

THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK OF THE INEVITABLE, BY LOUIS COUPERUS

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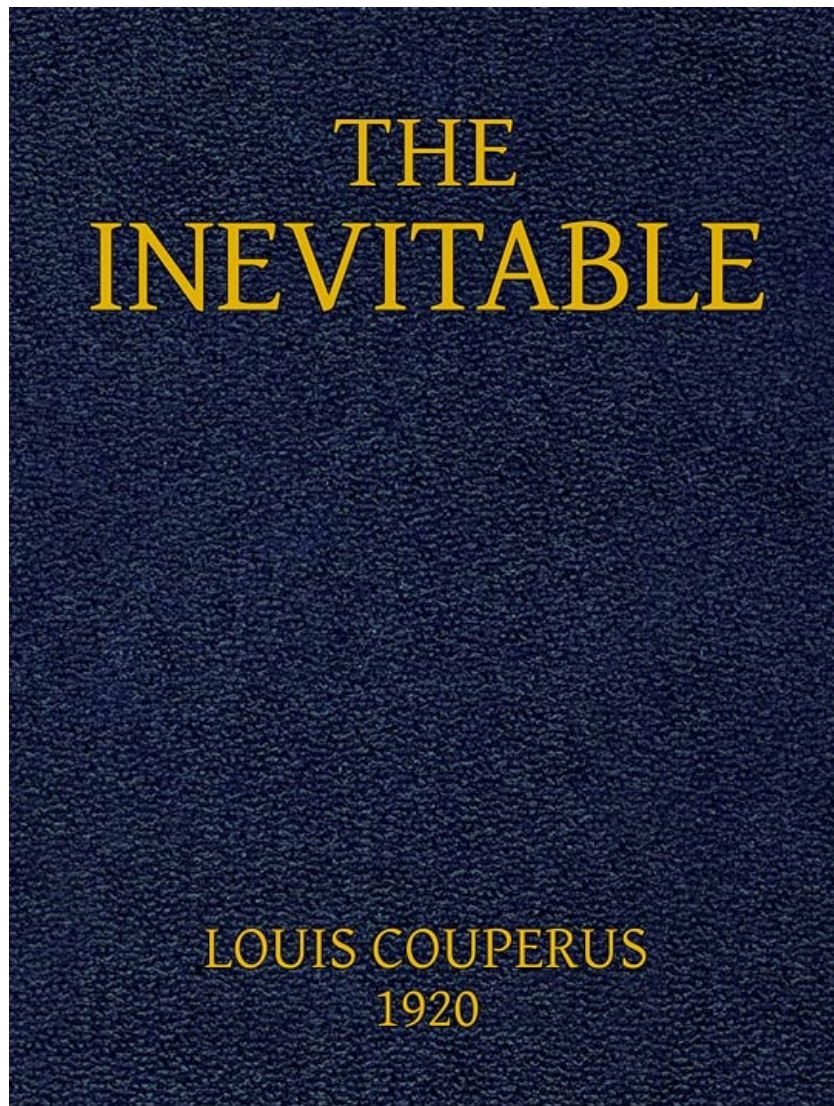
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THE INEVITABLE

THE WORKS OF LOUIS COUPERUS

Translated by ALEXANDER TEIXEIRA DE MATTOS

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THE INEVITABLE

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BY

LOUIS COUPERUS

TRANSLATED BY

ALEXANDER TEIXEIRA *DE* MATTOS

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THE INEVITABLE

CHAPTER I

The Marchesa Belloni's boarding-house was situated in one of the healthiest, if not one of the most romantic quarters of Rome. One half of the house had formed part of a *villino* of the old Ludovisi Gardens, those beautiful old gardens regretted by everybody who knew them before the new barrack-quarters were built on the site of the old Roman park, with its border of villas. The entrance to the *pension* was in the Via Lombardia. The older or *villino* portion of the house retained a certain antique charm for the marchesa's boarders, while the new premises built on to it offered the advantages of spacious rooms, modern sanitation and electric light. The *pension* boasted a certain reputation for comfort, cheapness and a pleasant situation: it stood at a few minutes' walk from the Pincio, on high ground, and there was no need to fear malaria; and the price charged for a long stay, amounting to hardly more than eight lire, was exceptionally low for Rome, which was known to be more expensive than any other town in Italy. The boarding-house therefore was generally full. The visitors began to arrive as soon as October: those who came earliest in the season paid least; and, with the exception of a few hurrying tourists, they nearly all remained until Easter, going southward to Naples after the great church festivals.

Some English travelling-acquaintances had strongly recommended the *pension* to Cornélie de Retz van Loo, who was travelling in Italy by herself; and she had written to the Marchesa Belloni from Florence. It was her first visit to Italy; it was the first time that she had alighted at the great cavernous station near the Baths of Diocletian; and, standing in the square, in the golden Roman sunlight, while the great fountain of the Acqua Marcia gushed and rippled and the cab-drivers clicked with their whips and their tongues to attract her attention, she was conscious of her "nice Italian sensation," as she called it, and felt glad to be in Rome. [2]

She saw a little old man limping towards her with the instinct of a veteran porter who recognizes his travellers at once; and she read "Hotel Belloni" on his cap and beckoned to him with a smile. He saluted her with respectful familiarity, as though she were an old acquaintance and he glad to see her; asked if she had had a pleasant journey, if she was not over-tired; led her to the victoria; put in her rug and her hand-bag; asked for the tickets of her trunks; and said that she had better go on ahead: he would follow in ten minutes with the luggage. She received an impression of cosiness, of being well cared for by the little old lame man; and she gave him a friendly nod as the coachman drove away. She felt happy and careless, though she had just the faintest foreboding of something unhappy and unknown that was going to happen to her; and she looked to right and left to take in the streets of Rome. But she saw only houses upon houses, like so many barracks; then a great white palace, the new Palazzo Piombino, which she knew to contain the Juno Ludovisi; and then the *vettura* stopped and a boy in buttons came out to meet her. He showed her into the drawing-room, a gloomy apartment, in the middle of which was a table covered with periodicals, arranged in a regular and unbroken circle. Two ladies, obviously English and of the æsthetic type, with loose-fitting blouses and grimy hair, sat in a corner studying their Baedekers before going out. Cornélie bowed slightly, but received no bow in return; she did not take offence, being familiar with the manners of the travelling Briton. She sat down at the table and took up the Roman *Herald*, the paper which appears once a fortnight and tells you what there is to do in Rome during the next two weeks. [3]

Thereupon one of the ladies asked her, from the corner, in an aggressive tone:

"I beg your pardon, but would you please not take the *Herald* to your room?"

Cornélie raised her head very haughtily and languidly in the direction where the ladies were sitting, looked vaguely above their grimy heads, said nothing and glanced down at the *Herald* again; and she thought herself a very experienced traveller and smiled inwardly because she knew how to deal with that type of Englishwoman.

The marchesa entered and welcomed Cornélie in Italian and in French. She was a large, fat matron, vulgarly fat; her ample bosom was contained in a silk cuirass or spencer, shiny at the seams and bursting under the arms; her grey frizzled hair gave her a somewhat leonine appearance; her great yellow and blue eyes, with bistre shadows beneath them, wore a strained expression, the pupils unnaturally dilated by belladonna; a pair of immense crystals sparkled in her ears; and her fat,

greasy fingers were covered with nameless jewels. She talked very fast; and Cornélie thought her sentences as pleasant and homely as the welcome of the lame porter in the square outside the station. The marchesa led her to the lift and stepped in with her; the hydraulic lift, a railed-in cage, running up the well of the staircase, rose solemnly and suddenly stopped, motionless, between the second and the third floor.

[4]

“Third floor!” cried the marchesa to some one below.

“*Non c’è acqua!*” the boy in buttons calmly called back, meaning thereby to convey that—as seemed natural—there was not enough water to move the lift.

The marchesa screamed out some orders in a shrill voice; two *facchini* came running up and hung on to the cable of the lift, together with the ostensibly zealous boy in buttons; and by fits and starts the cage rose higher and higher, until at last it almost reached the third storey.

“A little higher!” ordered the marchesa.

But the *facchini* strained their muscles in vain: the lift refused to stir.

“We can manage!” said the marchesa. “Wait a bit.”

Taking a great stride, which revealed the enormous white-stockinged calf of her leg, she stepped on to the floor, smiled and gave her hand to Cornélie, who imitated her gymnastics.

“Here we are!” sighed the marchesa, with a smile of satisfaction. “This is your room.”

She opened a door and showed Cornélie a room. Though the sun was shining brightly out of doors, the room was as damp and chilly as a cellar.

“Marchesa,” Cornélie said, without hesitation, “I wrote to you for two rooms facing south.”

“Did you?” asked the marchesa, plausibly and ingenuously. “I really didn’t remember. Yes, that is one of those foreigners’ ideas: rooms facing south.... This is really a beautiful room.”

“I’m sorry, but I can’t accept this room, marchesa.”

La Belloni grumbled a bit, went down the corridor and opened the door of another room:

[5]

“And this one, signora?... How do you like this?”

“Is it south?”

“Almost”

“I want it full south.”

“This looks west: you see the most splendid sunsets from your window.”

“I absolutely must have a south room, marchesa.”

“I also have the most charming little apartments looking east: you get the most picturesque sunrises there.”

“No, marchesa.”

“Don’t you appreciate the beauties of nature?”

“Just a little, but I put my health first.”

“I sleep in a north room myself.”

“You are an Italian, marchesa, and you’re used to it.”

“I’m very sorry, but I have no rooms facing south.”

“Then I’m sorry too, marchesa, but I must look out somewhere else.”

Cornélie turned as though to go away. The choice of a room sometimes means the choice of a life.

The marchesa caught hold of her hand and smiled. She had abandoned her cool tone and her voice was all honey:

"*Davvero*, that's one of those foreigners' ideas: rooms facing south! But I have two little kennels left. Here...."

And she quickly opened two doors, two snug little cupboards of rooms, which showed through the open windows a lofty and spacious view of the sky, outspread above the streets and roofs below, with the blue dome of St. Peter's in the distance.

[6]

"These are the only rooms I have left facing south," said the marchesa, plaintively.

"I shall be glad to have these, marchesa."

"Sixteen lire," smiled la Belloni.

"Ten, as you wrote."

"I could put two persons in here."

"I shall stay all the winter, if I am satisfied."

"You must have your way!" the marchesa exclaimed, suddenly, in her sweetest voice, a voice of graceful surrender. "You shall have the rooms for twelve lire. Don't let us discuss it any more. The rooms are yours. You are Dutch, are you not? We have a Dutch family staying here: a mother with two daughters and a son. Would you like to sit next to them at table?"

"No, I'd rather you put me somewhere else; I don't care for my fellow-countrymen when travelling."

The marchesa left Cornélie to herself. She looked out of the window, absent-mindedly, glad to be in Rome, yet faintly conscious of the something unhappy and unknown that was going to happen. There was a tap at her door; the men carried in her luggage. She saw that it was eleven o'clock and began to unpack. One of her rooms was a small sitting-room, like a bird-cage in the air, looking out over Rome. She altered the position of the furniture, draped the faded sofa with a shawl from the Abruzzi and fixed a few portraits and photographs with drawing-pins to the wall, whose white-washed surface was broken up by rudely-painted arabesques. And she smiled at the border of purple hearts transfixed by arrows, which surrounded the decorated panels of the wall.

After an hour's work her sitting-room was settled: she had a home of her own, with a few of her own shawls and rugs, a screen here, a little table there, cushions on the sofa, books within easy reach. When she had finished and had sat down and looked around her, she suddenly felt very lonely. She began to think of the Hague and of what she had left behind her. But she did not want to think and picked up her Baedeker and read about the Vatican. She was unable to concentrate her thoughts and turned to Hare's *Walks in Rome*. A bell sounded. She was tired and her nerves were on edge. She looked in the glass, saw that her hair was out of curl, her blouse soiled with coal and dust, unlocked a second trunk and changed her things. She cried and sobbed while she was curling her hair. The second bell rang; and, after powdering her face, she went downstairs.

[7]

She expected to be late, but there was no one in the dining-room and she had to wait before she was served. She resolved not to come down so very punctually in future. A few boarders looked in through the open door, saw that there was no one sitting at table yet, except a new lady, and disappeared again.

Cornélie looked around her and waited.

The dining-room was the original dining-room of the old villa, with a ceiling by Guercina. The waiters loitered about. An old grey major-domo cast a distant glance over the table, to see if everything was in order. He grew impatient when nobody came and told them to serve the macaroni to Cornélie. It struck Cornélie that he too limped with one leg, like the porter. But the waiters were very young, hardly more than sixteen to eighteen, and lacked the waiter's usual self-possession.

A stout gentleman, vivacious, consequential, pock-marked, ill-shaven, in a shabby black coat which showed but little linen, entered, rubbing his hands, and took his seat, opposite Cornélie.

[8]

He bowed politely and began to eat his macaroni.

And this seemed to be the signal for the others to begin eating, for a number of boarders, mostly ladies, now came in, sat down and helped themselves to the macaroni, which was handed round by the youthful waiters under the watchful eye of the grey-haired major-domo. Cornélie smiled at the oddity of these travelling types; and, when she involuntarily glanced at the pock-marked gentleman

opposite, she saw that he too was smiling.

He hurriedly mopped up his tomato-sauce with his bread, bent a little way across the table and almost whispered, in French:

"It's amusing, isn't it?"

Cornélie raised her eyebrows:

"What do you mean?"

"A cosmopolitan company like this."

"Oh, yes!"

"You are Dutch?"

"How do you know?"

"I saw your name in the visitors' book, with '*la Haye*' after it."

"I am Dutch, yes."

"There are some more Dutch ladies here, sitting over there: they are charming."

Cornélie asked the major-domo for some *vin ordinaire*.

"That wine is no good," said the stout gentleman, vivaciously. "This is Genzano," pointing to his *fiasco*. "I pay a small corkage and drink my own wine."

The major-domo put a pint bottle in front of Cornélie: it was included in her *pension* without extra charge.

"If you like, I will give you the address where I get my wine. Via della Croce, 61."

Cornélie thanked him. The pock-marked gentleman's uncommon ease and vivacity diverted her.

"You're looking at the major-domo?" he asked.

"You are a keen observer," she smiled in reply.

"He's a type, our major-domo, Giuseppe. He used to be major-domo in the palace of an Austrian archduke. He did I don't know what. Stole something, perhaps. Or was impertinent. Or dropped a spoon on the floor. He has come down in the world. Now you behold him in the Pension Belloni. But the dignity of the man!"

He leant forward:

"The marchesa is economical. All the servants here are either old or very young. It's cheaper."

He bowed to two German ladies, a mother and daughter, who had come in and sat down beside him:

"I have the permit which I promised you, to see the Palazzo Rospigliosi and Guido Reni's *Aurora*" he said, speaking in German.

"Is the prince back then?"

"No, the prince is in Paris. The palace is not open to visitors, except yourselves."

This was said with a gallant bow.

The German ladies exclaimed how kind he was, how he was able to do anything, to find a way out of every difficulty. They had taken endless trouble to bribe the Rospigliosi porter and they had not succeeded.

A little thin Englishwoman had taken her seat beside Cornélie.

"And for you, Miss Taylor, I have a card for a low mass in His Holiness' private chapel."

Miss Taylor was radiant with delight.

"Have you been sight-seeing again?" the pock-marked gentleman continued.

"Yes, Museo Kircheriano," said Miss Taylor. "But I am tired out. It was most exquisite."

"My prescription, Miss Taylor, is that you stay at home this afternoon and rest."

"I have an engagement to go to the Aventino...."

"You mustn't. You're tired. You look worse every day and you're losing flesh. You must rest, or you sha'n't have the card for the low mass."

The German ladies laughed. Miss Taylor, flattered, in an ecstasy of delight, gave her promise. She looked at the pock-marked gentleman as though she expected to hear the judgement of Solomon fall from his lips.

Lunch was over: the rump-steak, the pudding, the dried figs. Cornélie rose:

"May I give you a glass out of my bottle?" asked the stout gentleman. "Do taste my wine and tell me if you like it. If so, I'll order a *fiasco* for you in the Via della Croce."

Cornélie did not like to refuse. She sipped the wine. It was deliciously pure. She thought that it would be a good thing to drink a pure wine in Rome; and, as she reflected, the stout gentleman seemed to read her quick thought:

"It is a good thing," he said, "to drink a strengthening wine while you are in Rome, where life is so tiring."

Cornélie agreed.

"This is Genzano, at two lire seventy-five the *fiasco*. It will last you a long time: the wine keeps. So I'll order you a *fiasco*."

He bowed to the ladies around and left the room.

The German ladies bowed to Cornélie.

"Such an amiable man, that Mr. Rudyard."

"What can he be?" Cornélie wondered. "French, German, English, American?"

[11]

CHAPTER II

She had hired a victoria after lunch and had driven through Rome, to make her first acquaintance with the city for which she had longed so eagerly. This first impression was a great disappointment. Her unspoiled imagination, her reading, even the photographs which she had bought in Florence and studied with the affection of an inexperienced tourist had given her the illusion of a city of an ideal antiquity, an ideal Renaissance; and she had forgotten that, especially in Rome, life has progressed pitilessly and that the ages are not visible, in buildings and ruins, as distinct periods, but that each period is closely connected with the next by the passing days and years.

Thus she had thought the dome of St. Peter's small, the Corso narrow and Trajan's Column a column like any other; she had not noticed the Forum as she drove past it; and she had been unable to think of a single emperor when she was at the Palatine.

Now she was home again, tired, and was resting a little and meditating; she felt depressed, yet she enjoyed her vague reflections and the silence about her in the big house, to which most of the boarders had not yet returned. She thought of the Hague, of her big family, her father, mother, brothers and sisters, to whom she had said good-bye for a long time to go abroad. Her father, a retired colonel of hussars living on his pension, with no great private means, had been unable to contribute anything to the fulfilment of her caprice, as he called it; and she would not have been able to satisfy that caprice, of beginning a new life, but for a small legacy which she had inherited some years ago from a godmother. She was glad to be more or less independent, though she felt the selfishness of her independence.

[12]

But what could she have done for her family-circle, after the scandal of her divorce? She was weak and selfish, she knew it; but she had received a blow under which she had at first expected to succumb. And, when she found herself surviving it, she had mustered such energy as she possessed and said to herself that she could not go on existing in that same narrow circle of her sisters and her girl friends; and she had forced her life into a different path. She had always had the

knack of creating an apparently new frock out of an old dress, transforming a last year's hat into one of the latest fashion. Even so she had now done with her distraught and wretched life, all battered and broken as it was: she had gathered together, as in a fit of economy, all that was left, all that was still serviceable; and out of those remnants she had made herself a new existence. But this new life was unable to breathe in the old atmosphere: it felt aimless in it and estranged; and she had managed to force it into a different path, in spite of all the opposition of her family and friends. Perhaps she would not have succeeded so readily if she had not been so completely shattered. Perhaps she would not have felt this energy if she had suffered only a little. She had her strength and she had her weakness; she was very simple and yet she was very various; and it was perhaps just this complexity that had been the saving of her youth.

Besides, she was actually very young, only twenty-three; and in youth one possesses an unconscious vitality, notwithstanding any apparent weakness. And her contradictory qualities gave her equilibrium and saved her from falling over into the abyss....

[13]

All this passed vaguely through her mind as clouds pass before the eyes, not with the conciseness of words but with the misty indefiniteness of a dreamy fatigue. As she lay there, she did not look as if she had ever exerted the strength to give a new path to her life: a pale, delicate woman, slender, with drooping movements, lying on a sofa in her not very fresh dressing-gown, with its faded pink and its rumpled lace. And yet there was a certain poetical fragrance about her personality, despite her weary eyes and the limp outlines of her attire, despite the boarding-house room, with its air of quickly improvised comfort, a comfort which was a matter of tact rather than reality and could be packed away in a single trunk. Her frail figure, her pale and delicate rather than beautiful features were surrounded, as by an aura, by that atmosphere of personal poetry which she unconsciously radiated, which she shed from her eyes upon the things which she beheld, from her fingers upon the things which she touched. To those who did not like her, this peculiar atmosphere, this unusualness, this eccentricity, this unlikeness to the typical young woman of the Hague, was the very thing with which they reproached her. To those who liked her, it was partly talent, partly soul; something peculiar to her which seemed almost genius; yet it was perturbing. It invested her with a great charm; it gave pause for thought and it promised much: more, perhaps, than could be realized. And this woman was the child of her time but especially of her environment and therefore so unfinished, revealing disparity against disparity, in an equilibrium of opposing forces, which might be her undoing or her salvation, but were in either case her fate.

[14]

She felt lonely in Italy. She had stayed for weeks at Florence, where she tried to lead a full life, enriched by art and history. There, it was true, she forgot herself to a great extent, but she still felt lonely. She had spent a fortnight at Siena, but Siena had depressed her, with its sombre streets, its dead palaces; and she had yearned for Rome. But she had not found Rome yet that afternoon. And, though she felt tired, she felt above all things lonely, terribly lonely and useless in a great world, in a great town, a town in which one feels the greatness, uselessness and vast antiquity of things more perhaps than anywhere else. She felt like a little atom of suffering, like an insect, an ant, half-trodden, half-crushed, among the immense domes of Rome, of whose presence out of doors she was subtly conscious.

And her hand wandered vacantly over her books, which she had stacked punctiliously and conscientiously on a little table: some translations of the classics, Ovid, Tacitus, together with Dante, Petrarch, Tasso. It was growing dusk in her room, there was no light to read by, she was too much enervated to ring for a lamp; a chilliness hovered in her little room, now that the sun had quite gone down, and she had forgotten to ask for a fire on that first day. Loneliness was all about her, her suffering pained her; her soul craved for a fellow-soul, but her mouth craved for a kiss, her arms for *him*, once her husband; and, turning on her cushions and wringing her hands, she prayed deep down in herself:

"O God, tell me what to do!"

[15]

CHAPTER III

At dinner there was a buzz of voices; the three or four long tables were all full; the marchesa sat at the head of the centre table. Now and then she beckoned impatiently to Giuseppe, the old major-domo, who had dropped a spoon at an

archducal court; and the unfledged little waiters rushed about breathlessly. Cornélie found the obliging stout gentleman, whom the German ladies called Mr. Rudyard, sitting opposite her and her *fiasco* of Genzano beside her plate. She thanked Mr. Rudyard with a smile and made the usual remarks: how she had been for a drive that afternoon and had made her first acquaintance with Rome, the Forum, the Pincio. She talked to the German ladies and to the English one, who was always so tired with her sight-seeing; and the Germans, a *Baronin* and the *Baronesse* her daughter, laughed with her at the two æsthetes whom Cornélie had come upon that morning in the drawing-room. The two were sitting some distance away, lank and angular, grimy-haired, in curiously cut evening-dress, which showed the breast and arms warmly covered with a Jaeger undervest, on which, in their turn, lay strings of large blue beads. Their eyes browsed over the long table, as though they were pitying everybody who had come to Rome to learn about art, because they two alone knew what art was. While eating, which they did unpleasantly, almost with their fingers, they read æsthetic books, wrinkling their brows and now and then looking up angrily, because the people about them were talking. With their self-conceit, their impossible manners, their worse than tasteless dress and their great air of superiority, they represented types of travelling Englishwomen that are never met except in Italy. They were unanimously criticized at the table. They came to the Pension Belloni every winter and made drawings in water-colours in the Forum or the Via Appia. And they were so remarkable in their unprecedented originality, in their grimy angularity, with their evening-dresses, their Jaegers, their strings of blue beads, their æsthetic books and their meat-picking fingers, that all eyes were constantly wandering in their direction, as though under the influence of a Medusa spell.

[16]

The young baroness, a type out of the *Fliegende Blätter*, witty and quick, with her little round, German face and arched, pencilled eyebrows, was laughing with Cornélie and showing her a thumb-nail caricature which she had made of the two æsthetic ladies in her sketch-book, when Giuseppe conducted a young lady to the end of the table where Cornélie and Rudyard sat opposite each other. She had evidently just arrived, said "Evening" to everybody near her and sat down with a great rustling. It was at once apparent that she was an American, almost too good-looking, too young, to be travelling alone like that, with a smiling self-possession, as if she were at home: a very white complexion, very fine dark eyes, teeth like a dentist's advertisement, her full breast moulded in mauve cloth plentifully decorated with silver braid, on her heavily-waved hair a large mauve hat with a cascade of black ostrich-feathers, fastened by an over-large paste buckle. At every movement the silk of her petticoat rustled, the feathers nodded, the paste buckle gleamed. And, notwithstanding all this showiness, she was child-like: she was perhaps just twenty, with an ingenuous expression in her eyes. She at once spoke to Cornélie, to Rudyard; said that she was tired, that she had come from Naples, that she had been dancing last night at Prince Cibo's, that her name was Miss Urania Hope, that her father lived in Chicago, that she had two brothers who, in spite of her father's money, were working on a farm in the Far West, but that she had been brought up as a spoilt child by her father, who, however, wanted her to be able to stand on her own feet and was therefore making her travel by herself in the Old World, in dear old Italy. She was delighted to hear that Cornélie was also travelling alone; and Rudyard chaffed the ladies about their modern views, but the Baronin and the Baronesse applauded them. Miss Hope at once took a liking to her Dutch fellow-traveller and wanted to arrange joint excursions; but Cornélie, withdrawing into herself, made a tactful excuse, said that her time was fully engaged, that she wanted to study in the museums.

[17]

"So serious?" asked Miss Hope, respectfully.

And the petticoat rustled, the plumes nodded, the paste buckle gleamed.

She made on Cornélie the impression of a gaudy butterfly, which, sportive and unthinking, might easily one day dash itself to pieces against the hot-house windows of our cabined existence. She felt no attraction towards this strange, pretty little creature, who looked like a child and a *cocotte* in one; but she felt sorry for her, she did not know why.

After dinner, Rudyard proposed to take the two German ladies for a little walk. The younger baroness came to Cornélie and asked if she would come too, to see Rome by moonlight, quite close, from the Villa Medici. She felt grateful for the kindly suggestion and was just going to put on her hat, when Miss Hope ran after her:

"Stay and sit with me in the drawing-room."

"I am going for a walk with the Baronin," Cornélie replied.

[18]

"That German lady?"

"Yes."

"Is she a noblewoman?"

"I presume so."

"Are there many titled people in the house?" asked Miss Hope, eagerly.

Cornélie laughed:

"I don't know. I only arrived this morning."

"I believe there are. I heard that there were many titled people here. Are you one?"

"I was!" Cornélie laughed. "But I had to give up my title."

"What a shame!" Miss Hope exclaimed. "I love titles. Do you know what I've got? An album with the coats of arms of all sorts of families and another album with patterns of silk and brocade from each of the Queen of Italy's ball-dresses. Would you care to see it?"

"Very much indeed!" Cornélie laughed. "But I must put on my hat now."

She went and returned in a hat and cloak; the German ladies and Rudyard were waiting in the hall and asked what she was laughing at. She caused great merriment by telling them about the album with the patterns of the queen's ball-dresses.

"Who is he?" she asked the Baronin, as she walked in front with her, along the Via Sistina, while the Baronesse and Rudyard followed.

She thought the Baronin a charming person, but she was surprised to find, in this German woman, who belonged to the titled military-class, a coldly cynical view of life which was not exactly that of her Berlin environment.

"I don't know," the Baronin answered, with an air of indifference. "We travel a great deal. We have no house in Berlin at present. We want to make the most of our stay abroad. Mr. Rudyard is very pleasant. He helps us in all sorts of ways: tickets for a papal mass, introductions here, invitations there. He seems to have plenty of influence. What do I care who or what he is! Else agrees with me. I accept what he gives us and for the rest I don't try to fathom him."

[19]

They walked on. The Baronin took Cornélie's arm:

"My dear child, don't think us more cynical than we are. I hardly know you, but I've felt somehow drawn towards you. Strange, isn't it, when one's abroad like this and has one's first talk at a *table-d'hôte*, over a skinny chicken? Don't think us shabby or cynical. Oh, dear, perhaps we are! Our cosmopolitan, irresponsible, unsettled life makes us ungenerous, cynical and selfish. Very selfish. Rudyard shows us many kindnesses. Why should I not accept them? I don't care who or what he is. I am not committing myself in any way."

Cornélie looked round involuntarily. In the nearly dark street she saw Rudyard and the young Baronesse, almost whispering and mysteriously intimate.

"And does your daughter think so too?"

"Oh, yes! We are not committing ourselves in any way. We do not even particularly like him, with his pock-marked face and his dirty finger-nails. We merely accept his introductions. Do as we do. Or ... don't. Perhaps it will be better form if you don't. I ... I have become a great egoist, through travelling. What do I care?..."

The dark street seemed to invite confidences; and Cornélie to some extent understood this cynical indifference, particularly in a woman reared in narrow principles of duty and morality. It was certainly not good form; but was it not weariness brought about by the wear and tear of life? In any case she vaguely understood it: that tone of indifference, that careless shrugging of the shoulders....

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They turned the corner of the Hotel Massier and approached the Villa Medici. The full moon was pouring down its flood of white radiance and Rome lay in the flawless blue glamour of the night. Overflowing the brimming basin of the fountain, beneath the black ilexes, whose leafage held the picture of Rome in an ebony frame, the waste water splashed and clattered.

"Rome must be very beautiful," said Cornélie, softly.

Rudyard and the Baronesse had come nearer and heard what she said:

"Rome *is* beautiful," he said, earnestly. "And Rome is more. Rome is a great consolation to many people."

His words, spoken in the blue moonlit night, impressed her. The city seemed to lie in mystical billows at her feet. She looked at him, as he stood before her in his black coat, showing but little linen, the same stout, civil gentleman. His voice was very penetrating, with a rich note of conviction in it. She looked at him long, uncertain of herself and vaguely conscious of an approaching intimation, but still antipathetic.

Then he added, as though he did not wish her to meditate too deeply the words which he had uttered:

"A great consolation to many ... because beauty consoles."

And she thought his last words an æsthetic commonplace; but he had meant her to think so.

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CHAPTER IV

Those first days in Rome tired Cornélie greatly. She did too much, as every one does who has just arrived in Rome; she wanted to take in the whole city at once; and the distances, although covered in a carriage, and the endless galleries in the museums resulted in producing physical exhaustion. Moreover she was constantly experiencing disappointments, in respect of pictures, statues or buildings. At first she dared not own to these disappointments; but one afternoon, feeling dead-tired, after she had been painfully disappointed in the Sistine Chapel, she owned up to herself. Everything that she saw that was already known to her from her previous studies disappointed her. Then she resolved to give sight-seeing a rest. And, after those fatiguing days, when every morning and every afternoon was spent out of doors, it was a luxury to surrender herself to the unconscious current of daily life. She remained at home in the mornings, wrapped in a tea-gown, in her cosy little bird-cage of a sitting-room, writing letters, dreaming a little, with her arms folded behind her head; she read Ovid and Petrarch, or listened to a couple of street-musicians, who, with their quavering tenors, to the shrill whining of their guitars, filled the silent street with a sobbing passion of music. At lunch she considered that she had been lucky in her *pension*, in her little corner at the table. She was interested in Baronin von Rothkirch, with her indifferent, aristocratic condescension towards Rudyard, because she saw how residence abroad can draw a person out of the narrow ring of caste principles. The young Baronesse, who cared nothing about life and merely sketched and painted, interested her because of her whispering intimacy with Rudyard, which she failed to understand. Miss Hope was so ingenious, so childishly irrational, that Cornélie could not imagine how old Hope, the rich stockinet-manufacturer over in Chicago, allowed this child to travel about alone, with her far too generous monthly allowance and her total ignorance of the world and people; and Rudyard himself, though she sometimes felt an aversion for him, attracted her in spite of that aversion. Although she had so far formed no deeper friendship with any of her fellow-boarders, at any rate they were people to whom she was able to talk; and the conversation at table was a diversion amid the solitude of the rest of the day.

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For in the afternoons, during this period of fatigue and disappointment, she would merely go for a short walk by herself down the Corso or on the Pincio and then return home, make her own tea in her little silver tea-pot and sit dreaming by the log fire, in the dusk, until it was time to dress for dinner.

And the brightly-lit dining-room with the Guercino ceiling was gay and cheerful. The *pension* was crammed: the marchesa had given up her own room and was sleeping in the bath-room. A hum of voices buzzed around the tables; the waiters rushed to and fro; spoons and forks clattered. There was none of the melancholy spirit of so many *tables-d'hôte*. The people knew one another; and the excitement of Roman life, the oxygen in the Roman air seemed to lend an added vivacity to the gestures and conversation. Amidst this vivacity the two grimy æsthetic ladies attracted attention by their unvarying pose, with their eternal evening-dress, their Jaegers, their beads, the fat books which they read, their angry looks because people were talking.

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After dinner they sat in the drawing-room or in the hall, made friends here and there and talked about Rome, Rome, Rome. There was always a great fuss about the music in the different churches: they consulted the *Herald*; they asked

Rudyard, who knew everything, and gathered round him; and he, fat and polite as ever, smiled and distributed tickets and named the day and hour at which an important service would be held in this church or in that. To English ladies, who were not fully informed, he would now and then, as it were casually, impart details about the complexities of Catholic ritual and the Catholic hierarchy; he explained the nationalities denoted by the various colours of the seminarists whom you met in shoals of an afternoon on the Pincio, staring at St. Peter's, in ecstasy over St. Peter's, the mighty symbol of their mighty religion; he set forth the distinction between a church and a basilica; he related anecdotes of the private life of Leo XIII. His manner of speaking of all these things possessed an insinuating charm: the English ladies, greedy for information, hung on his lips, thought him *too* awfully nice, asked him for a thousand particulars.

These days were a great rest for Cornélie. She recovered from her fatigue and felt indifferent towards Rome. But she did not think of leaving any the sooner. Whether she was here or elsewhere was all the same to her: she had to be somewhere. Besides, the *pension* was good, her fellow-boarders pleasant and cheerful. She no longer read Hare's *Walks in Rome* or Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, but she read Ouida's *Ariadne* over again. She did not care for the book as much as she had done three years before, at the Hague; and after that she read nothing. But she amused herself with the von Rothkirch ladies for a whole evening, looking over Miss Hope's album of seals and collection of patterns. How mad those Americans were on titles and royalties! The Baronin good-naturedly contributed an impression of her own arms to the album. And the patterns were greatly admired: gold brocades; silks heavily interwoven with silver; spangled tulles. Miss Hope related how she had come by them: she knew one of the queen's waiting-women, who had formerly been in service with an American; and this waiting-woman was now able to procure the patterns for her at a high price: a precious bit of material picked up while the queen was trying on, or sometimes even cut out of a broad seam. The child was prouder of her collection of patterns than an Italian prince of his paintings, said Baronin von Rothkirch. But, notwithstanding this absurdity, this vanity, Cornélie came to like the pretty American girl because of her candid and unsophisticated nature. She looked most attractive in the evening, in a black low-cut dress, or in a rose chiffon blouse. For that matter, it was a different frock every night. She possessed a kaleidoscopic collection of dresses, blouses and jewels. She would walk through the ruins of the Forum in a tailor-made suit of cream cloth, lined with orange silk; and her white lace petticoat flitted airily over the foundations of the Basilica Julia or the Temple of Vesta. Her gaily-trimmed hats introduced patches of colour from Regent Street or the Avenue de l'Opéra into the tragic seriousness of the Colosseum or the ruined palace of the Palatine. The young Baronesse teased her about her orange silk lining, so in harmony with the Forum, about her hats, so in keeping with the seriousness of a place of Christian martyrdom, but she was never angry:

"It's a nice hat anyway!" she would say, in her Yankee drawl, which always afforded a good view of her pretty teeth but made her strain her mouth as though she were cracking filberts.

And the child enjoyed everything, enjoyed the Baronin and the Baronesse, enjoyed being at a *pension* kept by a decayed Italian marchioness. And, as soon as she caught sight of the Marchesa Belloni's grey, leonine head, she would make a rush for her—because a marchioness is higher than a baroness, said Madame von Rothkirch—drag her into a corner and if possible monopolize her throughout the evening. Rudyard would then join them; and Cornélie, seeing this, wondered what Rudyard was, who he was and what he was about. But this did not interest the Baronin, who had just received a card for a mass in the papal chapel; and the young Baronesse merely said that he told legends of the saints so nicely, when explaining the pictures to her in the Doria and the Corsini.

CHAPTER V

One evening Cornélie made the acquaintance of the Dutch family beside whom the Marchesa had first wished to place her at table: Mrs. van der Staal and her two daughters. They too were spending the whole winter in Rome: they had friends there and went out visiting. The conversation flowed smoothly; and mevrouw invited Cornélie to come and have a chat in her sitting-room. Next day she accompanied her new acquaintances to the Vatican and heard that mevrouw was expecting her son, who was coming to Rome from Florence to continue his archæological studies.

Cornélie was glad to meet at the hotel a Dutch element that was not antipathetic. She thought it pleasant to talk Dutch again and she confessed as much. In a day or two she had become intimate with Mrs. van der Staal and the two girls; and on the evening when young Van der Staal arrived she opened her heart more than she had ever thought that she could do to strangers whom she had known for barely a few days.

They were sitting in the Van der Staal's sitting-room, Cornélie in a low chair by the blazing log-fire, for the evening was chilly. They had been talking about the Hague, about her divorce; and she was now speaking of Italy, of herself:

"I no longer see anything," she confessed. "Rome has quite bewildered me. I can't distinguish a colour, an outline. I don't recognize people. They all seem to whirl round me. Sometimes I feel a need to sit alone for hours in my bird-cage upstairs, to recollect myself. This morning, in the Vatican, I don't know: I remember nothing. It is all grey and fuzzy around me. Then the people in the boarding-house: the same faces every day. I see them and yet I don't see them. I see ... I see Madame von Rothkirch and her daughter, I see the fair Urania ... and Rudyard ... and the little Englishwoman, Miss Taylor, who is always so tired with sight-seeing and who thinks everything most exquisite. But my memory is so bad that, when I am alone, I have to think to myself: Madame von Rothkirch is tall and stately, with the smile of the German Empress—she is rather like her—talking fast and yet with indifference, as though the words just fell indifferently from her lips...."

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"You're a good observer," said Van der Staal.

"Oh, don't say that!" said Cornélie, almost vexed. "I see nothing and I can't remember. I receive no impressions. Everything around me is colourless. I really don't know why I have come abroad.... When I am alone, I think of the people whom I meet. I know Madame von Rothkirch now and I know Else. Such a round, merry face, with arched eyebrows, and always a joke or a witticism: I find it tiring sometimes, she makes me laugh so. Still they are very nice. And the fair Urania. She tells me everything. She is as communicative ... as I am at this moment. And Rudyard: I see him before me too."

"Rudyard!" smiled mevrouw and the girls.

"What is he?" Cornélie asked, inquisitively. "He is so civil, he ordered my wine for me, he can always get one all sorts of cards."

"Don't you know what Rudyard is?" asked Mrs. van der Staal.

"No; and Mrs. von Rothkirch doesn't know either."

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"Then you had better be careful," laughed the girls.

"Are you a Catholic?" asked mevrouw.

"No."

"Nor the fair Urania either? Nor Mrs. von Rothkirch?"

"No."

"Well, that is why la Belloni put Rudyard at your table. Rudyard is a Jesuit. Every *pension* in Rome has a Jesuit who lives there free of charge, if the proprietor is a good friend of the Church, and who tries to win souls by making himself especially agreeable."

Cornélie refused to believe it.

"You can take my word for it," mevrouw continued, "that in a *pension* like this, a first-class *pension*, a *pension* with a reputation, a great deal of intrigue goes on."

"La Belloni?" Cornélie enquired.

"Our marchesa is a thorough-paced *intrigante*. Last winter, three English sisters were converted here."

"By Rudyard?"

"No, by another priest. Rudyard is here for the first time this winter."

"Rudyard walked quite a long way with me in the street this morning," said young Van der Staal. "I let him talk, I heard all he had to say."

Cornélie fell back in her chair:

"I am tired of people," she said, with the strange sincerity which was hers. "I should like to sleep for a month, without seeing anybody."

And, after a short pause, she got up, said goodnight and went to bed, while everything swam before her eyes.

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CHAPTER VI

She remained indoors for a day or two and had her meals served in her room. One morning, however, she was going for a stroll in the Villa Borghese, when she met young Van der Staal, on his bicycle.

"Don't you ride?" he asked, jumping off.

"No."

"Why not?"

"It is an exercise which doesn't suit my style," Cornélie replied, vexed at meeting any one who disturbed the solitude of her stroll.

"May I walk with you?"

"Certainly."

He gave his machine into the charge of the porter at the gate and walked on with her, quite naturally, without saying very much:

"It's beautiful here," he remarked.

His words seemed to convey a simple meaning. She looked at him, for the first time, attentively.

"You're an archæologist?" she asked.

"No," he said, deprecatingly.

"What are you, then?"

"Nothing. Mamma says that, just to excuse me. I am nothing and a very useless member of society at that. And I am not even well off."

"But you are studying, aren't you?"

"No. I do a little casual reading. My sisters call it studying."

"Do you like going about, as your sisters do?"

"No, I hate it. I never go with them."

"Don't you like meeting and studying people?"

"No. I like pictures, statues and trees."

"A poet?"

"No. Nothing. I am nothing, really."

She looked at him, with increased attention. He was walking very simply by her side, a tall, thin fellow of perhaps twenty-six, more of a boy than a man in face and figure, but endowed with a certain assurance and restfulness that made him seem older than his years. He was pale; he had dark, cool, almost reproachful eyes; and his long, lean figure, in his badly-kept cycling-suit, betrayed a slight indifference, as though he did not care what his arms and legs looked like.

He said nothing but walked on pleasantly, unembarrassed, without finding it necessary to talk. Cornélie, however, grew fidgety and sought for words:

"It *is* beautiful here," she stammered.

"Oh, it's very beautiful!" he replied, calmly, without seeing that she was constrained. "So green, so spacious, so peaceful: those long avenues, those vistas of avenues, like an antique arch, over yonder; and, far away in the distance, look,

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St. Peter's, always St. Peter's. It's a pity about those queer things lower down: that restaurant, that milk-tent. People spoil everything nowadays.... Let us sit down here: it is so lovely here."

They sat down on a bench.

"It is such a joy when a thing is beautiful," he continued. "People are never beautiful. Things are beautiful: statues and paintings. And then trees and clouds!"

"Do you paint?"

"Sometimes," he confessed, grudgingly. "A little. But really everything has been painted already; and I can't really say that I paint."

"Perhaps you write too?"

"There has been even more written than painted, much more. Perhaps everything has not yet been painted, but everything has certainly been written. Every new book that is not of absolute scientific importance is superfluous. All the poetry has been written and every novel too."

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"Do you read much?"

"Hardly at all. I sometimes dip into an old author."

"But what do you do then?" she asked, suddenly, querulously.

"Nothing," he answered, calmly, with a glance of humility. "I do nothing, I exist."

"Do you think that a good mode of existence?"

"No."

"Then why don't you adopt another?"

"As I might buy a new coat or a new bicycle?"

"You're not speaking seriously," she said, crossly.

"Why are you so vexed with me?"

"Because you annoy me," she said, irritably.

He rose, bowed civilly and said:

"Then I had better go for a turn on my bicycle."

And he walked slowly away.

"What a stupid fellow!" she thought, peevishly.

But she thought it tiresome that she had wrangled with him, because of his mother and his sisters.

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CHAPTER VII

At the hotel, however, he spoke to Cornélie politely, as though there had been no embarrassment, no wrangling interchange of words between them, and he even asked her quite simply—because his mother and sisters had some calls to pay that afternoon—whether they should go to the Palatine together.

"I passed it the other day," she said, indifferently.

"And don't you intend to see the ruins?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"They don't interest me. I can't see the past in them. I merely see ruins."

"But then why did you come to Rome?" he asked, irritably.

She looked at him and could have burst into sobs:

"I don't know," she said, meekly. "I could just as well have gone somewhere else. But I had formed a great idea of Rome; and Rome disappoints me."

"How so?"

"I find it hard and inexorable and devoid of feeling. I don't know why, but that's the impression it makes upon me. And I am in a mood at present which somehow makes me want something less insensible and imperturbable."

He smiled:

"Come along," he said. "Come with me to the Palatine. I must show you Rome. It is so beautiful."

She felt too much depressed to remain alone; and so she put on her things and left the hotel with him. The cabmen outside cracked their whips:

"*Vole? Vole?*" they shouted.

He picked out one:

"This is Gaetano," he said. "I always take him. He knows me, don't you, Gaetano?"

"*Si, signorino. Cavallo di sangue, signorina!*" said Gaetano, pointing to his horse.

They drove away.

"I am always frightened of these cabmen," said Cornélie.

"You don't know them," he answered, smiling. "I like them. I like the people. They're nice people."

"You approve of everything in Rome."

"And you submit without reserve to a mistaken impression."

"Why mistaken?"

"Because that first impression of Rome, as hard and unfeeling, is always the same and always mistaken."

"Yes, it's that. Look, we are driving by the Forum. Whenever I see the Forum, I think of Miss Hope and her orange lining."

He felt annoyed and did not answer.

"This is the Palatine."

They alighted and passed through the entrance.

"This wooden staircase takes us to the Palace of Tiberius. Above the palace, on the top of the arches, is a garden from which we look down on the Forum."

"Tell me about Tiberius. I know that there were good and bad emperors. We were taught that at school. Tiberius was a bad emperor, wasn't he?"

"He was a dismal brute. But why do you want me to tell you about him?"

"Because otherwise I can take no interest in those arches and chambers."

"Then let us go up to the top and sit in the garden."

They did so.

"Don't you feel Rome here?" he asked.

"I feel the same everywhere," she replied.

But he seemed not to hear her:

"It's the atmosphere around you," he continued. "You should try to forget our hotel, to forget Belloni and all our fellow-visitors and yourself. When anybody first arrives here, he has all the usual trouble about the hotel, his rooms, the *table-d'hôte*, the vaguely likable or dislikable people. You've got over that now. Clear your mind of it. And try to feel only the atmosphere of Rome. It's as if the atmosphere had remained the same, notwithstanding that the centuries lie piled up one above the other. First the middle ages covered the antiquity of the Forum

and now it is hidden everywhere by our nineteenth-century craze for travel. There you have Miss Hope's orange lining. But the atmosphere has always remained the same. Unless I imagine it...."

She was silent.

"Perhaps I do," he continued. "But what does that matter to me? Our whole life is imagination; and imagination is a beautiful thing. The beauty of our imagination is the consolation of our lives, to those of us who are not men of action. The past is beauty. The present is not, does not exist. And the future does not interest me."

"Do you never think about modern problems?" she asked.

"The woman question? Socialism? Peace?"

"Well, yes, for instance."

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"No," he smiled. "I think of them sometimes, but not about them."

"How do you mean?"

"I get no further. That is my nature. I am a dreamer by nature; and my dream is the past."

"Don't you dream of yourself?"

"No. Of my soul, my inner self? No. It interests me very little."

"Have you ever suffered?"

"Suffered? Yes, no. I don't know. I feel sorry for my utter uselessness as a human being, as a son, as a man; but, when I dream, I am happy."

"How do you come to speak to me so openly?"

He looked at her in surprise:

"Why should I be reticent about myself?" he asked. "I either don't talk or I talk as I am doing now. Perhaps it is a little odd."

"Do you talk to every one so intimately?"

"No, hardly to anybody. I once had a friend ... but he's dead. Tell me, I suppose you consider me morbid?"

"No, I don't think so."

"I shouldn't mind if you did. Oh, how beautiful it is here! Are you drinking Rome in with your very breath?"

"Which Rome?"

"The Rome of antiquity. Under where we are sitting is the Palace of Tiberius. I see him walking about there, with his tall, strong figure, with his large, searching eyes: he was very strong, he was very dismal and he was a brute. He had no ideals. Farther down, over there, is the Palace of Caligula, a madman of genius. He built a bridge across the Forum to speak to Jupiter in the Capitol. That's a thing one couldn't do nowadays. He was a genius and a madman. When a man's like that, there's a good deal about him to admire."

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"How can you admire an age of emperors who were brutes and mad?"

"Because I see their age before my eyes, in the past, like a dream."

"How is it possible that you don't see the present before you, with the problems of our own time, especially the eternal problem of poverty?"

He looked at her:

"Yes," he said, "I know. That is my sin, my wickedness. The eternal problem of poverty doesn't affect me."

She looked at him contemptuously:

"You don't belong to your period," she said, coldly.

"No."

"Have you ever felt hungry?"

He laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

"Have you ever pictured yourself leading the life of a labourer, of a factory-girl who works until she's worn out and old and half-dead for a bare crust of bread?"

"Oh, those things are so horrible and so ugly: don't talk about them!" he entreated.

The expression of her eyes was cold; the corners of her lips were depressed as though by a feeling of distaste; and she rose from her seat.

"Are you angry?" he asked, humbly.

"No," she said, gently, "I am not angry."

"But you despise me, because you consider me a useless creature, an aesthete and a dreamer?"

"No. What am I myself, that I should reproach you with your uselessness?"

"Oh, if we could only find something!" he exclaimed, almost in ecstasy.

"What?"

"An aim. But mine would always remain beauty. And the past."

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"And, if I had the strength of mind to devote myself to an aim, it would above all be this: bread for the future."

"How abominable that sounds!" he said, rudely but sincerely. "Why didn't you go to London, or Manchester, or one of those black manufacturing towns?"

"Because I hadn't the strength of mind and because I think too much of myself and of a sorrow that I have had lately. And I expected to find distraction in Italy."

"And that is where your disappointment lies. But perhaps you will gradually acquire greater strength and then devote yourself to your aim: bread for the future. I sha'n't envy you, however: bread for the Future!..."

She was silent.

Then she said, coldly:

"It is getting late. Let us go home...."

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CHAPTER VIII

Duco van der Staal had taken a large, vault-like studio, with a chilly north light, up three flights of stairs in the Via del Babuino. Here he painted, modelled and studied and here he dragged all the beautiful and antique objects that he succeeded in picking up in the little shops along the Tiber or in the Mercato dei Fiori. That was his passion: to hunt through Rome for a panel of an old triptych or a fragment of ancient sculpture. In this way his studio had not remained the large, chilly, vault-like workroom bearing witness to zealous and serious study, but had become a refuge for dim-coloured remnants of antiquity and ancient art, a museum for his dreaming spirit. Already as a child, as a boy, he had felt that passion for antiquity developing; he learnt how to rummage through the stocks of old Jewish dealers; he taught himself to haggle when his purse was not full; and he collected first rubbish and afterwards, gradually, objects of artistic and financial value. And it was his great hobby, his one vice: he spent all his pocket-money on it and, later, without reserve, the little that he was able to earn. For sometimes, very seldom, he would finish something and sell it. But generally he was too ill-satisfied with himself to finish anything; and his modest notion was that everything had already been created and that *his* art was useless.

This idea sometimes paralysed him for months together, without making him unhappy. When he had the money to keep himself going—and his personal needs were very small—he felt rich and was content in his studio or would wander, perfectly content, through the streets of Rome. His long, careless, lean, slender body was at such times clad in his oldest suit, which afforded an unostentatious glimpse of an untidy shirt with a soft collar and a bit of string instead of a tie; and his favourite headgear was a faded hat, battered out of shape by the rain. His

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mother and sisters as a rule found him unrepresentable, but had given up trying to transform him into the well-groomed son and brother whom they would have liked to take to the drawing-rooms of their Roman friends. Happy to breathe the atmosphere of Rome, he would wander for hours through the ruins and see, in a dazzling vision of phantom columns, ethereal temples and translucent marble palaces looming up in a shimmering sunlit twilight; and the tourists going by with their Baedekers, who passed this long lean young man seated carelessly on the foundations of the Temple of Saturn, would never have believed in his architectural illusions of harmonious ascending lines, crowned by an array of statues in noble and god-like attitudes, high in the blue sky.

But he saw them before him. He raised the shafts of the pillars, he fluted the severe Doric columns, he bent and curved the cushioned Ionic capitals and unfurled the leaves of the Corinthian acanthuses; the temples rose in the twinkling of an eye, the basilicas shot up as by magic, the graven images stood white against the elusive depths of the sky and the Via Sacra became alive. He, in his admiration, lived his dream, his past. It was as though he had known preexistence in ancient Rome; and the modern houses, the modern Capitol and all that stood around the tomb of his Forum were invisible to his eyes.

He would sit like this for hours, or wander about and sit down again and be happy. In the intensity of his imagination, he conjured up history from the clouds of the past, first of all as a mist, a miraculous haze, whence the figures stepped out against the marble background of ancient Rome. The gigantic dramas were enacted before his dreaming eyes as on an ideal stage which stretched from the Forum to the hazy, sun-shot azure of the Campagna, with slips that lost themselves in the depths of the sky. Roman life came into being, with a toga'd gesture, a line of Horace, a sudden vision of an emperor's murder or a contest of gladiators in the arena. And suddenly also the vision paled and he saw the ruins, the ruins only, as the tangible shadow of his unreal illusion: he saw the ruins as they were, brown and grey, eaten up with age, crumbled, martyred, mutilated with hammers, till only a few occasional pillars lifted and bore a trembling architrave, that threatened to come crashing to the ground. And the browns and greys were so richly and nobly gilded by splashes of sunlight, the ruins were so exquisitely beautiful in decay, so melancholy in their unwitting fortuitousness of broken lines, of shattered arches and mutilated sculpture, that it was as though he himself, after his airy vision of radiant dream-architecture, had tortured and mutilated them with an artist's hand and caused them to burst asunder and shake and tremble, for the sake of their wistful aftermath of beauty. Then his eyes grew moist, his heart became more full than he could bear and he went away, through the Arch of Titus by the Colosseum, through the Arch of Constantine, on and on, and hurried past the Lateran to the Via Appia and the Campagna, where his smarting eyes drank in the blue of the distant Alban Hills, as though that would cure them of their excessive gazing and dreaming....

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Neither in his mother nor in his sisters did he find a strain that sympathized with his eccentric tendencies; and, since that one friend who died, he had never found another and had always been lonely within and without, as though the victim of a predestination which would not allow him to meet with sympathy. But he had peopled his loneliness so densely with his dreams that he had never felt unhappy because of it; and, even as he loved roaming alone among the ruins and along the country-roads, so he cherished the privacy of his lonely studio, with the many silent figures on an old panel of some triptych, on a tapestry, or on the many closely hung sketches, all around him, all with the charm of their lines and colours, all with the silent gesture of their movement and emotion and all blending together in twilight corners or a shadowy antique cabinet. And in between all this lived his china and bronze and old silver, while the faded gold embroidery of an ecclesiastical vestment gleamed faintly and the old leather bindings of his books stood in comfortable brown rows, ready to give forth, when his hands opened them, images which mistily drifted upwards, living their loves and their sorrows in the tempered browns and reds and golds of the soundless atmosphere of the studio.

Such was his simple life, without much inward doubting, because he made no great demands upon himself, and without the modern artist's melancholy, because he was happy in his dreams. He had never, despite his hotel life with his mother and sisters—he slept and took his meals at Belloni's—met many people or concerned himself with strangers, being by nature a little shy of Baedekered tourists, of short-skirted English ladies, with their persistent little exclamations of uniform admiration, and feeling entirely impossible in the half-Italian, half-cosmopolitan set of his rather worldly mother and smart little sisters, who spent their time dancing and cycling with young Italian princes and dukes.

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And, now that he had met Cornélie de Retz, he had to confess to himself that he possessed but little knowledge of human nature and that he had never learnt to

believe in the reality of such a woman, who might have existed in books, but not in actual life. Her very appearance—her pallor, her drooping charm, her weariness—had astonished him; and her conversation astonished him even more: her positiveness mingled with hesitation; her artistic feeling modified by the endeavour to take part in her period, a period which he failed to appreciate as artistic, enamoured as he was of Rome and of the past. And her conversation astonished him, attractive though the sound of it was and offended as he often was by a recurrent bitterness and irony, followed again by depression and discouragement, until he thought it over again and again, until in his musing he seemed to hear it once more on her own lips, until she joined the busts and torsos in his studio and appeared before him in the lily-like frailness of her visible actuality, against the preraphaelite stiffness of line and the Byzantine gold and colour of the angels and madonnas on canvas and tapestry.

His soul had never known love; and he had always looked on love as imagination and poetry. His life had never known more than the natural virile impulse and the ordinary little love-affair with a model. And his ideas on love swayed in a too wide and unreal balance between a woman who showed herself in the nude for a few lire and Petrarch's Laura; between the desire roused by a beautiful body and the exaltation inspired by Dante's Beatrice; between the flesh and the dream. He had never contemplated an encounter of kindred souls, never longed for sympathy, for love in the full and pregnant sense of the word. And, when he began to think and to think long and often of Cornélie de Retz, he could not understand it. He had pondered and dreamed for days, for a week about a woman in a poem; on a woman in real life never.

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And that he, irritated by some of her sayings, had nevertheless seen her stand with her lily-like outline against his Byzantine triptych, like a wraith in his lonely dreams, almost frightened him, because it had made him lose his peace of mind.

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CHAPTER IX

It was Christmas Day, on which occasion the Marchesa Belloni entertained her boarders with a Christmas-tree in the drawing-room, followed by a dance in the old Guercino dining-room. To give a ball and a Christmas-tree was a custom with many hotel-keepers; and the *pensions* that gave no dance or Christmas-tree were known and numbered and were greatly blamed by the foreigners for this breach of tradition. There were instances of very excellent *pensions* to which many travellers, especially ladies, never went, because there was neither a dance nor a Christmas-tree at Christmas.

The marchesa realized that her tree was expensive and that her dance cost money too and she would gladly have found an excuse for avoiding both, but she dared not: the reputation of her *pension*, as it happened, depended on its worldliness and smartness, on the *table-d'hôte* in the handsome dining-room, where people dressed for dinner, and also on the brilliant party given at Christmas. And it was amusing to see how keen all the ladies were to receive gratis in their bill for a whole winter's stay a trashy Christmas present and the opportunity of dancing without having to pay for a glass of *orgeade* and a bit of pastry, a sandwich and a cup of soup. Giuseppe, the old nodding major-domo, looked down contemptuously on this festivity: he remembered the gala pomp of his archducal evenings and considered the dance inferior and the tree paltry. Antonio, the limping porter, accustomed to his comparatively quiet life—fetching a visitor or taking him to the station; sorting the post twice a day at his ease; and for the rest pottering around his lodge and the lift—hated the dance, because of all the guests of the boarders, each of whom was entitled to invite two or three friends, and because of all that tiring fuss about carriages, when a good many of the visitors skipped into their *vettura* without tipping him. Round about Christmas, therefore, relations between the marchesa and her two principal dignitaries became far from harmonious; and a hail of orders and abuse would patter down on the backs of the old *cameriere*, crawling wearily up and downstairs with their hot-water-cans in their trembling hands, and of the young greenhorns of waiters, colliding with one another in their undisciplined zeal and smashing the plates. And it was only now, when the whole staff was put to work that people saw how old the *cameriere* were and how young the waiters and qualified as disgraceful and shocking the thrifty method of the marchesa in employing none but wrecks and infants in her service. The one muscular *facchino*, who was essential for hauling the luggage, cut an unexpected figure of virile maturity and robustness. But above everything the visitors detested the marchesa because of the great number of her servants, reflecting that now, at

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Christmas-time, they would have to tip every one of them. No, they never imagined that the staff was so large! Quite unnecessarily large too! Why couldn't the marchesa engage a couple of strong young maids and waiters instead of all those old women and little boys? And there was much hushed plotting and confabulating in the corners of the passages and at meals, to decide on the tips to be given: they didn't want to spoil the servants, but still they were staying all the winter; and therefore one lira was hardly enough and they hesitated between one lira twenty-five and one lira fifty. But, when they counted on their fingers that there were fully five-and-twenty servants and that therefore they were close on forty lire out of pocket, they thought it an awful lot and they got up subscription-lists. Two lists went round, one of one lira and one of twelve lire a visitor, the latter subscription covering the whole staff. On this second list some, who had arrived a month before and who had arranged to leave, entered their names for ten lire and some for six lire. Five lire was by general consent considered too little; and, when it became known that the grimy æsthetic ladies intended to give five lire, they were regarded with the greatest contempt.

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It all meant a lot of trouble and excitement. As Christmas drew nearer, people streamed to the *presepi* set up by painters in the Palazzo Borghese: a panorama of Jerusalem and the shepherds, the angels, the Magi and Mary and the Child in the manger with the ox and the ass. They listened in the Ara Cœli to the preaching of little boys and girls, who by turns climbed the platform and told the story of the Nativity, some shyly reciting a little poem, prompted by an anxious mother; others, girls especially, declaiming and rolling their eyes with the dramatic fervour of little Italian actresses and ending up with a religious moral. The people and countless tourists stood and listened to the preaching; a pleasant spirit prevailed in the church, where the shrill young children's voices were lifted up in oratory; there was laughter at a gesture or a point driven home; and the priests strolling round the church wore an unctuous smile because it was all so pretty and so satisfactory. And in the chapel of the Santo Bambino the miraculous wooden doll was bright with gold and jewels; and the close-packed multitude thronged to gaze at it.

All the visitors at Belloni's bought bunches of holly in the Piazza di Spagna to adorn their rooms with; and some, such as the Baronin van Rothkirch, set up a private Christmas-tree in their own rooms. On the evening before the great party one and all went to admire these private trees, going in and out of one another's rooms; and all the boarders wore a kind, festive smile and welcomed everybody, however much at other times they might quarrel and intrigue against one another. It was universally agreed that the Baronin had taken great pains and that her tree was magnificent. Her bedroom had been cleverly metamorphosed into a boudoir, the beds draped to look like divans, the wash-hand-stands concealed; and the tree was radiant with candles and tinsel. And the Baronin, a little sentimentally inclined, for the season reminded her of Berlin and her lost domesticity, opened her doors wide to everybody and was even offering the two æsthetic ladies sweets, when the marchesa, also smiling, appeared at the door, with her bosom moulded in sky-blue satin and with even larger crystals than usual in her ears. The room was full: there were the Van der Staals, Cornélie, Rudyard, Urania Hope and other guests going in and out, so that it became impossible to move and they stood packed together or sat on the draped beds of the mother and daughter. The marchesa led in beside her an unknown young man, short, slender, with a pale olive complexion and with dark, bright, witty, lively eyes. He wore dress-clothes and displayed the vague good manners of a beloved and careless *viveur*, distinguished and yet conceited. And she proudly went up to the Baronin, who kept prettily wiping her moist eyes, and with a certain arrogance presented:

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"My nephew, Duca di San Stefano, Principe di Forte-Braccio...."

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The well-known Italian name sounded from her lips in the small, crowded room with deliberate distinctness; and all eyes went to the young man, who bowed low before the Baronin and then looked round the room with a vague, ironical glance. The marchesa's nephew had not yet been seen at the hotel that winter, but everybody knew that the young Duke of San Stefano, Prince of Forte-Braccio, was a nephew of the marchesa's and one of the advertisements for her *pension*. And, while the prince talked to the Baronin and her daughter, Urania Hope stared at him as a miraculous being from another world. She clung tight to Cornélie's arm, as though she were in danger of fainting at the sight of so much Italian nobility and greatness. She thought him very good-looking, very imposing, short and slender and pale, with his carbuncle eyes and his weary distinction and the white orchid in his button-hole. She would have loved to ask the marchioness to introduce her to her *chic* nephew, but she dared not, for she thought of her father's stockinet-factory at Chicago.

The Christmas-tree party and the dance took place the following night. It became known that the marchesa's nephew was coming that evening too; and a great excitement reigned throughout the day. The prince arrived after the presents had

been taken down from the tree and distributed and made a sort of state entry by the side of his aunt, the marchesa, into the drawing-room, where the dancing had not yet begun, though the guests were sitting about the room, all fixing their eyes on the ducal and princely apparition.

Cornélie was strolling with Duco van der Staal, who to his mother's and sisters' great surprise had fished out his dress-clothes and appeared in the big hall; and they both observed the triumphant entry of la Belloni and her nephew and laughed at the fanatically upturned eyes of the English and American ladies. They, Cornélie and Duco, sat down in the hall on two chairs, in front of a clump of palms, which concealed one of the doors of the drawing-room, while the dance began inside. They were talking about the statues in the Vatican, which they had been to see two days before, when they heard, as though close to their ears, a voice which they recognized as the marchesa's commanding organ, vainly striving to sink into a whisper. They looked round in surprise and perceived the hidden door, which was partly open, and through the open space they faintly distinguished the slim hand and black sleeve of the prince and a piece of the blue bosom of la Belloni, both seated on a sofa in the drawing-room. They were therefore back to back, separated by the half-open door. They listened for fun to the marchesa's Italian; the prince's answers were lisped so softly that they could scarcely catch them. And of what the marchesa said they heard only a few words and scraps of sentences. They were listening quite involuntarily, when they heard Rudyard's name clearly pronounced by the marchesa.

"And who besides?" asked the prince, softly.

"An English miss," said the marchesa. "Miss Taylor: she's sitting over there, by herself in the corner. A simple little soul.... The Baronin and her daughter.... The Dutchwoman: a *divorcée*.... And the pretty American."

"And those two very attractive Dutch girls?" asked the prince.

The music boom-boomed louder; and Cornélie and Duco did not catch the reply.

"And the divorced Dutchwoman?" the prince asked next.

"No money," the marchesa answered, curtly.

"And the young baroness?"

"No money," la Belloni repeated.

"So there's no one except the stocking-merchant?" asked the prince, wearily.

La Belloni became cross, but Cornélie and Duco could not understand the sentences which she rattled out through the boom-booming music. Then, during a lull, they heard the marchesa say:

"She is very pretty. She has tons and tons of money. She could have gone to a first-class hotel but preferred to come here because, as a young girl travelling by herself, she was recommended to me and finds it pleasanter here. She has the big sitting-room to herself and pays fifty lire a day for her two rooms. She does not care about money. She pays three times as much as the others for her wood; and I also charge her for the wine."

"She sells stockings," muttered the prince, obstinately.

"Nonsense!" said the marchesa. "Remember that there's nobody at the moment. Last winter we had rich English titled people, with a daughter, but you thought her too tall. You're always discovering some objection. You mustn't be so difficult."

"I think those two little Dutch dolls attractive."

"They have no money. You're always thinking what you have no business to think."

"How much did Papa promise you if you...."

The music boomed louder.

"... makes no difference.... If Rudyard talks to her.... Miss Taylor is easy.... Miss Hope...."

"I don't want so many stockings as all that."

"... very witty, I dare say.... If you don't care to...."

"No."

" ... then I retire.... I'll tell Rudyard so.... How much?"

"Sixty or seventy thousand: I don't know exactly."

"Are they urgent?"

"Debts are never urgent!"

"Do you agree?"

"Very well. But mind, I won't sell myself for less than ten millions.... And then you get...."

They both laughed; and again the names of Rudyard and Urania were pronounced.

"Urania?" he asked.

"Yes, Urania," replied la Belloni. "Those little Americans are very tactful. Look at the Comtesse de Castellane and the Duchess of Marlborough: how well they bear their husbands' honours! They cut an excellent figure. They are mentioned in every society column and always with respect."

" ... All right then. I am tired of these wasted winters. But not less than ten millions."

"Five."

"No, ten."

The prince and the marchesa had stood up to go. Cornélie looked at Duco. He laughed:

"I don't quite understand them," he said. "It's a joke, of course."

Cornélie was startled:

"A joke, you think, Mr. van der Staal?"

"Yes, they're humbugging."

"I don't believe it."

"I do."

"Have you any knowledge of human nature?"

"Oh, no, none at all!"

"I'm getting it, gradually. I believe that Rome can be dangerous and that an hotel-keeping marchesa, a prince and a Jesuit...."

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"What about them?"

"Can be dangerous, if not to your sisters, because they have no money, but at any rate to Urania Hope."

"I don't believe it for a moment. It was all chaff. And it doesn't interest me. What do you think of Praxiteles' *Eros*? I think it the most divine statue that I ever saw. Oh, the *Eros*, the *Eros*! That is love, the real love, the predestined, fatal love, begging forgiveness for the suffering which it causes."

"Have you ever been in love?"

"No. I have no knowledge of human nature and I have never been in love. You are always so definite. Dreams are beautiful, statues are delightful and poetry is everything. The *Eros* expresses love completely. The love of the *Eros* is so beautiful! I could never love so beautifully as that.... No, it does not interest me to understand human nature; and a dream of Praxiteles, lingering in a mutilated marble torso, is nobler than anything that the world calls love."

She knitted her brows; her eyes were sombre.

"Let us go to the dancers," she said. "We are so out of it all here."

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CHAPTER X

The day after the dance, at table, Cornélie received a strange impression: suddenly, as she sipped her delicious Genzano, ordered for her by Rudyard, she became aware that it was not by accident that she was sitting with the Baronin and her daughter, with Urania and Miss Taylor; she saw that the marchesa had an intention behind this arrangement. Rudyard, always civil, polite, thoughtful, always full of attentions, his pockets always filled with cards of introduction very difficult to obtain—or so at least he contended—talked without ceasing, lately more particularly to Miss Taylor, who went faithfully to hear all the best church music and always returned home in ecstasy. The pale, simple, thin little Englishwoman, who at first used to go into raptures over museums, ruins and the sunsets on the Aventine or the Monte Mario and who was always tired by her rambles through Rome, now devoted herself exclusively to the hundreds of churches, visited and studied them all and above all faithfully attended the musical services and spoke ecstatically of the choir in the Sistine Chapel and the quavering *Glorias* of the male *soprani*.

Cornélie spoke to Mrs. van der Staal and the Baronin von Rothkirch of the conversation between the marchesa and her nephew which she had heard through the half-open door; but neither of them, though interested and curious, took the marchesa's words seriously, regarding them only as so much thoughtless talk between a foolish, match-making aunt and an unwilling nephew. Cornélie was struck by seeing how unable people are to take things seriously; but the Baronin was quite indifferent, saying that Rudyard could do her no harm and was still supplying her with tickets; and Mrs. van der Staal, who had been in Rome a long time and was accustomed to little boarding-house conspiracies, considered that Cornélie was making herself too uneasy about the fair Urania's fate.

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Suddenly, however, Miss Taylor disappeared from the table. They thought that she was ill, until it came to light that she had left the Pension Belloni. Rudyard said nothing; but, a few days later, the whole *pension* knew that Miss Taylor had been converted to the Catholic faith and had moved to a *pension* recommended by Rudyard, a *pension* frequented by *monsignori* and noted for its religious tone. Her disappearance produced a certain constraint in the conversation between Rudyard, the German ladies and Cornélie; and the latter, in the course of a week which the Baronin was spending at Naples, changed her seat and joined her fellow-countrywomen the Van der Staals. The Von Rothkirches also changed, because of the draught, said the Baronin; their seats were taken by new arrivals; and Urania was left alone with Rudyard at lunch and dinner, amid those foreign elements.

Cornélie reproached herself and one day spoke seriously to the American girl and warned her. But she dared not repeat what she had overheard at the dance; and her warning made no impression on Urania. And, when Rudyard had obtained for Miss Hope the privilege of a private audience of the Pope, Urania would not hear a word against Rudyard and considered him the kindest man whom she had ever met, Jesuit or no Jesuit.

But Rudyard continued to appear through a haze of mystery; and people were not agreed as to whether he was a priest or a layman.

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CHAPTER XI

"What do those strangers matter to you?" asked Duco.

They were sitting in his studio: Mrs. van der Staal, Cornélie and the girls, Annie and Emilie. Annie was pouring out the tea; and they were discussing Miss Taylor and Urania.

"I am a stranger to you too!" said Cornélie.

"You are not a stranger to me, to us. But Miss Taylor and Urania don't matter. Hundreds of shadows pass through our lives: I don't see them and don't feel for

them.”

“And am I not a shadow?”

“I have talked to you too much in the Borghese and on the Palatine to look upon you as a shadow.”

“Rudyard is a dangerous shadow,” said Annie.

“He has no hold over us,” Duco replied.

Mrs. van der Staal looked at Cornélie. She understood the enquiring glance and said, laughing:

“No, he has no hold over me either. Still, if I felt the need of a religion, I mean an ecclesiastical religion, I would rather be a Roman Catholic than a Protestant. But, as things are ...”

She did not complete her sentence. She felt safe in this studio, in this soft, many-coloured profusion of beautiful things, in the affection of her friends; she felt in harmony with them all: with the worldly charm of that somewhat superficial mother and her two pretty girls, a little doll-like and vaguely cosmopolitan and a trifle vain of the little marquises with whom they danced and bicycled; and with that son, that brother so very different from the three of them and yet obviously related to them, as a movement, a gesture, a single word would show. It also struck Cornélie that they accepted each other affectionately as they were: Duco, his mother and sisters, with their stories about the Princesses Colonna and Odescalchi; mevrouw and the girls and him, with his worn jacket and his unkempt hair. And, when he began to speak, especially about Rome, when he put his dream into words, in almost bookish sentences, which however flowed easily and naturally from his lips, Cornélie felt in harmony with her surroundings, secure and interested and to some extent lost that longing to contradict him which his artistic indolence sometimes aroused in her. And, besides, his indolence suddenly seemed to her merely apparent and perhaps an affection, for he showed her sketches and water-colour drawings, not one of them finished, but every water-colour alive with light before all things, alive with all that light of Italy: the pearl sunsets over the molten emerald of Venice; the *campanili* of Florence drawn vaguely and dreamily against tender tea-rose skies; Siena fortress-like, blue-black in the bluish moonlight; the blazing sunshine behind St. Peter's; and, above all, the ruins, in every kind of light: the Forum in the bright sunlight, the Palatine by twilight, the Colosseum mysterious in the night; and then the Campagna: all the dream-like skies and luminous haze of the glad and sad Campagna, with pale-pink mauves, dewy blues, dusky violets or the swaggering ochres of pyrotechnical sunsets and clouds flaring like the crimson pinions of the phoenix. And, when Cornélie asked him why nothing was finished off, he answered that nothing was right. He saw the skies as dreams, visions and apotheoses; and on his paper they became water and paint; and paint was not a thing to be finished off. Besides, he lacked the self-confidence. And then he laid his skies aside, he said, and sat down to copy Byzantine madonnas.

When he saw that his water-colours interested her nevertheless, he went on talking about himself: how he had at first raved over the noble and ingenuous Primitives, Giotto and especially Lippo Memmi; how, after that, spending a year in Paris, he had found nothing that excelled Forain: cold, dry satire in two or three lines; how, next, in the Louvre, Rubens had become revealed to him, Rubens whose own talent and whose own brush he used to trace amid all the prentice-work and imitations of his pupils, until he was able to tell which cherub was by Rubens himself in a sky full of cherubs painted by four or five disciples.

And then, he said, he would pass weeks without giving a thought to painting or taking up a brush and would go daily to the Vatican, lost in contemplation of the magnificent marbles.

Once he had sat dreaming a whole morning in front of the *Eros*; once he had dreamt a poem there, to a very gentle, melodious, monotonous accompaniment, like an inward incantation. On coming home he had tried to put both poem and music on paper, but he had failed. Now he could no longer look at Forain, thought Rubens coarse and disgusting, but remained faithful to the Primitives:

“And suppose for a moment that I painted a lot and sent a lot of pictures to exhibitions? Should I be any the happier? Should I feel satisfied in having done something? I doubt it. Sometimes I do finish a water-colour and sell it; and then I can go on living for a month without troubling Mamma. Money I don't care about. Ambition is quite foreign to my nature.... But don't let us talk about myself. Do you still think of the future and ... bread?”

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"Perhaps," she said, with a melancholy laugh, while the studio around her grew dusk and dim and the figures of his mother and sisters, sitting silent, languid and uninterested in their easy-chairs, gradually faded away and every colour slowly paled. "But I am so weak-minded. You say that you are not an artist; and I ... I am not an apostle."

"To give one's life a course: that is the difficulty. Every life has a line, an appointed course, a road, a path: life has to flow along that line to death and what comes after death; and that line is difficult to find. I shall never find my line."

"I don't see my line before me either."

"Do you know, a restlessness has come over me. Mamma, listen, a restlessness has come over me. I used to dream in the Forum, I was happy and didn't think about my line, my appointed course. Mamma, do you think about your line? Do you, girls?"

His sisters giggled in the dark, sunk in their low chairs, like two pussy-cats. Mamma got up:

"Duco dear, you know I can't follow you. I admire Cornélie for liking your water-colours and understanding what you mean by that line. My line is to go home at once, for it's very late."

"That's the line of the next two seconds. But there is a restlessness about my line that affects it for days and weeks to come. I am not leading the right life. The past is very beautiful and so peaceful, because it has been. But I have lost that peace. The present is very small. But the future! ... Oh, if we could only find an aim ... for the future!"

They no longer listened; they went down the dark stairs, groping their way.

"Bread?" he asked himself, wonderingly.

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CHAPTER XII

One morning when Cornélie stayed indoors she went through the books that lay scattered about her room. And she found that it was useless for her to read Ovid, in order to study something of Roman manners, some of which had alarmed and shocked her; she found that Dante and Petrarch were too difficult to learn Italian from, whereas she had only to pick up a word or two in order to make herself understood in a shop or by the servants; she found Hare's *Walks* a too wearisome guide, because every cobble-stone in Rome did not inspire her with the same interest that Hare evidently derived from it. Then she confessed to herself that she could never see Italy and Rome as Duco van der Staal did. She never saw the light of the skies or the drifting of the clouds as he had seen them in his unfinished water-colour sketches. She had never seen the ruins transfigured in glory as he did in his hours of dreaming on the Palatine or in the Forum. She saw a picture merely with a layman's eye; a Byzantine madonna made no appeal to her. She was very fond of statues; but to fall head over ears in love with a mutilated marble torso, in the spirit in which he loved the *Eros*, seemed to her sickly ... and yet it seemed to be the right spirit in which to see the *Eros*. Well, not sickly, she admitted ... but morbid: the word, though she herself smiled at it expressed her opinion better; not sickly, but morbid. And she looked upon an olive as a tree rather like a willow, whereas Duco had told her that an olive was the most beautiful tree in the world.

She did not agree with him, either about the olive or about the *Eros*; and yet she felt that he was right from a certain mysterious standpoint on which there was no room for her, because it was like a mystic eminence amid impassable sensitive spheres which were not hers, even as the eminence was to her an unknown vantage-point of sensitiveness and vision. She did not agree with him and yet she was convinced of his greater rightness, his truer view, his nobler insight, his deeper feeling; and she was certain that her way of seeing Italy, in the disappointment of her disillusion, in the grey light of a growing indifference, was neither noble nor good; and she knew that the beauty of Italy escaped her, whereas to him it was like a tangible and comprehensible vision. And she cleared away Ovid and Petrarch and Hare's guidebook and locked them up in her trunk and took out the novels and pamphlets which had appeared that year about the woman movement in Holland. She took an interest in the problem and thought that

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it made her more modern than Duco, who suddenly seemed to her to belong to a bygone age, not modern, not modern. She repeated the words with enjoyment and suddenly felt herself stronger. To be modern: that should be her strength. One phrase of Duco's had struck her immensely, that exclamation:

"Oh, if we could only find an aim! Our life has a line, a path, which it must follow...."

To be modern: was that not a line? To find the solution of a modern problem: was that not an aim in life? He was quite right, from his point of view, from which he saw Italy; but was not the whole of Italy a past, a dream, at least that Italy which Duco saw, a dreamy paradise of nothing but art? It could not be right to stand like that, see like that a dream like that. The present was here: on the grey horizon muttered an approaching storm; and the latter-day problems flashed like lightning. Was that not what she had to live for? She felt for the woman, she felt for the girl: she herself had been the girl, brought up only as a social ornament, to shine, to be pretty and attractive and then of course to get married; she had shone and she had married; and now she was three-and-twenty, divorced from the husband who at one time had been her only aim and, for her sake, the aim of her parents; now she was alone, astray, desperate and utterly disconsolate: she had nothing to cling to and she suffered. She still loved him, cad and scoundrel though he was; and she had thought that she was doing something very clever, when she went abroad, to Italy, to study art. But she did not understand art, she did not feel Italy. Oh, how clearly she saw it, after those talks with Duco, that she would never understand art, even though she used to sketch a bit, even though she used to have a biscuit-group after Canova in her boudoir, *Cupid and Psyche*: so nice for a young girl! And with what certainty she now knew that she would never grasp Italy, because she did not think an olive-tree so very beautiful and had never seen the sky of the Campagna as a fluttering phoenix-wing! No, Italy would never be the consolation of her life....

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But what then? She had been through much, but she was alive and very young. And once again, at the sight of those pamphlets, at the sight of that novel, the desire arose in her soul: to be modern, to be modern! And to take part in the problem of to-day! To live for the future! To live for her fellow-women, married or unmarried!...

She dared not look deep down into herself, lest she should waver. To live for the future!... It separated her a little more from Duco, that new ideal. Did she mind? Was she in love with him? No, she thought not. She had been in love with her husband and did not want to fall in love at once with the first agreeable young man whom she chanced to meet in Rome....

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And she read the pamphlets, about the feminine problem and love. Then she thought of her husband, then of Duco. And wearily she dropped the pamphlets and reflected how sad it all was: people, women, girls. She, a woman, a young woman, an aimless woman: how sad her life was! And Duco: he was happy. And yet he was seeking the line of his life, yet he was looking out for his aim. A new restlessness had entered into him. And she wept a little and anxiously twisted herself on her cushions and clasped her hands and prayed, unconsciously, without knowing to whom she was praying:

"O God, tell me what to do!"

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CHAPTER XIII

It was then, after a few days, that Cornélie conceived the idea of leaving the boarding-house and going to live in rooms. The hotel-life disturbed her budding thoughts, like a wind of vanity that was constantly blighting very vague and fragile blossoms; and, despite a torrent of abuse from the marchesa, who reproached her with having engaged to stay the whole winter, she moved into the rooms which she had found with Duco van der Staal, after much hunting and stair-climbing. They were in the Via dei Serpenti, up any number of stairs: a set of two roomy, but almost entirely unfurnished apartments, containing only the absolute essentials; and, though the view extended far and wide above the house-tops of Rome to the circular ruin of the Colosseum, the rooms were rough and uncomfortable, bare and uninviting. Duco had not approved of them and said that they made him shiver, although they faced the sun; but there was something about the ruggedness of the place that harmonized with Cornélie's new mood.

When they parted that day, he thought how inartistic she was and she how unmodern he was. They did not meet again for several days; and Cornélie was very lonely, but did not feel her loneliness, because she was writing a pamphlet on the social position of divorced women. The idea was suggested to her by a few sentences in a tract on the feminist problem; and at once, without wasting much time in thought, she flung off her sentences in a succession of impulses and intuitions, rough-hewn, cold and clear; she wrote in an epistolary style, without literary art, as though to warn girls against cherishing too many illusions about marriage.

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She had not made her rooms comfortable; she sat there, high up over Rome, with her view across the house-tops to the Colosseum, writing, writing and writing, absorbed in her sorrow, uttering herself in her stubborn sentences, feeling intensely bitter, but pouring the wormwood of her soul into her pamphlet. Mrs. van der Staal and the girls, who came to see her, were surprised by her untidy appearance, her rough-looking rooms, with a dying fire in the little grate and with no flowers, no books, no tea and no cushions; and, when they went away after fifteen minutes, pleading urgent errands, they looked at each other, tripping down the endless stairs, with eyes of amazement, utterly at a loss to understand this transformation of an interesting, elegant little woman, surrounded by an aura of poetry and a tragic past, into an "independent woman," working furiously at a pamphlet full of bitter invective against society. And, when Duco looked her up again in a week's time and came to sit with her a little, he remained silent, stiff and upright in his chair, without speaking, while Cornélie read the beginning of her pamphlet to him. He was touched by the glimpses which it revealed to him of personal suffering and experience, but he was irritated by a certain discord between that slender, lily-like woman, with her drooping movements, and the surroundings in which she now felt at her ease, entirely absorbed in her hatred for the society—Hague society—which had become hostile to her because she refused to go on living with a cad who ill-treated her. And while she was reading, Duco thought:

"She would not write like that if she were not writing it all down from her own suffering. Why doesn't she make a novel of it? Why generalize from one's personal sorrows and why that admonishing voice?..."

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He did not like it. He thought the sound of that voice was hard, those truths so personal, that bitterness unattractive and that hatred of convention so small. And, when she put a question to him, he did not say much, nodded his head in vague approval and remained sitting in his stiff, uncomfortable attitude. He did not know what to answer, he was unable to admire, he thought her inartistic. And yet a great compassion welled up within him when he saw, in spite of it all, how charming she would be and what charm and womanly dignity would be hers could she find the line of her life and moved harmoniously along that line with the music of her own movement. He now saw her taking a wrong road, a path pointed out to her by the fingers of others and not entered upon from the impulse of her own soul. And he felt the deepest pity for her. He, an artist, but above all a dreamer, sometimes saw vividly, despite his dreaming, despite his sometimes all-embracing love of line and colour and atmosphere; he, the artist and dreamer, sometimes very clearly saw the emotion looming through the outward actions of his fellow-creatures, saw it like light shining through alabaster; and he suddenly saw her lost, seeking, straying: seeking she herself knew not what, straying she herself knew not through what labyrinth, far from her line, the line of her life and the course of her soul's journey, which she had never yet found.

She sat before him excitedly. She had read her last pages with a flushed face, in a resonant voice, her whole being in a fever. She looked as if she would have liked to fling those bitter pages at the feet of her Dutch sisters, at the feet of all women. He, absorbed in his speculations, melancholy in his pity for her, had scarcely listened, nodding his head in vague approval. And suddenly she began to speak of herself, revealed herself wholly, told him her life: her existence as a young girl at the Hague, her education with a view to shining a little and being attractive and pretty, with not one serious glance at her future, only waiting for a good match, with a flirtation here and a little love-affair there, until she was married: a good match, in her own circle; her husband a first lieutenant of hussars, a fine, handsome fellow, of a good, distinguished family, with a little money. She had fallen in love with him for his handsome face and his fine figure, which his uniform showed to advantage, and he with her as he might have done with any other girl who had a pretty face. Then came the revelation of those very early days: the discord between their characters manifesting itself luridly at once. She, spoilt at home, dainty, delicate, fastidious, but selfishly fastidious and flying out against any offence to her own spoilt little *ego*; he no longer the lover but immediately and brutally the man with rights to this and rights to that, with an oath here and a roar there; she with neither the tact nor the patience to make of their foundering lives what could still be made of them, nervous, quick-tempered, quick to resent

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coarseness, which made his savagery flare up so violently that he ill-treated her, swore at her, struck her, shook her and banged her against the wall.

The divorce followed. He had not consented at first, content, in spite of all, to have a house and in that house a wife, female to him, the male, and declining to return to the discomfort of life in chambers, until she simply ran away, first to her parents, then to friends in the country, protesting loudly against the law, which was so unjust to women. He had yielded at last and allowed himself to be accused of infidelity, which was not beside the truth. She was now free, but stood as it were alone, looked at askance by all her acquaintances, refusing to yield to their conventional demand for that sort of half-mourning which, according to their conventional ideas, should surround a divorced woman and at once returning to her former life, the gay life of an unmarried girl. But she had felt that this could not go on, both because of her acquaintances and because of herself: her acquaintances looking at her askance and she loathing her acquaintances, loathing their parties and dinners, until she felt profoundly unhappy, lonely and forlorn, without anything or anybody to cling to, and had felt all the depression that weighs down on the divorced woman. Sometimes, in her heart of hearts, she reflected that by dint of great patience and great tact she might have managed that man, that he was not wicked, only coarse, that she was still fond of him, or at least of his handsome face and his sturdy figure. Love, no, it was not love; but had she ever thought of love as she now sometimes pictured it? And did not nearly everybody live more or less so-so, with a good deal of give and take?

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But this regret she hardly confessed to herself, did not now confess to Duco; and what she did confess was her bitterness, her hatred of her husband, of marriage, of convention, of people, of the world, of all the great generalities, generalizing her own feelings into one great curse against life. He listened to her, with pity. He felt that there was something noble in her, which, however, had been stifled from the beginning. He forgave her for not being artistic, but he was sorry that she had never found herself, that she did not know what she was, who she was, what her life should be, or where the line of her life wound, the only path which she ought to tread, as every life follows one path. Oh, how often, if a person would but let herself go, like a flower, like a bird, like a cloud, like a star which so obediently ran its course, she would find her happiness and her life, even as the flower or the bird finds them, even as the cloud drifts before the sun, even as the star follows its course through the heavens. But he told her nothing of his thoughts, knowing that, especially in her present mood of bitterness, she would not understand them and could derive no comfort from them, because they would be too vague for her and too far removed from her own manner of thinking. She thought of herself, but imagined that she was thinking of women and girls and their movement towards the future. The lines of the women ... but had not every woman a line of her own? Only, how few of them knew it: their direction, their path, their line of life, their wavering course in the twilight of the future. And perhaps, because they did not know it for themselves, they were now all seeking together a broad path, a main road, along which they would march in troops, in a threatening multitude of women, in regiments of women, with banners and mottoes and war-cries, a broad path, parallel with the movement of the men, until the two paths would melt into one, until the troops of women would mingle with the troops of men, with equal rights and equal fullness of life....

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He said nothing to her. She noticed his silence and did not see how much was going on within him, how earnestly he was thinking of her, how profoundly he pitied her. She thought that she had bored him. And suddenly, around her, she saw the dim, barren room, saw that the fire was out; and her zeal subsided, her fever cooled and she thought her pamphlet bad, lacking strength and conviction. What would she not have given for a word from him! But he sat silent, seemed to take no interest, probably did not admire her style of writing. And she felt sad, deserted, lonely, estranged from him and bitter because of the estrangement; she felt ready to weep, to sob; and, strange to say, in her bitterness she thought of *him*, of her husband, with his handsome face. She could not restrain herself, she wept. Duco came up to her, put his hand on her shoulder. Then she felt something of what was going on within him and that his silence was not due to coldness. She told him that she could not remain alone that evening: she was too wretched, too wretched. He comforted her, said that there was much that was good, much that was true in her pamphlet; that he was not a good judge of these modern questions; that he was never clever except when he talked about Italy; that he felt so little for people and so much for statues, so little for what was newly building for a coming century and so much for what lay in ruins and remained over from earlier centuries. He said it as though apologizing. She smiled through her tears but repeated that she could not stay alone that evening and that she was coming with him to Belloni's, to his mother and sisters. And they went together, they walked round together; and, to divert her mind, he spoke to her of his own thoughts, told her anecdotes of the Renaissance masters. She did not hear what he said, but his voice was sweet to her ears. There was something so gentle about his indifference to the modern things

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that interested her, he had so much calmness, healing as balsam, in the restfulness of his soul, which allowed itself to move along the golden thread of his dreams, as though that thread was the line of his life, so much calmness and gentleness that she too grew calmer and gentler and looked up to him with a smile.

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And, however far removed they might be from each other—he going along a dreamy path, she lost in an obscure maze—they nevertheless felt each other approaching, felt their souls drawing nearer to each other, while their bodies moved beside each other in the actual street, through Rome, in the evening. He put his arm through hers to guide her steps.

And, when they came in sight of Belloni's, she thanked him, she did not know exactly for what: for the look in his eyes, for his voice, for the walk, for the consolation which she felt inexplicably yet clearly radiating from him; and she was glad to have come with him this evening and to feel the distraction of the Belloni *table-d'hôte* around her.

But at night, alone, alone in her bare rooms, she was overcome by her wretchedness as by a sea of blackness; and, looking out at the Colosseum, which showed faintly as a black arc in the black night, she sobbed until she felt herself sinking to the point of death, derelict, lonely and forlorn, high up above Rome, above the roofs, above the pale lights of Rome by night, under the clouds of the black night, sinking and derelict, as though she were drifting, a shipwrecked waif on an ocean which drowned the world and roared its complaints to the inexorable heavens.

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CHAPTER XIV

Nevertheless Cornélie recovered her calmness when her pamphlet was finished. She unpacked her trunks, arranged her rooms a little more snugly and, now more at her ease, rewrote the pamphlet and, in the revision, improved her style and even her ideas. When she had done working in the morning, she usually lunched at a small *osteria*, where she nearly always met Duco van der Staal and had her meal with him at a little table. As a rule she dined at Belloni's, beside the Van der Staals, in order to obtain a little diversion. The marchesa had not bowed to her at first, though she suffered her to attend her *table-d'hôte*, at three lire an evening; but after a time she bowed to Cornélie again, with a bitter-sweet little smile, for she had relet her two rooms at a higher price. And Cornélie, in her calmer mood, found it pleasant to change in the evening, to see Mrs. van der Staal and the girls, to listen to their little stories about the Roman *salons* and to cast a glance over the long tables. And they saw that the guests were ever again different, as in a kaleidoscope of fleeting personalities. Rudyard had disappeared, owing money to the marchesa, no one knew whither; the Von Rothkirches had gone to Greece; but Urania Hope was still there and sat next to the Marchesa Belloni. On her other side was the nephew, the Prince of Forte-Braccio, Duke of San Stefano, who dined at Belloni's every night. And Cornélie saw that a sort of conspiracy was in progress, the marchesa and the prince laying siege to the vain little American from either side. And next day she saw two *monsignori* seated in eager conversation with Urania at the marchesa's table, while the marchesa and the prince nodded their heads. All the visitors commented on it, every eye was turned in that direction, everybody watched the manœuvres and delighted in the romance.

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Cornélie was the only one who was not amused. She would have liked to warn Urania against the marchesa, the prince and the *monsignori* who had taken Rudyard's place, but especially against marriage, even marriage with a prince and duke. And, growing excited, she spoke to Mrs. van der Staal and the girls, repeated phrases out of her pamphlet, glowing with her red young hatred against society and people and the world.

Dinner was over; and, still eagerly talking, she went with the Van der Staals—mevrouw and the girls and Duco—to the drawing-room, sat down in a corner, resumed her conversation, flew out at mevrouw, who had contradicted her, and then suddenly saw a fat lady—the girls had already nick-named her the Satin Frigate—come towards her with a smile and say, while still at some distance:

"I beg your pardon, but there's something I want to say. Look here, I have been to Belloni's regularly every winter for the last ten years, from November to Easter; and every evening after dinner—but *only* after dinner—I sit in *this* corner, at *this* table, on *this* sofa. I hope you won't mind, but I should be glad to have my own seat now."

And the Satin Frigate smiled amiably; but, when the Van der Staals and Cornélie rose in mute amazement, she dumped herself down with a rustle on the sofa, bobbed up and down for a moment on the springs, laid her crochet-work on the table with a gesture as though she were planting the Union Jack in a new colony and said, with her most amiable smile:

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“Very much obliged. So many thanks.”

Duco roared, the girls giggled, but the Satin Frigate merely nodded to them good-humouredly. And, not even yet realizing what had happened, astounded but gay, they sat down in another corner, the girls still seized with an irrepressible giggle. The two æsthetic ladies, with the evening-dress and the Jaegers, who sat reading at the table in the middle of the room, closed their two books with one slam, rose and indignantly went away, because people were laughing and talking in the drawing-room:

“It’s a shame!” they said, aloud.

And, angular, arrogant and grimy, they stalked out through the door.

“What strange people!” thought Duco, smiling. “Shadows of people!... Their lines curl like arabesque through ours. Why do they cross our lines with their petty movements and why are ours never crossed by those which perhaps would be dearest to our souls?...”

He always took Cornélie back to the Via dei Serpenti. They walked slowly through the silent, deserted streets. Sometimes it was late in the evening, but sometimes it was immediately after dinner and then they would go through the Corso and he would generally ask her to come and sit at Aragno’s for a little. She agreed and they drank their coffee amid the gaiety of the brightly-lit café, watching the bustle on the pavement outside. They exchanged few words, distracted by the passers-by and the visitors to the café; but they both enjoyed this moment and felt at one with each other. Duco evidently did not give a thought to the unconventionality of their behaviour; but Cornélie thought of Mrs. van der Staal and that she would not approve of it or consent to it in one of her daughters, to sit alone with a gentleman in a café in the evening. And Cornélie also remembered the Hague and smiled at the thought of her Hague friends. And she looked at Duco, who sat quietly, pleased to be sitting with her, and drank his coffee and spoke a word now and again or pointed to a queer type or a pretty woman passing....

