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TO LEEWARD

BY

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TO MY UNCLE,

SAMUEL WARD,

OF NEW YORK,

THIS STORY IS AFFECTIONATELY

Dedicated.

TO LEEWARD

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CHAPTER I.

THERE are two Romes. There is the Rome of the intelligent foreigner, consisting of excavations, monuments, tramways, hotels, typhoid fever, incense, and wax candles; and there is the Rome within—a city of antique customs, good and bad, a town full of aristocratic prejudices, of intrigues, of religion, of old-fashioned honour and new-fashioned scandal, of happiness and unhappiness, of just people and unjust. Besides all this, there is a very modern court and a government of the future, which may almost be said to make up together a third city.

Moreover, these several co-existent cities, and their corresponding inhabitants, are sub-

divided to an infinity of gradations, in order to contain all and make room for all. The foreigner who hunts excavations does not cross the path of the foreigner who sniffs after incense, any more than the primeval aristocrat sits down to dinner with the representative of fashionable scandal, any more than the just man would ever allow the unjust to be presented to him. They all enjoy so thoroughly the freedom to ignore each other that they would not for worlds endanger the safety of the barrier that separates them. Of course, as they all say, this state of things cannot last. There must ultimately be an amalgamation, a deluge, a unity, fraternity, and equality; a state of things in which we shall say, "*Sois mon frère, ou je te tue*"—a future glorious, disgusting, or dull, according as you look at it. But, meanwhile, it is all very charming, and there is plenty for every one to enjoy, and an abundance for every one to abuse.

When Marcantonio Carantoni saw his sister married to a Frenchman years ago, he was exceedingly glad that she had not married an

Englishman, a Turk, a Jew, or an infidel. The Vicomte de Charleroi was, and is, a gentleman; rather easy-going, perhaps, and inclined to look upon republics in general, and the French republic in particular, with the lenient eye of the man who owns land and desires peace first—and a monarchy afterwards, whenever convenient. But in these days it is not altogether worthy of blame that a man should look after his worldly interests and goods; for how else can the aristocracy expect to make any headway against the stream of grimy *bourgeois*, who sell everything at a profit, while the nobles buy everything at a loss? So Marcantonio is satisfied with his brother-in-law, and just now is particularly delighted because Charleroi has got himself appointed to a post in Rome, and he goes to see his sister every day, for he is very fond of her.

In truth it is not surprising that Marcantonio should like his sister, for she is a very charming woman. She is beautiful too, in a grand way, with her auburn hair, and grey eyes, and fair skin; but no one can help feeling that she might be quite as beautiful,

and yet be anything but charming; so many beautiful people are vain, or shy, or utterly idiotic. Madame de Charleroi is something of a paragon, and has as many enemies as most paragons have, but they can find nothing to feed their envy. She was very unhappy years ago, but time has closed the wounds or has hidden them from sight, and her dearest friends can only say that she was cold and showed very little heart. When the world says that a woman is a piece of ice, you may generally be sure that she is both beautiful and good, so that they can find nothing worse to say. Marcantonio Carantoni's sister is a paragon, and there are only two things to be said against her—she did not marry Charleroi for love, and she has not done half the things in the world that she might have done.

On the January afternoon which marks the opening of this story, the brother and sister sat together in a small boudoir in the Carantoni palace; there was room for all in the great house, and as Marcantonio was not married, it was natural that his sister and her husband,

with their children, governesses, servants and horses, should occupy the untenanted part of the ancestral mansion. Up in the second story there is a room such as you would not expect to find within those grey and ancient walls, where the lower windows are heavily grated, and huge stone coats of arms glare down forbiddingly from above. It is a room all sun and flowers and modern furniture, though not of the more hideous type of newness—modern in the sense of comfortable, well padded and airy. At the time I speak of, the afternoon sun was pouring in through the closed windows and there was a small wood fire in the narrow fireplace. The Vicomtesse de Charleroi sat warming her toes, and her brother was rolling a cigarette as he looked at her. A short silence had succeeded a somewhat animated discussion. She looked at the fire and he looked at her.

"My dear Diana," said Marcantonio at last, rising to get himself a match, "what in the world can you have against her? We are not Hindoos, you know, to talk about caste in these days; and even if that were the

objection, she comes of very proper people, I am sure, though they are foreigners."

Madame moved her feet impatiently.

"Oh, you know it is not that!" she said petulantly. "As if I had not married a foreigner myself! But then, if you had felt about it as I feel about this, I would have thought twice——"

"Have I not thought twice—and three times?"

"Of course, yes—all in a day, while your head is hot with this fancy. Yes, you have probably thought a hundred times, at least, this very day. Listen to me, my dear boy, and do what I tell you. Go away to Paris, or London, or Vienna, for a fortnight, and then come back and tell me what you think about it. Will you not do that—to please me?"

"But why?" objected Marcantonio, looking very uncomfortable, for he hated to refuse his sister anything. "Seriously, why should I not marry her? Is there anything against her? If there is, tell me."

Donna Diana rose rather wearily and went to the window.

"I wish you would abandon the whole idea," she said. "I am quite sure you will repent when it is too late. I do not believe in these young girls who occupy themselves with philosophy and the good of the human race. Politics—well, we all have a finger in politics; but this dreadful progressive thought—it is turning the world upside down."

"Oh—it is the philosophy that you do not like about her? *Ebbene*, my dear sister, that is exactly what I think so interesting. This young English Hypatia——"

"Hypatia, indeed!" cried Donna Diana rather scornfully.

"Yes. Is she not learned?"

"Perhaps."

"And beautiful?"

"No—certainly not. She is simply a little pretty."

Marcantonio shrugged his shoulders.

"Of course," he said, "you will not allow it." His sister looked round quickly.

"That is rude," she said. In a moment her brother was by her side.

"Forgive me, Diana *mia*—you know I did

not mean it. But you see I think she is beautiful, and that is everything, after all."

"Yes," answered she, "I suppose it is everything, now. But philosophy is not everything. Put her out of your head, dear boy, and do not say any more rude things."

Marcantonio had the power to avoid being rude, but he was not able to follow the other piece of advice. He could not put "her" out of his head. On the contrary, he went out and shut himself up in his own rooms and thought of "her" for a whole hour.

He was not at all like his sister in appearance, though he resembled her somewhat in character. He was of middle height, sparely built, dark of skin and aquiline of feature; neither handsome nor ugly, but very decidedly refined—gentle of speech and kind of face. Without any more vanity than most people, he was yet always a a little more carefully dressed than other men, and consequently passed for a dandy. Altogether he was a pleasant person to look at, but not especially remarkable at first sight.

As regards his position, he bore an ancient name, dignified with the title of marquis; he

was an only son, and his parents were dead; he owned the fine old palace in Rome and a good deal of land elsewhere; he never gambled, and was generally considered to be rich, as fortunes go in modern Italy. Of course, he was a good match, and many were the hints he received, from time to time, to the effect that he would be very acceptable as a son-in-law. Nevertheless he was not married, and he did not particularly care for the society of women. In truth women did not find him very amenable, for he would not marry, and could not pay adoration well enough to please them. So they left him alone. Grave old gentlemen nodded approvingly when they spoke of him, and his uncle the cardinal regarded him as one of the mainstays of the clerical party. As a matter of fact, he did not aspire to anything of the kind, and was merely a very honest young nobleman of good education, who had not made for himself any interest in life, but who nevertheless found life very agreeable. Possessing many good qualities, he yet knew very well that he had never been put to the test, nor required to show much strength of character—and he did not

wish to be put into any such position. His sister was very fond of him, but she sometimes caught herself wishing he would do something a little out of the everlasting common round of social respectability. He was twenty-nine years old, and she was a year younger.

Of late, however, it had become apparent that Marcantonio, Marchese Carantoni, had not only found an interest in life, but had also discovered in himself the strength of will necessary to its prosecution. The dull regularity of his existence was shaken to its foundations, and out of the vast social sea a figure had risen which was destined to destroy the old order of things with him, and to create a new one. There was no doubt about it—not so much because he himself said so, as because his whole manner and being proclaimed the fact, that he was seriously in love. Worse than that, he was in love with a lady of whom his sister did not approve, and he evidently meant to marry, whether she liked it or not.

He was seriously in love; and, indeed, love ought always to be a serious thing, or else it

should be called by another name. There is a great deal of very poor nonsense talked and written about love by persons only vicariously acquainted with it; and it is a great pity, because there is absolutely no subject so permanently interesting to humanity as love, whether in life or in fiction. And there is no subject which deserves more tenderness and delicacy, or which requires more strength in the handling.

The relation of brother and sister is unlike any other. It represents the only possible absolutely permanent and platonic affection between young men and young women. Its foundation is in identity of blood instead of in the spontaneous sympathy of the heart, and even when brother and sister quarrel they understand each other. Lovers frequently do not understand each other when they are on the best of terms, and the small difference of opinion grows by that misunderstanding until it makes an impassable gulf. Brothers and sisters may be estranged, separated, divided by family quarrels or by the bloody exigencies of civil war—but if once they are thrown

together again the mysterious attraction of consanguinity shows itself, and their life begins again where it had been broken off by untoward fate. And yet they will allow small things to make trouble between them!

Madame de Charleroi was inclined to be angry with Marcantonio, and when he was gone she sat by the fire, wondering what he would be like when he should be married. Somehow she had never thought of him as married—certainly not as married to a pernicious young English girl with all sorts of queer ideas in her brain, and a tendency to sympathise with the dynamite party. He might surely have chosen better than that. Donna Diana was not a woman of narrow prejudices, but she really could not be expected to be pleased at seeing her brother, a Catholic gentleman, bent on uniting himself to a foreign girl with no fortune, no beauty—well, not much—and a taste for explosives. He might surely have chosen better.

Donna Diana thought of her father, and fancied what he would have said to such a

match—the strict old nobleman. And so, between her thoughts and her memories the afternoon wore on, and she bethought herself that it was time to go out.

The horses spun along the streets through the crisp golden air, and now and then a ray of the lowering sun caught them as they dashed through some open place on the way, making them look like burnished metal. And the light touched Madame de Charleroi's beautiful face and auburn hair, so that the people stood still to look at her as she passed—for every Roman knew Donna Diana Carantoni by sight, just as every Roman knows every other Roman, man, woman and child, distinguishing lovingly between the Romans of Rome and the Romans of the north. By and by the carriage rolled through the iron gates of the Pincio and along the drive to the open terrace where the band plays, till it stood still behind the row of stone posts, within hearing of the music. The place has been absolutely described to death, and everybody knows exactly how it looks. There are flowers, and a band-stand, and babies, and a view of St. Peter.

The first person Donna Diana saw was her brother, standing disconsolately by one of the short pillars and looking at each carriage as it drove up. He was evidently waiting for some one who did not come. His black moustache drooped sadly, and his face was so melancholy that his sister smiled as she watched him.

Marcantonio was soon aware of her presence, but he had no intention of showing it, and studiously kept his head turned towards the drive, watching the line of carriages. Madame de Charleroi was soon surrounded by a crowd of men, all dressed precisely alike, and all anxious to say something that might attract the attention of the famous beauty. Presently they bored her, and her carriage moved on; whereupon they pulled their hats off and began to chatter scandal amongst themselves, after the manner of their kind. They nodded to Marcantonio as they passed him in a body, and he was left alone. The sun was setting and there was a purple light over the flats behind the Vatican, recently flooded by a rise in the Tiber. There was no longer any proba-

bility of her coming, and the young man sauntered slowly down the steps and the steep drive to the Piazza del Popolo, and entered the Corso.

To tell the truth, he was disappointed, bored, annoyed and angry, all at once. He had fully expected to see her, and to find consolation in some sweet words for the hard things his sister had said to him. Perhaps also he had enjoyed the prospect of exhibiting himself to his sister in the society of the lady in question—for Marcantonio was obstinate, and had just discovered the fact, so that he was anxious to show it. Men who are new in fighting are sure to press every advantage, not having yet learned their strength; but in the course of time they become more generous. Marcantonio was therefore grievously chagrined at being cheated of his small demonstration of independence, besides being a little wounded in his pride, and honestly disappointed at not meeting the young lady he meant to marry. In this state of mind he strolled down the Corso, looked up at her windows, passed and repassed before the house, and ultimately inquired of the confidential

porter, who knew him, whether she were at home. The porter said he had not seen the signorina, but that one of the servants had told him she was indisposed. The marchese bit his black moustache and went away in a sad mood.

CHAPTER II.

Miss Leonora Carnethy was suffering from an acute attack of philosophical despair, which accounted for her not appearing with her mother on the Pincio.

The immediate cause of the fit was the young lady's inability to comprehend Hegel's statement that "Nothing is the same as Being;" and as it was not only necessary to understand it, but also, in Miss Carnethy's view, to reconcile it with some dozens of other philosophical propositions all diametrically opposed to it and to each other, the consequence of the attempt was the most chaotic and hopeless failure on record in the annals of thought. Under these circumstances, Miss Carnethy shut herself up in a dark room, went to bed, and agreed with Hegel

that Nothing was precisely the same as Being. She thus scattered all the other philosophies to the angry airts of heaven at one fell sweep, and she felt sure she was going to be a Hindoo.

This sounds a little vague, but nothing could be vaguer than Miss Carnethy's state of mind. Having agreed with Mr. Herbert Spencer that the grand mainspring of life is the pursuit of happiness, and that no other motive has any real influence in human affairs, it was a little hard to find that there was nothing in anything after all. But then, since her own being was also nothing, why should she trouble herself? Evidently it was impossible for nothing to trouble itself, and so the only possible peace must lie in realising her own nothingness, which could be best accomplished by going to bed in a dark room. It was very dreary, of course, but she felt it was good logic, and must tell in the long run.

It had happened before. There had been days when she had reached the same point by a different road, and had been satisfactorily roused by a flash of intelligence shedding enough light in her darkened course to give

her a new direction. To-day, however, it was quite different. She had certainly now reached the absolute end of all speculation, for she was convinced of the general nothingness of all created strength and life.

"For," said she, "I am quite sure that if I saw a train coming down upon me now, I would not get out of the way—unless, the train being nothing, and I also nothing, two nothings should make something. But Hegel does not say that, and of course he knew, or he would not have understood that Nothing is the same as Being."

This kind of argument is irreproachable. It is like the old lady who said she was so glad she did not like beans, because if she did she would eat them, and, as she detested them, that would be very unpleasant. There is no answer possible to a properly grounded philosophical argument of this kind. On the whole Miss Carnethy did the right thing when she tried to realise the physical being of nothing.

Miss Leonora was no ordinary girl. She belonged to a small class of young women

who take a certain delight in being different from "the rest"—higher, of course. She had the misfortune to be of a mixed race, as far as blood was concerned, for her father was English and her mother was a Russian. It would probably be hard to find two people more utterly unlike than these two, for the beef-eating conqueror is one, and the fire-eating Tartar is quite another, while this unlucky child of an international parentage had something of each. Her history—she was twenty-two years of age, then—might be summed up in a very few words. An English child, an Italian girl, a Russian woman. Her father had many prejudices and did not believe in much; her mother had no prejudices at all, and believed in everything under the sun, and in a few things besides, so that certain evilly disposed persons had even said of her that she was superstitious.

There is something infinitely pathetic about such a growing to maturity as had made Leonora Carnethy what she was. Imagine such an anomaly as a poor little seed, of which no one can say whether it is a rose or

a nightshade, alternately treated as a fair blossom and as a poisonous weed. Imagine a young girl, full of a certain fierce courage and impatience of restraint, chafing under the moral flat iron of a hopelessly proper father whose mind is of the great levelling type, and his prejudices as mountains of stone in the midst, reared to heaven like pyramids to impose a personal moral geography on the human landscape; and imagine the same girl further possessed of certain truly British instincts of continuity and unreasonable perseverance, eternally offending by her persistence a mother whose strong point is a kind of gymnastic superstition, a strange perversity of exuberant belief, forcing itself into the place of principle where there is more—imagine a young girl in such a situation, in such a childhood, and it will not seem strange that she should grow up to be a very odd woman.

The father and mother understood each other after a fashion, but neither of them ever understood Leonora, and so Leonora tried to understand herself. To this laudable end she devoured book and ideas of all sorts and kinds,

not always perceiving whether she took the poison first and the antidote afterwards, or the contrary, or even whether she fed entirely on poisons or entirely on antidotes. Poor child! she found truth very hard to define, and the criticism exercised by pure reason a very insufficient weapon. Moreover, like Job of old, she had friends and comforters to help in making life hideous. She wondered to-day, as she lay in her darkened room, whether any of them would come, and the thought was unpleasant.

She had just made up her mind to ring the bell and tell her maid that no one should be admitted, when the door opened after the least possible apology for a knock, and she realised that she had thought of the contingency too late.

"Dear Leonora!"

"Dearest Leonora!"

The room was so dark that the young ladies stood still at the door as they fired off the first shots of their brimming affection. Leonora moved so as to see their dark figures against the light.

"Oh," she said, "is it you?"

She was not glad to see her dear friends Mademoiselle Le Creux and Mademoiselle Le Vide, for her fits of philosophical despair were real while they lasted, and she hated to be disturbed in them. But as these two young women were her companions in the study of universal hollowness, she felt that she must bear with them. So, after a little hesitation she allowed them to make a little light in the room, and they sat down and held her hands.

"We want to talk to you about Infinite Time," began Mademoiselle Le Vide.

"And Infinite Space," added Mademoiselle Le Creux.

"I am persuaded," said the former, "that our ideas of Time are quite mistaken. This system of hours and minutes is not adapted to the larger view."

"No," said Leonora, "for Time is evidently a portion of universal pure Being, and is therefore Nothing. I am sure of it."

"No," answered Mademoiselle Le Vide, "Time is not Nothing—it is Colour."

"How do you mean, dear?" asked Leonora in some surprise.

"I do not quite know, dearest, but I am sure it must be. It is quite certain that Colour is a fundamental conception."

"Of course," remarked Mademoiselle Le Creux sagely. There was a pause. Apparently the identity of Infinite Time with Colour did not interest Miss Carnethy, who stared at the light through the blinds between her two friends.

"It seems to me that we girls have no field nowadays," said she, rather irrelevantly.

"An infinite field, dear," said Mademoiselle Le Creux.

"And infinite time, dearest," said Mademoiselle Le Vide.

"I would give anything I possess to be able to do anything for anybody," began Leonora. "We know so much about life in theory, and we know nothing about it in practice. I wish mamma would even let me order the dinner sometimes—it would be something. But of course it is all an illusion, and nothing, and very infinite."

Poor Miss Carnethy turned on her pillow with a dreary look in her eyes.

"It will be different when you are married, dear," suggested one.

"Of course," acquiesced the other.

"But can you not see," objected Miss Carnethy, "that we shall never marry men whose ideas are so high and beautiful as ours? And then, to be tied for ever to some miserable creature! Fancy not being understood! What do these wretched society men care about the really great questions of life?"

"About Time—" began Mademoiselle Le Vide.

"And Infinite Space—" suggested Mademoiselle Le Creux, scornfully.

"Nothing, nothing, nothing!" cried Miss Carnethy in real distress.

"And yet it would be dreadful to be an old maid——"

"Perfectly dreadful, of course!" exclaimed all three, in a breath. Then there was a short silence, during which Leonora moved uneasily, and finally sat up, her heavy red hair falling all about her.

"By the bye," she said at last, "have you been out to-day, dears? What have you been doing? Tell me all about it."

"We have been to Lady Smyth-Tompkins's tea," said Mademoiselle Le Vide. "It was very empty."

"You mean very hollow," corrected Mademoiselle Le Creux, "for there were many people there."

"Yes," said the other, "it was very hollow—empty—everything of that sort. Then we went to drive on the Pincio."

"So very void," said Mademoiselle Le Creux sadly.

"Yes," assented Mademoiselle Le Vide. "We saw Carantoni leaning against a post. I am sure he was thinking of nothing. He looks just like a stuffed glove—such an inane dandy!"

Miss Carnethy's blue eyes suddenly looked as though they were conscious of something more than mere emptiness in the world. Her strong well-shaped red lips set themselves like a bent bow, and the shaft was not long in flying.

"He is very pleasant to talk to," said she,

"and besides—he really dances beautifully." It was probably a standing grievance with her two friends, that Marcantonio did not dance with them, or Leonora could scarcely have produced such an impression in so few words.

"What does he talk about?" asked Mademoiselle Le Vide with an affectation of indifference.

"Oh, all sorts of things," answered Leonora. "He does not believe at all in the greatest good of the greatest number. He says he has discovered the Spencerian fallacy, as he calls it."

"Alas, then that also is nothing!" groaned Mademoiselle Le Creux.

"Absolutely nothing, dear," continued Leonora. "He says that, if there is no morality beyond happiness—"

"Of course," murmured Mademoiselle Le Vide in great dejection.

"—then every individual has as much right to be happy as the whole human race put together, since he is under no moral obligation to anybody or anything, there being no abstract morality. Do you see? It is very pretty. And then he says it follows that there

is no absolute good unless from a divine standard, which of course is pure nonsense, or ought to be, if Hegel is right."

"Dear me!" ejaculated Mademoiselle Le Creux, "of course it is!"

"And so, dears," concluded Leonora triumphantly, "we are all going to the big, big D—do you see?" The association of her friends with the initial letter in question seemed exhilarating to Miss Carnethy, and in truth the conclusion was probably suggested more by her feelings than by her logic, if she really possessed any. She felt better, and would put off the further consideration of Nothing and Being to some more convenient season. She therefore gave her friends some tea in her bedroom, and the conversation became more and more earthly, and the subjects more and more minute, until they seemed to be thoroughly within the grasp of the three young ladies.

At last they went, these two charming damsels, very much impressed with Leonora's cleverness, and very much interested in her future—which she would only refer to in the vaguest terms possible. They were both

extremely fashionable young persons, possessed of dowries, good looks, and various charms, such as good birth, good manners and the like; and it would be futile to deny that they took a lively interest in the doings of their world, however hollow and vain the cake appeared to them between two bites.

"Are you going to-night, Leonora dear?" they inquired as they left her.

"Of course," answered Miss Carnethy. "I *must* hear the rest of the 'Spencerian fallacy' you know!"

When Leonora was alone she had a great many things to think of.

The atmosphere had cleared during the last hour, as far as philosophy was concerned, and as she looked at herself in the glass, she was wondering how she would look in the evening Not vainly—at least, not so vainly as most girls with her advantages might have thought—but reflectively, the English side of her twofold nature having gained the upper hand. For as she gazed into her own blue eyes, trying to search and fathom her own soul, she was conscious of something that gave her pleasure

and hope—something which she had treated scornfully enough in her thoughts that very afternoon.

She knew, for her mother had told her, that Marcantonio Carantoni had written to her parents, and had called, and had had an interview, and had been told that he would be an acceptable son-in-law, provided that he could obtain Leonora's consent. She knew also that in the natural course of things he would this very evening ask her to be his wife—and, lastly, she knew very well that she would accept him.

She wondered vaguely how all those strange unsettled ideas of hers would harmonise in a married life. How far would she and her husband ever agree? She had a photograph of him in her desk, which he had given to her mother, and which she had naturally stolen and hidden away. Now she took it out and brought it to the window, and looked at it minutely, wonderingly, as she had looked at herself a moment before in the mirror.

Yes—he was a proper husband enough, with his bright honest eyes and his brave aristocratic nose and black moustache? Not very in-

telligent, perhaps, by the higher standard—that everlasting "higher standard" again—but withal goodly and noble as a lover should be. A lover? What weal and woe of heart-stirring romance that word used to suggest! And so this was her lover, the one man of all others dreamed of as a future divinity throughout her passionate girlhood. A creature of sighs and stolen glances—ay, perhaps of stolen kisses—a lover should be; breathing soft things and glancing hot glances. Was Marcantonio really her lover?

He was so honest—and so rich! He could hardly want her for her dower's sake—no, she knew that was impossible. For her beauty's sake, then? No, she was not so beautiful as that, and never would be, though the fashion has changed and red hair is in vogue. A pretty conceit, that mankind should make one half of creation fashionable at the expense of the other! But it is so all the same, and always will be. However, even with red hair, and an immense quantity of it, she was not a great beauty.

Perhaps Marcantonio would have married a

great beauty if he could have met one who would accept him. It would not be nice, she thought, to marry a man who could not have the best if he chose. To think that he might even look back and wish she were as beautiful as some one else. But after much earnest consideration of the matter no image of "some one else" rose to her mind, and she confessed with some triumph that she was not jealous of any one; that he had chosen her for herself, and that she was without rival so far as he was concerned. Not even the dark and classic Mademoiselle Le Vide, nor the fair and dreamy Mademoiselle Le Creux could boast of having roused his interest. That was a great advantage.

But did she care for him—did she love him? Of course—how else would it be possible for her, with her high ideas of man's goodness, to think of ever consenting to marry him? Of course she loved him.

It was not exactly the kind of thing she had expected, when she used to think of love a year ago; when love was a detached ideal with wings and arrows, and all manner of romantic and mythical attributes. But considering how

very hollow and barren she had demonstrated the world to be, this thing had a certain life about it. It was a real sensation, beyond a doubt, and not an unhappy one either.

The room grew dark and she sat a few moments, the photograph lying idly in her hand. Out of the dusk, coming from the fairy-land of her girl's fancy, rose a figure, the figure of the ideal lover she used to evoke before she knew Marcantonio Carantoni. He was a different sort of person altogether, much taller and broader and fiercer; a very impossibility of a man, coming towards her, and upsetting everything in his course; trampling rough-shod over the mangled fragments of her former idols, over society, over Marcantonio, over everything, till he was close and near her, touching her hand, touching her lips, clasping her to him in fierce triumph, and bearing her away in a whirlwind of strength. A quick sigh, and she let the photograph fall to the ground, sinking back in her chair with a light in her eyes that overcame the darkness.

Dreamland, dreamland, what fools you make of us all! What strange characters there are

among the slides of your theatre, only awaiting the nod of Sleep, the manager, to issue forth, and rant and rave, make love and mischief, do battle and murder, play the scoundrel and the hero, till our poor brains reel and the daylight is turned on again, and all the players vanish into the thinnest of thin air!

Miss Carnethy rang for her maid, who brought lights and closed the shutters and let down the curtains preparatory to dressing her mistress for dinner. Leonora looked down and saw Marcantonio's photograph lying where it had fallen. She picked it up and looked at it once more by the candlelight.

"Perhaps I shall refuse him after all," she thought, coldly enough, and she put it back into the drawer of her desk.

Perhaps you are right, Miss Carnethy, and the world is stuffed with sawdust.

CHAPTER III.

THE soft thick air of the ballroom swayed rhythmically to the swell and fall of the violins; the perfume of the roses and lilies was whirled into waves of sweetness, and the beating of many young hearts seemed to tremble musically through the nameless harmony of instrument and voice, and rustling silk, and gliding feet. In the passionately moving symphony of sound and sight and touch, the whole weal and woe and longing of life throbbed in a threefold pace.

The dwellers in an older world did well to call the dance divine, and to make it the gift of a nimble goddess; truly, without a waltz the world would have lacked a very divine element—few people can really doubt

what the step was that David danced before the ark.

The ball was at a house where members of various parties met by common consent as on neutral ground. There are few such houses in Rome, or, indeed, anywhere else, as there are very few people clever enough, or stupid enough, to manage such an establishment. Men of entirely inimical convictions and associations will occasionally go to the house of a great genius or a great fool, out of sheer curiosity, and are content to enjoy themselves and even to talk to each other a little, when no one is looking. It is neutral ground, and the white flag of the ball-dress keeps the peace as it sweeps past the black cloth legs of clericals and the gray cloth legs of the military contingent, past the legs of all sorts and conditions of men elbowing each other for a front place with the ladies.

Conspicuous by her height and rare magnificence of queenly beauty was Madame de Charleroi, moving stately along as she rested her fingers on the arm of a minister less than half her size. But there was a look of weari-

ness and preoccupation on her features that did not escape her dear friends.

