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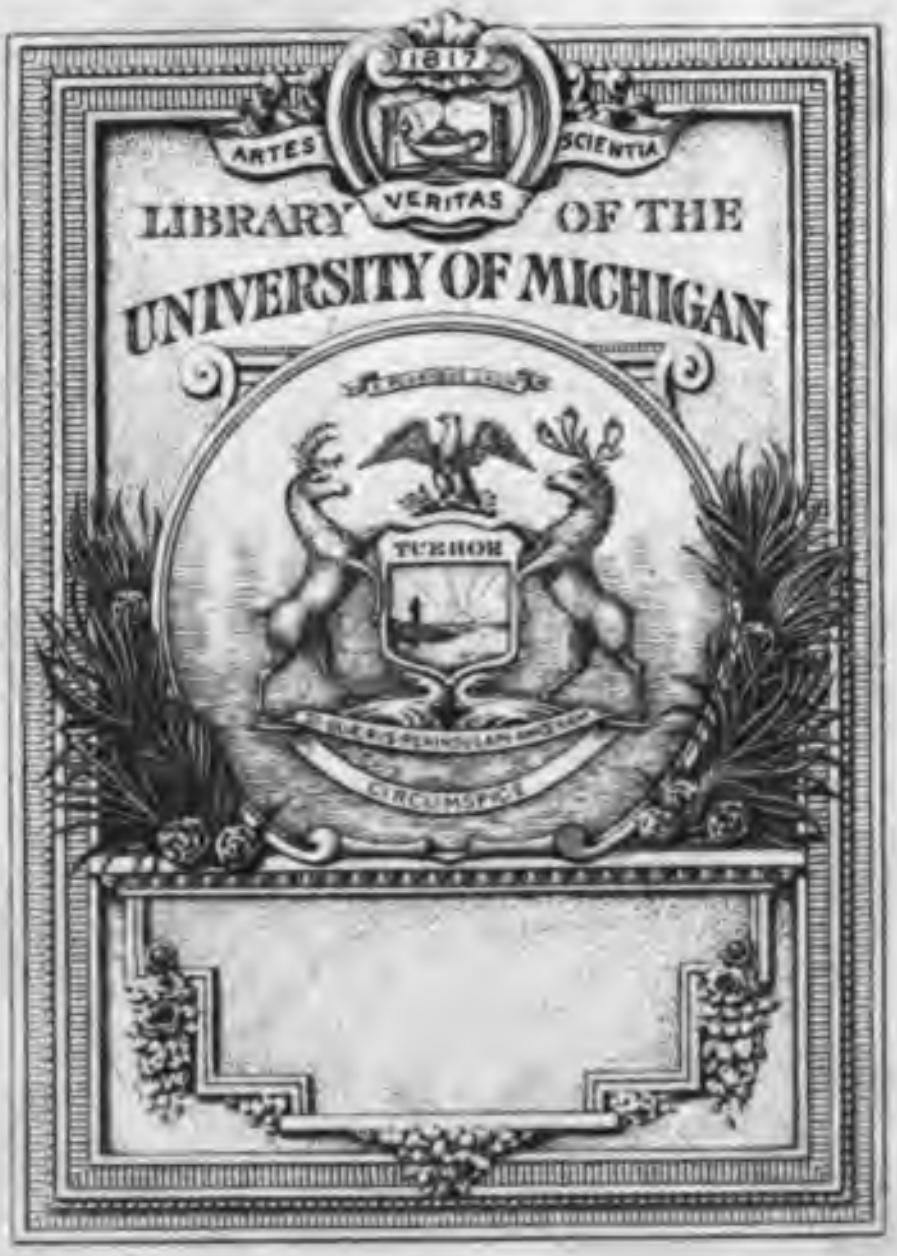
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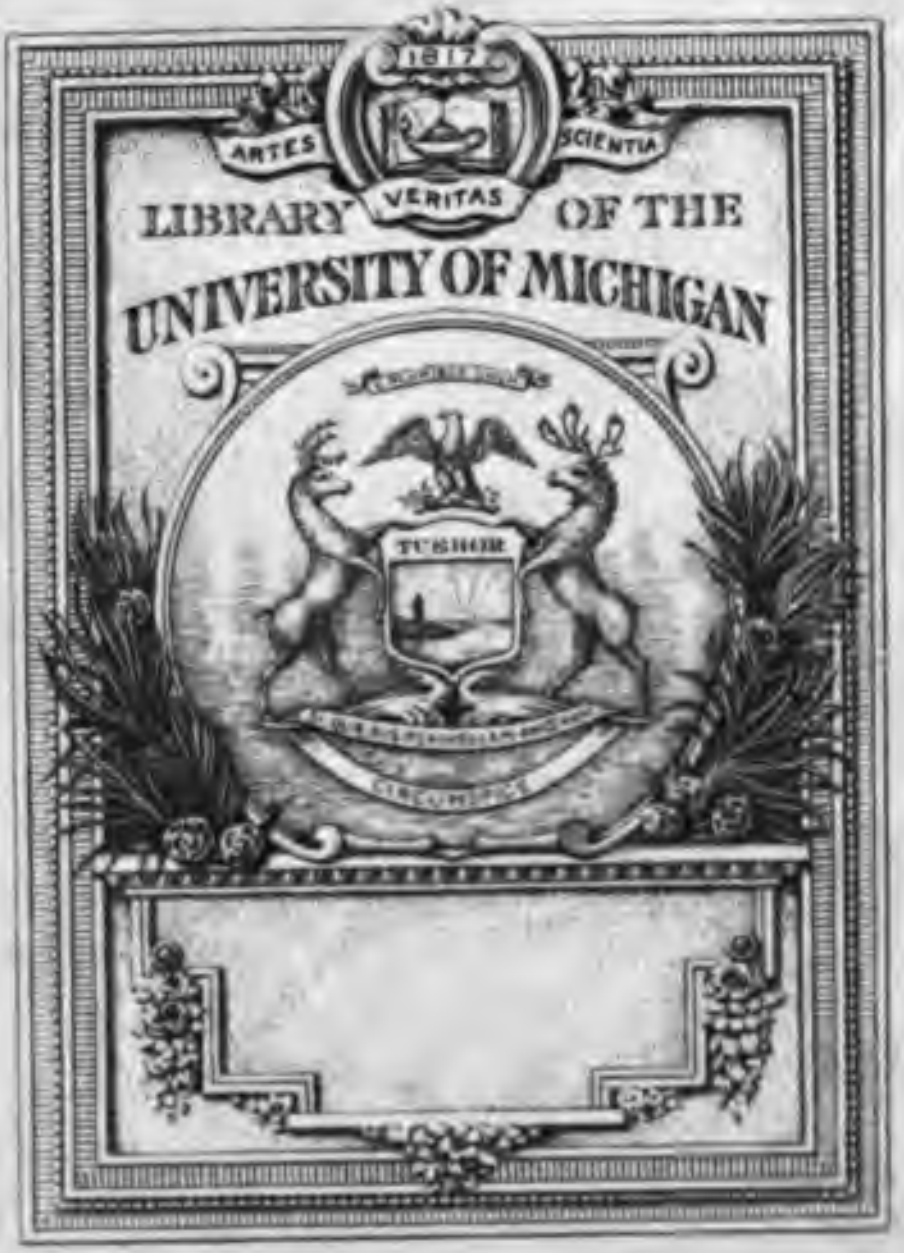
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BY

WILLIAM D. HOWELLS

Author's Edition

VOL. I.

EDINBURGH
DAVID DOUGLAS, CASTLE STREET
1887

Edinburgh University Press:
T. AND A. CONSTABLE, PRINTERS TO HER MAJESTY.

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sciously paid to Des Vaches the tribute of feeling that an objectless life was disgraceful to a man.

In the meantime he suffered keenly and at every moment the loss of the occupation of which he had bereaved himself; in thinking of quite other things, in talk of totally different matters, from the dreams of night, he woke with a start to the realisation of the fact that he had no longer a newspaper. He perceived now, as never before, that for fifteen years almost every breath of his life had been drawn with reference to his paper, and that without it he was in some sort lost, and, as it were, extinct. A tide of ridiculous home-sickness, which was an expression of this passionate regret for the life he had put behind him, rather than any longing for Des Vaches, swept over him, and the first passages of a letter to the *Post-Democrat-Republican* began to shape themselves in his mind. He had always, when he left home for New York or Washington, or for his few weeks of summer vacation on the Canadian rivers or the New England coast, written back to his readers, in whom he knew he could count upon quick sympathy in all he saw and felt, and he now found himself addressing them with that frank familiarity

which comes to the journalist, in minor communities, from the habit of print. He began by confessing to them the defeat of certain expectations with which he had returned to Florence, and told them that they must not look for anything like the ordinary letters of travel from him. But he was not so singular in his attitude toward the place as he supposed; for any tourist who comes to Florence with the old-fashioned expectation of impressions will probably suffer a disappointment, unless he arrives very young and for the first time. It is a city superficially so well known that it affects one somewhat like a collection of views of itself; they are from the most striking points, of course, but one has examined them before, and is disposed to be critical of them. Certain emotions, certain sensations failed to repeat themselves to Colville at sight of the familiar monuments, which seemed to wear a hardy and indifferent air, as if being stared at so many years by so many thousands of travellers had extinguished in them that sensibility which one likes to fancy in objects of interest everywhere.

The life which was as vivid all about him as if caught by the latest instantaneous process made the same comparatively in-

effective appeal. The operatic spectacle was still there. The people, with their cloaks statuesquely draped over their left shoulders, moved down the street, or posed in vehement dialogue on the sidewalks; the drama of bargaining, with the customer's scorn, the shopman's pathos, came through the open shop door; the handsome, heavy-eyed ladies, the bare-headed girls, thronged the ways; the caffès were full of the well-remembered figures over their newspapers and little cups; the officers were as splendid as of old, with their long cigars in their mouths, their swords kicking against their beautiful legs, and their spurs jingling; the dandies, with their little dogs and their flower-like smiles, were still in front of the confectioners' for the inspection of the ladies who passed; the old beggar still crouched over her scaldino at the church door, and the young man with one leg, whom he thought to escape by walking fast, had timed him to a second from the other side of the street. There was the wonted warmth in the sunny squares, and the old familiar damp and stench in the deep narrow streets. But some charm had gone out of all this. The artisans coming to the doors of their shallow booths for the

light on some bit of carpentering, or cobbling, or tinkering; the crowds swarming through the middle of the streets on perfect terms with the wine-carts and cab horses; the ineffective grandiosity of the palaces huddled upon the crooked thoroughfares; the slight but insinuating cold of the southern winter, gathering in the shade and dispersing in the sun, and denied everywhere by the profusion of fruit and flowers, and by the greenery of gardens showing through the grated portals and over the tops of high walls; the groups of idle poor, permanently or temporarily propped against the bases of edifices with a southern exposure; the priests and monks and nuns in their gliding passage; the impassioned snapping of the cabmen's whips; the clangour of bells that at some hours inundated the city, and then suddenly subsided and left it to the banging of coppersmiths; the open-air frying of cakes, with its primitive smell of burning fat; the tramp of soldiery, and the fanfare of bugles blown to gay measures —these and a hundred other characteristic traits and facts still found a response in the consciousness where they were once a rapture of novelty; but the response was faint and thin; he could not warm over

the old mood in which he once treasured them all away as of equal preciousness.

Of course there was a pleasure in recognising some details of former experience in Florence as they recurred. Colville had been met at once by a *festa*, when nothing could be done, and he was more than consoled by the caressing sympathy with which he was assured that his broken trunk could not be mended till the day after to-morrow; he had quite forgotten about the festas and the sympathy. That night the piazza on which he lodged seemed full of snow to the casual glance he gave it; then he saw that it was the white Italian moonlight, which he had also forgotten. . . .

II.

COLVILLE had reached this point in that sarcastic study of his own condition of mind for the advantage of his late readers in the *Post-Democrat-Republican*, when he was aware of a polite rustling of draperies, with an ensuing well-bred murmur, which at once ignored him, deprecated intrusion upon him, and asserted a common right to the prospect on which he had been dwelling alone. He looked round with an instinctive expectation of style and poise, in which he was not disappointed. The lady, with a graceful lift of the head and a very erect carriage, almost Bernhardtesque in the backward fling of her shoulders and the strict compression of her elbows to her side, was pointing out the different bridges to the little girl who was with her.

"That first one is the Santa Trinità, and the next is the Carraja, and that one quite down by the Cascine is the iron bridge. The Cascine you remember — the park

where we were driving—that clump of woods there——"

A vagueness expressive of divided interest had crept into the lady's tone rather than her words. Colville could feel that she was waiting for the right moment to turn her delicate head, sculpturesquely defined by its toque, and steal an imperceptible glance at him: and he involuntarily afforded her the coveted excuse by the slight noise he made in changing his position in order to be able to go away as soon as he had seen whether she was pretty or not. At forty-one the question is still important to every man with regard to every woman.

"Mr. Colville!"

The gentle surprise conveyed in the exclamation, without time for recognition, convinced Colville, upon a cool review of the facts, that the lady had known him before their eyes met.

"Why, Mrs. Bowen!" he said.

She put out her round, slender arm, and gave him a frank clasp of her gloved hand. The glove wrinkled richly up the sleeve of her dress half-way to her elbow. She bent on his face a demand for just what quality and degree of change he found in hers, and apparently she satisfied herself that his

inspection was not to her disadvantage, for she smiled brightly, and devoted the rest of her glance to an electric summary of the facts of Colville's physiognomy; the sufficiently good outline of his visage, with its full, rather close-cut, drabbish-brown beard and moustache, both shaped a little by the ironical self-conscious smile that lurked under them; the non-committal, rather weary-looking eyes; the brown hair, slightly frosted, that showed while he stood with his hat still off. He was a little above the middle height, and, if it must be confessed, neither his face nor his figure had quite preserved their youthful lines. They were both much heavier than when Mrs. Bowen saw them last, and the latter here and there swayed beyond the strict bounds of symmetry. She was herself in that moment of life when, to the middle-aged observer, at least, a woman's looks have a charm which is wanting to her earlier bloom. By that time her character has wrought itself more clearly out in her face, and her heart and mind confront you more directly there. It is the youth of her spirit which has come to the surface.

"I should have known you anywhere," she exclaimed, with friendly pleasure in seeing him.

"You are very kind," said Colville. "I didn't know that I had preserved my youthful beauty to that degree. But I can imagine it—if you say so, Mrs. Bowen."

"Oh, I assure you that you have!" she protested; and now she began gently to pursue him with one fine question after another about himself, till she had mastered the main facts of his history since they had last met. He would not have known so well how to possess himself of hers, even if he had felt the same necessity; but in fact it had happened that he had heard of her from time to time at not very long intervals. She had married a leading lawyer of her Western city, who in due time had gone to Congress, and after his term was out had "taken up his residence" in Washington, as the newspapers said, "in his elegant mansion at the corner of & Street and Idaho Avenue." After that he remembered reading that Mrs. Bowen was going abroad for the education of her daughter, from which he made his own inferences concerning her marriage. And "You knew Mr. Bowen was no longer living?" she said, with fit obsequy of tone.

"Yes, I knew," he answered, with decent sympathy.

"This is my little Effie," said Mrs. Bowen after a moment; and now the child, hitherto keeping herself discreetly in the background, came forward and promptly gave her hand to Colville, who perceived that she was not so small as he had thought her at first; an effect of infancy had possibly been studied in the brevity of her skirts and the immaturity of her corsage, but both were in good taste, and really to the advantage of her young figure. There was reason and justice in her being dressed as she was, for she really was not so old as she looked by two or three years; and there was reason in Mrs. Bowen's carrying in the hollow of her left arm the India shawl sacque she had taken off and hung there; the deep cherry silk lining gave life to the sombre tints prevailing in her dress, which its removal left free to express all the grace of her extremely lady-like person. Lady-like was the word for Mrs. Bowen throughout—for the turn of her head, the management of her arm from the elbow, the curve of her hand from wrist to finger-tips, the smile, subdued, but sufficiently sweet, playing about her little mouth, which was yet not too little, and the refined and indefinite perfume which exhaled from the ensemble of her silks, her

laces, and her gloves, like an odorous version of that otherwise impalpable quality which women call style. She had, with all her flexibility, a certain charming stiffness, like the stiffness of a very tall feather.

"And have you been here a great while?" she asked, turning her head slowly toward Colville, and looking at him with a little difficulty she had in raising her eyelids; when she was younger the glance that shyly stole from under the covert of their lashes was like a gleam of sunshine, and it was still like a gleam of paler sunshine.

Colville, whose mood was very susceptible to the weather, brightened in the ray. "I only arrived last night," he said, with a smile.

"How glad you must be to get back! Did you ever see Florence more beautiful than it was this morning?"

"Not for years," said Colville, with another smile for her pretty enthusiasm. "Not for seventeen years at the least calculation."

"Is it so many?" cried Mrs. Bowen, with lovely dismay. "Yes, it is," she sighed, and she did not speak for an appreciable interval.

He knew that she was thinking of that

old love affair of his, to which she was privy in some degree, though he never could tell how much; and when she spoke he perceived that she purposely avoided speaking of a certain person, whom a woman of more tact or of less would have insisted upon naming at once. "I never can believe in the lapse of time when I get back to Italy; it always makes me feel as young as when I left it last."

"I could imagine you'd never left it," said Colville.

Mrs. Bowen reflected a moment. "Is that a compliment?"

"I had an obscure intention of saying something fine; but I don't think I've quite made it out," he owned.

Mrs. Bowen gave her small, sweet smile. "It was very nice of you to try. But I haven't really been away for some time; I've taken a house in Florence, and I've been here two years. Palazzo Pinti, Lung' Arno della Zecca. You must come and see me. Thursdays from four till six."

"Thank you," said Colville.

"I'm afraid," said Mrs. Bowen, remotely preparing to offer her hand in adieu, "that Effie and I broke in upon some very important cogitations of yours." She shifted

the silken burden off her arm a little, and the child stirred from the correct pose she had been keeping, and smiled politely.

"I don't think they deserve a real dictionary word like that," said Colville. "I was simply mooning. If there was anything definite in my mind, I was wishing that I was looking down on the Wabash in Des Vaches, instead of the Arno in Florence."

"Oh! And I supposed you must be indulging all sorts of historical associations with the place. Effie and I have been walking through the Via de' Bardi, where Romola lived, and I was bringing her back over the Ponte Vecchio, so as to impress the origin of Florence on her mind."

"Is that what makes Miss Effie hate it?" asked Colville, looking at the child, whose youthful resemblance to her mother was in all things so perfect that a fantastic question whether she could ever have had any other parent swept through him. Certainly, if Mrs. Bowen were to marry again, there was nothing in this child's looks to suggest the idea of a predecessor to the second husband.

"Effie doesn't hate any sort of useful knowledge," said her mother half jestingly.

"She 's just come to me from school at Vevay."

"Oh, then, I think she might," persisted Colville. "Don't you hate the origin of Florence a little?" he asked of the child.

"I don't know enough about it," she answered, with a quick look of question at her mother, and checking herself in a possibly indiscreet smile.

"Ah, that accounts for it," said Colville, and he laughed. It amused him to see the child referring even this point of propriety to her mother, and his thoughts idled off to what Mrs. Bowen's own untrammelled girlhood must have been in her Western city. For her daughter there were to be no buggy rides, or concerts, or dances at the invitation of young men; no picnics, free and unchaperoned as the casing air; no sitting on the steps at dusk with callers who never dreamed of asking for her mother; no lingering at the gate with her youthful escort home from the ball—nothing of that wild, sweet liberty which once made American girlhood a long rapture. But would she be any the better for her privations, for referring not only every point of conduct, but every thought and feeling, to her mother? He suppressed a sigh for the

inevitable change, but rejoiced that his own youth had fallen in the earlier time, and said, "You will hate it as soon as you 've read a little of it."

"The difficulty *is* to read a little of Florentine history. I can't find anything in less than ten or twelve volumes," said Mrs. Bowen. "Effie and I were going to Vieusseux's Library again, in desperation, to see if there wasn't something shorter in French."

She now offered Colville her hand, and he found himself very reluctant to let it go. Something in her looks did not forbid him, and when she took her hand away, he said, "Let me go to Vieusseux's with you, Mrs. Bowen, and give you the advantage of my unprejudiced ignorance in the choice of a book on Florence."

"Oh, I was longing to ask you!" said Mrs. Bowen frankly. "It is really such a serious matter, especially when the book is for a young person. Unless it 's very dry, it 's so apt to be—objectionable."

"Yes," said Colville, with a smile at her perplexity. He moved off down the slope of the bridge with her, between the jewellers' shops, and felt a singular satisfaction in her company. Women of fashion always

interested him; he liked them; it diverted him that they should take themselves seriously. Their resolution, their suffering for their ideal, such as it was, their energy in dressing and adorning themselves, the pains they were at to achieve the trivialities they passed their lives in, were perpetually delightful to him. He often found them people of great simplicity, and sometimes of singularly good sense; their frequent vein of piety was delicious.

Ten minutes earlier he would have said that nothing could have been less welcome to him than this encounter, but now he felt unwilling to leave Mrs. Bowen.

"Go before, Effie," she said; and she added, to Colville, "How very Florentine all this is! If you dropped from the clouds on this spot without previous warning, you would know that you were on the Ponte Vecchio, and nowhere else."

"Yes, it 's very Florentine," Colville assented. "The bridge is very well as a bridge, but as a street I prefer the Main Street Bridge at Des Vaches. I was looking at the jewellery before you came up, and I don't think it 's pretty, even the old pieces of peasant jewellery. Why do people come here to look at it? If you were going

to buy something for a friend, would you dream of coming here for it?"

"Oh *no!*" replied Mrs. Bowen, with the deepest feeling.

They quitted the bridge, and turning to the left, moved down the street which with difficulty finds space between the parapet of the river and the shops of the mosaicists and dealers in statuary cramping it on the other hand.

"Here 's something distinctively Florentine too," said Colville. "These table-tops, and paper-weights, and caskets, and photograph frames, and lockets, and breast-pins; and here, this ghostly glare of undersized Psyches and Hebes and Graces in alabaster."

"Oh, you mustn't think of any of them!" Mrs. Bowen broke in with horror. "If your friend wishes you to get her something characteristically Florentine, and at the same time very tasteful, you must go——"

Colville gave a melancholy laugh. "My friend is an abstraction, Mrs. Bowen, without sex or any sort of entity."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Bowen. Some fine drops had begun to sprinkle the pavement. "What a ridiculous blunder! It 's raining! Effie, I 'm afraid we must give up your book

for to-day. We're not dressed for damp weather, and we'd better hurry home as soon as possible." She got promptly into the shelter of a doorway, and gathered her daughter to her, while she flung her sacque over her shoulder and caught her draperies from the ground for the next movement. "Mr. Colville, will you please stop the first closed carriage that comes in sight?"

A figure of *primo tenore* had witnessed the manœuvre from the box of his cab; he held up his whip, and at a nod from Colville he drove abreast of the doorway, his broken-kneed, tremulous little horse gay in brass-mounted harness, and with a stiff turkey feather stuck upright at one ear in his head-stall.

Mrs. Bowen had no more scruple than another woman in stopping travel and traffic in a public street for her convenience. She now entered into a brisk parting conversation with Colville, such as ladies love, blocking the narrow sidewalk with herself, her daughter, and her open carriage door, and making people walk round her cab, in the road, which they did meekly enough, with the Florentine submissiveness to the pretensions of any sort of vehicle. She said a dozen important things that

seemed to have just come into her head, and, "Why, how stupid I am!" she called out, making Colville check the driver in his first start, after she had got into the cab. "We are to have a few people to-night. If you have no engagement, I should be so glad to have you come. Can't you?"

"Yes, I can," said Colville, admiring the whole transaction and the parties to it with a passive smile.

After finding her pocket, she found that her card-case was not in it, but in the purse she had given Effie to carry; but she got her address at last, and gave it to Colville, though he said he should remember it without. "Any time between nine and eleven," she said. "It 's so nice of you to promise!"

She questioned him from under her half-lifted eyelids, and he added, with a laugh, "I 'll come!" and was rewarded with two pretty smiles, just alike, from mother and daughter, as they drove away.

III.

TWENTY years earlier, when Mrs. Bowen was Miss Lina Ridgely, she used to be the friend and confidante of the girl who jilted Colville. They were then both so young that they could scarcely have been a year out of school before they left home for the year they were spending in Europe; but to the young man's inexperience they seemed the wisest and maturest of society women. His heart quaked in his breast when he saw them talking and laughing together, for fear they should be talking and laughing about him; he was even a little more afraid of Miss Ridgely than of her friend, who was dashing and effective, where Miss Ridgely was serene and elegant, according to his feeling at that time; but he never saw her after his rejection, and it was not till he read of her marriage with the Hon. Mr. Bowen that certain vague impressions began to define themselves. He then remembered that Lina Ridgely in many fine

little ways had shown a kindness, almost a compassion, for him, as for one whose unconsciousness a hopeless doom impended over. He perceived that she had always seemed to like him—a thing that had not occurred to him in the stupid absorption of his passion for the other—and fragments of proof that she had probably defended and advocated him occurred to him, and inspired a vain and retrospective gratitude; he abandoned himself to regrets, which were proper enough in regard to Miss Ridgely, but were certainly a little unlawful concerning Mrs. Bowen.

As he walked away toward his hotel he amused himself with the conjecture whether he, with his forty-one years and his hundred and eighty-five pounds, were not still a pathetic and even a romantic figure to this pretty and kindly woman, who probably imagined him as heart-broken as ever. He was very willing to see more of her, if she wished; but with the rain beginning to fall more thick and chill in the darkening street, he could have postponed their next meeting till a pleasanter evening without great self-denial. He felt a little twinge of rheumatism in his shoulder when he got into his room, for your room in a Florentine hotel is

always some degrees colder than outdoors, unless you have fire in it; and with the sun shining on his windows when he went out after lunch, it had seemed to Colville ridiculous to have his morning fire kept up. The sun was what he had taken the room for. It was in it, the landlord assured him, from ten in the morning till four in the afternoon; and so, in fact, it was, when it shone; but even then it was not fully in it, but had a trick of looking in at the sides of the window, and painting the chamber wall with a delusive glow. Colville raked away the ashes of his fire-place, and throwing on two or three fagots of broom and pine sprays, he had a blaze that would be very pretty to dress by after dinner, but that gave out no warmth for the present. He left it, and went down to the reading-room, as it was labelled over the door, in homage to a predominance of English-speaking people among the guests; but there was no fire there; that was kindled only by request, and he shivered at the bare aspect of the apartment, with its cold piano, its locked bookcases, and its table, where the London *Times*, the *Neue Freie Presse* of Vienna, and the *Italie* of Rome exposed their titles, one just beyond the margin of the other.

He turned from the door and went into the dining-room, where the stove was ostentatiously roaring over its small logs and its lozenges of peat. But even here the fire had been so recently lighted that the warmth was potential rather than actual. By stooping down before the stove, and pressing his shoulder against its brass doors, Colville managed to lull his enemy, while he studied the figures of the woman-headed, woman-breasted hounds developing into vines and foliage that covered the frescoed trellising of the quadrangularly vaulted ceiling. The waiters, in their veteran dress-coats, were putting the final touches to the table, and the sound of voices outside the door obliged Colville to get up. The effort involved made him still more reluctant about going out to Mrs. Bowen's.