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One evening, after dinner, he suggested that they should all go to the ruins. It was full moon, a wonderful sight. But mevrouw was afraid of malaria, the girls of foot-pads; and Duco and Cornélie went by themselves. The streets were quite empty, the Colosseum rose menacingly like a fortress in the night; but they went in and the moonlight blue of the night shone through the open arches: the round pit of the arena was black on one side with shadow, while the stream of moonlight poured in on the other side, like a white flood, like a cascade; and it was as though the night were haunted, as though the Colosseum were haunted by all the dead past of Rome, emperors, gladiators and martyrs; shadows prowled like lurking wild animals, a patch of light suggested a naked woman and the galleries seemed to rustle with the sound of the multitude. And yet there was nothing and Duco and Cornélie were alone, in the depths of the huge, colossal ruin, half in shadow and half in light; and, though she was not afraid, she was obsessed by that awful haunting of the past and pushed closer to him and clutched his arm and felt very, very small. He just pressed her hand, with his simple ease of manner, to reassure her. And the night oppressed her, the ghostliness of it all suffocated her, the moon seemed to whirl giddily in the sky and to expand to a gigantic size and spin round like a silver wheel. He said nothing, he was in one of his dreams, seeing the past before him. And silently they went away and he led her through the Arch of Titus into the Forum. On the left rose the ruins of the imperial palaces; and all around them stood the black fragments, with a few pillars soaring on high and the white moonlight pouring down like a ghostly sea out of the night. They met no one, but she was frightened and clung tighter to his arm. When they sat down for a moment on a fragment of the foundation of some ancient building, she shivered with cold. He started up, said that she must be careful not to catch a chill; and they walked on and left the Forum. He took her home and she went upstairs alone, striking a match to see her way up the dark staircase. Once in her room, she perceived that it was dangerous to wander about the ruins at night. She reflected how little Duco had spoken, not thinking of danger, lost in his nocturnal dream, peering into the awful ghostliness. Why ... why had he not gone alone? Why had he asked her to go with him? She fell asleep after a chaos of whirling thoughts: the prince and Urania, the fat satin lady, the Colosseum and the martyrs and Duco and Mrs. van der Staal. His mother was so ordinary, his sisters charming but commonplace and he ... so strange! So simple, so unaffected, so unreserved; and for that very reason so strange. He would be impossible at the Hague, among her friends. And she smiled as she thought of what he had said and how he had said it and how he

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could sit quietly silent, for minutes on end, with a smile about his lips, as though thinking of something beautiful....

But she must warn Urania....

And she wearily fell asleep.

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CHAPTER XV

Cornélie's premonition regarding Mrs. van der Staal's opinion of her intercourse with Duco was confirmed: mevrouw spoke to her seriously, saying that she would compromise herself if she went on like that and adding that she had spoken to Duco in the same sense. But Cornélie answered rather haughtily and nonchalantly, declared that, after always minding the conventions and becoming very unhappy in spite of it, she had resolved to mind them no longer, that she valued Duco's conversation and that she was not going to be deprived of it because of what people thought or said. And then, she asked Mrs. van der Staal, who were "people?" Their three or four acquaintances at Belloni's? Who knew her besides? Where else did she go? Why should she care about the Hague? And she gave a scornful laugh, loftily parrying Mrs. van der Staal's arguments.

The conversation caused a coolness between them. Wounded in her touchy oversensitiveness, she did not come to dinner at Belloni's that evening. Next day, meeting Duco at their little table in the *osteria*, she asked him what he thought of his mother's rebuke. He smiled vaguely, raising his eyebrows, obviously not realizing the commonplace truth of his mother's words, saying that those were just Mamma's ideas, which of course were all very well and current in the set in which Mamma and his sisters lived, but which he didn't enter into or bother about, unless Cornélie thought that Mamma was right. And Cornélie blazed out contemptuously, shrugged her shoulders, asked who or what there was for whose sake she should allow herself to break off their friendly intercourse. They ordered a *mezzo-fiasco* between them and had a long, chatty lunch like two comrades, like two students. He said that he had been thinking over her pamphlet; he talked, to please her, about the modern woman, modern marriage, the modern girl. She condemned the way in which Mrs. van der Staal was bringing up her daughters, that light, frivolous education and that endless going about, on the look for a husband. She said that she spoke from experience.

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They walked along the Via Appia that afternoon and went to the Catacombs, where a Trappist showed them round. When Cornélie returned home she felt pleasantly light and cheerful. She did not go out again; she piled up the logs on her fire against the evening, which was turning chilly, and supped off a little bread and jelly, so as not to go out for her dinner. Sitting in her tea-gown, with her hands folded over her head, she stared into the briskly burning logs and let the evening speed past her. She was satisfied with her life, so free, independent of everything and everybody. She had a little money, she could go on living like this. She had no great needs. Her life in rooms, in little restaurants was not expensive. She wanted no clothes. She felt satisfied. Duco was an agreeable friend: how lonely she would be without him! Only her life must acquire some aim. What aim? The feminist movement? But how, abroad? It was such a different movement to work at.... She would send her pamphlet now to a newly founded women's paper. But then? She wasn't in Holland and she didn't want to go to Holland; and yet there would certainly be more scope there for her activity, for exchanging views with others. Whereas here, in Rome.... An indolence overcame her, in the drowsiness of her cosy room. For Duco had helped her to arrange her sitting-room. He certainly was a cultivated fellow, even though he was not modern. What a lot he knew about history, about Italy; and how cleverly he told it all! The way he explained Italy to her, she was interested in the country after all.

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Only, he wasn't modern. He had no insight into Italian politics, into the struggle between the Quirinal and the Vatican, into anarchism, which was showing its head at Milan, into the riots in Sicily.... An aim in life: what a difficult thing it was! And, in her evening drowsiness after a pleasant day, she did not feel the absence of an aim and enjoyed the soft luxury of letting her thoughts glide on in unison with the drowsy evening hours, in a voluptuous self-indulgence. She looked at the sheets of her pamphlet, scattered over her big writing-table, a real table to work at: they lay yellow under the light of her reading-lamp; they had not all been recopied, but she was not in the mood now; she threw a log into the little grate and the fire smoked and blazed. So pleasant, that foreign habit of burning wood instead of coal....

And she thought of her husband. She missed him sometimes. Could she not have managed him, with a little tact and patience? After all, he was very nice during the period of their engagement. He was rough, but not bad. He might have sworn at her sometimes, but perhaps he did not mean any great harm. He waltzed divinely, he swung you round so firmly.... He was good-looking and, she had to confess, she was in love with him, if only for his handsome face, his handsome figure. There was something about his eyes and mouth that she was never able to resist. When he spoke, she had to look at his mouth. However, that was all over and done with....

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After all, perhaps the life at the Hague was too monotonous for her temperament. She liked travelling, seeing new people, developing new ideas; and she had never been able to settle down in her little set. And now she was free, independent of all ties, of all people. If Mrs. van der Staal was angry, she didn't care.... And, all the same, Duco was rather modern, in his indifference to convention. Or was it merely the artistic side in him? Or was he, as a man who was not modern, indifferent to it even as she, a modern woman, was? A man could allow himself more. A man was not so easily compromised.... A modern woman. She repeated the words proudly. Her drowsiness acquired a certain arrogance. She drew herself up, stretching out her arms, looked at herself in the glass: her slender figure, her delicate little face, a trifle pale, with the eyes big and grey and bright under their remarkably long lashes, her light-brown hair in a loose, tangled coil, the lines of her figure, like those of a drooping lily, very winsome in the creased folds of her old tea-gown, pale-pink and faded.... What was her path in life? She felt herself to be something more than a worker and fighter, to be very complex, felt that she was a woman too, felt a great womanliness inside her, like a weakness which would hamper her energy. And she wandered through the room, unable to decide to go to bed, and, staring into the gloomy ashes of the expiring fire, she thought of her future, of what she would become and how, of how she would go and whither, along which curve of life, wandering through what forests, winding through what alleys, crossing which other curves of which other, seeking souls....

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CHAPTER XVI

The idea had long fixed itself in Cornélie's mind that she must speak to Urania Hope; and one morning she sent her a note asking for an appointment that afternoon. Miss Hope wrote back assenting; and at five o'clock Cornélie found her at home in her handsome and expensive sitting-room at Belloni's: many lights, many flowers; Urania hammering on the piano in an indoor gown of Venetian lace; the table decked with a rich tea, with cut bread-and-butter, cakes and sweets. Cornélie had said that she wanted to see Miss Hope alone, on a matter of importance, and at once asked if she would be alone, feeling a doubt of it, now that Urania was receiving her so formally. But Urania reassured her: she had said that she was at home to no one but Mrs. de Retz and was very curious to know what Cornélie had come to talk about. Cornélie reminded Urania of her former warning and, when Urania laughed, she took her hand and looked at her with such serious eyes that she made an impression of the American girl's frivolous nature and Urania became puzzled. Urania now suddenly thought it very momentous—a secret, an intrigue, a danger, in Rome!—and they whispered together. And Cornélie, no longer feeling anxious amid this increasing intimacy, confessed to Urania what she had heard through the half-open door: the marchesa's machinations with her nephew, whom she was absolutely bent on marrying to a rich heiress at the behest of the prince's father, who seemed to have promised her so much for putting the match through. Then she spoke of Miss Taylor's conversion, effected by Rudyard: Rudyard, who did not seem able to achieve his purpose with Urania, failing to obtain a hold on her confiding, but frivolous, butterfly nature, and who, as Cornélie suspected, had for that reason incurred the disfavour of his ecclesiastical superiors and vanished without settling his debt to the marchesa. His place appeared to have been taken by the two *monsignori*, who looked more dignified and worldly and displayed great unctuousness, were more lavish in smiles. And Urania, staring at this danger, at these pit-falls under her feet which Cornélie had suddenly revealed to her, now became really frightened, turned pale and promised to be on her guard. Really she would have liked to tell her maid to pack up at once, so that they might leave Rome as soon as possible, for another town, another *pension*, one with lots of titled people: she adored titles! And Cornélie, seeing that she had made an impression, continued, spoke of herself, spoke of marriage in general, said that she had written a pamphlet against marriage and on *The Social Position of Divorced Women*. And she spoke of the suffering which she had been through and of the feminist movement in Holland.

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And, once in the vein, she abandoned all restraint and talked more and more emphatically, until Urania thought her exceedingly clever, a very clever girl, to be able to argue and write like that on a *ques-tion brû-lante*, laying a fine stress on the first syllables of the French words. She admitted that she would like to have the vote and, as she said this, spread out the long train of her lace tea-gown. Cornélie spoke of the injustice of the law which leaves the wife nothing, takes everything from her and forces her entirely into the husband's power; and Urania agreed with her and passed the little dish of chocolate-creams. And to the accompaniment of a second cup of tea they talked excitedly, both speaking at once, neither listening to what the other was saying; and Urania said that it was a shame. From the general discussion they relapsed to the consideration of their particular interests: Cornélie depicted the character of her husband, unable, in the coarseness of his nature, to understand a woman or to consent that a woman should stand beside him and not beneath him. And she once more returned to the Jesuits, to the danger of Rome for rich girls travelling alone, to that virago of a marchesa and to the prince, that titled bait which the Jesuits flung to win a soul and to improve the finances of an impoverished Italian house which had remained faithful to the Pope and refused to serve the king. And both of them were so vehement and excited that they did not hear the knock and looked up only when the door slowly opened. They started, glanced round and both turned pale when they saw the Prince of Forte-Braccio enter the room. He apologized with a smile, said that he had seen a light in Miss Urania's sitting-room, that the porter had told him she was engaged, but that he had ventured to disobey her orders. And he sat down; and, in spite of all that they had been saying, Urania thought it delightful to have the prince sitting there and accepting a cup of tea at her hands and graciously consenting to eat a piece of cake.

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And Urania showed her album of coats of arms—the prince had already contributed an impression of his—and next the album with patterns of the queen's ball-dresses. Then the prince laughed and felt in his pocket for an envelope; he opened it and carefully produced a cutting of blue brocade embroidered with silver and seed-pearls.

"What is it?" asked Urania, in ecstasy.

And he said that he had brought her a pattern of her majesty's last dress; his cousin—not a Black, like himself, but a White, belonging not to the papal but to the court party and a lady-in-waiting to the queen—had procured this cutting for him for Urania's album. Urania would see it herself: the queen would wear the dress at next week's court ball. He was not going, he did not even go to his cousin's officially, not to her parties; but he saw her sometimes, because of the family relationship, out of friendship. And he begged Urania not to give him away: it might injure him in his career—"What career?" Cornélie wondered to herself—if people knew that he saw much of his cousin; but he had called on her pretty often lately, for Urania's sake, to get her that pattern.

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And Urania was so grateful that she forgot all about the social position of girls and women, married or unmarried, and would gladly have sacrificed her right to the franchise for such a charming Italian prince. Cornélie became vexed, rose, bowed coldly to the prince and drew Urania with her to the door:

"Don't forget what we have been saying," she warned her. "Be on your guard."

And she saw the prince look at her sarcastically, as they whispered together, suspecting that she was talking about him, but proud of the power of his personality and his title and his attentions over the daughter of an American stockinet-manufacturer.

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CHAPTER XVII

A coolness had arisen between Mrs. van der Staal and Cornélie; and Cornélie no longer went to dine at Belloni's. She did not see mevrouw and the girls again for weeks; but she saw Duco daily. Notwithstanding the essential differences in their characters, they had grown so accustomed to being together that they missed each other if a day passed without their meeting; and so they had gradually come to lunch and dine together every day, almost as a matter of course: in the morning at the *osteria* and in the evening at some small restaurant or other, usually very simply. To avoid dividing the bill, Duco would pay one time and Cornélie the next. Generally they had much to talk about: he taught her Rome, took her after lunch to all manner of churches and museums; and under his guidance she began to

understand, appreciate and admire. By unconscious suggestion he inspired her with some of his ideas. She found painting very difficult, but understood sculpture much more readily. And she began to look upon him as not merely morbid; she looked up to him, he spoke quite simply to her, as from his exalted standpoint of feeling and knowledge and understanding, of very exalted matters which she, as a girl and later as a young married woman, had never seen in the glorious apotheosis which he caused to rise before her like the first gleam of a dawn, of a new day in which she beheld new types of life, created of all that was noblest in the artist's soul. He regretted that he could not show her Giotto in the Santa Croce at Florence and the Primitives in the Uffizi and that he had to teach her Rome straight away; but he introduced her to all the exuberant art-life of the Papal Renaissance, until, under the influence of his speech, she shared that life for a single intense second and until Michael Angelo and Raphael stood out before her, also living. After a day like that, he would think that after all she was not so hopelessly inartistic; and she thought of him with respect, even after the suggestion was interrupted and when she reflected on what she had seen and heard and really, deep down in herself, no longer understood things so well as she had that morning, because she was lacking in love for them. But so much glamour of colour and the past remained whirling before her eyes in the evening that it made her pamphlet seem drab and dull; and the feminist movement ceased to interest her and she did not care about Urania Hope.

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He admitted to himself that he had quite lost his peace of mind, that Cornélie stood before him in his thoughts, between him and his old triptychs, that his lonely, friendless, ingenuous, simple life, content with wandering through and outside Rome, with reading, dreaming and now and then painting a little, had changed entirely in habit and in line, now that the line of his life had crossed that of hers and they both seemed to be going one way, he did not really know why. Love was not exactly the word for the feeling that drew him towards her. And just very vaguely, inwardly and unconsciously he suspected, though he never actually said or even thought as much, that it was the line of her figure, which was marked by something almost Byzantine, the slenderness of the frame, the long arms, the drooping lily-line of the woman who suffered, with the melancholy in her grey eyes, overshadowed by their almost too-long lashes; that it was the noble shape of her hand, small and pretty for a tall woman; that it was a movement of her neck, as of a swaying stalk, or a tired swan trying to glance backwards. He had never met many women and those whom he had met had always seemed very ordinary; but she was unreal to him, in the contradictions of her character, in its vagueness and intangibility, in all the half-tints which escaped his eye, accustomed to half-tints though it was.... What was she like? What he had always seen in her character was a woman in a novel, a heroine in a poem. What was she as a living woman of flesh and blood? She was not artistic and she was not inartistic; she had no energy and yet she did not lack energy; she was not precisely cultivated; and yet, obeying her impulse and her intuition, she wrote a pamphlet on one of the most modern questions and worked at it and revised and copied it, till it became a piece of writing no worse than another. She had a spacious way of thinking, loathing all the pettiness of the cliques, no longer feeling at home, after her suffering, in her little Hague set; and here, in Rome, at a dance she listened behind a door to a nonsensical conspiracy, hardly worthy of the name, he thought, and had gone to Urania Hope to mingle with the confused curves of smaller lives, curves without importance, of people whom he despised for their lack of line, of colour, of vision, of haze, of everything that was dear as life to him and made up life for him.... What was she like? He did not understand her. But her curve was of importance to him. She was not without a line: a line of art and line of life; she moved in the dream of her own indefiniteness before his gazing eyes; and she loomed up out of the haze, as out of the twilight of his studio atmosphere, and stood before him like a phantom. He would not call that love; but she was dear to him like a revelation that constantly veiled itself in secrecy. And his life as a lonely wanderer was, it was true, changed; but she had introduced no inharmonious habit into his life: he enjoyed taking his meals in a little café or *osteria*; and she took them with him easily and simply, not squalidly but pleasantly and harmoniously, with an adaptability and with just as much natural grace as when she used to dine of an evening at the *table-d'hôte* at Belloni's. All this—that contradictory admixture of unreality, of inconsistency; that living vision of indefiniteness; that intangibility of her individual essence; that self-concealment of the soul; that blending of her essential characteristics—had become a charm to him: a restlessness, a need, a nervous want in his life, otherwise so restful, so easily contented and calm, but above all a charm, an indispensable every-day charm.

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And, without troubling about what people might think, about what Mrs. van der Staal thought, they would one day go to Tivoli together, or another day walk from Castel Gandolfo to Albano and drive to the Lago di Nemi and picnic at the Villa Sforza-Cesarini, with the broken capital of a classic pillar for a table. They rested side by side in the shadow of the trees, admired the camellias, silently contemplated the glassy clearness of the lake, Diana's looking-glass, and drove

back over Frascati. They were silent in the carriage; and he smiled as he reflected how they had been taken everywhere that day for man and wife. She also thought of their increasing intimacy and at the same time thought that she would never marry again. And she thought of her husband and compared him with Duco, so young in the face but with eyes full of depth and soul, a voice so calm and even, with everything that he said much to the point, so accurately informed; and then his calmness, his simplicity, his lack of passion, as though his nerves had schooled themselves only to feel the calmness of art in the dreamy mist of his life. And she confessed to herself, there, in the carriage beside him, amid the softly shelving hills, purpling away in the evening, while before her faded the rose-mallow of a pale gold sunset, that he was dear to her because of that cleverness, that absence of passion, that simplicity and that accuracy of information—a clear voice sounding up out of the dreamy twilight—and that she was happy to be sitting beside him, to hear that voice and by chance to feel his hand, happy in that her line of life had crossed his, in that their two lines seemed to form a path towards the increasing brightness, the gradual daily elucidation of their immediate future....

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CHAPTER XVIII

Cornélie now saw no one except Duco. Mrs. van der Staal had broken with her and would not allow her daughters to have any further intercourse with her. A coolness had arisen even between the mother and the son. Cornélie saw no one now except Duco and, at times, Urania Hope. The American girl came to her pretty often and told her about Belloni's, where the people talked about Cornélie and Duco and commented on their relations. Urania was glad to think herself above that hotel gossip, but still she wanted to warn Cornélie. Her words displayed a simple spontaneity of friendship that appealed to Cornélie. When Cornélie, however, asked after the prince, she became silent and confused and evidently did not wish to say much. Then, after the court ball, at which the queen had really worn the dress embroidered with seed-pearls, Urania came and looked Cornélie up again and admitted, over a cup of tea, that she had that morning promised to go and see the prince at his own place. She said this quite simply, as though it was the most natural thing in the world. Cornélie was horrified and asked her how she could have promised such a thing.

"Why not?" Urania replied. "What is there in it? I receive his visits. If he asks me to come and see his rooms—he lives in the Palazzo Ruspoli and wants to show me his pictures and miniatures and old lace—why should I refuse to go? Why should I make a fuss about it? I am above any such narrow-mindedness. We American girls go about freely with our men friends. And what about yourself? You go for walks with Mr. van der Staal, you lunch with him, you go for trips with him, you go to his studio...."

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"I have been married," said Cornélie. "I am responsible to no one. You have your parents. What you are thinking of doing is imprudent and high-handed. Tell me, does the prince think of ... marrying you?"

"If I become a Catholic."

"And ...?"

"I think ... I shall. I have written to Chicago," she said, hesitatingly.

She closed her beautiful eyes for a second and went pale, because the title of princess and duchess flashed before her sight.

"Only ..." she began.

"Only what?"

"I sha'n't have a cheerful life. The prince belongs to the Blacks. They are always in mourning because of the Pope. They have hardly anything in their set: no dances, no parties. If we got married, I should like him to come to America with me. Their home in the Abruzzi is a lonely, tumbledown castle. His father is a very proud, stand-offish, silent person. I have been told so by ever so many people. What am I to do, Cornélie? I'm very fond of Gilio: his name is Virgilio. And then, you know, the title is an old Italian title: Principe di Forte-Braccio, Duca di San Stefano.... But then, you see, that's all there is to it. San Stefano is a hole. That's where his papa lives. They sell wine and live on that. And olive-oil; but they don't make any money. My father manufactures stockinet; but he has grown rich on it. They haven't many

family-jewels. I have made enquiries.... His cousin, the Contessa di Rosavilla, the lady in waiting to the queen, is nice ... but we shouldn't see her officially. I shouldn't be able to go anywhere. It does strike me as rather boring."

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Cornélie spoke vehemently, blazed out and repeated her phrases: against marriage in general and now against this marriage in particular, merely for the sake of a title. Urania assented: it was merely for the title; but then there was Gilio too, of course: he was so nice and she was fond of him. But Cornélie didn't believe a word of it and told her so straight out. Urania began to cry: she did not know what to do.

"And when were you to go to the prince?"

"This evening."

"Don't go."

"No, no, you're right, I sha'n't go."

"Do you promise me?"

"Yes, yes."

"Don't go, Urania."

"No, I sha'n't go. You're a dear girl. You're quite right: I won't go. I swear to you I won't."

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CHAPTER XIX

The undertaking which Urania had given was so vague, however, that Cornélie felt uneasy and spoke of it to Duco that evening, when she met him at the restaurant. But he was not interested in Urania, in what she did or didn't do; and he shrugged his shoulders indifferently. Cornélie, on the other hand, was silent and absent-minded and did not listen to what he was talking about: a side-panel of a triptych, undoubtedly by Lippo Memmi, which he had discovered in a little shop by the Tiber; the angel of the Annunciation, almost as beautiful as the one in the Uffizi, kneeling with the stir of his last flight yet about him, with the lily-stem in his hands. But the dealer asked two hundred lire for it and he did not want to give more than fifty. And yet the dealer had not mentioned Memmi's name, did not suspect that the angel was by Memmi.

Cornélie was not listening; and suddenly she said:

"I am going to the Palazzo Ruspoli."

He looked up in surprise:

"What for?"

"To ask for Miss Hope."

He was dumb with amazement and continued to look at her open-mouthed.

"If she's not there," Cornélie went on, "it's all right. If she is, if she has gone after all, I'll ask to speak to her on urgent business."

He did not know what to say, thinking her sudden idea so strange, so eccentric, thinking it so unnecessary that her curve should cross the curves of insignificant, indifferent people, that he did not know how to choose his words. Cornélie glanced at her watch:

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"It's past half-past nine. If she does go, she will go about this time."

She called the waiter and paid the bill. And she buttoned her coat and stood up. He followed after her:

"Cornélie," he began, "isn't what you are doing rather strange? It'll mean all sorts of worries for you."

"If one always objected to being worried, one would never do a good action."

They walked on in silence, he moving irritably by her side. They did not speak: he

thought her intention simply crazy; she thought him wanting in chivalry, not to wish to protect Urania. She was thinking of her pamphlet, of her fellow-women; and she wanted to protect Urania from marriage, from that prince. And they walked through the Corso to the Palazzo Ruspoli. He became nervous, made another attempt to restrain her; but she had already asked the porter:

"Is *il signore principe* at home?"

The man looked at her suspiciously:

"No," he said, curtly.

"I believe he is. If so, ask if Miss Hope is with his excellency. Miss Hope was not at home; I believe that she was coming to see the prince this evening; and I want to speak to her urgently ... on a matter which will not brook delay. Here: la Signora de Retz...."

She handed him her card. She spoke with the greatest self-possession and referred to Urania's visit calmly and simply, as though it were an every-day occurrence for American girls to call on Italian princes in the evening and as though she were persuaded that the porter knew of this custom. The man was disconcerted by her attitude, bowed, took the card and went away. Cornélie and Duco waited in the portico.

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He admired her calmness. He considered her behaviour eccentric; but she carried out her eccentricity with a self-assurance which once more showed her in a new light. Would he never understand her, would he never grasp anything or know anything for certain of that changeful and intangible vagueness of hers? He could never have spoken those few words to that porter in just that tone! Where had she got that tact from, that dignified, serious attitude towards that imposing janitor, with his long cane and his cocked hat? She did it all as easily as she ordered their simple dinner, with a pleasant familiarity, of the waiter at their little restaurant.

The porter returned:

"Miss Hope and his excellency beg that you will come upstairs."

She looked at Duco with a triumphant smile, amused at his confusion:

"Will you come too?"

"Why, no," he stammered. "I can wait for you here."

She followed the footman up the stairs. The wide corridor was hung with family-portraits. The drawing-room door was open and the prince came out to meet her.

"Please forgive me, prince," she said, calmly, putting out her hand.

His eyes were small and pinched and gleamed like carbuncles; he was white with rage; but he controlled himself and pressed his lips to the hand which she gave him.

"Forgive me," she went on. "I want to speak to Miss Hope on an urgent matter."

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She entered the drawing-room; Urania was there, blushing and embarrassed.

"You understand," Cornélie said, with a smile, "that I would not have disturbed you if it had not been important. A question between women ... and still important!" she continued, jestingly; and the prince made an insipid, gallant reply. "May I speak to Miss Hope alone for a moment?"

The prince looked at her. He suspected unfriendliness in her and more, hostility. But he bowed, with his insipid smile, and said that he would leave the ladies to themselves. He went to another room.

"What is it, Cornélie?" asked Urania, in agitation.

She took Cornélie's two hands and looked at her anxiously.

"Nothing," said Cornélie, severely. "I have nothing to say to you. Only I had my suspicions and felt sure that you would not keep your promise. I wanted to make certain if you were here. Why did you come?"

Urania began to weep.

"Don't cry!" whispered Cornélie, mercilessly. "For God's sake don't start crying. You've done the most thoughtless thing imaginable...."

"I know I have!" Urania confessed, nervously, drying her tears.

"Then why did you do it?"

"I couldn't help it."

"Alone, with him, in the evening! A man well-known to be a bad lot."

"I know."

"What do you see in him?"

"I'm fond of him."

"You only want to marry him for his title. For the sake of his title you're compromising yourself. What if he doesn't respect you this evening as his future wife? What if he compels you to be his mistress?"

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"Cornélie! Don't!"

"You're a child, a thoughtless child. And your father lets you travel by yourself ... to see 'dear old Italy!' You're an American and broad-minded: that's all right; to travel through the world pluckily on your own is all right; but you're not a woman, you're a baby!"

"Cornélie..."

"Come away with me; say that you're going with me ... for an urgent reason. Or no ... better say nothing. Stay. But I'll stay too."

"Yes, you stay too."

"We'll send for him now."

"Yes."

Cornélie rang the bell. A footman appeared.

"Tell his excellency that we are ready."

The man went away. In a little while the prince entered. He had never been treated like that in his own house. He was seething with rage, but he remained very polite and outwardly calm:

"Is the important matter settled?" he asked, with his small eyes and his hypocritical smile.

"Yes; thank you very much for your discretion in leaving us to ourselves," said Cornélie. "Now that I have spoken to Miss Hope, I am greatly relieved by what she has told me. Aha, you would like to know what we were talking about!"

The prince raised his eyebrows. Cornélie had spoken archly, holding up her finger as though in threat, smiling; and the prince looked at her and saw that she was handsome. Not with the striking beauty and freshness of Urania Hope, but with a more complex attractiveness, that of a married woman, divorced, but very young; that of a *fin-de-siècle* woman, with a faintly perverse expression in her deep grey eyes, moving under very long lashes; that of a woman of peculiar grace in the drooping lines of her tired, lax, morbid charm: a woman who knew life; a woman who saw through him: he was certain of it; a woman who, though disliking him, nevertheless spoke to him coquettishly in order to attract him, to win him, unconsciously, from sheer womanly perversity. And he saw her, in her perverse beauty, and admired her, sensitive as he was to various types of women. He suddenly thought her handsomer and less commonplace than Urania and much more distinguished and not so ingenuously susceptible to his title, a thing which he thought so silly in Urania. He was suddenly at his ease with her, his anger subsided: he thought it fun to have two good-looking women with him instead of one; and he jested in return, saying that he was consumed with curiosity, that he had been listening at the door but had been unable to catch a word, alas!

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Cornélie laughed with coquettish gaiety and looked at her watch. She said something about going, but sat down at the same time, unbuttoned her coat and said to the prince:

"I have heard so much about your miniatures. Now that I have the chance, may I see them?"

The prince was willing, charmed by the look in her eyes, by her voice; he was all fire and flame in a second.

"But," said Cornélie, "my escort is waiting outside in the portico. He would not come up: he doesn't know you. It is Mr. van der Staal."

The prince laughed as he glanced at her. He knew of the gossip at Belloni's. He did not for a moment doubt the existence of a *liaison* between Van der Staal and Signora de Retz. He knew that they did not care for the proprieties. And he began to like Cornélie very much.

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"But I will send to Mr. van der Staal at once to ask him to come up."

"He is waiting in the portico," said Cornélie. "He won't like to...."

"I'll go myself," said the prince, with obliging vivacity.

He left the room. The ladies stayed behind. Cornélie took off her coat, but kept on her hat, because her hair was sure to be untidy. She looked into the glass:

"Have you your powder on you?" she asked Urania.

Urania took her little ivory powder-box from her bag and handed it to Cornélie. And, while Cornélie powdered her face, Urania looked at her friend and did not understand. She remembered the impression of seriousness which Cornélie had made on her at their first meeting: studying Rome; afterwards, writing a pamphlet on the woman question and the position of divorced women. Then her warnings against marriage and the prince. And now she suddenly saw her as a most attractive, frivolous woman, irresistibly charming, even more bewitching than actually beautiful, full of coquetry in the depths of her grey eyes, which glanced up and down under the curling lashes, simply dressed in a dark-silk blouse and a cloth skirt, but with so much distinction and so much coquetry, with so much dignity and yet with a touch of yielding winsomeness, that she hardly knew her.

But the prince had returned, bringing Duco with him. Duco was nervously reluctant, not knowing what had happened, not grasping how Cornélie had acted. He saw her sitting quietly, smiling; and she at once explained that the prince was going to show her his miniatures.

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Duco declared flatly that he did not care for miniatures. The prince suspected from his irritable tone that he was jealous. And this suspicion incited the prince to pay attentions to Cornélie. And he behaved as though he were showing his miniatures only to *her*, as though he were showing *her* his old lace. She admired the lace in particular and rolled it between her delicate fingers. She asked him to tell her about his grandmothers, who used to wear the lace: had they had any adventures? He told her one, which made her laugh very much; then he told an anecdote or two, vivaciously, flaming up under her glance, and she laughed. Amid the atmosphere of that big drawing-room, his study—it contained his writing-table—with the candles lighted and flowers everywhere for Urania, a certain perverse gaiety began to reign, an airy *joie de vivre*. But only between Cornélie and the prince. Urania had fallen silent; and Duco did not speak a word. Cornélie was a revelation to him also. He had never seen her like that: not at the dance on Christmas Day, nor at the *table-d'hôte*, nor in his studio, nor on their excursions, nor in their restaurant. Was she a woman, or was she ten women?

And he confessed to himself that he loved her, that he loved her more at each revelation, more with each woman that he saw in her, like a new facet which she made to gleam and glitter. But he could not speak, could not join in their pleasantries, feeling strange in that atmosphere, strange in that atmosphere of buoyant animal spirits, caused by nothing but aimless words, as though the French and Italian which they mixed up together were dropping so many pearls, as though their jests shone like so much tinsel, as though their equivocal playing upon words had the iridescence of a rainbow....

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The prince regretted that his tea was no longer fit to drink, but he rang for some champagne. He thought that his plans had partly failed that evening, for, fearing to lose Urania, he had intended to compel her; seeing her hesitation, he had resolved to force the irreparable. But his nature was so devoid of seriousness—he was marrying to please his father and the Marchesa Belloni rather than himself; he enjoyed his life quite as well with a load of debts and no wife as he could hope to do with a wife and millions of money—that he began to consider the failure of his plans highly amusing and had to laugh within himself when he thought of his father, of his aunt, the marchesa, and of their machinations, which had no effect on Urania, because a pretty, flirtatious woman had objected.

"Why did she object?" he wondered, as he poured out the foaming Monopole, spilling it over the glasses. "Why does she put herself between me and the American stocking-seller? Is she herself in Italy hunting for a title?"

But he did not care: he thought the intruder charming, pretty, very pretty,

coquettish, seductive, bewitching. He fussed around her, neglecting Urania, almost forgetting to fill her glass. And, when it grew late and Cornélie at last rose to go and drew Urania's arm through hers and looked at the prince with a glance of triumph which they mutually understood, he whispered in her ear:

"I am ever so grateful to you for visiting me in my humble abode. You have defeated me: I acknowledge myself defeated."

The words appeared to be merely an allusion to their jesting discussion about nothing; but, uttered between him and her, between the prince and Cornélie, they sounded full of meaning; and he saw the smile of victory in her eyes....

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He remained behind in his room and poured himself out what remained of the champagne. And, as he raised the glass to his lips, he said, aloud:

"O, che occhi! Che belli occhi!... Che belli occhi!..."

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CHAPTER XX

Next day, when Duco met Cornélie at the *osteria*, she was very cheerful and excited. She told him that she had already received a reply from the woman's paper to which she had sent her pamphlet the week before and that her work was not only accepted but would be paid for. She was so proud at earning money for the first time that she was as merry as a little child. She did not speak of the previous evening, seemed to have forgotten Urania, but felt an exuberant need to talk.

She formed all sorts of great plans: to travel about as a journalist, to fling herself into the movement of the great cities, to pursue every reality, to have herself sent by some paper as a delegate to congresses and festivals. The few guilders which she was earning already made her intoxicated with zeal; and she would like to make a lot of money and do a great deal and consider no fatigue. He thought her simply adorable: in the half light of the *osteria*, as she sat at the little table eating her *gnocchi*, with in front of her the *mezzofiasco* of pale-yellow wine of the country, her usual languor acquired a new vivacity which astonished him; her outline, half-dark on the left, lighted on the right by the sunshine in the street, acquired a modern grace of drawing which reminded him of the French draughtsmen: the rather pale face with the delicate features, lit up by her smile, faintly indicated under the sailor hat, which slanted over her eyes; the hair, touched with gold, or a dark light-brown; the white veil raised into a ruffled mist above; her figure, slender and gracious in the simple, unbuttoned coat, with a bunch of violets in her blouse.

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The manner in which she helped herself to wine, in which she addressed the *cameriere*—the only one, who knew them well, from seeing them daily—with a pleasant familiarity; the vivacity replacing her languor; her great plans, her gay phrases: all this seemed to shine upon him, unconstrained and yet distinguished, free and yet womanly and, above all, easy, as she was at her ease everywhere, with an assimilative tact which for him constituted a peculiar harmony. He thought of the evening before, but she did not speak of it. He thought of that revelation of her coquetry, but she was not thinking of coquetry. She was never coquettish with him. She looked up to him, regarded him as clever and exceptional, though not belonging to his time; she respected him for the things which he said and thought; and she was as matter of fact towards him as one chum towards another, who happened to be older and cleverer. She felt for him a sincere friendship, an indescribable something that implied the need of being together, of living together, as though the lines of their two lives should form one line. It was not a sisterly feeling and it was not passion and to her mind it was not love; but it was a great sense of respectful tenderness, of longing admiration and of affectionate delight at having met him. If she never saw him again, she would miss him as she would never miss any one in her life. And that he took no interest in modern questions did not lower him in the eyes of this young modern Amazon, who was about to wave her first banner. It might vex her for an instant, but it did not carry weight in her estimation of him. And he saw that, with him, she was simply affectionate, without coquetry. Yet he would never forget what she had been like yesterday, with the prince. He had felt jealousy and noticed it in Urania also. But she herself had acted so spontaneously in harmony with her nature that she no longer thought of that evening, of the prince, of Urania, of her own coquettishness or of any possible jealousy on their side.

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He paid the bill—it was his turn—and she gaily took his arm and said that she had a surprise in store for him, with which he would be very pleased. She wanted to give him something, a handsome, a very handsome keepsake. She wanted to spend on it the money she was going to receive for her article. But she hadn't got it yet ... as though that mattered! It would come in due time. And she wanted to give him his present now.

He laughed and asked what it could be. She hailed a carriage and whispered an address to the driver. Duco did not hear. What could it be? But she refused to tell him yet.

The *vetturino* drove them through the Borgo to the Tiber and stopped outside a dark little old-curiosity-shop, where the wares lay heaped up right out into the street.

"Cornélie!" Duco exclaimed, guessing.

"Your Lippo Memmi angel. I'm getting it for you. Not a word!"

The tears came to his eyes. They entered the shop.

"Ask him how much he wants for it."

He was too much moved to speak; and Cornélie had to ask the price and bargain. She did not bargain long; she bought the panel for a hundred and twenty lire. She herself carried it to the victoria.

And they drove back to his studio. They carried the angel up the stairs together, as though they were bearing an unsullied happiness into his home. In the studio they placed the angel on a chair. Of a noble aspect, of a somewhat Mongolian type, with long, almond-shaped eyes, the angel had just knelt down in the last stir of his flight; and the gold scarf of his gold-and-purple cloak fluttered in the air while his long wings quivered straight above him. Duco stared at his Memmi, filled with a two-fold emotion, because of the angel and because of her.

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And with a natural gesture he spread out his arms:

"May I thank you, Cornélie?"

And he embraced her; and she returned his kiss.

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CHAPTER XXI

When she came home she found the prince's card. It was an ordinary civility after yesterday evening, her unexpected visit to the Palazzo Ruspoli, and she did not give it a second thought. She was in a pleasant frame of mind, pleased with herself, glad that her work would appear first as an article in *Het Recht der Vrouw*¹—she would publish it as a pamphlet afterwards—and glad that she had made Duco happy with the Memmi. She changed into her tea-gown and sat down by the fire in her musing attitude and thought of how she could carry out her great plans. To whom ought she to apply? There was an International Women's Congress sitting in London; and *Het Recht der Vrouw* had sent her a prospectus. She turned over the pages. Different feminist leaders were to speak; there would be numbers of social questions discussed: the psychology of the child; the responsibility of the parents; the influence on domestic life of women's admission to all the professions; women in art, women in medicine; the fashionable woman; the woman at home, on the stage; marriage- and divorce-laws.

In addition the prospectus gave concise biographies of the speakers, with their portraits. There were American, Russian, English, Swedish, Danish women; nearly every nationality was represented. There were old women and young women; some pretty, some ugly; some masculine, some womanly; some hard and energetic, with sexless boys' faces; one or two only were elegant, with low-cut dresses and waved hair. It was not easy to divide them into groups. What impulse in their lives had prompted them to join in the struggle for women's rights? In some, no doubt, inclination, nature; in an occasional case, vocation; in another, the desire to be in the fashion. And, in her own case, what was the impulse?... She dropped the prospectus in her lap and stared into the fire and reflected. Her drawing-room education passed before her once more, followed by her marriage, by her divorce....

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What was the impulse? What was the inducement?... She had come to it gradually, to go abroad, to extend her sphere of vision, to reflect, to learn about art, about the modern life of women. She had glided gradually along the line of her life, with no great effort of will or striving, without even thinking much or feeling much.... She glanced into herself, as though she were reading a modern novel, the psychology of a woman. Sometimes she seemed to will things, to wish to strive, as just now, to pursue her great plans. Sometimes she would sit thinking, as she often did in these days, beside her cosy fire. Sometimes she felt, as she now did, for Duco. But mostly her life had been a gradual gliding along the line which she had to follow, urged by the gentle pressure of the finger of fate.... For a moment she saw it clearly. There was a great sincerity in her: she never posed either to herself or to others. There were contradictions in her, but she recognized them all, in so far as she could see herself. But the open landscape of her soul became clear to her at that moment. She saw the complexity of her being gleam with its many facets.... She had taken to writing, out of impulse and intuition; but was her writing any good? A doubt rose in her mind. A copy of the code lay on her table, a survival of the days of her divorce; but had she understood the law correctly? Her article was accepted; but was the judgement of the editress to be trusted? As her eyes wandered once again over those women's portraits and biographies, she became afraid that her work would not be good, would be too superficial, and that her ideas were not directed by study and knowledge. But she could also imagine her own photograph appearing in that prospectus, with her name under it and a brief comment: writer of *The Social Position of Divorced Women*, with the name of the paper, the date and so on. And she smiled: how highly convincing it sounded!

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But how difficult it was to study, to work and understand and act and move in the modern movement of life! She was now in Rome: she would have liked to be in London. But it did not suit her at the moment to make the journey. She had felt rich when she bought Duco's Memmi, thinking of the payment for her article; and now she felt poor. She would much have liked to go to London. But then she would have missed Duco. And the congress lasted only a week. She was pretty well at home here now, was beginning to love Rome, her rooms, the Colosseum lying yonder like a dark oval, like a sombre wing at the end of the city, with the hazy-blue mountains behind it.

Then the prince came into her mind and for the first time she thought of yesterday, saw that evening again, an evening of jesting and champagne: Duco silent and sulky, Urania depressed and the prince small, lively, slender, roused from his slackness as an aristocratic man-about-town and with his narrow carbuncle eyes. She thought him really pleasant; once in a way she liked that atmosphere of coquetry and flirtation; and the prince had understood her. She had saved Urania, she was sure of that; and she felt the content of her good action....

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She was too lazy to dress and go to the restaurant. She was not very hungry and would stay at home and sup on what was in her cupboard: a couple of eggs, bread, some fruit. But she remembered Duco and that he would certainly be waiting for her at their little table and she wrote him a note and sent it by the hall-porter's boy....

Duco was just coming down, on his way out to the restaurant, when he met the little fellow on the stairs. He read the note and felt as if he was suffering a grievous disappointment. He felt small and unhappy, like a child. And he went back to his studio, lit a single lamp, threw himself on a broad couch and lay staring in the dusk at Memmi's angel, who, still standing on the chair, glimmered vaguely gold in the middle of the room, sweet as comfort, with his gesture of annunciation, as though he sought to announce all the mystery that was about to be fulfilled....

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1 *Woman's Rights.*

CHAPTER XXII

A few days later, Cornélie was expecting a visit from the prince, who had asked her for an appointment. She was sitting at her writing-table, correcting proofs of her article. A lamp on the writing-table cast a soft glow over her through a yellow silk shade; and she wore her tea-gown of white *crêpe de Chine*, with a bunch of violets at her breast. Another lamp, on a pedestal, cast a second gleam from a corner; and the room flickered in cosy intimacy with the third light from the log-fire, falling over water-colours by Duco, sketches and photographs, white anemones in vases, violets everywhere and one tall palm. The writing-table was littered with books and printed sheets, bearing witness to her work.

There was a knock at the door; and, at her "Come in," the prince entered. She remained seated for a moment, laid down her pen and rose. She went up to him with a smile and held out her hand. He kissed it. He was very smartly dressed in a frock-coat, with a silk hat and pale-grey gloves; he wore a pearl pin in his tie. They sat down by the fire and he paid her compliments in quick succession, on her sitting-room, her dress and her eyes. She made a jesting reply; and he asked if he was disturbing her:

"Perhaps you were writing an interesting letter to some one near your heart?"

"No, I was revising some proofs."

"Proofs?"

"Yes."

"Do you write?"

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"I have just begun to."

"A story?"

"No, an article."

"An article? What about?"

She gave him the long title. He looked at her open-mouthed. She laughed gaily:

"You would never have believed it, would you?"

"Santa Maria!" he murmured in surprise, unaccustomed in his own world to "modern" women, taking part in a feminist movement. "Dutch?"

"Yes, Dutch."

"Write in French next time: then I can read it."

She laughed and gave her promise, poured him out a cup of tea, handed the chocolates. He nibbled at them:

"Are you so serious? Have you always been? You were not serious the other day."

"Sometimes I am very serious."

"So am I."

"I gathered that. If I had not come that time, you might have become very serious."

He gave a fatuous laugh and looked at her knowingly:

"You are a wonderful woman!" he said. "Very interesting and very clever. What you want to happen happens."

"Sometimes."

"Sometimes what I want also. Sometimes I also am very clever. When I want a thing. But generally I don't want it."

"You did the other day."

He laughed:

"Yes! You were cleverer than I then. To-morrow perhaps I shall be cleverer than you."

"Who knows!"

They both laughed. He nibbled the chocolates in the dish, one after the other, and asked if he might have a glass of port instead of tea. She poured him out a glass.

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"May I give you something?"

"What?"

"A souvenir of our first acquaintance."

"It is very charming of you. What is it to be?"

He took something wrapped in tissue-paper from his pocket and handed it to her.

She opened the little parcel and saw a strip of old Venetian lace, worked in the shape of a flounce, for a low bodice.

"Do accept it," he besought her. "It is a lovely piece. It is such a pleasure to me to give it to you."

She looked at him with all her coquetry in her eyes, as though she were trying to see through him.

"You must wear it like this."

He stood up, took the lace and draped it over her white tea-gown from shoulder to shoulder. His fingers fumbled with the folds, his lips just touched her hair.

She thanked him for his gift. He sat down again:

"I am glad that you will accept it."

"Have you given Miss Hope something too?"

He laughed, with his little laugh of conquest:

"Patterns are all she wants, patterns of the queen's ball-dresses. I wouldn't dare to give you patterns. To you I give old lace."

"But you nearly ruined your career for the sake of that pattern?"

"Oh, well!" he laughed.

"Which career?"

"Oh, don't!" he said, evasively. "Tell me, what do you advise me to do?"

"What do you mean?"

"Shall I marry her?"

"I am against all marriage, between cultivated people."

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She wanted to repeat some of her phrases, but thought to herself, why? He would not understand them. He looked at her profoundly, with his carbuncle eyes:

"So you are in favour of free love?"

"Sometimes. Not always. Between cultivated people."

He was certain now, had any doubt still lingered in his mind, that a *liaison* existed between her and Van der Staal.

"And do you think me ... cultivated?"

She laughed provocatively, with a touch of scorn in her voice:

"Listen. Shall I speak to you seriously?"

"I wish you would."

"I consider neither you nor Miss Hope suited for free love."

"So I am not cultivated?"

"I don't mean it in the sense of being civilized. I mean modern culture."

"So I am not modern."

"No," she said, slightly irritated.

"Teach me to be modern."

She gave a nervous laugh:

"Oh, don't let us talk like this! You want to know my advice. I advise you *not* to marry Urania."

"Why not?"

"Because you would both of you have a wretched life. She is a dear little American *parvenue*...."

"I am offering her what I possess; she is offering me what she possesses...."

He nibbled at the chocolates. She shrugged her shoulders:

"Then marry her," she said, with indifference.

"Tell me that you don't want me to and I won't."

"And your father? And the marchesa?"

"What do you know about them?"

"Oh ... everything and nothing!"

"You are a demon!" he exclaimed. "An angel and a demon! Tell me, what do you know about my father and the marchesa?"

"For how much are you selling yourself to Urania? For not less than ten millions?"

He looked at her in bewilderment.

"But the marchesa thinks five enough. And a very handsome sum it is: five millions. Which is it, dollars or lire?"

He clapped his hands together:

"You are a devil!" he cried. "You are an angel and a devil! How do you know? How do you know? Do you know everything?"

She flung herself back in her chair and laughed:

"Everything."

"But how?"

She looked at him and shook her head tantalizingly.

"Tell me."

"No. It's my secret."

"And you think that I ought not to sell myself?"

"I dare not advise you as regards your own interest."

"And as regards Urania?"

"I advise her not to do it."

"Have you done so already?"

"Once in a way."

"So you are my enemy?" he exclaimed, angrily.

"No," she said, gently, wishing to conciliate him. "I am a friend."

"A friend? To what length?"

"To the length to which *I* wish to go."

"Not the length to which *I* wish?"

"Oh, no, never!"

"But perhaps we both wish to go to the same length?"

He had stood up, with his blood on fire. She remained seated calmly, almost languidly, with her head thrown back. She did not reply. He fell on his knees, seized her hand and was kissing it before she could prevent him:

"Oh, angel, angel. Oh, demon!" he muttered, between his kisses.

