco—who often suffered from inflammatory sore throats—from leeches to camphor cigarettes.

In the little study there was another very close and long embrace. "So much! So much! So much!" Gilardoni exclaimed, meaning a world of things.

Poor Gilardoni, his eyes were glistening. He himself had longed in vain for a happiness similar to his friend's! Franco understood and, much embarrassed, did not know what to say to him, and a silence so significant followed that Gilardoni could not stand it, and set about lighting a little fire to heat some coffee he had prepared. Franco offered to do this for him, and the Professor accepted, pleading his headache, and began unrolling his turban before a basin of the sedative water. "Well," said he, controlling his emotion by an effort of his will, "tell me all about it." Franco told him everything, from his grandmother's dinner-party, to the wedding ceremony in the church at Castello, except of course, his private talk with Signora Teresa. Professor Beniamino, meanwhile, had replaced his turban, and now summoned up all his courage. "And——" said he, substituting a sort of low groan for the beloved name, "how is she?" Upon learning of the hallucination he exclaimed: "A letter? She thought she saw a letter? But what letter?" This Franco did not know. A hissing on the fire interrupted the conversation; the coffee was boiling hard and bubbling over.

Gilardoni also resembled his young friend in that his heart might be read from his face. The young friend who was, however, a far cleverer and quicker reader of faces than he, at once perceived that he had thought of some special letter, and inquired, while the coffee was settling, if he could explain this hallucination. The Professor

hastened to say "no," but no sooner had he uttered that "no" than he weakened it by adding several other negatives, mingled with inarticulate grumblings: "Ah, no!—no indeed!—I cannot say—certainly not!" Franco did not insist, and another extremely significant silence ensued. When he had taken his coffee, with many involuntary signs of uneasiness, the Professor promptly proposed that they go to bed. Franco, who must leave before daybreak, preferred not to go to bed, but wished his friend to do so, and, after an infinite number of protests and ceremonies, after hesitating on the very threshold, his basin of sedative water in his hand, the Professor suddenly faced about, and throwing a "good-night" over his shoulder, disappeared.

When he was alone Franco put out the lamp and stretched himself in an easy-chair with the good intention of going to sleep, seeking sleep in some indifferent thought if he could possibly fix his mind on such a thought. Not five minutes had passed when there was a knock at the door and immediately the Professor rushed in, without a light, and exclaiming: "Well, here I am again!" "What is the matter?" Franco inquired. "I am sorry I put out the light." At the same moment he felt the arms of the worthy Beniamino about his neck, his beard brushed Franco's face, and he smelt the camphor and heard the voice. "Dear, dear, Don Franco! I have an enormous load on my heart! I did not intend to speak now; I wanted to leave you in peace, but I cannot, I cannot!"

"But speak! Calm yourself, calm yourself!" said Franco, gently freeing himself from that embrace.

Gilardoni let him go, and pressed his hands to his forehead, groaning: "Oh, what a stupid fool, what a stupid fool, what a stupid fool I am! I might have left him alone; I might have waited until to-morrow or the next day. But now it is done! It is done!"

He seized Franco's hand. "I tell you I had begun to undress when a sort of giddiness came over me, and then it was all up with me. I must needs put on the dressing-gown again, and rush in here without a light, like a lunatic. In my haste I

even tipped over the basin of sedative water."

"Shall we light the lamp?" Franco asked.

"No, no, no, we had better talk in the dark, better talk in the dark! See, I am going way over there!" And he sat down at his writing-desk, to escape the faint glimmer of light which fell through the window. Then he began. He always spoke in a nervous and disorderly fashion, and it may easily be imagined how he spoke now, in his present state of agitation.

"Shall I begin? Goodness knows what you will say, dear Don Franco! These are all useless words, but what would you have—alas! patience—! Well, I will begin—but where shall I begin? Oh, Lord! just see what a fool I am, not even knowing where to begin! Ah, that hallucination! Yes, I told you a lie just now; I can easily guess the origin of that hallucination. It has to do with a letter; a letter I showed Signora Teresa two years ago, a letter from Don Franco, your grandfather. Well, now let us begin at the beginning.

"During his last days my poor father spoke to me of a letter from Don Franco which I should find in the strong-box, where all the important papers were kept. He told me to read it, to preserve it carefully, and, when the time came, to act in accordance with the dictates of conscience. 'But' said he, 'it is almost certain there will be nothing to be done.' My poor father passed away. I searched the strong-box for the letter, but did not find it. I hunted the whole house over, but in vain. What could I do? I contented myself with reflecting that there was nothing to be done, and thought no more about the matter. A fool, was I not? A real idiot! Say so freely, I deserve it. I have said so to myself so many times! But let us continue. Do you know how your grandfather's estate was settled? Do you know how the affairs of your house were arranged? You will forgive me for speaking to you of these matters, will you not?"

"I know my grandfather died without a will, and that I have nothing," Franco

replied. "But let us pass that over, and proceed."

To Franco it was truly a painful subject. At old Maironi's death no will had been found. In perfect love and harmony, the widow and the son, Don Alessandro, had divided the estate equally between them. In order to secure this arrangement the son had made a very large grant to his mother, declaring that he was only carrying out the paternal wishes, which had not found a means of expression. This depraved young man, a spendthrift and a gambler, was already caught in the toils of usurers at the time of his father's death. In the seven years he survived him he managed to spend everything, not leaving a penny to his only son, Franco, who found himself reduced to some twenty thousand svanziche, the fortune of his mother who had died in giving him birth.

"Yes, yes, let us get on," Gilardoni continued. "Three years ago, three years ago, I say, I received a letter from you. I remember it was the second of November, all Souls' Day. Curious circumstance, mysterious circumstance! Very well. That night I went to bed, and dreamed a dream. I dreamt of your grandfather's letter. Note that I had never thought of it again. I dreamt I was hunting for it, and that I found it in an old box I keep in the attic. I read it, still dreaming. It said there was a great treasure in the cellar of Casa Maironi at Cressogno and that that treasure was to come to you. I awoke in intense excitement, convinced that this had been a prophetic dream. I got up, and went to look in the box. I found nothing; but two days later, being about to sell certain lands which I owned at Dasio, I got out an old deed of purchase, which my father kept in the strong-box, and, in turning over the leaves, a letter fell out. I glanced at the signature and saw: Nobile Franco Maironi. I read the letter. It was the one in question! Thus you see, the dream...."

"Well," said Franco, interrupting him, "and what did this letter say?"

The Professor rose, took a match half a cubit long, ran it in among the live coals in the little fireplace, and lit the lamp.

"I have it here," he said with a great, despairing sigh. "Read it."

He took from his pocket and handed to Franco a small yellowish letter, without an envelope, and still showing traces of the little red wafer. The yellow-black lines of writing inside showed through here and there, almost in relief.

Franco took it, held it near the lamp, and read aloud as follows:

"Dear Carlin,—

"You will find my last will enclosed in this letter. I have written it in duplicate. One copy I am keeping. This is the other, and I charge you to publish it if the first be not forthcoming. Do you understand? Very well then; and when we meet I forbid you absolutely to worry me with your advice, as is your d——d custom. You are the only person in whom I have confidence, but, after all, it is my right to command, and your duty to obey. Therefore all advice is useless and will not be tolerated. Good-bye.

"Your affectionate master, "Franco Maironi.

"Cressogno, 22 Sept., 1828."

"Now here is the will," said Gilardoni dolefully, handing Franco another yellow document, "but don't read that aloud."

The document read as follows:

"I, the undersigned, Nobile Franco Maironi, desire that my estate be divided in accordance with this, my last will and testament.

"Donna Orsola Maironi, born Marchesa Scremin, having deigned to accept my homage as well as that of many others, I bequeath to her, in proof of my gratitude, the sum of ten thousand Milanese Lire, to be paid once and for all, and what, to her, is the most precious jewel of my household, namely Don Alessandro Maironi, duly inscribed in the parish-registers of the Cathedral of Brescia as my son.

"I bequeath to my said son that part of my property which is lawfully due to him,

and three parpagliole [H] a day more, in token of the special esteem in which I hold him.

"I leave to my agent in Brescia, Signor Grigi, should he be still in my employ at the time of my death, all that he has stolen from me.

"I leave to my agent in Valsolda, Carlino Gilardoni, upon the same condition as above, four Milanese Lire a day, during his natural life.

"I desire that, during the life of Donna Orsola Maironi Scremin, a Mass be celebrated daily in the Cathedral of Brescia, for the good of her soul.

"I name and appoint my grandson, Don Franco Maironi, son of Don Alessandro, residuary legatee of all the rest of my property.

"As witness my hand, this fifteenth day of April, 1828.

"Franco Maironi."

Franco read—and, half dazed and without a word, passed the sheet of paper back to the Professor. He was shaken, but felt vaguely that he must control himself, that he must restrain his own agitation, collect his thoughts, and strive to get a clear view of this matter and of himself.

"What do you say to that?" the Professor exclaimed.

At this point Gilardoni's intense excitement reached a climax.

"Why did I not speak before, eh?" he continued. "The thing is that I can't possibly give a clear, precise and positive reason for not having done so. Those papers were a horror to me! If I myself and my own father and mother had been involved in such a question, I would rather have let a million slip than ask for it with those documents in my hand. There! I have been a fool again, to have said that! Just forget those last words, for in your place ... it is a different thing. I was speaking for myself. Good Lord, of course I was speaking for myself! Well, I thought—see what an ass I was—I thought your grandmother just doted on you, and that your grandfather's

property would go to you anyway. And with that idea...! After a while I consulted Signora Teresa, and showed her the letter and the will. She said I should have informed you at once, as soon as I had made the discovery, but that she could not give me any advice because now her daughter was, in a way, an interested party. Besides, she said.... But that is of no consequence. In short I saw the will was a horror to her also. Anyway, I was convinced your grandmother would end by accepting this marriage, and I did not speak. Tonight you come and tell me the Marchesa has used threats. Fancy that! Now you understand that I could not wait, that I could not keep these documents a moment longer. There—they are yours—take them!"

Franco, absorbed in his own thoughts, heard only these last words. "No," said he, "I will not take them. I know myself too well. With them in my possession I might be led into doing something rash, or into acting prematurely. You keep them for the present." Gilardoni would not hear of keeping them, and drove Franco into one of his fits of impatience. There was indeed nothing so irritating to his nerves as the inconclusive outpourings of kind-hearted but brainless persons. Gilardoni's opposition angered him, and he gave him to understand that this wish to rid himself of the documents at all costs, was selfishness pure and simple, and that those who have blundered must bear the consequences. The words he uttered amounted to this, but the angry and harsh expression of his face said much more. Gilardoni, whose face was crimson, shuddered at the accusation of selfishness, but controlled himself and putting on a grim frown in his turn, hastily pocketed the documents, repeated a string of "well, well, well, wells," and abruptly left the room. To appease his own conscience Franco at once set to work trying to convince himself that Signor Beniamino was entirely in the wrong. He had done wrong in not having given him the documents much sooner, and now he was doing wrong in taking offence. As he was quite sure he should make his peace with the inconclusive philosopher, he thought no more about him, put out the lamp, and, returning to his easy-chair,

became once more engrossed in his previous meditations.

Now he was beginning to see clearly. He could not with dignity make use of that will, which, both in form and in substance was dishonouring to his grandmother, arousing as it did, when the letter was considered, a suspicion of criminal suppression. The will also reflected little honour upon his father. No, never. He must tell the professor to burn both documents.

"Thus, Madam Grandmother, shall I triumph over you!" thought Franco, "Making you a free gift of the property, and of your honour as well, without even taking the trouble to tell you of it!" Revelling in this thought Franco felt almost as if he were lifted above the earth, and he drew a long breath, vastly pleased with himself, his soul illumined and soothed by a sentiment of mingled generosity and pride. With all his faith and his acts of Christian piety, he was very far from suspecting that such a sentiment was not entirely good, and that a less self-conscious magnanimity would have been more noble.

He let himself sink back in his easy-chair, more disposed to rest than he had been before, thinking quietly of what he had read, of what he had heard, as one who has been on the verge of embarking upon some perilous speculation, and looks back upon the anxiety and the calamities from which he has escaped forever. Old memories were also beginning to stir in the depths of his soul. He recalled a certain tale an old servant had told concerning the riches of the house of Maironi, which, she said, had been stolen from the poor. He was a child then, and the woman had not hesitated to speak in his presence. But the child had received a deep impression, and this impression had been re-awakened in his early boyhood, by the words of a priest, who had confided to him, with an air of great secrecy and solemnity, and perhaps not without intention, that the Maironi fortune was the fruit of a law-suit which had been unjustly won against the Ospedale Maggiore of Milan.

"So, through me," thought Franco, "everything has gone back to the devil."

It struck him that perhaps it was late, so he lighted the lamp once more, and consulted his watch. It was half-past three. Now, it would be impossible for him to rest. The moment which would re-unite him to Luisa was too near at hand, his fancy was too greatly excited. One hour and a half more! He looked at his watch every two minutes; it seemed as if the tedious time would never pass. He took a book, but could not read. He opened the window; the air was soft, the silence profound, the lake was bright over towards S. Salvatore, and the heavens were studded with stars. At Oria he could see a light. Perhaps it would be his fate to live there in Uncle Piero's house. Gazing absently at that luminous spot, he began to imagine what the future would be, and ever-changing phantoms rose before him. At about half-past four he heard a bell ring on the lower floor, and presently Pinella came with a message from his master to the effect that if he wished to make the ascent of the Boglia it was time to start. The master had a severe headache, and could neither rise nor receive him. Franco searched on the writing-table for a sheet of paper, and wrote:

"Parce mihi, domine, quia brixiensis sum."

He went out, Pinella accompanying him with the light as far as the dark arcade, where the road to Castello begins. Then he disappeared.

The Marchesa Orsola rang her bell at half-past six, and ordered the maid to bring her chocolate as usual. She swallowed more than half of it before asking with the utmost composure, at what hour Don Franco had returned.

"He has not yet returned, Signora Marchesa."

The old woman must have received an inward shock, but not a muscle of her face twitched. She placed her lips on the edge of her cup of chocolate, looked at the maid, and said calmly:

"Bring me one of those little biscuits we had yesterday."

Towards eight o'clock the maid came back to say that Don Franco had returned, but

only to go directly to his room for his passport, coming down again immediately, and he had then ordered the footman to find a boatman who would take him to Lugano. The Marchesa said never a word, but later in the day she sent word to her confidant Pasotti that she was expecting him. Pasotti took in the situation at a glance, and remained with her more than half an hour. The lady was determined to find out where and how her grandson had spent the night. Pasotti had already heard some rumours, which he now repeated, concerning a nocturnal visit of Don Franco's to Casa Rigey; but more reliable and precise information was desired. The cunning Tartufo, by nature as curious as a hound, that goes about following every scent, poking his nose into every hole, and rubbing it against every pair of trowsers, promised to furnish the Marchesa with such information in the course of a day or two, and then took himself off, his eyes sparkling, rubbing his hands in anticipation of a pleasant chase.

Footnotes

[H] Parpagliota: a small coin then in circulation, and worth about twenty centimes (?). [Translator's note.]

CHAPTER V THE ROGUE AT WORK

The next morning, Pasotti having imbibed his coffee and milk, lay pondering the plan of the chase until half-past ten, when he summoned Signora Barborin, who slept in another room because her snoring disturbed the "Controller," as she respectfully called her husband. "He is quite right," the poor deaf woman would say, "it is a terribly bad habit, this snoring of mine!" She was older than Pasotti, whom she had accepted as her second husband because her heart was very susceptible, and to whom she had brought certain moneys which he had long coveted, and was now enjoying. The Controller was fond of her in his own way; he obliged her to make calls, to go on boating excursions, to take long walks in the hills, all of which things

were torments to her. He made fun of her deafness, sent her out covered with silks and feathers, and at home made her work like any drudge. In spite of all this she respected and served him like a slave, in fear and trembling it is true, but not without affection. When she did not call him "the Controller" she called him "Pasotti," but she never allowed herself to use a more familiar appellation.

Pasotti, with a face as stern as any satrap, ordered her by gestures to go to the drawer for a white shirt, to the wardrobe for his second-best suit, to a cupboard for a pair of boots. When his wife had prepared everything, hunting anxiously here and there, continually facing about to follow the eyes and gestures of the master who several times called her a fool, when she would stare open-mouthed at him, striving to catch the word she had only seen, Pasotti stuck his legs out of bed, and said:

"Here you are!"

Signora Barborin knelt before him, and began pulling on his stockings, while the Controller, stretching out his arm to the pedestal, took his snuff-box, and, having opened it, continued his previous meditations, his fingers buried in the snuff. He intended to make several visits of discovery, but in what order should he arrange them? From what his farmer had told him, he judged that Signor Giacomo Puttini's Marianna, and perhaps even Signor Giacomo himself must know something about Don Franco, and certainly something must be known in Castello. While Signora Barborin was tying the second shoe-lace, Pasotti remembered that it was Tuesday. Every Tuesday Signor Giacomo, with a few friends, was in the habit of going to the market at Lugano, or rather to the tavern called "del Lordo," in order to vary the daily wine of Grimelli by a weekly glass of an undiluted vintage, and he often came home in an affectionate and communicative frame of mind. It would therefore be better to call upon him late in the day, say between four and five. In fancy Pasotti was already holding him in his hand, and managing him as he liked. With a malicious smile he raised his fingers from the snuff-box, shook the pinch to the

proper dimensions by means of a few gentle, even raps, enjoyed it at his leisure, and then his wife having given him his handkerchief, he rewarded her by mumbling with a benign expression of countenance, as he rolled the handkerchief into a ball: "Poor woman! poor creature!"

When, after half an hour's labour he had put on and buttoned up his coat, he exclaimed, seriously: "What d—— hard work!" and went to the glass. Then his wife ventured to edge cautiously towards the door, saying very timidly—

"Can I go now?"

Pasotti turned round frowning and imperious, and beckoning to her to approach, he drew about her head and person certain lines in the air, which meant a hat and shawl. She did not understand, and stood staring at him, with her mouth open. Then she pointed her forefinger at his breast, questioning him with her eyes, and her lifted eyebrows, as if suspecting he wanted those articles for himself. Pasotti answered this questioning in the same manner, with three stabs of his forefinger, which signified: "you, you, you!" Then, making the motions of cutting something with his open hand, he gave her to understand that she was to go out with him. She started several times, astonished and protesting, opened her eyes extremely wide, and said in that voice of hers which seemed to come from the cellar:

"Where?"

The Controller's only answer was a fulminating glance and a gesture: "march!" He did not intend to give any further information.

Signora Barborin struggled a little longer.

"I have not breakfasted yet," she said.

Her husband took her by the shoulders, drew her towards him, and shouted into her face:

"You will breakfast later."

Only at Albogasio Inferiore, in front of the Annunziata, did he inform her, by pointing to the place with his stick, that they were going to Cadate, to that old manor-house planted in the lake between Casarico and Albogasio, and generally known as "the Palace," where there lived, all alone, in the small rooms of the upper story, the priest, Don Giuseppe Costabarbieri and his servant Maria, called "Maria of the Palace." Pasotti knowing well that both were eager listeners, but extremely cautious in talking, wished to examine them one at a time, without seeming to do so, and, if he found any soft spot, he intended to press it very gently. He had brought his wife with him that she might help him in this delicate matter of taking them one at a time, and she, poor innocent, trotted on behind him with short, quick steps, and followed him down the flight of one hundred and twenty-nine steps called the "Calcinera," never suspecting the perfidious part she was to act.

The lake was like oil, and Don Giuseppe, a fine, pursy priest, short and fat, with white hair, a ruddy complexion and small glistening eyes, was seated near the fig-tree in his garden, with a black straw hat on his head, and a white handkerchief round his neck, angling for carp, certain big, fat carp, grown old and wary, that might be seen moving about very slowly under the water, all for love of the figs, and that were as inquisitive and, at the same time, as cautious as the priest and his servant. This latter was not visible. Pasotti finding the street-door open, went in, calling out for Don Giuseppe and Maria. As no one answered he planted his wife in a chair and went down into the garden, making straight for the fig-tree, where Don Giuseppe was sitting, who, on catching sight of him, went into a fit of ceremonious convulsions. He threw down his fishing-rod and went towards Pasotti vociferating: "Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord! Oh, dear me! In this state! My dear Controller! Come up-stairs! Come up-stairs! My dear Controller! In this state! I hope you will excuse me! I hope you will excuse me!" But Pasotti would not hear of "going up," he was bound to remain where he was. Don Giuseppe began bawling for "Maria! Maria!" Presently Maria's big face appeared at a window in the upper story.

Don Giuseppe called to her to bring down a chair. Then the Controller revealed the presence of his wife, whereupon the big face disappeared and Don Giuseppe had another fit.

"How is this? How is this? Signora Barborin? She here? Oh, Lord! Come up-stairs!" and he started forward impelled by obsequiousness, but Pasotti reduced him to obedience, at first catching him by the arm, and then declaring that he wished to see him take one or two of those monstrous carp; and notwithstanding Don Giuseppe's protests: "It is no use! I sha'n't catch anything! They're far too cunning, these fish. They see!" in the end he was obliged to throw his line.

At first Pasotti pretended to watch him, but finally he also threw his line.

He began by asking Don Giovanni how long it was since he had been to Castello. Upon being informed that he had been there the day before to see his friend, the curate Intrioni, the good Tartuffe, who could not abide Intrioni, burst into a perfect panegyric of him. What a jewel, this curate of Castello! What a heart of gold! And had Don Giuseppe been to Casa Rigey? No, Signora Teresa was too ill. More panegyrics concerning Signora Teresa and Luisa. What a splendid creature! What circumspection, what high principles, what sentiment! And the Maironi affair? It was still going on, was it not? Had it gone far?

"I know nothing, nothing, nothing!" Don Giuseppe said sharply.

At that hasty denial Pasotti's eyes sparkled. He took a step forward. Oh, come now. It was not possible that Don Giuseppe did not know anything! It was not possible that he had not discussed the matter with Intrioni! Was not Intrioni aware that Don Franco had spent the night at Casa Rigey?

"I know nothing about it, nothing at all!" Don Giuseppe repeated.

Then Pasotti declared that by this concealment of certain well known circumstances, many were led to suspect evil. What the deuce! Don Franco had of course gone to Casa Rigey with the most honourable intentions, therefore——

"A bite! A bite!" whispered Don Giuseppe hurriedly, and he leaned far out over the parapet, grasped the end of the pole firmly, and fixed his gaze on the water as if a fish were about to seize the hook. "A bite!"

Pasotti, much vexed, gazed into the water also, but declared he could see nothing.

"He has made off, the wretch! But his mouth almost touched the hook. He must have felt the prick!" said Don Giuseppe, sighing and straightening himself up. He also had felt the prick of the hook, and was trying to "make off" as the fish had done.

The other renewed his attack, but in vain. Don Giuseppe had seen nothing, heard nothing, talked of nothing, knew nothing. Pasotti was silent, and the priest in turn, threw out a bit of timid malice: "They don't bite well to-day,—there must be something in the air."

In the house, meanwhile, the dialogue between Maria and Signora Barborin had proceeded most unsatisfactorily, after the first affectionate exchange of greetings, which had been a great success. Maria proposed by gestures that they go into the garden, but Signora Pasotti begged with clasped hands, to be allowed to remain in her chair. Then the big Maria took another chair, and seating herself beside her guest tried to talk to her. But she found it impossible to make her understand, no matter how she shrieked, so gave up in despair, and taking her great cat upon her lap, talked to him instead.

Poor Signora Barborin, who was quite resigned, watched the cat with her great black eyes, dimmed by age and grief. Ah! here was Pasotti at last, with Don Giuseppe, who at once began to puff out his:

"Oh, good Lord! My dear Signora Barborin! Pray excuse me!" Maria having confessed to the Scior Controlor that his wife and she had not been able to understand each other, her master—as a mark of respect for Signora Pasotti—called the servant a "block head," and, as she attempted to justify herself, he prudently checked her by an imperious wave of the hand and a string of "there, there, there's."

Then he signalled to her mysteriously with his head, and she left the room. Pasotti followed her, and told her that his wife really felt obliged to call on the Rigeys, but was in doubt as to how she should act, having heard certain rumours which were current, and that she had greatly hoped to gain some information from Maria, for "Maria always knew everything."

"What foolish talk!" said Maria, much flattered. "I never know anything; but I can tell you to whom your wife must apply. To Signor Giacomo Puttini. It is Signor Giacomo Puttini who always knows everything."

"Well done!" thought Pasotti, adding these remarks to what the farmer had said, and concluding he was on the track at last. At the same time he shrugged his shoulders incredulously. Signor Giacomo might perhaps be aware of what was going on in the moon, but that was all; he never knew anything else. Maria insisted, and the old fox began to press her with questions, beating cautiously about the bush; but he found her obdurate, and presently he saw that he should have his labour for his pains, and that he must be satisfied with that one bit of information. He became silent, and half satisfied, half preoccupied, returned to the room where Don Giuseppe was explaining to Signora Barborin, by means of appropriate gestures, that Maria was going to bring her something to eat. In fact the woman appeared presently with a square, glass jar, full of brandy-cherries, a renowned specialty of Don Giuseppe's, who was in the habit of offering them solemnly to his guests, in his own peculiar Italian:

"Allow me to offer you something! Will you try a few of my cherries? Magara con un tochello di pane? Perhaps with a slice of bread?" And then, lapsing into dialect once more: "Maria, tajee gio un poo de pan—cut off a bit of bread."

Signora Barborin feasted on bread alone, following the advice of her satanic husband, who himself took cherries without bread. Then they went away together, and she was permitted to return to Albogasio, while the Controller set off in the

direction of Casa Gilardoni.

"That Pasotti is a rogue," said Maria when she had bolted the street-door.

"He is not only a rogue, but an extra big rogue! A bargnif!" Don Giuseppe exclaimed, remembering the hook; and by the application of the dialect title of "Bargnif," which means the arch-fiend, considered in the light of his great cunning, these two mild beings found relief for their feelings, and a compensation for so many things given unwillingly: courtesies, smiles and cherries.

Professor Gilardoni was reading perched on his belvedere in the kitchen-garden, when he caught sight of Pasotti coming towards him behind Pinella, between the rows of beets and turnips. He had little liking for the Controller, with whom he had exchanged only one or two calls, and who had the reputation of being a tedescone, a rank German. Nevertheless, being inclined to think the best of those with whom he was only slightly acquainted, he found no difficulty in extending to him the same cordial courtesy which it was his habit to show to every one. He went to meet his guest, velvet cap in hand, and after a skirmish of compliments which proved an easy victory for Pasotti, Gilardoni returned to the belvedere with him.

Pasotti, on the other hand, felt a lively dislike for the Professor, not so much because he knew him to be a Liberal, as because, though Gilardoni did not go to Mass as often as he himself did, he lived like a Puritan, loving neither the table nor the bottle, neither tobacco nor certain loose discourses. Moreover he did not play tarocchi. One evening, when talking in the kitchen-garden with Don Franco, of the tremendous bouts of eating and drinking which Pasotti and his friends often celebrated in the taverns of Bisnago, the Professor had said something which was overheard by the big curate, one of the gluttons, whose boat, in which he himself sat fishing, happened to be gliding along very softly, close to the walls. "Miserable knave!" the most worthy Controller had exclaimed when the words were repeated to him, his face wearing the expression of a bargnif bilioso, of Satan with a bilious attack. The

exclamation had been followed by a contemptuous snarl, after which the Controller spat protestingly. This, however, did not prevent him from overflowing on the present occasion with excuses for having unduly postponed his visit, nor from immediately spying out the volume resting on the rustic table of the belvedere. Gilardoni saw him glance at it and, as the book in question was one of those forbidden by the government, he took it up almost instinctively as soon as he had started the conversation, and rested it on his knee in such a manner that Pasotti could not read the title. This precaution disturbed Pasotti, who was just then praising the little villa and the garden in all their particulars, and in the tone best adapted to each part; the beets, with amiable familiarity, the aloes, with serious and frowning admiration. An angry light flashed in his eyes, and then disappeared.

"Fortunate man," he sighed. "If my affairs would permit it, I myself should like to live in Valsolda."

"It is a peaceful spot," said the Professor.

"Yes, a peaceful spot; and, besides, nowadays those who have served the Government are not comfortable in the big towns. People make no distinction between a faithful official who attends strictly to his own duties, as I have done, and a police-spy. We are exposed to many suspicions, many humiliations——"

The Professor turned red, and was sorry he had removed the book from the little table. In fact, notwithstanding his assumption of humility, Pasotti was too proud to act the spy, and, owing to this pride, or perhaps to some good strain in him, he had never done so. Thus in his words there was a grain of sincerity, a grain of gold, which sufficed to give them the ring of true metal. Gilardoni, touched by this, offered his guest a glass of beer, and hastened away in search of Pinella, glad of an excuse for leaving the book on the little table.

Hardly had the Professor disappeared when Pasotti snatched up the volume, and gave it an inquisitive glance; then he laid it down on the same spot, and stationed

himself at the top of the steps, toying with the snuff in the box he held open in his hand, and smiling a smile half of beatitude, half of admiration, at the lake, the hills and the sky. The book was a volume of Giusti, pretending to have been published in Brussels or rather Brusselle, and bearing the title: Italian Poems, from manuscripts. Written across one corner of the fly-leaf was the name: "Mariano Fornic." It needed less keenness than Pasotti possessed to perceive at once in that heteroclite, the anagram of Franco Maironi.

"How lovely! What a paradise!" said he softly, while the Professor was coming up the steps followed by Pinella with the beer.

Presently, between two sips of beer, he confessed that his visit was not entirely of a disinterested nature. He declared that he was in love with the blossoming wall that upheld the kitchen-garden on the lake-side, and that he wished to copy it at Albogasio Superiore, where, though the lake was wanting, there were plenty of bare walls. Where did the Professor get those aloes, those roses and caper-bushes?

"Why," the other answered frankly. "Maironi gave them to me."

"Don Franco?" Pasotti exclaimed. "Well done! I will appeal to Don Franco, who is always very kind to me."

And he took out his snuff-box. "Poor Don Franco," said he, with all the tenderness of a compassionate rogue as he scrutinised and fingered the snuff. "Poor young man! He sometimes flies into a passion, but, after all, he is a splendid fellow. A heart of the best! Poor young man! Do you see him often?"

"Yes, quite often."

"If only his hopes could be realised, poor young man! His hopes and hers also, of course. That affair is not off, is it?"

Pasotti put this question with the skill of a great actor, with affectionate but discreet interest, with no more curiosity than was fitting, and with the intention of lubricating and softening somewhat Gilardoni's closed heart, that it might open of itself, little by

little. But Gilardoni's heart, instead of spreading itself open at that gentle touch, contracted and closed tighter than ever.

"I don't know," the Professor replied, feeling the colour mounting to his face, and indeed he turned scarlet. In his mental note-book Pasotti immediately made a note of the embarrassed manner, and of the heightened colour. "He would be unwise to throw up the game. It is only natural that the Marchesa should create difficulties for them, but after all, she is a good creature, and devoted to him. Poor woman, what a fright she had the other night!"

He glanced at the Professor who was frowning in uneasy silence, and reflected: You will not speak? Then you know. "Just think of it! Not to say where he was going! What do you think of that?"

"But I know nothing about it, I don't understand." Gilardoni exclaimed, frowning more darkly still and growing ever more uneasy.

And now Pasotti, who was aware that the Professor had long since ceased to visit the Rigeys, but was ignorant of the reason why, made a move which was worthy only of a novice in roguery.

"You might enquire about it at Castello." said he, with a malicious simper.

At this point Gilardoni, who was already boiling with rage, overflowed.

"Pray oblige me by dropping this subject," said he, angrily, "oblige me by dropping it."

Pasotti grew sullen. Ceremonious, insinuating, and given to adulation though he was, his pride would not allow him to suffer an unpleasant word calmly, and he took offence at every shadow. He said no more, and in a few minutes took his leave with dignified coolness, and retired through the beets and the turnips, nursing his wrath. On reaching the top of the Contrada dei Mal'ari, the bargnif paused a moment to think, resting his chin on his hand, then he started towards the shore of Casarico, moving slowly, his head bent low, but with glistening eyes, like the poodle that

smells the hidden truffle in the air. Don Giuseppe's frightened denials, Maria's obstinate denials, and the Professor's embarrassment and outburst of temper, told him that a truffle really existed, and that it must be a big one. He had thought of going to Loggi where dwelt Paolin and Paolon, both of whom were well informed, but then he had remembered that it was Tuesday, and that probably he would not find them. No, it would be better to go directly up to Castello from Casarico, and sniff and hunt about in the house of a certain Signora Cecca, an admirable woman, all heart, and famous for the assiduous watch she kept from her window over the entire Valsolda by means of a powerful spy-glass. She could tell you any day who had gone to Lugano with the boatman Pin, or with Panighet; noted the conversations the unhappy Pinella held with a certain Mochét in front of the church at Albogasio, half a mile distant; she knew how many days it had taken Engineer Ribera to drink the little cask of wine which his boat carried back empty from the house at Oria to the cellar at S. Margherita. If Franco had been to Casa Rigey Signora Cecca must surely know it.

In the passage that leads from Casarico to the narrow street of Castello, Pasotti heard hurried steps behind him, and then some one brushed past him in the darkness and he believed he had recognised a man nicknamed "légora fugada" or the "hunted hare," because of the furious pace at which he always walked. This honest man, who was even more inquisitive than Pasotti, was a most worthy person who loved to know things just for the sake of knowing them, and for no other reason. He always went about alone, was everywhere, appearing and disappearing like a flash, sometimes in one place, sometimes in another, like certain large, winged insects, which pass with a glance, a whirr, a touch, and then, hush! they are neither heard nor seen again until there comes another glance, another whirr, another touch. He had seen the Pasottis enter the "Palace," and the unusual hour had caused him to suspect something. Lying flat in a small field he had seen Signora Barborin turn homewards, and the Controller start towards Casarico. Then, having followed at a distance, this

individual had posted himself behind one of the pilasters of the portico of Casarico while Pasotti was calling on Gilardoni, and now he had slipped past him, taking advantage of the dark passage, and hastening to reach Castello before him, that he might watch his movements from some point of vantage.

In fact he saw him enter Signora Cecca's house.

The old lady, who had the goitre, was in her little parlour, holding a small urchin on her left arm, while with her free hand she supported a very long and slender pasteboard tube, which was struck slanting across the window like a wall-gun and pointed down at the sparkling lake, at a white sail, filled with the breva. On the entrance of Pasotti, who came forward with stooping shoulders, his face suffused with a most gentle gaiety, the kindly and hospitable old dame hastened to put down the monstrous pasteboard nose, which she was so fond of poking into the most distant affairs of others, where her own parchment nose, though it was long beyond measure, could not reach. She received the Controller as she might have received a saintly miracle-worker, who had come to remove her goitre.

"Oh, how kind of you! Dear Sior Controlor! Oh, how kind! What a pleasure! What a pleasure!"

And she made him sit down and nearly suffocated him with her offers of hospitality.

"A piece of cake! A bit of nut-candy! Dear Sior Controlor! A little wine! A taste of rosoho!—You must excuse me," she added, for the youngster had begun to whine. "He is my little grandson, you know. My little pet."

Pasotti took a great deal of urging, having not only Don Giovanni's cherries, but also Gilardoni's beer in his stomach, but finally he was obliged to yield, and resign himself to gnawing a piece of that accursed almond cake, while the urchin clung to his grandmother's goitre.

At this the sarcastic rogue said pathetically, laughing in his sleeve the while: "Poor Signora Cecca! Twice a mother!" When he had enquired for her husband and for all

her descendants even unto the third generation, he brought forward Signora Teresa Rigey. How was that poor lady? Bad! Really very bad? But since when had she been worse? Had there been any cause? Some trouble, perhaps? The old troubles were well known, but had there been some fresh ones? Perhaps on Luisina's account? About the marriage? And did Don Franco come to Castello? Ah, not in the daytime, but perhaps——?

As the patient who is being questioned and examined by the surgeon searching for the painful, hidden spot, answers ever more briefly, ever more fearfully as the hand draws nearer and nearer to the point, and starts and draws back as soon as the spot is touched, so Signora Cecca answered Pasotti ever more briefly, ever more cautiously, until, at that "but" which touched the painful spot so delicately, she started, exclaiming—

"A little more cake, Sior Controlor! It is a cake light enough for young girls."

Pasotti in his heart cursed the "young girls" and their cake, a concoction of honey, chalk and almond oil, but deemed it prudent to swallow another mouthful before once more touching, or rather pressing the tender spot he had discovered.

"I know nothing! I know nothing! Absolutely nothing!" Signora Cecca exclaimed. "Try sounding Puttini. Try Signor Giacomo. And pray don't ask me anything more." Again! Pasotti's face shone at the prospect of getting the unlucky Signor Giacomo into his clutches. Thus the eyes of a falcon might shine at the joyous prospect of snatching a frog, and of holding him in his claws, to toy with at pleasure. Presently he took his departure well satisfied with everything save with the chalky cake, which lay like lead in his stomach.

Casa Puttini, which, within its minute, genteel appearance, resembled the little old gentleman who ruled it, in a black coat and white stock, stood just below that stately pile, Casa Pasotti, on the road to Albogasio Inferiore. The falcon went there in the afternoon, towards five o'clock, with a cunning expression on his face. He knocked

at the door and then listened. He was there! The unlucky frog was there! And he was quarrelling as usual with the perfidious servant. Pasotti knocked louder. "Go down!" said Signor Giacomo, but Marianna would not hear of going down to open the door. "Go down! I am the master!" It was all in vain. Pasotti knocked again, knocked like a battering-ram. "Who the devil can it be!" scolded Puttini, and he came down puffing: "Apff! apff!" to open the door. "Oh, most gracious Controller!" said he winking hard, and raising his eyebrows pathetically. "Pray excuse me! That awful servant! I am quite worn out! You would not believe the things that go on in this house!"

"That is a lie!" Marianna cried from above.

"Hold your tongue, you!" And then Signor Giacomo began telling his woes, stopping from time to time to silence the protests of the invisible servant.

"Just fancy! This morning I went to Lugano. I got home about three o'clock. On the doorstep—look there—I saw some splashes. Hold your tongue, you! I did not heed them, and went straight in. At the head of the kitchen-stairs there were more splashes. Be quiet, will you?—What can have been spilled? said I to myself, and I stooped and touched the spots with my finger. It was something greasy; I smelt it, it was oil. Then I followed the splashes, touching and sniffing, sniffing and touching. All oil, most gracious Controller! So I said to myself again: Either it came in, or it went out. If it came in, the farmer brought it, and in that case there will be splashes outside the door, and they will extend upwards, if it went out, that means that this accursed.... Hold your tongue, I say!... took it to S. Mamette and sold it, and then the splashes outside will extend downwards. So back I went, always following the splashes and presently I found myself here at the door. Most gracious Controller, those splashes all extended downwards! That d——"

At this point the servant's voice rang out like the bell on an alarm-clock, and no "hold your tongue" was strong enough to stem that shrill flow of angry words.

Pasotti tried, and not succeeding, flew into a passion himself, and shouted: "Oh, you cheat!" following up that title with a string of insults, at each of which Signor Giacomo gave a low grunt of satisfaction. "Yes, yes, give it to her! that's right! I am much obliged to you. Yes, shout,—that's right. You torment, you!—I am really greatly obliged to you, most gracious Controller! Really greatly obliged!"

When Marianna had been overpowered and reduced to silence, Pasotti told Signor Giacomo that he must speak a few words with him. "I am really not up to it," the little man complained. "You must excuse me, for I feel quite ill."

"Not up to it, not up to it, indeed!" shouted Marianna who had revived. "You had better tell us how you wear yourself out going up to Castello at night to see the girls!"

"Hold your tongue," Puttini shrieked, while Pasotti exclaimed, with a fiendish grin: "What, what, what!" Seeing that Puttini was becoming furious, he took him by the arm, and calming him with peaceful and affectionate language, dragged him away to his own house where he at once summoned his wife, and started a game of three-handed tarocchi, with the purpose of soothing the poor frog, and getting a firmer grip of him.

If Signora Barborin played badly, Signor Giacomo, meditating, pondering and puffing, played worse. He was an extremely timid player, and never set himself up alone against the other two, but to-day at the very first deal, he discovered that he held such extraordinary cards that he was seized with a fit of courage, and, to use the language of the game, he entered. "Goodness knows what sort of a hand he has!" Pasotti growled.

"I don't say.... I don't say.... There certainly are several friars who walk in slippers."

Signor Giacomo's "I don't say" meant that he held marvellous cards, and the friars in slippers, in his lingo, were the four kings of the game. While he was getting ready to play, feasting his eyes upon his cards, and feeling each one in turn, Pasotti took the

opportunity of opening fire, hoping to make him lose the game, into the bargain. "Come now," said he, "tell us about it! When was it you went to Castello at night?"

"Oh Lord! Oh Lord! Don't talk about it," Signor Giacomo replied, growing very red and sorting his cards faster than ever.

"Well, well, play away then. We can talk later. I know the whole story any way!"

Poor Signor Giacomo, how could he play with that bone in his throat? He sorted and puffed, led when he should not have done so, blundered in adding up the points, lost two of the friars and their slippers as well, and in spite of his splendid hand, left several markers in the clutches of Pasotti who was grinning with delight, and several more on the little plate beside Signora Barborin, who kept repeating with clasped hands: "What have you done, Signor Giacomo? what have you done?"

Pasotti gathered up the cards and began shuffling them, casting sardonic glances at Signor Giacomo, who did not know where to look.

"Certainly," said he, "I know everything. Signora Cecca told me the whole story. I assure you, my dear Political Deputy, you will be called upon to answer for this before the Imperial and Royal Commissary of Porlezza."

With these words Pasotti passed the cards to Puttini, that he might cut. But Puttini, hearing that dreaded name, began to groan:

"Oh Lord! Oh Lord! What is that you say?... I know nothing.... Oh Lord! The Imperial and Royal Commissary?... I assure you I can't see what for! ... apff!"

"Certainly," Pasotti repeated. He was waiting for a word that should enlighten him, and by pointing first to the door and then to his own mouth, he made his wife understand that she was to fetch something to drink.

"And that dreadful engineer as well!" Signor Giacomo exclaimed, as if speaking to himself.

As the fisherman who, pulling hard on the long, heavy line quivering, he fancies,

with the weight of the one big fish he has been angling for so long, finally redoubles his caution and skill, as, with a thrill, he sees two great shadowy fishes instead of one rising from the depths, so Pasotti, upon hearing this allusion to the engineer, was thrilled and amazed, and began preparing, with the most exquisitely delicate touch, to draw out this secret concerning Signor Giacomo and Ribera.

"Certainly," said he, "you did wrong."

Silence on Signor Giacomo's part.

Pasotti insisted.

"You did very wrong."

But just then Signora Barborin entered, smiling genially, and bearing a tray with the bottle and glasses. The wine was of a dark red, shot through with ruby lights, and Signor Giacomo contemplated it if not yet tenderly, at least benevolently. This wine had an aroma of austere virtue, and Signor Giacomo smelt of it affectionately, gazed at it with emotion, and then smelt of it again. This wine had that mellow richness which fills both palate and soul with its flavour, and indeed it possessed exactly that honest and pure tartness that its aroma pre-announced, and Signor Giacomo sipped it and wished it were not liquid and evanescent, tasted it, smacked his lips over it, and rolled it under his tongue. When, from time to time, he rested his glass on the little table, neither his hand nor his languid gaze were withdrawn from it.

"Poor Engineer! Poor Ribera!" Pasotti exclaimed. "He is a most upright man, but ..."

And as he pulled and pulled the unlucky Signor Giacomo began to rise to the hook and the line.

"I myself did not wish it," he said. "'Twas he made me go—'Come along,' said he. 'Why do you not wish to go? There will be no harm done. The thing is honest.' 'Yes!' I answered, 'so it seems to me also, but all this secrecy?' 'On account of the grandmother,' he replied. 'But then,' I asked, 'what sort of a figure shall you and I cut?' 'We are just a couple of simpletons!' he answered, with that way of

his—honest, old-fashioned soul that he is,—that always gets round me. 'I will go,' said I."

Here he paused. Pasotti waited a while, and then gave the line a cautious jerk. "The trouble is," said he, "that the story leaked out at Castello."

"Yes, Sir, and I was sure it would. The family and the engineer might keep the secret, and of course I should never speak, but the priest and the sacristan would surely talk."

The priest? The sacristan? Ah! at last Pasotti understood. He staggered! He had not expected such a tremendous disclosure. He filled the unhappy Signor Giacomo's glass, and had little difficulty in getting all the particulars of the wedding out of him. Then he tried to find out what plans for the future the young people had formed, but in this he did not succeed. He began shuffling the cards with the intention of continuing the game, but Signor Giacomo looked at his watch, and found that it wanted only nine minutes to seven, at which hour he was in the habit of winding his clock. Three minutes in the street, two minutes on the stairs, and there remained only four minutes for leave-taking. "Reckon it out for yourself, most gracious Controller. It is as I say: there is no doubt about it."

Signora Bardorin, noticing this consultation, questioned her husband about it. Pasotti raised his hands to his mouth, and shouted into her face: "He wants to go and see his sweetheart!" "What nonsense! What nonsense!" poor Signor Giacomo exclaimed, turning all colours; and Signora Pasotti, having understood by a miracle, opened her mouth enormously wide, not knowing whether or no to believe her husband. "His sweetheart? Oh, what nonsense. It is foolish talk, is it not, Signor Giacomo? Of course you might have a sweetheart, I don't deny that. You're not old, but...!" Seeing that he really intended to be off, she tried to detain him, telling him she had some chestnuts from Venegono on the fire, which were nearly done, and begging him to accept some of them. But neither the chestnuts nor Pasotti's reproaches could

persuade Signor Giacomo, and he departed with the spectre of the Imperial and Royal Commissary in his heart, harassed by unpleasant twinges of conscience, and a vague sense of dissatisfaction with himself, which he could not explain, and feeling instinctively that the perfidious servant's insolence was, after all, preferable to Pasotti's cajoleries.

As to the latter, his eyes shone even brighter than usual. He intended going to Cressogno at once. Being an indefatigable walker he expected to get there by eight o'clock. He was hugely pleased at the prospect of going to the Marchesa with his great discovery in pectore, of acting mysteriously, of dropping the most artful hints, one by one, and of obliging her to wrest the particulars from him. For his own gratification he was already preparing a gentle and soothing little speech to lay upon the wound of the imperturbable old dame, so that she might not be able to hide it, and that no one might complain of him, not even Franco. He went to the kitchen where he got them to light a lantern for him, for the night was very dark, and then he set out.

At the door he met his steward who was just coming in. The steward greeted him, and carried a large basket of fruit into the kitchen, and, having helped the maid put it away, he seated himself by the fire, and said placidly:

"Signora Teresa of Castello has just passed away."

CHAPTER VI THE OLD LADY OF MARBLE

The door was opened a little way, very, very softly; the maid looked in, and called to Franco, who was absorbed in prayer, kneeling by a chair near the couch upon which the dead woman lay. Franco did not hear, and it was Luisa who rose. She went to listen to the woman's whispered request, said something in reply, and when the maid had withdrawn, stood waiting for some one. As no one appeared she pushed the door open and said aloud: "Come in, come in." A great sob answered her. Luisa stretched

out both hands and Professor Gilardoni seized them. They stood some time thus, motionless, fighting their sorrow with tightly pressed lips, he more shaken than she. Luisa was the first to move. She gently withdrew one hand, and, with the other, led the Professor into the chamber of death.

Signora Teresa had passed away in the drawing-room in the armchair from which she had never been able to rise after the night of the wedding. They had made the sofa into a funeral couch, and laid her out upon it. The sweet face rested there on the pillow, showing waxen in the light of the four candles, the lips were slightly parted, and it was as if a smile shone through the closed eyelids. The couch and the clothes were strewn with autumn flowers; cyclamen, dahlias and chrysanthemums. "See how beautiful she is," said Luisa, in a tender, quiet tone that went to the heart. The Professor stood leaning upon a chair at some distance from the bed.

"Do you realise it, Mamma," Luisa said softly, "how much you are beloved?"

She knelt down, and taking one of the dead hands, began kissing it, caressing it, and murmuring sweet words over it in a low voice; then she was silent, and, replacing the hand, she rose, kissed the brow and contemplated the face with clasped hands. She recalled her mother's reproofs in past years, remembering every one since her childhood, for she had always felt them deeply. Once more she fell upon her knees, and pressed her lips to the icy hand with an impulse of affection more ardent than if she had been dwelling upon past caresses. Then taking a cyclamen from her mother's shoulder, she rose and offered it to the Professor. He took it, weeping, and going to Franco, whom he now met for the first time since that night, he embraced him with silent emotion, and felt his embrace returned. Then, stepping very softly, he left the room.

It was striking eight o'clock. Signora Teresa had died the night before at six; in twenty-six hours Luisa had never rested for a moment, and had left the room only four or five times for a few minutes. Franco it was who often went out, and

remained away a long time.

Summoned in secret he had reached Castello just in time to see the poor mother alive, and it had fallen to his lot to perform all the sad offices which death imposes, for Uncle Piero, in spite of his years, had not the slightest knowledge of these matters, and was greatly bewildered by them.

Now, hearing it strike eight, he went to his wife and gently urged her to take a little rest, but Luisa answered him at once in a way that put an end to his insistence. The funeral was to take place the next morning at nine o'clock. She had wished it to be postponed for as long as possible, and intended to remain with her mother to the last. In her slim person there was an indomitable vigour capable of withstanding still greater trials. For her, her mother was there still, on that narrow couch, among the flowers. She did not think that a part of her was elsewhere, did not look out of the west window, seeking her among the tiny stars that trembled above the hills of Carona. Her one thought was that in a few hours, the darling mother, who had lived so many years for her alone, caring for naught else on earth save her happiness, would be laid away to sleep for ever under the great walnut-trees of Looch, in the shadowy solitude where the little cemetery of Castello rests in silence, while she herself would continue to enjoy life, the sun, and love. She had answered Franco almost sharply as if, in some way, affection for the living were an offence to the affection for the dead. Then, fearing she had hurt him, she repented, kissed him and endeavoured to pray, knowing that in this she would be pleasing him, and that certainly her mother would have expected this of her. She began reciting the Pater, the Ave and the Requiem over and over again, but without deriving the slightest comfort from them, experiencing, rather, a secret irritation, an unwelcome drying up of her grief. She had always practised religion, but, after the ardour of her first Communion had died out, her soul had ceased to be associated in religious observance. Her mother had lived rather for the next world than for this; she had regulated her every action, her every word, her every thought with that end in view.

In her precocious intellectual development, Luisa's ideas and sentiments had taken another direction, with that determined vigour which was one of her characteristics. She covered these views, however, with certain half-conscious, half-unconscious dissimulations, partly for love of her mother, partly because some germ of religion, sown by maternal precepts, fostered by example, and strengthened by habit, had not died out. Since her fourteenth year she had been growing ever more inclined to look beyond this present life, and at the same time not to consider herself; to live for others, for the earthly good of others, but always, however, according to a strong and fierce sense of justice. She went to church, performed the external duties of her religion, without incredulity, but also without the conviction that they were pleasing to God. She had a confused conception of a God so great, so lofty, that no immediate contact was possible between Him and mankind. Sometimes, indeed, she feared she might be mistaken, but her possible error seemed to her of a nature such as no God of infinite goodness might punish. She herself did not know how she had come to think thus.

The door opened very softly once more, and a low voice called, "Signor Don Franco." When Luisa was alone she ceased to pray, and resting her head upon her mother's pillow, she pressed her lips to the dear shoulder, closed her eyes and let the flood of memories flow over her that sprung from that touch, from that familiar odour of lavender. Her mother's dress was of silk, her best, and had been a present from Uncle Piero. She had worn it only once, some years before, on the occasion of a visit to the Marchesa Marioni. The odour of the lavender brought back this memory also, and with it came scalding tears, acrid with tenderness and with another sentiment that was not actually hatred, that was not actually anger, but that held the bitterness of both.

Franco could not at once account for the shudder that shook him when he heard his name called. Early that morning Uncle Piero had written to the Marchesa, announcing his sister's death in simple but most respectful language, and had

enclosed a note from Franco himself, which ran as follows:

"Dear Grandmother,—I have not time to write to you because I am here, but I will tell you all by word of mouth to-morrow evening. I hope you will listen to me as my father and mother would have listened."

No answer had as yet come from Cressogno, but now a man from Cressogno had brought a letter. Where was this man?—Gone; he would not stop a minute. Franco took the letter and read the address: "Al. preg. Signor Ingegnere Pietro Ribera." At the same time he recognised in the writing, the hand of the agent's daughter. He went up to Uncle Piero's room at once. The engineer, who was worn out, had gone to bed.

When Franco brought him the letter he showed neither surprise nor curiosity, but said, calmly:

"Open it."

Franco placed the light on the chest of drawers, and opened the letter, keeping his back to the bed. As he stood, he seemed turned to stone; he neither breathed nor moved.

"Well?" said the uncle.

Silence.

"I understand," the old man added. Then Franco let the letter fall, and stretching his hands above his head, he uttered a long "Ah!" deep and hoarse, and laden with amazement and horror.

"Come, come!" Uncle Piero repeated, "what about this letter?"

Franco roused himself, and hastened to embrace him, hardly able to restrain his sobs.

The placid man bore this storm calmly and patiently for a time, but presently he began to defend himself, and demanded the letter. "Let me see it, let me see it," said

he, and he muttered, "What can that blessed woman have written?"

Franco brought the light and the letter, which he handed to Uncle Piero. His grandmother had written never a word, never a syllable; she had simply returned the engineer's letter and Franco's note. It was some time before the uncle could grasp this. He was never quick to understand things, and this thing was utterly incomprehensible to him! When at last he did make it out, he could not help saying: "Certainly this is very hard!" Then, seeing how beside himself Franco was, he added, with the big solemn voice he used when judging human actions toto corde, "Listen. It is, I should say——" (and he searched for the right word, in his own peculiar fashion puffing out his cheeks, and emitting a sort of rattling sound)"——an injustice! But I am by no means so extremely astonished as you are. Not all the wrong is on her side, my dear fellow, and so——However, I am sorry for you two, who will have to eat plain food and live in this miserable little town; but how about me? For my part, I gain by all this, and I may even say, I feel inclined to thank your grandmother. You see I have never founded a family of my own; I have always counted upon this family. Now my poor sister is dead, and if your grandmother had opened her arms to you, I should have been of no more use than an old cabbage stock. So you see——"

Franco was careful not to let his wife know about this matter, and although she was aware that the letters had been sent to Cressogno, she did not ask if his grandmother had answered, until after the funeral, until some hours after the funeral. The little drawing-room, the little terrace, the little kitchen, had been full of people all day long, from nine o'clock in the morning until nine in the evening. At ten Luisa and Franco left the house without a lantern, turned to the right, went very slowly and silently through the darkness of the village, and, passing the bright and windy turning to which rises the deep roar of the river of S. Mametti, stood among the shadows and the pungent odours of the walnut-trees of Looch. Shortly before they reached the cemetery, Luisa said softly to her husband: "Have you heard nothing

from Cressogno?" He would have liked to hide at least part of the truth from her, but he could not. He said his note had been returned to him; and then Luisa wanted to know if his grandmother had sent a word of condolence to Uncle Piero. Franco's "no" was almost timid, and so uncertain that, after they had gone on a few steps a suspicion flashed across Luisa's mind, and she suddenly stopped, and seized her husband's arm. Before she had uttered a word Franco understood and embraced her as he had embraced Uncle Piero, only still more impetuously, telling her to take his heart, his soul, his life, to seek for nothing else in this world. He felt she was trembling violently in his arms, but neither then nor afterwards did a word on this subject pass between them. At the gate of the cemetery they knelt together. Franco prayed with the fervour of faith. Luisa, with eager eyes, pierced the earth where it had been disturbed near the entrance; pierced the coffin, and, in thought, fixed her gaze on her mother's mild and serious face; once more, in thought, but with an impulse so violent that the bars of the gate shook, she bent forward, lower and lower, pressed her lips to the lips of the dead woman, imprinting upon them a violence of affection, stronger than all the insults, than all the baseness of this world.

Towards eleven o'clock she tore herself reluctantly away from the spot. Going slowly down the slippery and stony path beside her husband there suddenly arose before her mind's eye a vision of a future meeting with the Marchesa. She stopped, drawing herself up and clenching her fists, and from her handsome, intelligent face there shone forth such fierceness that, could the old lady of marble have seen her thus, have met her at that moment, she might not have surrendered, perhaps, but she would certainly have hastened to put herself on the defensive.

Part Second

CHAPTER I FISHERMEN

Dr. Francesco Zérboli, Imperial and Royal Commissary of Porlezza, landed at the Imperial and Royal Ricevitoria—the custom-house—at Oria, on the tenth day of September, 1854, just as a truly imperial and royal sun was rising above the ponderous bastions of Galbiga, glorifying the little pink custom-house and the oleanders and beans of Signora Peppina Bianconi, and summoning to his office, in accordance with the regulations, Signor Carlo Bianconi, her husband, that same Receiver of Customs who had scented conspiracy in manuscript music. Bianconi, whom his wife called el mè Carlascia,—"my big Charley"—and the people, el Biancon, a tall man, fat and solid, with a clean-shaven chin, a grey moustache, and the large dull eyes of a faithful mastiff, went down to meet that other clean-shaven Imperial and Royal one, of higher rank. There was no resemblance between the two, save in the Austrian nudity of their chins. Zérboli, dressed in black and carefully gloved, was short and stout, and wore a pair of fair moustaches flattened against his sallow face, out of which peered two small, sarcastic, and scornful sparks of eyes. His hair grew so low on his forehead that he was in the habit of shaving off a strip, and at times a shade showed there, that gave him the appearance of some strange beast. Quick in his movements, in his glance, in his speech, he spoke, with easy courtesy, a nasal Italian, having the modulations of the province of Trento. He now informed the Receiver that he had come to hold a convocato—the communal council of those days—at Castello, and that he had preferred to come early and climb the hill while it was cool, from Oria rather than from Casarico or Albogasio, that he might have the pleasure of greeting the Receiver.

