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A decorative, symmetrical floral frame in a dark color, possibly embossed or blind-tooled. It features three large, rounded floral motifs at the top, with intricate scrollwork and leaf-like patterns extending downwards to form a heart-like shape around the title.

THE PURSUIT
OF
CAMILLA

CLEMENTINA BLACK

by Edm





“Short Stories” Prize.

.....

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THE PURSUIT OF CAMILLA

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THE PURSUIT OF CAMILLA

BY

CLEMENTINA BLACK

AUTHOR OF "THE PRINCESS DÉSIÉRÉ," "AN AGITATOR," ETC



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A PURPLE PARASOL

“NOT at all,” said a clear female voice;
“not at all.”

The English words, rising unexpectedly from the lower street of an old foreign town, struck the ear of the English tourist lounging in the square above. He stepped to the low wall that bounded the square, and looked down as from a gallery into the irregular street. The young lady was standing on a lower step of the steep intervening stairway. Her dress was light-coloured; in her hand was a furled parasol; the tints of her golden-red hair, her sparklingly blue eyes and delicately fresh, variable complexion were vivid under the gay morning sun.

Before her, at the foot of the steps, stood the person to whom her words had been addressed—a man, the very attitude of whose shoulders proclaimed a nationality other than hers. Something else, some touch of awkwardness, some

8 THE PURSUIT OF CAMILLA

subtle testimony, perhaps, of dress, though the man's clothes were neither poor nor showy, marked him to the observer's eye as divided from her not only by race but by status. Already the spectator found his interest engaged on the young lady's side. A second elbow planted itself on the parapet; from this private box he looked down with increasing eagerness upon the little drama.

The man and the girl remained another moment or two face to face without speaking. Their silence, however, was not passive, but held as much challenge and parry as any clash of hard words. The man seeming, at last, by a shrug of the shoulders and an impatient movement of the hands, to acknowledge himself defeated, the young lady turned serenely from him, and slowly continued her ascent. The drama was over, and the spectator, withdrawing a little regretfully, could but watch the departure from the stage of the principal performer. She crossed the square at a good pace, and took the upward path to the hills behind the town, where indeed the diminishing dome of her shot-silk parasol was presently discernible against the grey of the hill-side.

The Englishman, on his part, recalling certain frescoes commemorated by his guide-book, turned into the old church, where a lingering

scent of stale incense floated in the cool darkness. The frescoes were in one of the many accessory chapels, and he wandered round, inspecting one after another, in all the ease of absolute solitude.

Suddenly he became aware that his solitude was not absolute—a man stood motionless before one of the recessed archways. The Englishman, unwilling to disturb a possible worshipper, paused and reversed his circuit. Glancing across the church, he saw the stranger still in the same attitude, and apparently unaware of a second presence. Light fell from an upper window on the dark uncovered head, and showed a few white hairs; the face, bent forward a little, could not be distinguished, but the whole person, and even the way of holding an ordinary modern hat, had the patrician air. Altogether, the living figure was more picturesque, and made a greater appeal to the imagination than did the thirteenth-century frescoes of the pious Bernardino da Saragosta, which, being of a mouldy and greenish complexion and but ill-lighted, loomed through the twilight like pale ghosts of the martyrs whom they represented.

A sudden strip of light fell across the tiled floor, and was quenched again. The heavy, silently swinging door had been pushed open

to admit a third person, and the Englishman, turning from the dismal frescoes, beheld the man who had stood in the lower street, and whose expostulation had been disregarded by a charming young lady.

Approaching the gentleman before the chapel of St. Ursula, the new-comer addressed him in low, respectful tones ; and the attention of the Englishman departed once for all from the works of Bernardino. The words spoken being at this distance quite inaudible, his conscience, which would have forbidden him to listen, permitted him to look. He saw the hearer throw out his hands with a slight motion, that might perhaps indicate vexation ; then he saw the two walk leisurely together out of the church, and in that progress he distinguished clearly the face of the elder, and found him to be a man of perhaps five-and-forty, endowed with an admirable and classic line of profile, and a pair of fine dark eyes.

The door fell softly back, and the Englishman was left alone in the cool, dim church. Very few minutes sufficed for its further inspection, and he too emerged into the radiant sunlight. The men were not visible, nor was the girl. His mind went fluttering after her, and the grey hill-side took on a sudden attractive charm. Saragosta, it now appeared, was a

dull hole, and the thing most to be desired was the society of the agreeable Polish artist with whom he had for some days past been travelling, and who had, a couple of hours earlier, gone over, by way of the hills, to the telegraph office at Dalarocca. So the Englishman went out of the square as the young lady had done, by the upper end, and began to climb the steep track upon which he had last beheld her.

Possibly he was not himself aware how keen and constant was the look-out which he kept for a purple and amber shot parasol. No parasol, however, hove in sight. He mounted and mounted; the sun looked down upon him with an increasing intensity that seemed positively malignant. For the first three-quarters of an hour or so, he met no person and saw no habitation. The desolate hill-side lay grey and empty under the insistent sun. But suddenly, in a diminutive crater, he came upon a white-walled building—half farm, half fortress. Scattered cypresses and olive-trees fringed the enclosure, and threw round their own feet a fine black lace pattern of shadow. Against the north wall, however, lay a broad band of shade, cool, dark, and inviting as water. Here, with a luxurious sense of relaxation, the Englishman let himself sink upon the dry, thin herbage.

A low-growing olive was before him, and

through its veil he beheld the margin of the hollow, sharp against the blue unwinking sky. Neither sight nor sound of life came from the dwelling; the distant cry of a grasshopper seemed rather to emphasize than to break the stillness. Presently the wanderer's eyelids fell, his mind fluttered idly away, and he lay dreaming, but not, as he afterwards averred, quite asleep.

A sound startled him into wakefulness, and his opening eyes looked into the purple concavity of a silken parasol. He lay quite still, staring.

"Camilla!" said a man's voice.

The tones were deep and full of emotion, and the value given to each separated "l" betokened a tongue of exacter articulation than the English. Yet the next words were English, and the sound of them fell upon the listener's ear like an awakening shock of cold water. For this was the voice of Ladzinski, his travelling companion.

"Ah, trust me; tell me why you left London, and how you come to be here. Surely you know——"

But here the eavesdropper, now thoroughly aroused, became alive to the impossibility of his situation. He sprang up, and the parasol, which had been dropped stem downward among

the olive branches, became dislodged, and, rolling leisurely upon the earth, presented its under surface to the sky. The Englishman, as he emerged from his retreat, perceived why it had been dropped: the two hands of the lady were in those of Ladzinski.

The four hands fell apart; the four eyes gazed upon him blankly; he saw the quick rise and fall of the girl's bosom, the growing anger in the eyes of the man.

"I beg your pardon," the intruder began a little stammeringly; "I was lying there half asleep. I had no notion that any one was near."

Ladzinski was silent, wrestling visibly with his own turbulent agitation. The gaze of the girl was not merely that of a person startled; its steadiness held something of scrutiny, of balance, something almost of appeal. "Who are you? May you be trusted?" those blue eyes appeared to ask.

The Englishman, with a vague sense of loyalty to Ladzinski, shut out from his own eyes any gleam of response; and his virtue was repaid to him in a vague pang of disloyalty to Camilla. As neither of them spoke, he began to retreat in good order, his pace neither hasty nor reluctant.

Then Ladzinski, mastering himself, called out, "Allison, stop!"

The other stopped and wheeled half round.

"This meeting is a secret—the profoundest secret!"

"Certainly," Allison answered promptly.

No other word being immediately spoken, he continued his retreat, his mind engaged in wondering whether the appeal in Camilla's eyes had been merely the same as that on Ladzinski's lips. He thought not.

II

LADZINSKI'S EXPLANATION

AN hour and a half later, Allison sat writing letters behind the half-closed shutters of an upper room in Saragosta's one hotel. Before the window lay a white and dusty expanse, chequered sharply with black patches of shade. It was empty, for the natives of Saragosta have not the habit of walking abroad in the hot hours of the afternoon. From an old tower, lower down, a clock chimed its slow repeated three. Allison's attention wandered from the sister in England to whom he was writing. Where now, he wondered, was Camilla, and who was Camilla? On his return to the hotel he had at once looked into the visitors' book for a surname to fit her; but the visitors' book supplied no information: the only recent names were his own and Ladzinski's. The lady, therefore, had to retain in his thoughts the name of Camilla; and it would appear that she occupied them a good deal, since he had not yet completed a second letter when the clock from the tower tolled out its drowsy four.

The square was no longer deserted ; a trio of urchins played noisily to and fro ; a couple of women stood in doorways, their fingers busy with straw plaiting, their eyes roaming hither and thither. Presently another figure came into view ; Ladzinski, swinging an ostentatious sketch-book, strode swiftly across the square. Allison, looking down at him, felt the strangest mixture of liking, admiration, and displeasure. This Pole, indeed, was one of the persons who may be regarded with love or with hatred, or with alternations of the two, but hardly with indifference. The adjective "elegant" applied to a man carries with it a note of depreciation, yet elegance was the quality which struck you in looking at Ladzinski, and struck you as creating a singular and superior charm. There can never have existed a human being more remote from clumsiness ; every line of face and form, every movement, every posture, was apt and satisfying. To English eyes, indeed, a bodily presence so lucidly expressive was almost alarming ; any pair of village gossips in Britain would have pronounced it incompatible with long life, and no discreet British parent would have approved it in a prospective son-in-law.

He came directly to the room where Allison was sitting, and pushing wide the now unneces-

sary shutter, admitted the clear daylight. The other, looking up, met a calm and friendly smile, which was immediately and involuntarily reflected in his own face. All his unreasoned liking for Ladzinski surged up warm above an unsounded depth of personal depression.

"I think you are my friend," Ladzinski said, looking down at him.

"I am," the Englishman answered earnestly. The words were absolutely sincere; yet in the background of his mind was a sensation of their costing him some appreciable sacrifice.

Ladzinski dropped his sketch-book upon the table and himself into a chair, cast a quick look right and left across the wide empty room, and shifted his chair to command the view from the window.

"It was in Paris that I knew her first," he began. "She was a little girl, and her mother was a widow—Madame Veneroni—an American. Their home was in London. There was an Italian—Menosotti—who was always following the widow. They went away, and she married him in England. I met them again at Cannes one winter. Miss Veneroni was nearly eighteen then. Menosotti was not often with them; I think his wife was frightened of him; she was a poor timid creature. As for me, I hated him—I do hate him"; his voice slackened

pace a little. Allison had to fill in the gaps of the narration.

“Of course, I soon went to London, but I hardly saw her. The mother was ill. A cousin came, an Englishman called Bush. Then Madame Veneroni died, and afterwards the Bushes took her with them into the country. I saw Mrs. Bush, and she made me promise to leave Camilla alone for a year. She wrote to me—Mrs. Bush—three times, and she assured me there was no other lover. Then at the end of the year they came back to London—nearly three weeks ago. I went to her house. She was out with the cousin. Next day she wasn't there, but I saw Mrs. Bush. She was terribly agitated; she begged me to tell her if I knew anything of Camilla. She had disappeared, leaving a little letter to say that she had gone of her own will, that she was doing nothing wrong, and was in no danger, but that she might not be able to write during her absence.”

The eyes of Allison had grown rounder and rounder as he listened.

“Her maid had a notion that she had gone out to Italy to her father's family. Acting on that, Mrs. Bush and I made inquiries, and found that a lady who might be she had crossed to Calais. I came upon her track in Paris. There a man met her, and went on with her.

I followed ; I lost them once or twice. They have been here for nearly a week, staying at the Villa Sans Souci. I managed to get a letter to her yesterday, asking her to meet me where she did meet me."

Allison opened his mouth to put a question, and closed it again in silence ; there was so much more which he felt necessary to complete the story. Then, remembering that it was in his own power to make a contribution, he detailed the parting of Camilla on the steps from the man of doubtful status, and the subsequent interview in the church between the same man and an unknown gentleman. Ladzinski listened with attention, but remained silent. A hasty mental survey reinforced Allison's conviction that before committing himself he must have fuller knowledge.

" You think," he began, " that perhaps I may be of help to you in this ; that is why you tell me ? "

" Yes, assuredly."

" But you have not told me enough to make me sure whether I ought to help you."

Ladzinski looked up sharply.

" May I ask two or three questions ? "

" Ask."

" Is Miss Veneroni—I mean, does Miss Veneroni at all—at all return your feeling for her ? "

The colour shot into the other's face and died away again.

"I fear not, at present," he answered with an effort. "But she has an old friendship and regard for me. There seems to be a sort of barrier. She does not tell me why she came."

"She doesn't want help from you?"

Ladzinski shook his head.

"Then what is there to do?"

"I don't know what to do," the other cried, with a gesture of despair. "She seems to be under a spell."

"Is she of age?"

"No."

"Who are her guardians?"

"I suppose her cousins in England."

"You don't know for certain whether her parents appointed any?"

Once more Ladzinski shook his head.

"And she is not an English subject—at least, I suppose not, if her father was an Italian. Is she rich?"

"I believe so; I am sure her mother was, and I think the wealth came from her father; so I should think it could not go to Menosotti."

"Then it would be to his interest to keep hold of her, and to the interest of her father's relations, if any, to get hold of her. They, by the way, are probably her legal guardians."

Ladzinski nodded gravely.

"Was the man I saw with her this morning the step-father?"

Ladzinski caught up his sketch-book, drew a few hasty lines, and tearing off a strip of paper, passed it to his companion. "That's Menosotti," said he.

Allison contemplated the little drawing. "That is not the man I saw with her, nor the man in the church either."

Ladzinski's pencil was busy once more, and once more he handed over a slip of paper.

"Yes, yes, that's the man I saw."

"That is the man who has been travelling with her. I don't know who he is."

"She did not seem very friendly with him this morning," Allison remarked, frowning over the drawing. The thought behind his words was that this was hardly a lover with whom a charming girl could be induced to elope. He handed back the second portrait, but retained the first. "It may be useful," he observed, "for me to have this."

He bestowed it in a pocket-book, and leaned back silent, with a face of grave cogitation.

"What we want here," he declared at last, "is a good Italian lawyer, or else, and better still, a trustworthy, middle-aged Italian lady. Do you know either one or the other?"

"There is Madame Perivier," Ladzinski replied slowly. "She is a Frenchwoman, but she has lived in Rome longer than we have been alive. She knew the Veneronis in Paris. I think she knew something of Menosotti too. There is no kinder or cleverer woman alive, and she knows Italy as I know the Luxembourg Gardens."

"The very person ; and would she come, do you think ?"

"She might. Of course she isn't in Rome at this time of year. She is probably at her daughter's, close to Lucca."

"You'll write to her to-night, won't you ?"

"Yes. I have told Ca—I have told Miss Veneroni that I am coming to call on her at the Villa Sans Souci to-morrow afternoon. She said she would be glad to see me, and that I might bring you."

"It is clear, then," said Allison, "that she is quite at liberty. It is a strange tale."

"A very strange tale," echoed Ladzinski, and he would probably have added more had not a dingy waiter, appearing at this juncture and introducing an atmosphere of garlic, announced, in a fine Italian accent, that "*ces messieurs*" were served.

The meal was spread below, on an island of table in an ocean of dining-room, and two

gentlemen of Saragosta who ate habitually at the Hotel Corona d'Italia were already seated. One of these was the local doctor, the other an official of functions not yet very clearly apprehended. They received the foreigners with amicable greetings, and resuming the conversation precisely where it had been left on the previous evening, inquired whether the frescoes of Bernardino had yet been inspected.

Allison answered in terms as civil as possible to the memory of Saragosta's one distinguished citizen, and proceeded to ask questions about the lonely farm on the hill-side. It belonged, they told him, to a Roman count, by whom it had been inherited from the last daughter of an ancient local family. The tenants, quiet, elderly people, were too strenuously industrious for sociability, and were seldom seen beyond their own confines.

"They are, however, well-behaved persons," Signor Sacchetti, the official, condescendingly concluded, while the doctor added, "They would, no doubt, be delighted that Monsieur should make a picture of their dwelling."

Ladzinski made a polite, evasive reply. He was not perhaps unwilling to have his goings and comings credited with motives solely artistic. Of the English-speaking young lady, no word was uttered by any of the party.

III

THE EMPTY VILLA

ALLISON and Ladzinski stood before the door of the Villa Sans Souci and awaited some result of their repeated knocking. A good many minutes passed before a promising sound was heard of bolts withdrawn; the door was at last partially opened, and in the narrow space appeared an old woman with a broom. Ladzinski asked for the Signorina Veneroni. She shook her head. The young man persisted, gently, firmly, with all the persuasiveness of his voice, his smile, and his manner. But the woman, although she relaxed visibly under these influences, maintained her position. There was no young lady, she declared, at the villa. Allison, calling up his best Italian, interposed a question: "Was it this morning that she left, or last night?"

"Last night," replied the old woman.

Further questions drew the information that there had been lodgers in the house for five days, and that they had departed rather

suddenly the evening before. She did not know where they had gone—that was no concern of hers—but she knew the driver of the carriage which had taken them, one Girolamo, living three steps away.

The visitors turned gravely from the door of the villa.

“To Girolamo, I presume,” said Allison.

Ladzinski nodded silently. That sensitive face of his was not only pale but actually drawn and furrowed with anxiety.

The abode of Girolamo was an old stone house marked with lines of age like wrinkles, and enclosing odours peculiarly ancient and concentrated. Girolamo himself sat in his doorway, engaged in the careful and precise shaving of a poodle. His simple tale was soon told. He had on the previous day conveyed to the station at Dalarocca the gentleman from the Villa Sans Souci and the young lady his sister (at this designation the eyes of each listener sought the other). The young lady—this in reply to specific questions—seemed perhaps a little tired; she had spoken little. The two travellers having heard this narration, stood for perhaps a minute before the narrator, silent.

“Dalarocca seems to be the next step,” remarked Allison, and Ladzinski assenting, they saw no better plan than to bid Girolamo bring

his conveyance in half an hour's time to the hotel.

The clock in the tower was once more striking four as they crossed the square. Ladzinski winced at the sound.

"They have had twenty-two hours' start," said he. "They might be half across Europe before we could trace them."

It seemed to be agreed without any words that pursuit was to be made, and that Allison was to share it. This tacit agreement struck him afterwards as odd, but at the moment it was the merest matter of course.

The shadows were already growing longer in the modernised streets of Dalarocca when they alighted at the railway station. It had been determined that Allison, who could not possibly be recognised as a former friend of Miss Veneroni, should undertake the part of inquirer. After having catechised the ticket-clerk and porters, he returned eagerly to his companion and announced that two persons corresponding in appearance with those they sought had taken train, the evening before, for Padua.

"And now," he concluded, "had we better both go on to Padua? You see, there may be letters at Saragosta to-morrow. There's your friend, Madame What's-her-name?—and Miss Veneroni *might* write to you."

At this suggestion Ladzinski shook his head despondently, but he agreed that it might be wiser to divide forces, and it needed little discussion to decide that the better speaker of Italian should go forward, while the comparatively inarticulate Allison remained at Saragosta.

"You will open Madame's letter, of course," said Ladzinski.

"And you will wire to me where I am to send any other."

"Yes,"—he paused, hesitated, and with a visible effort conquered his reluctance,—“and the other, if there should be one, you had better open that too.”

Allison too hesitated, and then replied simply, “Very well.”

The next train to Padua would go, it appeared, in three-quarters of an hour.

“And so good-bye,” said the artist, holding out his hand.

But Allison refused to accept the farewell.

“Nothing of the kind,” said he stoutly. “I am not going to be shaken to pieces a second time in that gig of Girolamo's. And besides, I am hungry. He shall take back my traps and tell them to expect me, and in the meantime you and I will have some dinner.”

Ladzinski with a faint smile shook his head :

a mute answer which indicated not refusal but comprehension. He recognised perfectly that Allison, though perhaps genuinely hungry and genuinely averse to renew his experience of the "gig," was staying primarily for none of these reasons, but to keep him company.

They dined, talking of casual topics, and parted without any display of feeling. But in the very moment of parting Allison received from the midst of a warm look of liking a sudden sensation as if a curtain lifted and gave him a glimpse of tragedy ahead. He looked after the retreating train with a vague, unformulated terror and with a clinging of the heart to the man who was being borne away.

On his table, when he entered the big upper room next morning, Allison beheld two letters. He hurried forward, full of trembling anticipation. One was for himself—a square English envelope with a square English writing—his sister's. The other was for Ladzinski, and he knew even before he perceived the Lucca postmark that this thin, long envelope and this long angular writing were not Camilla's but Madame Perivier's. He opened first the letter which was not addressed to himself. Its thin and highly polished surface presented but few words, and of those few none indicated place or date.

“Meet me, *mon ami*, on Thursday at half-past three, at the station at Dalarocca.—E. P.”

Allison contemplated this command with stupefaction. Thursday was to-morrow. To telegraph to a lady whose only known address was “near Lucca” appeared impossible; and the address of Ladzinski was for the moment more uncertain still. Clearly it would devolve upon himself to meet this imperative lady and to entertain her as best he could. His heart sank, and for some moments he became entirely oblivious of the second letter which lay awaiting his attention. When by-and-by he did open it, the contrast provoked a smile. Guendolen’s communication was duly headed with place and date, it opened with an orderly “My dear Laurence,” and closed with her own name at length. But between this opening and this close lay a manuscript as much greater in volume as clearer in caligraphy than Madame Perivier’s. Allison’s brow wrinkled as he read; here were more demands upon him. Guendolen’s sojourn with an old school-fellow was not, it appeared, turning out to her satisfaction. She wished he were in England; had written to Aunt Lucy, but doubted whether Aunt Lucy could receive her. “If you are not very busy with your cathedrals and your palaces,

could not you come home?" she wrote, "or could not I come out to you?"

"But how can I?" Allison inquired of the surrounding air.

He looked from letter to letter, and felt that women and the postal system were great complicators of existence. He also felt that his own recent courses and present position would be a little difficult of explanation to Guendolen. By profession this young man was an architect, but a comfortable income permitting him to pursue his studies at leisure, he was now journeying with a note-book through northern Italy instead of sitting in a London office to wait for clients. He resolved to write and exhort Guendolen to patience. Meanwhile, since Madame Perivier would have to be met, and since she could hardly be expected to walk from Dalarocca, it would be as well to bespeak Girolamo. In visiting Girolamo it was natural to survey the exterior of the Villa Sans Souci, which stood directly opposite.

"The villa is still empty?" he presently remarked in his laborious Italian.

"There is the old Filomena," Girolamo gently corrected him.

"She is alone?"

"She is alone."

The Englishman looked wistfully at the

closed door in the villa's garden wall, then he walked slowly round the house and regarded it from the north and from the south. Finally he was rewarded by the emergence of Filomena with a basket. He at once walked towards her, greeted her politely, and began: "If the villa is still to let, may I look at the rooms? There is a lady coming to-morrow to Saragosta; she may perhaps prefer not to stay at the hotel."

The dark eyes of Filomena took stock of him; he seemed to feel them numbering the coins in his pocket. She drew from the bottom of her basket a key about as long as her forearm and turned back to the house. They crossed a melancholy garden, containing nearly as much stone-work as vegetation, and entered a wide hall.

Measured by an Italian standard, the rooms of the Villa Sans Souci were not particularly large; none of them would have contained more than two of the flats assigned in London to working class families. From the sprawling, crudely coloured arabesques of the walls the eyes sank with relief to the mellow red of the tiled floors. The furniture was sparse and somewhat austere. Upon one hearth were still lying the soft grey ashes of a wood fire; he wondered whether Camilla had warmed

herself at that fire. A flake of burnt paper was discernible, brown and crisp among the grey dust; he wondered whether she had burned it. In no other room was there any other imaginable trace of her. Filomena stood patiently waiting till the visitor should speak. Allison at last, chasing away the dim feeling of something here to be discovered, asked her about the terms and the landlord, and following her out into the sunshine, left her turning the huge key in the garden door.

IV

THE HAND AT THE CARRIAGE WINDOW

THE sun was still shining when, in the afternoon, Girolamo's vehicle went jolting along the road to Dalarocca. The grey-white track ascended between grey-white walls; the sharp outlines, the clear sober colouring, extraordinarily lucid, but without glow, had the peculiar austerity that belongs to North Italian landscape. The clear light air was still, and no birds sang.

Allison, meditating, like a true Englishman, upon climate, said to himself that anywhere else, if the air were as hot as this, it would also be sultry; and if it were as fresh, there would be wind. This combination of the light and the still was physically delicious and invigorating; yet the resulting mood inclined rather to melancholy than to exhilaration. Perhaps it was some old remnant of Puritan habit which rendered the British conscience dissatisfied.

under inaction, and imparted to this countryside an air of emptiness and desolation. Thinking idly thus and noting idly the dark spears of cypress above the line of wall, he perceived a carriage approaching — a covered, closed carriage, large, dingy, and jingling. He had imbibed already enough of village feeling to look with curiosity upon the stranger and traveller; and when the two vehicles had crossed, he turned his head and looked back. Suddenly from the window of the carriage a white handkerchief fluttered — a bare white hand, the cuff of a biscuit-coloured sleeve — Camilla.

In a moment he had stopped Girolamo, had leapt out, and was expounding to that unruffled driver the duty of meeting and bringing home an unknown French lady to be identified by her mention of Ladzinski's name. This explanation had occupied, in spite of his utmost haste, some two or three minutes. When he turned to pursue the carriage it was already out of sight. He ran eagerly down the road; presently, at a turning, he could see before him a stretch of about half a mile. There was no carriage upon the road. He stood amazed, bewildered. There were arched doorways, indeed, in some of the high walls, but these were not of width to admit a carriage. He ran on again

at his utmost speed, a new length of roadway opening at every stride. The road remained absolutely empty. Again he stood still and began to look for wheel-marks in the shallow dust at his feet. He saw but one clear pair of lines, and these not surely wide enough to belong to the carriage; these must doubtless be due to Girolamo's wheels. He walked thus slowly once more in the direction of Dalarocca, his head bent, his eyes following the double wheel-line. All at once he perceived a second track, wider than the first, entering the road with a curve from the right and continuing towards Dalarocca. Here, on the right, was a by-way, narrower than the road; he followed it, breathless. The ground was white and hard, sprinkled with blades of greyish grass, and bare of dust. No wheel-marks showed. Eagerly Allison hurried along this turning, only to find himself presently on the open hillside, a network of ill-defined footpaths at his feet, no house, no vehicle, no person within sight. Hastily he ascended the hill that rose immediately before him, grey, bare, and rounded, like all the others; arrived at the crown, he beheld only gently curving hollows rising to grey mounds again, all softly undulating in exquisite gradations of light and shadow. He mounted another summit and another; the

landscape was always the same, and presently he had lost all notion of direction.

Now he began to think of Madame Perivier, and to wonder how he should return to Saragosta. Choosing the first fairly well-marked path, he determined to persevere in it until he should meet some landmark. He persevered, and landmarks remained obstinately wanting.

At last, however, he heard—oh, welcome sound!—the voice of the Saragosta clock speaking faintly across the hills to the right. Deserting his path, he aimed a course towards it, and was rewarded, about a quarter of an hour later, by coming to that very by-path into which the carriage-track had led him. He walked along it quickly, and, when he was about midway, remarked a small folded white paper lying at the foot of one wall. He did not really suppose it to be a token from Camilla, but he stooped and picked it up. His heart gave a leap. Pricked with a pin upon the paper was a series of uneven letters spelling the English words: "Tell S. L. keep address hotel."

Allison stood between the blank walls, staring at this message, eager, hopeful, full of a longing to devote himself wholly to the sender's service. Mechanically he walked on to the high road; and there, calling his thoughts together, consulted his watch, considered the pace of Giro-

lamo's steed, and concluding that Mme. Perivier could hardly yet have reached this spot, leaned his shoulders against the wall and waited.

The justice of his conclusion was presently evinced. The lean and leisurely beast of Girolamo advanced into view, and on the seat behind it sat a lady. Allison, who had been accustomed to suppose that skill and success in the art of dress came by nature to every Frenchwoman, was a good deal amazed at her appearance. Her gown and mantle, both of good material, and possibly even of good cut, had evidently been indued without reference to a mirror, and bore no consistent relation to the person within them. Like her nondescript bonnet they were black, and of the peculiar dinginess possible only to that hue. And yet with her odd figure, her huddled garments, and her bonnet on one ear, Mme. Perivier had the air of an empress. Her fine and noble countenance breathed calm command; the light clasp of her brown hands would have been completed appropriately by a sceptre. She sat the seat of Girolamo's chaise like a throne.

Allison advanced, lifting his hat; Girolamo paused; and the raised eyebrows of the lady perceptibly inquired, "Who are you?"

"M. Ladzinski," the Englishman began in

his best French, "is away from Saragosta. I was his fellow-traveller, and, with your permission, will do my best to replace him for a day or two until he returns."

The expressive eyebrows of Madame Perivier remained exalted; she bowed politely without speaking, and Allison ascended apologetically to the seat at her side.

"The fact," he proceeded, "is that the very day after he wrote to you, Ladzinski found that Miss Veneroni had gone away, and he went after her."

"Where is he?" Madame Perivier demanded, sitting up with sudden alacrity and with all the appearance of intending immediate chase.

Her voice, despite its somewhat alarming note of command, was singularly mellow and agreeable.

"I don't know; he has not written."

"But then"—she reflected for a moment, and slowly opened upon him her large, dark eyes—"it was *you* who read my letter?"

He admitted it.

"But this," said Madame Perivier, with the first symptoms of a smile, "is very promising."

Their eyes met, and Allison allowed expression to the amusement that underlay his alarm. Madame Perivier, reading plainly both influ-

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ences, frankly laughed ; and at the laugh his alarms took wing.

“ And if Severyn Ladzinski does not write or return ? ” she asked.

“ Then, ” said Allison boldly, “ you and I will find Miss Veneroni without him. ”

Not until they were seated together in the hotel drawing-room did he produce the scrap of paper, and relate the adventure of the closed carriage.

She heard him with profound attention and uttered no immediate comment.

“ A letter will come from her to the hotel, ” she presently declared.

“ And we shall not know where to send it to Ladzinski. ”

“ There will be a letter from him to-morrow morning, ” Madame pronounced with conviction. “ As for us, we must find out where those roads over the hills lead. She was being taken somewhere. ”

The young man at once produced and displayed a map, upon which, however, his companion turned but a distant and indifferent eye.

“ Maps, ” she remarked, “ say nothing to me. If you can understand it, pray tell me the conclusion. ”

“ The conclusion, ” Allison announced, after a little study, “ seems to be that they may have

gone to Minolina or to Saltello, or may have turned back to Dalarocca."

"The conclusion, in short," returned Madame Perivier briskly, "is nothing. What houses are there between here and Dalarocca?"

"There is nothing but one farm, a lonely sort of place, called Casello."