She now withdrew her hand, pushed him away from her gently and said:

"How quick an Italian is with his kisses!"

She laughed at him. He rose from his knees:

"Teach me what Dutchwomen are like, though they are slower than we."

She pointed to his chair, with an imperious gesture:

"Sit down," she said. "I am not a typical Dutchwoman. If I were, I should not have come to Rome. I pride myself on being a cosmopolitan. But we were not discussing that, we were speaking of Urania. Are you thinking seriously of marrying her?"

"What can I do, if *you* thwart me? Why not be on my side, like a dear friend?"

She hesitated. Neither of these two, Urania or he, was ripe for her ideas. She despised them both. Very well, let them get married: he in order to be rich; she to become a princess and duchess.

"Listen to me," she said, bending towards him. "You want to marry her for the sake of her millions. But your marriage will be unhappy from the beginning. She is a frivolous little thing; she will want to cut a dash ... and you belong to the Blacks."

"We can live at Nice: then she can do as she pleases. We will come to Rome now and again, go to San Stefano now and again. And, as for unhappiness," he continued, pulling a tragic face, "what do I care? I am not happy as it is. I shall try to make Urania happy. But my heart ... will be elsewhere."

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"Where?"

"With the feminist movement."

She laughed:

"Well, shall I be nice to you?"

"Yes."

"And promise to help you?"

What did she care, when all was said?

"Oh, angel, demon!" he cried. He nibbled at a chocolate. "And what does Mr. van der Staal think of it?" he asked, mischievously.

She raised her eyebrows:

"He doesn't think about it. He thinks only of his art."

"And of you."

She looked at him and bowed her head in queenly assent:

"And of me."

"You often dine with him."

"Yes."

"Come and dine with me one day."

"I shall be delighted."

"To-morrow evening? And where?"

"Wherever you like."

"In the Grand-Hôtel?"

"Ask Urania to come too."

"Why not you and I alone?"

"I think it better that you should invite your future wife. I will chaperon her."

"You are right. You are quite right. And will you ask Mr. van der Staal also to give me the pleasure of his company?"

"I will."

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"Until to-morrow then, at half-past eight?"

"Until half-past eight to-morrow."

He rose to take his leave:

"Propriety demands that I should go," he said. "Really I should prefer to stay."

"Well, then stay ... or stay another time, if you have to go now."

"You are so cold."

"And you don't think enough of Urania."

"I think of the feminist movement."

He sat down.

"I'm afraid you must go," she said, laughing with her eyes. "I have to dress ... to go and dine with Mr. van der Staal."

He kissed her hand:

"You are an angel and a demon. You know everything. You can do anything. You are the most interesting woman I ever met."

"Because I correct proofs."

"Because you are what you are."

And, very seriously, still holding her hand he said, almost threateningly:

"I shall never be able to forget you."

And he went away. As soon as she was alone, she opened all her windows. She realized, it was true, that she was something of a coquette, but that lay in her nature: she was like that of herself, to some men. Certainly not to all. Never to Duco. Never to men whom she respected. Whereas she despised that little prince, with his blazing eyes and his habit of kissing people.... But he served to amuse her....

And she dressed and went out and reached the restaurant long after the appointed hour, found Duco waiting for her at their little table, with his head in his hands, and at once told him that the prince had detained her.

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CHAPTER XXIII

Duco had at first wished to decline the invitation, but Cornélie said that she would think it pleasanter if he came. And it was an exquisite dinner in the restaurant of the Grand-Hôtel and Cornélie had enjoyed herself exceedingly and looked most charming in an old yellow ball-dress, dating back to the first days of her marriage, which she had altered quickly here and there and draped with the prince's old lace. Urania had looked very handsome, with her clear, fresh complexion, her shining eyes and gleaming teeth, clad in a close-fitting frock in the latest fashion, blue-black spangles on black tulle, as though she were moulded in a cuirass: the prince said, a siren with a mermaid's tail. And the people at the other tables had stared across at theirs, for everybody knew Virgilio di Forte-Braccio; everybody knew that he was going to marry a rich American heiress; and everybody had noticed that he was paying great attention to the slender, fair-haired woman whom nobody knew. She had been married, they thought; she was chaperoning the future princess; and she was very intimate with that young man, a Dutch painter, who was studying art in Italy. They had soon found out all that there was to know.

Cornélie had thought it pleasant that they all looked at her; and she had flirted so obviously with the prince that Urania had become angry. And early next morning, while Cornélie was still in bed, no longer thinking of last night but pondering over a sentence in her pamphlet, the maid knocked, brought in her breakfast and letters and said that Miss Hope was asking to speak to her. Cornélie had Urania shown in, while she remained in bed and drank her chocolate. And she looked up in surprise when Urania at once overwhelmed her with reproaches, burst into sobs, scolded and raved, made a violent scene, said that she now saw through her and admitted that the marchesa had urged her to be careful of Cornélie, whom she described as a dangerous woman. Cornélie waited until she had had her say and replied coolly that she had nothing on her conscience, that on the contrary she had saved Urania and been of service to her as a chaperon, though she did not tell her that the prince had wanted her, Cornélie, to dine with him alone. But Urania refused to listen and went on ranting. Cornélie looked at her and thought her vulgar in that rage of hers, talking her American English, as though she were chewing filberts; and at last she answered, calmly:

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"My dear girl, you're upsetting yourself about nothing. But, if you like, I will write

to the prince that he must pay me no more attentions."

"No, no, don't do that: it'll make Gilio think I'm jealous!"

"And aren't you?"

"Why do you monopolize Gilio? Why do you flirt with him? Why do you make yourself conspicuous with him, as you did yesterday, in a restaurant full of people?"

"Well, if you dislike it, I won't flirt with Gilio again or make myself conspicuous with him again. I don't care twopence about your prince."

"That's an extra reason."

"Very well, dear, that's settled."

Her coolness calmed Urania, who asked:

"And do we remain good friends?"

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"Why, of course, my dear girl. Is there any occasion for us to quarrel? I don't see it."

Both of them, the prince and Urania, were quite indifferent to her. True, she had preached to Urania in the beginning, but about a general idea: when afterwards she perceived Urania's insignificance, she withdrew the interest which she took in her. And, if the girl was offended by a little gaiety and innocent flirtation, very well, there should be no more of it. Her thoughts were more with the proofs which the post had brought her.

She got out of bed and stretched herself:

"Go into the sitting-room, Urania dear, and just let me have my bath."

Presently, all fresh and smiling, she joined Urania in the sitting-room. Urania was crying.

"My dear child, why are you upsetting yourself like this? You've achieved your ideal. Your marriage is as good as certain. You're waiting for an answer from Chicago? You're impatient? Then cable out. I should have cabled at once in your place. You don't imagine, do you, that your father has any objection to your becoming Duchess di San Stefano?"

"I don't know yet what I myself want," said Urania, weeping. "I don't know, I don't know."

Cornélie shrugged her shoulders:

"You're more sensible than I thought," she said.

"Are you really my friend? Can I trust you? Can I trust your advice?"

"I won't advise you again. I have advised you. You must know your own mind."

Urania took her hand:

"Which would you prefer, that I accepted Gilio ... or not?"

Cornélie looked her straight in the eyes:

"You're making yourself unhappy about nothing. You think—and the marchesa probably thinks with you—that I want to take Gilio from you? No, darling, I wouldn't marry Gilio if he were king and emperor. I have a bit of the socialist in me: I don't marry for the sake of a title."

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"No more would I."

"Of course, darling, no more would you. I never dreamt of suggesting that you would. But you ask me which I should prefer. Well, I tell you in all sincerity: I don't prefer either. The whole business leaves me cold."

"And you call yourself my friend!"

"So I am, dear, and I will remain your friend. Only don't come overwhelming me with reproaches on an empty stomach!"

"You're a flirt."

"Sometimes. It comes natural to me. But, honestly, I won't be so again with Gilio."

"Do you mean it?"

"Yes, of course. What do I care? He amuses me; but, if it offends you, I'll gladly sacrifice my amusement for your sake. I don't value it so much."

"Are you fond of Mr. van der Staal?"

"Very."

"Are you going to marry him, Cornélie?"

"No, dear. I sha'n't marry again. I know what marriage means. Are you coming for a little walk with me? It's a fine day; and you have upset me so with your little troubles that I can't do any work this morning. It's lovely weather: come along and buy some flowers in the Piazza di Spagna."

They went and bought the flowers. Cornélie took Urania back to Belloni's. As she walked away, on the road to the *osteria* for lunch, she heard somebody following her. It was the prince.

"I caught sight of you from the corner of the Via Aurora," he said. "Urania was just going home."

"Prince," she said at once, "there must be no more of it."

"Of what?"

"No more visits, no more joking, no more presents, no more dinners at the Grand-Hôtel, no more champagne."

"Why not?"

"The future princess won't have it."

"Is she jealous?"

Cornélie described the scene to him:

"And you mayn't even walk with me."

"Yes, I may."

"No, no."

"I shall, for all that."

"By the right of the man, of the strongest?"

"Exactly."

"My vocation is to fight against it. But to-day I am untrue to my vocation."

"You are charming ... as always."

"You mustn't say that any more."

"Urania's a bore.... Tell me, what do you advise me to do? Shall I marry her?"

Cornélie gave a peal of laughter:

"You both of you keep asking *my* advice!"

"Yes, yes, what do you think?"

"Marry her by all means!"

He did not observe her contempt.

"Exchange your escutcheon for her purse," she continued and laughed and laughed.

He now perceived it:

"You despise me, perhaps both of us."

"Oh, no!"

"Tell me that you don't despise me."

"You ask me my opinion. Urania is a very sweet, dear child, but she ought not to travel by herself. And you ..."

"And I?"

"You are a delightful boy. Buy me those violets, will you?"

"*Subito, subito!*"

He bought her the bunch of violets:

"You're crazy over violets, aren't you?"

"Yes. This must be your second ... and your last present. And here we say good-bye."

"No, I shall take you home."

"I'm not going home."

"Where are you going?"

"To the *osteria*. Mr. van der Staal is waiting for me."

"He's a lucky man!"

"Why?"

"He needs must be!"

"I don't see why. Good-bye, prince."

"Ask me to come too," he entreated. "Let me lunch with you."

"No," she said, seriously. "Really not. It's better not. I believe...."

"What?"

"That Duco is just like Urania."

"Jealous?... When shall I see you again?"

"Really, believe me, it's better not.... Good-bye, prince. And thank you ... for the violets."

He bent over her hand. She went into the *osteria* and saw that Duco had witnessed their leave-taking through the window.

CHAPTER XXIV

Duco was silent and nervous at table. He played with his bread; and his fingers trembled. She felt that he had something on his mind:

"What is it?" she asked, kindly.

"Cornélie," he said, excitedly, "I want to speak to you."

"What about?"

"You're not behaving properly."

"In what respect?"

"With the prince. You've seen through him and yet ... yet you go on putting up with him, yet you're always meeting him. Let me finish," he said, looking around him: there was no one in the restaurant save two Italians, sitting at the far table, and they could speak without being overheard. "Let me finish," he repeated, when she tried to interrupt him. "Let me say what I have to say. You of course are free to act as you please. But I am your friend and I want to advise you. What you are doing is not right. The prince is a cad, a low, common cad. How can you accept presents from him and invitations? Why did you compel me to come yesterday? The dinner was one long torture to me. You know how fond I am of you: why shouldn't I confess it? You know how high I hold you. I can't bear to see you lowering yourself

with him. Let me speak. Lowering, I say. He is not worthy to tie your shoe-strings. And you play with him, you jest with him, you flirt—let me speak—you flirt with him. What can he be to you, a coxcomb like that? What part can he play in your life? Let him marry Miss Hope: what do you care about either of them? What do inferior people matter to you, Cornélie? I despise them and so do you. I know you do. Then why do you cross their lives? Let them live in the vanity of their titles and money: what is it all to you? I don't understand you. Oh, I know, you're not to be understood, all the woman part of you! And I love everything that I see of you: I love you in everything. It doesn't matter whether I understand you. But I do feel that *this* isn't right. I ask you not to see the prince any more. Have nothing more to do with him. Cut him.... That dinner, last night, was a torture to me...."

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"My poor boy," she said, gently, filling his glass from their *fiasco*, "but why?"

"Why? Why? Because you're lowering yourself."

"I do not stand so high. No, let *me* speak now. I do not stand high. Because I have a few modern ideas and a few others which are broader-minded than those of most women? Apart from that I am an ordinary woman. When a man is cheerful and witty, it amuses me. No, Duco, I'm speaking now. I don't consider the prince a cad. I may think him a coxcomb, but I think him cheerful and witty. You know that I too am very fond of you, but you are neither cheerful nor witty. Now don't get angry. You are much more than that. I'm not even comparing *il nostro Gilio* with you. I won't say anything more about you, or you will become conceited, but cheerful and witty you are not. And my poor nature sometimes feels a need for these qualities. What have I in my life? Nothing but you, you alone. I am very glad to possess your friendship, very happy in having met you. But why may I not sometimes be cheerful? Really, there is a little light-heartedness in me, a little frivolity even. Am I bound to fight against it? Duco, am I wicked?"

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He smiled sadly; there was a moist light in his eyes; and he did not answer.

"I can fight, if necessary," she resumed. "But is this a thing to fight against? It is a passing bubble, nothing more. I forget it the next minute. I forget the prince the next minute. And you I do not forget."

He was looking at her radiantly.

"Do you understand that? Do you understand that I don't flirt and fence with you? Shake hands and stop being angry."

She gave him her hand across the table and he pressed her fingers:

"Cornélie," he said, softly. "Yes, I feel that you are loyal. Cornélie, will you be my wife?"

She looked straight in front of her and drooped her head a little and stared before her earnestly. They were no longer eating. The two Italians stood up, bowed and went away. They were alone. The waiter set some fruit before them and withdrew.

They both sat silent for a moment. Then she spoke in a gentle voice; and her whole being displayed so tender a melancholy that he could have burst into sobs and worshipped her where she sat.

"I knew of course that you would ask me that some day. It was in the nature of things. A great friendship like ours was bound to lead to that question. But it can't be, dearest Duco. It can't be, my dear, dear boy. I have my own ideas ... but it's not that. I am against marriage ... but it's not that. In some cases a woman is unfaithful to all her ideas in a single second.... Then what *is* it?..."

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She stared wide-eyed and passed her hand over her forehead, as though she did not see clearly. Then she continued:

"It is this, that I am afraid of marriage. I have been through it, I know what it means.... I see my husband before me now. I see that habit, that groove before me, in which the subtler individual characteristics are effaced. That is what marriage is: a habit, a groove. And I tell you candidly: I think marriage loathsome. I think passion beautiful, but marriage is not passion. Passion can be noble and superhuman, but marriage is a human institution based upon our petty human morality and calculation. And I have become frightened of those prudent moral ties. I promised myself—and I believe that I shall keep my promise—never to marry again. My whole nature has become unfitted for it. I am no longer the Hague girl going to parties and dinners and looking out for a husband, together with her parents.... My love for *him* was passion. And in my marriage he wanted to restrict that passion to a groove and a custom. Then I rebelled.... I'd rather not talk about it. Passion lasts too short a time to fill a married life.... Mutual esteem to follow, *etcetera*? One needn't marry for that. I can feel esteem just as well without

being married. Of course there is the question of the children, there *are* many difficulties. I can't think it all out now. I merely feel now, very seriously and calmly, that I am not fit to marry and that I never will marry again. I should not make you happy.... Don't be sad, Duco. I am fond of you, I love you. And perhaps ... had I met you at the right moment. Had I met you before, in my Hague life ... you would certainly have stood too high for me. I could not have grown fond of you. Now I can understand you, respect you and look up to you. I tell you this quite simply, that I love you and look up to you, look up to you, in spite of all your gentleness, as I never looked up to my husband, however much he made his manly privilege prevail. And you are to believe that, very firmly and with great certainty, and you must believe that I am true. I am coquettish ... only with Gilio."

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He looked at her through his silent tears. He stood up, called the waiter, paid the bill absent-mindedly, while everything swam and flashed before his eyes. They went out of the door and she hailed a carriage and told the man to drive to the Villa Doria-Pamphili. She remembered that the gardens were open. They drove there in silence, steeped in their thoughts of the future that was opening tremulously before them. Sometimes he heaved a deep breath and quivered all over his body. Once she fervently squeezed his hand. At the gate of the villa they alighted and walked up the majestic avenues. Rome lay in the depths below; and they suddenly saw St. Peter's. But they did not speak; and she suddenly sat down on an ancient bench and began to weep softly and feebly. He put his arm round her and comforted her. She dried her tears, smiled and embraced him and returned his kiss.... Twilight fell; and they went back. He gave the address of his studio. She accompanied him. And she gave herself to him, in all her truthful sincerity and with a love so violent and so great that she thought she would swoon in his arms.

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CHAPTER XXV

They did not alter their mode of life. Duco, however, after a scene with his mother, no longer slept at Belloni's but in a little room adjoining his studio and at first filled with trunks and lumber. Cornélie was sorry about the scene: she had always had a liking for Mrs. van der Staal and the girls. But a certain pride arose in her; and Cornélie despised Mrs. van der Staal because she was unable to understand either her or Duco. Still, she would have been pleased to prevent this coolness. At her advice Duco went to see his mother again, but she remained cool and sent him away. Thereupon Cornélie and Duco went to Naples. They did not do this by way of an elopement, they did it quite simply: Cornélie told Urania and the prince that she was going to Naples for a little while and that Van der Staal would probably follow her. She did not know Naples and would appreciate it greatly if Van der Staal showed her over the town and the surrounding country. Cornélie kept on her rooms in Rome. And they spent a fortnight of sheer, careless and immense happiness. Their love grew spacious and blossoming in the golden sunlight of Naples, on the blue gulfs of Amalfi, Sorrento, Capri and Castellamare, simply, irresistibly and restfully. They glided gradually along the purple thread of their lives, they walked hand in hand down their lines now fused into one path, heedless of the laws and ideas of men; and their attitude was so lofty, their action so serene and so certain of their happiness, that their relations did not degenerate into insolence, although within themselves they despised the world. But this happiness softened all that pride in their soaring souls, as if their happiness were strewing blossoms all around it. They lived in a dream, first among the marbles in the museum, then on the flower-strewn cliffs of Amalfi, on the beach of Capri or on the terrace of the hotel at Sorrento, with the sea roaring at their feet and, in a pearly haze, yonder, vaguely white, as though drawn in white chalk, Castellamare and Naples and the ghost of Vesuvius, with its hazy plume of smoke.

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They held aloof from everybody, from all the people and excursionists; they had their meals at a small table; and it was generally thought that they were newly married. If others looked up their names in the visitors' book, they read two names and made whispered comments. But the lovers did not hear, did not see; they lived their dream, looking into each other's eyes or at the opal sky, the pearly sea and the hazy, white mountain-vistas, studded with towns like little specks of chalk.

When their money was almost exhausted, they smiled and went back to Rome and resumed their former lives: she in her rooms and he, now, in his studio; and they took their meals together. But they pursued their dream among the ruins in the Via Appia, around and near Frascati, beyond the Ponte Molle, on the slopes of the Monte Mario and in the gardens of the villas, among the statues and paintings,

mingling their happiness with the Roman atmosphere: he interweaving his new-found love with his love for Rome; she growing to love Rome because of him. And because of that charm they were surrounded by a sort of aura, through which they did not see ordinary life or meet ordinary people.

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At last, one afternoon, Urania found them both at home, in Cornélie's room, the fire lighted, she smiling and gazing into the fire, he sitting at her feet and she with her arm round his neck. And they were evidently thinking of so little besides their own love that neither of them heard her knock and both suddenly saw her standing before them, like an unexpected reality. Their dream was over for that day. Urania laughed, Cornélie laughed and Duco pushed an easy-chair closer. And Urania, blithe, beautiful and brilliant, told them that she was engaged. Where on earth had they been hiding, she asked, inquisitively. She was engaged. She had been to San Stefano, she had seen the old prince. And everything was lovely and good and dear: the old castle a dear old house, the old man a dear old man. She saw everything through the glitter of her future princess' title. Princess and duchess! The wedding-day was fixed: immediately after Easter, in a little more than three months therefore. It was to be celebrated at San Carlo, with all the splendour of a great wedding. Her father was coming over for it with her youngest brother. She was obviously not looking forward to their arrival. And she never finished talking: she gave a thousand details about her bridal outfit, with which the marchesa was helping her. They were going to live at Nice, in a large flat. She raved about Nice: that was a first-rate idea of Gilio's. And incidentally she remembered and told them that she had become a Catholic. That was a great nuisance! But the *monsignori* saw to everything and she allowed herself to be guided by them. And the Pope was to receive her in private audience, together with Gilio. The difficulty was what to wear at the audience: black, of course, but ... velvet, satin? What did Cornélie advise her? She had such excellent taste. And a black-lace veil on her head, with brilliants. She was going to Nice next day, with the marchesa and Gilio, to see their flat.

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When she was gone, after begging Cornélie to come and admire her *trousseau*, Cornélie said, with a smile:

"She is happy. After all, happiness is something different for everybody. A *trousseau* and a title would not make me happy."

"These are the small people," he said, "who cross our lives now and again. I prefer to get out of their way."

And they did not say so, but they both thought—with their fingers interlaced, her eyes gazing into his—that they also were happy, but with a loftier, better and nobler happiness; and pride arose within them; and they beheld as in a vision the line of their life winding up a steep hill. But happiness snowed blossoms down upon it; and amid the snowing blossoms, holding high their proud heads, with smiles and eyes of love, they walked on in their dream remote from mankind and reality.

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CHAPTER XXVI

The months dreamed past. And their happiness caused such a summer to bloom in them that she ripened in beauty and he in talent; the pride in them broke into expression: in her it was the blossoming of her being, in him it was energy; her languid charm became transformed into a proud slenderness; her contour increased in fullness; a light illumined her eyes, a gladness shone about her mouth. His hands quivered with nervous emotion when he took up his brushes; and the skies of Italy arched firmaments before his eyes like a canopy of love and fervid colour. He drew and completed a series of water-colours: hazes of dreamy atmosphere which suggested Turner's noblest creations; natural monuments of sheer haze; all the milky blue and pearly mistiness of the Bay of Naples, like a goblet filled with light in which a turquoise is melted into water; and he sent them to Holland, to London, found that he had suddenly discovered his vocation, his work and his fame: courage, strength, aim and conquest.

She too achieved a certain success with her article: it was discussed, contested; her name was mentioned. But she felt a certain indifference when she read her name in connection with the feminist movement. She preferred to live with him his life of observation and emotion; and she often imparted to all the haze of his vision, to the excessive haziness of his colour-dream a lustre of light, a definite horizon, a streak of actuality which gave realism to the mist of his ideal. She learnt

with him to distinguish and to feel nature, art, all Rome; and, when a symbolic impulse overmastered him, she surrendered herself to it entirely. He planned a large sketch of a procession of women, mounting along a line of life that wound up a hill: they seemed to be moving out of a crumbling city of antiquity, whose pillars, joined by a single architrave, quivered on high in a violet haze of evening dusk; they seemed to be releasing themselves from the shadow of the ruins fading away on the horizon into the void of night; and they thronged upwards, calling to one another aloud, beckoning to one another with great waving gestures of their hands, under a mighty fluttering of streamers and pennants; they grasped hammer and pick-axe with sinewy arms; and the throng of them moved up and up, along the line, where the light grew whiter and whiter, until in the hazy air there dimly showed the distant vista of a new city, whose iron buildings, like central stations and Eiffel towers in the white glimmer of the distance, gleamed up very faintly with a reflection of glass arches and glass roofs and, high in the air, the musical staves of the threads of sound and accompaniment....

And to so great an extent did their influences work upon each other's souls that she learnt to see and he learnt to think: she saw beauty, art, nature, haze and emotion and no longer imagined them but felt them; he, as in his sketch, a very vague, modern city of glass and iron, saw a modern city rising out of his dream-haze and thought of a modern question, in accordance with his own nature and aptitudes. She learnt above all to see and feel like a woman in love, with the eyes and heart of the man she loves; he thought out the question plastically. But whatever the imperfection in the absoluteness of their new spheres of feeling and thought, the reciprocal influence, through their love, gave them a happiness so great, so united, that at that moment they could not contemplate it or apprehend it: it was almost ecstasy, a faint unreality, in which they dreamed, whereas it was all pure truth and tangible actuality. Their manner of thinking, feeling and living was an ideal of reality, an ideal entered and attained, along the gradual line of their life, along the golden thread of their love; and they scarcely apprehended or contemplated it, because the every-day life still clung to them. But only to the smallest, inevitable extent. They lived apart; but in the morning she went to him and found him working at his sketch; and she sat down beside him and leant her head on his shoulder; and they thought it out together. He sketched each figure in his procession of women separately and sought for the features and the modelling of the figures: some had the Mongolian aspect of Memmi's angel of the Annunciation, others Cornélie's slenderness and her later, fuller wholesomeness; he sought for the folds of the costumes: the women escaped from the violet dusk of the ruined city in pleated pepli; and farther on their garments altered as in a masquerade of the ages: the long trains of the medieval ladies, the veils of the sultanas, the homespun of the workwomen, the caps of the nursing sisters, the attire becoming more modern as the wearer personified a more modern age. And in this grouping the draughtsmanship was so unsubstantial and sober, the transition from drooping folds to practical stiffness so careful and so gradual, that Cornélie hardly perceived the transition, that she appeared to be contemplating one style, one fashion in dress, whereas each figure nevertheless was clad in a different stuff, of different cut, falling into different lines.... The drawing displayed an old-mastery purity, a simplicity of outline, which was nevertheless modern, nervous and morbid, but without the conventional ideal of symbolical human forms; the grouping showed a Raphaelite harmony, the water-colour tints of the first studies the haze of Italy: the ruined city loomed in the dusk as he saw the Forum looming; the city of iron and glass gleamed up with its architecture of light, such as he had seen from Sorrento shining around Naples. She felt that he was creating a great work and had never taken so lively an interest in anything as she now did in his idea and his sketches. She sat behind him silent and still and followed his drawing of the waving banners and fluttering pennants; and she did not breathe when she saw him, with a few dabs of white and touches of light—as though light were one of the colours on his palette—make the glass city emerge as from a dream on the horizon. Then he would ask her something about one of the figures and put his arm around her and draw her to him; and they would long sit scrutinizing and thinking out lines and ideas, until evening fell and the evening chill shuddered through the studio and they rose slowly from their seats. Then they went out and in the Corso they returned to real life: silently, sitting at Aragno's, they watched the bustle outside; and in their little restaurant, with their eyes absorbing each other's glance, they ate their simple dinner and looked so obviously and harmoniously happy, that the Italians, the two who also always sat at the far table, at that same hour, smiled as they bowed to them on entering....

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At the same time Duco developed great powers of work: so much thought dimly took shape before him that he was constantly discovering another motive and symbolizing it in another figure. He sketched a life-size woman walking, with that admixture of child, woman and goddess which characterized his figures, and she walked slowly down a descending line towards a sombre depth, without seeing or understanding; her eyes towards the abyss in magnetic attraction; vague hands hovered around her like a cloud and softly pushed and guided her; on the hill-top, on high rocks, in the bright light, other figures, holding harps, called to her; but she went towards the depth, pushed by hands; in the abyss blossomed strange purple orchids, like mouths of love....

When Cornélie came to his studio one morning, he had suddenly sketched this idea. It came upon her as a surprise, for he had not mentioned it to her: the idea had sprung up suddenly; the quick, spontaneous execution had not taken him an hour. He was almost apologizing to her when he saw her surprise. She certainly admired it, but shuddered at it and preferred *The Banners*, the great water-colour, the procession of the women marching to the battle of life.

And to please her he put the straying woman aside and worked on solely at the striving women. But constantly a fresh thought came and disturbed him in his work; and in her absence he would sketch some new symbol, until the sketches accumulated and lay spread on every side. She put them away in portfolios; she removed them from easel and board; she saved him from wandering too far from *The Banners*; and this was the one thing that he completed.

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Thus smoothly did their life seem willing to run, along a gracious line, in one golden direction, while his symbols blossomed like flowers on either side, while the azure of their love seemed to form the sky overhead; but she plucked away the superfluous flowers and only *The Banners* waved above their path, in the firmament of their ecstasy, even as they waved above the militant women.

They had but one distraction, the wedding of the prince and Urania: a dinner, a ball and the ceremony at San Carlo, attended by all the Roman aristocracy, who however welcomed the wealthy American bride with a certain reserve. But, when the Prince and Princess di Forte-Braccio left for Nice, all distraction was at an end; and the days once more glided along the same gracious golden line. And Cornélie retained only one unpleasant recollection: her meeting during those festive days with Mrs. van der Staal, who cut her persistently, turned her back on her and succeeded in conveying to her that the friendship was over. She had accepted the position; she had realized how difficult it was—even if Mrs. van der Staal had been willing to speak to her—to explain to a woman like this, rooted in her social and worldly conventions, her own proud ideas of freedom, independence and happiness. And she had avoided the girls also, understanding that Mrs. van der Staal wished it. She was not angry at all this nor hurt; she could understand it in Duco's mother: she was only a little sad about it, because she liked Mrs. van der Staal and liked the two girls. But she quite understood: it had to be so; Mrs. van der Staal knew or suspected everything. Duco's mother could not act differently, though the prince and Urania, for friendship's sake, overlooked any *liaison* between Duco and Cornélie; though the Roman world during the wedding-festivities accepted them simply as friends, as acquaintances, as fellow-countrymen, whatever they might whisper, smiling, behind their fans. But now those festivities were over, now they had passed that point of contact with the world and people, now their golden line once more sloped gently and evenly before them....

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Then Cornélie, not thinking of the Hague at all, received a letter from the Hague. The letter was from her father and consisted of several sheets, which surprised her, for he never wrote. What she read startled her greatly, but did not at first dishearten her altogether, perhaps because she did not realize the full import of her father's news. He implored her forgiveness. He had long been in financial difficulties. He had lost a great deal of money. They would have to move into a smaller house. The atmosphere at home was unpleasant: Mamma cried all day; the sisters quarrelled; the family proffered advice; the acquaintances were disagreeable. And he implored her forgiveness. He had speculated and lost. And he had also lost her own little capital, which he managed for her, her godmother's legacy. He asked her not to think too hardly of him. Things might have turned out differently; and then she would have been three times as well off. He admitted it, he had done wrong; but still he was her father and he asked her, his child, to forgive him and requested her to come home.

She was at first greatly startled, but soon recovered her calmness. She was in too happy a mood of vital harmony to be depressed by the news. She received the letter in bed, did not get up at once, reflected a little, then dressed, breakfasted as usual and went to Duco. He received her with enthusiasm and showed her three new sketches. She reproached him gently for allowing himself to be distracted from his main idea, said that these distractions would exhaust his activity, his

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perseverance. She urged him to keep on working at *The Banners*. And she inspected the great water-colour intently, with the ancient, crumbling Forum-like city and the procession of the women towards the metropolis of the future, standing high in the dawn. And suddenly it was borne in upon her that her future also had fallen into ruins and that its crumbling arches hung menacingly over her head. Then she gave him her father's letter to read. He read it twice, looked at her aghast and asked what she proposed to do. She said that she had already thought it over, but so far decided only upon the most immediate thing to be done: to give up her rooms and come to him in his studio. She had just enough left to pay the rent of her rooms. But, after that, she had no money, no money at all. She had never consented to accept alimony from her husband. All that was still due to her was the payment for her article.

He at once put out his hands to her, kissed her and said that this had been also his idea at once, that she should come to him and live with him. He had enough: a tiny patrimony; he made a little money in addition: there would be enough for the two of them. And they laughed and kissed and glanced round the studio. Duco slept in a small adjoining den, a sort of long wall-cupboard. And they glanced round to see what they could do. Cornélie knew: here, a curtain draped over a cord, with her wash-hand-stand behind it. That was all she needed, only that little corner: otherwise Duco would not have a good light. They were very merry and thought it a jolly, a capital idea. They went out at once, bought a little iron bedstead and a dressing-table and themselves hung up the curtain. Then they both went to pack the trunks in the Via di Serpenti ... and dined at the *osteria*. Cornélie suggested that they should dine at home now and then: it was cheaper. When they returned home, she was enchanted that her installation took up so little room, hardly six feet by six, with that little bed behind the curtain. They were very cheerful that evening. The bohemianism of it all amused them. They were in Italy, the land of sunshine, of beauty, of *lazzaroni*, of beggars who slept on the steps of a cathedral; and they felt akin to that sunny poverty. They were happy, they wanted for nothing. They would live on nothing, or at any rate on very little. And they saw the future bright, smiling. They were closer together now, they would live more closely linked together. They loved each other and were happy in a land of beauty, in an ideal of noble symbolism and life-embracing art.

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Next morning he worked zealously, without a word, absorbed in his dream, in his work; and she, likewise, silent, contented, happy, examined her blouses and skirts attentively and reflected that she would need nothing more for quite another year and that her old clothes were amply sufficient for their life of happiness and simplicity.

And she answered her father's letter very briefly, saying that she forgave him, that she was sorry for all of them, but that she was not coming back to the Hague. She would provide for her own maintenance, by writing. Italy was cheap. That was all she wrote. She did not mention Duco. She cut herself off from her family, in thought and in fact. She had met with no sympathy from any of them during her unhappy marriage, during the painful days of her divorce; and now, in her turn, she felt no affection for them. And her happiness made her partial and selfish. She wanted nothing but Duco, nothing but their harmonious life in common. He sat working, laughing to her now and then as she lay on the couch and reflected. She looked at the women marching to battle; she too could not remain lying on a couch, she too would have to sally forth and fight. She foresaw that she would have to fight ... for him. He was at present in the first fine frenzy of his art; but, if this slackened, momentarily, after a result of some kind, after a success for himself and the world, that would be commonplace and logical; and then *she* would have to fight. He was the noble element in their two lives; his art could never become her bread-winner. His little fortune amounted to hardly anything. She would have liked to work and make money for both of them, so that he need not depart from the pure principle of his art. But how was she to strive, how to work, how to work for their lives and their bread? What could she do? Write? It brought in so little. What else? She was overcome by a slight melancholy, because she could do so little. She possessed minor talents and accomplishments: she wrote a good style, she sang, she played the piano, she could make a blouse and she knew something about cooking. She would herself do the cooking now and then and would make her own clothes. But that was all so small, so little. Strive? Work? In what way? However, she would do what she could. And suddenly she took up a Baedeker, turned over the pages and sat down to write at Duco's writing-table. She thought for a moment and began a casual article, a travel-picture for a newspaper, about the environs of Naples: that was easier than at once beginning about Rome. And in the studio, filled with a faint warmth of the fire, because the room faced north and was chilly, everything became still and silent, save for the occasional scratching of her pen or the noise made by him when fumbling among his chinks and paint-brushes. She wrote a few pages but could not hit upon an ending. Then she got up; he turned round and smiled at her, with his smile of friendly happiness.

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And she read to him what she had written. It was not in the style of her pamphlet. It contained no invective; it was a pleasant traveller's sketch.

He thought it very nice, but nothing out of the way. But that wasn't necessary, she said, defending herself. And he kissed her, for her industry and her pluck. It was raining that day and they did not go out for their lunch; there were eggs and tomatoes and she made an omelette on an oil-stove. They drank water, ate quantities of bread. And, while the rain outside lashed the great curtain-less window of the studio, they enjoyed their repast, sitting like two birds that huddle side by side, against each other, so as not to get wet.

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CHAPTER XXVIII

It was a couple of months after Easter, in the spring days of May. The flood of tourists had ebbed away immediately after the great church festivities; and Rome was already very hot and growing very quiet. One morning, when Cornélie was crossing the Piazza di Spagna, where the sunshine streamed along the cream-coloured front of the Trinita de' Monti and down the monumental staircase, where only a few beggars and the very last flower-boy sat dreaming with blinking eye-lids in a shady corner, she saw the prince coming towards her. He bowed to her with a smile of gladness and hastened up to speak to her:

"How glad I am to meet you! I am in Rome for a day or two, on my way to San Stefano, to see my father on business. Business is always a bore; and this is more so than usual. Urania is at Nice. But it is too hot there and we are going away. We have just returned from a trip on the Mediterranean. Four weeks on board a friend's yacht. It was delightful! Why did you never come to see us at Nice, as Urania asked you to?"

"I really wasn't able to come."

"I went to call on you yesterday in the Via dei Serpenti. They told me you had moved."

He looked at her with a touch of mocking laughter in his small, glittering eyes. She did not speak.

"After that I did not like to commit a further indiscretion," he said, meaningly. "Where are you going?"

"To the post-office."

"May I come with you? Isn't it too hot for walking?"

"Oh, no, I love the heat! Come by all means, if you like. How is Urania?"

"Very well, capital. She's capital. She's splendid, simply splendid. I should never have thought it. I should never have dared to think it. She plays her part to perfection. So far as she is concerned, I don't regret my marriage. But, for the rest, *Gesu mio*, what a disappointment, what a disillusion!"

"Why?"

"You knew, did you not—I even now don't know how—you knew for how many millions I sold myself? Not five millions but ten millions. Ah, *signora mia*, what a take in! You saw my father-in-law at the time of our wedding. What a Yankee, what a stocking-merchant and what a tradesman! We're no match for him: I, Papa, or the marchesa. First promises, contracts: oh, rather! But then haggling here, haggling there. We're no good at that: neither Papa nor I. Aunt alone was able to haggle. But she was no match for the stocking-merchant. She had not learnt that, in all the years during which she kept a boarding-house. Ten millions? Five millions? Not three millions! Or yes, perhaps we did get something like that, *plus* a heap of promises, for our children's children, when everybody's dead. Ah, signora, signora, I was better off before I was married! True, I had debts then and not now. But Urania is so economical, so practical! I should never have thought it of her. It has been a disappointment to everybody: Papa, my aunt, the *monsignor*. You should have seen them together. They could have scratched one another's eyes out. Papa almost had a stroke, my aunt nearly came to blows with the *monsignor*.... Ah, signora, signora, I don't like it! I am a victim. Winter after winter, they angled with me. But I didn't want to be the bait, I struggled, I wouldn't let the fish bite. And then this came of it. Not three millions. Lire, not

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dollars. I was so stupid, I thought at first it would be dollars. And Urania's economy! She allows me my pocket-money. She controls everything, does everything. She knows exactly how much I lose at the club. Yes, you may laugh, but it's sad. Don't you see that I sometimes feel as if I could cry? And she has such queer notions. For instance, we have our flat at Nice and we keep on my rooms in the Palazzo Ruspoli, as a *pied-à-terre* in Rome. That's enough: we don't come often to Rome, because we are 'black' and Urania thinks it dull. In the summer, we were to go here or there, to some watering-place. That was all right, that was settled. But now Urania suddenly conceives the notion of selecting San Stefano as a summer residence. San Stefano! I ask you! I shall never be able to stand it. True, it's high up, it's cool: it's a pleasant climate, good, fresh mountain air. But I need more in my life than mountain air. I can't live on mountain air. Oh, you wouldn't know Urania! She can be so awfully obstinate. It's settled now, beyond recall: in the summer, San Stefano. And the worst of it is that she has won Papa's heart by it. I have to suffer. They're two to one against me. And the worst of it is that Urania says we shall have to be very economical, in order to do San Stefano up a bit. It's a famous historical place, but fallen into grisly disrepair. It's not our fault: we never had any luck. There was once a Forte-Braccio pope; after that our star declined and we never had another stroke of luck again. San Stefano is the type of ruined greatness. You ought to see the place. To economize, to renovate San Stefano! That's Urania's ideal. She has taken it into her head to do that honour to our ancestral abode. However, she has won Papa's heart by it and he has recovered from his stroke. But can you understand now that *il povero Gilio* is poorer than he was before he acquired shares in a Chicago stocking-factory?"

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There was no checking his flow of words. He felt profoundly unhappy, small, beaten, tamed, conquered, destroyed; and he had a need to ease his heart. They had passed the post-office and now retraced their steps. He looked for sympathy from Cornélie and found it in the smiling attention with which she listened to his grievances. She replied that, after all, it showed that Urania had a real feeling for San Stefano.

"Oh, yes!" he admitted, humbly. "She is very good. I should never have thought it. She is every inch a princess and duchess. It's splendid. But the ten millions: gone, an illusion!... But tell me: how well you're looking! Each time I see you, you've grown lovelier and lovelier. Do you know that you're a very lovely woman? You must be very happy, I'm certain! You're an exceptional woman, I always said so. I don't understand you.... May I speak frankly? Are we good friends, you and I? I don't understand. I think what you have done such a terrible thing. I have never heard of anything like it in our world."

"I don't live in your world, prince."

"Very well, but all the same your world must have much the same ideas about it. And the calmness, the pride, the happiness with which you do, just quietly, as you please! I think it perfectly awful. I stand aghast at it.... And yet ... it's a pity. People in my world are very easy-going. But that sort of thing is not allowed!"

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"Prince, once more, I have no world. My world is my own sphere."

"I don't understand that. Tell me, how am I to tell Urania? For I should think it delightful if you would come and stay at San Stefano. Oh, do come, do: come to keep us company. I entreat you. Be charitable, do a good work.... But first tell me, how shall I tell Urania?"

She laughed:

"What?"

"What they told me in the Via dei Serpenti, that your address was now Signor van der Staal's studio, Via del Babuino."

Laughing, she looked at him almost pityingly:

"It is too difficult for you to tell her," she replied, a little condescendingly. "I will myself write to Urania and explain my conduct."

He was evidently relieved:

"That's delightful, capital! And ... will you come to San Stefano?"

"No, I can't really."

"Why not?"

"I can no longer move in the circle in which you live, after my change of address," she said, half laughing, half seriously.

He shrugged his shoulders:

"Listen," he said. "You know our Roman society. So long as certain conventions are observed ... everything's permitted."

"Exactly; but it's just those conventions which I don't observe."

"And that's where you are wrong. Believe me, I am saying it as your friend."

"I live according to my own laws and I don't want to move in your world."

He folded his hands in entreaty:

"Yes, yes, I know. You are a 'new woman.' You have your own laws. But I beseech you, take pity on me. Be an angel of mercy and come to San Stefano."

She seemed to hear a note of seduction in his voice and therefore said:

"Prince, even if it agreed with the conventions of your world ... even then I shouldn't wish to. For I will not leave Van der Staal."

"You come first and let him come a little later. Urania will be glad to have his advice on some artistic questions, concerning the 'doing up' of San Stefano. We have a lot of pictures there. And old things generally. Do let's arrange that. I am going to San Stefano to-morrow. Urania will follow me in a week. I will suggest to her to ask you down soon."

"Really, prince ... it can't happen just yet."

"Why not?"

She looked at him for some time before answering:

"Shall I be candid with you?"

"But of course!"

They had already passed the post-office twice. The street was quite silent and deserted. He looked at her enquiringly.

"Well, then," she said, "we are in great financial difficulties. We have no money at present. I have lost my little capital; and the small sum which I earned by writing an article is spent. Duco is working hard, but he is engaged on a big work and making nothing in the meantime. He expects to receive a bit of money in a month or so. But at the moment we have nothing, nothing at all. That is why I went to a shop by the Tiber this morning to ask how much a dealer would give for a couple of old pictures which Duco wants to sell. He doesn't like parting with them, but there's no help for it. So you see that I can't come. I should not care to leave him; besides, I should not have the money for the journey or a decent wardrobe."

He looked at her. The first thing that he had noticed was her new and blooming loveliness; now he noticed that her skirt was a little worn and her blouse none too fresh, though she wore a couple of roses in the waist-band.

"*Gesu mio!*" he exclaimed. "And you tell me that so calmly, so quietly!"

She smiled and shrugged her shoulders:

"What would you have me do? Moan and groan about it?"

"But you are a woman ... a woman to revere and respect!" he cried. "How does Van der Staal take it?"

"He is a bit depressed, of course. He has never known money trouble. And it hinders him from employing his full talent. But I hope to help him bear up during this difficult time. So you see, prince, that I can't come to San Stefano."

"But why didn't you write to us? Why not ask us for money?"

"It is very nice of you to say that, but the idea never even occurred to us."

"Too proud?"

"Yes, too proud."

"But what a position to be in! What can I do for you? May I give you two hundred lire? I have two hundred lire on me. And I will tell Urania that I gave it to you."

"No, thank you, prince. I am very grateful to you, but I can't accept it."

"Not from *me*?"

"No."

"Not from Urania?"

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"Not from her either."

"Why not?"

"I want to earn my money and I can't accept alms."

"A fine principle. But for the moment ..."

"I remain true to it."

"Will you allow me to tell you something?"

"What?"

"I admire you. More than that: I love you."

She made a gesture with her hand and wrinkled her brows.

"Why mayn't I tell you so? An Italian does not keep his love concealed. I love you. You are more beautiful and nobler and superior to anything that I could ever imagine any woman to be.... Don't be angry with me: I am not asking anything of you. I am a bad lot, but at this moment I really feel the sort of thing that you see in our old family-portraits, an atom of chivalry which has survived by accident. I ask for nothing from you. I merely tell you—and I say it in Urania's name as well as my own—that you can always rely on us. Urania will be angry that you haven't written to us."

They now entered the post-office and she bought a few stamps:

"There go my last soldi," she said, laughing and showing her empty purse. "We wanted the stamps to write to the secretary of an exhibition in London. Are you seeing me home?"

She saw suddenly that he had tears in his eyes.

"Do accept two hundred lire from me!" he entreated.

She smilingly shook her head.

"Are you dining at home?" he asked.

She gave him a quizzing look:

"Yes," she said.

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He was unwilling to ask any further questions, was afraid lest he should wound her:

"Be kind," he said, "and dine with me this evening. I'm bored. I have no friends in Rome at the moment. Everybody is away. Not at the Grand-Hôtel, but in a snug little restaurant, where they know me. I'll come and fetch you at seven o'clock. Do be nice and come! For my sake!"

He could not restrain his tears.

"I shall be delighted," she said, softly, with her smile.

They were standing in the porch of the house in the Via del Babuino where the studio was. He raised her hand to his lips and pressed a fervent kiss upon it. Then he took off his hat and hurried away. She went slowly up the stairs, mastering her emotion before she entered the studio.

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CHAPTER XXIX

She found Duco lying listlessly on the sofa. He had a bad headache and she sat down beside him.

"Well?" he asked.

"The man offered me eighty lire for the Memmo," she said, "but he declared that the panel was not by Gentile da Fabriano: he remembered having seen it here."

"The man's crazy," he replied. "Or else he is trying to get my Gentile for nothing.... Cornélie, I really can't sell it."

"Well, Duco, then we'll think of something else," said she, laying her hand on his aching forehead.

"Perhaps one or two smaller things, a knickknack or two," he moaned.

"Perhaps. Shall I go back to him this afternoon?"

"No, no, I'll go. But, really it is easier to buy that sort of thing than to sell it."

"That is so, Duco," she agreed, laughing. "But I asked yesterday what I should get for a pair of bracelets; and I'll dispose of those to-day. And that will keep us going for quite a month. But I have some news for you. Do you know whom I met?"

"No."

"The prince."

He gave a scowl:

"I don't like that cad," he said.

"I've told you before, Duco. I don't consider him a cad. And I don't believe he is one either. He asked us to dine with him this evening, quite quietly."

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"No, I don't care about it."

She said nothing. She stood up, boiled some water on a spirit-stand and made tea:

"Duco dear, I've been careless about lunch. A cup of tea and some bread-and-butter is all I can give you. Are you very hungry?"

"No," he said, evasively.

She hummed a tune while she poured out the tea into an antique cup. She cut the bread-and-butter and brought it to him on the sofa. Then she sat down beside him, with her own cup in her hand.

"Cornélie, hadn't we better lunch at the *osteria*?"

She laughed and showed him her empty purse:

"Here are the stamps," she said.

Disheartened, he flung himself back on the cushions.

"My dear boy," she continued, "don't be so down. I shall have some money this afternoon, for the bracelets. I ought to have sold them sooner. Really, Duco, it's not of any importance. Why haven't you been working? It would have cheered you up."

"I didn't feel inclined and I had a headache."

She waited a moment and then said:

"The prince was angry that we didn't write and ask him to help us. He wanted to give me two hundred lire...."

"You refused, surely?" he asked, fiercely.

"Well, of course," she answered, calmly. "He invited us to stay at San Stefano, where they will be spending the summer. I refused that too."

"Why?"

"I haven't the clothes.... But you wouldn't care to go, would you?"