The door opened, and some English ladies entered, faintly acknowledging, provisionally ignoring, his presence, and talking of what they had been doing since lunch. They agreed that it was really too cold in the churches for any pleasure in the pictures, and that the Pitti Gallery, where they had those braziers, was the only place you could go with comfort. A French lady and her husband came in; a Russian lady

followed; an Italian gentleman, an American family, and three or four detached men of the English-speaking race, whose language at once became the law of the table.

As the dinner progressed from soup to fish, and from the *entrée* to the roast and salad, the combined effect of the pleasant cheer and the increasing earnestness of the stove made the room warmer and warmer. They drank Chianti wine from the wicker-covered flasks, tied with tufts of red and green silk, in which they serve table wine at Florence, and said how pretty the bottles were, but how the wine did not seem very good.

"It certainly isn't so good as it used to be," said Colville.

"Ah, then you have been in Florhence before," said the French lady, whose English proved to be much better than the French that he began to talk to her in.

"Yes, a great while ago; in a state of pre-existence, in fact," he said.

The lady looked a little puzzled, but interested. "In a state of prhe-existence?" she repeated.

"Yes; when I was young," he added, catching the gleam in her eye. "When I was twenty-four. A great while ago."

"You must be an Amerhican," said the lady, with a laugh.

"Why do you think so? From my accent?"

"Frhom your metaphysics too. The Amerhicans like to talk in that way."

"I didn't know it," said Colville.

"They like to strhike the key of perhsonality; they can't endure not being interhested. They must rhelate everything to themselves or to those with whom they are talking."

"And the French, no?" asked Colville.

The lady laughed again. "There is a large Amerhican colony in Parhis. Perhaps we have learned to be like you."

The lady's husband did not speak English, and it was probably what they had been saying that she interpreted to him, for he smiled, looking forward to catch Colville's eye in a friendly way, and as if he would not have him take his wife's talk too seriously.

The Italian gentleman on Colville's right was politely offering him the salad, which had been left for the guests to pass to one another. Colville thanked him in Italian, and they began to talk of Italian affairs. One thing led to another, and he found that

his new friend, who was not yet his acquaintance, was a member of Parliament, and a republican.

"That interests me as an American," said Colville. "But why do you want a republic in Italy?"

"When we have a constitutional king, why should we have a king?" asked the Italian.

An Englishman across the table relieved Colville from the difficulty of answering this question by asking him another that formed talk about it between them. He made his tacit observation that the English, since he met them last, seemed to have grown in the grace of facile speech with strangers; it was the American family which kept its talk within itself, and hushed to a tone so low that no one else could hear it. Colville did not like their mumbling; for the honour of the country, which we all have at heart, however little we think it, he would have preferred that they should speak up, and not seem afraid or ashamed; he thought the English manner was better. In fact, he found himself in an unexpectedly social mood; he joined in helping to break the ice; he laughed and hazarded comment with those who were

new-comers like himself, and was very respectful of the opinions of people who had been longer in the hotel, when they spoke of the cook's habit of underdoing the vegetables. The dinner at the Hotel d'Atene made an imposing show on the *carte du jour;* it looked like ten or twelve courses, but in fact it was five, and even when eked out with roast chestnuts and butter into six, it seemed somehow to stop very abruptly, though one seemed to have had enough. You could have coffee afterward if you ordered it. Colville ordered it, and was sorry when the last of his commensals, slightly bowing him a good-night, left him alone to it.

He had decided that he need not fear the damp in a cab rapidly driven to Mrs. Bowen's. When he went to his room he had his doubts about his dress-coat; but he put it on, and he took the crush hat with which he had provided himself in coming through London. That was a part of the social panoply unknown in Des Vaches; he had hardly been a dozen times in evening dress there in fifteen years, and his suit was as new as his hat. As he turned to the glass he thought himself personable enough, and in fact he was one

of those men who look better in evening dress than in any other: the broad expanse of shirt bosom, with its three small studs of gold, dropping points of light, one below the other, softened his strong, almost harsh face, and balanced his rather large head. In his morning coat, people had to look twice at him to make sure that he did not look common; but now he was not wrong in thinking that he had an air of distinction, as he took his hat under his arm and stood before the pier-glass in his room. He was almost tempted to shave, and wear his moustache alone, as he used to do: he had let his beard grow because he found that under the lax social regimen at Des Vaches he neglected shaving, and went about days at a time with his face in an offensive stubble. Taking his chin between his fingers, and peering closer into the mirror, he wondered how Mrs. Bowen should have known him; she must have remembered him very vividly. He would like to take off his beard, and put on the youthfulness that comes of shaving, and see what she would say. Perhaps, he thought, with a last glance at his toilet, he was overdoing it, if she were only to have a few people, as she promised. He

put a thick neckerchief over his chest so as not to provoke that abominable rheumatism by any sort of exposure, and he put on his ulster instead of the light spring overcoat that he had gone about with all day.

He found that Palazzo Pinti, when you came to it, was rather a grand affair, with a gold-banded porter eating salad in the lodge at the great doorway, and a handsome gate of iron cutting you off from the regions above till you had rung the bell of Mrs. Bowen's apartment, when it swung open of itself, and you mounted. At her door a man in modified livery received Colville, and helped him off with his overcoat so skilfully that he did not hurt his rheumatic shoulder at all; there were half a dozen other hats and coats on the carved chests that stood at intervals along the wall, and some gayer wraps that exhaled a faint, fascinating fragrance on the chilly air. Colville experienced the slight exhilaration, the mingled reluctance and eagerness, of a man who formally re-enters an assemblage of society after long absence from it, and rubbing his hands a little nervously together, he put aside the yellow Abruzzi blanket *portière*, and let himself into the brilliant interior.

Mrs. Bowen stood in front of the fire in a brown silk of subdued splendour, and with her hands and fan and handkerchief tastefully composed before her. At sight of Colville she gave a slight start, which would have betrayed to him, if he had been another woman, that she had not really believed he would come, and came forward with a rustle and murmur of pleasure to meet him; he had politely made a rush upon her, so as to spare her this exertion, and he was tempted to a long-forgotten foppishness of attitude as he stood talking with her during the brief interval before she introduced him to any of the company. She had been honest with him; there were not more than twenty-five or thirty people there; but if he had overdone it in dressing for so small an affair, he was not alone, and he was not sorry. He was sensible of a better personal effect than the men in frock-coats and cut-aways were making, and he perceived with self-satisfaction that his evening dress was of better style than that of the others who wore it; at least no one else carried a crush hat.

At forty-one a man is still very much of a boy, and Colville was obscurely willing that Mrs. Bowen, whose life since they last met

at an evening party had been passed chiefly at New York and Washington, should see that he was a man of the world in spite of Des Vaches. Before she had decided which of the company she should first present him to, her daughter came up to his elbow with a cup of tea and some bread and butter on a tray, and gave him good-evening with charming correctness of manner. "Really," he said, turning about to take the cup, "I thought it was you, Mrs. Bowen, who had got round to my side with a sash on. How do you and Miss Effie justify yourselves in looking so bewitchingly alike?"

"You notice it, then?" Mrs. Bowen seemed delighted.

"I did every moment you were together to-day. You don't mind my having been so personal in my observations?"

"Oh, not at all," said Mrs. Bowen, and Colville laughed.

"It must be true," he said, "what a French lady said to me at the *table-d'hôte* dinner to-night: 'the Amerhicans always strhike the note of perhsonality.'" He neatly imitated the French lady's guttural accent.

"I suppose we do," mused Mrs. Bowen, "and that we don't mind it in each other.

I wish *you* would say which I shall introduce you to," she said, letting her glance stray invisibly over her company, where all the people seemed comfortably talking.

"Oh, there 's no hurry; put it off till to-morrow," said Colville.

"Oh no; that won't do," said Mrs. Bowen, like a woman who has public duties to perform, and is resolute to sacrifice her private pleasure to them. But she postponed them a moment longer. "I hope you got home before the rain," she said.

"Yes," returned Colville. "That is, I don't mind a little sprinkling. Who is the Junonian young person at the end of the room?"

"Ah," said Mrs. Bowen, "you can't be introduced to *her* first. But *isn't* she lovely?"

"Yes. It 's a wonderful effect of white and gold."

"You mustn't say that to her. She was doubtful about her dress, because she says that the ivory white with her hair makes her look just like white and gold furniture."

"Present me at once, then, before I forget not to say it to her."

"No; I must keep you for some other person: anybody can talk to a pretty girl."

Colville said he did not know whether to smile or shed tears at this embittered compliment, and pretended an eagerness for the acquaintance denied him.

Mrs. Bowen seemed disposed to intensify his misery. "Did you ever see a more statuesque creature—with those superb broad shoulders and that little head, and that thick braid brought round over the top? Doesn't her face, with that calm look in those starry eyes, and that peculiar fall of the corners of the mouth, remind you of some of those exquisite great Du Maurier women? That style of face is very fashionable now: you might think he had made it so."

"Is there a fashion in faces?" asked Colville.

"Why, certainly. You must know that."

"Then why aren't all the ladies in the fashion?"

"It isn't one that can be put on. Besides, every one hasn't got Imogene Graham's figure to carry it off."

"That 's her name, then—Imogene Graham. It 's a very pretty name."

"Yes. She 's staying with me for the winter. Now that 's all I can allow you to know for the present. Come! You must!"

"But this is worse than nothing." He made a feint of protesting as she led him away, and named him to the lady she wished him to know. But he was not really sorry; he had his modest misgivings whether he were equal to quite so much young lady as Miss Graham seemed. When he no longer looked at her he had a whimsical impression of her being a heroic statue of herself.

The lady whom Mrs. Bowen left him with had not much to say, and she made haste to introduce her husband, who had a great deal to say. He was an Italian, but master of that very efficient English which the Italians get together with unimaginable sufferings from our orthography, and Colville repeated the republican deputy's saying about a constitutional king, which he had begun to think was neat.

"I might prefer a republic myself," said the Italian, "but I think that gentleman is wrong to be a republican where he is, and for the present. The monarchy is the condition of our unity; nothing else could hold us together, and we must remain united if we are to exist as a nation. It's a necessity, like our army of half a million men. We may not like it in itself, but we know

that it is our salvation." He began to speak of the economic state of Italy, of the immense cost of freedom and independence to a people whose political genius enables them to bear quietly burdens of taxation that no other government would venture to impose. He spoke with that fond, that appealing patriotism, which expresses so much to the sympathetic foreigner in Italy: the sense of great and painful uncertainty of Italy's future through the complications of diplomacy, the memory of her sufferings in the past, the spirit of quiet and inexhaustible patience for trials to come. This resolution, which is almost resignation, poetises the attitude of the whole people; it made Colville feel as if he had done nothing and borne nothing yet.

"I am ashamed," he said, not without a remote resentment of the unworthiness of the republican voters of Des Vaches, "when I hear of such things, to think of what we are at home, with all our resources and opportunities."

The Italian would have politely excused us to him, but Colville would have no palliation of our political and moral nakedness; and he framed a continuation of the letter he began on the Ponte Vecchio to

the *Post-Democrat-Republican*, in which he made a bitterly ironical comparison of the achievements of Italy and America in the last ten years.

He forgot about Miss Graham, and had only a vague sense of her splendour as he caught sight of her in the long mirror which she stood before. She was talking to a very handsome young clergyman, and smiling upon him. The company seemed to be mostly Americans, but there were a good many evident English also, and Colville was dimly aware of a question in his mind whether this clergyman was English or American. There were three or four Italians and there were some Germans, who spoke English.

Colville moved about from group to group as his enlarging acquaintance led, and found himself more interested in society than he could ever have dreamed of being again. It was certainly a defect of the life at Des Vaches that people, after the dancing and love-making period, went out rarely or never. He began to see that the time he had spent so busily in that enterprising city had certainly been in some sense wasted.

At a certain moment in the evening,

which perhaps marked its advancement, the tea-urn was replaced by a jug of the rum punch, mild or strong according to the custom of the house, which is served at most Florentine receptions. Some of the people went immediately after, but the young clergyman remained talking with Miss Graham.

Colville, with his smoking glass in his hand, found himself at the side of a friendly old gentleman who had refused the punch. They joined in talk by a common impulse, and the old gentleman said, directly, "You are an American, I presume?"

His accent had already established the fact of his own nationality, but he seemed to think it the part of candour to say, when Colville had acknowledged his origin, "I 'm an American myself."

"I 've met several of our countrymen since I arrived," suggested Colville.

The old gentleman seemed to like this way of putting it. "Well, yes, we 're not unfairly represented here in numbers, I must confess. But I 'm bound to say that I don't find our countrymen so aggressive, so loud, as our international novelists would make out. I haven't met any of their peculiar heroines as yet, sir."

Colville could not help laughing. "I wish *I* had. But perhaps they avoid people of our years and discretion, or else take such a filial attitude toward us that we can't recognise them."

"Perhaps, perhaps," cried the old gentleman, with cheerful assent.

"I was talking with one of our German friends here just now, and he complained that the American girls—especially the rich ones—seem very calculating and worldly and conventional. I told him I didn't know how to account for that. I tried to give him some notion of the ennobling influences of society in Newport, as I 've had glimpses of it."

The old gentleman caressed his elbows, which he was holding in the palms of his hands, in high enjoyment of Colville's sarcasm. "Ah! very good! very good!" he said. "I quite agree with you, and I think the other sort are altogether preferable."

"I think," continued Colville, dropping his ironical tone, "that we 've much less to regret in their unsuspecting, unsophisticated freedom than in the type of hard materialism which we produce in young girls, perfectly wide awake, disenchanted,

unromantic, who prefer the worldly vanities and advantages deliberately and on principle, recognising something better merely to despise it. I've sometimes seen them——"

Mrs. Bowen came up in her gentle, inquiring way. "I'm glad that you and Mr. Colville have made acquaintance," she said to the old gentleman.

"Oh, but we haven't," said Colville. "We're entire strangers."

"Then I'll introduce you to the Rev. Mr. Waters. And take you away," she added, putting her hand through Colville's arm with a delicate touch that flattered his whole being, "for your time's come at last, and I'm going to present you to Miss Graham."

"I don't know," he said. "Of course, as there *is* a Miss Graham, I can't help being presented to her, but I had almost worked myself up to the point of wishing there were none. I believe I'm afraid."

"Oh, I don't believe that at all. A simple school-girl like that!" Mrs. Bowen's sense of humour had not the national acuteness. She liked joking in men, but she did not know how to say funny things back. "You'll see, as you come up to her."

IV.

MISS GRAHAM did, indeed, somehow diminish in the nearer perspective. She ceased to be overwhelming. When Colville lifted his eyes from bowing before her he perceived that she was neither so very tall nor so very large, but possessed merely a generous amplitude of womanhood. But she was even more beautiful, with a sweet and youthful radiance of look that was very winning. If she had ceased to be the goddess she looked across the length of the *salon*, she had gained much by becoming an extremely lovely young girl; and her teeth, when she spoke, showed a fascinating little irregularity that gave her the last charm.

Mrs. Bowen glided away with the young clergyman, but Effie remained at Miss Graham's side, and seemed to have hold of the left hand which the girl let hang carelessly behind her in the volume of her robe. The child's face expressed an adoration of

Miss Graham far beyond her allegiance to her mother.

"I began to doubt whether Mrs. Bowen was going to bring you at all," she said frankly, with an innocent, nervous laugh, which made favour for her with Colville. "She promised it early in the evening."

"She has used me much worse, Miss Graham," said Colville. "She has kept me waiting from the beginning of time. So that I have grown grey on my way up to you," he added, by an inspiration. "I was a comparatively young man when Mrs. Bowen first told me she was going to introduce me."

"Oh, how *good!*" said Miss Graham joyously. And her companion, after a moment's hesitation, permitted herself a polite little titter. She had made a discovery: she had discovered that Mr. Colville was droll.

"I 'm very glad you like it," he said, with a gravity that did not deceive them.

"Oh yes," sighed Miss Graham, with generous ardour. "Who but an American could say just such things? There's the loveliest old lady here in Florence, who's lived here thirty years, and she's always going back and never getting back, and

she 's so homesick she doesn't know what to do, and she always says that Americans may not be *better* than other people, but they are *different.*"

"That 's very pretty. They 're different in everything but thinking themselves better. Their native modesty prevents that."

"I don't exactly know what you mean," said Miss Graham, after a little hesitation.

"Well," returned Colville, "I haven't thought it out very clearly myself yet. I may mean that the Americans differ from other people in not thinking well of themselves, or they may differ from them in not thinking well enough. But what I said had a very epigrammatic sound, and I prefer not to investigate it too closely."

This made Miss Graham and Miss Effie both cry out "Oh!" in delighted doubt of his intention. They both insensibly drifted a little nearer to him.

"There was a French lady said to me at the *table-d'hôte* this evening that she knew I was an American, because the Americans always strike the key of personality." He practised these economies of material in conversation quite recklessly, and often made the same incident or suggestion do duty round a whole company.

"Ah, I don't believe that," said Miss Graham.

"Believe what?"

"That the Americans always talk about themselves."

"I'm not sure she meant that. You never can tell what a person means by what he says—or *she*."

"How shocking!"

"Perhaps the French lady meant that we always talk about other people. That's in the key of personality too."

"But I don't believe we do," said Miss Graham. "At any rate, *she* was talking about *us*, then."

"Oh, she accounted for that by saying there was a large American colony in Paris, who had corrupted the French, and taught them our pernicious habit of introspection."

"Do you think we're very introspective?"

"Do you?"

"I know I'm not. I hardly ever think about myself at all. At any rate, not till it's too late. That's the great trouble. I wish I could. But I'm always studying other people. They're so much more interesting."

"Perhaps if you knew yourself better you wouldn't think so," suggested Colville.

"Yes, I know they are. I don't think any young person can be interesting."

"Then what becomes of all the novels? They 're full of young persons."

"They 're ridiculous. If I were going to write a novel, I should take an old person for a hero—thirty-five or forty." She looked at Colville, and, blushing a little, hastened to add, "I don't believe that they begin to be interesting much before that time. Such flat things as young men are always saying! Don't you remember that passage somewhere in Heine's *Pictures of Travel*, where he sees the hand of a lady coming out from under her mantle, when she 's confessing in a church, and he knows that it 's the hand of a young person who has enjoyed nothing and suffered nothing, it 's so smooth and flower-like? After I read that I hated the look of my hands—I was only sixteen, and it seemed as if I had had no more experience than a child. Oh, I like people to be *through* something. Don't you?"

"Well, yes, I suppose I do. Other people."

"No; but don't you like it for yourself?"

"I can't tell; I haven't been through anything worth speaking of yet."

Miss Graham looked at him dubiously,

but pursued with ardour: "Why, just getting back to Florence, after not having been here for so long—I should think it would be so romantic. Oh dear! I wish I were here for the second time."

"I 'm afraid you wouldn't like it so well," said Colville. "I wish I were here for the first time. There 's nothing like the first time in everything."

"Do you really think so?"

"Well, there 's nothing like the first time in Florence."

"Oh, I can't imagine it. I should think that recalling the old emotions would be perfectly fascinating."

"Yes, if they 'd come when you do call them. But they 're as contrary-minded as spirits from the vasty deep. I 've been shouting around here for my old emotions all day, and I haven't had a responsive squeak."

"Oh!" cried Miss Graham, staring full-eyed at him. "How delightful!" Effie Bowen turned away her pretty little head and laughed, as if it might not be quite kind to laugh at a person's joke to his face.

Stimulated by their appreciation, Colville went on with more nonsense. "No; the only way to get at your old emotions in

regard to Florence is to borrow them from somebody who 's having them fresh. What do *you* think about Florence, Miss Graham ?"

"I ? I 've been here two months."

"Then it 's too late ?"

"No, I don't know that it is. I keep feeling the strangeness all the time. But I can't tell you. It 's very different from Buffalo, I can assure you."

"Buffalo ? I can imagine the difference. And it 's not altogether to the disadvantage of Buffalo."

"Oh, have you been there ?" asked Miss Graham, with a touching little eagerness. "Do you know anybody in Buffalo ?"

"Some of the newspaper men ; and I pass through there once a year on my way to New York—or used to. It 's a lively place."

"Yes, it is," sighed Miss Graham fondly.

"Do the girls of Buffalo still come out at night and dance by the light of the moon ?"

"What !"

"Ah, I see," said Colville, peering at her under his thoughtfully knitted brows, "you do belong to another era. You don't remember the old negro minstrel song."

"No," said Miss Graham. "I can only remember the end of the war."

"How divinely young!" said Colville. "Well," he added, "I wish that French lady could have overheard us, Miss Graham. I think she would have changed her mind about Americans striking the note of personality in their talk."

"Oh!" exclaimed the girl reproachfully, after a moment of swift reflection and recognition, "I don't see how you could let me do it! You don't suppose that I should have talked so with every one? It was because you were another American, and such an old friend of Mrs. Bowen's."

"That is what I shall certainly tell the French lady if she attacks me about it," said Colville. He glanced carelessly toward the end of the room, and saw the young clergyman taking leave of Mrs. Bowen; all the rest of the company were gone. "Bless me!" he said, "I must be going."

Mrs. Bowen had so swiftly advanced upon him that she caught the last words. "Why?" she asked.

"Because it's to-morrow, I suspect, and the invitation was for one day only."

"It was a season ticket," said Mrs. Bowen, with gay hospitality, "and it isn't to-morrow for half an hour yet. I can't think of letting you go. Come up to the

fire, all, and let 's sit down by it. It 's at its very best."

Effie looked a pretty surprise and a pleasure in this girlish burst from her mother, whose habitual serenity made it more striking in contrast, and she forsook Miss Graham's hand and ran forward and disposed the easy-chairs comfortably about the hearth.

Colville and Mrs. Bowen suddenly found themselves upon those terms which often succeed a long separation with people who have felt kindly toward each other at a former meeting and have parted friends: they were much more intimate than they had supposed themselves to be, or had really any reason for being.

"Which one of your guests do you wish me to offer up, Mrs. Bowen?" he asked, from the hollow of the arm-chair, not too low, which he had sunk into. With Mrs. Bowen in a higher chair at his right hand, and Miss Graham intent upon him from the sofa on his left, a sense of delicious satisfaction filled him from head to foot. "There isn't one I would spare if you said the word."

"And there isn't one I want destroyed, I 'm sorry to say," answered Mrs. Bowen.

"Don't you think they were all very agreeable?"

"Yes, yes; agreeable enough—agreeable enough, I suppose. But they stayed too long. When I think we might have been sitting here for the last half-hour, if they 'd only gone sooner, I find it pretty hard to forgive them."

Mrs. Bowen and Miss Graham exchanged glances above his head—a glance which demanded, "Didn't I tell you?" for a glance that answered, "Oh, he *is!*" Effie Bowen's eyes widened; she kept them fastened upon Colville in silent worship.

He asked who were certain of the company that he had noticed, and Mrs. Bowen let him make a little fun of them: the fun was very good-natured. He repeated what the German had said about the worldly ambition of American girls; but she would not allow him so great latitude in this. She said they were no worldlier than other girls. Of course, they were fond of society, and some of them got a little spoiled. But they were in no danger of becoming too conventional.

Colville did not insist. "I missed the military to-night, Mrs. Bowen," he said. "I thought one couldn't get through an evening in Florence without officers?"

"We have them when there is dancing," returned Mrs. Bowen.

"Yes, but they don't know anything but dancing," Miss Graham broke in. "I like some one who can talk something besides compliments."

"You are very peculiar, you know, Imogene," urged Mrs. Bowen gently. "I don't think our young men at home do much better in conversation, if you come to that, though."

"Oh, *young* men, yes! They're the same everywhere. But here, even when they're away along in the thirties, they think that girls can only enjoy flattery. *I* should like a gentleman to talk to me without a single word or look to show that he thought I was good-looking."

"Ah, how could he?" Colville insinuated, and the young girl coloured.

"I mean, if I were pretty. This everlasting adulation is insulting."

"Mr. Morton doesn't flatter," said Mrs. Bowen thoughtfully, turning the feather screen she held at her face, now edgewise, now flatwise, toward Colville.

"Oh no," owned Miss Graham. "He's a clergyman."

Mrs. Bowen addressed herself to Colville.

"You must go to hear him some day. He 's very interesting, if you don't mind his being rather Low Church."

Colville was going to pretend to an advanced degree of ritualism; but it occurred to him that it might be a serious matter to Mrs. Bowen, and he asked instead who was the Rev. Mr. Waters.

"Oh, isn't he lovely?" cried Miss Graham. "There, Mrs. Bowen! Mr. Waters's manner is what I call *truly* complimentary. He always talks to you as if he expected you to be interested in serious matters, and as if you were his intellectual equal. And he 's so *happy* here in Florence! He gives you the impression of feeling every breath he breathes here a privilege. You ought to hear him talk about Savonarola, Mr. Colville."

"Well," said Colville, "I 've heard a great many people talk about Savonarola, and I 'm rather glad he talked to me about American girls."

"American girls!" uttered Miss Graham, in a little scream. "Did Mr. Waters talk to you about *girls?*"

"Yes. Why not? He was probably in love with one once."

"Mr. Waters?" cried the girl. "What nonsense!"

"Well, then, with some old lady. Would you like that better?"

Miss Graham looked at Mrs. Bowen for permission, as it seemed, and then laughed, but did not attempt any reply to Colville.

"You find even that incredible of such pyramidal antiquity," he resumed. "Well, it *is* hard to believe. I told him what that German said, and we agreed beautifully about another type of American girl which we said we preferred."

"Oh! What could it be?" demanded Miss Graham.

"Ah, it wouldn't be so easy to say right offhand," answered Colville indolently.

Mrs. Bowen put her hand under the elbow of the arm holding her screen. "I don't believe I should agree with you so well," she said, apparently with a sort of didactic intention.

They entered into a discussion which is always fruitful with Americans—the discussion of American girlhood, and Colville contended for the old national ideal of girlish liberty as wide as the continent, as fast as the Mississippi. Mrs. Bowen withstood him with delicate firmness. "Oh," he said, "you 're Europeanised."

"I certainly prefer the European plan of

bringing up girls," she replied steadfastly. "I shouldn't think of letting a daughter of mine have the freedom I had."

"Well, perhaps it will come right in the next generation, then; she will let her daughter have the freedom she hadn't."

"Not if I'm alive to prevent it," cried Mrs. Bowen.

Colville laughed. "Which plan do you prefer, Miss Graham?"

"I don't think it's quite the same now as it used to be," answered the girl evasively.

"Well, then, all I can say is that if I had died before this chance, I had lived a blessed time. I perceive more and more that I'm obsolete. I'm in my dotage; I prattle of the good old times, and the new spirit of the age flouts me. Miss Effie, do you prefer the Amer——"

"No, thank you," said her mother quickly. "Effie is out of the question. It's time you were in bed, Effie."

The child came with instant submissiveness and kissed her mother good-night; she kissed Miss Graham, and gave her hand to Colville. He held it a moment, letting her pull shyly away from him, while he lolled back in his chair, and laughed at her with his sad eyes. "It's past the time *I* should

be in bed, my dear, and I'm sitting up merely because there's nobody to send me. It's not that I'm really such a very bad boy. Good night. Don't put me into a disagreeable dream; put me into a nice one." The child bridled at the mild pleasantry, and when Colville released her hand she suddenly stooped forward and kissed him.

"You're so *funny!*" she cried, and ran and escaped beyond the *portière*.