The big, faithful mastiff did not at once understand that the Commissary had a second end in view, and poured forth his thanks in a medley of obsequious phrases, and short, silly laughs, rubbing his hands and offering coffee, milk, eggs, and the open air of the little garden. The other accepted the coffee, but declined the open air with a motion of his head and a wink so eloquent, that Carlascia, after shouting upstairs, "Peppina!" ushered him into the office where, feeling himself transformed

(such was his double nature) from a receiver of customs into a police-officer, he composed himself, and put on an expression of austerity, as if about to enter into a sacramental union with the monarch himself. This office was a miserable hole on the ground floor, with iron gratings at the two small windows; an infectious and primitive cell, that already stunk of the great empire. The Commissary seated himself in the middle of the room, looking at the closed door that led from the landing-stage to the ante-room, the one leading from the ante-room to the office having been left open by his orders.

"Tell me something of Signor Maironi," said he.

"He is still watched," Bianconi answered, and continued in the Italian of Porta Tosa. "By the way—wait a moment—I have a report here that is nearly finished." And he began hunting and fumbling among his papers, in search of the report and of his glasses.

"You will send it in, you will send it in!" exclaimed the Commissary, who had a dread of the big mastiff's prose.

"Meanwhile speak. Tell me everything."

"He is as ill-intentioned as ever. We knew before he was ill-intentioned, but now it is very evident," the eloquent Receiver continued. "He has begun to wear that beard—you know—that midget—that moschetta—that pointed tuft, that filthy——" [I]

"Pardon me," said the Commissary, "you see I am new to the place. I have my instructions and I have received some information, but as yet I have no exact knowledge of the man and his family. You must describe them to me as minutely as you can. Let us begin with him."

"He is a proud man, violent and overbearing. He has quarrelled here at least fifty times over questions of duty. He will never give in, and he wants to teach me and the guard also. His eyes flash as if he were going to eat the custom-house. But it is

no use being overbearing with me, even if he——For indeed he knows almost everything, and that is a fact! He knows law, finance, music, flowers, fish, and the devil knows what all else."

"And she?"

"She? Oh, she is a sly puss, but when she shows her claws they are worse than his; much worse! When he is angry he turns red and makes a great row, she turns pale and is devilish insolent. Of course I never tolerate her insolence, but—well, you understand. She is a talented woman, I can tell you. My Peppina is devoted to her. She is a woman who makes friends everywhere. Here in Oria they often send for her instead of sending for the doctor. If there is a quarrel in a family, they send for her. If an animal has the stomach-ache, she must come. All the children run after her, and she even makes little dolls for them at Carnival time. You know, those little puppets. Moreover this woman can play on the spinet, and knows French and German. I am so unfortunate as not to speak German, so I have been to her several times to get German documents explained, when such come to the office."

"Ah! So you go to the Maironis' house?"

"Yes, sometimes, for that purpose."

In truth the big mastiff also went there to get Franco to explain certain enigmatical passages in the customs-tariff to him, but he did not say so.

The Commissary continued his examination.

"And how is the house furnished?"

"Well, very well. Fine Venetian floorings, painted ceilings, sofas heavily draped, a spinet, a splendid dining-room all hung with portraits."

"And the Engineer-in-Chief?"

"The engineer is a jolly, old-fashioned, kind man; he resembles me, though he is older. But he is not here much. He comes for two weeks about this time of the year,

and two weeks more in the Spring, and he pays a few short visits in between. Just leave him alone, and let him have his milk in the morning, his milk at night, his flask of Modena for dinner, his game of tarocchi, and his Milan Gazette, and Engineer Ribera is perfectly happy. But to return to Signor Maironi's beard. There is something even worse! I discovered yesterday that the gentleman has planted a jasmine in a wooden box painted red!" [J]

The Commissary, a man of parts, and probably in his secret heart, indifferent to all colours save that of his own complexion and his own tongue, could not refrain from slightly shrugging his shoulders. Nevertheless, he presently asked—

"Is the plant in blossom?"

"I don't know. I will ask the woman."

"Ask whom? Your wife? So your wife goes to Casa Maironi also?"

"Yes, from time to time."

Zérboli fixed his two little scornful eyes on Bianconi's face, and put the following question, enunciating every syllable very distinctly.

"Does she, or does she not, go there from good motives?"

"Well, as to that, it depends! She imagines she goes as a friend of Luisina's, to talk about the flowers, their sewing, and for little bits of gossip, and they chatter and chirp away as women will; you know the way. But I get out of her——"

"Tè chì, tè chì! Behold, behold!" Signora Peppina Bianconi exclaimed in her Porta Ticinese dialect, as she came forward with the coffee, smiling pleasantly. "The Commissary! What a pleasure it is to see you! I am afraid the coffee isn't very good, but any way it is fresh made. It is a great nuisance not being able to have it from Lugano!"

"Tut, tut, tut!" grumbled her husband crossly.

"Well, what harm is that? I only said so in fun. You understood, didn't you, Sür

Commissari? That blessed man there never understands anything. I never get any coffee for myself, anyway. I am taking mallow-water now for a dizzy head."

"Don't talk so much, don't talk so much!" her husband interpolated, and the Commissary, setting down the empty cup, told the good woman that he was coming to see her flowers presently, and this gallantry was like the act of one who, at a café, throws the money upon the tray, that the waiter may take it and be gone.

Signora Peppina understood, and awed by the ferocious eyes of her Carlascia, withdrew in haste.

"Listen, listen, listen," the Commissary exclaimed, covering his brow with his left hand, and pressing his temples. "Oh!" he ejaculated, suddenly remembering, "I have it! I wanted to inquire if Engineer Ribera is in Oria at present."

"He is not here now, but I believe he is coming very shortly."

"Does Engineer Ribera spend much money on this Maironi family?"

"He certainly must spend a great deal. I don't believe Don Franco has more than three svanziche a day of his own, and she——" The Receiver blew across the palm of his hand. "So you see——! They keep a servant. They have a little girl about two years old, and so they must needs keep a maid to look after the child. They send away for flowers, books, music, and all sorts of things. Of an evening they play cards, and there is always a bottle of wine. It takes a good many svanziche to live in this way, you know."

The Commissary reflected a moment with a clouded brow, and eyes rolled up to the ceiling, and then, in short, disjointed sentences that sounded like fragments of an oracle, he let it be understood that Engineer Ribera, an Imperial and Royal official, recently favoured by the Imperial and Royal government with a promotion in loco, should exert a better influence over his nephew's family. Then with further questionings and further observations touching the engineer's present weaknesses, he intimated to Bianconi that his paternal attention should be directed with special

secrecy and delicacy towards their Imperial and Royal colleague, in order that—should this become necessary—they might be able to enlighten their Superiors concerning certain acts of tolerance which would be scandalous. He ended by inquiring if Bianconi was aware that the lawyer V. from Varenna and another individual from Loveno were in the habit of visiting the Maironis quite often. The Receiver knew this, and had learned from his Peppina that they came to make music. "I don't believe it," the Commissary announced, with sudden and unusual asperity. "Your wife does not understand at all. If you go on like this, my dear Bianconi, they will lead you by the nose. Those two are a couple of rascals, who would be better off at Kufstein. [K] You must seek for more information, and when you have obtained it, you will pass it on to me. And now let us go into the garden. By the way, when anything comes from Lugano for the Marchesa Maironi——" Zérboli finished the sentence with a gesture of amiable munificence, and started forward, followed by the deeply mortified mastiff.

Signora Peppina allowed them to find her in the garden watering the flowers aided by a small boy. The Commissary looked, admired, and found a means of giving the subaltern police-officer a little lesson. By praising her flowers he easily led Signora Bianconi to mention Franco, but, as if quite indifferent to that gentleman, he did not dwell a moment upon him, but stuck to the flowers, declaring that Maironi could not possibly have finer ones. Little cries, groans, and ejaculations broke from the humble Signora Peppina, who was really embarrassed by such a comparison. But the Commissary insisted. How? Even the Casa Maironi fuchsias were finer? The heliotrope and the pelargonia also? How about the jasmine?

"The jasmine!" Signora Peppina exclaimed. "Why, Signor Maironi has the finest jasmine in the whole Valsolda, my dear sir!"

Thus, in the most natural way possible, did the Commissary presently discover that the famous jasmine had not yet blossomed. "I should like to see Don Franco's

dahlias," said he. The ingenuous creature offered to accompany him to Casa Ribera that very day. "They will be so delighted!" But the Commissary expressed his desire to wait the coming of the Imperial and Royal Engineer-in-Chief, that he might have an opportunity of greeting him, whereupon Signora Peppina said approvingly: "That is right." Meanwhile the mastiff, humiliated by that superior skill, and wishing to show in some way that, at least, he was zealous, seized the boy with the watering-pot by the arm, and presented him:

"My nephew. Son of a sister of mine, married to an Imperial and Royal doorkeeper, at the police station in Bergamo. He has the honour to bear the names, Francesco Giuseppe—Francis Joseph—bestowed upon him by my express desire. Of course, you see, it would not be respectful to use these names ordinarily——"

"His mother calls him Ratì, and his father calls him Ratù, fancy that!" Aunt Peppina put in.

"Be quiet!" said his uncle. "I call him Francesco. He is a well-behaved boy, I must say; a very well-behaved boy. Now tell us, Francesco, what are you going to do when you are a man?"

Ratì rattled off his answer as if he were reciting his catechism.

"When I am a man I shall always comport myself as behooves a faithful and devoted subject of His Majesty our Emperor, and a good Christian; and I hope, with the help of the Lord, to become some day, an Imperial and Royal Receiver of Customs like my uncle, that I may, at last, enter Paradise, and be duly rewarded for my virtuous actions."

"Well done, well done, well done!" said Zérboli, caressing Ratì. "Always walk in the path of virtue."

"You be quiet, Sür Commissari," Peppina once more burst out. "This morning the little villain ate half the sugar out of the sugar-basin!"

"What, what, what?" Carlascia exclaimed, forgetting his part in his astonishment. He

remembered himself at once however, and declared: "It was your own fault. Things should be put away. Is not that true, Francesco?"

"Perfectly," Ratì answered; and the Commissary vexed at this wrangle, and at the twist his paternal admonition had received, took himself off without ceremony.

Hardly had he disappeared when Carlascia scolded angrily: "You take the sugar again if you dare, you!" and hit Francis Joseph a formidable knock on the side of the head. This worthy had expected quite different treatment, and ran off to hide among the beans. Then Bianconi had it out with his wife, scolding her roundly, and swearing that in the future he would look after the sugar himself; and upon her daring retort: "What business is it of yours, after all?" he flung out: "Everything is my business, everything is my business!" and turning his back upon her, strode off, puffing and tingling, to the spot where his attentive wife had prepared the fishing-rod and the polenta, and began to bait the two great hooks he used in catching tench. In the olden days that little world was even more completely isolated from the great world than at present, and was, even more than at present, a world of silence and of peace, in which the functionaries of both State and Church, and, following their venerable example, many faithful subjects as well, dedicated several hours a day to edifying contemplation. Seated first on the West, the Receiver cast two hooks attached to a single line, two tempting mouthfuls of polenta, as far out from the shore as possible; when the line was stretched tight, when the float seemed firmly anchored in quiet expectation, the Imperial and Royal personage placed the short rod delicately upon the low wall, and sat down to contemplate. To the east of him the sedentario, as the customs-guard was then called, crouching on the humble landing-stage in front of another float, smoked his pipe and contemplated. A few steps beyond old, half-starved Cüstant, a retired white-washer, sacristan and churchwarden, one of the patricians of the village of Oria, sat in contemplation, on the prow of his boat, a lofty, prehistoric, tall hat on his head, the magic wand in his hand, his legs dangling above the water, and his soul concentrated on his own

particular float. Seated on the edge of a small field, in the shade of a mulberry-tree and a large, black, straw hat, the puny, thin, be-spectacled Don Brazzova, parish-priest of Albogasio, was lost in contemplation, his image reflected in the clear water. In a kitchen-garden of Albogasio Inferiore, between the banks of the Ceron and that of Mandroeugn, another patrician in a jacket and high boots, the churchwarden Bignetta, called el Signoron, the fine gentleman, sitting stiff and solemn, upon an eighteenth century chair, with the famous rod in his hand, watched and contemplated. Under the fig-tree at Cadate, Don Giuseppe Costabarbieri sat in contemplation. At S. Mamette the doctor, the grocer, and the shoemaker were hanging over the water and contemplating most diligently. At Cressogno the Marchesa's florid cook was contemplating. Opposite Oria, on the shady deserted shore of Bisgnago, a dignified arch-priest from lower Lombardy was in the habit of leading a life of contemplation for forty days every year. All alone he sat, with three rods resting at his feet, while with the air of a bishop, he contemplated the three floats belonging to these rods—two with his eyes, one with his nose. If some one, passing far out on the lake could have seen all these brooding figures without perceiving the rods, the lines, and the floats, he would have thought himself in a country inhabited by hermits and ascetics, who, weary of the earth, were contemplating the sky in this liquid mirror, simply for the sake of greater convenience.

As a matter of fact, all these ascetics were fishing for tench, and no mystery the future of humanity might contain could be of more importance to them than those mysteries at which the little float secretly hinted, when, as if possessed by a spirit, it showed signs of growing unrest, and, at last, even of mental derangement; for, after dipping and jerking, now forward, now backward, it would at last, in the utter confusion of its ideas, choose the desperate course of plunging head foremost into the depths. These phenomena, however, occurred only at rare intervals, and some of the contemplators would pass whole half-days without noticing the slightest

movement in their floats. Then each one, removing his eyes from the bit of cork, would follow a line of thought running parallel with the line attached to the rod. Thus it sometimes happened that the arch-priest would land an episcopal see, the "fine gentleman," a wood that had once belonged to his ancestors, the cook, a tench from the hills, rosy and fair, and Cüstant, an order from government to whitewash the peak of Cressogno. As to Carlascia, his second line was usually of a political nature, and the reason of this will be more readily grasped if we reflect that the main line, the one attached to the rod, often awoke in his big, dull head certain political considerations which the Commissary Zérboli had suggested to him. "You see, my dear Receiver," Zérboli had once said, when discoursing weakly about the events which had taken place on the sixth of February in Milan, "you who fish for tench, can easily understand this matter. Our great monarchy is fishing with a line. The twin baits are Lombardy and the Venetian provinces; two round and tempting morsels, with iron inside. Our monarchy has cast them there at its feet, opposite the lurking-place of that foolish little fish, Piedmont. In 1848 it grabbed at the bait Lombardy, but eventually succeeded in spitting it out and making off. Milan is our float. When Milan moves, it means that the little fish is just beneath. Last year the float moved a wee bit, but the dear little fish had only sniffed at the bait. But wait, some day there will be a violent movement, and we shall give a jerk; there will be some struggling, some floundering, but we shall land our little fish, and never let it escape again, the little white, red, and green pig!"

Bianconi had laughed heartily at this, and often when he sat down to fish, he would amuse himself by ruminating on this graceful simile, from which would generally arise other subtle and profound political musings. That morning the lake was quiet and most favourable to contemplation. The tallest grass of the precipitous bottom could be seen standing erect, a sign that there was no under-current. The baited hook cast far out, sunk straight and slowly, the line stretched evenly and smoothly below the float which sailed behind it a little way, surrounded by a series of tiny rings, that

told of the ticklings of small carp, and then sunk into repose, a sign that the bait was resting on the bottom, and that the carp no longer worried it. The fisherman placed the short rod on the low wall, and fell to thinking of Engineer Ribera.

Though he was not aware of it Bianconi had a large dose of meekness in one corner of his heart which God, without informing him of it, had made with a false bottom. The world had proof of this in 1859, when the dear little fish, having swallowed the bait Lombardy, with the hook, the line, the rod, the Commissary, and everything else, Bianconi took to planting national and constitutional cabbages at Precotto. In spite of this hidden meekness, as he now laid down his rod and reflected that poor, old Engineer Ribera was to be fished for, he experienced a singular satisfaction, neither in his heart, nor his head, nor in any of the usual senses, but in a particular sense of his own, purely Imperial and Royal! Indeed he had no consciousness of himself as distinct from the Austrian governing organism. Receiver at a small frontier customs-house, he considered himself the point of the nail on a finger of the state; then, as a police-agent, he considered himself a microscopic eye under that nail. His life was that of the monarchy. If the Russians tickled the skin of Galicia, he felt the itching at Oria. The greatness, the power, the glory of Austria inflated him with unbounded pride. He would not admit that Brazil was vaster than the Austrian Empire, or that China was more thickly populated, or that the Archangel Michael could take Peschiera, or the Almighty Himself take Verona. His real Almighty was the Emperor; he respected the One in Heaven as an ally of the one at Vienna.

So, although he had never suspected that Engineer Ribera was an unfaithful subject, the Commissary's words—gospel truth to him—had carried conviction with them, and the idea of getting hold of this untrustworthy servant fired the zeal of the royal eye and the imperial finger nail. He called himself an ass for not having seen through this man before. Oh, but there was still time to catch him and hold him fast, fast, fast! "You just leave it to me! Just leave it to me, Signor Comm——"

He broke off suddenly and seized the rod. Gently, almost without moving, the float had printed a ring on the water, the sign of a tench. Bianconi clutched the rod tight, holding his breath. Another dip of the float, another and larger ring; the float moved slowly, slowly upon the water, and then stopped. Bianconi's heart was beating violently; the float moved still a little further on the surface, and then went under; zag! Bianconi gave a jerk, and the rod bowed with the tugging on the line of a hidden fish. "Peppina, I've got him!" shouted Carlascia, losing his head. "The guadèll, the guadèll!" The customs-guard turned round enviously: "Have you got him, Scior Recitòr?" Cüstant, consumed with envy, gave no sign, not even turning his tall hat. Ratì and Signora Peppina came rushing up, the latter bringing the guadèll, a long pole with a large net at the end of it, used for bagging the tench in the water, for it would be a desperate risk to lift it up by the line. Bianconi took the line and began drawing it in very slowly. The tench was not yet visible, but must surely be enormous. The line came in smoothly for a few feet, and then was jerked violently back; then it began to come in again, nearer, ever nearer, until, far down below the surface, underneath the very noses of the three personages, something yellow flashed, a monstrous shadow! "Oh, the beauty!" said Signora Peppina under her breath. Ratì exclaimed: "Madone, Madone!" But Bianconi spoke never a word, and only pulled and pulled cautiously. It was a fine, big fellow, short and fat, with a dark back and a yellow belly, this fish that was coming up from the depths, nearly exhausted and moving crosswise with evident reluctance.

The three faces did not please the fish, for it suddenly turned tail upon them, and once more dived furiously towards the depths. At last, however, completely exhausted, it followed the line, and appeared at the foot of the wall, its gilded belly uppermost. Signora Peppina, almost upside down on the parapet, plunged her rod as far as it would go, seeking in vain to bag the unhappy fish. "By the head!" shouted her husband. "By the tail!" piped Ratì. At the noise, at sight of that terrible net, the fish struggled and dived. Peppina worked harder than ever, but could find neither

head nor tail. Bianconi pulled and the tench rose to the surface once more, coiled itself up, and with a mighty jerk, snapped the line, and shot off amid the foam. "Madone!" exclaimed Ratì, while Peppina continued to hunt about in the water with her rod. "Where is that fish? Where is that fish?" Bianconi, who had sat as one petrified, still grasping the line, now faced about in a rage; he kicked Ratì, caught his wife by the shoulder, and shook her like a bag of nuts, loading her with reproaches. "Has it made off, Scior Recitòr?" asked the customs-guard mellifluously. Cüstant turned his tall hat just a little, glanced towards the scene of the disaster, and then, returning to the contemplation of his own placid float, mumbled in an indulgent tone: "Minga pratich! Not skillful!"

Meanwhile the tench had returned to its native grass-grown depths, melancholy but free, like Piedmont after Novara. It is, however, doubtful if the poor Engineer-in-Chief will be equally fortunate.

Footnotes

[I] A short, pointed beard, called la mosca, and worn by patriots in those days. [Translator's note.]

[J] Box, red; leaves, green; flower, white. The Italian colours, so the worthy Receiver scents sedition. [Translator's note.]

[K] Box, red; leaves, green; flower, white. The Italian colours, so the worthy Receiver scents sedition. [Translator's note.]

CHAPTER II THE MOONSHINE AND CLOUD SONATA

The sun was sinking behind the brow of Monte Brè and darkness was rapidly covering the precipitous shores and the houses of Oria, stamping the purple and gloomy profile of the hill on the luminous green of the waves, which were running

obliquely towards the west, still high, but foamless in the tired breva. The lights in Casa Ribera had been the last to go out. Standing against the steep vineyards of the mountainside dotted with olives, it spanned the narrow road that follows the coast-line, its modest façade rising from the clear water, and flanked on the west, towards the village, by a little hanging-garden, divided into two tiers, on the east, towards the church, by a small terrace raised on pillars, which framed a square of church ground. In this façade there was a small boathouse where at that time the boat belonging to Franco and Luisa lay rocking on the jostling waves. Above the boathouse a slender gallery united the hanging-garden on the west and the terrace on the east, and looked out upon the lake by means of three windows. They called it a loggia, perhaps because it really had been one in olden times. The old house bore incrusted here and there several of these venerable, fossil names, which had survived through tradition, and represented, in their apparent absurdity, the mysteries of the religion of domestic walls. Behind the loggia was a spacious hall, and there were two rooms more behind that. On the west was the small dining-room, its walls covered with little, illustrious, paper men, each under his own glass and in his own frame, each in a dignified attitude, like the illustrious in flesh and blood, looking as if his colleagues did not exist at all, and the world was gazing at him alone. On the east was the alcove-room, where next to her parents, in her own little bed, slept Signorina Maria Maironi, born in August, 1852.

From the great rococo chests to the bed-rooms, the kitchen cupboard, the black clock in the little dining-room, the sofa in the loggia, with its brown cover, sprinkled with red and yellow Turks; from the straw-bottomed chairs to the armchairs with disproportionately high arms, the furniture of the house all belonged to the epoch of the illustrious men, most of whom wore the wig and pigtail. Even though it did appear to have just descended from the garret, it seemed, nevertheless, to have regained in the light and air of its new surroundings certain lost habits of cleanliness, a decided interest in life, and the dignity of old age. Thus a collection of disused

words might to-day be composed by the breath of some aged and conservative poet, and reflect his serene and graceful senility. Under the mathematical and bureaucratic rule of Uncle Piero, chairs and armchairs, tables large and small, had lived in perfect symmetry, and the privilege of immobility had been extended to the very mats themselves. The only piece of furniture which might have been called movable, was a grey and blue cushion, an abortive mattress, which the engineer, during his short visits at Oria, carried with him when he moved from one easy-chair to another. When he was absent the caretaker respected all relics of him to such an extent as never to dare touch them familiarly, or dust the less visible parts. This caused the housekeeper to fly into a rage, regularly, every time they returned to Valsolda. The master, vexed that a little dust should cause so much scolding of a poor peasant, would reprimand her, and suggest that she do the dusting herself; and when the woman—by way of a scornful retort—would demand, wrathfully, if she was to kill herself with dusting the house every time they came, he would answer good-naturedly: "If you kill yourself once, that will be sufficient."

The cultivation of the little garden as well as of a kitchen-garden he owned to the east of the church grounds, he left entirely to the caprice of the caretaker. Only once, two years before Luisa's marriage, arriving at Oria at the beginning of September, and finding six stalks of maize growing on the second terrace of the little garden, did he allow himself to say to the man: "Look here, my friend. Couldn't you really get along without those six stalks of Indian corn?"

Those liberal poets, Franco and Luisa, had breathed upon things and changed their aspect. Franco's poetry was more ardent, fervid and passionate; Luisa's more prudent. Thus Franco's sentiments always flamed out in his eyes, his face, his words, while Luisa's seldom burst into flames, and only tinged the depths of her penetrating glance, and her soft voice. Franco was conservative only in matters of religion and art; he was an ardent radical as far as the domestic walls were concerned, always planning transformations of ceilings, walls, floors, and drapery. Luisa began by

admiring his genius, but as nearly all the funds came from her uncle, and there was little margin for extraordinary undertakings, she persuaded him, very gently and little by little, to leave the walls, the ceilings, and the floors as they were, and to study how best to arrange the furniture without seeking to transform it. And she would make suggestions without appearing to do so, letting him believe the ideas were his own, for Franco was jealous of the paternity of ideas, while Luisa was quite indifferent to this sort of maternity. Thus, together, they arranged the hall as a music-room, drawing-room, and reading-room; the loggia as a card-room, while the terrace was sacred to coffee and contemplation. This small terrace became in Franco's hands the lyric poem of the house. It was very tiny and Luisa felt that here a concession might be made, and an outlet provided for her husband's enthusiasms. It was then that the king of Valsoldian mulberry-trees fell from his throne, the famous and ancient mulberry of the churchyard, a tyrant that deprived the terrace of the finest view. Franco freed himself from this tyrant by pecuniary means; then he designed and raised above the terrace an airy context of slim rods and bars of iron which formed three arches surmounted by a tiny cupola, and over this he trained two graceful passion-flower vines, that opened their great blue eyes here and there, and fell on all sides in festoons and garlands. A small round table and some iron chairs served for coffee and contemplation. As to the little hanging-garden, Luisa would have been willing to put up even with maize, with that tolerance of the superior mind which loves to humour the ideas, the habits, the affections of inferior minds. She felt a sort of respectful pity for the horticultural ideals of the poor caretaker, for that mixture of roughness and gentleness he had in his heart, a great heart, capable of holding at once, reseda and pumpkins, balsam and carrots. But Franco, generous and religious though he was, would not have tolerated a carrot or a pumpkin in his garden for love of any neighbour. All stupid vulgarity irritated him. When the unfortunate kitchen-gardener heard Don Franco declare that the little garden was a filthy hole, that everything must be torn up, everything thrown away, he was so

dazed and humiliated as to excite pity; but when, working under his master's orders, tracing out paths, bordering them with tufa-stones, planting flowers and shrubs, he saw how skilful Franco himself was with his hands, and how many terrible Latin names he knew, and what a surprising talent he possessed for imagining new and beautiful arrangements, he conceived, little by little, an almost fearful admiration for him, which soon—in spite of many scoldings—developed into devoted affection.

The little hanging garden was transformed in Franco's own image and likeness. An olea fragrans in one corner spoke of the power of gentle things over the hot, impetuous spirit of the poet; a tiny cypress, not over-acceptable to Luisa, spoke in another corner of his religiosity; a low, brick parapet, in open-work pattern, ran between the cypress and the olea, supporting two parallel rows of tufa-stones, between which blossomed a smiling colony of verbenas, petunias, and wall-flowers, and spoke of the singular ingenuity of its author; the many rose-bushes scattered everywhere spoke of his love of classic beauty; the ficus repens which decked the walls towards the lake, the twin orange-trees between the two tiers, and a vigorous carob-tree, revealed a chilly temperament, a fancy turning always towards the south, insensible to the fascination of the north.

Luisa had worked far harder than her husband, and still continued to do so, but whereas he was proud of his labours and glad to speak of them, Luisa, on the contrary, never mentioned hers, nor was she in the least proud of them. She laboured with the needle, the crochet, the iron, the scissors, with a wonderful, calm rapidity; working for her husband, her child, the poor, herself, and for the adornment of her house. Each room contained some creation of hers; dainty curtains, rugs, cushions, or lamp-shades. It was also her duty to arrange the flowers in the hall and the loggia; no flowers in pots, for Franco did not have many, and did not wish them shut up in rooms; no flowers from the little garden, for to gather one of those was like tearing it out of Franco's heart. But the dahlias, the gladioles, the roses, and the asters of the kitchen-garden were at Luisa's disposal. These, however, were not sufficient, and as

the village loved "Sciora Luisa" best after the Almighty, St. Margherita, and St. Sebastian, at a sign from her, its children would bring her wildflowers and ferns, and ivy to festoon between the great bunches, stuck in metal rings on the walls. Even the arms of the harp that hung from the ceiling of the hall, were always entwined with long serpents of ivy and passion-flower.

If they wrote to Uncle Piero of these innovations he would answer little or nothing. At most he would caution them not to keep the kitchen-gardener too busy, but to leave him time for his own work. The first time he came to Oria after the transformation of the little garden he paused and contemplated it as he had contemplated the six stocks of maize, and murmured under his breath: "Oh dear me!" He went out to the terrace, looked at the little cupola, touched the iron bars, and pronounced an "Enough!" that was resigned, but full of disapproval of so much elegance, which he considered above the position of his family and himself. But when he had examined in silence all the nosegays and bunches of flowers, the pots and the festoons of the hall and the loggia, he said, with his good-natured smile: "Look here, Luisa! Don't you think it would be better to keep a couple of sheep with all this fodder?"

But the housekeeper was delighted that she no longer need kill herself for dust and cobwebs, and the kitchen-gardener was for ever praising the wonderful works of "Signor Don Franco," so that Uncle Piero himself soon began to grow accustomed to the new aspect his house had assumed, and to look without disapproval upon the little cupola, which, indeed, afforded a most grateful shade. At the end of two or three days he asked who had made it, and he would sometimes pause to examine the flowers in the garden, to inquire the name of one or another. At the end of eight or ten days, standing with little Maria at the door leading from the hall to the garden, he would ask her: "Who planted all those beautiful flowers?" and teach her to answer: "Papa!" He exhibited his nephew's creations to an employé of his who one day came to visit him, and listened to his expressions of approval with a fine assumption of

indifference, but with the greatest satisfaction. "Yes, yes, he is clever enough." Indeed he ended by becoming one of Franco's admirers, and would even listen, in the course of conversation, to other projects of his. And in Franco, admiration and gratitude were growing for that great and generous bounty that had vanquished conservative nature, and the old aversion for elegance of every description; for that same bounty that at all such opposition rose silently and even higher behind the uncle's resistance, until it surmounted all, covered all in a broad wave of acquiescence, or at least with the sacramental phrase: "However, fate vobis; do as you like." One innovation only Uncle Piero had not been willing to accept—the disappearance of his old cushion. "Luisa," said he, gingerly lifting the new, embroidered cushion from the easy-chair, "Luisa, take this away." And he would not be persuaded. "Will you take it away?" When Luisa, smiling, brought him the little abortive mattress he sat down upon it with a satisfied, "That's it!" as if he were solemnly taking possession of a lost throne.

At the present moment, while the violet dusk was invading the green of the waves and running along the coast from village to village, eclipsing, one after another, the shining white houses, the engineer was seated upon his throne holding little Maria on his knees, while out on the terrace Franco was watering the pots of pelargonia, his heart and his face as full of affectionate satisfaction as if he had been slaking the thirst of Ishmael in the desert. Luisa was patiently untangling a fishing-line belonging to her husband, a frightful snarl of string, lead, silk, and hooks. She was talking, meanwhile, with Professor Gilardoni, who always had some philosophical snarl to untangle, but who greatly preferred a discussion with Franco, who always contradicted him, right or wrong, believing him to possess an excellent heart, but a confused head. Uncle Piero, his right knee resting on his left, held the child on this elevation, and for the hundredth time at least, was repeating a little scrap of verse to her, with affected slowness, and a slight distortion of the foreign name—

Proud shade of the river, Of Missipipì——

As far as the seventh word the child would listen, motionless and serious, with earnest eyes; but when he reached "Missipipì," she would burst out laughing, pound hard with her little legs, and clap her tiny hands over the uncle's mouth, who would also laugh merrily, and after a short pause he would begin again, speaking slowly, slowly, in the same approved tone:

Proud shade of the river——

The child did not resemble either father or mother; she had the eyes, the delicate features of Grandmother Teresa. She exhibited a strange impetuous tenderness for the old uncle, whom she so seldom saw. Uncle Piero did not use sweet words to her; indeed, when necessary, he would even chide her gently, but he always brought her toys, often took her out to walk, danced her upon his knee, laughed with her, and repeated comic verses to her—the one beginning with the "Missipipì," and that other, ending with the words:

Answered so promptly young Barucabà!

Who may this Barucabà have been, and what had they been asking him? "Toa Bà! Toa Bà! Barucabà again! Barucabà again!" and once more the uncle would recite the poetic tale to the child, but there is no one now to repeat it to me.

This is what Professor Gilardoni was discussing in his timid, gentle voice with Luisa; the Professor, grown just a little older, just a little more bald, just a little more sallow. "Who knows," Luisa had said, "if Maria will resemble her grandmother in soul as she does in face." The Professor replied that it would indeed be a miracle to find two such souls in the same family, and separated by so short an interval of time. Then wishing to explain to how rare a species he conceived the grandmother's soul to have belonged, he gave voice to the following tangle: "There are souls," said he, "that openly deny a future life, and live according to their opinions, solely for the present life. Such are few in number. Then there are souls that pretend to believe in a future life, and live entirely for the present. These are far more numerous. There are

souls that do not think about the future life, but live so that they may not run too great a risk of losing it if, after all, it should be found to exist. These are more numerous still. Then there are souls that really do believe in the future life, and divide their thoughts and actions into two categories, which are generally at war with each other; one is for heaven, the other for earth. There are very many such. And then there are souls that live entirely for the future life, in which they believe. These are very few, and Signora Teresa was one of them."

Franco, who hated psychological disquisitions, passed frowning, with his empty watering-pot, on his way to the little garden, and thought: "Then there are those souls that are bores!" Uncle Piero who, by the way, was slightly deaf, was laughing with Maria. When her husband had passed, Luisa said softly: "Then there are souls that live as if there were only the future life, in which they do not believe. And of such there is one." The Professor started, and looked at her in silence. She was hunting in the tangle of the line for a double thread with a ring that must be drawn through, and though she did not see his glance, still she felt it, and quickly nodded towards her uncle. Had she really been thinking of him when speaking those words? Or had there been in her some occult complication? Had she alluded to her uncle without conviction, simply because she dare not name, even in thought, another person to whom her words might more justly apply? The Professor's silence, his searching glance which she had felt without meeting, revealed to her that he suspected her. It was for that reason she had hastily nodded towards Uncle Piero.

"Does he not believe in a future life?" the Professor asked.

"I should say not," Luisa answered, and then at once her heart was filled with remorse, for she felt that her reasons for affirming this were not sufficient, that she had no right to answer thus. In fact her uncle had never taken the trouble to meditate on religion. In his conception of honesty were included the continuation of the ancient, family practices and the profession of the inherited faith, accepted

carelessly, as it stood. His was a good-natured God like himself, who, again like himself, cared little for genuflections and rosaries; a God well pleased to have honest, hearty men for His ministers, as Uncle Piero was well pleased to have such for his friends, even though they might be merry eaters and drinkers, life-long devotees of tarocchi, open tellers of spicy but not filthy stories, as a lawful outlet for that prurient hilarity which is in all of us. Certain joking remarks of his, certain aphorisms uttered thoughtlessly upon the relative importance of religious practices and the absolute importance of honest living, had struck her, even as a child, especially as they greatly vexed Signora Teresa, who would entreat her brother not to "talk nonsense." She suspected that he went to church simply because it was fitting to do so. Perhaps this was not true; one must overlook the aphorisms of a man who had grown old in self-sacrifice and self-abnegation, and who was wont to say: Charitas incipit a me. Besides, even if her uncle did hold religious practices in slight esteem, there was a vast difference between that and denying a future life. Indeed, as soon as Luisa had uttered her opinion and had heard how it sounded, she felt it was false, saw more clearly within herself and realised that she had been seeking in her uncle's example, a prop and a comfort for herself.

The Professor was greatly moved by this unexpected revelation.

"This one soul," said he, "that lives as if thinking only of a future life in which it does not believe, is indeed in error, but nevertheless, we are bound to admire it as the most noble, the greatest of all. It is something sublime!"

"But are you then sure that this soul is in error?"

"Oh, yes, yes!"

"And you yourself, to which category do you belong?"

The Professor really believed he was of the few who rule their actions entirely according to an aspiration towards a future life, but he would have been embarrassed had he been called upon to demonstrate that his earnest study of Raspail, his zeal in

the preparation of sedative water and camphor cigarettes, his horror of dampness and of draughts, were proofs of slight attachment to the present life. However, he would not answer, but said that though he did not belong to any church, he nevertheless, believed firmly in God and the future life, and that he could not judge of his own conduct.

Meanwhile, Franco, watering the little garden, had discovered that a new verbena had blossomed, and setting down his watering-pot, had come to the door of the loggia and was calling to Maria, to whom he wished to point it out. Maria let him call, and demanded "Missipipì" again, whereupon the uncle put her down, and himself led her to her father.

"But, Professor," Luisa said, emerging by means of the living word from a course of occult ponderings, "do you not think one may believe in God and still be in doubt concerning the future life?"

Speaking thus she had dropped the tangled maze of net, and was looking the Professor straight in the face, with an expression of lively interest, and a manifest desire that he might answer yes. As Gilardoni did not speak she added—

"It seems to me some one might say: What obligation is God under to give us immortality? The immortality of the soul is an invention of human selfishness, which, after all, simply wishes to make God serve its own convenience. We want a reward for the good we do to others, and a punishment for the evil others do to us. Let us rather resign ourselves to complete death, which comes to every living thing, being just with ourselves and with others as long as we live, without looking for future reward, but simply because God wishes it, as he wishes every star to give light, and every tree to give shade. What do you think about it?"

"What can I say?" Gilardoni answered. "It seems to me a thought of great beauty! I cannot say: a great truth. Indeed I do not know. I have never thought about it, but it is very beautiful! I will say that Christianity has never had, has never even imagined

a Saint so sublime as this some one! It is very beautiful, very beautiful!"

"And besides," Luisa continued after a short silence, "it might also be maintained that this future would not mean perfect happiness. Can there be happiness if we do not know the reasons of all things? If we may not explain all mysteries? And will this longing to know all things be satisfied in the future life? Will there not always remain one impenetrable mystery? Do they not teach us that we shall never understand God perfectly? Therefore, in our longing to know, shall we not end by suffering as at present, perhaps even more, because in a higher life that longing must become stronger? I can only see one way of arriving at a knowledge of everything, and that would be to become God——"

"Ah! You are a pantheist!" the Professor exclaimed, interrupting her.

"Hush!" said Luisa. "No, no, no, I am a Catholic Christian. I am only repeating what others might say."

"Pardon me, but there is a pantheism——"

"Philosophy still?" exclaimed Franco, coming in with the little one in his arms.

"Oh, misery!" grumbled Uncle Piero behind him.

Maria held a beautiful white rose in her hand. "Look at this rose, Luisa," said Franco. "Maria, give Mamma the flower. Look at the shape of this rose, its pose, its shading, the veins in its petals; look at that red stripe, and inhale its perfume. Now drop philosophy."

"You are an enemy of philosophy?" the Professor said, smiling.

"I am a friend of that simple and sure philosophy which even roses can teach me," Franco answered.

"Philosophy, my dear Professor," Uncle Piero put in solemnly, "is all contained in Aristotle. You can get all you want from that source."

"You are jesting," the Professor said, "but you yourself are a philosopher."

The engineer placed a hand on his shoulder.

"Listen, dear friend! My philosophy could all be put into eight or ten glasses."

"Mercy on us! Eight or ten glasses!" grumbled the housekeeper, who had caught her most temperate master's words of boastful intemperance, as she came in. "Eight or ten fiddlesticks!"

She had come to announce Don Giuseppe Costabarbieri, whose hollow but jolly voice was just then heard in the hall, saying heartily, "Deo gratias." Then the red and wrinkled face, the lively eyes, and the grey hair of the gentle priest appeared.

"We are discussing philosophy, Don Giuseppe," said Luisa when greetings had been exchanged. "Come here and let us have your valuable opinion."

Don Guiseppe scratched his head, and then turning it slightly towards the engineer, with the expression of one who desires something for which he hardly dares to ask, gave utterance to this flower of his philosophical opinions.

"Wouldn't a little game of primero be better?"

Franco and Uncle Piero, who were only too glad to escape from Gilardoni's philosophy, sat merrily down to the little table with the priest.

As soon as he and Luisa were alone, the Professor said softly—

"The Marchesa left yesterday."

Luisa, who had taken Maria upon her lap, pressed her lips to the child's neck passionately.

"Perhaps," continued Gilardoni, who had never known how to read in the human heart, or to touch its chords correctly, "perhaps sometime—it is only three years, yet—perhaps the day may come when she will yield."

Luisa raised her face from Maria's neck. "Perhaps she may yield!" said she. The Professor did not understand, and giving way to the evil genius that invariably suggested to him the worst word at the worst moment, he persisted instead of

breaking off. "Perhaps, if she could see Maria!" Luisa pressed the little girl to her breast, and looked at him so fiercely that he was confused, and stammered, "I beg your pardon!" Maria, in this close embrace, raised her eyes to her mother's strange face, grew very red, pressed her lips tight together, cried two great tears, and began to sob.

"No, no, dear!" Luisa murmured tenderly to her, "be quiet, be quiet! You shall never see her, never!"

As soon as the child was comforted the Professor, distressed at the mistake he had made, at having offended this Luisa, who seemed to him a superhuman being, wished to explain, to justify himself, but Luisa would not allow him to speak. "Pardon me, but that will do," said she, rising. "Let us go and watch the game."

But, as a matter of fact, she did not go near the players. She sent Maria to amuse herself in the church-grounds with her little nurse, Veronica, and herself went to carry a piece of pudding to an old villager who had a voracious appetite and a small voice, with which he would every day promise his benefactress the same precious recompense, "Before I die, I will give you a kiss."

Meanwhile the Professor was filled with scruples and remorse for the unfortunate step he had taken. Not knowing whether to go or to remain, whether the lady would or would not return, whether it would or would not be indiscreet to go in search of her, after having looked out towards the lake as if seeking advice from the fishes, towards the hills to see if she or some one of whom he could inquire about her happened to be at one of the windows, he finally went to watch the game.

Each one of the players kept his eyes fixed on the four cards he held in his left hand, placed one upon the other in such a way that the second and third projected above the others just enough to be recognisable, while the fourth remained carefully hidden.

The Professor reflected that he also held a secret card, a trump, and he was

undecided whether to play it or not. He held old Maironi's will. A few days after Signora Teresa's death, Franco had told him to destroy it, and never breathe a word about it to Luisa. He had obeyed only so far as keeping silence was concerned. The document still existed, though of this Franco was ignorant, because its custodian had determined to await the development of events, to see if Cressogno and Oria would come to terms, or if, in consequence of prolonged hostilities, Franco and his family would be reduced to want, in which case he himself intended to do something. What he should do, he did not really know. He was nurturing the germs of several foolish plans in his head, and trusted that one or other of them would have ripened before the time for action arrived. Now, as he watched Franco play, he wondered how that man, so engrossed in his desire to win a pasteboard king, could ever have refused that other precious card, not even wishing to inform his wife of its existence. He attributed this silence to modesty, to a desire to hide a generous action, and although he had suffered more than one sharp rebuff from him, and felt that Franco esteemed him lightly, still he looked upon him with a respect full of humble devotion.

"Give me the cards! Give me the cards!" the priest exclaimed, and he shuffled them eagerly. Then the game, symbol of the universal struggle between the blacks and the reds, began once more.

The lake now lay sleeping, covered and encircled by shadows. Only on the east the great, distant mountains of the Lario were still in a glory of purple and rich, yellow gold. The first breath of the evening breeze out of the north, moved the tender branches of the passion-flowers, ruffled, in spots, the surface of the grey waters towards the upper lake, and wafted a perfume of cool woods.

When Luisa returned the Professor had been gone some time.

"Ah, here is Sciora Luisa!" said Don Giuseppe, who was feeling quite satisfied, having had his fill of primero, and he gently stroked the modest rotundity of his ribs and belly. Then this little personage of the world of long ago remembered the

second object of his visit. He had wished to speak a little word to Signora Luisa. The engineer had gone out to take his usual short walk as far as the Tavorell hill, which he jokingly called the St. Bernard, and Franco, after a glance at the moon which was just then sparkling above the black brow of the Bisgnago, and below, in the undulations of the water, began improvising on the piano outpourings of ideal sorrow, that floated out of the open windows upon the deep sonorousness of the lake. His musical improvisations were more successful than his elaborate poems because in music his impulsive feelings found a mode of expression more facile, more complete, and the scruples, the uncertainties, the doubts which rendered the labour of language most wearisome and slow, did not torment his fancy at the piano. There he would give himself up, body and soul, to the poetic rage, and quivering to the roots of his hair, his clear, speaking eyes reflecting every little shade in the musical expression, while his face worked with the continuous movement of inarticulate words, his hands, though neither very agile nor very supple, would make the piano sing ineffably.

At the present moment he was passing from one tone to another, breathing hard, and putting all the strength of his intellect into those passages, eviscerating the instrument, as it were, with his ten fingers, and almost with his glowing eyes as well. He had begun to play under the spell of the moonshine, but as he played, sad clouds had arisen from the depths of his heart. Conscious that as a youth he had dreamed of glory and that later he had humbly laid aside all hope of attaining it, he said, almost to himself, with his sad and passionate music, that in him there was indeed some glow of genius, some of the fire of creation seen only by God, for not even Luisa exhibited that esteem for his intellect which he himself lacked, but which he could have wished to find in her; not even Luisa, the heart of his heart. She praised his music and his poetry in measured terms, but she had never said: "Follow this path, dare, write, publish." He was thinking of this as he played on in the dark hall putting into a tender melody the lament of his love, the timid, secret lament he would never

have dared to put into words.

Out on the terrace in the quivering light-and-shade formed by the breath of the north wind and the passion-flower vines, by the moon and its reflection in the lake, Don Giuseppe was telling Luisa that Signor Giacomo Puttini was angry with him on account of Signora Pasotti, who had repeated to him the false report that he, Don Giuseppe, was going about preaching the necessity of a marriage between Puttini and Marianna. "May I be struck dead," the poor priest protested, "if I ever breathed a single word! Not a single word! It is all a lie!" Luisa would not believe poor Barborin guilty, but Don Giuseppe declared he had it straight from the Controller himself. Then she understood at once that the cunning Pasotti was indulging in a joke at the expense of his wife, Signor Giacomo, and the priest, and declining to interfere in the matter as Don Giuseppe wished her to do, she advised him to speak to Signora Pasotti herself. "She is so terribly deaf!" said the priest, scratching his head; and he finally departed, dissatisfied, and without saluting Franco, whom he did not wish to interrupt. Luisa went towards the piano on tiptoe, and stopped to listen to her husband, to hear the beauty, the richness, the fire of that soul which was hers, and to which she belonged for ever. If she had never said to Franco, "Follow this path, write, publish!" it was perhaps because in her well-balanced affection she believed, and with reason, that he would never be able to produce anything superior to mediocrity, but it was above all, because, although she had a fine feeling for music and poetry, she did not really esteem either of much account. She did not approve of a man's dedicating himself wholly to either, and she had an ardent longing that her husband's intellectual and material activity should flow in a more manly channel. Nevertheless, she admired Franco in his music more than if he had been a great master; she found in this almost secret expression of his soul something virginal, something sincere, the light of a loving spirit, most worthy to be loved.

He did not perceive her presence until two arms brushed his shoulders and he saw two little hands hanging on his breast. "No! no! Play, play!" Luisa murmured, for

Franco had grasped the hands; but, without answering, his head thrown back, he sought her, sought her lips and her eyes, and she kissed him and then raised her face, repeating, "Play." He drew the imprisoned wrists still farther down, silently praying for the sweet, sweet mouth: then she surrendered, and pressed her lips upon his in a long kiss, full of understanding, and infinitely more exquisite, more exhilarating than the first. Then she once more whispered, "Play."

And in his happiness he played the music of triumph, full of joy and of cries. For at that moment it seemed to him he possessed the soul of this woman in its entirety, whereas sometimes, even though convinced that she loved him, he seemed to feel in her that lofty reason, towering serene and cold, above love itself, and far beyond the reach of his enthusiasms. She would often place her hands upon his head, and from time to time kiss his hair softly. She was aware of her husband's doubts, and always protested that she was all his, but in her heart she knew he was right. There was in her a tenacious, fierce sense of intellectual independence which withstood love. She could judge her husband calmly, recognising his imperfections, but she felt he was not capable of doing the same, felt how humble he was in his love, in his boundless devotion. She did not think she was unjust to him, she felt no remorse, but she was touched with loving pity when she pondered these things. Now she guessed the meaning of this joyous musical outpouring, and, deeply moved, she embraced Franco and the piano became suddenly silent.

Uncle Piero's slow, heavy step was heard on the stairs; he was returning from his St. Bernard.

It was eight o'clock, and the usual tarocchi-players, Signors Giacomo and Pasotti, had not yet arrived, for in September Pasotti himself became a regular visitor at Casa Ribera, where he pretended to be in love with the engineer, with Luisa, and even with Franco. Franco and Luisa suspected some duplicity, but Pasotti was an old friend of the uncle's, and must be tolerated out of respect to him. As the players

failed to appear Franco proposed to his wife that they should go out in the boat to enjoy the moon. First, however, they went to see Maria, who was asleep in her little bed in the alcove, her head drooping towards her right shoulder, one arm under her pillow, and the other resting across her breast. They looked at her and kissed her smiling, and then the silent thoughts of both flew to Grandmamma Teresa, who would have loved her so dearly. With serious faces, they kissed her once more. "My poor little one!" said Franco. "Poor, penniless, Donna Maria Maironi!"

Luisa placed her hand upon his mouth. "Be quiet!" said she. "We are fortunate, we who are the penniless Maironis."

Franco understood, and did not answer at once, but presently, when they were leaving the room to go to the boat, he said to his wife, forgetting one of his grandmother's threats, "It will not always be thus."

This allusion to the old Marchesa's wealth displeased Luisa. "Do not speak of it to me," she said. "I would not soil my fingers by touching that money."

"I was thinking of Maria," Franco observed.

"Maria has us. We can work."

Franco was silent. Work! That was one of the words that chilled his heart. He knew he was leading a life of indolence, for were not music, books, flowers, and a few verses now and then, merely vanities and a waste of time? And he was leading this life almost entirely at the expense of others, for how could he possibly have managed with only his one thousand Austrian lire a year? How could he have maintained his family? He had taken his collegiate degree, but without deriving the slightest profit from it. He doubted his own ability, felt himself too much of an artist, too foreign to forensic wiles, and he was well aware that the blood of earnest labourers did not flow in his veins. His only hope was in a revolution, a war, in the freedom of his country. Ah! When Italy should be free, how well he would serve her, with what great strength, what joy! This poetry he had indeed in his heart, but

he lacked the energy, the constancy to prepare himself by study for such a future.

While he was rowing away from the shore in silence, Luisa was wondering how it was that her husband could pity the child because she was poor. Did not this sentiment stand in contradiction to Franco's faith, to his Christian piety? She recalled Professor Gilardoni's categories. Franco believed firmly in a future life, but in practice he clung passionately to all that is beautiful and good in this earthly life, clung to all its lawful pleasures, including cards and dainty dinners. One who obeyed the precepts of the Church so scrupulously, who was so careful to abstain from flesh on Fridays and Saturdays, to listen to a sermon every Sunday, should conform his daily life far more strictly to the evangelical ideal. He should rather fear than desire riches.

"A pleasant sail to you!" Uncle Piero called out from the terrace, catching sight of the boat and Luisa seated in the prow in the moonlight. Opposite black Bisgnago all Valsolda, from Niscioree to Caravina lay spread out in the glory of the moon; all the windows of Oria and of Albogasio, the arches of Villa Pasotti, the tiny white houses of the most distant villages, Castello, Casarico, S. Mamette, Drano, seemed to be gazing as if hypnotised, at the great, motionless eye of the dead orb in the heavens.

Franco drew the oars into the boat. "Sing," said he.

Luisa had never studied singing, but she possessed a sweet mezzo-soprano voice and a perfect ear, and had learned many operatic airs from her mother, who had heard Grisi, Pasta, and Malibran, during the golden days of Italian opera.

She began the air from Anne Boleyn:

Al dolce guidami Castel natio.

The song of the soul which at first descends, little by little, and finally, in greater sweetness gives itself up to its love, to rise again, locked in his embrace, in an impulse of desire towards some distant light which shall complete its happiness. She sang, and Franco, carried away, fancied that she longed to be united to him in that

lofty region of the soul from which she had, until now, excluded him; that in this perfect union, she longed to be guided by him towards the goal of his ideals. A sob rose in his throat, and the rippling lake, the great tragic mountains, those eyes of things fixed upon the moon, the very light of the moon itself, everything, was filled with his indefinable sentiment. And so, when beyond the broken image of the orb, silver lights flashed for a moment as far as Bisgnago, and even into the shadowy gulf of the Doi, he was moved, as if they had been mysterious signals concerning him, which lake and moon were exchanging, while Luisa finished the verse:

Ai verdi platani, Al cheto rio Che i nostri mormora Sospi ancor.

Pasotti's voice called from the terrace—

"Brava!"

And Uncle Piero shouted—

"Tarocco!"

At the same moment they heard the oars of a boat coming from Porlezza, and a bassoon mimicked the air of Anne Boleyn. Franco, who had seated himself in the stern of his boat, started to his feet, crying delightedly—

"Who goes there?" A fine, big, bass voice answered him—

Buona sera Miei signori, Buona sera, Buona sera.

They were his friends from the Lake of Como, the lawyer V. of Varenna and a certain Pedraglio of Loveno, who were in the habit of coming to make music openly, and discuss politics in secret; this was known only to Luisa.

They called from the terrace—

"Well done, Don Basilio!—Bravo, bassoon!" And in the interval the voice could be heard of some one who was begging to be excused from tarocco: "No, no, most gracious Controller, it is late! The time is too short; really too short. Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord! Indeed you must excuse me. I cannot, I cannot. Most worshipful Engineer, I

appeal to you!"

But they made the little man play, promising that they would not go beyond two games. He puffed very hard, and sat down to the little table with the engineer, Pasotti, and Pedraglio. Franco seated himself at the piano, and the lawyer placed himself beside him with the bassoon.

Between Pasotti and Pedraglio, two terrible quizzers, poor Signor Giacomo passed a short half-hour which was full of tribulation. They did not leave him alone a minute. "How goes it, Scior Zacomo?—Badly, badly! Scior Zacomo, are there no friars walking about in slippers?—Not one. And the bull, how is the bull, Scior Zacomo?—Stop, stop—A most accursed beast, eh?—Yes, indeed, Sir. And the servant, Scior Zacomo?" "Hush!" exclaimed Pasotti at this impertinent question of Pedraglio's. "Be prudent. On this point Signor Giacomo is having a great deal of trouble, through the indiscretion of certain individuals." "Let us not discuss it, most gracious Controller, let us not discuss it!" Signor Giacomo exclaimed, writhing all over, and the engineer advised him to send his tormentors to the devil. "But how is this, Scior Zacomo," Pasotti went on, undaunted, "don't you call that little priest indiscreet?" "I call him an ass!" Signor Giacomo answered angrily. Then Pasotti, smiling and triumphant, because this joke was really of his own making, ordered Pedraglio to be quiet, and started the game afresh, although Pedraglio was bursting with curiosity to hear the story.

Franco and the lawyer were studying a new composition for piano and bassoon, continually making mistakes and beginning over again. Presently Signora Bianconi came in on tiptoe that she might not interrupt the melody. No one noticed her entrance save Luisa, who made her sit down beside her on the little sofa near the piano.

Signora Peppina with her cordial good-nature, her long tongue, and her foolishness was irritating to Franco, but not to Luisa. Luisa liked her, but she was careful on

account of Carlascia. From her garden Peppina had heard that "lovely song," and then the bassoon and the greetings; she had imagined there was going to be music, and she was "so madly fond of music, you know!" There was that lawyer who "blows into that shiny thing," to say nothing of Don Franco with those fingers of his "that seem bewitched." To hear the piano played with such precision was as good as hearing a barrel-organ, and she was "so awfully fond" of barrel-organs! She added that she had been afraid she should disturb them, but that her husband had encouraged her to come. And she asked if that other gentleman from Loveno did not play also; if they were going to stay long; and observed that both must be passionately fond of music.

"I'll be even with you, you rascal of a Receiver," thought Luisa, and she proceeded to stuff his wife with the most ridiculous tales of the melomania of Pedraglio and the lawyer, inventing more and more as she grew more and more angry with those odious persons against whom one was obliged to defend one's self by lying. Signora Peppina swallowed all the stories scrupulously down to the very last, accompanying them with gentle notes of pleased wonder: "Oh, how strange!—Just fancy!—Just think of that!" Then, instead of listening to the diabolical dispute going on between the piano and the bassoon, she began to talk of the Commissary, saying he intended to come and see Don Franco's flowers.

"He may come," said Luisa, coldly.

Then Signora Peppina, taking advantage of the storm Franco and his friend were raising, risked a little private speech, which would have cost her dear had her Carlascia overheard it, but fortunately that faithful mastiff was asleep in his own bed, his night-cap drawn well down over his ears.

"I am so devoted to these dear flowers!" she began. It was her opinion the Maironis would do well to pet the Commissary a little. He was one of the Marchesa's intimates, and it would be awful if he should take it into his head to cause them

trouble. He was a terrible man, this Commissary! "Now my Carlo barks a little, but he is a good creature; the other one doesn't bark, but—you understand?" She herself knew nothing about it, had not heard anything, but if, for example, that lawyer and the other gentleman had come for something else than music, and the Commissary should find it out——! Then the Lord have mercy on us!

The moon was dragging its splendour across the lake towards the western waters; the game had come to an end, and Signor Giacomo was preparing to light his little lantern, in spite of Pasotti's remonstrances. "A light, Scior Zacomo? You are mad! A light with such a moon!" "At your service," Puttini replied. "In the first place there is that accursed Pomodoro to cross, and then—cossa vorla—the moon nowadays! Besides I must tell you it is the August moon, for although we are in September, still the moon belongs to August. Well, once upon a time, my dear sirs, August moons were fine and big, as large as the bottom of a cask at least; now they are no better than moonlets, good-for-nothing moons——no, no, no." And his lantern lighted, he departed with Pasotti, the impertinent Pedraglio accompanying them as far as the gate of the little garden, with his usual fire of antiphones about the bull and the servant. Then the little man turned towards the cavernous streets of Oria, greatly comforted by Pasotti's exclamations: "Ill-bred people, Scior Zacomo! Vulgar people!" exclamations uttered in a tone calculated to reach the others, and add to their amusement.