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"No," he said, dully.

She drew his head to her and stroked his forehead. A wide patch of reflected afternoon light fell through the studio-window from the blue sky outside; and the studio was like a confused swirl of dusty colour, in which the outlines stood forth

with their arrested action and changeless emotion. The raised embroideries of the chasubles and stoles, the purples and sky-blues of Gentile's panel, the mystic luxury of Memmi's angel in his cloak of heavily-pleated brocade, with the golden lily-stem between his fingers, were like a hoard of colour and flashed in that reflected light like so many handfuls of jewels. On the easel stood the water-colour of *The Banners*, with its noble refinement. And, as they sat on the sofa, he leaning his head against her, both drinking their tea, they harmonized in their happiness with that background of art. And it seemed incredible that they should be worried about a couple of hundred lire, for they were surrounded by colour as of precious stones and her smile was still radiant. But his eyes were dejected and his hand hung limply by his side.

She went out again that afternoon for a little while, but soon returned again, saying that she had sold the bracelets and that he need not worry any longer. And she sang and moved gaily about the studio. She had made a few purchases: an almond-tart, biscuits and a small bottle of port. She had carried the things home herself, in a little basket, and she sang as she unpacked them. Her liveliness cheered him; he stood up and suddenly sat down to *The Banners*. He looked at the light and thought that he would be able to work for an hour longer. He was filled with transport as he contemplated the drawing: he saw a great deal that was good in it, a great deal that was beautiful. It was both spacious and delicate; it was modern and yet free of any modern *trucs*; there was thought in it and yet purity of line and grouping. And the colours were restful and dignified: purple and grey and white; violet and pale-grey and bright white; dusk, twilight, light; night, dawn, day. The day especially, the day dawning high up yonder, was a day of white, self-conscious sunlight: a bright certitude, in which the future became clear. But as a cloud were the streamers, pennants, flags, banners, waving in heraldic beauty above the heads of the militant women uplifted in ecstasy.... He selected his colours, chose his brushes, worked zealously, until there was no light left. Then he sat down beside her, happy and contented. In the falling dusk they drank some of the port, ate some of the tart. He felt like it, he said; he was hungry....

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At seven o'clock there was a knock. He started up and opened the door; the prince entered. Duco's forehead clouded over; but the prince did not perceive it, in the twilit studio. Cornélie lit a lamp:

"*Scusi*, prince," she said. "I am positively distressed: Duco does not care to go out—he has been working and is tired—and I had no one to send and tell you that we could not accept your invitation."

"But you don't mean that, surely! I had reckoned so absolutely on having you both to dinner! What shall I do with my evening if you don't come!"

And, bursting into a flow of language, the complaints of a spoiled child, the entreaties of an indulged boy, he began to persuade Duco, who remained unwilling and sullen. At last Duco rose, shrugged his shoulders, but, with a compassionate, almost insulting smile, yielded. But he was unable to suppress his sense of unwillingness; his jealousy because of the quick repartees of Cornélie and the prince remained unassuaged, like an inward pain. At the restaurant he was silent at first. Then he made an effort to join in the conversation, remembering what Cornélie had said to him on that momentous day at the *osteria*: that she loved him, Duco; that she did not even compare the prince with him; but ... that he was not cheerful or witty. And, conscious of his superiority because of that recollection, he displayed a smiling superciliousness towards the prince, for all his jealousy, condescending slightly and suffering his pleasantry and his flirtation, because it amused Cornélie, that clashing interplay of swift words and short, parrying phrases, like the dialogue in a French comedy.

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CHAPTER XXX

The prince was to leave for San Stefano next day; and early in the morning Cornélie sent him the following letter:

"MY DEAR PRINCE,

"I have a favour to ask of you. Yesterday you were so good as to offer me help. I thought then that I was in a position to decline your kind offer. But I hope that you will not think me very changeable if I come to you to-day with this request: lend me what you offered yesterday to give me.

"Lend me two hundred lire. I hope to be able to repay you as soon as possible. Of

course it need not be a secret from Urania; but don't let Duco know. I tried to sell my bracelets yesterday, but sold only one and received very little for it. The goldsmith offered me far too little, but I had to let him have one at forty lire, for I had not a soldo left! And so I am writing to appeal to your friendship and to ask you to put the two hundred lire in an envelope and let me come and fetch it myself from the porter. Pray receive my sincere thanks in advance.

"What a pleasant evening you gave us yesterday! A couple of hours' cheerful talk like that, at a well-chosen dinner, does me good. However happy I may be, our present position of financial anxiety sometimes depresses me, though I keep up my spirits for Duco's sake. Money worries interfere with his work and impair his energy. So I discuss them with him as little as I can; and I particularly beg you not to let him into our little secret. [159]

"Once more, my best and most sincere thanks.

"CORNÉLIE DE RETZ."

When she left the house that morning, she went straight to the Palazzo Ruspoli:

"Has his excellency gone?"

The porter bowed respectfully and confidentially:

"An hour ago, signora. His excellency left a letter and a parcel for me to give you if you should call. Permit me to fetch them."

He went away and soon returned; he handed Cornélie the parcel and the letter.

She walked down a side-street turning out of the Corso, opened the envelope and found a few bank-notes and this letter:

"MOST HONOURED LADY,

"I am so glad that you have applied to me at last; and Urania also will approve. I feel I am acting in accordance with her wishes when I send you not two hundred but a thousand lire, with the most humble request that you will accept it and keep it as long as you please. For of course I dare not ask you to take it as a present. Nevertheless I am making so bold as to send you a keepsake. When I read that you were compelled to sell a bracelet, I hated the idea so that, without stopping to think, I ran round to Marchesini's and, as best I could, picked you out a bracelet which, at your feet, I entreat you to accept. You must not refuse your friend this. Let my bracelet be a secret from Urania as well as from Van der Staal.

"Once more receive my sincere thanks for deigning to apply to me for aid and be assured that I attach the highest value to this mark of favour. [160]

"Your most humble servant,
"VIRGILIO DI F. B."

Cornélie opened the parcel and found a velvet case containing a bracelet in the Etruscan style: a narrow gold band set with pearls and sapphires. [161]

CHAPTER XXXI

In those hot May days, the big studio facing north was cool while the town outside was scorching. Duco and Cornélie did not go out before nightfall, when it was time to think of dining somewhere. Rome was quiet: Roman society had fled; the tourists had migrated. They saw nobody and their days glided past. He worked diligently; *The Banners* was finished: the two of them, with their arms around each other's waists and her head on his shoulder, would sit in front of it, proudly smiling, during the last days before the drawing was to be sent to the International Exhibition in Knightsbridge. Their feeling for each other had never contained such pure harmony, such unity of concord, as now, when his work was done. He felt that he had never worked so nobly, so firmly, so unhesitatingly, never with the same strength, yet never so tenderly; and he was grateful to her for it. He confessed to her that he could never have worked like that if she had not thought with him and felt with him in their long hours of sitting and gazing at the procession, the pageant of women, as it wound out of the night of crumbling pillars to the city of sheer increasing radiance and gleaming palaces of glass. There was rest in his soul, now that he had worked so greatly and nobly. There was pride in them both: pride because of their life, their independence, because of that work of noble and stately art. In their happiness there was much that was arbitrary; they

looked down upon people, the multitude, the world; and this was especially true of him. In her there was more of quietude and humility, though outwardly she showed herself as proud as he. Her article on *The Social Position of Divorced Women* had been published in pamphlet form and made a success. But her own performance did not make her proud as Duco's art made her proud, proud of him and of their life and their happiness.

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While she read in the Dutch papers and magazines the reviews of her pamphlet—often displaying opposition but never any slight and always acknowledging her authority to speak on the question—while she read her pamphlet through again, a doubt arose within her of her own conviction. She felt how difficult it was to fight with a single mind for a cause, as those symbolic women in the drawing marched to the fight. She felt that what she had written was inspired by her own experience, by her own suffering and by these only; she saw that she had generalized her own sense of life and suffering, but without deeper insight into the essence of those things: not from pure conviction, but from anger and resentment; not from reflection, but after melancholy musing upon her own fate; not from her love of her fellow-women, but from a petty hatred of society. And she remembered Duco's silence at that time, his mute disapproval, his intuitive feeling that the source of her excitement was not pure, but the bitter and turbid spring of her own experience. She now respected his intuition; she now perceived the essential purity of his character; she now felt that he—because of his art—was high, noble, without ulterior motives in his actions, creating beauty for its own sake. But she also felt that she had roused him to it. That was her pride and her happiness; and she loved him more dearly for it. But about herself she was humble. She was conscious of her femininity, of all the complexity of her soul, which prevented her from continuing to fight for the objects of the feminist movement. And she thought again of her education, of her husband, her short but sad married life ... and she thought of the prince. She felt herself so complex and she would gladly have been homogeneous. She swayed between contradiction and contradiction and she confessed to herself that she did not know herself. It gave a tinge of melancholy to her days of happiness.

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The prince ... was not her pride only apparent that she had asked him not to tell Urania that she was living with Duco, because she would tell her so herself? In reality, she feared Urania's opinion.... She was troubled by the dishonesty of the life: she called the intersections of the line with the lines of other small people the petty life. Why, so soon as she crossed one of these intersections, did she feel, as though by instinct, that honesty was not always wise? What became of her pride and her dignity—not apparently, but actually—from the moment that she feared Urania's criticism, from the moment that she feared lest this criticism might be unfavourable to her in one respect or another? And why did she not speak of Virgilio's bracelet to Duco? She did not speak of the thousand lire because she knew that money matters depressed him and that he did not want to borrow from the prince, because, if he knew about it, he would not be able to work free from care; and her concealment had been for a noble object. But why did she not speak of Gilio's bracelet?...

She did not know. Once or twice she had tried to say, just naturally and casually:

"Look, I've had this from the prince, because I sold that one bracelet."

But she was not able to say it, she did not know why. Was it because of Duco's jealousy? She didn't know, she didn't know. She felt that it would make for peace and tranquillity if she said nothing about the bracelet and did not wear it. Really she would have been glad to send it back to the prince. But she thought that unkind, after all his readiness to assist her.

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And Duco ... he thought that she had sold the bracelets for a good sum, he knew that she had received money from the publisher, for her pamphlet. He asked no further questions and ceased to think about money. They lived very simply.... But still she disliked his not knowing, even though it had been good for his work that he had not known.

These were little things. These were little clouds in the golden skies of their great and noble life, their life of which they were proud. And she alone saw them. And, when she saw his eyes, radiant with the pride of life; when she heard his voice, vibrating with his new assured energy and pride; and when she felt his embrace, in which she felt the thrill of his delight in the happiness which she brought him, then she no longer saw the little clouds, then she felt her own thrill of delight in the happiness which he had brought her and she loved him so passionately that she could have died in his arms....

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CHAPTER XXXII

Urania wrote most charmingly. She said that they were having a very quiet time with the old prince at San Stefano, as they were not inviting visitors because the castle was too gloomy, too shabby, too lonely, but that she would think it most delightful if Cornélie would come and spend a few weeks with them. She added that she would send Mr. van der Staal an invitation as well. The letter was addressed to the Via dei Serpenti and forwarded to Cornélie from there. She understood from this that Gilio had not mentioned that she was living in Duco's studio and she understood also that Urania accepted their *liaison* without criticizing it....

The Banners had been dispatched to London; and, now that Duco was no longer working, a slight indolence and a vague boredom hung about the studio, which was still cool, while the town was scorching. And Cornélie wrote to Urania that she was very glad to accept and promised to come in a week's time. She was pleased that she would meet no other guests at the castle, for she had no dresses for a country-house visit. But with her usual tact she freshened up her wardrobe, without spending much money. This took up all the intervening days; and she sat sewing while Duco lay on the sofa and smoked cigarettes. He also had accepted, because of Cornélie and because the district around the Lake of San Stefano, which was overlooked by the castle, attracted him. He promised Cornélie with a smile not to be so stiff. He would do his best to make himself agreeable. He looked down rather haughtily on the prince. He considered him a scallywag, but no longer a bounder or a cad. He thought him childish, but not base or ignoble.

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Cornélie went off. He took her to the station. In the cab she kissed him fondly and told him how much she would miss him during those few days. Would he come soon? In a week? She would be longing for him: she could not do without him. She looked deep into his eyes, which she loved. He also said that he would be terribly bored without her. Couldn't he come earlier, she asked. No, Urania had fixed the date.

When he helped her into a second-class compartment, she felt sad to be going without him. The carriage was full; she occupied the last vacant seat. She sat between a fat peasant and an old peasant-woman; the man civilly helped her to put her little portmanteau in the rack and asked whether she minded if he smoked his pipe. She civilly answered no. Opposite them sat two priests in frayed cassocks. An unimportant-looking little brown wooden box was lying between their feet: it was the supreme unction, which they were taking to a dying person.

The peasant entered into conversation with Cornélie, asked if she was a foreigner: English, no doubt? The old peasant-woman offered her a tangerine orange.

The remainder of the compartment was occupied by a middle-class family: father, mother, a small boy and two little sisters. The slow train shook, rattled and wound its way along, stopping constantly. The little girls kept on humming tunes. At one station a lady stepped out of a first-class carriage with a little girl of five, in a white frock and a hat with white ostrich-feathers.

"*Oh, che bellezza!*" cried the small boy. "Mamma, mamma, look! Isn't she beautiful? Isn't she lovely? *Divinamente!* Oh ... mamma!"

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He closed his black eyes, lovelorn, dazzled by the little white girl of five. The parents laughed, the priests laughed, everybody laughed. But the boy was not at all confused:

"*Era una bellezza!*" he repeated once more, casting a glance of conviction all around him.

It was very hot in the train. Outside, the mountains gleamed white on the horizon and glittered like a fire with opal reflections. Close to the railway stood a row of eucalyptus-trees, sickle-leaved, brewing a heavy perfume. On the dry, sun-scorched plain, the wild cattle grazed, lifting their black curly heads with indifference to the train. In the stifling, stewing heat, the passengers' drowsy heads nodded up and down, while a smell of sweat, tobacco-smoke and orange-peel mingled with the scent of the eucalyptuses outside. The train swung round a curve, rattling like a toy-train of tin coaches almost tumbling over one another. And a level stretch of unruffled lazulite—metallic, crystalline, sky-blue—came into view, spreading into an oval goblet between slopes of mountain-land, like a very deep-set vase in which a sacred fluid was kept very blue and pure and motionless by a wall of rocky hills, which rose higher and higher until, as the train swung and rattled round the clear goblet, at one lofty point a castle stood, coloured like the

rocks, broad, massive and monastic, with the cloisters running down the slope. It rose in noble and sombre melancholy; and from the train one could hardly distinguish what was rock and what was building-stone, as though it were all one barbaric growth, as though the castle had grown naturally out of the rock and, in growing, had assumed something of the shape of a human dwelling of the earliest times. And, as though the oval with its divine blue water had been a sacred reservoir, the mountains hedged in the Lake of San Stefano and the castle rose as its gloomy guardian.

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The train wound along a curve by the water-side, swung round a bend, then round another and stopped: San Stefano. It was a small, quiet town, lying sleepily in the sun, without life or traffic, and visited only in the winter by day-trippers, who came from Rome to see the cathedral and the castle and tasted the wine of the country at the *osteria*.

When Cornélie alighted, she at once saw the prince.

"How sweet of you to come and look us up in our eyrie!" he cried, in rapture, eagerly pressing her two hands.

He led her through the station to his little basket-carriage, with two little horses and a tiny groom. A porter would bring her luggage to the castle.

"It's delightful of you to come!" he repeated. "You have never been to San Stefano before? You know the cathedral is famous. We shall go right through the town: the road to the castle runs behind it."

He was smiling with pleasure. He started the horses with a click of his tongue, with a repeated shake of the reins, like a child. They flew along the road, between the low, sleepy little houses, across the square, where in the glowing sunlight the glorious cathedral rose, Lombardo-Romanesque in style, begun in the eleventh and added to in every succeeding century, with the *campanile* on the left and the *battisterio* on the right: marvels of architecture in red, black and white marble, one vast sculpture of angels, saints and prophets and all as it were covered with a thick dust of ages, which had long since tempered the colours of the marble to rose, grey and yellow and which hovered between the groups as the one and only thing that had been left over of all those centuries, as though they had sunk into dust in every crevice.

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The prince drove across a long bridge, whose arches were the remains of an ancient aqueduct and now stood in the river, the bed of which was quite dried up, with children playing in it. Then he let the little horses climb at a foot's pace. The road led steeply, winding, barren and rocky, up to the castle, while valleys of olives sank beneath them, affording an ever wider view over the ever wider panorama of blue-white mountains and opal horizons gleaming in the sun, with suddenly a glimpse of the lake, the oval goblet, now sunk deeper and deeper, as in a fluted brim of sun-scorched hills, its blue growing deeper and more precipitous, a mystic blue that caught all the blue of the sky, until the air shimmered between lake and sky as in long spirals of light that whirled before the eyes. Until suddenly there drifted an intoxication of orange-blossom, a heavy, sensual breath as of panting love, as though thousands of mouths were exhaling a perfumed breath that hung stiflingly in the windless atmosphere of light, between the lake and the sky.

The prince, happy and vivacious, talked a great deal, pointed this way and that with his whip, clicked at the horses, asked Cornélie questions, asked if she did not admire the landscape. Slowly, straining the muscles of their hind-legs, the horses drew the carriage up the ascent. The castle lay massive, huddling close to the ground. The lake sank lower and lower. The horizons became wider, like a world; a fitful breeze blew away some of the orange-blossom breath. The road became broad, easy and level. The castle lay extended like a fortress, like a town, behind its pinnacled walls, with gate within gate. They drove in, across a courtyard, under an archway into a second courtyard, under a second archway with a third courtyard. And Cornélie received a sensation of awe, a vision of pillars, arches, statues, arcades and fountains. They alighted.

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Urania ran out to meet her, embraced her, welcomed her affectionately and took her up the stairs and through the passages to her room. The windows were open; she looked out at the lake and the town and the cathedral. And Urania kissed her again and made her sit down. And Cornélie was struck by the fact that Urania had grown thin and had lost her former brilliant beauty of an American girl, with the unconscious look of a *cocotte* in her eyes, her smile and her clothes. She was changed. She had "gone off" a little and was no longer so pretty, as though her good looks had been a short-lived pretence, consisting of freshness rather than line. But, if she had lost her bloom, she had gained a certain distinction, a certain style, something that surprised Cornélie. Her gestures were quieter, her voice was softer, her mouth seemed smaller and was not always splitting open to display her

white teeth; her dress was exceedingly simple: a blue skirt and a white blouse. Cornélie found it difficult to realize that the young Princess di Forte-Braccio, Duchess di San Stefano, was Miss Urania Hope of Chicago. A slight melancholy had come over her, which became her, even though she was less pretty. And Cornélie reflected that she must have some sorrow, which had smoothed her angles, but that she was also tactfully accommodating herself to her entirely novel environment. She asked Urania if she was happy. Urania said yes, with her sad smile, which was so new and so surprising. And she told her story. They had had a pleasant winter at Nice, but among a cosmopolitan circle of friends, for, though her new relations were very kind, they were exceedingly condescending and Virgilio's friends, especially the ladies, kept her at arm's length in an almost insolent fashion. Already during the honeymoon she had perceived that the aristocracy were prepared to tolerate her, but that they could never forget that she was the daughter of Hope the Chicago stockinet-manufacturer. She had seen that she was not the only one who, though she was now a princess and duchess, was accepted on sufferance and only for her millions: there were others like herself. She had formed no friendships. People came to her parties and dances: they were *frère et compagnon* and hand and glove with Gilio; the women called him by his Christian name, laughed and flirted with him and seemed quite to approve of him for marrying a few millions. To Urania they were just barely civil, especially the women: the men were not so difficult. But the whole thing saddened her, especially with all these women of the higher nobility—bearers of the most famous names in Italy—who treated her with condescension and always managed to exclude her from every intimacy, from all private gatherings, from all cooperation in the matter of parties or charities. When everything had been discussed, then they asked the Princess di Forte-Braccio to take part and offered her the place to which she was entitled and even did so with scrupulous punctiliousness. They manifestly treated her as a princess and an equal in the eyes of the world, of the public. But in their own set she remained Urania Hope. And the few other, middle-class millionaire elements of course ran after her, but she kept these at a distance; and Gilio approved. And what had Gilio said when she once complained of her grievance to him? That she, by displaying tactfulness, would certainly conquer her position, but with great patience and after many, many years. She was now crying, with her head on Cornélie's shoulder: oh, she reflected, she would never conquer them, those haughty women! What after all was she, a Hope, compared with all those celebrated families, which together made up the ancient glory of Italy and which, like the Massimos, traced back their descent to the Romans of old?

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Was Gilio kind? Yes, but from the beginning he had treated her as "his wife." All his pleasantness, all his cheerfulness was kept for others: he never talked to her much. And the young princess wept: she felt lonely, she sometimes longed for America. She had now invited her brother to stay with her, a nice boy of seventeen, who had come over for her wedding and travelled about Europe a little before returning to his farm in the Far West. He was her darling, he consoled her; but he would be gone in a few weeks. And then what would she have left? Oh, how glad she was that Cornélie had come! And how well she was looking, prettier than she had ever seen her look! Van der Staal had accepted: he would be here in a week. She asked, in a whisper, were they not going to get married? Cornélie answered positively no; she was not marrying, she would never marry again. And, in a sudden burst of candour, unable to conceal things from Urania, she told her that she was no longer living in the Via dei Serpenti, that she was living in Duco's studio. Urania was startled by this breach of every convention; but she regarded her friend as a woman who could do things which another could not. So it was only their happiness and friendship, she whispered, as though frightened, and without the sanction of society? Urania remembered Cornélie's imprecations against marriage and, formerly, against the prince. But she did like Gilio a little now, didn't she? Oh, she, Urania, would not be jealous again! She thought it delightful that Cornélie had come; and Gilio, who was bored, had also looked forward so to her arrival. Oh, no, Urania was no longer jealous!

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And, with her head on Cornélie's shoulder and her eyes still full of tears, she seemed merely to ask for a little friendship, a little affection, a few kind words and caresses, this wealthy American child who now bore the title of an ancient Italian house. And Cornélie felt for her because she was suffering, because she was no longer a small insignificant person, whose line of life happened to cross her own. She took her in her arms, comforted her, the weeping little princess, as with a new friendship; she accepted her in her life as a friend, no longer as a small insignificant person. And, when Urania, staring wide-eyed, remembered Cornélie's warning, Cornélie treated that warning lightly and said that Urania ought to show more courage. Tact, she possessed, innate tact. But she must be courageous and face life as it came....

They stood up and, clasped in each other's arms, looked out of the open window. The bells of the cathedral were pealing through the air; the cathedral rose in noble

pride from out of a very low huddle of roofs, a gigantic cathedral for so small a town, an immense symbol of ecclesiastical dominion over the roof-tops of the little town kneeling in reverence. And the awe which had filled Cornélie in the courtyard, among the arcades, statues and fountains, inspired her anew, because glory and grandeur, dying but not dead, mouldering but not spent, seemed to loom dimly from the mystic blue of the lake, from the age-old architecture of the cathedral, up the orange-clad hills to the castle, where at an open window stood a young foreign woman, discouraged, although that phantom of glory and grandeur needed her millions in order to endure for a few more generations....

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"It is beautiful and stately, all this past," thought Cornélie. "It is great. But still it is no longer anything. It is a phantom. For it is gone, it is all gone, it is but a memory of proud and arrogant nobles, of narrow souls that do not look towards the future."

And the future, with a confusion of social problems, with the waving of new banners and streamers, now whirled before her in the long spirals of light, which, like blue notes of interrogation, shimmered before her eyes, between the lake and the sky.

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CHAPTER XXXIII

Cornélie had changed her dress and now left her room. She went down the corridor and saw nobody. She did not know the way, but walked on. Suddenly a wide staircase fell away before her, between two rows of gigantic marble candelabra; and Cornélie came to an *atrio* which opened over the lake. The walls, with frescoes by Mantegna, representing feats of bygone San Stefanos, supported a cupola which, painted with sky and clouds, appeared as though it were open to the outer air and which was surrounded by groups of cupids and nymphs looking down from a balustrade.

She stepped outside and saw Gilio. He was sitting on the balustrade of the terrace, smoking a cigarette and gazing at the lake. He came up to her:

"I was almost sure that you would come this way," he said. "Aren't you tired? May I show you round? Have you seen our Mantegnas? They have suffered badly. They were restored at the beginning of the century.¹ They look rather dilapidated, don't they? Do you see that little mythological scene up there, by Giulio Romano? Come here, through this door. But it's locked. Wait...."

He called out an order to some one below. Presently an old serving-man arrived with a heavy bunch of keys, which he handed to the prince.

"You can go, Egisto. I know the keys."

The man went away. The prince opened a heavy bronze door. He showed her the bas-reliefs:

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"Giovanni da Bologna," he said.

They went on, through a room hung with tapestries; the prince pointed to a ceiling by Ghirlandajo: the apotheosis of the only pope of the house of San Stefano. Next through a hall of mirrors, painted by Mario de' Fiori. The dusty, musty smell of an ill-kept museum, with its atmosphere of neglect and indifference, stifled the breath; the white-silk window-curtains were yellow with age, soiled by flies; the red curtains of Venetian damask hung in moth-eaten rags and tatters; the painted mirrors were dull and tarnished; the arms of the Venetian glass chandeliers were broken. Pushed aside anyhow, like so much rubbish in a lumber-room, stood the most precious cabinets, inlaid with bronze, mother-of-pearl and ebony panels, and mosaic tables of lapis-lazuli, malachite and green, yellow, black and pink marble. In the tapestries—Saul and David, Esther, Holofernes, Salome—the vitality of the figures had evaporated, as though they were suffocated under the grey coat of dust that lay thick upon their worn textures and neutralized every colour.

In the immense halls, half-dark in their curtained dusk, a sort of sorrow lingered, like a melancholy of hopeless, conquered exasperation, a slow decline of greatness and magnificence; between the masterpieces of the most famous painters mournful empty spaces yawned, the witnesses of pinching penury, spaces once occupied by pictures that had once and even lately been sold for fortunes. Cornélie remembered something about a law-suit some years ago, an attempt to send some

Raphaels across the frontier, in defiance of the law, and to sell them in Berlin.... And Gilio led her hurriedly through the spectral halls, gay as a boy, light-hearted as a child, glad to have his diversion, mentioning without affection or interest names which he had heard in his childhood, but making mistakes and correcting himself and at last confessing that he had forgotten:

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"And here is the *camera degli sposi*...."

He fumbled at the bunch of keys, read the brass labels till he found the right one and opened the door, which grated on its hinges; and they went in.

And suddenly there was something like an intense and exquisite stateliness of intimacy: a huge bedroom, all gold, with the dim gold of tenderly faded golden tissues. On the walls were gold-coloured tapestries: Venus rising from the gilt foam of a golden ocean, Venus and Mars, Venus and Cupid, Venus and Adonis. The pale-pink nudity of these mythological beings stood forth very faintly against the sheer gold of sky and atmosphere, in golden woodlands, amid golden flowers, with golden cupids and swans and doves and wild boars; golden peacocks drank from golden fountains; water and clouds were of elemental gold; and all this had tenderly faded into a languorous sunset of expiring radiance. The state bed was gold, under a canopy of gold brocade, on which the armorial bearings of the family were embroidered in heavy relief; the bedspread was gold; but all this gold was lifeless, had lapsed into the melancholy of all but grey lustre: it was effaced, erased, obliterated, as though the dusty ages had cast a shadow over it, had woven a web across it.

"How beautiful!" said Cornélie.

"Our famous bridal chamber," said the prince, laughing. "It was a strange idea of those old people, to spend the first night in such a peculiar apartment. When they married, in our family, they slept here on the bridal night. It was a sort of superstition. The young wife remained faithful only provided it was here that she spent the first night with her husband. Poor Urania! We did not sleep here, *signora mia*, among all these indecent goddesses of love. We no longer respect the family tradition. Urania is therefore doomed by fate to be unfaithful to me. Unless I take that doom on my own shoulders...."

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"I suppose the fidelity of the husbands is not mentioned in this family tradition?"

"No, we attached very little importance to that ... nor do we nowadays...."

"It's glorious," Cornélie repeated, locking around her. "Duco will think it perfectly glorious. Oh, prince, I never saw such a room! Look at Venus over there, with the wounded Adonis, his head in her lap, the nymphs lamenting! It is a fairy-tale."

"There's too much gold for my taste."

"It may have been so before, too much gold...."

"Masses of gold denoted wealth and abundant love. The wealth is gone...."

"But the gold is softened now, so beautifully toned down...."

"The abundant love has remained: the San Stefanos have always loved much."

He went on jesting, called attention to the wantonness of the design and risked an allusion.

She pretended not to hear. She looked at the tapestries. In the intervals between the panels golden peacocks drank from golden fountains and cupids played with doves.

"I am so fond of you!" he whispered in her ear, putting his arm round her waist. "Angel! Angel!"

She pushed him away:

"Prince...."

"Call me Gilio!"

"Why can't we be just good friends?"

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"Because I want something more than friendship."

She now released herself entirely:

"And I don't!" she answered, coldly.

"Do you only love one then?"

"Yes."

"That's not possible."

"Why not?"

"Because, if so, you would marry him. If you loved nobody but Van der Staal, you would marry him."

"I am opposed to marriage."

"Nonsense! You're not marrying him, so that you may be free. And, if you want to be free, I also am entitled to ask for my moment of love."

She gave him a strange look. He felt her scorn.

"You ... you don't understand me at all," she said, slowly and compassionately.

"You understand me."

"Oh, yes! You are so very simple!"

"Why won't you?"

"Because I won't."

"Why not?"

"Because I haven't that feeling for you."

"Why not?" he insisted; and his hands clenched as he spoke.

"Why not?" she repeated. "Because I think you a cheerful and pleasant companion with whom to take things lightly, but in other respects your temperament is not in tune with mine."

"What do you know about my temperament?"

"I can see you."

"You are not a doctor."

"No, but I am a woman."

"And I a man."

"But not for me."

Furiously, with a curse, he caught her in his quivering arms. Before she could prevent him, he had kissed her fiercely. She struggled out of his grasp and slapped his face. He gave another curse and flung out his arms to seize her again, but she drew herself up:

"Prince!" she cried, screaming with laughter. "You surely don't think that you can compel me?"

"Of course I do!"

She gave a disdainful laugh:

"You can not," she said, aloud. "For I refuse and I will not be compelled."

He saw red, he was furious. He had never before been defied and thwarted; he had always conquered.

She saw him rushing at her, but she quietly flung back the door of the room.

The long galleries and apartments stretched out before them, as though endlessly. There was something in that vista of ancestral spaciousness that restrained him. He was an impetuous rather than a deliberate ravisher. She walked on very slowly, looking attentively to right and left.

He came up with her:

"You struck me!" he panted, furiously. "I'll never forgive it, never!"

"I beg your pardon," she said, with her sweetened voice and smile. "I had to defend myself, you know."

"Why?"

"Prince," she said, persuasively, "why all this anger and passion and exasperation? You can be so nice; when I saw you last in Rome you were so charming. We were always such good friends. I enjoyed your conversation and your wit and your good-nature. Now it's all spoilt."

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"No," he entreated.

"Yes, it is. You won't understand me. Your temperament is not in harmony with mine. Don't you understand? You force me to speak coarsely, because you are coarse yourself."

"I?"

"Yes. You don't believe in the sincerity of my independence."

"No, I don't!"

"Is that courteous, towards a woman?"

"I am courteous only up to a certain point."

"We have left that point behind. So be courteous again as before."

"You are playing with me. I shall never forget it; I will be revenged."

"So it's a struggle for life and death?"

"No, a struggle for victory, for me."

They had reached the *atrio*:

"Thanks for showing me round," she said, a little mockingly. "The *camera degli sposi*, above all, was splendid. Don't let us be angry any more."

And she offered him her hand.

"No," he said, "you struck me here, in the face. My cheek is still burning. I won't accept your hand."

"Poor cheek!" she said, teasingly. "Poor prince! Did I hit hard?"

"Yes."

"How can I extinguish that burning?"

He looked at her, still breathing hard, and flushed, with glittering carbuncle eyes:

"You're a bigger coquette than any Italian woman."

She laughed:

"With a kiss?" she asked.

"Demon!" he muttered, between his teeth.

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"With a kiss?" she repeated.

"Yes," he said. "There, in our *camera degli sposi*."

"No, here."

"Demon!" he muttered, still more softly.

She kissed him quickly. Then she gave him her hand:

"And now that's over. The incident is closed."

"Angel! She-devil!" he hissed after her.

She looked over the balustrade at the lake. Evening had fallen and the lake lay shimmering in mist. She regarded him as a young boy, who sometimes amused her and had now been naughty. She was no longer thinking of him; she was thinking of Duco:

"How lovely he will think it here!" she thought. "Oh, how I long for him!..."

There was a rustle of women's skirts behind her. It was Urania and the Marchesa Belloni.

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CHAPTER XXXIV

Urania asked Cornélie to come in, because it was not healthy out of doors now, at sunset, with the misty exhalations from the lake. The marchesa bowed coldly and stiffly, pinched her eyes together and pretended not to remember Cornélie very well.

"I can understand that," said Cornélie, smiling acidly. "You see different boarders at your *pension* every day and I stayed for a much shorter time than you reckoned on. I hope that you soon disposed of my rooms again, marchesa, and that you suffered no loss through my departure?"

The Marchesa Belloni looked at her in mute amazement. She was here, at San Stefano, in her element as a marchioness; she, the sister-in-law of the old prince, never spoke here of her foreigners' boarding-house; she never met her Roman guests here: they sometimes visited the castle, but only at fixed hours, whereas she spent the weeks of her summer *villeggiatura* here. And here she laid aside her plausible manner of singing the praises of a chilly room, her commercial habit of asking the most that she dared. She here carried her curled, leonine head with a lofty dignity; and, though she still wore her crystal brilliants in her ears, she also wore a brand-new spencer around her ample bosom. She could not help it, that she, a countess by birth, she, the Marchesa Belloni—the late marquis was a brother of the defunct princess—possessed no personal distinction, despite all her quarterings; but she felt herself to be, as indeed she was, an aristocrat. The friends, the *monsignori* whom she did sometimes meet at San Stefano, promoted the Pension Belloni in their conversation and called it the Palazzo Belloni.

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"Oh, yes," she said, at last, very coolly, blinking her eyes with an aristocratic air, "I remember you now ... although I've forgotten your name. A friend of the Princess Urania, I believe? I am glad to see you again, very glad.... And what do you think of your friend's marriage?" she asked, as she went up the stairs beside Cornélie, between Mino da Fiesole's marble candelabra.

Gilio, still angry and flushed and not at all calmed by the kiss, had moved away. Urania had run on ahead. The marchesa knew of Cornélie's original opposition, of her former advice to Urania; and she was certain that Cornélie had acted in this way because she herself had had views on Gilio. There was a note of triumphant irony in her question.

"I think it was made in Heaven," Cornélie replied, in a bantering tone. "I believe there is a blessing on their marriage."

"The blessing of his holiness," said the marchesa, naïvely, not understanding.

"Of course: the blessing of his holiness ... and of Heaven."

"I thought you were not religious?"

"Sometimes, when I think of their marriage, I become very religious. What peace for the Princess Urania's soul when she became a Catholic! What happiness in life, to marry *il caro Gilio*! There is still peace and happiness left in life."

The marchesa had a vague suspicion that she was mocking and thought her a dangerous woman.

"And you, has our religion no charm for you?"

"A great deal! I have a great feeling for beautiful churches and pictures. But that is an artistic conception. You will not understand it perhaps, for I don't think you are artistic, marchesa? And marriage also has charms for me, a marriage like Urania's. Couldn't you help me too some time, marchesa? Then I will spend a whole winter in your *pension* and—who knows?—perhaps I too shall become a Catholic. You might give Rudyard another chance, with me; and, if that didn't succeed, the two *monsignori*. Then I should certainly become converted.... And it would of course be lucrative."

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The marchesa looked at her haughtily, white with rage:

"Lucrative?..."

"If you get me an Italian title, but accompanied by money, of course it would be lucrative."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, ask the old prince, marchesa, or the two *monsignori*."

"What do you know about it? What are you thinking of?"

"I? Nothing!" Cornélie answered, coolly. "But I have second sight. I sometimes suddenly see a thing. So keep on friendly terms with me and don't pretend again to forget an old boarder.... Is this the Princess Urania's room? You go in first, marchesa; after you..."

The marchesa entered all aquiver: she had thoughts of witchcraft. How did that woman know *anything* of her transactions with the old prince and the *monsignori*? How did she come to suspect that Urania's marriage and her conversion had enriched the marchesa to the tune of a few ten thousand lire?

She had not only had a lesson: she was shuddering, she was frightened. Was that woman a witch? Was she the devil? Had she the *mal'occhio*? And the marchesa made the sign of the *jettatura* with her little finger and fore-finger in the folds of her dress and muttered:

"*Vade retro, Satanas...*"

In her own drawing-room, Urania poured out tea. The three pointed windows of the room overlooked the town and the ancient cathedral, which in the orange reflection of the last gleams of sunset shot up for yet a moment out of its grey dust of ages with the dim huddle of its saints, prophets and angels. The room, hung with handsome tapestries—an allegory of *Abundance*: nymphs outpouring the contents of their cornucopias—was half old, half modern, not always perfect in taste or pure in tone, with here and there a few hideously commonplace modern ornaments, here and there some modern comfort that clashed with the rest, but still cosy, inhabited and Urania's home. A young man rose from a chair and Urania introduced him to Cornélie as her brother. Young Hope was a strongly-built, fresh-looking boy of eighteen; he was still in his bicycling-suit: it didn't matter, said his sister, just to drink a cup of tea. Laughing, she stroked his close-clipped round head and, with the ladies' permission, gave him his tea first: then he would go and change. He looked so strange, so new and so healthy as he sat there with his fresh, pink complexion, his broad chest, his strong hands and muscular calves, with the youthfulness of a young Yankee farmer who, notwithstanding the millions of "old man Hope," worked on his farm, way out in the Far West, to make his own fortune; he looked so strange in this ancient San Stefano, within view of that severely symbolical cathedral, against this background of old tapestries. And suddenly Cornélie was impressed still more strangely by the new young princess. Her name—her American name of Urania—had a first-rate sound: "the Princess Urania" sounded unexpectedly well. But the little young wife, a trifle pale, a trifle sad, with her clipping American accent, suddenly struck Cornélie as somewhat out of place amid the faded glories of San Stefano. Cornélie was continually forgetting that Urania was Princess di Forte-Braccio: she always thought of her as Miss Hope. And yet Urania possessed great tact, great ease of manner, a great power of assimilation. Gilio had entered; and the few words which she addressed to her husband were, quite naturally, almost dignified ... and yet carried, to Cornélie's ears, a sound of resigned disillusionment which made her pity Urania. She had from the beginning felt a vague liking for Urania; now she felt a fonder affection. She was sorry for this child, the Princess Urania. Gilio behaved to her with careless coolness, the marchesa with patronizing condescension. And then there was that awful loneliness around her, of all that ruined magnificence. She stroked her young brother's head. She spoilt him, she asked him if his tea was all right and stuffed him with sandwiches, because he was hungry after his bicycle-ride. She had him with her now as a reminder of home, a reminder of Chicago; she almost clung to him. But for the rest she was surrounded by the depressing gloom of the immense castle, the neglected glory of its ancient stateliness, the conceit of that aristocratic pride, which could do without her but not without her millions. And for Cornélie she had lost all her absurdity as an American *parvenue* and, on the contrary, had acquired an air of tragedy, as of a young sacrificial victim. How alien they were as they sat there, the young princess and her brother, with his muscular calves!

Urania displayed her portfolio of drawings and designs: the ideas of a young Roman architect for restoring the castle. And she became excited, with a flush in her cheeks, when Cornélie asked her if so much restoration would really be beautiful. Urania defended her architect. Gilio smoked cigarettes with an air of indifference; he was in a bad temper. The marchesa sat like an idol, with her leonine head and the crystals sparkling in her ears. She was afraid of Cornélie and

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promised herself to be on her guard. A major-domo came and announced to the princess that dinner was served. And Cornélie recognized old Giuseppe from the Pension Belloni, the old archducal major-domo, who had once dropped a spoon, according to Rudyard's story. She looked at Urania with a laugh and Urania blushed:

"Poor man!" she said, when Giuseppe was gone. "Yes, I took him over from my aunt. He was so hard-worked at the Palazzo Belloni! Here he has very little to do and he has a young butler under him. The number of servants had to be increased in any case. He is enjoying a pleasant old age here, poor dear old Giuseppe.... There, Bob, now you haven't dressed!"

"She's a dear child," thought Cornélie, while they all rose and Urania gently reproached her brother, as she would a spoiled boy, for coming down to dinner in his knickerbockers.

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CHAPTER XXXV

They were in the great sombre dining-room, with the almost black tapestries, with the almost black panels of the ceiling, with the almost black oak carvings, with the black, monumental chimney-piece and, above it, the arms of the family in black marble. The light of two tall silver candle-sticks on the table merely cast a gleam over the damask and crystal, but left the remainder of the too large room in a gloomy obscurity of shadow, piled in the corners into masses of densest shadow, with a fainter shadow descending from the ceiling like a haze of dark velvet that floated in atoms above the candlelight. The ancestral antiquity of San Stefano hovered above them in this room like a palpable sense of awe, blended with a melancholy of black silence and black pride. Here their words sounded muffled. This still remained as it always had been, retaining as it were the sacrosanctity of their aristocratic traditions, in which Urania would never dare to alter anything, even as she hardly ventured to open her mouth to speak or eat. They waited for a moment. Then a double door was opened. And there entered like a spectral shade an old, grey man, with his arm in the arm of the priest walking beside him. Old Prince Ercole approached with very slow and stately steps, while the chaplain regulated his pace by that stately slowness. He wore a long black coat of an old-fashioned, roomy cut, which hung about him in folds, something like a cassock, and on his silvery grey hair, which waved over his neck, a black-velvet skull-cap. And the others approached him with the greatest respect: first the marchesa; then Urania, whom he kissed on the forehead, very slowly, as though he were consecrating her; then Gilio, who submissively kissed his father's hand. The old man nodded to young Hope, who bowed, and glanced towards Cornélie. Urania presented her. And the prince said a few amiable words to her, as though he were granting an audience, and asked her if she liked Italy. When Cornélie had replied, Prince Ercole sat down and handed his skull-cap to Giuseppe, who took it with a deep bow. Then they all sat down: the marchesa and the chaplain opposite Prince Ercole, who sat between Cornélie and Urania; Gilio next to Cornélie; Bob Hope next to his sister:

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"My legs don't show," he whispered.

"Ssh!" said Urania.

Giuseppe, revived in his former dignity, standing at a sideboard, solemnly filled the plates with soup. He was back in his element; he was obviously grateful to Urania; he wore a distinguished air, as of one whose mind is at peace, and looked like an elderly diplomatist in his dress-coat. He amused Cornélie, who thought of Belloni's, where he used to become impatient when the visitors were late at meals and to rail at the young greenhorns of waiters whom the marchesa engaged for economy's sake. When the two footmen had handed round the soup, the chaplain stood up and said grace. Not a word had been spoken yet. They ate the soup in silence, while the three servants stood motionless. The spoons clinked against the plates and the marchesa smacked her lips. The candles flickered now and again; and the shadow fell more oppressively, like a haze of black velvet. Then Prince Ercole addressed the marchesa. And turn by turn he addressed them all, with a kindly, condescending dignity, in French and Italian. The conversation became a little more general, but the old prince continued to lead it. And Cornélie noticed that he was very civil to Urania. But she remembered Gilio's words:

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"Papa nearly had a stroke, because old Hope haggled over Urania's dowry. Ten millions? Five millions? Not three millions! Dollars? No, lire!"

And the prince suddenly struck her as the grey-haired egoism of San Stefano's glory and aristocratic pride, struck her as the living shade of the past that loomed behind him, as she had felt it that afternoon, when she stood gazing with Urania into the deep, blue lake: an exacting shade; a shade demanding millions; a shade demanding a new increment of vitality; a spectral parasite who had sold his depreciated symbols to gratify the vanity of a new commercial house, but who, in his distinction, had been no match for the merchant's cunning. Their title of princess and duchess for less than three million lire! Papa had almost had a stroke, Gilio had said. And Cornélie, during the measured, affable stiffness of the conversation led by Prince Ercole, looked from the old prince and duke, seventy years of age, to the breezy young Far-Westerner, aged eighteen, and from him to Prince Gilio, the hope of the old house, its only hope. Here, in the gloom of this dining-room, where he was bored and moreover still out of temper, he seemed small, insignificant, shrunken, a paltry, distinguished little *viveur*; and his carbuncle eyes, which could sparkle merrily with wit and depravity, now looked dully, from under their drooping lids, upon his plate, at which he picked without appetite.

She felt sorry for him; and her mind went back to the golden bridal chamber. She despised him a little. She looked upon him not so much as a man who could not obtain what he wanted but rather as a naughty boy. And he must feel jealous of Bob, she reflected: jealous of his young blood, which tingled in his cheeks, of his broad shoulders and his broad chest. But still he amused her. He could be very agreeable, gay and witty and vivacious, when in the mood, vivacious in his words and in his wits. She liked him, when all was said. And then he was good-hearted. She thought of the bracelet and especially the thousand lire, always remembered, with a certain emotion, how touched she had been during that walk up and down past the post-office, how touched by his letter and his generous assistance. He had no backbone, he was not a man to her; but he was witty and he had a very good heart. She liked him as a friend and a pleasant companion. How dejected and moody he was! But then why would he venture on those silly enterprises?...

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She spoke to him now and again, but could not succeed in rousing him from his depression. For the rest, the conversation dragged on stiffly and affably, always led by Prince Ercole. The dinner came to an end; and Prince Ercole rose from his chair. Giuseppe handed him his skull-cap; every one said good-night to him; the doors were opened and Prince Ercole withdrew, leaning on his chaplain's arm. Gilio, still angry, disappeared. The marchesa, still terrified of Cornélie, also disappeared, making the *jettatura* at her in the folds of her dress. And Urania took Cornélie and Bob back with her to her own drawing-room. They all three breathed again. They all talked freely, in English: the boy said in despair that he wasn't getting enough to eat, that he dared not eat enough to stay his hunger; and Cornélie laughed, thinking him jolly, because of his wholesomeness, while Urania hunted out some biscuits for him and a piece of cake left over from tea and promised that he should have some cold meat and bread before they went to bed. And they relaxed their minds after the pompous, stately meal. Urania said that the old prince never appeared except at dinner, but that she always looked him up in the morning and sat talking to him for an hour or playing chess with him. At other times he played chess with the chaplain. She was very busy, Urania. The reorganizing of the housekeeping, which used to be left to a poor relation, who now lived at a *pension* in Rome, took up a lot of her time. In the mornings, she discussed a host of details with Prince Ercole, who, notwithstanding his secluded life, knew about everything. Then she had consultations with her architect from Rome about the restorations to be effected in the castle: these consultations were sometimes held in the old prince's study. Then she was having a big hostel built in the town, an *albergo dei poveri*, a hostel for old men and women, for which old Hope had given her a separate endowment. When she first came to San Stefano she had been struck by the ruinous, tumbledown houses and cottages of the poorer quarters, leprous and scabby with filth, eaten up by their own poverty, in which a whole population vegetated like toadstools. She was now building the hostel for the old people, finding work on the estate for the young and healthy and looking after the neglected children; she had built a new school-house. She talked about all this very simply, while cutting cake for her brother Bob, who was tucking in after his formal dinner. She asked Cornélie to come with her one morning to see how the *albergo* was progressing, to see the new school, run by two priests who had been recommended to her by the *monsignor*.

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Through the pointed windows the town loomed faintly in the depths below; and the lines of the cathedral rose high into the sultry, star-spangled night. And Cornélie thought to herself:

"It was not only for a shadow and an unsubstantial shade that she came here, the rich American who thought titles 'so nice,' the child who used to collect patterns of the queen's ball-dresses—she hides the album now that she is a 'black' princess—the girl who used to trip through the Forum in her white-serge tailor-made,

without understanding either ancient Rome or the dawn of the new future.”

And, as Cornélie went to her own room through the silent heavy darkness of the Castle of San Stefano, she thought:

“I write, but she acts. I dream and think; but she teaches the children, though it be with the aid of a priest; she feeds and houses old men and women.”

