

HEART OF STEEL.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

A Beautiful autumn day was shining over Paris, its brightness softly tempered by a delicate haze that draped the vista of the Champs-Élysées and removed the Arc de Triomphe to a region as visionary as the memory of the victories it recorded. So, at least, it appeared to Lester Stanhope, as he walked up the great avenue from the Place de la Concorde, his frame of mind pleasantly toned to unison with the loveliness of the day and the animation of the scene around him. It was a scene sufficiently familiar, yet which always pleased him afresh when he returned to it after an absence of some time. Other places might charm more deeply, might touch chords which the gay city of the Seine had no power to stir, but there was a mingling of attractions here which it seemed to him he found in no other place. Where else, indeed, does one so nearly touch the great pulse of humanity as in this brilliant capital, with its air of perpetual *fête*, its heart of smoldering fire? Yes, Paris pleased him—that is, it pleased his present mood, which was but one of many—as he moved onward with the tide setting toward the Barrière de l'Étoile. Every element of the scene entered into his enjoyment of it—the pearly sky and the soft effect of the receding vista, as well as the crowd flowing along the broad pavement under the yellowing chestnuts, the throng of carriages flashing toward the Bois.

He was himself aware of this, realizing from his observation of others that he was exceptional in the possession of a nature so many-sided that pleasure could flow in from a multitude of channels; and, without thanking God like the Pharisee that he was not as other men, he was grateful for the difference that insured to him so great an advantage over them. It was not the only respect in which Fortune had been kind to him. An American by birth, he had been spared the necessity of entering into that struggle for wealth which makes life in America at once so crude and so feverish. With tastes that inclined him to a life of leisure, he had inherited easy means, which enabled him to indulge these tastes; and he had spent his youth in a series of delightful wanderings, which had in no degree dulled his faculties of appreciation and admiration. On the contrary, so far was he removed from those who find their own shallowness reflected in the spiritual and material world, that existence seemed to him overflowing with sources of interest; and the eyes that looked out on the Champs-Élysées this autumn day were full of that genial observation which characterizes the true philosopher of life. He had done a little literary work which proved this—a few character-sketches, in which every stroke told like the touch of an etcher—but the work was of too fine and delicate an order to have received popular attention, or to have brought its author more than the careful praise of discriminating critics. His social success did not rest at all upon this basis. Indeed, few of those who knew him socially were aware that he had any pretension to be regarded as an *homme de lettres*. The quiet grace of his appearance and manner, the keenness of his intelligence, and the thoroughness of his culture were claims more easily appreciated. To his personal friends he was also endeared by a readiness of sympathy as sincere as it was unusual; and he was one of the people who exert an influence over all with whom they

come in contact, which strikes the outside world as disproportioned to their apparent importance. For the rest, he was thirty-six years of age, had a slender, well built figure of medium height, penetrating blue-gray eyes, a mouth which expressed firmness, without a touch of obstinacy, the forehead of a thinker, and the clear, straight nose which, says Lavater, “indicates refinement of character and love of the fine arts, together with a mind capable of acting and suffering with calmness and energy.”

As he advanced, many signs told him that other absentees besides himself were fluttering back to the asphalt pavements. Several familiar faces bowed to him from passing carriages, and he knew that he would be made welcome did he care to present himself in more than one drawing-room within easy reach. If there was any temptation in such a thought, it was perhaps betrayed when, in passing the Avenue Montaigne, he turned his head and glanced along that street. By one of those chances which occasionally surprise us, his glance met that of a lady who, seated in an open carriage, was driving directly toward him. She bowed, smiled, spoke to her footman, and the next moment the carriage drew up at the pavement beside him.

“So, Mr. Stanhope, you are back in Paris!” she said, leaning forward to give him a delicately gloved hand. “Why have you not been to see me?”

“For the very good reason that I only arrived in Paris this morning,” he answered. “Do you think I could possibly have been here long without coming to see if you were again installed in your familiar quarters?”

“I returned to them a week ago,” she said, “and I am glad to be back. No place suits me so well as Paris. I feel more at home here than anywhere else. I like the circle of people whom I have gathered round me; and I like—I can’t help liking—all the brilliancy in the outward aspect of things.”

“You speak in a very apologetic tone,” he said, smiling. “Why should you not like it?”

“I don’t know,” she replied, smiling in turn, “except that I fancied you might think it a culpable taste, indicating a low degree of culture, perhaps. You see I stand very much in awe of your opinion.”

“I see that you are inclined to be unkindly satirical. I am also sure that, if I condemned your liking for the brightness of Paris, I should condemn myself; for I have been thinking, as I walked up the Champs-Élysées, what a charming place it is—and I am more than ever of that opinion now,” he added, looking at the face before him.

It was certainly a very charming face—that of a lovely woman in the fully developed prime of her loveliness—a refined, expressive face, with a complexion of exceeding fairness and delicate bloom, beautiful violet eyes, and a rich abundance of sunny hair. She was most becomingly and harmoniously dressed, and her toilet, which would have delighted the eye of any man, would have told almost any woman two things: first, that she possessed great wealth; secondly, that, despite the serene composure of her manner, she was not indifferent to admiration, and would not be averse to homage.

“I did not know that you ever paid compliments, even by implication,” she replied. “But I am glad that Paris charms you, because it may keep you—at least long enough for me to tell you a dozen things that I have been treasuring for that purpose.”

“There is no danger that Paris will not keep me long enough for you tell me all those things, and many more besides. When may I come to see you, in order that we may make a beginning?”

“Can you take breakfast with us to-morrow, in our old pleasant fashion?”

“I shall be delighted to do so. Nothing is pleasanter than to take up such habits just where one dropped them.”

“I shall expect you, then. And, that being settled, I will not detain you longer—unless I may take you to your destination, if you have a destination besides promenading along the Champs-Élysées?”

“I have a destination; but, whether I can allow you to take me to it or not, depends upon what is your own.”

“Mine is the Bois merely.”

“Then, since you are so kind, you may take me to Numero —, Avenue du Bois de Boulogne.”

She drew aside her silken skirts, as the footman opened the door; and the next moment Stanhope found himself seated by her side, rolling up the avenue toward the great Arc which, as they approached, loomed clearer and more distinct against the soft blue sky.

“Numero —, Avenue du Bois de Boulogne!” she repeated. “It strikes me I know that house. Did not the Irvings have an apartment there?”

“Yes. It is to a lady who occupies the apartment of the Irvings, during their absence in America, that I am about to pay a visit.”

“So you are about to pay a visit—and not to me! Yet I fancied I was your chief friend in Paris.”

“Do not fancy, but be sure of it,” he replied, with a smile. “This is a visit in which there could be no more delay than in obeying a royal command—for what royalty is like that of misfortune? When I arrived this morning, the first thing which I did was naturally to send to my banker for letters. Among them was a note from a lady whom I have known long and well, telling me of her presence in Paris, and desiring to see me. You have often heard of her. She was once the Countess Waldegrave—she is now called Madame Lescar.”

“Indeed! Of course I have heard of her, but I have never seen her; and I fancied, somehow, that she was dead.”

“She has been dead to the world for several years. After her career as a singer in America ended, she came abroad—partly to educate her daughter; partly, I think, because she likes Europe, and can live here quietly and cheaply. She spends her winters in Italy and her summers in Switzerland. I have chanced to be of service to her several times—there is an hereditary friendship between our families—and now she calls upon me whenever she needs a friend.”

“I am sure she could not find a better,” said his listener. “And so she has a daughter! Ah, what a sad story it was! I always admired her pride in refusing to accept anything from the man who sacrificed her to his ruthless ambition.”

“You would admire much—perhaps all—about her, if you knew her.”

“And can I not know her? I like to meet interesting people as much as I dislike meeting commonplace ones.”

“It may be possible, and she is certainly worth knowing, for she is a woman who has borne great misfortunes with a noble spirit.”

“Say to her, then, if you think it worth while, that it would give me great pleasure to be allowed to make her acquaintance. You may add, as a claim on her consideration,

that my mother was Miss Sherwood, of Virginia, and that I often heard her speak of the beautiful Miss Lescar, whom she knew during her last, and the latter's first, season in Washington."

"I will make honorable mention of these things, and I do not think she will refuse to see you. To old friends—that is, to those connected in any way with her old life—she is, as I learned in my own case, very accessible t but, naturally, she shrinks from meeting strangers."

"I can readily fancy that. Has she come to Paris to remain for some time?"

"She has come to see a physician, and her stay will be of uncertain duration. She has not been strong since I have known her; but she was less so when I saw her last than ever before."

"Poor woman! How terrible it must be to her to think of the position in which her daughter will be left if she dies! What will become of the child?"

"She is no longer a child. Madame Lescar was married in '60, and this is '78. Her daughter is seventeen."

"So old as that! And what is she like? Has she her mother's beauty, her mother's charm?"

"Both, I think, with a brilliancy which the mother has not—which she inherits from her imperious and ambitious father. There is something very striking about her."

"It could hardly be otherwise. I have never heard but one opinion of the mother, while all the world knows what the father is. Ah! how can any one believe in earthly retribution who looks at that man? He has every gift of fortune that his soul covets—power, rank, wealth, the favor of his sovereign, the virtual government of a realm. He stands, as far as one can perceive, in the broadest sunlight of prosperity, while how deep is the shadow in which the woman he wronged has dwelt, and must continue to dwell!"

"Call no man happy till he dies," said Stanhope. "Retribution does not come in a day. Moreover, there is one thorn in Prince Waldegrave's triumph. The woman who is now called his wife brought him great riches and a noble name, but she has borne no children."

"And, like all men of his type, no doubt he would like to found a house. I am glad that he is disappointed—that there is one thorn beneath his splendor! I wonder—" she hesitated for a moment, "what the woman whom he flung out of his path has thought of that splendor? It was hard to be so near such a height and to be cast down so utterly—that is, if she be an ambitious woman."

"I do not think she is an ambitious woman. I should not judge, from my knowledge of her character, that she has ever regretted the loss of the exalted station of which she was robbed."

"Yet it is such an exalted station that even I, who am not ambitious, can imagine that it would be possible to regret it."

Stanhope looked with a smile into the fair countenance beside him.

"Shall I remind you," he said, "of the old counsel, 'Know thyself'?"

She met his glance with one of surprise. "Do you mean that you take me to be ambitious? For once, you are mistaken. If one is ambitious, one entertains willingly the thought of change; is it not so? But I like the position I occupy too well to desire to exchange it for any other."

"It is certainly an enviable position," ho said; "yet I think the time will come

when you will look upon it as only the stepping-stone to something more brilliant.”

“Do you? Take care! Prophecy is always unsafe—never more unsafe than when it concerns a woman.— *Oui, à gauche.*”

This to the footman—for they had now passed around the Place de l’Etoile, and were entering the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne. Turning, as indicated, into the upper roadway to the left, the carriage presently stopped at the gate of one of the houses which are situated there.

“I shall know where to come if Madame Lescar will receive me,” said the lady. “How glad I am to have met you! Do not forget to-morrow. Adieu.”

The next instant the gracious presence was gone, and Stanhope, looking after the carriage, said to himself with a smile:

“Does one never know one’s self? Does the vain man always fancy himself modest, the proud man believe that he is humble? It is not a bad rule in life to take for granted that we are just the opposite of what we esteem ourselves to be. No doubt she is sincere in thinking that she is not ambitious; and ambitions, in a vulgar sense, she is not. But of a character so flexile and adaptive the ideal woman of the world is formed. She ought to fill a great position; and there is no position, however great, that she would not adorn. Give her a month in a palace, and she would bear herself as if born to the purple!”

With this summary—and there was nothing he so much enjoyed as analyzing a character, and describing it for his own satisfaction in epigrammatic phrases—he turned and passed through an open gate into a court-yard, with buildings on three sides, and in the center a fountain round which shrubs and flowers were planted. To the right was a *porte cochère* opening on another street; to the left a flight of steps leading to a door which he entered, and, mounting a staircase within, rang the bell *au seconde*.

CHAPTER II.

The servant—a white-capped maid—who answered his summons, replied in the affirmative to his question if Madame Lescar was at home, and taking his card showed him into a small, pretty drawing-room. He knew the apartment well, for the absent Irvings often received their friends there in an informal fashion, and all the tables and cabinets and chairs seemed to his fancy to smile a welcome—as if saying, “Ah, you and we remember some pleasant hours!” The windows were open to the soft air of the delicious day, and before them lay one of the gayest scenes in all gay Paris—the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne in the full tide of its afternoon brightness. The great roadway was thronged with equipages, people were walking, equestrians were riding, and over the whole scene of animated movement the sunlight was streaming—that sunlight of Paris which seems to have in it the quality of champagne.

Like all persons who possess in any degree the artistic temperament, Stanhope was very impressionable to outward influences; but this picture did not affect him as that of the Champs-Élysées had done—probably because he was now under an influence which brought forcibly to his mind (what was never far from its realization) the depth of sadness which might underlie this glittering surface. He walked to one of the windows, but, before he had stood there more than a minute, a *porti ère* on the other side of the room was drawn back, and a lady entered.

A slender figure almost shadowy in its thinness, yet preserving the grace that

accompanies perfect proportion; a face with soft olive complexion, features as purely chiseled as those of a head on an antique cameo, and large, dark eyes of wonderful luster. The hair which crowned this face was of snowy whiteness, and, with something of the effect which is given by a powdered coiffure, it served to deepen and throw into relief the splendor of the eyes and the dark beauty of the finely finished brows and sweeping lashes.

“Ah, you have come at last!” she said in a voice of cordial eagerness, as she held out her hand. “I began to fear that it might be some time before I saw you.”

“I only reached Paris this morning,” Stanhope answered, “and have made haste to obey your summons. I am very sorry that it should have been so long in reaching me; but during the last ten days I have been on the homeward road, and my letters have not been forwarded.”

“I was sure that the delay was not yours,” she said, with an exquisite smile; “but I should have been none the less sorry if I had not seen you.”

“You are leaving Paris soon, then?” he asked, with some surprise.

“I may be leaving Paris soon, to go on a very long journey,” she replied. “But we will not talk of that now. I am so very glad to see you! Let us sit down.”

He had been holding her hand up to this point. Now he relinquished it, and, following her example, sat down, drawing his chair close to the sofa on which she sank.

Being thus on a level with her, he saw more plainly traces of physical suffering on the face which was none the less stamped with ineffaceable beauty. The cheeks were pale and sunken, but the nose was like a piece of fine carving, and, although there was something of the habitual compression which indicates habitual pain about the mouth, the lips were still lovely in outline. It was a very *spirituelle* face, gentle but also thoughtful, refined by suffering, and calm now with the supreme calmness of one who has passed through the stress and anguish of conflicts in which the soul wrestled with despair, and has come forth victor.

“Tell me what you have been doing since I heard from you last,” she said, kindly. “There is time enough to talk of my affairs—I feel at ease about them since I see you. Tell me first about yourself.”

This Stanhope was reluctant to do, and he would fain have passed over in very general terms the account of his summer in Norway; but her interest was keen, and she asked questions which obliged him to give many details of his travels. But at last he said, a little impatiently:

“You must not insist upon my talking of myself when there is so much that I wish to hear from you! Above all, I am anxious about your health—and you have not told me what the physicians think of it.”

“There is some news which it is not well to be in haste to hear,” she answered. “You will be sorry to learn that the physicians find no good to say of me.”

“Do they think you dangerously ill?” he asked, quickly.

She met his gaze with perfect calmness, and there was no change of countenance as she replied:

“They think me hopelessly ill—and that is why I wished so much to see you.”

“Good Heavens!” exclaimed Stanhope. He could say no more, but what he felt was written so plainly on his face that she extended her hand and touched his.

“There is nothing for which to be sorry,” she said, in a tone of sweetness.

“Believe me, I have no regret—none—except for Irène.”

He took her hand and kissed it before speaking. Then he said: “I can well understand that to you there is nothing to regret; but I can not believe this sentence. You must have other advice.”

She shook her head. “There is no need of other advice,” she said, “I was sure before the doctors spoke; but I saw two, in both of whom you will have confidence”—and she mentioned eminent names. “They were reluctant to tell me the truth; but, when I expressed my own belief, they acknowledged that I was right. Indeed, my lease of life is even shorter than I fancied. It is certainly measured by months; it may even be measured by weeks.”

Silence fell for a moment. What could Stanhope say? He was inexpressibly grieved, and, despite his forebodings, deeply shocked. But the time of deepest feeling is the time when speech is least possible. After an instant, it was Madame Lescar herself who spoke again:

“Since this is the case, I must put my worldly affairs in order without delay. “What I have already said, I repeat—I have but one regret in leaving life, and that is for my daughter.”

“No one can take your place to her,” said Stanhope, in a tone full of emotion; “but have you not friends and relatives?”

“I have a brother in America—the only one of my immediate family left—but he is in narrow circumstances, and burdened by a large family. I should not like to send Irène to him, even though she will be, moderately speaking, independent. Besides, I do not think she would remain there. So, why attempt to make an incongruous arrangement—one which could not last?” She hesitated for a moment, then added: “You do not know Irène. You can not tell why it is that for many reasons I am most anxious about her future.”

“I know her partially—and I can imagine your anxiety. What mother would not be anxious for the future of one so young, so beautiful—”

“And so desolate!” she said, as he paused. “Why hesitate to speak what is in my mind as well as in yours? But that is not all. Irène has a nature which makes me tremble. If I lived, I could control her through her affections, which are as strong as her passions. But after I am gone what will restrain her?”

There was so much subdued anguish in the tone of the last words that Stanhope was startled.

“What do you fear for her?” he asked, involuntarily.

“What do I not fear!” she answered. “What mistake is not possible to a girl so young, of beauty so great, of mind so independent, of will so strong, and feelings so intense? Can you, who have imagination as well as worldly knowledge, conceive a more dangerous combination of qualities? No!”—as Stanhope shook his head—“I am sure you can not. Then add to this that her knowledge of the wrong done to us, to her as well as to me, has had a deep, an almost transforming effect upon her character. Since she learned the truth—and, as she grew toward womanhood, I felt bound to tell it her—she has been a changed creature. She is, perhaps, even more passionately attached to me than before; but, of the depth of her resentment against the doer of the wrong, I can give you no idea. She is intensely proud—my poor child!—so you can imagine how she is stung by the thought of what she should have been, and what she is. Ah, I have suffered over again for

her all that I suffered for myself in the years of agony that are gone! And never before have I so clearly realized the fact that it is in the nature of wrong to perpetuate wrong, as when I see the strength of a character which should be so noble turned into bitterness.”

“But can she learn no lesson from you?” said Stanhope. “I should think such feelings natural if she had not before her eyes your example; if she did not see that, instead of suffering wrong to drag you down to bitterness, it has elevated and purified you.”

“If it has done so in any degree, remember that it has been after years of suffering, of tears and prayers unnumbered. She is so young—she has not yet suffered much; she has not wept many tears, and she has not learned how to pray, for most of us are such poor creatures that grief must teach us that. Then, she has a fiery element in her nature which was never in mine. I recognize in her many traits—of her father. She has his indomitable resolution, his ambition, and many of his intellectual qualities. But, thank God! she has not his selfishness, nor his hardness of heart. A more loving heart than hers does not exist; but as yet she has only loved her mother—and her mother must leave her so soon!”

For the first time her voice faltered, and two large luminous tears gathered in her eyes. She dried them quickly, and went on:

“Do not think, my friend, that this is idle talk; that I desired to see you merely to relieve my mind by pouring out my trouble. I have described my poor Irène because I want you to understand her character, in order to advise me with regard to her. I must leave her—there is no help for that—and, although I am sure that God will not forsake her, there are some arrangements for her future which I must make, in which there is scope for both wisdom and folly.”

“I will advise you to the best of my ability,” replied Stanhope. “You are sure of that.”

“Listen, then, to a brief account of my position. When I quitted America, I left there, safely invested, the sum of thirty thousand dollars, money that I made as a singer. On the interest of this we have lived in comfort, and I have educated Irène. If I had continued to sing I could have made more, but the life was so intensely distasteful to me that I left it as soon as I could feel assured that I had enough for our wants and her education. This small fortune I will of course, secure to her; but she needs for several years a trustee or guardian. Now, tell me frankly, am I asking too much of your friendship when I say, will you be that guardian?”

“Madame!” said Stanhope. He was exceedingly and not agreeably surprised. There was not probably in the world a man to whom the offer of such a responsibility could have been more unwelcome. It was opposed to every habit and every principle of his life; and, as an immediate instinct warned him, full of immense annoyance. Money to look after, when he did no more looking after his own than was strictly necessary; and a girl of the most dangerous dispositions to guide, or attempt to guide, and keep clear of the difficulties into which she was sure to rush! He foresaw unnumbered troubles, and it spoke much for the kindness of his heart, the depth of his sympathy, that he did not at once utter a decided negative. As it was, he said after an instant, “Pardon, but before I answer the question, permit me to ask, would not your brother be a more suitable person than myself?”

“No,” she answered. “My brother, as I have said, is overburdened with his own

affairs, and naturally has little interest to spare from his struggling family. Then, have I described Irène to such little purpose that you do not see that what she needs, and what I desire above all things to secure for her, is the control and guidance of a nature capable of comprehending and influencing her? Fancy such a character as hers, with her story and her training, placed among my brother's kind, commonplace children! Do you not see that she would break her bonds in a short time, and go away—to destruction, perhaps? No, it would never do! And so, my only hope is in you. I am poor in friends, but, were I rich in them, I should still prefer you for this trust to any one else in the world; for I have not only tested you—and I can not speak now of what I have found you!—but you possess, in the highest degree of any one whom I have ever known, the ability to read such a nature as Irène's, and the wisdom to guide it. I should feel safe if I left her to your care; but," she added, with a pathetic smile, "do not let my selfishness make you accede to my request if it would be too great a trouble."

These words overcame Stanhope's hesitation, and made him feel that anything was easier than to refuse a request which, granted, would give partial peace to the last days of this sad life.

"Do not speak of trouble," he said, earnestly. "I will do anything to serve you. Make me what you will. If I hesitated, it was because, though somewhat past the *beau garçon* age, I fear I am not yet old enough to undertake the guardianship of a young lady."

"I never thought of your taking personal charge of her," said Madame Lescar. "All I ask is that you will hold her fortune, and guide her life as far as possible. I must find a home for her—though where and with whom I know not. Have you thought of anything?"

This question was drawn forth by a start which Stanhope made, and by a sudden change in his face. In fact, an idea had occurred to him with the force of an inspiration—but he refrained from uttering it.

"A thought has suggested itself to me," he replied, "which I may tell you hereafter—if, on reflection, I decide that it is worth telling."

"I have implicit reliance on your judgment," she answered. Then she looked at him a little wistfully. "I fear your consent to my request has cost you something," she said. "If so, let it console you that you have given me great happiness. I shall sleep in peace to-night."

"I am not worthy of your kindness," he said, deeply moved; "but I shall spare no effort to deserve your trust. Believe that."

"I do believe it," she replied, gratefully.

There was a moment's pause—then Stanhope, seeing that her face had grown paler, said:

"I must not tax your strength further. But, before I go, let me say that, on my way here, I met a lady who has heard much of you, and who desires to be allowed to make your acquaintance. I think I may venture to promise that you will like her."

She shrank a little. "Even if I cared to make any new acquaintance," she said, "I am not strong enough to do so. Who is this lady?"

"Her name is Mrs. Falconer. She is an American, but the widow of an Englishman. She told me that her mother was a Miss Sherwood, of Virginia—who knew you in Washington, when you made your *début* there."

“Miss Sherwood!” repeated Madame Lescar, like one who searches memory for the association of a name. “Ah, yes—I remember. She was the daughter of one of my father’s friends and political confreres. She was older than myself, and was married, during my first season, to one of the representatives from Ken-tacky. And now her daughter is a widow! Surely time flies!”

“A very young widow. I do not think she can be more than twenty-five or six.”

“Certainly not more. And how did she chance to marry an Englishman? Was she an heiress?”

“A very great heiress. Her parents died in her early youth, and an uncle, who had made a large fortune in Colorado, adopted her, and placed her at the head of his household as his acknowledged heiress. She is very lovely, so you may imagine that she did not lack suitors. Among them was a young Englishman—one of those men of good family who have lately gone to the West in considerable numbers, in the hope of bettering their fortunes. This man was proved, by after-events, to be a *mauvais sujet* of the worst type; but he must have had a great outside polish and charm. He was handsome, accomplished, just the man to fascinate a girl with longings for a higher type of manhood than her experience furnished. She accepted him, subject to her uncle’s approval. Her uncle disapproving, but having no very valid reason for doing so, wrote to the family of the gentleman. They—pleased, no doubt, at the prospect of washing their hands of him in so satisfactory a manner—replied, with a statement of his past more rose-colored than true. Then Mr. Joscelyn (the uncle) put the suitor on probation. ‘I never do anything without a good reason,’ he said to his niece, ‘and I have no good reason for refusing to allow you to engage yourself to him; but I insist upon knowing what kind of a man he is before I let you marry him.’ This was a sensible precaution; but, unfortunately, the speaker died a month later. He had left all his fortune to his niece; and she soon bestowed herself and it on Mr. Falconer. She, who told me this, has never said much of what followed—but what did follow was the bitterest disappointment. She had married a man of the most dissipated and extravagant habits, whose God was self-indulgence, and who valued her only in proportion to the means which she brought for this self-indulgence. Like all men of his description, he had neither a heart to be touched nor a sense of honor to be roused. Immediately after their marriage they went to England, and there the girl learned fully in what manner she had wrecked her life. A few years of association with the man would have broken her heart and wasted her fortune; but, happily, he killed himself speedily by his excesses, and she was once more free. Then she took her life into her own hands. The family, who had deceived instead of warning her, were disposed to be exceedingly cordial, and to take so much American money under their warmest protection. But this protection she declined. She came to Paris, and here she has chiefly lived—growing more attractive every year, and so enamored of the freedom which has been restored to her that I hardly believe she will ever resign it again. But I fear I have wearied you with this long story?”

“No, I have been much interested,” replied Madame Lescar, with a faint smile.

“Tell your friend to come to see me. I may not be able to receive her; but she will take the chance, perhaps. Ah, how many forms of suffering there are! and who shall say which is worst? But now I must ask you to go—I feel that my strength is indeed exhausted.”

Regarding her with sudden self-reproach, he saw that her pallor had increased, and that she looked as if she might be about to faint. He rose at once.

“I can not leave you alone,” he said. “Shall I not summon some one?”

She pointed to a bell, then leaned back and closed her eyes, the dark lashes resting like a silken fringe on the clear ivory of her cheeks. “Touch that,” she said.

He touched it and went without another word. To the servant who, simultaneously with himself, appeared in the vestibule, he said:

“Madame is not well. Go to her at once.”

“Ah, madame has exerted herself too much,” replied the maid, with French freedom and a French shrug. “Mademoiselle has been very uneasy; and, listen!—she is already there.”

Indeed, through the only partially closed door of the salon Stanhope heard a soft rush of drapery, and a voice sweet and full of tenderness as a mother’s to an infant, cry :

“O mamma darling, why have you done this!”

He carried the sound of that voice with him into the outer world; and its sadness—suggesting all the certain desolation before this young and friendless creature—robbed the sunshine of something of its brightness.

CHAPTER III.

It was a little after noon the next day when Stanhope descended from a fiacre before the door of an hotel in the Avenue Montaigne, and, entering under the wide *porte cochère*, mounted to the first floor.

The servant who answered his ring admitted him into a corridor, where exotics in tall vases and large lamp-bearing statues of bronze on each side of a mirror like a sheet of crystal gave an impression at once of luxury and beauty. The foot sank soundlessly into the thick carpet which covered the floor, and, through the parted folds of heavy velvet *portières*, the glance passed into lofty and spacious salons. Turning from these, however, the man led the way down the corridor, saying:

“Madame is in her boudoir; she will receive monsieur there.”

It was not unfamiliar to Stanhope, the sanctuary into which he was then introduced, a room with furniture and hangings of soft India silk, and a wealth of comfort in the form of easy-chairs, couches, and cushions, with beautiful cabinets, mirrors in Venetian frames, low carved book-cases, well filled; a writing-table covered with every possible convenience for correspondence, and on the walls excellent aquarelles, interspersed with photographs of places and people, the last a collection of personal friends and literary celebrities. As the door opened, a lady rose from a chair beside the writing-table, and, putting down the morning “Figaro,” advanced to receive him. It was the lady of the Champs-Élysées, who was even lovelier in a becoming *toilette negligée* than she had looked when arrayed for the Bois.

“*Bon jour*, M. Stanhope,” she said, with a cordial smile. “I am delighted to see you—and here is Aunt Marion, who is as glad as I am to welcome you back again.”

“How do you do, Mr. Stanhope?” said an elderly lady, who, seated near a window, was busy with some netting. “I am certainly very glad to see you. Come and shake hands with me, for my rheumatism is troublesome again, and I rise with difficulty.”

“My dear Mrs. Vance, it is a great pleasure to see you,” said Stanhope, crossing the floor to shake hands as requested; “but I am very sorry to hear such a bad account of the rheumatism.”

“It is shameful of Aunt Marion to be suffering with rheumatism,” said Mrs. Falconer, “when I sacrificed a month of my summer to take her to Wildbad in the Tyrol for the hot baths; and she declared herself cured by them.”

“Improved, my dear,” said Mrs. Vance, tranquilly. “And I don’t feel at all overpowered by your sacrifice of a month, for I think you enjoyed Wildbad quite as much as I profited by the baths.”

“I enjoyed it very much,” said Mrs. Falconer. “The Tyrol delighted me. You know it, of course, Mr. Stanhope—what do you not know? Are you not afraid of exhausting this world before you are ready for another.”

“Not in the least,” replied Stanhope, with a smile. “I am half through the allotted term of man’s life, and I have not nearly half finished the world. The continents of Asia and Africa lie unexplored before me, to say nothing of Oceania.”

“We can not allow you to undertake the exploration of them just yet,” said Mrs. Falconer. “You are far too necessary to your friends. *A propos*, was your visit yesterday a success?”

“That depends upon how you would define a visit as a success. I found Madame Lescar at home, and it gave her pleasure, I am sure, to see me; but the visit was a very sad one, and I have not shaken off the impression of it yet.”

“Did you find her worse in health than you expected?”

“Very much worse. Two of the best physicians in Paris are agreed that there is no hope of her life.”

“How very sad! I have never seen her, but I am sorry.”

“Of whom are you talking?” asked Mrs. Vance, with that instinctive curiosity which the majority of people feel with regard to any one concerning whom there is question of death.

“Of a woman who has been famous in more ways than one during her life,” replied Mrs. Falconer. “Did you not hear Mr. Stanhope mention Madame Lescar?”

“I did. Who is Madame Lescar?”

“She is, properly speaking, the Princess Waldegrave.”

“Oh!”—the netting dropped from Mrs. Vance’s hands. “You mean her! —the unfortunate lady whom that German treated so infamously?”

“The same,” replied Stanhope. “You remember her, then?”

“I remember her unhappy story—who could forget that? But I never saw her, except once when she was singing in America. What a beautiful woman she was, and what a divine voice she had!”

“Divine, indeed!” said Stanhope. “No wonder that, with such a voice, and her beauty, and the knowledge of her wrongs, people went wild over her. Yet this public life, which would have been so great a triumph to almost any other woman, was a penance equal to walking over burning plowshares to her. There are some natures that shrink from publicity as from absolute suffering. Of just such fiber is this woman made. ‘Nothing nerved me to endure it but the thought of my child,’ she said to me more than once.”

“But, if she disliked publicity so much, why did she become a singer?” asked Mrs. Vance.

“I thought every one knew the reason,” answered Stanhope. “You remember her history, no doubt—that she was the beautiful only daughter of one of the most eminent statesmen and wealthiest gentlemen of the old regime of the South. A princess could not

have been more shielded from every breath of harsh fortune than was she who was to pass through such cruel suffering in after-life. She made her debut in Washington with brilliant success; and, after reigning as a belle for a few years, finally married one of the most ardent of her suitors—Count Waldegrave, who was then in Washington, attached to the embassy of his country. You know the sequel. Ability, ambition, and the favor of his sovereign, soon marked out an exalted career for the man who proved himself one of the first diplomatists in Europe. But it became apparent, and was signified royally, it is said, that his marriage was a mistake. He had but a small fortune, and he needed wealth. Miss Lescar had been a great heiress when he married her, but the war in America, which followed quickly on her marriage, ruined her father utterly. Apart from the loss of her fortune, Count Waldegrave found the religion of his wife a drawback to his public career. Her mother had belonged to one of the old French families of Louisiana, and the daughter, like herself, was a Catholic. The result was easily to be foreseen in a country where divorce is easy and all things possible to power. Count Waldegrave experienced no difficulty in having his marriage annulled on some pretext of informality. Certainly a more helpless creature than his wife could not readily have been discovered. She was in a foreign land, without friends or fortune. Her father had died at the end of the war—happily before he knew this last blow of Fate—and left an estate which was a wreck. Of course the man who sacrificed her to his ambition had grace enough to desire to secure to her a provision for life. This she refused. ‘Tell him,’ she said, ‘that there is no one in the world from whom I would not sooner take the means to live.’ But the decision left her almost penniless. Of all the bounteous gifts of Fortune, but one remained to her—the beautiful voice which it had been her father’s delight to have carefully and highly trained. With this she determined to win from the world enough for her own needs and her daughter’s education. She went to America and became a singer. You remember the *furor* she created, but you do not know how entirely she succeeded in her object. When she quitted America, she left thirty thousand dollars invested there, on the interest of which she has lived.”

“Ah, what a woman!” said Mrs. Falconer. “What a flower to have been crushed in the iron gauntlet of such a man!”

“Thank you for telling me the story, Mr. Stanhope,” said Mrs. Vance. “I remembered it; but vaguely, as one remembers what one has heard in fragments.”

“You know I am raconteur by profession,” said Stanhope, smiling at the recollection of the story which he told to Madame Lescar the day before. It seemed an odd chance which had made him to each of these women the historian of the other.

A few minutes later a servant drew back a *portiere* and announced breakfast.

“Surely this is the poetry of civilization,” said Stanhope when they had seated themselves around a table, sparkling with engraved glass and delicate painted china, in a room which charmed the eye by the harmonious beauty of all its appointments. “There is nothing that so marks our place in the scale of civilized beings as the degree of artistic refinement with which we surround the really humiliating fact that we must eat in order to live.”

“Do you think it an humiliating fact?” asked Mrs. Falconer. “We are made of body as well as spirit, and why should it humiliate us to be reminded of the truth?”

“Because we are so fettered by the necessities of this body, and because it vexes the spirit to feel that even its subtle emotions are in great measure dependent on the

quantity and quality of food which la *bête*, as De Maistre called it, is bound to consume.”

“I think it a very arrogant spirit, then, and properly punished. Come, don’t be so *spirituel*, but tell Gustavo what wine you prefer at *d’être*.”

The breakfast which followed was very pleasant, the conversation gay, sparkling, and cordial, for no one put Stanhope more at his best than this pretty and clever woman—they were so thoroughly sympathetic in tastes and opinions. To him, as to most men, a woman of masculine intellect was distasteful; but there was an altogether feminine quality in Mrs. Falconer’s *esprit*, which responded charmingly to his own. He had led her along many ways of culture which were his delight, and he felt, with regard to her, something of the pride of a discoverer, mingled with the admiration of a man for a lovely woman, and the fondness of a master for a clever pupil.

“And you enjoyed your visit to London?” he asked, presently.

“Yes,” she replied, “I always enjoy London—for a time, and that time the height of the season. Afterward, I like a month or so of English country life, and then I want to wing my flight to the Continent.”

“I think you were rather reluctant to wing your flight this year,” observed Mrs. Vance.

“Perhaps I was a little reluctant,” she said, with a smile that seemed inspired by pleasant recollections. “I went to Scotland with the Falconers—Sir George has a shooting-box there—and I found it very agreeable. The place is picturesque, and Lady Falconer has excellent discrimination in the selection of guests. A propos, Mr. Stanhope, do you know that your friend the Marquis de Châteaumesnil is her cousin?”

“Yes,” Stanhope replied; “his mother was English, and in tastes and training he is half an Englishman. He was going to London when we parted—you met him there, of course?”

“Frequently—and he, too, went to Scotland with the Falconers.”

“And have you learned to like him?”

“I do not know,” she answered, slowly. “I can understand all his fascination, for he is handsome, accomplished, and intellectual in no ordinary degree; but he belongs to a class that I know well in all their soulless, selfish epicureanism. And I am past, long past, the age to find any attraction in them.”

He understood what gave the vibrating thrill to her voice, what bitter memory was recalled in her words.

“I think,” he said, “that you misjudge the marquis, and I am sure that you are too kind and too reasonable to desire to misjudge any one. He has been guilty of many follies, but you should remember that he was born into ‘a world out of joint,’ inheritor of a political creed that closed to him every field for high ambition. And he is ambitious, with powers that would fit him to play a distinguished part in the world under happier auspices.”

“I grant you that is a hard fate,” answered Mrs. Falconer; “but need it have made him a *viveur des viveurs*—believing in nothing save the necessity for good manners, loving nothing save the pursuit of pleasure?”

“Is that how you have read him?” asked Stanhope, with a smile. “I gave you credit for more discernment of character.”

“I never gave myself credit for it,” she replied, with a slightly heightened color; “but I do not like to be guilty of injustice. Tell me, then, what I am to think of your

marquis. I know what is said of him in Paris and in London—nothing better, some things a good deal worse, than what I have expressed; but tell me what you know.”

“No,” Stanhope answered. “You must judge him for yourself. I know him as it is only possible to know a man with whom one has been associated in prolonged travel, with whom one has endured discomfort, hardship, even danger, and whom one has found to be brave, unselfish, and cheerful, through it all.”

“That is high praise,” she said.

“And deserved—yet it does not prevent many things that you have heard of him from being true.”

“He is one of the Legitimists who will accept nothing but Henri Cinq and the *fleur-de-lis*, is he not?” asked Mrs. Vance.

“He is a Legitimist—*cela va sans dire*,” answered Stanhope; “but, if it were possible for him to serve France, I am sure that he would do so, even though Henri Cinq did not sit on the throne. But it is not possible in the radical republic that represents France to-day, where anarchy and revolution are rapidly advancing toward some *d'énouement* more terrible, perhaps, than any the world has yet seen.”

“Good Heavens, Mr. Stanhope!” said Mrs. Vance. “You make me feel like running away!”

“So do not I,” said Mrs. Falconer, as she rose from the table. “I would stay if the ground sounded hollow beneath my feet. I like to see history made—to hear the stylus trace the leaf.”

“When they went back to the boudoir, Mrs. Vance considerably retired, leaving the two friends alone together, and then Stanhope found his opportunity to say:

“I have not felt at liberty to speak before of a matter on which I wish to consult you. What will you think when I tell you that I have bound myself to play the part of guardian—after a fashion, at least—to Madame Lescar’s daughter?”

“I think that you are a very amiable man,” replied Mrs. Falconer, “for I fear that it will entail a great deal of trouble on you. “What are you to do with a girl of—seventeen, did you not say?”

“The fact that she is a girl of seventeen is not the worst of the matter. Listen to the description of her character which her mother gives,” and he repeated in substance what Madame Lescar had said.

“It is easy to realize that she may be all that,” said Mrs. Falconer, when he had finished. “The very force which she has inherited from her father is arrayed against him. I begin to be more interested in the daughter than in the mother,” she added, with a smile.

“That is what I desire,” he said. “I want you to be interested in her. I want you to suggest, if you can, what is to be done with her. To send her to America is out of the question—yet, how and where in Europe is she to find a home?”

“Has Madame Lescar no friend—no woman friend—who would take charge of her?”

“I do not think that she has; indeed, I am sure that she has not. She hopes for a suggestion of some plan from me; and I feel absolutely incapable of making any.”

“This comes of playing Don Quixote,” said Mrs. Falconer, with a gentle laugh. “But I am really sorry for you—and sorry, too, for this poor lady, who sees death so near, and her daughter’s future so uncertain. I must consider the matter, and try to help you. What is the good of having friends if they do not help one in one’s difficulties? But I

should like, if possible, to see Miss Lescar, in order to judge what would be best for her.”

“That is easily accomplished. Madame Lescar desired me to say that she would be happy to know you.”

“Did she? The matter is simple, then. I will go to see her. Can you accompany me? You know *I* could hardly ask for the daughter, while it will be easy for you to do so—you, who are an old friend and future guardian.”

“I shall be delighted to accompany you,” said Stanhope, and the trite words had true meaning, for he really was delighted to find so valuable an ally.

Mrs. Falconer promptly rang the bell, and ordered her carriage.

“There is nothing like doing a thing without delay, when it is to be done at all,” she said. “We will go at once.”

CHAPTER IV.

When the two friends entered together the court which Stanhope had entered alone the day before, Mrs. Falconer said:

“Will you believe that I feel a little trepidation? Those words which you uttered yesterday recur to me, ‘There is no royalty like that of misfortune.’ I feel that I am about to see one who might say with Constance, ‘Here I and Sorrow sit.’”

“She might say it,” replied Stanhope, “but she does not, and therein lies a great difference. She does not pose in the least. I have always been particularly charmed by her simplicity and serenity. She is one to whom a great wrong has been done; but it has not sullied her with passion any more than with shame.”

“How you warm into enthusiasm when you speak of her!” said Mrs. Falconer, with a smile. “I wonder if I shall admire her as much as you do?”

“Hardly as much, because you will not know her as well; but you can not fail to admire her in exactly the degree in which you know her.”

They paused on the second *éage* as he spoke, and he pulled the bell of the door before them. It was answered by the maid, who, in reply to his inquiry for Madame Lescar, replied that madame was much better to-day, and would, no doubt, be charmed to see monsieur—and madame. Receiving their cards, she then opened the drawing-room door, and, after their entrance, closed it on them.

There was no long delay on the part of Madame Lescar. A moment later, the same *portiere* which had been drawn back the day before was again lifted, and she entered the room. To Stanhope, who was familiar with her graceful presence, it brought no new revelation; but the words “a beautiful woman” leave a wide margin to the imagination; and Mrs. Falconer’s had by no means prepared her for what she was to see. She had expected a wreck of past loveliness—one of those worn and faded countenances upon which pain and suffering had left their heavy footprints, amid what are called “signs of beauty”—and what she saw was a face which impressed her instantly with the feeling that it should not be left to die, but should be set on canvas in immortal tints to charm succeeding generations with its fairness, with the spell of its sweetness and its sadness.

“You see that I have not come alone to-day, madame,” said Stanhope, coming forward to meet her. “I have brought—or, to speak more correctly, I am brought by—Mrs. Falconer, who is anxious to know you.”

“I am very happy to make Mrs. Falconer’s acquaintance,” answered Madame

Lescar, with a smile. "The name which your mother bore was one of the most familiar of my youth," she went on, addressing that lady, "so I feel that I am welcoming one with all the claim of old friendship."

"I feel the claim as strongly as yourself," replied Mrs. Falconer, "for, although I lost my mother when I was very young, I had often heard her speak of you in terms of warm remembrance. I thought myself fortunate, then, to learn from Mr. Stanhope yesterday that you were in Paris, and to-day that your health would allow you to receive a visitor."

"It would hardly allow me to receive any other," said Madame Lescar. "But I rested well last night," she continued, looking at Stanhope with a glance which he understood, "and I am consequently stronger this morning than I have been for several days."

"I am not only glad, but relieved in conscience to hear it," he replied, "for I was haunted by the recollection of your face as it looked when I went away, and by the tone of Mademoiselle Irène's voice, which I heard after I left the room, and which seemed full of reproach for me."

"For me more likely," said Madame Lescar. "She watches me with the most jealous care, and scolds me for every imprudence. I have never yet had courage to tell her the truth," she added, in a lower tone.

There was a moment's pause; then Stanhope said, with a glance at his ally:

"May I not hope to see her? It has been nearly a year since I saw her last, and no doubt she has changed much in the interval."

"Not much, but somewhat, perhaps," answered Madame Lescar, "and certainly you can see her."

She rang a bell near her hand, and desired the servant who appeared, to request her daughter to come to her.

"I, too, shall be glad to see Mademoiselle Lescar," said Mrs. Falconer. "Mr. Stanhope tells me that she is very beautiful."

"I am afraid that she is," said Madame Lescar. "Do you wonder that I should say, 'I am afraid'?" she asked, as she caught the expression on the other's face. "I say so because a woman with any exceptional gift of mind or person is not so likely to have a happy lot in life as one who is commonplace."

"No doubt you are right," said Mrs. Falconer. "It is certainly true that commonplace women are generally happier than their more beautiful or more intellectual sisters. Yet, if the choice were given me, I do not think I would take happiness at such a price."

"No one willingly descends from a height," said Madame Lescar, smiling. "Yet happiness does not invariably fall *only* to the commonplace. I hope that you may find it," she added, kindly.

"I do not look for it," said Mrs. Falconer. "I shall be satisfied if I escape unhappiness. I am like one who has been shipwrecked. I do not care to sail over the sea in search of Treasure Islands—the risk is too great. I would rather remain quietly and contentedly on the shore, where nothing wonderful is likely to happen, but where one has all the minor pleasures of life, and the sweet recurrence of peaceful days and nights."

"You are a wise philosopher," said Madame Lescar. "And is this bright Paris the shore where you have elected to remain so contentedly?"

“For the present,” answered Mrs. Falconer. “Paris suits me—that is, I find more advantages here than anywhere else; and I am singularly free from ties to bind me to one place more than another. Yet it is not for what is most distinctively French that I like it, but because it is, in many respects, what it boasts of being, the capital of civilization; and hence one may find here a truly cosmopolitan society.”

“If France had but wisdom—if she did not seem doomed by the madness of her folly never again to know the blessing of a stable government—Paris might indeed become, in a wider sense than ever before, the capital of civilization,” said Stanhope. “But one can not build a capital on a volcano.”

“That is so true,” said Mrs. Falconer, “that I often find myself looking with wonder at the Parisians going their different ways of business and pleasure, as if such terrible subterranean fires were not smoldering beneath their feet; as if Montmartre, like a more deadly Vesuvius, did not hang over the city in continual menace.”

“They are accustomed to it,” said Stanhope. “It has always been a turbulent city, and the people have through centuries acquired their characteristic light-heartedness and *carpe-diem* philosophy.”

“I am often reminded—” began Mrs. Falconer, but paused abruptly in her speech, for at this moment the *porti ère* was again drawn aside, and a young girl entered.

A tall, graceful girl, slight with the slightness of extreme youth, but with remarkable dignity and stateliness of carriage. She was very simply dressed, but her high collar could not conceal the round, white fullness of her throat—the singer’s throat—which bore her head with an air of unconscious pride. The sensitive, finely-drawn face, with long, straight nose and thin, delicate nostril, was the type of face to express both fire and feeling in extreme degree. There was much likeliness to Madame Lescar, with much difference—less sweetness and more resolution in the curve of the lips, greater intellectual force on the broad, calm brow. Her complexion was fair and pale—a clear paleness, like that of alabaster. But the crowning beauty, and also the crowning mystery of the face, lay in the eyes, which were deep yet transparent, of that rare, limpid gray which has not a tint either of blue or hazel, fringed by dark lashes, and surmounted by dark, straight brows. Her hair, also dark, was of silken abundance, and, being simply braided and coiled, showed to the best advantage the classic shape of her head.

“Ma *Chérie*,” said Madame Lescar, as she entered with the gliding step, the gentle composed manner of a girl trained in foreign ideas of decorum, “come and let me present you to a lady who has been kind enough to remember that friendship should be hereditary, even in a strange land.”

“Though I am much your senior, mademoiselle, we belong to the same generation,” said Mrs. Falconer, taking the girl’s hand, “and, as your mother has said, friendship should be hereditary.”

Irène gave one straight, steady look into the face of the speaker before answering; then she said, simply:

“My mother’s friends are mine, and I am glad to know them.”

“Do not forget, then,” said her mother, “that here is one of our oldest and best—Mr. Stanhope.”

“Were you waiting for me to cry *peccavi* for yesterday’s transgressions, mademoiselle, before you would recognise me?” asked Stanhope, as she turned toward him.

“How did you know that I was angry with you yesterday?” she asked. “I was—very angry—because you staid so long! But mamma is so much better to-day that you are forgiven.”

“I am properly grateful,” he said, amused by the tone in which this forgiveness was accorded. “My own conscience reproached me for the length of my visit; but it had been so long since I saw your mother last that we had much to talk of.”

“But why had it been so long? Why have you not been to see us during the whole past year?”

“Are you not aware that other things besides inclination frequently determine our journeyings?” replied Stanhope—who had really no better reason to give than that a duty is apt to seem less insistent when viewed through the medium of time and distance.

“I thought that you had nothing to consult hut your inclination,” she said, with a look of surprise. “But pardon me,” she added, quickly, “I know that we have no real claim upon you; and, if I quarrel with you for not coming, it is only because your visits always gave mamma so much pleasure.”

“Do not misunderstand me,” he answered. “There can be no more real claim than such friendship as I entertain for your mother: hut it is possible to make for one’s self plans which have almost the force of duties. My winter was spent in Asia Minor, my summer in Norway. Yet I feel a regret that needs no intensifying that I did not, at any cost of convenience to myself, see Madame Lescar between the two Journeys. I meant to do so, but —what are we told?—that ‘procrastination is the thief of time,’ that ‘hell is paved with good intentions,’ and many like proverbs, true as if Solomon had uttered them.”

“Who accuses himself should be excused,” she said, with a softening of voice and glance. “Mamma would be vexed if she knew that I was making you either accuse or excuse yourself. She takes everything gratefully, and demands nothing. I shall never be like her in that! You see that I demand at once.”

“I see that one thing which I have gained by my inexcusable absence is the ability to perceive with what a bound you have passed from girlhood—nay, from childhood, for what were you but a child, last year?—into womanhood.”

The swiftest possible change came over her face at his words—a change that made him realize the singular mobility of her countenance. It might have been another face altogether—a face both proud and sad—that looked at him as she answered:

“Yes, I was a child last year—but that is over. In a day, childhood closed for ever behind me. But I can not talk of this! Tell me what you think of mamma. Do you find her very much altered? Do you think her very ill?”

Fortunately for Stanhope, he was spared an answer to these questions. Before he could reply, Mrs. Falconer turned from Madame Lescar, with whom she had been talking.

“Mademoiselle,” she said, “your mother thinks that you might like a drive in the Bois this lovely afternoon. My carriage is at the door. Will you come with me?”

“You are very kind, madame,” answered Irène, with evident reluctance; “but I do not think it is possible for me to go—to leave my mother—”

“Go, *mon enfant*,” said Madame Lescar. “There is no reason why you should not leave me for so short a time. Mrs. Falconer kindly offered to take me, but I do not feel equal to the exertion. You must go and enjoy the pleasure for us both.”

The girl was too well-bred to make any further demur. “Since you are so good I

will prepare myself," she said, and, rising, left the room.

In a few minutes she reappeared, dressed with that perfection of quiet simplicity which French taste ordains for a *jeune fille* and at her entrance Mrs. Falconer rose.

"If you will allow me, I shall see you soon again," she said to Madame Lescar, "and another day I hope that I may be more fortunate in inducing you to accompany me. A half-hour's drive in the quiet parts of the Bois would surely not injure you?"

"Another day, then, I may go," she replied. "Meanwhile, thank you for taking Irène. The poor child has few recreations, and only goes out for her walks with Nathalie."

There were a few more words—pleasant and cordial on both sides—and then Mrs. Falconer turned to Stanhope. "Are you coming with us?" she asked.

"I shall have the pleasure of putting you into the carriage," he replied. "I see that I must bid madame adieu—for Mademoiselle Irène is watching me with jealous eyes."

"I am afraid that if you stay you will make mamma talk too much," said Irène.

Madame Lescar smiled, but did not bid him stay. She only detained him for an instant to whisper:

"I like her very much. Ah! if Irène may but win such a friend."

"It is what I hope," he answered.

CHAPTER V.

"So we can not tempt you, Mr. Stanhope," said Mrs. Falconer, when, after having put them into the carriage, he closed the door.

"You tempt me," he answered, smiling, "but I must not yield to the temptation. I have an engagement for this afternoon; and, even if I had not, I could hardly bring myself to disturb what ought to be a purely feminine tête-à-tête."

"Adieu, then," she said, understanding him. "Remember that to-morrow evening I am at home."

As the carriage drove off, Mrs. Falconer smiled a little to herself over the impulse which had prompted her to undertake the task of drawing out the girl beside her. It did not seem quite so easy a task as she had imagined it would be, when she glanced at the young face in its pale, clear-cut repose. Woman of the world as she was, she felt a hesitation in opening the conversation; and, when she spoke, her choice of a subject was certainly not liable to objection on the score of originality.

"You have been some time in Paris, mademoiselle?"

"Only a month at present," Irène answered. "But I have been here often before."

"You know it well, then?"

"I do not think that any one could know it less," the girl replied, "unless to know a place it is sufficient to be acquainted with the appearance of a few of its streets. Of course, I have seen few people."

"Ah! the life of a demoiselle here is different from what it is in America—that land of social liberty," said Mrs. Falconer. "I confess that I should not like to be a girl in France."

"It seems natural if one has never known anything else," said Irène. "I was too young when I was in America to know much of its customs, and I have not seen many Americans. Indeed, the only one I know is Mr. Stanhope."

"You have seen a great deal of him, have you not?"

“Mamma has known him for a long time. He has been very kind to her, and she likes him exceedingly.”

“Everybody likes Mr. Stanhope,” said Mrs. Falconer. “He is rather a remarkable man in impressing his friends with a sense of his sympathy and trustworthiness. And then, he is extremely clever.”

“He must be clever,” said Irène. “His books show how keenly he looks at life and character.”

“So keenly that most people are afraid of him,” said Mrs. Falconer. “I am a little afraid of him myself,” she added, smiling.

“Afraid of him—you!” said Irène, with surprise. Then she, too, smiled. “I suppose you are jesting. I can not imagine that you are really afraid of any one.”

“In a literal sense, perhaps not,” answered Mrs. Falconer. “But can you not understand such a feeling for one whose opinions are worth more than your own, whose tastes are fastidious, and whose standard of culture is high?”

The girl shook her head. “I can not understand being afraid of even the cleverest man in the world,” she said.

“You have not much veneration, I fancy,” said Mrs. Falconer.

“No one could feel the spell of genius more than I do,” Irène answered; “but I can not efface myself before it. I have my individuality, just as Dante had his.”

Mrs. Falconer looked at the proud young face, wondering how far this was the voice of conscious power.

“You are right,” she said then. “But, to return to our mutton, I am surprised that you like Mr. Stanhope’s books. When one is very young, one is inclined to enjoy romantic pictures of life rather than delicate studies like his.”

“It is because they contain so little romance that I like them,” the girl replied. “I want to know life as it is; not life as one might dream or fancy it.”

“You will know life as it is soon enough, without desiring to anticipate the knowledge,” said Mrs. Falconer. “It is a pity when youth throws away too early its dreams and fancies. They are like the mists that soften this landscape,” she added, smiling, as the carriage paused at the end of the lake. “I always stop here for the view,” she went on; “there is something delightful to me in the wide expanse of this scene—those hills and woods and shining villages beyond the Seine.”

“Ah!” said Irène. “This must be the view that always strikes me like a poem as I come through the Arc de Triomphe—a high, distant scene, on which clouds and sunshine lie enchantingly.”

“This is it—those are the hills of Meudon and Suresnes, and yonder is the park of St. Cloud. Of course you have been there?”

“Never. I thought the Prussians destroyed it—that there was nothing left.”

“They burned the chateau, but the park is uninjured, and the garden also. Do you like such places?”

“Like them!”—the expressive face lit up as by a flash. “I like nothing so much as places where the great drama of history has been played—where those who are mere names to us now have walked and talked, bowed, smiled and intrigued!”

“Then would you care to go to St. Cloud? We have time enough to do so this afternoon.”

“I would like nothing better. Only”—the face changed again—“I am afraid I

should be too long absent from mamma.”

“I do not imagine that your mother needs you,” said Mrs. Falconer, “and I am sure that she would like you to go. We shall not be long.—St. Cloud, Henri.”

So they rolled away through the park, out on the great high-way, past the famous course of Longchamps, by the side of the Seine, with the sky and the clouds and the village-crowned hills of the opposite bank reflected in its clear water, past boats filled with people, past pleasant villas and country-houses, until they crossed a bridge and the high-stepping horses carried them up the steep, stony hill of St. Cloud to the front of the ch^{âteau}.

“I am superstitious enough to believe,” said Mrs. Falconer, after they had alighted, as they stood in the court-yard looking at the empty shell of the once stately palace, “that the day of the Bonapartes is finally over. The Tuileries and St. Cloud were peculiarly associated with them—were the two spots between which the courts of both emperors vibrated—and behold them! Does it not look like the handwriting on the wall?”

“But there were other places associated with them,” said Irène—“Fontainebleau, for instance.”

“Not so much with their splendor, with the arrogance of their power. Remember, it was at St. Cloud that the *coup d' état* of the 18th Brumaire was effected! However, who can prophesy the future of France? This way—we will go round, and enter the garden.”

They entered the lovely old pleasure-ground—the sunshine streaming over its turf, its statues gleaming, its waters as tranquil as when Henrietta of England trod its paths, as when Marie Antoinette saw her fair face reflected in those still depths. Talking of the scenes that had been enacted here, of the people that had passed into shadows, they walked about the wide parterre, looked into the beautiful park that tempted to wanderings for which they had not time, and listened to the sound of a bugle that seemed to come like an enchanted echo from the far depths of its woodland recesses.

“It may be some ghostly company of the soldiers of Henry of Valois,” said Irène, smiling. “Should you not like to meet one of them, and hear what he had to say of turbulent Paris?”

“I fancy it would not differ very much from what might be said to-day,” replied Mrs. Falconer. “But *you* must have met some one of the kind, or else you have a wonderful imagination in dealing with the past.”

“I am only very fond of history, especially French history,” the girl replied. “It is like a marvelous pageant, full of the most splendid dramatic effects. What nation has such a list of heroes—from Vercingetorix to Bayard! I often wonder what the French of the present day are made of, that they can be so indifferent to their past, when, even to me, a stranger, it has such thrilling interest.”

“What they are made of?” repeated Mrs. Falconer. “Nonsense, I think—the most of them—with as much idea of the glories of the past as the tadpoles from which, advanced science tells them, they have sprung. The France of to-day is simply an *ouvrier* in the palace of kings. But, since you find so much in these palaces, you should see them all. Have you been to Versailles and Fontainebleau?”

“I went once with mamma to Fontainebleau, but I have never seen Versailles.”

“Then you must do so. I think one hardly knows what a palace is until one has seen Versailles. Should you not like to go there some day?”

“Yes, I should like it exceedingly. But it is not possible—I could not leave

mamma for so long a time.”

“You could surely leave her for a day, and one can see Versailles in a day.”

“I should not like to leave her even for a day,” said Irène, with a troubled look. “You do not understand how ill she is. I fear, sometimes, that I do not altogether understand myself. She has had several alarming attacks, and the doctors look so grave! I am afraid to go out, even like this; I do not know how ill she might become while I am away. And, without her, nothing has power to give me pleasure. She is the sun of the world to me!”

There was a pathetic fervor in these words which would have touched Mrs. Falconer, even if she had not known the sorrowful truth—the truth which, in its utmost sorrow, was yet veiled from the speaker. For a moment she was so moved with compassion that she could not reply. Then she said, gently:

“I would press nothing that is painful to you, but, if it is true that your mother needs your care, it is true, also, that you can not maintain your health without exercise and recreation.”

“I go to walk every day.”

“That may be exercise, but it is certainly not recreation; and you need the latter as much as the former. Therefore, pray, do not refuse such a simple pleasure as I offer you; do not deny your mother the gratification of thinking that, for a little time, your mind is diverted from sadness and anxiety.”

“It can never be that while she grows no better,” said Irène, sadly. “But there is not anything I would not do to gratify her.”

“Then do this,” said Mrs. Falconer. “You will gratify her, and give me pleasure.”

The young face turned toward her with a wistful look on it that she had seen once before.

“You must not think that I am ungrateful for your kindness,” the girl said, “if I ask, why should it give you pleasure? What am I to you?”

“I am afraid,” answered the lady, smiling, “that you do not give the weight you ought to your mother’s saying that friendship should be hereditary. I do not know you yet—though I think frankly, that I shall like you—but are you not aware that your mother has always, from her earliest girlhood, won a peculiar tribute of admiration and affection from all who knew, and even from those who only heard of her, and are you too proud to accept kindness—if you choose to call it so—that springs from regard for her?”

She touched a chord that responded at once. The beautiful eyes grew luminous, the sensitive lips quivered for an instant.

“I would rather accept kindness that springs from regard for her than anything whatever that was given to me personally,” the proud, sweet voice answered. “If I have pride, it is for *her* alone. And I”—the tones trembled—“I can not tell you what I feel for those who, even in her misfortune, see and know her for what she is.”

Mrs. Falconer laid her hand with a gentle touch on the arm next her.

“They are blind and very contemptible people who can not look below the mere accidents of life,” she said. “And although it seems trite to say that misfortune is a test to determine true gold from base metal, I have never felt so sure of it as in the case of Madame Lescar. So now,” she went on, anxious not to pursue a painful subject, “you must consent to let me cultivate your acquaintance a little.”

“You are very kind—you are more than kind,” said the girl with a grateful

glance. "I will do whatever you like; only, pray do not ask me to leave mamma too much."

"Trust me," said Mrs. Falconer. "I will ask nothing you need hesitate to grant. But we must have that day at Versailles, and we will take our good friend Mr. Stanhope with us. Now come this way—let us see the view from the terrace."

They mounted a flight of steps, and, following a long alley with close-clipped hedges on both sides, emerged finally on the broad terrace which commands a magnificent view of the distant city. Over the rich valley, where the Seine winds like a silver ribbon, the eye passes to rest on the immense extent of the great capital of modern civilization. On this afternoon the wide expanse of its roofs, the multitude of towers and spires and monuments were distinctly revealed in the clear golden air—a sight that made Irène hold her breath as she gazed. Never before had she so comprehensively beheld this wonderful Paris, or so felt the weight of all its thronging associations. Fresh as if she had yesterday sprung, like Aphrodite, from the foam, how far back does her history extend—this town of Clovis, of Charlemagne, of St. Louis, and of Henri Quatre! The massive towers of Notre Dame, with their memories of seven centuries, uplifted themselves from the island where the wild tribe of the Parisii first made their home; above the crowded houses of the *Quartier Latin* rose the hill of St. Geneviève, with the spire of St. Etienne du Mont marking the shrine of the shepherd-girl who once saved Paris; and, dominating palaces and gardens and those far-stretching quarters whence the hordes of Revolution and of Commune pour into the world of glittering boulevards and Elysian Fields, gleamed the gilded dome of the Invalides above the tomb of Europe's second Attila, while from end to end the great city seemed to flash into a magic illumination as the sun sank toward the fortified crest of Mont Valérien.

"It was this scene which Metternich saw when he was here after Waterloo," said Mrs. Falconer. "I was reading the passage in his 'Memoirs' the other day. 'Seeing,' he says, 'the immense city still brilliant with all its towers and spires in the setting sun, I said to myself, "This city and this sun will still greet one another when there are no longer any traditions of Napoleon and Blücher, and least of all myself."'" "No doubt it will be true. A thousand years hence this city and this sun will still greet one another, while we—*Eh bien!* let us go home! It is growing late, and I doubt if Metternich found the reflection cheerful."

CHAPTER VI.

When Stanhope entered Mrs. Falconer's salon the next evening, he found a company assembled which fully justified that lady in saying that she liked Paris because she could there command a cosmopolitan society. A cosmopolitan society it certainly was, comprising almost as many nationalities as guests, but a notable and very agreeable society also. Without being in the least a lion-hunter, nor tolerant any more than a duchess of Bohemianism in any form, she had a passion for cleverness and a peculiar gift in discerning it. "I care nothing for merely famous people," she often said. "Many famous people are very tiresome. What I care for are people worth knowing."

"In short, what you want is sublimated society—dullness and mediocrity weeded out," Stanhope would answer, laughing. "I fear such an ambition must always remain unrealized."

He was fain to confess, however, that she was sometimes very near realizing it. The people who filled her salon were, generally speaking, people worth knowing—and people who, having been there once, found it pleasant to go again, and yet again. For she was a woman admirably fitted to be the center of such a circle; adaptive, versatile, with instinctive tact and constantly widening worldly knowledge, she added to these things a personal charm which, in its effect, can hardly be overrated.

A murmur of well-bred conversation filled the large salon with its rich tones of color, its soft wax-lights, and animated groups, when Stanhope entered. Many familiar faces at once greeted his sight, and as he moved from one to another he felt all the pleasure that lies in social intercourse after months of deprivation of it.

“Monsieur Stanhope, I am enchanted to see you,” said a sparkling French lady, holding out her hand as he drew near where she sat, talking with a man whose rugged head and face expressed intellectual force in the highest degree. “And you are just in time to give me assistance, for here is Monsieur Godwin attempting to overthrow all my most cherished idols.”

“Did you not know that he is an iconoclast, madame?” asked Stanhope, exchanging a greeting with the rugged-faced man. “he has a hammer like that of Thor, with which he strikes right and left, demolishing all one’s favorite beliefs. He does not demolish any of mine, however, for the very good reason that I never let him know what they are.”

“For the better reason that I doubt whether you know yourself,” said the iconoclast. “I don’t care to waste blows on shadows: men like you have no beliefs.”

“I think I have a few,” said Stanhope, modestly, “but I do not preach a crusade in their behalf. I am not sufficiently assured of my own infallibility. You never doubt yours.”

Godwin laughed. “Perhaps not,” he said. “Madame la Baronne will agree with me, that a fallible teacher is no teacher at all.”

“*Cela d’épend*,” said Madame la Baronne. “You do not mean that you can not err?”

“So far from that, I only mean that I do not teach.”

“Like a Nihilist,” said Stanhope, “he destroys, but he does not rebuild.”

“I do not destroy everything,” said Godwin. “I have a few beliefs, for which—I think—I would go to the stake.”

“You are quite the stuff of which martyrs are made,” said Stanhope; “but you are also of the stuff to make martyrs.—Let us be grateful, madame, that he has not the power to send us to the stake.”

“*Ma foi*, yes,” said madame, shrugging her pretty shoulders. “I confess I have no ambition to wear the crown of martyrdom.”

“There are certainly other crowns more becoming to your brows,” said Godwin, with a politeness that veiled his sarcastic meaning.

Then he rose, and, with a gesture of the head like that of a lion shaking his mane, walked across the room toward Mrs. Falconer. She saw him approaching, and made a slight gesture of dismissal to a young man standing by her—a graceful, brown-eyed young fellow, known to all *habitués* of the house as her distant cousin, and also as the petted favorite which women often like to make of men younger than themselves.

“Go and talk to Mrs. Percy, Lionel—I think she looks a little bored by Count

Schewndorf," she said.—"And do you, Mr. Godwin, sit down here and talk to me. See how kind I have been to you," she added, as he obeyed, "for I have sent away poor Lionel, with whom I know you have scant patience."

"Patience is certainly not my *forte*," said Godwin, "especially not with gentlemen of the type of Mr. Lionel Erne. I have respect for the poorest character that has in it the salt of sincerity, but none for the cleverest talent that tricks itself out in borrowed plumes."

"As a general rule, I agree with you," said the lady; "but you are too uncompromising in the expression of your opinions."

"You have preached the *suaviter in modo* to me for a long time," said he, looking at her kindly, "but I am made in too rugged a mold ever to learn it. Bears can not be transformed into greyhounds."

"No ; but bears can be gentle with greyhounds," she replied. "That is all I ask. Men like you are too prone to think that strength gives you a right to ride rough-shod over the weakness of others."

"I do not think that I feel it," said Godwin. "For weakness I have pity, if not respect; but for pretense I have neither pity nor respect."

"And how dare you presume to judge always what is pretense?" asked she, rousing a little. "Mr. Godwin, I have often heard of intellectual arrogance: I see it in you."

"Do you?" said Godwin, with a laugh. "Well, it may be so. I am a bear, certainly, and not likely to change even for you, I am afraid."

"You are a bear with a good heart," said she, laying her fan lightly on his arm; "and you should not belie your heart so often."

He looked down at the pretty painted toy, which seemed, in its delicate perfume and grace, a part of herself.

"By such things are men swayed!" he said, as if to himself. Then he added, with a smile: "To show you that even bears are susceptible to flattery, I will promise not to be hard on your *prot ég é*—the young gentleman who plays with 'advanced' ideas on all the great problems of humanity as if they were a set of intellectual toys devised for his amusement."

"He is young," she said, apologetically, "and of course all clever young men—unless they have some better anchor for thought than he has—go with the current of their age. Instead of bestowing merely a word or two of ridicule, why do you not seriously refute some of his theories?"

"Nay," said Godwin, curtly, "that is not work for me. I fight the leaders, but as for refuting every stray disciple, every boy who has merely caught the jargon of the different schools—good Lord deliver me! There have been fools from the beginning, there will be fools to the end, but spearing them is poor sport."

"You are incorrigible," said she, smiling. "I shall waste no further expostulation on you. Tell me what you are doing— what work, I mean?"

"Just now," he answered, "I am preparing a series of papers on 'The Political and Social Aspect of Russia.' I spent five months in the country, to observe for myself, and, though five years would hardly suffice for the work of thorough observation, still I had learned the language, I had many influential acquaintances, and I was perfectly free from prejudice. I had no more sympathy with the Russophobists than I had belief in M. Karl

Blind and his friends. I went to see what one intelligent, unprejudiced man could discover for himself, and I shall profess to tell no more than that to the readers of my articles.”

“I shall look for them with eagerness,” she said; “but, meanwhile, can not you, who often crystallize so much into a brief phrase, tell us what was the result of your observation?”

“Pray do, M. Godwin,” said a Roumanian countess, who, attracted by the word Russia, had drawn near to listen.

Then Godwin lifted his lion-like head, for a German diplomate came up also, and he liked nothing so well as an audience. He was an admirable talker, brilliant and powerful, with a manner hardly less trenchant than his written style—a style which often made even those who did not agree with his argument cry, “Heavens! with what force the man writes!”

He talked now with equal force, and the diplomate, taking fire, began to combat some of his conclusions. The countess, eager for the fray, chimed in, taking issue now with one, now with the other. Those around began to listen. Scenes like this were common in Mrs. Falconer’s *salon*.

At last Godwin ended it by rising abruptly. “I have given you so much of the kernel of my thoughts,” he said, “that I am afraid you will not care much about the shell of them when they appear in print. Remember that I do not expect either the partisans of revolution or the apologists of the government to agree with me. I condemn both, and I have sympathy for both. The oppressions are undoubted, and the difficulties that beset the government are gigantic. It is an impressive spectacle which that great nation presents—throwing off the fetters of barbarism and struggling toward the light of civilization, the while rent and torn by the *duel à mort* of two deadly enemies, an irresponsible autocracy and a wide-spread secret society committed to the most destructive aims, and seeking them in the most dastardly manner.

“But,” he went on, warming again, “the Russian people possess two great levers for good, did a wise ruler know how to use them—their deeply rooted sentiments of devotion and loyalty. Though the national church is sunk in the depths of ignorance and corruption, the mass of the people retain religious faith; and, though the rulers grind them like powder, they still call the Czar their father. But ‘Heaven is high and the Czar is far,’ says their native proverb; and if Heaven and the Czar can not be brought nearer, the day which will see the double burial of faith and loyalty is not distant. And when the masses hearken to those who cry, ‘Dreamers, there is no heaven: arise! let us possess the things of the earth,’ *then* the Romanoffs may take heed, and on that day there are other thrones that will tremble also, M. le Comte.”

The next moment he had quitted the *salon* leaving Count Schewndorf in the act of shrugging his shoulders.

“A singular man!” he said. “If he is neither for the government nor for the people, what is he?”

“He is a free-lance,” answered Mrs. Falconer. “He says to rulers, ‘Here are your blunders!’ and to the people, ‘There lies madness!’”

“The task of critic is an easy one,” said the diplomate; “but to say, ‘Here are your remedies’—that is more difficult.”

“A countryman of yours, is he not?” asked the countess of Mrs. Falconer.

“Oh, no,” she answered. “He is an Englishman—from what you call the North

Country, do you not, Mrs. Percy?—and has made a great success as an essayist, political and social.—Count Schewndorf, you read the English journals, I know; did you see in a late ‘Nineteenth Century’ his paper on ‘Phases of Modern Thought’?”

Before Count Schewndorf could reply, a new-comer entered the *salon* —a slender, handsome man, with a lofty ease of bearing that sat well upon him. His finely shaped head was covered with dark, close-clipped curls which were thinning away from the temples; his face was boldly and clearly cut, and his dark, thoughtful eyes were so deep-set that they looked smaller than they were in reality. Diffused over him, like a perfume, was the nameless charm which distinguishes in such high degree the French gentleman and his manner had the simplicity and grace of the finest breeding.

“I am charmed to welcome you back to Paris, madame,” he said, bowing over Mrs. Falconer’s hand, “and you perceive that I lose no time in giving myself that pleasure since I had my first glimpse of you in the Bois this afternoon.”

“I have not been many days in Paris, M. le Marquis,” she answered. “But you—I fancied you still in Scotland. At least, Lady Falconer mentioned in her last letter that you were at Glenrochan.”

“I am afraid Lady Falconer can not be a very good correspondent,” he replied; “or else her letter must have been long in reaching you, for I left Glenrochan several weeks ago.”

“How stupid of me to forget that the letter followed me from the Tyrol!” said she, with a smile. “But you see I realize the attractions of Glenrochan so strongly that nothing is easier for me to imagine than the possibility of any one’s remaining there indefinitely.”

“Yet you went away,” he said; and, though the words were simple, the accent was expressive.

“There comes a time when one must leave even the most charming place,” she answered.

“There comes a time, unfortunately, when one is ready to leave even the most charming place,” he said. “Glenrochan is no exception to the rule.”

“Were you, then, ready to leave it?” she asked. “I know that *ennui* is the fiend that lies in wait for you in most places; but I thought Glenrochan might have proved an exception. The shooting there is very good, is it not? And I have heard that you are *de premiere force* in matters of sport.”

“I have given much time to sport, and derived a good deal of pleasure from it,” he replied. “But my taste for it is intermittent —subject to sudden and almost total eclipse. My English friends think that is because I am a Frenchman—but I think differently.”

“And if I may be permitted an opinion,” she said, “I think that it is because your tastes might perhaps be known under another name.”

“And that is—”

“Caprices.”

“Ah, madame, *quelle injustice!* What have I done to give you such an opinion?”

“It is rather what you have said than what you have done, so far as I am concerned,” she answered. “I have heard you speak of liking many things by turns, and nothing long.”

“I fear I must plead guilty to that charge,” he said. “But there may be an explanation besides caprice. Almost every one has more than one side to his nature. I

have been blessed, or cursed, with many; and sometimes one is uppermost, sometimes another. To-day one order of pleasures attracts me, to-morrow another. Can you wonder that my tastes do not remain fixed during these changes?"

"Perhaps not," she replied; "but such a character must be a great misfortune."

"I am not sure of that. It enables one to taste a number of varied interests, and it saves one from finding life hopelessly dull when any of them fail."

"But at what a cost!" she said. "You are never certain that what you like to-day may not disgust you to-morrow. You can never be sure of yourself, and others can never be sure of you."

"That is a complaint which I am happy to say my friends have never made," he answered. "There are a few points on which I do not change. But there is no stupidity greater than the stupidity of talking of one's self I Pardon me, and let me ask what you have been doing since we parted?"

"You wish to make *me* commit the stupidity of talking of myself?" she asked, with a laugh. "I can not fall into such a palpable trap. And, fortunately, here comes Mr. Stanhope, whom I hardly think you have seen since his return to Paris."

The Marquis had not seen Mr. Stanhope since his return, and the meeting between the two was even more cordial than Mrs. Falconer anticipated. Their greetings over, they began to talk of Stanhope's late wanderings, in which M. de Châteaumesnil expressed great interest.

"I almost wish I had been with you," he said. "A summer in Scandinavia must have made an effective contrast to a winter in Asia Minor."

"But Mr. Stanhope spoiled the effect of the contrast by introducing two or three months of Paris between Asia Minor and Norway," said Mrs. Falconer.

"It did not diminish the effect," said Stanhope. "My mind was still filled to overflowing with Eastern pictures, with the memories of Eastern types, and the Scandinavian characters and customs broke on these like a Northern morning on an Oriental night. It was like stepping from the 'Arabian Nights' into the 'Nibelungenlied.'"

"What an advantage these *homes de la plume* have over us prosaic men of practical life!" said the Marquis. "One striking metaphor conveys more to the imagination than many words of description."

"It conveys an impression—yes," said Stanhope, "but it is by no means always an accurate one; and, being striking, it is therefore the more likely to be misleading. I am inclined to class the use of metaphor among vicious habits."

"And self-depreciation is another vicious habit," said Mrs. Falconer. "Fancy M. de Châteaumesnil classing himself among 'prosaic men of practical life'!"

"Should I then class myself among men of impractical life?" asked he, smiling.

In this way talk flowed on, pleasantly enough, certainly; yet Stanhope could not altogether restrain a sense of impatience at the absolute lack of opportunity to exchange a few private words with Mrs. Falconer. But all things come to him who knows how to wait; and presently, when the room had nearly emptied, and the Marquis went to pay his respects to Mrs. Vance, he at last found his chance.

"I flatter myself that I have behaved with great self-control and decorum," he said, "considering how anxious I have been to hear what you think of Madame Lescar and her daughter."

"Yes, you have behaved with great decorum," she answered, smiling, "but I

knew you were impatient. Now, what shall I tell you? There is but one thing to think of Madame Lescar. She is all that you have said, and more—if more could be.”

“But the daughter—what do you think of her?”

“That is not so easy to answer. I am as yet only able to think that she is very remarkable.”

“There are many ways of being remarkable,” said Stanhope, who did not find this reply very satisfactory. “You can at least tell whether you were pleased with her or not?”

“No,” she answered, “I can not tell that, for hers is not a simple, direct character to be read at a glance, but a very complex one. I can only say that I am interested—even more interested than by your description.”

“That is something gained—for I may frankly confess that I count much upon you in this matter. What should I do if left to myself with such an explosive compound on my hands?”

Mrs. Falconer laughed. “I have not discovered anything in her of an explosive nature,” she said, “unless it be the strength of her feeling for her mother. Poor girl! My heart aches to think what a crushing blow is before her. And, thinking of it, I have determined as far as possible to win her regard, in order that I may be of some comfort to her at that time.”

“You could not have a more charitable purpose,” he said, “for there could not be a more desolate creature upon the earth than she will be in that hour.”

“I am sure of it,” she answered. “I have read her well enough to see that. And, by-the-by, do you feel inclined to act some day as our escort to Versailles? I perceive that the only way in which I can cultivate her acquaintance will be by arranging excursions which will also have the advantage of giving her fresh air and recreation.”

“You know that you may command me, for Versailles or anywhere else.”

“I know that you are always very kind.”

“It is not exactly kindness in this case,” he answered, “since I am directly accountable for the trouble you are taking.”

“Have you ever observed,” said Mrs. Falconer, turning to M. de Châteaumesnil, who again approached, “that Mr. Stanhope has a great aversion to being credited with any philanthropic or kindly impulses?”

“Yes,” replied the Marquis; “I know that, if one ever commends his sympathetic quality, he desires it to be understood that he regards human nature entirely *en philosophe*.”

“So I do,” said Stanhope, “and therefore I deserve no credit for any apparent sympathy. But since I do not wish to be forced to such unflattering candor with regard to myself, permit me, madame, to bid you good-night.”

The Marquis followed his example; and, as they left the room together, said: “If you are going down into Paris, will you not take a seat in my coupé? It is below.”

CHAPTER VII.

Stanhope had been right when he acknowledged to Mrs. Falconer that many things which common report averred of the Marquis de Châteaumesnil were true. He was, indeed, exceedingly well known in the gay world of Paris, though his fame belonged rather to the past than to the present, as time is reckoned in the fast modern world. A few

years before the date of this story, he had been one of the most conspicuous figures among the host of *viveurs* who flutter through a short, splendid life in that capital of the kingdom of pleasure. A favorite of the *salons*, a leader in the Jockey Club, a bold rider, an intrepid duelist, a daring winner or imperturbable loser over the green cloth, what more was needed for fame in Paris? Yet, as Stanhope had said, there was excuse for his folly. Belonging to one of those noble families of France which had given courtiers and ministers to the courts of its kings, from St. Louis to Charles Dix, it is almost needless to add that the traditions in which he was educated were those of strictest legitimacy; and that, like many another Frenchman of his order and political creed, he grew to manhood without discerning for himself any possible place in the public life of his country, although to brilliant mental ability he united an ambition which would have supplied the motive-power for climbing any height. It is a law of the moral as well as of the physical world that force restrained in one direction will find its outlet in another; so it was not surprising that when the death of his father, in the last years of the Second Empire, left him in possession of a fortune sufficient to maintain the dignity of his name, he became a celebrity in Paris, according to the manner described above. How long his career might have lasted, with what result on his character and fortune, there is no difficulty in conjecturing. Happily (for him), the end came with the fall of the empire. When war became invasion, he, like most of his class, though disowning the government, entered the army of France. They fell by scores, the gallant victims of an almost universal imbecility—but De Châteaumesnil was not among the number. He was severely wounded, but recovered, to fling himself, heart and soul, into that tide which almost carried France to the port of legitimate monarchy. The failure of the movement is written in history. Then—overcome by despair and disgust—he dropped all interest in public affairs, and unable to take up again the toys he had thrown aside when called to arms, wounded in body, sick in spirit, broken in fortune, he left France and spent several years in traveling. Thus it chanced that he met Stanhope in the Levant, that acquaintance ripened to friendship, and finally that they spent a winter together in Syria and Arabia. On their return to Paris in the spring, the intimacy continued, and was only suspended when the marquis went to England in June, while Stanhope started on the Scandinavian tour from which he had just returned.

It was natural that, as they rolled down the Champs-Élysées, the conversation which began at Mrs. Falconer's door should have had her for its subject. "A very charming woman," the Marquis said. "And since I am indebted to you, *mon ami*, for my introduction to her, I feel bound to acknowledge the obligation afresh."

"Oh," said Stanhope, "you would have met her in any event. Your connection with Lady Falconer made that certain. It was only a question of time."

"*Sans doute*: but you anticipated the time, and therefore when we met in London it was as acquaintances. And I found her acquaintance a distinction," he added, smiling. "She achieved a striking success, and might have been one of the celebrities of the season had she made the least effort in that direction."

"There is nothing she would be less likely to make," said Stanhope. "I have never known any one who cared less for social notoriety, or who was better fitted to wield social power."

"*Elle est grande dame jusqu'au bout des ongles*," observed the other. "It may not be—it is hardly likely to be—a common type among your countrywomen, but here is a

proof that it exists.”

“My countrywomen,” said Stanhope, “are, as a general rule, very flexible and adaptive; but Mrs. Falconer possesses those qualities in superlative degree, with a refinement and an intellectual grace wholly her own. It may be well to remember also that, despite her wealth, she does not spring from a plutocracy of yesterday, but from the old gentry of the South.”

“No doubt that explains a great deal. What has been said—that it takes three generations to make a gentleman? But I should say that, even then, the gentleman would be of very inferior pattern. And what is true of one sex, must be, in greater or less degree, true of the other.”

“Mrs. Falconer has generations enough behind her,” said Stanhope. “You could put her in no position where she would not be able to hold her own with grace and dignity. I do not exaggerate her capabilities, for I have known her a long time; and I please myself by anticipating a brilliant future for her.”

“I am quite sure that you do not exaggerate her capabilities,” said the Marquis; “but is not her present brilliant enough to satisfy you? She seems to possess everything that the heart of woman can desire—great wealth, assured position, unlimited homage.”

“She possesses those things,” answered Stanhope. “But she is without a definite object toward which to direct them.”

“And in what form do you think that a definite object would be found?”

“Perhaps in marriage, if marriage meant alliance with a man who possessed the ability to win personal distinction—one whose career her own powers could aid. She is emphatically *femme du monde*.”

“I presume,” said the Marquis, after a pause, “that her marriage was unhappy?”

“Yes. She escaped total shipwreck so narrowly that I am sometimes inclined to believe that she will never embark on the sea of matrimony again. Hers is not a passionate nature. She is capable of affection, and has one of the kindest hearts imaginable; but strong emotion plays no part in her life. Hence, she will never think the world well lost for love, and neither has she any of the commonplace ambition that would lead her to marry merely for higher rank. It would need to be a combination of remarkable qualities of character and accidents of fortune that would tempt her to resign her present freedom.”

There was another pause. The carriage was turning into the Place de la Concorde, starred with its brilliant lights, when the marquis said:

“Is it not within the limit of possible things that you might be the tempter yourself?”

“I!” replied Stanhope. “Nothing could be more improbable—I may say impossible. What pretensions have I to aspire to the hand of such a woman as Mrs. Falconer? Her wealth alone would crush me. Then, what would become of the brilliant future which I anticipate for her? Should I shiver my own castle? No: we are too good friends ever to be anything more.”

“You believe, then, in friendship—between man and woman?”

“I believe in it, yes. And I am sorry for the man or woman who does not believe in it. There is a coarseness of mind in those who think that passion is the only ground for regard between the sexes.”

“I do not wish to be guilty of coarseness of mind,” said the Marquis, “and I

certainly believe in friendship of the kind, under some circumstances. But under others—for instance, where youth and attractive qualities exist on both sides—I think it is, at best, a playing with fire in which one or the other is generally scorched.”

“As a general rule, true enough. But you can not apply—”

“Do not imagine that I intend the least personal application,” interposed the other. “And no one admires the theories of Plato more than I do; though I regret to say that I have always made a conspicuous failure in endeavoring to practice them.”

Stanhope laughed. “I wonder if you have ever attempted to do so?” he said.

“*Ma foi*, yes! It is the prettiest of games—for a time. But the women with whom I have played it were of a different caliber from your fair compatriot. What a frank glance she has!—how little coquetry there is in it! I used to agree with La Rochefoucauld that coquetry is the basis of character in woman—or, at least, the basis of charm—but she has almost converted me to another opinion. I can fancy the purest, frankest friendship altogether possible with *her*. But would it be possible with any man less *spirituel* than yourself?”

“I am not *spirituel*,” said Stanhope, a little shortly. “It is simply my safeguard or my misfortune, as you choose to consider it, that my inveterate habit of analyzing character and emotion stands effectually in the way of a passion which must be largely imaginative.”

“Ah! You think, then, that illusion is always its foundation.”

“Undoubtedly—and generally illusion of the most absurd and monstrous kind. There is really nothing in life like it. We laugh over Titania’s apostrophe to Bottom’s ears; but are not follies identical with that going on around us all the time?—nay, have we not ourselves been guilty of them? What is there at once so ludicrous and so pitiable as to look with disenchanted eyes at the object of such a passion? You spoke of La Rochefoucauld a moment ago. Do you remember his maxim, ‘*Il n’y a guère de gens qui ne soient honteux de s’être aimés quand ils ne s’aiment plus*’? For my part, I never see a man or woman madly in love, without desiring to suggest to him or her what numbers of people there are in the world equally if not more desirable than the one desired. But you know what the answer would be to that—the answer which is the staple of so much passion and romance and sublime faithfulness and insufferable folly.”

“Yes,” said the Marquis, with a smile. “But it is a divine folly, after all, and when the capability for it is passed, one may feel that he has said adieu to his youth—and who ever said adieu to youth without regret?”

“If one were wise, one would bid it adieu with pleasure,” replied Stanhope. “The calmness, the self-possession of mature life is worth more than its feverish delights.”

“To you, perhaps—whose ambition is moderate, whose powers are disciplined, whose passions are in subjection, and whose mind is keenly alive to every source of enjoyment. But to others—”

“If thy friend praise thee, contradict him not,” said Stanhope, laughing. “I don’t deserve a word you have uttered, except about the moderate ambition—but let it pass! I only fail to see why you should not be glad to be free from the fever and fret of youth, as well as I.”

“For a simple reason—what does mature life bring me? Only weariness of spirit, that in a little while will lead me to say with Constant, ‘*Je ne vois de motifs pour rien dans ce monde et je n’ai de goût pour rien.*’ There are men who can carry the toys of

youth even into old age. There is no probability of my being able to do so. And when they have ceased to amuse me, what is to take their place?"

This was a difficult question to answer, and Stanhope was, perhaps, not sorry that the carriage stopped at that moment before the door of his hotel, where, after making an engagement to breakfast together next morning, the two friends parted.

CHAPTER VIII.

"*Voilà, mademoiselle — une lettre pour vous!*" Irène turned in surprise, for letters addressed to herself were rare things in her experience. She had been sitting in the *salon*, a book open before her, but her eyes gazing through the window toward the Avenue, where the morning sunshine was pouring on the changing foliage of the trees, on the equestrians riding under them to and from the Bois, on children and *bonnes* taking air along the broad pavements. It was a bright scene, but the girl's eyes did not reflect any of its brightness. They were thoughtful, almost sad, when she was roused by Nathalie's voice and turned to see the letter presented.

"For me!" she said, in an incredulous tone, as she took it.

Then she saw that it was addressed to herself in a quaint Italian handwriting, and that the post-mark was Milan. "Ah!" she cried, with a flash of light on her face, "it is from the *maestro!* Nathalie, what is mamma doing?"

"Madame has risen, and is taking her *café au lait*," replied Nathalie.

The girl said no more, but rose, crossed the room quickly, and lifting a *portiere*, knocked on the door behind it. "*Entrez!*" said a languid voice, and she opened the door, revealing a pretty chamber, with soft, striped hangings. In a deep easy-chair Madame Lescar sat, wrapped in a cashmere *robe de chambre*, with her breakfast-equipage on a small tray at her side. As it is in the morning that youth and health are most beautiful, so it is in the morning that age and illness are most apparent. When Stanhope saw Madame Lescar, he thought that she looked very ill; but she looked as ill again seen thus, with her sunken cheeks, her pallid skin, and her dark-circled eyes unrelieved by toilet, or by that rallying of the vital force which the day brings.

Irène's manner became subdued the moment she crossed the threshold. She went forward with the utmost quietness, and, when she bent to kiss her mother's cheek, it was as if a freshly opened lily touched a faded and dying one.

"A happy day, mamma dearest!" she said, softly, in Italian. "How have you slept?"

"As well as usual," replied Madame Lescar. "I am glad to hear you speak Italian again, *carissima*. It is the first word of it you have uttered in weeks."

"I spoke without thinking," the girl answered, smiling, "but you will not be surprised when you know that I have a letter from the *maestro*. Here it is"—she did not show the letter until she had said this. "Will you read it?"

"Nay," said Madame Lescar, glancing at the address, "it is to you. Read it yourself."

"I will read it aloud, then," said the girl, and, drawing forward a low stool, she sat down at her mother's feet, and, breaking the seal, opened the inclosure.

It was written in Italian, and conveyed an affectionate message from the master to the pupil, "the sweet singing-bird," whom he missed, with many injunctions and

directions to practice her voice, and many hopes that she would soon wing her flight back to Italy.

“The dear *maestro!*” said Irène, when she finished reading. “Was it not good of him, in the midst of all his pupils and lessons and vexations, to think of and write to me?”

“He thinks much of you, and more of your voice,” said Madame Lescar. “He could hardly forgive me for taking you away. ‘It is a pearl among voices,’ he said, ‘and she will neglect, she will tarnish it.’ Are you not neglecting it, *mia cara*? How often have you sung since we have been in Paris?”

“Not often,” answered the girl. “But how could I? You have been so ill—I so sad.”

“Listen, my child, and heed this,” said the mother, gravely; “let nothing interrupt the work of life—or, if forced to interrupt it by some pressing need, resume it again as soon as possible. If you are suffering, it will not make you suffer more, but rather less. Have you been less sad because you did not exercise your voice? It is true that, if you feared to disturb me, that was a good reason. But put such a fear aside. Your singing never disturbs me. Go, then, this morning, and practice as the *maestro* bids you.”

“I will go in half an hour,” said Irène, with the simplicity of a child and the obedience of a soldier; “but you must let me read your ‘meditation’ to you as usual.”

She took up, as she spoke, a book of French devotional exercises, and read one of the chapters, while Madame Lescar slowly drank her *café au lait*, and ate a little of the bread which accompanied it.

When the chapter was finished, Irène put the book down, but still remained on her lowly seat, her hands clasped around her knees, and her eyes lifted to the blue sky that looked down on them through the window near which they sat. It requires a very beautiful face to bear this upward position, which brings out so clearly all the lines of the cheek and chin and throat, but those lines were so perfect in this face that the mother’s gaze lingered on it with an admiration which forgot to be sad, and was only fond and proud. For the moment, she did not think what the life of this richly endowed creature should have been—nor yet what her future might be. She only felt that pleasure in contemplation which harmonious loveliness inspires.

“I wonder,” said the girl at last, dreamily, “if that is what I am meant to do—to sing? The *maestro* thinks so; he says that such a voice is a great and wonderful gift, not to be lightly regarded. ‘To you it is given to express what others only feel,’ he said. But it does not seem to me that the expression is complete. When I pour my soul out in song which mounts yonder”—she pointed to the sky—“I feel as if it ought to carry a greater meaning.”

“That is the note of incompleteness which enters into every human chord,” said the mother.

Irène shook her head. “No,” she said, “it is not that. I scarcely understand myself—so I can not make you understand— what it is. But, if I puzzle myself, it does not matter. When one’s life has a strong, controlling purpose, all things else count for little.”

“And what is that purpose—with you?” asked Madame Lescar, startled by the decision of those words.

Irène turned, with a motion as if recalled to herself, and, meeting the soft gaze fastened on her, said, with a smile of exceeding sweetness:

“To do everything that you desire. And that means, just now, to go and practice.”

She rose as she spoke, and, bending, kissed the thin cheek again, saying, “I will sing all your favorite songs.”

When the door had closed upon her, Madame Lescar leaned back in her chair, and looked up into the same blue sky on which the girl’s eyes had been fixed.

“To do everything that I desire!” she repeated to herself. “But when that can no longer be a motive, what then?”

Half an hour later, the clear, beautiful voice, having executed many scales and trills, was pouring all its silvery power and freshness into one of Gordigiani’s songs, when Nathalie opened the door of the *salon* to admit Mrs. Falconer. Irène, absorbed in singing, did not hear any sound, and the lady motioned the servant to be silent, while she herself paused, full of surprise and that keen delight which lovers of music most fully know. It was as little as possible what she had expected—this wonderful voice filling the room with floods of glorious sound. When it died away in the last cadence, she caught her breath, and then went quickly forward, as Irène rose and turned around.

“Forgive me,” she said, “but the temptation was too great— what could I do but listen? What a voice you have! Do you know how beautiful it is?”

“I think I do,” answered Irène, quietly. “I have a master who has praised it highly, and I know what I can do with it. But not here, this room is too small.”

“Yes, almost any room would be too small. But will you not come and sing— once, at least—in my large *salon*? It would give me so much pleasure to hear you where you could let out your voice more fully.—Ah, Madame Lescar”—as that lady entered— “you have come in time for me to appeal to you! I am charmed with your daughter’s singing, and I venture to petition that I may hear her in my *salon*, which is much larger and loftier than this. Will you allow her to gratify me?”

“Surely, yes,” answered Madame Lescar, with a cordial smile. “I should be glad for you to hear her to the best advantage. She will be happy to sing for you—will you not, *ma Chérie*?”

“Some time, mamma, when you are quite well,” answered the girl.

“We will not wait for that,” replied her mother, calmly. “I am so much better just now that there is no reason why you should not go on any day which Mrs. Falconer will appoint.”

“I am like a child,” said that lady. “No day seems to me so good as to-day. I am disengaged for this evening, and if you will permit your daughter to dine with me— strictly *en famille* except that I should like Mr. Stanhope, if possible, to be with us and share the pleasure of hearing her—I shall be exceedingly happy.”

Madame Lescar hesitated for a moment. Then she said: “As you may imagine, she is, with regard to society, a child yet. She has never accepted an invitation; but it is as well, perhaps, that she should begin. Indeed, I feel”—here the dark, lustrous eyes looked steadily and gravely at Mrs. Falconer— “that Heaven has been good in sending you to open a little the door of her cloistered life. She shall dine with you.”

Unconsciously the last words had a solemnity both to herself and to her listeners. A common social act this, of breaking bread under another’s roof, yet here it meant—and each felt that it meant—the first step into a new life.

“Thank you,” answered Mrs. Falconer, meeting the gaze with her own frank and earnest one. “Believe me, I feel your trust. I only wish that it were possible for me to

have the happiness of receiving you also.”

“That, however, is impossible, for the doctor’s orders are strict—no excitement, little society, early hours,” replied Madame Lescar, smiling.

“A *propos* of early hours,” said Mrs. Falconer, “I came to ask if we could not arrange a party for Versailles to-morrow. I see that mademoiselle is reluctant”—as she caught Irène’s expression of face—“but I thought that it would interest her to go, if you were well enough for her to leave you with an easy mind.”

“I could not go out this evening and to-morrow both,” said Irène, quickly, with an appealing look at her mother.

“No,” said Mrs. Falconer, “I should not ask that. If you come to me this evening, we will appoint another day for Versailles.”

“You are very kind,” said Madame Lescar. “I understand and appreciate all your thoughtfulness. But,” she added, “do not defer the party too long. The fine weather may change.”

“We must guard against that danger by making an early appointment,” said Mrs. Falconer. “I will consult Mr. Stanhope, who has promised to accompany us; and do you object if I also include a cousin of my own—*un jeune homme*?”

“Certainly not,” answered Madame Lescar. “I trust Irène to you unreservedly, sure that while under your care she will meet no one whom she should not know. I do not wish to keep her from meeting men, now that she is old enough to do so.” Then she said in a lower tone: “Nothing is so dangerous as ignorance. She must learn to guide herself.”

The dropping of her voice conveyed to Irène a subtle intimation that she desired to speak to Mrs. Falconer alone. The girl rose, therefore, and softly left the room. Both ladies followed with their eyes the motions of her tall, graceful figure; and, when the door closed, their eyes met. In that glance everything was revealed between them—the keen anxiety of the one, the deep sympathy of the other. After a moment, Madame Lescar spoke:

“You see—you recognize,” she said, “all that I feel with regard to her.”

“I see, and I do not wonder,” Mrs. Falconer answered in a compassionate tone. “She is so beautiful, and she has such rare gifts.”

“And a nature so perilously endowed, that it is impossible to imagine any common destiny for her—and common destinies are the happiest.”

“She may have a common destiny,” said Mrs. Falconer; she may love, she may marry.”

Madame Lescar’s brow contracted as if in pain.

“God forbid that I should wish her not to do so if it were possible for her to find happiness in that state!” she said; “but if the perils of life are great in every other direction, they are for her tenfold greater in that. I know the loneliness in which she will soon be left; but, facing it all, I can not wish, I can not hope, that she may marry.”

There was a moment’s pause. Mrs. Falconer could not say, “Is the memory of your own marriage the cause of this?” but the thought was in her mind, and Madame Lescar answered it.

“The recollection of my marriage has little part in what I feel with regard to her,” she said. “It is of *her* that I think—of her mind that soars so high, of her passion that strikes so deep, of her character which is so strongly outlined, of her nature so sensitively poised. It would be a rare chance that would send into her life a man capable of meeting

all the demands of that nature; and if she failed to find such a man, and married one of any common type, the result would be misery. See!" she said, breaking off with a faint smile, "how I take your interest in her for granted, when I speak, and with such confidence."

"I feel your confidence very much," answered Mrs. Falconer, "and you take my interest for granted because it exists. I have seldom met any one who excited it so much as your daughter does."

Madame Lescar laid her hand down on the hand of the other. "It is my earnest hope that she may win your friendship," she said, in a tone as if she were pleading. "The time is coming— coming very fast—when she will be left so utterly alone."

To resist this appeal was, to the warm-hearted woman addressed, impossible. She clasped the thin, feverish hand in her own as she said earnestly: "Do not regard it as a hope, but as a certainty. The friendship is hers, and, as far as lies in my power, she shall not be left alone."

Each felt that further words were unnecessary. The pledge had been given and would be kept. There was silence for a moment, and then Mrs. Falconer rose.

"I shall look for Mademoiselle Lescar this evening," she said. "I dine at seven."

CHAPTER IX.

Mrs. Falconer's invitation was, as Madame Lescar said, an era in Irène's life. The girl had never been out, in a social sense, before; and if the occasion had called for any display of toilet, she would have been altogether unprepared. But, even for a more considerable occasion than a dinner *en famille*, nothing, according to French taste, could have been more suitable than her simple but graceful dress of cream-colored cashmere, with a cluster of fresh crimson roses at her belt, and another nestling in the lace around her throat. Madame Lescar herself fastened these flowers, and looked with admiration at the beautiful picture which the girl made—slender and straight as a lily, the soft tint and folds of her dress just what a painter would have asked, the only point of strong color about her that which the roses presented. But as she looked, it was impossible not to remember her own brilliant youth, not to think what a different *début* her daughter should have had! Before her imagination long *salons* opened, where that stately form would have walked with so much grace. She saw the shining draperies, the jewels, the lights, and then—

"You are lovely, my darling!" she said, with passionate fondness. "I could not wish you other than you are."

"I wish myself other," said Irène, kissing her. "I wish that I had your coloring and your eyes. That is all which I value in myself—what is like you. The rest—" She made a quick gesture signifying that it was of no account.

"You have no need to desire any change in yourself," said the mother.—"Ah! here comes Nathalie—just as you are ready."

Nathalie, who had been sent to call a carriage, entered with a cloak hanging on her arm—a long, silk, fur-lined cloak to wrap around Irène.

"Ah, mademoiselle, quelle charmante toilette!" she cried, with a Frenchwoman's quick eye for effect. "Et vous êtes bien coiffée. Madame a les doigts d'une fée." Then addressing her mistress, "La voiture est arrivée, madame."

It was certainly a new sensation to Irène when, having parted with Nathalie at the door of Mrs. Falconer's apartment, she found herself, for the first time in her life, entering a drawing-room alone, announced in imposing tones by an imposing-looking servant. But there are instincts which supply the place of training. Of shyness or awkwardness there was not the least trace in her bearing, and, as she entered with her proud carriage, her high-bred air, the little group of people already assembled regarded her with admiration. Mrs. Falconer rose and went forward. Erne put up his eye-glass, Mrs. Vance glanced at Stanhope and lifted her brows. He smiled slightly—as much at himself as at the sensation Irène produced, for he was conscious of the awakening of a new interest in this girl, over whose future fate he was destined to exercise so much control.

“I almost began to fear that you would play truant,” said Mrs. Falconer, taking her hand. “And that would have been a very great disappointment, for I have summoned our friend Mr. Stanhope to meet you; and my cousin, fortunately for himself, dropped in; while here is my aunt, who is most anxious to know your mother's daughter.”

“You are very like your mother, my dear,” said Mrs. Vance, kindly. “And, if you could see her as she remains in my memory, you would know that I pay you a great compliment.”

“I am sure of it, madame,” answered Irène, with grateful eyes. Nobody could pay me a greater one.”

“Madame Lescar's beauty is by no means a thing of the past,” said Stanhope. “I doubt, my dear Mrs. Vance, whether your memory of her is lovelier than the present reality.”

Irène looked at him with the same quick, grateful light in her eyes. “It is true,” she said. “I am certain that my mother has never been more beautiful than she is now. But it is possible that every one might not think so. She is thin, she is pale—but she looks like the Madonna Dolorosa, and, as the body grows more shadowy, one sees the soul, which is even lovelier.”

The pathos of her expression touched them all. Those who knew the truth felt their sympathy almost painfully wrought upon, while Erne, who knew nothing except that he had been promised that he should see a lovely girl and hear a charming voice, was conscious of a surprise little short of amazement. His practiced eye took in every point of her beauty, all the harmony of her dress, just as his ear caught the soft music of her tones; and he said to himself; “What does it mean? Is my cousin playing a jest—introducing a celebrity as a *débutante*?”

This was only his first thought. He saw its folly when he was presented to Irène, and recognized at once the exquisite freshness of early youth, and that virginal innocence of glance which is only to be seen where the life has been as absolutely sheltered from the remotest knowledge of evil, as that of a foreign girl is. He flattered himself greatly upon the delicacy and quickness of his perceptions, and he had much of that insight into color, form, and expression, which painters display in the highest degree. The time had been when he had spoiled canvas by the yard, and fancied himself possessed of the divine *afflatus* which mortals call genius; but as his culture advanced his belief in his own powers waned, until now he had reached a point of fastidiousness which made the satisfaction of his taste far beyond the scope of his ability. Had the vulgar necessity of bread-making pressed upon him, he might have been forced to set this fastidiousness

aside—to work despite it, as many a heart-sick artist is forced to do; but he chanced to be one of those favored children of Fortune in whom, as George Eliot has remarked, “the unproductive labor of questioning” (whether it is worth while to take part in the battle of the world) “is sustained by three or five per cent on capital which somebody else has battled for.” Erne, indeed, had an indulgent and obliging father, who still battled for this capital, and put much of it at the disposal of his son.

“My cousin tells me that I am to have the pleasure of hearing you sing, mademoiselle,” he said to Irène, “and that your voice is wonderful.”

“Mrs. Falconer ought to have remembered that people are generally disappointed when their expectation has been excited,” she answered. “As for my voice, no doubt it is good, since my teachers all agree in saying so; but it will never compare with my mother’s.”

She looked at Mrs. Vance, by whom she was sitting, as she uttered the last words, which were addressed rather to her than to Erne. But to the latter they brought a flash of revelation. He could almost have cried, “Eureka!” He knew now why such a distinct and unmistakable seal of originality was set upon this girl, why she regarded him with eyes in which genius seemed to dwell as by right divine. Whatever his follies, it could at least be said of him that he was not of the number of those who look in such eyes and fail to know them.

“I have, then,” he said, after an instant’s pause, “the pleasure of seeing Madame Lescar’s daughter. Forgive my stupidity in not recognizing the fact before. It is one of the most delightful memories of my life that I had once the honor to know your mother, mademoiselle.”

“To know my mother—you?” said Irène, looking at him with surprise and evident incredulity.

“Ten years ago, when she was in America,” he said, “I heard her sing; and though I was very young—not more than fifteen—I was then, as now, passionately devoted to music, and I have retained the recollection of her voice as perhaps the most exquisite that I ever heard. But my enthusiasm had more than her voice to feed upon,” he went on, smiling. “My father was one of her old friends, and one day he was good enough to take me with him when he went to see her. I shall never forget that visit—her beauty, her grace, the sweetness of her look and tone when she gave me her hand and called my name. She seemed to me more than a queen, and I went from her presence wild with adoration. I think I may truly say that Madame Lescar was my first love.”

“She has had many successors,” said Mrs. Vance.

But with what a smile Irène rewarded his story! It flashed upon him from every eloquent feature, reminding him of the transformation of light and color that he once saw come over a woman’s face when he chanced to praise her lover.

“How happy it makes me to hear people say that they knew, admired, or loved my mother!” she said, with a glance that thanked him while she spoke. “Tell me your name—the name she called you—that I may tell it to her.”

“Lionel,” said Mrs. Falconer, suddenly supplying the name, “you will take Mademoiselle Lescar in to dinner.”

“I should like,” said Erne, as he offered his arm, “to be permitted to recall myself to Madame Lescar’s recollection. I have not known before of her presence in Paris. May I not hope that she will receive me?”

“If she were well enough, I have no doubt she would be glad to do so,” replied Irène, a shadow falling over her face. “But she is ill, and since her arrival in Paris she has seen no visitors but Mr. Stanhope and Mrs. Falconer.”

“And my cousin did not tell me! how can I forgive her? I am not even indebted to her for being here this evening—for it was merely chance that brought me. But Fortune sometimes favors one, and it has never favored me more signally than to-day.”

The last words were uttered as they sat down to table, and Mrs. Falconer, overhearing them, looked at the speaker with a smile.

“You do not know yet how much it has favored you,” she said. “Wait until you have heard Mademoiselle Lescar sing.”

“I hardly think I shall appreciate my good fortune more even then,” he replied, “although I hope to hear in her voice an echo of strains that delighted me ten years ago.”

“You have heard Madame Lescar, then?” said Stanhope.

“As I have just been telling mademoiselle, Madame Lescar was my first love.”

They all laughed, looking at the handsome young fellow, who on his part looked reproachfully at Mrs. Falconer.

“And you have seen her, known her for some time, my cousin, and never mentioned the fact to me!”

“I never for an instant thought of you in connection with it,” said Mrs. Falconer, frankly. “Why should I? Ten years ago you were in round-jackets.”

“That sounds like a crushing fact,” he said, “but one may have a very tumultuous heart even beneath a round-jacket. Youthful passions are considered only matter for laughter, yet for depth, intensity, tragedy of feeling, I have never known a passion equal to that which I felt for Madame Lescar.”

“And you will never know one, whatever its depth, intensity, or tragedy, for an object more fit to inspire passion,” said Stanhope. “I have bowed at Madame Lescar’s shrine myself, so I know whereof I speak.”

“How do you like to be the inheritor of such a renown, mademoiselle?” asked Mrs. Falconer, turning to Irène. “Do you not feel as if it laid upon you a weight of possible achievement in the form of fascination?”

“Oh, no,” the girl answered. “So far from that, I should never forgive any one who thought that I could compare with my mother in any respect.”

“You hear?” said Mrs. Falconer, looking at Erne with a laughing glance. “So be warned.”

She led the conversation then to other topics, and Irène soon felt that sense of ease which ease inspires. However much repressed and overshadowed youth may be, it is still youth in nothing more than in its elasticity, its matchless power of snatching enjoyment from the passing minute. The girl herself was surprised by the manner in which her spirits rose, her tongue was loosed, her ideas gained point and brightness. It was her first experience of that wonderful friction, that sharpener of even the dullest wits, known as social life. But if one could conceive a young fish brought up on land and suddenly placed in the element for which Nature intended it, that would be a type of Irène, when from her cloistered life, filled with sadness and darkened by the bitter sense of wrong, she stepped within the threshold of a world which every fiber of her nature, every instinct of her intelligence, fitted her to enjoy.

After the ladies left the dining-room, Erne, who opened the door for them, had

hardly closed it and returned to his seat, when he broke forth:

“What a girl! She is not a girl—she is a poem incarnate! I have never seen any one like her! But, then, that might naturally be expected of Madame Lescar’s and Prince Waldegrave’s daughter. She is wonderfully like her mother; but she has her father’s brow and eyes. I saw him at Homburg last summer, and I assure you they are exact reproductions of his.”

*’ Very likely,” said Stanhope. “No one can deny Prince Waldegrave’s intellectual ability, and it is the brow and eyes that make his daughter’s face most striking—so striking that one almost forgets its beauty.”

“I don’t think one forgets the beauty,” said Erne. “One only feels that the intellectual expression elevates its character, giving it a more unique nobleness and charm. I have never had any fancy for insipid beauty. I have always maintained that it is not beauty in a true sense. How can it be? The highest type of beauty is at the same time the highest type of intellect. We see that in antique sculpture. I should like to model Mademoiselle Lescar’s head! It would be as fine as the Pompeiian Sappho.”

“If you modeled it, no doubt it would,” said Stanhope with good-natured sarcasm. He was not surprised at Erne’s enthusiasm, but neither was he altogether pleased by it. He had a vague sense as if his right in Irène was in a manner threatened, and, although he smiled to himself over this feeling, it could not be ignored. He had accepted Madame Lescar’s trust with reluctance; but there had begun to dawn upon him a conviction that after all it might possess compensations; that to stand in close relation to such a girl, to study the development of her character, to direct the unfolding of her intellect, would be interesting to a student of human nature like himself. And now if Erne, with his aestheticism and his theories, his ready culture and his equally ready words, should usurp a share of the influence that was rightfully his own— He smiled, but even in smiling he felt that such a result would not be altogether agreeable.

They did not linger long behind the ladies, and on entering the *salon* they found Mrs. Falconer and Irène turning over music-scores, from which the former looked up to say:

“You have come just in time, for Irène is about to sing. You see,” she added, aside to Stanhope, “we have advanced a step. By her request, I have dropped ‘mademoiselle.’”

Erne went up to Irène, who, standing by the grand piano, slim and straight, in her soft drapery and with her crimson roses, made a picture naturally pleasing to the eye of an artist, however embryonic.

“Do you know,” he said, “I am afraid to bear you sing?”

“Why?” she asked, with some surprise. “Do you think you will not like my voice?”

“I am afraid I shall like it only too well,” he answered. “Music is my passion. “When I am under the influence of it, I am literally like ‘a reed shaken by the wind’—the wind of harmony. If you sing as you look, what will become of me?”

She smiled, but not as most girls listening to the language of compliment for the first time would have smiled—and she did not blush at all.

“What usually becomes of you under such circumstances?” she asked, with playful mockery. “I fancy that you listen quietly, you applaud; if the singing is in a drawing-room, you pay a few compliments; then you go away. That is what I think you

will do to-night. Now imagine yourself in a stall at the opera!”

That was not difficult to imagine, for it is seldom out of an opera that a voice is heard like that which now rose and filled the *salon*—so pure, so clear, so highly trained. And what was it she began to sing—pouring, it seemed, her whole soul into the melody?—

“Knowest thou the laud where the pale citron grows,
And the gold orange through dark foliage glows?
A soft wind flutters from the deep-blue sky,
The myrtle blooms, and towers the laurel high.
Know’st thou it well?

Oh, there with thee I—

Oh, that I might, my own beloved one, flee!”

It was Mignon herself who was singing to them, with pathetic remembrance, with eager yearning, with passionate tenderness. They looked at each other, thrilled almost less by the beauty of the voice than by its wonderful expression. Stanhope was amazed. He had expected that Madame Lescar’s daughter would sing well, but he had not imagined he should hear anything like this. No drawing-room, no concert singer here, no organ to warble arias and ballads; but a voice to ring above the heads of multitudes with its silvery sweetness—a power to sway the hearts of thousands from the lyric stage!

“And this is what your mother has been doing down in Milan!” he said, when the song ended. “She has been training such a voice, and not even allowing an old friend like myself to hear it. Well, she is fitly punished—or rewarded. You must bear to hear that your voice is finer than hers. It has the same exquisite timbre, but with greater range, fullness, and expression.”

“Monsieur Stanhope!” cried Irène, almost indignantly. “Do you think to please me by saying such a thing as that? My voice does not, can not, compare with my mother’s! It wounds me that you should say so.—Monsieur Erne, you remember her—you do not think this!”

She turned to Erne with an appeal so manifestly earnest that he would gladly have responded to it as she desired if truth had not been too mighty for him. As it was, he could only say:

“You have left me no power to recall any other voice, mademoiselle. One could forget anything in listening to yours.”

He spoke with sincerity as manifest as her own; but he did not please her. She swept him with a glance from under her long lashes, as she said, “You see you have found what I thought you would—a compliment.” And then she turned away.