"You must go to-morrow and make inquiries there."

"Why not this evening?"

Madame Perivier smiled approvingly. "I thought," she said, "that you would want your dinner."

"So I do—or I shall; but I want to find Miss Veneroni."

Folding up his map, he arose alertly.

"*Au revoir*," said Madame Perivier graciously, and without further prelude he set forth, meditating as he went on the strangeness of his errand and of the lady who sent him upon it.

Two hours later Allison was returning towards the hotel of the Crown of Italy, his mind occupied more immediately by his impending meal than by any other topic. Madame Perivier's allusion to dinner led him to hope that her disregard of clothes did not extend into the region of food, and that although the regular hour was over he would find a comfortable repast await-

ing him. The doctor and the *sindaco* would of course be gone home. He wondered, with a momentary smile, what they had thought of Madame Perivier.

He made straight for the dining-room, and on its threshold stood transfixed. At the table, with an air of having personally provided this entertainment, sat Madame Perivier, presiding, but not partaking, and on her right sat Ladzinski, who, on Allison's entrance, sprang up with a cry of pleasure.

"And have you heard anything?" he eagerly asked.

"I saw the woman—a shrivelled, overworked creature; her answers were dry and short, but quite clear. She had seen a carriage in the distance. She did not know where it was going. And you, have you found anything?"

Ladzinski shook his head, and dropped his hand with an expressive gesture.

"Show me the paper—her paper," said he; and Allison gave him the ragged, pathetic scrap that meant so much.

Madame Perivier, here intervening, commanded both to sit down and eat their dinners, an occupation which naturally left the word with her.

"Now," she said, when the waiter had departed, "we require to be acquainted with many

things of which we are ignorant. We want to know the whereabouts of Menosotti—I have the poorest opinion possible of Menosotti. We want to know who is this man with whom she has been seen and this other man to whom Mr. Allison saw him speaking in the church. We want to know who are Camilla's relations in Italy, and in what manner her money is left to her. Am I not right?"

Her audience respectfully assented.

"Some part of this information can only be obtained from England; some part only in Italy. Besides all this, we desire to follow and discover her."

Ladzinski was heard to mutter, "Saltello, Minolina," and something about the earliest train.

Allison, on his part, began to remember Guendolen's letter of the day before.

"You know the address of the English cousins," Madame Perivier proceeded. "You had better write to-night."

"How would it be——" Allison began, and there paused, realizing suddenly the pang it would cost him to forego active participation in this enterprise.

The eyes of Madame Perivier were, however, upon him, and he found himself compelled to complete the sentence.

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“—if I were to go to England? I got a letter yesterday asking me to go back. Then, if you like, I can see the cousins and the will, and send you all particulars.”

Ladzinski lifted a blank countenance.

“You will go home—not to come back?” he said.

“No, no; I will come back,” Allison returned quickly. After all, he reminded himself, Guendolen had suggested that she should come here.

“That seems an excellent plan,” said Madame Perivier, after a moment.

Allison scarcely heard her; his eyes were upon the face of his comrade, which, now that the disguising animation of speech had died out, showed plainly the traces of wearing anxiety. Thin it had always been, but now it was haggard, the ridge of the cheek-bone prominent between a hollow above and a hollow below, the whole profile brought to an edge like a knife. That apprehension, sudden and undefined, which Ladzinski often awoke in him sprang up once more. Come back! Of course he would come back. Suffering such as this was not to be deserted. In what way his own presence was to alleviate the sufferings of Ladzinski was not very clear, but the emotion of sympathy has no need of

sharp definitions. Then, Ladzinski looking up and speaking, the appearance of suffering dropped like a mask, and the worn-out friend to be protected changed under Allison's eyes into a leader to be followed. Perhaps the air of romantic weariness had, after all, been mainly hunger.

It was quite cheerfully that the Englishman sought his vast, bare bedchamber, and there, by the light of a three-beaked lamp, delightful to the eye and detestable to the nose, packed into his knapsack his belongings.

THE EMBASSY TO LONDON

ALLISON stepped from the train into the Sunday morning inactivity of a London terminus, and the hours of travel fell behind him like the prolonged dream of a restless night. London was sunny, with a pale sunniness like sunshine and water, dusty and airless, the place of the atmosphere being supplied by something heavier which carried a slight flavour of coal-smoke and stables, and which differed from the air of Saragosta as rain-water differs from Apollinaris. But this young Briton, breathing in with it a sense of home, smiled and knew a sudden exhilaration. He sprang gaily into a hansom, and compared that conveyance, greatly to its advantage, with Giro-lamo's. At the hotel, presently, it was a new delight to behold on his breakfast table an absolutely contemporary English newspaper. Resisting the temptation to linger over its advertisements, he was, soon after ten o'clock, on his way to catechise the cousin of Camilla.

This lady lived, it appeared from the address on Ladzinski's letter, in Eglinton Gardens, Bayswater. The house, when he arrived before it, presented a desolate, half-shut-up aspect. Mrs. Bush, he felt sure, would prove to be absent. But, no; Mrs. Bush was at home, and he was ushered without delay into the presence of an eminently British middle-aged lady, whose flaxen hair and somewhat florid complexion he scrutinised in vain for any resemblance to the young lady of Saragosta.

"I have come," he began, "from Italy, from M. Ladzinski"—the lady clasped her hands together—"and here is a letter from him."

She took the letter, looked it through, and smiled up a little anxiously at her visitor.

"He tells you, I think, how I came to learn, by accident, something of the circumstances."

Mrs. Bush made a little motion of assent.

"And so, as I had other reasons for coming to England, and as I am going out again very shortly, Ladzinski thought it would save time and correspondence if you would let me ask you about two or three points."

"Certainly," said Mrs. Bush.

Allison laid before her his friend's pencil-drawing of the man who had been seen with Camilla.

"Do you, in the first place, know that person?"

"I never saw him in my life," was the answer.

Her speech, now that he heard more of it than a word at a time, had a faint hereditary American accent.

"Secondly," the young man proceeded, "has Miss Veneroni relations in Italy?"

"Not that I know of; but I don't really know. I don't think I ever heard anything of Mr. Veneroni's family."

"Did you know him?"

"Oh, yes; I was my aunt's bridesmaid. He was rather a melancholy man, but very kind. He was a—a refugee," said Mrs. Bush, a little reluctantly.

"Then he probably was poor?"

"Oh, no—quite the contrary. He was a Greek merchant, a partner in—I forget the name of the firm—but a very well-known house. Mr. Bush would know."

"You don't happen to know whether he was naturalised?"

"I don't know at all."

"Your aunt was an American, I think?"

"Yes; she was my mother's half-sister, much younger; her father left her quite poor, and she came over to stay with my mother. She was very pretty—very pretty indeed, but she

wasn't—she hadn't very much judgment, I think ; I am afraid she did not make her first husband very happy."

"And when he died, was his property left to her absolutely or only a life interest?"

"I can't say. I don't think I ever heard. But I think my husband was a trustee or an executor or something."

"If you can tell me when Mr. Veneroni died, I will look up the will."

Mrs. Bush, after sifting her memory and bringing the event into relation with a general ladder of family history, arrived at an approximate date.

Inquiries as to the whereabouts of Menosotti came next. Of him Mrs. Bush knew and evidently desired to know nothing. The notion of his step-daughter's being with him or being influenced by him, she scouted.

"Camilla," she declared, "always hated him. I don't believe she has seen him or spoken to him since her mother's death."

Allison stood for a moment reviewing the harvest of these answers and considering the next step. Outside a slow church bell began to chime.

"Have you any portrait of Mr. Veneroni that you could lend me?" he asked at last. "That might be useful in case of having to

look up his relations ; and the address of his partners—they might know something of his family.”

Mrs. Bush replied that she would write to her husband for the address ; that she would see if she could find a photograph in Camilla’s album ; and that there was a portrait in the dining-room which he might like to see. He followed her thither, and was left face to face with the portrait of a man of perhaps fifty. The countenance, which was typically Italian—of the noble Italian type—struck him as already familiar, yet he was quite sure that it was not of Camilla that it reminded him. He was still hunting the fugitive resemblance when Mrs. Bush returned with the photograph.

“ I need not ask you, Mr. Allison,” she said, “ to write at once when you have any news. It is more than three weeks now——” She stopped a little abruptly.

“ I’ll telegraph,” said Allison.

With the photograph of Camilla’s father in his pocket, and with the slow church bell chiming behind him, he turned his steps eastward. Little groups of persons carrying prayer-books were beginning to move sedately along the main thoroughfare. Suddenly Allison’s heart stood still ; for the space of a couple of

breaths he believed that he beheld Camilla coming towards him. Then he perceived that this girl was not even very much like her, that a momentary sunbeam had given Camilla's colour to a coil of light hair, and that the figure in a biscuit-coloured dress was taller and less slender than hers. He walked on again in a world grown empty. Presently, however, a new thought encouraged him. Within half a mile—in Palace Gardens to be precise—dwelt an old family friend who was a barrister of eminence. Without any pause he turned southward and began to thread the windings of Silver Street.

Again fortune favoured him. Mr. Crozier was at home, and, upon receipt of a message about urgent private business, ordered the admission of his young friend to the study, wherein he sat entrenched behind a fortress of papers. He lifted a face at once inquiring and absent-minded.

“Eh? Laurence? Is that you? I thought you were abroad somewhere.”

“I was, until to-day, and I am going off again not later than Tuesday.”

At that the lingering inattention vanished and left inquiry dominant upon the shrewd and kindly countenance. The nearest papers were pushed away.

"Sit down, my boy; sit down. Now tell me, and for Heaven's sake begin at the beginning and drive straight through."

Allison, thus adjured, took a minute to reflect, and drew out the photograph.

"That," he began to say, "is the portrait——"

But his old friend interrupted him. "Why, that's Veneroni!" he exclaimed, bending over the card with interest.

"Did you know him?" Allison asked, amazed.

"I used to meet him a good deal at one time at the Simonides'. He was a junior partner of old Stephen Simonides. He was a nice fellow, Veneroni, always ready to do any one a kindness; half the refugees over here used to live on him, and they were plentiful in my young day."

"Did you know his wife?"

"American, wasn't she? Showy woman, with nothing in her."

"And his family? Did you know anything of that?"

"I remember Constantine Simonides telling me that he belonged to some great family, and had lost everything by his opinions; but I never knew any details. He was the last man in the world to boast of such things. But go

on with your story; it interests me if it has to do with Veneroni."

Allison told the story. His hearer hastily noted several points, but he said nothing until the narration had come to an end. Then he remarked, "You make an uncommonly good witness, Laurence. There are two or three details in which I can help you. As to the will, I will send my clerk to look it up; it will take him about a tenth of the time it would take you. And I will see old Simonides—call on him this very evening."

Allison expressed his gratitude, but ventured to suggest that he further craved for an opinion.

Mr. Crozier leaned back in his chair, rattled a bunch of keys in his pocket, and assumed an inscrutable smile. Allison waited in patient deference.

"The obvious explanation in the case of a girl of twenty is a lover."

"But Mrs. Bush assured Ladzinski there wasn't one."

"That is an assurance which parents and guardians frequently entertain."

Allison said nothing, but he reflected that age may sometimes lose in insight what it gains in experience.

"You don't agree with my opinion?" said Mr. Crozier,

"I don't," Allison promptly returned.

Mr. Crozier chuckled. "You are not such a good witness after all. How do you know that you don't agree with my opinion? I haven't expressed one yet."

"I wish you would express one," said Allison, smiling.

"My opinion is that the young lady has been deliberately deceived and enticed away; I don't know by whom, and I don't know in what way, but almost certainly in order to obtain money; and if she is made at all after her father's pattern, the trap was probably some sort of appeal to her generosity. And my further opinion is that the sooner she is taken away from her present companions, the better for her."

"But if she doesn't want to be taken away? She seems to be a free agent."

"Free agent? Nothing of the kind! She is a minor, isn't she? Make her a ward of Court in no time."

"But is she an English subject?"

"Certainly," returned Mr. Crozier with firmness. "Her father was naturalised; I remember the discussion about it at the time. The girl was born in England, daughter of a naturalised Englishman; she is as English as you are. But it doesn't follow," he added,

after a moment, "that these Italians know it."

"Can I get a copy of the Act of Naturalisation, or whatever it is?"

"I will see about that. Who's her nearest relative here?"

"Mrs. Bush, first cousin; her mother's niece."

"Married woman or widow?"

"Married."

"What's the husband?"

"I don't know. County society, I should say, or well-to-do clergy, perhaps."

"And she lives?"

"21, Eglinton Gardens, Bayswater. I have just left her."

"Ah, Veneroni's house. Come and dine with me to-morrow evening and I will have some more facts."

Allison hesitated an instant.

"May I bring Guen?"

"What! is Guen with you? Yes, bring her by all means. Does she know all this?"

"No, nothing."

"Oh, well, some of my girls will be in; I'll tell 'em to."

He glanced again at the photograph which still lay before him, and looked away with a sigh.

Allison picked up the card, and in doing so, he too looked at it.

"I know now," he cried suddenly.

Mr. Crozier turned to him, astonished.

"The likeness that I could not get hold of, in this and in the painting—it is to the man in the church—the gentleman who was talking to the other man."

"You are sure? You are not being deceived by something generically Italian?"

"I think not."

"What age was the man?"

"Forty to fifty at a rough guess."

"Veneroni, our Veneroni, Vincenzo, would be seventy. He must have been fifty or thereabouts when he married."

"The man must be a relation," said Allison, still gazing wide-eyed at the portrait.

"It appears possible," said the cautious senior. "I'll bear the point in mind."

He drew towards him his discarded papers, and Allison, accepting the hint, made his farewells.

Once more he was out in the warm breath of the London Sunday. The bells were all silent now, and as he came to Kensington Church he heard the ebb and flow of a familiar hymn and the hour of noon striking on an unfamiliar clock. It seemed a month since he had heard the hours strike in the tower of Saragosta.

Late in the afternoon Guendolen arrived, and was delighted with the idea of going to Italy.

"I must get a hat and some thick shoes, that's all; I can be ready to go to-morrow," she declared, and was even a little disappointed to hear that they must wait till Tuesday. "*Must* we go to the Croziers'?" she murmured. But being a person of easy temper, willing to allow for other people's wishes without insisting on knowing their motives, she said no more.

Notwithstanding her forbearance, however, she was perfectly aware, before the close of that evening, of wishes and motives existing in her brother's mind and not communicated to her. It was clear to her that in the three weeks of their separation "something had happened" to Laurence. That "something had happened" to Guendolen also, Laurence, on the other hand, remained quite unsuspecting.

In Palace Gardens, the next evening, her sisterly eye was observant of Lucy and Mildred Crozier, and she soon convinced herself that neither of those young ladies filled a great place in her brother's thoughts. "But why, then," Guendolen asked herself, "did he stay another day for the sake of coming here?"

Dinner over, Mr. Crozier led the young man away to his study. Yesterday's little paper of

notes—he knew it again at once—lay upon a larger sheet, which was closely written. Mr. Crozier laid his hand on the two.

“I saw Simonides,” he began. “He says that Veneroni did belong to a swell family, and they cast him off because of his opinions. There was a father and an uncle and at least one younger brother.”

“Younger? Then Miss Veneroni would be the natural heiress.”

“Gently, gently; what do wills exist for? It does look a little as if your young lady was a marchioness in her own right, but it doesn’t follow that she inherits a penny. I am not familiar with the modern Italian laws of inheritance, and the naturalisation may be a bar. As to the English will, the money was in trust for the mother—Constantine Simonides and James Bush trustees—but was to go straight to the girl if she was eighteen or more at the mother’s death, as it appears she was. I have seen Mrs. Bush——”

“You have?” cried Allison.

“And she consents to take immediate steps to get her cousin made a ward of Court.”

“But doesn’t that involve publicity?”

“Not at all; then a guardian will no doubt be appointed, and the young lady will have to be guided by that guardian till she is of age,

which will not be until next June. This"—he smoothed out carefully the shiny blue sheet before him—"contains the signed declaration of old Simonides as to his partner's naturalisation. I should think there is no high official in any European country who would not accept his statement. If you leave me your address, I'll try and get a copy of the deed itself sent to you."

Allison wrote down the rather voluminous directions required by letters to Saragosta, and Mr. Crozier, still meditating the case, inquired, "What is the young lady like?"

"Fair hair, almost red; very bright blue eyes, regular features, delicate complexion."

"Pretty, then?"

"I should say, very pretty."

"The mother was fair too, with a soft complexion. Wonder whether she's a fool."

"She doesn't look it."

"Hm! The mother did. And what about your sister? She is not going out with you, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes."

"Won't that be a little awkward? You can't fly to and fro, leaving Guen stranded in a foreign hotel."

"There's Madame Perivier, you know, the old French lady."

“You had better leave Guen with us ; the girls will be delighted.”

“You are very kind,” said Allison with a little inward embarrassment. He was sure in his heart that Guendolen would choose to come to Saragosta. This brother and sister, though they could not always trace each other’s inner workings, had generally a clear enough perception of the results in which those workings would issue ; and surely enough, Guendolen, while making many grateful acknowledgments, refused to stay. She was tired of London, wanted a real change of air, and was dying to take photographs of old Italian towns.

VI

THE ARROW IN THE AIR

IT was on Thursday afternoon, just a week from the Thursday of Madame Perivier's arrival, that the brother and sister alighted at Dalarocca. Allison looked eagerly for Ladzinski, or, failing Ladzinski, even Giro-lamo. But neither was visible. It was clear that no pedestrian could carry Guendolen's trunk to Saragosta. Guendolen was not at all impatient; she stood smiling up and down the dull and dirty station, finding for the present pleasure enough in the mere foreignness of the bills on the walls. A man, however, now appeared, and announced that he was ordered to fetch the baggage of the travellers, but that as he had other errands in the town he could not set out for Saragosta within an hour. An hour in Dalarocca did not strike the newly-disembarked as inviting; they confided to him their belongings, and started on foot. The hilly path seemed to Allison wonderfully familiar and home-like. On these hills, a week

ago, had disappeared that mysterious carriage. Involuntarily he fell into silence, and his sister, watching him, thought : "*It* happened at Saragosta." She for her part was charmed with everything ; she praised the solitude, the peace, the exhilarating air. Presently, when they came—suddenly, as one always came to it—to the lonely farm with its high wall and its air of ancient desolation, she declared that she would like to live here—"among olives, actually olives ; and I daresay there's no postal delivery."

She walked a few steps nearer.

"Does any one really live here, or is it an enchanted castle ?"

"People live here : I have talked to 'em ; and there's a dog. I wonder we have not heard him bark. He barked at me furiously last time I was here."

"Depend upon it, the dog has fallen into a hundred years' sleep, and the people too. I want to see the other side. Is that just as shut-up and dreary ?"

She advanced quickly across the dry, grey-green herbage ; her brother more idly followed. To him this scene was not so empty ; memories peopled it, and the phantom of a purple parasol lay beneath the olive trees.

The back of the enclosure, in which it was

difficult to tell at what precise point the house ended, was, if anything, even drearier than the front; it lacked the arched doorway on the right, and the little loggia peeping above the wall on the left. The windows were all above their heads, the lower range heavily caged in iron and the upper little more than slits. On this side were no olives; the walls rose from the thin turf, and nothing else was visible but the sky.

“I like this greyness and blueness and whiteness,” said Guendolen. “It is not quite like anything else, and——”

The words stopped short on her lips. From high up in the white wall flew something white that fluttered downward, turned in the air, struck lightly on Allison’s shoulder, and dropped to the ground.

Guendolen’s surprise at this unexpected incident was deepened into amazement by her brother’s reception of it. He uttered a faint, inarticulate sound, something more than a breath and less than a cry; in an instant he had caught the missile from the ground, glanced at it, hidden it, and given her a warning gesture that arrested her rising inquiry. His face, turned upward to the mute wall which had so strangely spoken, showed an intensity of eagerness such as she had

never, even in the vivid days of schoolboy-hood, seen upon it.

The startling revelation was brief. He turned to her, and said in a low voice, "Let us go at once. Control yourself, and don't show surprise; it may be important."

She obeyed, and they returned quietly to the pathway before the house. The door in the wall was now open, and an old woman stood watching their approach.

Allison threw her a cheerful greeting.

"Are you still seeking that carriage, signor?" she asked.

"No; I have given up seeking the carriage," he replied.

Guendolen, whose Italian was even scantier than his, could contribute to the conversation nothing but a smile.

"What was it, Laurence?" she asked, as they walked on.

"It was a letter."

"And you knew from whom?"

This was uttered rather as an affirmation than as a question; she had no doubt on the subject.

"Yes, I knew. Let us push on. When I am sure we are out of sight and not followed, I will read it."

Presently, in an absolutely lonely dip of the

undulating track, they sat down; Guendolen was bidden to watch for any signs of approach, and Allison drew out the strangely shaped object which had fallen from the clouds. It was, in fact, a small dart or javelin, artfully formed of a folded sheet of paper, the point being inserted into a head, made of a second sheet, and fixed for security with a long black-headed pin. Pencilled words were discernible on both portions.

When Guendolen beheld that pin, she was at once convinced that the artificer of the dart was a woman.

Allison, drawing forth this significant pin, held it doubtfully, not seeming to know in the least how to dispose of it, until his sister, with a little impatience, took it from him and thrust it firmly into her own hat. He separated the head from the body of the javelin, and opened first the lightly folded shaft and then the closely folded head.

On the shaft was written in Italian:—

“A reward will be given to the person who takes this to M. S. Ladzinski, at the Hotel Corona d’Italia at Saragosta, or to his English friend.”

The last words suggested to Allison the incredible probability that Camilla was actually unacquainted with his name. He felt himself

suddenly removed to a great distance from her.

The head of the dart being resolved once more into a plain page, proved to contain several lines written in English :—

“I am being kept here by force. I believe that this is done with an idea of safety for me; but I will not submit to it. No one has any right to control me. Help me to get away; but do so without calling public attention. *Remember, I do not wish the police employed.* I have urgent reason for this. I am in no danger, but I want to get away and go where I please. I have been here for 7 days” (the figure had plainly been added at the last moment, in a space left for it). “Pray keep my promise and reward the bearer.”

Allison folded the papers neatly together, and rose to his feet.

“The letter is for Ladzinski, really,” he said. “Let us get on as quickly as possible to the hotel. They are keeping a young English lady there, and she doesn’t like it.”

“Keeping a young English lady! Against her will!” The whole indignant amazement of a sex and a nation were in Guendolen’s voice. “But why? What excuse?”

“I don’t know. We shall learn, perhaps, when we get her away.”

"But you knew she was there?"

"I had no suspicion of it. We have sought her up and down. Ladzinski has been looking for her for three weeks."

Guendolen's face wore an expression of absolute stupefaction.

"But, Laurence—you mean she has been carried off—kidnapped—banditti, and that sort of thing?"

"No, I don't think it is quite so romantic as that. I don't know. Nobody seems to know how she was persuaded away at first. Last Monday week she was at liberty; we saw her, both of us, and Ladzinski talked to her. On Tuesday she had vanished without leaving a word. On Thursday I got a glimpse of her, in a carriage, and she dropped a scrap of paper. We have looked for her in vain ever since."

"'We?' But how came you to have anything to do with it?"

"Oh, friend of the hero, you know; sort of part that always crops up—what they call the feed, I believe, on the stage."

"Then M. Ladzinski, I understand, is in love with this girl?"

"Oh, my dear child, you must ask *him* that."

"It seems very — is she a — nice girl, Laurence?"

"I have never spoken to her. Ladzinski seems to think so, and he has known her since she was a little girl."

"Well, I call it very odd," said Guendolen, and walked on revolving the case in silence behind uplifted eyebrows.

On their arrival at the "Crown of Italy," the whole staff came bustling to receive them; Allison was greeted like an old friend.

"But where," he asked, "is M. Ladzinski?"

There was a shower of exclamatory explanations. M. Ladzinski had gone away last night, after returning only in the morning. He had received a telegram, and had gone at once. Ah, yes, yes, there was a letter.

Allison took the letter eagerly, ordered some coffee—"for I don't think you would much fancy the 'Crown of Italy' tea"—and conducted his sister to the upper room which had heard so many consultations already about Camilla.

Ladzinski wrote that he was called away by Madame Perivier, who had seen Menosotti at the station at Pistoja, and that he had immediately started in pursuit of him.

"Here's a pretty state of things," said Allison discontentedly.

Guendolen, with a smile, held out her hand for the letter, which was yielded to her.

"Who is Menosotti?" she asked.

"Oh, a wretch—her step-father."

"Oh! well, it appears that Mr. Ladzinski can't be reckoned upon for the present. It will be you who will have to get her away from that place."

"It looks like that, certainly."

"You won't leave her there, now you know—not an *hour*."

"It is rather a difficult problem. If I go up alone, I shall not get her; and she forbids me to take the police."

"Surely that's strange," said Guendolen; and perhaps repeated inwardly her doubts whether this could be a nice girl.

Allison drank his coffee, and seemed to find good counsel in it.

"There's an official who comes here to dinner every day—a *sindaco*, whatever that may be—a man called Sacchetti, whom we have seen a good deal of. If I could get him to go up with me—and Girolamo—and a wheelbarrow."

"Girolamo?"

"Oh, he's just a man here who drives a wretched, jolting chaise to Dalarocca. It is no sort of a road up there for a horse; and I suppose she will have some kind of luggage."

Guendolen set down her empty cup.

"Let us go at once to your *sindaco*. I can stroll about while you go in and talk to him."

"It is awfully lucky you are here," Allison observed as they crossed the square.

"Is it? I am glad you think so."

"What should I do with an unknown young lady all alone in Saragosta?"

"You have not got your young lady yet," Guendolen remarked rather grimly; and with these words in his ears, Allison passed beneath the Italian shield that crowned Signor Sacchetti's official doorway.

VII

THE SYNDIC TO THE RESCUE

“WELL?” said Guendolen eagerly, as her brother emerged with a cheerful countenance from the shadow of the shield of Italy.

“It is all right. I have talked him over. Had to pitch it pretty strong about old Crozier, and my having seen Mrs. Bush.” These references were Hebrew to Guendolen, but she forbore inquiry. “I hope she *is* a ward in Chancery by this time, and that I have not perjured myself. Anyway, he’ll come. I am to get Girolamo and come back for him.”

He hurried her away to the ancient mansion over against the Villa Sans Souci.

“Do you mean to say,” cried Guendolen, “that Girolamo lives *there*, in that palace?”

“He does, and very uncomfortably, I have no doubt. The Villa Sans Souci, there, is a far more civilised dwelling.”

They stepped under the stone archway into

a dark entry, full of old-established smells. The obliging Girolamo issued, smiling, from some inner recesses, and readily engaged to borrow a hand-barrow and to meet the others at the church in ten minutes' time.

"I suppose," said Guendolen, whose views of the affair seemed to be a little tintured by Mrs. Radcliffe, "that the people up there are not likely to resist. Have you got any sort of weapon?"

"No, by the bye. I'll ask Sacchetti whether he has such a thing as a pistol. If we are not back in a couple of hours, Sacchetti's clerk will take a letter to the commanding officer at the barracks, half a mile out. But I don't for a moment suppose there will be any need."

They were now before the syndical office; she gave him back his hopeful smile, and turned away towards the hotel.

Within, Allison found not only Sacchetti but also the doctor, who having heard from his friend some hint of the affair, was desirous of accompanying them.

"Medical aid," he observed gravely, "can never come amiss."

"Pray come with us," said Allison politely. Privately he thought of Henny-Penny and Cocky-Locky in the nursery legend. The doctor's remark reminded him also of his

sister's apprehensions, and he asked about a pistol.

"A pistol!" cried Sacchetti, and in the twinkling of an eye produced three. They were rather curious than modern, but for the purpose of inspiring alarm in this primitive district no doubt sufficient. The three adventurers, therefore, set forth, their dangers augmented by the presence in each man's pocket of a loaded firearm.

They gathered in Girolamo and a barrow, and proceeded—again like Henny-Penny and her party—up the hillside.

In three-quarters of an hour or so they had reached the point of attack, and were standing before the door in the white wall. The hanging bell was pulled, and, after several minutes, the door was cautiously opened by an old man. At his heels was a large white dog of the fleecy-coated Italian breed which is reputed ferocious, but which in English eyes bears a pacific resemblance to that lesser variety which stands on a green board and squeaks.

Sacchetti and the doctor greeted the farmer by the name of Pasquale, and looked at Allison.

"We have come," said Allison, "to fetch the English lady who is here."

The man made a movement, but the doctor's

foot had been placed within the range of the door, and if he had thought of shutting it in their faces, he desisted.

“There is no English lady here,” he replied, after an instant.

“I have this very day had a letter from her, given me from a window of this house.”

The syndic interposed.

“We must see the lady who is in your house. She writes that she is being detained against her will. The law will not permit that.”

The man repeated that there was no English lady.

“There is a lady,” Sacchetti persisted, “over whom you have no legal right, and that lady must be produced. Otherwise the master of a house in which an illegal act is done must be arrested.”

Pasquale hesitated.

“But her brother ——” he began.

“She has no brother,” said Allison firmly.

“Come, come,” said Sacchetti; “can you not see, Pasquale, that you have been deceived, and are being employed in a bad business? This man who calls himself her brother is no relation of the lady. She is an English lady; and this English gentleman comes from her relations. You know me. I will be answer-

able for her restitution to this brother if he will come to me and prove his claim."

"But her brother says that she is placed here to prevent her from marrying against the will of her family."

He looked significantly at Allison.

"Her family," Sacchetti resumed, "is in England, and her guardian is a great lord of that country. Her marriage is not possible without his sanction; and if his ward were to be imprisoned by Italians, there might—Heaven preserve us!—be a war."

Having given this handsome version of the position of a ward in Chancery, the Saragostian resolutely pushed wider the open door and walked in. Within, was a grassy court, the house occupying the front, right-hand angle. The besiegers followed their leader closely, and the perplexed proprietor brought up the rear. Sacchetti stepped unhesitatingly into a wide hall which seemed to cover nearly the whole ground-floor, and to serve for kitchen, living-room and store-house. Sounds of animals rustling and munching came from beyond a wooden partition at one end. The old woman—bent over a large red pot with something in it that smelt of onions—looked up astonished.

Sacchetti wished her good evening, and bade her ask the young lady to walk downstairs.

She looked at him, then she looked at her husband, and, finally, having received no prohibition, advanced towards the winding stair which rose in one angle, and disappeared among its shadows.

The four visitors stood grouped in the wide entrance; the farmer, with his hand on the head of his white dog, stood a pace or two away in the courtyard. The face of the man and the face of the quadruped alike expressed uncertainty and uneasiness.

After a few minutes they heard the peculiar little scrape of a skirt's edge upon stone stairs, and the much-discussed young lady came swiftly into the room.