Then, in her room, looking out at the lake under the summer night all dusted with stars, she reflected that she too would like to be rich and to have a wide field of labour. For now she had no field, now she had no money and now ... now she longed only for Duco; and he must not leave her too long alone in this castle, amid all this sombre greatness, which oppressed her as with the weight of the centuries.

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CHAPTER XXXVI

Next morning Urania’s maid was showing Cornélie through a maze of galleries to the garden, where breakfast was to be served, when she met Gilio on the stairs. The maid turned back.

“I still need a guide to find my way,” Cornélie laughed.

He grunted some reply.

“How did you sleep, prince?”

He gave another grunt.

“Look here, prince, there must be an end of this ill-temper of yours. Do you hear? It’s *got* to finish. I insist. I won’t have any more sulking to-day; and I hope that you’ll go back to your cheerful, witty style of conversation as soon as possible, for that’s what I like in you.”

He mumbled something.

“Good-bye, prince,” said Cornélie, curtly.

And she turned to go away.

“Where are you going?” he asked.

“To my room. I shall breakfast in my room.”

“But why?”

“Because I don’t care for you as a host.”

“Me?”

“Yes, you. Yesterday you insult me. I defend myself, you go on being rude, I at once become as amiable as ever, I give you my hand, I even give you a kiss. At dinner you sulk with me in the most uncivil fashion. You go to bed without bidding me good-night. This morning you meet me without a word of greeting. You grunt, sulk and mumble like a naughty child. Your eyes are blazing with anger, you are yellow with spleen. Really, you’re looking very bad. It doesn’t suit you at all. You are most unpleasant, rough, rude and petty. I have no inclination to breakfast with you in that mood. And I’m going to my room.”

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“No,” he implored.

“Yes, I am.”

“No, no!”

“Then be different. Make an effort, don’t think any more about your defeat and be nice to me. You’re behaving as the offended party, whereas it is I who ought to take offence. But I don’t know how to sulk and I am not petty. I can’t behave pettily. I forgive you; do you forgive me too. Say something nice, say something pleasant.”

“I am mad about you.”

"You don't show it. If you're mad about me, be pleasant, civil, gay and witty. I demand it of you as my host."

"I won't sulk any longer ... but I do love you so! And you struck me!"

"Will you never forget that act of self-defence?"

"No, never!"

"Then good-bye."

She turned to go.

"No, no, don't go back. Come to breakfast in the pergola. I apologize, I beg your pardon. I won't be rude again, I won't be petty. You are not petty. You are the most wonderful woman I ever met. I worship you."

"Then worship in silence and amuse me."

His eyes, his black carbuncle eyes, began to light up again, to laugh; his face lost its wrinkles and cheered up.

"I am too sad to be amusing."

"I don't believe a word of it."

"Honestly, I am full of sorrow and suffering...."

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"Poor prince!"

"You just won't believe me. You never take me seriously. I have to be your clown, your buffoon. And I love you and have nothing to hope for. Tell me, mayn't I hope?"

"Not much."

"You are inexorable ... and so severe!"

"I have to be severe with you: you are just like a naughty boy.... Oh, I see the pergola! Do you promise to improve?"

"I shall be good."

"And amusing?"

He heaved a sigh:

"Poor Gilio!" he sighed. "Poor buffoon!"

She laughed. In the pergola were Urania and Bob Hope. The pergola, overgrown with creeping vine and rambler roses hanging in crimson clusters, displayed a row of marble caryatides and hermes—nymphs, satyrs and fauns—whose torsos ended in slender, sculptured pedestals, while their raised hands supported the flat roof of leaves and flowers. In the middle was an open rotunda like an open temple; the circular balustrade was also supported by caryatides; and an ancient sarcophagus had been adapted to serve as a cistern. A table was laid for breakfast in the pergola; and they breakfasted without old Prince Ercole or the marchesa, who broke her fast in her room. It was eight o'clock; a morning coolness was still wafted from the lake; a haze of blue gossamer floated over the hills, in the heart of which, as though surrounded by a gently fluted basin, the lake was sunk like an oval goblet.

"Oh, how beautiful it is here!" cried Cornélie, delightedly.

Breakfast was a sunny and cheerful meal, after yesterday's dark and gloomy dinner. Urania talked vivaciously about her *albergo*, which she was going to visit presently with Cornélie, Gilio recovered his amiability and Bob ate heartily. And, when Bob went off bicycling, Gilio even accompanied the ladies to the town. They drove at a foot-pace in a landau down the castle road. The sun grew hotter and the little old town lit up, with whitish-grey and creamy-white houses like stone mirrors, in which the sun reflected itself, and little open spaces like walls, into which the sun poured its light. The coachman pulled up outside the partly-finished *albergo*. They all alighted; the contractor approached ceremoniously; the perspiring masons looked round at the prince and princess. The heat was stifling. Gilio kept on wiping his forehead and sheltered under Cornélie's parasol. But Urania was all vivacity and interest; quick and full of energy in her white-piqué costume, with her white sailor-hat under her white sun-shade, she tripped along planks, past heaps of bricks and cement and tubs full of mortar, accompanied by

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her contractor. She made him explain things, proffered advice, disagreed with him at times and pulled a wise face, saying that she did not like certain measurements and refused to accept the contractor's assurance that she would like the measurements as the building progressed; she shook her head and impressed this and that upon him, all in a quick, none too correct, broken Italian, which she chewed between her teeth. But Cornélie thought her charming, attractive, every inch the Princess di Forte-Braccio. There was not a doubt about it. While Gilio, fearful of dirtying his light flannel suit and brown shoes with the mortar, remained in the shadow of her parasol, puffing and blowing with the heat and taking no interest whatever, his wife was untiring, did not trouble to think that her white skirt was becoming soiled at the hem and spoke to the contractor with a lively and dignified certainty which compelled respect. Where had the child learnt that? Where had she acquired her powers of assimilation? Where did she get this love for San Stefano, this love for its poor? How had the American girl picked up this talent for filling her new and exalted position so worthily? Gilio thought her *admirabile* and whispered as much to Cornélie. He was not blind to her good qualities. He thought Urania splendid, excellent; she always astounded him. No Italian woman of his own set would have been like that. And they liked her. The servants at the castle loved her. Giuseppe would have gone through fire and water for her; that contractor admired her; the masons followed her respectfully with their eyes, because she was so clever and knew so much and was so good to them in their poverty.

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"*Admirabile!*" said Gilio.

But he puffed and blowed. He knew nothing about bricks, beams and measurements and did not understand where Urania had got that technical sense from. She was indefatigable. She went all over the works, while he cast up his eyes to Cornélie in entreaty. And at last, speaking in English, he begged his wife in Heaven's name to come away. They went back to the carriage; the contractor took off his hat, the workmen raised their caps with an air of mingled gratitude and independence. And they drove to the cathedral, which Cornélie wanted to see. Urania showed her round. Gilio asked to be excused and went and sat on the steps of the altar, with his hands hanging over his knees, to cool himself.

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CHAPTER XXXVII

A week had passed. Duco had arrived. After the solemn dinner in the gloomy dining-room, where Duco had been presented to Prince Ercole, the summer evening, when Cornélie and Duco went outside, was like a dream. The castle was already wrapped in heavy repose; but Cornélie had made Giuseppe give her a key. And they went out, to the pergola. The stars dusted the night sky with a pale radiance; and the moon crowned the hill-tops and shimmered faintly in the mystic depths of the lake. A breath of sleeping roses was wafted from the flower-garden beyond the pergola; and below, in the flat-roofed town, the cathedral, standing in its moonlit square, lifted its gigantic fabric to the stars. And sleep hung everywhere, over the lake, over the town and behind the windows of the castle; the caryatides and hermes—the satyrs and nymphs—slept, as they bore the leafy roof of the pergola, in the enchanted attitudes of the servants of the Sleeping Beauty. A cricket chirped, but fell silent the moment that Duco and Cornélie approached. And they sat down on an antique bench; and she flung her arms about his body and nestled against him:

"A week!" she whispered. "A whole week since I saw you, Duco, my darling. I cannot do so long without you. At everything that I thought and saw and admired I thought of you, of how lovely you would think it here. You have been here once before on an excursion. Oh, but that is so different! It is so beautiful just to stay here, not just to go on, but to remain. That lake, that cathedral, those hills! The rooms indoors: neglected but so wonderful! The three courtyards are dilapidated, the fountains are crumbling to pieces ... but the style of the *atrio*, the sombre gloom of the dining-room, the poetry of this pergola!... Duco, doesn't the pergola remind you of a classic ode? You know how we used to read Horace together: you translated the verses so well, you improvised so delightfully. How clever you are! You know so much, you feel things so beautifully. I love your eyes, your voice, I love you altogether, I love everything that is you ... I can't tell you how much, Duco. I have gradually surrendered myself to every word of you, to every sensation of you, to your love for Rome, to your love for museums, to your manner of seeing the skies which you put into your drawings. You are so deliriously calm, almost like this lake. Oh, don't laugh, don't make a jest of it: it's a week since I saw you, I feel

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such a need to talk to you! Is it exaggerated? I don't feel quite normal here either: there is something in that sky, in that light, that makes me talk like this. It is so beautiful that I can hardly believe that all this is ordinary life, ordinary reality.... Do you remember, at Sorrento, on the terrace of the hotel, when we looked out over the sea, over that pearl-grey sea, with Naples lying white in the distance? I felt like this then; but then I dared not speak like this: it was in the morning; there were people about, whom we didn't see but who saw us and whom I suspected all around me; but now we are alone and now I want to tell you, in your arms, against your breast, how happy I am! I love you so! All my soul, all that is finest in me is for you. You laugh, but you don't believe me. Or do you? Do you believe me?"

"Yes, I believe you, I am not laughing at you, I am only just laughing.... Yes, it is beautiful here.... I also feel happy. I am so happy in you and in my art. You taught me to work, you roused me from my dreams. I am so happy about *The Banners*: I have heard from London; I will show you the letters to-morrow. I have you to thank for everything. It is almost incredible that this is ordinary life. I have been so quiet too in Rome. I saw nobody; I just worked a bit, not very much; and I had my meals alone in the *osteria*. The two Italians—you know the men I mean—felt sorry for me, I think. Oh, it was a terrible week! I can no longer do without you.... Do you remember our first walks and talks in the Borghese and on the Palatine? How strange we were to each other then, not a bit in unison. But I believe I felt at once that all would be well and beautiful between us...."

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She was silent and lay against his breast. The cricket chirped again, with a long quaver. But everything else slept....

"Between us," she repeated, as though in a fever; and she embraced him passionately.

The whole night slept; and, while they breathed their life in each other's arms, the enchanted caryatides—fauns and nymphs—lifted the leafy roof of the pergola above their heads, between them and the star-spangled sky.

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CHAPTER XXXVIII

Gilio hated the *villeggiatura* at San Stefano. Every morning he had to be up and dressed by six o'clock, with Prince Ercole, Urania and the marchesa, to hear mass said by the chaplain in the private chapel of the castle. After that, he did not know what to do with his time. He had gone bicycling once or twice with Bob Hope, but the young Far-Westerner had too much energy for him, like Bob's sister, Urania. He flirted and argued a little with Cornélie, but secretly he was still offended and angry with himself and her. He remembered her first arrival that evening at the Palazzo Ruspoli, when she came and disturbed his *rendez-vous* with Urania. And in the *camera degli sposi* she had for the second time been too much for him! He seethed with fury when he thought of it and he hated her and swore by all his gods to be revenged. He cursed his own lack of resolution. He had been too weak to use violence or force and there ought never to have been any need to resort to force: he was accustomed to a quick surrender. And he had to be told by her, that Dutchwoman, that his temperament did not respond to hers! What was there about that woman? What did she mean by it? He was so unaccustomed to thinking, he was such a thoughtless, easy-going, Italian child of nature, so accustomed to let his life run on according to his every whim and impulse, that he hardly understood her—though he suspected the meaning of her words—hardly understood that reserve of hers. Why should she behave so to him, this foreigner with her demoniacal new ideas, who cared nothing about the world, who would have nothing to do with marriage, who lived with a painter as his mistress! She had no religion and no morals—*he* knew about religion and morals—she belonged to the devil; demoniacal was what she was: didn't she know all about Aunt Lucia Belloni's manœuvres? And hadn't Aunt Lucia warned him lately that she was a dangerous woman, an uncanny woman, a woman of the devil? She was a witch! Why should she refuse? Hadn't he plainly seen her figure last night going through the courtyard in the moonlight, beside Van der Staal's figure, and hadn't he seen them opening the door that led to the terrace by the pergola? And hadn't he waited an hour, two hours, without sleeping, until he saw them come back and lock the door after them? And why did she love only him, that painter? Oh, he hated him, with all the blazing hatred of his jealousy; he hated her, for her exclusiveness, for her disdain, for all her jesting and flirting, as though he were a buffoon, a clown! What was it that he asked? A favour of love, such as she granted her lover! He was not asking for anything serious, any oath or lifelong tie; he asked for so little: just one

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hour of love. It was of no importance: he had never looked upon that as of much importance. And she, she refused it to him! No, he did not understand her, but what he did understand was that she disdained him; and he, he hated the pair of them. And yet he was enamoured of her with all the violence of his thwarted passion. In the boredom of that *villeggiatura*, to which his wife forced him in her new love for their ruined eyrie, his hatred and the thought of his revenge formed an occupation for his empty brains. Outwardly he was the same as usual and flirted with Cornélie, flirted even more than usual, to annoy Van der Staal. And, when his cousin, the Countess di Rosavilla—his “white” cousin, the lady-in-waiting to the queen—came to spend a few days with them, he flirted with her too and tried to provoke Cornélie’s jealousy. He failed in this, however, and consoled himself with the countess, who made up to him for his disappointment. She was no longer a young woman, but represented the cold, sculptured Juno type, with a rather foolish expression; she had Juno eyes, protruding from their sockets; she was a leader of fashion at the Quirinal and in the “white” world; and her reputation for gallantry was generally known. She had never had a *liaison* with Gilio that lasted for longer than an hour. She had very simple ideas on love, without much variety. Her light-hearted depravity amused Gilio. And, flirting in the corners, with his foot on hers under her skirt, Gilio told her about Cornélie, about Duco and about the adventure in the *camera degli sposi* and asked his cousin whether *she* understood. No, the Countess di Rosavilla did not understand it any too well either. Temperament? Oh, yes, perhaps she—*questa Cornelia*—preferred fair men to dark: there *were* women who had a preference! And Gilio laughed. It was so simple, *l’amore*; there wasn’t very much to be said about it.

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Cornélie was glad that Gilio had the countess to amuse him. She and Duco interested themselves in Urania’s plans; Duco had long talks with the architect. And he was indignant and advised them not to rebuild so much in that undistinguished restoration manner: it was lacking in style, cost heaps of money and spoilt everything.

Urania was disconcerted, but Duco went on, interrupted the architect, advised him to build up only what was actually falling to pieces, and, so far as possible, to confine himself to underpinning, reinforcing and preserving. And one morning Prince Ercole deigned to walk through the long rooms with Duco, Urania and Cornélie. There was a great deal to be done, Duco considered, by merely repairing and artistically arranging what at present stood thoughtlessly huddled together.

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“The curtains?” asked Urania.

“Let them be,” Duco considered. “At the most, new window-curtains; but the old red Venetian damask; oh, let it be, let it be!”

It was so beautiful; here and there it might be patched, very carefully. He was horrified at Urania’s notion: new curtains! And the old prince was enraptured, because in this way the restoration of San Stefano would cost thousands less and be much more artistic. He regarded his daughter-in-law’s money as his own and preferred it to her. He was enraptured: he took Duco with him to his library, showed him the old missals, the old family books and papers, charters and deeds of gift, showed him his coins and medals. It was all out of order and neglected, first from lack of money and then from slighting indifference; but now Urania wanted to reorganize the family museum with the aid of experts from Rome, Florence and Bologna. The old prince’s interest revived, now that there was money. And the experts came and stayed at the castle and Duco spent whole mornings in their company. He enjoyed every moment of it. He lived in his enchantment of the past, no longer in the days of antiquity, but in the middle ages and the Renaissance. The days were too short. And his love for San Stefano became such that one day an archivist took him for the young prince, for Prince Virgilio. At dinner that evening Prince Ercole told the story. And everybody laughed, but Gilio thought the joke beyond price, whereas the archivist, who was there at dinner, did not know how to apologize sufficiently.

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CHAPTER XXXIX

Gilio had followed the advice of his cousin, the Countess di Rosavilla. Immediately after dinner, he had stolen outside; and he walked along the pergola to the rotunda, into which the moonlight fell as into a white beaker. But there was shadow behind a couple of caryatides; and here he hid. He waited for an hour. But the night slept, the caryatides slept, standing motionless and supporting the leafy roof. He uttered a curse and stole indoors again. He walked down the corridors on

tiptoe and listened at Van der Staal's door. He heard nothing, but perhaps Van der Staal was asleep?...

Gilio, however, crept along another corridor and listened at Cornélie's door. He held his breath.... Yes, there was a sound of voices. They were together! Together! He clenched his fists and walked away. But why did he excite himself? He knew all about their relations. Why should they not be together here? And he went on and tapped at the countess' door....

Next evening he again waited in the rotunda. They did not come. But, a few evenings later, as he sat waiting, choking with annoyance, he saw them come. He saw Duco lock the terrace-door behind him: the rusty lock grated in the distance. Slowly he saw them walk along and approach in the light, disappearing from view in the shadow, reappearing in the moonlight. They sat down on the marble bench....

How happy they seemed! He was jealous of their happiness, jealous above all of him. And how gentle and tender she was, she who considered him, Gilio, only good enough for her amusement, to flirt with, a clown: she, the devilish woman, was angelic to the man she loved! She bent towards her lover with a smiling caress, with a curve of her arm, with a proffering of her lips, with something intensely alluring, with a velvety languor of love which he would never have suspected in her, after her cold, jesting flirtation with him, Gilio. She was now leaning on Duco's arms, on his breast, with her face against his.... Oh, how her kiss filled Gilio with flame and fury! This was no longer her icy lack of sensuous response towards him, Gilio, in the *camera degli sposi*. And he could restrain himself no longer: he would at least disturb their moment of happiness. And, quivering in every nerve, he stepped from behind the caryatides and went towards them, through the rotunda. Lost in each other's eyes, they did not see him at once. But, suddenly, simultaneously, they both started; their arms fell apart then and there; they sprang up in one movement; they saw him approaching but evidently did not at once recognize him. Not until he was closer did they perceive who he was; and they looked at him in startled silence, wondering what he would say. He made a satirical bow:

"A delightful evening, isn't it? The view is lovely, like this, at night, from the pergola. You are right to come and enjoy it. I hope that I am not disturbing you with my unexpected company?"

His tremulous voice sounded so spiteful and aggressive that they could not doubt the violence of his anger.

"Not at all, prince!" replied Cornélie, recovering her composure. "Though I can't imagine what you are doing here, at this hour."

"And what are you doing here, at this hour?"

"What am I doing? I am sitting with Van der Staal...."

"At this hour?"

"At this hour! What do you mean, prince, what are you suggesting?"

"What am I suggesting? That the pergola is closed at night."

"Prince," said Duco, "your tone is offensive."

"And you are altogether offensive."

"If you were not my host, I would strike you in the face...."

Cornélie caught Duco by the arm; the prince cursed and clenched his fists.

"Prince," she said, "you have obviously come to pick a quarrel with us. Why? What objection can you have to my meeting Van der Staal here in the evening? In the first place, our relation towards each other is no secret for you. And then I think it unworthy of you to come spying on us."

"Unworthy? Unworthy?" He had lost all self-control. "I am unworthy, am I, and petty and rude and not a man and my temperament doesn't suit you? *His* temperament seems to suit you all right! I heard the kiss you gave him! She-devil! Demon! Never have I been insulted as I have by you. I have never put up with so much from anybody. I will put up with no more. You struck me, you demon, you she-devil! And now he's threatening to strike me! My patience is at an end. I can't bear that in my own house you should refuse me what you give to him.... He's not your husband! He's not your husband! I have as much right to you as he; and, if he thinks he has a better right than I, then I hate him, I hate him!..."

And, blind with rage, he flew at Duco's throat. The attack was so unexpected that Duco stumbled. They both wrestled furiously. All their hidden antipathy broke forth in fury. They did not hear Cornélie's entreaties, they struck each other with their fists, they grappled with arms and legs, breast to breast. Then Cornélie saw something flash. In the moonlight she saw that the prince had drawn a knife. But the very movement was an advantage to Duco, who gripped his wrist as in a vice, forced him to the ground and, pressing his knee on Gilio's chest, took him by the throat with his other hand.

"Let go!" yelled the prince.

"Let go that knife!" yelled Duco.

The prince obstinately persisted:

"Let go!" he yelled once more.

"Let go that knife."

The knife dropped from his fingers. Duco grasped it and rose to his feet:

"Get up," he said, "we can continue this fight, if you like, to-morrow, under less primitive conditions: not with a knife, but with swords or pistols."

The prince stood panting, blue in the face.... When he came to himself, he said, slowly:

"No, I will not fight a duel. Unless you want to. But I don't. I am defeated. She has a demoniacal force which would always make you win, whatever game we played. We've had our duel. This struggle tells me more than a regular duel would. Only, if you want to fight me, I have no objection. But I now know for certain that you would kill me. *She* protects you."

"I don't want to fight a duel with you," said Duco.

"Then let us look on this struggle as a duel and now give me your hand."

Duco put out his hand; Gilio pressed it:

"Forgive me," he said, bowing before Cornélie. "I have insulted you."

"No," said she, "I do not forgive you."

"We have to forgive each other. I forgive you the blow you struck me."

"I forgive you nothing. I shall never forgive you this evening's work: not your spying, nor your lack of self-control, nor the rights which you try to claim from me, an unmarried woman—whereas I allow you no rights whatever—nor your attack, nor your knife."

"Are we enemies then, for good?"

"Yes, for good. I shall leave your house to-morrow."

"I have done wrong," he confessed, humbly. "Forgive me. I am hot-blooded."

"Until now I looked upon you as a gentleman...."

"I am also an Italian."

"I do not forgive you."

"I once proved to you that I could be a good friend."

"This is not the moment to remind me of it."

"I remind you of everything that might make you more gently disposed towards me."

"It is no use."

"Enemies then?"

"Yes. Let us go indoors. I shall leave your house to-morrow."

"I will do any penance that you inflict upon me."

"I inflict nothing. I want this conversation to end and I want to go indoors."

"I will go ahead of you."

They walked up the pergola. He himself opened the terrace-door and let them in before him.

They went in silence to their rooms. The castle lay asleep in darkness. The prince struck a match to light the way. Duco was the first to reach his room.

"I will light you to your room," said the prince, meekly.

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He struck a second match and accompanied Cornélie to her door. Here he fell on his knees:

"Forgive me," he whispered, with a sob in his throat.

"No," she said.

And without more she locked the door behind her. He remained on his knees for another moment. Then he slowly rose to his feet. His throat hurt him. His shoulder felt as though it were dislocated.

"It's over," he muttered. "I am defeated. She is stronger now than I, but not because she is a devil. I have seen them together. I have seen their embrace. She is stronger, he is stronger than I ... because of their happiness. I feel that, because of their happiness, they will always be stronger than I..."

He went to his room, which adjoined Urania's bedroom. His chest heaved with sobs. Dressed as he was, he flung himself sobbing on his bed, swallowing his sobs in the slumbering night that hung over the castle. Then he got up and looked out of the window. He saw the lake. He saw the pergola, where they had been fighting. The night was sleeping there; the caryatides, sleeping, stood out white against the shadow. And his eyes sought the exact spot of their struggle and of his defeat. And, with his superstitious faith in their happiness, he became convinced that there would be no fighting against it, ever.

Then he shrugged his shoulders, as if he were flinging a load off his back:

"Fa niente!" he said to console himself. *"Domani migliore..."*

And he meant that to-morrow he would achieve, if not this victory, another. Then, with eyes still moist, he fell asleep like a child.

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CHAPTER XL

Urania sobbed nervously in Cornélie's arms when she told the young princess that she was leaving that morning. She and Duco were alone with Urania in Urania's own drawing-room.

"What has happened?" she sobbed.

Cornélie told her of the previous evening:

"Urania," she said, seriously, "I know I am a coquette. I thought it pleasant to talk with Gilio; call it flirting, if you like. I never made a secret of it, either to Duco or to you. I looked upon it as an amusement, nothing more. Perhaps I did wrong; I know it annoyed you once before. I promised not to do it again; but it seems to be beyond my control. It's in my nature; and I shall not attempt to defend myself. I looked upon it as a trifle, as a diversion, as fun. But perhaps it was wrong. Do you forgive me? I have grown so fond of you: it would hurt me if you did not forgive me."

"Make it up with Gilio and stay on."

"That's impossible, my dear girl. Gilio has insulted me, Gilio drew his knife against Duco; and those are two things which I can never forgive him. So it is impossible for us to remain."

"I shall be so lonely!" she sobbed. "I also am so fond of you, I am fond of you both. Is there no way out of it? Bob is going to-morrow too. I shall be all alone. And I have nothing here, nobody who is fond of me..."

"You have a great deal left, Urania. You have an object in life; you can do any

amount of good in your surroundings. You are interested in the castle, which is now your own."

"It's all so empty!" she sobbed. "It means nothing to me. I need affection. Who is there that is fond of me? I have tried to love Gilio and I do love him, but he doesn't care for me. Nobody cares for me."

"Your poor are devoted to you. You have a noble aim in life."

"I'm glad of it, but I am too young to live only for an aim. And I have nothing else. Nobody cares for me."

"Prince Ercole, surely?"

"No, he despises me. Listen. I told you once before what Gilio said ... that there were no family-jewels, that they were all sold: you remember, don't you? Well, there *are* family-jewels. I gathered that from something the Countess di Rosavilla said. There are family-jewels. But Prince Ercole keeps them in the Banco di Roma. They despise me; and I am not thought good enough to wear them. And to me they pretend that there are none left. And the worst of it is that all their friends, all their set know that the jewels are there, in the bank, and they all say that Prince Ercole is right. My money is good enough for them, but I am not good enough for their old jewels, the jewels of their grandmother!"

"That's a shame!" said Cornélie.

"It's the truth!" sobbed Urania. "Oh, do make it up, stay a little longer, for my sake!..."

"Judge for yourself, Urania: we really can't."

"I suppose you're right," she admitted, with a sigh.

"It's all my fault."

"No, no, Gilio is sometimes so impetuous...."

"But his impetuousness, his anger, his jealousy are my fault. I am sorry about it, Urania, because of you. Forgive me. Come and look me up in Rome when you go back. Don't forget me; and write, won't you?... Now I must go and pack my trunk. What time is the train?"

"Ten twenty-five," said Duco. "We shall go together."

"Can I say good-bye to Prince Ercole? Send and ask if he can see me."

"What shall I tell him?"

"The first thing that comes into your head: that a friend of mine in Rome is ill, that I am going to look after her and that Van der Staal is taking me back because I am nervous travelling. I don't care what Prince Ercole thinks."

"Cornélie...."

"Darling, I really haven't another moment. Kiss me and forgive me. And think of me sometimes. Good-bye. We have had a delightful time together and I have grown very fond of you."

She tore herself from Urania's embrace; Duco also said good-bye. They left the princess sobbing by herself. In the passage they met Gilio.

"Where are you going?" he asked, in his humble voice.

"We are going by the ten twenty-five."

"I am very, very sorry...."

But they went on and left him standing there, while Urania sat sobbing in the drawing-room.

In the train, in the scorching morning heat, they were silent; and they found Rome as it were bursting out of its houses in the blazing sunshine. The studio, however, was cool, solitary and peaceful.

"Cornélie," said Duco, "tell me what happened between you and the prince. Why did you strike him?"

She pulled him down on the sofa, threw herself on his neck and told him the incident of the *camera degli sposi*. She told him of the thousand lire and the bracelet. She explained that she had said nothing about it before, so as not to speak to him of financial worries while he was finishing his water-colour for the exhibition in London:

"Duco," she continued, "I was so frightened when I saw Gilio draw that knife yesterday. I felt as if I was going to faint, but I didn't. I had never seen him like that, so violent, so ready to do anything.... It was then that I really felt how much I loved you. I should have murdered him if he had wounded you."

"You ought not to have played with him," he said, severely. "He loves you."

But, in spite of his stern voice, he drew her closer to him.

Filled with a certain consciousness of guilt, she laid her head coaxingly on his chest:

"He is only a little in love," she said, defending herself feebly.

"He is very passionately in love. You ought not to have played with him."

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She made no further reply, merely stroked his face with her hand. She liked him all the better for reproaching her as he did; she loved that stern, earnest voice, which he hardly ever adopted towards her. She knew that she had that need for flirting in her, that she had had it ever since she was a very young girl; it did not count with her, it was only innocent fun. She did not agree with Duco, but thought it unnecessary to go over the whole ground: it was as it was, she didn't think about it, didn't dispute it; it was like a difference of opinion, almost of taste, which did not count. She was lying against him too comfortably, after the excitement of last evening, after a sleepless night, after a precipitate departure, after a three hours' railway-journey in the blazing heat, to argue to any extent. She liked the silent coolness of the studio, the sense of being alone with him, after her three weeks at San Stefano. There was a peacefulness here, a return to herself, which filled her with bliss. The tall window was open and the warm air poured in beneficently and was tempered by the natural chilliness of the north room. Duco's easel stood empty, awaiting him. This was their home, amid all that colour and form of art which surrounded them. She now understood that colour and form; she was learning Rome. She was learning it all in dreams of happiness. She gave little thought to the woman question and hardly glanced at the notices of her pamphlet, taking but a scanty interest in them. She admired Lippo's angel, admired the panel of Gentile da Fabriano and the resplendent colours of the old chasubles. It was very little, after the treasures at San Stefano, but it was theirs and it was home. She did not speak, felt happy and contented resting on Duco's breast and passing her fingers over his face.

"*The Banners* is as good as sold," he said. "For ninety pounds. I shall telegraph to London to-day. And then we shall soon be able to pay the prince back that thousand lire."

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"It's Urania's money," she said, feebly.

"But I won't have that debt hanging on."

She felt that he was a little angry, but she was in no mood to discuss money matters and she was filled with a blissful languor as she lay on his breast....

"Are you cross, Duco?"

"No ... but you oughtn't to have done it."

He clasped her more tightly, to make her feel that he did not want to grumble at her, even though he thought that she had done wrong. She thought that she had done right not to mention the thousand lire to him, but she did not defend herself. It meant useless words; and she felt too happy to talk about money.

"Cornélie," he said, "let us get married."

She looked at him in dismay, startled out of her blissfulness:

"Why?"

"Not because of ourselves. We are just as happy unmarried. But because of the world, because of people."

"Because of the world? Because of people?"

"Yes. We shall be feeling more and more isolated. I discussed it once or twice with Urania. She was very sorry about it, but she sympathized with us and wasn't shocked. She thought it an impossible position. Perhaps she is right. We can't go anywhere. At San Stefano they still acted as though they did not know that we were living together; but that is over now."

"What do you care about the opinion of 'small, insignificant people, who chance to cross your path,' as you yourself say?"

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"It's different now. We owe the prince money; and Urania is the only friend you have."

"I have you: I don't want any one else."

He kissed her:

"Really, Cornélie, it is better that we should get married. Then nobody can insult you again as the prince dared to do."

"He has narrow-minded notions: how can you want to get married for the sake of a world and people like San Stefano and the prince?"

"The whole world is like that, without exception, and we are in the world. We live in the midst of other people. It is impossible to isolate one's self entirely; and isolation brings its own punishment later. We have to attach ourselves to other people: it is impossible always to lead your own existence, without any sense of community."

"Duco, how you've changed! These are the ideas of ordinary society!"

"I have been reflecting more lately."

"I am just learning how not to reflect.... My darling, how grave you are this morning! And this while I'm lying up against you so deliciously, to rest after all that excitement and the hot journey."

"Seriously, Cornélie, let us get married."

She snuggled against him a little nervously, displeased because he persisted and because he was forcibly dissipating her blissful mood:

"You're a horrid boy. Why need we get married? It would alter nothing in our position. We still shouldn't trouble about other people. We are living so delightfully here, living for your art. We want nothing more than each other and your art and Rome. I am so very fond of Rome now; I am quite altered. There is something here that is always attracting me afresh. At San Stefano I felt homesick for Rome and for our studio. You must choose a new subject ... and get to work again. When you're doing nothing, you sit thinking—about social ethics—and that doesn't suit you at all. It makes you so different. And then such petty, conventional ideas. To get married! Why, in Heaven's name, should we, Duco? You know my views on marriage. I have had experience: it is better not."

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She had risen and was mechanically looking through some half-finished sketches in a portfolio.

"Your experience," he repeated. "We know each other too well to be afraid of anything."

She took the sketches from the portfolio: they were ideas which had occurred to him and which he had jotted down while he was working at *The Banners*. She examined them and scattered them abroad:

"Afraid?" she repeated, vaguely. "No," she suddenly resumed, more firmly. "A person never knows himself or another. I don't know you, I don't know myself."

Something deep down within herself was warning her:

"Don't marry, don't give in. It's better not, it's better not."

It was barely a whisper, a shadow of premonition. She had not thought it out; it was unconscious and mysterious as the depths of her soul. For she was not aware of it, she did not think it, she hardly heard it within herself. It flitted through her; it was not a feeling; it only left a thwarting reluctance in her, very plainly. Not

until years later would she understand that unwillingness.

"No, Duco, it is better not."

"Think it over, Cornélie."

"It is better not," she repeated, obstinately. "Please, don't let us talk about it any more. It is better not, but I think it so horrid to refuse you, because you want it. I never refuse you anything, as you know. I would do anything else for you. But this time I feel ... it is better not!"

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She went to him, all one caress, and kissed him:

"Don't ask it of me again. What a cloud on your face! I can see that you mean to go on thinking of it."

She stroked his forehead as though to smooth away the wrinkles:

"Don't think of it any more. I love you, I love you! I want nothing but you. I am happy as we are. Why shouldn't you be too? Because Gilio was rude and Urania prim?... Come and look at your sketches: will you be starting work soon? I love it when you're working. Then I'll write something again: a chat about an old Italian castle. My recollections of San Stefano. Perhaps a short story, with the pergola for a background. Oh, that beautiful pergola!... But yesterday, that knife!... Tell me, Duco, are you going to work again? Let's look through them together. What a lot of ideas you had at that time! But don't become too symbolical: I mean, don't get into habits, into tricks; don't repeat yourself.... This woman here is very good. She is walking so unconsciously down that shelving line ... and all those hands pushing around her ... and those red flowers in the abyss.... Tell me, Duco, what had you in your mind?"

"I don't know: it was not very clear to myself."

"I think it very good, but I don't like this sketch. I can't say why. There's something dreary in it. I think the woman stupid. I don't like those shelving lines: I like lines that go up, as in *The Banners*. That all flowed out of darkness upwards, towards the sun! How beautiful that was! What a pity that we no longer have it, that it is being sold! If I were a painter, I should never be able to part with anything. I shall keep the sketches, to remind me of it. Don't you think it dreadful, that we no longer have it?"

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He agreed; he also loved and missed his *Banners*. And he hunted with her among the other studies and sketches. But, apart from the unconscious woman, there was nothing that was clear enough to him to elaborate. And Cornélie would not have him finish the unconscious woman: no, she didn't like those shelving lines.... But after that he found some sketches of landscape-studies, of clouds and skies over the Campagna, Venice and Naples....

And he set to work.

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CHAPTER XLII

They were very economical; they had a little money; and all through the scorching Roman summer the months passed as in a dream. They went on living their lonely, happy life, without seeing any one except Urania, who came to Rome now and again, looked them up, lunched with them at the studio and went back again in the evening. Then Urania wrote to them that Gilio could stand it no longer at San Stefano and that they were going abroad, first to Switzerland and then to Ostend. She came once more to say good-bye; and after that they saw nobody.

In the old days Duco had known an artist here and there, a fellow-countryman painting in Rome; now he knew nobody, saw nobody. And their life in the cool studio was like life in a lonely oasis amid the torrid desert of Rome in August. For economy's sake, they did not go into the mountains, to a cooler spot. They spent no more than was absolutely necessary; and none the less this bohemian poverty, in its coloured setting of triptych and chasuble, spelt happiness.

Money, however, remained scarce. Duco sold a water-colour once in a way, but at times they had to resort to the sale of a curio. And it always went to Duco's heart to part with anything that he had collected. They had few needs, but the time would come when the rent of the studio fell due. Cornélie sometimes wrote an

article or a sketch and bought out of the proceeds what she needed for her wardrobe. She possessed a certain knack of putting on her clothes, a talent for looking smart in an old, worn blouse. She was fastidious about her hair, her skin, her teeth, her nails. With a new veil she would wear an old hat, with an old walking-dress a pair of fresh gloves; and she wore everything with a certain air of smartness. At home, in her pink tea-gown, which had lost its colour, the lines of her figure were so charming that Duco was constantly sketching her. They hardly ever went to a restaurant now. Cornélie cooked something at home, invented easy recipes, fetched a *fiasco* of wine from the nearest *olio e vino*, where the cab-drivers sat drinking at little tables; and they dined better and more cheaply than at the *osteria*. And Duco, now that he no longer bought things from the dealer in antiques on the Tiber, spent nothing at all. But money remained scarce. Once, when they had sold a silver crucifix for far less than it was worth, Cornélie was so dejected that she sobbed on Duco's breast. He consoled her, caressed her and declared that he didn't care much about the crucifix. But she knew that the crucifix was a very fine piece of work by an unknown sixteenth-century artist and that he was very unhappy at losing it. And she said to him seriously that it could not go on like this, that she could not be a burden to him and that they had better part; that she would look about for something to do, that she would go back to Holland. He was alarmed by her despair and said that it was not necessary, that he was able to look after her as his wife, but that unfortunately he was such an unpractical fellow, who could do nothing but splash about a bit with water-colours and even that not well enough to live on. But she said that he must not talk like that; he was a great artist. It was just that he did not possess a facile, money-making fertility, but he ranked all the higher on that account. She said that she would not live on his money, that she wanted to keep herself. And she collected the scattered remnants of her feminist ideas. Once again he begged her to consent to their marriage; they would become reconciled with his mother; and Mrs. van der Staal would give him what she used to give him when he used to live with her at Belloni's. But she refused to hear either of marriage or of an allowance from his mother, even as he refused to take money from Urania. How often had Urania not offered to help them! He had never consented; he was even angry when Urania had given Cornélie a blouse which Cornélie accepted with a kiss.

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No, it couldn't go on like this: they had better part; she must go back to Holland and seek employment. It was easier in Holland than abroad. But he was so desperate, because of their happiness, which tottered before his eyes, that he held her tightly pressed to his breast; and she sobbed, with her arms round his neck. Why should they part, he asked. They would be stronger together. He could no longer do without her; his life, if she left him, would be no life. He used to live in his dreams; he now lived in the reality of their happiness.

And things remained as they were: they *could* not alter anything; they lived as thriftily as possible, in order to keep together. He finished his landscapes and always sold them; but he sold them at once, much too cheaply, so as not to have to wait for the money. But then poverty threatened once more; and she thought of writing to Holland. As it happened, however, she received a letter from her mother, followed by one from one of her sisters. And they asked her in those letters if it was true, what people were saying at the Hague, that she was living with Van der Staal. She had always looked upon herself as so far from the Hague and from Hague people that it had never occurred to her that her way of life might become known. She met nobody, she knew nobody with Dutch connections. Anyhow, her independent attitude was now known. And she answered the letters in a feminist tone, declared her dislike of marriage and admitted that she was living with Van der Staal. She wrote coldly and succinctly, so as to give those people at the Hague the impression that she was a free and independent woman. They knew her pamphlet there, of course. But she understood that she could now no longer think of Holland. She gave up her family as hopeless. Still it tore something in her, the unconscious family-tie. But that tie was already greatly loosened, through lack of sympathy, especially at the time of her divorce. And she felt all alone: she had only her happiness, her lover, Duco. Oh, it was enough, it was enough for all her life! If only she could make a little money! But how? She went to the Dutch consul, asked his advice; the visit led to nothing. She was not suited for a nurse: she wanted to earn money at once and had no time for training. She could serve in a shop, of course. And she applied, without saying anything to Duco; but, notwithstanding her worn cloak, they thought her too much of a lady wherever she went and she thought the salary too small for a whole day's work. And, when she felt that she hadn't it in her blood to work for her bread, despite all her ideas and all her logic, despite her pamphlet and her independent womanhood, she felt helpless to the point of despair and, as she went home, weary, exhausted by climbing many stairs and by useless conversations and appeals, the old plaint rose to her lips:

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"O God, tell me what to do!"

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CHAPTER XLIII

She wrote regularly to Urania, in Switzerland, at Ostend; and Urania always wrote back very kindly and offered her assistance. But Cornélie always declined, afraid of hurting Duco. She, for herself, felt no such scruples, especially now that it was being borne in upon her that she would not be able to work. But she understood those scruples in Duco and respected them. For her own part, however, she would have accepted help, now that her pride was wavering, now that her ideas were falling to pieces, too weak to withstand the steady pressure of life's hardships. It was like a great finger that just passed along a house of cards: though built up with care and pride, everything fell flat at the least touch. The only things that stood firm and unshakable amid the ruins were her love and her happiness. Oh, how she loved him, how simple was their happiness! How dear he was to her for his gentleness, his calmness, his lack of irritability, as though his nerves were strung only to the finer sensibilities of the artist. She felt so deliciously that it was all imperturbable, that it was all settled for good. Without that happiness they could never have dragged their difficult life along from day to day. Now she did not feel that burden every day, as though they were dragging the load along from one day to the next. She now felt it only sometimes, when the future was quite dark and they did not know whither they were dragging the burden of their lives, in the dusk of that future. But they always triumphed again: they loved each other too well to sink under the load. They always found a little more courage; smiling, they supported each other's strength.

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September came and October; and Urania wrote that they were coming back to San Stefano, to spend a couple of months there before going for the winter to Nice. And one morning Urania arrived unexpectedly in the studio. She found Cornélie alone: Duco had gone to an art-dealer's. They exchanged affectionate greetings:

"I am so glad to see you again!" Urania prattled, gaily. "I am glad to be back in Italy and to put in a little more time at San Stefano. And is everything as it used to be, in your cosy studio? Are you happy? Oh, I need not ask!"

And she hugged and kissed Cornélie, like a child, still lacking the strength of mind to condemn her friend's too free existence, especially now, after her own summer at Ostend. They sat beside each other on the couch, Cornélie in her old tea-gown, which she wore with her own peculiar grace, and the young princess in her pale-grey tailor-made, which clung to her figure in a very up-to-date manner and rustled with heavy silk lining, and a hat with black feathers and silver spangles. Her jewelled fingers toyed with a very long watch-chain which she wore round her neck: the latest freak of fashion. Cornélie was able to admire without feeling envious and made Urania stand up and turn round in front of her, approved of the cut of her skirt, said that the hat looked sweet on her and examined the watch-chain attentively. And she plunged into these matters of *chiffons*: Urania described the dresses at Ostend; Urania admired Cornélie's old tea-gown; Cornélie smiled:

"Especially after Ostend, eh?" she laughed, merrily.

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But Urania meant it seriously: Cornélie wore it with such *chic*! And, changing the topic, she said that she wanted to speak very seriously, that perhaps she knew of something for Cornélie, now that Cornélie would never accept her, Urania's, assistance. At Ostend she had made the acquaintance of an old American lady, Mrs. Uxeley, a regular type. She was ninety years of age and lived at Nice in the winter. She was fabulously rich: an oil-queen's fortune. She was ninety, but still behaved as if she were forty-five. She dined out, went into society, flirted. People laughed at her but accepted her because of her money and her splendid entertainments. All the cosmopolitan colony visited her at Nice. Urania produced an Ostend casino-paper and read out a journalistic account of a ball at Ostend, in which Mrs. Uxeley was called *la femme la plus élégante d'Ostende*. The journalist had been paid so much for it; everybody laughed and was amused by it. Mrs. Uxeley was a caricature, but with enough tact to get herself taken seriously. Well, Mrs. Uxeley was looking for somebody. She always had a lady companion with her, a girl, a young woman; and already numberless ladies had succeeded one another in her employ. She had had cousins living with her, distant cousins, very distant cousins and total strangers. She was tiresome, capricious, impossible; everybody knew that. Would Cornélie care to try it? Urania had already discussed it with Mrs. Uxeley and recommended her friend. Cornélie did not feel greatly attracted, but thought it worth thinking over. Mrs. Uxeley's companion was staying on till November, when the old thing went back through Paris to Nice. And at Nice they

would see so much of each other, Cornélie and Urania. But Cornélie thought it terrible to leave Duco. She did not think that it would ever work. They were so attached to each other, so used to each other. From the money point of view it would be excellent—an easy life which attracted her, after that blow to her moral pride—but she could not think of leaving Duco. And what would Duco do at Nice! No, she couldn't, she simply couldn't: she must stay with him.... She felt a reluctance to go, like a hand that withheld her. She told Urania to put the old lady off, to let her look out for somebody else. She could not do it. What use to her was such a life—socially dependent, though financially independent—without Duco?

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And, when Urania was gone—she was going on to San Stefano—Cornélie was glad that she had at once declined that stupid, easy life of dependence as companion to a rich old dotard. She glanced round the studio. She loved it with its precious colours, its noble antiques and, behind that curtain, her bed, behind that screen, her oil-stove, making the space look like a little kitchen; with the Bohemianism of its precious *bibelots* and very primitive comforts, it had become indispensable to her, had become her home. And, when Duco came in, she kissed him and told him about Urania and Mrs. Uxeley. She was glad to be able to nestle in his arms. He had sold a couple of water-colours. There was no reason whatever to leave him. He didn't wish it either, he never would wish it. And they held each other tightly embraced, as though they were conscious of something that would be able to part them, an ineluctable necessity, as if hands hovered around them pushing them, guiding them, opposing and inhibiting them, a contest of hands, like a cloud around them both: hands that strove by main force to sunder their radiant path of life, their coalescent line of life, as if it were too narrow for the feet of the two of them and the hands were trying to wrench it asunder, in order to let the broad track wind apart in two curves. They said nothing: clasped in each other's arms, they gazed at life, shuddered at the hands, felt the approaching constraint which already was clouding more closely around them. But they felt warm in each other's company; they locked up their little happiness tightly in their embrace and hid it between them, so that the hands might not point to it, touch it and thrust it aside....

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And under their fixed gaze life softly receded, the cloud dispersed, the hands faded away and disappeared and their breasts heaved a sigh of relief, while she still remained lying against him and closed her eyes, as though in sleep....

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CHAPTER XLIV

But the life of constraint returned, the hovering hands reappeared, like a gentle mysterious force. Cornélie wept bitterly and admitted to herself and admitted to Duco: it could not go on any longer. At one moment they had not enough to pay the rent of the studio and had to apply to Urania. Gaps showed in the studio, colours vanished, owing to the sale of things which Duco had collected with love and sacrifice. But Lippo Memmi's angel, whom he refused to sell, still shone as of old, still holding forth the lily, in his gown of gold brocade. Around him on every side yawned melancholy spaces, with bare nails showing in the walls. At first they tried to hang other things in the place of those which had gone; but they soon lost the inclination. And, as they sat side by side, in each other's arms, conscious of their little happiness, but also of the constraint of life with its pushing hands, they closed their eyes, that they might no longer see the studio which seemed to be crumbling about them, while in the first cooler days a sunless chill descended shivering from the ceiling, which seemed higher and farther away. The easel stood waiting, empty. And they both closed their eyes and thus remained, feeling that, despite the strength of their happiness and their love, they were gradually conquered by life, which persisted in its tyranny and day by day took something from them. Once, while they were sitting thus, their arms relaxed and their embrace fell away, as though hands were drawing them apart. They remained sitting for a long time, side by side, without touching each other. Then she sobbed aloud and flung herself with her face on his knees. There was no more to be done: life was too strong for them, speechless life, the life of the soft, persistent constraint, which surrounded them with so many hands. Their little happiness seemed to be escaping them, like an angelic child that was dying and sinking out of their embrace.