“It is really wonderful, is it not?” said Mrs. Falconer, in a low tone to Stanhope. “You can imagine my surprise, when, without the least preparation, without even having been told that the girl could sing at all, I went in this morning and heard that voice. I thought that I must have wandered into the apartment of a prima donna; but, in truth, there are not many prima donnas who possess such an organ.”

“It is startling,” he answered. “I hardly feel that I have recovered under the shock of surprise, for there is more than a voice here; there is the power of the dramatic artist, that power which makes us feel and comprehend things indefinable in words. Who have

been her masters, do you know?"

"Oh, C—, the great *maestro* in Milan, he who usually only trains artists, and since she has been in Paris she has sung for Viardot. Her simplicity is remarkable. If she knows the value of her voice, she certainly seems to care very little for it; and she is firmly persuaded that it can not compare with her mother's."

"Bah!" said Stanhope, in a tone which it was well Irène did not overhear. "The mother's voice was lovely, as charming a drawing-room or even concert-room organ as I ever heard; but she had no more dramatic fire than a canary-bird, and her voice was not powerful enough for any large space; whereas, this girl could fill La Scala."

"Let us hope that she will never desire to do so!" said Mrs. Falconer, fervently; and, as their eyes met, it was evident that the same fear was in the minds of both.

There was much more music, for Irène sang as often and as long as they desired. They were all, with the exception of Mrs. Vance, who at length began to yawn behind her fan, musical enthusiasts, and, after the first astonishment wore off, the evening was full of delight. Erne felt like one who has been intoxicated by sweet sounds when he found himself at last in the cool night air on the brilliant streets. But above all other strains, it was an echo of the South, of the far-blue seas and the wonderful blue skies, of the poetry and enchantment of Italy, which lingered with him in the haunting melody of Mignon's song.

CHAPTER X.

Before Mrs. Falconer parted with Irène, the day for their visit to Versailles was set, with the concurrence of Stanhope and Erne.

"I hope that nothing will occur to prevent our going," she said later to her aunt, "for I have quite set my heart on giving that poor child a little pleasure."

"Do you think she will enjoy a day at Versailles?" asked Mrs. Vance, who had herself found such a day very fatiguing, and who, like most good Americans, restricted her sight-seeing in Paris to the shops, especially to the Bon Marché where she reveled in a wild dissipation of shopping, returning home with a carriage filled with bundles—"Such wonderful bargains, my dear!"—most of which were taken back and exchanged next day, according to the obliging custom of the Bon Marché for other bargains quite as wonderful.

"I am sure she will," replied Mrs. Falconer. "I can not imagine anything that she would enjoy more. Then there is youth, there is gayety in her, and I want to see them brought out."

"Are you not a little afraid about Lionel?" asked Mrs. Vance, after a moment's pause. "Suppose he should fall in love?"

"Suppose!" echoed Mrs. Falconer, with a laugh. "It is already an accomplished fact. Violet Dysart's star has set, which is something to be grateful for, since she might have married him at last, and fancy what a wife a girl would make who has spent her youth running over Europe in the attempt to marry a man of rank! Lionel's infatuation for her is at an end; and if Irène should fancy him, think what a happy solving of all difficulties it would be!"

"Sydney!" said Mrs. Vance, in amazement and some dismay, "you don't mean that you are going to try *match-making*?"

“Why not?” asked Mrs. Falconer, undismayed. “The idea never occurred to me until I saw at dinner that Lionel was *épousé*; but now it arranges itself beautifully in my mind. Mr. Erne could not object, for he—have I not heard it told in the chronicles of the past?—was one of Madame Lescar’s adorers in the days of her brilliant youth. Madame Lescar, I am sure, would not object; for, although Prince Waldegrave’s acknowledged daughter would necessarily look far higher, Prince Waldegrave’s unacknowledged daughter has only her mother’s rank. Then, think of the ease to her mind, and the relief to poor Mr. Stanhope! Oh, it grows upon me!”

“Sydney, I am astonished at you!” said Mrs. Vance. “Matchmaking is a very dangerous responsibility! If they should not suit each other—”

“My dear aunt,” said Sydney, “if we waited to be sure that people suit each other, how many marriages would ever take place? Besides, why should they not suit each other? I grant you that Irène is not an ordinary person, but neither is Lionel.”

“Still it seems to me that it would be a great risk, and I— I really do not think that, if I were you, I would attempt it,” said Mrs. Vance, who, like many people, felt more strongly than she could express herself.

“I shall be quite ready to assume the risk,” said Mrs. Falconer, cheerfully, “if it can only be brought about. How it would cut the Gordian knot of difficulty! It is true it is a very commonplace solution; but what will you? The commonplace is a thing to which we must all, at some period of our lives, submit.”

She did not add that one submits to the commonplace, as well as to most other evils, more philosophically for one’s friends than for one’s self; but she was quite in earnest in thinking that here might be an unexpected avenue of escape from all the difficulties foreseen by Madame Lescar and Stanhope. It is true that the earnest words of the former with regard to the improbability that Irène could ever find happiness in marriage, were still ringing in her ears; but she said to herself that there was a chance at least that the mother might be mistaken, and that in any event the lesser of two dangers should be chosen. “For, what lies before the girl if she does not marry?” she thought. “She might make for herself a career in art—with that voice it is entirely possible for her to become a great singer—but what dangers, what insults, would surround her, while as Lionel’s wife she would be sure of being sheltered from everything—except, perhaps, *ennui*, from which no one, be he lover, friend, or husband, can secure one!”

With this conclusion, she laid her head down on its pillow; but, naturally enough, her last waking thought pursued her into that land of shadows which we call dreams. Was it Mignon’s song which bore her to Italy? At least, there could be no doubt of the association which led her to find herself in the Church of St. Cecilia in Rome. It was very vivid—the lifting the heavy leathern curtain at the door, the cold chill of the atmosphere of the church after the sunny warmth of the outer air, the perception as she advanced that two figures stood before the altar—one in the white robes and flowing veil of a bride; then the recognition, when she drew near, that they were Irène and Erne. The marriage ceremony did not take place—what ceremony ever does in a dream?—but the meaning of the scene was plain, and the dreamer smiled as she woke.

She smiled again when, on entering Madame Lescar’s *salon* that afternoon, to ask if the latter would not like a drive, she found Erne installed with all the air of a visitor who has made good his right of entrance. He laughed, and colored a little when her glance fell on him.

“You see,” he said, “that I have been very adventurous; I have thrown myself, alone and unsupported, on Madame Lescar’s kindness.”

“It was something that your father’s son need not have hesitated to do,” said Madame Lescar, with her smile of cordial sweetness. “I suppose that I value my old ties the more because I am so wholly separated from them,” she added, looking at Mrs. Falconer.

“I hope their value does not decrease when you are brought into contact with them,” said Erne, “for I do not wish to shine only in the reflected light of my father. I aspire to rank as an old friend myself.”

“You could not possibly rank as a very old one,” replied Madame Lescar, “and I assure you that the reflected luster of your father might satisfy you. I have never had a better friend, nor one whom I remember more kindly.”

“No dimness has fallen upon his memory of you,” said Erne; “so you may imagine what pleasure it will give him to hear from you—to hear that he is remembered by you! And I shall tell him what a representative you have,” he added, looking at Irène.

She met his glance, and, leaning forward a little, said, in a low tone, “Be certain you do not tell him what you told me last night—about my voice, I mean.”

“Your will is my law,” answered the young man, smiling. “I shall be happy to tell him whatever you say.”

“I do not bid you say anything,” she replied, drawing back. “I only tell you what not to say.”

“Let me remind you that it was Mr. Stanhope, not myself, who made the obnoxious speech last night,” he said; “but I pledge myself to profound secrecy and strict obedience on the subject. Yet I should like to put a price on my virtue.” Then, quickly, “Will you not sing for me?”

She turned to her mother with the simplicity which made such a contrast to the occasional imperiousness of her manner. “Mamma,” she said, “Mr. Erne asks me to sing for him. Shall I?”

“Why not, if you feel like singing?” Madame Lescar answered.

“I always feel like it,” the girl replied.

She rose as she spoke, and, followed by Erne, crossed the room to the piano. Mrs. Falconer watched the graceful figure, struck again, as she had been before, by the entire absence of anything like self-consciousness in her manner.

“I can not tell you how charmingly she acquitted herself last night,” she said, turning to the mother. “And such a voice! We were all delighted, and Mr. Stanhope, I am sure, will have much to say to you about never having let him know how fine it is.”

“It has developed wonderfully within the last year,” Madame Lescar replied, “and I have scarcely seen Mr. Stanhope at all during that time. Yes, it is very fine. The musical connoisseurs in Milan think very highly of it, and Signor C— declaims to me upon the crime of robbing the world of a great singer by not preparing her for the lyric stage.”

“And have you thought of listening to him?” Mrs. Falconer asked, glad of an opportunity to put the question.

“No, I have not thought of it at all. I feared for a time that Irène herself might do so; but I have no fear of the kind now. Her pride, which is as strong as her ambition, would make her shrink from such a career. Though she is reticent on any subject which

she believes would pain me, I can tell from slight indications what she feels; and I am sure that nothing stings her more deeply than the thought of my ever having sung in public.”

“You think, then, that the glamour which is thrown around the career of a great singer would have no fascination for her?”

“None, I believe. She realizes too keenly how different her position in the world ought to be.”

They were silent then, for Irène began to sing, her pure, delightful voice rising again in Mignon’s song. This was by Erne’s request. “It haunted me all night,” he said; “it made me dream of Italy, it has followed me like a refrain all day. Pray break the spell, or deepen it, by letting me hear it again.”

He saw by her smile that he had pleased her. “If you love Italy as well as I do,” she said, “you would rather have the spell deepened than broken. It is the song I always sing when I am most homesick.”

“For Italy?”

“Of course for Italy. I have never had any other home.”

“I can not love it like that,” he said. “I have had another home—though I can not, by any stretch of fancy, conceive myself homesick for it!—but Italy is to me the Mecca of the mind and the imagination. Could it be otherwise when I aspire to be a painter?”

“Do you?” she said, with a look of interest. “Then, you must love Italy, and I will sing the song for you.”

She sang it, if possible, even better than she had the night before, and Mrs. Falconer, leaning back in her chair, listened with the suspicion of a smile about her lips.

“Now,” she said, when it was over, “I know you are ready to petition for another and yet another—and Irène would probably be good-natured enough to sing them for you; but I must interfere. There is a time for everything, and this is the time for the Bois. I want to take these ladies out into the sunshine. You will come, will you not?” she said, turning to Madame Lescar.

“Yes, I feel to-day as if I should like to go,” that lady answered.

Irène rose from the music-stool and turned—her face radiant with pleasure.

“Ah!” she cried, “it is long since I have heard mamma say she would like anything. Madame, how kind you are! We will be ready in a moment.”

She drew her mother quickly from the room—as if she feared some possible change of mind—leaving Mrs. Falconer and Erne alone. The latter crossed over from the piano, where he had been left stranded, and paused before his cousin.

“No doubt that was well done,” he said, “but naturally I don’t feel very grateful to you.”

“I suppose not,” she answered. “I can not say that I expected your gratitude; but I think it more important for Madame Lescar to have the benefit of the sunny warmth of the afternoon, than for you to hear Irène sing. Remember that there will probably be many occasions in the future when you can have that pleasure.”

“I hope so,” he said, “for what a voice it is! “

“And what an owner for a voice! “

“Yes. She is so original that one hesitates to use ordinary words with regard to her.”

“She is very beautiful—if that is not too ordinary a word to be applied to her.”

“I think it is. Other women are beautiful—at least, some other women are.”

“Violet Dysart, for example?”

She looked at him mischievously, and he looked at her and smiled.

“Beyond doubt,” he answered. “Miss Dysart is beautiful—in her style.”

“And how does that style compare with Irène’s?”

“You can not compare them. There is a stamp of noble simplicity upon Mademoiselle Lescar’s beauty. And when she looks at one with those proud, clear eyes, do you know what one sees in them? It is genius.”

“I hope not,” said Mrs. Falconer. “Fate has been hard enough upon her without that misfortune.”

“Why should it be a misfortune?”

“What else has it ever been? Give me an instance of a woman—or man, either—who possessed it and was happy? I hope you are, as usual, artistically extravagant; and I beg you not to invest a charming girl with such fancies.”

“If I am artistically extravagant, remember that artists have eyes that look below the surface.”

“And sometimes see what does not exist. I am willing to agree with you that Irène is beautiful and original; but I will not have her converted into a ‘violet-crowned Sappho’ and doomed to poetical misery.”

“The misery is your own imagination,” said he; “but it is curious that you should speak of Sappho. I told Mr. Stanhope last night that she reminded me of the bust of the Pompeiian Sappho.”

“You see I know you so well. I can predict your line of probable comparison. She is certainly a very striking girl, but I hope not so remarkable as you fancy.”

“I could hardly fancy her more remarkable than she is,” he answered.

The conversation was ended here by the entrance of Madame Lescar and Irène, and then it appeared that there was an unexpected pleasure in store for the young man.

After he had gone out with the ladies and put them into the carriage, he was in the act of closing the door when Mrs. Falconer pointed to the fourth, unoccupied seat.

“Will you take it?” she said. “We are in rather alarming preponderance; but we shall not make the tour du Lac, so you may not mind.”

“Mind!—I shall only be too happy,” he said, eagerly, as he stepped in. Irène made room for him with a smile, and they drove off in the great afternoon tide of equipages toward the Bois.

On entering the gates, however, they turned, as Mrs. Falconer had said, and avoiding the crowded drive along the lake, where faces are scanned and toilets displayed, followed some of the beautiful winding roads toward the Pr éCatelan. It was evident that Madame Lescar enjoyed the luxurious motion, the exhilarating air and soft sunshine, and, seeing this, Irène gave herself up to enjoyment also. The exquisite face under its picturesque dark-plumed hat was a revelation of loveliness to Erne, and he had no more idea of resisting the enchanting influences brought to bear upon him than if he had been a child of nature instead of a product of the latest philosophy of culture. “Falling in love,” says some one, “is as delightful as falling out again is disagreeable”— and, to a man trained to appreciate every delicate ebb and flow of feeling, there is certainly a charm in the first dawn of sentiment, the play of fancy, the subtle glow of interest, that may lead to passion. It is the prelude of a drama that may prove a tragedy— but in the sweetness of

its fairy overture who thinks of this?

Certainly not Erne, with whom the drama had never advanced beyond the first act. He had, so far, played with feeling much as he had done with art; and though he had a consciousness at the present time that he was stirred in some newer, perhaps deeper manner, than ever before, the emotion was altogether one of pleasure—as delicate and fine in its nature as the object which inspired it. It was a golden hour—not only to the young sybarite, but also to his companions—to Madame Lescar, in Mrs. Falconer's kindness to her daughter, as well as in the air and sunshine; to Irène, in her mother's brightness, and after that in the varying beauty of the great pleasure-ground and in the exchange of quick thought and repartee with a companion whose eyes would have spoken admiration to the dullest capacity; while Mrs. Falconer felt the most benevolent satisfaction, as she thought, "Surely here is the best solution for the difficulty."

But golden hours always end speedily; and this one was no exception to the rule. The champing horses were again drawn up before the gate on the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne, and, when Madame Lescar and Irène parted with their companions. Erne's last words were:

"I shall have the happiness of seeing you soon again, mademoiselle, for you know Thursday is the day we go to Versailles."

CHAPTER XI.

On Thursday Fortune favored them with fine weather, and at an early hour of the morning the two ladies drove up to the Gare St. Lazare, where Stanhope and Erne awaited them. Both men were struck by the radiance that animated Irène and spoke in her every air and movement. She looked like a young princess gazing out on the world with fearless, beautiful eyes that to-day had in them something of a child's joyousness.

"Mamma was so well when I bade her good-by," she said, as she gave her hand to Stanhope. "She told me to enjoy everything—and I think I shall. I have never before had a whole day of pleasure."

"A whole day of pleasure is a thing that is not often granted to any of us," said Stanhope, with his pleasant, whimsical smile. "Something generally interferes, if it is only the morning mail. The sole chance to obtain it is to run away—as we are doing now."

"At least, we are all in spirits to enjoy it," said Mrs. Falconer. "Have you taken the tickets, Lionel? The doors are opening—*allons!*"

A minute later they were rolling out of Paris, secure from any invasion on the privacy of their first-class carriage. And their spirits during the short journey justified Mrs. Falconer's opinion. She herself was one of the fortunate people whom their friends call "equable," but those who knew her intimately knew that she had accessions of brightness, and this was plainly one of her brightest days. In truth, she felt as light-hearted as possible, for she was not only doing a kind action—in which she always delighted to a degree that, as she often declared, robbed her of merit—but she was with people who were thoroughly agreeable to her. The last was one of her prime requisites. "I flatter myself that I have mastered the art of being bored with as amiable demeanor as any woman in Christendom," she often said; "but, for all that, I don't like it—while I adore good companionship." That she had what she wanted to-day was obvious, and her

becoming costume—a triumph of dress-making and millinery art —proved that she had thought her companions worth looking her best for.

One of them, at least, appreciated this. Stanhope's sentiments with regard to women were not such as the sex in general would cordially have approved; but no man found more pleasure in association with individuals of that sex, and it has already been said that Mrs. Falconer always put him at his best. There was consequently very good reason for *his* spirits, albeit their flow was of the quietest description; while Erne just then asked nothing better than the smile of the lovely face before him, or the glance of the eyes that seemed to bring the sunshine with them whenever they turned from the wide, light-flooded landscape.

The beautiful day had not a cloud upon it when they reached Versailles, and, stepping into an open carriage, were driven directly to the palace—up the broad avenue which leads to the Place d'Armes, into the grand court lined with colossal statues of the great men of France, with the proud equestrian figure of Louis Quatorze keeping guard over the palace and the city that rose like magic at the bidding of his imperious will. When they alighted and looked at the immense pile which overshadowed them, and read the inscription dedicating it, "*À toutes les gloires de la France,*" it was impossible not to think of the glories belonging to that *ancien régime*, which, with all its faults, lifted the fair name of France so high, bore it with such grace in a hundred courts, and blazoned it with deeds of daring on a thousand battle-fields.

But they are silent and empty now—the golden chambers of that wonderful palace—though it is silence eloquent of a myriad brilliant memories. For the world had never seen before, and probably will never see again, such magnificence, united with such grace of wit, such elegance of manners, as that which reigned here, from the palmy days of the Grand Monarque to the day when the hoarse clamor of revolution was heard within these gilded walls. Stanhope, to whom French memoirs had always been peculiarly interesting, and who was therefore well versed in the annals of Versailles, found himself drawing upon this store of knowledge to a degree which astonished him, for he generally disliked the attitude of instructor. But Irène's enthusiasm was too contagious to be resisted; and her imagination seized so readily upon outlines, and colored them with life, that it seemed as if the stirring, picturesque tide of splendor and intrigue rolled back, courtiers once more thronged the *Œil de Bœuf*, famous beauties filled the salons, the voice of Louis XIV seemed still echoing in the *Cabinet du Roi*, the superb salons and *Grande Galerie des Glaces* blazed with lights and a multitude of richly clad forms, as the pageant of vanished courts swept through them by the aid of a girl's vivid fancy.

"And they have all passed away," she said, standing slender and straight in the sunlight which fell in a stream through one of the great windows on gilded ceiling and polished floor, "and there is nothing to tell of them but history. Surely history is a wonderful thing."

"Rather a dull thing to most people," said Erne, "but you seem to make the dry bones live." Then, as she looked at him, he added, "You put a soul into them—the soul of poetry."

"Oh, no," she said, quickly, "pray do not think so! It is only that what is real—what has been—thrills me more than any imaginary creation. Why should we care so much for what some great men have written about mere abstractions, and so little for

people whose pulses have beat, whose hearts have bled, like our own?"

"We care for them when a great master of poetic art—a Shakespeare, a Schiller, a Walter Scott—brings them before us vividly, brushes away the dust of the past and lets us hear the pulses beat."

She regarded him with something like surprise. "But do you need such an interpreter?" she asked. "I think the best that can be said is poor compared to what one can fancy for one's self. The power of expression is so limited; there are so many inexpressible things. One feels, one understands all the play of human life that has taken place here—but who could put it all in words?"

"I am afraid my imagination is deficient," said the young man, smiling. "I need to have it stimulated. I need an interpreter—and you are just the interpreter I need."

"Mr. Stanhope is a much better one," she said. "He can tell you what Saint-Simon and M. de Luynes and the Duc de Richelieu have left on record of that brilliant life."

Stanhope, who overheard her, smiled. "You are mistaken," he said; "I am not the interpreter Lionel wants. And, to do him justice, he is right. I can only give him facts, which are within his reach as well as mine—you give him fancies,"

"But fancies have no value," said she, blushing a little.

"Have they not? Put them in a scale against facts, and facts have no chance at all; it is like the old saying about the ballads and the laws. Moreover, they have a value of their own—they are to facts what spirit is to matter."

So talking, they wandered on through the magnificent rooms where a great monarchy danced and feasted to its end, paused before numbers of historical portraits, admired many a fair face, criticised many a great one, tried to picture the gorgeous theatre with its courtly throngs, and presently found themselves within the richly decorated walls of the chapel.

"Do not let fancy run away with you here," whispered Stanhope to Irène. "This is not where Bossuet and Massillon thundered the great truths of death and eternity into the ears of a startled court. That was in the older chapel. But it may be worth remembering that before this altar Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette joined their hands in marriage."

From the chapel they went out into the park, where the golden day was holding high carnival; where the great basins of water were flashing back the sunlight; where the broad terrace, in its space and majesty, seemed awaiting the splendid tide of life and movement that might yet pour out upon it from the empty palace; where the multitudinous statues stood in serene, smiling grace, through all changes of seasons and of men; where the long, straight alleys, with their perfect arch of shade, stretched away in apparently endless perspective, and where the *tapis vert* was as much like emerald velvet as in the days when Louise de la Vallière and her gay companions played blind-man's-buff upon it. But these stately pleasure-grounds are overwhelming in their immensity, and tired nature presently demanded rest. Then Stanhope carried them to an hotel, where, it appeared, he had already ordered *d'jeuner* to be in readiness.

Such interludes are not the least pleasant parts of days like this. Human nature grows more genial when refreshed by delicate dishes and inspired by good wine; and they talked and lingered until Erne suggested that time was slipping away. "We have the Trianons yet to see," he added.

"Suppose we omit the Grand Trianon," said Mrs. Falconer. "There is so much in

knowing what not to see, and I never thought there was much of interest there. We will go to the Petit Trianon, which is full of the association of Marie Antoinette, and where one imagines her, not as the fated queen, but as the gay young dauphiness. You must not think of her sorrows but of her joyousness there," she added, looking at Irène.

"But the joyousness seems to deepen the gloom of the sorrow," said the girl.

Nevertheless, it was as Mrs. Falconer decreed. The Grand Trianon was omitted, and they went to the smaller chateau, filled with memories of the beautiful, light-hearted princess, whose tragical fate stands out more luridly against the gay frivolity of her youth. The afternoon was at its full tide of brightness when they entered the grounds, where, after the formal splendor of the great park of Versailles, the eye found pleasant refreshment in the graceful grouping of trees and shrubs; in the forest glades, full of tempered light and soft shadow; and in the winding paths leading into the still heart of woodland greenness, by the side of the gleaming crystal stream.

"Is it not charming?" said Mrs. Falconer to Stanhope, as they left the chateau together. "And those," she added, looking at Irène and Erne, who were walking in advance, "make a charming picture! The scene is an idyllic background for them."

"Very effective!" said Stanhope. Then he regarded her with a half-satirical smile, which she knew well. "When do you mean the idyl to take place?" he inquired.

She could not help flushing like one detected in guilt. "Why do you assume that I mean it to take place at all?" she asked. "Am I such a transparent schemer as that?"

"You are a very transparent schemer—to me," he answered. "I do not think your eyes have fallen upon either of those young people to-day, that I have not read your wishes and intentions in them. Perhaps it is as well that, while your romance is still in embryo, I should give you warning that the part for which you may cast me is that of the hard-hearted guardian."

"Are you in earnest?" she demanded, looking up at him as he looked cool and smiling down upon her. "Do you really mean that—that you should object to such an arrangement?"

"I mean exactly that," he replied. "And before I tell you why I should object, you must let me say how much I am surprised to find you developing into a match-maker."

"That is the term with which Aunt Marion tried to crush me," she said. "But I am not to be crushed by it. A matchmaker—and why should not one be a match-maker, if the match to be made is for the interest of all parties concerned? My opinion of marriage as a state of life is not very high; but it seems to me that a girl in the position of Irène is decidedly one of the people for whom it is necessary."

"You think, then, that position is to be considered rather than character?"

"No—that is, not exactly. You must acknowledge, however, that matrimony was instituted for people of all characters."

"I acknowledge nothing of the kind. It is an absurdity, which you would never advance in a cooler moment. I grant you that it was instituted, and is essential, for the majority of the human race; but there is a considerable minority who are manifestly unfitted for the state. And I am inclined to believe that Irène belongs to this minority."

"Her mother thinks so," said Mrs. Falconer; "but you will allow that, in such a matter, no person has a right to judge for another."

"Undoubtedly; and Madame Lescar would, I am sure, be the last to judge in a peremptory manner; but forgive me if I say that I think her decided opinion should at

least prevent your forming any matrimonial scheme for her daughter.”

“I am rebuked!” said Mrs. Falconer. “How foolish I was to betray my scheme to you!” she added, after a moment, while her lips began to curve into a smile. “Now I am afraid that you will not trust me, nor listen reasonably to a proposal I wish to make.”

“I am a very unreasonable person, certainly,” he answered; “and, with regard to my trust in you, I confess that it is shaken. Nevertheless, I promise to listen with due attention to any proposal you wish to make; provided, of course, that is not a proposal of marriage on behalf of Mr. Erne.”

“Oh, matters have not progressed nearly so far as that,” she said. “It was only my mind that dipped into futurity. I have no idea that Lionel’s has done so. And I will promise to keep mine in order hereafter, if you will tell Madame Lescar that, if she consents and desires it, I will take charge of her daughter when—she needs a home.”

There was a pause. Irène turned her head and looked back at them, as she disappeared with Erne around a turn of the path, before Stanhope spoke. At last he said, gravely:

“This is like you—it is as generous as it is kind; but, since I am responsible for it, I must relieve my conscience by pointing out that you may be bringing a good deal of trouble upon yourself by yielding to an impulse which I know to be altogether charitable. Consider that this girl, however interesting, is made of dangerous material.”

“I believe you regard her as possessing a dynamic quality,” she said, laughing. “But I am not in the least afraid of an explosion, and I am interested in her—more interested than I can tell you. She is so beautiful, so richly endowed, and she will soon be so pathetically alone! If I can do anything for her, should I think of a little trouble, more or less? All care for others means trouble; but for that reason shall we harden our hearts in selfish isolation?”

He smiled at the pleading tone, at the fair face turned toward him instinct with generous feeling.

“Listening to you, one would fancy that you were asking, rather than proposing to bestow, a favor,” he said. “But, if you forget yourself, I must think for you, and I fear that you may be carried by impulse into something that you would possibly regret.”

“It is not merely impulse,” she said. “I am more selfish than you think in the matter. I have long wanted a companion; not a mere *dame de compagnie*, but a sympathetic friend; one who could share my pursuits, my studies, my social life. It seems to me that everything I have dreamed of I find in Irène, with the addition of elements of romance of which I never dreamed.”

“It is the elements of romance which I dread,” he answered. “For Madame Lescar’s sake, I am willing to undertake whatever is involved in such a charge; but, although the arrangement you propose would relieve me immensely, I can not feel satisfied that it should be made.”

“But it will be made,” she said. “I tell you that I am resolved. That wonderful voice decided me. Think of having such a voice under one’s roof all the time!”

“Think of trying to play hypocrite to anybody who knows you as well as I do!” said Stanhope. “Do you imagine I will believe that you want the girl because she can give you pleasure? If the truth were told, I have no doubt your resolution was taken before you knew that she had a voice.”

“Not my resolution exactly,” she replied. “I have been wanting to say that I

would do this from the first; but I thought I would be prudent enough to satisfy even you. I would wait—I would see—I would judge! And now that I have waited, that I have seen, that I have judged; now that, after calm deliberation, I have taken my resolution, you try to dissuade me, to disappoint me! Mr. Stanhope, you are not really so unkind.”

Perhaps it was the voice, which took again a pleading tone difficult to resist, or perhaps it was the thought of Madame Lescar and her sad anxiety for her daughter’s future, which made Stanhope, after a moment, answer:

“No. You must follow the dictates of your heart; and, if it costs you something—well, it is not immediately that we look for the reward of any good action. One reward you will certainly have—that of your own conscience. And now”—he smiled— “that I have eased my conscience by a protest, I must honestly say that your decision is an infinite relief to me. It ends the perplexity which has troubled both Madame Lescar and myself, and gives Irène all that we could ask or desire of protection.”

“Your relief does not equal my pleasure,” she said, frankly. “I feel what a good thing it is to be rich and free—to be accountable to nobody for my actions. I need not even ask any one’s opinion: I can do exactly and entirely as I like.”

The smile was still on his lips as he looked at her. She had thrown back her head a little, her color was raised, her eyes bright—she seemed to be exulting in her freedom, yet it was a delicate, tempered exultation which became her graceful beauty. Stanhope remembered it afterward—the picture she made, the sun striking on the green foliage all around them, with here and there a russet tint, the still depths of the park stretching away like a fairy world of light and shade, the stream shining in its curves, the soft blue sky overhead.

“I think,” he said, “that you do what you like because you are made of the stuff to do it. The freedom that is a delight to you would be a burden to a weaker woman. One can not blame vines for requiring a prop, instead of standing like a palm, upright, slender and straight. But I like palms.”

While Irène’s fate, in a partial sense, was being thus decided behind her, she was walking on with Erne, so fully alive to all the spell of the day and scene, to every association of the spot, that she was almost unconscious of the presence of her companion. And, although aware of this unflattering fact, Erne was not restive under it. There was a charm in the girl’s indifference, which was like a new flavor to his mental palate. Then, it was almost worth being ignored to have such good opportunity to watch the turn of the white throat, the lines of the clear-cut profile, to meet now and then the large clear eyes, full of wistful, shining light.

“What do you see?” he asked at length. “Marie Antoinette, with her fair Austrian face, and the Watteau groups of courtiers and ladies who followed her here to play at rustic life? Is there no plant with which you could anoint my eyes that I might see them too?”

She shook her head, smiling. “I do not know of any such plant,” she answered. “And it seems to me that you ought not to need it—if you are an artist.”

“You think that an artist must possess the second-sight called imagination?”

“Surely, yes,” she replied with some surprise. “What else does it mean to be an artist?”

“I suppose it ought to mean that,” he said. “And in proportion as it does mean it is a man an artist. But you must remember that I am one in a very imperfect degree.”

“Are you?” she said. There was something prepossessing in the frank words, and not less so in the handsome young face on which the sun was shining. “Modesty is a very good thing,” she went on, smiling again, “and to think poorly of yourself and highly of art—that is the secret of great achievement, is it not?”

“Perhaps so,” he replied. “Modesty, as you remark, is a very good thing, and I have been cultivating it lately. I have discovered that a taste is not a passion—that appreciation is not power. In feeling I shall always be an artist—in execution, I fear, never.”

“That is a pity,” she said, in a voice which seemed made to express every shade of feeling. “Perhaps you are mistaken—perhaps you are only discouraged. One can not expect to become a great artist in a day.”

“Certainly not,” he answered; “but I don’t think I am merely discouraged. I have weighed myself and found myself wanting,” said the young fellow with honest self-deprecation, yet a lurking desire not to be taken at his word. “It is not a pleasant thing to realize, *mais que voulez-vous?*”—shrugging his shoulders lightly in Gallic fashion. “One should face the truth. And the truth for me is that I can make pictures, but I can not put into them the soul of genius.”

He saw what quick sympathy the girl had, when she looked at him now. Surely, eyes speaking so much—so eloquent, so lustrous, so kind—he had never met before! They brought into his mind the splendid Homeric images. Just such eyes he fancied the goddesses, sweeping down from Olympus, had.

“But genius is a rare thing,” said the sweet voice, “and if no one was satisfied to fall short of it, there would not be much accomplished in the world. If one can add a little to the sum of existing beauty, should one refuse to do so because one is not a Raphael?”

“Ah, *if one can!*” said he. “But do you really think that the world is in need of any more mediocre pictures? That is hardly the conclusion forced upon one in the galleries.”

“No,” she answered, candidly. “There is certainly no need of more mediocre pictures. But great ones—there is always need of them. And perhaps special need, since modern art seems so deficient in greatness. When I go to the Luxembourg, and think of the Vatican or the Pitti or the Belle Arti—”

“But you know it is not fair to compare men with giants,” he said, rousing a little. “Art is the expression, the outcome, of the spirit of its age—and this age has not one but a thousand spirits. The air is full of the clash of old and new ideas. In such an atmosphere art can not flourish. It needs serenity, and—yes—it needs faith.”

“And you believe that there is neither serenity nor faith to be found at the present time?” she asked, interested, and not having Godwin to inform her that what she heard was merely an echo of the ideas of other men.

“I believe that the age does not know them,” he answered. “Individual lives may; but art is the expression of the force of a current. Whether a man will or no, the spirit of his age tells upon his work. It does not follow that they were all religious men, those wonderful mediaeval painters. But they felt around them the presence of intense religious enthusiasm; they painted for the eyes of religious faith, and they were inspired by an atmosphere of strong, unwavering belief.”

It was pleasant to talk in this strain to such a listener, to a face that responded so quickly, that expressed assent, doubt, or denial almost without the aid of words. As they

walked on, Erne felt that it would have been quite possible to expound his theories for an indefinite length of time. But now a space opened before them: here and there on the sward were set a number of picturesque buildings—thatched cottages, with deep shade drooping over their roofs, a silent mill, an empty dairy. “The Swiss hameau,” he said.

It was like an enchanted world as they paused and looked around. Not a leaf stirred in the golden air; the placid, shining water scarcely seemed to flow under the bridge that spanned it; the glades of the park stretched away, full of sylvan beauty. In the intense stillness one listened for the echo of laughing voices, the rustle of silken skirts, the tread of dainty feet—feet destined to mount the steps of the guillotine.

“Oh!” said Irène, in a low tone, “how lovely it is—and how sad!”

“All deserted places are sad,” said Erne.

“There is more than the sadness of desertion here,” she answered. “There is the shadow of tragedy. Do you not feel it all the time under these trees of Trianon? I wonder if the leaves could have rustled, the sunshine streamed, the shadows fallen over the grass, the day the queen met her death yonder at her palace-gate in Paris?”

“Nature has no tears to shed for any tragedy,” replied the young man. He threw back his head, and looked up at the green boughs, the limpid, stainless sky. “What a day!” he said. “Do not darken it with the thought of that past piteous suffering! Life is so short—there are so many things that of necessity mar our happiness—that we should not introduce a single unnecessary one.”

“Do you mean that we should ignore all suffering—except our own, which we can not ignore?” she asked. “That would make us very selfish.”

“Oh, the poetry of pathos is an essential part of life,” said the disciple of aestheticism. “But harsh and terrible tragedy—one shrinks from the thought of that in a scene like an embodied pastoral.”

“But it happened!” said the girl, in a low voice. To her, at that moment, it was real beyond expression—all the long martyrdom of agony, and the moment of final release, when the fair royal head fell under the axe. She could not introduce it merely as a pathetic, poetic adjunct to the beauty around. Her cheek grew pale, her eyes gathered back their wistful sadness—a sadness which had dissolved into a mist of tears when she stood before the lovely picture of the boy-Dauphin, painted by Lebrun, in the boudoir of the Petit Trianon. To Erne, although he deprecated it, there was something in this intense sympathy, this passionate realization of things wholly beyond the circle of personal knowledge or interest—a circle which proves an insurmountable barrier to most of the world—which was very charming, though he felt that such a nature was not formed for happiness. It was interesting, however, it was *spirituelle*, it promised to the aesthetic mind much more gratification than is to be obtained from the contemplation of anything so commonplace as happiness.

They were rapidly becoming very well acquainted as they wandered about the hamlet; peered through the closed casements into empty rooms; looked in the dairy at the marble slabs, where fair hands had played at butter-making; saw the picturesque mill reflected in the glassy water, where swans were slowly sailing to and fro; and finally paused on the bridge, under which flowed the stream along which their path had lain.

“It is like a pastoral,” said Irène; “but a Watteau pastoral—fit for a court in masquerade. It is a scene to suggest pictures and poems—a whole world of dramatic possibilities. What charming figures one sees coming along the glades, or crossing the

sward yonder—some joyous, some agitated; and then, you know, one begins to imagine all the causes of the joy and the agitation. It is difficult to stop in such fancies,” she broke off, with a smile.

“No doubt it is—to you,” said Erne. “And I suppose you often find suggestion for them?”

“Continually,” she answered. “Sometimes it torments me. I should like to be more—how do you call it?—matter-of-fact! Why, I never see a figure passing down a road—especially if it be lonely, and with a sunset sky beyond—that I do not dream out a destiny for it.”

“It is no wonder that you sing as you do,” he said. And then he added, “I wish you would sing—one song—for me now.”

“But what would be appropriate?” she asked, with perfect simplicity and readiness to oblige. “One should not sing anything at the Trianon. It ought to be something associated with the past—with the old court life. Ah, I know what it shall be! Do you know this ballad of the Cardinal Duc de Rohan? “

Then in a low, soft voice she began to sing:

“Ton souvenir est toujours là
O toi, qui ne peut plus m’entendre,
Toi qui j’aimais d’amour si tendre,
Jamais mon cœur ne t’oubliera.
Toujours présente à ma pensée,
Ma voix sans cesse redira
Douceur d’amour trop tôt passé,
Ton souvenir est toujours là”

It is simple in melody, this strain which has been wafted down to us from the *ancien régime*, but there is tenderness as well as grace in it, a fragrance like the faint odor of faded roses. It seemed to summon back all the stately and beautiful past, all those courtly shades of which the girl had been dreaming. The thrill of her voice told Erne how her thoughts were with that life, so full of picturesque splendor and elaborate social art, yet when eyes shone and lips smiled and hearts beat even as they do to-day. The sun was sinking low in the sky, the shadows were stretching long over the turf, the windows of the Swiss houses, catching the light, gleamed as if from radiant fires within, the swans were sailing on a glorified expanse of water. It was one of the enchanted moments of life which end too soon.

Several hours later, evening had fallen over the great city, the beautiful day had melted into a mild, clear night, the sky thickset with stars, which looked serenely down on the lines of flashing light along the wide Boulevards, the brilliant shops, the hurrying crowds, the sparkling *cafés*, as Stanhope and Erne drove together from the railway-station. “It has been a delightful day. Thank you, and good-night,” Mrs. Falconer had said, when they parted. She looked a little tired; but Irène’s radiance was still undimmed. Her eyes were shining like stars under the great dark-plumed hat, when she, too, said good-night, and was borne away by the eager horses and impatient coachman. Then the two young men called a cab, and were jolting together over the stones, when Erne said, abruptly:

“Do you remember Matthew Arnold’s ‘Urania’? Mademoiselle Lescar has kept the first verse of it running through my mind all day.” Then, without waiting for an

answer, he began to quote:

“She smiles and smiles, and will not sigh,
While we for hopeless passion die;
Yet she could love, those eyes declare,
Were men but nobler than they are.”

“So, she will not sigh!” said Stanhope, with a laugh. “My dear fellow, if there were any good in warnings, I should be tempted to offer you one. I should be tempted to say: Don’t fancy yourself in love with Irène Lescar! She could easily turn what has been amusement with you hitherto into uncomfortable earnest—but, however much you might die with hopeless passion, I doubt if you would waken any response in those eyes of hers. They are filled with the light of imagination—the light that will hardly suffer her to find her ideal among the sons of men.”

CHAPTEK XII.

It would be difficult to imagine a greater relief than that which Mrs. Falconer’s resolution with regard to Irène brought to Stanhope’s mind. Where the girl was to be placed in the event of her mother’s death, had troubled him scarcely less than it troubled Madame Lescar, and that the difficulty should be solved in such a manner was as agreeable as it was unexpected. He had foreseen, from the beginning of Mrs. Falconer’s interest in the mother and daughter, that she would be of great assistance to him; but, well as he knew her, he had not ventured to expect such assistance as this—realizing how far it would be from the inclination of many a beautiful woman to place near herself a woman more beautiful, and from that of most worldly women to assume the responsibility of protecting one who had no worldly influence or rank. “But she is not like other women,” he said to himself. “She is *sui generis*, and deserves all the admiration and confidence that one can give her.”

In this pleasant frame of mind he went, the day after the Versailles expedition, to tell his news to Madame Lescar. As he entered the gate of the house on the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne, he met Irène and Nathalie just issuing forth.

“*Bon jour*, M. Stanhope,” said the girl, putting out her hand. “You have come to see mamma, and, fortunately, she has just taken her *dîne*, and is able to see you. Be sure to tell her what a delightful day we spent yesterday. She has asked many questions about it, and seems pleased to hear all that I can tell.”

“And that is a great deal, I have no doubt,” he said, “for I think you enjoyed the day.”

“I am sure you know that I did,” she answered. “But let Nathalie take you up to mamma. I will wait for her here.”

It occurred to him to wonder if she had a thought apart from her mother; but he accepted his dismissal, and followed Nathalie across the court-yard, up the stairs, and into the presence of Madame Lescar, who was lying on a sofa in the *salon*. She made no attempt to rise, but held out her hand to him with a smile of welcome, sweet and cordial as her smiles always were.

“I am very glad to see you,” she said. “I was thinking of you when I heard your step, thinking that I would write to you if you did not come to-day.”

“I am delighted to appear so opportunely,” he said. “What is it that you wish of

me?"

He sat down as he spoke, and she looked at him with the expression of trustful reliance which always touched him peculiarly.

"I wish," she answered, "to say that I have suffered much lately, and I think that whatever is to be done should not be delayed. Are the papers ready for my signature?"

"They will be ready to-morrow," he replied. "You have only to appoint an hour when I can attend you with the notary."

"This is a good hour," she said. "If you will come at this time to-morrow, I shall be ready to receive you."

"I will come," he said. "Consider that the matter is settled, and let me have the satisfaction of knowing that your mind is at rest."

"If you could know how much!" she said. "I am giving you a great deal of trouble, but if you could realize what your kindness is to me, I am sure you would be repaid."

"Do you think that I need to be repaid?" he asked. "Are you not aware that it gives me happiness to be of service to you?"

"I do not doubt it," she answered, "and therefore I have not hesitated to ask very much of you. Ah, not a word!" she said, putting her slender, transparent hand down upon his. "I know what I have asked—I know what a responsibility I have laid upon you."

"I hope," he said, "that it may be long before I am called upon to assume that responsibility. But I have to tell you that your mind may also be at rest with regard to something that has troubled you about your daughter—the question of a home—of social guardianship—"

"Yes," she said, lifting herself eagerly, "that has troubled me greatly. What have you to suggest?"

"I have to tell you," he answered, "that Mrs. Falconer has empowered me to say that, if you desire it, she will take Irène under her care. I do not think you could ask anything better for her than that."

"Nothing!" she replied, in a low, fervent tone—"nothing!"

She sank back on her pillows, and closed her eyes for a moment. Then she lifted the lids again, and looked at him with a glance full of grateful brightness.

"It is to you that I owe this," she said. "How can I thank you?"

"You must not thank me at all," he answered, "for it is not to me that you owe either your daughter's attractiveness or Mrs. Falconer's kindness."

"I owe it to you that I ever heard of Mrs. Falconer," she said, "and I suspect that I owe to you also the suggestion of an arrangement which is better than I could have dared to hope for."

"No," he insisted, "you do not. I may have entertained a faint hope of something of the kind; but I never suggested it—even indirectly. The proposal came spontaneously from Mrs. Falconer herself."

"This, then, is what she meant when she said that, as far as her friendship could shield Irène, she should not be left alone. Surely, I did well to feel that she is a woman to trust."

"I do not think that a truer heart exists—nor a more generous nature," said Stanhope. "And everything seems to combine to fit her for this trust. There are the ties of country and of hereditary friendship, besides the great advantages of wealth and high

station.”

“And the fact,” said Madame Lescar, “that she has sufficient seniority to give her influence over Irène, but not enough to destroy the sympathy of youth. It almost seems as if the arrangement is too perfect—too much all that I could desire. There must be a flaw somewhere.” She paused a moment, then added, “Mrs. Falconer is young and beautiful—may she not marry?”

“It is possible, certainly,” replied Stanhope; “but I do not think probable. As far as I am able to judge, Mrs. Falconer thinks of nothing so little as of resigning the freedom which Fate has restored to her. Of course, the world does not credit this. There is no more obstinate hallucination fixed in the minds of mankind than the idea that every man or woman who is single must desire to be married. I do not mean to say that Mrs. Falconer may not eventually make a marriage that would give her higher position, wider opportunities in life—but I am sure that she has no immediate thoughts of it.”

“Is she ambitious? I had hoped—I had thought perhaps that you—”

He made a gesture which stopped her. “Et tu Brute?” he said, half laughing. “I fancied that you knew me better; Mrs. Falconer does, at any rate. We understand each other, we are the best, the frankest friends—and some day when she may be madame la duchesse or madame *l’ambassadrice*, I shall still have my familiar corner in her *salon*, like Châteaubriand in that of Madame Récamier.”

“The comparison is damaging to your case,” she said, smiling, “for Châteaubriand was lover, not friend.”

“Friendship for such a woman must partake somewhat of the character of love,” he answered, “but a great difference lies in the fact that it is less selfish. A friend does not desire to monopolize: a lover always desires to do so.”

“Yes,” she said, “love is almost invariably selfish; and for that reason I hope that you are right, that Mrs. Falconer will be content with her present freedom—at least until Irène has sufficient age and experience to decide upon her future. That future is something of which I can not permit myself to think,” she added, with the shadow of pain falling over her face. “I can—I must—trust God.”

The next day, according to his promise, Stanhope brought the notary, and, after her business arrangements had been completed, a calm of spirit settled upon Madame Lescar, which in its result upon her health had the appearance of improvement. “I am ready now for Death,” she said: but, because she was ready, Death seemed to draw back and lower his leveled dart. She grew stronger instead of weaker, and a few days later Irène said to Mrs. Falconer joyously, “Mamma is certainly better—much better.”

“There is undoubtedly a great improvement,” said Mrs. Falconer, who had herself observed it, and who could hardly believe what the doctor said to Stanhope: “It is a mere fluctuation of the disease—a flicker of the candle.”

“I have not seen her so much better for a long time—not for nearly five months,” the girl went on. “If she continues to improve so rapidly, we may leave Paris before long and go back to Italy.”

“You would be glad of that?”

“Who would not be glad to return to Italy? I am like Mignon—my heart is always there. But still, if it were better for mamma to be here—or anywhere else—I should be satisfied never to see it again.”

“Poor child!” thought Mrs. Falconer, as she had thought often before. “But I must

not waste time," she said, aloud, "for do you know what I am here at this untimely hour for?"—it was not more than eleven o'clock.—"It is to take you to the Chapelle Expiatoire. Have you forgotten that this is the anniversary of the death of Marie Antoinette, and that when we were at Versailles I promised to go with you to the Chappelle to-day?"

"I scarcely expected you to remember it," said the girl, with pleased, grateful eyes. "How very kind you are! I will get ready at once."

A few minutes later they were driving around the Place de l'Étoile, down the Avenue Friedland, and into the Boulevard Haussmann, where the carriage stopped at the gate of the Chappelle. It is a quiet spot ordinarily, although around it the great life of Paris surges in restless tide—only a few *bonnes* and children generally sit under the trees of the small green square, or walk along its paths. But twice a year—on the anniversaries of the death of the king and of the queen—this is changed. Then carriages throng about its gates, and all day long a quiet, respectful crowd pours into the building. One who watches this crowd may see bearers of the oldest and noblest names of France, men who are descendants of the Crusaders, delicate high-born women, and mingled with these now and then, some of the lower orders.

But never the middle class—be sure the bourgeois does not go to the Chapelle Expiatoire! It would be wiser to expect to draw blood from a stone than to find the beautiful virtue of loyalty in the breast of a *roturier*.*

"I came here once before—on the anniversary of the death of the king," said Mrs. Falconer, as they walked up to the door of the vestibule, into which a stream of people was pouring. "But I found it impossible to enter the chapel, the crowd was so great—and that notwithstanding masses are said every half-hour from seven o'clock until noon. You see it is a profession of faith to be here—and look at that!"

What she indicated were two large baskets filled to overflowing with cards. "Those are sent to the Comte de Chambord," she said. "If anything could cheer the heart of an exiled king, it ought to be such proofs of devotion, when we consider how this wretched human nature of ours is prone to turn from what is fallen and worship only risen suns.—And that is to be sent to Frohsdorf also, *n'est-ce pas?*" she asked of a man who stood behind a table where lay a large open volume, on the pages of which a number of names were inscribed.

"*Oui, madame,*" he answered. "Will madame inscribe her name?" he added, offering a pen.

"Why not?" she said, with a smile to Irène. "It will tell the Comte de Chambord nothing, except, perhaps, that he has the best wishes of two strangers—for I shall write yours also, shall I not?"

"Oh, yes," said Irène, with all her heart in the soft music of her voice. "I surely hope that he may yet 'have his own again.'"

The words, though spoken in English, were heard and evidently understood by a gentleman at that moment approaching, for he looked quickly and with interest at the speaker. Then his glance fell on the lady who was writing, and when Mrs. Falconer laid down her pen, she found herself face to face with the Marquis de Châteaumesnil.

"This is an unexpected pleasure," he said, with a smile in his dark eyes which

* Since this was written the demolition of the Chapelle has been decreed by the existing government of France—a fresh proof of the vandalism and intolerance which are practiced in the name of liberty!

proved that the words were no mere form of expression. "I am delighted to see you here, madame; and still more delighted that you are sending your name to the king."

"Do you not know that I am an adherent, or at least a well-wisher, of Henri Cinq?" she asked. "Though I confess it is not that which has brought me here, but the desire of my young friend Mademoiselle Lescar to see the Chapelle, and to see it especially to-day."

The Marquis turned to Irène with a bow. "I had the pleasure of hearing mademoiselle express a sentiment a moment ago, for which I am glad to be able to thank her," he said.

"What was the sentiment—that she hoped the king would 'have his own again'?" said Mrs. Falconer. "Ah, we all hope that—but hopes, unfortunately, do not count for much.—Irène, let me present the Marquis de Châteaumesnil.—And now, M. le Marquis, do you think that in return for our sympathy you can get us within the Chapelle?"

"I do not think there is any doubt of it," answered the Marquis; "but we shall probably have to wait until the mass at present being said is over."

They passed on, and found themselves in the raised, oblong court, with cloistral arches on each side, which lies between the vestibule and the chapel. Here, ranged in serried order, are the tombs of the Swiss guard—the brave men who died fighting on the stairs of the Tuileries, knowing well that the struggle was vain, yet ready to be slaughtered rather than betray their trust. It was plain that the mere sight of these memorials touched Irène like a strain of heroic music. Mrs. Falconer saw the quick light in her eyes, and asked of what she was thinking.

"Only how appropriate it is that these should be here," she answered. "It seems as if they are still a guard—in death as in life. It reminds one of Schiller's line:

'As sleeps a soldier on the shield he would not quit.'"

"I think," said the Marquis, with another glance of interest at the kindling face, "that looking at these tombs one realizes forcibly how much better a noble death is than an unworthy life. They might easily have saved their lives for a time, those soldiers; but, in such case, who would know of them now?—while as it is, their name is the synonym for courage and faithfulness, the most glorious of virtues."

Talking in this way, they stood. The inclosure was filled with people, waiting their opportunity to enter the chapel, which was crowded to overflowing. On the steps a silent throng held their places, but scattered about the court were various knots and groups engaged in conversation. With most of these, the Marquis exchanged salutations, and many curious glances were cast on the beautiful women whom he attended. Mrs. Falconer, however, recognized a few acquaintances, for her social lines extended even into the exclusive Faubourg; and she turned now and then to whisper to Irène the name of some distinguished man, or of some graceful, high-bred woman.

Altogether, it was a scene which, as a prelude to what awaited them within the chapel, touched Irène in a manner only possible to a poetic nature. The soft autumn sky overhead, the caressing breath of the autumn air, with the light, fitful breezes which now and then sent showers of yellow leaves fluttering from the trees, all seemed full of the suggestion of that other day when the death-cart rolled into the Place de la Concorde, and a woman, whose hair had grown gray with agony, looked toward the place where she had reigned, and bade farewell to earth. If the tragedy had seemed real to the girl under the trees of the Trianon, how much more real did it seem in this spot—once the obscure

burial-ground where the bodies of the king and queen were thrust into the earth, now a shrine of expiation!

“One sees here how strong the Legitimist feeling is in France,” she thought, looking at the crowd which filled the court, the dense throng within the chapel. All that is best in unhappy France was indeed represented there—the element which recognizes the great principle of authority in the temporal, as in the spiritual, order to be the sole hope of stability in either; but even to a girl, with no knowledge of the troubled affairs of states, an instinct was borne that it was too high an element to leaven the great mass of ignorance, swayed by passion and cupidity. And something like this she heard the Marquis say a moment later to Mrs. Falconer.

“No, I am not sanguine,” he said, in answer to some remark of hers. “I can not permit myself to be blinded by hope. Things must grow worse—much worse—before they can grow better. Men must learn where the tide of revolution will carry them.”

“Do you, like Mr. Godwin, look for a terrible consummation to the present state of affairs?” she asked.

“I look,” he answered, “for a flood that will sweep away the whole existing fabric of social order. After it has passed, I know not what will remain—except that one ark will be found floating upon the waters.”

His tone and manner surprised Mrs. Falconer exceedingly. There was a gravity and depth of feeling in them which was as far as possible from what she had imagined of the man she had conceived him to be. “After all, Mr. Stanhope may be right,” she thought, “and I have read him superficially.”

A little later they succeeded in entering the chapel, where one crowd had given place to another as dense.

To Irène it was an impressive scene. The bowed, silent throng of people extending to the verge of the sanctuary, where, amid starry lights and silver lilies, the final mass was being said; the heavy black draperies, the multitudes of wreaths and crosses, the statues of the king and queen at opposite ends of the chapel, relieved against the dark background, and telling their piteous story to the gaze and heart of the youngest child present; the last words of each—the will of the king, the letter of the queen to Madame Elisabeth—inscribed upon the pedestals in letters of gold—all seemed to her full of the most noble pathos. They were near the statue of the queen, and, looking up at the kneeling form to which a shrouded figure is presenting a cross, she had a brief knowledge of that exaltation of feeling—not for long possible to weak human nature—in which we recognize the divine office of suffering, even in its most awful forms. Truly she drank the bitter cup to its dregs, that fair, pampered child of imperial fortune—but who can read those last words from the gloomy cell of the Conciergerie, without feeling that anguish had borne heroic fruit, and that the daughter of kings had risen to be the daughter of martyrs?

Great sorrows are great lessons to those who will heed them. And the girl whose life had been so early shadowed by wrong, and whose heart was now torn by the fear of desolation, felt as if for a little time she gained a height where both wrong and desolation were more endurable. “Look at me!” said the beautiful, agonized face of the murdered queen. “Of my splendors and my sufferings what remains to me but the merits gained by the last?” And then the solemn voice at the altar said, “*Oremus!*”

Afterward Irène wondered if this scene, with all the thoughts and feelings which

it suggested, was in some manner a preparation for what lay before her. Certainly she had rarely been more deeply stirred. It was a face still pale with emotion, on which the soft sunshine fell, when she presently emerged from the chapel, and with her companions walked across the court. She hardly heard them as they talked, and she was not aware when they paused to read an inscription. She walked on toward the vestibule; and, looking after her, the Marquis said:

“Mademoiselle Lescar seems deeply impressed. May I ask if she is French?”

“By descent only,” answered Mrs. Falconer, glad of a loophole of evasion. “She is a young compatriot of mine—one who is full of imagination and sensitiveness.”

“She has a striking face,” he said.

“It is very beautiful,” said Mrs. Falconer.

“Ah, beauty is common beside such *spirituelle* expression,” said the Marquis, who, like most of his countrymen, ranked expression before perfection of feature.

There was time for no more. Irène had paused in the door to wait for them, and when they joined her there were not many steps to be taken to the carriage. After they were seated in this, Mrs. Falconer, as if with a sudden thought, said to the Marquis:

“Do you know that Lady Falconer is in Paris, and with me at present?”

“No, I was not aware of it,” he replied, with a slight air of surprise. “But I have been out of Paris for nearly a week until to-day. May I beg you to make my compliments to my cousin, and say that I shall have the pleasure of seeing her very soon—this evening, if you will permit me?”

“I am sorry that we are engaged this evening,” she answered. “But can you not dine with us to-morrow?”

“I shall be delighted to do so,” he replied. “Then *au revoir*. Our last words are, *Vive Henri Cinq!* — are they not, Irène?”

Irène bowed and smiled, the Marquis lifted his hat, and the carriage drove away. There was silence in it for a moment or two, when the girl laid her hand lightly on that of her companion, as she said:

“Thank you for taking me there to-day. I have liked it so much—so very much.”

“Felt it too much, I am afraid,” answered Mrs. Falconer, with a glance at her face. “Your eyes are as sad as if you had been to the execution of the queen! My dear child, what is to become of you if you go through life responding in this manner to every touch upon your spirit?”

“How can I tell?” asked Irène. “But was it not like a poem of loyalty and faith?”

“Yes, it was very touching—the more because it was so genuine, and genuine things are rare—as rare as disinterested ones. No man or woman there could serve any selfish end by going—many of them, indeed, like the Marquis de Châteaumesnil, have given up much, have sacrificed ambition to loyalty.”

“Is that what he has done?” asked the girl, with a quick glance. “I am not surprised; I liked his face.”

If Mrs. Falconer had followed her impulse she would have said, “And he liked yours.” But she was too wise a woman for that. She only smiled, and answered much as she had answered the Marquis, “It is a handsome face.”

“Yes, but that is not what I meant,” replied Irène, putting aside the statement as the Marquis had put aside that of her beauty. “It is a face that seems full of distinction and power. It reminds me of some of the historical portraits we saw the other day at

Versailles—calm, high-bred, intellectual faces, with dark, inscrutable eyes.”

“That is not remarkable,” said Mrs. Falconer. “They may have been his ancestors. It is, at least, the same type. And Mr. Stanhope thinks that the Marquis has powers that under other circumstances would make him distinguished.”

“If Mr. Stanhope thinks so, I am certain of it,” said Irène confidently. “But surely a Marquis de Châteaumesnil is distinguished under any régime.”

“He has the distinction of his rank, of course—nothing can rob him of that; but what he desires also is the personal distinction that his forefathers won, in court and camp and cabinet. But,” added the speaker, suddenly bethinking herself that it would not do to kindle the interest of this imaginative girl for a man like the one of whom they spoke, “I regret to say that there is a side to his character which is by no means heroic. Failing worthy objects of ambition, he has fallen back upon unworthy ones—has been a mere man of fashion, squandered his fortune, exhausted himself in idle pleasures—in short, run a very common course of folly.”

“I am sorry,” said Irène, with sincere regret in her voice. “I liked his face, and I hoped—I thought— But perhaps he may be less to blame than most men. If there was nothing else for him to do—”

“There is always something else—something better to be done,” said Mrs. Falconer, her face hardening a little. “But that also is what Mr. Stanhope says,” she added a moment later, softening and brightening. “There is certainly great unanimity of sentiment between you on the subject of the Marquis de Châteaumesnil.—But here we are at your door, so I must bid you good-by.”

“Good-by—and thank you again,” said the girl, bending forward to leave a kiss on the cheek nearest her. Then she sprang lightly out and stood smiling in the gate-way while the carriage drove off. The sun was shining down on her—behind the slender figure was a glimpse of the tranquil court, with its fountain and beds of plants, overshadowed by the tall houses. Mrs. Falconer carried the scene away as a picture in her mind. It is fortunate that we can keep such pictures safe from the ravage of time, that takes all else. The face that she left then, she was destined never to see again, for an ineffaceable change had passed over it when she saw it next: but in her memory she carries it yet, smiling from the gate, with the golden sunshine falling over it, and the green court behind.

CHATTER XIII.

So far all had progressed with encouraging smoothness regarding Mrs. Falconer’s intentions toward Irène. Mrs. Vance had indeed shaken her head when they were communicated to her, but she had ventured on no remonstrance. A remonstrance, however, was to be uttered, and that in a quarter where, to Stanhope at least, it was unexpected. No thought of anything of the kind, no fear of being in any manner taken to task, was in his mind when, after having enjoyed a remarkably pleasant dinner, he entered Mrs. Falconer’s drawing-room on the evening after her visit to the Chappelle Expiatoire. He did not observe, as he entered, that Lady Falconer had established herself in a deep *fauteuil* apart from the other ladies, nor that she let the group of gentlemen file past without lifting her half-closed eyelids, until he appeared, when she extended her fan and stopped him, saying:

“Come and sit down by me, Mr. Stanhope. I want you to tell me what is the meaning of this new caprice of Sydney’s.”

He sank into a chair and looked at her with a smile. She was a very pleasant object to contemplate—fair and plump, and, without any special refinement of personal appearance, possessing the *grande dame* air which is the unconscious result of assured position. Her velvet dress lay in soft folds around her, there was an atmosphere of delicate perfume and rich lace and diamond stars that had a pleasant effect even upon Stanhope’s masculine consciousness, and her bright blue eyes had a challenge in them as she repeated her question.

“You must first tell me,” he replied, “to what caprice you allude.”

“As if you did not know!” she said. “As if *I* did not know that you are more in Sydney’s confidence than any one else! I mean her caprice for taking charge of a beautiful girl with a mysterious parentage. What does it mean?”

“It means,” said Stanhope, “that Mrs. Falconer has a keen sense of the ties of old friendship. She did not, perhaps, explain to you clearly who Mademoiselle Lescar is. There is nothing whatever mysterious about her parentage. Her grandfather was one of the most distinguished men of his day in American political life—even to English ears the name of Godfrey Lescar means something yet. Her mother was, and still remains, one of the most beautiful and charming of women—but she made a fatal mistake in her marriage.”

“Sydney told me something about it. She is divorced, is she not?”

“Rather, the marriage was declared invalid on the pretext of some legal informality—in reality to enable Prince Waldegrave to discard a wife who was an obstacle to his upward progress.”

“Prince Waldegrave!” repeated Lady Falconer. She lifted herself and opened her eyes wider with surprise and interest. “Is it possible,” she said, “that Prince Waldegrave is the man? I must have been asleep when Sydney was talking to me, or else she did not mention his name. There is not a diplomatist in Europe whom I admire more than Prince Waldegrave.”

“That is very probable,” said Stanhope. “A great many people admire him, and there is certainly no question of his ability; unfortunately, there is also no question but that he is utterly heartless and profoundly unscrupulous. Those qualities are by no means drawbacks in his diplomatic career; but they wrecked the life of the woman who married him.”

“Tell me the story,” said Lady Falconer, thoroughly roused now.

She listened with interest and close attention, and, if he told the story well, it was in a different manner from that in which he had told it to Mrs. Falconer. He knew better than to attempt to enlist the sympathy of this keen woman of the world—he was aware that, to those of her kind, misfortune is synonymous with weakness, to be pitied, perhaps, but also to be despised. There are numbers of people to whom, consciously or unconsciously, prosperity is the test of merit. He dwelt, then, very little on the pathetic side of the story, but strove to put Mrs. Falconer’s kindness in as ordinary a light as possible. That he failed in this attempt, however. Lady Falconer’s first words proved.

“It is a sad story,” she said, “and I am quite disgusted with Prince Waldegrave; but I see exactly how it is about Sydney! You have worked upon her sympathy, Mr. Stanhope; whereas, if your own sympathy and interest were not excited, you would think

with me that she is making a mistake.”

“I beg to differ with you,” said Stanhope. “My interest and sympathy certainly are excited, but, if they were not, I am sure I should not think that Mrs. Falconer is making a mistake. I am unable to see what possible ground there is for such an opinion.”

“You do not see that it is a mistake to burden herself with a girl who, from what she tells me, is so remarkable that people must ask who she is, and about whom awkward explanations will have to be made? It is folly, it is romantic nonsense, and I consider you very much to blame in the matter!”

“I am desolated to have incurred your displeasure,” said Stanhope, with a smile which she did not particularly fancy; “but I do not see the necessity for any awkward explanations. Mademoiselle Lescar can be presented to the world simply as one who has hereditary claims on Mrs. Falconer’s kindness—the daughter of an old friend.”

“It is a foolish and hazardous experiment—one that I should never have expected from a woman of Sydney’s good sense,” said Lady Falconer, who was plainly not to be moved from her position. “It is certain to give rise to disagreeable complications. Besides, where will her responsibility end? And if she marries—”

“Do you mean Mademoiselle Lescar?” asked Stanhope.

“No—I mean Sydney.” Then she looked at him with a glance that was meant to penetrate, and added, “Of course we both know that she *will* marry.”

“It is likely,” answered Stanhope, “though I have never seen a woman whose thoughts seemed as free of any matrimonial bent.”

“You may think that praise, perhaps,” said her ladyship, calmly; “I do not. One must have common sense, or else one may throw away one’s advantages in life, and reap nothing. Sydney has great advantages, and I want to see her make the most of them. I have set my heart on her making a brilliant marriage. You must agree with me that she is fitted to do so.”

“Yes,” he said, “I agree with you heartily; but I think she has time—”

Lady Falconer interrupted him by an impatient gesture. “Time!” she said. “I grant you that she has time enough—she is young yet—but what does she gain by waiting? Everything that she has now, a judicious marriage would only make more secure. She would lose nothing, and she would gain a great deal.”

“She would lose one thing, which I am sure she would regret,” said Stanhope. “That is freedom.”

“A doubtful good,” said Lady Falconer, shaking her head. “Wise control is better for individuals as well as for states. Prince Waldegrave and I agree on that subject. You see freedom means, among other things, imprudent benevolence. No, I would like to see Sydney married at once.”

“I presume, then, that you have selected the fitting man,” said Stanhope, who was able to smile because he felt sure that, whatever her plans might be, they would come to naught.

“There have been several fitting men,” she replied, with a sigh. “There was Herbert Wycliffe, a rising man, a member of Parliament—but Sydney found him dull. Perhaps he was—one can not have everything—but dullness is not always an objectionable quality in a husband. However, the person whom I have in my mind at present can not be accused of it; and I suppose that you know whom I mean?”

Stanhope confessed his utter inability to imagine. “For,” he said, “I think we

agree on one point—that Mrs. Falconer is fitted to be the wife of a man who will play a distinguished part in the world.”

“Yes,” said Lady Falconer; “and do you know any one better fitted to play such a part than my kinsman, the Marquis de Châteaumesnil?”

Stanhope did not answer for a moment. Then, with the air of a man who has had a surprise, he said: “M. de Châteaumesnil has brilliant abilities, and in another country they would certainly open for him a brilliant career; but you forget what France is now.”

“Rather, do not *you* forget what France may be?” she asked. “What can be predicted of it but change? I know what you will say—a change for the worse. But the worse must lead to the better. From anarchy men will fly to order; and then—”

“Henri Cinq on the throne of St. Louis, and the Marquis de Châteaumesnil near that throne,” said Stanhope. “I fear that I can not take such an optimistic view of the future.”

“Putting public life aside, then, his rank is high enough, his social prestige great enough, to satisfy the most ambitious woman.”

“And his fortune?” asked Stanhope, with a slight, significant smile. “You have forgotten to mention that.”

“Not at all,” replied the lady, in no wise disconcerted. “You must be aware that his fortune has suffered very much. But we are people of the world, you and I, and we know that, in an elevated rank of life, marriages are not arranged without a balance of advantages.”

“In other words, you think that Mrs. Falconer’s fortune is only a proper equivalent for the rank of the Marquis de Châteaumesnil?”

“Without doubt. And I must add that, but for her personal gifts, I should not think so. For it is not every woman who is the possessor of American millions who would make a suitable Marquise de Châteaumesnil.”

“And am I to understand,” said Stanhope, after a moment’s pause, “that the Marquis formally proposes himself, or is proposed by you, as a suitor to Mrs. Falconer?”

“No, no,” answered she, quickly. “Don’t go so fast! The idea is my own, and you are the first person to whom I have breathed it. But it occurred to me at Glenrochan, and I should not be surprised if it had also occurred to him.”

Stanhope thought that he would not be surprised either; but he also thought that there was not, as far as he was aware of Mrs. Falconer’s attitude of mind, much therein to encourage any matrimonial hopes. “But ‘who is’t can read a woman?’” he said to himself. “And such an alliance would give her all the scope for social ambition that she could desire.”

Lady Falconer, who was watching his face, leaned forward. “I see that it begins to grow upon you,” she said. “I have counted much on you—your influence with her, your friendship for him, make you just the person to accomplish all I desire.”

“Pardon me,” he replied; “but I must say at once that you count too much on my influence with Mrs. Falconer and my friendship for the Marquis. I am hardly inclined to use either in anything so perilous as a matrimonial scheme.”

“Do you mean,” she asked, a little pettishly, “that you are opposed to such a marriage?”

“Not at all,” he answered. “I only mean that I am opposed to assuming the responsibility of arranging it.”

What answer Lady Falconer would have made could only be conjectured, for at this moment Count Schewndorf approached, to whom Stanhope willingly yielded his seat and moved away.

It was not with altogether agreeable thoughts that he did so. The remonstrance about Irène had ruffled him a little, but it was entirely a surface ruffling, for he knew Mrs. Falconer too well to imagine that she would be swayed in the least by such advice: at that moment he recalled the picture of her, smiling up into his face in the grounds of the Trianon, and congratulating herself that she was rich and free, and able to do what she liked. But the suggestion of her marriage to the Marquis de Châteaumesnil had struck below the surface. Why it rendered him impatient, Stanhope hardly knew. He had long anticipated, and, as he once said, pleased himself by anticipating, some such destiny for her. But, lulled into security by the decided manner in which she put away that question of marriage which society insists upon thrusting on the attention of all unmarried and desirable women, he had dreamed of a number of years of her present life, with all its delightful circumstances, and then the brilliant marriage, the higher position as a *finale*. If she thought of surrendering this freedom on which she had congratulated herself, no one knew better than himself what a material difference it would make in her position toward Irène. "But I have no reason to believe that she would think of it," he said, by way of reassuring himself.

Meanwhile—for it was Mrs. Falconer's evening of reception—the *salon* was filling with guests, and he had not taken many steps away from the nook where Lady Falconer had established herself, before he was stopped by a young lady who uttered an exclamation of pleasure and surprise at sight of him. She was a small and exquisitely pretty person, although, to an eye experienced in such matters, it was apparent that she owed some measure of this prettiness to her toilet, which was perfect in its becomingness and grace. Nature, however, had been very generous to her. An abundance of pale, golden hair framed a piquant face, with large dark eyes full of diablerie, a delicate, blooming complexion, a saucy nez retroussé a mouth that seemed made for laughter and kisses, and a dainty chin cleft by a dimple. She held out her hand as Stanhope came toward her. He knew—who did not know?—Violet Dysart, one of the prettiest, and, in all save her chief aim, most successful of those young ladies whom America sends forth to amuse and astonish, and now and then to conquer, Europe.

"How charmed I am to see you!" she said, "and surprised, too—though why I should be surprised I don't know. It is at least as natural for you to be in Paris as it is for me to be here."

"Nothing could be more natural in either case," replied Stanhope, smiling, "Paris being a magnet likely to attract such wandering bodies as we both are. I am delighted to meet you, and to find you looking so well."

"I ought to look well," she answered, "for I always thrive on enjoyment, and I have had an enchanting summer. I believe the last time I saw you was here in Paris in May, and you told me you were going to Iceland or some such place. I went to London for the season, and then I was invited to several country-houses, so that I have just returned to the Continent. No people in the world live so perfectly as the English, and I would rather marry an Englishman—a high-born, wealthy Englishman—than any one else whatever."

"I think," said Stanhope, gravely, "that the last time I heard you express a

matrimonial preference, it was for an Austrian. I welcome the change as an indication that perhaps your taste may presently settle upon one of your own countrymen.”

“Never!” said she, emphatically. “I wonder that you venture to say such a thing to me, when you know that you are the only American I can tolerate; and you are not an American at all—you are a cosmopolitan.”

“I hardly know whether to thank you or not. I am afraid that, when a man rids himself entirely of his nationality, he also loses something of his individuality.”

“Something better lost than kept—at least in your case. In mine it is different. I abhor America; hut I find that to keep my American manners—modified, of course—and my American freedom, makes me more individual, and therefore more attractive over here. I have reduced it to a fine art—exactly how much to keep and how much to let go—and the consequence is, I have had a wonderful success. I am astonished at it myself.”

“I am not,” said Stanhope, amused by her frankness. “You were made to conquer. And I have no doubt you have a great deal to tell me of your conquests in England?”

“Oh, a great deal—more than I can tell you now. You must come to see me. I am with the Gilberts, Numero —, Avenue Marceau. You know them—or, if you don’t, they will be delighted to know you. Poor souls! they thought it would be charming to live abroad, and now that they have established themselves here they are very dull, and welcome any of their friends who may appear, as though they were Crusoes cast away on a desert island. I don’t like their circle of acquaintances or anything about them,” pursued the young lady with the candor that characterized all her utterances, “for, being in Paris, their chief effort seems directed toward living as much as possible as if they were in America. But I am chaperonless at present. The people with whom I went to London have returned to America, and the Jerninghams are still in Germany. I wish Mrs. Falconer would take me under her wing—I don’t know anybody whose mode of life I like better than hers. But of course it is not to be expected. What woman in her place *could* be expected to take charge of a younger and—well, as pretty a woman?”

“Especially if the latter is mistress of the art of fascination,” said Stanhope, with a smile which Miss Dysart did not altogether understand.

“I presume you mean to be sarcastic,” she said, “but all the same, you are right. I *do* know something of the art—though not much more, probably, than Mrs. Falconer herself. *A propos*, does she mean to marry the Marquis de Châteaumesnil?”

“Why should you think so?” asked Stanhope, a little startled, not only by the promptness with which the suggestion met him again, but by the matter-of-course tone in which it was made.

Miss Dysart regarded him with an expression of surprise. “It is what everybody who knows anything about the matter expects her to do,” she answered. “And when I was at Glenrochan—did I tell you I was there for a fortnight?—I saw that Lady Falconer meant to make the match. I only wish *I* had the chance!” she added, with a candid sigh. “To hear one’s self called Madame la Marquise, to bear one of the oldest names and be married to the most charming man in France—what happiness!”

“You might not find as much happiness in it as you imagine, perhaps,” said Stanhope, gently—being in truth sincerely sorry for the girl, who was wasting her youth, her beauty, her undoubted cleverness in a hopeless quest that had already made her only too notorious. “There may be better things than to be called Madame la Marquise. For instance, to reward devotion.”

“Such as that?” she asked, her lip curling as she followed his glance, which had involuntarily fallen on Erne. “No, monsieur, *je vous remercie*, but not until I am ten years older, at least, shall I think of that. Indeed, I doubt if ten—twenty—years will bring me to it! But here comes M. le Marquis himself! However hopeless it may be, I confess that I have a decided *tendresse* for him.”

Stanhope was of the opinion that the *tendresse* was very hopeless; but, as M. de Châteaumesnil approached, he thought that if the fascinations of the young lady made any impression, he, at least, would not be grieved thereat. Yet it was with something like a sense of shame that he recognized this feeling. After all, he could not deny that Lady Falconer had been right in much that she had said. The personal distinction, which was set like a seal upon the Marquis, seemed only the outward token of qualities which fitted him to achieve a position even higher than his inherited rank, were circumstances ever propitious. And among those circumstances, what was more essential than the ease of fortune which Mrs. Falconer could bestow?—while for that fortune she would certainly receive the fullest worldly equivalent. The idea once suggested persisted in intruding itself, let him do what he would to banish it; and so it was, perhaps, that not finding himself attuned to the social atmosphere, he soon sought his hostess to say good-night.

“You are leaving early,” she said. “I fear we are not very entertaining. You must be sure to come on Sunday—” (this was when she received only her special friends). “But, meanwhile, I see that something annoys you. Has Lady Falconer been talking to you about Irène?”

“Yes,” he answered, glad at that moment to remember that Lady Falconer had been doing so. “She has been taking me severely to task—blaming me for having excited your sympathy to do a foolish thing.”

“I was sure she would attack you,” said Mrs. Falconer, “after she found that her remonstrances had no effect upon me. But you don’t mind—do you? You understand how it may look from her point of view—but, fortunately, her point of view does not matter at all.”

“I don’t mind in the least what she thinks,” he replied, “but I need hardly say I should be deeply sorry, and reproach myself severely, if in any respect it did prove a foolish thing for you.”

She looked at him in surprise. “I am afraid that it is you who are foolish,” she said. “You have been influenced by Lady Falconer’s opinion, while on me it has not had the slightest effect. *Va-t-en!* I am ashamed of you!”

“I am ashamed of myself,” he answered, in a low tone, as he took her hand. And then he went away.

CHAPTER XIV.

The next morning Stanhope was waked at an early hour by the appearance of his servant at his bedside with a note which, the man said, the messenger who brought it declared to be urgent —“else I should not have disturbed monsieur,” he added, apologetically.

“You were quite right,” Stanhope answered, as he took the note and opened it. It was certainly urgent, for this was what it contained in hasty, almost illegible writing:

“Dear Mr. Stanhope, pray come to us at once. Mamma is very ill, and asks for

you. Irène.”

It required only a minute for him to rise and begin to make a hurried toilet, while he sent his servant to call a fiacre. He was ready when the man returned to say that one awaited him. Going down, he bade the messenger—whom he knew to be the son of Madame Lescar’s concierge—come with him, and as he entered the carriage he gave first Madame Lescar’s, and then, changing it quickly, Mrs. Falconer’s address. The boy stared; but the cause of the change was soon apparent, for, taking out his note-book as soon as he was seated, he began to write, as well as the motion would allow, on a blank leaf.

“I inclose,” he said, “a note from Irène which has just reached me, and I am on my way to answer the summons. I think it probable that Madame Lescar is dying, and I know that I do not ask too much of your kindness in begging you to follow me as soon as you can. L. S.”

He only paused long enough at Mrs. Falconer’s door to leave this, and then drove away toward the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne. As the fiacre rattled up the Champs-Élysées he thought of the day of his arrival in Paris, when he had walked along there, to obey another summons from Madame Lescar, and had met Mrs. Falconer on the way. “But for that meeting, I might never have thought of enlisting her interest in the matter,” he reflected. “Ought I to congratulate myself on the chance—if chance it was? It has certainly given peace to the poor soul to whom I am going—Heaven grant that it may never bring anything else to the kind heart that proved itself so easily touched!”

There were many thoughts like this to fill his mind; yet such is the dual action of consciousness, that he marked and appreciated all the aspect of Paris at this early hour. The street-sweepers had lately done their work and left the wide avenue clean as a palace-court; floods of sunshine poured over the chestnut-trees, under which only a few workmen now loitered, over the basins of the Rond Point, where the fountains were not yet playing, over the richly ornamented facades of the great hotels that extend thence to the Barrière de l’Étoile, and over the noble sculptures that stand in high relief on the Arc de Triomphe.

As they drove around the latter, his eye involuntarily turned to a scene that had for him much the same fascination as for Irène—the sweep of distant country between Longchamps and St. Cloud—soft woods, far heights, villages like spots of light. No one can forget that view who has ever seen it with the golden sky of evening above, when it seems like some enchanted world beyond the passionate, struggling, feverish city. But at this hour it was not less lovely. Shining mists were lying over it, already lifting to meet the sun’s ardent kiss, presenting a thousand effects of light and color, and showing a dream-landscape toned to the most exquisite softness. A fair day had dawned upon the earth; but its beauty was full of sadness to Stanhope, as he thought of the eyes that, in all probability, would not see the setting of its sun.

His worst anticipations were realized by the weeping maid, who opened the door of Madame Lescar’s apartment for him.

“Ah, monsieur,” she said, “she is dying—the sweet lady, the good lady! The doctor gives no hope.”

Stanhope had expected to hear this; but nevertheless his heart sank. “Ask the doctor to come and speak to me,” he said. “I will wait in the *salon*.”

He entered that room as he spoke, and a moment later the physician joined him.

He had seen Stanhope before, and knew his interest in Madame Lescar.

“It has come,” he said—”suddenly, as I knew that it would. Her paroxysms are now very sharp, but the end may be peaceful.”

“There is, then, no hope?” asked Stanhope.

The doctor looked surprised. “I thought I told you how it would be,” he said. “There is not a shadow of hope. But I am doing all that I can to alleviate the pain. When I arrived, her suffering was terrible. But she is a brave woman, *ma foi!* In the midst of it she found words to console her daughter, and she directed that you and a priest might be sent for.”

“The priest, no doubt, has arrived?”

“Some time ago.”

“And when can I see her?”

“The sooner the better. A paroxysm was passing off when I left her, and no doubt she is now quiet. Come with me.”

He walked across the room, drew back the *portiere* that hung before the door of Madame Lescar’s chamber, and entered.

Stanhope followed, and, if he had shrunk from the scene which he feared awaited him, he recognized on his entrance that there was nothing here to dread or shrink from. All was calm and very peaceful. In Madame Lescar’s suffering, the heart was involved to a degree that made a reclining posture impossible for her. She was seated, therefore, in a deep arm-chair, which was placed in the middle of the floor, fronting a window through which the eye rested on a great space of blue sky, with a few golden tree-tops rising against it. Nothing else was visible. Only heaven looked into this death-chamber.

That it was a death-chamber, Stanhope felt there was indeed no room to doubt when his eye fell on Madame Lescar’s face, stamped as it was with the signet which none can ever mistake or forget. Her complexion was of deathly pallor, her eyes closed, her breathing faint and labored. One hand was pressed to her heart; her daughter, who was kneeling at her side, clasped the other with her head bent upon it. Near by stood one well used to such scenes—a priest of the order of the Passionists—a crucifix in his hand, his face full of compassion. The candles burning on a table close at hand proved that the last sacraments had already been administered.

As Stanhope drew softly toward her, an instinct seemed to tell the dying woman of his presence, for she opened her eyes, and with a smile of exceeding sweetness held out her hand to him.

“I am glad,” she whispered, “that you have come—in time.”

He was too much moved to answer. He felt himself to be not only in the presence of God’s great messenger, but also of one who had so well “fought the good fight,” had so bravely “kept the faith,” had so borne injury with meekness and adversity with unalterable patience, that there seemed a blessing in her touch.

After a moment she spoke again. “It is not,” she said, “that I have anything to add to what I have already told you. I only wish to thank you once more for all your kindness, to pray that God will reward you for it, and to repeat that I have perfect confidence in you.” She paused a moment, then in a lower whisper said, “*Irène!*”

The girl lifted her face, and, as Stanhope’s glance fell on it, he thought that he had never seen a human countenance so moved and transfigured by grief. It was the face of one whose heart seemed literally breaking. There was scarcely a tinge of color in the

pale lips that said, "I am here, mamma."

"My child," said the faint voice, "I leave you to the care of this good friend, and I beg you to do what he counsels and directs. It is the comfort that God gives me for the bitterness of leaving you, that I leave you in such kind hands."

"Ah!" was the answer with a sobbing breath, "I will do whatever you wish; but it matters nothing—less than nothing— what befalls me after you are gone."

"It matters everything—to me," said the dying woman. "God forgive me if I am loath to go, when I think of leaving you behind! But he has been very good—he has raised up friends for you—and I know that you will obey my wishes. I have written—I have directed—"

"Whatever you have directed I will do," said the girl. "Have no doubt or fear but that I will fulfill all your wishes. What else shall I have to do in life?"

"And I," said Stanhope, taking the pale hand again, "promise, as I have promised before, that to the best of my ability I will fulfill the trust you have given me; and that, so long as I live, your daughter shall never lack a friend."

She thanked him by a look that he long remembered—so eloquent, so pathetic was it. And then there was silence for several minutes. Presently the doctor touched her pulse and whispered to Stanhope, "The end is near."

She heard him, and lifted again the lids that covered her eyes. "I have—something—yet to do," she whispered brokenly. "Irène —my child—"

"Here—here, mamma! Do you not see me?" said the girl, in an agonized voice.

Yes, it was plain that the mother still saw that loved, familiar face. The beautiful eyes opened wide and gazed on it fondly for a moment. Then with faint, tremulous eagerness, she said, "Promise me—I have waited until now to ask—promise me that you will forgive—all who have wronged you."

Stanhope looked at Irène, and it appeared to him that even at that moment her face hardened like granite. She hesitated—then for the first time broke into passionate weeping.

"Ask me anything else!" she cried. "I would give you my life; but how can I say that I forgive one who wronged *you* more than me?"

"Because, were the wrong a hundred times greater, you must not suffer it to embitter your heart and endanger your soul," answered Madame Lescar, with strange command in the weak tones of her voice. It seemed as if at that moment she rose above the power of death, shaking off its fatal lethargy to speak these words —words which Stanhope felt, it had been long in her mind to speak at that moment. "What do you think that it looks to me —here on the threshold of eternity?" she asked, with a light on her face which those who saw it never forgot. "O my darling, nothing—nothing that is worth one thought of resentment! We have lost the splendors and the honors of the world: but, God knows best. He knows how hard it is to possess them—and save one's soul. And, while the wrong was great, yet, remember, nothing done to us can degrade us. Thank God, I have forgiven it—wholly! Could I do other when I look at *that*?" She pointed to the crucifix. "Give it to me, father," she said, and when it was placed in her hands she extended it to her daughter. "On this—on this—" she said, in tones that became more faint and gasping—"promise me on this that you will try to forgive!"

That it was a terrible struggle with Irène either to refuse or to comply, Stanhope saw with compassion. The priest was silent— knowing that at such a moment the

mother's words would have far more weight than his. The pause lasted only an instant, but it seemed longer than many minutes, when suspense was ended by the doctor, who let his hand fall on the girl's shoulder.

"Speak quickly," he said, "or it will be too late to speak at all."

She cast a terrified glance on her mother's face, and, seeing the awful change written there, cried in a choking voice: "I will try—I will try. O mamma, do you hear me? I will try!"

"Amen!" said the priest, solemnly, as he lifted the crucifix to the dying lips, which seemed to wear a sweet, triumphant smile.

CHAPTER XV.

There are times in the lives of many of us when all familiar things change and fall away—it may be through some uprooting catastrophe, or with the departing grace of some beloved presence—and we suddenly find ourselves standing alone amid the wreck of interests, hopes, and feelings. All seems at an end except the mere fact of existence. The path we were treading has come to a blank, dead wall. Does anything lie beyond? "Who knows or cares? All that we ask is to sink down at the foot of this wall—which so hopelessly divides the past we can never retrace from the future, for which we have no heart—and be left in sorrowful peace to our darkness and desolation.

This, at least, was all that Irène asked in the days that followed her mother's death. To her the wall which ended her pathway was blank and dead indeed. "As yet she has only loved her mother," Madame Lescar once said with yearning pathos to Stanhope; and it was sadly true. No one—not even God—had shared this love; and so the poor, crushed heart had not a ray of comfort or light in the agony that fell upon it. Even Mrs. Falconer's kindness, untiring as it was, failed to move her. Indeed, there is no doubt that, had she been utterly friendless, it would hardly have been an added drop to the full cup of her poignant grief. Everything was swallowed up in the greatness of her desolation. And, in speaking of this desolation, it is difficult to avoid apparent exaggeration, for it was such as does not often befall any one, even upon this sorrowful earth. Not only had she poured out all the devotion of her nature upon a single head, but this devotion was intensified by the burning sense of a common wrong, by the realization of the majestic patience with which that wrong had been borne, and by the keenness of pity, admiration and sympathy blent into one whole of passionate feeling.

Moreover, it is the prerogative of an imaginative nature to heighten feeling. Where the commonplace mind sees only facts, the imaginative sees motives, thoughts, emotions—a whole world of possible mental action. So it was that Irène, in dwelling on the magnitude of the wrong that had been done to her mother, saw not only the wrong itself, but all that flowed from it—the long martyrdom of heart and pride, borne with heroic silence, but ending only in the peace of death. It is hardly too much to say that every pang which the mother had suffered, the daughter lived over again through the intense sympathy that is like intuition. She knew her mother so well—all her delicate pride, her inborn reserve, her exquisite fastidiousness: she felt as if it were branded on her comprehension with fire all that it must have been to such a nature to undergo the ordeal through which it had passed. And this was the end. The cloud had never lifted, the wrong had never been redressed, nor had Heaven smitten the wrong-doer with any punishment

visible to men.

Poor Irène! Over heaven itself just then a dark pall seemed to be drawn. Is it not often so with grief? “Strong indeed must be the divine light of faith in souls that, when sorely smitten, cry not out to God that it is ill-done. Few are those who in such an hour can say with holy Job in the sublimest words ever uttered by grief: “The Lord gave; the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord.” Certainly such devout submission was far from the poor child who in her mother had lost her all—the sole vessel in which she had garnered up the treasures of her heart. At first she seemed smitten into dumb despair; but there came an hour when despair found a voice. It was the night before Madame Lescaur’s funeral—the last of Irène’s old life, for on the next day she was not to return to the apartment on the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne, but to go home with Mrs. Falconer. That night all her partial composure gave way, and the flood-gates of grief were opened. When she was at last taken almost forcibly from the coffin where the fair, serene face lay sleeping with the blessed candles throwing their light down upon it, they hoped that from exhaustion she might sleep; but it proved a vain hope. She began to pace the floor of her chamber, talking the while, half to herself, half to Mrs. Falconer, who sat by the fire watching the slender figure, as it passed to and fro across the dim, half-lighted room.

“It seems so strange that I should be alive!” the piteous voice was saying. “I always thought that, when the blow fell, it would kill me; but I am strong, I am well, while my mother, my dearest, my best-beloved—ah, what do I say?—my *only* beloved, is lying dead! Great God, what am I made of—that I can see it and know it and endure it, and live!—” Then, presently, after a pause: “Do you know of what I think when I look at her dead face? It is the long-suffering of her life. You will say that it is over now—and I know that it is. But *it was*—and it has killed her! She bore it with the patience of a saint; but it has killed her all the same.—And do you know that I promised her to try to forgive? But I can not—oh, I can not! It is useless to try! When I remember all that she endured, and the cruel wrong which blasted her life, I can find no prayer but ‘May God requite him!—may God return to him every pang!’”

“Irène!” said Mrs. Falconer, startled more by the passion of the tone than even by the words, “my dear child, remember yourself! Remember how such feeling would grieve the mother whom you love so devotedly. For her sake—”

“It is for her sake that I feel it!” the passionate voice went on. “Do you think that for myself it would matter? Oh, you do not know how it is for her I have felt it all! He might have done everything, that he has done to *me*—taken away my birthright, denied me a name, left me to the charity of the world—and I should only have turned from the thought of him with scorn. But it was on *her* that his cruelty and his baseness fell. It was that pure and noble soul which felt the weight of his iron hand—it was that gentle heart which he made to taste the bitterness of death! Do you wonder?”—she flung her arms upward in a gesture unconsciously tragical—“that, when I heard it, I consecrated my life to a single purpose—the purpose by some way, some means, to make *him* suffer a part at least of what he had inflicted? It seems wild—it seems mad to you, no doubt—but I have never doubted my power to do so. He is great and magnificent in the world, and I am poor and obscure, but I feel as if the strength of a thousand was in my veins when I think of finding a shaft that shall pierce even his armor of selfishness. I have said to myself a hundred times, ‘If I live, it shall be for that end alone!’ And now she has asked me with

her dying breath to forgive him! O my mother, how can I?—how can I? You forget that I am *his* daughter—not an angel like you!”

So the wild storm went on, and as Mrs. Falconer listened— moved with the deepest compassion, yet appalled by the revelation of resentment like a flaming sword— she felt that it was no ordinary strength of nature, whether for good or for evil, which was here, and that, if ever the good triumphed over the evil, it would be in no easy fight. An instinct told her that it was foreseeing this which made the mother exact the promise she had carried with her into eternity. The anguish of conflict was upon the untried spirit now—a strange contrast to the ineffable peace that was on the pale, beautiful face lying in its coffin so near at hand—and it would be long before the scale turned for victory or defeat. Surely, thought the spectator, it was a singular fate which had thus made of two parents the embodiments of evil and of good on the battle-ground of a soul. Would the influence of the mother wane as time went on, the sense of wrong deepen, grow more bitter and corrode the spirit, as it is the nature of wrong to do, unless the soul is great enough to rise above it? Who could tell? Only the sweet, triumphant smile, which still lingered on the lips of the dead, seemed to answer.

It was on the softest and saddest of autumn days that the funeral took place, and it seemed to Stanhope that over no soul which had more truly triumphed was the solemn requiem of the Church ever said. Some such thought came to her daughter also—a faint gleam of spiritual radiance through the dense cloud of sorrow—as she knelt in the dim church, and heard the tones from the altar like a remembered dream. What memory was it that stirred even at this moment? The hour in the Chapelle Expiatoire, when by the statue of the murdered queen she had realized some things which returned to her now—the brevity of earthly splendor, the enduring value of the merits that lie hidden in suffering. Who had more fully made those merits her own, than she whose soul had now gone forth to meet its reward? “And would you lessen that reward if you could, O you of little faith?” an inward voice said. It was a lull in the storm, a moment of peace sweet but transient; for beyond the sanctuary the battle was yet to be fought. Life would be too easy, heaven too lightly gained, if the victor’s crown could be won by a single struggle. In that battle the heart’s best blood must be drained, the wearied soul must stand to its arms again and yet again; there will be many an apparent truce, and perhaps many a sore defeat, before the end—which sometimes seems so far—is won at last.

On the height of Montmartre they laid her to rest, who had deserved to sleep in soil made sacred by the blood of martyrs—a peaceful height, where the dead lie with folded hands, while below imperial Paris flashes back the sunlight from her myriad roofs and spires, exults in her multitudinous life, and breaks now and then into wild tumult that rocks the world, but never stirs the calm sleepers on her encircling hills.

CHAPTER XVI.

That hour “between the lights,” which is charming almost everywhere, was particularly pleasant in Mrs. Falconer’s boudoir toward the close of a gray day of mist and rain a fortnight after Madame Lescar’s death. Outside the windows low clouds were shortening the already short day, but within all was warmth, fragrance, brightness, the leaping blaze of a wood-fire falling on the softly mingled tints of the silken hangings, on golden embroidery, on the beautiful color of masses of flowers here and there. The

mirrors in their gleaming crystal frames repeated the scene and made a picture of it. They also reflected the figures of a lady and gentleman who sat near the fire—the lady leaning back in a low chair with the light playing over the graceful lines of her form, the sheen of her satin dress, the sparkling jewels on the white hand that held a screen between her face and the blaze. They had been talking for several minutes—and she now said, meditatively, “The question is, what will be the best thing to do with her?”

To which the gentleman answered: “I do not see the necessity to do anything—unless you find the charge more than you care to undertake. That might reasonably be; but—”

“But you know it is not so,” she answered. “No—what I mean is that I think it would be a good thing if she were taken out of Paris. Grief must have its own way, of course, wherever she is—but here, perhaps, worse than elsewhere.”

“But how is she to be taken out of Paris?” asked he, a little startled. “I should be very glad to do that or anything else for her; but you know Mrs. Grundy would have something to say—”

“You are stupid to-day,” said the lady. “It seems to me plain that when I say she ought to be taken out of Paris, I mean that *I* will take her.”

“Oh, but I can not consent to that,” he said. “For you to leave Paris, your amusements, your friends, your delightful quarters—it is impossible!”

“It is not at all impossible,” she replied, serenely. “And it is not a very great sacrifice, either, for Paris is dull in winter. I have thought of going to Italy for some time, and Lady Falconer is urging me to take a villa at Nice. But I do not think that Nice would be the place for Irène.”

“It would be the place for Lady Falconer,” said Stanhope. “She would find it very convenient, if you were established there, to be your guest for the winter.”

“And I should be very glad for her to be,” said Mrs. Falconer. “The question, however, is about Irène.”

“You are very good not to say that I am bad-tempered as well as stupid to-day,” he observed, smiling. “After all, I am afraid Lady Falconer is right—that Irène will be an embarrassing charge to you. Already the consideration of her interferes with your plans for the winter. But for her, you would go to Nice with Lady Falconer, and luxuriate in all its warmth and brilliance and social gayety.”

“Perhaps so,” she said. “But surely it is better to do a little good if one can, than to enjoy a winter in Nice. And my opportunities for being of use are so few! I can give money—but money is nothing when the giving entails no personal sacrifice. I never could see that there was much merit in presenting part of one’s abundance to charity. However, what I want to say is this: of course, I could go to Nice, taking Irène with me, but it seems to me that, of all places to jar on a wounded spirit, that would be the worst; whereas, of all places to heal such a spirit, am I not right in thinking that Rome is best?”

“Yes,” he answered, “you are right. And are you going to Rome?”

“I am thinking of it. I should like to go myself—I have never been there but once, and that not for long—and I believe it would be the place for Irène. If you agree with me, we may regard the matter as settled.”

“I certainly agree with you.” He paused before adding: “And I should like to say how much I feel your kindness to this poor girl. We have been friends a long time, so I suppose I may tell you that it has made me admire you more than ever.”

“It seems to me a very simple thing,” she replied—though she blushed a little—“and that it should seem to *you* at all a remarkable one only proves what a selfish world this is.”

“It is certainly a very selfish world,” he answered. “Here is Lady Falconer, for example, who considers you—”

“In plain language, a fool,” she said, with a laugh. “According to her code—and she means no harm by it, either—I should be thinking only of amusement, and social power, and admiration. Don’t misunderstand me,” she added, hastily. “Don’t for a moment imagine that I do *not* think of these things! I think of them—I am afraid I like them—far too much; but still I have a little time for other things besides.”

“Who knows that better than I?” he asked. “You have time to cultivate your intellect and to listen to your heart. For the rest, that you are an ambitious woman I always knew.”

“You mean that you always said. There is a difference.”

“Do you mean that you are not?”

“I? Oh, no! I have not the presumption to believe that I can read my own character as well as you can read it.”

“I am inclined to believe that you have the presumption to be laughing at me,” replied he. “But you dare not say that you are not an ambitious woman.”

She did not answer for a moment. The hand which held the screen had dropped into her lap, and the firelight played over her face, over the fair, rounded cheeks, the soft, well-cut mouth, the deep violet eyes that were full of thoughtfulness.

“Long ago,” she said, “when I was a child—before my uncle sent for me, or life in any remarkable manner opened before me—I never dreamed of any ordinary fate for myself, of settling contentedly to the course of existence which I saw all around me: I always imagined wider flight, brilliant opportunities, some vague, exalted destiny in store for me. How far these fancies shaped my life I do not know; nor yet how far they constitute me an ambitious woman by nature. I only know that I dream no more of them now.”

“There is no need to dream any more,” he replied. “Dreams give place to realities; and the realities are yours in the fullest sense. The wider flight has been taken, the brilliant opportunities are in your hand, the exalted destiny is within your reach—if you are only wise in your choice.”

There must have been more significance than he intended in his tone, for she looked at him quickly.

“Why do you say that?” she asked. “What choice do you suppose I am thinking of making?”

“None immediately,” he replied. “But in time you will make one, and I should like it to be wise as well as brilliant.”

“And you probably distrust the judgment of such a worldly woman,” said she, with a smile which he did not quite understand. “*Eh bien*, I will promise to consult you when the time arrives. And now tell me, if we go to Rome, is there any probability of seeing you there?”

“I am afraid there will be every probability, if you go,” he answered. “I am such an inveterate wanderer that one place is much the same as another to me; and if I miss my corner in your *salon*, Paris will be dull to me indeed.”

“Can Paris ever be dull to you?” she asked. “I do not believe it.”

“Not absolutely, perhaps, but relatively,” he replied. “And when I said all places are alike to me, I should have excepted Rome, for which I have a passion that grows insistent now and then in its demands. Yes, I shall be glad to go there; I shall be glad to see the yellow houses and the narrow streets, the great sweep of the Campagna, and the sun setting behind the dome of St. Peter’s from the Pincian Hill.”

“I am glad to hear you talk so,” she said, in a tone of satisfaction, “for how pleasant it will be to have you there as one’s guide and cicerone! And now, the matter being arranged, I will go and send Irène to you.”

He could not refuse to allow her to do so, though in his inmost soul he knew that he dreaded the interview. He had not seen the girl for several days, and when he saw her last she had not been able to control herself, and her passionate grief had moved him to that poignant, unavailing pity which is too painful to be willingly renewed. He had realized then very forcibly his deep indebtedness to Mrs. Falconer—for, in the midst of his pity it had occurred to him to wonder what he would have done had such a charge been left upon his hands alone!

But when she entered, a few minutes later, he saw that he had not to fear the repetition of such a scene. She was very pale—so pale that the young face looked more as if carved out of marble than made of flesh—and the deep mournfulness of her eyes was like a revelation of grief; but her manner was composed, though sad. He was more than ever struck with her likeness to her mother as she crossed the room in her sweeping black draperies and held out a cold little hand to him. He drew her to the fire, and made her sit down in one of the luxurious chairs; and, after a moment, it was she who began to speak.

“It is very good of you to come to see me,” she said; “and I will not distress you again as I did the last time. Whatever one suffers, it is very weak not to control one’s self. I felt that after you were gone.”

“Believe me,” he answered, gently, “I was only distressed for your sake, and also because I felt deeply with you. That, I am sure, you know.”

“Yes,” she said. “I have not been blind or deaf. I know all that you have done—all that you have undertaken to do. I am very grateful for the first; and for the last I can only promise that I will give you as little trouble as possible.”

The simplicity and humility of these words touched him exceedingly.

“My dear child,” he said, “I beg that you will never mention that word again. I accepted willingly” (at the moment he thought that he had!) “the trust which your mother gave me; and it involves nothing which merits the name of trouble. Since I sent you a copy of her will, you know exactly the position in which she has left you.”

“Yes,” she replied, sadly but quietly, “and every direction she has given, every wish she has expressed, I will follow.”

“Then you see my office is as light as possible. I have really little to do besides looking after your business affairs and paying over your income. With regard to your home—which it is for me to appoint until your majority—you are aware that Mrs. Falconer has offered you a home with her, and that your mother sanctioned and approved of the arrangement.”

“Yes,” she said again. “Mrs. Falconer told me, and she is so kind that I have been glad to be with her for a time. But, as I begin to rouse myself and look the world in the face, it seems to me that, since I have no claim upon her, such kindness is greater than I

ought to accept—than ought to be permitted.”

“But you have just said that you will fulfill your mother’s wishes,” he answered, “and this was most especially her wish. I have seldom seen her so moved as when I told her that Mrs. Falconer would take charge of you.”

“That was because she thought of *me*,” said the girl, with the same quiet sadness. “But I should try to think of others—should not I? And, although Mrs. Falconer is kindness itself, I feel that I have no right to burden her with my sorrow.”

“Mrs. Falconer does not consider it a burden,” he replied. “She is already much attached to you, and she has long desired such a companion as you will prove. But that is not the point,” he added, hastily, as he saw her about to speak. “It is that the arrangement was made by your mother herself; and she declared that it lifted from her mind her heaviest anxiety with regard to your future. If you broke it, therefore, you would be undoing her work.”

“I would never do that,” said the girl, in a low voice. “I only felt as if I ought to think of others. But even if she had made no such arrangement, I should submit to your decision; for that is what she desired, and it is all I can do for her now.”

“I am sure,” he said, “that after a little while you will recognize, what I do now, that nothing better could possibly be desired for you.”

She did not answer. It was evident that she felt little interest in the matter; and so for an instant there was a pause, during which Stanhope observed with compassion the forlorn aspect of her face, and the already wasted outlines of the figure that in its severe mourning made a strange contrast to the delicate luxury all around it.

“You look badly,” he said at last, in a tone so kind that it redeemed the words from abruptness. “I am afraid that you are ill. Is there nothing that I can do for you?”

She shook her head with a hopeless gesture. “I am not ill,” she answered; “and there is nothing you or any one else can do for me. I look badly because I can neither eat nor sleep; but perhaps I may get over that after a while.” Then she looked at him wistfully. “I am trying to realize that this is to go on—that I must live without her,” she said; “and it is hard to do. It seems so useless. What is my life worth to me—or any one else? I had only one thing on earth, and I have lost that.”

“Poor child!” he said, half under his breath. It did not need her words to make him understand the peculiar desolation of her position, yet they seemed to move him with a fresh sense of it, and he felt unable to point out the manifest truth that life might yet have other meaning and other duties for her. He had too keen a comprehension of what she was suffering to hint even remotely of the inevitable hour of comfort. After a moment it was she who spoke again.

“Perhaps it is wrong to feel in this way; but, you see, I am like a child that misses—its mother’s hand—in the dark—” Her lip quivered piteously for a moment; then, controlling herself with an effort, she went on: “But I promised not to distress you, and I am afraid that I have. You must forgive me. I will do better when you come again.”

“There is no need to do better,” he answered. “You have been as brave as I knew you could be. A great grief unnerves the strongest. And I fear that your days have been long and dreary. Have you seen no one but Mrs. Falconer?”

“No one—except Mrs. Vance, who has been very kind.”

“Then you have not joined the household at all?”

“No. Mrs. Falconer begged me not to do so if it would be an effort; and I was

glad to be spared meeting any one.”

“Of course, I would not counsel your meeting her guests,” said Stanhope, after a short pause, “but, when she has only her usual circle, I think it would be well for you to join it. If you are to make one of her household, it is better to fall into your place; and the longer absolute seclusion is maintained, the harder it will be to end it.”

He saw that she shrank from the counsel which it had cost him an effort to offer; but presently she looked up with pathetic acquiescence.

“No doubt you are right,” she said. “It is difficult not to be selfish when one is sorrowful. And, after all, it does not matter. Nothing seems to matter—now.”

It was with those words in his ears that he took leave, carrying the memory of the pale young face with him out into the rushing world of the Paris streets.

CHAPTER XVII.

There was one person, at least, who welcomed the intelligence of Irène’s transfer to Mrs. Falconer’s protection with sentiments of the most sincere gratification. This was Lionel Erne, who, being familiar as a brother, or the traditional tame cat, in Mrs. Falconer’s house, naturally felt that the advantages of this familiarity would not be lessened by the presence of Mademoiselle Lescar therein. Indeed, it is to be feared that his state of feeling, during the fortnight following Madame Lescar’s death, was rather more elated than became one who had expressed so much devotion for that lady. He haunted the apartment in the Avenue Montaigne, and, as day followed day without the appearance of Irène, his impatience made him very much of a nuisance to Mrs. Falconer.

It commended him, however, to the interest and good graces of Lady Falconer, who, reading the situation with a glance, leaped at once to the most practical conclusion. “The thing settles itself perfectly,” she said to her sister-in-law. “This young man—who is very clever, and no doubt eligible—is plainly in love with your interesting *prot ég ée*, and you have really nothing to do but arrange the marriage and so relieve yourself in a satisfactory manner of a responsibility which you should never have assumed.”

Mrs. Falconer laughed. To her, as we are aware, such a plan had already suggested itself, but she did not feel inclined to take this lively lady into her confidence. “The matter,” she said, “is not quite so simple as it appears to you. In the first place, you have not yet seen my ‘interesting *prot ég ée*,’ whom I think you will admit, when you do see her, is not exactly a person to be married off-hand—even to the most clever and eligible *parti*. In the second place, Mr. Stanhope, who is her guardian, would have a word to say on the subject. And in the third place, I am by no means certain that the idea of matrimony has ever suggested itself to Lionel. His fancy is easily attracted, and he raves over one woman after another—that is all.”

“But it need not remain all,” said Lady Falconer, who did not surrender an idea easily when once it had entered her head. “A woman as clever as you are, my dear, could easily bring the matter about. You have the two people concerned under your roof—for I am sure Mr. Erne spends most of his time under it— and in your hand.”

“Because they are under my roof, it does not follow that they are in my hand,” answered Mrs. Falconer. “And, as I have said, Irène is intrusted to me by Mr. Stanhope—”

“Oh, Mr. Stanhope!” said her ladyship, in a tone which did not imply a very

complimentary opinion of that gentleman. "It will be easy to make him agree to anything you choose."

"Do you think so?" said Mrs. Falconer, with an air of amusement. "I should never have imagined that any one could give Mr. Stanhope that character."

"It would depend, of course, on who attempted to make him agree," said the other. "I could not do so. But I am sure that you could, if you cared to try."

"It is fortunate," said Mrs. Falconer, with another laugh, "that I do not care to try; for, if I did, I should certainly find that I had no such power."

Lady Falconer lifted her eyebrows, but, beyond this mute expression of opinion, made no rejoinder. She had in her own mind conceived very clearly the reason why Stanhope declined to assist in arranging a marriage between Mrs. Falconer and the Marquis de Châteaumesnil, but, being in doubt how far her knowledge was shared by her sister-in-law, she had decided to be reticent—at least for the present.

It was soon after this conversation that Irène, in accordance with Stanhope's advice, emerged from her seclusion to face the new life in which she was to play a part altogether strange to her. After Erne, the person most gratified by her appearance was Lady Falconer, who had a strong curiosity to see one around whom so much romantic interest clustered. "Though, no doubt, I shall be very much disappointed," she said to herself. "One always is when one looks for anything remarkable." It was, therefore, with something like a shock of surprise that she found her curiosity more justified than she had imagined possible. Her practiced glance at once appreciated all the beauty, all the distinctive charm of the girl—and, so appreciating, she failed more than ever to understand Mrs. Falconer's action and motive. "What can she mean?" thought the woman of the world, sweeping aside as altogether unworthy of attention those considerations of old friendship which Stanhope had suggested. "As Prince Waldegrave's daughter, this girl would be a brilliant success; but, as Mademoiselle Lescar, she can only excite curious attention. "What is Sydney thinking of? It seems a caprice without reason—unless Mr. Stanhope's connection with the matter gives it a reason. Why have I been so blind as not to suspect him before?" Then followed the reflection, "And why was I so utterly *bête* as to lay open my plan to him?"

Meanwhile, it may be imagined that to Irène the scrutiny which judged her was not only unheeded, but wholly unobserved.

She was not even conscious of the keen glances of Lady Falconer's bright blue eyes. Deep grief is like a thick veil drawn between the senses and the outer world. We know that the things of life are going on, but the sound of them comes to dull ears, and for the time we wear an armor of indifference which no shaft can pierce. So it was with the girl who sat in Mrs. Falconer's drawing-room, and heard the flow of light talk and laughter around her—feeling, the while, as if divided from the talkers by an immeasurable gulf of distance. Erne recognized this the first time that he took her hand—for, whatever else he lacked, he did not lack quickness of perception. All the woful change in her struck him as it had already struck Stanhope. The radiance, like light shining through alabaster, the lustrous eyes, the flashing smiles of the face he saw last were gone. It was a poor, faint smile into which the lips strove to fashion themselves to greet him, and the eyes seemed to have wept away all their luster. Not all their beauty, however, nor yet their kindness. They were full of the last as she rose to meet him, and stood—a slight figure in deepest black—against the rich beauty of the long *salon*.

“I am not sorry to see you,” she said, with wistful gentleness, “and, if that does not sound very cordial, you must forgive it, since there is not any one to whom I could say more, and few to whom I could say as much. But you knew my dear mother— you loved—I am sure you have regretted her. There are so few” —with a catching of the breath that narrowly escaped being a sob—“who have done so, that my heart goes out to all who have been in any degree companions in my grief.”

“I do not think,” the young man answered in a low voice, “that any one could have felt more sorrow for her—more sympathy for you—than I have.”

This was certainly a bold assertion, but the boldness had its reward, for Irène thanked him by a look which thrilled him with many sensations—the pity which is akin to tenderness among them, and the sense that their friendship had made a great stride. He knew that the girl’s devotion to her mother represented all the ardor of her nature—it was the first thing that he had learned about her, the first message that her voice brought him; and he felt that, even in the remotest association with her grief, he had gained much. It was a bond of sympathy that time could not lessen.

With a fine instinct, he did not say more to her, but went up to Mrs. Falconer, who greeted him with unusual gravity, though a smile hovered round the corners of her lips. “I have something to tell you that I fear will be a shock to you,” she said presently.

“What?” he asked, in sudden consternation. His heart sank—he hardly knew what he feared, but he was filled with apprehension that was not reassured even by the lurking smile. He knew that people sometimes find food for amusement in matters that are serious enough to others.

“It is nothing very alarming,” she answered, “only I am afraid it will interfere a little with your plans for the winter. I am sure you would have given us a good many of your spare hours—and you know that I am always glad to see you—but, unfortunately, I am going to leave Paris.”

He did not observe her raillery: the fact overwhelmed him. “Leave Paris!” he ejaculated. “When?—and for how long?”

“I have hardly thought of when,” she replied, “but I suppose in a few weeks—as soon as I can make the necessary arrangements. As for how long—well, for the winter, certainly.”

“And does Mademoiselle Lescar go with you?”

“Naturally. She is one of my household now.”

“What does it mean?” he asked, with a blending of surprise and injury. “Why can you not be satisfied? Why are you going to run away as soon—as soon, almost, as you are settled?”

“It is very flattering that you should feel my departure so much,” she said with a laugh. “But, you see, Paris is very disagreeable in winter. I made up my mind last year that I would not endure it again. So I am going to Italy.”

“To Italy!” he repeated—expression both of face and tone changing like magic. “What a capital idea! It is just what I was—what I am thinking of myself.”

“Indeed!” said she, with a strong flavor of incredulity in the expression. “And may I ask to what part of Italy you are going?”

“I really have not thought at all,” he answered, cheerfully. “I am quite ready to go anywhere. I should be delighted if you would make me useful and let me be your escort.”

“No doubt,” she replied. “But there are one or two trifling objections to that. I

understand of exactly how old a date your resolution of going to Italy is; so, at the risk of appearing rude, I must beg that you will remain in Paris and devote yourself, if you like, to Violet Dysart."

"But Miss Dysart is going to Italy—she told me so last night," returned he, smiling. "Oh, on my honor, I assure you! She is going to Nice with the Baroness Bodenbach."

"Nice is in France."

"A geographical (or, rather, a political) fiction. Nice is as much in Italy as Naples is. I presume, however, from the correction, that you are not going there?"

"No—I am going to Rome."

"If I were a school-boy, I would clap my hands! Indeed, the gravity of age would not deter me, but the fear of shocking Mademoiselle Lescar does. My dear cousin, you have had the happiest inspiration! I have long determined to spend the winter in Rome—a few months' study in those galleries will be of infinite service to me—and I shall be charmed to be there with you."

"Come, Lionel, this is nonsense!" said she, laughing in spite of herself. "You must see that I can not allow any such thing."