A loud gape from the engineer put Signora Peppina to flight. A few minutes later, having drunk his cup of milk, Uncle Piero took leave of the company in verse—

Tall laurel trees and myrtle sweet upon Parnassus grow, May night upon you, worthy Sirs, great happiness bestow.

The two guests also asked for a little milk, but Franco, who understood their Latin, went for an old bottle of the wine from the small but excellent vineyard of Mainé.

When he returned Uncle Piero was no longer present. The dark, bearded lawyer, the

picture of strength and placidity, raised both hands silently, summoning Luisa and Franco, one to either side of him. Then he said softly, in his voice like a violoncello, warm and deep—

"Great news!"

"Ah!" ejaculated Franco, opening his eager eyes wide. Luisa turned pale, and clasped her hands in silence.

"Yes, indeed!" said Pedraglio calmly and seriously, "we have succeeded!"

"Speak out! Speak out!" Franco begged. The lawyer answered him:

"We have Piedmont allied with France and England! To-day war with Russia, to-morrow with Austria! Are you satisfied?"

With a sob Franco sprang to embrace his friends.

The three stood clinging to one another in silence, pressing close in the intoxication of the magic word: War! Franco forgot that he still held the bottle. Luisa took it from him. Then he tore himself impetuously from the other two, rushed between them, and seizing each round the waist, dragged them into the hall like an avalanche, repeating: "Tell all, tell all, tell all!"

There, when they had prudently closed the glass door leading to the terrace, the lawyer and Pedraglio disclosed their precious secret. An English lady, spending her holiday at Bellagio, who was a devoted friend of Italy, had received a letter (of which the lawyer possessed a translation) from another lady, a cousin of Sir James Hudson, English Minister at Turin. The letter stated that secret negotiations were being carried on in Turin, Paris, and London, to obtain the armed co-operation of Piedmont in the Orient; that the matter was looked upon as settled by the three cabinets, but that there still remained a few formal difficulties to arrange, as Count Cavour demanded the greatest consideration for the dignity of his country. At Turin they were confident the official and open invitation from the Western powers to accede to the treaty of the tenth of April, 1851, would come to hand not later than

December. It was even affirmed that the troops forming the contingent would be under the command of the Duke of Genoa.

The lawyer read, and Franco held his wife's hand tight. Then he wanted to read the letter himself, and after him Luisa read. "But," said she, "war with Austria? How is that?"

"Most certainly," said the lawyer. "Do you suppose Cavour is going to send the Duke of Genoa with fifteen or twenty thousand men to fight the Turks unless he already holds the war with Austria in his hand? You may believe me, Madam, it will come about before a year is passed."

Franco shook his fists in the air, his whole body quivering.

"Hurrah for Cavour!" whispered Luisa.

"Ah!" the lawyer exclaimed, "Demosthenes himself could not have praised Cavour with greater efficacy."

Franco's eyes were filling with tears. "I am a fool!" he said. "I don't know what to say!"

Pedraglio asked Luisa where the deuce she had hidden the bottle. Luisa smiled and went out, returning again immediately with the wine and glasses.

"Count Cavour!" said Pedraglio in a low tone. All raised their glasses repeating: "Count Cavour!" Then they drank, even Luisa, who never took wine.

Pedraglio refilled the glasses and again rose to his feet.

"War!" said he.

The three others sprang up, clutching their glasses in silence, too deeply moved to speak.

"We must all go!" said Pedraglio.

"All!" Franco repeated. Luisa kissed him impetuously on the shoulder. Her husband seized her head in both hands, and imprinted a kiss upon her hair.

One of the windows towards the lake was open. In the silence that followed the kiss, they heard the measured dip of oars.

"The customs-guards," whispered Franco. While the guards' long-boat was passing beneath the window, Pedraglio said: "D—— hogs!" in such a loud tone, that the others hushed him. The long-boat floated past. Franco looked out of the window.

It was cool; the moon was sinking towards the hills of Carona, streaking the lake with long, gilded stripes. What a strange sensation it gave him to contemplate that quiet solitude, with a great war so near at hand! The dark, sad mountains seemed to be thinking of the formidable future. Franco closed the window, and the conversation began again in low tones round the little table. Each one had his own suppositions concerning future events, and all spoke of these events as of a drama, of which the manuscript was lying quite ready, down to the very last verse, with all its stops and commas in place, in Count Cavour's writing-desk. V., who was a Bonapartist, saw clearly that Napoleon intended to avenge his uncle, overthrowing one after another, the parties to the Holy Alliance; to-day Russia, to-morrow Austria. But Franco, on the other hand, who was mistrustful of the emperor, attributed the Sardinian alliance to the good-will of England, but acknowledged that as soon as this alliance would be proclaimed, Austria, sacrificing her own interests to principles and hatred, would cast in her lot with Russia, and therefore Napoleon would be obliged to fight her. "Listen," said his wife, "I am afraid Austria will come over to the side of Piedmont," "Impossible!" said the lawyer. Franco felt alarmed, and admired the acuteness of the observation, but Pedraglio exclaimed: "Nonsense! Those blockheads are too great asses to think out a trick like that!" This argument appeared decisive, and no one save Luisa gave the possibility another thought. They began discussing plans for the campaign, plans for insurrections, but here they could not agree. V. knew the men and the mountains of the Lake of Como from Colico to Como and Lecco, better perhaps than any one else. And everywhere all along the lake, in Val Menaggio, in Vall 'Intelvi, in Valsassina, in the Tre Pievi, he knew those

who were devoted to the cause, and even ready to strike the blow at a sign from the Scior Avocât. He and Franco considered any insurrectional movement useful that might serve to distract part of the Austrian forces even for a moment. But Luisa and Pedraglio were of opinion that all the able-bodied men should hasten to swell the Piedmontese battalions. "We women will make the revolution," said Luisa, with her mock gravity. "I, for my part, will pitch Carlascia into the lake!"

They still conversed in an undertone, with an electric current in their veins that flashed from their eyes, and made their nerves tingle; enjoying this hushed talk behind closed doors and windows, the danger of being in possession of that letter, the glowing life they felt in their blood, and those intoxicating words they were always repeating: Piedmont, War, Cavour, Duke of Genoa, Victor Emmanuel, Cannon, Bersaglieri.

"Do you know what time it is?" said Pedraglio, consulting his watch. "It is half-past twelve! Let us go to bed."

Luisa went for the candles, and lighted them, standing the while, but no one moved, so she also sat down again. When he saw the candles lighted, even Pedraglio himself lost his desire to go to bed.

"A fine kingdom!" said he.

"Piedmont," said Franco, "Lombardy-Venice, Parma, and Modena."

"And the Legations!" [L] V. added.

More discussions followed. All wished for the Legations, especially the lawyer and Luisa, but Franco and Pedraglio were afraid to touch them, fearing to stir up difficulties. They grew so warm that Pedraglio entreated his companions to "scream" in an undertone. "Scream softly, children!" Then it was V.'s turn to propose going to bed. He took his candle in his hand but did not rise.

"Body of Bacchus!" said he, not knowing whether he meant it as a conclusion or an exhortation. Indeed he had a terrible desire to talk, and to hear others talk, but could

find nothing new to say. "Body of Bacchus it is indeed!" Franco exclaimed, who was in much the same state of mind. A long silence ensued. At last Pedraglio said, "Well?" and rose. "Shall we go?" said Luisa, leading the way. "And the name?" the lawyer asked. They all stopped. "What name?" "The name of the new Kingdom!" Franco set down his candle at once. "Well done!" said he, "the name!" as if it had been a point that must be settled before going to bed. Fresh discussions followed. Piedmont? Cisalpino? Upper Italy? Italy?

Luisa also was quick to put down her candle, and as the others were not willing to accept his "Italy," Pedraglio set his down also. But finding the debate promised to be a long one, he resumed it, and ran away, repeating: "Italy, Italy, Italy, Italy!" heedless of the "hushes" and admonitions of the others, who were following on tiptoe. They all stopped once more at the foot of the stairs that Pedraglio and the lawyer must ascend to reach their room, and exchanged good-nights. Luisa entered the neighbouring alcove-room; Franco waited to watch his friends upstairs. "Look here!" he suddenly exclaimed. He had been going to speak to them from the foot of the stairs, but finally decided it was better to go up to them. "And what if we are defeated?" he whispered.

The lawyer simply uttered a contemptuous "Nonsense!" but Pedraglio turning like a hyena, seized Franco by the throat. They struggled gaily there on the landing, and then once more said good-night. Pedraglio rushed upwards, while Franco flung himself downstairs.

His wife was waiting for him, standing in the centre of the room, her eyes fixed on the door. When she saw him enter she moved gravely towards him, and folded him in a close embrace. When, after a few moments had elapsed, he moved as though to draw away, she silently pressed him closer. Then Franco understood. She was embracing him now as she had kissed him before, when they had talked of all going to the war. He pressed her temples between his hands, kissed her again and again on

the hair, saying gently: "Dearest, think how great she will be afterwards, this Italy!" "Yes, yes!" said she. She raised her face to his, and offered him her lips. She was not crying, but her eyes were moist. To feel himself gazed upon like this, to be kissed thus, was indeed worth a few years of life, for never, never before had her tenderness towards him contained this humility.

"Then," said she, "we shall no longer live in Valsolda. You will be obliged to assume the duties of a citizen, will you not?"

"Yes, yes, certainly!"

They began to talk eagerly, both he and she, about what they should do after the war, as if to banish the thought of a terrible possibility. Luisa let down her hair, and went to look at Maria in her little bed. The child had probably been roused some time before, and had put a tiny finger in her mouth, which, little by little, as sleep returned, had slipped out. Now she was sleeping with her mouth open, and the little finger resting on her chin. "Come here, Franco," said her mother. Both bent over the bed. Maria's small face held the sweetness of paradise.

Husband and wife lingered over her in silence, and then rose, deeply moved. The interrupted conversation was not resumed.

When they were in bed and the light put out, Luisa murmured, on her husband's lips—

"If that day should come, you will go; but I shall go also."

And she would not allow him to answer.

Footnotes

[L] The Legations were provinces of the Roman state, governed by a legate from Rome. The Marches, Romagna and Umbria. [Translator's note.]

CHAPTER III THE GLOVED HAND

To make his joke more complete Pasotti reproached his wife for having repeated to Signor Giacomo Don Giuseppe's speech concerning the necessity of a marriage. The poor deaf woman was thunderstruck; she knew nothing either of a speech or of a marriage, and protested that this was a calumny, entreating her husband not to believe it, and was nearly beside herself because the Controller still appeared to harbour a suspicion. This malicious man was preparing a treat for himself; he was going to tell Signor Giacomo and Don Giuseppe that his wife wished to make amends for the harm she had done, and bring about a truce; in this way he would get all three together at his house, and from behind a door would enjoy the delicious scene that must ensue between the wrathful Signor Giacomo, the terrified Don Giuseppe, and the deaf and distracted Barborin. But his plan failed, for his wife could not wait, and ran off to the "Palace" to clear herself.

She found Don Giuseppe and Maria in a state of the most extraordinary agitation. Something tremendous had happened to them, something that Maria wished to tell, and Don Giuseppe did not. However, the master yielded on condition that she should not shout, but should convey her news by signs. Meeting with opposition on this point also, he, in his prudence, became furious, and the servant did not insist.

A rumour had spread of a case of cholera at Lugano, the victim being a man who had come there from Milan, where the disease had broken out; so Don Giuseppe had arranged to have all provisions for the kitchen come from Porlezza instead of Lugano, and had entrusted the commission to Giacomo Panighet, the postman, who brought the letters to Valsolda, not three times a day, as at present, but twice a week, as was the comfortable custom in the little world of long ago. Now, not five minutes before Signora Pasotti's arrival, Giacomo Panighet had brought the usual basket, and in the bottom of that basket, beneath the cabbages, they had discovered a note addressed to Don Giuseppe. It ran as follows:—

"You, who play at primero with Don Franco Maironi, should warn him that the air

of Lugano is far better than the air of Oria.

"Tivano."

Maria silently exhibited the basket, which was still full, to Signora Pasotti, and by clever acting illustrated the manner of discovery of the letter, which she gave her to read.

As soon as the deaf woman had finished reading, a strange, indescribable pantomime began between the three. Maria and Don Giuseppe, by dint of gesticulations and rollings of their eyes, expressed their surprise and terror; Barborin, half frightened, half dazed, stared open-mouthed, from one to the other, the letter still in her hand, as if she had understood. As a matter of fact she had made out only that the letter must be terrible. Presently a thought struck her. She held the letter out to Don Giuseppe with her left hand, while with her right forefinger she pointed to the word Franco; then she crossed her wrists with a questioning gesture; and as the others, recognising that the sign meant handcuffs, nodded their heads violently in confirmation, she became half frenzied, so great was her affection for Luisa, and forgetting the matter that had brought her there, she explained by signs, as if both the others had been deaf also, that she would go straight to Oria, see Don Franco, and give him the letter.

She started to rush away, cramming the letter into her pocket, and with hardly a word of leave-taking to Don Giuseppe and Maria, who, greatly distressed, were trying in vain to get hold of her, to detain her and recommend all possible precautions. But she slipped through their fingers, and her great, tall bonnet quivering, her old grey skirt dragging, set off at a trot towards Oria, where she arrived quite out of breath, with her head full of gendarmes, inspections, scenes of terror and of grief.

She went up the stairs of the little Ribera garden, making straight for the hall, where she saw there were visitors. She recognised the Receiver and the Imperial and Royal

Commissary of Porlezza, and was terrified, believing they were come for the terrible blow, but then she perceived Signora Bianconi and Signor Giacomo Puttini, and once more breathed freely.

The Commissary, seated in the post of honour on the large sofa, next to the Engineer-in-Chief, talked a great deal, with much fluency and brilliancy, looking oftenest at Franco, as if he were the only person present upon whom it was worth while to waste breath and wit. Franco, lounging in an armchair, was mute and sullen, like one who, in the house of another, perceives a bad odour which good manners forbade him either to flee from or curse. They were discussing the Crimean campaign, and the Commissary was praising the plan of the allied powers to attack the colossus in that vital point, his ambition. He spoke of the Russian barbarities, and of the autocrat himself in such terms as to cause Franco to tremble in his dread of an Anglo-Franco-Austrian alliance, and Carlascia to open his eyes wide, for he still held the views of 1848, and looked upon the Czar as a good friend of the family. "And you, Signor First-Political-Deputy, what do you think of it?" said the Commissary, turning his sarcastic smile upon Signor Giacomo. Puttini winked his little eyes very hard, and having felt his knees all over, replied: "Most respected Signor Commissary, I know little about Russia, France, or England, and I care still less. I let them settle their own affairs. But, to speak the truth, I am sorry for that poor dog 'Papuzza.' He was as quiet as a young chicken until they worried him, then when he called for help, fifty rushed to his aid, and now they are all upon him, devouring everything they can grab; and whether poor 'Papuzza' win or lose, he will have nothing left but his shirt."

This nickname "Papuzza,"—a Venetian distortion of Babbuccia slippers—Signor Giacomo applied to the Turk. "Papuzza" personified Turkey in the form of one ideal Turk, with a huge turban, a long beard, a big belly, and slippers. Puttini, the peaceful, half free-thinker, had a weakness for the lazy, placid, easy-going "Papuzza."

"Don't worry," the Commissary laughed. "Your friend 'Papuzza' will come out all right. We are his friends also, and will not allow him to be mutilated or bled."

Franco, frowning sternly, could not refrain from grumbling.

"Nevertheless, that would be a great injustice towards Russia."

The Commissary was silent, and Signora Peppina, displaying unusual tact, proposed going out to see the flowers.

"A good idea!" said the engineer, who was very glad to have the discussion interrupted.

While passing from the hall to the little garden the Commissary took Franco's arm familiarly, and whispered in his ear: "You are right, you know, about the injustice; but there are certain things we government officials may not say." Franco, who was greatly astonished at this utterance, felt as if the touch of the Imperial and Royal hand were burning him. If this man had had a more Italian face he would have believed him, but with that Kalmuc countenance he did not believe him, and allowed the subject to drop. But his companion resumed it in a low tone, as he leaned over the parapet above the lake, and pretended to examine the ficus repens that covered the wall.

"You yourself should avoid certain expressions," said he. "There are fools who might place false interpretations upon them." And he gave a slight nod in the direction of the Receiver. "Be careful, be careful!" "Thank you," Franco replied, dryly, "but I hardly think I shall need to be careful." "We can never be sure, never be sure, never be sure!" the Commissary murmured, and, followed by Franco, he moved away towards the spot where the Receiver and the engineer were discussing the subject of tench, near the few steps leading down to the second terrace of the little garden.

Close at hand stood the famous red box with the jasmine.

"That red does not look well, Signor Maironi," said the mastiff, ex abrupto, and he

threw up his hand with a gesture that meant, "Away with it!" Just then Luisa looked into the garden from the hall, and called her husband. The Commissary turned to his zealous acolyte, and said sharply, "Drop that!"

Signora Pasotti was leaving, and wished to salute Franco. He would have shown her out through the garden, but she, anxious to avoid going through so many ceremonies with those other gentlemen, preferred to go down by the inside stairs, and Franco escorted her as far as the street-door, which stood open. To his great surprise Signora Pasotti, instead of passing out, closed the door, and began an excited and perfectly unintelligible pantomime, accompanying it with short sighs and rollings of the eyes; after this she took a letter from her pocket and offered it to him.

Franco read, shrugged his shoulders, and put the letter in his pocket. Then as Signora Pasotti kept on recommending flight, flight—Lugano, Lugano, in despairing pantomime, he smiled and reassured her by a gesture. She once more seized his hands, and once more the lofty bonnet (which had a tipsy inclination towards the right), and the long black curls, trembled in earnest supplication. She strained her eyes wide, pushed out her lips as far as possible, and laid her forefinger against her nose to indicate silence. "With Pasotti also!" she said; and these were the only words she spoke during the whole interview. Then she trotted away.

Franco went upstairs again, thinking about his position. This might be a false alarm, just as it might also be a serious matter. But why should they arrest him? He tried to remember if he had anything of a compromising nature in the house, and could recall nothing. It flashed across his mind that his grandmother might have been guilty of some perfidy, but he at once banished the thought, reproaching himself, and postponed a decision until he should have spoken to his wife.

He returned to the little garden, where the Commissary, as soon as he caught sight of him, asked him to point out the dahlias Signora Peppina had been praising. Upon learning that they were in the kitchen-garden he proposed going there with Franco.

They could go alone, for indeed all the others were ignorant on the subject of dahlias. Franco accepted.

The conduct of this little police-spy in gloves puzzled him, and he sought to discover if it could in any way be connected with the mysterious warning.

"Listen, Signor Maironi," the Commissary began resolutely, when Franco had closed the gate of the kitchen-garden behind him. "I wish to say a word to you."

Franco who was descending the few steps leading from the threshold of the gate, stopped with a clouded brow. "Come here," the Commissary added imperiously. "What I am about to do is perhaps not in accordance with my duty, but I shall do it, notwithstanding. I am too good a friend of the Marchesa, your grandmother, not to do it. You are in great danger."

"I?" Franco inquired, coldly. "In danger of what?"

Franco was endowed with a rapid and sure intuition of the thoughts of others. The Commissary's words agreed perfectly with the message Barborin had brought; still, at that moment he felt that the little police-spy harboured treachery in his heart.

"In danger of what? Of Mantua!" was Zérboli's reply.

Franco did not flinch upon hearing the awful word, synonym of incarceration and the gibbet.

"I need not fear Mantua," said he. "I have done nothing to deserve Mantua."

"Nevertheless——!"

"Of what am I accused?" Franco repeated.

"You will soon find out if you remain here," the Commissary replied, laying stress upon the last words. "And now let us examine these dahlias."

"I have done nothing!" Franco once more repeated. "I will not leave."

"Let us see these dahlias, let us see these dahlias," the Commissary insisted.

Franco felt that he should thank this man, but he could not. He showed him his

flowers with just that amount of civility that was indispensable, and with perfect composure. Then he conducted him from the kitchen-garden to the house, talking of some obscure Professor Maspero, and of his secret method of combating oidium.

In the hall they were discussing another and far worse form of oidium. Signora Peppina was harassed by a terrible fear of cholera. She recognised that cholera served as a warning to every good Christian to make his peace with God, and that when we are at peace with God, it is indeed a blessing to be called to the next world, "but still, this body of ours, you know! This precious body! And when you reflect that we have only one!"

"The cholera," said Luisa, "might do no end of good, if it had any sense, but it has not. You see," she whispered to Signora Peppina as Bianconi rose and went towards the Commissary, who had returned with Franco, "the cholera is quite capable of taking you, and leaving your husband." At this extraordinary remark the terrified Peppina started violently, exclaiming: "Jesusmaria!" and then, perceiving she had betrayed her true feelings, that she had not exhibited that tenderness for Carlascia of which she was always prating, she clutched her neighbour's knee, and bending forward, said in an undertone, her face as red as a poppy: "Be quiet, be quiet, be quiet!"

But Luisa was no longer thinking of her. A glance from Franco had warned her that something had happened.

When all the visitors had departed, Uncle Piero sat down to read the Milan Gazette, and Luisa said to her husband: "It is three o'clock. Let us go and wake Maria."

When he and she were alone in the alcove-room, instead of at once opening the shutters, she inquired what had happened. Franco told her everything, from Signora Pasotti's letter to the Commissary's strange communication.

Luisa listened with a serious face, but without exhibiting any sign of fear. Then she examined the mysterious note. Both she and Franco were aware that among the

government agents at Porlezza there was one honest man, who, in 1849 and 1850 had saved several patriots by a timely warning. But they were also aware that this honest man was ignorant of the rules of orthography and grammar, and the note Barborin had brought was perfectly correct. As to the Commissary, it was well known that he was one of the most malicious and treacherous of the government's tools. Luisa approved of the answer her husband had made him.

Franco himself was well aware of all this, but he could find no plausible explanation for this persecution. Luisa, however, had one in mind which contempt for the grandmother had suggested to her. This Commissary was a good friend of the grandmother's, he himself had said so, thereby displaying, so he thought, the refinement of cunning. In the Commissary's glove there was the talon of the Marchesa. She meant to strike not Franco alone, but all the others as well, and they were to be reached through him who maintained the family with the fruit of his labours, out of the kindness of his generous heart. She knew from speeches which had been repeated to her by the usual hateful gossips, that the grandmother hated Uncle Piero because Uncle Piero had made it possible for her grandson to rebel against her, and to live comfortably enough in rebellion. Now they were seeking for a pretext to strike him. The flight of the nephew would be a confession, and, for a government like the Austrian, a good pretext to strike the uncle. Luisa did not say so at once, but she let him see that she had an idea, and little by little, her husband drew it from her. When she had told him, though in his heart he believed she was right, he nevertheless protested in words, defending his grandmother against an accusation which seemed too monstrous, and which rested on so slight a foundation. At all events husband and wife agreed perfectly in their resolve not to flee, but to await further developments. They therefore wasted no time in making or discussing suppositions. Luisa rose and went to open the shutters, and standing in the full light, she turned to look smilingly at her husband, stretching out her hand to him. He pressed it and shook it, his heart aflame, but his tongue speechless. They felt like

soldiers, who, conscious of the distant roar of cannon, are being led along a quiet road, towards what fate God only knows.

CHAPTER IV THE HAND WITHIN THE GLOVE

The Engineer-in-Chief noticed nothing, and two days later, the term of his leave having expired, he went away peacefully in his boat, wrapped in his great, grey travelling cloak, and accompanied by Cia, the housekeeper. Ten days passed without further developments, and Franco and Luisa concluded that a trap had been set for them, and that, after all, the police would not appear. On the evening of the first of October they played tarocchi merrily with Puttini and Pasotti, and then, their guests having left early, they went to bed. When Luisa kissed the child, who was sleeping, she noticed that her flesh was hot. She felt of her hands and legs. "Maria is feverish," she said.

Franco took up the candle and looked at her. Maria was sleeping with her little head drooping towards her left shoulder as usual. The lovely little face which always wore a frown when she was asleep, was slightly flushed, and the breathing rather quick. Franco was alarmed, and at once thought of scarlet fever, the measles, gastric, and brain fever. Luisa, who was more calm, thought of worms, and prepared a dose of santonine, which she placed ready on the pedestal. Then both father and mother went noiselessly to bed, put out the light and lay listening anxiously to the little one's short, quick breathing. At last they dozed, but towards midnight they were aroused by Maria, who was crying. They lighted the candle and Maria became quiet and took the santonine. Then presently she began to cry again, and wanted to be taken into the big bed, between mamma and papa, and finally went to sleep there; but her sleep was uneasy and often interrupted by sobs.

Franco kept the candle burning that he might watch her more closely. He and his wife were bending over their darling when two knocks sounded in quick succession

on the street-door. Franco started up in bed. "Did you hear?" said he. "Hush!" said Luisa, grasping his arm, and listening. Two more knocks sounded, louder still, and Franco exclaimed: "The Police!" and sprang to the floor. "Go, go!" Luisa begged in a low tone. "Don't let them take you! Go by the little courtyard! Climb over the wall!" He did not answer, but hastily threw on some clothes and rushed from the room, heedless of danger, and determined never of his own free will to leave his Luisa and his sick child.

He dashed down the stairs. "Who is there?" he inquired, without opening the door. "The Police!" some one answered. "Open at once."

"At this hour I open to no one I do not see."

A short dialogue ensued in the street. The voice he had heard first said: "You speak to him," and the voice that spoke next was very familiar to Franco.

"Open, Signor Maironi."

It was the Receiver. Franco threw the door open. A gentleman, dressed in black and wearing spectacles, entered, and was followed by the mastiff; after the mastiff came a gendarme with a lantern, then three other armed gendarmes, two of whom were subalterns while the other was of higher rank, and carried a large leathern bag. Some one remained outside.

"Are you Signor Maironi?" said the man in spectacles, a police-adjunct, or detective from Milan. "Come upstairs with me." And the whole party started upstairs, with the thud of heavy steps and the rattling of military trappings.

They had not yet reached the first floor when a light fell on the stairs from above, and sobs and groans were heard on the second floor.

"Is that your wife?" asked the detective.

"Do you fancy it is?" Franco retorted ironically. The Receiver murmured: "It is probably the servant." The detective turned and gave an order; two gendarmes

started forward and went rapidly up to the second floor. More sharply than before the adjunct asked Franco: "Is your wife in bed?"

"Of course."

"Where? She must get up."

The door of the alcove-room was thrown open, and Luisa appeared in her dressing-gown, with flowing hair, and bearing a candle in her hand. At the same moment a gendarme leaned over the banisters on the upper floor, and said that the servant had nearly fainted away, and could not come down. The detective ordered him to leave his companion with the woman, and to descend. Then he saluted the lady, who did not reply. In the hope that Franco had fled, she had hastened to leave the room in order to detain and, if possible, deceive the police. She now saw her husband and shuddered, her heart beating wildly, but she composed herself at once.

The detective stepped forward to enter the room. "No!" Franco exclaimed. "Some one is ill in there." Luisa clutched the handle of the closed door, looking the man straight in the face.

"Who is ill?" asked the detective.

"A little girl."

"Well, what harm do you suppose we shall do her?"

"Pardon me," said Luisa almost defiantly, and giving the handle a nervous shake, "must you all go in?"

"All of us."

At the sound of voices and the rattling of the door-handle little Maria had begun to cry in a weary and forlorn voice that was heart-rending.

"Luisa," said Franco, "let these gentlemen do their work."

The detective was a fashionably-dressed young man, with a refined but cruel face. He threw Franco a sinister glance. "Obey your husband, Signora," said he, glad of an

opportunity to retaliate. "I think he is prudent."

"Less prudent than you are, who bring a whole army as escort," Luisa retorted, opening the door. He glanced at her, shrugged his shoulders, and passed in, followed by the others.

"Open everything here," said he roughly, in a loud voice, pointing to the writing-desk. Franco's big, blue eyes flashed. "Speak softly!" said he. "Do not frighten my child."

"Silence, you!" the detective thundered, bringing his fist down upon the desk. "Open!"

At that noise the child began to sob violently. Franco, who was furious, flung the key upon the desk.

"Open it yourself," said he.

"You are under arrest!" cried the detective.

"Very well."

While Franco was answering thus, Luisa, who had bent low over her baby, trying to pacify her, raised her face impetuously.

"I also have a right to that honour," said she, in her fine, ringing voice.

The detective did not deign to reply, but ordered a gendarme to open all the drawers of the writing-desk, and he himself searched them, removing all the letters, examining them rapidly, throwing some on the floor, and tossing others into the great leathern bag. After the writing-desk it was the turn of the chests of drawers, where everything was turned upside down. Then Maria's little bed was inspected. The detective ordered Luisa to remove the child from the big bed, which he also intended to examine.

"Then put the little bed in order for me," Luisa replied, quivering with rage. Up to this moment, the mastiff, Carlascia, had stood silent and stiff behind his moustaches,

as if this operation, which he had perhaps desired in the abstract, were proving not entirely to his taste, now that it was being put into practice. He came forward and began arranging the mattresses and sheets of the little bed with his great ugly paws. Luisa placed the child in it, and then the large bed was torn to pieces and examined, but without any result. Maria had stopped crying, and was staring at the scene of confusion with wide eyes.

"Now follow me, both of you," said the adjunct. Luisa, who believed she was to be led away with her husband, demanded that the servant be summoned, that she might give the child into her care. At the idea that Luisa was under arrest, that the sick child was to be deprived of her mother also, Franco, beside himself with rage and grief, uttered a protesting cry—

"This is not possible! Say it is not so!"

The detective did not vouchsafe a reply, but ordered that the servant be brought in. The maid, half dead with fright, entered between two gendarmes, groaning and sobbing.

"Fool!" Franco muttered between his teeth.

"The woman will stay here with the child," said the adjunct. "Both of you will come with me. You must be present when the rest of the house is searched." He sent for some lights, left a gendarme in the alcove-room, and went into the hall, followed by the other gendarmes, Bianconi, Franco, and Luisa.

"Before continuing the search," said he, "I will ask you a question I should have asked before had your conduct been more correct. Tell me whether you have any weapons, or seditious publications, or papers either printed or in manuscript, which are hostile to the Imperial and Royal Government."

Franco answered, in a loud tone—

"No."

"That is what we shall see," said the detective.

"Do as you like."

While the adjunct was causing furniture to be moved away from the wall, and was searching and peering everywhere, Luisa remembered that eight or ten years before her uncle had shown her in the chest of drawers of a room on the second floor, an old sabre that had lain there ever since 1812. It had belonged to another Pietro Ribera, a lieutenant of cavalry, who had fallen at Malojaroslavetz. No one ever slept in that room above the kitchen and it was seldom entered; it was as if it did not exist. Luisa had completely forgotten the old sabre of the Empire. Oh, God! now she recalled it! What if her uncle had forgotten it also? What if he had not given it up in 1848, after the war, when orders had been issued to deliver up all weapons, under pain of death? Had her uncle grasped the fact, in his patriarchal simplicity, that this heir-loom that had lain for six-and-thirty years at the bottom of a drawer, had now become a dangerous and forbidden object? And Franco, Franco who knew nothing! Luisa was resting her hands on the back of a chair; it creaked sharply under her convulsive pressure. She withdrew her hands, frightened, as if the chair had spoken.

In fancy she saw the adjunct pass from room to room with his gendarmes, and arrive at that door, open the drawer, and discover the sabre. She made every effort to recall the exact position in which she had seen it, to find some way out of this danger; and she was silent, mechanically following with her eyes the candle which a gendarme, in obedience to his chief's gestures, held close, now to an open drawer or cupboard, now to a picture which the detective had lifted, that he might look behind it. No, she could think of no remedy. If her uncle had failed to remove the sabre, she could only trust they would not visit that room.

Franco, leaning against the stove, was following every motion of the searchers with a clouded brow. When they plunged their hands into the drawers, his rage was visible in the silent working of his jaws. Nothing was heard save, now and then, a

sharp order from the detective, and a low-toned reply from the gendarmes. Nothing moved around them, save their great shadows wavering on the walls. The silence of the Receiver, of Franco and Luisa, was like the silence of those who have risked great sums in a secret gaming-house, and stand about the players who, from time to time, speak some brief word. The sinister face and voice of the detective never changed, although he had not discovered anything. To Luisa he seemed a man sure of achieving his purpose. And not to be able to do anything, not even warn Franco! But perhaps it was better he did not know; perhaps his ignorance would save him.

Having searched the hall and the loggia the detective entered the salon. He took the candle from the gendarme's hands and swiftly examined the little, illustrious men.

Seeing the portraits of Gouvion Saint-Cyr, Marmont, and other generals of Napoleon, he said: "The Engineer-in-Chief Ribera would have done far better to hang the portrait of His Excellency Field-Marshal Radetzky on his walls. Is it here?"

"No," said Franco.

"A nice government official!" said the other contemptuously, and with indescribable arrogance.

"Are government officials bound," Franco burst forth, "to hang the portraits——"

"I am not here to argue with you," the detective said, interrupting him.

Franco was about to answer. "Be quiet, you with your tongue a yard long!" said the Receiver, brutally.

The detective passed from the drawing-room into the corridor leading to the stairs. Would he go up or not, Luisa wondered. He went up, and she followed him, not trembling, but imagining with a dizzy rapidity, the many different things that might happen. All the possibilities of the moment, both disastrous and favourable, were whirling, as it were, in her head. If she lingered upon the first, horror carried her with a bound to the second; if she dwelt upon these, fancy returned with perverse eagerness to the first.

Before they had set foot in the corridor of the second floor they heard Maria crying. Franco begged the adjunct to allow his wife to go down to the child, but she protested that she wished to remain. The idea of not being with him when the weapon was discovered, terrified her. Meanwhile the detective had entered a small room where there were some books, and finding a volume printed at Capolago, and bearing the title, Literary Writings of a Living Italian, he said: "Who is this living Italian?" "Padre Cesari," Franco replied boldly. The other, deceived by his prompt answer and the priestly name, assumed the air of a man of culture, saying: "Ah! I am acquainted with his works." Replacing the book, he inquired where the Engineer-in-Chief slept.

Luisa was too completely dominated by the one great dread to sense anything else, but Franco, when he saw the police-agent and his band enter the uncle's room, which was so clean, so neat, so full of his dear, calm spirit, when he reflected what a blow to the poor old man the news of all this would be, was completely overcome, and could have wept with rage. "It seems to me," he said, "that this one room at least should be respected."

"Keep your observations to yourself," the adjunct retorted, and began by ordering the blankets and mattresses stripped from the bed. Then he demanded the key to the chest of drawers. Franco had it, and went down to his room for it, accompanied by a gendarme. The uncle had entrusted it to him before leaving, telling him that in case of need he would find a small amount of cum quibus in the top drawer. They opened it. It contained a roll of svanziche, a few letters and papers, some pocket-books, old note-books, compasses, pencils, and a small wooden bowl in which were several coins.

The detective examined everything carefully, discovering among the coins in the little bowl a five-franc piece of the time of Carlo Alberto, and a forty-franc piece of the Provisory Government of Lombardy. "The Engineer-in-Chief has preserved

these coins with extraordinary care," said the detective; "henceforth we will preserve them." He closed the drawer, and, without opening the others, returned the key to Franco.

Then he went out into the corridor and paused, undecided. The Receiver thought he intended to go down, and as the corridor was nearly dark, and the stairs were not visible, he, who was acquainted with the house, started towards the right in the direction of the stairs, saying: "This way." The room where the sabre lay was on the left.

"Wait," said the adjunct. "Let us look in here, also." And turning, he pushed open the fatal door. Luisa, who had been the last in the procession, pressed forward, now that the supreme moment had arrived. Her heart, which had beat furiously while the adjunct hesitated, now became quiet as by a miracle, and she was cool, daring, and ready.

"Who sleeps here?" the detective asked her.

"No one. My uncle's parents used to occupy this room, but they have been dead these forty years, and no one has slept here since."

The room contained two beds, a sofa, and a chest of drawers. This the detective signed to the gendarmes to open. They tried it, but it was locked. "I think I have the key," said Luisa with the utmost indifference. She went down, accompanied by a gendarme, and returned immediately with a little basket of keys which she offered to the detective.

"I do not know the key," she said. "It is never used. It must be one of these."

He tried them all, but in vain. Then the Receiver tried, and then Franco. The right one was not there.

"Send to S. Mamette for the lock-smith," said Luisa, calmly. The Receiver looked at the detective as if to say: "It seems to me unnecessary," but the detective turned his back upon him and exclaimed to Luisa: "This key must be somewhere!"

The chest of drawers, a piece of rococo furniture, had metal handles to each drawer. One of the gendarmes, the strongest, tried to force the drawers open. He did not succeed either with the top one or with the second. Just at that moment Luisa remembered that she had seen the sabre in the third drawer, together with a roll of drawings. The gendarme seized the handles of the third. "This one is not locked," said he. In fact it opened easily. The detective took the light and bent over to examine it.

Franco had seated himself on the sofa, his eyes fixed on the rafters of the ceiling. When his wife saw the drawer pulled open she sank down beside him, took his hand, and pressed it spasmodically.

She heard some papers rustle, and the Receiver murmured, in a benign voice: "Drawings." Then the detective exclaimed: "Ah!" and the satellites all leaned forward to see. She had the strength to rise and inquire; "What is it?" The detective was holding a long pasteboard case, curved and slim, and bearing a label with an inscription. He had already read the inscription to himself; he now read it aloud with an accent of ineffable sarcasm and satisfaction. "The sabre of Lieutenant Pietro Ribera, killed at Malojaroslavetz in 1812." Franco started to his feet, astounded and incredulous, and at the same moment the adjunct opened the case. From where he stood Franco could not see it, and he glanced at his wife, who could. Her lips were white and he thought it was with fright, although this did not seem possible.

But her lips were white with joy, for the case contained only an empty scabbard. Luisa suddenly drew back into the shadow and sank upon the sofa, struggling with a violent inward trembling, vexed with herself and ashamed of her weakness, which however, she soon conquered. Meanwhile the detective, who had removed the scabbard and examined it on all sides, asked Franco where the sabre was. Franco was about to answer that he did not know, which was perfectly true, but reflecting that this might seem like self-justification, he said—

"In Russia."

The sabre was not in Russia, but fast in the mud, at the bottom of the lake, where Uncle Piero had secretly flung it rather than give it up.

"But why did they write sabre?" inquired the Receiver, wishing to show he also was zealous.

"The writer is dead," said Franco.

"Hand over that key at once!" the detective scolded angrily. And this time Luisa found it, and the two other drawers were opened. One was empty, the other contained some blankets and a little lavender.

The search ended here. The adjunct went down to the drawing-room, and ordered Franco to make ready to follow him in fifteen minutes. "You had better arrest all of us then!" Luisa exclaimed.

The man shrugged his shoulders, and repeated to Franco: "In fifteen minutes. You may go to your room, now, if you wish to." Franco dragged Luisa away entreating her to be silent, to resign herself for love of Maria. He seemed like another man, exhibiting neither grief nor anger, and there was in his voice a ring of serious sweetness, of manly calm.

He put some linen into a bag, together with a volume of Dante and an Almanach du Jardinier, which were on the table, bent over Maria for a moment but did not kiss her, for she had gone to sleep, and he feared to wake her. He kissed Luisa, however, but as they were being observed by the gendarmes stationed at either door of the room, he quickly freed himself from her embrace, saying, in French, that they must not provide a spectacle for those gentlemen. Then he took up his bag, and went to place himself at the detective's orders.

The police-adjunct had a boat waiting not fifty paces from Casa Ribera, towards Albogasio, at the landing called del Canevaa. Upon issuing from the portico spanned by his house, Franco heard a shutter being thrown open above his head, and saw the

light from his bedroom flash against the white façade of the church. He turned towards the window, saying—

"Send for the doctor to-morrow morning. Good-bye."

Luisa did not answer.

When the gendarmes reached the Canevaa with their prisoner, the adjunct ordered them to stop.

"Signor Maironi," said he, "you have had your lesson. This time you may return to your home, and I advise you to learn to respect the Authorities."

Amazement, joy, and indignation welled up in Franco's heart. He controlled himself, however, biting his lips, and started homewards at a leisurely pace. He had not yet turned the corner of the church when Luisa recognised his step, and called, "Franco!"

He sprang forward, and she saw him. Then her shadow vanished from the window. He rushed into the house, flung himself up the stairs, crying, "Free! Free!" while his wife came flying down, exclaiming wildly, "How! How! How!" They sought each other with eager arms, clung together, pressing close, without further speech.

But afterwards, in the loggia, they talked incessantly for two hours, of all they had heard, seen, and experienced, always coming back to the sabre, the papers, the coins, dwelling upon many trifling details, on the detective's Venetian accent, on the dark-haired gendarme, who seemed a good fellow, and the fair-haired gendarme, who must be a regular cur. From time to time they would cease speaking, enjoying in silence their sense of security, the sweetness of home, but presently they would begin again. Before going to bed they stepped out on the terrace. The night was dark and warm, the lake motionless. The sultriness, the gloom, the vague and monstrous shapes of the mountains, seemed to their imagination heavy with the mortal weight of Austria. The very air itself seemed full of it. Neither Franco nor Luisa was sleepy, but they must go to bed on account of the servant who was watching with Maria.

They entered the room on tiptoe. The child was sleeping, her breathing almost normal.

They also tried to sleep, but could not. They could not refrain from talking, especially Franco. He would ask softly: "Are you asleep?" and upon her answering, "No," the coins, the papers, the sabre, or the bully with his Venetian accent would be discussed once more. By this time there was nothing new to be said on these subjects, and, as Maria began to be restless, and to show signs of waking, towards dawn, Luisa answered, "Yes," the next time Franco inquired softly, "Are you asleep?" and after that he kept quiet, as if he really believed it.

The day after the search at Casa Ribera, Oria, Albogasio, and S. Mamette were full of whisperings. "Have you heard?—Oh, dear Lord!—Have you heard?—Oh, holy Madonna!" But the loudest whisperings were of course those that communicated the news to Barborin Pasotti. Her husband shouted into her face: "Maironi! Police! Gendarmes! Arrest!" The poor woman concluded an army had swept her friends away, and began to puff—"oh! oh!"—like an engine. Then she groaned and wept, and questioned Pasotti about the child. Pasotti, who was determined not to allow her to go down to Oria and exhibit her affection for the Maironis under these circumstances, replied with a gesture like the sweep of a broom. Gone! Gone! She also!—But the servant? The servant must surely be there still. The crafty man made another sweeping gesture in the air, and then Barborin grasped the fact that His Imperial and Royal Austrian Majesty had had the servant carried off as well.

But the most malicious whisperings were uttered at a great distance from Valsolda, in a room in the Maironi Palace, at Brescia. Ten days after the search the Chevalier Greisberg di S. Giustina, a cousin of the Maironis, who had been attached to the government of Field-Marshal Radetzky in Verona until 1853, and had then accompanied his master to Milan, alighted at the door of Casa Maironi from the carriage of the Imperial and Royal Delegate of Brescia, whose guest he had been for

some days. The Chevalier, a handsome man of about forty, perfumed, and smartly dressed, did not look particularly happy as he stood very erect in the centre of the reception room, examining the ancient stucco-work of the ceiling, and waiting for the Marchesa, who was of the same period. Nevertheless, when the door opposite him, pushed open by a servant's hand, admitted Madam's big person, marble countenance, and black wig, the Chevalier was at once transformed, and kissed the old lady's wrinkled hand with fervour. A Lombard gentlewoman devoted to Austria was a rare animal, and extremely precious to the Imperial and Royal government. Every loyal functionary owed her the most obsequious gallantry. The Marchesa received the homage of her cousin the Chevalier with her usual unruffled dignity, and having invited him to be seated, enquired after his family and thanked him for his call, all in the same guttural and sleepy tone. Finally, slightly out of breath from the fatigue of uttering so many words, she crossed her hands over her stomach, and let it be seen that she was now waiting for what her cousin might have to say.

She expected he would speak about Engineer Ribera and the search. She had on previous occasions expressed to him her displeasure that Franco should be under the influence of his wife and Ribera, and her surprise that the government should retain in its service one who in 1848 had openly played the Liberal, and whose family—especially that artful young woman—professed the most impudent Liberalism. The Chevalier Greisberg had assured her that her wise observations should be given due consideration. Then the Marchesa had instigated the Commissary Zérboli against the poor Engineer-in-Chief, and it had been through Zérboli that she had heard of the search. Therefore, when Greisberg appeared she concluded he had come to speak of that. Now, she was quite willing to make the government serve her own private rancour, but, as a matter of principle, she never recognised a debt of gratitude toward any one. By thus subjecting a doubtful functionary to examination, the Austrian government had been working in its own interests. She had not asked for anything; it was not for her to ask, it was for the

Chevalier to speak first. But the Chevalier, cunning, sly, and proud, did not understand his rôle in this way. The old woman wanted a favour, and in order to obtain it she must bow down and kiss the beneficent claws of government.

He remained silent for some time, to collect his thoughts, and in the hope that the other would yield. Seeing that she remained mute and unbending, he himself became suddenly smiling and gracious, told her that he had come from Verona, and proposed that she guess what route he had taken. He had passed through such a sweet town, had seen such a charming villa, so splendid, a real paradise! The Marchesa was not good at guessing; she asked if he had been in Brianza. No, he had not come from Verona to Brescia by way of Brianza. He once more described the villa, and this time so minutely that the Marchesa could not help recognising her own estate of Monzambano. Then the Chevalier proposed that she guess why he had gone to see the villa. She guessed at once, guessed the whole plot of the comedy that was being acted for her benefit, but her dull face said nothing of this. The Delegate had once before sounded her to ascertain if she would be willing to let the villa to His Excellency the Marshal, but she—having been secretly threatened with fire and death by the Liberals of Brescia—had found some polite excuses. She now perceived in Greisberg's words the tacit offer of a bargain, and stood on her guard. She confessed to her cousin that she was unable to guess even this. Indeed she felt she was growing more and more stupid every day. The effect of years and grief! "I have had a great grief very lately," she said. "I am told that the Police have searched my grandson's house at Oria."

Greisberg, feeling that this elderly hypocrite was slipping through his fingers, now pulled off his glove, and seized her with his talons. "Marchesa," said he, in a tone which admitted of no rejoinder, "you must not speak of grief! Through the Commissary of Porlezza and myself, you have furnished precious information to the government, of which service it is not unmindful. Not a hair of your grandson's head was touched, nor will be, if he is judicious. But, on the other hand, I regret that we

may perhaps not be able to adopt severe measures against another person who has injured you seriously in private matters. In order to find a means of reaching this person the Commissary has even exceeded his duty. You must understand once for all, Marchesa, that this is not a question of grief, and that you are especially indebted to the government." The Marchesa had never before been spoken to in such strong language and with such formidable authority. Perhaps the continuous, undulating movement of neck and head visible above her stiffly-held body, corresponded with the angry beating of her heart, but it seemed the movement of some animal struggling to swallow an enormous mouthful. At any rate she did not unbend sufficiently to speak a word of acquiescence. Only, having regained her obese calm, she observed that she had never demanded that measures be adopted against any one; that she was glad the search had revealed nothing incriminating against Engineer Ribera; that, nevertheless, all sorts of things had been said in Casa Ribera, but that words were difficult to trace. The Chevalier replied more gently, that he could not say whether anything had been discovered, and that the last word would be spoken by the Marshal himself, who intended to give this matter his personal attention. This remark enabled him to return to the subject of the villa at Monzambano. He asked for it formally for His Excellency, who wished to go there within a week. The Marchesa thanked him for the great honour, which she said, her villa did not deserve; it seemed to her too dilapidated, it wanted repairing, and His Excellency must be informed of this. She wished to defer her decision, to await the payment of the miserable price of her condescension, but the Chevalier struck another blow with his talons, and declared she must answer at once, answer clearly, yes or no, and the old lady was forced to bow her head. "To accommodate His Excellency," she said. Greisberg at once became amiable again, and jested about the measures to be adopted against that Signor Ingegnere. There was no question of spilling blood, only a little ink need be spilled. There was no question of depriving any one of liberty, rather of conferring perfect liberty on somebody. The Marchesa

made no sign. She sent for two lemonades, and drank hers slowly in little sips, not without a faint expression of satisfaction between the sips, as if this lemonade had a new and exquisite flavour. But the Chevalier wished for an explicit word from her concerning Ribera, a confession of her desire, and placing the glass he had hastily drained upon the tray, he said, "I will see to this myself, you know, and we shall succeed. Are you satisfied?"

The Marchesa continued to sip the lemonade slowly, slowly, gazing into the glass.

"Does that suit you?" her cousin asked, having waited in vain for an answer.

"Yes, it is very good," the drowsy voice replied. "I drink it slowly on account of my teeth."

The last whisperings were not human. Luisa and Franco were seated on the grass at Looch, near the cemetery. They were speaking of the mother's great and exquisite goodness, and comparing it to Uncle Piero's great and simple goodness, noting the similarity and the differences. They did not say which sort of goodness, taken as a whole, seemed to them superior, but from the opinions each expressed, their different inclinations could be divined. Franco preferred that goodness which is permeated with faith in the supernatural, while Luisa preferred the other form of goodness. He was grieved by this secret contradiction, but hesitated to reveal it, fearing to sound a too painful note. But it had brought a cloud to his brow, and presently he said, almost involuntarily: "How many misfortunes, how much bitterness your mother suffered, with such great resignation, such strength, such peace! Do you believe that natural goodness alone would be able to suffer thus?" "I do not know," Luisa replied. "I think poor Mamma must have lived in a better world before she was born into this, for her heart was always there." She did not say all she thought. She thought that if all the good souls on earth resembled her mother in religious meekness, this world would become the kingdom of the rascal and the tyrant. And as to ills, which do not come from man, but from the very conditions of

human life itself, she felt greater admiration for such as strive against them with their own strength, than for such as invoke and obtain aid from that same Being by whom the blow was dealt. She would not confess these sentiments to her husband, but instead, expressed the hope that her uncle might never suffer deep affliction. Could it be possible that the Lord would wish such a man to suffer? "No, no, no!" Franco exclaimed; at another moment he would not perhaps have dared to admonish God in this manner. A breath of the Boglia swept down the ravine of Muzài, and rustled the top branches of the walnut-trees. To Luisa that fluttering seemed connected with Franco's last words; it seemed to her that the wind and the great trees knew something of the future, and were whispering about it together.

CHAPTER V THE SECRET OF THE WIND AND THE WALNUT-TREES

Maria's fever lasted only eight days; nevertheless, when she left her bed, her parents found her more changed in face and in mind than if the eight days had been eight months. Her eyes had grown darker, and had assumed a peculiar expression of calm and precocious maturity. She spoke more distinctly and rapidly, but to those who were not to her liking, she would not speak at all, would not even greet them. This was more displeasing to Franco than to Luisa. Franco wished her to be amiable, but Luisa feared to spoil her sincerity. For her mother Maria cherished an affection violent rather than demonstrative, a jealous, almost fierce affection. She was very fond of her father also, but it was evident that she felt he was unlike herself. Franco had passionate outbursts of affection for her, when he would catch her up unexpectedly, press her close, and cover her with kisses. At such moments she would throw her head back, plant one little hand upon her father's face, and look frowningly at him, as if something in him were strange and repugnant to her. Often Franco would scold her angrily, and Maria would cry and stare at him through her

tears, motionless, and as if fascinated, and always wearing the expression of one who does not understand. He noticed the child's predilection for her mother, and this was pleasing to him, for it seemed a just preference, and he never doubted that later Maria would love him tenderly also. Luisa, loving her husband as she did, was much troubled that the child should exhibit greater affection for herself; however this sentiment of hers was less lively, less pure, than Franco's generous pleasure. It seemed to Luisa that, after all, in spite of his transports, Franco loved his daughter as a being distinct from himself, while she, who had no transports of external tenderness, loved the child as a vital part of herself. Moreover she cherished in her heart a future Maria probably very different from the one Franco cherished. For this reason also she could not regret her moral ascendency over her daughter. She foresaw the danger that Franco might favour an exaggerated development of the child's religious sentiment, and this, to her, was a very serious danger, for in Maria, full of curiosity, eager for stories, there were the germs of a very lively imagination, which would be most favourable to religious fancies, and a badly balanced moral sense might be the result. It was not a question of abolishing religious sentiment; this Luisa, out of respect for Franco, if for no other reason, would never have sought to do, but it was imperative that Maria, on reaching womanhood, should be able to find the pivot of her own existence in her own sure and vigorous moral sense, a moral sense not founded upon beliefs which, after all, were simply hypotheses and opinions, and which, sooner or later, might fail her. The preservation of faith in Justice and in Truth, setting aside all other faith, all hope, all fear, seemed to her the most sublime condition of the human conscience. She believed that because she went to Mass, and twice a year to the sacraments, she had renounced such perfection for herself, and she intended to renounce it for Maria also, but as one who, finding himself hampered by wife and children, must renounce Christian perfection, but who does so unwillingly, and in as slight a degree as possible.

Fate might bestow riches upon Maria. Therefore they must carefully provide against

her acceptance of a life of frivolity, compensated for by the giving of alms, the Mass in the morning, and the rosary at night. On several occasions Luisa had attempted to sound Franco upon the question of giving Maria's education a moral direction quite apart from the religious direction, but such attempts had never been accompanied by satisfactory results. Franco could understand an unbelief in religion, but it was quite incomprehensible to him that there were those who found religion insufficient as a rule of life. He had never for a moment believed that all should aspire to saintliness, or that those who love tarocchi, primero, hunting, fishing, nice little dinners and a bottle of fine wine, are not good Christians. And this moral direction in education as divided from the religious direction seemed to him a mere notion, because, to his thinking, all honest men who did not believe, were honest either by nature or from habit, and not from any moral or philosophical reasoning. So it was not possible for Luisa to come to an understanding with her husband on this delicate point. She must act alone and very cautiously, in order neither to offend nor to grieve him. When Franco pointed out to the child the stars and the moon, the flowers and the butterflies, as admirable works of God, using poetically religious language fit for a child of twelve, Luisa held her peace; but if, on the contrary, he chanced to say to Maria: "Mind, God does not wish you to do that!" Luisa would immediately add: "That is wicked! You must never do what is wicked!" In such cases some dissension must inevitably arise between the parents, for the moral judgment of one was not always in harmony with the moral judgment of the other. Once they were standing together at the window of the hall, while Maria played with a little girl of about her own age from Oria. A brother of the child passed, a tyrant of eight, and ordered his little sister to follow him. She refused and wept. But Maria, looking very grave, faced the tyrant with clenched fists. Franco restrained her by a sharp command; the little one turned and looked at him, and then burst into tears, while the tyrant dragged his victim away. Luisa left the window, saying in an undertone to her husband: "Excuse me, but that was not just." "Why was it not just?" said Franco, and

he became heated and raised his voice, demanding whether his wife wished Maria to grow up pugilistic and violent. She answered gently and firmly, overlooking some sharp words of his, and maintaining that Maria's impulse had been good; that our first duty is to withstand tyranny and injustice; and that, though the child use his fists, the man would use more civilised weapons; but if the natural impulse of the soul be repressed in the child, there was danger of destroying the nascent sense of justice as well.

Franco would not be convinced. According to him it was very doubtful whether Maria had harboured any such heroic sentiments. She had simply been angry because she was to be deprived of her playmate, that was all. Besides, was it not a woman's place to oppose gentle meekness to injustice and tyranny, to appease and correct the offender, rather than repulse the offence by force? Luisa flushed crimson, and replied that this rôle might suit some women, perhaps the best of women, but it would certainly not suit all, for not all were so meek and humble.

"And you are of that number?"

"I believe so."

"A fine thing to boast of!"

"Does it grieve you very much?"

"Very much indeed."

Luisa placed her hands on his shoulders. "Does it grieve you very much," said she, "that I rebel as you yourself do against the presence of these masters in our house; that I desire as you yourself do, to help, even with my hands, in driving them out? Or would you prefer to see me attempt to correct Radetzky and appease the Croatians?"

"That is a different thing."

"In what way? No, it is the same thing."

"It is a different thing!" Franco repeated, but he was unable to demonstrate this. He felt he was wrong according to superficial ratiocination, and right according to a profound truth which he was unable to grasp. He said no more but was thoughtful all day, and was evidently seeking for an answer. He thought about it in the night also, and finally, believing he had found an answer, called to his wife, who was asleep.

"Luisa!" said he. "Luisa, that is a different thing."

"What is the matter?" Luisa exclaimed, waking with a start.

He had reflected that the offence of a foreign dominion was not personal like a private offence, and was always the result of a violation of a principle of universal justice. But while he was explaining this to his wife it struck him that in private offences also there was always the violation of a principle of universal justice, and he fancied he must have blundered.

"Nothing," said he.

His wife thought he was dreaming, and placing her head upon his shoulder, she went to sleep again. If any argument could convert Franco to his wife's ideas it was this sweet contact, this gentle breathing upon his breast, in which he had so often and so deliciously felt the blending of their two souls. But now it was not so. Through his brain the thought flashed suddenly like a quick and cold blade, that this latent antagonism between his wife's views and his own might one day burst forth in some painful form, and, terrified, he pressed her in his arms, as if to defend both himself and her against the phantoms of his own brain.

After breakfast, on the sixth of November Franco took his great gardening-shears and proceeded as usual, to the extermination of all dry leaves and branches on the terrace and in the little garden. The great beauty and deep peace of the hour went to the heart. Not a leaf stirred; the air from the west was most pure and crystalline; on the east the hills between Osteno and Porlezza were fading against a background of light mist; the house was glorious with the sun and the tremulous reflections from

the lake; but though the sun was still very hot, the chrysanthemums in the little garden, the olives and laurels along the coast—more plainly visible now among the reddening, falling leaves—a certain secret freshness in the air, scented with olea fragrans, the absence of all wind, the vaporous mountains of the Lake of Como, white with snow, all said, with one melancholy accord, that the sweet season was dying. When he had exterminated the withered brushwood Franco proposed to his wife that they should go to Casarico in their boat, and return the two first volumes of the Mystères du Peuple which they had eagerly devoured in a few days, to their friend Gilardoni, and borrow the next volume from him. They decided to start after lunch, when Maria should have gone to bed. But before Maria had been put to bed Barborin Pasotti appeared, all out of breath, her bonnet and mantle askew. She had come up from the garden-gate, and now stopped on the threshold of the hall. It was the first time she had been to see them since the search. Upon catching sight of her friends she clasped her hands, and kept repeating in a low tone: "Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord!" Then she flung herself upon Luisa and covered her with kisses.