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She said that she would write to Urania: the Forte-Braccios were at Nice. He listlessly assented. And, as soon as she received a reply, she mechanically packed her trunk, packed up her old clothes. For Urania wrote and told her to come, said that Mrs. Uxeley wanted to see her. Mrs. Uxeley sent her the money for her

journey. She was in a desperate state of constant nervous sobbing and she felt as if she were being torn from him, torn from that home which was dear to her and which was crumbling about her, all through her fault. When she received the registered letter with the money, she had a nervous attack, complaining to him like a child that she couldn't leave him, that she wouldn't leave him, that she could not live without him, that she loved him for ever, for ever, that she would die, so far away from him. She lay on the sofa, her arms stiff, her legs stiff, crying out with a mouth distorted as though by physical pain. He took her in his arms and soothed her, bathed her forehead, gave her ether to drink, comforted her, said that everything would be all right again later.... Later? She looked at him vacantly. She was half mad with grief. She tossed everything out of the trunk again, all about the room—underclothing, blouses—and laughed and laughed. He conjured her to control herself. When she saw his frightened face, when he too began to sob on her breast, she drew him tightly to her, kissed him and comforted him in her turn. And everything in her became dulness and lethargy. Together they packed the trunk again. Then she looked round and, in a gust of energy, arranged the studio for him, had her bed taken away, pinned his own sketches to the walls, tried to build up something of what had gone to pieces around them, rearranged everything, did her best. She cooked their last meal; she made up the fire. But a desperate threat of loneliness and desertion reigned over everything. It was all wrong, it was all wrong.... Sobbing, they fell asleep, in each other's arms, close against each other.

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Next morning he took her to the station. And, when she had stepped into her compartment, they both of them lost all their self-control. They embraced each other sobbing, while the guard was waiting to lock the door. And she saw Duco run away like a madman, pushing his way through the crowd; and, broken with misery, she threw herself back in her seat. She was so ill and distressed, so near to fainting, that a lady beside her came to her aid and bathed her face in eau-de-Cologne....

She thanked the lady, apologized for the trouble she had given and, seeing the other passengers staring at her with compassionate eyes, she mastered herself, sat huddled in her corner and gazed vacantly through the window. She went on, stopping nowhere, only alighting to change trains. Though hungry, she had not the energy to order food at the stations. She ate nothing and drank nothing. She travelled a day and a night and arrived at Nice late the following evening. Urania was at the station and was startled to see Cornélie look grey and sallow, dead-tired, with hollow eyes. And she was most charming: she took Cornélie home with her, looked after her for some days, made her stay in bed and went herself to tell Mrs. Uxeley that her friend was too unwell to report herself. Gilio came for a moment to pay Cornélie his respects; and she could not do other than thank him for these days of hospitality and care under his roof. And the young princess was like a sister, was like a mother and fed Cornélie up with milk and eggs and strengthening medicines. Cornélie let her do as she liked, remained limp and indifferent and ate to please Urania. After a few days, Urania said that Mrs. Uxeley was coming to call that afternoon, being anxious to see her new companion. Mrs. Uxeley was alone now, but could wait until Cornélie's recovery. Cornélie dressed herself as well as she could and with Urania awaited the old lady's arrival. She entered gushingly, with a torrent of words; and, in the dim light of Urania's drawing-room, Cornélie was unable to realize that she was ninety years old. Urania winked at Cornélie, who only smiled faintly in return: she was afraid of this first interview. But Mrs. Uxeley, no doubt because Cornélie was a friend of the Princess di Forte-Braccio, was very easy-mannered, very pleasant and free of all condescension towards her future companion; she enquired after Cornélie's health in a wearisome profusion of little exclamations and sentences and bits of advice. Cornélie, in the twilight of the lace-shaded standard-lamps, took her in with a glance and saw a woman of fifty, with the little wrinkles carefully powdered over, in a mauve-velvet gown embroidered with dull gold and spangles and beads. On the brown, waved chignon was a hat with a white aigrette. Her jewels kept on sparkling, because she was very fussy, very restless in her movements. She now took Cornélie's hands and began to talk more confidentially. So Cornélie would come the day after to-morrow. Very well. She was accustomed to pay a hundred dollars a month, or five hundred francs, never less, but also never more. But she could understand that Cornélie would want something now, for new clothes: would she order what she wanted at this address and have it put down to Mrs. Uxeley's account? A couple of ball-dresses, two or three less dressy evening-frocks, in short, everything. The Princess Urania would tell her all about it and would go with her. And she rose, affecting the young woman, simpering through her long-handled lorgnette, but meanwhile leaning hard on her sunshade, working herself with a muscular effort along the stick of her sunshade, with a sudden twitch of rheumatism which uncovered all sorts of wrinkles. Urania saw her to the hall and came back shrieking with laughter; and Cornélie also laughed, but only listlessly. She really didn't care: she was more amazed at Mrs. Uxeley than amused. Ninety years old! What an energy, worthy of a better object, to remain elegant: *la femme*

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Ninety years old! How the woman must suffer, during the hours of her long toilet, while she was being made up into that caricature! Urania said that it was all false: the hair, the bust. And Cornélie felt a loathing at having to live for the future beside this woman, as though beside an ignominy. In the happiness of her love, a great part of her energy had become relaxed, as though their dual happiness—Duco's and hers—had unfitted her for any further struggle for life and diminished her zest for life; but it had refined and purified something in her soul and she loathed the sight of so much show for so vain and petty an object. And it was only necessity itself—the inevitability of the things of life, which urged and pushed her with a guiding finger along a line of life now winding solitary before her—that gave her the strength to hide within herself her sorrow, her longing, her nostalgia for everything that she had left behind. She did not talk about it to Urania. Urania was so glad to see her, looked upon her as a good friend, in the loneliness of her stately life, in her isolation among her aristocratic acquaintances. Urania accompanied her enthusiastically to dressmakers' establishments and shops and helped her to choose her new outfit. She did not care about it all. She, an elegant woman, a woman of innate elegance, who in her outward appearance had always fought against poverty and who, in the days of her happiness, was able, with the aid of a fresh ribbon, to wear an old blouse gracefully, was utterly indifferent to everything that she was now buying on Mrs. Uxeley's account. To her it was as though these things were not for her. She let Urania ask and choose; she approved of everything. She allowed herself to be fitted as though she had been a doll. She greatly disliked having to spend money at a stranger's expense. She felt lowered and humiliated: all her haughty pride of life was gone. She was afraid of what they would say of her in the circle of Mrs. Uxeley's friends, afraid lest they knew of her independent ideas, of her cohabitation with Duco, afraid of Mrs. Uxeley's opinion. For Urania had had to be honest and tell everything. It was only on Urania's eager recommendation that she had been taken by Mrs. Uxeley. She felt out of place, now that she would once more dare to play her part among all those people; and she was afraid of giving herself away. She would have to make-believe, to conceal her ideas, to pick her words; and she was no longer accustomed to doing so. And all for that money. All because she had not had the energy, living with Duco, to earn her own bread and, gaily, independently, to cheer him in his work, in his art. Oh, if she could only have managed to do that, how happy she would have been! If only she had not allowed the wretched languor that was in her blood to increase within her like a morbid growth: the languor of her upbringing, her superficial, showy, drawing-room education, which had unfitted her for everything whatsoever! By temperament she was a creature of love as well as a woman of sensuousness and luxury, but there was more of love in her than of luxury: she would be happy under the simplest conditions if only she was able to love. And now life had torn her away from him, gradually but inexorably. And now her sensuous, luxurious nature was gratified, but in dependence; yet it no longer satisfied her cravings, because she could not satisfy her soul. In that lonely soul a miserable dissatisfaction sprang up like a riotous growth. Her only happiness was his letters, letters of longing but also letters of comfort. He wrote expressing his longing, but he also wrote enjoining courage and hope. He wrote to her every day. He was now at Florence, seeking his consolation in the Uffizi, in the Pitti Palace. He had found it impossible to stay in Rome; the studio was now locked up. At Florence he was a little nearer to her. And his letters were to her a love-story, the only novel that she read; and it was as though she saw his landscapes in his style, the same dim blending of colour and emotion, the pearly white, misty, dreamy distances filled with light, the horizon of his longing, as though his eyes were ever gazing at the vista in which she, on the night of departure, had vanished as in a mauve-grey sunset, a sky of the dreary Campagna. In those letters they still lived together. But she could not write to him in this strain. Though she wrote to him daily, she wrote briefly, telling him ever the same things in other words: her longing, her weary indifference. But she wrote of the happiness which she derived from his letters, which were her daily bread.

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She was now with Mrs. Uxeley and occupied in the gigantic villa two charming rooms overlooking the sea and the Promenade des Anglais. Urania had helped her to arrange them. And she lived in an unreal dream of strangeness, of non-existence alone with her soul, of un-lived actions and gestures, performed according to the will of others. In the mornings she went to Mrs. Uxeley in her boudoir and read her the French and American papers and sometimes a few pages of a French novel. She humbly did her best. Mrs. Uxeley thought that she read very nicely, only she said that Cornélie must cheer up a bit, that her melancholy days were over now. Duco was never mentioned and Mrs. Uxeley behaved as though she knew nothing. The great boudoir looked through the open balcony-windows over the sea, where, on the Promenade, the morning stroll was already beginning, with the gaudy colours of the parasols striking a shrill note against the deep-blue sea, an expensive sea, a costly tide, waves that seemed to exact a mint of money before they would consent to roll up prettily. The old lady, already painted, bedizened and

bewigged, with a white-lace wrap over her wig against the draught, lay in the black and white lace of her white-silk tea-gown on the piled-up cushions of her sofa. In her wrinkled hand she held the lorgnette, with her initials in diamonds, through which it amused her to peer at the shrill patches of the parasols outside. Now and then, when her rheumatism gave a twinge, she suddenly distorted her face into one great crease of wrinkles, under which the smooth enamel of her make-up almost cracked, like crackle-china. In the daylight she seemed hardly alive, looked like an automatic, jointed, stiff-limbed doll, which spoke and moved mechanically. She was always a trifle tired in the mornings, from never sleeping at night; after eleven she took a little nap. She observed a strict *régime*; and her doctor, who called daily, seemed to revive her a little every day, to enable her to hold out until the evening. In the afternoon she drove out, alighted at the Jetée, paid her visits. But in the evening she revived with a trace of real life, dressed, put on her jewels and recovered her exuberance, her little exclamations and simpers. Then came the dances, the parties, the theatre. Then she was no more than fifty.

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But these were her good days. Sometimes, after a night of insufferable pain, she remained in her bedroom, with yesterday's enamelling untouched, her bald head wrapped in black lace, a black-satin bed-jacket hanging loosely around her like a sack; and she moaned and cried and shrieked and seemed to be begging for release from her torments. This lasted for a couple of days and occurred regularly every three weeks, after which she gradually revived again.

Her fussy conversation was limited to a constantly recurrent discussion of all sorts of family-matters, with appropriate annotations. She explained to Cornélie all the family-connections of her friends, American and European, but she enlarged more particularly upon the great European families which she numbered among her acquaintances. Cornélie could never listen to what she was saying and forgot the pedigrees again at once. It was sometimes unendurably tedious to have to listen for so long; and only for this reason, as though she were forced to it, Cornélie found the energy to talk a little herself, to relate an anecdote, to tell a story. When she saw that the old woman was very fond of anecdotes, riddles and puns, she collected as many as she could from the *Vie parisienne* and the *Journal pour rire* and kept them ready to hand. And Mrs. Uxeley thought her very entertaining. Once, as she noticed Duco's daily letter, she referred to it; and Cornélie suddenly discovered that the old lady was devoured with curiosity. Then she quietly told her the truth: her marriage, her divorce, her independent ideas, her meeting and her life with Duco. The old woman was a little disappointed because Cornélie spoke so simply about it all. She merely advised her to live discreetly and correctly now. What people said about former incidents did not matter so very much. But there must be no occasion for gossip now. Cornélie promised meekly. And Mrs. Uxeley showed her her albums, with her own photographs, dating back to her young days, and the photographs of all sorts of men. And she told her about this friend and that friend and, vain-gloriously, allowed the suggestion of a very lurid past to peep through. But she had always lived discreetly and correctly. That was her pride. And what Cornélie had done was wrong....

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The hour or so from eleven to half-past twelve was a relief. Then the old woman regularly went to sleep—her only sleep in the twenty-four hours—and Urania came to fetch Cornélie for a drive or a walk along the Promenade or to sit in the Jardin Public. And it was the only moment when Cornélie more or less appreciated her new-found luxury and took pleasure in the gratification of her vanity. The passers-by turned round to stare at the two young and pretty women in their exquisite serge frocks, with their fashionable headgear withdrawn in the twilight of their sunshades, and admired the Princess di Forte-Braccio's glossy victoria, impeccable liveries and spanking greys.

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Gilio maintained a reserved and respectful attitude towards Cornélie. He was polite but kept a courteous distance when he joined the two ladies for a moment in the gardens or on the Jetée. After the night in the pergola, after the sudden flash of his angry knife, she was afraid of him, afraid also because she had lost much of her courage and haughtiness. But she could not answer him more coldly than she did, because she was grateful to him as well as to Urania for the care shown her during the first few days, for their tact in not at once surrendering her to Mrs. Uxeley and in keeping her with them until she had recovered some of her strength.

In the freedom of those mornings, when she felt herself released from the old woman—vain, selfish, insignificant, ridiculous—who was as the caricature of her life, she felt that in Urania's friendship she was finding herself again, she became conscious of being at Nice, she contemplated the garish bustle around her with clearer eyes and she lost the unreality of the first days. At such times it was as though she saw herself again for the first time, in her light serge walking-dress, sitting in the garden, her gloved fingers playing with the tassels of her sunshade. She could hardly believe in herself, but she saw herself. Deep down within herself, hidden even from Urania, she concealed her longing, her home-sickness, her

stifling discontent. She sometimes felt ready to burst into sobs. But she listened to Urania and joined in her laughter and talk and looked up with a smile at Gilio, who stood in front of her, mincing to and fro on the tips of his shoes and swinging his walking-stick behind his back. Sometimes, suddenly—as a vision whirling through the crowd—she saw Duco, the studio, the happiness of the past fading away for one brief moment. Then with her finger-tips she felt his letter of that morning, between the strips of gathered lace in front of her bolero, and just crushed the hard envelope against her breast, as something belonging to him that was caressing her.

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And it was not to be denied: she saw herself and Nice around her; she became sensible of new life: it was not unreal, even though it was not actual to her soul; it was a sorrowful comedy, in which she—dismally, feebly, listlessly—played her part.

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CHAPTER XLV

It was all severely regulated, as by rule, and there was no possibility of the least alteration: everything was done in accordance with a fixed law. The reading of the newspaper; her hour and a half to herself; then lunch. After lunch, the drive, the *Jetée*, the visits; every day, those visits and afternoon teas. Once in a way, a dinner-party; and in the evening generally a dance, a reception or a theatre. She made new acquaintances by the score and forgot them again at once and no longer remembered, when she saw them again, whether she knew them or not. As a rule people were fairly pleasant to her in that cosmopolitan set, because they knew that she was an intimate friend of the Princess Urania's. But, like Urania herself, she was sometimes conscious, from the feminine bearers of the old Italian names and titles which sometimes glittered in that set, of an overwhelming pride and contempt. The men always asked to be introduced to her; but, whenever she asked to be introduced to their ladies, her only reward was a nod of vague surprise. She herself minded very little, but she felt sorry for Urania. For she saw at once, at Urania's own parties, that they hardly looked upon her as the hostess, that they surrounded and made much of Gilio, but accorded to his wife no more than the civility which was her due as Princess di Forte-Braccio, without ever forgetting that she was once Miss Hope. And for Urania this contempt was more difficult to put up with than for herself. For she accepted her *rôle* as the companion. She always kept an eye on Mrs. Uxeley, constantly joined her for a minute in the course of the evening, fetched a fan which Mrs. Uxeley had left in the next room or did her this or that trifling service. Then she would sit down, against the wall alone in the busily humming drawing-room, and gaze indifferently before her. She sat, always very smartly dressed, in an attitude of graceful indifference and weary boredom, tapping her little foot or unfolding her fan. She took no notice of anybody. Sometimes a couple of men would come up to her and she spoke to them, or danced with one of them, indifferently, as though conferring a favour. Once, when Gilio was talking to her, she sitting and he standing, and the Duchess di Luca and Countess Costi both came up to him and, standing, began to chaff him profusely, without honouring her with a word or a glance, she first stared at the ladies between her mocking lids, eyeing them from head to foot, and then rose slowly, took Gilio's arm and, with a glance which darted sharp as a needle from her narrowed eyes, said:

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"I beg your pardon, but you must excuse me if I rob you of the Prince di Forte-Braccio, because I have to finish a private conversation."

And with the pressure of her arm she made Gilio move on a few steps, then at once sat down again, made him sit down beside her and began to whisper with him very confidentially, while she left the duchess and countess standing two yards away, open-mouthed with stupefaction at her rudeness, and furthermore spread her train wide between herself and the two ladies and waved her fan to and fro, as though to preserve a distance. She could do this sort of thing so calmly, so tactfully and haughtily, that Gilio was tickled to death and sat and giggled with delight:

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"I wish that Urania knew how to behave like that!" he said, pleased as a child at the diversion which she had afforded him.

"Urania is too nice to do anything so odious," she replied.

She did not make herself liked, but people became afraid of her, afraid of her quiet malice, and avoided offending her in future. Moreover, the men thought her pretty and agreeable and were also attracted by her haughty indifference. And, without really intending it, she achieved a position, apparently by using the greatest

diplomacy, but in reality quite naturally and easily. While Mrs. Uxeley's egoism was flattered by her little attentions—always dutifully remembered and paid with a charming air of maternal solicitude, in contrast to which Mrs. Uxeley thought it delightful to simper like a young girl—Cornélie gradually gathered a court of men around her in the evenings; and the women became insipidly civil. Urania often told her how clever she thought her, how much tact she displayed. Cornélie shrugged her shoulders: it all happened of itself; and really she did not care. But still, gradually, she recovered some of her cheerfulness. When she saw herself standing in the glass, she had to confess to herself that she was better-looking than she had ever been, either as a girl or as a newly-married woman. Her tall, slender figure had a languorous line of pride that gave her a special grace; her throat was statelier, her bosom fuller; her waist was slimmer in these new dresses; her hips had become heavier, her arms more rounded; and, though her features no longer wore the look of radiant happiness which they had worn in Rome, her mocking smile and her negligent irony gave her a certain attraction for those unknown men, something more alluring and provoking than the greatest coquetry would have been. And Cornélie had not wished for this; but, now that it came of itself, she accepted it. It was foreign to her nature to refuse it. And, besides, Mrs. Uxeley was pleased with her. Cornélie had such a pretty way of whispering to her:

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"Dear lady, you were in such pain yesterday. Don't you think you ought to go home a little earlier to-night?"

And then Mrs. Uxeley would simper like a girl who was being admonished by her mother not to dance too much that evening. She loved these little ways of Cornélie's; and Cornélie, with careless indifference, gave her what she wanted. And those evenings amused her more than they did at first; only, the amusement was combined with self-reproach as soon as she thought of Duco, of their separation, of Rome, of the studio, of the happiness of those past days, which she had lost through her lack of fortitude.

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CHAPTER XLVI

Two months had passed like this. It was January; and these were busy days for Cornélie, because Mrs. Uxeley was soon to give one of her celebrated evenings and Cornélie's free hours in the morning were now taken up with running all sorts of errands. Urania generally drove with her; and she came to rely upon Urania. They had to go to upholsterers, to pastry-cooks, to florists and to jewellers, where Cornélie and Urania selected presents for the cotillon. Mrs. Uxeley never went out for this, but occupied herself with every trifling indoor detail; and there were endless discussions, followed by more drives to the shops, for the old lady was anything but easy to please, vain as she was of her fame as a hostess and afraid of losing it through the least omission.

During one of these drives, as the victoria was turning into the Avenue de la Gare, Cornélie started so violently that she clutched Urania's arm and could not restrain an exclamation. Urania asked her what she had seen, but she was unable to speak and Urania made her get out at a confectioner's to drink a glass of water. She was very nearly fainting and looked deathly pale. She was not able to continue her errands; and they drove back to Mrs. Uxeley's villa. The old lady was displeased at this sudden fainting-fit and grumbled so that Urania went off alone to complete the errands. After lunch, however, Cornélie felt better, made her apologies and accompanied Mrs. Uxeley to an afternoon tea.

Next day, when she was sitting with Mrs. Uxeley and a couple of friends on the Jetée, she seemed to see the same thing again. She turned as white as a sheet, but retained her composure and laughed and talked merrily.

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These were the days of the preparations. The date of the entertainment drew nearer; and at last the evening arrived. Mrs. Uxeley was trembling with nervousness like a young girl and found the necessary strength to walk through the whole villa, which was all light and flowers. And with a sigh of satisfaction she sat down for a moment. She was dressed. Her face was smooth as porcelain, her hair was waved and glittered with diamond pins. Her gown of pale-blue brocade was cut very low; and she gleamed like a reliquary. A triple rope of priceless pearls hung down to her waist. In her hand—she was not yet gloved—she held a gold-knobbed cane, which was indispensable when she wanted to rise. And it was only when she rose that she showed her age, when she worked herself erect by muscular efforts, with that look of pain in her face, with that twinge of rheumatism which shot through her. Cornélie, not yet dressed, after a last glance through the

villa, blazing with light, swooning with flowers, hurried to her room and, already feeling tired, dropped into the chair in front of her dressing-table, to have her hair done quickly. She was irritable and told the maid to hurry. She was just ready when the first guests arrived and she was able to join Mrs. Uxeley. And the carriages rolled up. Cornélie, at the top of the monumental staircase, looked down into the hall, where the people were streaming in, the ladies in their long evening-wraps—almost more expensive even than their dresses—which they carefully gave up in the crowded, buzzing cloakroom. And the first arrivals came up the stairs, waiting so as not to be the very first, and were beamed upon by Mrs. Uxeley. The drawing-rooms soon filled. In addition to the reception-rooms, the hostess' own rooms were thrown open, forming in all a suite of twelve apartments. Whereas the corridors and stairs were adorned only with clumps of red and white and pink camellias, in the rooms the floral decorations were contained in hundreds of vases and bowls and dishes, which stood about on every hand and, with the light of the shaded candles, gave an intimate charm to the entertainment. That was the speciality of Mrs. Uxeley's decorations on great occasions: the electric light not used; instead, on every hand candles with little shades, on every hand glasses and bowls full of flowers, giving the effect of a fairy garden. Though perhaps the main outlines were broken, a most charming effect of cosiness was gained. Small groups and couples could find a place everywhere: behind a screen, in a loggia; you constantly found a spot for privacy; and this perhaps explained the *vogue* of Mrs. Uxeley's parties. The villa, suitable for giving a court ball, was used only for giving entertainments of a luxurious intimate character to hundreds of people who were quite unknown to one another. Each little set chose itself a little corner, where it made itself at home. A very tiny boudoir, all in Japanese lacquer and Japanese silk, was aimed at generally, but was at once captured by Gilio, the Countess di Rosavilla, the Duchess di Luca and Countess Costi. They did not even go to the music-room, where a concert formed the first item. Paderewski was playing, Sigrid Arnoldson was to sing. The music-room also was lighted by shaded candles; and everybody whispered that, in this soft light, Mrs. Uxeley did not look a day over forty. During the interval she simpered to two very young journalists who were to describe her party. Urania, sitting beside Cornélie, was addressed by a Frenchman whom she introduced to her friend: the Chevalier de Breuil. Cornélie knew that Urania had met him at Ostend and that his name was coupled with the Princess di Forte-Braccio's. Urania had never mentioned De Breuil to her, but Cornélie now saw, by her smile, her blush and the sparkle in her eyes, that people were right. She left them to themselves, feeling sad when she thought of Urania. She understood that the little princess was consoling herself for her husband's neglect; and she suddenly thought this whole life of make-believe disgusting. She longed for Rome, for the studio, for Duco, for independence, love and happiness. She had had it all; but it had been fated not to endure. Everything around her was like one great lie, more brilliant than at the Hague, but even more false, brutal and depraved. People no longer even pretended to believe the lie: here they showed a brutal sincerity. The lie was respected, but nobody believed in it, nobody put forward the lie as a truth; the lie was nothing more than a form.

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Cornélie wandered through the rooms by herself, went up to Mrs. Uxeley for a moment, in accordance with her habit, whispered to ask how she felt, whether she wanted anything, if everything was going well, then continued on her way through the rooms. She was standing by a vase, rearranging some orchids, when a woman in black velvet, fair-haired, with a full throat and bosom, spoke to her in English:

"I am Mrs. Holt. I dare say you don't know my name, but I know yours. I very much want to make your acquaintance. I have often been to Holland and I read Dutch a little. I read your pamphlet on *The Social Position of Divorced Women* and I thought a good deal of what you wrote most interesting."

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"You are very kind. Shall we sit down? I remember your name too. You were one of the leaders of the Women's Congress in London, were you not?"

"Yes, I spoke about the training of children. Weren't you able to come to London?"

"No, I did think about it, but I was in Rome at the time and I couldn't manage it."

"That was a pity. The congress was a great step forward. If your pamphlet had been translated then and distributed, you would have had a great success."

"I care very little for success of that kind."

"Of course, I can understand that. But the success of your book is also for the good of the great cause."

"Do you really mean that? Is there any merit in my little book?"

"Do you doubt it?"

"Very often."

"How is that possible? It is written with such a sure touch."

"Perhaps just for that reason."

"I don't understand you. There's a vagueness sometimes about Dutch people which we English don't understand, something like a reflection of your beautiful skies in your character."

"Do you never doubt? Do you feel sure of your ideas on the training of children?"

"I have studied children in schools, in *crèches* and in their homes and I have acquired very decided ideas. And I work in accordance with these ideas for the people of the future. I will send you my pamphlet, containing the gist of my speeches at the congress. Are you working on another pamphlet now?"

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"No, I regret to say."

"Why not? We must all fight shoulder to shoulder, if we are to conquer."

"I believe I have said all that I had to say. I wrote what I did on impulse, from personal experience. And then ..."

"Yes?"

"Then things changed. All women are different and I never approved of generalizing. And do you believe that there are *many* women who can work for a universal object with a man's thoroughness, when they have found a lesser object for themselves, a small happiness, such as a love to satisfy their own *ego*, in which they can be happy? Don't you think that every woman has slumbering inside her a selfish craving for her own love and happiness and that, when she has found this, the outside world and the future cease to interest her?"

"Possibly. But so few women find it."

"I believe there are not many. But that is another question. And I do believe that an interest in universal questions is a *pis-aller* with most women."

"You have become an apostate. You speak quite differently from what you wrote a year ago."

"Yes, I have become very humble, because I am more sincere. Of course I believe in certain women, in certain choice spirits. But would the majority not always remain feminine, just women and weak?"

"Not with a sensible training."

"Yes, I believe that it lies in that, in the training...."

"Of the child, of the girl."

"I believe that I have never been educated and that this constitutes my weakness."

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"Our girls should be told when still very young of the struggle that lies before them."

"You are right. We—my friends, my sisters and I—had the 'safety' of marriage impressed upon us at the earliest possible moment. Do you know whom I think the most to be pitied? Our parents! They honestly believed that they were having us taught all that was necessary. And now, at this moment, they must see that they did not divine the future correctly and that their training, their education was no education at all, because they failed to inform their children of the struggle which was being waged right before their eyes. It is our parents that are to be pitied. They can mend nothing now. They see us—girls, young women of twenty to thirty—overwhelmed by life; and they have not given us the strength for it. They kept us sheltered as long as possible under the paternal wing; and then they began to think of our marriage, not in order to get rid of us, but with a view to our happiness, our safety and our future. We are indeed unfortunate, we girls and women who were not, like our younger sisters, told of the struggle that lay just before us; but I believe that we may still have hope in our youth and that our parents are unhappier and more to be pitied than we, because they have nothing more to hope for and because they *must* secretly confess that they went astray in their love for their children. They were still educating us according to the past, while the future was already so near at hand. I pity our parents and I could almost love them better for that reason than I ever did before."

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CHAPTER XLVII

She had suddenly turned very pale, as though under the stress of a sudden emotion. She covered her face with her fluttering fan and her fingers trembled violently; her whole body shuddered.

"That is well thought on your part," said Mrs. Holt. "I am glad to have met you. I always find a certain charm in Dutch people: that vagueness, which we are unable to seize, and then all at once a light that flashes out of a cloud.... I hope to see you again. I am at home on Tuesdays, at five o'clock. Will you come one day with Mrs. Uxeley?"

Mrs. Holt pressed her hand and disappeared among the other guests. Cornélie had risen from her chair, while her knees seemed to give way beneath her. She remained standing, half-turned towards the room, looking in the glass; and her fingers played with the orchids in a Venetian vase on the console-table. She was still rather pale, but controlled herself, though her heart was beating loudly and her breast heaving. And she looked in the glass. She saw first her own figure, her beautiful, slender outline, in her dress of white and black Chantilly, with the white-lace train, foaming with flounces, the black-lace tunic with the scalloped border and sprinkled with steel spangles and blue stones, a spray of orchids in the sleeveless *corsage*, which left her neck and arms and shoulders bare. Her hair was bound with three Greek fillets of pearls; and her fan of white feathers—a present from Urania—was like foam against her throat. She saw herself first and then, in the mirror, she saw *him*. He was coming nearer to her. She did not move, only her fingers played with the flowers in the vase. She felt as though she wished to take flight, but her knees gave way and her feet were paralysed. She stood rooted to the floor, hypnotized. She was unable to stir. And she saw him come nearer and nearer, while her back remained half-turned to the room. He approached; and his appearance seemed to fling out a net in which she was caught. He was close by her now, close behind her. Mechanically she raised her eyes and looked in the glass and met his eyes in the mirror. She thought that she would faint. She felt squeezed between him and the glass. In the mirror the room went round and round, the candles whirled giddily, like a reeling firmament. He did not say anything yet. She only saw his eyes gazing and his mouth smiling under his moustache. And he still said nothing. Then, in that unendurable lack of space between him and the mirror, which did not even give shelter as a wall would have done, but which reflected him so that he held her twice imprisoned, behind and before, she turned round slowly and looked him in the eyes. But she did not speak either. They looked at each other without a word.

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"You never expected this: that you would see me here one day," he said, at last.

It was more than a year since she had heard his voice. But she felt his voice inside her.

"No," she answered, at last, haughtily, coldly, distantly. "Though I saw you once or twice, in the street, on the Jetée."

"Yes," he said. "Should I have bowed to you, do you think?"

She shrugged her bare shoulders; and he looked at them. She felt for the first time that she was half-naked that evening.

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"No," she replied, still coldly and distantly. "Any more than you need have spoken to me now."

He smiled at her. He stood before her as a wall. He stood before her as a man. His head, his shoulders, his chest, his legs, his whole stature rose before her as incarnate manhood.

"Of course I needn't have done so," he said; and she felt his voice inside her: she felt his voice sinking in her like molten bronze into a mould. "If I had met you somewhere in Holland, I would only have taken off my hat and not spoken to you. But we are in a foreign country...."

"What difference does that make?"

"I felt I should like to speak to you.... I wanted to have a talk with you. Can't we do that as strangers?"

"As strangers?" she echoed.

"Oh, well, we're not strangers: we even know each other uncommonly intimately, eh?... Come and sit down and tell me about yourself. Did you like Rome?"

"Yes," she said.

He had led her as though with his will to a couch behind a half-damask, half-glass, Louis-XV. screen; and she dropped down upon it in a rosy twilight of candles, with bunches of pink roses around her in all sorts of Venetian glasses. He sat on an ottoman, bending towards her slightly, with his arms on his knees and his hands folded together:

"They've been gossiping about you finely at the Hague. First about your pamphlet ... and then about your painter."

Her eyes pierced him like needles. He laughed:

"You can look just as angry as ever.... Tell me, do you ever hear from the old people? They're in a bad way."

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"Now and then. I was able to send them some money lately."

"That's damned good of you. They don't deserve it. They said that you no longer existed for them."

"Mamma wrote that they were so pushed for money. Then I sent them a hundred guilders. It was the most that I could do."

"Oh, now that they find you sending them money, you'll begin to exist for them again!"

She shrugged her shoulders:

"I don't mind that. I was sorry for them ... and sorry I couldn't send more."

"Ah, when you look so thundering smart...."

"I don't pay for my clothes."

"I'm only stating a fact. I'm not venturing to criticize. I think it damned handsome of you to send them money. But you do look thundering smart.... Look here, let me tell you something: you've become a damned handsome girl."

He stared at her, with his smile, which compelled her to look at him.

Then she replied, very calmly, waving her fan lightly in front of her bare neck, sheltering in the foam of her fan:

"I'm damned glad to hear it!"

He gave a loud, throaty laugh:

"There, I like that! You've still got your witty sense of repartee. Always to the point. Damned clever of you!"

She stood up strained and nervous:

"I must leave you. I must go to Mrs. Uxeley."

He spread out his arms:

"Stay and sit with me a little longer. It does me good to talk to you."

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"Then restrain yourself a bit and don't 'damn' quite so much. I've not been used to it lately."

"I'll do my best. Sit down."

She fell back and hid herself behind her fan.

"Let me tell you that you have positively become a very ... a very beautiful woman. Now is that like a compliment?"

"It sounds more like one."

"Well, it's the best I can do, you know. So you must make the most of it. And now tell me about Rome. How were you living there?"

"Why should I tell you about it?"

"Because I'm interested."

"You have no need to be interested."

"I dare say, but I happen to be. I've never quite forgotten you. And I should be surprised if you had me."

"I have, quite," she said, coolly.

He looked at her with his smile. He said nothing, but she felt that he knew better. She was afraid to convince him further.

"Is it true, what they say at the Hague? About Van der Staal?"

She looked at him haughtily.

"Come, out with it!"

"Yes."

"You *are* a cheeky baggage! Do you no longer care a straw for the whole boiling of them?"

"No."

"And how do you manage here, with this old hag?"

"What do you mean?"

"Do they just accept you here, at Nice?"

"I don't brag about my independence; and no one is able to comment on my conduct here."

"Where is Van der Staal?"

"At Florence."

"Why isn't he here?"

"I'm not going to answer any more questions. You are indiscreet. It has nothing to do with you and I won't be cross-examined."

She was very nervous again and once more rose to her feet. He spread out his arms.

"Really, Rudolph, you must let me go," she entreated. "I have to go to Mrs. Uxeley. They are to dance a pavane in the ball-room and I have to ask for instructions and hand them on. Let me pass."

"Then I'll take you there. Let me offer you my arm."

"Rudolph, do go away! Don't you see how you're upsetting me? This meeting has been so unexpected. Do let me go, or I sha'n't be able to control myself. I'm going to cry.... Why did you speak to me, why did you speak to me, why did you come here, where you knew that you would meet me?"

"Because I wanted to see one of Mrs. Uxeley's parties and because I wanted to meet you."

"You must understand that it upsets me to see you again. What good does it do you? We are dead to each other. Why should you want to pester me like this?"

"That's just what I wanted to know, whether we are dead to each other...."

"Dead, dead, quite dead!" she cried, vehemently.

He laughed:

"Come, don't be so theatrical. You can understand that I was curious to see you again and talk to you. I used to see you in the street, in your carriage, on the Jetée; and I was pleased to find you looking so well, so smart, so happy and so handsome. You know that good-looking women are my great hobby. You are much better-looking than you used to be when you were my wife. If you had been then what you are now, I should never have allowed you to divorce me.... Come, don't be a child. No one knows here. I think it damned jolly to meet you here, to have a good old yarn with you and to have you leaning on my arm. Take my arm. Don't make a fuss and I'll take you where you want to go. Where shall we find Mrs. Uxeley? Introduce me ... as a friend from Holland...."

"Rudolph...."

"Oh, I insist: don't bother! There's nothing in it! It amuses me and it's no end of a lark to walk about with one's divorced wife at a ball at Nice. A delightful town, isn't it? I go to Monte Carlo every day and I've been damned lucky. Won three thousand francs yesterday. Will you come with me one day?"

"You're mad!"

"I'm not mad at all. I want to enjoy myself. And I'm proud to have you on my arm."

She withdrew her arm:

"Well, you needn't be."

"Now don't get spiteful. That's all rot: let's enjoy ourselves. There is the old girl: she's looking at you."

She had passed through some of the rooms on his arm; and they saw, near a tombola, round which people were crowding to draw presents and surprises, Mrs. Uxeley, Gilio and the Rosavilla, Costi and Luca ladies. They were all very gay round the pyramid of knickknacks, behaving like children when the number of one of them turned up on the roulette-wheel.

"Mrs. Uxeley," Cornélie began, in a trembling voice, "may I introduce a fellow-countryman of mine? Baron Brox."

Mrs. Uxeley simpered, uttered a few amiable words and asked if he wouldn't draw a number.

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The roulette-wheel spun round and round.

"A fellow-countryman, Cornélie?"

"Yes, Mrs. Uxeley."

"What do you say his name is?"

"Baron Brox."

"A splendid fellow! A handsome fellow! An astonishingly handsome fellow!... What is he? What does he do?"

"He's in the army, a first lieutenant...."

"In which regiment?"

"In the hussars."

"At the Hague?"

"Yes."

"An amazingly good-looking fellow! I like those tall, fine men."

"Mrs. Uxeley, is everything going as it should?"

"Yes, darling."

"Do you feel all right?"

"I have a little pain, but nothing to speak about."

"Won't it soon be time for the pavane?"

"Yes, see that the girls go and get dressed. Has the hairdresser brought the wigs for the young men?"

"Yes."

"Then go and collect them and tell them to hurry up. They must be ready within half an hour...."

Rudolph Brox returned from the tombola, where he had drawn a silver match-box. He thanked Mrs. Uxeley, who simpered, and, when he saw that Cornélie was moving away, he went after her:

"Cornélie ..."

"Please, Rudolph, let me be. I have to collect the girls and the men for the pavane."

I have a lot to do....”

“I’ll help you....”

She beckoned to a girl or two and sent a couple of footmen to hunt through the room for the young men and to ask them to go to the dressing-room. He saw that she was pale and trembling all over her body:

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“What’s the matter?”

“I’m tired.”

“Then let’s go and get something to drink.”

She was numb with nervousness. The music of the invisible band boom-boomed fiercely against her brain; and at times the innumerable candles whirled before her eyes like a reeling firmament. The rooms were choked with people. They crowded and laughed aloud and showed one another their presents; the men trod on the ladies’ trains. An intoxicating, suffocating fragrance of flowers, the atmosphere peculiar to crowded functions and the warm, perfumed odour of women’s flesh hung in the rooms like a cloud. Cornélie hunted hither and thither and at last collected all the girls. The ballet-master came to ask her something. A butler came to ask her something. And Brox did not budge from her side.

“Let’s go now and get something to drink,” he said.

She mechanically took his arm; and her hand trembled on the sleeve of his dress-coat. He pushed his way with her through the crowd; they passed Urania and De Breuil. Urania said something which Cornélie did not catch. The refreshment-room also was chock-full and buzzed with loud, laughing voices. Behind the long tables stood the butler, like a minister, supervising the whole service. There was no crowding, no fighting for a glass of wine or a sandwich. People waited until a footman brought it on a tray.

“It’s very well managed,” said Brox. “Do you do all this?”

“No, it’s been done like this for years....”

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She dropped into a chair, looking very pale.

“What will you have?”

“A glass of champagne.”

“I’m hungry. I had a bad dinner at my hotel. I must have something to eat.”

He ordered the champagne for her. He ate first a patty, then another, then a *châteaubriant* and peas. He drank two glasses of claret, followed by a glass of champagne. The footman brought him everything, dish by dish, on a silver tray. His handsome, virile face was brick-red in colour with health and animal strength. The stiff hair on his round, heavy skull was cropped quite close. His large grey eyes were bright and laughing, with a straight, impudent glance. A heavy, well-tended moustache curled over his mouth, in which the white teeth gleamed. He stood with his legs slightly astraddle, firm and soldierly in his dress-coat, which he wore with an easy correctness. He ate slowly and with relish, enjoying his good glass of fine wine.

Mechanically she now watched him, from her chair. She had drunk a glass of champagne and asked for another; and the stimulant revived her. Her cheeks recovered some of their colour; her eyes sparkled.

“They do you damn well here,” he said, coming up to her with his glass in his hand.

And he emptied his glass.

“They are going to dance the pavane almost at once,” she murmured.

And they passed through the crowded rooms, to a big corridor outside, which looked like an avenue of camellia-shrubs. They were alone for a moment.

“This is where the dancers are to meet.”

“Then let’s wait for them. It’s nice and cool out here.”

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They sat down on a bench.

“Are you feeling better?” he asked. “You were so queer in the ball-room.”

“Yes, I’m better.”

"Don't you think it's fun to meet your old husband again?"

"Rudolph, I don't understand how you can talk to me like that and persecute me and tease me ... after everything that has happened...."

"Oh, well, all that has happened and is done with!"

"Do you think it's discreet on your part ... or delicate?"

"No, neither discreet nor delicate. Those, you know, are things I've never been: you used to fling that in my face often enough, in the old days. But, if it's not delicate, it's amusing. Have you lost your sense of humour? It's damn jolly humorous, our meeting here.... And now listen to me. You and I are divorced. All right. That's so in the eyes of the law. But a legal divorce is a matter of law and form, for the benefit of society. As regards money affairs and so on. We've been too much husband and wife not to feel something for each other at a later meeting, such as this. Yes, yes, I know what you want to say. It's simply untrue. You have been too much in love with me and I with you for everything between us to be dead. I remember everything still. And you must do the same. Do you remember when...?"

He laughed, pushed nearer to her and whispered close in her ear. She felt his breath thrilling on her flesh like a warm breeze. She flushed crimson with nervous distress. And she felt with her whole body that he had been her husband and that he had entered into her very blood. His voice ran like molten bronze, along her nerves of hearing, deep down within her. She knew him through and through. She knew his eyes, his mouth. She knew his broad, well-kept hands, with the large round nails and the dark signet-ring, as they lay on his knees, which showed square and powerful under the crease in his dress-trousers. And she felt, like a sudden despair, that she knew and felt him in her whole body. However rough he might have been to her in the old days, however much he had ill-treated her, striking her with his clenched fist, banging her against the wall ... she had been his wife. She, a virgin, had become his wife, had been initiated into womanhood by him. And she felt that he had branded her as his own, she felt it in her blood and in the marrow of her bones. She confessed to herself that she had never forgotten him. During the first lonely days in Rome, she had longed for his kisses, she had thought of him, had conjured up his virile image before her mind, had persuaded herself to believe that, by exercising tact and patience and a little management, she could have remained his wife....

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Then the great happiness had come, the gentle happiness of perfect harmony!...

It all flashed through her like lightning.

Oh, in that great, gentle happiness she had been able to forget everything, she had not felt the past within her! But she now felt that the past always remained, irrevocably and indelibly. She had been his wife and she held him still in her blood. She felt it now with every breath that she drew. She was indignant because he dared to whisper about the old days, in her ear; but it had all been as he said, irrevocably, indelibly.

"Rudolph!" she entreated, clasping her hands together. "Spare me!"

She almost screamed it, in a cry of fear and despair. But he laughed and with one hand seized both hers, clasped in entreaty:

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"If you go on like that, if you look at me so beseechingly with those beautiful eyes, I won't spare you even here and I'll kiss you until ..."

His words swept over her like a scorching wind. But laughing voices approached; and two girls and two young men, dressed up, for the pavane, as Henri IV. and Marguerite de Valois, came running down the stairs:

"What's become of the others?" they cried, looking round in the staircase.

And they came dancing up to Cornélie. The ballet-master also approached. She did not understand what he said:

"Where are the others?" she repeated, mechanically, in a hoarse voice.

"Here they come.... Now we're all there...."

They were all talking and laughing and glittering and buzzing about her. She summoned up all her poor strength and issued a few instructions. The guests streamed into the great ball-room, sat down in the front chairs, crowded together in the corners. The pavane was danced in the middle of the room, to an old trailing

melody: a long, winding curve of graceful steps, deep bows and satin gleaming with sudden lustre like that of porcelain ... with the occasional flutter of a cape ... and a flash of light on a rapier....

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CHAPTER XLVIII

"Urania, I beseech you, help me!"

"What is it?"

"Come with me...."

She had seized Urania by the hand and dragged her away from De Breuil into one of the deserted rooms. The suite of rooms was almost entirely deserted; the dense throng of guests stood packed along the sides of the great ball-room to watch the pavane.

"What is it, Cornélie?"

Cornélie was trembling in every limb and clutching Urania's arm. She drew her to the farthest corner of the room. There was no one there.

"Urania," she entreated, in a supreme crisis of nervousness, "help me! What am I to do? I have met him unexpectedly. Don't you know whom I mean? My husband. My divorced husband. I had seen him once or twice before, in the street and on the Jetée. The time when I was so startled, you know, when I almost fainted: that was because of him. And he has been talking to me now, here, a moment ago. And I'm afraid of him. He spoke quite nicely, said he wanted to talk to me. It was so strange. Everything was finished between us. We were divorced. And suddenly I meet him and he speaks to me and asks me what sort of time I have had, tells me that I am looking well, that I have grown beautiful. Tell me, Urania, what I am to do. I'm frightened. I'm ill with anxiety. I want to get away. I should like best to go away at once, to Florence, to Duco. I am so frightened, Urania. I want to go to my room. Tell Mrs. Uxeley that I want to go to my room."

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She hardly knew what she was saying. The words fell incoherently from her lips, as in a fever. Men's voices approached. They were those of Gilio, De Breuil, the Duke di Luca and the young journalists, the two who were pushing their way into society.

"What is the Signora de Retz doing?" asked the duke. "We are missing her everywhere."

And the young journalists, standing in the shadow of these eminent noblemen, confirmed the statement: they had been missing her everywhere.

"Fetch Mrs. Uxeley here," Urania whispered to Gilio. "Cornélie is ill, I think. I can't leave her here alone. She wants to go to her room. It's better that Mrs. Uxeley should know, else she might be angry."

Cornélie was jesting nervously, in feverish gaiety, with the duke and with De Breuil and the journalists.

"Would you rather I took you straight to Mrs. Uxeley?" Gilio whispered.

"I want to go to my room!" she whispered, in a voice of entreaty, behind her fan.

The pavane appeared to be over. The buzz of voices reached them, as though the guests were scattering about the rooms again:

"I see Mrs. Uxeley," said Gilio.

He went up to her, spoke to her. She simpered at first, leaning on the gold knob of her cane. Then her wrinkles became angrily contracted. She crossed the room. Cornélie went on jesting with the duke; the journalists thought every word witty.

"Aren't you well?" whispered Mrs. Uxeley, going up to her, ruffled. "What about the cotillon?"

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"I will see to everything, Mrs. Uxeley," said Urania.

"Impossible, dear princess; and I shouldn't dream of letting you either."

"Introduce me to your friend, Cornélie!" said a deep voice behind Cornélie.

She felt that voice like bronze inside her body. She turned round automatically. It was he. She seemed unable to escape him. And, under his glance, as though hypnotized, she appeared, very strangely, to recover her strength. It seemed as though he were willing her not to be ill. She murmured:

"Urania, may I introduce ... a fellow-countryman?... Baron Brox.... Princess di Forte-Braccio...."

Urania knew his name, knew who he was:

"Darling," she whispered to Cornélie, "let me take you to your room. I'll see to everything."

"It's no longer necessary," she said. "I'm much better. I only want a glass of champagne. I am much better, Mrs. Uxeley."

"Why did you run away from me?" asked Rudolph Brox, with his smile and his eyes in Cornélie's eyes.

She smiled and said the first thing that came into her head.

"The dancing has begun," said Mrs. Uxeley. "But who's going to lead my cotillon presently?"

"If I can be of any service, Mrs. Uxeley," said Brox, "I have some little talent as a cotillon-leader."

Mrs. Uxeley was delighted. It was arranged that De Breuil and Urania, Gilio and the Countess Costi and Brox and Cornélie should lead the figures in turns.

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"You poor darling!" Urania said in Cornélie's ear. "Can you manage it?"

Cornélie smiled:

"Yes, yes, I'm all right again," she whispered.

And she moved towards the ball-room on Brox's arm. Urania stared after her in amazement.

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CHAPTER XLIX

It was twelve o'clock when Cornélie woke that morning. The sun was piercing the golden slit in the half-parted curtains with tiny eddying atoms. She felt dog-tired. She remembered that Mrs. Uxeley, on the morning after one of these parties, left her free to rest: the old lady herself stayed in bed, although she did not sleep. And Cornélie lacked the smallest capacity to rise. She remained lying where she was, heavy with fatigue. Her eyes wandered through the untidy room; her handsome ball-dress, hanging listlessly, limply over a chair, at once reminded her of yesterday. For that matter, everything in her was thinking of yesterday, everything in her was thinking of her husband, with a tense, hypnotized consciousness. She felt as if she were recovering from a nightmare, a bout of drunkenness, a swoon. It was only by drinking glass after glass of champagne that she had been able to keep going, had been able to dance with Brox, had been able to lead the figure when their turn came. But it was not only the champagne. His eyes also had held her up, had prevented her from fainting, from bursting into sobs, from screaming and waving her arms like a madwoman. When he had taken his leave, when everybody had gone, she had collapsed in a heap and been taken to bed. The moment she was no longer under his eyes, she had felt her misery and her weakness; and the champagne had as it were suddenly clouded her brain.