"Diana is certainly going to be thin and scraggy," remarked a black-browed dame of Rome, fat and solid, a perfect triumph of the flesh. She said it behind her fan to her neighbour.

"It is sad," said the other; "she is growing old."

"Ah yes," remarked her husband, who chanced to be standing by and was in a bad humour, "she was born in 1844, the year you left school, my dear." The black-browed lady smiled sweetly at her discomfited friend, who looked unutterable scorn at her consort.

Donna Diana glanced uneasily about the room, expecting every moment to see her brother appear with Miss Carnethy. She was very unhappy about the whole affair, though she could not exactly explain to herself the reason of what she felt. Miss Carnethy was rich, had a certain kind of distinguished beauty about her, was young, well born—but all that did not compensate in Madame de Charleroi's mind for the fact that she was a

heretic, a free-thinker, a dabbler in progressist ideas, and—and—what? She could not tell. It must be prejudice of the most absurd kind! She would not submit to it a moment longer, and if the opportunity offered she would go to Miss Carnethy and say something pleasant to her. Donna Diana had a very kind and gentle Italian heart hidden away in her proud bosom, and she had also a determination to be just and honest in all situations—most of all when she feared that her personal sympathies were leading her away.

The diplomat at her side chatted pleasantly, perceiving that she was wholly preoccupied; he talked quite as much to himself as to her, after he had discovered that she was not listening. And Donna Diana determined to do a kind action, and the swinging rhythm of the straining, surging waltz was in her ears. She was just wondering idly enough what the little diplomat had been saying to her during the last ten minutes, when she saw her brother enter the room with Miss Carnethy on his arm. They had met in one of the outer drawing-rooms and had come in to dance. Donna

Diana watched them as they caught the measure and whirled away.

"She is *affreusement* interesting," remarked the little man beside her as he noticed where she was looking.

"She is also decidedly a beauty," answered Madame de Charleroi, with the calm authority of a woman whose looks had never been questioned.

People who are in love are proverbially amusing objects to the general public. There is an air of shyness about them, or else a ridiculous incapacity for perceiving the details of life, or at least an absurd infatuation for each other most refreshing to witness. There is no mistaking the manner of them, if the thing is genuine.

The sadness that had been on Donna Diana's face, and which the resolution to be civil to Miss Carnethy had momentarily dispelled, returned now as she watched the young couple. She remembered her own courtship, and she fancied she saw similar conditions in the wooing now going on under her eyes. Marcantonio was furiously in love, after his manner,

but she thought Leonora's face looked hard. How could she let her brother marry a woman who did not love him? Her resolution to be civil wavered.

But just then, as luck would have it, the waltz brought the pair near to where she was standing. Marcantonio was talking pleasantly, with a quick smile coming and going at every minute. Leonora stood looking down and toying with her fan. One instant she looked up at him, and Donna Diana saw the look and the quick caught heave of the snowy neck.

"I do not know what it is," she said to herself, "but it is certainly love of some kind." She moved towards them, steering her little diplomat through the sea of silk and satin, jewels and lace.

"How do you do, Mademoiselle Carnethy?" she said, in a voice that was meant to be kind, and was at least very civil.

Leonora stood somewhat in awe of the Vicomtesse de Charleroi, who was so stately and beautiful and cold. But she was very much pleased at the mark of attention. It was an approval, and an approval of the most

public kind. The few words they exchanged were therefore all that could be desired. The Vicomtesse nodded, smiled, nodded again, and sailed away in the easy swinging cadence of the waltz. Marcantonio looked gratefully after her. The air was warm and soft, and the light fluff from the linen carpet hung like a summer haze over the people, and the hundreds of candles, and the masses of flowers.

Marcantonio was silent. Something in the air told him that the time had come for him to speak—something in Miss Carnethy's look told him plainly enough, he thought, that he would not speak in vain. The last notes of the waltz chased each other away and died, and the people fell to walking about and talking. Marcantonio gave Leonora his arm and the pair moved off with the stream, and through the great rooms till they reached an apartment less crowded than the rest and sat down near a doorway.

The young man did not lack courage, and he was honestly in love with Leonora. He felt little hesitation about speaking; and only wished to put the question as frankly and as

courteously as might be. As for her, she was obliged to acknowledge that she was agitated, although she had said to herself a hundred times that she would be as calm as though she were talking about the weather. But now that the supreme moment had come, a strange beating rose in her breast, and her face was as white as her throat. She looked obstinately before her, seeing nothing, and striving to appear to the world as though nothing were happening. Marcantonio sat by her side and glanced quickly at her two or three times, with a very slight feeling of uncertainty as to the result of his wooing—very slight, but enough to make waiting impossible, where the stake was so high.

"Mademoiselle," he said, in low and earnest tones, "I have the permission of monsieur your father, and of madame your mother, to address you upon a subject which very closely concerns my happiness. Mademoiselle, will you be my wife?" He sat leaning a little towards her, his hands folded together and his face illuminated for a moment with intense love and anxiety. But Miss Carnethy did not see the

look, and only heard the formal proposition his words conveyed. She saw a man standing in the door near them; she knew him, and she wondered a little whether he would have used the same phrases in asking a woman to marry him—whether all men would speak alike in such a case.

She had looked forward to this scene—more than once. Again the figure of the ideal lover of her dreams came to her, and seemed to pour out strong speech of love. Again she involuntarily drew a comparison in her mind between Marcantonio and some one, something she could not define. On a sudden all the honesty of her conscience sprang up and showed her what she really felt.

A thousand times she had said herself that she would never marry a man she did not love; and for once that she had said to herself, she had said it ten times over to her friends, feeling that she was inculcating a good and serviceable lesson. And now her conscience told her that she did not love Marcantonio—at least not truly—certainly not as much as she would have liked to love. Then she remembered what

she had thought that afternoon. How was it possible that she could have thought of him for a moment as her husband, if she did not love him—especially with her high standard about such things? Oh, that high standard! With a quick transition of thought she made up her mind; but there was a strange little feeling of pain in her, such as the prince might have felt in the fairy tale when the ring pricked him. Nevertheless her mind was made up.

"Yes," she said very suddenly, turning so that she could almost see his eyes, but not quite, for she instinctively dreaded to look him in the face; "yes, I will be your wife."

"*Merci*, mademoiselle," he said. The room was nearly empty at the moment and Marc-antonio took her passive hand and touched his lips to her fingers, being quite sure that no one was looking. But the man who stood at the door saw it.

"Such a good match, you know!" said some people, who had no prejudices.

"Such a special grace!" said the resident Anglo-American Catholics; "he is quite sure to convert her!"

"Such a special grace!" exclaimed the resident Anglo-American Protestants; "she is quite sure to lead him back!"

"Il faut toujours se méfier ses saints," remarked Marcantonio's uncle, concerning his nephew.

"Never trust red-haired women," said the man who had stood at the door.

The engagement made a sensation in Rome, a consummation very easily attained, and very little to be desired. In places where the intercourse between young marriageable men and young marriageable women is so constrained as it is in modern Europe, a man's inclinations do not escape comment, and a very small seed of truth grows beneath the magic incantations of society tea parties to a very large bush of gossip. Nevertheless these good people are always astonished when their prophecies are fulfilled, and the bush bears fruit instead of vanishing into emptiness; which shows that there is some capacity left in them for distinguishing truth and untruth. Marcantonio's marriage had long been a subject in every way to the taste of the chatterers, and though

Madame de Charleroi had accused her brother of hastiness, for lack of a better reproach, it was nearly a year since his admiration for Miss Carnethy had been first noticed. During that time every particular of her parentage and fortune had been carefully sought after, especially by those who had the least interest in the matter; and the universal verdict had been that the Marchese Carantoni might, could, should, and probably would, marry Miss Leonora Carnethy. And now that the engagement was out, society grunted as a pig may when, among the crab-oaks of Périgord, he has discovered a particularly fat and unctuous truffle.

Probably the happiest person was Marcantonio himself. He was an honest, whole-souled man, and in his eyes Leonora was altogether the most beautiful, the most accomplished, and the most charming woman in the world. That he expressed himself with so much self-control and propriety when he asked her to marry him, was wholly due to the manner of his education and training in the social proprieties. That a man should use any language warmer or less guarded than that of absolutely respectful

and distant courtesy toward the lady he intended to make his wife, was not conceivable to him. In the privacy of his own rooms he worshipped and adored her with all his might and main, but when he addressed her in person it was as a subject addresses his sovereign; a tone of respectful and submissive reverence and obedience pervaded his actions and his words. He would have pleased a woman who loved sovereignty, better than a woman who dreamed of a sovereign love.

But she was never out of his thoughts, and if he wooed her humbly, he anticipated some submission on her part after marriage. He had no idea of always allowing her mind to wander in the strange channels it seemed to prefer. He thought such an intelligence capable of better things, and he determined, half unconsciously at first, and as a matter of course, that Miss Carnethy, the philosopher, should be known before long as the Marchesa Carantoni, the Catholic. Gradually the idea grew upon him, until he saw it as the grand object of his life, the great good deed he was to do. His love consented to it and was purified and

beautified to him in the thought that by it he should lead a great soul like hers to truth and light. He was perfectly in earnest, as he always was in matters of importance; for of all nations and peoples Italians have been most accused of frivolity, heartlessness, and inconstancy, and of all races they perhaps deserve the accusation least. They are the least imaginative people on earth, apart from the creative arts, and the most simple and earnest men in the matter of love. Northern races hate Italians, and they fasten triumphantly on that unlucky Latin sinner who falls first in their way as the prototype of his nation, and as the butt of their own prejudice. In the eyes of most northern people all Italians are liars; just as a typical Frenchman calls England "perfide Albion," and all Englishmen traitors and thieves. Who shall decide when such doctors disagree? And is it not a proverb that there is honour among thieves?

Marcantonio never spoke of these ideas of his to his friends when they congratulated him on his engagement. He only looked supremely happy, and told every one that he was, which

was quite true. But his sister was to him a great difficulty, for she evidently was disappointed and displeased. He debated within himself how he should appease her, and he determined to lay before her his views about Leonora's future. To that intent he visited her in the boudoir, where they had so often talked before the engagement.

Madame de Charleroi received him as usual, but there was a look in her eyes that he was not accustomed to see there—an expression of protest, just inclining to coldness, which had the effect of rousing his instinct of opposition. With his other friends he had found no occasion for being combative, and his old manner had sufficed; but with his sister he found himself involuntarily preparing for war, though his intentions were in reality pacific enough. Marcantonio was very young, in spite of his nine and twenty years. His manner now, as he met his sister, was a trifle more formal than usual, and he bent his brows and pulled his black moustache as he sat down.

"Carissima Diana," he began, "I must speak

with you about my marriage, and many things."

"Yes—what is it?" said his sister, calmly, as she turned a piece of tapestry on her knee to finish the end of a needle-full of silk. Marcantonio had somehow expected her to say something that he could take hold of and oppose. Her bland question confused him.

"You are not pleased," he began awkwardly enough.

"What would you have?" she asked, still busy with her work. "I am sure I told you what I thought about it long ago."

"I want you to change your mind," said Marcantonio, delighted at the first show of opposition. Madame de Charleroi raised her eyebrows, gave a little sigh of annoyance and turned towards him.

"I will always treat your wife with the highest consideration," she said, as though that settled the matter and she wished to drop the subject. But her brother was not satisfied.

"I want you to love her, Diana, I want you to treat her as your sister."

Donna Diana was silent, and Marcantonio shifted his position uneasily, for he did not know exactly what to do, and he saw that he was failing in his mission. But in a moment his heart guided him. He went and sat beside her, and laid his hand on hers.

"We cannot quarrel, dear," he said. "But will you love her if I make her like you—if I make her thoughts as beautiful as yours?"

Donna Diana's face softened as she turned to him and affectionately pressed his hand.

"I will try to love her for your sake, dear boy," she answered gently—and he kissed her fingers in thanks.

"Dear Diana," he said, "you are so good. But you know she is really not at all like what you fancy her. She is full of heart, and so wonderfully delicate and lovely—and so marvellously intelligent. There is nothing she does not know. She has read all the philosophies—."

"Yes, I know she has," interrupted his sister, as though deprecating the discussion of Miss Carnethy's wisdom.

"But not as you think," he protested,

catching the meaning of her tone. "She has read them all, but she will take what is best from each, and I am quite sure she will be a good Catholic before long."

"I really hope so," said Donna Diana seriously.

"Not that I should love her any the less if she were not," continued Marcantonio, who was loth to feel that there could be any condition to his love. "I would love her just as much if she were a Chinese—just as much, I am sure. But of course it would be much better."

"Of course," assented Diana, smiling a little at his enthusiasm. Somehow the peace was made—it is so easy to make peace when each can trust the other, and knows it! Just as, on the evening when her brother offered himself to Leonora, Madame de Charleroi had determined to say something pleasant, so now she made up her mind to stand by Marcantonio and to help him in his married life by being as sympathetic and as kind as possible.

In due time Marcantonio obtained the permission of the Church to unite himself with

his Protestant wife, and after a great many formalities the wedding took place in the late spring, after Easter.

Weddings are tiresome things to talk about, and even the principal persons concerned in them always wish them over as soon as possible. What can be more trying for a young girl than to be set up to be stared at by the hour, be-feathered and be-rigged in a multiplicity of ornaments, made flimsy with tulle and lace, and ghastly with the accumulation of white things, when she is pale enough already with the acute fever of an exceedingly complicated state of mind? Or how can a man possibly enjoy being envied, hated, loved, despised, and considered a fool, by his rivals, his bride, the woman he has not married, and his bachelor friends—all in a breath? It is absurd to suppose that any one with an intelligence above that of the average peacock can enjoy playing a leading part in a matrimonial parade.

Marcantonio Carantoni and Leonora Carnethy were married, and Mademoiselle Le Vide shed

a tear as she observed how extremely empty a form it was. But Mademoiselle Le Creux looked a little pale, and said she was quite sure she could have chosen some one "better than that."

CHAPTER IV.

"NEEDLES and pins, needles and pins,"—the rhyme is obvious, and very old—"When a man marries his trouble begins." Marcantonio is an Italian, and his native language contains no precise equivalent of this piece of wisdom, with which every English baby is made acquainted as soon as it can know anything.

The real difficulty seems to be that there are as many different ways of looking at marriage as there are people in the world. Marriage is described as being either a holy bond or a social contract. Obviously a holy bond implies at least a certain modicum of holiness on the part of the bound; and it is not likely that a single and very simple form

of contract can ever cover the multifarious requirements and exigencies of a thousand million human beings. A contract, in order to be satisfactory, must be thoroughly understood and appreciated by the parties who undertake it, and this seems to be a very unusual case in the world.

When Marcantonio Carantoni married, he was possessed of very noble and exalted ideas, totally unformulated, but, as he supposed, only requiring the seal of experience to define, cement and consolidate them. He believed that his wife would be the stately queen of his household, the gentle partner of his deeds and thoughts, a loving listener to his words. He pictured to himself a magnificence of goodness unattainable for a man alone, but within easy reach of a man and a woman together; he imagined a broad perfection of human relations which should be a paradise on earth and an example of beatific possibility to the world. He dreamed of that kind of happiness, which, as it undoubtedly passes the bounds of experience, is aptly termed by poets transcendent, and is regarded by men of the world

as a nonsensical fiction. He saw visions in his sleep, and waking believed them real, for he had a great capacity for believing in all that was good; and as he was human he found ceaseless delight in believing in these good things, more especially, as in store for himself. He had always been fond of the pleasant side of life, and found no difficulty in conceiving of an infinite series of pleasantness, culminating in his union with Miss Leonora Carnethy. He never analysed. Only pessimists analyse, and the best they can accomplish thereby, is to make other men even as themselves, critical to see the darns in other people's clothes, and learned to spy out infinitesimal mud-specks upon the garments of saints.

Marcantonio was young. There is a faculty which men acquire from mixing with the world, which is not pessimism, nor analysis, nor indifference; it is rather a knowledge of good and evil with a fair appreciation of their proportion in human affairs. Nothing is more necessary to thought than the generalising of laws; nothing is more pernicious than the generalising of humanity into types, the torturing

application of the nineteenth century boot to the feet of all—men, women, and children alike. If men are only interesting for what they are, regardless of what they may be, a day of any one's actual experience must be a thousand times more interesting than all the fictions that ever were written. If art consists in the accurate presentation of detail, then the highest art is the petrifaction of nature, and the wax-works of an anatomical museum are more artistically beautiful than all the marbles of Phidias and Praxiteles. True art depends upon an *a priori* capacity for distinguishing the beautiful from the ugly, and the grand from the grotesque; and true knowledge of the world lies in the knowledge of good and evil, not confounding the noble with the ignoble under one smearing of mud, nor yet whitewashing the devil into an illgotten reputation for cleanliness. The temptation of Saint Anthony may convey a righteous moral lesson, but the temptation of Saint Anthony as described by his pig would risk being too unsavoury to be wholesome.

But Marcantonio was young, and he troubled

himself about none of these things, supposing everything to be good, beautiful, and enduring, excepting such things as were evidently bad, inasmuch as they were ugly and disagreeable.

Now Miss Leonora Carnethy had long been given over to a sort of sleek, cynic philosophy—the kind of cynicism that uses lavender water in its tub. Her dissatisfaction with the world was genuine, but she found means to alleviate it in the small luxuries and amenities of her daily life. She and her friends had talked the kernel out of life, or thought that they had, but the shell was still fresh and well favoured. Leonora herself was indeed subject to moods and fits of real unhappiness, for she was far too intelligent a person not to long for something beautiful, even when she was most convinced that life was ugly. There were times when she dreamed of an ideal man who should win her, and love her, and give her all the happiness she had missed. And again she would dream of the freedom of the earthbound soul from ills, and cares, and thorns, and she would enter some silent Roman church and kneel for hours before a dimly lighted altar, praying for rest, and

peace, and inspiration of holiness. But there was too much poetic feeling in her religious outpourings. If religion is to be poetic a very little thing will destroy its harmony; some careless sacristan chatting with a crony in the corner of the church, or a couple of thoughtless children wrangling over a halfpenny by the door, or any such little thing, would destroy instantly the fair illusion that lay as balm upon her unrestful soul. Religion must be real to every man if it is to stand the test of reality.

Leonora's views of marriage were therefore more or less subject to her moods. There were days, indeed, few and far between, when her better intelligence got the upper hand of the fictitious fabric of so-called philosophy which she had erected for herself. Then for a brief space she thought of life very much as Marcantonio did, and she contemplated her marriage as a noble and worthy career—for marriage is a career to most women of the world. But then, again, all her uncertainty returned twofold upon her, and the only real thing was the dream of love, the vision of a lover, and the hope of a

realised passion. She was so strong and radiantly human, that from the moment when her mind fell into abeyance the material beauty of life sprang up in her heart, until, being disappointed and cast down through not attaining the end of her passionate dreams, she once more sank into a half religious, half poetic melancholy. Nevertheless, the strongest element in her character was the desire to be loved, not by every one, but by some one manly man, and loved with all the strength he had, overwhelmingly. Her studies were a refuge when she saw how improbable such a piece of sweet fortune was, and, as might have been expected, they were far from regular and systematic. She read a great deal, especially of such authors as had a reputation for being profound rather than clear, and, as her mind had received no kind of preliminary training, the result was eminently unsatisfactory to herself. To Marcantonio, who knew more about the opera than about philosophy, she seemed a miracle of learning, and she loved to talk with him about theories, generally finding that, in spite of his ignorance, he made extremely

sensible remarks upon them. But he always tried to lead her to different subjects, for, in spite of his immense admiration for what he supposed to be her wisdom, he was aware that it seemed very vague, and that it even occasionally bored him.

Leonora had acquired the unfortunate faculty of deceiving herself, and when the fit was upon her she saw things obliquely. In spite of the little prick of conscience that hurt her when she accepted Marcantonio's offer, she had soon persuaded herself that she loved him, on the principle that, since her "standard" was so very "high," she could not possibly have demeaned herself to accepting a man she did not love. It is a very fine thing to believe that we are so far removed from evil that we cannot do wrong, and therefore that whatever we do is infallibly right, no matter how our instincts may cry out against it. It is a most comforting and comfortable vicious circle which we convert into a crown of glory for ourselves on the smallest provocation. So when Leonora was finally married to Marcantonio, she made herself believe that she loved him, and all her

vague theories were temporarily cast aside and trampled on in her determination to realise in him all the happiness she had dreamed of in her ideal.

She had got a husband who did most truly love her, and whose one and absorbing thought would be her happiness, but he was not exactly what she had longed for. She mistook his courtesy for coldness, and his deference for indifference, and since she had persuaded herself that she loved him she wanted to find him a perfect fiery volcano of love and jealousy. Marcantonio was nothing of the kind; he was calm, courteous, and affectionate; he had not the slightest cause for jealousy, and, not in the least understanding his wife, he was perfectly happy.

Of all tests of true love a honeymoon is the severest, and by every right of sensible sequence ought to come last of all in the history of married couples. It is the great destroyer of illusions, and the more illusions there are the greater the destruction. Two people have seen each other occasionally, perhaps for an hour every day—and that is a great deal in Europe—during which meetings they have

become more or less deeply enamoured, each of the qualities of the other. People notoriously behave very differently to the people they love and to the world at large; but their behaviour to the world at large is the outcome of their character, whereas their conduct to each other is the result, or the concomitant, of a passion which may or may not be real, profound, and good. But each has a great number of characteristics which practically never appear during those hours of courtship. Suddenly the two are married, and the lid of Pandora's box is hoisted high with a vicious jerk that scares the little imps inside to the verge of distraction, and they fly out incontinent, with an ill savour. If the lid had been gently raised, the evil spirits would probably have issued forth stealthily, and one at a time, without any great fuss, and might not have been noticed. The two condemned ones travel together, eat together, talk together, until in a single month they have exhausted a list of bad qualities that should have lasted at least half a dozen years under ordinary circumstances.

Marcantonio and Leonora travelled for a time, and at last agreed to spend the remainder of the summer in some quiet seaside place in Southern Italy. They soon discovered the fallacy of wandering about Europe with a maid and a quantity of luggage, and they both hoped that under the clear sky of the south they would find exactly what they wanted. So they gravitated to Sorrento and hired a villa overhanging the sea, and Marcantonio suggested vaguely that they might have some one to stay with them if they found it dull. At this Leonora felt injured. The idea of his finding life dull in her company!

"How can you possibly suggest such a thing?" she asked, in a hurt tone.

"Not for myself, *ma chère*," said Marcantonio, with an affectionate smile. "It struck me that you might not find it very amusing. I could never find it dull where you are, *ma bien aimée*." And indeed he never did. Leonora was pacified, as she almost always was when he was particularly affectionate.

"But, of course," he continued, "you will

enjoy the being able to read and study your favourite books."

"I never want to read them now," said Leonora, who chanced that day to be not very philosophically disposed. She had been perusing the latest French impossibility—she found it rather amusing to be allowed to have what she liked now that she was married.

"I would be glad if you never read any more philosophy," said Marcantonio, unwisely saying what was uppermost in his thoughts.

"Really, though," answered Leonora, "I know it all so very superficially that I feel I must go back and be much more thorough. I think I will take a sound course of Voltaire and Hegel, and that kind of thing, this summer."

Her husband was silent. He began to suspect his wife of being capable of an occasional contradiction for the mere love of it. Besides, he saw no particular connection between the two authors she named. But then he knew very little about them. He looked at Leonora. There was not a trace of unpleasant expression in her face, and she seemed to have

merely made the remark in the air, without the least intention of being contradictory or captious. He liked to look at her, she was so fresh and fair. Neither heat nor cold seemed to touch her delicate white skin—her hair was so thick and strong, and her blue eyes so bright. She was the very incarnation of life. What if her features were not quite classic in proportion?

"I am not so beautiful as Diana," she said laughingly one day to Marcantonio, "but I am sure I am much more alive than she is." He laughed too, well pleased at the distinction drawn. He was glad that his sister should be thought cold, and he believed his wife loved him. He kissed her hand tenderly.

They had been married two months when they came to stay in Sorrento. It is a beautiful place. Perhaps in all the orange-scented south there is none more perfect, more sweet with gardens and soft sea-breath, more rich in ancient olive-groves, or more tenderly nestled in the breast of a bountiful nature. A little place it is, backed and flanked by the volcanic hills, but having before it the glory of the

fairest water in the world. Straight down from the orange gardens the cliffs fall to the sea, and every villa and village has a descent, winding through caves and by stairways to its own small sandy cove, where the boats lie in the sun through the summer's noontide heat, to shoot out at morning and evening into the coolness of the breezy bay. Among the warm green fruit trees the song-birds have their nests, and about the eaves of the scattered houses the swallows wheel and race in quick smooth circles. Far along through the groves echoes the ancient song of the southern peasant, older than the trees, older than the soil, older than poor old Pompeii lying off there in the eternal ashes of her gorgeous sins. And ever the sapphire sea kisses the feet of the cliffs as though wooing the rocks to come down, and plunge in, and taste how good a thing it is to be cool and wet all over.

To this place Marcantonio and his wife came at the beginning of July, having picked up numerous possessions and a few servants in Rome. They both had a taste for comfort, though they enjoyed the small privations of

travelling for a time. To luxurious people it is pleasant to be uncomfortable when the fancy takes them, in order that they may the better enjoy the tint of their purple and the softness of their fine linen by the contrast. For contrast is the magnifying glass of the senses.

At sunset they walked side by side in their terraced garden overlooking the sea. They had travelled all night and had rested all day in consequence, and now they were refreshed and alive to the magic things about them.

"How green it is," said Leonora, stopping to look at the thick trees.

"Yes," answered Marcantonio, "it is very green." He was thinking of something else, and Leonora's very natural and simple remark did not divert his thoughts. The cook had arrived with a touch of the fever, and he was debating whether to send for the doctor at once or to wait till the next day. For he was very good to his servants, and took care of them. But Leonora wanted something more enthusiastic.

"But it is so very fresh and green," she repeated. "Do you not see how lovely it all is?" She laid her hand on his arm.

"*Oui, chérie,*" said he, getting rid of the cook by an effort, "and green is the colour of hope." Then it struck him that the saying was rather commonplace, and he began to realise what she wanted. "It is a perfect fairy-land," he went on, "and we will enjoy it as long as we please. Are you fond of sailing, my dear?"

"Oh, of all things!" exclaimed Leonora, enthusiastically. "I love the sea and the beautiful colours, and everything——" she stopped short and put her arm through his and made him walk again. She was conscious, perhaps, that she was making an effort—why, she could not tell—and that she had not much to say.

"Marcantoine——" she began. They spoke French together, though she knew Italian better. She thought his name long, but had not yet decided how to abbreviate it.

"Yes, what would you say, my dear?" he asked pleasantly.

"I think I could—no—Marcantoine, now that we are married, are you quite sure that you love me—quite, quite?" Marcantonio's

face turned strangely earnest and quiet. He looked into her eyes as he answered,

"Yes, my very dear wife, I am quite sure. And you, are you sure, Leonora?"

"How serious you are!" she exclaimed, laughingly. "Well, perhaps I am not so sure as you are—but I think I could." Somehow he did not smile—he took some things so seriously.

Honeymoon conversations are insignificant enough, but it would be well if they were still more so. They should be limited by an international law to the phrases contained in the works of M. Ollendorff.

"Is it a fine day, sir?"

"Yes, madam, it is a very fine day, but the baker has the green hat of the officer."

"Has the baker also the red cow of the general's wife?"

"No, madam, the baker has not the red cow of the general's wife, but the undertaker has the penknife of the aunt of the good butcher."

It would be hard for the most ill-disposed couple to quarrel if confined to this simple elegance of dialectics, where truths of the broadest kind

are clothed in the purest and most energetic words. Young married people are allowed too much latitude when they are turned loose upon a whole language with a sort of standing order to make conversation. When they have exhausted a certain fund of stock poetry and enthusiasm, they have very little to fall back upon, except their personal relation to each other; and unless they are equally serious or equally frivolous, the discussion of such matters is apt to get them into trouble.

