



Because of These Things

Marjorie Bowen

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Title: Because of These Things

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eBook No.: 0900461.txt

Language: English

Date first posted: July 2009

Date most recently updated: July 2009

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Because of These Things

Marjorie Bowen

First published 1915

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Dedicated, very humbly, to a
passionate joy and an
overwhelming grief
giuseppina

Sicily, Nov. 6th, 1914—Kent, May 19th, 1915
Tempus fugit

* * * * *

..."but...all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient;...let no man deceive you with vain words: for *because of these things* cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience."

Epistle to Ephesians v. 3-6

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BOOK I. The Strength Of Passion

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I

The coach, that had been slowly proceeding through the starless Italian night by the light of the two lanterns either side of the box seat came to a stop, with a violent jolt, and lurched heavily to one side on the cumbrous leather straps. Guard, postilion, and coachman dismounted, and their short, vigorous Italian curses disturbed the heavy, warm stillness.

With exclamations, complaints, and much reluctance, the passengers opened the now slanting door and descended into the circle of lantern light that revealed the broken wheel.

Two of these passengers were Italians, and, after the first annoyance, took the discomfiture good-humouredly; the other two were Englishmen, and bore themselves with all the haughtiness customary to their race when travelling in a foreign country.

"Harry," came the severe and proud voice of one of these gentlemen, "we had been better situated if you had taken my advice and hired a coach for ourselves. See what comes of travelling in a public stage!"

The other responded more quietly; he had, in fact, been roused from sleep, and still yawned and blinked too indolently for bad temper.

"We can walk into Bologna," he replied; "we must be near the gates." He stretched himself and flung back his fawn-coloured

mantle.

"And leave our baggage in charge of these?" asked the first speaker, pointing a shapely hand at the five Italians gathered round the broken wheel.

"Come, Frank, thou art too suspicious," answered his companion, with familiarity and good-nature. "Even though these be Papists and cut-throats (and I make no doubt they are), they must deliver the portmantles in Bologna." So saying, he strode up to the guard and demanded, in a tone of command:

"How far is it to Bologna?" He spoke a tolerable Italian, though his accent was without grace; he translated the man's courteous answer as: "Two miles--and the alternative to sleep here all night!"

With that he pulled out a gold repeating watch and glanced at the dial.

"Ten o'clock, Frank--will you walk to Bologna?" he cried.

"We have no choice," returned the other; "but speak to him, I pray you, about the baggage--I would I had enough of the tongue to do so myself."

"Fellow," said his friend, pointing to the darkness that concealed the top of the coach, "have an eye to yonder portmantles. I am Mr. Middleton and my friend is Mr. Moutray--you will find us at the palazzo of the Countess Odaleschi, in Bologna."

At this name the two Italian gentlemen looked up from the wheel and regarded the foreigners with a more interested scrutiny than they had yet shown. Mr. Moutray noticed this, and flushed with annoyance, pulling his hat over his eyes and stepping further out of the rays of the lantern as resenting even a glance of casual curiosity.

Mr. Middleton fee'd the guard, who was vehement and expressive in his assurances and apologies, raised his hat to his fellow-travellers (who showed no disposition to leave the scene of the disaster, and who appeared, indeed, quite reconciled to a night on the road), and taking Mr. Moutray by the arm, set off along the highway to Bologna.

As soon as they stepped out of the radius of the long lantern beams, complete and impossible darkness engulfed them. With a laugh Mr. Middleton went back and returned with one of the coach lamps--a cumbersome thing that cast, however, a clear radiance over the dusty, rough road.

"By God," said Mr. Middleton, "I'll pay you a compliment, Frank--there are no roads in Scotland worse than this."

Francis Moutray did not respond; his companion guessed that he was considering a grievance, and became silent too. He had learnt that silence was the only weapon with which to meet the young Scotchman's sombre moods of deep depression and reserve.

As they stumbled over the rough stones and into the hollows of white dust, it was Francis Moutray himself who spoke first.

"Saw you how yon fellows stared when you gave the name of the Contessa Odaleschi?" he demanded impatiently. "Surely I will go to an inn and not to the residence of this woman."

"What have you against her?" asked the Englishman lightly. "I tell you that when I met her in Paris she had a charming salon and was much thought of--her first husband was a Contestabile Colonna--"

"Her father was the Duke of Northumberland--and her mother--who?" interrupted Francis Moutray.

The Englishman gave him a swift look across the yellow light of the lantern he held.

"Ah, you know that," he commented.

"I heard it yesterday, and there was light talk about her--a coquette of fifty!" replied Mr. Moutray drily.

"You pragmatist fellow!" exclaimed Mr. Middleton. "I produce you an invitation from the most famous and charming lady in the Italian States, and this is my reward."

"I am," said Mr. Moutray firmly yet wearily, "desirous to be rid of this country which I find an offence and an abomination. I hear the Pope is as great in Bologna as in Rome," he added abruptly.

"Tis his second city," admitted Mr. Middleton, and he smiled at the scorn and bitterness with which the young man--Calvinist and Northerner in every drop of his blood--spoke. "But when you come to Italy, Frank, you must tolerate the Pope."

"I came for my instruction and for the pleasure of your companionship," returned Mr. Moutray rather coldly; "but I am eager to be in my own country, and I shall never again leave Scotland, no, nor Glenillich either."

"So you say--but you misjudge yourself," smiled the Englishman. "'Twas not wholly the pious desire for instruction, Frank, that brought you on this tour. Your blood is warmer than you admit, and your spirit is too ardent to be satisfied with Glenillich and the kirk."

"My father was so satisfied," retorted the young man half fiercely, "and methinks it would have been well had I followed in his footsteps and remained to rule at Glenillich, nor been drawn by idle curiosity to

traverse the lands of pagans and idolaters."

"But you were of too lusty a habit to endure the life your father led," remarked Mr. Middleton keenly. "Believe me, you will never be a saint, Francis, for all your Puritan ancestors, your dominie and pastor in Geneva bands, and the works of theology you have consumed."

The truth of this stung Francis Moutray like a prick on the bare flesh, and he flushed hotly.

"The Devil is busy about all of us," he said, and he spoke with a feeling and a sincerity that redeemed his words from the impression of hypocrisy or foolishness. Mr. Middleton held the lantern higher.

"And you perceive him rather unusually busy here?" he answered. "Does he not tempt you, Frank, austere as you are, with all the entrancing wares he has to offer?"

"I have seen nothing yet for which I would make traffic with Satan," answered the young man with some real loftiness.

Mr. Middleton lightly laughed.

"You have not seen everything," he remarked. "You are very young."

"Well," returned Mr. Moutray wearily, "I would I were in Scotland and away from these heathen countries."

"This is the end of our pilgrimage," said Harry Middleton. "Give me but a few days in the gay Bologna and I am ready to accompany you home."

Francis Moutray did not speak again until they reached the gates of Bologna, where they had to pull out their passports and answer the inquiries of the Swiss Papal Guards, and then, when all preliminaries

were over and the gates were opened for them to pass through, he murmured something under his breath that Mr. Middleton could not catch the sense of, but the tone of which caused him to look at his companion sharply.

The young man was standing in the full rays of the yellow lamp that lit the interior of the old worn gate arch, and his eyes were fixed on the dark vista of the long, dimly illumined arcaded street of Bologna.

He had removed his hat some time since by reason of the oppressive heat, and his face showed clearly pale between his dark hair and his dark clothes; his haughty and pensive features wore a look of black melancholy and bitter apprehension that startled his companion.

"Why--Frank--?"

Francis Moutray half-turned.

"I have a premonition that this city will be fatal to me," he said simply.

Mr. Middleton shrugged his shoulders and laughed; he was well-used to these Gaelic superstitions, glooms, and forebodings.

"Thou art not thyself," he answered kindly, and, thrusting his passport into his pocket, he turned and asked the gate-keeper the whereabouts of the inn at which they had arranged to stay the night.

Mr. Moutray sighed, half angrily, clapped his hat on his brow, and strode forward into Bologna.

"Nay, return to Milan," said Mr. Middleton mildly, catching up with him.

Francis Moutray suddenly smiled, with a flash of some humour.

"Now--on foot?" he asked. "I will stay the night here, at least."

The streets were empty, the city silent, here and there fluttering lamps lit the arcades, here and there a coach rattled over the stones and echoed into the dark distance; at intervals a light showed in one of the arched windows of the tall palaces. The strangeness and the oppression were extraordinary to Francis Moutray; something in the city of which he could see so little affected him powerfully with a sense of attraction, a sense of repulsion, and a sense of doom. His hereditary melancholy deepened unbearably; he felt old and useless, a weight as of the world on his heart, and the dark, arched street became to him as awesome as a highway to hell.

The inn was in darkness too; all hope of the coach had been abandoned for that night, and the landlord and drawers had to be roused from their beds.

Francis Moutray declined supper, left Mr. Middleton at a hearty meal, and was ushered upstairs into the room prepared for him--a large chamber with a stone floor and a thick, white mosquito-net hanging round a black four-poster bed. The flickering flame of the thick yellow candle shot a wavering light over the walls and the painted ceiling, revealed too, near the bed, a great picture of the Madonna holding her Child.

The landlord withdrew, leaving the light on the old black bureau, and Francis Moutray stood looking at the one picture in the room.

He left as if he was face to face with the menace of the city--a thing hitherto not seen, but felt.

He stood for some while, quite still, staring at the flamboyant oil-painting of the Mother and Child, both of whom seemed to regard him with a peculiar and derisive smile that affected him like a

narcotic, for presently his senses dazed, and he thought that the figures moved and pointed at him and mocked.

A clock struck midnight; the first of the strokes roused him. He strode up to the picture, pulled it from the wall, opened the door, and put the Papist symbol in the dark passage.

As he returned to his chamber he became suddenly acutely conscious that he was tired to exhaustion. He flung off his hat and cloak and cast himself down in the huge chair beside the bed; the windows were shut and the room close and oppressive, even the shiny marble floor was damp with heat. Francis gasped for air, but he knew that to open the window would be to let in a cloud of poisonous nightflies; even now a faint circle of them hovered round the candle flame and dropped, singed, into the guttered pools of coarse tallow.

Francis hated the room. His apprehension grew, it was with him like a living companion, to whisper, to suggest, to warn.

He rose up again and turned the key in the lock; he looked to the pistols in his belt, and put his sword on the chair, ready to his hand. His fatigue increased until it was as if he had been drugged; all his mental fear and dread could not keep his body alert, his knees and hands shook, and the lids fell heavily over his eyes.

"The Papist picture has bewitched me," he murmured, as he dragged off his coat and, pulling aside the white net curtains, fell on the narrow bed.

The pillows and mattress were hard, the linen neither fresh nor cool, but Francis Moutray sank at once into a sleep or swoon in which the most powerful and vivid dream of his life came to him—came in a flash, like a streak of lightning against a midnight heaven.

He thought that a woman grew up from the darkness, formed rapidly, and came to instant perfection out of a swirl of fire, jewels, and flowers. She was dressed like those Italian ladies he had lately met, in full vanity of brocade and velvet, lace and gems; she was beautiful with the beauty he had dreamed of in profane and forbidden dreams, not with the human beauty he had seen with his waking eyes, and he knew that she was Temptation and Evil and Desire, no longer a dim, haunting shape to sting secretly and be thrust away, but a visualized form, full-grown, challenging, dominant. She had a look of the Madonna he had flung from his room; she was the thing he had dreaded, feared, yet sought to find; he wanted her and he hated her--both passionately.

He made a movement of pain and she slowly approached the bed, holding her soft hands on her full bosom--her movements and her looks were tender and caressing, yet the movement and look of some one advancing on her prey.

Francis shivered, yet longed for her approach. The room was certainly full of a vague horror; reality was mingled with his vision, and he could see the circle of light and the circle of flies about the candle--it worried him that he had left it burning, and he tried to move, but his limbs were as powerless as if they were under a leaden pall, and the woman came nearer. He looked at her, knowing she was but the embodiment of his own fancies and fears and desires, yet seeing her clearly, actually a creature of flesh and blood yet touched with the terror of dreams. She came nearer, and the cambric on her bosom heaved with the beating of her heart. She was fair, and her blue eyes sparkled with an unearthly fire. She reached the bed and drew aside the mosquito-net; her lips were full and moist as those of the vampire who lives on men's blood--but gently curved too and sweetly smiling.

With a sob of horror and despair Francis sac up, overcoming, with an effort of agony, the inertia that bound him; his staring eyes gazed into the soft orbs of the phantom who bent down till her loose locks touched his feverish forehead.

She was pervading him, overcoming him, absorbing him...

"You want my soul!" he shrieked, and he called on God and seized the fair mischief by the throat...She made no resistance, she was slack in his grip; his strength came to him in a rush of triumph, he flung her down, dragging the mosquito-net from the pole. She faded, drooped, and all the flash went from her jewels, all the colours from her robe.

Francis laughed.

"Come to me now! I have often wanted you, and now you are dead I may hold you in my arms!"

He tried to lift her on to the bed, but he observed that she was covered with blood from head to foot, and with a moan he let her slip on to the marble floor.

"I have murdered her!" he said. He fell back, and an awful sense of loneliness possessed him--loneliness and horror and the hot sickness of his fantasy. He struggled up again with desperate strength, and stretched out his arms over the torn curtains where he thought the lady lay; his hand knocked against the chair, and a loud clatter roused him from the thick horror of his dream. He sat up, clasping his hands to his damp forehead; he perceived that the room was empty and the marble floor unstained, and that the noisy rattle which had awakened him had been caused by his sword and pistol being cast to the ground by his own violent movement.

He sprang up and, with shaking hands, replaced the weapons, then stumbled to the window and pulled it open. The fresher air of the outer night revived him and dispelled his confused fancies. Regardless of the poison supposed to linger in the night air, he fastened the casement back on the rude clasp and stood staring into the darkness that concealed Bologna.

He now scorned himself for his vision; he felt his forehead and pulse, and knew himself feverish. This was not the first time he had found himself weakened and delirious with fever since he had crossed the Italian frontiers. He cursed the country and cursed the heat; he thought of the picture of the Virgin in the corridor and shuddered, half-accusing her of having put a spell on him; but did not the whole country stand for witchcraft and damnation?

The thick flame of the candle sank out under the weight of the thronging mosquitoes, the rank smell of tallow filled the room. Francis Moutray fumbled his way back to the bed and, falling on his knees beside it, dropped his head against the disarranged coverlet, and sank into a delirious sleep, while without his window the coloured Italian dawn began to reveal Bologna.

II

Vittoria Odaleschi had a history as scandalous and romantic as any lady in the scandalous and romantic Italian States. She was the most admired, most criticized, most envied, and most powerful woman in Bologna; nothing honourable was ever said of her, neither during her childhood, when her father, the English Duke, made her, at fourteen, the hostess at his Roman feasts--nor during her brief married life, nor during her gorgeous widowhood; but she had a reputation for wit and shrewdness and daring not to be eclipsed by any reputation in the Papal See.

More money was lost, more marriages made, more rendezvous kept, and, it was added, more crimes planned, under the painted ceiling of the Palazza Odaleschi than in the whole of the rest of Italy. Her beauty was not as famous as it had been twenty years before, but she had still numerous cavaliers, and her mansion boasted the attractions of youth and fresh loveliness in the persons of her two daughters. Her high-reaching schemes to secure a brilliant match for each of her children had roused much profane laughter among her votaries, but this passionate ambition was the most laudable, as it was now the strongest of the feelings that animated her worldly soul.

On the day after the arrival of Mr. Middleton and Mr. Moutray in Bologna, the Contessa received a note from the former gentleman, written in very fair Italian, and asking when he might be received.

Vittoria smiled to think that the Englishman did not know that the Palazzo Odaleschi was always open to young men of good family with money to stake on the gambling tables and to spend on the beautiful women who followed in Vittoria's train.

She put the letter down and thought a little. She had a good memory, and she soon recollected that she had met this Mr. Middleton a year ago in Paris, when she had gone there to sell some property belonging to her late husband. She remembered that she had taken the trouble to have inquiries made about him, and had discovered that he was a rich English esquire with large estates in Surrey and with foreign tastes, unmarried, gay, but prudent. She had liked him, but he was no use to her, and her invitation to the Palazzo Odaleschi had been the mere politeness of a manner by nature and cultivation sweet and flattering.

But in a postscriptum Mr. Middleton reminded her of "her gracious offer of hospitality," and asked, in a way that admitted of no refusal, if he might bring his travelling companion, Francis Moutray, Laird of

Glenillich.

Vittoria shrugged and smiled, and sent one of her black pages in a frivolous gilt cabriolet to fetch the two gentlemen and their vails from the inn. She reflected, when her messenger had gone, that she could not any longer afford to be too careless in encouraging the gallants who waited on her. There had been a great feast last night, and she had noticed that the gambling saloon was not so full as usual, and that some of the ladies had lacked cavaliers. There were many women who were her bitter enemies, very willing to do her a mischief, and she perceived, with the practical prudence that was concealed beneath her wanton frivolity, that she was losing ground, and that she would scarcely recover it unless she could bring about the marriage of her daughter Emilia with the son of Prince Orsini.

Occupied with these sombre thoughts, the Odaleschi sat in her private chamber drinking chocolate, and gazing at herself in the small mirror of Venetian glass surrounded with a border of heavy crystal flowers that hung above her ormolu toilet-table.

Everything in the room was luxurious, splendid, ponderous: the lofty ceiling was crowded with bright paintings of cupids, birds, flowers, and fantastic shields displaying the Odaleschi quarterings; the floor and walls were covered in Eastern tapestries, and the bed was hung with heavy draperies of blue and yellow Genoa velvet. Above the bed was an elaborate crucifix in gold and ebony, and beneath it a lamp of lapis-lazuli on a gilt bracket, while on the opposite wall was a painting of the school of Rubens, representing the Rape of Ganymede.

The Contessa's perfumes, lotions, powders, rouges, pomades, Hungary waters, and pastilles were all encased in chased gold; the candlesticks were gold also, and heavy enough and tall enough to light the holy vessels on the altar instead of the toilet of the

Odaleschi. She was fond of telling in her mad moments how a cardinal, who was in love with her, had robbed these candlesticks from his church and put gilt in the place of them, with a pound of lead in each to make them heavy.

But she was in no mad humour now but one very pensive, as she sat with her chin propped on her hand and gazed across the profaned gold on her dressing-table at the reflection in the mirror that hung on the wall beyond. No one knew her age, but she had long left her youth behind.

Still the Northern blood of her father had served her well in preserving her beauty long after the period when her Southern rivals faded. Her nut-brown hair was still abundant and glossy, her figure still comely and straight, and if her large dark eyes were no longer perfectly brilliant and no cosmetics could quite disguise the ravages on her soft face, if she kept her throat covered even when her bosom was bare, still, by candlelight, when dressed with art, she was yet a beauty by reason of the delicacy of her features, the grace of her movements, her expression of sweetness and gaiety.

She wore, as she sat before the mirror, a robe of white silk with raised flowers in velvet that fell open over a gown of lawn and lace that swathed her to the chin; heelless slippers of crimson brocade hung on her feet which rested on a small red cushion; on her lap was a silver box full of bonbons wrapped in blue and pink papers.

After a long and intent scrutiny of her reflection she threw back her head with a half-humorous, half-defiant movement.

"Ah, *Dio!*" she exclaimed, "it is nearly over!"

When her face was utterly bereft of beauty she would be as bankrupt as the merchant who has lived on trading in silver and gold, and one

day finds the mines empty and himself ruined, if he has not been prudent enough to save from the fat days.

And the Contessa had not saved a maravedi; her sole investments were her two daughters, and she was hampered there, because, for the first time in her life, she felt proud objection to anything ignoble; when it was a question of her children she was virtuous and rigid. She wished to sell her daughters, but the price was to be marriage, an honourable name, a fine establishment; and the girls had been educated, guarded, kept severely in a convent, for this end.

"When they are married they may do as they please," smiled the Contessa, "but there shall be no breath against them before."

And her smile became bitter when she reflected that she might have married a reigning Duke, had not scandal so persistently connected her name with a Roman noble that her father was glad to give her to the Contestabile Colonna, who took his bride and her dowry without question, which no other of her admirers had been prepared to do; and when for the first time a widow, scandal had prevented her securing a finer second match than a Bolognese noble.

"If I had not been a little fool," thought Vittoria, "I might have been the mistress of a court instead of a burnt-out woman scheming how she may escape penury."

She rose to shake off these recollections, and the forgotten silver box of bonbons fell from her lap, and the blue and pink papers scattered over the floor.

The stiff velvet was pulled aside from the door, and Giovanna Odaleschi entered.

When she saw the scattered bonbons she stooped without a word

and began picking them up.

Vittoria watched her daughter with an eager expression touched with fierceness; the younger woman was in the full radiance of opening beauty--a creature of colour, of softness, of sparkle and grace.

Her white, slightly untidy mob showed the long curves of her rounded limbs; her hair, as dull a yellow as amber, was carelessly knotted with a black velvet ribbon. Her warm, flushed, dusky blonde beauty had a peculiar character; her neck was long, her features small, her lips full, her brow low, her eyes large, slow-moving, and of a sleepy look, the deep brown of them veiled by the gold glint of lashes thick and curved. She was lovely and complete in her loveliness, but she was not the classical type then in fashion; there was more in her of the bacchante or nymph than the goddess or the queenly women so admired, and there were those who found the touch of the strange in her far from attractive. The Orsini prince, who was wooing her sister, had likened her, with her long body, long throat, small head, and cluster of yellow hair, to the Medusa changing to the snake.

Her mother caught a little sigh in her throat. Emilia would be safe in the Palazzo Orsini, if human wits could get her there--but how could Giovanna be provided for?

So far she had evoked no offers in the marriage mart of the Odaleschi palace.

"Come here," said Vittoria gravely and with a yearning note.

The girl obeyed and came, her hands full of the sweetmeats. Vittoria put her bleached, perfumed, and cool fingers under her daughter's round chin. Giovanna stood controlled but restive, with shifting eyes.

"Have you a lover, Vanna?" asked Vittoria intently and sadly.

"No," said the girl frankly, "nor am I like to have till you have married Emilia. She will permit no gallant to come within reach of the tip of my fan."

"Is there anyone you want for a lover, Vanna?"

"No."

Vittoria gazed into the small exquisite face. She saw passion there and wit and gaiety, wilfulness and pride, but she did not trace in those fair features the strength of will, the clearness of intelligence, the judgment and penetration that had balanced her own hot-blooded follies and imprudences.

"Trust me, *carina*," she said rapidly. "I will make you a princess--only wait, be patient, be prudent--Emilia is three years older."

A mischievous look brightened the sleepy brown eyes to a golden flash.

"I have only left the convent six months," returned Giovanna, "and you are always warning me! What do you think I shall do?"

She gently moved her face from her mother's hand and shook the bonbons on to the dressing-table.

Vittoria thought of her own youth.

"You have plenty of temptation to fall in love," she said.

"And if I do?" answered the girl. "I am nineteen. You were married at fifteen."

"Yes," said the Contessa sharply, "that is why I sent you and Emilia to a convent. I did not want you spoilt too."

"Spoilt?" Giovanna laughed lightly and freshly. "Madonna! You have had a lovely life!"

Vittoria looked at her swiftly, then sank into the chair before the dressing-table.

"Listen to me, Vanna," she said coldly. "I have plans for you. I know you are impulsive and impatient, and that is why I speak to you plainly. You are going to marry a great man--there is no one coming here at present good enough for you--you must marry as well as Emilia, if not better--"

"Emilia is not married yet," remarked Giovanna with a touch of malice.

Vittoria glanced over her shoulder, and the vigour and energy that had made her a power in her time showed in her alert face.

"Emilia *will* marry--as I wish," she said, "and so will you. Amuse yourself with these cavaliers, but go no further with them than compliments."

Giovanna came behind her mother's chair and gazed at the reflection of her glowing face in the thick Venetian mirror.

"How can I," she replied, "when you always have an old woman about me?"

"When you are married," said her mother, "you shall do as you wish."

"*Dio!*" cried Giovanna, "when will you marry me?"

"When I can find the husband rich enough and powerful enough, Vanna."

She was still turned in her chair, and as she spoke was gazing anxiously into the careless young face above her shoulder.

"*Carina*," she said, with a sudden deep note in her voice, "you do believe that I love you and am labouring for your good, do you not?"

Giovanna instantly flung her arms about her mother.

"*Madre mia!*" she cried passionately. "I care for no one at all but you. I will do whatever you tell me. I do not love anyone; no, I do not think I ever shall, either. Find me a good-tempered husband, *carissima*, and I shall be content."

Vittoria returned the embrace ardently and gazed into her daughter's face with searching eyes. Giovanna's frank innocence of expression put the seal of truth on her simple words; she was untouched as yet by any emotion, plastic to any influences, heart-whole and joyous.

"Jesu and the Holy Virgin protect you," said Vittoria in a trembling voice; she felt that, as she embraced her daughter, she was enfolding her own lost girlhood—and that innocence and light-heartedness which she herself had never known.

Giovanna gravely drew a crucifix of gold and ivory from the bosom of her mob and pressed it reverently to her lips; attached to the fine chain by which this crucifix was fastened to her neck was a little reliquary that contained a lock of the hair of Santa Caterina of Alexandria.

"I am well protected," said the girl, with a serious look. "Santa Caterina guards me! The Reverend Mother said this holy relic would bring a blessing."

"So it will," returned Vittoria; she was still a religious woman, despite

everything, and a generous benefactress of the Church. "Keep it, Vanna, always, and pray to the saint every night to give you a good husband; and when you tell your rosary add a prayer to the Holy Virgin to the same purpose."

Giovanna slipped her treasures back into her slender bosom, over her gay young heart, and turning lightly about, snatched up some of the bonbons and began to unwrap them and crack them with her strong white teeth.

"When are you going to give another *festa*?" she asked.

"When Emilia is married," replied the Contessa firmly.

Giovanna made a grimace.

"Not before?"

"Not a soldo more do I spend on dazzling the Orsini," said Vittoria. "He is in love--let love work his way. Besides, child, it is as well you should know that we have very little money now. Once "--her eyes gleamed--"there was a *festa* every night for me."

"Ah!" exclaimed Giovanna greedily; she stretched her limbs with a luxurious movement, "will the Orsini give Emilia a *festa* every night?"

"He is one of the greatest princes in Rome," returned the Contessa drily.

"Find me such a lord!" cried the girl.

"If there is such another in Italy, you shall be his wife," returned her mother, with the old indomitable spirit flushing her faded cheek and restoring something of the lost brilliancy of her beauty.

Giovanna stood thoughtfully silent; the glamour of the dawn of life's spring-time showed in her eyes and in her fresh lips.

"Is it better to be loved or to have a *festa* every night?" she asked gravely.

The Contessa stretched out her hand for her gilt rouge pot.

"Tell Clarisse to come to me," she said. "I must dress--two strangers are to attend the reception this afternoon--nay, they have produced an old invitation and must stay here--foreigners, Vanna."

"I hate foreigners." Giovanna ate another sweetmeat.

"An Englishman and a Scotchman," continued Vittoria.

"On their way to Rome, to the Palazzo Muti?--the King of England?" demanded Giovanna with some interest.

"I have only met one of these cavaliers," answered the Contessa languidly, "and from what I can recall he was very staunch for the established government in England, and spoke of His Majesty at Rome as the Pretender only."

Giovanna lifted her shoulders.

"I do not know when they will arrive," continued the Contessa, "but if I am not ready, you will receive them--you and Emilia. I believe they are persons of quality," she added.

Giovanna came to her gracefully, kissed her, and left the room with a smiling farewell.

When she was alone Vittoria slipped back in her chair in a weary attitude, and, holding her hand over her brow, began to consider how

she could use Emilia's marriage (when it was accomplished) to secure a match as brilliant for Giovanna; the younger girl was nearer her heart, and she forgot her own troubles in dreaming over the gorgeous future she might gain for her tall golden daughter.

III

When Francis Moutray found himself in the imposing salon of the Palazzo Odalesehi, he already knew the scandalous history of the *avventuriere* who was to be his hostess; he knew that she was the daughter of an English duke and a French lady of good family and frail virtue; that she had been married at fifteen, with a reputation already smirched, to a man whose wife had died in suspicious circumstances; that she had made more noise in Italy than any other beauty of the same type; that most of the murders, marriages, intrigues, and duels in Bologna were traced to the Odalesehi palace; and that the Contessa had been five times banished the city, though she returned from each exile with an undiminished hold on the aristocracy of Bologna, who found her their principal amusement, their main theme of scandal and the most lavish patroness of their vices and passions.

With this knowledge of the lady arming him, Francis Moutray was prepared to meet her with some curiosity and much disgust; these tales of her filled him with aversion; he found no pleasure in such corrupt splendour, nor was he in the least apprehensive of being tempted by any lures so obvious and so alien as those this stale siren employed; when told that "he who entered the Odalesehi palace must be prepared to leave his skin behind" he had smiled, but Mr. Middleton had left his jewels locked away at the inn for fear the Bologna ladies might beg them of him for a token.

The salon into which they were conducted was of that rococo

magnificence held to be the height of taste and fashion; in each compartment of the vaulted ceiling was painted a mythological subject in bright colours, and from the gilt ribs and bosses hung heavy chandeliers of cut crystal, furnished with scented tapers; the great expanse of polished floor was gleaming with reflections, the windows hung with Venetian velvet and stamped leather, the tables and chairs placed near the walls were gilt and heavy.

An entrance enclosed by two dark red porphyry pillars gave on to a formal garden on which the spring-tide sun sparkled and where a fountain sent up a long jet of radiant water against the background of the cypress trees.

Several Italian gentlemen were also waiting for the Contessa, though it was yet some time before the hour when her usual reception began. Francis cast a condemning eye over the foreign fashion of their dress, the affectations of their courtesy, and withdrew himself to the door open on to the garden that he might not be offended by their voluble talk.

At one end of the salon three shallow marble steps led to a dais behind which were gilt folding-doors.

Presently these doors were opened by two footmen in the Odaleschi livery, and the Contessa, attended by her two daughters, made her usual entry. Francis glanced up, and the sight of three lovely women, who, at this little distance, might have been sisters, was certainly a gracious thing even to his prejudiced eyes.

The Contessa wore a purple brocade, and her powdered hair was dressed a foot above her fair pale face; Emilia and Giovanna were each in light yellow gowns, with long shawls of white lace; Vittoria kissed the tips of her fingers to the waiting cavaliers, who, with the exception of Francis, all bent low, and the two girls curtsied. When

they had descended into the salon and the presentations had been made, Francis Moutray gazed with searching curiosity at the celebrated beauty.

As his eyes flickered over her he knew that she was not perilous for him; he saw every wrinkle, every stroke of paint on her face, and something brutal in him was satisfied that this enchantress was being deprived of her weapons by time; he looked from her to Emilia, who was a dark creature with an aloft and dreaming air, and his appraisal of her was careless; his last consideration was for the golden Giovanna, who was laughing with Mr. Middleton.

He noticed at once the strangeness of her beauty, the long throat, the small delicate head, the full lips, and with a horrid thrill he recognized in her a likeness to the woman of his vision the night before.

His eyes remained on her, and his heart beat slightly faster as something of the terror and fascination of his dream came over him again.

Giovanna turned and looked at him.

Her sleepy eyes widened, brightened, then the lids drooped again, a faint blush overspread the small oval of her face; she turned again to Mr. Middleton and made some remark.

Francis could not catch what she said, but he knew she was talking English; the sound of his own tongue on her lips gave him a peculiar sensation; he remembered her English blood.

Again Giovanna looked at him gravely; this time the drowsy eyes came bright as gold; she moved away from Mr. Middleton and stood in the entrance to the garden.

The salon was beginning to fill; the Contessa's attention was taken

by her guests; Mr. Middleton was endeavouring to return Emilia's coquetries in Italian; Francis stood watching Giovanna.

He told himself that she was a thing to be despised, such as her mother had been at her age--her mother's bait now; a deep regret for this possessed him, and mingled with this regret was a stirring of all the old desires and longings he always held chained and bound in his soul.

Giovanna looked at him again, then passed out into the garden; he saw the sunlight flash over her as she went.

For a moment he held himself motionless where he was, struggling with a horrid remembrance of his dream; then he said to himself, "Why should I be afraid of this poor creature?"

And he followed her.

There were several people in the garden, seated on the coloured tiled benches or wandering in and out of the intricate paths; Giovanna stood beside a flowering bush of myrtle; she was pulling one of the flowers to pieces with her long fingers. Francis Moutray stopped before her.

"You speak my language?" he said in English.

"Yes." She looked directly at him without either confusion or coquetry. "The Contessa is proud of her English father, and we have always been well practised in his tongue."

He hardly heard what she said, he was gazing at her so intently; he noticed she had a little mole behind her left ear, that her lashes were brighter than her hair, that her whole skin had a golden look over the rose and white.

Then their eyes met.

"Where do you come from, Signore?" she asked.

"Scotland," he said briefly.

She seemed about to speak, but her breath appeared to die in her throat; she stared at his dark blunt-featured face, dark with the cold darkness of the north, at his grey eyes that regarded her so sternly, at his plain attire; then she glanced at his bare, brown and muscular hands.

"What is your name?" she asked.

"Francis Moutray."

"I am the Contessa Giovanna Odaleschi."

"I know," he smiled; "a famous name. You must have many cavaliers."

"Not one," she shook her head. "I am only six months from a convent."

He felt rebuked for his estimate of her; was it possible that she was as innocent as her air proclaimed her? His blood gave a quick leap at the thought. "Six months is long enough," he said.

Her eyes were suddenly mysterious.

"Yes--or six weeks or days--or minutes," she answered. "But I have chosen no one."

"But you--living in this palace--know something of love?" he insisted.

Her face took on a closed look.

"Will you be my *cavalier servente*?" she asked. He flushed, half in anger, half in shame.

"I do not know your customs," he answered, and drew back a step.

"Nor I yours," she smiled. "No Italian would have refused me--like that."

"I am a boor," said Francis quickly. "I did not mean to hurt you. But I am only a few days in Bologna."

"Only a few days!"

"Yes."

"And then?"

"I return to Scotland."

"You do not like Italy," asked Giovanna; her lids had dropped and her face was clouded.

"It is so--different," he replied.

"From your country?"

"Yes."

"You come from the north where it is cold and bitter," she said. "Why do you not stay here?"

Francis laughed.

"My place is in my own country."

"Ah!" she gave a little sigh.

"You do not understand why I cannot stay?"

She looked at him sadly. He saw a little pulse beating in her throat and the moisture on her lips; behind the heaped amber locks of her hair the frail bridal blossoms of the myrtle swayed in the breeze; again the memory of his dream came over him. She looked now like the same woman who had advanced to his bedside the night before.

He stepped back from her and took his eyes from her face.

"Do not go," she said.

"Do not--go?" he echoed stupidly.

"Why should you?"

She dropped the ruined flower and touched his left hand with her right. They both started and flushed; she drew back instantly.

"What have you done to me?" she trembled. "Ah, *Dio!*"

She moaned as if she had been hurt; he stared down at his still tingling hand, and braced himself.

"I take too much of your time," he said, his voice was hoarse and came with difficulty, he found himself trembling.

This real flesh and blood was a thousand times more to be dreaded than the allurements of his dream woman; he could not believe his senses--could not credit that this creature had so captured him. He longed to touch her again to prove her power--he hoped that this time he might find her flesh cold and her hand powerless to make his

heart quiver, but her whisper, "What have you done to me?" thrilled in his blood, and he did not dare approach her by a single step.

"Shall we not return to the palace, Donna Giovanna?" he asked.

She shook her head; in the small exquisite features was fear and bewilderment and a wild curiosity.

"Whatever her mother may be," was his thought, "I dare swear this child is immaculate!"

A wild triumph followed the reflection--if she was still unwon, would she not be a glorious creature for some one man's winning?

Mastering himself he returned to the palace, leaving her unceremoniously, and never looking back to the myrtle bush.

Among the throng of cavaliers and high-born ladies (for even the noblest dames of Bologna did not disdain the entertainment afforded by the Contessa's "conversazione") Francis found Mr. Middleton.

"Which girl is spoken of with the Orsini?" he asked.

"The Contessa Emilia."

"Ah," Francis averted his eyes; "the other, Harry, might be saved from this wanton crowd."

"What makes you think so?" asked the Englishman sharply.

"I have spoken to her," replied Francis moodily; "she has the means of grace within her--have you marked her?"

"She is not considered so great a beauty as her sister."

"I was speaking of her soul, not her body," retorted Mr. Moutray impatiently, at which Mr. Middleton laughed.

"She is a fair woman though," he said, putting up his glass to survey a passing beauty, "and beware, Frank, of fair women whom you meet in the Palazzo Odaleschi."

Francis answered gravely and with a sudden touch of tenderness:

"This maid is but a few months from a convent; this--" he glanced round the gorgeous room, the gorgeous company--"is not where she should find herself!"

"She is guarded as jealously as one of your own Puritan children," answered Mr. Middleton. "The Contessa is too wise a woman not to understand the market value of a fair reputation. Both these girls, Frank, aim to be princesses."

Francis smiled darkly.

"This is a tawdry crowd, Harry," he said, "and makes me more than ever eager to be gone."

"Our stay is but for a few days, and enjoy them, Frank, for what they are worth."

"Nay," said Mr. Moutray wearily, "with or without you, I return to-morrow."

With that he left his friend, and, pushing his way brusquely through the groups of the Contessa's guests, found a quiet seat behind one of the great pillars at the top of the marble steps.

There, unnoticed and alone, he put his elbow on his knee and took his brow in his hand, while he stared at the chequered pattern of the

black-and-white tiled floor.

His forehead was burning, his blood rushing in a full tide through his body. He was roused at last as he had always feared to be roused, as he had always believed he never could be roused; his passions were loosed at last from their long bondage. Giovanna Odaleschi! He shuddered as he thought of her--the woman of his dread, of his vague, restless desire, the woman who formed the temptation of his dreams; last night he had had a premonition and, like a fool, disregarded it, and now it was no vision of fever but a real human creature. Giovanna Odaleschi!--the child of Papacy, corruption, vice. No doubt but she was light as the wind herself--a foreigner--all that was abhorrent to his training, his creed, his ideals--yet desirable as water in the desert, as sweet as fresh honey on the lips. Giovanna Odaleschi! He shuddered at the name.

With the gloomy superstition of his wild and sensitive race, he began to think that she had bewitched him--began to imagine that it was she who had really appeared to him last night. He had heard good cases of these handmaidens of the devil sent to tempt the weak flesh of Christians. He rose and pressed his brow, that was still hot and beating with last night's fever, against the cool, polished surface of the green marble pillar.

With angry, brooding eyes he watched the company passing to and fro in the salon; and presently he saw her.

She was seated on one of the huge gilt chairs that bore, on a red velvet cushion, the Odaleschi arms in gold braid, and she was listening, in a pensive way, to the chatter of three ladies and a cavalier.

Francis Moutray tried fiercely to find fault with her; she was too tall, too slender, her carriage was peculiar, her manners too free. He

tried to set against her allurements the modest charm of his own country-women as he had seen them at the kirk or on the heather, with the silk tartan drawn over the blue snood of maidenhood.

But he knew that his swift fancy was not to be so cheated and deceived. He gazed at her, at her movements, her gestures, the fall of her yellow gown, the turn of her small head, and even more strongly his blood flowed in a hot tide of passion and desire and yearning.

His soul sickened and reproached him, placed his God, his duty, his home before him, pointed out the gulf of utter sin into which he was peering, and he turned away with a mighty effort, making a resolve that, if carried out, would have averted a dismal tragedy.

"I will leave this city, this country of abomination, where I have stayed too long," he cried to himself. "I will tear these wanton thoughts from my soul--I will go home and serve God honourably."

He thought of Harry Middleton's protestations, laughter, and long advice, and he decided to leave the Odaleschi Palace early the next morning before anyone was astir--to return alone to Scotland. Strengthened by this resolve he came from the shadows of the green pillar and mingled with the other guests.

The women were gay, the men amiable; they spoke to him without ceremony, and he answered as best he could in his uncertain French, while his glance was ever turning towards Giovanna Odaleschi.

She never looked up, nor round, nor caught his glance--his sad reluctant glance that admired her with such unwilling fervour; once he came so near her that he could distinguish the pattern of white roses round the hem of her brocade gown, but still she did not raise her

head.

Presently he heard her laugh. He paused in his conversation to listen, and turned his dark intent face towards her; and while she was laughing, she saw him and rose suddenly to her feet, put the tip of her feather fan to her startled lips, and slipped hastily through the crowd.

"She is afraid of me," he thought, and all his blood danced, but the instant afterthought was strong and bitter--"as I--my God!--am afraid of her--"

IV

Francis Moutray did not admit to himself that he was flying from the influence of a girl to whom he had only spoken once. He argued that he was sick of his travels, sick of his travelling companion, weakened with fever, weary of the heat, that his estates needed him, that his neighbours would wonder at his absence, and so reconciled himself to a secret flight from the Palazzo Odaleschi.

He went to the "Corona d'Oro," and ordered a saddlehorse, and hired a servant to go with him as far as the frontier; his portmantles had not yet been brought to the Palazzo, save one that was no larger than he could carry himself.

The long summer Italian evening gave him ample leisure for these preparations, and the Contessa had too many guests and too much on her mind to pay any attention to the doings of so obscure a unit as the Scottish cavalier, and Mr. Middleton was too absorbed in extracting all the enjoyment he prudently could out of the Odaleschi's entertainment to give much heed to his friend whom he had lately found impossibly moody.

At supper Francis saw Giovanna again; the sight of her, powdered and adorned, radiant and admired, shook his senses into fierce protest against his flight. The meal was an agony, he could not eat nor scarcely speak, and the strong Italian wines he drank to give him strength fired him to a deeper delirium of anguish.

He fortified himself by the thought of his completed preparations; by the next dawn he would be out of Bologna, please God, and soon out of this cursed country.

His place was some distance from Giovanna, so that he could not hear her voice, and he was glad; yet he knew he fiercely hated the man seated beside her who was near enough to her to count the pearls on her neck...to feel her breath on his cheek when she turned to speak to him.

He laughed at himself for this jealousy--some man would have her when he was gone--she might even become what her mother was...and he wanted her in a convent! He was mad, he told himself with fierce contempt--mad to concern himself with the purity of Giovanna Odaleschi.

And he did not use the term "mad" in any conventional sense, there was no other word but that of "madness" to describe the new emotions, the revolt in his heart, the upset of all the values by which he had guided his life, the desperate resolve of flight--all these strange sensations and weaknesses that tormented him; he told himself that the fever had still hold of him, that the Italian sun and the Italian wines had made his mind cloudy. When he rose to leave the table he was shivering as if indeed the malaria had touched his blood.

He looked across the crowd at Giovanna; the last time, he told himself, that he ever would look at her. She was standing with her

back to him, the long lines of her figure showed through the fine white folds of her hoopless dress; her small drooping head was crowned with a wreath of summer violets--little Italian violets odourless and brightly pale.

"Fair mischief," said Francis Moutray in his heart, "this is the last chance thou wilt have to dazzle me!"

He left the company unnoticed (the Contessa was hardly aware of his existence, and Mr. Middleton was absorbed), and went up to the great bed-chamber given him in the left wing of the palace.

To his Northern eyes it seemed large enough for a ballroom, the walls and the ceiling were painted with landscapes and figures, gay-coloured and heathen; the bed was draped with Genoa velvet and covered with a great square of rich hand-worked lace, inside the curtains hung the mosquito-nets. Francis, seeing them, shuddered, thinking of last night and how he had torn the nets in his fierce struggle with the phantom woman; and now she was a phantom no longer, but a creature to whom he had spoken--a creature who had cried out, "What have you done to me?"

His one candle in the stick of red Florentine copper gave a leaping light that did not touch the corners of the vast room nor the high ceiling; there were sconces and a chandelier, but Francis did not light them; he sat in the deep armchair between the bed and the wall and dropped his cheek on to his palm.

He felt bound, burning hot; every nerve in his body tingled to the sense of the alien in the atmosphere; everything was strange--the warm air, the vast room, the heavy furniture. He was acutely aware that all belonged to a world he did not understand but hated, and a world that had no place for him...the world where Giovanna Odaleschi moved and flourished, where she would continue to bloom

and laugh when he had gone.

The thought of her moving about this palace when he had put land and sea between them caused him a physical agony; he groaned, dropped his hand from his damp brow, raised his head. As he did so he gave a great start, for a second he thought another man, a complete stranger, was seated close beside him; then he saw that he was gazing at his own reflection in the great mirror hanging on the opposite wall. He saw himself engulfed in shadows, sunk in the huge chair, the ragged light of the candle on his face; it startled him to notice how strange he looked.

His face was flushed and softened, the dark brown hair loosened and falling over his white cravat, the fine features, usually so austere, expressing wild unhappiness...he was frightened at his eyes, it seemed to him as if a soul that was not his looked out of them.

He put his right hand to his face, and with the other groped for the candle-light and put out the coarse flame.

He flung himself dressed, ready for his flight, on the bed, shrouded and concealed by the heavy curtains, face downwards on the great pillows where the darkness was like the darkness of oblivion.

But it brought him no peace; his wild thoughts threw the pale bright figure of the Contessa Giovanna on the intense blackness. He saw her, as he had seen the woman of his vision last night, advancing towards him, coming soft-footed to the bedside and holding out her arms.

As soon as the summer dawn showed in a pale line between the velvet curtains, he rose and made his few preparations for departure. For two nights he had scarcely slept, and he felt giddy, but he resolved to rest at the first inn—not here. "I shall not sleep," he said,

"until I have left Bologna behind--until my face is set homeward."

He found water in his chamber and bathed his face; he put on his dark hat and mantle over the steel-blue silk he had worn the night before, took up his gloves and his small portmanteau, left a note for Mr. Middleton and a guinea for the servant, and stepped out on to the grand staircase.

The palace was absolutely silent from garret to cellar. His spirits rose when he saw that he was not likely to meet any difficulty in making his escape (for escape he named it to himself); he had another guinea ready for the porter at the gates, who would be well enough used, he was sure, to people coming and going at all seasons.

He descended the first flight of stairs, turned down a corridor, came to another staircase, descended that, found himself in a part of the building strange to him, and realized with deep vexation that he did not know his way out.

When he had been conducted to his room he had not noticed where he was being guided; when he had come up after supper he had come by the back staircase from the salon that was not near the entrance.

He resolved, however, to return that way, and from the ground floor find an exit; but in retracing his steps again lost his way in the palace that was vaster far than any house in which he had ever been.

Vexed and humiliated he went from passage to passage, from staircase to staircase, then began to traverse a suite of state-rooms that opened from one to the other and were all painted and splendidly furnished; these rooms gave on to the garden, and Francis thought that from one of them steps must descend from the window to the terrace below.

When he had crossed the fourth room, however, he found himself in a windowless antechamber of white marble, lit only by a tall door of stained glass in a screen of cedar wood, that formed the end of the suite.

The light that struggled through the coloured squares was the uncertain light of dawn before sunrise, and the whole antechamber was dim, silent, and oppressive—a shadowed, chill whiteness in which Francis could hardly see his surroundings. He realized that he had been again foiled in his attempt to leave the palazzo, and was turning on his heel with a kind of impatient despair, when the low but distinct sound of a voice made him turn again and pause.

A woman's voice reciting Latin—a prayer, Francis thought; it came from behind the cedar-wood wall or screen, and Francis now guessed that a chapel or oratory was concealed by the glass doors, for he noticed a faint perfume of the powerful and, to him, infinitely repugnant incense such as the Papists used.

He had now a stronger reason for endeavouring to find his way out of the palace as quickly as possible, for one person at least was awake, and might any moment discover him. But instead of leaving, he lingered, and finally, putting his portmanteau down by one dim white wall, he crossed to the stained glass door, shuddering, reluctant, but irresistibly drawn.

He thought that it was Giovanna's voice, that she was there praying to her images, and he thought that he was strong enough to look on her once more and then to go, when he had seen his vision of the torturing night—the tantalizing phantom, that always faded before it touched him, resolved into beautiful reality. He trembled at the thought of meeting her alone, in this remote, silent hour; he waited at the door of the oratory, his hat off and the brim pressed to his lips, for he could not bring himself to enter a Papist place of worship.

The voice faded into a silence that lasted so long that he had almost forced himself into pushing open the door that concealed her and her idol, when he heard a step.

Her step, he knew it already; he leant back against the carved cedar wood, and his heart gave a sick lurch.

"I will look on her once, and go," he said.

The door swung back with a gentle creak and Giovanna Odaleschi stepped into the white antechamber.

She was in white herself, a white gown that hung from throat to ankles, and a white scarf was twisted round her head, showing the pale oval of her face as she stood for a second in the open doorway; the heavy golden light from the chapel was upon her, changing her garments to an amber colour, and the bluish smoke of the incense and the sickly strong perfume of it rushed out into the cool air.

Francis moved a slow step forward, and she, seeing him, paused, and allowed the door to fall into place behind her.

With eager and despairing eyes he stared at her through the veil the obscure light put between them; the peculiarity of her person was heightened by the fantastic effect of her white figure in the white room. She looked abnormally tall, long-limbed, and slender, and her small head had an extraordinary look of delicacy, like the drooping bell of some Eastern flower.

When she saw the young man in his light travelling cloak leaning against the wall with his hat crushed to his breast and his feverish eyes fixed with such a passionate intentness on her, she gave a faint exclamation in her own language, but she showed no surprise, nor

did he, nor had he felt any even when he first heard her voice. It seemed to him that from the first this was inevitable, in no way to be avoided. She spoke in an even, natural voice.

"You are up early," she said. "I often come here to pray--my rooms are near. How did you find your way here? These apartments are generally shut since my father died. They were his."

"I found the door open," answered Francis, marking with fury the Papist symbols about her, the dark crucifix hanging at her bosom, the breviary in her hand.

"Why did you come?" asked Giovanna; her manner was grave, even sad, all the coquetry that she had displayed last night had gone.

"I lost my way," he said hoarsely, knowing that he had but too well found it, that this way he had been meant to come by the magic that had bewitched him since he had entered Bologna.

"Lost your way?" she echoed; she came nearer, bringing with her the smell of the incense that was so hateful to him. "Why are you abroad so soon?" she added.

He did not answer; he realized that they were talking in a great intimacy, with no restraint or embarrassment, and it was not his way to be easy, especially with foreigners and women. He watched her as she came slowly across the white floor, even as his vision had come, slowly towards him. In that moment he hated her; she stood for all that was alien and evil, and he hated her the more that her presence troubled him, and she shook his soul to tumults of longing and desire.

She gazed at him in a calm way, then her glance fell on the portmanteau beside him.

"Ah, you are going?" she said.

He was usually acutely sensitive to anything approaching the undignified, and avoided ridicule as he avoided dishonour, but now it did not occur to him that there was anything foolish in being caught by the daughter of his hostess in attempting an escape from her house. These outside considerations did not affect him at all, the issue seemed to be only and entirely between him and her.

"Yes, I am going," he answered, and squared his shoulders as if he replied to a challenge.

She did not ask why; she threw out her hands with a foreign gesture and said softly: "You hate us all."

"I hate the Papists," he said bitterly, "and all their mummary and witchcraft."

Giovanna made the sign of the cross hastily.

"Of course you are a heretic," she said.

Francis laughed.

"I am leaving Bologna. I am leaving Italy. Farewell, Signora, for we are not likely to meet again."

"Ah *Dio*!" she exclaimed with an intense accent; she moved swiftly towards him and held out her two slim hands exactly as his vision had done.

"Signore, how have I offended you? Yesterday you would not speak to me nor look at me, and now you leave me!"

He drew back before her.

"You have been very hospitable," he answered hoarsely, "but I was not made for these soft delights."

"I do not understand," said Giovanna in a humble voice.

Francis felt for her a sudden pang of pity that quenched his hate; how could she understand anything? He flushed and quivered as again the thought came to him that perhaps she might be saved from the damnation surrounding her--that *he* might save her.

"Why would you not be my cavalier?" asked Giovanna. She slowly unwound the white scarf from her head and neck, and the light was now strong enough to reveal the soft lines and hues of her bared throat and ears, the crushed coronal of curls on her small head.

Francis averted his eyes.

"I am going," he said.

She was puzzled, bewildered, like a hurt child; she lifted her hand and let it fall.

"Your country is very far off?" she asked, and in that sentence he saw the ignorance of her mind laid bare; she was no more than a child, he thought, and like a child might be taught and led...

"I come from Scotland," he answered her.

"There arc many Scotch gentleman in Rome," said Giovanna.

"They are cursed Jacks and traitors and Papists," returned Francis, "men who would never dare show their faces at home. I am Mr. Moutray of Glenillich."

The light was now strong in the antechamber and they could see each other clearly, could mark how pale and strained the features of either were--her eyes seemed red with weeping, and his were heavy and flushed with blood.

"You have not slept," she said.

"No," he admitted in a rough voice; "and you?"

"I have been praying--"

"To those images!"

She pressed her hands tightly over her heart with a gesture of terror.

"How different we are, you and I!" she cried--"different in everything! I never met before one like you!--nor you a woman like me, I think--"

"There is a gulf between that nothing can bridge," said Francis hoarsely. "Go back to your idolatry--it is not for such as me to strive for the souls of such as you!"

"My soul?" repeated Giovanna. "Are you thinking of my soul? I am good, Signore; I am but newly come from the convent--I mean to be good all my life."

"Poor child!" said Francis.

"Why do you say that? Do you think I am a useless creature? I know that I am--only a woman--but a woman can do something."

"What can she do?" asked Francis.

"Love," said Giovanna simply.

At that one word, at her voice and her look, he trembled all over, and, turning hastily round to conceal his emotion, caught up his portmantle.

"Tell me how I may leave the palace," he asked, "and farewell again, Signora."

She put out her hand, then withdrew it; he moved away from her, his cloak slipped from his shoulder on to the marble floor. She moved as if to pick it up, he with a word of protest stooped and their hands met.

As her fingers touched his she began to sob.

"Are you going?" she asked, "are you going?"

He raised her, repelling her light weight that seemed to lean towards him; her hands clung to his wrist ruffles.

"Are you going?" she repeated for the third time.

He stared down on to her closed eyes.

"What else," he asked, "can I do?"

He pushed her gently away from him, and she suddenly retreated and looked at him, bright eyed and very white.

"Go, then," she said, "doubtless it is better."

"Before God," cried Francis Moutray, "it is better."

But his heart was sick and heavy and his feet faltered as he turned away.

"When do you leave Bologna?" she asked.

He struggled with himself, he knew that servant and horses were waiting for him even now at the inn, and that he had meant by full sunrise to be well on the way to Milan; but he was making compromises, desperate compromises, with himself.

"To-night," he answered.

"Where are you staying?" she asked.

The name of the inn was on his lips, but he made a violent effort over his weakness.

"I shall spend the hours seeing Bologna," he answered with an unsteady laugh.

Giovanna drew her breath sharply.

"Go through these rooms," she said, "and take the second staircase--it will lead you to the gates."

He bent his head, then dared a last look at her; she was faintly smiling, and it fired his blood with ecstasy and terror.

V

Several hours after the dawn when Francis and Giovanna had parted, Vittoria Odaleschi entered her daughter's chamber.

The girl was seated by her white damask-hung bed, her elbow resting on her knee, her chin resting on her hand.

"Vanna," said the Contessa sharply, "what is the matter? Emilia tells me that you have refused to go with her party to the *casini*. Are you ill?"

Giovanna shivered.

"Yes, I think so," she answered faintly.

"Why did you not come to Mass this morning?" demanded Vittoria, closing the door; she sat down near her daughter, her billowing panniers and huge skirt, all glittering with gold tinsel, wholly concealing the chair.

Giovanna held out her right hand in which a letter was crushed; her face frightened her mother, for her eyes were heavy, her lips swollen and dry with fever, her cheeks colourless.

"I love a man and he loves me," she said fiercely, "and--he is going away."

Vittoria put down the coquettish tricorn hat, mask, and black lace shawl she carried, her eyes sparkled and her features blanched beneath the French red and white.

"Who is it?" she asked.

"The Scotch milord," cried out Giovanna; "he is flying from me! Why? Am I ugly or hateful? Madonna, help me to bring him back."

Vittoria had scarcely noticed the man, never even perceived that he had left the palace.

"Speak to me coherently," she said in a calm voice; "tell me everything."

"There is nothing to say," returned Giovanna; "we met yesterday--we loved. I rose early this morning to pray the Virgin send us happiness, and when I left the chapel I met him--he was leaving--he would not

stay nor tell me where he would lodge, but all the while I knew he loved me. I sent my page to follow him--he was at 'La Corona d'Oro.' I wrote to him, asking him to come back--he answered me--" she held out the crumpled scrap of paper in her hot, moist hand--"refusing--I do not understand."

The Contessa did not understand either; her world was a world where women were paramount, the amusement and the authority of a decadent age, and no man refused to interpret aright the language of gallantry nor to accept a lady's favour. But this was not what troubled Vittoria, the thing that cut to her heart was to see the marks of passion in Giovanna's wretchedness, that Southern passion was even more her daughter's inheritance than her own.

"Who is this man?" she asked with deep anger.

"I do not know," answered Giovanna. "I love him."

Vittoria rose.

"Only yesterday," she said, "I told you what I intended for you," her eyes blazed. "You will have no lover till you are safely married."

"I shall only have this one lover all my life," replied Giovanna.

Vittoria laughed.