Allison—who after all had seen her but twice before, and for a minute or two at a time—received a shock of surprise. The Camilla of his memory, or rather perhaps of his imagination, was a creature of intense vitality, impulsive, self-willed, not controllable nor probably self-controlled. This Camilla was calm and concentrated; her colouring, which he remembered so vivid in the morning sunlight, took soberer tones in this shadowy hall, and certain classic lines of feature became now the leading characteristic of her face. There was something in it of certain statues of Diana, a touch, too, of certain Minervas. But this statuesque

Camilla lasted only a moment. She stopped short; a brilliant smile flashed into her face; she made an eager step forward, and holding out her hands to Allison, cried: "Ah, you have come!"

That was the voice which had caught his attention that morning in the square above the church—a voice fuller and deeper than was quite consonant with her slight frame and northern colouring—an inheritance rather from the Italian parent than from the American.

Involuntarily he began an English word of answer, but stopped himself, recollecting that converse in an unknown tongue might seem to the others suspicious.

"This," he said, in deliberate Italian, "is Signor Sacchetti, the syndic of Saragosta. This, Signor Sacchetti, is Miss Veneroni. Perhaps you would like to ask her some questions."

Camilla and Sacchetti bestowed each a polite bow upon the other.

"May I ask you, Miss Veneroni, whether you are here by your own wish?"

"I am not; I wish to go away," she replied; and though her voice was mellowly Italian, her accent was perceptibly English. Sacchetti, by a movement of the eyebrow, invited the attention of the doctor to this detail.

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“ You are prevented from going away ? ”

“ I have been prevented.”

“ By the orders of your brother ? ”

“ I have no brother.”

“ Do you know this English gentleman ? ”

She hesitated a moment.

“ To-day is the first time I have spoken to him, but I know that he is the friend of my friends, and I wrote to him to come and fetch me.”

The tone of all these answers was admirably direct and simple, and her eyes were as candid as her speech.

Sacchetti waved his hand to the farmer.

“ And you, Pasquale, have you anything to say ? ”

He murmured something about her brother.

“ This brother,” said Sacchetti; “ is he an Englishman ? ”

“ No, signor, an Italian.”

“ But the lady,” Sacchetti bade him remark, “ is not an Italian. It is clear by the way she speaks that she is a foreigner.” He turned again to Camilla, and beckoned Girolamo. “ This man has a truck for your luggage. He will go up and wait at your door to bring down anything belonging to you. The rest of us will wait here until you are ready.”

He seated himself on a stone bench by the

wall ; the doctor and Allison did the same ; Camilla and Girolamo ascended the stair, and silence fell.

On the open hearth a little wood-flame snapped and crackled ; beyond the dark partition cattle stamped and munched. As he sat here, in this shadowy place of dreams, Allison's mind went back over the scene which had just passed. He had not yet addressed twenty words to this girl : hers to him, he remembered, had numbered exactly four ; and here he was transformed suddenly into her guardian and nearest friend, taking her into his charge, not only with her own consent, but by the authority of the Italian law. It was a fairy tale—a dream.

She returned, the heavy footstep of Girolamo following. She had now a hat upon her head, and in her hand a purple-shot parasol. Girolamo bore a portmanteau, a bag, and a cloak. Three minutes later the whole party was on the open hill-side, their long shadows pointing forward on the road to Saragosta.

VIII

THE RESCUED MAIDEN

HAVING parted at the church from their companions, Camilla and Allison, a little shy now that they were left alone, descended the worn stone stairs to the main street of the town.

“It was here that I first saw you,” said Allison. “I heard you speaking English and looked over.”

She looked back at the steps, and seemed to look back in the same glance at the past. Turning again to her companion, she said: “I have been wanting to ask you all the time—Where is Severyn?”

“He has gone to Milan, I believe, after Signor Menosotti.”

“Signor Menosotti?” she echoed.

“Madame Perivier saw him at Pistoja and telegraphed for Ladzinski.”

“Madame Perivier! But why did she?”

Allison recounted the coming of Madame Perivier, and then, as they were now close to

the hotel, proceeded: "You will find my sister here; you saw her, most likely, with me, this afternoon."

"Yes, I saw her, and I wondered whether she was your sister."

"She only came to-day. We were walking from the station. There she is at the window."

Camilla looked up. Guendolen waved a welcoming hand and vanished. A minute later she was uttering her welcome in words at the foot of the staircase, accepting the whole position as if it were the most natural thing in the world, and Camilla as if she had known her for a dozen years. Allison, standing by, felt that he had never, till this moment, done full justice to his sister's merits. The two girls went off together, and he seized this first minute to write, and send upon the earliest stage of its journey, his promised telegram to Mrs. Bush.

The rescued damsel came gaily into the room with her arm in Guendolen's, and with an enchanting air of having dwelt all her days at the hotel of the Crown of Italy.

"Can you tell me" she inquired, "how soon I can send a letter to England?"

"Not until to-morrow; but if your letter is to Mrs. Bush, I have this minute telegraphed to her that you are safe with us."



Camilla looked startled.

"You *know* Mrs. Bush?" she murmured.

"I saw Mrs. Bush on Sunday."

"And Madame Perivier a day or two before!" She began to laugh with the gayest and most infectious of laughter. "And I am not even certain of your name!" she cried. This information was supplied, and the chance which brought together Allison and Ladzinski explained.

"I should like to see Mr. Ladzinski," said Guendolen; and her brother launched forth into warm eulogy of his absent friend. Camilla listened with downcast eyes, and with an aspect of some discomfort, due not to dissent, but to an uneasy uncertainty whether it was upon her accepted suitor that he supposed himself to be lavishing these praises. The entrance of the waiter, who came to inquire whether *ces dames* would attend the *table-d'hôte*, effected a diversion. The ladies looked for advice to their cavalier.

"If you don't object," said Allison, "I hope you will come down. There will probably be no one but the two men whom you have seen—Sacchetti and the doctor. It would be well—don't you think?—to avoid any appearance of concealing yourself from them."

The waiter departed with his answer, and

Guendolen immediately inquired whether these Italian gentlemen were picturesque persons who would like to be photographed. Her eye, as she spoke—the devouring eye of the person with a recently acquired hobby—rested upon Camilla.

The two Saragostians were discovered standing a little uncertainly behind their chairs; at the entrance of the English party they bowed in unison, like figures on a clock, and a simultaneous wave of satisfaction spread across their countenances. Camilla smiled gratefully upon them, and Guendolen, finding herself placed next to the syndic, at once began to express, in fluent French, her admiration for the skill with which he had directed the rescue. The syndic smiled a diplomatic smile, and presently, in the absence of the waiter, took occasion to say that there was one point to which he must draw Miss Veneroni's attention. Miss Veneroni was all polite expectation.

“This gentleman, who calls himself your brother—I undertook to restore you to him if he should prove his claim. I fear I must therefore beg you to remain within my knowledge for at least several days.”

Camilla was grave; she appeared to hesitate.

“If it suits your plans,” Allison quickly inter-

posed, "to remain here with us, my sister and I have only our own pleasure to consult; and for my own part I should be unwilling to leave until I hear from M. Ladzinski."

"And I," said Guendolen, "until I have thoroughly photographed Saragosta."

"Thank you," said Camilla simply, but with her fervent glance. "Certainly, signor, I will stay, but you will see that no claim will be made."

The meal was far more conversational than usual; the Saragostians emulated each other in their efforts to be agreeable, and each carried home a pleasing conviction of having succeeded.

"The French lady," the doctor remarked, "was very agreeable, but these are more charming."

"I have always been of opinion," said Sacchetti, "that the English system of education made the *damigelle* of that nation agreeable in intercourse for strangers."

Camilla, on her appearance next morning in the sitting-room, inquired eagerly whether there were letters, and, hearing from Allison that there were none, stood for a moment looking at him with a little doubtful air, her blue eyes bluer than ever, her rose-leaf complexion extraordinarily pure and clear in this early morning

freshness, so that the delicate tints seemed actually to waver as she breathed. "I am wondering, Mr. Allison," she said, "whether I don't owe you some sort of explanation of— of my being here at all, in fact."

Allison eagerly protested that he had no claim to any explanation, and that her doings needed no justification in his eyes.

"I am not sure that they don't in mine," she returned with a sudden rueful smile. After an instant, and with a mischievous light shining through the demureness of her face, "Shouldn't you like to know?" she asked.

"Yes, I should like to know," Allison admitted; and she smiled, but offered no further communication.

Guendolen came in cheerful and rejoicing in the fine weather. "Do you know," said she, "there is a sort of cupboard with a window in the wall of my room; I have been pasting over the window with orange-coloured paper, and it will be just splendid for developing."

"And are we to go out with you and take photographs?" said Camilla. "You don't know how delicious it seems to be able to walk about where one likes, after being shut in for seven days in the house and court at Casello."

For some hours of the morning, accordingly, the two young ladies and the camera and the

shot-silk parasol and the docile attendant squire perambulated, amid considerable local interest, the town of Saragosta. Guendolen, as the responsible operator, was serious and absorbed, but Camilla was gaily conversational. For Allison the presence of this second onlooker furnished, naturally enough, the chief interest of the expedition. The name, the doings, the past, the ancestry of Camilla, had been so much his familiar topics of inquiry and meditation, that she herself had come to assume in his thoughts a distinct and highly romantic personality. The real Camilla, however, was a stranger to him, and this morning began the difficult passage from imagination to acquaintance. Nothing could be less heroic—or more agreeable—than the easy cheerfulness of her present mood. By noonday Guendolen had decided that Miss Veneroni's recent strange predicament had surely not been due to her own fault; and Allison, translating the same opinion into a different notation, felt, with a faint involuntary twinge of disappointment, that apparently the romance encircling her had belonged solely to her circumstances and to Ladzinski.

IX

ALLISON AS FATHER CONFESSOR

ON the night of Friday there was a lively thunderstorm, and Saturday morning showed resolutely rainy.

Guendolen, after some observations upon the too flattering reputation enjoyed by the Italian climate, retired to her developing cupboard. Camilla began by accompanying her, but, finding no field for assistance, presently returned to Allison in the big saloon and turned over rather indifferently the five volumes which constituted the hotel's library. By-and-by she said abruptly, "Mr. Allison, I have been thinking that perhaps it would be a good thing for some one person to know all about my coming here. Things might happen—one never knows. And so, since you *would* like to know——"

He made a heroic interruption: "If only one person is to hear, should it not rather be Ladzinski?"

"No, it should not," Miss Veneroni replied

with some asperity, and for a moment she remained silent.

Allison felt his virtue—which had not been easy to him—receiving virtue's usual reward.

Presently, however, she relented. "My father," she began, "was a political exile. Perhaps you knew that."

"Yes."

"His father was a marquis."

"I know."

"But you know everything! Who told you that?"

"Mr. Simonides was the channel."

"Ah! I felt sure my cousin did not know."

"The mother did not know," was Allison's mental comment.

"And my father was the eldest son, but he did not try and return afterwards and take the title. He told me that he did not feel it a duty, because his next brother, my uncle Luca, had much more liberal views than my grandfather; and he did not wish me to be left to the influence of his Italian relatives. He knew he was not likely to live till I grew up. He used to talk to me a great deal about Italy—about what they had tried to do, and how bad things were." She paused and added in an altered voice, "They are not so much better now."

Her eyes wandered from her hearer's face ; her own stiffened into intensity, and the sprightly modern girl became a classic heroine of tragedy. The Englishman, with a steady-going ancestry behind him, unpractised for a couple of centuries in plots and conspiracies, had never seen a woman in real life look like this. Something near the surface of his nature shivered at the dangers that attend such enthusiasms ; something deeper down responded. It was that moment of decisive appeal—for the generous—when we recognise suddenly in another soul the nobility that involves suffering. This recognition, which had already once or twice waved a wing over Allison and withdrawn, had been at the root of certain ill-defined emotions, haunting the earlier days of the Camilla legend. Since yesterday, when the heroine had been replaced by the pleasant average girl, they had ceased to haunt ; his attitude had become critically observant, and his good-will rather rational than emotional. Now, in a flash, there was an end of all this calm, well-ordered rationality. He left off thinking, and began simply to feel.

“The cause that my father gave up everything for,” Camilla continued, “is not dead. It is just as much alive as it was then. I must not tell you details. A message was brought

to me. An old companion of my father's sent for me. It was thought that I could do certain things, as an Englishwoman, without being suspected and without so much danger."

Allison thirsted to ask, "What things?" The darkest apprehensions beset him; assassinations, dynamite, daggers, and scaffolds danced before his eyes.

"I took certain messages," Camilla proceeded. "I was to meet a man in the hills between here and Dalarocca, and tell him—well, I went twice, from the Villa Sans Souci. It was when I was coming back, the second time, that a little boy gave me Severyn's letter. I sent him word to meet me near Casello. And then the man, who was the agent in all this, wanted me not to go; but I would. We always spoke English," she added; "it was thought better, because of not being understood."

She paused a moment; a touch of self-conscious remembrance tinged her cheek, and she left him to reconstitute in his own mind the crisis of his awakening and intervention.

"That same afternoon," she continued, a little hurriedly, "there came a message. We had been traced, and perhaps I should be arrested, and we had to go away at once. We

only went to the second station beyond Dalacrocca, and we stayed the night at a little village—I don't know its name—and the next day we went to another; and then we came in a carriage, and he would not tell me where we were going, and I began to be angry. I was ready to do anything of my own will; it was not necessary to treat me like a child. Then, when I saw you, suddenly I made up my mind, and I made a sign—I hoped you would know me—and then I pricked the paper and threw it out; did you ever find it?"

"Yes, I found it."

"Well, he took me up to Casello, and when he was gone I found they had orders to keep me there. I suppose it was to hide me—to make sure of my safety; or perhaps they actually thought I might be frightened and betray them."

She paused, indignant, the full emphasis of her scorn in her voice and in the proud lifting of her head. Indeed, Allison thought, it must be a conspirator of small discrimination who imagined this girl to be of the kind that is frightened into confessions.

"I was very angry," said Camilla simply, and, indeed, somewhat superfluously. "I did not say much to Pasquale and Rosina—what was the use?—but I determined to get free.

I remembered how we used to make those darts when we were children—Severyn and his cousins and I—in the court of his aunt's house in Paris. I had forgotten the way to fold them. I tried and tried a whole day before I found it out again. Then I wrote that letter, only I left a space blank for the number of days; and I waited and waited for some one to come in sight. And then, when I heard voices—and it was *you!* Only," her voice slackened pace as she drew to her close, "I was frightened when I found you had brought the syndic, and I am a little frightened still." Her engaging smile had returned, and she looked up with a doubtful, deprecating air.

Allison found himself unable to answer; he had too much to say. There was a brief interval, in which he began to feel the solemn duty of speaking words of wisdom to this rash young woman.

"Are you sure," he ventured at last, "that you quite understand the full nature of this"—he was going to say "conspiracy," but stopped himself in time—"this design?"

"Why, yes," returned Camilla with round and innocent eyes of surprise. "We want to make Italy really free—to release the poor from undue taxation and from tyranny."

"By violence?"

"Well, I suppose by fighting, if it has to come to that."

Allison sat silent with a countenance of extreme gravity.

"You disapprove!" cried Camilla, flushing angrily.

"I don't feel that I know enough to judge. What I am wondering is—if you will forgive my saying so—whether you know enough to judge."

"I think I do," said the young lady with haughty gentleness.

Allison felt that he was distinctly not invited to express any further opinion. Yet his silence did not appear entirely to satisfy her. An inquiring, almost an apologetic eye was directed towards him. He accepted the invitation.

"I don't ask you to tell me anything, but may I just tell you the things that strike me? First, about this agent—whether he is really trustworthy—whether you know all about him. His behaviour in getting you shut up there doesn't look—— Well, it looks odd. And then, if the condition of Italy is so bad, is it because of any curable defects of government? Is not the real trouble that the preservation of the country demands a larger military outlay than it can afford? I don't say it is so—I don't know; but are you sure it isn't? And if there

is even a chance that this may be what is the matter, doesn't it rather look as if the people who are running this attempt don't really quite understand the case? and may they not be mistaken in the means as well? It would be a frightful thing if you were to be made a tool, perhaps, of——"

"Of?" echoed Camilla.

"Of an attack upon anybody's life, for instance."

She shrank perceptibly. "Oh, no; you are quite mistaken. They are not anarchists. They are reformers—Liberals."

"Republicans?"

"Yes, certainly; but it is not the form that they care so much about. They want a really absolutely representative system, and the poor and ignorant not to be at the mercy of the better off and better taught."

"Ah! that is what we all want; but I am afraid the only way to it lies in the abolishing of ignorance, and that takes such a long time."

Camilla's eyes were full of wonder, of consideration, of balancings; in their blue depths lay a faint shadow of doubt and alarm. Most women, by the time they reach her age, have learned to do their thinking behind a veil; but that was a lesson which Camilla would probably never learn. Each question and answer,

as it passed through her brain, spoke in her face; and a lie in her mouth would have been as futile as in that of a child of two.

"They were the things my father tried to do," she murmured; and Allison had not the heart to retort, "But is this the Italy in which he tried to do them?"

His absence of insistence saved her from throwing up bulwarks against him, behind which she would afterwards have been compelled to entrench herself.

A few minutes passed in silence; then Camilla, turning suddenly towards him, said, "I will do nothing further without telling you. It is not that I distrust any one, but I can see that some one ought to know. And it is easier," she added, with a smile of charming candour, "to tell it to some one who has no sort of right to stop me."

"I wish," said Allison, "that you would spread the knowledge to one or two people more."

"*You* must not do so," she cried sharply.

"Of course I must not. That's why I wish that you would."

"I will wait, at any rate," Camilla retorted, "until I am at home in England, and until I have outgrown your Lord Chancellor whom you have set over me."

The words were defiant, but the tone was gay, and the glance friendly. Allison, looking neither back nor forward, nor yet into himself, was but half aware of the pleasure that he felt in possessing her secret and her confidence. This talk had replaced the Camilla of his fancies by another Camilla, formed indeed after much the same likeness, but in the round instead of in the flat, possessing the three-quarters and the full face and a second profile.

MORE GUESTS AT THE "CROWN OF
ITALY"

THE mid-day meal was not long over when the syndic presented himself.

"The false brother has turned up," was Allison's first thought, and he felt sure that Camilla's was like his own.

"A strange thing," said Sacchetti, "has happened. Pasquale came down this morning from Casello to tell me that an unknown gentleman had been there declaring that Miss Veneroni was his cousin, and desiring to take her away with him."

Camilla's face was blank with surprise.

"And what did Pasquale do?" asked Allison.

"He told him to come and inquire of me."

"And has he come?"

"Not at present," returned Sacchetti, with a dry smile. "You would be willing, signorina, if he should come, that I should bring him here to see you?"

“By all means,” said Camilla. “This is very interesting. What was he like, this cousin? I know none of my cousins in Italy—not even whether there are any—and I am a little curious.”

“Ah, signorina, Pasquale has not the gift of description. If the gentleman comes to me, I will bring him here for you to judge; and if he should refuse to come to you—which I cannot imagine—I will observe him in every detail, and describe him to you.” Turning to the Englishman, he inquired, with much politeness, after his sister. Allison explained her employment, and Camilla went to fetch her.

Sacchetti seized the moment of her absence to say quickly: “Mr. Allison, I think there is no need to wait longer for the supposed brother. If I were you, I would take the young lady quickly home.”

“Gladly,” answered Allison.

Sacchetti, looking at him rather critically, added: “I do not understand the whole of this affair, but it seems as though persons of doubtful motives were pursuing this young lady. You, signor, are her countryman. I should, under all circumstances, support your claim; but it would be better to place her with her own family.”

"Much better," said Allison heartily. "We will go, if possible, this evening."

Guendolen came in with stained and cold fingers, and began to compliment the amiable syndic upon the beauties of his town. Sacchetti began to have visions of a stream of tourists for ever trickling through Saragosta, and a succession of conversible English ladies enlivening the evening *table d'hôte*.

"Do you suppose," Allison asked Camilla when they were again alone, "that this man was really your cousin, or an emissary of the police, or an agent of the man who called himself your brother?"

"I cannot tell at all. It is possible; my father had two brothers, and I know that both of them were married; but I do not see how any of my father's relations could learn of my being here."

"Sacchetti thinks you should go home to England."

She meditated, broke out impulsively, "I wish I could see—" and then arresting herself, finished with a smile—"some one."

"I am glad you can't," thought Allison, who perfectly comprehended that it was not the name of Ladzinski which should have completed the sentence.

At this moment the waiter appeared and

handed to Allison a telegram. Opening it, he read aloud, "Shall arrive this afternoon.—Bush."

"That's all right," said he cheerfully, and with a creditable endeavour to stifle internal regrets.

"Yes, I suppose so," assented Camilla rather doubtfully. "At any rate, you won't have the bother of seeing me back to England, which I am certain you would have insisted upon doing."

She went to give orders for her cousin's accommodation, and Allison was left to reflect how strong in two short days had become the habit of companionship, and how vast would be the blank left by her departure. When she presently returned, Guendolen came with her, and, announcing that she had now dealt with all her plates, and that they were going to be splendid, seated herself by the window, and lapsed—in reaction, no doubt, from her morning of solitude and silence—into unwonted volubility.

"The rain gives quite a new character to this place," she presently remarked. "Look how the wetness brings out all the lines; everything shines; it might all be brown marble instead of this rough stone. And it is not raining so very much now, except from the spouts and gutters. And the great black hole

of that open window on the other side! Oh, why do we have flat windows with no light and shade to them at home?"

"Because we haven't got the Italian climate," her brother returned, with a touch of professional dogmatism.

"Only there are no people; it is like that city in the *Arabian Nights*, where the people were all changed into different kinds of fishes. Do Italians never go out when it rains? Then what is the use of those gigantic red umbrellas that they sell in the shops? Ah, there's a little boy; he shrinks along and shakes his bare toes like a cat. I wish I could draw. Oh, and here comes actually a man—such an interesting-looking man, in a grey coat. Do look here, Laurence, for a minute. Is this some distinguished inhabitant of Saragosta?"

Allison looked and beheld Ladzinski, and remembered how seldom he had thought of him in the last two days.

"Do you know who it is?" repeated Guendolen.

"It is Ladzinski," said Allison.

Camilla's voice behind him, low and startled, said: "Severyn!" She closed the book whose leaves she had been turning and stood up, then seemed to pause, and stood without advancing to the window.

“Well——” said Guendolen, uttering in that vague exclamation her feeling that here indeed came the fitting hero of the romance.

The graceful, grey figure drew swiftly nearer and was lost to sight; a light and rapid step came up the stair, and Ladzinski was among them.

The change of his face, as he beheld Camilla, was like nothing but the sudden blaze of flame in a dull fire, and when he spoke her name the sound of his voice—the voice was a mellow tenor, hovering on the edge of the baritone—pierced straight to the heart. Guendolen thought: “If a man whom I had never seen spoke my name in that voice, and looked at me with that face, I should rise up and follow him round the world.” As to Allison, his emotions were so conflicting and so complex that any spoken word would have seemed to himself deceptive in its inadequacy.

Camilla exhibited no very marked change of face; she became perhaps a shade paler, said in a very quiet and still voice, “Ah, Severyn!” and held out her hand. His eyes rapidly perused her whole person. “Ah, you are safe,” he said, “and you have not suffered.”

“Nothing but a little anger,” she replied. “Some well-meaning people tried to control me against my will, and you know”—a smile

broke—"that I don't like that. Mr. Allison brought the syndic and took me away; and this is Miss Allison, his sister,"—Ladzinski bowed in a mechanical and vacant manner,—
 "and my cousin, Mrs. Bush, is coming this afternoon. Now you know everything."

She was speaking quickly and with an effort at gaiety. Upon the face of her hearer had come an expression of repose and content such as Allison had never before seen there. Recalling himself with a deep breath to the consideration of that fraction of the universe which was not Camilla, Ladzinski now turned to Allison.

"He is fond of Laurence, too," Guendolen thought to herself, and in this observation recognised her secret expectation that the suitor of Camilla would be jealous of her deliverer.

"And how is Madame Perivier?" the Englishman asked.

"She is well; she will be here by the next train."

"What!" cried Allison and Camilla with one voice, and Guendolen began to laugh. Ladzinski, at this sound, remembered her existence, looked at her, and found that this sister of Allison's had agreeable brown eyes, the warm complexion which is England's at-



tempt at a *brunette*, a quantity of brown hair, neither dark nor light, and a most delightful air of health and wholesomeness. She at once displayed the British practicality of her mind by asking, in the first place, whether the resources of the "Crown of Italy" would be equal to the fresh demands upon them, and, in the second, whether Mr. Ladzinski did not want a meal.

When these points had been settled, Camilla asked: "But, Severyn, why did you go after Signor Menosotti?"

Guendolen at this question rose and was quietly going away, but Camilla interposed. "Don't go, Guendolen; there isn't any secret in the matter, and if there is, we won't discuss it."

"No secret at all," said Ladzinski. "After that last glimpse that Allison had of you in the carriage, we were not sure that you were still a free agent; and Menosotti was quite capable of trying to coerce you. I thought I had better follow him on the chance." He paused and hesitated. "It did seem to me, when I got him at bay, that he was not so ignorant of your movements as he pretended."

"Oh!" said Camilla, visibly startled. She revolved the unpleasing idea, and reached a consoling conclusion. "No doubt it was just his habit of always deceiving. I don't think

it possible he can know anything about me. Where is he?"

"I believe he was going to Paris. It was not to Paris that he told me he was going."

"Was he hostile or friendly?"

"Horribly friendly."

"Ugh!" said Camilla, with a little shudder.

They were interrupted by the buzz of an arrival, and hurried out to meet Mrs. Bush.

The excellent Sacchetti, arriving at dinner-time, half expectant of a table laid only for himself and the doctor, beheld with amazement an array of no less than eight places. Sounds from the staircase heralded an imposing procession. First came Madame Perivier in a nondescript black woollen gown, then a British lady in a dress also black, but shining, silken, and besprinkled with innumerable twinkling beads. After her came the two young ladies, and finally the Englishman and the Pole. The meal at once assumed the character of a dinner-party to the invitation of Madame Perivier. She it was who performed the introductions, distributed the company, and guided the main conversation. Allison found himself next to Mrs. Bush, beyond whom was Sacchetti, and beyond Sacchetti Madame Perivier. Facing her on the other side sat Ladzinski, then Camilla, the doctor, and, opposite to himself, Guen-

dolen. A little island of English speech was thus enclosed by the two Saragostians, and Mrs. Bush was enabled to murmur comfortably into Allison's ear her joy in beholding Camilla safe and well, and her obligations to himself and his sister.

"And on Monday I shall take her straight home, away from this dreadful country, and all these mysterious dangers. Don't you think that is the wisest plan?"

"Quite the wisest," answered Allison. "But we shall miss her very much, shan't we, Guendolen?"

"Oh, but you must come and see us, both of you, when you come back. We shall always feel, Mr. Allison, that we can never be grateful enough for what you have done for Camilla."

"It is very kind of you to take that view, but, you see, I did not know Miss Veneroni; it was chiefly out of regard for Ladzinski."

"Ah, yes," Mrs. Bush murmured, not quite so happily.

Allison, suspecting in her an opinion that what Camilla had really fled from was the suit of Ladzinski, persisted,—

"Now *he* has really taken trouble, and run risks, and suffered terrible anxiety too."

"Yes," said Mrs. Bush, again in the same uncomfortable tone.

Allison, lowering his voice and speaking with the utmost earnestness, continued: "I think I never met a man whom I liked better than Ladzinski."

She looked up with an expression which might, upon a less placid countenance, have been dismay.

"But a foreigner, Mr. Allison," she whispered.

"Well, of course," Allison admitted, smiling. "So was Mr. Veneroni, and so, I suppose, in a way, was Mrs. Veneroni, too."

Mrs. Bush sighed. "Mr. Veneroni," she remarked, "was quite an exception."

"So is Ladzinski an exception," Allison declared, still smiling, half sorry in spite of himself for the poor lady's troublous state, but fundamentally indignant. Did Camilla, he wondered, think with equally inadequate appreciation of Ladzinski? Looking up, he met his sister's eye. She was looking at him with an odd mixture of criticism and approval, evidently applied to himself, but not at all addressed to him. As his mute inquiry reached her brain, her face changed; she smiled, and a look of intelligence answered him. He instantly felt convinced that Guendolen might be trusted to see that Camilla did not leave Saragosta without having given an undisturbed interview

to Ladzinski. He glanced across at the pair. They seemed a little silent, the lively conversation which prevailed at that end of the table being supported chiefly by Madame Perivier and the syndic.

He began to wonder how things would be when Camilla had finally departed. Madame Perivier, no doubt, would return to "near Lucca," and Ladzinski—well, Ladzinski would certainly not stay in Saragosta. Guendolen and himself would be left, and the world would become remarkably empty. It began to become empty already in the mere forecast, and Madame Perivier, the observant, wondered what it was that caused Mr. Allison to look suddenly so gloomy. Catching her eye, he recollected himself, and began to make civil talk. A strange unreality attended the prolonged meal; the bell from the clock tower had the note of a bell on the stage. Upstairs in the big saloon he had still the sensation of playing a part, and helping to keep up a representation. It was difficult to believe that no longer ago than this morning Camilla had told her tale in a real world to a really concerned listener.

XI

SUNDAY IN SARAGOSTA

SUNDAY broke clear and bright, with a delicious touch of autumn freshness breathing from the distant snowy hills. By soon after ten o'clock the four young people found themselves, without any arts on Allison's part, but not, he shrewdly suspected, without some on the part of Madame Perivier and Guendolen, walking outside the town, not this time upon the way to Dalarocca. The descending road was, according to the custom of Italian roads, straight, but it had abundant by-paths, and the brother and sister, dropping behind to examine these, were presently able to lose sight of their companions. They sat down, after a time, on a low wall, where green lizards peeped and darted among the stones; the cry of a grasshopper came up from the fields behind them.

"I thought, from what you said," observed Guendolen, "that those two were just on the eve of becoming engaged."

"For all I know, they may be."

"I thought you meant that there was an understanding."

"I think I said that I could not tell you anything, either way."

"Oh, yes, you said *that*," Guendolen admitted.

Allison sat silent, not willing to ask in set terms for his sister's opinion, but quite willing to afford her an opportunity of volunteering it. Guendolen, however, said nothing.

"You like her?" he said presently.

"Very much indeed."

"And you like him, don't you?"

"I hardly know him. But I own," she added, after a moment, "that I never saw a more attractive man. He ought to be made king of some half-civilized country, where they would adore him. Does he paint well, too?"

Allison drew forth the pencil sketch which Ladzinski had made on the day of his own first meeting with Camilla. "Well, that's how he draws."

"This is awfully good. Who is it?"

"Oh, I don't know his name," her brother answered a little awkwardly. "It is just a man we both saw, and Ladzinski drew him."