Like most Italians Marcantonio had difficulty in understanding English humour. When Leonora said she was not quite sure she loved him, she had meant it for a jest, and if the jest had a deeper meaning and a possibility of truth for herself, that was no reason, she thought, why Marcantonio should consider it no jest at all. She was somewhat annoyed, and she made up her mind that there must be an element of Philistinism in his character. She hated and feared Philistines, partly because they were bores, and partly because she had met one or two of them who had known vastly more than she did, and who had not scrupled to show it.

But, after all, how could Marcantonio be really like them? He did not know very much, nor did he pretend to, and he had very good taste and was altogether very nice—no, he was not a Philistine; he loved her, and that was the reason he was serious. All this she thought, springing from one idea to another, and ending by drawing her arm closer through his and moving along the terrace by his side.

The sun had set over there in front of them, and the air was cool and purple with the afterglow. They stood by the wall and looked out silently without any further effort at conversation. Talking had been a failure, probably because they were tired, and for a brief space they were content to watch the clouds, and to listen to the swift rush of the swallows and the faint soft fall of the small waves on the sand far below them. There they were, linked together, for better for worse, to meet the joys and the sorrows of life hand in hand; to stand before the world as representatives of their class, to play a part in public, and in their homes to be all in all to each other, man and wife.

Man and wife! Ah me! for the greatness and the littleness of the bonds those names stand for! Is there a man so poor and thin-souled in the world that he has not dreamed of calling some woman "wife"? Is there any wretch so mean and miserable in spirit that he has not looked on some maiden and said, "I would marry her, if I could"? Or has any woman, beautiful or ugly, fair or dark, straight or crooked, not thought once, and more than once, that a man would come, and love her, and take her, and marry her?

But have all the woes and ills of humanity, massed together and piled up in their dismal weight, ever called forth one half the sorrow that has ensued from this wedding and being wedded? Alas and alack for the tears that have fallen thick and fast from women's eyes—and for the tears that have stood and burned in the eyes of strong men, good and bad! Who shall count them, or who shall measure them? Who shall ever tell the griefs that are beyond words, the sorrows that all earthly language, wielded by all earthly genius, cannot tell? Will any man make bold to say that

he can describe what pain his neighbour feels? He may tell us what he does, for he can see it; he may tell us what he thinks, for perhaps he can guess it; but he cannot tell us what he suffers. The most he can do is to strike the sad minor chord that in every man's heart leads to a dirge and a death-song of his own.

A man who tries to tell of great suffering is rebuked. "No human creature," says the critic, "could suffer as this man describes, and live. There can therefore be no such suffering in the world." But does any critic or reader or other intelligent person say, when he reads about great happiness, "This joy is too much for humanity; there is no such joy in the world"?

We shrink from suffering, in others as in ourselves, and we turn to happiness and cannot get enough of it, so that however the tale ends, we would have made it end yet more joyfully; for so would we do with our own lives if we could. The strength of half mankind is spent in trying to remedy mistakes made at the outset, and I suppose that there is not one man in ten millions who is not striving to make himself happier, in his own fashion

A man is only happy when he believes himself to be so, in whatever way the proposition is turned, and no man believes himself so happy but what he might be happier.

Marcantonio Carantoni was in just such a position. He was more than contented, for he looked forward to much in the future that he had not yet attained, and he looked forward to it with certainty. His wife Leonora was trying hard to be as happy as he, but there had been a doubt—a cruel, hot little doubt—in her soul from the first. She had deceived herself—with the best intention—until she could hardly ever be sure that what she felt was genuine. She had asked questions of her heart until it was weary of answering them, and would as soon speak false to her as true.

And here ends the prologue of this story.

CHAPTER V.

A FEW days after the arrival of the Carantion establishment in Sorrento, Leonora was sitting alone on a terrace of the villa with a book and a great variety of small possessions in the way of needlework, shawls, cushions, flowers, parasols, fans, and a white cat. Marcantonio was gone to the town alone, intending to buy more possessions; for Sorrento is famous for its silk-weaving and its exquisite carved work of olive wood, and Leonora loved knick-knacks.

"I would give anything in the world for a sensation," she thought, as she looked out over the sea. It was towards evening, and the water was as smooth as glass and tinged with red.

Marcantonio was right after all. It was very dull in Sorrento, with no one but one's husband to speak to—and he had made such a fuss about the cook's illness. Of course, it was very beautiful and that; but life with the beauties of nature is so very tiresome after a time. She longed for some of her friends —even her mother, she thought, would be a relief. But no one had called, excepting some very proper people of the Roman set, who all had gout and rheumatism and a dictionary-ful of diseases, and were taking sulphur baths at Castellamare.

She was wishing with all her might that some amusing person would call, when, as though in answer to her thoughts, a servant brought her a card. Then she yawned slightly, supposing it to be some toothless old princess of Rome or some other wearisome bore. But as she looked at the name—"Mr. Julius Batiscombe" — she gave a little start and pulled and touched her lace and ribbands, and smoothed her thick hair with her hand, and said she would receive.

Mr. Julius Batiscombe was a man of five

and thirty years of age. and a person who would be sure to attract attention anywhere. He was tall and looked strong, but he trod as lightly as a woman and none of his movements were clumsy or awkward. Not that he stepped daintily or affected any feminine grace of movement; there was something in his build and proportion that made it always seem easy for him to move, as though his strength were perfectly under control.

People were divided in opinion concerning his appearance. Some said he was handsome and some said he was coarse. Some said he was refined and some said he looked ill-tempered. As a matter of fact he had a rather small head, set upon a strong neck. His nose was large and broad, and decidedly aquiline and he had a remarkably clean-cut and determined jaw. His mouth was comparatively too small for his face, but well shaped and well closed, shaded by a black moustache of very moderate dimensions. His blue eyes were set deep in his head and far apart. Of hair he had an unusual quantity, of a blue black colour, and he brushed it carefully. A single deep line scored its mark

across, just above his brows. He had a way of looking at things, that hid the half of the iris under the upper lid, showing the white of the eye a little beneath the coloured portion. His complexion was of that brilliant kind which sometimes goes with black hair and blue eyes, and is known as especially a characteristic of the Irish race. Moreover he was noticeably well dressed, in a broad neat fashion of quiet colour, and he wore no jewellery nor ornament except an old seal ring.

Opinions varied almost as much about Mr. Julius Batiscombe's character and reputation as about his claims to be thought good-looking. He had no intimate friends, or was supposed to have none; and he never answered many questions because he asked none. It was known that he was an Englishman or an Irishman by birth, but that he had never lived long in his own country, whereas he seemed to have lived everywhere else under the sun.

"I am so glad you came to-day, Mr. Batiscombe," said Leonora after he was seated, and looking at him rather curiously. He was no other than the man who had stood in the door-

way at the ball when Marcantonio offered himself to her. She knew him as well as she knew most of the stray foreigners who from time to time frequent Roman society. He had been in Rome all that winter and she had met him two years before, when she first went out. He interested her, however, by a certain reserve of manner and by an air of 'having a story about him'—as young ladies put it—which was unusual.

"I am very fortunate," he answered, with a slight inclination and a polite smile. "I called entirely at random. Somebody said you were coming here, and so I came to see if you had arrived."

"Yes," said Leonora, "we have been here several days, with all sorts of troubles on our hands. It is such very hard work to settle down, you know."

"What has been the trouble?" inquired Mr. Batiscombe glancing at the evidences of comfort that were scattered about.

"Oh—it is the cook," said Leonora with a little laugh; she was just beginning to feel the novelty of housekeeping, and she laughed at

the mention of the cook, as though the idea amused her. "He has had a little fever and my husband was dreadfully anxious about him. But he is quite recovered."

"I am very glad," said Mr. Batiscombe. "It must be a terrible bore to have one's cook ill. Did you get anything to eat in the meanwhile?" And so forth, and so on, through a few dozen inanities. He would not make an original remark, being quite sure that Leonora would ultimately turn the conversation to some congenial subject.

"Shall you be in Rome next winter, Mr Batiscombe?" she asked at length rather suddenly.

"It is rather doubtful," he answered slowly. "I am a great wanderer, you know, Marchesa. I can never say with any certainty where I shall be next." He was looking at her and thinking what a splendid living thing she was, with the evening sun on her red hair. That was all he thought, but it gave him pleasure, and his glance lingered contentedly upon her, as upon a picture or a statue. He supposed from her remark that she wanted him to talk about him-

self and he was willing to please her, but he was in no hurry, for he feared she would move and show herself in a less favourable light. She was so good to look at, it was worth a visit to see her; and yet she was not a great beauty.

"I was thinking a little of going to the East," he added presently.

"But you have been there, have you not?"

"Not for a long time; and it will bear revisiting often—very often. I mean to go there and study again as I did years ago. You have no idea how interesting those things are." Mr. Batiscombe looked thoughtfully out towards the sea.

"What are those things—as you call them?" asked Leonora.

"What many people call the 'wisdom of the East.' They make us the compliment of implying that there is a 'wisdom of the West' also—which seems unlikely."

"Dear me, what a sweeping remark!" exclaimed Leonora, rather startled.

"I will prove it," said Mr. Batiscombe. "It seems to me that in the West no two wise men think alike; whereas in the East no two wise

men think differently. Is not that a kind of proof?"

"Not a very valuable proof," said the Marchesa. "But I do not know much about it."

"You have the reputation of knowing more about it than most people, Marchesa," answered Batiscombe. "I have been told that you know everything." Leonora blushed very slightly.

"What nonsense!" said she; "I might say the same of you."

"I observe that you do not, however," said he, laughing.

"I never flatter any one," she answered calmly.

"Obviously, there is but one thing for me to say," said Batiscombe, still smiling.

"What is that?"

"That no one could possibly flatter you, Marchesa—since the truth is no flattery."

"No, but imitation is," retorted Leonora, well pleased at having got a small advantage of him.

"Very good," said Batiscombe; "but do you know who said so?"

"Shakespeare—" began Leonora, but stopped. "No—I cannot tell."

"A man called Colton said it. He wrote a book called 'Lacon,' containing innumerable reflections on things in general. He was a wandering sea-parson and wrote books of travels. He died of a complication of nautical and religious disorders—he confused the spirituous with the spiritual—but he was a wise man for all that."

"I suppose you remembered all that for the sake of showing that you really know everything," said Leonora, looking up from behind the fan that shaded her eyes. The last rays of the sun shone horizontally across the terrace. The movement she made, caused the book she had been reading to slip from her lap. With a quick movement Batiscombe caught it before it fell and laid it on the little table. Leonora noticed the action and admired the ease of it. She was altogether disposed to admire the man, though she would have confessed that his conversation hitherto had not been at all remarkable. Nevertheless there was something in his manner that attracted her. He was quick and gentle, and yet he looked so big and strong.

"Thanks," she said. "By the bye, are you

going to spend the summer here, or are you only passing?"

"I am only passing—literally passing, for I have come from the north, and am going southward. I believe I am doing rather an original thing."

"You are generally supposed to be always doing original things," said Leonora.

"At all events I am never bored," he answered, "which cannot be said of most people. At present I am going round Italy in an open boat. It is great fun. I started from Nice six weeks ago."

"How delightful! I should like it immensely!"

"Are you fond of sailing, Marchesa?"

"I enjoy it of all things," she answered. In spite of her remark to the same effect made to Marcantonio on the day of their arrival, she had not yet been on the water. He had been so anxious about the cook.

"There is a man-of-war to be launched at Castellamare the day after to-morrow," said Batiscombe. "May I have the pleasure of taking you over in my boat?"

At this moment Marcantonio appeared at the extremity of the terrace and came towards them.

"Would you like to go?" asked Batiscombe quickly, in a lower voice. "If so, I will propose it at once." Leonora nodded, and her husband approached.

"Marcantonio," she said, "you know Monsieur Batiscombe?"

"*Mais certainement*," cried Marcantonio cordially, and the two men shook hands. Batiscombe was at least as much at home in French as his host, and immediately attacked the subject.

"I came to propose to Madame la Marquise," he said, "that you should come over to Castellamare in my boat the day after to-morrow to see the launch. I trust the plan meets your approval?"

Marcantonio turned to his wife to inquire. She nodded to him; he nodded to her.

"We should be charmed," said he.

And so the matter was arranged; they agreed about the hour, and Leonora said she would bring the lunch.

"Yes," said Marcantonio, "I am glad to say

the cook——" At this point Mr. Batiscombe rose to go, and the remark about the cook's health was lost in the stir. Batiscombe bowed, smiled, bowed again, and moved smoothly away across the terrace, disappearing with a final inclination, and a sweep of his straw hat.

"He walks like a cat, that gentleman," said Marcantonio as he sat himself down beside his wife.

"He is charming," said Leonora. "He has been so amusing." She looked at her husband furtively to see how he took the remark.

"Perhaps," thought she, "he is one of those men who have to be managed by being made jealous. I have read about them in novels."

But Marcantonio was very glad that she had been amused, and he merely smiled pleasantly and said so. It never entered his head to suppose that Leonora was not satisfied with his show of affection, because he knew in himself that his love was perfectly real. There is a little vanity in such men as Marcantonio, together with a great deal of honesty. Their vanity makes them quite sure that the woman they love is satisfied, and their honesty

makes them think the woman would speak out if she were not, just as they themselves would do.

Leonora had vanity enough of a certain kind, but it was not personal. She doubted her own powers and gifts more than she need have done, and there was enough uncertainty about her own affection to make her uncertain of her husband's love. In the meanwhile she was bored since Mr. Batiscombe had gone, and she wished Marcantonio would talk and amuse her. But when he did begin to say something it was about local Roman politics, and she understood nothing about that sort of thing. She longed more and more for "a sensation." It would probably be different to-morrow, for her moods seldom lasted long. But this evening it was intolerable. She made the most absent-minded answers to her husband's remarks, and seemed so impatient that he suggested she must be tired and had better go to bed.

"But I am not tired at all—on the contrary," she objected. "There is nothing to tire me here—a little driving, a great deal of

sitting on the terrace, a great deal of reading, and very little conversation——"

"Very little conversation!" exclaimed Marcantonio. "*Mais, ma chère,* here it is two hours we have been talking, without counting the visit of the gentleman who walks like a cat—Bat—Botis—I cannot say his name, but I know him."

"Ah, yes—Mr. Batiscombe. Yes," said Leonora languidly, "he was very amusing. He talked about all sorts of things."

"Shall we ask him to pass a few days with us? I would be very glad if you like him."

Marcantonio was really glad to do anything his wife might wish. Leonora was touched. He was sitting beside her, and she put her arms round his neck and laid her head on his shoulder.

"You are so good," she said in a low voice. "Oh, I do not want anybody else here at all. I only want you—but *all* of you—and I feel as though I had not all yet." For the moment she really loved him. He gently smoothed her hair with his delicate, olive-tinted hand.

Meanwhile Mr. Julius Batiscombe had gone

to his hotel, and, having eaten his dinner, was sitting on the tiled terrace over the sea, with a cup of coffee at his elbow, and a cigarette in his mouth. There were lamps on the terrace, and there was starlight on the water, and Mr. Batiscombe was alone at his small table.

"I wish I had not gone there. I wish I had not asked them to go to Castellamare. I wish I were at sea in my boat." He said these things over and over to himself, and now and again he smiled a little scornfully, and sipped his coffee.

Julius Batiscombe was generally in trouble. He was a strong man in all respects save one. He had conquered many difficulties in his life, and by sheer determination had turned evil fortune into good, winning himself a name and a position, and such a proportion of wealth as he needed. Of good family, and brought up in luxury and refinement, he had been left at twenty years of age without parents, without much money and without a profession. He knew some half dozen languages ancient and modern, and he had a certain premature

knowledge of the world. But that was his whole stock-in-trade excepting an indomitable will and perseverance, combined with exceedingly good health, and a great desire for the luxuries of life. He had lived in all sorts of ways and places, getting his pen under control by endless literary hackwork. By and by he tried his hand at journalism, and was successively addicted to three or four papers, published in three or four languages in three or four countries. Last of all he wrote a book which unexpectedly succeeded. Since then the aspect of life had changed for him, and though he still wandered, from force of habit, so to say, he no longer wandered in search of a fortune. A pen and a few sheets of paper can be got anywhere, and Julius Batiscombe set up his itinerary literary forge wherever it best pleased him to work. He had fought with ill-luck, and had conquered it, and now he felt the confidence of a man who has swum through rough water and feels at last the smooth, clean sand beneath his feet. His success had not turned his head in the least; he was too much of an artist for that, striving

always in his work to attain something that ever seemed to escape him. But he felt now that he might some day get nearer to what he aimed at, and there were moments, brief moments, of genuine happiness, when he believed that there was wrought by his pen some stroke of worth that should not perish. Ten minutes later he was dissatisfied with it all, and collected his strength for a new effort, still hoping, and striving, and labouring on, with his whole soul in his work.

Strong in body and strong in determination he was yet very weak in one respect. He was eternally falling in love, everlastingly throwing himself at the feet of some woman and making mischief that he afterwards bitterly regretted. It seemed as though it were impossible for him to live six months without some affair of a more or less serious character. It made no difference whether he wandered off into the recesses of the Italian mountains, or went into hermitage in the Black Forest, or steamed and sweltered under a tropical sun; there was always a feminine element at hand to make trouble for him.

It was not only the universal woman calling to him to follow—it was the universal woman seizing him and carrying him away by main force. For it was no matter of inclination. He struggled hard enough to deserve victory, but without any perceptible result.

What gave him most pain was the dreary consciousness of his own insincerity in his love-making, the consciousness that came to him after the affair was over. While it lasted he was carried away and blinded by a sort of madness that took possession of him and allowed him no time for thought. But when it was over he remembered, bitterly enough, how untrue it had all been, to himself and to the one woman whom he had loved, and whom, down in the depths of his turbulent heart, he loved still. His other loves were like horrible creations of black magic, bodies with no soul, when he looked back on them. And yet while they lasted they seemed to him real, and high, and noble.

At first he fought against every new inclination, and cursed his folly in advance; and sometimes he conquered, but not always.

If once the fatal point were passed there was no salvation, for then he deceived himself, and the deception was complete. It was no wonder people thought so differently about him. He had been known to do brave and generous things, and things that showed the utmost delicacy of feeling and courtesy of temper; and he had been known to act with a sheer, massive, selfish disregard of other people, that made cynics look grave and mild-eyed society idiots stare with horror. The fact was that Julius Batiscombe in love was one person, and Julius Batiscombe out of love, repentant, and trying to make up to the world for the mischief he had done, was quite another—and he knew it himself. He was perfectly conscious of his own duality, and liked the one state—the state of no love —and he loathed and detested the other both before and after.

And now he sat over his coffee, and the prophetic warning of his soul told him that he was in danger, so that he was angry at himself and feared the future. He had known Miss Carnethy, as has been said, for some

time, and had danced with her and sat beside her at dinner more than once, without giving her a thought; he, therefore, had found it perfectly natural to call when he discovered that she was at Sorrento. But his impression after his visit was very different. The Marchesa Carantoni was not Miss Carnethy at all.

She had looked so magnificent as she sat in the evening sunshine, and he had gazed contentedly at her with a sense of artistic satisfaction, thinking no evil. But now he could think of nothing else. The sun seemed to rise again out of the dark sea, turning back on its course till it was just above the horizon, with a warm, golden light; by his side sat the figure of a woman with glorious red hair and he was speaking to her; the whole scene was present to him as he sat there, and he knew very well what it was that he felt. Why had he not known it at first? He would surely have had the sense not to propose such a thing as a day together. "A day together" had so often entailed so much misery.

Nevertheless he would not invent an excuse, nor go away suddenly. It would be quite

possible, he knew, and perhaps also he knew in his heart that it would be altogether right. But it seemed so uncourteous, he was really anxious to see the launch of the great ship and—and—he would not be such a fool as to fancy he could not look at a woman without falling in love with her on the spot. At his age! Five-and-thirty—he seemed so old when he thought of all he had done in that time. No. He would not only go with them, but he would be as agreeable as he could, if only to show himself that he was at last above that kind of thing.

Some human hearts are like a great ship that has no anchor, nor any means of making fast to moorings. The brave vessel sails through the stormy ocean, straining and struggling fiercely till she lies at last within a fair harbour. But she has no anchor, and by and by the soft smooth tide washes her out to sea, so gently and cruelly, out among the crests, and the squalls, and the rushing currents, and she must fain beat to windward again or perish on the grim lee shore.

Julius Batiscombe went to bed that night knowing that he was adrift and yet denying it to himself; knowing that in a month, a week perhaps, he would be in trouble—in love—pah! how he hated the idea!

CHAPTER VI.

During the time that elapsed between Mr. Batiscombe's visit and the expedition to see the launch, Leonora had an access of the religious humour. The little scene with her husband had made a deep impression on her mind, and as was usual when she received impressions, she tried to explain it and understand it and reason about it, until there was little of it left. That is generally the way with those people who make a study of themselves; when they have a good thought or a good impulse, they dissect the life out of it and crow over the empty shell.

It was clear, thought Leonora, that the sudden outburst of affection which made her tell her husband that she wanted "all of him,"

was the result of some sensation of dissatisfaction, of some unfulfilled necessity for a greater sympathy. But, if at the very beginning she had not the key to his heart, if he did not wholly love her now, it was clear that he never would at all. Why was it clear? Oh! never mind the "why"—it was quite clear. Moreover, if he could never love her wholly as she wished and desired, she was manifestly a misunderstood woman, a most unhappy wife, a condemned existence—loving and not being loved in return. And he, the heartless wretch, was anxious about the cook! Good heavens! the cook—when his wife's happiness was in danger! In this frame of mind there was evidently nothing more appropriate for her to do than to take a prayer-book and to hide her face in a veil, and slip away to the little church on the road, a hundred yards from the house. For a wrecked existence, thought Leonora, there is no refuge like the Church. She was not a Catholic—but that made no difference; in great distress like this, she could very well be comforted by any kind of religion short of her father's, which latter, to her exalted view, consisted of four

walls and a bucket of whitewash, seasoned with the Rev. Dr. McSnivel's discourses and an occasional psalm-tune.

What she could not see, what was really at the bottom of the small tempest she rashly whirled up in her over-sensitive soul, was her own disillusion. She had deceived herself into believing that she loved her husband, and the deception had cost her an effort. She was beginning to realise that the time was at hand when she might strive in vain to believe in her own sincerity, when her heart would not submit to any further equivocation, and when she would know in earnest what hollowness and weariness meant. As yet this was half unconscious, for it seemed so easy to make herself the injured party.

Poor Marcantonio was not to blame. He was the happiest of mortals, and went calmly on his way, doubting nothing, and thinking that he was of all mortal men the most supremely fortunate.

Meanwhile Leonora kneeled in the rough little church, solacing herself with the catalogue of those ills she thought she was suffering.

The stones were hard; there was a wretched little knot of country people, squalid and ill-savoured, who stared at the great lady for a moment and then went on with their rosaries. A dirty little boy with a cane twenty feet long was poking a taper about and lighting lamps, and he dropped some of the wax on Leonora's gown. But she never shrank nor looked annoyed.

"All these things are very delightful," she said to herself, "if you only consider them as mortifications of the flesh." She remembered how often just such little annoyances had sent her out of other churches disgusted and declaring that religion was a vain and hollow thing; and now, because she could bear with them and was not angry she felt quite sure it was genuine.

"Yes," said she piously, as, an hour later, she picked her way home through the dusty road, "yes, the Church is a great refuge. I will go there every day."

Indeed, she was so resigned and subdued that evening at dinner, that Marcantonio asked whether she had a headache.

"Oh no," she answered, "I am perfectly well, thank you."

"Because if you are indisposed, *ma bien-aimée*," continued her husband with some anxiety, "we will not go to Castellamare to-morrow."

"I will certainly go," she said. "I would go if I had twenty headaches," she might have added, for it would have been true.

"The occasion will be so much the more brilliant, *ma très chère*," remarked Marcantonio gallantly, as they went out into the garden under the stars.

"It is a hollow sham," said Leonora to herself, "he does not mean it."

But whether it was the effect of the morning, or the magic influence of Mr. Batiscombe's personality, is not certain; at all events when that gentleman appeared at the appointed hour to announce that his boat was in readiness, Leonora looked as though she had never known what care meant. She doubtless still remembered all she had thought on the previous afternoon, and she was still quite sure that her existence was a wreck and a

misery—but then, she argued, why should we poor misunderstood women not take such innocent pleasures as come in our way? It would be very wrong not to accept humbly the little crumbs of happiness—&c., &c. So they went to Castellamare.

It is not far, but the wind seldom serves in the morning, and it was an hour and a half before the six stout men in their white dresses and straw hats pulled the boat round the breakwater of the arsenal. Everything was ready for the ceremony. Half a dozen Italian ironclads lay in the harbour, decked from stem to stern with flags; the royal personages had arrived, and were boring each other to death in a great temporary balcony, gaudily decorated with red and gold, which had been reared on the shore within reach of the nose of the new ship. The ship itself, a huge ungainly thing, painted red and bearing three enormous national flags, lay like a stranded monster in the cradle, looking for all the world like a prehistoric boiled lobster with its claws taken off. The small water room opposite the arsenal was crowded with every

kind of craft, and little steamers arrived every few minutes from Naples to swell the throng. The July sun beat fiercely down and there was not a breath of air. The boatmen were all wrangling in a dozen southern dialects, and no one seemed to know why the ceremony was delayed any longer. Nevertheless, as is usual in such cases, there was half an hour to wait before the thing could be done.

"I am afraid you will find this a dreadful bore," said Batiscombe to Leonora in English, while Marcantonio was busy trying to make out some of his friends on shore through a field-glass. Batiscombe had sat in the stern sheets to steer during the trip, and having Leonora on one side of him and her husband on the other, had gone through an endless series of polite platitudes. If it had not been that Leonora attracted him so much he would himself have been bored to extinction. But then in that case he would probably not have put himself in such a position at all.

"Oh, nothing of *this* kind bores me," said Leonora cheerfully.

"You say that, as though there were many kinds of things that did, though," observed Batiscombe, looking at her. It was a natural remark, without any intention.

"Dear me, yes!" exclaimed Leonora. "Life is not all roses, you know." She therewith assumed a thoughtful expression and looked away.

"I should not have supposed there were many thorns in your path, Marchesa. Would it be indiscreet to inquire of what nature they may be?" Leonora was silent, and put up her glass to examine the proceedings on shore.

Batiscombe, who had come out that day with the sworn determination not to say or do anything to increase the interest he felt in the Marchesa, found himself wondering whether she were unhappy. The first and most natural conclusion was that she had been married to Marcantonio by designing parents, and that she did not care for him, Society said it had been a love-match, but what will society not say? Poor thing, he thought, I suppose she is miserable!

"Forgive me," he said, in a low voice. "I

did not know you were in earnest." Leonora blushed faintly and glanced quickly at him. He had the faculty of saying little things to women that attracted their attention.

"What lots of poetry one might make about a launch," he said, laughing—for it was necessary to change the subject—"Ship—dip, ocean—motion, keel—feel; the rhymes are perfectly endless."

"Yes," said Leonora; "you might make a sonnet on the spot. Besides, there is a great deal of sentiment about the launching of a great man-of-war. The voyage of life—and those sort of things—don't you know? How hot it is!"

"I will have another awning up in a minute," and he directed the sailors, helping to do the work himself. He stood upon the gunwale to do it.

"I am sure you will fall," said Leonora, nervously. "Do sit down!"

"If I had a millstone round my neck there would be some object in falling," said Batiscombe. "As it is, I should not even have the satisfaction of drowning."

"What an idea! would you like to be drowned?" she said, looking up to him.

"Sometimes," he answered, still busy with the awning. Then he sat down again.

"You should not say those sort of things," said Leonora. "Besides, it is rude to say you would like to be drowned when I am your guest."

"Great truths are not always pretty. But how could any man die better than at your feet?" He laughed a little, and yet his voice had an earnest ring in it. He had judged rightly when he foresaw that he must fall in love with Leonora.

Marcantonio, who did not understand English, was watching the proceedings on shore.