"My dear girl! My dear girl!" she exclaimed. She would have liked to treat Franco in the same way, but Franco was not favourable to this sort of emotion, and his expression was not encouraging, so the poor woman had to be satisfied with taking both his hands and shaking them heartily. "My dear Don Franco! My dear Don Franco!" Finally she gathered Maria into her arms, but the child planted her two little hands upon Barborin's chest, her face wearing an expression similar to her father's. "I am old, am I not? And ugly? You don't like me? Well, never mind, never mind!" And she fell to kissing the child's arms and shoulders humbly, not daring to brave the sour little face. Then she told her friends she had brought them a piece of good news, and her eyes sparkled at the pleasant mystery. The Marchesa had written to Pasotti, and one passage in the letter Barborin had committed to memory. "It was with the deepest regret (deepest regret, those were the very words) that I learned of the sad affair at Oria ... at Oria ... (wait a moment) the sad affair at Oria ... (ah!) and

although my grandson is most undeserving (wait! ... have patience!) I trust that it may have no unpleasant consequences." The passage did not produce any great effect. Luisa frowned and said nothing. Franco glanced at his wife, and did not dare to utter the favourable comment he had on his lips, but not in his heart. Poor Barborin, who had taken advantage of her husband's absence at Lugano to run to her friends with this sugar-plum, was deeply mortified, and after gazing ruefully from Luisa to Franco, ended by pulling a real sugar-plum from her pocket, and offering it to Maria. Then, having made out that the Maironis wanted to go away in the boat, and longing to be allowed to stay with Maria a little while, she begged and entreated so hard that they finally started, leaving orders with Veronica to put the child to bed a little later.

Maria did not seem any too well pleased with the company of her elderly friend. She remained silent, obstinately silent, and before long she opened her mouth and burst into tears. Poor Barborin did not know which Saint to appeal to, so she appealed to Veronica, but Veronica was discoursing with a customs-guard, and either did not or would not hear. Barborin showed her rings, her watch, even the big bonnet, â la vice-reine Beauharnais, but nothing would do, and Maria continued to weep. Then she bethought her of going to the piano, where she strummed eight or ten bars of an antediluvian jig over and over again. Then little Princess Maria became more amiable, and allowed her old court-pianist to lift her as carefully as if her little arms had been a butterfly's wings, and place her on her lap as softly as if there had been danger of the old legs crumbling to dust.

When the jig had been repeated five or six times Maria began to look bored and tried to pull the elderly pianist's hand from the key-board, saying in an undertone: "Sing me a song." Obtaining no answer, she turned, looked Barborin straight in the face, and shouted at the top of her voice: "Sing me a song."

"I don't understand," Barborin replied. "I am deaf."

"Why are you deaf?"

"I am deaf," the unfortunate woman answered, smiling.

"But why are you deaf?"

Barborin could not imagine what the child was saying.

"I don't understand," said she.

"Then you are stupid," Maria announced with a very serious face, and knitting her brows, she repeated in a whining voice: "I want a song!"

A voice from the little garden said—

"Here is the person for songs."

Maria raised her head and her face became radiant. "Missipipì!" she cried, and slipping down from Barborin's lap, ran to meet Uncle Piero who was coming in. Signora Pasotti rose also, astonished and smiling, and stretched out her arms towards this old and unexpected friend. "Behold, behold, behold!" she exclaimed, and hastened to greet him. Maria was calling so loudly for "Missipipì, Missipipì!" and clinging so tight to Uncle Piero's legs, that, although he did not seem inclined to do so, he was obliged to sit down on the sofa, take the child on his knees, and repeat the old story to her.

Proud shade of the river——

After four or five "Missipipìs" Signora Pasotti went home, fearing her husband might return. Veronica wished to put the child to bed, but the little one rebelled, and Uncle Piero interfered, saying: "Oh, leave her here a little while longer," and he took her out to the terrace to see if Papa and Mamma were coming.

No boat could be seen coming from Casarico. The little one ordered her uncle to sit down, and then she climbed upon his knee.

"Why did you come?" said she. "There isn't any dinner for you, you know."

"Then you must cook some for me. I came to stay with you."

"Always?"

"Always."

"But really always, always, always?"

"Really always."

Maria became silent and thoughtful, but presently she asked—

"What have you brought me?"

Uncle Piero drew a rubber doll from his pocket. Had Maria known, had she been able to understand how he had gone out to buy that doll for her in great anguish of mind, still smarting from a terrible blow, she would have wept with pity.

"This is an ugly present," said she, recalling others he had brought her. "And if you stay here will you never bring me any more presents?"

"No more presents."

"Go away, Uncle," said she.

He smiled.

And then Maria wanted her uncle to tell her if his uncle had brought him presents when he was a little boy. But, though the thing was inconceivable to Maria, this uncle of her uncle had never existed. Who had brought him presents, then? And had he always been a good little boy? Had he cried much? Her uncle began telling her many tales of his childhood, things that had happened sixty years before, when people wore wigs and pig-tails. He enjoyed talking to his little grand-niece of that far-away time, making her share for a moment the existence of his dead parents, and he spoke with sad gravity, as if the dear ones who had passed away had been present, and he were speaking more for them than for her. She fixed her wide-open eyes on his face, and gazed intently at him. Neither he nor she heeded the flight of time, neither he nor she thought of the boat that was coming.

And the boat came. Luisa and Franco drew near, suspecting nothing, and believing

the child to be asleep. Franco was the first to perceive Uncle Piero seated under the drooping branches of the passion-flower vine with Maria on his knee. He uttered a loud exclamation of surprise, and, followed by Luisa, hastened towards them, fearing something had happened. "You here?" he called as he ran. Luisa, who was very pale, said nothing. Uncle Piero raised his head, and looked at them. They felt at once that he had brought bad news, for they had never seen him so grave.

"Addio! God bless you!" said he.

"What has happened?" Franco whispered. Uncle Piero motioned to them to withdraw from the terrace to the loggia, whither he followed them. Then the poor old man spread wide his arms as one crucified, and said in a sad but firm voice—

"I am dismissed."

Franco and Luisa stared at him for a moment, dazed. Then Franco burst out: "Oh, Uncle, Uncle!" and fell upon his neck. Seeing her father's action and the expression on her mother's face Maria fell to sobbing. Luisa tried to pacify her, but she herself, strong woman that she was, felt the tears rising in her throat.

Seated on the sofa in the hall Uncle Piero told them that the Imperial and Royal Delegate of Como had sent for him to tell him that the search which had been carried out in his house at Oria had given painful and unexpected results, but what these results were he had positively refused to state. The Delegate had added that the authorities had at first intended to take legal proceedings against him, but that in consideration of his long and faithful services to the government, it had been decided to remove him from office instead. Uncle Piero had insisted upon knowing the nature of the accusations brought against him, but the Delegate had dismissed him without an answer.

"And what is to be done now?" said Franco.

"What is to be done——" Uncle Piero was silent for a moment, and then pronounced that sacramental phrase of unknown origin which he and his fellow

tarocchi players were in the habit of repeating when the game was hopelessly lost. "We are done brown, O Queen!"

A long silence ensued, which was finally broken by Luisa, who cast herself upon her uncle's neck, murmuring: "Oh, Uncle, Uncle! I am afraid it is our fault." She was thinking of the grandmother, but Uncle Piero thought she was accusing Franco and herself of some imprudence.

"Listen, my dear friends," said he good-naturedly, but in his tone there was a hidden spirit of reproof, "these discourses are useless. Now that the evil is done we must think of bread. You may count upon this house, upon some modest savings which bring me in about four svanziche a day, and upon two more mouths to feed, mine and Cia's. Let us hope you will not have to feed mine long." Franco and Luisa protested. "Better so, better so!" Uncle Piero exclaimed, waving his arms as if in contempt of unreasonable sentimentality. "Live well, and die in good time. That is the best rule. I have performed the first part, now I must perform the second. Meanwhile send some water to my room, and open my bag. You will find ten meat croquettes, which Signora Carolina dell'Agria insisted upon giving me. You see we are not so badly off, after all!"

Whereupon Uncle Piero rose and went out at the drawing-room door with a firm step, and even when his back was turned, displaying a head and body held erect, and an unruffled serenity like that of an ancient philosopher.

Franco, with knitted brows and arms crossed upon his breast, was standing motionless on the edge of the terrace, and looking towards Cressogno. If at that moment he had had a bundle of Delegates, Commissaries, police-agents, and spies between his teeth, he would have ground them so hard that all these functionaries would have been reduced to pulp.

CHAPTER VI THE TRUMP CARD APPEARS

"The boat is ready," said Ismaele, coming in unceremoniously, his pipe in his left hand, a lantern in his right.

"What time is it?" Franco asked.

"Half-past eleven."

"And the weather?"

"It is snowing."

"That is good!" Uncle Piero exclaimed ironically, stretching his legs towards the flames of the juniper bush that was crackling in the little fireplace.

In the small parlour, arranged for winter, Luisa, on her knees, was tying a muffler round Maria's neck. Franco, holding his wife's cape, stood waiting while the old housekeeper, her bonnet on and her hands buried in her muff, was grumbling at her master. "What a man you are! What are you going to do all alone here at home?"

"I don't need any one when I am asleep," the engineer answered. "Other people may be mad, but I am not. Put my milk and the lamp here."

It was Christmas Eve and the mad idea these otherwise sane people had conceived, the determination which seemed so incomprehensible to Uncle Piero, was to go to the solemn Midnight-Mass at S. Mamette.

"And that innocent victim also!" said he, glancing at the child.

Franco flushed hotly, and declared that he wished to prepare precious memories for her. He believed this excursion at night, in the boat, on the dark lake, the snow, the crowded and brightly lighted church, the organ, the singing, the holy associations of Christmas, would prove to be such. He spoke with heat, perhaps not so much for the uncle as for some one who was silent.

"Yes, yes, yes," said Uncle Piero, as if he had expected this rhetoric, this useless poetry.

"I am going to have some punch, too, you know!" said the child. The uncle smiled.

"That is not bad! That will indeed form a precious memory!" Franco frowned at beholding his frail structure of poetical and religious memories thus demolished.

"And Gilardoni?" Luisa asked.

"Here they are now," Ismaele said, going out with his lantern.

Professor Gilardoni had invited the Maironis and Donna Ester Bianchi to come to his house for punch after Mass. He was now expected from Niscioree, whither he had gone to fetch the young lady, who had lived there alone with two maid-servants since her father's death, which had taken place in 1852. The worthy Professor had mourned secretly for Signora Teresa for a reasonable length of time, but during the convalescence of his heart, which kept him weak and languid, and in permanent danger of a relapse, he had not been careful enough of the merry little face, the lively eyes, and sparkling gaiety of the little Princess of Niscioree, as the Maironis called Donna Ester.

At seven-and-twenty Donna Ester looked like a girl of twenty, save in her movements there was a certain languor, and in her eyes a certain delicious hidden knowledge. She had not intended to fish for this respectable lover, but now she knew he was caught, and she was pleased, believing him to be a man of great genius, and infinite wisdom. That he should ever dare speak to her of love, that she might marry all this sallow, wrinkled, dry knowledge, had never entered her head. Nevertheless she did not wish to quench this little fire, which was so discreet, which was an honour to her, and probably a source of happiness to him. If she sometimes laughed about him with Luisa she was never the first to laugh, and always hastened to repeat: "Poor Signor Gilardoni! Poor Professor!"

She came in hastily, her fair head enveloped in a great black hood, looking like Spring out on the spree disguised as December. December was close behind her, his neck shrouded in a great scarf, above which rose the red and shining professorial nose, irritated by the snow. As it was already late they immediately took leave of

Uncle Piero, who was left alone with his milk and his lamp before the dying embers of the juniper-bush.

A slight shadow of disapproval still rested on his face. Franco was playing the poet too much. Nowadays life was hard at Casa Maironi. Breakfast consisted of a cup of milk and chicory-coffee, and they used a sort of reddish sugar that tasted of the chemist's shop. They indulged in meat only on Thursdays and Sundays. A bottle of Grimelli wine appeared on the table regularly every day for Uncle Piero, who rebelled against being the privileged one. Every day clouds gathered around this bottle and a little storm burst forth, which, however, always ended as Uncle Piero wished, in a short shower of the decoction into each of the five glasses. The servant had been dismissed, and only Veronica remained to do the heavy work, stir the polenta, and sometimes look after Maria. But in spite of these and other economies Luisa could not make both ends meet, though Cia had refused to accept any wages, and gifts of curds, of mascherpa, of goats'-cheeses, of chestnuts and walnuts were always pouring in upon them from the townspeople. She had obtained some copying from a notary at Porlezza, but it was hard work for miserable pay. Franco had also begun to copy diligently, but he accomplished less than his wife and, moreover, there was not work enough for two. He should have bestirred himself, have sought some private employment, but Uncle Piero saw no signs of this, and so——?

And so this thinking about poetic expeditions seemed to him more out of place than ever. After having pondered a long time upon their sad plight, and upon the slender probability that Franco would ever be able to extricate them from it, he reflected that, for him, the first thing to do was to drink his milk, and the second, to go to bed. But another thought came to him. He opened the hall-door, and seeing the room was quite dark, went into the kitchen, lighted a lantern, and carried it to the loggia, where he opened one of the windows. Although it was snowing there was no wind, so he placed the lantern on the window-sill, that its light might help those poetic people to steer their homeward course over the dark lake.

Then he went to bed.

Ismaele brought his freight safely to S. Mamette in the covered boat. The snow was still falling placidly in big flakes. The church was already quite full, and even the ladies were obliged to stand, behind the first row of benches. Ester volunteered to look after Maria, and lifted her to a seat on top of the bench in front of them, while the sacristan was busy lighting the candles on the high-altar. Cia was tormenting the Professor, whom she believed to be a pious man, with a thousand questions concerning the difference between the Roman and Ambrosian rites, and Maria was keeping Ester busy with still more puzzling questions.

"Who are they lighting those candles for?"

"For our Lord."

"Is our Lord going to bed now?"

"No, hush!"

"And has the bambino Gesu—the child Jesus—gone to bed already?"

"Yes, yes," Ester replied thoughtlessly, to put an end to these questions.

"With the mule?"

Once Uncle Piero had brought Maria an ugly, little wooden mule which she detested, and when she was obstinate and capricious her mother would put her to bed with the mule under her pillow, under her obstinate little head.

"Be quiet, chatterbox!" said Ester.

"I don't go to bed with the mule. I say excuse me!"

"Hush! Listen to the organ."

All the candles were now lighted, and the organist having mounted to his post, was teasing his old instrument as if to waken it, drawing from it what seemed to be angry grunts. When, on the ringing of a bell, the organ poured forth all its great voice, and the altar-boys and the priest appeared, Luisa stole her hand into her husband's, as if

they had still been lovers.

Those two hands pressing each other furtively were speaking of a fast approaching event, of a serious resolve which must be kept a secret, and which was not yet formed irrevocably. The little nervous hand said: "Have courage!" The manly hand said: "I will!" They must indeed make up their minds to it. Franco must go away, leave his wife, his child, and the old man, perhaps for some months, perhaps for some years. He must leave Valsolda, the dear little house, his flowers, perhaps for ever. He must emigrate to Piedmont, seek for work and gain, in the hope of being able to call his family to him in case that other great national hope should not be realised. He was glad his wife had chosen this solemn place and hour in which to encourage him in his sacrifice, and he did not drop the gentle hand, but held it as a lover might, never looking at Luisa, his face and person immovable. He spoke with his hand only, with his soul in palm and fingers, he spoke the most varied, passionate language, consisting of soft caresses, of embraces, of tenderness and ardour. From time to time she would endeavour to gently withdraw her hand, and then he would clasp it violently. His gaze was fixed on the altar, and he held his head erect as if absorbed in the music of the organ, in the voice of the priest, in the singing of the congregation. As a matter of fact he was not following the prayers, but he felt the Divine Presence, was experiencing an ecstasy, a fervour of love, of pain, of hope in God. Luisa had taken his hand in the belief that he was praying, that all his fears, all his doubts were stirring in his soul. She had indeed wished to inspire him with courage, convinced that this painful step was best for him. She only half understood the pressure that answered her; it seemed to her a passionate protest against this separation, and although this was most sweet to her, she could not approve of it, and so from time to time she strove to withdraw her hand. At the moment of the Elevation it was he who withdrew his, out of respect. Then he was obliged to take Maria in his arms, for she had fallen asleep, and slept on, her head on her father's shoulder, displaying half of a little, peaceful face. She, his darling, did

not know that her father was going so far away, and his heart was filled with tender yearning towards that little, warm treasure, which breathed upon it, towards that tiny head, which had the perfume of a little wild bird. He imagined himself already gone, imagined that she was seeking for him, was crying, and then a desire to press her closer ran through his arms, a desire he quickly checked for fear of waking her.

It had stopped snowing when they left the church.

"Wind! Wind!" said Ismaele, coming towards them.

"I shall walk! I shall walk!" groaned Cia, who had a great horror of the lake. Meanwhile the crowd issuing from the church pushed and dispersed the group, and carried them down the steps. The six travellers and the boatmen met again in the square of S. Mamette and here Donna Ester declared that, as she was not feeling very well, she must forego the punch, and that she would walk home with Cia.

Franco, Luisa, and the Professor saw it would be useless to insist, and the two women started towards Oria escorted by Ismaele, who was to come back for the Maironis and the boat.

A moderateur lamp illumined Gilardoni's salon, a good fire was burning on the hearth, and Pinella had prepared everything for the punch over which Luisa presided, the host himself being much depressed in spirit by Donna Ester's desertion.

"Look at Maria," said Franco softly.

The little one had gone to sleep in the Professor's armchair near the window. Franco took the lamp and held it aloft in order to see her better. She seemed like some little creature descended from heaven, fallen there with the star-light, unconscious, her face suffused with a sweetness which was not of this world, with a solemnity full of mystery. "Darling!" said he, and drew his wife towards him with an encircling arm, his eyes still fixed on Maria. Gilardoni came up behind them, and murmured: "How lovely!" Then he went back to the fireplace sighing: "Happy people!"

Franco, who was deeply moved, whispered in his wife's ear: "Shall we tell him?"

She did not understand, and looked questioningly into his eyes. "That I am going away," said he, still in an undertone. Luisa started and answered, "Yes, yes!" She was greatly affected, for she had not expected this. In the church she had believed he was still undecided. Her astonishment did not escape Franco. He was troubled by it and felt his resolution shaken, but she at once perceived this, and repeated earnestly: "Yes, yes!" and gently pushed him towards Gilardoni.

"Dear friend," said he, "I have something to tell you."

The Professor, absorbed in contemplation of the fire, did not answer. Franco placed a hand on his shoulder. "Ah!" he exclaimed, rousing himself, "I beg your pardon! What it is?"

"I wish to commend some one to your care."

"To my care? Who is it?"

"An old man, a woman, and a little child."

The two men looked at each other in silence, one deeply moved, the other amazed.

"Don't you understand?" Luisa whispered.

No, he neither understood nor answered.

"I commend my wife, my daughter, and the old uncle to your care," Franco replied.

"Oh!" the Professor exclaimed, looking in astonishment from one to the other.

"I am going away," said Franco, with a smile that went to Gilardoni's heart. "We have not told Uncle Piero yet, but I must go. In our position I cannot stay here doing nothing. I shall say I am going to Milan, and those who will may believe it, but I shall really be in Piedmont."

Gilardoni clasped his hands in silent amazement. Luisa embraced Franco and kissed him, holding his head upon her breast, her eyes closed.

The Professor imagined it was painful to her to bow to her husband's will in this matter.

"Now listen to me," said he, addressing Franco. "If war had broken out I could understand your going, but as it is, I think you do wrong to cause your wife so much suffering for a question of money."

Luisa who was still clinging with one arm to her husband's neck, motioned to Professor Gilardoni with the other hand, entreating him to be silent.

"No, no, no!" she murmured, once more clasping her arms about Franco. "You are doing right! You are doing right!" As Gilardoni continued to insist, she drew away from her husband, and cried, her hands extended protestingly towards their host: "But, Professor, it is I who tell him he is doing right! I, his wife, tell him so! Dear Professor, don't you understand?"

"After all, dear lady," Gilardoni burst out, "it is time you were informed——"

Franco flung his arms towards him, crying impetuously: "Professor!"

"You are doing wrong," the other replied. "You are doing wrong, very wrong!"

"What is it, Franco?" Luisa demanded in astonishment. "Is there something I do not know?"

"Only that I must go away, that I shall go away. That is all!"

Franco's exclamation, "Professor!" had awakened Maria with a start. Seeing her mother's agitation she prepared to cry; presently she burst into violent sobbing, and wailed: "No Papa! Papa not go away! Not go away!"

Franco took her in his arms, kissing and caressing her, while she kept repeating: "My Papa! My Papa!" in a pitiful, grieved voice that made their hearts ache. Her father yearned over her, and protested that he would always stay with her; but he wept at his own deceit, wept with the emotion this new tenderness, springing up at such a moment, caused him.

Luisa was thinking of her husband's cry. Gilardoni saw she suspected a secret, and, hoping to distract her thoughts, asked her if Franco intended to start at once. Franco

himself replied. Everything depended upon a letter from Turin. Perhaps it would be a week, at the latest a fortnight, before he started. Luisa was silent, and the subject was dropped. Then Franco talked of politics, of the probability that war would break out in the Spring. But again conversation soon languished. Gilardoni and Luisa seemed to be thinking of something else, to be listening to the beat of the waves against the garden wall. Finally Ismaele returned, drank his punch, and assured them that the lake was not very rough, and that they could start homewards.

As soon as the Maironis were seated in the boat, and Maria had gone to sleep, Luisa asked her husband if there was something she did not know, and which Gilardoni must not tell.

Franco did not answer.

"Enough!" said she. Then her husband threw his arm around her neck and pressed her to him, protesting against words she had not uttered. "Oh, Luisa, Luisa!"

Luisa suffered his embrace, but did not return it, and at last, in despair, her husband promised to tell her every thing, at once. "Do you think I am curious?" she whispered, in his arms. No, no. He would tell her at once, tell her everything; he would explain why he had not spoken before. She did not wish this; she preferred that he should speak at some other time, and of his own free will.

The wind was in their favour and the light shining in the window of the loggia served Ismaele well as a guide. Franco's arm still encircled his wife's shoulders, and his gaze was fixed upon that shining point. Neither he nor she thought of the loving and prudent hand that had lighted it. But Ismaele thought of it, and reflected that neither Veronica nor Cia were capable of such an act of genius, and blessed the engineer's kind heart.

On leaving the boat Maria woke up, and her parents seemed to have no thought save for her. When they were in bed Franco put out the light.

"It concerns my grandmother," said he in a broken and agitated voice. "Poor boy!"

Luisa murmured and took his hand affectionately. "I have never told you in order to avoid accusing my grandmother, and also because——" He paused, and then it was he who mingled with his words the most tender caresses, to which Luisa now no longer responded. "I feared your impressions, your sentiments, the ideas you might conceive——!" As his words began to express his doubts his voice grew more tender.

Luisa felt the approach, not of a dispute, but of a far more lasting disagreement. Now, she no longer wished her husband to speak, and he, noticing her increasing coldness, did not continue. She rested her forehead against his shoulder, and said, almost in spite of herself: "Tell me!"

Then Franco, his lips against her hair, related the story the Professor had told him on the night of their marriage. In repeating from memory the contents of his grandfather's letter and will, he greatly softened the injurious expressions used against his father and grandmother. In the middle of his recital Luisa, who had not expected such a revelation, raised her head from her husband's shoulder. He stopped. "Go on," said she.

When he had finished she asked if there was any proof that his grandfather's will had been suppressed. Franco promptly answered that there was not. "Then," said she, "why did you speak of the ideas I might conceive?" Her thoughts had immediately flown to the probability of his grandmother's crime, to the possibility of a prosecution. But if prosecution were not possible?

Franco did not answer, and she exclaimed, after a moment's reflection, "Ah! the copy of the will! Could that be used? Would that be valid?"

"Yes."

"And you would not use it?"

"No."

"Why not, Franco?"

"There!" Franco exclaimed. "You see? I knew you would say so! No, I will not make use of it! No, no, never!"

"But what reasons have you for not doing so?"

"Good Lord! My reasons! My reasons can be felt. You should feel them without my having to explain them."

"I do not feel them. Don't imagine I am thinking of the money. We will not touch the money. Give it to whomever you like; I feel the claims of justice. There are your grandfather's wishes to be respected; there is the crime your grandmother has committed. You who are so religious should perceive that Divine Justice has brought this document to light. Would you place yourself between this woman and Divine Justice?"

"Let Divine Justice alone," Franco retorted, hotly. "What do we know of the ways of Divine Justice? There is also Divine Mercy. She is my father's mother, think of that! And have I not always despised this accursed money? What did I do when my grandmother threatened not to leave me a penny if I married you?"

Unable to speak, he drew Luisa's head to his breast.

"I despised the money for your sake," he went on in a stifled voice. "Would you have me try to regain it now by going to law?"

"No indeed!" Luisa broke in, raising her head. "You may give the money to whomever you wish. I am talking of justice. Don't you also feel the demand of justice?"

"Dio mio!" said he, with a deep sigh. "It would have been better if I had not spoken to-night."

"Yes, perhaps. If you were bound never to alter your decision, it would perhaps have been wiser."

Luisa's voice expressed sadness, not anger, as she uttered these words.

"In any way, that document no longer exists," Franco remarked.

Luisa started. "It no longer exists?" said she anxiously, in an undertone.

"No. The Professor was to destroy it, by my orders."

A long silence followed. Very slowly Luisa withdrew her head and rested it on her own pillow. Suddenly Franco exclaimed, aloud: "A law-suit indeed! With those documents! With those insults! To the mother of my father! And all for money!"

"Don't keep repeating that," his wife exclaimed indignantly. "Why do you keep repeating that? Don't you know very well it is not true?"

Both spoke excitedly. It was plain that during the preceding silence their thoughts had been hard at work on this point. The reproof irritated him, and he replied blindly—

"I know nothing about it!"

"Oh, Franco!" cried Luisa, much hurt. He already regretted the affront, and begged her to forgive him, accusing his hot temper, which made him say things he did not mean, and he entreated her to speak a kind word to him. "Yes, yes," Luisa answered with a sigh, but he was not satisfied, and wished her to embrace him and say, "I forgive you." The touch of the dear lips did not refresh him as usual. Some minutes passed, and then he strained his ear to hear if his wife had fallen asleep. He heard the wind, Maria's quiet breathing, the noise of the waves, the jarring of a window, but that was all. "Have you really forgiven me?" he whispered, and he heard her soft answer: "Yes, dear." Presently she, in her turn, listened, and besides the wind, the waves, the creaking of a shutter, the even, regular breathing of the child, she heard the even, regular breathing of her husband. Then she once more sighed deeply, sighed despairingly. Oh, God! How could Franco have acted thus? What wounded her heart most sorely was the fact that he did not seem to sense the injuries which her poor mother and Uncle Piero had suffered. But she would not allow herself to dwell on this thought, at least not until she had considered his other mistake, his

mistaken idea of justice. And here she felt bitterly, but not without a certain satisfaction, that he was her inferior, that he was controlled by sentiments that were the outcome of his fancy, while her own sentiment was inspired by reason. Franco had in him so much of the child. He had, even now, been able to go to sleep, while she was sure of not closing her eyes all night long. She believed she was without imagination because she did not feel it move, because in her it was less easily inflamed. She would have laughed had she been told that imagination was more powerful in her than in her husband. But indeed such was the case. Only, in order to demonstrate this, both souls must be turned upside down, for Franco's imagination was visible on the surface of his soul, and all his reason was at the bottom, while in Luisa's soul imagination was at the bottom, and reason was plainly visible on the surface. In fact, she did not sleep, but all night long she thought, with that imagination that lay at the bottom of her soul, how religion favours weak sentimentality, how incapable it is, even while preaching the thirst for justice, of forming a correct sense of justice in those intellects which are devoted to it.

The Professor also, who was subject to serious infiltrations of imagination into the ratiocinative cells of his brain, as well as into the amorous cells of his heart, having put out the light, spent the greater part of the night in front of the fireplace, working with the tongs and with his imagination, taking up, examining and then dropping embers and projects, until only one glowing coal and one last idea remained. Then he took a match, and having held it in contact with the ember, lighted the lamp once more, seized the idea, which was also hot and luminous, and carried it off to bed with him.

This was the idea. He would start secretly for Brescia, present himself before the Marchesa with the terrible document, and obtain a capitulation.

CHAPTER VII THE PROFESSOR PLAYS HIS TRUMP

CARD

Three days later, in Milan, at five o'clock in the morning, Professor Gilardoni, muffled up to the eyes, issued from the Albergo degli Angeli, passed in front of the cathedral, turned into the dark street called dei Rastrelli behind a line of horses led by postilions, and entered the booking office of the public coaches. The little courtyard where the post-office now stands, was already full of people, of horses, of lanterns. To the hermit of Valsolda all these voices of postilions and of guards, this stamping of horses and jingling of bells, seemed like a real pandemonium.

The horses were being harnessed to two coaches, four to each. The Professor was going to Lodi because he had learned that the Marchesa was visiting a friend there, and the Lodi coach would start at half-past five.

It was intensely cold, and the poor Professor wandered anxiously around the ungainly carriage, stamping his feet to warm them, until presently another traveller said jestingly to him: "Cool, is it not?" "Just a little fresh! Just a little fresh!" The horses were harnessed at last, an employé called the passengers by name, and the worthy Beniamino disappeared within the bowels of the huge vehicle, together with two priests, an old woman servant, an elderly gentleman with an enormous wart on his face, and a fashionably dressed young man. The doors were closed, an order was given, the bells jingled, the huge vehicle shook itself, the priests, the old woman, and the gentleman with the wart crossed themselves, the horses' sixteen hoofs rattled under the portal, the massive wheels rumbled through it, and then all this noise grew fainter as the coach turned to the right, towards Porta Romana.

Now the wheels revolved almost noiselessly, and the travellers heard only the irregular beat of the sixteen hoofs on the stones. The Professor watched the passing of dark houses, the pale glow of infrequent street lamps, the flashing light from some small coffee-house, or a vanishing sentry-box.

It seemed to him that the presence of these soldiers lent something threatening,

something so formidable to the silence of the great city, that the very walls of the houses were black with hatred. When the coach entered the Corso di Porta Romana, so filled with fog that he could hardly see out of the window, he closed his eyes, and gave himself up to the pleasure of thinking of and conversing with the things and persons that filled his heart.

It was no longer the passenger with the wart who sat opposite him, but Donna Ester, all enveloped in a great black cape, a broad-brimmed hat upon her head. She was looking at him fixedly, and her lovely eyes were saying: "Well done! You are acting nobly! Showing a great heart. I would not have believed it! I admire you! To me you are no longer old and ugly. Courage!" At this exhortation to have courage, he was seized with fear, for the image of the Marchesa rose before him, and the dull rumble of the wheels became the old lady's nasal voice, saying: "Won't you sit down? What can I do for you?"

At this point the coach stopped and the Professor opened his eyes. Porta Romana. An official opened the door and asked for the passports and having collected them, carried them away. Returning again in about five minutes, he restored their passports to all the passengers save the fashionably dressed young man. To him he said sharply: "Come with me." The young man turned pale, but got out in silence and did not return. In a moment or two the door was closed, and a rough voice cried: "Avanti!" The gentleman with the wart placed his travelling-bag on the seat that was now vacant, but none of the other passengers gave any sign of having noticed what had happened. Only when the four horses had once more begun to trot did Gilardoni ask the priest, his neighbour, if he knew the young man's name, but the priest's only answer was a cross grunt, as he turned two terrified and suspicious eyes upon the Professor. Beniamino now looked towards the other priest, who immediately drew a rosary from his pocket and, having made the sign of the cross, began to pray. Once more the Professor closed his eyes, and the image of the unknown young man was lost for ever in the mist, like the few and phantom-like trees, the poplars and

willows, slipping past on either side of the road.

"How shall I begin?" thought Gilardoni. Ever since Christmas Eve he had done nothing but imagine and debate within himself how he should present himself before the Marchesa, how introduce the subject, how explain it, and what terms he should offer. This was the only point on which he was clear. If the Marchesa would make her grandson a liberal allowance, he would destroy the documents. He had not brought them with him, but he had copies of them. Their effect would surely be tremendous, but how should he begin? Not one of the many preambles he had thought of satisfied him. Even now with closed eyes and fancy hard at work, he was considering the question, starting from the only known factor: "Take a seat. What can I do for you?" But invariably his answer would appear to him either too obsequious or too daring, too remote from the subject or too close to it, and he would once more go back to the beginning. "What can I do for you?"

The pale light of dawn, dreary, sad, and sleepy, invaded the coach. Now that the time for the interview was approaching, a thousand doubts, a thousand fresh uncertainties upset all the Professor's plans. The very base of his calculations suddenly collapsed. What if the Marchesa should not say either, "Take a seat," or "What can I do for you?" What if she should receive him in some other embarrassing manner? And what if she should not receive him at all! Merciful heavens! What then? The sudden ringing of the sixteen hoofs on a paved way set his heart to beating. However, it was not yet the streets of Lodi, but those of Melegnano.

He reached Lodi at about nine o'clock, and got out at the Albergo del Sole, where they gave him a room without fire or sun. Not daring to brave either the fog in the street or the fumes in the kitchen, he decided to go to bed, and putting on his night-cap, which was acquainted with all his woes, he waited, a camphor cigarette between his lips, for the coming of noon and a happy thought.

At one o'clock he ascended the steps of the Palazzo X. with the wise determination

to carefully forget all the speeches he had prepared, and to trust to the inspiration of the moment. A footman in a white tie ushered him into a large, dark apartment, with a brick floor, walls hung with yellow silk, and a stuccoed ceiling, and having bowed respectfully, went away. A few antique, white and gilt armchairs covered with red damask stood in a semicircle before the fireplace, where three or four enormous logs were burning slowly, behind the brass fender. The air was laden with the mixed odours of ancient mould, ancient cakes, ancient stuffs, ancient leather, and decrepit ideas, the whole forming a subtle essence of old age enough to shrivel the very soul.

The servant reappeared and announced, to Gilardoni's utter confusion, the imminent arrival of the Signora Marchesa. He waited and waited, and at last a great door, ornamented with gilding, swung open, a little moving bell tinkled, Friend trotted in, sniffing the floor to right and left, and was followed by a great bell-shaped mass of black silk, under a small cupola of white lace, while, between two blue ribbons, appeared the black wig, the marble brow, the lifeless eyes of the Marchesa herself.

"What miracle! The Professor in Lodi!" said the drowsy voice, while the small dog sniffed at the Professor's boots. Gilardoni made a low bow, and the lady, who might have been the jar containing the essence of old age, seated herself on one of the chairs near the fire, and installed her lap-dog on another; after which she motioned to Gilardoni to be seated also. "I suppose," said she, "that you have some relative at the convent of the 'Dame Inglese'?"

"No," the Professor replied, "I have not."

Sometimes the Marchesa was facetious in her own way. "Then," said she, "you probably came for a supply of mascherponi." [M]

"Not for that either, Signora Marchesa. I came on business."

"Indeed. You are unfortunate in the weather. I believe it is raining now."

At this unexpected digression the Professor came near losing his bearings. "Yes," said he, feeling that he was growing foolish, like the scholar whose examination is

taking a bad turn. "It is drizzling."

His voice, his expression, could not fail to reveal his inward embarrassment, to show the Marchesa that he had come to tell her something important. However, she carefully avoided helping him to unburden himself, and continued to talk of the weather, the cold, the dampness, a catarrh from which Friend was suffering, while the dog punctuated his mistress's recital with frequent sneezes.

The drowsy voice had a calm, almost jocose inflection, a sort of bland benevolence, and the Professor was bathed in cold sweat at the bare thought of checking this mellifluous flow, and offering in exchange the bitter pill he had in his pocket. He might have taken advantage of a pause to pour forth his preamble, but he was not equal to it, and it was the Marchesa who seized the opportunity to close the interview.

"I thank you very much for your visit," said she, "and now I am going to dismiss you, for you have your business to attend to, and, to tell the truth, I also have an engagement."

Now or never he must take the leap.

"As a matter of fact," Gilardoni began, greatly agitated, "I came to Lodi to speak with you, Signora Marchesa."

"I should never have been able to guess that," said the lady frigidly.

The Professor was carried forward by the impetus of his daring.

"It is a most urgent matter," said he, "and I must beg——"

"If it is a matter of business, you must apply to my agent in Brescia."

"Pardon me, Signora Marchesa, it is really a most important affair. No one knows and no one must know that I have come to see you. I will tell you at once that it concerns your grandson."

The Marchesa rose, and the dog that had been crouching in the armchair also sprang

up, barking in Gilardoni's direction.

"Do not speak to me of that person who no longer exists for me," the old lady said solemnly. "Come, Friend!"

"No, Signora Marchesa," the Professor protested. "You cannot possibly imagine what I have to tell you."

"I do not in the least care to know. I do not wish to hear anything. Good-day to you!"

Whereupon the inflexible old lady moved towards the door.

"Marchesa!" Beniamino called after her, while Friend, who had jumped from the chair, barked furiously around his legs. "It concerns your husband's will!"

This time the Marchesa could not but stop. She did not, however, turn round.

"This will cannot be pleasing to you," Gilardoni added rapidly. "But I have no intention of publishing it. I entreat you to listen to me, Marchesa."

She turned round. Her impenetrable face betrayed a certain emotion in the quivering of the nostrils. Nor were the shoulders entirely at rest.

"What tales have you to tell?" she retorted. "Do you think it fitting to thus inconsiderately mention my poor Franco to me? How dare you meddle with my family affairs?"

"Excuse me," the Professor repeated, searching in his pocket. "If I do not meddle some one else may do so even less considerately. Kindly examine these documents. These——"

"Keep your scribblings to yourself," the Marchesa interrupted, seeing him draw some papers from his pocket.

"These are copies I have made——"

"I tell you to keep them, to take them away!"

The Marchesa rang the bell, and once more started to leave the room.

Gilardoni, quivering with excitement, hearing the approaching steps of a servant, and seeing her about to open the door, threw his documents upon one of the armchairs, saying hastily, in an undertone: "I will leave them here. Let no one see them. I am staying at the Sole, and will return to-morrow. Examine the papers, and think over them carefully!" And before the servant arrived he had rushed out at the same door by which he had entered, had seized his heavy cape, and fled downstairs.

The Marchesa dismissed the footman, and stood listening for a few moments. Then she retraced her steps, took up the papers, and went to her room, locking her door behind her. Having put on her spectacles she took her stand near the window, and began to read. Her brow was clouded and her hands trembled.

The Professor was preparing to go to bed in his icy room at the Sole when two police-agents came with a summons for him to appear at once at the police-station.

He felt some secret misgivings, but did not lose his head, and went quietly away with the two men. At the station a little impudent Commissary asked him why he had come to Lodi, and upon being informed that he had come on private business shrugged his shoulders in contemptuous incredulity. What private business did Signor Gilardoni pretend to have in Lodi? With whom? The Professor mentioned the Marchesa. "There are no Maironis at Lodi," the Commissary exclaimed, and when his victim protested he speedily interrupted him. "Basta! That will do! That will do!" The police knew for a certainty that Professor Gilardoni, although he was an Imperial and Royal pensioner, was not a loyal Austrian; that he had friends at Lugano, and that he had come to Lodi for political ends.

"You are better informed than I am," Gilardoni exclaimed, restraining his wrath with difficulty.

"Silence!" the Commissary commanded. "You must not think the Imperial and Royal government is afraid of you. You are free to go, but you must leave Lodi within two hours."

At this point Franco would have immediately perceived from whence the blow came, but the philosopher did not understand.

"I came to Lodi on most urgent business, which is not yet finished," said he. "On most important, private business. How can I leave in two hours?"

"By carriage. If you are still in Lodi at the end of two hours I shall have you arrested."

"My health does not permit me to travel at night in December," the victim urged.

"Very well, then I will have you arrested at once!"

The poor philosopher took up his hat in silence, and went out.

An hour later he started for Milan in a closed calash, his feet embedded in straw, a rug over his legs, a great muffler round his neck, reflecting that this had been a most successful expedition, and swallowing momently to see if his throat were sore. He passed a horrible night, indeed, but the Marchesa herself did not rest on a bed of roses.

Footnotes

[M] Mascherponi: A sort of common cheese made in Lodi. [Translator's note.]

CHAPTER VIII HOURS OF BITTERNESS

On the last day of the year, while Franco was writing out the very minute directions concerning the care of the flowers and the kitchen-garden, which he intended to leave for his wife's guidance, and the uncle sat reading for the tenth time his favourite book, the History of the Diocese of Como, Luisa went out for a walk with Maria. The sun was shining brightly. There was no snow save on Bisgnago and Galbiga. Maria found a violet near the cemetery, and another down in the Calcinera. There it was really warm, and the air was pleasantly scented with laurel. Luisa sat down to think, with her back to the hill, and allowed Maria to amuse herself by

climbing up the bank behind her, and sliding down again on the dry grass.

She had not seen the Professor since Christmas Eve, and she longed to speak with him; not to hear the story of the Maironi will over again, but to get him to tell her about his interview with Franco, when he had shown it to him: to ascertain what Franco's first impression had been and what the Professor's opinion was. As the will had been destroyed, all this could only be of psychological importance, but Luisa's curiosity was not the curiosity of the idle observer. Her husband's conduct had deeply wounded her. Thinking of it over and over again, as she had done ever since Christmas Eve, she had arrived at the conclusion that his silence towards her had been an outrage against justice and affection. It was a bitter sorrow to her to feel her esteem for him diminishing, especially bitter now, on the eve of his departure, and at a time when he really deserved praise. She would have liked, at least, to know that when Gilardoni had shown him the documents there had been some inward struggle, that a more just sentiment had been aroused in his soul, if only for a moment. She rose, took Maria by the hand, and started towards Casarico.

She found the Professor in the garden with Pinella, and told Maria to run and play with the boy, but Maria, always eager to listen to the conversation of her elders, would not hear of going. Then Luisa broached the subject without mentioning any names. She wished to speak to the Professor about certain papers, about those old letters. The Professor, who was crimson, protested that he did not understand. Fortunately, Pinella called Maria, enticing her with a picture-book, and she ran to him, conquered by her curiosity concerning the book. Then Luisa relieved the Professor of his scruples, by informing him that Franco himself had told her everything, and she confessed to him that she had disapproved of her husband's conduct, that it had been, and still was a source of great sorrow to her——

"Why, why, why?" said the worthy Professor, interrupting her. Because Franco had not been willing to do anything. "I have done something! I have done something!"

Gilardoni exclaimed, anxiously and excitedly. "But for the love of Heaven, don't tell your husband!" Luisa was amazed. What had the Professor done? And when, and how? And was not the will already destroyed?

Then Gilardoni, as red as a glowing coal, his eyes full of anxiety, his recital often interrupted by such exclamations as, "For mercy's sake, don't tell!—You will be silent, eh?" revealed all his secrets to her, from the preserving of the will to his journey to Lodi. Luisa listened to the very end, and then, clasping her face tightly between her hands, uttered a horrified "Ah!"

"Did I do wrong?" said the poor Professor, much alarmed. "Did I do wrong, Signora Luisina?"

"Very wrong! Terribly wrong! Forgive me, but it looked as if you were proposing some transaction, some bargain, and the Marchesa is sure to believe we are in league with you! Oh, it is awful!"

She wrung her clenched hands as if striving to press into shape, to remodel a more level professorial head for him. In utter amazement the poor Professor kept repeating: "Oh, Lord! Oh, dear me! Oh, what an ass I am!" without really comprehending the nature of his blunder. Luisa flung herself upon the parapet overhanging the lake, and stared into the water. Suddenly she started up, beating the back of her right hand upon the palm of her left, her face brightening. "Take me to your study," said she. "Can I leave Maria here?" The Professor nodded, and, trembling, accompanied her to the study. Luisa took a sheet of paper and wrote rapidly: "Luisa Maironi Rigey begs to inform the Marchesa Maironi Scremin that Professor Beniamino Gilardoni is a most faithful friend of both her husband and herself, but that they nevertheless heartily disapprove of his inopportune use of a document which should have been disposed of in a different manner. Therefore, no communication from the Marchesa is either expected or desired."

When she had finished she silently held out the letter to the Professor. "Oh no!" he

exclaimed, as soon as he had read it; "For the love of Heaven don't send that letter! What if your husband should find it out? Think what a misfortune for me, for you yourself! And how can it possibly be kept from your husband?" Luisa did not answer, but gazed fixedly at him, not thinking of him, but of Franco; thinking that the Marchesa might look upon the letter as a snare, an attempt to intimidate her, she took it back and tore it in pieces, with a sigh. The Professor became radiant, and wished to kiss her hand, but she protested. She had not done it for his sake or for Franco's but for other reasons. The sacrifice of this outlet for her feelings exasperated her still more against Franco. "He is wrong! He is wrong!" she repeated, with bitterness in her heart, and neither she nor the Professor noticed that Maria was in the room. On seeing her mother leave the garden the little one no longer wished to remain with Pinella, so he had brought her to the door of the study, opening it noiselessly for her. The child, struck by her mother's expression, stopped and stared at her with a look of terror. She saw her tear the letter and heard her exclaim: "He is wrong!" and then she began to cry. Luisa hastened to her, folded her in her arms, and consoled her, and then they immediately took their departure. The Professor's parting words were: "For pity's sake, be silent!"

"Why be silent?" Maria quickly demanded. Her mother did not heed her; her thoughts were elsewhere. Three or four times Maria repeated: "Why be silent?" until at last Luisa said: "Hush! That will do." Then she was quiet for a time, but presently she began again, simply to tease her mother, and lifting her little, laughing face repeated: "Why be silent?" This time she was well scolded, and once more became silent; but when they were passing below the cemetery, only a few steps from home, she again burst forth, with the same mischievous laugh. Then Luisa, who had been absorbed in the effort to compose her face into an expression of indifference, simply gave her a shake, but it sufficed to silence her.

That day Maria was in very high spirits. At dinner, while jesting with her mother, she suddenly recalled the reprimands she had received when out walking, and

looking covertly at Luisa, once more repeated her "Why be silent?" with the same timid and provoking little laugh. Her mother pretended not to hear, so she persevered. Then Luisa checked her with an "Enough!" so unusually stern that Maria's little mouth opened wider and wider, and the tears began to flow. Uncle Piero exclaimed: "Oh dear me!" and Franco frowned, showing that he disapproved of his wife's action. As Maria kept on crying, he vented his displeasure upon her, took her in his arms, and carried her off, screaming like an eagle. "Better still!" said Uncle Piero. "Fine disciplinarians, both of you!" "You let them alone," said Cia, for Luisa did not speak. "Parents must be obeyed." "That's it! Let us have your wisdom also!" Uncle Piero retorted, and Cia relapsed into sullen silence.

Meanwhile Franco returned, having deposited Maria in one corner of the alcove-room, grumbling something about people who seemed bound to make children cry. And now Luisa also was vexed, and went to fetch Maria, whom she presently brought back in a lachrymose but mute state. The short meal ended badly, for Maria would not eat, and all the others were out of temper for one reason or another; all save Uncle Piero, who set about lecturing Maria, half seriously half playfully, until he succeeded in bringing a little sunshine back to her face. After dinner Franco went to look after some flower-pots, which he kept in the cellar below the little hanging garden, and took Maria with him. Seeing her once more in good spirits, he gently questioned her about what had happened. What did she mean by that "Why be silent?" "I don't know." "But why did mamma not wish you to say it?" "I don't know. I kept saying that, and mamma kept scolding me." "When?" "Out walking." "Where did you go?" "To the Signor Ladroni's." (It was Uncle Piero who had thus simplified the Professor's name.) "And did you begin saying that when you were at Signor Ladroni's house?" "No. Signor Ladroni said it to mamma." "What did he say?" "Why, papa, you don't understand anything! He said: 'For pity's sake be silent!'" Franco said no more. "Mamma tore a paper at Signor Ladroni's house," Maria added, believing her father would be all the better pleased the more she told

him concerning that visit, but he ordered her to be quiet. On returning to the house Franco asked Luisa, with an expression that was far from amiable, why she had made the child cry. Luisa scrutinised him closely. It seemed to her he suspected something, and she asked indignantly if he expected her to seek to justify herself for such petty matters. "Oh no!" Franco answered coldly, and went into the garden to see if the dry leaves at the base of the orange-trees and the straw around the trunks were in order, for the night promised to be very cold. As he worked over the plants he reflected that had they possessed intelligence and words they would have shown themselves more affectionate, more grateful than usual, on account of his imminent departure, while Luisa had the heart to be harsh with him. He did not remember that he also had been harsh. Luisa, on the other hand, at once regretted her answer, but she could not hold him back, throw her arms about his neck, and end it all with a kiss or two; that other matter weighed too heavily on her heart. Franco finished swathing his orange trees and came into the house for his cape, intending to go to church at Albogasio. Luisa, who was in the kitchen peeling some chestnuts, heard him pass through the corridor, stood hesitating a moment, struggling with herself, and then rushed out, catching up with him just as he was starting downstairs.

"Franco!" said she. Franco did not answer, but seemed to repulse her. Then she seized his arm and dragged him into the neighbouring alcove room.

"What do you want?" said he, shaken, but still determined to appear vexed. Luisa, instead of answering, threw her arms about his neck, drew his unwilling head upon her breast, and said softly—

"We must not quarrel these last days."

He had expected words of excuse, and pushed his wife's arm aside, answering dryly—

"I have not quarrelled. Perhaps you will tell me," he added, "what Professor Gilardoni confided to you that was such a great secret that he felt obliged to entreat

you to be silent."

Luisa looked at him, amazed and pained. "You doubted me?" said she. "You questioned the child? Did you indeed do that?"

"Well," he cried, "and what if I did? Anyway, I am well aware you always think the worst of me. Listen now. I don't want to know anything." She interrupted him. "But I will tell you! I will tell you!" His conscience was pricking him a little on account of his questioning of the child, and now seeing Luisa ready to speak, he would not listen to her, and forbade her to explain. But his heart was full to overflowing with bitterness, for which he must find an outlet. He complained that since Christmas Eve she had not been the same to him. Why protest? He had seen it clearly. Indeed, something else had long been clear to him. What? Oh, something very natural! Perfectly natural! Was he, after all, worthy of her love? Certainly not. He was only a poor useless creature, and nothing more. Was it not natural that upon knowing him better she should love him less? For surely she did love him less than at one time!

Luisa trembled, fearful that this might be true.

"No, Franco, no!" she cried, but her very dread of not saying the words with proper conviction was sufficient to paralyze her voice. He had expected a violent denial, and murmured terrified: "My God!" Then it was her turn to be terrified, and she pressed him despairingly in her arms, sobbing: "No, no, no!" By means of some magnetic current they understood each other's every thought, and remained long united in a close embrace, speaking in a mute, spasmodic effort of their whole being, complaining one of the other, reproaching, passionately striving to draw together again, revelling in the sharp and bitter delight of being, for the moment, united by sheer force of will and of love, in spite of the secret disunion of their ideas, of their natures; and all this without a word, without a sound.

Franco once more started to go to church. He would not invite Luisa to accompany him, hoping she would do so of her own free will, but she did not, fearing he might

not wish it.

On the morning of the seventh of January, shortly after ten o'clock, Uncle Piero sent for Franco.

The uncle was still in bed. He was in the habit of rising late, because his room could not be heated, and for the sake of economy he did not wish the fire in the little salon lighted too early. However, the cold did not prevent his sitting up in bed and reading, half his chest and both arms outside the covers.

"Ciao! Good-morning!" said he, as Franco entered.

From the tone of his greeting, from the expression of the fine face, serious in its kindliness, Franco understood that Uncle Piero was about to say something unusual.

In fact, the uncle pointed to the chair beside his bed, and uttered the most solemn of his exordiums—

"Sit you down!"

Franco sat down.

"So you are leaving to-morrow?"

"Yes, uncle."

"Good!"

It would seem that in uttering that "Good!" the uncle's heart came into his mouth, for the word filled his cheeks, and came out full and ringing.

"So far," the old man continued, "you have never heard me—let us say—either approve or disapprove of your plan. Perhaps I did not feel quite sure you would carry it out. But now——"

Franco stretched out both hands to him. "Now," Uncle Piero went on, pressing those hands in his own, "seeing you are firm in your resolve, I say to you: Your resolve is good. We are in need, go; work, work is a great thing! May God help you to begin well, and then help you to persevere, which is a far more difficult thing. There!"

Franco would have kissed his hands, but he was quick to withdraw them. "Let them alone! Let them alone!" And he once more began to speak.

"Now listen. It is quite possible we may never meet again." Franco protested. "Yes, yes, yes!" the old man exclaimed, withdrawing his soul from his eyes and voice. "Those are all fine things, things that must be said. But let them go!"

The eyes once more resumed their kindly and serious light, and the voice its grave tone.

"It is quite possible we shall never meet again. After all, I put it to you, what good am I now in this world? It would be far better for you if I took my departure. Perhaps your grandmother resents my having taken you in; perhaps, if I were gone, it would be easier for her to accept a reconciliation. Therefore, supposing we never meet again, I beg you to make some overtures to her as soon as I am dead, if things have not already been arranged."

Franco rose and embraced his uncle with tears in his eyes.

"I have made no will," Uncle Piero continued, "and I shall not make one. What little I have belongs to Luisa; no will is necessary. I commend Cia to your care. Do not let her want for a bed and a crust of bread. As to my funeral, three priests will suffice to sing my requiem with true feeling; our own priest, Intrioni, and the Prefect of Caravina. There is no necessity of having five, who will sing it for love of the candles and the white wine. Leave the question of my clothes to Luisa, she will know what to do with them. You yourself will keep my repeater to remind you of me. I should like to leave Maria a keepsake, but what shall it be? I might give her a piece of my gold chain. If you have a little medallion or a crucifix you may attach it to my chain and hang it round her neck. And now, Amen!"

Franco was in tears. It was a great shock to hear the uncle speak of his death thus calmly, as if it had been some matter of business which must be arranged judiciously and honestly; the uncle who, when conversing with his friends, seemed so deeply

attached to life that he would often say: "If one could only avoid that inevitable breakdown!!"

"Ah! Now tell me," said Uncle Piero, "what sort of work do you expect to find?"

"T. writes that at first I am to go into a newspaper office in Turin. Perhaps I shall find something better later on. If I don't earn enough to live on in the office, and nothing else turns up, I shall come back. Therefore all this must be kept perfectly secret—at least, for a time."

Uncle Piero was incredulous concerning the possibility of secrecy. "And how about the letters?" he inquired.

As to letters, it had been arranged that Franco should address his to the postoffice at Lugano, and Ismaele would take those from the family to Lugano, and bring back his. And what should they tell their friends? They had already said that Franco was going to Milan, on the eighth, on business, and would be absent perhaps a month, perhaps longer.

"It is not the most agreeable thing in the world to have to throw dust in people's eyes," the uncle said. "But however...! I am going to embrace you now, Franco, for I know you are leaving early to-morrow morning, and we shall hardly be alone together to-day. Good-bye, then. Once more, remember all my injunctions, and don't forget me. Oh, one thing more! You are going to Turin. As a government official I always did what I could to be of service to my country. I never conspired, and I would not conspire even now, but I have always loved my country. And so, salute the tricolour for me. Good-bye, my dear boy!"

Then Uncle Piero opened his arms.

"You shall come to Piedmont also, uncle," Franco said, as he rose from that embrace, greatly moved. "If I can only manage to earn money enough I shall send for you all."

"Ah no, my dear boy! I am too old, I shall not make another move."

"Very well, then. I myself will come next spring, with two hundred thousand of my friends."

"That's it! Two hundred thousand pumpkins! A fine idea! Fine hopes!—Oh! here is Signorina Missipipì."

Signorina Missipipì—thus the family called Maria in happy moments—came in, dignified and serious. "Good-morning, uncle. Will you say 'Missipipì' for me?"

Her father lifted her up and placed her on Uncle Piero's bed. Smiling the old man drew her towards him, and set her across his legs.

"Come here, miss. Did you sleep well? And did the doll sleep well, and the mule also? The mule was not there? So much the better. Yes, yes! I am coming to 'Missipipì.' Am I not to have a kiss first? Only one? Then I shall have to say:

Proud shade of the river Of Missipipì, Don't play you are bashful, But of kisses give three."

Maria listened as if hearing the lines for the first time, then she burst out laughing, and began to jump and clap her hands, while her uncle laughed with her.

"Papa," said she, suddenly becoming serious. "Why are you crying? Have you been naughty?"

They expected many friends would call that day, many who had promised to come and say good-bye to Franco before his departure for Milan. Luisa performed the miracle of lighting the stove in Siberia, as Uncle Piero called the hall, and at one time Donna Ester, the two Pauls from Loggio, Paolin and Paolon, and Professor Gilardoni were all there together. Then presently Signora Peppina arrived, most unexpectedly, for she had never been to see them since the search. "Oh, my dear Süra Luisa! Oh, my dear Don Franco! Is it true you are really going away?" Paolin began to shift uneasily on his chair, for he feared Signora Peppina had been sent by her husband to see who had and who had not rallied round the suspected man, in this house that was under the ban. He longed to go away at once with his Paolon, but

Paolon was more dense. "How shall I manage now, with this idiot, who doesn't understand anything?" thought Paolin, and without looking at Paolon he said to him, in an undertone: "Let us go, Paol, let us go!" It did indeed take Paolon some time to get it through his head, but finally he arose and went out with Paolin, getting his lesson on the stairs.

Franco had the same thought as Paolin, and greeted Signora Peppina coldly. The poor woman could have wept, for she dearly loved his wife, and held Franco himself in great esteem, but she understood his aversion, and in her heart excused it. Franco was relieved when Veronica came to call him.