"But this is absurdity!" said he. "What right have you to say whether or not I shall go to Rome to pursue my study of art? And if it chances that you are there—"

"It will be no chance at all," she said, more gravely. "You know that you never thought of going until you heard that we were to be there. Of course, if it had been an honest chance, I should have been glad; but as it is— You see, I am responsible about Irène, and Mr. Stanhope might think that it was some plan."

"Mr. Stanhope!" said the young man, in much the same tone that Lady Falconer had used. "Who cares anything about Mr. Stanhope? And what plan could there be? Do you think I want to devour Mademoiselle Lescar?"

"Not exactly—only, perhaps, to make love to her," answered Mrs. Falconer, with a smile. But, as the words were uttered, she was surprised by the change that came over his face. The laughter died out of it—he seemed to shrink, almost as a girl might have shrank.

"I don't think," he said, "that you understand at all how she affects me. It is not in that way. The mere term 'make love' seems like desecration, applied to her."

"Indeed!" replied Mrs. Falconer. "I knew that you had poetical ideas about her, but I was not aware that you regarded her as so ethereal. I presume, that this is the aesthetic mode of showing admiration."

"There is nothing easier than to laugh at aesthetics," he answered, flushing a little. "But we who believe in it have some subtile perceptions and pleasures which atone to us for all ridicule. I suppose I can hardly make you comprehend my feeling for Mademoiselle Lescar—"

"I am afraid, indeed, it is too subtile," said she.

"But," he went on, "the charm she has for me is not in the least like the charm of other women. I can make love—oh, yes, by the hour—to Violet Dysart. But to her I can only offer such silent homage as Dante offered to Beatrice. You remember that his love, so fruitful in words on paper, was speechless toward its object."

"It is something I never expected of you," said his cousin, with an irrepressible laugh. "However, if you will promise that your homage shall continue silent, perhaps I

may allow you to pursue your studies in Rome this winter. It is very convenient to have a man at one's command, whom one can call upon for service without any fear of misapprehension. I confess that I shall be very sorry when you go back to America."

"I have not gone yet," said he, lightly; "nor do I see any reason why I should go. But I will make my preparations for Rome; and I repeat that it is a happy inspiration on your part."

CHAPTER XVIII.

There is room for much difference of opinion on the same subject. Lady Falconer did not think it at all a happy inspiration on the part of her sister-in-law to go to Rome. To her it was, on the contrary, a very irritating proceeding—and one which deepened her conviction that some malign influence was opposed to her wishes. More and more her suspicion turned toward Stanhope. It was for the sake of Irène that, instead of going to sunny, brilliant Nice, Mrs. Falconer was about to convey her household gods to the Eternal City, where Lady Falconer did not care to go, finding it dull, and having that dread of the Roman climate which many foreigners feel. But, if she had spoken her thoughts plainly, she would have said that, although the folly of this was great enough, it was not the worst point in the affair. The worst point was that, by means of such a link of interest and association as he had created (so she believed), Stanhope, no doubt, was planning to increase his intimacy and influence with Mrs. Falconer, for an ulterior purpose easily to be conjectured. "If the matter goes on as it is going now," she thought, judging as nine people out of ten in her position would have judged, "it will end by Sydney's throwing away all her opportunities in life. What is the best thing for me to do? Shall I speak to Armand? But there would be little good in urging him forward until I have sounded her. I am afraid that it will not be easy; but I must attempt it."

Braced in this way by a sense of duty, she proceeded cautiously to make her soundings. As she had anticipated, it did not prove an easy task. Mrs. Falconer was either serenely unconscious, or determined to appear so; and Lady Falconer was driven to speak more plainly than she liked or desired, before eliciting anything satisfactory. Then it only merited that term from being at least decided.

"I wish," said Mrs. Falconer, "that I could induce you as well as other people to believe that I have no intention of marrying. There is not a man in the world who could give me anything I want, while any one of them would take from me what I adore— my liberty."

She looked very spirited and lovely as she uttered these words; but the woman who heard them shook her head.

"My dear," she said, "if you will pardon my plain speaking, that is purely and simply nonsense! Have I lost my liberty because Sir George is nominally my lord and master? I do very much as I please, except in so far as I am trammelled by circumstances and duty. We are all trammelled in that way. Who has absolute liberty?"

"I have," said Mrs. Falconer. "There is nobody to say to me nay, if I choose to start to-morrow for the north pole."

"But you don't choose to start," said the other, practically. "Therefore, what is the good of your liberty? It is a visionary thing, for the sake of which you are risking the loss of substantial things."

Mrs. Falconer laughed and shook her head. They had been over this ground

before, and she knew, or thought she knew, exactly what she had to hear. She nestled with an air of resignation deeper into the silken cushions of her chair, as she answered:

“And what are the substantial things that in your opinion outweigh my visionary liberty? If it is social rank — I have enough to satisfy me. If it is fortune—I have more than enough. My money is absolutely a weight upon my conscience. I wish I could give half of it away.”

“That is quite possible,” said Lady Falconer; and, as she spoke, she thought of the heavily encumbered acres and the noble old ch[^]teau of the Marquis de Ch[^]teaumesnil. What a stream of prosperity this great American fortune could pour over those lands, into those ancient walls! Surely it was worth a struggle —and so thinking, she nerved herself to make it.

“It is very easy to give away money,” she went on; “but to give it away judiciously—that is not so easy. Your fortune is a great responsibility—I do not wonder that you recognize it—but there is the more reason that you should use it wisely. It would enable you to make a great marriage, to take a position in the world that I do not flatter you when I say you are fitted to take; and at the same time you might do much good—you might give aim to a life—you might aid a career—”

There she paused. After all, she had no right to speak for the Marquis, and she remembered this in time. But her last words had surprised and interested Mrs. Falconer. Of the great marriage, the higher position, she had heard before, and her hand had been carelessly stroking a little dog that lay in her lap while Lady Falconer spoke of these desirable things; but the slender white fingers paused in their motion, and she looked up with evidently roused attention at the words “give aim to a life—aid a career”— that was something new.

“May I ask,” she said, “what you mean? To whose life might I give an aim?—whose career might I aid? I confess I do not understand.”

Then Lady Falconer was driven to explain. “I was wrong, perhaps, to express myself so plainly,” she said; “but I was thinking of my cousin the Marquis de Ch[^]teaumesnil. Sydney, I should be happy if I could see you married to him!”

“Should you?” said Sydney, smiling—perhaps at the fervor of the other’s tone. “But your happiness might be gained at the expense of mine—not to speak of that of the Marquis. Though, to do him justice, I have never seen in him the least indication of such a desire as that at which you hint.”

“I can not imagine any one more fitted to make you happy,” said Lady Falconer, waiving the last remark. “And you might not only make him happy, but aid his life—stimulate his powers —make him, perhaps, all that he should be.”

“You are prudent to qualify your prophecy with a ‘perhaps,’” said Mrs. Falconer. “I can not imagine anything more unlikely than that I should have any power to influence a man of his character. Of that character,” she continued, more gravely, “I do not care to speak. He has never made it necessary—I hope that he will never make it necessary—that I should do so. But, since you have spoken of the subject, you will pardon me for saying frankly that the experiment of marrying a *rou[^]é* is one which I shall never repeat.”

There was a moment’s silence. The blood mounted to Lady Falconer’s face, for she felt herself offended in a double sense. First, at the plain truth, which no one knew better than herself, with regard to the dead and gone Falconer; secondly, at the implied

opinion of the Marquis de Châteaumesnil. To refrain altogether from expressing her irritation was impossible; therefore, after a pause, she spoke:

“I am at no loss to imagine,” she said, coldly, “from whom you derived your opinion. But, without saying anything of the wisdom of attempting to judge a matter of which you can know very little, I may suggest that it is never well to trust the opinion of interested persons.”

Mrs. Falconer looked surprised. “I do not know in the least to whom you are alluding,” she said. “I have derived my opinion of the Marquis de Châteaumesnil from common report; and I am unable to imagine what ‘interested person’ you can have in your mind.”

“I have in my mind,” replied Lady Falconer, “the person who, unfortunately, appears to influence most of your opinions and acts—Mr. Stanhope.”

The violet eyes opened a little wider. “Mr. Stanhope!” repeated Sydney. Then she laughed. “Forgive me,” she said, “but how very amusing! And what a specimen of the accuracy and justice of many of our judgments! Why, Mr. Stanhope has always been the warm defender of the Marquis—excusing and praising him to me much as if he wished what you do.”

It did not often happen to Lady Falconer to change color twice within five minutes; but she blushed now—probably from the disconcerting consciousness of having made a blunder. She also hesitated a little in her reply.

“I am sorry to have done Mr. Stanhope injustice,” she said after a moment, “but it was natural that I should think of him. His intentions and hopes are very evident.”

“Toward me, do you mean?” asked Mrs. Falconer. “I suppose it is natural for people to think so—people who imagine that no disengaged man can approach a rich woman without matrimonial hopes and intentions. But I really thought that you knew better—at least as regards Mr. Stanhope.”

“Why should he be an exception to other men?” asked Lady Falconer, a little sharply.

“Why is he an exception to other men in other respects?” was the quiet reply. “I don’t believe that he ever thinks of marriage—I am sure that he has never thought of marrying me; and the proof of it is that he has again and again intimated just what you have—that I ought to make a brilliant marriage; in other words, that I ought to buy with my money the highest rank available.”

“That is a very foolish way of regarding the matter,” said Lady Falconer, with some asperity. “Of course, if you throw away your advantages, you will be very culpable. I am glad to hear that Mr. Stanhope thinks so.”

“You would not object to my being influenced by his opinion on that point,” said Mrs. Falconer.

Lady Falconer owned that she would not; and, in reflecting afterward on the conversation, she felt that it had not been without its satisfactory result. She had still a lurking distrust of Stanhope—being by no means so positive, as Sydney professed herself, with regard to his lack of matrimonial intentions—but, if he made himself the advocate of the Marquis, she was prepared to forgive him much. As for her hopes for that nobleman, she was not disheartened; but it was evident to her now that it would be a work of longer time than she had anticipated, and she decided to give him a few hints, the opportunity for which was easily found. It was in Sydney’s own boudoir that these hints

were given—Lady Falconer having elected to remain at home one afternoon to receive her cousin, in consequence of which Mrs. Falconer forcibly carried off Irène for a drive.

“Don’t be afraid,” she said, when the girl shrank at the first proposal of it; “I will not take you to the Bois. I am going to Villette on a charitable errand. It is a long and not pleasant drive, but it will be better for you than sitting here; and you will be interested, perhaps, in the work of the Sisters of Charity in the house to which I am going.”

So, while they drove away through miles of crowded streets to the over-populous quarter of the poor where they were bound, Lady Falconer settled herself comfortably with a novel, to wait for her kinsman’s coming. He was longer than she had expected, but, being well entertained by M. Cherbuliez, she did not mind his delay. It was at last rather a distraction to her pleasantly engrossed attention when the bell of the apartment rang, and a moment later he was shown into her presence. She rose and held out her hand.—At that moment Mrs. Falconer was sitting in a low chair in the midst of a paved court surrounded on all sides by tall buildings, a large paper open in her lap, from which she and Irène were distributing *bonbons* to a long file of children whom a smiling Sister was marshaling in front of them. They were children of the poorest poor—some orphans, some kept by the day while the parents went to work; they clutched the sugar-plums in their eager little fingers, their dark, wistful eyes fastened on the ladies as they whispered “*Merci*.” This was their place of amusement—this square court, with only the bit of sky above to tell of God’s wide, beautiful world. All that the good Sisters could do for them they did; but they could give them no better play-ground than this—fit type of the barren, inclosed life of poverty that lay before them, with only the fair hope of heaven shining into it, if they be not robbed of that hope and that heaven, as multitudes of their brethren have been, and multitudes yet will be, in unhappy France.

“I am glad to see you,” said Lady Falconer to her cousin. “I asked you to come this afternoon because I thought we would be uninterrupted, and I have something of importance to say to you.”

“You know that I am always happy to obey your summons,” answered the Marquis, “whether for a matter of importance or not.”

“I wish you were as ready to obey me in other matters,” said she; “or at least to give attention to what I advise.”

“And do I ever fail to give attention to what you advise?” asked he, with a smile, as he sat down and turned his handsome head toward her.

“I have advised one thing for a long time to which you have paid no heed,” she answered. “And it is on that subject I want to talk to you. Armand, do you not think it is time you should range yourself and marry?”

The Marquis did not look very much surprised by this abrupt attack. Probably he had anticipated it. He only smiled—a quiet smile that might mean anything or nothing.

“Is it time?” he said. “I really have not thought about it. My liberty is the last valuable possession left me, and I am not in haste to resign it. I prefer conjugating the verb *s’ennuyer* alone, to entering into a relation that might give it double meaning.”

“Why should it?” asked Lady Falconer. “In our rank of life, thank Heaven! marriage does not mean anything so odious as enforced companionship. It only means a proper balance of advantages, a firmer hold on the responsibilities of life, a—in short, a thing that has to be done,” said her ladyship, breaking down in her enumeration of what was signified by the marriage state. “Therefore, why defer it?”

“Why does one defer any evil hour?” asked he, lifting his shoulders. “Besides, you forget that I am no longer *bon parti*.”

“A Marquis de Châteaumesnil must always be *bon parti*,”” answered she. “Because you have been extravagant and injured your fortune is no reason why you should not make any marriage you desire. But I think”—she paused an instant—“that, considering your lessened fortune, a wealthy marriage would be best for you.”

“I am quite sure of it,” he answered, calmly, “and perhaps for that reason I have been in no haste. I am placed by my folly in a position which makes it impossible for me to seek the hand of any but a rich woman. Now, rich women not only do not abound, but they are generally found with great disadvantages. I confess it would go hard with me to make the daughter of some banker, or retired *marchand*, Marquise de Châteaumesnil.”

“It is not to be thought of!” said his cousin, hastily and decidedly. “There is no reason why it should be thought of. There are well-dowered daughters of noble houses to be found—and the best might be satisfied to become Marquise de Châteaumesnil. But—I have another plan for you.”

The deep, dark eyes, which Irène had called “inscrutable,” looked at her with amusement shining in their depths.

“Shall I spare you the trouble of telling your plan?” he asked. “I can imagine what it is.”

“I have sometimes thought that it was yours also,” she said.

“You are mistaken,” he answered. “It is not mine. I admire Mrs. Falconer; but I have never thought of proposing myself as a suitor to her.”

“But it is worth thinking of—are you aware of that?” cried Lady Falconer. “Do you know what her fortune is? She has not less than twenty thousand pounds a year, and Sir George says that part of her property is certain to increase immensely in value. My dear Armand, consider what you could do with such a fortune—how you could restore Châteaumesnil—how you could enter public life! I might see you Prime Minister of France yet.”

Something like a flush rose to his cheek at her eager words, but there was a half-sad, half-ironic smile on his lip as he answered: “Money has enormous power, certainly; but I hardly think that any amount of it could make me a successful rival of the ‘*fou furieux*.’ But do you think you are doing Mrs. Falconer justice in saying so much of her fortune, so little of herself?”

“What is there to say of her, except that it is surprising such a shower of gold should have fallen upon one so well able to make use of it? She has beauty, cleverness, and social talent; and if she brings no *prestige* of family—well, there must always be some drawback. And I believe her family is good—in America.”

There was silence for a moment. The tall mirrors reflected a grave-looking gentleman, and a lady who was regarding him with evident anxiety. Presently he spoke:

“*Eh bien*, what am I to say? If I were ready to put myself in your hands, what then? Is Mrs. Falconer likely to look kindly on our institution of *mariage de convenance*?”

“No,” answered Lady Falconer, after a slight hesitation, “she is not. Her ideas on that subject are very foolish—altogether those of one not bred in the great world. There is no doubt but that it will be necessary for you to *faire la cour*. It is a troublesome process, but there is no help for it. I must deal frankly with you; and I assure you that, unless you

can win her heart, you have no chance at all.”

“Ah!” said he. His face cleared, brightened. Evidently this was an assurance which pleased, instead of dismaying him. It may be that it did not seem a very troublesome process to one who had already won so many hearts as the Marquis de Châteaumesnil.

“And,” added his cousin, watching him closely, “I have something else to tell you. I am sorry to say that you have a prejudice to overcome. As an acquaintance, Sydney may like you very well; but, regarded in a matrimonial point of view— You know the story of her marriage, no doubt. A sad *mauvais sujet*, poor Ralph; and the experience has given her a dread of men of the same character. Now, I do not mean for a moment to compare you to Ralph—”

“Pray, don’t apologize,” said he, calmly. “I have deserved that or any other comparison. Mrs. Falconer can think no worse of me than I deserve, except in the fact that I follow no more wandering fires. I am *rang é* now.”

“It rests with you to make her believe that,” said Lady Falconer. “I warn you that it may not be an easy task. Ah—you smile! You think, perhaps, that I am mistaken—”

“Not at all,” he answered, “but you may have heard a witty and admirable definition of the passion of love— ‘*un caprice enflammé par des obstacles.*’ If I smiled, it was because I hoped that perhaps the obstacles of overcoming Mrs. Falconer’s prejudice might inflame me again with that pleasant caprice.”

CHAPTER XIX.

There was great regret among Mrs. Falconer’s intimate friends when her intentions for the winter were announced. It was clearly impossible for all of them to imitate the proposed example of Stanhope and Erne, and follow her with bag and baggage to the Eternal City; therefore, when they assembled for her last Sunday *r éunion*, the sorrow expressed on all sides was evidently sincere. She was herself a trifle less radiant than usual. There is always regret in parting with agreeable surroundings, and she began to realize that it was something of a sacrifice to leave her charming quarters and break up her pleasant circle.

“Don’t talk any more of being sorry, please,” she said at last, “for I am, perhaps, sorriest of all. I have always said that Paris is my favorite place of residence, and when I see my friends around me, and know that I am saying good-bye to them for several months, you may be sure that Italy does not look all sunshine to me.”

“You will carry sunshine to it, then,” said some one gallantly—but the compliment was rather spoiled by the laugh with which she answered:

“That would be like carrying coals to Newcastle. No! if I possessed any sunshine, the best thing to do would be to leave it in Paris for your winter benefit.”

“There is no doubt we shall need it, literally as well as figuratively,” said Godwin. “I don’t know a worse winter climate than that of Paris, except that of London.”

“Why, then, do you not go to Italy?” asked Mrs. Falconer, turning toward him.

“Because I have work to do which can be better done in the gray fogs of the Seine than under voluptuous southern skies,” he answered. “I am cast in rugged mold, yet even I can be tempted to *dolce far niente* now and then.”

“And have you forgotten that sometimes ‘*le temps le mieux employé est celui que*

l'on perd'?"

He shook his head. "That may do for a dilettante worker like Stanhope. I have no doubt he will employ time admirably in that manner. But for me, I have learned, like Balzac, that '*le temps est le seul capital de gens qui n'ont que leur intelligence pour fortune!*' And also that '*les succès littéraires ne se conquièrent que dans la solitude et par d'obstinés travaux.*'"

"No doubt that is very true," she said. "But—do you think you are quite just in calling Mr. Stanhope a *dilettante* worker? I think he deserves to be classed better than that."

"I did not apply the term in an offensive sense," Godwin answered. "What work he has done is good; but he is not likely to do much more while he gives up his time to society and to wandering." Then he glanced at her quickly. "You have influence with him," he said. "Why do you not make him accomplish something that would give him an enduring reputation?"

"I can not imagine," she replied, with a slight increase of color, "why you should fancy that I have any influence with him. I assure you that I have none. Nor do I think that he is a man to be easily influenced."

"It does not follow that he is easily influenced because I said that you could influence him. Most women overrate their power; I am afraid you underrate yours. And it is a pity that he should waste his time. He is very clever; there is sometimes almost a touch of genius about him."

"That is high praise from you, I know," she said, smiling like one who is well pleased; "but I have such confidence in Mr. Stanhope's judgment, that I believe he knows what is best to do, and that, if he does not press his productive power, it is with deliberate intention, and not from idleness or because he is in the least distracted by social pleasures."

"Hum!" said Godwin—a sound which might be taken to mean either assent or dissent.

He did not pursue the subject further, and Mrs. Falconer's attention was claimed then by others; but she had a feeling as if he were regarding her closely and almost suspiciously. It puzzled at the same time that it amused her. What did he mean? Of what did he suspect her?

"I think," she said presently to Stanhope, "that Mr. Godwin holds me accountable for tempting you to Italy and making you waste time. Can you not let him know that I am guiltless in the matter?"

"Ah, can I?" answered he, lightly. "Are you guiltless? In other words, should I be going to Italy if you were not going there?"

"That is nonsense!" she returned, with something like a shade of vexation in her voice. "You know that my going has nothing to do with the matter. It is on account of Irène—"

"True," he said, more gravely, as she paused. "I should not, of course, think of following you, except that I do not feel that I have a right to throw all my responsibility as guardian on your shoulders. You are quite right—I will let Godwin know."

Something in his tone made her look up quickly. "I hope," she said, hastily, "that you don't think I meant—that it matters at all to me—"

"What inferences are drawn?" he said, with a smile, as she paused again. "No—I

am sure that it does not matter; but all the same, it is as well that they should not be drawn. Godwin's opinion is of no importance; but there might be others—"

He paused in turn, for at that moment he saw the Marquis de Châteaumesnil approaching. The latter was as full of calm, highbred grace as ever; but Stanhope fancied that he detected something under the repose of his manner—a strain, as it were, of animation, or perhaps of feeling—which gave a light to the eye that was not usually in it.

"And so, madame, you are forsaking us!" he said. "Have you, then, grown tired of Paris?"

"I never tire of Paris, M. le Marquis," she replied; "but there are reasons apart from weariness that sometimes make it advisable to change one's sky—and you must admit that I am going to seek a brighter one."

"No one will admit it more readily than I," he answered; "for, with all my attachment to Paris, I, too, prefer to seek a brighter sky in winter.—It would be hard to imagine one brighter than that under which we spent last winter, *mon cher*," said he, turning to Stanhope. "And, since Mrs. Falconer is forsaking us, what do you say to a sun-bath in Algiers this season?"

"I shall like nothing better," replied Stanhope, promptly, "if you will agree to return by way of Italy."

"*De tout mon coeur!*" said the Marquis. It was what he had already decided to do; but he was not sorry that the proposal should come from Stanhope—although a little surprised. Mrs. Falconer caught the expression which betrayed the latter feeling, and hastened to give the necessary explanation.

"Mr. Stanhope is not very flattering to me," she said. "I am to take with me to Italy a young lady who is his ward, and whom he is willing to trust to me partially—but, as you perceive, not entirely."

"Pardon me," said Stanhope; "so far from not trusting you entirely, I only feel that I must not demand too much from your kindness."

"That is a mere *façon de parler*," said she. "You really mean that you feel bound to see how I am acquitting myself. But I assure you that, if you have the least inclination to explore the source of the Nile, you can do so with a mind at ease so far as Mademoiselle Lescar is concerned."

"Mademoiselle Lescar!" repeated the Marquis. "Have I not heard that name lately?"

"You have not only heard the name, but seen its bearer," said Mrs. Falconer. "Do you remember my companion at the Chapelle Expiatoire?"

"Perfectly," he answered. "She had a face not easily to be forgotten."

"She is now under my care, and will be my companion, I hope, for some time to come. Her mother died a few days after our visit to the Chapelle, leaving her to the guardianship of Mr. Stanhope. A singular choice, perhaps you think—considering his age—but the circumstances were peculiar. Madame Lescar was alone, dying in a foreign land, and Mr. Stanhope will allow me to say that he was very kind to her—"

"There were claims of old friendship," interposed Stanhope, "and she was a woman to whom any one short of a brute would have been kind."

"Exactly," said Mrs. Falconer. "Mr. Stanhope, being short of a brute, then, was not only kind, but devoted to her. Madame Lescar therefore intrusted him with the legal guardianship of her daughter. But since there was also hereditary friendship between her

family and mine, I have taken social charge of the young lady, and, so far as I can judge, his fears that I may find the responsibility onerous are wholly unfounded.”

“I am sure,” said the Marquis, who had already heard something of this from Lady Falconer, but without paying much attention, or at all grasping the identity of the person concerned, “that few responsibilities would prove too onerous for your kindness; but I can understand why Mr. Stanhope hesitates to let you incur too much. If it were possible to predicate from appearances, however, I should say that there was little danger to be apprehended from Mademoiselle Lescar. Her face is rarely beautiful and interesting.”

“Beautiful and interesting people are generally those who give most trouble,” observed Stanhope. “If personal experience did not assure us of that, history would—not to speak of fiction.”

“According to my experience, numbers of plain and uninteresting people give trouble also,” said Mrs. Falconer.

“I grant you that the faculty of giving trouble is not at all dependent on personal appearances,” said Stanhope; “but, with the best or worst intentions possible in that line, a plain woman is heavily handicapped; while there are few limits to the amount of trouble a beautiful woman can give if she has a mind that way.”

“And do you mean to imply that Irène has a mind that way?” asked Mrs. Falconer. “I never heard anything more unjust!”

“I did not mean in the least to imply it,” he answered; “only to suggest that beauty is not an argument in favor of harmlessness.”

“I begin to believe that he is a woman-hater, and not to be trusted at all,” said Mrs. Falconer to the Marquis. “I assure you that Mademoiselle Lescar is as charming as she is beautiful—and she has the most divine voice! I wish you could hear her sing.”

“And is there no hope that I may have that pleasure?”

“Not now, certainly—she has not sung since her mother’s death. Perhaps in Italy—if you come to Italy—”

“I shall certainly come,” he said, quickly.

“Then she may sing for you.”

“I shall be happy to hear her. That *spirituelle* face looks as if she might do anything well. But,” he added after a moment’s pause—a moment during which Stanhope moved away—“the chief pleasure which I promise myself in Italy is not the pleasure of hearing Mademoiselle Lescar sing.”

“I hardly imagined so,” said Mrs. Falconer, with a smile. “There are many pleasures that one promises one’s self in Italy, and most of them are too great to be compared to anything a woman can do.”

“Yet it is possible that the greatest of them might fall into insignificance by the side of what a woman can do—or can simply be,” he said, with a manner which she felt to indicate a suggestion of personal homage.

“Possible—yes,” she answered; “but it would be so far from a proof of wisdom on the part of the man in whose esteem they fell, that I am sure you do not mean to commend it, even from the most gallant point of view.”

“Whether I commend it or not,” he said, “I think that most of your sex would approve of it.”

“So much the worse for them,” she replied. “I am afraid it is an intense egotism

which makes women desire to be unduly exalted—for a time—to be, perhaps, as unduly depreciated afterward.”

“But there are a few women whom it would be impossible to depreciate,” said the Marquis, with an air of offering homage a shade more personal.

“Then they are women who would certainly not desire to be unduly exalted,” she answered, with something like a challenge in her soft, bright glance.

Lady Falconer, who was watching this conversation from the other side of the room, saw from the expression of her kinsman’s face that he was pleased. In truth, he liked the ease and grace with which his advances were received; and he liked also — perhaps even more—the assurance that no lover-like raptures would be expected of him. For him, indeed, the season of what he had called “that pleasant caprice” was over; and he could offer little more than appreciative admiration to the most charming woman now.

“According to my experience,” he once said to Stanhope, “women in general outline are much alike. One is amused by them, one likes their beauty, one endures their caprices—occasionally one finds a *femme d’esprit*, who is the most vain and certainly the most exacting of all. Do you remember that piquant mot of Talleyrand’s when some one expressed surprise at his finding pleasure in the society of Madame Grant, after that of Madame de Staël?—*Il faut avoir aimé Madame de Staël pour savourer le bonheur d’aimer une bête.*”

“And has it never occurred to you,” said Stanhope, “that between the *femme d’esprit* and *bête* there may be another woman—one in whom intellectual strength is united to feminine grace, and who can at the same time stimulate the mind and charm the heart?”

“It is an ideal I have never found,” replied the Marquis, “and one I have no great desire to find; for a companion who could at the same time ‘stimulate the mind and charm the heart’ would prove too brilliant and fatiguing for daily life.”

“You are a true Frenchman,” said Stanhope, smiling, “and in that idea, as in many others, your compatriots remind me of the Athenians of old.”

This interchange of sentiment had taken place months before, but some association recalled it to the mind of the Marquis, as he listened to Mrs. Falconer and watched her changeful face. Was not this, perhaps, Stanhope’s ideal—the woman who united “intellectual strength to feminine grace,” and could at once “stimulate the mind and charm the heart”?

There was some one besides Lady Falconer who observed the *tête-à-tête* but with widely different feelings from hers. This was Godwin, who was meditating an interruption, when two ladies, accompanied by Erne, entered the *salon*, and made their way to the hostess. One was Miss Dysart — even more charmingly dressed and brilliantly pretty than usual — the other a delicate woman of the frail American type. Their appearance was at once explained by the elder lady.

“Mr. Erne dined with us,” she said, a little nervously, “and mentioning that you are leaving Paris soon, and that you receive this evening, Violet thought it would be well that we should come and say good-by.”

“You are very kind, Mrs. Gilbert; and I am glad to see you,” said Mrs. Falconer, with the most gracious courtesy. She understood Miss Dysart perfectly; but it was, nevertheless, her first impulse to reassure that young lady’s evidently unwilling companion. “Yes, I am leaving Paris soon, I regret to say.”

“Do you regret it?” asked Mrs. Gilbert, with an air of surprise. “I should be so glad to get away; but we have taken our apartment, for some time, and Mr. Gilbert is beginning to like Paris better than he did at first. But I really don’t know what I shall do when Violet has left me.”

“She is going away, then?” said Mrs. Falconer, with a politeness which scarcely covered the fact that she felt not the slightest interest in Miss Dysart’s movements.

“Yes, dear Mrs. Falconer,” said Violet, turning from an exchange of greetings with the Marquis, “I am going to Nice— where, no doubt, I shall have the pleasure of seeing you in the course of the winter.”

“No,” said Mrs. Falconer, “I shall not be in Nice. I am going to Rome.”

“Oh, Rome is very agreeable,” said Miss Dysart, patronizingly. “Society there is not so gay as in Nice, but it is much less doubtful; and, if there is not the excitement of running over to Monte Carlo for an evening’s amusement, there are compensations for that.”

“The compensation of finding a full purse rather than an empty one in the morning, probably,” said the Marquis.

She nodded, laughing. “I hope you are not shocked,” she said, “but I have come away from Monte Carlo with an empty purse in my time. It was fortunate that it was empty, however, for the excitement of play is so entrancing, that if I had won I should probably have become a resident of Monaco, and be there yet.”

“Then we must all be glad that you did not win,” said the Marquis, “since in that case we should have been deprived of the pleasure of seeing you on many occasions.”

“And I should have been forced to go and, like Daniel Deronda, bring you to a sense of the wickedness of your ways by casting an evil eye on your play,” said Erne.

“I can not imagine you in that part,” she answered, “since, unless my memory fails, you also left the tables with an empty purse one evening when we were there together, with the Jerninghams.”

“Your memory is very good,” he answered. “I was reduced to the necessity of borrowing money to return to Nice. I have not been to Monte Carlo since.”

“But you have not sworn off, I hope,” said she. “You must come down this winter and let us try to break the bank.”

“I think,” said Mrs. Falconer, “that to prevent such an arrangement as that, I am justified in claiming Lionel’s services as due to me this winter, in virtue of a prior engagement. He is going to Rome, to act as my cavalier.”

“How very pleasant—for him!” said the girl, with a glance of mirthful meaning. “But what is to become of poor Mr. Stanhope? I thought *he* was your cavalier by prescriptive right.”

“Mr. Stanhope has just made an engagement to accompany M. de Châteaumesnil to Algiers,” answered Mrs. Falconer, with unruffled composure.

“Has he, indeed?” said Miss Dysart, turning her eyes full of *diablerie* on the Marquis. “Algiers maybe a place of banishment; but what has M. de Châteaumesnil done to be sent there?”

“He has discovered that the fiend *ennui* is to be met even on the asphalt of Paris,” answered the Marquis.

“Then I turn the invitation which Mr. Erne can not accept over to you,” said she, gayly. “Come to Nice, and let us go to Monte Carlo and break the bank. I fancy that will

put ennui to flight.”

“It might be a panacea that would kill in curing,” said he, shrugging his shoulders lightly.

“My dear Violet,” interposed Mrs. Gilbert, finding words at this juncture, “I really think it is very wrong of you, and—and might be misunderstood—to give such invitations.”

“They could not possibly be misunderstood,” replied the young lady, “for they are distinctly meant to be accepted.—O Mr. Stanhope, I am so glad you have come to speak to me, and be shocked by an invitation to Monte Carlo! I have heard that you are to be ‘off duty’ this winter—so you have no excuse for declining.”

“It would be rather difficult for you to shock me,” said Stanhope as he took her offered hand; “but I am not fond of Monte Carlo, and I don’t think it is a particularly suitable place for you. As for my being ‘off duty’—may I beg to know what duty?”

But, as Violet afterward confessed to Mrs. Gilbert, Stanhope was one of the few people of whom she stood in awe, and with whom the ready audacity of her speech sometimes failed. Instead, therefore, of answering him as frankly as she would have answered any one else, she hesitated an instant and looked after Mrs. Falconer, who had turned away.

“Have you so many duties that you do not know?” she asked. “*A propos*, I have heard of a mysterious, beautiful protégée of yours and Mrs. Falconer’s. Why is she not visible to-night? I am very anxious to see her.”

“I suppose you mean Mademoiselle Lescar,” he answered. “She is in deep mourning—her mother died only a few weeks ago—and therefore does not appear in society.”

“Oh, her mother died a few weeks ago,” said Miss Dysart, giving him a glance. “And the name is Lescar.—Ah, I see! Do you ever read ‘The Tittle-Tattle,’ Mr. Stanhope?”

“Never,” replied Stanhope, with emphatic condemnation in that trenchant word, for “The Tittle-Tattle”—an American paper published in Paris—was one of the most unscrupulous of the “society” sheets that are among the blessings (well disguised!) of the age.

“Ah! I do—of course, it is shockingly personal in its gossip; but, after all, one likes to know what the world is about, and, if there is any world outside of society, I confess that *I* am not interested in it. I’ll send you the paper for this week—there is an article in it you may care to glance at. What is your address—Meurice’s?”

Stanhope’s mind misgave him as to what the promised paper might contain; but he was discreet enough to make no inquiries, and only said that he would be glad to receive anything that Miss Dysart chose to send.

“You shall have it early to-morrow,” said the young lady, “though it is not likely you will be pleased when you read it. *Eh bien*, I shall hope to see Mademoiselle Lescar if I go as far as Rome this winter; and as for you, pray remember that Nice could be taken as well as not on your way to Algiers.”

“If I am so fortunate as to be the traveling companion of the Marquis de Châteaumesnil, I shall endeavor not to forget,” said Stanhope.

“Now that is very ungrateful,” she retorted, “for you know, or you ought to know, the extent of my regard for you.—Yes, dear Mrs. Gilbert, as soon as I have spoken

to Lady Falconer, I am ready to go.”

CHAPTER XX.

Miss Dysart was as good as her word, and the next morning Stanhope found on his breakfast-table a copy of “The Tittle-Tattle,” addressed in writing that might have served, in respect to size, for a sign-post, yet was so illegible that it was remarkable it should ever have reached its destination. He tore off the wrapper and turned over the paper with an exact foreboding of what he should find. And there it was, with the dramatic heading, “Sad Close of a Checkered Life.”

“A woman who in her time played many brilliant parts in the world,” the column-long article began, “died the other day in poverty and obscurity in Paris. Many of our readers will recall the name and fame of the beautiful Miss Lescar, who twenty-five years ago was a great Southern heiress, the daughter of a distinguished statesman, and perhaps the greatest belle in America. Her marriage with Count Waldegrave—Minister from — to Washington—was the most brilliant social event of its time, and was followed—”

At this point Stanhope flung the paper across the room, with an execration that would not have flattered the editor’s ear. So, to make a paragraph to tickle sensation-loving palates for an hour, it was all spread out again—the story of the bitter martyrdom which ended in that quiet grave of Montmartre! Madame Lescar’s life in Paris—and certainly also her death—had been so quiet that he wondered how even the instinct of a reporter had discovered anything about it, until he remembered Erne and his wide Bohemian acquaintance. A word dropped by him might soon have traveled to a purveyor for “The Tittle-Tattle,” with this result. Well, it could no longer harm her who had passed from man’s injustice to God’s eternal peace; but he knew how disagreeable would be the curiosity which it would excite with regard to Irène. So quickly do such stories die out of the minds of men, that he had counted on her name awakening little or no recollection of the mother’s history when she appeared as Mrs. Falconer’s charge; but now—Miss Dysart was only one of a number who would recognize it at once. There was some relief in the recollection that the readers of “The Tittle-Tattle” were wholly American, and that the society of her compatriots was that which, as a general rule, Mrs. Falconer least affected. Nevertheless, he had a feeling as if Lady Falconer’s remonstrance against such a responsibility was already in a manner justified.

Presently he took up the paper again, thinking that it was necessary he should know exactly what it contained, and forced himself to read the article through. It was not more offensive than most articles of the kind, though grossly inaccurate in detail, partly from ignorance, partly from the sensational desire to heighten effect. The writer described Madame Lescar as dying in the depths of poverty; but, after all, there are worse charges than that—as Stanhope, though chafed and angry, reflected when he finally put the paper into the fire, and rose to change his thoughts by going out.

When he stepped into the street, he found that it was one of those days which might almost tempt a statue to descend from its pedestal and walk abroad in Paris. Floods of sunshine brought out all the fête-like aspect of the brilliant city. The air was balmy, the blue sky soft and distant, and as he strolled across the garden of the Tuileries toward the Seine, the sense of annoyance was imperceptibly lifted from him. He had come forth without a definite purpose, but almost unconsciously his steps turned toward one of his

favorite lounging-places—the book-stalls along the quays. Crossing the river by the Pont Royal—not without pausing to admire the scene up and down its banks, the play of light on its surface, the animated movement of boats to and fro—he reached the stalls and began to examine the books displayed there in such heterogeneous collection. Left in peace, he would probably have spent the morning in this manner; but he was not long undisturbed. A man at some distance from him paid for a volume, put it under his arm, and turned around. As he did so, his glance fell on Stanhope, and, walking up, he laid a hand on the latter's shoulder. It was Godwin.

“You are just the man I want to see,” he said. “Can you give me half an hour?”

“An hour if you like,” replied Stanhope. “I have nothing to do.”

“Perhaps *I* may have something to do,” said the other, a little grimly. “However, come to my apartment. It is not far from here.”

It was indeed quite near, in one of the houses that front the Quai Voltaire—very high, but all the better for that. What a panorama of Paris was to be seen from those windows, after one had climbed the five flights of stairs that led to them! Immediately below lay the river, with its bridges, and throngs of people like a stream of ants passing over them; opposite stretched the noble front of the Louvre, with the rich foliage of the garden of the Tuileries farther along. In the other direction were the roofs of the old Cité with the massive towers of Notre-Dame rising above them in the golden air; while behind lay the Quartier Latin. It was there that Godwin loved to wander, to dive into the narrow, picturesque streets, to haunt dark book-shops and cafés of a different order from those of the Boulevard des Italiens; above all, to mingle in the *vie de Bohème* that still exists there—a world of struggling artists and men of letters—some of whom achieve fame, while others fall by the wayside, and, instead of the Academy, find the Hotel-Dieu or the Morgue. “I live on the border of two worlds,” he often said, “and I like to make excursions into both. But, if I had to resign one, I would sooner give up the Champs-Élysées than the Quartier Latin. It would be a dull clod who did not draw some inspiration from the spot where for ages learning made her home.”

There was, however, little or no suggestion of Bohemianism in these pleasant rooms, with their great outlook of sky, their wide view over the palaces and towers of the beautiful city.

“You have the pleasantest apartments that I know, Godwin,” said Stanhope, walking to one of the windows. “Should you like me for a neighbor?”

“I should like you very well,” Godwin answered. “But sit down—you have seen the view often enough. I have something to say.”

Stanhope removed a pile of books from an easy-chair and flung himself into it.

“You look serious,” he said. “What is the matter?”

“Nothing that concerns myself,” replied Godwin, “but something that annoys me, nevertheless. One can be annoyed occasionally by things that don't concern one's self!” He paused and took a turn across the room, his hands in the pockets of his coat, his heavy, overhanging brows drawn closer together. Then he stopped in front of Stanhope, who, without stirring, looked up—waiting quietly for whatever was to come.

“You are certainly,” he said, “Mrs. Falconer's friend. Being so, do you mean to stand by and see her marry that notorious roué the Marquis de Châteaumesnil?”

“My dear fellow!” exclaimed Stanhope. He sat upright suddenly, and regarded the other with an expression of amazement. Had the thing gone so far that even

Godwin— That was his first thought.

“You must see, anybody must see, what he intends,” Godwin went on. “It is very natural— He has squandered one fortune, and no doubt he thinks that he can secure another by merely offering the title of marquis to Mrs. Falconer. It is what goes on every day. I mean no harm of him; but for her —”

Stanhope had by this time recovered his composure. He was even able to smile. “Is it possible,” he said, “that you know so little of Mrs. Falconer as to fancy that she could be bought by a title?”

“By the mere title—no,” answered Godwin. “By the advantages and attractions of the Marquis de Châteaumesnil—it is likely. You know—every one knows—that his success with women is great; and, unless you wish to see her throw away her life by marrying a ruined viveur, you—any friend whom she has—should interfere.”

“How?” asked Stanhope. “Who has any right to interfere? I don’t know a woman more free than Mrs. Falconer, nor do I know one whose good sense is more to be trusted. She has made one foolish marriage: she will never make another.”

“There is no one of whom you can affirm that with certainty.”

“Perhaps not; but I was going on to say that I do not agree with you in thinking that this marriage would be foolish. No, hear me out—” (for Godwin was about to speak). “It is true that the Marquis de Châteaumesnil is a ruined viveur, but his ruin is not altogether complete, and the follies of his youth are pretty well over. As we say in English, he has sowed his wild oats. What he is, apart from those wild oats, nobody knows better than I do; and I am certain that Mrs. Falconer might do worse than marry him.”

If the expression of this opinion cost the speaker an effort, it certainly astonished his hearer. Godwin stared a moment before he said, bluntly:

“What are you thinking of?”

“I am thinking,” replied Stanhope, calmly, “of Mrs. Falconer’s character. She is an ambitious woman, and a woman intended by nature for a distinguished position in life. Such a position the Marquis de Châteaumesnil can offer her; and, if ever France should be happy enough to know a stable government again, he will be one of the foremost men in it, for, you may believe me or not, his abilities are great.”

“Confound him!” said Godwin, in a tone of disgust and exasperation. “Who cares for his abilities? What I care about is seeing Mrs. Falconer sacrifice herself for the sake of a distinguished position in life!”

“The question is,” said Stanhope, “would it be a sacrifice?”

“It strikes me that to know her is to answer the question,” said Godwin. “You wonder, perhaps, what interest it is of mine,” he went on, frowning more portentously. “Well, simply, that if I was a man capable of pleasing a woman—which I am not—I have never seen any woman whom I should like so well to please as the one of whom we speak. If I had the remotest chance— But I am not a fool: I know that beautiful women do not fancy bears. I can not understand, however” — here he regarded Stanhope with a glance of fierce contempt— “how a man who has a chance, can, from faint-heartedness or carelessness, fail to put forth his hand and seize it.”

“Good Heavens!” exclaimed Stanhope, gathering himself together as best he could under this most unexpected attack. “Is it possible that you mean me? My dear Godwin, what are you thinking of? In the first place, I am only Mrs. Falconer’s very good

friend; in the second place, if I were her lover, I should have no more chance than you fancy that you have.”

“Try,” said Godwin, curtly.

“You must really excuse me,” answered Stanhope. “And you must allow me to say that this is quite the most extraordinary thing I have ever known. Am I troublesome in Mrs. Falconer’s *salon*?—do you wish to get rid of me? I believe that, according to the etiquette for such cases, a rejected suitor must forswear the society of his mistress.”

“You are trying to baffle me,” said Godwin, looking at him with a glance which might have daunted one less strong in the consciousness of integrity. “Persiflage is not to my taste when I am talking seriously. I have long felt sure that you would be the fortunate man, and I have not grudged you your luck. But I do grudge it,” he said, bringing his hand down heavily on a table by his side, “if you are so little worthy of it as you pretend.”

“On my honor, you are talking in enigmas to me,” said Stanhope, seriously enough now. “What is it that I am not worthy of? The honor of being rejected by Mrs. Falconer? Will you not believe me when I assure you that we have not a thought beyond friendship for each other? She is not a woman who would be tempted to matrimony without some great advantage to recommend the step; and I—as you might be aware—am not a marrying man.”

“That is a mere phrase,” said Godwin, “which means nothing.” He took another turn across the floor, then stopped and spoke again, in a tone, if possible, harsher than before. “I can not believe,” he said, “that you are as insensible as you pretend. I can not believe that any man who has not killed within himself the possibility of feeling, could know such a woman as intimately as you know her, and remain unmoved.”

“Unless,” said Stanhope, looking up and meeting the eyes bent on him, while he spoke emphatically, “the man realized fully that there must be no such feeling, and was neither fool nor coward. Why will you not understand that between Mrs. Falconer and myself there are two great barriers—her wealth and her ambition? I have money enough for my moderate wants, but by her side I am a poor man. The Marquis de Châteaumesnil is comparatively a poor man also; but he can offer her high rank and a splendid name. Do you not see that, if I were mad enough to listen to you, I should fill the contemptible role of a suitor who had nothing to offer and everything to gain? Bah! of what have you been dreaming?”

Again silence for a minute. Then Godwin said, slowly: “Of a mistake, it seems. Well, I have not learned for the first time to-day that there is little to be gained by interfering in matters that are not one’s affair. But, for a man who repudiates the idea of any attachment to Mrs. Falconer, it occurs to me that you follow her very closely. Have I not heard that you are going to Italy this winter?”

“Yes,” answered Stanhope, “I am going to Italy—do you know why? Because Mrs. Falconer has taken charge of a young girl who is my ward, and whom I am, therefore, in a manner bound to look after.” He paused an instant, then added: “What you may have said to her on the subject last night, I do not know; but she desired me to tell you this.”

“Desired you to tell me why you are going?” asked Godwin, with a keen glance.

“Distinctly. She said: ‘Mr. Godwin seems to think that I am tempting you to Italy, and making you waste time. Can you not let him know that I am guiltless in the

matter?' I promised to let you know; and she added—or implied in an unmistakable manner—that such inferences as might be drawn were disagreeable to her. I think that ought to satisfy you."

"I hope it satisfies *you*," said Godwin, dryly. "But, whatever your feelings may be, I warn you that if you encourage her to throw away her life on an exhausted *viveur* like the Marquis de Châteaumesnil, you will regret it."

Now, few things are more irritating than such a warning as this—especially if it is echoed by a lurking doubt or fear in the mind of the person warned—and Stanhope's patience gave way.

"By Jove!" he said, "you talk as if I had anything to do with Mrs. Falconer's matrimonial choice! I can not conceive anything more improbable than that she should ask my advice—unless it be that I should offer it."

The sense of irritation was still with him when he found himself again in the open air, mingled with a curious bewilderment.

"Of all men—Godwin!" he was saying to himself. It was a thought which dominated the other thoughts that had been presented to him—annoying though these were. The suggestion of his own probable success with Mrs. Falconer he thrust impatiently aside, as a fresh proof of the deeply rooted folly of the world on the subject of marriage; also the warning with regard to the Marquis de Châteaumesnil, which he knew to rest on a basis of superficial knowledge and prejudice. But, even after the first shock of surprise, his wonder seemed rather to grow than lessen that Godwin—who had always appeared to be hard and rugged as his native rocks—should not only prove susceptible to the tender passion, but should be inspired with humility enough to recognize the hopelessness of such feeling on his part, and unselfishness enough to urge another to advance and seize the prize that was beyond his own reach! The man who had analyzed, criticised, described love in all its phases—but had never risen, through it, to such a height as this—felt as if a new revelation of the complex human heart had been spread before him—a revelation the more startling for its unexpectedness, inasmuch as it came—of all men— from Godwin.

CHAPTER XXI.

Another scene of those days in Paris, Stanhope remembered. Returning from a ride in the Bois one morning—it was the day before Mrs. Falconer's intended departure for Italy—instead of taking the usual horseman's road on the left of the Avenue, he turned to the right and followed the upper way, leading past the familiar gate through which he had so often gone to see Madame Lescar, and out of which he had followed her coffin. There is a singular fascination in places that we have once known well; their aspect ever after is like the face of a familiar friend, their stones seem to speak of a hundred memories. Since Madame Lescar's death, Stanhope had scarcely glanced toward the house as he passed it; until to-day he had certainly not thought of seeking it. But now, as he checked his horse and rode slowly by, it seemed as if he was again bidding farewell to the soul that had gone forth within those walls. How the beautiful, sensitive face rose before him!—how he heard the tones of the gentle voice! "My daughter!" they were saying in his ears; and then he looked around, and what was it he saw?—*Irène* standing in the gate-way and beckoning him with a black-gloved hand! A small boy, the son of the

concierge, came running out to hold his horse.

“I thought,” she said, when he dismounted and advanced to her, “that you might like to come with me. I am going to look at the rooms for the last time; and—and you were so kind to her— But I don’t wish you to come if it would be painful to you,” she added, with an instinct of possible reluctance on his part.

It would not have been possible so much as certain reluctance had this been foretold to him. But on the spot, with all the associations which it awakened, and with Irène’s pathetic glance on him, he could not acknowledge that he shrank in the least from what she proposed.

“Yes, I shall like to go with you,” he said. “Thank you for stopping me. It seems a strange chance which brought me here at this moment—yet it was not a chance altogether, for I remembered—”

“That it is a month to-day since she died?” asked the girl in a low voice. “I have just left the church where a mass was said for her; and I felt *then* as if I had strength to come here.”

“But you did not come alone?” he said, quickly.

“Oh, no—I have a maid with me. I sent her to speak to the *concierge*, while I waited here for you—I saw you coming. Yonder she is now.”

They turned and walked toward the woman, who appeared with a key in her hand. The *concierge* followed her, and stood in the door with a benevolent air. His wife also came out of their tiny lodge. Both welcomed “mademoiselle” with that charming courtesy which still lingers with the French—though the spirit of democracy is fast destroying it, and teaching among the first of the rights of man the right of rudeness and insolence. They knew Stanhope, and were not surprised that he should be with Irène. “*Il est le fiancé de mademoiselle, sans doute*” the *concierge* had long since observed to his wife. Leaving the maid below, therefore, these two went up together to the second *étage*, and Stanhope opened the door.

Who does not know the aspect, the feeling of closed and deserted rooms? And when they are rooms from which a beloved presence has passed for ever, the chill is one that strikes to the heart. Stanhope made haste to open the windows; but the sunlight could not dissipate the gloom. It only fell over Irène—who stood in her black draperies in the middle of the floor, her hands clasped over her heart—and wrapped her in a saint-like glory. There was nothing of saintly victory, however, but rather the stress of anguish and conflict, in her sad face and sorrowful eyes.

“A month!” she was whispering to herself as she looked around with a glance that took in every familiar spot. “Oh, my mother, my darling, my best-beloved, I have been alive a month without you!”

They were in the *salon*; but presently she turned and moved slowly across the room to the door which opened into what had been her mother’s chamber. She paused a moment with her hand on the lock, as if to enter was almost more than she had strength to do, then turned it quickly and went in.

Needless to say that Stanhope did not follow. There, where the spirit had taken its flight, where the fair shell of mortality had lain, was for the daughter a sacred spot into which he had no thought of intruding. Indeed, for him every association with Madame Lescar save the last had its scene in the apartment in which he stood. It was here that she had begged him to accept the care of Irène’s future; here that she had described the girl in

terms that he felt would be both warning and guide to him in any emergency which that future might hold; here that she had expressed her gratitude for Mrs. Falconer's promise, and here that she had thanked him in words of sweetness that came back to him now, with her look, her tone.—Something like a mist was before his sight as he walked quickly to the open window. The soft, warm air—a true St. Martin's Summer day it was—met him like a caress; the bending sky was limpid and stainless. At his feet rolled the brilliant, shifting tide of the great artery of pleasure, as on the day he had first stood there and thought of the life which, like a wreck, the world had flung aside. What now was that world, with its honors and pleasures, its heart-break and struggle, to her?

“Gentle and heroic soul,” he thought, “wherever in God's great universe you may be, surely it is well with you!”

Then, from the mother his thoughts passed to the daughter. As yet he had scarcely felt the responsibility which had been laid upon him, so much had Mrs. Falconer's kindness lifted the first burden of it; but now the realization began to grow and deepen. Distinctly—as if he had heard them the day before—he remembered all of Madame Lescar's words on the occasion of his first visit here, and especially some pathetic ones. “I am poor in friends,” she said, “but, were I rich in them, I should still prefer you for this trust to any one else in the world; for you possess the ability to read such a nature as Irène's, and the wisdom to guide it. I should feel safe if I left her to your care.” Was it wonderful that, standing where these words had been spoken, with the memory of yet another day when a dying hand had grasped his, and a dying voice had thanked him, he registered a solemn vow in his inmost heart that he would never suffer the effect of passing time to weaken his sense of the meaning of the trust? That his mind misgave him with regard to Irène's future was, however, not remarkable. For such a creature it was impossible to conceive a commonplace destiny; yet in all that lies outside the commonplace, how great the peril, how slender the prospect of happiness for woman, he knew well. Every gift of mind, every grace of person, seemed but an irony of fortune to one on whom the consequences of a deep wrong had so darkly fallen. After all, it was no wonder, he thought, that she found it impossible to forgive the man who had flung wife and child out of his path like broken toys, and walked to greatness over their ruined lives. Would she ever gain the height of the tender and noble soul which had felt that no wrong was “worth resentment”? Would the passionate heart ever learn the lesson contained in that beautiful saying of St. Francis de Sales, “Blessed are the hearts that bend, for they shall never break”? He was asking himself these questions when the sound of a step, the soft rustle of a dress, made him turn to face her of whom his thoughts were full.

“Have I kept you long?” she asked, with strange composure—but she was so pale that he quickly moved a chair toward her, into which she sank like one who might else have fallen. “It is nothing,” she whispered after a moment; “only, in there I remembered, I realized so clearly!—I lived it over again—I almost think I heard her speak! My mother, my mother, can it be that I shall never hear you speak again!”

He was glad to see the tears come then in blinding torrents. Such a storm of emotion would be followed by exhaustion; but that was better than the state which had preceded it. Leaving her, he went down to the *concierge* for a glass of wine, and when he returned he found that the lull had already come. She was struggling for self-control; and, as he put the wine to her lips, she looked up at him with piteous apology.

“I am sorry—very sorry,” she said. “I have distressed you, and I did not want to do that. I thought all this was over—or I would not have asked you to come. In the church I felt so calm, so certain that it is better for her. But now—here—it is my own desolation that I feel!”

She stopped, and he bade her drink the wine and not talk. Like a child she obeyed, and it was several minutes before she began to speak again. Then, though calm, she was trembling like an aspen-leaf, and tears were shining on her lashes and lying wet on the lily-white cheeks.

“When I went there,” she said, with a motion toward the door of the room she had left, “I felt as if it might ease the intolerable sense of loss if I knelt by the chair in which she died, and kissed the cushions against which she had leaned. But, as I did so, only one thought, one remembrance came to me—that of her last request! I seemed to hear her voice—her words. O Mr. Stanhope” —she looked up at him with a glance of passionate appeal— “is it not hard that such a thing should come between my mother and me? Am I never to think of her without remembering that I refused to give the promise she asked with her dying breath?”

“But,” said he compassionately, “you did not refuse. You gave all that she asked—you promised to try.”

“Yes, and I have tried,” she answered. “But after a month of struggle—of effort—of prayer—I have failed! I could sooner die than say from my heart—if it was not from the heart what value would it have?—that I forgive him!”

It was easy indeed to see that. The great eyes dilated, and through their tears a flash of fire came—fire which not even the mighty waters of grief had quenched.

“I am sorry,” said Stanhope, “but not surprised. The mistake you have committed has been in making the struggle at all —now. Poor child, had you not enough to suffer without tearing yourself to pieces in such an effort? I can offer you no better counsel than this—have patience with yourself. Your mother was too wise, too reasonable, to expect you to accomplish what she asked in a day, or a month. It must be a work of time.”

She shook her head. “I do not think time will have any effect,” she said. “It can not change what has been done—it can not alter what is. Nothing can alter that. Nothing can bring her back, or undo the wrong—”

“And if you could bring her back, if you could undo the wrong and put her in her rightful place to-day, would you do it?” asked he. “You know that you would not. You know that, apart from what faith tells you she has merited, she triumphed over wrong in a manner which those who knew her can never forget; she set, as it were, her foot upon it, and rose into an atmosphere where it had no power to sully her.”

“She did that—all that—my beautiful, noble mother!” said the girl with a flood of tears such as we weep at the praise of those dearer to us than our heart’s-blood and far from us as eternity is far from time. “But what then? I am not made like her—I can not conquer wrong by rising above it.”

“Then you must own yourself conquered by it,” said Stanhope. “And that you will never do. I have no fear. Your mother’s example, your mother’s desire, must tell on you. And, meanwhile, my earnest advice to you is to put all memory of your promise as far as possible from your mind—the very struggle to forgive keeps resentment alive.”

“Yes,” she said, “that is true. I have never felt less able to forgive than since I have been struggling to do so. It has made me realize the wrong even more clearly than I

did before.”

“Therefore, cease to struggle. Try, instead, to forget. You shake your head—you think that is not much easier? You are too young yet to have learned that, of all things in this world, it is easiest. And time, after all, is the supreme conqueror. Some day—believe me, some day you will find it possible to say, ‘I forgive.’”

“I can not even desire that such a day may come,” she said; “so you see how much hope there is of it. Though I have struggled hard to do what she asked, because she asked it, I have not even reached the point of *wishing* to forgive. I would far rather—but I will not talk of that! I am sure you are right about the effort to forget, but how am I to make it?”

“It can only be made in one way,” he answered—“that is, by filling the mind with other thoughts. You are going into a new life—try not to let the shadow of the past darken it. If you had some absorbing occupation—”

“I might have,” she said, as he paused. She pointed to the closed piano. “More than an occupation—a career—lies there. Shall I take it?”

“What do you mean?” he asked—though he knew very well what she meant.

“My kind old *maestro* in Milan thinks that I am meant by nature for the lyric stage,” she replied. “Shall I, according to his desire, begin the study for it?”

“I am not aware that *his* desire has anything to do with it,” said Stanhope, to whom this was far from a pleasant revelation. “*Yours*, of course, has—though you will pardon me for adding that what your mother thought of such an intention on your part is even more important.”

“I do not know,” the girl answered, “for *I* never thought of it while she lived. It is only since her death that I am conscious of the wish to fling myself into some absorbing pursuit—something that will deaden thought and pain. And if—if my pride is averse to the stage, I feel that to be all the more reason why I should not shrink from going where *she* went.”

“Ah!” said Stanhope—which meant that the last words gave him the clew he needed. “But you forget that in the sense you mean, she did not go on the stage; and, further, that there was a necessity in her case which does not exist in yours. She sang in public in order to obtain for herself and for you the means to live. Why, then, should you set aside all that she did, and make it of no account? The fortune which she left you is small, but have you need for more?”

“Do you imagine that I am thinking of money?” she asked, with a quick flash in her glance.

“Most of those who go on the stage think of it,” he answered. “I do not suppose there is in the world a more mercenary class of people, taken generally, than famous singers. It is very likely that if you followed the counsel of your *maestro*, you might achieve a great success; but, unless I read your character wrongly, it would bring nothing to compensate you for the drawbacks of the career—for the bondage in which you would be bound, for the sense that you had left the grace and dignity of private life for ever behind you, for the insults from which no care could shield you, for the feverish excitement and the tinsel fame. These things are not felt by one born to them, a child of the stage and its traditions; but you were born for a different destiny.”

“You forget,” she said, in a choking voice, “that I was born to—nothing.”

“Nay,” he answered, gently, “you were born to follow in the footsteps of one who

is gone, and to prove, as she did, that 'no wrong done by another can degrade you.'"

She caught her breath with a convulsive sob, and for a minute there was silence.

Then—

"I see," she said in a low voice, "how wise my dear mother was in bidding me be guided by you. I could almost believe she had spoken. I will think no more of the stage."

"I do not say that," he answered—as much surprised as relieved by such unexpected docility—"but you must make no rash resolutions. You are not able to decide on your future now. Continue to cultivate your voice if you will—indeed, my advice to you is to do so—and six months hence, if you desire it, we will talk of this again."

"Six months hence!" she repeated, her glance wandering round the room with lingering wistfulness, then turning through the window in the direction of the distant height of Montmartre. "Six months hence I shall be that much farther from her—or should I say nearer to her?—than to-day!"

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

By the first of March there is an atmosphere of spring in Rome. The air may still be sharp in the high, narrow streets, and cold, with a chill which strikes to the heart, in the great galleries and marble churches; but in the gardens of the villas violets are blooming everywhere, and the sunshine lies warm and bright over the wide expanse of the Campagna, where wild flowers are springing in profusion, and the long undulations, like giant billows, are growing green. The beautiful outlines of the Alban and the Sabine Hills wear the softest tints of azure, and away beyond Soracte the snow-clad peaks of the higher Apennines rise against a sky of tender blue. Even over the time-worn face of the city which has witnessed such myriads of springs, a smile seems to break. The characteristic Roman life flows out rejoicing into the piazzas, women group around the fountains, children laugh in the sunshine, people lean from balconies or gossip in doorways, soft-eyed girls are offering fragrant bunches of violets at every corner—spring has come with a tide of joyous movement, a great thrill of awakening life.

There are some people to whom the changes of season are fraught with influences almost as deep as those to which Nature responds with bud and leaf. The breath of spring stirs the current of their being, as it stirs the sap of trees, the dormant roots of flowers and grass. There is a poem in the sunshine, a something too subtle and sweet for utterance in the delicate clouds of blossom, the sparkling mist of distant hills. And if there is hardly a spot of earth where this influence may not be felt, what is it in Rome, where all influences meet and center?

Irène could scarcely have told, perhaps; but she felt all that it meant. With the opening season she began for the first time to rally from the long depression of poignant grief. The weight of sadness seemed in a measure lifted from her. It does not follow that people forget because they cease to mourn "as one refusing to be comforted." Remembrance may live under smiles as well as under tears. Indeed, the truest, the sweetest, the deepest hearts are those which remember in this way—which with a cheerful spirit go to meet all fair and pleasant gifts of God, yet carry in sunshine or in shadow the tender memory of some buried past. So it was that, after long and passionate

sorrow, a realization of better wisdom was borne to Irène in the sweetness of this Roman spring. Would it have been so elsewhere? It is doubtful. In this Eternal City all things speak of eternity to the thinking mind, the feeling soul: the solemn glory of the churches, with their tombs and shrines of imperishable memories, the earth which has been soaked with the blood of martyrs, the stones which have known the footsteps of unnumbered saints, the tranquil spaces of convent-gardens, the beauty of cloisters where holiness and learning have made their home for centuries, all the mighty past, which in Rome can not be put aside, that confronts one at every turn— these things told slowly but surely upon her, as Mrs. Falconer had hoped that they might.

It was certainly a different-looking girl from the one who left Paris, who stood on a sunny afternoon in the garden of Santa Silvia on the Caelian Hill, and gazed over the scene before her. Sorrow had indeed set its enduring stamp on the countenance, which had much matured, and gained greater depth and intensity of expression, since the day she was introduced to Mrs. Falconer, as well as to the reader, in the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne. It is not for any child of man to pass through the dark valley of an intense grief and bear no after-sign or token of it. Many such signs were evident in Irène to those who had known her before the blow fell; yet they were signs which only those who knew her well would now perceive. When she left Paris she was little more than a pale shadow and picture of grief; now the fair cheek had rounded again, the beautiful lips could smile, the violet shadows lay no darker than Nature intended under the wonderful eyes. She was a study of loveliness, though she thought little of it, as she stood in her tall, slender grace, her perfect head rising, with classic effect, from the dark folds of her mourning dress, in this old garden with its picturesque surroundings.

She had just emerged with her companion from the church of San Gregorio, and uttered a soft cry of surprise and pleasure, when the Cistercian monk opened a side-door, and the view burst on her, together with the soft glowing outer air. She had hardly realized before how closely grouped around the spot are the most famous monuments of ancient Rome. In front rose the Palatine, crowned with those somber masses of ruin, shaded by dark groups of cypress, which are all that remains of the palace of the Caesars—a picture which no familiarity can ever make less impressive. Desolate beyond all expression, solemn and deserted, like a spot accursed, it stands—this hill round which Romulus traced the mystic circle of his city with the yoked heifer and bull, from which went forth the force to subdue and rule the world, and where the long line of emperors rivaled each other in crime and cruelty, and unimaginable excesses. Yonder are the broken arches of the great amphitheatre where, for their pleasure, the martyrs of Christ died by fire, and sword, and wild beasts. There are the cyclopean walls of the Baths of Caracalla, with their testimony to the luxury of the imperial and pagan city—the luxury which sapped the foundations of Roman strength and valor. And here—O contrast only possible in Rome!—in the church of St. Gregory, is the cell of the monk who, called forth from that cell to rule the church of God, “gave the last blow to the power of the Caesars, and first set his foot as sovereign on the cradle and capital of their greatness”—the majestic Pontiff whose figure seems near to us as we look across at the Palatine Hill, yet who on this spot gave his parting blessing to St. Augustine and the monks who went with him as missionaries to carry the light of faith to England, and of whom Montalembert has well written, “*C’est lui qui inaugure le moyen âge, la société moderne et la civilisation chrétienne.*”

“Truly Rome is an awful place—the weight of its memories is enough to crush one!” thought the girl, as she stood with clasped hands, trying to picture all the innumerable scenes of history that had been enacted on the space of earth that lay beneath her gaze. That quiet road, coming from the Via Appia and leading toward the Forum, what is it but the Via Triumphalis, along which the victorious generals passed with their legions and captives and the conquered wealth of tribute nations, in the gorgeous spectacle of a Roman triumph to the temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline Hill? Along that way St. Paul was led, “having appealed unto Caesar,” to the quarters of the praetorian guard and the judgment-seat of Nero. Along there St. Peter fled, to meet on the Appian Way the well-known figure of his Lord, to cry, “*Domine quo vadis?*” and to be sent back by the answer to suffer, head downward, on the height of Janiculum. And that defaced arch, is it not the Arch of Constantine, erected in memory of the victory, won under the sign of the cross, which ended the long persecution of three hundred years and brought the Church forth from the Catacombs, to conquer the world?

There was a dazzled expression in the girl’s eyes when she slowly turned at last. It was caused less by the sunshine than by the visions that had risen before her. How tranquil this small space, partially inclosed by soft-toned church and convent-walls, looked! Violets were blooming in profusion along all the borders; the monk in his picturesque habit was stooping to gather some, while Mrs. Vance stood by, talking to him in broken Italian. “*Si, signora,*” he was saying. Irène was touched by his gentle, worn face, his dark, kind eyes. When he divided the flowers and offered her half, she thanked him with a smile.

“One feels as if they ought to be sweeter here than elsewhere,” she said. “Thirteen hundred years ago St. Gregory must often have walked where we are walking now. How he regretted the peace that he left here! It seems to be here yet,” said she, looking round.

From the garden they went to the chapels, and there Irène might have lingered long, but for the presence of Mrs. Vance, who, though developing a praiseworthy desire to see what she called “the objects of interest” of Rome, had an appetite for those objects very soon satisfied. She looked obediently at the famous frescoes of Guido and Domenichino, at the great statue of St. Gregory, and at the table where he daily fed twelve poor pilgrims, and where, the beautiful legend tells, he one day found an angel as the thirteenth; but her capacity for interest and admiration being limited, Irène knew that she was soon ready to go, and had not the selfishness to detain her. So it came to pass that, half an hour later, they were descending the noble flight of steps that leads to the front of the church, when they met a young man ascending them, who paused and lifted his hat, eagerly smiling. It was Erne.

“How fortunate I am to find you still here!” he cried. “I have hurried, but I was afraid you would be gone.”

“What is the matter?” asked Irène. “And how did you know that we were here?”

“Antonio told me. ‘They have gone to San Gregorio,’ he said. So, I followed post-haste—or, rather, cab-haste.”

“But why?” asked the girl again.

The young man turned with an injured air to Mrs. Vance. “Did you ever hear anything more uncivil?” he demanded. “Of course, it is understood that I have made all this haste to enjoy the afternoon with you.”

The elder lady laughed. "You are very good indeed," she said. "But we have finished sight-seeing for the present, and now we are going to drive."

"I can drive with you, can not I? That is, if Mademoiselle Lescar will graciously permit. But there is time enough for driving. I want you to come to the Villa Mattei, and see the view of the Campagna from its terrace."

"Is it far?" asked Mrs. Vance, hesitating. She wanted to sink back in the luxurious carriage that awaited them, draw her fur-lined cloak about her, and with a rug over her knees enjoy the pleasure of motion without exertion; she could not believe that there was anything in a view of the Campagna, with which she felt herself already sufficiently familiar, to compensate for deferring this pleasure.

"It is very near at hand," answered Erne, "and, if you have not seen it, I think you will be wrong to miss the view from the garden."

"We have seen a great many views," observed Mrs. Vance, with an appealing look over the Palatine.—"But what do you say, my dear?"

"Let us go," answered Irène. "It will not take us long; and, as Mr. Erne says, there is time enough for driving."

So, smothering a sigh, Mrs. Vance consented, and, as they had by this time reached the carriage, Erne handed them in and followed, after bidding the coachman drive to the Villa Mattei. Mrs. Vance could not deny that it was very near at hand, when they stopped at its gate, nor could she refrain from acknowledging that it was well to have come, when they walked through the lovely, quiet grounds, with their long alleys bordered by tall hedges of clipped box, their wealth of sweet spring flowers, their ancient statues and columns. And when they presently emerged on the terrace, she echoed Irène's exclamation of delight.

For it was a glorious view which lay before them. The noble Campagna, with its indescribable shades and gradations of color, crossed by the mighty lines of the broken aqueducts, stretched afar until bounded by the beautiful outlines and exquisite tints of the Alban Hills, on the sides of which, like spots of glittering light, the different towns and villages—Frascati, Albano, and many more—shone in the sunshine. A divine sky overarched the wide expanse; cloud-shadows were softly falling here and there—now on the plain, now over the distant mountains—like deep notes in some mighty harmony. In the near foreground were the walls of Rome, the secluded valley which contains the Fountain of Egeria and the ruined Baths of Caracalla; while at the other extremity of the Caelian, the great Basilica of St. John Lateran stood in full relief, the statues on its roof clear-cut against the sapphire sky.

"Was I not right to bring you here?" asked Erne, presently, of the girl who stood silent and motionless gazing over the scene.

She turned her shining eyes on him. "Why did you not bring me long ago?" she asked.

"Well," he answered, "you know my suggestions are not always favorably received. I have proposed to do so several times, but you were indifferent, and others made objections—"

"Yes, I have been very indifferent," said she, in a low voice. "But now I begin to feel as if all these beautiful scenes had a message for me. I am glad that you brought us here."

Then she turned and walked slowly onward along the broad terrace. Erne

followed with Mrs. Vance, for he knew Irène well enough by this time to be aware that she desired to be alone. He contented himself, therefore, with answering his companion's questions with regard to every prominent object on the wide landscape, while watching the graceful figure that moved in front of them. Slowly as it moved, however, Mrs. Vance moved even more slowly, so that the distance between them gradually widened. Presently he saw Irène pause at the opening entrance of the ilex avenue that leads from the terrace to the villa. A seat is placed there, on which an inscription tells that "here St. Philip Neri loved to sit and speak with his companions of the things of God." It is truly a spot for saint as well as poet. The ilexes—most picturesque of trees—meet overhead; behind is the green obscurity of the avenue lined with fragments of ancient sculpture; in front the Campagna with its spreading horizon, its far faint hills, its storied ruins, lying under a mist soft as a magic glamour.

The beauty and the associations of the scene moved Irène in a manner impossible to describe. She almost seemed to hear the voice of the gentle saint of Rome, as she looked beyond bastioned steep and classic ruins to the eternal sky and the heavenly hills. That the thought of her mother came to her with peculiar force was not surprising. It was always an underlying consciousness, and all beautiful, all holy, all touching things, led directly to it; for it has been well said that when living our friends are with us sometimes, when dead with us always. As she so stood—her face unveiled, her large, wistful eyes fastened on the distant horizon—she seemed like the embodiment of some exquisite vision to a man who was advancing under the shade of the ilex-trees toward her.

He was a young man, with an air of high breeding, and something in manner or bearing which seemed to indicate a habit of command. It may have been the carriage of the head which suggested this, or the proud outline of the face, which was strikingly intellectual and also singularly cold. "A man of marble or ice—*ma foi*, there is no such thing as melting him!" a fascinating Frenchwoman had once declared, shrugging her shoulders in despair. Marble or ice he might be, yet there was a poetic side to his nature, as a physiognomist would have told from the shape of his brow—a side not very much cultivated, probably, yet existing for all that, and awakened now by the sight of this girl with her fair face and sorrowful eyes. She was like a picture, framed by the green opening, with the sky and the Campagna and the far blue hills as a background. To read the inscription on the seat, she had turned her profile toward him, and so remained when her glance wandered away. In the strong light that fell on her, he noted every detail of her appearance—the purple violets from San Gregorio hanging in the front of her black dress, the long crape veil swept backward, one delicate ungloved hand, the distinction and grace that pervaded her appearance like a perfume. So entire was her unconsciousness of his presence, that as he drew nearer he first hesitated, then paused. It seemed impossible to startle her by his appearance; yet to stand still and stare at her was equally impossible, since she might at any moment become aware of what could only appear extreme rudeness. He turned, therefore, to examine one of the fragments of ancient marble; and, as he did so, steps approached on the terrace, and a voice spoke in English:

"I see," said Erne, "that you have discovered the best point for the view—and St. Philip Neri discovered it before you, as no doubt you have observed. The most effective approach to the terrace is by that ilex avenue; but I brought you another way because I wanted to keep that for our return. Shall we enter it now?"

"No," answered Irène quickly, before Mrs. Vance could utter the assent which

trembled on her tongue. "Let us go on to the end of the terrace and return here. One can not have too much of this beautiful view."

"It is almost unsurpassed," said the young man, pausing at her side. "Rome abounds in magnificent views, as we know, but there is none finer than this. I have come here often during the winter for atmospheric effects—they have been inexpressible. And I like the foreground—this great bastion built on the ancient wall of Servius Tullius, those ruins which in massive strength and beauty so far surpass our most finished achievements; the fact that yonder is the site of the Porta Capena; and there the Fountain of Egeria, I have almost dreamed sometimes that I saw Numa Pompilius himself."

"And the nymph?" she asked, smiling.

"No," he answered, as he looked at her. "I see the nymph for the first time to-day."

"And, like a true nymph, I suppose she is only visible to you," said the young lady, quietly. "I should like to see her—should not you, Mrs. Vance? But let us go on: I am afraid that you are anxious to get back to the carriage."

"Not anxious, my dear," said Mrs. Vance, who with eye-glass lifted had been trying to take in the Porta Capena and the Fountain of Egeria. "But I think it would be well for us to return as soon as you are ready. It seems to me that it grows a little chilly."

"It seems to me like a day from paradise," said Irène, looking from the fair, outspread earth to the gracious, bending sky.

They passed on as she spoke, and the next moment a man stepped forth from the ilex shade, and stood in turn on the terrace. The majesty of the great plain, the soft beauty of the distant heights, and the tender glory of the sky, certainly did not appeal to him in vain. From the expression of his face, it was evident that there was no influence of nature or memory of history to which he did not respond. But presently his gaze returned from a wide sweep over the scene, to the Fountain of Egeria, and his lips stirred into a slight smile—evoked by the recollection of Erne's words. Yet, when his glance fell a minute later on a few fresh violets lying at his feet, it seemed an unconscious impulse with him to stoop and pick them up.

CHAPTER II.

Mrs. Falconer's apartments were scarcely less luxurious and certainly not less agreeable in Rome than in Paris. The house, of which she had the first floor, was situated near the head of the Trinità dei Monti steps, and commanded a beautiful outlook over the city with its multitude of roofs and spires, dominated by the great dome of St. Peter's. This view had been a source of extreme pleasure to Irène all winter, and she had often declined to go to drive in the afternoon, preferring to establish herself in a window, and watch the sun set behind that majestic dome, "*la seule des œuvres d'hommes qui ait quelque chose de la grandeur des œuvres de Dieu.*"

That Mrs. Falconer had gathered round her in Rome, as in Paris, a brilliant circle of acquaintances, was not remarkable. A woman who is lovely, wealthy, clever, and unexceptionally introduced, can generally accomplish whatever she desires in a social point of view, and "people worth knowing" are perhaps to be found in greater numbers in Rome than anywhere else in the world. Her *salon* was soon filled with a throng as cosmopolitan as her heart could desire—Italians, with that grave and noble dignity which

still sits upon the true Roman; Englishmen of the best class, intellectually as well as socially; Parisians who had torn themselves for a brief space from their Boulevards; Americans who had a claim upon her friendship; artists, musicians, men of letters. Those who were privileged to enter it declared that there was no drawing-room in Rome that season to compare with Mrs. Falconer's in attraction. And besides the charm of the hostess, and the exceptional nature of the company, there were whispers of a remarkable beauty, and a still more remarkable voice, to be seen and heard now and then. Though not going into society, Irène was always willing to appear when Mrs. Falconer had only a few friends, and to sing for them. "It is nothing to me, and gives others pleasure," she always simply said. It certainly gave others pleasure; and naturally they talked of it. "It is a wonderful voice," one or two musical critics of high authority pronounced. "If she went on the stage she would make a diva of the first rank." These opinions, with the air of mystery thrown about the young singer, her seclusion, her deep mourning, her striking beauty, all tended to excite curiosity and arouse interest.

Erne was among the first to hear of this. Such a face could not escape the notice of artists, and when one of their own guild was seen in attendance on it, he was speedily forced to run a gantlet of questions. Very little was to be extracted from him, however, beyond the facts that Miss Lescar was a young lady under the care of Mrs. Falconer, that she had not yet been introduced into society, and that her voice was not intended for the stage. On the latter point he was more emphatic than his knowledge warranted, for he really knew nothing of Irène's intentions; but all his feeling rose up in arms against the suggestion. It seemed to him little short of sacrilege, for the half-fanciful homage with which her beauty first inspired him had deepened from knowledge and association into a passion of which he had not yet asked himself the probable end. It was enough for him at present to see her constantly and familiarly, as no other man saw her; to be her companion and guide through galleries filled with shapes of classic beauty and harmonies of glowing color, through spacious gardens with fountains flashing and statues standing out against the deep green of box and ilex or the far horizon of blue hills, through the solemn majesty of churches rich with the wealth and beauty of the ages of faith, or through ancient ruins incrustated with poetry and history, with the passion and the pathos of past life. Certainly they were ideal scenes in which to wander with a companion whose nature, like the sensitive strings of a violin, answered to every touch, whether that touch came through religion, nature, art, or history—and it was no wonder that fancy should have deepened to passion under such influences. It was a result naturally to be expected, Mrs. Falconer afterward confessed; but at the time she was singularly unconscious of it. Erne had so easily fallen into his place, and it was so pleasant to have the agreeable, cultivated young fellow always at hand—"for men have their uses," she acknowledged with an air of candor—that she overlooked the danger to his peace of mind. Perhaps she was incredulous of the possibility of such a danger. Worshipers at many shrines are liable to have the depth as well as the permanence of their devotion doubted. That he was for the present enthralled by Irène's charm, she knew; but it did not seem to her a matter for serious consideration. The girl herself was as little affected thereby as one of the marble statues of the Vatican; and, this being the case, Mrs. Falconer felt thoroughly at ease, and failed to see any reason why the association should be restricted.

That such a reason existed, however, was at length made clear to her by one of the friends who are always ready to point out their neighbors' mistakes to them. This

friend was an English lady with whom she was driving on the same afternoon that Irène and Erne were looking over the Campagna from the terrace of the Villa Mattei. There had been a brilliant breakfast-party earlier in the day, at a villa just without the walls of Rome, and, after their return from this, the two ladies were making the usual round on the Pincian. Discussing the beauty of a young Russian princess whom they had met, Lady Dorchester said:

“She is very lovely, but not to compare to your young *prot ég ée*. I mention *her* because they have both the same indescribable air of refinement and high breeding. And, by-the-by, my dear, it has been on my mind for some time to tell you that Miss Lescar is really seen too much with that clever young Mr. Erne. You know Rome is a sad place for gossip—I suppose because we have all nothing else to do—and his attendance on her must be remarked all the more because she is not in society yet.”

“But for that reason I thought it would *not* be remarked,” said Mrs. Falconer. “Irène knows so few people, and Lionel is my cousin, and like a brother to me—so their association has seemed very natural. Either my aunt or myself have always made one of the party.”

“Exactly,” said the other, smiling. “But whether your aunt or yourself plays chaperon, Mr. Erne always appears in conjunction with Miss Lescar. I don’t wonder at all—she is certainly an exquisite creature—but unless they *fianc é* it is a misfortune for a girl to be so publicly and constantly seen with one man.”

“There is nothing of the kind between them—nothing,” said Mrs. Falconer, in a tone of vexation. “It never occurred to me that any one would think so.”

“No one would have thought so—the matter would never have been noticed at all but for her striking beauty,” said Lady Dorchester. “Even if she were nobody, that face would attract attention, and since it is known that she is with you— But, pray, don’t fancy, my dear, that I am blaming you. I understand the young man’s position, and how it is that he is admitted to such familiarity. I only thought it well to call your attention to the fact that other people do not understand the circumstances of the case.”

“I am afraid that I deserve blame,” said Mrs. Falconer, after a moment’s pause. “I have, at least, been absurdly blind. I have not considered how the matter must look to outsiders. Thank you, dear Lady Dorchester, for telling me.”

“I fancy the young people will not thank me,” said Lady Dorchester, with a smile.

“Lionel may not,” said Mrs. Falconer, “but Irène is thoroughly indifferent. If I had not been sure of that, I should not have permitted the association as I have done.”

Lady Dorchester murmured something to the effect that people could never be altogether sure of matters of the kind.

“I am perfectly sure of this,” said Mrs. Falconer. “Irène is not in the least like ordinary girls.”

“*Cela va sans dire*,” said the other. “But I believe that even Sappho is supposed to have fallen in love.”

“This Sappho will not fall in love with poor Lionel,” said Mrs. Falconer, smiling; “but there is a sympathy between them which has set up a certain camaraderie that I fear I shall find it difficult to break, without making too much of the affair—which it is undesirable to do, you know.”

“There is one simple way of accomplishing it,” said Lady Dorchester. “Take

Miss Lescar into society, and there will soon be plenty of men to contest Mr. Erne's place with him. I know half a dozen who are wild about her now."

"But she is in mourning—her mother died last October."

"That is no reason for maintaining absolute seclusion. Of course, you would not take her to balls, but she might appear at your receptions, and go out quietly. Bring her to me on Wednesday evening."

"My dear Lady Dorchester, I am afraid she will never consent."

"Try, at all events. I assure you that, unless you wish the matter to become serious, it is your only chance. You underrate your cousin's fascinations. I think that even Sappho might yield to them, if she saw nobody else."

The carriage at that moment stopped before Mrs. Falconer's *portone*; so these words were virtually the last of the conversation. Lady Dorchester drove away with the agreeable sense of a duty discharged and an attraction probably secured for her next reception; while Mrs. Falconer mounted the staircase to be informed by Antonio—the Italian servant who opened the door of her apartment—that the signora and signorina had gone out early to San Gregorio, and that the Signor Erne had come later, had inquired where they were gone, and had followed them.

There was certainly nothing unusual nor even reprehensible in this; but with Lady Dorchester's words still ringing in her ears, Mrs. Falconer felt a sense of irritation. "Lionel really ought to consider!" she found herself thinking, as she went to her chamber. But by the time she had laid aside her wraps and changed her dress, the sense of irritation had given way to amusement at the thought of expecting Lionel to consider. "That is for me to do," she said to herself.

She had time enough for reflection before the trio returned. And there were several points upon which to reflect. In the first place, did she "wish the matter to become serious"? Almost without hesitation, she replied in the negative—her knowledge having greatly increased since the time she had conceived such a plan in Paris. She knew now that the cleverness which Erne possessed was like the flicker of a taper beside the electric flash of genius in Irène, and that there could be no prospect of happiness where so great a disparity existed. "Of course he is desperately in love, poor fellow!—that is only natural," she thought. "But I can not believe that there is any danger for *her*. The only ground for it that could possibly exist is the fact of her being so closely thrown with him. Some people think that love is altogether a matter of propinquity. It is certainly so in great measure, and I may have been wrong in permitting the propinquity in this case. What would Mr. Stanhope say? I am afraid he would believe that I have betrayed my trust, and attempted the matchmaking which he condemned. The more I think of it the more I see that Lady Dorchester is right. I must end the constant association—and, in order to do so, I must introduce Irène into society. I hardly like to take the responsibility of the step without consulting Mr. Stanhope—but, since he chooses to remain away, I am obliged to act as I believe to be best. I can not wait to hear the opinion of a man in Africa."

The man in Africa would probably have smiled had he heard the tone in which this was uttered—for Mrs. Falconer unconsciously spoke the last words aloud. The sound of her own voice startled her in the large, silent room, and she said nothing more, but, leaning back in her chair, watched the firelight shining on the rich silk hangings, the pictures and *bric-à-brac* which transformed an ordinary Roman apartment into a drawing-room of distinctive taste and luxury. This radiance brightened as the sunset glow

burned slowly out and twilight gathered in the farther end of the room. Presently voices were heard, then the door opened and a slender black-clad figure crossed the floor into the circle of flickering light.

“Dear Mrs. Falconer, I hope you have had a pleasant day,” said Irène, bending down to touch a soft, flushed cheek with cool, fresh lips. “We have seen a great many beautiful things this afternoon, and I have brought you some violets from the garden of Santa Silvia.”

“They are very fragrant,” said Mrs. Falconer, putting up her hand to take the violets.—“Ah, Lionel, is that you? Antonio told me that you followed the signora and signorina.”

“Yes, and met them luckily on the steps of San Gregorio,” said Erne, with the air of one whose conscience was wholly at rest. “I wanted them to see the view from the Villa Mattei while they were in that neighborhood.”

“It was glorious!” said Irène, in a voice like a chord of music. “I think I like it better than any other view of the Campagna. And then we went to drive.”

“I did not see you on the Pincio,” said Mrs. Falconer.

“No; we drove out over the Campagna.”

A few more words were exchanged, when Irène left the room to lay aside her wraps, and then Mrs. Falconer said to her cousin:

“Don’t go, Lionel. I have something to say to you. Sit down there”—she pointed to a chair opposite her own—“I want you to tell me how much your knowledge of art has improved in Rome this winter.”

It scarcely needed the expression of her eyes and tone to convey her meaning. The question in itself was sufficiently significant, and she saw that the young man flushed as he replied:

“I hope that my knowledge has improved considerably, though my achievement has certainly not been great.”

“Then, my dear Lionel, don’t you think that it would be well to devote a little more time to achievement?” she asked.

“I suppose,” said he, with the flush still on his face, “that you mean I am here too much.”

“No,” she answered, “I do not mean that you are here too much—for you know that you are always welcome. But I do mean that you are with Irène too much.”

“And what then?” asked he. “Have I broken my word to you? Have I said a word to her that you—that the whole world—might not hear?”

“I have no reason to believe that you have,” she answered. “But you—and I too, for that matter—have forgotten that your constant attendance on her must be observed and remarked, and that it is not well for any girl to be compromised by such attentions.”

“Oh,” said he, sarcastically, “you have become the mouthpiece of Mrs. Grundy; you are thinking of the absurd figments of propriety.”

“I am most certainly thinking of them,” she replied, more severely than she had spoken before, “and, whatever you may think of them, I do not intend that they shall be violated with regard to any one under my care. I repeat that you have been seen in public too much with Irène, and that your attendance so frequently must cease.”

There was silence for a moment, and the heart of Mrs. Grundy’s mouth-piece melting within her as she saw the downcast look on the handsome young face, she was

about to soften the severity of her words, when Erne spoke:

“Of course I must bow to your decision, though I am sorry— very sorry—for it will end the greatest pleasure that I have ever enjoyed in my life. However, that is all that society, as at present constituted, seems to exist for—to end pleasure rather than to create it.”

“I beg that you will not talk such nonsense,” said his cousin, coldly. “There is not a single law of society which does not rest upon a basis of common sense. The world is not Arcadia. Whether warranted or unwarranted, people will draw conclusions from what they see.”

“And what conclusion could justly be drawn in this case, save the true one—that Miss Lescar is the one woman in the world to me? My infatuation has reached such a point that I would as soon proclaim it from the house-tops as not.”

“But you are not the only person concerned,” said she, gently. “It may not matter what is said of you, but you will agree with me that Irène should be shielded from the possibility of the sort of comment which only injures a girl.”

“But she knows no one—she is not in society; how, then, in the name of Heaven, can the fact that I accompany her to a few galleries and churches and ruins excite comment? I thought that the presence of a chaperon was enough to propitiate Mrs. Grundy.”

Mrs. Falconer did not acknowledge how nearly this had been her own opinion; she only said: “There is no good in discussing the matter. It has excited comment—and therefore it must end. You see we are not mere wandering tourists; and Anglo-Roman society is not so large that a girl so striking as Irène can remain unobserved. Indeed, she has been so much observed that I feel it necessary to introduce her into society—quietly, of course.”

“In other words,” said Erne, rising to his feet and standing by the mantel straight and tall, “you mean that our pleasant intercourse of the last three months is to end.”

“To end—no: to be restricted—yes,” she answered. “You must remember that I have several things to consider. I must think of Irène herself. It is not just to her to throw her so constantly, so wholly with you.”

“You may spare yourself any anxiety on that score,” he said. “She has never given me a thought. The wildest vanity could not misinterpret her manner. Nor have I ever tried to draw a look or word of interest from her. I have scrupulously kept my promise given to you in Paris.”

“I do not doubt it,” she said, “and I am sure I have trusted you unreservedly.”

“Why, then, begin to distrust me now?”

“Have I expressed the least distrust? Pray be reasonable; pray think a little of my responsibility! As a matter of fact, I ought to consider you as well as Irène; for, by your own account, you are simply encouraging a hopeless passion.”

He made a gesture signifying that that was a matter of no importance. “You need not consider me,” he said. “I am willing to take all risks. And I warn you that, if you end our association and take her into society, I shall not hold myself any longer bound by my promise to you. Other men will then meet her without such restriction, and I must do so too.”

“Very well,” said his cousin. “Then you must only expect such opportunities as are afforded to other men. I can not trust an avowed enemy as if he were a friend.”

“But why consider me as an enemy?” asked he, and unconsciously, as it seemed, he drew a step nearer to her. “What objection could you have if the impossible were to come to pass— if I could win her to look kindly on me?”

“My dear Lionel,” she answered, touched—as what woman would not have been?—by this sudden appeal, “what objection, indeed, could I have? But I have no voice in the matter. Irène, you know, is simply intrusted to me by her guardian—”

“Ah!” said he, throwing back his head and shoulders abruptly. “And he would not approve! But that has no weight with me. I hold his opinion at less than a farthing’s value, and I would tell him so without hesitation. For, why should he object, unless—and that I have suspected for some time—he wishes to marry her himself?”

“Lionel, you must know that is absurd!”

“Absurd, is it?” said the young man. “I fail to see why. You must know that Mr. Stanhope’s age makes his guardianship ridiculous. Why, then, should Madame Lescar have given him the charge, or he accepted it, but for such an end?”

“So, having nobody else to be jealous of, you have absolutely transformed Mr. Stanhope into a rival!” said she. “If your suspicions are correct, why should there be any mystery?—why should he be in Algiers and not here?”

He shrugged his shoulders. “How can I tell? But time will show whether or not my suspicions, as you call them, are correct. Meanwhile, I give you fair warning that, if there is a chance for me, I shall spare no effort to take it.”

“And I shall govern myself accordingly,” said she, smiling. “Now we may consider everything said that need be said. Will you stay to dinner?—or is it war to the knife?”

“I thought you probably intended to forbid me the house,” said he, smiling also.

“Not at all,” she replied. “You are much too useful as well as too agreeable. I only desire you not to join Irène and Aunt Marion again. When I think it well for you to accompany us on any of our expeditions, I will ask you myself.”

CHAPTER III.

There is not a more charming spot in the world than the Pincian Hill on a bright winter, or, better still, a soft spring afternoon. There are many more extensive promenades in Europe, but where is there one which from a height so noble overlooks a scene so fair? Who that has ever stood on that outlying terrace, with its massive balustrade of stone, can forget the picture spread before the gaze—the soft-toned city, with her palaces, cupolas, and towers lying below; the noble outlines of that dome which Michael Angelo lifted high in air; the majestic angel sheathing his sword on the castle which was once the tomb of Hadrian; the Campagna stretching afar to meet the silver line of the sea; the frame of purple hills that in all other directions bounds the wide expanse? It is a picture which imprints itself not only on the memory but on the heart, and remains there through all lapse of time, all change of seasons.

And on such afternoons it is a bright scene which the promenade itself displays. A stream of carriages fills its broad roadway, and among the throng of pedestrians there are many picturesque contrasts of dress and appearance. For, though degraded, for the present, of her distinctive character—degraded, as far as possible, from her proud position as the capital of Christendom to the capital of a kingdom founded on force and

fraud—Rome is still unlike any other city of the world, for thither still come the pilgrims of all nations and all tribes to lay their offerings at the feet of Christ's Vicar, to pay to the royal prisoner of the Vatican such homage of love and fealty as no other sovereign on earth can command. And on the Pincian Hill these mingle with eager sight-seeing tourists, with the fashionable foreign element which follows its narrow social orbit in complacent self-satisfaction here as elsewhere, with artists, scholars, poets drawn from all parts of the earth by the charm of this Eternal City, with quiet priests and grave prelates, with students from the great religious colleges, whose robes make a gleam of bright color as they file around the winding road.

The band was playing, the sunshine streaming, the crowd at its greatest, when Lady Dorchester's carriage drew up in front of the Piazzale on the afternoon following her conversation with Mrs. Falconer. Leaning back under the shade of a heavily fringed parasol, her eyes passed over the faces near her, and presently fell on a young, distinguished-looking man, to whom she bowed and then held out her hand as he approached the carriage.

"I am delighted to see you back in Rome, my dear count," she said. "When did you return?"

"Only within a few days past," answered the gentleman, who spoke English perfectly, but with a slight accent which betrayed that it was not his native tongue. "My uncle's illness detained me longer than I expected."

"It must have been a very severe illness. I am glad to see favorable accounts of his recovery."

"More favorable than exact, I fear. Though he has a strong constitution, this attack has shaken it, and he does not regain strength rapidly. His physicians are urging him to go to Nice or Cannes for a month or two."

"And he will do so, of course?"

"Not if he can possibly avoid it. He is anxious to resume his public duties; but I think he will find himself obliged to yield to advice."

"It is always best in the end, I am sure, though no doubt it is hard for Prince Waldegrave to believe so. At all events I am glad that he is better, and glad to see you back among us, though you hardly deserve that I should say so."

"Why do I not deserve it?" asked he, smiling. "What have I done?"

"What have you not left undone—in a social way? Yet society is very agreeable in Rome this winter."

"I do not doubt it, and I shall begin at once to atone for my misdemeanors as far as may be. In consideration of such good intentions, will you—who know everybody worth knowing—tell me who is the beautiful girl in the carriage just beyond you?"

Lady Dorchester looked around, bowed, and turned back, smiling as she did so.

"That beautiful girl," she said, "is just now the most admired person in Rome. Have you ever seen more perfect blending of lines and tints with spiritual expression? It is the head of a Muse. Artists and sculptors are raving over her."

"I do not wonder at that," said the young Count. "It is a singularly rare and noble type of beauty. But you have not yet told me who she is."

"An American. Nay—don't look so disappointed! There are Americans and Americans. For example, the lady by whom this beauty is sitting, and whom you have not noticed, though she well deserves notice, is English by marriage but American in

everything else, and there is not a more charming woman in Rome. She is young, she has the delicate loveliness of her country, she is *femme d'esprit*, and immensely wealthy—can you imagine a more delightful combination?"

"It would be difficult to do so; yet I have a prejudice—" He paused, perhaps because his eye fell again on the face in the carriage beyond. "What is her name?" he asked, abruptly.

"Mrs. Falconer," answered Lady Dorchester. "Oh! you mean the Muse-like beauty? She is Miss Lescar; very young, and in mourning, as you perceive; so she has not appeared in society at all. But Mrs. Falconer has half promised to bring her to my reception on Wednesday evening, and, if you come, I will introduce you."

"You are very kind. If I do not claim your promise, it will only be because introductions are sometimes mistakes. That is such an ideal face—it is not likely that what it leads one to expect will be fulfilled."

"That depends, of course, upon what you expect," said Lady Dorchester, "I have found that Miss Lescar corresponds very well with her face. I do not believe that Nature ever misleads one who knows how to read her signs, and such a countenance as that is like the portico of a beautiful temple."

"The temple should be very beautiful indeed, if it is in harmony with the portico," said he, smiling. "I think, after that comparison, I must enter and judge for myself."

"And I promise that you will not regret it," she replied.

It occurred to Count Waldegrave, after the speaker had driven away, that such promises are rash, though he had no foreboding of how rash this promise was to prove. The face that he had first seen on the terrace of the Villa Mattei had disappeared; so its charm could not counteract his reluctance to exchange an ideal for a reality which, he felt sure, would suffer by the contrast. He began to wish that he had made no inquiry with regard to the poetic beauty. To be promised an introduction to an American girl was certainly the last object he had in view in doing so.

From which it will be perceived that, like most people of strong character, he was prejudiced, as he had acknowledged to Lady Dorchester. Conservative in politics and an intense aristocrat in conviction as well as in feeling, he disliked America on general principles, as he disliked all republican experiments of government or forms of society. There was probably also a personal edge to this dislike, from the recollection of his uncle's first marriage, of which he had himself known nothing, but which had been represented to him by his father—Prince Waldegrave's elder brother—as an act of consummate folly. He had rarely seen his brilliant uncle until after this act of folly had been completely set aside; but on the death of his father, Prince Waldegrave had taken charge of him, and, as time went on, had given him the place of a son in his house and heart. For, as he sometimes thought, had he been granted a son, he could not have desired him different from Otto, whose intellectual powers were seconded by an ambition which promised to control his life as thoroughly as the same passion had controlled that of Prince Waldegrave himself. Placed early in the diplomatic service, he was already distinguished as much by his ability as by his name and connection. The usual follies of youth had played but a small part in his career. Fired, no doubt, by his uncle's rapid elevation, his heart had from childhood been set on high and stern pursuits. And he was no dreamer. He knew that the price of greatness is always, in one form or another, "to

scorn delights and live laborious days,” and he was ready to pay that price. An intense student, a clear thinker, with a nature for which frivolities possessed no attraction, he had avoided those shoals and quicksands on which many a life of fair promise has been wrecked; and there was a mingling of austerity and poetry in his character which had so far rendered him insensible to the charms of women. Perhaps nothing about his nephew gave Prince Waldegrave greater satisfaction than this insensibility. “No woman will ever blind *him!*” he had said to himself more than once with grim pleasure.

And now it was a woman’s face which floated before the young man’s fancy as he walked along the Pincio, with all the soft sights and sounds of spring around him. Wheels were flashing by, voices mingling in every form of civilized speech, fountains were rising and falling as if keeping time to the strains of music; the marble busts of poets, heroes, and statesmen looked with serene gravity from their pedestals at the motley throng which filled the avenues; overhead arched the same deep-blue Roman sky that smiled upon the gardens of Lucullus on this Pincian Hill; and afar beyond St. Peter’s the sun was going down into a great bed of glory. Count Waldegrave, if not a social favorite, was at least a marked person in society; so he had to pay his respects at other carriages besides that of Lady Dorchester, to receive many congratulations on his uncle’s recovery, and acknowledge many gracious speeches about his own return—until at length, weary of these civilities, he left the neighborhood of the crowd and wandered away in the direction of the Muro-Torto, that strange fragment of ancient wall, which for fourteen centuries has seemed about to fall, yet remains immovable.

Standing here by the parapet, in comparative solitude, he looked afar, over the intervening space of the Campagna, to the blue heights which began to wear their softest evening lights and shades—aerial hills, borrowing tints from the sky into which they melted with many an exquisite rise and fall of outline, while the wide plain at their feet seemed swimming in light. The atmosphere was full of charm—the mingled charm of spring and Italy. What is there in this enchanted air which seems to suggest all the passion and romance with which it has throbbled? Delicate, subtile, yet of exceeding sweetness, it stirs the current of the coldest blood, fires the most sluggish imagination. As a waft of fragrance floated up from a cluster of violets that hung on his coat, Waldegrave felt as if he appreciated for the first time the full spell of Italy—as if all the glory of her past and the beauty of her present, melting into one wonderful whole, were suffused with golden light, like the plain below him, and made the background for a face fair as the dream of some artist under the sky of Hellas.

CHAPTER IV.

Mrs. Falconer’s doubt whether Irène could be induced to appear at Lady Dorchester’s reception proved well founded. Though not absolutely refusing to do so, the girl evinced so much reluctance that it was impossible to press the point.

“Since you object so much, I will not insist,” Mrs. Falconer said; “I can only assure you that I would not have proposed such a thing without a reason. It is not mere caprice on my part.”

“I never thought that it was,” Irène answered; “and if you insist, I will go; but, if your reason is not very important, I shall be glad to be spared. It seems so short a time—my mourning is so fresh—”

“My dear child,” Mrs. Falconer hastened to say, “I should not have thought of proposing any but the quietest mode of going out. Lady Dorchester is simply at home to her friends, and we drop in and take a cup of tea—that is all. Society in any gay sense I never dreamed of for you.”

“Even that is more than I feel inclined to face,” said the girl. “If you wish, I will appear on the evenings when you are quietly at home; but I can not do more—yet.”

“That will do,” said Mrs. Falconer, kissing her. “I shall be satisfied with that.”

Lady Dorchester was not satisfied, however, when the speaker made her appearance without the promised attraction—and she expressed her disappointment very frankly. “Why did you not bring her *nolens volens*?” she asked. “She would soon have found that our festivity is of the mildest order. And now, you see, I am forsworn—for I have promised an introduction to her.”

“My dear Lady Dorchester, that was very rash, since I spoke doubtfully of the probability of bringing her.”

“But I felt sure that you would—and the man to whom I promised it is one whom I never heard express any interest or curiosity about a woman before: so I thought he ought to be encouraged. I shall present him to you instead, and you can invite him to your receptions, and perhaps let him meet Miss Lescar.”

“May I ask who he is?”

“Count Waldegrave—nephew of Prince Waldegrave. He is attached to his embassy here, but has been out of Rome for a month or more in attendance on his uncle, who—as no doubt you have observed from the newspapers—has been very ill.”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Falconer, in vague assent. Worldly training had seldom stood her in better stead than at that moment. She had a sense of being mentally knocked down, which almost made her catch her breath. Count Waldegrave! It seemed incredible that *he*, of all men, should be seeking, desiring an introduction to Irène! “Thank Heaven, she did not come!” was her first collected thought.

Meanwhile, Lady Dorchester had gone on talking. “A very attractive man,” she was saying, “and immensely clever, but cold as an iceberg. One sees that ambition is his ruling passion.”

“What else could be expected of the nephew of his uncle?” asked Mrs. Falconer, who had by this time recovered the power of speech. “‘Since he, misnamed the Morning Star,’ I doubt if any one has surpassed Prince Waldegrave in that respect.”

“Probably not; but it has made him a great man.”

“Pardon me,” said Mrs. Falconer, “I think that his ability has made him a great man; his ambition has only made him an unscrupulous one.”

“A nice distinction,” said the other, smiling. “But, however that may be, Count Waldegrave is the nephew of his uncle in ability as well as ambition. You, who have such a penchant for clever men, will like him.”

“I hardly think so,” replied Mrs. Falconer, gravely. Then, after an instant’s pause, she asked, “How is it that such a man has sought to know a girl not yet in society?”

“He has not sought to know her,” answered Lady Dorchester. “He was struck by her beauty—as who is not?—on the Pincio, a day or two ago, and asked me who she was. As I have said, I never heard him express any curiosity about a woman before, so I volunteered to introduce him to her to-night. Ah!”—she lifted her eye-glass—“here he comes. I shall shift the odium of my broken word to your shoulders.”

This she at once proceeded to do when Count Waldegrave came up.

"I am sorry that I am not able to fulfill the promise which I made to you on the Pincio," she said, after shaking hands with him. "It is not my fault, however, but that of Mrs. Falconer—to whom allow me to present you, with the hope that you will reproach her as she deserves."

"Lady Dorchester tells me that she promised to introduce you to Miss Lescar," said Mrs. Falconer, looking keenly into the face before her. "I regret that I should have misled her into imagining that Miss Lescar would be here to-night. But I can not consent to bear the responsibility of her absence. She herself declined to come. She is in mourning for her mother."

She spoke the last words deliberately, with her eyes still fixed on Count Waldegrave's face, desiring, if possible, to surprise any expression that should betray whether Irene's name had wakened the recollection of his uncle's discarded wife. But, as it had not done so—as he was, indeed, ignorant of the name of a woman to whom he had not for years given a thought—his face expressed no more interest than courtesy demanded, and Mrs. Falconer said to herself that he was either endowed with a countenance which would be of inestimable value in diplomacy, or that the name had no significance to his ears.

"I regret that I am not to have the pleasure of meeting Miss Lescar," he said. "But Lady Dorchester prepared me for a possible disappointment, by telling me that she had not appeared in society."

"And it is fortunate that I should have given my promise to one capable of meeting disappointment with so much philosophy," said Lady Dorchester. "I doubt if there is another man in Rome who, under the circumstances, would not be ready to anathematize me."

"Then you should be glad that philosophy is the strong point of a *'barbaro Tedesco,*' instead of being unkindly sarcastic," said Waldegrave, smiling. "I can not imagine the circumstances which would lead me to be guilty of anathematizing you; but my disappointment is perhaps more severe than you suppose.—No one could see Miss Lescar without being struck by her remarkable beauty," he added, turning to Mrs. Falconer.

"It is almost unfortunately remarkable," replied that lady. "In Rome, at least, it is impossible for her to escape constant notice and admiration. You know the open homage Italians pay to beauty."

"I think it charming," said Lady Dorchester. "I should like a beggar to bless God for having made my face, as I heard one do, not long ago, when Miss Lescar passed him on a church-step."

"I am sure if he had entertained the least suspicion of your desire, or of how efficacious it would probably prove in the matter of *centesimi*, he would have done so," said Waldegrave.

"Then it would have had no spontaneity, and consequently no value. No, no—an Italian is too shrewd to attempt to blind a middle-aged Englishwoman with such palpable flattery. But it was a genuine tribute to that exquisite face of Miss Lescar's—of which, by-the-by, I heard M. Villefort say the other day that it is the true artist physiognomy—at once intellectual and impassioned."

"She has the artist temperament," said Mrs. Falconer. "There is an echo of it in

her singing.”

“The most divine voice!” said Lady Dorchester to Waldegrave. “I hoped we should have heard that to-night. But disappointment, no doubt, is good for man—and woman also.”

As she moved away, Waldegrave looked at Mrs. Falconer.

“I am by no means sure that disappointment is good for man,” he said. “At least, I fail to recognize its excellence in such a case as the present.”

“We generally fail to recognize what is good for us when it comes in a disagreeable guise,” she answered—meeting his gaze with eyes so full of gravity that he was struck by their expression. “Yet I doubt if there is any one whose experience can not furnish examples of happily unfulfilled desires.”

“There is no question of that,” he replied; “but such examples never reconcile one to the unfulfillment of fresh desires.”

“Then one is a poor philosopher; and you have just said that philosophy is your strong point.”

“You are probably aware that to talk of philosophy is one thing, to practice it quite another.”

“I can not imagine that they are very different things with you,” she answered, smiling slightly.

Then she turned from him to speak to an acquaintance who came toward her, and he found himself wondering what it meant. Plainly, he was advised to be satisfied with his disappointment, and believe that it was for the best. But why? What possible reason was there why he should not desire to know Miss Lescar—a desire which Lady Dorchester had intimated was shared by many other men in Rome? There could be no doubt that up to the last moment he had been conscious of that disinclination to exchange the ideal for the real, which he had confessed on the Pincio; but this fanciful hesitation vanished before a tangible obstacle; and according to a rule which is universal in its application to human nature—whether philosophical or unphilosophical—difficulty sensibly quickened desire.

There was, however, nothing more to be said to Mrs. Falconer, round whom her special friends were gathering. The rooms were filled with all that was best in Roman society, for Lady Dorchester, no more than Mrs. Falconer, cared to open her salon solely to her own country-people. “If I wanted English society pure and simple, what would prevent my staying in England to enjoy it?” she said. “When I come abroad, it is for something else.” The something else was here in force—all the picturesque mingling of nationalities which makes Rome unique—and there was no lack of cordial welcome on all sides for Count Waldegrave.

“I saw you talking to Mrs. Falconer,” said an attaché of the English embassy to him presently. “A charming woman—with one of the pleasantest *salons* in Rome. The talk in her drawing-room is always good—one hears the best of the brilliant things that are floating about in this Roman atmosphere. It is neutral ground where all free lances have a tilt at each other, and where Philistines and votaries of the Higher Cult may shake hands. You’ll like it,” he ended, with much the same words Lady Dorchester had used when assuring Mrs. Falconer that she would like Count Waldegrave.

“Perhaps so,” the latter answered, “but I am not likely to present myself without an invitation, and Mrs. Falconer has not given me that.”

“Oh, she overlooked it, no doubt,” the other said. “She is exclusive in her own way. Rank and wealth have no effect with her; but she adores cleverness, and I am sure you would prove a congenial spirit.”

“There was nothing to evoke congeniality in our conversation,” said Waldegrave, smiling.

But, although he smiled, he felt that he had been treated with distinct discouragement by Mrs. Falconer, and it was a sensation which surprised far more than it piqued him. What could be the meaning of it? he asked himself once more. What had he said or done, or left unsaid or undone? Had his desire to know Miss Lescar in preference to herself wounded that vanity which is the weak point of many a woman? The recollection of her grave glance, full of serious meaning, seemed to disprove this conjecture. He did her no more than justice in recognizing that pettiness of the kind was impossible to one whose countenance expressed so much that was at once sweet and noble.

The woman of whom he thought thus was meanwhile not a little disturbed in mind by what seemed to her a singular freak of fate. That Count Waldegrave should be seeking, desiring to know Irène, was almost incredible—yet, since it was true, the question arose, what was her best course of action? If Irène appeared in society at all, could she avoid meeting him? And could she (Mrs. Falconer), without any apparent reason whatever, close her door in his face? These reflections made an undertone to all that went on around her; and when she found herself at home, presented themselves in the light of problems to be solved. As she sat before her dressing-table, gazing between tall candles into the mirror, while her maid combed out the soft masses of her hair, it was with eyes that hardly saw her own image, so much was her mind occupied.

For there were many things to be taken into consideration, she said to herself. One was Irène’s peculiar character. She had not forgotten the glimpse given at Madame Lescar’s death of the passionate bitterness with which the girl regarded her father; she dreaded for her anything which should rouse this feeling, and what could rouse it more than the sight of Prince Waldegrave’s adopted son? All the outraged, impotent sense of wrong would rush back upon the nature which grief had softened but certainly not subdued. Yet how to prevent such a meeting? There was the policy of seclusion; but in that case she must incur the responsibility of subjecting a girl—who, after all, might prove to be like other girls—to the constant society of a young, not unattractive man who was deeply in love with her. And love in itself is a potent attraction—provided that the man who offers it is not positively disagreeable to the woman whom he loves, and that she has an unoccupied heart. Tossed on the horns of this dilemma, Mrs. Falconer breathed a sigh so deep that it startled her sleepy maid into alert attention, and made her suspect that her mistress was the victim of some malady of the heart. Meeting her quick, sharp glance in the mirror, the mistress smiled.

“That will do, Mathilde,” she said, putting up her hand to her hair. “I will go to bed now.”

But going to bed and going to sleep were different things, for the tormenting questions banished slumber from her pillow. “Shall I write to Mr. Stanhope?” she asked herself as a last resource from perplexity; but the recollection of the length of time necessary for a reply seemed to negative this. She had heard from him several times during the winter, and in his last letter he had spoken of going on an expedition into the

Atlas Mountains— so there was no telling when a letter would reach him. She must therefore arrive at a decision unaided by his advice. And finally, after much reflection, she did so.

“I will tell Irène,” she thought, “and let her decide whether or not she will run the risk of meeting Count Waldegrave. She has a right to do so. And if, as I fear, it would be deeply painful to her, I would rather leave Rome than subject her to it.”

CHAPTER V.

When Mrs. Falconer woke the next morning it was with that weight upon the mind which tells at once of something unpleasant either past or impending. And with the full return of consciousness she remembered that, in this case, it was both past and impending. But, although a decision arrived at by night is often changed under the light of the morning, she felt no inclination to change that at which she had arrived. Had Stanhope been conveniently at hand, she would certainly have deferred the matter to his decision; but, since he had chosen to convey himself into the wilds of Algeria, she was forced to do what seemed to her the next best thing—leave it to Irène, whom assuredly it altogether concerned.

Having taken her coffee in her own room as usual, she sent her maid to ask Miss Lescar to come to her. A minute later the door opened, and Irène entered. She was dressed for walking— and something in her appearance and manner suggested all the freshness and sweetness of the spring. The heavy lassitude of grief had passed, and the elastic step, the bright, clear glance unconsciously reflected the divine joyousness of awakening nature. Despite her black draperies, she looked like a nymph, whose longing was for wild woodland haunts, and upland sweeps of breezy hills.

“You are going out, I see,” said Mrs. Falconer. “Where?— and with whom?”

“Oh, the morning seemed too exquisite to spend in the house; so I was on my way to beg Mrs. Vance to come with me for a turn on the Pincio, when Mathilde gave me your message,” the girl answered. “But it is not a matter of any importance whether I go or not.”

“Yes it is, if you wish to go. It is true I want to talk to you; but our desires may be reconciled if you do not mind accepting me for a companion instead of Aunt Marion?”

“I shall be delighted,” was the quick reply. “I often feel that our lives are so separated now—that I see so little of you.”

“That,” said Mrs. Falconer, “is a necessity of our different modes of life; but I hope they will not be so different after awhile, for I regret the separation as much as you do. We will go this morning to the Pincio, however, and enjoy the delicious air and sunshine together. Will you ring for Mathilde?”