Mrs. Bowen stared in the same direction, but not with severity. "Really, Effie has been carried a little beyond herself."

"Well," said Colville, "that's *one* conquest since I came to Florence. And merely by being funny! When I was in Florence before, Mrs. Bowen," he continued, after a moment, "there were two ladies here, and I used to go about quite freely with either of them. They were both very pretty, and we were all very young. Don't you think it was charming?" Mrs. Bowen coloured a lovely red, and smiled, but made no other response. "Florence has changed very much for the worse since that time. There used to be a pretty flower-girl, with a wide-flapping straw hat, who flung a heavy bough full of roses into my lap when

she met me driving across the Carraja bridge. I spent an hour looking for that girl to-day, and couldn't find her. The only flower-girl I could find was a fat one of fifty, who kept me fifteen minutes in Via Tornabuoni while she was fumbling away at my button-hole, trying to poke three second-hand violets and a sickly daisy into it. Ah, youth! youth! I suppose a young fellow could have found that other flower-girl at a glance; but *my* old eyes! No, we belong, each of us, to our own generation. Mrs. Bowen," he said, with a touch of tragedy—whether real or affected, he did not well know himself—in his hardiness, "what has become of Mrs. Pilsbury?"

"Mrs. Milbury, you mean?" gasped Mrs. Bowen, in affright at his boldness.

"Milbury, Bilbury, Pilsbury—it's all one, so long as it isn't——"

"They're living in Chicago!" she hastened to reply, as if she were afraid he was going to say, "so long as it isn't Colville," and she could not have borne that.

Colville clasped his hands at the back of his head and looked at Mrs. Bowen with eyes that let her know that he was perfectly aware she had been telling Miss Graham of his youthful romance, and that he had now

touched it purposely. "And you wouldn't," he said, as if that were quite relevant to what they had been talking about—"you wouldn't let Miss Graham go out walking alone with a dotard like me?"

"Certainly not," said Mrs. Bowen.

Colville got to his feet by a surprising activity.

"Good-bye, Miss Graham." He offered his hand to her with burlesque despair, and then turned to Mrs. Bowen. "Thank you for *such* a pleasant evening! What was your day, did you say?"

"Oh, any day!" said Mrs. Bowen cordially, giving her hand.

"Do you know whom you look like?" he asked, holding it.

"No."

"Lina Ridgely."

The ladies stirred softly in their draperies after he was gone. They turned and faced the hearth, where a log burned in a bed of hot ashes, softly purring and ticking to itself, and whilst they stood pressing their hands against the warm fronts of their dresses, as the fashion of women is before a fire, the clock on the mantel began to strike twelve.

"Was that her name?" asked Miss

Graham, when the clock had had its say. "Lina Ridgely?"

"No; that was *my* name," answered Mrs. Bowen.

"Oh yes!" murmured the young girl apologetically.

"She led him on; she certainly encouraged him. It was shocking. He was quite wild about it."

"She must have been a cruel girl. How *could* he speak of it so lightly?"

"It was best to speak of it, and have done with it," said Mrs. Bowen. "He knew that I must have been telling you something about it."

"Yes. How bold it was! A *young* man couldn't have done it. Yes, he's fascinating. But how old and sad he looked, as he lay back there in the chair!"

"Old? I don't think he looked old. He looked sad. Yes, it's left its mark on him."

The log burned quite through to its core, and fell asunder, a bristling mass of embers. They had been looking at it with downcast heads. Now they lifted their faces, and saw the pity in each other's eyes, and the beautiful girl impulsively kissed the pretty woman good-night.

V.

COLVILLE fell asleep with the flattered sense which abounds in the heart of a young man after his first successful evening in society, but which can visit maturer life only upon some such conditions of long exile and return as had been realised in his. The looks of these two charming women followed him into his dreams; he knew he must have pleased them, the dramatic homage of the child was evidence of that; and though it had been many years since he had found it sufficient cause of happiness to have pleased a woman, the desire to do so was by no means extinct in him. The eyes of the girl hovered above him like stars; he felt in their soft gaze that he was a romance to her young heart, and this made him laugh; it also made him sigh.

He woke at dawn with a sharp twinge in his shoulder, and he rose to give himself the pleasure of making his own fire with those fagots of broom and pine twigs which

he had enjoyed the night before, promising himself to get back into bed when the fire was well going, and sleep late. While he stood before the open stove, the jangling of a small bell outside called him to the window, and he saw a procession which had just issued from the church going to administer the extreme unction to some dying person across the piazza. The parish priest went first, bearing the consecrated wafer in its vessel, and at his side an acolyte holding a yellow silk umbrella over the Eucharist; after them came a number of *facchini* in white robes and white hoods that hid their faces; their tapers burned sallow and lifeless in the new morning light; the bell jangled dismally.

"They even die dramatically in this country," thought Colville, in whom the artist was taken with the effectiveness of the spectacle before his human pity was stirred for the poor soul who was passing. He reproached himself for that, and instead of getting back to bed, he dressed and waited for the mature hour which he had ordered his breakfast for. When it came at last, picturesquely borne on the open hand of Giovanni, steaming coffee, hot milk, sweet butter in delicate disks, and

two white eggs coyly tucked in the fold of a napkin, and all grouped upon the wide salver, it brought him a measure of the consolation which good cheer imparts to the ridiculous human heart even in the house where death is. But the sad incident tempered his mind with a sort of pensiveness that lasted throughout the morning, and quite till lunch. He spent the time in going about the churches; but the sunshine which the day began with was overcast, as it was the day before, and the churches were rather too dark and cold in the afternoon. He went to Vieusseux's reading-room and looked over the English papers, which he did not care for much; and he also made a diligent search of the catalogue for some book about Florence for little Effie Bowen: he thought he would like to surprise her mother with his interest in the matter. As the day waned toward dark, he felt more and more tempted to take her at her word, when she had said that any day was her day to him, and go to see her. If he had been a younger man he would have anxiously considered this indulgence and denied himself, but after forty a man denies himself no reasonable and harmless indulgence; he has

learned by that time that it is a pity and a folly to do so.

Colville found Mrs. Bowen's room half full of arriving and departing visitors, and then he remembered that it was this day she had named to him on the Ponte Vecchio, and when Miss Graham thanked him for coming his first Thursday, he made a merit of not having forgotten it, and said he was going to come every Thursday during the winter. Miss Graham drew him a cup of tea from the Russian samovar which replaces in some Florentine houses the tea-pot of Occidental civilisation, and Colville smiled upon it and upon her, bending over the brazen urn with a flower-like tilt of her beautiful head. She wore an æsthetic dress of creamy camel's-hair, whose colour pleased the eye as its softness would have flattered the touch.

"What a very Tourguéneffish effect the samovar gives!" he said, taking a biscuit from the basket Effie Bowen brought him, shrinking with redoubled shyness from the eyebrows which he arched at her. "I wonder you can keep from calling me Fedor Colvillitch. Where is your mother, Effie Bowenovna?" he asked of the child, with a temptation to say Imogene Grahamovna.

They both looked mystified, but Miss Graham said, "I'm sorry to say you won't see Mrs. Bowen to-day. She has a very bad headache, and has left Effie and me to receive. We feel very incompetent, but she says it will do us good."

There were some people there of the night before, and Colville had to talk to them. One of the ladies asked him if he had met the Inglehart boys as he came in.

"The Inglehart boys? No. What are the Inglehart boys?"

"They were here all last winter, and they've just got back. It's rather exciting for Florence." She gave him a rapid sketch of that interesting exodus of a score of young painters from the art school at Munich, under the head of the singular and fascinating genius by whose name they became known. "They had their own school for a while in Munich, and then they all came down into Italy in a body. They had their studio things with them, and they travelled third class, and they made the greatest excitement everywhere, and had the greatest fun. They were a great sensation in Florence. They went everywhere, and were such favourites. I hope they are going to stay."

"I hope so too," said Colville. "I should like to see them."

"Dear me!" said the lady, with a glance at the clock. "It 's five! I must be going."

The other ladies went, and Colville approached to take leave, but Miss Graham detained him.

"What is Tourguéneffish?" she demanded.

"The quality of the great Russian novelist, Tourguéneff," said Colville, perceiving that she had not heard of him.

"Oh!"

"You ought to read him. The samovar sends up its agreeable odour all through his books. Read *Lisa* if you want your heart really broken."

"I 'm glad you approve of heart-breaks in books. So many people won't read anything but cheerful books. It 's the only quarrel I have with Mrs. Bowen. She says there are so many sad things in life that they ought to be kept out of books."

"Ah, there I perceive a divided duty," said Colville. "I should like to agree with both of you. But if Mrs. Bowen were here I should remind her that if there are so many sad things in life that is a very good reason for putting them in books too."

"Of course I shall tell her what you said."

"Why, I don't object to a certain degree of cheerfulness in books; only don't carry it too far—that 's all."

This made the young girl laugh, and Colville was encouraged to go on. He told her of the sight he had seen from his window at daybreak, and he depicted it all very graphically, and made her feel its pathos perhaps more keenly than he had felt it. "Now, that little incident kept with me all day, tempering my boisterous joy in the Giottos, and reducing me to a decent composure in the presence of the Cimabues; and it 's pretty hard to keep from laughing at some of them, don't you think?"

The young people perceived that he was making fun again; but he continued with an air of greater seriousness. "Don't you see what a very good thing that was to begin one's day with? Why, even in Santa Croce, with the thermometer ten degrees below zero in the shade of Alfieri's monument, I was no gayer than I should have been in a church at home. I suppose Mrs. Bowen would object to having that procession go by under one's window in a book; but I can't really see how it would hurt the

reader, or damp his spirits permanently. A wholesome reaction would ensue, such as you see now in me, whom the thing happened to in real life."

He stirred his tea, and shook with an inward laugh as he carried it to his lips.

"Yes," said Miss Graham thoughtfully, and she looked at him searchingly in the interval of silence that ensued. But she only added, "I wish it would get warmer in the churches. I've seen hardly anything of them yet."

"From the way I felt in them to-day," sighed Colville, "I should think the churches would begin to thaw out about the middle of May. But if one goes well wrapped up in furs, and has a friend along to rouse him and keep him walking when he is about to fall into that lethargy which precedes death by freezing, I think they may be visited even now with safety. Have you been in Santa Maria Novella yet?"

"No," said Miss Graham, with a shake of the head that expressed her resolution to speak the whole truth if she died for it, "not even in Santa Maria Novella."

"What a wonderful old place it is! That curious façade, with the dials and its layers of black and white marble soaked golden-

red in a hundred thousand sunsets! That exquisite grand portal!" He gesticulated with the hand that the tea-cup left free, to suggest form and measurement as artists do. "Then the inside! The great Cimabue, with all that famous history on its back—the first divine Madonna by the first divine master, carried through the streets in a triumph of art and religion! Those frescoes of Ghirlandajo's with real Florentine faces and figures in them, and all lavished upon the eternal twilight of that choir—but I suppose that if the full day were let in on them, once, they would vanish like ghosts at cock-crow! You must be sure to see the Spanish chapel; and the old cloister itself is such a pathetic place. There 's a boys' school, as well as a military college, in the suppressed convent now, and the colonnades were full of boys running and screaming and laughing and making a joyful racket; it was so much more sorrowful than silence would have been there. One of the little scamps came up to me, and the young monk that was showing me round, and bobbed us a mocking bow and bobbed his hat off; then they all burst out laughing again and raced away, and the monk looked after them and said, so sweetly and wearily, 'They 're at

their diversions: we must have patience.' There are only twelve monks left there; all the rest are scattered and gone." He gave his cup to Miss Graham for more tea.

"Don't you think," she asked, drawing it from the samovar, "that it is very sad having the convents suppressed?"

"It was very sad having slavery abolished —for some people," suggested Colville; he felt the unfairness of the point he had made.

"Yes," sighed Miss Graham.

Colville stood stirring his second cup of tea, when the *portière* parted, and showed Mrs. Bowen wistfully pausing on the threshold. Her face was pale, but she looked extremely pretty there.

"Ah, come in, Mrs. Bowen!" he called gaily to her. "I won't give you away to the other people. A cup of tea will do you good."

"Oh, I 'm a great deal better," said Mrs. Bowen, coming forward to give him her hand. "I heard your voice, and I couldn't resist looking in."

"That was very kind of you," said Colville gratefully: and her eyes met his in a glance that flushed her face a deep red. "You find me here—*I* don't know why!— in my character of old family friend, doing

my best to make life a burden to the young ladies."

"I wish you would stay to a family dinner with us," said Mrs. Bowen, and Miss Graham brightened in cordial support of the hospitality. "Why can't you?"

"I don't know, unless it 's because I 'm a humane person, and have some consideration for your headache."

"Oh, that 's all gone," said Mrs. Bowen. "It was one of those convenient headaches —if you ever had them, you 'd know—that go off at sunset."

"But you 'd have another to-morrow."

"No, I 'm safe for a whole fortnight from another."

"Then you leave me without an excuse, and I was just wishing I had none," said Colville.

After dinner Mrs. Bowen sent Effie to bed early to make up for the late hours of the night before, but she sat before the fire with Miss Graham rather late, talking Colville over, when he was gone.

"He 's very puzzling to me," said Miss Graham. "Sometimes you think he 's nothing but an old cynic, from his talk, and then something so sweet and fresh comes out that you don't know what to do. Don't

you think he has really a very poetical mind, and that he 's putting all the rest on ?"

"I think he likes to make little effects," said Mrs. Bowen judiciously. "He always did, rather."

"Why, was he like this when he was young ?"

"I don't consider him very old now."

"No, of course not. I meant when you knew him before." Miss Graham had some needlework in her hand ; Mrs. Bowen, who never even pretended to work at that kind of thing, had nothing in hers but the feather screen.

"He is old, compared with you, Imogene ; but you 'll find, as you live along, that your contemporaries are always young. Mr. Colville is very much improved. He used to be painfully shy, but he put on a bold front, and now the bold front seems to have become a second nature with him."

"I like it," said Miss Graham, to her needle.

"Yes ; but I suspect he 's still shy, at heart. He used to be very sentimental, and was always talking Ruskin. I think if he hadn't talked Ruskin so much, Jenny Milbury might have treated him better. It was very priggish in him."

"Oh, I can't imagine Mr. Colville's being priggish!"

"He 's very much improved. He used to be quite a sloven in his dress; you know how very slovenly most American gentlemen are in their dress, at any rate. I think that influenced her against him too."

"He isn't slovenly now," suggested Miss Graham.

"Oh no; he 's quite swell," said Mrs. Bowen, depriving the adjective of slanginess by the refinement of her tone.

"Well," said Miss Graham, "I don't see how you could have endured her after that. It was atrocious."

"It was better for her to break with him, if she found out she didn't love him, than to marry him. That," said Mrs. Bowen, with a depth of feeling uncommon for her, "would have been a thousand times worse."

"Yes, but she ought to have found out before she led him on so far."

"Sometimes girls can't. They don't know themselves; they think they 're in love when they 're not. She was very impulsive, and of course she was flattered by it; he was so intellectual. But at last she found that she couldn't bear it, and she had to tell him so."

"Did she ever say why she didn't love him?"

"No; I don't suppose she could. The only thing I remember her saying was that he was 'too much of a mixture.'"

"What *did* she mean by that?"

"I don't know exactly."

"Do you think he 's insincere?"

"Oh no. Perhaps she meant that he wasn't single-minded."

"Fickle?"

"No. He certainly wasn't that in her case."

"Undecided?"

"He was decided enough with her—at last."

Imogene dropped the hopeless quest. "How can a man ever stand such a thing?" she sighed.

"He stood it very nobly. That was the best thing about it; he took it in the most delicate way. She showed me his letter. There wasn't a word or a hint of reproach in it; he seemed to be anxious about nothing but her feeling badly for him. Of course he couldn't help showing that he was mortified for having pursued her with attentions that were disagreeable to her; but that was delicate too. Yes, it was a very large-minded letter."

"It was shocking in her to show it."

"It wasn't very nice. But it was a letter that any girl might have been proud to show."

"Oh, she *couldn't* have done it to gratify her vanity!"

"Girls are very queer, my dear," said Mrs. Bowen, as if the fact were an abstraction. She mused upon the flat of her screen, while Miss Graham plied her needle in silence.

The latter spoke first. "Do you think he was very much broken by it?"

"You never can tell. He went out west then, and there he has stayed ever since. I suppose his life would have been very different if nothing of the kind had happened. He had a great deal of talent. I always thought I should hear of him in some way."

"Well, it was a heartless, shameless thing! I don't see how you can speak of it so leniently as you do, Mrs. Bowen. It makes all sorts of coquetry and flirtation more detestable to me than ever. Why, it has ruined his life!"

"Oh, he was young enough then to outlive it. After all, they were a boy and girl."

"A boy and girl! How old were they?"

"He must have been twenty-three or four, and she was twenty."

"*My* age! Do you call that being a girl?"

"She was old enough to know what she was about," said Mrs. Bowen justly.

Imogene fell back in her chair, drawing out her needle the full length of its thread, and then letting her hand fall. "I don't know. It seems as if I never should be grown up, or anything but a child. Yes, when I think of the way young men talk, they do seem boys. Why can't they talk like Mr. Colville? I wish I could talk like him. It makes you forget how old and plain he is."

She remained with her eyelids dropped in an absent survey of her sewing, while Mrs. Bowen regarded her with a look of vexation, impatience, resentment, on the last refinement of these emotions, which she banished from her face before Miss Graham looked up and said, with a smile: "How funny it is to see Effie's infatuation with him! She can't take her eyes off him for a moment, and she follows him round the room so as not to lose a word he is saying. It was heroic of her to go to bed without a murmur before he left to-night."

"Yes, she sees that he is good," said Mrs. Bowen.

"Oh, she sees that 's he 's something very much more. Mr. Waters is good."

Miss Graham had the best of the argument, and so Mrs. Bowen did not reply.

"I feel," continued the young girl, "as if it were almost a shame to have asked him to go to that silly dancing party with us. It seems as if we didn't appreciate him. I think we ought to have kept him for high æsthetic occasions and historical researches."

"Oh, I don't think Mr. Colville was very deeply offended at being asked to go with us."

"No," said Imogene, with another sigh, "he didn't seem so. I suppose there 's always an undercurrent of sadness—of tragedy—in everything for him."

"I don't suppose anything of the kind," cried Mrs. Bowen gaily. "He 's had time enough to get over it."

"Do people *ever* get over such things?"

"Yes—men."

"It must be because he was young, as you say. But if it had happened *now?*"

"Oh, it *couldn't* happen now. He 's altogether too cool and calculating."

"Do you think he 's cool and calculating?"

"No. He 's too old for a broken heart—a new one."

"Mrs. Bowen," demanded the girl solemnly, "could *you* forgive yourself for such a thing if you had done it?"

"Yes, perfectly well, if I wasn't in love with him."

"But if you 'd made him *think* you were?" pursued the girl breathlessly.

"If I were a flirt—yes."

"*I* couldn't," said Imogene, with tragic depth.

"Oh, be done with your intensities, and go to bed, Imogene," said Mrs. Bowen, giving her a playful push.

VI.

IT was so long since Colville had been at a dancing party that Mrs. Bowen's offer to take him to Madame Uccelli's had first struck his sense of the ludicrous. Then it had begun to flatter him ; it implied that he was still young enough to dance if he would, though he had stipulated that they were not to expect anything of the kind from him. He liked also the notion of being seen and accepted in Florentine society as the old friend of Mrs. Bowen's, for he had not been long in discovering that her position in Florence was, among the foreign residents, rather authoritative. She was one of the very few Americans who were asked to Italian houses, and Italian houses lying even beyond the neutral ground of English-speaking intermarriages. She was not, of course, asked to the great Princess Strozzi ball, where the Florentine nobility appeared in the mediæval pomp—the veritable costumes —of their ancestors ; only a rich American

banking family went, and their distinction was spoken of under the breath; but any glory short of this was within Mrs. Bowen's reach. So an old lady who possessed herself of Colville the night before had told him, celebrating Mrs. Bowen at length, and boasting of her acceptance among the best English residents, who, next after the natives, seem to constitute the social ambition of Americans living in Italian cities.

It interested him to find that some geographical distinctions which are fading at home had quite disappeared in Florence. When he was there before, people from quite small towns in the East had made pretty Lina Ridgely and her friend feel the disadvantage of having come from the Western side of an imaginary line; he had himself been at the pains always to let people know, at the American watering-places where he spent his vacations, that though presently from Des Vaches, Indiana, he was really born in Rhode Island; but in Florence it was not at all necessary. He found in Mrs. Bowen's house people from Denver, Chicago, St. Louis, Boston, New York, and Baltimore, all meeting as of apparently the same civilisation, and whether Mrs. Bowen's own origin was, like

that of the Etruscan cities, lost in the mists of antiquity, or whether she had sufficiently atoned for the error of her birth by subsequent residence in the national capital and prolonged sojourn in New York, it seemed certainly not to be remembered against her among her Eastern acquaintance. The time had been when the fact that Miss Graham came from Buffalo would have gone far to class her with the animal from which her native city had taken its name; but now it made no difference, unless it was a difference in her favour. The English spoke with the same vague respect of Buffalo and of Philadelphia; and to a family of real Bostonians Colville had the courage to say simply that he lived in Des Vaches, and not to seek to palliate the truth in any sort. If he wished to prevaricate at all, it was rather to attribute himself to Mrs. Bowen's city in Ohio.

She and Miss Graham called for him with her carriage the next night, when it was time to go to Madame Uccelli's.

"This gives me a very patronised and effeminate feeling," said Colville, getting into the odorous dark of the carriage, and settling himself upon the front seat with a skill inspired by his anxiety not to tear any

of the silken spreading white wraps that inundated the whole interior. "Being come for by ladies!" They both gave some nervous joyful laughs, as they found his hand in the obscurity, and left the sense of a gloved pressure upon it. "Is this the way you used to do in Vesprucius, Mrs. Bowen?"

"Oh no, indeed!" she answered. "The young gentlemen used to find out whether I was going, and came for me with a hack, and generally, if the weather was good, we walked home."

"That's the way we still do in Des Vaches. Sometimes, as a tremendous joke, the ladies come for us in leap-year. How do you go to balls in Buffalo, Miss Graham? Or, no; I withdraw the embarrassing question." Some gleams from the street lamps, as they drove along, struck in through the carriage windows, and flitted over the ladies' faces and were gone again. "Ah! this is very trying. Couldn't you stop him at the next corner, and let me see how radiant you ladies really are? I may be in very great danger; I 'd like to know just how much."

"It wouldn't be of any use," cried the young girl gaily. "We 're all wrapped up,

and you couldn't form any idea of us. You must wait, and let us burst upon you when we come out of the dressing-room at Madame Uccelli's."

"But then it may be too late," he urged. "Is it very far?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Bowen. "It's ridiculously far. It's outside the Roman Gate. I don't see why people live at that distance."

"In order to give the friends you bring the more pleasure of your company, Mrs. Bowen."

"Ah! that's very well. But you're not logical."

"No," said Colville; "you can't be logical and complimentary at the same time. It's too much to ask. How delicious your flowers are!" The ladies each had a bouquet in her hand, which she was holding in addition to her fan, the edges of her cloak, and the skirt of her train."

"Yes," said Mrs. Bowen; "we are so much obliged to you for them."

"Why, I sent you no flowers," said Colville, startled into untimely earnest.

"Didn't you?" triumphed Mrs. Bowen. "I thought gentlemen always sent flowers to ladies when they were going to a ball with them. They used to, in Columbus."

"And in Buffalo they always do," Miss Graham added.

"Ah! they don't in Des Vaches," said Colville. They tried to mystify him further about the bouquets; they succeeded in being very gay, and in making themselves laugh a great deal. Mrs. Bowen was even livelier than the young girl.

Her carriage was one of the few private equipages that drove up to Madame Uccelli's door; most people had not even come in a *remise*, but, after the simple Florentine fashion, had taken the little cabs, which stretched in a long line up and down the way; the horses had let their weary heads drop, and were easing their broken knees by extending their fore-legs while they drowsed; the drivers, huddled in their greatcoats, had assembled around the doorway to see the guests alight, with that amiable, unenvious interest of the Italians in the pleasure of others. The deep sky glittered with stars; in the corner of the next villa garden the black plumes of some cypresses blotted out their space among them.

"*Isn't* it Florentine?" demanded Mrs. Bowen, giving the hand which Colville offered in helping her out of the carriage

a little vivid pressure, full of reminiscence and confident sympathy. A flush of youth warmed his heart; he did not quail even when the porter of the villa intervened between her and her coachman, whom she was telling when to come back, and said that the carriages were ordered for three o'clock.

"Did you ever sit up so late as that in Des Vaches?" asked Miss Graham mischievously.

"Oh yes; I was editor of a morning paper," he explained. But he did not like the imputation of her question.

Madame Uccelli accepted him most hospitably among her guests when he was presented. She was an American who had returned with her Italian husband to Italy, and had long survived him in the villa which he had built with her money. Such people grow very queer with the lapse of time. Madame Uccelli's character remained inalienably American, but her manners and customs had become largely Italian; without having learned the language thoroughly, she spoke it very fluently, and its idioms marked her Philadelphia English. Her house was a menagerie of all the nationalities; she was liked in Italian society, and there were many Italians; English-speak-

ing Russians abounded; there were many genuine English, Germans, Scandinavians, Protestant Irish, American Catholics, and then Americans of all kinds. There was a superstition of her exclusiveness among her compatriots, but one really met every one there sooner or later; she was supposed to be a convert to the religion of her late husband, but no one really knew what religion she was of, probably not even Madame Uccelli herself. One thing you were sure of at her house, and that was a substantial supper; it is the example of such resident foreigners which has corrupted the Florentines, though many native families still hold out against it.

The dancing was just beginning, and the daughter of Madame Uccelli, who spoke both English and Italian much better than her mother, came forward and possessed herself of Miss Graham, after a polite feint of pressing Mrs. Bowen to let her find a partner for her.

Mrs. Bowen cooed a gracious refusal, telling Fanny Uccelli that she knew very well that she never danced now. The girl had not much time for Colville; she welcomed him, but she was full of her business of starting the dance, and she hurried away

without asking him whether she should introduce him to some lady for the quadrille that was forming. Her mother, however, asked him if he would not go out and get himself some tea, and she found a lady to go with him to the supper-room. This lady had daughters whom apparently she wished to supervise while they were dancing, and she brought Colville back very soon. He had to stand by the sofa where she sat till Madame Uccelli found him and introduced him to another mother of daughters. Later he joined a group formed by the father of one of the dancers and the non-dancing husband of a dancing wife. Their conversation was perfunctory; they showed one another that they had no pleasure in it.

Presently the father went to see how his daughter looked while dancing; the husband had evidently no such curiosity concerning his wife; and Colville went with the father, and looked at Miss Graham. She was very beautiful, and she obeyed the music as if it were her breath; her face was rapt, intense, full of an unsmiling delight, which shone in her dark eyes, glowing like low stars. Her *abandon* interested Colville, and then awed him; the spectacle of that

young, unjaded capacity for pleasure touched him with a profound sense of loss. Suddenly Imogene caught sight of him, and with the coming of a second look in her eyes the light of an exquisite smile flashed over her face. His heart was in his throat.

"*Your* daughter?" asked the fond parent at his elbow. "That is mine yonder in red."