"You had better have stayed in your convent," she said.

Giovanna pressed the letter to her lips and rocked herself to and fro.

"Bring him back to me," she implored.

"Vanna," cried the Contessa impatiently, "you must never see this man again."

Giovanna laughed now, and the sound of it frightened her mother.

"I love him," she repeated, rising in her dishevelled mob and pushing back her fallen hair; "do you not understand? And if I cannot have him for my lover and my husband--"

"Your husband?" broke in Vittoria.

"My husband," repeated the girl, "*mine for always!* He must come back to me or I shall be mad--think of it"--she put her hand to her throat and the words came hoarsely--"he--will--go--away, and one day some other woman--Oh *Dio!* save me!"

She sank on her knees on the bedstep, and abandoned herself to bitter sobbing.

Vittoria looked at her with dismay and anger but little pity.

"You will not give yourself to this nameless foreigner, this rude heretic, this barbarian," she said with great pride and authority. "Do you think that I have guarded you, adored you, tended you, for that? Forget this man--"

Giovanna lifted her haggard face.

"*You* were not so old as I," she said, "*you* did as you chose--you married where you loved--"

"You speak of what you do not know," returned the Contessa sternly. "I made mistakes, and I want to save you from them--"

"This is another life and another mistake, *mine*, not yours," said Giovanna passionately. "Do not tell of the past--this is *my* time now; if you will not help me, I will win him for myself--he loves me--"

"He flies you," cried Vittoria, catching at straws, "he does not appreciate you, *you, my daughter*, worthy of a prince--"

"He loves me," answered Giovanna; "could I but see him he would not leave me. Oh, heart, heart! Mother, he must not leave Bologna to-night--"

Vittoria caught her by the shoulders and dragged her to her feet.

"What do you want from life?" she asked; "think, you are not a child. Here is everything women want--to your hand, for the picking up--consider, you like these things--gallantries, luxuries, idleness--"

"I liked such pleasures till yesterday," interrupted Giovanna; "now I do not care--no, for none of these--"

She lifted her tear-stained face defiantly, and Vittoria stared down into it with frightened, angry eyes. She could not blind herself to the sincerity and force with which her daughter spoke, and she knew what a power passion could be, but her life had too long been idle intrigue and restless liberty for her to consider the question of such self-sacrifice as Giovanna wildly proposed, nor had she it in her to conceive an unselfish love for any man.

"You mean you would leave me, leave your country, and go with this man if he asked you?" she demanded.

"Yes," shivered Giovanna, "at once--anywhere--"

"He is a foreigner," remarked Vittoria bitterly, "and a cursed heretic--and what can he give you?"

"It does not matter," answered the girl. "You speak as if I were thinking of my own advantages--and I tell you--" she drew herself

away from her mother's grasp--"that I love him."

The English blood that was in the Contessa and that made her so bold, so prudent, and often so eccentric, helped her to take a practical view of this fantastic affair; all the graces and languishing coqueties of the famous beauty fell from her; she looked her age, and her face formed into hard lines.

Giovanna had fallen across the bed again, and the fine contours of her long, slack limbs showed through the twisted folds of her muslin gown; her face was concealed in her hands, and the knot of rose-coloured ribbons which fastened her curls was slipping down the silken length of her hair.

"Let me see the letter," said Vittoria. She took the crumpled paper from the girl's moist, hot hand and spread it out.

"Signora Contessa,--I thank you for your offer of further hospitality, but I may stay no longer in Bologna, therefore I cannot even wait on you this afternoon, which is to the regret of your obedient servant,

"Francis Moutray of Glenillich--"

As the Contessa read this letter she flushed angrily.

"A boor," she said, with an accent of scorn, "a barbarian--and if I remember well, a man of insignificant aspect."

Giovanna at once sat up; her face too was crimson and her whole body shook; Vittoria had used the unforgivable weapon in scorning the man her daughter had chosen; the girl's tears died in an angry heat, she felt wronged and bitter, she recalled gallants of her mother's whom *she* would have spurned, and her heart swelled.

But Vittoria continued, careless or unheeding--

"And with this creature you would fly the delights of Bologna--the future I can assure you!" she said. "It is a caprice of youth, and a foolish caprice, and I pray you forget it."

Giovanna's clear brown eyes flashed black with passion, but she made no answer.

"There are better gallants than this," added Vittoria, flicking Francis' letter with her delicate finger-nails, "to be had by lifting an eyebrow--put a cushion on the balcony and smile down the street for half an hour and you will have a dozen to choose from better than this Francis Moutray."

Giovanna's heart suddenly and for ever closed to her mother, who was, she told herself passionately, either incredibly stupid or incredibly cruel--at least it was plain that she either did not or would not understand, and a deep reserve fell over Giovanna's heart concealing the tumult, the passion, and the pain.

Still she did not speak, and Vittoria stood helpless, not able to read her at all.

"It is impossible that you can love this man," said the Contessa at last, flinging down the letter.

Giovanna looked away and smiled.

"It is not love, it is fancy," continued Vittoria; "do I not know?"

"Too much!" flashed Giovanna, "too much, Madonna, ever to understand me!"

"Do you scoff at experience, you foolish child?"

Giovanna rose with a certain dignity and a certain calm.

"Your experience is no use to me," she answered. "I am free, am I not? My life is my own--"

"You are *mine*," interrupted Vittoria, with pain in her voice.

Giovanna shook her small head.

"No--God made me a free creature--and if you will not help me, I will pray to Him and to the Virgin to give me good counsel."

"God will not listen to you," said the Contessa angrily. "What you ask is mortal sin--this man is a heretic."

Giovanna trembled.

"There is that between you that nothing can bridge," added Vittoria.

Giovanna turned sharply away. Francis Moutray had used these very words that morning; foreboding and despair fell over her heart; she moved to the elaborate and frivolous toilet-table covered with scents, unguents, and washes in gold and silver boxes.

"It is he and he only," she said, more as if speaking aloud to herself than addressing her mother. "I shall never care for anyone else--never even see anyone else. It is for all my life."

To the Contessa these words sounded like folly; she knew passion and devotion, emotion and sentiment, but she despised constancy, and all her instincts and training and experience were against a single love exalted by self sacrifice, nor could she regard marriage as anything but a step of material advancement and a safe-guarding of reputation in a woman's life.

She smiled, and Giovanna, in the depths of the dressing mirror, saw the smile, and the breach between them was complete, though the Contessa was not entirely aware how she had stung her daughter.

Nor was she at that moment watching Giovanna; her quick and daring brain was already conceiving a plan to end this foolishness,—the fellow said he was leaving—probably only a ruse, but it must be seen to that he did leave both Bologna and Italy; she had seen the name of the inn heading the letter Francis had written, she would have the place watched, and if he lingered in the city her plans were ready; she was a power in Bologna.

This resolve brought her sudden comfort. She banished the dismal forebodings that had arisen (for her finest, truest feelings were bound up in her children, and she would have given her life to have saved either of them from a spoilt career or failure, as she imagined failure), that Giovanna was madly rushing on destruction.

With her air of the great lady, the coquette and the woman of the world, she crossed to the slim, silent figure of her daughter and kissed her on the forehead—tall as Giovanna appeared, her mother was taller.

The girl did not speak and made no response; Vittoria gave her an anxious look, then smiled brilliantly, as she reflected that she who had been equal to the college of Cardinals and the Pope himself, was not likely to find much difficulty in dealing with a simple girl out of a convent—she pictured Giovanna soon mistress of a Roman or Florentine palace, and the Scotchman soon enclosed in the grey fogs of his impossible island.

Picking up her armoury of weapons, the fan, the mask, the lace shawl, the Contessa left the room to join the aristocratic company who were already assembled on the benches outside the palace.

But Giovanna remained in her room, in untidy undress, seated before the dressing-table and staring with red eyes at her wretched reflection in the glass.

She considered dismally that by her impulsive confidences to her mother she had made her case worse; she knew that she would be watched now as the young wives of the nobles who thronged the Palazzo Odaleschi were watched.

She had meant to find the friend of Mr. Moutray, but he too had disappeared, and now there was little chance of her meeting him.

And to-night *he* might be leaving Bologna; she shivered to the soul as she pictured him riding away, and sought desperately for the cause of this flight.

He loved her, of that she was sure; she did not come of a race of women schooled to be diffident or shy. Love, religion, and politics were the three interests of her world, and love came first with most, certainly with those who frequented her mother's salons, and she felt neither shame nor wonder at her own feelings, nor at her expression of them, but his attitude, the contradiction with the lips of what the eyes told her, this reluctant flight--these were beyond her comprehension.

She could only think of two explanations, either he was married (not a very potent reason in her eyes), or it was religion keeping them apart.

This last obstacle she did tremble before; she felt the barrier it was between them, the awful position of a heretic; she knew the impossibility of a union with one, and already felt herself cowering before the wrath of an outraged Church--the Church that condoned everything but apostasy.

She recalled his scornful gesture, his scornful words, evoked by the sight of the crucifix hanging at her bosom, and fresh tears of agony began to sting her tired eyes.

She saw the huge, yawning chasm between them. She was not stupid, and she pictured clearly enough the differences between their Gods, their countries, their outlook, and their positions; yet it seemed to her, in the generous strength of her swift passion, that all these obstacles could be lightly swept away; it was bitter to consider that he did not find it so easy on his side.

With an unsteady hand she poured some Hungary water over her handkerchief and held it to her throbbing, aching head.

She pressed the wet cambric over her closed lids, and pictured him as she had seen him that morning in his light travelling cloak with his hat pressed to his heart, his dark eyes shadowed, his features wan and fatigued--looking at her, moving reluctantly away.

She had his portrait by heart: she knew every wave in his soft hair--she remembered the pattern of the lace of his cravat, the make of the tassels on his sword hilt, the red silk roses on the flourishing of his waistcoat--all these trivial details that were important because they helped to form the picture of him...

When the Contessa Emilia entered in swaying white silk hoops with pink rosettes and high-heeled mules buckled in gold--Emilia, perfumed, powdered, and smiling--she hardly recognized her sister in the dishevelled, tragic figure at the dressing-table.

"I am not coming to the *casini*," said Giovanna, rising and facing her sister.

Emilia stared, shrugged, laughed, and went away to her

amusements; Giovanna pulled the crucifix from her bosom and, resting her elbows among the combs, ornaments, and complexion washes, pressed the holy symbol to her dry lips.

VI

The Contessa found Mr. Middleton among the company lounging in front of the Palazzo Odaleschi. She spoke to him, graciously and decisively, of his friend, and the Englishman, who had what he termed 'Moutray's confounded foolish letter' in his pocket, began to think that there had been more than mere whim in the flight of Francis, so clearly did the Contessa let it be understood that it would be for Mr. Moutray's own good to leave Bologna at once.

Curiosity and some apprehension for the safety of his travelling companion sent Henry Middleton round to the "Corona d'Oro" as soon as he could unobtrusively leave the company.

It was now nearing the fall of evening, the first dusk began to creep over the long afternoon, but Francis Moutray was still at the inn.

Mr. Middleton found him, in the bare parlour with the painted walls, wearing his travelling coat, his hat on his knees, smoking a long clay pipe and staring out of the window at the little garden where some fowls scratched the dust under the vine-covered arbours.

"Eh, Frank," cried Mr. Middleton, "what turn is this?"

Francis Moutray showed a face so violent in expression that the Englishman's jovial humour was checked at once; he had always known that the mobile features were capable of expressing passion, but he had not looked for this transformation. Mr. Moutray spoke quietly, however.

"Have you also left the Palazzo Odaleschi?" he asked.

"To find you, Frank, to ask you how you have offended the Contessa."

Francis turned his smouldering eyes away.

"I offend the Contessa?" he repeated slowly.

"She hinted plainly that you had better leave Bologna no later than to-night for your own sake," said Mr. Middleton, flinging his hat on the table and thrusting his hands jauntily into his embroidered pocket-holes. "What is it, Frank? Hast thou an intrigue at last?"

Francis was silent, but obviously startled and amazed.

"'Twill be too dark to start soon," continued Mr. Middleton, "and 'twere best you went."

"She threatens?" asked Francis moodily, knocking out his pipe. "What can she mean? I do not think I shall leave Bologna."

"Why? You meant to this morning."

"I have changed my mind," replied Francis gloomily. "I am not well; I have a touch of fever. I shall stay till to-morrow."

"There is some mystery here," cried Mr. Middleton impatiently. "What occurred between you and the Contessa during those few hours you were in her house?"

"I never spoke to her," returned Francis shortly.

"But she is not a woman," persisted the other, "to talk idly. She has some grievance against you, believe me. And she is near as

powerful in this city as the Pope himself."

"A fitting lieutenant to His Holiness!" said Francis fiercely. "I am not afraid of this woman, even though she has all the bravoos in Bologna in her pay, as I doubt not she has. And as she has seen fit to threaten me, for that reason I shall remain."

"But confound me, Frank," cried Mr. Middleton, "what has she against you?"

Francis did not answer; he did not himself know. He held it inconceivable that Giovanna should have spoken to her mother about that meeting in the dawn, and he flattered himself that the young Contessa did not herself know the reason of his flight, so utterly new was he to this type of woman. He knew that Giovanna was extraordinary, but he clothed her, unconsciously, in the conventional modesty and stupidity, reserve and shrinking, that he had always been taught to associate with her sex.

Nor, in his pride and arrogance, could he believe that a creature such as the Contessa would take offence if he did deign to notice her daughter. Indeed, he now thought that perhaps she hoped to frighten him into a formal offer, since he had heard that she was looking for a husband for the girl, and he smiled at the idea. Such a marriage was as utterly preposterous in his estimation as it was in that of the Contessa.

But to Mr. Middleton, alert with idle curiosity, enlightenment suddenly came: he remembered a remark Francis had made the day before, he recalled the disappearance of Vittoria's youngest daughter from the company.

"'Tis the Contessa Giovanna!" he exclaimed. "Thou hast been caught in the springe of love at last!"

"What makes you say that?" cried Francis violently, and rising as he spoke.

Mr. Middleton laughed.

"Confess you were caught in conversation with the lady, Frank. The Odaleschi is a very Argus where her daughters are concerned. I warned you."

"She overacts the part," returned Francis scornfully. "She is a fitting sentinel for youthful innocence! I hate her, Harry."

"But Giovanna?"

Francis would not use the heathen, Papist name.

"The Contessa's daughter and I could never have anything in common," he said half angrily, half mournfully. "What would my marriage with such an one mean but black misery?"

Mr. Middleton started in real surprise.

"Marriage? By Heaven!" he exclaimed.

Francis whitened at having betrayed where his wild thoughts were leading him.

"Is she not an honourable woman?" he asked fiercely, stung into further indiscretion.

"She is not the wife for you, Frank. You have fever, indeed, or are deeper in love than ever I thought to see you. Ye heavens! Giovanna Odaleschi!"

Francis' face took on an expression akin to that which had come

over Giovanna's when her mother laughed at her lover, but the long training of reserve helped him to control his leaping, unreasonable anger.

He answered quietly:

"I do not think to see her again. I shall leave Bologna to-morrow."

Mr. Middleton thought this course the wisest too, and was about to say so, but a spirit of mischief checked him. He had often wanted to see the austere, cold, moody Francis moved, and the idea of his being roused at last, and by the daughter of a woman whose name was a byword in Italy, amused him immensely.

The rage and disgust of the Contessa at a heretic foreign suitor for her daughter, the scorn and loathing of Francis for the Papist and the wanton, the immense pride of each, the desire of Mr. Moutray to go, the alluring figure of Giovanna drawing him to stay--all these things seemed to Mr. Middleton to hold the elements of a very pretty drama, and one he was not minded to miss. He had no wish to do Francis Moutray any harm; he had, indeed, a certain affection for him, but he was a man of little imagination, and he did not see the potentialities of tragedy in the diversion he was arranging for himself by the discomfiture of a travelling companion who was never congenial and often moody to discourtesy.

Affecting a careless air, but with a look of amused malice, he said:

"Leave Bologna, Frank, but, as you say, what need to hasten as if you were afraid of the girl? To-morrow will do, since you must leave me--but spare me your company to-night."

The manner of Francis Moutray responded instantly to that of his friend; he became cold and indifferent, and stretched and yawned

carelessly.

"Where are you going to-night?" he asked lazily.

"The Palazzo Rossi—I met the Marchese yesterday and he gave me welcome to the gala he holds to-night. 'Twill be a grand fete, Frank, such as one only sees in Italy. Will you not come?"

Francis Moutray hesitated; he looked out of the window where the warm purple of the Italian dusk was falling, giving magic even to the confined garden and the dusty vine arbours. He wanted to stay, he wanted to taste to the full the idleness, the luxury, the nameless air of pleasure that was so insidiously alluring; but, apart from being ashamed of such desires, had he not vowed to put miles of the long white road to Milan between himself and Giovanna Odaleschi?

"You said you were not leaving to-night," put in Mr. Middleton, who knew perfectly well that Francis had only made that statement in pique, "and surely you might as well be amusing yourself as sitting in this miserable parlour?"

"Indeed, I am not well," said Francis, but he felt the excuse was childish, and amended it by rising with a laugh on his lips, "but I am well enough to go to your masque with you, Harry. I have been a sorry companion to you, and you will be glad to see me ride homewards," he added, and the smile that still lingered on his dark, thoughtful face eradicated the gloomy and frowning lines in a sudden and lovable fashion so that he looked, in his slimness and erectness and grace, only a youth—a handsome youth with melancholy in his blood.

"You will be happier in Scotland," responded Mr. Middleton, "where there are no Giovanna Odaleschis to disturb you!"

"Cease!" cried Francis, and the blood tingled to a flush in his

cheeks. "Say no more of that foolish fancy of mine. I meant nothing serious."

Mr. Middleton narrowed his eyes humorously, then pulled his watch out of his laced pocket.

"I will order a coach and call for you at nine, Frank," he said. "I am still a guest of the Odaleschi—they have an entertainment to-night, but they will not notice my absence."

He thus skilfully informed Francis that Giovanna would not be at the ball—a point Mr. Moutray had already resolved to be certain on before he himself joined the fete at the Palazzo Rossi.

"I shall be ready," he answered indifferently, and Mr. Middleton left him and rode back to the Palazzo Odaleschi.

Francis rang for his man, ordered his clothes to be put ready, ordered the barber to be fetched, and his dinner to be served early, adding that he would stay this night in Bologna, but no longer; the horses and baggage were to be ready with the dawn.

When the servant had left him, Francis remained at the window.

He would not see her again, he told himself, he would go back to the honourable, quiet, careful life such as his father had lived, such as he meant to live, such as he had been trained to live all his days. Yet he wished he had never come to Bologna with a force that showed how deeply the allurements of the city and the woman had entered into his soul.

Both were the final realization of many vague, stinging and, as he felt, wicked dreams; warmth, softness, idleness, beauty, luxury, and a fair, useless, loving woman—dreams of these devices of the devil had often troubled his austere, repressed youth; and the mingled

longing for them, and spurning himself for the longing, and the dreading of the eye of God whose beam was directed into his soul and could read there his wickedness, had been the cause of the black melancholies that at times swept over his spirit as a storm of dark waters will sweep over and overwhelm a strong swimmer until he can no more lift his head above them.

But hitherto the temptations had been dreams only, obscure suggestions of the blood, whisperings of sleepless nights, visions and fancies founded on his country's vast lore of ballad and tale and the wild legends that were rife in his native Ayrshire.

Now this wicked life was no longer a dream; he saw it before his eyes. The woman was no longer the Elfin Queen who had lured Thomas the Rhymer away, but a human creature, made for love, who had looked at him, bent towards him--stood ready--ah, heart, heart, he knew it!--for his touch, his kiss, his embrace.

He rose abruptly and began to pace the small but lofty room. A dull triumph steadied the unhappiness of his unsatisfied desires. He had not fallen. He would turn his back on Giovanna, on Bologna, on Italy, and take up again the thread of his rigid life as a Calvinist laird, and he would be stronger than before, for he would have faced the bait and refused it--despised it and gone his way.

And he did despise these worldly things; he was austere and intolerant as well as passionate, his gloomy creed suited him, and he clung to it with more tenacity and felt for it even a stronger veneration than men usually feel for an hereditary religion. He hated the Papists as the descendant of the persecuted alone can hate the persecutor, and he was arrogantly proud of the high standing of his name, the sacrifices his family had made for country and faith, his substantial position (founded on the reward King William had given his grandfather for loyal support) and grave unblemished record;

therefore one part of him did truly scorn these cheap and soft delights of love and luxury and idleness and ease--and yet--and yet--there was that in him that hungered and cried out and writhed under repression, and threatened a terrible revenge.

He went up to his room presently--the same he had occupied that first night he had slept in Bologna--but, either from complaisance (and he had already noticed that the Romanists did not wear their bigotry as openly as he did) or carelessness the Madonna had not been replaced.

The windows were open on the still lingering rosy light that fell in prodigal beauty over the gardens and palaces of Bologna, and the room was lit by two candles on the bureau that cast a soft illumination, yellow as an August moon.

A certain scent, either of some flower that Francis did not know (and he knew very few by name or sight), or of some wine from a cask being opened below, or some perfume or unguent somewhere spilt or scattered, filled the warm air; the bareness, the dirt, and gauntness of the room were concealed by the wonder of the fading light and the sweet fluttering shadows the two tapers cast.

On the bed were Francis' grey satin suit and his ruffles of Bruges lace, his embroidered sword-belt, his silk stockings, and his red-heeled shoes with cut silver buckles.

He glanced at his portmantles lying unstrapped, and thought, with the curious pang a broken resolve brings in the remembrance, that he should by now have been half-way to Milan.

"But to-morrow," he said to himself, "to-morrow--"

He reflected on that, that this was but an episode, that his real life lay

far outside these scenes, and would be resumed, as he had left it, grave, calm, untouched.

As he considered this, a kind of exaltation of the spirit came over him; he felt immeasurably stronger, he even smiled at the recollection of the power the beautiful Bolognese had had to move him—he evoked her image and viewed it without fascination; he felt that he could have met her and turned away without a quickening of his pulses.

He knelt down on the warm stone floor and unlocked his private box; from among the papers and jewel cases within he took out an Anglican Prayer Book in an ivory cover with gilt clasps—a book too splendid for his beliefs, but it was older than the modern days of stern simplicity. A Moutray, who had fallen fighting for Protestantism in the Low Countries under General Mackay, had carried it in his pocket on the battlefield where he had met his death; the dry, yellowed front pages were sprinkled with faded bloodstains.

Francis bowed his head, remained on his knees, and turned over the pages with fanatical reverence.

He stopped at the Epistle to the Ephesians, used in the Church of England on the third Sunday in Lent, and often resorted to for comfort and strength by the young Calvinist.

He began to read the words aloud in a hushed, tense voice:

"Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us... But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named amongst you, as becometh saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient; but rather giving of thanks... Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God

upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them: for ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as Children of Light...and have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them."

The broken, eager sentences ceased. Francis was silent, shuddering as he had often shuddered before in face of the awful might and power of those words--sentences that held as much of menace and terror as of strength and consolation. Either by menace or by consolation they cooled the hot rebellious blood in him; he put the old book back among his valuables, turned the key on it, and rose outwardly composed and inwardly master of himself.

As he turned to close the windows on the final glimmer of the daylight, he was conscious of a great increase in the sweet, powerful perfume of wine or blossom that he had before noticed in the room. So strong was this wave of heavy scent that he instinctively turned.

His newly acquired Italian servant stood within the door in a charming attitude of deprecation; he held a cluster of pure white and perfect flowers.

"The gardenias," he said, and placed them delicately on Mr. Moutray's lace ruffles, "for the Signore to wear to-night."

Francis came to the bed and looked down at the blooms which emitted the overpowering and exciting odour. He had never worn flowers before, but he had seen the Italian cavaliers with posies tucked into the velvet and lace of their cravats.

He picked up the flowers and gazed at them; his acute but stifled sense of beauty was stirred to great animation by the strength and whiteness, purity and delicacy of the strange blooms among the dark green leaves, and as he looked at them the fine edge of his spiritual

exaltation wore away—he felt the blood stirring in his veins, rapidly, dangerously.

"*Because of these things*"—the warning darted through his brain; he stepped to the window and flung the gardenias out, but before the perfect courtesy of the valet's smile he was ashamed.

VII

There was no fete that night at the Palazzo Odaleschi, as Mr. Middleton well knew. Vittoria and her daughter Emilia were engaged for the Palazzo Rossi, and when Harry Middleton returned to the Contessa, he contrived by a skilful whisper to the languid Giovanna that she should also be of the company.

"Francis Moutray is coming," he said, and it was enough, more than enough—a spark to tinder. She was like a creature transfigured, she glowed at him with such honest gratitude, she seemed so frankly to include him in her love-affair, that he was touched to a sense of shame by her simplicity, her sincerity, and her unconsciousness.

When he saw her descend into the coach resplendent with the Odaleschi arms on the gilt leather panels, he had a sense that he had inflicted an injury on three people—the Contessa, Francis, and Giovanna.

But as he drove to the inn to fetch Francis, the mood of laughter returned.

"Those two, Gods!" he cried to himself, and he tried to picture Giovanna in the gloomy mansion at Glenillich, sewing with the maids, preserving fruit and baking pies, or sitting in the old church listening to a pastor, in Geneva gown and bands, preaching the gloomy theology of Calvin. "But it is impossible," he assured himself, "it can

never be--neither love nor passion ever worked such a miracle as this."

So it came that Francis and Giovanna met at the fete in the Palazzo Rossi--he unconsciously, she prepared.

Francis, turning from the dances in the great painted saloon, came face to face with her, a late arrival, in the arch of the window, with a crystal lamp illuminating her ardent beauty, and behind her the garden and the moonlight--as behind her there had been the garden and the sunlight when he had met her in her mother's palace.

A black lace shawl was folded over her fair hair and hung down over the gold silk of her hoop; round her head was a coronet of cornelian stones, and on her breast hung a large cameo of a pale pink colour set in a gold filigree. He noticed this at once, and all the details of the gold stitching and embroidery on the billowings of her skirt.

He paused a couple of feet away from her, and anger showed in his face where she was eagerly looking for welcome.

"You look as if you had seen an enemy," she said, and shrank a little.

"So you may prove," he faltered, and put his palm across his eyes, for at the unexpected sight of her his strength was dwarfed, his resolutions shaken.

"Why?" asked Giovanna, without coquetry or lightness, but with a kind of tragic question and apprehension. "Are you afraid of me? Did you not know I was coming?"

"No," he replied, in a tone of such absolute firmness that she was at once convinced and shocked; the tragic look deepened in her eyes, her lips parted, she gave a short sigh.

"I should be on the Milan road," he said.

"I do not understand," she murmured; a certain gravity had fallen over the gay sweetness of her manner, a certain dignity touched the usual lightness of her demeanour. Francis instantly noticed this hint of depth in her, and it increased her attraction for him a thousandfold--opened up a thousand possibilities, a thousand tempting hopes--but he crushed and repelled them savagely.

"I am not a man for dalliance," he said in a low voice, "in--this world--I am out of place--in everything, these people, you--are different--therefore let me go."

He looked at her as if she held him actually bound and he pleaded for his release, and a certain gleam of triumph passed over her face and was gone in another sigh.

"Well," she said, "go."

She swung the pink cameo on her breast and gazed out into the gardens. He came a step nearer; he would go, of course, he told himself, but first he must see her face again--she must turn once more and look at him.

Behind him were the steps of the dancers sounding to the languid melody; before him she stood, and beyond her the garden, silver beneath the prodigal beauty of the moon, and in the air was a heavy sweet scent--he knew it now--the perfume of the white flowers that he had cast from his window...His heart began to beat unsteadily..."*Because of these things*"--yet she must look at him again.

"Donna Giovanna," he said, "you know that I go, not from discourtesy--but because I must?"

She looked at him now, and he came nearer.

"Who am I to keep you?" she returned. "I suppose we shall not meet again. Walk with me in the garden a while."

He was not a churl to refuse, nor a stoic to endure the anguish of leaving her now and facing the long struggle with himself alone in the inn bed-chamber. He was strong enough to snatch these foolish hours, to use them and fling them aside, and forget--so he said to himself as he obeyed her little gestures and followed her through the open window into the warm Italian night--warm, still, light, and perfumed.

She came beside him silently; she lifted her skirt from her feet--she wore mules of dark velvet with big rosettes on them--as she walked the high heels tapped on the stone paths. She was without words because she could not understand; he was silent because he understood too much; both were burdened with thoughts and uneasy with misgivings.

They walked on till the palace was far behind them and they could no longer hear the dance music; the moon shone behind the tall cypress trees, cutting a disc of fierce white silver in the dense blackness of the foliage. They came to a pond surrounded by formal walks and hedges of roses; facing the water was a stone bench beneath a stone figure, both gleaming now like molten silver.

It was so utterly still that he could hear her low breath, and the whisper of her gold silk skirt seemed a great thing.

She seated herself on the bench, and he, without a word, beside her, and together they looked at the water black in the shadow of the cypress save for the moon mirrored in the centre of the darkness. The smooth air and the perfume seemed to permeate his blood, the

struggle in his soul was lulled, his uneasiness was soothed. He looked up at the great expanse of deep luminous blue, and as he looked it seemed to him as if his feet were lifted from the earth; he thought how seldom men looked full up at the heavens, and, somehow, his constant fear of God, his constant thought of God, slipped from him and seemed to be absorbed into and lost in the great sweep of midnight sky.

He turned to glance at Giovanna; her face was towards him, and the moonlight showed a smile on her lips like a smile of triumph, but faint and soft and sweet.

Again a feeling of apprehension came over him—he had seen such a smile on the face of the painted Madonna above his bed the first night he had slept in Bologna. He turned to go, but again glancing up at the deep violet sky starred with fire, the sensation of peace and enervation returned to his heart.

He rose, but did not move away, and she sat with her hands folded in her lap, and the great stillness seemed to close about them like a mantle being swept tighter round their souls.

Giovanna rose also, and the black lace slipped from her hair which looked misty dull under the circle of the cornelian coronet.

"I have lost my shoe," she said, and gave a little exclamation and stooped over the shadows round the seat.

Her shoes were made like the clogs Francis had seen in his own country, and slipped easily from the feet; they were dark too, and the missing one was not easily found in the shadows, though both searched. She sat down again at length and held out her silk-clad foot, and laughed.

"How can I return--so?" she laughed.

"I will find it," said Francis. He was on one knee before her, the end of the ruffles of his cravat touched the ruffles of her petticoat; he looked up, and she was gazing down at him with an air of solicitude, leaning so far forward that the lace and lawn on her bosom were pressed against her knee. He forgot the shoe, he continued to look at her through the veil of the moonlight; he was calm and at peace. It seemed to him that she belonged to him, was even part of him, and that this was an inevitable fact which no person could alter and no circumstance overcloud. She had the same sweet certainty; she smiled, and he lowered his head against the hand she drooped against her knee.

She looked at the bent dark head in the attitude of surrender with something of pity and compassion mingled with the great tenderness that made her features radiate; then she stooped lower, and drew him gently and steadily to her so that his face rested on her bosom. He came without resistance, almost weakly, as if the strength had been all smitten out of him; but she, as she folded him to her heart, dilated with a dominant triumph as she gazed down on the arrogance, pride, and reluctance, now so still, in her embrace.

She bent to kiss his hair, and he moved then and got to his feet and drew her to hers, and she stood in one stockinged foot and one shoe.

"You love me?" he said.

"Yes," she said.

He put his arm round her waist and she hers round his neck.

"Do you love me?" he asked with a quick fierceness.

"Yes," said Giovanna.

"Have you ever loved anyone before?"

"No."

"You are not playing with me?"

"I do not play with these things."

"Kiss me," said Francis; he now was the one alert and triumphant, while she stood weakly as if only his support kept her from falling.

She kept her face hidden on the velvet lapels of his coat.

"Call me Giovanna now," she said. She spoke as if they had both entered into a new world where everything was different, and he understood with a thrill, that shook to his heart, the chance there was for him as well as for her. For a while both were silent, the new and marvellous sensation of the near presence of the other being overwhelming; they could hear each other's hearts, and she felt his breath passing her ear and on her neck.

"Kiss me," he repeated.

She raised her head. He freed one hand to take her under the chin and draw her face near to his; his lips pressed hers so fiercely that she moaned, but the sound was stifled in her throat; he seemed to her to be drawing the soul from her body. Her senses reeled, her hands fell nerveless from his neck, and still his lips remained on hers; she felt her mouth crushed beneath his mouth and her chin pressed by his chin; her eyes closed, and she lost all sense of time and place--her throat heaved with her pent breath. He released her at last and led her to the seat, and she fell across it. She pulled a handkerchief from the bosom of her gown and pressed it to her

smarting lips; when she took it away she saw, by the silver light, that it was stained by tiny drops of blood; she thrust it back into her gown. It pleased her that he had hurt her in the passion of his kiss; it pleased her to hear him breathing heavily like a spent runner and gazing at her with eyes that held no thought for anything but her...

"You will not go now?" she asked hoarsely.

At these words the outer world rushed in on Francis and overwhelmed him. He made no answer; he had kissed her too recently; the moist warmth of her lips still lingered on his own; he could not reason.

"Oh *Dio!*" said Giovanna, "this is love--love!"

"Have pity on me," broke from Francis. "I must go--"

She stared at him incredulously.

He turned to her with anguish in his face, in his voice in his gesture.

"Would you give up your *God* for me?" he asked.

She shrank away in horror and clasped her hands together in an attitude of prayer, as if she begged her outraged saints to spare the speaker.

"One cannot give up God," she whispered.

"You will not!" cried Francis; "you cling to your creed. And I cannot surrender mine."

Giovanna understood; she had dimly pre-visioned this barrier--a terrible one, she knew--he was a heretic. Her mother's words came back to her, stinging her through the delight of her new joy; she too

hated foreigners and heretics--but he did not seem to her to be either; he was now a thing apart, not to be judged by ordinary standards.

"Leave this now," she implored.

"I cannot," he replied passionately; "it is between us and always will be--"

"Oh--" said Giovanna. "Oh," she added helplessly--"but we love each other."

He looked at her with a bitter desperation.

"God is against it," he said. "Say adieu to me while we can speak it--we must not meet again--"

She rose.

"Your love is weak after all," she answered.

"No--no--"

"You leave me for fear of hell," she continued.

Francis trembled.

"I will not deny God for you," he returned, "and how may I take you without? You must be united to me in honour--"

"Either honour or dishonour I am yours," she broke in.

"Honour only can we consider because I love you," he said simply, "and such a marriage as ours would be cursed by heaven and earth."

She had not been taught to regard marriage as the sole end of love, but she had only one desire--to give all her life to the man before her, and, as he spoke, the idea of marriage assumed a new proportion in her eyes; instead of a convenience or a stepping-stone, she saw it as an indissoluble bond between two who loved, keeping them apart and sacred from the world. His words too showed her the quality of his passion; this was no episode of a summer night--if he loved her at all he would love her as his wife.

She felt an extraordinary gratitude and an extraordinary humility; she stretched out her hands imploringly towards him and began to weep silently.

"My dearest!" whispered Francis, "my sweet, dear girl!" he took the two pleading little hands and impressed gentle kisses on them. "I shall never marry...always you...in my heart. Do not weep--your tears sear my soul--we should never have met..."

She crouched away on the marble seat.

"Is it impossible?" she asked from a dry throat. "Is--our love so monstrous and unnatural that we must kill it thus?" she added in a tone that was sharp as if with physical agony.

"You torture me," said Francis; "help me instead to be strong--Giovanna."

She rose at that, instantly.

"I will try," she answered. "You think you must go away? It seems--*wrong*. Why should we have such--pain?"

She put both her hands to her left side as if she had been stabbed there and was concealing the wound.

"I am right," he said violently and fiercely. "You know I am right."

She was thinking of his kiss; she was bewildered; she wished to help him, to understand. The magnitude of the obstacles dividing them she did comprehend, but she needed time to think--to consider. Meanwhile he was going. She drew herself erect; there seemed a certain chill in the air that cooled her passion; she thought in one flash of her God, her country, her family--

"It is better that you should go," she said, adding in her own language, "There is the nunnery for me!"

He did not dare to touch her, no, nor to look long at her, he did not even offer to take her back to the Palazzo.

He turned alone through the silent garden; he knew nothing by which to measure the anguish of that solitude, the misery of walking away from her..."Farewell," he kept saying in his heart--"farewell, farewell."

VIII

"Francis Moutray was at the fete to-night and you were with him," said the Contessa Vittoria.

They had returned from the Palazzo Rossi, and were in one of their own great gilt-and-crimson rooms lit by the rapidly increasing dawn.

Emilia had taken her silks, her yawns, her laughter, upstairs; the pages and maids who tended the magnificence of all three ladies had disappeared in the corridors of the quiet palace, and Giovanna was alone with her mother.

She sat by an agate and ormolu table placed against the wall; it bore a lamp of Florentine copper that diffused a ruddy light over her figure,

saving her from the chill touch of the dawn.

The Contessa stood in the centre of the room. She wore black and scarlet, and held in her hand the velvet fantastic beak-shaped mask she had worn that evening; her attitude was one of anger and pride, but in her dark eyes was a look of pain and yearning.

"I was with him in the garden," replied Giovanna in a dead voice; there were purple shadows beneath her eyes, and her lips had a swollen, blistered look against the creamy colourlessness of her face.

"I know, I saw, but too late to prevent it," said Vittoria. "You are a fool, Vanna." She spoke with conviction for she knew that only a few such indiscretions, as Giovanna had committed to-night, had cost her the almost royal match she might have had and made her glad to accept the Colonna. "I did not know that he was to be there tonight or you would not have gone, Vanna."

Giovanna did not trouble to betray Mr. Middleton. She was too weary, too bewildered, too bruised in her soul, to give much heed to what her mother said; her mind was fiercely engaged on her own problems.

The Contessa gazed at her intently.

"Are you a fool, child?" she asked.

Giovanna made a helpless movement of her head and hand.

"I--love--him," she stammered; "he has gone because there is so much between us--to be bridged. What shall I do?"

"Forget him," said Vittoria quickly; "choose another gallant."

Giovanna shook her head; she felt alien to her mother, impatient of her talk. She wished, as she had wished ever since Francis had left her, to be alone, to think out by herself the amazing gain and loss that had come into her life; her mother seemed to her to belong to another world and to be arguing in a foreign tongue.

The Contessa waited a while but, getting no word from Giovanna, spoke again.

"If he has gone there is nothing more for either of us to do or say."

"He has gone," said Giovanna, "because of God."

"Of God?" Vittoria started and made the sign of the cross--then she understood. "We must be grateful," she said, "that he fears God."

Giovanna stood up.

"It has changed everything," she answered heavily--"all my life. I do not understand the meaning of all of it--but it seems to me that love--that lasts--is a terrible thing."

Vittoria looked at her with wise, wearied eyes.

"What can you know of love that lasts?" she asked.

"I know I shall never care for anyone else," returned the girl calmly. "I told you--I do not even see anyone else. Do you not know this feeling? It is as if a curtain had been dropped in front of all the world and he and I were alone--the only *real* things. Is not love a real thing--stronger, perhaps, than God?"

The Contessa shivered.

"You speak terrible words--but I will forget them--since you have sent

this man away."

"No," replied Giovanna, "he left me."

"But you let him go? You saw the madness, and let him go?"

"Yes," said Giovanna.

"Then," answered the Contessa with her magnificent air of the great lady, "there is surely nothing more for either of us to say. Come to me with tales of another cavalier and you will not find me unsympathetic. But you must have a husband by this time next month, Vanna," she added firmly; and, indeed, she had already decided that a girl liable to such wild and violent fancies was not safe unwed.

Giovanna pulled the chain of the red copper lamp, the flame sank out, leaving her standing in shadow, for the light of the dawn had not yet encroached upon her, and only touched into a faint colour the extreme edges of her silk skirts.

"Why are you silent with me?" asked the Contessa, and her face was haggard, her voice sharp.

"There is nothing to say," returned the girl on a note of suppressed passion; "he has left me."

"So he says--but methought that he was to have left Bologna to-night. He delays."

The Contessa continued to gaze with apprehension, suspicion, and tenderness at the dimly seen figure of her daughter.

Giovanna, with the instinct of one nurtured in an atmosphere of intrigue, at once divined her mother's meaning.

"We are in no conspiracy to deceive you," she replied.

The Contessa moved toward her, the rich domino over her arm, the mask in her hand, and the silver lace gleaming faintly on her befurbelowed dress; her beauty, that had been a delight and a ruin to so many, had a definite look of age, a chill over it, like snow over flowers.

"Are you not happy with me, Vanna?" she asked in a low voice. "Do you not care for me a little--?"

"Oh, you know--" trembled the younger woman. "But--for the moment--this other feeling--Ah, I fear I have undertaken something beyond my strength!"

She ended the broken sentences by putting her hands before her face and her face to the wall.

The Contessa went up to her, bent over her, embraced her. If she was, or had ever been, what the worst of her enemies said of her, the look and gesture of unselfish affection she used now would, at least for a while, have ennobled her above her sins.

"*Carissima*," she cried, "Christ and the Holy Virgin help thee!"

Giovanna was unresponsive in her grasp. She was thinking of Francis, of his kiss, of his farewell--all her pulses beat to that theme; all that was not he or of his, was an interference, an intrusion; and she could not give her mother her confidence, for she recalled how she had spoken of Francis yesterday.

The tears came to the Contessa's eyes as she felt the stiff, unyielding young body in her embrace.

"Has he, in a few short hours, displaced me, and all you used to care

for?" she asked stormily.

"I suppose," gasped Giovanna. "Let me go to bed--indeed, I suffer."

But the Contessa did not remove her arms, and the two women in their festival splendour remained together in the gorgeous ornate room with the dawn light slipping between the opened shutter, and glancing over them soft as a caress.

"You are mine," said Vittoria in her heart, "mine, and this foreigner shall not take you away from me."

Giovanna writhed to be free, and moaned.

"I suffer," she repeated. "My head hurts and my heart. I want to be alone in the dark--"

"In a few days you will have forgotten this--these fancies are soon over," said the Contessa, slowly releasing her.

The girl replied by a wild look; she was burning and shaking with fever, the disordered hair on her brow was damp, and her cheeks were utterly pallid.

She turned away, walking heavily and with an air of infinite weariness. Her mother made no attempt to follow; her plans were already formed, nor had she any fear that she, Vittoria Odaleschi, bound by no convention, stayed by no scruple, great in art, resource, and charm, would be unable to cope with this mad affair. The foreigner, whom she scorned and hated, she did not trust; she did not believe that the heretic was actuated by her own horror of another creed, another race, nor did her long experience of men teach her that one of them was likely to forgo the chance of a beautiful, seductive woman and a large fortune--for the Contessa knew that it

must appear to every stranger as if the Odaleschi, however ambiguous their position must be, were rich as well as noble.

Therefore she did not believe that Francis Moutray was leaving Bologna; yet she had a trust--strange in a character so false and unscrupulous--in her daughter's sincerity. She was sure Giovanna had truly resolved to see no more of an impossible lover; it was round the lover himself that all her suspicions and fears centred, and it was with him that she was prepared to deal.

Giovanna was untouched by her mother's intentions, more through carelessness than lack of insight. If she had considered the matter at all, she would have seen that the Contessa would take powerful and daring measures to prevent any frustration of her schemes or any affront to her pride; but she was too utterly occupied with her own wild emotion to consider what anyone else might do. She had, in a moment, won him and lost him--lost him--and yet it seemed to her incredible that he was really riding away.

She went up to her great dusky bedroom where the heavy curtains shut out the light, impatiently took off her jewels, her cloak, and cast herself on the bed-step with her face hidden in the velvet coverlet.

A complete lassitude crept over her; she was incapable of action, of thought. One idea only beat in her startled brain: that she belonged to this stranger and he to her, and that they were separated by that God whom she had always held in the deepest awe.

In all her short, careless life no counter influence to that of the lax but mighty Church that governed her world had ever disturbed Giovanna. She was, like her mother, deeply and unthinkingly religious; she had never rebelled against the yoke of Rome, principally because she had never felt its weight; there was no pleasure, no licence, no sin, ever likely to tempt her that the Church would not easily condone.

She had heard a Cardinal answer, to one who remarked that Bologna was becoming too lawless--no fewer than two thousand deaths from murder and duels having resulted in one year--"What will you? It is human nature." She knew that priests were among her mother's guests, often the gayest at the *festas*, and she was under no delusion as to the exceedingly worldly part they played in political and domestic intrigue, but she knew that these people were safe and saved, and that a heretic was damned and lost.

So her mind told her, repeating the lesson impressed on it during her whole youth; but her heart contradicted fiercely, declaring heaven and hell to be shadows compared with the needs of earth, telling her that nothing mattered but human love, and suffering and compassion and yearning.

This struggle between a life-long belief, convention and conviction, and an emotion more powerful than any she had believed it possible to experience, left her bewildered and exhausted. She saw herself opposed to the Church on the one point on which the Church was adamant, and yet she could not believe that what she desired was sin; indeed, she was more passionately desirous of being virtuous than she had ever been. All frivolous, empty ideas had fallen from her; she wanted to be good, she wanted to serve this man, to make him happy, to school herself in his service; she wished to dedicate to him her beauty (which she rated very humbly now), her gifts, all her life; to leave her country, her luxury, her idleness, for his sake, she counted as nothing; she was eager to put her whole life beneath his feet--but it was God he asked her to give up, and before that she shrank in an abasement of horror.

The idea of moving him never occurred to her; she knew by instinct that her spirit could not cope with his, and whatever she might do for love of him, he would not move from his path for love of her. If he took her it would be on his own terms--"Will you give up your God for

me?"

The memory of these words of his was like a sword in her heart, an actual pain burning and tearing.

He would leave her, and the loss would be complete and utter. She knew nothing of him, of the country or the people he came from, but she knew there was some woman somewhere whom he would one day kiss as he had kissed her in the garden of the Palazzo Rossi.

He had said that he would forswear love for her, but she did not credit that; such renunciation was not in her nature to comprehend.

She was herself so keen and sweet, so bright and ardent, so full of the capacity for love, devotion, and pleasure, so utterly without spiritual ideals--unless obedience to the Church could be called one--so direct and sincere in her desire and capacity for material success and happiness, that renunciation, repression, denial of human emotion was for her inconceivable; had she discovered it at all she would have found it arid and hideous.

Therefore the fiercest jealousy possessed her of the unknown woman, who must some day win the man who was for all time now the supreme passion of her soul. She loosened her hair and tore the ends of it, she pressed her bosom against the coverlet; she did not feel the hard wood of the step against her knees nor her cramped attitude. Her mind rushed ahead down the dank cavern of the future; for her she saw loveless blackness, and for him love for another; and so strong in her was the sheer human instinct and passion, that, ignorant and timid as she was, she rose to the height of the awful audacity of defying God. Even as the shrinking sheep will turn at bay to defend its lamb and make a show of fight to the attacking eagle, so Giovanna Odaleschi was wrought up to defy even God for the sake of her love.

She clutched at the crucifix, given her at the convent, that she always wore inside her gown, to steady herself against this awful blasphemy; she put her lips to it, but it was not the silver Christ she felt, but the fierce pressure of other soft human lips on her own.

"The devil has hold of me!" she moaned. She got to her feet, weak and miserable; she wondered what he was doing now, if he was really leaving Bologna...not before the sun was up...surely not before the sun was up.

She stumbled across the dark room and pulled aside the curtains; above the garden and the towers the serene blue of the early sky glowed, and a pale, lovely pink light fell on the buildings and the dark, straight trees that rose between them.

"Supposing he was already gone," thought Giovanna.

She turned from the windows to the mirror and saw herself there, red-eyed, hollow-cheeked, dishevelled.

"I am not beautiful enough, he cannot love me," she said in her heart, and a greater despair fell over her spirit; she felt rejected by God and man, useless and humbled, beyond expression unhappy.

She thought it a cruelty that this had happened--she longed to be as she had been two days ago--only two days!

"Oh Madonna!" she prayed, "I only want this one thing in all the world, and that is the thing you must deny me!"

The sun strengthened, joyously scattering the darkness in the heavy, gorgeous chamber, rendering brighter the reflections of her own wan face in the mirror.

"Am I never to be happy any more?" she asked herself. The crucifix dangled on her breast above the pink cameo, she stared dully before her, seeing nothing of the gay sunshine--nothing save the intolerable empty future when Francis Moutray would have left Bologna and her own wretched life.

IX

Francis Moutray wandered all night through the arcaded streets and across the magnificent piazza of Bologna, pursued by the scorpion lashes of remorse and thwarted desire; remorse that he had ever turned aside from his own sphere to dabble with the votaries of the Scarlet Woman, thwarted desire because his passions were roused and unsatisfied. And something softer and finer than passion was also awake for the first time in his heart and yearning for fulfilment--the instinct of tenderness, of devotion, of protection, all the delicate emotions belonging to real love; he wished to serve her, to watch her, to guard her--to see her in his home, to speak to her by her name and confide to her ail the fancies and resolves born of his loneliness and his melancholies; but these feelings he repressed as sternly as his sheer longing to be with her and to forget everything in her arms.

He had no thought of yielding; while she on her knees by her bed was considering desperately how she might give everything up and retain her love, he was fiercely revolving in his mind how he might retain everything in his life as it was and cast away from him even the memory of this violent love; but his struggle was as keen as hers; the thought of her clung to his soul as persistently as perfume clings to a garment, and was no more easily to be shaken off.

He wandered aimlessly; the city seemed to him a place of abomination, full of monstrous temples to the Devil and palaces

where sin reigned supreme; lights flashed from high balconies, inside streets men fought and quarrelled, monks and priests slipped to and from the churches, coaches and sedans went up and down from one *festa* to another, and there was no peace or silence through the hot, moonlit night.

When the dawn came he was standing outside the great church in the *piazza* and watching the peasants and their mule carts laden with vegetables come in from the country to the market.

He stood huddled against the wall, a wretched figure, drooping together as if in shame, With his riding coat over his grey ball dress and his hat pulled over his eyes.

The sunlight crept over the buildings, changing the dusky shapes to ivory and rose colour and gold that was flushed with red like thick amber. Francis did not heed this sunshine nor the brightening blue above the fairy clouds of crimson that was certain promise of a joyous day; his limbs were weary and weak, his head heavy and hot with fever; he looked with fierce and bitter eyes on the alien city, the alien life--the alien people who were just gaily and thoughtlessly beginning another day of their pleasant, idle lives. Something of the fanatic's zeal possessed him; he longed for an angel with a sword to come and smite these people, for hell to open in the middle of the *piazza* and show the hungry flames that were waiting for all these wanton souls...for they would surely all burn some day...even she...

Absolute despair overcame him as he thought of this, and again the wild possibility of saving her, body and soul, flashed into his distracted mind.

"But no," he said to himself, "it is but a trick of the Devil--that I may take this woman to myself and so allow her to destroy me."

People were beginning to come to early Mass; a few ladies, attended by pages and cavaliers, and a great number of peasants came up the low shallow steps and, passing under the leathern covering of the door that two beggars lifted, disappeared into the huge, dim interior of the church.

None of them noticed Francis--figures of all degrees of strangeness were too common in this city of licence.

He came forward a little and peeped under the leather the next time it was lifted; he had never been into a Romish church, and he looked with a shuddering distaste and apprehension at the incense-filled dusk through which the candles gleamed on hangings of gold and blue and crimson--and on images crowned and jewelled.

Here Giovanna must often worship her false gods, clasping the crucifix he had seen hanging to her fair bosom; here, when he had left Bologna, she would come to sob out to a leering priest her confession that she had loved a heretic--and he would be in Scotland trying to forget her--and neither would forget the other--ever--

Francis lifted his tired face to the gorgeous day.

"Something is wrong," he said in his heart. "She is not wicked, why should she be damned? And I, what have I done that I should be tempted...almost beyond my strength?" He turned wearily away from the great church and wandered aimlessly about the city in the endeavour to silence the anguish of his soul by fatigue of body.

When it was near seven he turned past the two leaning towers that rise high above the houses and returned to the inn, meaning to order horses and to leave at once for the Milan road.

He hoped wearily that Mr. Middleton, with his curiosity, his laughter

and his mocking, would not be there; he flushed with anger against the man, recalling how he had inveigled him to the Palazzo Rossi when he must have been aware that Giovanna would be present.

Mr. Middleton was not in the little painted parlour overlooking the dusty yard and dusty vine when Francis entered, but a lady in a gorgeous gown rose from the rush-bottomed chair by the window and smilingly gave him "good morning."

It was Vittoria Odaleschi.

Francis stood, like a rustic, utterly at a disadvantage; he had entirely forgotten to wonder at the Contessa's desire, as reported by Mr. Middleton, for him to leave Bologna, and he was absolutely unprepared for her to take any step in the matter, nor, though he knew her reputation for eccentricity, could he have believed that she would come to his inn and wait for him in this fashion.

He took off his hat with an effort at dignity; he was cruelly conscious of his dishevelled clothes and of the freshness of her attire.

"I could not have looked for this, Madam," he stammered.

"No," she replied in her excellent English; "if you had expected me I should not have been kept waiting half an hour."

She resumed her seat, with her back to the light. She wore a lace mob cap in the English fashion, her velvet gown came to her throat in lawn ruffles; she was painted and powdered, but she looked beautiful, and remote from any thought of age. The charm of her smiling, composed presence was a potent one, and Francis, looking at her, thought her a wonderful woman--Satan's handmaiden--but wonderful; not like Giovanna though, he decided eagerly.

"I thought you scarcely knew me," he said.

"I marked you," she replied, "at the *festa* last night."

"You came here to see me?" he asked with a mechanical desire to speak, and yet to gain time.

The Odaleschi smiled.

"You love the Contessa Giovanna," she said directly.

Francis stood grasping the edge of the table and staring at the lady, the blood stormed his face, and he could find no reply to this sudden and extraordinary statement.

Vittoria allowed her contempt to show in her sparkling brown eyes and in the curl of her sensitive, painted mouth.

"Has your passion," she asked, "deprived you of your reason?"

Francis drew himself erect; her scorn cleared and steadied his senses.

"Who told you my feelings for your daughter?" he demanded, and disdain equal to her own fired his weary eyes.

The Contessa, eagerly watching him from behind her languid white lids, saw in his look and speech a flash of a quality she had not hitherto expected; she saw he was neither coward nor fool.

"Giovanna told me," she answered, still smiling.

Again he was utterly at a loss. All his ideas of modesty, reserve, and delicacy in a woman were outraged by the thought of Giovanna telling her mother of their tremulous love-affair; scarcely even in his own soul had he said yet definitely, "I love her"—and she had already

hurried to climax and catastrophe. Still there was a suggestion in this of swift feeling, of sincere abandon, and the reflection that she too struggled with passion stirred anew his pulses...He shivered and pulled at the lace on his right cuff.

"She told you, Madam, perhaps of her own feelings?" he asked, probing into this miracle of a woman with fear and a swooning sense of delight.

The Contessa was too out of touch with his world to read him; she thought his remark was a challenge, and as such replied.

"You know better than I, Signore, that she imagines herself in love," she said, shrugging her shoulders, "notwithstanding that she could choose her gallants from those of her own country and station--a woman's caprice, Signore."

The oblique insult of words, the direct insult of tone, were not lost on Francis; rage and loathing of the woman, and all she stood for, surged up in his heart.

"I have not asked you for your daughter's hand," he said in a deliberate tone.

She seized the black fan from her side with a gesture as if she drew a dagger.

"There is no question of marriage," she replied with infinite haughtiness, "between you"--she pointed the fan at him still as if it were a weapon--"and an Odaleschi."

"Then why," asked Francis with a bitter gleam in the intent dark eyes he never moved from her face, "did you trouble to come here to see me, Contessa?"

"To suggest to you that you leave Bologna," said Vittoria, rising.

"Are you afraid of me?" he demanded.

She amended the sentence.

"Afraid *for* you, perhaps, Signore. I have plans for my daughter which are not to be interfered with by you--no, I shall not endure interference."

It was monstrous, intolerable, to Francis that this woman should imagine that he--Moutray of Glenillich--should deign to unite himself with her house of tarnished splendour and notorious wantonness.

"There is everything between me and your daughter," he said--"country, custom, and God. If you knew me better you would not suspect me of taking a wife from--the Palazzo Odaleschi!"

She understood him and smiled.

"My father was an English Duke," she replied, "and you are a little Scots lord; that a girl's whim should bring me to this discussion with you--!"

He interrupted her, speaking with stiff, pale lips.

"I do not wed with a foreign Papist nurtured in the wickedness of this city," he said,--"therefore why should we longer speak of this?"

"If you will not wed her," replied Vittoria, regarding him with narrowed eyes, "why do you make love to her--first in the dawn and then in the moonlight--and each time leave her weeping? Is your aim amusement?"

"You insult her!" cried Francis, torn between his hatred of the mother

and his desire to protect and spare the daughter.

"We have a different morality," said the Contessa coldly. "I fear we do not understand each other. Giovanna is not destined for a convent, but a good husband, and she shall not spoil her chances by such incidents as last night, do you understand me? There are enough ladies in this city who will very willingly listen to your flatteries, but my daughter is not for your diversion. When she is married she chooses her own gallants; while she is with me--"

"You guard the bait that is to lure riches into your trap!" flung out Francis. His whole being was burnt dry with pity for Giovanna; he saw her now as an ignorant child, a mere pawn, in the hands of this monstrous woman.