Mathilde appeared and equipped her mistress for walking. Then the two ladies went out, and were soon following the winding road which leads to the top of the Pincian. At this hour the promenade was almost deserted. There were no carriages and few pedestrians visible—only some nurses in picturesque Albanese costume, with their small charges; two or three intrepid-looking Englishwomen in sealskin jackets, a priest seated on a bench reading his breviary, a couple of loitering artists leaning over the balustrade of the great terrace. It was, as Irène had said, a day of exquisite beauty. The air seemed sparkling with sunshine, and contained an exhilarating quality which recalled Shelley’s

words when he spoke of “the effect of the awakening spring in that divinest climate, the new life with which it drenches the spirit even to intoxication.” The historic city seemed glittering with light over all her myriad domes, her towers, and palaces; the majestic curve of St. Peter’s rose against a dazzling infinity of sky; the girdling Campagna was full of indescribable color, changing from delicate green in the foreground to marvelous shades of blue and purple afar, where it met the hills robed in azure and wrapped in tender haze, through which gleamed here and there the crest of some snow-clad peak.

“How divine they are—those hills!” said Mrs. Falconer. “Now that spring has come, we must make some excursions into them. Should you not like that?”

The girl’s face answered for her. “Of late I have never looked at them without desiring it,” she said. “They seem to invite, to beckon one—it is like the song of the sirens. I don’t know how it is possible for any one to resist their invitation.”

“We will not,” said Mrs. Falconer. “And so much that is interesting lies hidden there, of which the multitude of people around us—English and Americans who fancy themselves cultured, and who spend their time in lounging on the Pincian and the Corso, in visiting at one another’s houses, in buying cameos and perhaps riding on the Campagna—know no more than they do of the Rome that lies beyond the Piazza di Spagna. Perhaps I have no right to be scornful of them, for I have been very much living their life this winter—though I hope with an idea or two outside of it—but we will leave it all behind and plunge into Italy, the real Italy which those blue hills still guard, and which has not yet been ruthlessly plowed up in the name of civilization—which here, at least, under the present *régime*, is a term for barbarism worse than that of the Goths.”

“*Bien dit!*” said Irène. “And when shall we go?”

“We will begin a series of excursions as soon as the spring is fairly open, and—Mr. Stanhope comes.”

“But when will he come?”

“Ah, who can say? He may wander away into the interior of Africa and be heard of no more for a year or so. But in that case we will not wait for him, but will make the best of Lionel.”

“What a shame to speak so of Mr. Erne!” said Irène, with a smile. “It is very ungrateful, after having made the best of him all winter.”

“Yes, he has been very useful,” said Mrs. Falconer. “But here is a quiet place—shall we sit down?”

It was on the north side of the hill. They had turned into a path screened by shrubbery from the road, and bounded on the other side by the parapet which guards the precipice where it drops in sheer descent more than a hundred feet to the grounds of the Villa Borghese. Mrs. Falconer sat down on a bench, and made room for Irène beside her. As the girl obeyed the gesture, she was struck by the expression of the face which a large parasol shaded without concealing.

“Dear Mrs. Falconer,” she said, quickly, “has anything occurred to annoy you?”

“Have I betrayed it?” asked Mrs. Falconer, smiling slightly. “You are a close observer. Yes, I have been annoyed a little— not very seriously. And about you.”

“About me! What have I done?”

“What have you done? My dear child, nothing at all! How could you imagine that you had done anything? I said that I was annoyed *about*, not *with*, you.”

“But how is that possible, unless in some way I am to blame?”

“Because another person is concerned in the matter. You are certainly not accountable for what other people may say or do. And it is not your fault that you are beautiful,” she ended, with a smile.

“I think I understand,” said Irène, quietly; and her brilliant eyes met her companion’s without a shade of wavering. “Mr. Erne has been talking to you, has he not?”

“Has he been talking to you?” asked Mrs. Falconer, not a little startled by this unexpected question.

“In the way you mean—not at all,” the girl answered, with the same composure. “But, of course, I should be blind if I did not see that he fancies himself what is called ‘in love’ with me. I thought that perhaps he had spoken of it to you, and that you would tell him that I have no thought of such folly. It has no place at all in my life.”

She uttered the last words impatiently—as one who wishes to put aside an annoyance and hear no more of it—and Mrs. Falconer was for a moment incapable of reply. The decision of the speech did not surprise her more than the expression of the proud young face—for almost unconsciously the nostrils had dilated, the delicate lips curved with scorn.

“I never thought,” she said, presently, “that you were likely to return Lionel’s passion, but I have only allowed his constant association with you under a pledge that he would not take advantage of it for love-making—and I am glad that he has kept it.”

“Yes, he has kept it,” said Irène, indifferently. “But words amount to very little. And you need not have been afraid of love-making,” she added, with the scornful curve again on her lip. “I should have ended that very soon.”

“Why?” asked Mrs. Falconer, directly—her curiosity as well as her surprise excited.

“Why?” repeated the girl—and now the composure vanished from her face, and quick feeling flashed from every feature—“because your cousin is nothing to me. And because there is no man on the earth who could win my heart. I shall never marry. Not from want of love—for love means nothing to me—but because I have no recognized rank or name, and I have the most arrogant spirit upon which the sun shines; one to which the humiliation that brands me is like an unceasing burn, and which will never permit me either to take voluntarily a lower rank than that which should be mine, or to allow a king to feel that he stooped to me.”

“Irène—my dear child!” said Mrs. Falconer. She was startled yet not astonished by this glimpse of the fiery spirit. It was like an echo, a confirmation of what she had been thinking the night before. She had never been deceived by the girl’s outward composure and habitual gentleness; she had a glimpse once of what lay beneath, and she had never forgotten it.

“Why should you think of these things?” she asked. “What do they matter? In yourself you are worthy of the highest love, and if you should ever give it—”

“I tell you that it is impossible,” Irène interrupted. “Do not speak to me of such a thing. Apart from what I have said, it seems to me the greatest curse that has been laid upon humanity—this passion that blinds people’s eyes, that makes them commit innumerable follies, that deprives one of one’s freedom, and gives to another the power to strike one to the heart! I saw the result once—I saw my mother—that is enough!”

She rose quickly and walked away. Her hands were clasped together; it was

evident that she was quivering in every fiber with the passionate force of feeling that had been aroused. Mrs. Falconer looked after her with a sense of bewilderment. What was to be made of such a nature as this?—and what would become of it? She thought of Madame Lescar, of her fears, that had seemed exaggerated, of her solemn words of warning. Was not all that she had described, revealed here—the tortured pride, the high ambition, the fierce, implacable resentment? “Poor child!” she said to herself with a sense of compassion, as she looked at the slender, black-clad figure standing by the parapet, outlined against the wide, beautiful scene of sky and plain and far mountains.

She made no motion to follow, but waited quietly until the girl turned and came slowly back to her. The large eyes were still shining in the pale face, but otherwise she had regained her usual composure. She did not resume her seat, however, but paused in front of Mrs. Falconer.

“Forgive me,” she said, “if I have said anything that I ought not—particularly anything that seemed unkind with regard to Mr. Erne, whom I really like very much. But now you understand me, and the subject need never be mentioned between us again.”

“Whether I understand you or not,” said Mrs. Falconer, “you have very much misunderstood me. When I began to speak, Lionel was not in my mind at all. It is impossible for any one not to perceive that he is very much in love with you; but he has never, directly or indirectly, asked me to ascertain your sentiments toward him. So much I must say injustice to him.”

“Of what—of whom, then, were you talking?” asked Irène, while a flush came into her cheeks.

“Not of any one who is in love with you—you will be glad to hear,” said Mrs. Falconer, with a slight, grave smile—“only of some one who wishes to know you. Sit down again, and let me tell you all about it.”

Irène sat down without a word. She felt humiliated. How ridiculous, how vain it looked to have anticipated Mrs. Falconer in such a manner, and avowed her knowledge of what she was aware women are not supposed to know until they are told!

“In the first place,” said Mrs. Falconer, “I am glad you did not go with me to Lady Dorchester’s last night. She expressed great regret that you did not appear, not only on her own account, but because she had promised to introduce to you a man who had seen you, and been struck with your beauty. There are many men, no doubt, who have been so struck, but this man proved to be—Count Waldegrave.”

“Mrs. Falconer—!” The words were a gasp, and the girl drew back as one might from the touch of a serpent.

“Probably you do not know who he is,” Mrs. Falconer went on, quietly. “He is your cousin, and the adopted son of—Prince Waldegrave. He is attached to his embassy here in Rome, but has been absent for some time, so that I never met him before.”

There was a pause—in reality not long, yet which seemed long to both. Irène put her hand to her throat as if she could not articulate. When she finally spoke, the voice did not sound like her own.

“And he wishes to know *me*?” she asked.

“Yes,” Mrs. Falconer answered. “I have no reason to believe that he imagines in the least who you are. I tested him as far as possible—and either he does not suspect, or his command of countenance is incredible.”

“How can he fail to suspect,” said the girl in the same strained voice, “when I

bear my mother's name?"

"It is possible that he may never have heard your mother's name. Of course, as your father's wife, she bore—"

"Yes," said Irène. She was silent for another minute, and Mrs. Falconer, glancing at her, saw that she was gazing steadfastly at the distant horizon, while her face wore a look as set and white as that of one of the marble heads gleaming from the shrubbery behind them. Presently she spoke without moving. "It is very strange," she said, slowly. "Why does he wish to know me?"

"Your mirror must answer that question," replied Mrs. Falconer. "He saw you, he asked Lady Dorchester who you were and she promised to introduce him to you, because she never knew him to express interest or curiosity about a woman before."

"And does not that look as if he must be aware—"

"Hardly. The more I reflect upon the matter, the more I am inclined to believe that no thought of who you are has entered his mind. If it had, I can not conceive for what reason he should seek to know you."

"Neither can I," said Irène. "And you—what did you tell him?"

"That I regretted his disappointment; but that Lady Dorchester was mistaken in imagining that there was ever a promise of your going. And I gave him no hope of meeting you at another time. But I felt that it would be impossible to guard against the danger of such a meeting if you appear at all in society—as we agreed that it is best you should; so I determined to leave it to you to decide whether you will continue your life of seclusion, or will take the risk."

Silence for another minute. Then, saying in a stifled voice, "I must think—I must consider!" Irène rose again and walked away.

This time her footsteps led her to that point of the hill where the parapet overlooks the ruined Muro Torto; and there, on the same spot where Waldegrave had found himself haunted by the memory of her face, she paused to do battle with herself in one of the sternest moments of her life.

For she felt instinctively how much hung on her decision. And she also felt that, as one should flee from stress of mighty temptation, so there was but one word for her to utter—and that word was, No. But all the passion of her nature seemed to rise up and forbid the utterance. She could hear nothing, heed nothing, except one thought which was surging through her mind: "I have done nothing to bring this about: it has come of itself!" If Stanhope had seen her at that moment, he would have been struck by the likeness which her face bore to that of her proud and dominant father. Her lips were compressed into a straight, firm line; her eyes were burning under the dark, knitted brows; her whole expression was of resolute force and unbending will. It was easy to see that there were few obstacles she would not be ready to trample upon, few scruples that would not perish like straw in the flame of her passion.

How long she stood there she did not know. At last she turned and went back to Mrs. Falconer.

"I have decided," she said, in a clear, firm tone. "It is not for me to shrink from any meeting. Let us make no change in what we intended, and, if Count Waldegrave still desires to know me, do not hesitate to introduce him."

CHAPTER VI.

That abstraction called Fate, which played so large a part in the affairs of the ancients, and which is not without use to moderns, inasmuch as it serves to throw the blame of many untoward affairs and undesirable catastrophes upon, certainly seemed determined to bring together two people whom the natural course of events had placed far apart. It was a sense of this which made Irène find it impossible to refuse to know Count Waldegrave. "I have done nothing to bring it about—it has come of itself," she said, as an Arab would have said, "Kismet!" It was shifting responsibility from herself to something vague and impersonal.

But Mrs. Falconer had no such inclination. She did not believe in Fate, and she did believe in the consequences of one's own acts. The sense of responsibility was strong with her, and although she had felt it right to let Irène decide for herself in a matter that concerned herself alone, she had not doubted what the decision would be. She was sure that the girl's impulse would at once declare for avoiding one who recalled, and in a manner represented, her mother's great wrong. The answer which she received was, therefore, not only surprising but almost dismaying. Irène offered no explanation—beyond the proud remark, "It is not for me to shrink from any meeting"—and she asked none; but something in the girl's manner rendered her uneasy, and made her regret that she had not kept her own counsel, and acted on her own judgment. What she feared she hardly knew—but her foreboding was at least sufficiently tangible for her to resolve that, if it rested with her to prevent a meeting between the cousins, such a meeting should never take place.

It did not rest with her, however. On the contrary, she proved the indirect means through which the meeting came to pass. It will be remembered that she had requested Erne not to join Irène and Mrs. Vance again in their drives, walks, or expeditions; adding, "When I wish you to go, I will ask you myself." But the mood which issued this prohibition underwent a change after the conversation with Irène on the Pincio. She saw no reason after that for any further prohibition of intercourse than the consideration of Mrs. Grundy rendered necessary. "The poor fellow will soon enough learn that his hopes are baseless," she thought. "I will let him have what pleasure he can, meanwhile." It must be confessed that this was very much the spirit with which one gives a child the probably indigestible sugar-plums it covets; but Erne, being fortunately unaware of her motive, was simply grateful when, on the next time that he presented himself, she said:

"Is not to-morrow the day for the Villa Albani? Irène has not been there yet. Should you not like to go with us in the afternoon?"

"I shall be delighted," he answered. Then he turned to Irène. "Do you remember what I was saying the other day about the Orpheus and Eurydice? I am glad that I shall have the pleasure of showing it to you. But you must sing '*Che faro senza Euridice*' for me as a prelude."

"Must I?" she said, smiling. She never made any difficulties about singing—never begged to be excused, never said that she was hoarse; so she crossed the floor to the piano, and a moment later her voice rose in the song for which he asked. She sang it, as she did everything, with a fervor that seemed to make its passion and its pathos for the time her own. They were thrilling tones—tones that seemed to "take up the whole of love and utter it"—and as Mrs. Falconer listened, she asked herself if this could be the girl who had repudiated the very thought of the passion she was expressing. "If this is merely

the instinct of art, what will the force of nature be, when the hour for it strikes!" she thought; and then she observed, with something of a pang, the look on Erne's face. The hour had struck for him, and these heart-piercing tones were like fuel to his flame. "Come to luncheon to-morrow, Lionel," she said, when he bade them goodnight. It was another sugar-plum, but the young man did not know it as he went out into the night with his heart beating high. The excitement of the music seemed to have entered into his veins. His was a temperament peculiarly susceptible to such excitements—to everything that touched his nature on its aesthetic side. He carried with him not only the strains of Irène's voice, but a picture of her as she sang, with the sconces over the piano showering their light down upon her. "If I could paint her so!" he thought. A line of poetry which seemed made for her was running through his memory:

"The star-like sorrow of immortal eyes,"

he found himself murmuring. They were shining before him, filled with the expression that had been in them when she sang the "Euridice"—the sorrow that genius feels through sympathy with every form of human suffering. "Your imagination is always playing you tricks," Mrs. Falconer often said to him; but he felt sure that his imagination never played him any trick with regard to Irène. He had recognized her for what she was at first; and time had not withered nor custom staled the force and freshness of her unique charm.

He made his appearance punctually the next day, and in the golden afternoon they drove out to the Villa Albani. Irène had not seen this most beautiful of Roman villas, and her visit to it had been purposely delayed. Several times Erne had proposed to go, but Mrs. Falconer always negated the proposal. "I want to wait until she is really able to enjoy it, and until I have a leisure moment to accompany her," she said. The leisure moment had been long in arriving; and so it chanced that Irène first saw in all the glory of Italian spring this matchless spot, where, as an English writer says, "Cardinal Albani, having spent his life in collecting ancient sculpture, formed such porticoes and such saloons to receive it as an old Roman would have done: porticoes where the statues stood free upon the pavement between columns proportioned to their stature; saloons which were not stocked but embellished by families of allied statues, and seemed full without a crowd"—and where the garden, with its groves of ilex and avenues of box, its solemn cypresses, its fountains and columns, and terrace whence the eye beholds one of the most beautiful of Roman views, forms a picture never to be forgotten.

It seemed to Count Waldegrave that absence had enhanced his sense of delight in the beauty, both of nature and of art, so lavishly displayed here. He was wandering with apparent aimlessness but real enjoyment from room to room filled with exquisite shapes of antique loveliness, when he entered the apartment containing the famous Greek marble, representing the parting of Orpheus and Eurydice. At the moment it was empty save for a single figure—that of a girl in deep mourning who stood before the bas-relief. She did not turn her head as his foot rang on the floor, but involuntarily he paused, for a single glance told him that if she turned he would see the face which he saw first on the terrace of the Villa Mattei. He did not feel an instant's doubt: there was no mistaking the shape and poise of the slender figure, or the distinction in the carriage of the head. Thought is so quick that, as he paused, he had time to wonder how she came to be alone, when, to his infinite surprise, she spoke—her low but clear voice breaking on the silence with the distinctness of a silver bell:

“You are right—it grows upon one,” she said. “The simplicity is so exquisite—and so pathetic. Certainly the Greeks did not believe in overstrained emotion. It is, as Ampere says,” —her glance fell to a book in her hand—“*l’effet le plus pathétique est produit par la composition la plus simple; l’émotion la plus pénétante s’exhale de la sculpture la plus tranquille.*” —I think I feel that,” she added, turning toward him with a smile.

A speechless instant followed — an inappreciable space of time, yet one which seemed long to both of the two people so unexpectedly set face to face. Then the girl recovered herself. A tide of color flushed her clear white skin as soon as she perceived her mistake; and it had not passed away when she said in French, “Pardon, monsieur—I mistook you for some one else”— and with a slight bend of the head passed him on her way to leave the room.

But Fate—in the persons of Mrs. Falconer and Erne—stopped her at the door. It was Erne who had left her alone for a moment while he went back for Mrs. Falconer, who, having lingered to speak to an acquaintance, became separated from them. “Look at it well,” he had said, alluding to the bas-relief. “The charm of it will grow upon you. I shall return in a minute.” And when a minute later a masculine tread rang on the floor behind her, forgetting that the Villa Albani might contain other men than the one who had accompanied her, she spoke without looking round.

It was all very rapid. Waldegrave had only time—after acknowledging her apology with a deep bow—to move forward mechanically to the sculpture, when she met her delinquent companions at the door.

“You perceive I had not far to go,” said Erne. “But what is the matter? Surely you have not tired of the Orpheus and Eurydice already?”

“I am not so stupid,” she replied. “At least, not in that way—but I have been very stupid in another. Do you see that man? I spoke to him for you—of course, without looking around.”

“Moral: it is always well to look at people when addressing them,” said Erne, laughing. “But it was a trifling mistake, and the man is apparently a gentleman—therefore not likely to have misunderstood it.”

“It is of no importance,” said Mrs. Falconer. “Don’t give it any by appearing to think of it.”

She walked forward as she spoke; but as she approached the bas-relief and the man standing before it turned, she changed her opinion of the importance of the mistake as rapidly and completely as possible. She had the true *grande dame* command of countenance; but for once she was betrayed into an expression of dismay.

“Count Waldegrave!” she ejaculated.

Waldegrave bowed. “I am happy that Mrs. Falconer remembers me,” he said.

There may have been a faint shade of malice in the words, for Mrs. Falconer’s remembrance was evidently altogether unmixed with pleasure. In a moment, however, she recovered herself, and, recognizing that the meeting she wished to prevent was now unavoidable, saw that the only thing to be done was to invest it with as matter-of-course an air as possible. Even at that moment she felt with a sense of relief that she could trust Erne. It would be terribly unexpected, but the girl would not blench—she was sure of that, and it was much to be sure of.

“Count Waldegrave does not find it remarkable to be remembered, I imagine,”

she said, with a slight smile—not without graciousness, though certainly without warmth. “Perhaps I should apologize for my surprise. But one is often absurdly surprised at meeting an acquaintance where one only expected to see a stranger.” After a slight pause, she added, “Miss Lescar has just had an exactly contrary surprise, she tells me.”

Waldegrave glanced toward Irène, who, with Erne, was advancing.

“Miss Lescar spoke—I can scarcely say addressed me—under the evident impression that I was some one else,” he replied.

“She supposed you to be my cousin, who had left her only a moment before,” said Mrs. Falconer. Then she turned, and with an instinctive movement laid her hand on the girl’s arm. “Irène,” she said, “let me introduce a gentleman whom Fate has gratified in his desire to know you—Count Waldegrave.”

She felt as if the difficulty which she experienced in pronouncing the name resulted in her uttering it with almost violent distinctness. Whether this impression was correct or not, it certainly had upon Erne the effect of a thunder-bolt. He started and looked at his cousin as if asking whether his ears had played him false, or whether she had taken leave of her senses. But she had no attention to bestow upon him. All her thoughts were concentrated upon Irène. As her hand rested on the girl’s arm, she could feel her quiver when the name which had such meaning for her was pronounced. But her control of countenance proved the mettle of her courage. Only the sudden, shining light which came into her eyes betrayed to her two anxious observers how deeply she was moved. But it naturally revealed nothing to Waldegrave. Having never looked fully into those eyes before, he was only struck by their rare brilliance, and by the singular directness and intentness of their gaze.

If Mrs. Falconer had afterward been required, under pain of severe penalties, to describe what followed, it is doubtful if she could have done so with any degree of exactness. She had a confused recollection of an exchange of platitudes about the Villa; then she bethought herself to introduce Erne, and they talked a little of Greek art as exhibited in the bas-relief before them. Count Waldegrave remarked that it was doubtful whether the scene had been really intended to represent the parting of Orpheus and Eurydice in Hades; Erne replied that it seemed to him the correct explanation of the subject, but that so long as it represented that perfectly, he saw no reason for troubling themselves about the original intention of the artist. Then a good deal was said about Winckelmann, and then—there was no help for it!—they moved away, accompanied by Count Waldegrave.

It seemed to Mrs. Falconer a necessity of the position that she should take charge of this undesired addition to the party. She was too uncertain of Irène, to allow him to attach himself to her—and, indeed, he evinced no desire of the kind. So, talking, it is safe to say, with less thought and more incoherence than she ever before displayed, she walked on with him through the spacious rooms, leaving Irène and Erne to follow.

For once the latter would have preferred a different arrangement. He was eager for an explanation which he felt it impossible to ask of Irène. He had never heard her allude in the most remote manner to her father’s name or existence, and it was therefore out of the question for him to make any allusion of the kind. An expression of surprise with regard to the introduction would undoubtedly be such an allusion; therefore they walked in silence for several minutes, until she spoke.

“No doubt you think this very strange on Mrs. Falconer’s part,” she said; “so I

feel as if I ought to tell you that she did not introduce Count Waldegrave without my consent. We talked of the matter the other day; and I told her to do so.”

Erne’s surprise was not lessened by this statement, and, after a short pause, he said: “I have seldom been more amazed. I was aware that Count Waldegrave was in Rome; but I could never have imagined—”

“That he would desire to know me?” she said, as he stopped. “It is certainly amazing. But you understand, of course, that he does not suspect who I am. Otherwise, I should not have thought of consenting to know him.”

He looked at her in astonishment, which seemed to ascend from comparative to superlative degree.

“I confess that I do *not* understand,” he said. “How can you be sure that he does not—suspect? And even if he does not, an accident may at any time reveal your identity to him.”

“There is no accident probable—I may say possible—except the indiscretion of some of my friends,” she replied. “And they are not so many that I can not feel safe on that point.”

“You may assuredly feel safe with regard to one of them,” he said. “But you must pardon me if I say that I think you are making a mistake.”

“You have always been so kind that I do not mind your saying it,” she answered, quietly. “It is, however, a matter of which no one can judge except myself. But we are moving too fast through so much beauty. See! is not this the Antinous crowned with lotus, which Winckelmann declares to be, ‘after the Apollo and the Laocoon, the most beautiful monument of antiquity which time has transmitted to us’?”

She walked up to the chimney-piece as she spoke, and stood for several minutes before the famous *relievo*. Erne, as he watched her, was struck with something of resemblance between her face and that of the marble. The brows of Antinous are slightly knitted, as if with thought or pain, and so were hers, while in both faces the severe intellectual beauty of the Greek type was softened by the charm of youth.

Presently she turned to him. “Why are you not a sculptor?” she asked. “It seems to me that of all forms of art none is so glorious as this—to put one’s conceptions into imperishable marble that after the lapse of hundreds of centuries shall still give delight to myriads! What can be greater than that?”

“But you forget that such sculpture as this is a lost art,” he answered, “though I confess that I have been saying much the same thing to myself. I *have* dabbled in clay as well as in paint in my time, and I will go back to the clay to-morrow if you will let me model your head. I might hope to rival the Antinous then, perhaps.”

Her straight, dark brows drew closer together. “I did not think you would turn what I said into a foolish compliment,” she remarked, with severity.

“It is not a foolish compliment,” he replied. “I am in earnest. Artist after some fashion I am, but the divine spark has never yet been successfully brought out of me. If you will give me a chance—”

“My dear Lionel”—it was Mrs. Falconer’s voice half laughing behind him—“what chance are you demanding from fortune or Miss Lescar?”

“From Miss Lescar rather than from fortune,” he answered; and, as he turned, he met the glance of Count Waldegrave. “I have been asking her to allow me to model her head—as a preparation for becoming the rival of Praxiteles.”

“And she—?”

“Has begged him not to be foolish,” said Irène, with a slight touch of unconscious scorn.

It did not misbecome her, Waldegrave thought. She looked like a disdainful young princess as she stood a moment longer, then, turning, moved away.

It was finally in the garden, on the terrace whence one looks afar over the swelling ridges of the Campagna to the beautiful outlines and tints of the Sabine Mountains, to Monte Gennaro lifting his stately crest with the Monticelli beneath, and at the picturesque churches of Sant ‘Agnese and Santa Costanza in the middle distance, that he found an opportunity to speak to her. Some acquaintances of Mrs. Falconer again joined them, and Irène, walking a little apart, stood by the marble balustrade with her eyes fixed on the heights where such exquisite lights and shades were chasing each other.

Her attitude recalled to Waldegrave the first time that he saw her, on the terrace of the Villa Mattei. But the similarity, if he had known it, was only outward: it would be difficult to imagine two states of mind, two strains of feeling, more different than hers on that occasion and on the present. *Then* even the sadness of grief had been tempered by a sense of peace—the exquisite peace breathed by nature and taught by faith: *now* a hot strife of inward passion was shaking her soul to its center. The old bitter memory of wrong, the old passionate sense of antagonism rose within her. The recollection of her mother at this moment was like fire near a burn. She could hardly endure to think that she had consented to know one who stood so near to, who was in fact the representative of, the man who had inflicted such ineffaceable injury upon that ardently loved mother.

It may seem strange that the sound of Waldegrave’s voice finally steadied if it did not cool her. But in some natures the necessity is one with the power of self-control. Irène felt that she could do anything sooner than betray what influence this presence had upon her. Every nerve was strung to its highest tension when she turned and looked at him with her proud and brilliant glance.

“I am reminded, Miss Lescar, of the first time I saw you,” he said. “Do you remember an afternoon not long ago when you stood on the terrace of the Villa Mattei and looked out over the Campagna toward the Alban Hills?”

She regarded him with an expression of surprise.

“I remember it very well,” she answered. “But you were not there.”

“Pardon me, I was there—in the ilex avenue which leads to the terrace. It was a mere chance which took me there—but I was repaid.”

“It is a beautiful view,” she said, quietly. If she understood the inference of his words, not even the flicker of an eyelash betrayed as much.

“Yes,” he replied, “so beautiful that I have been back twice since that afternoon. It is an unsociable habit, no doubt, but I have a fancy for wandering alone about the antiquities and outskirts of Rome.”

“Ah,” she said, involuntarily, “that is what I should like. I am often ashamed to feel how I long to be alone. It is not,” she added, quickly, “that I have not the most intelligent and sympathetic companions; but where there is so much to realize—so much to meditate upon—one must desire solitude.”

“In Rome—which is so full of august memories, and where the very dust, as Châteaubriand said, bears with it something of human grandeur—I think one must. Though it is an unusual desire for one of your age and sex,” he added, smiling slightly.

Perhaps the smile irritated Irène, who was ready to read all that he said or did in an evil light. At all events, her face changed, as that of one who regrets having spoken too impulsively, and she looked away again toward the distant hills.

"I am not aware that either age or sex has anything to do with appreciating what is great," she said, coldly.

"Certainly not," replied Waldegrave; "I only spoke of the desire for solitude. You must admit that to be unusual."

"I know too little of how others feel, to admit or deny it," she answered. "I only know what I feel myself."

A pause followed. For once in his life Waldegrave was at a loss how to proceed. Nothing is more discouraging to conversational effort than indifference; and complete indifference, he felt, was here. There was not even the attempt to look interested and appear agreeable, which, however transparent it may be, is at least a tribute to civility. There are few men of good social rank who are not accustomed to expect this; and Waldegrave might have been pardoned if he had expected much more. But here was a girl who looked away from him as if his personal and social consequence had been represented by a cipher, yet who filled him with a desire, as strong as it was strange, to bring her eyes back and wake in them a light of interest and sympathy.

At length he spoke. "You have been long in Rome?" he asked.

"Only during the winter," she answered.

"And I have been absent during most of the winter—which accounts, no doubt, for the fact that I first had the pleasure of seeing you only a few days ago, on the terrace of the Villa Mattei."

"You are mistaken," she said, with slight *hauteur*. "I have not been going out at all. No one has seen me—unless by an accident I could not prevent."

The inference of her tone was unmistakable. "If I could have prevented it, *you* would not have seen me," it said. Irène scarcely knew herself how much of her inner feeling her manner expressed; while Waldegrave was conscious of the same surprise he had felt with regard to Mrs. Falconer, at this apparently causeless rebuff. It appeared to him altogether inexplicable. He might have imagined it to proceed from lack of breeding in any one else—but there was something about this girl which forbade such a supposition, and brought to his mind again the thought of a disdainful princess. "How have I possibly offended her?" he asked himself with a half-humorous sense of astonishment; and, while he did so, she suddenly looked at him.

"When one has a great grief for companion," she said, "no seclusion can be too great for one."

What was it in her voice or glance which made Waldegrave feel all the depth of meaning in these simple words? Some people have this rare gift of expression. It was at once an explanation and an apology which the beautiful, candid eyes made. "After all, it is not his fault," the girl had said to herself. As for Waldegrave, it was with a quick sense of sympathy that he received the *amende*. As long as men are men, such sympathy will be evoked more readily by youth and beauty than by any corresponding degree of distress in age and ugliness.

Whether or not the conversation would have proceeded more smoothly after this, can only be left to conjecture, for at this moment Mrs. Falconer—who had been watching it from afar, herself the while on thorns—now managed to disengage herself from her

friends and came toward them.

"It is time for us to go, Irène," she said. "The sun is low, and I never like to be out after it has set.—A great deal, in the matter of health, depends in this climate on observing such rules," she added, turning to Waldegrave.

He replied that there could be no doubt of it; that many fatal illnesses among foreigners resulted from not observing them. Then he walked with her to the gate—Erne at once seizing the opportunity to rejoin Irène—and, by the time they reached it, she felt that there was no possible escape in civility from telling him that she was always at home on Thursday evening, and would be happy to see him.

CHAPTER VII.

It was with a humiliating sense of having been thoroughly defeated that Mrs. Falconer leaned back in her carriage and was driven into Rome. If she had been alone with Irène, she would have asked the subject of her conversation with Waldegrave, and perhaps expressed some of the serious misgivings which she felt; but this was impossible with Erne on the seat before them; so there was little said—and that of a commonplace nature—during the drive.

When they reached the familiar *portone*, Erne handed them out of the carriage, but declined his cousin's not very pressing invitation to enter. "I have an engagement to dine with some men," he said.

"It is as well that he did not come in," remarked Mrs. Falconer to her companion, as they ascended the stairs. "I don't know how you may be, but I am tired and stupid.—What is it, Antonio?"

A signor in the drawing-room who had asked for the signora, and was now talking to Mrs. Vance, Antonio replied.—The signora frowned. "I do not feel like seeing any one," she said, "and I can not imagine who it is."

Nevertheless, she opened the drawing-room door, while Irène passed on. The apartment was filled with a glow of sunset light which for an instant dazzled her vision so that she could only perceive that a dark figure rose quickly and advanced toward her. It was not until her hand was taken in a close clasp that she saw clearly who was before her, and said, in a tone which savored more of indignation than welcome:

"So, Mr. Stanhope, you have come at last!"

"At last!" repeated Stanhope, laughing. "How kind of you to say that! I fancied that I should hear, 'Pray, Mr. Stanhope, why have you come so soon?'"

"There was certainly reason to fancy it," she replied, drawing her hand out of his and walking to a chair. "'I shall be in Rome in a month or two,' you said, when we parted in Paris. I believe four months have elapsed since then. However, it does not matter. I have always observed that people are sure to come the day after they are wanted."

"But what is the matter?" he asked, in surprise—and, as he followed her, Mrs. Vance rose and discreetly withdrew. "If I had had the least idea that you wanted me—"

"I was likely to telegraph to the Atlas Mountains!" said she, with undiminished asperity. Then suddenly she broke into a smile. "Forgive me," she said. "I am horridly cross. But I have wanted you so much; and now you have come—too late."

"Too late—for what?" he asked, fairly turning pale, as far as was possible through a very bronzed upper surface.

“To be of use in a matter that seriously concerns Irène.”

“Oh—Irène!” and unaccountably his face seemed to clear. “I thought it might have been— And what has Irène been doing? Not falling in love with Lionel Erne, I hope?”

“By no means. She is a strange girl—I doubt if she will ever fall in love at all.”

“*Tant mieux pour lui!*” said he; and, drawing a chair immediately in front of the one in which she had placed herself, he sat down. “Before we discuss Irène,” he went on then, “let me say how glad I am to see you again. I feel like a way-worn traveler who has reached the most delightful haven.”

“And received the most delightful welcome,” said she, with another smile. Now that the first shock of surprise was over, the first emotion of indignation, she felt that she was very glad to see him. There was no one in the world with whom she was so much at ease—with whom she had such a sense of certain comprehension and sympathy—as with Stanhope. He had a way of regarding things which she always felt to be the right way; and, though nobody flattered her less, she felt instinctively that nobody admired her more. The sight of his face, the half-kindly, half-sarcastic look in his eyes, the ring of his voice, the sense of reliance which he inspired, were all pleasant to her with the pleasantness of things tried and familiar.

“It might have been worse,” said he, smiling also. “To hear that one has been wanted, is better than to realize that one has not been thought of.”

“You would not be flattered if you could know how I have thought of you lately.”

“Have you anathematized me? But how could I imagine that I was needed when I had not received a hint to that effect?”

“There has not been time to give you a hint. Besides, I thought you were probably en route to the interior of Africa. But, I will tell you the whole story, and you shall say what you would have done had you been here.”

The story was told, and listened to with the greatest attention. Because he had for a moment waived the subject of Irène, it did not follow that Stanhope’s interest in her was not keen. He made no comment until Mrs. Falconer brought her narrative down to the events of that afternoon, when he said:

“You have made one mistake. After you saw that the meeting was inevitable, you should have told Count Waldegrave who Irène is.”

“But she desires above all things that he should not know.”

“What she desires is of no importance compared to what is right. Why she has consented to meet him I do not understand. But there can be no doubt that an explanation was due to him before the introduction took place.”

“In that case, it would have been better not to have allowed an introduction.”

“Of course, it would have been better. Had I been here, I should have advised you not to take it into consideration for a moment.”

“You see how right I was in wishing for you,” she said in a tone of self-vexation. “I *knew* that whatever I decided upon would be wrong.”

“You had no reason to think so,” said he, quickly. “I know of no one on whose judgment I would sooner rely—but we are all liable to mistakes. I blame myself for having thrown such a decision upon you. If I could have anticipated the chance arising, I should never have remained away.”

“No one could have anticipated it,” she said. “Who could have imagined Prince Waldegrave’s nephew brought into contact with Irène! But, I know what I will do,” she added, with an air of resolution—“I will leave Rome.”

“You will do nothing of the kind,” said Stanhope, decidedly. Then he smiled at his own tone, and the expression of her face. “Pardon me,” he said. “I only mean that I can not permit the responsibility, which it is my fault you undertook, to become such an annoyance to you that it leads to overturning your plans and changing your residence.”

“Annoyance is too strong a word; it is not that.”

“It is distinctly that—however willingly met, or cheerfully borne. If you leave Rome for such a reason, I shall regret that I did not place Irène in a convent, instead of allowing you to take charge of her.”

“You forget that it was not entirely a matter for your arrangement—that *I* promised Madame Lescar.”

“Nevertheless, the power to appoint her home was and is absolutely mine; and I am responsible for any trouble she may cause you.”

“I never knew you so imperious before, Mr. Stanhope. However, we need not quarrel, for I am willing to do whatever you wish with regard to her. Only tell me what it is.”

“It is easily told, for it is comprised within one word—nothing. Stay just where you are; do just what you are doing.”

“But—Count Waldegrave?”

“Count Waldegrave will not give any trouble. It was a mistake to permit him to make Irène’s acquaintance without telling him who she is; but, since it has been done, we will let the matter rest, unless he shows signs of continued interest in her. In that case he must be told.”

“I am glad that you will be here to tell him,” she said, with an air of relief.

“I am glad to be here—for other reasons.” He looked around the *salon*. “How charmingly you are settled!” he said. “This is as pleasant as your apartment in Paris. *Apropos*, one of your Parisian friends arrived in Rome with me to-day.”

“I suppose you mean M. de Châteaumesnil,” she said. “I know you have been together in Algiers.”

“Yes, and the best of comrades I have found him this winter, as heretofore. I have little fancy for Frenchmen in general, but if one finds the highest type of French gentleman, he is delightful.”

“As delightful as the French bourgeois is detestable. But”—she rose—“I am forgetting that you have not seen Irène.”

“Don’t send for her,” said he, rising also. “If you have no engagement for this evening, perhaps you will let me come back after dinner.”

“I have no engagement; but will you not dine with us?”

“I am sorry that I can not, I promised the Marquis that we would dine together. Afterward, with your permission, we will have the pleasure of paying our respects to you.”

Then he left, and Mrs. Falconer went to her room. If she was still tired and stupid, as she had declared herself on her return from the Villa Albani, there was no sign of it in her appearance. Indeed, there was, instead, an unusual brightness, which made Mathilde exclaim, when her toilet was completed, that she had never seen madame look

better.

At dinner Irène heard of Stanhope's arrival and expressed her gratification. If she felt any surprise that she had not been summoned to see him, she did not express that. Probably she suspected what had been the topic of conversation between her two guardians. However this might be, no allusion was made to Count Waldegrave by herself or Mrs. Falconer. It was plainly a subject which, for the present, at least, was to be ignored.

When they were in the drawing-room after dinner, Mrs. Falconer said, "A gentleman is coming with Mr. Stanhope whom you met once, though you may have forgotten him—the Marquis de Châteaumesnil."

Irène looked up with a quick glance of interest.

"I have not met so many people in my life that I could forget such a person as the Marquis de Châteaumesnil," she said. "It was at the Chapelle Expiatoire. I remember him well—his highbred face, his dark, deep eyes, and how he looked as if he had stepped out of the old court-life at Versailles."

"I see that you remember him," said Mrs. Falconer, smiling, while she thought that the imaginative temperament was calculated to mislead the unimaginative. Prosaic people—especially if they be vulgar as well—are not able to comprehend enthusiasm without a personal meaning; and the most directly personal meaning to which their minds leap, is that of love. Such a person would probably have set Irène down as the victim of a romantic penchant for the Marquis; but Mrs. Falconer knew that her interest in him was exactly of a kind with the interest she might have felt in the Constable Du Guesclin. The fear, which had once crossed her mind, of arousing the girl's fancy for such a dangerously attractive person, troubled her no longer. She understood Irène better now.

The expected visitors were soon announced. "Le Marquis de Châteaumesnil et Monsieur Stanhope," said Antonio—who had a fair smattering of French—opening the door. And when the two gentlemen entered, Mrs. Falconer was struck by the fact that the Marquis was looking remarkably well. His clear-cut face was as keen and refined as ever, his deep-set eyes as dark and brilliant, his manner and bearing as graceful and distinguished. But, with all this, there was an undefinable change in him. Perhaps the fresh breezes of the Atlas Mountains had proved more invigorating than those which blow over the streets of Paris. At least, he had the air of a man to whom some new and bracing influence had come—to whom life offered more definite meaning and purpose than it had done before.

His first words were words of evidently genuine pleasure and self-congratulation. "How delighted I am to see you again, madame—and to find myself at last in Italy!"

"You speak as if there had been difficulty in finding yourself in Italy," she said, with a smile. "Yet the Mediterranean is a navigable sea."

"*Sans doute*. But if one has a companion who is procrastinating and immovable beyond belief, one may be delayed even in crossing the Mediterranean."

"And has Mr. Stanhope proved such a companion?"

"Incredibly so. But for my perseverance and determination to depart, I am sure we would be in Algiers now."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Falconer, with a glance toward Stanhope, who was speaking to Irène, "I remarked to him this afternoon that people generally appear after they are wanted."

“He has been wanted, then?”

“Oh, not very much—only, if he had arrived a little earlier, I should have been glad of his advice on a point that concerned his ward. You remember Mademoiselle Lescar, perhaps?”

“Could one forget Mademoiselle Lescar?” asked the Marquis, with a look of admiration at the beautiful profile presented to his view. “I remember her very well, and I remember, also, that one of the pleasures you promised me in Italy was that of hearing her sing.”

“I am sure she will redeem the promise.— Ir ène”—the girl turned—“let me recall the Marquis de Châteaumesnil to your recollection.”

“I recall M. de Châteaumesnil perfectly,” said Ir ène, while her large, clear eyes met the dark, deep ones of which she had spoken; “I can never forget the day I met him at the Chapelle Expiatoire.”

“And I can never forget,” said the Marquis, “that the first words I heard mademoiselle speak were a hope that the king might ‘have his own again.’”

“Ah, by that proof I see that you really remember me,” said Ir ène, with a smile.

“And do you mean that, but for such a proof, you would doubt the fact?” he asked, smiling also.

“I should think it likely that you only professed to remember out of courtesy,” she replied. “It would be very natural if you did—it would be only as the Persian proverb says, ‘The moon looks on many flowers, the flowers see but one moon.’”

“And the application of the proverb is—?”

“The application is that you, no doubt, see many young ladies, while I have seen but one Marquis de Châteaumesnil,” she replied, still smiling with what he thought charming frankness.

“I certainly see many young ladies,” he answered; “but, believe me, I have seen but one Mademoiselle Lescar.”

“I wonder why it is,” said Ir ène, turning to Mrs. Falconer, “that one should be so much flattered by the imputation of originality. It would seem presumable that the pattern on which the majority of people are made is better than the pattern of one.”

“Not at all,” replied that lady, “for the most beautiful things are never those which are greatly multiplied. There are many more vessels of delf than of porcelain in the world.”

“But there is more need for delf than for porcelain.”

“It is an inferior need, however,” said Stanhope, “though a more widely extended one. And there is no danger that the supply of delf will ever fail. To drop metaphor—which is always troublesome and frequently inaccurate—the common type of humanity perpetuates itself without trouble. But it requires much trouble, in the form of hereditary culture, to make and preserve a type which shall serve for the finer uses of existence.”

“Therefore porcelain should not decry itself,” said the Marquis, looking at Ir ène.

“I did not mean to decry anything,” she said. “I was thinking more of originality in individuals than of different types.”

“Oh, originality can not be esteemed too highly,” said Stanhope. “It is what preserves the world from degenerating into the abject commonplace. Even eccentric people have their uses. As Sir Arthur Helps has pointed out in one of his essays, they resist conformity, they rebel against conventional decrees, and so ‘make broad the paths

of freedom' for us."

"No one admires originality more than I do," said Mrs. Falconer, "but I really think I must draw the line at eccentricity. Perhaps I am tinged with Philistinism; but I do not like startling divergences from established rules and customs."

"Neither do I consider 'startling divergences' admirable," said Stanhope. "I only maintain in their behalf that they protect against that tyranny of the conventionalities which unresisted grows intolerable."

"I am afraid your sojourn in Kabylia has not been very good for you," said Mrs. Falconer. "I never heard you declaiming against conventionalities before."

"I am not declaiming against them now," he answered. "They are very good things in their way. But I object to any form of tyranny. And there are worse places in the world than Kabylia," said he, rising suddenly, as if he was about to start back there.

He only strolled toward the piano, however, and asked Irène if she would sing. As usual, she assented with the utmost readiness, and followed him to the instrument. "What should you like to hear?" she asked as she seated herself.

"Whatever you choose to give me," he answered, looking down at her and thinking how beautiful she was, and how much she had matured since he saw her last.

She hesitated an instant; then, saying with a smile, "Perhaps this will suit your frame of mind," she began one of the wild *stornelli* which she had caught up since she had been in Rome. Simple as these airs are, there are the directness and force of primitive passion in them. All the life of the people finds expression—the fiery love, the passionate sorrow, the poetry innate in every Italian peasant, which breaks forth now and then into the *improvisatore*; the glad, free, out-door life of the South, the dancing feet, the tinkling music, the murmur of fountains, all is told in the strains that have passed from lip to lip—who can say for how long? They suggest the wide freedom of the Campagna, its windswept space and girdling hills, as the *barcarolles* suggest the blue sea of Naples or the green canals of Venice.

And, in this instance, whatever the song itself may have lacked, the singer put into it. The girl seemed throwing all her wealth of feeling into the wild, monotonous cadences, and giving them a meaning as direct and personal as the appeal of passion itself. When she ceased she looked up at Stanhope with a smile.

"Was that unconventional enough for you?" she asked.

"It suited me exactly," he replied. "But what a voice you have! Its notes are like those of a violoncello. And you sing as if you felt—more than I hope you do."

"You think that feeling is a misfortune?" she asked, with something wistful in her upward glance.

"Much of it undoubtedly is," he replied; "and indeed there is more than a grain of truth in what cynical people declare—that to be thoroughly comfortable one should have none."

"I should be sorry to buy comfort at such a price," she said, letting her hands fall into her lap and still looking up at him. "Why, there could be no such thing as devotion or sacrifice, or anything great and noble, without the power that deep feeling gives! Religion, patriotism, the pursuit of any high ideal, all rest on that—do they not?"

"Yes," he answered. "It is the strongest force in the world. 'The greatest of these is charity.' Yet what I have said is none the less true: intensity of feeling is a source of pain rather than of happiness."

"I believe it," she said, in a low voice. "But it is a pain one would not relinquish for any selfish happiness."

"I hope you may always think so," he said. "I confess that I—"

He broke off abruptly, and at that moment Mrs. Falconer spoke from the other side of the room.

"Irène," she said, "will you sing '*Che faro senza Euridice*' for the Marquis?"

For the first time in her life Irène hesitated according to the ordinary manner of singers, but not for the ordinary reason. Mrs. Falconer's request—the name of the song she was asked to sing—brought before her with startling distinctness the scene in the Villa Albani, when she had turned from the Orpheus and Eurydice bas-relief, to meet the eyes of the man who was at once her cousin and her foe. Those eyes seemed looking at her again. She shuddered slightly.

"I can not sing that to-night," she said. "Is there not something else that M. de Châteaumesnil would like to hear?"

"I shall be charmed to hear anything that you will give, mademoiselle," said the Marquis, answering for himself. "The *stornello* was delightful."

"Then you shall have another," she said. "We will welcome you to Italy with Italy's own music."

And so she sang song after song—all the melodies that spring from the people, and that a great composer takes now and then and weaves into elaborate harmony and puts on the stage, to bring to dress-circles and court-boxes a whisper of the freshness of nature—of *festas* when the soft-eyed oxen are wreathed with flowers; of vines hanging with grapes; of laughing seas, and the fishermen singing as they haul in their great nets on the shining beach; of the life of the shepherds, who with their flocks roam the great plain where buried cities lie; and of the mighty hills where torrents leap and flowers bloom, and the tide of modern discontent has not yet swept away the pastoral life, nor torn down the way-side shrine to erect a statue to Mammon.

The Marquis was enchanted. To the *blas é* man of the world there was a freshness in this that was delightful, and that gained charm from the speaking face of the singer. He would have been prepared to give graceful, measured applause to an aria such as he had expected to hear; but this wild music, with its thousand suggestions and the pulse of passion beating through it, rendered by a voice with magnetism enough to thrill a host, was a revelation to him.

"*Ma foi!* it is not singing—it is inspiration!" he exclaimed at last. "Mademoiselle, listening to you is like looking at one of Leopold Kober's pictures—you bring before one the scenes, the very atmosphere, of Italy!"

"*Merci, monsieur,*" said the girl, looking at him with eyes that were shining with a light which seemed like that of inspiration. "You are too kind; but it is all so vividly present to me as I sing, that I could hardly fail to impress others a little. Then I love Italy so much—the real Italy I mean, not the spurious Italy of the revolution."

"Who does not love that Italy?" he asked.

"But with most people—who are not Italians—it comes after their own country," she said. "I have no country to put before it. Italy is all to me."

"I thought—I fancied—that you were American," he said, a little surprised.

"I was not born in America," she replied, "nor do I know much of it, except through the kind friends it has sent into my life," she added, with a comprehensive glance

and a sweet smile toward Mrs. Falconer and Stanhope.

The Marquis was too well bred to ask any question, but that the chance remark made an impression upon him was apparent when Stanhope and himself took leave. They hardly found themselves in the street before he said:

“I have seldom seen a more striking person than Mademoiselle Lescar. It is not only her beauty which makes her remarkable—there is that in her face and in her voice which is beyond beauty.”

“Yet which derives much from it,” said Stanhope, who had lighted a cigar and was puffing vigorously. “She is certainly a very striking person; no one is more thoroughly aware of it than I am.”

“A fascinating person she might easily prove,” said the Marquis. Then, after a brief pause, “May I ask who she is?”

“*Who she is!*” repeated Stanhope, a little startled by the unexpectedness of the question. He took his cigar from his lips and glanced at his companion by the light of a street-lamp. “I thought you knew that she is the daughter of an old friend of Mrs. Falconer’s and my own.”

“So I heard; but—pardon me if I am indiscreet!—there is something about her that suggests unusual parentage. She not only has the *air noble* in marked degree, but there is a brilliance, a charm—”

“If you had seen her mother,” said Stanhope, quietly, as the other paused, “you would have seen a queen among women—one from whom the daughter has inherited almost all that seems to you so remarkable.”

“And the father,” said the Marquis; “was he also remarkable?”

“Very,” replied Stanhope, dryly. “A man of great ability, though lacking in principle.”

“Ah!” was the expressive response. They walked on in silence for a moment; then, as they were descending the Trinità dei Monti steps, the Marquis said slowly, “It is a pity if there is a cloud upon the life of such a creature.”

“Why should you imagine that there is?” asked Stanhope.

De Châteaumesnil lifted his shoulders in the gesture that with a Frenchman says so much. “How can I tell?” he answered. “One has an instinct of these things. It may be in her face—which has a singular depth of expression for one so young—or it may be in her voice: but one sees and feels that she has suffered.”

“She suffered intensely in the death of her mother, to whom she was devoted.”

“That would be grief,” said the Marquis, “and is different from what I mean. Yet she is so young—she can hardly have had a story of her own!”

“Certainly not,” said Stanhope—who understood what was meant. “She has led the life of a child. Until within the last few months, she had never left her mother’s side.”

“She has tasted the fruit of the tree of knowledge, nevertheless—and found it bitter,” said the other, with an air of conviction. “I do not ask you to tell me anything, but, as I have said, one recognizes some things. Only, as we are old friends, pardon one question—do you mean to marry her?”

“Good Heavens, no!” cried Stanhope, taking his cigar from his lips again, and in his irritation hurling it away. “I believe the world is mad on that subject of marriage! My dear Marquis, although you are half English, you have never learned and do not know that a man can feel pure and simple friendship for a woman who is not related to him.”

“You are mistaken,” said the Marquis. “Such a sentiment is uncommon, but I recognize the possibility that it may exist. I believe, for instance, that it is such friendship which you feel for the charming Mrs. Falconer. But for this brilliant, nymph-like creature—what are you made of, that it is possible!”

“For one thing, this brilliant, nymph-like creature seems a mere child to me,” said Stanhope, shortly.

“Yet you are not a *vieillard*,” said the Marquis, smiling.

“For another thing, I should as soon think of falling in love with a goddess from Olympus, if one were to be found, and expecting her to share a prosaic, terrestrial existence. And, lastly, I am not a marrying man—and never shall be!”

They had reached the “Europa” by this time, and, as they turned in under its great portal, the last emphatic declaration ended the conversation.

CHAPTER VIII.

With the exception of a bow exchanged on the Pincio, nothing more was seen or heard of Count Waldegrave for several days. But as Thursday evening approached, Mrs. Falconer began to feel a little nervous. Would he appear? She felt unable to suggest that Irène should not do so, though, had the girl herself manifested any reluctance, she would gladly have consented to her absence. But Irène manifested none. It is probable that pride had something to do with her attitude; but it is also likely that—the first painful shock of meeting over—the very antagonism with which she regarded Waldegrave made her feel a certain desire to meet him. She was not satisfied with the manner in which she had met him before: she longed to efface a sense of failure. “For I let him see—he *must* have seen—that his presence affected me,” she thought. “I was taken by surprise—I do not think I could have been so weak but for that. I shall not be taken by surprise another time, and then—” She did not clearly set before herself what should occur “then”; she was only conscious of a strong impulse to impress her personality upon this man, and at the same time to evince her indifference toward him. A difficult task, it will be seen, and one which demanded for its fulfillment certain conditions of tact and temper and worldly knowledge which Irène—with all her brilliance—hardly possessed.

Meanwhile Waldegrave had quite determined that he would not appear at Mrs. Falconer’s reception. Every day he told himself this with decision—which was an unnecessary amount of iteration if he had not been conscious of some current of desire setting in the other direction. But, because he was conscious of such a current, he was the more resolved not to yield to it. Why should he go? He was sufficiently haunted already by that “pale, perfect face,” and those great eyes full of light and pathos. Not that he feared any folly on his part like the folly he had observed in other men—for, if a man does not deduce his conclusions even with regard to himself from his past experience, what shall he base them upon? There was no experience of past weakness to warn him of possible future weakness; but it is undesirable to be haunted by a face, though one may do no more than admire it; and eyes are best avoided that inspire a longing to gaze down, down, and yet down into their strangely unfathomable depths. Moreover, he reminded himself that he had not desired to make Miss Lescar’s acquaintance. He had been decidedly put in a false position, had been represented as wishing to know her, had been introduced as one whom Fate had gratified in this wish, and then had been treated with

unmistakable disdain! No, he was quite resolved that he would not attend Mrs. Falconer's reception, and, to make quite sure of himself, he accepted an invitation to dinner on that evening.

But he had a fate as well as Oedipus, and he was not to be allowed to shun it. Among the guests at the dinner was Lady Dorchester, and he found himself seated beside her at table. Both had prior claims upon their attention, yet presently an opportunity for a little conversation arose.

"I have not seen you for some time, M. le Comte," said she, turning toward him. "Have you forsworn society?"

"So far from that," he replied, "I did myself the honor of calling on you the other day, but was so unfortunate as to find you out."

"Of course you did—and so you would any day if you came at the hour when I drive. What is the good of being in Rome for one's health if one does not breathe as much as possible of Roman air? *A propos*, my companion that day was Mrs. Falconer—who is decidedly the most agreeable person I have met here—and she chanced to mention that you have accomplished your desire to know Miss Lescar."

"I do not wish to be ungallant even by implication," said Waldegrave, smiling, "but if you will recall our conversation on the Pincio the day I asked the name of the young lady, you will remember that I by no means expressed a desire to know her."

"I remember. You expressed, on the contrary, a fanciful fear that she might not fulfill the ideal her face inspired. But, despite that, you can not deny that you were disappointed when you did not meet her at my house as I had promised that you should."

"I am sure you would not believe me if I did deny it."

"I should certainly think it an incomprehensible manifestation of the idealism of the German nature. Now that you have met her, what is the result?—is the ideal shattered?"

"I can scarcely say—for the very good reason that she hardly deigned either to look at or to speak to me."

"Ah!—shyness, no doubt. She has never been out."

Waldegrave laughed. "If it was shyness," he said, "I can only declare that I have never seen shyness manifest itself in such a manner before. It looked much more like *hauteur*."

"Nonsense! Why should she exhibit *hauteur* to you?"

"I confess I have not the faintest idea; unless, indeed—I did not think of it before—she had heard of my doubt whether she would fulfill the ideal her face suggested."

"She could not have heard of it, for I have never mentioned it; and I can not imagine that it would have had any effect upon her if she had heard of it. She may or may not be your ideal, but she is certainly a very clever girl; whereas, according to my experience, only people who are deficient in sense are offended easily."

"I am quite sure that Miss Lescar is not deficient in sense," said Waldegrave. "There is a likeness in her face to some other face that I have seen or known, which puzzles me, like a tune one can not name though its melody is familiar. I fancy it must be some head on an ancient medal or cameo. She looks more like that than anything else."

"She is a beautiful creature," said Lady Dorchester. Then, after a pause, "Are you going to Mrs. Falconer's to-night?"

“I think not,” he replied, with a little hesitation. “I know Mrs. Falconer very slightly.”

“And you still fear the shattering of the ideal?” said she, with a smile. “I thought you too much of a philosopher. Let me advise you to go. It is one of the pleasantest *salons* in Rome.”

“So I have heard. You are going, I presume?”

“Yes, I always go. Do you wish to make your *entrée* under my wing?”

“Could I make it under a better one?—that is, if you will permit me.”

Mrs. Falconer’s rooms were well filled, though not crowded, when Lady Dorchester and Count Waldegrave entered. And, by a singular chance, the first person on whom the eyes of the latter fell was Irène, who happened at that moment to have been asked to sing, and who was standing by the piano—her tall, slender figure, her black dress, and her graceful, classic head making her conspicuous. Among the group surrounding her, Waldegrave’s quick glance at once singled out the young man who had been her companion on both occasions when he had seen her and whose air of devotion would have been evident to the most casual observation.

He had only time for a glance, however, as he followed Lady Dorchester to where Mrs. Falconer stood talking to a stately, handsome Roman prince. She was looking very lovely in a toilet of violet satin, draped with misty falls of lace, caught here and there with a diamond like a dewdrop, which suited the delicate, Greuze-like beauty of her skin and the clear luster of her eyes. She greeted Lady Dorchester cordially, and when the latter said,

“You see, I have brought Count Waldegrave,” she turned to him with her peculiar sunny graciousness of manner. This was not only because she was now in her own house, but also because she felt that the burden of responsibility no longer rested on her shoulders. Stanhope was come—and Stanhope would decide what was to be done about Irène. Meanwhile, Waldegrave was a guest whom it was incumbent upon her to receive and treat as she would any other.

So she talked to him for several minutes, while Lady Dorchester conversed with the Prince; and Waldegrave began to understand why it was that he heard Mrs. Falconer’s praises so often sung. To perfect *usage du monde* she united—what is not often found united with it—a frank and kindly sympathy, and thorough freedom from effort of any kind. It is only in the very highest breeding that one finds this exquisite simplicity; but whether given by nature or acquired by art, Mrs. Falconer possessed it, and to its charm men and women of all kinds responded with admiration and regard.

Suddenly, however, the conversation was interrupted. A voice rose—clear, thrilling, of vibrating sweetness—in the passionate strains of “*Che faro senza Euridice.*” Waldegrave fairly caught his breath. Like most Germans, he was devoted to music, keenly alive to its influence, and thoroughly able to judge of its excellence. It appeared to him now that he had never listened to such a voice before. On the stage, no doubt, he had heard a few voices as beautiful—though never one more so—and culture as great; but where had he ever heard anything like that quality which no training can bestow, and which can only be described in one word—expression? There was something in this voice which language can no more embody than it can give the melody of the sky-lark, a power such as that which now and then electrifies a great audience into wild enthusiasm, and sways the feeling of a multitude as the wind sways the trees of a forest.

And it was another link in the chain of fate that this special song should have greeted him. Irène sang it in compliance with Erne's request—a request seconded by others—and with no idea of Waldegrave's presence; but to him it was like a personal message—conjuring up the saloon of the Villa Albani, the beautiful Greek marble with its tale of tender love and of parting by the fiat of inexorable destiny. The melody expressed it all, and with it recalled the terrace with its wide outlook, the figure that stood there and gazed toward the far blue hills, and then the glance of eloquent pathos.—When the song ceased, he turned to Mrs. Falconer with irrepressible surprise.

"It is wonderful!" he said. "I do not think that I ever before heard such a voice off the stage."

"It *is* wonderful, is it not?" she replied, gratified by the impression made on him. "I have never heard one more beautiful anywhere."

"And so thoroughly cultivated," he said after a moment. "May I ask where Miss Lescar has studied?"

"In Milan. She has been for several years under Signor C—."

"But C—'s pupils are all intended for the stage—and for high rank there. I have often heard that he will not train inferior talent. It is not possible that Miss Lescar—"

"Certainly not," said Mrs. Falconer, answering with the more quickness and decision because she perceived several new-comers advancing toward her.

Her attention being claimed by them, and the Prince still monopolizing Lady Dorchester, Waldegrave moved away. He found acquaintances on every side, for—as he had been told—the best of the cosmopolitan society of Rome was here; but he felt little inclination to linger with the most famous man or by the side of the most charming woman. A few words, a gliding bow, and he passed on, holding the piano steadily in view, where he saw Irène still standing, talking to a young Spaniard who was well known in Rome as possessing a delightful tenor voice. "No doubt he is going to sing," thought Waldegrave, with a sense of irritation. And his prophetic soul did not deceive him, for a moment later the young man sat down, and, after preluding with a light, brilliant touch, began a Spanish serenade full of the suggestion of "cloudless climes and starry skies," of odorous blossoms and opening lattices. It was charmingly rendered, but there were some persons who shared Waldegrave's sense of impatience. A lady beside whom he had paused, said:

"That is very good indeed, but pray some one go and persuade Miss Lescar to sing again. One can hear Signor Mendoza anywhere, but she only sings here. Count Waldegrave, do you go!"

Waldegrave not unwillingly obeyed—but he found himself forestalled. When he reached Irène's side, the Marquis de Châteaumesnil was standing before her, saying:

"Now, mademoiselle, you will be kind enough to give us another song, I hope."

"I shall be happy to do so, M. le Marquis," she answered, "if you will tell me—"

She paused. She saw Waldegrave, and—alas, poor Irène!— she had no power to conceal the effect his presence had upon her. To the Marquis the change in her countenance was striking, though nothing in his own countenance or manner betrayed his perception of it. He only turned when Waldegrave bowed and spoke.

"I have come," he said, "as an ambassador of others, as well as a suppliant in my own person, to beg that Miss Lescar will sing again."

"I have just said that I shall be happy to do so," she replied, somewhat recovering

herself. "M. de Châteaumesnil has anticipated you." Then she looked at the Marquis with a friendly, almost grateful glance. "I was about to ask what you wish to hear?" she said.

"I can not presume to dictate," he answered, "but there was an exquisite air from 'La Gazza Ladra' which you sang last night."

"No doubt that will do as well as anything else," she said, turning to the instrument, at which Erne seated himself, saying, "I will play your accompaniment."

"What can be the matter!" thought Waldegrave. "It is not imagination on my part, nor shyness on hers. There is distinctly some reason why she does not regard me with favor."

"So," thought the Marquis, "there is, or there has been, a story—and here is the hero of it!"

Happily unconscious of these thoughts, Irène began her song, thus affording relief to Erne's mind, who on his part thought that the disturbing element which Count Waldegrave represented would probably tell upon her singing, and who played his accompaniment with great spirit when he heard the clear, soaring melody into which she broke. Indeed, now that the first surprise was over, the excitement had rather a stimulating effect upon her. She never sang better—and the Italian part of the audience were carried away with enthusiasm.

That there were some dissenting spirits, however, was only natural; and it was an Englishwoman—tall, good-looking, with her golden hair worn in a tight clubbed knot, and her manners a happy blending of stiffness and superciliousness—who put up her eye-glass and said to her companion:

"No doubt it is very fine. But did you ever hear anything like it in a drawing-room before—unless from a professional singer?"

"I grant you that it is not at all an ordinary drawing-room performance," said the gentleman to whom she spoke, with a laugh. And then he moved away, to join the group around the singer and beg that she would not cease.

But Irène turned decidedly from the piano and resisted all importunities. "No," she said, smiling, "because some people enjoy my singing, I must not convert the evening into a *soirée musicale*."

Of course, this elicited a number of sufficiently sincere assurances that every one desired her to continue; but, to her relief, the Marquis cut the matter short by offering his arm, saying:

"I think, mademoiselle, that you will like to refresh your throat with an ice. Later in the evening, perhaps, you will sing again for us."

It was a happy mode of escape. Irène, who knew instinctively that Waldegrave was still standing by, and who had not ventured to look toward him, took the offered arm eagerly. "Thanks," she said quickly, "I shall be glad of a little refreshment."

So, the Marquis led her triumphantly away—down the long suite and through a curtained doorway into a room where refreshments were served. There he placed her in a nook shaded by broad-leaved plants, and asked what she would have.

"A cup of tea," she replied. "That will be better than an ice."

It was quickly brought, and the Marquis, after requesting an ice for himself, sat down and looked at her for an instant in silence. Glancing up, she met the dark, deep eyes, and with the frankness which characterized her, said:

"What is the matter?—of what are you thinking?"

"I am thinking," he answered, smiling slightly, "whether, since this is your first appearance at one of Mrs. Falconer's large receptions, you have felt no timidity in singing?"

"Not the least," she answered. "One or many—what does it matter? Crowds are made up of units: it seems to me that thought robs them of terror."

"It does not avail to rob them of terror for nervous *débutantes*—but that, I see, you are not, and could not be. I imagine that you have never known what it was to feel awe or fear of any one."

"Do I give you that impression?" she asked, not ill pleased, "But I should not be honest if I did not confess that I have felt both, of one person. That was my *maestro*. Ah, I used to tremble before him—how cold my hands would grow when I was going to a lesson! But I should not have been afraid if I had not cared for him a great deal. I think affection makes one a coward—one fears to fall short, to disappoint a person one loves."

"Your *maestro* was very much to be envied if he inspired such a sentiment," said the Marquis. What was it about this girl, he wondered, which gave a charm to her simplest utterances which was like a wild fresh flavor to his mental palate? "He would be proud of the success of his pupil if he had heard you to-night."

She shook her head. "No. He cares nothing for success—absolutely nothing for applause. He thinks only of art."

"And you?"

"Oh, I think of both, but not enough of art to please the *maestro*. I like the power of expressing in singing much that seems to me inexpressible in words; and I like the sense of swaying others. I am afraid that I am fond of power," she added, in the tone of making a serious confession.

The Marquis smiled. "It would be strange if you were not," he said. "I imagine that you were born to exercise it. And"—a half-sigh—"you are fortunate in possessing a field as wide as mankind."

She looked at him with quick sympathy; recalling some words that Mrs. Falconer had once spoken of him—of powers and ambition without a field. But before she could answer, a lady advanced directly toward them, saying:

"How do you do, Miss Lescar. I have not been able to speak to you before.—Ah, M. le Marquis, I am glad to see you in Rome."

It was Lady Dorchester, who, after salutations and compliments had been exchanged, sat down by Irène.

"I have been wanting to see you for some time in order to quarrel with you," she began, frankly. "Why did you refuse to come to me? My reception is really not so much of an affair as this. You need not have hesitated."

"You are very kind," said Irène, "but you must understand that if I went to you I could not refuse to go to other houses; and I do not wish to do that."

"Very well. You shall come quietly to dinner some evening, when no one—to speak of—can be the wiser. Will you agree to that?"

"Yes," answered Irène, feeling that it would be ungracious to refuse; "I shall be happy to dine with you, quietly."

"We shall be very quiet—do not fear. I agree with Lord Chesterfield, that to be perfect a dinner-party should never be less than the Graces or more than the Muses. I shall have one Muse at least," said she, smiling.

“And Mademoiselle Lescar is a most obliging Muse,” said the Marquis.

“She ought to be,” said Lady Dorchester. “Such an enchanting voice has been given her that she may add to the happiness of her fellow-creatures.”

“I am sure,” said Irène, “that I do my best toward that end, if singing can accomplish it—though it is a very transient happiness which I have the power to bestow.”

“For that matter, all happiness is transient,” said Lady Dorchester. “But—” with a glance at Irène’s empty tea-cup—“do not let me detain you. I feared that I should not find another opportunity of speaking to you. As for you, M. le Marquis, do you not mean to come to see me?”

“I shall do myself that honor at the earliest possible moment,” replied the Marquis. “I have not been aware until tonight of your presence in Rome. Indeed, I have been here only a few days.”

“You seem to know Lady Dorchester very well,” said Irène, as they made their way back to the *salon*.

“I have known her for a long time,” he replied. “She is a special friend of my cousin Lady Falconer—and a very agreeable woman.”

“Yes, I think so. English people are agreeable when one knows them; but they are very hard to know.”

“Very,” said the Marquis, smiling, “and the result does not always repay one for the effort required. Strange to say, also, they are rather proud of their stiffness and reserve.”

“It is very strange to one who has known the gracious sweetness of Italian manners,” said Irène. “There seems so much truer dignity in the one than in the other.”

“Oh, there is nothing comparable to the charming grace of Italian manner. Even French courtesy is poor compared to it. And when one speaks of Germans—”

“Do not speak of them,” said Irène, with a quick gesture of disgust. “I abhor Germans and everything connected with them!”

A gentleman, whom they were passing at the instant, heard her words and turned. It was Waldegrave.

“So that is *le mot de l’énigme!*” thought the young man, looking after her. “She abhors Germans. Well, I have no ground to be offended, for I dislike Americans. We are therefore fairly quits. But what reason can she have for such an abhorrence?”

He turned back and continued a conversation in which he had been engaged; but he could not forget the words, nor their heart-felt emphasis. And, when he finally moved away, it was with the definite intention of seeking Miss Lescar, and discovering whether an abhorrence of Germans in general made it impossible for her to tolerate any individual of that nation. He represented this to himself as a matter of abstract curiosity; but there can be no doubt that he was a little piqued, and determined if possible to conquer the liking of the disdainful young lady.

This time Irène was not thrown off her guard by surprise. She saw him before he reached the corner where she sat talking to a painter who was one of Mrs. Falconer’s most frequent informal visitors. In this way she had time to brace herself, and it was with an air of wholly ordinary courtesy that she turned when he approached.

“I hope, Miss Lescar,” he said, “that you mean to fulfill your implied promise to sing again this evening.”

“Did I imply such a promise?” she asked. “I think not. According to my recollection, it was M. de Châteaumesnil who said something of the kind; but I am not bound by that.”

“Certainly not; but one may be allowed to trust that you will, at least, prove him a true prophet?”

She shook her head. “I can not sing again this evening,” she said. “It is not”—she looked at the painter with a smile— “like the evenings when I sing for you and a few others, Mr. Neville.”

“No,” said the pleasant Irishman, answering her smile. “I am afraid we are not as considerate of you as we might be on those occasions.”

“I have often told you that it is a pleasure to me to sing,” she said, simply. “I never weary of it.”

“What large drafts upon her good-nature Miss Lescar encourages by such a remark!” said Waldegrave.

“Not larger than she honors,” replied Mr. Neville. “I can testify to that.”

“You ought,” said Irène, “after having made me sing through a whole book of Irish melodies the other evening.”

“Ah, but what happiness it gave me!” said he, with effusion. “I could hardly sleep that night, the familiar strains recalled so many memories.”

“And do you call that happiness!” said she, expressively.

“Miss Lescar is evidently incredulous of the pleasures of memory,” said Waldegrave.

“Because I think there is generally more sadness than pleasure in it,” she replied.

“You are young to have found that out,” said the painter. “It is true—after a manner—but, for myself, I agree neither with Dante nor Tennyson about ‘a sorrow’s crown of sorrow.’ On the contrary, I think it a truer sentiment to say:

‘Give me the pleasure with the pain,
So would I live and love again.’”

“And, fortunately,” said Waldegrave, “past pleasure is always heightened in memory, whereas past pain is lessened.”

“That must depend upon the nature both of the pleasure and the pain,” said Irène. “Some pleasure could not be heightened; some pain, I am sure, could never grow less.”

Again there came into her voice the pathetic thrill which Waldegrave had heard on the terrace of the Villa Albani. And was it that, or his own sympathy, which made him certain that such a pain—or what she believed to be such a pain—was part of her life? He looked at her, and for the first time she owned to herself that there was something neither unpleasing nor unkindly in that clear, penetrating glance.

“There are few pains of that character,” he said, “else life would be a much more miserable affair than it is. The one recommendation of time is, that if it robs us of our joys, it also heals our wounds.”

“But surgeons will tell you that some wounds never heal,” said she, meeting his glance with eyes in which he seemed to see at once the shadow of pathos and the fire of passion.

“Ah, they are rare—happily very rare—those wounds,” said Mr. Neville.

“According to my experience,” added he, philosophically, “the most enduring wounds we receive in life are those which we suffer in our vanity. Grief and disappointment may be

forgotten, but who forgets a blow to his *amour propre*?"

"We remember such blows," said Waldegrave, "but we generally dignify our sensations under them with very fine names— such as wounded feelings and insulted honor."

"Then, I presume," said Irène, " that, since you are both so well aware of this, you would not suffer from a blow of the kind."

"That is another thing," said the painter. "I may know that it is my vanity which is wounded, yet the vanity suffers all the same. It will suffer if you refuse to sing for me the next time I come," added he, smiling at her.

"There is no danger of that," she replied, putting her hand in his as he rose and bade her good-night.

"I am disappointed that I can not hope to have the pleasure of hearing you sing again to-night," said Waldegrave, as Mr. Neville walked away. "It is so great a pleasure—for, as you must be aware, your voice is in all respects exceptional."

"I know, of course, that it is good," she answered. "If I doubted every one else, I could not doubt my *maestro* on that point."

"Not, certainly, if you mean C—. I was surprised when Mrs. Falconer told me that he had been your teacher; for, as a general rule, he only trains singers for the stage."

"He hoped—he still hopes—to persuade me to go on the stage," she said, quietly.

"But *you*," said Waldegrave, quickly, "you do not think of it?"

"Why not?" she asked—some impulse making her speak. "Perhaps the *maestro* is right. Perhaps Nature intends me for it."

"I think," said Waldegrave, who (as he reflected afterward) had no right to express any thought in the matter, "that Nature intended you for a very different destiny."

"You know nothing of me," she said, almost curtly. "You can not tell how ambitious I may be; and what other field for ambition have I? I may love power—and I shall surely find it there."

"Pardon me," he said. "I do indeed know little of you— but that little is enough to make me quite sure that you would choose what is fictitious at the cost of what is really brilliant in life, by taking such a step. People for whom it is the only escape from obscurity, may be tempted by the kind of fame and power that the stage offers; but you—" He paused expressively.

"Let me remind you again that you know nothing of me—of my outward circumstances, or my inward needs," she said. "And it *is* a happiness to sing—to pour out one's own soul, and feel that one is playing on the souls of others as if they formed some great instrument."

"I do not doubt that it is," he said, smiling at the light which sprang into her eyes. "But since you love music so well, let me ask why you dislike Germans so much—who have, at least, the merit of sharing that passion with you?"

"How do you know that I dislike Germans?" she inquired.

"I regret to say, from the best possible authority—yourself. I heard you state in the most forcible manner that you 'abhorred' them—and that being in the order of a blow to one's self-love, you see that I have not forgotten it."

"I am sorry that you should have overheard my speech," she said, without, however, manifesting any of the embarrassment which might have seemed natural under the circumstances, "but I can not possibly retract the words. I dislike Germans very

much; and if they had a monopoly of music—which, fortunately, they have not—I should probably dislike that too.”

“And may I be permitted to ask the ground for such an intense aversion?” he said, amused rather than offended by the frankness and decision of her tone.

Her face changed—the mobile face which, with its play of expression and swift lights and shades, he had begun to feel it a fascination to watch.

“It does not matter what the ground is,” she said, coldly. “Nothing can change it—nothing can alter my opinion.”

She looked away from him—across the room as she had looked across the Campagna from the terrace of the Villa Albani—and, as she did so, her eyes met those of Stanhope. She colored suddenly, for something in his expression made her aware that he was regarding her keenly and not approvingly. Waldegrave saw the color that suffused the white skin, and involuntarily glanced in the direction of her gaze. At that moment Stanhope detached himself from a group and advanced toward them.

“I am sent, mademoiselle,” he said, “to ask if you will not sing a song of which Lady Dorchester is specially fond, and which she would like to hear before she goes.”

“I suppose I can not refuse Lady Dorchester, though I have declined to sing several times,” she answered. “But you must ask the name of the song, Mr. Stanhope.”

“You can ask it yourself *en route* to the piano,” said Stanhope, offering his arm.

She turned with a glance of apology toward Waldegrave, who said with a smile, “I am glad that we are to be indebted to Lady Dorchester.”

Nevertheless, as he watched the graceful figure move away, he was conscious of an impression that, let him do what he would, he was not likely to find favor in Miss Lescar’s eyes.

“Well,” said Lady Dorchester, as he was taking her down to her carriage half an hour later, “what is the result of this evening? Have you discovered whether it was shyness or *hauteur*?”

“I have discovered that it was neither,” he answered, “but a dislike to every one who is unfortunate enough to be of Teutonic birth.”

“Did she tell you so?”

“Distinctly. There is no doubt of her sentiments on that point.”

“And did she also tell you why she dislikes them?”

“No—that is still left in mystery. But a woman’s likes and dislikes have generally a personal basis.”

“Generally speaking, I am afraid they have. So in this instance some particular German is no doubt accountable for Miss Lescar’s aversion to all Germans.”

“Or some Frenchman, perhaps—I suppose you observed the Marquis de Châteaumesnil in attendance on her.”

“Ah, but the Marquis is a suitor of Mrs. Falconer. I know that positively from my friend Lady Falconer, who is his cousin and her sister-in-law. Therefore, you can not place the blame of Miss Lescar’s dislike to Germans on him.”

“I have no desire to place it anywhere,” said Waldegrave, smiling. “What is Hecuba to me, or I to Hecuba?”

“A good deal, I fancy,” thought Lady Dorchester, after her carriage-door was closed and she rolled away. “Unless I am much mistaken, you are more interested than you are willing to acknowledge or believe.”

He was certainly not willing to acknowledge it. For, as he buttoned his overcoat and, lighting a cigar, walked away from the *portone*, he said to himself:

“So she wishes—she is half resolved—to become a professional singer! It will be desecration if it is allowed, but I am glad she was led to speak of it. If there had been any danger for me of folly such as that exquisite face might lead another man into, this would end it. Now I am safe.”

CHAPTEK IX.

“I am by no means easy in mind with regard to Irène and Count Waldegrave,” said Stanhope, meditatively.

The person to whom he spoke was, of course, Mrs. Falconer. It was the day after her reception, and they were alone in her drawing-room. Stanhope had asked for Irène, but, having been told that she was gone out with Mrs. Vance, he sat down contentedly to a *tête-à-tête* with Mrs. Falconer. There was everything in his surroundings to promote contentment. The picturesque room, filled with objects which it delighted the eye to rest upon, was also fragrant with flowers; the long windows opened on a balcony set with plants, above which a sapphire sky looked in, and there was a glimpse of towers and domes. A graceful head was also part of the prospect—for, in seating herself, Mrs. Falconer had taken a chair near one of these windows, and, after Stanhope’s words, she looked at him with an interrogative glance.

“What have you observed to cause you uneasiness?” she asked.

“One can hardly describe such things,” he answered. “I suppose that I have really observed nothing which would strike me with regard to any one else; but this juxtaposition is so strange that I can not help feeling it unsafe.”

“Then why not end it?”

“How?”

“By telling Count Waldegrave who Irène is.”

“Ah, you see one must have a reason for such a step. The time for the information would have been when he asked an introduction to her; but that time is past. I can not go to him now and say, ‘This young lady is your uncle’s daughter,’ without having some reason for making the disclosure. As yet I have none. He has only talked to her for a few minutes, as any other man might.”

“I observed the manner in which you ended the conversation between them last night.”

“It was time to do so. His interest was deepening, and her antagonism of feeling being roused. You know how expressive her face is. I could tell the whole progress of the conversation— and when she turned from him with an air of disdain, I judged it time to interfere.”

“What had he said to evoke disdain? When I observed them, they seemed to be talking very amicably.”

“I fancy it was a surface amicableness—at least on Irène’s part. But I did not ask what he said. No doubt it was some chance remark which struck her hidden wound. That is the worst of such wounds. Being hidden, they are always likely to be rubbed against.”

“Yes—and hers can never be healed. You know she speaks of it very seldom. Only twice has she ever spoken of it to me— but on both occasions it was a revelation of

deep, bitter, corroding passion. Seeing what the wrong is to her, and what its effect must be on her character and life, I do not wonder at the mother's dying request. But she might have spared it. This girl will never forgive. She is not strong enough for that, and she is too strong to ignore what has been done, and content herself with the things life puts within her reach."

"She is young," said Stanhope. "Her misfortune and her excuse lie in that."

"I wish all other misfortunes were as easily surmounted," said Mrs. Falconer, smiling. "But what reconciling influence will later life bring? She says that she is resolved not to marry. Such a declaration as that means nothing from the lips of most girls; but it means something from her."

"No doubt it does," replied Stanhope. "What led her to say so?"

"She misunderstood me, and thought that I was going to plead Lionel's suit; so she anticipated and much surprised me by announcing first her indifference to him—which I did not doubt—and secondly her resolution never to marry, because—I give you her own words—she 'will not take voluntarily a lower rank than that which should be hers, nor allow a king to feel that he stooped to her.'"

"Poor child!" said Stanhope—"poor, proud, foolish child! Yet it is hard; for in such case a man can make name and rank for himself; but what can a woman do!"

"Like Madame Lescar, she can ennoble a hard fate by nobly bearing it."

"True—but Prince Waldegrave's daughter has not the qualities to fit her for such a role. The ambition she has inherited from him, and the sense of power which comes from the possession of high gifts, make her position in life intolerable to her. It is impossible to foresee what her future will be. She is an enigma."

"But a charming one."

"Yes, she is charming to those who see only the brilliant surface and know nothing of the volcano underneath."

"Do not speak so. It is not a volcano likely to harm any one but herself."

"Unless it should burst forth upon Prince Waldegrave. I do not wish to do her injustice even in my thoughts—and only to you would I speak of what has occurred to me. But has it occurred to you that some such desire may have been the motive for her consent to know Count Waldegrave?"

"Some such desire'—you are very obscure. What kind of desire do you mean?"

"It is more easily felt than expressed. If I said 'a desire to do him harm,' it would express more than I mean."

"I hope so," said Mrs. Falconer, warmly. "I am sure you are unjust in entertaining the faintest form of such a thought. Let her faults be what they will, they are all of a noble order. I know that she would if she could make the author of her mother's wrongs feel what her sufferings were—but not by any act of petty revenge, even if knowing Count Waldegrave could bring such an act within her reach."

"He is probably the only person in the world to whom his uncle is attached," said Stanhope, "and to destroy his peace of mind would be a mode of reprisal."

"Mr. Stanhope, I will not listen to another word! Never talk again of women's fancies running away with them! Yours have run quite as far as any woman's could, and outleaped probability as completely. Can even a novelist's imagination conceive Count Waldegrave's peace of mind destroyed?—Count Waldegrave, who is simply a reproduction of his heartless, ambitious uncle!"

“May a novelist be permitted to remind you, as a matter not of imagination but of fact, that at the outset of his career that ‘heartless and ambitious uncle’ committed the folly of marrying a beautiful and charming woman, simply because she was beautiful and charming? And if the nephew is a reproduction of the uncle, it is a reproduction with difference. This man has a side to his character which Prince Waldegrave—if one may judge by his face—has not.”

“And that is—?”

“A side which, if not poetic in itself, is vulnerable to poetic influences. In other words, he has imagination to be roused, and the capability of ideal sympathies. You can tell whether or not Irène’s character is likely to possess attraction for such a nature.”

“It is very likely. Her character possesses attraction for every one capable of appreciating it. But however warm Count Waldegrave’s appreciation should become, I confess that I could not consider the matter very seriously. ‘Men have died and worms have eaten them, but not for love’—and what was true in the sixteenth century is doubly true in the nineteenth.”

“I know your opinion on that head,” said Stanhope, smiling slightly. “I should not like to be the man who came to you with a tale of passion.”

“Tales of passion have gone out of fashion,” said she, her lip curling half scornfully, half impatiently. “Who tells them, who believes in them now?”

“I fancy that the world is much as it ever was,” said Stanhope; “and while we grow cynical in drawing-rooms, people below our windows are making love in the old manner.”

“Perhaps so. But in the world—in our world—people marry, as they do everything else, from motives of interest.”

“That depends upon the people. The majority of the world undoubtedly seek interest in all things. But who knows, or ought to know, better than you, that there are many exceptions.” He paused a moment, then went on quietly, “Since we are on the subject of marriage, I wonder if you will permit me to be—perhaps a little presumptuous?”

She was silent for an instant—looking down at her hands, which lay clasped together on the velvet of her dress—before answering:

“I have no fear that you will be presumptuous. You may be as frank as you please.”

But, after the permission was given, he did not seem in haste to avail himself of it. He looked out at the sapphire of the sky, at the soft roundness of a distant dome, and it was plain that it cost him an effort to speak at last.

“No one is more fully aware than I am how delightful your present life is—and no one would feel more deeply any change in it,” he said. “But, naturally, there must be a change. I have always looked forward to your making a brilliant marriage, and I have only feared that it might prove more brilliant than happy. But I believe that you have now an opportunity to make a marriage which to brilliance would combine as fair a prospect of happiness as—as is possible in any marriage, I presume,” he ended, rather uncheerfully.

She lifted her eyes and looked at him with an expression which he did not understand.

“May I beg you to be more clear?” she said. “What opportunity have I of making

a brilliant marriage, with a fair prospect of happiness combined?"

"You may have many, for aught I know," he answered, smiling a little. "But I imagined you would be aware that I alluded to the Marquis de Châteaumesnil."

"Has M. de Châteaumesnil asked you to speak for him?" she demanded, with something like a flash in her glance.

"Certainly not," he replied. "But I am acquainted with his sentiments and hopes—the ice was broken one night in Algiers when we smoked our cigars together by the sea, and since then I have heard much of them: so, thinking that my opinion might have a little weight with you, I felt as if I ought to speak. I hope," he added, after another pause, "that you know I have only one end to serve—your happiness."

"And do you think that would be served in what is called 'a brilliant marriage'—a marriage for rank?" she asked with the faintest possible shade of bitterness in her voice.

"No," he answered, "I do not think so, if such a marriage were based only on the advantages it brought. But if united with these advantages were qualities to insure happiness, I certainly think that Nature intended you for a *grande dame*, to fill and adorn a great position."

"It is the old story," she said; "you think me very ambitious."

"You can not deny that you are: you can not say that you would be satisfied in obscurity, or that it is not your delight to be on a social pinnacle—to surround yourself with distinguished and cultured people."

"I can do that as I am."

"Undoubtedly. But it is too much to expect that a woman of your age and with your attractions will remain as you are. Besides, you would like, even better than the freedom and pleasure of your present existence, to unite your life with that of a man capable of winning distinction; you would like to aid in his success, and see it reflected back upon yourself."

"You have certainly paid me the compliment of studying me closely," she said, flushing slightly.

"Yes, I have studied you closely," he replied, quietly. "I know what will be best for you. I do not wish to be understood as saying that the Marquis de Châteaumesnil is altogether worthy of you. I have never seen a man who was. But with high rank he unites the power to achieve distinction, should circumstances ever be propitious, and a character which, after long and close observation, I can earnestly commend. He is brave, generous, and unselfish in no ordinary degree."

She did not reply for several minutes, but looked silently at the deep-blue Roman sky. The momentary flush had faded from her face and left it a little paler than usual, and her eyes, when she turned them back on him, seemed deeper and darker from the contrast.

"You know," she said in a low but distinct voice, "the story of my marriage—you know what shipwreck overtook my hopes then. Can you, therefore, advise me to marry a man whose past has been much the same as the past of Ralph Falconer? Should I not be mad if I did not profit by experience? Should I deserve compassion if I found myself a second time at the mercy of a selfish epicurean, a profligate spendthrift?"

"There is generally a measure of risk in answering for another person," he said, "but I do not feel that I incur any in declaring that you would have nothing of the kind to fear from M. de Châteaumesnil. The follies of his youth are over — over not merely in

lapse of time, but in change of character, which makes their recurrence impossible. Of selfishness—which is the foundation of epicurean indulgence—I have found him conspicuously free. His matured taste revolts from any form of profligacy, and he has too much sense to be a spendthrift. Those things which lower him in your opinion were the mere effervescence of youthful vitality. Time, trouble, the stern realities of suffering and death which war brought, have wholly changed him. The *gentilhomme* remains—keenly sensitive to honor in all forms and with his heart set on high ambitions, though he is not willing to sell his God or his king to gain them.”

“You are an eloquent advocate—I have observed that before,” she said. “But M. de Châteaumesnil must plead his own cause. A man who fails to do that does not deserve and should not expect an answer.”

“M. de Châteaumesnil has no other intention,” said Stanhope. “It was because I am aware that he means to do so, that I felt bound to tell you what I have found him to be. I know that you have some reliance on my opinion; and I know also that you have done him some injustice in your estimate of his character.”

“Probably I have,” she replied. Her eyes turned through the open window again. “One may be mistaken about many things,” she said. “And, after all, what does anything matter?”

“Such a sentiment is not like you,” he said, rising. Perhaps (she thought) now that his friendly task was discharged he was glad to go. There was certainly an air of relief in his movement. But through his bronzed skin he too looked a little pale, like a man who is holding himself in some sort of a tension. “Believe that I have thought—that I think—only of your happiness,” he said, standing before her. “I would not wish you to marry a prince, unless he had qualities to secure that.”

“But what are the qualities to secure it?” she asked, as she rose also and stood before him. “That, Mr. Stanhope, with all your powers of observation, you do not know.” Then she held out her hand. “Good-by,” she said, with a smile. “You will be satisfied, I suppose, if I promise to consider what you have said—but I make no further promise. Understand that.”

“I understand,” he replied. And then, leaving a message for Irène, he went away.

But he carried the memory of that smile with him. It haunted and perplexed him. What did it mean? It had contained a meaning to which he felt he had not a key, unless—Suddenly Godwin’s face rose before him and Godwin’s words seemed sounding in his ears. “I can not understand how a man who *has* a chance, can, from faint-heartedness or carelessness, fail to put forth his hand and seize it.” But he dismissed the thought as angrily as he had dismissed the original suggestion. “Am I a fool,” he thought, “that I should remember such folly? And even if it were true, what then? A chance can not be said to exist when a man must forfeit his self-respect to seize it.”

CHAPTER X.

Lady Dorchester did not long delay in arranging that dinner-party which was to be restricted to the number of the Muses. Indeed, it was within that number—for it comprised only eight persons, including the hostess. Besides Mrs. Falconer and Irène, there were Colonel and Mrs. Bevis—pleasant English people and cousins of Lady Dorchester—the Marquis de Châteaumesnil, Count Waldegrave, and Mr. Ffulkes, a

young *attaché* of the British embassy, brimming over with musical enthusiasm and aesthetic culture.

“Now, have I not done well? I am sure you can not feel that this is not quiet enough!” said Lady Dorchester when she met Irène, who replied that there was certainly nothing alarming in the size of the assembly. If she smiled at the same time, it was because she thought the lady’s solicitude was solely on account of her singing. But in that she was mistaken. Not even the perfect voice and flawless method, of which all the *cognoscenti* in Rome were talking, would have wrought upon Lady Dorchester, without the beauty and grace which were as remarkable as the voice and the charm that was like a soul to both. Moreover, she had a half-mischievous desire to see what would be the result of feeding the flame of interest which she felt very sure existed in Count Waldegrave’s breast. “He is such an icicle, I shall be glad to see him melted a little,” she said to herself; and, with no more fear of consequences than a child has in applying a match to gunpowder, she proceeded to subject this icicle to what she conceived to be a melting influence.

It was rather a freezing one, the icicle himself thought, when Irène acknowledged his presence by a slight bow and then turned with a warm smile to the Marquis. Mr. Ffulkes also received a share of her sunshine, being evidently on a footing of cordial acquaintance. Indeed, he was one of her most ardent admirers— one of those who had done much to waken curiosity with regard to her. Mr. Ffulkes’s admiration was always purely aesthetic and abstract, but it had great weight. When he turned from the contemplation of Botticelli and the study of Carpaccio to commend the beauty of a living woman, people felt that she must, in one way or another, be worth looking at. Frequently his beauties were of a type which did not accord with preconceived standards, but he had been understood to say that Miss Lescar belonged to “the most intellectual type of antique loveliness”; and those who entered the galleries were happily able to verify this for themselves.

Mrs. Bevis, though lately arrived, had already heard of her, and she put up her eye-glass with much curiosity as the slender, stately figure in black, relieved only by white roses, followed Mrs. Falconer into the drawing-room.

“Oh, she *is* beautiful!” she exclaimed involuntarily. “What a charming face and what radiant eyes! One is generally disappointed when one has heard so much of anybody, but disappointment is not possible here.”

“Miss Lescar is very beautiful,” observed Waldegrave—to whom she spoke—“and beautiful in an uncommon style.”

“Yes—so *spirituelle*. And she has a phenomenal voice besides? It is really too much for one person!”

“One does not think so when one knows the person,” said he.

The lady looked at him quickly. “I dare say not,” she replied, with a smile.

When dinner was announced, Waldegrave, who took in Mrs. Bevis, found himself at table opposite Irène, who had been taken in by Mr. Ffulkes, and was seated between him and the Marquis. Although placed thus advantageously, it was some time before they exchanged even a glance, notwithstanding that each was intensely conscious of the presence of the other. With Irène this consciousness was something to be resented: she would gladly have ignored it in reality as in appearance. With Waldegrave it was something so new that he was surprised by its novelty. When ever before had he found

himself listening with eager attention to catch the sound of a voice not addressed to him, or irresistibly impelled to let his gaze wander toward a face that more and more seemed to him the expression of all that was most intellectually delicate and spiritually refined?

“That girl has a most fascinating face,” said Mrs. Bevis, suddenly—speaking, as it were, his thought—“it drives one to stare in a very ill-bred manner; it has such vivid changes that one has a curiosity to see what it will express next.” Then in a lower tone: “Does it strike you how well it harmonizes with that fine, high-bred countenance of the Marquis de Châteaumesnil? Of Mr. Ffulkes’s appearance one can not say much. Though an apostle of beauty, he is certainly not beautiful.”

“If Mr. Ffulkes had been allowed to make himself, he would have appeared before the world in a different form,” said Waldegrave, smiling. “As it is, he does his best to correct the mistakes of nature. Unless basely slandered, he lives on a most ethereal diet, in order to keep down any possible grossness of form or spirit.”

“A bunch of grapes and a glass of water? I have heard so— though he appears to be devoting himself to the *entrées* in a very commendable manner now. But what is he saying?”

Mr. Ffulkes was saying, in reply to some question or assertion of Colonel Bevis, that culture was an imperative duty laid upon every one; that no one had a right to neglect a single power, to crush a single aspiration; and that human society would only reach an ideal standard when it was composed of people who, as far as possible, were fully rounded on all sides.

“Then you must have an ideal state of leisure to accomplish your standard,” said Colonel Bevis, “and people must recognize no duty except the duty of culture. If a man does recognize the obligation to do anything else, life is not long enough to grasp all arts, to perfect himself in all accomplishments and in all knowledge.”

Mr. Ffulkes was understood to reply that all knowledge was not essential: that much of it was irrelevant and added nothing to the grace and loveliness of life.

“Oh, it is only grace and loveliness of which you are thinking!” said Colonel Bevis. “But even on that ground I don’t see that your position is tenable. The man who paints pictures adds to the grace and loveliness of life, but he is not fully rounded according to your view, because painting is only one beautifying influence; and unless he neglects his special art he certainly can not also write books, model statues, or build bridges, like Leonardo da Vinci.”

“I am glad you have spoken of Leonardo da Vinci,” said Mr. Ffulkes, “as he is the great type of many-sided genius, the great proof that it is possible for one man to do many things equally well—”

“But he can hardly be called a type,” interposed Mrs. Falconer. “He stands alone— *sui generis*.”

“And he was a supreme genius,” added Lady Dorchester, “whereas your painters and poets and architects generally are clever men of talent—no more.”

“I was going to say,” went on Mr. Ffulkes, waving these remarks aside with one slight motion of a lily-like hand, “that Leonardo da Vinci proves what is possible even in the line of achievement, though I was thinking chiefly of appreciation.”

“But somebody must achieve something,” said Colonel Bevis. “Even in art you can scarcely propose that the world shall rest on what has been done.”

“The world appears likely to rest on it,” said Mr. Ffulkes in a tone of severe

significance. "There are few modern works of art worthy of any consideration. "We can do nothing better now than devote ourselves to the reverent study of the past."

"That is not a very bright outlook for the future," Colonel Bevis replied, with an irreverent laugh.

"Consideration of the future does not play a large part—or, in fact, any part at all—in Mr. Ffulkes's creed," said the Marquis. "It is a curious and significant fact," he went on, "that in this feverish nineteenth century, with its war-cries of material progress, a school should arise that preaches absolute indifference to such progress, and counsels its disciples to sit down in a world of beautiful sights and exquisite sounds and regard the struggling mass of humanity with mingled scorn and disgust."

"Pardon me," replied Mr. Ffulkes, "you are mistaken. As far as we can be said to preach at all, we try to urge upon all men the calming and satisfying influences of beauty."

"I should like to hear them urged upon a mob of Communists, mad for '*la R évolution Sociale*'—which is to put it out of any one's power to surround himself with sights and sounds of beauty," said Count Waldegrave with the sarcastic smile which made many people declare that his face was disagreeable.

The apostle of beauty looked at him with something like a flash in his usually serene glance.

"I think," he said, "that you and I are of one mind with regard to what should be done with the gentlemen who cry for '*la R évolution Sociale*'"

"Are we?" said Waldegrave. "My method would be summary, and not at all in the order of the calming and satisfying influences of beauty."

"No sane man could think that tigers athirst for blood would be amenable to such influences," said Mr. Ffulkes, with dignity.

Then he turned and addressed himself to Irène; but he found her attention wandering to what the Marquis was saying to Waldegrave.

"Your method would be very summary, I do not doubt," he observed, "and for the leaders I grant you that it could not be too summary. But there are the deluded masses, worked upon through their suffering and ignorance—how would you deal with them?"

"There is but one way—with the strong hand," replied the other, while Irène, looking at him, saw the resolute expression of power that came into his face.

The Marquis smiled. "I am little more than a philosophical observer of the political problems that are convulsing modern society," he said, "but what strikes me chiefly is that, although we are informed that this is an age when for the first time the people have secured or are about to secure certain rights and privileges supposed to be theirs, there has really never been a time when this same people—in the sense of the great multitude of mankind—are likely to fare worse. For where have they a friend? In the darkest days of the middle ages there was the great power of the Church that took the serf by the hand and bade baron and king see in him a brother; that stood by the throne and said to Caesar, 'Thus far shalt thou go and no farther.' But the kings found that power a burden and constraint, so they bade it go forth from their courts. It can not be said that they have gained much, for they are now trembling before the menacing form of Socialism—the Frankenstein monster that has been evoked by the doctrine of free thought and free speech. But, meanwhile, how do the people fare? There are rulers like

yourself, Count Waldegrave, ready to grind them to powder; there is a new paganism, which wraps itself in Tyrian purple, preaches sensuous enjoyment, and gives not a thought to anything beyond; there are visionaries who talk of humanity, but whose ideas, when translated from the vague phraseology in which they are clothed into plain language, mean only that humanity is to take the place of God, and every man is to do as he likes; and, lastly, there are designing demagogues who inflame the minds of multitudes with wild declarations of the rights of man; who incite the people to seize power, through the flattering doctrine that it belongs to them, in order that they may in turn seize it and show the world such corruption and such tyranny as only a democracy can produce.”

It was seldom that the Marquis was led to speak in such a strain or at such length, and the only person not surprised was Mrs. Falconer. Irène, who had listened eagerly, looked involuntarily at Waldegrave for his reply, and as he met the light that shone in her eyes—a light of warm approval—he found himself suddenly and unaccountably envying the Marquis.

“I agree with you almost entirely,” he said, “though you are so uncomplimentary in your designation of my method of government. The removal of the spiritual curb, both with regard to rulers and people, must certainly be acknowledged by any thinking man to have been a great misfortune. But we have to face things as they are—not as they might have been; and the severity that averts revolution is better than the temporizing weakness that leads to it.”

“Who should know that better than a Frenchman?” said the Marquis.

“When the ladies were presently alone in the drawing-room, Lady Dorchester said to Mrs. Falconer: “How well M. de Châteaumesnil spoke, and how well he looked while speaking! I never saw him so animated or so much in earnest before. Indeed, I did not think he could be. He always seemed to me entirely *persifleur*.”

“I did him that injustice, too,” said Mrs. Falconer with a slight smile, “until—well, until my eyes were opened by one who knows him well.”

“It is a pity he does not enter public life—as far as it is possible for a Legitimist to do so in France,” Lady Dorchester went on. “He might at least make a brilliant reputation. Can you not rouse his ambition?”

“I doubt if it needs rousing,” answered Mrs. Falconer, with self-possession. “Mr. Stanhope says that the secret of his apparent indifference lies in the fact that he has a great deal of ambition and no field for its exercise.”

“Mr. Stanhope!” repeated Lady Dorchester, diverted to a new train of thought. “That is your clever friend who writes social studies full of delicate satire. What an oversight it was on my part not to have had him here this evening!”

“Your party is very well balanced as it is,” said Mrs. Falconer. And to herself she said that she was for once glad of Stanhope’s absence. It was within the bounds of possibility that she might have felt some constraint had he been present, his keen glance upon the Marquis and herself; for her intentions were still an enigma which she was not able to solve.

A few minutes later the gentlemen appeared, and soon after Lady Dorchester crossed the room over to Irène, who was smiling into the broad, good-humored countenance of Colonel Bevis and listening to an account of a fox-hunt on the Campagna. “I am sure you would like it,” he was saying in conclusion; “you look just the sort of girl

to ride well and to enjoy riding.”

“Do I?” she said, with a soft laugh. “But I don’t ride at all—I have never had the opportunity—though I am sure I should like it very much. I think that to gallop over the Campagna—which is so wild, so free—would be delightful!”

“Suppose you try it—” the Colonel was beginning, when Lady Dorchester interposed:

“Miss Lescar does something much better than ride, Henry. She sings like an angel—or, rather, like a prima donna, for we don’t know much about angels—and she is going to sing for us now; are you not, my dear?”

“Certainly, if you wish it,” answered Irène.

She rose at once and went to the piano, but Colonel Bevis, who accompanied her, said confidentially as he opened the instrument:

“Singing is very well, and I’ve no doubt you sing like a thrush—which to my mind is better than a prima donna—but riding would be good for you; and, if you feel inclined to try it, we can get up some riding-parties, no doubt. Mrs. Falconer rides, I know, and my wife is very fond of it.”

“It would be charming, if you think I could ride without lessons,” said Irène.

“Oh, I could teach you all that is essential very soon, and I am sure M. le Marquis would take a hand in conducting your education. He is a crack rider, though he is a Frenchman. I have seen him in two or three steeple-chases.”

“It will not do to count on his kindness,” said Irène; “but you are very good, and I am going to sing something specially for you. What do you like best?”

“Well, a hunting-song, if you know any.”

She smiled, and struck the ringing chords of a Tyrolean hunting-song, judging that it would please him. It not only pleased him, but it electrified the whole company, for it was astonishing how deep and rich and powerful her voice sounded, with what spirit she sang, and how they seemed to hear the hunters coming in with their spoils, to see the wild glens, the green forests, the far, fair mountain heights.

“Wunderschon!” said Count Waldegrave when she finished—and without a moment’s hesitation he walked across the floor to the piano.

“I am glad to hear that you will sing a German song, Miss Lescar,” he said; and Irène, turning quickly at the sound of his voice, was forced to own to herself that it was a pleasant smile which shone down on her.

“Oh, yes,” she replied in a more natural tone than he had heard from her before, “I sing many German songs. They are very fine, many of them: no one can deny that.”

“I am afraid that you would fain deny it if you could,” he said, smiling again. “You are evidently a good hater.”

“I can’t imagine Miss Lescar hating anything,” said Colonel Bevis, regarding her with frank admiration, “unless it very particularly deserved to be anathema—and then I fancy she would temper justice largely with mercy.”

“I should not,” said Miss Lescar, decidedly. “Do not credit me with any such virtue. Like Count Waldegrave, I believe in an iron hand, and summary justice, for ill-doers. We agree on that point, at least.”

She looked at Waldegrave as she uttered the last words, and what was it that he read in the brilliant glance—a gleam of defiance? It conveyed that idea to his mind, and puzzled him as he had been puzzled from the first by this girl—so gracious and gentle to

others, so repellent to him.

“But I do not believe in an iron hand for all ill-doers,” he said; “only for dangerous revolutionaries, to prevent the spread of mischief; to protect—as M. de Châteaumesnil put it—the ignorant from their sophistries.”

“A very good thing to attempt, but you can’t do it, you know. The more ignorant people are, the more determined they are to be deluded,” said Colonel Bevis.

“We must not drift into another discussion of political problems,” said Waldegrave, “for Miss Lescar is here to sing.”

“Yes, I must sing,” said Irène.

She turned back to the key-board and after a moment’s thought began the “*Lascia ch’io pianga*” of Handel. Its noble breadth of harmony suited her voice, which seemed made to express all noble things. There were no displays of vocalization to arrest attention, but a flood of glorious melody that seemed to bear her listeners on its tide in rapt attention.

When she finished, and the applause—more enthusiastic than drawing-room applause generally — had subsided, Waldegrave said:

“May I beg you to sing a song now for me? I heard you sing ‘*Che faro senza Euridice*’ the other night, and I have desired to hear it again ever since.”

She hesitated—averse to acceding to his request, and averse also to singing that particular song. It was so associated to her now with their first meeting in front of the Greek marble of the Villa Albani that she would not have sung it willingly for any one. He saw the hesitation, and said, quickly:

“Do not let me urge anything that is disagreeable to you. If you do not wish to sing it—”

“Oh,” she said, feeling that some explanation was necessary, “it is so sad! And I realize the sadness more since I saw the bas-relief of the Villa Albani. Irrevocable parting was never expressed more clearly than it is there.”

“But there are sadder things in life than irrevocable parting,” he said.

“Yes,” she answered; “for much that is tender and fine may go hand in hand with that, and sweetness as well as bitterness may remain. Of course there are worse—many worse—things in life; but nevertheless such parting has in it the sadness of death.”

Then, perhaps because it was easier to sing than to continue talking, she began the song for which he asked. It has already been said that her voice acquired an exquisite pathos in its strains. One seemed following Orpheus into the gloomy realm whither he had gone to seek his beloved; to hear the passion of his voice and the heart-piercing entreaty of the cry that startled even that lower world:

“*Euridice, Euridice, O Dio rispondi!*”

Irène had never sung better, and her voice thrilled the inmost consciousness of those who heard her. “It seems to reach the very center of one’s heart,” whispered Lady Dorchester to Mrs. Falconer. “I have never heard any other which could compare to it in that sympathetic quality.”

Then the Marquis went to the piano and made *his* petition. Would Mademoiselle Lescar sing for him Mignon’s song?

“You must surely ask for that because you know how much I like it,” she said, looking at him with a smile. “I always fancy myself in Mignon’s place—longing, yearning for Italy.”

The next moment she was singing "Know'st thou the land?" And as Waldegrave listened it seemed to him that he heard the beating of her heart in every cadence. He was afraid to ask himself what it was that he felt stirring at *his* heart—what floodgate those magic tones might be opening. But he was as sure then as afterward that whoever else might sing this song for him, he should always hear in it the sound of Irène's voice—a voice which spoke not only of the real Italy, but of some ideal land of thought and feeling where only the "beloved one" might enter and dwell.

CHAPTER XL

The day after Lady Dorchester's dinner, Stanhope and Erne dropped in to luncheon at Mrs. Falconer's. Her house was the pleasantest possible for this kind of unpremeditated visiting, and Stanhope had quite fallen back into the position of intimacy which he occupied in Paris, though he had resolved against doing so before coming to Rome. Such a resolution might have been kept more easily, however, if Irène had not made a member of the household. But having this interest, this responsibility in common with Mrs. Falconer, how was it possible to withdraw from an association which had led to her participation in it? He felt that it was not possible. "After all, there will be time enough to step back when she becomes Madame la Marquise," he now said to himself. "Why should a man anticipate evil by a single day?"

He did not. The Roman porter soon knew him as well as the Paris *concierge* had done, and Antonio welcomed him with the most gracious benignity. But Erne did not share these friendly sentiments. There was a vague jealousy mingled with his reluctance to yield the position of *ami de la maison*, and it was with a sense of decided vexation that on this day he found Stanhope already established when he entered the drawing-room.

Luncheon, however, was as agreeable as usual, for Mrs. Falconer had infinite tact in harmonizing difficult elements, and there was excellent assistance in Stanhope's unconsciousness and good spirits. The occurrences of the evening before were touched upon, and Mrs. Falconer spoke of the riding-parties which Colonel Bevis had lost no time in proposing to her.

"I have only waited for the spring in order to begin riding," she said. "But about Irène—of course it is for you to decide, Mr. Stanhope."

"Is it?" said Stanhope, looking at Irène. "I am afraid I make a very poor guardian: it never occurs to me to assert my rights of authority. But I see no reason why she should not ride. It will be of benefit to her. She is too pale."

"It is what I proposed long ago; but no one would listen to me," said Erne, rather injuredly.

"I listened to you," said his cousin. "I told you that later in the season we would ride. It is later in the season now."

"And I told you that I did not know how to ride—which is as true now as it was then," said Irène.

"It does not seem to weigh with you now as it did then," he observed in a quick tone of reproach—that tone which it appears impossible for a man in love to avoid (however little right he may have to use it) when he sees, or thinks he sees, others preferred to him.

"No," she answered, quietly; "because things are different now. You have heard Mr. Stanhope consent to my riding, and Colonel Bevis has kindly promised to teach me

the essentials of horsemanship.”

“I might have done that, if you would have allowed me,” said Erne, still reproachful. “But I hope that Colonel Bevis, whoever he may be, is not to monopolize you—that, at least, I may be permitted to join you sometimes?”

“My dear Lionel, you will be always welcome,” said Mrs. Falconer. “Indeed, I have set my heart on making some excursions just with yourself and Mr. Stanhope—that is, if you would like it?” she added, turning to Stanhope.

He met her eyes with a smile in his own. “You know,” he said, “that I am entirely at your service.”

“That is not the point,” she replied, coloring and speaking with slight impatience. “I asked if you would *like* to go?”

“There is nothing I should like better,” he answered then, with promptitude and evident sincerity. “I fancied that went without saying.”

Meanwhile Erne had glanced at Irène with a flash of pleasure lighting up his face.

“I shall enjoy that,” he said. “I abhor a mob of people, but a *parti carré* is perfect. It will be like our visit to Versailles. Ah, shall I ever forget that day!”

“I am sure that I never shall,” said Irène.

“I have a picture of you in my mind, as you stood on the bridge of the Petit Trianon,” the young man went on. “At this moment I can see the water flowing below, the shade arching above, and hear your voice as you sang ‘*Ton souvenir est toujours là*’—I have never heard you sing that since.”

“I will sing it for you whenever you like,” she said, smiling.

They rose from the table soon after this, and returned to the *salon*, where Irène walked to one of the open windows, followed by Erne. As soon as she showed herself, half a dozen tame pigeons came fluttering to the balcony. “Please get me some crumbs for them—ring for Antonio,” she said, looking back over her shoulder at her companion. When the crumbs were brought, she stepped outside and stood, her slender figure outlined against the deep-blue sky, with the snowy doves trooping round her feet.

“For Heaven’s sake, stand still and let me sketch that scene!” exclaimed Erne, from the shadow of the window-curtains. “I have just been talking of one picture of you—and here is another as perfect! Have you any drawing-materials? A bit of charcoal and a board will do.”

“You can carry it in your mind as you have carried the other,” said she, scattering all her crumbs in one lavish shower, and stepping back into the room. Then she looked at him with unexpected severity. “You certainly possess the feeling of an artist,” she said. “Do you mean to play with it all your life?”

“I don’t know,” he replied. “We have talked of it before, and I have told you what I believe—that I have feeling, not power.”

“You mean that you have not diligence,” she said. “You don’t like drudgery; but you know one must drudge, if one ever means to do anything in art. You have the true artistic perception, but you will not work.”

“You are hard on me,” he said, smiling. “I have been working lately. It was my only resource. All our pleasant excursions have been ended, all our agreeable intercourse broken up—so I have been trying to console, or at least to distract myself by modeling in clay. I came this morning to ask if you—and, of course, Mrs. Falconer—will pay a visit to my studio? I should like you to see one thing which I have just finished.”

“I shall be very glad to go, and I am sure Mrs. Falconer will be also. Why don’t you ask her?”

Thus encouraged, he crossed the floor, and made his request.

Mrs. Falconer agreed at once. “It will be a pleasant occupation for this afternoon,” she said. “I presume you mean to ask Mr. Stanhope?”

“Oh, yes, I shall be happy if Mr. Stanhope will come,” replied Erne.

His tone was rather indifferent, but Stanhope only smiled. “Fortunately, I am not thin-skinned,” he said to Mrs. Falconer, as the young man went back to Irène, “and I have nothing else to do.” Looking out of the window, he added, “When the visit to the studio has been paid, can we not go somewhere else—to some villa or ruin?”

“Certainly we can,” she answered. “You have only to select the villa or ruin. Meanwhile, I shall order the carriage.”

The carriage was ordered, and the ladies retired to make some changes of toilet, leaving Stanhope and Erne alone together. Since there was on Stanhope’s side at least good-humored tolerance, it was he who spoke first:

“I have never heard where your studio is.”

“It is in the Ripetta,” said Erne. “I should have preferred the Babuino or the Margutta, but there were no studios to be had there—especially for the limited space of time for which I wanted one. But, though the Ripetta is not a popular street, I like it—especially since I am near the quay, and have a fine outlook over the fields beyond the Tiber.”

“Ah!” said Stanhope. “Is there not a pleasant walk in those fields behind the Castle San Angelo?”

“Of course there is, and one can, if one likes, re-enter the city by the Porta Angelica under the shadow of the Vatican.”

“That, then, is where we will go,” said Stanhope, with decision, “if the ladies do not object.”

“I imagine there is not much danger of their objecting to anything that you propose,” said Erne, somewhat sarcastically.