Colville did not answer, nor look at the young lady in red. The dance was ceasing; the fragments of those kaleidoscopic radiations were dispersing themselves; the tormented piano was silent.

The officer whom Imogene had danced with brought her to Mrs. Bowen, and resigned her with the regulation bow, hanging his head down before him as if submitting his neck to the axe. She put her hand in Colville's arm, where he stood beside Mrs. Bowen. "Oh, *do* take me to get something to eat!"

In the supper-room she devoured salad and ices with a childish joy in them. The place was jammed, and she laughed from her corner at Colville's struggles in getting the things for her and bringing them to her. While she was still in the midst of an ice, the faint note of the piano sounded. "Oh,

they 're beginning again. It 's the Lancers ! " she said, giving him the plate back. She took his arm again ; she almost pulled him along on their return.

" Why don't *you* dance ? " she demanded mockingly.

" I would if you 'd let me dance with you."

" Oh, that 's impossible ! I 'm engaged ever so many deep." She dropped his arm instantly at sight of a young Englishman who seemed to be looking for her. This young Englishman had a zeal for dancing that was unsparing ; partners were nothing to him except as a means of dancing ; his manner expressed a supreme contempt for people who made the slightest mistake, who danced with less science or less conscience than himself. " I've been looking for you," he said, in a tone of cold rebuke, without looking at her. " We 've been waiting."

Colville wished to beat him, but Imogene took his rebuke meekly, and murmured some apologies about not hearing the piano before. He hurried her off without recognising Colville's existence in any way.

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were better than with the fond father, and joined him, just as a polite officer came up and entreated him to complete a set. "Oh, I never danced in my life," he replied; and then he referred the officer to Colville. "Don't *you* dance?"

"I used to dance," Colville began, while the officer stood looking patiently at him. This was true. He used to dance the Lancers, too, and very badly, seventeen years before. He had danced it with Lina Ridgely and the other one, Mrs. Milbury. His glance wandered to the vacant place on the floor; it was the same set which Miss Graham was in; she smiled and beckoned derisively. A vain and foolish ambition fired him. "Oh yes, I can dance a little," he said.

A little was quite enough for the eager officer. He had Colville a partner in an instant, and the next he was on the floor.

"Oh, what fun!" cried Miss Graham; but the fun had not really begun yet.

Colville had forgotten everything about the Lancers. He walked round like a bear in a pen: he capered to and fro with a futile absurdity; people poked him hither and thither; his progress was attended by rending noises from the trains over which he

found his path. He smiled and cringed, and apologised to the hardening faces of the dancers: even Miss Graham's face had become very grave.

"This won't do," said the Englishman at last, with cold insolence. He did not address himself to any one; he merely stopped; they all stopped, and Colville was effectively expelled the set; another partner was found for his lady, and he wandered giddily away. He did not know where to turn; the whole room must have seen what an incredible ass he had made of himself, but Mrs. Bowen looked as if she had not seen.

He went up to her, resolved to make fun of himself at the first sign she gave of being privy to his disgrace. But she only said, "Have you found your way to the supper-room yet?"

"Oh yes; twice," he answered, and kept on talking with her and Madame Uccelli. After five minutes or so something occurred to Colville. "Have *you* found the way to the supper-room yet, Mrs. Bowen?"

"No!" she owned, with a small, pathetic laugh, which expressed a certain physical faintness, and reproached him with insupportable gentleness for his selfish obtuseness.

"Let me show you the way," he cried.

"Why, I *am* rather hungry," said Mrs. Bowen, taking his arm, with a patient arrangement first of her fan, her bouquet, and her train, and then moving along by his side with a delicate-footed pace, which insinuated and deprecated her dependence upon him.

There were only a few people in the supper-room, and they had it practically to themselves. She took a cup of tea and a slice of buttered bread, with a little salad, which she excused herself from eating because it was the day after her headache. "I shouldn't have thought you *were* hungry, Mrs. Bowen," he said, "if you hadn't told me so," and he recalled that, as a young girl, her friend used to laugh at her for having such a butterfly appetite; she was in fact one of those women who go through life the marvels of such of our brutal sex as observe the ethereal nature of their diet. But in an illogical revulsion of feeling, Colville, who was again cramming himself with all the solids and fluids in reach, and storing up a vain regret against the morrow, preferred her delicacy to the magnificent rapacity of Miss Graham: Imogene had passed from salad to ice, and at his suggestion had

frankly reverted to salad again, and then taken a second ice, with the robust appetite of perfect health and perfect youth. He felt a desire to speak against her to Mrs. Bowen, he did not know why and he did not know how; he veiled his feeling in an open attack. "Miss Graham has just been the cause of my playing the fool, with her dancing. She dances so superbly that she makes you want to dance too—she made me feel as if I *could* dance."

"Yes," said Mrs. Bowen; "it was very kind of you to complete the set. I saw you dancing," she added, without a glimmer of guilty consciousness in her eyes.

It was very sweet, but Colville had to protest. "Oh no; you didn't see me *dancing;* you saw me *not* dancing. I am a ruined man, and I leave Florence to-morrow; but I have the sad satisfaction of reflecting that I don't leave an unbroken train among the ladies of that set. And I have made one young Englishman so mad that there is a reasonable hope of his not recovering."

"Oh no; you *don't* think of going away for that!" said Mrs. Bowen, not heeding the rest of his joking.

"Well, the time has been when I have left Florence for less," said Colville, with

the air of preparing himself to listen to reason.

"You mustn't," said Mrs. Bowen briefly.

"Oh, very well, then, I won't," said Colville whimsically, as if that settled it.

Mrs. Bowen would not talk of the matter any more; he could see that with her kindness, which was always more than her tact, she was striving to get away from the subject. As he really cared for it no longer, this made him persist in clinging to it; he liked this pretty woman's being kind to him. "Well," he said finally, "I consent to stay in Florence on condition that you suggest some means of atonement for me which I can also make a punishment to Miss Graham."

Mrs. Bowen did not respond to the question of placating and punishing her *protégée* with sustained interest. They went back to Madame Uccelli, and to the other elderly ladies in the room that opened by archways upon the dancing-room.

Imogene was on the floor, dancing not merely with unabated joy, but with a zest that seemed only to freshen from dance to dance. If she left the dance, it was to go out on her partner's arm to the supper-room. Colville could not decently keep on

talking to Mrs. Bowen the whole evening; it would be too conspicuous; he devolved from frump to frump; he bored himself; he yawned in his passage from one of these mothers or fathers to another. The hours passed; it was two o'clock; Imogene was going out to the supper-room again. He was taking out his watch. She saw him, and "Oh, don't!" she cried, laughing, as she passed.

The dancing went on; she was waltzing now in the interminable german. Some one had let down a window in the dancing-room, and he was feeling it in his shoulder. Mrs. Bowen, across the room, looked heroically patient, but weary. He glanced down at the frump on the sofa near, and realised that she had been making a long speech to him, which, he could see from her look, had ended in some sort of question.

Three o'clock came, and they had to wait till the german was over. He felt that Miss Graham was behaving badly, ungratefully, selfishly; on the way home in the carriage he was silent from utter boredom and fatigue, but Mrs. Bowen was sweetly sympathetic with the girl's rapture. Imogene did not seem to feel his moodiness; she laughed, she joked, she told a number of

things that happened, she hummed the air of the last waltz. "Isn't it divine?" she asked. "*Oh!* I feel as if I could dance for a week." She was still dancing; she gave Colville's foot an accidental tap in keeping time on the floor of the carriage to the tune she was humming. No one said anything about a next meeting when they parted at the gate of Palazzo Pinti, and Mrs. Bowen bade her coachman drive Colville to his hotel. But both the ladies' voices called good-night to him as he drove away. He fancied a shade of mocking in Miss Graham's voice.

The great outer door of the hotel was locked, of course, and the poor little porter kept Colville thumping at it some time before he unlocked it, full of sleepy smiles and apologies. "I'm sorry to wake you up," said Colville kindly.

"It is my duty," said the porter, with amiable heroism. He discharged another duty by lighting a whole new candle, which would be set down to Colville's account, and went before him to his room, up the wide stairs, cold in their white linen path, and on through the crooked corridors haunted by the ghosts of extinct *tables d'hôte*, and full of goblin shadows. He had recovered

a noonday suavity by the time he reached Colville's door, and bowed himself out, after lighting the candles within, with a sweet plenitude of politeness, which Colville, even in his gloomy mood, could not help admiring in a man in his shirt sleeves, with only one suspender up.

If there had been a fire, Colville would have liked to sit down before it, and take an account of his feelings, but the atmosphere of a bed-chamber in a Florentine hotel at half-past three o'clock on a winter morning is not one that invites to meditation; and he made haste to get into bed, with nothing clearer in his mind than a shapeless sense of having been trifled with. He ought not to have gone to a dancing party, to begin with, and then he certainly ought not to have attempted to dance; so far he might have been master of the situation, and was responsible for it; but he was, over and above this, aware of not having wished to do either, of having been wrought upon against his convictions to do both. He regarded now with supreme loathing a fantastic purpose which he had formed while tramping round on those women's dresses, of privately taking lessons in dancing, and astonishing Miss Graham at the next ball

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"Let me show you the way," he cried.

"Why, I *am* rather hungry," said Mrs. Bowen, taking his arm, with a patient arrangement first of her fan, her bouquet, and her train, and then moving along by his side with a delicate-footed pace, which insinuated and deprecated her dependence upon him.

There were only a few people in the supper-room, and they had it practically to themselves. She took a cup of tea and a slice of buttered bread, with a little salad, which she excused herself from eating because it was the day after her headache. "I shouldn't have thought you *were* hungry, Mrs. Bowen," he said, "if you hadn't told me so," and he recalled that, as a young girl, her friend used to laugh at her for having such a butterfly appetite; she was in fact one of those women who go through life the marvels of such of our brutal sex as observe the ethereal nature of their diet. But in an illogical revulsion of feeling, Colville, who was again cramming himself with all the solids and fluids in reach, and storing up a vain regret against the morrow, preferred her delicacy to the magnificent rapacity of Miss Graham: Imogene had passed from salad to ice, and at his suggestion had

frankly reverted to salad again, and then taken a second ice, with the robust appetite of perfect health and perfect youth. He felt a desire to speak against her to Mrs. Bowen, he did not know why and he did not know how; he veiled his feeling in an open attack. "Miss Graham has just been the cause of my playing the fool, with her dancing. She dances so superbly that she makes you want to dance too—she made me feel as if I *could* dance."

"Yes," said Mrs. Bowen; "it was very kind of you to complete the set. I saw you dancing," she added, without a glimmer of guilty consciousness in her eyes.

It was very sweet, but Colville had to protest. "Oh no; you didn't see me *dancing;* you saw me *not* dancing. I am a ruined man, and I leave Florence to-morrow; but I have the sad satisfaction of reflecting that I don't leave an unbroken train among the ladies of that set. And I have made one young Englishman so mad that there is a reasonable hope of his not recovering."

"Oh no; you *don't* think of going away for that!" said Mrs. Bowen, not heeding the rest of his joking.

"Well, the time has been when I have left Florence for less," said Colville, with

the air of preparing himself to listen to reason.

"You mustn't," said Mrs. Bowen briefly.

"Oh, very well, then, I won't," said Colville whimsically, as if that settled it.

Mrs. Bowen would not talk of the matter any more; he could see that with her kindness, which was always more than her tact, she was striving to get away from the subject. As he really cared for it no longer, this made him persist in clinging to it; he liked this pretty woman's being kind to him. "Well," he said finally, "I consent to stay in Florence on condition that you suggest some means of atonement for me which I can also make a punishment to Miss Graham."

Mrs. Bowen did not respond to the question of placating and punishing her *protégée* with sustained interest. They went back to Madame Uccelli, and to the other elderly ladies in the room that opened by archways upon the dancing-room.

Imogene was on the floor, dancing not merely with unabated joy, but with a zest that seemed only to freshen from dance to dance. If she left the dance, it was to go out on her partner's arm to the supper-room. Colville could not decently keep on

talking to Mrs. Bowen the whole evening; it would be too conspicuous; he devolved from frump to frump; he bored himself; he yawned in his passage from one of these mothers or fathers to another. The hours passed; it was two o'clock; Imogene was going out to the supper-room again. He was taking out his watch. She saw him, and "Oh, don't!" she cried, laughing, as she passed.

The dancing went on; she was waltzing now in the interminable german. Some one had let down a window in the dancing-room, and he was feeling it in his shoulder. Mrs. Bowen, across the room, looked heroically patient, but weary. He glanced down at the frump on the sofa near, and realised that she had been making a long speech to him, which, he could see from her look, had ended in some sort of question.

Three o'clock came, and they had to wait till the german was over. He felt that Miss Graham was behaving badly, ungratefully, selfishly; on the way home in the carriage he was silent from utter boredom and fatigue, but Mrs. Bowen was sweetly sympathetic with the girl's rapture. Imogene did not seem to feel his moodiness; she laughed, she joked, she told a number of

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things that happened, she hummed the air of the last waltz. "Isn't it divine?" she asked. "*Oh!* I feel as if I could dance for a week." She was still dancing; she gave Colville's foot an accidental tap in keeping time on the floor of the carriage to the tune she was humming. No one said anything about a next meeting when they parted at the gate of Palazzo Pinti, and Mrs. Bowen bade her coachman drive Colville to his hotel. But both the ladies' voices called good-night to him as he drove away. He fancied a shade of mocking in Miss Graham's voice.

The great outer door of the hotel was locked, of course, and the poor little porter kept Colville thumping at it some time before he unlocked it, full of sleepy smiles and apologies. "I'm sorry to wake you up," said Colville kindly.

"It is my duty," said the porter, with amiable heroism. He discharged another duty by lighting a whole new candle, which would be set down to Colville's account, and went before him to his room, up the wide stairs, cold in their white linen path, and on through the crooked corridors haunted by the ghosts of extinct *tables d'hôte*, and full of goblin shadows. He had recovered

a noonday suavity by the time he reached Colville's door, and bowed himself out, after lighting the candles within, with a sweet plenitude of politeness, which Colville, even in his gloomy mood, could not help admiring in a man in his shirt sleeves, with only one suspender up.

If there had been a fire, Colville would have liked to sit down before it, and take an account of his feelings, but the atmosphere of a bed-chamber in a Florentine hotel at half-past three o'clock on a winter morning is not one that invites to meditation; and he made haste to get into bed, with nothing clearer in his mind than a shapeless sense of having been trifled with. He ought not to have gone to a dancing party, to begin with, and then he certainly ought not to have attempted to dance; so far he might have been master of the situation, and was responsible for it; but he was, over and above this, aware of not having wished to do either, of having been wrought upon against his convictions to do both. He regarded now with supreme loathing a fantastic purpose which he had formed while tramping round on those women's dresses, of privately taking lessons in dancing, and astonishing Miss Graham at the next ball

where they met. Miss Graham? What did he care for that child? Or Mrs. Bowen either, for the matter of that? Had he come four thousand miles to be used, to be played with, by them? At this point Colville was aware of the brutal injustice of his mood. They were ladies, both of them, charming and good, and he had been a fool; that was all. It was not the first time he had been a fool for women. An inexpressible bitterness for that old wrong, which, however he had been used to laugh at it and despise it, had made his life solitary and barren, poured upon his soul; it was as if it had happened to him yesterday.

A band of young men burst from one of the narrow streets leading into the piazza and straggled across it, letting their voices flare out upon the silence, and then drop extinct one by one. A whole world of faded associations flushed again in Colville's heart. This was Italy; this was Florence; and he execrated the hour in which he had dreamed of returning.

VII.

THE next morning's sunshine dispersed the black mood of the night before; but enough of Colville's self-disgust remained to determine him not to let his return to Florence be altogether vain, or his sojourn so idle as it had begun being. The vague purpose which he had cherished of studying the past life and character of the Florentines in their architecture shaped itself anew in the half-hour which he gave himself over his coffee; and he turned it over in his mind with that mounting joy in its capabilities which attends the contemplation of any sort of artistic endeavour. No people had ever more distinctly left the impress of their whole temper in their architecture, or more sharply distinguished their varying moods from period to period in their palaces and temples. He believed that he could not only supply that brief historical sketch of Florence which Mrs. Bowen had lamented the want of, but he could make her his-

tory speak an intelligible, an unmistakable tongue in every monument of the past, from the Etruscan wall at Fiesole to the cheap, plain, and tasteless shaft raised to commemorate Italian Unity in the next piazza. With sketches from his own pencil, illustrative of points which he could not otherwise enforce, he could make such a book on Florence as did not exist, such a book as no one had yet thought of making. With this object in his mind, making and keeping him young, he could laugh with any one who liked at the vanity of the middle-aged Hoosier[1] who had spoiled a set in the Lancers at Madame Uccelli's party; he laughed at him now alone, with a wholly impersonal sense of his absurdity.

After breakfast he went without delay to Vieusseux's reading-room, to examine his catalogue, and see what there was in it to his purpose. While he was waiting his turn to pay his subscription, with the people who surrounded the proprietor, half a dozen of the acquaintances he had made at Mrs. Bowen's passed in and out. Vieusseux's is a place where sooner or later you meet every one you know among the foreign residents at Florence; the natives in smaller proportion

[1] A native of Indiana.

resort there too; and Colville heard a lady asking for a book in that perfect Italian which strikes envy to the heart of the stranger sufficiently versed in the language to know that he never shall master it. He rather rejoiced in his despair, however, as an earnest of his renewed intellectual life. Henceforth his life would be wholly intellectual. He did not regret his little excursion into society; it had shown him with dramatic sharpness how unfit for it he was.

"Good *morning!*" said some one in a bland undertone full of a pleasant recognition of the claims to quiet of a place where some others were speaking in their ordinary tones.

Colville looked round on the Rev. Mr. Waters, and took his friendly hand. "Good morning—glad to see you," he answered.

"Are you looking for that short Florentine history for Mrs. Bowen's little girl?" asked Mr. Waters, inclining his head slightly for the reply. "She mentioned it to me."

By day Colville remarked more distinctly that the old gentleman was short and slight, with a youthful eagerness in his face surviving on good terms with the grey locks that fell down his temples from under the brim of his soft felt hat. With the boyish sweetness of his looks blended a sort of apprecia-

tive shrewdness, which pointed his smiling lips slightly aslant in what seemed the expectation rather than the intention of humour.

"Not exactly," said Colville, experiencing a difficulty in withholding the fact that in some sort he was just going to write a short Florentine history, and finding a certain pleasure in Mrs. Bowen's having remembered that he had taken an interest in Effie's reading. He had a sudden wish to tell Mr. Waters of his plan, but this was hardly the time or place.

They now found themselves face to face with the librarian, and Mr. Waters made a gesture of waiving himself in Colville's favour.

"No, no!" said the latter; "you had better ask. I am going to put this gentleman through rather an extended course of sprouts."

The librarian smiled with the helplessness of a foreigner, who knows his interlocutor's English, but not the meaning of it.

"Oh, I merely wanted to ask," said Mr. Waters, addressing the librarian, and explaining to Colville, "whether you had received that book on Savonarola yet. The German one."

"I shall see," said the librarian, and he went upon a quest that kept him some minutes.

"You 're not thinking of taking Savonarola's life, I suppose?" suggested Colville.

"Oh no. Villari's book has covered the whole ground for ever, it seems to me. It 's a wonderful book. You 've read it?"

"Yes. It 's a thing that makes you feel that, after all, the Italians have only to make a real effort in any direction, and they go ahead of everybody else. What biography of the last twenty years can compare with it?"

"You 're right, sir—you 're right," cried the old man enthusiastically. "They 're a gifted race, a people of genius."

"I wish for their own sakes they 'd give their minds a little to generalship," said Colville, pressed by the facts to hedge somewhat. "They did get so badly smashed in their last war, poor fellows."

"Oh, I don't think I should like them any better if they were better soldiers. Perhaps the lesson of noble endurance that they 've given our times is all that we have the right to demand of them in the way of heroism; no one can say they lack courage. And sometimes it seems to me that in simply

outgrowing the different sorts of despotism that had fastened upon them, till their broken bonds fell away without positive effort on their part, they showed a greater sublimity than if they had violently conquered their freedom. Most nations sink lower and lower under tyranny; the Italians grew steadily more and more civilised, more noble, more gentle, more grand. It was a wonderful spectacle — like a human soul perfected through suffering and privation. Every period of their history is full of instruction. I find my ancestral puritanism particularly appealed to by the puritanism of Savonarola."

"Then Villari hasn't satisfied you that Savonarola wasn't a Protestant?"

"Oh yes, he has. I said his puritanism. Just now I'm interested in justifying his failure to myself, for it's one of the things in history that I've found it hardest to accept. But no doubt his puritanic state fell because it was dreary and ugly, as the puritanic state always has been. It makes its own virtues intolerable; puritanism won't let you see how good and beautiful the Puritans often are. It was inevitable that Savonarola's enemies should misunderstand and hate him."

"You are one of the last men I should have expected to find among the *Arrabiati*," said Colville.

"Oh, there 's a great deal to be said for the Florentine Arrabiati, as well as for the English Malignants, though the Puritans in neither case would have known how to say it. Savonarola perished because he was excessive. I am studying him in this aspect; it is fresh ground. It is very interesting to inquire just at what point a man's virtues become mischievous and intolerable."

These ideas interested Colville; he turned to them with relief from the sense of his recent trivialities; in this old man's earnestness he found support and encouragement in the new course he had marked out for himself. Sometimes it had occurred to him not only that he was too old for the interests of his youth at forty, but that there was no longer time for him to take up new ones. He considered Mr. Waters's grey hairs, and determined to be wiser. "I should like to talk these things over with you—and some other things," he said.

The librarian came toward them with the book for Mr. Waters, who was fumbling near-sightedly in his pocket-book for his card. "I shall be very happy to see you

at my room," he said. "Ah, thank you," he added, taking his book, with a simple relish as if it were something whose pleasantness was sensible to the touch. He gave Colville the scholar's far-off look as he turned to go: he was already as remote as the fifteenth century through the magic of the book, which he opened and began to read at once. Colville stared after him; he did not wish to come to just that yet, either. Life, active life, life of his own day, called to him; he had been one of its busiest children: could he turn his back upon it for any charm or use that was in the past? Again that unnerving doubt, that paralysing distrust, beset him, and tempted him to curse the day in which he had returned to this outworn Old World. Idler on its modern surface, or delver in its deep-hearted past, could he reconcile himself to it? What did he care for the Italians of to-day, or the history of the Florentines as expressed in their architectural monuments? It was the problems of the vast, tumultuous American life, which he had turned his back on, that really concerned him. Later he might take up the study that fascinated yonder old man, but for the present it was intolerable.

He was no longer young, that was true; but with an ache of old regret he felt that he had not yet lived his life, that his was a baffled destiny, an arrested fate. A lady came up and took his turn with the librarian, and Colville did not stay for another. He went out and walked down the Lung' Arno toward the Cascine. The sun danced on the river, and bathed the long line of pale buff and grey houses that followed its curve, and ceased in the mist of leafless tree-tops, where the Cascine began. It was not the hour of the promenade, and there was little driving; but the sidewalks were peopled thickly enough with persons, in groups, or singly, who had the air of straying aimlessly up or down, with no purpose but to be in the sun, after the rainy weather of the past week. There were faces of invalids, wistful and thin, and here and there a man, muffled to the chin, lounged feebly on the parapet and stared at the river. Colville hastened by them; they seemed to claim him as one of their ailing and aging company, and just then he was in the humour of being very young and strong.

A carriage passed before him through the Cascine gates, and drove down the road next the river. He followed, and when it

had got a little way it stopped at the roadside, and a lady and little girl alighted, who looked about and caught sight of him, and then obviously waited for him to come up with them. It was Imogene and Effie Bowen, and the young girl called to him: "We *thought* it was you. Aren't you astonished to find us here at this hour?" she demanded, as soon as he came up, and gave him her hand. "Mrs. Bowen sent us for our health—or Effie's health—and I was just making the man stop and let us out for a little walk."

"My health is very much broken too, Miss Effie," said Colville. "Will you let me walk with you?" The child smiled, as she did at Colville's speeches, which she apparently considered all jokes, but diplomatically referred the decision to Imogene with an upward glance.

"We shall be very glad indeed," said the girl.

"That's very polite of you. But Miss Effie makes no effort to conceal her dismay," said Colville.

The little girl smiled again, and her smile was so like the smile of Lina Ridgely, twenty years ago, that his next words were inevitably tinged with reminiscence.

"Does one still come for one's health to the Cascine? When I was in Florence before, there was no other place if one went to look for it with young ladies—the Cascine or the Boboli Gardens. Do they keep the fountain of youth turned on here during the winter still?"

"I 've never seen it," said Imogene gaily.

"Of course not. You never looked for it. Neither did I when I was here before. But it wouldn't escape me now."

Since he had met them he had aged again, in spite of his resolutions to the contrary; somehow, beside their buoyancy and bloom, the youth in his heart faded.

Imogene had started forward as soon as he joined them, and Colville, with Effie's gloved hand stolen shyly in his, was finding it quite enough to keep up with her in her elastic advance.

She wore a long habit of silk, whose fur-trimmed edge wandered diagonally across her breast and down to the edge of her walking dress. To Colville, whom her girlish slimness in her ball costume had puzzled after his original impressions of Junonian abundance, she did not so much dwindle as seem to vanish from the proportions his visions had assigned her that first

night when he saw her standing before the mirror. In this outdoor avatar, this companionship with the sun and breeze, she was new to him again, and he found himself searching his consciousness for his lost acquaintance with her, and feeling as if he knew her less and less. Perhaps, indeed, she had no very distinctive individuality; perhaps at her age no woman has, but waits for it to come to her through life, through experience. She was an expression of youth, of health, of beauty, and of the moral loveliness that comes from a fortunate combination of these; but beyond this she was elusive in a way that seemed to characterise her even materially. He could not make anything more of the mystery as he walked at her side, and he went thinking—formlessly, as people always think—that with the child or with her mother he would have had a community of interest and feeling which he lacked with this splendid girlhood! he was both too young and too old for it; and then, while he answered this or that to Imogene's talk aptly enough, his mind went back to the time when this mystery was no mystery, or when he was contemporary with it, and if he did not understand it, at least accepted it as if it were the most natural thing in the

world. It seemed a longer time now since it had been in his world than it was since he was a child.

"Should you have thought," she asked, turning her face back toward him, "that it would be so hot in the sun to-day? *Oh*, that beautiful river! How it twists and writhes along! Do you remember that sonnet of Longfellow's—the one he wrote in Italian about the Ponte Vecchio, and the Arno twisting like a dragon underneath it? They say that Hawthorne used to live in a villa just behind the hill over there; we 're going to look it up as soon as the weather is settled. Don't you think his books are perfectly fascinating?"

"Yes," said Colville; "only I should want a good while to say it."

"*I* shouldn't!" retorted the girl. "When you've said fascinating, you 've said everything. There 's no other word for them. Don't you like to talk about the books you 've read?"

"I would if I could remember the names of the characters. But I get them mixed up."

"Oh, *I* never do! I remember the least one of them, and all they do and say."

"I used to."

"It seems to me you *used* to do everything."

"It seems to me as if I did.

"'I remember, when I think,
That my youth was half divine.'"

"Oh, Tennyson—yes! *He's* fascinating. Don't you think he 's fascinating?"

"Very," said Colville. He was wondering whether this were the kind of talk that he thought was literary when he was a young fellow.