"I think I must ask Mr. Ladzinski to show me his sketch-book," said Guendolen.

"Better not," advised her brother. "It

might be rather full of—of Camilla, don't you know."

"Oh, yes, perhaps," Guendolen answered, looking up rather absently through the grey olive branches to the sky.

Within herself she was debating whether to tell Laurence another love story, the heroine of which was nearer at hand than Camilla. But she did not tell it, and when she asked herself afterwards why she had forborne, she could not decide whether it was because she felt it unfair to reveal the suit of a man whom she could never accept, or because she felt that it might, some day, be awkward to have confessed prepossessions against the man whom she had married. As for Allison, his mind had gone back to Camilla's confidences of the day before, and to the reported advent of a relative claiming rights over her.

Thus they sat, absorbed in their own thoughts, and, still absorbed, walked homeward, to find the mid-day meal on the table, and the other couple still absent.

"Is Camilla not with you?" Mrs. Bush asked, as she saw them enter.

"She is with Mr. Ladzinski," Guendolen replied. "I should think they will be in soon, but there are so many little paths to lose one's way in."

She proceeded to narrate all the little incidents of the walk, and Madame Perivier seconding her, they managed to sustain the semblance of quite a lively conversation. Camilla and Ladzinski did not appear, a circumstance which seemed to Allison to augur auspiciously for the wooer.

The meal ended, he offered himself as an escort in case Mrs. Bush would care to see the town and the frescoes of Bernardino. This expedition, owing to the slowness of the lady's pace and the fulness of the gentleman's commentaries, prolonged itself until nearly three o'clock. The saloon on their return was empty, half darkened by the closing of shutters and agreeably cool. A great calm reigned throughout the house.

"I think," said Mrs. Bush, "that every one must be taking a little nap."

Allison noted a sympathetic cadence in her voice, and discreetly left her to the empty room and the arm-chair.

In his own room lay a letter staring at him from the table. As he went hastily forward he saw that the writing was Ladzinski's. In the stillness of the drowsy afternoon he opened it, and read with amazement:—

"I congratulate you. You have succeeded

completely. I had no suspicions, and the blow has fallen upon me entirely unprepared. I shall leave this afternoon, and hope never to see either of you again. Even though you have won and I have lost, I would not change places with you.—S. L.”

Allison stared at the letter blankly. Could Ladzinski suppose him to be in any way answerable for Camilla's refusal, if this meant that Camilla had refused him? He must see Ladzinski instantly. With the letter in his hand he hurried to his fellow-traveller's room.

An open portmanteau was spread upon the table; Ladzinski, standing behind it, lifted a face of pale severity.

“What does this mean?” demanded the Englishman, holding out the letter. “I don't understand in the least.”

It would have been difficult to express in words an incredulity so contemptuous as was indicated in the coldness of Ladzinski's countenance, and the slight movement of his shoulders.

Allison began to feel a certain difficulty in keeping his temper. “What is it that you mean?” he impatiently repeated.

Ladzinski visibly strove to preserve his haughty silence, failed, and cried with sudden

fierceness : "Don't be a coward! Don't affect to misunderstand. At least accept and answer for your own acts."

Stopping himself as suddenly as he had broken out, he bent again over his portman-teau.

Allison stood for a moment, carefully choosing his next words.

"Look here, Ladzinski, you are under some mistake. Speak out and tell me plainly what you think you have against me."

"I have against you," answered Ladzinski, "that you have won from me the woman you knew I loved."

"No," protested Allison; "no," and for a moment was debarred by the unexpected commotion of his own feelings from shaping any more precise denial.

"I assure you most earnestly," he presently proceeded, "that no word of the sort has ever passed between Miss Veneroni and myself."

"But she owned——" began Ladzinski, and stopped.

Allison was aware of something like the thrust of a dagger, and of an instant bewildering recognition that this poignant emotion was not pain but joy. The habit of calm demeanour, so invaluable in moments of agitation, enabled him, nevertheless, to say with dull

persistence : " Not that I cared for her, or she for me ; of that I am certain."

" She owned," returned Ladzinski, speaking with evident difficulty and reluctance, " that she had a stronger affection—that she was bound by other claims. And a month ago there were none—and whom has she seen since ?"

Daylight broke upon Allison's understanding, and he told himself, with an immense sinking of the spirit, that he had been a blinded fool. " Other claims—a stronger affection !" yes, for her country, for her " cause " ; that was clear enough—but how to make it clear to Ladzinski ? She had distinctly forbidden him to speak ; and had expressly excluded Ladzinski. To betray her trust was impossible ; he must entreat her to be frank herself. Oh, but that ! Could he do that ? Reveal that he knew her answer to her other lover ? He stopped short, self-convicted by the mentally conceived word " other." No, he could not speak to Camilla ; it would be better if he could avoid the necessity of ever speaking to her again.

Ladzinski stood observing his confusion and silence.

" You did not suppose," said he with a sneer, " that she would have said that ?"

" She never would have said it," Allison stoutly declared, " if she could have guessed

how you would misinterpret it. If the most distant thought of me had ever entered her head, she would have seen that there might be a misunderstanding, and would not have used those words. You must speak to her again, Ladzinski; you must insist upon hearing her real meaning."

Ladzinski, leaning a hand on each end of his portmanteau, stood gazing at him steadily.

"Do you see any other meaning?" he slowly asked. "If so, why don't you tell me?"

Allison drew a long breath.

"Yes," he said boldly; "I know another meaning. Something Miss Veneroni told me yesterday explains it; but she gave me no permission to tell any one else. This, however, I may say: there was nothing which need make any permanent division between her and you."

The intentness with which Ladzinski listened seemed to draw the blood from his face. As Allison ceased, he suffered his hands to relax their grasp and to drop with a slight hopeless gesture.

"You say that, and you own at the same time that she speaks freely to you of what she hides from me."

"Exactly—because I am not her lover and you are. Why, man, the very openness with which she talks to me, as easily as if I were

Guendolen, while she is silent and shy with you, shows that she never had a thought of me." He hastily stifled an inapposite sigh. "Come, Ladzinski, you may find it easy to doubt me—you haven't known me so long—but at least you know Miss Veneroni. Can you seriously suppose her capable of joining with me or with any person on earth to wound and deceive her old friend?"

Ladzinski, whose attention had hung on every word, now moved away uncertainly, and sank without replying into the single chair of the large bare room. It seemed to Allison that he had never beheld human suffering so intense as upon this pale and restrained countenance. Forgetting altogether that his was the part of aggrieved innocence, he sprang forward, moved partly by a compassion so warm as to simulate remorse and partly by sheer irritation at the unnecessariness of all this pain.

"Well, I can't help it if you won't believe me," he cried impatiently.

Ladzinski caught his hand. - "I do believe you," he exclaimed, and proceeded to address to himself several opprobrious names.

"That's all right," said Allison pacifically. "But if I were you I would not think of going away without getting a full explanation. Time is pretty short. I wonder where she is now.

She is not in the drawing-room. Shall I go and see whether she is with Guendolen?"

Receiving by way of answer a grateful look, he sped down the long corridor to his sister's room, and knocked. Guendolen came to open the door, and he saw the room empty behind her.

"Oh—Miss Veneroni isn't here?"

"No; has she come in yet?"

"Why, yes—at least, I suppose so; Ladzinski is in."

"She did not come in with him."

"Not? But then—just go and find out whether she is in the house, there's a good girl."

She went, and in a few minutes returned, her face grave.

"Camilla is not in the house."

Her brother uttered an exclamation, and hurried back to Ladzinski's room.

"Did not Miss Veneroni come in with you?" he asked abruptly.

"No," answered Ladzinski.

"She isn't in the house. Guendolen thinks she has never come in."

"What!" cried Ladzinski, starting up.

"Was she far away when you parted from her?"

"No, not at all; about a quarter of a mile

from Saragosta, on the main road. She could not miss the way; but she may have been hurt; there may have been an accident. Let us go at once."

In the corridor they found Guendolen waiting, who begged to go with them.

Full of apprehensions, the three young people stepped out into the warm-breathing Italian afternoon, and walked briskly to the spot where Ladzinski had last seen Camilla. It was a stretch of open road, with a rough pasture on one hand and a walled-in olive plantation on the other.

"It was here that I turned off," said Ladzinski, indicating a path across the pasture. "She was walking straight homeward. She had her parasol over her head. I lost sight of her at that little bend of the road."

They looked that way, the impression of her presence so strong upon them that they could almost believe themselves to behold the slim figure still upon the road, and shimmering lights, lilac and golden, glancing from the open parasol.

The three stood, not knowing what next to do.

"She is not on this road," said Allison at last. "She is not at Saragosta. Now here's a sort of path here, on the left——"

"I went by that," said Ladzinski. "It leads past a house, into a road parallel with this, and into Saragosta by the other gate."

"You heard no sounds?"

"None."

"Was there any one else upon the road?"

"Not then. A good many people passed us earlier, coming, I suppose, from the church. The last person who passed us was a well-dressed man, whom I noticed because he rather stared at Camilla."

"An Italian?"

"Oh, yes, certainly. Not a young man—handsome."

An idea shot through Allison's brain.

"I wonder whether it is possible—you remember the man I saw in the church, Ladzinski, that first day?—the man who was speaking to *this*?"

The little sketch of the "agent" came out again, and was followed by an old brown *carte-de-visite* photograph.

"Look, Ladzinski; look carefully. Was he at all like that?"

Ladzinski looked attentively.

"Yes," he pronounced at last; "there is certainly a likeness. But he was not this man; he was younger, and he had no beard. Who is this?"

"This is Miss Veneroni's father. I was struck when I first saw it by a resemblance to the man in the church. Now, only yesterday, just before you came, Sacchetti had been to tell us of a gentleman having gone to Casello, saying he was her cousin, and wanting to take her away."

"Ah!" murmured Ladzinski, under his breath.

"Could you draw the man, Ladzinski?"

"I could give an idea of him, with the photograph to help."

"We will make Sacchetti show it to the farmer at Casello."

"But surely, Laurence," interposed Guendolen, who had listened with gathering amazement, "you don't *really* think any one *could* have the insolence to dare to carry off Camilla — here on the high road — at ten minutes' distance from the town?"

"My dear girl, I don't believe Miss Veneroni would go off of her own accord, without a word to any of us. In fact, she said to me, yesterday, that she would not. Now, if she did not go of her own will, she must have been made to go against her will. We know that she was kept at Casello against her will, and that I saw a man whom I suspect of being her relation apparently in confidential

communication with the person who took her to Casello. We also know that a man professing to be her relation went to Casello, three days ago, expecting to find her there; and we know very well that her wealth at her own disposal might make her relatives anxious to get hold of her."

"Well, but this isn't the way to do it," said Guendolen, still mightily indignant. "They can't suppose that Camilla would ever forgive their behaving like this."

"They don't know her, you see; they might think they could frighten her."

"You may be right," said Ladzinski. "But I still believe that Menosotti has had a hand in it. However, let us inquire about this man; and let us also search for any traces of her. She left a sign before."

"They would have to take her in some sort of carriage," remarked Guendolen.

"You are right, Miss Allison. A carriage can be traced, and it has to keep to the main roads. Let us go on, and inquire at every house whether a carriage has passed."

They walked on, every eye on the watch for some token.

At the first house Ladzinski went in, and returned shaking a despondent head.

Again they walked on.

From the second house Ladzinski came forth transfigured.

"Give me the photograph," he cried. "Quick! And a letter — a card — anything that I can draw upon."

Allison produced the photograph, and Guendolen a card-case, from which she handed to Ladzinski a couple of thick, unglazed English visiting cards.

He dashed back into the house, and the brother and sister stood expectant in the road. In two or three minutes he rejoined them.

"He stayed there; he has been there for four days, and about three hours ago he came in, paid his bill, and left. His name was Neroni."

"And the carriage?" Guendolen asked, as they walked on. "Had they seen any carriage?"

"Two or three; they say that is always the case on Sunday."

They arrived at a bifurcation of the road, and hesitated, looking this way and that for guidance.

Suddenly Guendolen gave a little cry.

"Look!" she said, and pointed along the left-hand turning.

In an olive-tree by the roadside hung Camilla's parasol.

XII

THE CAPTURE OF CAMILLA

IF Ladzinski had been a prudent or a practised lover, he would have known better than to employ an outdoor scene as the background of his declaration. The prudent lover foresees, and the practised lover knows by experience, that if his lady should refuse him, there will be a certain awkwardness about walking home with her afterwards, and that if she should accept him he will probably find himself debarred from sealing his success by a kiss. The course of Ladzinski not having been guided by these sage considerations, there came a moment in which, after having heard Camilla avow, as he believed, her preference for another man, he found himself still a couple of miles from Saragosta, obviously obliged to walk with her for those two miles, and in a state of feeling which absolutely precluded the utterance of a civil word.

The pair walked on in silence and embarrass-

ment. The emotion of Ladzinski was, for the moment, almost entirely one of resentment; he felt himself wronged, tricked, played upon. Camilla, being quite unsuspecting of the meaning attributed to her words, felt no sort of self-reproach. She was only sorry for Severyn, her old friend, whom indeed she loved very much, but tranquilly, and with none of the ardour which rendered inspiring the idea of suffering or of dying for her father's country. It was really a great mistake of Severyn's to think that she could make him happy, she whose heart was so firmly set upon other aims. She stole a glance at him from under her eyelashes, and was almost frightened. That implacable countenance showed her an unsuspected side of the character which she had supposed herself to know. She realized all at once—what the average parent finds so hard to realize—that to have known the boy, however exhaustively, is not necessarily to know the whole of the man.

This angry presence at her side oppressed her. She stood still.

"Pray don't feel bound to walk back with me, Severyn," she said. "The road is perfectly safe."

She spoke in tones carefully gentle, almost apologetic. He looked at her with a certain stern contempt.

"I will walk behind you," he replied. "When you are within ten minutes of the hotel, I will relieve you of my presence altogether."

It was Camilla's turn now to be hurt, and in a flash she was as desirous to give him pain as a moment earlier she had been to spare him.

"As you please," she said haughtily, and walked on.

The feeling of his eyes upon her kept up the sense of oppression; the inclination to turn and look round became stronger at every step. Her temper, quick to be aroused, was quick also to be appeased. Before long the desire to meet a look which, if not forgiving, should be at least not unfriendly, began to urge her like a voice at her ear. The sound of his foot behind her ceased. She turned and saw him standing at a distance of some dozen paces, and evidently about to turn aside across the pasture. She made a little movement of the hand; he might take it for a summons or a farewell, as he would.

He replied by a grave and perfectly ceremonious bow, and stepped into his pathway. She did not guess—though Guendolen in her place would have guessed it—that when she had again turned and was walking on, he sprang back into the road, and stood watching her

until she disappeared. Nor did he guess that under the shelter of the gay parasol the tears were running down her cheeks.

Presently she heard a step behind her. Her heart began to beat faster. Had Severyn relented, and was he coming after her? The step came nearer; an unrecognized voice said: "Signorina Veneroni."

Camilla's hesitation fell from her like a dropped handkerchief. She turned, calm, ready for some message or some summons. Her resolution was instantly formed, not under any circumstances to leave Saragosta without forewarning her friends, or without confiding to Allison precisely whither and why she was going. It was quite characteristic of her that the possibility of such confidences placing the young man in an embarrassing position never occurred to her.

She found herself face to face with a man wearing an unknown uniform, too little adorned to seem military, too severe for a private livery. Without further ado this functionary explained that his business was to arrest her.

Camilla was surprised, but this was not an emergency of a kind to agitate her. She asked calmly upon what charge, and was told upon that of conspiring against the king and government of Italy.

"Where is your order, your authority?" she asked. "I suppose you have some such thing."

A paper was unfolded before her, bearing at its head various intricate heraldic devices, at its foot an autograph and several seals. Between, in a flowing clerkly hand, appeared an order for the arrest of Camilla Veneroni, aged twenty, lately living in England. She returned the paper.

"I may as well tell you," she remarked, "that I am an English subject."

"That is not for me to judge," returned the man. "I have but to obey my orders."

"I suppose I may communicate with my friends, who are English, and are here at the Hotel Corona d'Italia, close by?"

"I have no authority for any such permission."

"But I shall find a means," Camilla thought, "to let Mr. Allison know."

"What do you wish me to do?" she asked.

"A carriage is waiting at a few minutes' distance."

"And if I refuse to go?"

"It would be useless; I have helpers within call. The signorina will surely understand that she must submit to the law."

"I submit to the law of the strongest—for

the moment," said Camilla. "Where is your carriage?"

As she sat, a few minutes later, in the carriage, and was conveyed at rather a deliberate pace along the road, her active mind was busy in considering by what means she should leave a sign for those who would come after her. The carriage turned aside to the left. Camilla, leaning suddenly from the window, cast her parasol out and upward. Then making a feint of trying to open the door, "Oh, my parasol!" she cried. "Do let me get my parasol!"

The man, as she had fully expected, saw in this manœuvre only a clumsy pretext for getting out of the vehicle, and instead of acceding, called to the driver to go faster.

The parasol remained hanging, and Camilla was carried onward. On her own account her mind was fairly easy : she had no compromising papers about her ; on the other hand, she had money, brought with her when she first set out upon her adventures, and safely stitched into a double lining of her dress. She was convinced that an Englishwoman could not be long retained in Italian imprisonment, while as to temporary inconveniences and hardships, her eager spirit rather rejoiced in them. When, however, she considered the uneasiness of her friends at Saragosta, she did feel disturbed, and

her heart softened in contemplation of what Severyn would certainly suffer. Deep in these reflections, and with a mind made up not to attempt escape until such time as the carriage should stop, she had given no great heed to the road, or to the time that had elapsed.

She was roused by the stopping of the carriage. Her mind sprang into alertness. A man came to the window—a man not young, and of distinguished appearance. Camilla's escort sprang up, in apparent anger.

"You are the officer in charge of the Signorina Veneroni," the stranger said politely. "The signorina is being conveyed to Florence. Her destination is now to be changed. If you read this, you will see that the minister has granted permission to me, the signorina's nearest relation, to take charge of her."

Camilla, who had at first supposed some mere legal formality to be in course of transaction, was now fully aroused. Leaning forward eagerly she fixed her eyes upon this professing kinsman, and in this first moment of surprise, distinguished little beyond an instantly perceptible likeness to her father. She was sure at once of the kindred, and the certainty brought with it a warm gladness, a sense of home-coming.

"Let me," said he, "make myself known to

you. I am your cousin, Ottavio Veneroni, the only son of your father's brother, Francesco."

The officer of justice, having inspected the paper handed to him, became meekly deferential. Stepping from the carriage, he invited the new-comer, by the title of "Signor Marchese," to enter. The Signor Marchese did so, and the carriage once more proceeded. Camilla, who had accepted her arrest so calmly, was greatly fluttered by this new development. The possibility of arrest had been always in her calculations; this intervention came from a world outside her reckonings. She gazed wide-eyed at her cousin Ottavio, and found him a relative of singularly presentable exterior. Youth indeed he had left behind, but he had not yet reached the age when the years take more than they bring. He had the features of a fine Roman medal, the dark, watchful eye and deeply waved dark hair—but threaded with a line or two of white—of a fine early Italian portrait, and that peculiar grace in the carriage of a contemporary coat and collar that belongs to the modern Italian alone.

Turning to her with a smile at once grave and gracious, he said, "I am very sorry, my dear cousin, that our meeting should be among circumstances so disquieting. You may, however, put aside all further alarm. I have the

minister's assurance that no steps will be taken as long as you remain quietly with your family."

"You are very kind," murmured Camilla, vaguely.

"I must not conceal from you," the marquis continued, "that you have been in serious danger. The whole of your dealings with Bertoni are known to the Government. If I had not been so fortunate as to possess some influence, you would probably have been imprisoned for life."

Camilla could not believe that any such danger had ever been imminent, but she forbore to express an incredulity that diminished her cousin's services. This glimpse, however, of unknown agencies working, behind her back, for and against her, gave a sudden sensation of fetters and powerlessness. In the imagined world of Camilla, Camilla was always supreme directress. To be handed over, however advantageously, and to however benevolently minded a cousin, was something of a humiliation. Yet she was pleased, too, with the man, if not with the situation. Bertoni had been a companion whom she could never have been proud to acknowledge; it would be with gratification that she would make known the marquis to any of her friends. On the heels of that reflection came another. Turning eagerly

to him, she said : " Oh, my friends at Saragosta, who will be so uneasy! Pray let me go back at once to Saragosta."

He gently shook his head.

" I am to keep you in my house, under my care ; that is the condition."

" Oh—h—," said Camilla, startled, almost alarmed.

Then, recovering herself, " But at least I may write to them ?"

The marquis threw out his hands with a deprecating gesture. " I am in despair at being obliged to refuse you."

Camilla's face fell.

Taking her hand, he besought her not to be distressed.

" Surely you are not afraid to trust yourself with your own nearest relative ?"

" Oh, it is not that. It is of them I am thinking."

" Perhaps by-and-by it may be permitted to us to communicate with them ; for the present we must repay the favour granted to us by absolute submission."

Absolute submission was a state by no means congenial to Camilla's temperament. She turned away her face, and would have drawn away her hand, but her cousin kept it and lifted it to his lips.

“ My whole endeavour,” he said, “ shall be to make up to you for the pleasures and gaieties from which you will be cut off. If I were free to follow my own wishes, it would be my pride and joy to show to all Rome a kinswoman whom everybody must envy me.”

“ You are very kind,” Camilla murmured for the second time.

And indeed she was touched by all this care and solicitude bestowed spontaneously upon an unknown cousin. The family relation had not been largely prominent in her life, and she seemed to see a new element flowing in, joyful and welcome, but not yet clear. The thought weighed on her that her cousin, if he really knew her, would not like her, and that their views of life were probably quite incompatible. We all know the sense of unwilling imposture forced upon us by kind people who assume as a matter of course that our faiths are like their own. By such a sense was Camilla discomforted, and the frankness of her disposition set her seeking the impossible form of words which should proclaim her true self. Nor did she seem to herself quite candid in having let pass his assumption that she would long be a resident in his house. Prolonged residence under even the mildest and kindest of restraints was by no means within the schemes of Camilla,

and her secret rebellion against it was fortified by thoughts of British Consuls, having behind them a Lord Chancellor and all the ponderous national machinery which would be set in motion by the clamour of her friends.

She turned towards him, and met a gaze so concentrated that it discomposed her, and drew from her the unwonted and most unwilling acknowledgment of a blush. She turned away again, without having spoken.

After a time the carriage stopped, and Camilla, who saw no house, wondered whether they could possibly have come to their journey's end. In a minute or two the driver came to the window, bringing bread and wine.

"You must be hungry," the marquis said. "I am sorry that nothing better can be got here in the mountains than this bread of the country."

Camilla declared truly that she liked this bread. Never had anything tasted better to her than this sweet, dark-coloured slice, eaten on the open road, among the scent of the pine trees. It occurred to her to wonder whether this democratic taste appeared plebeian in the eyes of the marquis. He did not himself condescend to eat of this peasants' bread, but by-and-by took a very little wine. When the meal was finished, the driver, who had shared a slice

fraternally with his steed, carried away the loaf and the various vessels to some house unseen among the trees.

Again the carriage rolled forward, and the rays began to fall aslant through the tree-stems. A few words had been spoken on each part. Once a little bell was heard tinkling—from some chapel, Camilla supposed—but she saw nothing. The lengthening afternoon seemed to grow into some prolonged tract of life; it would have been hardly strange to find her clothes grown ragged at its close, or her hair grey. And still, throughout these lengthening hours the man beside her filled not only her bodily but her mental horizon. In her immediate future she could see nothing but two aspects of the marquis—the one, his Roman profile, with the dominant, disquieting mouth and chin; the other, his intent gaze, which seemed to turn her into a captive under the eye of a conqueror.

She was very grateful to him, and in some mysterious way flattered by his very presence; but there were moments in which she could have found it in her heart to regret that she had not been left in the hands of the Italian law.

XIII

THE MARCHESA SERAFINA

THE carriage containing Camilla and her new cousin stood still at last before an arched door in a white wall. The marquis stepped out, opened the door with a key, and offered his hand to Camilla. She, a little stiff from the long drive, descended with something less than her usual alacrity. There was nothing to be seen but the wall, the road, and the carriage, with its tired and panting horse. The marquis led her through the door and locked it behind them. Within was a sort of quadrangle, grass-grown and intersected by flagged pathways. On two sides were buildings; the third was formed by the inner side of the wall; and the fourth partly by a wing of the house and partly by a short stretch of open cloister, through which she had a glimpse of a somewhat desolate garden. The afternoon sun did not succeed in imparting gaiety to this prospect. An air of neglect and desolation lay

heavy on the whole enclosure, where no warm breath seemed to linger of human habitation.

Camilla received at once an impression of her family's impoverishment and decay, and the impression deepened as she followed the marquis along the grey pathway, across an empty hall, and up a staircase where dust lay thick in every crevice of the carved marble. A door on the first landing admitted them to a vast and chilly apartment, where at the farther end sat a hard-featured lady, clothed in black, who appeared to be about fifty-five years old. She eyed with attention Camilla's progress up the room, but neither spoke nor smiled. Camilla felt herself presented like a captive at the shrine of some stern idol.

The marquis addressed this lady as "my dear aunt," and with various little complimentary formulas, which in English would sound pompous and insincere, but in Italian were graceful and almost essential, presented Camilla to her, and explained to the newcomer that this was her aunt, the Marchesa Serafina Veneroni. At this oddly inapposite Christian name, the corners of Camilla's mouth rose in an involuntary smile.


The marchesa, in flowery terms and in a chilling voice, expressed her satisfaction ;

Camilla, unable to feel any great delight in making acquaintance with a lady so austere, merely murmured a vague gratitude.

A pause followed, broken at last by a suggestion from the marquis that Camilla might like to see her room. He rang a bell, and after that somewhat prolonged interval which always marks Italian service, an elderly maid appeared. She was dressed, like her mistress, in black, and something indefinitely conventual about her aspect assured Camilla that she was a person active in religious observances.

The room to which she was now conducted was smaller and much more amply furnished than the saloon. It possessed lace curtains, comfortable chairs, a modern-looking bed, and a vast wardrobe. A dressing-gown hung over the end of the bedstead; there were brushes and scent-bottles on the dressing-table, and a pair of new slippers beside it. Over the looking-glass hung a rosary. From all these tokens of habitation, Camilla concluded either that this was the room of the marchioness, or that there was some other lady living in the house.

Marietta, the maid, threw open the wardrobe doors and observed that she believed everything the marchesina could need would be



found there. Camilla beheld, neatly folded on the shelves, a small but sufficient store of garments; and, hanging in another division, a couple of gowns.

“But these are not mine,” said she, and was informed that they had been prepared for her arrival.

Left alone, she proceeded with a very natural curiosity to examine the dresses. One was a morning dress of grey wool, the other was of dark silk; both bore the mark of a well-known Parisian house, and both were evidently quite new. Camilla, closing the door and turning away, caught the reflection of her own countenance, and was obliged to laugh at its look of amazement.

Then she looked out of the window, which was so high that she could only reach it by standing on a chair, and finally, she sat down to consider with infinite astonishment the position in which she found herself.

Marietta presently re-appearing, announced that dinner was ready, and Camilla very willingly followed to another spacious apartment where a fine Venetian chandelier, its brilliance subdued by dust, hung above a somewhat scanty dining-table. The repast was excellent; she did full justice to it, and felt her rebellious energies rising cheerfully once more. The

marquis was almost oppressively attentive to her every need; his aunt, on the other hand, treated her rather as if she were a child in disgrace. The meal being over, the elder lady fixed her eye upon the younger and rose.

Camilla followed docilely to the saloon, on the other side of the landing, in which they had at first met. The marchioness invited her to be seated.

"This is, I think," said she, "the first time that you have seen any of your relations in Italy."

"Yes."

"Your father must however have spoken to you of them."

"I knew that my father had two brothers, called Luca and Francesco, that my grandfather was dead, and that my father had allowed his brother to succeed."

"Your father could not have done otherwise. He was an outlaw."

Camilla, who thought it advisable to keep her English nationality well in sight, replied after a moment: "And his country having renounced him, he made himself a citizen of another and a freer country."

The marchioness appeared a little startled. "What!" said she; and then recovering her-

self,—“but a native country cannot be renounced.”

She paused as if waiting for contradiction, but none was given.

“Your father’s brother, the Marchese Luca,” she presently resumed, “was my husband.” She made a rapid sign of the cross, and a rapid silent movement of the lips. “And the Marchesino Francesco was the father of the present marchese; they are both dead. There are also sisters, one of whom is the Superior of a convent. There remain of the family but yourself and the marchese.”

Camilla with a sudden return of loyalty to a family whose existence she had seldom considered, reflected that the marquis in failing to marry had neglected a duty.

“It was,” continued the marchioness, “with the deepest concern and anxiety that we heard of your escapade. For myself, I must confess that I was inclined at first to think no excuse or pardon possible. It was my opinion that you ought to be placed at once under the charge of your aunt in the convent at Arano. But the marquis, who has seen more than I of foreign customs, was more willing to make excuses for you. He it was who went to Rome, put your case in the best light to the minister, pleaded your youth and your ignor-

ance, and obtained—with great difficulty—permission to intervene for your release.” She paused, looked hard at her hearer, and called up a smile. “Can you not think of any way of repaying him?”

Camilla had a giddy sensation of depths opening before her feet; a sudden distrust of the marchioness and of the marquis sprang up fully armed.

“What do you mean?” she asked bluntly.

The marchioness laid a hand on hers.

“I understand you, my dear,” said she. “You think that such proposals should not be made to yourself, but to your friends. But consider: I am your friend, your relative; it is through me that it comes, and I will answer for you.”

“You are quite mistaken,” returned Camilla. “I asked what you meant because it seemed incredible that a man who never saw me until to-day could think of marrying me. If such a proposal were to be made to me seriously, I should not dream of letting any second person answer for me.”

“Such a proposal is made to you seriously,” said the marchioness.

Camilla drew herself up.

“I suppose,” she returned after a moment, and hesitating a little, “that the marquis,

seeing me in danger, generously wishes to provide this effectual protection for me. I am very grateful; but I could never consent to accept such a sacrifice."

"Sacrifice!" cried the marchioness, with some vehemence. "It is the marchese's dearest wish."

"I cannot believe that; I cannot see any reason why," Camilla protested.

"Do you never look in the glass?" said the marchioness. "Surely you might find a reason there."

This explanation was even less acceptable to the girl than the other, and she replied in a cooler tone: "In that case, regard for the marquis as well as for myself would oblige me to decline. He knows nothing about me, and would find too late that he had made a terrible mistake."

"You do not know the marquis," the lady began.

"I do not," Camilla quickly interposed. "That is the very reason why a marriage between us is out of the question."