“To become a guide and philosopher, as well as friend, is one of the melancholy privileges of advancing years,” replied Stanhope, smiling, as he might have smiled at the petulance of a spoiled child.

A few minutes later, Mrs. Falconer returned, and was soon followed by Irène, when the party set out.

They found Erne’s studio, as might have been expected, very little of a studio in so far as that term applies to a place of work. An easel was there, and a good many canvases, but on these were only a few hasty sketches or studies of color. The young sybarite had, however, surrounded himself with as many rare and beautiful things as if he intended to become one of the most industrious of painters. Gorgeous Eastern stuffs, rare old hangings of faded tapestry, pieces of armor, bits of mediaeval carving, made a picturesque *mélange* of artistic properties.

“Why, Lionel, you must have ransacked the Ghetto!” said Mrs. Falconer, looking round. “How very mean of you to have kept all these delightful bargains to yourself! I would have paid almost any price for some of these things.”

“They were not much of bargains—if you mean by that term things that one gets for less than their value,” said Erne, laughing. “The old Hebrew rascals from whom I

bought most of them, made me pay dearly for my inexperience.”

“You must have spent a fortune,” said Mrs. Falconer. “The things are worth a good deal, and, of course, you paid three prices. Confess, now, that you have brought us here simply to prove your taste as a collector I “

“No, indeed. It has been an amusement and occupation to select these things at intervals during the winter; but I should never have thought of asking you to come to see them. What I want to show you is of more value—at least to me.”

He walked across the room, drew aside a curtain of Algerian stuff, and showed a bas-relief executed in clay—a life-size head—which made them all start, and Mrs. Falconer exclaim, “Ir ène!”

It was indeed Ir ène. Being in high relief, the likeness came out perfectly. Every exquisite line of the delicate yet noble face was reproduced, and on the shapely head was lightly laid—so lightly that it seemed as if it might be lifted off by a touch—a crown of lotus-leaves. The beautiful neck and shoulders were finished by a few folds of classic drapery, while the oval, concave surface on which the whole was modeled was surrounded by a wreath of the same graceful foliage.

“I am afraid you think that I have taken a great liberty,” said the young man, turning to Ir ène, who stood silent, with a heightened color. “But—do you remember the day we were at the Villa Albani? The resemblance of your face to the Antinous gave me the idea, and I could not banish it. So I got some clay, shut myself up, and here is the result.”

“Ah, the Antinous!” said Stanhope. “That accounts for the crown of lotus-leaves.”

“Not altogether,” replied Erne. “Association suggested it, but the more I thought, the more appropriate it seemed. Genius should always be crowned with the divine tree of the gods.”

“Pray do not make me absurd, Mr. Erne!” said Ir ène, quickly.

“There was also another reason which made it appropriate,” said he, turning to her and speaking in a lower tone. “The leaves of the lotus closely resemble those of the nettle—a plant, as you may be aware, which no man dare touch.”

“That is very revengeful of you,” said she, betrayed into a smile; “but I would much rather be considered a nettle on sufficient grounds than a genius on insufficient ones.”

“And is it possible that you had no sitting?” asked Stanhope. “It is an astonishingly good likeness.”

“Miss Lescar can tell whether or not I have had a sitting,” answered Erne. “I had only my recollection of her face, and a photograph which I stole.”

“You have succeeded admirably,” said Mrs. Falconer. “I really think you had better abandon paint and devote yourself to clay.”

“That is decidedly my opinion,” said Stanhope.

“And mine,” said Ir ène, at whom Erne looked. “I wish you had chosen another subject—but this proves your power.”

“I could not have proved it with another subject,” said he, in a low tone.

It was true. Love, the great inspirer, had stood by him as he worked, and the result was due to that inspiration more than to anything else. Talent and technical skill had been the servants to do its bidding—but only the servants. Nevertheless, the

achievement was so striking that Stanhope felt he had not before done justice to the young man's ability.

"I have thought him a mere *dilettante*, dabbling with art; but this shows that he is an artist," he said aside to Mrs. Falconer.

"It is amazingly good," she answered. "I am really as much surprised as you are. It is not only an admirable likeness of Irène, but it is fine ideal work. I should like to see it in marble. Was it not Thorwaldsen who said that 'clay is birth, plaster death, and marble the resurrection'?—You will have it executed in marble, will you not, Lionel?"

"If Miss Lescar does not object," replied Erne, with an appealing glance at Irène.

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Falconer. "Why should she object? If I had such a face, I should be glad to have it wrought into something enduring, something almost imperishable. Do you remember 'Praxiteles to Phryne'?—

'Phryne, thy human lips shall pale,
Thy rounded limbs decay. Nor love nor prayers can aught avail
To bid thy beauty stay;
'But there thy smile for centuries
On marble lips shall live—

For Art can grant what Love denies,
And fix the fugitive.'"

Erne's eyes gave a quick flash. "I have thought of that poem often since I have been at work," he said. "Again and again I have repeated to myself:

'And there upon that silent face
Shall unborn ages see Perennial youth, perennial grace,
And sealed serenity.'

Of course, it came with a better grace from Praxiteles than from me," he added with a laugh, "but still I did feel some exultation in perpetuating what so well deserves perpetuation."

"Put it into marble for *me*," said Mrs. Falconer. "That will settle Irène's scruples, if she has any. I only wish it were a bust. This has a mortuary suggestion."

"I can not see how or why," said Erne; "but the Antinous is accountable for its being *rilievo*."

They talked of it a little longer, then some time was spent in examining the *bric-à-brac* which filled the studio, and finally they went out on a narrow balcony which commanded a view of the open fields beyond the Tiber, and of the massive walls of the Castle of San Angelo, which seemed almost to overshadow them.

"Do you know," said Stanhope to Mrs. Falconer, "that those fields are the Prata Quintia of Cincinnatus—the site of his farm, the spot where the messengers from Rome found him leaning on his spade and requested him to put on his toga to receive a message from the senate? If you care to wander over a spot of such historic interest, we can cross the ferry here and walk round to the Porta Angelica."

"I should like it very much," she answered. "But what shall be done with the carriage?"

"Send it to St. Peter's to meet you."

She turned to Irène. "Do you hear, my dear? Do you think you would like it?"

"Oh, very much," replied Irène, eagerly. "I have been longing to cross the river and get out into the country this lovely day—even before I knew about the farm of

Cincinnatus.”

“Very well,” said Mrs. Falconer, “we will go.”

It was, indeed, a lovely day, and after they had crossed the ferry from the picturesque Quay of the Ripetta, and found themselves in what remains of the “Quinctian meadows,” all the sweetness of spring—spring in Italy—seemed to meet them. The limpid sky, the soft fitful wind that came from remote distance— from the far blue hills and over the wide grassy sweep of the Campagna, laden with faint odors of the blossoms it had kissed in passing—the fresh turf which their feet pressed, the flowers that starred the fields sloping down to the river, the ineffable charm of the atmosphere, all touched them as Nature can touch those only who are alive to her influence.

Erne smiled at the expression of enjoyment on Irène’s face. “How happy you look!” he said. “And how little it takes to make you happy!”

“Do you call this little?” she asked with a glance of surprise.

“What could one have more? The only trouble is that there is too much—one can not take it all in. But it is divine!”

She paused, and, resting her arms on a low stone wall, looked across the fields to “the noble river that rolls by the towers of Rome,” to the great mediaeval walls of San Angelo, to the mighty dome which rose beyond, then let her gaze wander over the wide scene of rolling plain and villa-crowned hills, of the gray-green of distant olive-woods, of far, snowy peaks, of almond-trees blossoming near at hand.

“I am glad that it is I who have brought you here,” said Erne. “At least, if you had not gone to my studio, we should not have thought of this walk.”

“So I owe you two pleasures,” she said, turning her eyes on him with a smile—but a smile which even in its sweetness seemed to set him at a distance. “The visit to the studio was a great pleasure. I am sure now that you will be a famous sculptor some day.”

“If I ever am, it will be owing entirely to you,” he said—“to those words of yours in the Villa Albani—and to my desire to copy your face in a manner worthy of it. Do you know I have failed entirely with paint? I could never make any likeness of you which satisfied me at all. But the clay lent itself to my fingers. I worked at fever-heat as I saw your features coming out under my touch. It was like creation. I felt myself almost a Pygmalion,” he ended, with a slight laugh.

She took no notice of the allusion, but, looking away to where the golden sunlight was falling on the cypresses of Monte Mario, said;

“I am glad if I have had anything to do with it, but I think you must be exaggerating in order to give me pleasure—to make me feel of importance.” She glanced at him again with another swift, sweet smile. “One likes to feel one’s self of importance, you know.”

“Then, Heaven knows, you ought to be satisfied with your importance to me!” said the young man, impulsively. “You fill my life—it seems to me that the thought of you is like the breath I draw. I know that I could sooner stop breathing than cease to think of you—to love you!”

It was done — and a moment’s dreadful pause followed. Whether he felt most relief at having at last uttered what had so long burned for utterance, or most apprehension of what Irène would reply, Erne did not know. It was an awful second; but he was not prepared for her turning silently and commencing to walk on again rapidly.

“Have I offended you?” he asked—one long step carrying him to her side. “I am

sorry—but at least you might give me one word.”

“What word can I give that you will care to hear?” she asked, coldly. “I think you have forgotten yourself; that is all.”

“Forgotten myself!” he repeated. “What is there to forget? I have loved you from the first hour we met—if you have not known it, you are unlike all other women—and you have so entered into my life, so colored, so swayed it, so revealed not only yourself but myself to me, that I can not go back even in memory to the time when I did not love you, any more than I can imagine that I shall ever cease to love you.”

“Oh, but you will!” said the girl, stopping abruptly and turning her face toward him, her eyes full of an expression which he had never seen in them before—an expression of one who suddenly wakes to startling knowledge. It had been one thing to put this love aside before it had been offered, to think lightly, even contemptuously, of it—but it was quite another thing to see a man’s passionate heart unveiled, to hear his tones—such tones as had never before fallen on her ear, or stirred the calm of her spirit. The first words of love spoken to a woman are always an era and sometimes an awakening in her life. But to Irène they were a revelation. She had read, heard, sung of it—this strange, strong passion of humanity—but she had not realized it until she met Erne’s eyes and heard in his voice the echo of that which filled his heart.

“Oh, but you will!” she repeated, in a tone of earnest assertion. “It would be terrible if I, who care nothing for you, should be forced to make you unhappy.”

“I who care nothing for you!” It was impossible for words to be more positive than these, as Erne felt, with his heart sinking even lower than it had sunk before. He had known it—oh, yes, he had certainly known it; but to tell one’s self a thing of this kind, and to have it told by the lips of the person beloved, are different matters.

“It is true, then,” he said, despairingly; “you care nothing for me!”

“Not in the way that you care for me,” she answered. “I thought you would have known it.”

“I did know it—I have always felt it,” he said. “Instinct told me from the first that you would never think of me. But there have been hours—I was mad, I suppose—when I have said to myself, ‘She is a woman—therefore to be won!’”

“But that is what I am not to be—neither by you nor any one else,” she said, haughtily. “Understand that once for all. I have heard—I have read,” she went on, a little wistfully, “that a hopeless passion must die. The best kindness I can do you, therefore, is to make you believe that yours is absolutely hopeless. You have been my good friend, and I am grateful to you—but you can never, while we two live upon the earth, be to me anything more.”

If there had been any vanity in the young man to be mortified, this speech would certainly have stung it in a salutary manner. But on this point there was none. His love was deep enough to be humble, and these words in their pitiless decision only seemed to him like the death-knell of all hope. He had fancied that he indulged none—but he knew his mistake now.

“And so,” he said, huskily, “it is over. I never really looked for anything else; and yet—my God! can it be that I am to go on living all my life without you?”

The passionate, painful vehemence of his tone touched the girl to the heart. She made a step nearer to him, her eyes shining like stars in the pale, beautiful face.

“Is it not a common lot?” she said, her voice full of infinite gentleness. “See!

have not I to live all my life, whether it be long or short, without the creature I love best? “What am *I* compared to my mother? And I have lost her for this world—utterly, hopelessly.”

It was a singular form of consolation; but Erne never looked for Irène to say the things which other people said, nor would she have been Irène if she had. He could not point out to her that his eager passion was different in its demands from the love of which she spoke. He could only say:

“Death is different. One must resign one’s self to that. But to know that you are living, and that some day you will—you must—love some other man—”

A change came over her face that almost startled him. It seemed in an instant to harden, to grow cold.

“Did I not tell you a moment ago that such a thing is not possible?” she demanded. “Do you imagine that I am talking idly; that I have not reason for what I say?”

“I imagine that you do not know yourself,” he answered; “that your heart is not yet awakened, and that you have no idea of the power of love.”

“It is you who are talking of something which you do not understand,” she replied, coldly. And then she turned once more and walked on.

He walked silently by her side, moving as in a dream through the scene that had been so full of charm a little while before. Now all the sunny beauty of the day was wholly eclipsed for him. He put out his hand mechanically and broke off a branch of almond-blossom that hung over a wall. To the end of his life he will abhor the sight of an almond-tree in bloom. Far ahead Mrs. Falconer and Stanhope were loitering along. It was like, yet how unlike, that day at Versailles of which he had spoken!

“*Ton souvenir est toujours là*,” he said at last, abruptly. “It seemed a prophecy.”

Irène looked at him. Her anger had been short-lived, for her eyes now expressed only compassionate regret. “I hope that it will not prove a prophecy,” she said. “Why should you remember me? I have played a very small part in your life.”

“I do not seem to have known any other life,” he answered. “What did I tell you a moment ago? You have been a revelation to me. I have amused myself with sentiment and even passion many times, but I never before knew what it was to have my days and nights filled with the memory of one face, the sound of one voice. “When I am with you, I feel that I could accomplish anything. Every faculty that I have is quickened, every power intensified. You are a perpetual inspiration. With you I could rise to any height. But without you—” he snapped the almond-branch in two and flung it away—“I shall be like that,” he said, “broken and useless.”

“You exaggerate,” she said, earnestly. “I hope and trust that you exaggerate, for it would be terrible and—” she hesitated, she had almost said “contemptible”—“unworthy, if a man’s achievement in life depended on whether or not a woman loved him.”

“You are not like any other woman,” he said. “Have you not learned that? When one has known you, all other women have lost their charm. And so”—he looked at the walls of the Leonine City, which they were approaching—“I am willing to be anything you will permit, rather than lose you utterly. Except in moments of madness, I have never dreamed of winning you; so I shall try to be content if you will let me remain your friend—see you, be with you, as I have been.”

“I should be sorry if there were any change in our intercourse,” she answered; “but if I promise to forget all this, you must promise on your part to forget also—never to

“speak of it again.”

He shook his head. “I can not promise the first,” he said. “It would be as easy to forget that I exist. But not to speak of it again—well, that is in my power. I promise that, if you insist.”

“I do insist,” she said, quickly. “And oh! I do beg you, try to forget! Believe me when I tell you that you are wasting every thought which you give me.”

The passionate earnestness of her manner carried conviction with it. Erne was no more disposed, than most men would have been in his place, to believe that a young and beautiful woman meant what she said when she talked of love as a possibility having no place in her life. But he could not doubt Irène. Whatever revelation the future might bring to her, she meant all that she said now.

There was no opportunity for further conversation, since Mrs. Falconer and Stanhope were waiting for them, lingering outside the Porta Angelica. A few words were exchanged, and, when they entered the city, the division of the party—whether by accident or design was not clearly apparent—altered. Erne walked on with his cousin; Stanhope fell back with Irène.

She thought that she had never before appreciated what a pleasant companion he was. He made no demand upon her attention, for his keen glance detected that something had moved her—and it was not difficult to imagine what it had been. “The young fool has spoken,” he thought; but he went on talking easily, and in a manner which needed no reply, about the picturesque antiquity of the Borgo, through which they were passing, beneath the walls of the Vatican garden.

“Do you know,” he said, “the meaning of the name ‘Borgo’? There was a Saxon settlement here called Burgus Saxonum, founded by a certain Ina, King of Wessex in the eighth century. When Pope Leo IV inclosed this part of the city, it obtained the name of Borgo, from the Burgus Saxonum—and holds it to this day.”

“What a place it is—this city of Rome!” said Irène. “Is there a foot of its earth which has not some far-reaching history?”

Stanhope smiled; and, not unwilling to divert her mind, began—it was something very unusual with him—to quote:

“Rome! what a scroll of history thine has been!
In the first days thy sword republican
Ruled the whole world for many an age’s span:
Then of thy peoples thou wert crowned queen,
Till in thy streets the bearded Goth was seen;
And now upon thy walls the breezes fan
(Ah, city crowned by God, discrowned by man!)
The hated flag of red and white and green.
When was thy glory? When in search for power
Thine eagles flew to greet the double sun,
And all the nations trembled at thy rod?
Nay, but thy glory tarried for this hour,
When pilgrims kneel before the Holy One,
The prisoned shepherd of the Church of God.”

“How beautiful!” said the girl, glancing up at him with eyes into which quick tears had sprung. “And how true! Who wrote it, Mr. Stanhope? I wish I could think that

you did.”

“I never wrote, or attempted to write, a sonnet in my life,” said Stanhope, “though I should not have been sorry to write that. I am not a Catholic, but I hope I have some idea of justice, and there has never been a more unjust outrage since the world began, than the occupation of Rome by the Italian Government.”

“I am glad that you think so,” said Irène, “for many people —Anglo-Saxon people, I mean—seem blinded to the plain justice of the matter by an inheritance of prejudice. But it does not trouble Catholics. We feel, indeed, all the insults and indignities and dangers to which the Holy Father is subjected, but we know, with absolute certainty, what will be the result. If we had not faith, history would tell us. Do you remember the *bon-mot* of M. Thiers, when the Empress Eugenie asked him what he thought of the Roman question? ‘I confess that I am not a good Catholic,’ he said, ‘but I am a papist—because I have read history and have learned there that all who have eaten of the Pope *have died of it.*’ For me,” she went on, “I have only to look from the Janiculum to the Palatine, to feel that, when Caesar matches himself against God, the end—whether delayed for a longer or a shorter time—is certain. No scepter is strong enough to break the staff of Peter.”

“You remind me of a passage from the great French preacher Lacordaire, which M. de Châteaumesnil is fond of quoting,” said Stanhope. “You may probably know it. He describes how Caesar, having failed to overthrow the papacy by force, comes and offers to share his purple with it; and the answer is: ‘Keep thy purple, O Caesar! To-morrow we will bury thee in it, and chant over thee the *Alleluia* and the *De Profundis*, which never change.’ Ages hence, when the kingdom of Italy is a forgotten name in history, I doubt not the Pope will still be reigning in this Eternal City.”

As he uttered the last words, they turned into the great Piazza of St. Peter’s, with its wide-spreading colonnades and springing fountains, and the tall obelisk, like a tongue of flame, bearing the cross upon its summit. A few carriages were scattered over its wide expanse, a few figures could be seen, like ants, ascending or descending the steps of the church. But these served to increase rather than diminish the sense of majestic space. As they advanced up this noble court, with the soft murmur of the flashing fountains growing more distinct, and from the sweeping colonnades colossal statues of saints and apostles looking down, it was impossible not to feel that this was a worthy approach to the grandest temple ever raised by man for the worship of God.

CHAPTER XII.

To stand on the steps of St. Peter’s for the first time; to give a glance back over the magnificent court up which one has approached, then to cross the wide portico, to enter the vestibule, where fitly stand statues of Constantine and Charlemagne—heroic figures of the Church’s great political benefactors—then, with a beating heart, to lift the heavy leathern curtain and gaze on the glory of the interior—this is a moment in life never to be forgotten.

Yet it seemed to Irène as if, in a measure, this moment was renewed for her whenever she put that curtain aside, and the splendor of the great church burst on her sight—for it is no more possible to carry St. Peter’s in the memory than to realize its vastness when within it. Each time the resplendent beauty, which is like nothing else

earthly, dazzled her afresh. Light, majesty of space, richness of color, magnificence of decoration surpassing description—these are the things that strike the eye as soon as the threshold is passed. And with every step the scene of awe and wonder deepens. The floor spreads away, a sea of glistening marble. Massive pillars, rich with sculptured entablature, support the lofty arches which disclose the broad aisles beyond the nave and the chapels opening into them, with their sumptuous altars and solemn tombs and pictures of imperishable mosaic. Far under the center of the soaring dome, a circle of gleaming stars marks the heart of the great temple. Those are the never-dying lamps before the tomb of the Apostles. And farther still, beyond the baldacchino of bronze which, though high as the roof of the Farnese Palace, looks a mere ordinary canopy in this stupendous edifice, the eye discerns a distant glory of golden light—as if heaven itself were opening into this, its earthly portal. “*L’architecture de St. Pierre est une musique fix é,*” said Madame de Staël, and its effect may indeed be likened to a burst of triumphant harmony. But it is more than that—it is an embodiment of the Christian idea. It is architecture inspired by faith and adapted to the needs of Catholic worship. Taking the ancient basilica for a basis, the noble arches, which open such glorious vistas to the eye, have been substituted for the long rows of pillars, in order to reveal more fully the chapels and side-altars which in some of the older churches—notably in Santa Maria Maggiore—are partially concealed and lose their dignity. The dome, which rises like the canopy of heaven and suggests as little the thought of space or limitation, is a sublime and exulting expression of faith in the immortality that lies beyond the tomb; while the diffusion of light, the glory of art, the richness of wealth brought to adorn the sanctuary of God, together with the exquisite proportion, the wonderful blending of parts into one perfect whole, all conspire to make it a symbol of the faith which has produced it.

Walking up the grand nave, with its beautiful pavement of colored marble inlaid from designs of Giacomo della Porta and Bernini, with its vaulted roof coppered and gilded, our party advanced under the dome, round which, in letters of purple-blue mosaic, runs the inscription, “*Tu es Petrus, et super hanc petram aedificabo ecclesiam meam, et tibi dabo claves regni caelorum*”—and beneath which lies the body of the apostle to whom those words were spoken. Here burn the golden lamps, like faithful hearts, here stands the altar where only the living successor of Peter can officiate, and here cluster the most glorious memories as well as the most sacred traditions of faith. This is the site of the oratory founded by Anacletus, Bishop of Rome, who was ordained by St. Peter himself, to mark the spot where countless Christian martyrs suffered in the circus of Nero, and where St. Peter was buried after his crucifixion on the Janiculum. Here Constantine, at the request of Pope Sylvester, began the erection of a basilica, laboring, we are told, with his own hands at the work, and carrying away twelve loads of earth in honor of the twelve apostles. It was at this time that the body of the great apostle was exhumed and reinterred in a sumptuous shrine. To the basilica thus founded came pilgrims from the (then) uttermost parts of the earth. There came the proud Emperors of the East, Theodosius and Valentinian; there came Cedwalla, fair-haired King of the West-Saxons, praying for baptism; there came Ina of Wessex and Carloman of France, and many another royal pilgrim, until the greatest of all, Charlemagne, knelt to be crowned by Christ’s vicar. And there, in the last year of the reign of Leo IV, Ethelwolf, King of the Anglo-Saxons, came also to be crowned, having with him his son of six years old, a child who carried from the apostle’s tomb grace to make him blessed in his land as Alfred the

Great of England.

And it is a significant fact that in all the storms which have shaken Rome, in all the invasions to which it has been subjected, this ancient and sacred basilica has never suffered. The Goth, the Saracen, fierce mediaeval baron, and ruthless emperor, have done their worst on the Eternal City, but their footsteps trembled and paused at the shrine of him to whom was given the awful keys. Hence the peace that broods here has in it something majestic as well as serene—something which elevates as well as soothes the spirit. One feels the steadfastness of the everlasting rock. What does one more storm matter to the Church founded upon it? “Et super hanc petram aedificabo ecclesiam meam.” Centuries have passed, unnumbered storms of human passion have raged, since that word was spoken, but lo! the old, old Church stands firm. “The gates of hell” have not prevailed, though they have had—even as to-day—many a brief, seeming triumph.

Erne sank on her knees by the balustrade where the deep-diving stair leads down to the crypt below, and where swing the shining lamps. The others, after lingering for a little, passed on and left her—Erne had parted with them on the portico, having excused himself from entering. She was glad to be alone. When she entered, her heart had been heavy with the realization of the pain she had been forced to inflict, with a penetrating sense of the unavoidable sorrow and difficulty of life, with the memory of an old yet ever new wound, and of her own lasting bereavement. But, as she knelt, her heart grew still, her mind serene. It is difficult for any words to express the influence of the spot. Peace seemed to wrap her like a veil. Now and then a light foot-fall went by; some one came, knelt, rose, and passed away. She rose also, after a while, stood for an instant gazing up into the vast, solemn space above, from which the great figures of the evangelists look down, then turned and moved away to the left, aware that Mrs. Falconer would know where to seek her.

And half an hour later, as twilight shadows began to gather in the mighty transepts and under the lofty arches, Mrs. Falconer touched her shoulder as she knelt on the pavement before the chapel of the Blessed Sacrament.

She rose at once and they went again into the nave. The lamps around the shrine were more like stars than ever in the dusk—the vast church stretched away until lost in obscurity. It seemed a solemn world of ineffable repose. Presently from the shadow of one of the immense pillars, near the tomb of the Stuart kings, a figure emerged and joined them. It was the Marquis de Châteaumesnil. He had spent the afternoon in the church, had been down in the crypt and up in the dome. “I feel as if I had been exploring a city,” he said, with a smile.

“I have never been on the roof,” said Mrs. Falconer. “Some day I must really go; but I dislike such exertion.”

“You will be well repaid,” he said. “The view from the top of the dome is fine beyond description. One can liken it only to the pinnacle of a mountain; but what mountain has Rome at its feet, ancient Latium around it, the Mediterranean on one hand, and the Apennines on the other!”

He lifted the leathern curtain of the door as he spoke, and a flood of light met them. They crossed the vestibule, and what a sight dazzled their eyes as they paused in the portico at the head of the great steps! The sun had gone down, and a reflection from the splendor of its setting was flung upon the sky in front of them. A number of floating clouds had caught the glory, and formed resplendent golden masses upon the deep-blue

ether. Against this stood out in bold relief the battlements of the Castle of San Angelo, while the superb angel poised upon its summit looked as if he had at that instant descended from the open heaven—as if its radiance shone still on his outspread wings and flashed along his gleaming sword.

“Oh, what a picture!” cried Irène, with such an expression of voice that the Marquis turned to look at her. She was gazing at the scene with shining eyes and parted lips—herself a picture in her delight.

“It is not often, even from the steps of St. Peter’s, that one can see anything like it,” said Stanhope. “One might fancy all the heavenly host upon those clouds.”

“The one of the heavenly host whom we see on San Angelo is glorious enough,” said Mrs. Falconer. “What a figure of majesty!”

“What a scene altogether!” said Stanhope, letting his gaze wander over the piazza at their feet, with its iris-tinted fountains and sweeping colonnades. “A fit close for a delightful afternoon.”

“What have you been doing to make the afternoon specially delightful?” asked the Marquis.

“Nothing of importance,” replied Mrs. Falconer. “We went to Lionel Erne’s studio to see a *rilievo* of Irène’s face which he has just finished—a very good bit of work; then we walked from the Quay of the Ripetta to the Porta Angelica, and then we wandered into St. Peter’s. *Voilà tout!*”

“But the ‘*tout*’ comprised several very pleasant hours for me,” said Stanhope; “therefore I insist upon being permitted to consider the afternoon delightful.”

“I am sure Mademoiselle Lescar, with her interest in everything natural and historical, has found it so,” said the Marquis, turning to Irène.

He was surprised at the change that had come over her face since he looked at it before. The radiance had faded out of her eyes: there was an expression of pain in them. She was thinking how far from delightful the afternoon had proved to one person—how little his spirit was likely to be attuned to this sunset glory!

“Yes,” she said, “it has been very pleasant; but this is glorious! I think I should like to live on the roof of St. Peter’s,” she added, glancing at the Marquis with a smile.

“I wish you had been there with me,” he said. “You would have enjoyed it greatly, I am sure. And you know there are many people living on the roof.”

“Yes; how strange, is it not? Fancy having one’s dwelling on the roof of St. Peter’s! But probably the people who live there never think of it as strange at all.”

“The force of habit accustoms people to anything,” said Stanhope. “There are very few things that long retain the sense of strangeness, and certainly a residence on the roof of St. Peter’s need not be one of them.”

“I am sure it is large enough for a village,” said Mrs. Falconer. “Some day we will go and see it, but now we must go home. M. le Marquis, there is a vacant seat in my carriage if you care to take it.”

“Many thanks, madame,” answered the Marquis, “but I have a *voiture* waiting.—I suppose I can not tempt you, *mon cher*, to share it with me?” he added, turning to Stanhope.

“Yes, you can,” answered Stanhope, “since our destination is probably the same, and I should only take Mrs. Falconer out of her way.”

“Very little,” said Mrs. Falconer. But she made no demur; so the ladies were put

into their carriage and drove off alone.

Both were silent for some time. It was not until they were crossing the bridge of San Angelo and, glancing back, caught the last gleam of light on the angel's sword, that Mrs. Falconer said, "And so you have consigned poor Lionel to despair!"

"Did he tell you?" asked Irène, looking up with wistful eyes. "I never thought it would be so hard! I feel as sad and guilty as if I had willfully injured him—and so sorry for him!"

"Yes, I am sorry for him, too," said Mrs. Falconer. "He is very unhappy, poor fellow! But, as for your feeling guilty, that is nonsense. Never did a man rush on his fate with more certainty of what it would be. If any idiocy in love could surprise me, I should be surprised by his conduct—for he knew that you cared nothing for him."

"He said so; but I fancy he must have had some hope, or he could not have been so disappointed," replied Irène. "It is dreadful to see a man look heart-broken—and he did."

"No doubt he did," said Mrs. Falconer, smiling; "but his heart will mend—I have never known a broken heart that did not. The first man one refuses—especially if he be very much in love and very much in earnest—tries one's feelings deeply. But one grows accustomed to it after a while, and learns that the wound one inflicts is only skin-deep, and frequently to the vanity rather than the heart."

"I should be sorry to wound even vanity," said Irène.

"I am sure you would, though I do not mean to imply anything of the kind about poor Lionel. His passion is genuine, and his unhappiness, I doubt not, very keen. But he will get over it."

"Oh, yes," said Irène, "I suppose one gets over everything in time. But that does not make it less hard to feel that he is suffering now—through *me*."

"Why, are you to blame for his suffering?"

"Certainly not; but the consciousness of being blameless can not make one feel less the sadness of giving pain."

"Ah, child," said the elder woman, "I wish I could harden your heart. Not enough to make you cruel; only enough to make you indifferent. There is nothing so much to be desired—so safe, so pleasant—as indifference!"

"Dear Mrs. Falconer, have you gained it yourself?" asked the girl, smiling.

"Not entirely. I wish I had. But I tremble for what lies before you in life, with such a heart. Sooner or later it will cause you misery."

"I think not," said Irène, as they drew up under the *portone*. "But if so, I shall only follow in my mother's footsteps."

CHAPTER XIII.

"I THINK," said M. de Châteaumesnil, settling his shoulders comfortably against the back of the small open carriage in which Stanhope and himself drove out of the piazza of St. Peter's, "that Mademoiselle Lescar is the most interesting person I have ever seen."

Stanhope gave him a quick look. "Indeed!" he said. "How has she proved so interesting?"

"It is impossible for her to prove anything else," said the Marquis. "Even when

she says nothing, the expressions of her face are a study, they are so full of thought and feeling.”

“Humph!” said Stanhope.

Besides this significant sound he uttered nothing more for a minute. He would, indeed, have found it difficult to express his feelings—chief among which was a sense of irritation that Mrs. Falconer should be, as it were, overshadowed by this girl she had so kindly taken under her charge. Such overshadowing would have been trying enough in any case, but with the man who was her avowed suitor, and probably her future husband—some recollection of Lady Falconer’s warning came to Stanhope and deepened his annoyance.

“Mademoiselle Lescar is certainly not an ordinary person,” he said, after a moment; “but whether the expressions of her face are sufficiently interesting to repay your study of them, I do not know.”

Now, he is a master of social dissimulation who, being annoyed, can keep all sign of it out of his voice. Stanhope, on the present occasion at least, was not able to do so. His tone betrayed his feeling, and made the Marquis glance at him with keen scrutiny.

“I did not mean to imply that I had made a study of Mademoiselle Lescar’s expressions of face,” he said. “They would strike any one.” Then, after a short pause, and with a slight smile: “It is as I suspected, *mon ami*. She is more to you than you are willing to admit. Nothing proves love like jealousy.”

It was a very natural inference; but, being so wide of the mark, it only served to increase Stanhope’s irritation.

“Why is it,” he demanded, “that nothing I can say has any effect to disabuse you of this absurd hypothesis which you have adopted? *Irène* is to me simply a girl in whom I feel deep interest, but for whom I have no shade of the kind of feeling you imagine. If I have betrayed any jealousy,” he went on, forced by his irritation into candor, “it was for Mrs. Falconer. Do you think that, as her friend, I can hear a man who holds the position toward her that you do, declaring the most enthusiastic admiration for another woman, and not feel that he is not worthy of this woman, unless she is in every sense supreme to him?”

For an instant the Marquis was too much amazed to reply. Never before had he seen the usually imperturbable Stanhope so moved. It was a revelation to him, as well as an astonishment. A suspicion, which he had once or twice entertained before, but which had of late faded away, returned now with renewed force. But he made no allusion to this when he answered, quietly:

“You have forgotten one or two things. The first is that only the unreason of a woman ever requires that even a man in love shall cease to find attraction in other women; the second is that I have never professed myself in love with Mrs. Falconer. According to our French view, that sentiment is not necessary to the happiness of marriage, as you are aware. I have the highest admiration, the deepest respect for her; but that passion, which quickens the pulse and mists the brain, I have not. Nevertheless, I am ready to offer her my honor and my name. In that sense she is supreme to me; but does it prevent my having eyes to see the exceeding beauty, the *spirituelle* charm of Mademoiselle Lescar?”

It was now Stanhope’s turn to be silent. What was there to reply to this? Had he not known it before? No doubt he had: but there is a great difference between knowing

and realizing a thing. It is doubtful if he had before thoroughly realized the calmness of the sentiment with which the Marquis approached Mrs. Falconer. In fact, it had seemed impossible to him that any man who knew her well could regard her with indifference, and he had taken for granted in M. de Châteaumesnil's suit a degree of warmth which it now seemed did not exist.

"If I had known," he said at last in a tone of suppressed indignation, "that it was so entirely a *mariage de convenance* which you wished to make, I should never have interested myself to speak to Mrs. Falconer in your behalf"

The Marquis started a little. "You have done so?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Stanhope. "After you gave me your confidence, it seemed only a matter of friendly justice that I should remove from Mrs. Falconer's mind certain prejudices against you which I knew to exist there, and which I thought I could remove. It was simply clearing the way for you—I said nothing which could be interpreted as pleading your cause; nor did she give any hint or sign how she would receive your suit. But I am sorry now that I did so much. It is offering an indignity to such a woman to regard her simply as a figure on which her fortune is hung."

There was a deep note of anger in his voice as he uttered the last words; but the Marquis turned to him with a light in his eyes which was by no means a reflection of it.

"You are a friend indeed, *mon cher* Stanhope!" he said, warmly. "What a friend you have proved to me! What a friend to Mrs. Falconer you are proving yourself now! You are right: it would be an indignity to such a woman to regard her simply as the figure on which her fortune is hung. But, believe me, I do not so regard her. Were her fortune trebled, it would not tempt me if she were not the woman she is. But—you know my position—you know that I could not marry a goddess if she were without fortune."

"And Irène Lescar has nothing which deserves the name," said Stanhope, looking at him keenly.

The other shrugged his shoulders. "*Ma foi*, I have never, for an instant, thought of her in such a connection. She seems to me like some rare, beautiful creature, quite

‘. . . too bright and good

For human nature's daily food.’

But, whatever her attraction, whatever her rank—of which I know nothing—or her wealth, if she possessed any, I am none the less bound in honor—the more since you have spoken—to offer myself to Mrs. Falconer. I am here for that purpose, and I shall not delay it longer."

He spoke with decision; and, as the carriage at that moment drew up before their hotel. Stanhope was spared the necessity of reply. If he did not feel very cheerful over the prospect of Mrs. Falconer's probable acceptance of the Marquis—especially since he had heard such an exposition of the sentiments of the latter—he had at least a sense of relief in feeling that, in one way or another, the matter would soon be settled. He had been conscious of a weight of responsibility since he had taken upon himself the duty of speaking to Mrs. Falconer, and of uneasiness in watching the laggard wooing of her suitor, which pride—pride for *her*—had prevented his quickening by a word. He said to himself now that he should probably soon be able to offer his congratulations to the future Marquise, and find some excuse for leaving Rome; since the place in her *salon*, of which he had once spoken to Madame Lescar, began to appear less attractive to him.

The Marquis did not fail to prove himself a man of his word. The next morning

his card was brought to Mrs. Falconer, and, as she read the name, she felt an instant conviction of what was before her, coupled with a dismaying sense that even yet her mind was not made up. "I suppose if one thought for ever, one never could make up one's mind in a case of this kind," she said to herself, "unless—unless one were in love, and that is not to be hoped for." Then she turned to Antonio, who stood respectfully waiting. "Show M. le Marquis in," she said.

A moment later the Marquis was shown into the inner *salon* where she sat. Even more than the larger drawing-room, it was filled with the evidences of her individual taste and the beauty which only great wealth can command—not magnificence, but an exquisite luxury, the costliness of which was veiled by delicate refinement. Flowers in bountiful profusion filled the *jardinières* and the balcony; a deep sky of sapphire looked in between folds of sweeping silken drapery. The graceful figure that rose from a writing-table seemed made for such surroundings.

There was not a trace of consciousness in her manner as she received him, yet her heart was beating as it had not done before since her girlhood. "Was she really again on the brink of the awful experiment of matrimony? She did not ask herself what force it was that was driving her on: she only felt that she was driven, yet that she was reluctant. Never had her liberty seemed to her more alluring than at this moment when she was almost prepared to resign it.

"I hope that you have not suffered me to disturb you," said the Marquis, with a glance at her writing materials and the open page of an evidently unfinished letter.

"Oh, no," she answered. "My epistolary labors are rarely so great that I can not very well bear to be disturbed in them. I have been writing to Lady Falconer; and, by leaving my letter open, I can add that I have seen you, that you are very well, and any other item of information you are good enough to furnish me."

If M. de Châteaumesnil had been in the Castle of Truth, he would have replied that he hoped before his visit ended to be able to furnish an item of information which would certainly prove very agreeable to Lady Falconer; but since such frankness did not commend itself to his approval, he replied instead that his cousin, hearing of his presence in Rome, would argue everything that was good for him.

"I am not sure of that," said Mrs. Falconer, smiling. "One does not always argue well of a Parisian out of Paris. Do you not begin to think of the Boulevards and the Champs-Élysées now that spring has come?"

"You are thinking of the average Parisian," he answered, "for whom the Boulevards and the Champs-Élysées make the world. But I am not a Parisian of that type—if, indeed, I am a Parisian at all. I am a Frenchman, rather, for whom Paris has now little attraction."

"But, whatever her misfortunes, Paris always has attractions," said Mrs. Falconer.

"To foreigners and to some classes of her own people—yes. But not to those who know her well enough to see the great social deterioration steadily going on, to be pained by her decadence in every respect. Even her prosperity at the present time is hollow—a bubble that will end in revolution."

"And revolution may end in bringing about what you desire—the restoration of stable government."

"It may; but, as I think I have said to you before, I am not sanguine. It is difficult to see how any government is possible with a people educated as the present race of

Frenchmen have been, in infidel doctrine and social revolt.”

Mrs. Falconer never liked the Marquis so well as when he was stirred to serious feeling and serious speech. At such moments she recognized what his friends meant when they spoke of his abilities and deplored his forced inaction.

“If you are right,” she said, “it is sad to think what dark and evil days are before France. But it seems to me,” she added, with a quick impulse, “that, however dark and evil they may be, no man who sees as clearly and speaks as forcibly as you should fail to do all that lies in him to avert them. Forgive me”—the color came into her face—“for saying this. It has been in my mind a long time.”

“Nay,” he answered, “you must let me thank you for saying it.” Then, after a brief pause, he added: “If you will help me, much may be possible to me. Mine has been at best but a useless existence. If you will give it meaning by giving me yourself, I may accomplish something yet.”

It was a happy inspiration which prompted him to choose that form of speech. No other could have touched the woman to whom he spoke so deeply. Indeed, it is doubtful if any other would have touched her at all. Certainly no offer of devotion could have done so. But to be asked for the help she knew that she could give, in herself as well as in her fortune—to know that it rested with her to give meaning and usefulness to a life that even yet might be brilliant in the eyes of the world—she would not have been the generous, impulsive woman she was, if this had not moved her.

But her self-possession did not fail. She met his gaze gravely; only the soft flush which had risen into her cheek remained there and added to her loveliness.

“I am flattered,” she said, “that you think me capable of so much. Frankly, I am sure that your life contains many possibilities of honor and usefulness; but—pardon me if I am frank also in this—how can I tell that my influence would give the definiteness, heretofore lacking, to your aims and purposes?”

“You may be sure that it would,” he answered, seriously, for he understood her. “Will you permit me to indulge a little egotism? It is well that you should know thoroughly what manner of man is asking you to share his life. You have often charged me with being *ennuyé*. It is true enough. How can I be otherwise, when the days come and go, and I have nothing with which to fill them save a routine of motiveless pleasures? My wanderings were pleasant while they lasted; but I am not a savant to bury myself in antiquities, nor a philosophical student of human nature like our friend Stanhope. I grew weary: I said to myself, ‘I will go home and take up life again.’ I went, and what was there to take up? The pleasures I had exhausted were empty and tasteless to me. The country I had left was moving faster and faster toward socialistic revolution. I did not find it easy to look on at such a drama. Day by day it grew more hard to me. Old fires of ambition kindled, while above all was bitter pain for France—pain for her degradation, pain in the realization of my own powerlessness to avert the evils that so darkly threatened her! You know how the fashion of one’s life is to ignore all deep emotion. One smiles, one shrugs one’s shoulders, one utters a biting epigram, perhaps; but under this one may feel—*ma foi*, what may not one feel!”

These words, with their concentrated yet controlled force, would have been no surprise to Stanhope, who knew accurately enough the real temper of the man, the overmastering bent of his mind and desire of his spirit. But they were a revelation to Mrs. Falconer — and knowledge warmed to keenest sympathy.

“Believe me,” she said, “I feel for you—and for France. You miss a field for power, a career for ambition; but she misses one who would serve her with the heart of a patriot and the mind of a statesman.”

With a gesture as graceful as it was respectful, he took her hand and kissed it.

“You would be,” he said, “an inspiration to a patriot, a help to a statesman. And you are right—every man who can, should make himself a breakwater against the tide of revolution. Will you, then, take this poor France for your country, and help me to work for her; will you, if the turn of the tide should ever come, give value to any distinction I may gain by sharing it?”

There was no lack of earnest feeling in his tone—and, therefore, it stirred Mrs. Falconer. It was not the distinction offered, so much as the help demanded, which appealed to her. Stanhope was right enough—within certain limits, she was an ambitious woman; but, even more than that, she was a woman who longed to give freely of the abundance which was hers. Not mere material abundance only, but that of sympathy, of intellect, of heart. She was wise enough to distrust her own impulses, however, and, after a short hesitation, she answered gravely yet graciously:

“This is not a matter which should be decided without deeper thought than I have given it. The happiness of both our lives is at stake—and I realize it clearly. I confess that I am touched—I confess, also, that I am tempted—by much that you have said. But I must have time to consider.”

“I beg that you will take as much time as you desire,” said the Marquis. “Only believe that, if your decision is what I hope, I shall feel the full value of all that you grant—and remember that I am in your hands.”

He rose as he spoke, with the evident intention of taking leave; but at that moment the *portiere* was lifted, and a radiant presence stood in the doorway. It was Irène, with her hands full of flowers.

“See, dear Mrs. Falconer, how lovely!” she cried. “I am so fond of wild-flowers!—Ah, M. le Marquis, *bon jour*—are you fond of wild-flowers, too?”

“I am fond of everything beautiful, mademoiselle,” answered the Marquis, smiling. “May I ask where you found those?”

“Outside the Porta San Giovanni. Mrs. Vance kindly went with me to Santa Maria Maggiore this morning. Then, after hearing a mass, we went to Santa Croce by the beautiful Via di Santa Croce. Do you know it?—a long vista, with such glorious distances—the Campagna, the aqueducts, the mountains, seen through foliage and between the castellated towers of the old walls! It was like a poem, which deepened in beauty the nearer we approached the basilica. Then I begged to go outside the Porta, and I gathered these flowers under the arches of the aqueducts—after which we came back by St. John Lateran. And there is nothing in Rome like the view from the front of the Lateran!”

Mrs. Falconer smiled. “I think,” she said, “that you change your mind every day with regard to what is finest in Rome.”

“Oh, no!” said Irène, quickly. “I admire each thing in a different way, with a different feeling. But I have always thought that the view from the Lateran is unequalled. Even if it had no history, it would be glorious; but when to the majestic picture is added the thought of all its memories, I feel, when I am there, as if I were listening to the noblest music!”

It seemed as if she had brought a strain of it with her. The light in her eyes, the quick thrill in her voice—what were they but an echo of the great harmony to which she had been listening? She appeared suddenly to remember herself, however, and, with a blush, moved away.

“My flowers will fade if I do not put them in water,” she said. “But”—turning again to Mrs. Falconer—“I had almost forgotten that we met Colonel Bevis, and he is coming this afternoon to arrange a riding-party for to-morrow. I told him that it was quite impossible for me to go, since I know nothing of riding; but he insists that, with his instruction, I can. Do you think I ought to venture?”

“Perhaps M. de Châteaumesnil will tell us whether you ought or not,” said Mrs. Falconer.

“If Mademoiselle Lescar does not attempt to go too far, her first lesson might be taken in a riding-party as well as in any other way,” replied the Marquis; “and,” he added, looking at the girl with a smile, “I beg to offer my services as instructor, if at any time Colonel Bevis should be otherwise engaged.”

“You are very kind,” she answered. “Colonel Bevis himself proposed some such arrangement. He says that you are a ‘crack rider.’”

“Which is no light compliment from an Englishman to a Frenchman,” said Mrs. Falconer.

“He is probably aware that my education in horsemanship was English, rather than French,” replied the Marquis. “But I shall say good-morning, madame, with the hope that I may be permitted to join the riding-party to-morrow.”

“It is Colonel Bevis’s party, not mine,” she answered, as she gave him her hand; “but no doubt he will include you in it.”

CHAPTER XIV.

The Marquis was included in the party, and some one else whom Colonel Bevis consulted no one about inviting. This was Count Waldegrave, whom he encountered after leaving Mrs. Falconer and asked to join them, with a comfortable assurance that such an addition could not fail to be agreeable to every one. He would have been surprised if he could have looked into the minds of three of the party and seen how far from agreeable it proved to them—these three being Mrs. Falconer, Stanhope, and Irène. But conventionalities are admirable things to restrain the exhibition of awkward feeling, and no one would have imagined that the party was not thoroughly harmonious in all its elements, as they rode out of the Porta del Popolo *en route* for the villa of Livia—this having been decided upon as a good objective point for the first excursion, which it was desired should be short.

“We must not take Miss Lescar too far on her first ride,” said Colonel Bevis; and, although Irène had protested against being made a weight, his motion was unanimously seconded. “Our next excursion shall be to Ostia or the hills,” he said.

So, to the Villa Livia, seven miles beyond the walls of Rome, the party turned their horses’ heads. In setting out, Colonel Bevis, according to his promise, constituted himself Irène’s escort, and the ride at first meant for her little besides a succession of brief instructions. “Sit square in the saddle. Miss Lescar”—“right shoulder too far forward”—“left rein too short”—“keep your hand low”—“curve your wrist easily”—

“lean slightly forward for the trot”—“rise in your saddle”—“so!” But riding, no more than any other accomplishment, can be learned in an hour, and like every other its first steps are difficult and fatiguing; so it was a pale and rather wearied face that Count Waldegrave saw when he presently fell back and joined the last pair of equestrians.

“I am afraid you are tired, Miss Lescar,” he said, with such a tone of kindness that Irène looked at him gratefully. She was tired, and in her instinctive acknowledgment of the sympathy she forgot who offered it.

“It is harder work, learning to ride, than I imagined it would be,” she said.

“I am afraid I have fatigued you,” said Colonel Bevis, full of self-reproach at once. “It is fatiguing to be kept too long under steady drill. Well, we will take things easily now at a walk, and all you need do is to keep your shoulders square and your reins properly adjusted.”

“That means a good deal,” said Irène, “since my reins appear to have a remarkable faculty for adjusting themselves improperly, and the worst of it is that I can not tell when my right or left rein is shorter than the other.”

“Your right rein needs attention now,” said Waldegrave, smiling a little.

Then, as she hesitated, he leaned over, and saying, “Allow me,” took the loose end and drew it an inch or two through her fingers. It was a very simple act, and one which Colonel Bevis had already several times performed; but from Waldegrave it acquired a new meaning. Though his hand did not touch hers, there was something in the momentary closeness of contact which made the girl flush. It seemed to bring more vividly to her consciousness who and what the man was who offered this friendly, familiar attention.

After this they walked their horses down to the Ponte Molle, and the talk became something besides a monologue of instruction. Colonel Bevis still had a vigilant eye for any departure from the right position of body or the slightest laxity of either rein; but his admonitions were only interjections in the conversation. Their way was now along the old classic road which leads from Rome to Northern Italy, and the boundless expanse of the Campagna spread around them as far as the eye could reach, crossed by the varying lights and shadows of the fair spring day. Except at certain seasons of the year, there is no look of desolation about this wonderful tract of country—unless such a look is given by the lack of habitations—but a beauty peculiar to itself and almost indescribable. Mount one of the turfey hillocks which abound, and see what a picture is spread before the gaze—a grassy sweep of luxuriant green, golden with the flower of the broom, bright with “flame-born anemones” and glowing poppies, starred with myriads of daisies, buttercups, narcissi, and wild convolvuli. The ground is broken by long, swelling ridges, which rise now and then into those rocky cliffs that formed the natural strength of the citadels and towns of ancient Latium. In the hollows wander streams fringed by green osiers. Solitary mediaeval towers are scattered here and there—remnants, for the most part, of the feuds of the Orsini and Colonna. Yonder a deserted castle occupies the site of an old Etruscan stronghold; there is a shepherd’s hut, built of reeds, such as Virgil describes. Afar, the great aqueducts, in giant arches, lead the eye to the violet beauty of the mountains which bound this strange, wild, glorious plain, where unnumbered armies have marched, where battles have been fought of which history has forgotten the very names, and where great cities have risen, flourished for a time, then fallen so utterly to decay that not even one stone upon another remains to tell where they stood in their

strength and beauty—alternately the friends and rivals of mighty Rome.

“I am never on the Campagna,” said Irène, “without thinking of that striking phrase of Madame de Staël, ‘*Cette terre fatiguée de gloire qui semble d’écarter de produire.*’ I am glad that it can not be cultivated. I should not like to see it other than it is.”

“If it were cultivated, Rome would lose an impressive setting,” said Waldegrave. “Nothing could be more appropriate to the Eternal City than this great plain with its ruins and tombs.”

“I believe,” said Colonel Bevis, “that we are in the neighborhood of the place where the battle between Constantine and Maxentius was fought.”

“We are very near it,” said Waldegrave. “This earth beneath our feet heard the thunder of the legions. If we had time to examine, we might find some of the red volcanic rock which gave its name to the battle-field.”*

“*In hoc signo vinces,*” said Irène, glancing up at the sky, as if expecting to see the fiery cross outlined there. “I should like to have been one of the legions that day.”

“You would have fought well,” said Colonel Bevis, regarding the clear, noble line of her profile, the quick radiance of her look. “There is warlike stuff in you.”

The radiance had not left her glance when she turned it on him. “Why do you say that?” she asked. “Have I betrayed any warlike taste?”

“You betray it all the time,” he answered. “Your eyes glow, your color rises at the mere name of some old battle; and, when you sing a song that tells of bloodshed and fighting, your voice has the ring of a trumpet. I’m sure that you would like to lead an army.”

“Perhaps I would,” she said, smiling. “But it should be an army inspired with some heroic purpose and ready for noble deeds. Bloodshed and fighting, in themselves, are terrible—but for a noble end they become glorious. If it were not for war, we should not know of what human nature is capable—what it can dare, endure, sacrifice.”

Colonel Bevis nodded approvingly. “I am glad to hear you talk so,” he said. “One grows sick of the cant about the millennium of peace which is to dawn upon the world. War has its horrors—who knows them better than a soldier?—but it has its glories too; and, in my opinion, the world will have lost rather than gained, when a man is not ready to drop the pursuit of wealth, to leave home and wife and child, to take up arms for the cause of his fatherland. For, ‘it is appointed unto all men once to die.’”

“And how should man die better
Than facing fearful odds,
For the ashes of his fathers
And the temples of his gods?”

said Irène quickly, with the ring in her voice of which he had spoken.

“If war had always a noble end,” said Waldegrave, “it would certainly be easy to face the death it might bring. But the end is often unworthy in the extreme—and the gloom of defeat has overtaken many a righteous cause. You might not always be able to twine laurels around the brows of your heroes,” he added, with a smile at Irène.

“They would be none the less heroes to me,” she replied. “Indeed, they would be more heroic, more worthy of love and reverence, in defeat than in triumph. If there is anything I desire it is to reach the soul of things—not their mere outer shell of

* Saxa Rubra.

appearance. And I have a peculiar sympathy for the defeated and unfortunate—provided that their cause was just and their shield stainless. Even in social life I do not care for people who are too prosperous. They are always a little—often greatly—hardened. The fineness of their sympathy is blunted. The world goes too well with them, for them to hear the sorrowful beating of other hearts, or to see a martyr in the victim of defeat and scorn.”

She had gone on speaking, without knowing where she would end; her voice had taken its deepest chord, her eyes were full of luster. It did not occur to her at the moment that Waldegrave might suppose that he was classed under the head of the too prosperous people.

“Those are very fine sentiments, my dear Miss Lescar,” said Colonel Bevis, “but a trifle unpractical. In this excellent world of ours we take off our hats to success.”

“I know that you do,” she answered, with a touch of scorn. “But I shall never make the world’s standard mine. I do not care to follow any triumphal chariot. I would rather stay with those who have fallen on the battle-field and bind up their wounds.”

One of the two men who were looking at her pale, beautiful face, her shining eyes, thought, with the quickness and intensity of a leaping flame, that he would be glad to be wounded if her hands would bind up his wounds. But there was no echo of this thought in his voice when he spoke.

“You have just said that you desire to reach the soul of things—and do you not see that the soul of heroism might as well be in the triumphal chariot as in the dust of the battle-field? It was Constantine, not Maxentius, who conquered here.”

“I remember,” she said; “but this is my feeling—the hero in the chariot has enough in his success, in the praise and honor of the world. I should like to bestow what is mine to give, on one who needs it more.”

“So we must be defeated in order to obtain your smiles,” said Colonel Bevis. “Yet I have never seen any one better fitted to grace a triumphal chariot than yourself.”

Waldegrave agreed with the speaker—yet felt a sense of irritation at the personal character of the speech. He was pleased that Irène did not answer it; she only said, as she slowly stroked the neck of her horse with a slender, gloved hand:

“I can sympathize with ambition; but the success which the world glorifies is often such a vulgar and ignoble thing that I have little sympathy with that. But now”—she looked at the Englishman with a smile—“do you not think that I might trot a little more? I shall never learn if I do not try.”

When they reached the villa of Livia they found that the rest of the party had been there for some time. The Marquis came forward quickly to dismount Irène before either of her attendants could do so. Mrs. Bevis observed his movement, and turned to Stanhope with a smile. “You are the only cavalier who does not fly to the service of the beautiful Miss Lescar,” she said.

“Miss Lescar is sufficiently attended,” he answered; but there was a shade of gravity on his face as he glanced from the Marquis to Waldegrave.

They explored the ruins, and descended into those lately excavated chambers which opened to the modern mind a wonderful revelation of the beauty which surrounded ancient Roman life, and the excellence of ancient Roman art. For here the frescoes glow with surpassing freshness, in tints as brilliant as if laid on yesterday—such an exquisite trellis-work of fruits and flowers, such delicate foliage of oleander, orange, and myrtle,

with birds of bright-hued plumage sporting among the branches, as fills the mind with the most delightful visions.

“It is incarnate summer—the summer of Italy,” said Irène, as she stood in the center of one of the chambers, holding up the folds of her habit and gazing round. She looked at M. de Châteaumesnil, who was near her. “It makes one think that the Empress Livia must have been a very charming person,” she said.

“She was charming enough to retain the affection of Augustus to the last,” he answered. “But it is not always a safe rule to argue from the decoration of a house to the character of its possessor.”

“Do you not think so? It seems to me that few things are more indicative of character. For instance, whoever chose this decoration must have loved nature—must have felt all the sweetness of its skies, of its trees, of its flowers and birds; and have you ever known a person of bad or petty character who felt and loved the influence of these things?”

He smiled. “I am not sure,” he said. “The answer to that question would require consideration—though in a broad sense I am inclined to think that you are right. But the paintings of this villa were probably done by order of the Emperor, and may be read as a token of his great and tender love.”

“That gives them added beauty,” she said, looking round again with soft, bright eagerness. “They ought to be imperishable—like the love which has come down to us, a wafted sweetness from that far-off time.”

What was there in this girl’s voice which seemed to impart such deep and exquisite meaning to her simplest words? The Marquis was a man of the world, but he was also a man of refined nature, and he felt, when listening to her, like one who looks into an ideal world full of images as beautiful as those pictured on the walls before them.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Falconer, finding herself alone in one of the chambers with Stanhope, said to him, “What is the matter, that you look so grave?”

“Am I looking grave?” he asked.

“Not enough so to attract the attention of others,” she answered, “but I know your face. Is it about Irène?”

“Yes.” He paused—then after a moment went on: “I do not like this association with Count Waldegrave; and still less do I like his evident interest in her.”

“But it is natural,” she said. “Who could fail to be interested in one so attractive?”

He looked at her with sudden keenness. She was trifling with the tassel of her riding-whip, and, if her words had any deeper meaning than appeared, there was no sign of it in her face. She met his gaze quietly, and added:

“We should not wonder if others are conscious of the charm that both you and I have felt.”

“Ah,” he said, “but I fear a different kind of interest from yours and mine; and I perceive signs of it in Count Waldegrave which make me think that the time has come when I must tell him who she is.”

“I am sorry. She will dislike it.”

“That can not be helped. Their position toward each other is a false one, so far as he is concerned. It is not right that he should be kept in ignorance of the truth.”

“Would it not be better for us to leave Rome? I am willing to do so.”

He shook his head. "No. Who could guard against another meeting elsewhere? I think that his interest is deeper than he is himself aware, and that the sooner he is made acquainted with the existence of the barrier between Irène and himself, the better."

"You do not think," she said, quickly, "that he would desire to marry her?"

Stanhope shrugged his shoulders. "How can I tell? Who can answer for the folly of a man in love?—and this man is in love, though probably he does not know it."

"What a strange caprice of fate their meeting has been!" said Mrs. Falconer. "But pray wait a little—pray do not be precipitate! He may only admire her, as every one does and must."

Again he glanced at her.

"Do you know," he said, "it strikes me, as it often has struck me before, how few women there are who in your position would care to be to this girl what you have been and are?"

"Why not?" she asked. "Ought I to be afraid of being overshadowed? But you see I am too certain of my own charm—that golden charm which is never eclipsed save by one more golden."

"Do you think that you are just to your friends when you speak in that manner?" he asked, in a low tone.

"It is not unjust to state a manifest fact," she answered, calmly. "The consciousness that my wealth is my chief claim to consideration does not make me cynical or bitter. I flatter myself I am too much a woman of the world for that. I accept the fact with composure and philosophy. I fancy that it is only very vain people who resent being valued for what they possess rather than for what they are. I used to be vain enough to believe that I had something in myself apart from my wealth—something which might win for me affection and esteem. But I have learned otherwise, since even my friends think that I can do no better, expect no more, than to strike a bargain and exchange my wealth for rank."

She spoke without the faintest excitement, the least trace of bitterness; but her very quietness cut Stanhope like a sword. He had literally not a word to reply; and, indeed, with the entrance of the rest of the party a moment later, he lost the opportunity to reply at all.

CHAPTER XV.

It is doubtful if Stanhope had ever in his life been more moved than by Mrs. Falconer's words. They rang in his ears like the voice of an accusing angel. If there had been an accent of reproach in them he might have defended himself better from the self-reproach he felt; but her calm acceptance of what she called "a manifest fact"—that her friends held her fortune of more account than herself—had a confounding effect upon him. She was so reasonable that it had never occurred to him that she would misinterpret his motive in advocating a brilliant marriage for her, or draw the conclusion that he considered her not worthy of the highest love and honor. But now he began to ask himself if she was not justified in such an inference. Had he not, in his determination to ignore his own feelings—to put them entirely aside—rushed fiercely to the extreme of deciding what would be best for her? Was there not something of presumption in his positive and oft-repeated opinion that her ambition demanded a field which only a great

marriage would give? A certain emphasis was lent to this questioning by his recent realization of the motives of M. de Châteaumesnil. Since it had been made clear to him that the Marquis was simply intent upon making a *mariage de convenance*, he had endeavored to console himself, to silence his sense of indignation by thinking that, after all, such a marriage might suit Mrs. Falconer better than another, and that at least she was a free agent in accepting it. But now these consolatory reflections seemed to vanish and leave him face to face with the fact that this woman, with all her capabilities for giving and receiving happiness, was about to enter into a worldly contract with which hearts have naught to do.

He found time for these meditations after his return to Rome. He had shaken off the society of the Marquis and gone out alone. Having dined at a café where he met no one whom he knew, he strolled into the streets and almost unconsciously took his way toward the heart of ancient Rome. There was no moon—at least, there was no moonlight—but the sky was of a soft, velvety purple, like the petal of a pansy, out of which the stars shone great and glorious in golden beauty. As he passed along, many pictures met his eye which at another time would have interested and delighted him. Now it was the arched *portone* of some stately palace which gave a glimpse of the spacious court within, where the musical splash of falling water was heard—that sound which pervades Rome—and where there was a glimpse of lofty columns, sculptured heads, and armorial bearings. Then came the entrance of some deep, narrow street, spanned by a feudal arch from under which a cavalier of the middle ages might have emerged. Next, with the sound of laughter and the tinkling of a musical instrument, a wine-shop threw a flood of crimson light across the way, revealing a scene of Rembrandt lights and shades. Here was a piazza filled with the cheerful tread of feet, the roll of passing carriages, the glare of brilliant windows. Yonder a campanile lifted its graceful outlines against the wonderful sky; there the rich drapery over the door of a church showed that the devotion of the Forty Hours was being celebrated within, and as some hand drew back the leathern curtain there was a glimpse through a vista of pillars of the high altar ablaze with light.

A strange contrast to these scenes the Forum presented when he reached it—a picture of death in the midst of life. The starlight filled the great open space with a mild radiance which made sufficiently clear the fragments of ruin with which it is strewn, and the groups of delicate columns that stand in mournful, isolated beauty. The lamps along the roadway shone like terrestrial stars, while above them the somber Palatine lifted its dark crown of pines and cypresses. Turning toward the west, Stanhope saw hanging over the roofs and towers of Rome the golden crescent of the moon in her first quarter—a young queen of night just stepped upon her throne, whence she would soon rule the whole vast firmament, and quench with her light the myriad stars that now, “like patines of bright gold,” embroidered the sky.

It was a place and a time to wake all the poetry of any nature not wholly commonplace. And generally no one would have been quicker than Stanhope to be thrilled by the associations and the beauty of the scene. But to-night a strong personal emotion had laid its hold upon him, and, for once, he was comparatively insensible to the most august memories, the most beautiful effects. He descended into the excavated space, and, taking his way carefully among the confusion of fallen shafts and scattered blocks of marble, reached the solitary column of Phocas, and sat down on its no-longer-buried base. Here, with quiet all around him, and the serene glory of heaven above, he felt able

to confront a knowledge which he had long endeavored to hide from himself.

Yes, he loved her. There could not be a doubt of that. The mask of friendship could no longer conceal the face of love. He had flattered himself that he was impervious to this passion which made fools of other men, that what he felt was only the most sympathetic friendship, the most admiring affection; but he knew now that he had deceived himself, and that the winged arrow was buried in his heart. She had said that he did not think her worthy of love, and all the time he was offering her a devotion the greater in that it asked for no return. For he clearly regarded and accepted the position—the fact that her wealth made an obstacle he could never overcome. To go to this woman, dowered like a princess, and say, “I love you, but I have nothing to offer besides my heart and an obscure name,” was something from which every instinct of pride revolted. And, moreover, he had no reason to change his opinion that she was fitted for a great position, a social rank of assured power. He knew her so well—no one else could ever know her as well, he thought, with a pang—that he appreciated all her capabilities for filling such a position, all that she would be to a man whose life she would consent to share, whose career she would aid. But, then, that man should give her the devotion that she deserved. He should think less of her splendid fortune than of herself. His eyes should not leave her to wander toward any rare, brilliant creature like Irène.

He rose suddenly to his feet. He remembered how De Châteaumesnil had looked, had spoken, as he rode by Irène’s side that afternoon. “If I had known!” he said, taking off his hat to a soft breeze that came wandering by. “I believe that but for my influence she would not have entertained his suit—and what if in my blind presumption I have induced her to wreck her life a second time?—It shall not be! I will tell him—” He paused. “What can I tell him? He has spoken: she has promised to answer. There is nothing more to be said. But if—but if—” He looked up at the great constellations burning so steadily overhead. “Ah, madness and folly! If I could grasp one of those shining stars, would it be well with me? The star would not be content down here; and I—feeling that I had plucked it from where it should have shone—I should be miserable! No man can possess self-respect who, without some brilliant counterbalancing advantage, seeks to marry a woman of great fortune. No—she must marry a man of high rank—I have always felt that—but I hope now that it may not be De Châteaumesnil.”

While Stanhope thus communed with himself in the Forum, and derived little comfort therefrom, Mrs. Falconer, stepping out on the balcony of her salon, called Irène to come and look at the new moon.

The girl went out, letting the soft drapery of the window fall behind her, and stood for a moment motionless. The beauty of the night penetrated her like a charm. The flowers with which the balcony was filled were exhaling their fragrance on the air. The city lay at her feet, a mass of shadow, braided with lines of light, here and there sharp silhouettes of roofs and towers cut against the sky, which seemed to throb with the glory of its myriad stars, while afar toward St. Peter’s the moon was lying like a fairy boat in the great infinity of purple ether.

“Is it not beautiful?” said Mrs. Falconer.

“Oh, it is more than that,” answered Irène. She advanced and stood by the balustrade, looking out over the scene. “It is so exquisite that it hushes speech. It is like a great church full of the thought of God. That is the Paschal moon,” she added, softly.

“Yes, Easter is not far off,” answered Mrs. Falconer. “Next Sunday is Passion-

Sunday. And you know that during the last two weeks of Lent nothing social goes on in Rome. I am not sorry. It will give one time to draw breath—to think. One has need to think now and then,” she said, dropping her voice a little.

They were both silent for some time. Then Mrs. Falconer said: “Let us sit down. Night is a good time for confidence. And I have something to say—something, also, to ask.”

There was a light chair in a nook of the balcony, on which she sat, while Irène knelt on a silk cushion near her feet, and, leaning against the balustrade, still looked on the picture of city and sky. Several minutes passed, and then Mrs. Falconer said:

“Are you not tired? That was a long ride this afternoon for your first.”

“Yes, I suppose I am tired,” Irène answered, “but I do not feel it now. It is delightful to be here alone with you and the night. I am glad you told Antonio to deny you to any one who called.”

“I, too, am tired a little. It has been some time since I rode before. And one needs practice in such exercise. Did you enjoy it?”

“I found the instruction—the attempt to do something which I did not understand—fatiguing at first. But the rest at the villa refreshed me, and on our return I felt more at ease in the saddle.”

“And perhaps you found M. de Châteaumesnil a pleasanter instructor than Colonel Bevis.”

“I did,” answered the girl, frankly. “There was a grace even in his mode of instructing. How true it is that there is a pleasant and an unpleasant way to do everything! M. de Châteaumesnil’s way is always pleasant.”

“He is very charming,” said Mrs. Falconer, half absently. Then she roused herself, and laughed softly. “Perhaps you will be surprised,” she said, “that I am hesitating whether or not to marry him.”

“Are you?” asked Irène, in a tone of quick interest. She looked up, and by the starlight tried to read the face above her, but the obscurity baffled the attempt. Her voice changed when she spoke again. “No,” she said. “I am not surprised. However charming a man may be as an acquaintance, a woman *must* hesitate when it is a question of uniting her life to his. Indeed, it seems to me that he would cease to be charming when he tried to draw so near to one.”

“Is that your feeling?” asked Mrs. Falconer. “But you know that if one lives in the world one must face this question of marriage. The world will not let one alone,” she said, with a slight accent of impatience. “People will not realize that one may wish to be free, that one may enjoy freedom. And if one has a large fortune, then there is no peace—suitors come in multitudes; each of those whom one calls one’s friends has a candidate to propose. It becomes very wearying at last.”

“But you are not a person to do a thing because your friends wish you to do it,” said Irène. She was still on her knees, but she had turned away from the city and sky to look eagerly into the face that only showed its outlines and kept its expression like a secret veiled by the night. “You are proud and steadfast, and able to stand alone. What right has any one to dictate what is best for your life?”

“No right, certainly,” said the other; “but friendship has some privileges, and to offer advice is held to be one of them. I do not hear a great deal, because I am rich—and it is one of the advantages of riches that people do not presume to offer one advice. But

there are a few people who speak to me freely, and the burden of their counsel is the same—make a brilliant marriage, use your wealth to purchase higher rank, more assured position.”

“But you do not mean to heed them?” cried the girl, with a quiver of indignation in her voice.

“Not exactly,” answered Mrs. Falconer. “I would not entertain the suit of a prince if his personal character did not command my liking and respect. But, after all, there are other things in life besides love, and when one has been cheated—”

“But because one has been cheated by base metal, one does not doubt the existence of gold,” said the proud young voice.

“Does one not?” was the slightly sad reply. “One is at least inclined to do so. And, as I have said, the passion which plays so large a part in novels really plays a very small part in actual life. There are many other things to be considered. One must think of one’s future—to grow old alone will be melancholy. Another thing which is melancholy is to have no great controlling interest in life. What is mine? To amuse myself, to enjoy society, to draw around me cultivated and delightful people. But I should enjoy all this more if I felt that I was directing it to some end—and that end the ambition of a man whom I admire.”

“I can imagine that,” said Irène, musingly. “That would be noble—to merge one’s self in a great career—but could one do it if one did not love the man?”

“I thought that you did not believe in love,” said the other, looking down at her and trying in turn to read the starlit countenance. “I thought that you repelled the idea of such a thing?”

“So I do—for myself,” was the calm reply, “because I should like to be always free, and whoever loves another deeply is not free but bound. It is in the power of that other to render you happy or miserable, to make or mar your life. Now I”—she lifted her head—“wish to hold my life in my own hand. But why do I speak of myself? I told you once before what I feel on this subject. We are talking of yourself. Could you merge your life in that of another if you cared nothing for him?”

“Certainly not if I cared nothing. But there are many degrees of caring short of passion. Here is the Marquis de Châteaumesnil: can you not fancy that a woman might find pleasure in aiding his career, in opening, perhaps, a field for his ambition?”

“Yes, if she loved him, I can imagine no higher pleasure.”

“We are not talking of love,” said Mrs. Falconer, impatiently. “Put it out of your mind. You have heard of *mariage de convenance*—it is that I shall make if I marry the Marquis. He offers me the distinction of high rank. I can give him wealth, sympathy, aid.”

“And is the distinction of rank all that he offers you?” asked Irène, with a vibrating thrill in her tone. “If so, I can only say this: I am poor, I am almost nameless; but if the Marquis de Châteaumesnil, or any other man on earth, came and offered me his rank and not his heart, I should tell him that I was far too proud to accept it—that I knew myself worthy of love, and would have that or nothing!”

Even in the starlight the flash of her eyes could be seen, and the ring of her voice had in it something magnetic. Mrs. Falconer caught her hand and held it firmly.

“But remember,” she said, “that I have no love for him. When a man offers a heart, he wishes a heart in return.”

“And would marriage be other than a hideous mockery, unless one’s heart—and all one’s heart—were in it?” asked the girl. “Perhaps I am what worldly people call romantic, but I can only judge by my own feelings. And when I look at you—you so worthy of love—I can not believe that you think of this desecration. There is one person who I am sure will agree with me. Does Mr. Stanhope know what you think of doing?”

Involuntarily Mrs. Falconer drew her hand back. Irène could not perceive whether her face altered, but her voice had altogether changed—it was cooler and harder—when she said:

“Mr. Stanhope not only knows, but he is one of the friends, of whom I spoke a moment ago, who urge me to accept M. de Châteaumesnil.”

“Mr. Stanhope!” repeated Irène in an amazed voice. “Can you be in earnest? Forgive me, but I have always been sure that he loves you himself.”

“Many people have thought so because we are such good friends,” said Mrs. Falconer, in the same tone; “but it is a mistake. Mr. Stanhope is not a man who will ever love, in the sense of exclusive passion; and he certainly is not a man who will ever think of marrying, for he does not wish to place any fetter upon his life. Besides, you forget, what *he* never forgets, that I am very rich, therefore I must make a great marriage.”

“On the contrary, because you are so rich, it seems to me that you are free to do what you will,” said Irène, almost hotly; “that there is no reason why you should sacrifice yourself in a *mariage de convenance*.”

“Does it seem to you a sacrifice? I thought that you admired M. de Châteaumesnil very much.”

“So I do; and if you cared for him and he adored you—for a man ought to love much more than a woman—I should be glad to see you Madame la Marquise. But not even M. de Châteaumesnil is worthy of you unless he brings his heart, as well as his name and rank, to lay at your feet.”

“Men like the Marquis de Châteaumesnil have not often a heart left by the time they have reached his age,” said Mrs. Falconer. “Nothing wears out all freshness of emotion like a life of pleasure. One should not expect more than a man can give.”

“But you have a right not only to expect but to demand all that a man can give,” said Irène, with the proud accent that had been in her voice before. “I like the Marquis, and I admire even more than I like him. He seems made for the court of a king; but were he a king himself I should still say to you: Wait! Life must hold many chances for one so young, so beautiful, so rich as you are. It must be that at last the hour and the man will come.”

“I do not think so,” said Mrs. Falconer. “One does not readily recover from such a disappointment as I had in my marriage. I thought then that I should never believe in, never expect anything from, a man again. Such a revelation of coldness and hardness, of selfishness and self-indulgence, was enough to turn a woman’s heart to stone.”

“But are all men like that?”

“All men are not, but the vast majority are. Whether it is ambition, or self-indulgence, or pride, they are alike selfish in it. I have never seen a man who thought more of another than of himself. Therefore, it is useless to hope for the impossible; and if anything is to be gained by a *mariage de convenance*, why should one not make it? At least, it will be frank and open this time. There will be no pretense of devotion offered or required.”

Irène did not answer. She was indeed struck dumb by this calm cynicism. She could not tell how the woman's heart and pride were writhing under it—how her mood was that which finds pleasure in a desperate deed. Had the Marquis de Châteaumesnil been there at that moment, she would probably have held out her hand and said, "I will marry you."

There was silence for some time; then Mrs. Falconer said: "I did not mean to talk so much about myself. I meant to speak of—other things. Do you know"—she hesitated—"I am a little troubled by the association into which we have drifted with Count Waldegrave?"

"What is there to be troubled about?" asked Irène—and now it was her voice that changed—"have we drifted into any association with him? It seems to me that we have only met him now and then, when it has been impossible to avoid doing so."

This was true, and Mrs. Falconer paused. There was apparently nothing more to say. Yet she felt that something more must be said. After a moment she asked:

"What do you think of him on further acquaintance?"

"I have thought of him as little as possible," was the reply. "His presence wakes such bitter recollection, that I try to ignore it. Yet I wish to be just, and if one could conceive him other than he is—I mean, with another name, another birth—I might think him not a disagreeable person."

"That is surely damning him with faint praise," said Mrs. Falconer, smiling.

"It is high praise—from *me*, of *him*," said Irène.

Then there was silence again, during which Mrs. Falconer nerved herself to say:

"I am afraid you will be sorry to hear that Mr. Stanhope thinks Count Waldegrave should be told who you are."

"What!" cried Irène, in a sharp, quick tone. She lifted herself suddenly to an erect position, like one who hears a sound of danger. "If Mr. Stanhope does that, I will never forgive him!" she said, passionately. "I will tell him so; I will not permit it. The matter is my affair. He has no right to interfere."

She uttered these sentences with proud impetuosity. Her whole nature was in arms. At that moment nothing seemed to her so intolerable as that Waldegrave should know the truth.

"My dear," said Mrs. Falconer, quietly, "I think that you forget that Mr. Stanhope has every right to interfere—indeed, he has more than a right. He has an obligation to do so."

"He has nothing of the kind," said Irène, still passionate and proud. "This is something which does not belong to his province. It is *I* who have a right to say what shall or shall not be done in a matter which affects myself alone."

"The question is," said the other, "does it affect yourself alone?"

"Whom else could it affect?" she asked, haughtily.

"Is it possible you do not see that it affects Count Waldegrave? His interest in you has been evident from the first—and it is also evident that it increases. Is it, therefore, honorable to leave him in ignorance on such a point as this?"

"What right has he, or any one of his name, to expect any consideration from me?"

"Such a question is not like you. It is not what others have a right to expect from us that we are to think of, so much as what is worthy of one's self."

“And why is this not worthy of me?”

“Because no concealment is worthy of a noble nature; and because, if you will look closely into your motives, you will find, I am sure, that they are not worthy. Answer me one question: Do you think that your mother would approve of your course?”

Irène was silent for a moment. She was apparently struggling with herself; and when she finally spoke, it was to say in a tone of bitterness:

“What have I told you before? My mother was an angel. But I am not like her. You can not expect me to be like her, when you remember who is my father.”

“But I do expect it,” said Mrs. Falconer. “You have her example, and, if there is greater strength of passion in your nature than there was in hers, that strength can be turned to good as well as evil. Indeed, all your future depends upon how you use it.”

Irène could almost have fancied it was her mother who spoke—but to rouse that association, in order to overcome her bitterness toward Waldegrave, was like fighting fire with fire. It remained to be seen which would prove strongest, love or hatred. Just now it was hatred which seemed in the ascendant.

“If fate has forced into my hand a weapon, am I to blame?” she asked, presently. “I have done nothing. I have never given Count Waldegrave a kind look, hardly a civil word. But if he laid his heart down at my feet I should not be sorry—I should put my foot on it and say, ‘So my mother’s fared!’”

“Irène!” exclaimed Mrs. Falconer, startled and shocked. “I would not have believed this! My child, you are ruining your nature. Do you not know that the harm you may do others is as nothing compared to the harm you are doing yourself?”

“Am I?” said the girl, wearily. She rose and stood for a moment with her tall, graceful figure outlined against the starry softness of the sky. Then she bent suddenly and left a light caress on her companion’s cheek. “Do not let us talk of this,” she said. “I can only struggle and pray. Good-night.”

CHAPTER XVI.

“It is as you feared,” said Mrs. Falconer the next time that she saw Stanhope. “Irène has perceived Count Waldegrave’s admiration, and, although she is too proud to take one step to encourage it, she is evidently entertaining the thought of some dramatic *finale* when he will lay his heart at her feet and she will put her foot upon it and say that ‘so her mother’s fared!’”

Stanhope frowned impatiently. The result of being in pain one’s self is not always to make one more sympathetic with another’s pain.

“The girl is mad,” he said. “She has brooded over one thought until it has almost taken the form of a mania. Since her devotion to her mother is so great, it is a pity she would not recall her counsels—especially her dying request. But nothing is, happily, more unlikely than that Count Waldegrave will lay his heart at her feet.”

“I thought you fancied that there was danger of it,” said Mrs. Falconer.

“There is danger, but not probability. However much he may be attracted by her—and he is evidently very much attracted—he is not likely to forget what is demanded of a man in his position; he is not likely to do more than admire a nameless, portionless American girl.”

“I remember expressing that opinion once, and you spoke of the marriage of his

uncle. But I thought then of the great difference between Irène's position and that of her mother."

"You were right—there is a decided difference. Madame Lescar was not only a great heiress and a famous beauty, but she was the daughter of one of the most distinguished of American statesmen. It was no very unequal marriage for him who was Count Waldegrave in those days. But her daughter is to all intents and purposes nobody."

"There I think you are mistaken. A person so beautiful and interesting makes a rank for herself."

He shook his head. "*You* are mistaken. Her rare gifts would only draw attention to the fact that she has no rank if you did not throw the mantle of your protection around her. But, although her social position would prevent Count Waldegrave from thinking of marrying her, it does not prevent him from finding her very attractive; therefore, since I do not hold him accountable for his uncle's wrong-doing, I think it right that he should know who she is. I will speak to her and frankly tell her so."

"I can see no good that your speaking to her will effect. She is not to be influenced on this point, however docile she may be in other matters."

"I shall not attempt to influence her," he said, quietly. "I shall simply tell her what I mean to do."

"Here is your opportunity, then," said Mrs. Falconer—"for yonder she comes."

Stanhope turned. She was coming down the long suite of apartments, and he was struck afresh by the grace of her bearing, by the manner in which the spacious rooms and lofty ceilings, the wide doorways hung with Oriental stuffs, the great spaces filled with mirrors, seemed fit surroundings for her noble beauty. "She was certainly born to be a princess!" he said to himself as he advanced to meet her.

She gave him her hand and said, "I heard that you were here, so I thought I should like to speak to you—if you have no objection."

"Could I possibly have an objection?" he answered, smiling. "And, as it chances, I was just remarking that I wished to speak to you."

She looked at him with a flash of intuition, as she sat down in a chair that he drew forward. "Perhaps we both have the same thing on our minds," she said. "Mrs. Falconer has told me that you are about to do something to which I have a right to object. You are thinking of telling Count Waldegrave who I am—is it not so?"

"Yes," he answered, "I am thinking of telling him—because I believe it is the right thing to do; because I feel that he should know the true position in which you stand to one another."

"We stand in the position of mere acquaintances," she said, "and no revelation of yours could make us stand in any other. But I am not a child, Mr. Stanhope—I must insist that my wishes be regarded in this matter—and I do not wish him to be told anything concerning me."

"If you are not speaking as a child," said Stanhope, "you must have a reason for such a wish. What is it?"

A tide of color suffused her face, then left it white as marble. "Do you need to ask what it is?" she said, in a low tone. "There is no one in the world who should know the truth if I could help it. But, above all, not he—not any one belonging to the man who has cast—"

She suddenly paused and put her hand to her throat as if she were choking—a

gesture which reminded Mrs. Falconer of the day she first mentioned Count Waldegrave's name to her. But her eyes did not lose their proud luster, and after a moment she went on:

"It is not as if any end were to be gained by the revelation. What right has Count Waldegrave to know anything of me? What possible reason have you, Mr. Stanhope, for desiring to tell him?"

Stanhope hesitated an instant, then answered:

"Concealments are not only dishonorable—they are almost always unwise."

"But," said Irène, quickly, "how can concealment be dishonorable, when a person from whom a matter is concealed has no claim to know it?"

"Let us then say only that it is unwise. Chance may at any time reveal to Count Waldegrave who you are—when the fact that the truth has been withheld from him will look very badly."

"How is that possible," she insisted, "when I have made no false pretenses? I bear my own name—my mother's name. I repeat that he, of all people, has no right to know anything more about me."

Stanhope felt that he had no alternative but to speak plainly.

"He has a right," he said, "when through ignorance he is being led into an interest which you must recognize."

Her lip curled in haughty scorn. "What then?" she asked. "Is his interest of so much importance that you should rush to put him on his guard and say to him that I am his uncle's disowned daughter? If you do, Mr. Stanhope"—she rose, pale and looking like a queen in her anger—"I can only say that I will never forgive it, never as long as I live!"

She quitted the room as she uttered the last word, leaving Stanhope and Mrs. Falconer looking at one another. The latter spoke first:

"Are you much surprised? I told you how she felt on this subject."

"I can hardly say that I am surprised at all," he replied, calmly. "Her mother's warning is verified. But that does not alter my intention to do what is right."

"You still intend to tell Count Waldegrave who she is?"

"Undoubtedly—as soon as chance affords me a good opportunity. I do not think that the matter is, as yet, of so much importance that I should make a formal visit in order to communicate it to him."

She reflected for a moment; then said: "If you will wait a little, I can promise you a good opportunity. After Easter we shall make some excursions to the hills, and probably Count Waldegrave will be of the party—at least, one can easily arrange that he shall be. In the mean time, it is not likely that he will see Irène. I mean to discontinue my receptions during the two coming weeks, and make a kind of retreat. It is not necessary to enter a convent for the purpose. One need only close one's doors."

"I hope you do not mean to close them in the faces of all your friends," said he.

She looked at him with a faint smile. "You know that they are never closed in *yours*," she said. "But I confess that I should like to close them to every one else."

"Even"—he hesitated a moment—"to M. de Châteaumesnil?"

"To M. de Châteaumesnil most of all," she replied; "because, as you are probably aware, I have promised to answer him, and I am not yet decided what my answer shall be. His presence, therefore, though he is the most considerate of suitors, is like a reproach to

my delay.”

She paused, and Stanhope did not speak. He was, in truth, struggling with a mighty temptation—the temptation to beg her not to throw away her life in a loveless marriage; to tell her that one heart, at least, was passionately devoted to her. But this seemed to him like disloyalty, almost like treachery, to his friend; and while he struggled, doubted, well-nigh yielded, she rose abruptly from her chair.

“Do not think that I mean to ask your advice,” she said. “I am well aware that one must decide for one’s self in a matter of this kind. Come, now, and tell me what you think of a picture which I bought yesterday. I had not Lionel to assist me in the purchase, for you know that he has gone with some artist friends to the hills—so I do not know whether or not I have been cheated.”

To answer for others is not often safe; but to answer for that chance which depends on the accidents of life is most conspicuously unsafe. Mrs. Falconer had said that it was not likely that Count Waldegrave would see Irène again until it should please herself to allow a meeting; but the perverse fate which had presided over their meetings from the first stepped in, and brought them face to face in St. John Lateran on Palm-Sunday.

Accompanied by Mrs. Vance, Irène went there for high mass; but, apart from the great dignity and historic renown of the Lateran, the beautiful singing of its choir always attracts a crowd; so they found, on their arrival, a throng already gathered around the tribune. The impregnable English—chiefly represented by women in seal-skin jackets, who plant their camp-stools with an air of taking a redoubt—were established many file deep. An American gentleman, however, courteously surrendered to Mrs. Vance one of the few available seats, and Irène contentedly knelt down behind her on the marble pavement, near one of the great pillars. They had not long to wait until the celebrant with his train of acolytes appeared before the altar, the canons in their purple robes and white capes filed into their stalls, and the solemn mass of Palm-Sunday began.

If it is impressive everywhere—even in the humblest chapel of the New World—what was it in this august basilica, the Pope’s cathedral, the “Mother and Head of all Churches,”* with its host of glorious memories? When the ceremony of blessing the palms was over, and the procession bearing them moved down the grand nave to the magnificent anthems which tell how “The Hebrew children carrying palm-branches met our Lord, crying out and saying, ‘Hosanna in the highest!’ The Hebrew children spread their garments in the way and cried out, saying, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord!’”—Irène felt as if the great Lateran walls expanded in direct vista to Jerusalem, where the multitude went forth to meet the King who came to mount his awful throne of love. The solemn vastness of the church, spreading on all sides into dim obscurity, made a noble background for the stately forms, the robes of splendid colors, the starry lights, the clouds of incense, the massive golden cross borne aloft as a standard. From tomb and chapel and shrine, the ages that had passed—and in passing witnessed how many repetitions of this scene!—seemed looking on with the steadfast calm of eternity, while the silver voices rang through nave and aisle and transept, telling the old, old story in a series of strophes which increase in beauty until they cry with inspired fervor, “In faith we be united with the angels, and those

* The ancient west front of the Lateran bears the inscription, “*Sacrosancta Lateranensis ecclesia omnium urbis et orbis ecclesiarum mater et caput.*”

children crying to the triumpher over death, ‘Hosanna in the highest!’”

Far and yet farther these voices recede. The procession grows indistinguishable to the sight—then disappears. It has passed into the great portico, and when it returns it finds the doors closed, to represent how heaven’s gates were barred against lost man. A semi-chorus within sings the first two verses of the hymn, “Gloria, laus, et honor,” and the full chorus replies from without—sounds that seem infinitely remote and of the most solemn pathos. At the conclusion, the sub-deacon strikes the door with the staff of the cross which he bears, to denote that through the redemption of the cross the gates of heaven were unbarred. Then the doors are thrown open and the procession enters, the chorus with a burst of harmony recounting the final entry of our Lord’s triumphal procession into the holy city.

Irène felt herself thrilled in every fiber. Past and present seemed merged for her into one glorious whole. It was a splendid burst of color, as well as of harmony, which the opening of those massive doors revealed. A vision of blue bills and tender sky, far away, threw out the gleaming robes, the burnished cross, all the majestic form of homage which man has been offering to God in this old sanctuary of faith for fifteen centuries. She looked at the procession advancing, with its standard borne in front, its palms, the emblems of victory; its glad, jubilant song—and then she glanced up to where, over the arch of the tribune, a grand mosaic bead of our Lord, attributed to the time of Constantine, and evidently of the fourth century, looks down. Around it are the six-winged seraphim; afar, the New Jerusalem, the entrance into which this mysterious procession typified, as did that other procession of eighteen centuries ago.

The long train having re-entered the sanctuary, the canons being again in their stalls, the celebrant, with his attendants, before the altar, the mass proceeded. On this day the entire history of the Passion forms a part of it, and was chanted by three voices of exquisite beauty. The one which sustained the narrative was a tenor of rare sweetness; the words of our Saviour were given in a deep, rich bass, and those of any other persons in a high contralto. No music could be worthy of such a theme save that in which it was sung—the noble, simple chant born of Catholic worship, and belonging essentially to it. The voices carried a penetrating sense of what they expressed, even to those who did not follow the text. Long as it is, monotonous as it might have seemed, not a movement was heard in all the throng while the touching cadences rose and fell in the sorrowful history given by St. Matthew.

As Irène leaned against the pillar, in her black draperies, her eye fastened on the spot in the sanctuary whence the voices proceeded, she seemed to Waldegrave, who stood near, but on whom as yet her glance had not fallen, to be absorbed in listening. In truth, her thoughts were taking a wide sweep. She heard the shouts of the Jewish multitude, she saw the temporizing Roman governor, the indifferent Roman soldiers, the divine figure of the Victim, beaten with many stripes and crowned with thorns, bearing his cross to the height of Calvary. And then she saw how, in all ages, this tragedy has been repeated—how, in the person of his Church, of his faithful servants, of his vicar, Christ is continually being led forth by a furious rabble to be crucified afresh, while the temporizing or indifferent world looks on. Certain words of solemn warning recurred to her: “The servant is not greater than his master. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.”

She had forgotten possible weariness in these thoughts, when her drapery was

lightly touched, and she turned, to see Waldegrave standing by her with a camp-stool in his hand.

“I have been watching you for some time,” he said, in a low tone, “and I am sure you must be very tired. Will you not take this and sit down?”

“Thank you; but I am not tired,” she answered. “I will not deprive you—”

“You will not be depriving me,” he interposed. “I do not use such a seat. I thought you looked weary, so I obtained it for you.”

After this it was impossible to refuse, and Irène sat down. She was conscious that Waldegrave stood by her, leaning against the pillar as she had done before. Once she looked toward him. He was standing like a statue, with that absolute quietude which is rightly held to belong to high-breeding, yet which is rare, even in the most high-bred. And, as he stood uncovered, the hand which held his hat hanging by his side, it struck her suddenly, with the force of a new discovery, that he was a singularly handsome man. But it was a severe type of beauty—clear-cut, pale, and cold. The broad, perpendicular brow expressed intellectual force; the deep eyes had a penetrating power that seemed made to find Truth at the bottom of her deepest well; while the mouth and chin, if fit for Antinous, were also without a trace of softening weakness. He looked like one on whom Nature had set her seal of ruler, but set it with so much nobility and loftiness that it was impossible to imagine him descending to anything petty or base. Involuntarily Irène found herself thinking, “Would he use his strength to crush a woman if she stood in the path of his ambition?”

But it was only for a moment that glance or thought lasted. She quickly turned both her eyes and mind away. The long Gospel was now ending, and the solemn part of the mass commencing. Not until all was over, and she rose from her knees, did she look toward Waldegrave again. Then, when she turned to thank him for the seat he had provided, he quietly joined Mrs. Vance and herself as they walked down the nave, instead of following the greater part of the crowd in their exit by the transept. Near the door they met the gentleman—a well-known acquaintance—who had surrendered his seat to Mrs. Vance, and they emerged together into the portico, where the warm, soft air met them like a caress, and the tender beauty of the spring day burst upon them with a sense of freshly revealed charm.

There are many beautiful views to be seen in the seven-hilled city, many a majestic picture to be imprinted on the mind and heart, but among them all there is none more glorious than this view from the great west front of the Lateran. Immediately before it is that open grassy sweep which was the favorite promenade of the mediaeval popes during the thousand years of their residence in the old palace of the Lateran. What sumptuous pictures of those warlike and heroic ages this space recalls! The sunlight, which lies so quietly on the green turf and the long avenue of mulberry-trees stretching away to Santa Croce, has lit up glancing steel and floating banners, splendid processions flashing with light and color, as emperors, kings, ambassadors, and prelates came hither in state, when all nations owned a Father and an Arbiter in the Vicar of Christ. Five general councils have met here and passed into the basilica to deliberate on questions as wide as the world and stretching beyond the world into eternity. Here St. Francis, coming from Assisi to obtain permission to found the great Franciscan order, flung himself at the feet of Innocent III; and in this church he met St. Dominic for the first time. Here treachery opened the Lateran gate to Henry IV of Germany, after a siege of three

years; and here Robert Guiscard, with his mailed chivalry at his back, came to punish the venal city with fire and sword. Here Gregory VII lifted up his voice for the last time in public, in the council convoked to denounce these outrages—that voice which was to say in dying, “I have loved justice and hated iniquity; therefore I die in exile.” And to whom the majestic reply was uttered, “Because God has given thee the heathen for thine inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession, Vicar of Christ, in exile thou canst not die.”

Such are the memories which in this spot crowd upon the mind. And meanwhile the world has no lovelier picture than that which lies before the gaze. The old Aurelian wall with its rich tones of color; the many-hued Campagna spreading beyond, and crossed by the massive broken arches of the Claudian aqueduct, which stretch over the vast plain until lost in the magic haze of distance; the Alban heights, swimming in light and sown with spots of pearl, like a vision of celestial mountains rather than steepes which mortal feet can climb; the exquisite Sabine Hills, with Monte Genaro lifting his stately crest to greet the farther Apennines; and near at hand, seen across the wide, open common set with avenues of trees, the basilica of Santa Croce with its memories of Santa Helena and the Holy Sepulchre, the ruins of an ancient temple, and the groves and gardens of the Villa Wolkonski, bright with masses of delicate-tinted bloom and dark with the shade of ilex and cypress.

Irène, on whom this scene had always an effect even deeper than the music to which she had likened it, uttered a low exclamation when they emerged from the church and its full radiance burst on them — a vision of luminous distance, of Titan arches, of blue, soft hills on the far horizon. Waldegrave turned to her with a smile. “It makes a noble conclusion, does it not?” he said.

She looked at him with a quick flash of comprehension. “Yes,” she answered, “and a conclusion in perfect harmony. It is a fit end for all that we have seen and heard.”

“I am glad we came,” observed Mrs. Vance. “The services have been most interesting and the music magnificent. But if it had not been that Mr. Merry was kind enough to give me his seat, I should have been very tired,” she added, turning to that gentleman.

“I think that when we next go to a long ceremony, we must take camp-stools like the English,” said Irène, laughing. “They have their use, though they do not seem appropriate to the spirit of devotion which fills the air of a Roman basilica.”

“But you are made of body as well as of spirit,” said Waldegrave, “and therefore no amount of devotion can support you in kneeling for hours on a hard marble floor.”

“It does seem to support people, however,” said Mr. Merry. “In wandering about the churches I am constantly struck with wonder and admiration at the devotion exhibited in this manner. I am a strong man, but I do not think I could kneel on a cold pavement for the length of time that I see many delicate women doing.”

“You have not the inward fire to warm and support you that they have,” said Irène, glancing at him with a smile.

“I suppose not,” he answered, returning the smile, and thinking more of the beauty of the face thus revealed than of the inward fire which he lacked.

Mrs. Vance was meanwhile looking anxiously around the large empty piazza. “The carriage does not seem to have arrived,” she said, “though I told Giovanni to be sure and return for us.”

“Coachmen sometimes need a little grace as well as other people,” said Mr. Merry. “Since you have to wait, let us enjoy this delicious air and sunlight by walking to the wall yonder.”

Every one assenting, they descended the steps of the portico and walked slowly across the open grassy space to the wall, which the height of the ground on the inner side renders low enough to be overlooked, even when standing immediately beside it. And as Irène so stood and gazed over the beautiful scene, its radiance seemed reflected in her face. All was peace and stillness around them. A bright carpet of flowers spread to the foot of the old wall, where such carnage has often raged. Out in the plain a lark rose up suddenly—singing as it soared; a distant cloud-shadow fell over Tusculum and Frascati; the fair blue sky bent down to kiss the hills as if in an everlasting covenant of amity, and the soft, fitful breeze was laden with the odor of countless blossoms.

“How beautiful it is!” said Irène, speaking at length, softly, and unaware that only Waldegrave was within sound of her voice. “And how hard it seems to return to the petty things of life after one has been stirred by noble thoughts and far-reaching emotions!” She paused a moment, then went on: “It is like standing on a mountain—one never wants to go down to the plain again.”

“But is it not a good thing to be able to stand on a mountain now and then?” asked Waldegrave. “There are many people unable to leave the plain—people to whom high thought or exalted emotion is impossible?”

She turned her face toward him—its radiance slightly touched with wistfulness. “Perhaps, after all, they are happiest,” she said. “They live on a dead-level, and never know the longing of the spirit to spread its wings, the aversion to descending from some height of feeling.”

“That aversion is the penalty which must be paid for exaltation,” he answered. “And do you not see that it is well? If the feet which are ‘beautiful upon the mountains’ did not sometimes come down to those in the plain, life would be a duller, a more sordid, a more commonplace thing than it is. And you can carry the noble thoughts with you—like a fragrance of incense from the altar.”

“I wish that I could,” she said, simply, looking away again toward the heavenly hills.

“I can answer that you do,” he replied; “and, more than that, you waken them in others.”

The words were not words of compliment, but spoken in a tone of quiet sincerity, and they pierced her with a quick sense of compunction. If he had read her heart, could the bitterness with which it overflowed have awakened noble thoughts in him?

Standing here on this Palm-Sunday, with the songs of unearthly triumph still ringing in her ears, and the story of divine forgiveness fresh in her memory, she seemed for a moment of time to be lifted to the height on which her mother had stood when she said that no wrong was worth resentment; and the light of this thought was in her eyes when she turned them back to Waldegrave.

“I have not deserved for you to feel in that way about me,” she said, low yet quickly. “I do not think I could ever have wakened noble thoughts in you—for my own have not been noble when I have been with you.”

“I know that,” he said, with the same quietness. “But, though a cloud may pass over a beautiful landscape and darken it, we feel that it is beautiful notwithstanding the

shadow. So it is with you. Whenever I have been near you, a cloud has thrown its shadow over you, but I saw the landscape underneath. And I have seen it smile for others.”

The last words touched her: the sense of compunction grew stronger. The thought came again to her. Was this man to blame for the wrong which had blasted her mother’s life and darkened her own? And was there not something of stupidity as well as of malice in hating one not accountable for the wrong-doing of another? She looked at him again with her candid eyes.

“I am sorry,” she said, gently, “that we can never be friends —things of which you know nothing forbid it—but the landscape can at least smile for you as for others. There is no harm in that.”

“I feel the sunshine to-day—and I am grateful for it,” he replied. “But will you let me ask why I can never hope to obtain any friendly consideration from you? It is surely not only because I am a German?”

“No,” she answered. “It is not because you are a German.”

“It is something personal to myself, then,” he said, with a slight smile. “It is less flattering to be disliked on personal than on national grounds; but there is more hope of overcoming such a dislike. One may perhaps change what is obnoxious in one’s self, though one can not change one’s country.”

“I have said nothing of disliking you,” she said, quickly—for Mrs. Vance and Mr. Merry, who had walked toward the Porta, were now returning—“I have no cause; it would be unjust and foolish in me. But there is a wide ground between dislike and friendship, and on that ground we must remain. Friendship is no more possible between you and me, Count Waldegrave, than it is possible for you to make yourself over again and disown your name and your country!”

Despite herself, something of the repressed passion within her made itself manifest in those words; and it seemed to Waldegrave that he had never met anything like the proud fire of her glance. There was no time to remonstrate or demand an explanation, had he been disposed to do so. But, in truth, he was more astonished than offended. The sense of surprise and mystery excluded any thought of mortified self-love. There was no room to doubt her earnestness; and since his nationality was not the *mot de l’énigme*, he felt unable to conjecture what it could be. One thing only was plain—there was no need for the defensive armor he had been inclined to assume. Why should he put himself on his guard against interest in a girl who told him that even friendship was impossible between them?

CHAPTER XVII.

Mrs. Falconer found that it was not altogether possible to close her doors, as she had told Stanhope that she desired to do. There were others beside himself who had established a familiar right of entrance into her salon, who were in the habit of dropping in for a cup of tea and an hour of pleasant talk in the evening, whether she was formally at home or not. And there was no part of the agreeable freedom of her life which she enjoyed more than these informal gatherings of people, whose conversation generally ranged over the highest topics—the discussion of great questions, brightened now and then by gay bits of social satire or light persiflage.

A group of this kind had assembled one evening in Holy Week. Lady Dorchester

came first with the Bevises, who were just returned from a visit to Naples. Stanhope and the Marquis de Châteaumesnil soon followed. After which appeared Erne and Mr. Neville with a portfolio of sketches—the result of a fortnight’s wandering among the Volscian Hills. It was the first time that Irène had seen Erne since their memorable walk in the Quinctian meadows, and she met him with the eager cordiality of one who wishes to efface a painful reminiscence. Indeed, there was something almost appealing in her manner—something which seemed begging him to forget and be friends again.

It was an appeal to which the young man was ready enough to respond. There was in him none of the vanity which finds it impossible to forgive such a wound. Though he had rushed away in his first sore pain, he soon reminded himself that he had no one to blame, no right to feel injury or disappointment. He had willfully courted rejection, and the result was his own fault. “I have been a fool—that is all!” he thought; and when a man has this basis of sound knowledge, much may be hoped from him.

The sketches naturally suggested the subject of conversation for some time. Every one examined and commented upon them, while Irène expressed an eager desire to see some of the places represented—especially Cori and Norba.

“But we have not yet been to Albano or Tivoli,” said Mrs. Falconer. “Let us begin by making excursions which are within reasonable distance.”

“Tivoli is considered the most attractive of all the places in the immediate neighborhood of Rome,” said Mrs. Bevis. “If none of us have been there, why should we not begin with that?”

“There is no reason why we should not,” answered her husband. “Of course, no one wishes to leave Rome this week; but on the first convenient day after Easter we can go to Tivoli—if Mrs. Falconer approves.”

Mrs. Falconer expressed her approval. “And who will be of the party?” she asked.

Lady Dorchester, at whom she looked, smiled and shook her head. “I have no great liking for rocks and water-falls,” she said. “I pray thee hold me excused.”

Mr. Neville also declined—pleading want of time and the fact that he had once spent a month at Tivoli, and therefore knew it well.

“Then I should think you would be all the more anxious to go,” said Irène, turning to him. “Surely, familiarity with a beautiful place does not lessen its charm for you?”

“I am not so stupid,” he answered, with a smile. “And if I were a man of leisure I should like nothing better than to go—especially if I might claim the privilege of being your guide—but I have just spent ten days in rambling. Now I must shut myself up in my studio and work.”

“And you?” said Irène, looking at Erne. “Surely you will come with us?”

“If I were wise,” he answered with a slightly melancholy smile, “I should feel bound also to shut myself up in my studio and work.”

“But your tone implies that you will not be wise,” she said. “So I hope you will go to Tivoli. And after that you must help me to carry the point about Cori and Norba. I shall not be satisfied until I have seen this”—taking up, as she spoke, a sketch of the Cyclopean citadel of Norba.

“That is grand,” said Mr. Neville; “but what will enchant you most is Ninfa—‘the Pompeii of the middle ages.’ Imagine a city deserted by its inhabitants and converted by

Nature into a capital of Flora, where castles, walls, convents, and churches are buried in flowers of countless variety and boundless profusion. These flowers fill the streets, they form the congregations of the churches, they sentinel the towers and ramparts. It is the wildest, the strangest, the most beautiful and most fairy-like scene I have ever beheld!”

“But what is the meaning of it?” asked Irène. “Why was the city deserted by its inhabitants?”

“Nobody knows. It is a mystery. Perhaps they are there under a spell of enchantment, as flowers. It is not difficult to believe in fairies and their spells in Ninfa.”

“What an enchanting as well as enchanted place it must be!” said the girl. “I shall certainly go there!”

“Take care when you go,” said the painter, “for the real spell of enchantment is the fever. Even the shepherds dare not pass a night within the walls. Under every flower there lurks the dart of death.”

“And, as the season advances, the danger is greater,” said Erne. “On that account I wish it were possible for you to go at once. For, as Mr. Neville says, it is unique—there is nothing like it in the world. The massive feudal architecture is covered with a sea of flowers. The walls of the city are like a green rampart—ivy overspreads every inch of them, and flowers wave triumphantly, like banners, from them. Hans Andersen ought to have gone to Ninfa. It makes one think of just such wild, exquisite fancies as his.”

“And can it never be reclaimed and inhabited again?” asked Irène.

Mr. Neville shook his head. “Never,” he answered. “The marvel is that it ever should have been inhabited. The Pontine marshes lie at its door. The Nymphaeus—a beautiful foaming stream which flows past it—falls into a lake which is the very haunt of fever, and just outside the walls is a pool covered with water-lilies and fringed with forget-me-nots, from which the deadly miasma rises constantly.”

“It was into this pool that the maiden from whom, according to tradition, the town received its name, flung herself in order to escape marrying an unsympathetic *partito*,” said Erne. “And in the lake into which the Nymphaeus empties, Pliny mentions that in his time there were floating islands called *Saltuares*, because they were said to move to the measure of dancing feet. So you see Ninfa is decidedly an enchanted place.”

“I never heard anything like it!” said Irène. “Have you a picture of it?”

Erne turned over the sheets in the portfolio, and presently drew forth a sketch of a tower rising above an ivy-buried wall, and reflected in a sheet of water fringed with all manner of flowers and surrounded by tall reeds.

“It was from this tower that ‘la bella Ninfa’ flung herself,” he said. “It stands at the entrance of the town. I can not imagine anything more impressive than its appearance, especially toward sunset. One thinks then of Virgil and Dante—of souls being ferried over to Hades or Purgatory. One can fancy no figure except that of Charon on the glittering, death-bearing expanse, around which the tall reeds rustle mournfully, and only the sobbing cry of the water-hen comes at intervals.”

“It reminds one of the tower that Dante described, where the souls waited,” said Irène, with her eyes fastened on the sketch. “And such ideas are appropriate to a place of which Death is the supreme ruler.”

“That fact gives it the last touch of charm and mystery,” said Mr. Neville. “Death is there—Death triumphant and crowned with flowers.”

“I am sure I shall dream of it to-night,” said Irène, putting the sketch down. “I

have never been so much impressed by the mere description of any place. I should like to go there directly, without waiting to see Tivoli or Albano, or any other place."

Meanwhile Colonel Bevis, in talking of Tivoli, had mentioned Count Waldegrave's name. "He would be a pleasant addition to the party," he observed.

"Oh, we must ask him by all means," said Mrs. Falconer. "I feel that we are in a manner bound to do so."

"He is not in Rome just now," said Lady Dorchester. "I met him a few days ago, and he told me that he was on the point of leaving for Nice. You know Prince Waldegrave is there at present for his health."

"Yes. I saw his arrival there announced some time ago," said Mrs. Falconer, with a quick glance toward Irène, who, she was glad to perceive, was absorbed in the subject of Ninfa.

"He had just arrived when we were in Nice a month ago," said Colonel Bevis. "I saw him driving once or twice, and thought him looking very badly."

"People always look badly after severe illness," said Lady Dorchester. "I hope he is not failing. Europe has not so many statesmen that she can afford to lose one."

"Prince Waldegrave is more fortunate than most men, inasmuch as his mantle will fall on a worthy successor," said M. de Châteaumesnil. "Count Waldegrave has already shown that he possesses remarkable ability."

"He is very clever," said Lady Dorchester, "and has distinguished himself, I believe, in political affairs; but it remains to be seen whether he will prove as great a man as his uncle."

"He will have to prove a greater, in order not to be overshadowed by his uncle's fame," said Stanhope. "That is the misfortune of inheriting a mantle—people are always disposed to aggrandize the dead at the expense of the living. My own acquaintance with Count Waldegrave is very slight," he added, after a moment, "but I should say that he differs in one important respect from his uncle. He has a conscience."

"And will that difference make him a greater man?" asked Lady Dorchester.

"It will make him essentially a greater man, but it may make him a less successful one. Prince Waldegrave has allowed no obstacle to stand in his path. He has seen his end clearly, and walked to it with that hard determination which is not trammelled by any considerations of right or wrong."

"You are very severe," said Colonel Bevis.

"I am perfectly just," answered Stanhope, "as any one who is familiar with his history is aware."

"Oh, for that matter," said Lady Dorchester, "there is the least possible amount of true greatness in the world. What we have to put up with is mostly a counterfeit—not greatness but success."

"A distinction well made," said the Marquis, "but a distinction which unfortunately does not exist for the majority of people. To them a man who has succeeded—a man who has put his foot on the necks of his fellow-beings, howsoever the feat was accomplished—is one who has achieved greatness. Let him have been guilty of what falsity, what cruelty, what injustice he will, there are thousands ready to do him honor."

"And to envy and imitate him," said Mrs. Falconer. "The effect of example is to me one of the most terrible things in life."

“It is one of the most pervading,” said Stanhope. “No one can possibly tell how far it extends. One man’s life or one man’s thought—influencing in turn a multitude of others—may go down through ages, gathering its tremendous harvest of good or evil.”

“It ought to make one tremble,” said Lady Dorchester; “only we have got past trembling at anything.”

“And our standard of good or evil, as far as one can make out, is simply success or failure,” said Colonel Bevis.

“True,” said Stanhope. “It is an absolutely brutal standard; but no other appears to have weight or meaning to the modern mind. For example, we are told repeatedly—told until our ears are weary with the sound—that prosperity is the standard, by which we are to measure the worth of a nation. Let a country abound with material wealth, let the earth tremble under the sound of its manufactures, and the sea be white with its ships, let it build great cities and impose its rule on reluctant myriads, and whatever virtues have perished in the consuming flame of that love of riches, which we are emphatically told in an antiquated volume is ‘the root of all evil,’ there is no paean too lofty to be sung in its praise. But take another country, where there is no such triumphant prosperity, but where the people are brave, honest, virtuous, and, above all, contented—let it be anathema! What, no factories, no mines, no ships, no gamblers on a stock-exchange, no extremes of immense wealth and poverty such as cries to Heaven for vengeance—really, it is doubtful if such a country can be said to be civilized!”

“But,” said Colonel Bevis, “you surely do not think it necessarily follows that the virtues of which you speak must perish in the midst of material prosperity?”

“Yes, I do,” answered Stanhope, unhesitatingly. “In the race for wealth, which soon becomes the controlling passion of such a nation, there is no place for them. It is the most debasing of all the ideals that have ever been set before mankind.”

“And it is that,” said the Marquis, “which is the foundation of the movement that is threatening Europe with social and political anarchy to-day. “When you put material prosperity before men as the only end of human effort—when you say to them, ‘You are of worth only as you possess the goods of the world’—and when you add that there is no God to fear and no heaven to compensate for the injustices of time, what can be expected save that which is sounding in our ears—the mad cry of socialistic revolt? For the revolution, as we know it, is simply Materialism carried to its logical conclusion. If the only facts in the world are the properties and products of matter, and if the only test of right and wrong is the will of a majority, what answer can be made to the movement which displays itself as Communism, as Socialism, or even as Nihilism? What can be expected of men who have for their evangel the Bill of Rights of the French Revolution, and for their war-cry ‘*Ni Dieu, ni ma ître!*’ but the negation of every bond which holds society together and makes government possible?”

“It is a terrible outlook,” said Colonel Bevis. “But I think there is some protection in the common sense of human nature.”

“Did the common sense of human nature save France from the Reign of Terror?” asked the Marquis. “Common sense is like straw before the flame of human passion. I do not say that such a gigantic tyranny as the socialists will inaugurate when they get the upper hand can last, but it will certainly be tried. What else is going on in France now? Every step is toward concentrating all power in the state—which is the ideal of Communism. They have struck at the rights of paternity in making education public and

compulsory; they will strike next at the rights of property. '*La propri   est le vol!*' is one of the first articles of their creed. No man is to be allowed to accumulate or to inherit. The state is to be the sole inheritor. In that way they mean to secure the visionary equality which has never been, and can never be, realized."

"A more monstrous idea was never conceived," said Colonel Bevis. "Its palpable injustice lies in the fact that it would drag the industrious down to the level of the thriftless, and that, instead of elevating human nature, it would degrade it to absolute savagery."

"That is plain to you and to me," said the Marquis, "but it contains no argument for the multitude whose will, according to the revolutionary creed, is the last reason of power. 'Since we can not rise to your level, you shall come down to ours!' they cry, in rage against all wealth, all prosperity, all distinction of rank. And what appeal have you? That was a wise saying of a great ruler, 'You can not govern a people who have forgotten the life eternal.' Eliminate the idea of God—as modern thought has eliminated it—and the source of all justice, the sanction of all moral law, is gone. Nothing on earth can stand without a basis, and, when there is no basis of acknowledged right, when the underlying principle of civil power is simply brute force, as represented in the will of a dominant multitude, political tyranny and social chaos must inevitably follow."

"The tyranny, undoubtedly," said Lady Dorchester. "I saw, by-the-by, a capital *jeu d'esprit* in one of the Paris papers the other day—a discussion between two politicians. Said Number One, 'So you are still fixed in your aspirations toward republicanism?' Answered Number Two: 'That I am. I stand for compulsory education, the obligatory ballot—in short, for the *r  gime* of complete and absolute liberty!'"