"How perfectly weird the 'Vision of Sin' is!" Imogene continued. "Don't you like *weird* things?"

"Weird things?" Colville reflected. "Yes; but I don't see very much in them any more. The fact is, they don't seem to come to anything in particular."

"Oh, *I* think they do! I've had dreams that I've lived on for days. Do you ever have prophetic dreams?"

"Yes; but they never come true. When they do, I know that I didn't have them."

"What *do* you mean?"

"I mean that we are all so fond of the marvellous that we can't trust ourselves about any experience that seems supernatural. If a ghost appeared to me I

should want him to prove it by at least two other reliable, disinterested witnesses before I believed my own account of the matter."

"Oh!" cried the girl, half puzzled, half amused. "Then of course you don't believe in ghosts?"

"Yes; I expect to be one myself some day. But I 'm in no hurry to mingle with them."

Imogene smiled vaguely, as if the talk pleased her, even when it mocked the fancies and whims which, after so many generations that have indulged them, she was finding so fresh and new in her turn.

"Don't you like to walk by the side of a river?" she asked, increasing her eager pace a little. "I feel as if it were bearing me along."

"I feel as if I were carrying it," said Colville. "It 's as fatiguing as walking on railroad ties."

"Oh, that 's too bad!" cried the girl. "How can you be so prosaic? Should you ever have believed that the sun could be so hot in January? And look at those ridiculous green hillsides over the river there! Don't you like it to be winter when it *is* winter?"

She did not seem to have expected anything from Colville but an impulsive acquiescence, but she listened while he defended the mild weather. "I think it 's very well for Italy," he said. "It has always seemed to me—that is, it seems to me now for the first time, but one has to begin the other way—as if the seasons here had worn themselves out like the turbulent passions of the people. I dare say the winter was much fiercer in the times of the Bianchi and Neri."

"Oh, how delightful! Do you really believe that?"

"No, I don't know that I do. But I shouldn't have much difficulty in proving it, I think, to the sympathetic understanding."

"I wish you would prove it to mine. It sounds so pretty, I 'm sure it must be true."

"Oh, then, it isn't necessary. I 'll reserve my arguments for Mrs. Bowen."

"You had better. She isn't at all romantic. She says it 's very well for me she isn't —that her being matter-of-fact lets me be as romantic as I like."

"Then Mrs. Bowen isn't as romantic as she would like to be if she hadn't charge of a romantic young lady?"

"Oh, I don't say that. Dear me! I'd no idea it *could* be so hot in January." As they strolled along beside the long hedge of laurel, the carriage slowly following them at a little distance, the sun beat strong upon the white road, blotched here and there with the black irregular shadows of the ilexes. The girl undid the pelisse across her breast, with a fine impetuosity, and let it swing open as she walked. She stopped suddenly. "Hark! What bird was that?"

"'It was the nightingale, and not the lark,'" suggested Colville lazily.

"Oh, *don't* you think *Romeo and Juliet* is divine?" demanded Imogene, promptly dropping the question of the bird.

"I don't know about Romeo," returned Colville, "but it's sometimes occurred to me that Juliet was rather forth-putting."

"You *know* she wasn't. It's my favourite play. I could go every night. It's perfectly amazing to me that they can play anything else."

"You would like it five hundred nights in the year, like *Hazel Kirke?* That would be a good deal of Romeo, not to say Juliet."

"They ought to do it out of respect

to Shakespeare. Don't you like Shakespeare?"

"Well, I've seen the time when I preferred Alexander Smith," said Colville evasively.

"Alexander Smith? Who in the world is Alexander Smith?"

"How recent you are! Alexander Smith was an immortal who flourished about the year 1850."

"That was before I was born. How could I remember him? But I don't feel so very recent for all that."

"Neither do I, this morning," said Colville. "I was up at one of Pharaoh's balls last night, and I danced too much."

He gave Imogene a droll glance, and then bent it upon Effie's discreet face. The child dropped her eyes with a blush like her mother's, having first sought provisional counsel of Imogene, who turned away. He rightly inferred that they all had been talking him over at breakfast, and he broke into a laugh which they joined in, but Imogene said nothing in recognition of the fact.

With what he felt to be haste for his relief she said, "Don't you hate to be told to read a book?"

"I used to—quarter of a century ago,"

said Colville, recognising that this was the way young people talked, even then.

"Used to?" she repeated. "Don't you now?"

"No; I'm a great deal more tractable now. I always say that I shall get the book out of the library. I draw the line at buying. I still hate to *buy* a book that people recommend."

"What kind of books *do* you like to buy?"

"Oh, no kind. I think we ought to get all our books out of the library."

"Do you never like to talk in earnest?"

"Well, not often," said Colville. "Because, if you do, you can't say with a good conscience afterward that you were only in fun."

"Oh! And do you always like to talk so that you can get out of things afterward?"

"No. I didn't say that, did I?"

"Very nearly, I should think."

"Then I'm glad I didn't quite."

"I like people to be outspoken—to say everything they think," said the girl, regarding him with a puzzled look.

"Then I foresee that I shall become a favourite," answered Colville. "I say a great deal more than I think."

She looked at him again with envy, with admiration, qualifying her perplexity. They had come to a point where some moss-grown, weather-beaten statues stood at the corners of the road that traversed the bosky stretch between the avenues of the Cascine. "Ah, how beautiful they are!" he said, halting, and giving himself to the rapture that a blackened garden statue imparts to one who beholds it from the vantage-ground of sufficient years and experience.

"Do you remember that story of Heine's," he resumed, after a moment, "of the boy who steals out of the old castle by moonlight, and kisses the lips of the garden statue, fallen among the rank grass of the ruinous parterres? And long afterward, when he looks down on the sleep of the dying girl where she lies on the green sofa, it seems to him that she and that statue are the same?"

"Oh!" deeply sighed the young girl. "No, I never read it. Tell me what it is. I *must* read it."

"The rest is all talk—very good talk; but I doubt whether it would interest you. He goes on to talk of a great many things—of the way Bellini spoke French, for example He says it was blood-curdling, horrible, cataclysmal. He brought out the poor French

words and broke them upon the wheel, till you thought the whole world must give way with a thunder-crash. A dead hush reigned in the room: the women did not know whether to faint or fly; the men looked down at their pantaloons, and tried to realise what they had on."

"Oh, how perfectly delightful! how shameful!" cried the girl. "I *must* read it. What is it in? What is the name of the story?"

"It isn't a story," said Colville. "Did you ever see anything lovelier than these statues?"

"No," said Imogene. "*Are* they good?"

"They are much better than good—they are the very worst rococo."

"What makes you say they are beautiful, then?"

"Why, don't you see? They commemorate youth, gaiety, brilliant, joyous life. That 's what that kind of statues was made for—to look on at rich, young, beautiful people and their gallantries; to be danced before by fine ladies and gentlemen playing at shepherd and shepherdesses; to be driven past by marcheses and contessinas flirting in carriages; to be hung with scarfs and wreaths; to be parts of eternal *fêtes cham-*

pêtres. Don't you see how bored they look? When I first came to Italy I should have detested and ridiculed their bad art; but now they 're exquisite—the worse the better."

"I don't know what in the world you *do* mean," said Imogene, laughing uneasily.

"Mrs. Bowen would. It 's a pity Mrs. Bowen isn't here with us. Miss Effie, if I lift you up to one of those statues, will you kindly ask it if it doesn't remember a young American signor who was here just before the French Revolution? I don't believe it 's forgotten me."

"No, no," said Imogene. "It 's time we were walking back. Don't you like Scott?" she added. "I should think you would if you like those romantic things. I used to like Scott so *much.* When I was fifteen I wouldn't read anything but Scott. Don't you like Thackeray? Oh, he 's so *cynical!* It 's perfectly delightful."

"Cynical?" repeated Colville thoughtfully. "I was looking into *The Newcomes* the other day, and I thought he was rather sentimental."

"Sentimental! Why, what an idea! That is the strangest thing I ever heard of. Oh!" she broke in upon her own amazement, "don't you think Browning's 'Statue

and the Bust' is splendid? Mr. Morton read it to us—to Mrs. Bowen, I mean."

Colville resented this freedom of Mr. Morton's, he did not know just why; then his pique was lost in sarcastic recollection of the time when he too used to read poems to ladies. He had read that poem to Lina Ridgely and the other one.

"Mrs. Bowen asked him to read it," Imogene continued.

"Did she?" asked Colville pensively.

"And then we discussed it afterward. We had a long discussion. And then he read us the 'Legend of Pornic,' and we had a discussion about that. Mrs. Bowen says it was real gold they found in the coffin; but I think it was the girl's 'gold hair.' I don't know which Mr. Morton thought. Which do you? Don't you think the 'Legend of Pornic' is splendid?"

"Yes, it's a great poem, and deep," said Colville. They had come to a place where the bank sloped invitingly to the river. "Miss Effie," he asked, "wouldn't you like to go down and throw stones into the Arno? That's what a river is for," he added, as the child glanced toward Imogene for authorisation, "to have stones thrown into it."

"Oh, let us!" cried Imogene, rushing

down to the brink. "I don't want to throw stones into it, but to get near it — to get near to any bit of nature. They do pen you up so from it in Europe!" She stood and watched Colville skim stones over the current. "When you stand by the shore of a swift river like this, or near a railroad train when it comes whirling by, don't you ever have a morbid impulse to fling yourself forward?"

"Not at my time of life," said Colville, stooping to select a flat stone. "Morbid impulses are one of the luxuries of youth." He threw the stone, which skipped triumphantly far out into the stream. "That was beautiful, wasn't it, Miss Effie?"

"Lovely!" murmured the child.

He offered her a flat pebble. "Would you like to try one?"

"It would spoil my gloves," she said, in deprecating refusal.

"Let *me* try it!" cried Imogene. "I'm not afraid of my gloves."

Colville yielded the pebble, looking at her with the thought of how intoxicating he should once have found this bit of wilful *abandon*, but feeling rather sorry for it now. "Oh, perhaps not?" he said, laying his hand upon hers, and looking into her eyes.

She returned his look, and then she dropped the pebble and put her hand back in her muff, and turned and ran up the bank. "There 's the carriage. It 's time we should be going." At the top of the bank she became a mirror of dignity, a transparent mirror to his eye. "Are you going back to town, Mr. Colville?" she asked, with formal state. "We could set you down anywhere!"

"Thank you, Miss Graham. I shall be glad to avail myself of your very kind offer. Allow me." He handed her ceremoniously to the carriage; he handed Effie Bowen even more ceremoniously to the carriage, holding his hat in one hand while he offered the other. Then he mounted to the seat in front of them. "The weather has changed," he said.

Imogene hid her face in her muff, and Effie Bowen bowed hers against Imogene's shoulder.

A sense of the girl's beauty lingered in Colville's thought all day, and recurred to him again and again; and the ambitious intensity and enthusiasm of her talk came back in touches of amusement and compassion. How divinely young it all was, and how lovely! He patronised it from a height far aloof.

He was not in the frame of mind for the hotel table, and he went to lunch at a restaurant. He chose a simple trattoria, the first he came to, and he took his seat at one of the bare, rude tables, where the joint saucers for pepper and salt, and a small glass for toothpicks, with a much-scraped porcelain box for matches, expressed an uncorrupted Florentinity of custom. But when he gave his order in offhand Italian, the waiter answered in the French which waiters get together for the traveller's confusion in Italy, and he resigned himself to whatever chance of acquaintance might befall him. The place had a companionable smell of stale tobacco, and the dim light showed him on the walls of a space dropped a step or two lower, at the end of the room, a variety of sketches and caricatures. A waiter was laying a large table in this space, and when Colville came up to examine the drawings he jostled him, with due apologies, in the haste of a man working against time for masters who will brook no delay. He was hurrying still when a party of young men came in and took their places at the table, and began to rough him for his delay. Colville could recognise several of them in the vigorous burlesques

on the walls, and as others dropped in the grotesque portraitures made him feel as if he had seen them before. They all talked at once, each man of his own interests, except when they joined in a shout of mockery and welcome for some new-comer. Colville, at his *risotto*, almost the room's length away, could hear what they thought, one and another, of Botticelli and Michelangelo; of old Piloty's things at Munich; of the dishes they had served to them, and of the quality of the Chianti; of the respective merits of German and Italian tobacco; of whether Inglehart had probably got to Venice yet; of the personal habits of Billings, and of the question whether the want of modelling in Simmons's nose had anything to do with his style of snoring; of the overrated colouring of some of those Venetian fellows; of the delicacy of Mino da Fiesole, and of the genius of Babson's tailor. Babson was there to defend the cut of his trousers, and Billings and Simmons were present to answer for themselves at the expense of the pictures of those who had called their habits and features into question. When it came to this all the voices joined in jolly uproar. Derision and denial broke out of the tumult, and pre-

sently they were all talking quietly of a reception which some of them were at the day before. Then Colville heard one of them saying that he would like a chance to paint some lady whose name he did not catch, and "She looks awfully sarcastic," one of the young fellows said.

"They say she *is*," said another. "They say she 's awfully intellectual."

"Boston?" queried a third.

"No, Kalamazoo. The centre of culture is out there now."

"She knows how to dress, anyhow," said the first commentator. "I wonder what Parker would talk to her about when he was painting her. He 's never read anything but Poe's 'Ullalume.'"

"Well, that 's a good subject—'Ullalume.'"

"I suppose she 's read it?"

"She 's read 'most everything, they say."

"What 's an Ullalume, anyway, Parker?"

One of the group sprang up from the table and drew on the wall what he labelled "An Ullalume." Another rapidly depicted Parker in the moment of sketching a young lady; her portrait had got as far as the eyes and nose when some one protested: "Oh, hello! No personalities."

The draughtsman said, "Well, all right!" and sat down again.

"Hall talked with her the most. What did she say, Hall?"

"Hall can't remember words in three syllables, but he says it was mighty brilliant and mighty deep."

"They say she 's a niece of Mrs. Bowen's. She 's staying with Mrs. Bowen."

Then it was the wisdom and brilliancy and severity of Imogene Graham that these young men stood in awe of! Colville remembered how the minds of girls of twenty had once dazzled him. "And yes," he mused, "she must have believed that we were talking literature in the Cascine. Certainly I should have thought it an intellectual time when I was at that age," he owned to himself with forlorn irony.

The young fellows went on to speak of Mrs. Bowen, whom it seemed they had known the winter before. She had been very polite to them; they praised her as if she were quite an old woman.

"But she must have been a very pretty girl," one of them put in.

"Well, she has a good deal of style yet."

"Oh yes, but she never could have been a beauty like the other one."

On her part, Imogene was very sober when she met Mrs. Bowen, though she had come in flushed and excited from the air and the morning's adventure. Mrs. Bowen was sitting by the fire, placidly reading; a vase of roses on the little table near her diffused the delicate odour of winter roses through the room; all seemed very still and dim, and of another time, somehow.

Imogene kept away from the fire, sitting down, in the provisional fashion of women, with her things on; but she unbuttoned her pelisse and flung it open. Effie had gone to her room.

"Did you have a pleasant drive?" asked Mrs. Bowen.

"Very," said the girl.

"Mr. Morton brought you these roses," continued Mrs. Bowen.

"Oh," said Imogene, with a cold glance at them.

"The Flemmings have asked us to a party Thursday. There is to be dancing."

"The Flemmings?"

"Yes." As if she now saw reason to do so, Mrs. Bowen laid the book face downward in her lap. She yawned a little, with her hand on her mouth. "Did you meet any one you knew?"

"Yes; Mr. Colville." Mrs. Bowen cut her yawn in half. "We got out to walk in the Cascine, and we saw him coming in at the gate. He came up and asked if he might walk with us."

"Did you have a pleasant walk?" asked Mrs. Bowen, a breath more chillily than she had asked if they had a pleasant drive.

"Yes, pleasant enough. And then we came back and went down the river bank, and he skipped stones, and we took him to his hotel."

"Was there anybody you knew in the Cascine?"

"Oh no; the place was a howling wilderness. I never saw it so deserted," said the girl impatiently. "It was terribly hot walking. I thought I should burn up."

Mrs. Bowen did not answer anything; she let the book lie in her lap.

"What an odd person Mr. Colville is!" said Imogene, after a moment. "Don't you think he's very different from other gentlemen?"

"Why?"

"Oh, he has such a peculiar way of talking."

"What peculiar way?"

"Oh, I don't know. Plenty of the young

men I see talk cynically, and I do sometimes myself—desperately, don't you know. But then I know very well we don't mean anything by it."

"And do you think Mr. Colville does? Do you think he talks cynically?"

Imogene leaned back in her chair and reflected. "No," she returned slowly, "I can't say that he does. But he talks lightly, with a kind of touch and go that makes you feel that he has exhausted all feeling. He doesn't parade it at all. But you hear between the words, don't you know, just as you read between the lines in some kinds of poetry. Of course it 's everything in knowing what he 's been through. He 's perfectly unaffected; and don't you think he 's good?"

"Oh yes," sighed Mrs. Bowen. "In his way."

"But he sees through you. Oh, quite! Nothing escapes him, and pretty soon he lets out that he has seen through you, and then you feel so *flat!* Oh, it 's perfectly intoxicating to be with him. I would give the world to talk as he does."

"What was your talk all about?"

"Oh, I don't know. I suppose it would have been called rather intellectual."

Mrs. Bowen smiled infinitesimally. But after a moment she said gravely, "Mr. Colville is very much older than you. He 's old enough to be your father."

"Yes, I know that. You feel that he feels old, and it 's perfectly tragical. Sometimes when he turns that slow, dull, melancholy look on you, he seems a thousand years old."

"I don't mean that he 's positively old," said Mrs. Bowen. "He 's only old comparatively."

"Oh yes; I understand that. And I don't mean that he really seems a thousand years old. What I meant was, he seems a thousand years off, as if he were still young, and had got left behind somehow. He seems to be on the other side of some impassable barrier, and you want to get over there and help him to our side, but you can't do it. I suppose his talking in that light way is merely a subterfuge to hide his feeling, to make him forget."

Mrs. Bowen fingered the edges of her book. "You mustn't let your fancy run away with you, Imogene," she said, with a little painful smile.

"Oh, I *like* to let it run away with me. And when I get such a subject as Mr. Col-

ville, there 's no stopping. I can't stop, and I don't *wish* to stop. Shouldn't you have thought that he would have been perfectly crushed at the exhibition he made of himself in the Lancers last night? He wasn't the least embarrassed when he met me, and the only allusion he made to it was to say that he had been up late, and had danced too much. Wasn't it wonderful he could do it? Oh, if *I* could do that!"

"I wish he could have avoided the occasion for his bravado," said Mrs. Bowen.

"I think I was a little to blame, perhaps," said the girl. "I beckoned him to come and take the vacant place."

"I don't see that that was an excuse," returned Mrs. Bowen primly.

Imogene seemed insensible to the tone, as it concerned herself; it only apparently reminded her of something. "Guess what Mr. Colville said, when I had been silly, and then tried to make up for it by being very dignified all of a sudden?"

"I don't know. How had you been silly?"

The servant brought in some cards. Imogene caught up the pelisse which she had been gradually shedding as she sat talking to Mrs. Bowen, and ran out of the room by another door.

They did not recur to the subject. But that night, when Mrs. Bowen went to say good night to Effie, after the child had gone to bed, she lingered.

"Effie," she said at last, in a husky whisper, "what did Imogene say to Mr. Colville to-day that made him laugh?"

"I don't know," said the child. "They kept laughing at so many things."

"Laughing?"

"Yes; he laughed. Do you mean toward the last, when he had been throwing stones into the river?"

"It must have been then."

The child stretched herself drowsily. "Oh, I couldn't understand it all. She wanted to throw a stone in the river, but he told her she had better not. But that didn't make *him* laugh. She was so very stiff just afterward that he said the weather had changed, and that made *us* laugh."

"Was that all?"

"We kept laughing ever so long. I never saw any one like Mr. Colville. How queerly the fire shines on your face! It gives you such a beautiful complexion."

"Does it?"

"Yes, lovely." The child's mother stooped over and kissed her. "You 're

the prettiest mamma in the world," she said, throwing her arms round her neck. "Sometimes I can't tell whether Imogene is prettier or not, but to-night I'm certain you are. Do you like to have me think that?"

"Yes—yes. But don't pull me down so; you hurt my neck. Good night."

The child let her go. "I haven't said my prayer yet, mamma. I was thinking."

"Well, say it now, then," said the mother gently.

When the child had finished she turned upon her cheek. "Good night, mamma."

Mrs. Bowen went about the room a little while, picking up its pretty disorder. Then she sat down in a chair by the hearth, where a log was still burning. The light of the flame flickered upon her face, and threw upon the ceiling a writhing, fantastic shadow, the odious caricature of her gentle beauty.

VIII.

IN that still air of the Florentine winter, time seems to share the arrest of the natural forces, the repose of the elements. The pale blue sky is frequently overcast, and it rains two days out of five; sometimes, under extraordinary provocation from the north a snow-storm whirls along under the low grey dome, and whitens the brown roofs, where a growth of spindling weeds and grass clothes the tiles the whole year round, and shows its delicate green above the gathered flakes. But for the most part the winds are laid, and the sole change is from quiet sun to quiet shower. This at least is the impression which remains in the senses of the sojourning stranger, whose days slip away with so little difference one from another that they seem really not to have passed, but, like the grass that keeps the hillsides fresh round Florence all the winter long, to be waiting some decisive change of season before they begin.

The first of the Carnival sights that marked the lapse of a month since his arrival took Colville by surprise. He could not have believed that it was February yet if it had not been for the straggling maskers in armour whom he met one day in Via Borgognissanti, with their visors up for their better convenience in smoking. They were part of the chorus at one of the theatres, and they were going about to eke out their salaries with the gifts of people whose windows the festival season privileged them to play under. The silly spectacle stirred Colville's blood a little, as any sort of holiday preparation was apt to do. He thought that it afforded him a fair occasion to call at Palazzo Pinti, where he had not been so much of late as in the first days of his renewed acquaintance with Mrs. Bowen. He had at one time had the fancy that Mrs. Bowen was cool toward him. He might very well have been mistaken in this; in fact, she had several times addressed him the politest reproaches for not coming, but he made some evasion, and went only on the days when she was receiving other people, and when necessarily he saw very little of the family.

Miss Graham was always very friendly,

but always very busy, drawing tea from the samovar, and looking after others. Effie Bowen dropped her eyes in re-established strangeness when she brought the basket of cake to him. There was one moment when he suspected that he had been talked over in family council, and put under a certain regimen. But he had no proof of this, and it had really nothing to do with his keeping away, which was largely accidental. He had taken up, with as much earnestness as he could reasonably expect of himself, that notion of studying the architectural expression of Florentine character at the different periods. He had spent a good deal of money in books, he had revived his youthful familiarity with the city, and he had made what acquaintance he could with people interested in such matters. He met some of these in the limited but very active society in which he mingled daily and nightly. After the first strangeness to any sort of social life had worn off, he found himself very fond of the prompt hospitalities which his introduction at Mrs. Bowen's had opened to him. His host—or more frequently it was his hostess—had sometimes merely an apartment at a hotel; perhaps the family was established in one of the furnished lodgings which stretch

the whole length of the Lung' Arno on either hand, and abound in all the new streets approaching the Cascine, and had set up the simple and facile housekeeping of the sojourner in Florence for a few months; others had been living in the villa or the palace they had taken for years.

The more recent and transitory people expressed something of the prevailing English and American æstheticism in the decoration of their apartments, but the greater part accepted the Florentine drawing-room as their landlord had imagined it for them, with furniture and curtains in yellow satin, a cheap ingrain carpet thinly covering the stone floor, and a fire of little logs ineffectually blazing on the hearth, and flickering on the carved frames of the pictures on the wall and the nakedness of the frescoed allegories in the ceiling. Whether of longer or shorter stay, the sojourners were bound together by a common language and a common social tradition; they all had a Day, and on that day there was tea and bread and butter for every comer. They had one another to dine; there were evening parties, with dancing and without dancing. Colville even went to a fancy ball, where he was kept in countenance by several other Florentines of

the period of Romola. At all these places he met nearly the same people, whose alien life in the midst of the native community struck him as one of the phases of modern civilisation worthy of note, if not particular study; for he fancied it destined to a wider future throughout Europe, as the conditions in England and America grow more tiresome and more onerous. They seemed to see very little of Italian society, and to be shut out from practical knowledge of the local life by the terms upon which they had themselves insisted. Our race finds its simplified and cheapened London or New York in all its Continental resorts now, but nowhere has its taste been so much studied as in Italy, and especially in Florence. It was not, perhaps, the real Englishman or American who had been considered, but a *forestiére* conventionalised from the Florentine's observation of many Anglo-Saxons. But he had been so well conjectured that he was hemmed round with a very fair illusion of his national circumstances.

It was not that he had his English or American doctor to prescribe for him when sick, and his English or American apothecary to compound his potion; it was not that there was an English tailor and an

American dentist, an English bookseller and an English baker, and chapels of every shade of Protestantism, with Catholic preaching in English every Sunday. These things were more or less matters of necessity, but Colville objected that the barbers should offer him an American shampoo; that the groceries should abound in English biscuit and our own canned fruit and vegetables, and that the grocers' clerks should be ambitious to read the labels of the Boston baked beans. He heard — though he did not prove this by experiment — that the master of a certain trattoria had studied the doughnut of New England till he had actually surpassed the original in the qualities that have undermined our digestion as a people. But above all it interested him to see that intense expression of American civilisation, the horse-car, triumphing along the magnificent avenues that mark the line of the old city walls; and he recognised an instinctive obedience to an abstruse natural law in the fact that whereas the omnibus, which the Italians have derived from the English, was not filled beyond its seating capacity, the horse-car was overcrowded without and within at Florence, just as it is with us who invented it.

"I wouldn't mind even that," he said one day to the lady who was drawing him his fifth or sixth cup of tea for that afternoon, and with whom he was naturally making this absurd condition of things a matter of personal question; "but you people here pass your days in a round of unbroken English, except when you talk with your servants. I 'm not sure you don't speak English with the shop people. I can hardly get them to speak Italian to me."

"Perhaps they think you can speak English better," said the lady.

This went over Florence; in a week it was told to Colville as something said to some one else. He fearlessly reclaimed it as said to himself, and this again was told. In the houses where he visited he had the friendly acceptance of any intelligent and reasonably agreeable person who comes promptly and willingly when he is asked, and seems always to have enjoyed himself when he goes away. But besides this sort of general favour, he enjoyed a very pleasing little personal popularity which came from his interest in other people, from his good-nature, and from his inertness. He slighted no acquaintance, and talked to every one with the same apparent wish to

be entertaining. This was because he was incapable of the cruelty of open indifference when his lot was cast with a dull person, and also because he was mentally too lazy to contrive pretences for getting away; besides he did not really find anybody altogether a bore, and he had no wish to shine. He listened without shrinking to stories that he had heard before, and to things that had already been said to him; as has been noted, he had himself the habit of repeating his ideas with the recklessness of maturity, for he had lived long enough to know that this can be done with almost entire safety.