"Ah! it is magnificent!" he cried, with great enthusiasm. The royal personage who was to christen the ship had just broken the bottle of wine, and the little crowd of courtiers, officers, and maids of honour, clapped their hands and grinned. They all looked hot and miserable and exhausted, but they grinned right nobly, like so many Cheshire cats. There was a sound of knocking and hammering, a

final shout of warning from the dock officers, a slight trembling of the great hulk, and then the ship began to move, slowly at first, and ever more quickly, till with a mighty rush and a plunge and a swirl she was out in the water. The people yelled till they were hoarse, the boatmen cursed each other by all the maledictions ever invented to meet the exigencies of a lost humanity, the royal personages stood together on their platform looking like a troupe of marionettes in a toy theatre, and congratulating each other furiously as though they had done it all themselves; everything was noise and sunshine and tepid water; Marcantonio was flourishing his hat, and Leonora waved a little lace handkerchief, while Batiscombe sat looking at her and wondering why he had never thought her beautiful before. Indeed, she was superb in her simple, raw silk gown, with fresh-cut roses at her waist.

"It seems to me, Marchese, that you are very enthusiastic," said Batiscombe to Marcantonio.

"*Mon Dieu!*" exclaimed the other, shrugging his shoulders, "one cheers these things as one

would cheer fireworks, or a race. It signifies nothing."

"Oh, of course," said Leonora; "and besides, it is so pretty."

"I think it is horrible," said Batiscombe, suddenly.

"Why—what?"

"To see a nation squandering money in this way, when the taxes on land are at sixty per cent. and more, and the people emigrating by the shipload because they cannot live in their own homes."

"Oh, for that matter, you are right," said Marcantonio, turning grave in a moment. "I could tell you a story about taxes."

"What is it?" asked Leonora. "Those things are so interesting."

"Last autumn I was in the Sabines—I have a place up there, altogether ancient and dilapidated—*éreinté*. I own some of the land, and the peasants own little vineyards. One day I saw by the roadside a poor old man, a sort of village *crétin*, that every one knew quite well. We used to call him Angelino—he was half idiotic and quite old. He was weeping

bitterly, poor wretch, and I asked him what was the matter. He pointed to a little plot of land by the road, inclosed with a stone wall, and said the tax-gatherer had taken it from him. And then he cried again, and I could not get anything more out of him."

"Poor creature!" exclaimed Leonora, sympathetically.

"*Eh bien,*" continued Marcantonio, "I made inquiries and I found that he had owned the little plot, and that the tax-gatherer had first seized the wretched crop of maize—perhaps a bushel basket full—to pay the tax; and then, as that did not cover his demands, he seized the land itself and sold it, or offered it for sale."

"Infamous!" cried Leonora, and the tears were in her eyes.

"A cheerful state of things," remarked Batiscombe, "when the whole crop does not suffice to pay the taxes on the soil!"

"*N'est-ce pas?*" said Marcantonio. "Well, I provided for the poor old man, but he died in the winter. It broke his heart."[1]

[1] The author witnessed the facts here described in 1880.

"I love the Italians," said Batiscombe; "but their ideas of economy are peculiar. I suppose that without much metaphor or exaggeration one might say that the poor *crétin's* bushel of corn is gone into that ridiculous ironclad over there."

"But of course it is," said Marcantonio. "The whole thing probably paid for one rivet. You, who write books, Monsieur Batiscombe, put that into a book and render it very pathetic."

"It needs little rendering to make it that," said Batiscombe, and he looked at Leonora's eyes that were not yet dry.

By this time the royal marionettes had been bundled off to their boats, and the crowd of small craft on the water began to disperse. Batiscombe's six men fell to their oars and the boat shot out from the breakwater. Presently they hoisted the bright lateen sails to the breeze. Batiscombe perched himself on the weather rail with his foot on the tiller, and the brave little craft heeled over and began to cut the water. The wind fanned Leonora's cheek, and she said it was "too delightful."

Batiscombe suggested that they should run into one of the great green caves that honeycomb the cliffs near Sorrento, and make it their dining-room. So away they went, rejoicing to be out of the heat and the noise. It was twelve o'clock, and far up among the orange groves the little church bells rang out their midday chime, laughing together in the white belfries for joy of the sunshine and the fair summer's day.

"I would like to be always sailing," said Leonora, who had now quite forgotten her woes and enjoyed the change.

"*Ma chère*," said her husband, "there is nothing simpler."

"You always say that," she answered rather reproachfully; "but this is the very first time I have been on the water since we came."

"My boat and my men are always at your disposal, Marchesa," said Batiscombe, looking down at her, "and myself, too, if you will condescend to employ me as your skipper."

"Thanks, you are very good," said she. "But I thought you were only passing, and would be gone in a few days?" She glanced

up at him, as though she meant to be answered.

"Oh, it is very uncertain," said Batiscombe. "It depends," he added in a lower voice and in English, "upon whether you will use the boat." It was rather a bold stroke, but it told, and he was rewarded.

"I would like very much to go out again some day," she said.

Those little words and sentences—what danger-signals they ought to be to people about to fall in love! Batiscombe knew it; he knew well that every such speech, in her native language and in a half voice, was one step nearer to the inevitable end. But he was fast getting to the point when, as far as he himself was concerned, the die would be cast. His manner changed perceptibly during the day, as the influence gained strength. His voice grew lower and he laughed less, while his eyes shone curiously, even in the midday sun.

The boat ran into the cave, which was the largest on the shore, and would admit the mast and the long yards without difficulty. Within

the light was green, and the water now and again plashed on the rocks. The men steadied the craft with their oars and the party proceeded to lunch. Most of 'society' has a most excellent appetite, and when one reflects how very hard society works to amuse itself, it is not surprising that it should need generous nourishment. The unlucky cook had done his best and the result was satisfactory. There were all manner of things and some bottles of strong Falerno wine. Batiscombe drank water and very little of it.

"Somebody has said," remarked Marcantonio with a laugh, "that one must distrust the man who drinks water when other people drink wine. We shall have to beware of you, Monsieur Batiscombe." He had learned the name very well by this time.

"Perhaps there is truth in it," said Batiscombe, "but it is not my habit I can assure you. The origin of the saying lies in the good old custom of doctoring other people's draughts. The man who drank water at a feast two hundred years ago, was either afraid of being poisoned himself, or was engaged in poisoning his neighbours."

"Oh, the dear, good, old time!" exclaimed Leonora, eating her salad daintily.

"Do you wish it were back again, Marchesa?" asked Batiscombe. "Are there many people you would like to poison?"

"Oh—not that exactly," and she laughed; "but life must have been very exciting and interesting then."

"*Enfin*," remarked Marcantonio, "I am very well pleased with it as it is. There was no opera, no election, no launching of warships; and when you went out you had to wear a patent safe on your head, in case anybody wanted to break it for you. And then, there was generally some one who did. Yes, indeed, it must have been charming, altogether *ravissant*. *Allez!* give me the nineteenth century."

"I assure you, Marchesa," said Batiscombe, "life can be exceedingly exciting and interesting now."

"I dare say," retorted Leonora, "for people who go round the world in boats in search of adventures, and write books abusing their enemies. But we—what do we ever do that

is interesting or exciting? We stay at home and pour tea."

"And in those days," answered Batiscombe, "the ladies stayed at home and knit stockings, or if they were very clever they worked miles and miles of embroidery and acres of tapestry. About once a month they were allowed to look out of the window and see their relations beating each other's brains out with iron clubs, and running each other through the body with pointed sticks. As the Marchese says, it was absolutely delightful, that kind of life."

"You are dreadfully prejudiced," said Leonora. "But I am sure it was very nice."

And so they talked, and the men smoked a little, till they decided that they had had enough of it, and the oars plashed in the water together sending the boat out again into the bright sun. In five minutes they were at the landing belonging to the Carantoni villa. There was a deep cleft in the cliffs just there, and the descent wound curiously in and out of the rock, so that in many places you could only trace it from below by the windows hewn in the solid stone to give light and air to the passage. The

rocks ran out a little at the base, and there were steps carved for landing. There are few places so strikingly odd as this landing to the Carantoni villa. Leonora said it was 'eerie.'

When it came to parting, the young couple were profuse in their thanks to Mr. Batiscombe for the enchanting trip.

"I hope," said Marcantonio, "that you will come and dine with us very soon, and change your mind about the water-drinking, and give us another opportunity of thanking you."

"I have enjoyed it very, very much," said Leonora, giving Batiscombe her hand. Their eyes met, and for the first time she noticed the curious light in his glance. But he bowed very low and very elaborately, so to say.

"You will keep your promise," he said, "and use the boat again?"

"Thanks so very much. But of course we will have a boat of our own now, and so I would not think of asking you." She smiled a little at him. Somehow he understood perfectly that he would nevertheless induce her to accept his offer. He stood hat in hand on the rocks as

they disappeared into the dark stairway. Then he sprang into the boat, and the men pulled lustily away.

He leaned back in the stern with his hand on the tiller and his eyes half closed. In the bottom of the boat were the lunch baskets, and one of Leonora's roses had fallen from the stem and lay withering in the hot July sun. Batiscombe picked it up, looked at it, pulled a leaf or two, and threw it overboard, with a half sneer of dissatisfaction.

"They have forgotten the baskets, though," he thought to himself. "If they had asked me to go up with them, as they should have done, I would have had them carried up. As it is I will—I will wait till they write for them. I could hardly take them myself." And he lighted a cigarette.

As Leonora mounted the stairway, leaning on her husband's arm, she turned to get a glimpse of the boat gliding away in the distance. She could just see it through one of the windows, in the rock.

"Why did you not ask him to come up?" said she.

"Why did you not ask him, *mon ange?*" returned Marcantonio.

"I thought you might not like it," she answered.

"*Comment donc!* He is very amiable, I am sure. But I thought you were tired and had had enough of him—in short, that you did not want him."

"Ah!" ejaculated Leonora. She felt a little curious sense of pleasure, that was quite new to her, at the idea that her husband could have seriously thought she did not want Mr. Batiscombe.

"Naturally," added Marcantonio, "we ought to have asked him."

"I suppose so," said she indifferently enough.

"I will call on him to-morrow, and we will have him to dinner, if it is agreeable to you, *ma chère.*"

"Oh yes—I do not mind at all," said Leonora. She was thinking about something, and did not speak again till they reached the house.

It was very frivolous, but she was really thinking about the curious expression of Mr.

Batiscombe's eyes. She did not remember to have ever seen anything exactly like it. Besides, she had known him, more or less, for some time and had never noticed it before. Perhaps it was the reflection from the water. But she dreamed that night that she saw those eyes very close to her, and the expression of them frightened her a little, but was not altogether disagreeable.

CHAPTER VII

JULIUS BATISCOMBE was a restless man, by day and night, after the trip to Castellamare. Marcantonio called upon him, but he was out, and then he received an invitation to dinner from Leonora, with a postscript about the unlucky baskets. He accepted the invitation. What else could he do?

But when the day came he regretted it. He wished he had refused and had gone away. Then he made a fine resolution.

"I will not go to this dinner," he said to himself, savagely, as he walked quickly up and down his room. "I will not go near her again. It is not right, and I won't do it. I will sail over to Naples at once, and send back a telegram of excuse, saying that a matter of the most urgent

importance keeps me there. So it is—I should think so—a matter of very urgent importance. Oh! Julius Batiscombe, what an ass you are to be sure!" With that he crammed some things into a bag, sent for his man, and descended in hot haste to the shore. There was no time to be lost, for it was already four o'clock in the afternoon and the invitation was for eight. He could just reach Naples and send his telegram in time to prevent the Carantoni from waiting for him.

The lazy breeze was dying away, and he wished he had had the sense to make up his mind sooner. But his men rowed lustily, and kept time, so that the boat spun along fairly enough.

"I shall do it," said Julius Batiscombe to himself. He was happy enough in the sensation that he was cheating his fate and was about to escape a serious affection. Then he laughed at the comic side of the case, and lit a cigar and blew great clouds of smoke over his shoulder. But fate and Batiscombe were old enemies, and fate generally got the better of him.

It chanced that on this very day Leonora and Marcantonio had determined to go out in the new boat. For Marcantonio had wanted to give his wife a surprise, and had got from Naples a beautiful clean-built launch. He had said nothing about it, and had patiently borne her reproaches at his indifference to sailing, until on the previous evening he had taken her down the descent to the rocks and had shown her his purchase, which had just arrived by the steamer. Of course she was enchanted, and determined to make the most of it, for she was really fond of the water. Accordingly, on this very day, she and her husband sallied forth with six men—for he had not dared to give her a smaller crew than Mr. Batiscombe's. She was in such a hurry to go that she said she did not mind the sun in the least—oh, dear no! she rather liked it. And so it came to pass that a few minutes after Julius had given his men the word to fall to their oars at the little beach of the town of Sorrento, a long low craft, painted in dark green and gold, and looking exceedingly trim and "fit" with its long lateen yard and

raking mast, shot out from the cleft beneath Leonora's villa.

Batiscombe looked straight before him, steering by the Naples shore, and intent on wasting neither time nor distance. He might have been out half an hour or more when a remark from one of his crew made him look round, and he was aware of a dark green boat two or three hundred yards astern, but rapidly pulling up to him. He started, for though he could not see the faces of the occupants, he recognised a parasol that Leonora had taken to Castellamare.

"It is the new boat of the Marchese Carantoni," said the man who had first spoken to Batiscombe. The man had seen it arrive by the steamer the night previous, and had helped to put it into the water to be rowed down to the villa. Batiscombe gave one more look and groaned inwardly. He would make a fight for it, though, he thought. He encouraged his men not to allow themselves to be overtaken by a parcel of Neapolitans, as he derisively called the crew of Carantoni's boat. His own men were tough fellows from

the north of Italy, bearded, and broad, and bronzed; but his boat, built for rougher weather and rougher work than pleasure-rowing in the bay of Naples, was twice as heavy as the slight green craft astern. His sturdy men set their teeth and tugged hard, but the others gained on them.

Leonora and Marcantonio had recognised the cut of Batiscombe's boat and crew from a distance; and, in profound ignorance of his amiable intentions of flight, they imagined nothing more amusing than to race him.

"If we cannot beat him," said Leonora, breathless with excitement, "I will never come out in your boat again!" She strained her eyes to make out if they were gaining way. Marcantonio spoke to the men.

> "Corraggio, Corraggio!
> Maccaroni con formaggio!"

The men repeated the rhyme to each other with a grin, and bent hard to their work. They were not Neapolitans as Batiscombe called them, but strong-backed slim fishermen from the southern coast, as dark as Arabs and

as merry as thieves, enjoying a race of all things best in the world, and well able to row it. Swiftly the dark green boat crept up to her rival, and soon Batiscombe could hear the remarks of the men. His own crew did their best, but it was a hopeless case.

"Monsieur Batiscombe, Monsieur Batiscombe," shouted Marcantonio, almost as much excited as his wife, "we shall conquer you immediately!"

Julius turned and waved his hat, and made a gesture of submission. A few lengths more and they were beside him. He raised his hand, and his men hung on their oars.

"Kismet, it is my portion," he said to himself as he gave up the fight.

"But where are you going in such a hurry, Mr. Batiscombe?" asked Leonora, who was delighted at having won the race. "You see it is no use running away; we can catch you so easily."

"Yes," said Batiscombe, laughing recklessly at the hidden truth of her words, "I see it is of no use, but I tried hard. It was a good race." He turned in his seat and leaned

over, looking at his friends. The boats drifted together, and the men held them side by side, unshipping their oars. Batiscombe admired the whole turn-out, and complimented Leonora upon it. Marcantonio was pleased with everything and everybody; he was delighted that his wife should have had the small satisfaction of victory, and he was proud that his boat had fulfilled his expectations. So they floated along side by side, saying the pleasantest manner of things possible to each other. Time flew by, and presently they turned homewards.

"I wonder how long it will be," thought Batiscombe as he held the tiller hard over and his boat swung about, "before I tell her where I was going 'in such a hurry'?" And he smiled a grim sort of irony at himself, for he knew that he was lost.

"Eight o'clock—don't forget!" cried Leonora. She had a pleasant voice that carried far over the water. Batiscombe waved his hat, and smiled and bowed. They were soon separated, and their courses became more and more divergent as they neared the land.

Batiscombe swore a little over his dressing, quite quietly and to himself, but he bestowed much care upon his appearance. He knew just how much always depends on appearance at the outset, and how little it is to be relied on at a later stage. So he gave an unusual amount of thought to his tie, and was extremely fastidious about the rose in his coat.

As for Leonora, she was on the point of a change of mood. She had been very gay and happy all day long, and the adventure with the boat had still further raised her spirits. But that was all the more reason why they should sink again before long, for her humours were mostly of short duration, though of strong impulse. This evening she felt as though there were something the matter, or as though something were going to happen, and her gaiety seemed to be the least bit fictitious to herself. She and her husband stood on the terrace in the sunset, awaiting their guest.

"*Ma chère*," said Marcantonio, "I am in despair. I shall be obliged to go to Rome to-morrow or the next day. My uncle, the Cardinal, writes me that it is very important."

Leonora's face fell; she had a sharp little sense of pain.

"Oh, Marcantoine," she said, "do not go away now!"

"It is only for a day or two, *mon ange*," he said, drawing her arm through his.

"Must you really go?" she asked, not looking at him.

"*Hélas*, yes."

"Then I will go with you," said she, in a determined tone.

"Ah, I thank you for the wish, *chérie*," he answered. "But you will tire yourself and be so hot and uncomfortable. See, I will only be away a day and a half."

"But I do not want to be alone here without you," she pleaded. She could not for her life have told why she was so distressed at the idea, but it gave her pain, and she insisted.

"As you wish," said Marcantonio, kissing her hand. "I will make every arrangement for your comfort and do what I can to make the journey pleasant." He was a little surprised, but, man-like, he was flattered at his wife's show of affection. There are moments in a

woman's life when, whether she loves her husband or not, she turns to him and holds to him with an instinctive sense of reliance.

A moment later Julius Batiscombe was announced, and the three went in to dinner. It was a strange position, though it is by no means an uncommon one. A man, his wife, and another man, an outsider; the outsider loving the woman, the husband supremely happy and unconscious, and the woman feeling the evil influence, not altogether opposing it, and yet clinging desperately to her husband's love. Three lives, all trembling in the balance of weal and woe. But no one would have suspected it from their appearance, for they were apparently the gayest and most thoughtless of mortals.

The adventure in the afternoon, the expedition to Castellamare, the baskets and even the cook—then, the events of the past winter, their many mutual acquaintances, and the whole unfathomable cyclopædia of society facts and fictions—everything was reviewed in turn and talked of with witty comments, goodnatured or illnatured as the case might be. Batiscombe

was full of strange stories, generally about people they all knew, but he was not a gossip by nature, and he avoided saying disagreeable things. Leonora, on the other hand, would be gay and brilliant for a few moments and then would let fall some bitter saying that sounded oddly to Batiscombe, though it made her husband laugh.

"You would have us believe you terribly disillusioned, Marchesa," said Batiscombe after one of these sallies. Leonora laughed, and her eyes flashed again as she looked at him across the table.

"You, who are so fond of Eastern magic," she said, "should give back to this age all the illusions we have lost."

"Were I to do so," answered Batiscombe, looking into her eyes as he spoke, "I fear that you, who are so fond of Western philosophy, would tear them all to pieces."

"My poor philosophy," exclaimed Leonora, "you will not let it alone. You seem to think it is to blame for everything—as if one could not try, ever so humbly, to learn a little something for oneself, without being always held up

for it as an exception to the whole human race It is as if I were to attribute everything you say and do to the fact of your having written a book—how many—two ?—three ?" She laughed gaily. "I do not know," she continued, "and I will never read anything more that you write, because you laugh at my philosophy."

"It is better to laugh at it than to cry at it," said Marcantonio, without meaning anything.

"Why should I cry at it ?" asked Leonora quickly. Her husband did not know how honestly she had shed tears and made herself miserable over it all.

"You laugh now," he answered, "but imagine a little. All philosophers are old and hideous and wear——"

"For goodness' sake, Marchese," broke in Batiscombe, "do not paint the devil on the wall, as the Germans say."

"The Germans need not paint the devil," retorted Marcantonio, irrelevantly. "They need only look into the glass." He hated the whole race.

"You might as well say that Italians need not go to the theatre," put in Leonora, "because

they are all actors." Her husband laughed goodhumouredly.

"You might as well say," said Batiscombe, "that Englishmen need not keep horses because they are all donkeys. But please do not say it."

"No," said Leonora, "we will spare you. But you might say anything in the world of that kind. It has no bearing on my philosophy."

"That is true," answered Marcantonio. "I said that philosophers were old and hideous, but not that they were devils, actors, or donkeys. You suggest the idea. I think they are probably all three."

"Provided you do not think so after I have become a philosopher," said Leonora, "you may think what you please at present, *mon ami*."

"I think that you are altogether the most charming woman in the world," replied her husband, looking at her affectionately.

"Is it permitted to remark that the Marchese is not alone in that opinion?" inquired Batiscombe, politely.

"No" said Leonora, demurely, "it is not

permitted. And observe that an English husband would not say that kind of thing in public, *mon cher*."

"Perhaps because they do not believe it in private," objected Marcantonio.

"More likely for the reason I suggested," observed Batiscombe, "that we are all donkeys."

"All?" asked Leonora. "But some of you are authors——"

"It is the same thing," said Batiscombe.

"*Mon Dieu!* there are times——" began Marcantonio.

"When you believe it?" inquired Batiscombe, laughing.

"Ah, no! you are unkind; but times when I would like to be an Englishman."

"I have heard of such people," said Batiscombe, gravely, "but I have never met one. You interest me, Marchese."

"You must not be so terribly disloyal," said Leonora. "You know I am English too—at least, I was," she added, looking at Marcantonio.

"Precisely," said he. "The wife takes the nationality of the husband."

"I am not disloyal," answered Batiscombe. "I am very glad to be an Englishman, but I cannot fancy any one else wishing to be one. I should think every one would be perfectly contented with his own country. I cannot imagine wanting to change my nationality any more than my person."

"Evidently, you are well satisfied," said Leonora.

"Perfectly, thank you, for the present. When I am tired of myself I well retire gracefully—or perhaps gracelessly; but I will retire. I am sure I should never find another personality half as much in sympathy with my ideas."

As they followed Leonora from the dining room out upon the terrace, Batiscombe watched her intently. There was a strength and ease about her carriage that pleased his strong love of life and beauty. He noticed what he had hardly noticed before, that her figure was a marvel of proportion—no wasp-waisted impossibility of lacing and high shoulders, but strong and lithe, and instinct with elastic motion. He had seen her lately always in

some wrap, or lace, or mazy summer garment, whereas this evening she was clad in close silk of a deep-red colour with the least possible trimming or marring line. The masses of her hair, too, rich in red lights and deep shadows, were coiled close to her noble head, and her dazzling throat just showed at the square cutting of her dress.

"People must be wonderfully mistaken," thought Batiscombe. "She is certainly, undeniably a great beauty—in her very peculiar way. Gad! I should think so indeed," which was the strongest expression of affirmation in Julius Batiscombe's vocabulary.

It was no wonder she attracted him. For nearly two months he had been wandering, chiefly in his boat on the salt water, and in that time he had not so much as spoken to a woman. His conversation had been with himself during all that time; and if he had enjoyed intensely the freedom of heart and thought in the intellectual point of view, his strong nature, always drawn to women when not plunged deep in work or adventure, could not withstand the sudden magnetism now thrown upon it.

He knew and felt the evil of it and he struggled as best he could, but each fresh meeting made the chances of escape fewer and the danger more desperate.

"Marry," said his best friend to him, when, now and then, in the course of years, they met.

"How can I marry?" he would ask. "How can I ever hope to love one woman again as a woman deserves to be loved?"

"Then go into a monastery and do no more mischief," returned the friend. She was a woman.

"I am no saint," Julius would say, "but I will try to be." And ever he tried and failed again.

They sat upon the terrace in the cool of the early night, with their coffee and their cigarettes. There was a lull in their conversation, the result of having talked so much at table.

"*À propos*," said Marcantonio, "of contentment, we are very discontented people. We are going to Rome to-morrow, or the next day."

Batiscombe was surprised. He paused with

his coffee-cup in one hand and his cigarette in the other, as though expecting more.

"Of course it is only for a day or two," continued Marcantonio. "We shall return immediately."

"Seriously, Marcantoine," said Leonora, "how long shall we have to stay?"

"Oh—not very long," he said. "I will get the letter. Monsieur Batiscombe will pardon me?" Batiscombe murmured something polite and Marcantonio rose quickly and entered the house.

"Are you really going so soon?" Julius asked in English, when they were alone, and Leonora could see the light in his eyes as he spoke. She looked away, over the starlit sea.

"I am not quite sure," she said. "I think I ought to go."

"I hope you will not," said Batiscombe boldly. She turned and looked at him again, with a little surprise in her face. Marcantonio came back—it was only a step to his study.

"Here it is," said Marcantonio, sitting down. "He says he thinks that a day would do, if I could be with him all the time

Voyez-vous, he is old and wishes to put his affairs in order."

"I cannot see——" began Leonora, but stopped.

"*Enfin*," said Marcantonio, "it might happen to any one, I should think."

"Let us hope it may happen to all of us," remarked Batiscombe, for the sake of saying something.

When it came to parting, Batiscombe made some polite remark about the pleasure he had enjoyed.

"When do you go?" he asked, as he shook hands with Marcantonio.

"I think we will go to-morrow night—*n'est-ce-pas, Léonore?*" He turned to his wife, as though inquiring. She looked up from where she sat in her deep, cane armchair.

"To-morrow night? Oh yes—one day is like another—let us go then to-morrow night." She spoke indifferently enough, as was natural. Batiscombe supposed she meant to go. He took his leave with many wishes to his hosts for a pleasant journey.

Marcantonio lighted a cigarette and stood

looking out over the water, by his wife's side. She was quite silent, and fanned herself indolently with a little straw fan decked with ribbands.

"Will you really go to-morrow night?" asked Marcantonio at last. He had a way of dwelling on things that wearied Leonora. What possible difference could it make whether they went to-morrow, or the day after? "Because," he continued, "if you will be ready, I will make arrangements."

"What arrangements?" asked Leonora languidly.

"I will write to the Cardinal to say I am coming—one must do that."

"You can telegraph."

"What is the use, when there is time for writing? Why should one waste a franc in a telegram?" He had curious little economics of his own.

"A franc!" she exclaimed with a little laugh.

"And besides," he continued, not heeding her remark, "old gentlemen do not like to receive telegrams. It gives on their nerves."

"*Enfin*," said she, weary of the question, you can write that you will go to-morrow night, if you like."

"And you—will you go then?" he asked.

"It depends," she answered. "I may be too tired."

Marcantonio knew very well that his wife was not easily fatigued; but he said nothing, and by his silence closed the discussion. She was very changeable, he thought, but then, he loved her very much, and she had a right to be as changeable as she pleased. It was very good of her to have wanted to go at all, and he would not think of pressing her to it. He was a very sensible and unimaginative man, not at all given to thinking about things he could not see, or troubling himself about them in the least. So he did not press Leonora now, and did not make himself unhappy because she was a little changeable. The one thing he really objected to was her pursuance of what he considered fruitless objects of study; she had not opened a book of philosophy since their marriage, and he was perfectly satisfied. Before he went to bed he

wrote a line to his uncle, Cardinal Carantoni, to say that he would arrive on the next day but one.

Batiscombe strolled back to the town through the narrow lanes, fenced in to right and left by high walls. His thoughts were agreeable enough, and he now and then hummed snatches of tunes with evident satisfaction. What a magnificent creature she was! And clever too — at least she looked intelligent and said very cutting things, as though she could say many more if she liked; and she knew about most things that were discussed, and was altogether exactly what her husband called her—the most charming woman in the world. Besides, he thought he could make a friend of her. How foolish of him, he reflected, to suppose that very afternoon that he must needs fall in love with her! Where was the necessity? He had evidently been mistaken, too, about her relations with her husband. It was clear that they adored each other, could not be separated for a moment, since when he went to Rome on business she must needs accompany him

—in July too! Would she go? Probably. At all events, he would not call for a week, when they would certainly have come back. This he thought as he walked home.