After the general laugh which followed this, Mrs. Falconer said, "Now, in order to give a more cheerful turn to our thoughts, we will have some tea, and make Ir  ne sing for us."

Ir  ne was very willing to sing, but that the drawings she had been looking at were still in her mind was evident, for, as she went to the piano, she asked the Marquis, who accompanied her, if he had ever been to Ninfa.

"I am fascinated, possessed by the thought of it," she said. "I should like to go there to-morrow."

"And why should you not, if you wish to do so?" he asked, having the vaguest possible idea of where Ninfa might be.

"Oh, I fancy it is some distance away, though I do not know exactly how far," she answered; "and of course I was only jesting when I spoke of to-morrow. I would not, on any account, leave Rome this week. But, do you not think you would like to see a town of the middle ages, covered with ivy and inhabited only by flowers? Mr. Neville says that it is the most fairy-like place he has ever seen or conceived."

"I should like it very much," answered the Marquis, to whom her enthusiasm was always charming. "How is it reached, and when shall we go?"

"I do not know how it is reached or when we shall go," she answered, smiling; "but I wanted to be sure that, when I propose it as an objective point for an excursion, you will be on my side."

"And are you not sure of that?" he asked, smiling also. "Am I not always on your side? I should be on your side, whatever you proposed."

She was so accustomed to his kind words and admiring regard that neither his

tone nor the glance which accompanied it surprised her. But Mrs. Falconer, who at the moment chanced to look toward them, was struck by the expression of the last. There was in it a caressing warmth—a glow of feeling real and deep—which startled her. She had often before seen the Marquis look at Irène with admiration, and thought no more of it than that every one must admire such a beautiful and noble creature; but now she felt that there was more than admiration in this glance. Not even when he had asked her to bear his name and share his life had there been any such look in his eyes for her.

“What is the matter?” asked Stanhope, seeing the change that came over her face.

There was a moment’s pause before she answered. Then she turned to him with a slight smile.

“Nothing,” she said. “It might have been something—something very serious—but it is nothing.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

The band was playing on the Pincio, the air was filled with the fragrance of flowering trees and shrubs, the atmosphere seemed dissolving into gold as the sun sank toward the west, the revolving procession of equipages was like a kaleidoscope in the contrasts and alternations of toilet which it displayed—for Easter was just passed and Rome had not yet thinned in the least—the Piazzale was full of the murmur of voices, and from the great terrace the city seemed swimming in radiant mist, out of which its cupolas, towers, and campanili rose.

“After all, this is better than the *Promenade des Anglais*,” said the younger of two ladies, whose carriage drew up where they could survey the whole wide scene of glorified city and sunset sky, the great dome of St. Peter’s and the pines of Monte Mario. But it was not on this noble panorama that the gaze of either of them rested. Their glances were for the crowd—for the carriages in which ladies in beautiful toilets leaned back with an air of graceful languor, and for the cavaliers of various nationalities who with uncovered heads stood by them to exchange a few remarks or utter a few compliments. “It might have been better if we had come here earlier,” the young lady proceeded. “Nice is very gay, but unless one is careful it is easy to be drawn into doubtful associations. There would be more to gain by being well launched here. I wish I had known—”

She paused, and her companion—a richly dressed woman of that age which the French call uncertain, and of whom it was also uncertain how much of her was natural and how much artificial, for she was plainly indebted to art for her figure, her complexion, her hair, and her eyebrows—observed that she had always found Rome dull.

“All places are dull when you don’t know people—that is, the right kind of people,” answered the first speaker, who was none other than Miss Dysart. “But I have so many English acquaintances of rank that I could soon have made my place good in Anglo-Roman society.”

“Then why did you not propose that we should come?” asked the other, a little sharply.

Miss Dysart shrugged her shoulders. “We were very well satisfied at Nice,” she said.

“And we should have been satisfied still, if you had not met Count Waldegrave,” said her companion.

"I think you liked him as well as I did, my dear Baroness," observed Miss Dysart, serenely; "and thought him as well worth cultivating. But, whether he will be likely to notice us in Rome because we met him once or twice in Nice, is a matter of doubt. I am sure, from what I have heard of him, that he will not step out of his way to do so. But if one meets him in the society where he moves—that will be another thing."

"Ah, but that is the very highest, of course," said the Baroness. "How do you propose to enter it?"

"As I have entered many others," was the reply. "What does one need?—a little patience, a great deal of tact, and the knowledge how to use every advantage. Those three things have given me my success, and you will admit that it has been great."

"But you have not yet accomplished your end—you have not yet married a man of rank," said the Baroness, a little maliciously. It is quite possible that she wished her young friend to understand that being patronized by princesses, and presented at court by countesses, and flirted with by Lords Blank, were, after all, very empty distinctions as compared with being the wife of a German baron, however objectionable and impossible to live with that baron might be.

"Not yet," said Miss Dysart, calmly; "but, of course, I could long ago have married a title, if I had cared merely for that. *Vauriens*, with nothing else to offer, abound in Europe, as we know well."

How the Baroness would have replied to this barbed arrow is doubtful; but, fortunately, these amenities were interrupted by the approach of Lionel Erne, who, from where he stood leaning against a tree near the music, had been observing the occupants of the carriage for some time with an air of amusement. Now he advanced to its side.

"I am delighted to have the pleasure of welcoming you to Rome, Miss Dysart," he said.

Violet started at the sound of the familiar voice, and turned with a radiant smile.

"So it is *you!*" she cried. "How charmed I am to find you here! You see I have proved that 'all roads lead to Rome.' Nice is growing dull and quite warm. Even Monte Carlo began to lose its attractions—especially since you did not come to help me break the bank!"

"I had no idea that you were expecting me to assist in that very laudable undertaking," he replied, with a laugh.

"I told you when we parted in Paris that I should expect you," she said. "The time has been when you would have remembered such an intimation; *mais nous avons changé tout cela!* But I believe you do not know the Baroness Bodenstein.—Baroness, let me introduce Mr. Erne."

The Baroness acknowledged the introduction very graciously. She was an American, who at a period of exceedingly mature maidenhood had inherited a fortune, come abroad, and captured, or, more properly speaking, been captured by, Baron Bodenstein at a German spa. Erne's name was familiar to her, and had a golden association which made her bestow her best smile on the handsome young fellow. But she was not allowed opportunity for more than this, since Violet went eagerly on:

"You are not looking well—are you aware of that? Roman air can not agree with you. Now, if you had come to Nice and gone yachting with me in Lord Blank's charming Siren, you would look very differently."

"It is quite possible that under such circumstances I might have listened to the

song of another siren, and my last state have been worse than my first," he replied. "But did Lord Blank put his yacht at your disposal?"

"It amounted to that," she said—"did it not, Baroness?"

"Decidedly," answered the Baroness, who, in the alliance offensive and defensive into which she had entered with Miss Dysart, never failed to sound that young lady's trumpet as loudly as desired, "Lord Blank appeared to think that his yacht simply existed for your service—until he went to Sicily."

"Ah, one grows tired even of a yacht after a while," said Miss Dysart, with an air which intimated that she was to be held accountable for Lord Blank's departure to Sicily. "But we will not talk of Nice—that is over and done with! I want to talk of Rome—to hear everything about everybody. You have been here all winter, Mr. Erne—you must know all the social gossip. Now tell it all to me. To begin with, who is that beautiful woman in an exquisite toilet, whose carriage has just drawn up?"

Erne replied that the person spoken of was the Duchessa, one of the greatest ladies in Rome. "But you will hear no gossip about her," he added. "She is like untouched snow—as pure as she is stately."

"Then tell me about some one less perfect and more interesting," said Miss Dysart.

Erne laughed and obeyed—recounting many histories more or less edifying of the crowd which defiled in the golden sunshine. But presently a carriage drove up from the Piazza del Popolo and stopped not very far from them, which at once engaged Miss Dysart's liveliest attention.

"So there is Mrs. Falconer!" she said. "How very well she is looking! But who is the young lady with her?"

"That," answered Erne, "is Miss Lescar."

"Miss Lescar!" repeated Violet. Her eyes gave a great flash of interest. "Is that the girl of whom I heard in Paris—whom Mr. Stanhope was interested in, and Mrs. Falconer was to take charge of—Madame Lescar's daughter?"

"Yes," replied Erne, with a manner which in its very quietness was full of warning, "that is Madame Lescar's daughter—and I am sure you do not need to be reminded that Madame Lescar was one of the noblest as well as one of the most unfortunate of women."

"Oh, every one knows that," was the indifferent reply. "We are not talking of Madame Lescar, but of her daughter. She has a beautiful face and a very distinguished air. It is almost a pity—under the circumstances—that she should be so striking. It must have required a great deal of social courage in Mrs. Falconer to take up a girl with such a story and such an appearance."

"What are you talking about, my dear Violet?" inquired the Baroness, who was by this time as curious as Erne was indignant.

"Neither Mrs. Falconer nor her friends thought that her conduct required any social courage," he said, haughtily. "No shadow of the wrong done Madame Lescar rested on herself or her daughter. It all fell on the author of the wrong."

"Yes, I believe that was what people thought—in America," said Miss Dysart. "In Europe, however, the matter would probably be regarded differently. But your position is very chivalrous, and it helps me to understand various things—why you found no attraction at Nice, for example."

She gave him a glance in which the *diablerie* was tinged unmistakably with malice—for there is nothing which a woman of this order resents so deeply as desertion from her standard. A man may do what he will, may be what he will, so long as he pays her vanity the tribute of superficial homage ; but when he withdraws or transfers that homage, he may be sure of evoking one keen sentiment at least—that of enmity.

“But you have not yet told me what you are talking about!” said the Baroness, whose curiosity was given a sharper edge by the beauty of the person under discussion.

To this appeal, however, Miss Dysart had at that time no ear to lend. She saw a gentleman approach Mrs. Falconer’s carriage and stand speaking to its occupants. For a moment she gazed in speechless astonishment. Then she turned to Lionel Erne.

“Do you see?” she said. “It is Count Waldegrave!”

“What then?” he asked, quietly. “Is there any reason why Count Waldegrave should not be one of Mrs. Falconer’s acquaintances?”

Miss Dysart paused a moment before answering. She felt from the tone of his voice that it was necessary to proceed cautiously.

“There is certainly no reason why he should not be one of *Mrs. Falconer’s* acquaintances,” she said, then; “but you must admit that it is singular, to say the least, that he should be one of Miss Lescar’s. May I ask if he knows who she is?”

Erne frowned. He thought the question altogether impertinent.

“I have never inquired,” he answered. “But I do not imagine that any one has interfered in the matter sufficiently to inform him. He has simply met Miss Lescar as he might meet any other young lady in society.”

“Ah!” said Miss Dysart. Then she turned to her companion. “If you wish, we will drive now,” she said.—“Mr. Erne, we are at the H *ôtel* Costanzi, where I hope we may count upon seeing you.”

Erne replied that he would certainly do himself the honor of calling. After which he stepped back and the carriage drove on.

He stood quite still, looking after it for a minute before crossing the terrace to where Mrs. Falconer’s carriage was drawn up. As he approached, Count Waldegrave, with a slight salutation to him, moved away.

“Ah, Lionel,” said Mrs. Falconer, “am I to congratulate or to condole with you? I see that Violet Dysart is in Rome.”

“So far as I am personally concerned,” he replied, “nothing could be a matter of greater indifference to me than Mrs. Dysart’s arrival. But for—other reasons, I am sorry that she has come.”

“That sounds mysterious,” said Mrs. Falconer, smiling. But as she glanced at him the gravity of his face struck her, and she said no more. It was Ir *ène* who asked carelessly:

“And who is Miss Dysart?”

“Since Lionel expresses such indifference toward her, I suppose I may answer frankly,” said Mrs. Falconer. “She is an exceedingly pretty American girl—well, something more than a girl now, though she still looks very young—of good birth and moderate fortune, who unfortunately conceived the desire to make a social success in Europe. In a certain way she has achieved it. By dint of excessive tuft-hunting she has made her way into some very high circles, cultivated a great many distinguished acquaintances, and been written up in those odious publications called ‘society papers’ to

a great extent. But under this apparent triumph there lies a real disappointment, for she has set her heart on marrying rank, and that is not easy—unless one possesses a million or two,” said the speaker sarcastically, “when it becomes the easiest thing in the world. Lacking the millions, poor Violet has been trifled with shamefully two or three times; but she goes on dauntlessly in her quest, making herself notorious all over Europe, and wasting her youth in the most pitiable manner.”

“Pitiable! It is incredible,” said Irène, “that a woman can degrade herself so!”

“She does not think of it as degradation,” said Mrs. Falconer. “It is to her a high and noble ambition.”

“High, certainly,” said Erne. “As for its nobleness—well, I don’t think Miss Dysart troubles her head much about that.” He paused a moment, then, looking at his cousin, added significantly, “She is just from Nice, and seems to know Count Waldegrave. She was very much interested to observe him at your carriage.”

“Was she?” said Mrs. Falconer, carelessly. “It is a pity that her interest could not have been gratified by overhearing our conversation, which consisted of little besides an exchange of salutations. But pray get in, Lionel, and come home with us. We have already taken our drive in the Borghese Garden, and only came here for a glimpse of the crowd—which *I* like; and a glimpse of the sunset—which Irène likes.”

Erne willingly obeyed. He stepped into the carriage and they drove from the Pincio.

Mrs. Falconer was right in saying that their conversation with Count Waldegrave had been little besides an exchange of salutations; but there may be a difference even in the manner of saying good-day. “What would decidedly have interested Miss Dysart was the spirit which, on Count Waldegrave’s part at least, animated the salutations.

It was a spirit which surprised himself. When he went to the Pincio that afternoon it was with only one thought—should he see the face which during his absence had never ceased to haunt him, and which had shone before him like a star in the return to Rome? Should he hear the proud, sweet voice, with its undertone of pathos, which when he heard it last had said: “We can never be friends—reasons of which you know nothing forbid it—but the landscape may smile for you as for others. There is no harm in that”?

It had seemed to him at the time a singular speech, and, the more he reflected upon it, the more singular it appeared. Indeed, Irène’s manner toward him had from the first suggested a mystery which he was quite unable to solve. It was a distinctly personal aversion which he read more than once in the brilliant eyes that were kind and friendly to every one but himself. There had been times, it was true, when they had changed, and, as they looked at him full of the fire of a high thought or the softness of a sad one, he thought that he was to be included in the friendliness. But the aversion had always returned—the glance grown cold, the face haughty. It was something not to be calculated upon—that face. He found himself wondering with what look it would greet him this afternoon.

It was not an ungracious one, for Irène had not forgotten her promise. Nor did it cost her an effort to fulfill it. Unconsciously to herself, something in the character of this man was beginning to tell upon her. In proportion as she knew him she found the individual taking the place of the abstract representative of wrong which he had at first appeared to her. And in the individual there was much that was sympathetic with her own nature—the nature which in many of its sterner traits was inherited from the same source

as his own.

She was not aware of the reason of his absence—for no one had mentioned Prince Waldegrave's name in her presence—so, when he observed that he had been out of Rome for ten days, she said:

“Then you have missed a great deal. It seemed as if Heaven and earth could not smile too beautifully on the Paschal season.”

“They smiled very beautifully where I have been,” he answered. “Of course, you know Nice-sur-Mer? It is a paradise of loveliness just now.”

“Oh, yes, I know it,” she replied. “It is like a dream—the blue sea, the enchanting heights, the wealth of flowers. Yet the thought of that glittering loveliness has no attraction for me—I suppose because I am so steeped in the influence of Rome. Were you not glad to come back to the solemn, tawny walls, to the Campagna and the broken aqueducts, even from that paradise by the sea?”

He smiled. There was something pleasant to him in the frank question and the clear light in her eyes. They were not unfriendly eyes just now, he thought.

“Yes,” he answered. “I was—I am—glad to return. Rome draws one with a powerful attraction. And, after all, the beauty of the Riviera chiefly appeals to the pleasure-loving side of one's nature; while this”—he looked over the great view spread before them, the many-towered city, the vast rounded outline of St. Peter's dome, the sky of splendid gold, the wide plain steeped in harmonious color—“is not only noble in itself, but suggestive of all noble things.”

“Like the very name of Rome,” said Irène. “The proud, sonorous accent with which the people say ‘Roma’ seems to express everything that is lofty.”

“There is much in the ear of the listener,” said Count Waldegrave, with a smile. “It expresses lofty thoughts to *you*. There are others to whom it expresses as little as—well, as Rome itself means to them.”

“I suppose there are numbers of such people,” said Irène. “But what then? One need not think of them—further than to pity them for the narrow limitations in which they were inclosed.”

“They are sadly narrow,” said Mrs. Falconer. “It is really pitiable to observe what high walls of ignorance, prejudice, and that absurd mixture of vanity and selfishness which leads the typical Englishman and American to conceive that whatever does not accord with his standard is, therefore, necessarily wrong, surround most people.”

“You think the spirit of which you speak—the mixture of vanity and selfishness—is stronger in Englishmen and Americana than in others?” asked Waldegrave.

“According to my experience, undoubtedly,” was the reply. “There are no other people in the world who are so arrogantly possessed with the idea of their own infallibility, with the desire to measure everything in heaven or on earth by their own foot-rule. Yet it is simply the provincial spirit on a large scale. Some of them rise above it; but, generally speaking, it requires wide culture, and half a life-time of cosmopolitan experience, to enable them to do so.”

“And why is it that Englishmen and Americans are peculiarly liable to this narrowness of vision?”

“Ask Mr. Matthew Arnold,” answered she, smiling. “It arises in great measure, I think, from what he calls Philistinism, and what M. de Châteaumesnil defines as

materialism. They are puffed up with the vanity of material prosperity, and the provincial character of their surroundings has rendered them as ignorant as they are vain.”

“The terms are almost synonymous,” said Waldegrave, “Vanity means ignorance. The first thing which a man should do who desires to rid himself of vanity is to go into the world and measure himself with others.”

“But few people care to be rid of such a comfortable thing,” said Mrs. Falconer. “‘Among the blind the one-eyed is king’— and the one-eyed is, therefore, not likely to seek voluntarily the society of people with two eyes. Alas for poor human nature! —the sense of inferiority generally makes us uncomfortable.”

“I suppose that is true,” said Irène, “but it strikes me as very strange—for what greater pleasure is there than heartily to feel and acknowledge superiority, to realize that there are heights in human nature above anything that we dreamed of, that there is wisdom greater than our own and charity broader?”

“To realize high things, one must have something in one’s self which responds to them,” said Waldegrave, wondering the while what there was in this girl’s voice which seemed to sink into his heart, to touch the most exquisite fibers of his being. To be near her was to feel all that was most poetic in him waked to life, to have a sense that his nature answered to her touch like a violin to the hand of a master. A sudden doubt assailed him as he realized this. On what tide was he drifting? What was to be the end? He had never before yielded to any attraction or taken any step without seeing clearly what the end was to be. Now he saw no end. Apart from her proud, strange assurance that not even friendship was possible between them, nothing was less possible to *him* than to break through the sacred traditions of rank and imperil the career which his ambition now saw clear before him by marriage with a person of no rank. He did not for an instant take such a step into consideration. *Noblesse oblige* to him meant no mere form of words, but a real and stern obligation, which it was not possible even to desire to throw aside. Nevertheless this beautiful girl, with her exalted nature and her passionate soul, had from the first interested—nay, fascinated him. She had never appeared to him as to the Marquis de Châteaumesnil—a creature far

“... too bright and good

For human nature’s daily food.”

On the contrary, he felt like one confronted with forbidden possibilities of delight. There came to him a conviction of what life might be with a companion whose quick perceptions and ardent sympathies would give existence a meaning unknown to duller souls. It was the first time that his heart had ever stirred at any woman’s touch; and, feeling his danger, he had resolution enough to have forsworn its occasion had not those words at the Lateran seemed to make caution unnecessary.

Meanwhile, it is not to be supposed that all of these thoughts were occupying his mind at the present moment. There was but a short pause after his last words before Mrs. Falconer said:

“And are you, M. le Comte, one of those whose interest in Rome is restricted to the city itself, or do you extend it to the surrounding country?”

“I think I may describe myself as one of the latter class,” he answered, smiling.

“Then you will sympathize with Irène and myself in our desire to leave Rome for a time, and wander among the cities of the Alban and Volscian Hills,” she went on.

Waldegrave’s face changed a little—a fact perceptible to the lady’s keen glance.

“It is an attractive plan,” he said; “but why is it necessary to leave Rome? Most persons make Rome the center for all such excursions.”

“Ah, but we wish to go farther than most persons do, though just at first we may make the ordinary excursions in the ordinary way. *A propos*, Colonel Bevis has arranged a party for Tivoli, which I think he intends to ask you to join—but probably you have already been there?”

“I have been there once or twice, but it is a place one can hardly see too often. I shall be happy to join the party.”

And it was then that, seeing Erne approaching, he had bowed and moved away.

The drive from the Pincio to Mrs. Falconer’s *portone* was short, and, when they ascended to her apartment, she entered the *salon* with Erne, while Irène, saying that she would put off her wraps, went on to her chamber.

“Now,” said Mrs. Falconer, as soon as she found herself alone with the young man, “tell me what Violet Dysart said about Count Waldegrave. It was something impertinent, I am sure.”

“She inquired if he knew who Miss Lescar is,” Erne answered.

“So she knows?”

“What is there belonging to social gossip which Violet Dysart does not know? It is her one branch of study, and she is entitled to the rank of *savante* in it.”

“Has she a personal acquaintance with Count Waldegrave?”

“I did not inquire—but it is likely. As you observed in your description of her, she has a great many distinguished acquaintances, and it is probable that she met him in Nice.”

“Then that settles the matter,” said Mrs. Falconer, with energy. “He must hear without delay, from one who has a right to tell him, who Irène is. If the disclosure is delayed longer, he will hear it from Violet Dysart—with her interpretation of our silence.”

“I have always thought the silence ill-advised,” said Erne.

“Both Mr. Stanhope and myself have thought the same,” said his cousin. “But you know—or you do not know—what Irène is! She has a will against which it is difficult to stand. Lately, however, Mr. Stanhope has determined to make the disclosure to Count Waldegrave—and had he not left Rome it would probably have been made before this. Then I suggested our projected excursion to Tivoli as a good opportunity for it—better than formally seeking an interview; since, after all, he may say, ‘Of what importance is it to me?’”

“I do not think he is in the least likely to ask of what importance it is to him,” said Erne, gravely. “Unless I am much mistaken, he will think it of great importance.” Then, after a pause, he added: “What I do not understand is *her* position—why she should object to his knowing the truth—what motive she has in the concealment. To my mind it puts her in a false and unworthy position.”

“It does,” said Mrs. Falconer, “and I blame myself very much for it. I weakly yielded to her wishes on this point at first. As for her motive—I doubt if she has such a thing, beyond a passionate disinclination to his knowing the truth, the exact root of which is not easy to determine. But something unforeseen has come to pass as a consequence,” the speaker added, with a smile. “Whether she knows it or not, she has begun to like him.”

“To like him!” repeated Erne, in a tone of consternation. “You do not mean—”
“I mean no more than I say,” answered his cousin. “But that is remarkable enough.”
“It is so remarkable,” he said, after a minute, “that, if it is true, nothing else could surprise me.”

CHAPTER XIX.

The morning on which the party for Tivoli set out was one that promised a perfect day. Colonel Bevis had insisted on an early start, and the *aurora Angelus* was ringing as they rode through the quiet streets, where the shops were still closed, the windows of the houses still barred. All around them Rome lay-steeped in shadow, while overhead the multitudinous bells were filling the cool, delicate air with sound, calling all Christian hearts to praise God for the great mystery of the Incarnation: “The angel of the Lord declared unto Mary—.” The joyful notes were ringing it out over the still sleeping city, to the distant mountains clad in amethyst and gold, to the sun as he rose in splendor over their purple crests. And from every campanile clouds of birds flew out, rustling and twittering, adding their sweet tribute to the mighty note of praise, the early sunlight gilding their flashing wings and pouring in golden flood through the arches of the lofty towers from which they came.

But it was when the party passed out of the Porta San Lorenzo and saw around them the wide Campagna, before them a vision of enchanted heights, and about them a great sense of pure, delightful freshness, that they fully faced the morning. It was like going into a new world—one washed clean in God’s baptismal dew from every stain of sin and sorrow. It was hard to tell where the earth ended and the sky began, for the vast plain, blue and undulating as the sea, melted into the mists that were rising from stream and marsh, and assuming a thousand beautiful opal tints as they mounted upward; while the mountain-range, toward which the faces of the travelers were set, was like the magical birth-place of day—peaks of sapphire and amethyst swimming in radiant haze and overarched by a sky out of which the marvelous tints of dawn had not yet faded.

“It is like a great *Laudate Dominum*,” said Irène.

M. de Châteaumesnil, who was riding by her side, thought that the eyes which were glancing over the wide scene looked as clear under their dark lashes as if they had been washed in dew.

“It is very beautiful,” he said, “and repays one for the exertion of early rising. It is a pity that such lovely effects should be so evanescent—but one ought to be grateful for them nevertheless.”

“I can imagine nothing better worth gratitude,” she said. “Look at those tints! If one were to try to describe them now—at this moment—one could not. There are no words for such color. It is just pure gladness.”

“You make one realize what possibilities of gladness the simple things of life hold for you,” he said, with a slight strain of unconscious envy in his voice—for what would not the man who had so long regarded the world with tired eyes have given for such freshness of emotion?

She looked at him with surprise. “What you call the simple things are after all the best blessings of life,” she said. “And it seems to me that there is enough here to fill to

overflowing the heart of a poet or a saint.”

“But how if one has not the heart of either a poet or a saint?”

“Oh, one must do the best one can with the heart one has,” she said, with a smile. “I did not mean to imply that *I* had the heart of either.”

“I think you have the heart of the first,” he said, quite seriously, “and perhaps of the second also.”

“You always say kind things to me,” she answered, simply; “but that is far, far too kind. Perhaps I feel things sometimes as a poet might—but there are no words to express how little I feel them as a saint.” Then she looked at the radiant hills which, like heights of saintly perfection, are beautiful to look upon, but hard to climb. “I knew what a saint was once,” she said, as if speaking to herself, “and I am as far from that as earth is far from heaven.”

He did not answer—for the shadow that crossed her face like a cloud over a landscape, and the note of sadness which came into her voice, told him that he had touched some painful chord, such as he had long been aware existed in her experience.

Meanwhile the tints of mists and hills and distance were changing momentarily, and the sun was sending long level lines of gold over the Campagna, while the air retained its delicious freshness, and above the dewy sea of flowers which spread around them, innumerable birds were flitting, twittering and singing in every bird-tone possible to imagine. This road to Tivoli—the ancient Via Tiburtina—is one of the least interesting of the Campagna ways. But no journey across this wonderful plain can be uninteresting to those who appreciate the beauty of atmospheric effects, the magic of sunlight and shadow, the violet loveliness of distant heights on which ancient towns, villages, and castles glitter like points of light, and to whom the silence which broods over the waste is more eloquent than a thousand voices. Most of the party were on horseback, but there was a carriage containing Lady Dorchester—who at the eleventh hour decided to go—and Mrs. Falconer. The latter, however, was in her habit, for she intended after a time to take Irène’s horse, and let her enter the carriage, knowing that the ride of eighteen miles would be too much for an inexperienced horsewoman. But, guided by M. de Châteaumesnil’s instruction, Irène was riding so well and enjoying it so much, that the miles went by and Mrs. Falconer said nothing of a change until Stanhope, who kept near the carriage, rode up and suggested it.

Mrs. Falconer looked at him with a smile. “I am very comfortable,” she said. “To drive along with this delightful air in one’s face is so pleasant that I have little inclination for a change—and Irène is evidently not anxious for it.”

“That is not saying that it would not be well for her,” said Stanhope, looking with a slight, unconscious frown at Irène and the Marquis as they rode on in front.

“M. de Châteaumesnil will not allow her to fatigue herself, I am sure,” said Mrs. Falconer, observing his glance and the irritation which it expressed.

In the presence of Lady Dorchester it was impossible to say more, even if Stanhope had been inclined to do so, and therefore he rode forward, and, when another mile was passed, made his suggestion to Irène. The Marquis at once demurred.

“Mademoiselle Lescar is not tired,” he said. “She could not look so bright or ride so well if she were.”

“It would be better not to wait until she is tired,” said Stanhope, decidedly.

Something in his tone made Irène aware that he wished her to get into the

carriage. She looked at the Marquis.

“Perhaps it would be better, as Mr. Stanhope says, not to wait until I am tired,” she remarked. “And then, Mrs. Falconer may wish to ride. I did not think of that before.”

So the carriage was stopped and the exchange proposed. But Mrs. Falconer shook her head.

“I feel very indolent,” she said. “This luxurious motion, without any exertion, suits me exactly. And if you are not tired, my dear, why should you dismount? If you go all the way to Tivoli it does not matter.—Only, M. le Marquis, take care that she does not fatigue herself too much to enjoy the day.”

The Marquis replied that he would certainly take care of this; and, as the carriage drove on, Lady Dorchester looked at her companion with a smile.

“Poor Mr. Stanhope must feel baffled,” she said. “Why did you not have more compassion on his desire to deposit Miss Lescar safely here? What is the reason of his uneasiness, by-the-by? Is he afraid of the fascinations of the Marquis?”

Mrs. Falconer replied evasively, for she was herself not quite sure of the reason of Stanhope’s evident wish to separate Irène and the Marquis. No doubt he perceived what she had detected some time before—the interest of the Marquis in this girl, who seemed formed by nature to interest every one—but whether he feared the effect on Irène, or was thinking of herself, she felt unable to decide. “If he is thinking of *me*, I must let him see that his consideration is needless,” she thought, with an emotion of haughtiness.

Mrs. Bevis, meanwhile, who was an admirable horsewoman, was gayly trotting along between her husband and Count Waldegrave, and she also remarked presently that the Marquis seemed to have taken entire charge of Miss Lescar’s equestrian education. “I thought she was your pupil, Henry?” she said, with a glance at Colonel Bevis.

“Oh, the Marquis is as good a rider as I am,” replied that gentleman; “and I fancy his mode of teaching is better. At least, I observe that Miss Lescar appears to get on better under his instruction.”

“There might be reasons for that, apart from the superiority of the instruction,” said Mrs. Bevis, laughing. “M. de Châteaumesnil has charming manners. I wonder—” She paused.

“Do you wonder how far charming manners will assist in giving a good seat and a good hand?” asked Waldegrave, with a smile.

She shook her head. “No; I do not wonder at all, for, according to my experience, charming manners are an assistance in everything. And really”—she turned and glanced back critically at Irène—“Miss Lescar is improving wonderfully.”

“There is a talent for horsemanship as for everything else,” said Colonel Bevis. “Miss Lescar has the material for a first-rate rider—a fine light hand, great quickness in learning, and any amount of pluck.”

“If one may judge by her face, she is absolutely fearless,” said Waldegrave.

“Is it not a noble, spirited head?” said Mrs. Bevis. “I should like to see it on a cameo. *A propos*, I hear that it has been beautifully modeled by that young man whom we have met once or twice at Mrs. Falconer’s, Henry. Erle—Erne—is that his name?”

“I was not aware that Mr. Erne was a sculptor,” said Waldegrave.

“Oh, after a fashion—*dilettante*, so I am told. But Mr. Ffulkes, who is an authority, speaks very highly of this head—which he says is as fine as the Pompeian

Sappho.”

“The head, I presume—not the work,” said Colonel Bevis, while Waldegrave drew his brows closer together and looked straight before him. He knew it was no affair of his if a dozen sculptors modeled Irène Lescar’s head, yet he felt as if Erne had been guilty of an unwarrantable impertinence, for which he deserved summary rebuke.

They were now approaching the hills, and their surroundings grew more interesting. They crossed the Ponte Lucano and paused for a few minutes at the massive castellated tomb of the Plautii, which, like the mausoleum of Hadrian, has changed its character from a classic sepulchre to a mediaeval fortress. But they did not pause at the Villa Adriana, which, since the destroying hand of Signor Rosa has fallen upon it, as upon the ruins of Rome, has lost the beauty and grace of verdure with which Nature adorned it during many successive centuries, and has become a mere mass of bare stones, interesting only to the antiquary.

During their halt at the tomb, there was a slight change in the order of the party, and, when they began the ascent of the mountain by the beautiful winding road of Duke Braschi, Irène found herself riding between the Marquis and Count Waldegrave. At this time, however, she had little thought for anything save the beauty around them, which now increased with every step. The groves of grand old olive-trees through which they were passing—those groves of Tivoli that even from the walls of Rome can be seen clothing the mountain-side—were indescribably picturesque: the great gnarled, twisted, caverned trunks, throwing out mighty branches, clothed in the gray-green foliage, with its silver lining, which seen once can never be forgotten. “It is well,” says Ruskin, “to have seen and loved the olive-tree; to have loved it for Christ’s sake, partly also for the helmed Wisdom’s sake, which was to the heathen in some sort as that nobler Wisdom which stood at God’s right hand when He founded the earth and established the heavens; to have loved it even to the hoary dimness of its delicate foliage, subdued and faint of hue, as if the ashes of the Gethsemane agony had been cast upon it for ever; and to have traced line by line the gnarled writhing of its intricate branches and the pointed petals of its light and narrow leaves, inlaid on the beautiful field of the sky, and the small rosy-white stars of its spring blossoming, and the beads of sable fruit scattered by autumn along its topmost boughs—the right, in Israel, of the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow—and, more than all, the softness of the mantle, silver-gray and tender like the down on a bird’s breast, with which, far away, it veils the undulations of the mountains.”

As they mounted in gradual and easy ascent, each turn in the road revealed a wider distance, a more striking picture. Near at hand were steeps clothed in deep-green foliage, cliffs on which convents and chapels hung, and masses of rock crowned with flowers; but afar, boundless in appearance as the ocean, the vast Campagna spread, while, lion-like, Soracte lifted itself out of the azure plain, and the Sabine Hills bounded it with their beautiful outlines.

“What glorious distances!” said Irène, as they paused at one of the many winding turns of the road to look over a world outspread like a scroll. “And what enchanting pictures on every side! Surely it was no wonder that Tivoli—or Tibur, as it was then—should have been the great summer resort of noble Romans in the days of the empire.”

“Or that it should have been beloved by the poets,” said Waldegrave. “Horace has sung the beauty of its thymy uplands, its luxuriant woods, and leaping waters, in imperishable verse.”

“And yet,” said the Marquis, “as Ampère remarks, ‘*Malheureusement il ne reste d’Horace à Tivoli que les cascates dont le murmure semble un echo de ses vers.*’”

“But I can not think it unfortunate that nothing else remains of him,” said Irène, as they rode on. “What are the ruins of a villa compared to poetry which seems to mingle itself for ever with the voice of the waters that sounded in his ears?”

“And therein lies the immortality of genius,” said Waldegrave. “To so paint in words the beauty of earth and sky that henceforth all that come after shall see that beauty with the poet’s eyes, and so the image of his presence shall still move amid the scenes he loved.”

Irène looked at the speaker with a glance such as from the first had passed between them—a glance of that quick response which makes the essence of sympathy. Once this response had been reluctant—but now it was not so; partly because her feeling toward Waldegrave had changed, and partly because she felt as if all painful things were far from her in this glorious upper world. Even to breathe the air was like drinking the wine of the gods. She had a sense of delight in the wide, glorious prospect, in the exquisite beauty of her immediate surroundings, and in the thrilling associations of the spot, that was a veritable exaltation. For it is in the nature of great scenes to waken noble feeling. One is ashamed of anything petty in the face of a landscape which is like an embodied thought of God.

But now they approached the gate of the town by the stately five-towered castle of Pius II, and entering passed along a street full of picturesque mediaeval houses, to the point of rock known as *Castro Vetere*, the citadel of ancient Tibur, where stands the beautiful temple of the Sibyl—familiar, through pictures, to all the world—with the grace of its pure Greek architecture outlined against the opposite heights of Monte Peschiavatore, and crowning the verge of that deep chasm in the cleft mountain where the Anio took its mighty leap, until diverted to another channel in order to save the temple from being eventually carried away. Farther beyond the headlong waters now pour

“In floods of snow-white foam,”

filling all the air with tuneful thunder as they make their plunge of more than three hundred feet into the green depths below.

Leaving the horses at an inn near by, the party followed the beautiful walks which by gradual descent lead into the depths of what Cardinal Wiseman calls “Anio’s urn”—the abyss filled with its resounding voice, damp with its constant spray, and rent and riven into a thousand picturesque forms by its ceaseless waters. It is an enchanted spot. For here, in the cool, shadowy dimness, with the classic river foaming and roaring near by, it is impossible not to dream of all beautiful creations of the classic fancy—and of the immortal figures of the classic time. Here Horace may have wandered, murmuring to himself:

“Quam domus Albunae resonantis,
Et praeceps Anio ac Tiburni lucus, et uda
Mobilibus pomaria rivis.”

And here is a fit haunt for dryads and nymphs, for fauns and satyrs. Far overhead the arch

of an ancient bridge is seen through the masses of foliage which hang from the cliffs, and higher still, clear-cut against a sky of Italy's own blue—that blue which the great painters borrowed for the mantle of the Mother of God—stands in bold relief the exquisite temple of the Sibyl on its rocky throne.

“What taste they had, those wonderful ancients!” said Stanhope, as they stood gazing at this beautiful picture. “Nothing can be conceived more sublime than the situation of that temple—it is ‘art crowning nature in perfect harmony of beauties.’”

“It is almost too picturesque to be quite natural,” said Lady Dorchester. “I feel as if I were looking at a painter's dream.”

“How significant that feeling is of the manner in which our modern appreciation is trained!” said Mrs. Falconer. “A perfect harmony of art and nature is to us so strange that it seems unreal. But to the eyes of the ancients such harmony was as familiar as possible; and the grace of a beautiful temple crowning a height like that, no more remarkable than the hideous erections of the nineteenth century are to our sight.”

“Happy ancients!” said Irène, with a soft sigh.

“They were certainly happy in their opportunities of culture,” said Waldegrave. “Think of a poet living in this enchanting spot, while yonder lay imperial Rome with all her splendor—the center of the world in a sense never known before or since.”

“But they were pagans, you know,” said Mrs. Bevis, in the tone of stating an undeniable drawback.

“Pagans, yes,” said M. de Châteaumesnil. “But, as pagans, more faithful to their idea of religion than is the modern world to the light of faith. We are fast lapsing back into essential paganism, without the good which leavened it, or the grace and beauty which adorned it.”

“It will certainly be long before we erect such a temple as that to any of our idols,” said Stanhope, smiling.

Presently, having viewed the cascades and explored the grottoes, they ascended again to the upper world, and, after a short interval for rest, started on the walk to the Quintiliolo. This road—one of the most charming features of Tivoli—winds along the side of the hill, amid a succession of constantly changing and ever lovely scenes, and, as it passes around the valley, commands a perfect view of the picturesque town, with its temples, ruins, and churches crowning the bold crest of the opposite height, of the splendid verdure-clad cliffs, of the Anio pouring its waters in foaming flood into the deep, green chasm, and of the amethystine distances of the Campagna—a vast world where form is lost and only color remains—spreading in misty beauty to the remote horizon, where the tints of earth and sky blend, and where one glittering point alone breaks the level line—a solemn dome which tells where Rome lies hidden on the wide expanse.

“Lady Dorchester is right—it is almost too lovely for reality,” said Irène to her companion, as they paused again and yet again by the stone parapet which bounds the road, to look at some scene more enchanting than the last. “It is like a picture—yet how poor all pictures seem beside the work of Nature!”

Her companion, who was Count Waldegrave, for a moment did not answer. They were in the rear of the party; the others had passed on, while they lingered, gazing down at the slopes of the mountain covered with olives, at the thickets of myrtle and jasmine, the banks of wild hyacinths and tufts of rosemary, at the waters of the Cascatelle,

foaming, dancing, sparkling through a wealth of green verdure, at great gnarled trees carpeted around their roots with violets and anemones, at glimpses of the parapeted road winding along the hill-side, at wayside fountains where peasant-women stooped to fill the brazen water-jars which they poised with antique grace on their handsome heads, and at a vision of ultramarine cliffs and magic plain far, far beyond, while over all arched a dazzling sky, and the air was such as might blow upon the battlements of paradise.

"It is not the first beautiful scene on which we have looked together," Waldegrave said, at last; "and in such a scene your presence seems a natural and fitting element. It has been so to me ever since I saw you first, gazing out over the Campagna from the terrace of the Villa Mattei."

His voice was quiet in the extreme, but underneath its quietness was a tone that startled her. Involuntarily she turned and looked at him; but he was not looking at her. He was gazing afar toward Rome, as, on the day he spoke of, *she* had gazed toward the hills where they now stood together.

"You would be surprised, perhaps, to know how much your face revealed to me that day," he went on—still looking across the plain as if he saw the ilex opening and St. Philip's seat. "After all, it is true—we only know those perfectly whom we recognize at first sight."

"And do you think that you recognized me, that you know me perfectly?" she asked. "If you do think so, I can only say that no man was ever more mistaken."

He looked at her now—meeting the sudden light that had come into her eyes with the clear penetration of his glance.

"Do I think that I recognized you then, that I know you now?" he repeated. "Yes—as far as the real you is concerned. By that I mean your mind, your nature, your soul. I do not pretend to know anything of the circumstances of your life, or to fathom the mystery which from the first has made you turn to me a different face from the face which you show to all the rest of the world."

She turned that face quickly away from him. "Why do you speak of that here?" she asked, in a troubled voice. "I had, for the time, almost forgotten."

"But only for the time," he said. "You would have remembered—the shadow would have come into your eyes again, even if I had not recalled it. They have been like crystal water today. One could look into their depths, and find there only kind and gentle thoughts. But now—look at me now, and let me see what I can read!"

His tone was more of an appeal than a challenge; but to her it was like the last, and she turned her glance to his again, compelling herself to keep it steady for a minute.

"Yes," he said, speaking as if to himself, "it has come back. But, for the first time, I see something besides the shadow of defiance and dislike: I see that you are steeling yourself with an effort."

"Against *you*, perhaps I am," she said, in a low tone. "For you have done me no harm. I am just enough to acknowledge that. But against what you represent to me—it will never require an effort, Count Waldegrave, to steel myself against that!"

There was no effort certainly in the fire which came into her eyes at those words. And, as he looked at her, he did not pause to ask himself what end it would serve to pluck the heart out of this mystery. He only felt that he must do so.

Yet there was no trace of eagerness in his face or manner. Still standing motionless by the parapet, and regarding her with the same clear glance, he said: "And

what do I represent? The time has come for me to ask and for you—in justice—to answer.”

“And why should I answer?” she returned, proudly. “What am I to you, that you should concern yourself with the kind of sentiment I feel toward you—or the cause of that sentiment? The east and the west are not farther apart than your life and mine have been in the past and will be in the future. It is a mere freak of Fate that has brought us together for a little while. I told you once before that we could never be friends, but that I was content to treat you as I would any other indifferent stranger. Have I not kept my word?”

“Yes,” he answered; “but I am not content with that. I wish to know—I *will* know—why to me, of all men, the possibility of your friendship is denied!”

The imperiousness of his tone was involuntary, was simply the form that strong feeling took. But it struck on Irène’s mood like flint on steel, bringing out the spark of anger.

“You will never know from me,” she answered, haughtily, “though, no doubt, there are others who will tell you—if you choose to seek knowledge from them.”

There was a pause. They looked at each other steadily for a moment, and what each read in the other, besides a strife of will and pride, it is difficult to say. Irène felt as if she could not withdraw her gaze from that which held it and seemed searching the depths of her soul. She had no idea of the measure of time, before Waldegrave said:

“I will not seek to learn anything which you do not choose to tell me. If you knew me better, I should not need to say this.”

Then, as she looked away from him again, something like a rush of feeling—was it relief or pain?—made the fair prospect swim for a moment before her eyes. It was at this moment that the first doubt of her own wisdom assailed her. Some words of Stanhope’s—harsh words they had seemed when spoken—sounded in her ears above the fall of Anio’s waters. Was it, indeed, unworthy of her—the concealment? And the passionate desire to return in some sort the wrong that had blasted her mother’s life and darkened her own? How was it that now—when Fate put the weapon in her hand—she could not use it? She had often said in bitterness of spirit that she was her father’s daughter. But the hour had come for her to feel that she was her mother’s also. “No wrong done by another can degrade us,” the sweet, solemn voice seemed saying in her heart, “unless we suffer it to drag us down to hatred and revenge.” She put her hand to her throat with a sudden sound like a convulsive sob, which startled Waldegrave. Quite as much the paleness of her face startled him when she turned around.

“Do you know what it is,” she said, quickly, “to be rent in two—to be drawn in opposite directions by opposite feelings and influences—to be neither wholly good enough to forgive, nor wholly bad enough to hate, yet to be torn by the struggle and exhausted by the fight? You do not comprehend; and I can not tell you what I mean. But those who are wiser than I am are probably right—it is just that you should know. Therefore, do not let any thought of me keep you from listening, if—if one who has a right to speak should come to you.”

The effort which it cost her to utter this was so great that it gave an effect to the words, in themselves sufficiently surprising, which startled Waldegrave, even more than the expression of her face.

“But,” he said, moved out of his usual calm, and taking a step nearer to her,

“whatever there is to tell, why should you not tell it to me yourself—here—now?”

“It is impossible,” she answered. “An hour ago I could not have believed it possible that I should say as much as this; but there is no need that you and I shall ever meet again: so it does not matter.”

“No need! —He stopped himself suddenly. Surely there was no need, and surely also there was that within his heart which made the need imperative the other way—imperative that they should not meet. For where could this attraction possibly end? He was sufficiently master of himself to face that question and answer it. And the answer left no alternative. In the very pang which stirred him at the thought of separation, he recognized the absolute necessity for it. There was no possible ground on which he could meet this beautiful stranger—this girl without any advantage of worldly position, of whose past and whose circumstances he knew nothing—without incurring danger; not, indeed, to what he held and would hold sacred through any stress—the obligations and duties of rank—but to his own peace of mind. To *hers* he recognized that there was no danger. The mysterious dislike—which yet was not entirely dislike—with which she regarded him, surrounded her like a shield.

“I do not understand you in the least,” he said, at length. “But perhaps you will tell me that does not matter.”

“Do not think me rude,” she answered, “if I say that nothing could matter less. Now let us walk on. I fear the others must wonder where we are.”

CHAPTER XX.

Meanwhile, another conversation was taking place along this beautiful road to the Quintiliolo. Mrs. Falconer, as the party set out, had, by a slight gesture, summoned Stanhope to her side.

“I shall be glad if you will walk with me,” she said, in a low tone; “there is something I wish to say to you—presently.”

“You are very kind to give me the pleasure of being with you,” he answered. “One may be grateful for that which one could not have ventured to ask for.”

“You have suddenly become very modest,” she replied. “I can not imagine that there is anything for which—if you wished it—you would hesitate to ask.”

A slight—very slight—significance in her tone was not lost on his ear. But he smiled as he said, “If you really think so, it only proves that, even after our long acquaintance, you do not know me well.”

“I may say the same thing,” she rejoined. “Even after our long acquaintance, I sometimes wonder if you know me at all.”

“What proof of ignorance have I given?” he asked, gravely.

She looked at him with a glance which he did not comprehend. “I will tell you presently,” she answered.

And presently, when they had fallen a little apart from the others, and private conversation became possible, she opened the subject in a manner altogether unexpected to him.

“I should like to know,” she said, “why you were so anxious this morning that Irène should enter the carriage and that I should ride?”

Stanhope, who was not prepared for being taken to task on this point, felt himself

change countenance—a fact sufficiently unusual to warrant strong conclusions being drawn from it.

“I thought my reason was obvious,” he answered, after a perceptible pause. “The ride was too long for her—and, though she may not have been conscious of fatigue at the time, I am sure she will feel the effects severely.”

“That may have been one reason,” Mrs. Falconer replied; “but you can not affirm that it was your only or even your chief one. And if you do not wish to tell me what that reason was, I can tell you. It was because you wished to separate her from the Marquis de Châteaumesnil.”

Again she looked at him, as if defying him to contradict her; and he had not one word to say. So, after a moment, she resumed:

“Do you call that knowing me, Mr. Stanhope? To think that I would care for an allegiance which had wavered and needed to be guarded from the object that attracted it? Have you not done me injustice enough in urging me to barter my wealth for rank, without doing me the deeper injustice of fancying that all I cared for was that rank, without regard to the loyalty of the person concerned?”

The proud, passionate indignation of her voice pierced him like a sword—as the reproach which she uttered once before on this subject had done. He looked at her with a face pale from feeling, and eyes that seemed pleading against her judgment.

“Before I answer you with regard to Irène and the Marquis,” he said, “let me reply to your charge with regard to yourself. You misunderstood me in fancying that I ever urged you to barter your wealth for rank. I only thought it best, from every point of view, that you should make a great marriage—and I fancied that you thought so also.”

“You had no reason to imagine that I thought so,” she said, with the same quiver of indignation in her voice.

“Pardon me,” he answered. “I had reason in my knowledge of your character, and in much that has fallen from yourself. You have not denied that, within certain limits, you are an ambitious woman. I have never done you the injustice to imagine that you would condescend to anything unworthy, for an ambitious end. But there is nothing unworthy in making a *mariage de convenance*. It is only a question of taste and of personal character.”

“I understand,” she said—and now it was an edge of bitterness that her voice took—“you thought me a woman without any of the finer sentiments which go to make up the highest type of womanhood; one who, for greater rank, loftier social position, was ready to enter into a loveless marriage. And I”—she paused for an instant, and looked away over the beautiful foreground of rocks and water and green hill-side to the blue Campagna and the distant solemn dome—“well, I justified your opinion in thus far that I have hesitated. I have taken into consideration doing what every one advised; I have said to myself: ‘Why not? Love failed me long ago, and those who are my friends think that I can do no better with my life than to devote it to social ambition.’ Yet something has held me back. Perhaps it was the dread of losing my liberty—for marriage is a bondage which only love can sweeten. But now I hesitate no longer. Consideration is at an end. To think of marrying a man who had worn out the power of keen feeling, and whose indifference toward me was only a part of his indifference to all the world, was one thing; but to think of marrying a man to whom another woman is more attractive than I am, is quite a different thing. Of the last I will never think.”

The flash of a haughty glance emphasized her words—and Stanhope's heart leaped as it had not leaped in many days before. He felt like one from whom a weight was suddenly lifted, before whom a door in a dark wall unexpectedly opens with glimpses of the fair, enchanting world of magic plain and radiant hills. Involuntarily he turned toward her eagerly. "Do you mean, then, that you will not marry M. de Châteaumesnil?" he asked.

"I mean that," she answered, coldly—for she read his eagerness as alarm—"I must forget my own self-respect before I could marry a man who is in love with some one else."

Then the obstinate sense of justice which had before this led Stanhope to speak in behalf of the Marquis, forced him to say:

"There, I think, you mistake. I am sure that he is not in love with Irène. She has attracted him from his first acquaintance with her, as—to use your own expression—she must attract every one, and he is interested and charmed by her; but no more than that."

"Everything is relative," she answered, "and to be interested and charmed is a great deal for M. de Châteaumesnil. Certainly he has never professed to be either the one or the other, so far as I am concerned. But do not imagine," she went on, quickly, as she met an anxious glance from Stanhope, "that I am angry or piqued. I have known this for some time past, and it has not cost me a pang of any kind—not even of mortified vanity. You are the only person with whom I have been angry. I confess that I felt very much vexed with you this morning when I saw, by your persistence about the riding, that you recognized all that I did, and that, instead of giving me the warning of a friend—instead of saying, 'At least I hold you worthy of a better fate than to give your life and all its capabilities to a man who even now thinks more of another than of you'—you were anxious that I should remain in ignorance, and under any circumstances become Marquise de Châteaumesnil."

"You are very hard on me," he said, in a low tone. "Do you not see that I had no right? And then, on my honor, I believe that you are wrong in your inference—I do not believe that the Marquis feels for Irène anything that merits serious consideration. You may credit my sincerity in this," he added, "since it is no easy thing for me to say. But I should be guilty of treachery to my friend if I did *not* say it."

"I know that you are exceedingly loyal in your friendship—to him," she said, with a faint emphasis on the last pronoun.

"And you think that I am less loyal in my friendship to you?" he asked. "Well—with a slight, painful smile—"I must submit to that opinion as a punishment for venturing to advise—no, I never advised—for venturing to discuss your personal and private affairs."

"Forgive me," she said, with a sudden impulse. "What right have I to weigh and measure, to blame and reproach you? I am sure you have meant to be truly my friend; and if—if I expected some degree of comprehension from you which I have not found, it is well, no doubt, to realize that perfect comprehension is not to be hoped from any one on earth."

"If I have failed in comprehension, and made mistakes with regard to you," he said, "it is because I have presumptuously insisted on fitting your character to my conception of it, instead of being willing to amend the conception by the character."

"Perhaps I am to blame for not having a consistent character," she said, with a

smile. "But you know I warned you long ago that it was possible that even your judgment might be mistaken."

"I remember," he said, "and I can only repeat that I am sufficiently punished."

"But that I do not wish you to be," she said. "Why should I? There is no harm done. And if I have felt aggrieved by your reading me in such a light—well, that is over. After all, what was my anger but a form of wounded self-love? What I resented was that you rated me lower than I felt that I deserved to be rated."

"For any one to rate you higher than I do," he said, "would be impossible, I think; and I can hardly make you understand the form of my mistake, which was rather in holding you to be fitted by nature for a great position, than in any belief of your ambitious desire for it."

"Let us then say no more about it," she answered. "And I assure you that, as concerns M. de Châteaumesnil, I feel relief rather than regret. I had bound myself to answer him, and I grew daily more uncertain how to answer. Now all uncertainty is ended."

"And yet," said Stanhope, constrained again by stubborn honesty to speak against the dictates of his own heart, "I am sure that you will do him injustice if you base your refusal on the attraction he has manifested for Irène."

"I shall do no injustice," she replied. "I shall not act rashly. I have not even judged rashly—I have observed M. de Châteaumesnil closely for some time, and I believe I know more of what he feels than he knows himself."

To this Stanhope did not answer, and they walked on in silence for several minutes. The soft air—like an elixir of life—blew in their faces, fresh with the heavenly freshness of the great hills. The deep ravines at their feet were filled with silvery light as the wind passed over them, rustling the leaves of the olive-woods which clothed them; long tendrils of clematis and ivy were waving from the rocks, up which goats were scrambling to nibble at the herbage, and across the gorge they caught the white flash of leaping waters, and saw the temple of the Sibyl clear-cut against the azure sky.

It was, as Irène and Waldegrave were just then agreeing, an ideal scene; but people have not always feelings at command to accord with such scenes, and Stanhope was very much out of accord with it. There was a tumult in his breast which he was determined should not find expression, and since the danger of silence was just then greater than the danger of speech, he soon broke into the latter.

"I can not avoid blaming myself," he said abruptly, "for having introduced Irène into your life. She has only proved an element of perplexity and trouble."

"So far from that," said Mrs. Falconer, "she has proved an element of pleasure and interest. But even if it were otherwise," she added, with a smile, "you should not blame yourself, for I remember very well a day when, as we walked through the park of Versailles, I told you that I would take charge of her. You remonstrated then, if my memory serves me, and prophesied much possible trouble; but I insisted upon carrying out my intention, and I have never for an hour regretted it."

"I remember that day very well," he said, looking at the picturesque road as it wound away before them, flecked with sun and shadow, "and how you exulted in the freedom that permitted you to do what you would."

"And I have nearly parted with it!" she said. "The thought almost makes me shudder! Henceforth suitors may come and go, but I shall hold fast to the one great good

that I have.”

“Do you then,” he said, after a moment’s pause, “forswear all thought of marriage?”

“I can not tell how my ambition will be tempted hereafter,” she answered, a little dryly; “but for the present, certainly I wish to hear no more of it.”

“You shall certainly hear no more of it from me,” he said, with a lightening of the heart, like that of one who sees a threatening evil removed from his path. “We will talk of Irène. So you still think it would be well for me to tell Count Waldegrave to-day who she is?”

“That is for you to decide,” she answered. “I am only sure that he should be told as soon as possible. Are you aware that Violet Dysart is in Rome, and that she not only knows who Irène is, but that she is acquainted with Count Waldegrave?”

“No,” he replied, “I was not aware that Miss Dysart had wandered to Rome, nor that she was acquainted with Count Waldegrave; but I was aware that she knew all that there is to know about Irène.”

“How did she learn it?”

“You forget that it is no secret. Madame Lescar’s story is an exceedingly well-known fact, and a few years ago was fresh in the minds of most of her country-people. Of late the deep seclusion of her life has caused many to forget; but you can judge how little is needed to recall it in all its freshness, by the manner in which you remembered it as soon as I mentioned her name to you.”

“But I had a peculiar, almost a personal interest—from having heard my mother speak of her.”

“That interest was slight,” he said, with a smile, “compared to that which gossips feel. Quietly as Madame Lescar lived, and quietly as she died, she was not suffered to rest in peace by the purveyors of scandal. I never told you—it was not worth a thought—that the ‘Tittle-Tattle’ had a long article on her death; a garbled version of her story in all its details. Miss Dysart sent me the paper.”

“The ‘Tittle-Tattle’—oh, I know what you mean,” said Mrs. Falconer. “That odious paper which is published in Paris, and abounds in the most insolent personalities. For the matter of that, all personalities are insolent, unless there is a distinct understanding between the editor and the person desiring to be socially advertised. To one who does not desire it, nothing is more outraging than such a liberty.”

“It is one of the crying evils of the day—the unbridled license of the press,” said Stanhope; “and the violation of every sanctity of private life must, in its result, be demoralizing in the extreme. You would have been indignant if you had seen the article on Madame Lescar—but ‘things without remedy should be without regard.’ I put the paper in the fire, and endeavored to forget it.”

“And Violet Dysart sent it to you?”

“Yes. She is of the class who like such information as is afforded by papers of the order of the ‘Tittle-Tattle.’ Of course, when she heard of Miss Lescar—a young girl who had lately lost her mother, and whom you had taken under your protection—she had no difficulty in putting two and two together.”

“And she will not hesitate to enlighten Count Waldegrave at the first opportunity. Lionel Erne said that she looked and spoke most significantly when, on the Pincio a few days ago, she saw him standing at my carriage.”

“You are sure that she knows him?”

“I am not sure, but it is probable that she met him in Nice. I should not be surprised if he were the magnet that has drawn her to Rome—poor Violet!”

“Then certainly he must be told at once,” said Stanhope. “This makes the necessity imperative. I shall either find an opportunity to speak to him to-day, or—if opportunity does not offer—lose no time when we return to Rome.”

“I am curious to know how he will take the revelation,” said Mrs. Falconer, after a pause. “Have you observed that he is like one attracted against his will by Irène? He does not voluntarily seek her; but his eyes are not thoroughly under his control, and they follow her constantly, with an evidently unwilling fascination. “What will he think, what will he do, when he hears who she is?”

Stanhope lifted his shoulders. “I do not know,” he said. “But of this I am sure—whatever *he* may do, *she* will never willingly see him again.”

The scattered party reunited on the broad terrace, where the Church of the Madonna di Quintiliolo stands on the slope of Monte Peschiavatore, looking across the valley at picturesque Tivoli, at the massive ruins of the villa of Maecenas, at the foaming, sparkling cascades which burst forth beneath it and contrast with the rich tint of its old masonry and the vivid green of the surrounding vegetation, and at the vast distances of the Campagna spreading as far as the sea, which in clear weather can be discerned—a glimmering line on the distant horizon.

After remaining here for some time, they followed a path which winds in steep descent down through magnificent olive-groves—trees that look patriarchal enough to have sheltered Horace—to the Ponte dell’ Acquaria, or “Bridge of the Golden “Water”—called thus from a beautiful spring which rises near it. A modern bridge crosses the Anio here, but a fine single arch of travertine is left of the massive Roman bridge, over which the ancient Via Tiburtina passed.

At the spring they found servants with hampers awaiting them, and Colonel Bevis said he had decided that this was preferable to taking luncheon at one of the inns of Tivoli. Every one agreed with him, and Lady Dorchester in especial commended his judgment highly.

“I was just considering within myself,” she said, “how I should possibly ascend that opposite height, where I am told we are to go, without some support for exhausted nature.”

“And I am glad of an excuse to stay here a little longer,” said Irène.

Lady Dorchester smiled as she looked at the girl, who stood by the fountain, the flickering shadows falling over her bare, graceful head—for she had taken off her hat—her eyes full of pleasure, her slender form seen against a background of beautiful greenery and foaming water framed by the noble arch of the ancient bridge.

“You might be taken for the nymph of the spot,” she said, “and nymphs, I believe, require nothing besides mist to subsist upon. But you must not be surprised if the rest of us need something more substantial.”

Irène laughed as she sat down on the spreading root of a large olive-tree. “Dear Lady Dorchester,” she said, “I have not expressed the least surprise, and no doubt I shall like very well to be supported in that manner myself; but, just now, I feel as if it were enough simply to be in such a beautiful place.”

“Mademoiselle Lescar makes one understand,” said the Marquis, “what that love

of nature is which one of the English poets said has ‘no need of a remoter charm.’”

“Am I remarkable in it?” she asked, simply. “It seems to me that all people who are capable of feeling at all, must feel on this subject alike.”

“No more than we feel alike on any other,” said Lady Dorchester. “You and I, for instance, look on a beautiful scene with wholly different eyes. And I confess that I should like to borrow yours,” she added, with another smile.

“We might all be glad to borrow Miss Lescar’s eyes,” said Colonel Bevis, with an air of gallantry.

It was a delightful hour which they spent in this dell fit for Egeria—the beautiful fountain sparkling at their feet, the Anio rushing by, the soft green shade flickering over them, the great hills rising above, while attentive servants placed delicate dishes before them, and filled their glasses with the beaded foam of wine as pure and sweet as the water in which it had been cooled—the delightful vintage in which seems expressed all the mellow sunshine of France and Italy.

After luncheon, chance gave to Stanhope the opportunity he desired for speaking to Count Waldegrave. They had roused themselves from the pleasant lassitude which follows such refreshment, from the talk that ranged lightly over many subjects, and prepared to make the ascent of the Clivus Tiburtinus and re-enter Tivoli. As they started, Waldegrave lingered behind to light a cigar, and, perceiving the opportunity, Stanhope fell back and joined him—producing his own cigar-case as an excuse.

“I perceive, M. le Comte, that we have a bond of sympathy,” he observed.

“One very strong—though light as smoke,” answered the other, with a smile. He had seen little of Stanhope, but was not indisposed to like him. He extended his box of vesuvians, adding, “May I offer you a light?”

“Thanks,” said Stanhope, accepting the courtesy, though he was too confirmed a smoker not to be well provided himself. By the time he had lighted his cigar, however, he was gratified to perceive that the others were some distance in advance, ascending the steep road.

But, now that he found himself alone with Waldegrave as they slowly followed, the difficulty of saying what he intended made itself felt. Without an apparent reason to justify it, the revelation was likely to appear unnecessary—as he had remarked to Mrs. Falconer; and, but for the thought of Miss Dysart, it is probable that he would have allowed the opportunity to escape and suffered matters to go on, trusting that no need for disclosure would arise, or else that the *déroulement* would arrange itself. But this being impossible under present circumstances, and feeling the need to justify Mrs. Falconer even more than himself, for permitting the concealment, he began:

“Chance has befriended me, M. le Comte, in a desire which I have had for some time to speak to you in private. Indeed, if today’s excursion had not accidentally brought us together, I should have been obliged to seek an interview with you for the purpose.”

The formality of this speech, and the gravity of the speaker’s tone, struck Waldegrave with less surprise than either would have excited but for his late conversation with Irène—from the recollection of which his consciousness was still vibrating. He felt instantly what these words prefaced, and he seemed to hear Irène’s voice as she said, “If any one who has a right to speak comes to you, do not let any thought of me keep you from listening.” Plainly the time for listening—for hearing what was the mystery which had puzzled him—was come. He turned to Stanhope with a face that expressed the

keenest interest and attention.

“I shall be happy to hear whatever you have to say,” he answered.

“There would be no need for me to say anything,” Stanhope replied, “if I had been in Rome when you first met Miss Lescar. I should have insisted upon informing you who she is before you made her acquaintance; and in that case, speaking for her, I am sure that there would have been no acquaintance.”

“Waldegrave stopped short in the path which they were following, and almost unconsciously confronted the speaker.

“Why not?” he asked, quickly—almost haughtily—“I have known from the first that there was some mystery connected with Miss Lescar, but I am unable to conceive how it can affect me. You say that you would have told me who she is. Tell me now. *Who is she?*”

The question was peremptory; the answer prompt and brief:

“She is your uncle’s daughter.”

Silence followed. For a moment they stood facing each other—Stanhope reading the rapid changes in the face before him—

Waldegrave regarding him with that mixture of surprise, incredulity, and dawning belief which often characterizes the reception of astonishing news. At last he said, in a low, restrained voice:

“My uncle’s daughter! Then you mean—”

“That she is the child of Prince Waldegrave’s first marriage— with Miss Lescar—an American,” replied Stanhope. “You must certainly be aware that there was a marriage.”

“Yes,” answered Waldegrave, after a pause. “I am aware that my uncle made such a marriage, and that it was regarded by his friends as a mistake; but it was set aside before I knew him, and I have never heard him allude to it.”

“He would hardly be likely to allude to it if he has the grace of a conscience,” said Stanhope. “Nothing can be conceived more shameful than the manner in which his wife was treated. I do not apologize for such words, Count Waldegrave. Truth needs no apology.”

“And should not be resented,” said Count Waldegrave. “I am ignorant of anything beyond the barest facts of the matter. During my early youth I knew nothing of my uncle. He lived at court or on foreign missions, while I was brought up on my father’s estate in Silesia. His first marriage had been annulled before the death of my father. Since then he has taken the place of a father in my life.”

“And very naturally you are indisposed to judge him harshly,” said Stanhope. “But it is the test of a just mind to be able to put itself in the place of another; and if you will put yourself in the place of Irène Lescar, you may be able to understand the bitterness of her resentment toward the man who sacrificed her mother to his ambition.”

Waldegrave was silent for some time. Then he said: “I can understand. I realize what she must feel, and I know now what it is that has shone in her eyes when she looked at me.”

“You have represented and recalled to her,” said Stanhope, “the wrong which darkened her mother’s life and threatens to embitter her own. The mother bore her great burden with a nobleness and dignity that I have never seen equaled. It is not from her that Irène has her fiery passion and unbending nature. Those traits are inherited from the

father she abhors. It was her mother's greatest anxiety in life and last thought in death, the fear that this sense of wrong would darken and overshadow her nature. Therefore, of all things to have been avoided was anything which would recall and intensify the sense of it. Her acquaintance with you has been such a thing. It has kept fresh in her mind the passionate sense of outrage, and deepened the desire for revenge, which is a poison that will destroy the noblest nature."

"If that is the case," said Waldegrave, "why was I not told at once?"

"Because," answered Stanhope, "Mrs. Falconer had not sufficient resolution to resist Irène, who vehemently insisted that you should not be told. Had I been here, I should not have felt it right to regard her wishes; but, when I arrived, the acquaintance had been made. I therefore waited to see what would be the result. I hoped that it might prove a mere passing contact of strangers; but since circumstances have persistently continued to throw you together, I determined some time ago that you should hear the truth, notwithstanding Irène's opposition."

"You told her, then, of your intention?"

"Distinctly."

"And may I ask—since you speak with so much authority— what your position toward her is?"

"My position," replied Stanhope, "is that of her guardian. It is a responsibility which I reluctantly assumed at the earnest request of her mother, and which has been greatly lightened by the kindness of Mrs. Falconer."

"She is not related to Mrs. Falconer, then?"

"Not in the least. The only tie is that of hereditary friendship."

They walked on in silence for several minutes. Waldegrave was evidently thinking deeply, and as Stanhope glanced at him once or twice, he was struck by the expression of his face—a proud, resolute face seen thus in repose, but as Irène had felt in looking at it in St. John Lateran, not the face of a man who could be guilty of treading down weakness with power. They were nearing the crest of the hill, when he spoke abruptly:

"That was true which you said a moment ago—that it is the test of a just mind to be able to put itself in the place of another, and, I may add, to look calmly at both sides of a question or a fact. I should like to hear the story of my uncle's marriage as his daughter has heard it. Will you tell it to me?"

"Willingly," answered Stanhope. "But to tell it thoroughly and in detail would be too long for this time and place."

"As we return to Rome it may be possible to make an opportunity. If not, I shall be happy to see you at my apartment. And now, one other favor. Do not suffer Miss Lescar to know or suspect that you have spoken to me on this subject. Let her enjoy the remainder of the day without a shadow."

Stanhope was pleased by the consideration evinced in this request.

"She shall certainly not know or suspect from me," he said, "for it would make your presence very painful to her. But I warn you that her eyes are keen. Beware of betraying it yourself."

Waldegrave smiled slightly. "I rarely betray what I wish to conceal," he said. "Moreover, I shall not trust myself near her."

Then they entered the mediaeval battlemented gate, through which the rest of the

party had preceded them, into the narrow streets of the town, which still bears as its motto the proud name bestowed on it by Virgil, *Superbum Tibur*.

CHAPTER XXI.

Nothing can be conceived finer than the descent of the mountain from Tivoli. The whole azure scroll of the Campagna then unrolls before the gaze, from the base of the hill to the distant Mediterranean, and from the fairy Sabines to the Pontine Marshes—an expanse absolutely unmatched in all the world for beauty and historic glory. On all the near hill-sides, convents, villas, and villages gleam above the olive-groves that surround them, and in the midst of the great plain lies Rome—a vision of a city surmounted by the soaring dome which distance is unable to obliterate.

It seemed to Irène like a beautiful dream of a world at peace with heaven, as, leaning back beside Lady Dorchester in the luxurious open carriage, they were driven rapidly down the winding road—a fresh, soft wind blowing in their faces, at their feet the magical plain steeped in light and color, and before them a radiant sky, where mountains, cities, peaks, and infinite distances of cloud, were kindled into ineffable glory by the last rays of the sinking sun—while from every cliff and valley came the sweet sound of the Angelus bell, mingling with the tints of earth and heaven that make twilight so divine in Italy.

Waldegrave had kept his word. No shadow of the knowledge given to him had fallen on her to mar her enjoyment of the day. When they wandered through the wild, beautiful garden of the Villa d'Este, he had carefully avoided approaching her; though, as Mrs. Falconer had remarked, his eyes were less under his control than his movements, and *they* followed the graceful figure as it passed down the long alleys shaded by gigantic cypress and ilex trees, as it paused by fountains that flung their flashing spray against a background of deepest green, and fell with musical murmur into colossal basins fringed with ferns and mosses, or when it stood framed by that archway at the end of the great terrace, of which it has been well said, that “none but the most consummate artist would have placed it where it stands, in glorious relief against the soft distances of the many-hued Campagna.” It is impossible to imagine any presence more fitted to such scenes than that of Irène, with her noble bearing and classic grace; and as Waldegrave watched her he felt like one before whom obstacles vanished—and who had but to put forth his hand with one supreme effort, and seize that which had become to him of chief value in the world.

This feeling was still with him as he rode down the mountain in the sunset that was enchanting earth and sky. A few hours before he had thought that only separation was possible between himself and Irène. Now a sense of elation filled his veins like wine. She had been brought near to him in a manner that seemed as wonderful as it was unexpected, which stirred all the chivalry of his nature in her behalf. It was like a marvelous fate—like a page of romance—that this girl, toward whom he had been so strongly attracted from the first, and whom he had loved despite all the prejudices that had been arrayed against her, should prove to be of his own race and lineage, born while her mother bore his uncle's name in the face of the world! He went back in memory over all his meetings with her—recalling every look, every tone, every word, in the light of this new knowledge, and comprehending all that had been dark and puzzling—until his heart melted with an intense pity for the sadness that had fallen so early on an innocent

head. He tried then to remember all that he had heard of his uncle's first marriage. Certainly it had been annulled on the ground of a mere legal informality— *that* he knew; and, for the first time, a sense of the cruel injustice involved in this, occurred forcibly to him. It may safely be said that he had never before given a thought to the probable feelings of the woman whom Prince Waldegrave had swept out of the path of his ambition. The marriage had been a mistake which had been remedied—that was all. How sharp the remedy had proved to her whom it crushed, he had not considered until now, when it came to him with a penetrating sense of possible wrong, making a darker stain on noble honor than any *mésalliance* could.

“But if there has been wrong, it shall be mine to atone,” he said to himself, with a passionate pleasure in the thought that it would be his to banish for ever the shadow he had seen so often in the beautiful eyes, to give back to the daughter all that the mother had lost. His heart stirred as he felt how much he had already gained—much which he only realized now that he knew what forces had been arrayed against him—and with the hope of all that he would yet win. It was not strange that he did not think of failure. A man who has never failed in his life can hardly be expected to conceive that even a woman's heart is beyond his reach.

Altogether it was a magical hour. He had dropped behind the others, and only the regular tramp of his horse's feet broke the stillness, except when he met a group of peasants returning from their work in the vineyards below, and received their gracious “*Felicissima notte, signor.*” He echoed the salutation to himself, “*Felicissima!*” Yes, surely it was that—this the fair, coming night, which brought within his reach the happiness that when the sun rose had seemed absolutely unattainable save at a price he could not pay. All the poetry which formed the ideal element of his nature seemed to waken, and passion—the stronger for its late restraint—leaped all barriers. They were dreams as exquisite as the “cloud-capped towers and gorgeous palaces” of the heaven before him, which filled his mind and heart as he rode down the beautiful hill-side of Tivoli.

The Anio, running swift as an arrow, was still full of lovely reflections from the sky when he crossed the Ponte Lucano and on the farther side overtook Stanhope, who had fallen behind the others to wait for him. After a word or two, they rode on in silence for some time—both feeling the spell of the charmed twilight, and loath to break it by conversation. But several things still remained to be said, and, conscious that it would be difficult to find a better opportunity than this, Waldegrave presently spoke:

“Will you now, Mr. Stanhope, fulfill your promise to tell me the story of my uncle's marriage, as his daughter has heard it? I have been endeavoring to recall all that I ever heard regarding it—but that is very little.”

So Stanhope began the story that to its principal actor proved so sad a tragedy. In its details it was entirely new to Waldegrave, and, being related simply and strongly, every word told with the effect that only truth possesses. When it was ended, he remained silent for some time. Then he said in a meditative tone:

“If the mother was formed in such a mold as the daughter, the blow must have been terrible indeed to her!”

“The mother was all and more than all that the daughter is,” said Stanhope. “All the exquisite sensitiveness and delicate pride which you see in Irène was manifest in her. The blow was so terrible that but for her child I am sure that it would have killed her at

once. I believe that it did kill her at last.”

Again Waldegrave was silent for a moment or two before he said: “I do not doubt, from what you have told me—which is corroborated by my own knowledge—that she suffered a very cruel wrong, and that her daughter has just cause for resentment. What I desire to do, therefore, is to repair the wrong—as far as possible.”

“But how is it possible?” asked Stanhope, with surprise. “Madame Lescar has gone before ‘a Judge whom no king can corrupt.’ Nothing can efface the wrong done to her, or remove its memory from her daughter’s mind, its consequences from her daughter’s life.”

“Nothing, certainly, can now efface the wrong done to Madame Lescar,” said Waldegrave. “But it is possible to remove the consequences from her daughter’s life. There is not, in justice, any stain whatever upon her birth; and—especially now that her mother is dead—there is no reason why Prince Waldegrave should not acknowledge her as his daughter in the face of the world.”

Stanhope smiled—a little sarcastically. “You have not studied Irène’s character to much purpose,” he said, “if you fancy she would accept that or any other *amende* which Prince Waldegrave could offer. She is the passionate champion of her mother’s wrong, and she would rather live under the stigma which injustice has placed upon her, than to take rank and wealth from the man who inflicted that wrong.”

“From my knowledge of her I can imagine it possible,” said Waldegrave. “But there is another way of repairing the injustice, to which no such objection could be made. She can allow me to give her exactly the position which her mother lost.”

Dusk had deepened around them by this time, but there was still light enough to enable them to see each other’s faces, and Stanhope looked with an expression of astonishment at his companion.

“If I understand you,” he said at length, “you mean that you wish to marry her?”

“I mean that,” Waldegrave answered. “And, since you are her guardian, it is proper that you should hear it at once.”

There was a short silence. Then Stanhope said:

“Have you considered the obstacles in your way?”

“There are no obstacles in my way except her own bitter feeling,” the young Count answered, “and that I hope to overcome. I shall pay my uncle the respect of acquainting him at once with what I intend to do—and I shall be glad if he gives me his approval. If he does not approve, however, I shall feel only the more bound, as the representative of our house in my generation, to do all that I can to atone for what I regard as a stain on its honor.”

“That is nobly said, and still more nobly felt,” said Stanhope, in a voice that showed how his quick sympathies were roused. “I am glad that Irène has found such a kinsman and champion. But I think you have little idea of what you will undertake in offering yourself as her suitor. I should like to believe that you will succeed; but I must speak honestly—and there is nothing which seems to me less possible than that she will ever voluntarily take the name of which her mother and herself were robbed.”

“But,” said Waldegrave, “if she is reasonable—and I think she is—she will feel that it is unjust to visit an offense on the head of one who was not in the remotest degree accountable for it; and, I may add, that it is ungenerous not to permit one who has wronged her to make any reparation in his power.” He paused a moment, and his voice

changed as he went on: "There is something else to be considered. I should not think of offering my name to a woman whom I did not love. I have struggled against the attraction which she has had for me ever since I saw her first—for nothing would induce me to marry beneath my rank. Only to-day I determined not to see her again. I had no fear of yielding; but there is folly in subjecting one's self to unnecessary pain. Judge, then, what your revelation has been to me! It has brought near what before was beyond the pale of possibility, and it has given love the form of duty. I have not only to win the woman who has stirred my heart to its depths, but to lift from her the shadow of wrong, and from my name the stain of an unjust action. Do you think, then, that I am likely to fail?"

There was no earnest of failure in the proud and ardent resolution which filled the tone of this question. It was that of one who felt within himself the power to overcome any obstacle, to break down any barrier. But Stanhope, who knew better than he what barrier was before him, said after a moment:

"You will, I fear, regard me as a prophet of evil, but I am constrained to answer that, judging from my knowledge of Irène, I do think you more likely to fail than to succeed. I believe that so deeply is the memory and the resentment of her mother's wrong impressed on her nature, that if you could win her heart it would only be to inaugurate a worse struggle with herself than any she has known yet, and the end of which would be that she would suffer anything rather than forget that wrong in the manner you propose."

"But that would be a very blindness of hate—and a folly of which I believe her incapable," said Waldegrave.

"I hope that you may prove right," said Stanhope. "At least my conscience is clear; I have warned you."

"And I am grateful for your warning," said the other—"though I should feel myself a craven if I heeded it. Indeed, you have added another motive to those which I have already mentioned—the motive of securing the triumph of her better nature, of casting out hatred by love."

"It would be impossible to have a better end," said Stanhope, earnestly. "I wish you success with all my heart!"

They rode on in silence for some time. Stars were shining above them now; around, the wide, vague, shadowy plain spread like a world of infinite space. The charm of the soft, mystical night seemed to touch them sensibly, like a caress of nature. In the stillness they heard the sound of running water, and the wild, sweet odors that haunt a stream came to their nostrils. Presently they began to speak of indifferent things; but conversation was fitful and without interest on either side. They lapsed again into silence, and it was not until the great shadow of the basilica of San Lorenzo told them that the walls of Rome were near at hand, that Waldegrave spoke again on the subject which filled the thoughts of both.

"I shall start to-morrow for Nice, to see my uncle," he said. "I shall remain there a day or two. Then I shall return to Rome. May I beg you to be kind enough to refrain from telling Miss Lescar of our conversation until I return?"

"Certainly," answered Stanhope, with an alacrity which suggested that he was glad of an excuse to defer an evil hour.

"I shall communicate with you as soon as I return," Waldegrave went on. "My resolution can not be changed in the faintest degree; but I shall be glad if my uncle takes the view of the matter that I take."

“That is hardly to be expected,” said Stanhope. “I only hope that your resolution may not lead to a rupture between yourself and him.”

“If it does,” said the young man, “I shall have the consolation of feeling that it is I who am supporting the honor of our name.”

PART III.

CHAPTER I.

Near where Nice lies, with its white houses fringing the fair Mediterranean shore, the liquid sapphire of the sea in front, and behind range upon range of hills gray-green with olive-woods, above which rise the jagged, glittering peaks of snow-clad Alps, the villa in which Prince Waldegrave had established himself is situated.

Its gates open on the road which winds from Nice toward that famous headland where the “lone-dwelling Heracles” of the old Hellenic colonists has left his name to the Portus Herculis Monoeci—the little modern principality of Monaco—and thence, climbing the rocky ledges of the Turbia, follows the curving shore as it stretches away in many a bold cliff and fairy bay to where Genoa sits enthroned with her marble palaces. Behind the villa, gardens of great extent and beauty cover a promontory that juts upon the sea—a paradise of loveliness, with avenues of dark-green foliage, at the end of which, seen through arched openings, the blue waves sparkle and dance, where great stone-pines lift their heads into the upper air, where against the tropical green of palms the tremulous gold of the mimosa shows, with the pink-white of flowering almond and the blossoming fire of scarlet camellias, where oranges gleam “like gold in leafy gloom,” where Judas-trees drop their purple blossoms, and where roses, heliotrope, and oleander fill the air with fragrance, which seems to mingle with the soft pervading murmur of the sea.

Knowing that his uncle had a great aversion to being taken by surprise, Waldegrave had telegraphed on leaving Rome; and, when he reached the small station near the villa, he found Prince Waldegrave’s admirably appointed carriage and richly liveried servants awaiting him. There was only a short stretch of road from the station to the gates of the villa, then a winding drive under orange and mimosa trees led to the door, where other servants were in attendance. As Waldegrave entered the superb hall with its statues on pedestals and Oriental carpets strewed over the marble pavement, a suave major-domo advanced and informed him that “his Excellency” would be happy to see him in his private apartments after dinner.

“His Excellency dines alone?” he inquired.

“His Excellency has been very unwell for several days,” the major-domo replied, “and by order of his physician dines early. Madame la Princesse, however, dines at the usual hour, and will expect M. le Comte.”

M. le Comte was then conducted to his apartments, where, in the interval before dinner, he had time to realize, more clearly than he had yet done, all that awaited him in the interview with his uncle. What he felt was not fear in the ordinary sense—nor as ordinary people would have felt it in bearding such a lion as Prince Waldegrave—so much as that shrinking from giving pain which a fine nature must always feel, and which in his case was intensified by the necessity to sit in judgment on the conduct of one who had been as a father to him. For a moment he wished that he had made his

communication in writing; but he rejected the thought almost instantly. No: whatever was to be said should be said face to face; and, if the end was a rupture of the affection of years, it should at least not be from any fault of word or manner on his part.

Fortified by this resolution, he went down, as the dinner-hour drew near, and found Princess Waldegrave in one of the salons that opened into each other in a long suite. She was a handsome, inanimate woman, who roused herself, however, to express pleasure at his arrival.

“For we have been dull since the last attack of the Prince,” she said. “I have been out very little, and have invited no one here.”

“I hope the attack was not serious,” said Waldegrave.

“Not very serious, though at one time the physicians expressed some anxiety,” replied the Princess. “We thought of telegraphing to you, but it appeared there was no need; and then a day or so later your telegram arrived, which made your uncle suspect that you *had* been summoned.”

“I shall disabuse his mind of that suspicion,” said Waldegrave, smiling. “I have come on a matter of special importance, and my resolution to leave Rome was taken so suddenly that I had not time to write.”

“I supposed that it was some political affair,” said the Princess, indifferently—she was one of the women to whom politics represent all that is least interesting in life—“but the physicians greatly disapprove of Prince Waldegrave’s devoting so much time to his correspondence,” she went on. “They say that he overworks his brain, and I really think it would be well if you remonstrated. Your influence is greater with him than that of any one else.”

“I do not think that any one can be said to have any ‘influence’ with him,” replied Waldegrave. “He has always a reason for what he does—he has always deliberately weighed and accepted consequences—and therefore to remonstrate with him is useless.”

The speaker’s words had peculiar meaning to himself as he uttered them, for he could not help thinking how little it was likely that his wishes would affect the strong, proud nature that he knew so well, in the matter now near his heart.

Dinner was then announced, and during the course of it Princess Waldegrave talked entirely of social gossip, for which Nice near by afforded an admirable field, and with which she seemed thoroughly conversant, notwithstanding the seclusion of which she complained. When she finally rose to leave the room, Waldegrave excused himself from joining her in the drawing-room, since his uncle had desired to see him; and, left alone, devoted a few minutes to collecting his thoughts and nerving himself for the coming interview.

Prince Waldegrave’s apartments were on the other side of the house, and, having summoned the groom of the chambers, and learned that he was ready to receive him, Waldegrave went down a long corridor covered with thick carpet, upon which not a footfall was audible, to the *cabinet de travail*, where he found his uncle slowly pacing up and down the floor, while a secretary sat writing at a desk in one corner.

It is difficult to imagine a more striking presence than that on which the tempered lamp-light fell—a tall figure, appearing taller even than it was, by reason of superb proportions and stately bearing; a noble head, crowned by close-clipped gray curls; and a face which expressed that blending of intellectual and moral force which forms the ideal combination for a ruler. The brow was more wide and compact than high, with the broad

base of brain so essential for intellect, making the setting of the eyes very deep, from which they looked out clear as crystal and penetrating as Damascus steel. The nose was large and well formed, the mouth finely cut and resolute in the extreme—an expression deepened by the shape of the square, massive jaw; altogether a face in which there was not one weak line—the face of a man whose enemies might well fear, whose adherents, well trust in him.

But what was it that Waldegrave for the first time saw in this face? With the quickness of lightning it came to him as he entered the room, and his uncle paused, confronting him. It was the likeness to another face—in which a vague resemblance had often haunted him—a face where this brow was to be seen copied in miniature, and from which the same clear, dauntless eyes looked out. “How could I have been so blind as not to have seen it before?” he thought, while Prince Waldegrave held out his hand, saying:

“This is an unexpected pleasure, Otto.”

“It was wholly unexpected to me,” the young man answered. “But it is a greater pleasure, inasmuch as the Princess tells me that I am to congratulate you on recovering from an attack of illness.”

“Oh, a slight attack,” said the Prince—who, having lived for years as if his muscles were leather and his nerves steel, now chafed under the restrictions and imputation of illness. “It was not serious. I hope that—despite my orders to the contrary—you were not summoned on that account.”

“Certainly not,” answered Waldegrave. “I had not heard of your illness until I reached here a few hours ago. I am truly glad to see that the attack was *not* serious. But the Princess tells me that the physicians remonstrate against the labor to which you still subject your brain.”

“Pooh!—a little correspondence.”

Waldegrave elevated his eyebrows as he glanced toward the desk where the secretary sat, with its piles of official-looking documents and sheafs of letters.

“I have been in public life some time,” he said, “and I confess that is hardly my idea of ‘a little correspondence.’”

Prince Waldegrave smiled, but frowned slightly also.

“No matter,” he said. “If I am to die I shall die in harness. The Princess is very kind, but do not let her persuade you to come to me with the ‘remonstrances’ of physicians—who know no more of the importance and exigence of the affairs which demand my attention than they do of the laws governing the stellar system. However, I was just about to dismiss my secretary for the evening when you came in, and I shall now do so, which I hope will satisfy you that I am not killing myself.”

He turned away as he spoke, and Waldegrave, watching the stately figure, thought that by the vigor and decision of its movements there was not much ground for fear. The secretary was dismissed with a few brief directions, and then the Prince returned.

“Now tell me,” he said, as Waldegrave and himself sat down in front of a window which opened on the garden, and through which came the odor of flowers with the soft, incessant murmur of the sea, “what has brought you?”

Certainly a leading question this—and certainly, also, one which Waldegrave, despite all his preparation, felt himself for a moment unable to answer. His silence and hesitation were so remarkable, that his uncle gave a quick glance of surprised

interrogation.

“What is the matter?” he asked. “Surely no serious complication has arisen at Rome?”

“None,” answered Waldegrave. “None is likely to arise with the government, which, like Mohammed’s coffin, hangs between heaven and earth, without support in either. A kingdom created by revolution, and menaced by the forces which created it, is scarcely likely to be offensive. As for the Vatican, no influence of diplomacy nor force of arms can change the tranquil *non possimus* of his Holiness.”

The Prince frowned. Undeterred by the example of many before him, he had made that vain trial of strength with the Rock of Peter, which, since the days of Nero, has only ended in one way. Like another famous diplomatist, he had declared that he would never go to Canossa; and, like that same diplomatist, he was now generally supposed to be on his road thither—finding even his iron will met by that calm resistance which offers its neck to the sword, but will not in one jot or one tittle yield the sacred rights committed to its care—and feeling it absolutely necessary, in the face of the growing power of socialism, to conciliate the outraged Catholic subjects of his sovereign.

“What then?” he said, rather impatiently. “You are not given to caprice—you would not have come without a reason—and I am not fond of mystery, you know.”

“I have not come without a reason,” replied Waldegrave; “and I have no desire to make a mystery of it. I am at last thinking of marriage.”

“I am glad to hear it,” said the Prince, warmly. “It is a subject which I have not urged upon your consideration, because I knew that in time you would think of it; and it is better to defer marriage too late than to make it too early. Moreover, I have great confidence in your judgment. I have always felt sure that your choice, whenever it was made, would be a wise one.”

“I think that it is a wise one,” said “Waldegrave, “but whether you will agree with me or not is, I fear, doubtful.”

“What!” said the Prince, sharply, “do you mean to tell me that, after all my confidence, you—of all men—are thinking of any marriage in which there can be a doubt of its wisdom?”

“Before I answer,” said Waldegrave, calmly, “let me ask how you would define a wise marriage?”

“There is but one way in which a sensible man can define it,” was the reply. “A wise marriage is one which strengthens a man’s hands in the battle of life—which brings him wealth, influence, and strong alliance. Such a marriage I have never doubted that you would make.”

“But, in the first place,” said Waldegrave, “I do not recognize in my case the need to seek those things. The great prestige of your fame is more than any of them; and starting in life with that advantage, I feel within myself the power to achieve all that I desire. I have no need to strengthen my hands by strong alliance.”

“Every man in public life has need of it,” said his uncle, “though *you* certainly less than most. But, with the ambition which I know you to possess, I did not think that you would neglect any means that would help you to set your foot on the neck of Fortune.”

“I shall set it there,” said Waldegrave, quietly, “without such help. And now let me tell you what *I* hold to be a wise marriage. It is one that will indeed strengthen a

man's hands for the battle of life, but in a different manner from that you recommend; for, while wealth is a good thing, strong alliance another good thing, and rank the best—indeed, I should not think of marrying any one of low rank—”

“I am glad to hear that,” said the Prince, parenthetically.

“Nevertheless, there are things for the absence of which neither wealth, rank, nor alliance could compensate. A wise marriage is that which gives to a man a companion of whose sympathy and comprehension he is sure—one with intellect enough to understand his thoughts, and who by understanding helps him to embody them; with a nature that responds to every feeling, and with whom existence, therefore, could never become dull. Such a companion would make for one's life a citadel of peace, would give wings to ambition, which might else crawl upon the earth, would quicken all one's powers, and would double the sweetness of any success, as she would take the sting from any failure.”

Waldegrave had almost forgotten to whom he was speaking, as his own words conjured before him the vision that for many days now had been present with him. He looked out over the garden, while his face assumed an expression which his uncle had never seen it wear before—the expression of one who had entered into the charmed citadel of which he spoke—and, after regarding him for a moment with astonishment. Prince Waldegrave shrugged his shoulders.

“When you talk in that strain, Otto, I have nothing to remark except that it is something I never expected to hear from you,” he said. “I hoped that the passion which makes fools of men would not find a victim in you. But I perceive that I flattered myself with a vain hope. The hour of folly has come to you, as I suppose it comes to all. It is some consolation, however, that you have not quite lost your senses. Under all this talk of sympathy and comprehension and unrealizable ideals, I gather that at least you are not thinking of marrying any one beneath you in rank.”

“The person of whom I am thinking is in point of rank altogether my equal,” said Waldegrave.

“In that case it is necessary to make the best of the matter. Who is she?”

It was exactly the question which Waldegrave himself had turned to Stanhope and asked on the hill of Tivoli. The recollection of that moment, and of his own sensations, made him hesitate again. He feared the effect upon his uncle more than he feared anything which the latter was likely to say or do. But hesitation was something which Prince Waldegrave did not tolerate. With another of the quick glances that seemed able to pierce any reserve, he repeated the question:

“Who is she?” Then, after an instant, he added, “Not a foreigner, I hope?”

“She is not exactly a foreigner,” answered Waldegrave; “but her birth and her life have been at variance. She was born to high rank, which she lost—at least, she lost all the advantages of it—through no fault of her own, very early in life. She has, therefore, never lived in her native country, and she is alienated from it in affection. But an act of simple justice may restore to her what she has lost, and she is fitted by nature and education to adorn the highest position.”

“Are you describing the daughter of an exiled royal house?” asked his uncle, with a slight smile. “I have said before that I do not like mysteries. What is the name of this princess?”

Then Waldegrave could hesitate no longer.

“She is called,” he said, “Miss Lescar. She is indeed an exiled princess; but,

instead of being the daughter of a royal house, she is your daughter.”

CHAPTER II.

The pause which followed those words may not have been very long in reality, but it seemed of immense length to Waldegrave. He almost felt as if his heart ceased beating as he waited for his uncle's reply. The awe with which Prince Waldegrave inspired every one else was now felt by him for the first time; yet it was not so much awe as anxiety—as doubt how he would receive the intelligence, and fear for its possible effect upon him. The suspense was keen; yet, when the Prince spoke, his tone and manner were altogether different from any Waldegrave had expected.

“How do you know this?” he asked, in a low tone.

As Waldegrave, with a sense of relief, turned his glance toward him, he was struck by the change that had come over his face. It was that of a man before whom suddenly a ghost had risen—the ghost of dead youth and dead love and possible self-reproach—at which he looked with grave sorrow. The clear eyes were penetrating as ever, but there was nothing of anger in them as he met his nephew's gaze.

“I know it,” Waldegrave replied, in the same tone, “from the statement of her guardian—a statement made reluctantly, and against her desire—and easily substantiated by proof, which he spoke of possessing; but for which I did not ask, since my only surprise on learning the fact was that I had not suspected it before.”

“Her guardian!” repeated the Prince, with a sharp accent. “Where, then, is—her mother?”

Waldegrave looked away. He had no desire to see the effect of his reply.

“Her mother,” he answered, “is dead. She died last year, in Paris.”

Silence again—and this time a silence in which, besides the murmur of starlit waves, and the soft rustle of leaves, Waldegrave seemed to hear the voice of accusing memory which might speak to a heart long hardened against it. He was not surprised when, after a moment, his uncle rose from his chair and walked away.

It seemed to him that many minutes passed while he looked out into the flower-laden gloom, and heard behind him the tread of a foot which passed several times across the room before Prince Waldegrave spoke. Presently, without his steps pausing, he said:

“And how long have you known—this girl?”

Waldegrave had to wait an instant to collect his thoughts before he could answer the question. He had absolutely forgotten how long he had known Irène. It appeared to him an indefinite length of time. But, after a brief effort of recollection, he answered:

“I have known her for a month or two as Miss Lescar. But only for a day or two as—what she is.”

“Her birth, then, is not generally known?”

“Not in Rome—where she has excited much attention this winter, from her beauty and her many gifts.”

“How did you chance to meet her?”

“It was literally chance—if, indeed, there is such a thing. I saw her first in the garden of one of the Roman villas, and was struck by her face as I had never been struck by a woman's face before. Soon afterward I learned her name, and was promised an introduction to her by Lady Dorchester. I did not seek this, however, and our acquaintance finally came about by accident. Then we met on various social occasions,

but from the first she evinced a marked repulsion and dislike toward me, which evidently had its root in some strong feeling that I was unable to understand. It did not lessen her attraction to me," he added, quietly, "but it lessened what I felt to be the danger of association with her. It was only during an excursion to Tivoli a few days ago, that I learned the secret of her dislike in learning who she is; her guardian saying that he did not think it right I should be longer in ignorance, and that only her vehement opposition had prevented my being told before."

"Who is this guardian?"

"His name is Stanhope. He is an American. Until he told me, I had no idea of his connection with Miss Lescar, for she lives and appears socially with a wealthy and attractive woman who is American, I believe, by birth, but English by marriage."

Another pause, and then the Prince—still passing backward and forward—said, abruptly:

"What is she like?"

"That is a difficult question to answer," said Waldegrave, "for she is not in the least like any one else whom I have ever seen. She is altogether original, and infinitely charming. She is very beautiful; with a rare and noble type of beauty, expressive of intellect, full of poetic grace. And, when you know her, you become aware that this beauty is only the fitting shrine for a mind capable of the highest thought, and a spirit cast in the heroic mold; one that kindles at a noble suggestion, that is vivid in imagination and strong in feeling, that is proud, sensitive, tender, and through its very tenderness capable of passionate resentment."

"Ah!" said the Prince. The sound seemed to escape him unconsciously. He said nothing more, and Waldegrave presently went on:

"She has impressed me in this manner from the first, and exercised over me a fascination against which I have struggled, and to which I had not the least intention of yielding, when I supposed her to be simply an American girl, without rank or consequence. Only the other day at Tivoli I had resolved—and my resolves, as you know, are generally executed—that I would not voluntarily see her again; when the revelation was made, which suddenly brought her, not only within my own rank and pale, but"—the speaker paused for a moment, and his voice changed—"which gave to love the force of duty."

The regular tread behind him stopped suddenly, hearing which, the young man rose to his feet, and turning, faced his uncle. So, for an instant, they stood looking at each other in the softly-toned lamp-light, before Prince Waldegrave said, slowly:

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," Waldegrave answered, "without intending to cast any reproach on you, that Miss Lescar is the innocent victim of a wrong that shadows all the fair promise of her life; and that, for the honor of our name, I am glad that I can repair it; that I can give her, if she will accept it, the place her mother lost."

There was another pause, and then Prince Waldegrave said, like one from whom the words were sharply wrung:

"It is sometimes necessary that, to attain great ends, there must be sacrifice."

"No end can justify a sacrifice in which honor is lost and justice outraged," was the reply that rose in Waldegrave's mind, but which his lips did not utter. However sternly he might condemn in thought, that sternness could not fail to be tempered in

expression by the affection and reverence of years.

“At least,” he said aloud, and his voice was grave and cold, “the end being attained, there is now no reason why wrong should not be repaired as far as possible.”

“What reparation do you consider possible—from me?” asked the Prince.

“It is possible,” answered “Waldegrave, “for you to acknowledge your daughter. She is a daughter, believe me, of whom a king might be proud. Understand,” he added, quickly, “that I do not ask this on my own behalf. I am thinking solely of her and of you. I shall offer her all that is mine—my heart, my name, my rank—whatever you decide to do; but it would add very much to my happiness to obtain the sanction of your approval, and to know that you had atoned for an undoubted wrong.”

The voice, at once proud and pleading, sank to the depths of Prince Waldegrave’s heart; for those were mistaken who said that he had no heart. His fault had been that of towering ambition; and his indomitable pride had stifled the faintest acknowledgment of wrong, the least outward sign of self-reproach. But, for all that, self-reproach had existed in the depths of his consciousness, and, since he had parted with the wife who proved an obstacle to the full realization of his ambition, his heart had been kept alive by Otto if by no one else. Now, in the same hour, he heard that this wife, who had represented all that was noblest and least selfish in his life, had passed for ever beyond the reach of earthly wrong, and Otto came to him asking justice for her daughter. A poignant sense of regret and the power to atone seemed given to him at the same moment; and like wax the stern heart suddenly melted.

“If the sanction of my approval will add to your happiness,” he said, “it is yours. And my gratitude also. For you enable me to repair in some measure what has never lain easily on my conscience, and you make yourself, in a double sense, the son I have long felt you to be.”

With the last words he held out his hand, which Waldegrave clasped. Further speech was unnecessary: they understood each other thoroughly.

Presently, when they were again sitting at the window, Prince Waldegrave said:

“She must be very like her mother, who, with all her gentleness, had depths of possible resentment. I learned that when, after the dissolution of the marriage, she refused to accept anything from me for herself or her daughter. And I had no longer power to insist,” he added, with a short sigh.

“From what Mr. Stanhope tells me,” said Waldegrave, “the resentment of the mother was slight to that of the daughter. There is a fiery element in her nature—I have seen it more than once— which will render it not easy to induce her to forget the past.”

“Yet you hope to do so?”

“Yes; for I have already won something. Except when this memory is revived, when she forgets for the moment my name and its associations, she no longer regards me with dislike. There will be difficulty. That I expect. But difficulty has never daunted me; and, indeed”—he smiled—“I do not think I should care for anything that was to be won without it.”

“Understand,” said Prince Waldegrave, “that you carry with you not only my approval, but from myself the offer to acknowledge, receive, and fitly provide for her as my daughter.” He paused a moment before saying, in a lower tone: “The death of the mother removes any possible obstacle to this, and it is what I should be inclined to do, even apart from your wishes. But those wishes make everything easy.”

“It is hardly more than I expected from you,” said Waldegrave, “but it increases the gratitude and affection which I have always felt for you. And you can not realize what a daughter you will gain. She is peerless.”

A shade came over the Prince’s face.

“That may be,” he said; “and, for your sake and the sake of justice, I shall be glad to welcome her and make all the *amende* in my power. But for myself, seeing her can only be an occasion of great pain.”

Waldegrave could comprehend this, and for several minutes there was silence. Then his uncle rose.

“The physicians whom the Princess believes in declare that I should retire early as well as dine early,” he said; “and so I must bid you good-night. When do you return to Rome?”

“I shall start by an early train to-morrow morning,” Waldegrave replied, “unless you wish to see me again.”

“I should like to see you again,” the Prince said, “but I will not detain you for anything so trifling as political affairs, when you are evidently anxious to be away.”

“My anxiety is not so great that it can not support the delay of a few hours,” Waldegrave answered, “I shall certainly not leave, then, until the midday train.”

With this they separated, and, as his uncle retired, Waldegrave, who felt excitement like electricity in every fiber, passed out into the garden. The soft gloom, the odorous breath of the night met him with an exquisite charm, and, for the first time, he surrendered himself wholly to the spell of thoughts and visions which rose in the perfume of every flower, and mingled with the soft music of the sea. Not even in that memorable ride from Tivoli had he felt so much as if moving in an enchanted dream. Then surprise was still overshadowing him, and doubt and struggle were before him; but now everything had been magically smoothed, obstacles had vanished; it seemed as if in a special manner Fate had interfered in his behalf—and that became not only possible, but the most desirable of all possibilities, which a little time before had appeared altogether impossible. He was like one who trod on air: all the romance of passion awakened under the stars of this fair southern night. Irene’s proud, delicate presence seemed beside him—it walked with him down the avenues, dusk with shadow and rich with fragrance; it paused where the fairy-like fountains laughed and tossed their waters, like Undine, and stood by him on the broad, curved terrace that overlooked the sea. Leaning on the marble balustrade, he gazed out over the starlit waves, while all the influences of the place and hour entered into and made a part of his passionate happiness—happiness so great that it was like exaltation.

Not to every life does such an hour come, nor can the most favored life know it in perfection more than once. Many conditions are needed to produce it, and it is rarely that all of them are fulfilled. But all of them were fulfilled for Waldegrave in this hour, under the divine sky, with the sea of immortal poetry sighing gently at his feet. Fronds of feathery palms were dark above his head, across the waves the lights of Nice gleamed like golden stars, there was a sound of oars, and an unseen voice floated over the water in some sweet, familiar strains. Again he fancied the presence he knew and loved leaning beside him over the glistening balustrade, gazing out into the night that seemed to throb with beauty and all the indefinable charm of these enchanted shores. They had stood together in many fair scenes—together, and yet apart—but *here* she would be at last in

her rightful place, within the shelter of her father's home. It can be said for him that just now he thought more of this than even of all that he hoped and believed might follow. For that is not true love—indeed, it is doubtful if it deserves the name of love at all—which does not, above all things, long to secure the beloved object from the harsh touch of suffering. It is more often a longing than a possibility; but, when it is possible, existence does not hold greater delight. And this was now given to Waldegrave. He never doubted it would be his to lift the shadow of wrong and pain from the life they had so long darkened; and, looking out into the magical darkness toward the crescent shores of Italy, he sent his heart to those old walls of Rome which he longed to enter.

CHAPTER III.

On the morning of the day that Waldegrave reached Nice, Irène, standing on the broad platform in front of San Pietro in Montorio, gazed with delighted eyes over the unrivaled scene spread before her.

Those who know Rome are aware that this church stands on the height of the Janiculum, where the hill rises boldly above the Tiber; that it marks the spot of St. Peter's crucifixion, as the great Vatican basilica of the same name marks the place of his burial—and that it is to modern Rome what the Capitol was to ancient Rome, in the extent and variety of the view which the parapet-bounded platform commands. All Rome—ancient and modern—is spread before the gaze, from the Palatine to the Leonine city, from the Aventine to the Pincio, and from the mountains to the sea. In other places some special era of history—be it long or short—is recalled to the mind; but *here* all history seems to have met and left its record, so that, as the eye passes from one object to another, a gulf of centuries is heaped in a glance. On this fair day of spring every dome and tower, every broken arch and storied ruin stood clearly revealed, with that distinctness of outline which as an effect of the limpid atmosphere distinguishes everything in Italy. The dark height of the Palatine, with its somber ruins, looked over the mediaeval houses thickly clustered between its base and the Tiber; while above their irregular, many-colored roofs, the picturesque campanile of San Giorgio in Velabro rose against the marvelous blue sky, and there was a glimpse of the columns and architrave of its portico. Nearer the river stood the graceful round temple of Vesta, with its roof of rugged tiles so dear to artists, and in the river-wall keen eyes might have discerned a circular opening which was none other than the mouth of the Cloaca Maxima, built by Tarquinius Priscus, more than two thousand years ago, to drain the marshy land of the Velabrum, and still serving the purpose for which it was intended. Beyond, the bold, rocky escarpment of the Aventine was crowned by the churches of Santa Sabina, San Alessio, and the Priorato—names that echo like the blast of a trumpet from the Ages of Faith. For within the cloisters of Santa Sabina is the cell of St. Dominic, and to its door came the “Angel of the School,”* pursued by the entreaties of the world he was renouncing. And from the Priorato, with its church filled with tombs of the Knights of Malta, what visions rise of the stormy days when those sworn soldiers of the Cross stood with their mailed breasts between Christendom and the infidel power of the East!

Then, as Irène let her gaze wander over the maze of streets and houses, of churches and palaces that cover the space between the Tarpeian Rock and the Castle of

* St. Thomas Aquinas.

San Angelo—space crowded with objects that open such doors to memory and imagination as no other spot on earth affords—she could mark the splendid curve of the Tiber, as sweeping by the Leonine city where another Leo reigns, and where the wondrous dome stood out against a background of the Campagna and the hills, it came flowing past the Trasteverine gardens white with blossoms; past the great gateway of the Orsini Palace with its sculptured bears; past the classic isle of the Tiber, which ancient tradition tells was born from the produce of the corn-fields of the Tarquins; past the noble tower which alone remains of the castle built on this island by the family of St. Gregory the Great, and occupied as a fortress by the Countess Matilda, the heroic defender of the Holy See; past those massive fragments of masonry which are the tokens and remnants of the Pons Sublicius, the oldest bridge in Rome, that which Horatius and his two companions “kept” against the Etruscan army; and past those gigantic heads of lions, half hidden by shrubs and ivy on the Trastevere bank, from which in ancient times chains were drawn across the stream to prevent the advance of hostile vessels—until, at last escaping from the mighty walls, the current takes its way rejoicing through green fields toward that distant shining line where the sea breaks in many a long, curling wave on the Ostian beach.

“I should like to know of what you are thinking, mademoiselle,” said a voice, speaking so close beside Irène that she started perceptibly as she turned to meet the dark eyes of the Marquis de Châteaumesnil.

“I am afraid that I have startled you,” he continued; “but I have been standing here for several minutes, and you were so unconscious of my presence that the desire to know the subject of your thoughts became irresistible.”

“I should have no objection to telling them to you,” she answered, smiling, “but you would probably not be interested.”

“Try me, at least.”

“But where shall I begin?” she asked. “I have thought of so much—there is so much to suggest thought in what lies before us. Perhaps I began with Lars Porsenna. I fancied him standing here, watching the three who kept the bridge against his army. He must have had a noble heart. You remember when Horatius plunged into the Tiber—

“‘Heaven save him,’ said Lars Porsenna,
‘And bring him safe to shore.
For such a gallant feat of arms
Was never seen before I’”

“That, however, is not exactly history,” suggested the Marquis, smiling.

But Irène did not choose to heed this. “It is what a brave heart would have felt,” she said, “and I am sure he must have uttered something equivalent to it. At least, you will not deny that he was *here* and the bridge *there*, that Horatius held it ‘in the brave days of old,’ and that not all Etruria’s army could put the Tarquins back in Rome.”

“Believe me, I have not the least inclination to deny it,” he said. “And what did you think of next?”

“There was much to think of,” she answered, “but I could not dwell on it. My mind passed over all the long centuries which lay between those dim early days and the broad light of another day when two Jewish prisoners, apostles of a strange faith, were led along the road that winds yonder at the foot of the Aventine and out of the Ostian Gate, as companions in martyrdom. We know where they parted, where one was led to

suffer by the sword,* while the other was brought here to be crucified. Can you not fancy the scene on which he looked?—the imperial city as it flashed back the sunlight that midsummer day—the palace of Caesar covering the Palatine, the great temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline, the hills crowded with dwellings, the Campus Martius covered with temples, porticoes, and columns! Would it not have seemed a wild dream that, through the power of the keys given to the poor prisoner dying here, it was to rule the world in a far deeper, wider sense than ever before?—that it was to be through all ages the See of Peter?”

“You remind me,” said the Marquis, “of a curious fact—the name Roma, which comes down from the old Pelasgic days and signifies Strength, is with the letters placed in inverted order Amor, which is Love. It is as if from the very foundation of that mighty power which was to rule the world by strength, its name contained a prophecy of the mightier power that should succeed it and rule the world by love.”

She looked at him with kindling eyes. The beauty of the thought touched her like a strain of noble harmony.

“That is exquisite,” she said. “I never thought of it before, although I knew the signification of the name. But”—she looked round with a sudden air of recollection—“Mrs. Vance is waiting for me in the church. We came here to an interesting function, of which Monsignor K— told me last night, and when it was over Mrs. Vance went in search of a sacristan to show us the chapels and cloister, while I ran out for some warm air and the glorious view. I must go to her now.”

“And I may come with you?”

“Certainly, if you care to do so.”

The Marquis plainly cared. He turned and walked by her side across the terrace to the door of the church, where at this moment Mrs. Vance appeared.

“My dear Irène,” she said, “where have you been?” Then, recognizing her companion—“Oh, M. le Marquis, I was not aware that you were here!”

“I have not been here long, madame,” the Marquis answered. “Returning from a ride in the grounds of the Villa Pamfili-Doria, I halted for the view, which I always admire; and, seeing Mademoiselle Lescar, I dismounted and joined her. But, though I often pause on this terrace, I am not very well acquainted with the interior of the church. Therefore, if you will permit me to join you, I shall be glad.”

“We shall be very happy,” said Mrs. Vance, graciously.

Then they went into the church, where the sacristan was waiting for them—a picture of calm, resigned patience. There are few more pathetic figures than these Roman sacristans. Frequently they are monks—some humble lay-brother, with the simplicity and gentleness of a child, his worn face telling a story of hardship and care, which might, one would think, disarm the most virulent prejudice. The hand of persecution is heavy upon them. With lawless robbery the government has confiscated all their revenues—accumulations of the piety of generations—and property, to which the state had no more right than to the private estate of any individual. But retribution, though it travel “with a leaden heel,” yet strikes “with an iron hand”; and the terrible cry of Communism, of war against *all* rights of property, is sounding like thunder in the ears of those who, in their own persons or in those of their ancestors, have laid sacrilegious hands upon the property

*St. Paul, as a Roman citizen, was beheaded about two miles from Rome, on the road to Ostia, at a place now called the “Tre Fontane.”

of the Church. "We can rob God with impunity," these rulers have seemed to think for many a long day. But "God," says St. Augustine, "is patient, because eternal." Not in an hour, a day, a century, are his judgments wrought. He suffers the seed sown by men to ripen to their full evil harvest; and it is only by looking back across the centuries that we can trace the beginning of the fire now undermining Europe with such fearful rapidity.

They made the round of the chapels, with their frescoes and pictures by Sebastian del Piombo, by Vesari and Volterra; they marked the place over the high altar where the great Transfiguration of Raphael—which was painted for this church—hung, until carried to Paris at the time of the French invasion by that chief of robbers, Napoleon, and which was placed in the Vatican gallery when returned to Rome with the great freebooter's other spoils; and, finally, they went into the cloister, where the Tempietto—a small domed building resting on Doric columns, a model of architectural beauty—marks the exact spot of St. Peter's crucifixion.

The thoughts which rise in the mind, the feelings which fill the heart here, are indescribable. Across the mighty gulf of centuries we almost seem to touch the robe of him to whom the tender yet solemn voice of his Lord said: "When thou wast younger thou didst gird thyself and walk where thou wouldst. But when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands and another shall gird thee, and lead thee whither thou wouldst not." "And this," explains St. John, "he said, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had said this, he saith to him, 'Follow me.'" And here was where he followed him!—in deep humility, with head turned toward the earth, alleging that he was not worthy to suffer in the same manner as his divine Master had suffered. O wonderful Fisherman of Galilee, perfected out of so much human weakness and lovable impetuosity into the Prince and Ruler of God's Church, thou who wast made the rock against which the gates of hell shall not prevail, thou to whom were given the keys of the kingdom of heaven, thou to whom was spoken the solemn charge, "Feed my sheep," on what untold glory must not thine eyes have opened, when on this spot they closed upon the fair Italian sky and the glittering splendor of the mistress of the world!

When they re-entered the church from the cloister and were slowly walking down its long nave, Irène paused and directed the attention of the Marquis to the gravestones which mark the resting-place of Tyrconnel and Tyrone. "After all," she said, "do adversity and exile greatly matter? How soon it is all over!"

"And how long it has been since these laid down their burden!" he remarked, looking at the date. "What a sublime thing it is that in all ages there has been this city of refuge for Christian exiles, that they could bring their wrongs and sorrows here, where all things speak of the brevity of human injustice and the steadfastness of eternal truth!"

Irène looked at him with a wistful expression.