"Put it as you please," smiled the Contessa. "You may say, if you will, that I wish to see my child great and happy in the fashion--such as she deserves--but it is no matter. Leave Bologna to-day."

It had been his own resolve to go, but now she threatened him--now he thought of Giovanna dominated by her mother, hating, perhaps, her life, but helpless--now he had this new bewildering vision of her overwhelmed by passion, every instinct fiercely urged him to stay; indeed, to go seemed a coward's act, unpardonable--yet reason whispered that it were the wisest thing for her as well as for him.

He sank down on the rush-bottomed chair by the table and turned his haggard face away from Vittoria, while his right hand fumbled mechanically with the basket hilt of his sword.

In the thin authoritative profile, in the sweep of frowning brow, in the full compressed lips, in the dilation of the sensitive nostril, Vittoria's antagonistic gaze discerned a strength of purpose and of passion equal to her own, however alien and different in expression.

She had no pity for him as she stood observing him; fair-looking and composed in her fashionable silks, she was considering by what means she best could, if he proved obdurate, have him removed from Bologna to disappear in a Papal prison.

During the pause of silence that was upon them both, the door opened impetuously, and she who was the centre of the whirling thoughts of both stepped into the room--Giovanna, in white, with knots of rose colour and a frivolous straw hat shading a piteous, pallid face.

"A rendezvous!" said the Contessa with a soft bitterness, "and an indiscreet one!"

Francis sprang to his feet; Giovanna answered her mother.

"No--I came to say farewell to him--to see if he had gone," she said confusedly; "and you? Why are you here?"

"To give a warning to your reluctant lover."

"My reluctant lover?"

"This man," said Vittoria in Italian, pointing at him scornfully,--"disdains to match with you, and values you only as a passing diversion."

Francis understood the words; his whole body became taut with ardour and energy.

"Giovanna," he said, "will you come with me? Will you leave all this and come with me?"

He spoke on a fierce impulse that overwhelmed all the careful cautions of reason--the impulse of love renewed at the sight of her, at

the thought of her coming to him--the impulse of hate against this woman who wanted to take her away from him and bring her up a wanton.

Instantly she crossed the room, leant over the back of the chair that stood before him, and flung her arms round his neck.

"I have been waiting for you to ask me!" she said passionately, and with great simplicity and sweetness.

He put up his hot hands and grasped her wrists as they rested on his shoulders.

"Will you come with me? You must be sincere with me now," he said hoarsely, hardly able to command himself in this moment of her surrender.

"Do you hear him?" asked Vittoria, who surveyed them with a smile of scorn and sadness; "do you understand him? He wants you to leave everything for him--your God--your country--your people--"

Giovanna looked with questioning bewilderment at Francis--the significance of the little English word "leave" touched her brain.

"Leave?" she repeated; "but you will stay in Bologna?"

In the intensity of his disappointment he put her away from him with a force that was almost violence.

"I asked you to come with me, to leave this cursed life, your idols and your wantonness--to put it all behind you for ever."

Giovanna shrank away from him; her face was tragic in the shade of the gay rose-pink hat; she put her hand to her heart and looked at her mother. Vittoria stood immovable.

"Are you going with him?" she demanded.

The girl's fingers fumbled for the crucifix on her heart, her eyes grew round with horror, and her lips fell apart. She glanced again from her mother, who stood for all she knew, valued, and feared; to her lover--who stood for the contrasted wild, dangerous sweetness of love.

"Will you not stay here?" she asked in a shaken voice. Bologna was her universe--contained all that she had hitherto loved.

"I leave the city within the hour," said Francis, "either with you or alone."

Vittoria moved; the stiff rustle of her silk flounces sounded harshly.

"Go with him," she said, "mount behind him like a trooper's wench--you, an Odaleschi! Let him caress you till he is tired, then leave you in the first ditch he passes. If you have chosen that way--go, I say!"

Francis turned his back on her.

"Giovanna, you may trust me," he said. "I think you know it. The first Protestant priest we meet shall marry us. I am a Moutray; in my own country there do not lack those who would speak for me."

"Go with him," smiled Vittoria.

"No," panted Giovanna, "no--*Maria Vergine*, this is awful!"

She staggered to the impassive, dominant figure of her mother, and put up feeble hands.

"God would curse me!" she whispered in terrified tones. "I dare *not*--"

Vittoria still stood immovable, regarding Francis with the clear, mocking gaze that had quelled so many.

Pride and anger sealed his lips. He could not plead with the girl under that contemptuous glance; besides, he recognized in Giovanna the strength that was in himself. He would not leave his people and his God for her, and when it came to the actual moment she clung, too, to those things which were hers by birth and breeding.

There was a dreadful silence, then he raised his face, over which a look of indifference, akin to a look of death, had settled.

"Farewell," he said; then to the Contessa, "You may believe that I shall leave Bologna."

She also was very pale beneath the rouge that showed unnaturally bright on her cheeks.

"Yes, I believe you now," she answered; she put her arm round her daughter's shoulders, "God will help you to forget this, Vanna," she added seriously.

The girl moaned like one half-insensible with pain, and allowed Vittoria to draw her towards the door.

When he saw her being actually taken away from him, an awful despair took possession of Francis; he sprang forward, passionately addressing Giovanna:

"Dear, my dearest--say one word to me--do not go like this--"

She looked at him, but she did not resist Vittoria's gentle but insistent strength drawing her away.

"I will pray for you," she muttered.

"I also, Signore," said Vittoria with a wise smile, and the door closed on them.

It seemed to Francis that it had closed on all that made life desirable for him; he stood rigid, bewildered, by his loss. In two days she had grown as needful as the air he breathed; she loved him, she had stood before him in sweet submission, and now she was gone--to a life that in his eyes spelt damnation.

He stared at the window, but he did not see the shrivelled oleanders, the dusty clusters of the vine, the fierce violet of the sky--all was black and bitter as the final waters of oblivion to a lost soul.

He was still standing so when the Italian valet entered to know what time he wished the horses.

"As soon as they can be saddled," said Francis. He went upstairs to change into his riding clothes.

X

He rode all day away from Bologna, fiercely along the road to Modena, the first stage to Milan; at Cavalcanti he dismissed the servant, being in no mood for company, and declared he could find his way alone, at least as far as the frontier, where he might engage another man.

He had almost fallen from his saddle with fatigue; for two nights he had not slept, but he was worn out with the strength and fierceness of his misery rather than by physical strain; he fell across the bed in the room they showed him into at Vignola and slept till another twilight was falling.

Rising then, with his brain confused and throbbing and his limbs relaxed with weariness, he struggled, in the quiet of the inn chamber, with his loneliness, his yearning, his regret; but he could not rise above his passions, they mastered him, drove him before them. He called on his God in vain; he might take the name of sacred things on his lips, but the name of Giovanna was crying aloud in his heart.

Like a man under the influence of a drug he paid his reckoning, had out his horse, and, leaving his portmantles regardlessly behind him, turned back on the road lit by the gorgeous red glow of the sunset, towards Bologna, that city so fatal to his peace.

Another sombre evening overtook him and there was no moon for hours; dusky clouds presaging a storm had closed over the last rays of the sun. Exhausted in mind and body, bewildered with suffering, in every way desperate, haggard, and travel-stained, Francis Moutray arrived at the Revizzi hostel, which was the double of that he had flung from at Vignola--only he was now a stage nearer Bologna.

He could scarcely eat the food they put before him, but he drank heavily of the acrid red wine, which added a heavy languor to his fatigue; it was no later than nine and hardly yet completely dark when he went up to the best chamber hastily prepared for him.

The day had been intolerably hot, but a wind had risen with the approach of the storm and blew across the bare, whitewashed chamber, strong and sweet from travelling through numberless chestnut groves.

Francis went to the window, hardly knowing what he did, and stared out at the dusky darkness. The wind shook the boughs of sumach and wild cherry tree that overhung the rocky slopes behind the inn and swept along the little hawthorns that supported the young vines in the neighbouring field; the whole rich landscape was still just visible

in the red radiance of the last sunlight confined beneath the heavy lowering curtain of fast-approaching clouds; but even as Francis gazed this glow faded, the view became blank and dead, darkness against darkness, then was swiftly and finally absorbed into the night.

Francis mechanically closed the window against mosquitoes and the malarious night airs and turned back into the room.

He could not rest nor sleep, and yet action was impossible until the morning, even if he had had any plan of action, and he had none.

He did not know in the least what he should do in Bologna, but he was reckless of the Contessa's threats and Mr. Middleton's laughter, regardless of the sorry figure he would cut on his quick return--he was going on the mere chance of seeing her, of hearing of her, of passing near the place where she dwelt, and of treading the stones she trod.

He did not contemplate breaking his resolution; he meant to part from her, but not so suddenly; he had found that to go out from her presence into a world where he could never even hear her name spoken, where there was no sign, no trace of her, was an impossible consideration. Of the future he thought not at all; as a starving man will consider nothing but the gratification of his desperate need, so Francis thought of nothing but of satisfying his imperative desire to behold Giovanna again.

He could not reason, he could not argue, he had no longer even the strength left to despise himself; he was as helpless in the grip of fate as an infant in a giant's grasp, beaten to his knees, exhausted, and utterly overcome.

He sat down on the one poor chair, endeavouring to restrain himself, to control himself till morning, and fixed his eyes on the tall flame of

the thick yellow candle that stood on the little black bureau; round this flame a scintillating halo trembled, and he thought that he could trace in the dazzle of brightness the golden lines of her head and face. He was aware of an oppression in the air; the freshness of the fragrant wind had gone, the heaviness of one of the sudden Southern storms fell suddenly, the wind rattled at the casements, tore through the sumachs and faded away; the thunder began, so violent and insistent, that all sound or movement within the inn was lost.

Francis, superstitious and melancholy by race and temperament, was always painfully excited by thunderstorms; sometimes they drove him into an ecstasy of prayer, sometimes into fierce rebellion of the flesh that he always expiated by passionate repentance--always the thunder opened a door into that other world of mystery, horror, awe, and forbidden delights that was neither heaven nor hell, a world that did not fit in with Francis' theology and yet one that he knew well was there--the land of fancy, they called it in Scotland, the haunted borderland that in this land seemed unknown country.

Stung with a thousand fancies and glimpses of these nameless powers Francis sprang up and began pacing up and down; his state was near delirium; he projected shapes of horror about himself, he saw the candle burn into a winding-sheet and beheld the headless goblin who was believed to haunt his house start across the bed and hide beneath the cold straight sheets; he felt an acute presage of some event horrible and tremendous and a sense of such gloom and terror, such hopeless despair, that his limbs shook and the drops of sweat stood out on the swollen veins on his forehead.

The thunder crashed nearer and nearer and the summer storm came swiftly to a climax of violence; thunder and lightning were incessant. Francis opened his door and stood listening at the head of the dark stairs.

The lights were out and every one either abed or shut in the kitchens; they did not get many travellers at this inn.

Francis went back for the candle; his lips and throat were dry with thirst and there was no water in his room; he meant to go down and find some.

With one hand on his sword (he was always on his guard in this country of the foreigner and the Papist), and holding the candle in the other, he descended the crooked wooden stairs into the common *salon* or parlour where he had seen water in a great red pitcher by the door; the storm shook the walls about him, and the inner silence of the house seemed the more intense compared with the outer fury of the thunder.

There was a light in the parlour; a lamp stood on a bracket against the white wall and showed the stone floor, the scanty furniture, the wine bottles and glasses on the table, and the figure of a woman standing in a pensive attitude by the green shutters of the window.

Francis held his candle high above his head, for the lamp gave but a dim light, and he felt his senses reel, for the woman turned towards him the face of Giovanna Odaleschi.

Giovanna, no longer pale and frightened, but flushed and glorified.

He thought this was another of his bitter visions, she seemed no more real to him than the woman who had approached his bedside the first night he had slept in Bologna, and when he spoke he stammered:

"You--you--Giovanna!"

She came towards the table; there was a little pause in the thunder,

and in that interval the silence was absolute.

"I did not hope to overtake you so soon," she said. She held out her hands. "How I love you!"

"I was coming back," he answered; "there was nothing else possible."

"No," she said, "there was nothing else possible."

They stood for a while staring at each other while the thunder rolled about them.

"You have come to me," said Francis.

"Yes."

She was utterly different from the girl who had followed her mother out of the inn at Bologna, being composed, erect, and giving the impression of strength as with a kind of radiance; without her splendour and her background she seemed another creature; he marked her plain coats and petticoats of the striped woollens, the simple lawn wrapped round her head, the bundle on the chair that was evidently all of her worldly possessions that she had brought, and his reason staggered under the wild thought that she was his, that she had left everything to come to him.

"Will you follow me?" he asked.

"In everything--"

"My country--my God."

"Yes."

She took the crucifix and the rosary from her neck and gave them to him; she drew a rosary and a Prayer Book from the pocket of her gown and put them in his hands. He accepted these symbols of her faith and placed them on the table; he clasped her round the waist, and, resting his head on her bosom, broke into violent weeping, terrible tears, the first he had ever shed.

She looked down with calm eyes at his bent dark head and heaving shoulders; she was as passive before his passion as the seashore plant round which the waves beat during a storm; an expression of eternal wisdom touched her youthful mouth, she seemed to tenderly pity and to tenderly triumph.

"Teach me what you will," she said; "do with me what you will. I am yours now."

The thunder was dying down; the heavy rain could be heard outside beating against the shutters. Giovanna drew herself away from Francis and seated herself at the table, unfolding the lawn round her head and showing her close curls and the ships of gold that hung in either ear.

"I escaped," she said, "this morning. While they were at Mass I slipped out of the church unperceived, went home for a few *scudi*, then I went to the 'Corona d'Oro,' learnt which way you had gone, and hired a coach to follow you--I thought you would be at Cavalcanti by now."

He knelt down beside her and clasped her knees and kissed the folds of her gown; a feeling of great peace was on him, of ease, relaxation, and content.

"We must hasten," added Giovanna. "I stopped here because the storm was so fierce, that the horses were alarmed--but now take me

away...they will be after me."

He sprang to his feet, realizing for the first time what she had done, what powers she had roused against her; he did not, he never was to, fully realize the sacrifices she had made for him, nor what this violent resolution had cost her, but he did understand the position she had placed herself in, and that she had thrown herself on his protection against all Papal Italy, and his passion was exalted into a great tenderness and admiration.

"Will you be happy with me?" he asked unsteadily. "Always?"

She repeated "always" and took up her little bundle.

The tears still washed his eyes; her trust was almost more than he could bear; he took her small, soft, childish hand and kissed it humbly.

"God help me," he said; "God grant me the power to make you happy."

She followed him out of the inn and to her hired coach drawn up without; the brief, fierce rain was over and the moon was mounting the clouds; he brought with him the rosary, Prayer Book, and crucifix she had resigned, and as, a little later, the coach clambered up the high winding road that edged a little gorge and ravine grown with wild cherry and plum he leant from the window and cast the three down the rocky slope, and they were lost in the foliage and the darkness.

She did not even wince, he thought, but she sat opposite to him, and he could only see the pale blur of her face.

They neither of them spoke; awe and wonder was too strong upon them; the sense of fate, of the inevitable being accomplished,

overwhelmed them.

They saw the landscape, tree and rock and road, glimmering wet in the moonlight; they felt the air, warm and full of the fragrance of olive and chestnut, blow in through the little wooden window of the coach; it was her country, and she was leaving it for ever. She knew that never again, once she had crossed the frontier, would she look upon the fair fields of Italy; and of the land and people to whom she was going she was utterly ignorant, as she was ignorant of the man to whom she had entrusted all the future; but she was as free from sadness as from regret. She lay passive in the hands of Fate, and moved blindly at the dictates of her heart; she was with him, and she was satisfied with the peaceful satisfaction of strong passions appeased.

Francis was on fire with love, with triumph, with a hundred noble resolutions for the guarding and keeping of this soul committed to him (to make his action right with God he insisted to himself that a proselytizing zeal as much as a lover's ardour animated him, and that he was more desirous to see Giovanna kneeling in the kirk at Glenillich than to feel her in his arms); but even over the fires of this joy a faint chill descended, a sense of apprehension as if this love of theirs was built on no secure foundation, but was a dangerous ecstasy enjoyed on perilous heights.

So the coach with the two strange occupants jolted over the uneven-cut road, silence within and without save for the occasional crack of the whip and the driver's shout to his stumbling horses.

Towards dawn she slept, with her head resting in the corner by the window on the uneven leather lining and her hands folded in her lap.

Stiff and weary himself, but far from any thought of sleep, Francis, in the pale light that now filled the carriage, gazed at her with an almost

incredulous amazement; it seemed impossible that this was the creature, so aloof, so proud, so unattainable, belonging to a world so different, so alien, whom he had seen a few days before seated at her mother's table laughing with an Italian cavalier.

It was unbelievable that he had won her, that she was here, sleeping before him in utter trust--his--body and soul; he could use the words literally, for he recalled with a shudder of excitement the three symbols of her false faith that he had cast out of the carriage window...his to mould and shape...to guard and tend...he bent his thin, eager, dark face towards her, he lifted her lax little hand to his desperately beating heart.

"God help me, God guide me," he said from the depths of his soul, "to treat thee with love and honour always!"

At Modena they arrived in the full daybreak, and there she woke for awhile, only to fall asleep again, smiling at him, on the low white bed; he kissed her forehead and left her. At Milan they went to a humble inn, and he slept outside her door. He had taken up his luggage from Cavalcanti, but she had nothing save the piteous bundle that contained her nightshift, a few jewels, and a beloved Ariosto her father had given her. His bankers had agents in Milan; he drew a bill on them, and gave her two hundred *scudi*. He left her awhile in the inn while he went to hire a coach to take them to the frontier where they could catch the Swiss diligence--and when he returned she was out.

She came back at the dusk in a hired sedan, laughing and radiantly happy; she had spent all the two hundred *scudi* on clothes. Francis could find no fault with her, though neither the extravagance nor the fantastic nature of the garments she had bought pleased him, and she perceived his instinctive disapproval.

"You must teach me how to please you," she said with an exquisite tenderness. "I shall not be slow to learn."

He took her to him, giddy with happiness, and kissed, with all the grave passion of his pure love, the long braided strands of silky hair that crowned her small head.

"How I love you," he whispered to her. "I love you more than you can ever imagine--or believe--"

At the first Protestant church they came to they were married; it was the old Scotch church of St. Andrews in Paris.

The same day they drove to Calais, and at midnight got aboard a packet bound for Leith harbour.

Pursuit, if there had been any, had not troubled them. They had travelled rapidly and met with no stop or challenge, and as they stood together on the deck of the little packet, with the dark water surrounding them, the Contessa, the Palazzo Odaleschi, and all the heat and perfume and sunshine, all the gaiety and sin of Bologna, seemed to them both a dream from which they had for ever awakened.

XI

She who had been Giovanna Odaleschi and was now Mrs. Moutray of Glenillich, stood in one of the lower rooms of her manor-house and looked out on to the Scotch rain.

The summer had been dull, and the winter had come in almost with the first breath of autumn, at least it seemed winter to Giovanna, who had scarcely seen the sun since she left Italy.

The prospect of lake, moor, and hill she looked on now was colourless; and the room, filled with comfortable, well-worn furniture and without adornment of any kind, was colourless also.

Giovanna was *thinking* for the first time since she had fled from Bologna to overtake her lover.

A few words from Francis, a greyer day, the end of a mood, had brought home to her, quite suddenly, the thing she had done and the conditions under which she found herself. It was as if she had passed from darkness into light; the darkness had been beautiful, full of dreams, concealing realities; the light threatened to be cold and empty of vision. Looking ahead, she shivered.

Yet nothing had happened; their love was still fresh, she did not regret her exile, she could not sorrow for her mother and Bologna, for the old life was dead like a flower without a root--withered completely; but other things besides love were beginning slowly to creep into Giovanna's mind as her spirit awoke from the first heedless intoxication of joy.

Fear was one of these things--fear of not being able to please Francis in the way he wished--fear of being overwhelmed by what she had undertaken--a terrible, secret, unacknowledged fear of God.

She was beginning to understand Francis, and it bewildered her. Lately he had been several times gently displeased with her--at the gay clothes she had bought in Milan, at her inattention in church, at her lax rule over his household--all details, and Giovanna had been glad to swiftly remedy them as far as she could; yet now, when she looked from the rain to the great bunch of keys at her waist, she was aware that he wanted of her what she had never expected to give.

She had never seen any life that was not idle luxury, she had never

conceived any love that was not all fire and passion and ardour and adoration--and this life was severe, monotonous, filled with tasks strange to her ignorance; and this love was restrained, often speechless, often hard, often as if ashamed of its own transports. She had discovered too that Francis was not sympathetic like her own Southern men, but impatient of feminine whims, contemptuous of feminine weakness--she had found, also, that while she had abandoned her God for him, he was as terribly in earnest with his religion as with his love; she had a powerful rival in his narrow creed, and one she began to dread and fear.

The rain increased, shutting out the hills and splashing on the dark lake; the few trees that were visible had lost their leaves--only the melancholy firs rose in full dark foliage above the water.

Giovanna moved from the window. She was not a clever woman, and thinking confused instead of enlightening her; in her heart, not her brain, she found comfort. Her love was still a pure glow of joy, and there still clung to her something of the bright satisfaction of sacrifice; it consoled her to think how completely she had stripped herself to come to him.

She turned her back resolutely on the dismal prospect, and moved to the only piece of furniture in the room that could be called frivolous--a large, plain harpsichord that stood in one corner.

The room itself was large and gloomy; Glenillich House had been a castle when the Moutrays had owned half Ayrshire, and was still, even though a wing was in ruins, too large for the style in which the present owner lived.

As Giovanna seated herself at the harpsichord she was struck afresh with the size and darkness of the room, and her fingers broke off the little melody she had commenced, and fell into her lap.

While she stared in front of her the door was opened softly, and Francis Moutray entered.

If she lost something by this environment, he gained; he was in his place here as she had been in her place in Bologna. His masterful, melancholy, brooding personality seemed one with the old house, the heavy furnishing, the sombre, majestic landscape. As he advanced towards his wife, he looked a handsome figure in his dark, uncourtly clothes, with his air of health and hardihood, while her loveliness--clipped, repressed, and lacking the sparkle and colour of her proper background--seemed now to have in it something insignificant.

Francis crossed over to her and smiled; she lifted a face radiant with love, but he did not kiss her.

"At the harpsichord in silk at this hour!" he said gently.

Giovanna in her loyalty was silent, but his words seemed to her grotesque, in her mind women were one with silk and music.

"I wish you were serious," continued Francis, smiling; "cannot you try, Jean?"

He had changed her name in his desperate desire to efface all traces of her past life, to stamp out from her all flavour of the hated foreigner.

Giovanna looked at him; she had a premonition that he also had reached a crisis, that to him also things seemed difficult and tangled.

"You want me to be--useful?" she asked slowly.

"Do you not wish to be?" he replied quietly.

Giovanna turned her small head away.

Francis felt tender towards her and towards her admission; she had been very docile and sweet under his training and he could afford to be patient.

"Beloved," he said, "you will learn."

She looked towards him again and smiled; but there were tears on her thick brown lashes.

"What?" she asked. "Do you wish me to do as your Scotch ladies, spin and sew and put the fruits in sugar, and make the pies and the wines, the candles and the perfumes?" Francis had an unreasonable desire for her to identify herself with his countrywomen, therefore it vexed him to hear her say--"your Scotch ladies."

"Yes," he answered; "I want you to do these things, Jean, and look after the people on my land. I want you to be honoured in Glenillich as my mother was."

"But I know none of these things," said Giovanna, "and your servants do not need me. They were here before I was--the steward and his wife do everything."

"When you know your duties," smiled Francis, "I shall not need to keep a steward." Giovanna rose from her seat.

"I do not know any of these things," she repeated, almost sternly; "there is no one to teach me--I was not made for this--"

As Francis gazed at her the smile faded from his dark features; a thought that was torture stabbed him--what was she made and trained for?--merely to sit on a balcony and ogle the gallants below?

He thought he caught a look of her mother in her eyes and shuddered to his soul.

"You must learn," he repeated.

She came gracefully and gently towards him and put her arms round him. There was lace on her bosom and at her elbows, perfume in her hair; he would not yield to her caress. There were still moments when she was to him a deadly Delilah, when her love seemed a secret guilty joy, her kisses forbidden fruit; he put her away from him now as a man will put away a temptation.

She, in her material frankness, her single-mindedness, did not understand his morbid subtleties, she only knew she was repulsed, only knew that she was hurt, and she cried out, between fire and tears:

"You took me for love's sake--I have given you love and you are not satisfied!"

Her quick, outspoken candour silenced him, as it always did; she leapt so swiftly to the essential things that he could never even put into words that she left him breathless, and what she said now stabbed him, for it stripped away the thick wrappings of deception he was for ever putting round the fact that he had taken her for love, sheer earthly love, passion that had overmastered, and not because, as he tried to think, he had wished to save her for the Lord.

She saw him wince and was instantly all melting affection again.

"*Caro, mio caro*," she said, clinging to his shoulders, forgetful that he hated to hear Italian words on her lips. "I will try--indeed--but cannot we alter it?"

He shuddered under the warm pressure of her on his heart; he could not resist embracing her, and she smiled happily as she felt his arms about her.

"How--alter?" he asked unsteadily.

Her little head rested on his plain needlework cravat.

"Let us go away--this place is old--the people do not like me--we are both free--we might have--the sun--"

Her words held a strong temptation for Francis; as she spoke he yearned, with that old rebellion of his, for luxury a soft life, some gaiety, a fine setting to their love--but he fiercely repressed these longings; his place was here where his father's had been; Glenillich was their home until it would be their tomb--she had already tempted him far enough.

"It is impossible," he said briefly.

The hope died out of Giovanna's face; he took his arms from her and moved away.

She saw in a swift review the future days passing, she could not see what was ever to make one different from another save the formal visits of people whom she disliked and who despised her; he had his estate to look after, his theology to argue, his people to patronize, the book on medals he was writing--what had she?

"I must learn to spin," she said in a shaking voice.

"Jean," he cried, "are you not happy?"

"Oh, my dear, yes!" she responded, with beautiful eagerness--"anywhere if you are with me! But I am sorry not to please you more."

"Dear, my dear--if I love you!"

He kissed her little hand with something of her countrymen's grace; she seemed then all sufficient in herself, even in her ignorance and helplessness. He did not really want her to be a good housekeeper, but he was resolved that she should not be inferior to his neighbours' wives, and; that he would complete what he had begun, and make her a perfect. God-fearing woman.

"Oh, I will try!" cried Giovanna, her eyes radiant; "but it is all new to me--there is no one to teach me."

He thought her complaint just, and reflected.

"There is my cousin in Edinburgh. I think she would come for a while to keep you company."

Giovanna instinctively shrank from this proposal.

"Do you *want* her?" she asked again, with her quick frankness, "when you and I are here--*loving* each other?"

Francis flushed.

"Jean, we must take up our life as it is going to be--we each have duties--obligations to ourselves, my dear, and to God."

"God!" repeated Giovanna.

His God was a menace, a terror, and a gloom to Giovanna; she had formally entered his creed, she sat beside him in church, she read prayers with him, all in the name of love, but in her heart hating and fearing the grim observances of the heretic.

"You think too much of God," she said, rather wildly.

An unnatural whiteness succeeded to his flush.

"What do you mean?"

She glanced at him, timid at once before the first touch of his anger.

"I mean--I gave up for you--my God--but you are a slave to yours."

Francis was dumb with amaze and a sense of fatality that she, after months of his patient training, could speak so; it confirmed his secret belief that love of him alone kept her from her images.

"I did not part you from God," he said at last. "I took you from the mummery, the anti-Christ's deceits that are the inspirations of wickedness, wantonness, and vanity."

Giovanna winced now; his words still seemed to her blasphemy. The avenging judgment she was for ever shutting out of her fearful thoughts suddenly seemed to hasten nearer; it seemed awful that they were not both struck down, withered by God's fire.

She shook off the horrid oppression.

"Do not let us speak of these things," she said with stiff lips. "I followed you; I am in your hands."

He regarded her narrowly; the gold eyes were dim, the gold head bent, but in her pose and voice were a rare dignity and decision.

He had only one point of view. It was not possible for him to realize how things seemed to her; he was never to realize how tremendous was the step she had taken, with such seeming ease, of leaving her religion; but at this moment a dim sense of what she had done for

him touched his brain.

He kissed her until she smiled.

"She must be lonely," was his clumsy guess at the cause of her sadness; and he devised a clumsy remedy.

That night he wrote to Miss Stacy Wigram, his cousin, and asked her to Glenillich.

XII

The coming of Stacy Wigram to Glenillich was not in any way notable to Giovanna, who found her a meek, housewifely girl without personality.

But this quiet, ineffective creature brought with her a person who was destined to have a most powerful effect both on the lives of Giovanna and Francis.

It was a Mr. Allan Forsythe, of a noble Edinburgh family, who was betrothed to Miss Wigram, who had acted as her escort from the Capital to Glenillich, and who remained at the house a few days, together with Miss Wigram's other impedimenta of maids, servants, and footmen who had filled inside and out the huge coach she had come in.

Mr. Forsythe was fair, eager, cold in temperament, levelheaded, cheerful, and robust. Giovanna felt no sympathy towards him, rather the reverse, and Francis privately disliked him, yet struggled against this feeling, that was, after all, unreasonable, for Allan Forsythe was guiltless of offence towards any man, and all Francis had against him was that he was a lax Churchman, and at the time of the '45 had been suspected of dabblings with the Pretender.

He had business to call him away and was not staying long; the first two days, Giovanna, absorbed in Francis, graciously endeavouring to conciliate her husband's gentle cousin and to learn from her the household ways of Scottish ladies, hardly noticed Mr. Forsythe, but on the morning of his departure she chanced to come into the withdrawing-room, and found him there, at the spinet.

She would have gone away again indifferently, but even as she turned in the doorway with one hand holding back the worn tapestry, he began to play.

And he played an Italian air that Giovanna had heard ever since she had heard anything—a melody as familiar and sweet to her as violets. She stood erect and silent, listening, and in that moment, as she heard the spinet give this echo of the past through her new home, a sense of the unreality of life touched her almost unbearably.

The thin stream of music bridged the huge gulf she had placed between herself and all that had formerly composed her existence; it seemed as if it would not be a strange or monstrous thing if she closed her eyes and opened them on the Palazzo Odaleschi flooded with lazy sunshine and full of the whispered gossip of Bologna.

She turned towards the player.

"Where did you learn that music, sir?" she asked, her foreign accent strong, as it was always when she was moved.

He looked at her fully with his capable, serene, cheerful blue eyes.

"In Rome, Mrs. Moutray," he answered.

"Rome?" The word seemed to bewilder her; it was the first time since her wild flight from her country that she had heard anyone

speak of it or any town or person there, nor had she expected to ever hear these words or to meet anyone who could in any way lift the veil she had dropped between herself and Italy.

"I have been in Rome," said Mr. Forsythe.

She came across the dull room towards him--a figure of rare and extraordinary grace in her slenderness, her poise, her rich and unusual dress; she paused beside the spinet, utterly unconscious, and looking at him with a brilliant and inquiring glance.

He noted, as he had noted ever since he had been in her house, the exquisite fineness of her small features, her delicate hands and arms, the elaborate arrangement of her amber curls, the impression of intense vitality her slender body gave in repose; even in absolute stillness she had a look of swiftness and motion only momentarily arrested.

He noted also her dress--which was one of those she had brought from Italy--the blue and white coat of yarn and linen over a petticoat of a poppy colour bright with a design of flowers, the amber necklace and ear-rings, and the apron covered with silver lace.

Knowing the place whence she came, he could supply the background for her gay and elegant figure--sunshine, palace, loggia, balcony, light flowers, gallantry, brilliancy.

"What is there in Frank Moutray," he asked himself, "to win her to this?"

She rested her elbows on the spinet and took her chin in her hands.

"When were you in Rome?" she asked.

"When the Chevalier St. George was there," he answered, "before

the '45."

"Ah!" cried Giovanna, "you are one of his followers?"

Mr. Forsythe smiled.

"In my heart, yes."

Giovanna's chestnut eyes dwelt long and gravely on his composed face.

"Are you returning to Rome?" she asked abruptly. "The Cardinal d'Orcko and his father are still in Rome."

"Yes, I shall return, I think," he said; he added quietly, "And you?"

"I? Oh, never, never," replied Giovanna vehemently.

"You do not regret your country then, Mrs. Moutray?"

Again she said, and with great sincerity and force, "Oh, never, never!--"

"Yet it must be a great change for you, and this a strange life."

As he looked at her he was wondering, as Giovanna herself had wondered a few days before, if she had quite realized yet what she had undertaken, what road she had set her foot upon.

"I am afraid of displeasing Francis," she replied with her Latin frankness; "of that only, Mr. Forsythe."

He struck a few notes in a minor key, and looked away from her.

"You are not afraid of displeasing God?" he asked.

"How," asked Giovanna, "do I displease Him?"

"Tis no matter of mine," he replied; "but you must have been--before you married Frank--a Romanist."

"Yes," she said, and her eyes were frightened; "but I left that--for him."

"Yet you believe in hell!"

Allan Forsythe looked at her as he spoke, and she saw in his face the expression she had often seen on Francis' features--the stern expression of the bigot.

"Are you of the Faith?" she asked, stepping a little away from him.

"I am a Papist," he answered sombrely.

Giovanna was silent in amazement and confusion and a terrible shame at finding herself before a member of that religion she had spurned.

"Keep my counsel," added Allan Forsythe. "We are under such penalties in this country, such disabilities that I, to be of any service to my cause, must for the present deny my belief and practise it in secret."

"You are no better than I!" cried Giovanna.

"I have a dispensation for what I do," he replied, "and it is but for a while and for a purpose."

"What I did was for a purpose," she said; "my heart is not changed, and still I dare to pray to the Madonna. I think she understands. Any woman would," she added passionately.

"God pity you!" he said.

His tone of grief stung her and lifted her from her shame.

"He must have forgiven me," she said, "for I am beyond words happy."

Allan Forsythe rose abruptly

"Why should I speak? But in time you might come to need one of your own faith--"

"Oh," said Giovanna, "why?"

Allan Forsythe rose and closed the spinet.

"You are only a woman," he answered, "you must--some day--need God."

"I have," she replied, "my husband's God."

He looked at her with reproach and pity.

"Do you," he asked, "in your heart believe the faith of the heretic?"

"Please say no more," answered Giovanna. "I have left everything for him. I cannot argue about it. I did it."

He looked sadly at her, in her beauty, her loneliness, in what to him was her great sin; prophecy of infinite tragedy seemed to shadow the grey background and the grey surroundings.

"I am not your father confessor," he said sombrely, "yet I could not believe as I do believe and not speak to you. Since I first saw you the thought of you and of what you have done has haunted me as

something sad and pitiful."

"My soul," replied the lady, with a touch of wildness, "is mine to do as I will with--and I am not the first woman who has risked damnation for the sake of love."

"You speak for yourself," said Mr. Forsythe; "you may have, some day, to speak for others, to answer for them before God."

"Who?" asked Giovanna.

"Madam, do you love your husband so that you can look on your unbaptized children with a serene heart?"

"My children?" said Giovanna; she looked at him steadily and her pale lips parted again, but she said nothing more.

"God help you!" exclaimed Mr. Forsythe, "and forgive Frank this thing he has done!"

Giovanna sank down into the window seat and pressed her hands together on the poppy-red skirt; she looked out between the deep mullions at the pines, and the hills, and the river, all swathed in mist, and her eyes grew defiant.

It seemed to her as if her soul, naked and alone, was challenging all the world, and all heaven, and God, yet she felt an extraordinary serenity.

"I have lodgings," said Mr. Forsythe, "in Edinburgh, near the Tollbooth and St. Giles' Church--when I am in Italy a friend of mine resides there--you may care to remember this--'tis above a silk hosier's shop, and the sign is the sign of the 'Saracen's Head.'--"

"Why should I," asked Giovanna, "remember this?"

"In case you might--in some extremity--need a priest."

Giovanna shuddered at that word.

"You see," continued Allan Forsythe, "I trust you with my secret."

"Why?" she asked simply.

"Because I cannot forget the faith you were baptized into," he answered, "therefore I have told you what even Stacy Wigram does not know."

"Oh, 'tis safe with me," she said almost indifferently, and again turned her defiant yet dreamy eyes towards the mist-drenched landscape.

Mr. Forsythe, under the influence of his belief, which was as strong and deep as that held by Francis Moutray in his creed, and even the more intense for being concealed, was about to speak again, when the Lord of Glenillich himself entered the apartment.

He was flushed and red from riding, and flung off his mantle and shook the water from his hat as he entered.

His quick breath, the frown of his dark eyes, and his silent glance and sharp movements bespoke his ill-humour. He had been visiting his farms, and as usual there had been a conflict of wills between his tenantry and himself; he was not popular, and his marriage had given that point and reason to the common dislike of him which had hitherto been lacking.

His energetic and restless spirits had been recently employed in endeavouring to improve his estates, and every one of his attempts, particularly that which tried to introduce rye-grass, had met with the

fiercest opposition; and Francis, austere and unsociable, a hard master and proud to the point of tyranny, had found to-day that he was fairly hated in Ayrshire, and that his marriage with "the wanton, graceless, foreign woman, covered with pearlin' an' gowd," had made him an object of real dislike and contempt.

As he looked now at Giovanna in her gay attire, sitting idle as usual, gazing out of the window, his anger deepened; he was quick to spy out faults in her, ever on the watch for the tainted blood to show in her, for what she had been was ever in his mind; nor could he forget that she was there, a sign to all the world, of how he had yielded to worldly wiles and worldly lusts.

At his entry she had risen, and she stood watching him now with a face quietly radiant, joyous, and content.

Allan Forsythe marvelled at her. From whence came this power, he asked himself, which this poor, lonely creature, who had denied her God, found to sustain her?

Francis did not speak to her, but began a conversation with Allan on the farmers and the dull stupidity of their opposition.

And all the while Giovanna watched him; she was so sure of his love, so proud of the great price she had paid for it, so calm in the sense of fulfilment that following the heart's behests bestows, that the shadows Allan Forsythe's words had cast over her happiness had already disappeared. His words had raised strange memories of the past and awful visions of the future; he had reminded her, by his manner and his confession of his creed, that in his eyes and in the eyes of the Church that was still to her the one Church of God, she was no wife, but a poor dishonoured outcast. Yet now, when she looked at Francis, the remembrance of this even did not sting; she was bound to him by his laws, she was the honoured mistress of his

house, and for the first time Giovanna felt herself draw nearer towards her husband's God Who protected her.

Presently Mr. Forsythe left, and then Francis came towards her.

"Jeannie," he asked, with a little smile, "is this girl going to be of any use to you?"

Giovanna half closed her chestnut eyes and laughed.

"You mean Stacy? She is making--jam."

"And you?"

"I can make nothing, as you know."

"Dear love--will you not learn?"

"It is so--useless."

He tried to control his vexation, and standing as near to her as he was now it was hard for him to be angry, yet the thought of the spectacle her luxurious uselessness made before Ayrshire drove him into speech.

"What will you do with the rest of time, Jeannie?"

She put her pretty hands on his shoulders and brought her face near to his.

"Love you," she answered; "is not that what you brought me here for--to love you?"

This was so exactly the truth, and at the same time so exactly what he was always endeavouring to conceal from himself, that he

palpably winced.

"I wanted your soul!" he cried. "I wanted to save your soul!"

Her hands crept together behind his neck and clasped there over the loose knot of dark ribbon on the dark hair.

"Do you not care for me--my body--at all?" she asked.

She drew him to the window seat, and when he was beside her she laid her head on his heart, so that the yellow curls crushed under his chin, his cravat.

"My dear, are you afraid of love?" she whispered, "when I love you you seem afraid."

He kissed her smooth and childish forehead.

"Afraid?" he answered; "no--not afraid--yet it seems so strange--so wonderful--that we should be here--like this--"

And on his pale face was a look that was not wholly content nor satisfaction.

Something was between them, even when he held her as close as this, something seemed to lie between his heart and her own; she had resigned all he had asked her to resign, she had followed him, obediently--yet why did he think of her as a temptation, why could he never shake off the oppression that there was wrong, *wrong* at the bottom of their love, and that with every kiss they took they were hurried a step further towards some dim end of horror.

Giovanna raised herself from his heart and looked at him.

"Do you not care for *me*," she repeated passionately, "as I am--as

you won me?" She laid her hand on her slender bosom. "Now, while we are young, can not you love me--without these doubts--these silences?"

He thought he traced her mother's tones in her voice,--the tones of the enchantress, the soulless wanton,--and he rose up and put her from him, and turned away.

Her eyes flashed and she bit her under lip, but the next second her native sweetness returned.

"Francis," she said, making, as always, a pretty difficulty of the name, "are you angry with me?"

"No," he answered hoarsely, "no--but you are *my wife*, not my toy--do you not understand?"

She did not, she could not; in that moment he realized, for perhaps the first time wholly, the great gulf between their outlook, the unalterable differences of race and creed and breeding; she could not understand his doubts, his temptations, his pride--something of this seemed to touch her own consciousness.

"Is not love enough?" she asked desperately.

The truth of it all came in his reluctant answer:

"No," he said, "no."

XIII

Anastasia Wigram was meek and neither brilliant in looks nor wits, but she was not wanting in the good sense few of her country folk lacked, nor a certain dry discernment and plain courage that were

also national characteristics.

After she had been a month at Glenillich she came to her cousin when he was in his library casting up his accounts, comparing his rent-roll with the expenses he had been put to for the improvements his tenants so disliked.

"I am taking my leave of you," she said cheerfully and quietly by way of greeting. "I came here to make a good housewife of your pretty lady, Frank, and I find it is a task not the greatest genius in the land could accomplish. So I'll no' be staying to be in the way and interfere."

So saying she seated herself in one of the great worn leathern arm-chairs and smiled at him with perfect good humour.

But his face darkened, and anger and disappointment and a kind of shame clouded his expressive eyes; he flung down his pen with an impatient violence. Of course he had known this thing, but he had evaded it, put it off, hoped that, by some miracle, she would change; now he was face to face with it; the neat, gentle little person in the plain grey gown and blue snood was telling him the truth.

"She cannot learn," continued Stacy, "and from what I'm hearing of her former life it is you who should not expect it--she comes from foreign parts, Frank, where honest work is unknown and where a decent woman spends her time on a cushion with flowers in her hair like any quean among us."

Miss Wigram spoke without malice, with, indeed, a desire to put forward the best case possible for Giovanna, and the calm contempt with which she referred to the "foreign parts" was unconscious and no more than the usual scorn of the Briton for every thing and person outside the limits of his own isles; travel had, though against his will,

effaced much of this prejudice from the mind of Francis Moutray, yet still in his secret heart he regarded his wife as of a heathenish inferior race, and every time one of his country people spoke in the usual terms of pity and contempt of the foreigner his blood burnt as if he had been personally shamed. He had forgotten completely the fact that his wife was better born than he, that her father had been a great noble, her mother the daughter of an English duke, and she herself, in her own right, a countess; he only remembered, and that vividly, the sort of woman her mother was, and the sort of life he had snatched her from, and as he looked at his fair little cousin he knew that for her to have imagined how Giovanna had lived in Bologna was as impossible as for the Contessa Odaleschi to imagine how her daughter was living now.

As he sat silent, moody, and melancholy, with these thoughts, Stacy continued, still with the idea of defending and excusing the stranger to whom her heart had gone out:

"How should anyone know of these things without teachings?" she asked.--"I doubt but that Jeannie's mother was a feckless kind of woman, who never went into her own kitchens or knew what her maids were doing from one hour to another; and how was Jeannie, poor thing, to learn, in that wild country, the ordering of a Christian man's house?"

"She might," said Francis, "learn."

Miss Stacy replied eagerly:

"I have done my best, Frank. *But it is not in her.* She will listen and watch, as sweet and gay as a bird, but she spoils her cakes and her sewing, and loses her keys, and gives jellies to the servants, and wears silk in the morning--like a child, and when I speak to her, telling her what is expected of the wife of a God-fearing man in a Christian

country she will listen gravely, and then I find her at her spinet, singing in her heathen language, as if there was no such thing as bread to bake and linen to spin and soap and candles to make!"

Miss Wigram finished rather breathless after her long speech, and looked at her cousin deprecatingly, both on Giovanna's account and her own, for she felt that she too had failed in the task of instruction entrusted to her.

There was a pause of silence.

Francis looked at Stacy, and the thought entered his head that he might have married this girl before Allan Forsythe had secured her, and that every one thought, and was no doubt thinking still, that he was a perverse fool to have passed over one of his own countrywomen and family, with all domestic virtues and a good dowry, for a penniless, foreign creature whose incapacity made her a byword.

He thought himself that he had been foolish and had made a wild and reckless speculation of his marriage instead of a sober, pleasant certainty; yet the restless, passionate, though repressed, part of him could not wish the thing undone. He could never have conceived a rapturous love for the good little housewife sitting opposite him--she moved him no more than the prim painting of a long dead ancestress hanging above the fireplace behind her--while the very memory of his wife's kisses, his wife's outspoken passion, her beauty, given so unreservedly and solely to him, caused all his blood to shudder; yet of this passion that was so human, so earthly in tenderness and strength, the religious fanatic in him was ashamed.

He turned his face away now from his cousin, as if he feared she would read in his countenance his strange and secret thoughts.

But Stacy Wigram was far from being capable of even dimly surmising the complex and conflicting emotions that moved Francis; she merely thought he had fallen in love impetuously and made a foolish marriage, and she let it go at that, with a kind hope in her meek heart that neither Francis nor Giovanna would regret their union as much as Stacy's good sense told her they would.

"So I'll go back to Edinburgh," she said at length, "and you must get a decent woman to manage Glenillich." She looked critically round the rather cheerless apartment. "You'll be needing new hangings here, Frank, these are moth-eaten and past patching. It takes awhile to get a man's house in order after he has been away a time!"

She rose, and Francis turned his face towards her. As he looked at her, without speaking and with an arrested expression as of one pausing to listen and consider, she was impressed as never before by something unusual in his appearance. In that moment he appeared to her almost as foreign as his wife, as utterly apart from herself as was Giovanna; she thought too that she detected an expression of terror and apprehension--a haunted look--and she, joining to her stern practical religion all the wild superstition of the Scot, was quick to notice and tremble before that look.

"Eh, Frank," she asked, "what ails you?"

The expression darkened a moment on his face, then was gone.

"Why, I am well enough," he answered, smiling, and he rose, an attractive figure in his dark riding suit, with his dark, expressive eyes and rich hair and refined, passionate face.

"You think, I suppose," he continued, "that I have made a failure, a mistake, with this marriage?"

"Why should I presume to think so or say so, Frank?" answered the girl with sincere modesty. "She is the most beautiful person I ever saw."

"Do you think," demanded Francis keenly, "a man might make that excuse and hold himself justified--might he say, 'She is beautiful and therefore I wedded her, never thinking of anything but that--never thinking of what her race was, or her creed--of what this union might mean--thinking nothing but that she was fair, and I maddened for her'? Shall this be his excuse? Shall it not rather damn him for his lust?"

"You speak strangely," said Stacy. "If there is true love between you, what need for else?"

Francis was silent. He would not admit the name of his feeling for Giovanna; true love his cousin thought it, but he knew that the jealous, fierce, exacting passion that consumed him was not anything so serene and fair as Stacy meant when she said "true love."

And Stacy, watching him, noting his unease, his silence, felt that he was disloyal to his wife, and fired with championship of Giovanna.

"She followed you from her own land, Frank," she said. "She is like a dog to your bidding, and she worships even where your shadow falls, and you are not the one to be wasting reproach on her, even in your thoughts."

Francis paled, and looked at his cousin with passionate earnestness.

"My love for her gets between me and God," he said. "So much do I--adore her--"

"She is your wife," answered the practical Stacy. "and 'tis a love God

should bless."

"He does--I trust He does," said Francis hastily. His little cousin did not understand--how could she? he asked himself; no one could understand. He tried to persuade himself that there was nothing to understand, that all was simple and easy of comprehension.

He rose, and, with the sweetness that was seldom long absent from his manner (a sweetness that was unconscious and came from the innate gentleness of his heart, which still was a dominant quality, however overlaid and repressed by the gloom and pride of his religion), he bade his cousin take his thanks for her services during her stay in Glenillich, and offered to escort her home to Edinburgh if Mr. Forsythe could not come for her himself.

She thanked him, accepted his offer, and arranged her departure for the morrow, and with that left him, smiling brightly into his dark and thoughtful face.

Her going left Francis with a sense of desertion, almost of desolation; he saw now, and more clearly day by day, that his wife was coming between him and all his old life.

His neighbours came more seldom now, even the pastor and the elders were not so warmly his friends as they had been; his relatives in Edinburgh had received the news of his marriage coldly; his tenantry had taken Giovanna as little better than the Scarlet Woman herself set above them; and now Stacy, good-hearted, meek little Stacy, was leaving him--she could not or would not be the friend and helper of his foreign wife.

He tried to look the thing squarely in the face. He had married recklessly, in a wild humour, and he must pay the price, he told himself. The natural generosity of his spirit recognized that she had

paid, and paid highly (though he was never to realize, in his masculine absorption, how highly), and that he must not shirk his share of the toll. Love demanded and love had given lavishly on his side—he loved her in a fashion that, was beyond blemish, and so she loved him.

He asked himself, fiercely, why he was not content?—she appeared to be, she had taken her sacrifices cheerfully, she bloomed joyously in the dreary country that was a place of exile to her—and she had given up her country and her faith, while he retained both, and she had bowed to his God and submitted herself to his customs and smiled on his people—yet still neither his pride nor his conscience were satisfied. He could not be happy—he felt as if God demanded this woman from him—bade him turn her from his house, and would not be satisfied until he had done so.

Nor could he divest himself of a certain nightmare atmosphere that clung to his winning of Giovanna, the hot corrupt city, the gorgeous palace, the dirty inn, the picture of the Madonna he had turned out of his room, the fever vision of the voluptuous woman who had crept up to the mosquito nets, all were mingled in his mind with the touch of horror that was common to his thoughts, all seemed to hold presage of ill omen—as if their love had been from the first forbidden—an ecstasy snatched from evil and from wrong.

One of his dreadful moods of black melancholy swept over him, the place seemed peopled with ghouls and fiends; it was as if hell opened beneath his feet.

He sat still, the sweat gathering on his brow, his hand before his eyes, his elbow on the table among the letters and accounts he had been looking over.

"Is God cursing me?" he asked himself desperately, "Will He never

leave me in peace while I keep this woman next my heart?"

And then she came upon him; he heard the door click, and turning saw her in her white yarn gown embroidered with blue and her gold and amber ornaments, smiling at him as she always smiled with steady sweetness and a tender gaiety.

"Giovanna," he said; a light flashed into her face when she heard him use her true name, and she came instantly.

"You are sad, you are angry?" she smiled, noting eagerly the haggard look of his dark face, the limited expression in his large eyes.

"I feel as if the evil spirits were abroad to-day," he answered hoarsely.

He rose and caught hold of her, and she laid on his breast the soft hands that seemed useless for anything save to arrange the elaborate braids of her gorgeous hair.

"You do not know of these things," he said, looking down into her clear, frank, unshadowed eyes.

"No."

He wondered, with a horrid shudder, if it was because she had no soul that she was never dimly aware of supernatural terrors, that she seemed to have no thought or conception of anything beyond this earth; yet because of this, he loved her, perversely, despite himself. Yes, he loved her for this, her material gaiety and charm; the very sight of her often, as now, banished the dark visions that tore his soul.

"You are a good woman, are you not?" he asked passionately.

She thought of what Allan Forsythe had said to her, and a pale fire sparkled in her eyes.

"If you find me good it is well enough," she replied. "I have aimed only to please you."

"But you love God?--you love and serve Him?" demanded Francis.

"Yes," said Giovanna.

"Do you say that only to please me?"

"*Mio caro*, you want too much," replied Giovanna; "love me as I love you and think not so much of God."

Her near presence was overcoming him like a strong perfume, his senses lulled his soul; at least that was how he explained to himself the effect she, in her lovely affection, had on him and how he named the quality of his passion.

He held her closer, closer, her hair pressed against his lips, and he felt the blood rushing into his heart and beating there in furious exaltation: it was worth it--surely worth it--worth even the terror of God's burning Eye turned on him in judgment: as he held her that Eye grew dim, faded, and finally vanished until he was aware only of Giovanna, and a tremendous mystical sense of union in which all individuality was merged, in which differences of race, of creed, of character, were overwhelmed and forged together in the fierce heat of love.

Giovanna lifted her face; her eyes were closed, the warm fragrant weight of her head pressed just above his heart.

"Does anything else matter?" she muttered.

Francis bowed his head to kiss her, before their passionate lips had met he had breathed, in a full sigh from his heart--"No." For that moment it was true--but for that moment only--as too well he knew.

BOOK II. The Power Of The Spirit

* * * * *

I

Allan Forsythe sat at his window overlooking the St. Giles' Church, and read for the twentieth time a letter written in a hand delicate and beautiful as a steel engraving.

It was from a lady whom he had only seen once before, and that occasion was something over five years ago.

Nor had she written to him before, nor had he very often heard of her, though he was still supposed to be bound, by somewhat fantastical and unsubstantial ties to her husband's cousin, Stacy Wigram.

Still he knew something of the very remarkable story of the lady, and he was not likely to forget either her rare personality or the vivid interview he had had with her; therefore this letter written to him by Mrs. Moutray of Glenillich and asking for an immediate and private interview, surprised him and strangely held his fancy.

Since he had journeyed into Ayrshire soon after the marriage of Francis Moutray, he had travelled several times between England and Rome and Bois-le-Duc and been engaged in various skilful, energetic, but cautious attempts to help the exiled dynasty of Stuart.

The cause was too thoroughly lost for him to have been able to make the least headway with his intrigues, and he was both too obscure and too prudent to meet adventures; therefore the years since he last saw Mrs. Moutray had really been eventless, as he reflected with

some humour and some bitterness, and his position was exactly what it was when last he spoke to her; he was still a concealed Romanist, still waiting for those enormous changes which every year seemed to make more impossible; still bound to Stacy Wigram; still hopeful, resolute, cautious, cold, a secret fanatic; outwardly a well-placed man of secure fortune and calm intelligence, with a taste for travel and for collecting cameos, which last was the gloss he gave to his very frequent visits to Italy.

He had many reasons to be satisfied with himself; but as he stared first out of his window at the dull November evening, and next at the letter he held, he was oppressed by a sense of futility and even meanness in his own career.

Mrs. Moutray's letter had chanced to rouse his mind to dwell on the years that had slipped away since he had seen her, and his own use of them did not seem very satisfactory; therefore he rather abruptly turned his thoughts to the lady's record as far as it had come to him, through casual talk and through Stacy Wigram.

There again the years had brought little change or little noticeable to the careless observer.

Mrs. Moutray, despite the extraordinary circumstances of her marriage, behaved like every other Scotch lady of her position, save that she was credited with unusual idleness and a little extravagance, and that it was known a paid housekeeper managed Glenillich.

She had always conformed to her husband's religion and to the customs of his country. She had given him a son, and she was still of a beauty incongruous to her position.

This was all Allan Forsythe knew of his cousin's wife.

It was, indeed, all there was to know; it comprised all the outside history of Giovanna since her marriage, the inner history no one guessed and no one cared about.

Francis Moutray had several times brought his wife to Edinburgh, but the occasions had always chanced on the times when Allan Forsythe was abroad; he had come now, as Allan had learnt from Stacy, on lawyer's business connected with his estate; Giovanna did not mention him in her letter.

Allan had replied to the letter at once, offering to wait on her, but she had sent a hasty note saying she would prefer to come to his lodgings. Allan smiled and wondered over a lack of ceremony that he did not think would be very pleasing to his austere cousin. Edinburgh was not as Rome, Paris, or even London; the lady's half-secret visit would certainly not be approved of were it known.

The appointment was for this day and this hour. Allan stirred the logs, for it was mid-November and cold even for the time of year; the window-panes were blurred with fine rain, and a damp grey mist penetrated the warm, comfortable chamber.

Exact to the hour named, Allan's servant ushered in a lady who curtsied and then hesitated, but not shyly.

"Well met, after so long. Madam," said Mr. Forsythe.

She seated herself in the chair he placed for her and put back the hood of the cardinal she wore.

"It was kind of you to see me," she said. "My husband does not know that I have come, and I pray that you will not tell him."

Her disconcerting frankness, her foreign accent, her foreign gestures were as noticeable as they had been nearly six years ago. Allan

looked at her with a curiosity that he was scarcely able to disguise.

She wore a maroon-coloured hood and cloak, and as she unclasped it, put it aside, and revealed herself, his first impression was that her beauty, always peculiar, had changed to a merely fantastic charm; instantly, however, he perceived that she was a rare and entrancing creature. She was still slender, but her long limbs were more rounded, and she had the bust of a Juno; her amber hair was still elaborately arranged in plaits and curls on the crown of her small head, and her exact, delicate features, though they had lost the indescribable exquisiteness of bloom and contour, the real loveliness of her early youth, yet remained fine, vivid, and pre-eminently attractive.

It was not likely that she would please all or even many, but to the few, the fastidious, the person of exacting and particular taste, she would always remain beautiful.

Allan saw that among the princes, cardinals, poets, and great men who made her mother's world, Giovanna would be considered a pearl among women; he saw also that in Scotland she was more likely to be stared at than admired.