Now she lay thinking of him in the dejected slackness of her overwhelming morning fatigue. And it seemed to her as if her whole Italian year had been an interlude, a dream. She saw herself at the Hague again, with her pretty little face and her little flirting ways and her phrases always to the point. She saw their first meetings and how she had at once fallen under his influence and been unable to flirt with him, because he laughed at her little feminine defences. He had been too strong for her from the first. Then came their engagement. He laid down the law and she rebelled, angrily, with violent scenes, not wishing to be controlled, injured in her pride as a girl who had always been spoiled and made much of. And then he

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subdued her as though with the rude strength of his fist—and always with a laugh on his handsome mouth—until they were married, until she created a scandal and ran away. He had refused to be divorced at first, but had consented later, because of the scandal. She had freed herself, she had fled!...

The feminist movement, Italy, Duco.... Was it a dream? Was the great happiness, the delightful harmony, a dream and was she awaking after a year of dreams? Was she divorced or was she not? She had to make an effort to remember the formalities: yes, they were legally divorced. But *was* she divorced, was everything over between them? And *was* she really no longer his wife?

Why had he done it, why had he pursued her after seeing her once at Nice? Oh, he had told her, during that cotillon, that endless cotillon! He had become proud of her when he saw how beautiful she was and how smart, how happy she looked driving in Mrs. Uxeley's or the princess' elegant victoria; it was then that he had seen her, beautiful, smart and happy; and he had grown jealous. She, a beautiful woman, had been his wife! He felt that he had a right to her, notwithstanding the law. What was the law? Had the law taught her womanhood or had he? And he had made her feel his right, together with the irrevocable past. It was all irrevocable and indelible....

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She looked about her, at her wits' end what to do. And she began to weep, to sob. Then she felt something gaining strength within her, the instinctive rebellion that leapt up within her like a spring which had at length recovered its resilience, now that she was resting and no longer under his eyes. She would not. She would not. She refused to feel him in her blood. Should she meet him once more, she would speak to him calmly, very curtly, and order him to leave her, show him the door, have him put out of the door.... She clenched her fists with rage. She hated him. She thought of Duco.... And she thought of writing to him, telling him everything. And she thought of going back to him as quickly as possible. He was not a dream, he existed, even though he was living so far away, at Florence. She had saved a little money, they would find their happiness again in the studio in Rome. She would write to him; and she wanted to get away as quickly as possible. With Duco she would be safe. Oh, how she longed for him, to lie so softly and quietly and blissfully in his arms, against his breast, as in the embrace of a miraculous happiness! Was it all true, their happiness, their love and harmony? Yes, it had existed, it was not a dream. There was his photograph; there, on the wall, were two of his water-colours—the sea at Sorrento and the skies over Amalfi—done in those days which had been like poems. She would be safer with him. When she was with Duco, she would not feel Rudolph, her husband, in her blood. For she felt Duco in her soul; and her soul would be the stronger! She would feel Duco in her soul, in her heart, in all the most fervent part of her life and gather from him her uppermost strength, like a sheaf of gleaming sword-blades! Already now, when she thought of him with such longing, she felt herself growing stronger. She could have spoken to Brox now. Yesterday he had taken her by surprise, had squeezed her between himself and that looking-glass, till she had seen him double and lost her wits and been defeated. That would never happen again. That was only due to the surprise. If she spoke to him again now, *she* would triumph, thanks to what she had learnt as a woman who stood on her own feet.

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And she got up and opened the windows and put on her dressing-gown. She looked at the blue sea, at the motley traffic on the Promenade. And she sat down and wrote to Duco. She told him everything: her first startled meeting, her surprise and defeat at the ball. Her pen flew over the paper. She did not hear the knock at the door, did not hear Urania come in carefully, fearing lest she should still be asleep and anxious to know how she felt. Excitedly she read out part of her letter and said that she was ashamed of her weakness of yesterday. How she could have behaved like that she herself was unable to understand.

No, she herself could not understand it. Now that she felt somewhat rested and was speaking to Urania, who reminded her of Rome, and holding her long letter to Duco in her hand ... now she herself did not understand it all and wondered which had been a dream: her Italian year of happiness or that nightmare of yesterday....

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CHAPTER L

She stayed at home for a day, feeling tired and, deep down within herself, almost unconsciously, afraid, in spite of all, of meeting him. But Mrs. Uxeley, who would never hear of illness or fatigue, was so much put out that Cornélie accompanied her next day to the Promenade des Anglais. Friends came up to talk to them and

gathered round their chairs, with Rudolph Brox among them. But Cornélie avoided any confidential conversation.

Some days later, however, he called on Mrs. Uxeley's at-home day; and, amid the crowd of visitors paying duty-calls after the party, he was able to speak to her for a moment alone. He came up to her with that laugh of his, as though his eyes were laughing, as though his moustache were laughing. And she collected all her thoughts, so that she might be firm with him:

"Rudolph," she said, loftily, "it is simply ridiculous. If you don't think it indelicate, you might at least try to think it ridiculous. It tickles your sense of humour, but imagine what people would say about it in Holland!... The other evening, at the party, you took me by surprise and somehow—I really don't know how it happened—I yielded to your strange wish to dance with me and to lead the cotillon. I frankly confess, I was confused. I now see everything clearly and plainly and I tell you this: I refuse to meet you again. I refuse to speak to you again. I refuse to turn the solemn earnest of our divorce into a farce."

"If you look back," he said, "you will recollect that you never got anything out of me with that lofty tone and those dignified airs, but that, on the contrary, you just stimulate me to do what you don't want...." [278]

"If that is so, I shall simply tell Mrs. Uxeley in what relation I stand to you and ask her to forbid you her house."

He laughed. She lost her temper:

"Do you intend to behave like a gentleman or like a cad?"

He turned red and clenched his fists:

"Curse you!" he hissed, in his moustache.

"Perhaps you would like to hit me and knock me about?" she continued, scornfully.

He mastered himself.

"We are in a room full of people," she sneered, defiantly. "What if we were alone? You've already clenched your fists! You would thrash me as you did before. You brute! You brute!"

"And you are very brave in this room full of people!" he laughed, with his laugh which incited her to rage, when it did not subdue her. "No, I shouldn't thrash you," he continued. "I should kiss you."

"This is the last time you're going to speak to me!" she hissed furiously. "Go away! Go away! Or I don't know what I shall do, I shall make a scene."

He sat down calmly:

"As you please," he said, quietly.

She stood trembling before him, impotent. Some one spoke to her; the footman handed her some tea. She was now in the midst of a circle of men; and, mastering herself, she jested, with loud, nervous gaiety, flirted more coquettishly than ever. There was a little court around her, with the Duke di Luca as its ring-leader. Close by, Rudolph Brox sat drinking his tea, with apparent calmness, as though waiting. But his strong, masterful blood was boiling madly within him. He could have murdered her and he was seething red with jealousy. That woman was his, despite the law. He was not going to be afraid of any more scandal. She was beautiful, she was as he wished her to be and he wanted her, his wife. He knew how he would win her back; and this time he would not lose her, this time she should be his, for as long as he wished. [279]

As soon as he was able to speak to her unheard, he came up to her again. She was just going to Urania, whom she saw sitting with Mrs. Uxeley, when he said in her ear, sternly and abruptly:

"Cornélie..."

She turned round mechanically, but with her haughty glance. She would rather have gone on, but could not: something held her back, a secret strength, a secret superiority, which sounded in his voice and flowed into her with a weight as of bronze that weakened and paralysed her energy.

"What is it?" she asked.

"I want to speak to you alone."

"No."

"Yes. Listen to me calmly for a moment, if you can. I am calm too, as you see. You needn't be afraid of me. I promise not to ill-treat you or even to swear at you. But I must speak to you, alone. After our meeting, after the ball last week, we can't part like this. You are not even entitled to show me the door, after talking to me and dancing with me so recently. There's no reason and no logic in it. You lost your temper. But let us both keep our tempers now. I want to speak to you...."

"I can't: Mrs. Uxeley doesn't like me to leave the drawing-room when there are people here. I am dependent on her."

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He laughed:

"You are almost even more dependent on her than you used to be on me! But you can give me just a second, in the next room."

"No."

"Yes, you can."

"What do you want to speak to me about?"

"I can't tell you here."

"I can't speak to you alone."

"I'll tell you what it is: you're afraid to."

"No."

"Yes, you are: you're afraid of me. With all your airs and your dignity, you're afraid to be alone with me for a moment."

"I'm not afraid."

"You *are* afraid. You're shaking in your shoes with fear. You received me with a fine speech which you rehearsed in advance. Now that you've delivered your speech ... it's over and you're frightened."

"I am not frightened."

"Then come with me, my plucky authoress of *The Social Position of the What's-her-name!* I promise, I swear that I shall be calm and tell you calmly what I have to say to you; and I give you my word of honour not to hit you.... Which room shall we go to?... Do you refuse? Listen to me: if you don't come with me, it's not finished yet. If you do, perhaps it will be finished ... and you will never see me again."

"What can you have to say to me?"

"Come."

She yielded because of his voice, not because of his words:

"But only for three minutes."

"Very well, three minutes."

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She took him into the passage and into an empty room:

"Well what is it?" she asked, frightened.

"Don't be frightened," he said, laughing under his moustache. "Don't be frightened. I only wanted to tell you ... *that you are my wife*. Do you understand that? Don't try to deny it. I felt it at the ball the other night, when I had my arm round you, waltzing with you. Don't try to deny that you pressed yourself against me for a moment. *You're my wife*. I felt it then and I feel it now. And you feel it too, though you would like to deny it. But that won't help you. What has been can't be altered; and what has been ... always remains part of you. There, you can't say that I am not speaking prettily and delicately. Not an oath, not an improper word has escaped my lips. For I don't want to make you angry. I only want to make you confess that what I say is true *and that you are still my wife*. That law doesn't signify. It's another law that rules us. It's a law that rules you especially; a law which, without our ever suspecting it, brings us together again, even though it does so by a very strange, roundabout path, along which you, especially, have strayed. That law rules you especially. I am convinced that you still love me, or at least that you are still in love with me. I feel it, I know it as a fact: don't try to deny it. It's *no use*, Cornélie. And I'll tell you something besides: I am in love with you

too and more so than ever. I feel it when you're flirting with those fellows. I could wring your neck then, I could break every bone in their bodies.... Don't be afraid: I'm not going to; I'm not in a temper. I just wanted to talk to you calmly and make you see the truth. Do you see it before you? It is in-con-tro-ver-tible. You see, you have nothing to say in reply. Facts are facts.... Will you show me the door now? Do you still propose to speak to Mrs. Uxeley? I shouldn't, if I were you. Your friend, the princess, knows who I am: leave it at that. Had the old woman never heard my name, or has she forgotten it? Forgotten it, I expect. Well, then, don't trouble to refresh her ancient memory. Leave things as they are. It's better to say nothing. No, the position is not ridiculous and it's not humorous either. It has become very serious: the truth is always serious. It is strange, I admit: I should never have expected it. It's a revelation to me as well.... And now I've said what I had to say. Less than five minutes by my watch. They will hardly have noticed your absence in the drawing-room. And now I'm going; but first give your husband a kiss, for I am your husband ... and always shall be."

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She stood trembling before him. It was his voice, which fell like molten bronze into her soul, into her body, and lamed and paralysed her. It was his voice of persuasion, of persuasive charm, the voice which she knew of old, the voice that compelled her to do everything that he wanted. Under the influence of that voice she became a thing, a chattel, something that belonged to him, once he had branded her for ever as his mate. She was powerless to cast him out of herself, to shake him from herself, to erase from herself the stamp of his possession and the brand which marked her as his property. She was his; and anything that otherwise was herself had left her. There was no longer in her brain either memory or thought....

She saw him come up to her and put his arm around her. He took her to his breast slowly but so firmly that he seemed to be taking possession of her entirely. She felt herself melting away in his arms as in a scorching flame. On her lips she felt his mouth, his moustache, pressing, pressing, pressing, until she closed her eyes, half-fainting. He said something more in her ear, with that voice under which she seemed not to count, as though she were nothing, as though she existed only through him. When he released her, she staggered on her feet.

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"Come, pull yourself together," she heard him say, calmly, authoritatively, omnipotently. "And accept the position. Things are as they are. There's no altering them. Thank you for letting me speak to you. Everything is all right between us now: I'm sure of it. And now *au revoir*. *Au revoir*...."

He kissed her again:

"Give me a kiss too," he said, with that voice of his.

She flung her arm round his body and kissed him on the lips.

"*Au revoir*," he said, once more.

She saw him laugh under his moustache; his eyes laughed at her with flames of gold; and he went away. She heard his feet going down the stairs and ringing on the marble of the hall, with the strength of his firm tread.... She remained standing as though bereft of life. In the drawing-room, next to the room in which she was, the hum of laughing voices sounded loudly. She saw Rome before her, saw Duco, in a short flash of lightning.... It was gone.... And, collapsing into a chair, she uttered a suppressed cry of despair, put her hands before her face and sobbed, restraining her despair before all those people, dully, as from a stifling throat.

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CHAPTER LI

She had but one thought: to take to flight. To fly from his mastery, to fly from the emanation of that dominion which, mysteriously but irrevocably, wiped away with his caress all that was in her of will, energy and self. She remembered having felt the same thing in the old days: rebellion and anger when he became angry and coarse, but an eclipse of self when he caressed her; an inability to think when he merely laid his hand upon her head; a swooning away into a vast nothingness when he took her in his arms and kissed her. She had felt it from the first time of seeing him, when he stood before her and looked down upon her with that light irony in the smile of his eyes and his moustache, as though he took pleasure in her resistance—at that time prompted by flirting and fun, soon by petulance, later by anger and fury—as though he took pleasure in her futile feminine attempts to

escape his power. He had at once realized that he ruled this woman. And she had found in him her master, her sole master. For no other man pressed down upon her with that empire which was of the blood, of the flesh. On the contrary, she was usually the superior. She had about her a cool indifference which was always provoking her to destructive criticism. She had a need for fun, for cheerful conversation, for coquetry, for flirtation; and, always a mistress of quick repartee, she invited the occasion for repartee; but, apart from this, men meant little to her and she always saw the absurd side of each of them, thinking this one too short, that one too tall, a third clumsy, a fourth stupid, finding something in every one of them to rouse her laughter, her mockery or her criticism. She would never be a woman to give herself to many. She had met Duco and given herself to him with her love, wholly, as one great inseparable golden gift; and after him she would never fall in love again. But before Duco she had met Rudolph Brox. Perhaps, if she had met him after Duco, his mastery would not have swayed her. She did not know. And what was the good of thinking about it. The thing was as it was. In her blood she was not a woman for many; in her blood she was the wife, the spouse, the consort. Of the man who had been her husband she was in her flesh and in her blood the wife; and she was his wife even without love. For she could not call this love: she gave the name of love only to that other passion, that proud, tender and intense completion of life's harmony, that journey along one golden line, the marriage of two gleaming lines.... But the phantom hands had risen all about them in a cloud, the hands had mysteriously and inevitably divided their golden line; and hers, a winding curve, had leapt back, like a quivering spring, crossing a darker line of former days, a sombre line of the past, a dark track full of unconscious action and fatal bondage. Oh, the strangeness, the most mysterious strangeness of those lines of life! Why should they curl back, force her backwards to her original starting-point? Why had it all been necessary?

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She had but one thought: to take to flight. She did not see the inevitability of those lines and the fatality of those paths and she did not wish to feel the pressure of the phantom hands that rose about her. To fly, to turn up the dusky path, back to the point of separation, back to Duco, and with him to rebraid and twist the two lost directions into one pure movement, one line of happiness!...

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To fly, to fly! She told Urania that she was going. She begged Urania to forgive her, because it was she who had recommended her to the old woman whom she was now suddenly leaving. And she told Mrs. Uxeley, without caring for her anger, her temper or her words of abuse. She admitted that she was ungrateful. But there was a vital necessity which compelled her suddenly to leave Nice. She swore that it existed. She swore that it would mean unhappiness, even ruin, were she to stay. She explained it to Urania in a single sentence. But she did not explain it to the old woman and left her in an impotent fury which made her writhe with rheumatic aches and pains. She left behind her everything that she had received from Mrs. Uxeley, all the superfluous wardrobe of her dependence. She put on an old frock. She went to the station like a criminal, trembling lest she should meet him. But she knew that at this hour he was always at Monte Carlo. Nevertheless she went in a closed cab and she took a second-class ticket for Florence. She telegraphed to Duco. And she fled.

She had nothing left but him. She could never again count upon Mrs. Uxeley; and Urania had behaved coolly, not understanding that singular flight, because she did not understand the simple truth, Rudolph Brox' power. She thought that Cornélie was making things difficult for herself. In the circle in which Urania lived, her sense of social morality had wavered since her *liaison* with the Chevalier de Breuil. Hearing the Italian law of love whispered all around her, the law that love is as simple as an opening rose, she did not understand Cornélie's struggle. She no longer resented anything that Gilio did; and he in his turn left her free. What was happening to Cornélie? Surely it was all very simple, if she was still fond of her divorced husband! Why should she run away to Duco and make herself ridiculous in the eyes of all their acquaintances? And so she had parted coolly from Cornélie; but still she missed her friend. She was the Princess di Forte-Braccio; and lately, on her birthday, Prince Ercole had sent her a great emerald, out of the carefully kept family-jewels, as though she were becoming worthy of them gradually, stone by stone! But she missed Cornélie and she felt lonely, deadly lonely, notwithstanding her emerald and her lover....

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Cornélie fled: she had nothing in the world but Duco. But in him she would have everything. And, when she saw him at Florence, at the Santa Maria Novella Station, she flung herself on his breast and clung to him as to a cross of redemption, a saviour. He led her sobbing to a cab; and they drove to his room. There she looked round her nervously, done up with the overstrain of her long journey, thinking every minute that Rudolph would come after her. She told Duco everything, opened her heart to him entirely, as though he were her conscience, as though he were her soul, her god. She nestled up against him, she told him that he must help her. It was as though she were praying to him; her anguish went up to

him like a prayer. He kissed her; and she knew that manner of comforting, she knew that tender caressing. She suddenly fell against him, utterly relaxed; and so she continued to lie, with closed eyes. It was as though she were sinking in a lake, in a blue sacred lake, mystic as the Lake of San Stefano in the sleeping night, powdered with stars. And she heard him say that he would help her; that there was nothing in her fears; that that man had no power over her; that he would never have any power over her, if she became his, Duco's, wife. She looked at him and did not understand what he was saying. She looked at him feverishly, as though he had awakened her suddenly while she lay sleeping for a second in the blue calmness of the mystic lake. She did not understand, but, dead-tired, she hid her face against his arm again and fell asleep.

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She was dead-tired. She slept for two hours immovably, breathing deeply, upon his breast. When he shifted his arm, she just moved her head heavily, like a flower on a weary stalk, but she slept on. He stroked her forehead, her hair; and she slept on, with her hand in his. She slept as if she had not slept for days, for weeks.

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CHAPTER LII

"There is nothing to be afraid of, Cornélie," he said, convincingly. "That man has no power over you if you refuse, if you refuse with a firm will. I do not see what he could do. You are quite free, absolutely released from him. That you ran away so precipitately was certainly not wise: it will look to him like a flight. Why did you not tell him calmly that he can't claim any rights in you? Why did you not say that you loved me? If need were, you could have said that we were engaged. How can you have been so weak and so terrified? It's not like you! But, now that you are here, all is well. We are together now. Shall we go back to Rome to-morrow or shall we remain here a little first? I have always longed to show you Florence. Look, there, in front of us, is the Arno; there is the Ponto Vecchio; there is the Uffizi. You've been here before, but you didn't know Italy then. You'll enjoy it more now. Oh, it is so lovely here! Let us stay a week or two first. I have a little money; you need have no fear. And life is cheaper here than in Rome. Living in this room, we shall spend hardly anything. I have light enough through this window to sketch by, now and again. Or else I go and work in the San Marco or in San Lorenzo or up on San Miniato. It is delightfully quiet in the cloisters. There are a few excursionists at times; but I don't mind that. And you can go with me, with a book, a book about Florence; I'll tell you what to read. You must learn to know Donatello, Brunelleschi, Ghiberti, but, above all, Donatello. We shall see him in the Bargello. And Lippo Memmi's *Annunciation*, the golden *Annunciation*! You shall see how like our angel is to it, our beautiful angel of happiness, the one you gave me! It is so rich here; we shall not feel that we are poor. We need so little. Or have you been spoiled by your luxury at Nice? But I know you so well: you will forget that at once; and we shall win through together. And presently we shall go back to Rome. But this time ... married, my darling, and you belonging to me entirely, legally. It must be so now; you must not refuse me again. We'll go to the consul to-morrow and ask what papers we want from Holland and what will be the quickest way of getting married. And meanwhile you must look upon yourself as my wife. Until now we have been very, very happy ... but you were not my wife. Once you *feel* yourself to be my wife—even though we wait another fortnight for those papers to sign—you will feel safe and peaceful. There is nobody and nothing that has any power over you. You're not well, if you really think there is. And then I'll bet you, when we are married, my mother will make it up with us. Everything will come right, my darling, my angel.... But you must not refuse: we *must* get married with all possible speed."

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She was sitting beside him on a sofa and staring out of doors, where, in the square frame of the tall window, the slender *campanile* rose like a marble lily between the dome-crowned harmonies of the Cathedral and the Battisterio, while on one side the Palazzo Vecchio lay, a massive, battlemented fortress, amid the welter of the streets and roofs, and lifted its tower, suddenly expanding into the machicolated summit, with Fiesole and the hills shimmering behind it in the purple of the evening. The noble city of eternal grace gleamed a golden bronze in the last reflection of the setting sun.

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"We *must* get married at once?" she repeated, with a doubting interrogation.

"Yes, as soon as ever we can, darling."

"But Duco, dearest Duco, it's less possible now than ever. Don't you see that it can't be done? It's impossible, impossible. It might have been possible before,

some months ago, a year ago ... perhaps, perhaps not even then. Perhaps it was never possible. It is so difficult to say. But now it can't be done, really not...."

"Don't you love me well enough?"

"How can you ask me such a question? How can you ask me, darling? But it's not that. It is ... it is ... it can't be, because I am not free."

"Not free?"

"I am *not* free. I may feel free later ... or perhaps not, perhaps never.... My dearest Duco, it is impossible. I wrote to you, you know: that first meeting at the ball; it was so strange; I felt that ..."

"That what?"

She took his hand and stroked it; her eyes were vague, her words were vague:

"You see ... he has been my husband."

"But you're divorced from him: not merely separated, but divorced!"

"Yes, I'm divorced; but it's not that."

"What then, dearest?"

She shook her head and hid her face against him:

"I can't tell you, Duco."

"Why not?"

"I'm ashamed."

"Tell me; do you still love him?"

"No, it's not love. I love you."

"But what then, my darling? Why are you ashamed?"

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She began to cry on his shoulder:

"I feel...."

"What?"

"That I am not free, although ... although I am divorced. I feel ... that I am his wife all the same."

She whispered the words almost inaudibly.

"But then you do love him and more than you love me."

"No, no, I swear I don't!"

"But, darling, you're not talking sense!"

"Yes, indeed I am."

"No, you're not. It's impossible!"

"It isn't. It's quite possible. And he told me so ... and I felt it...."

"But the fellow's hypnotizing you!"

"No, it's not hypnotism. It's not a delusion: it's a reality, deep, deep down within myself. Look here, you know me: you know how I feel. I love you and you only. That alone is love. I have never loved any one else. I am not a woman who is susceptible to.... I'm not hysterical. But with him ... No other man, no man whom I have ever met, rouses that feeling in me ... that feeling that I am not myself. That I belong to him, that I am his property, his chattel."

She threw her arms about him, she hid herself like a child in his breast:

"It is so strange.... You know me, don't you? I can be plucky and I am independent and I am never at a loss for an answer. But with him I am no longer sure of myself, I no longer have a life of my own. And I do what he tells me to."

"But that is hypnotism: you can escape that, if you seriously wish to. I will help you."

"It is not hypnotism. It is a truth, deep down inside me. It exists inside me. I know that it is so, that it has to be so.... Duco, it is impossible. I can't become your wife. I *mustn't* become your wife ... less now than ever. Perhaps...."

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"Perhaps what?"

"Perhaps I always felt like that, without knowing it, that it must not be. Both for you and for me ... and for him too.... Perhaps that was what I felt, without knowing it, when I talked as I used to, about my antipathy for marriage."

"But that antipathy arose from your marriage ... with him!"

"Yes, that's the strange part of it. I dislike him ... and yet...."

"Yet you're in love with him!"

"Yet I belong to him."

"And you tell me that you love me!"

She took his head in her two hands:

"Try to understand. It tires me so, trying to make you understand. I love you ... but I am his wife...."

"Are you forgetting what you were to me in Rome?..."

"I was everything to you: love, happiness, intense happiness.... There was the most intense harmony between us: I shall never forget it.... But I was not your wife."

"Not my wife!"

"No, I was your mistress.... I was unfaithful to him.... Oh, don't repulse me! Pity me, pity me!"

He had unconsciously made a gesture that frightened her.

"Let me stay like this, leaning against you. May I? I am so tired and I feel restless, leaning against you like this, my darling. My darling, my darling ... things will never be as they were. What are we to do?"

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"I don't know," he said, in despair. "I want to marry you as soon as may be. You won't consent."

"I can't. I mustn't."

"Then I don't know what to do or say."

"Don't be angry. Don't leave me. Help me, do, do! I love you, I love you, I love you!"

She drew him into her arms, in a close, sudden embrace, as though in perplexity and despair. He kissed her passionately in response.

"O God, tell me what to do!" she prayed, as she, lay hopelessly perplexed in his embrace.

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CHAPTER LIII

Next day, when Cornélie walked with Duco through Florence, when they entered the courtyard of the Palazzo Vecchio, saw the Loggia dei Lanzi and looked in at the Uffizi to see Memmi's *Annunciation*, she felt something like her former sensations irresistibly unfolding within her. They seemed to have taken their lines which had burst asunder and with human force to have bent them together again into one path, along which the white daisies and white lilies shot up with a tenderness of soft, mystic recognition that was almost like a dream. And yet it was not quite the same as before. An oppression as of a grey cloud hung between her and the deep-blue sky, which hung out stretched like strips of æther, like paths of lofty, quivering atmosphere, above the narrow streets, above the domes and towers and turrets. She no longer felt the former apprehension; there was a remembrance in her, a heavy pondering weighed upon her brain, an anxiety for what was about to happen. She had a presentiment as of a coming storm; and when, after their walk,

they had had something to eat and went home, she dragged herself up the stairs to Duco's room more wearily than she had ever done in Rome. And she at once saw a letter lying on the table, a letter addressed to her. But how addressed! It gave her so violent a start that she began to tremble in every limb and managed to thrust the letter away even before Duco had followed her into the room. She took off her hat and told Duco that she wanted to get something out of her trunk, which was standing in the passage. He asked if he could help her; but she said no and left the room and went into the narrow passage. Here, standing by the little window overlooking the Arno, she took out the letter. It was the only place where she could read for a moment undisturbed. And she read that address again, written in his hand, which she knew so well, with its great thick, heavy characters. The name which she bore abroad was her maiden name; she called herself Madame de Retz van Loo. But on the envelope she read, briefly:

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"BARONNE BROX,
37, Lung' Arno Torrigiani,
FLORENCE."

A deep crimson flush mantled over her face. She had borne that name for a year. Why did he call her by it now? Where was the logic in that title which, by the law, was hers no longer? What did he mean by it, what did he want?... And, standing by the little window, she read his short but imperious letter. He wrote that he took her flight very much amiss, especially after their last conversation. He wrote that, at this last interview, she had granted him every right over her, that she had not denied it and that, by kissing him and putting her arms around him, she had shown that she regarded herself as his wife, just as he regarded her as his wife. He wrote that he would not now resent her independent life of a year in Rome, because she was then still free, but that he was offended at her still looking upon herself as free and that he would not accept the insult of her flight. He called upon her to return. He said that he had no legal right to do so, but that he did it because he nevertheless had a right, a right which she could not dispute, which indeed she had not disputed, which on the contrary she had acknowledged by her kiss. He had learnt her address from the porter of the Villa Uxeley. And he ended by repeating that she was to return to Nice, to him, at the Hôtel Continental, and telling her that, if she did not do this, he would come to Florence and she would be responsible for the consequences of her refusal.

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Her knees shook; she was hardly able to stand upright. Should she show Duco the letter or keep it from him? She had to make up her mind then and there. He was calling to her from the room, asking what she was doing so long in the passage. She went in and was too weak to refrain from throwing herself on his breast. She showed him the letter. Leaning against him, sobbing violently, she heard him fume and rage, saw the veins on his temples swell, saw him clench his fists and roll the letter into a ball and dash it to the floor. He told her not to be frightened, said that he would protect her. He too regarded her as his wife. It all depended upon the light in which she henceforth regarded herself. She did not speak, merely sobbed, broken with fatigue, with fright, with head-ache. She undressed and went to bed, her teeth chattering with fever. He drew her curtains to darken the room and told her to go to sleep. His voice sounded angry and she thought that he was angry at her lack of resolution. She sobbed and cried herself to sleep. But in her sleep she felt the terror within herself and again felt the irresistible pressure. While sleeping she dreamt of what she could reply and wrote to Brox, but it was not clear what she wrote: it was all a vague, impotent pleading for mercy.

When she woke, she saw Duco beside her bed. She took his hand; she was calmer. But she had no hope. She had no faith in the days that were coming. She looked at him and saw him gloomy, stern and self-contained, as she had never seen him before. Oh, their happiness was past! On that fatal day when he had seen her to the train in Rome, they had taken leave of their happiness. It was gone, it was gone! Gone the dear walks through ruins and museums, the trips to Frascati, Naples, Amalfi! Gone the dear, fond life of poverty in the big studio, among the gleaming colours of the old brocades and chasubles, of the old bronzes and silver! Gone the gazing together at his water-colour of *The Banners*, she with her head on his shoulder, within his arm, living his art with him, enjoying his work with him! Gone the ecstasy of the night in the pergola, in the star-spangled night, with the sacred lake at their feet! Life was not to be repeated. They had tried in vain to repeat it here, in this room, at Florence, in the Palazzo Vecchio, tried in vain to repeat it even in the presence of Memmi's angel emitting his beam of light! They tried in vain to repeat their life, their happiness, their love; it was in vain that they had forced together the lines which had burst asunder. These had merely twined round each other for a moment, in a despairing curve. It was gone, it was gone!... Gloomy and stern he sat beside her bed; and she knew it, he felt that he was powerless because she did not feel herself to be his wife. His mistress!... Oh, she had felt that involuntary repulsion when she had uttered the word! Had he not always wanted to marry her? But she had always felt unconsciously that it could

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not be, that it must not be. Under all the exuberance of her acrid feministic phrases, that had been the unconscious truth. She, railing against marriage, had always, inwardly, felt herself to be married ... not by a signature, in accordance with the law, but according to an age-old law, a primeval right of man over woman, a law and a right of flesh and blood and the very marrow of the bones. Oh, above that immovable physical truth her soul had blossomed its blossom of white daisies and lilies; and that blossom also was the intense truth, the lofty truth of happiness and love! But the daisies and lilies blossomed and faded: the soul blossoms for but a single summer. The soul does not blossom for a lifetime. It blossoms perhaps before life, it blossoms perhaps after it; but in life itself the soul blossoms for but a single summer. It had blossomed, it was over! And in her body, which lived, in her being, which survived, she felt the truth in her very marrow! He was sitting beside her bed, but he had no rights, now that the lilies had blossomed.... She was broken with pity for him. She took his hand and kissed it fervently and sobbed over it. He said nothing. He did not know how to say anything. It would all have been very simple for him, if she had consented to be his wife. As things were, he could not help her. As things were, he saw his happiness foundering while he looked on: there was nothing to be done. It was slowly falling to pieces, like a crumbling ruin. It was gone! It was gone!...

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She stayed in bed these days; she slept, she dreamt, she awoke again; and the dread waiting never left her. She had a slight temperature now and again; and it was better for her to stay in bed. As a rule, he remained by her side. But one day, when Duco had gone to the chemist's for something, there was a knock at the door. She leapt out of bed, terrified, terrified lest she should see the man of whom she was always thinking. Half-fainting with fright, she opened the door ajar. It was only the postman, with a registered letter ... from him! Even more curtly than last time, he wrote that, immediately on the receipt of his letter, she was to telegraph, stating the day when she would come. He said that, if on such and such a day—he would calculate, etc., which—he did not receive her telegram, he would leave for Florence and shoot her lover like a dog at her feet. He would not take a moment to reflect. He did not care what happened.... In this short letter, his anger, his fury, raged like a red storm that lashed her across the face. She knew him; and she knew that he would do what he said. She saw, as in a flash, the terrible scene, with Duco dropping, murdered, weltering in his blood. And she was no longer her own mistress. The red fury of that letter, dispatched from afar, made her his chattel, his thing. She had torn the letter open hastily, before signing the postman's book. The man was waiting in the passage. Her brain whirled, the room spun before her eyes. If she paused to reflect, it would be too late, too late to reflect. And she asked the postman, nervously:

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"Can you send off a telegram for me at once?"

No, he couldn't: it wasn't on his road.

But she implored him to do it. She said that she was ill and that she must telegraph at once. And she found a gold ten-franc piece in her purse and gave it to him as a tip over and above the money for the telegram. And she wrote the telegram:

"Leaving to-morrow express train."

It was a vague telegram. She did not know by what express; she had not been able to look it up. Would it be in the evening or quite early in the morning? She had no idea. How would she be able to get away? She had no idea. But she thought that the telegram would calm him. And she meant to go. She had no choice. Now that she had fled in despair, she saw it: if he wanted to have her back, back as his wife, she must go. If he had not wanted it, she could have remained, wherever she might be, despite her feeling that she belonged to him. But now that he wanted it, she must go back. But oh, how was she to tell Duco? She was not thinking of herself, she was thinking of Duco. She saw him lying before her in his blood. She forgot that she had no money left. Was she to ask him for it? O God, what was she to do? She could not go next day, notwithstanding her telegram! She could not tell Duco that she was going.... She had meant to slip quietly to the station, when he was out.... Or had she better tell him?... Which would be the least painful?... Or should ... should she tell everything to Duco and ... and run away ... run away somewhere with him and tell nobody where they were going.... But supposing *he* discovered where they had gone! And he would find them!... And then ... then he would murder ... Duco!...

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She was almost delirious with fear, with terror, with not knowing what to do, how to act.... She now heard Duco's steps on the stairs.... He came in, bringing her the pills.... And, as usual, she told him everything, too weak, too tired, to keep anything hidden, and showed him the letter. He blazed out, furiously, with hatred; but she fell on her knees before him and took his hands. She said that she had

already sent the answer. He suddenly became cool, as though overcome by the inevitable. He said that he had no money to pay for her journey. Then, once more, he took her in his arms, kissed her, begged her to be his wife, said that he would kill her husband, even as her husband had threatened to kill him. But she did nothing but sob and refuse, although she continued to cling to him convulsively. Then he yielded to the fatal omnipotence of life's silent tyranny. He felt death in his soul. But he wished to keep calm for her sake. He said that he forgave her. He held her, all sobbing, in his arms, because his touch calmed her. And he said that, if she wanted to go back—she despondently nodded yes—it was better to telegraph to Brox again, asking for money for the journey and for clear instructions as to the day and time. He would do this for her. She looked at him, through her tears, in surprise. He himself drew up the telegram and went out.

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"My darling, my darling!" she thought, as he went, as she felt the pain in his torn soul. She flung herself on the bed. He found her in hysterics when he returned. When he had tended her and tucked her up in bed, he sat down beside her. And he said, in a dead voice:

"My dearest, be calm now. The day after to-morrow I shall take you to Genoa. Then we shall take leave of each other, for ever. If it can't be otherwise, it must be like that. If you feel that it has to be, then it must be. Be calm now, be calm now. If you feel like that, that you must go back to your husband, then perhaps you will not be unhappy with him. Be calm, dear, be calm."

"Will you take me?"

"I shall take you as far as Genoa. I have borrowed the money from a friend. But above all try to be calm. Your husband wants you back; he can't want you back only to beat you. He must feel something for you if he wants you so. And, if it has to be ... then perhaps it will be the best thing ... for you.... Even though I can't see it in that light!..."

He covered his face with his hands and, no longer master of himself burst into sobs. She drew him to her breast. She was now calmer than he. And, as he sobbed with his head on her beating heart, she quietly stroked his forehead, while her eyes roamed distantly round the walls of the room....

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CHAPTER LIV

She was now alone in the train. By tipping the guard lavishly, they had travelled by themselves through the night and been left undisturbed in their compartment. Oh, the melancholy journey, the last silent journey of the end! They had not spoken but had sat close together, hand in hand, with eyes gazing into the distance before them, as though staring at the approaching point of separation. The dreary thought of that separation never left them, rushed onward in unison with the rattling train. Sometimes she thought of a railway-accident and that it would be welcome to her if she could die with him. But the lights of Genoa had gleamed up inexorably. Then the train had stopped. And he had flung out his arms and they had kissed for the last time. Pressed to his breast, she had felt all his grief within him. Then he had released her and rushed away, without looking round. She followed him with her eyes, but he did not look back and she saw him disappear in the morning mist, pierced with little lights, that hung about the station. She had seen him disappear among other people, swallowed up in the hovering mist. Then the silent and despairing surrender of her life had become so great that she was not even able to weep. Her head dropped limply, her arms hung lax. Like an inert thing she let the train bear her onward with its rending rattle.

A white morning twilight had risen on the left over the brightening sea; and the dawning daylight tinted the water blue and defined the horizon. For hours and hours she travelled on, motionlessly, gazing out at the sea; and she felt almost painless with her impassive surrender of life. She would now let things happen as life willed, as her husband willed, as the train willed. As in a tired dream she thought of the inevitability of everything and all the unconscious life within herself, of her first rebellion against her husband's tyranny, of the illusion of her independence, the arrogance of her pride and all the happiness of her gentle ecstasy, all her gladness because of the harmony which she had achieved.... Now it was past; now all self-will was vain. The train was carrying her to where Rudolph called her; and life hemmed her in on every side, not roughly, but with a soft pressure of phantom hands, which pushed and led and guided....

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And she ceased to think. The tired dream became clouded in the deeper blue of the day; and she felt that she was approaching Nice. She returned to the petty realities of life. She felt that she was looking a little travel-worn: and, feeling that it would be better if Rudolph did not see her for the first time in so unattractive a light, she slowly opened her bag, washed her face with her handkerchief dipped in eau-de-Cologne, combed her hair, powdered her face, brushed herself down, put on a transparent white veil and took out a pair of new gloves. She bought a couple of yellow roses at a station and put them in her waistband. She did all this unconsciously, without thinking about it, feeling that it was best, that it was sensible to do it, best that Rudolph should see her like that, with that bloom of a beautiful woman about her. She felt that henceforth she must be above all beautiful and that nothing else mattered. And when the train droned into the station, when she recognized Nice, she was resigned, because she had ceased to struggle and had yielded to all the stronger forces. The door was flung open and, in the station, which at that early hour was comparatively empty, she saw him at once: tall, robust, easy, in his light summer suit, straw hat and brown shoes. He gave an impression of health and strength and above all of broad-shouldered virility; and, notwithstanding his broadness, he was still quite thoroughbred, thoroughly well-groomed without the least touch of toppishness; and the ironical smile beneath his moustache and the steady glance of his fine grey eyes, the eyes of a woman-hunter, gave him an air of strength, of the certainty of doing as he wished, of the power to subdue if he thought fit. An ironic pride in his handsome strength, with a tinge of contempt for the others who were less handsome and strong, less of the healthy animal and yet the aristocrat, and above all a mocking, supercilious sarcasm directed against all women, because he knew women and knew how much they were really worth: all this was expressed by his glance, his attitude, his movements. It was thus that she knew him. It had often roused her to rebellion in the old days, but she now felt resigned and also a little frightened.

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He had come to her; he helped her to alight. She saw that he was angry, that he intended to receive her rudely; then, that his moustache was curling ironically, as though in mockery because he was the stronger. She said nothing, however, took his hand calmly and alighted. He led her outside; and in the carriage they waited a moment for the trunk. His eyes took her in at a glance. She was wearing an old blue-serge skirt and a little blue-serge cape; but, notwithstanding her old clothes and her weary resignation, she looked a handsome and smartly-dressed woman.

"I am glad to see that you thought it advisable at last to carry out my wishes," he said, in the end.

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"I thought it would be best," she answered, softly.

Her tone struck him; and he watched her attentively, out of the corner of his eyes. He did not understand her, but he was pleased that she had come. She was tired now, from excitement and travelling; but he thought that she looked most charming, even though she was not so brilliant as on that night, at Mrs. Uxeley's ball, when he had first spoken to his divorced wife.

"Are you tired?" he asked.

"I have been a bit feverish for a day or two; and of course I had no sleep last night," she said, as though in apology.

The trunk was brought and they drove away, to the Hôtel Continental. She did not speak again in the carriage. They were also silent as they entered the hotel and in the lift. He took her to his room. It was an ordinary hotel-bedroom; but she thought it strange to see his brushes lying on the dressing-table, his coats and trousers hanging on the pegs: familiar things with whose outlines and folds she was well-acquainted. She recognized his trunk in a corner.

He opened the windows wide. She had sat down on a chair, in an expectant attitude. She felt a little faint and closed her eyes, which were blinded by the stream of sunlight.

"You must be hungry," he said. "What shall I order for you?"

"I should like some tea and bread-and-butter."

Her trunk arrived; and he ordered her breakfast. Then he said:

"Take off your hat."

She stood up. She took off her cape. Her cotton blouse was rumped; and this annoyed her. She removed the pins from her hat before the glass and quite naturally did her hair with his comb, which she saw lying there. And she settled the silk bow around her collar.

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He had lit a cigar and was smoking quietly, standing. A waiter came in with the breakfast. She ate a mouthful without speaking and drank a cup of tea.

"Have you breakfasted?" she asked.

"Yes"

They were silent again and she went on eating.

"And shall we have a talk now?" he asked, still standing up, smoking.

"Very well."

"I won't speak about your running off as you did," he said. "My first intention was to give you a regular flaying, for it was a damned silly trick..."

She said nothing. She merely looked up at him; and her beautiful eyes were filled with a new expression, one of gentle resignation. He fell silent again, evidently restraining himself and seeking his words. Then he resumed:

"As I say, I won't speak about that any more. For the moment you didn't know what you were doing and you weren't accountable for your actions. But there must be an end of that now, for I wish it. Of course I know that according to the law I have not the least right over you. But we've discussed all that; and I told it you in writing. And you have been my wife; and, now that I am seeing you again, I feel very plainly that, in spite of everything, I regard you as my wife and that you are my wife. And you must have retained the same impression from our meeting here, at Nice."

"Yes," she said, calmly.

"You admit that?"

"Yes," she repeated.

"Then that's all right. It's the only thing I wanted of you. So we won't think any more now of what happened, of our former unpleasantness, of our divorce and of what you have done since. From now on we will put all that behind us. I look upon you as my wife and you shall be my wife again. According to the law we can't get married again. But that makes no difference. Our divorce in law I regard as an intervening formality and we will counter it as far as we can. If we have children, we shall get them legitimized. I will consult a lawyer about all that; and I shall take all the necessary measures, financial included. In this way our divorce will be nothing more than a formality, of no meaning to us and of as little significance as possible to the world and to the law. And then I shall leave the service. I shouldn't in any case care to stay in it for good, so I may as well leave it earlier than I intended. For you wouldn't find it pleasant to live in Holland; and it doesn't appeal to me either."

"No," she murmured.

"Where would you like to live?"

"I don't know..."

"In Italy?"

"No," she begged, in a tone of entreaty.

"Care to stay here?"

"I'd rather not ... to begin with."

"I was thinking of Paris. Would you like to live in Paris?"

"Very well."

"That's all right then. So we will go to Paris as soon as possible and look out for a flat and settle in. It'll soon be spring now; and that is a good time to start life in Paris."

"Very well."

He flung himself into an easy-chair; it creaked under him. Then he asked:

"Tell me, what do you really think, inside yourself?"

"How do you mean?"

"I want to know what you thought of your husband. Did you think him absurd?"

"No."

"Come over here and sit on my knee."

She stood up and went to him. She did as he wished, sat down on his knee; and he drew her to him. He laid his hand on her head, with that gesture which prevented her thinking. She closed her eyes and laid her head against his cheek.

"You haven't forgotten me altogether?"

She shook her head.

"We ought never to have got divorced, ought we?"

She shook her head again.

"But we used to be very bad-tempered then, both of us. You must never be bad-tempered in future. It makes you look spiteful and ugly. As you are now, you're much nicer and prettier."

She smiled faintly.

"I am glad to have you back with me," he whispered, with a long kiss on her lips.

She closed her eyes under his kiss, while his moustache curled against her skin and his mouth pressed hers.

"Are you still tired?" he asked. "Would you like to rest a little?"

"Yes," she said. "I would like to get my things off."

"You'd better go to bed for a bit," he said. "Oh, by the way, I forgot to tell you: your friend, the princess, is coming here this evening!"

"Isn't Urania angry?"

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"No, I have told her everything and she knows about it all."

She was pleased to know that Urania was not angry and that she still had a friend left.

"And I have seen Mrs. Uxeley also."

"She must be angry with me, isn't she?"

He laughed:

"That old hag! No, not angry. She's in the dumps because she has no one with her. She set great store by you. She likes to have pretty people about her, she said. She can't stand an ugly companion, with no *chic*.... There, get undressed and go to bed. I'll leave you and go and sit downstairs somewhere."

They stood up. His eyes had a golden glimmer in them; his moustache was lifted by his ironic smile. And he caught her fiercely in his arms:

"Cornélie," he said, hoarsely, "I think it's wonderful to have you back again. Do you belong to me, tell me, do you belong to me?"

He pressed her to him till he almost stifled her with the pressure of his arms:

"Tell me, do you belong to me?"

"Yes."

"What used you to say to me in the old days, when you were in love with me?"

She hesitated.

"What used you to say?" he insisted, holding her still more tightly.

Pushing her hands against his shoulders, she fought to catch her breath:

"My Rud!" she murmured. "My beautiful, glorious Rud!"

Automatically she now wound her arms around his head. He released her as with an effort of will:

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"Take off your things," he said, "and try to get some sleep. I'll come back later."

He went away. She undressed and brushed her hair with his brushes, washed her face and dripped into the basin some of the toilet-water which he used. She drew the curtains, behind which the noonday sun shone; and a soft crimson twilight filled the room. And she crept into the great bed and lay waiting for him, trembling. There was no thought in her. There was in her no grief and no recollection. She was filled only with a great expectancy, a waiting for the inevitability of life. She felt herself to be solely and wholly a bride, but not an innocent bride; and, deep in her blood, in the very marrow of her bones, she felt herself to be the wife, the very blood and marrow, of him whom she awaited. Before her, as she lay half-dreaming, she saw little figures of children. For, if she was to be his wife in truth and sincerity, she wanted to be not only his lover but also the woman who gave him his children. She knew that, despite his roughness, he loved the softness of children; and she herself would long for them, in her second married life, as a sweet comfort for the days when she would be no longer beautiful and no longer young. Before her, half-dreaming, she saw the figures of children.... And she lay waiting for him, she listened for his step, she longed for his coming, her flesh quivered towards him.... And, when he entered and came to her, her arms closed round him in profound and conscious certainty and she felt, beyond a doubt, on his breast, in his arms, the knowledge of his virile, over-mastering dominion, while before her eyes, in a dizzy, melancholy obscurity, the dream of her life—Rome, Duco, the studio—sank away....

THE END

COLOPHON

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Corrections

The following corrections have been applied to the text:

Page	Source	Correction
16	a	an
19	give	gives
61	ttering	fluttering
102	grocchi	gnocchi
114	[<i>Not in source</i>]	"
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