But when he sat in his room at the hotel, he remembered what he had thought as he followed her out of the dining-room. He had not thought then as he had an hour later. The magnetism of her glorious vitality had been upon him, and he had envied Marcantonio with all his heart, right sinfully.

"Some people call women changeable," he reflected as he blew out his candles; "they are not half so changeable as we are, and some day I will write a book to prove it."

CHAPTER VIII.

LEONORA would not go to Rome when the moment came to decide. She was so sorry, she said, but the weather had grown suddenly hotter and she really did not feel as though it were possible. She tried to make up for it to Marcantonio by being all that day a very model of devotion and tenderness. She affected a practical mood, and listened with attention while he explained to her the reasons for his going. She insisted on seeing herself that he had a small package of sandwiches and a bottle of wine and plenty of cigarettes to last him through the night; and when he finally drove away, she would have driven with him to Castellamare, save that she must have come back over

the lonely road alone. To tell the truth, she was a little ashamed of herself; she had been so anxious to accompany him, and now she feared he would be disappointed. Marcantonio saw it all, and was grateful and affectionate, though he begged her not to take so much trouble.

"*En vérité, mon ange*," he said more than once, "I might be sailing for Peru, you give yourself so much thought."

But she busied herself the same, going about with a queer little air of resignation that sat strangely on her face. He took an affectionate leave of her.

"I will not receive any one, if any one calls," she said, as he was going. He looked at her in some surprise.

"But why in the world?" he asked. "Who should call particularly? Not even Monsieur Batiscombe—he thinks you will go with me."

Leonora felt the least faint blush mount to her cheeks, but it was dark in the hall of the villa, though it was only just dusk, and Marcantonio could not see.

"Oh, not him," said Leonora. "Only I want

to be alone when you are not here." For a moment again she wished she were going.

"*Enfin*, my dear," he answered; "do as you prefer; it is very amiable—very *gentil*—of you. Adieu, *chérie!*" and he got into the carriage and rolled away.

But her words lay in his memory and would not be forgotten. Why should she not want to see any one? Was there any one? Why had she been so very anxious to accompany him, and had begged so hard that he would not leave her? After all, the only person she could be afraid of was Batiscombe. He wondered for one moment whether there had ever been anything between them; he could remember to have seen them together more than once in the winter, at balls. But then, they always met with such perfect frankness. He had not watched them, to be sure, but he would have noticed anything out of the way—bah! it was ridiculous. Not that he wanted Batiscombe as an intimate, for the man was certainly called dangerous. He had known him for years, and had of course heard some of the stories about him—but then, there

are stories about every one, and Batiscombe had evidently become very *posé* since he had gotten to himself a reputation. Besides, to see him a little, as they did in Sorrento, it would do no harm; it meant nothing, and he would think no more about it. He was not going to begin life with the ridiculous whims of a jealous husband, when he had married such an angel as Leonora—not he! Besides, Batiscombe—of all people! If it had been his sister Diana, it would have been different. Everybody knew that poor Batiscombe had loved her ten years ago, when he was as poor as Job and had nothing but a fair position in society. But Marcantonio had been away then on his travels, being just nineteen and having been sent out into the world to learn French and spend a little money on his own account.

Strange that he should almost have forgotten it! Not that it mattered in the least. The man had loved his sister to distraction, but had soon recognised the impossibility of such a match and had gone away to make his fortune. He had come to see Madame de Charleroi now

and then of late; Marcantonio knew that, but it was perfectly natural that they should be the best of friends after so many years. How they had first met, or what had passed between them, Marcantonio did not know, and never troubled himself to ask; perhaps he feared it would pain his sister to speak of it. But the whole story invested Batiscombe with a kind of air of safety as regarded Leonora. He had certainly behaved well about Diana, and nobody denied it. Nevertheless, it was best that he should not see Diana too often, especially if he intended to live in Rome, now that he had made his fortune. But Leonora—he might call if he pleased, and amuse her in the dull summer days. Carantoni would not begin life by playing the jealous husband. It was certainly odd, though, that he should have thought so little about that old story. The fact was, he had never seen so much of Batiscombe in his life as during the last week or ten days.

Meanwhile, he rolled along the road to Castellamare, and, after a great deal of shifting, found himself in the night train from

Naples for Rome. He ate his sandwiches and thought affectionately of his wife as he did so; and then he lay down and slept the sleep of the just until morning.

When he reached the Palazzo Carantoni the first piece of news he received was that Madame de Charleroi was in the house, having arrived the previous day alone—that is to say, with her courier and her maid. The old servant volunteered the information that the Vicomtesse was going to stay a week, or thereabouts, and had sent a note to the house of his Eminence, Cardinal Carantoni, the night before. Marcantonio gave instructions that she should be informed of his arrival and that he would come and see her later in the morning, and he retired to dress and refresh himself.

He hated family councils and he saw himself condemned to one, for there was no doubt of the Cardinal's intention, since Madame de Charleroi had come and had communicated with him. The Cardinal was old, and felt the need of settling his affairs and of talking them over with his only near relations—his nephew

and his niece. For he was rich and had money to leave.

Marcantonio and his sister greeted each other affectionately, for they were always glad to be together, and their meeting seemed to have been unexpected. His Eminence had sent for each separately, and they had arrived within twenty-four hours of each other—Diana from Pegli and Marcantonio from Sorrento. Of course, they talked of trivial matters, for now that Diana had accepted the marriage there was nothing more to be said about it. At twelve o'clock they drove to the Cardinal's house, through the hot, glaring streets of Rome, fringed with the red and white awnings of the shops. The carriage rolled under the dark porch of the palace, and the pair mounted the cool stairway and were soon ushered through a succession of dusky halls and swinging green baize doors to their uncle's study—a curious, old-fashioned room in an inner angle of the building. The blinds were drawn and the occasional chirp of the lazy little birds came up from the acacia trees in the courtyard.

The room was carpetless, with bright, smooth,

red tiles; in the middle was a huge writing table, covered with papers and books; on one end of it stood a large black crucifix with a bronze Christ, and there was an enormous inkstand of glass and brown wood. Around the walls were mahogany bookcases ornamented with light brass-work in the style of the first empire and filled with books and pamphlets. The room was cool, and dark, and high, and as the brother and sister entered their steps clicked sharply on the clean, hard tiles. His Eminence sat in an armchair at the writing table, clad in a loose purple gown and wearing a minute scarlet skull-cap.

He looked, indeed, as though his life were nearly spent; for, though his dark eyes shone bright and penetrating from under the heavy brows, his cheeks were thin and sunken, the hue of wax, and his white hands were transparent and discoloured between the knuckles. Marcantonio and Diana touched their lips to the great sapphire on his finger, and then the old man laid his hand on the head of each. They were his brother's children and he loved them dearly, after his crabbed old fashion

for all the Carantoni are people of heart and kindness.

"My dear children," he began, when they were seated by his side on straight-backed chairs that Marcantonio brought up to the table; "my dear children, I am growing very old and infirm, and I wanted to see you here together before I leave you all." A kind smile played fitfully over the waxen features, like the memory of life that haunts a plaster mask. Diana laid her fingers gently on his arm, and Marcantonio broke out into solicitous protestations. His uncle was not yet sixty—he had many years of life—this was a passing indisposition, a black humour, a melancholy. One should never expect to live less than seventy years at the very least, he said, and that would not be reached for a long time.

"Ah! no, dear uncle," he concluded, "you will surely live to see my sons growing up to be men, and to marry Diana's little girls!"

The Cardinal shook his head. That was not the way of it, he said. He might die any day now, he said, in his meek voice; and it really sounded as if he might, so that Donna Diana

felt her eyes growing dim and her heart big. She took one of the old man's thin hands in both of hers and he with the other pushed back the rich heavy hair and smoothed it tenderly. A marvellous picture in sooth they made—the dying prelate in his purple and scarlet, and the great unspeakable freshness and life of the fair woman. Marcantonio passed his hand over his eyes and sighed as he sat watching them.

Then his Eminence explained to the two what his chief plan was in calling them to him now. He had made a deed, he said, which he wished them both to understand. There were certain estates which he had inherited from his mother—their grandmother—as being the second son. These he earnestly desired to see incorporated in the property of the Carantoni family. To that end he had made an act of gift, transferring the lands to Marcantonio at once, on the condition that the Cardinal should continue to receive a certain income from them during his life. This he insisted upon doing, as he feared that after his death the lands would be sold by the executors in order to

divide the proceeds between the two heirs. In order to make the present arrangement a fair one, however, he at the same time gave to his niece Diana de Charleroi a sum of money from his personal estate which was equal to the value of the lands given to Marcantonio. Whatever they found after his death could then be divided and distributed—the lands would be safe in the male line; they might find something left after all.

Diana protested; she was very glad that the lands should be settled, but she did not wish to accept a large sum of money in that way. In fact she begged her uncle to reconsider the matter. As for Marcantonio, he looked grave and wished himself well out of it. He was practically to be administrator of his uncle's property during the remainder of the latter's lifetime, and he did not like it. However, as the arrangement was for the ultimate good of his children, and as he had not Diana's excuse for refusing on the ground of not wishing to take a gift—since it hardly was none—there was nothing for him to do but to accept the situation with a good grace.

"You do not deserve anything at all, my boy," said the Cardinal, half kindly, half in earnest, "because you married a heretic. But as I helped you to obtain the permission I must do something for you."

"But I," said Diana—"I cannot take all this. It is not fair to Marcantonio, for I ought to pay you the income of it, just as he is to do."

"Nonsense, *figlia mia*," said the old man. "You need money more than he does or ever will, with that husband of yours, who is always going from one court to another on his nonsensical diplomatic errands. Ah! my children, diplomacy is not what it used to be! *Altri tempi, altri tempi!*"

The end of it was that the two young people agreed to their uncle's provisions, and he insisted on their hearing and understanding all the papers, to which end he sent for his secretary, a wizened little Roman with grey hair and bright eyes and a fondness for snuff; and the secretary read on for two good hours. The old man from time to time nodded his head to Marcantonio or to Diana, as the one

or the other was referred to in the documents, and waved his pale thin hand in appreciation of the completeness and simplicity of his arrangements. At last the various deeds were signed, and a notary, whom the secretary had provided, was called in from the antechamber where he had waited, and attested the signatures and the general legality of the proceedings. The Cardinal was satisfied and leaned back in his chair. He was one of those old-fashioned noblemen who still believe in the divine right of primogeniture and in the respectability of land as a possession. With the modern laws concerning the division of estates—the keen Napoleonic knives that cut the strings of succession at every knot—these conservative aristocrats have infinite trouble; but they generally manage to evade the spirit of the law, and to conform as little to the letter of it as they can.

"*Cara mia*, one must submit," said Marcantonio to his sister, when they were alone together. "Old men have strange fancies, and he has always been good to us. What he said about my marriage was quite true. If he

had not helped me, I should have made a *fiasco* of it—or done something rash."

"I suppose so," said Diana, thoughtfully. "By the bye, are you comfortable at Sorrento? How is Leonora?" She was rather ashamed of not having asked the question before, but Marcantonio was goodnatured, and was glad that she had not said anything hard. And, of course, the moment she mentioned his wife, he was delighted of the chance to speak of what was nearest to his heart.

"Leonora is well and more than well, Diana *mia*," he answered. "Ah, she is an angel! She has not read any philosophy since we married—imagine! And she was crazy to come with me to Rome—in this heat!—because she did not want to stay in Sorrento alone without me."

"Why did you not let her come, then?" asked Donna Diana.

"She was tired," he said, "and as I told her how fatiguing it was, she made up her mind to stay. I shall go back to-morrow, I suppose. I wish I could go to-night."

"So soon?" asked Diana. "But I have seen nothing of you, dear boy!"

"Why not come with me to Sorrento? Do come—there is room for us all, and for all your servants into the bargain, if you like to bring them." Marcantonio was charmed with his idea; it seemed the most natural thing in the world. Besides, he had longed for an opportunity of bringing Diana and Leonora together. He was quite sure they would become bosom friends. Diana hung back, however, and was less enthusiastic.

"I do not see how I could manage it," she said. "I have so many things to do, and I must go back to Pegli, before long." Marcantonio sat down beside her and took her hand affectionately.

"Cara Diana," he said coaxingly, "will you not come and make friends with Leonora? It would be so kind of you, and she would feel it so much!"

Madame de Charleroi hesitated; not so much on account of her reluctance to stay with Leonora as because she knew that Julius Batiscombe was somewhere in the neighbourhood of Naples. She avoided him always, though she was his best and most faithful friend; for though she

had loved him once, there was not a trace of that left in her heart, and yet she knew well enough that he loved her still. Her high and noble nature could not understand so earthly a man as he; she could not conceive how it was that through all his many affairs he still looked on her as the one woman in the world; but nevertheless she knew that it was so and she therefore avoided him, not wishing to fan a hopeless passion. He came to see her sometimes, and she was very kind to him, giving him the best of advice, but she never encouraged him to come. So she was not anxious to meet him. But the question of her relations with her brother in the future seemed to make it now desirable that she should go with him and "make friends" with his wife, as he expressed it.

"Well," she said at last, "I will go with you, and do what you wish."

Marcantonio was very grateful. He felt that his young wife must have friends—young wives have so few—and he could desire no better friend for her than his sister, the model of all goodness, gentleness, and honour.

'Dearest sister," he said, "you are so good.

And if you have much to do here, I can put off going for a day, you know. You can do your little errands in a day, can you not?"

"I might, perhaps," said she; "but must you not take some steps about all this land of yours —or of our uncle's? Do you realise what a position you have assumed, my dear boy? From this day you are absolutely master of the estate, if you like—but you are also absolutely responsible for the payment of the income. You positively must see the lawyers about it, and you may as well see them at once."

"It is not the whole income of the place that he takes," remarked Marcantonio.

"That makes no difference," said Diana. "If you were to have it all, it would be the same. You are bound to take care of it. Your own lawyer knows nothing about this transaction. You may not be in Rome again for three months. Make some provision for your absence. Who is to collect your rents, in the first place?"

"I suppose somebody would," said Marcantonio laughing. "But you have a much better

head for business than I, *Diana mia*. Perhaps you are right."

"You manage things very well, *caro mio*, so long as they are under your hand. But you hate to go and look after business when you want to be doing something else."

"After all," he argued, "when a man is just married—"

"He ought to be specially careful of his affairs, for his children's sake," interrupted Donna Diana with remarkable good sense. She wanted a day or two in Rome, and she thought he was really remiss in his management. She had rather a contempt for a man who cast everything to the winds in order to be one more day with his wife. She did not believe that his wife would have done as much for him.

The end of it was that he agreed to stay a little longer—at least one day more than he had at first proposed; and he wrote an affectionate letter to Leonora, half loving, half playful, explaining his position and telling her of his sister's coming, that she might be ready to receive her. He added that he hoped to see them very affectionate and intimate, for that

Diana was the best friend his wife could have. If Batiscombe had wanted to make a friendship between two women he would not have gone about it in that way. Marcantonio was very young and inexperienced, though he was also very good and honest. His sister saw both sides of his character and understood them. Leonora saw, but only understood the honesty of him. His inexperience she supposed to be a sort of paternal, philistine, prosaic, humdrum capacity for harping on unimportant things, and she already felt the most distinct aversion for that phase of his nature.

Diana and Marcantonio went down by the night train, having stayed the better half of a week in Rome. Marcantonio sent a telegram to Leonora in the afternoon, to say that they would come. They had a compartment to themselves, and as they sat with the windows all open, rushing along through the quiet night, they fell into conversation about Sorrento. Madame de Charleroi had taken off her hat, and the breeze fanned the smooth masses of her hair into rough gold under the light of the lamp, like the ripple on the sea at sunset. She

was a little tired with the many doings that had occupied her in Rome, and her face was pale as she leaned back in the corner. Her brother looked at her as he spoke. "Of course," he thought, "there was never any one so beautiful as Diana." What he said was different.

"You should see Leonora, she is a perfect miracle—more beautiful every day. And though she has been on the water several times, she is not the least sunburnt."

"Have you sailed much?" inquired Diana.

"A good deal. I bought Leonora a very good boat in Naples and had it fitted. It is so pretty. And before it came Monsieur Batiscombe took us to Castellamare."

"Ah!" ejaculated Diana half interrogatively. She was prepared for the news that he was at Sorrento, for she had known that he was in the neighbourhood.

"Yes," answered Marcantonio. "He was very amiable, and then we had him to dinner. You know him, Diana?" he asked, as one often asks questions of which one knows the answer. He did not remember having ever mentioned Batiscombe to her, but his solitary journey to

Rome a week before had set him thinking, in a lazy fashion, and he wondered whether his sister ever thought of the man after all these years.

"Oh yes," answered Madame de Charleroi. "I have known Batiscombe a long time—long before he was famous."

"Yes," said her brother, "I remember to have heard that he was once so bold as to want you to marry him. Imagine to yourself a little! The wife of an author." There was nothing ill-natured in what Marcantonio said. In the prejudice of his ancient name he was simply unable to imagine such a match. Diana turned her grey eyes full upon him.

"My dear boy, do not say such absurd things. We are not in the age of Colonna and Orsini any more. I came very near to marrying Julius Batiscombe, in spite of your fifty titles, my dear brother." Diana was a loyal woman, from the outer surface that the world saw, down to the very core and holy of holies of her noble soul. She would not let her brother believe that, if she had chosen it, she would have feared to marry a poor literary hack.

"Do you mean to say, Diana, that you loved him?" asked Marcantonio in great surprise.

"Even you must not ask me questions like that," said Diana, a little coldly. "But this I will tell you—it was not for any consideration of birth, nor out of any regard of our dear father's anger, that I did not marry Batiscombe. Once I was very near it. We are very good friends now." She turned a little in her seat and drew the blue woollen curtain across the window to shield her from the draught.

"You do not mind meeting him?" asked Marcantonio, rather doubtfully. To tell the truth he feared he had committed a mortal error, and was taking his sister into the jaws of danger and unhappiness. He had never suspected that she had entertained any idea of marrying Batiscombe. Julius was a very agreeable man, very amiable, as Marcantonio would have said. What a fearful thing if Diana were to take a fancy to him! Loyal as she was to Charleroi, she did not care a straw for him—her brother knew it very well.

Italian brothers are very watchful and Argus-eyed about their sisters.

"Why should I mind?" asked Diana, looking at him again. "We are very good friends. He comes to see me in Rome every now and then. I do not object in the least, and he is really very agreeable."

"Worse and worse!" thought Marcantonio "She wants to meet him and is glad of the chance. But then, she is so good—what harm can it do?" Between his idea that he ought to keep them apart, and his knowledge of his sister's noble and upright character, Marcantonio was in a sad quandary. It always took him some time to grasp new situations —and the idea that Diana had ever loved Batiscombe was utterly new to him. True, she had not said it; she had only said she had been near to marrying him.

CHAPTER IX.

When Leonora was alone she resolved to have a good fit of thinking. Accordingly the next morning after Marcantonio's departure she sat by herself in a cool room, surrounded with books and dainty writing materials—thinking. The little white cat that her husband procured, because she liked animals, climbed to the back of her chair and made passes at her head with its small soft paws, seeming to delight in touching her. She put up her hand and pulled the little creature down to her lap.

"Pussy," said she, talking English to it, "were you ever in love?" She kissed it softly and held it up to her fair cheek. "I wonder what it is like," she said to herself. "I wonder whether being in love is always

like this! People who love always say they would die for each other. I am not sure whether I would die for Marcantonio. He is very good. Yes—of course—one's husband! Any woman would die for her husband. And yet—if the knife were very sharp and cold—or the poison very dreadful to take—I am not sure. Perhaps there would be some other way out of it, and one would not have to die after all."

Poor Leonora, she made herself think she loved him, and then she would apply all kinds of tests to her love which it would not bear, being but a very thin and pitiful little ghost of a love.

"I really believe," she said at last, kissing the cat and half closing her eyes, "that there is not anything much in anything after all. Things are not much more real than the shadows in the cave that Plato talks about. O dear me! And then to have people think that one is clever! They have such an absurd idea about it—Marcantonio, I mean. Of course it is the nicest thing in the world to be loved more than one deserves—but, on the other hand, it is just as terrible a bore

to have other people for ever thinking you really worth more than you are. And then, to have him think that my little bit of knowledge is dangerous! As if so very little could help or hurt any one. I must know a great deal more before it will do me any good. I think I will read something hard to-day—how pleasant it is to be alone!"

The last reflection came quite naturally and she did not even pause and think about it, the sudden interest she anticipated in reading having chased away the dutifully affectionate ideas she made it her business to build up concerning her husband. With characteristic quickness of determination she rose, got herself a volume of Hegel's *Æsthetics* and buried her whole mind in the question of subjective and objective art.

To a woman—or a man either—who has not, what is called, an interest in life, all manner of things take temporarily the place which should be occupied by the leading, absorbing thought. The things that are but relaxations, amusements, or even unimportant bits of usefulness to the thoroughly busy

woman, to a woman like Leonora become in turn objects of intense study and care, only to be cast aside and forgotten when the next day brings in a new era of speculation, weariness, or excitement. It is good to read many kinds of books, it is good to do many pleasant and agreeable things, but it is emphatically not good to think many kinds of thoughts. If a woman must change her opinions, it is well that the change should be gradual and the result of careful study and examination, instead of taking place according to the weather, the cut of a gown, or the conversation of a stray caller. Men change their minds as completely as women, but not so often, and above all not so quickly. To be unchangeable is the quality of the idiot; to change too easily belongs to children and lunatics, and the happy faculty of a sensible judgment permitting a change for the better and forbidding a change for the worse, is the high privilege of the comparatively small class of humanity who are neither fools nor madmen.

With Leonora to live was to change, and to change often. Brimming over and exulting

in strength of physical life, neither her mind nor her nerves could keep pace with her vitality, and the result was the inevitable one. After great excitement there was morbid reaction, and in the state of rest there was a restless, insatiable craving for motion. A strong man, ruthlessly ruling her by sheer superiority of massive power, would have brought out all that was best in her, and would have driven her to her very best weapons for defence. But her husband was quite another sort of person. His love for her was by far the best thing about him—save for that, he was not an interesting man. He was young and very tactless, though full of good impulses and gentle courtesy to her and to every one. But he wearied her with useless details and made her doubt whether his affectionate manner meant love or mere good breeding. He had an entire incapacity for making any one believe that he was capable of great things. His sister knew how real was his goodness of heart and how generous he could be—and she knew also how much he loved his wife. But she had no power to

put into him the passionate, burning romance which was precisely what Leonora most longed for; and Diana did not believe that such a woman as Leonora would long be satisfied with such a husband as Marcantonio.

Meanwhile the day wore on, and she read seriously, and had her midday breakfast in solitude and tried to read again. But by and by she nodded over her book and fell asleep in the humming heat of the summer's afternoon. As she slept she dreamed of a strong black browed man who kneeled there beside her in her own house, and who presently took her in his arms and bore her fast down the dark stairs and passages through the rocks to the sea, where a boat lay; and as he carried her his eyes gleamed like burning stars and she felt that her own grew big and bright. And suddenly he would have leapt into the boat with her, but he stumbled and fell, and she heard the deep roar of the waters in her ears as they sank together.

She woke with a start. The white cat had climbed up and lay on her shoulder, purring with all its might. That was evidently where

the sound of the sea came from. She laughed, a little startled at the dream and amused at its cause. It had been so strange—so—so wicked. She was shocked. How could her thoughts, of themselves unaided, have gone to such a subject. Besides, it was not the first time. She had dreamed of Julius Batiscombe before, and always of that strange look in his eyes gleaming wildly with something she could not understand.

"It is dreadful!" she exclaimed, rising and going to the window. She had slept long, for the sun was low, and when she looked at her watch it was six o'clock. She reflected that she had not been out all day, and that she wanted a walk. She wrapped something thin and dark over her white summer dress and left the house. The white kitten followed her to the door, mewing sorrowfully, and wistfully waving its little tail.

She walked slowly down the road musing on the odd thing she had dreamed, and seeking in her mind for the reason and cause of it, finding fault with herself for being able to dream such things. It is one thing to be able

to call up images of ideal men, and to tell the truth, she strove even against that; but it is quite another matter to find one particular man so much in your thoughts that you dream of his running away with you.

She looked up, and a little church was before her, the door being open. She hesitated a moment; she had come out to walk, but it would be so pleasant to kneel in the cool quiet place, in the half lights and deep shadows; to think, and think, and to pray sweet wordless heart-prayers, half mystic, half religious; to pour out the confessions of her soul's suffering, and to find, even for a brief space, that trust in something unseen, which her troubled spirit could not give to earthly wisdom, or earthly love. She raised the curtain and entered.

It was a simple little church, with a floor of green and white tiles, whereon stood rows of green benches and a few straw chairs. The light was high and the sun did not penetrate into the building. Everything was very clean and cool. Over the altar was a great picture, neither bad nor good, of a monk saint, dark in colour and inoffensive in composition; there

were two or three small chapels at the sides and the plain white arch of the roof was supported by two rows of square masonry pillars.

When Leonora entered she saw that she was alone, and the anticipated pleasure of religious exaltation was heightened by the sensation of solitude. She stood one moment, and then, being sure that no one saw her, she touched her fingers to the holy-water in the basin by the door and made the sign of the cross, bending her knee slightly towards the altar. Had there been any one in the church she would perhaps not have done so; but being alone she loved to experience the forms of a religion in which she did not seriously believe, but in which she trusted far more than she knew. She went forward, took a straw chair, turned it round and kneeled on the tiles, burying her face in her hands.

At first, as she knelt there, she trembled with a strange emotion that she loved—a sort of wave of contrition, of faith, of penitence and of uncertainty, half painful and yet wholly delicious, that seemed to her the sweetest and

most salutary sensation in the world. It was just painful enough to make the pleasure of it keener and rarer. She could not have described it, but she loved it and sought it, when she was in the humour. Gradually her troubles, real and fancied, would answer to her command, and array themselves in rank and file for her inspection ; the domestic difficulties, small and snappish little knots of mosquito-like annoyance, biting tiny bites to right and left and with little stings stinging their way to notice in the foreground ; then the troubles of the heart, the temptations of a wild unspoken and ideal love, streaming by her in the sweep of tempest and storm, stretching out sweet faces and fierce hands to take her with them, and to bear her away from hope of salvation or thought of Heaven to the strange unknown space beyond ; then again the shapeless and awful host of her fancied philosophies, now towering in fearful strength and menace to the sky, and rending and tearing each other to empty nothing and howling hollowness, now falling down to earth in miserable shapes and slinking insignificantly away; but last and

worst of all, there was a deep dark shadow, the trouble of her heart, the certainty that she had made the great mistake and done the irretrievable sin against truth—that she had married a man she could never love, but whom—God forbid the thought!—whom she might hate for the very lack he had of anything that could deserve hating. And then all the pleasure of her exultation was gone, and the dull, uncertain pain that would not take shape because it had no remedy, filled all her soul and mind and body; she had never felt it as she felt it to-day, but she knew that each time she came to the church to let her heart talk to her in the silence this same pain had come, sooner or later, and that each time it was stronger and more real. She bent low under its weight, and the tears gathered and fell upon her hands and on the rough straw chair.

Julius Batiscombe had passed the day after the dinner in his boat, sailing far out to sea in the early morning, among the crested waves and the dancing sunbeams, smelling the salt

smell gladly and enjoying the sharp cool spray that flew up over the bows. And at noon, when the west wind sprang up, he went about and ran homewards over the rolling water. All that day he was thinking of Leonora, but he was persuading himself that he could and would make her his friend, and that the sudden attraction he had felt for her was nothing but a little natural sympathy of minds striving to assert itself.