He was wanted in the kitchen garden. He went there and found Signor Giacomo Puttini and Don Giuseppe Costabarbieri, who had come to say good-bye, but having been informed by Paolin and Paolon of the presence of Signora Peppina, they did not wish her to see them. Even the soil of the kitchen-garden scorched their feet. While the little lean hero was puffing and parrying Franco's invitation to go up to the house, the little fat hero was rolling his head and his small eyes like a good-natured blackbird, looking from the hills to the lake, almost from a habit of suspicion. He caught sight of a boat coming from Porlezza. Who knows? Might it not be bringing the Imperial and Royal Commissary? Although the boat was still at some distance, he immediately began to cast about for an excuse for going away, and determined to take Puttini to call upon the Receiver, as they would be sure of not finding Signora Peppina at home.

Having lavished many hasty and muttered compliments on Franco, the two old hares trotted off, with bowed heads, leaving Franco in the kitchen-garden. Meanwhile the boat Don Giuseppe had seen had come rapidly forward, and was now passing in front of the garden, at some distance from the shore. It contained a lady and a gentleman. The gentleman rose and saluted Franco in a loud voice: "How are you, Don Franco? Long life to you!" The lady waved her handkerchief. The Pasottis!

Franco saluted with his hat.

The Pasottis in Valsolda in January! Why had they come? And that greeting! Pasotti salute him thus? Pasotti, who had never been near them since the search? What did all this mean? Franco, greatly perplexed, went up to the house and told the news. All were amazed, and most of all Signora Peppina. "How? Do you really mean it? The Signor Controller of all men! And Signora Barborin also, poor little woman!" The event was excitedly discussed. Some thought one thing, some another. In about five minutes Pasotti came noisily in, dragging Signora Barborin behind him. She was laden with shawls and bundles and half dead with the cold. The poor creature could only keep repeating: "Two hours in the boat! Two hours in the boat!"

"Whatever brought you to Valsolda in this weather, Süra Pasotti?" Peppina screamed at her. "Oh, gracious! She don't understand anything, poor little woman!" And though Luisa and Ester shouted the same question in her ear, and though she opened her mouth wide, the poor deaf woman could not understand, and continued to answer at random: "Have I had my dinner? If I will dine here?" At last Pasotti came to the rescue, and told them that he and his wife had been called away by urgent business in October, and the last washing had been left undone. His wife had been worrying him for some time about that blessed washing, and finally he had made up his mind to satisfy her by coming. Then Donna Ester turned to Signora Pasotti, going through the pantomime of washing.

Barborin glanced at her husband, who had his eyes fixed upon her, and answered: "Yes, yes. The washing! The washing!" That glance, the order she read in the Controller's eyes, made Luisa suspect a mystery underlying all this. This mystery and the inexplicable effusiveness of Pasotti suggested another suspicion to her. What if they had come on her account and Franco's? What if the Professor's trip to Lodi had something to do with bringing about this unexpected visit? She would have liked to consult the Professor and beg him to remain until the Pasottis had left, but

then, how could she speak to him without Franco's noticing it? Meanwhile Donna Ester was saying good-bye, and Gilardoni was graciously permitted to escort her home.

The Pasottis could not go up to Albogasio Superiore until the farmer, who had been notified at once, should have had time to prepare and heat at least one room for their reception. The Controller at once proposed a three-handed game of tarocchi with the Engineer and Franco. Then Signora Peppina went away, and Barborin asked Luisa to allow her to withdraw for a few minutes, and begged her hostess to accompany her. As soon as he was alone with her friend in the alcove room, she glanced all about her with wide, frightened eyes, and then whispered: "We are not here on account of the washing, you know. Not on account of the washing!" Luisa questioned her silently with face and gestures, for had she spoken in a loud voice they would have heard her in the hall. This time Signora Pasotti understood, and replied that she did not know anything, that her husband had not told her anything, that he had ordered her to corroborate the story about the washing, but that really she was not in the least anxious about it. Then Luisa took a piece of paper and wrote: "What do you suspect?" Signora Pasotti read the words, and then began a most complicated pantomime: shakings of the head, rollings of the eyes, sighs, imploring glances towards the ceiling. It was as if a mighty struggle were going on within her between hope and fear. At last she uttered an "Ah?" seized the pen, and wrote below Luisa's question:

"The Marchesa!"

Then she dropped the pen and stood looking at her friend. "She is at Lodi," she said in an undertone. "The Controller has been to Lodi. So there you have it!" And she hastened back to the hall, faring to arouse her husband's suspicions.

The game over, Pasotti went to one of the windows, saying something in a loud voice about the effect of the twilight, and called Franco to him. "You must come and

see me this evening," he said softly. "I have something to say to you." Franco sought to excuse himself. He was starting the next morning for Milan, leaving his family for some time; he could hardly spend this last evening away from home. Pasotti answered that it was absolutely necessary. "It concerns your journey to-morrow!" said he.

"It concerns your journey to-morrow!" As soon as the Pasottis had left for Albogasio Superiore, Franco repeated the conversation to his wife. He had been much upset by it. So Pasotti knew! He would not have been so mysterious had he not been alluding to the journey to Turin, and Franco was greatly vexed to think that Pasotti was aware of this. But how had he found out? Perhaps the friend in Turin had been indiscreet. And now what did Pasotti want of him? Was another blow perhaps about to be struck by the police? But Pasotti was not the man to come and warn him. And all that hypocritical amiability? Perhaps they did not wish him to go to Turin, did not wish him to find an easier path, to free himself and his family from poverty, from commissaries and gendarmes. He thought and thought, and finally decided this must be the reason. In her heart Luisa greatly doubted it. She feared something else; but she also was persuaded Pasotti knew about Turin, and this upset all her suppositions. After all, the only way was to go and find out.

Franco went at eight o'clock and Pasotti received him with the most effusive cordiality, and apologised for his wife's absence, she having already gone to bed. Before opening the conversation he insisted that Franco should take a glass of S. Colombano, and a piece of panettone. With the wine and the cake Franco was obliged to swallow, much against his will, many declarations of friendship, and the most exalted eulogies upon his wife, his uncle, and himself. The glass and the plate being at last empty, the mellifluous rogue showed himself disposed to come to business.

They were seated facing each other at a small table. Pasotti, leaning back

comfortably in his chair, held a red and yellow silk handkerchief in his hands, with which he played constantly.

"Well," said he, "as I told you, my dear Franco, the matter concerns your journey to-morrow. I heard it said to-day at your house that you are going away on business. Now it remains to be seen whether I am not bringing you still more important business than that which calls you to Milan."

Franco remained silent, surprised by this unexpected preamble. Pasotti continued, his eyes fixed on the handkerchief which he never ceased handling.

"Of course, my good friend Don Franco Maironi knows that if I touch upon intimate and delicate questions it is because I have a serious reason for doing so; because I feel it my duty, and because I am authorised to do so."

The hands became still, the shining and cunning eyes were raised to Franco's distrustful and troubled eyes.

"It concerns both your present and your future, my dear Franco."

Having uttered these words, Pasotti resolutely laid aside the handkerchief. Resting his arms and his clasped hands on the little table, he went to the heart of the matter, keeping his eyes fixed upon Franco, who now, in his turn, leaning back in his chair, returned the gaze, his face pale, his attitude one of hostile defiance.

"You must know that the old friendship I bear your family has long been urging me to do something to put an end to a most painful quarrel. Your good father, Don Alessandro!—What a heart of gold!—How fond he was of me!" (Franco was aware that his father had once threatened Pasotti with his cane, for meddling overmuch in his family affairs.) "Never mind! Having learned that your grandmother was at Lodi, I said to myself last Sunday: After all the trouble the Maironis have had, perhaps this is the right moment. Let us go and make the attempt. And I went."

There was a pause. Franco was quivering. What a mediator he had had! And who had asked for mediation?

"I must tell you," Pasotti went on, "that I feel satisfied. Your grandmother has her own opinions, and she has reached an age when opinions are not easily changed; you know her character; she is very firm, but after all, she is not heartless. She loves you, you know, and she suffers. There is a continuous struggle going on within her, between her sentiments and her principles; or, one might rather say, between her sentiments and her resentment. Poor Marchesa, it is painful to see how she suffers! But anyhow she is beginning to yield. Of course we must not expect too much. She is indeed yielding, but not sufficiently to break what sustains her—her principles I mean, especially her political principles."

Franco's eyes, his twitching jaws, a quivering of his whole person said to Pasotti: "Woe to you if you touch upon that point!" Pasotti stopped. Perhaps he was thinking of the cane of the late Don Alessandro.

"I understand your feelings," he continued. "Do you think I don't? I eat the government's bread, and must keep what I feel shut up in my heart, but, nevertheless, I am with you. I sigh for the moment when certain colours shall replace certain others. But your grandmother holds different opinions, and there is nothing for it but to take her as she is. If we want to arrive at an understanding we must take her as she is. You may seek to oppose her as I myself did, but——"

"All this talk appears to me perfectly useless," Franco exclaimed, rising.

"Wait!" Pasotti added. "The affair may not prove as disagreeable as you think! Sit down and listen."

But Franco would not hear of resuming his seat.

"Out with it, then!" said he, his voice ringing impatiently.

"First of all your grandmother is prepared to recognise your marriage——"

"How kind!" Franco put in.

"Wait!—--and to make you a suitable allowance: from what I heard I should think of

from six to eight thousand svanziche a year. Not bad, eh?"

"Go on."

"Be patient! There is nothing humiliating in all this. Had there been a single humiliating condition I should not have mentioned the matter to you. Your grandmother wishes you to have an occupation, and also desires that you give a certain guarantee not to take part in political doings. Now there is a decorous way of combining these two points, as you yourself will be obliged to recognise, although I tell you plainly that I had proposed a different course to your grandmother. My idea was that she should place you at the head of her affairs. You would have had enough to do to keep you from thinking of anything else. However, your grandmother's idea is good also. I know fine young fellows like yourself, who think as you do, and who are in the judicial service. It is a most independent and respectable calling. A word from you and you will find yourself an auditor of the court."

"I?" Franco burst out. "I? No, my dear Pasotti! No! They don't send the police into my house—be quiet!—they don't brutally dismiss from service an honest man, whose only crime is that he is my wife's uncle,—be quiet, I tell you!—they don't seek every possible means of reducing my family and myself to the verge of starvation to-day, that they may offer us filthy bread to-morrow! No, my man, no! Do your worst! By God! I am not to be trapped by any one through hunger! Tell my grandmother so, you——you——you——"

Pasotti's nature certainly had much that was feline; he was rapacious, cunning, prudent, a flatterer, quick to feign, but also subject to fits of rage. He had continued to interrupt Maironi's outpouring with protests which became ever more violent, and at this last invective, forseeing the approach of a deluge of accusations which were all the more exasperating because he could guess their character, he also started to his feet.

"Stop!" said he. "What do you mean by all this?"

"Good-night!" cried Franco, who had seized his hat. But Pasotti had no intention of letting him go thus. "One moment!" said he, bringing his fist down swiftly and repeatedly on the little table. "You people are deluding yourselves! You hope great things from that will; but it is not a will at all, it is simply a bit of waste paper, the ravings of a madman!"

Franco, who had already reached the door, stopped short, stunned by the blow. "What will?" said he.

"Come now!" Pasotti retorted, half coldly, half mockingly. "We understand each other perfectly!"

A flash of rage once more set Franco's blood on fire. "We do not!" he cried. "Out with it! Speak! What do you know of any will?"

"Ah! Now we are getting on famously!" Pasotti said with ironical sweetness.

Franco could have strangled him.

"Didn't I tell you I have been to Lodi? So of course I know!"

Franco, quite beside himself, protested that he was entirely in the dark.

"Of course," Pasotti continued, with greater irony than before. "It is for me to enlighten the gentleman! Then I will inform you that Professor Gilardoni, who is by no means the friend you believe him to be, went to Lodi at the end of December, and presented himself before the Marchesa with a legally worthless copy of a will which he pretends was made by your late grandfather. This will appoints you, Don Franco, residuary legatee, in terms attrociously insulting to both the wife and the son of the testator. So now you know. Indeed, Signor Gilardoni did not betray his trust, but stated that he had come on his own responsibility, and without your knowledge."

Franco listened, as pale as death, feeling darkness creeping over his sight and his soul, mustering all his strength that he might not lose his head, but be able to give a fitting answer.

"You are right," said he. "Grandmother is right also. It is Professor Gilardoni who has done wrong. He showed me that will three years ago, on the night of my marriage. I told him to burn it, and believed he had done so. If he did not, he deceived me. If he really went to Lodi on the charming errand you describe, he has committed an act of outrageous indelicacy and stupidity. You were quite justified in thinking ill of us. But mark this! I despise my grandmother's money as heartily as I despise the money of the government, and as this lady has the good fortune to be the mother of my father, I will never—never, I say—although she resort to the most base, the most perfidious means of ruining me—never make use of a document that dishonours her. I am too much her superior! Go and tell her this in my name, and tell her also to withdraw her offers, for I spurn them! Good-night!!"

He left Pasotti in a state of utter amazement, and went his way, trembling with over-excitement and rage. He forgot his lantern, and went down the hill in the dark, striding along, neither knowing nor caring where he placed his feet, and from time to time uttering an ejaculation, pouring out that which was seething within him —rage against Gilardoni, and accusations against Luisa!

Uncle Piero had gone to bed early, and Luisa was waiting for Franco in the little salon with Maria, whom she had kept up that her father might see something of her this last night. Poor little Signorina Missipipì had very soon grown weary, and had begun to open wide her little mouth, and assume a tearful expression, asking in a small and pitiful voice: "When is papa coming?" But she possessed a mamma who was unrivalled in consoling the afflicted. Now it was some time since Signorina Missipipì had owned a pair of whole little shoes: and little shoes, even in Valsolda, cost money. Not much money, it is true, but what is to be done when you have hardly any? However, this unique mamma was also unrivalled in shoeing those who were shoeless. The very day before, Luisa, in searching for a piece of rope in the attic, had found a boot which had belonged to her grandfather, buried beneath a heap of rubbish, of empty boxes and broken chairs. She had put it in water to soften, and

had borrowed a shoemaker's knife, an awl, and shears. She now took the venerable boot, that frightened Maria, and placed it on the table. "Now we will recite its funeral oration," said she, with that liveliness she could assume at will, and of which even mortal anguish could not rob her, if she deemed it necessary to be lively. "But first you must ask your great-grandfather's permission to take his boot." She made Maria clasp her hands, and recite the following jingle, her eyes comically raised to the ceiling.

Great granddad of mine Who to heav'n did climb, This boot, to you useless Pray give to this princess, Who longs in vain For slippers twain, And throws you a kiss, The pert little Miss, Which she begs you to put On the sole of your foot.

Then followed a somewhat irreverent fancy, one of many such born in Luisa's brain—a strange story of the little angel who polishes the boots in heaven, and who one day let great-grandfather's boot fall to the earth while attempting to grab a bit of golden bread he had been forbidden to touch. Maria brightened visibly; she laughed and interrupted her mother with a hundred questions concerning the other boot that was still in heaven. What would her great-grandfather do with that? Her mother replied that he would apply it from behind to the Emperor of Austria, and push him out of heaven with it, if he chanced to meet him there.

Just at that moment Franco entered.

Luisa at once saw signs of storm on his brow and in his eyes.

"Well?" she questioned. Franco answered shortly: "Put Maria to bed."

Luisa observed that she had kept the child up waiting for him, that she might spend a little time with him. "I tell you to put her to bed!" Franco said, so harshly that Maria began to cry. Luisa flushed, but was silent. Lighting a candle she took the child in her arms and silently held her up that her father might give her a kiss. He did so coldly, and then Luisa carried her away. Franco did not follow her. The sight of the boot irritated him, and he threw it upon the floor. Then he sat down, planted his

elbows on the table, and rested his head in his hands.

The bitter thought that Luisa was Gilardoni's accomplice had immediately flashed into his mind while Pasotti was talking, and with it there came also the recollection of that "Why be silent?" of that "Enough!" and of the child's story. He felt as if he had a whirlwind within him, in which this idea was being continually caught up and whirled away, to reappear again farther down, ever nearer the heart.

"Well?" Luisa once more asked, as she entered the room. Franco looked at her a moment in silence, scrutinising her closely. Then he rose and seized her hands. "Tell me if you know anything?" said he. She guessed his meaning, but that look and manner offended her. "What do you mean?" she exclaimed, her face aflame. "Why do you ask in that way?" "Ah! you do know!" cried Franco flinging away her hands, and raising his arms with a despairing gesture.

She foresaw what was coming—his suspicion of her complicity with Gilardoni, her denial, and the mortal irremediable offence Franco would be offering her if, in his wrath, he refused to trust her word, and she clasped her hands in terror. "No, Franco! No, Franco!" she murmured softly, and threw her arms about his neck, striving to close his lips with kisses. But he misunderstood her, believed she was seeking forgiveness, and pushed her aside. "I know! Yes, I know!" she cried, once more casting herself passionately upon his breast. "But I found out afterwards, when it was already done, and I was as indignant as you are, even more indignant!" But Franco was too anxious to give vent to his feelings, too anxious to offend. "How can I know you are speaking the truth?" he exclaimed. She started back with a cry, and then once more coming a step nearer, she held out her arms to him. "No, no!" she entreated in agony, "Tell me you believe me! Tell me so now, for if you do not say so, you don't know, you can't realise what will happen!"

"What is it I can't realise?"

"You don't know me as I am, for though I may love you still, I can never again be a

wife to you, and though I may suffer deeply, I shall never change, never again. Do you realise what that means, never again?"

He drew her slender, trembling figure towards him, pressed her hands as if to crush them, and said, in a stifled voice: "I will believe you! Indeed I will believe you!" But Luisa, gazing at him through her tears, was not satisfied. "I will believe you?" she said. "I will believe you?"

"I do believe you, I do believe you!"

Indeed he did believe her; but where there is anger there is always pride as well. He did not wish to surrender entirely, and at once, and his tone was rather condescending than convinced. Both were silent, holding each other's hands, and then with a slow, almost imperceptible movement they began to draw apart. It was Luisa who at last gently drew away completely. She felt this silence must be broken; he could find no glowing words, and cold words she would not speak, so she began to tell him how she had heard of the unfortunate journey to Lodi from Gilardoni himself. Seated at the table opposite her husband, she spoke in a calm voice that was not precisely cold, but rather grieved. While she was relating the Professor's disclosures Franco again took fire, and often interrupted her. "And did you not say that to him?—And did you not say this to him?—Did you tell him he was a fool?—Did you not call him an ass?" At first Luisa ignored these exclamations, but finally she protested. She had already said that Gilardoni's blunder had filled her with indignation, but now it would almost seem as if her husband doubted this. Franco was reduced to unwilling silence.

Her story finished, he once more stormed against that blockhead of a philosopher, and Luisa was moved to take his part. After all he was their friend; he had indeed made a terrible mistake, but with the best of intentions. Where were all Franco's maxims about charity, and forgiving injuries, if he was not willing to forgive one whose only wish had been to benefit him? And here thoughts came to her which she

did not utter. She reflected that Franco was ready enough to forgive great things when there was glory and sometimes even folly in forgiving, while he would not now forgive a slight offence when there were the best of reasons for doing so. When she spoke of charity Franco became exasperated; he did not venture to say he felt he did not deserve a similar attack, but returned the blow somewhat roughly. "Ah! Indeed!" he exclaimed, with a reticence that was full of insinuations. "So you defend him! Oh, of course!"

Luisa's shoulders twitched nervously, but she held her peace.

"And why did you not speak!" Franco continued. "Why did you not tell me everything at once?"

"Because when I reproached Gilardoni he entreated me not to tell. Besides, I thought—and I was perfectly correct—that the thing being done, it was useless to cause you such great annoyance. The last day of the year, when you were so angry, I wished to tell you, to relate all Gilardoni had confided to me. Do you remember? But you absolutely refused to listen. I did not insist, especially as Gilardoni had told your grandmother we knew nothing about the matter."

"She did not believe him. Naturally!"

"And what good would it have done if I had spoken? As it is, Pasotti must have seen plainly that you knew nothing."

Franco did not answer. Then Luisa asked him to repeat the conversation to her, and she listened to his recital with breathless attention. She guessed, her intuition sharpened by hatred, that if Franco had accepted the proffered position, a further condition would have been imposed: separation from her uncle, from an official who had been dismissed from service for political reasons. "Certainly," she said, "she would have demanded this also. Canaille!" Her husband started, as if he also had been cut to the quick by that lash. "Steady," said he. "Be careful of your expressions! In the first place, that is only a supposition of yours, and then——"

"Only a supposition? And how about the rest? How about the cowardly action she proposed to you?"

Franco, who had answered Pasotti with such violence, now answered his wife weakly.

"Yes, yes, yes! But after all——"

It was her turn to be violent now. The idea that his grandmother should dare propose that they forsake the uncle drove her nearly out of her mind. "You will at least acknowledge this," she cried, "that she deserves no mercy? My God! And to think that will still exists!"

"Oh!" Franco exclaimed. "Are we to begin over again?"

"Let us begin over again! Have you any right to demand that I shall neither think nor feel save in such a way as is pleasing to you? Did I obey you I should be cowardly, I should deserve to become a slave. And I will be neither cowardly nor a slave!"

The rebel he had suspected, even felt at times lurking behind the loving woman, the creature possessed of an intellect intensely proud, and stronger than love, whom he had never succeeded in conquering completely, now stood before him, quivering in the consciousness of her rebellion.

"Well, well!" said Franco, as if speaking to himself, "so you would be cowardly, would be a slave? Do you at least reflect that I am going away to-morrow?"

"Do not go! Stay here! Carry out your grandfather's wishes. Remember what you told me concerning the origin of the Maironi wealth. Give it all back to the Ospitale Maggiore. See that justice is done!"

"No," Franco retorted. "These are idle dreams. The end does not justify the means. The real end with you is to strike my grandmother. This talk of the Ospitale is simply a means of justifying the blow. No, I will never make use of that will. I declared as much to Pasotti, in such strong language that should I ever change, I

should deserve to be spit upon. I shall certainly leave to-morrow."

A long silence followed, then the dialogue was once more resumed, but the two voices were cold and sad as if now some dead thing lay in the heart of either.

"Do you realise," said Franco, "that I should be dishonouring my own father?"

"In what way?"

"In the first place by the outrageous nature of the terms in which the document is couched, and then by implying my father's complicity in the suppression of the will. But then you don't understand these matters. And, after all, what do you care?"

"But there is no need to speak of suppression. It is quite possible the will was never found."

Another silence. Even the tallow candle that was burning on the table had a lugubrious look. Luisa rose, picked up the great-grandfather's boot, and prepared to begin her work. Franco went to the window and pressed his forehead against the glass. He remained there some time, absorbed in contemplation of the shadows of night. Presently he said softly, without turning his head:

"Never, never has your soul been wholly mine."

No answer.

Then he faced about and asked his wife in a tone entirely free from anger, and with that ineffable gentleness which was his in moments of moral or physical depression, if, since the very beginning of their union, he had ever failed her in any way. An almost inaudible "No" was the answer.

"Then perhaps you did not love me as I believed?"

"No, no, no!"

Franco was not sure he had understood correctly, and repeated:

"You did not love me?"

"Yes, yes! So dearly!"

His spirits began to revive, and a shade of severity returned to his voice.

"Then," said he, "why did you not give me your whole soul?"

She was silent. She had been trying in vain to resume her work, but her hands trembled.

And now this terrible question! Should she answer or not? By answering, by revealing for the first time things that lay buried at the bottom of her heart, she would only be widening the painful gap between them; but could she be dishonest? She was silent so long that at last Franco said: "You will not speak?" Then she mustered all her strength and spoke.

"It is true, my soul has never been wholly yours." She trembled as she spoke the words, and Franco held his breath.

"I have always felt myself different from you, separated from you," Luisa continued, "in that sentiment which should govern all others. You hold the religious views my mother held. Religion was to my mother, as it is to you, a union of certain beliefs, ceremonies, and precepts, inspired and governed by the love of God. I have always shrunk from this conception of religion; no matter how hard I may have tried, I have never been able to feel this love of an invisible and incomprehensible Being; I have never been able to understand what good could come of forcing my reason to accept things I do not understand. Nevertheless I felt an ardent longing to direct my life towards what was good, according to a disinterested ideal. Moreover, by her words and example my mother had embued me with such a strong sense of my duty towards God and the Church, that my doubts caused me great pain, and I struggled hard against them. My mother was a saint. Every act of her life was in harmony with her faith. This also influenced me strongly. And then I knew that the greatest sorrow of her life had been my father's unbelief. I met you, loved you, married you, and I was strengthened in my resolve to become as you are in matters of religion, because I believed you were as my mother was. Then, little by little, I discovered you are not

like my mother. Shall I go on?"

"Yes, to the end!"

"I discovered you were kindness itself, that you had the warmest, most generous heart in the world, but that your faith and your religious practices rendered these treasures almost useless. You did not strive! You were satisfied to love me, the child, Italy, your flowers, your music, the beauty of the lake and the mountains. In this you followed your heart. As to a higher ideal, it was sufficient for you to believe and to pray. Without this faith and without these prayers you would have given the fire that is in your soul to that which is surely true, which is surely just in this world, you would have felt the same need to be doing that I feel. You are well aware, are you not, what I could have wished you to be in certain things? For example, who feels patriotism more keenly than you do? Surely no one. Well, I could have wished to see you endeavour to serve your country seriously, and according to your strength. Now you are indeed going to Piedmont, but your principal reason for doing so is that we have hardly anything left to live upon."

Franco, frowning angrily, made an impatient gesture of protest. "If you wish it I will stop," Luisa said humbly.

"No, no. Go on! Let us have the whole of it! It will be better!"

He spoke so excitedly, so angrily, that Luisa was silent, and it was only after a second, "Go on!" that she continued.

"Without going to Piedmont there would have been enough to do here in Valsolda, in Val Porlezza, in Vall' Intelvi; what V. does on the Lake of Como, communicating with different people, keeping the right spirit alive, preparing all that must be prepared against the coming of war, if, indeed, it ever comes. I used to tell you so, but you would not be convinced, you saw so many difficulties in the way. This sluggishness fostered my repugnance to your conception of religion, and my tendency towards another conception. For I also felt myself intensely religious. The

conception of religion which was gradually shaping itself clearly in my mind was, in substance, as follows: God really exists, and is powerful and wise as you believe, but He is perfectly indifferent to our adoration of Him, and prayers to Him. What He demands of us is what we may learn from the heart he has formed for each one of us, from the conscience He has given us, from the surroundings in which He has placed us. He wishes us to love all that is good, to hate all that is evil, to labour with all our strength, according to this love and this hatred, and to occupy ourselves exclusively with the things of this world, with things we can comprehend, that can be felt! Now you will understand what my idea really is of my duty, of our duty, in the face of all injustice, all tyranny!"

The further she went in this definition, this exposure of her own views, the greater was the relief she experienced in so doing, in being perfectly sincere at last, in frankly taking her stand on her own firm ground, and gradually all indignation against her husband died down within her, and in her heart there arose a tender pity for him.

"Indeed," she added, "if it had been only this trouble about your grandmother, do you think I would not rather have sacrificed my own opinion a thousand times, rather than grieve you? There was something else underlying that. Now you know all. Now I have laid my bare soul in your hands."

She read dull pain and hostile coldness on her husband's brow. She rose and moved towards him very slowly, with clasped hands, gazing at him, seeking his eyes, which avoided hers, and then halted on the way, repulsed by some higher power, for he had neither spoken nor made a gesture.

"Franco!" she entreated, "can you no longer love me?"

He did not answer.

"Franco! Franco!" she cried, stretching out her clasped hands. Then she started to move forward. He drew back with a rapid movement. Thus they stood in silence,

face to face, for half a minute that seemed an eternity.

Franco's lips were pressed tight together, and she could hear his quick breathing. It was he who broke the silence.

"What you have said is exactly what you feel?"

"Yes!"

His hands were clutching the back of a chair. He shook it violently, saying bitterly: "Enough!" Luisa looked at him with inexpressible sadness, and murmured: "Enough?" He answered angrily, "Enough, enough, enough!" After a moment's silence he went on harshly: "I may be indolent, sluggish, selfish, anything you like, but I am not a boy to be soothed by a couple of caresses after all you have said to me. Enough, I tell you!"

"Oh, Franco! I know I have hurt you, but it has cost me so much, having to hurt you! Can't you take me kindly?"

"Ah, take you kindly, indeed! You wish to be free to inflict any wound, and then expect to be taken kindly! You are superior to every one else! You judge, you pass sentence, you alone understand what God wishes and what He does not wish? But this at least I will not have! Say whatever you like about me, but let those things you do not understand alone. You had better be working on your boot!"

He was determined to see only pride in his wife, while his own anger was born almost wholly of pride, of outraged self-esteem; it was an impure anger which darkened his brain and his heart. Both husband and wife would have acknowledged the justice of any other accusation sooner than that of pride.

She silently resumed her seat and tried to resume her work as well, but she handled the tools nervously without really knowing what she was doing. Franco went into the hall, banging the door behind him.

It was very cold in the darkness of the hall which had been unoccupied since five

o'clock, but Franco did not notice this. He threw himself upon the sofa, giving himself up entirely to his grief, to his anger, to an easy and violent mental defence of himself against his wife. As Luisa had rebelled against God and against himself—though indeed she had made a distinction—he now found it convenient to make common cause in his heart with that other mute and terrible One whom she had offended. At first astonishment, bitterness, rage, good reasons and bad, formed a whirling tempest in his brain. Then he found relief for his feelings in imagining Luisa's repentance, her prayers for forgiveness, and his own magnanimous answers.

Suddenly he heard Maria screaming and crying. He rose to go and see what had happened, but he was without a light. He waited a moment thinking Luisa would go out, but he did not hear her move, and the child was screaming louder than ever. Very softly he went towards the parlour, and looked in through the glass door.

Luisa had hidden her face in her arms, which were crossed on the table, and the light of the candle revealed only her beautiful dark hair. Franco felt his anger cooling, he opened the door, and called softly, his tone still gently severe: "Luisa, Maria is crying." Luisa raised her face, which was very pale, took the candle and went out without a word. Her husband followed her. They found the child sitting up in bed bathed in tears; a dream had frightened her. When she saw her father she stretched out her arms to him. "Not go away, papa, not go away!" she entreated, her voice big with tears. Franco pressed her in his arms, covered her with kisses, soothed her, and then put her back into her little bed. But she clung tightly to one of her father's hands, and could not be prevailed upon to let it go.

Luisa took another candle from the table and tried to light it, but her hands shook so she did not succeed. "Are you not coming to bed?" Franco asked. "No," she said, trembling more violently than ever. Franco thought he divined a supposition, a fear in her, and was offended. "Oh, you can come!" he said angrily. Luisa lighted her candle and said, more calmly, that she must work on the little shoes. She went out,

and only on the threshold did she murmur: "Good-night." "Good-night," Franco answered coldly. For a moment he thought he would undress, but he presently relinquished his intention because his wife was still up, and at work. He spread back the coverlet and lay down in his clothes, on the side of the bed next to the child, that he might hold Maria's little hand—she had not yet gone to sleep—and put out the light.

What sweetness in the touch of that dear, tiny hand! Franco felt her the little child she was, his daughter, the innocent, loving baby, and then he imagined her a woman, her heart all his, united to him in every thought, every sentiment, and he fancied the little hand that pressed his was striving to compensate him for all that Luisa had made him suffer, and was saying: "Papa, you and I are united for ever!" Good God! he shuddered at the thought that Luisa might wish to bring her up in her own way of thinking, and that he, being far away, would be powerless to prevent this. He prayed to God, to the Virgin Mary, to the saintly grandmother Teresa, to his own mother, who, he was well aware, had been so pure and so pious. "Watch over my Maria, watch over her!" he murmured. He offered to sacrifice his whole being, his earthly happiness, his health, even life itself, that Maria might be saved from error.

"Papa," said the child, "a kiss."

He leaned out of bed, and, bending down, sought the dear little face in the dark, and told her to be quiet, to go to sleep. She was silent for a moment, and then called—

"Papa!"

"What is it?"

"I haven't got the mule under my pillow, you know, papa."

"No, no, dear, but now go to sleep."

"Yes, papa, I am going to sleep."

Once more she was silent for a moment and then said—

"Is mamma in bed, papa?"

"No, dear."

"Why not?"

"Because she is making little shoes for you."

"Shall I wear shoes in heaven also, like great grandfather?"

"Hush! Go to sleep."

"Tell me a story, papa."

He tried, but he had neither Luisa's imagination nor her skill, and soon came to a stand-still. "Oh, papa!" said Maria, in a compassionate tone, "you don't know how to tell stories."

This was humiliating. "Listen, listen!" he answered, and began reciting a ballad by Carrer, always going back to the beginning after the first four lines, which were all he knew of it, his expression becoming ever more mysterious, his voice ever fainter, until it was only an inarticulate murmur, and thus at last Signorina Missipipì, lulled by the rhythm of the lines, passed with them into the world of dreams. When he heard her sleeping peacefully it seemed to him he was so cruel to leave her, he felt himself such a traitor, that he wavered in his resolve. He at once controlled himself, however.

The sweet dialogue with the child had greatly soothed him and raised his spirits. He began to be conscious of an imperative duty towards his wife which would henceforth be incumbent upon him. He must show himself a man, both in will and in deed, and this at the cost of any sacrifice. He must defend his faith against her by his works, by leaving home, by labour and suffering; and then—and then—if Almighty God should see fit to allow the cannon to roar for Italy, he must push ever to the front; and let the Austrian ball come, if it but teach her to weep and pray at last!

He remembered that he had not said his evening prayers. Poor Franco, he had never

been able to say them in bed without dropping off to sleep before they were half finished. Feeling comparatively calm, and reflecting that it might perhaps be some time before Luisa came to bed, he feared he should go to sleep, and what would she say if she found him sleeping? He rose very softly and said his prayers; then he lighted the candle and sat down at the writing-desk, intending to read, but presently he fell asleep in his chair.

He was aroused by the beat of Veronica's wooden shoes on the stairs. Luisa was not yet come. Soon, however, she entered the room, and expressed no surprise at seeing Franco already up.

"It is four o'clock," she said. "If you intend to start, you have only half an hour's time." He must leave home at half-past four, to be sure of reaching Menaggio in time for the first boat coming from Colico. Instead of going to Como and thence to Milan as had been officially announced, Franco was to leave the steamer at Argegno and go up to S. Fedele, coming down into Switzerland by Val Mara or by Orimento and Monte Generoso.

Franco signed to his wife to be quiet, that she might not disturb Maria. Then with another silent gesture he called her to him.

"I am going," he said. "Last night I was harsh with you. I beg you to forgive me. I should have answered you differently, even though I was in the right. You know my temperament. Forgive me! At least, do not let us part in anger."

"For my part I feel none," Luisa answered gently, as one who finds it easy to condescend, because he feels himself superior.

The final preparations were made in silence; breakfast was eaten in silence. Franco went to embrace the uncle to whom he had not said good-bye the night before; then he returned to the alcove-room alone, and kneeling beside the little bed, touched with his lips a tiny hand that was hanging over the edge. Upon returning to the parlour he found Luisa in shawl and hat, and asked if she were going to Porlezza

also. Yes, she was going. Everything was ready. Luisa had the handbag, the valise was in the boat, and Ismaele was waiting on the stairs of the boathouse, one foot on the step, the other on the prow of the boat.

Veronica accompanied the travellers with a light, and wished her master a pleasant journey, with a crestfallen expression, for she had an inkling of the quarrel.

Two minutes later and the heavy boat, pushed forward by Ismaele's slow and steady "travelling strokes," was passing beneath the wall of the kitchen-garden. Franco put his head out of the little window. The rose-bushes, the caper-bushes, and the aloes hanging from the wall, passed slowly in the pale light of this starry but moonless night; then the orange-trees, the medlar, and the pine slipped by. Good-bye! Good-bye! They passed the cemetery, the Zocca di Mainè, the narrow lane where he had so often walked with Maria, the Tavorell. Franco no longer watched. The light that usually burned in the little cabin was not there to-night, and he could not see his wife, who was silent.

"Are you going to Porlezza about those papers of the notary's, or simply to accompany me?" he said.

"This too!" Luisa murmured sadly. "I tried to be strictly honest with you, and you took offence. You ask my forgiveness, and now you say such things as this to me. I see that one cannot be faithful to truth without great, great suffering. But patience! I have chosen that path now. You will know soon whether I really came on your account or not. Do not humble me by making me say so now."

"Do not humble me!" Franco exclaimed. "I do not understand. We are indeed different in so many ways. My God, how different we are! You are always so completely mistress of yourself, you can always express your thoughts so exactly, they are always so clear, so cool."

Luisa murmured: "Yes, we are different."

Neither spoke again until they reached Cressogno. When they were near the

Marchesa's villa Luisa began to talk, and tried to keep the conversation alive until they should have left the villa behind. She asked him to repeat to her the itinerary that had been arranged for his journey, and suggested that he take only his handbag with him, for the valise would be a burden from Argegno on. She had already spoken to Ismaele about it, and he had promised to carry it to Lugano and send it on to Turin from that place. Meanwhile they had passed his grandmother's villa.

Now the sanctuary of Caravina came in sight. Twice during their courtship Franco and Luisa had met under those olive-trees, at the festa of Caravina, on the eighth of September. And now the dear little church in its grove of olives, beneath the awful rocks of the peak of Cressogno, was left behind also. Farewell, little church. Farewell to the past!

"Remember," Franco said, almost harshly, "that Maria is to say her prayers every morning and evening. It is an order I give you."

"I should have made her do so without this order," Luisa answered. "I know Maria does not belong to me alone."

Then they were silent all the way to Porlezza. Coming forth from the tranquil bay of Valsolda, seeing other valleys, other horizons, the lake just rippled by the first breath of dawn, the two travellers were drawn towards other thoughts, were led to think, without knowing why, of the uncertain future, which must bring great events, of which prophetic whisperings already circulated mysteriously through the heavy Austrian silence. Some one called out from the shore at Porlezza, and Ismaele began to row rapidly. It was the driver, Toni Pollin, who was shouting to them to make haste if they wished to catch the steamer at Menaggio.

The last moments had come. Franco let down the window in the little door, and looked at the man as if he were most anxious not to lose a word.

When they touched the shore he turned to his wife. "Are you going to get out also?" "If you wish it," she said. They alighted. A cabriolet stood ready on the shore. "By

the way," said Luisa, "you will find some lunch in your bag." They embraced, exchanging a cold and rapid kiss in the presence of three or four curious bystanders "Try and make Maria forgive me for leaving her thus," said Franco, and they were his last words, for Toni Pollin was hurrying them: "Quick, quick!" The horse started off at a brisk trot, and the cabriolet rattled noisily, with a great snapping of the whip, through the dark and narrow street of Porlezza.

Franco was on board the Falcon between Campo and Argegno when he thought of his lunch. He opened the bag, and his heart gave a bound as he perceived a letter bearing as an address the words "For You" in his wife's hand. He tore it open eagerly, and read as follows—

"If you only knew what I am experiencing in my soul, how I am suffering, how sorely I am tempted to lay aside the little shoes—in the making of which I am far less skilful than you think—and to go to you, taking back all I have said, you would not be so harsh with me. I must have sinned deeply against truth, that the first steps I now take in following her are so difficult, so bitter.

"You think me proud, and I believed myself very sensitive, but now I feel that your humiliating words alone could not have kept me from hastening to you. What holds me back is a Voice within me, a Voice stronger than I am, which commands me to sacrifice everything save my consciousness of truth.

"Ah! I hope this sacrifice may bring its reward! I hope that one day there may be a perfect union between our two souls.

"I am going into the garden to gather for you that brave little rose we admired together the other day, the little rose that has challenged and conquered January. Do you remember how many obstacles lay between us the first time I received a flower from your hand? I was not yet in love with you, but you already dreamt of winning me. Now it is I who hope to win you!"

Franco came near letting the steamer pass Argegno without moving from his seat.

CHAPTER IX FOR BREAD, FOR ITALY, FOR GOD

Eight months later, in September, 1855, Franco was occupying a miserable attic in Via Barbaroux, Turin. In February he had obtained the post of translator for the Opinione, with a monthly salary of eighty-five lire. Later he began to write the parliamentary reports, and his salary was raised to a hundred lire. Dina, the manager of the paper, was fond of him, and procured him extra work outside the office, thus adding twenty-five or thirty lire to his earnings. Franco lived on sixty lire a month. The rest went to Lugano to be carried thence to Oria by the faithful hands of Ismaele. To live a month on sixty lire took more courage than Franco himself had believed he possessed. The hours at the office, the translating—a laborious task for one full of scruples and literary timidity—weighed more heavily upon him than the privations; moreover he felt even sixty lire was too large a sum, and reproached himself for not being able to do with less.

He had attached himself to six other refugees, some of whom were Lombards, others Venetians. They ate together, walked together, conversed together. With the exception of Franco and a young man from Udine, all the others were between thirty and forty years of age. All were extremely poor, and not one of them had ever consented to accept a penny from the Piedmontese Government as a subsidy. The young man from Udine came of a rich family, of Austrian tendencies, and received not a penny from home. He was a good flutist, gave four or five lessons a week, and played in the small orchestras of second-rate theatres. A notary from Padua was copyist in Boggio's office. A lawyer from Caprino, Bergamasco, who had seen service at Rome in 1849, was book-keeper at a large establishment in Via Nuovo, where umbrellas and walking-sticks were sold, and for this reason his friends had dubbed him "the knave of clubs." A fourth, a Milanese, had been through the campaign of 1848 as one of Carlo Alberto's scouts. His present occupation was to quarrel continually with "the knave of clubs," for reasons of provincial rivalry, to

teach fencing in a couple of boarding schools, and in winter to play the piano behind a mysterious curtain in halls where polkas were danced at a penny each. The others lived on insufficient allowances from their families. All except Franco were unmarried, and all were gay. They called themselves, and were called by others, the "seven wise men," and in their wisdom they dominated Turin from the elevated positions of seven attics, scattered all over the city from Borgo San Dalmazzo to Piazza Milano.

Franco's was the most wretched of these attics, the rent being only seven lire a month. No member of this band had any services whatsoever performed for them, save the notary from Padua, for whom the doorkeeper's sister carried water to his attic, and had he not been the calm philosopher he was, the merciless teasings of his friends would have made him regret Marga's devotion. They all cleaned their own boots. The most skilful with his hands was Franco, and it was his lot to sew on his friends' buttons when they did not wish to humble themselves by applying to the lawyer and his Marga, who, nevertheless, often had her hands full, "poor, overworked woman that I am!" The young man from Udine had a sweetheart, a little tota [N] from the first booth in Piazza Castello on the corner of Po, but he was jealous, and would not allow her to sew on buttons for any one. The friends took their revenge by calling her "the puppet," because she sold puppets and dolls. However, thanks to "the puppet," he was the only member of the band whose clothes were always in order, and whose cravat was always tied in a graceful knot. They took their meals at a restaurant in Vanchiglia, which they had christened "Stomach-ache Tavern," and where they had lunch and dinner for thirty lire a month. Their only extravagance was the bicierîn, a mixture of coffee, milk, and chocolate, costing only fifteen centimes. They drank this in the morning, the Venetians at the Café Alfieri, the others at Café Florio. All except Franco, however. He went without the bicierîn and the torcètt, a cake costing a penny that went with it, in order that he might lay by enough for a little trip to Lugano, and a trifling present for Maria. In

the winter they walked under the porticoes of Po, the "wise ones" in the vicinity of the University, while the more light-minded frequented the porticoes on the San Francesco side. After their walk they would go to a coffee-house, where the one whose turn it was would sip a cup of coffee, while the others read the newspapers and looted the sugar basin. Once a week, to satisfy the "knave of clubs," they would betake themselves to a den in Via Bertola, where the purest and most exquisite Giambava wine was to be had.

The flutist from Udine of course went to the theatres, and by his means some of the others went gratis from time to time, but always to the play, and usually either to the Rossini or Gerbino theatres. For Franco to be obliged to pass the posters at the Regio and the other opera houses was a far greater trial than to be obliged to clean his own boots and lunch off two square inches of omelet that was so thin it would have served admirably to observe the spots on the sun through. He had had the good fortune to make the acquaintance of a certain C., a Venetian, who was secretary at the department of Public Works, and who presented him to the family of a most distinguished major in the sanitary corps, also Venetian, and who owned a piano and was in the habit of receiving a few friends of an evening, on which occasions he would regale them with a cup of most excellent coffee of a quality almost unique in the Turin of those days. When, for one reason or another, the "seven wise men" did not spend the evening together, Franco would go to this gentleman's house in Piazza Milano, to make music, to converse on art with the daughters, or to discuss politics with his hostess, a fierce Venetian patriot, a woman of great talents, and possessed of a strenuous soul, who had not only borne heroically all the hardships and the bitterness of exile, but had sustained the courage of her husband, whose first steps had been most painful and difficult; for those precious, honest old numskulls of the inflexible Piedmontese administration had actually obliged this already famous professor of the University of Padua to submit to an examination, before they would admit him into the army as surgeon. [O]

The correspondence between Turin and Oria did not indeed reflect the true state of mind of Franco and Luisa; it ran on smoothly and affectionately enough, but with great caution and reserve on either side. Luisa had expected that Franco would answer her note, and resume the great discussion. As he never mentioned either the note or what had passed between them that last night, she risked an allusion. It was allowed to pass unheeded. As a matter of fact Franco had several times started to write with the intention of confuting his wife's opinions. Before beginning he always felt himself strong, and was convinced that with a little thought he could easily discover crushing arguments, and, indeed, arguments he believed to be such would rush to his pen, but when they were set down in writing, he would at once be forced to recognise their inadequacy. Though surprised and grieved he would make another attempt, but always with the same result. Nevertheless his wife was certainly in error; this he never for a moment doubted, and there must be a way of demonstrating it to her. He must study. But what, and how? He consulted a priest to whom he had been to confession soon after his arrival in Turin. This priest, a little misshapen old man, who was fiery and very learned, invited him to his house in Piazza Paisana, and began to help him enthusiastically, suggesting a number of books, some for his own perusal, and others to be sent to his wife. He was a learned Orientalist, and an enthusiastic Thomist, and had taken a great fancy to Franco, of whose genius and culture he had formed an opinion which was perhaps exaggeratedly favourable. At one time he was on the point of proposing to him the study of Hebrew, and indeed insisted upon his reading St. Thomas. He went so far as to sketch for Franco the outlines of a letter to his wife, with a list of the arguments he must expound. Franco had at once fallen in love with the enthusiastic little old man, who, moreover, had the pure expression of a saint. He began to study St. Thomas with great ardour, but did not persevere long. He felt he was embarking upon a sea without beginning and without end, across which he was unable to steer a straight course. The scholastic scheme of treatment, that sameness in the form of argument for and against, that icy

Latin, dense with profound thought, and colourless on the surface, had successfully routed all his good intentions at the end of three days. Of the arguments contained in the sketch for the letter he understood only a small part. He got the priest to explain them to him, understood somewhat better, and prepared to open a campaign with them, but found himself as much encumbered by them as was David by the armour of Saul. They weighed upon him, he could not handle them, he felt they were not his own and never would be. No, he could not present himself before his wife with Professor G.'s priestly hat and tunic, a theological lance in his hand, and entrenched behind a shield of metaphysics. He recognised that he was not born to philosophise in any way; he was destitute of the very power of strictly logical reasoning, for indeed his glowing heart, rich in tenderness and indignation, would too often interfere, speaking for or against, according to its own passions. One evening at Casa C. he was playing the andante of Beethoven's twenty-eighth sonata, when, with quivering nerves and flashing eyes, he said in a low tone: "Ah! This, this, this!" He was reflecting that no theologian, no doctor, could communicate the religious sentiment as Beethoven does. As he played on he put his whole soul into the music, and longed for Luisa's presence that he might play this divine andante to her, that he might unite himself to her, praying thus in an ineffable spasm of the spirit. But he did not reflect that Luisa who, moreover, was far less sensitive to music than he was, would probably have attributed another meaning to the andante, that of the painful conflict between our affections and our convictions.

He went to G., returned the works of St. Thomas and confessed his utter incapacity in such humble and feeling language, that after a few moments of frowning and uneasy silence, the old priest forgave him. "There, there, there!" said he, resignedly taking back the first volume of the Somma. "Commend yourself to our Lord, and let us hope He Himself will act." Thus ended Franco's theological studies.

All this pondering of his wife's opinions and his own, and above all the Professor's advice: "Commend yourself to our Lord," were not fruitless. He began to see that on

some points Luisa was not mistaken. When she had reproached him for not leading a life in conformity with his faith, he had been more offended by this than by anything else. Now a generous impulse carried him to the other extreme; he judged himself severely, exaggerated his faults of idleness, of anger, even of greed, and held himself responsible for Luisa's intellectual aberrations. He felt a desire to tell her this, to humble himself before her, to separate his own cause from the cause of God. When he obtained his position on the Opinione, and regulated his own expenses in such a manner as to be able to make an allowance to his family, his wife wrote that this allowance was entirely too large in proportion to his earnings, and that the thought of him, living in Turin on sixty lire a month, gave her own food a bitter taste. He answered—and this was not strictly true—that in the first place, he never went hungry, but that he would, indeed, be glad to fast, because he felt an intense desire to change his way of life, to expiate his past idleness, including the hours he had wasted on his flowers and music, to expiate all past softness, all past weaknesses, including the weakness for dainty dishes and fine wines. He added that he had asked God's forgiveness for this past life, and that he felt he must ask her forgiveness also. In fact the Paduan, with whom Franco had become very intimate, and to whom he read this passage in his letter as a sort of confirmation of previous confessions, exclaimed: "That bit sounds for all the world like the oration of Manasseh, king of Judæa!"

Luisa wrote most affectionately, but with less effusion. Franco's silence on the painful subject displeased her, and she felt it would be unwise on her part to allude to it in the face of a silence so obstinate.

His good intentions concerning labour and self-sacrifice moved her deeply; when she read that confession of great wickedness, followed by the prayer for pardon to God and to herself, she smiled and kissed the letter, feeling that this was an act of submission, and a humble acceptance of the censure which had at first only irritated him. Poor Franco! These were the impulses of his noble, generous nature! But

would they last? She answered at once, and if her emotion was apparent in her answer, so also was her smile, which displeased Franco. At the end he found these words: "When I read your many self-accusations I thought, with remorse, of the accusations I brought against you, one sad night, and I felt that you also had been thinking of them as you wrote, although neither in this letter nor in any other are they alluded to. I deeply regret those accusations, my own Franco, but how I wish we could speak together as true friends, concerning those other questions of which I think so much here in my solitude!"

Luisa's wish remained ungratified. In answering Franco did not even touch on this point; indeed his next letter was somewhat cool, so Luisa did not again revert to the subject. Only once, when speaking of Maria, did she write: "If you could only see how Maria recites her 'Our Father' every night and morning, and how well she behaves at Mass, on Sundays, you would be satisfied."

He replied: "As to what you tell me concerning Maria's religious exercises, I am satisfied, and I thank you!"

Both Luisa and Franco wrote almost every day, and sent their letters once a week. Ismaele went to the post at Lugano every Tuesday, taking the wife's letters and bringing back the husband's. In June Maria had the measles, and in August Uncle Piero lost the sight of his left eye, almost without warning, and for some time was greatly distressed. During these two periods the letters from Oria were more frequent, but in September the weekly correspondence was resumed. From the bundle of letters I take the last that passed between Franco and Luisa, on the eve of those events which overwhelmed them at the end of September.

Luisa to Franco.

"September 14, 1856.

"I do not think Pasotti will ever come to our house again. I am sorry on poor Barborin's account, for I fear she will not be able to come either, but I do not regret

what I did.

"He has known perfectly well for some time that you are in Turin. He even talked of it with the Receiver, so Maria Pon told me. She was in the Romit chapel, and heard them talking on their way down from Albogasio Superiore. When he came here he would always pretend not to know, and would enquire for you with his usual assumption of interest and friendship. To-day he found me alone in the little garden and asked how much longer you would be absent and whether you were in Milan at present. I answered frankly that his question surprised me. He turned pale. 'Why?' said he. 'Because you have been going about saying that Franco is in an entirely different place.' He became confused and protested angrily. 'You may protest as much as you like!' I said. 'It is quite useless. You know that. At all events Franco is very well off where he is. You may say as much to whomever you please.' 'You wish to insult me!' he exclaimed. I did not stop to think long, but retorted: 'That is quite possible!' Then he rushed away without saluting me, and looking as black as the ace of spades—that simile suits my present mood! I am sure he will go to Cressogno this evening.

"Cüstant has sent us a present of a magnificent tench which he caught this morning, much to the chagrin of Bianconi, who fishes all day long, and never catches anything. He is furious with the impudent tench because they snap their fingers—so to speak—at His Imperial and Royal Majesty of Austria and his Carlascia. 'Poor fellow!' says Signora Peppina. 'He is eating his heart out!'

"However, he will get over it, he will get over it.

"September 15.

"I related the Pasotti episode to Uncle Piero and he was very much annoyed. 'Much good this will do you!' he said. Poor Uncle! One might almost suspect him of being a utilitarian, whereas he is really a philosopher. After all the strongest argument he ever opposes to all my burning indignation against the many ugly things in this

world is: 'Worrying won't mend it!'

"To-day the parish Mass was said at Albogasio Superiore. In coming out of church with Maria I caught a despairing glance from poor Barborin, who evidently had orders to avoid me. However, Ester walked down with us and coming into the house told me privately something I have been expecting to hear. She began by begging me not to laugh, while all the time she was laughing herself. I succeeded in gathering that the Professor, by dint of great perseverance, has overcome her resistance, although Ester still declares she does not know her own mind.

"'It is his nose!' she said this morning, laughing and hiding her gay little face. Indeed that scandalous nose seems to me to be prospering; it is redder than ever, and grows ever larger!

"September 18.

"I have not written for three days, fearing I should not be mistress of my pen, nor be able to confine my thoughts within words which must not exceed certain bounds. Now I feel equal to the task, and so I will set about it. But I must warn you, Franco, that I am not sure of being able to control my feelings all the way through.

"Well, then, your grandmother's agent came to me on the evening of the fifteenth. As the half-yearly payment of your income is due on the sixteenth, I concluded he had come to bring the five hundred svanziche, and so I told him at once that I would go and prepare the receipt for him. Then the most gracious Signor Bellini informed me that my receipt would not be sufficient. 'How can that be?' I said. 'It was sufficient on the sixteenth of March.' 'I don't know,' he replied. 'I have my orders.' 'But Franco is not here.' 'I know that.' 'Then what did you come here for?' 'I came to tell you that if Don Franco wishes to draw his money he must present himself at the Signora Marchesa's agency in Brescia.' 'And what if he cannot go to Brescia?' Here Signor Bellini made a gesture that meant, 'That is your affair.' I replied that it was all right, had coffee brought for him, and told him I was anxious to purchase the

book-shelves in your old study at Cressogno from the Signora Marchesa. Bellini turned yellow, and sneaked away like our old dog Pato at Casa Rigey when he had been stealing.

"Most certainly the worthy Pasotti has had a finger in this dirty business.

"The Prefect of Caravina was here yesterday and told us that Pasotti went to Cressogno on the evening of the fourteenth. He was very late, and reached your grandmother's house while they were saying the rosary, so he had to mumble the prayers with the others, which greatly amused the prefect, for it is his opinion that Pasotti goes to Mass simply because he is an Imperial and Royal pensioner, but that his only prayer is 'the rats' Pater,' whatever that may be. He added that after the others had gone out Pasotti remained in confabulation with your grandmother, and that Bellini was also present. Bellini had arrived that very day from Brescia. He probably brought the money for you.

"We have enough left to live upon until the money comes from you in October. That is all I wish to say.

"Maria sends you the cyclamen you will find enclosed. I must also tell you the following incident. You can fancy she notices the state of mind I am in. She often hears me discussing the subject with Uncle Piero. The uncle is always the uncle! In his whole life he has set down as rascals only such contractors as offered him bribes, and another uncle his exact opposite, who, after making use of his nephew for many years, died without leaving him so much as a dried fig. He would never recognise any other rascals, nor will he do so even now. Well, when I am talking with him, Maria always wants to listen. I send her away, but I sometimes fail to notice that she has returned very softly. This morning she began saying her prayers. Oh, Franco! your daughter is indeed very religious in your own way! The last prayer she repeats is a requiem for poor Grandmamma Teresa. 'Mamma,' said she when she had finished, 'I want to recite a requiem for the grandmother in Cressogno also.' Never

mind my answer. My words were bitter; perhaps I did wrong; I am even ready to confess I did wrong. Maria looked at me, and said: 'Is the grandmother at Cressogno really wicked?' 'Yes.' 'But why does Uncle Piero say she is not really wicked?' 'Because Uncle Piero is so very good.' 'Then you are not so very good?' My dear little innocent! I devoured her with kisses, I could not help it! As soon as she was free to speak she began again: 'You will not go to Paradise, you know, if you are not so very good.' Paradise is her one idea. Poor Franco, not to have her with you, you who would be so satisfied with her! You are indeed making a great sacrifice! If it will give you any pleasure I will tell you that the only possibility for me to love God is through this child, for in her God becomes visible and intelligible to me.

"Good-bye, Franco. I embrace you.

"Luisa.

"P. S. I must tell you that I have dismissed Veronica for the first of October. This I did in the first place for reasons of economy, and secondly because I have discovered that she is flirting with a customs-guard. Oh! I almost forgot something else! Half an hour ago Ester came to tell me she has decided to say 'yes,' but she wishes to wait a day longer before seeing the Professor. She has evidently succeeded in swallowing the nose, but has not yet digested it."

Franco to Luisa.

"Turin, September 14, 1855.

"The 'knave of clubs' is threatened with dismissal by his employer on account of the truly miserable state of his clothes. The 'knave' is indeed given to extravagance, and has not yet learned—duris in rebus—to handle a clothes brush, but however that may be, the other 'wise men' have decided not to lunch for a week in order that he may re-clothe himself. Now observe the baseness of the human heart! The 'knave,' overflowing with expressions of gratitude, calmly prepared to go to his own lunch! This, however, we would not stand. So to-day, instead of repairing to Stomach-ache

Tavern, we spent half an hour on the banks of the Po, near the Valentino, watching the water flow past. The wise man from Udine had brought his flute with him, because music should not be wanting at an ideal lunch, at which the most Irimalchionian ideas of food and beverages are handed round. He also had with him a letter from his family, containing magnificent proposals for his return to the fold. They even offer him a riding-horse. He says he has written them that they will soon see him come dashing up on one of King Victor Emmanuel's horses. Then the Paduan, who is a wag, said to him with a great assumption of seriousness, "Ah, my hero! So you are beginning to blow your own trumpet as well as play the flute!" The flutist was wild, but presently he calmed down, and played us a nice little tune. The strange part of it all is that none of us felt hungry. However, when the meeting was adjourned, we decided that the 'knave's' clothing should be simplified, and that he could get along without the justicoat, known in modern parlance as the waistcoat.