"But you will know him," the marchioness persisted, "after you have been here with us a little time." Camilla started. "And besides, it is all folly, this notion of knowing a husband beforehand. What can be known is his family,

his position, and his appearance. You will never have a finer position offered you than this."

Camilla's resolution had gathered firmness, and her patience was wearing a little thin.

"It will perhaps save trouble," said she, "to say distinctly, once for all, that I refuse absolutely to marry the Marchese Veneroni."

"You would prefer to be handed back to the police?"

"I should very much prefer it," Camilla answered calmly.

"You would prefer! You would prefer! It is not asked what young girls would prefer. You will do what is decided for you by your elders and wisers."

Camilla made no answer. She was determining that she would have to come to plain speech with the marquis himself. Dispute with this overbearing lady was worse than useless.

The marchioness was still talking vehemently.

"If you think that you will be allowed again to behave as you have behaved—to disgrace our name, to endanger your own life—No, you are here, and you will remain here until you have taken the step laid down for you. You appear entirely to misapprehend your position.

You are the daughter of an Italian house, and you will be ruled by the head of the house."

"And with your permission," said Camilla, rising, "I prefer to take his orders at first hand."

She walked out of the room and paused a moment on the landing. The sudden thought occurred to her that perhaps it might be possible to escape at once. She ran lightly down the wide staircase, across the hall, where she found no servant, and into the quadrangle. Of the outer gate she felt no hope, but she tried it and found it locked. It was the moment of the sudden Italian sunset, and a thin darkness dropped like a veil as she crossed towards the arcade and descended into the melancholy garden. In a very few minutes this darkness seemed to melt into starlight, and she could see the main features of the scene. A high wall ran round the garden; the thin tinkle of a thread of water still dripped into the chipped and greenish basin of a fountain; tall ranks of shrubs rose dark beside the pale pathways; here and there were stone benches with rolled ends, like the pseudo-classic settees of the first empire. Solitude, expectancy, enchantment brooded. Camilla, full of tumultuous rebellion, felt these influences like a tightening net. Her breath came fast; the words of the marchioness

rang in her indignant ears, and kept the hammers of her heart beating. Hastily she examined the wall, and found it to be everywhere of a height far beyond any climbing powers of hers. No old tree grew near enough to afford a step ; no bench was planted close to it. Sadly she turned back towards the house. Was there no other way out than this ? In the court there was only the door by which the marquis had let her in. She had seen the key of that returned to his own pocket, but probably there was another key. Was there a porter who kept that ? Would it be possible to watch in the garden for some chance opening of the door, and to rush through it ? She stood in the striped shadow of the colonnade, looking with longing eyes at the locked door. Suddenly an impulse came upon her, something that neared the unreason of panic, and she fled like a thing pursued up the staircase.

Behind the locked door of her own room she sat down breathless and began to be amazed at her own tremors. The marchioness was an unreasonable and prejudiced woman, but her nephew——Camilla's mind stopped short. She found herself unable to frame with any confidence a reassuring opinion of the marquis, but as she cooled she began to regain some degree of confidence in Camilla Veneroni. After all,

the decision remained unalterably with her. At the very worst, these tiresome relatives could but keep her here, resisting their persuasions, until her friends discovered her.

Had Mr. Allison, she wondered, told her story to the others? As things now were, that would be the course she would wish taken; but remembering the strictness of her own prohibition she felt sure that Allison would not feel himself allowed to take it. Perhaps, since he knew Bertoni by sight, though not by name, he would trace him out and appeal for help to him. That idea afforded her no great solace or encouragement. Daily association had slowly sapped her faith in Bertoni, and without any defined or conscious change of front, she now thoroughly distrusted him. Her hope was in Allison and in Allison only.

She leaned back in her chair, looked round this room, already so familiar,—her prison and her refuge—and yielded to the sense of weariness. High up beyond her window was a sky coloured as no English sky is coloured, like the heart of the darkest of sapphires, and with stars in it that shone not yellow but silver. No English star would ever again, she thought, look to her quite free from murkiness.

Suddenly a wonder shot through her whether this house were an old possession of her family,

and whether her father had looked up at this dome of darkened ultramarine and the whiteness of these stars. The thought brought warmth about her, and she ceased to feel her prison so oppressive.

XIV

THE SUIT OF THE MARQUIS

IT was not until the mid-day breakfast on the morrow that Camilla again saw her relatives. The civilities of Italian intercourse were observed, a little scantily by the marchioness, very amply by her nephew.

Camilla, resolutely unabashed, presently told the marquis that she should be glad of some conversation with him by-and-by, about her own affairs.

He gave a fervent assent, and turned upon her a smile so emphatic and so glowing as rather to discompose her; she was almost grateful for the harshly interrupting voice of the marchioness.

"I think it right," she broke in, "to warn you, Ottavio, against such an interview. The marchesina is simply reckoning upon her power over you to persuade you to her wishes."

The marquis lifted his hand.

"My dear aunt," he said, "permit me to be the judge of my conduct."

He had not raised his voice by a semi-tone, or hastened it by the beat of a semi-quaver; but the warmth of his tone to Camilla was replaced by an icy chillness. More than ever, in this mood, he filled the stage; but with a presence that provoked rather antagonism than sympathy. Camilla's instant thought was of the intolerability of such a tone in a husband. Then, relenting a little, she told herself that the marchioness was a relative whose cumulative powers of irritation could probably not be gauged by a sample, and who might, not improbably, require exceptional measures of repression.

For the moment the lady was completely subdued, and offered bread in the meekest manner to her English niece. Meekly also, when the meal was over, she rose and retired.

The marquis conducted Camilla to a smaller room, which had by way of furniture a handsome, unfriendly table of coloured marbles, and three gilded chairs. In one of these she was installed; the marquis stood before her by the table.

As he stood there, looking at her, her purpose all at once loomed difficult; she was

obliged to snatch at her courage and to begin hastily :

“The marchioness told me yesterday something that seemed to me very improbable.”

“What was that?” the marquis asked, in his deep and soft voice, and with his eyes still full upon her.

Camilla, generally the least shy of human beings, had a wild impulse to spring up and run away. The answer stood before her like a wall. She mastered herself and took it at a leap.

“She gave me to understand that you wished to marry me.”

“Why should that be improbable?” he asked.

This time she evaded the direct reply.

“I thought it so.”

“There is surely no improbability,” said the marquis, “in such a desire on the part of any man.”

Camilla preserved a rather scornful silence.

“As for me,” her cousin proceeded, “I am no longer a young man, but until yesterday I had never seen the woman whom I could be willing to make my wife.” He moved a step nearer. “And now that I have seen her, I will take no refusal.”

The low voice, with its mellow cadences that seemed almost to take shape and touch her

like a hand, softened the threatening note of the words, but deepened their note of insistence. She stood up and moved a step aside. Such a tone was new to her; she was dismayed to find herself more disturbed by it than offended. The blending of calm, experienced assurance, of personal emotion and of habitual ascendancy, seemed for the moment to put resistance out of the question.

"It is absurd," she said impatiently, "to talk like that"; and the feebleness of the words seemed to mock her as she uttered them. The marquis said nothing, but his fixed gaze had the effect of speech.

Camilla stiffened herself, met his eyes squarely, and said: "I am greatly honoured; but I assure you that I shall never marry you."

He smiled — smiled as it seemed with genuine amusement, and drew forward the chair from which she had risen.

"We know a lady's 'never,'" he said lightly. "Let us sit down quietly, my dear cousin, and consider the facts."

Camilla, after a moment's hesitation, re-seated herself, and at once repented having done so, for the marquis placed his own chair immediately before her, and it was impossible, unless she again stood up, to withdraw from the neighbourhood of this barricade. It was all

very slight, this assumption of nearness, but all very intentional. She resented the more because she felt herself fluttered. Frightened she was not—of that she was certain—but a pulse shook in her veins like the beating wing of a bird, and she watched his words and movements as an untamed animal watches the advance of a stranger.

“The facts,” said the marquis, extending the fingers of one hand as digits of enumeration, and the index of the other wherewith to mark them off, “are these: You have exposed yourself to a terrible danger, from which I have rescued you. As I have already had the honour of explaining to you, you are liable to lifelong imprisonment.”

“Not, I imagine, until I have been tried and found guilty,” Camilla remarked, with a great assumption of composure.

The smallest possible lifting of her cousin’s eyebrows seemed to acknowledge a momentary surprise.

“Alas!” said he, “you do not understand Italian methods. How thankful I am that I have been permitted to interpose! If by any chance you had belonged to any other family—if I had been unable to claim the right of your guardian——” He made a movement as if he shook off intolerable reflections. “One con

dition," he continued, "was that I should without delay find for you an Italian husband who would be answerable for you in future." He paused a moment. "I had not at that time seen you."

Camilla found it less easy to assure the marquis than it had been to assure his aunt, that he was really mistaken in supposing himself in love with her; it began even to be not so easy to assure herself. She felt that she must hasten to play her winning cards.

"The Italian authorities," she said, rather hurriedly, "seem to forget that I am an English subject."

"Indeed!" said the marquis, polite and unruffled.

"My father was naturalized as an Englishman before my birth."

The expressive hands made a little movement.

"Here," he said, "you must, I fear, be content to remain an Italian, and to be guided as young ladies in Italy are guided—by the head of their house."

She recognized the phrase of the marchioness; it acted like a call to battle; her spirit had for some minutes been rising, and her vague terrors giving place to the excitement of conflict, which sharpened alike her wits and her tongue.

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"If I am an Italian," she smartly retorted, "it is I who am the head of the house. If I am an Englishwoman, the Lord Chancellor of England is my guardian, and to him I shall appeal for protection."

"By word of mouth, no doubt!" the marquis smilingly remarked, while his fingers lightly indicated the circumjacent walls. "Your Lord Chancellor, my dear cousin, may be powerful in England. Here he is nothing; he can find you only through Italian officials, and—I know my Government—he would never be permitted to find you."

"But you," said Camilla, "who know I am English—you, as an honourable man, will restore me to England."

"As an honourable man," the marquis returned, "I shall keep the promise in virtue of which alone I have been able to preserve you from dangers which I shudder to think of. As my wife, and as my wife alone, I shall be able to take you to England. Ah, Camilla, can you not understand what it costs me to be obliged to deny you and oppose you, to appear to your inexperience in the light of a gaoler—I to whom your smile is a treasure? And yesterday you gave me your smile."

If there was any truth in the marquis's hint that this was the first time he had set himself to

woo a bride, his natural talent for lovemaking was remarkable. Camilla, who neither quite believed him nor trusted him, and who was very sure that she had no spark of love for him, was yet shaken and troubled as she had never been by the wooing of Severyn, whose truth and loyalty were as solid to her as the foundations of the earth.

Vague alarms awoke within her, and a sense of unmeasured depths. Were they in the ardent eyes of the man, those depths? or in unsounded abysses of herself? Dim inklings began to stir of an underself incalculable and powerful. The clear daylight unity of her soul had hints of insurrection. She held fast to her post, but she had to hold fast by a conscious effort.

“You forget my English friends at Saragosta. They will certainly trace me out. One of them is acquainted with all that I have done in Italy. He is a man of resolution, and has interfered on my account already. He has my promise that I would take no step without informing him beforehand. He will know that I have been taken away against my will, and will certainly apply on my behalf to the English ambassador.”

The marquis slightly, gently, almost apologetically shrugged his shoulders.

“Your English ambassador——” he said, and paused.

Then, leaning towards her, his voice falling to deeper notes, insidious, penetrating, weighted with passion—“Do you know,” he murmured, “what he will be told, your English ambassador? That the Marchesa Camilla Veneroni is with her husband at his estate.”

He was so near that she felt his breath pass with a thrill of horror, of delight, of fascination and of repulsion, through her hair. Her own breath stood still, and as she recovered it, she saw her answer before her.

“And the ambassador will remind you that the marriage of an English subject abroad is only legal when solemnized before a representative of Great Britain.”

The marquis, who had not, like Camilla, seen a parent married abroad to a foreign subject, had been clearly unprepared for this. His face hardened a little and he did not instantly reply.

“He will also tell you,” Camilla triumphantly proceeded, “that, my friends having placed me under the guardianship of the highest English court of law, I cannot be legally married without the formal consent of the Lord Chancellor of England.”

A sudden smile flashed into her face; she rose to her feet and added almost gaily :

“You see you may as well let me go. You can never fulfil your promise and provide an Italian husband for me.”

The marquis too stood up, and he too smiled, not suddenly, as she had done, but slowly; not in the least with the air of a person conquered or baffled, but with the tolerance of the senior in whose hands lies power.

“What a child you are, what a charming, beautiful child! And yet woman enough to seek the words that you think will hurt. Let you go, you little wild bird! No, you must remain and be tamed, and your eyes opened to understand. Rest contented, dearest; here lies your world, your world and mine.”

Camilla stood confounded; his voice was like the building of walls around her; webs of enchantment wove themselves to its music; she saw herself enslaved. Then, like the final word of the spell, she heard the soft entreaty of her own name. With the liquid note of the divided double-l sprang up out of the past the memory of another voice, another entreaty, so like and so unlike this, of the wide hills above Saragosta, and the grey, questioning eyes of Severyn Ladzinski. Her heart went out in an unspoken cry. “Oh, Severyn! Dear Severyn!” The thought was like an exile’s sudden yearning for the wild-flower scents of

home. With Severyn dwelt truth and freedom and all the open-eyed sincerities of life. In a flash she felt that her moment of essential release would be the moment when she would stand face to face with Severyn, unblushing, untroubled, the depths of her heart all filled and stilled, and would put her hands willingly into his.

She had forgotten the marquis ; it was with a sort of wonder that her eye came back and met his. He who had watched breathless the quick passage of emotion across her transparent face, had believed for a moment that he had conquered ; suddenly he perceived that she had passed beyond him. As for her, she was no longer angry with the marquis, because she no longer felt him powerful.

“My dear cousin,” she said, assuming now the tone of the guider of events, “you see your generosity is wasted on me. If I would, I am unable to marry you while you keep me here.”

All at once, in the new joy of this sense of release and regained mastery, an impulse seized her, made partly of malice ; partly perhaps of the terribly besetting feminine desire to set emotions working and see what then, whereby so many a woman has found herself landed on shores she never meant to touch ; but partly too

of a returning warmth of loyalty to her earlier lover.

"Besides," she said softly, a dimple coming in the rose-leaf of her cheek, and a spark kindling in the depths of the periwinkle-blue eyes, "how do you know that I am not promised already to another man?"

She watched the marquis's face as she spoke, and her perversity had its punishment. She saw for a single instant a gleam of malevolence, cold, deep, insatiable. It seemed to run like a red ray along her future, and Severyn was the victim in its path. Camilla, who had seldom in her life been frightened, was frightened now; she shrank together with a sharp breath of panic, and fairly ran out of the room.

A wild instinct of escape hurried her downstairs towards the open air; the wall of the garden seemed nothing; she could climb anything, do anything to escape the marquis. Three minutes later she was sitting with shaking knees on the remotest of the garden seats, and was beginning to tell herself with infinite chagrin, that her own cowardice had given away her triumph. What was it, after all, from which she had run away? She had often seen a look as evil-intentioned in the eyes of Menosotti, and had never felt the smallest inclination towards flight. It became

evident that there were elements in herself which she had never yet suspected; and that henceforth she must no longer dare to trust blindly in her own firmness. Her thoughts went back to Saragosta and to yesterday, and especially to Severyn Ladzinski. How if, instead of turning from him yesterday, she had turned towards him and told him all that she had told Allison? She saw the scene unfolding itself after this new pattern, and heard the familiar voice telling her that her hope should be his, and that the cause that claimed her should claim him too. She knew that he would have said that, and that was why she shrank from telling him. If she had known what lay before her—no, even then she would not have told him, but she would have kept him safely by her until they were back at the hotel.

In looking back to that past, she had recovered something of the self-confident Camilla of yesterday morning, and of all the days before. Again she felt herself the commander of her own enterprises, and again her mind turned firmly towards escape.

She rose and went to investigate the wall by the light of day. The only point conceivably accessible was at the angle of junction with the house, and was entirely commanded

by windows. It was indeed the lowest window whose strong exterior iron grating furnished a ladder of ascent. By day it would be impossible to employ this means ; but she would assuredly try by night.

While she still stood looking at the wall, a slight sound startled her. Marietta, cat-footed and with downcast eyes, came stealing down the steps. The signora marchesa, she explained, had sent a sunshade to the marchesina ; it was not safe for strangers to walk bare-headed in the sunshine. She handed a small black umbrella to Camilla, who thanked her and moved away with it unopened, to a shady walk, where her steps were dogged by the uncomfortable sensation of Marietta's silent presence on the other side of the bushes.

Suddenly she stood breathless. A parasol, her experience reminded her, might be used as a medium of communication. If she could but attach to this umbrella of her aunt's some kind of letter ! Oh for a sheet of paper ! A pencil she possessed, and she remembered that her purse had a small tablet of ivory.

She emerged from her sheltered walk, unfurled her new treasure, and sat down in the circle of its shadow. Marietta slowly walked on and disappeared behind some bushes, but her eye, Camilla imagined, was able to penetrate

the screen. To write here would be unsafe. She threw back her head, suffered her eyes to wander in the blueness of the sky and her lips to drop smilingly apart, while her busy mind arranged the details of a plan. All at once the soft lines of her face stiffened ; the dreamy eyes became alert. A sound had reached her, full of hope and promise—the creaking of wheels in the road beyond the wall. People did pass, then, on this road, and a judiciously thrown umbrella might hope to be picked up by some stranger.

She rose, walked about for a few minutes, and then went into the house, carrying her prize with her.

THE BEATING OF WINGS IN A CAGE

CAMILLA had written a letter upon a clean pocket-handkerchief, spread flat against her looking-glass, and was contemplating the result a little ruefully. Would these poor pencil marks endure long enough to convey her tale? The letter stated in English, and in the fewest words possible, what had befallen her, with whom she now was, and what were the proposals of the marquis; noted that the drive hither had occupied about four and a half hours, that the direction seemed to be north-westerly, and that the ascent had, from an early stage, been constant. Folding the handkerchief carefully, she pinned it round one of the inner spokes of the umbrella, cut from her purse the ivory tablet, and, having with some difficulty pierced a hole in it, wrote upon it in Italian, "Mrs. Bush, of the Hotel Corona d'Italia, Saragosta, will give twenty lire to the person who carries her this umbrella," and fixed

it with a bent pin to the outside of the umbrella. She did not immediately go back to the garden—that she thought would be suspicious, but remained sitting behind her locked door until near five o'clock.

Then stealing down, umbrella in hand, she made a careful search for Marietta, and assured herself that the garden was empty. In the farthest corner of that wall which bordered the road she rose on tiptoe and launched her spear. She heard it fall, and stole away again. Ah, but at Casello, when she cast her missile, she saw the recipient below, and was sure of its reception. As to this road, who could guess whither it travelled, and how long it might be before wheels would pass upon it again?

The dinner hour drew near ; she braced herself to meet the marquis, and succeeded in putting on an entirely undisturbed countenance. He met her as she entered, and his smile compelled her to remember, and to know that he was remembering, the manner of their last parting. The dinner was much like yesterday's dinner ; the marchioness was still haughtily distant, the marquis still eagerly attentive, his manner tinged with an additional shade of intimacy, a faint, faint touch of proprietorship, too slight for open resentment. Camilla had fully made up her mind not to be afraid of him,

but she did not find it possible to be unconscious. He kept her aware at every moment that his thoughts were on her, and with every moment her inward irritation grew. She fixed her mind upon that umbrella, lying in mute appeal in the roadway, and then, with a sudden gleam of hope, upon the garden wall, and the possibility of scaling it to-night.

The meal was at an end, and the dark figure of the marchioness drew itself slowly to its full height. Gladly and alertly Camilla too stood up, prepared to retreat immediately to the upper floor. But it appeared that the ladies were not intended this evening to depart alone. The marquis, instead of contenting himself with opening the door for them, approached Camilla, took her hand, and proceeded to lead her in the wake of the marchioness across the landing to the saloon. At the foot of the stairs she would have withdrawn her hand but was not permitted.

"Surely," said the marquis, in the most appealing of voices, "you will not refuse to sit with us? Why not yield to our customs? They will have to become yours at last."

"Your customs will never become mine," Camilla declared. "Why should I sit with you as if I were your friend? I am your prisoner—your unwilling prisoner—not your guest."

The marchioness, hearing these words behind her, turned over her shoulder a haughty profile. It was evident that she longed to speak ; but she said nothing.

The marquis lifted the reluctant fingers, kissed them, and slowly let them go.

“ It is I who am your prisoner, your willing prisoner,” he said.

Camilla, released, fled up the marble steps.

She had her plan. She would wait till it was a little darker, then, locking her door behind her, steal downstairs, secrete herself in the garden, and wait until the house should be all dark and silent ; then she would attempt to ascend the wall at that corner by the iron-latticed window. By-and-by, therefore, she glided down, her skirt lifted from the stair-edges, a little striped silk rug upon her arm— for she had no cloak here, and the night might be cold later on. No one was on the staircase ; she heard no voice behind the door of the saloon, nor did the door itself fly open and reveal the marquis ; there was no servant on the lowest floor.

She slipped out into the court and sped across to the garden. The emptiness of the house and of Italy seemed concentrated in this silent enclosure. She retreated to the remotest and most overshadowed of the benches. Here

she was invisible to any person not actually upon the path before her. She wrapped the little rug about her shoulders and sat waiting, listening. The moon rose presently, but not in last night's resplendence; there were drifting clouds in the sky, and among the tree-tops a sighing wind. Camilla sat and waited. At last she drew out her watch and found that it was past nine o'clock.

Suddenly she heard a sound—a step. At first she thought that it was in the road outside, the step of that unknown ally who would find the marchioness's umbrella. Then she knew that it was in the garden—a step light, even, but not rapid; it might be that of the marquis, or of some servant looking round before locking up for the night. Should she move? Should she retreat among the bushes? But the wind was silent at the moment; she would be heard. Perhaps he would not come here; perhaps—and then the step came into her path, and in two minutes the marquis stood before her.

He showed no sign of surprise, but seated himself quietly at her side.

“Was there no shawl provided for you?” he asked, after a moment. “That was a forgetfulness on the marchesa's part.”

Camilla said nothing.

“Has everything else been provided as it

should? Is there anything else that you want?"

"There is one thing," Camilla answered slowly.

He turned an eager face. "Something that I can give?"

"Oh, yes—my liberty."

"That, as you know, I cannot give you. I can give you only change of captivity—since captivity you choose to call it."

"I demand the change."

"And I," said the marquis, "refuse it, as I would refuse a firearm to a child."

There was a pause.

Presently, speaking in a tone of use and wont that might have beseemed a husband of twelve months' standing, he said: "I am glad this garden pleases you. We will often sit here."

Camilla made no reply; what reply could be made to such a speech? She stared before her stonily; it seemed to her as if she had already been for years resisting this dominating presence; she was wearied beforehand with the struggle.

The calm voice went on beside her: "If you choose, we may be on our way to England by this time next week."

England! Her heart gave a leap.

"I hope," she answered as quietly as she

could, "that my friends will have taken me there before that."

"A reverend father," the marquis pursued, "will arrive to-morrow, or the next day at latest. He brings with him the dispensation of the Holy Father. Our marriage therefore need not be delayed beyond Wednesday. We must then wait for the Government's permission, which, upon news of your marriage, will be instantly awarded, and then we may immediately set out for England."

Camilla, growing angry, replied with considerable haughtiness: "Pray amuse yourself with any projects that please you; but, as far as I am concerned, be good enough to remember that such a marriage would be both illegal and against my conscience. I am a British subject and a Protestant. Moreover, if I were an Italian and a Roman Catholic, I would not marry you."

With that she stood up and moved slowly away.

He followed and kept pace with her.

"You are going in?" he asked.

"I am going in."

"You are wise. You would assuredly fail to climb the wall, probably hurt yourself in the endeavour, and certainly catch cold if you remained all night out of doors."

She found these observations the more irritating on account of their probable truth.

"As to our marriage," the marquis resumed, "you may make yourself perfectly easy. The English authorities will make no difficulty about confirming a marriage duly performed and recognized in Italy. We can go through the civil ceremony before the English Consul at Genoa or Turin."

"I do make myself perfectly easy," she retorted. "I know that no marriage of mine can be legal in any country without my consent, and that will never be given."

"We will speak further to-morrow," said the marquis, quite unruffled.

Camilla merely threw up her head, and submitted, in angry silence, to be escorted across the quadrangle and up the stairs.

On the upper landing the marquis wished her "good-night," and stood watching her disappearance into her room. Then permitting his somewhat pensive smile to expand into one of broad amusement, he went cheerfully downstairs.

On the next day, which was Tuesday, Camilla, when she descended to the noonday breakfast, looked hastily for a fourth cover, and, seeing none, concluded that the priest had not yet arrived. The marquis came towards her

with his glowing smile. In his hand he held a small umbrella.

"This, I think, is yours," he said.

Camilla received, without a word, but with an immeasurable sinking of the heart, her missile of the day before.

The meal passed like its predecessors, but the manner of the marchioness had lost several degrees of its chilliness. That of the marquis was precisely what it had been yesterday; that is to say, it tacitly assumed intimacy and boldly exhibited devotion. Camilla, for her part, observed the necessary civilities, and volunteered no word beyond.

Breakfast being over, she picked up that flag of defeat, the umbrella, and withdrew unopposed to her own room, where she ruefully unfastened the handkerchief and the tablet. From the handkerchief, as she unwrapped it, fell a note. An instant gleam of hope ran through her; she caught it up. It was in Italian, full of melodious superlatives and diminutives in *issima* and *ina*.

"My Camilla," it began, "why beat against the bars? Why break my heart with the sight of your unhappiness in my house? Dearest, fairest, yield yourself cheerfully to the inevitable, which shall be, I swear it, the happiness of all your future life. Cease to pine, little

bird ; cease to be clouded, little sunbeam. Mine you must be ; never, never shall I desist from my pursuit. For your sake, never, no less than for my own. No law shall snatch you from me, no guardianship less tender than mine shall shelter you. You rashest ! you wildest ! you sweetest ! Give your life willingly to me, even as mine is given already wholly to you, whether I will or no."

" He must be mad," said Camilla aloud.

The persistence of the marquis was indeed incomprehensible to her. She sat down with the letter in her hand to try and understand wherefore he should so much desire to marry her. Were there possibly family reasons—estates, perhaps, which inevitably belonged by law to the child of the eldest son ? These considerations brought to mind that of her own wealth. Having never herself known the lack of money, the mercenary motive seldom presented itself. This was actually the first time that her possessions struck her as a possibly attracting force ; and even now she found it difficult to suppose that they could be a preponderating one. Rather, judging her cousin by the elements of stubbornness, strong in herself, she was disposed to believe that her own opposition determined his persistence. That he was a man delighting in the exercise of

power she was convinced ; this was the quality which at once stiffened her against him and drew her towards him, his greatest fault and his highest charm. So she thought, as she sat calmly glancing at his written words—which moved her not at all—and feeling herself once more altogether mistress of herself and of her fate. She felt to-day no traitor within the citadel, no need to think of Severyn for a support.

A knock came at the door. Marietta presented herself with a polite message that the signora marchesa begged for the marchesina's company.

The message was well calculated. Camilla, incapable of incivility through the mouth of a servant, rose and followed.

XVI

THE EMBASSY TO ROME

THE champions of Camilla had not meanwhile been idle. For more than an hour the three young people sought her vainly upon that lonely road in which a purple parasol hung indicative. As they sadly re-entered the town, it occurred to Allison to seek counsel from the Syndic. He turned aside into the office, while Ladzinski and Guendolen went on to tell the tale to the unsuspecting ladies at the Crown of Italy.

Guendolen found herself overtaken by that impulse of exposition which grows from the conviction of woman that no man really understands any other woman.

"I am certain," she declared, "that Camilla has not left us on purpose."

The declaration awoke some gleam of pleasure in the anxious heart of her hearer. He looked at her with—almost for the first time—a fully realizing perception, and with a

sudden sense of her honesty and her competence.

"And I don't suppose," Guendolen proceeded, "that she is very much frightened, whatever has happened to her. I can't imagine Camilla scared, can you?" He shook his head with a faint smile. "And she will be as certain as she is of the daylight that we shall all be looking for her and working for her."

Her calm, convinced voice, though it said to him nothing which he had not said to himself already, was immeasurably comforting. They were at the hotel door, and as he stood still to let her pass before him, she met his serious look of grateful trust. From that moment there was a staunch alliance between them.

When Allison presently arrived with Sacchetti, he found the story already imparted to the two ladies. Madame Perivier, generally so full of words, sat in almost total silence; Mrs. Bush was ejaculatory and interrogative. The Englishman discerned clearly beneath her somewhat disconnected words the thread of suspicion against Ladzinski.

"But what had happened, Mr. Ladzinski? Had there been any quarrel between you?" she asked.

Ladzinski, extremely pale, and with a coun-

tenance of the deepest discomfort, hesitated for an answer.

"Mr. Ladzinski," cried the agitated lady, "you know something more than you say. You know where she is."

"My dear Mrs. Bush!" Allison interposed reproachfully, "Ladzinski, let me speak. You know, Mrs. Bush, we all know, Ladzinski's feelings for Miss Veneroni. You know, too, that he has never had an opportunity till to-day, of speaking to her plainly. Of course he took that opportunity. The answer which she gave him was not—not so favourable as he deserved; although not, I feel sure, quite so unfavourable as he thought it. After that he naturally avoided the awkwardness of coming in with her to lunch. He meant to leave this afternoon—his half-packed portmanteau lies on his table at this moment. As to Miss Veneroni, why there's none of us, not even you yourself, upon whom this falls with so heavy a blow as upon him."

There was a pause which Madame Perivier broke.

"Here," she said in French, "are five of us, without counting M. le Syndic. How are we to divide our forces? What step is each of us to take towards the recovery of Camilla?"

"Some one must go to England, to the Court of Chancery," said Allison.

"Some one should go to Rome, to the English Ambassador," said Sacchetti.

"Some one—and that will be I," said Ladzinski, "must go after Menosotti and force a confession from him."

"You think," cried Mrs. Bush eagerly, "that Signor Menosotti has had to do with this."

"I do think so," Ladzinski answered.

"And so do I," said Mrs. Bush, looking at him with quite a new expression of faith.

"I think so so firmly," Ladzinski proceeded, "that I have kept a detective watching him. I heard only this morning that he has returned to Milan."

"And you will go to Rome, Laurence," said Guendolen. "And surely Mrs. Bush would be the proper person to apply to the Court."

"Then am I to go home?" Mrs. Bush asked rather piteously.

"I think you had better," answered Allison, who found himself by some odd chance the director of Mrs. Bush's conscience. "As to anyone staying here, that seems hardly necessary. Our friend the Syndic will be here. If Miss Veneroni should return here—which seems hardly likely—his protection will be the

best that she can have. Perhaps, in case there should be a letter, we had better ask him to open it."