"Yes, it is well to be here," she said. "Even those who have not lost kingdoms and crowns may find a home of the soul when life offers them no other, and gain wisdom by meditating among these speaking tombs. I wish that I could hope to be buried in a Roman church," she ended, with a faint smile.

"I hope that it may be long before you need a tomb," said the Marquis.

She did not answer; she was again looking down at the gravestones which cover the hearts that once beat so high, the brains that once planned so daringly, the empty shell of the spirits that risked so much and suffered so keenly.

"In Aubrey de Vere's 'Urbs Roma,'" she said, "there is a sonnet which I never

come here without recalling.” And in a voice with a pathetic thrill she repeated:

“Within St. Peter’s fane, that kindly hearth
Where exiles crowned their earthly loads down cast,
The Scottish kings* repose, their wanderings past.
In death more royal thrice than in their birth.
Near them, within a church of narrower girth,
But with dilated memories yet more vast.
Sad Ulster’s princes find their rest at last.
Their home the holiest spot, save one, on earth.
This is that mount which saw St. Peter die!
Where stands yon dome stood once that cross reversed:
From this dread hill, a Western Calvary,
The empire and that synagogue accursed
Clashed two ensanguined hands—like Cain—in one.
Sleep, where the Apostle slept, Tyrconnel and Tyrone!”

Silence followed the last fall of her tones—silence which was the best tribute—and after a moment they moved on. But when they came out again into the soft air, with the fair city at their feet, the wide historic plain and the blue distance of magic heights afar, the Marquis said:

“It is as great a pleasure to hear you repeat poetry as to hear you sing. Your voice says so much—it would put noble meaning into common words.”

“But those are not common words,” she said.

“No—certainly not. But the voice is more than any words,” he answered.

“My dear,” said Mrs. Vance, coming up, “I think we had better go now—especially if you want to stop in the Trastevere.”

“May I ask where you mean to stop in the Trastevere?” the Marquis inquired, as they turned toward the waiting carriage.

“At Santa Cecilia,” answered Mrs. Vance. “It is a church of which Irène is so fond, that she is never in the neighborhood without going there.”

“I am sure that I ought to have a special devotion to the

‘ . . . seraph-haunted queen of harmony,’ ”

said Irène, with a smile.

“And I am sure she must reward it by obtaining for your voice something of the sweetness that we are told her own possessed,” said the Marquis. Then, as he put them into the carriage, he added, “It is an interesting church, Santa Cecilia, is it not?”

“Very interesting,” answered Mrs. Vance. “Will you not come with us?”

“With your permission, I will follow and meet you there,” he replied. And, as they drove away, they saw him beckoning a man who held his horse.

In the carriage there was silence for a minute. Then Mrs. Vance said, “I think, my dear, that the Marquis likes your society.”

“And I,” said Irène with a laugh, “certainly like his. I have always found him very *simpatico*.”

To this Mrs. Vance made no reply; and it was not long before the carriage paused

* James II, his son, and grandson, are buried in St. Peter’s.

at the door of the ancient church founded upon and still retaining part of the dwelling of the noble Roman lady who confessed God so valiantly sixteen hundred years ago, and here received the crown of martyrdom. We stand on the threshold of the palace where, as the antiphon which is sung on her festival says, "Cecilia, thy servant, served thee, O Lord, as the bee that is never idle"; where the beautiful tradition tells that angels often descended to join in her songs of praise, and where by order of the prefect—who feared to bring to public execution one of such high rank and exalted virtue—she was imprisoned in the *sudatorium* of her own bath and a blazing fire lighted, in order that she might be suffocated by the hot vapors. But "when the bath was opened she was found still alive, singing with ravishing sweetness the praises of God who had sent a cooling shower to temper the heat." A lictor was then sent to behead her, but he performed his duty so ill that she still lived after the third stroke; and Roman law forbade that a victim should be stricken more than three times. So the Christians found her bathed in her blood; and during three days she preached and taught, like a doctor of the church, with such sweetness and eloquence that four hundred pagans were converted. She was visited by Pope Urban, "to whom she bequeathed the poor she had nourished and the palace in which she had lived, that it might be consecrated as a temple to her Saviour. Then thanking God that he considered her, a humble woman, worthy to share the glory of his heroes, and with her eyes fixed upon the heavens opening before her, she departed to her heavenly bridegroom in the year of our Lord 280."

The Marquis joined Mrs. Vance and Irène as they descended from the carriage, and together they entered the ancient atrium with its antique pillars and frieze of mosaic. It was noon, and a glory of sunlight was glancing along the polished marble, and giving a new aureole to the medallion heads of Cecilia, Pope Urban, Valerian, and Tiburtius, which appear in the old mosaic. But there was no sunlight in the cool, dim church when, lifting the heavy leathern curtain, they entered. The broad nave spread before them, its massive columns forming a vista for the eye, at the end of which rose the tribune, the richly carved altar, and beautiful Gothic canopy. Lamps of chased silver were burning around it, and—was it a vision, that exquisite sleeping form beneath, or had the saint returned to dwell humbly under the altar, in the house which she gave to God?

In the archives of the Vatican there is an account written by Pope Paschal I himself, describing how, "yielding to the infirmity of the flesh," he fell asleep in his chair during the early morning-service at St. Peter's, his mind preoccupied with a longing to find the burial-place of Cecilia and discover her relics. Then, in a glorified vision, the saint appeared to him and revealed the spot where she lay in the catacomb of Calixtus, and there on the following day her body was found and transported to her church. This was in the ninth century. In the sixteenth, Sfondrato, titular cardinal of the church, opened her tomb, and the embalmed body was found, as it had previously been found by Paschal, robed in gold tissue, with linen cloths steeped in blood at her feet, not lying upon the back, like a body in a tomb, but upon its right side, with every appearance of sleep. "All the people of Rome rushed to look upon the saint, who was afterward inclosed as she was found, in a shrine of cypress-wood cased in silver. But, before she was again hidden from sight, the greatest artist of the day, Stefano Maderno, was called in to sculpture the marble portrait which now lies upon her tomb."

Who that has seen can forget this lovely statue? The perfect position of the limbs, the beautifully modeled drapery, the delicate hands lightly crossed at the wrists, the

wound in the slender neck, the ineffable purity which breathes in every line, all stamp it as no work of human inspiration. "Behold," says the inscription, "the body of the most holy virgin, Cecilia, whom I myself saw lying incorrupt in her tomb. I have in this marble expressed for thee the same saint in the very same posture of body." And so, under the altar the beautiful figure lies, while around burn ever the ninety-six silver lamps given to the shrine by Cardinal Sfondrato, whose own tomb is in this church.

There are delightful hours to be spent in these old Roman churches, rich with beauty and richer still in imperishable memories. Hundreds of years pass before these altars, "like a watch in the night"; the floors are worn with the feet of unnumbered generations who have passed over them; the shrines are enriched by the love and faith of hearts that have been still for ages; the air seems filled with the incense of unceasing prayer; the roar and fret of the world die away into a peace that has in it the quiet of centuries, the promise of eternity.

After lingering before the statue, Irène carried her companion into the *sudatorium*, which still retains the pipes and calorifers of an ancient Roman bath. The sacristan, pleased by her eager interest, explained everything minutely in soft-voweled Italian, and ran his taper far down to show the extent of the black furnace underneath. It was a picture, the Marquis thought—the beautiful girl kneeling on the iron grating in order to look into the dark depths below, the monk in his picturesque habit, with his animated face and close-shorn head, the taper flashing fitfully, the dim old walls making just the background a painter would have chosen for the scene.

When they stood again in the atrium, he said to her: "You must let me thank you for the pleasure of this morning. To be with you in such places is a greater pleasure than you can imagine. It gives one new eyes with which to regard even familiar things, for I do not think there is a ray of present sunlight, or a memory of past glory, that does not enter into your delight."

"I am glad if it is so," she answered, simply. "When I see people who can neither enjoy nor appreciate, it seems to me that, among the things for which we should be most grateful, the power to enjoy and appreciate does not rank least. But you, M. le Marquis"—she looked at him with a smile—"you possess the faculty yourself."

"When I am with you—yes," he replied. "But it is a reflected light. It does not stay."

"And is there no spell by which one could make it stay?" she asked, still smiling.

What was there in his glance that struck her suddenly with a sense of sadness?

"None," he answered, gravely. "Sunshine that stays must come from within, not from without."

Certainly it had all vanished from his aspect when, having put Mrs. Vance and herself again into their carriage, he stood for a moment as they drove away. Material sunlight was pouring into the narrow street, lighting up the front of the picturesque mediaeval house which faces the church, and bringing out the effect of many a curious bit of architecture and tone of color along the way which his eye followed. But it is doubtful if he saw any of it. As the carriage disappeared, he turned and walked toward his horse with a face grave to sternness.

CHAPTER IV.

Mrs. Falconer soon heard of the events of the morning. Irène mentioned at

luncheon that the Marquis had joined them at San Pietro, and accompanied them to Santa Cecilia; and, although Mrs. Vance endeavored to appear absorbed in a salad which she was mixing, her expression of face was hardly less significant than the fact. Mrs. Falconer observed it, smiled slightly, and at the first opportunity afterward said to her:

“So, you are like every one else. Aunt Marian! You perceive that M. de Châteaumesnil has lost his heart to Irène, and you have not the least idea of giving me a friendly hint to that effect.”

“My dear Sydney!” ejaculated Mrs. Vance. She could not for a moment say anything more, so entirely did this sudden attack, this plain utterance of what was only a dawning suspicion in her own mind, confound her. Then she made an altogether unnecessary statement. “You astonish me!” she said. “I have never dreamed of such a thing. I have noticed that he likes her society—and this morning, for the first time, it occurred to me that he showed the liking very plainly, perhaps a little too plainly—but it did not occur to me that a man of the world like the Marquis could lose his heart to a girl like Irène.”

“Yet it is with just such a girl that he would be likely to lose his heart, if he lost it at all,” said Mrs. Falconer, calmly. “She is unlike other women whom he has known, and she has the charm, not only of her character and of her rare beauty, but of her youth.”

“I think it possible to overrate the charm of youth,” said Mrs. Vance. “It is generally such a crude thing that it could not, in itself, attract a man of fastidious taste.”

“In itself—no,” answered Mrs. Falconer. “But Irène’s is the ideal youth—the youth of genius—full of bright fancies and high aspirations. And she has proved so attractive to M. de Châteaumesnil because he is a man of noble nature, to whom these fancies and aspirations are like the sight of morning to a poet.”

“Then you really believe that he has lost his heart?”

“I really believe it; and it increases my respect for him to find that he has a heart to lose.”

“But, my dear Sydney, I thought that he—that you—that he was *your* suitor.”

“You thought right. He was—he probably still is—my suitor. But he has never professed to be my lover.”

“And yet you have thought of marrying him?”

“Yes—I have thought of it. But more on his account than my own—because I felt that, with the power which wealth gives me, I might be of use to him; and, as it is, I am of use to no one.” The last words were uttered a little sadly, and she paused a moment before adding: “I was the more inclined to accept his suit because he made no protestation of devotion. It was *mariage de convenance* that he offered, and *mariage de convenance* that I have been endeavoring to persuade myself to accept.”

“Then,” said Mrs. Vance, with energy, “I am glad that he has fallen in love with Irène! I am old-fashioned enough to hold such marriages to be abominable. And for you, Sydney, you —”

“I, who once had different dreams, you mean?” said the other, with a faint smile. “Ah, it does not require many years of life to show one that such dreams are best put away. The choice rests between that and being deceived to the end. I preferred the first—and so I felt that I might make up my mind to marry a man who was indifferent to me; who belongs to a world which regards marriage as something with which sentiment has little to do. But I can not marry a man who, whether he knows it or not, is in love with

some one else.”

“I should think not, indeed!” said Mrs. Vance, in a tone of indignation. “But M. de Châteaumesnil has acted very badly in falling in love with some one else while filling the position of your suitor.”

Mrs. Falconer smiled. “I do not lay claim to many virtues,” she said, “but one which I hope I do possess is a sense of justice. I can not blame M. de Châteaumesnil for what I am sure has overtaken him in his own despite. He has nothing to gain and much to lose by such a passion.”

“Most women in your place would blame him, nevertheless,” said Mrs. Vance, “and not only him but Irène.”

Sydney looked surprised. “Could any one possibly be unreasonable enough to attach blame to Irène?” she asked.

Mrs. Vance rose suddenly, went over and kissed her.

“I don’t know how much justice you can lay claim to,” she said. “But I do know that you are the most generous-hearted woman in the world. Say what you please, there are few women who would not feel it hard to find a rival in a girl to whom—”

“So much the worse for most women, then!” interrupted Mrs. Falconer, who had a great objection to what she knew was coming—an allusion to her kindness. “And ‘rival’ is an incorrect word. One can not have a rival when there is no rivalry. Now, there is not a man on earth whom I would condescend to rivalry about. If a man offers his allegiance to me—whatever its quality or degree—it must be absolute. If it wavers, he may go.”

“But you could not feel that if he had won your heart.”

“I should feel it if he had won my heart as completely as ever heart was won. If it were in my power to retain a wavering allegiance, I should scorn to make an effort to do so.”

“Ah,” said Mrs. Vance, with a sigh, “you have a haughty spirit. I am afraid you will never find a heart that satisfies you.”

“Then I can do without it,” was the quiet answer. “There are other things in life worth living for, and in the end more satisfying. There are few hearts worth possessing—and fewer still worth holding. But, so far as I am concerned, there is no question of M. de Châteaumesnil’s heart. It has never been offered to me. All that now remains for me to do is to decline his hand.”

Mrs. Vance’s face fell. It was evident that, despite her hasty assertions of gladness a moment back, she was disappointed.

“It is a pity,” she murmured. “If you feel in this way about hearts—if you are really indifferent to love—it would have been a marriage that would suit you.”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Falconer, smiling slightly. “I should have made a very charming Marquise de Châteaumesnil, and had the pleasure of gratifying all my friends besides. But that is over; and the best thing now is to end the matter as soon as possible.”

The last words had hardly left her lips when Antonio appeared with a card, which he presented to her. She glanced at it, then held it out to her aunt.

“A singular coincidence, is it not?” she said. “Le Marquis de Châteaumesnil” was what met Mrs. Vance’s eye. She sighed again, with a sense of regret, and also of slight trepidation. “Shall you see him?” she asked.

“Of course,” answered Mrs. Falconer, rising as she spoke. “It is what I desire.”

Mrs. Vance's trepidation found something of an echo in the Marquis's breast as he stood in the grand *sala* waiting for Mrs. Falconer. It is doubtful if in all his life before any occasion had found him with so little inclination for what lay before him. But, after parting with Irène in the morning, his colloquy with himself had been short and sharp. For the first time he recognized where he stood—or, at least, where he was drifting—and he felt that there was but one course open to him. That was to ask Mrs. Falconer's answer to his suit, and, if she accepted him, to close his eyes to the fact that such a person as Irène Lescaer existed in the world. It would be hard; but a sense of honor has helped many a man over a road as hard—and the Marquis had not an instant's doubt where honor lay, or what its counsel was.

Naturally, however, the prospect of such a struggle was not cheerful, and he was blaming himself for having been persuaded by his cousin to place himself in the position he occupied, as he walked to and fro across the *sala*. But it was impossible he could have foreseen, or could even have imagined, such a resurrection of his youth as this. A few months before, anything would have seemed, to him more probable than that he could ever know again the passion which contains in itself the very essence of youth. He might appreciate, he might admire, he might offer the most sincere homage, but (he would have thought) the capability of ideal feeling, the spell of illusion, had for ever departed. And now—

He found himself suddenly pausing before a new addition to the works of art which filled the apartment. It was a copy in marble of Erne's *rilievo*. Thrown out by the sweeping folds of a rich curtain of bronze-green velvet behind it, the beauty of the sculpture was striking, and the likeness not less so. The noble brow, the fine spiritual lines of the face, the exquisitely curved lips, were Irène's own—and hers, also, the classic grace infused into every line. It might have been some freshly disinterred fragment of antique art—a Greek dream of “violet-crowned Sappho”—so closely did the type and spirit approach that of antique ideals.

The Marquis stood as if fascinated. It was the head of a Muse; but he knew that it was also the head of one who could be touched by the simplest as well as by the loftiest things, whom imagination had not misled nor intellect hardened, and whose brilliant powers were less striking than the sympathy which leaped like flame in response to every noble thought or heroic memory. And while he stood, recalling the tones of the voice which had sounded in his ears that morning on the Janiculum, and in the church of Santa Cecilia, he did not perceive the figure which came down the suite of apartments behind him, nor hear the step which approached his side. It was not until Mrs. Falconer spoke that he was aware of her presence.

“An admirable likeness, M. le Marquis—is it not?”

“It is perfect,” he replied, turning around, “and a very striking piece of sculpture besides. Can it possibly be Mr. Erne's work?”

“Yes, it is his,” she answered. “I think it very remarkable for so young a sculptor—and one who is more *dilettante* than artist. But there may be an explanation of his success in the fact that he found in the face an inspiration as well as a model.”

“Ah!” said the Marquis. “Such a face might well prove an inspiration to an artist.”

“And even to those who are not artists,” said Mrs. Falconer. “I am never

surprised by any degree of admiration for Irène—I admire her so enthusiastically myself. Therefore you may imagine that I am delighted to have this likeness in the form that her likeness ought to take. That head seems made for marble.”

The Marquis replied that he could imagine it; but, naturally, Irène’s beauty was a subject on which he did not care to dilate. He had come for quite another purpose, and he felt as if a malignant fate had put her sculptured presentment before him and made it the opening topic of conversation. As Mrs. Falconer sat down, he turned from the marble and placed his chair so as to leave it behind him. With that haunting face before his eyes he would have found it difficult to utter what he was determined should be uttered.

The *savoir-faire* of the man of the world came to his assistance, however, and his manner was altogether perfect as he recalled to Mrs. Falconer her promise to consider his suit, and begged for her answer.

She was silent for a moment—not with the confused silence on which a suitor might find hope, but with the calm silence of deliberation. Then she looked at him with an expression which he did not understand.

“You have been very patient,” she said, gravely, “and I do not ask you to pardon the length of time I have taken for consideration, because we are agreed that marriage is a very serious affair, and because this delay has served the purpose for which I wished it. If I had answered you when you did me the honor of offering me your hand, I should have felt, whatever my answer, many doubts. Delay has solved those doubts. I can now answer you decidedly.”

She paused—and the Marquis felt as a man does who braces himself to receive the sentence of a court. But in the tension of suspense he forgot that some expression of hope or eagerness might have been expected from him. The slender, nervous hand tightened on the rim of the hat he was holding, the dark eyes regarded her steadily—that was all.

She smiled a little, and went on—her calm voice unshaken in a single tone:

“I think I told you that I was tempted by what you offered—not so much by your rank, though I am not foolish enough to undervalue its great distinction and advantage, as by the opportunity to aid in noble ends, to make the wealth with which I am burdened of use in the highest manner, and to find an outlet for my sympathy, a field for my ambition. All this you offered me in offering me your hand. But there is something else that ought to be concerned in marriage which you did not offer—that is, your heart.”

Her clear glance was searching him through as she uttered the last words, and she could see how great was his surprise at the altogether unlooked-for conclusion. But, although surprised, he was not discomposed.

“In offering you my hand,” he said, “I was also offering you the most sincere homage of my heart—that homage of admiration and respect which in France we hold to be the best foundation for married happiness. It does not take wings like the wild passion on which no wise man would desire to build his life.”

“I said that to myself,” she answered, “and though I was trained in a different school—one which holds love to be the only true consecration of marriage—I was able to recognize the practical wisdom of the basis of which you speak. And I felt the more inclined to it because love has only entered my life to pain and cheat me. I thought that, if you did not offer me your heart, it was because you had exhausted the power of passionate feeling, and were too honest to simulate it. I believed that what you did

offer—honor, respect, admiration—was, at least, the best which you had. Was I right in believing that?”

“You were right,” he replied. “I believed then—I believe still—that the tribute of a man’s dispassionate judgment is worth more than the emotion (generally founded upon illusion) of his heart.”

“It may be,” she said, “but believe me, it is a doctrine that will never plead your cause with a woman. I might have listened to it—for, as I have said, my experience of love has been very bitter—but it would surely in the end have been to your and to my lasting regret. That, however, is not the point. The point is, can you give me the same assurance now?—can you tell me today, M. le Marquis, that you offer me your best?”

There was no indignation in the voice, no anger in the violet eyes—only a ring of challenge in the first, a proud light in the last. It was a challenge which M. de Châteaumesnil found it difficult to meet. He had not anticipated this, and he was forced to hesitate before replying. Then he said, gravely:

“I should not be here if I could not still offer you what I believe to be best—the tribute of my judgment, the admiration of my mind, the homage of my taste.”

“But not the love of your heart,” she said, “and I—being only a woman—hold *that* best. Yet I grant that one must not ask more than a man can give; and if you were incapable of giving it, I might be satisfied with the tribute of your judgment and the homage of your taste. But you are not incapable. I have read your heart for some time—and, if you do not know what image it holds, I will tell you.”

He looked at her—startled somewhat, puzzled more. It was a fair face which confronted him—fair at all times, but just now particularly charming from its animation. The proud light was still in the eyes, but the lips were smiling. As he did not reply, she lifted her hand and pointed to the marble behind him.

“It is that,” she said.

“I suppose that you allude to my admiration for Mademoiselle Lescar,” he said, after a moment; “but have you not leaped to a hasty conclusion in imagining that what I feel for her must be love? I acknowledge that she is singularly attractive, that she has stirred my fancy as it has not been stirred for many a day—but I know that fancy forms no staple of life; and you know that one is often attracted—even fascinated—by rare and brilliant people, whom it does not therefore follow that one loves.”

She regarded him steadily before replying. Then she said: “And is that what you are telling yourself—that you are attracted, that you are fascinated, but that you do not love? I can only say that such subtilty is too fine for me. What I have seen in your eyes when you looked at her, what I have heard in your voice when you spoke to her, was either love or the most exact of counterfeits. And you mistake when you say that I have leaped to this conclusion. I was determined not to act hastily—I have waited, I have observed—closely observed. Even in my thoughts I would not do you injustice—though, understand, that I do not blame you in the least. I am sure that this fascination has overtaken you against your will, in despite of your judgment.”

“You are as wise as you are kind,” he said. “It is true. Today for the first time I have recognized its power, and the sharpest sting was in the thought of apparent disloyalty to you.”

“Therefore, a sentiment of honor brought you here at once,” she said. “I appreciate that. But I am too proud—I hope also too wise—to take your name and rank

when the heart which did not waken for me has wakened for another. I am glad that the recognition of this was neither a shock nor a pain to me. I am glad also—very glad—that in declining the honor of your hand I do not wound your heart. We have both been on the brink of a great mistake. Let us be grateful that we have not made it.”

“For myself I can not think that it would have been a mistake,” he said, touched exceedingly by the sweetness of her voice and smile. “But I have no alternative save to bow to your decision.”

“Believe me, it is best,” she said. “You have learned that the heart which you fancied dead is not dead—I have learned that I dare not make a *mariage de convenance*. So let us part— friends.”

“Always friends, I trust,” he said. Then he rose, lifted the hand which she extended to his lips, and left the room.

Mrs. Falconer remained standing where he left her, gazing fixedly at the serene grace of the sculptured face before her. She saw as in a vision all that her life might have been had that face not crossed her path. The high rank, the noble old name, the personal charm and brilliant powers of the Marquis had never appealed to her imagination with such a sense of attraction as now when she had renounced them and all that they put within her reach. There flashed across her mind the thought, “What if I had listened to Mr. Stanhope’s warning that day at Versailles!” Was it, indeed, an evil fate that she had brought under her roof— a fate to stand between her and the realization of all that her ambition had dreamed? She had hardly asked the question when a revulsion of feeling came. “I am free,” she said aloud with an exultant accent. Then she walked up to the *relievo* and left a kiss on the marble brow.

CHAPTER V.

“And so, *mon ami*, you see that the matter is over,” said the Marquis.

He spoke with quiet philosophy; but Stanhope, to whom the words were addressed, frowned.

“I see,” he replied, “that you left Mrs. Falconer no alternative but to act as she has done. But whether it was consistent with a fine sense of honor to offer your hand to one woman and then let your fancy wander to another, I leave you to determine.”

There was a pause. Stanhope was aware that he had spoken severely; but the same mingled and inconsistent feelings which had made him once before arraign the Marquis for admiring Irène more than Mrs. Falconer, dictated his speech. There is a jealousy for, as well as of, a person beloved, and it was that jealousy which he felt. He was relieved by the result of the Marquis’s suit; and yet he was conscious of a sense of indignant anger that Mrs. Falconer should have been, as it were, overshadowed and set aside by a girl who seemed made to bewitch every man but himself.

“I do not think,” said M. de Châteaumesnil, after a moment, “that I have been guilty of anything which the finest sense of honor could condemn. When I offered my hand to Mrs. Falconer, it was as clearly understood by her as by myself that I offered it in the sense of *mariage de convenance*. The heart being no factor in the affair, she could not have complained of its disloyalty, however willful such disloyalty had been. But, in truth, nothing could be less a matter of will than the feeling which I entertain for Mademoiselle Lescar. Mrs. Falconer herself, with a justice and reason rare in my experience of women,

recognized this. It is an attraction which has deepened to a fascination.”

“I confess,” said Stanhope, “that I have little sympathy with that old excuse of misguided passion, that it was not a matter of will. What is will given us for but to choose between good and evil?”

“True,” said the Marquis. “But you must have your good and your evil, and the will must be roused to resist the last. Now you can not possibly define my feeling for Mademoiselle Lescar in that way. I grant that I should have resisted such an attraction if I had at all suspected its nature. But I did not suspect it. This exquisite girl was to me like a beautiful, poetic vision, rather than a woman to inspire love. I did not realize that passion may be stronger when it allies itself to the noblest emotions, than when it is simply a matter of fancy and the senses.”

“And yet,” said Stanhope, “I should have thought that a man so well versed in affairs of the heart as yourself would have known where he stood.”

“It was because I was so familiar with the signs of ordinary passion that I did not know,” replied the Marquis. “This morning for the first time the knowledge flashed upon me. I met Mademoiselle Lescar by accident as I was returning from a ride in the garden of the Pamfili-Doria. She was standing on the terrace of San Pietro in Montorio, and in the delight which her presence gave me I recognized the existence of love. When I parted with her, I said to myself, ‘What remains to be done?’ And it did not require a moment’s reflection to decide that I would go to Mrs. Falconer, I would obtain her answer to my suit, and if she accepted me I would see no more of Mademoiselle Lescar. I knew that I could trust my will in such a case.”

“Fortunately, you are not called upon to exert it,” said Stanhope, dryly. “You knew little of Mrs. Falconer, or you would not have imagined for a moment that if you had been a royal duke she would have accepted you under such circumstances.”

“It never occurred to me that she had penetrated a secret which was a new discovery to myself.”

“Who can blind a woman where love is concerned? She has an instinct like the magnetic needle.”

“*Eh bien*, it is better so,” said the other, calmly. “She is a woman whom any man might regret to lose; but she is also a woman who could not have been happy without more than I was able to give. She fancies that she is done with passion because her heart has never recovered from the bitter disappointment of her marriage; but this is a mistake. She is capable of, and she could not be satisfied without, assured affection.”

There was another pause, for Stanhope was not inclined to discuss Mrs. Falconer’s character. He had entirely lost confidence in his own power of judging it, and he had no reliance on that of the Marquis. Both, therefore, walked on silently for some time. They had met at the foot of the Trinità de Monti steps, and the Marquis saying to Stanhope, “I have something to tell you,” they turned and passed together along the Via Babuino, in the direction of the Piazza del Popolo. They were now entering the Piazza, with its obelisk and fountains, its radiating streets and twin churches. On one side, carriages and pedestrians were streaming along the winding road which leads to the top of the Pincio; other equipages were passing through the Porta del Popolo, to and from the Villa Borghese. By mutual but silent consent, Stanhope and the Marquis crossed the square, passed out of the gate, and entered that fairy-land, which it is the happy heritage of one man to possess, yet which, with a generosity in which the Roman nobles excel all

others in the world, he throws open to the free enjoyment of every one. After her popes, it is difficult to say what Rome does not owe to her princes, in whose beautiful gardens the humblest may wander, and in whose noble galleries of art the poorest student can study without price. It will be the privilege of these men to preserve for us all that can be preserved from the present reign of misrule, which is making such barbarous havoc of the Rome that saint and scholar, antiquary and poet have known and loved for ages, have so pondered over and so written upon. Says a writer*, whom no one will accuse of undue sympathy for the dispossessed power, "Should the present state of things continue much longer, and especially should Signor Rosa remain in power, the whole beauty of Rome will have disappeared, except that which the princes guard in their villas, and that which the everlasting hills and the glowing Campagna can never fail to display."

Whatever else of antiquity and beauty, then, may disappear, another generation can at least hope to behold the enchanted glades of the Borghese Villa as we behold them today—a picture of sylvan loveliness which no pleasure-ground in the world can equal, for the most beautiful park-scenery elsewhere lacks the classic charm which is here—the glorious old ilex-trees that in venerable repose spread their great branches over the turf, the noble stone-pines that rise high in upper air, the avenues of cypresses, the softly-swelling lawns carpeted in spring with multitudes of wild flowers, the vistas filled with golden light, the flowery dells where great trees fling their shadows and fountains flash into fern-clad basins, and the graceful statues and columns, the antique altars and tombs—many of them half-buried in verdure—which everywhere meet the eye. Well might Madame de Staël say, "La mythologie des anciens y semble ranimée. Les naïades sont placées sur le bord des ondes, les nymphes dans les bois dignes d'elles, les tombeaux sous les ombrages Elyséens; la statue d'Esculape est au milieu d'une île; celle de Vénus semble sortir des ondes; Ovide et Virgile pourraient se promener dans ce beau lieu; et se croire encore au siècle d'Auguste." It is indeed a scene in which fancy can find everything to aid its wildest play, its most exquisite dreams. As we wander down the beautiful vistas and see on each hand woodland paths leading into still lovelier seclusions, where the forms of nymphs and goddesses gleam, we feel as if our careless feet had passed into the golden age, and as if all the sweet myths of classic lore were starting to life around us.

Leaving the wide carriage-road and the more frequented paths, M. de Châteaumesnil and Stanhope followed one of the many ways that lead into the heart of woodland greenness—a world of beauty. They paused in a glade where a group of picturesque ilexes made a study for a painter, and near by, partly concealed by embowering foliage, stood a gray altar with half-effaced inscription to Pan, while a statue, fallen from its pedestal, lay prone upon the turf. The Marquis sat down on the empty pedestal as Stanhope, abruptly resuming their late topic of conversation, said:

"And what do you mean to do now?"

The other lightly shrugged his shoulders. "Why should I do anything?" he asked. "I am not heart-broken; I am not even disappointed, and I enjoy life here. *Voilà tout!*"

"But you forget," said Stanhope, after a minute, "that if enjoying life—which, by-the-by, is something new for one who a little time ago only tolerated it—means devoting yourself to the society of Irène, I, as her guardian, must have a word to say to that."

* Augustus J. C. Hare.

“I do not think of devoting myself to her society,” replied the Marquis, “for the reason that whatever other mistakes I have made or may yet make with regard to myself, I am at least not likely to be mistaken in this—that the time for loving like a boy has passed with me. But her society affords me pleasure, from which I can not see that I need debar myself. *Her* golden calm is absolutely unbroken, and you may be sure that I shall not break it.”

“Intentionally I do not suppose that you would,” said Stanhope; “but unintentionally you may. The betrayal of your feeling will come without your intention, perhaps without your knowledge. And I need hardly tell you, who have won so many women’s hearts, that you are well fitted to win the heart of an imaginative girl like Irène. Therefore knowing that nothing could be further from your conception of the possible than marriage with one who is without family or fortune, I feel that I should fail in my duty to her if I did not say positively that such intercourse can not be permitted.”

M. de Châteaumesnil’s face changed, and with an accent of haughtiness he said: “Do you mean that you can not trust my word?”

“I mean,” Stanhope answered, coolly, “that I trust my own observation and knowledge of the human heart rather than any man’s rash word. ‘He who loves danger shall perish in it.’ He who courts the force of temptation, confident of his power to resist, is the man who will fall. Moreover, you forget one point. You speak of yourself—you can not speak for Irène.”

A moment’s silence followed. The Marquis was evidently struggling with himself; at last he said abruptly:

“Who is she? I asked you the question once before, and you evaded it. But now I think you will acknowledge that I have a claim to be answered. She has told me that she is not American. Of what country is she, then; and, if she is of no family, how is it that she possesses such a look of distinction?”

“Ah!” said Stanhope. Leaning his back against the altar of Pan, he drew forth a cigar-case which he offered to the other, who declined it by a gesture. Then he took out and lighted a cigar for himself before he answered.

“It is a long story,” he said; “but, since you wish to hear it, there is no reason why I should decline to tell it. Indeed, it is likely that every one who knows Irène, or is interested in her, will hear it soon. One good feature of that,” he added, meditatively, “will be that I shall no longer have to play *raconteur*.”

So, after sending out upon the golden air some light-blue wreaths of smoke, he began again the story which Waldegrave had heard a few days before. The Marquis listened attentively, his dark, brilliant eyes fastened eagerly on the narrator’s face, and when it was ended he said:

“I am not surprised. I have recognized from the first that Mademoiselle Lescar was not of ordinary birth, and also that the shadow of some unusual fate had fallen upon her. And this is the explanation!—this the knowledge of sorrow and wrong which I have seen in her eyes and heard in her voice!” Then, after a pause, he added: “No one who is acquainted with the character of Prince Waldegrave could be astonished at his part of the story; but I confess I *am* astonished that you should have permitted Count Waldegrave to know her.”

“The decision of that matter was fortunately not left to me,” answered Stanhope. “I say fortunately, because I should have decided against the acquaintance; and, as events

have lately proved, it may be the means of restoring Irène to her rightful place in the world!"

"How?" asked the Marquis, quickly.

"I felt bound to tell the story to Count Waldegrave," Stanhope replied, "seeing that he, like yourself, was yielding to the attraction which she possesses in such remarkable degree. I meant it as a warning; but he received it as intelligence which brought within the limit of possibility what had before seemed beyond it. He at once declared his intention of offering her the name, the rank, the position, of which her mother was unjustly deprived. But, before doing so, he has gone to obtain, if possible, Prince Waldegrave's sanction of his suit. There is no reason now why he should not present her to the world as his daughter, and Count Waldegrave hopes that he may do so."

The Marquis looked grave; he also turned a little pale.

"And she?" he asked. "What does she say to this?"

"She has heard nothing of it. By Count Waldegrave's special request, she has not been told of his resolution or his mission."

"What do you think her answer will be when she does hear?"

It was now Stanhope's turn to lift his shoulders. "Who is it can read a woman?" he said. "So far as I can read Irène, I do not think that she will accept what he offers, or that she will meet any advances from her father. She is passionately alive to the sense of her mother's wrong—passionately full of resentment toward the author of that wrong. But she belongs to an impressionable sex, and she has an imaginative temperament. Nothing, therefore, can be predicted of her with certainty. If she were like other women, however, I should consider the end quite certain, for such a proof of devotion as Count Waldegrave's might touch any woman's heart."

The Marquis rose from his pedestal and took a turn across the turf. It might be, he thought, that one so quickly thrilled by anything noble, as Irène always was, would be touched by the chivalry of Count Waldegrave, by his taking upon himself the part of champion, the duty of atonement. Before his mental vision rose the face that had been with him that morning on the terrace of San Pietro and by the shrine of Santa Cecilia, that had looked at him from Erne's marble in Mrs. Falconer's salon. To him as to Waldegrave the moment of possibility had come: he could not let that face pass out of his life without an effort to retain it. He turned abruptly in his walk and paused before Stanhope.

"Do you think that my chance of success would be better than Count Waldegrave's?" he asked.

Stanhope, who had not expected this, regarded him with surprise for a moment before answering. Then he said, slowly:

"But what becomes of your opinion that ideal sentiment is not a good foundation for marriage?"

"It goes the way of many another opinion. I am sure that in this case it would be the best foundation."

"You have also said repeatedly that you could not marry without fortune. Irène, remember, has none—that is, none according to your standard."

"To be a poor nobleman is not agreeable," said the Marquis, calmly. "It is mortifying and crippling in many ways—especially if one has an ambition to enter public life. But, after all, I am not ruined. If I live quietly, the revenues of Châteaumesnil suffice

to maintain the dignity of a seigneur. Fortune, then, is not essential. But good birth is, I hope that Prince Waldegrave will acknowledge his daughter, because I could not give my name to one on whom even the shadow of a stain rested."

"Prince Waldegrave's acknowledgment can not alter facts," said Stanhope, "and you, who as a Catholic are bound to believe in the absolute indissolubility of marriage, certainly can not feel that any stain rests on his daughter."

"None in reality; but we have to consider the opinion of the world—and for that reason I desire his acknowledgment. Beyond that I should agree with her in neither asking nor accepting anything."

"Well," said Stanhope, after a pause, "this is a change in affairs! A few hours ago you were Mrs. Falconer's suitor: now you are Irène's. Does it not strike you that such an abrupt change of allegiance will place you in rather an awkward position?"

"Not at all," answered the other, quietly. "Why should it? Mrs. Falconer fully comprehends the motives that made me her suitor. She will also comprehend those which make me Mademoiselle Lescar's."

"And when do you intend to offer yourself—at once?"

"No," answered the Marquis, "for she is not in the least prepared. The man who proposes to a woman when she is not expecting his suit rushes upon certain rejection—unless the woman is influenced by considerations that would not influence Mademoiselle Lescar."

"True. But remember that Count Waldegrave will return in a few days to offer himself."

"I have little fear of the result. I understand now what I have seen more than once in her eyes when he approached her. An ordinary woman would accept him. She is not an ordinary woman—she will refuse him."

"I think so," said Stanhope.

The sun had now left the glade where they stood; its last rays were gilding the tops of the tall pines and pointing the giant cypresses with flame. Even in spring it is not safe to linger in these lovely shades at this hour, for malaria is inhaled with every breath; and the two men turned to go. As they walked slowly back along the woodland vista which led them there, the Marquis said:

"It is certainly a strange caprice of Fate! Had it been foretold me, I should not have found it credible. I could not have conceived that a *grande passion* would enter my life again, to disturb and derange it, to alter my plans and cause me to lose whatever character for wisdom I may possess in the eyes of my friends. But there are compensations. A little while ago, as you remarked, I only tolerated life; *ennui* of the most hopeless description was closing in upon me. Now there is a change. Feelings and aspirations that I had almost forgotten—dreams that I thought gone with my youth—seem to awaken by contact with this fresh and beautiful nature. When I am near it, I might fancy myself five-and-twenty again."

"A very undesirable fancy, in my opinion," said Stanhope. "I should be sorry, even in feeling, to turn the clock of time back from five-and-thirty to five-and-twenty."

"Ah," said the Marquis, "that is because you have retained all that is best of youth, and lost only its undesirable qualities. Life is still full of interest and hope to you, for you have not burned out its best fires. But for me, weary of pleasure, debarred from the career for which nature intended me, I had fallen into a state out of which this new

feeling has come to rouse me, to give zest and meaning to life again.”

“What I fail to understand,” said Stanhope, “is why Mrs. Falconer could not have done all this for you.”

The other laughed. “I should not have thought,” he said, “that you knew so little of the human heart. Why does one person touch it and another not? There you have one of the mysteries of our being. Yet in this case it seems to me that the explanation is plain. Mrs. Falconer, graceful, charming, lovely as she is, belongs to the class of women of the world whom I know well. But Mademoiselle Lescar was a new type to me, and not only a new type, but a revelation. I have known many *femmes d’esprit*, but I have never before known a creature at once so intellectual, so poetic, and so simple—with a nature that responds so quickly to every noble emotion.”

“It does not respond to one,” said Stanhope, dryly. “She is implacable toward her father.”

“And yet,” said the Marquis, “that is a consequence of the very thing of which I speak. The nature which responds quickly to nobleness, revolts equally from baseness. And, when this baseness has struck both affection and pride, it is not wonderful that passion should be in arms against it.”

“I think,” said Stanhope, “that, if you assure her of your sympathy on this point, it will go further than any other means you could devise to win her heart.”

“She would be sure of my fullest sympathy,” said the Marquis; “yet that would not prevent my seeing that if she wishes to rise higher she must forgive the injury, because only by that step can she rise from natural to supernatural nobleness; and because, after all, an act of baseness injures no one so much as the person guilty of it.”

CHAPTER VI.

It seemed to Waldegrave that the journey from Nice to Rome was thrice as long as it had ever been before, though he traveled without stopping, rushing with all the speed of steam down the beautiful Riviera, emerging from dark tunnels for brief glimpses of lovely bays, with picturesque fishing villages, bold olive-clad heights on one side, on the other a marvelous sea flecked with zones of color, “the peacock’s neck in hue,” and dotted with russet sails; past Mentone and Spezzia, past Genoa in her pride and beauty, past Pisa and Leghorn, till, leaving Civit à Vecchia, the train sped across the wide Campagna toward Rome.

As he neared the city, some words of Irène’s recurred to him. “Were you not glad,” she said, “to come back to the solemn tawny walls, to the Campagna and the broken aqueducts, even from that paradise by the sea?” He could hear her voice—the thrilling, pathetic voice which he knew so well—asking the question; and his heart answered that he was glad with an infinite gladness. Glancing out of the carriage-window, he saw the Campagna spreading afar under the dim light of the stars, like a vision of a boundless waste; then some giant arches loomed through the darkness, then came the shadow of a mighty wall. The train rushed through: he was again in Rome.

It was hard to decide to do nothing that night. But, since it was already ten o’clock, he curbed his impatience and allowed his servant to tell the coachman to drive home. Before they had gone far, however, he countermanded the order. “Drive to the Hôtel Europa,” he said. It had suddenly occurred to him that he might leave a card to

inform Stanhope of his arrival, and make an appointment for the next day.

But, as the carriage drew up before the hotel, who should appear, passing under the *portone*, but Stanhope himself! He had been to Mrs. Falconer's; but since it was her reception evening, and her rooms were full, he left early. Society had of late lost its charm for him. He found himself strangely absent and *distract*. It was the old story: when the heart ardently desires the companionship of one person, all others weary and annoy. It is part of that mystery and madness called love, which makes lovers, for a time at least, the most selfish of the world's inhabitants.

Waldegrave descended quickly from the carriage and followed the figure as it entered the court. The sound of his name made Stanhope pause and turn. He smiled when he saw who it was that had spoken.

"Ah, M. le Comte, so you are back in Rome!"

"I have just arrived," Waldegrave answered, "and on my way from the railway-station I called to leave my card, and beg you to see me in the morning. But, since I am fortunate enough to meet you in this way, perhaps you will not object to hearing the result of my journey now."

"I shall be delighted to do so. You will come to my apartment?"

"For a few minutes—yes."

It was a pleasant suite of rooms to which Waldegrave found himself conducted, and the small salon, with its litter of books and papers, had more the air of the study of a man of letters than of the drawing-room of a man of society. Stanhope drew an easy-chair into the circle of shaded lamp-light shed from the writing table, and then crossing the floor laid his hand on a bell.

"Since you are just from a journey you will permit me, I hope, to order some refreshment?" he said.

But Waldegrave declined. "I shall not remain longer than a few minutes," he said. "What I have to tell can be told very briefly. I am sure you will be glad to hear that I return not only with my uncle's sanction of my wishes, but also with his offer to acknowledge, receive, and fitly provide for his daughter. He is anxious to do all that can be done in atonement for past injustice. It remains, therefore, now only to determine what steps are best to be taken—in other words, shall Miss Lescar be informed of this before she hears of my hopes? I am not so eager to let her know the last as to see her established in her rightful place in the world."

Stanhope, who had returned to the table which occupied the center of the room, thought that he had rarely seen a face more full of generous feeling than that which looked at him. He was the more touched because he felt sure that sharp disappointment awaited these confident anticipations.

"Have you forgotten," he said, quietly, "the warning which I gave you on our way from Tivoli? Do you not remember my having told you then that Irène's resentment for her mother's wrong is so deep that I do not believe she will accept anything that her father does or can offer."

"But the deepest resentment must surely be disarmed by regret and atonement," said Waldegrave. "I can not believe that she will prove implacable when she hears that her father is willing to make every reparation in his power."

"There only remains, then, to put the matter to the test," said Stanhope. "I sincerely trust that your opinion may prove correct; but I warn you again that mine is

founded on a longer and better knowledge of her character than you possess. And I do not trust only to my own knowledge. I have told you of her mother's anxiety on this point. It was so great that with her dying breath she entreated her daughter to forgive the man who had injured them: and Irène did not—could not—promise to do so. Yet her devotion to her mother was of passionate intensity. Judge, therefore, what chance you have to obtain that forgiveness."

There was a moment's silence; then Waldegrave said, gravely:

"At least the attempt must be made—you recognize that?"

"Yes," Stanhope answered, "I recognize that it must be made. Since the father wishes to do justice, no one would have a right to prevent the daughter from deciding for herself whether she will accept what he offers."

"Then," said Waldegrave, "the next question arises, who shall convey his offer to her? You are not only the guardian appointed by her mother, but you have a knowledge of her character, as you remarked, which I do not possess; and since I desire above all things that *this* offer shall be accepted, whatever may be her answer to my own, would it not be well for you to make it on behalf of Prince Waldegrave?"

"So far as I know myself," Stanhope answered, "I have never yet shrunk from doing anything which clearly presented itself to me in the light of a duty—and if I thought this a duty I would do what you propose, even though quite sure it would serve no possible end: for I have no knowledge of Irène's character which would be of use to me in such a case. But apart from the fact that you, being the bearer of the offer, ought to deliver it, there is another reason why I should be sorry to take your place. If I did, you would probably never again see Irène—never, I am sure, with her consent—and I presume that you wish to do so."

This startled Waldegrave. "Is it possible," he said, "that you really fear such a result as that?"

"I do not fear," Stanhope answered, "I am certain of it. When she heard of Prince Waldegrave's offer, the question would at once follow, 'How did he come to make this—he who never before has appeared conscious of my existence?' Your story would then have to be told—and I am not only sure that you could tell it better than any one else could tell it for you, but I am also sure that it is your only chance to obtain a personal hearing. Do not, therefore, throw away an advantage which is always great, and which in this instance is your only hope."

"Certainly you are not encouraging," said Waldegrave. "But I anticipated difficulty, and I am not easily daunted by it. For her sake as well as my own—indeed, for her sake more than my own—I am determined to succeed. I shall, therefore, take the forlorn hope you recommend. I shall go to her with my story and her father's offer—and I shall accept no refusal."

"That plan would answer very well—you would be quite certain of success—with many women," Stanhope answered. "But you do not yet know Irène. However, I will say no more to discourage you. Only I think it right to warn you that you have a formidable rival."

For the first time Waldegrave looked alarmed.

"Who?" he asked.

"The Marquis de Châteaumesnil," Stanhope replied.

"You astonish me!" Waldegrave said, after a moment. "I have been under the

impression that he was Mrs. Falconer's suitor."

"He was—but Mrs. Falconer herself discovered his attraction toward Irène. The result is a formal transfer of his suit. His name and rank are fully worthy of Prince Waldegrave's daughter—and he only asks that the purity of her birth shall be acknowledged by her father."

"That will be done in any case," said Waldegrave. "But my uncle will be sorry—"
He broke off, hesitated, then, with an effort, asked: "And she? What is her answer?"

"She has given none, for the simple reason that she has not yet heard of his intentions. M. de Châteaumesnil, aware that she has only thought of him as Mrs. Falconer's suitor, wishes to efface that impression before declaring his sentiments toward herself. I think, moreover, that he is desirous to know Prince Waldegrave's decision."

"You may set his mind at rest on that point," said the young Count, rising. "Justice will be done in any case; though my uncle will be sorely disappointed if this is the end. I do not speak of myself; what I shall feel is of importance only to myself. But I will not yield without an effort. Do you think that I might hope to see Mademoiselle Lescar to-morrow, and that Mrs. Falconer would permit me to see her alone?"

"It could only be through Mrs. Falconer's aid and arrangement that you would be able to do so," answered Stanhope. "I am sure that, if appealed to on the subject, Irène would decline to see you; knowing, or at least suspecting as she must, that you have heard the truth regarding her. I will see Mrs. Falconer to-morrow morning, and will let you know what hour she appoints for you to come, with the best hope of finding Irène alone."

"You are very kind," said Waldegrave. "I shall, then, hope to hear from you."
And with this understanding they parted.

It was with that feeling of reliance which is only inspired by a few people, who, in the offices and affairs of friendship, have proved themselves altogether steadfast and trustworthy, that Stanhope set forth the next morning to see Mrs. Falconer. Although it was much before the usual hour for visitors, he had no difficulty in obtaining admittance, nor had he long to wait for her appearance.

She came in, looking very fresh and lovely in one of those charming morning-robos which Parisian dress-makers devise, where apparent simplicity disguises consummate art.

"Have you come to apologize for disappearing so early last night?" she asked, giving him her hand. "It was very discourteous. You did not even bid me good-night, but when I looked around for you I found you gone."

"I did not think you would miss me," he answered; "but I will apologize to any extent that you demand. By leaving when I did, however, I met Count Waldegrave, who had just returned from Nice, and who drove from the station to my hotel, arriving there at the same time that I did. He intended merely to leave his card and make an appointment for to-day; but since we met so opportunely, he told me the result of his journey."

"And what was it?" she asked, with quick interest.

"Prince Waldegrave gives a fatherly benediction to the proposed marriage, and is ready to acknowledge and receive his daughter."

"Can it be possible? It is more than I dreamed of!"

"It is much more than I expected, and proves one of two things—either that

Count Waldegrave has extraordinary influence over his uncle, or that the latter is not insensible to remorse.”

“Probably both considerations weighed with him. He is glad, no doubt, to gratify his nephew, at the same time that he does tardy justice to his daughter. But to be allowed to atone for wrong committed is a great privilege; and it is one which I do not think Prince Waldegrave has deserved.”

“I am afraid that will be Irène’s opinion,” said Stanhope; “but I did not think that it would be yours.”

“On this point I can appreciate her feeling. Shall this man, who has profited by wrong and gained all that was his end, now have the satisfaction of believing that he has made full *amende*?”

“He can never make full *amende*,” said Stanhope, “for the person on whom chiefly the wrong was wrought has passed beyond the reach of reparation. His *amende* at the utmost will be only partial; and if he is indeed anxious to atone, it would be a hard and ungenerous spirit which refused to allow him to do so.”

“No doubt you are right; yet for the first time I sympathize fully with Irène on this subject. I find myself revolting against her accepting anything from one who disowned her mother and herself.”

“What she accepts, however, will only be her birthright. You must remember that. Remember, too, that it is an acknowledgment of wrong done her mother as well as herself. And, then, do you wholly overlook Count Waldegrave? Has the romance of your woman’s heart no plea to make for him?”

“None,” she answered. “I am much more struck with the poetical justice of his loving Irène fruitlessly than of her bearing the name and filling the place from which her mother was cast.” Then she added, with a smile: “I am the advocate of M. de Châteaumesnil. I want her to marry *him*.”

Stanhope regarded her silently for a minute before he said: “I confess that you puzzle me. I do not understand you at all.”

“How do I puzzle you?” she asked. “What is it that you do not understand?”

“For one thing, I do not understand why you wish Irène to marry M. de Châteaumesnil.”

“Yet it is plain enough. He offers her rank as high if not as brilliant as Count Waldegrave’s, and an older, prouder name. I want her to take her proper place in the world, not through any grace of her father, but through the love of a man who is her father’s equal. Then, there are several reasons why I think she would be happier with the Marquis than with Count Waldegrave. He has a nature much more sympathetic with her own; they are of the same religious faith, and I think that he would appreciate her; while I am sure she would prove the most appreciative companion to him.”

“Appreciative—yes. But not a companion fitted to aid his success in life. She is too ideal.”

“A great mistake that. An ideal nature gives the spirit wings over the rough places in life, which must be traversed in order to reach high ends. Believe me, Irène would make a perfect Marquise de Châteaumesnil. The Faubourg itself could find no flaw in her. It would have found many flaws in me.”

“How can you speak so of yourself?” demanded Stanhope, indignantly. “It is an injustice which I can not endure. What is this girl compared to *you*?”

“Ask M. de Châteaumesnil that question,” she said, with a slight smile.

“M. de Châteaumesnil is—a fool!” cried Stanhope, who, in excuse for this outbreak, it may be said was really provoked beyond endurance. “He is acting without sense or judgment.”

“On the contrary,” said Mrs. Falconer, quietly, “he is acting with both. Certainly the man is a fool who throws away his life for any mere sentimental fancy. But the deep, or rather the high, passion which springs from the contact of a thoroughly sympathetic nature is a different thing. The wisest man can prove his wisdom in no better manner than by following that. I assure you my respect for M. de Châteaumesnil is increased since I find him capable of such a passion and willing to sacrifice everything for it.”

“He will sacrifice much,” said Stanhope, “unless Irène accepts her father’s offer—which Count Waldegrave declares will hold good whether she accepts *him* or not.”

“Did you tell him of the intentions of the Marquis?”

“Yes; I felt bound to do so. I told him that the Marquis only asked that Prince Waldegrave should acknowledge his daughter, and he replied that I might set his mind at rest on that point; that justice would be done in any case.”

“It is very noble of him to give such an assurance.”

“I think you will be struck by the fact that he looks at the matter in a very noble way. He is more anxious for Irène to be restored to her rightful place in the world, the possession of her birthright, than for her to consent to marry himself; though no doubt he thinks that the last would eventually follow the first.”

“Did he seem startled to hear of a rival?”

“He seemed much surprised, especially since, like every one else, he considered the Marquis your suitor. But he was not daunted. He desires to plead his cause at once, and wishes to know whether you will permit him to see Irène alone to-day.”

Mrs. Falconer smiled. “The difficulty on that point will be with Irène,” she said.

“So I told him. But I ventured to promise that you would arrange the difficulty. I am sure that you will, notwithstanding that you have declared yourself on the side of the Marquis.”

“I suppose that for the sake of fair play I must. But it will have to be done by stratagem.” She considered for a moment. “Tell him to come this afternoon—about three o’clock. I will go out, giving Antonio strict orders that no one is to be admitted but Count Waldegrave, and I will endeavor to arrange that Irène shall be found here. I do not know what reason I shall give for begging her to remain in the drawing-room; but necessity is the spur of invention. Perhaps I might tell her that you are coming and particularly wish to see her. Do you think it likely you will look in this afternoon?”

“I am quite sure that I shall—after Count Waldegrave’s visit.”

“That will do, then. She will be angry, I fear, when she discovers the trap—*mais cela ne fait rien!* He will have had his chance.”

CHAPTER VII.

“My dear,” said Mrs. Falconer, after luncheon, addressing Irène with an unblushing countenance, “I am obliged to go out to keep an engagement made with Lady Dorchester last night; but I leave you in possession of the boudoir, and I shall tell

Antonio to show Mr. Stanhope in here when he comes.”

“Pray do,” said Irène, “though I hope he may not come; for I can not imagine that he has anything of importance to say to me, and this book is very interesting.”

She looked up, smiling as she spoke, with an unsuspectingness which gave Mrs. Falconer something of the feeling of a conspirator. But she went out, dropping behind her the *portiere* which screened this apartment from the rest of the long suite. Occupying an angle of the building, it was of irregular shape, and had a charming aspect. The soft hangings of Persian silk, on brass-tipped lances of ebony, were of the most harmoniously mingled colors; the crystal frames of Salviati’s mirrors were like fairy-work; two or three beautiful inlaid cabinets were covered with *bric-à-brac*; paintings and photographs hung on the walls, lamps and vases from ancient Etruscan models were scattered on brackets and shelves; from one corner a marble Puck seemed starting forward to put a girdle round the earth; in another, Hebe stood, bearing the cup of the gods. There were luxurious chairs, a writing-table furnished with all appliances for correspondence, and another table covered with the latest English and French publications. Two curtained doors led from the apartment—one into the suite of reception-rooms, the other into Mrs. Falconer’s chamber.

Left alone in this delightful retreat, half buried in a deep chair, with a book for companion, perfect silence reigning around, and, when she chose to lift her eyes, a view of towers and domes and pines to be seen between the folds of filmy muslin which formed the inner drapery of the window, Irène felt like the philosopher who said, “When I open a noble volume I say to myself, ‘Now, the only person that I envy is he who is reading a better book than this.’” There was pleasure in the sense of safe seclusion, and she read with that enjoyment which only an ardent student knows, for a length of time of which she took no heed. She was at length roused by a distant but well-known sound—that of the door-bell of the apartment.

“Probably that is Mr. Stanhope,” she thought, dropping the book into her lap. And then it occurred to her to wonder again why Stanhope should come to see her. He very seldom did so in any formal manner. If he had anything to say to her, it was said in the course of those ordinary and quite frequent visits which, she knew, were primarily intended for Mrs. Falconer. He had been in the house that morning—why had he not seen her then? why make this second, unusual visit? It must mean something of importance—yet what could that something be? An instinct that it might concern Waldegrave suddenly flashed upon her; and at that moment Antonio drew back the *portiere* and announced Count Waldegrave.

Irène rose to her feet—a picture of astonishment. Was Antonio mad? That was her first thought. Only a few of Mrs. Falconer’s most intimate friends were ever admitted to this apartment, and then only by the special order of its mistress. But to introduce a comparative stranger here, and she alone—Antonio received a glance which made him drop the *portiere* and hastily retire. He had obeyed his mistress, that was enough for him; but he did not care to meet the signorina’s eyes when she looked in that way. The signorina, however, had no mind to accept the situation quietly.

“Pardon, M. le Comte,” she said, as Waldegrave advanced, “but it is evident that the servant has made a mistake. Mrs. Falconer is not at home.”

“Pardon *me*, mademoiselle,” Waldegrave answered, “but the servant has made no mistake. I asked for yourself.” Then, meeting a look of still greater surprise, he added: “I

should not have presumed to take such a step without the consent of your guardian. But it is with his permission that I am here."

"I do not recognize his right to give such a permission," she said, haughtily, feeling an instant conviction, in part at least, of what lay before her. Evidently Waldegrave had heard who she was, and with Stanhope's consent and by Mrs. Falconer's arrangement had come to speak on the subject. She was like one mailed in steel at the thought. It was a liberty which could not be too severely rebuked. She made a step as if to leave the room, but Waldegrave hastily interposed.

"Whether you recognize such a right or not," he said, "I beg you to remain—to listen to me! I have nothing to say that can possibly offend you."

"The mere fact that you have come to speak to me in this manner offends me," she said. "Why has Mr. Stanhope ventured to give a permission which does not enter into the scope of his duties at all?"

"Because," Waldegrave answered, "the matter upon which I have come is of such importance that it does enter into the scope of his duties to be sure that it is properly put before you."

She threw back her head with a gesture as haughty as her tone. "I find it impossible," she said, "to imagine anything which you can have to say to me of importance."

"Then you will certainly allow me to tell you what it is," he said.

The gentleness, the entreaty in his tone, might have touched her, if at that moment she had been capable of being touched by anything. But her mood was entirely resistant. Again she thought of escape, but Waldegrave stood immediately between her and the door leading to Mrs. Falconer's apartment, and she could not make an undignified attempt to pass him. But she did not speak; only her silence gave him leave to go on:

"I am sure," he said, after a moment, "that I need not recall to your memory our last conversation together, or how you then bade me listen if any one who had a right to speak for you came to me. A few hours later, one who certainly possessed that right told me your story, and in giving me the secret of your birth gave me also the secret of all that had puzzled me from our earliest acquaintance." He made a step nearer, and held out his hand, with a gesture as graceful as it was earnest. "Will you not acknowledge me as a kinsman," he said, "and grant me a kinsman's privilege to approach you?"

She did not notice either gesture or appeal. Standing with one hand on the back of the chair from which she had risen at his entrance, she regarded him with a face that might have been carved in marble for all sign of softening that was in it, and, when she spoke, her tones were clear and cold as ice.

"Since you recall so much of our last conversation, you must also recollect my telling you that after you had heard my story we should not meet again. If I had known that Mr. Stanhope had told it to you, I should have guarded against this interview. He has uncandidly betrayed me into it; but you will, I trust, believe me when I say that you have made a mistake—that there is nothing to be gained by any allusion to a subject which I decline to discuss."

Waldegrave felt like one in whose face a door is shut. Almost before he began, she had made it difficult for him to utter another word.

"I am forced," he said, "to disregard your request, because I hope there may be

much to be gained by discussing the subject, and especially because I am the bearer of a message from your father.”

If her face had been haughty before, what was it now? It seemed to him that human features were never made to express more perfectly the extreme of proud anger.

“Is it possible,” she said, “that any one has ventured to approach the person of whom you speak on my behalf?”

“I have ventured to do so,” Waldegrave answered. “As soon as I heard Mr. Stanhope’s communication, I went to Nice—where Prince Waldegrave is now staying—and laid it before him, together with some wishes of my own, of which I shall speak hereafter. What he felt, I leave you to judge from the fact that I return empowered to offer you all the atonement for wrong which it is in his power to make. He is willing—nay, anxious—to acknowledge, receive, and provide for you as his daughter.”

“And I,” she said, “leave you to judge what *I* feel, when I tell you that there is not wealth enough on earth to tempt, as there is not power enough on earth to force me to accept the least or the greatest thing which Prince Waldegrave can offer!”

The fiery spirit, which her listener had learned to know, spoke in her voice and shone in her glance as she uttered the last words, and he began to realize the truth of Stanhope’s warning. But, as he had said of himself, he was not easily daunted; and to yield without further effort was impossible.

“It can not be,” he said, gravely, “that this is your answer to one who acknowledges that he committed a wrong, and desires to repair it. Can you, who find in your soul an echo for every noble feeling, find none for the beauty and generosity of forgiveness? Do you think that you have a right to refuse atonement, when it is offered by one who has, at least, the natural claim of a parent?”

“It would have been better if you had left that unsaid,” she replied; “for you must be aware that no plea can be founded on a claim which has been renounced, and a hundred times forfeited. I owe no filial duty to the man who flung my mother and myself out of the path of his ambition, who blasted her life and darkened all of mine! It is no mere form of words when I say that were I starving and friendless, as I might have been for aught that he has known or cared, I should still fling his offer back to him in scorn—I should still bid you tell him that the name which he took from my mother I will never bear; and that when he can call *her* from the grave and put her again into the place from which he cast her, he may talk to me of reparation—not before!”

The passion within her had slipped its leash, and vibrated in every tone of her voice as she spoke. And what a voice it was to express emotion! Its cadences thrilled Waldegrave like the deep notes of a violoncello. And as he looked at the pale face, the shining eyes, he felt the hopelessness of appeal. What could move this spirit, with its profound sense of unalterable wrong, and its hatred and disdain of the wrong-doer? It was only the involuntary expression of his thoughts which made him say:

“But, in this bitter resentment, you are stifling and belying the better part of your nature.”

“So far from that,” she said, “all my nature finds expression in it, all my pride and sense of outraged justice, all my love for the one creature I have ever perfectly loved, all my scorn for things base and selfish. Before I could forgive such a wrong, I must trample upon nature. That divine faith bids me do; but I have not yet learned to do it. I have tried to say in my heart that I forgive, and I have never yet for one moment said it. I

will tell you why I tried. It was because with her last breath my mother asked me to do so. But, when her image rises before me, when I remember all the sadness of her life and death—Ah! why do I talk of this, and why have you come to me on such a fruitless errand ?”

As she broke off in this manner, there was for the first time an accent of pathos in her voice, and her eyes were full of quickly rising tears, which quenched their indignant fire. Then Waldegrave risked all on a last desperate cast.

“I have come,” he said, “not only because for the honor of my name I wish that justice should be done and wrong atoned for, but because I love you—I have long loved you—and I would fain cast out hatred by love.”

He drew nearer to her—there was now only the chair between them—and went on eagerly: “Listen to me. Do not let me plead in vain, since it is for you that I plead, as well as for myself! Take from me, if you will not take from your father, the name and place which is your right, together with the heart which has been yours since I saw you on that old terrace, where you were like a vision out of a dream to me. I love you with a passion against which I struggled vainly before I knew the truth, and when I knew it my first thought was one of intense gladness. You were brought near to me, and it might be mine to atone by a life-time of honor and devotion for the sadness and wrong that had overshadowed your youth. Fling away, like a dark memory, the thought of that past. Put your hand in mine, and let us face the sunlight together—the sunlight of love and youth, and hope and divine forgiveness! My beautiful love, with your poet soul and your poet eyes, you are not made for darkness, but for light. Be generous—let me have the happiness of pouring it over you.”

As he uttered these impassioned sentences, his was certainly a voice and a presence to thrill any woman’s heart. His face, usually so cold, was vivid with feeling, and his tones were full of the most eager entreaty. He might have stood for a picture of ardent passion—passion the more ardent, because not wholly intent on selfish ends. It was as he had said—he was pleading for her, as well as for his own, happiness.

Perhaps Irène felt this. At least he could see that his words moved her—though not in the manner he desired. The hand, which he again extended, she did not now ignore, but she shrank back from it.

“I beg you to say no more!” she exclaimed, in a quick tone. “What you ask is impossible. I told you once that you would have to be made over again before we could be friends. I tell you now that *I* should have to be made over before I could accept your love. But you have a noble heart. I acknowledge that, and I think I must have felt it all the time, for, although your name had such a bitter sound in my ears, I could not hate you—after I came to know you.”

“And is there not in that,” he said, eagerly, “a foundation to build upon? It has been my hope—the only hope I dared indulge.”

“No,” she answered, “there is no foundation possible between you and me. It would be easier for fire and water to blend. And I do not deserve that you should talk of loving me. For I have been glad to think that you might love me. It seemed a sort of retribution.”

He looked at her for a moment, as if unable to comprehend.

Then he said, “Do you mean—can you mean that you were glad because you wished to give me pain?”

"I did not wish to *give* it," she answered; "but I was glad to think that you should suffer it—through me. Does this seem to you a distinction without a difference? Yet it was very plain to me. When I heard that you wished to know me, I said to myself: 'I have done nothing to bring this about—it has come of itself. But if he loves me and suffers through me, I shall not be sorry.' But now"—her voice changed—"I *am* sorry. I would avoid painning you if I could."

Silence followed. What could Waldegrave answer? He turned and walked across the floor, stood for a moment by the window, then came back, with a face different from that of the ardent lover, who had poured out his heart a few minutes before. Now it was pale, quiet, resolute.

"And I," he said, pausing before her again, "am willing to bear this or any other pain, if by means of it I can at last win the triumph of your higher self over the bitterness which drags you down, and which made such a feeling as that of which you speak possible to you. For, what stronger proof could be given of the lowering nature of hatred than that you, of all women—*you*, who seem made to inspire noble thoughts in all who approach you—could have found satisfaction in the idea of giving or causing pain! Does it not show how wise and tender was that last prayer of your mother, which you disregard? Does it not make you feel that even in you there are possibilities that must be crushed, or they will crush all that forms the best part of your nature? This bitterness is like a dark shadow, which you must cast off—and again I say that I am willing to suffer any pain which love for you entails, if it enabled me to contribute in the least to the final victory of your true self, to the hour when you will rise high enough to see—"

"That 'no wrong is worth resentment'?" she asked. "That was my mother's saying. But my mother was a saint. *I* am Prince Waldegrave's daughter. And I should despise myself as worthy to be so—as capable, as he was, of sacrificing honor to self-interest—if I could take anything from his hand. Let this be my last word."

"Nay," he said, "it is impossible that I can accept it as such. You must *pause*—you *must* think, that for the sake of others, since no one in the world stands alone, you should take the justice of your birthright. It is only justice."

"It is truly only justice," she replied; "but is given or withheld at the pleasure of a man to whom I will not even owe—justice. And, for the rest, let me remind you that I *do* stand alone—and that what I choose to be, or refuse to be, concerns only myself."

"Do you really think that?" he asked. "Do you not see that it concerns others"—he paused, a thought of the Marquis de Châteaumesnil flashed on him—"chiefly the man whom you will love and marry?" he added.

"There is no such man," she answered, in her most haughty tone. "How could there be, when I have only a great wrong for inheritance?"

"Forgive me," said Waldegrave, "but is that statement worthy of you, when you know that with a word you can take exactly the place in the world which you would have filled had your mother remained Prince Waldegrave's wife?"

"*Had* she remained—she *did* remain his wife—she died his wife by every law of God and man!" cried the girl, turning on him with such a flash of passion in her face that she seemed for the moment almost transfigured. "And there you touch the point which makes it impossible that I could accept his offer, even if I were able to forget—to forgive! Would such an offer be made to me if my mother were living? You know that it would not! Therefore, in accepting it, in entering Prince Waldegrave's house, in

recognizing as his wife the woman who is there, I should accept the decree which drove my mother from her place, and I should take my right from her death. For how could even a subtle diplomatist in the same breath acknowledge a daughter and disown a wife? No; I would not take a throne at such a price!”

It was easy to see that—to read it in every line of the resolute face, and in the flashing glance of the superb eyes. “Good Heaven! what a likeness to her father!” Waldegrave thought, recalling a day when he had seen his uncle beard a parliamentary assembly reluctant to do his will, and impose that will upon them by the magnetism and majesty of his personal authority. Just such a will was arrayed against him now, and the young man realized that his words were like water poured on granite. Still he made one more effort.

“You are altogether wrong in your conclusion,” he said. “Do you not see that the acknowledgment of wrong done to your mother is clearly implied in what is offered you?”

She shook her head. “You are a clever advocate,” she answered; “but you can not blind me to the truth which my heart feels and my mind perceives, that in acting as you propose, I should accept and condone the past. That I will never do.” Then, after a moment’s pause—a despairing pause on Waldegrave’s part—she added, more gently: “Why will you not believe that you are wasting time in all that you urge? Why will you not take what I say as final? It is final, whether you believe it or not.”

“I shall never believe it,” he answered. “We have both the same will—it is a family inheritance; but in this contest mine should prove strongest, since I have the nobler end in view. At least I will hope—and you will allow me to see you again?”

“I would rather not,” she answered. “Why should I? There is nothing to be gained by it.”

“There may be something to be gained at last. Do not refuse to me a privilege which your merest acquaintance enjoys.”

“You are not a mere acquaintance,” she replied, “and your presence after this would too painfully excite me. I should like to go away—far away—where there would be nothing to remind me of the wrong. Then I might at last reach the height on which my mother stood, and forgive as she forgave. It is the only hope. But though I do not wish to see you again—ever again—I shall not forget that you are kind and noble. So—adieu.”

She held out the hand she had never before given him. And he, taking it, feeling for the first time the touch of her fingers upon his own, vowed to himself that, let her say what she would, this should be no final farewell. Again he would hold that small, flexible, firm hand, with its skin like satin and its rose-leaf palm; again he would struggle with her, until, by the force of love, her will should yield! So he promised himself; but he saw in her pale face that it was time the strain of the interview ended—and he said:

“I will leave you now; but I do not accept your sentence of banishment, and I warn you that you could not go so far that I would not follow and find you. Remember that I have everything on my side—the honor of our common name, the desire of your father to atone, and the last wish of your mother. Armed with these motives, and strong in the love which desires above all things that you should do that which is worthy of you, I can not despair! You must see at last what is truly noble—and seeing, you will follow it.”

“Do not hope so,” she said. “Do not think that I will ever do what *you* think noble, but I most ignoble.”

He smiled a little. "You told me once that I was mistaken in fancying that I knew you," he said; "but I am still presumptuous enough to think that I know you—better perhaps than you know yourself. Time will show. Meanwhile let me echo your word—adieu."

CHAPTER VIII.

"When Waldegrave left Mrs. Falconer's apartment, he found that a carriage was drawn up at the foot of the steps, from which two ladies had alighted and were in the act of ascending the stairs. As he met them and moved aside slightly to allow them to pass, one of them paused and spoke with an air of friendliness.

"How do you do, M. le Comte?" she said. "I have not had the pleasure of meeting you before since I have been in Rome."

When she began to speak, Waldegrave had no idea who she was, but before she finished—so quick is thought—he remembered her as a pretty American girl whom he had met in Nice.

"I was not aware that Miss Dysart was in Rome," he said.

"I have been here two weeks with my friend the Baroness Bodenstein," she replied. "But this is my first glimpse of you, with the exception of one afternoon, when I saw you standing by Mrs. Falconer's carriage on the Pincio," she added, with a smile. "It is a slight coincidence that we should meet now at Mrs. Falconer's door."

Waldegrave gave no sign of recognizing the force of the coincidence. "I hope," he said, "that you are well."

"Quite well—thanks."

"And that you find Rome as pleasant as Nice."

"I find it very pleasant, but less gay than Nice."

"Nice is Paris-sur-Mer," he said, smiling; "you can not expect the Eternal City to bear comparison with it in that respect."

"Oh, I like Rome and find it very interesting," she said, quickly. "I was sorry not to appear at Mrs. Falconer's reception last night. Her evenings are always particularly agreeable. You were present, of course?"

"No," he replied, "I was not present." Then, with a bow and a formal—"But do not allow me to detain you longer; I shall hope to have the pleasure of seeing you again"—he passed on.

It was with a heightened color and an expression of mingled vexation and mortification that Miss Dysart followed her friend who had discreetly continued her upward journey to the landing-place.

"I have never seen a man more changed," were her first words. "You know what he was in Nice. He is odious now—cold, abrupt, absolutely rude."

"Indeed!" said the Baroness. "What can be the matter? Perhaps he was preoccupied in some way."

"That would be no excuse for his manner. He did not even ask where I was to be found, or give the least sign of interest. It is not possible to imagine greater indifference than he displayed."

"Well," said the Baroness, philosophically, "that is the way of men. And you know you were warned that this Count Waldegrave is an iceberg."

"He was not an iceberg when I saw him before," said Miss Dysart, who, like

most women of her class, not only made the mistake of overrating her power of attraction, but also very much overrated its effect as apparent on others. "Another influence has come over him. Perhaps it is that of this girl whom they call Miss Lescar, and who I am sure he does not know to be his uncle's daughter. It may be a plan of Mrs. Falconer's, or of the girl's, to entangle him while he is in ignorance."

"Take care!" said the Baroness, with a warning glance at the door before which they stood.

Miss Dysart said nothing more, but she extended her hand and rang the bell with a sharp peal that brought Antonio with unusual celerity. When he opened the door, however, it was only to inform the ladies in his most dignified manner that Mrs. Falconer was not at home.

They exchanged a glance; but there was nothing to be done, save to leave their cards and go down again to their carriage. But as they did so, Violet said: "Count Waldegrave certainly came from that apartment. If Mrs. Falconer is really not at home, whom did he see?"

"He may have been told what we were," suggested the Baroness.

But the suggestion did not please Miss Dysart. "He had the look of a man who had paid a visit," she said, though she did not define in what the look consisted. "I am sure he had been admitted. I wish"—she hesitated—"I wish that Prince Waldegrave knew what was going on!"

"Shall we go to the Pincio?" asked the Baroness, who did not feel interested in Prince Waldegrave's probable sentiments.

And Violet answered, "Yes—to the Pincio."

Her disappointment had left no apparent trace when M. de Châteaumesnil saw her there half an hour later—radiant and lovely. She had always rather amused him, and he approached and paid his respects with an *empressement* very gratifying to her, who always calculated subtly the effect of everything in a social point of view. From this point of view nothing could be more desirable than to detain the Marquis at the side of her carriage for some time; and she therefore exerted herself to be as entertaining as possible. A sparkling account of social matters at Nice was followed by comments on such bits of Roman gossip as had come to her knowledge.

"I was sorry," she said, presently, "not to have been at Mrs. Falconer's last night, but the Baroness and myself received cards for the royal ball. I presume that you do not go to the Quirinal, M. le Marquis?"

"Never," answered the Marquis. "I do not recognize robbery as justifiable in great affairs more than in small ones."

"Well, I have an easy conscience," she said, smiling, "and a royal ball is—a royal ball. But it was a curious mob of people. I understand that it is always the case—and that if one wishes to be socially recognized in Rome, one must distinctly 'cut' the Quirinal—so I do not think I shall go to another."

"That depends, of course," said the Marquis, "upon what is your definition of social recognition. The Roman nobility, with few exceptions, hold aloof from the invading government; but there is a society composed of government officials and foreigners who go to the Quirinal."

"That is not the kind of society I care for," she said. "My ambition is always for the best, and while I am in Rome I mean emphatically to do as Romans do—that is, range

myself under the standard of the Vatican.”

The Marquis smiled. “You are frank in the statement of your motives,” he said.

“Oh, frankness is my chief virtue,” she answered. “Have you not discovered that? However, to return to our mutton, I was sorry to lose Mrs. Falconer’s evening, and we have just been so unfortunate as not to find her at home. Some one else was probably disappointed as well as ourselves, for we met Count Waldegrave descending the stair as we went up.”

“Ah!” said the Marquis—and to the quick ears listening the tone of his interjection betrayed more than he had intended. He had, in fact, heard from Stanhope of Waldegrave’s return, and knew that this afternoon was appointed for his visit to Irène. If Miss Dysart had met him descending the stair, the visit no doubt was over. What had been the result? It was impossible that he should not ask himself this question with some anxiety, and equally impossible that there should not be some betrayal of feeling other than indifference in his tone.

Putting her own interpretation upon it, Miss Dysart began to think that perhaps Count Waldegrave was attracted by Mrs. Falconer, since she knew that the Marquis was the avowed suitor of the latter. Nevertheless, she determined to make a sounding on the subject of Irène.

“It struck me,” she said, “as singular to see Count Waldegrave there, since the young lady under Mrs. Falconer’s care is so nearly connected with him. It was a sad story! Did you know that her mother was Prince Waldegrave’s wife—for a time?”

“And do you think,” asked the Marquis, restraining his inclination to speak haughtily, “that a wife can be a wife only ‘for a time’? I believe that marriage once contracted validly can only be dissolved by death. Therefore, if Miss Lescar’s mother was Prince Waldegrave’s wife once, she was his wife when she died.”

Violet did not reply for a moment. She was in truth astonished—not only by the Marquis’s evident knowledge of what she had supposed would be new information to him, but by the tone and manner of his speech. She began to ask herself, as Stanhope had more than once asked himself, if every one was bewitched by this beautiful girl with her heritage of wrong.

“You are probably not aware,” she said, presently, “that the marriage was dissolved on the ground of legal informality.”

“And what,” he answered, “has legal formality or informality to do with the sacrament of matrimony? It is something which is not derived from any law of man, and can not be dissolved by men’s laws. That, as you are no doubt aware, has always been the authoritative teaching of the Catholic Church. Being a Catholic, Miss Lescar’s mother neither did nor could acknowledge the power of any secular jurisdiction to set aside her marriage. She simply bowed to the law of force. And her daughter, like herself, is the victim of that law.”

“You seem to know a great deal about the matter—and to be very much interested in it,” said Miss Dysart, unable to repress a tone of sarcasm.

“I do not imagine that I know more than you do,” replied the Marquis. “The only difference is our way of looking at facts.”

“And does Count Waldegrave take the same view as yourself?” she asked, with the sarcastic tone still more plain.

“For the view which Count Waldegrave takes I must refer you to Count

Waldegrave," said the Marquis. And then, with a bow, he left the carriage.

Waldegrave, meanwhile, after parting with Miss Dysart, had gone directly to the "Europa," where he sent his card to Stanhope.

The latter had not gone out, and, when the young Count was shown up, met him eagerly. "I hope," he said, "that I may congratulate you."

"On the contrary," Waldegrave answered, "you may congratulate yourself on the accuracy of your judgment. I have accomplished nothing."

"Irène refuses all overtures?"

"All—absolutely and entirely."

"I feared as much. You did not know the force with which you had to cope."

"I have learned it, however—its strength, its intensity—and I shall know better how to cope with it a second time."

Stanhope regarded the speaker with surprise. "Then you have not resigned all thought of success?" he asked.

"How can I resign it, when so much depends upon success?" was the reply. "I do not speak of my own wishes, but of all her future life. Think of the difference in the eyes of the world between what she is and what she would be as Prince Waldegrave's acknowledged daughter! Think, again, of the difference in prospect before her now, and before her if she accepted his offer!"

"I do think of and fully realize it all," said Stanhope; "but what then? You can not move her."

"She must be moved," said Waldegrave. "It is incredible that the will of a mere girl can not be bent by the influence of every one whom she respects or loves. Of your influence I hope that I am certain."

"Perfectly certain—but the trouble is, that I have none."

"Who has any, then? Mrs. Falconer? As a woman of the world, she must see what is the wise thing to advocate."

"Mrs. Falconer is not so much a woman of the world, in some of her ideas, as you might imagine," answered Stanhope, thinking of some ideas which Mrs. Falconer had uttered that morning. "But with the best will in the world, and although there is a strong attachment between herself and Irène, I am sure that on this subject her advocacy would have no more weight than yours or mine. As I told you before, if her mother's prayer could not move the girl, no influence which could be brought to bear by any one else would have the least effect."

Waldegrave was silent for a moment. Then he said: "Yet it is evident that passionate affection for her mother is the chief root of her determination. Her resentment is less for herself than for one whom she calls 'the only creature that she ever perfectly loved.'"

"I am quite sure of that," said Stanhope. "It is her mother's wrong which is chiefly in her mind, and naturally she feels it more because it has not been long since death robbed her of that passionately loved mother. But this only makes the case more hopeless. If it were a selfish resentment, the atonement which is offered would suffice. But you can not atone for the wrong done one who has passed beyond the reach of man's injustice."

"No atonement would be possible if she were living," said Waldegrave. "Unfortunately, that is a point upon which Irène has fastened."

“And a point which it is difficult for you to get over,” said Stanhope, with a smile. “The best advice I can offer you is this: if you are a wise man, you will rest satisfied with what you have done, and think no more of this girl. She is impracticable.”

“Then I am not a wise man,” said Waldegrave, “for I do not intend to rest satisfied. On the contrary, I shall return to Nice and endeavor to persuade my uncle to come to Rome and try his personal influence. One who has been so deeply injured deserves that every possible *amende* shall be made to her.”

“I scarcely think that Prince Waldegrave will risk his dignity in such an interview,” said Stanhope, gravely—“and I am sure that he will regret it if he does.”

“There is no reason why any one should regret an attempt to atone, even if the atonement is refused by the person to whom it is offered,” said Waldegrave. “The offer of justice coming from my uncle must have more weight than when coming from me; and I trust much to the influence of his presence—of his strong personal magnetism.”

Stanhope shook his head. “Trust to nothing of the kind,” he said. “It will not affect Irène. She has a heart of steel. It may break—it will never bend. But because I believe that you will fail, it does not follow that I should not wish you to succeed—if success were possible.”

“It must be made possible,” said Waldegrave. “I am not daunted by her refusal. I believe that in the end she will yield. Even steel bends if subjected to sufficient heat.”

“You deserve to succeed,” said Stanhope, with a smile. “But let me ask if you have forgotten what I told you of the Marquis de Châteaumesnil?”

“No,” answered the other, rising, “and the field is open to him. I only hope that, if he succeeds, he may use whatever influence he acquires to induce her to take the simple justice of her birthright.”

CHAPTER IX.

Later the same afternoon, as Erne was crossing the Piazza di Spagna toward the Trinità dei Monti steps, he was struck by the figure of a lady who, attended by a maid, descended the steps and walked in the direction of the Propaganda. He knew Irène at once; for, though she was closely veiled, the grace which distinguished her was unmistakable, and involuntarily he turned also and followed her.

He had not far to go. Passing around the massive walls of the Propaganda, she entered the church of Sant' Andrea delle Fratte, which is situated in its rear. Erne entered also, but being much behind her, found that he had lost sight of the slender figure when he stood within the church. That, however, did not disturb him; it would be quite certain to reappear. Many forms were moving about the nave and kneeling at the different chapels—a diverse throng, such as may be seen in any Roman church: here a feeble beggar, come to thank God for the alms of the day, and ask for the bread of the morrow; there a princely gentleman, with the inherited culture of centuries stamped upon him, kneeling on the pavement near a laborer, toil-worn from his day's work; there a great lady, side by side with a humble woman of the people—for this is the one spot of earth where man's vain dream of equality is realized and practiced. It was past the hour when tourists, armed with red-backed guide-books, wander about the churches, reading descriptions of famous pictures, but discerning nothing of the spiritual glory around them. An air of quiet devotion filled this twilight hour. Presently some sweet unseen voices

began to sing, lights flashed out on an altar—there was to be Benediction.

It was then that Erne saw Irène again. She was kneeling in the circle of light, and the face which she had unveiled was white as a lily, with eyes gleaming like stars under the dark lashes and brows. The young man knew nothing of Waldegrave's visit—he had never been informed, save by his own vague jealousy, of any intentions or hopes of the latter—but he recognized at once, on the face he knew and loved, signs that the spirit had been, perhaps still was, deeply moved. There seemed to him a whole drama of feeling in that pale, sensitive countenance, in those violet-shadowed, brilliant eyes. He glanced at her hands. They were clasped tightly together with the unconscious force of one who is enduring either physical or mental pain, while her gaze was fastened without wavering on the Host, before which priest and people knelt, motionless as statues.

As the sweet chanting ceased, the priest, rising, took down the monstrance, with its flashing rays, to lift it in benediction. Every head bent—Irène's so far forward that her forehead almost touched the pavement—and then, after an interval, the candles on the altar were extinguished, and the kneeling forms, one by one, began to rise and move away. Erne waited until Irène rose, then he went outside and stood on the steps waiting for her. But she was long in appearing—so long, that he began to question whether she might not have left by another door, when the heavy curtain lifted, and, followed by her attendant, she came out.

His first glance showed him that a change had passed over her face. It was still strikingly pale, but more serene in expression; and a slight moisture clung to her long, dark lashes. She looked surprised when she saw him, but held out her hand with a smile.

"Have you been in the church?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered. "I followed you when you went in. And since the end of the Benediction I have been waiting here for you."

"I am sorry that you have had to wait so long," she said; "but I paused to speak to Monsignor R—."

"You are in trouble," said the young man, with a quick glance at her face. "I recognized that as soon as I saw you."

"Yes," she replied, "I am in trouble—in the shadow of an old grief and the stress of a struggle. But do not speak of it. I feel calmer since I entered here, and I have heard some words of counsel that will help me. But it is later than I thought.—Come, Betta, we must hasten home."

"I may come with you, may I not?" asked Erne.

"You know the laws of propriety better than I do," she answered, smiling. "I suppose you may be permitted to walk with me so far—since I am not alone."

"I was on my way to Mrs. Falconer's when I saw you, and, of course, followed you," he said, as they descended the steps and walked together. "I had a special object in the visit—to propose to her some definite arrangements for the visit to Cori and Norba that you wish to make."

"Ah, I should like that!" said Irène, quickly. "I should be glad to go anywhere—away from Rome—just now."

To Erne's lips leaped the words, "Who is annoying you in Rome?" But he restrained them, conscious that he had no right to ask—and after a short pause, said:

"Then we must go. I will urge my cousin to make an immediate appointment."

"And what of Ninfa, the fairy city buried in flowers?" she asked. "Shall we not

go there?"

"Certainly we shall. It is because I am so anxious for you to see it that I do not want to delay the visit later, on account of the danger of fever in visiting Ninfa."

"Then pray let us go at once. If Mrs. Falconer would consent, I should like to start to-morrow."

"That is hardly possible, but I want her to arrange her engagements so that we may go early next week."

"I hope she will consent to do so," said Irène.

They now reached the end of their short walk, and found Mrs. Falconer in the *sala*, rather anxiously awaiting Irène, who had gone out before she returned. It was a relief to her to see the girl enter, looking so much as usual, and with such a pleased and friendly expression.

"I am afraid you thought it strange when you heard that I had gone out," she said; "but of course I had Betta with me, and I went no farther than Sant' Andrea delle Fratte, where I wished to see Monsignor R—. That detained me; and when I came out I found Mr. Erne on the steps of the church."

"Whence he thought that Mrs. Grundy would permit him to escort Miss Lescar to her own threshold," said Erne, regarding his cousin half defiantly.

But Mrs. Falconer had no disposition to play the part of Mrs. Grundy with any degree of severity. She had feared she knew not what explosion on Irène's part after Count Waldegrave's visit, and her serenity was a delightful surprise. A few more words were exchanged, then Irène left the room to make her toilet for dinner, and Erne immediately said:

"Miss Lescar is in trouble. What has occurred to annoy her?"

"How do you know that she is in trouble?" asked Mrs. Falconer, surprised at the quickness of his penetration.

"By her face—which tells everything," he answered. "Not her face as it was looking when she left the room, but with the expression it wore when she was kneeling in the church—that of one who has just emerged, or was still suffering, from some storm of passion."

"Well," said Mrs. Falconer, "there had been, no doubt, such a storm. Count Waldegrave was here this afternoon—can you imagine for what purpose?"

The young man turned pale. "It could only be for one," he replied. "He wishes to marry her."

"He does wish to marry her," his cousin answered; "but that was not likely to have been as exciting intelligence as something else which he had to say. He came as Prince Waldegrave's envoy—bearing his offer to acknowledge, and receive her as his daughter."

"And she answered—?"

"What would you suppose, from your knowledge of her character, that she answered?"

"I should say that she refused to entertain such a proposal."

"She did refuse—absolutely. I have heard it from Mr. Stanhope, who had just left when you came in; and his information was from the best possible source—Count Waldegrave himself."

"And Count Waldegrave's matrimonial proposal—she also refused that?"

“She refused everything that uncle or nephew, separately or together, could offer.”

“She is a magnificent creature!” cried Erne, rising with an unconsciously exultant movement. “I always knew that.”

“She is an inflexible creature,” said Mrs. Falconer. “I do not blame her for refusing to take anything from the father who disowned her mother and herself; but I wish she could subdue the bitterness of her resentment toward him.”

“In short,” said Erne, “you would like her to talk of forgiveness while she proved her resentment by deeds that speak more loudly than many words. You are inconsistent. Either she should take what her father extends, and bury the past in her mother’s grave, or she should not talk of a forgiveness that bears no practical fruit.”

“Your opinion is expressed with sufficient decision,” said Mrs. Falconer; “but, since I am not aware that it rests on any ground but that of your own not infallible judgment, I must be pardoned if I differ from it.”

“At all events,” said Erne, “what you tell me accounts for her appearance as she was kneeling in church, unconscious that any eyes were observing her.”

“Naturally—since people do not go to church to be stared at. But when did the change occur—for I was surprised at her expression when she came in?”

“Her face had changed when she left the church. But I flatter myself that I had something to do with her look when she came in here. I had just told her that I was on my way, as I met her, to ask you to make arrangements for our visit to Norba and Ninfa—and she said at once: ‘I shall like that. I should be glad to go anywhere—away from Rome—just now!’”

“I am sorry that you did not speak to me before telling her of your intention,” said Mrs. Falconer, gravely, “for it is very necessary that she should not leave Rome just now.”

“Why not?” asked Erne, in displeased astonishment. “Does Count Waldegrave object?”

“My dear Lionel, sarcasm is not your forte. And you may be sure that I have a good reason for what I say.”

“Is your reason a mysterious as well as a good one?”

“It is confidential, at least—but I will trust you with it. Briefly, then. Count Waldegrave goes to Nice to endeavor to induce his uncle to come and himself make the offer of atonement which has been rejected by her. Of course, it is possible that Prince Waldegrave may refuse to do anything of the kind; but should he come, it would look very badly if we, Irène’s friends, had carried her away.”

“It is what she would wish,” said Erne. “She must have had an instinct of this when she spoke so eagerly of longing to go away.”

“Nevertheless, she must not be allowed to go. I do not think that, if Count Waldegrave persuades his uncle to come, the visit will have any effect upon her. But if she were won to accept her father’s proposal, the change in her life and all her life’s prospects would be so great, that no one could venture to throw any obstacle in the path that might lead to such a result.”

“And to another result which might or might not prove as happy—her marriage with Count Waldegrave,” said Erne, a little bitterly.

“I do not think of that,” said Mrs. Falconer. “I have no idea that she will ever

consent to marry him; and, although his own wishes shape his conduct somewhat, Mr. Stanhope is sure that he is disinterestedly anxious for her to accept what he considers but simple justice."

Erne did not speak for a moment. He walked across the floor, drew a flower from a vase full of blossoms, inhaled its fragrance absently, then replaced it, and returned.

"What a fate hers has been!" he said, abruptly. "And what will her destiny be? I am never with her without feeling that it can not be a common one."

"It may be a very brilliant one—if she chooses," said Mrs. Falconer.

"Yes—as Prince Waldegrave's daughter, or Count Waldegrave's wife. But she will never choose to be either. I am sure of that."

He spoke in the tone of one who challenges contradiction. But Mrs. Falconer did not contradict him. What had been in her mind was something altogether different—but something which she could not mention to Erne—the suit of the Marquis de Châteaumesnil.

Fortunately, a servant at that moment entered with lights, and the whole apartment was soon full of that soft radiance which only wax-candles in great numbers produce. Then, as the doorbell sounded, Mrs. Falconer said:

"M. de Châteaumesnil dines here this evening; and, if we discuss your expedition, Lionel, we must ask him to join it."

To which, unsuspecting Lionel—who had no doubt that in the end he should see his cousin Marquise de Châteaumesnil—replied that nothing could give him greater pleasure than that the Marquis should be asked to join them.

Several hours later, her guests having departed, Mrs. Falconer bade Mrs. Vance good-night and followed Irène—who had already at the first opportunity retired. Passing down the suite of reception-rooms, through the boudoir—which, in its air of inviolate quiet, gave no hint of the scene it had witnessed that afternoon—she entered her own chamber, and, crossing it, knocked at a closed door.

"*Entrez!*" said a low voice; and, when she entered the room, Irène lifted herself from a couch on which she had evidently thrown herself in an abandonment of weariness. She was looking very tired—her complexion as colorless, the violet shadows under her eyes as deep, as when Erne had seen her in the church—and, struck by her appearance, Mrs. Falconer exclaimed:

"How sorry I am that any one was here this evening! I should not have asked the Marquis to dine if I had known that you would be so exhausted—or, rather, that you would have to encounter what exhausted you."

"And why should I have encountered it?" asked Irène, in a tone of reproach. "Why did you betray me in such a manner?"

"I felt like a wretch," said Mrs. Falconer, sitting down by her. "But what could I do? I knew that you would not have seen Count Waldegrave without stratagem, and both Mr. Stanhope and myself felt that you ought to see him—that you ought to hear what he had to say. We could not take the responsibility of permitting you to decide without fully knowing what you were doing."

"That only shows how little you know me," said Irène. "What could Count Waldegrave possibly have to say that would alter facts? Can he, or can the man in whose name he spoke, bring back my mother, wipe out the wrong that was done her, the years of injustice and suffering? When they can—I told him that—they may come and talk to me

of reparation!"

"But, my dear child," said Mrs. Falconer, who would not acknowledge how nearly this was her own view of the case, "you must not be unjust in turn. You must not confound Count Waldegrave with his uncle. He had no share in your mother's wrong, and he offers to you all that your mother lost. If you take it from him, you will owe nothing to Prince Waldegrave. I am not urging you to do so," the speaker added, quickly, "I am only putting it before you."

"*He* put it before me," said Irène; "and yet he dwelt very little on himself. I will do him the justice to say that he seemed to think most of me. He urged me to accept Prince Waldegrave's offer. He dwelt little on his own."

"That is strange," said Mrs. Falconer. "Instinct should have told him that his own was the one to dwell upon."

"Then he would have made a mistake," said Irène. "He would have produced no more impression upon me with one than with the other. But I should have been less struck with his nobility and unselfishness."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Falconer—rather a long "Oh!"—"you *were* struck with those things?"

"I could not fail to be. Even after he heard that I would not marry him, and after I acknowledged that I had been glad to think that he loved me, because that *he* should suffer through *me* seemed a sort of retribution, he was not the less earnest in his desire that I should, at least, accept Prince Waldegrave's atonement. One feels sincerity. I felt that he was sincere in desiring this—in begging me to rise above resentment, to conquer wrong by forgiving it. That was my mother's way. But along that road I can not follow her!—and this is the struggle in which I have been, as it were, rent asunder."

She looked as if she had been. Her very lips were drained of color, and the shining of her great eyes showed the excitement which still wrought upon the high-strung temperament like illness. As she fell back again upon the cushions of her couch, her glance turned to a beautiful picture of her mother which hung at its foot, and, following the direction of her gaze, Mrs. Falconer said:

"Does it occur to you to consider what your mother would bid you decide in this important moment of your life?"

Irène put up her hands as if warding off a blow. "Do not ask me!" she said. "I can not ask myself. I am like one torn in two. My mother seems arrayed on both sides. I hear her voice—her dying voice—bidding me forgive. But forgiving does not—can not—mean taking for myself what she was robbed of! I am not bound to accept reparation, though I am bound to forgive. And I can not—I can not!"

It was only the old story—a story as old as humanity, and which will end only with humanity—the terrible struggle of nature in the effort to subject itself to a law higher than nature. Mrs. Falconer was silent. She felt that in this battle of the soul she could take no part; and she also felt that Irène needed quieting rather than further excitement. So, presently, she said:

"Let us talk no more of this. Try to think of something else. Think of our journey to the hills. You will like that."

"Yes, I shall like it," Irène answered. "I feel a longing for great heights—for wide distances. The soul, as well as the body, seems to breathe more freely in such places—to feel a higher atmosphere—to reach after nobler things."

“And we shall be a pleasant party—just ourselves, with Lionel, Mr. Stanhope, and the Marquis. I hope you do not object to M. de Châteaumesnil going with us?”

“Not at all. You know that I like him very much, and always find him very sympathetic.”

“He certainly finds you sympathetic,” said Mrs. Falconer, smiling. “It is a pity that he never found me so—nor I him, save in limited degree.” Then she added, “Have I told you that all is over between us—that I have declined the honor of his hand?”

“No,” answered Irène, with quick interest; “you have not told me before. Have you indeed done so? And yet he comes here—apparently unchanged?”

“Why not? There was no feeling to be wounded—on either side. We are still good friends.”

“I am sorry—and yet I am not sorry,” said Irène, after an interval of silence. “I should have been glad to see you filling a position for which you are so well fitted; but I should have hated to see you marry a man who did not love you as you deserve to be loved. Even M. de Châteaumesnil is not worthy of you, if he does not offer devotion as well as rank.”

“Devotion is what he did not offer—to me,” said Mrs. Falconer. “But I think that he will one day offer it to some one else.” She paused—hesitated—then, with the air of making a general remark, went on: “This troublesome thing of marriage meets one at every turn. If one does not marry one’s self, all one’s friends do—and that is almost as disagreeable. I confess that I can not conceive why a man should ever wish to marry. He is so free when unmarried! But a woman is different. Unless she has some strong bent—religious or artistic, let us say—it is better for her to marry, *if* she can marry well.” Another pause—then, “Does it never occur to you, my dear, to think of marriage as something that may concern yourself?”

“Never,” answered Irène. “I have told you the reasons why I shall never think of marriage. They are not changed.”

“But do you not feel that they may be changed by this action on the part of your father? Even if you accept nothing from him, his acknowledgment of the purity of your birth is much.”

“Then it would be to Prince Waldegrave I should be indebted for a husband,” said Irène, coldly. “I could hardly take even that gift from his hand. No: I am able to stand alone and suffice for myself. I will take my inheritance of wrong to no man—let his name or rank be what it will.”

This was a little dismaying to Mrs. Falconer, who, whatever her opinion of matrimony as regarded herself, had, as we have seen, a modicum at least of the usual feminine love of match-making, and who felt bound to protest when she saw this young and beautiful creature turning away from brilliant possibilities. “My dear child,” she said, gravely, “I do not like to hear you talk in such a manner. Believe me, it is not reasonable. You are too young to decide so positively for all your life. You do not know what you are doing.”

“I think that I know perfectly,” answered Irène, “and there is nothing in the prospect which daunts me. Why should it? If I had ever doubted how delightful the life of an unmarried woman can be made, your life would reassure me.”

“Ah! but I have been married,” said Mrs. Falconer. “That makes a great difference in the eyes of the world. And I am rich. I do not mean to be cynical, but

experience tells me that everything is possible to wealth—if one knows how to use it.”

“I have not been married, and I am not rich,” said Irène, with a slight smile, “yet I am not afraid of my future. There are all the delights of the intellect and of art; and, if I find life too tame, I can any day step on the lyric stage and make it what I will.”

“I am not in the least afraid that you will ever do that,” said Mrs. Falconer. “You are far too proud to forfeit social position for the tinsel rank of the stage. I am sure there is not the daughter of a princely house in Rome who would shrink from such a step more than yourself.”

“And do you think there is one—let her blood have come down through what centuries of nobles you will—who could shrink from it more than she did?” asked the girl, pointing to her mother’s picture. “And yet she had to bear it—for me! And I am asked to forgive the man who made such martyrdom necessary.—O my mother—my proud, brave, beautiful mother—I would rather follow your footsteps over burning plowshares than take the wealth of a kingdom from *him!*”

CHAPTER X.

When Waldegrave arrived at his uncle’s villa the second time, it was without announcement of his coming, and the servants, who received, him with well-bred surprise, informed him that the Prince and Princess had driven into Nice.

“Very well,” he replied. “Let his Excellency be informed, as soon as he returns, of my arrival. I shall probably be found in the garden.”

And, indeed, as soon as he had changed his dress, he descended to that paradise where on his last visit he had wandered under the stars and dreamed such exquisite and vain dreams. It was even more beautiful now—in the late afternoon of a perfect day—than it had been then. And it was a paradise in which he was as much alone as Adam was before the creation of Eve. No footstep but his own echoed down the green arcades, under the glossy foliage where oranges gleamed like veritable fruit of the Hesperides, and the golden blossoms of the mimosa swayed to the soft sea-breeze. No eye but his own marked the indescribable shades of color on the wide plain that spread to the far horizon until sea and sky melted into one divine harmony of tint. No glance but his own followed the majestic sweeping curve of the shore, watched the misty amethyst of distant mountains, the shimmering silver light on nearer olive-clad slopes, the icy glitter of Alpine summits cutting against the deep-blue sky, and the towers on far seaward promontories. Sunlight was dying over the waters, the enchanting tints of twilight were at hand. Already a marvelous rosy glow lay like a pathway across the sea, stretching from the pearly headlands of Italy to remote distance—a pathway that might have been made by the feet of Aphrodite herself. But the presence which Waldegrave had once fancied beside him here would come no more—not even in fancy. He saw instead the pale, disdainful face which had so lately confronted him, and the cold gentleness with which Irène had held out her hand in a farewell that she meant to be final.

He was standing by the marble balustrade of the terrace, looking out over the beauty of sea and sky—a beauty that deepened momentarily—when a voice beside him said, “So, Otto, you are back again!” and, turning, he faced his uncle.

They greeted each other warmly—for the affection between them was deep and sincere—and then Prince Waldegrave asked, like Stanhope, “Am I to congratulate you?”

The young man shook his head. "No," he replied. "She has proved immovable and implacable."

"Ah!"—Prince "Waldegrave's countenance changed—"I feared that it might be so. I am sorry—for you."

"And I am sorry—for her," said Waldegrave. "If it were merely a disappointment to myself, I could bear it, as many a man has had to bear such a disappointment. But it is of her that I think. She is refusing more than she knows or can understand, in refusing your offer."

"She is refusing much more in declining yours," said his uncle.

"No," said Waldegrave, "for many men might offer her love as great and rank as high as mine. But no one besides yourself can offer what you do."

"And what reason does she give for refusing it?"

"She will take nothing from one who has disowned her mother and herself."

"Ah!" said the Prince, again. "What, then, is to be done? Have you anything to propose?"

"I have one thing to propose," Waldegrave answered. "But it is a forlorn hope, and I am doubtful whether you will think of it."

"What is it?" asked his uncle. "I will think of almost anything that may secure the gratification of your wishes." This was easier than to say, "The quieting of my conscience."

"Will you make your offer in person?" asked Waldegrave. Then, as he saw surprise and disinclination on the Prince's face, he went on quickly: "I only ask you to think of it. And for this reason—I have gained some personal softening toward myself, but toward you her deep and passionate resentment is so great that nothing which I can urge has any effect in overcoming it. Yet it must be overcome if she is ever to accept what I earnestly hope she may accept."

"But," said the Prince, after a moment's silence, "if her resentment is so intense, how can you imagine that a personal effort on my part would have any effect upon her?"

"Because, in the first place, it is a propitiation which is due to one who has been deeply wronged; and, in the second place, there is a magnetism in a personal appeal which no words conveyed through another can possess."

"An appeal," said his uncle, a little haughtily, "is what I can not condescend to make."

"Then," said Waldegrave, "you must resign all hope of making reparation."

The Prince walked to the end of the terrace, turned and came back.

"I confess," he said, "that I do not understand your motive for such a request. If she has softened toward you, and if she entertains a deep and bitter resentment toward *me*, surely you are, of the two, the person who would be most likely to have influence with her."

"It is mockery to speak of such a thing," answered the young man. "So far from having any influence, I am sure that she will never willingly see me again. But if I, merely by personal association, have softened toward myself her bitter feeling, what might not contact with you effect?"

"Resentment does not always yield to contact," said the Prince. "It is sometimes intensified by it."

"That is impossible in this case—*Irène's* resentment could not be intensified."

“And yet you think there is a hope that it might yield?”

“Hardly a hope—or, as I have said, only a forlorn one. But I think that neither you nor I would wish to leave untried even the forlornest hope of inducing her to accept atonement and justice.”

“I am more anxious that she shall accept you,” said the Prince, slightly smiling.

“And I,” said Waldegrave, “think least of that. It is true that she is the ideal woman to me, and that I am sure I shall never find another who will take the place in my heart that she holds: it is also true that I have not resigned all hope of winning something beside the tolerance which she gives me now. But for the present I have put thought of myself aside. What I desire most ardently is that she may take the rank and fill the position which is hers by right of birth.”

There was another silence before the Prince said, abruptly: “Tell me all that passed between you. What did she say?”

This was not an easy task, for Waldegrave shrank from repeating Irène’s fiery words. It was necessary, however, that they should be repeated, since he did not wish his uncle to have any doubt of the depth of her resentment. When he had described the interview as faithfully as possible, he added:

“In all this she reminded me, more strongly than I can say, of yourself. The will that is arrayed against you is the will that she has inherited from you. I thought I had never seen a more striking likeness of child to parent than was in her face when she stood before me, a picture of pride and resolution.”

“Then,” said the Prince, “it is a will that I ought to be able to bend. I, who have bent the wills of many men, could hardly fail with that of a mere girl.”

“This mere girl,” said Waldegrave, “has a strength of which you do not reckon. As her guardian said of her the other day, she has a heart of steel, which may break but will not bend.”

“Then why,” demanded his uncle, again, “do you wish me to make a vain sacrifice of my dignity by going to her?”

“Because,” was the reply, “I hope that, by such a step, you may appeal to what is as strong as her will—her generosity. I have never known a nature that so quickly responds to a noble thought or a generous deed. I have spoken of her softening toward me—what is the reason of it? Simply that she recognizes my desire to atone, and something of unselfishness in my love. What, then, will she feel when you, her father, come to her and hold out your hand with reparation in it!”

Waldegrave’s voice had taken its deepest tone of appeal as he uttered these words. He spoke as one might who was pleading in some cause dear as life itself. At that moment nobody could have called his face cold; and Prince Waldegrave, after looking at him for a moment in unconscious admiration, said:

“Whatever she may feel toward me, she will be blind if she continues to refuse you, Otto.”

“Sparta has many a worthier son than I,” said Waldegrave, with a slight, painful smile. He thought of the Marquis de Châteaumesnil, but it was no part of his present intention to mention him to the Prince. He felt quite sure that half at least of the latter’s desire to repair his daughter’s wrong would vanish if he knew that she was likely after all to marry some one else, and that some one else a Frenchman, instead of the nephew who was to him an adopted son.

Both men now walked up and down the terrace silently for some time before Prince Waldegrave spoke again. Then he said, meditatively, in the tone of one who is drawing reluctantly to a decision:

“If I go to Rome, how can the matter be kept quiet? I mean my presence there.”

“Oh,” replied Waldegrave, “that shall be managed. I have a servant who is invaluable for such work. I will send him in advance, and he can arrange everything so that no one shall know of your presence in Rome whom you do not choose to enlighten.”

“Let him start to-night, then,” said the Prince, “and we will go to-morrow. I have no fancy for delay. Whatever is to be done should be done at once.”

CHAPTER XI.

Among all the beautiful and suggestive places of Rome, the old garden of the Priorato, on the crest of the Aventine, is not least beautiful, and certainly, in its associations and memories, not least suggestive. The tourist knows it from the famous view of St. Peter’s which is to be had through the key-hole of the gate—where the wondrous dome is seen, rising in purple air at the end of a green vista indefinitely prolonged. But, when those massive gates are opened, the true charm begins. A beautiful avenue of old bay-trees stretches before the gaze, framing in its arch of foliage that distant, soaring dome—a picture never to be forgotten. On each side are beds of flowers and masses of shrubbery; but no one, entering for the first time, can heed them. The most careless must follow the avenue as it leads to a terrace overhanging the Tiber, which commands a view of the river, the Trastevere, and—in the direct line of vision, as a bird would fly—the glorious pile of St. Peter’s, backed by Monte Mario, with its crown of cypresses.

It was on a lovely afternoon that Mrs. Falconer and Irène found themselves here, with Stanhope and the Marquis de Châteaumesnil. A sudden rush of fragrance met them as they entered the gate, and, looking up, they saw that the bay-trees overhead were white with blossoms. The custodian broke off one for each of them, and Irène fastened hers in her belt, where its glossy, pointed leaves and waxen petals showed effectively against her black dress.

“It is the tree of glory,” she said, looking at the Marquis; “and therefore appropriate here in this garden of the Knights of Malta.”

“It could scarcely be more appropriate anywhere in the world,” he replied. “I have lately been glancing over the history of the great military orders—especially that of the Knights Hospitallers of St. John of Jerusalem, now called the Order of Malta—and I know of nothing to equal it as a record of heroic courage and splendid deeds.”

“They were for centuries the bulwark of Christendom, saving its fairest lands from the fate of Byzantium,” said Stanhope. “The debt of gratitude which Europe owes them is incalculable.”

“And paid—how?” asked Mrs. Falconer.

“As such debts are usually paid,” said the Marquis, “with forgetfulness and robbery. The forgetfulness is not wonderful. They were, before all things, soldiers of the Cross—and a world which has turned from the Cross, and, in the persons of its leaders and chief teachers, enthroned humanity in the place of God, is not likely to have much in sympathy with them. There is nothing by which a man, or a society, can be judged more

accurately than by the objects of its admiration. Modern society worships at the feet of Mammon and of Self. It can, therefore, no more conceive the motives than it can emulate the deeds of men who renounced worldly gain for noble ends, and denied self that they might serve God and Christendom. The robbery also is natural enough—considering the power from which it comes. The Island of Malta, as you are no doubt aware, belongs to them by gift of the Emperor Charles V—hence they are a sovereign order, and their Grand Master has the rank of a sovereign prince. But Malta, having been taken by France, when France was under worse than infidel domination, in 1798, it fell by conquest into the grasp of England; and, although by the Treaty of Amiens its restoration to the order was distinctly stipulated, England—faithful to her traditions—has not observed the guarantee or restored the island.”

“The order still exercises sovereign prerogatives, however,” said Stanhope, “and keeps an ambassador at most of the courts of Europe.”

“I have seen their ambassador among the diplomatic corps at the royal entertainments in Vienna,” said Mrs. Falconer. “A striking figure, with a white cross on the breast of his gold cuirass, and the cross of Malta on the shoulder of his black-velvet mantle.”

“Ah, if you wish to see a noble mediaeval figure—one that carries the mind back to all the glories of chivalry and of faith—you should see the Grand Master himself,” said Irène. “I saw him the day I went with the Princess M— to the Cappella Papale in the Sistine Chapel. He was seated in the royal tribune, with two knights in waiting, and attended by a Cameriere di Spada e Cappa and a guard of honor. There were many splendid and picturesque figures present, but, until the Holy Father appeared, I could look at no one but the Grand Master. It was not only his appearance that fascinated me, but the thought of all that he represented—of Jerusalem, of Acre, of Rhodes, of Malta, of all those centuries when the tide of Moslem invasion threatened Europe, and they stood—those glorious soldiers—like a wall of steel!—and made the crescent bow before the cross.”

“The Sistine Chapel was a fine place for such memories,” said Stanhope, smiling at her glowing look.

“Was it not?” she said, quickly. “Fancy those grand frescoes of Michael Angelo looking down, and the rich color and majestic effect of the whole scene. In the royal tribune there was the Grand Master, and the group which surrounded him could not have been improved by a touch, had Michael Angelo himself wished to paint them. The diplomatic benches were filled with ambassadors to the Vatican. Then came the Roman nobility, and a sprinkling of distinguished foreigners—all in court-dress; then the Cameriere Segreti in their beautiful dress of velvet and lace—as if they had stepped out of Titian’s pictures; then the magnificent uniform of the Noble Guard, the scarlet robes of the cardinals, the violet of the prelates; and in the midst of all—thrown out by this glowing color—one slender, stately figure in pure ivory-white.”

“With what a face of steadfast power!” said Stanhope. “It has none of that beauty of feature which made the face of Pius IX so exquisite and memorable; but if ever a human countenance was expressive of intellectual and moral force, that of Leo XIII is. And in his shadowy thinness—in that look which he has of being more spirit than matter—with the courage of a lion in his calm glance, and the sweetness of a saint on his lips, his is just the type a great painter would select if this epoch were thrown back a

thousand years, and he wanted to embody a helmsman fit to steer the bark of Peter through raging seas.”

“It is impossible,” said the Marquis, “to imagine anything more majestic than the voice and the utterances of Leo XIII. In listening to him one feels elevated into a region as far above the mad cries of revolutionaries and the vague dreams of theorists as the eternal heaven is above the earth. And in the ability of a great ruler, in diplomatic sagacity and profound wisdom, no one, in all the long line of illustrious pontiffs, has surpassed him.”

“None, certainly, have been surrounded by greater perils and difficulties,” said Mrs. Falconer.

“Oh,” said the Marquis, with a slight smile, “you forget that what is going on to-day is an old story—oft repeated. ‘The servant is not greater than his master’—and the Pope is proved the Vicar of Christ by nothing more than by the persecutions to which in all ages he has been subjected. As divine lips have assured us, the world will love its own; but what is not of the world it will revile and persecute. Not Gregory VII alone, but many another Pope, might have said, ‘I have loved justice, and hated iniquity—therefore I die in exile.’”

“*Apropos* of Gregory VII,” said Stanhope, “do you know that this garden is peculiarly associated with him? It was here he was brought up as a boy under the care of his uncle, who was abbot of the adjoining monastery.”

“*Here!*” said Irène, looking around. “Here he walked— here studied and dreamed, and fitted himself in mind and heart for the great struggle that lay before him— eight hundred years ago! O Rome, Rome! What can one say of a city where every rod of earth has such thrilling memories and far-reaching associations?”