"Ah! We would all gladly do without dinner as well as lunch if we could only cross the Ticino with the King in April, 1856! We talked of this on our way back to the city after the ideal lunch. The Paduan observed that the water is too cold in April and that we had better wait until the end of June. We began to talk about how great Italy will be without the Germans. I assure you we were all enthusiastic, in spite of the emptiness of our stomachs. All except the Paduan of course, but of him I must tell you that if he is reduced almost to the verge of starvation, it is because he will not tolerate the Austrians, and that although he is knocking at the door of forty, he will fight better than some of these young fellows who are now devouring an Austrian for lunch, and two for dinner! He says we shall once more become a cat and dog kingdom. 'Mark this, for example,' he added. 'When the Germans shall have departed, each of us will return to his own home, and woe to you if you come and worry me in Padua!' I can almost fancy I am listening to Uncle Piero, when, at Oria, we used to discuss the greatness and the splendid future of Italy. 'Yes, yes, yes!' he would say, 'Yes, yes, yes! The lake will turn into milk and honey, and the Galbiga

will become a Parmesan cheese!'

"We shall see! We shall see!

"September 21.

"Your letter has awakened in me a tumult of feelings which cannot be described in writing.

"Of course my grandmother's action and the indirect malevolence of Pasotti grieve me deeply, but your too violent indignation is far more painful to me. When some one holding my power-of-attorney presents himself at Brescia, payment cannot be refused. It is true that you, a woman, are not expected to know these things. I can also forgive your anger, for in the beginning I myself was not unmoved. Then I asked myself: Why are you indignant? Why are you surprised? Were you not already acquainted with that evil spirit, and have you not already suffered greater insult from it?

"I am most deeply grieved that you did not succeed in hiding your feelings from Maria; I am deeply moved to learn that you repented of this; and deeply thankful that you love the Lord in the child, and that you have confessed as much to me. Indeed I feel I should not be so overjoyed at this, for the heavens and the earth are always inviting us to love God; He is visible in every ray of light, and His voice may be heard in every truth. But, at least, you are beginning to hear this voice! I have never touched upon this subject in my letters because I feel I am not capable of speaking worthily and efficaciously of it to you. And now I shall let God Himself speak to you through the child, and once more resume my silence. But remember, I am waiting in suspense; I am hoping and praying.

"How can I express to you what I feel for Maria? Who could describe this emotion, this immense tenderness, this consuming desire to clasp her for a moment, only for one moment, to my heart? Do you believe I shall be able to wait until November? No, no, no! I will write, I will copy, I will do the work of others, but I must come to

Lugano sooner! Cover her with kisses for me, and meanwhile, tell her that Papa carries his Maria in his heart always, and that he sends her his blessing. Ask her what she wishes me to bring her and let me know, without thinking too much about my poverty.

"With my whole soul I embrace you, my Luisa.

"Franco."

Luisa to Franco.

"September 24, 1855.

"At last! Ever since you left I have been longing for you to touch upon this question. How did I explain myself that night, in my painful emotion? How did you understand me, in your equally painful emotion? For months and months I have felt the necessity of speaking of this to you, and I have never done so because I lacked courage.

"You will remember you accused me of pride that night. I implore you to believe that I am not proud. I cannot even understand such an accusation.

"Your letter gives me the idea that you think I have returned to a belief in God. But did I ever tell you that I do not believe in God? I cannot have told you so, for the whole history of my opinions is engraved upon my mind, and the fright, the distressing thought that I might perhaps no longer be able to believe in God, came to me after you left. I know the day, the very hour. At S. Mamette I had heard them talking of a great dinner your grandmother had given at Brescia, while I could not even procure the food and wine necessary for the diet the doctor—fearing the loss of the right eye—had prescribed for our beloved Uncle. I struggled against these awful shadows, Franco, and I conquered. It is true the victory is due, in a great measure, to Maria. I mean that if all these black clouds hide the existence of Supreme Justice from me, a ray of light from it reaches me through Maria; and this ray of light makes me believe, makes me hope in the Orb. For it would be too horrible if the universe

were not governed by justice!

"That night then, I can only have told you that I understood religion in a different way from you; that prayers and acts of Christian faith did not seem to me essential to the religious idea, but rather love and actions for those who suffer, rather indignation and actions against those who cause suffering!

"And you wish to resume your silence? No, you must not. You feel weak, you say. Do you feel you yourself are weak, or your Credo? Let us reason, let us discuss. Confess that one reason why you who believe, love your beliefs, is because they are comfortably restful to the intellect. You stretch yourselves at your ease in them as in a hammock, suspended in the air by innumerable threads spun by men and fastened by men to many hooks. You are comfortable, and if any one examines or lays his hand upon one only of these threads, you are troubled, and afraid it will snap, because very probably its neighbour will snap also, and after that one, another; and so, to your great fright and pain, your fragile bed will come tumbling down from the sky to the earth. I know this fright and this pain, I know that the satisfaction of walking on solid ground must be purchased at this cost, and therefore I am not deterred by a pity that would be false from discussing with you. But I may be mistaken, and perhaps it may be you who will lift me up, up to your resting place of fragile threads and air. Maria is not equal to this task. If Maria makes me believe in God, it does not follow that she can make me believe in the Church as well. And you yourself believe in the Church above all things. Therefore try to convince me, and I also will listen in suspense, and though I do not pray, at least I can hope, because now my longing for a perfect union with you is stronger than ever before. Now, together with my old affection, I feel a new admiration for you, a new gratitude towards you.

"Will you take offence at this outpouring of mine? Remember that you must have found a letter from me in your handbag, eight months ago, and that I have waited

eight months for an answer!

"The Professor and Ester now meet at our house as fiancés. They, at least, are happy. She goes to church and he does not, and neither of them thinks any more about it than they do about the difference in the colour of their hair. And I believe nine hundred and ninety-nine couples in a thousand do the same."

"I embrace you. Write me a long, long letter.

"Luisa."

This letter did not leave Lugano until September 26th, and Franco received it on the 27th. On the 29th, at eight o'clock in the morning, he received the following telegram, also from Lugano:

"Child dangerously ill. Come at once.

"Uncle."

Footnotes

[N] Tota is Piedmontese for young girl, often used in the sense of grisette. [Translator's note.]

[O] It must be remembered that Padua and its university were at that time dominated by the Austrians, and that patriotism drove this "already famous professor" to give up his position and migrate to free Piedmont. [Translator's note.]

CHAPTER X SIGNORA LUISA, COME HOME!

In the early afternoon of the twenty-seventh of September Luisa was returning from Porlezza with some documents to copy for the notary. In those days the rocks between S. Michele and Porlezza were perfectly bare, and destitute of the narrow pathway which now runs across them. Luisa had had herself ferried that short distance, and had then walked along the lane that, like all those of my little world, both ancient and modern, would admit of no other method of travel; that pretty

deceitful lane, that seeks in every way to avoid leading whither the traveller wishes to go. At Cressogno it passes above Villa Maironi, which, however, is not visible from the path.

"What if I should meet her?" Luisa thought, her blood boiling. But she met no one. On the slope between Cressogno and Campo, the sun beat fiercely. When she reached the cool, high valley known as Campo, she sat down in the shade of the colossal chestnut-tree that is still alive, the last of three or four venerable patriarchs, and looked towards the houses of her native Castello, clustered in a circle round a lofty peak among those shady crags. She thought of her dead mother, and was glad she, at least, was at rest. Presently she heard some one exclaim: "Oh, blessed Madonna!" It was Signora Peppina, who was also on her way from Cressogno, and who was in despair because neither at S. Mamette, Loggio, nor Cressogno had she been able to find any eggs. "Carlo will beat me this time! He'll kill me outright, my dear!" She would have liked to go on to Puria, but she was half dead with fatigue. What roads! How many stones! "When I think of my Milan, my dear!" She sat down on the grass beside Luisa, saying many affectionate things to her, and wanted her to guess with whom she had been speaking about her, only a few minutes before. "With the Signora Marchesa! Certainly! Yes indeed! Oh, my dear...." It looked as if Signora Peppina had great things to tell, but did not dare do so, and as their presence in her throat was causing her discomfort, she was bound to make Luisa draw them out. "What a business!" she would exclaim from time to time. "What a business! What language! Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" But Luisa held her peace. At last the other yielded to the terrible tickling in her throat, and poured forth her story. She had gone to the Marchesa's cook to borrow some eggs, and the Signora Marchesa, hearing her voice, had insisted upon seeing her, and had kept her there chattering. In her heart she had felt what she believed to be a heavenly inspiration, which prompted her to speak of that unhappy family. Perhaps this was the right moment! She must speak about Maria, "that precious darling, that sweet little mouse, that dear little creature!"

But alas! The inspiration had come from the devil and not from Heaven! She had begun to speak, had been going to say how lovely Maria was, how sweet, and how wonderfully precocious, when that ugly old woman interrupted her, looking as black as a thunder-cloud. "Say no more about her, let her alone, Signora Bianconi. I am aware she is very badly behaved, and indeed one cannot expect her to be otherwise!" Then Peppina had tried sounding another note, and had touched upon Uncle Piero's misfortune in having lost his eye. "The Lord chastises the dishonest, Signora Bianconi." Here Peppina glanced at Luisa and regretted her chattering. She began caressing her, reproaching herself for having spoken, and entreated her to be calm. Luisa assured her that she was perfectly calm, that nothing coming from that source could surprise her. But Peppina insisted upon giving her a kiss, and then went her way, murmuring a string of "Oh, dear me's!" and haunted by a vague suspicion that she had made a mess of it!

Luisa rose and turned to look towards Cressogno, clenching her fists. "If I only had a horse-whip!" she thought "If I could only lash her!" The idea of a meeting, the old idea that had made her quiver with passion four years ago, on the night of her mother's death, had flashed across her mind shortly before, as she passed Cressogno, and had once more taken violent possession of her, and now made her start suddenly downwards. She checked her steps at once, however, and returning slowly, went towards S. Mamette, stopping every now and then to think, her brow clouded, her lips tightly compressed, seeking to untangle a knot in the thread of a scheme she was weaving in her secret heart.

At Casarico she sought out the Professor to offer him an opportunity of meeting Ester at her house the next day at two o'clock. As she was leaving she asked him if the Maironi documents were still in his possession. The Professor, greatly astonished at this question, replied that they were, expecting an explanation, but Luisa went away without further words. She was anxious to get home, for she could not rely either upon Cia or Uncle Piero to look after Maria, and she had little

confidence in the girl to whom she had given notice. She found Maria alone on the church-place, and scolded Veronica. Then she went to her room and began a letter to Franco.

She had been writing about five minutes when she heard a gentle tap on the window of the adjoining room. That window looked out upon a short flight of steps, leading from the square by the church to some stables, and thence to a short cut to Albogasio Superiore. Luisa went into the little room, and saw behind the iron grating the red and distracted countenance of Barborin Pasotti, who motioned to her to be quiet, and asked if she had visitors. Upon being reassured, Barborin glanced swiftly up and down, and hastily descending the steps entered the house in great trepidation.

Poor woman, she was on forbidden ground, and before her loomed the spectre of the wrathful Pasotti. Pasotti was in Lugano. "Oh, Lord, yes! In Lugano." Having imparted this information to Luisa the unhappy woman began to roll her eyes and squirm. Pasotti had gone to Lugano on account of the great dinner that was to take place on the morrow—to purchase provisions. How? Had Luisa not heard about the dinner? Did she not know who was coming? Why! The Signora Marchesa! The Signora Marchesa Maironi! Luisa started.

Barborin, misunderstanding the expression of her eyes, thought she read a reproach there, and began to cry, her face buried in her hands, shaking those two poor black curls, and saying through her fingers that she was so distressed about it, so distressed! She would rather have lived on bread and water for a year than invite the Marchesa to dinner. This dinner was indeed a cross to her, for it took a deal of thought, and then there was the trouble of preparing everything, to say nothing of Pasotti's awful scoldings, but the worst part of it all was the idea of displeasing Luisa. If, at least, it had been a cross she could lay at the feet of our Lord, but she could not do that, for it contained too much wrath. She had come on purpose to tell her Luisa how distressed she was on account of this dinner.

"Forgive me, Luisa!" she said in her hoarse voice, that seemed to come out of an ancient and tightly closed spinet. "I really could not prevent it, indeed I could not, indeed I could not!"

They were seated side by side on the sofa. Barborin drew a great handkerchief from her pocket and pressed it to her face with one hand, while with the other she sought Luisa's hand, without turning her head. But Luisa rose, and going to the writing-desk, scrawled upon a piece of paper: "When is the Marchesa coming? What road will she take?" Barborin answered that the dinner was to be at half-past three; that at about three the Marchesa would leave her gondola at the landing-stage of the Calcinera, where Pasotti was to meet her with four men and the famous litter that had belonged to an archbishop of Milan a century ago.

Luisa listened to every detail in silence and with the greatest attention. Before leaving, Signora Pasotti said she longed to kiss that love of a Maria, but was afraid the child might not know how to keep the secret. At this point the good creature plunged her left arm into her pocket up to the elbow, and drew out a small tin boat, which she begged Luisa to give to her little daughter in the name of another battered old craft, whose identity must not be made known. Then she rushed down stairs and disappeared.

Luisa returned to her letter to Franco, but having thought a long time, pen in hand, she finally put the letter away again without having added a word, and drawing the notary's documents towards her, began to copy. Her resolution was formed. Fate itself was offering her this meeting with the old wretch. She had neither a doubt nor a scruple. The passion which had sprung up within her so long ago, which she had caressed and fostered, had now gathered that strength which, when it reaches its full, transforms the thought into the deed at one blow, and in such a manner that all responsibility seems removed from the agent, while in reality, it is simply carried back to the first inward movement of yielding to temptation.

Yes, on the morrow, either at the landing-stage, on the Calcinera path, or on the church-place of the Annunciata, she would stand scornfully before the Marchesa, openly declaring war, and advising her to have a care, for now all legitimate weapons of defence were to be used against her. Yes, she would tell her so, and then she would act, act alone and unaided, since Franco would take no steps. If Franco had made promises she had not. A little later she wrote a note to the lawyer V. begging him to come to her as soon as possible. She wished to learn from him how to use the documents in Gilardoni's possession. Then she resumed her copying for the notary at Porlezza.

The next day Professor Beniamino arrived at Oria an hour earlier than the time fixed by Luisa. After Ester's "yes," the man had become transfigured. He seemed much younger than before. The sallowness of his skin, now irradiated by a rosy inner light, had entirely disappeared, and was only perceptible on his bald head, where Luisa daily expected to see the hair begin to grow. He neither walked nor breathed as before. But to-day he arrived with a clouded brow.

It was reported at S. Mamette that the physician of Pellio had been arrested and taken to Como, and that letters and memoranda had been found in his possession which incriminated others, among whom was Don Franco Maironi.

"I do not fear for Franco," said Luisa. "As to the rest, my good Professor, we will set the physician of Pellio, who is a big fellow and weighs pounds and pounds, down in the score the Emperor of Austria will have to pay. And now, Professor, I want you to promise me something."

"What do you wish me to promise?"

"I need those famous documents."

"They are at your service."

"Pray note that it is I and not Franco who ask for them."

"Yes, yes. Whatever you do is well done. I will bring you the documents

to-morrow."

"That is right."

Luisa knitted as she talked, her needles clicking continually, but her seeming calm and good spirits did not entirely conceal her inward excitement, which had begun on the previous day, had become more intense during a sleepless night, and was now steadily increasing as the moment for setting out drew nearer. Even in the playful tone of her voice an unusual chord seemed to be vibrating. About her hair, which was always most carefully dressed, there was a something of disorder, like the touch of a light breath brushing gently across her brow.

Ester arrived at a quarter to two, and explained that she had come a little earlier because she had heard it thunder. Thunder? Luisa hastened to the terrace to examine the sky. It certainly did not look very threatening. Above the point of Cressogno and over Galbiga the sky was perfectly serene as far as the hills of the Lake of Como. Towards Carona it was indeed rather dark, but not so very dark, after all. What if the Marchesa should not come on account of the weather? She seized the little telescope that was kept in the loggia. There was nothing to be seen. Of course; it was still too early. In order to reach the Calcinera at three, the Marchesa, with that heavy gondola of hers, must start at about half-past two. Luisa went back to the hall, where she found Ester, the Professor, and Maria. She would have preferred to have Maria remain in the loggia with Uncle Piero, but Signorina Missipipì always clung fast to her mother when there were visitors, becoming all eyes and ears. Luisa decided that when she was ready to start she would send Maria away, meanwhile she would keep her with her. As to the happy couple, they were seated apart, and were conversing almost in whispers.

Luisa, who now found it difficult to keep quiet, once more returned to the terrace, and looked through the telescope. Her heart gave a bound! The gondola was just coming in sight at the Tentiòn.

It was a quarter-past two o'clock.

Some one coming from Albogasio had stopped in the church-place to speak to some one coming down the steps at the side of Casa Ribera. They were saying: "Signor Pasotti has just gone down with the litter. There was a troop of children following."

Now the sky was overcast, even above the point of Cressogno and the Galbiga. Only the hills of the Lake of Como were still in the sunshine. The terrible wind which accompanies a thunderstorm, and which in Valsolda is called the Caronasco, was threatening seriously now. Above Corona the colour of the clouds was gradually becoming one with the colour of the hills. The great cloud over Zocca d'i Ment had become dark blue, and the Boglia was also beginning to knit its brows. The lake was calm and leaden.

Luisa had decided to start when the gondola should have arrived opposite S. Mamette. She now returned to the hall.

Maria had obeyed her mother's orders, and had not moved from the chair where Luisa had left her, but noticing that the Professor was speaking with animation and at great length to Ester, she had asked:

"Are you telling her a story?"

At this point Luisa entered.

"Yes, dear," said Ester, laughing. "He is telling me a story."

"Oh, tell it to me also! To me also!"

A muffled peal of thunder resounded. "Go, Maria dear," said Ester. "Go to your room and pray the Lord not to send a terrible thunderstorm or hail."

"Oh, yes, yes! I will pray to the Lord!"

The little one went out, and entered the alcove-room, serious and dignified, as if in that moment the safety of the whole Valsolda depended upon her prayer. Prayer to her was always a solemn matter; it was a point of contact with mystery which

always made her assume a grave and attentive air, as did also certain tales of enchantment and magic. She mounted a chair and said the few prayers she knew, and then assumed the attitude she had seen the most pious women of town assume in church, and began moving her lips as they did, repeating a wordless prayer. Seeing her thus one acquainted with the terrible secret of the next hour would have felt that the guardian angel of little children was standing beside her at that moment, and admonishing her to pray for something besides the vineyards and olive-groves of Valsolda, for something nearer to her, something the angel did not name, and she neither knew nor could put into words. The onlooker would have felt also that in these, her inarticulate whisperings, there was an element of occult tenderness, and tragedy, the docile surrender of a sweet soul to the admonitions of its guardian angel, to the mysterious will of God.

At half-past two the great lowering clouds above Carona belched forth another peal of thunder, to which the other great clouds above Boglia and the Zocca d'ï Ment immediately responded. Luisa ran out to the terrace. The gondola was opposite S. Mamette, and was making straight for the Calcinera. She could see quite plainly that the boatmen were pulling hard. As Luisa laid aside the telescope the first gust of wind swept through the loggia, banging doors and windows. Terrified by a feeling that she would be too late, she hastily closed both doors and windows, passed swiftly through the hall, seized an umbrella and went out, without telling any one she was going, and without closing the house-door behind her. She started towards Albogasio Inferiore. Just beyond the cemetery, on the spot they call Mainè, she met Ismaele.

"Where are you going in such weather, Signora Luisa?"

She answered that she was going to Albogasio, and passed on. When she had gone about a hundred paces she remembered that she had not let Veronica know she was going out, that she had not told her to close the windows in the bedrooms, and look

after Maria. She might send word by Ismaele. But he had already disappeared round the corner of the cemetery. In her heart she felt an impulse to go back, but there was not time. The rumbling of the thunder was continuous; great, infrequent drops were striking here and there on the maize; gusts of wind swept at intervals through the mulberry-trees, forerunners of the whirlwind of the Caronasco. Luisa opened her umbrella and hastened forward.

A furious downpour overtook her in the dark lanes of Albogasio. But she never thought of taking refuge in a doorway, and pushed on undaunted. She met a troop of children who were running away from the rain, after waiting in vain on the church-place of the Annunciata for the passing of the Marchesa in the litter. While she was crossing the short space between the town-hall of Albogasio and the church, the wind turned her umbrella inside out. She began to run, and reached the strip of ground behind the church that overlooks the path leading down to the Calcinera. There, protected by the church from the driving rain, she righted her umbrella as best she could, and looked over the parapet.

The Annunciata rests upon the summit of a cliff, sparsely covered with brambles and wild fig-trees, which rises from the foot of the Boglia and juts out over the lake, shutting in the narrow path to Calcinera on the west. The strip of ground where Luisa stood runs along that part of the cliff's brow. From here she could have followed the course of the boat from the waters of Cressogno as far as the landing-stage, but now that the rain was pouring down in sheets, a white mist hid all things from view. However, unless the Marchesa returned to Cressogno, she must certainly pass that way, no matter where she landed, for there, at the foot of the cliff, where it juts out with the coast, the narrow stairway starts upwards, leading from the Calcinera to the church-place, and this is the only way of reaching Albogasio Superiore either from the landing-stage below, or from S. Mamette, Casarico, or Cadate.

Presently the violence of the downpour lessened, the dark phantoms of the mountains began to stand out against the white background. Luisa gazed down at the lake. There was no gondola on the lake, and no litter on the path; nothing was to be seen. This troubled her. Was it possible that the gondola had returned to Cressogno? The mist cleared rapidly, and Cadate became discernible, while at the door of the boathouse of the "Palazz" the prow of the gondola appeared, shimmering white in the thin, grey mist. Ah, the Marchesa had taken refuge at the "Palazz," and Pasotti with his bearers had done the same. The thunderstorm was now practically over and the litter would soon appear.

But instead, ten long minutes elapsed. Luisa kept her eyes fixed on the point where the path from Cadate turns into the Calcinera. No movement of thought was going on within her. Her whole soul was watching and waiting, that was all. People passed her on the left going up to Albogasio or coming down, but each time she inclined her umbrella so that she was hidden from view, so that they might not recognise her, thus avoiding greetings and conversations.

At last a group of people appeared at the bend of the path. Luisa could distinguish the litter, and behind the litter Pasotti and Don Giuseppe, and the Marchesa's boatmen bringing up the rear. Still she did not move, but followed the litter with her eyes as it slowly advanced. Presently she closed her umbrella, for the rain had almost ceased. Five or six children from Albogasio reappeared. She ordered them off sharply. They hesitated to obey, but a sudden downpour of rain, unaccompanied by wind or thunder, put them to flight. The litter had now reached the foot of the steps. Luisa moved forward.

Her eyes glittered coldly, and she held herself very erect. Absorbed in one thought, she heeded not at all the pelting rain, which beat upon her head and shoulders, which surrounded her with a misty veil and loud noise. Perhaps she was glad of this outburst of passion in the elements, which was in keeping with the passion within

her. She went slowly down, clasping the handle of her closed umbrella very tightly, as if it had been the handle of a weapon. There is a somewhat sharp bend in the stairway, and the bottom is not visible until this bend is reached. Upon arriving there she saw the litter had stopped. The two boatmen were taking the places of two of the bearers.

Luisa went down as far as the spot where a great walnut-tree spreads its branches above the stairs. Here she stopped just as the Marchesa's bearers began coming upwards. Everything was as Luisa wished. Pasotti and Don Giuseppe, bringing up the rear with open umbrellas, could not see her. The bearers, on reaching the spot where she stood, would be obliged to stop to let her pass.

As they drew nearer she recognised the two who carried the front of the litter; one was Ismaele's brother, the other a cousin of Veronica's. When they were within a yard or two of her she ordered them, by an imperious gesture, to stop. They obeyed at once, and set the litter down, the two other bearers doing the same without knowing why. Pasotti raised his umbrella, and seeing Luisa, made a movement of astonishment, frowning blackly. Seizing Don Giuseppe, he drew him aside that she might pass, never dreaming that the meeting was intentional.

But Luisa did not move. "You did not think of meeting me, did you, Signor Pasotti?" she said in a loud voice. The Marchesa stuck her head out, caught sight of her, and withdrew it again, saying, with new strength in her usually lifeless voice:

"Go on!"

At that moment loud cries rang out from the top of the church-place above them. "Sciora Luisa! Sciora Luisa!" Luisa did not hear. Pasotti had called angrily to the bearers: "Go on!" and they had resumed the poles.

"Go on if you like," said she, resolved to walk along beside the litter. "I have only a few words to say."

If Pasotti and the old Marchesa had anticipated tears and supplications this fierce

glance and ringing voice must now have led them to expect something quite different.

"Words at present?" said Pasotti, coming forward almost threateningly.

"Sciora Luisa! Sciora Luisa!" a voice cried close at hand in a tone of anguish, while with the cries was mingled the noise of hastening steps. But Luisa did not appear to hear anything. "Yes, at present!" she said, addressing Pasotti with indescribable haughtiness. "I am generous enough to wish to warn this lady that——"

"Sciora Luisa!"

This time she was forced to pause and look round. Three or four women were upon her, distraught, dishevelled, sobbing: "Come home at once! Come home at once!" These faces, these tears, these voices, detached her from her passion, from her purpose, at one blow.

She rushed in among the women, exclaiming: "What is the matter?" and they could only repeat, their eyes starting from their heads: "Come home, come home at once!"

"But what has happened, you stupid things?"

"The child, the child!"

"Maria? Maria? What is it, what is it?" she shrieked like a mad woman. Amidst their sobbing she caught the word lake, and uttering a great cry, she dashed them out of her path like a wild beast, and rushed up the stairs. The women could not keep up with her, but on the church-place there were others waiting in spite of the rain, and they were also crying and sobbing.

Luisa felt herself growing faint, and fell to the ground on reaching the last step.

The women ran to her, many hands seized her and lifted her up. She shrieked: "Good God! Is she dead?" Some one answered: "No, no!" "The doctor?" she gasped. "The doctor?" Many voices answered that he was already there.

Once more she appeared to regain all her energy, and sprang eagerly forward. Eight

or ten people hastened after her, but only two could keep up with her. She flew! At the cemetery she met Ismaele and another man, and cried out as soon as she caught sight of them:

"Is she still alive? Is she alive?" Ismaele's companion turned and ran back to tell them that the mother was coming, but Ismaele was weeping, and could only answer: "Good God! Sciora Luisa!" as he tried to detain her. Luisa pushed him wildly aside and rushed on, followed by the boatman who had now quite lost his head and was calling out to her as she ran: "Perhaps it is nothing! Perhaps it is nothing, after all!" But the pelting, ceaseless, even downpour, seemed to be contradicting his words with its wail.

Gasping for breath, she reached the square by the church of Oria, and had the strength to call out: "Maria! My Maria!" The window of the alcove-room was open. She heard Cia crying and Ester chiding her. Several people, among them Professor Gilardoni, came out to meet her. The Professor, as pale as a ghost, was weeping silently with clasped hands. The others whispered: "Courage, there is still hope!" In her exhaustion she came near falling. The Professor encircled her waist with one arm and drew her up the stairs, which were crowded with people, as was also the corridor of the first floor.

As Luisa passed, the Professor almost carrying her, voices laden with words of comfort murmured: "Courage! Courage! Who can tell? Who can tell?" At the door of the alcove-room she freed herself from the Professor's arm, and went in alone.

They had been obliged to light a lamp, because it was already dark in the alcove, owing to the rain. Poor, sweet little Maria lay naked upon the bed, her eyes half open, and her lips slightly parted. Her face was still tinged with pink, but her lips were discoloured and her body was deathly pale. The doctor, with Ester's help, was trying to induce artificial breathing, alternately raising the tiny arms above the head and stretching them along the sides, and compressing the abdomen.

"Doctor! Doctor!" Luisa sobbed.

"We're doing all we can," the doctor answered gravely. She flung herself face downwards upon her baby's little icy feet, and covered them with wild kisses. Ester began to tremble. "No, no!" the doctor exclaimed. "Courage! Courage!" "Help!" shrieked Luisa. The doctor checked her by a gesture, and motioned to Ester to pause in her work. He bent over Maria's little face, placed his mouth upon hers and having breathed deeply several times, raised his head again. "But she is still rosy, she is still rosy!" Luisa gasped softly. The doctor sighed gently, struck a match and held it close to Maria's lips.

Three or four women who were praying on their knees, rose and approached the bed, holding their breath in suspense. The door leading into the hall was open, and other faces appeared there, all silent and intent. Luisa, kneeling beside the bed, kept her eyes fixed on the flame. A voice murmured:

"It quivers!"

Ester, standing very erect behind Luisa, shook her head. The doctor put out the match. "Hot flannels," he ordered. Luisa rushed from the room, and the doctor once more resumed the movements of the arms. When Luisa returned with the hot flannels they began to rub the child's chest and bowels, he on one side, she on the other. Presently, noting Luisa's pallor, and the distortion of her features, he motioned to a girl to take her place. "You must give up," said he, for Luisa had made a protesting gesture. "Even I am tired. You cannot go on." Luisa shook her head without speaking and continued her work with convulsive energy. The doctor silently shrugged his shoulders and raised his eyebrows, and gave his place to the girl, ordering Ester to bring more flannel with which to cover the child's legs. Ester went out and herself heated the flannel, for Veronica, on hearing what had happened, had disappeared and was nowhere to be found. In the corridor and on the stairs people were discussing the how and where of the event, and as Ester passed all

inquired: "What news? What news?" Ester made a despairing gesture and went on without answering. Then the talk once more flowed on in an undertone.

No one knew how long the child had been in the water. While the thunderstorm had been raging a certain Toni Gall had happened to be in the stables behind Casa Ribera. Reflecting that if the engineer's boat was not tied fast enough it would be dashed to pieces against the walls of the boathouse, he bounded down the steps, and seeing the door open, went in. The boat was being frightfully knocked about, and was drenched with the splashing of the waves that broke against the walls. It was tossing and writhing among its chains, and had set itself crosswise, with the stern knocking against the wall. Opposite the door that opens from the road, there runs a gallery from which two flights of steps lead down to the water, the first on the side of the prow, the second on the side of the stern. Toni Gall went down the second flight to tighten the stern chain. There, between the boat and the lowest step, where the water is from sixty to seventy centimetres deep, he saw Maria's little body. She was floating face downwards, with her back above the water. As he drew her out he saw a little tin boat lying on the bottom. He carried the child to the house, crying out with his terrible voice, bringing the whole town to the spot, and fortunately the doctor also, who happened to be in Oria, and then he helped Ester undress the poor little creature, who gave no sign of life.

With whom had she been before going down to the lake? Not with Veronica, for before Luisa went out Veronica had been seen going into the storeroom where the flowerpots were kept, with her customs-guard. Nor had she been with Ester and the Professor. Ester had sent her to pray in the alcove-room, and had not seen her again. Cia had been sewing and Uncle Piero had been writing when they heard Toni Gall's shouts. Maria must have gone straight from the alcove-room to the boathouse to sail her boat, and as ill-luck would have it, she had found both the house door and the door of the boathouse open. It was Toni Gall's opinion that she had been in the water several minutes, for she was floating at some distance from the spot where the little

tin boat lay. Standing in the hall where Cia, the engineer, the Professor, and others from the village were assembled, he was describing his frightful discovery for the hundredth time. All save Uncle Piero were sobbing. Seated on the sofa where Ester and the Professor had sat, he seemed turned to stone. He shed no tears and spoke never a word. Toni Gall's chattering was evidently annoying to him, but he held his peace. His noble countenance was rather solemn and grave than distressed. It was as if the shade of ancient Destiny had arisen before his eyes. He did not even ask for news; it was evident he was without hope. And it was also evident that his sorrow was very different from all this nervous, noisy, fleeting sorrow that surrounded him. His was the mute, calm grief of the wise and the strong.

From the open door of the alcove-room came voices now commanding, now questioning, but for an hour and a half no one could have asserted that they had heard Luisa's voice. From time to time half-frightened, almost happy exclamations were heard. Some one in there had thought they perceived a movement, a breath, the glow of life. Then all who were outside would press forward. Uncle Piero would turn his face towards the door, and only at such moments would his expression become slightly troubled. Alas! Each time he saw the others turn slowly away, in heartbroken silence. It was past five o'clock now, and as it continued to rain the light had begun to fade.

Finally, at half-past five, Luisa's voice was heard. She gave a loud and terrible cry, which froze the blood in the veins of all. The doctor's voice answered in accents of eager protest. It was whispered that he had made a gesture which said plainly: "It is hopeless now, let us desist," but at her cry he had once more renewed his efforts.

The monotonous lament that the fine rain sent in through all the open windows made the stillness of the house seem more sepulchral than ever. The hall and the corridor were growing dark, and the pale candle-light from the alcove-room seemed brilliant by contrast. People began to go away silently and on tiptoe, one shadow after

another, and presently steps and hushed voices and the beat of heavy boots were heard on the pavement of the street below. Cia went softly towards her master, and asked him in a whisper if he would not eat something. He silenced her by an imperious gesture.

After seven o'clock, when all outsiders had left save Toni Gall, Ismaele, the Professor, Ester, and three or four women who were in the alcove-room, long, low groans, which seemed hardly human, broke the silence. The doctor came into the hall. It was now quite dark, and he knocked against a chair. "Is the engineer here?" he asked aloud. "Yes, sir," Toni Gall replied, and went for a candle. The engineer neither spoke nor moved.

Toni Gall soon returned with a candle and Dr. Aliprandi—whom I am happy to recall here as a frank and upright man, possessed of a fine intellect and a noble heart—approached the sofa where Uncle Piero sat.

"Engineer Ribera," said he with tears in his eyes, "it is time for you to do something now."

"For me to do something?" said Uncle Piero, raising his eyes.

"Yes. We must at least try to get her away. You must come and speak a word. You are like a father to her. At such moments as these it is a father's place to speak."

"Let my master alone," Cia grumbled. "He can't do these things. It would just be making him miserable to no purpose."

Now pitying voices and kisses mingled with the groans.

The engineer pressed his clenched fists upon the sofa, and remained motionless for a moment, with bowed head. Then he rose, not without difficulty, and said to the doctor:

"Must I go alone?"

"Do you wish me to be present?"

"Yes."

"Very well. Our efforts may be of no avail. I should not wish to force her, but we must, at least, make an attempt."

The doctor dismissed the women who were still in the alcove-room; then, standing in the doorway, he turned to the engineer and motioned to him to come in.

"Donna Luisa," said he gently, "here is your uncle, who is coming to beseech you——"

The old man staggered as he came forward, although his face was composed. He advanced a few steps and then stopped. Luisa was seated upon the bed with her dead baby in her arms, holding her tight, kissing her face and neck, and uttering long, heart-rending groans as she pressed her lips to the little body.

"Yes, yes, yes," she was saying, with almost a smile of tenderness in her voice. "It is your uncle, dear, your uncle, who is coming to see his little treasure, his little Maria, his little Missipipì, who loves him so much! Yes, yes, yes!"

"Luisa," said Uncle Piero, "you must control yourself. Everything that could be done has been done. Now come with me—don't remain here any longer—come with me."

"Uncle, Uncle!" cried Luisa, in a voice full of tenderness but without looking towards him, while she pressed the little dead body to her breast and rocked backwards and forwards. "Come here! Come here to your Maria! Come! Come to us, for you are our uncle, our dear uncle! No, dear, no, dear! Our uncle will not forsake us."

Uncle Piero shuddered. His grief overwhelmed him for a moment, and wrenched a sob from him.

"Let her rest!" he murmured in a stifled voice. She did not appear to hear him, and continued: "We will go to our uncle, dear, you and I. Do you want to go to him, Maria? Yes, yes! Let us go!" She slid from the bed to the floor and went to Uncle

Piero. Clutching her sweet, dead burden to her breast with one arm, she threw the other about the old man's neck, and whispered: "A kiss, a kiss, for your little Missipipì. One kiss, only one!"

Uncle Piero bent down and kissed the little face, already sadly ravaged by death, wetting it with two great tears.

"Look, look, Uncle!" she said. "Doctor, bring the candle! Yes, yes! Don't be cruel, doctor. Look, Uncle! See what a little treasure she is, doctor!"

Aliprandi hesitated, and tried to resist her appeals, but in this mad grief there was something sacred, something that must be respected. He obeyed, and raising the candle, held it close to the tiny corpse, that was intensely pitiful with its half-open eyes and dilated pupils, this little corpse that had once been Maria, sweet little Missipipì, the old man's delight, the smile and the love of the house.

"Look at this tiny breast, Uncle. See how we have abused it, poor treasure, how we have hurt it with all our rubbing. It was your mamma, Maria darling! Your horrid mamma, and that wicked doctor there."

"Enough!" said the doctor resolutely, setting the candle on the writing-desk. "Talk to your child if you will, but not to this one. Talk to the one in Heaven."

The effect of his words was terrible. All tenderness vanished from Luisa's face. She drew back, frowning fiercely, and pressing her dead child closer to her breast. "No!" she cried aloud. "No, not in Heaven! She is mine! She is mine! God is wicked! I will not give her to Him!"

She drew ever farther back, back into the alcove, where, standing between the great bed and the little one, she once more began uttering those low groans which did not seem human. Aliprandi sent the trembling old man out of the room. "It will pass! It will pass!" he said. "We must have patience. I will stay with her now." Ismaele came into the hall and drew the Professor aside.

"Has Signor Don Franco been informed?" he asked.

They consulted the uncle and it was decided that a telegram in Uncle Piero's name, and announcing serious illness, should be sent from Lugano the next morning, for it was now too late. There was some one else in the hall. Poor Barborin Pasotti, who had hastened thither while her husband was absent escorting the Marchesa back to Cressogno. She was sobbing, and in despair because she had given Maria the little boat. She wished to go to Luisa, but the doctor, hearing loud crying, came out and begged her to be calm and silent. Barborin went to cry in the loggia. The Curate, Don Brazzova, and the Prefect of the Caravina, who had been dining at Casa Pasotti, had accompanied Barborin. Later the Curate of Castello, Intrioni, arrived, weeping like a child. He was determined to go to Luisa in spite of the doctor's protests, and knelt in the centre of the room, entreating her to give her baby to the Lord. "Listen, Signora Luisa, listen. If you will not give her to God, give her to her grandmother Teresa, to your own dear mother who will be so happy to have her with her in Heaven."

Luisa was touched, not by his words, but by his grief, and answered gently: "Can you not understand that I do not believe in your Heaven? My Heaven is here!"

Aliprandi made a gesture of entreaty to the Curate, who went out, sobbing.

The doctor left Oria towards midnight with the Professor. The whole house was quiet, nor was any voice to be heard in the alcove-room. Aliprandi had spent the last two hours in the hall with the Professor and Ester, and not a single cry, not a groan, nor any movement had he heard. He had gone twice to look in. Luisa was sitting on the edge of her bed, her elbows on her knees and her face in her hands, contemplating the little bed which Aliprandi could not see. This state of immobility caused him more anxiety than the state of intense excitement that had preceded it. As Ester was going to remain all night he advised her to try and rouse her friend, to make her talk and weep.

Some women from the village were to watch with Ester, and Ismaele would be there

until five o'clock, when he must start for Lugano. Uncle Piero had gone to bed.

Aliprandi and the Professor stopped on the square by the church to look at the lighted window of the alcove-room, and to listen. Silence. "Accursed lake!" the physician exclaimed, taking his companion's arm and once more starting forward. He was certainly thinking of the sweet little creature the lake had killed when he uttered the words, but in his heart there was also a great fear that other troubles might be approaching, that the treacherous waters had not yet done their worst; and he was overwhelmed with pity for the poor father, who, as yet, knew nothing.

CHAPTER XI SHADOWS AND DAWN

On receiving the telegram Franco at once hastened to the office of the Opinione, in Via della Rocca. Perceiving his agitation, Dina said: "Ah! then you already know?" Franco's blood ran cold, but on hearing about the telegram Dina exhibited great surprise. No, no, of that he knew nothing. Information had reached him from the Prime Minister that the Austrian police had been searching houses and making arrests in Vall' Intelvi, and that among the papers of a certain doctor there was one in which the name of Don Franco Maironi was mentioned, with particulars of a compromising nature. Dina added that at a moment of such great anguish for a father, he would refrain from going into an explanation of Count Cavour's interest in him; suffice it to say that he himself had mentioned Franco to the Count, who had expressed his regret that a Lombard gentleman, bearing such a distinguished name, should be obliged to live in such straitened and obscure circumstances in Turin. Dina believed it was his intention to offer him a position in the Foreign Office. Now, of course, Franco must go. But the little girl would recover and he must return as soon as possible. Meanwhile he would stop at Lugano, would he not? He must, at least, await news there, and unless it became absolutely necessary, he must not venture into Lombardy. After this affair at Vall' Intelvi it would be extremely

imprudent. As Franco remained silent, the director once more broached the subject before bidding him good-bye. "Be prudent! Don't let them take you!" But Franco would not answer.

Ever since the receipt of the telegram Franco had walked the streets of Turin like one in a dream, deaf to the noise of his own footsteps, unconscious of what he saw, of what he heard, going mechanically wherever it was necessary for him to go at this juncture, wherever a certain servile and lower faculty of the soul might lead him, that faculty composed of reason and of instinct, which is capable of guiding us through a labyrinth of city streets, while the mind, concentrated upon some problem, some passion, takes no heed of our movements. He sold his watch and chain to a watchmaker of Doragrossa for one hundred and thirty-five lire, purchased a doll for Maria, stopped at Café Alfieri and Café Florio to leave word for his friends, and was at the station by eleven o'clock, although the train for Novara which he was to take did not start until half-past eleven. At a quarter-past the Paduan and the young man from Udine appeared. They endeavoured to encourage him with all sorts of rosy suppositions and unconvincing arguments, but he answered never a word and only longed intensely for the moment of departure, longed to be alone, to be hastening towards Oria, for he was determined to go to Oria, no matter how great the danger might be. He entered a third-class carriage, and when the locomotive whistled and the train began to move, he heaved a great sigh of relief, and gave himself up entirely to thoughts of Maria. But there were too many people about him, they were too many, too rough, and too noisy. At Chivasso, feeling he could no longer bear their chattering and laughter, he changed into an empty second-class carriage, where he began to talk aloud, his eyes fixed on the opposite seat.

Good God! why had they not added another word to the telegram? Just one word more! At least the name of the illness.

A terrible name flashed across his brain: Croup! He gasped with horror, and threw

out his arms against this phantom, his muscles suddenly stiffening, then, letting his arms sink once more, he heaved a sigh so deep that it seemed to expel the very soul, even life itself, from his breast. It must indeed be a sudden illness, or Luisa would have written. Another name flashed across his mind. Brain-fever! He himself had been at the point of death with brain-fever when a child. Oh God! oh God! It must be that! God Himself had sent this thought to him. He was shaken by tearless sobbing. Maria, his treasure, his love, his joy! Yes, indeed it must be that. He could see her gasping, flushed, watched over by her mother and the doctor. In a moment he pictured to himself long hours spent by her bedside, long hours of anguish, then he pictured the birth of hope, heard the first whisper of that sweet voice:

"Papa! my papa!"

He started to his feet, clasping and wringing his hands in a mute impulse of prayer. Presently he sank back into his seat again, exhausted, and turned unseeing eyes upon the flying landscape, vaguely conscious of some connection between the misty Alps looming motionless there against the northern horizon and the thought that dominated him, looming motionless and torpid within his soul. From time to time the jolting of the train would rouse him from his stupor, suggesting the idea of a painful race, stimulating his heart to rush, to beat thus also. Sometimes he would close his eyes, the better to picture his arrival at home. Images would at once rise from his heart to his eyelids, but they were always changing, continually moving, and he could not hold them for more than a second. Now it was Luisa hastening towards him on the stairs; now the uncle holding out his arms to him from the door of the hall; now Dr. Aliprandi who was opening the door of the alcove-room to him, and saying: "She is better, she is better!" Now in the darkened room, filled with shadows, it was Maria herself who gazed at him with glassy, feverish eyes.

When he reached Vercelli, he felt as if he were a thousand miles from Turin, and once more awoke to a sense of reality. How should he get from Lugano to Oria?

What route should he take? Should he go openly by the lake, showing himself at the Custom-House? And what if they would not allow him to proceed because his passport had not been stamped on leaving Italy as the law demanded? Or, worse still, what if a warrant of arrest be out against him on account of those papers taken from the doctor at Pellio? He had better keep to the hills. They might arrest him later, but with his knowledge of the neighbourhood, acquired on his many hunting expeditions in 1848, he was almost sure of reaching home. This wearisome task of planning and arranging absorbed his attention for some time, and kept him occupied until he had passed Arona, on the Lake Maggiore steamer. He had arranged to reach Lugano in the middle of the night. Would there be some one there to meet him? If there were no one there, perhaps he might hear something at the Fontana pharmacy, where the Valsolda people were in the habit of congregating. If God would only permit reassuring news to reach him at Lugano he would postpone decision as to his journey to Oria until the morrow. He therefore determined to make no plans before reaching Lugano, and he prayed fervently that the Almighty would allow this good news to reach him. The sky was overcast; the mountains had already assumed their sad autumnal tints; a thin mist hung over the lake; the bells of Meina were ringing; on the steamer there were but few passengers, and Franco's prayer died in his heart, stifled by a crushing sadness, while his eyes unconsciously followed a flock of white gulls, that were winging their flight towards the distant waters of Laveno, towards that hidden country where his soul was.

It was past seven when he reached Magadino. He climbed Monte Ceneri on foot, following the path that leads to the road-mender's house, took a carriage at Bironico and reached Lugano shortly after midnight. He alighted in the Piazza, near Café Terreni. The coffee-house was closed, the square was deserted and dark, and silence reigned; even the lake, which could be seen gently rising and falling in the gloom, was silent. Franco paused a moment on the shore, hoping that some one had come to meet him, and would presently appear. He could not see Valsolda, hidden behind

Monte Brè, but that same water mirrored Oria, and slept in the boathouse at home. A wave of peace eased his heart somewhat; he felt he was among things familiar to him. Every human voice was hushed, but the great, dark hills spoke to him, Monte Caprino and the Zocca d'i Ment more than all, for they overlooked Oria. They spoke gently to him, suggesting comfort-bringing thoughts. Nineteen hours had passed since the telegram was sent. All danger might now be over.

As no one appeared he went to the Fontana pharmacy, and rang the bell. For many years he had known that most worthy, cordial, and honest man, Signor Carlo Fontana, who has now passed away with the world of long ago. Signor Carlo came to the window, and was greatly surprised to see Don Franco. He had no news from Oria. He had spent the last two days at Tesserete, and had returned only a few hours before, so could tell him nothing. His assistant had started for Bellinzona that evening. Franco thanked him and walked away in the direction of Villa Ciani, for he was now determined to go to Oria at once.

Two routes were open to him. He could either climb the Swiss slope of the Boglia from Pregassona, strike the heights of Bolla; cross the Pian Biscagno and the great beech wood, coming out at the venerable beech-tree of the Madonnina on the brow of the hill which slopes down into Lombardy, and then drop down on to Albogasio Superiore and Oria; or he could take the easy Gandria road, leading towards the lake, and then follow that treacherous and dangerous path which starts from Gandria, the last Swiss village, cuts along the face of the almost perpendicular cliff, crosses the frontier some hundred metres above the lake, runs on to the Origa farm, drops into the ravine of Val Malghera, rising once more to the Rooch farm, where it joins the paved way which passes above Niscicoree and finally leads down to Oria. The first route was much longer and far more difficult, but it afforded a better chance of eluding the vigilance of the guards at the frontier. On leaving the Fontana pharmacy Franco had been fully determined to go that way, but when, on reaching Cassarago, where the roads to Pregassona and to Gandria meet, he saw how near the

point of Castagnola was, and reflected that it would take him less than half an hour to go from Castagnola to Gandria, and that another hour and a half would take him from Gandria to Oria, the idea of climbing the Boglia, of walking seven or eight hours, became intolerable to him. Besides, if he went by the Boglia he would arrive in the daytime, and this, of course, would jeopardise his safety. He turned his face resolutely towards Castagnola and Gandria. The sky was now completely overcast with heavy clouds. Beneath the great chestnut trees that line the road to Castagnola, he could not see where to set his feet, but how much worse it would have been in the great beech forest of the Boglia if Franco had chosen that route. It was just as dark in Castagnola, and worse in the labyrinth of narrow lanes at Gandria. After wandering backwards and forwards among these lanes for some time, always mistaking his way, Franco at last found himself on the path leading to the frontier, and stopped to rest. Before starting forward again in the impenetrable darkness, before braving the dangers of a difficult path, and of a meeting with the Austrian guards, and then facing another terrifying step, that of entering his house, of putting the first question, of listening to the first answer, he raised his heart to God, and concentrated all the powers of his mind upon a determination to be strong and calm.

Once more he started forward. Now he must give his whole attention to the path, in order not to fall or lose his way. The little fields of Gandria soon come to an end. Then wild tracts follow, that jut out over the lake, and are covered with a thick growth of low bushes; then come ravines with crumbling sides, that go tumbling straight downwards, and are half hidden by the bushes. In such places as these Franco was obliged to feel his way blindly, to cling first to one branch, then to another, plunging his face in among the leaves, that, at least, smelt of Valsolda, and dragging himself from bush to bush. He must explore the ground with his foot, trembling lest it give way beneath him, and seeking for traces of the path. The bundle he carried was small, but nevertheless it embarrassed him. The rustling of the foliage as he brushed past, irritated him; it seemed as if it must be heard a long way

off, on the hills and on the lake, in the solemn hush of the night. Then he would stop and listen. He could hear only the distant thundering of the falls at Rescia, the hooting of owls in the woods over yonder, across the lake, and from time to time, far below, a sharp stroke on the water, for which he could not account. It took him quite an hour to reach the frontier. There, between the Valle del Confine and the Val Malghera, the forest had been recently cut down, and the rocky slope was bare. This enhanced both the danger of falling, and that of discovery. He crossed this tract very slowly, often pausing, sometimes crawling on hands and knees. Before reaching Oria he heard the faint dip of oars far below. He knew the customs-guards' boat sometimes passed the shore of Val Malghera at night. Surely these were the guards. Beneath the chestnut trees of Origa he breathed freely once more. There he was hidden, and could walk noiselessly on the grass. He descended the western slope of Val Malghera and climbed up the other side without encountering any obstacles. On approaching Rooch his heart beat furiously. Rooch is a sort of outpost of Oria. There the little path ends that he had so often followed with Luisa on mild winter afternoons, gathering violets and laurel leaves, and talking of the future. He remembered that the last time, they had had a discussion concerning the most desirable husband for Maria, and the qualities he must possess. Franco had hoped he would be a country gentleman, but Luisa had been in favour of a civil engineer.

Rooch is a little farmhouse perched above a few small fields which lie terraced against the hillside, and form a small, light clearing among the surrounding woods. The stable, a room above it, a small portico in front of the stable, a cistern under the portico—that is all. The little portico is just above the narrow paved way that passes some two or three metres below. It is only a few steps from the comb of the ravine of Val Malghera, to Rooch. Having reached the comb, Franco heard low voices in the farmhouse.

He paused and drawing aside, stretched himself, face downwards, upon the grass, beyond the path, and near a cluster of low chestnut trees. The voices became silent,

but he heard a man's steps coming rapidly towards him; he lay quite still, holding his breath. The man stopped almost at his side, waited a moment, and then slowly retraced his steps, saying in a loud voice, with a foreign accent: "There is no one here, it must have been a fox."

The guards! A long silence followed, during which Franco did not dare to move. The guards once more began to talk, and he decided to crawl noiselessly backwards, to drop down into Val Malghera and pass behind and above the house. Slowly, very slowly he pulled off his boots. He was about to move when he heard two or three guards leave the farmhouse, talking as they came towards him. He heard one of them say: "Is no one going to stay here?" and another answered: "It is not necessary."

Four guards brushed past him without noticing him. They certainly had no suspicions, for they were talking unconcernedly. One was saying that a person may remain ten minutes under water without drowning; but another maintained that five minutes is long enough to cause death. The fourth passed him in silence, but hardly had he done so when he stopped. Franco shuddered upon hearing him strike a match. He lit his pipe, puffed at it two or three times, and then called out to his companions in a loud voice, for they had already gone some way down the slope of Val Malghera.

"How old was she?"

One of the others answered, louder still:

"Three years and one month."

Then the fourth guard puffed twice more and started forward. Three years and one month! Maria's age! Franco, lying on his face, raised himself upon his elbows, clutching convulsively at the grass. The noise of the steps died away down below in Val Malghera.

"My God! My God!" he cried. Rising to his knees he repeated the terrible words in

his heart, slowly, as if stupefied. "She was!" He wrung his hands, moaning once more: "My God! My God!"

After this he was hardly conscious of his movements. He went down to Oria with the vague sensation of having grown suddenly deaf, and his arm which clasped the doll trembled violently. Reaching the Madonna del Romit he crossed the town, and instead of going down by the Pomodoro stairway he followed the path that joins the short cut to Albogasio Superiore, and descended those same stairs that Barborin Pasotti had descended the day before the catastrophe. On the wall of the church he noticed a pale light which was reflected from the alcove-room. He neither paused beneath the window, nor called out, but stepped under the porch and tried the door.

It was open.

From the coolness of the night he passed into a heavy, close atmosphere, laden with the unfamiliar odour of burnt vinegar and incense. With difficulty he dragged himself up the stairs. Before him, on the landing, half-way up, light fell from above. On reaching the spot he saw that the light came from the alcove-room. He went on and presently stood in the corridor. The door of the room was wide open; there must be many candles burning in there. Mingled with the odour of incense he recognised the perfume of flowers, and began to tremble so violently that he could not go on. No sound reached him from the room. Suddenly he heard Luisa's voice, speaking tenderly, quietly: "Do you want me to go where you are going to-morrow, Maria? Do you want your mamma under the ground with you?" "Luisa! Luisa!" sobbed Franco, and they found themselves in each others' arms, on the threshold of their nuptial chamber, where the memory of their love was still alive, but where its sweet fruit lay dead.

"Come, dear. Come in," said she, and drew him forward. In the centre of the room, between four lighted candles, stood the little open coffin, in which lay poor Maria, under a mound of flowers, broken and wilted like herself. There were roses,

heliotrope, jasmine, begonia, geraniums, verbena, flowering sprays of olea fragrans, and other blossomless sprays, all dark and shiny, from the carob tree she had loved so well, because it had been dear to papa. Flowers and leaves lay across her face as well.

Franco fell upon his knees sobbing: "My God! My God!" while Luisa chose two tiny rosebuds, placed them in Maria's little hand, and kissed her brow.

"You can kiss her hair," said she, "but not her face. The doctor does not wish it."

"But you have just done so!"

"Oh, it is a different thing for me."

But instead he pressed his lips to her icy lips, that showed among the geraniums and the carob leaves, touching them gently, as in a tender, but not despairing farewell to the outward wrapping now cast aside and empty, which had once belonged to his beloved baby, who had gone to dwell elsewhere.

"Maria! My darling Maria!" he whispered between his sobs. "What was the matter?"

He had not realised the connection between the guards' talk about drowning and the rest of their conversation.

"You have not heard?" said his wife calmly, and without surprise. They had told her how the telegram had been worded, but she was also aware that Ismaele was to have met Franco in Lugano. She did not know, however, that as Franco had not arrived by the coach from Ceneri, Ismaele had gone to bed.

"Poor Franco!" said she, kissing his hair almost maternally. "There was no illness."

He started to his feet, terrified, and exclaiming: "What do you mean? There was no illness?"

Leu, the person whom Franco had heard breathing heavily in her sleep, now came in with the intention of fumigating the room, but seeing Franco she stopped in amazement. "Come in," said Luisa. "You may place the brazier outside the door;

sprinkle whatever is necessary upon it, and then return to the kitchen and sleep, my good Leu." The woman obeyed.

"There was no illness?" Franco repeated.

"Come," his wife answered. "I will tell you everything."

She made him sit down on the dormeuse at the foot of their bed. He wished her to sit beside him, but she made a gesture of refusal, and of entreaty that he should not insist, that he should be quiet and wait; then, sinking down on the floor beside her baby, she began the painful story in a low, even voice, that sounded almost indifferent to the tragedy it was relating, a voice that resembled poor, deaf Barborin's, seeming to come from a far-away world. She began with her meeting with Peppina Bianconi at Campo, and—always in the same calm tone—told him all the thoughts, all the sentiments that had brought her to confront his grandmother, told him everything, down to the moment when she had realised that Maria was indeed dead. When she had finished she rose to her knees, and kissing her dead child, whispered to her: "Now your papa thinks that I killed you, but it is not true, dear, indeed, it is not true!"

He rose, quivering with nameless emotion, and bending over her, raised her—neither yielding nor resisting—from the floor. Touching her resolutely but tenderly, he placed her on the dormeuse beside him. He encircled her shoulders with his arm, pressing her to him, speaking with his lips on her hair, wetting it with the hot tears, which from time to time choked his voice. "My poor Luisa! No, indeed you did not kill her! How could you suspect me of thinking such a thing? I bless you instead for all that you have done for her ever since she came into the world; I, who have done nothing, bless you who have done so much. Never say such a thing again! Never, dear. Our Maria——"

A violent sob checked his words, but the man immediately exerted his strong will, controlled himself and continued:

"Don't you know what our Maria is saying now? She is saying: 'My darling mamma, my darling papa, now you are all alone, you have only each other, you are more closely united than ever; give me to God that He may give me back to you; that I may become your little guardian angel, and lead you to Him at last, that we may dwell together in all eternity,' Do you hear her saying these words, Luisa?"

She trembled in his arms, shaken by spasmodic quiverings; her face bent low, resisted Franco when he would have raised it. At last she took his hand and kissed it. Then he also kissed her on the hair, and murmured: "Answer me."