He found these thoughts so agreeable and edifying that he determined to repeat the experience on the following day, and test their reality by their durability. But somehow the hours seemed longer, and before the wind turned, as it does every day in summer on the southern coast, he put the helm down, furled sail, and bade his men pull home. He was discontented, and, having no one but himself to consult, he thought he would try something else. Once in his room at the hotel he tried to sleep, but he could not; he tried to read, but everything disgusted him; he tried to write, and wrote nonsense. At six o'clock he went out for a walk. It was not

unnatural, perhaps, that he should take the road toward Leonora's villa, between the high walls of the narrow lanes, for it was still hot, and the dust lay thick in the road. Besides, he knew that Leonora was away, and that consequently there would not be the temptation to call upon her. For in spite of his visions of friendship, he felt an instinctive conviction that he ought not to see her. Consequently, as he strolled along the road, smoking a cigarette and studying the extremely varied types of the Sorrento beggar, he was conscious of a comforting assurance that he was not in mischief.

At the end of half an hour he was passing the gate of the Carantoni villa. He stopped a moment to look at the little vision of flowers and orange-trees that gleamed so pleasantly through the iron rails, in contrast to the dead monotony of stone walls in the lane. A servant was coming toward the gate, and seeing Batiscombe standing there, opened it wide and took off his hat. Batiscombe carelessly asked if the Signora Marchesa was at home, expecting to be told that she was gone to Rome.

"No, signore," returned the man; "the Signora Marchesa is this minute gone out, it may be a quarter of an hour. Your excellency"—everybody is an excellency in the south—"will probably find her in the little church along the road, where she often goes." The man bowed, and Batiscombe turned on his heel, not wishing to talk with him. But he turned toward the church.

He walked very slowly, as though in hopes that Leonora would meet him as she came home; and when he came to the door he stopped, as she had done, hesitated, and went in. He trod softly, as Marcantonio had more than once observed, and he did not disturb the silence of the place. He stood still, holding his breath, and knowing that he ought not to stay, but unable for his very life to move. His overhanging brow bent as he watched her, and a curious look crossed his bronzed face, as though he were pained, but felt both sympathy and pity for the kneeling woman. The dead silence, the cold light from above, the half-prostrate figure of Leonora clad in white with the dark lace thing just

falling from her splendid hair—it all seemed like a strange scene in a play, and Julius looked for the sake of looking, while his heart felt something deeper than the artistic impression.

Leonora was bending low upon the seat of the straw chair, the bitter tears trickling down through her white fingers, and her whole life within her convulsed in the consciousness of sorrow. It had so long been vague, this sad knowledge of an evil ever present, and yet ever eluding her attempts to see it and understand it. But now it had come upon her suddenly. After two months of wedded life she knew that she had made a mistake beyond all repairing. She had tried hard to love Marcantonio, she had tried hard to believe that she loved him, but the deception could not last in her, and yet it seemed death to lose it. Sometimes she could think almost indifferently of her marriage, talking to herself, and asking questions of which she knew the answer, but to which she hoped to find another. Did she love him? she would ask at such moments; and she would answer that she

thought so, well knowing that whatever real love might be, it was not what she felt for him. But to-day it seemed as though the veil were torn and she saw the dreadful truth. He had left her for a day or two, and she had said it was so pleasant to be alone. That was not love—ah, no! And that dreadful dream, too, that haunted her still—it kept returning, with its sinful face, the face of Julius Batiscombe. The whole unfaithfulness of herself to herself rushed upon her overwhelmingly, relentlessly, till she could not bear it, but bowed herself and sobbed aloud before the altar.

There was a slight noise behind her, and with an effort she controlled herself, rose till she kneeled upright and merely bent her head upon her hands, drawing the back of the chair towards her in the act. She had been disturbed, and the sense of annoyance overmastered the expression of her trouble for a moment. Gradually the consciousness of a presence took possession of her, and she knew that some one was watching her; she grew uneasy, tried to repeat a prayer mechanically for the sake of thinking of something definite,

failed, smoothed her hair half surreptitiously with one hand, and finally rose from her knees As she turned to leave the church she met Julius Batiscombe's eyes, and she started perceptibly. It was so precisely the expression she had seen in her dream, little more than an hour before, that she was fairly frightened, and would have turned and fled had there been any other way out. But when she looked again she saw something that reassured her. There was that which attracted, as well as that which frightened her. She had the length of the church to walk, and she made up her mind that she would not show that she was surprised, and would behave as though nothing had happened. For she was a strong woman in such ways, and could rely upon herself if not taken too much off her guard. Meanwhile Batiscombe looked on the ground ; for he was often conscious of the too great boldness of his sight, and knew that it must be disagreeable to her. So he moved a step or two, hat in hand, waiting for Leonora to pass him, and prepared to follow if she showed any sign of wishing it. He

feared, however, that he had offended her by his inopportune appearance, and he was prepared for a repulse. Nevertheless, after the first start was over, she came boldly towards him, smiling rather sadly and looking wonderfully beautiful; for the tears only made her eyes softer and deeper, leaving a gentle shadow in them, just as the sea is bluer and pleasanter in its blueness beneath the shade of an overhanging cliff. She smiled, and passing out half looked at him again as he lifted the green curtain for her. He smiled again, gravely, and followed her. When they were on the steps, he bowed low again.

"How do you do, Mr. Batiscombe?" she said, quite naturally, holding out her hand to him. But in the open air, his hand touching hers, she could not help blushing a little when she thought of that dream an hour ago.

"You did not go to Rome, after all?" he said, as they began to walk along the lane.

"No," she answered, "it was too hot. Do you often go to the little church, Mr. Batiscombe? It is so nice and quiet there, is it not?" She was determined to put a bold face on the

matter. Besides, he perhaps had not heard those sobs—he had only seen her kneeling, perhaps, and had not understood that she was crying. But Julius had seen all and heard all, and was pondering deep in his heart the causes which could make her unhappy, seeing she was young and, in his opinion, beautiful—married, as society said, to the man she loved, and not lacking the goods of this world, while praying ardently for those of the next.

"I have sometimes looked in," answered Batiscombe. "It was a chance that took me there to-day."

"Yes?"

"Yes"—he glanced down sidelong at her face—"That is to say—not altogether."

She was silent, walking serenely by his side.

"No, not altogether," he continued, determining suddenly on his course. "The fact is, I was walking by your place, and a servant who was just coming out told me you were in the church, and then I went in. I suppose I ought not to have done it," he added with a little laugh; "I am very sorry I disturbed you. Pray forgive me."

"Not at all—churches are free for every one. But why do you laugh?"

"At my own stupidity," he answered. "I might have known that when you go to church at odd times you go to be alone, and not to have wandering callers sent there after you."

"What makes you think that?" she asked, curious to know how much he had noticed. She argued that if he had heard her crying he would think the question natural, whereas, if he had not, he would not suspect anything from it.

"Because you acted as though you thought you were alone," he said seriously.

"I did think so," she said, blushing faintly. "Do you know? I was quite startled when I saw you there."

"I saw you were," he answered, still very gravely, "and I am very sorry."

"Do you remember what I said to you at Castellamare, Mr. Batiscombe?"

"Yes; you said that life was not all roses, and you said it in earnest."

"Yes," said Leonora. "You see I did. I am not always in earnest."

"Is it rude to ask how one distinguishes between your Excellency in earnest and your Excellency in fun?" inquired Batiscombe, glad enough to turn the conversation to a jest, for he judged Leonora to be rather imprudent. Indeed, he wondered how she could have said what she had, unless it were from a wish to face out the situation.

"You ought to be able to see," she answered, laughing lightly, "but when you cannot, perhaps I will tell you."

"Pray do," said he. "I am very stupid about such things—but then, I am always in earnest, even when I want to be funny. Perhaps you might think me most diverting when I am most in earnest."

"No," said Leonora, "I should not think that. I should think you might be very unpleasant when you are in earnest—at least, from the things you write."

"That is a doubtful compliment," remarked Julius, smiling.

"Is it? I cannot imagine anything more delightful than having the power to be as unpleasant as you want to be."

"Is there anything I can do for you, Marchesa? I should be most happy, I am sure—short of poisoning your enemies, as you suggested the other day"

"You ought not to draw the line," she said with a laugh.

"Oh, very well. I will do the poisoning too, if you wish it."

"Of course. What is the use of having friends if you cannot rely on them to do anything you want?"

"If I could be one of your friends, Marchesa," he said gravely, "I am sure I would not 'draw any line,' as you call it."

"With what seriousness you say that!" she exclaimed, very much amused. She was nervous from the knowledge that he had found her out in the church, and she laughed at anything rather recklessly. But Batiscombe had turned grave again.

"Would you rather that one should ask such a privilege in jest?" he asked.

"No indeed," said she, a little frightened at the point to which she had brought him.

"Then I ask it very much in earnest," he answered.

"To be my friend?" she asked, looking straight before her.

"Yes, to be your friend," said he, watching her closely.

"Really? In earnest?

"Really—in earnest," he answered. She stopped suddenly in the road.

"I accept," she said, frankly holding out her hand.

"I am very proud," he said quietly. He took off his hat and touched his lips to her fingers. Then they walked on without a word for some minutes.

"What a strange thing life is!" exclaimed Leonora, at last.

"Yes, it is very strange," he answered. "Here are we two, on the smallest provocation swearing eternal friendship on the high road, as though we were going to storm a citadel, or head an Arctic expedition. But I am really very glad, and very grateful." Somehow the reflection did not sound light or flippant; and,

to tell the truth, Leonora was thinking precisely the same thing, wondering inwardly how she could possibly have gone to such a length with a mere acquaintance. But the land of friendship was an untried territory for Leonora, and she seemed to find in the idea a sudden rest from a sense of danger. A friend could never be a lover—she knew that! This was the meaning of the dream. But she answered quietly enough,

"If things are real at all," she said, "they are as real at one time as at another."

"Yes," answered Batiscombe. "Malakoff or Sorrento—it is all the same."

CHAPTER X.

"You will come in?" said Leonora when they reached the gate.

"Thanks—I would like to very much," answered Batiscombe, and he followed her through the gate into the garden. They passed into the house, and Leonora received from the servant a telegram which had come when she was out. It was the one Marcantonio had written when he had decided to stay a few days in Rome and to bring his sister to Sorrento. Leonora opened it quickly and glanced over the message. It was very evident from her expression that she was annoyed and somewhat surprised. Batiscombe looked away.

"It is too bad!" she exclaimed; her companion examined the handle of his stick, as

though there were something wrong with it. He was not curious, and he had very good manners. Leonora folded the despatch and put it away.

"Let us go out again," she said, "it is so close indoors." Batiscombe followed her in silence, obediently. They sat down among the orange trees on an old stone bench. The air was still and very warm, and the lizards were taking their last peep at the sun wherever they could, climbing up the trunks of the trees and the wall of the house to catch a glimpse of him before he set.

"My husband telegraphs that he will be away some time," said Leonora after a minute. "He has business that keeps him, and his sister is in Rome."

"You must be very lonely here," remarked Batiscombe in answer.

"Do you know Madame de Charleroi?" asked Leonora, taking no notice of the observation.

"Yes," said Batiscombe, "I know her. Somebody told me she was in Pegli."

"So she was. But she had to come to Rome

on business, and now my husband is going to bring her here."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Batiscombe. "To pass the summer?"

"Oh no! only for a week, I suppose. Do you know, I am rather glad; I hardly know her at all, and she seems so hard to know."

"Hard to know?" repeated Julius. "Perhaps she is. It is always hard to know very charming women."

"Is it?" asked Leonora, smiling at the frankness of the remark—it seemed to her that he had found it easy enough to swear friendship with her half an hour ago. "Is it? Is she such a very charming woman?"

"Yes, indeed," he answered.

"Yes to which question?"

"Both," said Julius. "Madame de Charleroi is charming, and it is very hard to know women of her sort well. Think how long it is since I first met you, Marchesa, and we are just beginning to know each other."

"Do you think we are?" asked Leonora. She was full of questions.

"I think so—yes. At least I hope so," he said with a pleasant smile.

"If you were writing a book about us, Mr. Batiscombe, would you say that we were beginning to know each other? No one would believe that we stopped in the road and shook hands and swore to be friends. It would be very amusing, would it not? I don't know why we did it; I wish you would explain." She laughed a little and stuck the point of her parasol into the earth. Batiscombe laughed too.

"When people have known each other in society for a long time," he said, "and then begin to be friends, there is always some ice to break, and it always seems odd for a little while after it is broken."

"I suppose that is the reason that such things always seem improbable in books—until you know about them yourself."

"Amusing books, and interesting ones, are made up of improbabilities," answered Julius. "And the people who write them are even more improbable. It is always improbable that a man who has lived a great deal should have the talent, or the patience if you like, to make

stories out of his own experience—or that a man who has not seen a great deal of the world should be able to evolve a good novel out of his inner consciousness. The probabilities for most men are that they will eat and drink and wear out their clothes and be buried. All those things are a great bore to do, a greater bore to describe, and an intolerable bore to read about. The most amusing books are either true stories of a very exceptional kind, or else they are rank, glaring, stupendous improbabilities, invented to illustrate a great theory, or a great play of passions—like Bulwer's 'Coming Race', or Goethe's 'Faust.' I am sure I am boring you dreadfully."

"Oh no!" cried Leonora, who was interested and taken out of herself by his talk. "But I think I prefer the 'exceptional true stories,' as you call them, like Shakespere—the historical part, I mean."

"The worst of it is," said Batiscombe, "that the true stories are generally the ones that no one believes. Critics always say that such things are a tissue of utter impossibilities."

"Oh, the critics," exclaimed Leonora; "they

must be the most horrid people. I wonder you authors let them live!"

"Thanks," said Batiscombe, laughing, "I was a critic myself before I was an author, and I do not think I was a very horrid person."

"That is different," said Leonora. "Of course a man may do ever so many things before he finds his real vocation."

"Authors owe a great deal to critics," continued Julius. "More men have come to grief at their hands by over-praise than by too much discouragement. A very little praise is often enough to ruin a man, and a man who has much talent will always survive a great deal of abuse and disappointment. If any one asked my advice about adopting literature as a career I would certainly tell him to have nothing to do with it; I should be quite sure that if he were born to it nothing would keep him from it for long."

"That is the way with other things," said Leonora, looking rather wistfully away at the setting sun, just below the green leaves of the orange grove. "It is the way with everything, good and bad. Some people are born to be

saints, and some people are quite sure to turn out the most dreadful sinners, whatever they do."

"What a depressing theory!" exclaimed Batiscombe, who had much more cause to think so than Leonora.

"Depressing is no name for it," she answered. "One makes such mistakes in life, and then there is no way out of it but to make others."

"And the worst of it is that one knows one is making them, and cannot help it."

"Yes," said she, "one always knows—if one only knew." Then she laughed suddenly, "What a ridiculous speech!"

"No," said Batiscombe, "I understand exactly what you mean. Just when one is doing the wrong thing, there is always a little instinct against it. But it is often so very little, that one does not quite know it from ever so many other instincts. And then, before one is quite sure that one knows what is right—before one's mind has time to think it over logically—one has done the wrong thing. At least, it seems afterwards as if that were what

happened; but I suppose it is because we are weak."

Leonora looked at Julius, who seemed deep in his thoughts. He had exactly put her idea into words, but she could not tell whether he believed what he said or was merely amusing himself with his faculty for explanation. He interested her extremely. It was just this kind of introspection that most delighted her—this cutting up and skinning of conscience and soul. Nevertheless she did not think that Batiscombe was the man to analyse his own actions. It was more likely, she thought, that he was very clever and could talk to please his listener. But he interested her greatly, and she was curious to know how he had got his knowledge of human nature.

"You must have had a wonderful life," she said, presently, saying aloud what she was thinking, rather than hoping to draw him on to talk about himself.

"Oh no—very commonplace, I assure you," said he, with a laugh that sounded natural enough. "Only, you see, I have had to make capital of what I know. But it spoils one's

own enjoyment to analyse anything, and I shall have to give it up, or resign myself to a miserable existence."

"I wonder whether you are right," said Leonora, reflectively.

"Of course I am," he answered gaily. "The man who carves the pheasant does not enjoy it—but the man who eats it does."

"Then let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die. Is that the end of your experience?" asked Leonora gloomily.

"Oh—well—if you put it so. Only if you do not eat and drink too much you may possibly not die until the day after to-morrow."

"Or you may spend your life in cooking the dinner, and die before it is served?" suggested Leonora.

"Or anything—What carnal similes!" laughed Batiscombe. "But they are very apt for any one who cares for eating. If that is really an important enjoyment, it may as well stand as the type."

"Exactly—'if' I am sure you do not think it is, nor that any material satisfaction can possibly stand as a type, nor that we should

enjoy to-day without thought of to-morrow, nor a great many other things that you have said." She watched him as she spoke, and he liked to feel her eyes on him.

"No," he answered, "you are quite right. I do not think those things at all. But I am sure I generally do them," he added smiling.

"But what do you think—really? Is there anything really high and noble in the world? It all seems so little and so hollow, sometimes." She sighed, thinking how, formerly, she had said such things speculatively and for the sake of raising an argument with Mademoiselle Le Creux and Mademoiselle Le Vide. Batiscombe turned on the stone seat, so that he faced her.

"Of course there are high and noble things in the world," he answered. "It is when you look into the small workings of the mind and soul, as you have been making me do, that you lose sight of the great ones. Material nature is most interesting under a microscope, and generally most beautiful in great masses at a distance. But if you walk close to the grandest cliff in nature, and flatten your face against it,

and hold your eye half an inch from the rock, the grandeur and the beauty are all gone, and without a microscope wherewith to examine your particular point, you will find the close inspection tiresome after a time. There is no microscope for the soul, any more than for the heart, or the mind. You gain nothing by looking too closely at it. It is ten to one that you hit upon a diseased spot for your examination. It may amuse you for a time to study other people's souls, because you can hardly get so near to them as to lose all impression of the whole, as you can with yourself. What does it matter what you know about your soul, so long as you do what is right?"

"That sounds true," said Leonora, "but I suppose there is something wrong about it."

"All good similes sound true," said Batiscombe laughing. "That is the reason why popular orators and preachers are so fond of them. The real use of a simile is for an explanation; the moment you make an argument upon it, you are revelling in words without logic, calling illustrations facts and generally making game of your audience."

"What a discouraging person you are," said Leonora. "You make one almost believe a thing, and then you turn round and tell one there is nothing to believe after all."

"Not so bad as that," said Batiscombe, leaning back and clasping his brown hands over his knee. "I have not said there was nothing to believe in. Only take care you do not believe in anything because it bears a tempting resemblance to something you like."

"That is ingenious, but I wish you would be positive about something. I wish you would tell me, for instance, what you yourself believe in." Her eyes, turned towards him in the twilight. For the sun had gone down, and the orange trees brought the shadows early where the two were sitting.

"What I believe in?" he repeated. "I suppose that, apart from religious matters, I believe most in sympathy and antipathy."

"That is not exactly a course of action or a rule of life," remarked Leonora, smiling and looking away.

"No. But in nine cases out of ten they are what determine both. At all events I believe

in them. They always carry the day over logic, philosophy, and all manner of calculation and forethought. You may determine that it is your duty to like a person, you may induce yourself to think that you do, and you may make every one believe you do; but if you really do not—there is an end of it. And the reverse is just as true."

"I should think every one knew that," said Leonora in an indifferent way. But she was wondering why he had said it, whether he had any suspicion of her own state of mind. "It is very safe to say you believe in things of that sort—everybody does. You are a very indefinite person, Mr. Batiscombe."

"What is the use of defining everything? Lots of people have been burned alive and have had their heads cut off for defining things they knew nothing about. Of course they were quite sure they knew better; but then, is it worth while to die for your personal opinion of an abstract question?"

"It is very fine and noble, though," said Leonora.

"There is a tradition that it is fine and noble

to 'die for' anything. It sounds well. Every one admires it. But reflect that the common murderer 'dies for' his individual views of the social state. The woman who maintained that scissors were better than a knife for cutting an apple, suffered her husband to drown her rather than give up the point, and as she sank her fingers still opened and closed, to imitate the instrument she preferred. She 'died for' her opinion, just as much as Savonarola or Giordano Bruno, whom my countrymen are so fond of raving about."

"You know that is not what I mean," said Leonora. "I mean it is noble to die for what is right."

"The question is, what is right? There are cases when it is eminently heroic to sacrifice one's life."

"For instance?"

"For instance, to die for the liberty of one's own country—for the defence and safety of one's king, who represents the embodiment of the social principle—or for the honour of an innocent woman."

"But about liberty and one's king, and those

sort of things," said Leonora, "where can you draw the line? There is no successful treason, you know, because when it succeeds it is called by other names. There must be a standard of absolute good—or something."

"I should think you must be a very unhappy person, Marchesa, if you are always trying to draw a line and to define absolute good. What is the use? Every one knows that it cannot be done."

Leonora was silent. It had interested her to hear the brilliant, successful man, apparently so happy and contented with his lot, talk seriously about the things she was always puzzling over. But what did it come to What was the use? Those were his last words.

The warm gloom of the night settled softly round them, laden with the sweetness of the oranges and the aromatic scent of the carnations. Batiscombe could just see Leonora by his side her head bent forward as she rested her chin upon her hand. The indescribable atmosphere and faint perfume that surrounds women of high beauty and degree intoxicated him. She was

so English in her beauty and so Russian in her delicate exuberance of vitality; above all, she was so intensely feminine, that Batiscombe felt his senses giving way to the magnetic influence. He leaned forward in the dark till he was nearer to her, looking at the faint outline of her face. Leonora sighed, and the gentle sound seemed like the softened echo of past weeping.

"Marchesa," said Julius in a low voice, "can I really be your friend? Will you let me help to make your life happier, if I can?"

Leonora felt the blood rise blushing to her face in the dark, and her heart trembled in its beating. A friend! Oh, if she really could find a strong, true friend to help her!

"How can you?" she asked faintly.

"I do not know," he answered. "Let me try. I will try very hard. I am sure I can succeed."

She let him take her hand for one moment. It was a consent, not spoken, but given and understood. Leonora rose to her feet and they walked silently toward the house.

"When may I come?" he asked, as he bid her good night. He spoke quite naturally, as though it were already a matter of course that

he should see her every day. She hesitated a moment, standing in the doorway with the warm light of the lamp upon her.

"Come at eleven," she said at last, and with a pleasant smile she left him and went in.

The aspect of life seemed changed for her when he was gone. That afternoon she had suffered intensely. Now there was a strange, calm sense in her heart that soothed all her thoughts, and made the lonely evening sweet and restful. She asked no questions, she made no self examination, she desired of herself no reasons for her conduct. It was enough that the storm had passed and that the calm was come, she knew not how. A man had spoken to her as no man ever spoke to her before, and the earnestness of his words still rang in her ear. He was loyal, strong and true. He would be her friend—he had asked it, she had granted it.

She dined alone, and read a little afterwards, closing her eyes now and again to enjoy the peace that had descended upon her. For the first time in many months she was happy, supremely, quietly happy, and she asked no questions.

As for Batiscombe, he wandered homewards through the dark lanes not heeding or caring where he went. He was wholly absorbed in recalling the events of the afternoon, revelling in the memory of Leonora's face and look and words. He, too, was wholly disinclined to reflect on the possible consequences of his action; he took it as a matter of course that he would keep his word and be indeed a friend to her; at all events he thought neither of the future nor the past, but only ever and ever of herself, clinging tenderly to the images that he called up, and asking nothing better than to call them up again, dreaming and waking. He might be in love, or he might not—the question no longer entered his head. He was fascinated, charmed and beside himself with enjoyment of his thoughts.

It was the state he had dreaded a day or two ago. To avoid it he had tried to escape by a stratagem, beyond the possibility of seeing Leonora again. He had cursed his folly in going to see her. He had promised himself that he would not go again, he had reviewed his past troubles and had remembered how plausibly

they had begun. And at last he had fallen into the ancient trap, the snare of fair friendship set out to catch men and women and to destroy them. But the mouth of the pit was garnished with roses and lilies, sweet and innocent enough.

At eleven o'clock of the next day Julius was again with Leonora, and on the day following and the day after that. They walked together, read together, sailed together and lunched together. A few stray callers came in now and then, but as they never came twice, not one of them thought it at all worthy of remark that Mr. Batiscombe should happen to be calling at the same time.

Leonora found an extraordinary pleasure in his conversation. He had a fund of varied study and experience from which to draw, that amused her and made her think in new grooves; and when he talked about her ideas and interests he always succeeded in showing them to her in a new light. His comments were by turns light and sarcastic, and then again very serious; and his general readiness to make things seem amusing made his graver sayings doubly strong by contrast. He had a bold way of asserting

that accumulated knowledge was of very little importance as compared with action, that would have sounded foolish enough from an ignorant man; but Julius was far from ignorant. He had studied a great many questions, and he possessed the faculty of speaking sensibly in a general way about subjects of which he did not profess to know anything. Most of all she found in him a ready sympathy and a love of human nature and of life for life's sake, that were utterly different from the artificial views she had cultivated. She found in him the strong love of enjoyment and the activity of mind and body, that best harmonised with her own real character; and in their long days together the hollowness and emptiness of life never once recalled themselves to her memory, except as things for her to wonder at and for Batiscombe to turn into jest and laugh to scorn.

The whole situation was utterly new and unexpected to her. After the first few days at Sorrento with her husband she had made up her mind that the beauties of nature were very tedious, and that she would be glad to go back to Rome and begin the duties of society—any-

thing, rather than go on from day to day longing for a sensation, and finding only a great deal of weariness. But now, in the discovery of a new friend, a man of talent and tact, who made all gloomy musings seem ridiculous by the side of his sanguine activity, the place was transformed into a paradise for her. Not a day but brought some new thought, some witty saying, some bit of novelty with it, so that she found herself happy when she was alone in going over what they had said and done together.

As for Marcantonio, she would be very glad when he came back. It seemed to her that he would be much more amusing now, and that she could say things to rouse him and make him talk. She wrote affectionate notes every day, telling him how beautiful everything was, and how he would enjoy it, now that the first difficulties of settling were over. She even said she had sent for the cook, and had ascertained that he was very well, having had no return of the fever; she thought it would please her husband to know that she was taking care of the household and looking after the people.

In the meanwhile Batiscombe fell in love,

studiously consoling his conscience with the reflection that he was doing a good deed, and was acting the part of a friend in making the time pass pleasantly for Leonora in her solitude. But his conscience did not trouble him greatly, though it would be sure to by and by. At present everything was swamped in a sea of glorious enjoyment, and he was no less really happy than Leonora. Day after day began and ended alike, but yet ever different. They never referred to the singularity of the arrangement by which Julius came every day in the morning and stayed till dark. There seemed no reason why they should not leave well alone, and enjoy each other's society to the very utmost. And they did most fully, each wholly engrossed in the other.

At the end of a week Marcantonio telegraphed that he and his sister would leave Rome by the night train and arrive in the morning. Leonora, in the innocence of her heart was glad, anticipating all manner of new pleasure in her husband's society, the result of her own cure from morbid *ennui*. But Batiscombe felt his heart sink within him.

CHAPTER XI.

The sun beat down fiercely as Marcantonio and Madame de Charleroi drove up to the house at half-past ten o'clock. They had travelled all night, but the beautiful Diana was not the less fair for being a little tired, and as she descended from the carriage and went up the short steps to the door Leonora could not help admiring the perfect smoothness and completeness of her appearance. Donna Diana did things in a stately fashion, and it would have been a hard journey indeed that could ruffle her lace or disturb the smooth coiling of her hair. Leonora herself was apt to arrive a little dusty from a night in a train, and not altogether serene, and she knew it; so that the absolutely finished completeness of

Madame de Charleroi struck her as enviable and much to be admired.

The two women kissed each other affectionately on either cheek, and then Marcantonio came running up and bent over his wife's hand, and, when Donna Diana was not looking, he just touched his lips to Leonora's cheek in a rather guilty fashion. Presently Leonora led Diana away to show her the rooms destined for her, and to fuss a little over all the arrangements, as women love to do when another woman is come to stay with them. Marcantonio was busy for a few minutes, asking questions of the coachman and the men-servants concerning the health of every individual in the establishment, and then he also retired to his room, and the perspiring grooms and servants raged furiously together with the luggage and bundles for a while; and then the front door was closed again, and all was cool and quiet.