He haunted the studios a good deal, and through a retrospective affinity with art, and a human sympathy with the sacrifice which it always involves, he was on friendly terms with sculptors and painters who were not in every case so friendly with one another. More than once he saw the scars of old rivalries, and he might easily have been an adherent of two or three parties. But he tried to keep the freedom of the different camps without taking sides; and he felt the pathos of the case when they all told the same story of the disaster which the taste for bric-à-brac had wrought to the cause of art; how people who came abroad no longer gave orders for

statues and pictures, but spent their money on curtains and carpets, old chests and chairs, and pots and pans. There were some among these artists whom he had known twenty years before in Florence, ardent and hopeful beginners; and now the backs of their grey or bald heads, as they talked to him with their faces towards their work, and a pencil or a pinch of clay held thoughtfully between their fingers, appealed to him as if he had remained young and prosperous, and they had gone forward to age and hard work. They were very quaint at times. They talked the American slang of the war days and of the days before the war; without a mastery of Italian, they often used the idioms of that tongue in their English speech. They were dim and vague about the country, with whose affairs they had kept up through the newspapers. Here and there one thought he was going home very soon; others had finally relinquished all thoughts of return. These had, perhaps without knowing it, lost the desire to come back; they cowered before the expensiveness of life in America, and doubted of a future with which, indeed, only the young can hopefully grapple. But in spite of their accumulated years, and the evil times on which they had fallen, Colville

thought them mostly very happy men, leading simple and innocent lives in a world of the ideal, and rich in the inexhaustible beauty of the city, the sky, the air. They all, whether they were ever going back or not, were fervent Americans, and their ineffaceable nationality marked them, perhaps, all the more strongly for the patches of something alien that overlaid it in places. They knew that he was or had been a newspaper man; but if they secretly cherished the hope that he would bring them to the *dolce lume* of print, they never betrayed it; and the authorship of his letter about the American artists in Florence, which he printed in the *American Register* at Paris, was not traced to him for a whole week.

Colville was a frequent visitor of Mr. Waters, who had a lodging in Piazza San Marco, of the poverty which can always be decent in Italy. It was bare, but for the books that furnished it; with a table for his writing, on a corner of which he breakfasted, a wide sofa with cushions in coarse white linen that frankly confessed itself a bed by night, and two chairs of plain Italian walnut; but the windows, which had no sun, looked out upon the church and the convent sacred to the old Socinian for the sake of the

meek, heroic mystic whom they keep alive in all the glory of his martyrdom. No two minds could well have been further apart than the New England minister and the Florentine monk, and no two souls nearer together, as Colville recognised with a not irreverent smile.

When the old man was not looking up some point of his saint's history in his books, he was taking with the hopefulness of youth and the patience of age a lesson in colloquial Italian from his landlady's daughter, which he pronounced with a scholarly scrupulosity and a sincere atonic Massachusetts accent. He practised the language wherever he could, especially at the trattoria where he dined, and where he made occasions to detain the waiter in conversation. They humoured him, out of their national good-heartedness and sympathy, and they did what they could to realise a strange American dish for him on Sundays—a combination of stockfish and potatoes boiled, and then fried together in small cakes. They revered him as a foreign gentleman of saintly amiability and incomprehensible preferences; and he was held in equal regard at the next green-grocer's where he spent every morning five centesimi for a bunch of radishes and ten for a little pat of

butter to eat with his bread and coffee; he could not yet accustom himself to mere bread and coffee for breakfast, though he conformed as completely as he could to the Italian way of living. He respected the abstemiousness of the race; he held that it came from a spirituality of nature to which the North was still strange, with all its conscience and sense of individual accountability. He contended that he never suffered in his small dealings with these people from the dishonesty which most of his countrymen complained of; and he praised their unfailing gentleness of manner; this could arise only from goodness of heart, which was perhaps the best kind of goodness after all.

None of these humble acquaintance of his could well have accounted for the impression they all had that he was some sort of ecclesiastic. They could never have understood—nor, for that matter, could any one have understood through European tradition—the sort of sacerdotal office that Mr. Waters had filled so long in the little deeply book-clubbed New England village where he had outlived most of his flock, till one day he rose in the midst of the surviving dyspeptics and consumptives and, following the example of Mr. Emerson, renounced his calling for ever. By that time

even the pale Unitarianism thinning out into paler doubt was no longer tenable with him. He confessed that while he felt the Divine goodness more and more, he believed that it was a mistake to preach any specific creed or doctrine, and he begged them to release him from their service. A young man came to fill his place in their pulpit, but he kept his place in their hearts. They raised a subscription of seventeen hundred dollars and thirty-five cents, and on its being submitted to the new button manufacturer, who had founded his industry in the village, he promptly rounded it out to three thousand, and Mr. Waters came to Florence. His people parted with him in terms of regret as delicate as they were awkward, and their love followed him. He corresponded regularly with two or three ladies, and his letters were sometimes read from his pulpit.

Colville took the Piazza San Marco in on his way to Palazzo Pinti on the morning when he had made up his mind to go there, and he stood at the window looking out with the old man, when some more maskers passed through the place — two young fellows in old Florentine dress, with a third habited as a nun.

"Ah," said the old man gently, "I wish they hadn't introduced the nun! But I suppose they can't help signalising their escape from the domination of the Church on all occasions. It's a natural reaction. It will all come right in time."

"You preach the true American gospel," said Colville.

"Of course; there is no other gospel. That *is* the gospel."

"Do you suppose that Savonarola would think it had all come out right," asked Colville, a little maliciously, "if he could look from the window with us here and see the wicked old Carnival, that he tried so hard to kill four hundred years ago, still alive? And kicking?" he added, in cognisance of the caper of one of the maskers.

"Oh yes; why not? By this time he knows that his puritanism was all a mistake, unless as a thing for the moment only. I should rather like to have Savonarola here with us; he would find these costumes familiar; they are of his time. I shall make a point of seeing all I can of the Carnival, as part of my study of Savonarola, if nothing else."

"I'm afraid you'll have to give yourself

limitations," said Colville, as one of the maskers threw his arm round the mock nun's neck. But the old man did not see this, and Colville did not feel it necessary to explain himself.

The maskers had passed out of the piazza now, and "Have you seen our friends at Palazzo Pinti lately?" said Mr. Waters.

"Not very," said Colville. "I was just on my way there."

"I wish you would make them my compliments. Such a beautiful young creature."

"Yes," said Colville; "she is certainly a beautiful girl."

"I meant Mrs. Bowen," returned the old man quietly.

"Oh, I thought you meant Miss Graham. Mrs. Bowen is my contemporary, and so I didn't think of her when you said young. I should have called her pretty rather than beautiful."

"No; she 's beautiful. The young girl is good-looking—I don't deny that; but she is very crude yet."

Colville laughed. "Crude in looks? I should have said Miss Graham was rather crude in mind, though I 'm not sure I wouldn't have stopped at saying *young*."

"No," mildly persisted the old man; "she couldn't be crude in mind without being crude in looks."

"You mean," pursued Colville, smiling, but not wholly satisfied, "that she hasn't a lovely nature?"

"You never can know what sôrt of nature a young girl has. Her nature depends so much upon that of the man whose fate she shares."

"The woman is what the man makes her? That is convenient for the woman, and relieves her of all responsibility."

"The man is what the woman makes him, too, but not so much so. The man was cast into a deep sleep, you know——"

"And the woman was what he dreamed her. I wish she were."

"In most cases she is," said Mr. Waters.

They did not pursue the matter. The truth that floated in the old minister's words pleased Colville by its vagueness, and flattered the man in him by its implication of the man's superiority. He wanted to say that if Mrs. Bowen were what the late Mr. Bowen had dreamed her, then the late Mr. Bowen, when cast into his deep sleep, must have had Lina Ridgely in his eye. But this seemed to be personalising the fantasy un-

warrantably, and pushing it too far. For like reason he forbore to say that if Mr. Waters's theory were correct, it would be better to begin with some one whom nobody else had dreamed before; then you could be sure at least of not having a wife to somebody else's mind rather than your own. Once on his way to Palazzo Pinti, he stopped, arrested by a thought that had not occurred to him before in relation to what Mr. Waters had been saying, and then pushed on with the sense of security which is the compensation the possession of the initiative brings to our sex along with many responsibilities. In the enjoyment of this, no man stops to consider the other side, which must wait his initiative, however they mean to meet it.

In the Por San Maria Colville found masks and dominoes filling the shop windows and dangling from the doors. A devil in red and a clown in white crossed the way in front of him from an intersecting street; several children in pretty masquerading dresses flashed in and out among the crowd. He hurried to the Lung' Arno, and reached the palace where Mrs. Bowen lived, with these holiday sights fresh in his mind. Imogene turned to meet him at the door of the apart-

ment, running from the window where she had left Effie Bowen still gazing.

"We saw you coming," she said gaily, without waiting to exchange formal greetings. "We didn't know at first but it might be somebody else disguised as you. We've been watching the maskers go by. Isn't it exciting?"

"Awfully," said Colville, going to the window with her, and putting his arm on Effie's shoulder, where she knelt in a chair looking out. "What have you seen?"

"Oh, only two Spanish students with mandolins," said Imogene; "but you can see they're *beginning* to come."

"They'll stop now," murmured Effie, with gentle disappointment; "it's commencing to rain."

"Oh, too bad!" wailed the young girl. But just then two mediæval men-at-arms came in sight, carrying umbrellas. "Isn't that too delicious? Umbrellas and chain-armour!"

"You can't expect them to let their chain-armour get rusty," said Colville. "You ought to have been with me—minstrels in scale-armour, Florentines of Savonarola's times, nuns, clowns, demons, fairies—no end to them."

"It's very well saying we ought to have been with you; but we can't go anywhere alone."

"I didn't say alone," said Colville. "Don't you think Mrs. Bowen would trust you with me to see these Carnival beginnings?" He had not meant at all to do anything of this kind, but that had not prevented his doing it.

"How do we know, when she hasn't been asked?" said Imogene, with a touch of burlesque dolour, such as makes a dignified girl enchanting, when she permits it to herself. She took Effie's hand in hers, the child having faced round from the window, and stood smoothing it, with her lovely head pathetically tilted on one side.

"What haven't I been asked yet?" demanded Mrs. Bowen, coming lightly toward them from a door at the side of the *salon*. She gave her hand to Colville with the prettiest grace, and a cordiality that brought a flush to her cheek. There had really been nothing between them but a little unreasoned coolness, if it were even so much as that; say rather a dryness, aggravated by time and absence, and now, as friends do, after a thing of that kind, they were suddenly glad to be good to each other.

"Why, you haven't been asked how you have been this long time," said Colville.

"I have been wanting to tell you for a whole week," returned Mrs. Bowen, seating the rest and taking a chair for herself. "Where have you been?"

"Oh, shut up in my cell at Hotel d'Atene, writing a short history of the Florentine people for Miss Effie."

"Effie, take Mr. Colville's hat," said her mother. "We 're going to make you stay to lunch," she explained to him.

"Is that so?" he asked, with an effect of polite curiosity.

"Yes." Imogene softly clapped her hands, unseen by Mrs. Bowen, for Colville's instruction that all was going well. If it delights women to pet an undangerous friend of our sex, to use him like one of themselves, there are no words to paint the soft and flattered content with which his spirit purrs under their caresses. "You must have nearly finished the history," added Mrs. Bowen.

"Well, I could have finished it," said Colville, "if I had only begun it. You see, writing a short history of the Florentine people is such quick work that you have to be careful how you actually put pen to

paper, or you're through with it before you 've had any fun out of it."

"I think Effie will like to read that kind of history," said her mother.

The child hung her head, and would not look at Colville; she was still shy with him; his absence must have seemed longer to a child, of course.

At lunch they talked of the Carnival sights that had begun to appear. He told of his call upon Mr. Waters, and of the old minister's purpose to see all he could of the Carnival in order to judge intelligently of Savonarola's opposition to it.

"Mr. Waters is a very good man," said Mrs. Bowen, with the air of not meaning to approve him quite, nor yet to let any notion of his be made fun of in her presence. "But for my part I wish there were not going to be any Carnival; the city will be in such an uproar for the next two weeks."

"O Mrs. Bowen!" cried Imogene reproachfully; Effie looked at her mother in apparent anxiety lest she should be meaning to put forth an unquestionable power and stop the Carnival.

"The last Carnival, I thought there was never going to be any end to it; I was so glad when Lent came."

"Glad when *Lent* came!" breathed Imogene in astonishment; but she ventured upon nothing more insubordinate, and Colville admired to see this spirited girl as subject to Mrs. Bowen as her own child. There is no reason why one woman should establish another woman over her, but nearly all women do it in one sort or another, from love of a voluntary submission, or from a fear of their own ignorance, if they are younger and more inexperienced than their lieges. Neither the one passion nor the other seems to reduce them to a like passivity as regards their husbands. They must apparently have a fetish of their own sex. Colville could see that Imogene obeyed Mrs. Bowen not only as a *protégée* but as a devotee.

"Oh, I suppose *you* will have to go through it all," said Mrs. Bowen, in reward of the girl's acquiescence.

"You 're rather out of the way of it up here," said Colville. "You had better let me go about with the young ladies—if you can trust them to the care of an old fellow like me."

"Oh, I don't think you 're so very old, at all times," replied Mrs. Bowen, with a peculiar look, whether indulgent or reproachful he could not quite make out.

But he replied, boldly, in his turn: "I have certainly my moments of being young still; I don't deny it. There 's always a danger of their occurrence."

"I was thinking," said Mrs. Bowen, with a graceful effect of not listening, "that you would let me go too. It would be quite like old times."

"Only too much honour and pleasure," returned Colville, "if you will leave out the old times. I 'm not particular about having them along." Mrs. Bowen joined in laughing at the joke, which they had to themselves. "I was only consulting an explicit abhorrence of yours in not asking you to go at first," he explained.

"Oh yes; I understand that."

The excellence of the whole arrangement seemed to grow upon Mrs. Bowen. "Of course," she said, "Imogene ought to see all she can of the Carnival. She may not have another chance, and perhaps if she had, *he* wouldn't consent."

"I 'll engage to get *his* consent," said the girl. "What I was afraid of was that I couldn't get yours, Mrs. Bowen."

"Am I so severe as that?" asked Mrs. Bowen softly.

"Quite," replied Imogene.

"Perhaps," thought Colville, "it isn't always silent submission."

For no very good reason that any one could give, the Carnival that year was not a brilliant one. Colville's party seemed to be always meeting the same maskers on the street, and the maskers did not greatly increase in numbers. There were a few more of them after nightfall, but they were then a little more bacchanal, and he felt it was better that the ladies had gone home by that time. In the pursuit of the tempered pleasure of looking up the maskers he was able to make the reflection that their fantastic and vivid dresses sympathised in a striking way with the architecture of the city, and gave him an effect of Florence which he could not otherwise have had. There came by and by a little attempt at a *corso* in Via Cerratani and Via Tornabuoni. There were some masks in carriages, and from one they actually threw plaster *confetti;* half a dozen bare-legged boys ran before and beat one another with bladders. Some people, but not many, watched the show from the windows, and the footways were crowded.

Having proposed that they should see the Carnival together, Colville had made him-

self responsible for it to the Bowen household. Imogene said, "Well, is *this* the famous Carnival of Florence?"

"It certainly doesn't compare with the Carnival last year," said Mrs. Bowen.

"Your reproach is just, Mrs. Bowen," he acknowledged. "I've managed it badly. But you know I've been out of practice a great while there in Des Vaches."

"Oh, poor Mr. Colville!" cried Imogene. "He isn't altogether to blame."

"I don't know," said Mrs. Bowen, humouring the joke in her turn. "It seems to me that if he had consulted us a little earlier, he might have done better."

He drove home with the ladies, and Mrs. Bowen made him stay to tea. As if she felt that he needed to be consoled for the failure of his Carnival, she was especially indulgent with him. She played to him on the piano some of the songs that were in fashion when they were in Florence together before. Imogene had never heard them; she had heard her mother speak of them. One or two of them were negro songs, such as very pretty young ladies used to sing without harm to themselves or offence to others; but Imogene decided that they were rather rowdy.

"Dear me, Mrs. Bowen! Did *you* sing such songs? You wouldn't let Effie!"

"No, I wouldn't let Effie. The times are changed. I wouldn't let Effie go to the theatre alone with a young gentleman."

"The times are changed for the worse," Colville began. "What harm ever came to a young man from a young lady's going alone to the theatre with him?"

He stayed till the candles were brought in, and then went away only because, as he said, they had not asked him to stay to dinner.

He came nearly every day, upon one pretext or another, and he met them oftener than that at the teas and on the days of other ladies in Florence; for he was finding the busy idleness of the life very pleasant, and he went everywhere. He formed the habit of carrying flowers to the Palazzo Pinti, excusing himself on the ground that they were so cheap and so abundant as to be impersonal. He brought violets to Effie and roses to Imogene; to Mrs. Bowen he always brought a bunch of the huge purple anemones which grow so abundantly all winter long about Florence. "I wonder why *purple* anemones?" he asked her one day in presenting them to her.

"Oh, it is quite time I should be wearing purple," she said gently.

"Ah, Mrs. Bowen!" he reproached her. "Why do I bring purple violets to Miss Effie?"

"You must ask Effie!" said Mrs. Bowen, with a laugh.

After that he stayed away forty-eight hours, and then appeared with a bunch of the red anemones, as large as tulips, which light up the meadow grass when it begins to stir from its torpor in the spring. "They grew on purpose to set me right with you," he said, "and I saw them when I was in the country."

It was a little triumph for him, which she celebrated by putting them in a vase on her table, and telling people who exclaimed over them that they were some Mr. Colville gathered in the country. He enjoyed his privileges at her house with the futureless satisfaction of a man. He liked to go about with the Bowens; he was seen with the ladies driving and walking, in most of their promenades. He directed their visits to the churches and the galleries; he was fond of strolling about with Effie's daintily-gloved little hand in his. He took her to Giocosa's and treated her to ices; he let her choose

from the confectioner's prettiest caprices in candy; he was allowed to bring the child presents in his pockets. Perhaps he was not as conscientious as he might have been in his behaviour with the little girl. He did what he could to spoil her, or at least to relax the severity of the training she had received; he liked to see the struggle that went on in the mother's mind against this, and then the other struggle with which she overcame her opposition to it. The worst he did was to teach Effie some picturesque Western phrases, which she used with innocent effectiveness; she committed the crimes against convention which he taught her with all the conventional elegance of her training. The most that he ever gained for her were some concessions in going out in weather that her mother thought unfit, or sitting up for half-hours after her bed-time. He ordered books for her from Goodban's, and it was Colville now, and not the Rev. Mr. Morton, who read poetry aloud to the ladies on afternoons when Mrs. Bowen gave orders that she and Miss Graham should be denied to all other comers.

It was an intimacy; and society in Florence is not blind, and especially is not dumb. The old lady who had celebrated Mrs. Bowen

to him the first night at Palazzo Pinti led a life of active questions as to what was the supreme attraction to Colville there, and she referred her doubt to every friend with whom she drank tea. She philosophised the situation very scientifically, and if not very conclusively, how few are the absolute conclusions of science upon any point!

"He is a bachelor, and there is a natural affinity between bachelors and widows — much more than if he were a widower too. If he were a widower I should say it was undoubtedly mademoiselle. If he were a little *bit* younger, I should have no doubt it was madame; but men of that age have such an ambition to marry young girls! I suppose that they think it proves they are not so very old, after all. And certainly he isn't too old to marry. If he were wise—which he probably isn't, if he's like other men in such matters—there wouldn't be any question about Mrs. Bowen. Pretty creature! And so much sense! Too much for him. Ah, my dear, how we are wasted upon that sex!"

Mrs. Bowen herself treated the affair with masterly frankness. More than once in varying phrase, she said: "You are very good to give us so much of your time, Mr. Colville, and I won't pretend I don't know it. You're

helping me out with a very hazardous experiment. When I undertook to see Imogene through a winter in Florence, I didn't reflect what a very gay time girls have at home, in Western towns especially. But I haven't heard her breathe Buffalo once. And I 'm sure it 's doing her a great deal of good here. She 's naturally got a very good mind; she 's very ambitious to be cultivated. She 's read a good deal, and she 's anxious to know history and art; and your advice and criticism are the greatest possible advantage to her."

"Thank you," said Colville, with a fine, remote dissatisfaction. "I supposed I was merely enjoying myself."

He had lately begun to haunt his banker's for information in regard to the Carnival balls, with the hope that something might be made out of them. But either there were to be no great Carnival balls, or it was a mistake to suppose that his banker ought to know about them. Colville went experimentally to one of the people's balls at a minor theatre, which he found advertised on the house walls. At half-past ten the dancing had not begun, but the masks were arriving; young women in gay silks and dirty white gloves; men in women's dresses,

with enormous hands ; girls as pages ; clowns, pantaloons, old women, and the like. They were all very good-humoured ; the men, who far outnumbered the women, danced contentedly together. Colville liked two cavalry soldiers who waltzed with each other for an hour, and then went off to a battery on exhibition in the pit, and had as much electricity as they could hold. He liked also two young citizens who danced together as long as he stayed, and did not leave off even for electrical refreshment. He came away at midnight, pushing out of the theatre through a crowd of people at the door, some of whom were tipsy. This certainly would not have done for the ladies, though the people were civilly tipsy.

"Then I know I wasn't."

Again they were silent, and it was he who spoke first. "I wish you would tell me why you object to the interdicted topic?"

"Because—because I like every time to be perfect in itself."

"Oh! And this wouldn't be perfect in itself if I were—not so young as some people?"

"I didn't mean that. No; but if you didn't mention it, no one else would think of it or care for it."

"Did any one ever accuse you of flattering, Miss Graham?"

"Not till now. And you are unjust."

"Well, I withdraw the accusation."

"And will you ever pretend such a thing again?"

"Oh, never!"

"Then I have your promise."

The talk was light word-play, such as depends upon the talker's own mood for its point or its pointlessness. Between two young people of equal years it might have had meanings to penetrate, to sigh over, to question. Colville found it delicious to be pursued by the ingenuous fervour of this young girl, eager to vindicate her sincerity in prohibiting him from his own ironical

depreciation. Apparently, she had a sentimental mission of which he was the object; he was to be convinced that he was unnecessarily morbid; he was to be cheered up, to be kept in heart.

"I must believe in you after this," he said, with a smile which his mask hid.

"Thanks," she breathed. It seemed to him that her hand closed convulsively upon his in their light clasp.

The pressure sent a real pang to his heart. It forced her name from his lips. "Imogene! Ah, I 've no right to call you that."

"Yes."

"From this out I promise to be twenty years younger. But no one is to know it but you. Do you think you will know it? I shouldn't like to keep the secret to myself altogether."

"No; I will help you. It shall be *our* secret."

She gave a low laugh of delight. He convinced himself that she had entered into the light spirit of banter in which he believed that he was talking.

The music ceased again. He whirled her to the seat where he had left Mrs. Bowen. She was not there, nor the others.

Colville felt the meanness of a man who

that made Colville laugh. She rose slowly, like one in a dream, and cast a look as impassioned as a look could be made through a mask on the scene she was leaving behind her. The band was playing a waltz again, and the wide floor swam with circling couples.

The corridor where the tables were set was thronged with people, who were drinking beer and eating cold beef and boned turkey and slices of huge round sausages. "Oh, how *can* they?" cried the girl, shuddering.

"I didn't know you were so ethereal-minded about these things," said Colville. "I thought you didn't object to the salad at Madame Uccelli's."

"Oh, but at the veglione!" breathed the girl for all answer. He laughed again, but Mrs. Bowen did not laugh with him; he wondered why.

When they returned to their corner in the theatre they found a mask in a black domino there, who made place for them, and remained standing near. They began talking freely and audibly, as English-speaking people incorrigibly do in Italy, where their tongue is all but the language of the country.

"Really," said Colville, "I think I shall stifle in this mask. If you ladies will do what you can to surround me and keep me secret, I 'll take it off a moment."

"I believe I will join you, Mr. Colville," said the mask near them. He pushed up his little visor of silk, and discovered the mild, benignant features of Mr. Waters.

"Bless my soul!" cried Colville.

Mrs. Bowen was apparently too much shocked to say anything.

"You didn't expect to meet me here?" asked the old man, as if otherwise it should be the most natural thing in the world. After that they could only unite in suppressing their astonishment. "It 's extremely interesting," he went on, "extremely! I 've been here ever since the exercises began, and I have not only been very greatly amused, but greatly instructed. It seems to me the key to a great many anomalies in the history of this wonderful people."

If Mr. Waters took this philosophical tone about the Carnival, it was not possible for Colville to take any other.

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"Not at all," said the old man promptly. "I have seen nothing but the most harmless gaiety throughout the evening."

Colville hung his head. He remembered reading once in a passage from Swedenborg, that the most celestial angels had scarcely any power of perceiving evil.

"Why aren't you young people dancing?" asked Mr. Waters, in a cheerful general way, of Mrs. Bowen's party.

Colville was glad to break the silence. "Mrs. Bowen doesn't approve of dancing at vegliones."

"No?—why not?" inquired the old man, with invincible simplicity.

Mrs. Bowen smiled her pretty, small smile below her mask.

"The company is apt to be rather mixed," she said quietly.

"Yes," pursued Mr. Waters; "but you could dance with one another. The company seems very well behaved."

"Oh, quite so," Mrs. Bowen assented.

"Shortly after I came," said Mr. Waters, "one of the masks asked me to dance. I was really sorry that my age and traditions forbade my doing so. I tried to explain, but I'm afraid I didn't make myself quite clear."

"Probably it passed for a joke with her," said Colville, in order to say something.

"Ah, very likely; but I shall always feel that my impressions of the Carnival would have been more definite if I could have danced. Now, if I were a young man like you——"

Imogene turned and looked at Colville through the eye-holes of her mask; even in that sort of isolation he thought her eyes expressed surprise.

"It never occurred to you before that I was a young man," he suggested gravely.

She did not reply.

After a little interval, "Imogene," asked Mrs. Bowen, "would you like to dance?"

Colville was astonished. "The veglione has gone to your head, Mrs. Bowen," he tacitly made his comment. She had spoken to Imogene, but she glanced at him as if she expected him to be grateful to her for this stroke of liberality.

"What would be the use?" returned the girl.

Colville rose. "After my performance in the Lancers, I can't expect you to believe me; but I really *do* know how to waltz." He had but to extend his arms, and she was hanging upon his shoulder, and they were

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whirling away through a long orbit of delight to the girl.

"Oh, why have you let me do you such injustice?" she murmured intensely. "I never shall forgive myself."

"It grieved me that you shouldn't have divined that I was really a magnificent dancer in disguise, but I bore it as best I could," said Colville, really amused at her seriousness. "Perhaps you 'll find out after a while that I 'm not an old fellow either, but only a 'Lost Youth.'"

"Hush," she said; "I don't like to hear you talk so."

"How?"

"About — age!" she answered. "It makes me feel—— Don't to-night!"

Colville laughed. "It isn't a fact that my blinking is going to change materially. You had better make the most of me as a lost youth. I 'm old enough to be two of them."

She did not answer, and as they wound up and down through the other orbing couples, he remembered the veglione of seventeen years before, when he had dreamed through the waltz with the girl who jilted him; she was very docile and submissive that night; he believed afterward that if he had

spoken frankly then, she would not have refused him. But he had veiled his passion in words and phrases that, taken in themselves, had no meaning—that neither committed him nor claimed her. He could not help it; he had not the courage at any moment to risk the loss of her for ever, till it was too late, till he must lose her.

"Do you believe in pre-existence?" he demanded of Imogene.

"Oh yes!" she flashed back. "This very instant it was just as if I had been here before, long ago."