The Southern bud had blossomed in the Northern soil, but blossomed into an exotic flower which owed its beauty to other suns and other skies, and had gained nothing from its environment. Giovanna, in every line, in every movement, in every word, disclosed her origin; the North had made no impression on her, she was, and ever would be, of the South.

Her dress set fashion at naught; it was rich and unusual. Had Allan known the cost of its graceful simplicity he would have considered it extravagant; as it was, he considered it inappropriate for Mrs. Moutray, however suitable it might be for the Contessa Odaleschi.

She was foreign--foreign; an almost unconscious feeling of hostility towards her rose in his Islander's heart. "How mad Francis was!" he thought, and "madness" seemed passion to him who had never experienced it nor considered its power.

"Keep this visit a close secret from my husband," insisted Mrs. Moutray, turning on him her sweet candid eyes, "for my entire happiness depends on your help and your silence."

All that was fine and generous in him prompted him to send her away at once before she spoke another word; he was no friend of Francis, but he knew his character well enough, and was fully aware that Mr. Moutray was the last man to tolerate even remote interference with his affairs.

"Forgive me. Madam, if I urge you to have no secrets from your husband, forgive me if I implore you to take this confidence that you propose to honour me with to him."

She slightly coloured, but her frank composed gaze did not falter.

"I cannot," she answered. "If I had any relations or any friends whom I could trust, anyone on whom I had a claim, I would go to them and not importune you. But I have no one."

This gave him a strange glimpse into her life; was she, after six years in her husband's country, as solitary as when she had fled her own gay world? He became more afraid of her.

"Believe me, I think of yourself," he urged, "when I tell you you would be wiser to keep nothing from your husband--he is not a man to brook it--"

"Is it that you will not be troubled with me?"

"Nay," he said eagerly. "I, a poor idler, would welcome any task you might set me. What man would not be pleased and honoured to serve such a lady? But I see trouble ahead for you; I think I can do no kinder thing than to tell you you act unwisely."

He was fully determined that he would be no partner with her in anything she kept from Francis, and his resolve was unselfish and based on his knowledge of her frank impulsiveness and her husband's brooding, gloomy, and suspicious character. Mrs. Moutray did not seem daunted by his diffidence.

"First hear me," she replied. "You may imagine that I do not come on an ordinary errand to you who once told me plainly you despised me. Ah, I recall it, if you do not--and at the same time you gave me this address in case I ever needed you."

He recalled it too, well enough. Six years had a little changed him; he would not have spoken those words now; he almost regretted them.

"I hoped that you had forgotten," he said.

"I have remembered, all these years," she said gravely. "And now I have come to you, not for myself, but for another."

"Another?"

"My child."

Allan Forsythe looked at her sharply.

"I have a little boy, sir, not quite five years old," continued Mrs. Moutray. She paused a moment, then added, with startling energy, "I wish to save his soul."

He saw suddenly the object of her visit.

"Yon wish the child baptized?"

"Yes," she said. "For myself I can bear it, but not for him."

"You are not happy, then?" he flashed.

"Happiness," she replied composedly, "is not for them who love. But I have chosen, and I neither repent nor repine, though I see now more clearly what I did and what it meant. I know what you and other members of Holy Church think of me, I know what I endure when I sit in the heretic church. But it is by his side," she added quite calmly. "And I have grown used to face the thought of hell. Perhaps God is more merciful than men say; if not, we shall be together still."

Allan was startled at this quiet laying bare of an overwhelming passion; there was nothing he could say.

"You may not consider me a wife," she continued, "but you must admit me a mother, and as a mother I come to you. Will you help me save the boy? You are my one hope."

Until this moment Allan had meant to firmly refuse to meddle in the affairs of the Moutrays, but at this appeal the sleeping bigot in him awoke; he saw that she was asking him to interfere in a matter far more delicate and dangerous than he had ever guessed; he saw that discovery would mean the total loss of her happiness and untold rage and agony and humiliation to Francis; he saw that, by all laws of honour, he had no right to help the wife against the husband, to alienate the child from the father; but one argument alone outweighed all these--here was a soul to be saved, here was a straying sheep to be brought back into the fold of Holy Church, and all his ardour of the neophyte, all his secret fanaticism, learnt from the

ardent priests of his persecuted faith, taught him that any means to this end were justified.

It seemed to him that God had sent this woman to him, and that it would be blasphemy to refuse her request.

Yet it was a tremendous responsibility to undertake, and still he hesitated.

"You yourself," he said, "have you no wish to return to the Church?"

"I belong to Francis," she answered. "The choice was given me, and I chose him. I can take the punishment of what I did. But the child is unconscious, innocent, he has never had a chance; and shall he be lost through me?" she added with despairing vehemence.

"But Mr. Moutray would never allow a priest within his doors, never permit his son to go to Mass."

She answered with a readiness that showed she had considered all difficulties.

"I know. I wish to have him secretly baptized so that he is a member of the Church—he can keep his religion secret as you do, sir; he is old enough to understand, and I shall find opportunities when we come to Edinburgh to see a priest. Then when he is older he can choose as I chose."

Allan winced at the thought of the awful situation she was preparing: at the terrible conflict between father and son there was bound to be some day if the boy followed her teaching; at the treachery to Francis she, who so profoundly loved him, was contemplating; but it was all in the name of God, and the present, not the future, was their concern.

He felt too, in his inmost heart, that she was right; it was an

unbearable thing that the helpless child should be consigned to damnation for her sin. Let him at least enjoy the Holy rite of baptism.

"I will help you," he said sombrely.

She gave a long, weary sigh of intense relief.

"I believed that you would," she responded simply. "You were my only hope," she repeated.

"Heaven grant that I am justified!" he replied.

"Will you tell me," asked Mrs. Moutray, "what I am to do?"

He was puzzled, even confused, by her manner. She was asking such a considerable service of him, she spoke so frankly and plainly, she invited him to conspire with her against her husband, yet she showed no intimacy or even friendliness; it was as if she regarded him as a mere impersonal instrument with which to carry out her wishes.

In this, he imagined, she unconsciously showed her breed; the great ladies of Italy were accustomed to take favours for granted.

"There is a priest here," he answered, "and I must consult him. When I know more I will wait on you."

"I will come again," she said.

He replied almost angrily—he wished to make the affair as little like an intrigue as possible:

"Nay, Madam, it is more reasonable that I should come to your house. Under any circumstances I should see Francis."

"Very well," she answered, and rose; he thought how strange and fair she looked in his precise room.

"What of Stacy Wigram?" she asked with a little smile, as she clasped her cloak.

He used the frankness she had used to him:

"Three years ago her father died, and she will not leave her mother, who is ill and alone. I—I wait. She knows my secret now. My wife could not be a heretic. I wait to know if she will change. At present she says neither yes nor no."

He sighed a little drearily His love-affair, like his political scheme, had dragged till all savour had gone out of it; he and Stacy had carried caution, prudence, and scruples to extremes. He perhaps began to find that love too long delayed fades, and vanishes when it is at last approached.

Mrs. Moutray did not feign much interest in his affairs. She smiled in a preoccupied fashion, and asked him when he was likely to wait on her with his news; she gave him an address near the Lawnmarket, and with mere formal thanks was going.

But his curiosity would not allow her to escape so easily; she was to him an extraordinary creature, and he longed to know something of what lay behind her calm, frank reserve.

"Do you never think of your mother and sister, Madam?" he asked. "Do you never wish to see Italy again?"

"One dead might as well desire to revisit the earth," she replied; "it would be as hopeless for me to dwell on my former life. That is closed to me as completely as if the gates of the tomb divided us. I may not even speak of it; my former name sounds strangely to me

now, so long it is since I heard it or spoke it. I entreat you," she added hastily, "do not mention Italy to Francis."

"So you both are playing at forgetting," said Allan. "And yet I am sure you both remember very well."

"We never speak of the past," she evaded.

"Yet you think of it," he insisted. On his last visit to Italy he had seen the Contessa Odaleschi in her gorgeous Bologna home, bereft of both her daughters now, and defying age and poverty and failure with undiminished courage and gaiety. She was sinking lower in her corrupt and scandalous society, she was no longer the power she had been, but she carried her head high, and had cast all her interests and hopes on the Church.

He had seen Emilia too at a reception of Cardinal York in Rome; she bloomed in the Orsini Palace now. Compared to the life Giovanna led, her existence was a fairy tale.

"You heard of the marriage of your sister?" Allan probed.

"No; how should I? But she was to marry the Prince Orsini."

"She is in Rome now--I saw her last year. She is very beautiful and gay and happy."

Still he could not move Giovanna to any expression of regret or remorse, hardly to any expression of interest; more and more he marvelled at her. He wondered if she quite realized all she had given up; she had been so young--even now she could not be more than five-and-twenty.

She could not have understood, he thought, *everything* sacrificed,

and for a hard, sour devil like Francis!

Mrs. Moutray gave him a smile that seemed to both penetrate and discount his thought. She held out her lovely perfumed hand that seemed made for kisses.

"I came in a hired chair which I dismissed at the corner," she said; "I will return the same way. I think the rain has stopped. Please do not come down with me. Remember, I shall be waiting."

She pulled her hood over her face and disappeared into the darkness of the unlit stairs.

Allan went to the window and watched her going down the wet grey street. He noticed her unconscious aptitude for intrigue; she might be frank, even reckless, but she was not likely to make a mistake in subterfuge or finesse.

Thinking over their interview, he smiled to recall how completely she had bent him to her will and how utterly he had failed to draw her; yet she had used no arts, unless her absolute directness was one.

Allan became desirous of seeing the other half of the puzzle--Francis Moutray. The plot in which he had been so suddenly involved interested him more than the vain intrigues for a lost cause to which he was used.

He thought over all he knew of Francis, and all he knew of her, her world, and breed.

The result of his reflections was not pleasant. He frowned as he closed the window.

"I hope he is kind to her," he said.

When Allan Forsythe visited the handsome house of the Moutrays near the Lawnmarket, he found husband and wife together in the withdrawing, room; she sitting idle behind the glitter of the Queen Anne tea equipage, he near the window in conversation with two lawyers.

He was in negotiations for the purchase of a neighbouring estate which he had always coveted; the present owner made difficulties about the price, and Mr. Moutray was in frequent consultation with his advisers; the business interested and absorbed him to a strange degree.

As he came forward to greet Allan, that gentleman saw that he also had changed little in these few years; he still looked alert, hardy, elegant, sombre; the dark waving hair was touched with premature grey above the ears, and his eyes had a curious narrowed look which gave him the expression of one bearing pain.

"He is not happy," thought Allan swiftly. "They are neither of them happy."

Giovanna rose and joined in the usual courtesies; Allan, acting the lie that this was their first meeting since Glenillich, felt more ashamed than he cared to admit.

She was serene; her loose draperies of red and yellow, the black lace shawl that hung open over her shapely shoulders, the little combs set with topaz in her wonderful hair, her whole air and pose so gracefully indolent, so unconsciously voluptuous, formed a picture incongruous indeed to the handsome but dreary room furnished by the cold and conventional taste of Francis' parents.

She had evidently touched nothing; the heavy walnut furniture, the faded blue Venetian velvet on the walls, the insipid portraits by Riley, the prim silver sconces, the dark cabinets containing Chinese monsters, the well-waxed boards, the brass fire-dogs were all as they were a generation ago when Giovanna had lain in her gilt cradle at Rome.

She sank back in her chair and, supporting her chin in her slender fingers and her elbow on her knee, looked at Allan with a radiant smile.

Francis introduced the two legal gentlemen, and hastily explained his business.

"I want to buy Fort Mary," he said, "but Winthorp asks too much."

"Adding to the estates?" smiled Allan. "You own half a county already."

The Lord of Glenillich waved aside this exaggeration.

"This ground is good for farming and pasturage," he continued, "better than mine. I want to build. The people live like dogs. I mean to bring some English farmers over."

"A dangerous experiment, Mr. Moutray," put in one of the lawyers. "The people do so hate the foreigner—" Then perceiving his slip he emphasised it by an awkward pause.

"That, sir," returned Mr. Moutray, with a sternness that showed how sore a point this was with him, "is one of the ignorant prejudices which I have to combat in my tenants."

"Quite so, quite so," agreed the other hastily, and beat a retreat by asking Giovanna for another dish of tea.

She smiled at him kindly as she filled his cup.

"My husband is so set on this land," she said, "and it is a beautiful place. Have you seen it, sir?"

"Yes, ma'am," returned the lawyer, his broad Scots accent heightened in his agitation. "But the price is high. Mr. Winthorp is a rich man and can afford to wait."

"I'll buy," said Francis. "Whatever the price, I'll buy."

"I think you will do well," agreed Allan. "An estate like Fort Mary will not be long on the market. I recall it very well; it has been much neglected, has it not?"

"Yes," answered Mr. Moutray. "Winthorp is never there. He squanders his guineas in London. It is because I must spend so much on the land that I wished to get a lower price; but, as I said, I will buy."

The lawyers took their leave, and Francis, wishing to have another word on the subject of which his mind was full, accompanied them to the door.

Allan turned to Giovanna, who was still regarding him with her clear smiling eyes.

"Why is Mr. Moutray so anxious to acquire this land?" he asked. He took the topic as the first that came to hand and because he felt foolishly embarrassed alone with Giovanna, but her answer startled him and roused him to a real interest in the subject.

"I believe that he wants to build a church," she said. "And he has set his mind on a site on the Fort Mary estate. The church at Glenillich is

very poor and old."

Allan could not repress an exclamation. "Ah, Madam, have you realized how devoted your husband is to his creed and what you are doing in deceiving him on this matter?"

"I have thought of all of it," she answered quietly, "but it is a question of the boy's soul."

He could not gainsay her; to do so would be blasphemy; yet he did not care to look ahead into the future.

"He builds his churches," continued Mrs. Moutray. "May I not build my temple in the child's heart?"

"You still *believe*?" he asked.

She turned her head and looked steadily into the flames.

"Yes, I still believe," she replied. "Even though I no longer have the right to pray. I still believe. Should I else do as I am doing?"

He took a sealed letter from his breast pocket and laid it on the table beside the heavy silver urn where the bohea emitted the fragrant perfume.

"I have seen Father Hilton," he said gravely, "And there are the arrangements we made—in that paper. Let me know if they are convenient to you."

She swiftly concealed the letter in the bosom of her dress; he noticed her sudden pallor.

"Thank you, thank you!" she said hastily. "Would you not like to see the boy? He understands something. I have spoken to him. I have

instructed him--"

"Will he keep the secret?" asked Allan.

"Ah, yes."

Allan turned away; the bigot, the enthusiast in him was pleased--had not his whole life's labour come to obtaining recruits for the Catholic and Stuart cause? But the man, the gentleman, in him revolted at this secret setting of the child against the father, at this conspiracy of the wife against the husband.

"I think of the future," he said sombrely.

"I too," she replied at once. "I think a great deal about the future--of the future in this world and the future beyond."

While the sentence was yet unfinished Francis returned.

"Forgive this dry intrusion on your visit," he smiled. "Those gentlemen came unexpectedly."

"Nay," said Allan, "I was interested. You are buying Fort Mary? It is a fine estate; was it not supposed to be haunted? I heard that was why Winthorp would not live there."

"Haunted?" said Francis.

Giovanna laughed.

"You do not believe in spirits, Madam?" asked Allan.

"Nay," she said, with a little shake of the head.

But Francis spoke coldly.

"We may not disbelieve these things for they are testified to in Holy Writ."

From this Allan had a glimpse of the wide difference between husband and wife; he knew enough of the South to know that Giovanna was typical of her race; he knew that the Southerners were not romantic or fanciful, though their passion, their colour, their beauty might make them appear so to the Northerner to whom romance and fantasy really belonged; Giovanna was material, passionate, capable of great loyalty, of boundless devotion, gay, brave, superstitious, and frank--Italian--from a country where fairies and elves were unknown, a country where everyone was too occupied with the hearty things of the present to attend to the things of the past; Giovanna's one spiritual expression was a blind and unthinking belief in the faith in which she had been bred.

Francis was introspective, moody, mystical, always striving after the things of the spirit, hating his own carnal desires, ridden by nightmare fancies, aware of the borderland, the world within the misty glens and gloomy mountains, assimilating the legends which had always encircled his life.

She saw the most complicated problem as a simple thing, he tortured the most simple issue into complications; she gave no thought to her soul, and he was always fighting his flesh.

There seemed to Allan Forsythe the elements of tragedy in these two. In want of a safe topic of conversation he continued speaking of Fort Mary, for he had no interests in common with Francis Moutray after all these years.

The estate had an interesting history; the ancient mansion once standing had been deserted on account of having been the scene of one of the savage crimes common enough in the sixteenth century;

at the time of the first Highland risings in favour of the Stuarts, the Government had bought the neglected land with the purpose of building a fort there--to be called Fort Mary in honour of the then Queen, but the Highlands being soon after quieted, the scheme was abandoned and the land sold to a London speculator, who in his turn disposed of it to a family of Scots who returned to their country after exile; they loyally retained the old evil savouring name of Ardnamurchan.

They began to repair the old mansion, but for some reason not properly understood, never finished the work, nor ever lived on the estate which they subsequently abandoned, and which had since passed by marriage into the hands of a family named Winthorp; the present owner, in his turn, selling to Francis Moutray.

"Will you take down the house or finish it?" asked Allan.

"I shall destroy it," replied Francis. "I intend to build a church. It is a fine site."

"Glenillich kirk is large enough for the village," smiled Allan.

"Nay," said Mr. Moutray, "it is not large enough for the dead or the living, and for constant repairs costs more than the erection of a new one. Besides, it was once Romanist, and the theatre of idolatry and foul deeds."

"Why," answered Allan, "I did not know that you were loyal to the Church of Scotland; I believed that you belonged rather to the select remnant of the faithful who found the present establishment a poor compromise."

"His people were Puritans," put in Giovanna.

"Nav. Covenanters," corrected Francis gravely.

"So many names!" smiled his wife.

"We were enemies to Episcopacy and Independency alike," said Francis,--"but we accepted the Established Church as we accepted the established government, and to both have been loyal. If I incline inwardly to a severe creed, at least I see no great errors in that to which I subscribe. We may split straws too finely, Mr. Forsythe."

"I always thought straw splitting a fault of the Dissenters," returned Allan.

"Ah, you were never a good Churchman," said Francis keenly.

"I believe in tolerance," answered Allan, making the usual mental reservation--"except to the other side."

"Ah, toleration!" cried Mr. Moutray impatiently; he crossed to the fireplace and stirred the falling logs with the toe of his boot. "When do you leave us again?" he asked, with an abrupt change of subject.--"You are always on your travels."

"I think to go abroad again in the spring."

Francis gave him a quick glance.

"Collecting cameos?" he asked.

"Amongst other things," smiled Allan, with a flush on his fair face that was not wholly from the fire.

"Foreign lands please you?"

Mr. Forsythe shrugged his shoulders.

"One must do something."

"Is not my cousin Stacy waiting for you?" asked Francis, still looking at him with grave, dark eyes.

"Nay, I am waiting for Stacy--she will not leave her mother alone."

"My aunt could live with you," returned Francis; and Allan, remembering what obstacle these two had overcome, recognised the excuse as feeble indeed, but he could not pretend to even comprehend, much less to have ever felt, the passion that had lifted them over such mighty difficulties.

"I wait for Stacy," he repeated. "It is in her hands; that is all I can say."

"Ask her to come to a decision," said Francis. "It is near seven years that this betrothal has lasted. I do not want my cousin to grow old waiting. You should not go abroad again, Mr. Forsythe, until she is wed or freed. Forgive my interference. I am her nearest male relative now."

"Sir, she shall have her choice," returned Mr. Forsythe. "The delay has never been of my seeking."

Which was not literally true; he had been willing enough to postpone his marriage until the re-establishment of his king and his faith; but that had been in the old days; now he was bitterly aware how distant the hour of that triumph must be.

"I am glad to have seen you," said Francis, with that sudden smile of his which rendered his face wholly charming, "for this has been on my mind, Mr. Forsythe."

Allan, seeing no further opportunity of speaking alone with Giovanna (who all this while had sat mute gazing into the fire), soon after took

his leave.

As soon as he had gone Francis turned sharply to his wife.

"That fellow is either a fribble or he is playing a part. I hope Stacy will have the good sense to give him up. I always wondered why my uncle consented to the marriage."

Giovanna rose.

"You do not like him?" she asked, and she raised her brows as if she was distressed.

"No," said Francis bluntly. "I have seen little of him, but I do not like him; his father was suspected of dealings with Bar-le-Duc, and I mistrust these visits abroad in search of cameos."

Giovanna slightly started.

"But you yourself collect medals," she smiled.

"I do not go abroad two or three times a year to look for them, my dear," he smiled back.

Giovanna turned her head away.

"Well, it is Stacy's affair, not mine," she answered.

"Do not see more of him than you can help," said Francis abruptly.

"Why, what chance have I of seeing him?" she asked, looking at him quietly.

"He might come here again, you might meet him at Stacy's house. At the best, he is an idle man; at the worst, a dangerous one."

"You have taken a very sudden dislike to this poor gentleman," she said.

"I have these feelings, these instincts, about people," he replied frowningly. "I felt a premonition of evil, of disaster, when that man was in the room. When he looked at me I thought it was the look of an antagonist."

"Fancies," said Giovanna; "fancies."

"Aye," he said, "fancies;" he sighed and took her slack hand. "But I do not like Mr. Forsythe."

"You will see no more of him when we return to Glenillich."

She put her soft pale face next his dark cheek. She was wholly his, she felt herself sincere with him in word as in deed, yet her free hand was over Allan's letter which lay warm upon her bosom.

III

When Allan Forsythe left the Moutray's mansion he went direct to another which was, in size, in pretension, in furniture, in stiff and sombre taste, almost exactly similar.

This was the home of Stacy Wigram in Castle Street, where that lady lived with her mother, and had lived all her life the same serene, uneventful life, filled with small duties, small gossip, small excitements, and great sacrifices.

The most tremendous thing that had ever happened to her had been Allan's proposal of marriage; but perhaps seven years had worn off something of the wonder and sweetness even of that, yet she never complained. She was in her usual place in the drawing-room at her

usual task of needlework; a lamp stood on the table near her elbow, and the cheerful fire illuminated her neat figure in the blue woollen gown and muslin cap and apron.

She greeted Allan as always--quietly and kindly; he took the deep, worn leather chair opposite her, and regarded her keenly.

He could not but mark with a pang how the weary, monotonous years had sharpened the fine features that had been so exquisite, how the bloom of twenty had not survived to twenty-seven, how the colour had slightly faded from lip and cheek, how a slight primness--the precision and gravity of the exact housekeeper--had taken the place of the girlish gaiety and light-heartedness he first loved her for. He blamed himself--why had he so delayed his marriage?

"You are very silent this afternoon," said Stacy, "and I get silent too, always in the house with sickness. Today mother was too ill to come downstairs at all. There is a nurse with her now," she added, as if excusing her own absence.

"The house is over-big for you," said Allan.

"It is my home," she answered simply.

He still looked at her and was silent again. The object of his visit was twofold: he wished to bring his betrothal to a climax, as he had promised Francis, and he wished to make Stacy his confidante in the affair Mrs. Moutray had entrusted to him. He thought his future wife had a right to know, and he thought that he would feel less guilty towards Francis were Stacy a party to this intrigue.

He approached his first object first.

"Stacy, dear," he said with real feeling, "how long are we to wait?"

She put down her needle and raised her honest eyes.

"You wish to be set free?" she asked with startling quietness.

The shock of her words brought the blood to his cheeks.

"You know that is not true," he said vehemently; "it has been you who has delayed our marriage--"

"Lately," she returned, "since my father died; but for five years before that it was you who made the postponements, Allan--and after five years of waiting, would you expect that I should show eagerness to press you? Nay, and there are other questions you have lately raised--your politics, your religion--"

"I trusted you with my secrets, Stacy."

"And they are safe with me. But they are more delays, are they not?"

"Not if you will decide," he answered hastily. "But perhaps it is you who wish to be free."

She leant forward, her hands were clasped on her knees; her eyes suddenly filled with tears.

"It has been too long," she said. "I have not been unhappy, but I have changed. It is quite natural that you should wish it to end."

He rose in his agitation.

"Why do you speak like that?"

"Love would never suffer this discussion," she said.

"Stacy, you hurt me--"

"Please speak no more. If you had loved me you had married me before. Lovers do not postpone, Allan."

He thought of Francis, but he would not acknowledge the truth of what she said.

"Stacy, you are gloomy to-night, you speak without thinking."

She put out her hand with a gesture that stopped his speech.

"There is another obstacle you have lately raised. You tell me that you are a concealed Romanist. You ask me to share your faith. I cannot."

"So soon decided, so coldly put!" he cried, surprised and hurt.

"Coldly?" she repeated. "Well, perhaps the fire has died a little in seven years. I cannot change my creed."

"Why?" he asked.

She gave a little smile, a little lift of her brows.

"We have had Romanists and Covenanters in our families, I know, and I am no stern believer like my cousin Frank. I think it is enough to know of God and serve Him—I never could understand intolerance—yet I see no reason good enough to warrant me in leaving my father's faith. I like it better than yours, Allan."

"You dismiss the matter so lightly!" he cried, deeply wounded.

She answered gravely:

"Nay, I have thought over it a great deal. I do not care for your creed. It permits you to live in deceit, to intrigue against your country, to be

little better than a plotter and a spy."

"Is that how you think of me?"

"Oh, my dear," she exclaimed, "how useless this is! I set you free—I set you free!"

"I did not come to ask you for freedom—I came to ask you to be my wife immediately."

"Would you take a Protestant wife, Allan?"

He was silent.

"Go your ways," she smiled. "God bless you, Allan."

"You misunderstand me," he said hotly. "I think you purposely misunderstand me."

"Do not let us quarrel," she implored. "That would be truly a sorry ending."

A fear and dread of losing her possessed him now. She had been his comfortress, his patient listener, his meek adorer so long that she seemed like part of his life; he really wanted her, he found, not as he had wanted her once—differently, but no less eagerly.

"Stacy," he replied, "this is all moonshine and madness. Are we, in a moment, to break up the affection of all these years?"

She looked at him sadly as if she saw the selfishness that moved him. She had long known that he did not love her, and she—quiet, demure, commonplace woman as she was—wanted love or nothing. No one would have called her romantic, she did not herself consider that she was, yet nothing would have induced her to make a

marriage of mere affection, mere friendship; and she was aware that affection and friendship were all Allan had to offer her now.

Her face was very pale, and the tears that had gathered in her eyes overbrimmed and ran down her cheeks.

"Say no more," she murmured, "it is over."

He was truly bewildered, truly overcome; in a grotesque way he remembered how he had meant to tell her of the service he had undertaken for Mrs. Moutray--and now she was shutting him out from all confidences for ever.

"Do you mean this?" he asked.

"Yes," she replied. "Come to me when your King Charlie is back and your Pope of Rome has churches all over Scotland."

Her words were not without bitterness, and they revealed to him the futility of the grand schemes for which he had postponed his marriage. He was working on a hopeless cause, as she knew.

"Well," he said sternly, "I work for the God and king I believe in. I can do little, but I take no shame in my work."

Her faint smile was not without mockery.

"I am not the woman who would be a good wife to a Papist plotter, Allan. You should have found a foreign lady from the Pope's own country, as Frank did."

He strangely blushed and strangely thrilled; what would not life have been with such lovely passionate loyalty as Giovanna's by his side? Surely she was more fitted to adventure for the true faith with him, as Stacy was more fitted to spin and sew in Glenillich House!

The reflection angered him.

"So you dismiss me!" he exclaimed, and his nervous fingers pulled at his wrist ruffles.

"Put it like that if you will," said Stacy. She could not even begin to explain her feelings: how she had loved him, the long waiting, the gradual disillusion, the change in both of them; now she felt scarcely regret, only a great weariness.

"Very well." he replied. "Little did I think of this end--"

"Nor I," she interrupted; her eyes flashed in her pallid face, and her voice was suddenly animated. "Would you give up your plots, your Church, and live quietly with me in Edinburgh?"

"It is too much to ask."

"I know," she smiled; "therefore, good-bye."

He was still thinking of Giovanna.

"Frank Moutray's wife gave up more than I am asking of you," he cried.

"Yes," said Stacy; "poor soul! I have seen something of her of late. How she has paid for his love! But women do pay for love--terribly."

"She is happy--as you would be."

"Jeannie Moutray is not happy. Frank holds her a frail thing reclaimed from foulness--he is always watching her to spy her mother in her--he almost counts his love for her a thing to do penance for, I know, I have seen. I would not have such a marriage. 'I'll

keep my creed and my liberty, Allan."

"Frank Moutray is a gloomy bigot."

"You are no better," she smiled. "He thought she was damned as the handmaiden of the Scarlet Woman, and you think I am damned as a heretic. But at least he had love, great love, to give her--while you--"

He turned sharply towards her.

"Stacy, dear little Stacy," he cried, distressed, "I love you--believe that I love you and want you--"

She rose decisively and held out a shaking hand.

"Good-bye, Allan."

"Stacy!"

"Good-bye, dear."

"Nothing more?"

"No--nothing more."

Plainly she was lost. His pride could plead no more; a certain resentment hardened his pain. Giovanna was still in the background of his thoughts; he felt a certain secret gladness that he had not told Stacy of the secret he shared with Frank's wife.

"I hope I leave you my well-wisher?" he said.

"I have your secret," she said simply. "It is as safe with me as if I was your wife--believe that."

"I believe it."

He looked round the dark room that was so familiar to him, he gazed at the modest, simple lady who had been so dear. He was sorry, sorry indeed; it was failure—a piece with all his life.

"Good-bye," he said again, and left her. So the past was dead between them and buried in her heart.

She had wanted this moment, looked for it, shaped it. She did not regret the sudden ending to hopes that had once been so gorgeous; she told herself she was glad this mockery of love was over; but when she heard the door shut after him she did not feel the gladness, only a great desolation.

She thought of her cousin's wife.

"Would I have given what she has given as the price of love? Would I?"

From force of habit she took up her sewing and returned to her place beside the lamp; but she could not see the stitches for the tears in her eyes.

Allan Forsythe, walking up Castle Street through the drizzling rain, was also thinking of Giovanna; he thought of her more than of the woman he had just left.

IV

Father Hilton, the able and energetic Jacobite to whom Allan had told the story of Giovanna, made neither difficulties nor scruples about receiving the child into the faith his mother had forsaken; nay, he saw rather a just vengeance in this on the heretic who had

beguiled the daughter of a powerful Romanist family from her duty.

It was the aim of his life to make converts to his religious and political creeds, and the son of the Lord of Glenillich, child as he was, was regarded by Father Hilton as an important recruit.

With the secret teaching of his mother and the Church, the boy would grow into a faithful follower of Pope and Stuart, with the result that one of the fairest estates in Scotland would one day be in the hands of a man pledged to the true faith and the true King.

Father Hilton, more hopeful than Allan, dreamed that Charles Stuart might be on the throne before this lad was grown, or at least that the Romanist religion might be practised openly; in any case, and whether the good cause triumphed or no, the heir of Glenillich, a Papist and under the influence of an Italian mother, could not fail to be a valuable asset in the hands of the vanquished and oppressed party that was so strenuously struggling for their old supremacy in Britain.

Glenillich was a wealthy estate; the present owner, by his interest, prudence, and enterprise, had greatly increased the value during the last few years, and when he had cultivated Fort Mary the worth of the property would be yet further augmented.

So reflected Father Hilton as he waited in his chambers for the coming of Allan Forsythe and Mrs. Moutray; he smiled to think that the harvest the heretic was so carefully sowing should one day be reaped by a Papist.

He lived, when in Edinburgh, in a turning off the High Street, called Rosamund's Wynd; as a matter of necessity he was always in disguise, and passed for a writer to a London newsletter. Amongst some he was suspected of alchemy and credited with a search after

the philosopher's stone, a supposition based on his solitary life, the books in foreign languages on his shelves, his absorbed air, and his long absences abroad; pilgrimages in search of the magnum opus these were supposed to be; pilgrimages in a sense they were, and success was as difficult to achieve on these ways as on those trodden by the eager seekers after the secret of eternal wealth and eternal youth.

Father Hilton sat at his window and looked into the narrow street which was lined by open shops and booths, mostly gold and silver and copper smiths, whose wares glittered against the dark recesses of their shops.

The mist of evening was beginning to deepen and a chill little wind whistled round the corners and shook the great hanging signboards. The priest's trained eyes noticed a public chair coming along his street; as he watched it stopped at his door, as he had expected; a lady and a child descended; she paid the bearers, and when the empty chair had gone she stood a moment confused, holding the boy by the hand and looking up and down the street while her garments were stirred and shaken by the wind.

Then a man detached himself from a group who were idly gazing at a great silver ship hanging in one of the shop windows and joined the new-comers; it was Allan Forsythe, who had been loitering about until she came; they entered the house together, and Father Hilton came from the window and lit two thick candles in copper sticks which stood on a plain table inside the door.

The room was very simple, the house very old, the beams of the ceiling were warped and twisted, the floor uneven and sunken in places; a large desk with many locks, shelves of books, a chest covered with a rug, a few chairs completed the furniture. Above the table with the candles was a large picture; an oil-painting

representing a dark cavalier, badly painted, smoke blackened, and cracked.

The priest himself was a man of rather insignificant appearance, attired in the ordinary garb of a humble citizen; he was between forty and fifty; a pair of horn spectacles rested on his nose, and inside his coat-pocket, though not visible, was a case of small pistols.

Allan came up, as always, without being attended by the servant attached to the chambers, and himself ushered the lady and the boy into the presence of the priest.

"This is Mrs. Moutray, father," he said as he closed the door.

The priest looked at her with calm curiosity as she stepped quickly forward.

She wore a black cardinal of thick material which obscured her slenderness and her loveliness; but Father Hilton, a swift observer, recognized her fineness, her quality.

Giovanna, on her part, turned on the priest a glance brilliant in its keenness.

"Sir," she said hastily, "do you speak Italian?"

"Not well, but I understand it."

She drew the boy forward into the candlelight; both Allan and the priest looked with eager interest at the child, who stood surveying them with unabashed gravity.

He is, thought Allan Forsythe, strange.

Elphin Moutray had indeed an air of reserve, of thoughtfulness that

was remarkable in so young a child, and the expression of his grave peaked face had in it something peculiar. He possessed all the usual delicacy and grace of high-born children, and was besides distinguished by a certain wild beauty not properly belonging to ordinary childhood.

He was tall for his age and very slender, his complexion was a smooth unblemished olive tint, his long locks a heavy dead brown, his eyes were hazel, preternaturally large and liquid, his features were extremely delicate, his chin notably pointed; his mother's taste was obvious in the fine flourishing of his grey satins and the exquisite embroidery of his falling muslin collar and ruffles.

Allan and the priest both had the same feeling that here was not a mere infant, but a personality already complete.

"Father," said Giovanna in Italian, "this is my son--you know my story? Mr. Forsythe has told me that you believe me, and will be my friend." ("Padre, que sto e mio figlio; Lei conosce la mia storia? Il Signor Forsythe mi ha detto che Lei mi crede e sara il mio amico.")

She paused.

"Yes, it is true," replied the priest. ("Si è vero.")

Giovanna gazed at him with eyes blazing bright.

"Do not speak of my sin before the child," she asked. "He understands nothing of what I did. I do not wish him to understand." ("Non mi parli del mio peccato in presenza del bambino--non capisce nulla di quello che io ho fatto; non voglio che lui capisee.")

It moved and touched Allan to hear her speak her own language so rapidly--it could not have passed her lips since she left Italy--unless she had used it in private prayer; he marked her foreign gesture, her

Bolognese accent--how completely she belonged to the dear cities of the South!

Swiftly she continued speaking with her native frankness, yet with a certain pride she took all the burden of what she had done; she knew what she must appear in the eyes of a priest, especially as she had not come as a penitent, but she implored him not to think of her, not to notice her, but to pity and take the child.

As she continued speaking she became greatly excited and distressed, and her language became so rapid and impassioned that it was difficult for both Allan and the priest to follow the swift Italian.

"Madam," said Father Hilton, when she had come to an end. "I am prepared to leave you to God and your conscience--may you find grace and mercy. As for your child, though in the eyes of the Church he is born in sin, yet I am, aware that in the eyes of the worldly he bears no stain and at the present he need not know how he stands before God--that will be your duty; to enlighten him some day, your duty and your penance."

A painful red stained Giovanna's face; she twisted her fingers together on her breast as if to control the violent beating of her heart; Allan realized now the full depth of the humiliation she was enduring to save her son's soul; he had not before considered this aspect of the case--that if her child became a Romanist he would grow up to believe his mother no true wife and himself misbegotten.

It was not the policy or meaning of the priest to insist on this point; the heir of Glenillich must be always considered as legitimate enough to retain the estates.

"Perhaps," said the priest, not unkindly, "Mr. Moutray may one day

be brought to leave his errors and make you truly his wife."

"Never," she replied firmly. "Nor would I ask him. I gave all up for him, and I do not complain. But with the child I thought I had no right to make, for him, this sacrifice."

An angry sparkle lit the priest's mild eyes.

"Are you then so defiant in your error?" he asked.

"I have come about my son, not about myself!" she cried desperately.

It was a tangled business at best, and one, Father Hilton reflected, that was not for him to straighten.

"I will give the boy the blessings of baptism," he said drily. "And pray God to pardon me if I do wrong."

Giovanna gave a quivering sigh of relief and sank into a chair, drawing the boy towards her; she was trembling violently and her eyes swam in tears; Father Hilton went into the inner room.

"Does the boy understand?" asked Allan in Italian.

For answer she turned to her son.

"Elphin," she asked in English, "do you understand why we are here?"

As she addressed him the child's whole demeanour changed, he glowed and smiled and crept closer to her; every fibre of his body seemed to respond to her voice; it was plain she had an unusual influence over him and that there was an unusual affection between them.

"Yes," he answered.

"He knows," said Giovanna, "that the true worship of God is forbidden in this country, that it is practised only by a few, and that secretly; he knows that we come here to-day, secretly, that he may be baptized into the true faith, that henceforth he too must worship in secret--praying God and the Virgin to forgive us all."

"And I must tell no one, not even my father," said Elphin with great gravity in the childish voice, and slowly and distinctly as if repeating something learnt by heart. "And when I go into the kirk to pray, I must pray to be forgiven for being there, and I shall have a book and a string of beads; and when we are alone you will hear me pray, will you not, mother?"

Allan's conscience utterly misgave him as he listened; here was a burden to put on a child of a few years!--a baby to be trained in difficult and subtle deceit--what could he make of it all? It was plain he was merely following Giovanna's directions; but when he did begin to understand--and believe--would it not be pain and suffering twisted into the very inmost threads of his existence?--yet all objection was silenced before the fact that they were saving his soul.

Father Hilton returned in his priest's robe and carrying an embroidered cloth and a wrought silver basin; Allan locked the door and set his back against it, while the priest arranged the chest as a kind of rude altar on which he placed the cloth, the two candles, and a tortoiseshell and ebony crucifix which he took from his desk.

He handled this last very lovingly, and told Giovanna that it was the gift of the late saintly Queen Clementina Sobieski, presented to him when he had received special licence and permission to perform the ceremonies of the Church outside consecrated walls.

Many a dying exile had clasped that crucifix to his breast, while he had thought, perhaps, more of the country he would never see again than of the Paradise to which he was departing; it had been smuggled in to many a death-bed of one who had denied his faith through prudence during life, and at the last sought comfort and hope from the forbidden symbol.

As Father Hilton placed it now on the improvised altar, Allan went on his knees; the last crucifix Giovanna had seen was the one she had put into Frank Moutray's hands as they left the inn on the Milan road--the crucifix he had hurled, with rosary and book, out of the coach window into the dark gorge grown with wild cherry and chestnut.

As she again saw, after these strange years, the revered emblems of her childhood's faith she rose to her feet (not daring to kneel), and pressed her face against the wall.

Father Hilton, used to minister to the oppressed, the exiled, the fugitive, knew how to make the little service impressive.

He put some questions to the child, who, well schooled by Giovanna, answered correctly; he gave a simple homily on the duties of Faith and Obedience; he read some prayers; and then he received Elphin Moutray into the bosom of the Church, baptizing him with some holy water from a crystal phial that he had brought from Rome.

Allan stood for godparents and parents both; the priest objected to the heathen name of Elphin, which brought with it no saint's protection, and the name of John was substituted...

Giovanna stood against the wall watching the strange little group of three figures in the red light of the candles.

She was shut out--she was not fit to kneel; if the priests were right,

she was lost and damned.

She remembered once seeing a peasant girl grovelling in the dust outside a church door in Italy--her face, one of awful agony--"absolution refused!" the passers-by had said, and when the priest left the church after the service and the poor sinner tried to clutch his robe, he had shaken her off.

"As she was then, so am I now," thought Giovanna. "I cannot even ask for pardon, for I am not penitent."

When the ceremony was ended, the priest gave the child two little books, a silver crucifix, and a rosary.

He wished to say some words to Giovanna, but she was eager to be gone; her husband, she said, would notice any longer absence and it was already dark. "And what," she added, "can you have to say to me?"

He could only tell her, "If you need me, you can find me through Mr. Forsythe."

She left them both with hasty farewells, but Allan overtook her at the foot of the dark stairs; he was greatly moved by her courage, her distress, her loneliness, her remarkable situation; secretly he thrilled to think that there was so strong and hidden a bond between them--that he was the godfather of her child--secretly he quivered to an unbidden thought--he was freed from Stacy Wigram and she was no wife--at least he was at liberty to play with the thought of her reconversion...

She pleased him by not thanking him, but she insisted that he should not escort her home; he got a chair for her and helped her in; as she was carried away down the dark street he had a glimpse of the

child's white face, the eyes blazing with excitement, gazing from the narrow window of the chair.

He realized then, and with surprise, that the boy affected him unpleasantly.

V

Glenillich lay in a pleasant sheltered valley protected by a low chain of hills; a little river ran through the valley, which was fertile and highly cultivated. In a secluded portion stood the house of the Moutrays, surrounded by large grounds and a park filled with pines, oaks, and ash, and containing a little lake.

At the distance of about a mile was the village of Glenillich--a collection of fifty ancient cottages, a few houses of a more decent order, a church, an inn, and a schoolhouse.

Against the background of the wild, wide, and beautiful country the village seemed but a few huts, so dwarfed and insignificant did it appear. The church, in the midst of the houses, was half-sunk into the burial-ground which sloped to the edge of the river; ivy covered the ancient bricks and the leaning spire, and almost completely closed the narrow, deep windows; near by, in a little grove of ash and yew, stood the square-built manse, nearly as old, as decayed, as reverent, as sombre, as the church itself.

On either side--each huddled up against the other and all huddled close about the church, the manse, and the graveyard--the village houses stood,--all ancient, small, poor--all thatched with thick straw roofs that darkened the small top windows--all seeming to own some ancient inmate who on fine days might be seen at the door on a three-legged stool, dozing in the sun.

The most pretentious house in the village, after the manse, was occupied by the schoolmaster; there were one or two others of good appearance, owned by small farmers, and the inn was a fine, if old, building slightly beyond the village and pleasantly situated on the banks of the river; and near a little beech wood were several modern cottages of neat brick with slate roofs which Francis Moutray had lately built.

Of all the laird's unpopular attempts to improve his land, this was the most unpopular. The peasants, to a man, were against the new buildings; the minister even dared to preach against them; the schoolmaster spoke against them to the children.

It was not in Mr. Moutray's nature to conciliate; his reply was to threaten to pull the whole of Glenillich down when the leases expired. Meanwhile he brought farmers from the Lowlands, and even from Cumberland, to occupy the new dwellings and exploit the new lands he was laying out. Just beyond the village the valley broadened into a large heath and several miles of pasture-land—comprising the estate of Fort Mary—in the middle of which stood the neglected park and ruined mansion of the former ill-fated owner; the latter stood on a noble eminence, and commanded a fair and spacious view of the sloping meadowlands, the spreading heath, the distant mountains.

Adjoining the mansion were the remains of a chapel and an old private burial-ground, in which lay the princely ancestors of the man who had ended his line on the scaffold, and some Covenanters killed in one of the obscure affrays of the last century and hastily laid to rest in the neglected burial-ground.

No definite story of horror, no tale of ghost or evil spirit, clung to the place, but it was infinitely melancholy, both by reason of the lonely situation, the brutal story of the last occupation, and the sad associations of the little burial ground where the dust of knight and

lady mingled with that of murdered men. No sun, no green of tree, no brightness of flower, no song of bird, could dispel the inevitable sadness of these ruins--a place once inhabited, now forsaken--a place once the scene of violent passions suddenly quenched in blood, now silent to everything but the owl's cry--a place where the dead had been laid with love and agony, with pomp and terror, and now so long neglected that every name was obliterated from the stones--a place where once God had been worshipped with song and prayer, where now the birds flew in and out of the roofless church and the bramble and wild rose rioted where the altar had been--a place where all had been and nothing now was--a place that had no secret memories, but only those of death, murder, degradation, unhappiness. Such a spot needed no evil spirit to haunt it; in itself it seemed accursed, and as accursed it had been shunned, under one excuse or another, by four generations of men, when Francis Moutray, in sheer defiance of his own gloom, his own unhappiness, bought the land.

He meant to purge the spot. Church and mansion should be levelled to the ground, a new and spotless temple should arise; the ruined park, the unkept heath, should be divided into farms and cottages, the pasture-land recultivated after the new methods he was introducing.

He met with neither sympathy nor encouragement in his schemes; like everything else he did, the purchase of Fort Mary was unpopular.

"The place was cursed," the peasants said. "Other people had left it alone, the laird had better not meddle. He might pull down the house and leave not one brick of it--but who would pass the spot without thinking of the red murder done there?"

The spring Francis finally entered into possession of Fort Mary, the feeling against him in his village, his farms--even among the

dependents on his own estate--amounted almost to hate.

For he was too proud and too sincere to excuse or soften what he did. He was putting all his energy, all his strength, into the improvement of the land, and he did not mean to allow a few poor peasants to hinder him; he had always, for all the humility taught by his religion, been impatient and regardless of the common and ignorant people.

Yet he was conscious of the atmosphere of dislike and opposition surrounding him, and while he hardened his pride it increased his restless melancholy.

A melancholy that work, religion, love, might deaden but could not cure; a melancholy that nothing could cure, for it came of his old struggle between soul and body, spirit and senses--the desire for human love, human pleasure, human gaiety, human extravagance and beauty, and the yearning towards self-denial, self-sacrifice, self-negation--the teaching which his bitter creed had burnt into his soul, the fear of God's eye, the fear of the Devil's snares, the fear of hell fire.

He had never forgiven himself that surrender to passion which had resulted in his marriage; he never could forgive himself while he remained so intensely, so unhappily, bound up in his wife. True it was that he had taken her away from her idolatry, her vile surroundings; true it was that she conformed to his every wish, but that did not deceive him--he knew that it did not deceive her, that it deceived nobody. The truth was never spoken, yet somehow all were aware of it--they had taken each other through love, and what she did she had done through love of him, not because of any revelation from on high.

That was the hideous thing which was eating the joy out of his life, this woman whom he could not cease to love, to need, the mother of

his son--his wife; at heart she was a Papist, at heart she was the daughter of Vittoria Odaleschi, adventuress of adventuresses, at heart she was a foreigner who obeyed him, but did not understand. When she knelt in church beside him he felt that they were mocking Heaven, when she permitted his pretence that she was ardent for good as he knew it, virtuous as he understood virtue, religious as he understood religion, he felt it a blasphemy which God some day must avenge.

For he knew that the only thing which kept her walking in the paths of Calvinistic rectitude was her love for him; from a thousand chance words, sighs, smiles, glances, from her large sympathy with the sinful, from her ignorant fearlessness of the powers of darkness, from her frankness on things that to him were awfully sacred, from her lax charity, from her idleness, her gaiety, he knew, very terribly he knew, that she did not comprehend his code, his creed, his traditions, or his pride.

She disbelieved in his God, she disliked his country, she was indifferent to his position, to his coat of arms, to the legends, the fine records of his house (and here his pride was doubly hurt, for it forced him to admit how much better born she was, how splendid her lineage); she was not impressed by his estate, she was useless as the mistress of his establishment, she was unpopular with his people--yet he loved her as he had loved her when he had turned back to Bologna mad for a sight of her face.

There was the tragedy for him--he loved her, he needed her with a restless, unhappy passion that was never at peace, never satisfied.

He was dependent on her; his loneliness wanted her company, his gloom her cheerfulness, his introspective melancholy her material gaiety, she was balm and wine and sunshine to him; the sight of her beauty warmed his days, he longed for her caresses as a thirsty man

longs for water; if he could have believed that she was a saved soul, if he could have looked upon his love as other than forbidden fruit, upon her as other than a temptation and a snare, he might have been as happy as he now was unhappy.

As it was he could neither do without her nor wholly surrender himself to her--sometimes he thought she was virtually dragging him to damnation, so bitterly was he aware of his dependence on her, so clearly did he see there was no tie between them but love. At first, in the joy of having carried her off from her false faith and her wanton city, he had sincerely, earnestly endeavoured to draw her soul up to a level with his, both in major and minor interests. She was radiantly sympathetic, she was the most exquisite of companions, but after six years and more he was compelled to admit that she cared for the things that were life and death to him as a mother cares for the toys of her child--for love of him she could pretend everything--but she was unchanged, unchanged, a daughter of that sin and darkness typified by Rome.

Never had they spoken of these things, her perfect obedience left him no chance for complaint; yet both knew of what was between them, they seemed to embrace across a chasm, kiss through flames.

There was the child, of that Francis hardly dared to think; it seemed to him that the boy was strange; he shuddered at his abnormal fondness for his mother, at his coldness for himself.

Once he had tried to take the boy away and send him to be schooled in Edinburgh, but she had opposed this with such frantic agony that he had given way; in his heart, however, he had set a limit to his complaisance--when Elphin was seven he should leave his mother.

Francis often took his melancholy, his forebodings, his torments, to

the ruined mansion and graveyard of Fort Mary; the utter isolation of the ill-reputed spot was but too well suited with his moods.

That spring that saw the place really his he went there more frequently; one day he asked Giovanna to accompany him; he would like, he said, to show her the plans for the new church on the place where it was to be built.

Giovanna was not interested in Fort Mary nor in the church; she was, on the contrary, extremely interested in a gorgeous embroidery she was making (needlework was her one occupation), but she assented at once with her unfailing sweet obedience. But Elphin who had been sitting at her feet while she sewed, and listening to some stories she was telling him (legends of the saints, all the stories she knew, poor lady), scowled at his father for taking away his companion.

Francis saw the scowl, and there was something so mature and antagonistic in the child's expression that he had not the courage to chide the boy, but tried to believe he had not seen that look on the face of his baby son.

VI

The day was clear and beautiful, the air soft, as Francis Moutray and his wife rode to Fort Mary that April morning; the heather had taken on a fresh flush of purple, new green tipped the pine boughs, and the violet and primrose were blowing beneath the hedgerows; the sky was pale blue pearly with small clouds; bright insects winged their way across the moors; to Francis it was perfect spring weather, to Giovanna it conveyed no idea of spring at all—it was more cold, more colourless, more barren than a Southern winter; she missed the sun more than she ever admitted to herself.

She was not a good horsewoman and very seldom went beyond the limits of the village, she had not before seen the estate of Fort Mary, and as they left the pleasant lands about Glenillich and turned across the cattle-track which led towards the ruined church and mansion she glanced once round the wide lonely prospect and then at her husband.

"Why did you buy it, Frank?" she asked.

"It is a fine piece of land, and I paid very little for it," he replied; he had long ceased to hope that she would comprehend his plans for his property, his pride in Glenillich.

"Dear, I do not like it," she said with her bright frankness.

He halted his horse and pointed with the stock of his whip round the rolling moor and neglected pasture land which opened out between the low hills.

"In two years all this will be cultivated and peopled with pleasant homes."

"It will take money?" she questioned.

"Yes, a great deal, but it will repay me. Perhaps you would like a new house built here, Jean? Glenillich is old-fashioned."

She turned her head quickly towards him with a lovely sparkle in her eyes.

"Oh, will you?"

He did not relish the eagerness of her tone.

"Is the old place so distasteful to you, dear?" he asked gently.

"No, no!" she exclaimed hastily; never would her loyalty be brought to confess how she disliked her dark, heavy home, nor how she welcomed any excitement in the even monotony of her days.

He said no more and they rode further and further into loneliness; the hawk and the eagle flew over the narrow glens into which they passed; the fox slipped away into the undergrowth; they were gaining higher land and leaving the valley and the moor behind them.

The sombre pines closed over them, excluding the sunshine; they rode slowly, one behind the other, on the narrow path between the trees, and so came on to the disused road which led to the gates of Fort Mary House, better known still by the ill-reputed name of Ardnamurchan, as it had been called when the Moidarts lived there.

To say "gates," however, was but a way of speaking--there were none; the brick walls had partially crumbled away and the entrance was merely indicated by the granite pillars placed there by the last man who had proposed to rebuild, and who had advanced no further than this in his project.

Within there was a fine avenue of beech, ancient trees that must have shaded John Moidart when he left his home the last time. The late owner had had the ground between them cleared of undergrowth, so that there was a tolerable approach to the house.

A moat had encircled it but was now filled with brambles and trees which had not been cut away for a generation, and beyond this wilderness of wild green rose the ruins of Ardnamurchan. There was nothing left but the walls and one broken down tower, and these walls themselves were fallen into gaps and crumbling heaps of masonry, overgrown with ivy and wild plants.

In the interior of the mansion, now open to the skies, grew a little

cluster of silver larch trees, and through the few remaining window sockets the trailing creepers flowed.

A temporary wooden bridge had lately been laid across the moat, and over this Francis and his wife rode, and on into the heart of the ruins.

The floor of what had been the entrance and dining halls was carpeted with grass, moss, and little violets, and where the hearthstone had been a young beech tree grew.

"It is pretty," said Giovanna.

"It is awful," said Francis. "Do you not feel that?"

"Nay," she replied; "it is lonely--but no more than all your country here, Frank."

He dismounted and fastened his horse to the young beech.

"The place is cursed," he said briefly.

Giovanna laughed; the sound jarred on him and roused his old futile longing to make her like himself--to make her realize that border-world he realized, to change her material light-heartedness, her pagan gaiety, into awestruck comprehension of the things of the spirit.

"There was a horrid crime done here," he continued, as he helped her from her horse. "You have read of it? John Moidart slew his wife in the stables here. No one has lived in the house since."

"Yes, I have heard of it," she said, shaking out her dress. It was plain she was not moved; bloodshed had been considered neither surprising nor horrible in Bologna.

"It was an awful thing," insisted Frank.

"Yes," said Giovanna; "but she had been unfaithful, had she not?"

"So at least he thought."

"Well then--what else could he do?"

Francis looked at her sharply; did he not yet know her completely--was there yet another aspect of her to be probed?

"You think he was justified?" he asked.

"Why, yes," she answered simply. "He had to do it, for his honour's sake."

Deep in his heart a response to this stirred, but he answered quickly:

"It was a hideous crime. He died for it in Edinburgh market-place."

Now she was plainly surprised.

"Ah, you have savage laws," she said, and unconsciously her manner was the manner of one of an old civilization speaking of barbarians.

"Do you uphold murder?" asked Francis.

"Murder? I don't know. But it is blood alone that can wipe out dishonour. I have never thought about it--but death is not too hard a punishment for unfaithfulness."

"Jean! You say reckless things!" he smiled. "If I was unfaithful to you, would you kill me?"

She answered with her shining frankness, which was like a lamp to carry truth into dark corners.

"I think I should," she said. "But why do you talk of such ugly things?"

"It is indeed idle, my dear, as you know, for you have me for ever. Also you do not mean what you say. You do not realize how awful a thing murder is, how insupportable was the curse of Cain, how horrible the punishment both of man and God."

She was silent. She did not dare to quote her own country, her own code, so there was nothing to say; but as she looked at his dark face, flushed with the eagerness of his words--his beloved face so inexpressibly dear, she said to herself: "I could never let him live to belong to another woman."

"Is there not a church?" she asked aloud. Holding up her skirt she moved across the ruins towards the larch trees; she was, as always, richly dressed beyond need. Her clothes were of her own design, partly of her own making; after her husband and child, they were her one interest in life. Francis had often tried to check this useless luxury that was the matter of such unfavourable comment among the neighbours, but the task had proved too difficult. He was not a petty tyrant, and could not override all her soft excuses and sweet evasions; besides, all the suppressed instincts of the beautiful and sensuous in himself were pleased by her lovely appearance.

He thought now, as he watched her, how incongruous and yet how exquisite her figure looked among the Gothic ruins.

Her riding-habit, fashioned like a man's in the coat, was of emerald green cloth heavily embroidered with silver, black feathers weighted her black hat, a collar of red fox opened on the fine lace on her bosom, and the soft knot of her blue satin cravat fastened by a silver

brooch; the tight, long coat, the trailing skirt, emphasized the upright slenderness of her figure. She walked rapidly, parting the brambles with her riding-stock.

"Jean, take care!" cried Francis, and hastened to her side.

"Why?" she smiled; but as she spoke she stepped through the broken wall and saw for herself the danger.