Sacchetti nodded gravely.

"Then I," said Madame Perivier, "shall go home to my daughter's villa." Turning to Guendolen, she invited her, in her daughter's name as well as her own, to accompany her.

"Yes, by the way, Guen, what about you?" said her brother, suddenly recollecting that his sister could hardly be left alone at the Crown of Italy.

Mrs. Bush mildly suggested that perhaps Miss Allison would come back to England; but Guendolen, thanking both ladies, said that if nobody saw any objection she would rather go to Florence, where she would be more in the centre, able to hear news quicker, and to meet her brother on his way back from Rome. "Aunt Lucy was at an English *pension* there, a Miss Wilson's in the Piazza d'Arno; and there are so few tourists in Florence at this time of year that she would be sure to have room for me."

"Then the next thing," said Sacchetti the practical, "is to secure some sort of vehicle to take the ladies and your luggage to Dalarocca in time for the six o'clock train."

It was about eight o'clock on Monday morn-

ing when the brother and sister, having dropped their companions at various points of the journey, arrived at Florence. There was no train to Rome until nearly eleven, so that Allison would reach Rome too late to see the British representative that day. Even his eagerness admitted the impossibility of knocking up an ambassador after eleven at night.

Throughout the long hours of Monday he travelled on, anxious, hot, and restless; and soon after ten on Tuesday was standing within the walls of the British Embassy, and explaining to the hall-porter that he must at once see the Ambassador's private secretary, upon business of the utmost importance. He was shown into a waiting-room, where the duller half of Saturday's *Times* lay on the table, and where a neat, very young Englishman presently came to him.

"A—you were wanting to see Sir Alfred's secretary?"

"I am wanting," Allison briskly returned, "to see Sir Alfred himself, and my business can't be communicated to any one else. But of course I know that he keeps a staff on purpose to act as a sieve for callers, and so I thought it might save time if I asked for the private secretary to begin with."

The young man, who had entered with a somewhat doubtful air as if distrustful of early callers, had perceptibly thawed on perceiving the visitor to be one whose speech, clothes, and general conventions resembled his own. At the first words he relapsed into surprised doubt, and finally suffered his features to expand into a genial grin.

"Well, you are pretty cool," he remarked, not apparently without admiration.

"Not at all," said Allison. "I am only desperately anxious, and every minute is precious."

"What sort of business is it?" demanded the juvenile diplomatist.

"One part of it refers to a conspiracy against the Italian government,"—the young man's eyes grew wide and round—"the other part of it refers to the abduction of a wealthy British subject."

"Eh!" cried the young gentleman in a prolonged whistle of amaze; and turning quickly to the door, he added: "Seymour 'll see *you*."

In a minute or two Allison was conducted accordingly to a fine and spacious Italian apartment, among the furniture of which a typical British office writing-table seemed to have lost itself. Before the writing-table sat an English-

man of perhaps thirty-five, grave, official and affable, as becomes the highly placed.

"Take a chair, Mr. Allison. What can we do for you?"

"You can give me the opportunity," Allison answered, "of giving to Sir Alfred Dunnington in person an account of the disappearance two days ago—the abduction as we believe—of a wealthy English lady, Miss Camilla Veneroni."

"Veneroni? But that's an Italian name."

"Her father was naturalized, and was a partner in the firm of Simonides & Co. There are circumstances in the case which Sir Alfred ought to know, and which I do not feel at liberty to communicate to any one else—not even to you."

Mr. Seymour eyed him attentively, and possibly reflected that Sir Alfred might not feel bound to equal reticence. He wrote a few hasty lines, summoned a messenger, and sent them to his chief.

The messenger reappearing with the invariable formula: "Will you step this way, if you please, sir?" conducted Allison to a somewhat smaller and gayer room, perfumed with a distinct aroma of newly-smoked tobacco.

Sir Alfred, a tall and stout man, florid, grey-whiskered, with an alert blue eye and a loud

and cheery voice, stood with his back to the empty, open fire-place.

"Hey?" said he. "What's this you tell us?"

Allison narrated succinctly the departure of Camilla from her home, the pursuit by Ladzinski and himself, the imprisonment at Casello and the release. There he paused.

"The next point," said he, "is the explanation which Miss Veneroni gave me of her motives. She made me promise to keep them to myself, but now I feel that it is my duty to tell you."

"Quite so, quite so," said the ambassador, and Allison related Camilla's communication.

The shrewd eyes of his Excellency rested upon him appraisingly as he spoke.

"She did not tell this to any one else?"

"No."

"Now how was that?"

"Well, you see—I happened to be there—and I—rather understood that she preferred to tell it to some one who had no possible right to prevent her from doing as she pleased."

Sir Alfred nodded.

"And the agent; what was his name?"

"I don't know."

"Hm—hm! And what's this?"

Allison was presenting to him a small square of paper.

"That's the agent."

"Oh—ah! Just wait a minute, Mr. Allison."

He struck a handbell and bade the responding messenger ask Mr. Seymour kindly to step this way.

The secretary came in.

"Look at that," said Sir Alfred. "Do you know the fellow?"

"I think," the cautious Seymour hazarded, "that we have seen the gentleman here, not very much to his credit."

"Isn't it that police spy—what was his name?—who got himself turned out for running rather too scandalous a gambling hell?—place where that young fool from Oxford got himself robbed."

Mr. Seymour cast a reproachful glance at his chief. Was this the way for an ambassador to talk before a casual member of the public?

"I'll enquire," he said in a tone of pained caution, and went away with the drawing.

"Well, well, what next?" said Sir Alfred, turning eagerly to Allison.

Allison related the report from Casello that a self-styled cousin had come to take away Camilla, and then her disappearance at noon-day from the open road outside Saragosta, the

fruitless search for her, and the discovery of her parasol hanging in a tree.

“Capital girl!” here interjected Sir Alfred.

Allison produced Ladzinski’s sketch of the supposed cousin, and noted that this was the man whom he had himself seen in the church in conference with the agent, and whom Ladzinski had seen not many minutes before he left Camilla; beside the sketch he laid, first, the photograph of Vincenzo Veneroni, and, secondly, a newly made, exquisite little drawing of the heroine herself. Upon this last the attention of Sir Alfred immediately fixed itself.

“Eh? What? Is *this* the young lady? Do you mean to say she is as pretty as all this?”

“Quite,” said Allison with sober brevity.

“Well, well! And this the father, you say? Fine head. And this? Oh, we know this. This is the Marchese Veneroni.”

“It *is*, is it?” cried Allison. “And what about him? Who is he?”

Sir Alfred, who had sat down to look at the portraits, threw himself back in his chair.

“Well, I suppose the simplest answer is that he is a bit of a blackguard. And that’s the whole of your tale, is it?”

“There’s one other thing. Ladzinski has a strong impression that Miss Veneroni’s step-father, a man called Menosotti, has had some

hand in this. I know nothing about Menosotti, but Miss Veneroni and all her friends without exception appear to detest him. And this is Ladzinski's drawing of him."

"He draws uncommonly well, your friend Ladzinski. I suppose he is one of the nephews of the old countess in Paris; I remember hearing that one of them painted. And this is Menosotti; I thought so. Well, your young friend has got a nice set of relations about her, I must say."

"You know Menosotti too?"

"Know him! Heaven forbid! But I know about him. He lives on sham plots and false reports, and he's an ally, or was, of Raniero's."

"Raniero?"

"Our friend whose portrait you showed me in the first place. Young Ladzinski is probably right."

"He has gone after him to Milan."

"Who? After whom?"

"Ladzinski, after Menosotti."

Sir Alfred whistled.

"Alone?"

"Yes."

"I wish I had seen him first."

"You think it is dangerous?"

"I remember——well, you don't want Menosotti's past in detail, but I can tell you he

would not have many scruples about killing a man who stood in his way."

Allison sat full of anxious terrors.

"Well, we'll hope for the best," said Sir Alfred cheerfully. "A young fellow who has knocked about the world as those Ladzinskis have done ought to know how to take care of himself, and such of 'em as I have known were neither fools nor cowards. As to this matter of Miss Veneroni, I'll tell you exactly what I will do. I'll find out from the very surest source whether there ever was a plot at all. I'll get a first-class detective put on the track of the marquis, and I'll lay the whole matter, personally and privately, before the king. I take it, Miss Veneroni's friends don't want her name shouted in every European newspaper, and if there's one thing surer than another, it is that England and Italy don't want an international row about an affair of this sort. I have spoken to you quite openly—never could see any sense in beating about the bush myself—and I trust to your discretion to hold your tongue, and not do anything off your own bat. Come here, this evening, a little after ten, and ask for Seymour. By the way, you had better leave me your address, and Ladzinski's. Thank-you; good-morning. You did quite right to come to me direct."

Allison departed, carrying away an even heavier load of anxiety than he had brought ; while Sir Alfred was left to reflect that it was long since he had had so cheerful a morning.

XVII

THE PERSISTENCE OF THE MARQUIS

RELUCTANTLY Camilla entered the long saloon. The marchioness, who was alone, came to meet her, and took her hand with quite a friendly air.

“My dear child,” she said, “I congratulate you and myself. Your family will owe you endless gratitude.” She drew the girl to a chair near her own. “Our Ottavio has caused us hitherto one serious grief—his unwillingness to marry. Proud though he is of his name and his race, he seemed willing to let them die. He was himself an only child. I was childless; your father was lost to us, and he also left no son. Our hopes were centred in Ottavio. He was sought everywhere; ladies of the highest rank and of the noblest character were proposed to him; never was any young man more popular with ladies—and yet!” She made a little despairing gesture. “There must have been some reason, some

tragic story, some deep emotion of those days, of which he has never spoken."

She sank into silence, and her eyes under their drooped lids watched Camilla. Her calculation appeared to have been just; the girl's face wore a look of dreamily absorbed attention; that surest arrow of appeal—a man's romantic past—had doubtless gone home once more to a girlish imagination. Camilla was, in fact, thinking with interest and curiosity of the difference between the timid youth full of a genuine and trembling passion, and the dominating man who looked with the same eyes, spoke with the same seductive voice, and measured the value of every glance and every syllable. It seemed to Camilla that she could have been in love with her cousin Ottavio when he was eighteen, and before he had learned the exercise of his charms.

The marchioness had taken up her tale. "In vain have I urged upon him, even with tears; in vain has our director, with all the authority of the Church, urged upon him his duty to his house. We had grown to despair. But you have come like an enchantress—you who yourself bear the honoured name, and can understand what it would be to let it die."

The lady spoke with emotion, and paused for a reply.

Camilla, unprepared for attack in this quarter, had no answer ready.

Her aunt proceeded gently, almost caressingly: "A happy life lies before you. Not to many women is given such love as you have inspired. The marchese seems only to live for your presence; his eyes follow your steps; his very voice alters when he speaks your name."

"I am very sorry——" Camilla began.

"Nay, you should rejoice. A power is in your hands like that of the saints—to give happiness to one who worships you. Ottavio is a man of strong feeling; it is ill to rouse his anger; but where he loves he is easily led, and his love will be as sure as his anger is terrible."

Again Camilla had the vision of Severyn standing in the marquis's path and struck down. It held her silent and absorbed, watching as if she beheld it with bodily eyes.

"I do not disguise it," the elder lady continued. "At first I disapproved of this scheme. All that I knew of you displeased me. But even if I had continued to disapprove, I could not have resisted the marchese's will. He is the master and the head of the house. Moreover, when I saw what he felt, I could but bow to the will of Heaven, which has chosen in this manner to grant our prayers. Gladly and will-

ingly I welcome you into the family to which you belong."

Bending forward, she applied her lips solemnly to Camilla's forehead.

Camilla naturally protested that these hopes were mistaken, and that she neither had accepted nor would accept the proposal of the marquis.

The marchioness refused to be angry.

"At least," she said, "you are a Veneroni, one of our race and the nearest of our kin. Be content to stay with us and to know us. The rest may be left to nature and to the love of Ottavio."

She drew from her finger a ring of old Italian workmanship—a trefoil of dark-blue enamel and gold, springing from a diamond centre.

"This," she said, "belonged to your grandmother. It was your grandfather's first gift to his bride, and my husband's to me. I had begun to think that it would never be worn by any other of our name."

She slipped the ring upon Camilla's half reluctant finger.

"Surely you are not unwilling to take it from an old woman who wishes to think of you as the daughter she never had?"

"If you are giving it to me as Camilla

Veneroni, I will take it very gratefully and gladly ; but if you are giving it to the marquis's future wife——”

“Come, come,” said the marchioness, patting the hand that wore the ring. “Let us say that I give it to you as my niece.”

“In that case, thank you very heartily. It is the only thing which I have ever possessed belonging to my father's family.”

The marchioness looked at her with a good deal of friendliness.

“You possess their name,” said she, “and perhaps their temper.”

She raised her head and listened. So did Camilla. There were sounds in the house of voices and of steps. Was this the rescue of which Camilla always dreamed ?

The door opened and gave entrance to the marquis.

“Our guest, I suppose, is come,” said his aunt.

“He is come, and will take some refreshment after his journey.”

She rose and went towards the door. Camilla had been quick to follow her movement, and was now following her retreat.

The marquis, crossing their path on his way to open the door, said, “Stay, marchesina.”

Camilla hastened to draw closer to the marchioness, who, however, paused and held her back. Camilla felt the trembling of the fingers that detained her. His aunt, too, it seemed, feared him. Involuntarily her own candid questioning eyes went to the other woman's face.

"You must stay here, my dear," the marchioness whispered. "You must not anger the marchese."

A little push directed her back into the room, and the skirts of the marchioness rustled hastily away.

The marquis, turning back with his hand on the closed door, stood for a moment silent, and Camilla, as she faced him, was compelled once more to admit the excellence of his exterior. His whole silhouette, dark against the white door, was like a master's painting, or like the pose of an extraordinarily artistic actor. The black of the hair, the warm, brown tones of flesh, the fine line of profile, melting below the ear into the strong sweep of the shoulder and running down in long muscular curves to the square fingers on the door-knob, presented an admirable combination of strength, ease, and grace. Camilla had met no other human being of whose mere physical presence she was so acutely and unremittingly conscious.

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He came towards her, earnest, observant, without his maddening smile; and when he was close by, lifted the hand with the ring, looked down at it for an instant, then raising at the same time her hand and his own eyes, kissed the ringed finger.

She stepped back hastily with an angry blush.

"Ah!" said the marquis upon a note of reproach, regret, and entreaty.

Camilla resisted her first impulse to snatch off the ring. After all, why should she acknowledge in it any significance?

"When you come to Rome," said the marquis, "and see the portraits of our ancestors, you will find that ring painted as far back as five generations ago."

"But I shall not go to Rome," said Camilla.

"Not until we have been to England," he answered calmly.

He began to tell her of the Palazzo Veneroni, its size, its antiquity, the portraits, the gardens. All this was told quietly and easily, in a tone that might pass for mere cousinliness. Camilla, genuinely interested, and making no attempt to disguise her interest, listened attentively. Perhaps her real charm had never before been so clearly shown to him.

"Ah!" he said at last with a long sigh, "I

knew that you would care as I care for all these things."

She started a little, and her face resumed its defensive air.

"I felt from the first moment the link between us; I knew that you were the marchesa for whom my house has waited empty. You draw back, you erect your pretty barriers of impatience and rebellion; but you know it too. Your words deny, but your face acknowledges—yes, and your heart."

Camilla, with the ardent eyes upon her and the whole air about her full of the deep caressing voice, began to ask herself whether it was not indeed true, and whether this strange inner tumult was not indeed her heart's acknowledgment. The voice went on; she scarcely followed its words. The persuasive, endearing cadences had the power not of speech but of music; the eyes held her, more persuasive, more insistent than the speech; and Nature, the perverse and primitive match-maker, who is for ever trying to urge her children over the verge of pitfalls, began to murmur in the girl's Italian blood, and vaguely, dimly, to picture the touch of the man's arms about her and the warm murmur of his accents at her ear. And perhaps, if the marquis had been a degree more patient, a degree more delicate of perception

the prize might at that crisis have fallen to him. He saw the first dawn of change in her candid eyes, judged her by his own impenetrability, and took it for permitted, deliberate invitation. He suffered the flush of triumph to run openly across his face, laid his two hands on the arms of the girl, and stooped towards her.

But he had mistaken the nature of his quarry. Camilla was of the women who can give themselves but cannot let themselves be taken. With a sudden rage of repulsion, she wound herself free from the grasping hands and the approaching face, moved several steps away, and stood turned from him.

The anger of the Marchese Ottavio Veneroni was evidently different in kind and in manifestation from that of his Anglicised cousin. He may possibly have noted this rebuff as an item for future repayment to his wife, but at the moment he permitted himself not even an exclamation. She heard him follow her, heard him utter an apology that was also a reproach. For a moment she stood averted, still full of terrors and tumults. Then, some instinct warning her that her silence would be interpreted assentingly, she turned sharply and faced him.

The marquis was startled. Her eyes were

wet; the wavering, varying tones of delicate pink had vanished and left her very pale, so that the fundamental, sternly-classic lines of brow and mouth stood out clear. He saw, as he had never seen before, the truth of his own declaration, that there was a likeness between them. For the first time he felt an instant's doubt of his own ultimate success—an instant's doubt whether it were worth while to succeed. To crush this resolute opposition—yes, that would be glorious; but to circumvent it and find it after all not crushed! Yet, what power he must already have gained over her if he could move her thus!

He brought a chair to her; he was careful to bring it from between her and the door.

"You are faint; you are ill," he said gently. "I have frightened you."

She sat down without reply; her mind was busy with herself, not with him.

The marquis, watching her with an air of tender solicitude, knelt down beside her, and slowly, gently, almost timidly laid a hand over one of hers as it lay upon the arm of the chair. The posture was a youthful one, not lightly to be attempted by mature Britons; but it became the marquis admirably. Humility in the proud ~~the~~ imaginably violent has wonderful at-

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Camilla, who had been indeed a good deal shaken, sat looking down vaguely at the hand upon the chair. It was characteristically Italian—square, strong, skilful, supple, massive rather than elegant, thick from back to palm, and suggesting to English eyes a bulkier frame than that to which it generally belongs. The force of contrast, perhaps, brought to Camilla's mind the hand of Ladzinski—long, slender, with fine articulations, and in particular a delicately-finished juncture of hand and wrist—a hand that was all expression like his face.

She felt no desire to withdraw her own hand, nor to rise and go away. For the moment the reaction of strong excitement was upon her. There seemed nothing in this dull languor that could yield the marquis either response or repulse. But such a mood could not last long. The colour began to return to her cheeks, the resolution to her mind; she sat upright.

The marquis stood up.

“Father Ambrogio is here,” he said, “and our marriage has nothing to wait for. As to your refusals, your little resistances, they are straws—straws on the wind. And if my country were against me instead of for me, if the law forbade, if another man stood between us, if you were another man's wife, all would

matter nothing—all would be straws to be swept away. *Is there another man?*”

His voice, rising on a note of passion, leaped into sudden fierceness.

Camilla shrank.

“There is no other man,” she said faintly, and then was angry with herself for lack of courage.

She rose to her feet and spoke boldly. “It needs no barrier of another man to strengthen me against you.”

“You are mistaken,” the marquis answered quite cheerfully. “If you loved another man—but you do not yet know what love is. You will learn from me—and it will be a passion, your love, my cousin.”

Camilla moved away slowly, scornfully.

“It may be what it will,” she said, “but it will never be for such a man as you.”

The words had rather the fervour of aspiration than the firmness of conviction.

She was on her guard now, less against him than against the disloyal something in herself that responded to him. She vowed to herself that he should never see the response. She had grown pale again in this struggle—the inward struggle which exhausts the strong and passes lightly over the weak. The marquis slowly smiled; she was glad of that. The

smile that roused her to arms was her ally. Her enemy, the enemy that called to the traitor within, spoke through the honeyed voice and the eyes of bold appeal. They came again, these enemies; the smile melted into speech.

“You do not understand how my hope, my life, my future, hangs upon you. No power of any king is such a power as you have over me. Is it nothing to hold in your hand the life and death of a man, to be able to heal suffering and restore hope to the despairing? Does all this mean nothing to you?”

She stood in stern and rigid silence.

He tried another note.

“Are you not afraid? Have you no thought of how a man’s love rejected may turn to fury—of the temptation to make you mine in death if not in life?”

Camilla slightly smiled. It was not of his anger that she was afraid. She continued her course in silence towards the door.

The marquis planted himself resolutely before it.

“Listen,” said he. “Our marriage is fixed, and fixed for within the twenty-four hours. The only choice that rests with you is to yield willingly or unwillingly. In this house there is no one but the priest who will perform the marriage, our aunt, whose heart is set upon it,

and the servants. You reckon upon help from your English friends. Let me tell you that they have made their appeal already, and that to the king in person ; and have been told that the naturalization of your father was an impossibility ; that you are yourself an Italian subject ; and that your liberty is forfeited to the law. To me comes an order to forward within a week the certificate of your marriage or to give you up to imprisonment."

"Then give me up," said Camilla.

"I would kill you sooner," cried the marquis.

Camilla drew herself up ; a sudden gust of bitter impatience showed her where a weapon might pierce.

"In the hope of inheriting my money ?" she said, and succeeded in giving to the words a calculated and cutting note of scorn.

The weapon did pierce ; a faint change of face, a stiffening, a veiling gave the acknowledgment ; she seemed even to trace a moment's irresolution before he decided upon his answer.

"Ah, you are cruel," he said gently ; and behind her anger she was compelled to feel a little ashamed of a suspicion uttered without full belief.

But her anger still ruled. "Cruel !" she

repeated with a laugh, and threw out her hand as if she called the walls to witness. “How cruel you are !’ says the wolf to the lamb !”

This time the marquis indubitably reddened ; she looked with terrified triumph for an outburst of anger. But his self-control was of a sturdier quality than hers. He merely said, “I cannot quarrel with you. Say what you will ; it is enough for me to hear your voice. It is not I who have put you into the position where you stand ; it is yourself. My part in it has been to save, to extricate, to find for you a path of safety. There is no other path. As your cousin, as your guardian, it would be my duty to lead you to it. Love has come to make the duty a joy, and your unwillingness comes to make the joy a torture. Do you suppose that if there were time, if you were free and safe, I would hurry you like this ? Ah, Camilla, cease to behave like a foolish child. See”—he set open the door, and stood back from it—“I will not force you to hear me. I know that you are a woman of courage and resolution. Call your courage and your resolution now to face your own position. Think of what I have said. See for yourself that it must be so. If you can see any other path, speak plainly. I am ready to listen. But if you find none, give yourself frankly and freely ; and remember—

remember that I love you, and that my life has known no suffering like that which you have cost me during the last few days."

He spoke gravely, gently, sadly; and his face full of pain, of longing, of passion restrained, held an appeal more powerful than the words. Camilla, with her hand actually upon the door, felt it almost impossible not to turn back, not to yield some comforting assurance, not to grant herself the immediate satisfaction of seeing his face change to happiness, and of feeling herself borne away on the current. For a moment she lingered, for a moment his eyes held her; then the door was between them, and she had escaped.

The marquis, when the door had closed, said, "Ouf!" let himself drop with a great sigh into the nearest chair, and passed his hand wearily over his forehead.

As for Camilla, she carried with her a sense of sheer consternation. She had been near not so much to defeat as to surrender.

The first thing that met her eyes in her own room was an unfamiliar pale-coloured something lying folded on the foot of the bed. Nearer inspection revealed a fringed shawl, made of the finest of soft silks, and coloured throughout its shining surface with the faintest breath of pink.

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Camilla was in no mood of gracious acceptance. The offered gift stung like an insult. She caught up the soft packet, and flung it angrily far out on the marble landing.

XVIII

CONSTITUTIONAL METHODS

ON presenting himself in the evening at the British Embassy, Allison was shown into a comfortable sitting-room where Mr. Seymour and another Englishman were playing chess.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Allison," said the secretary. "Sir Alfred will be at liberty in a few minutes. Mr. Horace Legarde. I think Mr. Legarde knows your friend, Mr. Ladzinski."

"Which of them is it?" asked Mr. Legarde. "There were three: Karol, Romàn, and Severyn."

"This is Severyn."

"Ah! the painting one. Romàn is musical. Karol was the one I knew best. He is here in Rome."

"And he is a brother?"

"No; they were all cousins, and all orphans; and they were all brought up by the old countess, their aunt. Severyn was the youngest and the cleverest."

Allison inquired the address of the cousin now in Rome, and resolved to seek him out in the morning.

A whistle sounded. Seymour lifted the end of a tube and listened.

"Sir Alfred is disengaged now. Will you come with me, Mr. Allison?"

Sir Alfred was discovered in occupation of a deep and comfortable arm-chair; at his elbow was what looked like a modest glass of whisky and water, and opposite to him sat a man of some two or three and thirty, lightly but muscularly built, grey-eyed, with a thin, well-moulded face, and a bearing that proclaimed the soldier.

"This is Mr. Allison," said Sir Alfred. "Mr. Allison, this is Count Karol Ladzinski, your friend's cousin. He is a captain in the Italian army, and we have got permission for him to follow his cousin by to-night's train."

"I am thankful to hear it," said Allison, meeting gladly the hand and the gaze of Severyn's cousin.

"Let me thank you for your friendship for him—and for Camilla too," said the count, speaking with the accent and the inflexions of Severyn, and with the same voice on a deeper note.


"Captain Ladzinski," said Sir Alfred, "has

been confirming my impressions of the Marchese Veneroni. It is a good old family, rather come down in the world. He has squandered every penny he could lay hands upon of his own or other people's; been mixed up in various scandals about other men's wives, and shady money transactions; and last of all, had a hand in a swindling company, and only escaped prison by the skin of his teeth. Since then, he has gone into retirement, and the last report was that he had married, or was going to marry, a wealthy American. Now I understand that Miss Veneroni is partly American."

Allison was unable to utter a word.

Karol Ladzinski, who had risen and made his farewells, looked back from the door. "At the very worst," said he grimly, "this marchese is not immortal. There are plenty of honest fellows among us ready to cross swords with him for the sake of setting her free."

"He would be ready enough himself, no doubt," remarked Sir Alfred as the door closed; "and, upon my word, the duel seems a useful institution for scoundrels of that sort. Sit down, Mr. Allison, and let me tell you the result of our inquiries. In the first place, there neither is, nor ever has been, any plot. The whole thing is a plant. I thought from the beginning that tale was a little thin. No



man out of a lunatic asylum would think of trusting Raniero with a real plot. But for a man like Veneroni, he would be the very tool. Veneroni, it appears, was observed in the town of Dalarocca some three weeks or so ago ; and the family have a sort of villa at a place called Benivieni, about twenty miles north of Saragosta. It belongs to the Marchesa Serafina, the widow of this man's uncle. She's a respectable old woman enough, I understand, but rather under the thumb of her precious nephew. If she is there, and if he has put the girl with her, it is not so bad. Ladzinski tells me she is a Protestant ; that may delay things a little. I hope we may yet be in time. A good deal depends upon herself ; and Veneroni's a persuasive rascal. My notion is, that you and Seymour and a high police official should set out by the midnight train for Florence, and push on as fast as you can to Benivieni. Orders will be sent to the officer in command at Arano to provide a military escort. If Veneroni is inclined to make any difficulties, that will bring him to reason. Does the plan suit you ?”

“ Perfectly. I am immeasurably obliged.”

“ Oh, not at all. That's what we are here for,” returned this most unofficial of functionaries. “ One thing more ; I don't want you to go back to your hotel ; it is three to one that

you have been followed. I propose that Legarde should go, taking a note from you, pay your bill, and bring your bag in a cab to the station. When it is time to start, you and Seymour shall go out by way of the garden and stables, and get into the carriage there. It will drive out of the stables seeming to be empty, and probably won't be followed."

"You seem to have thought of everything, and smoothed every difficulty," said Allison gratefully.

"Oh, this is nothing," said Sir Alfred. "Just think what it would have been in the old days, with the whole Government secretly against us. This is all plain sailing. Now, if you'll just write that note to the hotel people; there's paper, and so forth, on that table."

He rang the bell, and Allison's note was handed to a grave English servant. "For Mr. Seymour," said his master; "and get a meal laid at once for this gentleman and Mr. Seymour. By the way," turning again to Allison, as the man went out, "we find that Menosotti has just gone to Florence. Ladzinski has telegraphed to his cousin to meet him there. Now is there anything that we have forgotten? Have you a pistol with you?"

"No," said Allison, remembering, with a smile, his previous expedition under arms.

“ It might come handy. We’ll tell Seymour to take a pair. You’ll find Seymour a capital fellow; and I believe he is not so confoundedly diplomatic when my back is turned, and he hasn’t to keep up my dignity for me. Bet you anything you like, he tells you before you get to Florence that mine is a Palmerstonian manner. It is his formula of consolation. I don’t think he could put up with me at all if he hadn’t that. Your portrait of Miss Veneroni is in the hands of the police—hope you don’t mind that. It is important they should know her. Ladzinski has been telling me something about her. Fine girl, altogether, I should think; but, good Lord, what imprudence! Well, if she comes through this safe, she will probably have learned her lesson. Remember, if it’s any convenience, you can bring her here at any moment. Lady Dunnington will take charge of her. I don’t know but what it might be the very best thing, if tales have got about, to bring her here, and let her go about with my wife, and be married here, rather publicly, to young Ladzinski.”

Allison could not but wonder what Karol Ladzinski had said to make the marriage appear so probable. He began to utter thanks on the young lady’s behalf, but was not permitted to finish,

“Pooh! pooh! Wait till we have done something for her. Now come, and get some food.”

Half an hour later the travellers were taking farewell.

“Good-bye, Mr. Allison, and good luck! Good-bye, Seymour! Take care of yourself, my boy; and don't stay longer than you need. You know I am sure to get into a scrape without you.”

It certainly seemed to Allison that these words were accompanied by a wink addressed to himself. Seymour replied with his usual judicious propriety, and, with his usual discretion, abstained from further speech until they were well away from the precincts of the Embassy.

“I sometimes think,” he then remarked, “that Sir Alfred's manner is at times a little too Palmerstonian.”

Allison was obliged to laugh.

“He told me you would say that.”

Seymour looked pained, murmured “No; did he really?” and relapsed into resigned meditation.

At the station they were joined by Karol Ladzinski. Of the police official Allison saw nothing, but Seymour afterwards reported that he had seen him, and been seen by him.

The train moved. The Polish-Italian captain and Allison looked at each other with a sigh of satisfaction and a feeling on each side of established friendship.

"Now tell me," said Karol, "all about this whole matter."

"Well," said Allison, a little doubtfully; "there are parts of the story which I promised Miss Veneroni not to tell to any one. It is true that I have told them to the Ambassador."