"Dancing with me?"

"With you? Yes—yes—I think so."

He had lived long enough to know that she was making herself believe what she said, and that she had not lived long enough to know this.

"Then you remember what I said to you—tried to say to you—that night?" Through one of those psychological juggles which we all practise with ourselves at times, it amused him, it charmed him, to find her striving to realise this past.

"No; it was so long ago? What was it?" she whispered dreamily.

A turn of the waltz brought them near Mrs. Bowen; her mask seemed to wear a

dumb reproach. He began to be weary; one of the differences between youth and later life is that the latter wearies so soon of any given emotion.

"Ah, I can't remember, either! Aren't you getting rather tired of the waltz and me?"

"Oh no; go on!" she deeply murmured. "Try to remember."

The long, pulsating stream of the music broke and fell. The dancers crookedly dispersed in wandering lines. She took his arm; he felt her heart leap against it; those innocent, trustful throbs upbraided him. At the same time his own heart beat with a sort of fond, protecting tenderness; he felt the witchery of his power to make this young, radiant, and beautiful creature hang flattered and bewildered on his talk; he liked the compassionate worship with which his tacit confidence had inspired her, even while he was not without some satirical sense of the crude sort of heart-broken hero he must be in the fancy of a girl of her age.

"Let us go and walk in the corridor a moment," he said. But they walked there till the alluring melancholy music of the waltz began again. In a mutual caprice, they rejoined the dance.

It came into his head to ask, "Who is *he?*" and as he had got past denying himself anything, he asked it.

"He? What he?"

"He that Mrs. Bowen thought might object to your seeing the Carnival?"

"Oh!—oh yes! That was the not impossible he."

"Is that all?"

"Yes."

"Then he 's not even the not improbable he?"

"No, indeed."

They waltzed in silence. Then, "Why did you ask me that?" she murmured.

"I don't know. Was it such a strange question?"

"I don't know. You ought to."

"Yes, if it was wrong, I 'm old enough to know better."

"You promised not to say 'old' any more."

"Then I suppose I mustn't. But you mustn't get me to ignore it, and then laugh at me for it."

"Oh!" she reproached him, "you think I could do that?"

"You could if it was you who were here with me once before."

"Then I know I wasn't."

Again they were silent, and it was he who spoke first. "I wish you would tell me why you object to the interdicted topic?"

"Because—because I like every time to be perfect in itself."

"Oh! And this wouldn't be perfect in itself if I were—not so young as some people?"

"I didn't mean that. No; but if you didn't mention it, no one else would think of it or care for it."

"Did any one ever accuse you of flattering, Miss Graham?"

"Not till now. And you are unjust."

"Well, I withdraw the accusation."

"And will you ever pretend such a thing again?"

"Oh, never!"

"Then I have your promise."

The talk was light word-play, such as depends upon the talker's own mood for its point or its pointlessness. Between two young people of equal years it might have had meanings to penetrate, to sigh over, to question. Colville found it delicious to be pursued by the ingenuous fervour of this young girl, eager to vindicate her sincerity in prohibiting him from his own ironical

depreciation. Apparently, she had a sentimental mission of which he was the object; he was to be convinced that he was unnecessarily morbid; he was to be cheered up, to be kept in heart.

"I must believe in you after this," he said, with a smile which his mask hid.

"Thanks," she breathed. It seemed to him that her hand closed convulsively upon his in their light clasp.

The pressure sent a real pang to his heart. It forced her name from his lips. "Imogene! Ah, I 've no right to call you that."

"Yes."

"From this out I promise to be twenty years younger. But no one is to know it but you. Do you think you will know it? I shouldn't like to keep the secret to myself altogether."

"No; I will help you. It shall be *our* secret."

She gave a low laugh of delight. He convinced himself that she had entered into the light spirit of banter in which he believed that he was talking.

The music ceased again. He whirled her to the seat where he had left Mrs. Bowen. She was not there, nor the others.

Colville felt the meanness of a man who

has betrayed his trust, and his self-contempt was the sharper because the trust had been as tacit and indefinite as it was generous. The effect of Mrs. Bowen's absence was as if she had indignantly flown, and left him to the consequences of his treachery.

He sat down rather blankly with Imogene to wait for her return; it was the only thing they could do.

It had grown very hot. The air was thick with dust. The lights burned through it as through a fog.

"I believe I will take off my mask," she said. "I can scarcely breathe."

"No, no," protested Colville; "that won't do."

"I feel faint," she gasped.

His heart sank. "Don't," he said incoherently. "Come with me into the vestibule, and get a breath of air."

He had almost to drag her through the crowd, but in the vestibule she revived, and they returned to their place again. He did not share the easy content with which she recognised the continued absence of Mrs. Bowen.

"Why, they must be lost. But isn't it perfect sitting here and watching the maskers?"

"Perfect," said Colville distractedly.

"Don't you like to make romances about the different ones?"

It was on Colville's tongue to say that he had made all the romances he wished for that evening, but he only answered, "Oh, very."

"Poor Mrs. Bowen," laughed the girl. "It will be such a joke on her, with her punctilious notions, getting lost from her *protégée* at a Carnival ball! I shall tell every one."

"Oh no, don't," said Colville, in horror that his mask scarcely concealed.

"Why not?"

"It wouldn't be at all the thing."

"Why, are *you* becoming Europeanised too?" she demanded. "I thought you went in for all sorts of unconventionalities. Recollect your promise. You must be as impulsive as I am."

Colville, staring anxiously about in every direction, made for the first time the reflection that most young girls probably conform to the proprieties without in the least knowing why.

"Do you think," he asked, in desperation, "that you would be afraid to be left here a moment while I went about in the crowd and tried to find them?"

"Not at all," she said. But she added, "Don't be gone long."

"Oh no," he answered, pulling off his mask. "Be sure not to move from here on any account."

He plunged into the midst of the crowd that buffeted him from side to side as he struck against its masses. The squeaking and gibbering masks mocked in their falsetto at his wild-eyed, naked face thrusting hither and thither among them.

"I saw your lady wife with another gentleman," cried one of them, in a subtle misinterpretation of the cause of his distraction.

The throng had immensely increased; the clowns and harlequins ran shrieking up and down, and leaped over one another's heads.

It was useless. He went back to Imogene with a heart-sickening fear that she too might have vanished.

But she was still there.

"You ought to have come sooner," she said gaily. "That red mask has been here again. He looked as if he wanted to make love to *me* this time. But he didn't. If you'd been here you might have asked him where Mrs. Bowen was."

Colville sat down. He had done what he

could to mend the matter, and the time had come for philosophical submission. It was now his duty to keep up Miss Graham's spirits. They were both Americans, and from the national standpoint he was simply the young girl's middle-aged bachelor friend. There was nothing in the situation for him to beat his breast about.

"Well, all that we can do is to wait for them," he said.

"Oh yes," she answered easily. "They 'll be sure to come back in the course of time."

They waited a half-hour, talking somewhat at random, and still the others did not come. But the red mask came again. He approached Colville, and said politely—

"*La signora è partita.*"

"The lady gone?" repeated Colville, taking this to be part of the red mask's joke.

"*La bambina pareva poco bene.*"

"The little one not well?" echoed Colville again, rising. "Are you joking?"

The mask made a deep murmur of polite deprecation. "I am not capable of such a thing in a serious affair. Perhaps you know me?" he said, taking off his mask; and in further sign of good faith he gave the name of a painter sufficiently famous in Florence.

"I beg your pardon, and thank you," said

Colville. He had no need to speak to Imogene; her hand was already trembling on his arm.

They drove home in silence through the white moonlight of the streets, filled everywhere with the gay voices and figures of the Carnival.

Mrs. Bowen met them at the door of her apartment, and received them with a manner that justly distributed the responsibility and penalty for their escapade. Colville felt that a meaner spirit would have wreaked its displeasure upon the girl alone. She made short, quiet answers to all his eager inquiries. Most probably it was some childish indisposition; Effie had been faint. No, he need not go for the doctor. Mr. Waters had called the doctor, who had just gone away. There was nothing else that he could do for her. She dropped her eyes, and in everything but words dismissed him. She would not even remain with him till he could decently get himself out of the house. She left Imogene to receive his adieux, feigning that she heard Effie calling.

"I 'm—I 'm very sorry," faltered the girl, "that we didn't go back to her at once."

"Yes; I was to blame," answered the humiliated hero of her Carnival dream. The

clinging regret with which she kept his hand at parting scarcely consoled him for what had happened.

"I will come round in the morning," he said. "I must know how Effie is."

"Yes; come."

you who proposed it? Imogene was afraid that she had. What exemplary young people you are! The way each of you confesses and assumes all the blame would leave the severest chaperon without a word."

Her gaiety made Colville uncomfortable. He said gravely, "What I blame myself most for is that I was not there to be of use to you when Effie——"

"Oh, you mustn't think of that at all. Mr. Waters was most efficient. My admirer in the red mask was close at hand, and between them they got Effie out without the slightest disturbance. I fancy most people thought it was a Carnival joke. Please don't think of that again."

Nothing could be politer than all this.

"And you won't allow me to punish myself for not being there to give you even a moral support?"

"Certainly not. As I told Imogene, young people *will* be young people; and I knew how fond you were of dancing."

Though it pierced him, Colville could not help admiring the neatness of this thrust. "I didn't know you were so ironical, Mrs. Bowen."

"Ironical? Not at all."

"Ah! I see I'm not forgiven."

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean."

Imogene and Effie came in. The child was a little pale, and willingly let him take her on his knee, and lay her languid head on his shoulder. The girl had not aged overnight like himself and Mrs. Bowen; she looked as fresh and strong as yesterday.

"Miss Graham," said Colville, "if a person to whom you had done a deadly wrong insisted that you hadn't done any wrong at all, should you consider yourself forgiven?"

"It would depend upon the person," said the girl, with innocent liveliness, recognising the extravagance in his tone.

"Yes," he said, with an affected pensiveness, "so very much depends upon the person in such a case."

Mrs. Bowen rose. "Excuse me a moment; I will be back directly. Don't get up, please," she said, and prevented him with a quick withdrawal to another room, which left upon his sense the impression of elegant grace, and a smile and sunny glance. But neither had any warmth in it.

Colville heaved an involuntary sigh. "Do you feel very much used up?" he asked Imogene.

"Not at all," she laughed. "Do you?"

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"I 'm—I 'm very sorry," faltered the girl, "that we didn't go back to her at once."

"Yes; I was to blame," answered the humiliated hero of her Carnival dream. The

clinging regret with which she kept his hand at parting scarcely consoled him for what had happened.

"I will come round in the morning," he said. "I must know how Effie is."

"Yes; come."

X.

COLVILLE went to Palazzo Pinti next day with the feeling that he was defying Mrs. Bowen. Upon a review of the facts he could not find himself so very much to blame for the occurrences of the night before, and he had not been able to prove to his reason that Mrs. Bowen had resented his behaviour. She had not made a scene of any sort when he came in with Imogene; it was natural that she should excuse herself, and should wish to be with her sick child: she had done really nothing. But when a woman has done nothing she fills the soul of the man whose conscience troubles him with an instinctive apprehension. There is then no safety, his nerves tell him, except in bringing the affair, whatever it is, to an early issue—in having it out with her. Colville subdued the cowardly impulse of his own heart, which would have deceived him with the suggestion that Mrs. Bowen might be occupied with Effie, and it

would be better to ask for Miss Graham. He asked for Mrs. Bowen, and she came in directly.

She smiled in the usual way, and gave her hand, as she always did; but her hand was cold, and she looked tired, though she said Effie was quite herself again, and had been asking for him. "Imogene has been telling her about your adventure last night, and making her laugh."

If it had been Mrs. Bowen's purpose to mystify him, she could not have done it more thoroughly than by this bold treatment of the affair. He bent a puzzled gaze upon her. "I'm glad any of you have found it amusing," he said; "I confess that I couldn't let myself off so lightly in regard to it." She did not reply, and he continued: "The fact is, I don't think I behaved very well. I abused your kindness to Miss Graham."

"Abused my kindness to Miss Graham?"

"Yes. When you allowed her to dance at the veglione, I ought to have considered that you were stretching a point. I ought to have taken her back to you very soon, instead of tempting her to go and walk with me in the corridor.".

"Yes," said Mrs. Bowen. "So it was

you who proposed it? Imogene was afraid that she had. What exemplary young people you are! The way each of you confesses and assumes all the blame would leave the severest chaperon without a word."

Her gaiety made Colville uncomfortable. He said gravely, "What I blame myself most for is that I was not there to be of use to you when Effie——"

"Oh, you mustn't think of that at all. Mr. Waters was most efficient. My admirer in the red mask was close at hand, and between them they got Effie out without the slightest disturbance. I fancy most people thought it was a Carnival joke. Please don't think of that again."

Nothing could be politer than all this.

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"Certainly not. As I told Imogene, young people *will* be young people; and I knew how fond you were of dancing."

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"Ironical? Not at all."

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"I 'm sure I don't know what you mean."

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Colville heaved an involuntary sigh. "Do you feel very much used up?" he asked Imogene.

"Not at all," she laughed. "Do you?"

"Not in the least. My veglione hasn't ended yet. I'm still practically at the Pergola. It's easy to keep a thing of that sort up if you don't sleep after you get home."

"Didn't you sleep? I expected to lie awake a long time thinking it over; but I dropped asleep at once. I suppose I was very tired. I didn't even dream."

"You must have slept hard. You're pretty apt to dream when you're waking."

"How do you know?"

"Ah, I've noticed when you've been talking to me. Better not! It's a bad habit; it gives you false views of things. I used——"

"But you mustn't say you *used!* That's forbidden now. Remember your promise!"

"My promise! What promise?"

"Oh, if you've forgotten already."

"I remember. But that was last night."

"No, no! It was for all time. Why should dreams be so very misleading? I think there's ever so much in dreams. The most wonderful thing is the way you make people talk in dreams. It isn't strange that you should talk yourself, but that other people should say this and that when you aren't at all expecting what they say."

"That's when you're sleeping. But

when you 're waking, you make people say just what you want. And that 's why day dreams are so bad. If you make people say what you want, they probably don't mean it."

"Don't you think so?"

"Half the time. Do you ever have day dreams?" he asked Effie, pressing her cheek against his own.

"I don't know what they are," she murmured, with a soft little note of polite regret for her ignorance, if possibly it incommoded him.

"You will by and by," he said, "and then you must look out for them. They 're particularly bad in this air. I had one of them in Florence once that lasted three months."

"What was it about?" asked the child.

Imogene involuntarily bent forward.

"Ah, I can't tell you now. She 's trying to hear us."

"No, no," protested the girl, with a laugh. "I was thinking of something else."

"Oh, we know her, don't we?" he said to the child, with a playful appeal to that passion for the joint possession of a mystery which all children have.

"We might whisper it," she suggested.

"No; better wait for some other time." They were sitting near a table where a pencil and some loose leaves of paper lay. He pulled his chair a little closer, and, with the child still upon his knee, began to scribble and sketch at random. "Ah, there 's San Miniato," he said, with a glance from the window. "Must get its outline in. You 've heard how there came to be a church up there? No? Well, it shows the sort of man San Miniato really was. He was one of the early Christians, and he gave the poor pagans a great deal of trouble. They first threw him to the wild beasts in the amphitheatre, but the moment those animals set eyes on him they saw it would be of no use; they just lay down and died. Very well, then; the pagans determined to see what effect the axe would have upon San Miniato: but as soon as they struck off his head he picked it up, set it back on his shoulders again, waded across the Arno, walked up the hill, and when he came to a convenient little oratory up there he knelt down and expired. Isn't that a pretty good story? It 's like fairies, isn't it?"

"Yes," whispered the child.

"What nonsense!" said Imogene. "You made it up."

"Oh, did I? Perhaps I built the church that stands there to commemorate the fact. It 's all in the history of Florence. Not in all histories; some of them are too proud to put such stories in, but I 'm going to put every one I can find into the history I 'm writing for Effie. San Miniato was beheaded where the Church of Santa Candida stands now, and he walked all that distance."

"Did he have to die when he got to the oratory?" asked the child, with gentle regret.

"It appears so," said Colville, sketching. "He would have been dead by this time, anyway, you know."

"Yes," she reluctantly admitted.

"I never quite like those things, either, Effie," he said, pressing her to him. "There were people cruelly put to death two or three thousand years ago that I can't help feeling would be alive yet if they had been justly treated. There are a good many fairy stories about Florence; perhaps they used to be true stories; the truth seems to die out of stories after a while, simply because people stop believing them. Saint Ambrose of Milan restored the son of his host to life when he came down here to dedicate the Church of San Giovanni. Then

there was another saint, San Zenobi, who worked a very pretty miracle after he was dead. They were carrying his body from the Church of San Giovanni to the Church of Santa Reparata, and in Piazza San Giovanni his bier touched a dead elm-tree that stood there, and the tree instantly sprang into leaf and flower, though it was in the middle of the winter. A great many people took the leaves home with them, and a marble pillar was put up there, with a cross and an elm-tree carved on it. Oh, the case is very well authenticated."

"I shall really begin to think you believe such things," said Imogene. "Perhaps you *are* a Catholic."

Mrs. Bowen returned to the room, and sat down.

"There's another fairy story, prettier yet," said Colville, while the little girl drew a long deep breath of satisfaction and expectation. "You've heard of the Buondelmonti?" he asked Imogene.

"Oh, it seems to me as if I'd had *nothing* but the Buondelmonti dinned into me since I came to Florence!" she answered in lively despair.

"Ah, this happened some centuries before the Buondelmonte you've been bored with

was born. This was Giovanni Gualberto of the Buondelmonti, and he was riding along one day in 1003, near the Church of San Miniato, when he met a certain man named Ugo, who had killed one of his brothers. Gualberto stopped and drew his sword; Ugo saw no other chance of escape, and he threw himself face downward on the ground, with his arms stretched out in the form of the cross. 'Gualberto, remember Jesus Christ, who died upon the cross praying for His enemies.' The story says that these words went to Gualberto's heart; he got down from his horse, and in sign of pardon lifted his enemy and kissed and embraced him. Then they went together into the church, and fell on their knees before the figure of Christ upon the cross, and the figure bowed its head in sign of approval and pleasure in Gualberto's noble act of Christian piety."

"Beautiful!" murmured the girl; the child only sighed.

"Ah, yes; it's an easy matter to pick up one's head from the ground, and set it back on one's shoulders, or to bring the dead to life, or to make a tree put forth leaves and flowers in midwinter; but to melt the heart of a man with forgiveness in the presence of

his enemy—that's a different thing; *that's* no fairy story; that's a real miracle; and I believe this one happened—it's so impossible."

"Oh yes, it must have happened," said the girl.

"Do you think it's so very hard to forgive, then?" asked Mrs. Bowen gravely.

"Oh, not for ladies," replied Colville.

She flushed, and her eyes shone when she glanced at him.

"I 'm sorry to put you down," he said to the child; "but I can't take you with me, and I must be going."

Mrs. Bowen did not ask him to stay to lunch; he thought afterward that she might have relented as far as that but for the last little thrust, which he would better have spared.

"Effie dear," said her mother, when the door closed upon Colville, "don't you think you 'd better lie down a while? You look so tired."

"Shall I lie down on the sofa here?"

"No, on your bed."

"Well."

"I 'll go with you, Effie," said Imogene, "and see that you 're nicely tucked in."

When she returned alone, Mrs. Bowen

was sitting where she had left her, and seemed not to have moved. "I think Effie will drop off to sleep," she said; "she seems drowsy." She sat down, and after a pensive moment continued, "I wonder what makes Mr. Colville seem so gloomy."

"Does he seem gloomy?" asked Mrs. Bowen unsympathetically.

"No, not gloomy exactly. But different from last night. I wish people could always be the same! He was so gay and full of spirits; and now he 's so self-absorbed. He thinks you 're offended with him, Mrs. Bowen."

"I don't think he was very much troubled about it. I only thought he was flighty from want of sleep. At your age you don't mind the loss of a night."

"Do you think Mr. Colville seems so very old?" asked Imogene anxiously.

Mrs. Bowen appeared not to have heard her. She went to the window and looked out. When she came back, "Isn't it almost time for you to have a letter from home?" she asked.

"Why, no. I had one from mother day before yesterday. What made you think so?"

"Imogene," interrupted Mrs. Bowen,

with a sudden excitement which she tried to control, but which made her lips tremble, and break a little from her restraint, "you know that I am here in the place of your mother, to advise you and look after you in every way?"

"Why, yes, Mrs. Bowen," cried the girl, in surprise.

"It 's a position of great responsibility in regard to a young lady. I can't have anything to reproach myself with afterward."

"No."

"Have I always been kind to you, and considerate of your rights and your freedom? Have I ever interfered with you in any way that you think I oughtn't?"

"What an idea! You 've been loveliness itself, Mrs. Bowen!"

"Then I want you to listen to me, and answer me frankly, and not suspect my motives."

"Why, how *could* I do that?"

"Never mind!" cried Mrs. Bowen impatiently, almost angrily. "People can't help their suspicions! Do you think Mr. Morton cares for you?"

The girl hung her head.

"Imogene, answer me!"

"I don't know," answered Imogene

coldly; "but if you 're troubled about that, Mrs. Bowen, you needn't be; I don't care anything for Mr. Morton."

"If I thought you were becoming interested in any one, it would be my duty to write to your mother and tell her."

"Of course; I should expect you to do it."

"And if I saw you becoming interested in any one in a way that I thought would make you unhappy, it would be my duty to warn you."

"Yes."

"Of course, I don't mean that any one would knowingly try to make you unhappy?"

"No."

"Men don't go about nowadays trying to break girls' hearts. But very good men can be thoughtless and selfish."

"Yes; I understand that," said Imogene, in a falling accent.

"I don't wish to prejudice you against any one. I should consider it very wrong and wicked. Besides, I don't care to interfere with you to that degree. You are old enough to see and judge for yourself."

Imogene sat silent, passing her hand across the front of her dress. The clock ticked audibly from the mantel.

"I will not have it left to me!" cried Mrs. Bowen. "It is hard enough, at any rate. Do you think I like to speak to you?"

"No."

"Of course it makes me seem inhospitable, and distrustful, and detestable."

"I never thought of accusing you," said the girl, slowly lifting her eyes.

"I will never, never speak to you of it again," said Mrs. Bowen, "and from this time forth I insist upon your feeling just as free as if I hadn't spoken." She trembled upon the verge of a sob, from which she repelled herself.

Imogene sat still, with a sort of serious, bewildered look.

"You shall have every proper opportunity of meeting any one you like."

"Oh yes."

"And I shall be only too gl-glad to take back everything!"

Imogene sat motionless and silent. Mrs. Bowen broke out again with a sort of violence; the years teach us something of self-control, perhaps, but they weaken and unstring the nerves. In this opposition of silence to silence, the woman of the world was no match for the inexperienced girl.

"Have you nothing to say, Imogene?"

"I never thought of him in that way at all. I don't know what to say yet. It—confuses me. I—I can't imagine it. But if you think that he is trying to amuse himself——"

"I never said that!"

"No, I know it."

"He likes to make you talk, and to talk with you. But he is perfectly idle here, and — there is too much difference, every way. The very good in him makes it the worse. I suppose that after talking with him every one else seems insipid."

"Yes."

Mrs. Bowen rose and ran suddenly from the room.

Imogene remained sitting cold and still.

No one had been named since they spoke of Mr. Morton.

XI.

COLVILLE had not done what he meant in going to Mrs. Bowen's; in fact, he had done just what he had not meant to do, as he distinctly perceived in coming away. It was then that in a luminous retrospect he discovered his motive to have been a wish to atone to her for behaviour that must have distressed her, or at least to explain it to her. She had not let him do this at once; an instant willingness to hear and to condone was not in a woman's nature; she had to make him feel, by the infliction of a degree of punishment, that she had suffered. But before she ended she had made it clear that she was ready to grant him a tacit pardon, and he had answered with a silly sarcasm the question that was to have led to peace. He could not help seeing that throughout the whole Carnival adventure she had yielded her cherished reluctances to please him, to show him that she was not stiff or prudish, to convince him that she

would not be a killjoy through her devotion to conventionalities which she thought he despised. He could not help seeing that he had abused her delicate generosity, insulted her subtle concessions. He strolled along down the Arno, feeling flat and mean, as a man always does after a contest with a woman in which he has got the victory; our sex can preserve its self-respect only through defeat in such a case. It gave him no pleasure to remember that the glamour of the night before seemed still to rest on Imogene unbroken; that, indeed, was rather an added pain. He surprised himself in the midst of his poignant reflections by a yawn. Clearly the time was past when these ideal troubles could keep him awake, and there was, after all, a sort of brutal consolation in the fact. He was forty-one years old, and he was sleepy, whatever capacity for suffering remained to him. He went to his hotel to catch a little nap before lunch. When he woke it was dinner-time. The mists of slumber still hung about him, and the events of the last forty-eight hours showed vast and shapelessly threatening through them.

When the drama of the *table d'hôte* reached its climax of roast chestnuts and

butter, he determined to walk over to San Marco and pay a visit to Mr. Waters. He found the old minister from Haddam East Village, Massachusetts, Italianate outwardly in almost ludicrous degree. He wore a fur-lined overcoat indoors; his feet, cased in thick woollen shoes, rested on a strip of carpet laid before his table; a man who had lived for forty years in the pungent atmosphere of an air-tight stove, succeeding a quarter of a century of roaring hearth fires, contented himself with the spare heat of a scaldino, which he held his clasped hands over in the very Italian manner; the lamp that cast its light on the book open before him was the classic *lucerna*, with three beaks, fed with olive oil. He looked up at his visitor over his spectacles, without recognising him, till Colville spoke. Then, after their greeting, "Is it snowing heavily?" he asked.

"It isn't snowing at all. What made you think that?"

"Perhaps I was drowsing over my book and dreamed it. We become very strange and interesting studies to ourselves as we live along."

He took up the metaphysical consideration with the promptness of a man who has no

small-talk, and who speaks of the mind and soul as if they were the gossip of the neighbourhood.

"At times the forty winters that I passed in Haddam East Village seem like an alien experience, and I find myself pitying the life I lived there quite as if it were the life of some one else. It seems incredible that men should still inhabit such climates."

"Then you 're not homesick for Haddam East Village?"

"Ah! for the good and striving souls there, yes; especially the souls of some women there. They used to think that it was I who gave them consolation and spiritual purpose, but it was they who really imparted it. Women souls—how beautiful they sometimes are! They seem truly like angelic essences. I trust that I shall meet them somewhere some time, but it will never be in Haddam East Village. Yes, I must have been dreaming when you came in. I thought that I was by my fire there, and all round over the hills and in the streets the snow was deep and falling still. How distinctly," he said, closing his eyes, as artists do in looking at a picture, "I can see the black wavering lines of the walls in the fields sinking into the drifts! the snow

billowed over the graves by the church where I preached! the banks of snow around the houses! the white desolation everywhere! I ask myself at times if the people are still there. Yes, I feel as blessedly remote from that terrible winter as if I had died away from it, and were in the weather of heaven."

"Then you have no reproach for feeble-spirited fellow-citizens who abandon their native climate and come to live in Italy?"