Outside the cincture of the house the ground sloped at this point straight into the moat, which here had fallen into a tarn or pond filled with black water and ringed with bracken and water plants; the banks were a foot or so deep, and it was crossed by a couple of rude planks and overshadowed by some fir trees.

"It is very deep," said Francis, looking down, "and never dries, even in the summer; I will have it drained. Come here, Jean, that is not the way to the church."

Again they crossed the ruins. There was no sound but the incessant rustling of the larches; though they were surrounded by the decaying work of man's hands they seemed infinitely far from anything human--as far as if they had been in a desert in which none had ever stepped before.

They circled the house and came upon a long building almost totally destroyed.

"This is the stable where Moidart killed his wife," said Francis. "When he discovered her guilt she was out riding; he went to meet her, but missed her--he found her in the stable here, where she was feeding her horse herself. He killed her with her own riding-crop before she could say a word--"

"Poor creature," said Giovanna, but she looked at the remains of the

stables without a shudder. "Supposing she was innocent, Frank?"

"In any case he is in hell," he said grimly, moving on.

"And she?"

"She too, if she was guilty. Is it not as deadly a sin to break the eighth commandment as the sixth?"

"So I thought," she replied. "But why do you speak of death and hell? They have nothing to do with us."

"Not now--but we are not immortal."

"I am not afraid," she said, thinking of her own case.

"She knows neither God nor Devil!" he thought, as he strode on through the briars and stinging nettles.

Close to the house, but on a slightly higher eminence, stood the church and the burial-ground heavily shaded with firs and yews; below, the ground fell away suddenly into a valley beyond which stretched a noble extent of moor bounded by low hills.

It was a magnificent prospect thus glimpsed between the thick twisted trunks of the ancient yews; the sight of rolling country, the lift of the distant hills, seemed to rob the spot of much of its melancholy. Yet even with this relief, melancholy it remained. The little church was leaning to one side and seemed about to sink into a grave--a dead thing among the dead. Some pious hand had made some rude attempts at preservation; the building was in a better condition than the house, the roof was still there and the doors still clung to the hinges; a great bell, fox-red with rust, showed through the ivy on the steeple.

The graveyard was overgrown with tall grass and such weeds as would flourish in the dank shade of the yews; there were no flowers--not even one daisy or pimpernel. The moss-grown graves were, like the church, sinking crookedly into the ground. Time, weary of these vain memorials of forgotten men, was levelling them with the dust they covered.

Until the time of the Covenanters, none save the Moidarts and their wives had been buried here. Crusading knights lay there with their dames; lords and ladies in coifs and ruffs showed their crude effigies among the nettles; here lay the father and mother of the last John Moidart; here he himself rested beside her he slew--so much favour was granted a noble family. His brother put a stone over them with the name and date, then went abroad to die, the last of his name.

Among the noble dust and proud tombs of this ancient family were the tortured bones and plain head-stones of the Covenanters who had died for their stern beliefs.

They lay huddled to one corner, the grave of each marked by a granite stone on which the name was rudely cut.

Giovanna, in her radiancy, her bright garments, moved through this gloom and darkness with her light, quick step.

"You will pull all this down, will you not, Frank?" she asked. "It is so old and sad."

He was at the church door.

"I will build a new church," he answered. "But I cannot disturb the dead."

"Yet take away some of these trees and let the sun in--see how dark and chilly it is."

He looked round and saw she was seated on a flat tombstone, the shade of a huge yew dimming her brightness, her green gown trailing over the rank grass, her riding-crop lying on the mossy grave. He could not repress an exclamation.

"That is Jane Moidart's grave," he said. To his quick sombre fancy this figure in the riding-habit with the riding-stock might have been the ghost of the woman lying beneath; in such a garb had Jane Moidart been slain—her riding-whip had slain her. He wished Giovanna would move.

But she did not.

"Had this lady any children?" she asked irrelevantly.

"No."

"Ah, *poor* creature," said Giovanna slowly.

He wished she would leave the grave of Jane Moidart; he wished his perverse fancy had not pictured her as the ghost of the murdered woman seated on her own tomb with the weapon of her own destruction beside her; he began to wonder if this long-dead creature had been fair and slender, and her age?

Dark and damp was the shade of the yew trees; the greenness of the grass, of the mossy tombs, of the low, sweeping boughs, seemed the colour of decay, yet Giovanna sat amid this melancholy obscurity with her radiancy undimmed; she glowed with a beauty, health, and strength that seemed to lighten the very gloom.

Francis set his back to the church door and regarded her curiously.

"What are you thinking of, Jean?"

"Of you--as always."

"In what way are you thinking of me?" he smiled.

"I was wondering why you bought this place."

"I told you."

"Yes--but how strange--for you--so young, Frank--to care so much about building a church--what is the real reason?"

"I fear," he answered sombrely, "that much of what I do will always remain strange to you."

It was a rent in the veil always between them; he wished he had not made it, and yet he longed to tear all concealment away and speak to her without disguise. She made no answer, but picked up the riding-whip and, with the butt of it, cleared the deep-cut name of Jane Moidart from the moss which filled the letters.

"Speak to me," said Francis. "When you are silent I feel as if you did not belong to me--speak to me!"

"What can I say? I fear to displease you." She raised her head, but in the shade of the heavy hat and the heavy yew tree her face was but an indistinct oval.

"You do not belong to me," he said. "Your soul is not mine."

"My soul?" she cried wonderingly.

"Perhaps you have no soul! Sometimes I feel as if you had not, Jean."

"Yes, I have a soul," said Giovanna. "It is in the hands of God. Why do you speak of it?"

He came nearer to her, goaded by her calm into disclosing something of what had so long seethed in his thoughts.

"You believe in God, Jean?"

"He who did not would be a fool, Frank."

"But you do not think of Him much?"

"Oh, my dear, my dear!" her voice, her sigh, her gesture towards him were like perfume and warmth. "I am alive--I love you--I try to make you content, why will you not be happy?"

He shuddered a little as if he listened to the lure of the siren, the wooing of the enchantress.

"Listen, Jean--there are other things beside love and happiness--do you not know of them?"

"There is pain and death--hate, and--loneliness," she said.

"All those are of the body. Jean, my wife--do you never think of the things of the spirit?"

She lifted her head so that he could see her face; she smiled very tenderly.

"Do you never think of God overhead, of the Devil beneath--do you never feel--in such a place as this--influences of another world about you--things beyond our ken, mysterious, fearful--do you never wonder what our ultimate destiny will be?"

She made a gentle little movement with her head as if to excuse herself.

"No," she said, still smiling.

Francis gazed at her steadily.

"Do you never feel the need of self-sacrifice, self-abnegation, penitence, remorse, humiliation, that your spirit may be purged and made ready for something better than this world?"

"No," repeated Giovanna.

He gave a deep sigh--how useless it was to speak to her--he felt baffled, defeated, terror-stricken before this woman who had no imagination, no spirituality. "What am I mated with?" he thought--then--"Will God ever forgive me my passion for this woman?"

She saw his trouble, his distress.

"I know I am stupid," she said humbly.

He could have laughed in despair over such an excuse.

"You do not understand--you do not comprehend," he cried. "You are like a child, you do not see beyond the limits of your own flesh and blood."

"No," she admitted. "This world is all I can cope with, Frank."

"But you believe in damnation?" he flashed.

"Yes," she stammered. "I suppose so--and yet--I do not think about it."

"If you think about none of it, what keeps you honourable?"

She was bewildered, she frowned and reflected. She had no code, she acted on instinct; love was her guiding star, she obeyed that as kindly as the sea ebbs and flows in accordance with the moon.

"Perhaps I am not honourable," she said. "I do not know--I try to make those I love happy--Frank! Why do you speak of these things? I always anger you--"

"It is terrible," he answered with a catch in his voice, "that we are so apart in this."

"We are together in love," she said, rising. "I think I have proved I love you. I have put myself in your hands very completely. You took me for love's sake--more than love I cannot give you. You are right, I do not understand--I am only a woman. When you are tired of me, put me away; while you love me, do not torment yourself with these fancies."

"Jean, Jean!" he cried miserably. "Do you not see that it is because I love you that I want your soul too?"

"I am all yours," she said. "First you, then Elphin--nothing else in the world."

He felt humbled, yet sickened with doubts.

"Love that comes between a human being and God is wrong," he murmured.

"That I do not understand. Why did God let us love, then?"

"Talk no more of it," he said. "We get into a labyrinth."

She looked at his dark, pale face so strangely moved, so strangely sad; it seemed as if she pitied him and yearned over him as a mother will over the fantastic troubles of her child.

"Come out into the sun, Frank."

She took his sleeve and then his hand, and drew him out of the churchyard. He felt a tremendous strength in her warm fingers, a serenity and a repose in her pagan simplicity that not all his intricate faith could give him--at that moment he also felt as if she was right and he was wrong.

When they were clear of the funereal yews and stood in the pale light on the verge of the hill, with the wide prospect before them, she turned to him and said gently:

"Are you building this church, Frank, as an expiation for loving me?"

VII

He had always believed her as clear-sighted as she was unimaginative, but he was not prepared for this question, which showed an exact reading of his whole attitude towards her; he felt unpleasantly humbled that she found him so transparent, and startled that she recognized the quicksands on which their love was built.

She marked his amazement and distress.

"Ah, Frank," she said kindly, "if you could forgive yourself for taking me we should be happier. If you could forget your God for a little while."

"As you say, do not speak of these things," he replied hastily, "for you are like a child in understanding."

They paused on the edge of the hill that sloped beneath the churchyard; the fair landscape spread beneath them, brimming with soft, bright light.

Giovanna was silent; as always in these discussions, she did not dare remind him that she had sacrificed something for him, and therefore might justly expect a generous return, for she was forbidden to mention her former faith, her former country, her former people.

"Jean," said Francis, "in some things we are apart--it is terrible that it should be so. But there was everything against us."

She glanced at his averted face and saw that he was deeply moved.

"If you did not love me you would think me vile," she said.

There again she spoke the bitter truth that he had hardly voiced himself.

"And you," he replied slowly, "are only held to me by--affection--and that is an ugly thing for me to know."

"Yes, only by love," smiled Giovanna, "and that is not enough for you? Surely I am of no understanding!"

He could not answer this nor explain to her the kind of woman to whom affection would be the lightest chain of all, one whom honour, loyalty, piety and chastity would keep to her duty; if Giovanna ceased to love him he believed she would leave him, and that, for Francis, was to consider her a light woman.

She spoke again as if she heard and answered these charges,

"Have I not been good since I have been with you? Have you ever had any fault to find with me, Frank?"

None, he knew, none--it would have been better for his peace if she had made some lament, some complaint, if she had shown some yearnings for her old home; her utter abnegation, her complete renunciation he could not believe in. Behind her resignation or her content, whichever it might be, there were the makings of such a woman as her mother was, he thought; in brief, he held her perilous, and this conviction was his daily torture.

"What we cannot understand," said Giovanna, "let us not talk of. Our love is not ordinary, but heroic--since it can bridge so much."

Her frankness half frightened, half pleased him, as always; he liked her strange choice of a word. Heroic! Considering what each had given for this love, it might be called heroic--she had paid with all her worldly possessions, and he with his soul's peace.

"Let us go home," he said, as if rousing from a reverie. "You are right. It is folly for us to talk on themes on which we cannot understand each other."

She pulled down one of the dark branches of the churchyard yew which drooped over the low wall behind her and gazed at the spray of funereal foliage.

"You speak as if I angered you," she said. "I am sorry, Frank."

"Oh, my dear," he cried wearily, "I wish I could let everything go, drift as you do, accept everything simply as you do--be content with love. But I cannot--there are so many things besides our present ease and pleasure. Now we are young--but when we are old--"

"Love will be old too," said Giovanna.

"Ay," he added sombrely. "All earthly passions will pass and vanish--and if man hath not something else to turn to, in what is he better than the brute? He shall rejoin the dust which was his idol, and if he shall have glimpsed higher things and ignored them for his earthly lusts, what may he expect but hell?"

Giovanna let go of her yew bough and gathered up her long skirts which trailed over the close grass and heather of the hill-slope.

"You must not think so sadly," she said. She was quite serene; he could no more frighten her with his spiritual distresses and terrors than a child could frighten a grown man with fairy tales; what he said was outside her comprehension, and therefore she attached no meaning to it.

"Let us go home," repeated Francis gloomily; he turned and walked back through the churchyard, his hands folded behind him, his head bent.

Into his grief and his indignation, both so long repressed and so futile, there crept a certain anger against Giovanna, a more definite disloyalty than he had yet felt against his love.

She was perilous, she was unsafe; she was swayed entirely by her passions, no law nor honour nor morality would restrain her--he even recalled as evidence against her the lack of reserve, the boldness she had shown in their stormy love-affair--the way she had followed him; it was only by chance--the chance given by his standards--that she was his wife--she had never asked for it or seemed to expect it--he believed she would have come with him on any terms. He remembered how she had laughed delicately at his reserve towards her, his attitude of chivalrous respect before their marriage in Paris; then he had viewed her with exceeding tenderness, with unquenched

passion, and her complete unquestioning surrender had seemed to him to reveal the strain of the heroine--now it seemed to him to reveal the strain of the light o' love.

Never had he understood that these ceremonies of his Church were indifferent to her--they neither awed nor held her; when she thought of them at all she feared that she was damned for participating in them. She was true to him because of her own nature, which Francis had never truly valued; her complete personal modesty had prevented him from ever allowing that she was of a descent infinitely higher than his own; from both sides she came from families who had touched royalty in their alliances, and she had all that courage, that indifference to disaster, that fineness and poise of spirit which have made men in all ages endure an aristocracy, however corrupt and shameful. All that made Francis hold her as unsafe was but this showing of noble blood in her; she came from people who had been too great to be bound by conventions, people who had been their own laws; she could have managed such a salon as her mother reigned over, she could have followed her lover in the rear of an army and lived with the camp stragglers. It was neither his God nor hers but her thrice-refined breed which made it possible for her, almost a princess and of a luxurious nation, to live as the wife of a Scots landowner, fill her days with interests both dull and petty, and remain serene, unrepining, and sweet.

This difference in their birth counted as much as the difference in their nationality and creed to make them unintelligible to each other, but they were unaware of it; or if it ever occurred to Giovanna, she was too loyal to let her thoughts dwell on it, and he had certainly never considered that statesmen, soldiers, knights, great ladies, patrons of learning, scholars, generations of brilliant, enlightened nobles, gay and great, were behind Giovanna, while behind him was a line of humble Scots gentry, all undistinguished, who had thrown their whole energy into the religious questions which disturbed their

country, and never known a wider interest.

Francis, wandering across the churchyard in his musing, hit his foot against a grave.

It roused him; he stopped, and observed that it was the tomb of Jane Moidart that barred his way, and he winced that his blind wandering had brought him, in a circle, back to the spot he had so hastily quitted--the ill-omened grave.

About the defaced stone lay the little tufts of deer grass and moss that Giovanna had uprooted with her whip from the deep-cut letters of the name.

As he stared at the tomb Giovanna joined him; it was now fast growing dark in the upper shadow of the yews, and the sun was low enough to cast long rays of heavy gold light through the trunks and tip the spears of unkempt grass with radiance.

"Come, unless you would have a moonlight ride back," said Giovanna, and she laid her hand caressingly on his arm as if to draw him out of his abstraction.

His mood had not affected hers; he marked her brilliant smile, the sparkle of her eyes, the flush in her clear cheeks, and he was jealous of these high spirits which were never overcast by any sullenness of his nor any gloom of her surroundings. They returned to where the horses were tethered within the ruined walls of the mansion; Francis had withdrawn again into his thoughts, but Giovanna observed a dozen objects of interest--a lizard, a butterfly among the ivy, a thistle with leaves stained as with milk, a bright insect clinging to a flower, the swift flight of a disturbed owl, and, finally, an old woman.

There was something strange in this sudden sight of a human being

in a spot so desolate, but the creature and her occupation were ordinary enough. She wore the decent grey of a superior peasant, heavy latchet shoes, and a scarlet shawl, and she was engaged in gathering roots and herbs in the ditch by the huge oak tree which overshadowed the entrance to the ruined mansion of Ardnamurchan. Giovanna observed the labour she was using for such a mean reward, and instinctively opened the satchel at her side; the giving of alms was a matter of course to her, coming as she did from a country where the very poorest offer charity.

"Look at the poor old woman, Frank," she said impulsively, and she stepped towards the object of her compassion. "Here is a piece of silver for you, my good mother, and a fine evening to you and a peaceful night--"

Francis turned vexedly to the horses; he considered that Giovanna pampered his peasantry and earned more contempt than gratitude by her reckless giving, and, even if this were not so, he had no wish that his unpopularity should be mitigated by his wife's graces.

The old woman, hearing voices, turned, and Giovanna, seeing for the first time her face, could not repress a cry.

It was a woman of about sixty, with a sober, intelligent countenance, but on her forehead was stamped a red cross, which reached from the root of her nose to the neat bands of her grey hair and from one temple to another.

Francis had looked up on his wife's exclamation and, on seeing the woman's face, he cried out angrily:

"Come away, Jean, have no trafficking with that creature!"

But Giovanna had already put a piece of money in the woman's

palm, and observed that the terrifying mark on her forehead was a wound, cut almost to the bone and still fresh.

"How did you come by that hurt?" she asked compassionately.

Francis stepped to her side and took her wrist.

"Get to your horse. Madam. I have already commanded you."

Giovanna flushed crimson and turned away; the woman tendered the money to Francis.

"I am no wanting alms given with an ill-will, laird," she said. "Let your honour's lady take back the siller."

Though this was spoken respectfully in that Lowland tongue which was almost unintelligible to Giovanna, Francis resented it as an insolence, and harshly told the woman she was trespassing and bade her leave his lands.

"And have you bought Ardnamurchan, laird?" she replied. "It is an ill purchase, and an ill beginning you make to turn away the wretched from plucking a few berries and roots--"

"I know you and your reputation," said Francis, turning on his heel,--
"and I bid you begone."

The woman threw down the silver at his feet and turned away, leaving her gatherings in the grass.

Giovanna had already mounted; when Francis joined her she turned to him with a flash of anger.

"Speak to me civilly before others," she said.

"Obey me when first I speak," answered Francis. Her angry words, coming after the secret discontent with her that he was feeling since their conversation in the churchyard, caused him to flame into wrath. "I know these creatures and you do not; you wrong me and yourself by this compliance--"

"Oh, you are hard," cried Giovanna. "I was ashamed for you when you spoke to the poor wretch so."

For the first time they were exchanging angry speech; hitherto his reproofs had been disguised with caresses, or, when they were not, she had always known how to turn his ill-humour by gaiety and sweetness, but now they showed openly as antagonists.

They realized this, and their eyes dropped; Francis, to cover his confusion, spoke:

"That woman has an ill reputation, she lives here alone from her fellows, who will have no kind of commerce with her. They consider her a witch, and if the act against sorcery had not been lately repealed I think she would have been burnt. It was lately supposed that she had laid a spell on a certain dairy wife, and the relatives marked her, as you see, with the cross to render her powerless."

They rode away from the mansion and down the ancient avenue; then Giovanna answered in a cold and reserved way:

"Is this woman's misfortune a reason for denying her charity?"

"Yea," said Francis, "she is dishonest, corrupt, and well-reputed able to work evil."

"That," replied Giovanna, "is silly ignorance."

He remembered instantly that witches and Papists were supposed

to be one, as much as the Devil and the Pope were one.

"I know not," he answered sharply; "some think that these people be no more than melancholians, but we have the authority of Holy Writ for believing in warlocks, and we might as well discredit Satan himself as his messengers and heralds."

Giovanna could not answer this. She was quite ignorant of the Bible, but she had a strong, natural common sense, and she had never been taught any superstition but the one of the supremacy of the Romanist Church; the superstitions of Scotland, the reading of future deaths in the blade-bone of a sheep, the dipping of clothing in south-running water to procure the gift of seership for the owner--all such charms and spells, the tales of witches, warlocks, brownies, ghosts, fiends, and imps had first amused, then disgusted, then become indifferent, to her; and now, angered as she was by her husband's ignoring of his discourtesy, his half championship of things that were to her as follies, further inflamed her against him; she paled and gazed down on her saddle.

Francis was angry too, angry enough to deliberately provoke the proud silence of his wife.

"I think you believe in nothing," he said. "No mystery nor wonder moves you--and to be so is to be as the brutes of the field."

"Perhaps I am even so," returned Giovanna in a kind of defiance. "The brutes are good and loyal, and fierce and patient--I have seen much nobility in a dog--"

"You talk blasphemy," he cried.

"You push me to it," she replied. "You always want more of me than I can give; I am mere flesh and blood, Frank, with all my interests on

the earth and all my instincts of the body, as I think God meant them to be, or why did He make life itself spring from love, which you take to be from the Devil?"

Francis had seldom seen her so moved.

"You disturb yourself for nothing," he said coldly.

"You anger me," she answered, "you weary me. If I no longer please you, let me go."

At these words Francis shuddered. To regain his composure he turned his eyes from her and fixed them on the golden and purple expanse of moor over which they were slowly riding.

"God in heaven!" he cried; "when will you learn you are not my chattel but my wife?"

"I am yours as long as you love me, Frank."

"You are mine till death by God's sacrament," he said hotly.

Giovanna, on the edge of a passionate answer, regained her self-control; her natural sweetness overcame her anger.

"I entreat you do not let us contend, Frank--if I have offended you, forgive me."

He recognized her generosity, but his nature was too reserved to permit him to emulate it; he had often envied her easiness with words.

"Say that you forgive me, Frank," she insisted.

He did not admit himself in the wrong nor ask her pardon for his

rudeness, but he turned, raised her gloved hand from her saddle, and kissed it; she, knowing him, was satisfied.

But this brief dissension seemed to leave traces behind. For several days Francis was moody and melancholy beyond the ordinary; then he announced his intention of a solitary journey to Edinburgh. He gave two pretexts: he wished, he said, to learn why Stacy Wigram had broken off her betrothal, and he wished to consult his lawyers and his architects as to the rebuilding of the mansion and church of Ardnamurchan.

It was the first time that he had ever left Giovanna alone in Glenillich; her passionate faithfulness was hurt, but she made no comment, and they parted tenderly.

VIII

Francis spent several days in the capital in a kind of gloom, neither calling on those for whose sake the visit had been made nor in any way courting company.

To avoid the disturbance of opening his house, he had taken lodgings near the Lawnmarket for himself and his domestic, and commonly took his meals at a tavern close by, in Raymond's Wynd, called "The Arms of Orange."

Francis had conceived a disgust to waiting on the lawyers, or summoning the architects; he felt disinterested in the formalities of one and the technicalities of the other, he even began to feel a dislike to his new property and to unpleasantly recall the dark churchyard and the dismantled house where he had come to sharp words with Giovanna. To distract himself he resorted to a noted antiquarian shop where he endeavoured to find a certain gold coin of

the Emperor Aureilan which he wished to add to his collection, but not discovering it, this trifle further discontented him, and he yet again postponed his visits to his cousin and to Allan Forsythe; he was strangely indifferent as to what these two, with whom he had pretended to be concerned, did with their fortunes.

He was always thinking of Giovanna, thinking of her with a different background to the one he had given her, thinking of being in company with her in some of the Italian cities he had seen, of loving her as he had never yet allowed himself to love her, amid the southern flowers, the southern colours, in that sunlight and under those skies which had seemed so beautiful that they must be of the Devil's making.

Francis knew that these yearnings were of evil prompting and that never would he give way to them; he would live and die in Glenillich, and they would grow old, and never would he have loved her amid the beauty to which she belonged, never loved her as she might be loved--and that thought was torture.

At times it was such torture that he almost hated her as the cause of it; it seemed that she wanted his soul, as if, like the witch-wife the peasant brought home as his bride, she would allow him no peace until he had cast her back into her native elements of mystery and damnation.

Then his mood would change, and he would consider her in a passion of tenderness for her lovingness, her sweetness, her beauty, her eager, generous, ardent spirit, and then he would wish that, were she lost or soulless, so might he be, as long as he might be there to comfort her through the torments of that future existence in which he believed so intensely.

One evening after he had been near a week in Edinburgh and not yet

attended to any of his business, he met Allan Forsythe as he was turning into Raymond's Wynd.

Francis, forced to put a good grace on the meeting, invited Allan to dine with him at "The Arms of Orange." Mr. Forsythe accepted, and the two turned into the tavern, glad to be out of the sleet and mist of the raw evening.

"I see you delay your going abroad this year," said Francis, as they seated themselves at his customary table. "Yet Stacy tells me that your marriage is broken off," he added bluntly.

Allan snuffed the candles that stood between them and did not immediately answer; his fair, smiling, but rather hard and heartless face was beginning to lose the delicate freshness of his youth, it had, even in the yellow candlelight, a pallid and bleached look, and the fine lines round mouth and eyes were becoming more deeply marked. Francis, noting his face, his neat dress, his careful movements, suddenly realized how much he disliked him, and leant back against the wooden screen eyeing him discontentedly.

"Stacy hath broken it, therefore it is past mending," said Allan at length. "I had her final answer some days ago."

"It is a pity, Mr. Forsythe," said Francis with energy, leaning across the table. "This affair hath dragged seven years and more, my cousin is not a young girl nor can my aunt last long--what is Stacy's future?"

"I have her definite refusal to consider our contract existent," replied Allan. "It is therefore useless for me to do anything further in the matter."

It was quite impossible to explain to Francis the question of religion that kept him and Stacy apart, therefore he saw no use in wasting

words over it, and turned composedly to select his dinner from the bill of the day which the drawer brought.

But when the dishes were chosen and the man had gone, Francis spoke again:

"What was my cousin's reason, Mr. Forsythe, for this sudden breach?"

Allan slightly flushed.

"It would be more satisfactory to you, sir," he answered with perfect civility, "if you were to ask her yourself."

"Aye, I will ask her," replied Francis. "I hold you to blame, you should have married her out of hand, years ago. There was never any real obstacle."

It was the truth, but Allan parried it deftly:

"It was Miss Wigram, not I, made the delays, Mr. Moutray."

"That is a woman's part--to make delays--as it is a man's to overcome them," returned Francis drily. "And methinks you made some delays too, notably these journeys to Italy."

"They were to pass the time," said Allan lightly. "I ever had a taste for travel. This year I am not going."

"Why?" asked Francis; "has some other lady replaced my cousin?"

Allan smiled; he was amusing himself by wondering what this man would do if he was to quietly answer with the truth: "I am staying in Scotland because I want to see more of your wife, because I am interested in her and in a secret we share."

"No, there is no one," he said, "but I fancy to stay at home."

The dinner was laid and the tavern began to fill; instinctively both gentlemen turned the conversation to less personal topics.

Mr. Forsythe spoke of Ardnamurchan, and discovered a lively interest to view the place; he could divine no way to see Giovanna save through an invitation to Glenillich.

This Francis never thought of proffering; he discussed, willingly enough, his plans for his new property, but he issued no invitation and he never mentioned his wife--the only subject on which Allan would have been interested to hear him speak.

The city dweller listened with courteous indifference to these agrarian details, plans of husbandry, and farming; he could himself have opened a hundred channels of interest, for he was well acquainted with the great events of Europe, but he was equally well aware that Francis Moutray cared for little outside his own particular domain. When the dinner was over, Francis ordered some spiced wine, and chanced, as it was brought, to mention the gold Aurelian coin which he had been unable to find.

"Why," thought Allan, "I have such an one," and he began instantly, with the instinct of one trained in secret intrigue, to plan how he might use this coin to gain admission to Glenillich and Giovanna. "I might find one," he began.

Francis was about to reply with some eagerness, when, to Allan's vexation, he was interrupted by a gentleman who came round from behind the next screen and cried out in a great jolly voice, "Why, Frank!"

This gentleman, who was very handsomely dressed and had his

napkin still tucked over his flowered muslin cravat, was plainly an Englishman.

"Frank Moutray!" he repeated.

Francis turned swiftly and recognized Harry Middleton.

No meeting could have been more unpleasant, more humiliating, or more unexpected, to Francis; he paled and stammered in his surprise and vexation, and could hardly proffer his hand. But Mr. Middleton, who knew him of old, was in no way put out.

"I have a nodding acquaintance with this gentleman," he said, bowing to Allan, "and as my friend has just left, I will join you over a bottle," and he took the third seat at the end of the table--a proceeding as disagreeable to Allan as it was to Francis.

But Mr. Middleton was in no way disturbed.

"My dear," he said to Francis, "you served me an ill turn--you left me with never a farewell, and I got not as much as a word of greeting on the occasion of your marriage--"

Francis was humiliated to the heart at the sudden appearance of this man who had been witness of his struggles and surrender in Bologna, the one man who was possessed of the details of his wild courtship--a man he had hoped never to see again.

Striving to command himself, he asked Mr. Middleton how he came to be in Edinburgh?

"Why, with whom but the Maxwells," replied that gentleman, "where you and I met near seven years ago and planned our grand tour."

Allan's dislike and indifference began to vanish; he perceived that

Mr. Middleton had been with Francis during that fateful visit to Italy, on the subject of which Mr. Moutray was always dumb.

"Ah," he remarked, with easy cordiality, "you were Mr. Moutray's companion when he was in Bologna."

"And a fair trick he served me," smiled Mr. Middleton, "stealing his lady and leaving me to bear the brunt of the--" 'scandal,' he was going to have said, but he changed it clumsily--"trouble, and I was nearly knived, sir, for the success of this grave Romeo."

He leant back and laughed; the years had mellowed him, although he was still capable of a malicious pleasantry, but his florid face and lusty voice mostly expressed good humour.

Francis regarded him with pure aversion; it seemed incredible that he had once liked this man, sought his friendship, and been glad to take him as a travelling companion. Now he merely represented an episode of the past that Francis wished to blot out.

Allan perfectly gauged Mr. Moutray's feelings, but it did not suit him to spare them.

"Have you been lately in Italy?" he asked.

"I have but a month returned," said Mr. Middleton. "I was in Germany and afterwards in Rome."

"I, too, last year," said Allan. "Are you never going abroad again, Mr. Moutray?"

"I have all my interests at home," replied Francis briefly.

"Ah, I have been hearing news of you from the Maxwells," cried Mr. Middleton. "You have been buying up haunted land, eh, Frank?--and

are become a very perfect farmer. But where is your lady, the Countess--I did not know you were in Edinburgh, though I have met several of your acquaintances. May I not see the Countess, Frank?"

That he should give Giovanna her title seemed to Francis' perversity like an insult.

"My lady is Mrs Moutray of Glenillich, sir," he replied, "and knows no other title. She is at present at home. I am here merely upon affairs."

"Still the same Frank," laughed the Englishman. "You are a strange compound, man. Well, you gave me the gobye, but I bear no malice, and we may as well be civil when we meet--after all, I always liked you."

"Thank you for the compliment," returned Francis, "which I return. If I made no effort to pursue our friendship, it was because we had little in common."

He spoke calmly, but when he raised his wine-glass it was noticeable that his hand shook.

"It was because you were mighty uncivil," said Mr. Middleton good-naturedly, "but I forgave your abrupt departure because of the circumstances--how does the lady in Scotland? I met her sister in Rome--"

This allusion was too much for Francis' patience.

"Sir," he interrupted, "I wish for no news from Italy--do you understand?"

Harry Middleton glanced at him with narrowed eyes.

"As you wish," he replied. "I perceive you are still a bigot. Give me

leave to tell you that Emilia Colonna is a lady queens do not disdain to receive, and methought your wife might have been glad to have a message from her--"

"I will have no news from Italy," repeated Francis. "You say you find me unchanged, therefore you will know what manner of man I am--"

"But your wife--?"

"Please omit her name in a tavern," said Francis, and he abruptly called for his bill.

Mr. Middleton glanced at Allan and raised his brows.

"I am sorry to have disturbed you, Frank," he said.

Allan put his fine finger-tips together and smilingly remarked:

"What is the talk of the Pretender's chances in Rome, Mr. Middleton?"

"Why, sir, they say that he has none since Henry York went into the priesthood, and that he knows it and is praying himself to death."

"A lost cause," remarked Francis, and with the more pleasure since he suspected Allan of favouring it. But Allan was serene, he had purposely started the subject to save the conversation from becoming a quarrel.

"And the young Chevalier--as they call him--still wandering about Europe? No news of him at the Palazzo Muti?" he asked.

"Since his brother took Orders he is too incensed to return home. They say he has a Scots lady for company and drinks over-much."

Allan smiled; this careless Englishman confirmed what he had suspected--that all those outside the Stuart intrigues regarded them as hopeless; Allan himself was growing lukewarm in this cause; he was becoming more interested in Giovanna than in Charles Stuart.

Francis paid his reckoning and rose.

"I will see my cousin to-morrow," he said, addressing himself to Allan, "and afterwards beg your company again."

Allan bowed.

"And I am dismissed?" asked Mr. Middleton heartily.

Francis gave him the address of his lodging.

"Come and see me when you will, if you can be plagued with me," he said civilly, "but I see you find me, now as then, sour company."

The three gentlemen passed out of the warmth and lights of the tavern into the damp chill of the autumn night.

Francis showed no desire to linger; he took his leave and turned towards his lodgings. Allan did not offer to accompany him, for he had a desire to speak to Harry Middleton; that gentleman also seemed to delay his departure; the two watched the graceful figure of Francis Moutray until it was nearly lost in the obscurity of the street.

"You are some connexion, sir, of Frank?" asked Harry Middleton.

"I have for seven years been contracted to his cousin, and know him well," smiled Allan, not quite ingenuously, for he did not wish to check any of the other's confidences.

"A queer fellow he is, sir," was the reply. "Of a very melancholic

temperament, and his marriage was the most amazing thing I ever heard of--and if you are intimate with him you might help me, Mr. Forsythe."

They had moved from the tavern door and stood under the swinging sign of "The Arms of Orange."

"Willingly," replied Allan. "I know well enough that Frank Moutray is difficult in temper."

"You saw him to-night? He would not have me mention the Princess Colonna, and I have a message from her to her sister."

"Did you see the Contessa Odaleschi?" asked Allan; it was a question he had longed to ask before, but neither he nor even Harry Middleton had cared to mention his-wife's mother in Francis' hearing.

"It was that I wished to speak of," replied the Englishman, "but broaching the edge of the subject I received such an ugly reception that I'll be hanged if I try Frank again on the matter. But you, if you will, may hear the business and take it to Frank, who, perhaps, will receive it more kindly from you."

"I will, very willingly," said Allan.

"Then I must pray you to come to my lodgings," said Mr. Middleton. "It has been a mad business this, and I shall be glad to finally wash my hands of it. How is the lady, eh--happy?"

"I believe so, she has, you know, a son."

"So I heard. Poor Contessa Giovanna! She was never considered so great a beauty as her sister, but she was a lovely wench."

"She is," said Allan, "very lovely still."

IX

Harry Middleton, when they were at ease in his lodgings, told Allan all that he knew of the flight of Giovanna, of the nine days' scandal and wonder in Bologna--that city of scandal and wonder--and the Contessa's stern refusal to allow of any pursuit.

"But I think it broke her, both her affection and her pride," he added. "She lost her influence, the creditors began to harass her; two years ago she gave up her famous *salon* and went to Rome."

"So I heard."

"She talked of entering a convent, and she has written a deal of religious poetry; but she would be nothing less than abbess and her past has been too openly notorious--she lives very well in Rome, in the shadow of her daughter's position. But I think that she is most unhappy."

"She gave you a commission for her daughter?"

Mr. Middleton leant back in his chair and stretched his limbs to the fire.

"I met her in the Palazzo Orsini; she knew me and spoke to me of the Contessa Giovanna. She said she had never heard from her, nor could she have written, even if she had had a mind, for she knew not where to address her letter. I told her I was not in touch with Frank Moutray and did not greatly desire to be, for he had behaved to me with bare courtesy, but that I was going soon to Scotland where I might certainly chance to meet him, and should, of a surety, see his friends. She then told me that she had no desire to enter into

communication with her daughter, but she seemed wistful. 'I could have forgiven anything,' she said, 'save his being a heretic and a foreigner.' I put myself at her service if she wished to send some message to the young Contessa, though in truth it was a mission I had no relish for, and she said, well, she had a few jewels that she was too old to need (though on my faith, sir, she is yet a most gracious fair woman); Emilia had the greater part, but she would trust me with a few bagatelles for Giovanna if I would see them delivered to her. What could I do but agree? And she was very gentle and pretty in her thanks and gratitude.

"Before I left that *fiesta*, the Principessa Emilia sent for me.

"'I perceive,' she observed, 'that my mother has been asking after Giovanna, and now I want to know the news also.' I protested there were none, and that I had seen neither her sister nor Frank since they fled from Bologna, but that I knew they were in Scotland. Thereupon she gave me a letter she had prepared, and entreated me to deliver it to her sister. This I did not promise, but said I would attempt it, if she knew no other messenger, which she agreed to. The dance being then over, she summoned her husband, the Orsini prince, and presented him to me.

"'We are both of a mind in what I have writ there,' she says, taking his hand, 'and that is, if Giovanna chooses to come to Rome, our house is her house and we will protect her'; and he said, yes, it was so. The Principessa is a great beauty, and I perceived that he was very enamoured of her."

"It was generous on their part," said Allan, judging the action from his own secret standards of a Romanist.

"They *are* generous and large dealing, these great Italian nobles, and very tenacious of the ties of kinship. If the Contessa Giovanna

returned, the Orsini would, I doubt not, tide her triumphantly over all and make a good match for her--for she is, you know, in their eyes, not married."

"That would be a shrewd blow for Frank Moutray," mused Allan. Crazy thoughts darted into his brain: if she returned, if he could bring her back to the true faith--if he established himself in Rome--in some wild distant future the Orsini might bestow her on him; it was so unlikely as to be an absurdity, but it was an absurdity that strangely pleased.

"Of course she will never leave him," he added aloud; his thin face flushed slightly and he gazed into the fire.

"That I know nothing of," returned Mr. Middleton; "but to come to the point of my story. I heard no more from these ladies until the day before my departure from Rome, and then there came a messenger from the Contessa with a letter reminding me of the favour I had promised her, accompanied by a casket containing the ornaments. She had spoken of them so carelessly that I imagined them to be of but little value and but trifling in number, and it was to my amazement that I found she had sent considerable valuables. I disliked the idea of being burdened with such a responsibility, and waited on the Contessa early next day, but she had gone with the Orsini to their villa near Frascati, and as I was due to leave Rome I had to bring the casket with me.

"When I reached Edinburgh I inquired of Frank from the Maxwells; they gave me some particulars of him and said he was at Glenillich. I was in a dilemma how to discharge my trust; I did not believe either a visit or a letter from me would be well received--then to-night I heard Frank's voice in the tavern--and there you have the situation, sir."

"Frank Moutray will receive this very ill," said Allan.

"I know. I did not even dare broach the Contessa's name to-night, and you saw how he closed my mouth about the Principessa Emilia? To be plain, Frank wearies me, and I shall be well content to be clear of the whole business."

"The messages were to her, not to him," remarked Mr. Forsythe.

"I know; but how, in the name of Heaven, am I to get at her? I've no wish to go uninvited to the wilds of Ayrshire and have Frank's pistol emptied into me for my pains. If the lady had been in Edinburgh--"

"She is not likely to be," said Allan, "but I believe I shall see her before long," he added, purposely exaggerating his chances.

"Then, sir, I wish you would take this commission off my hands, I should be vastly obliged; deliver the gewgaws to the lady, and the business is over. You are a relative, you know both, and even if Frank be angry you will know how to manage him; as for me, I confess I have neither time nor patience to follow his moods."

"If you will leave the jewels with me," answered Mr. Forsythe slowly,--
"I will give you a discharge for them and endeavour to deliver them."

Mr. Middleton expressed honest relief and gratitude, and rose to open the deep cupboard behind him.

Allan sat still, gazing into the fire. He was strangely stirred by what he had heard to-night of the passionate wooing and flight of Giovanna; he was moved and fascinated by the strength and power of this emotion; he was utterly incapable of any such action himself, utterly incapable of any such feeling, and therefore the story attracted him and filled him with a kind of envy.

He was more interested in Giovanna than he had yet been in man or

woman, but there was nothing of passion in this regard for her--it was curious, contained, secretive, and, above all, cautious. Mr. Middleton's remark about not wishing to have Francis Moutray's pistol emptied into him impressed Allan; he intended to be very circumspect in his dealings with the lady.

He glanced up, to see that his host had placed a long casket covered in stamped leather on the table and was unlocking it. Allan rose.

"I shall be glad to get them off my hands," said Harry Middleton. "I was always fearing they would be stolen."

He pulled out the trays and emptied the contents on to the black surface of the table. Allan knew something of gems; he was a dilettante in many arts.

"Why, these are very beautiful and valuable," he exclaimed in a startled tone.

"I thought so." Mr. Middleton pushed the gems together, and pulled out of the box a piece of paper. "There is a list I made of 'em--you will find it correct."

Allan was examining the jewels which flashed gorgeously in the candlelight; they were indeed extremely costly and set with the fine Italian workmanship; some were pieces of the greatest loveliness and rarity, dating from the first century.

"There is a fortune here," said Allan.

Mr. Middleton shrugged.

"She was one of the wealthiest women in Italy in her time," he remarked. "And she has had many worshippers--"

He laughed, and his eyes flickered over the jewels.

"The wages of sin, Frank would call them!"

Allan returned the gems to the casket.

"I will try and deliver them," he said, "and, if I cannot succeed, return them to you."

"Here is the letter," replied Mr. Middleton, and taking a sealed packet from his notebook he laid it inside the case which he then locked, and handed the key to Allan.

"If you have no luck," he remarked, "I must endeavour to find another messenger; I do not wish you to embroil yourself with Frank on this account."

"I will do my best," answered Allan quietly. He went to the desk and copied the list of jewels in his neat hand, added beneath that Mr. Harry Middleton had delivered them to him, and put the date and his name.

The other folded away this paper with an air of relief, gave Allan many warnings as to the danger of the custody of the jewels, and finally parted from him with much cordiality.

Allan went home to his elegant apartments, entered his bedroom, locked the door, opened the casket, and, after carefully putting away Emilia's letter, took out the treasures. To examine them and handle them gave him great pleasure; they reminded him of Giovanna.

The most beautiful piece was a parure, or set of ear-rings, necklet, and bracelets; the design was that of a cluster of grapes, each grape an emerald, shaded with leaves of fine enamel in deep tints of green,

the stalks were formed of gold, and each bunch was nearly two inches long and composed of about twenty or thirty stones. There was also a gold necklace of Etruscan design hung with fine tassels of the precious metal and set with lapis-lazuli; a pendant shaped like a dragon, with a single pearl for the body and rough silver starred with topaz for the exquisitely modelled head and tail; a pomade box of root of sardonyx, bearing a coronet in rubies; a pair of ear-rings of rosy pearls set as the centre of a flower of pale milky green jade--an Eastern ornament this; a bracelet of sapphires buckled together with cinnamon diamonds, the whole set in chased gold; a hat buckle of four table diamonds; a string of aquamarines and heriots separated by beads of carved silver; a gold hair-comb surmounted by a mermaid cut out of a solid piece of coral; an antique seal ring; a head of Diana cut on a purple topaz; a watch of gold filigree with a black opal in the back; a carved and painted ivory fan, the outer sticks adorned with chrysolite and rubies in the shape of flowers; several pins for the hair, of cameo, amber, lapis-lazuli, topaz, and silver; a number of rings, curious and valuable; a necklace of cat stones and another of yellow diamonds; many chains and pendants of the beautiful workmanship of the fifteenth century; and a pomander of gold fretwork in the shape of a pomegranate.

The casket gave forth an exotic, faint, and foreign perfume; like the gems, it recalled Giovanna to the man who stood turning over these costly trinkets. He wondered how the Contessa had come by them--some were, perhaps, hers by inheritance, some had probably been love-tokens, others, perhaps, bribes or rewards, others her own purchases or mere gifts.

It was, of course, folly to suppose that Francis would allow his wife to accept them; it was equally foolish to suppose that she would not wish to accept them. Allan meant to deliver them secretly; the idea of sharing the secrets and the confidence of Giovanna pleased him. He walked up and down his handsome bedchamber, picturing his next

interview with her; then he went thoughtfully to the cabinet where he kept his cameos and other treasures, and, opening a small drawer full of coins, took out the gold Aurelian which Francis had been searching for to add to his collection.

X

Giovanna, though left alone for the first time since her marriage, was neither lonely nor unhappy; she had a kind of gaiety, of simplicity, that was like a charm against gloom or melancholy; she could take an intense joy and interest in things which others would not even notice. Thus, though she took no part in the management of her own house, though she saw no one save her own dependents, her days were full.

To begin with, there was the companionship of Elphin; both mother and son unconsciously allowed themselves greater freedom and felt more at their ease than when they were always at the disposition of Francis, on the watch for his commands, adapting themselves to his moods.

Then there was her needlework—all the laces and silks she took such pleasure in stitching, the fine embroidery of her own design she was making for Elphin's falling bands.

They would too be happy for hours while she played the spinet and he listened; she had no written music, but she had the natural gift for melody of her people, and could remember and improvise enough to hold the child enthralled. Another occupation and delight was a tame fox, captured when a cub and taken and cherished by Giovanna; it was now a beautiful animal, intelligent, unscrupulous, loving, full of elegant and endearing ways and devoted to its mistress.

Giovanna named it Rinaldo.

Francis had considered it an outlandish pet, and, in deference to his wishes, it had been kept unobtrusively in the background, but now it followed her and Elphin like a dog and came to meals with them--meals that were no longer served with state and ceremony in the great dining room, but in Giovanna's own chamber, on a little table by the window that overlooked the lake.

This was the only room in the house that Giovanna had ventured to alter; she could not do much here, but she had made it more like Italy than pleased Francis.

She had bought hangings of a dark rose-coloured velvet for the sombre walls, she had pleaded to have the dull ceiling repainted--blue with roses; on her last visit to Edinburgh she had coaxed a pink carpet (the only one in the house it was) from Francis, and she had rearranged and cleaned some old pieces of Chinese furniture she had found there. The curtains, the cushions, the settees, were all of her own working, and all in colours of red, rose, tawny, gold, and brown.

The spinet had been tuned and moved here; there were always flowers on it--even now, in winter when there were none, there was a bunch of heather.

The room was charming and totally unlike any other apartment of the house save her bedchamber, and even that was not so gay, for it contained tapestries and furniture which Francis considered it sacrilege to move; and at the first hint of his opposition she had desisted from alterations.

In the antechamber, or boudoir, she spent the greater part of her days, always with Elphin. The child adored her with a dumb passion that was extraordinary and almost terrifying in one little more than a baby; he was reserved, grave, almost sad, but in the absence of his

father he laughed more than he had ever done; yet Francis was tender and indulgent towards him. This change in him troubled Giovanna a little, yet she could not deny to herself that they were very happy alone together.

They would go for walks in the grounds, feed the swans on the lake, go to the farm and watch the poultry, to the stables and caress the horses, into the cottages on the estate and gossip with the housewives--all which diversions were tacitly understood to be forbidden when Francis was at home.

They found wonder and interest in everything--in the tiny mosses that grew beneath the pines, in the wax-like bells of the heather, in the owls and bats that came out at night, in the big star which always appeared first, in the manifold changes of the moon, now clear as ice in a steel-blue sky, now misted with blood like a blood-stained veil, now dazzling in faint gold light, now like a drifting wafer, now like a buckle of precious metal.

In the evenings or on the wet or chilly days, Giovanna taught Elphin Italian from the Ariosto which was the sole relic of her youth, or told him some rich and highly coloured tale woven from the gorgeous incidents of the "Orlando Furioso," and the stories of saints and martyrs, knights and emperors, which she recalled from her own childhood.

Sometimes she would read to him from the secret books given him by Father Hilton, teach him to tell the rosary, and to pray to St. John who was now his patron, and by whose name she sometimes, when they were quite alone, called him.

She spoke to him of his baptism as of a mystery; she parried the direct questions of his innocence by saying that God would reveal all in time; He is very merciful, she always added. She laboured to

explain to his understanding that she followed Francis' God because women must obey their husband, but to save his soul she had introduced him into the Church she had left, but secretly, until he was older; then (and she sincerely meant it), he could tell his father, and between them they could decide.

She bade him say his prayers and always ask for grace for heretics, and to remember, in after years, to always confess his sins and obey the priests. This was the extent of her theology, she knew nothing of the doctrines of her own Church save the central facts of the sacraments, confession, and obedience; nearly seven years' acquaintance with the doctrines of the heretics had taught her nothing of their beliefs that she could grasp save their sternness and severity, their hatred of natural human passion, their laudation of abnegation of the senses, and suffering of the soul.

Often Elphin, his infant mind fumbling with this confusion of creeds, asked her questions which she could by no means answer.

She was, poor lady, uneducated and unlettered in these things; beyond her phantasmagoria of tales, her knowledge of some Italian poets and novels, her art with the needle, and her little gift of music, she knew nothing.

But if she had remained in Italy she would have learned, for she was naturally apt, cultured, and passionately fond of all grandeur and beauty. She might have been such a woman as Vittoria Colonna, had she had the chance; but this possibility, as all the others she had possessed, she had sacrificed to Francis Moutray.

When Elphin insisted on knowing where God was, she, thinking of the most magnificent thing she knew, told him--in the sun.

Her chamber faced west, and at the hour of twilight Elphin would

climb into the window-seat to watch the matchless glory that he called God walking over the hills.

And so the days passed, solitary days, but rich with love.

Francis delayed his return, but that did not disturb Giovanna's serenity, for he wrote by almost every express, and his letters were those of a lover.

Once or twice the pastor came to see her, and from his speech she gained strange glimpses into the little world of Glenillich, still so incomprehensible. She listened courteously to his talk of a Covenant, of falling from Grace, of the wickedness of dancing and singing which he had discovered in the village, of the strange rumours of witchcraft, of the people's discontent at Francis' reforms and their rage at his proposal to bring over Cumberland men to work the new estate he had purchased.

And when the good man had finished, she went back to her sewing, her child, her tame fox, her tales of Italy, and of Ariosto's fairyland. Every Sunday she went to the kirk; she tried to conform to the customs of Glenillich by appearing quietly gowned, but she did not avoid censure; her silks, her curls, her grace, some bright ribbon or jewel unconsciously worn, all aroused repulsion and dislike. She began to notice the looks, the whisperings (less concealed now the laird had turned his back), and her nature, eager to be liked by all, was hurt and humbled.

She shut herself more and more into the house, and a little sense of loneliness overspread her life, like the first touch of frost in glorious autumn days. Once, when abroad beyond the confines of the park, she met the woman she had seen in the ruins of Ardnamurchan.

Giovanna gave her good-day somewhat timidly and wistfully; the

woman stopped and gazed at her with pointed curiosity.

Autumn was changing into winter, and, though the sky was clear, cold white mists rested on the mountains and about the frozen ground. The lady was walking near a hedge of briar, she was gowned and wrapped in black velvet; on one side of her walked Elphin in embroidered scarlet, carrying a large brown muff, on the other the fox with a silver medal round his neck.

Giovanna flushed under the woman's scrutiny, for she felt as if she owed her some reparation for their last meeting > but as it was impossible for her to admit her husband in the wrong, she could say nothing.

"If you had been a poor creature instead of the laird's lady, they had drawn blood above the brows from you as they have from me," said the woman, pointing to the still unhealed scar on her forehead.

"Why?" asked Giovanna, bewildered.

"There are reasons enough for thinking you not canny," replied the other in a tone more respectful than her words. "Your gowd and pearlin', the wild creature that follows you like a kitten, the way you fear neither dark nor kirkyard."

"They think I am a witch?"

"Many do, my lady--many hang a bit of rowan plucked between the two Beltan days and tied with red thread against the doors where you enter or pass."

This was the sum of her speech, but she spoke in the dialect of the place, and Giovanna found it difficult to understand her words though she grasped the sense of them.

"A witch--an enchantress--they think I am that?"

"Well," returned the woman, "it is hard to believe that the laird would have married a foreigner and a Papist if he had not been bewitched."

Giovanna was more amused than vexed or annoyed.

"You speak to me very freely," she smiled. "Do you think I am something evil?"

"God and your ladyship forgive me if I take a liberty," said the peasant, "but I know what it is to be suspected of devilish dealings, and maybe I would give you a warning not to wander too far from the mansion at nightfall now the laird is away."

"What do they do to witches here?" asked Giovanna.

"When I was a child they burnt them alive, my lady, or tortured them to death; now there is no law against them but no law for them, and many a woman has been so persecuted she would rather have gone to the stake. There was old Janet, who lived on the Moss of Glenlassie, they tossed her in a sheet and dragged her to and fro the pond, they set her wet in the stocks and put irons on her legs to make her confess when she had last seen the Devil. And when she had on a hundred pounds' weight she confessed, and they wanted to burn her, but the magistrates would not allow it, yet neither would they protect her, and she hanged herself in despair."

The woman spoke with fervour and a certain eloquence, and her words were emphasized by that sinister mark on her forehead.

"There are times when I am minded to do the same," she added. "It is ill living in a world where all have blows and curses for you and none the kind word, where the children run away from you and the old

folk spit on your shadow."

"Why do they think you are a witch?"

The woman smiled bitterly.

"When I was young, I was bold and gay, fond of dancing and the fiddle, caring nothing for the dark nor the talk of ghosts and brownies. Then they said I had bewitched their cattle and their crops, and one or two to whom I gave high words had misfortunes, and before I was thirty I was a witch, and there was neither home nor husband for me. And now they've marked me--well, if I had the power they think, they should smart for it."

"How do you live?" asked the lady.

"I have a little chicken farm, and some, through fear, buy of me, but this year the grain has been so dear I have made no profit, for none will deal with me, save these few, through fear."

"This is a dreary country," cried Giovanna, "where you make a sin of a laced handkerchief or a laugh; but of me you need not be afraid, for I believe not in these things. Come to Glenillich and I will help you."

"It would do your ladyship little good to befriend me--I would not do you such an evil turn for your kindness," replied the woman earnestly.--"And take my warning about going abroad alone."

"They hate me?"

"It is said it is you who influenced the laird to buy Ardnamurchan and introduce the rye-grass and build the new cottages and bring over the Southrons, and that you are no better than a Papist who has brought ill-luck on Glenillich."

"I knew nothing of any of these things!" cried Giovanna. "My husband never speaks to me of them"--then, suddenly checking herself, she added: "I will take your warning--even now it is late--remember I shall be always glad to help you."

She gave the woman a piece of money and passed on, smiling a pretty farewell.

"What did she say?" asked Elphin, catching at her hand.

"Hush, dearest, you must not think of it; she talked of ugly things. Bad fairies they say are here, but it is not true, my darling. There is nothing bad or wicked anywhere, you must think of that--you do believe it, do you not?" added Giovanna anxiously.

"I should *like* to believe it," replied the child gravely. "*She* was ugly, that woman."

"Thou must always be kind to those who are ugly, my Giovannino," said his mother, "for they have a great misfortune to bear."

They were passing into the grounds of the house when they were stopped by a man running swiftly towards them out of the twilight.

It was the minister. Giovanna stopped courteously.

"Mrs. Moutray," began the pastor, out of breath, "I saw you speaking with old Alison, which is a thing I would request you not to do, as the woman is believed to be a proved witch, a diabolic person of foul dealings."

"Oh, sir," cried Giovanna flushing, "I am sorry for your understanding if you give credit to such tales."

"Are you denying the existence of witches, Mrs. Moutray? Does not

Holy Scripture say, 'Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live'? And was there not the Witch of Endor and Baalam and Simon Magus?"

"Excuse me from this argument," replied Giovanna haughtily, "and learn I take your interference with my action ill."

She was turning away, but the minister, his long dislike of her inflamed by her words, stepped in front of her.

"I give you a warning, Mrs. Moutray, and one I shall repeat to the laird on his return. Take care how you tread, for there are many who believe you are no better than a Papist. You are slack in your religion, at best, and it breeds ill in Glenillich—as for such as old Alison--"

Giovanna interrupted; her sweetness of temper was not meekness, and her anger could be fierce.

"I will tolerate no more," she said. "Your presence offends me."

She stepped aside from his path and hastened away towards her home.

When her anger had died away she was not wholly happy about the incident; Francis would be vexed, she knew, both about her speech with the woman and her quarrel with the minister. She found the house gloomy that night, and her bright spirits could scarcely resist the sense of emptiness and loneliness that hung over Glenillich.

She sat in her own chamber with Elphin by her side and the red fox in her lap, when an express was brought her from Francis.

It said nothing of his return, and contained news that was not agreeable to Giovanna, namely, that the betrothal of Stacy and Allan was broken past any mending.

Giovanna had meant to ask Allan to take Stacy into his confidence with regard to the baptism of Elphin as soon as they were married, and now her frank mind was vexed that a man unattached shared her secret—a man who was no relation at all, as he would have been as Stacy's husband. It seemed to her unfair to Francis; she hoped that Allan would marry soon and that she would never see him again.

When the maid had put Elphin to bed, Giovanna still sat on by the fire.

Even this room was not cheerful in the evening when the wind shook the flames on the hearth and the hangings on the wall and rushed through the pine boughs without, when all was still and solitary in the house.

"I am lonely," said Giovanna. "Yes, I am lonely. I am also an alien here."

She allowed herself to think of Italy; she allowed herself to admit that she longed to be there, that this was only playing at happiness—real happiness had she left behind long ago. She started at this heresy to her loyal love, and checked the thought; she was happy, she told herself; she regretted nothing.