"You are good!" Luisa replied, in a faint and despairing voice. "You wish to spare me, but you do not believe what you say. You must feel that I caused her death, that if I had adopted your sentiments, your ideas, I should not have left the house, and if I had not left the house this would not have happened, and Maria would still be alive."

"Don't think of that, my dear, don't! You might have believed Maria was with Veronica; you might have remained in the room with the fiancés, and the accident would have happened just the same. Don't think of this any more, Luisa. Rather listen to what Maria is saying."

"Poor Franco! Poor, poor fellow!" said Luisa, with such bitterness of terrible hidden meanings, that his blood ran cold. He shuddered and was silent, unable to grasp her meaning, and at the same time dreading an explanation. Slowly they withdrew from each other's arms, Luisa being the first to move. She again took her husband's hand and wished to carry it to her lips, but Franco drew her hand tenderly towards him and made a last attempt.

"Why will you not answer me?"

"I should hurt you too much," she murmured.

He began to realise the irreparable ruin of her soul, and was silent. He did not withdraw his hand, but felt his strength deserting him, felt darkness and icy cold creeping over him, as if Maria, whom he had evoked in vain, had died a second

time. Anguish, fatigue, the heavy atmosphere, the mingled odours of the room, affected him so strongly that he was obliged to go out, or he would have fainted.

He went to the loggia. The windows were open and the sweet, fresh air restored him. Out there in the dark he wept for his little daughter unrestrainedly, without even that restraint which light imposes. He knelt by one of the windows, crossed his arms on his breast and wept, his face raised towards heaven, tears and words flowing together, disjointed words of anguish and of faith, calling out to God for help, to God, to God who had dealt him the blow. With streaming eyes he cried out, begging that his tears might continue to flow, confessing that he knew full well why the child had died. Had he not prayed again and again that God would preserve her from the danger of losing her faith through her mother's influence? Ah! that last night! That last night when Maria had said to him: "Darling papa, a kiss!" and so many other tender things, and would not let go his hand, how he had prayed! The memory of it was a terror, a joy, a spasm to him. "Lord, Lord!" said he, gazing heavenward. "Thou wert silent, but my voice reached Thee. Thou hast answered my prayer in Thine own mysterious way. Thou hast taken my treasure to Thyself, she is safe, she is happy, she awaits me. Thou wilt reunite us." The fast-falling tears that accompanied his last words had no bitter taste, but presently, while thinking once more of that last night, he was bitterly sorry he had left Maria without telling her that he had deceived her. "Maria, my own Maria!" he entreated, weeping, "forgive me!" Good God! it seemed impossible that all this could be true; it seemed impossible that if he went into the alcove-room he should not find her there asleep in her little bed, her head drooping towards her shoulder and her tiny hands resting, palms upward, upon the sheet. Indeed she was still there, but——! Oh! how awful it all was! Surely his tears would never end.

Leu came in bringing a light and a cup of coffee. The Signora had sent her. He felt a thrill of tender gratitude towards his wife. Good God! Poor Luisa! How hopeless was her grief! And what an awful semblance of punishment for her in the blow

which had fallen upon her at that very moment, that very moment! She herself had realised that he must think this, and he did indeed think it, but had denied his thought in order to spare her, and this she had also realised. And was this awful semblance of punishment destined not to bear any fruit whatsoever? She seemed to shrink from God more than ever now, and who could tell how far she might wander! Poor, poor Luisa! It was not Maria he should pray for, Maria did not need his prayers. He must pray for Luisa, pray night and day, trusting also in the prayers of the precious little soul now hidden in God.

He talked with Leu, feeling more calm now, and had her tell him all she had seen, all she had heard of this terrible event. "The Lord wanted your little child for Himself," said Leu at last. "If you could only have seen her in church, with her little folded hands and her serious little face! She looked just like an angel. Indeed she did." Then she asked Franco if she should leave the light. No, he preferred to be in the dark. At what time was the funeral to take place? At eight o'clock, Leu thought. When Leu once began talking it was always hard for her to leave off, and perhaps now she was afraid of staying in the kitchen all alone. "Her papa!" she added, before going out. "Her dear papa! It isn't more than a week ago that I came here with some chestnuts for the Signora, and that blessed little creature, who spoke so well, for all the world like a lawyer, said to me: 'Do you know, Leu, my papa is coming to Lugano very soon, and I am going to see him.' Oh, dear! What a dreadful thing!"

His tears flowed afresh. Ah, God had taken the child to save her from the errors of the world. God had punished Luisa for her errors, but was not this awful punishment intended for him also? Was he not guilty also? Ah, yes! Very, very guilty! A clear vision of his past life rose before him, his life, barren of all useful labour, full of vanities, corresponding ill with the beliefs he professed, a life which rendered him responsible for Luisa's unbelief. The world accounted him virtuous for certain qualities he possessed through no merit of his own, for they were inborn in him, and he felt that for this very reason God's judgment of him must be doubly severe; for

God had endowed him richly, and he had gathered no fruit. Once more he fell upon his knees and humbly accepted his punishment, in the desolate contrition of his heart, in his burning desire to expiate, to purify himself, to become worthy of re-union with Maria at last.

A long, long time he prayed and wept. At last he went out to the terrace. Above Galbiga and the hills of the Lake of Como the sky was growing light; day was breaking. From neighbouring Boglia a cold north wind was blowing. From far and near, from the lake shore, from the lofty bosom of the valley, bells rang out. The thought that Maria and Grandmother Teresa were together and happy, rose suddenly, clear and sweet in Franco's heart. It seemed to him the Lord was saying to him: "I afflict thee, but I love thee. Wait, be steadfast, and thou shalt know." The bells chimed far and near, from the lake shore and from the lofty bosom of the valley. The sky grew ever brighter above Galbiga and towards the Lake of Como, along the steep, black profile of the Picco di Cressogno; and the sweep of smooth water down there in the East, between the great shadows of the mountains, was like a shining pearl. The sprays of the passion-flower vine, touched by the north wind, waved silently above Franco's head, in quivering anticipation of the light, of the immense glory that was rising out of the east, colouring clouds and clear sky with itself, and welcomed by the bells.

To live, to live, to work, suffer, adore, and ascend! That was what the light demanded! He must carry the living away in his arms, carry the dead away in his heart, return to Turin, work for Italy, die for her! The dawning day demanded this. Italy! Italy! Beloved Mother! Franco clasped his hands in a transport of desire.

Luisa heard the bells also. She wished that she might not have heard them, wished that day might never dawn, bringing with it the hour in which Maria must be consigned to the grave. On her knees beside her baby's little body she promised her that every day of her life she would come and talk to her, bring her flowers, and bear

her company; morning and evening she would come. Then she sank down and gave herself up to those dark thoughts which she had not wished to confess to her husband, and which had grown and matured in her during the last twenty-four hours, as a malignant infection of remote origin which has lain dormant in the system, being caught up at last in the current of the blood, suddenly bursts forth with overwhelming violence.

All her religious views, her faith in the existence of God, her scepticism concerning the immortality of the soul were tending towards subversion. She was convinced that she was in no way responsible for Maria's death. If indeed there did exist an Intelligence, a Will, a Power which was master of men and of things, then the monstrous guilt was of this Intelligence, which had coldly pre-ordained Barborin Passotti's visit and gift; had withdrawn Maria from those who should have watched over her in her mother's absence; had lured her, defenceless, towards destruction; had killed her. That same Power had checked her, the mother, when she had been about to perform an act of justice. Fool that she was, ever to have believed in Divine Justice! There was no such thing as Divine Justice! Instead there was the altar allied to the throne; the Austrian God, a party to all injustice, all tyranny, author of suffering, and of evil, slayer of the innocent and protector of the wicked. Ah! if such a God did indeed exist, it were better that Maria be there in that body, better that no part of her should live on to fall into the toils of this fiendish Omnipotence!

But it was possible to doubt the existence of this horrible God. And if He did not exist we might desire that a part of a human being should continue to live beyond the grave, live not miraculously, but naturally. That was perhaps easier to conceive than the existence of an invisible tyrant, of a Creator who was cruel to the beings of His own creation. The rule of nature without God was certainly preferable; better a blind master, who was not our enemy, not deliberately cruel. But henceforth, at least, no thought must be wasted in any way, either in this life or in the next—if, indeed, the next exist—upon that vain phantom, Justice!

The faint light of dawn mingled with her thoughts as it had mingled with Franco's thoughts, solemn and consoling to him, hateful to her. He, the Christian, meditated an insurrection of wrath and of arms against brothers in Christ, for love of a dot upon the surface of one of Heaven's orbs; she meditated an immense rebellion, the liberation of the Universe. Her thought might be the greater, her intellect might appear the stronger, but he whom the human generations learn to know even better as they advance in civilisation and science; He who allows each generation to honour Him according to its strength, and who gradually transforms and raises the ideals of the nations, making use even of inferior and fleeting ideals, when He deems it opportune, in His government of the world; He who, being Peace and Life, has allowed Himself to be called the God of armies, had impressed the sign of His judgment upon the face of the woman and upon the face of the man. While dawn burned into the glory of sunrise, Franco's brow became ever more brightly illumined by a light from within, and through his tears his eyes shone with the vigour of life; but Luisa's brow grew ever darker, and from the depths, the shadows mounted to her dull eyes.

As the sun rose a boat came in sight off the point of Caravina. It brought the lawyer, V., who had come from Varenna in obedience to Luisa's call.

CHAPTER XII PHANTOMS

On the evening of that same day a numerous company assembled in the Marchesa's red drawing-room. Pasotti had brought his unlucky wife by main force, and he had brought Signor Giacomo Puttini also, although that gentleman had held out for some time against the most gracious Controller's despotic caprices. The curate of Puria and Paolin had also put in an appearance, both being anxious to observe the effects of the tragedy on the old lady's marble countenance. Paolin of course dragged the worthy Paolon in his wake, he being still in a state of limp and sheepish resistance.

The curate of Cima, who was devoted to the Marchesa, came also, as did the prefect of Caravina, whose heart really belonged to Franco and Luisa, but who, as parish-priest of Cressogno, was bound to treat their enemy with a certain amount of consideration.

She received them all with her usual impassive expression, with her usual calm greeting. Signora Barborin, who had been cautioned by her master against alluding to the event at Oria, was made to sit on the sofa beside her hostess, who graciously accepted the homage of the others, put the usual questions to Paolin and Paolon concerning their respective consorts, and having satisfied herself that both Paolina and Paolona were enjoying the best of health, she folded her hands over her stomach and relapsed into dignified silence, her courtiers forming a semicircle around her. Pasotti, noting the absence of Friend, inquired for him with obsequious solicitude. "And Friend? Dear little Friend?" Although, had he had him in his clutches—solus cum solo—the nasty, little snarling beast which worried his trousers and his wife's skirts, he would have joyfully wrung his neck. Friend had been ill for two days. The entire company was greatly affected by this news, and loudly deplored the misfortune, secretly hoping the while that the accursed little monster might not recover. Barborin, not hearing a word, but seeing so many mouths at work, so many faces assuming a look of affliction, naturally supposed they were speaking of Oria, and turning to her neighbour Paolon, questioned him with her eyes, opening her mouth and pointing towards Oria. Paolon shook his head. "They are talking about the little dog," said he. The deaf woman did not understand, but she said: "Ah!" on general principles, and assumed an expression of affliction like the rest.

Friend ate too much, and his food was too rich, and he was now suffering from a disgusting skin disease. Paolin and the curate of Puria gave much careful advice. The prefect of Caravina had elsewhere expressed the charitable opinion that the creature ought to be pitched into the lake with his mistress tied to his neck. While the others were discussing the favourite with such lively interest, the prefect was

thinking of Luisa as he had seen her that morning, her features distorted, opposing mad resistance first to the closing of the coffin, and then to its removal. He was thinking how, in the cemetery, she with her own hands had cast the earth upon her child, telling her to be patient, that she herself would soon come and lie down beside her, and that that would be their Paradise.

In spite of the animated and eager conversation concerning the mangy Friend, the phantoms of the dead child and the distracted mother were hovering in the room. Presently there came a moment of silence when no one could think of anything more to say about the dog, and then the two unhappy phantoms were heard by all, demanding that they speak of them, and all could see them distinctly in the eyes of one who loved them, in the eyes of poor, deaf Barborin. Her husband at once sought a diversion, and propounded a problem in tarocchi to Signor Giacomo. The other tarocchi enthusiasts immediately took up the question, the voices of the phantoms could no longer be heard, and every one breathed more freely.

It was nine o'clock. Usually at that hour the footman would come in with two lighted candles, and prepare the little tarocchi table in one corner of the room, between the great fireplace and the balcony on the West. Then the Marchesa would rise and say, with her habitual, drowsy calm:

"If you are ready——"

The two or three guests would invariably answer: "Quite ready," and then the three-handed or four-handed game would begin.

The old footman—who was devotedly attached to Don Franco—hesitated that night about bringing the candles. He did not believe it possible that his mistress and her guests would have the courage to play. At five minutes past nine, as the footman had not yet appeared, each one began privately commenting upon the delay. Before entering the house Paolin had maintained that there would be no playing, while the prefect had maintained the contrary. He now cast a triumphant glance at his

adversary, as did also Paolon, who, from a spirit of solidarity with the other Paul, was pleased that he should be in the right. Pasotti, who had felt sure of his game, began to show signs of uneasiness. At seven minutes past nine the Marchesa requested the prefect to ring the bell. It was now the prefect's turn to bestow a triumphant glance on Paolin, and he put into it all the silent contempt for the old woman that it would hold.

"Prepare the table," said the Marchesa to the footman.

He soon returned with the two candles. From the depths of his sorrowful eyes also, the phantom of the dead child looked forth. While he was busy arranging the candles, the cards, and the ivory counters on the table, the room was enveloped in that silence which always preceded the rising of the Marchesa. But the Marchesa showed no intention of rising. She turned to Pasotti, saying:

"Controller, if you and the others wish to play——"

"Marchesa," Pasotti promptly replied, "my wife's presence must not deter you from enjoying your game. Barborin is not a good player, but she delights in looking on."

"I shall not play this evening," the Marchesa answered, and although the tone was mild, the refusal was decisive.

The worthy Paolon, who was always silent and could not play tarocchi, believed he had at last discovered a word which was both wise and obsequious, and which he might safely utter:

"Exactly!" said he.

Pasotti gave him a surly glance, thinking: "What business is it of his?" but he did not venture to speak. The Marchesa appeared not to have noticed Paolon's utterance, and added:

"The others can play if they like."

"Never!" exclaimed the prefect. "We should not think of such a thing!"

Pasotti drew his snuff-box from his pocket. "The Signor Prefetto," said he, speaking very distinctly, and slightly raising his open hand, a pinch of snuff between the thumb and forefinger, "The Signor Prefetto must speak for himself. For my part, as the Signora Marchesa wishes us to play, I am quite willing to oblige her."

The Marchesa was silent, and the fiery prefect, encouraged by her silence, grumbled in an undertone:

"After all, we are in a house of mourning."

Never since Franco had left the house had his name been mentioned at these evening assemblies in the red drawing-room, nor had the Marchesa even alluded either to him or to his wife. She now broke the silence that had lasted four years.

"I am sorry for the baby," said she, "but as for her father and mother, the Almighty has seen fit to punish them."

No one spoke. After some minutes Pasotti said in a low and solemn tone:

"A fearful punishment!"

And the curate of Cima added in a louder voice:

"A manifest punishment!"

Paolin dared not remain silent, neither did he dare speak, so he ejaculated: "Dear, dear!" and this encouraged Paolon to repeat his "Exactly!" Signor Giacomo simply puffed.

"A chastisement from the Almighty!" the curate of Cima repeated with emphasis. "And also, considering the circumstances, a mark of His especial regard for some one else."

All, save the prefect, who was chafing inwardly, looked at the Marchesa as if the protecting hand of the Omnipotent were suspended above her wig. But instead that Divine Hand was hovering above the lofty bonnet of Barborin Pasotti, and was keeping her ears tightly closed, that they might not hear those contaminating and

iniquitous words. "Curate," said Pasotti, "as the Signora Marchesa has proposed it, shall we have a little game? You, Paolin, Signor Giacomo, and I?"

The four, seated in their corner at the little card table, at once gave themselves up to the luxury of unrestrained conversation, and to the enjoyment of certain stale, Ambrosian [P] witticisms, which cling to the tarocchi cards like grease.

"I shall get there first!" Pasotti exclaimed after the first round, laughing loudly, with the intention of proclaiming both his victory and his good spirits.

The players had rid themselves of the phantoms; not so the others. The deaf woman, sitting stiff and motionless on the sofa, had suffered mortal anguish, dreading a gesture from her husband which should command her to play. Oh, dear Lord! was she to be made to suffer this also? By the grace of Heaven the sign was not given, and her first feeling upon seeing the four seat themselves at the little table had been one of relief. But at once bitter disgust seized her. What an insult that game was to her Luisa! What contempt it showed for poor, dear little Maria, who was dead! No one spoke to her, no one noticed her, so she began to recite in her heart a string of Paters, Aves, and Glorias, for the soul of that wicked creature seated at the other end of the sofa, who was so old, so rapidly approaching the moment when she must appear before her God. She repeated, for her benefit, the prayer for the conversion of sinners which she had been in the habit of repeating night and morning for her husband's benefit, ever since she had discovered his over-familiarity with a certain menial attached to her household.

When the prefect heard Pasotti's outburst of mirth, he rose to take his leave. "Wait," said the Marchesa, "you must have a glass of wine." At half-past nine a precious bottle of old San Colombano was usually brought in. "I shall not drink to-night," said the prefect heroically, "I have been greatly upset ever since this morning. Puria knows why."

"Dear, dear!" said Puria softly. "Of course it was a terrible tragedy."

Silence. The prefect bowed to the Marchesa, saluted Signor Pasotti with an expression that said: "You and I understand each other," and left the room.

The curate of Puria, who was possessed of a big body and a level head, was studying the Marchesa without appearing to do so. Was she or was she not affected by the events at Oria? Her having refrained from playing seemed to him a doubtful symptom. She might have done so simply out of respect for her own flesh and blood. On closer observation the curate noticed that her hands trembled; this was unusual. She forgot to ask Pasotti if the wine was good; this also was unusual. Her face with its waxen mask, twitched violently from time to time; this was extremely unusual. "She is touched!" thought the curate. As she was perfectly silent, and as Signora Pasotti and Paolon were also silent, the whole group seemed turned to stone. Puria cast about for a means of breaking the ice, but could find nothing better than to induce those three heads to turn towards the card-table, while he commented upon Pasotti's exclamations, upon Paolin's and Signor Giacomo's ejaculations and puffings. The Marchesa roused herself somewhat, and expressed her satisfaction that the players were enjoying themselves. Barborin neither heard nor spoke a word, so the three others ended by talking about her. The Marchesa complained that she was so deaf it was impossible to converse with her. The other two lavished upon her all the praise she so richly deserved, the praise all those who remember her still lavish upon her. There she sat, sad and speechless, never suspecting that she was the subject of their conversation. The Lord protected her profound and simple meekness, by never allowing the praises of the world to enter into her ears, but only the scoldings of her worthy consort.

Her great, sorrowful black eyes brightened when Signor Giacomo uttered a loud and final puff, and his companions, dropping their cards, threw themselves back in their respective chairs to rest a little and reflect upon the delights of the game. At last her master approached the sofa, and motioned to her to rise. For the first time in her life, perhaps, she was glad to get into the boat.

When her guests had left, the Marchesa rang the bell for the rosary, which they had not been able to repeat at the usual hour. The rosary was a living thing in Casa Maironi, having its roots in the Marchesa's past sins, and its growth was steady, for it was always putting forth fresh Aves and Glorias, as the old lady became more advanced in years, and saw her own disgusting skull looming before her, ever more distinct, ever more apparent. Consequently her rosary was extremely long. The sweet peccadillos of her protracted youth did not trouble her conscience over-much, but there were certain other transgressions which could be computed in pounds, shillings, and pence, transgressions never properly confessed and therefore never properly forgiven, and these caused her great uneasiness; an uneasiness she was continually trying to stifle by means of rosaries, but which was forever bursting out afresh. While she was praying to the Great Creditor for the remission of her debts, she would feel perfect confidence in His power to remit them all, but later there would once more loom before her mind's eye the sorrowful faces of the lesser creditors, bringing with them doubts concerning the pardon received, and thus her avarice and her pride were ever struggling against the fear of a perpetual debtor's prison beyond the tomb.

When they had recited the prayers for the conversion of sinners, and those for the healing of the sick, and were about to begin the De Profundis, she announced three new Ave Marias, without, however, stating for what purpose. The scullery maid, a simple peasant from Cressogno, supposed these Ave Marias were intended for the unhappy family at Oria, and recited them with extreme fervour. The scullery-maid's Aves clashed with and routed those of her mistress, which were asking for sleep, and rest for the nerves and conscience. As to the Ave Marias of all the others, they were repeated in the common hope that they might not remain definitely attached to the rosary, as too often happened. In short, no one succeeded in checking the onward march of the ghost.

Towards eleven o'clock the Marchesa retired. She drank some citron-water, and the

maid having begun to talk of Oria and of Don Franco, who, it was whispered, had returned, she ordered her to be silent. She was certainly affected. She saw continually before her eyes the image of Maria as she had once seen her when passing in her gondola below the little Gilardoni villa; a slight figure in a white apron, with long hair and bare arms, and strangely like a child of her own who had died when only three. Did she feel affection or pity? She herself could not tell what she felt. Perhaps it was only irritation and terror at not being able to rid herself of an annoying image; perhaps it was fear at the thought that if a certain great sin had not been committed long ago, if Marchese Franco's will had not been burnt, the child would not have died.

When she was in bed she had the maid read some prayers to her, then she ordered her to put out the light, and finally dismissed her. She closed her eyes, trying not to think of anything, and saw beneath her eyelids, a shapeless, light spot, which little by little transformed itself into a small pillow, then into a letter, then into a large white chrysanthemum, and at last into a pale, drooping, dead face, that gradually grew smaller and smaller. She fancied she was falling asleep, but as a result of this last transformation the thought of the child shot through her heart, and although she saw nothing more beneath her eyelids, her drowsiness vanished, and she opened her eyes, vexed and uneasy. She determined to think out a game of tarocchi in order to drive away these troublesome fancies, and induce sleep. She thought of the game, and succeeded, by an effort, in seeing in her mind's eye the little card-table, the players, the candles, the cards; but when she relaxed the tension of effort, in order to give herself up to a passive contemplation of these soporific phantoms, something totally different appeared beneath her eyelids—a head which was continually changing its features, its expression, its position, and which, at last, slowly drooped forward, as in sleep or death, so that she could only see the hair. This was another shock to her nerves. The Marchesa once more opened her eyes, and heard the clock on the stairs begin to strike. She counted the strokes; twelve o'clock. It was already

midnight, and she could not get to sleep! She lay some time with wide open eyes, and now images began to appear in the dark as they had before appeared beneath her eyelids. At first there was only a formless nucleus, which soon began to undergo transformation. She saw the face of a clock which presently turned into the horrible eye of a fish, and then became an angry, human eye. Suddenly the Marchesa felt quite sure she would not be able to go to sleep at all, and once more the drowsiness that had already taken firm hold on her, was put to flight. Then she rang the bell.

The maid let her ring twice, and then came in, half dressed and sleepy. She was ordered to place the candle upon a chair in such a position that the flame might not be visible from the bed, to get a volume of Barbieri's sermons, and to read in a low voice. The maid was in the habit of administering these narcotics. She began to read, but at the end of the second page, hearing her mistress's breathing grow deeper, she very gradually lowered her voice, until it became only an inarticulate murmur, and finally lapsed into silence. She waited a moment, listening to the deep and regular breathing, then rose and went to look at the dark face turned upwards on the pillows, with wrinkled brow and half-open mouth. Then she took up the candle and went out on tiptoe.

The Marchesa was asleep and dreaming. She was dreaming that she was stretched on a bed of straw in a great dark dungeon, chains upon her ankles, and accused of murder. The judge entered with a light, sat down beside her, and read her a sermon on the necessity of confession. She kept protesting that she was innocent, and repeating: "Don't you know she was drowned?" The judge made no answer, but went on reading in a mournful and solemn voice, while the Marchesa insisted: "No, no! I did not kill her!" In her dream she was no longer phlegmatic, but writhed like one in despair. "Remember that the child herself says so," the judge replied. He rose to his feet, repeating: "She says so." Then he struck the palm of one hand loudly upon the palm of the other, and called out: "Enter!" Thus far the Marchesa had been conscious in her dream that she was dreaming; at this point she thought she awoke,

and saw with horror, that some one had indeed entered the room.

A human form, slightly luminous, was seated in the armchair heaped with clothes that stood beside her bed, but in such a position that she could not distinguish the lower part of the apparition. Its shoulders, arms, and clasped hands were of a whitish hue, and indistinct in outline, but its head, that rested against the chair-back, was distinctly visible, and surrounded by a pale light. The dark, living eyes were staring at the Marchesa. Oh, horror! It was indeed the dead child! Oh, horror! Oh, horror! The eyes of the apparition spoke, and accused her. The judge was right, the child was saying so—without words—with her eyes! "It was you who did it, Grandmother, you! I should have been born, should have lived under your roof. You would not have it. Your punishment shall be death everlasting!"

The eyes alone, the staring, sad, pitiful eyes said all these things at once. The Marchesa uttered a long groan, and stretched out her arms towards the apparition, trying to say something, and succeeding only in gasping out: "Ah—ah—ah—" while the hands, the arms, the shoulders of the phantom vanished in a mist, the outlines of its face became blurred, and only the gaze remained, staring intently, and then finally becoming veiled was absorbed, as it were, into a deep and distant Self, nothing remaining of the apparition save a slight phosphorescence which was presently lost in the darkness.

The Marchesa awoke with a start. In her agitation she forgot the bell, and tried to call out, but could not raise her voice. By an effort of her will, which was still strong in spite of her failing bodily strength, she thrust her legs out of bed, and stood upright. She staggered forward a step or two in the dark, stumbling against the easy-chair, and clutched at another chair, dragging it down with her as she fell heavily to the ground, where she lay moaning.

The noise of the fall roused the maid, who called out to her mistress, but receiving no answer, and hearing the moaning, she lighted her candle and hastened into the

room, where, in the dim light between the armchair and the bed she saw something large and white that was writhing on the floor like some huge marine monster, that has been cast upon the shore. She screamed and rushed to the bell, rousing the whole house at once, and then hastened to help the old woman, who was groaning: "The priest! The priest! The prefect! The prefect!"

Footnotes

[P] Ambrosian: From St. Ambrose, patron of Milan. Therefore, Milanese. [Translator's note.]

CHAPTER XIII FLIGHT

At half-past two that same night Franco, Lawyer V., and their friend Pedraglio were sitting in the loggia in the dark, and in silence. Suddenly Pedraglio started up exclaiming: "What can that fool be about?" Going out to the terrace he listened a moment and then returned to the room. "No sign of him," said he. "Oh, I say! Are we to sit here like idiots and wait for them to come and take us, and all on account of that silly ass, who has probably fallen asleep? Maironi, you are fairly well acquainted with the road, and we all three have plenty of courage. If it should be necessary to pitch into anybody we should be quite equal to the occasion. Don't you think so, V.?"

The night before, between seven and eight o'clock, Pedraglio had happened to be on the road between Loveno and Menaggio. At the spot that goes by the name of "Bertin's Cove" a man had begged of him, had pressed a note into his hand, and had then walked rapidly away. The note ran as follows: "Why does Carlino Pedraglio not go to Oria at once, to see Signor Maironi and the lawyer from Varenna, and take a nice little walk with his dear friends over beyond the stake?"

Ever since the arrest of his friend the doctor at Pellio, Pedraglio had been expecting some sign from the police, and this note was not the first timely and ungrammatical

warning which had reached a patriot. The note spoke plainly; he must pass the stake that marked the frontier without delay. Pedraglio knew nothing of Franco's misfortune and return, nor was he aware of the lawyer's presence in Oria. He did not stop to speculate, however, but hastened to Loveno, provided himself with money, and started off on foot. He would not risk going to Porlezza, but took the path that from a spot near Tavordo rises upwards through a lonely ravine to the Passo Stretto. As nimble as a chamois, he reached Oria in four hours, and found Franco and the lawyer preparing to start, another mysterious warning having reached them through the curate of Castello, who had been to Porlezza, and had there been charged with the message, in the confessional. Ismaele was to guide them across the frontier. The passes of Boglia were very carefully guarded, and Ismaele proposed passing between Monte della Neve and Castello; then they would drop down into the valley, making straight for the Alpe di Castello below the Sasso Grande, and from there descend to Cadro, an hour above Lugano.

But Ismaele was to have been there at two o'clock, and at half-past two he had not yet appeared.

Luisa was also up. She was in the alcove-room mending a pair of Maria's stockings, which she intended to place on the little bed, where she had arranged all of the child's little garments with the same care as when the little one was alive. She had not wished to see either the lawyer or Pedraglio. After her intense excitement at the funeral her grief had once more assumed that gloomy aspect which caused Dr. Aliprandi still greater anxiety. She was no longer excited; she did not even speak, and she had never yet wept. Her manner towards Franco exhibited nothing but pity for this man who loved her, and whose affection and presence were, in spite of herself, perfectly indifferent to her. Franco, relying upon obtaining the position his director had talked so much about, had proposed taking the whole family back to Turin with him. Uncle Piero, poor old man, was quite ready to make this new sacrifice, but Luisa had stated explicitly that rather than leave her little daughter, she

would end her days in the lake.

Upon hearing the proposal to start without Ismaele, Franco rose and said he would go and take leave of his wife. Just at that moment the lawyer heard a step in the street below. "Silence!" said he. "Here he is." Franco went out to the terrace. Some one was, indeed, coming from the direction of Albogasio. Franco waited until the wayfarer had reached the church-place, and then called out in a low voice:

"Ismaele?"

"It is I," a voice answered that was not Ismaele's. "It is the prefect. I am coming up-stairs."

The prefect at that hour? What could have happened? Franco went to the kitchen, lighted a candle, and then hastened downstairs.

Five minutes passed and he had not returned to his friends. But meanwhile Ismaele's wife had appeared to say that her husband was feeling very ill, and could not stir. She stood in the square, and spoke to Pedraglio, who was on the terrace. He hastened to summon Franco, and found him on the stairs, coming up with the prefect. "The guide is ill," said he, knowing the priest to be an honest man. "Let us start at once, and not waste any more time." Franco replied that he could not start immediately, and that they must go on ahead. How was this? Why could he not start? No, he could not. He ushered the prefect into the hall, called the lawyer, and tried to persuade both Pedraglio and him to start at once. Something extraordinary had happened, about which he must consult his wife, and he could not say what he might decide to do. His friends protested that they would not forsake him. The jovial Pedraglio, who was in the habit of spending more money than his father approved of, observed that if the worst came to the worst, they would be able to live more economically and more virtuously at Josephstadt or Kufstein than in Turin, and that this would be a consolation to his "governor." "No, no!" exclaimed Franco. "You must go! Prefect, you persuade them!" And he went towards the alcove-room.

"Are you ready to start?" said Luisa, in that voice which seemed to come from a far-away world. "Good-bye."

He came to her side, and stooped to kiss the little stocking she held. "Luisa," he whispered, "the Prefect of Caravina is here." She did not express the slightest astonishment. "Grandmother sent for him an hour or two ago," Franco continued. "She told him she had seen our Maria, shining like an angel."

"Oh, what a lie!" Luisa exclaimed, in a tone full of contempt, but not angrily. "As if it were possible she would go to her and not come to me!"

"Maria has touched her heart," Franco went on. "She begs us to pardon her. She fears she is dying, and entreats me to come to her, to bring her a word of peace from you also."

Franco himself did not believe in the apparition, being profoundly sceptical of everything that was supernatural outside of religion, but he did believe that Maria, in her higher state, had already been able to work a miracle, and touch his grandmother's heart, and the thought caused him indescribable emotion. Luisa remained like ice. She was not even irritated, as Franco had feared she would be, by the proposal to send a friendly message. "Your grandmother fears hell," she observed with her mortal coldness. "Hell does not exist, and so all this amounts to nothing more than a fright. The suffering is not great. Let her bear it, and then die as we all must, and so, 'Amen.'" Franco saw it would be useless to insist. "Then I will go," said he. She was silent.

"I don't think I shall be able to come back this way," Franco added. "I shall have to take to the hills."

Still no answer.

"Luisa!" the young man said softly. Reproach, grief, passion, all these were in his appeal. Luisa's hands, that had never once paused in their work, now became still. She murmured:

"I no longer feel anything. I am like a stone."

Franco turned faint. He kissed his wife on her hair, said good-bye, and then entered the alcove, where, kneeling beside the little bed, he threw his arms across it, recalling his treasure's little voice: "One kiss more, papa!" A paroxysm of weeping assailed him, but he controlled himself, and hurriedly left the room.

In the hall his friends were impatiently awaiting his return. How could they start? They did not know the way. The lawyer was, indeed, acquainted with the Boglia road, but was that the best way to go if they wished to avoid the guards? On hearing that Franco was going to Cressogno they were filled with amazement, and Pedraglio gave vent to his indignation, saying it was shameful to forsake his friends in this fashion, when they were in trouble. When the prefect realised how matters stood he took Pedraglio's part, and offered to explain Franco's absence to his grandmother, and proposed that Franco should write a line or two, which he himself would carry to Cressogno. But Franco was convinced that his Maria wished him to take this step, and he would not yield. He suddenly remembered that the prefect was as familiar as a hare with all the mountain paths. "You go!" said he, addressing the priest. "You accompany them!" The prefect was about to reply that perhaps the Signora Marchesa might need him, when the lawyer exclaimed: "Hush! Look there!"

Directly in front of the house, where the shadow of Monte Bisgnago lay obliquely upon the rippling water, a boat had stopped. Franco recognised the customs-guards' launch.

"I am willing to wager those hogs are watching for us," Pedraglio murmured. "They are afraid we shall escape by boat. Anyway, they are on the lookout."

"Hush!" the lawyer repeated, approaching the window that overlooked the church-place.

All held their breath in silence.

"Children," said V., turning quickly from the window, "we are done for!" Franco

went to the window, and saw a solitary figure running towards the house. He concluded the lawyer had given a false alarm, but the man—it was he who went by the nickname of "the hunted hare," and who knew and saw everything—flung two words upwards as he passed beneath the window: "The police!" At the same moment they heard the noise of many feet. "Come with me! You also, Prefect!" cried Franco, and the others following, he made for the little courtyard between the house and the hillside, and, passing through a woodshed, reached the short cut that leads to Albogasio Superiore. It was so dark that no one noticed a customs-guard, standing, carbine in hand, not two steps from the door of the wood-shed. Fortunately this guard, a certain Filippini, from Busto, was an honest fellow, who ate the bread of Austria unwillingly, and simply because he could find no other. "Be quick!" said he in an undertone. "Cut across the fields, and then take the Boglia road! The path below the Madonnina on the left." Franco thanked the man, and, with his companions, started up the steep path that comes out on the narrow communal road of Albogasio Superiore. Half-way up they all jumped into a field of maize on the right, and stopped to listen. They heard steps on the stairs leading upwards from the church-place, and then on the path where the guard was posted. Evidently the police wished to make sure that all the exits were well guarded. The four crawled swiftly away through the maize, and on reaching the spot below a great boulder called "Lori's Rock," they stopped to hold a consultation. They might take the path that comes out on the Albogasio road at the very door of Pasotti's garden, and then climb up from field to field, as far as the Boglia road. But the path would be hard to find at this hour, and fearing to lose too much time, they determined to make for the stairway that leads up from Albogasio Inferiore to Puttini's house, then, leaving Casa Puttini on the right, they could reach the Boglia road in no time. It was already less dark. In one way this was a disadvantage, but at least it would enable them to find their way through that labyrinth of small fields and low walls. All were silent. Only Pedraglio would utter an oath in Milanese from time to time, as he stumbled over a

stone or scratched his hands on a hedge. Then the others would hush him. They reached the narrow stairway preceded by the prefect, who jumped walls and hedges like a squirrel. When they were all together on the stairs Franco withdrew from the group. On the Boglia road they would not need him; he was going to Cressogno. In vain Pedraglio seized him by the arm, in vain the prefect implored him not to expose himself to certain arrest, and probable imprisonment. He believed he was obeying Maria's voice, and felt that he was acting according to the dictates of conscience. He tore himself from Pedraglio, and disappeared up the stairs, for he did not wish to go to Cressogno by way of S. Mamette—that would be too dangerous.

"Follow me!" said the prefect. "The man is mad, and we have ourselves to think of."

As they were about to turn the corner of Puttini's house, they heard people approaching who were probably going down the stairs. The door of Puttini's house was open. The friends slipped inside. The people passed, talking. They were peasants, and one was saying: "Where the deuce can he be going at this hour?" Alas, they had met and recognised Franco! If the gendarmes and the guards should start out to hunt for the fugitives and come across these people, they would discover a trace at once. Towards dawn one is always sure of meeting people. This time they had been able to avoid being seen, but a second time they might be less fortunate, and a meeting might prove as fatal to Pedraglio and the lawyer as this one would probably prove to Franco. "If you could only disguise yourselves as peasants!" said the priest. A happy thought struck the lawyer, who had something both of the poet and the artist, and who was well acquainted with Puttini. He would take Scior Zacomo's clothes for Pedraglio, who was also short, and the big, fat servant's clothes for himself; stuff their own things into a gerla, [Q] fasten it upon his back, and start for Boglia. The "first political deputy" of Albogasio might have a hundred reasons for visiting the forest belonging to the commune. No sooner said than done! They proceeded upstairs, and the prefect, who was familiar with the house, went straight to call Marianna. She did not answer, and her room was empty. The prefect guessed

at once that the unfaithful servant had gone to S. Mamette for some secret business transaction, like that of the oil. That was why they had found the door open. They went to the kitchen and lighted two candles. The lawyer took one and the prefect pointed out Scior Zacomo's room to him. Meanwhile Pedraglio explored the kitchen by the light of the other candle, in search of "something wet, something to brace him up."

Scior Zacomo slept in a corner room beyond the hall which the lawyer crossed on tiptoe, picking his way between piles of chestnuts, walnuts, filberts, and pears. He approached the door—it was closed. He listened—silence. Very slowly he turned the handle and pushed. The beastly door squeaked—he heard a formidable snort, and Scior Zacomo cried out angrily: "Go away! Let me alone! Go away!" The lawyer entered without further parley. "Away with you, you accursed woman! Go away, I tell you!" cried Scior Zacomo, the point of his white night-cap rising out of the pillows. On catching sight of the lawyer he began to groan: "Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord! Oh, dear me! For pity's sake, forgive me! I thought it was my servant. Most distinguished Advocate, for the love of Heaven, tell me what has happened."

"Nothing, nothing, Scior Zacomo!" said the lawyer. "Only the Commissary of Porlezza is here——"

"Oh, good Lord!" and Scior Zacomo started to stick his legs out of bed.

"It is nothing, nothing! Be calm, be calm! Cover yourself up; cover yourself up again! We are going up to Boglia on account of that accursed bull, you know."

"Oh, Lord! What are you talking about? There is no bull at Boglia at this time of the year. Oh! I am all bathed in sweat!"

"Never mind. I tell you we are going to see the place, to see where he used to be. But the Commissary has very good reasons for strictly forbidding you to accompany us; he forbids you, moreover, to go out until we return, and he has even ordered me to remove your clothes."

Then he began rapidly collecting Puttini's garments, commanding him in the name of the Commissary to be silent. He took possession of the tall hat, seized the bamboo walking-stick, ordered the wretched man to bolt the door as soon as he should have left the room, and to open it to no one, to speak to no one, until the Commissary's return; all this in the name of that dreaded functionary. Then, leaving the poor man more dead than alive, he once more joined his companions, who, by dint of much searching, had found a filthy dress of Marianna's, a big, red kerchief for the head, a gerla, and a bottle of Anesone triduo. [R] "The deuce!" swore the lawyer, on examining the loathsome garments he must don. His disguise was indeed most unsatisfactory. The skirt was too short, and the kerchief did not hide his face sufficiently. However there was no time to look for anything better. But Pedraglio, in the tall hat, with the bamboo walking-stick in his hand, was a perfect Scior Zacomo. The lawyer thrust an old manuscript pamphlet he found in the kitchen under his friend's arm, and showed him how to walk and puff. Finally he took the keys to the wine-cellar, two enormous keys, gave one to Pedraglio and put the other in his own pocket. These would prove valuable weapons in case of need; one, he said, would strike in the treble key, the other in the bass. And so they went out, the prefect first, followed by the false Scior Zacomo puffing like a steam-engine, and then the false Marianna and her gerla bringing up the rear. Hardly had they reached the street when the real Marianna appeared, returning from S. Mamette with an empty flask. Catching sight of her master's tall hat looming in the uncertain light, she faced about and made off as fast as her legs would carry her.

"Miserable thief!" the prefect exclaimed. "Excellent! Your disguise is splendid!" In five minutes they had reached the Boglia road. Then the prefect turned homewards, and presently, hearing people coming up from Albogasio Superiore talking of gendarmes and guards, he went to meet them and inquired what had happened. Oh, nothing very important; only the gendarmes and soldiers had been to Casa Ribera to arrest Don Franco Maironi, and, it would appear, lawyer V. also, for they were sure

he must have been there, and they had been asking every one about him. However, they had found neither one nor the other of the friends, although the customs-guards had been watching the house since midnight. Now the police were searching all the houses in Oria, in the belief that the two men must have escaped by the roof. While the prefect was listening to this news a boy came running towards them from the direction of Albogasio Superiore. They stopped him. "The guards!" he gasped; "the gendarmes!" He was as white as a sheet; why he was running away he himself could not tell, and they found it impossible to gather from him where the gendarmes were. A woman appeared on the scene who was able to give them more information. Four customs-guards and four gendarmes had just now crossed the square in Albogasio Superiore. It was rumoured that Don Franco had been seen on the road to Castello, and two gendarmes with two guards had started towards the Boglia. The priest shuddered. "Of course," some one said, "they will cut him off on the Boglia road." The prefect took some comfort in the thought that both gendarmes and guards were now searching for Franco only. He was so tall, so slender, that neither the false Puttini nor the false Marianna could possibly be suspected of being him. Their fate was now beyond his control, but for Franco he could still do much. He started for Cressogno, confident that Franco would reach that place in safety, if the gendarmes did not discover any fresh traces, for they would search for him on all the paths leading from Castello to the frontier, but not on the road to Cressogno.

Pedraglio and the lawyer accomplished the first part of the journey from Albogasio to the stables of Püs, creeping up the precipitous slope like cats, with long and cautious steps. The lawyer advanced in silence, but the other was continually cursing his garments in an undertone. That "beastly hat," that made his forehead slippery with grease, that "infernal tail-coat," that smelt strong of the sweat of ages. They reached Püs without having met a living being. At Püs an old woman came out from between the stables just after they had passed, and exclaimed in amazement: "You up here, Scior Giacomo? At this hour?" "Puff!" murmured the lawyer, and Pedraglio

began to blow, "Apff! Apff!" like a pair of bellows. "Such paths as these take the breath away, my good sir," said the old woman. They met no one else until they reached Sostra.

Sostra, a stable about half-way up the mountain, with a barn, a shed, and a cistern, lies some distance back from the path. That path is the very worst in the whole of Valsolda. It would make even a wild goat hang its tongue out. Pedraglio and the lawyer, panting and wet through with perspiration, turned into the Sostra for a moment's rest. There all was silence and solitude. At that height they already breathed a different air. And how much lower the mountain-tops had become! And the lake down there in the depths looked like a river! The lawyer cast anxious glances upwards towards the first crest of the Boglia, where the great beech forest begins. Only half an hour more of climbing! "Come along!" said he. But Pedraglio, in whose legs there still lingered the memory of that other long walk from Loveno to Oria by way of the Passo Stretto, wanted to rest a little longer, and began calmly turning over the leaves of Puttini's old manuscript. It was a monkish poem by some unknown Cremonese of the seventeenth century. "Come along," his companion repeated after a minute or two, and was already preparing to rise when he heard some one approaching. He had barely time to whisper, "Look out!" and turn his back that his face might not be seen. Pedraglio, though he kept his manuscript close to his nose, saw first two customs-guards and then two gendarmes appear upon the path. He warned his friend of this in a low tone, and without turning his head. The two guards halted. One of them saluted: "My respects, Signor Puttini." Turning to the gendarmes, he said: "This gentleman is the first political deputy of Albogasio." The gendarmes saluted also, and Pedraglio raised his hat, and held the manuscript a little higher. The guards wished to rest awhile, but one of the gendarmes ordered them to move on, and when the rest of the company had started forward, he himself approached the Sostra. He was from Ampezzo, and spoke Italian very fluently. "You dog! I hope you don't know me!" thought Pedraglio, vaguely conscious of his dual

personality. "We are in for it, anyway!"

"Signor Deputato Politico," said the man, "did you happen to see Signor Maironi at Oria this morning?"

"I? No, indeed. Signor Maironi is in bed and asleep at this hour."

"And you yourself——where are you going?"

"I am going up that mountain, up that accursed Boglia, to see about the communal bull."

"Idiot!" groaned the lawyer inwardly. "He is making it communal now!" But the "communal" was allowed to pass unchallenged. The gendarme, who had a face like a bull-dog, stared hard at his interlocutor. "You are a political deputy," said he insolently, "and you wear that thing on your chin?" Instinctively Pedraglio's hand went to his thin, black, pointed beard, the abhorred beard of the liberals. "I will cut it off," said he, with mock seriousness. "Most certainly, my dear sir! Are you also going up the Boglia!" Very stiffly the gendarme moved away, without answering, and all unconscious of the shameful gibbet to which the political deputy was consigning him.

The two friends congratulated themselves on their narrow escape, but they recognised that the game had become very serious. Now they had the guards to reckon with, who knew Puttini well, and they must find a means of avoiding them. And what if that bull-dog of a gendarme should blab about the beard? "Come on! Come on!" said the lawyer. "Let us follow them, and if we see or hear them turn back we must take to our heels and make off to the left, towards the frontier." This would have been a desperate move, for they were unacquainted with the ground, with which the guards were undoubtedly familiar.

But in order to catch up with his companions the bull-dog had to sweat and pant so hard that when he reached them he had no desire left to speak of beards. Pedraglio and the lawyer climbed slowly upwards, and saw the enemy reach the crest of the

hill at the Madonnina beech-tree. There they halted for some time and then disappeared.

The venerable beech-tree, which had the honour of bearing upon its trunk an image of the Madonna, which, on its death, it bequeathed to a small chapel, stood like a sentinel before the great forest of Boglia, like a soldier posted in this dip of the crest, to keep watch over the precipitous hillside, the lake, and the sloping ground of Valsolda. The venerable army of colossal beeches stood marshalled in another silent hollow between the slope of Colmaregia, the easily climbed Dorsi della Nave, the rocky base of the Denti di Vecchia or Canne d'Organo, and that other saddle of the Pian Biscagno, between Colmaregia and the Sasso Grande, and faced the depths of Val Colla from Lugano to Cadro. An open, grass-grown strip of ground stretched along the edge of the crest, between the Madonnina beech-tree and the forest. The two fugitives stopped to consider their position. Which way should they go? Should they look for the little path below the beech-tree, of which the guard who had saved them had spoken, or should they enter the forest? No, it would be unwise to take to the woods, in the wake of the game they had just seen enter them. In the forest they were sure to find the dead leaves lying ankle-deep, and it would be impossible to pass through without attracting the attention of the blood-hounds that were roaming there, and their disguise would not bear close inspection. The path? There were more paths than one beneath the beech-tree. Which was the right one? Pedraglio swore at the absent Franco for not having accompanied them, but the lawyer was studying the Colmaregia, which could be climbed without entering the forest. He had twice made the ascent of the Colmaregia, that superb, slender, grass-grown peak of the Boglia, which the line of the frontier cuts in halves. He knew that from there they would be able to descend to the Swiss village of Brè, and he resolved to try that route. No one was visible on the crest that rises from the Madonnina beech towards the Colmaregia, and the summit was enveloped in clouds.

Just below the beech-tree they were overtaken by a wave of mist which had rolled

up one side of the mountain and was rapidly pouring down the other; a cold, thick mist, a mist "as bad as they make them," so V. said. They could not see five steps ahead, and thus it happened that near the beech-tree Pedraglio ran almost into the arms of a customs-guard.

He was one of the four, and had been told off to guard the open space between the brow of the hill and the forest. Catching sight of the little man in the top-hat, he exclaimed: "On the Boglia, Sig——" The lawyer quickly cast aside his gerla, and the guard did not finish his sentence, but stared a moment, open-mouthed, and then exclaimed: "How is this?"

The lawyer did not wait for further explanations.

"This is how it is," said he calmly, and drawing his fists into position on his breast, he hit out suddenly, and dealt the guard a tremendous blow in the stomach that sent him rolling on the grass, his heels in the air. In a flash Pedraglio was upon him, and snatched his carbine from him.

"If you yell, you dog, I shall do for you!" said he. But how could he possibly yell? With a blow like that in the stomach, it was all he could do to breathe for at least fifteen minutes. In fact the man lay like one dead, and it was some time before they could even make him groan faintly: "Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord!"

"It's nothing, nothing at all," V. told him with his usual, mocking calm. "Shocks like that are good for the health. You will see. Now, my friend, you are just going to pick yourself up and stand nice and firm on your legs, and accompany us to Colmaregia. You will see how well you will be able to walk. I was careful not to use this." And he showed him the key.

"Oh, what a blow!" groaned the guard. "Oh, what a terrible blow!"

"It is indeed a rather stiff climb," the lawyer went on, taking the carbine from Pedraglio, "but with your permission we will help you up from behind with the point of this instrument. Thus climbing will become a delight. Then you must bear us

company down to Brè. We will carry your carbine for you, but you, in return, must carry this little gerla. Is my meaning quite clear to you? Now, march!"

But the wretched man could not get to his feet and they certainly could not leave him there and run the risk of his calling out for help.

"Poor fellow!" said Pedraglio. "You hit him too hard."

V. replied that he had touched him with the gentleness of a woman, and passing the carbine to Pedraglio, he seized the guard by the collar of his uniform, pulled him to his feet, and made him run his arms through the straps of the gerla.

"Go ahead, you fraud!" said he. "March, lazy-bones!"

Up, up, ever upwards they climbed through the thick mist. The hillside was extremely steep, and it was all they could do to find foothold between the clumps of soft grass. They slipped, they laboured with hands and feet, but they heeded naught, struggling ever upwards for freedom's sake. Up, up, ever upwards, through the thick mist, invisible as spirits, first the false Marianna, then the guard puffing and groaning under the heavy gerla, then the false Scior Zacomo promising him a fine view from the top, and from time to time encouraging him with the point of the carbine. The carbine worked miracles. In half an hour the three had reached the crest, from whence the hill slopes down towards Brè, lying only a short distance below the summit. Then, sitting upon the grass, they let themselves slide rapidly downwards. Presently it began to rain, and the mist grew thinner, and below them, at their feet, they could see the red of the woodlands. Scior Zacomo's venerable top-hat was the first to reach the spot, hurled from above by Pedraglio with a joyful "Hurrah for Italy!" as he himself slid onwards, arm in arm with the guard. At Brè Pedraglio called the whole town together by firing off the carbine in sign of exultation, and then he distributed anesone triduo among the men, and administered it in smaller doses to the girls. He begged the curate to allow him to hang the tail-coat in the church as a votive offering, sat down to eat with the guard, got the priest to preach

him a sermon on the duty of pardoning blows in the stomach, and read a verse of the monkish poem to him, which ended thus:

At this point the good priest did exclaim: My views are no longer the same.

After this he had no difficulty in demonstrating to him that if this Padre Lanternone had suddenly changed his opinions, he, the guard, would be fully justified in changing his, and he finally persuaded him to desert. The guard ended by casting aside his uniform and donning the tail-coat, amidst the laughter and applause of all present. The only one who did not join in the laughter was the lawyer. "What may not have happened to poor Maironi?" said he.

Franco did not cross Castello. Upon reaching the little Rovajà chapel he hastened downwards by the path that leads to the fountain at Caslano, reached the narrow lane that goes to Casarico and followed it upwards as far as the last turning just below Castello, where the church of Puria becomes visible beneath its amphitheatre of crags; then he turned into the valley on the right, hastening along a path fit for goats only, climbed upwards once more below the church of Loggio, and reached Villa Maironi without having met any one.

Carlo, the old servant who opened the door for him, nearly fainted with emotion as he kissed Franco's hands. At that moment the doctor was in the sick room. Franco decided to wait until he should come out, and meanwhile took the faithful old man into his confidence, telling that the gendarmes were at his heels. Dr. Aliprandi soon came out, and Franco, who knew him to be a patriot, confided in him also, for he must show himself, and make inquiries about his grandmother. Aliprandi had been called in the night, after the prefect had left for Oria. He had found the Marchesa in a state of nervous excitement, tormented by a terrible fear of death, but exhibiting no symptoms of illness. At present she seemed quite calm. Franco had her informed of his arrival, and was ushered into the room by the maid, who looked at him with obsequious curiosity, and then withdrew.

The half-open shutters of the room where the Marchesa lay, admitted only two slanting streaks of grey light, which did not reach the face, thrown back upon the pillow. On entering Franco could not see that face, but he heard the familiar, sleepy voice saying:

"Is that you, Franco?"

"Yes, grandmother. Good-morning," and he stooped to kiss her. The waxen mask was unruffled, but there was a vague and gloomy expression about the eyes that seemed at once desire and terror. "I am dying, you know, Franco," said the Marchesa. Franco protested, and repeated what the doctor had said to him. His grandmother listened, gazing eagerly at him, trying to read in his eyes if the doctor had really spoken thus. Then she answered:

"It makes no difference. I am quite ready."

From the changed expression on her face and in her voice Franco understood perfectly that she was quite ready to live twenty years longer. "I am sorry for your bereavement," said she, "and I forgive you."

Franco had not expected words of pardon from her. He had believed it was for him to bring forgiveness, not to receive it. Comforted and reassured, the Marchesa of every day was gradually reappearing beneath the Marchesa of an hour. She was willing to purchase peace of mind, but she was like the sordid miser who, having yielded to the temptation of gratifying some desire, allowed the price of his enjoyment to escape painfully from between his tightly-clasped fingers, trying the while to keep back as much as possible behind his nails. At another time Franco's wrath would have burst forth, he would have rejected that forgiveness angrily, but now, with his sweet Maria in his heart, he could not feel thus. He had however noticed that his grandmother had proffered her forgiveness to him alone. This was too much; he could not pass this over.

"My wife, my wife's uncle, and I myself have suffered much beside this last

bereavement," said he, "and now we have lost our only comfort. Uncle Ribera I leave out of the question; you, I myself, all must bow before him, but if my wife and I have sinned against you, let us make forgiveness mutual."

This was a bitter pill, but the Marchesa swallowed it in silence. Although she no longer saw death at her bedside, her heart still trembled with the terror inspired by the apparition, and by certain words the prefect had spoken on hearing her confession. "I shall make a will," she said, "and I wish you to know that the whole Maironi property will go to you."

Ah, Marchesa, Marchesa! Poor, icy creature! Did she believe she could purchase peace at this price? In this the prefect also had blundered, for it was he who had advised her to make this declaration to her grandson, kind, honest man that he was, but entirely without tact, and incapable of understanding Franco's lofty soul. The idea that she might think he had been prompted by sordid motives to come to her, was intolerable to Franco. "No, no!" he exclaimed, quivering, and fearing his hot temper would get the better of him after all. "No, no! Don't leave me anything. It will be quite enough if you will allow the interest on my own money to be paid at Oria. Grandmother, you must leave the Maironi property to the Ospitale Maggiore. I fear my ancestors did very wrong to keep it."

His grandmother had not time to answer, for there came a knock at the door. The prefect entered, and offering as an excuse that he would tire the invalid, persuaded Franco to say good-bye. "You must make haste," said he, when they were outside. "You have done more than your duty here. Too many people are now aware of your presence, and the gendarmes may appear at any moment. I have arranged everything with Aliprandi. He considers a consultation necessary for the Marchesa, and will take the Villa Maironi gondola and go to Lugano for a doctor. The two boatmen will be Carlo and yourself. There are those oil-cloth cloaks with hoods. Put on one of those and remain in the stern. Now we must shave off that pointed beard of yours,

and then with the hood drawn over your head, no one will possibly be able to recognise you. You will be perfectly safe. Perhaps you may not even be obliged to put in at the customs-house. At any rate, they will not recognise you. If there is any talking to be done, Carlo can do it."

The idea was good. The Marchesa's gondola was always looked upon by the agents of Austria with the greatest respect; as if it were carrying an egg of the double-headed eagle. Even when returning from Lugano it was made to stop at the customs-house simply pro forma.

It was past eight o'clock when the gondola left the boathouse. From the lofty summits the mist had descended upon the lake, and it was raining. Sad, sad day! Sad, sad journey! Neither Franco, the servant, nor Aliprandi spoke a word. They passed S. Mamette and Casarico, and then, amidst the mist beyond the olives of Mainè, the white walls of Maria's resting-place appeared. Franco's eyes filled with tears. "No, dear," he thought; "no, love; no, my life, you are not there; and I thank my God, who tells me not to believe this horrid thing!" A few strokes more and there was the little house of happy days, of bitter hours, of misfortune; there was the window of the room where Luisa was giving herself up to black grief, the loggia where, henceforth, poor old Uncle Piero would spend his days alone, that just man who was going down to the grave in silence, in tribulation, in weariness. Franco longed to know what had happened after his departure; if the police had worried Uncle Piero and Luisa. In vain he strained his eyes: no living being was to be seen either on the terrace, in the little garden, or at the windows of the loggia. All was silent, all was calm. He stopped rowing, searching for some sign of life. Dr. Aliprandi opened the door of the felze [S] and begged him to resume his rowing, begged him not betray himself. At that moment Leu came to the parapet of the little garden, with a jug in her hand; she glanced at the gondola and then entered the loggia. Uncle Piero must be in the loggia, and they were taking him the customary glass of milk, so probably nothing had happened. Franco once more began to row,

and Dr. Aliprandi closed the door. They glided past the little garden, past the other houses of Oria, and the gondola turned towards the landing-stage of the customs-house.