"And the Ambassador," remarked Seymour drily, "has told them to me, and to the police, and to the Minister of the Interior; and no doubt by this time to Lady Dunnington, so that it is hardly worth while to be so very scrupulous."

"Sir Alfred," Allison began, "is really a little too——"

"Palmerstonian?" interjected Seymour, with quite an unofficial smile.

Allison hereupon began to tell his tale for the second time that day, while the dark Campagna and the shadowed sapphire of the Italian night went streaming by, and the rattle of the railway wheels broke in upon his words. The faces of his companions were bent towards him in eager attention. Karol's alertly calm, soldierly, with every thought showing in it like a ripple in clear water; Seymour's critical, rather ostenta-

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tiously inscrutable, but by no means indifferent. Allison, while he spoke, was feeling all the time that every minute brought him nearer to Camilla, and that once more chance had put into his hands, and not into Ladzinski's, the opportunity of rescuing her.

XIX

UNCONSTITUTIONAL METHODS

ON arriving in Milan, Ladzinski went at once to seek the detective whom he had been employing to observe Menosotti, and to whom he had telegraphed from Dalarocca. He found a letter explaining that Menosotti had quitted Milan, that the detective had gone in pursuit, and that a telegram announcing their whereabouts would arrive as soon as possible.

Ladzinski spent several long hours in Milan, unable to find satisfaction in the pictures of the gallery, the aisles of the cathedral, or the excellent cooking of the hotel. The telegram, when at last it came, gave an address in Florence. He took the next train, and on Tuesday afternoon was sitting in confabulation with his detective. The lodging selected by this worthy was in a small street lying between the Via Maggio and the Via Toscanella. The reason of the choice was soon explained. Menosotti was

staying at an inn immediately opposite, the door of which was commanded by the detective's window, while the house in which the convenient window was situated, had the advantage of a second exit into a side-street, so that the goings and comings of Ladzinski were not necessarily overlooked. Menosotti, it appeared, had been joined by a companion, had gone out with him and returned with him. The detective, busy with the past as well as the present, had unearthed an old connection between Menosotti and the agent, who was identified by the name of Raniero.

It was clear that Ladzinski must defer his visitation until the intended victim should be reported alone. Having secured a room next the detective's, he went out into the white Florentine streets, where the warm air pulsated like the breath of some great living thing, and proceeded to Mrs. Wilson's *pension* in the Piazza D'Arno. Guendolen, when his name was brought to her, came flying into the room.

"You have news?" she cried.

"Of Menosotti, not of her."

He expounded his position. "You see, my chance of catching him may come at any minute; and if I get anything from him, I shall want to lose no time in getting off. Will you tell me where you will be at different times



to-morrow, so that I may be sure of catching you without delay?"

"I'll be here; I won't go out."

To this, however, Ladzinski demurred. She might have to wait till late; the suspense would be wearying; he could as easily come to her in one of the galleries.

Finally they laid out an elaborate scheme for every hour of Guendolen's morrow, and Ladzinski carried away a copy.

"I shall certainly come," he declared, "unless some misfortune happens, and I don't expect misfortunes from Menosotti; he is too great a coward."

Guendolen returned that she should be on thorns till she saw him, and that perhaps there might by to-morrow be a letter from Laurence, with the account of his visit to the Ambassador.

Ladzinski, awaking next morning to the sound of a clock which was not the clock of Saragosta, and to doors and windows in the wrong places, had a moment's bewilderment, followed by eager recollection of what lay before him. It was later than he wished. Dressing hurriedly, he went to seek the detective, who had disappeared, leaving a note behind him. Menosotti had gone out with his comrade, and the watcher was in pursuit.

The morning passed away in unfulfilled ex-

pectation. It was not until after two o'clock that the detective reported Menosotti returned and alone.

Ladzinski at once crossed over to the inn, asked for Menosotti, and saying in an indifferent tone that he knew the room, was allowed to go up unaccompanied. He opened the door quietly, and having stepped in, locked it behind him.

Menosotti, at the sound of the key grating in the lock, turned round from the table at which he was sitting, and found himself confronted by Ladzinski and by a pistol.

"What is the meaning of this?" he began, but his voice shook, and so did his knees.

"Pray sit down again. I will explain my business in a few words. Miss Veneroni, as I think you know, disappeared from her friends last Sunday—"

Menosotti gave an insolent shrug.

"Eh? it is not the first time," said he.

He hoped, no doubt, to divert Camilla's lover into the by-path of angry denial, but he was disappointed.

"I have learnt that you have been in communication at various times with the man Raniero, who caused her to be detained before at Casello. I know also enough both of his history and yours to understand how very dis-

pleasing for you would be an appearance before an Italian court."

Menosotti broke into violent interruptions.

"You would do better to listen quietly. I am not in the least desirous of forestalling the offices of the Italian law. You will be left perfectly uninjured, on one condition—that you make a full confession of where Miss Veneroni is, and of the whole plot against her."

"I know nothing, I know nothing," Menosotti cried, wringing his hands.

"If not," Ladzinski quietly continued, "I shall shoot you without the slightest scruple."

Menosotti recovered himself a little.

"You are only making threats," said he. "You would be discovered. You would risk your life."

"There would be no risk in the matter; there would be certainty. I should lose my life if I took yours, I know that. I am ready. I am not in the least in the habit of telling lies. You will either tell me truly where she is, or I will shoot you and take the consequences."

"I have done nothing to her—nothing," shrieked Menosotti, running to and fro like an animal in a cage.

"I am waiting," Ladzinski admonished him.

Menosotti made a dart towards the window.

"If you call, I shall shoot as soon as any one comes to the door. It is locked, and the key is in my pocket."

Menosotti stopped short, staring, abject.

"Make haste. Some one may happen to come without your calling, and the result will be the same."

He broke out into complaints and reproaches—his room forcibly entered—his life threatened; who was Ladzinski to assume such rights? He would have justice.

"It is quite true. I have no manner of right to enter your room or to threaten you, still less to shoot you. If I go that length, justice will no doubt be done. Let that thought console you. And in the meantime another justice waits to be done—the release of Miss Veneroni. I will give you till the church clock strikes the half-hour. Then, if you have not spoken, I shall shoot."

The poor wretch sank into a chair, and fairly burst into tears. He was not a villain of any sturdiness.

"The marquis will kill me," he moaned.

Ladzinski's breath stood still. In an instant he had marshalled the indications, remembered the title of Camilla's grandfather, and resolved to risk a guess.

"Better take that chance than my certainty.

The Marchese Veneroni is not half so dangerous in the future as I am at this moment."

Menosotti let his hands fall from his face.

"Why do you ask me," he demanded, "if you know already?"

Ladzinski felt his heart leap at the acknowledgment.

"That sort of knowledge requires confirmation," he answered calmly. "But since you perceive my knowledge, beware how you lie."

Menosotti drew a deep sigh.

"It was in Rome," he began. "The marquis came to me; he inquired about her fortune; he tempted me with all sorts of rewards if I would bring her over and get her to marry him" (here, if he had but known it, a stab was dealt to Ladzinski fully equivalent to any pang of his own cowardice). "He suggested that she should be persuaded there was some republican plot like those in which her father used to have a hand. And he suggested that Raniero should go over to England with a letter."

"Then the marquis also was acquainted with your friend Raniero? That was convenient."

Menosotti started.

"And although he had never seen his cousin, he knew enough of her fortune to conceive the plan of entrapping her, and enough of her disposition to hit upon the likeliest scheme. He

must be a man of talent, the marquis. Finally, where is she?"

"I do not know."

"Try again; follow up the road to the northwest from Saragosta."

"Raniero has betrayed us!" exclaimed Menosotti, starting up.

"Then you had better save yourself in the same way. No prosecution will be undertaken against you if you confess everything. We will not even inquire who first sought the other, you or the marquis."

"I do not know where she is; it is heaven's truth. But the marquis has a house in the mountains, beyond Arano. I believe that she is there, but if not, I am not answerable. He did not trust me; he is full of suspicions; he is terrible, the marquis."

"There strikes the half-hour," remarked Ladzinski. "It is well that you have saved yourself. You will now sit down at that table and write that you conspired with the Marchese Veneroni, and with Raniero, to fabricate a false message and a false plot; that by these means Miss Veneroni was enticed to Italy, and that you believe her to be in the hands of the marquis at his house near Arano. When you have signed that and given it to me, you may write a second paper, promising immunity from

punishment to yourself in case your statement be found substantially correct, and I will sign that."

Menosotti obeyed meekly. Ladzinski, standing behind him, watched the writing of the two statements, then bidding his adversary go to a distance, he signed the second, retreated—still with his eye on Menosotti—to the door, and having unlocked and opened it, withdrew without losing sight of the door as he descended, and with his pistol still in evidence.

He did not return to his lodging. His own safety, now that he and he alone knew the story of Camilla, had become a thing to be preciously guarded. He went instead to the post-office, and sent a telegram bidding his detective meet him at four o'clock in the Piazza Pitti. He fixed that spot because Guendolen had arranged to be in the Pitti Palace from three to four.

Emerging into the colonnade of the Uffizi he glanced round sharply. Menosotti was nowhere visible, and the unknown man lighting a cigarette at the corner excited no suspicion.

"He will go to the police," Menosotti had told his subordinate. "If you cannot stop him before that it will be useless." But he had not been to the police; it was only to the post-office that he had been. The spy concluded

that it was not yet too late, and when Ladzinski with a rapid and decided step turned on to the Pont Vecchio, the other cautiously followed, and presently watched the grey figure diminishing in the narrow vista of the Via Guicciardini. Ladzinski went into the Pitti Palace. So did his pursuer. The rooms were very empty. A few copyists were at work delightfully undisturbed.

Ladzinski passed on, not with the slackened gait of a man visiting a picture gallery, but with the swift directness of one keeping an appointment. In the Hall of Jupiter stood a young lady with an open red volume in her hand. Ladzinski went straight to her. She turned with an eager look, and their hands met. Then they walked away together towards the quaint long passage which connects this palace with that of the Uffizi. In its solitudes they lingered, talking earnestly and long. The spy at last ventured to traverse the passage and walk by them. The language they spoke was unknown to him—probably, judging by the looks of the lady, English. He was obliged to go forward and wait for their emergence into the Uffizi.

They came down, by-and-by, towards the exit, and there parted, the young woman going out and the young man going back. He ran lightly up the stair, and passed quickly—but

with momentary pauses and swift glances of recognition at one and another of the statues—along the first corridor of the Uffizi, and again up the steps leading to the passage of communication.

His observer, as soon as this intention was clear, hurried forward towards those turns and nooks which lie at its further end.

Ladzinski came rapidly up the steps, across two little rooms full of engravings, and along the straight path above the river. All the galleries were empty, for closing time was approaching; these outlying departments were absolutely so. The pursuer alone stood in the further shadows and waited.

XX

THE CONVENT AT ARANO

CAMILLA sat in a gilded chair, her arm on the edge of a parti-coloured table, and in a similar chair opposite to her sat Father Ambrogio, a man of about fifty, whose thin, intelligent face bore the peculiar priestly stamp of mingled austerity and urbanity. For nearly three-quarters of an hour they had been in talk, and Camilla had listened civilly enough to all that he had urged of her own position, the marquis's affection, and of the opportunity offered her to re-establish her family, and make happy a husband whose previous life had been full of troubles, "and even—I do not conceal it from you—of errors." He bade her beware of refusing a good work laid upon her, and with it her own future happiness.

Camilla, however, could not admit either that the work was laid upon her or that she was competent to undertake it. She admired the skill with which moral warnings, worldly

inducements, and appeals to the probable emotions, were mingled—admired, but was not persuaded. She made but very few interrupting protests, and when the admonition had come to an end, explained quietly that she was absolutely resolved against consenting to such a marriage, that she would take no part in any ceremony, either civil or religious, and that if—which she could hardly believe possible—any such ceremony were performed in spite of her protests, she would never cease to declare its illegality, and to denounce the persons who took part in it.

Father Ambrogio gravely and with dignity replied that such a profanation of the Church's sacrament was quite inconceivable.

“Without your own consent no marriage is possible. I do not however despair of bringing you to see that your duty, as well as your safety and happiness, lie in obedience to the wishes of your friends.”

“You will waste your eloquence, Father, as the marquis has wasted his. No persuasion can move me to this marriage. I have told the marquis so from the beginning, and the marchioness also. To me it is incomprehensible that any persons should persist as they have done.”

She paused a moment and stood up.

The priest, with a further word or two of pious exhortation, let her go.

The marquis coming presently to hear the result of his admonitions, found him very grave.

“Still obstinate?” said the marquis.

Father Ambrogio shook his head.

“I fear you will not succeed in this enterprise. If you will take my advice, you will give up the attempt.”

The marquis declared angrily that he would not be thwarted by a girl; that she had already wavered; that it would be ridiculous to desist after having spent so much time, trouble, and money, and might even be dangerous, if she were permitted to appeal to the representatives of England. The only safety now lay in going on.

“There is no priest in Italy,” Father Ambrogio returned, “who would consent to perform the service in face of the bride’s protest—even supposing that any functionary could be found to witness the civil contract. And you know well, signor marchese, that no such official could be found.”

“If the religious service had been performed first, perhaps,” suggested the marquis. “It is, of course, irregular to perform it first; but in such a case——”

“It is impossible,” said Father Ambrogio firmly. “If you are resolved to proceed, you must have patience, and go differently to work. As long as she has you before her eyes, and is able to refuse you daily, she will continue to do so. A little neglect and uncertainty may work wonders. Better send her to Arano to the convent, letting her clearly understand that she is to remain there until she accepts your conditions—and let her remain for some time.”

The marquis received this advice with dissatisfaction and dissent. For a few minutes he felt disposed to try the effect of a bribe upon the syndic of Arano, and to dispense with the religious ceremony altogether; but a little cooler reflection told him that the syndic would certainly be an ally not for himself, but for Camilla.

Still, in considerable displeasure, he came to dinner, and having contemplated the position, deliberately permitted his ill-humour to display itself. Its manifestation, however, was cut short. Early in the course of the meal a letter was brought to him, and he went out to speak to the messenger.

Returning, he took aside the priest, and the two, standing at the end of the long room, spoke together in subdued tones. Then they

resumed their places, and the marquis said :
“ Father Ambrogio finds himself unfortunately compelled to leave us earlier than he intended —this very evening in fact.”

His aunt began to express her regrets.

“ This being so, he has consented to take charge of our cousin Camilla.”

Camilla looked up sharply, but disdained to put any question.

“ I have already directed Marietta to prepare her luggage. The carriage will be here in half an hour.”

Was she going to be handed back, Camilla wondered, to the Italian authorities? Be it how it might, this looked like desistance on the marquis's part, and so far was acceptable.

Nobody ate much more. Marietta came in with a cloak. The marquis, with a word of apology, went away, and presently came back with an unaddressed letter, which he handed to Father Ambrogio. Very soon Camilla had given, as she hoped, her last look into the mirror, which on the first day had reflected her countenance of surprise, and was coming down duly furnished with hat and gloves. The marchioness kissed her niece with some show of emotion, and gave her the farewell, lacking to the English language, which looks forward to a future meeting.

Downstairs the marquis was standing by the open door ; his long look clung to her as she passed, his step followed her across the outer court. A carriage was visible beyond the open arch of the door. For a moment the two were standing together upon the white road that led to liberty and England. He drew a step nearer ; she had a momentary terror that he meant to take her in his arms. But the marquis had not studied her for four days in vain, and he knew better than that. He gently lifted the edge of her cloak and put it to his lips, and, in spite of herself, she was a little moved.

Of the priest, who sat opposite to her silent, with his eyes upon a book, she presently asked : "Where am I going ?"

He answered briefly : "To the convent at Arano."

The white ribbon of road unrolled before them, the scent of pines was in the air, in the sky the cloudless sunset was beginning. The journey lasted about an hour. Camilla had seen no town ; the building before which they stopped had fields beyond its walls.

They were admitted to a bare white room, where the abbess presently came to them. She was a woman well advanced in years, the fine features of her race accentuated by thin-

ness ; her face of a uniform tint looked like a delicate carving in old ivory. She held in her hand the letter which Father Ambrogio had brought, and looked earnestly from it at the girl, whom in gentle and pious formulas she bade welcome. The carriage was waiting, and Father Ambrogio's stay was very brief. The abess without further words summoned a nun, who seemed inferior in social, as well as in ecclesiastical standing, and put Camilla into her charge. She did not mention the visitor as her niece, nor indeed had she addressed her as such.

Camilla was conducted along a corridor bare and scrupulously clean. A door was opened, and her guide, who had a kind, timid face, smiled gently as she exhibited the tiny room. The window was high and faced the east ; the evening light was a little cold ; walls, floor, and narrow white bed were alike spotless. To Camilla this little maidenly cell seemed to promise peace and protection. The relief of being free, if only for four and twenty hours, from the marquis was amazing.

Presently she began to unfold the something in her own heart, which she had shrunk until now from examining. She acknowledged to herself that she had, not once only, had moments of inclination to relent. The inclina-

tion had been real; not a mere effect of fear or of weariness. The recollection was horrible: a cruel stab to her proud self-esteem; a despicable flaw in her own nature. A sinking sense beset her of degradation, of inner weakness that might perhaps recur. Then, suddenly, with a great leap of the heart, with a shock of horror, and yet with a warm illumination of sympathy, she realized the forces of temptation. The horizons widened around her; the dangers, the pitfalls, and the heroisms of life were all larger than she had foreseen them, and human nature incredibly more variable and complex. New thoughts surged up from depths unplumbed until now by her girlish experiences, and took form in words characteristically English, indefinite and unemphatic. "I shall never be hard again on men for the things they do." That murmur between the walls of the convent-cell was the harvest of Camilla's self-reproach—the first step on the journey from the wholesale condemnations of inexperience to the wider tolerance whose increasing comprehension brings increasing pardon. Being, as she was, courageous, and of a spirit readier to do than to suffer, these new vistas presently ceased to be mere avenues of horror; a call to battle rang along them. She beheld the book of life—unlike what the moralists said of it—revealing

hopes and fears, lights and shadows intenser than her expectations, and a personal battle infinitely better worth fighting. The world had borne to her imagination the aspect of a stage for her domination ; she saw it now as the field not of ascendancy, but of ceaseless struggle, wherein to have made a fair stand, and to escape egregious final downfall, is to have done well. A new humility showed her, not only that she was no greater or stronger than her fellows, but also, which is the healthier aspect of the same truth, that they were no less and no weaker than she.

A bell rang. Her conductress came and led her to the chapel. She heard the prayers contentedly. This conventual life, which she could not have borne to live, had a delicate atmosphere of serenity, very healing to the fatigued and dissatisfied onlooker. She slept that night calmly and happily in the narrow bed, and waked to the sound of a tinkling bell, and to a yellow sheaf of sunlight shining through the high window upon the ceiling.

XXI

THE VISITATION OF BENIVIENI

IT was not until after mid-day on Thursday that Allison, Seymour, and the police official, whose name was Cardolina, arrived at Benivieni. A lieutenant and twelve soldiers were with them, of whom six were to accompany their entrance and six to watch the house from without.

Cardolina, the representative of Italian law, rang the bell, as Sacchetti had done just a week earlier at Casello. A porter by-and-by appeared. Cardolina asked for the marquis, and the whole procession advanced into the quadrangle. Allison glanced up at the windows with a feeling that Camilla's hand must surely wave from one of them. Cardolina, with a quick sign to the others, followed the porter through the wide house door, and the phalanx entered.

In the spacious hall they paused; the ser-

vant disappeared, and presently a dark-eyed serious gentleman came quietly down the broad staircase. His countenance expressed a little surprise but no alarm. He looked from one to another, and waited for them to announce their business.

Seymour, whose Italian Allison had already observed to be excellent, said very politely that he came from the British Ambassador, and had instructions to see Miss Camilla Veneroni, an English subject, reported to his Excellency as being in the marquis's house at Benivieni.

The marquis gently shook his head.

"I am sorry," he said politely; "my cousin has left us."

Allison drew a sharp breath, and the eye of the marquis fixed itself upon him.

"You admit then," said Seymour, "that Miss Veneroni has been here?"

"Admit! I do not understand you. Assuredly the marchesina has been here. She wrote to me from—from Saragosta, I think. I met her on Sunday afternoon at Dalarocca, and until yesterday she stayed here with her aunt, the Marchesa Serafina Veneroni. I understood that she was returning to England; but she would not suffer me to accompany her beyond Dalarocca. She is a little headstrong."

It was all said with perfect simplicity and with every appearance of candour.

Seymour cast a look at Allison, and finding in him no apparent intention of intervening, continued to be the spokesman,

“We are greatly obliged to you for answering so openly. May we further trespass upon you for permission to see the marchesa?”

“By all means; pray come upstairs.”

The three civilians followed him. In a large and bare room sat a severe-faced lady, to whom the marquis presented them and told their errand.

She shook her head and sighed.

“It is indeed so, gentlemen. My niece has left us. I greatly desired that she should prolong her visit; but it appears that young ladies educated in England are not amenable to persuasion—and”—she slightly shrugged her shoulders—“the authority of relatives does not in these days extend beyond persuasion.”

“You too, sir, are perhaps her relative?” the marquis said to Allison.

Allison shook his head.

“I am merely the representative of Mrs. Bush, her cousin, who is her guardian by appointment of the English law.”

Cardolina now interposed. He was, he said, instructed to search the house for the young

lady. He regretted the necessity ; but the marquis would understand that the duty of a subordinate was obedience.

The marquis opened his hands with an assenting smile ; the house, he said, was his aunt's ; but he could answer for her, as for himself, that every corner was open to them.

“ And the servants, pray interrogate them if you choose. We have nothing to conceal.”

He looked at the marchioness. “ Marietta, I think, has your keys.”

She assented ; he rang, and the maid presented herself.

“ You will attend these gentlemen, Marietta ; you will open everything which they wish opened, and answer any questions which they may ask you.”

He seated himself by his aunt. The others—the Englishmen not without a little twinge of shame—followed the waiting-woman.

They went first into a range of upper rooms, all communicating and all unfurnished ; then into several comfortable enough sleeping rooms. Marietta threw open cupboards and wardrobes with silent scorn.

“ This,” she said, as she opened the last door, “ was the room of the marchesina.”

It had the dismantled, dust-shielded aspect of the uninhabited spare bedroom. She dis-



played the emptiness of the long wardrobe. Allison, standing on the threshold, had a frightful sense of desolation.

Descending, they inspected various spacious living rooms, none of which, as Allison silently remarked, contained a book, and below these a series of vaulted cellars and kitchens, where brass and copper vessels shone from the stone walls. In one of them an aproned boy was washing dishes under the drowsy eyes of an elderly cook. Cardolina, taking aside this functionary, catechized him exhaustively. The cook had never seen the guest. He only knew that plates went up for her, and returned having been used. The lad, being questioned separately, gave similar replies. Marietta, on the other hand, acknowledged readily—even, it struck Allison, with a certain malicious pleasure—that she had constantly seen and attended upon the young lady, who appeared perfectly contented and happy.

The investigators returned to the room which they had first entered. Cardolina asked permission to put a few questions. The marquis declared himself ready.

“The Minister is informed that there was a project of marriage between Miss Veneroni and yourself. May I ask whether that information is correct?”

“ Perfectly correct.”

“ And that project is now abandoned ?”

“ Not at all,” replied the marquis sharply.

“ Ah !” said Seymour softly to himself. Then aloud and to the marquis : “ You are, no doubt, aware, sir, that Miss Veneroni is not able to contract marriage without the consent of the English Court of Chancery ? ”

“ I am quite aware of it. But for that, the marriage would have taken place this week.”

Allison, as he stood hearing these smooth and ready answers, and watching the calm face of the speaker, began for the space of a moment, to ask himself whether it were conceivable that Camilla could be a very queen of deceivers.

“ I have nothing in the matter to hide,” the marquis said. “ My cousin has had this marriage under consideration for the last three months. She chose to come to Italy, instead of letting me come to England. Young ladies are sometimes romantic and fond of mystery.”

He smiled, and across his smile shot at Allison a glance full of covert scrutiny and defiance. The Englishman’s doubt—which hardly indeed amounted to a doubt, but was rather the equitable man’s recognition that there may possibly be a second side to the question—dissolved and left him with a deep-

seated conviction of the marquis's duplicity. He turned away.

"Is there any use in staying?" he said in English to Seymour.

Seymour slightly shook his head, and with polite apologies from him and from Cardolina, the trio withdrew.

In the hall stood the knot of soldiers. The whole party emerged, a little disconsolately, upon the steep white road.

"Did you believe him?" Allison asked Seymour.

"I should have done if I hadn't known anything about him. I could not help thinking," he added, after a moment, "that any girl very easily might."

"If she had believed him she would have been there to face us."

"He might be afraid, though she wasn't. He has spirited her away somewhere."

Allison looked across the stretch of hill and wood, and flung out his hands. "And where? Where in all this wilderness? We see her, we trace her; she is always gone." Seymour standing close to him looked at him silently, then turned and asked Cardolina what next.

"We must make enquiries in the village, but if we hear nothing we need not despair. The lady's portrait will be in the hands of every

syndic and in every police station in the country by to-morrow. We cannot fail to hear of her within a very short time."

Allison sighed wearily. His hope had died; he had a vague vision of an imprisoned Camilla, looking out in vain from some remote tower of captivity.

The village of Benivieni was found to be very small, and to possess neither syndic nor police station. Of the proceedings of the family at the villa its inhabitants appeared to take no sort of heed.

To linger here was evidently useless. It was decided that the Englishmen should go on to Arano, and send thence a police officer to relieve Cardolina and remain in observation.

Arano proved to be a town posted somewhat bleakly upon a northern slope, old, walled, having a vast and beautiful church and a small stagnant population. An inappropriate railway station sat beneath its walls, and trains went shrieking and hissing at the foot of a mediæval fortress. On the height beyond the town lay an old convent. In Allison's eyes it was a town far duller and sadder than Saragosta, and of its syndic's inferiority to the excellent Sacchetti there could be no question. He possessed no information and no ideas, and

the tale—so much of it as was told to him—excited in him no apparent interest.

Thursday night, Friday, Friday night were spent at Arano. To Allison the town became one vast waiting-room whence he watched in vain for a train that never came. Half-way up the hill between the old-world tinkle of the convent bell and the modern whistle of the steam-engine, these strangers spent the slow hours, and every hour as it came was weighted with a heavier dread. Allison had written at once to Guendolen and also to Karol; and on Saturday morning arrived a letter from Guendolen enclosing one from Karol.

Allison, as he read, gave an exclamation of horror, and passed the two papers to Seymour.

“I must go at once,” said he.

Seymour read to the end before he answered.

“Yes, I see no use in staying here. I expect every day to hear from Sir Alfred that I am to go back too. What a mercy that Captain Ladzinski was there.”

He reached across to a side-table, where lay a card with a list of trains. In the silence, while he scanned its columns, the triple three of the convent bell came floating, now louder, now lower on the mountain breeze. Allison thought with a sigh of relief that its voice would mark his hours of suspense no more.

THE MEETING OF THE COUSINS

KAROL LADZINSKI, upon his arrival in Florence, betook himself to the hotel in the Via Cerretani, whose address he had telegraphed to his cousin at Milan. He was surprised to find no answer awaiting him. Leaving a message for Severyn, he went off directly after breakfast to the head of the police for information about Menosotti, and learned that he was at a little hostelry on the other side of the river. Karol proceeded thither, nursing pleasing anticipations as he went of forestalling his cousin, forcing some sort of confession from Menosotti, and meeting Severyn with the news.

He was informed that Menosotti had gone out, leaving no word when he would return. Only half believing, he turned away, and went to meet a train from Milan. There was no Severyn among the passengers.

Early in the afternoon he returned to the narrow thoroughfare behind the Via Maggio.

Menosotti was now reported engaged with a gentleman, and Karol, esteeming it still too early to call upon Miss Allison, resolved to go into the Pitti galleries, whence he could by-and-by pass over by the cool passage of communication and emerge in the Uffizi, close by the Piazza d'Arno.

Finding himself by this time a good deal fatigued, for the travellers had spent nearly the whole night in talk, he sought a seat in the remotest gallery, and remained idly observing such pictures as hung immediately before him. A delicious calm reigned here. His peregrinations in the warm open air had induced an agreeable emptiness of mind, so that his pressing uneasiness for Severyn and for Camilla slumbered. After a time, he heard one of Florence's many clocks chiming half-past three, and rose to make his way out. He walked leisurely, his bearing and his step betraying his profession as surely as if he still wore the uniform from which he was at the moment exempted.

The gallery at this end has niches, and nooks, and windings. At an early turning he perceived a man ahead of him, walking forward, who suddenly stopped, turned aside into a recess, and became absorbed in a contemplation that kept his face to the wall. Karol won-

dered a little at his manœuvres, glanced back at him, saw him hurrying back towards the Pitti, and forgot him. Between the ghostly range of portraits, too large for their position, and too poor for any better, he passed; suddenly, at another turn, he perceived something else ahead—a vague, dark something—surely, as he hurried forward, a human figure lying huddled in a heap.

In an instant he was at the spot, and had distinguished that a man clothed in grey had fallen forward, and that a dark patch of blood was spreading slowly over the floor. A track of heavy drops ran backward and showed that he had not fallen where he was struck. It was clear enough that the giver of that blow, having first fled, had been afterwards returning to finish his work, and had turned back in alarm at the sound of steps behind him. With a darkening face, Karol gently lifted the insensible figure and turned it sideways that he might come at the wound. The limp head fell backward on his arm and showed him the face of his cousin Severyn. A patch of blood darkened the grey cloth above the heart. For an instant a mist swam before Karol's eyes. In the next he had quickly and cautiously put aside the upper coverings, torn a long slit in the shirt, and wiped the oozing edges of the

wound. It was a sharp cut, about an inch long, and in this position of the victim, bled but little.

Karol arranged as well as he could with their two handkerchiefs a pad and bandage, and then running to the Pitti exit from the gallery, stopped the nearest custodian, gave him his own name and grade, and bade him send instantly for a doctor and the police. The man was fortunately both intelligent and willing to obey ; but seven or eight minutes passed before the doctor's arrival, and the time seemed to Karol endless. Severyn did not move, or apparently breathe ; Karol's conviction was that he would never again do either. The hand which lay in his was cold and limp ; the mouth had fallen open a little. There was something especially ghastly in this marble inexpressiveness of a face usually so keenly and expressively alive.

Upon this group of the two cousins came presently, one from each end, a pair of custodians patrolling the galleries to make sure of their emptiness before closing. Karol replied briefly to their exclamations and inquiries, and they remained standing by in absorbed contemplation.

The doctor presently arrived, followed by a crowd of minor officials.

He knelt down where Karol had been kneeling, and after a moment looked up and desired that something might at once be fetched upon which the wounded man might be carried away.