But for all her gaiety, courage, and pride, the poor exile dropped her face on the soft fur of the red fox and wept.

XI

Giovanna's impulsive letter, relating the incident of the woman Alison and the minister, sent Francis into a fever of annoyance.

To learn that his wife was considered as a concealed Papist, a blight

and an evil in Glenillich, that she was subjecting herself to rebukes from the minister--making his name, in brief, a subject of gossip and reproach--was gall to his soul.

The more so as in his heart he could not but agree with them.

During these weeks while he lingered in Edinburgh, away from the charm of her presence, he had brought himself to definitely regret his marriage.

It had failed; he had betrayed the traditions of his country, his family, his faith, his own instincts, and for this--failure.

A failure, he sternly called Giovanna; as a lover, a mistress! but as a wife a failure.

Yet he loved her, he wanted her still; that was his deepest mortification, that he was not strong enough to resist her charm.

So he argued inwardly during the fit of black melancholy into which he fell at Edinburgh. He imagined he was lost, damned; he believed that he was cursed until he put this woman out of his life; yet the lover, the passionate, sensuous strain in him, forced him to write her love-letters by every post and wear her portrait over his heart.

He made some indifferent attempts to reconcile Stacy and Allan, he attended half-heartedly to the business of Glenillich and Ardnamilrchan, and the daily conflict in his soul brought him to the verge of an illness.

One evening he fell into that fever from which he had never been utterly free since he had endured the malaria in Italy.

These slight recurrent attacks of fever seemed to him part of the spell of that fateful land, and always they brought to his mind that

night in Bologna when he had torn the mosquito-nets from his bed in his attempt to strangle the woman of his vision.

As he sat alone in his rooms, his head burning, his body shivering, his mind battling with a thousand horrible fancies, Allan Forsythe was shown into his presence.

At first Francis was vexed by the appearance of this man, so cool, composed--always the same. He roused himself with an effort from the deep wand chair before the fire.

"I am very bad company to-night," he said.

Allan glanced at him keenly, noted the careless dress, the dark hair disordered, the dark eyes bloodshot, the brow flushed, the cheeks scarlet.

"You should return to Glenillich," he remarked, taking the chair opposite. "The city air is close and foul after Ayrshire."

"I look sick?" asked Francis grimly.

"Sick, or in at ease."

Francis propped his chin on his palm and gazed into the fire.

"I wish you would come to terms with Stacy," he said moodily.

"Why return to that matter?" asked the other with calm good-humour. "I have resolved never to marry."

"Why?" demanded Francis.

"Because I am afraid of failure."

Mr. Moutray's eyes flashed.

"But to my errand," continued Allan. "I brought you this."

He took from his pocket a leathern case, opened it, and handed to Francis the gold Aurelian coin that had lain in his cabinet five years or more.

But to enhance the value of the gift he embellished it with a fiction.

"I heard you were searching for such a coin, and as I knew one who had this, I made inquiries and at length obtained it."

Francis was genuinely pleased; he had really wanted the coin; it was a beautiful specimen, and he was both surprised and moved by Allan's thought and trouble.

"You must permit me to purchase this from your friend," he said.

"Nay," smiled Allan. "I gave him one of mine in exchange for it--an Alexander of Macedonia that I have in duplicate--so I beg you to accept it as a gift."

Francis, thus gracefully put under an obligation, could make no demur; he thanked Allan warmly, but that gentleman waived the subject and brought the conversation round to Ardnamurchan.

"I was talking with your architect to-day--he says you have some curious old glass in your church and some tombs interesting to the antiquary."

"Maybe," replied Mr. Moutray; "it is a gloomy spot. The grave of the murdered Jane Moidart is there."

Allan affected a vast interest in this lady, of whom he had hardly

heard before, and Francis was led on to recount the dreadful history of the deed which was supposed to have left a curse on the lands of Ardnamurchan.

Allan was impressed--impressed as when Harry Middleton told him the story of the winning of Giovanna; it was again the curiosity, the half-envy, half-wonder of the coolblooded, confronted by a tale of sheer passion.

"That story opens up the old question," he said, warming his hands.-- "May a man kill a faithless wife?"

"Nay, murder is murder," replied Francis. "There can be no excuse. And to murder a woman," he shuddered, "and one whom one had loved."

"Yet it has been thought forgivable," argued Allan.

Francis recalled Giovanna's defence of Jane Moidart's punishment, her characterization of the murderer's execution as "barbarous."

"Aye, among Papists, perhaps," he said bitterly.

The remark was so unexpected that Allan started.

"Have Papists a different code in the matter?" he asked.

"You should know," replied Francis, "you have been abroad oftener than I; it is a matter of common knowledge that in Papist countries they do these things."

"Yet it is unlawful, for when I was last in Rome there was a certain Count executed for killing his wife--though it is true that there were doubts cast on her guilt."

Then Allan checked further defence of his secret creed, and with adroit abruptness came to the point of his visit.

"I should be pleased to see Ardnamurchan, if you would any time have me," he said frankly.

"Why, come when you will," replied Francis, "but if you would see the church you must come with me when I return, for I intend to have it pulled down by the spring."

"I could not so force myself," protested Allan, "much as you tempt me."

But Francis had already seized on the idea of this visit as a relief and as a means of mitigating the embarrassment he so hideously felt at the thought of meeting Giovanna again. In a few weeks the architect was coming, but Francis preferred Allan (little as he cared for him) as a distraction, and besides he felt under an obligation for the gold coin; therefore he pressed Allan to accompany him in a few days when he returned to Glenillich.

Allan accepted the invitation he had so carefully planned to obtain; a very curious emotion stirred his heart at the thought of the interview with Giovanna, when he would show her her sister's letter and her mother's jewels.

"He is neglecting her," he said to himself. "What is her life alone at Glenillich? He is afraid of her--the sour Puritan! What if she should turn to me a second time--" but he stopped there, for he was cautious even in his thoughts.

Having obtained the object of his visit, and knowing that it was useless to hope that Francis could be induced to talk of his wife, Allan relieved himself of Francis' gloomy and distasteful company,

and returned to his own lodgings where he was giving supper to a number of friends.

Francis, confused with fever, continued to sit over the fire.

He soon forgot the coin that had briefly distracted him, and his heated thoughts returned to Giovanna.

The full misery of his situation overwhelmed him, and he groaned aloud.

He recalled how he had returned to her, how she had come to him--their meeting on the Modena road, the joy and madness of that union--his prayer to God to let him be good to her--and it had come to this--he slept lonely in Edinburgh, she slept lonely in Glenillich; he delayed his return, he submitted willingly, nay, eagerly, to the company of a man whom he disliked rather than meet her alone; his days were clouded with shame and remorse because of her--and yet she had not done anything--she had not changed. She was the same sweet, passionate, loyal woman he had taken from Italy.

He staggered to his feet and cried aloud.

"O *God*, my *God*, what has happened to it all? What have I done that my life should be thus a torment to me?"

What had happened that the passion that had been so strong and so beautiful should become a scourge and a curse?

What was wrong--she--he--the world?--or was all this wretchedness but a mirage of his own? Were his agonies warnings from God that must be obeyed, or mere evil fancies that must be rooted out?

He did not know, he could not tell--his mind was a burning confusion; he felt a kind of madness within him as if he could turn with a snarl

and rend the God who thus tormented him.

Was she of the Devil, of a wanton race, a cursed country--but was she not also beautiful and loyal, kind and patient, sincere and pure?

"I do blaspheme her with these thoughts of mine," he cried. "She is better than I--yet--yet--is it not horridly true that I have been as one *damned* since I owned her?"

He sank into the chair again, shivering and weak with fever; the supper his domestic set before him he refused; he would have gone abroad to distract himself, but heavy snow was falling, and the folly of it was too obvious.

He curtly sent the man to bed, and remained shuddering over the fire.

What was she doing now, he wondered, alone in that great house. He imagined her in the bedchamber she had so pathetically tried to make gay, surrounded by the trinkets and finery she so admired and cared for, sleeping in the great bed that had known so many deaths--sleeping with her amber-coloured hair unbound and some orange or violet ribbon, such as she loved, fastening the bosom of her bedgown.

Perhaps she was sad, certainly she was lonely; he knew that she was surrounded by dislike and distrust--yet he left her there, delaying his return.

Was it for this he had brought her from Italy? But he loved her (ah, loved her!) as much now as when he had first kissed her in that magic garden, he loved her--

Again he beat his brows--asking his soul--his God--what had

happened.

He dwelt with a desperate longing on a wild idea of taking her away, of abandoning everything to live with her in the sun as she had herself suggested on their first coming to Scotland; the next second he spurned the cowardice of such a thought.

One moment he thought of her and of all that belonged to her--her child, her clothes, her sewing, her rooms, her tame fox--with a passion of tenderness; in another he thought of all of them with a dread that was almost loathing.

Maddened and feeble he paced up and down the room; the fire was sinking out, the candles burning low, the snow deadened all outside sound. He felt his fever increase, his lips were dry, his eyes burning, his pulses beating strongly; he began to see shapes in the dark corner before which he cowered. The shapes of his mother and father who had taught him of God and the Devil before he could speak, and hatred of the Papist before he could think--shapes of his ancestors who had died fighting those things which had produced a Giovanna--all these stern bloodless shapes of men and women who had denied themselves body and soul, who had gone without wine, without kisses, without laughter, without passion, to please their God--who had lived perpetual abnegation, sacrifice, negation of all soft human qualities under the shadow of eternal damnation.

There had been no colour in their lives save the glow from hell fire, no passion in their hearts save their hatred of the flesh and the Devil--they seemed now to judge Francis from the level of their own repression--to judge--to condemn--to damn. "*Because of these things*"--the old text ran in his head--"*Because of these things cometh the wrath of God on the children of men--*"

Because of women such as Giovanna, because of all the lures and

enchancements and temptations of the world she came from, came wrath--and had it not fallen on him? He could not escape his hereditary creed which had been impressed so mercilessly on a mind naturally given to melancholy, he could not escape the strength, the power, the horror of it; it held him as with triple chains of steel--it had taught him that beauty was wrong, that gaiety was wrong, that love was wrong, that passion was abomination, that luxury and any worldly or fleshly gratification was directly of the Devil, that the only way to obtain God's favour was to deny and repress every natural instinct and kill every carnal desire--and this teaching he believed.

Even while he writhed and struggled, even while it burnt his very soul, still he believed.

The warm, passionate, sensuous nature he had been born with protested, fought, but was always conquered; it had triumphed in his love story, but his creed had exacted bitter payment for that victory.

It was strong and powerful too, this flesh, this Devil--whatever he called it--and not easily beaten, but never would it utterly free itself of the crushing weight of that black conviction, that ineffaceable belief, that overwhelming credence, in God, the judgment of the Almighty, and the pains of hell.

To-night the struggle passed from the agonies of the spirit to the tortures of the body.

Francis flung himself on his bed, stabbed with pain; he tossed to and fro, muttering, half-crazed by the hideous images his terrors evoked--now mad with longing for Giovanna, and shivering lest she should die before he could reach her--now hoping he might never see her again, now thinking she was a phantasmagoria and he had never known her. A slight convulsion shook him, his teeth locked, his eyes rolled back in his head, and he beat his limbs wildly on the bed.

Then with a cry he started up.

He saw Giovanna in a brocade petticoat and satin gown standing in the doorway, the ruby-like firelight rippled over her beauty; the words of her last letter occurred to his maddened brain.

"Witch," he sobbed.

He caught his sword from his scabbard and slashed at the figure of his wife; the point of the weapon caught in the hangings on the wall--there was nothing there; the quiet little room was empty.

"Magic!" laughed Francis, the sword fell from his weak wrist; at the clatter his man came running in, a candle in his hand.

"I am not well," said Francis thickly; his mouth was twisted and bloodied at the corners, he stared insanely--"indeed, I am not well."

He fell to his knees, and as the frightened domestic caught him, he fainted.

XII

Francis was three days half-delirious, half-unconscious with fever, but on the fourth day he forced his weakness and was ready, as he had promised, to accompany Allan to Glenillich.

Mr. Forsythe found him the taciturn and dull travelling companion he had anticipated, and, as they progressed further into the Lowlands, a certain depression settled on Allan's calm. He was no lover of nature nor of wild scenery, and he was dimly aware of a sense of danger; it seemed to be partly in Francis, partly in the lonely landscape, and though he was continually assuring himself of the innocence of the

whole expedition, his cautious mind dwelt with some uneasiness on the casket of jewels hidden among his vails and the letter from the Contessa Emilia hidden in his pocket-book.

They reached Glenillich House one stormy evening about sunset; the coach road having proved impossible, they had done the last stage on horseback, and Allan had a clear view of the mansion with the last red light flashing in the window-panes and the great snow-clouds rolling up behind the hills, the pines, the lake.

He thought it a dwelling inexpressibly dreary, too large, too pretentious, heavy, and cheerless; it possessed a certain air of grandeur, but Allan could not well imagine a more gloomy place in which to live.

"And this is where she spends her days!" he thought, and excitement stirred all his pulses.

As they left the stables the sun suddenly vanished in black clouds, and it was all but dark as they entered the house.

The servants were in the hall to receive them; Francis saluted them curtly, and went by, slowly up the stairs; Allan thought he looked ill, almost as if he might faint.

Certainly there was something strange in the atmosphere of the house, or so it seemed to Allan--a sense of repression, of wealth without luxury, of power without pleasure. Allan understood Francis better now that he had seen his home.

They entered the dining-room--or, rather, hall--and as Francis opened the door for his guest, Allan beheld a picture he was destined to remember even in the moment when the Eucharist was being held before his dying eyes.

The candles were all lit, and there were rosy shades before them, so that the whole dark chamber, the tawny portraits, the lustreless hangings, the dull leather furniture, were filled and tinged with warm soft lights.

The long table was covered with a fine cloth which was like a film of cobweb joining lilies and roses; glass and porcelain sparkled in a thousand stars and points of red soft brightness. And by the end of the table stood Giovanna in a lovely attitude of expectancy, of eager love, of impatient waiting.

Never was Allan to forget how she looked now, or to blot a single detail of her attire from his mind. She wore a gown of ivory satin that shone and gleamed in the delicate shade and tinted light with a thousand hues of opal, amber, rose, and pearl; from her slender, gleaming waist flowed the full folds of her overskirt, a brocade where crimson, purple, and gold intermingled, glow upon glow, to where her black velvet shoes showed beneath the pearl edging of her hem.

The gown was cut away from her shoulders and bosom, and the faint lace of her under garment was caught by a cluster brooch of yellow topaz on her breast; the brocade sleeves were slashed open on fall on fall of this same lace, and on her right round arm was a bracelet of gold links; her neck was encircled by a great string of glittering yellow topaz which seemed to throb with light, and in her ears hung others of the same stone--tear-shaped drops of inextinguishable fire; her hair, ungleaming, fold on fold luxuriously wreathed round her small head, was twisted with a black velvet ribbon on which gleamed little brilliants.

And over all was this glow of light, like the colour of wine, like the glow of gold, radiating from her and round her; she seemed in that moment to be beautiful with the beauty of immortality, like some picture old in the memory and admiration of men.

"She should be in an alabaster room," thought Allan, "with all gorgeous Italy glimpsed through an open window."

By her side stood Elphin; he was dressed in a dazzling pink silk and a white shirt of wonderful embroidery, in his hand he held two beautiful dark crimson roses, and, as Francis entered, he came forward and held them up.

"They were grown in the glass-house," he said, "and we have been hoping and praying that they would be ready for your return. So please, father, take them."

Allan looked at the child with a sudden sharp envy; it was an exquisite little creature, he thought, nearly as exotic as the blooms he so gravely offered.

Francis took the roses, silently bent and kissed the boy, then turned to his wife.

She had now seen Allan though he lingered in the doorway, and all her spontaneous joy was instantly killed. Francis had not told her that he was bringing anyone with him, and never for a second had it occurred to her that he would bring a witness to their first reunion; she rallied to the shock with all the bravery of her breed, though Allan was the last man she wanted to see under her roof, no matter the circumstances.

First she went to her husband and held out her hands, he kissed them both with some murmur in his throat; her welcome was so gracious, so unconsciously joyous, that he hated himself for bringing Allan, and still more for the cowardice of not telling her he was not returning alone.

Allan also was abashed by the royal way she took what must have

deeply wounded, almost insulted her, and his apologies for his intrusion were almost shamefaced.

But Giovanna ordered another place to be set, and covered his confusion and Francis' silence with her eager, pretty talk.

Francis had not been prepared for the unconscious festival made of his home-coming; she seemed to have transformed the room, the child, herself--never had he seen her look so beautiful nor his gloomy home so luxurious.

He made the excuse of showing Allan his room to escape her overwhelming presence; but there was no avoiding the dinner-hour, though his self-consciousness increased with every moment, and his almost morbid sense of the ridiculous made him curse the folly of exposing his wife's preparation for his welcome to the cynical glance of a stranger.

And those arrangements were more loving, more pitiful, than he knew; the tablecloth, the cushions, the silk candleshades were all of Giovanna's own making, as was Elphin's dress--especially designed for this occasion; her own gown had cost her a day's anxious thought, and the two roses he had placed so carelessly on the mantelpiece, she had hung over for a fortnight in anxious care.

She had taken incredible pains that the few dishes she had ever heard him express a liking for should appear at the dinner, and the choice of glass and silver had been a long and personal study.

All this tender forethought now went merely to amuse indifferent eyes, yet her utter disappointment was completely hidden, and it was owing to her that the long-planned little feast did not become ridiculous.

She managed the two men and the child with the tact with which her mother had managed a thousand guests, her laughter, her smiles, her wit, carried off the miserable situation; she almost contrived to conceal from the child that their festival was spoiled, and almost concealed from Allan that Francis had committed a heartless and bitter blunder.

She completely succeeded in easing the guest of his embarrassment; as the great fire warmed the room, rendering it bright and glowing, so the wine, the luxury, the beauty of the woman, warmed Allan's critical and fastidious senses.

He thought her perfect; he knew her for what she was--the exquisite product of noble generations, of ages of luxury, of gentle living, of a breed thrice refined.

And as he gazed at her across the candlelight, Francis chanced to see his expression, to understand, and from that moment another devil entered into the already torn soul of the Laird of Glenillich, to torture him with a torture compared with which the other fiends that tormented had been gentle.

In one flash he knew jealousy--in one flash it consumed him, obsessed him.

This man, whom he had never liked, was looking at his wife with hot admiration. Francis had known no such pang as he now felt since the day he had first seen Giovanna--when she had been laughing with an Italian cavalier.

His jealousy might well have slept, for since she had been his wife she had been hidden from all; now it was awake, wide-eyed, vigilant; he suddenly realized the luxury of her gown, the bare shoulders and bosom, her great beauty, her great desirableness, and, forgetting in

his wild unreasonableness that it was for him and him only she had adorned herself, he was angry with her for thus displaying herself.

The rest of the dinner was bitterness to him; it was over at last, and the maid came for Elphin.

Francis was standing by the fireplace when the boy came up to him to say good-night.

"You will have to lift me up," said Elphin, "but I am going to be taller soon."

Francis obeyed, almost mechanically, and raised the little figure, all silk, lace, and perfume; as he kissed the child, he felt his body quiver as if some one had hit him.

"Oh, sir," he cried, "you should not do those things. There were only two of them, and we kept them for you."

Francis saw he was pointing to the two roses which lay on the mantelpiece, shrivelled in the heat.

He hastily set the child down.

"Some others will grow," he said.

"It was *those* two," replied the boy, shaking his head. "They knew about your coming, they were waiting for you," and the tears glittered in his eyes.

Giovanna hastened to him.

"They are not dead," she said, "only faded. See," she rescued the roses and placed them in a glass of water, "take them upstairs, and to-morrow they will be lovely again."

"But they were for father," insisted Elphin, and all her passionate good-night kisses could not banish the sorrow from his face.

"It was not how you thought it would be, any of it, was it, mother?" he whispered, and Giovanna knew then, with a pang bitter indeed, that not all her art could deceive him.

"You shall have Rinaldo in you room to-night," she whispered hastily back.

When Elphin had gone, the situation again became foolishly awkward, and again Giovanna saved it. The withdrawing-room was shut up, she had not used it in Francis' absence nor thought they were likely to need it to-night; there was no fire, and the covers still on the furniture.

Therefore she quickly took her leave and went up to her own apartments, leaving Francis and Allan over their port, both disliking each other, fatiguing each other, forcing talk about Ardnamurchan, rye-grass, the failure of the Lowlands, Roman coins and cameos, and both thinking solely of what they never mentioned--the woman who had left them.

Francis dragged the conversation on till near midnight, then they parted, and he went slowly up to Giovanna.

She was still fully dressed, she sat by the fire in her antechamber, and, when he entered, she rose instantly.

"Not abed yet?" he said, and under pretence of securing the door, he did not meet her eyes.

"Oh, Frank," she cried, with a pitiful little laugh, "I wanted you to admire me! I had no chance to speak to you? Do you like the gown?"

"It is too luxurious," he answered, "fit for a palace--and Elphin--why do you dress him like a doll?"

"What welcome is this?" she asked tremblingly. "What has happened? What have I done? Why did you bring Mr. Forsythe?"

"He forced his company."

"Ah--but now he is not here; why did you stay so long? I have waited nearly two hours for you."

He came to the hearth, and she put her fair, timid hands on his coat sleeve.

"Do you not really like the dress, Frank--and did you notice the dinner? What is the matter--you do not look well?"

"Nay, I have been ill, but it is nothing."

Her arms crept up and clasped round his neck.

"Francis--are you glad to be back?"

"Yes, dear. God, of course," he answered with a catch in his voice.

Her head sank on his lace cravat.

"Do not go away again--please--it was lonely."

"Nay, I think I have no need to go again," he replied in the same guarded voice; the perfume of her locks stole into his nostrils, she was casting round him all her whole sensuous lure, but the Calvinist in him thought of his soul; this time she should not enmesh him--
"BECAUSE of these things"--"Because of these things."

"Elphie is a strange child," he said steadily. "What do you teach him?"
--"

"Nothing, for I know nothing--only fairy tales."

"He must soon go to Edinburgh," replied Francis; she unclasped him and moved away. "Go to bed, Jean," he added, "it is late; I will tell you all the news in the morning."

"I was not waiting to hear the news," said Giovanna with a quivering smile.

He tried to look steadily at her sad beauty; he bent suddenly and kissed her bare shoulder very passionately, but almost instantly moved away and dropped into the arm-chair where she had been sitting.

"Go to bed," he repeated. "I want to think awhile."

She hesitated, bewildered, hurt, amazed; he raised his eyes from the fire and smiled at her, he was very pale.

"Go to bed," he repeated.

She turned and left him in silence.

Francis gazed into the flames, all the old, ugly chaos seething in his mind, all the old, ghastly hauntings rising up to mock him, all the whole miserable fears jeering at him and all coloured with the glow of hell as this room was coloured with the glow of the fire.

A clock struck midnight, but he did not hear it, and he had lost count of time.

"Francis!"

He started like a guilty man, and turned in his chair to see his wife standing in the doorway of her room—a golden satin wrap was thrown over her bedgown and her hair hung, soft and unwavering, to her knees.

"Francis!" she said again; she came towards him, her bare feet showing above the low rose-velvet slippers. "What is the matter? Ah, Frank, you break my heart."

He got to his feet but did not answer; he thought how like a child she looked, yet how like the vision that had haunted him in the inn bedroom at Bologna.

"What have I done?" asked Giovanna.

"Nothing," he said, "nothing, Jean."

"Then do not hurt me so—my love, my dear—why do you turn from me?"

"I do not," he said hastily. "I do not."

She came nearer, all her charm and grace enhanced by her pleading look, her trembling wonder and distress.

"Did you bring Mr. Forsythe because you would not see me alone?" she asked.

As always, the tortuous subtleties of his mind winced before the clear, direct frankness of hers.

"No, no," he cried, as if defending himself.

"Then do not be so strange with me, Frank," she ventured nearer

with a piteous courage. "What is there for us if we do not love each other? Love me--kiss me--Frank!"

She crept caressingly close and lifted her flushed and tender face.

She offered her lips, her look besought him to kiss her; he bent and laid his lips lightly on her forehead.

Giovanna drew back, her flush deepened down her neck and bosom, then she paled, and flushed again; she seemed one utterly astonished and wounded to the heart.

At last she spoke--two words only--"Good-night," and she turned back into her bed-chamber.

Francis, standing rigidly, listening, heard her lock her door.

The sound was as bitter as the sound of earth thudding on a coffin; he dragged himself to the settee and wept difficult, terrible tears.

XIII

Allan found his visit to Glenillich dull, and feared it would be also profitless. He had not reckoned on the quick vigilance Francis displayed which prevented him ever getting private speech with Giovanna, and she herself was evasive and seemed rather to avoid his company; indeed, she appeared almost only at meal-times, and retired immediately after.

Allan spent his days visiting the estates--which he disliked, listening to Francis' talk of his improvements--in which he was utterly uninterested, and making excursions to Ardnamurchan--which dreary spot he loathed.

This was not what he had come to Glenillich for and he was thoroughly irritated and put out; he thought the house uncomfortable, the servants dour, every day almost it rained and was, besides, bitter cold. Francis was either sunk in stern gloom or absorbed with a kind of feverish activity in his agricultural plans; there were no books in Glenillich save a few volumes on religious topics, and Francis played no games and was unversed in those topics of general interest which make pleasing conversation.

To Allan, used to the elegancies and refinements of great cities, this life was almost barbarous, but he prolonged his visit, even when there was no more excuse, in the desperate hope of accomplishing his mission.

He tried to get into converse with the child and to delicately sound him on his memory of their former meeting, but Elphin was elusive too, and escaped him, in a half frightened manner.

Allan suspected an estrangement between Francis and his wife, but he was too proudly reserved and she too loyally gay for him to come to any certainty.

At last, to his intense relief, the architect arrived from Edinburgh; he brought with him the plans for the new church at Ardnamurchan, and the very day after his arrival Francis insisted on taking him to see the site.

It was a bitter day, and Allan pleaded a chill as an excuse for not accompanying them; for once Francis was too taken up with his new excitement to insist, and Allan at length found himself in the house with Giovanna in her husband's absence. She could not escape him now, for she must entertain him at dinner, since Francis and the architect could not return till nightfall.

Allan, guessing she was afraid of him, feared she might dine in her chamber, but it was not Giovanna's way to flinch. When he entered the dining-room she was there, the child beside her as usual; to-day the fox was of the company, and Elphin was playing with it with more gaiety than Allan had yet seen him display.

"It is very cold," said Giovanna, "and this room so large!"

She spoke as if in apology for her shivering, and seated herself without looking at him.

He looked at her with his glance of a connoisseur and found her, as always, perfect; since that first evening she had made no display of fine clothes, but it was not possible for her to dress without taste and elegance. To-day she wore a long sacque of olive-green tabinet with over-gown and panniers of black covered with little bright wreaths of roses; at her bosom and elbows were ruffles of Venetian lace, and a mob cap of muslin with lapels of this same lace was fastened under her chin; in her ears and round her neck were pearls. She was like a pearl herself, Allan thought, in her rarity, her delicacy, her aloofness, from all coarse and common things.

Her unconscious breeding passed the meal-time with ease; when the nurse had taken Elphin away, she rose as if to leave Allan to his wine, but he made a smiling protest.

"Do you judge me so unworthy of a little of your company?" he asked.

"I am dull to-day," she answered.

"Think how dull I am alone!"

"Ah," said Giovanna, looking at him, "this is a dull country and a dull house, sir. Why are you here? I think it would be better for you to

return to Edinburgh."

He hesitated, then met her delicate honesty with sincerity.

"I came here because I wanted to speak to you, Mrs. Moutray. I have seen Father Hilton, and he asked about your boy--"

"Sir," replied Giovanna, "the boy is very well and is too young to need priests. His soul is safe now, and if he is in danger he knows on whom to call--One who cannot be deaf to the cry of a baptized child. I have taught him some articles of his faith--when he is old enough he will speak to his father of it. For the present there is no need to trouble Father Hilton nor yourself in this affair."

Allan was baffled by her steadfast simplicity and vexed by the manner in which she still held him outside her confidence.

"I warn you that your husband is a bigot, Madam," he replied, "and that you will not easily accommodate this matter with him."

Giovanna paled and faintly smiled.

"You also are a bigot, Mr. Forsythe, and think I am damned for marrying a heretic."

"But you yourself know which is the true faith," he cried--"the one belief?"

"I am too ignorant," said Giovanna. "I can only hope that God is kinder than any of your creeds."

"Why, then, did you baptize the child?" asked Allan.

"That he might not suffer for my sin," she replied in a low voice, "if it is true--yes, I believe it true--at least I did not dare to--risk--such a

thing."

Allan thought that the absolute faith of her childhood had been undermined by her association with heretics and weakened by long absence from the authority of the Church. This pained and angered him; his thin face flushed; he cast about vainly in his mind for what to say.

Meanwhile Giovanna spoke again:

"I am sorry that you are not to marry Stacy Wigram."

"She would not change her religion," he answered, frowning.

"Always that!" cried Giovanna. "Does God interfere in everything?"

"He comes before everything," replied Allan.

"So Francis thinks," she said desperately, then checked herself. "But how foolish it is to talk of these things."

She turned to the door, but Allan would not so be dismissed.

"I must see you privately," he said. "I have a message for you."

Giovanna looked at him a second, hesitated, then said:

"You will find me in the withdrawing-room," and left the room.

Allan hastened upstairs and fetched the casket. He felt as if he was bound on a pleasantly perilous adventure; he was not touched by any passion, he meant to be extremely cautious, yet nevertheless there was excitement, attraction, in what was before him--and in the background of his thoughts always that wild vision of Giovanna brought back to the true faith and blooming again amid the luxury,

gaiety, and sunshine that was hers by right.

His hands trembled a little as he again entered her presence; she was seated by the fire, making lace from a pattern of pins on a pale blue satin cushion.

Allan put the casket on the spinet, and came to the hearth. She looked up at him keenly, his fair pale face, his neatly curled hair, his elegant steel-blue silks, so typical of towns and courts, the diamonds in his lace—all composed a picture of some one exact, careful, prudent, and possessed of a certain power. Giovanna lowered her eyes.

"Lately, in Edinburgh," he said, "I met a Mr. Middleton."

She started.

"Harry Middleton! Ah yes!"

"He had recently come from Rome, where he had seen the Contessa Odaleschi."

Giovanna gazed at him as if the name was strange to her; it was now over six years since she had heard it on anyone's lips or ventured to take it on her own.

"Your mother, Madam," said Allan.

The warm colour overspread her face.

"My mother?" she repeated in a tone of amazement.

"She gave Mr. Middleton certain jewels for you, and your sister, Madam Orsini, gave him this for you."

He carefully took Emilia's note from his pocket, and laid it on her lace pillow among the threads and bobbins.

"Oh!" said Giovanna. "Emilia--my Emilia! She writes to me--oh, Mr. Forsythe, this is hard to bear."

"Mr. Middleton entrusted me with his mission since he was soon leaving Edinburgh and had no chance to see you," continued Allan, finishing his precise explanation.

Giovanna was terribly moved; she broke open the letter and, when she had read the few words of warm and noble affection, she broke into tears.

Allan fetched the casket, placed it on the little worktable at her side, and opened the clasp.

"Your mother sent you these."

Giovanna rose up, casting her work to the ground.

"She sent me these--her beautiful jewels? I know not what to say or do! She is in Rome now--with Emilia? The Virgin bless Emilia, she will make her happy--was she well? Ah, I forgot, you did not see her--forgive me, my mind does not serve me here--pardon me, these memories--"

She stifled her tears, but continued walking up and down in great agitation.

"The jewels are very valuable and fine," said Allan, and pulled out the trays, showering about them the liquid light flickering through the wine red, the sea blue, the golden yellow of the stones.

"Her emeralds!" cried Giovanna, taking up the necklace of the

parure, formed grape fashion. "I always liked them--she promised them to me--and now she sends them," added the poor lady wildly, "when I have neither heart nor right to wear them."

Allan was moved and terrified by her unreserved emotion.

"Your sister invites you to Rome," he said. "Your mother would like to see you again."

"Alas, alas!" murmured Giovanna.

Allan made his great move with outward calm.

"Why not go?" he said.

Her wet eyes gazed at him uncomprehendingly.

"I think you are not too happy here," said Allan, moved beyond his caution into more than he had ever meant to say. "This is no life for you--this loneliness--this barbarity."

"What are you saying?" she stammered. "What do you mean?"

"I could reconcile you with your people," said Allan.

"You mean I should leave Francis?"

"He did you a great wrong," replied Allan; "forgive me, I do not consider you bound to him."

Giovanna stepped back from him; she was now perfectly composed.

"You take advantage," she said, "of my great foolishness in asking a service of you--"

"Nay, nay," he protested.

"Why did you come here?" she demanded, "Why did you take Mr. Middleton's place? I had rather that he had come himself. Yes, indeed, you are trying to put me under an obligation. Why were these things given to me secretly?"

She stood before him, flushed and angry, pointing to the jewels.

"Because Francis would never have allowed you to keep them!" he flashed.

"That is not for you to judge. In putting this other confidence between us you do me a wrong--yes, sir, you wrong me!"

"You wrong yourself. Madam, in this slavish submission to one your equal in nothing--"

"But my husband," said she, with a great glow; then, as she caught his flickering glance, "I know what you would say, I am not his wife--his mistress then--what does it matter? His, at least, and for always."

"Your loyalty is mistaken," cried Allan. "The man does not appreciate your sacrifice nor value you; he suspects you still, considers you the Papist, the frivolous foreigner--"

"Do you think," she asked, "that I do not know that, and live with the thought of it, day by day?"

"And it makes no difference?"

"No difference at all," she said.

Allan was stung into unusual animation.

"This is folly!" he exclaimed.

She closed the lid of her mother's case.

"Sir, why do you take this interest in my poor affairs?"

"Perhaps because once you trusted me."

"Alas," said Giovanna, "I was friendless!"

"And we are of the same faith."

"So men blame God for all their faults and troubles. I beg you leave my faith; if what you believe, and I was taught, be true, why, then, I am damned and he is damned. I have faced that and can face it still. If what he thinks is true, then love and all beauty are deadly sins, and that way I am damned too, but I have faith in Someone, who made me passionate, to pity me I For you--I ask you to leave my house, to forget me--out of charity."

The short winter day was fading, the room full of shadow; a dimness was over her beautiful figure as if darkness would soon snatch her away from his sight.

"I cannot so easily ride away and forget," said Allan. Again and again he had assured himself that his interest in her was cold, a mere curiosity, a measured admiration; but now, at the thought of her dismissal, emotion shook him and a vast regret.

"Why?" she asked. I want to see you happy.

"I am happy."

"Not as you were in Italy."

She stopped her agitated pacing to and fro before him, and looked at him earnestly.

"I am a loyal woman," she said; "I can only love once, and where I love I must spend myself. I have so few virtues--none, perhaps--but I am made loyal."

"Giovanna," he stammered, all his defences down, "I want to serve you--I want to help you--he is not worthy--"

She looked at him with great sweetness.

"I think you mean well by me," she answered, "and would serve me truly. But it could not be. No Italy, no sun for me--this Northern earth will be my grave."

"All for him?" cried Allan desperately.

"Yes," she said. "What else?"

"He does not make you happy."

"He loves me," she said softly.

"Other men could love you," he answered eagerly, "love you in a different fashion--not jealously, reluctantly; there are a hundred men in your own world would make life bloom for you, Giovanna."

"But I love only him," she answered with a little smile.

A despair such as he had not believed it possible to endure invaded his heart; he knew now what a fool he had been in his boasted calm and composure, and what wild, desperate hope he had been cherishing.

"And I must leave you?"

"Aye, you must," she said gently.

He took her hand, she did not resist; he tried to speak and could not; his keen worldly face was flushed and quivering, utterly changed.

Giovanna spoke, quite steadily and with that frank honesty she could not avoid employing.

"Dear, I am so sorry," she said; "I think you care for me. I thank you--it is good to be loved--thank you for your silence too. I did wrong to ask you for your service--I might have known. Thank you for that also--your service."

Allan pressed the little hand he held between his palms.

"I could offer you your old life," he said brokenly, "the life of Italy."

She shook her head.

"I am sorry," she repeated, "but you will soon forget; there are so many other women, and all women are lovable if--if you know how to love them--I think you do--"

She had revealed all his own heart to him.

"I love you," he said.

"Alas, I must never see you again. You must go to-morrow. I am very sorry," she looked at him almost piteously, as if asking pardon. Not till long afterwards did it occur to him to marvel that she had not been insulted or angered; now her behaviour seemed utterly natural, what he would have expected of her--or any woman.

He still held her hand; he knew further protest was useless; her gentleness held a more resolute absolute finality of dismissal than any outburst of passion.

For a second he was silent with his despair.

"Might I kiss you?" he asked at last; it was almost the first time in his life that he had spoken on pure impulse.

"I have never been kissed save by him," she answered with a blush of distress. "I would rather you did not ask that."

"Yet might I? What does it do to him or to you?--such a little thing--to me so much."

She hesitated, like one overcoming a selfishness, then offered her cheek; he kissed her very gently, released her hand, and turned away.

"Good-bye," she said, "and happiness to you always."

"Good-bye, Giovanna," he answered.

He left her and went upstairs to pack his vails; he did not know how she had wrought on him, what she had done, but in some way she had swept aside his caution, his prudence, his pretence, and brought out all that was natural and true in him; never before had he been so sincere even with himself.

Giovanna stood in the darkening room and forgot to ring for candles.

She took up her sister's letter and kissed it again and again, and finally hid it in her bosom; then, suddenly hearing her husband's voice, she snatched up the casket and fled upstairs. Francis saw the last glimpse of her, and his face darkened that she should thus fly at

his approach.

The architect was lodging at the inn. Allan, hearing this, could not endure to remain the third any more, and, using the excuse of an express he had really that day received (an unimportant letter of news from a gossiping friend), declared he must return to Edinburgh on the instant and would stay at the inn too, this night, to avoid rousing the house so early.

Francis took this poor excuse drily; his farewells were cold; he seemed perfectly aware there was some good reason for Allan's abrupt departure.

Giovanna, not knowing of Allan's sudden leaving, sent a message to Francis that she had a headache and would remain that evening in her chamber. When they told him this, Francis laughed; he dined alone that evening and drank heavily; scattered all over the table among the wine-glasses were the plans and drawings of the expiatory church he was to build at Ardnamurchan.

Now and then he looked at them fiercely; he wondered if God would consider this oblation favourably.

XIV

That evening Francis went upstairs early; after the first night of his home-coming he had found the little room off Giovanna's antechamber--which had been used by her maid before he had forbidden her such a luxuey--prepared for him, and there he had slept since, the width of the antechamber between him and his wife, and her door always locked; and neither of them made any comment on this arrangement.

To-night he found her door open and ajar; she imagined him still

engaged in some aimless forced talk with Allan, and was not prepared for this early coming.

Two candles lit the warm red colouring of the anteroom; he took up one and went softly to her door.

Her chamber was in darkness save for a little feeble lamp burning on the table beside the great, gloomy, heavily curtained bed; this poor flame lit the kneeling figure of Giovanna, who was bowed on the bed-step, her face hidden in her hands; the rest was a confusion of shadow. Francis advanced, holding up the candle.

"To whom are you praying?" he asked.

She looked up, startled; her green and black dress was lost in the darkness, the cross-lights threw into relief her pale face, her blonde hair beneath the heavy lace, the soft lustre of her pearls.

"I pray to God," she answered, trembling. "To whom else?"

"One of your idols, perhaps," he answered.

He set the candle on the black bureau where glittered the gilded crystal of her toilet trifles, and the long tortoiseshell-framed mirror behind him reflected his tall figure still in the dark-brown riding suit, his black disordered hair, his flushed and passionate face.

"Where is Mr. Forsythe?" asked Giovanna.

"Gone--to pass the night at the inn--and ride with the dawn to Edinburgh."

She was amazed and bewildered.

"And Elphin?--you sent him to bed?"

"Yea," said Francis, "the child is abed."

His fierce gaze dismayed her; her gallant spirit was utterly broken at this continued estrangement which he deepened with every word and action. She came towards him, holding out her hands in a gesture of appeal; before she could speak he caught her arm.

"My girl, my girl," he cried, "what is there between you and Allan Forsythe?"

Giovanna did not answer, but her eyes were unflinching.

"Why was he eager to come? Not to see Ardnamurchan—he cared nothing for the place, nothing for me; why did he leave so suddenly and you refuse to come down to-night? What passed between you?"

Still Giovanna did not answer; she could not lie to him, and was now resolved to tell him everything, but she was choosing her time and her words.

"And what is this?" demanded Francis, releasing her and putting his hand in his pocket, "you have no such jewel. Did Allan Forsythe give it you?"

He held out the magnificent emerald necklace from the Odaleschi casket; it fell over his hand like a cluster of green flames, every facet giving back the candlelight and the lamplight in streams of radiance.

"I found it in the withdrawing-room—where you had been with him, I think."

She realized that she must have left it there in her haste and the half-dark; she had been too agitated to glance again at the jewels since she had brought them to her chamber, and so had not missed the

necklace.

"I will tell you about that," she said. "I meant to tell you--but not now--when you are calmer. Oh, Francis, you frighten me--how can I tell you when you look at me like that?"

She leant against the bed-post, shuddering with terror and distaste at the scene to be faced.

"Tell me, tell me now while he is yet within my reach," demanded Francis. "That it should come to this! You have tricks, oh, you deceive me and cajole me--you knew he was coming, perhaps? It was for him you were dressed that night--you met in Edinburgh, I doubt not--you are bad and false! I knew it always in my heart," he added in a kind of triumphant agony--"in my heart I always knew it!"

At this she flashed from her gentle terrors into a spirit, a pride, and a force equal to his own. She was no coward, and he had neither cowed nor tamed the noble blood in her.

"You speak grossly," she said, "and shame me for your sake! You speak as one who thinks vile things easily--you say what you should spurn the thought of. By heavens, you should not suspect me on sworn proof, for I have been yours so utterly I have given up all the world beside!"

The nobility in him rose to answer this, but his jealousy still was unappeased.

"What are these?" he asked, and tossed the string of jewels on the bed.

"They, with others, are my mother's jewels."

"Your mother's?"

"Aye," she said, holding herself straightly. "She sent them to me with others by Mr. Middleton, who gave them to Mr. Forsythe to deliver."

"Prove that!" he cried, livid to the lips.

"Nay," said Giovanna. "I am not used to prove my word. If you doubt me, my proof will not convince you."

Despite himself he believed her.

"Show me the other jewels," he said fiercely.

She brought the casket, placed it on the bed, and gave him the key.

He saw the Odaleschi arms and coronet stamped on the leather, but she had forgotten how that confirmed what she said.

Francis unlocked the box and scattered the contents out over the coverlet.

All the beautiful shapes and colours, mingled with the links and settings of gold and silver, sparkled and glittered wonderfully on the red damask in the cross-lights of lamp and candle; to Francis they were typical of that past of Giovanna which he had always feared and dreaded would one day rise--as it had risen now.

"These are valuable," he said hoarsely.

"I have not examined them," she answered.

"Your mother's jewels?" he repeated. "Was there no letter?"

She took from her bosom Emilia's note, and gave it to him in silence. He read it swiftly, his face was ghastly, his limbs trembling; he tore

the letter across and flung it on the top of the jewels.

Giovanna gave a cry of distress.

"Oh, Francis, there was love there, love and kindness--things not to be so treated. May I not have her letter?"

"You shall have," he answered, "none of it."

"You will let me keep my mother's jewels?" she asked very low.

"Not one," he cried, "not one!"

Giovanna put her hand over her eyes.

"Remember I have nothing of the past," she said, "nothing at all. Not since I married you have I mentioned them or even Italy--she sent me these as a remembrance. May I not have one of them--to sometimes wear--to sometimes look at?"

"You shall neither wear nor keep," answered Francis; "these things contaminate."

Giovanna looked at him.

"Contaminate?" she repeated in an amazed tone; "they are my *mother's* jewels."

Francis returned her gaze sternly.

"You know what your mother was?"

"A lady of great breeding," said Giovanna; "do you speak of her like that because she is a Papist?"

"Ah, you know, you must know!" he exclaimed. "If you knew nothing then, now you must, when you look back, see plainly."

"I see that you have different rules here--especially for women," she replied. "Yes, I see how different all is here--yet I do not know what you mean nor how you can scorn my people, save only for their faith."

"Is it possible you do not understand what I took you from--what that life was? It was sin?"

"Was it?" said Giovanna; "BECAUSE it was gay and kind and easy, was it sin?"

"Do you not see that yet? Do you not realize the godlessness, the dishonour, the lusts you escaped from?--what kind of woman your mother was? All sin--*damned* sin."

"Was it?" repeated Giovanna, very pale; "it was pleasant though."

"You say that to me? After all these years?"

She was silent, leaning against the bed-post and looking down on the mingled fires of the jewels she had seen flash in the Odaleschi Palace at Bologna.

"Perhaps you regret that pleasant life?" asked Francis with trembling lips.

Again she was silent, but her sad face was a rebuke to his injustice.

"Perhaps," he added, "you would like to live as your mother lived?"

Giovanna lifted her head.

"If it had happened so," she answered, "why not? Yes, I should have

lived as other ladies of my country--but because of you I have lived as you have bidden me, and not regretted it, Frank, for an instant."

This maddened him.

"Then, if I had bidden you," he said, "you would have come with me anywhere, under any conditions, at my heels through Europe, outcast, dishonoured?"

"I would," she said, shuddering, "because I loved you. I think you always knew it."

He had always known it, but it did not make this moment any the less terrible.

"I did not come with you because I wanted your creed, your country, or your name," she added, in rising agitation, her hand holding her gown pressed against her heart, "but because I wanted you--did you not want me? Oh, I believed that--you wanted me as I was. If you hated me, why did you take me? Why not one of your own women who know your ways? Frank, I thought you loved me so much that you could forget the difference in us. I gave all my life to help you--but I have not made you happy, and now you are estranged and almost hate me, I think. This is cruel, Frank--better have rejected me from the first."

She stopped abruptly. Her breath was coming quickly, the colour flushing and fading in her face. She looked at him with an infinite pleading touched with terror.

He knew all she said was true; he knew that he had taken her because of an immense passion that he could not resist, that he had tried to justify this by forcing her into the appearance of the good woman and dutiful wife of his tradition; and he knew that his

punishment lay in his failure. After six years and more of discipline, of her obedience, of utter silence as to her past, a few jewels had pulled the whole elaborate structure of his pretence about his feet: she stood before him, as alien, as different, as much a Papist and a foreigner as when he had first seen her in the Odaleschi Palace; for all her deference, her sweet submission, he knew he had not in the least changed her. As she had said, she submitted because she loved him, submitted gladly, but it had been out of her power to become a Calvinistic Scotchwoman, a thrifty housekeeper, a woman of austere morality and deep piety; nay, as he looked at her now, the last of his frantic disguises of the truth was torn from him; she was the Contessa Odaleschi, an Italian, a Papist, daughter of a notorious woman, with luxury, idolatry, maybe wantonness in her blood--and neither he nor his God could ever change her.

He groaned and turned away, pacing about the shadowed room in the restlessness of mental agony.

"Take the jewels," said Giovanna gently; "it is not much for me to give up--"

"Nay," he cried, "because you have the memories in your heart and need not these toys!"

"Do you grudge me even memories?" she asked piteously.

He stopped before her.

"Yes, memories of the Palazzo Odaleschi!" he flung out, "a place wherein I would not have my wife even step!"

Giovanna shrank back.

"You ask me to judge my mother," she whispered. Her eyes were very bright, her hand crept from her bosom to her throat. "I do not

think you ever understood us--the life we had--what we were; we had ideas different from yours. I see that now!"

She was absolutely unconscious of it, but she was speaking as the aristocrat to the bourgeoisie. With every word she was increasing the distance between them, showing him more and more clearly what a stranger she really was--in everything; yet something that was hard and cruel in him, and was now roused to fury, urged him to test her, try her, put the matter of her unworthiness beyond a doubt.

"Tell me," he said, "would you have come with me if I had not married you?"

She answered with the truthfulness he had learnt to expect and dread.

"How did I know what you meant to do when I left Bologna to come to you? I never thought. I loved you."

"Then--our marriage," he stammered.

"Oh, that marriage," she said softly. "You know how little that meant to one of my faith--it was to please you--and now I am glad of it because of Elphin. But it was an incident--it did not make me love you more."

"I might have known," he said with intense bitterness.

He had known; only now, instead of being a vague, stifled horror in his own heart, it was dragged out into the light. She had avowed it, yea, she had avowed that she was light, wanton, unsafe--a woman like her mother, God help him!

He leant his elbow on the low black bureau and took his cheek in his hand; he had almost lost control of himself; he hardly knew what he

said or did.

"Perhaps you would leave me as easily as you came," he asked, "since you do not recognize any tie between us?"

She looked at him very gravely.

"I always meant to leave you as soon as you ceased to love me--I vowed that--"

"Ah! then there is neither honour nor duty would hold you in your place?"

"No," she said. "None where there is no love. But when I vowed that I--I had never thought of the child--*he* holds me."

"Aye, he holds you!" cried Francis. "Do not talk to me of him! You have made him like yourself--he seems to me an alien. I shall take him from you."

Her whole body sank, half sitting, half leaning against the bed.

"You try to hurt me," she said. "You speak cruelly and unjustly. What can I say? I trusted you never to let it come to this. I thought we were so sure of each other. When we were strangers we loved; now--when we have a child--we quarrel. I wish you could be gentle with me."

She paused and glanced at him, but he did not answer; she moistened her lips and continued.

"We cannot go on like this. I cannot live estranged with you," she began to sob. "O God, what has happened? Will you not love me and forgive me?"

She slipped from the bed-post to the floor and knelt, catching at the

skirts of his coat and looking up at him with reddened eyes. The lace fell back off her head, showing her blonde hair in the red candlelight, and the lapels clasped with the twinkling paste ornament under her chin.

Francis looked wildly down at her.

"Forgive you, girl?" he cried; "we were doomed to be the ruin of each other ere the world began."

He turned away gloomily, without offering to raise her, and she bent forward and rested her brow on the edge of the red damask chair by the bureau. Francis swept together the jewels and heaped them (among them the letter written in Rome with such a noble tenderness) in disorder into the casket, which he locked.

As he did so, the thought of Allan Forsythe forced itself on his tortured mind; he suddenly realized that there was some conspiracy against him, some gross insult intended. Harry Middleton had secretly offered his commission to Allan, who had found his way under false pretences to Glenillich to deliver these to his wife--Allan's broken betrothal flashed through Frank's mind--his sudden leaving to-night--surely there was some plot afoot.

Both Mr. Middleton and Allan were men whom he had always disliked; both had, he was sure, laughed at him, he knew they had discussed him--and Giovanna.

At that moment his feeling of hate against both almost choked him; he took up the casket and left the room without giving Giovanna another look.

He went to his own chamber, locked away the jewels, and drew his sword. His glance ran along the blade; he took out his handkerchief

and wiped off several little specks of rust. Mr. Middleton was not within his reach, but Allan--the pale, smiling hypocrite who had tricked him with the golden Aurelian and his pretended interest in Ardnamurchan--would be still in Glenillich.

He ordered his horse and rode round the curve of the dark lake to the village which lay grey beneath the white light of a bitter winter moon.

The architect was in the yellow-lit inn parlour, talking with the schoolmaster; the laird's entrance threw them both into confusion. His quick question brought hurried answers stammering to their lips.

Mr. Forsythe had gone, it must be two hours since he had taken his domestic and a guide; seeing the fine night and the bright moon, and, being in a mortal hurry to return to Edinburgh, he had decided not to wait till the dawn.

Francis leant against the homely sideboard filled with tobacco jars, pipes, and bottles, and stared down on to the sandy floor. The sight of these other men had restored him to some sanity; he realized now the impossible scandal it would have been to have forced a quarrel on Allan here, also the absurdity of attempting to pursue a man who had a two hours' start on a good horse.

He made some cold excuse about Mr. Forsythe having forgotten something. "But I will forward it to his lodgings in Edinburgh," he said, and left them abruptly.

"The laird is uncanny to-night," said the schoolmaster. "He is often so. He has a melancholy for no occasion--a dangerous humour."

"He lives too much retired," answered the architect. "He has a wife, sir, who would lighten any man's gloom. I thought her a lovely piece

both in face and spirit."

"She was never the wife for him," returned the schoolmaster. "A frivolous creature, always in pearlin' and smiling. She has brought no luck to Glenillich, and never will. A Papist born and bred, sir, and one now, to all who have eyes to notice. I doubt not she has her images secretly hidden at Glenillich for all she comes demure to the church."

The architect did not answer for a moment; he did not wish to discuss his patron thus openly, but a remembrance of Giovanna's eager courtesy stirred him. If she had been the master he was sure he would not have been sent to the inn to sleep; she was too highly born, he thought, to insist on distinction of rank.

"I liked the lady," he said, "and I am sorry for her. A painter named Delia Francesca once drew women such as she is. I have seen them in Italy. Think of one of them--in Scotland--going to the kirk, a *madonina* as they call them, like a crowned lily--" He laughed, seeing the other did not follow him. "Well, I am sorry," he repeated.

XV

Giovanna stayed well up into the night in the desperate hope that Francis would return and arrest, by some word or look or action, the final tragedy of their complete estrangement.

But he did not come; the reluctant winter dawn found his bed still unslept in, and her walking up and down the three rooms in a speechless misery.

She guessed that he had gone to find Allan, and believed that he had probably followed him to Edinburgh. But she had a strange kind of trust in Allan; she thought that he would avoid any encounter with Francis, that he would clearly explain how Mr. Middleton had given

him the jewels, and so quiet and pacify her husband.

Therefore she looked for his return later in the day--even supposing he had met Allan either in Glenillich or on the high road.

As for herself, she did not know what to do. Seated at her window staring with sleepless eyes at the lake, the hills, the pines being slowly revealed by the trembling frozen light of the dawn, she tried to think what to do.

Her instinct was to leave him.

As she had been impelled to come to him by a passion that overmastered all considerations, so now she felt as strongly impelled to leave him since she no longer pleased him, since he avoided her and used to her the language of hate, not love. To stay seemed to her degradation, for she had always known that love, not that heretical ceremony in Paris, justified their union; she could not, in her heart, regard herself as his wife before God, and if she stayed with him now, what would she be but his kept woman living on the charity he allowed her in memory of past passion?

"I may be damned for love," she thought. "I will not be damned for less--"

The fact that in order to leave him she must embark on almost impossible difficulties and hardships did not daunt her, but there were two considerations that held her back.

First, her loyalty; she had learnt that this country was different from her own and Francis different from her own men; she knew now that to leave him would be to cruelly wound his pride, and expose him raw to the scorn of his own dependents.

And the other reason, the more powerful reason by far, was Elphin.

To take him with her would be to deprive him of his inheritance and expose him to adventure and misfortune; yet to leave him was unthinkable. Francis was cold towards the child, he might in time hate him because of his mother, and the boy alone in Glenillich, without her, would very surely die.

If she went she would take him—he would love Italy and the sun—her powerful relations there could make up to him three times over what he would lose from Francis. But these thoughts were wild, she had no means of getting to Edinburgh, much less to Italy; even had she the money, she could not leave the country undetected, and he might have the power to cast her into jail, for all she knew.

Yet to remain, to live with him over the corpse of a dead love—her own great, passionate, and now heartbroken affection for him—was a torturing reflection.

She thought of death—but here, as always, Elphin complicated the issues for her; she must think out some way that did not hurt him.

She faced her awful problem fearlessly and with a noble courage; all the fine blood in her, the blood of her mother's family, the great dukes of her father's family—who had been Italian princes, who had been almost kings—rose to meet her need. She was quite calm; a little bewildered at the extent of her own misfortune, incredibly lonely, but neither frightened nor rebellious. She blamed no one, least of all him, and she had no regrets as to the extent of her recklessness; she did not repent of anything done for the sake of her love.

Presently she slept in her chair, but for a very little while; on waking, she disarranged the bed as if she had been in it, changed her gown, and redressed her hair.

At her usual hour she went downstairs; Francis had not returned.

She skilfully made light of it--she had her story ready: He had gone after Mr. Forsythe with some important documents that gentleman had left behind--this, though she did not know it, being the same excuse Francis had offered in the village.

Whether his self-contained servants believed her, she could not tell. She felt more than ever utterly an alien among them; yet the sight of the familiar faces, the sense of the household working as usual about her, restored her confidence in a life she had thought shattered. It now seemed as if he must come back, as if their quarrel *must* heal and fade into the past.

Elphin came to her room as usual that morning, followed by the red fox; whoever she deceived, she did not deceive him.

"You have been crying," he said; "and where is father?"

Giovanna laughed and caught him to her heart, but when she felt his warm face she bent hers and sobbed terribly.

"We must pray," she said through her tears, "yes, we must pray--things are sad now, my Giovannino, but only for a time."

She put him from her very tenderly, rose and unlocked the box where she kept the articles Father Hilton had given the boy, and brought out the crucifix and the rosary.

With locked doors and in hushed whispers, woman and child repeated the Latin prayers that she only partly--and he not at all--understood.

"Is it because of God you are sad?" asked Elphin, when they rose

from their knees.

Giovanna was silent; she went to her favourite seat in the window embrasure and took the child on her knee.

"Father is sad too," he insisted. "When will he come back?"