Leonora left her husband and her sister-in-law to their toilet, and came down stairs through the darkened halls to the drawing-room. She was wondering whether Batiscombe would appear at his usual hour. Strange to say

they had not spoken of it on the previous evening—probably because they feared that the mention of the subject would lead to some discussion about the singular intimacy into which they had fallen, and which neither wished to endanger. It would be just like Batiscombe to come, she thought; it would be just like him to show himself at once as her friend, and to establish the custom of coming every day.

She was not mistaken; at eleven o'clock the bell rang, and he was shown in.

"I was quite sure you would come," she said, holding out her hand.

"Of course," said he. "I hope they have arrived safely?"

"Quite, thanks. They are making themselves beautiful at this moment, though I think they must have done it on the way—they arrived looking as fresh as possible, all smiles and lavender and sunshine. I am so glad they are come, you cannot think!"

"Yes, I should think you must be," assented Julius with less enthusiasm.

At that moment Marcantonio was shaving

himself in the cool seclusion of his dressing-room. He was going over in his mind the past and the future, reflecting upon the absurd things he had said to Diana about Batiscombe in the train, and wondering what he could do to make her stay pleasant. Batiscombe must certainly be asked to the house, he thought, if only to show his sister that he, Marcantonio, had no objection to her meeting the man. It had been so thoroughly absurd to take up her speech about the possibility of her having married him, and to build on it the supposition that she had ever loved him. Bah! the fancy of a girl for the romantic! Batiscombe was now a man perfectly *posé*—decidedly so. Besides, Marcantonio began to dread very much the eternal trio of his wife, his sister, and himself, from morning till night. If only he had thought in time to ask some other man, it would have been such a charming square party. He wife was always more brilliant and good-tempered when there were outsiders present—probably a peculiarity of all women, he thought, excepting Diana. Supposing that Leonora took it into her head to be dull or bored while

Diana was there, how dreadful it would be! It was clearly necessary that Diana should have a favourable idea of the Carantoni *ménage;* that had been the whole object in bringing her down. And if Leonora did not seem in good spirits, Diana would be sure to think he was not making his wife happy. The idea grew in his mind; he was terribly afraid of what his sister might think, seeing how she had opposed the match from the first. Really it was absolutely necessary to ask some one to the house while she stayed. But whom could he ask at such short notice? There was nobody but Batiscombe within reach.

Marcantonio had finished shaving one side of his face, and took a fresh razor for the other. There was a pause in his thoughts while he tested the edge and applied more soap to his cheek. As he went to work again the original train of ideas continued.

Ebbene! Batiscombe. Why not? He was a very amiable man, and Leonora liked him. She would certainly not object. As for Diana, it would be probable that he would keep away

from her most of the time. He would scarcely press his company on her. Monsieur Batiscombe had tact, although he was a crazy foreigner who went round the world in boats and wrote books. Bah! it was so convenient! Just the very person—he knew everything, had seen most things, and could talk like a mill-wheel. All those ridiculous prejudices about Diana were absurd, and were an insult to her. Batiscombe should be asked to stay a week.

Having successfully finished his shaving operations, Marcantonio sat down to write a note to Julius while the thing was in his mind. Otherwise, he reflected, he might forget to do it, and Batiscombe could not be obtained until to-morrow. He wrote an invitation and signed it. Then he reflected that it would be as well to speak to Leonora before sending it. She did not know anything about that old story that happened when she was a little girl, and perhaps not even in Rome. It was a mere formality, but it would be more courteous to ask her, before sending the invitation. He would not ask Diana, however. She had herself said, the night before, that she had no

objection to meeting the man. Very well, she should meet him very soon. He hurriedly finished dressing and went down stairs to find Leonora. Entering the drawing-room he found her talking quietly with the very man he was thinking about.

"*Mon Dieu !* what a chance !" he exclaimed, cordially shaking Julius by the hand. "Imagine to yourself that I was in train of writing to you a note, when you were in the house yourself !"

"Really ?" ejaculated Batiscombe, in some astonishment. "How can I serve you—since I am here in the flesh ?"

"*Mais,* by remaining !" answered Marcantonio cheerfully. "I was in the act of writing a very pressing invitation to you to stay a week with us, and thus to make up the most agreeable *partie carrée* in the world. Madame unites herself with me in the request, I am sure," added Carantoni, turning to his wife, who looked rather pale.

"*Mais certainement*—we shall be charmed," said Leonora, utterly astonished and confused by the suddenness of the situation. She had

herself thought how delightful such an arrangement would be—more than once. But coming so suddenly, from her husband, without her suggestion, it frightened her and did not seem quite natural. Her voice did not sound very cordial as she spoke, but it was sufficient, and her husband, being full of his idea, noticed nothing.

"You are very kind. It will really give me very great pleasure," said Julius, controlling his voice wonderfully. For he, too, was taken off his guard. Marcantonio was delighted. It was such a wonderful piece of luck, he said, that Monsieur Batiscombe should have called at that hour.

"But come with me, if Madame permits," said he, "and I will show you your room. You can send for your things in the afternoon." Leonora was only too glad to be left alone for a moment, and the two men went away, Marcantonio rubbing his hands at the success of his arrangements for a pleasant week. With Batiscombe in the house the time could not fail to pass pleasantly, he thought.

There are some men who seem to be pursued

by an evil destiny that continually forces them to do the wrong thing out of pure goodness of heart. From an innocent desire to make his household pleasant for his sister, and to amuse the wife of his heart, he had asked the man of all others whom the one desired to avoid, and the other ought to have been kept from—simply because he wanted somebody and the man happened to be on the spot. And the whole thing had originated in a laudable desire to see pleasant relations established between his wife and his sister, the two persons in the whole world whom he most loved. Poor Marcantonio! he was under an unlucky star.

Presently Batiscombe returned alone to the drawing-room, his host remaining to give some orders about the lunch. He looked curiously at Leonora as he sat down opposite to her.

"This is very charming," he said, smiling. "It is so kind of you."

"I had nothing to do with it," said Leonora, avoiding his glance. "But of course I am very glad. I was dreadfully afraid of being left alone with my sister-in-law, and of course you will help me to make it pleasant for her.

Really, it is just like my husband—he is so good."

"It would have been very miserable to have our good time cut short," said Julius reflectively, "and I suppose they would have thought it odd if I went on calling every day at the same hour." Leonora blushed very slightly.

"Yes," she said, "I suppose so. People have such ideas about appearances. You know I should not mind in the least if it were only my husband; you might stay from morning till night, and we should all enjoy it. But I am so afraid of Madame de Charleroi—she is so tremendously correct, you know."

From which piece of conversation it will be seen that Julius and Leonora had grown intimate of late, and regarded things from a practical point of view.

All this time Madame de Charleroi was in ignorance of the amiable arrangement concluded by her brother, and was looking forward with almost as much dislike as he had done to the family trio in which she was to play a part during the week.

She understood Leonora to a certain extent.

She had at least a very strong presentiment that there would be trouble between her brother and his wife; not an open disagreement or anything dramatic, but the kind of small worry and discord that begins slowly and surely, and finally embitters the whole lives of people who are not suited to each other. She had agreed to come down to Sorrento in order to "make friends" with Leonora, as her brother had expressed it, and in her wisdom and knowledge of the world she knew very well what a difficult task she had undertaken, and how small was her chance of success. She foresaw that she must be continually left alone with Leonora, for she understood her brother well enough to suppose he would adopt that method of fostering the friendship he desired. Poor dear Marcantonio had so very little tact. Consequently Diana wished very much that some other person had been asked to stay at the same time. Meanwhile she lay down for an hour upon a sofa in her sitting-room, and thought the matter over.

Marcantonio, however, bethought him that in spite of Diana's expressed willingness to

meet Batiscombe, it might surprise her to find herself suddenly living under the same roof with him. He therefore determined to inform her of the fact before they all met at the midday breakfast. He supposed she was busy with her toilet, and so he would not go himself; he would send his wife. That was a good idea —it would be at once a chance of throwing the two together. To this end he returned to the drawing-room, where Leonora and Batiscombe were still talking, and with an apology to the latter, he drew his wife aside for a moment.

"I think, *mon ange*," he whispered, "that it would be better to tell Diana that Monsieur is here for a week. She is dressing at this moment. Would you be so amiable as to go to her and say in the course of the conversation that I have invited Monsieur Batiscombe? It would be very *gentil* of you, *ma chère*."

Leonora was not in the humour to refuse her husband anything. Everything was bright and happy to her, now that she saw a means of defence provided for her against the stately Diana, whom she feared. She had recovered

from her astonishment at the sudden invitation to Julius, and she saw in it a kind intention on her husband's part, for which she was grateful.

"Of course, *mon ami*," she answered, "I will do everything you like. Only amuse Monsieur Batiscombe for a moment, and I will run to Diana, and tell her what you wish."

"A thousand thanks, *mon ange chérie!*" exclaimed Marcantonio, and he turned to the task of amusing Mr. Batiscombe, more delighted than ever.

Leonora knocked rather timidly at the door of Diana's sitting-room.

"It is I," she said, through the door; "may I come in?"

"Oh, I am so glad to see you!" exclaimed Diana, rising swiftly from her couch, with a bright smile. She took Leonora's hand and led her to a chair, and arranged the curtains a little, so as to make more light, and then sat down by her side.

"You must be dreadfully tired," said Leonora, "and I ought not to disturb you. I just wanted to see if you had everything you wanted."

"But everything—everything, I assure you," answered Diana. "I am so very comfortable, and the view over the sea is exquisite, really *de toute beauté*."

They made a wonderful contrast, as they sat side by side. Donna Diana's perfect features were more mature than Leonora's, her bearing was more noble, and her look more quiet and self-possessed. She wore a loose peignoir of white, with lace and white silk ribbands, such as none but perfect blondes can wear. But nothing could dim the dazzling whiteness of her skin, or detract from her marvellous beauty. She was noble, calm, and statue-like, and it was only now and then that a glance from her deep grey eyes betrayed the warm and sympathising heart within. A grand, regal woman, fit to wear a crown or to have been the priestess of an ancient people. She had it all from her mother, who had been like her, though in a smaller mould, and had died, still young and beautiful, when Diana and her brother were little children. It was impossible to imagine her for a moment deprived of her perfect grace, and ease, and quiet.

Leonora was altogether more earthly. She moved well, but often impetuously. Her extraordinary vitality, when not reduced by reaction to a state of unnatural apathy, was for ever seeking an outlet. She loved the light and the stir of society life all the while that she amused herself with reflecting on its emptiness. She was instinct with strength, and motion, and elasticity. Her skin was always fresh, whether in heat or cold, but from the enthusiasm with which she did things, she sometimes lost the smoothness and "correctness"—as she would have called it—of her appearance. And yet even at such times she had a strange charm and fascination of her own. As she often said, she was far less beautiful than Diana but much more alive—though with a life that might perhaps be less strong and enduring than Diana's. Diana was a queen—Leonora a brilliant and irresponsible princess.

They talked a little together, and Leonora found it easy to lead the conversation to the plans she was making for the amusement of her sister-in-law.

"By the by," said she, "I ought to tell you. Mr. Julius Batiscombe is staying here this week. I suppose you know him?"

Leonora had no idea of anything having existed in former times in the way of sentiment between Diana and Julius. She was sent to convey a piece of information, and she did it as well as she could, not even looking at Diana as she spoke. Had she suspected anything she would have watched her, and she would have seen the least possible trembling of the eyelids, and the lightest imaginable shade of annoyance on her guest's fair face.

"Oh yes," she said calmly, "I know him. I have known him a long time. So he is staying with you?"

"Yes. He is so very agreeable, and Marcantonio wished it. He has been in Sorrento some time, and he took us to Castellamare to see that ironclad launched. He is so very clever."

"Because he took you in his boat?" laughed Diana. "Yes, my dear, a man is clever indeed who can get such charming company."

Leonora was pleased with the little speech—

it sounded kindly, and as Diana spoke she laid her hand softly on Leonora's.

"How cold your hands are," said Diana. And indeed they were chilled through, though it was a very hot day in July. "'Cold hands, warm heart,' you know, as the proverb says."

Leonora blushed a little. It seemed so odd to be talking about Julius Batiscombe to a stranger that it had frightened her a little, and she was conscious that her heart beat faster. Nevertheless she wondered vaguely why she felt the blood rise to her cheek. He was only her friend, and the remark about the heart could have nothing to do with him.

But Diana supposed she changed colour because she thought of Marcantonio. It was natural for a young bride to blush at the mention of her heart, of course, and altogether charming. She patted the cold little hand sympathetically and talked of something else. It is so easy to misunderstand a blush. But Leonora felt as though she were being patronised, which is the thing people of her stamp most bitterly resent of all others; and accordingly there sprang up in her breast a

little breeze of opposition, which might by and by blow a gale.

When the party met in the drawing-room before the midday breakfast everything seemed arranged for the best, and Marcantonio rubbed his hands with delight, and made numerous hospitable gestures as he walked round the three lambs of his fold. Batiscombe rose and bowed low to Madame de Charleroi. She nodded pleasantly as to an old acquaintance, and gave him her hand. He turned a little pale under the sunburnt bronze of his face.

"I am glad to see you," said she. "I thought you had probably been shipwrecked in that boat of yours. It was in all the *chroniques* in the papers, you know."

"The sea would not be so ill-bred as to swallow me up before I had had the honour of making my homage to you, Vicomtesse," said Batiscombe with a bow and a smile. It is so easy to say pretty things in French, and as every one does it no one ever knows the genuine from the spurious. Diana was well used to Batiscombe's ways, and she laughed a little. But somehow Leonora did not like

the speech. The English part of her revolted against a generality of gallant language, though her Russian blood made it quite possible for her to accept such things when addressed to herself.

Breakfast was announced.

"*Mon Dieu*," exclaimed Marcantonio, smiling at everybody, "it is the most charming *partie carrée* imaginable. But there arises a terrible question of precedence. I must evidently give my arm to my wife or to my sister. It is very grave. Mesdames, I pray you, select."

"Of course," said Leonora, "Diana is the guest. It is to her that you must give your arm; and Monsieur Batiscombe must console himself as he can." Everybody smiled politely, as people do over the inanities of a very cheerful and *empressé* host.

"Thank you," said Batiscombe in English, as he and Leonora followed the other couple into the breakfast-room at a little distance.

It became the duty of Batiscombe and the two ladies to make Marcantonio believe that they were all enjoying themselves and each

other immensely; their duty it was—the sacred and unavoidable duty of society towards its entertainers. Batiscombe found the situation very unpleasant. Diana wished the week well over, and bore her part with the unfaltering serenity and cheerfulness that well-bred sovereigns exhibit when they are obliged to do some of the thousand disagreeable things that make up most of their lives. Leonora was beginning to be quite sure she could never like Diana. How could she like a woman who assumed airs of superiority? Diana was not in the least like the young ladies whom she knew in Rome, and whom, she promised herself, she would rule with a rod of iron now that she was married. And Marcantonio smiled and said all the pleasantest things he could imagine; and they were many, for pleasantness was his strong point. Batiscombe seconded him to the best of his ability, and every now and then reflected for an instant on the extraordinary position in which he found himself.

Indeed, he had cause to wonder at the strangeness of fate. There he sat, eating his breakfast between the woman who had

dominated him all his life, and the woman who fascinated him in the present, with ample opportunity to compare them with each other, and a determination not to do it. It seemed as though Diana's coming had roused in him a feeling of contrariety, as it had in Leonora, though for quite different reasons. Diana knew well enough, he thought, that she ruled him and could bring him to her feet in a moment. Why, then, if she did not want him herself, did she come and disturb his peace and happiness? She need not have prevented him from enjoying the society of a charming woman —but she undoubtedly would. He knew well enough that her presence would be a check on the daily and hourly intercourse with Leonora which he just now most desired. She would not believe in the friendship which had seemed so real to Leonora and so possible to himself. She would watch him with those grey eyes of hers that knew him so well, and when she had an opportunity, she would give him a wholesome lecture on the error of his ways. He knew Diana well, and she knew him better.

He was forced to confess that she was more beautiful, more stately, and more perfect now, at eight-and-twenty, than she had been ten years ago at eighteen; that, if she lifted her finger to him now, he would be more entirely her servant and slave than ever before; and that in the bottom of his heart he wished she would do so as he wished no other thing in the world. At the same time he knew perfectly well that she would not, and he thought it was not fair of her to disturb an innocent friendship which had, by force of circumstances, assumed a peculiar aspect. She excited in him all the obstinacy which attends weakness—and Julius was a weak man where women were concerned. And whether he would or not, he made up his his mind not to relinquish his daily enjoyment of talking to Leonora for all the Dianas in the world—if it was only to please his own vanity.

The repast was somehow or other a success as far as Marcantonio was concerned. He felt that everything was proceeding as it should, that all his provisions had turned out well, and that he was a happy husband and a happy brother. He was in complete ignorance of

Julius Batiscombe's daily visits to his wife during his absence. She had meant to tell him, honestly, how pleasant it had all been, and how much she had enjoyed it; but, somehow, the invitation to Batiscombe to stay in the house had made her put it off. Marcantonio was so odd about some things, he was sure to want so many explanations; she could tell him just as well after Diana and Batiscombe were gone; and then, of course, it would not matter so much. She knew that Julius would never refer to all those days unless she herself did. If only that terrible Diana did not see or find out! How dreadful it would be to have her say anything to Marcantonio!

CHAPTER XII.

A COUNTRY-HOUSE is a glass house. The more people there are staying in it, the more fragile and delicate are the walls, and the more probability there is that some one will be inspired by the Evil One to throw stones. Sometimes it happens that two or three of a party fight a pitched battle, and then some lucky lovers who have nothing to do with the hostilities are forgotten and overlooked in the din of war. But if there is one thing in the world more certain to get out than murder it is love, righteous or unrighteous. Lovers who desire secrecy should never go to country-houses together.

It seems to them as though each and every member of the household had especially adopted a set of vile and pernicious habits; a deter-

mination to be where they ought not at all sorts of unexpected hours; to come skulking round corners under the empty pretext of seeking shade, and to be found lurking in wooded dells on pretence of studying natural history. There is the matitutinal fiend who shaves at the window in the grey dawn, and sees people who have got up for an early walk; and, verily, they feel like worms when they glance up and see his beak and talons at the casement. There is also the demon that walketh in darkness, smoking a midnight cigar on the lawn before going to bed. There is the mid-day dragon, green-eyed and loathly to behold, who steals out in old gloves and a parasol immediately after lunch, because she has left her glasses on the mossy seat under the trees, just out of sight of the house, and must needs find them. There is the vile and sickening bookworm, with his bland smile and unhealthy complexion, who dives into the library in the middle of the summer's afternoon, and ruthlessly opens the blinds to find the eighteenth volume of "*Jinxius de Naturâ Inanitatis, Folio, Göttingen*, A.D. 1"; and who wrinkles disagreeably

all over when he observes the couple in the corner, staring like blushing owls in the sudden glare.

And, besides all these, there are the low earth-spirits—a swarm of maids, butlers, grooms, stable-boys, and nurses—who are supposed to dwell somewhere underground, and are everlastingly appearing, like phantoms, noiseless and awful, with ears like vast trumpets of endless capacity and magnifying power.

A country-house is a terrible test of all the great virtues of mankind and a fearful reflector of all the vices. It is well to begin life in the country with an adequate certainty that, whatever you do, you will be found out, and that you will often be found out when you have done nothing. And a villa hired in the orange gardens of Sorrento, overhanging the murmuring sea and sweet with the breath of the rich south, is not different in this respect from a Yorkshire manor-house, a château in the south of France, or a "romantic retreat" on the Hudson River.

For two or three days after the events just chronicled, Leonora and Batiscombe

managed successfully to spend several hours out of the twenty-four in each other's society. Marcantonio was busy during a great part of the time with correspondence concerning the politics of his party, and once he went over to Naples to see an eminent person on business. The four inmates of the house met at meals, and in the late afternoon, when they generally went out in the boat. Donna Diana occasionally sat with Leonora for an hour, and they talked to each other studiously, Leonora trying her best to make the time pleasant for Diana, and Diana doing what she could to cultivate her acquaintance with Leonora. At the end of two days it was perfectly clear that the two women would never be intimate. But they both concealed the fact from Marcantonio; and he rubbed his hands, and wrote his letters, and bought cartloads of things for his wife, in the comforting assurance that she was very happy and inclined to follow his wishes in regard to his sister.

But Diana was not given to looking after Leonora when she was out of her sight, and she spent a great part of the day in writing

letters, in reading, and now and then in calling on a few acquaintances who lived along the shore in the villas towards Castellamare. She was glad that Batiscombe kept out of her way, but she did not exactly understand why he did so. He was generally extremely anxious to see as much as possible of her when he was in her neighbourhood. Could it be that he did not love her any longer? that after all these years he had at last put her out of his mind? Perhaps so. She was glad if it were so, most truly. She had many times prayed with her whole soul that he might forget her. It might be that the prayer was answered. At all events, he kept out of her way, and she did not regret it, or ever give him a sign to come to her. She supposed that he spent his hours with Leonora or Marcantonio or both, and there was no reason why he should not be intimate in the house so far as she herself was concerned.

One day it chanced that the wind was in the south, blowing a hot blast and making everything very hazy and sultry that was out of its reach, and covering everything it touched

with a disagreeable mixture of dust and clamminess. Every one who has lived in Italy knows what the sirocco is like, and the dismal stickiness, to coin the word, which it brings. It seems as though the universe were under a press and some one were screwing it down.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon, and Madame de Charleroi was sitting in her small boudoir, trying to write a letter to her husband. Unlike most Italians, she had not the habit of sleeping in the day, and used the time when other people were taking a nap during the great heat to keep up an extensive correspondence. She was a woman who had made this one interest for herself, and thoroughly enjoyed being in constant communication with a dozen intelligent people in all parts of the world.

It was excessively hot. Even she, who was southern born and did not mind it, felt her brain grow dizzy and her fingers tired and clammy. Leonora's white kitten had strayed into the room after lunch, and was walking about near the door, squeaking now and then as though it did not like the quarters and wanted to get out. For the mere sake of

changing her position, Diana laid down her pen and rose to open the door. As she did so the cat jumped nimbly through, and a little breath of cooler air blew in from the passage. Diana stood one moment as though enjoying it, and then went out. She took a parasol in the hall, and walked slowly down the garden. The sky was overcast with a dull leaden grey, and the south wind blew under the trees, bad enough in itself, but infinitely better than the close heat indoors. There was no one to be seen, and Diana paced slowly along the gravel path. At the end of it were the steps that led through the rocks to the sea.

She had gone down and come up again more than once with the rest of the party in the evening when they had been out in the boat, and she had thought each time that it would be pleasant to come and sit in some of the cool archways and look out over the sea in the heat of the day. She felt sure, too, of being alone there; it was not a likely place for any one to frequent at three o'clock in the afternoon. Diana closed

her parasol, and, just lifting the skirt of her white dress off the ground, began to descend the broad stone steps, hewn out of the solid rock, a steep vaulted tunnel in the inside of the cliff. Here and there a great arched window looked out, in which were cut broad seats for people to rest upon.

She had passed through the darkest part of the descent, carefully picking her way, when she suddenly found herself opposite to one of these windows. She was startled to see two people sitting there, for she had been certain that she would be alone. They were Leonora and Batiscombe, sitting side by side on the seat under the arched opening. Hearing her tread they both looked round, and Julius seemed to pick up something from the floor that had probably fallen while they were talking. Then he remained standing, and Diana, seeing she was discovered, advanced boldly toward the pair. There was nothing so extraordinary in the situation after all, only she had always supposed that Leonora slept in the afternoon while Batiscombe and Marc-antonio smoked and talked politics up stairs.

They had certainly been sitting very near together, she thought, but the sudden glare of the light and the distance that separated her from them had prevented her from noticing their faces. As she came near, Leonora rose also and spoke first. She held her back to the light, for she was blushing deeply; but Batiscombe, who never blushed and rarely turned pale, stood calmly pulling his moustache, as though it were all the most natural thing in the world.

"I had always meant to tell you how delightful it is here," said Leonora. "I am so glad you have found it out for yourself."

"*En effet*," answered Madame de Charleroi calmly smiling, "it is ideal." She came under the arch and looked out, enjoying the sight of the sea after the dark passages.

"And then," said Leonora, "it is strictly true that one is 'not at home' when one is here—if people call, it is very convenient. Nobody can find one."

"Excepting Madame de Charleroi," said Batiscombe, who was very angry at the interruption of his *tête-à-tête*. But he said it so

pleasantly and with such an air of paying a compliment, that Diana could not be offended; she only smiled a little bitterly in her lofty way, remembering other times when he would have given his right hand for a meeting of any kind with her.

In that moment a suspicion crossed Diana's mind. She understood the meaning of his remark perfectly, in spite of the bow and the smile, knowing, as she did, every intonation of his voice and every expression of his face. She knew that he was angry at the interruption, and she argued that Julius preferred being with Leonora to being with herself. That was clearly the reason why he kept out of her way —he spent his time with Leonora. If Leonora attracted him, he was certainly at liberty to talk to her if he pleased; but Diana thought it must be a strong attraction indeed that kept him away from herself. It was long since he had missed an opportunity of spending an hour with his old love.

Diana sat down beside Leonora, and Batiscombe leaned against the rock and looked out over the sea, the angry fire dancing in his blue

eyes, but his face as calm as ever. Diana began to talk to Leonora.

"You are very fortunate in getting such a place," she said. "It is by far the most beautiful on the whole shore."

"I wish it belonged to us," said Leonora. "I am sure I could come here every year and never grow tired of it."

"Ah!" exclaimed Diana, "do you like it so very much then?"

"*J'en raffolle!*" answered Leonora enthusiastically. "I am crazy about it. And then, it is always so charming to have absolutely the best. As you say, there is nothing like this place on the whole bay. I would like always to have the best."

"*Mais*, Madame," remarked Batiscombe, "it appears to me that you always do. You have the talent of supremacy."

"What an idea! The talent of supremacy!"

"But that is precisely it," continued Julius. "It is a talent. Some people are born with it—generally women."

"That is Monsieur Batiscombe's favourite theory," remarked Madame de Charleroi, just

glancing at him; "but he does not believe it the least in the world."

"Is it true?" asked Leonora, innocently, looking up with an expression that did not escape Diana. It was a sort of frightened look, as though it really mattered to her what Batiscombe thought about women in general.

"It pleases Madame to be witty," answered Julius, glancing in his turn at Diana. "I have not many theories, but I believe in them as a man who is about to be guillotined believes in death."

"One cannot say more than that," laughed Leonora. "But how about the supremacy of men? There have been more men in the world who have ruled it than there have ever been women."

"*Mon Dieu!* Men give themselves much more trouble," he replied. "Women, having the divine right given to them straight from Heaven, exercise it without difficulty. A word, a cup of tea, a glance—and the supremacy of a woman is established. What could a man do with a cup of tea? Or, if he looked at people by the hour together, could he rule them with a

glance? When a woman has the gift she finds little difficulty in using it—whereas the more of it a man has, the more trouble it is to him. Men are so *bêtes!*" And with this sweeping condemnation of his own sex, Julius lit a cigarette, having obtained permission of the two ladies.

"You ought not to have many friends, with such ideas about men," said Leonora.

"*En effet*," said Diana, "he has none."

"Not among men, at all events," said Julius. "I do not remember ever having any. I do not sleep any the worse on that account, I assure you. It is much more agreeable to have a number of pleasant acquaintances, who expect nothing from you and from whom you expect nothing. Friendship implies mutual obligations, I detest that."