The old man drew his fur coat closer about him and shrugged his shoulders in true Florentine fashion. "There may be something to say against those who do so in the heyday of life, but I shall not be the one to say it. The race must yet revert in its decrepitude, as I have in mine, to the climates of the South. Since I have been in Italy I have realised what used to occur to me dimly at home—the cruel disproportion between the end gained and the means expended in reclaiming the savage North. Half the human endeavour, half the human suffering, would have made the whole South Protestant and the whole East Christian, and our civilisation would now be there. No, I shall never go back to New England. New England? New Ireland—New Canada! Half the farms

in Haddam are in the hands of our Irish friends, and the labour on the rest is half done by French Canadians. That is all right and well. New England must come to me here, by way of the great middle West and the Pacific coast."

Colville smiled at the Emersonian touch, but he said gravely, "I can never quite reconcile myself to the thought of dying out of my own country."

"Why not? It is very unimportant where one dies. A moment after your breath is gone you are in exile for ever—or at home for ever."

Colville sat musing upon this phase of Americanism, as he had upon many others. At last he broke the silence they had both let fall, far away from the topic they had touched.

"Well," he asked, "how did you enjoy the veglione?"

"Oh, I'm too old to go to such places for pleasure," said the minister simply. "But it was very interesting, and certainly very striking: especially when I went back, toward daylight, after seeing Mrs. Bowen home."

"Did you go back?" demanded Colville, in some amaze.

"Oh yes. I felt that my experience was incomplete without some knowledge of how the Carnival ended at such a place."

"Oh! And do you still feel that Savonarola was mistaken?"

"There seemed to be rather more boisterousness toward the close, and, if I might judge, the excitement grew a little unwholesome. But I really don't feel myself very well qualified to decide. My own life has been passed in circumstances so widely different that I am at a certain disadvantage."

"Yes," said Colville, with a smile; "I dare say the Carnival at Haddam East Village was quite another thing."

The old man smiled responsively. "I suppose that some of my former parishioners might have been scandalised at my presence at a Carnival ball, had they known the fact merely in the abstract; but in my letters home I shall try to set it before them in an instructive light. I should say that the worst thing about such a scene of revelry would be that it took us too much out of our inner quiet. But I suppose the same remark might apply to almost any form of social entertainment."

"Yes."

"But human nature is so constituted that

some means of expansion must be provided, or a violent explosion takes place. The only question is what means are most innocent. I have been looking about," added the old man quietly, "at the theatres lately."

"Have you?" asked Colville, opening his eyes, in suppressed surprise.

"Yes; with a view to determining the degree of harmless amusement that may be derived from them. It's rather a difficult question. I should be inclined to say, however, that I don't think the ballet can ever be instrumental for good."

Colville could not deny himself the pleasure of saying, "Well, not the highest, I suppose."

"No," said Mr. Waters, in apparent unconsciousness of the irony. But I think the Church has made a mistake in condemning the theatre *in toto*. It appears to me that it might always have countenanced a certain order of comedy, in which the motive and plot are unobjectionable;—though I don't deny that there are moods when all laughter seems low and unworthy and incompatible with the most advanced state of being. And I confess," he went on, with a dreamy thoughtfulness, "that I have very great misgivings in regard to tragedy. The glare

that it throws upon the play of the passions —jealousy in its anguish, revenge glutting itself, envy eating its heart, hopeless love— their nakedness is terrible. The terror may be salutary; it may be very mischievous. I am afraid that I have left some of my inquiries till it is too late. I seem to have no longer the materials of judgment left in me. If I were still a young man like you——"

"Am I still a young man?" interrupted Colville sadly.

"You are young enough to respond to the appeals that sometimes find me silent. If I were of your age I should certainly investigate some of these interesting problems."

"Ah, but if you become personally interested in the problems, it 's as bad as if you hadn't the materials of judgment left; you 're prejudiced. Besides, I doubt my youthfulness very much."

"You are fifty, I presume?" suggested Mr. Waters, in a leading way.

"Not very near—only too near," laughed Colville. "I 'm forty-one."

"You are younger than I supposed. But I remember now that at your age I had the same feeling which you intimate. It seemed to me then that I had really passed the bound which separates us from

the further possibility of youth. But I've lived long enough since to know that I was mistaken. At forty, one has still a great part of youth before him — perhaps the richest and sweetest part. By that time the turmoil of ideas and sensations is over; we see clearly and feel consciously. We are in a sort of quiet in which we peacefully enjoy. We have enlarged our perspective sufficiently to perceive things in their true proportion and relation; we are no longer tormented with the lurking fear of death, which darkens and embitters our earlier years; we have got into the habit of life; we have often been ailing and we have not died. Then we have time enough behind us to supply us with the materials of reverie and reminiscence; the terrible solitude of inexperience is broken; we have learned to smile at many things besides the fear of death. We ought also to have learned pity and patience. Yes," the old man concluded, in cheerful self-corroboration, "it is a beautiful age."

"But it doesn't look so beautiful as it is," Colville protested. "People in that rosy prime don't produce the effect of garlanded striplings upon the world at large. The women laugh at us; they think we are fat

old fellows; they don't recognise the slender and elegant youth that resides in our unwieldy bulk."

"You take my meaning a little awry. Besides, I doubt if even the ground you assume is tenable. If a woman has lived long enough to be truly young herself, she won't find a man at forty either decrepit or grotesque. He can even make himself youthful to a girl of thought and imagination."

"Yes," Colville assented, with a certain discomfort.

"But to be truly young at forty," resumed Mr. Waters, "a man should be already married."

"Yes?"

"I sometimes feel," continued the old man, "that I made a mistake in yielding to a disappointment that I met with early in life, and in not permitting myself the chance of retrieval. I have missed a beautiful and consoling experience in my devotion to a barren regret."

Colville said nothing, but he experienced a mixed feeling of amusement, of repulsion, and of curiosity at this.

"We are put into the world to be of it. I am more and more convinced of that. We

have scarcely a right to separate ourselves from the common lot in any way. I justify myself for having lived alone only as a widower might. I—lost her. It was a great while ago."

"Yes," said Colville, after the pause which ensued; "I agree with you that one has no right to isolate himself, to refuse his portion of the common lot; but the effects of even a rebuff may last so long that one has no heart to put out his hand a second time—for a second rap over the knuckles. Oh, I know how trivial it is in the retrospect, and how what is called a disappointment is something to be humbly grateful for in most cases; but for a while it certainly makes you doubtful whether you were ever really intended to share the common lot." He was aware of an insincerity in his words; he hoped that it might not be perceptible, but he did not greatly care.

Mr. Waters took no notice of what he had been saying. He resumed from another point. "But I should say that it would be unwise for a man of mature life to seek his happiness with one much younger than himself. I don't deny that there are cases in which the disparity of years counts for little or nothing, but generally speaking, people

ought to be as equally mated in age as possible. They ought to start with the same advantages of ignorance. A young girl can only live her life through a community of feeling, an equality of inexperience in the man she gives her heart to. If he is tired of things that still delight her, the chances of unhappiness are increased."

"Yes, that 's true," answered Colville gravely. "It 's apt to be a mistake and a wrong."

"Oh, not always—not always," said the old minister. "We mustn't look at it in that way quite. Wrongs are of the will." He seemed to lapse into a greater intimacy of feeling with Colville.

"Have you seen Mrs. Bowen to-day? Or —ah! true! I think you told me."

"No," said Colville. "Have we spoken of her? But I have seen her."

"And was the little one well?"

"Very much better."

"Pretty creatures, both of them," said the minister, with as fresh a pleasure in his recognition of the fact as if he had not said nearly the same thing once before. "You 've noticed the very remarkable resemblance between mother and daughter?"

"Oh yes."

"There is a gentleness in Mrs. Bowen which seems to me the last refinement of a gracious spirit," suggested Mr. Waters. "I have never met any lady who reconciled more exquisitely what is charming in society with what is lovely in nature."

"Yes," said Colville, "Mrs. Bowen always had that gentle manner. I used to know her here as a girl a great while ago."

"Did you? I wonder you allowed her to become Mrs. Bowen."

This sprightliness of Mr. Waters amused Colville greatly. "At that time I was preoccupied with my great mistake, and I had no eyes for Mrs. Bowen."

"It isn't too late yet," said Mr. Waters, with open insinuation.

A bachelor of forty is always flattered by any suggestion of marriage; the suggestion that a beautiful and charming woman would marry him is too much for whatever reserves of modesty and wisdom he may have stored up. Colville took leave of the old minister in better humour with himself than he had been for forty-eight hours, or than he had any very good reason for being now.

Mr. Waters came with him to the head of the stairs and held up the lamp for him to see. The light fell upon the white locks

thinly straggling from beneath his velvet skull-cap, and he looked like some mediæval scholar of those who lived and died for learning in Florence when letters were a passion there almost as strong as love.

The next day Colville would have liked to go at once and ask about Effie, but upon the whole he thought he would not go till after he had been at the reception where he was going in the afternoon. It was an artist who was giving the reception; he had a number of pictures to show, and there was to be tea. There are artists and artists. This painter was one who had a distinct social importance. It was felt to be rather a nice thing to be asked to his reception; one was sure at least to meet the nicest people.

This reason prevailed with Colville so far as it related to Mrs. Bowen, whom he felt that he would like to tell he had been there. He would speak to her of this person and that—very respected and recognised social figures,—so that she might see he was not the outlaw, the Bohemian, he must sometimes have appeared to her. It would not be going too far to say that something like an obscure intention to show himself the next Sunday at the English chapel, where Mrs. Bowen went, was not forming itself in his

mind. As he went along it began to seem not impossible that she would be at the reception. If Effie's indisposition was no more serious than it appeared yesterday, very probably Mrs. Bowen would be there. He even believed that he recognised her carriage among those which were drawn up in front of the old palace, under the painter's studio windows.

There were a great number of people of the four nationalities that mostly consort in Italy. There were English and Americans and Russians and the sort of Italians resulting from the native intermarriages with them; here and there were Italians of pure blood, borderers upon the foreign life through a literary interest, or an artistic relation, or a matrimonial intention; here and there, also, the large stomach of a German advanced the bounds of the new empire and the new ideal of duty. There were no Frenchmen; one may meet them in more strictly Italian assemblages, but it is as if the sorrows and uncertainties of France in these times discouraged them from the international society in which they were always an infrequent element. It is not, of course, imaginable that as Frenchmen they have doubts of their merits, but that they have their misgivings

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"I am turning out a terrible tea toper," said Colville, stirring his cup in front of the old lady whom his relations to the ladies at Palazzo Pinti had interested so much. "I don't think I drink less than ten cups a day; seventy cups a week is a low average for me. I'm really beginning to look down at my boots a little anxiously."

Mrs. Amsden laughed. She had not been in America for forty years, but she liked the American way of talking better than any other. "Oh, didn't you hear about Inglehart when he was here? He was so good-natured that he used to drink all the tea people offered him, and then the young ladies made tea for him in his studio when they went to look at his pictures. It almost killed him. By the time spring came he trembled so that the brush flew out of his hands when he took it up. He had to hurry

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"Oh, that 's all changed now."

"Yes; I 've seen the tea, and I haven't heard the joke."

The flavour of Colville's talk apparently encouraged his companion to believe that he would like to make fun of their host's paintings with her; but whether he liked them, or whether he was principled against that sort of return for hospitality, he chose to reply seriously to some ironical lures she threw out.

"Oh, if you 're going to be good," she exclaimed, "I shall have nothing more to say to you. Here comes Mr. Thurston; I can make *him* abuse the pictures. There! You had better go away to a young lady I see alone over yonder, though I don't know what you will do with *one* alone." She laughed and shook her head in a way that

had once been arch and lively, but that was now puckery and infirm—it is affecting to see these things in women—and welcomed the old gentleman who came up and superseded Colville.

The latter turned, with his cup still in his hand, and wandered about through the company, hoping he might see Mrs. Bowen among the groups peering at the pictures or solidly blocking the view in front of them. He did not find her, but he found Imogene Graham standing somewhat apart near a window. He saw her face light up at sight of him, and then darken again as he approached.

"Isn't this rather an unnatural state of things?" he asked when he had come up. "I ought to be obliged to fight my way to you through successive phalanxes of young men crowding round with cups of tea outstretched in their imploring hands. Have you *had* some tea?"

"Thank you, no; I don't wish any," said the young girl, so coldly that he could not help noticing, though commonly he was man enough to notice very few things.

"How is Effie to-day?" he asked quickly.

"Oh, quite well," said Imogene.

"I don't see Mrs. Bowen," he ventured further.

"No," answered the girl, still very lifelessly; "I came with Mrs. Fleming." She looked about the room as if not to look at him.

He now perceived a distinct intention to snub him. He smiled. "Have you seen the pictures? There are two or three really lovely ones."

"Mrs. Fleming will be here in a moment, I suppose," said Imogene evasively, but not with all her first coldness.

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"I don't know," faltered the girl.

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She glanced at him with questioning trepidation.

"The respective duties of chaperon and *protégée* are rather undefined. Where the chaperon isn't there to command, the *protégée* isn't there to obey. I suppose you 'd know if you were at home?"

"Oh yes!"

"Let me imagine myself at a loan exhibition in Buffalo. Ah! that appeal is irresistible. You 'll come, I see."

She hesitated; she looked at the nearest

picture, then followed him to another. He now did what he had refused to do for the old lady who tempted him to it; he made fun of the pictures a little, but so amiably and with so much justice to their good points that the painter himself would not have minded his jesting. From time to time he made Imogene smile, but in her eyes lurked a look of uneasiness, and her manner expressed a struggle against his will which might have had its pathos for him in different circumstances, but now it only incited him to make her forget herself more and more; he treated her as one does a child that is out of sorts—coaxingly, ironically.

When they had made the round of the rooms Mrs. Fleming was not at the window where she had left Imogene; the girl detected the top of her bonnet still in the next room.

"The chaperon is never there when you come back with the *protégée*," said Colville. "It seems to be the nature of the chaperon."

Imogene turned very grave. "I think I ought to go to her," she murmured.

"Oh no; she ought to come to you; I stand out for *protégée*'s rights."

"I suppose she will come directly."

"She sees me with you; she knows you are safe."

"Oh, of course," said the girl. After a constraint which she marked by rather a long silence, she added, "How strange a roomful of talking sounds, doesn't it? Just like a great caldron boiling up and bubbling over. Wouldn't you like to know what they're all saying?"

"Oh, it's quite bad enough to see them," replied Colville frivolously.

"I think a company of gentlemen with their hats off look very queer, don't you?" she asked, after another interval.

"Well, really," said Colville, laughing, "I don't know that the spectacle ever suggested any metaphysical speculations to me. I rather think they look queerer with their hats on."

"Oh yes."

"Though there is not very much to choose. We're a queer-looking set, anyway."

He got himself another cup of tea, and coming back to her, allowed her to make the efforts to keep up the conversation, and was not without a malicious pleasure in her struggles. They interested him as social exercises which, however abrupt and undex-

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But no one came, though, as he cast his eyes carelessly over the company, he found that it had been increased by the accession of eight or ten young fellows, with a refreshing light of originality in their faces, and little touches of difference from the other men in their dress.

"Oh, there are the Inglehart boys!" cried the girl, with a flash of excitement.

There was a sensation of interest and friendliness in the company as these young fellows, after their moment of social intimidation, began to gather round the pictures, and to fling their praise and blame about, and talk the delightful shop of the studio.

The sight of their fresh young faces, the sound of their voices, struck a pang of re-

gret that was almost envy to Colville's heart.

Imogene followed them with eager eyes. "Oh," she sighed, "shouldn't you like to be an artist?"

"I should, very much."

"Oh, I beg your pardon; I forgot. I knew you were an architect."

"I should say I used to be, if you hadn't objected to my perfects and preterits."

What came next seemed almost an accident.

"I didn't suppose you cared for my objections, so long as I amused you." She suddenly glanced at him, as if terrified at her own words.

"Have you been trying to amuse me?" he asked.

"Oh no. I thought——"

"Oh, then," said Colville sharply, "you meant that I was amusing myself with you?" She glanced at him in terror of his divination, but could not protest. "Has any one told you that?" he pursued, with sudden angry suspicion.

"No, *no* one," began Imogene. She glanced about her, frightened. They stood quite alone where they were; the people had mostly wandered off into the other rooms.

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"I suppose she will come directly."

"She sees me with you; she knows you are safe."

"Oh, of course," said the girl. After a constraint which she marked by rather a long silence, she added, "How strange a roomful of talking sounds, doesn't it? Just like a great caldron boiling up and bubbling over. Wouldn't you like to know what they're all saying?"

"Oh, it's quite bad enough to see them," replied Colville frivolously.

"I think a company of gentlemen with their hats off look very queer, don't you?" she asked, after another interval.

"Well, really," said Colville, laughing, "I don't know that the spectacle ever suggested any metaphysical speculations to me. I rather think they look queerer with their hats on."

"Oh yes."

"Though there is not very much to choose. We're a queer-looking set, anyway."

He got himself another cup of tea, and coming back to her, allowed her to make the efforts to keep up the conversation, and was not without a malicious pleasure in her struggles. They interested him as social exercises which, however abrupt and undex-

terous now, were destined, with time and practice, to become the *finesse* of a woman of society, and to be accepted, even while they were still abrupt and undexterous, as touches of character. He had broken up that coldness with which she had met him at first, and now he let her adjust the fragments as she could to the new situation. He wore that air of a gentleman who has been talking a long time to a lady, and who will not dispute her possession with a newcomer.

But no one came, though, as he cast his eyes carelessly over the company, he found that it had been increased by the accession of eight or ten young fellows, with a refreshing light of originality in their faces, and little touches of difference from the other men in their dress.

"Oh, there are the Inglehart boys!" cried the girl, with a flash of excitement.

There was a sensation of interest and friendliness in the company as these young fellows, after their moment of social intimidation, began to gather round the pictures, and to fling their praise and blame about, and talk the delightful shop of the studio.

The sight of their fresh young faces, the sound of their voices, struck a pang of re-

gret that was almost envy to Colville's heart.

Imogene followed them with eager eyes. "Oh," she sighed, "shouldn't you like to be an artist?"

"I should, very much."

"Oh, I beg your pardon; I forgot. I knew you were an architect."

"I should say I used to be, if you hadn't objected to my perfects and preterits."

What came next seemed almost an accident.

"I didn't suppose you cared for my objections, so long as I amused you." She suddenly glanced at him, as if terrified at her own words.

"Have you been trying to amuse me?" he asked.

"Oh no. I thought——"

"Oh, then," said Colville sharply, "you meant that I was amusing myself with you?" She glanced at him in terror of his divination, but could not protest. "Has any one told you that?" he pursued, with sudden angry suspicion.

"No, *no* one," began Imogene. She glanced about her, frightened. They stood quite alone where they were; the people had mostly wandered off into the other rooms.

"Oh, don't—I didn't mean—I didn't intend to say anything——"

"But you *have* said something—something that surprises me from *you*, and hurts me. I wish to know whether you say it from yourself."

"I don't know—yes. That is, not—— Oh, I wish Mrs. Fleming——"

She looked as if another word of pursuit would put it beyond her power to control herself.

"Let me take you to Mrs. Fleming," said Colville, with freezing *hauteur ;* and led the way where the top of Mrs. Fleming's bonnet still showed itself. He took leave at once, and hastily parting with his host, found himself in the street, whirled in many emo tions. The girl had not said that from herself, but it was from some woman ; he knew that by the directness of the phrase and its excess, for he had noticed that women who liked to beat about the bush in small matters have a prodigious straightforwardness in more vital affairs, and will even call grey black in order clearly to establish the presence of the black in that colour. He could hardly keep himself from going to Palazzo Pinti.

But he contrived to go to his hotel instead,

where he ate a moody dinner, and then, after an hour's solitary bitterness in his room, went out and passed the evening at the theatre. The play was one of those fleering comedies which render contemptible for the time all honest and earnest intention, and which surely are a whiff from the bottomless pit itself. It made him laugh at the serious strain of self-question that had mingled with his resentment; it made him laugh even at his resentment, and with its humour in his thoughts, sent him off to sleep in a sottish acceptance of whatever was trivial in himself as the only thing that was real and lasting.

He slept late, and when Paolo brought up his breakfast, he brought with it a letter which he said had been left with the porter an hour before. A faint appealing perfume of violet exhaled from the note, and mingled with the steaming odours of the coffee and boiled milk, when Colville, after a glance at the unfamiliar handwriting of the superscription, broke the seal.

"DEAR MR. COLVILLE,—I don't know what you will think of my writing to you, but perhaps you can't think worse of me than you do already, and anything will be better than the misery that I am in. I have not been asleep all night. I hate

myself for telling you, but I do want you to understand how I have felt. I would give worlds if I could take back the words that you say wounded you. I didn't mean to wound you. Nobody is to blame for them but me; nobody ever breathed a word about you that was meant in unkindness.

"I am not ashamed of writing this, *whatever* you think, and I will sign my name in full.

"IMOGENE GRAHAM."

Colville had commonly a good appetite for his breakfast, but now he let his coffee stand long untasted. There were several things about this note that touched him—the child-like simplicity and directness, the generous courage, even the imperfection and crudity of the literature. However he saw it afterward, he saw it then in its true intention. He respected that intention; through all the sophistications in which life had wrapped him, it awed him a little. He realised that if he had been younger he would have gone to Imogene herself with her letter. He felt for the moment a rush of the emotion which he would once not have stopped to examine, which he would not have been capable of examining. But now his duty was clear; he must go to Mrs. Bowen. In the noblest human purpose there is always some admix-

ture, however slight, of less noble motive, and Colville was not without the willingness to see whatever embarrassment she might feel when he showed her the letter, and to invoke her finest tact to aid him in re-assuring the child.

She was alone in her drawing-room, and she told him in response to his inquiry for their health that Imogene and Effie had gone out to drive. She looked so pretty in the quiet house dress in which she rose from the sofa and stood, letting him come the whole way to greet her, that he did not think of any other look in her, but afterward he remembered an evidence of inner tumult in her brightened eyes.

He said, smiling, "I 'm so glad to see you alone," and this brought still another look into her face, which also he afterward remembered. She did not reply, but made a sound in her throat like a bird when it stirs itself for flight or song. It was a strange, indefinite little note, in which Colville thought he detected trepidation at the time, and recalled for the sort of expectation suggested in it. She stood waiting for him to go on.

"I have come to get you to help me out of trouble."

"Yes?" said Mrs. Bowen, with a vague smile. "I always supposed you would be able to help yourself out of trouble. Or perhaps wouldn't mind it if you were in it."

"Oh yes, I mind it very much," returned Colville, refusing her banter, if it were banter. "Especially this sort of trouble, which involves some one else in the discomfort." He went on abruptly: "I have been held up to a young lady as a person who was amusing himself with her, and I was so absurd as to be angry when she told me, and demanded the name of my friend, whoever it was. My behaviour seems to have given the young lady a bad night, and this morning she writes to tell me so, and to take all the blame on herself, and to assure me that no harm was meant me by any one. Of course I don't want her to be distressed about it. Perhaps you can guess who has been writing to me."

Colville said all this looking down, in a fashion he had. When he looked up he saw a severity in Mrs. Bowen's pretty face, such as he had not seen there before.

"I didn't know she had been writing to you, but I know that you are talking of Imogene. She told me what she had said

to you yesterday, and I blamed her for it, but I 'm not sure that it wasn't best."

"Oh, indeed!" said Colville. "Perhaps you can tell me who put the idea into her head?"

"Yes; I did."

A dead silence ensued, in which the fragments of the situation broken by these words revolved before Colville's thought with kaleidoscopic variety, and he passed through all the phases of anger, resentment, wounded self-love, and accusing shame.

At last, "I suppose you had your reasons," he said simply.

"I am in her mother's place here," she replied, tightening the grip of one little hand upon another, where she held them laid against the side of her waist.

"Yes, I know that," said Colville; "but what reason had you to warn her against me as a person who was amusing himself with her? I don't like the phrase; but she seems to have got it from you; I use it at third hand."

"I don't like the phrase either; I didn't invent it."

"You used it."

"No; it wasn't I who used it. I should have been glad to use another, if I could,"

said Mrs. Bowen, with perfect steadiness.

"Then you mean to say that you believe I've been trifling with the feelings of this child?"

"I mean to say nothing. You are very much older; and she is a romantic girl, very extravagant. You have tried to make her like you."

"I certainly have. I have tried to make Effie Bowen like me too."

Mrs. Bowen passed this over in serenity that he felt was not far from contempt.

He gave a laugh that did not express enjoyment.

"You have no right to laugh!" she cried, losing herself a little, and so making her first gain upon him.

"It appears not. Perhaps you will tell me what I am to do about this letter?"

"That is for you to decide." She recovered herself, and lost ground with him in proportion.

"I thought perhaps that since you were able to judge my motives so clearly, you might be able to advise me."

"I don't judge your motives," Mrs. Bowen began. She added suddenly, as if by an after-thought, "I don't think you had any."

"I 'm obliged to you."

"But you are as much to blame as if you had."

"And perhaps I 'm as much to blame as if I had really wronged somebody?"

"Yes."

"It 's rather paradoxical. You don't wish me to see her any more?"

"I haven't any wish about it; you must not *say* that I have," said Mrs. Bowen, with dignity.

Colville smiled. "May I *ask* if you have?"

"Not for myself."

"You put me on very short allowance of conjecture."

"I will not let you trifle with the matter!" she cried. "You have made me speak, when a word, a look, ought to have been enough. Oh, I didn't think you had the miserable vanity to wish it!"

Colville stood thinking a long time and she waiting. "I see that everything is at an end. I am going away from Florence. Good-bye, Mrs. Bowen." He approached her, holding out his hand. But if he expected to be rewarded for this, nothing of the kind happened. She shrank swiftly back.

"No, no. You shall not touch me."

He paused a moment, gazing keenly at her face, in which, whatever other feeling showed, there was certainly no fear of him. Then with a slight bow he left the room.

Mrs. Bowen ran from it by another door, and shut herself into her own room. When she returned to the salotto, Imogene and Effie were just coming in. The child went to lay aside her hat and sacque; the girl, after a glance at Mrs. Bowen's face, lingered inquiringly.

"Mr. Colville came here with your letter, Imogene."

"Yes," said Imogene faintly. "Do you think I oughtn't to have written it?"

"Oh, it makes no difference now. He is going away from Florence."

"Yes?" breathed the girl.

"I spoke openly with him."

"Yes?"

"I didn't spare him. I made him think I hated and despised him."

Imogene was silent. Then she said, "I know that whatever you have done, you have acted for the best."

"Yes, I have a right that you should say that—I have a right that you should always

say it. I think he has behaved very foolishly, but I don't blame him——"

"No! I was to blame."

"I don't *know* that he was to blame, and I won't let you think he was."

"Oh, he is the best man in the world!"

"He gave up at once; he didn't try to defend himself. It 's nothing for you to lose a friend at your age; but at mine——"

"I *know* it, Mrs. Bowen."

"And I wouldn't even shake hands with him when he was going; I——"

"Oh, I don't see how you could be so hard!" cried Imogene. She put up her hands to her face, and broke into tears. Mrs. Bowen watched her, dry eyed, with her lips parted, and an intensity of question in her face.

"Imogene," she said at last, "I wish you to promise me one thing."

"Yes."

"Not to write to Mr. Colville again."

"No, no; indeed I won't, Mrs. Bowen!" The girl came up to kiss her; Mrs. Bowen turned her cheek.

Imogene was going from the room, when Mrs. Bowen spoke again. "But I wish you to promise me this only because you don't feel sure of yourself about him. If you care