"Soon," said Giovanna, "and we must tell him about these--" she took up the rosary and the Latin prayer book--"we must tell him now."

The child's face clouded.

"I thought it was a secret--for us?"

"No, Giovanna, there must be no more secrets," she answered; she had indeed resolved, at all costs, to tell Francis what she had done.

"Then we need not hide these things?" asked Elphin.

"Nay," she said; "he may take them away--he has the right. But you must always pray in your heart to God and the Madonna, even if you have no beads."

Elphin reflected, stroking the fox which lay in the window-seat.

"What will God do?" he asked at length.

"God, my love, my dear?"

"Yes, if father takes these away and we are all unhappy--will God do something?"

She silenced him with kisses, told him a fairy tale that made him laugh, then set him to tie purple ribbons round the neck of the fox, who rolled over on the cushions like a dog, opening his mouth and

showing his sharp white teeth and long, fine, red tongue.

The morning had now nearly passed and still Francis did not come, nor any message from him. It occurred to Giovanna that perhaps he had gone to Ardnamurchan to ride off his anger and gloom, and she resolved to go and see if she could find him on the heaths and moors. The situation was becoming intolerable; twice the architect had sent up to ask if Mr. Moutray had returned, and the curiosity of the steward was becoming open, especially as the whole household now knew that Francis had not gone to Edinburgh, but that, on learning that Allan Forsythe had had two hours' start, had ridden away round the lake.

Giovanna put on her buff riding-habit with the black satin waistcoat and her great black hat and feathers; she put Elphin comfortably among the window-seat cushions for his midday sleep. "And if father comes before I return," she said, trying to keep her voice steady, "say that I have gone to Ardnamvirchan to look for him." She kissed the sleeping child and the sleeping fox and went downstairs.

While she was waiting for her horse she told Elphin's nurse to go to him, then mounted and rode away round the lake, the way her husband had taken last night.

When Elphin woke, an hour later, he was alone, the winter sunlight falling over his face; the nurse had visited him and slipped away again to gossip with the other servants over these unusual happenings in the monotonous household. Elphin, feeling hungry, imperiously called for her, but received no answer.

The fox woke and yawned, the child laughed and played with him awhile, then felt suddenly lonely, and cried; he wanted his dinner, the fire was almost out and the room desolate. He rose and ran to his mother's bedroom: not finding her, he was beginning again to cry

When he saw, on the little shelf of her desk where she always kept it, the little box containing the rosary, the prayer book, and the reliquary.

To-day it was not locked.

"It is no longer a secret," said Elphin. He took down the box and carried it to his bed in the window-seat. He knew that one prayed when in trouble; he took out the rosary and began stammering the prayers.

Then he grew tired of that, and fell to playing with the string of beads and twisting them round the neck of the fox, who snapped and bit at them, and so child and animal were rolling and laughing together on the cushions when the door opened sharply and Francis entered.

"Oh, I am *glad* you have come!" cried Elphin, scrambling up. "Mother has gone to Ardnamurchan to meet you--and where is my dinner, sir?--it is late."

"Gone to Ardnamurchan?" repeated Francis. He had been riding since he left Glenillich the night before--riding aimlessly and wildly in the endeavour to shake off the devils who pursued him; he too had been to Ardnamurchan and prayed in the ruined church; he was haggard, dishevelled, and still wore his riding clothes.

"Oh yes, she went a *long* time ago; I think she will be back soon!" cried Elphin eagerly. He sprang from the window-seat, upset the box, and sent the Papist prayer book and the crucifix flying to his father's feet.

Francis stood motionless, looking down at them.

"Are you ill, sir?" asked Elphin, beginning to tremble into tears.

Francis picked up the book and the crucifix.

"Nay," he said in a low voice; "whose are these?"

"Mine," answered the boy. "I was not to tell you, but now it does not matter. I have this too," he held out the rosary. "I may keep them, may I not?"

Francis swayed on his feet. "O God," he kept saying to himself--"O God."

"Mother said you might know now," insisted Elphin, still half-frightened.

Francis went to the window-seat and drew the boy to his knee; he looked stunned.

"Tell me," he said, "how it happened? Who gave you these things?"

"The priest," said Elphin.

"Ah--where did you see him?"

"In Edinburgh--Mr. Forsythe found him."

"Allan Forsythe?" Francis could not repress the wretched cry of agony.

"You do not like him, sir, do you?" asked Elphin anxiously; "but mother does. And he is good, he had the priest in his room--but it all had to be a secret; the priest was disguised, sir," continued the child with growing excitement, as he recounted the greatest adventure of his life. "He knew all about God, and so did Mr. Forsythe, but they both had to appear as heretics; they said mother was not a heretic, and they made me so that I was not a heretic either--"

"Stop," muttered Francis, but the word would not form in his dry throat, and Elphin continued, unheeding the interruption. His voice sounded to his father like a little bell tinkling in his ears, his words were a senseless jangle, for Francis was as a man who feels the solid earth giving way beneath his feet and the black walls of hell closing on him and the bitter flames rising to his lips; he thought that he must faint, but he fought against his weakness as a drowning man will fight off the waves, and his mind fixed on one thing: to find out from Elphin all he knew. He began questioning the child with a clearness and quietness that startled himself, with a desperate skill he drew from the baby lips confirmation of his most horrible surmises. Allan was a secret Papist, Giovanna secretly retained her own faith, they had had the child baptized, and she had been privately bringing him up a Papist; between her and Allan was an understanding; they were plotting against him...he believed they were lovers.

He gathered from the boy's reiteration that she had been several times to Allan's lodgings in Edinburgh, though in truth she had only taken him the once.

The disaster, the tragedy, was complete; this woman whom he had taken as his wife was worse even than his most horrified imaginings had depicted. Remembering her smiles, her loveliness, in the light of what he now knew of her, he saw her as a born wanton, soulless, treacherous, true to the bad blood in her and to her foul idols--a woman who had come into his life for his ruin--his damnation. He, poor fool, had thought to build a church to appease God, who was preparing the while this incomparable punishment for him!

He turned to the boy and put him from him.

"You too," he said, "you little, little child!"

"May I keep these?" asked the boy with his hand on his treasures.

Francis took them from his baby fingers; they looked the same as those he had cast down the ravine among the wild cherry trees--the symbols she had surrendered to him when she first came to him.

"I will speak to you presently," he said; he rose and staggered, but steadied himself against the wall. "Now I must find your mother."

He left the room; Elphin's nurse, hastening back to her post, passed him on the stairs.

"See to the child," he said; "keep him close."

He turned into the dining-room where the dinner waited on the long black table; he drank of the wine, but did not look at the food, though he had not eaten since yesterday evening, and it was now well into the afternoon.

"She will soon return," he said aloud--"she will soon return."

He began walking up and down the large gloomy room; he found himself counting the boards on the floor, the diamond panes in the window, the beams on the ceiling.

Presently he saw her handkerchief lying on the leathern seat of one of the chairs; he picked it up and began tearing it into shreds with his fingers, then set his teeth in the lace and tore it to a mass of threads which he cast down and set his heel on.

"*God* will judge her," he said with sudden triumph, "*God* will punish her."

The sun began to sink in the pale winter heavens, and the clear light of it lay in the lake and slipped through the straight stems of the

pinetrees.

Francis went into the hall, his riding-gloves and his riding-whip were where he had left them; he picked them up; the whip, a massive thing, ringed and ringed with silver, was almost too heavy for his nerveless hand.

"Bring me a fresh horse and a lighter whip," said Francis.

In a few moments the horse was ready, but the whip that was brought him he looked at with horror—it was one that he had once given to Giovanna.

"This is a lady's switch," he said, and threw it down; then he mounted and rode away again round the lake.

It was two hours later, in the dusk, when he returned.

The steward was waiting in the hall.

"I have not found Mrs. Moutray," said Francis; "as it grows dark, I think there should be some search—take two of the men with lanterns—I will go in another direction."

"She went towards Ardnamurchan, sir."

"I have not been so far," replied Francis; it was obvious he had not, since it was a five hours' ride.

"Would Mrs. Moutray have gone so far alone?" asked the steward in an uneasy tone.

"Who can tell?" replied Francis. He went with a swaying step into the dining-room, took out his watch and set it by the tall clock in the corner; then, after glancing towards the door to see that no one was

peering in at him, he took something quickly from his pocket and cast it on the fire.

He watched the flames devour this object, then left the room again.

The moon was brightening in a darkening sky when the lanterns were seen gleaming from the stables; the air was crisp and cold as if snow was not far off, the lake rippled in an icy breeze as the four started silently on their search.

XVI

About the same time that Francis returned Glenillich for the second time, Alys the old poultry wife left her lonely cottage and walked to the waste lands of Ardnamurchan.

It was largely these lonely excursions which had gained for her her evil reputation. She was supposed to gather herbs and recite incantations under the ghostly light of a malignant moon, but in truth her errand was as humble and harmless as herself. She went to gather bracken for her couch, to cut turf or gather wood for her fire, to search for whortle or elder-berries, and to collect acorns for her neighbours' pigs, and she chose lonely spots and late hours that she might be free from the observation which always meant unkindness if not persecution.

This afternoon she passed no one save the shepherd of the farmer, on the corner of whose land she dwelt, and he hastily turned his flocks aside at sight of her and passed silently away over the heath.

The poultry-wife gathered her bracken and tied it in bundles on her back, then hastened on towards the ruined church near which grew the elder trees.

It was a place few would have visited at that hour, but the poultry-wife had always been fearless.

The pale cold day was fading into a fair evening; stars like chips of crystal began to appear in the vast sweep of sky which was pellucid and light as water in a glass, heath and hill lay sharply outlined and flushed with red of bracken, of bramble, with purple of berry, with gold and brown of bare-limbed tree.

The yews about the church looked almost black, the building itself seemed to have lately sunk, to be more than usually grotesquely leaning into the earth as if seeking its own grave, and beyond; the four ruined walls of the mansion rose among the larches that were shaken in the night breeze and seemed symbolic of bitter desolation.

The solitude was complete; one wandering alone on the remote moor could hardly have felt more desolate than here in this loneliness haunted by miserable memories and marked by these forlorn ruins.

The old woman passed round the little incline on which the mansion was built to gain the greater hill where stood the church; she walked cautiously, for the tufts of deer grass were treacherous, and immediately beneath her was the black pool reputed to be unfathomable.

As she glanced down at this, remarking how it had spread with the late rains, she saw what seemed a heap of light-coloured clothes lying at the edge of the water.

The poultry-woman paused, amazed and a little frightened; then she carefully climbed down the bank, and skirted the pond which was still and black as a piece of ebony, for it was stagnant and reflected no light.

Old Alys came cautiously through the soft mud, the duckweed, the sorrel, the reeds, that edged the water; her bare feet sank into the ground to the ankles, and the thorny brambles tore at her short skirts.

She saw now that the heap of garments were the huddled coats of a woman who lay face downwards in the mud, her brow touching the water, and her left arm outstretched, the one nearer to Alys was turned in under her breast.

The poultry-woman recognized the buff riding-habit embroidered with silver, the long slender figure.

"Eh, eh, it is the laird's wife," she said--"it is Jean Moutray!"

She crept close and bent over the figure which lay sunk into the ooze and filth of the dead water; the face was turned sideways, the long blonde hair was clogged and soiled with dirt. Alys thought she looked on death, but when she timidly touched the sunk shoulder, the prone woman spoke:

"Please lift me up. I cannot see--I am hurt--please help me."

The poultry-wife dragged at the inert figure; she raised the light weight easily and set the woman with her back against the old stump of willow.

It was the laird's wife, but so changed, so disfigured, so terrible, that even the hardy peasant began to tremble with a terror which urged her to flee.

Giovanna's gown, her waistcoat, her laces, were stained and defaced with clay and duckweed and the foul water of the pond, while her neckcloth, her ruffles, and her hair were caked and defiled with blood; her eyes were closed; blood weighed the lids and trickled down her face which was distorted, swollen, bruised--not a vestige of

her former loveliness remained; she was as marred as a trampled lily, even her fair throat was swollen and marked with purple stains.

Yet as she sat there, blind, helpless, wounded to the death, the spirit within her seemed to dominate her body more strongly than it had ever done; her voice, though hoarse and feeble, was steady and controlled.

"Who are you, please?" she asked. "Can you take me to Glenillich--or take some message?"

"Alas, I am nothing but old Alys, the poultry-wife, and we are miles and miles from Glenillich, and I have no one to send--oh, what has chanced to your honour?"

Giovanna's left hand felt for and caught Alys's arm.

"I was thrown," she answered; she spoke like one whose mind works very clearly. "I broke my arm. My head is hurt and my eyes."

"You were thrown from your horse, my lady?"

"Yes, I was never a good rider. I fell here--from the ruins--"

"But there are no stones here to give your honour these terrible hurts."

"I dragged myself to the water--I wanted to drink; could you get me a drink?"

"There is a clear stream nearer the church--"

"Help me up--take the linen from my wrists and tie up my head. I must not die till I have seen some one from Glenillich."

The poultry-woman tore away the linen ruffles from Giovanna's shirt and bound them as well as she was able round the hideous wound among the clotted locks; she shuddered at her task; it seemed to her that the delicate head had been beaten in almost to the brain.

She then helped Giovanna to her feet and guided her up the slope towards the church. She knew something of pain, and she marvelled how this fragile woman could endure that wound, that broken arm, that bruised face; but the frivolous laird's lady bore herself valiantly, beads of agony stood out on her blood-stained forehead, but she uttered not a word of complaint.

"I must see some one from Glenillich," she said with that unnaturally steady voice. "I have lived for that...all these hours...Please go. I shall live till your return--I *will* live."

The poultry-woman put the bundle of bracken under her head, then tore off a strip of her petticoat and dipped it in the stream that ran at the bottom of the hill.

She could only squeeze drops from this on to Giovanna's lips for she had no cup; but she bathed some of the blood and dirt from the lady's face, so revealing that her cheek was cut open, almost to the bone. For the first time in her hard life the poultry-woman began to cry, rocking herself to and fro and pressing together her rough hands.

With difficulty Giovanna raised her swollen lids.

"You must not let me grieve you," her livid lips smiled with their old graciousness. "Why, I did not mind at all--an accident," the warm blood began to flow again from the gash in her cheek and dripped on to her lap. "This is ugly," smiled Giovanna, "but it is no matter. Go to Glenillich and fetch some one--"

"Why, 'twill be dawn before I return," sobbed Alys, "and you alone here with the foxes and the eagles and the dead--and in torture--"

"I shall not die till some one comes," returned Giovanna, closing her eyes, from which the pain she suffered forced the slow tears. "I have lived so long--ah, go for charity."

"*God* keep you," said the poultry-woman fervently, "and hold up your heart. I'll go and return as quick as maybe."

She turned away, hurrying through the bracken that now caught the flames of the sun that just peered over the edge of the earth.

"God keep me," muttered Giovanna. "He damned me, did He not? Shall I go to hell to-night?" She raised herself on her right elbow, and her tortured eyes peered at the wide prospect of rolling country that spread beneath the church.

Her disfigured lips muttered some sentences in her own tongue: "Ti prego--aspetta--sono onesta io! T'amo--per sempre, caro mio bene, per sempre--"

She fell over again on the bundle of bracken and lay quite still, waiting, as she had lain still, waiting, beside the black water.

So--as some wretched criminal tortured on the rack or the wheel, exposed with broken limbs to die in the cold night air, suffers all alone his agony, babbling to the stars--so suffered she.

She watched the sunlight fade and the moon brighten, she felt the wind on her face and heard it in the yew boughs behind her--twice she swooned, twice she fell into a delirium almost as merciful--each time the waiting soul within her forced her back to consciousness. Ancestors of hers had died in many ways and always bravely; none

had faced more torture than she now endured with greater fortitude; none had shown more courage than she showed in this lonely vigil, facing an ignoble death and hell--yes, hell; had she not forsaken her God, and why should He pity her?

And there was no priest to shrive her, to confess her, to give her the sacraments--she would go with her sins on her, unrepentant--she thought of that.

But she had neither fears nor regrets; what she had done she would do again, even now, when she had learned the price.

At last, the lanterns came swinging up the hill--she thought them fallen stars at first; she had not waited very long, not more than two hours, for the poultry-woman had met a search-party close and they had ridden fiercely, but to her it had been two cycles of recurring pain and agony--the anguish of her shattered body and the anguish of her waiting soul.

The poultry-woman was behind one of the riders. As she pointed out the spot, they all dismounted; as the lantern beams fell on Giovanna, they all uncovered. At first she could not speak; her eyes moved restlessly, looking for Francis.

"I knew I should live," she said at last. The foremost man was the architect; he turned faint and sick when he saw her, and the steward pushed him aside.

"Mr. Doughty," she called the steward. He went on his knees and bent over her; she could say no more. He had his brandy flask ready, and forced the spirit down her throat and dashed it over her brows. She gasped and choked, then struggled up.

The light had not yet entirely gone; a dull line of red still ringed the

horizon, the sunken church and the black j trees still showed clearly. Giovanna looked round the vast sweep of this alien world, then pressed her cold hand on to the damp ground, and spoke.

"I came too far. I was thrown. I was always a poor rider--you remember? It was an accident--the horse ran away with me. Where is Francis?"

"He is not here," said the steward, holding her up, "but we will take you to Glenillich, my lady."

"Do not move me," she whispered. "I cannot bear it--I am hurt."

The steward turned fiercely to one of the men.

"Mount and ride for your life to find the laird!"

"The child," muttered Giovanna. "Mr. Doughty--have an eye--to the child--oh!"

She was quiet awhile; the architect came and knelt the other side of her; with a tremendous effort she spoke again:

"I can't--live--till he comes--I waited--tell him I waited--as long as I could--say--an accident--you know--"

Mr. Doughty bent low over her.

"Is there anything you wanted to say?"

She feebly shook her head.

"No--only--it was an accident." Even at this moment her unconquerable gallant gaiety of spirit asserted itself. "This is a poor way to die--is it not? Forgive me--the trouble--do not let Elphin see

me--I am hideous. Hold me up. Give him my duty."

Again she was silent, fighting the encroaching pain; then she said, in a little whisper between her lips:

"Reward the poultry-woman--please. He--should marry again--for the child's sake--too. Do not let him be--melancholy. I do not mind dying."

They held her up between them; her eyes closed and her mind seemed to break.

"Sono onesta--sono tua donna. Dio ti manda perdono--per me fa niente, la morta,--ma per te,--T'amo."

Again she struggled back to her senses.

"What did I say? The accident--" she looked from one man to another. "Please take my hand--I am going now." The architect's fingers grasped her poor left hand. "Do you think God is merciful, Mr. Doughty? Thank you--for your are. Thank you all. Is he coming? Do you see him? Too late. Hold my hand tight. A good-night--"

She gave a short sigh and turned over in their arms.

"She has fainted," whispered the architect.

"She is dead," said Mr. Doughty.

They laid her out on the grass and, as the lantern light revealed her fully, the architect broke into a kind of passion-like anger.

"Look how she is hurt--broken--her arm--her face--her sweet face--"

They raised her head on to the bracken pillow, the bandage slipped from her hair. At the sight of her wound the men stared at each other

with the great tears in their eyes.

"She suffered--Christ--she suffered!" sobbed the architect.

"By what miracle did she live?" whispered the other.

The poultry-wife came stumbling out of the gloom.

"Eh, sirs, she wanted to live, she had something to say, she would live until she had said it--"

"What did she say?" asked the steward.

"Nothing," answered the others--"nothing."

They all stood awkwardly, averting their gaze from what lay before them. They spoke to each other in broken sentences, aimlessly, as if to distract or deceive themselves.

"There is no surgeon--how to fetch a surgeon?"

"The horse--did anyone find the horse?"

"They got him on the moors--still half-mad with fright."

"He has never bolted before--she was a poor rider."

"Where did she fail? Oh, this is a dreadful, dreadful thing."

"Those hideous stones--the ruins."

So they spoke in a hushed way among themselves, pacing about the cold slope of the hill, as if they expected to see Giovanna come towards them with her buoyant step and dispel the thick horror that had settled on them.

They could not yet realize that the disfigured corpse that lay beneath the churchyard wall was the gay, the brilliant, the lovely Giovanna.

All of them recalled her kindnesses, her gentlenesses, her smiles--the very stable-boys with the lanterns had memories of her graciousness; all of them were sorry now that they had so exactly obeyed their feared master as to have but little time or chance to please their mistress.

The last red ring of light had completely gone and the remote hills and heaths were merged into the deep blue darkness of the sky when, into the distracted group, came two horsemen--Francis and the man who had gone to search for him.

The architect hung back weakly against the wall.

"Who is to tell him?" he whispered.

The steward came forward and caught his master's bridle.

"Wait, sir--there is something here--you must not see for a moment."

Francis dismounted, and took the lantern from the trembling boy who stood near him.

"It is she?" he said. "You have found her?"

The architect stumbled in front of him, fearing for his reason if he suddenly turned the lantern rays upon her.

"Put down the light, for God's sake, sir."

The poultry-wife rose, whimpering, from her knees, and Francis paused and looked at her.

"The witch woman here!" he said with great bitterness; "it is a fitting place for her."

He put them all aside and went straight to where she lay, and, holding the light steadily, looked down on what had been so lovely and now was so terrible.

Defiled, disfigured, broken, her torn garments stained with filth and blood, her face wounded and bruised beyond recognition, she lay at his feet with a curious look of patience in the straight lines of her figure and the way her head was turned on to her arm.

At his feet. It was not many years since he had been at her feet under an Italian moon--she alive, warm, lovely; he on fire with love--and this was the end of her laughter and her pleasant ways, her tenderness and her courage; she, who had so loved ease and beauty, had died like this--hideously.

What memories stirred Francis, what emotions he knew, none of those fearfully watching him could guess; his sombre face had a locked look; the hand that held the lantern was so steady that even the lace at his wrist did not shake.

At last he turned away.

"Take her up--take her home," he said. He added with an awful smile, "I said God would judge her. He has done so."

XVII

The next day the snow came, shutting Glenillich off from the outer world. It seemed a fitting accompaniment to the tragedy of Ardnamurchan this freezing cold that swept the land--this steady snow that enfolded all the horror, the wonder, the talk, the whispered

gossip, the hinted scandal--that beat on the great dull house where Giovanna lay in her coffin, and rested inches deep in Glenillich churchyard where the Moutray vault was being opened to receive the alien who would never leave her exile now.

The snow fell for three days; on that before the funeral the storm still continued. Francis remained closed in his library; the steward managed everything. Only in two matters had his master interfered: he had forbidden the horse who had killed his wife to be shot, and he had ordered all Giovanna's belongings to be packed away at once and sent to the cellars, so that not one vestige of her presence remained in the house.

It was easily done. The dead lady had left no great traces in her husband's house; she had altered very little. Like a flower without a root, broken and flung away, seemed Giovanna; the household that had never known her ordering ran the same now she was gone. It was but a day's work to pack away her clothes (not so many, after all), her few trinkets, her embroidery frames, to take down the hangings, remove the furniture, covers, and carpets from two rooms, and put back those used by Francis' mother, and all that remained were a few corded hair-trunks, thrust into the darkest part of a disused cellar.

Glenillich was as it had been when Francis brought her there, save for her body lying on the great bed where many had lain in death (but none so fair or so unfortunate), and for one thing of hers not so easily cast away--the frightened child who scented tragedy, and sobbed day and night for his mother and for the fox who had fled from the gloomy house and disappeared in the snow.

The servants did their master's bidding without comment; they were all tinged with his humour and wholly under his influence. Something sweet and pleasant had left Glenillich with Giovanna, and every one

was the worse for this, harder and more sour.

The nurse cried a little for Giovanna, and tried to deceive Elphin with tales of his mother having gone to Edinburgh; but the others shed no tears. Some were sorry in their hearts, remembering her gentleness, while others thought her violent death but a true judgment on the foreigner, the intruder, who had clearly bewitched the laird with her wanton, frivolous ways. After the first shock of genuine horror the village, led by the pastor, took the same view; she who had met so little tolerance in life was not dealt gently with after her death.

It was matter of common gossip that the laird had been lately displeased with her; some even whispered that she was a bad woman, and that he had known it, and this was a release for him.

"Who was she?" they asked--"a foreigner, near a heathen, who could not look after her own house--a light creature with a heart full of vanity."

Such was the verdict of Glenillich on the Contessa Giovanna Maria Odaleschi, one of the loveliest and most brilliant of the princely race who had given all with a smile for love, and been thus rewarded.

There was one man in the village who took this view of the tragedy, and that was Mr. Maitland, the architect.

He had lived through these few days as through a terrible nightmare. The memory of the dying woman on the hillside, bearing her great agony with a smile, tortured him; the way her husband had looked at her, the words he had said, the dull, cold comments of the village, the sight of the huge, gloomy house, and the thought of the child within became unbearable to him.

Twice he had been turned from Francis' door, and he would have

returned to Edinburgh if the weather had been possible, but travelling was out of the question, and he must remain where he was--oppressed, horrified, sickened, by this dismal event which terribly stirred his imagination. Before the snow set in he had sent an express to Allan Forsythe with the news, and he half-hoped Allan would have come, but that was now as impossible as his own departure; it was doubtful even if the express had got through to Edinburgh.

It was the day before the funeral that he met the steward in the village street.

Mr. Maitland asked if Francis still kept his room.

"He sleeps in the library, sir, and sees no one," replied the man; his manner was dry enough, he had soon recovered from the emotion he had shown when Giovanna died in his arms.

The architect drew him into a doorway out of the whirl of snow; the wind blew the skirts of their greatcoats about them and cast the flakes in their faces.

"The child?" asked Mr. Maitland.

"The laird has not seen him yet--but he ordered him to be shown his mother to-morrow before they take her away."

"Has no one given--her message?" stammered the other, shocked.

Mr. Doughty looked sullen.

"Who is to face the laird? He will not hear her name. It would cost a man his place to mention--any message Besides, she said nothing--nothing at all."

"What she did say he should hear," replied Mr. Maitland sternly. "Is there never a coward among you will tell him?"

"There is no one would mention my lady to the laird. Why, he has had every rag she wore, every gawd she used, taken away, and that while she still lies in the house. I jalouse she was no good woman, and that it was the judgment of God came on her--as Mr. Moutray said himself, sir."

"The more eternal shame to him," replied the architect. "You should have the surgeon to your master," he added.

"There is none here save the barber--"

"And he, like the rest of you, under my lord's thumb!"

"There is no occasion to distress yourself on my lady's account," returned the steward sharply; "she brought no luck to Glenillich with her new-fangled ways and her vanities. She was but a foreign body, and many will tell you that she was not the laird's wife at all, but just his wench, and that was why the matter lay so on his conscience. The Almighty pity her, and let it go at that, sir."

He turned off into the storm, a cross-grained man with a frowning face.

"You will see me at Glenillich!" the architect called after him, and then hastened to the inn where he gathered up all his drawings, plans, notes, and maps relating to Fort Mary, and, placing them securely inside his greatcoat, had out his horse and rode up to the mansion.

As before he was instantly refused admission, but this time he was not to be so easily repulsed.

"I must see your master," he said, peering past the servant into the

great gloomy hall; "tell him so. Say I have a message."

"That will not cause him to alter his mind, sir," replied the servant.

"Tell him, then," said Mr. Maitland, "that I have a message from the dead."

The man looked at him queerly and then turned away; the architect entered and stood waiting by the fireside amid the deep shadows.

He had spoken on impulse when he had said to the steward. "You should fetch a surgeon to your master," but the idea that Mr. Moutray's mind had failed him or become clouded now became stronger; it was a horrible supposition, but less horrible than the remembrance of a sane man uttering the words Francis had uttered and the spectacle of a sane man behaving as he was behaving.

"Always gloomy, given to religious melancholy, down with the fever in Italy," thought Mr. Maitland; "yes, it is likely enough the shock turned his brain."

Complete silence filled the house. Mr. Maitland could not keep himself from wondering in which room Giovanna lay--and then his mind reverted unpleasantly to that hasty folding away of the bright clothes she had loved and the few trinkets she had cared for, and that hurried consignment of the corded hair-trunks to the cellars.

The minutes passed and the servant did not return; Mr. Maitland hesitated, but only for a while. "I am the one stranger in Glenillich," he said to himself, "all the rest are his creatures--she was a foreigner and there is none to speak for her--and there is the child."

He went up and knocked at the door of the library where he had had his stately interviews with Francis; at the sound of this knock, which echoed in the silence of the stairway, the servant came running along

the corridor.

"Sir, you must not go in," he said anxiously. "Mr. Moutray will see no one, as I was coming to tell you."

Mr. Maitland was always considered a man of an insignificant appearance and placid disposition, he turned now, however, to the servant with a force and dignity that silenced him.

"It is needful that I should see your master," he said, and entered the library.

He was prepared to see Francis in some wild attitude of despair, violently pacing the room or prone upon a couch; what he did see startled and horrified him far more utterly.

Francis was seated in a low chair drawn up by the hearth on which a huge wood fire blazed; before him, on a small table, stood a chessboard set with pieces, and he was playing a game with himself, moving black against white with exact and cautious fingers.

He was neatly dressed in grey, gallooned with gold--about no part of his attire was there any indication of mourning--he wore large spectacles with silver rims which flashed back the firelight and gave him the appearance of blankly staring with gleaming glass eyes.

The architect, a short, commonplace figure, plainly dressed, but ennobled by the expression of a resolute purpose in his homely face, closed the door and advanced into the lofty room, where the heavy furniture was half-concealed by the advancing shadows of the winter afternoon, and only the solitary chess-player showed clearly in the red glow of the flames.

"He is out of his mind," thought Mr. Maitland.

Francis had looked up and fixed him with the glittering spectacles, then turned again to his play, but he said, in a perfectly controlled and normal voice:

"Good-evening, Mr. Maitland. I thought I had said I could see no one."

"You must forgive me," said the architect, "it was necessary for me to see you."

Francis played the black king, then moved the table and board aside, pointed to a chair, and, leaning back, waited.

Mr. Maitland found this reception more intolerable than any show of violence; his errand became suddenly almost impossible. He did not know how to begin, what to say, nor how to act; but the memory of the woman lying upstairs, the child hidden in some part of this gloomy house, kept him to his task.

"I have a message for you, Mr. Moutray," he began. "I believe that your steward did not give it to you, therefore I must."

"A message?" repeated Francis softly. He had leant back into the shadows, his handsome face was pale but composed, and the spectacles, no longer caught by the light and of some slightly opaque material, gave him a sightless look.

"Yes," said the architect with less humility and respect than he had yet used to his patron; he waited a moment and then added, "I was with Mrs. Moutray at the last."

"I know," said Francis, never moving.

"And what she said--with her last strength, sir--I believe you have never heard."

"No," replied the Laird of Glenillich, "and I do not wish to--nor to hear her name mentioned."

Mr. Maitland flushed deeply.

"Yom' conduct is inhuman, abominable," he exclaimed. "I can only hope, sir, that this tragedy has turned your brain."

"What right have you," said Francis, "to interfere in my affairs?"

"The right of the only man here who is not your servant or your tenant, Mr. Moutray--the right of a man who has a wife and children himself and who owns some common humanity."

Francis turned his head sharply, and seemed to be gazing at the man whom he had hitherto regarded as completely his inferior.

Mr. Maitland looked at him straightly.

"Your wife," he said, standing by the chair which Francis had mutely offered him, "suffered great pains and agonies while she lay on that hillside, sir, and only the great quality of her spirit kept her alive until we found her--she had something to say."

"What?" demanded Francis. "The men told me that she said nothing save to speak of the accident."

"She spoke of her love and duty to you, her affection for her child. She asked that the old poultry-woman might be rewarded. She asked that the child might not see her. These requests, sir, are very sacred. She had, all through her torment, words of courage and kindness and gaiety."

Francis did not speak.

"She spoke also some words in her own language which I did not rightly understand, but I took them to mean she protested she had never harmed you."

"If so," said Francis, rising, "she lied."

Mr. Middleton, still doubtful if he had to deal with a man wholly sane, could not command an answer. The two stood regarding each other, and in the silence the sound of the rush of the flames up the chimney seemed a great thing.

After a second or two the architect took the roll of drawings and papers from the breast of his snowy greatcoat and laid them on the chair beside him.

"These are useless to me," he said. "You may give them to the man who builds Fort Mary church. I'll do no more work there."

"There is no need," replied Francis. "God has been appeased in other ways. He has accepted another sacrifice; I am under His wrath no longer. Once I was bound, now I am free; once I was mad, now I am sane. Nay, there is no need for a church at Ardnamurchan. But I will repair the old one--you will do that, Mr. Maitland?"

The architect was not rich and this promised work had been a great thing to him, but he did not hesitate in the least in his answer.

"I'll do nothing more for you at all, sir. I return to Edinburgh as soon as the roads are possible."

"What is this?" asked Francis angrily. "What notion have you got in your head?"

"I've the notion that you are crazed or cruel, Mr. Moutray."

"I tell you, man, I am sane for the first time for nearly seven years!" cried Francis. "Sane and in grace."

"Because she is dead?" asked the other bluntly.

"Yes," replied Francis with great force and clearness. "I will not spare myself. I will take the shame that is my punishment for my long and wicked folly--hear this and tell it to all men--my wife was a wicked woman."

"I believe you are mistaken, sir!" cried Mr. Maitland impulsively.

Francis smiled terribly.

"Nay," he replied. "She was a secret Papist and she had a lover. They baptized my child with Popish ritual, and turned him from me." He took a sharp turn about the hearth and added in an exalted tone, "She was wanton, false, treacherous--she blinded me, deceived me, and lured me on to damnation, but God set me free. He struck her down and cast her to that place where she can do no harm!"

Mr. Maitland was bitterly distressed. He had no means of casting doubt on any of Mr. Moutray's statements, nor could he any longer reasonably suspect the sanity of one who expressed himself so quietly and forcefully; yet the memory of Giovanna's gentleness and loveliness still moved the architect to be her advocate.

"I pray you may be mistaken," he answered; "but if she were a Papist, remember it was her childhood's faith, and though I believe it a false belief, still there is such a thing as bigotry, and you should judge the dead lightly."

"Dead?" repeated Francis, "dead and damned. And *he* will follow. She will not be long without her lover."

By a horrid intuition Mr. Maitland knew that he referred to Allan Forsythe; he wanted to hear no more of that matter.

"You have the child to think of," he said. "You will need all your charity and tenderness there."

"Sir," replied Francis with sudden fierceness, "I have strained my courtesy far already. On this matter I will have no interference."

"You have neither relations nor friends here," replied the architect stoutly, "and it is needful that you, enduring so grievous a blow, should have one to argue with you, sir, lest you do some ill-considered thing. You have given me poor satisfaction that my message will be respected. Show a little softness, sir, for the sake of the child," he added eagerly.

"She was an adulteress," said Francis, and Mr. Maitland winced before the word.

"Before God I do not think so!" he cried impulsively, "and if she were, it is an awful thing to foul your own dead."

"Not mine--never mine," replied Mr. Moutray. "An alien, a Papist, a born wanton--she deceived me--but now I am free."

He stopped short before Mr. Maitland who could now clearly discern every detail of his person. He bore no signs of disorder nor neglect; he was shaved to the blood, his hair carefully rolled and tied, his linen and his ruffles spotless, but to his whole appearance a grotesque look was given by the monstrous spectacles of misty glass with their shining silver rims.

"Why do you wear those spectacles?" asked Mr. Maitland, stepping back a little.

"My eyes are weak lately," replied Francis quietly; "I went out in the snow this morning and the dazzle hurt them. These glasses were my father's--I found them in my desk."

This exact explanation did not relieve Mr. Maitland of the sense of horror with which the other man inspired him.

"Take them off, sir," he said hastily, "they are unnatural--at such a moment."

Francis removed the horn supports from his ears, took off the spectacles, and looked at the architect.

Mr. Maitland moved hastily away and could not repress an exclamation.

Francis' eyes had changed and this change had altered his whole face: the whole of the orb was flushed with blood, turning the brown irises to deep red, but more than this the expression had altered to a wildness, an unnatural fire, an intensity and fierceness of gaze that was utterly at variance with his composed demeanour and utterly unlike any look Mr. Maitland had ever seen in a human face.

"I had better keep them on, had I not?" he said with a smile, and replaced the spectacles.

"Oh, sir," cried the architect in confusion, "can I not stay at Glenillich--I might be of service to you?"

And all the while he was thinking to himself, "I was right--I was right, those are not the eyes of a sane man--I wish there was some one here with him." Aloud he added, "Have you no friend or relation who should be here, sir?"

"None," replied Francis with the same exactitude that he had used

about the spectacles. "My mother's people are in Dumfriesshire, and none of my father's remain, save Mrs. Wigram and her daughter--and this weather, as you said, shuts one in; who could reach us now?"

"Perhaps I might stay here the night," said Mr. Maitland, who had a dread of leaving this man alone, "it is an evil evening to travel even as far as the village."

"I will send one of my men with you," said Francis; "here there is no accommodation, sir."

Mr. Maitland suddenly fired.

"You think I am afraid of you perhaps," he said, "because you were my patron--aye, I know you thought me not good enough to sit at your table, but in moments like this it is one man to another, and I tell you to your face I know you are a fanatic and I think you are a villain. I wonder how you treated that woman you are now defaming?--aye, defaming, for I'll swear she was honest as she was sweet and gay; and either you are mad, as I think you may be, or you are a villain, and in neither case are you fit to be left here. Aye," added Mr. Maitland, red in the face, "I never liked you, and now I know why."

"What are you afraid of?" asked Francis calmly.

"Of what you may do--with the child," replied the other boldly.

"Come with me," said Francis.

He left the room, and Mr. Maitland followed him.

XVIII

Francis conducted Mr. Maitland to an upper chamber--a sombre

apartment furnished in ancient style and with a cold taste. It looked as if it had never been lived in, so orderly was it in arrangement, so devoid of any article of personal use or any adornment or evidence of intimate interest; yet only a week ago this dreary room had been the gayest in the house, and Giovanna had sat in the window-seat reading Ariosto, with the pet fox asleep on the hem of her skirt.

Francis rang the bell and called for candles, and ordered Elphin to be brought to him.

"What are you going to do?" demanded Mr. Maitland.

"I will show you that I am not neglectful of the boy's soul," answered Francis--"yea, even if they set his feet on the road to destruction, I will save him."

The candles were brought, and soon after came the child walking, white and tearless, by his nurse. At sight of his father he hung back; he had not seen him since Giovanna rode away for the last time.

Francis called the boy to him.

"Come here, Elphin," he said; "I am all you have now, and you must obey me."

"Where is mother?" asked the child breathlessly; "why have I been shut up? Where is Rinaldo? What is the matter with your eyes?"

Francis took the glasses off and put them in his pocket.

"I do not like the light," he said. "Come nearer. They made you a Papist, did they not? That is damnation. But I will save you. You shall not sin as I sinned, nor pay as I paid. You little, little child, I have been very near the edge of the Pit and so have you, but I will drag you back."

"You have different eyes," said Elphin. "Where is mother? Everything is changed."

Mr. Maitland and the whimpering nurse moved instinctively towards him, but Francis caught him up and hastened to an inner door which stood ajar.

They followed; with a shock that sent the blood back on his heart, the architect saw that it was the death-chamber.

The dark-red curtains were looped back from the bed, and there lay Giovanna already in her coffin; the blinds were drawn and the mirrors covered, and the thick wax candles stood either side the bed and lit the room and cast the shadow of the coffin over the coverlet on which it stood. She who lay within no candles' light could brighten, from head to foot her white linen was covered with more jewels than she had ever worn in her brief life, for beside her personal belongings there flashed and glittered the Odaleschi gems.

And on top of all lay Emilia's letter, and the crucifix, prayer book, and rosary Father Hilton had given Elphin.

Before Mr. Maitland could realize what he was doing, Francis was holding the child up over his mother's coffin.

"Look now and then forget!" he cried. "There she lies, and all her snares and vanities with her--'Because of these things fall the wrath of God on the children of men!' *'Because of these things'*--there they lie, a fair woman, jewels, idols; as I have cast them from me, cast them from you in the years to come!"

The architect turned sick and hid his eyes, the nurse dropped on to her knees, and still the tall, fierce gentleman stood erect, holding the

blenching child over the open coffin.

"There lies your mother, and from this day you will not mention her nor anything belonging to her; her soul is in hell and her body gone to corruption; pray God day and night to forget her and her works!"

The boy began to shriek with terror; Francis set him down but still held him firmly.

Mr. Maitland stumbled forward.

"Nay," said Francis, flashing him a glance from his altered eyes, "I do what I will with mine own. I have been a fool, I am not one now. My son shall not be the man I have been and endure the torture I have endured."

He stood there dominating them all. There was a force about him few would have dared to oppose; there was a strangeness and a terror in the scene few could have looked on unmoved--the dark death-chamber, the coffin full of flashing gems, the yellow light of the candles over the terrible figure of the man denouncing the dead to the child.

"For God's sake, sir," muttered Mr. Maitland.

"Mother!" shrieked the child.

"Forget that word," said Francis, "and remember what I have said to you if you would escape damnation."

"Where is mother?" repeated the child, shuddering.

"In hell!" cried Francis furiously.

Mr. Maitland caught up Elphin whose eyes were turning in his head

and on whose lips a light foam gathered.

"Do you want to kill the child?" he asked fiercely, and thrust him into the arms of his nurse, who snatched at him and ran away weeping hysterically.

"Better he should die than live to be as she was," replied Francis.--
"What I have done I have done, and you have seen it."

"God forgive you," said the architect.

Francis turned his changed eyes with a look of bitter hate and contempt and triumph on the coffin where his wife lay hidden by her mother's jewels.

"When the snow has ceased and she is buried," he said, "I shall go to Edinburgh."

He then replaced his spectacles and left the darkened room.

BOOK III

The Adjustment

I

When Francis Moutray came to Edinburgh he went, on the day after his arrival, to the house of Stacy Wigram.

His cousin saw him at once; she was in the sombre withdrawing-room he had always associated with her. As she rose from her work-table to greet him, he noticed with a start that she was in mourning; she, with equal surprise, that he wore a brown riding-suit.

"Why, Frank--" she stammered, half-withdrawing her outstretched hand. "Are you--your wife?"

"You wear black for her?" asked Francis.

"What else? She was my cousin by marriage," replied Miss Wigram.

"Take it off, take it off," said Frank Moutray. "There is no cause for sorrow."

"Oh, I am grieved, I am grieved," whispered Stacy; she turned to the fire and her eyes were full of tears. She had heard something, but not much, of the strange way Giovanna had met her death, and of the strange manner in which Francis had taken his bereavement; none the less his words and his manner were a shock.

Francis turned also to the fire; it was early afternoon, but the bleak winter day had already filled the room with dreary shadows. It was with a start that Francis noticed the stiff figure of Mrs. Stacy seated in

the corner, behind a silk screen that protected her from the direct blaze of the fire.

The elderly gentlewoman sat erect, propped with cushions, her hands folded on her lap, her eyes staring before her; she wore a large white mob cap which cast a leaping shadow on the firelit wall behind her chair.

"I never leave her now," said Stacy, following his glance. "She seldom moves or speaks--she is becoming quite paralysed, Frank."

Francis went up and greeted his aunt formally, but she took no notice whatever, and he moved away, frowning; he was unpleasantly affected by this figure of death in life.

"I wish to speak to you privately," he said.

Stacy shook her head.

"I cannot leave her, Frank. I am the only person she knows now, she might want me; and you can speak freely, she never notices--her mind is lost."

She seated herself, but he remained standing.

"What have you come to say?" she asked, and she looked up at his changed face with a touch of terror. She longed to ask him why he wore the silver-rimmed glasses, but something held her back; even while she wondered he took them off and placed them in his pocket. He stood out of the flush of the firelight, but even in the grey room so shadowed and obscured she could see his strained, marred eyes.

"Wear no more mourning for my wife," he said abruptly. "There is no need for grief."

"Why?" asked Stacy.

"*Because it was God's will* that she died," he replied sternly, "as a punishment for her great sins."

"She was always sweet and pleasant to me," said Stacy. "And I never thought her a woman likely to be wicked."

"You did not know her," returned Francis quickly, "but every one in Glenillich hated her--the pastor told me he had taken her for a witch from the first. By Heaven, she bewitched me, but to all others she smelt of the contamination she came from."

"Oh, Frank," cried Stacy hotly, "I cannot listen to such talk of the dead. I'll stake my honour she was a good woman--wicked women don't throw all to the winds for one man, as she did for you. And if your marriage was a failure, you must blame yourself--she had no help, no friends, she was strange to everything. I'm thinking her life in Glenillich was not so pleasant--"

"You do not understand," interrupted Francis. "She had no soul--she was rotten to the inmost heart."

"Why did you choose her?" demanded Stacy. "She a gay creature with ribbons even for the kirk, and looking happy even on the blessed Sabbath Day, and you as hard and gloomy as God ever made a man--why did you take her?"

A sound like a sob burst from Frank.

"The Devil tempted me and caught me," he answered passionately. "I was snared through the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of the world--and to me she then had a goodly semblance. I thought she might be plucked from the idolatry and harlotry in which

her people wallowed--but it was useless. Now it is expiated."

"Not yet," answered Stacy. "There is the child."

Francis looked at her quickly.

"I will teach him to forget his mother," he said fiercely.

Stacy was silent; ever since her betrothal had been broken she had felt secretly and passionately allied with all women against all men. This feeling arose strongly in her now and made her dislike Francis; she was poignantly sorry that she had not offered more friendship to Giovanna during her lifetime.

Francis came and stood near, and slightly behind her chair; she was looking into the fire so that she did not see him, but she felt the sense of his presence very acutely.

"Stacy," he said, "I came to Edinburgh on a definite errand."

He did not wait for her to speak.

"I wanted to see Allan Forsythe," he added instantly.

"But he was recently at Glenillich," said Stacy.

"He left without farewells," answered Francis. "And as soon--as soon as the snow gave, I came to find him--but he has gone--gone to Italy."

Stacy was amazed.

"Gone to Italy? He never went before without coming first to take his leave of us!"

"He has gone--his rooms are shut up, one servant in charge; his

letters may be sent under cover of the Palazzo Muti, Rome."

"I do not understand," said Stacy, turning to look up into her cousin's face which showed darkly pale in the shadow.

"I am following him," said Francis.

"You? You are going to Italy again?" she rose in her astonishment and agitation and stood facing him, the chair between them.

"I would follow him into hell's mouth," answered Francis Moutray with a wild emphasis.

"What is he to you?" asked Stacy.

His counter-question came sharp and insistent:

"Why did you break your betrothal--after seven years--seven years, Stacy?"

"Because of those seven years, perhaps," she answered quietly.

"Because of nothing else?"

"What does it matter now?" she asked, still composed, but as if defending herself.

"Was it not because he was a concealed Papist--a concealed Jacobist?"

"Ah!" exclaimed Stacy, recoiling; bewilderment and a certain terror filled her at Francis' possession of this knowledge.

"A Papist and a rebel," repeated Francis. "If I had not--if I had not--if it had not been decided otherwise--he should not return here save to

mount the block, and all his property should be confiscated and his name shamed among honest men."

"You would denounce him?" she cried.

"No, I shall not denounce him--I do not put my revenge in the hands of the law."

"Your revenge?"

He was ghastly looking now in his pallor and his trembling; the cold sweat stood in drops on his forehead.

"Did you break your faith with Allan Forsythe because he loved another woman?" he asked sharply.

"No."

She too was pale and shivering as her quick wits began to piece together the tragedy Francis was unfolding in his wild words.

"It was because we had ceased to care," she added.

"I think that you lie," said Francis sullenly. "I think you knew."

"That he was a Papist--yes."

"Ah!"

"But I would never have told. It was his secret. I promised him that it was safe with me," she replied eagerly.

"You knew and you never warned me!"

"Warned you? What was it to you? You are the last person in whom I

should have confided--you, always so intolerant, so hard, in these things, Frank."

"A damned Papist!" he repeated with a kind of desperate triumph. "They will be together--to all eternity!"

"How did you find out?" asked Stacy, still fumbling for the truth, endeavouring to still her heart and keep her mind clear through all this tumult of pain and amazement.

"From the little child," he answered with a horrible smile which wrinkled his face into a look of distortion.

"From your child?"

"Yes."

"Please tell me clearly, Frank--tell me all," she demanded.

His fury broke forth again.

"My girl, we have been both betrayed from the first! Do you not understand? She was his woman--his wanton, his love!"

"Oh," said Stacy softly. She drew back, and it seemed that she shrank not so much from what he said as from the man himself.

"They baptized the child," continued Francis, "between them they did that--she used to go and see him--here in Edinburgh--then he fooled me and came to Glenillich--oh, I was properly fooled! And then I found the child playing with the emblems of damnation 'Ah, child,' I said, 'show me these and tell me their story,'--and he told me and I went out and--and--found her--dead--as God willed she should die in her sin! Do you ask me now why I wear no mourning?" She thought that he spoke idly, incoherently, almost insanely, but she admitted

that there must be some great cause for the emotion that could drive him into such speech.

Yet as to the substance of what he said she remained incredulous.

"Jeannie loved you," she said, reasoning as much with herself as with him. "And he--he--I think him honourable. Why did he urge me to marry him--if--if this is true? That makes it all too horrible. I cannot believe it, nay, I cannot. You judge too quickly. Jeannie can speak no more, but he is there--he will clear himself, Francis."

"Why does he fly from me?" demanded Francis. "That night before I returned he had gone suddenly--left for the village; when I went to seek him he had gone to Edinburgh; now I come to Edinburgh he has gone to Italy."

"He does not guess that you suspect--his mind is at ease."

"No," said Francis, "he is afraid. He brought her her mother's jewels--the spoils of an adventuress--the wages of the mother returned to buy the daughter. I buried them with her; they will lie heavy on her bad heart till the Judgment Day, when we three shall rise to face each other!"

"Frank--Frank!" cried Stacy. "Are you sure of this? Before your God are you sure?"

"Before Him I am sure," answered Francis sternly.

"It may be true about the child and not the rest," urged Stacy. "It is possible she was fearful for his soul, and took him to Allan as the only Papist she knew--"

"How did she know he was a Papist?" demanded Francis. "There must have been confidence between them from the beginning."

Stacy sickened at this. She seated herself, for she had no longer the strength to hold herself upright; her incredulity was beginning to weaken before his intense conviction; after all, what did she know of Frank's wife?

She had only her instinct to go upon, and that might have deceived her; she had always been taught that foreign blood was deceitful and lustful, and she had heard Giovanna came from disreputable people--then--Allan?

Was it not true that he had become cold--so cold that she had released him? and why had he gone to Glenillich? and why was he fleeing before Frank instead of facing him?

Yet she fought against these arguments with all the force of her generous nature, all the force of her instinctive trust in Giovanna.

"I cannot discuss this with you," she said. "I do not know quite why you came to tell me of it, but now you have told me I have a right to one explanation--why are you following Allan Forsythe?"

"Do you still care for him?" asked Francis with sudden amazing calm.

"Never mind whether I still care or no--please answer me."

"I wish for his explanation, his defence," replied Francis. "I wish for his confirmation or his denial."

His voice and manner were still composed; he seemed more like the former Francis Moutray of the old days; indeed, so striking was this change from his fury and incoherency, his gloom and passion, that it was as if he had been suddenly restored from delirium to sanity.

Stacy felt intensely relieved at this; she strove also to speak calmly and to dismiss the nightmare thoughts that his previous manner had roused.

"But you said you were sure, Frank, and it frightened me. I thought it meant a duel."

"There is the scandal to be considered," said Francis. "Why should I blow abroad my own dishonour? I am sure—but I am not sure how much the blame was his; I think it was the woman."

At this Stacy flushed as if she herself had been insulted.

"I cannot bear to hear that," she answered. "And Jeannie helpless in the cold grave."

"We will speak of it no more," said Francis with the same rational calm. "It is over, all of it. I begin a new life—only first I must see Allan Forsythe."

Stacy, half-reassured, half-dubious, looked at him keenly.

"Will you promise me that there will be no duel?" she asked.

He replied with great readiness.

"I promise you,"

She was surprised at this; it seemed so inconsistent with his former violence.

"And you will not denounce him?"

"That also I can promise you."

Yet Stacy still felt uneasy.

"Best stay at home, Frank," she urged, trying to speak in an ordinary commonplace manner, "and wait till the summer, when Allan will return. Have you not plenty to do at Fort Mary and on your new land?"

"I shall not build the church," replied Francis; "I have expiated in other ways. And I think that spot is cursed. If I can, I will sell the property, and for the rest my steward has in hand the draining scheme and the sowing of rye this year and the building of the new cottages. I can be spared for a few months."

He spoke so sensibly that Stacy felt her uneasiness subside.

"I am better away for awhile," he added.

"Ah yes," agreed his cousin; "but why go to Italy?"

"To find Allan Forsythe," he answered, and his tone was almost gentle.

Stacy took her face in her hands and set her elbows on her knees; the firelight gave a tender flush of rosiness to a face that no longer had much natural bloom, and softened features which were too fine and the lines of repression and suffering round lips and brow. In that moment she looked as fair as she had looked when she had waited for Allan in this room in the days when she was gay with hope and grateful love.

"Will you give me the child, Frank?" she asked thoughtfully.

If she had been looking at him she would have seen his face cloud with instant suspicion.

"The child?" he repeated slowly.

"Elphin--the poor little boy. You cannot leave him alone in Glenillich, it is purely impossible."

"He has his nurse and his servants," answered Francis quickly. "And I have strictly charged the minister to watch over him."

"Oh, Frank," cried Stacy earnestly and sorrowfully, "it will not do! He alone in that great house, thinking of his mother, and passing her grave every time he goes to kirk--and he so little! Take him to Italy with you," she added. "He is all you have now--cherish him."

"He does not love me," said Francis sternly.

"Then give him to me," said his cousin, rising. "This may be a sad house with a sick woman as mistress, but it would be better for the bairn than Glenillich, and if you would let him and his nurse come here I would do my all to make him happy. But it is even better that he should be with you, Frank, and that you should learn to love each other."

She made this suggestion with a double meaning, for she thought that the child's presence would have a softening influence on his father, and be a check on any violence or bitterness that might arise from his meeting with Allan Forsythe.

Francis answered drily:

"Do you think I can travel with a woman and child at my heels? And can you imagine that I would take him into that corruption, from the taint of which I am trying to purify him?"

"Then let him come here till you return," repeated Stacy.

"It is a thoughtful offer," he answered, "and I take it kindly from you,

but Elphin is better where he is. When I return I will get him a tutor."

Stacy was both hurt and vexed. So little did she care to think of Giovanna's strange little son alone in Glenillich, that she even resolved to contrive to leave her mother as soon as Francis had gone abroad, and to rush down to Glenillich herself and see what the child's condition really was.

"You must do as you will with your own, Frank," she said after a little pause--"man gives you that power, but remember, God will one day call you to account for how you have used your authority."

"I can justify myself to God," replied Francis.

She was silent and remained standing, as if waiting for him to go.

"You have had enough of my company?" asked Frank.

"I think it is no use for us to talk together any more, Frank," she returned quietly.

"Yet I have not discovered what I came for," he frowned. "You will not be candid with me."

"You mistake," said Stacy. "I have told you the truth--I knew Allan's secret, and we parted because our affection was dead between us. That is all I can say. I do not believe he loved another woman when we parted, and I do not believe the monstrous thing you have told me."

"Keep it secret then," replied Francis quickly. "On my return I will let you know if I credit it still or not."

"And you will neither challenge him nor denounce him?"

"Neither one nor the other--on my name I swear it."

He was still serene and easy, and Stacy again was reassured, more because of his manner than his words. Yet she parted from him coldly because she was thinking of the child.

When he had gone she rang for candles, and made up the fire, and drew the curtains over the dark prospect of the town.

Her movements were, as always, precise and careful, but in her heart was a tumult of emotion.

She had told Francis that she did not credit his statements, but her heart was neither so brave nor so confident as her words had been.

To herself she had to admit the possibility that the horrible thing might be true; it seemed at least beyond dispute that Giovanna and Allan had conspired together to secretly baptize the child, and that was a treacherous action according to Stacy Wigram's straightforward, exact code of honour.

Then she had to admit that she had never known much of Giovanna, and that of late she had seen very little of Francis; she could not answer for the actions or movements of either.

Perhaps it was true.

And if it was true, did she care?

Apart from the shock and disgust of a thing in itself hateful to her, did she personally care?

She asked herself this question, and strove to answer it with her usual painstaking honesty.

She admitted she had no right to care; she had set him free; she had told him never to think of her more except as an acquaintance; there was not a single tie between them, yet--

Yet for seven years she had looked on him as her lover and her future husband; she had given him all the sweetness, freshness, and hope of her youth and all the love of her life.

Old dreams that she had hoped were dead revived and mocked her; old tendernesses that had been treasured memories suddenly stung and shamed in the recollection.

Tears lay hot and heavy under her lids as she moved the fire-screen and adjusted her mother's cushions.

The paralytic made a convulsive movement of her hands and spoke in a thick, mumbling, and harsh voice.

"What do you say, mother?" asked Stacy; it was long since Mrs. Wigram had opened her lips or given any sign of noticing her surroundings.

"That was my nephew Glenillich?" the words came clearly now.

Stacy was surprised, almost startled.

"Yes, it was Frank," she answered.

The invalid muttered something her daughter could not understand at first; presently she made it out to be, "Do not let him come here again."

"Why?" exclaimed Stacy.