Leonora laughed a little. He had such a vicious way of saying such things, as though he thoroughly meant them. But then he was courteous and gentle to every one, though she suspected he might be different if he were angry. Diana knew very well that what he said was true, and that he had led an isolated

life among other men, fighting his way through with his own hand and owing no man anything. She herself had for years been his best friend and his only confidant, though he saw her rarely enough. And now she felt as though even that one bond of his were to be broken—and whether she would or not, the thought gave her pain, and she wished it could be otherwise.

"It is always far more amusing to detest things," said Leonora, "unless you happen to want them." She was forgetting some of her indifferentism.

"It is certainly more blessed to abuse than to be abused," returned Julius, "and, if one has the choice, it is as well to be the hammer and not the anvil. I am an excessively good-natured person, and if I had friends, they would make an anvil of me and beat my brains out —and then I should starve."

"Good-natured people are always made to suffer," said Leonora thoughtfully. "I am not in the least good-natured."

"I remember," said Diana, "that Mr. Batiscombe used to say good-nature was a mixture of laziness and vulgarity."

"Yes," answered Julius. "You have a good memory, Madame. Good-nature is a compound of the laziness that cannot say 'no,' and of the vulgarity which desires to please every one indiscriminately. I suppose I possess both those faults very finely developed."

"Fortunately," remarked Leonara, "goodness and good-nature are not the same."

"Fortunately for you, Marchesa—unfortunately for me," said Julius.

"It is too complicated—please explain," she answered.

"As you are so fortunate as to possess goodness without good-nature," said he, "you should be glad that the two are not one and the same—since good-nature is not a desirable quality. I am good-natured, but not good—I wish I were!"

"Ah, I see!" exclaimed Diana. "It was a compliment."

"Of course," said Julius.

"Of course; but your compliments are often complicated, as the Marchesa says." Diana smiled as she spoke. Batiscombe knew that she was repaying him for the remark he had

made when she had unexpectedly appeared twenty minutes earlier.

"I can only repeat," he retorted, "that Madame de Charleroi has a good memory." Leonora was puzzled. She saw well enough that Diana and Julius were, or had been, much more intimate than she had supposed. They understood each other at a glance, by a word, and they seemed on the verge of quarrelling politely over nothing. She devoutly wished that Diana would go away, instead of spoiling her afternoon. But Diana leaned back against the rock and crossed her feet and prepared to be comfortable. She was evidently not going. Batiscombe stood motionless with the easy stolidity of a very strong man who does not wish to move, and Leonora could see his bold profile against the gray haze of the sky. There was a short silence after his last remark, during which Leonora felt uneasy: something was in the atmosphere that made her anxious, and she did not like the way Diana looked at Batiscombe, with an air of absolute superiority, as though she could do anything she pleased with him.

"How dreadfully solemn we are," said

Leonora, rather awkwardly. Julius turned quickly with a laugh.

"Let us be gay," he said. "I hate solemnity, unless there is enough of it to make me laugh. I remember being at a ball once that produced that effect."

"*Allons!*" said Diana, "give us some of your reminiscences, Monsieur Batiscombe. They ought to be interesting."

"Not so much as you think, Vicomtesse. But the ball was very funny. It was in Guatemala three years ago. I was invited to a huge thing by the president—an entirely new president, too, who had just cut the throats of the old president and of all his relations. I believe there was some sort of revolution at the time, and when it was over the victorious individual gave a ball. The refreshments were simple—brandy for the men and rosolio for the ladies; there was no compromise in the shape of a biscuit or a glass of water."

Leonora laughed, being willing to laugh at anything so as to encourage Julius to talk.

"*En vérité,* that was very amusing," remarked Diana coldly. Batiscombe took no notice.

"The women sat round the room in a double row," he continued, "like a court ball, excepting that they all smoked large cigars, and industriously passed the liqueur. The men stood behind and gave their undivided attention to the brandy. Not a soul spoke, and they all scowled fiercely at the brandy, the rosolio, and each other. A ghastly and tuneless quartette of instruments doled out a melancholy dirge, slower than anything you ever heard at a funeral; and now and then some enterprising and funereal man led out a less enterprising but equally melancholy female in a strange step, like the tormented ghost of a waltz in chains. It was so hideous that I went out and laughed till I almost had a fit. I have never thought anything seemed very solemn since then—it destroyed the proportion in my brain. A pauper's burial on a rainy day in London is a wildly gay entertainment compared with that ball."

Leonora laughed, and even Diana smiled; whereupon Julius was satisfied, and relapsed into silence. But Leonora wanted conversation.

"What in the world took you to Guatemala, Mr. Batiscombe?" she asked.

"That is a question which I cannot answer, Marchesa," he replied. "I believe I went there for some reason or other—chiefly because I could go for nothing, and wanted to see something new."

"Can you always go to Guatemala for nothing?" asked Leonora. "It must be very amusing."

"A steamer company offered me a free passage to any port in their service," said Batiscombe; "and as the next ship went to Guatemala I sailed with her. It happened to be first on the list."

"What a queer idea!" exclaimed Leonora.

"You are too modest, Mr. Batiscombe," said Diana. "You ought to tell the whole story—it is very interesting." Her voice was less cold than when she spoke last.

"Oh, do tell the story!" cried Leonora. "I adore autobiographies!"

"*Mon Dieu!*" said Julius, "there is very little to tell. I did a service to a ship belonging to the company, and in acknowledgment they

presented me with a piece of plate and the free passage in question. *Voilà tout!* Madame is too good when she says it was interesting."

"If Monsieur Batiscombe will not be so obliging as to relate the experience, I will," said Diana. "He will correct me if I make a mistake."

Batiscombe looked annoyed. He was not fond of telling his own adventures, and he hated to hear them told by other people. He could not imagine why Diana wanted to hear the story. He was irritated already, and her conduct seemed more and more inexplicable. Leonora looked at him expectantly.

Who can understand a woman? It may be that Diana, who was really fond of him in a strange fashion, was sorry for the position she had taken that afternoon, and was willing to atone by giving him the credit before Leonora of some fine action he had done.

"It was three years ago or more, in the winter," began Diana. "Monsieur Batiscombe was travelling in a ship on the coast of America. There were a hundred passengers on board, or more, and a crew of thirty-five. Is that exact?"

Julius bent his head and turned away.

"*Eh bien,* there was a great storm—such as there are in the ocean. It is horrible, you may imagine. The ship was driven on the rocks, a long distance from the shore. A reef, you call it, *n'est ce pas?*"

"Yes," said Batiscombe. "Fifty or sixty yards from the shore."

"Good. What do they do? Six brave sailors volunteer to throw themselves in the sea in a chaloupe—a miserable boat——"

"And Monsieur was one of the volunteers——" exclaimed Leonora, enthusiastically.

"Not at all, my dear friend. The boat overturns. The sailors are immediately drowned. Every one is in consternation. Then Monsieur Batiscombe arrives; he says he will save everybody; he ties a thin line—a mere *ficelle*—to his waist; he throws himself to the sea. The passengers scream as they cling to the ropes and the side, while the vessel is beaten horribly on the reef. He struggles in the waves, swimming; he is thrown down again and again in the breakers; he rises and rushes on to the shore. Then he pulls the string, and

after the string a rope. A sailor ventures down and he also reaches the land. They fasten the rope, and every one is saved—passengers, crew, captain, *tout le monde*. Ah, Batiscombe, why are you not always doing such things—you, who can do them so well?"

Madame le Charleroi's grey eyes were wide and bright, and a very faint colour rose to her cheeks as she told the story. The calm, regal woman took a genuine delight in great actions, and as she turned to Julius at the end there was a ring of real sympathy and friendship and regret in her voice that it gave Leonora a strange sensation to hear.

"It was magnificently brave!" exclaimed Leonora in English, and she looked at Julius as though she admired him with all her heart and soul. She had always had a feeling that he had probably made himself remarkable in such ways, but he always had told her that his life had been uneventful. To think that this calm, smooth, well-dressed, fine gentleman should have saved a whole shipload of lives by sheer strength and courage! Ah, he was a man indeed!

But Batiscombe never moved. He stood looking seaward, his eyelids half closed and a thoughtful look on his brown face. Indeed he was thinking deeply, but not of the old story Diana had been telling as much as of herself. The strange appeal in her last words had touched the good chord in his wayward heart, and he was thinking how fair his life might have been with her—and how dark it had been without her. And the old true love rose up for one moment, hiding Leonora and the rest, and all the intervening years, and sending hot words to his ready lips. He turned in the act to speak, forgetting where he was—then checked himself. Both Leonora and Diana had seen that he was going to say something, for they were watching him. He hesitated.

"I ought to thank you, Madame," he said to Diana, "for gilding my adventure so richly. But as for the thing itself, and the doing of such things, the opportunity seldom offers, and the faculty for doing them is the result of an excellent digestion and quiet nerves. Meanwhile it is grown cooler and the boats are

below. Shall we go down and sail a little before dinner?"

The two ladies consented readily enough, and they all descended to the shore and got into one of the boats and pushed away.

"I shall have quite a new sensation in future when I sail with you, Mr. Batiscombe," said Leonora. "It would be impossible to be drowned with you on board."

But Diana was pale again, and settled herself among the cushions in silence.

Far up above, Marcantonio was interviewing the coachman on the terrace. He looked down and saw the boat shoot out with the three members of his household. He rubbed his hands smoothly together.

"Ha," he said to himself, "it is superb. What good friends they are all growing to be. *En vérité*, Batiscombe is a most amiable man, full of tact."

CHAPTER XIII.

LATE that evening Julius was sitting in a corner of the broad terrace over the sea. The clouds had cleared away before the light easterly breeze that springs up at night, and the stars shone brightly. Down in the west the young moon had set, and the air was fresh and cool after the long hot day. Julius had drawn an armchair away from the house and was smoking solemnly in enjoyment of the night. He found that he had much to think of. The rest of the household had gone to bed, or at all events had retired to their rooms.

It had been a day of emotions with him, and that was unusual, to begin with. His feeling for Leonora was growing to great proportions. He knew that very well; and in spite of the

momentary burst of passion, which, if he had been alone with Madame de Charleroi, would have found expression in words that he would have regretted and that she would have resented, he now felt that he was irritated against her and could not forgive the inopportune interruption of his *tête-à-tête* with Leonora. All his opposition was roused; and as if in despite of his old love he dwelt on the thoughts of the present, and delighted in recalling the details of the fair Marchesa's conversation, the quickly changing expression of her face, the tones of her voice, the grace of her movements. She was so strong and living that he felt his whole being permeated with the atmosphere and essence of her life.

As he leaned back in his chair, he experienced a sensation by no means new to him, of intense delight in existence, and he breathed in the soft fresh air, and tasted that it was the breath of love.

A small, short step sounded on the tiles of the terrace, coming toward his corner. He looked round quickly, and was aware of the tall and graceful figure of Diana de Charleroi

muffled in something dark, but unmistakable in its outline and stately presence. In a moment she was beside him; he rose and threw away his cigarette, somewhat astonished.

"Get another chair," said she, in a low voice. "It is pleasant here."

He obeyed quickly and noiselessly, as he did everything. She had taken his chair, and he sat down beside her, waiting for her to speak.

"I thought I should find you here, Julius," she said, calling him by his Christian name without the smallest hesitation. "I wanted to speak to you alone."

"You have the faculty of finding me," said Julius with a short, low laugh.

"Since when is it so disagreeable to you?" asked Diana.

Julius was silent, for there was nothing he could say. He wished he had said nothing at first—it would have been much better. Diana continued:

"You and I know each other well enough to talk freely," she said. "We need not beat about the bush and say pretty things to each other, and I forgive you for being rude, because I know you very well, and am willing to sacrifice

something. But I will not forgive you again if you are rude in public. There are certain things one does not permit one's self, when one is a gentleman."

"You are very good, Diana," said Batiscombe, humbly. "I am very sorry. I lost my temper."

"Naturally," she answered coolly. "You always lose your temper—you always did—and yet you fancy continually that you hide it. *Passe!* I have forgiven you for this time, because I am the best friend you have."

"The only one," said Julius.

"Perhaps. You are well hated, I can tell you. Then treat me as a friend in future, if you please, and not as an inquisitive acquaintance who makes a point of annoying you for her own ends." She spoke calmly, in a quiet, determined voice, without the slightest hesitation or affectation. Julius bent his head.

"I always mean to," he said.

"Now listen to me," she continued. "I came upon you this afternoon by pure accident. I do not owe you any apology for that, and you know very well that I am the last person in the world to do things in that way, by stealth.

That is the reason I come to you here, at night, to tell you my mind frankly."

"Yes," said Batiscombe, in a muffled voice. "I know."

"I came upon you by accident," said she, "and I made a discovery. You pass your afternoons in the society of my sister-in-law, and you lose your temper with me when I find you together—though you always wish me to understand that you prefer my society to that of any woman in the world."

"Ah—how you express it!" exclaimed Julius.

"I express it as plainly as I can. I cannot help it if you do not like it. It is all true. And the inference is perfectly clear. Do you see?"

"No," said Batiscombe.

"You do not? Very well, I will draw it for you." She leaned back in the chair and looked at him; her eyes were accustomed by this time to the gloom, and she could see him quite clearly in the starlight. He moved uneasily, and then fixed his eyes on hers. But she was not afraid of them as Leonora was, though he was near to her.

"Pray go on," he said.

"The inference is this. You are making love to Leonora Carantoni."

"You shall not say that," said Batiscombe, between his teeth, still looking fiercely at her.

"You might forbid a man to say it," answered Diana, in low, calm tones. "And for anything I care you may forbid any other woman in the world to say it. But you cannot forbid me. I have the right."

"In that case," said Julius, rising, and struggling to speak quietly, "there is nothing I can do but to leave you, since I will certainly not listen."

But Diana rose also, and laid her white hand on his arm, as though she could have bowed the strong man to the earth if she chose. She seemed taller than he in the power and determination of her gesture.

"Sit down instantly," she said, under her breath.

Julius obeyed silently and sullenly. Then Diana resumed her seat.

"I have the right, Julius," she continued, "not because you pretend to have loved me

for ten years—nor because I once thought I might accept your love—nor yet because I am sometimes weak enough to like you still, in a sisterly way. But I have the right because you are making love to my brother's wife, because she is young and innocent, and because there is not another human being in the world to stand by her, or to give her any protection in her danger."

"If you think that, why do you not tell your brother so?"

"Do you call yourself intelligent? Do you call yourself a gentleman?" exclaimed Diana, in bitter scorn. "Would you have me destroy the peace of my brother and of his wife, because you are doing a bad action, that has not yet borne fruit? Do you think I am afraid of you? Of *you?*" She repeated the word almost between her teeth.

"No," said Batiscombe, under his breath, "I do not. But I would like to ask you a question."

"I will answer," said Diana.

"Why did you tell that absurd story about me this afternoon? Did you not see it was just the very worst thing you could possibly

do, from your own point? That nothing rouses a woman's interest like such tales?"

"I promised to answer your question," said Diana, coldly, "and I will. I told the story thoughtlessly, because I am a woman, and admire such things quite independently of the person who has done them. Do not flatter yourself that a woman like Leonora Carantoni will fall in love with you because you are brave. But I daresay I did wrong, and I am sorry for it. You have qualities that any one may admire, but you have qualities that I despise."

"I despise them myself, sometimes," said Julius, almost to himself.

"Despise them always—at least, and be consistent," answered Diana. "But you will not. You like them, those bad qualities, and when you like them they make a miserable wretch of you, as they do now. You know well enough, however cleverly you may deceive yourself, that you ought not to be here. You stay—you are a coward, besides being a great many worse things which I leave you to understand."

Batiscombe's eyes flashed angrily in the starlight.

"You are cruel, Diana, and unkind," he said.

Diana was silent a moment, and she drew her dark lace shawl about her, as though she were cold. When she spoke, her voice was infinitely soft and gentle.

"Do not say that, Julius. Do not say I am ever cruel to you—for to you, of all people in the world, I would be most kind."

Julius bent down and pressed his hands to his temples, and sighed bitterly.

"Oh, Diana," he groaned, "I know it, I know it."

"Then I will not say any more. Do this thing because it is right—not because I ask you to. Have I ever reproached you before, when you have come to me of your own accord and told me your troubles? What right have I to reproach you?"

Julius was silent. He knew in his heart that she had the right, because he still loved her best. He sat immovable, his head buried in his hands. Diana rose and stood beside him; she lightly laid her hand upon his

shoulder, allowing it to linger kindly for a moment, and then she turned and moved away.

The spell was broken, and Batiscombe rose swiftly and followed her. There was a light in the drawing-room that opened upon the terrace which Batiscombe had not noticed before. As they entered they found Marcantonio with a candle, overturning books and papers as if in search of something. He looked up with a curious expression of surprise in his face, holding the candle before him.

"Ah!" he cried, "*bon soir*, my friends. You have been taking a little air, *n'est-ce-pas?* I imagined that you were all asleep."

Madame de Charleroi smiled serenely at her brother. She knew it was an accident, and that he had a habit of forgetting things and coming to look for them. She said it had been hot all day, and she and Monsieur Batiscombe had been enjoying the coolness of the terrace. Julius bowed blandly and said good-night. But he suspected Marcantonio of having come to watch his sister. They passed on, and Marcantonio stood for a moment

looking after them as they went out into the hall, where lights were still burning. He shrugged his shoulders.

"Eh!" he exclaimed aloud to himself, in Italian, "I do not understand anything about it—*ma proprio niente.*" And he continued his search for the missing letter, pondering deeply.

Batiscombe spent a sleepless night, which was very unusual with him. The interview with Diana had made a deep impression on him at the time. He knew that whenever she was at hand to exert her influence he would succumb to it. But as the night wore on, the strength of the impression diminished, and the old feeling of obstinate defiance gradually returned. At all events, he thought, he would show her that her suspicions were empty, and that nothing—no harm, at least—would come, of his intimacy with Leonora. He would also be sure that if Diana interrupted another *tête-à-tête* it could hardly be by accident. Such accidents did not occur every day. In the early dawn he rose and went down in his slippers to the sea, and bathed in the cool

salt water, and smoked a cigarette on the rocks, and another in the archway where the scene of the previous afternoon had occurred. Then he went up to the house and walked round it, and surveyed the various angles, and terraces, and balconies, and eccentricities of patchwork architecture that made up the dwelling. Suddenly he stopped as though an idea had struck him.

Houses in the south have often as many as five or six broad terraces, of various sizes and at various elevations, built from time to time to suit the taste and convenience of the owners. The strong brown vines grow up leafless from the ground till they reach the trellis, and then spread out into luxuriant foliage and a multiplicity of rich fruit-bearing branches, making a thick shade, into which even the noonday sun finds it hard to penetrate. Julius had just observed that there was a large terrace of this kind which he had not yet noticed, having been but a very few days at liberty to wander alone about the place. It was as high as the first floor, and on the side toward Castellamare, facing the sea. He had been in Marc-

antonio's room, and knew that it did not open upon this terrace, and Leonora's apartment was on the other side of the house. Obviously this balcony belonged to Madame de Charleroi's rooms, or was attached to some vacant part of the building. It struck him that if it were vacant, it would be a very agreeable spot in which to pass the afternoon. He thought he would mention it to Leonora that morning, and find out if it were available, since their retreat in the rocks had been invaded. It had the advantage of being large, so that people seated upon it could not be seen from below, and the thick vines would prevent their being seen from above.

He spoke to the Marchesa about it as soon as they were alone for a moment after breakfast. She went quietly and surveyed the place, ascertained that it corresponded with a set of rooms that were not in use, the house being very large and irregular, and agreed that she would spend the afternoon there with Julius, since the sun would then be on the other side. There were long window-doors opening to the ground, of which the blinds

were fastened, and only the middle one was left open to give access to the terrace. It was delightful, because it was in the house, so to say, and open to every one, and yet no one knew of it. Why should they not sit there? It was much better than going and hiding in the rocks with an air of secrecy, in order to be annoyed by that terrible Diana! Much better! Though, after all, they need not have troubled themselves, for Diana went out at three o'clock in the carriage to pay a visit.

Accordingly, Leonora and Julius passed a very pleasant afternoon together, and when it was late they found Marcantonio, and made him go out in the boat for an hour or two, and everything was very agreeable. Marcantonio was greatly relieved at finding that his sister was away from Batiscombe, and he talked his best, and really made Leonora take an interest in his conversation. She could always find him better company when she had been with Julius for some time and had said all the things she wanted to say, and which Marcantonio would not have understood.

The next day Marcantonio was obliged to

go to Naples on very urgent business. An ex-royalty who sympathised with Carantoni's party, and was now in exile, had come to Naples for a day or two *incognito*—quite as though he had never been a royalty at all, and Marcantonio felt it his duty to go and salute the august personage according to ancient custom. He therefore left the house at an early hour, to return at dusk. He thought his sister and his wife could chaperone each other for a day without danger. But he said to himself that if he had found Diana alone with Batiscombe again he would not have gone.

The morning passed away as usual. Batiscombe, relying on the afternoon for his hours with Leonora, only stayed down stairs till she was joined by Diana, and then retired to his room, where he wrote or read in solitude, as the fancy took him. The three breakfasted together at one o'clock; then Madame de Charleroi retired to her rooms, and in the course of a quarter of an hour Leonora and Julius were installed for the afternoon in their newly-found situation on the disused terrace.

Diana's boudoir was a corner room in the front of the house, facing the sea, and opening, by one window, on a narrow stone balcony running the whole length of the building; the other window was on the right side, and if she could have undone the blinds she would have seen that it opened upon the large terrace already mentioned. But the aforesaid blinds had resisted her efforts, and, as she supposed that they were closed for some purpose, she said nothing about it, merely opening the glass to admit the air. Leonora, who did not know the house thoroughly, and had a habit of leaving everything to the servants, was not aware of this, and did not realise the exact position of Diana's sitting-room. Batiscombe, of course, had taken her assurance that this side of the house was uninhabited. Accordingly, it came to pass that when he and Leonora installed themselves they took up their position immediately outside Diana's window, under the shadow of the wall.

Madame de Charleroi, on this particular day, did not go into her boudoir at once, but spent some time in her bedroom. When she was

ready to begin writing, she passed through the door and sat at her desk. She at once heard the sound of voices outside, but she did not listen, nor stop to think who the talkers might be.

Presently, however, the continued sound annoyed her, forced its way through the blinds, and prevented her from writing. They were speaking English. She understood the language, being a cultivated woman of the world and the wife of a diplomatist, though she avoided speaking it.

The strong, earnest voice of Julius Batiscombe—the pleading, protesting, yet yielding tones of Leonora, always dominated by the passionate eloquence of the man, and ever answering more weakly—all this she heard, and she sat stony and wild-eyed with horror, realising in a moment the whole hideous proportions of the phrases.

Diana de Charleroi was the noblest and most honourable of women. Under other circumstances, if the voices had been those of strangers or indifferent people, she would not have hesitated an instant, but would have given some

unmistakable sign of her presence. But this thing was too near her, it was a too horrible realisation of what she had dimly foreseen as possible, when she had spoken such strong words two nights before.

It was too utterly and unspeakably awful. Her brother's wife—not three months married—and Julius Batiscombe, the man who had for ten years loved herself—or had made her believe it—whom she herself had once loved, and had never forgotten!

But Diana was no weak woman, to give way to trouble or danger in the face of it. For a few minutes she bowed her head in her hands, trembling from head to foot, and no longer hearing the quickly spoken words outside. Then she rose to her feet and made one step toward the closed blinds.

No, she would not put them to open shame. Yet something must be done at once. With one turn of her strong white fingers she overturned the heavy olive-wood writing-table upon the smooth tile floor with a crash that sounded through the house. In the silence that followed, she heard a moving of chairs outside,

and the quick tread of departing feet. Then she went swiftly to her room, heedless of the streaming ink upon the floor, that stained her long white gown, and trampling the litter of pens and paper under foot. She threw herself upon her bed and lay quite still, white as death, and staring at the ceiling.

All the disgrace to her brother's name—to her own—came suddenly upon her, like a nightmare, a thing that no waking could cast off. All the utter baseness and unfaithfulness of her old lover was before her, making her scorn and loathe herself for ever having loved such a man, even in the foolish haste of a romantic girlhood. Her eyes strained wildly, striving to shed tears, and could not, and the whole possible pain of human agony, passing the very pains of hell, got hold upon her soul.

That night, at dinner, Leonora looked desperately ill. Her face was white, save for a small red flush upon each cheek, and her eyes had a strange, furtive look about them, avoiding all meeting with the look of the other three persons at table. She said she had been in the sun, had got a bad headache, and would

go to bed immediately. She had only insisted on being at dinner in order to greet her husband on his return from Naples—but when he touched her she shrank away, and said she was nervous.

Batiscombe was pale, too, beneath his tan, and though he looked every one in the face, his eyes were disagreeable to see, having an angry glare in them, like those of a wild beast at bay. He spoke little and drank more wine than usual, after the manner of Englishmen when they are unhappy.

Diana was magnificent. Being often pale in the summer, no one saw any especial change in her appearance, and she threw herself nobly into the breach, asking all manner of questions of her brother concerning his trip, and showing a reasonable amount of sympathy for Leonora. The consequence was that Marcantonio was nearly satisfied, in spite of the strong impression he at first received that something unpleasant had occurred in his absence. But when he had an idea he dwelt upon it, and he promised himself that he would ask many questions of his sister when Leonora had gone to bed.

He accompanied his wife to her apartment when dinner was over, with a solicitude which was perfectly genuine, but which made her tremble at every turn. His careful anxiety lest she should over-tire herself upon the stairs, lest there should be a draught in her room, or, in short, lest anything should be omitted which could conduce to her immediate recovery from the exposure to the sun—so dangerous in the south, he kept repeating—made her almost certain that she was already suspected, and that so much kindness was only preparatory to some dreadful outbreak of reproach.

While Marcantonio was gone, Diana led Batiscombe out through the drawing-room to the terrace. Neither spoke till they had reached the end away from the house, where they had sat together two nights before.

"Julius Batiscombe," said Diana, her voice trembling with strongly-mastered anger, "you will leave this house immediately."

"Why, if you please?" he asked, defiantly.

"You know very well why," she answered, turning full upon him. "Do not ask questions, but go."

"I will do nothing of the kind," said he, folding his arms and facing her. "You have no earthly reason to give, save your own caprice."

"I heard your conversation this afternoon outside my window. It was I who made the noise you heard, to warn you to be silent." She made the statement deliberately, choking down her anger, and looking him in the eyes.

"I heard no noise—I was not outside your window," answered Julius, telling the boldest lie of his life, and, to say the truth, one of very few, for he never lied to save himself, with all his faults. "I was not outside your window," he repeated, "and I am glad I was not. For, by your own account, you heard the conversation first, and gave your signal afterwards."

"Very well," said she. "I will not shame you by repeating the words I involuntarily heard before I frightened you away. But you will leave this house to-morrow all the same. You will also consider yourself in future as having no title to cross my threshold, or to bow to me in the street." She turned swiftly,

in utter scorn and disdain. Batiscombe followed her to the door and into the drawing-room, where Marcantonio met them, precisely as he had done before. It was too much for his newly-roused suspicions. Something had gone wrong, he was sure—and why should his sister and Batiscombe be everlastingly alone together on that terrace at night?

"Ah!" he exclaimed, a little sarcastically, "you have again been taking a little air? *Et bien, oui!* the evenings are very agreeable. If you will, we can sit outside, and Monsieur and I will smoke a cigarette."

It was dreary enough, sitting together for an hour and more in the dark. Madame de Charleroi would not speak to Batiscombe, and he confined himself to asking questions of Marcantonio and to general remarks. Marcantonio saw this, and decided that she was playing indifference in public, because she saw enough of Batiscombe in private. The latter did not force the position, but as soon as Donna Diana moved to go in, he bade them both good-night, and went to his room and to his reflections.

There was a long silence after he was gone. Both the brother and sister wanted to be sure that he was out of hearing. Diana spoke first, very gently and kindly.

"Marcantonio," she said, "I have something very important to say to you."

She threw a light paper shade over the bright lamp, and sat herself down beside him on the sofa.

END OF VOL I.

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