“One can be grateful for recognizing them,” said the Marquis. “Think of those to whom the glory that has encircled Rome for more than a thousand years, and made her to all the earth a Holy City, means nothing. Those to whom the Forum and the Capitol are more than the shrines where martyrs poured out their blood for God—the tomb of Cecilia Metella of greater interest than the tomb of the Apostles—and the ruins of a heathen temple better worth study than the noblest Christian basilica. That christendom— beautiful name, expressing a more beautiful idea!—found the key-stone of its arch here, is a fact as lost to their memory as it is meaningless to their understanding. They are like children from whom an inheritance has been torn, and who, standing in their father’s house, know it not.”

They had now come to the terrace, which, bounded by a high stone parapet, is on the rocky verge of the hill where it rises in bold escarpment from the bank of the river. Bay-trees droop over it; and there is a seat where, with the Tiber at one’s feet, the Janiculum and the Vatican before one’s eyes, one may sit and let the enchantment of Rome sink into one’s spirit.

“Speaking of Christendom,” said Mrs. Falconer, as she sat down on this, “I was reading the other day ‘*Traits and Travesties*,’* in which the author declares that Christendom should now be called anti-Christendom, inasmuch as all that is put before

modern society as its goal is directly opposed to the teaching of Christ.”

“It is very true,” remarked Stanhope. “At the present time there is not a single

* This is a slight anachronism. Mr. Oliphant’s brilliant book had not appeared at the date of this story.

government, composing that which was once called Christendom, which has not publicly repudiated the Christian basis. As I have observed before, the god which the nineteenth century worships is material progress; and of a worship so debasing, none other than debasing results can be expected. Progress is a word of very attractive sound; and it is the great shibboleth of our age: but it should be remembered that there are two kinds of progress—one upward, the other downward. And no progress can be truly regarded as upward which, while increasing material comfort and material wealth, while multiplying means of transportation and inventing Gatling guns, nevertheless ignores utterly the law of God as the foundation of public order, forgets utterly the divine precept of charity, thrusts the poor out of sight, to find them rising up arrayed in the awful vengeance of class-hatred, and teaches men that they are not the sons of God, but mere animals, destined to an animal end.”

“*Bien dit!*” said the Marquis. “And that is a correct statement of the progress which the Catholic Church and her Supreme Pontiff are reviled for not indorsing. It is sad,” he went on after a brief pause, “to witness the rapid disintegration of that beautiful and noble fabric of Christian states that established the splendid civilization to which we owe all that is good in our civil and social order. The civilization which, during the ages that the presumption of to-day calls ‘dark,’ filled Europe with houses of learning, founded chivalry, practiced the boundless charity toward Christ’s poor which runs like a thread of gold through all its history, and left in the great monuments of its genius, achievements which our boastful age is unable even to imitate.”

“I often wonder,” said Stanhope, meditatively, “what the generations that are to come after will think of us when they look at our architectural achievements, if Ruskin’s dictum is to be accepted, that ‘as great art is the expression of the mind of a great man, so mean art is of the want of mind of a weak man.’”

“They will probably think with another writer that in such achievements they see ‘the evidence not of an advancing but of a lost civilization’—unless they, too, are of the opinion that steam-engines and newspapers constitute civilization,” said Mrs. Falconer. “Why, there is more genius, more poetry, more thought, in one mediaeval building than in all the tame and idea-less edifices of modern construction put together. Go to an ancient square of Antwerp or a street of Nuremberg—then think of Piccadilly or the Boulevard Haussmann, and shudder!”

“Or go yonder into the Trastevere, and think of the Via Nazionale, near at hand!” said Irène. “It is hard that such barbarous forces should have power, even for a day, to work their will in Rome—our Rome, the Rome of Christendom.”

“Meanwhile we are forgetting how beautiful it is—this Rome—as it lies below us now,” said Mrs. Falconer. As she spoke she rose, and, followed by Stanhope, walked to the end of the terrace, where she paused, and, leaning over the parapet, looked down.

Between the river and the base of the cliff—the cliff which is the supposed site of the cave of the giant Cacus described by Virgil—winds the carriage-road which leads through the Porta San Paolo to the great basilica of that name, *fuori le mura*, and on to Ostia. Mrs. Falconer watched one or two carriages and ox-carts pass along this road before saying in a low voice to Stanhope, who stood beside her:

“Let us go and look at the church—did you not say it was interesting? We can return here presently.”

“Very well,” he answered. “I will speak to Irène and the Marquis.”

“No—do not!” she said, quickly. And as he looked at her, she added, with a smile, “How stupid men are!”

“Are we?” he asked, returning the smile. “Well, I suppose so—but, at least, we are docile to the dictates of intelligence higher than our own. You wish, then, to go without them?”

“I wish to go quietly, and let them follow if they like—but they will not follow.”

They were, indeed, not conscious of being left alone. The Marquis, having taken Mrs. Falconer’s vacant seat beside Irène, was pointing out to her Santa Cecilia across the river in the Trastevere.

“And there are the remains of the Sublician Bridge almost at our feet,” he said. “Do you remember that you spoke of it the day I met you at San Pietro in Montorio? And yonder is San Pietro. How boldly it stands out on the height of the Janiculum!”

“Yes,” she said. Her gaze followed his pointing hand, but he could see that a shadow had fallen across her delight in the beauty of the prospect, and her eyes gathered the pathetic sadness which he had often seen in them before.

“I remember that day,” she said, in a tone as wistful as her look. “I remember how we agreed that it is well to be in Rome, because all wrong and all sorrow are more easily borne here than elsewhere. But even here one can not always remember ‘the brevity of human injustice and the steadfastness of eternal truth.’ There are times when the sense of wrong conquers everything else; and one forgets, oh! one forgets in an hour of bitterness, the tears and prayers and meditations of months.”

“And do you think that to conquer one’s self—that most stupendous of all tasks—is a work of *months*?” he asked, with grave gentleness. “It is rather a work of life.”

“Then what a happy thing it would be if life were over!” she said, in the same wistful tone. “Is that like a coward wishing to desert a battle? But, how if the battle is too fierce, and one only falls into deeper and deeper defeat? When I enter these glorious old churches, and stand by the tombs of those who left wrong and struggle so long ago, I can only envy them.”

“They would not deserve to be envied, however, if they had desired to throw down their arms because the battle was fierce,” he said. “And it is not like you to feel in this manner. Why should you look at life so sadly—you who are fitted for its brightest sunshine?”

“Because the sunshine is darkened for me, by wrong without and bitterness within,” she answered. “Forgive me, if I tell you nothing more.”

He hesitated a moment—it seemed to him that the time had come to speak. He glanced around and saw the terrace deserted. Mrs. Falconer and Stanhope had disappeared. Then he turned back to Irène.

“Forgive me,” he said, “if I tell you that I know—all that there is to know regarding you. I know the story of the wrong from which you have suffered, and I feel for you with every throb of my heart. But what I do not know—what I do not acknowledge—is that there is any reason why you should allow it to darken one ray of the sunshine of your life.”

She looked at him with a face that had suddenly grown paler. “So, you know!” she said, in a low tone. “Well—it does not matter. Every one knows, I presume. And the

fact that the thought of such knowledge in the mind of another is like fire near a burn to me, proves only my pride. But that answers what you have said. Such tortured pride is enough to darken any sunshine.”

“I think not,” he said. “I think there may be a sunshine warm enough and broad enough to banish even that.”

“You think so,” she answered, “because you do not understand. If pride were all, I grant that it—being only a form of self-love—might be overcome. But you do not know all that is enlisted in the struggle.”

“I know more than you imagine, perhaps,” he said; “and my counsel would be this: Put the memory aside, try to forget the wrong; do not suffer it to triumph over you by darkening your life and your nature.”

“That would be good counsel,” she said, “if I could follow it. But everything prevents. Influences have come around me in an unexpected manner. The struggle has been kept alive and renewed when I was trying most to forget. I have been brought face to face with the question— not whether I would accept anything, for that could never be a question with me—but whether I could forgive, as I promised one who was dying that I would try to do.” She paused and looked at him with an expression of pain. “Did you ever hear,” she went on, “that saying of St. Francis de Sales, ‘Blessed are the hearts that bend, for they shall never break’? I think mine must surely break—for it can not bend.”

“Even in breaking,” he said, “there is sometimes hidden a blessing. But I would desire to spare you any blessing which comes in the guise of pain.” He, too, paused—hesitated an instant—then continued, with earnest feeling: “If you will let me, I will take you far from all influences that disturb you—far from the shadow of wrong that darkens your life. If you will give me your heart, you need never bestow another thought on the father who has treated you with such cruel injustice.”

She was so much surprised that at first she hardly grasped his meaning. Her eyes dilated as she gazed at him, before she said:

“I do not understand—it is impossible that you can mean—”

“I mean,” he said, as she stopped, “that I love you, and that it will be the happiness of my life if you can care for me in return. I mean that I shall find a new value for my name and rank if you will take them—and forget those of which you have been defrauded.”

He spoke with tender ardor—in a voice that few women could have heard unmoved. And Irène was not one of the few. She was deeply moved—although she sat silent and motionless for a minute. But silence may be the most significant token of emotion, and suddenly a shower of crystal drops fell from her eyes to her black dress.

“Irène!” cried the Marquis, making a movement to take her hand.

But she drew back; though, when she lifted her eyes, they were shining with light through the moisture that still suffused them.

“Do you know,” she said, gently, “what it is when you hear of a great deed or a noble thought, to feel your heart stir and your eyes fill with tears? So I have felt in listening to you—in realizing that you are indeed offering your old name and high rank to me—who have neither! “

“But you will take them?” he said, eagerly. “Tell me that!”

“I can not tell you that,” she answered; “because it is impossible that I can take them. I should feel that I had done you a wrong and an injustice if I did; for the time

might come when you would ask yourself whether such a sacrifice had been well made.”

“There is no sacrifice involved,” he said; “and, if there were, do you think that a man who has reached my age, and sounded the depths of all that the world offers, does not know what is best worth securing and retaining? You have made life a new thing to me since I have known you. I was like one who had wandered far into an arid desert, to whom a radiant messenger came and led him again to the region of morning freshness, of hope and enthusiasm. Faith I had not lost; but it had grown to be with me a matter of the head rather than of the heart. I believed in God and his Church, because I could not stultify my intellect with the impious and illogical follies of unbelief. But devotion, which is the better part of faith, was something which I had forgotten until you showed it to me again. You have wakened my heart out of a lethargy so deep that I thought it dead, and given back to me the youth I had fancied for ever gone. Surely, then, having done all this, you will not refuse to give me yourself? “

She had listened to him eagerly, her eyes still shining with the moisture of quick-rising tears; but, at the last words, she shook her head.

“I think,” she said, “that I would have courage to refuse, even if I loved you. Yet I thank you none the less for holding me worthy of such homage. I am not. But that does not matter. You believe me to be so; and you prove your own worth in every word that you utter. For it seems to me that in nothing more than in their mode of loving do men show what they are. You are most noble, and worthy—I have always felt it—of all that is highest and best. That includes the love of a woman. But I have no love for you.”

“None!” he asked, in a tone of deep pain.

“None,” she answered. “I have no heart, save that which is torn with bitterness and conflicting passion. If I married you— if it were possible that I could do so—I should never cease to remember that I had taken the shadow of my wrong to one whose name should shine in men’s eyes undimmed by any shadow. There is a brilliant future before you—I am sure of it—and you must have no weight on your career. Say that the day of brightness, the fulfillment of hope, came to France. How could you present to your king one whom her father had disowned—and that father the life-long enemy of France? No, M. le Marquis—I repeat, that even if I loved you, I would have courage to refuse to marry you.”

He thought that he could never forget her face as she looked at him, speaking these words—the mingled fire and sweetness that was in her glance. He felt as if he could almost see the clear shining of the generous soul, and the strong foundation on which her resolution rested.

“If you loved me,” he said, after a moment, “if there were any hope that you would ever love me, I would prove to you that all this amounts to nothing. Instead of casting any shadow on my career, you would aid it in the fullest degree. With you to inspire my purpose, and keep alive the high-heartedness which is essential for greatness in any true sense, I might do much. But, without you—”

“Without me,” she said, as he paused, “you will do as much as you could do with me. For you wrong yourself in thinking that what you will achieve depends on any inspiration save that which is within yourself. The heart, fit for great achievements, is in your own breast; and the mind that is made to grasp the highest thought needs no help from one who is only fitted to receive it. If I have indeed had any share in waking you from the lethargy which follows the vain pursuit of pleasure, I am more than glad—I am

deeply grateful; but there my influence ends. And I think you overrate it there. It is Rome, with her thousand voices of glory and faith, and all that lies beyond a mere ignoble life for self, which has waked you—once and for ever.”

“But you have been the living voice of these things,” he said. “They have indeed touched me; but it has been through your words and your eyes.”

“You may think so now,” she said; “but you are mistaken. On the contrary, you have taught me to see much that I might else have left unseen, to feel much that I might else have left un-felt. And of all those who will watch your name in the coming time, there will be none whose interest will be deeper than hers to whom you would have given it.”

“To whom I can not resign the hope of giving it,” he said. “Do you not see that you were born to fill a high position? You have every mark of an exalted destiny; you are fitted to adorn the most exalted rank. You have no right to doom yourself to obscurity, because of an injustice which even the author of it is anxious to repair.”

“But from him I will take no reparation,” she said, proudly.

“Believe that I would never ask you to take more than the acknowledgment of the absolute purity of your birth. That is your right. It is no favor from Prince Waldegrave.”

“It is a right which he can give or withhold at his pleasure,” she said, “and therefore I will have none of it. Do you think that if any legal remedy had lain in my hands, if I could have forced him by any means whatever to repair the injustice, that I would not have done so? But I will not take even justice from him—as a gift.”

What could the Marquis reply? It was now his turn to come in contact with the unbending will against which every one else had made vain trial of strength. But, wiser than most of those who had preceded him, he felt instinctively that words were useless. So, for a time, silence fell. As the sun sank toward the west, all the city at their feet was flooded with light, and more than one gleaming cross appeared to flash in the level rays. On this high rocky terrace they were as if hung in mid-air, with an exquisite stillness all around them, and an atmosphere of heroic memories, as distinct as the perfume of the blossoms of the bay-trees over their heads.

It was Irène who at length broke the spell. “I shall always be glad,” she said, in her clear, sweet voice, “to remember the hours that we have spent together among these scenes. And in the memory there will be nothing that I could wish to change—I mean, in my memory of you. It is not often that, when we paint a character to ourselves in noble lines, it keeps those lines unmarred by any closeness of association. Yours has done so. I thought you all that a high-born Frenchman should be—and could words say more?—when I knew you first. I have found you so at all times and in all things, and never more so than to-day—when you have offered your brilliant rank and stainless name to one who would be proud to wear them if fate had been kinder to her, and if she could have given you her heart in return.”

At the first sound of her voice he had turned quickly toward her, and during her speech his dark, deep eyes were reading her face as if intent to pierce through any mask to the soul below. But there was no mask. The eyes which met his were clear and candid as the sky above, and he read in them no shadow of hope. When she finished he could only say:

“And this is all? Will you not even take time for thought—for consideration?”

“Why should I?” she asked. “I could never give any other answer than I have

given now. To prolong the matter would only be to deceive you, and cause us both useless pain.”

“I will do nothing, urge nothing, that could cause you that,” he said. “My most earnest desire has been to relieve you of all pain, and my deepest regret is that you will not suffer me to do so.” He paused, and looked away toward the majestic dome which seems ever more of heaven than of earth, and which was now relieved against a sky of still and splendid gold. “I feel,” he said, “like one who is standing on the threshold of a new life— a life that I must enter alone. I have dreamed of a companionship so high and tender that it would sweeten any path of difficulty; but I shall, instead, have only a memory to carry with me. It is, however, a memory as white and fragrant as the flower you wear in your girdle. Will you give me that?” He held out his hand. “It will speak to me at once of sweetness and of glory—the sweetness that is denied to me, and the glory that may be won by all who can forget self in noble effort.”

CHAPTER XII.

Prince Waldegrave had gone to many decisive interviews with great ministers, to many important cabinet councils, with fewer misgivings, and less doubt of his own power, than he felt in approaching the interview with his daughter. As he had confessed to Otto in their first conversation, he would, under any circumstances, have seen her with reluctance. He was prepared to do so, however, in fulfillment of a painful duty, and to gratify one who had taken the place of a son in his heart. But now that atonement was made heavier to him—now that he, accustomed to command, was required to fill the position of a suppliant—his reluctance increased many fold; and when he found himself in Rome he was ready to regret that he had come. It was too late to recede, however, and since he was exceedingly anxious that his presence should not be discovered by many who would attach extreme political significance to it, he was also anxious that the interview to which he was committed should be over as soon as possible. The morning after his arrival, therefore, while Waldegrave and himself sat together at breakfast, he said:

“I wish to leave Rome within twenty-four hours, Otto, and consequently whatever is to be done should be done quickly. Tell me where I am to go, and how to see the person whom I have come to see.”

“It is very easy to tell you where to go,” answered Waldegrave. “Mrs. Falconer’s apartment is in the Via Gregoriana. But I cannot so easily tell you how to see Irène. It was only by stratagem that I was enabled to see her last, and I am sure that it will require stratagem to make her see you. The best thing will be for me to go to Mrs. Falconer and enlist her aid. Nothing can be accomplished without it.”

“And I—?” asked the Prince.

“You will follow in half an hour. Luigi will have a carriage in readiness for you.”

Notwithstanding these confident arrangements, it was with many doubts that the young Count presented himself at Mrs. Falconer’s door, where Antonio informed him that the signora did not receive at this hour.

“Nevertheless,” said “Waldegrave, “take my card to her, and say that it is not without good reason that I beg her to make an exception in my favor.”

His tone and manner were effective. He was shown into the richly draped *sala*,

while Antonio vanished with his card. Nor had he long to wait for a response. In a few minutes there was the slight sound of a distant closing door, and down the long vista of rooms Mrs. Falconer's graceful figure came. She received him, as he hastened to meet her, with a cordial smile.

"You will pardon me, I hope, for intruding at this hour when you learn why I have ventured to do so," he said.

"There is no need of pardon," she answered, kindly. "I can imagine why you have come. You wish me to aid you in seeing Irène—is it not so?"

"I wish to ask your aid in that manner," he replied, "but not for myself. It is Prince Waldegrave now who wishes to see her."

"Indeed!" Although prepared for this, Mrs. Falconer could not repress a slight indication of astonishment. "So he has come!" she said.

"He has come—to see his daughter and induce her to accept what she refused when offered through me," Waldegrave answered.

"What she refused when offered through you, she is not likely to accept from the father who is the object of her bitterest feeling," said Mrs. Falconer, gravely. "Are you not aware of that?"

"I am aware," he replied, "that the issue of the attempt is doubtful; but failure means nothing worse than the result of inaction. When that is the case, failure must be risked. And my uncle is prepared to risk it rather than leave any means untried to induce her to accept what is atonement from him, but justice for herself."

"You put it well," said Mrs. Falconer—touched, as Stanhope had been, by the young man's face and voice—"but Irène is resolutely determined not to accept even justice from Prince Waldegrave."

"I know it," he answered; "but I trust that her resolution will melt when she is brought face to face with her father. When she sees what he is willing to do—how far he is willing to go—in the effort to repair wrong, the generosity of her nature must assert itself, and she must feel that to accept atonement is often as great a duty as to make it."

Mrs. Falconer shook her head. She remembered some words of Irène's on that subject.

"I am sorry to discourage you," she said, "but I must prepare you for disappointment by assuring you that you entirely underrate the force of resentment which is arrayed against you."

"There are also some forces that will fight on our side," he said. "You must be aware of that."

"Yes," she answered, "but those forces are for the time in abeyance—dominated by the keen sense of injury. However, I will say no more; and I only hope that the result may prove me mistaken. One thing, at least, is certain—since Prince Waldegrave is here, there must be no obstacle to his seeing his daughter."

"Do you think it possible that she will consent to see him?"

"Certainly not. The interview, so far as she is concerned, can only be effected by stratagem."

"I feared as much, and for that reason I have come to beg your assistance—without which we can do nothing."

"I am afraid that Irène will never forgive me if I betray her again," said Mrs. Falconer, "but that can not be helped. This is one of the supreme opportunities of life."

Indeed, there are not many lives to which such an opportunity comes—one so fraught with important consequences.” She paused a moment, then added, with a smile: “You will let me offer my best wishes for your cause, M. le Comte. I think you deserve to win all that you desire. Frankly speaking, I have not always been on your side. I would have preferred to see Irène accept the Marquis de Châteaumesnil—but she has rejected him.”

Waldegrave started. Something like an electric shock of joy ran through him. He had hardly owned to himself how much he had feared M. de Châteaumesnil as a rival.

“He has left Rome,” Mrs. Falconer went on; “gone to Frohsdorf, to see the king and console himself with loyalty for the failure of love. I confess that I was so disappointed I was absolutely angry with Irène. But she declares her intention never to marry—and if any man is destined to make her forswear such a resolution, *you* must be that man.”

“I have not much hope of it,” he said. “Her resolutions, as we are aware, rest on firm grounds. And, indeed, for the present, I have put thought of myself aside. I desire only that she shall accept her rightful place in the world—and, even more, that she shall rise above the bitterness that is so unworthy of her.”

“Ah, you can not put yourself in her place. You do not know how deeply the iron has entered into her soul—how passionate love for her mother takes the form of passionate partisanship for that mother’s wrong.”

“I think that I realize it all,” he said, gravely. “It is because I realize it that I am so anxious for atonement to be made. That brings me back to my uncle. He will be here very soon. May I ask how you intend that Irène shall be brought to see him?”

“It can only be in one way—I shall send for her to come to me, and she will find Prince Waldegrave. It will be a shock to her; but no preparation is possible, because she would, undoubtedly, refuse to see him.”

“There must be no risk of her doing that,” said Waldegrave. “She must see him. All my hope is centered now on the effect of his personal influence.”

“I wish it were centered upon something more likely to succeed,” said Mrs. Falconer; “but, at least, the trial shall be made conclusively.”

“I ask no more,” said Waldegrave. And then, as the doorbell sounded, he added, “There he is.”

A few minutes later a servant came to Irène with a message from Mrs. Falconer, desiring her presence. It chanced that there had been some arrangements discussed between them for musical practice; and, supposing that this was what the summons meant, Irène made no inquiry, but at once obeyed. Of late she had neglected her voice; but she felt this morning the stirring of harmony, as if it would be a pleasure to pour out her soul on the wings of song. She took up some sheets of music, therefore, and walked quickly down the suite of apartments to the *grande sala*. It was not until she stood in the door-way of this, that she became aware that Mrs. Falconer was not alone, that a man of noble and distinguished appearance was with her.

Did some instinct tell the girl at once who this was? Certainly she paused, and would have retreated more quickly than she came, if Mrs. Falconer had not turned, advanced, and, taking her hand, led her forward.

“Here is one, my dear, who wishes to see you; and who has a right to do so,” she said. And then, with a whispered “Forgive me!” she passed swiftly from the room.

Irène made no effort to follow. Indeed, the thought of escape did not present

itself to her mind. She only felt an intuitive conviction that the man who was to her the embodiment of evil, the father whom she had never been conscious of seeing, was now before her. There was repulsion, yet there was also fascination in the thought. She stood motionless where Mrs. Falconer had left her, her head thrown back a little, her hands, as they hung before her, clasping tightly the roll of music, and her proud, clear glance meeting, walkout a shadow of wavering, the piercing gaze which was fastened on her.

And what did Prince Waldegrave feel in seeing himself thus confronted? But for those haughty, limpid eyes, he might almost have fancied himself once more in the presence of the wife he had renounced. Yet he was also conscious in every fiber that this girl was his daughter; he saw the signs of lineage; he recognized his own spirit in the dauntless glance, that never faltered; and, realizing this, he realized also, for the first time, what his life had lost. For here, instead of reverence, was defiance; instead of affection, hatred; instead of the sweet tie of parent and child, injured and injurer standing face to face.

It seemed to both of them that they stood so for a long time before a word was spoken. Then Prince Waldegrave extended his hand, saying:

“My daughter—do you know who I am?”

His voice broke the spell that had held Irène motionless. She drew back a step, as if fearing that he might touch her.

“There is no one in the world— now —who has the right to call me that,” she said, in a low, concentrated tone. “I presume that you are Prince Waldegrave. But I am unable to imagine why you are here.”

A wall of ice could not have been a more sensible barrier than that which these words created; and if Waldegrave had not sufficiently impressed his uncle with the difficulty of the undertaking before him, he would have been impressed with it now. There was another pause before he answered—gravely, and as if weighing his utterances:

“I am here in the fulfillment of what I feel to be a duty—to offer, in my own person, what you have refused when offered through another; to give, if you will accept it, a father’s care and affection; to restore to you a birthright, which has been too long withheld. I wish to do all that lies in my power to atone for the past, if you, on your part, will forget it.”

“Forget it!” the girl repeated, in the same concentrated tone, as of one who maintains calmness by a supreme effort. “Has it occurred to you to think what that would mean? I should have to cut out of my life, as if it had never been, all that antedates this moment. I must efface all memory of my mother, whose long martyrdom for my sake I now comprehend, and whose grave lies freshly behind me. I must make myself over into a new person, and not keep even a recollection of the Irène Lescar who felt that she would be the most ignoble creature on earth if she could take for herself the justice which was denied—which is still denied —one whose wrong was deeper, whose suffering keener, than her own. That is what forgetfulness of the past would mean for me. Judge, therefore, whether or not I am likely to forget it.”

There was fire in her glance as it met his own now, and, looking at her as she stood before him, her slight figure updrawn like that of a young queen, he understood the fascination which had made Otto say that she was unlike all other women. Her striking beauty had never before been more apparent than at that moment, and, recognizing that here was a daughter worthy of him— a wife worthy of the nephew he loved—after a

short silence, he spoke again:

“I was wrong to use that expression. To forget is, indeed, not in our power. But there is another thing which is in our power, and which is worthy of the highest natures—that is, to forgive. I have never said ‘Forgive me’ to a human being before, but in you I see not only yourself but your mother—and it is to her as well as to you that I speak when I say: ‘You have been wronged. Suffer me to atone for it.’”

The deep, melodious voice that had so often swayed men like reeds, took its deepest, its most melodious tone in the last words; and, had not Irène’s heart been mailed against him, she could hardly have resisted the spell which lies in the rare unbending of a stern nature. That this man, with his great power and greater fame, should come to her as a suppliant—should humble his pride sufficiently to say to a girl, and that girl his own daughter, “Forgive me”—would have touched those chords within her which were always ready to respond to whatever was generous or heroic. But there was no response in her soul to anything that Prince Waldegrave might say or do. The marble head, which, in milky whiteness, looked forth from a corner near them, had as much sign of softening on its features as her face showed.

“I could hardly have thought,” she said, “that you would mention my mother’s name to me; but, since you have seen fit to do so, since you have addressed her in my person, let me answer for her as well as for myself, and tell you that it is no more in your power to atone for the past than it is in that of a murderer to call back the soul to the body of one whom he has slain. You have slain love and trust and respect—and the dead do not rise again. To me you are of all beings upon this earth most abhorrent, for if you had killed her whom you took from her home and her country, whom you swore to love and protect, it would have been tenderest mercy compared with what you did. You broke her heart, you crushed her pride, you took from her rank and name and fortune—you made it necessary that she should blazon her cruel wrongs to the world in the effort to obtain bread for me. And now that she is dead and her claim can no longer conflict with that of one whom you put in her place, you come to offer me atonement, and ask me to forgive! Understand this: I would die of want before I would accept the least thing from your hand, and though my mother, who was an angel, did forgive you, I never will!”

Passion was shaking her before she concluded this speech, in which the deepest feeling of her nature, on the subject which touched it most nearly, found expression. It was a moment when the pent-up forces of years rushed to the outlet of speech, and she could no more control the fiery words that rushed to her lips, than it is possible to stem a tide of lava. Well as he had been prepared, Prince Waldegrave was intensely startled. It seemed an accusing angel that stood before him, with pale face and shining eyes, and read the terrible indictment, which was like thunder in his ears. Nothing is more serviceable for us than to perceive occasionally how those acts appear to others which we have glossed over to ourselves. The scorpion-whip of conscience had not been wholly unfelt by Prince Waldegrave, but never before had such a mirror been held up to him as in those words of Irène.

“And is this,” he asked at length, in a low tone, “the spirit which your mother taught you?”

“No,” the girl answered, haughtily. “It is the spirit born of my love for her and my detestation of you—her destroyer. Only twice did she ever mention your name to me, or even allude to your existence—once, when, as I approached womanhood, she told me

her story and mine, to explain why we had neither home nor rank nor place in the world; and again when she was dying, when, holding out the crucifix to me, with her last breath she implored me to forgive. There was nothing else which she could have asked that I would not have done—I would have followed her into the very shadow of death, if she had bidden me do so—but I could tear my heart out of my breast sooner than from that heart forgive you!”

“Then,” said the Prince, with something of haughtiness in his own tone, “we will say no more of forgiveness. There remains justice. Think what you will, feel what you will, about me. But do not fall into a blind folly of hate. Take the birthright of your name and rank, and reward the love of one whose chief anxiety is for you—not himself. It may be that you do not understand what is offered you in Otto’s love,” he went on in a softened tone, after a brief pause. “I have known many men, but never one who is more noble in all things.”

“He may be—I believe that he is—noble and good,” said Irène. “But what then? As I have told him, it would be easier for fire and water to blend than for me to unite my life with his. And even if I loved him—and if there did not lie between us an impassable gulf of wrong—how could I trust him? My mother trusted *you*.”

The last words were uttered in a tone of bitterness and scorn altogether indescribable. And meeting the full glow of the brilliant dilated eyes, above which the dark, straight brows were drawn together like a bar, Prince Waldegrave felt that further appeal was useless—that he had come on a vain errand. Yet, moved more deeply than he would beforehand have imagined possible, and realizing the depth of suffering by the measure of resentment, he was constrained to make one more appeal.

“Perhaps you will not believe me,” he said, gravely, “but it is nevertheless true that if, at this moment, I could undo all the past, I would make any sacrifice for that end. But it is out of my power. Even my will to atone is not strong enough to call back the dead, to unfasten the links that are forged around my life. But I have come here to-day to do all that lies in my power—to acknowledge the wrong, to offer the fullness of reparation. If God has promised pardon to one who does this, how can you dare to refuse it?”

“Go and ask it of God,” she answered, in a stifled voice, “but do not come to me. It is easy to talk of reparation to the dead, since it has become impossible. But what was denied to her I will never take. You threw us out of your life together—and what is done is done. My part is with her. I would rather share her grave than your palace. This is my last word.”

She turned away as she finished speaking. The next instant he found himself alone.

From the closed carriage which was standing at the foot of the stairs, Waldegrave emerged as he saw his uncle descending toward him. When they met, the Prince paused, and answered his eager look of interrogation:

“I have failed. She will take nothing—hear of nothing. My advice to you is to think of her no more. At least, never mention her name again to me.”

CHAPTER XIII.

After Mrs. Falconer heard of Prince Waldegrave’s departure, she waited for some

time in nervous anxiety, thinking that Irène might come to reproach her, and longing to know the result of the interview; but as the minutes passed by, and Irène did not appear, she finally felt suspense to be unbearable, and went to the door of the girl's room.

To her knock no answer was returned. Again she knocked, but still without receiving a reply; and then, seriously alarmed, she unclosed the door. The first object on which her eye fell was the form of Irène, who was lying upon the couch where she had found her once before. But not now in mere exhaustion from emotion; rather, prone under one of those storms of the spirit which seem as if they would rend soul and body asunder. Her face was buried in the cushions, but her frame was shaking with the passion of long-drawn convulsive sobs.

Hurrying across the floor, Mrs. Falconer knelt down by the couch. "Irène," she said, gently—"Irène!" Then, as no answer came, save the passionate sobs: "My dear, what is the matter? What has grieved you so?"

Still she had to wait some time before, without lifting her face, Irène said, in half-choked accents:

"Why is such a burden laid upon me? What have I done that I should have to struggle like this—and fail!—and fail!—O my mother, can you see, do you know, that when the supreme moment came, I refused what you asked of me? I said that I would try—and God sent the trial—and—when it came, I failed!"

"You refused to forgive your father!" asked Mrs. Falconer, in a whisper.

"Yes." She suddenly lifted herself and a flash of fire came into the tear-deluged eyes. "I could sooner have died. Everything came back to me—everything. All the outrage, the cruel wrong, the base injustice. I saw all my mother's ruined, martyred life—I felt as if her murderer stood before me—and I told him what I thought, what I felt. It is over. The moment of trial came—and I failed."

"But," said Mrs. Falconer — altogether uncertain what this passion of apparent regret might mean—"if you feel differently now—if you think that you could answer differently—it is easy to convey your answer to Prince Waldegrave."

"Feel differently—answer differently!" the girl repeated. "I should feel the same, I should answer the same, if it were to do over again. I think if I were dying and he stood before me, I should with my last breath tell him that I would never forgive him!"

"Irène!—my dear child—for Heaven's sake think what you are saying!"

"I do think—I feel all that you feel—I know that it is horrible. But what can I do? I have struggled and prayed—I have begged God to give me strength to overcome this passion of hatred—and sometimes for a little while when I am in church, for instance, there is a lull in the conflict, it is as if a vision of the nothingness of time and the greatness of eternity came over me, and forgiveness grew in a measure possible. I think then of my mother's sufferings as so many occasions of merit that will add to her happiness for all eternity. But when I come out into the world the battle is renewed, the sense of deep resentment takes possession of me again. And when I stood face to face with the man who had sacrificed her to his ambition, who had been worse, a thousand times worse, than her murderer, I forgot everything save the detestation and scorn which filled my soul. I should have liked to spurn him with my foot. I did spurn his offers with every word which indignation could suggest. And I should do it again. But when I left him—when I came here, panting and breathless with excitement—then in the stillness I seemed to hear my mother's voice, as clearly and distinctly as I hear yours —that dying

voice which will never cease to echo through my soul—and it said, ‘Your promise—where is your promise?’ O mamma, mamma!”—with another passionate burst of sobs she held out her arms to the calm picture that looked down on her— “ why did you ask of me what I can never give? Why did you make your memory like a stern angel to me? O my dearest, my best-beloved, anything else on earth I would do, but what you might have forgiven for yourself, I can never, never forgive for you!”

What could Mrs. Falconer say? It seemed to her that the only thing to do was to quiet the excited girl as far as possible. But that proved difficult; and after the storm finally subsided the prostration which followed was so great that, when Stanhope came in that afternoon, Mrs. Falconer told him that she almost feared illness as the result.

“There must be no more interviews with Prince Waldegrave or his nephew,” she said, decidedly. “I have given the last assistance that I mean to give in bringing about any meeting of the kind. Henceforth they must let Irene alone.”

“From what Count Waldegrave tells me, there is no question but that she will be let alone hereafter by her father,” said Stanhope. “He has requested that her name shall never be mentioned to him again.”

“I do not wonder. She must have let him hear the truth for once. And Count Waldegrave—does he also mean to put her out of his life and his thoughts?”

“On the contrary, he declares distinctly that he does not mean to do so. ‘As long as we both live,’ he said, ‘I will never relax my efforts to induce her to accept what is her right.’”

“Which, in his opinion, probably includes accepting himself, also,” said Mrs. Falconer.

“Probably,” answered Stanhope; “but we must not expect too high a flight of disinterestedness. I think that he means to be entirely unselfish, that he does not build at all on any hope of her changing toward himself. But such a hope may exist without his recognizing it. The human heart is, above all things, deceitful. It is astonishing how often we find that we have been cherishing a hope or an expectation without knowing it, until some sharp disappointment tears away the veil and shows what we have been building upon.”

“You only say ‘we,’ after the manner of writers, without really meaning to make the remark personal to yourself; is it not so?” she asked. “I can not imagine that you ever entertain hopes or expectations without fully recognizing them.”

“Why not?” he asked, with a smile. “Why should I be exempt from any of the folly or weakness to which human nature in general, and my sex in particular, are liable?”

“I did not mean to imply that you would be exempt from anything of the kind, but that, if it existed, you would recognize it,” she answered, quietly. “You, who are so fond of reading the characters and motives of others, would hardly be in doubt as to your own.”

“How keen, though gentle, your sarcasm is!” he said.

“You mistake,” she replied, quickly. “I did not mean to be sarcastic at all. I meant in all seriousness just what I said—that one so used to analyzing motives would not be readily deceived about his own.”

“As readily as about those of others,” he said; “and you know how readily that is. I might not have thought so a few months ago—I was then quite as besotted in my opinion of my own judgment as you imagine me to be now; but I have had several shocks

of revelation lately. One of them you know. I judged you presumptuously, and insisted that my presumptuous opinion was correct. Then I discovered that I did not know myself as well as I imagined—that the deceitfulness of the heart, of which I spoke a moment ago, had blinded me—*Eh bien!*” he broke off, suddenly. “I am wandering far from the topic of our conversation—the topic of most of our conversations—*Irène*.”

“She has certainly been the topic of many of them,” said Mrs. Falconer; “but scarcely, I think, of most. However, what I have yet to say of her is simply this—if she is able to travel in a day or two, I mean to take her away from Rome.”

“Where?”

“Not far at first. Only to Albano, or some other place in the hills, to recover the health and spirits which I am sure will be much shaken by to-day. People of her sensitive organization always fail terribly under the strain of mental emotion. She seems to me the sort of person to die of a great shock or a passionate struggle. If you could see her now—she is sleeping under the influence of an anodyne—you would see how much the excitement, the highly wrought emotion of to-day, has told upon her. But, fortunately, such people rally as quickly as they fail; and I hope that a quiet week at Albano—where she will not see or hear of any one from Rome—will render her able to enjoy that visit to Cori and Ninfa of which Lionel and herself have talked so much. Then, when we return to Rome, it will be time to make one’s plans for the summer.”

“And are you not beginning yet to tire of this charge upon your life?” he asked, struck by the kindness and thoughtfulness of her arrangements.

“Have I anything else to do with my life?” she asked. “Is it likely that I would tire of a charge which gives me an unselfish interest? That is a miserable life which is limited to itself in care and thought. For selfishness defeats its own end. Instead of excluding pain by excluding care for others, the selfish life only centers all care upon itself, and so, when pain touches it, has no other refuge. It is a great thing, therefore, to throw one’s self into other lives. And I owe you thanks for bringing *Irène* into mine.”

“I think it was your own kind heart that brought her into it,” he said. “Or, perhaps, her mother’s prayers. However that may be, let me ask if, in banishing yourself to Albano for a week, you mean to exclude every one from Rome?”

“I do not mean to exclude you, if you care to come,” she answered. “You can bring no painful association to *Irène*. But do not tell Count Waldegrave where she is. I scarcely suppose him to be a sufficiently ardent lover to follow her; but there must be no risk of anything of the kind.”

Stanhope readily promised that Count Waldegrave should learn nothing from him. “I agree with you,” he said, “that she has had enough of excitement for the present, and that it can serve no good end. If she is ever to be victorious in the struggle with herself—the struggle in which the forces of good and evil seem typified by her parents—it can only be by removing her from all influences that rouse intense feeling.”

Mrs. Falconer proved to be right in saying that the strain of emotion which *Irène* had undergone would tell on her like the effect of severe illness. For more than twenty-four hours she was completely prostrated, and it was not until the third day after Prince Waldegrave’s visit that she emerged from her chamber, looking the ghost of herself, or like the girl who with pale cheeks and violet-shadowed eyes had stood by her mother’s grave in Paris.

She exhibited, if not pleasure, at least unmistakable satisfaction, in hearing of the

Albano plan; and Mrs. Falconer made no delay in carrying it out. Erne, who eagerly volunteered his services, was sent to secure suitable apartments. And when he returned, assuring his cousin that he had found what he thought would suit her, she first thanked him, then said, with a smile:

“But *Lionello mio*, I have something else to add which may seem to you very ungrateful, and it is this: do not come to Albano while we are there. I want Irène to have perfect quiet from all disturbing influences; and a young gentleman who looks love, even when he does not make it, is a disturbing influence.”

“You are mistaken,” said the young gentleman in question, a little sadly. “I should be no disturbing influence—I have not power enough for that, even—and if I ‘look love,’ it is very unconsciously; for I have not a shadow of hope. But if I am not to come to Albano, how about our excursion to Norba and Ninfa?”

“Oh, I will write you when we are ready for that, and you can come and join us. You know you have to decide all about the route, where we are to go when we leave Albano.”

“We will go to Velletri. That was the headquarters of Mr. Neville and myself; and the place is so charming that I advise you to spend a day or two there.”

“Very well. All that can be arranged at the time. Meanwhile, possess your soul in patience, and wait in Rome for my summons.”

Erne felt that he could do this with a very good grace, having such a prospect ahead; and he bade them good-by quite cheerfully, when the three ladies, attended only by their servants, left Rome next morning.

CHAPTER XIV.

It was a period of much-needed rest to Irène, that quiet week at Albano. The repose of the great hills, the soothing freshness of the airs that blew over them, the magical beauty of sunsets, when heaven seemed opening to the gaze, and the world was like a beautiful dream-land far below, the blossoming richness of chestnut-woods in spring, the lovely lanes fringed with cyclamen, violets, and forget-me-nots, leading to glorious old ilex-groves—all were full of a charm which was like balm to her spirit.

They were days which Mrs. Falconer enjoyed also. The freedom from all social demands, the delight of perfectly sympathetic companionship, and the hours spent in the open air among the most lovely scenes, made the time pass like enchantment. They went to Arricia through its picturesque glen, and dreamed like the “improvisatore” that the lofty dome of its church was “that of St. Peter’s, which the angels had hung up in the blue air among the dark olive-trees.” They followed the flower-carpeted paths that lead to the Convent of the Cappucini, with its noble ilex-groves and views of surpassing beauty. They stood by the lakes of Alba and Nemi; they wandered over the site of Alba Longa, the mother-city of Rome; loitered through the beautiful grounds of the villas Barberini and Doria, and as evening came they saw, over the Campagna, sunsets in which the clouds were “like the curtains of God’s tabernacle,” and the wide earth was transfused and steeped in glory.

There were quiet hours, also, which Irène spent in kneeling before the altars of the old churches, where the grave, majestic frescoes looked down, and the sanctuary lamp burned, like the divine patience of God amid all the changes and unfaithfulness of men.

Here a voice seemed to speak to her of the peace that might at last crown struggle, and the silent figure on the crucifix preached as no mortal tongue could do of the divine nature of that forgiveness so hard for human hearts to practice. What knowledge of her own heart she gained in these silent hours it is difficult to tell. But something of it was written on her face, in the deep expression of her eyes. When Stanhope came he was struck by this, and at the first opportunity spoke of it to Mrs. Falconer.

“She looks like one who has gained some new perception,” he said. “It may be painful—there are signs of struggle in every line of her countenance—but it is also new.”

“It can hardly be, I think,” said Mrs. Falconer, “unless she has brought herself to the point of forgiving her father. I am sure that her heart knows little rest on that score.”

“Has she spoken of him since she has been here?”

“Never. It is a subject we entirely avoid. I would not on any account rouse again such a passionate storm of feeling as I witnessed in Rome.”

“I have always thought forgetfulness was best,” said Stanhope.

Then silence fell for a moment. They were slowly walking through the Galleria di Sotto—that magnificent avenue lined by ilex-trees centuries old, with their massive, leaning trunks, their wide-spreading branches, and their canopy of almost impenetrable shade. Presently, Stanhope said:

“I have not told you that I saw Count Waldegrave the other day in Rome. He came to ask me where you were gone.”

“You did not tell him?”

“No. I told him that I had been requested not to divulge your place of retreat. He said that he wished to see Irène. To that I replied that she would be again in Rome, and that he could then, if he liked, endeavor to see her; but that he need not expect further assistance from you, since you were of the opinion that she should be troubled no more by influences that had a most unhappy effect upon her.”

“That is exactly what I should have wished you to say. I hope that he will heed it.”

“I doubt that. His will, I think, is as strong as her own. And when an irresistible body meets an impenetrable body, we may, at least, expect collision.”

“He must let her alone,” said Mrs. Falconer, decidedly. “I will not consent that he shall keep the struggle alive, and make the poor child tear herself to pieces in the effort to attain a height which is—for the present, at least—beyond her strength.”

Stanhope was silent again for a moment. Then he said: “I have something else to tell you. The story is just now the talk of Rome.”

“What!” said Mrs. Falconer, pausing abruptly. “Irène’s story?”

“Yes—Irène’s and Count Waldegrave’s. You may fancy what a delightful morsel it was for the gossips—and how they have made of it a more than Romeo and Juliet affair. Lady Dorchester stopped me on the Pincio yesterday afternoon to tell me what she had heard. The current version, it seems, runs thus: Count Waldegrave lost his heart, and became entangled before he knew who Irène was. Prince Waldegrave heard of the affair, and came post-haste from Nice to interfere. There was a furious scene—particulars not stated—and it ended by your carrying the heroine off the scene.”

Mrs. Falconer looked for a moment as if she hardly knew whether to laugh or cry—astonishment, anger, and amusement were so mingled in her face. Then she drew a deep breath, and walked on.

“Well,” she said, “it is as accurate as most of the gossiping stories that one hears—an excellent example, indeed, of how accurate they mostly are. But how could it have started? Who had the grain of truth necessary for the foundation of this edifice of untruth?”

“Can you not imagine?”

“I have not an idea.”

Stanhope shrugged his shoulders. “I knew at once,” he said. He drew a newspaper from his pocket and handed it to her. “Do you recognize this?” he asked.

She took and opened it. It was a copy of the “Tittle-Tattle,” containing the article on Madame Lescar; and on the margin of the paper was written, “Count Waldegrave will furnish the sequel.” Mrs. Falconer looked up with an expression in which indignation struggled with disgust.

“Can it possibly be Violet Dysart?” she asked.

“It can not possibly be any one else,” Stanhope answered. “That was brought to me by Count Waldegrave. It was sent to his uncle, who found it on his return to Nice.”

“But why? What end could she have had?”

“The desire pure and simple to make mischief is enough of an end to some people. It is not worth while to trouble one’s self with endeavoring to find what other she may have had. The stories which have been set afloat in Rome are worse than this achievement. They, of course, emanate from the same source.”

“And did you feel at liberty to tell Lady Dorchester the truth?”

“Yes, for Count Waldegrave had said to me, ‘I bring you this because the person who sent it may be capable of worse things— of circulating false and injurious reports. Do not hesitate, if you hear anything of the kind, to tell the whole truth.’ I therefore told the whole truth to Lady Dorchester, and laid on her no injunction of secrecy.”

“How did she receive it?”

“With intense interest, as you may imagine; protested that she had always been sure that Irène was a remarkable person, and that she must be even more remarkable than she had imagined if she could resist such a paladin as Count Waldegrave.”

“I am inclined to be of the same opinion,” said Mrs. Falconer, smiling. “But I have no clew whatever to her feeling toward him. She never mentions his name. As for these stories, do you think that I ought to return to Rome on account of them?”

“Not an hour earlier than you intended—why should you? You might as well attempt to bridle the wind as to restrain the tongues of gossips. And Irène will be so much an object of attention when she returns to Rome that I do not think you would like to remain there.”

“It is not my intention to remain longer than to make my arrangements for leaving definitely.”

“And where, if I may ask, do you mean to go?”

“To Paris for a few weeks—until summer fairly sets in.”

“*Et après?*”

“That is a harder question to answer than you imagine. When there is nothing to take one anywhere in particular, it is difficult to decide upon a special place. After all, it is a good thing not to have too extended a field for choice.”

“It is a misfortune from which few of the world’s inhabitants suffer,” he said, smiling. “And for myself, I should never complain of it. I like to know that my field of

choice is only limited by the limits of the globe.”

“And where, in that very wide field, do *you* think of going next?”

“Oh, I was so much pleased with the Norse lands last summer that I shall probably go back to them. I wish I could tempt you to think of Norway. I should like you to see what I saw last year—the magnificent spectacle of the midnight sun.”

“I should like to see it; but I do not think I can go to Norway for the purpose.”

“You would not fear the journey?”

“Not at all.” She paused, and he was not certain whether a gleam of sunset-fire falling through the ilex-boughs reddened her cheek, or whether she flushed as she added, “I am tolerably independent of the opinion of the world, as you know; but I can be so only because I never violate its proprieties.”

“And what possible canon of propriety would you violate in going to Norway?” he asked, in surprise.

“None certainly in going to Norway,” she answered.

“Oh! “It was his turn to pause for a moment before adding, “Would the impropriety, then, be in my presence? But I thought that even Mrs. Grundy had by this time recognized my harmless-ness.”

“You forget,” said Mrs. Falconer, with a slight shade of coldness in her voice, “that every one has not had the advantage of hearing your statement of your own position, nor can be aware of the opinions you entertain with regard to me. I am speaking, therefore, of things as they appear in the eyes of the world.”

“And is it possible,” he said, in a low tone, “that even in the eyes of the world I could be credited with presumption enough to approach you as anything but a friend?”

Her hands were full of wild-flowers which she was arranging a little nervously as she replied in a tone as low as his own: “The world is mercenary—who knows it better than I?—yet even this mercenary world does not recognize in wealth the insurmountable barrier that you do. For what, after all, is your opinion but this—that I, Sydney Falconer, am of less importance than the money which came to me by an accident of inheritance? You wish to exalt, and, in fact, you degrade me. I am to forget the better part of my womanhood—I am to sell myself for high rank—and why? Because *I* count for nothing, but the wealth that hangs round my neck, for much!”

He had seen before the flash of indignation that was in her eyes as she turned them on him—and there could be no question now of sunset-light reddening her cheeks. It was the eloquent blood which rushed to them, and retreated again, leaving her pale.

Stanhope felt his own blood like fire in his veins; but he endeavored to retain control of himself, and after a moment managed to say, calmly:

“We have been over this ground before; you have before charged me with undervaluing you, because, presumptuously enough, I thought that you ought to make a great marriage. I tried to show you then that it was because I rated you—not your wealth—so high that I thought nothing worthy of you but the most brilliant position. If you doubt me, I wish that you could read my heart. You would find how far above every one else in the world you stand there. You would see that I speak simplest truth when I say that I would rather be your friend than the accepted lover of any other woman. Why am I here to-day? Is it not because I feel that I am only half alive when I am absent from you? But”—he stopped and checked himself sharply—“this is worse than madness! You are wrong in saying that the world does not hold such wealth as yours an

insurmountable barrier between you and a man who has no counterbalancing advantage to offer. The world does hold it so—rightly. And if the world did not, I should. The barrier is there—and so great that I can never even attempt to surmount it.”

They walked on silently. Mrs. Falconer was pale now to her lips. She felt that it was a supreme moment, that they might never be so near an understanding again, and that it was for her to make an heroic effort. She seemed still to be arranging her flowers, but presently she paused.

“If there is such a barrier,” she said, “and you will not attempt to surmount it, I must be braver than you—and hold out my hand across it.”

As she spoke, she extended her hand.

Stanhope seized it, and held it for a moment in a grasp which almost crushed it, before he said, hoarsely:

“Do you know what you are doing?—do you know that you are offering to throw away your life with all its brilliant possibilities; and that you are tempting me to take advantage of your generosity, and forfeit my own respect?”

“I would certainly not wish to do the last,” she said, touched by the passion of his tone, and lifting to his face her eyes, blue as the flowers she held, “but if you care for me all rests on that—”

“You know that I do!” he exclaimed, in a tone which was more than many protestations.

“Then I hold your scruples to be worth nothing. What! you, who denounce the worship of money, are ready to attach to it a value as great as that which could be placed upon it by its most ardent worshiper? You say that it is of sufficient importance to stand between two people, who might else find happiness together? Well”—she attempted to draw back her hand— “that is, of course, for you to decide. The money is, unfortunately, attached to me, and I can not throw it away. But, let me tell you that what you consider a question of self-respect is simply a question of pride.”

“Perhaps you are right,” he said, in a low tone. “I have always felt that, in marriage, I would desire to give—not to take.”

“And would you not give?” she asked. “Ah, how blind— how blind you are! What is all the wealth in the world compared to what you could give! Love, in which I, once so bitterly disappointed, might trust undoubtingly—aim and interest for a life which now lacks both, or tries to make them out of indifferent things, the rest and security that come from a heart at peace —But why do I talk ? It is not my place to plead. Go, if you will. I shall only have learned again of what stuff a man’s love is made.”

The ring of her voice was as proud as pathetic—and with the last words she strove again to withdraw her hand from the clasp that held it fast. But the barriers were broken down between them now, and, with the sentences she had just uttered ringing in his ears, there was nothing which was not more possible to Stanhope than to let that hand go. Fortunately the Galleria di Sotto was just now free from any presence save their own. He bent his head and kissed it passionately, as he said:

“Let me show you, indeed, what stuff a man’s love is made of! I will put my pride where my heart has long been—at your feet.”

“And do you expect me to be surprised?” asked Irène. “Did I not tell you that Mr. Stanhope was in love with you? But I did not know—I only suspected—that you cared

for him. And I did not see at all how the difficulty of your having so much money was to be got over.”

“I did not see myself,” said Mrs. Falconer. “In fact, I did not think that it ever would be got over, for by intuition I knew his feeling about it, and I never would have believed myself capable of taking a step to encourage a hesitating wooer. Yet that is what I did. His heart was open before me—only his pride stood between us—what could I do, then, but surrender mine? If there had been a shade of doubt, it would have been a perilous and indefensible experiment. But I had no doubt. All was clear: it was like a flash of light. I saw that everything hung on me.”

“And you have proved yourself as generous in love as in everything else,” said Irène. “But then, you are like a queen—made to do things that other women must not imitate. And Mr. Stanhope will give you the devotion you deserve, and the sympathy which is more than devotion. For I can imagine it quite possible to grow tired of the devotion of an unsympathetic person.”

“If friendship is the best foundation for love, we have that,” said Mrs. Falconer. “And do you know that but for you this would never have come to pass?”

“But for me?” repeated the girl, in surprise. “What had I to do with it? I should like to believe it—like to feel myself any kind of link between those who have been such friends to me—but I do not see how it can be.”

“Yet it is very plain, and in more ways than one. But for you, we should never have been thrown together so closely and intimately; but for you, Mr. Stanhope would not have been in Rome this winter; and but for you, I should probably at this moment be engaged to marry the Marquis de Châteaumesnil.”

“Is it possible!” said Irène, after considering the matter for a moment with thoughtful eyes. “Then I have not lived in vain. How often I have wished that I could do something for both of you—and now it seems that, unconsciously to myself, I have done something! It shows how little we can know what is for the best. I thought it so hard that M. de Châteaumesnil should care for me that I, who liked him so much, should have to inflict pain on him; for I would rather suffer pain myself than be forced to inflict it on another. Yet, if it has brought about your happiness and that of Mr. Stanhope, I can be resigned to it.”

“It would be unreasonable, however, to expect the Marquis to be resigned,” said Mrs. Falconer, smiling. “Ah, if you could have married him, all would have ended well—like a fairy-tale.”

But Irène shook her head. “It was impossible,” she said. “Do not talk of it. Talk of yourself. Tell me all about how happy you hope to be. And I, on my part, shall beg God with all my heart to make your hopes realities. And I think that He will. For surely this is a reward for the kindness you have both given to one who, but for that kindness, would have been friendless and alone in the world.”

CHAPTER XV.

It was with a light heart that Erne received his cousin’s summons. “Come,” she wrote, “and we will go to Velletri, as you proposed. The weather is perfect, and Irène is looking forward to the excursion with eagerness.”

Irène’s eagerness found an echo as Erne read these words; and with a step as light

as his heart he was walking down the Corso half an hour later. Why he felt so much elated would have puzzled himself to tell, further than that he would for a few days be with Irène among the most beautiful scenes. He knew that he had nothing beyond this to look forward to; yet this was a pleasure beyond which he would not look. "She does not care—she never will care—in the least for me," he thought; "but that does not hinder my feeling for her as Dante did for Beatrice. She will be my inspiration more than if I could win her. I realized that from the first. No doubt if there was any hope of her listening to me I should repeat the folly of which I have already been guilty; but there is no hope, and I am resigned. I can not imagine her as the wife of one man. She was made to be the star of many hearts."

Like most imaginative people, Erne found real comfort in his own imaginations, and it was naturally easier for him to assign to Irène a lofty stellar destiny than to fancy her bestowing on some other man what she had denied to him. "Some other man"—be he abstract or particular—is always the object of a lover's keenest detestation; and it pleased Erne to believe that this obnoxious person would not fare better than himself.

It was at this point of his thoughts that, looking up, he found himself suddenly face to face with Count Waldegrave, who was emerging from the Via Condotti, as he was about to turn into it. There was an exchange of salutations—after which Waldegrave, pausing for an instant, said:

"If you will permit me, I will walk with you for a short distance," and turned around.

Erne, although much surprised, assented courteously, and so for a moment they walked on together in silence. Then Waldegrave said:

"I have just been to call on Mr. Stanhope, and I find that he has left Rome. In consequence, I have entirely lost sight of Mrs. Falconer, and—Miss Lescar. Yet I am very anxious to see the latter. Am I asking you to violate confidence in telling me where she is?"

Now, if Erne hesitated a moment, it was not because he felt that he would be violating confidence in answering the question—for Mrs. Falconer, never dreaming of any encounter on his part with Count Waldegrave, had not exacted a promise from nor made a request of secrecy to him—but because a quick sense of jealousy rose in his breast. If this man had received the same inflexible "No" that had been his own answer from Irène, why was he not resigned to abide by it as he (Erne) was? Why did he wish to go and trouble her with vain pleading? Or, if he desired to address her again on the subject of her father's offer, he ought to know that such appeal was useless. These thoughts passed rapidly through his mind before he answered:

"I should not violate any confidence in telling you where she is; but I must doubt whether your seeing her again would be advisable."

It was on the point of Waldegrave's tongue to say, haughtily, "You will allow me to judge of that"; but he restrained the impulse, conscious that it was in Erne's power to give or withhold the information he desired. What he said was:

"It is not without a good reason that I desire to see her; and a reason which concerns myself in a very small degree. In every way she would be happier if she could be induced to forgive the past and take from her father's hand her proper place in the world. Any one who is her friend must wish her to do this."

"I am not sure on that point," said Erne. "I am her friend—and I do not wish it."

“Then,” said the other, quietly, “you do not wish to see the triumph of the noblest part of her nature over the less noble. I do—and I have not resigned the hope of securing such a triumph.”

“You would do well to resign it,” said Erne. “You do not know her if you fancy that you will ever induce her to forget the past sufficiently to entertain any association with her father.”

“You only echo what every one else has said,” answered Waldegrave; “but I have hope of better things. And it is a hope which I shall not resign. Therefore I ask again if you will tell me where she is?”

“I am not aware of any reason why I should not tell you,” said Erne, after a slight pause. “She is with Mrs. Falconer at Albano. But I have just received a letter from my cousin desiring me to join them, in order that they may go to Velletri.”

“And you go—?”

“To-day, by the evening train. We shall probably leave Albano to-morrow.”

“It is impossible for me to leave Rome to-day, or to-morrow either,” said Waldegrave, reflectively. “But, after that, you will be established at Velletri?”

“In a manner. We propose to make it our headquarters for a series of excursions among the Volscian Hills. This being the case, it is very doubtful whether you would find Miss Lescar if you went there—and I advise you to wait until her return to Rome, to make any effort to see her.”

Waldegrave smiled—a smile which indicated little intention of following the advice thus volunteered—then, with a few words of thanks, turned away, as they entered the Piazza di Spagna.

Erne looked after him uneasily. Now that it was too late, he was sorry for having given the information asked of him. The thought that Waldegrave might appear at any time to disturb and agitate Irène threw a shadow in advance over the enjoyment he had so eagerly pictured to himself. “Confound him!” the young fellow muttered. “Why can he not let her alone, and why did I not refuse to tell him where she is?”

Regrets being useless, however, his sanguine spirit soon reasserted itself, and he hoped that Waldegrave’s own good sense would show him the folly of a journey to Velletri, with no certainty of finding Irène, when by waiting patiently he could see her in Rome. He forgot, what Waldegrave remembered, that the difficulty of seeing her in Rome, now that Mrs. Falconer had declined to assist him again, was much greater than it would probably be in a place where he might contrive to take her by surprise.

It was the latter consideration which, three or four days later, moved him to do what his heart prompted—go to Velletri. It is a short journey from Rome to this old Volscian town, once besieged by Coriolanus. Little more than an hour over the Naples Railway places the modern traveler within its gates. But when Waldegrave drove to the principal hotel he found that those whom he came to seek were gone. The landlord himself came forward to answer his inquiries. “They went to Cori yesterday, signor, and will not return until to-morrow—if then. One of the signori talked of going on to Segni—he with the sketch-book, who has been here before. It is possible that they may do so.”

“Then I will follow them to Cori,” said the signor. “Order me a carriage at once.”

The carriage was ordered, and half an hour later he drove out of Velletri, along the green bowery lanes which environ the town on all sides, and which are particularly charming at this season, when the flowers that line them fill the air with their fragrance.

Everywhere rioted the sweet, wild honeysuckle, which the people lovingly call *fiori della Madonna*, because it blooms in the month of May; bands of peasants were at work in the hill-side vineyards that produce the famous wine of Velletri; and now and then, between the gnarled stems of olive-trees, were enchanting glimpses over the blue masses of farther and nearer mountains. But when at length the road began to ascend the steep height

“Whence Cora’s sentinels o’erlook
The never-ending fen”—

the view widened, and with every onward step grew more beautiful. “The never-ending fen”—in other words, that land where death lies hid under flowers, known as the Pontine Marshes, and of which the name gives a most erroneous idea—spread afar to the glittering sea, where the magical Cape of Circe stretched out in full view, while near it lay the soft purple islands of San Felice, Ponza, and Pandataria, where some of the worst cruelties of the Roman emperors were perpetrated.

But Waldegrave was for once thinking as little as the most shallow tourist of the loveliness which surrounded him, or the historical and poetical associations which rose up on every side. He had been to Cori before; he knew its streets, like staircases, too steep for anything but foot-passengers and mules, its ancient walls, its beautiful temples; and when he heard that the party of which he was in search had started early to Norba, he only delayed long enough to engage a mule and a guide, and set out to follow them.

Even in his absorbed mood, however, the glorious scenery into which he plunged on leaving the gates of Cori on the Norba side, began to tell. After crossing the picturesque bridge which, built of great masses of tufa, spans a deep ravine, he found himself following a road that wound along the side of the mountain, with precipices above and below, and a boundless view over the gleaming outspread world. As he advanced, the scenery grew more wild—a few goats browsing among the rocks were the only living creatures visible—and he could have fancied himself journeying through some deserted prehistoric region. Presently Norma came in sight, crowning its tremendous precipice of rock with rugged, towering heights all around it; and then the ancient citadel of Norba, which has been a ruin since the time of Sylla, yet the Cyclopean walls of which are absolutely untouched by decay. Perched like an eagle’s nest upon an almost inaccessible height, it is a spot where silence reigns, and has reigned, through all the centuries since its garrison, finding themselves betrayed into the hands of Lepidus, put themselves and all the inhabitants to the sword. Some memory of that tragedy—fit hearts they must have been to hold this citadel of giants—seems to linger in the sunshine which broods over the inclosure within those massive stones. And from this elevation what a panorama is spread before the gaze! The Pontine Marshes lie below, their forests and flowery plains set with lakes that gleam in the sunlight like jewels.

The line of the Appian Way can be distinctly traced as it passes across the marshes; and Cisterna—the Three Taverns of St. Paul—glitters in the sunshine. There are the town and lake of Fogliano, buried in a thick green wood—a magical, haunted-looking spot — while near the shore, with dark woods stretching around it also, is the celebrated castle of Astura. Lake after lake the eye discerns shining like molten gold in a setting of richest emerald, and forests extending to the sea, the level sapphire expanse of which fades afar into that misty sky-line where, from the sentinel watch-towers, the dreaded

sails of the Saracens were so often to be seen, bringing terror and dismay.

Here, again, Waldegrave found that those of whom he was in search had eluded him. The citadel was silent and deserted. But the guide was at no loss. He advanced to the edge of the precipice, and pointed downward, saying, "They are there."

Waldegrave's glance followed his pointing hand, and he saw the spot which had so fascinated Irène's imagination, and which has been admirably described by one * who also looked upon it from this height:

"Immediately beneath us is a ring of green ivy walls, encircling many wonderful mounds which all seem formed of flowers and ivy. Gray towers rise out of this, ruins all overhung with green, and in the midst of the strange circle we may see a silver spring gushing forth and glowing through the Pontine Marshes, and ending in a sparkling lake far away by the sea-shore. We ask in astonishment what this curious garlanded circle is, with its many green hillocks, and we are told that it is Ninfa—Ninfa, the Pompeii of the middle ages."

CHAPTEK XVI.

"It is even more strangely beautiful than I had imagined," said Irène. "Indeed, it would be quite impossible for one to conceive anything so like enchantment."

It was to Erne she spoke. They had succeeded in making their way into the barricaded city, for the flower-sprites which inhabit it are not without defenses, and its gates are barred by the long tendrils of the ivy which has covered every foot of the walls with thickest verdure. Having entered, it was as if they had stormed and carried the capital of Fairy-land. An indescribable sensation filled them as they wandered along grassy streets mosaicked with flowers, between houses out of whose windows roses, honeysuckle, and jasmine looked, where noble mediaeval palaces stood half-buried in green, and the only sound was the sighing of the wind among the leaves, or the voice of the swiftly rushing Nymphaeus. Irène thought of the charming and fantastic yet most accurate description which she had read with Erne the night before: "All the streets are filled with flowers, which seem to march in procession to the ruined churches. They climb on every tower, they lie laughing and smiling in all the desolate windows, they barricade every door, for within the houses reside elves, fairies, water-nymphs, and a thousand charming spirits of the fable-world. Yellow marigolds, mallows, sweet narcissus, gray-bearded thistles who once dwelt here as monks, white lilies who were nuns in their life-time, wild roses, laurestinus, masticks, tall ferns, wreaths of clematis and bramble; the red fox-glove which look like enchanted Saracens; the fantastic caper-plant growing in the clefts of the buildings, the sweet wall-flower, the myrtle, and the fragrant mint; brilliant yellow broom and dark ivy, which creeps over all the ruins and falls over the walls like green cascades—one may fling one's self into this sea of flowers, quite intoxicated by the perfume, and the most charming fairy power enchains the soul." All this wealth of color lay around them, and the beautiful architecture of the middle ages lent itself to the picturesque decay in a manner impossible to describe. For "how can one depict in words a shattered bell-tower, with round windows, or windows divided by small pillars, with its frieze formed of sharply pointed tiles, and with its romantic decorations of ivy and flowers, waving in the wind? or how picture the ruins of the arched niches, or the

* Gregorovius.

nave of the church all overhung with tapestries of flowers? The churches are old—they belong to the eleventh or twelfth century, if they are not of a still earlier date, for they are built in the simple basilica style. In their deserted space the flowers worship now, and the censers are swung by roses. From the walls, or perhaps from an ivy-hung tribune, some old fresco-paintings still look down. They represent early Christians with palms in their hands, and instruments of martyrdom by their side. With faded nimbi on their pale foreheads, in golden dalmatica, with stole upon their shoulders, they look from behind their veil of flowers, and seem shocked by the heathen rites which the children of Flora are daring to celebrate in these deserted churches.”

But Irène shook her head when Erne quoted this, as they stood in one of the churches. “I do not think they are here to celebrate any heathen rites,” she said. “I think they are here to praise and worship God, instead of those who come no longer. What fancy is it that we must turn away from Christianity and go back to paganism if we want poetical ideas? I do not think the gentle saints are ‘shocked.’ I think they are quite willing that flowers should come, since people can worship here no more. It seems fitting that their fragrance should fill the consecrated walls where the incense of prayer no longer rises.”

“One can not get rid of the idea that they must be conscious,” said Mrs. Falconer. “It is such a strange, enchanted-looking place! If the inhabitants were not, by some spell of magic, converted into flowers, what became of them?”

“It is a mystery,” said Erne. “There is not even a tradition to tell the story of the desertion of the place.”

“A stranger mystery to me,” said Stanhope, “is how it could ever have been inhabited. It must always have been the home of fever.”

“What is its history?” asked Mrs. Falconer. “Surely it has a history.”

“It is very obscure,” answered Stanhope. “The Frangipani—that race of glorious name *—possessed it in the twelfth century. In the thirteenth it passed to the Gaetani, whose descendants still hold it. But it must always have been flowery, since a church was dedicated here in 1216 to Santa Maria del Mirteto—that is, ‘of the Myrtle-grove.’”

“So the flowers have a right to come in,” said Irène, smiling. “They were in a manner invited by that dedication.”

“In ancient times,” said Erne, “a temple of the Nymphs stood by the lake, and it is evident that the name of the stream was derived from it—probably the name of the town also.”

“I thought you told me that the name of the town was derived from that of a maiden called ‘la bella Ninfa,’” said Irène.

“That is what the people of Norma say—a maiden who flung herself from the tall tower that stands by the pool at the entrance of the town, to escape marrying the *sposa* her parents had chosen for her.”

“Then I do not think she is as creditable a sponsor as the nymphs,” said Mrs. Falconer, “and I prefer to believe that the name comes from them.”

“She must have been very miserable,” said Irène.

Presently, when they were in the silent, flower-filled streets again, she said: “Let us go to the castle. I should like to mount to the top of the tower, if possible.”

“I hope you are not thinking of imitating the example of ‘la bella Ninfa,’” said

* The name signifies “bread-breakers,” and is derived from their immense charity in a time of famine.

Erne, smiling.

“I can not imagine any degree of unhappiness which could make that possible to me,” she answered.

No one objecting, they turned their steps in the direction of the castle, which stands at the entrance of the town, and was the seat of its barons. The square mediaeval tower rises high above its walls, and, with the mass of ivy-hung ruins, is beautifully reflected in the still waters of a pool, fringed with flowers and surrounded by tall reeds, that lies immediately below it.

After forcing an entrance into the castle which the ivy barred, as if fearing an invasion of Saracens from the coast, or warlike barons from the neighboring heights, they found it not difficult to mount the tower, for steps built of stone, in the glorious middle-age fashion, do not crumble or decay. It would be impossible to imagine a more wild or beautiful scene than that which rewarded them. The pool below was, in its absolute stillness, like a part of the enchanted world of death which surrounded it. White lilies were open on its breast, but no ripple crossed the still surface of the water. Like a mirror, reflecting the massive castle with its banners of ivy and the tall, solitary tower, it lay. A sense of something strange and unearthly seemed to brood over the spot: it was easy to fancy departed souls being ferried across the death-bearing expanse, where the only sound was of the wind among the reeds, or the sobbing cry of the water-hen which came at intervals from the neighboring marsh. On the other side of the castle the fairy ring of Ninfa lay in green beauty and magical silence. Above rose the noble height on which Norba stands, with its citadel

“Piled by the hands of giants
In godlike days of old,”

while, looking over the luxuriant expanse of the Pontine Marshes, they could trace the sparkling, foaming Nymphaeus, and see the Circean mount glittering in the evening light.

“It is certainly a marvelous place,” said Stanhope, breaking a long silence. “One might believe that Virgil or Dante had seen it, it is so like the mythic regions of their wonderful shadow-worlds.”

“Is it not?” said Irène. “I never felt like a disembodied spirit before, but I feel like one now. It seems to me that I have left the world behind, and that I am here waiting for Charon, who, with his boat, will presently push out from the shore yonder.”

“I confess that I have no such feeling,” said Mrs. Falconer; “but there is something of awe in the thought that death lies hidden under all this beauty—that it would be at the peril of our lives if we staid here after the sun sank.”

“We must not wait for the sun to sink,” said Stanhope. “We must be well away before then. Indeed”—he glanced at his watch—“we have not very much longer to remain.”

“Then let us go down,” said Mrs. Falconer. “We have not half explored the town.—Come, Irène.”

But Irène did not heed the summons. Leaning her arms on the ivy-hung battlements, she was looking up at the blue, entrancing mountains and over the flowery lake; and, since she did not move. Erne, of course, lingered with her after Mrs. Falconer and Stanhope were gone. They were silent for some time, until at length she said,

abruptly:

“Why are most people so afraid of death? There is nothing terrible in it, unless we make the terror for ourselves. To me it is attractive—like a vision of peace and beauty.” Then, after another pause: “If it were not wrong, do you know what I should do? I would stay here and see the moon rise. Then, indeed, we should behold an enchanted city.”

“I wish that it were possible,” said Erne, “but it is not.”

“What should we see, do you think?” she went on. “Would the Will-o’-the-wisps from the marsh come to storm the town and carry off the flower-spirits? Should we see Charon wafting his pale freight of souls across this water, and would there be among them the grave, ineffably melancholy face of the great Florentine? Would the churches be lighted up and vespers sung by the flowers? Or would the Duke of Alba come riding down the mountain to demand the surrender of the castle? We shall never know what takes place when the moon shines over Ninfa.”

“Never,” he answered, smiling. “But I think we must go now; some one is coming for us.”

Some one was certainly mounting the stone stair within—a step that rang against them as their mailed lords’ might have done in days gone by. Erne listened in surprise. It was undoubtedly not the step of the guide; it was hardly, he thought, the step of Stanhope. Were there strangers besides themselves in Ninfa? Impelled by curiosity, he walked to the head of the staircase, and there came face to face with Waldegrave.

Neither spoke for a moment. Then, looking past the young man, who almost unconsciously barred his way to the slender figure leaning over the battlements, Waldegrave said:

“I saw Mrs. Falconer and Mr. Stanhope below. They told me that I would find Miss Lescar here.”

His tone implied, “I wish to see her alone,” and so Erne understood it. But he hesitated. Jealousy on his own account, and irritation on behalf of Irène, prompted him to hold his ground, yet, in common courtesy, it was scarcely possible to do so. Had he not been enjoying Irène’s society all day and for several days, and should he now churlishly refuse to leave the field free to Waldegrave for half an hour? The instinct of the gentleman triumphed: he could not do so. Moving aside, he said, “I shall wait for Miss Lescar below,” and went down-stairs as Waldegrave walked to Irène’s side.

Thinking it was Erne, she turned as he approached, saying,

“Well, are we to go?”—then, seeing Waldegrave, drew back with a low exclamation and a paling face.

He on his part said, quickly: “Do not let me startle you! I am sorry to have come upon you so unexpectedly, but since I can only see you by accident—that is, by turning accident to my own advantage—how can I avoid it?”

“Why should you wish to see me?” she asked, after an instant, in a pained tone. “I told you that I would never willingly see you again.”

“And what did I tell you?” he asked in turn. “Did I not tell you that no space should be wide enough to divide us—that, if necessary, I would follow you over sea and land until I won from you the triumph of your nobler self?”

She did not flash out upon him as she had done once before, and as he half expected now. It was evident that some change had passed over her which, for the present

at least, had subdued the fiery spirit. She only looked at him with an expression at once appealing and sorrowful.

“Then,” she said, “do you know to what you condemn me? It is to a constant, wearing struggle, which in the end will kill me. I am exhausted by it now, and the only peace is when I can for a little while forget. For the last few days, in these fresh and beautiful scenes, I have in a manner somewhat forgotten, and now you come to bring the memory of conflict back. Is it my punishment because for an unworthy motive I consented to know you, and so brought all that has followed upon myself? Of late I have had many hours in which to reflect, and I have seen, as in a mirror, how all flows from that. I should never have consented to know you. Because I did consent, I am punished. But are you not satisfied with what I have had to suffer already? Will you not leave me alone?”

There was a poignant entreaty in her last words that pierced Waldegrave’s heart. It was like an echo of the painful struggle of which she spoke—of passionate forces which might, indeed, prove too much for the heart in which they battled.

“You must know,” he said, after a moment, in a tone as low and as pained as her own, “that I would not willingly do anything the result of which could be to cause you suffering.”

“Then,” she said, clasping her hands in the urgency of her speech, “go—and do not let me see you again! This has grown too much for my strength. I can not bear any more.”

Waldegrave was silent for a moment. What could he say? Words seemed useless after that appeal—an appeal like the cry of a wounded, struggling soul.

“If you would only believe,” he said, at length, “if I could only make you believe, that the best end for the struggle—the only true peace—would lie in forgiving the past—”

“You only say that,” she answered, “because you do not know what deep roots my feeling has. Do not talk of it! Only be generous—only be kind—only leave me!”

“Do you know what you ask of me?” he said, after another pause. “How can I leave you? Do you forget that I love you—passionately, intensely, as I never imagined it possible to love? Loving you thus, how can I accept your sentence of banishment?”

“Because for that reason alone—if there were no other—it would be necessary,” she answered. “What is there but banishment for one who loves where love is hopeless?”

“And is mine absolutely hopeless?” he asked. “Can I never hope to triumph over the feeling which holds you from me, as I have already triumphed over the prejudice with which you at first regarded me?”

“There is no comparison,” she answered. “To put aside prejudice—that was only a matter of justice. But the other—that is like the blood of my heart. Do you know the story of this tower—how a girl leaped from it once into that still water below, into the very arms of death, to escape a marriage worse than death to her? Well, I could do that sooner than forget the past.”

“Sooner than marry me, do you mean?” he asked, in a tone of sharp pain.

There was silence. Irene turned her face away, and looked over the still, gleaming water, over the level, green expanse of the marsh where death lay hid under riotous life. She had not told—she had not meant to tell him—that. But if he believed it—?

He did not mean to believe it without clear and definite assurance. He felt that this was a moment which could hardly be repeated—and that, whatever it cost, he must

know the truth. His voice, therefore, took a deeper tone of insistence as he said:

“If that is what you mean, tell me so! If my love only inspires you with aversion, I would wish to know it.”

“Aversion—no,” she answered, in a low, reluctant voice. “But why do you trouble—why do you press me? Does it matter what degree of like or dislike I feel? It is all one. A gulf as great as the gulf of death lies between us.”

“I will never acknowledge it—never!” he said. “There is no gulf save what your own feeling makes.”

“And what is feeling but the better part of ourselves?” she asked, turning her eyes back upon him. “I could sooner—far sooner—open my veins and let out the blood in them, than tear out of my heart the feeling which would make it impossible for me to think of marrying you—even if I loved you.”

Something in her voice, in her eyes, in the faltering accent of the last words, suddenly let a flood of light in upon him—a flood that, for a moment, almost stunned him. Then, like a flash of electricity, some words of Stanhope’s recurred to his memory: *“I believe that so deeply is the memory and the resentment of her mother’s wrong impressed on her nature, that, if you could win her heart, it would only be to inaugurate a worse struggle with herself than any she has known yet.”* Had he done this? Was that what the passionate entreaty of her tone, the new traces of struggle on her face, meant? He was struck dumb by the thought.

Meanwhile Irène went on—clasping her hands above her heart as if she would fain stop its beating—and her voice taking a more pathetic tone:

“Surely I have said enough—surely now you will go and make no more attempts to see me! It can serve no purpose—none. You only keep alive a conflict that is wearing out my strength. And you mistake if you think that what you urge is even possible to me. It is not. I am not exaggerating—I am not saying anything which I do not mean—when I tell you that I could sooner leap from this tower than forget or forgive the past.”

“But I had no part in the wrong of that past,” he said. “Why, then, should it make a barrier between us?”

“Why are the sins of the fathers visited upon the children? Why does one generation sow and another reap its harvest of evil or good? You and I must reap of evil. I, in any case, but you—well, you need not have suffered it, for of the wrong you were, indeed, guiltless, had I not been led away by bitterness to unworthy desires. I am punished—believe me, fitly punished—for that.”

“The last thing which I could possibly wish is that you should be punished for any pain that I have suffered,” he said. “I count it less than nothing, if I may be allowed to make any reparation for the past—if I can at last win you to let me efface its consequences. Why will you not listen to me? why will you not believe that this is the right, the noble, the generous thing for you to do? Irène, I can not go! I am pleading for you more than for myself—I am showing you where the true end of struggle lies. My love—whom I loved before I knew that one drop of kindred blood was in our veins—if there is in your heart a single throb that answers to mine—”

“No, no!” she cried, like one who starts back from a precipice. She retreated from him, and stood near the battlement, as if at bay. “Go,” she said. “I have given you my answer. There can never be any other possible between us. Go.”

There was a passion of mingled entreaty and command in the last word, which he

understood clearly. He saw that her fear was of herself more than of him. He stood irresolute. How was it possible to refuse to obey such a command?—yet how could he go?

The knot of his perplexity was sharply cut. A clear voice behind him said:

“Irène! you must come down. The guide declares that we are staying here too late for safety, and that we have barely time to reach Cori if we start immediately.”

It was Mrs. Falconer, who looked very cold and resolute when Waldegrave turned toward her, while Irène hurried down the stair. She waited until the girl was out of hearing—then said, in a tone as cold as her look:

“I told you once, M. le Comte, that you had my best wishes; but I must tell you now, that, while Irène continues under my care, I can not consent to her being annoyed and pained in this manner. She has a right to say who she will, or will not, see. She has distinctly declared that she does not wish to see you. I must beg you, therefore, to make no further effort to force your presence on her.”

The young man bowed. “I acknowledge that you are right to make the request,” he said; “and I recognize that I have accomplished no good in this interview. My only excuse is that my motive has been less selfish than it may appear. But I will not again make an effort to see her without her own or your consent.”

CHAPTER XVII.

It is difficult to say how warmly or how frequently Erne anathematized Waldegrave in the safe depths of his inner consciousness, when he saw what a change that half-hour had wrought in Irène. The girl who came down the tower-stair was no more the same girl who had leaned over its battlement, weaving her fancies of what might be seen when the moon rose over Ninfa, than a crushed lily is like the same flower in the freshness of newly opened beauty. She was like one who had been crushed by strong emotion, and out of whom, for the time being, all interest in things around her had departed.

Everything was ready for departure; the mules were standing in the gate-way, and she suffered herself to be mounted, with scarcely a glance at the fairy-like loveliness which a little while before had so enchanted her. Yet Ninfa wore now its most beautiful aspect, as the level sunset flooded it with light, bringing out all the wonderful effects of its ivy walls and flower-decked ruins. But it was a beauty under which the terrible shade of fever lurked; and, as soon as Mrs. Falconer returned, the guide hurried them away. After they had gone some distance they looked back at the magic city. It was filled with unspeakable richness of color in the evening glow; the lake was like a sheet of gold, and on the tall tower one solitary figure stood, outlined against the sky, as if watching for the boat which would bear him to the shadow-land of departed souls. It was their last glimpse of Ninfa. They turned around the hills and saw it no more.

“Really, I hope that Count Waldegrave does not mean to stay there and take fever as a means of committing suicide,” said Mrs. Falconer to Stanhope. “I am provoked with him; but I do not wish him so bad a fate as that.”

“He will not stay there much longer, I dare say,” replied Stanhope, who had no great fear of fever. “It is likely that he means to return to Norma to spend the night.”

But Waldegrave meant no such thing; nor had he any intention of taking fever as

a means of suicide. As soon as the little procession had wound out of sight, he descended from the tower, mounted, and slowly followed them toward Cori.

It was well that he did so; for the first person whom he met as he climbed the steep streets of the town, while the Ave Maria was ringing from the church-towers overhead, was his own confidential servant, who had followed him from Rome with a telegraphic dispatch.

It was from Nice, and marked "Important." Waldegrave tore it open with a foreboding heart, and read: "Prince Waldegrave has had another seizure, and is very ill. Come at once."

He was exceedingly weary from his day's travel, but the thought of delay did not occur to him. The servant, who knew everything that would be demanded of him, had learned at what hour the last train that night would pass Velletri. There was barely time to reach it by starting instantly, and Waldegrave merely stopped for much-needed refreshment before flinging himself into the carriage which brought him to Cori, and promising the driver a liberal reward if he reached Velletri before the train left.

The next day Irène seemed so indifferent to continuing their excursions that Mrs. Falconer, after consultation with Stanhope, declared her intention of going back to Rome—turning a deaf ear to Erne's proposals with regard to Segni, Alatri, and Ferentino.

"No doubt they are all very interesting places," she said. "But it is now growing late in the season, and I have many things to do as a preparation for leaving Rome. Do not be unreasonable! You have shown Irène Norba and Ninfa, as you wished to do."

"Yes; and had her pleasure and my own pleasure spoiled by the intrusion of Count Waldegrave," said Erne. "She has been a different creature from the moment he appeared. He has certainly some strong power over her."

"He has the power of recalling all the bitterness and struggle which darken her life," said Mrs. Falconer; "and for that reason, more than any other, I wish to return to Rome, in order to take her, as soon as possible, away from such influences."

"Where do you go when you leave Rome?"

"To Paris for a time."

This was consoling; for, to a young gentleman who plays at art, what place surpasses Paris in the number and variety of its advantages? Erne's face began to lose its elongated aspect. "Well," he said, "that is, no doubt, the best thing you can do; and Paris is particularly agreeable just now. I shall not be sorry to see the Champs-Élysées again."

As for Irène, when she heard of the intended return to Rome, it was with a sense of relief almost as great as pleasure. The solemn walls, the great, noble churches, the deep-colored streets, were to her like a vision of the native hearth to a homesick wanderer. There, if anywhere, peace was to be won—there, where every memory of history and tradition of faith were like hands stretched out to aid the struggling soul.

So they returned to Rome, and, on the afternoon of the day following their arrival, while Mrs. Falconer went to Lady Dorchester, to hear an authoritative account of the reports concerning Irène, which Stanhope had mentioned, Irène herself begged Mrs. Vance to go out with her on one of their old expeditions. Taking a carriage, they went to that stately basilica which crowns the Equiline—"St. Mary's snowy fane"—the beautiful story of the foundation of which is yearly commemorated, on the 5th of August, by showers of white rose-leaves which, during the solemn high mass, are continuously

floating down from the ceiling “like a leafy mist between priests and worshipers,” in memory of the original miraculous fall of snow. There is not in Rome a more beautiful and harmonious building than this ancient and patriarchal basilica. The magnificent nave, with its avenue of marble columns, surmounted by a frieze of mosaic pictures of the fifth century, seems, as one advances, to increase indefinitely in length and majesty. The pavement under foot is of splendid opus-alexandrinum, the crimson and violet hues of which contrast with the white marble of the pillars and the rich gilding of the carved and paneled roof, covered with the first gold brought to Spain from the New World, and presented by Ferdinand and Isabella to this basilica, which, in the days when Christendom existed in fact as well as in name, was under the protection of the sovereigns of Spain, as that of St. John Lateran was of the sovereigns of France, and that of St. Paolo *fuori le mura* of the sovereigns of England. Glorious mosaics of the thirteenth century cover the vault of the tribune, and look down with the calm serenity of the faith which produced them; porphyry columns support the great baldacchino over the high altar, precious marbles and alabasters line the chapels. Loving hearts and generous hands have, for fifteen centuries, brought their treasures of wealth and art, and poured them out in this noble sanctuary—making it in beauty, as in antiquity, Santa Maria Maggiore.

To Irène these old temples were the very shrines and home of peace. When the heavy curtain of the door fell, the world was to her like a thing forgotten. No footstep wandering down the mighty aisles could stir the repose which filled them. To-day she felt strangely languid and inert, but still the customary sense of rest seemed to meet her like a benediction as she walked down the great nave of the church. At another time she would have been thrilled to the quick with its long array of glorious memories, extending over all the ages since that August day in the year of our Lord 352, when Pope Liberius solemnly consecrated this spot to God and the Blessed Mother of God. But personal emotion is narrowing in its effect, and she was suffering under the long-continued strain of a personal emotion of the keenest order—an emotion from which she was now seeking refuge and relief. Crossing over to the beautiful Chapel of the Holy Sacrament, she knelt there so long that Mrs. Vance at length touched her shoulder. When she rose—as she did at once—the elder lady was struck by her strangely pallid look.

“My dear,” she said, quickly, “you have been too long in this cold church. Come out into the sunshine immediately.”

“I am cold,” Irène said, with an involuntary shiver, “though I did not think of it before. Yet the atmosphere of the church seemed very pleasant to me when we entered it.”

“It strikes with a chill, however, when one stays too long,” said Mrs. Vance. She took the girl’s hand as she spoke. “You feel as if you had a chill,” she said. “I shall take you home at once.”

But against this Irène protested. And thinking that what she felt was probably only the effect of having been long motionless, in an atmosphere much colder than that of the outer air, Mrs. Vance consented to go with her to the May devotions and Benediction at Sant’ Andrea della Valle. But, when this was over, and they came out of the church into the dying evening light, it was quite evident that it was no passing chill that had fastened on Irène. She was now white as a sheet, and shaking with cold.

“I am afraid that I must be ill,” she said. “I feel wretchedly.”

"I wish I had insisted on going home from Santa Maria Maggiore," said Mrs. Vance.

They drove quickly home now, and, when they alighted under their own *portone*, Irène said:

"I will go to bed at once, and no doubt I shall be well to-morrow; but first I must speak to Mrs. Falconer, lest she should be uneasy about me, and tell her why I can not appear at dinner."

Antonio opened the door for them, and she turned into the grand *sala*, intending to pass on to the boudoir, where Mrs. Falconer would probably be. But her first glance as she entered the room showed her Mrs. Falconer talking to Stanhope. Both turned as she appeared, and on the faces of both was set the seal of some new and startling knowledge—set so unmistakably that attempt at concealment was vain. Irène stopped short: a wild fear touched her heart. She saw again a figure standing in the evening light above the fever-haunted lake of Ninfa. She grew, if possible, paler than she had been before, and, putting out her hand, grasped the back of a chair. Yet, when she spoke, her voice was calm though tense:

"What has happened? What is the matter that you both look so strangely?" she asked.

They exchanged glances, and Mrs. Falconer murmured, "It may be best to tell her at once."

"It would be much the best," said Irène, who divined rather than heard the words. "What is it?"

Stanhope advanced and took one of her cold hands. "It is something," he said, gravely, "which can not be a grief, but may be a shock to you." He paused an instant, then added, "Prince Waldegrave is dead."

She stared at him for a moment as if she did not comprehend. Then, with dilated eyes still fixed on his face, repeated in a whisper, "Dead—are you sure?"

"Perfectly sure. He died in Nice this morning."

"Dead!" she repeated. It seemed as if her lips could utter no other sound. Her eyes left Stanhope's face and passed over the familiar scene around her, but finally turned back to him with the same awe-struck look. "It was here that he stood," she said. "Here that I told him I would sooner die than forgive him. But it is he who has died, and that was my last opportunity to do what my mother asked. *He* humbled his pride to come—I was hard and merciless. Now he has gone to answer at another bar." She threw her arms suddenly above her head. "O my God, forgive him!" she cried.

The next moment she had fallen fainting at Stanhope's feet.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The physician who was called in to see Irène looked so grave that Mrs. Falconer, who had heard from Mrs. Vance of the state in which the girl had returned home, asked anxiously if he feared anything serious.

"It is best to be frank with you," he answered. "There is danger of something very serious. The young lady has taken fever. How virulent its form may be, I can not yet tell—but there is much to fear."

It was indeed true. A frame weakened by mental struggle and laid open to the

influence of disease had absorbed some malaria amid the flowery haunts of Ninfa. The languor which had oppressed her ever since leaving there was thus in a measure accounted for; but the fever which would have resulted in any case was aggravated by the shock which had ended her long struggle.

A struggle of another kind followed now—one for life or death. The fever was not that violent disease which runs its fatal course in a day or two; but was of a lingering form, in which there were many fluctuations, trying to the hearts and tormenting to the hopes of those who watched beside the bed where the sick girl tossed in delirium or lay in a heavy stupor. So close was the battle, so unceasing had to be the vigilance, that these watchers hardly took note or measure of the passage of time. Everything was for them narrowed down to the hours for medicine, to the signs of the doctor's face, to all those things which go to make up the struggle of life or death in desperate illness.

Meanwhile, the world beyond the sick-room did not fail in kindness and attention. Prince Waldegrave's death, and the romantic stories which had been floating in the air, had quickened interest in Irène even beyond the point where it would in any case have been felt. Numbers of cards and flowers were daily left at Mrs. Falconer's door, and Antonio was constantly occupied with answering inquiries.

At length there came a day when he kept guard outside the door of the apartment, in order that no touch of its bell might disturb the carefully guarded quiet within; and those who came heard that the signorina lay almost at the point of death—so low that there was little hope of her ever rallying again.

The inquirers said to each other that the end was no doubt near—and those who were Catholic, as they turned away, dropped into the nearest church to pray for the soul in its agony. But in the room where Irène lay there was rather the battle of desperate hope than the calm which follows surrender. The doctor's low-voiced orders were executed instantly by the Sister of Charity who had been installed as chief nurse from the first, and by Mrs. Falconer and Mrs. Vance. Stimulants were unceasingly administered, and every effort made to keep the fever-wasted strength from sinking utterly. The fatal fire certainly seemed burned out. Like whitest marble now was the skin so lately flushed deep-red, and the lids lay heavily over the eyes which had been so brilliant with the light of delirium. Every few minutes the doctor would lift one attenuated hand which lay on the silken coverlet, to feel the feeble pulse where the vein ran like an azure thread under the skin.

They are terrible and heart-sickening moments these—when life and death hang in a balance so evenly poised that the watcher listens, with every sense intensely strained, for the faint breathing—fearing that it may have ceased. More than once they thought that the breath had ceased. "This is the supreme crisis," the doctors said. "It is now simply a question whether or not we can support nature with stimulants until the turn of the tide comes—if it comes at all."

The battle lasted through twelve hours. Then the turn of the tide came. Her pulse grew stronger, her breathing more perceptible. She was still unconscious, but her state was now more like sleep than stupor. The doctor's face relaxed. He caught Mrs. Falconer's appealing look, and said: "Go to bed and rest. There is hope."

Several hours later Irène awoke—conscious for the first time in many days, though weak as an infant, and needing more than ever, if possible, the most careful nursing. Food, stimulant, sleep—these things alone marked the recurring days, for what seemed an indefinite length of time. As in a dream, she saw familiar faces bending over

her, she took submissively whatever was put to her lips, and wondered in a vague manner at her own helplessness when she found that she was not able to lift her head from the pillow.

“I have been very ill, have I not?” she whispered one day faintly to the Sister who supported her with one arm, while with the other she held a cup of broth to her lips.

“You have been at death’s door, my child,” was the answer. “But God has seen fit to call you back. He has given you your life a second time.”

The gentle voice sank into the depths of Irène’s heart. Tears—which in weakness come easily—filled her great hollow eyes. “I do not see why He should have given it again to one who has made no more of it than I have,” she said.

“Ah,” said the Sister, cheerfully, “that is God’s way. If he waited to give us what we have deserved, we should never obtain anything. But he gives so generously that we must be ashamed not to try to give a little in return. Now drink your *bouillon*, and talk no more.”

But presently, of course, there came a time when this prohibition was removed, and Irène was permitted to talk as much as she liked. Not that she liked to talk much. Speech is a great effort when the body is weak or the mind weary. During the long hours of her convalescence she lay mostly silent, feeling life flow slowly back into her veins. It was on the day when she was first lifted up and placed in a large chair before an open window, through which she looked out on the roofs and towers of Rome once more, and where every breath of air came laden with the perfume of flowers, that she spoke for the first time of the news she had heard on the day she was taken ill.

“I want to ask you something,” she said to Mrs. Falconer, after a long silence. “Did I dream it in my delirium, or was I told, that Prince Waldegrave is dead?”

“You were told so,” answered Mrs. Falconer, in a low tone. “He has been dead a month.”

Silence fell again for several minutes. Mrs. Falconer watched the girl closely, rather dreading the effect of this agitating subject. But Irène seemed perfectly calm. The small, wasted hands remained lightly clasped together, and the large, clear eyes gazed steadily out at the sapphire sky.

“I thought that I could not have dreamed it,” she said, at length. “Mr. Stanhope told me in the grand *sala*, and I heard it standing just where he stood when he came to me.”

Mrs. Falconer could have told her how often she had talked of it in her delirium—how, not once, but a hundred times, she had gone over her interview with Prince Waldegrave, and the hour when she heard of his death—but she thought it best to let the past rest. As far as Irène’s relations with her father were concerned, its book was sealed for ever—the reparation which had been refused could never be offered again—the forgiveness denied never now be granted. Struggle was at an end—and she had no desire to intensify any regret the girl might feel.

But Irène herself went on speaking: “The greatest human grievance,” she said—“and surely mine has been very great—seems small in the presence of death. When one thinks of the soul before the bar of God’s judgment, one’s own judgment is turned into a cry for mercy on its behalf. And when one has stood on the brink of eternity one’s self—when its awful light has shone in one’s face—one sees many things differently from the manner in which they are seen by the light of time. Like fire then one beholds the words,

‘Forgive, as ye would be forgiven.’ And *I* did not forgive.”

“You forgive now,” said Mrs. Falconer. “That is much. Do not excite yourself by dwelling on the irrevocable past.”

“That is what makes it so terrible—that it *is* irrevocable,” said the girl. “I might not act differently if the chance were given me again—only no such chance is ever given us twice—for I can hardly believe that the fires of passion are all burned out; but at least I see my mother’s wisdom now. She wished to spare me what I have suffered and must suffer yet. She wished me to reach a noble height: but I was too weak—too weak. Yet how plain it is, in the light of the eternity into which *he* has entered, and on the threshold of which I have stood! No wrong has any real power to harm us unless we suffer it to drag us down to hatred. That was my mother’s word. I understand it now.”

“My poor child,” said Mrs. Falconer, “have you not suffered enough? Try to forgive yourself. Try to forget the past.”

“That is difficult,” said Irène. “Forgetfulness is not in our power.”

But after this she said no more on the subject, and when presently Mrs. Falconer began to speak of leaving Rome, she listened with interest to her plans, which were briefly that, as soon as she was able to travel, they would go to the Lago di Como, and thence to the Engadine. “Where we will stay,” Mrs. Falconer added, “until you have quite recovered your strength.”

A fortnight later the doctor declared that this programme should be carried out—that Irène was sufficiently strong to travel, and that she needed a more bracing atmosphere than that of Rome. So, preparations for departure were hurried forward; and, with a mingled sense of regret at going and of longing for the pure, health-giving air which she knew awaited her in that high region of peaks and clouds to which they were bound, Irène saw their last days in Rome drawing to a close.

It was on the last day but one that Erne came in to dinner, and having been told that Irène had for the first time that afternoon been taken out for a short drive, asked why they had not gone to St. Peter’s. “Do you know,” he said, “that the Quarant’ Ore is going on there? And anything more beautiful than that devotion in St. Peter’s can not be conceived.”

“Oh, I did not know, or I should have begged to be taken,” said Irène, in a tone full of regret. She was lying on a sofa in the boudoir, where the small party, consisting only of Mrs. Falconer, Mrs. Vance, Stanhope, and Erne, were assembled. The lights were low, for the windows were wide open, and the warm air was heavy with the fragrance of flowers which filled the apartment. In the dim light, Erne—who sat by the sofa—thought that Irène looked more like a spirit than a woman, as she lay, wrapped in a white, fleecy shawl which, despite the warmth, Mrs. Falconer had insisted on throwing over her. She raised herself a little as she went on speaking:

“I would not have missed it for anything—if I had only known! What a last memory it would be to take away from Rome!”

“Why should we not go now?” asked Erne, eager to gratify her. “It is even more beautiful by night than by day, you know.”

“If it were only possible—if they would only let me!” she said.

“There can surely be no possibility of harm for you, if we drive there quickly in a close carriage,” he said.

But, when the matter was proposed to Mrs. Falconer, she was of another opinion.

She was quite sure that it would not do to think of taking Irène out at night, until Stanhope, moved by Irène's great desire, finally agreed with Erne that it was difficult to see how the drive to St. Peter's in a close carriage could harm her.

"You must take the responsibility, then," said Mrs. Falconer, "for I fear that it is most imprudent."

"Oh, I will wear a fur cloak, if necessary," said Irène. "Only pray let me go!"

"You must promise not to stay a moment longer than I think right," said Mrs. Falconer.

Irène readily promised this, or anything else which could be demanded of her, and the carriage was ordered. Muffled up closely, she went down on Stanhope's arm, and the party were soon driving across the moonlit city. They had a brief glimpse of the brilliant Corso, with its festive-looking stream of modern life; then they plunged into narrow mediaeval streets, overshadowed by tall houses; then crossed the Ponte San Angelo, with the solemn Tiber flowing below, and saw above them the mighty walls of the Castle, with the glorious angel standing out superbly in floods of moonlight; then drove through the Leonine City into the great square of St. Peter's, with its fountains flashing silver in the lustrous light, which lay white as snow over the immense piazza and its sweeping, statue-crowned colonnades.

The carriage drew up at the foot of the steps, which people were here and there ascending or descending, looking, if possible, more like pygmies by moonlight than by daylight. Irène slowly mounted with the aid of Stanhope's arm, and supported by it across the portico and vestibule, entered the church. Stanhope heard her draw her breath with a deep inspiration as the curtain was lifted and the wonderful effect of the interior burst upon them.

It was an effect of which words can give little idea. Beautiful as the Devotion of the Forty Hours is in any Catholic church, most beautiful as it is in any of the great Roman basilicas, it is supremely beautiful in St. Peter's, where all the majesty of "this eternal ark of worship undefiled" seems only a fit setting for the radiance of the high altar. Irène felt glad, as the vision burst upon her, that her visit had been deferred until after night, so much was the impressiveness of the effect heightened. It seemed a solemn world of infinite space and majestic beauty into which they had entered. Far away—seeming twice as far as when seen by daylight—the high altar under the vast dome was a blaze of lights, which were blended by distance into a golden atmosphere of glory around the jeweled monstrance which held the Sacred Host. At intervals along the nave and aisles wax-candles of great size were placed in simple iron stands, but, unable to dissipate the obscurity, their light only made the gigantic proportions of the mighty arches, the depth and height of the chapels, the long vista of the aisles, more apparent. The roof seemed as far away as the sky, and the eye perceiving no limitations of space, the mind was unable to realize that it was within a temple built by the hands of man.

As they advanced up the nave, the splendor of the altar grew more and more dazzling. Immense numbers of wax-lights in rich candelabra were burning on it, in the light of which the rays of the monstrance, set with diamonds, glittered and flashed. The golden lamps before the shrine of the Apostles looked pale beside this mass of radiance. Before the altar were kneeling more than one cardinal and many monsignori, absorbed in prayer and motionless as statues. On the pavement below numbers of persons knelt, and over the whole church brooded a silence scarcely broken by a footfall. People came and

went, but their movements were almost noiseless. It was a scene never to be forgotten in its unearthly beauty, its touching awe.

But, beautiful as it was, it was not its beauty alone nor chiefly that appealed to Irène. To her the most deep and solemn thoughts came as she knelt with the light from the altar falling on her face like that light of eternity of which she had spoken. It was a piercing light, which seemed to penetrate the heart and lay bare the soul. "Learn of me," said the gentle voice of Him whose "delight is to be with the children of men"—a voice that never speaks with more appealing force than from the altar where he is throned to receive the homage of their love.

But Mrs. Falconer, very uneasy about what she feared was a great imprudence, would not suffer her to remain long. "You must come, my dear—remember your promise," she whispered, and Irène had no choice but submission. They passed out as slowly and softly as they had entered, leaving the lights to burn, the watchers to kneel through all the long hours of the night. Irène felt as if she were leaving her heart behind her. For this was Rome. *Here* was the true Eternal City. Turning when they reached the door to kneel again before the now distant altar—but beautiful in its distance as a vision of the New Jerusalem—she found herself almost too weak to rise without assistance. She looked around, but the others were already passing out of the door. Then, before she could make an effort to rise alone, some one stepped quickly forward from the shadow of a massive pillar and offered assistance. She accepted it, and, regaining her feet, found herself face to face with Waldegrave.

There was a moment's pause. Irène did not seem in the least startled, or even surprised. And as she stood, so calm, so pale, so shadowy-looking, Waldegrave felt, like Erne, as if a spirit rather than a woman was before him. After an instant, she silently held out her hand, and, when he relinquished it, she turned with a wistful look of farewell and passed out of the door, leaving him standing like one in a dream.

CHAPTER XIX.

"Where do you think you would like to go for your last drive in Rome?" asked Mrs. Falconer of Irène, the next afternoon.

Irène hesitated a moment, and then said: "I think I should like a short walk as well as a drive, and there is a beautiful view of the Campagna from the terrace of the Villa Mattei. Should you mind going there? And we can return by the Lateran."

Mrs. Falconer thought this a very good programme for a convalescent needing air and gentle exercise, and consented to carry it out. An hour later, as they were descending to the carriage which was drawn up at the foot of the steps, Stanhope walked in under the *portone*, and, being invited to accompany them, accepted the invitation.

As they drove out, Mrs. Falconer looked at him with a smile. "Do you remember," she said, "one day in Paris when you put Irène and myself for the first time in a carriage together, but declined to accompany us?"

"I remember it very well," he answered, returning the smile. "And you might give me credit for self-denial. I only declined because I wanted you to know each other, and, if possible, become friends."

"It proved very possible," said Mrs. Falconer, putting her hand down on Irène's. "The first links of our friendship were forged that day."

“And from the first to the last they have all been forged by your kindness,” said Irène.

It was not a long drive to the Villa Mattei, and, leaving the carriage at the gate, they walked slowly through the grounds—down the long avenues of closely trimmed box, under tall pines and picturesque ilexes, where statues stand out against a background of far blue hills, and fountains playing softly in green recesses. Here, as everywhere else in Rome at this season, bloomed, also, a multitude of flowers—roses lavishing their sweetness on the air, myrtle that seems to deck the earth for its bridal with the sun, orange-blossoms with their honeyed fragrance, and a wild riot of jasmine and honeysuckle.

Presently they emerged upon the terrace. At their feet were the noble old walls of Rome, beyond them the many-hued Campagna, crossed by the Titan arches of the ruined aqueducts, while bounding the horizon afar were the soft, luminous outlines of the Alban Hills, robed in tenderest color.

Even this short walk exhausted Irène, however, and when they came to that seat under the arching ilex-shade, where “Saint Philip Neri loved to sit and talk with his companions of the things of God,” Mrs. Falconer insisted that she should rest on it. Then, with an instinct that, in such a scene, the girl would like to be alone, she said:

“We will leave you here for a little while to enjoy the view, while Mr. Stanhope and myself explore the garden in the other direction.”

Irène looked up with a smile. “Do not hasten your return on my account,” she said. “I feel as if I should like to stay here all the afternoon.”

It was certainly a scene to sink into the spirit and remain engraved upon the memory. The wide distance of that storied plain, over which hangs, like a glamour of enchantment, an atmosphere full of the most exquisite tints and shades of color known to nature or to art, the divine beauty of those azure heights, fair as the heavenly hills “whence help cometh,” and the sapphire sky flecked by soft white clouds which threw their ever-changing shadows over plain and hills, so that the scene varied almost momentarily, and with every variation seemed to acquire new charm—all were full of a power which in Irène’s case touched some of the most sensitive chords of her being. Always an ardent lover of nature, she felt now as if earth and air and sky had a new meaning for her. She thought of what the Sister who nursed her had said: “God has given your life to you a second time.” It was indeed a new, fresh gift—this fair outspread beauty, this balmy sunshine, this sense of the great harmonies of nature.

And while she sat, silent and motionless, with the flickering shadows of the ilex-boughs falling over her black dress and the white hands, from which she had taken off her gloves, while her gaze dwelt on the soft outlines of the Alban heights, a step came again, as once before, down the ilex avenue behind her, and again an unseen spectator paused—full of surprise at seeing her, and uncertain whether or not to address her.

But so striking was her appearance of weakness, so evident the traces of recent illness—even more evident in this clear light than in the obscurity of St. Peter’s the night before—that he finally decided not to do so, and, retreating as he had come, met Mrs. Falconer and Stanhope at the other end of the avenue.

The consequence of this was, that a few minutes later Mrs. Falconer made her appearance in front of Irène, and when the latter looked up, saying, “Is it time to go?” she answered: “No. I have come for a different purpose. I do not like to trouble you, and yet I

hardly could refuse—” She paused; then, as Irène simply looked at her inquiringly, went on: “We met Count Waldegrave a few minutes ago. He came here accidentally—but, since he is here, he begged me to ask if you will allow him to speak to you. He promises not to be agitating.”

“Here!—is he here?” asked Irène. To Mrs. Falconer’s surprise, she exhibited no sign of astonishment or agitation. “I knew that he was in Rome. I saw him in St. Peter’s last night,” she said, quietly. “Yes, you may tell him to come. But do not leave us very long. Neither he nor I can have much to say.”

Mrs. Falconer did not feel sure of this, so far as Waldegrave was concerned, but she was very sure that it was not well that much should be said. So, promising to return before very long, she went away.

If Irène required to nerve herself at all for the coming interview, there was no sign of it in her appearance when Waldegrave presently stood before her. She had not stirred from the position in which he had seen her first; and when he appeared she only looked up and held out her hand silently, as she had done the night before. He clasped it as silently. It seemed impossible that either could speak. Yet at last he spoke first:

“You have been very ill. I would see it, even if I had not heard it.”

“Yes,” she answered, “I have been very ill—so ill that I am like one who has been called back from death. Do you know what that is?—to have stood on the brink of the other world, to have looked at this world from the verge of eternity? Nothing in life seems the same afterward. One gets new weights and measures, as it were.” She paused a moment and looked away from him—then turned her grave eyes back again. “I have changed—in one thing at least,” she said.

“And that thing?” he asked. But as he asked he thought to himself that she seemed changed in many things. He saw no signs of the old, haughty fire, and still less of the shrinking which she had displayed at Ninfa. She met his gaze with the calmness of one who in fierce struggle had exhausted the power of keen emotion, and reached at last a new height of knowledge and feeling.

But she did not answer his question immediately. She looked instead at the mourning which he wore, and, when she spoke, said, gently:

“You, too, have suffered since I saw you last. For you were attached to—Prince Waldegrave, were you not?”

“Very much,” he answered, in a low tone.

“I am sorry for you,” she said, with the same gentleness. “It is a terrible thing to lose one whom we love by death. I have thought of you—I have felt for you—and now I am glad to have an opportunity to tell you that, in the moment I heard of his death, I forgave him all the past. Everything rushed upon me then—the realization of what it must have been to him to humble his pride, and come to ask forgiveness and offer reparation—and the consciousness of how I had failed in what God commands, and my mother asked. I was beaten to the earth by that consciousness. Illness had fastened on me already—but that was the finishing stroke. I sank under it. I stood on the threshold of eternity, crying for the pardon I had dared to refuse—” she looked at him with great dilated eyes in her white face—“I deserved nothing, yet life was given back to me. I am here.”

“Thank God for it!” he exclaimed. “To lose one whom we love is indeed hard; but if it had been two—I did not know of your illness until I returned to Rome a few days ago. I went to Germany with my uncle’s body. I had much to do there before I could

return. I hardly hoped to find you here. Then I heard that you had been desperately ill; and when I suddenly saw you last night, kneeling before the high altar in St. Peter's, I almost feared that what I saw was not yourself, but your spirit."

With a faint smile she looked down at her thin hands. "I have certainly lost all my flesh," she said. "But I think—now— that I shall get well. For a long time I did not think so. I simply lay and waited for death. And I do not know yet why it did not come."

"It did not come because there is much for you to do in life," Waldegrave answered. "And do you not know that the sun would have gone out of the world for me if you had died?"

"Oh, no," she said, calmly. "You think so, but it is not so. You would soon have forgotten me, and it would have been better—much better."

"Better for you, or better for me?" he asked.

"I meant better for you," she answered.

"I deny it utterly," he said. "It can never be better for a man to have an influence taken out of his life which might lead him to higher things than he could hope to reach without it. You embody such an influence to me."

"I!" she said, "*I!*—who failed so utterly to reach the height which was put before me?"

"You judge yourself now," he said, "as hardly as you have before judged others—and less justly. You forget how natural it is for one who has been deeply wronged to be resentful and implacable. You were deeply wronged—and to help you to forgive one who is gone, let me tell you some of his last words. 'Remember,' he said to me, 'justice is in your hands now. Do for my daughter whatever she will suffer you to do.'" He paused, then in a lower tone of entreaty added: "What will that daughter suffer me to do? What will she accept?"

"Nothing," she answered. "There is nothing for you to do—nothing which I can accept. I could never, under any circumstances, have taken anything. It is not that which I regret—not that refusal."

"Yet forgiveness, if you had granted it, would have been empty without that practical proof," he said. "And even now, if you forgive, you ought to take what is your right—what I only hold in trust for you—and what nothing will ever induce me to use as my own."

"You will not be so foolish," she said, in a tone of alarm.

"Yes," he answered, "I shall be just so foolish—if you call it foolishness. Indeed, I have no choice. My uncle's wishes are binding on me, if not on you. But if you would be generous—if you would rise still higher—"

She lifted her hand to silence him. "Do not talk of it!" she said. "It is you who are generous—but what you ask is impossible."

"And is it impossible," he demanded, with sudden ardor, "that you can ever listen to my love, ever give me any love in return? The wrong which, you declared, lay like a gulf between us, is it not closed by death? Do you not know that I have loved you ever since I saw your face shining like a star on this very spot— here, where I came this afternoon to dream of you, and where, instead, I have found you? Is there no good omen in that? *Irène*, will you not take from love what you refuse from justice?"

She was shaken by his tone and words—he could see that— yet the face with which she looked at him was not one to encourage hope. Dark shadows had too lately

fallen around her for the sunshine of love to have tempting power.

“Do you think that death has closed the gulf?” she asked, in a low tone. “I do not. And there are others—”

“There is no gulf between us that I do not feel able to cross—in time,” he answered. “What I have told you before I repeat: I shall never surrender hope or effort until I have won from you the power to atone for the past, until you suffer me to give you the name and rank of which you were deprived. But I promised to speak of nothing agitating—and I fear that I have done so.”

“No,” she answered, though she had grown perceptibly paler, “I am only sorry—”

“There is no need for you to be sorry,” he interrupted. “All risk of failure or of pain is mine. And I do not mean to persecute you. After to-day I shall probably not see you again for a long time. Only remember that, wherever you go, you will carry my heart and my hope with you—and some day you will wake to a knowledge even beyond that which you have reached—and see that love alone can wipe out wrong.”

She did not answer. His words of confident prediction were at least uncontradicted.

And now the shadows began to lengthen over the marvelous plain, its amethystine distances to deepen in tint, and, as a soft purple glow stole over the Alban Hills, each town and village on their heights flashed like a brilliant jewel. At the end of the terrace Mrs. Falconer and Stanhope were seen slowly advancing toward them. Irène looked out over the fair wide scene, swimming in sunset glory; then turned her eyes again to the face beside her.

“Let us bury all memory of the past here,” she said, in a voice as sweet and solemn as an Angelus bell. “Never speak of it to me again. And whatever the future holds for us—what it holds is as God wills—I shall never forget that it is love which has wiped out the bitterness of wrong.”

THE END.

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