"He is alive, then?" said Karol.

"Certainly he is alive," the doctor answered, standing up. "Another inch and he would not have been. The weapon has gone into the muscles, and escaped both heart and lungs."

"Can he be taken as far as the Via Cerretani?"

"Better not. I know some people who let rooms in the Via de Neri, close to the Uffizi. I advise you to take him there for the present. In three or four days, if all goes well, you can move him."

He wrote in a page of his pocket-book, and sent a messenger with the paper.

In less than a quarter of an hour they had the patient safely in bed, on Signora Marzetti's first floor in the Via de Neri, and the doctor was administering an infinitesimal dose of brandy.

Severyn slowly opened his eyes and looked up into the anxious face of his cousin. "Karol," said he, without any particular show of surprise.

Karol, by way of answer, smiled silently, and

Severyn lay looking at him, his countenance slowly gathering intelligence and intention. All at once he made a movement to raise himself, which Karol promptly intercepted.

"Don't speak. We know where Camilla is. Allison has gone after her with a man from the British Embassy."

Severyn smiled faintly.

"He must not talk," said the doctor.

Upon which Severyn, with a more tranquil face, said, "Miss Allison."

"I will go to her presently," Karol answered. "Piazza d'Arno. I know."

Then seeing his cousin relapse, not apparently into insensibility, but into a kind of stupor, he followed the doctor out of the room.

"It has been a near thing," said the doctor. "But it will be nothing serious, unless——"

"Unless what?"

"Unless the weapon was not clean. Is he a feverish subject?"

Karol at this question grew graver.

"He has been going through great anxiety."

The doctor looked grave too.

"I will come back in an hour," he said.

"Is it safe for me to leave him for ten minutes?"

"Yes; I will ask Signora Marzetti to sit by him. What about a nurse for the night?"

“No need; I shall not leave him.”

The doctor nodded and turned into the rooms of the landlady.

In little more than two minutes Karol stood at the door of Mrs. Wilson's *pension*. Yes; the signorina was at home.

He was ushered into a room whose half-closed shutters shed a green twilight. He pushed one open and saw the afternoon sun shining golden on the narrow streak of the Arno.

The door of the room opened. He turned and faced a young lady whose clear and honest brown eyes met his inquiringly.

“I am Severyn Ladzinski's cousin. I came to Florence this morning after him. He has been—hurt.”

She put up her hand with a start. “Hurt!” she echoed, and then recovering her breath. “But how? When? It is not half an hour since I left him.”

“Where was that?”

“Just inside the Uffizi.”

“He was stabbed in the corridor that leads to the Palazzo Pitti.”

“Stabbed!” The colour left her face as it had been wiped off.

“No, no,” cried Karol quickly. “He is not going to die.”

“Where is he?”

“In the Via de Neri, here close by.”

He narrated the event succinctly.

Guendolen drew a long breath.

“I am coming back with you,” she announced.

“I am accustomed to illness ; I am really quite a good nurse, and you will have all sorts of arrangements to make. You must have somebody to help.”

Karol was conscious of an immense comfort in this suggestion. Guendolen inspired in him the same confidence as her brother, and regarded him with exactly the same look of established friendly relation.

He made no effort at polite refusal, but said simply, “Will you, indeed ? Thank you !” Again he stood looking out upon the golden thread of water, but in a mood incredibly more hopeful.

Guendolen came back with her hat on, and with a light cloak over her arm. It was quite within her previsions that her return might be at a late hour of the evening.

“I have just remembered,” she said, as they went downstairs ; “there is Mr. Ladzinski’s detective. He was going back to meet him in the square of the Pitti. They were to go on together to Arano.”

“Arano ? Then he knows where she is ? Did he see Menosotti ?”

"Then *you* know where she is?" cried Guendolen in equal surprise.

"We suppose her to be at Benivieni. Your brother will be there some time to-morrow." He saw her expression changing to alarm, and added quickly, "The Ambassador's secretary is with him, and a commissary of police, and they were to have a guard of soldiers. Was it Menosotti who told Severyn?"

"Yes, and gave him a paper. Here it is."

Karol glanced through the few lines.

"Yes; we had got at the same information, and I suppose it was some emissary of Menosotti's who stabbed him. Probably it was this paper that he was going back for. This is the house."

In ten minutes Guendolen had installed herself in full command of the sick room, and despatched Karol upon his various errands.

He returned to find her sitting quietly by the open window, the patient sleeping calmly, an air of peace and order reigning throughout the room, and an excellent meal waiting for himself. She sat by him while he ate, repeated to him the doctor's instructions, and listened eagerly to his report.

When towards ten o'clock he walked with her the few yards to Mrs. Wilson's door, she

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said in a matter-of-course way that she should be back by nine the next morning.

During the earlier hours of the night watch, Severyn muttered a good deal; the names of Camilla and Menosotti were several times distinguishable, and Karol, as he listened, sat realizing the utter powerlessness of one man to lift the burden of another. Then he too thought of Camilla, and hot waves of anger disturbed his steadiness and set him dreaming wild dreams of revenge. As morning dawned, Severyn sank into a quiet sleep, and Karol with a return of hope and comfort, said to himself, "At nine o'clock she will be here."

XXIII

GUENDOLEN LEARNS HER OWN
MIND

THE wound of Severyn proceeded on its way to recovery in a regular and orderly manner. For a couple of days there were apprehensions of fever, the rather that the weather became very hot. It was agreed that he should be removed at the earliest possible moment to the cooler air of that villa above Lucca to which Madame Perivier so earnestly invited him. Guendolen during these first days practically lived at Signora Marzetti's, returning to the Piazza d'Arno only to dine and sleep.

On the morning of Saturday, Karol being out, she was sitting reading aloud to the patient from a volume that bore the label of M. Vieusseux, when the servant of the house brought in a card, and said the gentleman was waiting to see her. Guendolen looked at the card, and read on it the name: Mr. James Holbeck.

Severyn, observing her with all the invalid's interest in any and every prospect of something new, saw her grow slowly red.

"I will come," she said, without any eagerness.

She rose, looked round to make sure that his glass of lemonade was within his reach, laid the book beside it, and went out.

As she opened the door she perceived that the visitor had been permitted to wait outside it. He gave a quick and searching glance at the interior, and, as the door shut it off, uttered a stiff "How do you do?"

Guendolen led him into the sitting-room, furnished with glaring colours and profusely hideous ornaments, which was the chief pride of Signora Marzetti's existence, and asked him to sit down.

He was a large young man, a little stiff in his movements, good-looking in a rough-hewn way, with a stubborn mouth, a square chin, and an aggressively white collar.

"You are surprised to see me?" he began.

"Yes," said Guendolen. She hoped her tone did not betray how little she was pleased.

"But not so surprised as I am to find you *here*."

She was silent.

"I came," Mr. Holbeck resumed, "because

I did not really feel that I could bear to wait any longer. It is a fortnight since you went away, and every day makes me feel more and more that I can't do without you."

He was one of the ill-endowed persons whom emotion renders gruff; and his words, which, on the lips of Severyn, for instance, would have been tender, sounded like a mere grumble.

Guendolen, however, did him justice. It was not his inadequacy of expression that checked her answer; it was the sudden clearness of her own course. Until she saw him again she had thought herself uncertain—when, indeed, she thought about the matter at all—but now she knew better.

"Surely," said Mr. Holbeck, "a fortnight must be enough for any woman to make up her mind in."

"It has been enough. I am very sorry, Mr. Holbeck, very sorry; but this fortnight has shown me that I shall never care for you in that way."

He turned pale through his sunburn. She felt a horrible remorse, and behind the remorse a glimpse of the relief it would be to have him gone for ever.

"I am—this is—rather unexpected," he said, with manifest effort.

She felt that strict justice would allow her a protest, but she abstained.

Being left uncontradicted, and his disappointment taking an angrily jealous tinge, he went a step further.

"I suppose there's another man."

Guendolen, still inclined to be as indulgent as possible, opened her mouth to say "No"; but her conscience suddenly arrested the word unspoken. She perceived for the first time that perhaps there was another man.

She sat with a look upon her face of surprised reflection, and Mr. Holbeck not unnaturally became irritated.

"One might guess as much when one finds a young lady established in charge of a romantic invalid, whom she had never heard of three weeks ago."

Guendolen stood up.

"You are mistaken. My interest in Mr. Ladzinski arises chiefly from his being in love with a friend of mine who is unable to be here herself."

Mr. Holbeck stood looking a little ashamed.

"It did look—a little odd," he said apologetically. "It is the sort of thing, you know, that makes people talk. I wonder your brother did not tell you of it."

Recognizing that these admonitions were

well intended, and that they were not uttered with enjoyment, Guendolen bore them patiently.

"I think," she said with good temper, "that in this matter I must judge for myself."

"Yes, of course, only——" He was turning his hat to and fro in his hands, and looking at it earnestly. "Do you think the—the young lady will quite like it?"

What answer Guendolen might have given to this suggestion remains uncertain. At this moment the door opened, and Karol Ladzinski appeared on the threshold. He had now resumed his uniform, and the blue and silver of an Italian officer is a singularly advantageous costume. In his hand he held a newspaper and a bunch of roses; the scent of the flowers flowed into the room. He had evidently not known that any stranger was here. The surprise on the faces of the two men was equal.

"A friend from England," said Guendolen, "has come to see me. Mr. Holbeck—Count Ladzinski."

Mr. Holbeck, who had grown red, gave a sort of disconcerted nod; Karol made his military bow, and said something in his excellent, deliberate English, of hoping to be made useful to any friend of Miss Allison. Then he laid

the paper on the table—it was the *Temps*, and Mr. Holbeck observed its French title with a frown—and went away.

Guendolen was perfectly well aware that this interlude had extremely displeased her visitor. He took up the newspaper, shrugged his shoulders, threw it down again, and said,—

“You seem to have become very thoroughly foreign in a short time.”

Guendolen said nothing.

“I understand now how a plain Englishman can't expect to compete with a count—and a uniform. Of course, I have no right to say anything——”

“No,” interjected Guendolen, gently but firmly.

“But I must just warn you that these foreign titles are deceptive. Many of these counts and things are mere penniless adventurers. To think of *you* being mixed up with a wretched Pole who has got himself stabbed in who knows what low quarrel!”

“I beg your pardon. I know exactly in what quarrel, and so does Laurence, and so does Sir Alfred Dunnington, the British Ambassador. It was a quarrel on behalf of the English lady I spoke of just now.”

Mr. Holbeck, in his desire not to acknowledge defeat, retreated upon a rash generality

singularly at variance with his own personal inclination of the moment.

"Gentlemen don't quarrel about ladies."

"Nor with them, I hope," Guendolen rather smartly retorted. "I am sorry, Mr. Holbeck, that my conduct strikes you as improper. The very difference between the way we look at things shows how unwise we should be to think of marrying."

To Mr. Holbeck's mind, on the contrary that difference showed how desirable for her would be a husband of sound common sense; but the expression in polite terms of this conviction was beyond his powers, and the futile endeavour told upon his temper.

"Some one ought to tell your aunt," he broke out. "It is not—it is really hardly respectable. If I had any influence——"

"You would insist on my going away immediately?"

"Yes, of course."

"It is as well, then, that the question does not arise. Are you staying long in Florence?"

"I am staying till the next train," said Mr. Holbeck angrily. "Do you suppose I came to this furnace of a town for anything except to see you? And I am glad I did come and saw for myself. I would not have believed——"

He stopped himself. "Good-bye, Miss Allison."

"Good-bye," said Guendolen gently.

He was gone, and she was left to ask herself how she could ever have thought it possible to accept him. It was not upon Mr. Holbeck, however, that her thoughts remained. A slow colour came over her face ; her lips parted in a surprised smile. Presently, with a long sigh, she recalled herself, and went to superintend the preparation of a cup of beef tea.

The scent of Karol's roses met her as she came into the sick room. Karol himself looked up from his place beside Severyn. There was an involuntary question in the look, almost a fear. Guendolen met it for an instant, and turned away satisfied.

XXIV

THE CAGE DOOR OPEN

CAMILLA had dwelt in the convent for nine days, and was growing impatient for the next turn of her fate. She longed with a veritable thirst for news of what her friends were doing. The marquis's assurance that they had made application and been refused she had upon consideration rejected as a mere invention. She was absolutely sure that neither Severyn nor Mr. Allison would accept such a refusal.

Now on the Friday morning she was summoned to the abbess, and asked herself as she went down the long corridor whether she would find the marquis with her. She found instead Father Ambrogio.

The abbess, lifting her face, so calm yet so worn, so strangely like, at some moments, both to the marquis and to Camilla's own father, said, "Father Ambrogio wishes to know, my

daughter, whether you are ready to return to Benivieni."

Camilla drew back.

"I will never return to Benivieni."

The abbess and the priest looked at each other.

"You are content, then," said Father Ambrogio, "to remain here?"

"Not at all; but rather here than at Benivieni."

The abbess, who until this moment had never addressed to her any but superficial observations, now asked in her measured tones, "Why, my daughter, are you so averse from a marriage with your cousin?"

"Because I distrust him; because he belongs to a different nation and a different religion; because"—a warm flush came over her face; her voice wavered and sank—"because I love another man, and he asked me to marry him that Sunday morning—"

She clasped her hands over her face, and tears crept through her fingers.

Again her hearers looked at each other, and the priest slowly shook his head.

Camilla, by a great effort of will, checked the rising waves, and with one long shivering breath faced the world again. She drew nearer to the abbess and gently touched her hand.

“Reverend mother, you are my nearest of kin—the only person living of my own blood who knew my father. Surely you will not help to cause unhappiness to his child, whom he loved and who desires to love you.”

She knelt down by her aunt’s chair, and laid the withered hand against her own fresh cheek.

“Child, child,” said the abbess, “I have put away these earthly ties fifty years ago—when I was as young as you are.”

She spoke, however, not unkindly, and her fingers closed gently upon the girl’s.

“My daughter, you have never learned the blessings of obedience and self-sacrifice. Your own will is dearer to you than the will of Heaven, speaking through the will of your elders and natural guardians. Go now, clear your heart of pride and of self-will, and later in the day we will speak again.”

Camilla went, and Father Ambrogio said, “It is useless.”

“She is her father’s own child,” said the aunt with some emotion.

“All the convents of the province are to be visited,” said the priest. “It is better that we should set her free and make a merit of it than that she should be set free by the civil arm.”

“Will not the marquis be very angry?”

“It is possible ; but it is better for him to be

angry than to be imprisoned. If she is taken from him by the law he will certainly be punished. Otherwise I imagine her friends will hardly desire to make the incident public, and he will escape."

"It is true," said the abbess meditatively. "Let us, if we can, save the last of my father's name from public disgrace."

Father Ambrogio suffered a moment to pass before replying. Perhaps in his wider worldly knowledge, the difference between public disgrace and the marquis's actual reputation appeared immaterial.

"Will you leave the matter in my hands?" he finally asked; and she gave an assenting motion of the head.

Late that afternoon some one knocked at the door of Camilla's tiny apartment. Opening it she beheld Father Ambrogio, who bade her take her hat and cloak and come into the garden.

She hung back.

"You are going to try and take me back to Benivieni?"

He assured her solemnly that he had no such intention.

Rather doubtfully she took up her hat and the cloak which had been provided for her when she came hither.

Father Ambrogio, stalking silently ahead, led the way to the garden. At each fresh turning and at each door he peered forward carefully before advancing, and when the garden was reached walked on into its more distant paths. Standing still and presenting a very grave countenance, he said, "If I risk the implacable resentment of your cousin by giving you your liberty, will you repay me by a promise that your friends will not try to punish him for detaining you?"

Her eyes widened. "I promise," she said eagerly.

He turned his arm and showed her a long key whose wards rested in his hand.

"Come, then."

She followed, all a-tremble. They came to a door in the wall at the end farthest from the building.

Father Ambrogio inserted and turned the grating key. It seemed hours until the door swung slowly back on its reluctant hinges.

The sun outside had a gayer light than here within. She sprang forward.

"Arano is below on the left," said the priest. "A moment—have you money?"

"Plenty, plenty."

"Adieu, then," said he; and she, murmuring hasty incoherent thanks, was beyond the wall

and hearing the door closing and locking behind her.

At first she ran, her shadow running aslant beside her; but presently, as the town came in sight, she slackened. She saw the white flag of steam from a train curling round the waist of the hill. To her it was a flag of hope. She had a sudden superstitious thrill such as runs across the imagination of the imprisoned. Her captivity showed like the work of a spell, and the spell broken by her own casting off of pride and open acceptance of Severyn. It was no longer England which stood as the goal of her journey, but Severyn. Their meeting rose before her in vague delightful pictures; she saw herself always going towards him with the words on her lips, "I am yours." No timidity, no reserve hung over that imagined re-union. There was nothing in Severyn that disconcerted her, nothing that beguiled her into contradictions and set her better self on the defensive.

Reaching Arano, she found that the next train southward would go in twenty minutes—a conjunction, indeed, which Father Ambrogio had carefully calculated. At the shops close to the station she bought herself fruit and a couple of little twisted rolls, and, with a sudden thirst of eagerness, a newspaper.

As she sat alone in her compartment, having taken a ticket to the junction of Siametta, which is the terminus of this little line, she began to dare to look forward with some definition of detail. When she came to Siametta, what next? The idea of England presented itself only to be immediately scouted. Saragosta was the spot where her enemies would naturally seek her; Saragosta was out of the question. Suddenly, like a rock out of the waves, rose the idea of Madame Perivier and the villa of Madame Perivier's daughter. The marquis could have no clue to guide his pursuit to Lucca; and Madame Perivier would certainly know where Severyn was. She would go thither without a minute's unnecessary delay. If she were fortunate, she ought to arrive at Siametta early enough to get a train to-night to Milan. At the worst she would have to spend the night in Milan, and go on early in the morning. In that case she would hardly reach Lucca before Saturday evening. It suddenly occurred to her that it would be awkward to present herself late at night at a Milanese hotel with no other luggage than a cloak, and that she would have to purchase at least a semblance of baggage at Siametta.

The sunlit landscape unrolled before her; by-and-by she perceived, like the scar of a cut

among the grey hills and the dark pine woods, the white road by which the marquis had brought her. She could even distinguish a vehicle upon it, and pleased herself with the fancy that her cousin sat within it, and that, looking down on the white flag that went wavering through the valley, he guessed it for the token of her escape.

The peaches, with their slight native roughness, so different from the bland insipidity of the hot-house, the rolls, with their sprinkling of aniseed, were the food of liberty, delicious alike to palate and to imagination. The air, warmer and warmer as they descended, was a tonic draught; her face, expanding into hope and happiness, drank in fresh life as a convalescent drinks fresh health at a first airing. As the train slackened for Dalarocca, the last station before Siametta, she could almost have cried. This dingy, familiar station had a face of home. She recognized the station-master, and with sudden recollection that she was a fugitive, drew back into her carriage lest he should recognize her.

Here presently was Siametta. Now to learn whether a train onward could be caught to-night in Milan. Yes, it could; there would be nearly an hour's interval, and the Milan train was due at Florence about eight to-morrow

morning. She had asked about Florence, unwilling to leave the name Pistoja lying in the track of possible pursuers.

At Milan she made a dream-like meal, saying to herself all the time, "In another twelve hours I shall be at Lucca and hearing of him."

The carriage for ladies was claimed by no participator. She stretched her feet along the seat, spread her cloak over them, and sat smiling out upon the darkened plains that floated by. Presently she even slept, waking at intervals to sweet thoughts. Happier night was never spent by released captive. She was too happy to be impatient of the train's deliberate slowness.

Seven o'clock; high sunlight on a cheerful world; Pistoja, and apparently market day, with a concourse of country folk, fruit, and skinny fowls, and a vast Babel of tongues. The allurements of coffee grew insistent; soon she had learned that she must wait until half-past eight for the train to Lucca, and was sitting before a steaming mortar of coffee.

The train to Lucca was full of lively persons; the whole province seemed astir this morning. Camilla, as she sat in it, had visions of a troubled marquis newly arrived in Milan, and running from hotel to hotel in pursuit of a flying kinswoman.

And here at last, after an illimitably stretched last hour, she stood before the gate of a garden, and knew that within that garden stood the abode of Madame Perivier. She could not pause for bells and servants; the gate yielded to her hand. She walked in, her hands empty, her cloak upon her arm. Swiftly she came along the walks. Suddenly, with her hand at her heart, she stopped dead.

On the grass, in a cool patch of shade, lay a rug, and on the rug lay Severyn, pale, thin, with closed eyelids. His hand, resting on a shut book, had the waxen pallor of illness. He opened his eyes; there was a murmur of voices; the world swam; she found herself supported by a firm arm, and looked up dazed into the friendly face of Karol Ladzinski.

"JOURNEYS END——"

WE lay out in the theatre of the mind our little scenes and dramas, and the part allotted to our own playing is the fixed central pivot. Then life takes the scenes and perhaps accepts our situation, but the part she puts into our mouth has a new shape. Camilla, when she found herself actually face to face with Severyn, had no disposition to go forward and say "Take me." A gulf yawned, and on the other side she saw a horrible uncertainty whether by this time he even desired to take her. And all that she said, stooping over a figure that raised itself on a left arm and held up an unduly transparent hand, was: "You have been ill, Severyn?"

"A mere trifle, not worth talking of. And you, Camilla?"

The thin hand clung to hers; a sudden confusion of sensations made it impossible to look from the hand to the face.



“I am free, unhurt.”

“And tired and hungry,” said Guendolen, who felt the necessity of breaking in upon a moment which, since it could not be confidential, threatened to become painful.

“Severyn, you shall be the first to hear her story, and to tell her everything, except”—she gave him a quick smile that fused itself in a blush—“what concerns me.”

She took Camilla by the shoulders, and gave her a long kiss. Camilla looked at her, bewildered by the name “Severyn” upon her lips. Then the recovered captive was yielded to Madame Perivier and then to Karol, in whose kind, fraternal eyes she perceived some deeper meaning, some warmer light than she remembered there. Two little children looked on round-eyed, the boy with a thumb in his mouth, the girl hugging a doll. In the cool house, Camilla was presented to Madame Bioletti, the daughter of Madame Perivier; and a call from Guendolen brought in Allison. He paused on the threshold, absolutely unprepared, amazed, speechless. They stared at each other, each beholding the change wrought by a fortnight’s experiences. Camilla feeling his silence as a reproof, cried out quickly:—

“You don’t think—do you—that I went away on purpose?”

"No, no. Were you at Benivieni after all?"

"Yes, and then at the convent at Arano."

"The convent at Arano!" he echoed, with a biting sense of the ironies of circumstance.

"But you must not ask her questions, Laurence. I promised Severyn that he should be the first to hear."

"Let me at least tell her that his wound is nearly well, and that he will be about as usual in less than a week?"

Camilla looked at him gratefully, but she could neither smile nor speak. The word "wound" had been an unexpected shock. She had seen Severyn ill; she had not thought of violence.

A few minutes later, when the two girls were together in Guendolen's room, that young woman, sitting by the open window, and turning to and fro a ring upon her finger, said gently, "Camilla——"

"Yes," said Camilla, with a sponge in her hands and her hands in a basin of water.

"Will you be my bridesmaid some day before the end of this year?"

The sponge dropped from Camilla's hands. She turned round sharply; silent, remembering that new use of Severyn's Christian name. Guendolen, in a flash of divination, understood

the fear behind the silence, and said softly, “Karol.”

In an instant a cool cheek was beside hers, and murmurs of congratulation were cooing into her ear. They held each other close, with a little sob or two. Guendolen, amid all her personal joy, and amid a very real relief on Severyn’s behalf, had a pang for her brother. How deep his feeling was, or how slight, she had never been able to decide ; of its existence she had no doubt, and she had foreseen from the beginning this pang of division—but she had expected the relief to be for Laurence and the sorrow for Ladzinski. Perhaps that was the reason why she had always been scrupulously anxious to give Ladzinski every chance.

Severyn, meanwhile, sat in a cool northern room looking out on the upward slope of Madame Bioletti’s garden, and preparing himself to walk in the path prescribed for him. Camilla, through all the agitation of later feelings, had remembered chiefly that at their last meeting Severyn had declared his love for her. What Severyn remembered was that she had refused it. The long inactive hours of illness had kept him face to face with his own position. He understood by this time the meaning of her words about a stronger affection and other ties ; and of Allison’s loyalty he was absolutely sure ;

but in the bottom of his heart a pang lingered. Since Camilla, admittedly, did not love himself, why should she not incline to Allison? He ranked the Englishman on a level higher than his own, and told himself quietly and sadly that the preference would be natural. What he did not and could not admit was that Allison loved her so well. His own part was clear enough—the thankless part of the calm and kind old friend who makes no personal claims.

Camilla came in and found him with a drawing-book before him. He closed it, leaving the pencil between the leaves, and she saw with pleasure that he was able to stand up and to move forward a chair for her. Her new shyness made it difficult to ask the questions whose answers she longed to hear. It was he who spoke first with some diffidence.

“You must forgive me for having come to know what you did not wish me to be told—the reason of your leaving England.”

“Mr. Allison, I suppose——”

“No, I learned it another way.” He paused an instant, and added generously, “I think he wanted very much to tell me, but he kept his promise to you. About that plot—I don’t know how to say it to you. I am afraid I shall hurt you. You were mistaken about it.”

Camilla drew her hands together.



“You mean—have they done something violent—something desperate?”

“No, no, not that at all; but you were deceived. The whole thing was a deception—a trap prepared for you. There never was any real plot at all.”

He spoke slowly, clause by clause, feeling each a separate cruelty.

“No plot—I don’t understand——”

“This man, Raniero”—he opened the drawing-book and showed her the head which he had drawn—“was the emissary not of any political party, but of the marquis, your cousin—of the marquis and Menosotti.”

Camilla gave a cry of horror, and clasped her hands over her face. The foundations crumbled about her feet; she saw herself a toy passed from one unworthy hand to another.

As for Severyn, the intensity of his pain for her rendered him absolutely dumb. To speak moderately was for the moment beyond him, and to speak as he felt would be to show her yet another trust ill founded.

His silence, as she recognized it, made the final drop in her misery more bitter even than the thought of having been duped by Menosotti.

The tension of the pause grew unendurable. Something had to be said.

"It was Menosotti himself who confessed it to me."

She dropped her hands and turned to him.

"To you? You made him?"

"Yes."

"Then it was he——?" Her hand sketched the gesture of a blow.

"Yes, but that was no matter."

She leaned back, very pale.

"Dear Camilla, don't think too much of it all. The honest are always liable to the pitfalls of the false. You knew what Menosotti was before. It makes no difference really."

"I knew what he was, yes. I did not know what I was. That is the difference." Her lips shook. "And my folly has come near to killing you."

"Not at all. He was a clumsy fellow, who did not know his business."

She bent her head forward, her eyelids down, her lips pressed together; all at once he saw a tear fall. He remembered suddenly how he had found her once as a little girl, weeping alone in a corner, and had sat down by her, taken her into an encircling arm and comforted her; he recalled the feeling of a wet curl pressed uncomfortably against his cheek, and his superior, dispassionate sympathy, as a lad of fourteen for the child of eleven. The

Severyn of nine years ago seemed to laugh at him over Camilla's head.

He laid a hand quietly on hers and said, very much in the tone of that other Severyn, “Don't cry, dear. Other people's doings don't really matter, you know.”

She looked up at him with tears in her eyes, and with an appeal there too.

“I should think you wish you had never seen me,” she cried.

It was the cry of her longing for some personal assurance, the invitation which a man more indifferent might have understood.

He set his teeth hard for a moment, and then said almost stolidly, “No, I don't wish that.”

The strain upon his strength, impaired already not only by ten days of illness and a month of wearing anxiety, but also by the joyful shock of her reappearance, was beginning to grow insupportable. His consciousness began to settle into a blind wish that she would go and leave him; his breath seemed to lift a weight of lead.

She, with the burden of her own disappointment upon her, and with an eager longing to have no disguise between them, persisted, “Mr. Allison warned me, but I would not understand. I thought myself so wise; I was so ready to believe what flattered me. And that's

not all; not the worst. The marquis—there were times, Severyn, when I nearly gave way to him. It was like a kind of madness—and I knew all the time——”

Her voice failed. For a moment she felt his hand tighten upon hers, then he flung it violently from him, and sprang up with an angry cry of two or three words in his own seldom-used native tongue; it sounded like a cry of execration; it was certainly a cry of passion.

She sat gazing at him wide-eyed, open-mouthed, a deep throb of answering emotion in her heart. She only half comprehended, even now, the stab she had dealt or the wild tumult of raging jealousy before which his last barrier of self-control had gone down. As for her, opposing currents broke over her and mingled into one irresistible stream. Out of the vague, bruised pain of seeing him lost to her, of seeing him hurt by her, out of the suddenly rising flood of her own feeling, came the overmastering impulse to speak the full truth from the bottom of her heart, and let come what might. She, too, stood up.

“I had to tell you. I hated him all the time; I did; but it was so. And it was being there, hearing him, that made me know the difference.”

He stood, deathly pale, with brightening eyes, looking at her, trembling.

“I was blind, I did not understand before ; but then I knew ; and the thought of you was like home.”

The irradiation of his face, before his embrace eclipsed it, was like the lifting of a mist. In an instant she had passed from the throb that started at a face she had never seen, to the recognition so deep that it feels, not like acquisition, but like recovery.

“I thought you had left off caring.”

“I shall leave off caring in my grave, perhaps ; not sooner.”

The space seemed long before he spoke again. Perhaps it was two minutes. It was long enough for the new relation to have made itself the oldest fact in the universe, long enough too for Severyn to see beyond the mist of his own pain the true character of her avowal.

“Not one woman in a thousand would have had the candour to tell me that.”

She gave a quick breath that was almost a sob. The words were sweeter to her even than the previous assurance.

The withdrawing wave of his angry jealousy left one last stone.

“If you had—given way, I should have killed him.”

"No, I should; I knew that all the time."

She paused a moment, even in the midst of her own content, and leaning backward so that she could look up at him, "I suppose," she said, "that is the punishment of that sort of man—that nobody can love him without an undercurrent."

Severyn did not ask the obvious question, "Is there an undercurrent here?" He stood looking down into the absolutely honest blue eyes, whose trust was as entire as his own.

The dinner that evening in Madame Bioletti's dining-room was a mere cat's cradle of crossing plans. Everybody's schemes which had stood in abeyance were set free by the return of Camilla. Karol must go back to Rome. Guendolen was going for a fortnight to Paris with Madame Bioletti. Camilla would remain here until Severyn was well.

"And I," said Allison, quite cheerfully, but with a slight pallor and rigidity of countenance, "shall look up a few more cathedrals."

There was a momentary silence, which Madame Perivier adroitly broke. Perhaps Camilla was the only person present who had no suspicion what the pursuit of her had cost him.



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