Bianconi, sitting under an umbrella and fishing for tench, spied the gondola, and, dropping his pole, came forward to pay his respects to the Marchesa. But he found Dr. Aliprandi instead, who so upset him by his alarming account of the lady that he felt called upon to summon his Peppina and impart the news to her; and Peppina, poor woman, was obliged to act a little comedy of affliction under her Carlascia's umbrella. Both husband and wife exhorted Aliprandi to make haste, to return quickly. The big mastiff gave him permission to cross directly from Gandria to Cressogno on the way back. Then the doctor turned to Franco, and gave the order to proceed. Franco had listened to the conversation standing motionless, his hands clasping his oar, and hoping to hear something about his friends or his family. But no word was breathed concerning either police, arrests, or flights, and Casa Ribera might have been in China. The gondola backed slowly away from the landing-stage, turned its prow towards Gandria, gliding ever further and further away until it had slipped across the frontier, and vanished in the mist.

On reaching the Lugano shore, Dr. Aliprandi opened the door, and called Franco into the little cabin. Their acquaintance was only slight, but they embraced like brothers. "When the cannonading begins I shall be there also," Aliprandi said.

They must say good-bye here, and Franco must go ashore first and alone, for Lugano was full of spies and the doctor must also be cautious. Besides, Aliprandi was in no hurry. He was more anxious to find a boatman than a physician. Franco drew his hood over his eyes, stepped ashore and went directly to the Albergo della Corona.

Some hours later, when the gondola had started homewards, he went out in search of some one from Valsolda who might give him news, and directed his steps towards

the Fontana pharmacy. Under the arcades he met his two friends, who had just left the pharmacy. They fell upon his neck, and wept with emotion. They also had been in search of news, and at the pharmacy they had heard that Franco had been arrested. What joy to find him here, and to feel they were standing on free soil!

Footnotes

[Q] Gerla: a basket the peasants both in Switzerland and in North Italy carry fastened upon their backs. [Translator's note.]

[R] Anesone triduo: a sort of very coarse and very strong anisette. [Translator's note.]

[S] Felze: the cover which is placed upon gondolas in winter or in bad weather. It forms a tiny cabin. [Translator's note.]

Part III

CHAPTER I THE SAGE SPEAKS

No less than three springs had come and gone since the autumn of 1855 without bringing to the banks of the Ticino that mustering of armies and of banners that the Italians had expected. In February, 1859, all were convinced that a fourth spring could not pass thus. Great events, duly pre-announced by a splendid comet, were approaching. The old world was quivering and creaking inwardly, as does a frozen river on the eve of a thaw. That deadly cold and awful silence which had lasted ten years, was about to disappear, to be swept away amidst the clamour of strife and destruction, by new currents, warm and brilliant. Carlascia was playing the braggart, and would talk to his guards (who made no comments) of an impending military expedition to Turin. Signor Puttini had never entirely recovered from the shock he had received on that memorable morning; and the lawyer's treachery, the tragic end

of the top-hat, the comic end of the tail-coat, had deeply affected him, and he had lost all respect for patriots. Dr. Aliprandi was already in Piedmont. A veteran subaltern of the army of Napoleon, who lived in Puria, was secretly furbishing up his old uniform, with the intention of presenting himself before the French Emperor when he should enter Italy. Whenever Intrioni, the curate of Castello, met Don Giuseppe Costabarbieri, he would remind him of a certain rhyme of 1796 which he, Don Giuseppe, had gone about repeating in 1848, but which he had soon hidden away again.

The mighty Ulans Came here from Hungary, But the Frenchman's arms Made them all promptly flee!

Don Giuseppe, greatly alarmed, would cry: "Hush! Hush!"

Meanwhile the violets continued to grow as peacefully on the slopes of Valsolda as if nothing were happening. On the evening of the twentieth of February, Luisa carried a bunch to the cemetery. She was still in mourning. Pallid and emaciated, her eyes had become larger, and there were many silver threads in her hair. She seemed to have grown twenty years older since her bereavement. Upon leaving the cemetery she turned towards Albogasio, and joined some women from Oria, who were going to recite the Rosary in the parish church. She no longer seemed the same dark phantom that had laid the violets on Maria's grave. She talked calmly, almost gaily, first with one, then with another of the women; inquired after a sick animal, praised and caressed a little girl who was going to the Rosary with her grandmother, and told her to sit very still in church, as her Maria had always done. She said this and mentioned Maria very quietly, but the women shuddered and were filled with astonishment, for Luisa herself never went to church now. She asked one of the girls if the young men were going to act a play as usual, and if her brother was to take part. Upon receiving an answer in the affirmative she offered to help with the costumes. She left the others on the church-place of the Annunciata, and as she went

down the Calcinera alone her face once more resumed its spectral appearance.

She was on her way to Casarico to see the Gilardonis, who had been married three years. The professor's happiness and his adoration of Ester would deserve to be told in verse! Uncle Piero said of him that he had grown feeble-minded. Ester feared he might become ridiculous, and would not allow him to assume certain ecstatic poses before her when there was anyone present. The only person in whose presence she did not insist upon the observance of this rule was Luisa. But Gilardoni always showed the greatest deference for Luisa; to him she was still a superhuman being; to his respect for the woman herself had been added his respect for her grief, and in her presence his behaviour was always most circumspect. Luisa had been going to Casa Gilardoni almost every evening for about two years now, and if anything could have troubled the couple's happiness it would have been these visits.

Indeed, their motive was a strange one, and one repugnant to Ester, but Ester's affection for her friend, and her pity for her bereavement, were so great, while her heart was so full of remorse for not having looked after Maria more carefully on that terrible day, that she did not dare to resolutely oppose her wishes, or dissuade her husband from gratifying them. She expressed her disapproval to Luisa, and begged her at least to maintain secrecy concerning the nightly doings in the professor's study, but she went no further. The professor, on the contrary, would have enjoyed these séances had it not been for his wife's disapproval. It was already dark when Luisa rang the bell at the little door of Casa Gilardoni. Ester herself opened it. Luisa did not return her greeting, which she felt was full of embarrassment. She simply looked at her, but when they reached the little parlour on the ground-floor where Ester was in the habit of spending her evenings, she embraced her so passionately that Ester burst into tears. "Have patience with me!" Luisa said. "It is all that is left me!" Ester tried to comfort her, telling her that happier times were coming for her; that she and Franco would soon be reunited. In a few months Lombardy would be free, and Franco would come home. And then—and then—so many things might

happen! Perhaps Maria might return! Luisa started violently and caught her friend's hands. "No!" she cried. "Do not say such things! Never! Never! I am all hers! I belong to Maria alone!" Ester could not answer, for at that point the smiling professor came bustling into the room.

He saw that his wife's eyes were wet with tears and that Luisa was greatly excited. He greeted her very quietly and sat down in silence beside Ester, in the belief that they had been discussing the usual subject, which was so painful to his wife. She would have liked to send him away and resume her conversation with Luisa, but did not venture to do so. Luisa was shuddering at that spectre of future danger which would sometimes stand vaguely outlined before her mind's eye, but which she had always banished with horror, never pausing to examine it, and which now, evoked by her friend's words, rose before her, naked and distinct. After a long and painful silence Ester sighed, and said in a low voice:

"You may go if you like. Go, both of you."

Luisa, moved by an impulse of gratitude, fell on her knees before her friend and buried her face in her lap. "You know," she said, "I no longer believe in God. At first I thought there must be a cruel God, but now I do not believe in the existence of any God. But if a loving God, such as He in whom you believe, did really, surely exist, He would not condemn a poor mother who has lost her only child, and who is struggling to persuade herself that a part of that child still lives!"

Ester made no reply. Almost every night for two years Luisa and her husband had evoked the spirit of the dead child. Professor Gilardoni, in whom there was a strange mingling of the free-thinker and the mystic, had read with great interest the marvellous tales that were told concerning the Fox sisters—Americans—and the experiments of Eliphas Levi, and had closely followed the spiritualistic movement which had spread rapidly in Europe, in the form of a mania that upset both heads and tables. He had spoken to Luisa about this movement, and Luisa, possessed and

blinded by the idea that she might ascertain if her child did still exist, in which case she might in some way be able to communicate with her, seeing nothing else in all the marvellous facts and strange theories save this one luminous point, had besought him to make some experiments with Ester and herself. Ester believed in nothing supernatural outside the doctrines of Christianity, and did not, therefore, take the matter seriously. She willingly consented to place her hands on a small table, in the company of her friend and her husband, who, on the contrary, exhibited great zeal, and had faith in their chances of success. The first experiments were disappointing. Ester, who found them tedious, would have liked to discontinue the attempts, but one evening, after twenty minutes of waiting, the little table tipped to one side, lifted a leg in the air, righted itself, and then tipped again, to Ester's great chagrin, but to the great joy of Luisa and the professor. The next night five minutes sufficed to make the table move. The professor taught them the alphabet, and then tried to summon a spirit. The table responded, knocking with its leg upon the floor according to the alphabet that had been arranged. The spirit evoked gave its name: Van Helmont. Ester was frightened and trembled like a leaf; the professor was trembling also, but with excitement. He wished to tell Van Helmont that he had his works in his library, but Luisa besought him to inquire where Maria was. Van Helmont answered: "Near!" Then Ester rose, as pale as a ghost, protesting that she would not continue, and neither Luisa's tears nor entreaties could move her. It was sinful, sinful! Ester's religious sense was not deep, but she had a wholesome fear of hell and the devil. For some time it had been impossible to resume the séances—she had a horror of them, and her husband did not venture to oppose her wishes. It was Luisa who, by dint of prayers and entreaties, at last obtained a compromise. The séances were resumed, but Ester took no part in them.

She did not even wish to know what took place. Only, whenever her husband seemed worried or preoccupied, she would throw out an uneasy allusion to the secret dealings in the study. Then he would be troubled, and offer to desist, but Ester had

not the courage to face Luisa. For she had discovered indirectly that Luisa really believed she held communication with the child's spirit. Once she had said: "I shall not come to-morrow night because Maria does not wish it." At another time she had said: "I am going up to Looch because Maria wants a flower from her grandmother's grave." To Ester it seemed incredible that a head so clear and strong could be thus deluded. At the same time she realised the extreme difficulty of convincing her by gentle means, and all the cruelty of using harsh measures with her.

The professor lit a candle and went upstairs to the study, followed by Luisa. We are acquainted with this study that was like a ship's cabin, its shelves filled with books, its little fireplace, its windows overlooking the lake and the armchair in which Maria had gone to sleep one Christmas Eve. The room now contained something else. Between the fireplace and the window stood a small round table, with one central leg only, that branched out into three feet, about a hand's breadth from the floor.

"I am very sorry to cause Ester so much pain," said the professor as they entered the room. He placed the light on the writing-desk, but instead of preparing the little table and the chairs as usual he went to look out of the window at the pale light on the water and in the sky, amidst the surrounding shadows of night. Luisa stood motionless, and suddenly he faced about as if some magnetism had revealed her anguish to him. He saw appalling anguish on her face, and understood that she believed he had made up his mind to stop the séances, whereas he had only been tempted to do so, and, greatly moved, he seized her hands, telling her that Ester was good, that she loved her so much, that neither he nor she would ever willingly cause her suffering. Luisa did not answer, but the professor had all he could do to prevent her kissing his hand. While he was arranging the little table and the two chairs in the centre of the floor, she sank into the armchair, in a state of great depression.

"There!" said the professor.

Drawing a letter from her pocket Luisa handed it to him.

"I need Maria and you so much to-night," said she. "Read that. It is from Franco. You can begin with the fourth page." The professor did not hear these last words, but going to the light, began to read aloud:

"Turin, February 18, 1859.

"My own Luisa,—

"Do you know you have not written to me for a fortnight!"

"You can skip that," said Luisa, but at once corrected herself. "No, perhaps you had better read it." The professor continued.

"This is my third letter to you since yours of the sixth. Perhaps I was too violent in my first letter, and wounded you. What a temper is this of mine, that makes me speak, and sometimes even write such harsh words when my blood is up! And what blood is this of mine that at two-and-thirty is as quick to boil as at two-and-twenty! Forgive me, Luisa, and permit me to return to the subject, and take back those words that may have offended you.

"At present there is no more talk here either of tables or of spirits, but only of diplomacy and war; in former years, however, spiritualism was very widely discussed, and several persons I both respect and esteem believed in it. I knew positively that many among them were simply deluded but I never doubted their good faith when they told me of conversations they had had with spirits. It would indeed seem that our imagination, when inflamed, can make us see and hear things that do not really exist. But I am willing to admit that in your case you are not deceived by your imagination; that your little table does really move and express itself exactly as you say. I was wrong to doubt this—I confess it—in the first place because you are so sure of not being mistaken, and secondly, because I am well aware of Professor Gilardoni's honesty. But to me this is a question of sentiment. I know that my sweet Maria lives with God, and I cherish the hope that some time I, with other souls dear to me, may go where she is. If she should appear before me

unbidden, if, without having summoned her, I should hear the sound of her voice, clear and distinct, perhaps I should not be able to bear such joy. But I could never summon her, never force her to come to me. The thought is repugnant to me; it is contrary to that sense of veneration I feel for a Being who is so much nearer God than I am. Dear Luisa, I also speak to our treasure every day, speak to her of myself and of you as well; I am convinced that she sees us, that she loves us, that she can still do much for us even in this life. How I wish that your intercourse with her might be of the same nature! If, in answering your letter in which you allude to a communication from her I expressed myself too harshly, forgive me, not only in consideration of my hasty temper, but still more in consideration of my sentiments, which are indeed a part of my nature.

"Forgive me also in consideration of the atmosphere of intense excitement in which I am living here. My throat is perfectly well. Since war has been talked of, I have cast aside both camphor and sedative waters, but my nerves are in a state of such extraordinary tension that it seems as if, were they touched, sparks must fly from them. All this is partly due to the amount of work to be accomplished at the Home Office, where it is no longer a question of regular hours, but where even the humblest secretary, if he be conscientious, must strain every muscle. When I first obtained this position through the kindness of Count Cavour, I felt I was not really earning the bread the government gave me. This is no longer the case, but I am about to withdraw from this field of strenuous labour; and this brings me to another topic, to something I have long had in my heart, and which I now impart to you with feelings of indescribable emotion.

"In a week my friends and I are going to enlist in the army as volunteers, for the duration of the coming campaign. We are entering the ninth infantry regiment, stationed in Turin. Here at the Home Office they would like to keep me some time longer, but I intend to become familiar with my duties in the regiment before the campaign opens, and I have therefore simply promised not to leave the Office until

the day before we enlist.

"Luisa, we have not seen each other for three years and almost five months! It is true you are under police surveillance, and that you may not go to Lugano, but I have several times proposed means to you of meeting me, at least at the frontier, or on the mountains, and you have never even answered. I believed I knew why. It was because you could not tear yourself away even for a short time, from a certain sacred spot. This seemed too much, and I confess I had many bitter feelings. Then I reproached myself, I felt I was selfish, and I forgave you. Now, Luisa, circumstances have changed. I have no forebodings of evil; indeed, it seems impossible that I should be destined to end my days on a battlefield, nevertheless this is not impossible. I am going to take part in a war that promises to be one of the greatest, one of the longest and most desperate, for if Austria is risking her Italian provinces, we, and perhaps Emperor Napoleon as well, are risking everything. It is said we shall spend next winter beneath the walls of Verona. Luisa, I cannot run the risk of dying without seeing you once more. I shall have only twenty-four hours, I cannot come to the frontier or to Lugano, and I should not be satisfied to spend ten minutes with you. Ask Ismaele to get you to Lugano in some way on the morning of the twenty-fifth of this month. Leave Lugano in time to reach Magadino at one o'clock, for you cannot go by way of Luino. At Magadino you must take the boat that leaves at about half-past one. At four or thereabouts you will reach Isola Bella, where I shall arrive at about the same hour from Arona. At this time of year Isola Bella is a desert. We can spend the evening together, and in the morning you will leave for Oria, I for Turin.

"I am writing to Uncle Piero to ask his forgiveness for depriving him of your company for one day.

"I do not apprehend any danger. The Austrians are thinking only of their arms, and their police are letting thousands of young men escape them, young men who come

here to take up arms. The Austrians would be terrible the day after a victory, but, God willing! that day shall never dawn for them.

"Luisa, can it be possible I shall not find you at Isola Bella, that you may think you are pleasing Maria by not coming? But don't you know that if some one had said to my Maria, to my poor little darling—run and say good-bye to your papa, who is perhaps going away to die—how fast——"

The reader's voice trembled, broke, and was lost in a sob. Luisa hid her face in her hands. He placed the letter on her knees, saying with difficulty: "Donna Luisa, can you hesitate?"

"I am wicked," Luisa murmured. "I am mad!"

"But do you not love him?"

"Sometimes I think I love him very much, at other times not at all."

"My God!" the professor exclaimed. "But now? Are you not moved by the thought that you may never see him again?"

Luisa was silent, she seemed to be crying. Suddenly she started to her feet, pressing her hands to her temples, and fixed her eyes on the professor's face, eyes in which there were no tears, but in which there shone a sinister and angry light. "You don't know," she cried, "what there is here in my head! What a mass of contradictions, how many opposite thoughts that are struggling together, and always changing places with each other! When I received the letter I cried bitterly, and said to myself. 'Yes, my poor Franco, this time I will go!'—And then there came a voice that spoke here in my forehead, and said: 'No, you must not go because—because—because——'"

She ceased speaking, and the professor, terrified by the flashes of madness he saw in those eyes that were fixed on his, did not dare to ask for an explanation. The eyes, which still stared into his, gradually softened and became veiled with tears. Luisa took his hands, and said gently, timidly: "Let us ask Maria."

They sat down at the table and placed their hands upon it. The professor sat with his back to the light, which fell full upon Luisa's face. The little table was in the shadow. After eleven minutes of profound silence, the professor murmured:

"It is beginning to move."

In fact the table was gradually leaning over to one side. Presently it righted itself, and knocked once, lightly. Luisa's face brightened.

"Who are you?" said the professor. "Answer with the usual alphabet."

There came seventeen, then fourteen, then eighteen knocks, and then one alone. "Rosa," said the professor softly. Rosa was a little sister of his wife's who had died in infancy, and the table had knocked out this name on several previous occasions. "Go away," said Gilardoni. "Send Maria to us."

The table soon began to move again, and knocked out the words:

"It is I, Maria!"

"Maria, Maria, my own Maria!" whispered Luisa, her face assuming an expression of intense joy.

"Do you know the contents of the letter your father has written to your mother?" Gilardoni inquired.

The table answered:

"Yes."

"What is your mother to do?"

Luisa was trembling from head to foot in anxious suspense. The table did not move.

"Answer," said the professor.

This time the table moved, but knocked out only an incomprehensible confusion of letters.

"We do not understand. Repeat."

The little table did not move again. "Repeat, I tell you!" said the professor, rather sharply.

"No, no!" begged Luisa. "Don't insist. Maria does not wish to answer." But the professor was bound to insist. "It is not admissible that a spirit should not answer. You know very well we have often before been unable to understand what they said."

Luisa rose, greatly agitated, saying that rather than force Maria she should prefer to cut the séance short. The professor remained seated, lost in thought. "Hush!" said he at last.

The table moved and once more began to knock.

"Yes!" exclaimed Gilardoni, his face radiant. "I inquired mentally if you should go, and the table has answered 'yes.' Now you yourself must ask aloud."

Five or six minutes passed before the table began to move. In answer to Luisa's question: "Shall I go?" there came first thirteen, then fourteen knocks. The answer was "no."

The professor turned pale, and Luisa questioned him with her eyes. He was silent for some time, and then said with a sigh:

"Perhaps it was not Maria. Perhaps it was a lying spirit."

"And how can we find out?" Luisa inquired anxiously.

"We cannot find out. It is impossible."

"Then how about the other communications? Is there never any certainty?"

"Never."

She lapsed into terrified silence. Then presently she murmured: "It was bound to end thus. This also was to be taken from me."

She rested her forehead upon the table. The candle light fell upon her hair, upon her arms and hands. She was motionless, nothing moved in the room save the little

flickering flame of the candle. Another little flame, the last light of hope and of comfort, was dying out in this poor head which had gone down before the onslaught of a bitter and invincible doubt. What could Gilardoni do or say? He saw that Ester's wish would soon be gratified, but not by his means. Three or four minutes later they heard Ester's voice, and steps on the floor below. Luisa rose slowly.

"Let us go," said she.

"Perhaps we should pray," Gilardoni observed without rising. "Perhaps we should ask the spirits if they confess Christ."

"No, no, no!" Luisa exclaimed in an undertone, at the same time protesting with a hostile gesture. The professor silently took up the candle.

On her way back to Oria Luisa went up to the gate of the cemetery. Resting her forehead against it she sent a stifled good-bye towards Maria's grave, then she went down the hill again. On reaching the church-place she crossed over to the parapet and gazed down upon the lake sleeping in the shadow. She stood there some time, letting her thoughts roam at will. Placing her elbows on the parapet, she leaned forward and rested her face upon her hands, still gazing at the water, the water that had taken Maria. Her thoughts were beginning to take a definite shape, not within her, but down there in the water. She contemplated this shape. To die, to end it all! She was familiar with the thought, she had seen it once before when gazing into the water thus, long ago, before the experiments with the professor began. After that it had disappeared. But now it had returned again. It was a sweet and merciful thought, full of rest, of self-surrender, and of peace. It was good to gaze upon it now that her faith in the spirits was gone also. To die, to end it all! On that former occasion the image of her old uncle had been strong in helping to dispel the fascination. Now it was not so strong. Since Maria's death Uncle Piero had lapsed into a state of almost complete silence which Luisa believed to be the beginning of the apathy of old age. She did not understand that in the old man's soul profound disapproval was mingled

with grief, nor did she understand how great was his aversion to these daily and repeated visits to the cemetery, the flowers, the mysterious journeys to Casarico, and above all, how he regretted her complete abandonment of the church. If she had not been so engrossed in her dead child she might have understood her uncle better, at least on this last point, the church, for now the silent old man himself went to Mass oftener than before, his heart returning to the religion of his father and mother, which, heretofore, he had practised coldly, from habit, and out of respect for family traditions. It seemed to Luisa that he had grown very dull, and that if only his personal needs were attended to, he would be quite content. Cia was there to attend to his comforts, and the means that had sufficed for three would be more than sufficient for two. Luisa thought she saw the water rise a hand's breadth. And Franco? Franco would be in despair, would mourn for a few years, and then he would be happier than ever. Franco knew the secret of speedy consolation. The water seemed to rise another hand's breadth.

At the same moment in which she had approached the parapet, Franco, passing the church of S. Francesco di Paolo in Via di Po, had seen lights and heard the organ. He went in. Hardly had he said a short prayer when the one dominant thought took possession of him once more; the sound of the organ became the noise of trumpets and drums, the clash of arms; and while a hymn of peace was rising from the altar, he, in imagination, was furiously charging the enemy. Suddenly he saw before his mind's eye the image of Luisa, pale, and dressed in mourning. He began to think of her, to pray for her with intense fervour.

Then, standing there on the church-place of Oria, she turned cold and was filled with dread, while the tempting thought gradually vanished. She tried to recall it, but could not. The water subsided. An inward voice said to her: "What if the professor be mistaken? What if it be not true that the table answered first yes and then no? what if it be not true about the lying spirits?" She drew back from the parapet, and with slow steps, went up to her house.

She found her uncle in the kitchen sitting in the chimney-corner, the tongs in his hand, and his glass of milk beside him. Cia and Leu were sewing.

"Well," said Uncle Piero, "I have been to the Custom-House. The Receiver is in bed with the jaundice, but I spoke with the Sedentario."

"What about, uncle?"

"About Lugano. About your journey to Lugano on the twenty-fifth. He has promised to close an eye and let you pass."

Luisa was silent, and stood thoughtfully watching the fire. Presently she gave Leu some orders for the next day, and then begged her uncle to come into the parlour with her.

"What for?" said he, with his habitual simplicity, "You can't have any great secrets to tell. Let us stay here where the fire is."

Cia lit a candle. "We will go out," said she.

The uncle made his usual grimace, expressive of compassion for the weaknesses of others, but remained silent. Draining his glass of milk, he passed it to Luisa. She took the glass, and said softly: "I have not decided yet."

"What?" the uncle exclaimed sharply. "What is it you have not decided?"

"Whether I shall go to Isola Bella."

"Now what the deuce——?"

Uncle Piero was utterly incapable of grasping such a thing as this.

"And why should you not go?"

She answered calmly, and as if stating a perfectly obvious fact:

"I am afraid I shall not be able to leave Maria."

"Oh, come now!" Uncle Piero exclaimed. "Sit down over there," and he pointed to a bench in the chimney-corner opposite him. Then he said, in that serious, honest

voice of his, which seemed to come from his heart:

"My dear Luisa, you have lost your bearings!"

And raising his arms, he uttered a long "Ah!" and then let them fall upon his knees once more.

"Lost your bearings completely!" he repeated. He sat silent for a time, his head bent, while behind his pursed lips there was the rumbling of words in course of formation, which presently burst forth.

"I would never have believed it! It does not seem possible! But when," and here he raised his head and looked Luisa straight in the face, "but when we once begin to lose our bearings it is all up with us. And you, my dear, began to lose yours a long time ago."

Luisa shuddered.

"Yes indeed!" Uncle Piero cried in a loud voice. "You began losing yours a long time ago. And now this is what I wish to say to you. Listen. My mother lost children, your mother lost children, I have seen many mothers lose children, but not one of them acted as you act. What can you expect? We are all mortal, and must adapt ourselves to our circumstances. Other mothers become resigned, but you do not. And this running two, three, and even four times a day to the cemetery! And the flowers, and I know not what all besides! Oh, dear me! And all that foolishness at Casarico with that other poor imbecile, which you think is such a secret, while every one is talking of it, even Cia. Oh, dear me!"

"No, uncle," said Luisa, sadly but calmly. "Don't talk of these things. You cannot understand them."

"Exactly!" the uncle retorted with all the irony of which he was capable. "I cannot understand! But there is something else. You no longer go to church. I have never mentioned this to you because I have always made it a rule to let people do as they like, but when I see you losing your good sense, losing your common-sense even,

the least I can do is to remind you that this is all you do by turning your back on the Almighty. And now this idea of not going to see your husband, under similar circumstances! It is past belief. Well, well," he said after a short pause, "I will go myself."

"You?" Luisa exclaimed.

"Why not? Yes, I. I had intended to accompany you, but if you will not go I must take the journey alone. I will go and tell your husband that you have lost your head, and that I hope I may soon be called to join poor Maria."

No one had ever heard such bitter words from Uncle Piero's lips. Perhaps it was for that reason, perhaps it was the authority of the man, perhaps it was Maria's name pronounced in that way, but at any rate Luisa was conquered.

"I will go," she said, "but you must stay here."

"Most certainly not!" cried Uncle Piero, greatly pleased. "It is forty years since I saw the islands. I must avail myself of this opportunity. And who knows but what I may enlist in the cavalry?"

"Well?" said Cia, when the uncle had gone to bed. "Does my master really intend to go? For the love of Heaven, don't let him, my dear!" And she told Luisa that two hours before he had rolled his eyes in a strange manner, letting his head sink upon his breast, and when she had called to him he had not answered. Presently he had recovered, and had been provoked at her anxious questions, protesting that he had not been ill, that he had simply felt rather sleepy. Luisa listened to her, standing with her candle in her hand, her eyes glassy, and her attention divided between the words she was hearing and another very different thought, a thought very far removed from Uncle Piero, from the house, from Valsolda.

CHAPTER II THE SUMMONS TO ARMS

On the morning of the twenty-fifth of February, the day fixed for their journey, Uncle Piero rose at half-past seven, and went to the window. A heavy, white fog hung over the lake, hiding the mountains so that they appeared only as short black streaks, one on the right, the other on the left, between the lake and the fog. "Alas!" the uncle sighed. He had not finished dressing when Luisa came in, and using the unpleasant weather as a pretext, once more begged him to remain at home, and let her go alone. Cia was greatly distressed, and had entreated her to urge him not to go, for she knew he had had an attack of giddiness on the twentieth, and that on the twenty-second he had gone to confession without mentioning it to any one. Seeing that he was growing impatient, Luisa decided it would be wiser to desist, and let him have his own way. Poor Uncle Piero, he had always enjoyed the best of health, and now he was extremely apprehensive, and the slightest disturbance alarmed him. But he did not feel that Luisa should be allowed to set out alone in her present state of mind, and so he was going to sacrifice himself for her. He finished dressing and returning to the window called out triumphantly to Luisa, who was in the little garden below.

"Look up!" said he. "Look up at the Boglia!"

High up above Oria through the smoking fog, the pale gold of the sun shining on the mountain could be seen, and still higher up all was clear and transparent.

"Fair weather!"

Luisa did not reply, and the old man came down to the loggia in a cheerful frame of mind, and went out to the terrace to enjoy the magnificent struggle between fog and sun.

The stretch of water towards the east between the Ca Rotta, the last house of S. Mamette on the left, and the gulf of the Doi on the right, was one immense white sea. The Ca Rotta could just be distinguished, coming out of the fog like some spectre. At the gulf of the Doi, the narrow black streak of the mountains began,

making a gap between the leaden lake and the fog, which, little by little, was assuming a bluish hue. Vague lights broke in the sky towards Osteno; at the end of the eastern sea a new brightness trembled, streaks and spots, dark with the breeze, were forming; the eye of the sun appeared and disappeared among the whirling clouds above Osteno, until at last, growing rapidly larger, it shone forth triumphant. The fog fled in all directions in sheets and puffs, of which many sped past Oria, large and swift, while others cast themselves upon the shore; but the largest rolled away into the far east, where, behind and above a heavy white curtain, the mountains of the lake of Como rose, glorious in the blue.

Uncle Piero called Luisa to witness the spectacle, the last splendid scene of the drama, the triumph of the sun, the flight of the mists, the glory of the hills. He admired nature in a simple manner, without the refinement of the artistic sense, but with youthful ardour, and with the ring of sincerity in his voice; his admiration was that of an old man who has lived a life of purity, who has not exhausted the freshness of his spirit, who still retains a certain simplicity of imagination. "Look, Luisa!" he exclaimed, "we must indeed cry out, 'Glory be to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost!'" Luisa did not answer, but went quickly indoors, that she might not see that white enclosure beyond the kitchen-garden that was drawing her so strongly, with its tacit cry of reproach and grief. She had gone there that morning at six o'clock, and had remained an hour, seated on the wet grass.

The uncle remained on the terrace lost in contemplation until the moment of departure arrived. Had he been a vain poet he might have imagined that Valsolda was offering him this farewell spectacle to speed him on his way; that she wished to show herself more beautiful than he had, perhaps, ever seen her before. However, these poetic fancies did not come to him, and, besides, his journey was to be so short. But the image of Maria came to him instead; he saw her running round him, he took her upon his knee, and repeated the old rhyme to her:

Proud shade of the river Of Missipipì——

"Enough!" he sighed. "It was a terrible thing!" and in answer to a summons from Cia he went slowly towards the little garden where Luisa was awaiting him, ready to go down to the boat. "Here I am," said he. "And you, Cia, be careful not to let the house tumble into the lake while we are away!"

During the journey on Lake Maggiore on board the San Bernardino, Luisa remained in the second-class cabin most of the time. She went on deck once to try and persuade Uncle Piero to go below also, but, although the wind was cold, Uncle Piero, wrapped in his heavy grey travelling cloak, would not stir from the deck, where he sat calmly watching the hills and villages, and chatting with a priest from Locarno, with a little old woman from Belgirate, and with other second-class passengers. Luisa was obliged to leave him there, while she herself went below again, preferring to be alone with her own thoughts. As they approached Isola Bella a sense of inward excitement and a vague foreboding of many things took possession of her. How would the meeting with Franco take place? How would he treat her? Would he repeat Uncle Piero's sermon to her? His letters were indeed always compassionate and tender, but who does not know that we write in one way and speak in another? How and where would they spend the evening? And then that other question, that question it so terrified her to think about——? All these anxious thoughts were rising higher and higher, threatening to become dominant, to place themselves in bold opposition to that image of the cemetery of Oria, which from time to time would return with impetuous violence, as if to snatch back its own. At the station of Cannero, Luisa heard the noise of many steps and of loud talking above her head, and went upstairs to look after her uncle. A party of soldiers, recalled to service, had come out to the steamer in two large barges. Other small boats bore women, children, and old men, who were crying and waving good-bye. The soldiers, most of whom were Bersaglieri, fine jolly young fellows, answered the greeting with shouts of "Hurrah for Italy!" and made promises of presents from

Milan. One old woman, all dishevelled, but tearless, had three sons among those soldiers, and was calling out to them to remember our Lord and the Madonna. "Yes, yes," grumbled an old sergeant who was escorting them, "Remember our Lord, and the Madonna, and the Bishop, and don't forget the prevosto, the parish priest!" The soldiers, who were well acquainted with the prevosto, or military prison, laughed loudly at the joke, as the steamer started forward. There were cries, and waving of handkerchiefs, and then the men burst into song, a song shouted by fifty strong voices.

Addio, mia bella, addio, L'armata se ne va.

The soldiers were all clustered together at the prow, among piles of bags and barrels, some sitting, some lying down, others standing, and all singing at the top of their voices to the dull accompaniment of the paddles as the steamer glided straight towards that background of sky, against which rose the pointed hills of Ispra, dividing the immense expanse of water from the Ticino beyond. The young men would soon be crossing the Ticino, probably to the cry of "Savoy for ever!" and amidst the fury of cannonading. Death was awaiting many of them down there under that clear sky, but all sang gaily, and only the dull noise of the paddles seemed to be aware of their fate. The free hills of Piedmont, past which the boat was gliding, although they stood in the shadow, seemed to shine with pride and satisfaction at having given their sons to the captive hills of Lombardy, which wore an air of tragedy, although illumined by the sun. Luisa felt her blood begin to tingle, felt her once ardent patriotism begin to stir. And those mothers who had seen their sons depart thus? She foresaw whither her thoughts were tending, and hastened to assure herself that she also would gladly have given a son to Italy, that the grief of those mothers could not in any way be compared to hers. But what a difference there was between reading a letter in Valsolda, telling of the war, and feeling the very breath, hearing the very noise of war all about her, feeling it in the air itself! In the quiet of Valsolda, war was a shadow without substance; here the shadow became incarnate.

Here Luisa's personal grief, that immense grief which filled the lifeless air surrounding her in Oria, seemed to shrink before the emotion of many, and her consciousness of this gave her an indefinable sense of discomfort and trouble. Was it the dread of losing a part of her own grief, a part, as it were, of herself? Was it the desire to escape from a comparison from which she shrank? At the same time the idea that Franco was going to this war, the idea that had affected her so slightly in Valsolda, was now assuming a new aspect of reality in her mind, was making her heart quiver, and it also was wrestling with the image of the cemetery of Oria. For the first time this image of the past was no longer the one, all-powerful master of her soul, and although her soul was indignant and regretful, new images, images of the present and of the future, were assailing it.

Uncle Piero began to feel cold and came down to the cabin.

"In little more than an hour we shall be at Isola Bella," said he.

"Are you tired?"

"Not in the least. I feel wonderfully well."

"But nevertheless, you will go to bed early to-night?"

The uncle, whose thoughts were wandering, did not answer, but presently he exclaimed: "Do you know what I was thinking? I was thinking that now there ought to be another Maria."

Luisa, who was sitting beside him, sprang up shuddering, and went to the little window opposite, standing with her back to Uncle Piero, who did not understand in the least, and, concluding she was embarrassed, went to sleep in his corner. The steamer touched at Intra. Now there was only Pallanza before Isola. They were skirting the coast; through the little oval window Luisa could see the banks, the houses, the trees slipping by. How fast the boat was gliding, how fast!

Pallanza. The steamer stopped five minutes.

Luisa went on deck and inquired when they would reach Isola Bella. They would not stop either at Suna or Baveno, so it was a question of only a few minutes now. And when would the steamer from Arona arrive? The steamer from Arona appeared to be late. She went below once more to awaken Uncle Piero, who presently came on deck with her. The last part of the journey was accomplished in silence. The uncle watched Pallanza, which they were leaving behind, while Luisa had fixed her gaze on Isola Bella, which they were rapidly approaching, and she saw nothing else.

The boat reached the landing-stage at Isola Bella at forty minutes past three. There was no sign of the steamer from Arona. A porter told Luisa that it was always late now because the train from Novara was never on time, owing to the movement of troops. No one else went ashore at Isola, no one was on the beach save the attendant at the landing-stage. When the boat had left, he himself conducted the two travellers to the Albergo del Delfino. He said it was a mere chance their finding the hotel open at this season. A large family were spending the winter there. They were English people. Indeed, it seemed the Island of Silence. The lake lay about it, motionless and silent, the shore was deserted, no living being was to be seen in the porches of the poor little houses clustered together about the bay, between one of the round bastions of the gardens and the hotel. The English people had gone out in a boat; the hotel was as silent as the shore and the water. The new arrivals were given two large rooms on the second floor, both of which faced south, and overlooked the melancholy strait between the island and the wooded strip of coast that runs from Stressa to Baveno. The first room was on the western corner of the house, and its window looked out on the little church of S. Vittore, which rises beside the hotel, and upon the small Isola dei Pescatori in the distance. Uncle Piero planted himself at the window contemplating the little island, the little pile of houses rising out of the mirror of the lake and culminating in a campanile; the great mountains of Val di Toce and Val di Gravellone, half hidden in a thin mist through which the sun was shining. Luisa, seeing that the room contained two beds, hastened to the other room,

where an alcove also held two beds. "There," said Uncle Piero, coming in, a moment later, "this will do nicely for you two." Luisa asked the proprietor, in an undertone, if they could not have three rooms instead of two. No, it was impossible. "But this is all right," Uncle Piero repeated. "This is a perfect arrangement. You take this room, and I will have the other." Luisa was silent, and the proprietor withdrew. "Don't you see you have an alcove, just as at home?" It never struck the simple old man that the very sight of that alcove was a torment to Luisa. She told him she preferred the other room, which was lighter and more cheerful. "Amen!" said the uncle. "Do as you like. I am quite willing to be alcoved."

This corner of the hotel soon lapsed into silence once more. Luisa posted herself at the window. The boat from Arona must be very near now; the man who had accompanied them to the hotel was walking slowly towards the landing-stage, and in a few minutes she heard the noise of the paddles in the distance. Uncle Piero told Luisa he was tired, and remained in his room.

She went down towards the landing-stage and stopped behind a small house that hid the boat from view, but she could hear it distinctly. Suddenly the prow of the San Gottardo glided slowly in front of her and stopped. Luisa recognised her husband in the midst of a noisy group. Franco saw her, and springing ashore, ran towards her, while she came forward a few steps to meet him. They embraced, he speechless and blind with emotion, laughing and crying, full of gratitude, but uncertain as to her state of mind, as to how he should regulate his conduct; she more composed, extremely pale, and serious. "God bless you! God bless you!" he kept repeating, as they turned towards the hotel. Then Franco overwhelmed her with questions, first about her journey and the passing of the frontier, and then about Uncle Piero. When he mentioned the uncle, Luisa raised her head and said: "Look!" The old man was at the window waving his handkerchief and calling out his welcome in a ringing voice. "Oh!" cried Franco in amazement, and he ran forward.

Uncle Piero was waiting for him on the landing, his face wearing an expression of satisfaction that seemed to spread all over his peaceful breast. "How are you, my boy?" said he, taking both his hands and shaking them heartily, but, nevertheless, holding him at a distance. He did not want kisses, feeling that at such a moment they would mean thanks; but he could not hold out against Franco's impetuosity. "Did you fancy a lady of the house of Maironi could travel without a courier?" said he, when he had extricated himself from the young man's arms. "Moreover, I came to enlist in the Bersaglieri!" And the man who had said he was tired started downstairs, saying he was going to order dinner.

There was no sofa in their room. Franco drew Luisa to a seat on the bed, and sat down beside her, encircling her shoulders with his arm. He could not talk to her, could only keep on repeating: "I thank you! I thank you!" as he lavished eager caresses, eager kisses, and tender names upon her. Luisa did not respond in any way, but trembled violently with bowed head. Presently he checked himself, and, taking her head in his hands like some sacred thing, fell to touching with his lips the white hairs he saw here and there. She knew he was searching out the white hairs, understood those timid kisses, and was moved. She felt her heart of ice melting, and, seized with terror, struggled to defend herself more against her own emotions than against Franco. "You don't know," she said, "how cold my heart is. I did not even want to come, did not want to leave Maria or give you the pain of finding me in this state. But I came on Uncle Piero's account. He was determined to set out alone, and that I could not allow."

When she had pronounced these cruel words she felt Franco's lips withdrawn from her hair, felt his arm forsake her shoulders. Both were silent for a time, then Franco murmured with great gentleness:

"Only thirteen hours more. Then perhaps I shall never trouble you again." At that moment Uncle Piero entered and announced that dinner was ready. Luisa took her

husband's hand and pressed it in silence; it was not a lover-like pressure, but it told him she shared his emotion.

At dinner neither Franco nor Luisa could eat. But the uncle had a good appetite, and talked a great deal. He did not approve of Franco's enlisting. "What sort of a soldier do you expect to become?" said he. "What will you do without your camphor, your sedative water, and all the rest?"

Franco replied that he had cast aside all remedies, that he felt as if he were of steel, and that he should become the most robust soldier of the whole ninth regiment. "Maybe," the uncle grumbled, "maybe. And you, Luisa, what do you say about it?" Luisa believed it would be as her husband had said. "Then that is enough!" the uncle cried. "And so, hurrah!" He had a great opinion of the strength of Austria, and did not view matters in the same rosy light as did Franco. According to Franco there was not the slightest doubt that the Italians would be victorious. He had seen one of Niel's adjutants, who had come to Turin on a secret mission, and had heard him say to some staff officers: "Nous allons supprimer l'Autriche!" Of course they fully expected to leave at least fifty thousand Italians and Frenchmen between the Ticino and the Isonzo.

"Excuse me, Signori," said the waiter who was serving them, "but did the gentlemen speak of enlisting in the ninth regiment?"

"Yes."

"The Queen's Brigade! A splendid brigade! I served in the tenth. We covered ourselves with glory in 1848, as you may remember. Goito, Santo Lucia, Governolo, and Volta. Now it will be your turn."

"We will do our best."

Luisa shuddered slightly. The English people, who were dining at a table near them, heard this dialogue and looked at Franco. For some minutes no one in the room spoke; there passed before them the vision of a column of infantry charging with

fixed bayonets, amidst a shower of grapeshot.

After dinner the uncle remained at the hotel for his usual nap, and Franco went out with Luisa. They turned to the right towards the Palace. It was rather dark and a few infrequent drops of rain were falling. The steps leading from the shore to the courtyard of the villa were slippery, and Franco offered his arm to his wife, who took it in silence. They stopped between the deserted courtyard and the stairs that lead to the landing-stage, to count the hours which the clock on the Palace was ringing out. Six o'clock. Two hours had passed, and there now remained only eleven before the separation, before the unknown! They walked on slowly and silently, following the straight path between the lake and the side of the Palace, as far as the corner which commands a view of the Isola dei Pescatori, where some lights were already visible. Two women came towards them, chattering, and walking arm in arm. Franco allowed them to pass, and then asked his wife if she remembered the Rancò.

Two years before their marriage they had made an excursion with a party of friends to Drano and the Rancò, high pasture-lands of the Valsolda, on the way to the Passo Stretto. They had had a lively dispute, and had sulked and suffered for an hour. "Yes," Luisa replied, "I remember." At the same moment both realised how different was the present hour, and how painful it was to have to admit the difference. They did not speak again until they reached the corner. Bells rang out on the Isola dei Pescatori. Franco dropped his wife's arm, and leaned upon the parapet. The misty lake was silent; nothing was to be seen save the lights on the other island. The lake, the mist, those lights, those bells, which might have belonged to a ship lost at sea, the silence of all things, even the infrequent, tiny rain-drops, everything was so sad!

"And do you remember afterwards?" Franco murmured, without turning his head. Luisa was also leaning against the parapet. She was silent for a moment, and then answered in an undertone:

"Yes, dear."

And in her "dear," there was a slight and hidden beginning of warmth, of affectionate emotion. Franco felt it, and thrilled with joy, but controlled himself.

"I am thinking," he went on, "of the letter I wrote you as soon as I got home, and of the three words you said to me next day, at Muzzaglio, when the others were dancing under the chestnut-trees, and you passed close to me on your way to get your shawl, which you had left on the grass. Do you remember?"

"Yes."

He took her hand and raised it to his lips.

"And do you also remember that I slipped before we reached the bridge, and that you said: 'My dear sir, it is your place to support me!'"

Luisa did not answer, but pressed his hands.

"I have been good for nothing," he added sadly. "I have not known how to support you."

"You have done all you could."

Luisa's voice, as she spoke these words, was indeed faint, but very different from when she had said: "My heart is so cold."

Once more her husband drew her arm through his, and they returned to the landing-stage. The dear arm was less passive than before, and betrayed agitation and a struggle. Franco stopped, and said softly:

"And if I am called to join Maria? What shall I say to her from you?"

She began to tremble, and resting her head on his shoulder, whispered: "No, stay here!" Franco did not hear the words, and repeated: "What?" There was no answer, and very slowly he bent his head towards her, saw her lips seeking his, and pressed his own upon them. His heart was beating fast, faster than when he had kissed Luisa for the first time as her lover. He raised his head, but could not speak. At last he

succeeded in saying these words: "I will tell her you have promised——" "No," murmured Luisa, in great distress. "I cannot do that. You must not ask it of me! It is no longer possible!"

"What is not possible?"

"Oh, you understand quite well! I also understood what you meant!"

She started forward as if to flee from the subject, but still clinging to Franco's arm, and he held her back.

"Luisa," said he gravely, almost severely, "will you let me go away like this? Do you realise what it means to me to go away like this?"

Then she slowly withdrew her arm from his, and turned towards the parapet on the right, leaning upon it, and gazing into the water as she had done that night at Oria. Franco stood quietly beside her; waited a few moments, and then begged her to answer his question.

"It would be better for me to end it all in the lake," she said bitterly. Her husband passed his arm round her waist, pulled her away from the parapet, and then letting her go, threw up his arm with a gesture of protest. "You!" said he indignantly. "You talk thus? You who used to prate of looking upon life as a battle? And is this the way you fight? Once I believed you were the stronger of us two. Now I know it is I who am the stronger. Much the stronger! Can you not even imagine what I have suffered during all these years? Can you not——" For a moment his voice failed him, but he quickly controlled himself and went on. "Can you not even understand what you are to me, and what I would give to be able to spare you the slightest pain? While you, it would seem, do not care how cruelly you rend my soul!" She flung herself into his arms. In the silence that ensued, broken only by her spasmodic and suppressed sobbing, Franco heard steps approaching, and with difficulty freed himself from her embrace and induced her to turn with him towards the hotel. "You naughty girl!" he whispered. "And it is you who don't want me to be glad to die,

when I can die so gloriously for my country!" Luisa pressed his arm without speaking. They met two young lovers, who looked curiously at them in passing. The girl smiled. When they reached the short flight of steps that leads down to the little square in front of S. Vittore, they heard voices of women and girls. Luisa paused a moment on the first step, and said softly the three words she had spoken at Muzzaglio.

"I love you!"

Franco did not answer, but pressed her arm. Very slowly they went down the stairs, and entered the Albergo del Delfino.

Some young men who were drinking, smoking, and laughing, rose as Franco and Luisa entered, and came towards them. "Signora," said the first to present himself to Luisa, "your husband has probably announced to you the visit of the Seven Wise Men." A great hubbub immediately ensued, because Franco had forgotten to tell Luisa that his friends had accompanied him from Turin, but, not wishing to intrude, had gone on to Pallanza promising to come and pay their respects to the Signora in the evening. They had come over from Pallanza in a row-boat, and had intended returning immediately, but Franco ordered a couple of bottles of wine and, soon, in spite of Luisa's presence, their hilarity became such that the proprietor begged them, for love of his English family, to make less noise.

After arranging with Franco to meet him in the morning on board the first steamer, the Wise Men took themselves off. Franco accompanied them to the boat and Luisa went to look after Uncle Piero. He had left word for them with the proprietor that, feeling very sleepy, he had gone to bed. In fact Luisa could hear him snoring noisily. She put the candle down, and waited for Franco.

He came up almost immediately, and was surprised to hear that the uncle was already asleep. He had wished to say good-bye to him before going to bed, as his boat was leaving so early in the morning—at half-past five. The door between the

two rooms was closed, but nevertheless Luisa begged her husband to step and speak softly. She told him what Cia had confided to her. The uncle needed rest. She hoped he would remain in bed until nine or ten o'clock, and she intended to start at one, and spend the night at Magadino, in order not to tire him too much. She laid great stress upon her apprehensions concerning Uncle Piero's health, and talked incessantly, nervously, anxious to avoid other topics, seeking thus to escape too tender caresses. At the same time she was continually moving about the room, repeatedly taking up and putting down the same objects, and this partly from nervousness, partly with the intention that her husband should go to bed before her. He, for his part, was intent upon a side-bag, which he was finding difficulty in opening. At last he succeeded, and, calling his wife to him, gave her a roll containing fifty twenty-franc pieces. "I know," said he, "that I shall not be able to send you anything for some months. This money is not mine, I have borrowed it." Then he drew a sealed letter from his pocket. "And this," he added, "is my will. I have little to leave, but of course I must dispose of that little. I have made only one legacy. My father's scarf-pin, which you have, is to go to Uncle Piero. I have also set down the name of the person who loaned me the thousand francs. Besides the will the letter contains a few words for you alone. That is all." He spoke with grave sweetness, and without agitation. Her hands trembled as she took the letter. "Thank you," she said, and began to unbraid her hair, but she immediately twisted it up again, hardly conscious of what she was doing, in her struggle with the phantom of the dead child, and with another vision of war and death. She said brokenly that, as she must be up so early to accompany Franco to the boat, she thought she would lie down with her clothes on, and not loosen her hair. Franco made no comment, but having said a short prayer, began to undress. From his neck he unclasped a little chain from which hung a small gold cross. This had belonged to his mother. "I wish you to keep this," said he, offering it to Luisa. "It will be safer. It might, perhaps, fall into the hands of the Croatians." She was horrified, she shuddered, hesitated a moment, then threw her arms about his

neck, and pressed him to her in a passionate embrace.

The waiter knocked at their door at about half-past four. At five Franco took the candle and went into Uncle Piero's room. He was already awake. Franco said good-bye to him, and then proposed to Luisa that they also take leave of each other in the privacy of their own room. In her face and voice there was an expression of grave and painful stupor. She displayed no agitation, and did not weep, but embraced and kissed her husband as one in a dream, and, still in a dazed state, followed him downstairs. Did a flash from the thought that was filling her soul pass into his? If so, it happened in the little hotel parlour, while he was taking his coffee, his wife seated opposite him. He seemed suddenly to discover something in that glance, in that expression, for he paused to study her, cup in hand, while ineffable tenderness, anxiety and emotion overspread his face. She evidently had no wish to speak, but he longed to do so. A hidden word quivered in all the muscles of his face, and shone in his eyes, but his mouth did not venture to utter it.

Hand in hand they went down to the landing-stage, and leaned against the wall where Luisa had leaned the day before. When they heard the noise of the paddles, they embraced for the last time and said good-bye without tears, troubled rather by the hidden thought harboured by both than afflicted by the separation. The steamer came in noisily, the ropes were flung ashore and made fast. A bell rang. One kiss more! "God bless you!" said Franco, and hurried on board.

She lingered as long as she could hear the noise of the paddles, as the steamer glided towards Stressa. Then she returned to the hotel, sank upon the bed, and sat there as one turned to stone, engrossed in the idea, in the instinctive certainty, that maternity awaited her a second time.

Although this was precisely what she had so greatly feared it cannot be said that now she was grieved. All other sentiments were subdued by the wonder of listening to a strong, inward voice, that was so clear and still so inexplicable. She was dazed.

Since Maria's death she had firmly believed that the Book of Destiny could contain nothing new for her, that certain secret fibres of her heart were dead. And now a mysterious voice was speaking within that heart, saying: Know that one page in the book of your destiny is finished, and the leaf has been turned. For you there is still a future of intense living. The drama that you believed had come to an end at the second act, is to continue, and if I Myself announce it to you, it must indeed prove wonderful!

For three hours, until Uncle Piero called her, she sat there, absorbed in this voice.

The uncle rose at half-past nine; he was feeling very well. The weather was still damp, almost rainy, but he would not hear of remaining in the house until it was time to start for Magadino, as Luisa wished him to do. He knew, for he had inquired of the proprietor, that the gardens could be visited after nine o'clock, so at ten he drank his milk and then started out to visit them with Luisa. When they passed S. Vittore he wished to go in and see the paintings. Mass was being sung, and at that moment the officiating priest turned towards them and said Benedicat vos omnipotens Deus. Uncle Piero crossed himself devoutly, and lingered to hear the last gospel. He did not attempt to examine the paintings, for there was little light in the church, but said with his accustomed cheerfulness: "Now that I have received that blessing I feel quite happy!"

It was not possible to hurry in his company. He stopped at every step, examining everything that seemed artistic, everything that was in a position to be examined. He studied the front of the church, the triple stairway of the landing-stage of Villa Borromeo, all three sides of the courtyard, and the great palm in the centre, which he was much scandalised to learn Luisa had not even noticed when she had passed it the night before with Franco. When the custodian ushered them into the palace, it took the uncle at least ten minutes to climb and admire the great stairway. As they reached the top a ray of sun glinted forth, and the custodian proposed that they

should take advantage of this and visit the gardens. He turned to the left and led the visitors through a suite of empty rooms to the iron gate, where he rang the bell. A gardener appeared, a civil lad, to whom Uncle Piero took a great fancy, for he explained everything willingly, and the uncle's questions were not few. The camphor-tree near the entrance cost him five minutes. Luisa was distressed, for she feared the uncle would tire himself too much, and she herself was weary of looking at so many trees, of hearing so many names, both Latin and Italian, and of having to watch the uncle, while her thoughts called for silence and solitude. The gardener proposed going up to the Castello di Nettuno. Uncle Piero would have liked to inspect more closely the unicorn of the Borromei, which stood rampant up there, but there were many stairs to climb, the air was heavy, and he hesitated. Luisa took advantage of that moment of hesitation to ask the gardener where she might find a seat. "Just below here," said he. "On the left, where the Strobus are." Uncle Piero finally consented to go down and visit the clump of Strobus.

He was tired, but he continued to look at everything, to ask questions about everything. As they walked towards the Strobus they heard in the distance, over towards Isola Madre, the rolling of the drums of the National Guard of Pallanza, which was drilling on the shore. "Now it is all play," said the young man. "Not exactly play, but.... Next month we shall go to work in earnest. We have a lesson to give to a huge beast. There it is, over there, the monster!" The monster was the Austrian war steamer Radetzky, called by the inhabitants of the Piedmontese shore, el Radescòn. "The ship is just entering the bay of Laveno," said the young fellow, "coming from Luino. Come this way if you wish to see her plainly."

Uncle Piero knew his eyes were not strong enough to see the steamer, so he sat down on the first bench he found under the Strobus, which stood just in front of a group of bamboos, and was flanked by two groups of large azaleas. Behind the bamboos, between the great twisted trunks of the Strobus, he could see the mirror of white water trembling as far as the black line of the hills of Ispra. The sky, dark

towards the north, was clear in that quarter. Luisa and the gardener went to the gate which bears the coat of arms, and which faces the green Isola Madre, Pallanza, and the upper lake. Luisa looked out over the immense expanse of leaden water, crowned by misty giants from the Sasso di Ferro group above Laveno to the mountains of Maccagno, and to the distant snows of the Splügen. The smoke of the Radetzky was more plainly visible than its body, and the drums of Pallanza were still rolling. Uncle Piero called the gardener and Luisa went to lean against the parapet beside the gate, and near the yew-tree that rises from the terrace below. The tree shut out the view on the east. She was glad to be alone at last, to rest her eyes and her thoughts on the grey of the great mountains and of the great waters. Presently the gardener came back to point out to her the yellow acacias and the white heather that were blossoming on the lower terrace. "The bruyères blanches bring luck," said he. Seeing that Luisa was lost in thought, and did not heed him, he started towards the hot-house containing the begonias. "An old Strobus," said he, speaking in a loud voice that the visitors might hear him, but without looking around, "An old Strobus that has been struck by lightning. If you wish to visit the private gardens——"

Luisa turned from the parapet and went to fetch the uncle, and give him her arm if necessary. The gardener, who was waiting at the entrance of the little grove of laurels, saw her start towards the old gentleman, who was still sitting on the bench, saw her quicken her pace and then rush to his side with a cry.

Like the innocent and aged tree Uncle Piero also had been struck down. His body was resting against the back of the bench, his head had fallen forward, and his chin touched his breast. His eyes were open, fixed and expressionless. It had indeed been a farewell spectacle his beloved Valsolda had offered him the day before. Uncle Piero, the dear, venerable, old man, wise, upright, and fatherly, the benefactor of his own people, Uncle Piero was gone, gone forever. He had come to enlist, but God had called him to a higher service; the bugle had sounded, and he had answered the

call. The drums of Pallanza still rolled, rolled for the end of the old world, and rolled for the advent of the new. In Luisa's womb there lay a vital germ which was preparing to fight the battles of a new era, preparing to taste other joys, other griefs than those which the man of the old world was leaving thus peacefully, blessed unconsciously, at the last moment, by that strange priest of Isola Bella, who had, perhaps, never uttered the holy words to one more worthy.

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Transcriber's Note:

The table of contents corresponds to a different edition. The footnotes have been moved to the end of the respective chapters. Obvious punctuation errors have been corrected. Archaic and inconsistent hyphenation was retained as printed. Pg 3 "once" replaces "one" (the voice groaned one more) Pg 40 "plena" replaces "piena" (Ave Maria, gratia piena) Pg 444 removed repeated word "the the" (Meanwhile Pedraglio explored the the kitchen...) Pg 445 "he" replaces "be" (Then be began rapidly collecting ...)

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE PATRIOT (PICCOLO MONDO ANTICO) ***

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