Mrs. Wigram turned her eyes on her daughter--terrible eyes in which

the broken and ruined intellect gleamed for a second with a flash of the old strength.

"He murdered--his wife," she said, "and--now he will murder--Allan Forsythe."

Having pronounced these words with an awful effort, she relapsed into the expression and pose of idiocy.

II

A week after his visit to his cousin, Francis was still in Edinburgh. Slowly and with infinite care he made his preparations for his journey.

He cast up the total of the probable expenses; he interviewed his bankers; he engaged a new servant; he wrote two minute letters of instruction to his steward and one to the minister of Glenillich; he consulted his lawyers on the sale of the Fort Mary property; he made an elaborate will, leaving the estates to his son, a pension to Stacy, and the rest to the Kirk of Scotland.

And all this he did because he wished to assure himself that his mind was quite clear, his spirit quite composed, and his whole being not in the least affected by what he had been through. He intended to persuade himself that his old life was gone from him like a cast-off garment, that he had finally and completely made his peace with God, and that the rest of his years would flow smooth and clear as undisturbed water.

He meant to marry again; Stacy Wigram was his choice if she would, in time, consent. He meant to settle in Glenillich, and lead there the sober, righteous, pious life his father had led before him.

First there was this journey to Italy and the meeting with Allan Forsythe, but even that he was determined to undertake in a practical and quiet fashion.

And certainly he had succeeded in maintaining a serene composure; such of his acquaintances who saw him at this period were all impressed by his calm.

The very lawyers to whom he went about the sale of the Fort Mary property were amazed at the unmoved way he discussed the situation and value of the land where his wife had met her death.

He even described, with a needless minuteness, the old church on the hill where Giovanna had breathed her last, and drew a ghastly parallel between the old crime which had kept Ardnamurchan deserted so long and the tragic end of his own wife.

There was, he said, something similar between the death of Jane Moidart, beaten out of life with a riding-whip, and the death of Jeannie Moutray, dashed to pieces by a fall from a bolting horse.

At least the resemblance, he concluded, was sufficient to make the ground doubly hateful--haunted, as the villagers called it in their fear.

The lawyers agreed, and thought it would be difficult to find a purchaser. A property that had changed hands so often and been neglected for nearly three centuries, that had two such tragedies associated with it, was not easy to get rid of, even at a poor price.

When Francis had left the lawyers' chambers the two looked at each other rather curiously.

Mr. Moutray's unreserved calm had made a strange impression on both.

"She has only been dead a month," remarked one, biting his quill. "He must be a man of no passions whatever."

"Do you take it so?" returned the other. "I think he is a man who will not die sane."

There were other people too who noticed, with distaste, his composure; but Francis took no heed of any of them.

Unmoved, he went about his business, and his leisure he spent in his rooms, arranging his private affairs and writing his laborious letters.

He was, besides, drawing up a complete itinerary of his proposed journey, marking on the map all his stopping-places, the post-houses, the dangerous roads, and the good inns.

By the end of the month he intended to start; the goal of his travel was Rome, since the address of the Pretender's residence in that city was the only clue to the whereabouts of Allan Forsythe; he knew also that it was to Rome the Jacobite usually went.

Francis had returned to the chambers he had occupied when last in Edinburgh; he did this in deliberate defiance of the evil and painful memories with which they were associated. He was no longer, he told himself, liable to be affected by fanciful terrors and the miseries of poignant recollections.

For the same reason he took his meals at "The Arms of Orange," where he had met Allan Forsythe and Harry Middleton, and dined at the very same table, defying the bitter memories of the place.

When he was alone he remained as calm as when he was in company; only sometimes he would pause in his exact writing or his learned reading, and take from his pocket the golden Aurelian coin Allan had given him, and stare at it, and his face would change to a

ghastly expression of sickness and his body shake as with an ague.

But he always silently subdued these convulsions of some inner terror, and carefully replaced the coin in the velvet case and returned quietly to his work.

He was very careful of his health--a thing of which he had never thought; now he recollected having read that the mind was largely dependent on the body for balance and sanity, and that a fever or some sudden sickness might overthrow the mind, and of that he had a great horror. Above all things he dreaded delirium, losing command of his senses and his tongue, descending to horrible visions and distorted imaginings.

He consulted a doctor as to the likelihood of the marsh fever or malaria attacking him in Italy, and was assured that the country was safe till May.

Francis meant to accomplish his object long before then. He remembered the heat of Italy as a nightmare, and his attacks of fever there as descents into hell; even to meet Allan Forsythe he would not risk a repetition of that misery.

But it was winter and he felt safe; to go to Italy at all was a torture, but he defied that torture as he had defied the recollections roused by certain spots in Edinburgh.

Yet the fear of his health giving way slightly troubled him. He shivered if he overheard anyone speak of the plague or the fever, and he had been terrified when the doctor told him that the malaria, once in the blood, never left it; and yet he had known this to be true; ever since his fatal visit to the South he had been liable to these recurrent attacks of fever.

He dosed himself with quinine and tried to keep his mind from the subject, and to an extent he succeeded.

But he noticed one peculiarity of his present condition that half-troubled, half-relieved him: All his former fancies and imaginings had indeed left him, he was no longer troubled with visionary terrors and black abysses of mental distress; he could, however, no longer exercise his mind in pleasant ways either.

No longer could he conjure up before him a face, a form, a scene--no longer could he visualize some fair fancy nor recall some sound, some perfume, once enjoyed; he could see and hear nothing save what was around him, he could not even bring up before his mind's eye Glenillich or the face of Allan Forsythe.

All was a blank; what his bodily eyes did not behold did not exist for him.

And with this, material things greatly increased their power for him, he noticed them, they crowded round him and overwhelmed him; now the torture of his fancies, his dreams, had gone, there came this torture of actuality--When he was abroad he was acutely conscious of the buildings, of their massiveness, height, and shape, of the hardness of the cobbles, of the glittering things in the shop windows, of the faces and costumes of the passers-by.

When he returned to his room he was acutely conscious of the furniture, the wood of which it was made, the thick material of the curtains, the cold marble of the clock, of the shining panels of the walls, of the shape and feel and weight of every common object there; they seemed to crowd him, to jostle him, to obtrude themselves on his vision.

In the midst of all his composure he could not escape this obsession;

it was locked in his heart and mentioned to no one, but it was there, never to be forgotten nor subdued.

He would rise, almost mechanically, from his occupation, to finger a piece of furniture, an article of clothing, to feel the different surfaces and weights of various objects.

Often this desire came over him with the strength of a fierce appetite; as a thirsty man craves for water, so Francis would crave to handle silk, to put his palm over carved wood, to gaze on some vivid colour, to hold a crystal glass next his cheek, or to close his hands over the cold hardness of a pebble.

Sometimes there was a lust of destruction with it; he longed to rend the silk, to crush the glass, to break the wood, and smash the stone, but this impulse he sternly resisted.

This strange mental state, so different from anything he had known before, disturbed him, for he associated it with some sickness of the body; but the blankness of his imagination greatly relieved him. He took that as a sign that God had at last forgiven and absolved him and was no longer pursuing him with scorpion-tailed lashes for his sin.

Two days before he was to start for Italy he received a letter from his steward.

He knew that it must have been written very shortly after his departure, and therefore supposed that it could contain no news of a great importance.

He left it on his desk and went out to his bankers, there to deposit his will and various deeds and documents; there were other copies with the lawyers, but he wished in all things to be methodical and prudent.

His supper he took as usual at "The Arms of Orange," and did not return to his rooms till about ten o'clock.

The candles were lit, the fire burning, the curtain drawn, his chair, his books, all arranged to his hand, his bed warmed his dressing-gown and slippers ready.

He dismissed his body-servant—who slept in the next room—and stretched himself out in the armed chair by the fire.

Now his mind was clear of fancies he did not dread a lonely evening.

The rooms no longer held memories; the past seemed neither sweet nor bitter—a mere blank.

He reflected with some satisfaction that even this visit to Italy held no dread.

No, neither Italy, nor Bologna, nor the Odaleschi Palace itself would be terrible to him now; he would be no more afraid of revisiting them than a conqueror of gazing at the dead bodies of his enemies.

He filled a long clay pipe with Virginian tobacco and, leaning back, began to smoke and consider the future.

First, he must find Allan Forsythe.

Once he had found him he meant to kill him; as he had promised Stacy, he would neither challenge nor denounce his enemy—he would kill him; the wrong, the outrage, the insult, could be removed by nothing save blood.

From the first he had deliberately resolved to kill Allan.

If he had found him in Glenillich village he would have killed him, if he

had met him in his rooms in Edinburgh he would have killed him. Long had he reasoned with himself that this was no passionate impulse, no mad desire, but a sane resolve, coolly conceived, by which his peace with Heaven would be consolidated and his future life entirely freed from the past.

Now he was glad that he had not met Allan in Scotland, because this way he avoided a scandal and had a surer chance of escape. If it had happened in his own country he would have called it a duel; in Italy there would be no need for that pretence.

Allan would disappear and be forgotten, and Francis would return home at peace.

How he would kill Allan he did not know; his impulse was to shoot him on sight, but there might be better ways; already he had formed and rejected many plans.

For awhile he watched the smoke rings ascending from the white bowl of his pipe, then he chanced to turn in his chair, and his glance fell on the large square envelope of the steward's letter standing propped against the ink-dish on his desk.

Francis stared at it a moment; the thick paper, the red seal, the black lines of the address--the material of the thing oppressed him. It seemed massive, heavy, to fill the room and threaten him.

He rose, seized it, and tore it open--the feel of the paper, the faint odour of the sealing wax affected him unpleasantly; he crushed the contents together nervously, almost angrily, and returned to the chair he had just left.

For a little longer he smoked to steady himself, then the pipe loomed large and insistent, he could think of nothing but the shape, the clay,

of which it was made.

With an angry movement he cast the pipe into the fire and opened the letter.

Mr. Doughty began with a preamble of much humility and apology; on the second page was the real matter of the letter.

"This is the grievous news that I have to afflict your honour with; may you deal mercifully with your servant who is the conveyer of such tidings.

"The day your honour left, the little master fell into convulsions and seemed in great distress of mind.

"All care was taken, there were the nurse, the doctor, and the minister in attendance, and none of us sleeping for the anxiety.

"And the minister had a contention or wrestle with the Devil, for your honour's son lay in a fever and called constantly for a priest and confession and the viaticum, which things he said he had learnt of in a book your honour took from him together with a crucifix. He also called much on your honour's late lady, and babbled many curious tales and foreign histories which seemed to our poor understanding no better than heathen. But the minister strove in prayer with these evil spirits until desired to desist by the doctor, who said he disturbed the child.

"Yet what matter of that if he wrestled for the bairn's soul?

"Still, he went, and the young master was more quiet, only asking for my late lady and a little wild fox she tamed for him--which last had strangely returned to the house since your honour's departure, and was brought to the child and lay on the bed beside him like a dog.

"At this the child seemed pleased, and began to talk with great clearness for one of his years, but saying ungodly things, as that his mother had told him he must be shriven, and insisting on a priest.

"The next day, as he was very weak and plainly dying, we sent for the minister again, but the child would not listen to the godly man but turned his face to the wall.

"He now had the fox in his arms, which we tried to remove, thinking it perhaps an evil spirit, but the beast was so fierce there was no one who could touch it for fear.

"And, without speaking again, the little master died, at four hours and forty minutes by the great clock in the hall.

"This was the third day after your honour left, the fourth day of February, as your honour will recall. And there following another snowstorm, the express we had sent with the news returned, being unable to cross the river, and so, being unable to obtain the wishes of your honour, we buried the child on the third day after his death in the afternoon at three o'clock, with all the respect due, the villagers in a mourning procession and the great bell tolling all day. On the evening of this day, the weather holding, the express is able to join the mail-coach, and I send this letter, awaiting your honour's further instructions for the tomb or memorial; at present there is nothing save the name to be added on the family vault.

"The fox beast has escaped again; we would very willingly have put it to death, thinking it a diabolic person."

Francis folded the letter across and laid it on the table beside him, where the candles stood; out of a confusion he heard himself talking:

"Better for both of us--for him and for me. So there is no link--so I

begin again. He could never have been happy, we should never have loved each other."

He rose and held on to the back of the chair, his world that had lately been so hard and concrete had altered: the curtains looked like veils of mist, the furniture seemed made of cloud, the whole room looked vague and unreal.

He found his way to the bell and rang, the servant came after a moment; he was half-dressed and startled--the hour was past midnight.

"Make me some coffee," said Francis.

"Sir?"

"Make me some coffee."

"Your honour is not well?" exclaimed the man, frightened by his master's look.

Francis seated himself in his own place; a late reveller returning through the street was whistling the "Monimusk" strathspey; he listened.

"No, indeed I am not well," he said at length, in a trembling voice,--"bring me some spirit. I feel my head reel--"

The servant hastened for the brandy, and when he returned Francis was unconscious, with his head fallen back on the chair in the attitude of a dead man.

It was Stacy who nursed Francis. She did not take him to her own home because of the dreadful sentence formed by the broken brain and uttered by the palsied lips of her mother.

Twice since, Mrs. Wigram had broken her long silences by the words "My nephew Glenillich," and once her almost useless hand seized one of her daughter's knitting needles and feebly traced "Glenillich" on the top of the worktable, as if it was the beginning of a message.

A message never completed, for the invalid's fingers had trailed away purposelessly and fallen stiffly in her lap.

Stacy did not dare bring Frank into her mother's house, but she came to and fro his chambers in what time she could spare, assisted by her old capable servant and a doctor she had known all her life.

She was strangely softened and almost remorseful towards Francis, for she felt that she had judged him harshly in the matter of the child.

For, she argued, if he had not loved Elphin he would not have been so terribly and suddenly stricken by the news of his death.

The tragedy, or rather the completion of the tragedy, had greatly shocked and moved Stacy, but it seemed to her quite natural and perhaps merciful that the child should die.

Yet it was a grief that admitted of no consolation, it was blank sorrow without relief, and Stacy did not know how to offer even a shallow comfort to Francis.

She believed that remorse deepened his sufferings; surely he could not but think of the little child left to the care of servants in a great house echoing still with whispered comments on the tragedy that had left him motherless. Surely he must recall the gloom and chill of Glenillich and what the boy must have suffered, lonely there and

frightened by a horror that must have been namelessly awful to his child's mind. But Stacy, in her strict justice, did not blame Francis for having left Elphin in Glenillich; it could not be supposed that a man overwhelmed as he was, and believing what he believed, would, in the first desperate agony of loss and discovery, give much thought to a child.

Had Stacy known of the scene the architect had witnessed in the death-chamber she might have been less tender with her cousin; but she knew nothing of what had happened in Glenillich save what she had heard from his own lips. For a week Francis lay helpless in an illness that puzzled the doctor; indeed, it was not within his science, for it was a sickness of the soul.

The physician could only say, "Fever, an old recurrent fever brought on by grief and anxiety of mind."

He seemed rather afraid of the case, and doubtful of the patient's ultimate sanity.

Stacy went her way, acting on her own common sense and her knowledge of her cousin.

For one thing she was glad of this illness, she hoped that it would prevent Francis from going to Italy to search for Allan Forsythe. She trusted that by the time Francis was able to travel, Allan would have returned to Scotland, or, at least, have written.

He had his explanation, his justification, she believed, and she wanted these given to her, not to Francis.

She had a womanly desire to be the mediator between the two men, to be the advocate for Giovanna, to bring Allan to clear her name and Francis to believe him; she did not want them to meet alone, in a

foreign land, for all the promise her cousin had given her so readily and calmly.

And if the whole horror was true, even then she would sooner face it here; even then she wished to stand between them, urging mercy and charity.

So she asked the doctor to tell Francis he must not travel to Italy this season, but wait till the cool of the autumn rains, and she wrote to Allan, under cover of the Palazzo Muti, asking him, in one brief sentence, to hasten his return to Edinburgh; usually he was back by May or June at latest, and March was almost over before Francis was past the crisis of his illness.

The doctor had readily acceded to Miss Wigram's request. It was his own opinion that a journey to Italy, where the heat would be beginning, might easily prostrate Mr. Moutray with perhaps a fatal attack of the old malaria, and he promised to speak to the patient as soon as he would be able to listen.

Francis Moutray lay, day and night, in a half-swoon, half-sleep, broken by fits of burning fever, during which he was completely unconscious. But--and this the doctor could not understand, as it was against all his experience--Francis, though delirious, never railed nor babbled. He sighed and moaned, and bit the sheets and pillows in what seemed an access of uncontrollable grief, but no word escaped him.

It was as if, even in his unconsciousness, he exercised some strong control that kept his heart locked, as if, even through all the agony that overwhelmed his senses, he yet retained sufficient command of himself to maintain a perfect silence.

Sometimes he would weep like a woman, drenching his pillow with

unchecked tears and muttering to himself the while words too low and incoherent for any to be heard; but if anyone spoke to him, he took no notice and seemed not to hear.

Nor would he lift his head or his eyes, but continued his muttering and his weeping as if alone.

More than once Stacy feared for his reason; it seemed to her almost impossible that control and poise once so shattered could ever be restored, that passions so strong as to prostrate the body thus could ever be subdued again. She could not see to the bottom of his sorrow nor guess the exact root of his endless grief, for never by one word did he give her a clue as to what was agonizing his mind. Whether it was the death of the child, or the death of Giovanna, or the thought of the betrayal he believed he had been the object of, or fear of God who had already punished him so dreadfully, Stacy could not tell.

Remembering his calm when she had last spoken to him in her house, the almost exultation with which he had talked of Giovanna's end, she could not believe that it was made for his wife he wept.

It must, she thought, be for the child, and that belief made her pitiful towards Francis.

Mr. Doughty, the Scotch factor, came to Edinburgh to consult with his master; but it was useless for him to see Francis, who was incapable of speech.

The sight of the steward set Stacy wondering what would become of the estates now the child was gone; she and Francis stood singularly alone, as far as she knew they had no relation in the world save each other.

She shuddered as she pictured Glenillich falling to the Crown, and becoming neglected, waste, and desolate like the fatal lands of Ardnamurchan.

Then the thought suddenly came to her, "I suppose if he recovers he will marry again--he is almost certain to marry."

Somehow the thought was both strange and unpleasant, yet she had to admit that it was the most sensible thing for Francis to do--the thing every one would advise him to do, especially now he had lost the child.

"If he does not, we two are the last of the Moutrays," she reflected,--"and I am the only one on my mother's side." She thought it a pitiful end to an old family; and all the world, as it affected her, seemed cruel and sad.

Towards April and the first faint warmth of spring, Francis began to mend.

His passions dropped like a great wind that has exhausted itself, and allowed his torn body some repose.

He began to sleep naturally, to eat, the convulsions and fits of fever ceased; his speech, though slow and sad, was reasonable.

Stacy stopped her visits, leaving him to the care of the doctor and his servant; her mother was sinking into complete decay, and Stacy felt she should be near her, for the poor lady seemed to know her daughter, or Stacy persuaded herself she did, by the faint light that seemed to wake in her eyes when Stacy approached.

Miss Wigram's days had for so long been nothing but service that she scarcely noticed the strain of a long double attendance on the sick.

But she did often wonder what her life would be when this service was over.

Francis would recover, her mother would not need her much longer, then she would be quite alone and free.

And what to do with this loneliness and freedom? She was not yet thirty; there were many blank years to fill in before the end.

Her fortune would be sufficient, if not splendid; she had her old home--her old friends--but these were not enough. Her cheated woman's nature revolted bitterly against this blank future. How differently she had dreamed it!

She had moods when she almost hated Allan Forsythe for having kept her pledged to him when he had ceased to love her--when she thought almost with rage of the beautiful Giovanna who had perhaps stolen all her life's happiness; if Giovanna had not come in his way with her claim of their mutual faith, might not she, Stacy, have held him?

And in these moments she felt almost affectionate towards Francis as if they had been both equally wronged by the same hand, had equally suffered, and were now allies in pain and disappointment.

Stacy fought through these humours with all the force of her just, honest nature. She refused to judge on suspicion, she reserved all anger till she had heard Allan speak for himself, and she clung to her resolve to be the defender and advocate of the dead.

But the bitter moments of doubt and despair, wrath and jealousy, were there, and though she conquered them, they left a mark on her soul.

One day, in the middle of April, when she had not for a week had news of Francis, she went round to his chambers accompanied by the old domestic who had helped her nurse him. He was much recovered, the servant told her, and had indeed lately been talking of a visit to his cousin.

Stacy found him in the sitting-room by the window that was wide open on the view of the houses and the castle hazy in the fitful morning sun.

He was reclining in a deep-bottomed leather chair, his hands placed on the arms; his limbs, that looked very long and gaunt, wrapped in a dark crimson dressing-gown.

A white linen cravat above a plain shirt enfolded his chin, and in contrast with this whiteness his thin dark face looked a strange colour, a bloodless pallor.

His hair had been cut short in his illness, the waving ends fell heavily on his brow; above the temples it was noticeably marked with grey.

His expression was the expression of the old Francis, reserved, grave, and proud.

Only his eyes were shadowed beneath, and he kept them continually downcast, or shifting restlessly, as if he was afraid to keep his gaze steadily raised or in one place.

He rose as Stacy entered, and kissed her hand in silence.

"I am glad that you are so much better, Francis," she said simply.

She took a chair near his, and the sunlight fell over her trim figure and her black gown, over the grave and rather wasted face in the frame of her hood.

Francis had reseated himself, and looked at her in silence still, as if too overcome to speak.

Stacy hurried on on ordinary topics till her voice seemed to lighten the dreary solitude of the chamber; she called in her maid and showed Francis the basket of home-made wines and cordials she had brought him, and when she had dismissed the woman to wait for her without, she placed on the table by Francis a little bunch of the first flowers of the year--violets, cowslips, and daisies.

As she did this she saw that the table held two books and a map--all of Italy.

"My dear, my dear," said Francis suddenly, "you should not have done all this for me. I never deserved it."

"Ah, tut," said Stacy.

"And you had better have left me--even out of kindness."

"Why, Frank?"

"Because it would have been so much better for me to have died."

"You would not have died, even if I had not come," replied Stacy in her practical way. "Do you think I saved you?"

"I think you did. But as you say, perhaps I could not have died, perhaps it was not meant; perhaps it is better that I go on."

He took his face in his hands and turned his eyes towards the window, but they remained downcast.

"It is certainly better," answered his cousin, feeling herself strengthen

as she endeavoured to strengthen him. "It is the only right thing."

"At least," said Francis, speaking with difficulty, "I am greatly beholden to your charity. You had no cause to care for me."

"Why no cause?" she smiled. "You and mother are the last two Moutrays--and I have no other kin."

"There is very little I can do for any," he answered. "What I can I have done. As soon as I could hold a pen I altered my will. I have left Glenillich--all--to you."

Stacy was shocked.

"Ah, you should not," she cried in a distressed tone. "What shall I do with Glenillich?"

"Would you rather it went to a stranger or the Crown?" he asked.

"No," she said honestly, remembering how she had thought of and dreaded such a possibility.

"Well, then, I have no other kin but you, Stacy."

"But you will--marry."

His answer was calm:

"I have thought of it--it is provided for in the will."

Stacy felt relieved. She would have been startled could she have remotely guessed that it was she he meant to marry if he ever took another wife, and that he intended, either way, Glenillich for her and her children.

Her relief was followed by a quick reaction; though she herself had mentioned his remarriage the idea was full of a great distaste, and there was something horrible to Stacy in the quiet way he had answered, showing that the idea was already familiar to him.

Nothing could make it familiar to Stacy; try as she would she could not regard any future match of her cousin as other than a cold and deliberate unfaithfulness, so intense still seemed the bond between Giovanna and Francis, so vivid still was the personality of the dead woman, so tremendous still the power of the passion that had enchained this strange pair--at least Stacy vaguely still felt it tremendous, even if the woman was dead and the man had forgotten--or thought he had forgotten.

"Well, we need not talk of these things," she said at length. "It is kind of you to think of me for the estates, Frank, but we are much of an age, and I hope not to come to an inheritance."

"You wish me a long life then?" said Francis in a peculiar voice.

"Yes--why, yes," she answered.

"I wonder," he mused, "if earth can hold torture as hideous as that of hell? I think so. Certainly it would be dreadful to die and not be sure that one would escape hell."

"If one has done no great sin why should not one trust God?" asked Stacy simply.

Francis very slightly shivered, and put out his hand for the map of Italy.

"Shall I close the window, Frank? The room is very chilly."

"No, no," he answered with sudden vehemence; "I cannot bear to

see the windows closed."

She glanced at the paper fluttering in his hand.

"You have given up those thoughts of going abroad?" she asked in a low voice.

"No, Stacy, I am going."

"But the doctor spoke to you?"

"Yes, he spoke."

"Are you not afraid of the heat--the malaria?"

"More afraid of--of--other things if I stay here."

Stacy was utterly daunted at this persistence of his resolve through the complete overthrow of his body and mind. How could she struggle with what had survived so fierce an illness, so much mental turmoil and anguish?

"I do nothing now because I save my strength," continued Francis. "I save my strength."

"He--he will soon, I think, return to Edinburgh," said Stacy.

"I would rather meet him in Italy."

"By May he should be here."

"By May I shall be in Italy."

IV

Francis was, as he had resolved and declared he would be, in Italy by the middle of the month of May. As far as Tuscany he travelled direct, only stopping the one night necessary at each stage, but, when he found himself within a few hours of Florence, his vigour and energy suddenly failed him. He put up at the inn of a little village not far from the coast, and waited, in a kind of lethargy of mind and body, for his purpose to become clear to him and his strength to return.

He was fatigued, he told himself, and must have time to recover and arrange his plans.

It was one thing to make stern resolutions in Edinburgh, another to make them in Italy. The long journey, the strange countries through which he had passed, the peculiar atmosphere of the place where he was now, all tended to confuse him.

He could not think clearly because he was distracted by a thousand hateful memories evoked by this country, because he could not forget or ignore the strange differences between this land and his own.

This impression was as sharp as when years before he had first travelled here with Harry Middleton.

The sheer physical differences oppressed and overwhelmed him; he hated them all, but he could not avoid them.

The great sense of light and brightness, the coloured houses, the dazzle in the air, the hardness of the people with their strongly curling black hair, their intelligent black eyes, their perfect white teeth like the teeth of animals, the pomp and show of their majestic and worldly religion, their monotonous, melodious music--martial, amorous, and gay--the whole atmosphere that seemed to radiate from individuals and crowds alike, of fierceness and good-nature, of

violence and courtesy, of practical common sense and strong, common passions, and a laugh above all. These things forced themselves on Francis; he could not escape them, and he hated them. For they, these common people of the streets, roads, and inns, seemed to him to differ only in dress and speech from the nobles he had met in Bologna; and he saw more than one woman with the ardent beauty of Giovanna, and more than one child with the strange gravity of Elphin.

He had meant to push on to Rome, but so overwhelmed was he by this alien atmosphere that was yet so full of bitter memories that he remained inert, his plans shattered, struggling for control and mastery of himself.

The inn would have been a pleasant place in any eyes save his, the country would have been a source of great delight to any less cruelly occupied with miserable thoughts, for the Tuscan spring was at the height, and day and night magnificent beauty of hill and field, sea and wood, tree and flower, lay triumphantly noble beneath the vast arch of the sky.

Even the bruised heart and unsettled brain of Francis were not altogether insensible to this beauty; against his will, almost against his knowledge, the rich loneliness soothed him like a narcotic.

That part of his nature against which he had always struggled, which had overthrown him once so utterly and which he had crushed with a terrible revenge, now asserted itself to torture him again.

He told himself that he was waiting there in this village to mature his plans, but he had no plans, had never had from the first, save the intention of going to Rome and finding Allan Forsythe through that vague indication of his address at the Palazzo Muti; nor was he forming any fresh plans in this interval of inaction.

Day by day he sat at the window of his room, or walked in the hills or rode by the sea, his mind as slack as his tired body, and his soul as dumb as his closed lips.

From his window he looked down on a vineyard; the vines were already three feet and more above the ground and coloured as clear a green as an emerald. Beyond them was a row of peach and apple trees shedding their last blossoms, and beyond that an orchard of olives--grey-silver, with fantastic trunks--grew up the hill slopes.

In the thick grass beneath them spread a profusion of wild flowers--the yellow iris, purple wind flowers, orchids of a dark violet, poppies like the English poppies of August, and the pale-yellow single hollyhock.

The vineyard was divided by a trellis over which grew climbing roses--pink and deep crimson--and this walk was bordered by a bed of white and striped red-and-white pinks which grew in a lavish profusion, and beyond the vineyard was a square herb-garden in which grew basil, citronella, lavender, majorum, rue, sassafras, and a laurel with sharp-pointed leaves.

At the end of the walk, under the trellis where the vines ended, was a paved square with a circular seat surrounding an old olive tree; the edges of this square were marked by a row of lemon trees in red earthenware pots; the background was the hillside and the olive grove.

Francis often went to this spot and rested himself on the seat beneath the ancient tree.

The sunny air was always full of the sweet acute odour of the herbs, great bees and butterflies flew in and out of the hearts of the heavy roses, lizards darted across the hot stones of the path, and there

was ever some bird singing, clear and shrill, in the shadows of the olive wood.

Hour after hour Francis would sit there, staring at the pinks, the vines, the pattern of the olive leaves cast by the sunshine at his feet, the half-green lemons hanging amid the dark curling leaves.

Then he would go up to his room--the best chamber in the inn--and pace up and down the brown brick floor until he was tired.

The room was very like that in Bologna where his first visions had come to him; The plain white walls, the ceiling painted with birds and flowers, the heavy four-post bed with the canopy and curtains of an old, rich, blue velvet, the massive dark wood wardrobe and desk, the bureau with brass handles furnished with candlesticks of coarse majolica, the deep, low, wand-bottomed chair, the strip of rough wool carpet near the bed, the window with the green shutters--all was the same.

Francis defied these associations as he had defied those in Edinburgh.

And for the present at least his sleep was not haunted.

Every morning he said to himself, "I must get on to Rome," every morning he postponed his departure.

He had with him one attendant, chosen especially for this journey--an Englishman who could speak French and Italian: Francis knew little of either language.

It was in the second week of his stay that there was a great thunderstorm.

Purple clouds swept up from behind the mountains, making the rifts

of the marble quarries on the summits look ghastly white, all the rich verdure of olive, pine, and chestnut bent and shivered; the white and coloured houses of the little hill towns were clearly visible in the glaring light of the sun rays forcing beneath the clouds, the stained marble campanile of the village, crowned by the turret with the great bronze bells and the weathercock, like a falling globe pierced with an arrow, stood out vividly against the darkening heavens.

Francis stood at the window of the upper parlour, and looked at this view of the piazza and the church against the rich light and shade of the mountains whose tops were beginning to be blotted out by the oncoming rain vapours.

It was the hour of his dinner, which was served in the little parlour overlooking the garden. He went down as usual.

Merton, the servant, was ready to wait on him; the girl of the inn, ruddy and talkative, was setting the dishes.

Every detail of the meal was clearly fixed now in the mind of Francis; it was always the same--the same as the meals he had eaten in Italy on his former visit.

The coarse, lip white cloth, the *fiasco* of red wine in the metal stand, the earthenware bowl of green leaves, the bottle of golden oil, the plate of thick tasty soup, the heavy, hard-crust bread, the two dishes of fruit--one-half acid cherries and the last oranges, wrinkled and hard, the other dried grapes and plums and wafer-like biscuits--all these things he remembered, trivialities that yet had power.

He was seated directly opposite open windows, and the storm-wind blew in and shook the curtains and the ends of the tablecloth.

Merton went to close them.

"No, leave them open," said Francis.

He ate his dinner in silence, keeping his eyes fixed on the rose trellis, on the vineyard, on the distant hills without.

The first thunder-clap rolled round the mountains, the vivid sunlight was hidden by the unrolling clouds.

The tireless birds in the olive wood stopped singing.

The girl brought in a dish of fried meat and vegetables from the kitchen.

Seeing the open windows she darted at them with a little cry of apology.

"Let them be—it is yet light," said Francis; "when they are closed my heart closes too."

"The Signore wishes them open," said Merton in Italian; with polite acquiescence in this folly the woman changed the plates in silence.

A flash of lightning like a bared sword sprang from the bosom of the thundercloud and darted into the chamber, the volley of the thunder shook the building.

Francis, pouring out wine, overtipped the fiasco, and the bright red stained the cloth.

"That means happiness," smiled the girl, and skilfully put a napkin over the mark.

The room was almost completely dark, full of wind and chill air, the curtains and the ends of the tablecloth continued to blow to and fro; the rain came now, suddenly, and dashed in, wetting the brick floor.

The whole hillside appeared misted, obscured, horrible, haunted, only lit now and then by the livid fire of the lightning which seemed to rend the sky and the very earth.

Francis remembered another Southern thunderstorm, also seen from an inn.

And a woman who had come to him out of the storm with her pitiful bundle in her hands, and her hired coach at the door, and all else left behind and abandoned for him. He took out his handkerchief and wiped his lips.

"Close the windows now," he said, for a mortal cold had seized his limbs.

Merton obeyed, and the rain slashed fiercely at the glass as if angry at being shut out from the room.

Francis drank more wine, and a false heat diffused itself over his body.

He sat motionless, fingering the bunches of hard white cherries with the pink stain flushing them; he recalled the wild cherry trees overgrowing the gorge down which he had flung her prayer book, her crucifix, her rosary.

Suddenly he began thinking of her in her coffin--as she lay now, this moment, while he listened to the storm.

She was shrivelling away to dust beneath the weight of the Odaleschi jewels--like a mummy she would be sealed from the air--hideous--but her hair would be the same.

That amber blonde hair that she had worn in curling plaits crowning

her small head--he recalled how it had hung to her waist the night she had come to him in her antechamber--the night he had returned from Edinburgh bringing with him, in his madness, Allan Forsythe.

That night she had locked her door on him, nor had it ever been opened again to him; from that night he had never seen her hair falling about her shoulders--save once only when she had lain at his feet on the bleak hillside under Ardnamurchan church.

And then it had been spoilt with blood. He wondered fiercely what had reminded him of her hair--perhaps the storm which had recalled that other storm when she had stood before him, radiant with passion, and unwound the scarf that showed her amber locks in disorder and the gold ornaments of ships in her ears.

He rose and went to the window, looking at that mysteriously dark hillside with the shivering olive trees, the vine tendrils, and the roses blowing and bending beneath the rain.

The storm was short as it was fierce, the thunder rolled away, the lightning ceased.

But the deep purple clouds continued to overhang the mountains, and the water poured down steadily, shaken by gusts of wind.

Behind those clouds the sun was now setting, and the darkness remained.

Francis walked up and down the parlour, his hands clasped behind under the skirts of his coat.

Presently the diligence, a little delayed by the storm, drove up with the letters.

There were two for him, one from Mr. Doughty the factor--the usual

cold report, correct and respectful, of the doings at Glenillich; the other from Stacy Wigram, quietly announcing the merciful death of her mother.

It seemed as if he could get no news that was not of death or disaster.

He had never loved his father's sister nor seen much of her, but she was the nearest kin he had, and, save for Stacy, the only one.

Gloomily he crushed up the letter in his hand and continued his pacing of the room, listening to the rain and watching it obscure the dark hillside.

Presently he became aware of some tumult of gossip without the door, among which he could distinguish his servant's voice.

The varied excited tones annoyed him, yet he dreaded to go up to his own room.

He was almost resolving to go out into the rain and the quiet of the garden, when Merton entered the parlour.

"What is all this discussion?" asked Francis. "Cannot you bid these people check their tongues?"

"They wanted me to tell you, sir," answered the servant. "The girl went up to your chamber to shut the windows from the rain, and she found a little child there, sitting on the bed, she says.

"So she ran down to ask me who it was, and I told her that it must be of the house, so we went up together and the child was not there, though she had shut the door on it and believed it too small to reach the handle. Nor can it be found anywhere in the house, and no one knows of such a child. Your honour knows nothing?"

"How should I know?" returned Francis. "I have seen no child in this house since I entered it--the girl was dreaming or stupid."

"So I thought, sir, but the girl was very exact in her relation. She said the child sat on the bed between the cushions, and was reading from a book with a cross on the cover, as it might be a book of prayers."

"Tell me no more of this foolishness," said Francis violently. "The rain has stopped. I will go forth a little."

The man hesitated.

"Your forgiveness, sir, but the strange thing is that others saw the child. Several of us went up, and one chanced to look through the keyhole and swore he saw--it--plain enough--but when the door was opened there was nothing. And afterwards I looked through the keyhole, and there was plainly a little child on the bed, and when we entered--no one."

Francis turned his head from the window towards the servant.

His face was quite livid.

"You are all making fools of each other," he said. "Do not let me hear any more of this."

Merton bowed, flushed, and stood respectfully silent.

"To-morrow morning," continued Francis, "I take the first stage to Pisa. See that everything is ready."

He stepped out into the close corridor and then into the little street, and walked out of the village briskly, and uncovered beneath the threatening sky from which fell still a fine rain.

V

The next day it poured heavily; the rain descended with steady violence from loose grey clouds, and neither towards the mountains nor towards the sea was there any sign of a break or change in the heavens.

The impression Francis had made on the people of the inn was strengthened by his resolve to take his departure on a day when even the field labourers were at home and the animals had been taken into shelter; they frankly thought him insane.

But Francis did not care; he knew that it was impossible for him to spend another night in that bedchamber.

The coach went at five, and Francis contrived to be up all night arranging his things, and writing to Mr. Doughty and to Stacy letters that could well have waited.

He stayed in the parlour to do this, and utterly avoided the bed-chamber.

By half-past four the inn was awake; the girl who brought Francis in his coffee assumed that the gentleman would not start to-day, and could hardly conceal her astonishment when Merton assured her he would.

There was more gossiping in the kitchens: the unslept-in bed, the stranger up all night writing letters--the hurried departure!

All of it increased Francis' anxiety to be gone; the inn, the little village where he had stayed willingly, even peacefully, had now become suddenly entirely hateful to him.

The "coach" was only an open diligence with stout canvas curtains tied down behind the seats at either side, gay blue wheels, drawn by tall mules; on the top were large casks of wine and oil and several packets; the inside was already half-filled with men and women bound for the neighbouring villages.

Francis had never meant to take this humble conveyance but to hire his own coach; to do this would, however, have meant a delay of several hours, and that he could not bear to consider. There was some difficulty with his luggage, which was far too bulky for the diligence; some valises were strapped under the driver's seat, and the rest had to follow on a baggage mule.

At length, after what seemed to Francis endless delays, they started, he inside and Merton beside the driver.

The interior was blocked with bundles of lettuces and peas, new potatoes and onions, tied with coloured handkerchiefs; the two women in charge of these filled the air with exclamations of annoyance and amazement about the weather.

The three other occupants were a gentleman farmer, a prosperous shopkeeper, and a priest. Francis, well-wrapped in his dark-blue broadcloth mantle that was the envy of the others, sat near the doorway, and received the rain on his face and shoulders.

He preferred the rain to the close interior with the smell of damp and vegetables and the chatter of the women.

He looked out on to the road to escape the bright eager eyes of the men which fixed him with a pleasant but insatiable and merciless curiosity.

At first his spirits rose a little, the headache brought on by his

sleepless night disappeared before the fresh air; the beauty of the scenery through which the road passed, the great hills wooded with olive and chestnut and dotted with little towns and churches on one hand, the fields of grain, of rice, of pasture-land, the white farmhouses covered with climbing lemons, the vineyards and pine-woods on the other, sloping down to the sea, pleased and distracted him. But at one hamlet where the diligence stopped for the priest to alight, his attention was hideously attracted by a huge iron cross that sprang from the ground at the edge of the wood of olives. Nailed across the arms were the symbols of the Passion--the cock, the hour-glass, the sponge, the nails, the spear, the crown of thorns, the hand, the scourge, all brightly painted in red and yellow.

Opposite, the other side of the little lane, was an alabaster shrine where the Madonna and Child were enclosed behind a gilt railing; before it lay fading bunches of wild flowers, and above hung a little lamp.

Francis remembered the grating of the chapel in the Odaleschi Palace, and his heart contracted with agony.

He looked no more from the door, and presently, despite the discomfort of his position, half fell asleep. He was aroused by the crying of a child.

Sitting up he looked round him sharply, he had not noticed that either of the women had a child. Nor could he see one now.

But the crying continued--low, desolate, half-suppressed sobs, yet so persistent and distinct it seemed as if no one could fail to hear them.

"It is some one on the road," thought Francis; but the sound travelled with them--it was in the diligence. The other travellers looked at each other, and the women began to talk loudly and glance at Francis. A

great terror seized him; he thought he was going to faint.

The diligence stopped and the two women got out; Francis too descended; it was still raining heavily, but he bid Merton change places with him.

"I cannot endure the closeness of the interior," he said. "I must have fresh air."

The servant obeyed, and Francis mounted beside the driver, who was all good-natured sympathy and gave him a goat-skin rug to protect him from the wet.

They reached Pisa about two of the clock; the noble city, with the line of fine palaces sweeping in an admirable curve either side the turbid yellow waters of the Arno, had no charm for Francis; he found it gloomy and sombre under the rain.

The inn where the diligence stopped, provided the usual meal. Francis forced himself to take some food.

He did not wish to stay in Pisa. There was a coach running to Empoli about four o'clock; he engaged seats in it, and, still under the rain, left the city, jolting in the heavy vehicle; it was the mail, and more important than the diligence of the morning, being equipped with four horses, guard, and postilion. Francis rode outside.

It was after dark when they reached Empoli, and even if Francis had so wished, there were no means of reaching Florence that night.

It was a large hostel or posting-house outside which the coach stopped, and in the great painted room where Francis was drying his mantle before the wood fire he spoke to his servant, and in gentler tones than he usually took to those in his service.

"Listen to me, Merton," he said. "I am a sick man. I should not have come abroad at all, but I have something very important to do in Italy, something very important. I am not here for amusement or fancy. I must get to Rome as quickly as possible. There is no coach to Florence till the morning, and I cannot hire one, even if one would take me on a moonless night. You see our journey is not going to be comfortable, Merton, but if you will put up with me, I will recompense you well." He paused a second, then added abruptly, "I cannot sleep in their bedrooms--they are all the same--"

"I do not blame your honour," replied the servant. "It is a very uncomfortable country, and in part not civilized--and for the inns--! They show gentlemen into rooms we should give to the grooms. And half of them are not clean."

"That is it," cried Francis eagerly, "they are uncomfortable. So to-night I shall sleep here, on this sofa--the coach goes early--of course I will hire a room for you."

"There is no need at all, sir. I can sleep here too if you do not mind--I will sleep here too; perhaps, in these places, it is as well that we should be together. But I am afraid you will have to pay the price of a bedroom."

Francis seemed pleased and relieved.

"Pay what you like," he said, "as long as we are left alone."

The Englishman gave his master a quick furtive look, and was leaving the room when Francis said, gazing the while into the fire:

"Merton, did you hear a--a child--crying--on the Pisa diligence to-day?"

"Yes, sir--some child on the road--every one was speaking about it."

"How could it have been on the road? The sound was in the carriage."

"That is impossible, sir, for there was no child among the passengers."

Francis said no more, and the man left the room. After a supper which he made only a pretence of eating, Francis went out for an aimless walk through the wet streets of Empoli.

When he returned he arranged his mantle as a pillow, and stretched himself along the wide, long, red damask-covered couch.

The servant had drawn out another faded settee for himself; before he put out the candles Francis spoke:

"The child--yesterday in the inn--did anyone find out who it was?"

"No, sir, but there were children next door, and 'twas concluded that one of them had got in and hidden in the house and then escaped--it would have been easy, sir."

"Ah yes," said Francis.

The lights were put out, and he lay motionless on his hard couch and presently slept.

That night he dreamt for the first time since his illness.

He thought that he was back again in Glenillich and walking from one room to another, and finding all empty until he came to a garret, and there was Allan Forsythe kneeling before an iron crucifix.

And Francis, in his dream, rushed at him, drawing his sword, and

Allan sprang up and showed him a denarius of the Empress Faustina in his hand, and seemed to offer it to him as a bribe, and instead of taking it Francis cast at his feet the golden Aurelian.

And the ringing sound the coin made woke him; he opened his eyes with a deep sigh and groan.

He found himself standing in the middle of the room, his hand on the sword which lay on the table, about him complete darkness and complete silence.

Trembling violently he fumbled his way across the room with the object of undoing the shutters; a little sudden sound arrested him.

The crying of a child.

Francis shrieked for Merton; the servant was up and had struck the flint and tinder in an instant.

As he lit the candles he glanced curiously at his master, and asked him, in a respectful tone, what had disturbed him.

"I thought I heard some one without, or even in the room," answered Mr. Moutray. "You should not have closed the shutters so, the place is oppressive."

The man looked round the large room then out into the corridor.

"There is no one," he said. "But, sir, the house is old and likely full of rats—perhaps your honour heard a rat."

"It is very possible," answered Francis. "Undo the shutters. I think it is nearly day."

Merton unlatched and folded back the shutters; a flood of rich light

entered.

It was nearly half-past five of the clock and broad daylight.

Francis gave a sigh of relief.

"Let us go out into the fresh air," he said.

The inn was already open, but few people seemed about; the traveller and his servant passed unnoticed into the garden.

The day had dawned fair and beautiful, the sun was shining with an exquisite bright softness through the ilex and acacia trees in the garden.

These last, that when Francis had entered Italy he had seen bare and dry covered with sharp thorns worthy to be twisted into a martyr's crown, had now their polished branches veiled with delicate pale leaves and clusters of milky white flowers which hid the thorns.

The ilex were fresh with their greenish blossoms, and the garden was divided from the road by a high hedge of tamarisk, the light plumage-like foliage and faint red stems laden with clouds of ashy-pink flowers which stirred to and fro in the wind, slight as it was.

Francis came down to a gate in this hedge and looked on to the white road.

A marble-fronted church with a semicircle of mosaic saints praying above the door stood opposite.

The bronze green-stained bell in the tower began to ring, and the people to enter the low door in twos and threes.

Last of all came two women, and behind them a little child more

splendidly dressed than anyone else who had entered the church. Merton uttered an ejaculation, and Francis seized his arm.

"Do you see him? He is going into the Papist church--that must not be; I thought that I had taken all the evil out of him--but his mother remains strong in him!"

"What does your honour mean?" asked the man bewildered.

"Did you not see the child?" demanded Francis with a ghastly look.

"Why, I did--I thought it was the same I saw in your honour's bed-chamber, but how could it be?"

"Where is he now?" asked Mr. Moutray, looking up and down the sunny street.

"He went into the church, I suppose, sir--at least, he disappeared in the doorway."

"Go into the inn and get together the vails and pay the reckoning," said Francis, "and take two places on the Florence coach. As for what I said, take no heed of it; I am a sick man and one greatly troubled in mind."

As soon as he was alone Francis crossed the road and seated himself on the top of the church steps.

The church was too poor to support the usual beggar, and Francis was quite alone.

The sun became strong and beat down full on him, but he took no heed, nor did he once remove his gaze from the church door. When at length the people began to come out (it seemed a long time to him but in reality the service was short), he rose and withdrew himself to

a less noticeable position.

The little congregation issued forth and disappeared, there were no children amongst them.

Francis waited still, then, drawn by a fearful curiosity, crept to the church door and peered in, slightly raising the heavy mat that served to keep out noise and heat.

The little church with domed roof and double line of stained marble columns was empty save for one person.

Walking up the bare aisles and wringing his hands with a gesture of despair was the child in the rich garments.

Francis lifted the mat and, for the first time in his life, entered a Papist church.

The scent of incense, the dull light sickened and confused him. He closed his eyes and felt his limbs shake beneath him; fearful of fainting, he crept to the first pillar and sat down on the base of the plinth.

After a second he had courage to look about him.

No one was in sight, the church seemed utterly empty save for himself.

He wanted to leave but had not the strength, so remained seated on the pedestal and leaning against the pillar.

Presently the priest came from the sacristy and, seeing this finely dressed stranger with the look of a dying man, approached him and asked him what was his trouble?

Francis, stammering, in his bad Italian, asked if a child had attended the late service.

"I too thought I saw a child," replied the priest gravely, "but he was not of us; does the Signore know him?"

Francis shook his head.

The priest looked at him intently.

"Yet the child had a look of the Signore."

Francis sprang up and hurried to the door.

"Of course the Signore knows it was not really a child at all?" asked the priest, pattering after him.

Francis turned a livid face.

"What then?"

"Why, Signore, a *fantasma*, a spirit--one who walks because he is not quiet in his grave."

"Why should he not be quiet?" demanded Francis fiercely.

"Who knows? Perhaps he was not baptized--or confessed--belike he died unshriven. Perhaps he is in hell for lack of masses for his soul, who knows?"

The old priest gave a little shrug and took a pinch of snuff.

Francis cried out at him in English, and left the church.

When they reached Florence the sun was in full strength; after the unusual rains and storms the usual heat poured down over Italy. The mighty palaces and narrow streets, the turbid river and scorched gardens seemed to give out heat as much as the blazing heavens; the city was beginning to empty, the great nobles and wealthy citizens withdrawing to their country villas.

Francis lodged at an inn of some repute near the church of Santa Maria Nipotecosa and the old church of San Cristoforo, which was now occupied by the great confraternity of Santa Maria della Misericordia.

The hostel was the most luxurious and pleasant Francis had yet lodged in; his room looked on to a garden filled with palms, laurels, and ilex covered with their pale greenish blossoms, in the centre was a fountain cooling the air pleasantly with the uprising streams of clear water.

The very day of his arrival Francis sent Merton to the agents of the bankers, both to change notes into Italian money and to obtain news, if possible, of Allan Forsythe, who was most likely known to all in Florence who dealt in any way with Scotch business.

Indeed it happened, as Francis had thought, that these same agents acted for Allan. The clerk told Merton that he had seen Mr. Forsythe only a few days before driving down the Via Calzaioli with the Count of Albany.

"He whom we call the Pretender," commented Merton, "and the Jacks, Charles the Third--is it not?"

"Yes," returned the young English clerk, glad to have a countryman to talk to. "Here he is the Count of Albany; he is much changed since

the '45 and his father's death--a man without hope, I think."

"Is this Mr. Forsythe an open Jack that he rides publicly with the Pretender?" asked Merton.

"At least he did not use to be; there was a secrecy about his coming and going--he always said he was collecting cameos. But do you not know him?"

"I do not even know my master," replied Merton with a little smile,--
"nor what his business with this Mr. Forsythe is. We have had a strange journey through Italy. For myself I wish it was well over and that we were back in Britain. I have never been in Italy so late."

"The heat begins now," said the other with a little sigh. "Every one goes up to the hills--in June and July one suffocates here; but if your master wants to find Mr. Forsythe he will have to go to Rome."

"To Rome?" echoed Merton, dismayed; he had had hopes that the journey would end at Florence.

"Well, the Count of Albany has gone there--probably to Frascati to the palace of the Cardinal York, and Mr. Forsythe is certainly in attendance on him--"

"When is he likely to be returning to Scotland, then?" asked Merton.

The other lowered his voice confidentially:

"Between ourselves I do not think he is returning to Scotland at all. He came here the other day to make arrangements to sell all his property there and transfer it into Italian securities. I heard him say he was buying a villa outside Rome--and, another thing, he has turned Romanist."

"A Papist?" exclaimed Merton.

"Indeed, he attended the Count of Albany and his gentlemen to a full service at the Duomo."

Merton looked thoughtful.

"There is something strange in this business," he remarked. "Mr. Moutray is one of your Calvin Scots, as stiff as a ramrod, hating the sight of a bit of tinsel or the sound of the Pope's name. He is keen for the Government too--now what is he doing chasing a Jack and a Papist over Italy at this time of the year? And he is sick too."

"Do you know nothing of him at all?" asked the clerk with his curiosity whetted.

"Nothing at all; he engaged me in London, and the same day sent his Scotch valet back--a dour fellow with whom I had only a few words. He told me his master was a rich Scots squire who had just lost his wife--no more."

"Well," returned the other, "you will see in time what he is about."

"Yes," said Merton doubtfully, "but if he is on some spying Jack treason I would rather be out of it--'tis a dangerous, silly game."

"But your master is a Scots Calvinist, you say."

"So he seems, but it may be a blind. He is queer at least--confounded queer. Well, I must be returning; doubtless I shall be coming again before we leave."

The two parted, and Merton turned from the dark office into the airless street where the thin rays of sun penetrated into the narrow ways between the huge blocks of buildings like swords striking into a

well.

The Englishman returned slowly to his master's lodging; he was an honest, quiet, well-trained fellow, who had travelled a great deal with various gentlemen, and was by no means lacking in shrewdness or knowledge of the world.

They had hardly left England for France before he had discerned something strange about his master, and now that feeling had increased most uncomfortably. He did not like Francis, he did not like his errand; many queer things had unnerved him that he had not told the clerk.

His real wish and instinct was to refuse to go to Rome, to demand his wage, and return by himself.

But long habits of obedience restrained him and the pride of a loyal servant; there was too a certain trustworthy goodness in the man. In a manner he felt sorry for Francis, and could not, with an easy conscience, have abandoned him in Italy.

When he returned to the hotel he did not find Francis in the parlour or the garden. Anxious to be rid of the packet of money he carried, he went into the kitchens and asked where his master was.

A tall boy who waited at table answered:

"The Signore is in his room--surely he is a sick man?"

"How so?" asked Merton, feeling his heart sink unpleasantly.

The Italians looked at each other, half-laughing, half-disturbed; the boy continued his relation, aiding his speech with many gestures and the quick tones and accents of Tuscan vivacity:

"For the first part of the morning the Signore was in the parlour, then he rang the bell, and when I went, asked me who was crying? And I listened and heard a child crying, and we went all over the house together and looked, for I thought some child had got into the house unbeknown, which proved to be the case, for when we reached the second corridor we saw a little boy running towards the chamber of the Signore; he was finely dressed and weeping bitterly, and when I put out my arms to catch him he ran sideways and down the staircase, and so must have got out. At least he disappeared, and I was turning to tell the Signore that the little runaway had disappeared and there was an end of the annoyance of the crying, when I saw him leaning against the wall in a kind of fit or seizure, moaning to himself in his own language, and I helped him to his chamber, where he dropped on the bed and exclaimed that he was sick--sick indeed, and yet would not that I sent for a doctor."

A sense of horror, like a faint wave of nausea, overcame Francis' servant.

"My master has these attacks," he answered quickly, "an old malaria returning; it is too late for him to be in Italy."

"There is much fever here, coming from the Maremma," said the bright chambermaid. "Your master should leave Florence."

"I hope he will," returned Merton sincerely, "and with his face set the homeward way. Is there a doctor near--a good doctor?"

"There is the Doctor Pallavincini, one of the best in the city, in the Piazzetta degh Adimari--but the Signore said he would have no doctor."

"Yet I cannot take this responsibility alone," said the servant. "He must have a doctor. I was tempted to call one in Pisa. I pray you go

to this gentleman and beg him to come as soon as may be."

The people of the inn, who were always afraid of the plague or the smallpox, were glad enough for a doctor to be called in to their sick guest, and the boy who had first spoken snatched up a straw hat and ran out into the heat.

Merton, feeling more uneasy than he would have cared to admit to anyone, went up to his master's room with an unconquerable reluctance. He knocked three times--at the last summons Francis said, "Come in."

The servant entered.

The room was large and handsome; curtains of a dark claret-coloured velvet were drawn across the windows, excluding all light save a faint glimmer like that of dawn.

On the large bed, which was hung with deep red draperies, lay Francis, the pillows doubled up under his head, the coverlet disordered by the tossing of his limbs.

His cravat was undone, his shirt loosened, the hair pushed back from his forehead was damp at the roots with sweat, his whole face had that ghastly pallor, peculiar to those whose proper complexions are dark, when all the blood has receded and only the natural brown of the skin remains, drained and livid.

As Merton entered he started up and held out his hand, as it were with a gesture of supplication, then seemed to recollect himself, and, taking his handkerchief from his pocket, passed it over his lips.

"Any news of Mr. Forsythe?" he asked in a dry voice.

Merton delivered the money and said that Mr. Forsythe had lately

been in Florence and was now probably in Rome.

"Then we must go to Rome," said Francis, sinking back on his hot pillows.

Merton eyed him keenly.

"I do not think your honour is fit to travel," he remarked carefully,--
"especially to Rome in this heat."

"I told you I was ill," answered Francis. "I am ill; I have this cursed fever in my bones sapping my very life. But I must find Allan Forsythe. I told you that before. But if you care to come no farther I can very well go on alone."

This came so near Merton's secret thought that he was shamed.

"I shouldn't think of that, sir," he declared. "I spoke for your own sake. This climate is dangerous for the fever."

"I know," replied Francis Moutray, "but I must go on if it kills me. We will start to-morrow; there is no sense in staying in this hateful city--you hear their bells--all day!"

Merton restrained himself from saying that Rome would be the same, and remarked quietly:

"I hope you will forgive me, sir, but hearing you were ill again, I have sent for a doctor."

"You should not have done that!" cried his master angrily--"you should not have done that!"

"Forgive me, sir, but these people are very afraid of the plague or infectious illness, and unless a doctor reassures them, are apt to be

unmanageable. They might even have turned your honour out of the inn. And a doctor can give you, sir, some strengthening medicine to help you on your way to Rome."

Before this tactful explanation Francis was silent; Merton took it he was dismissed, and left the chamber.

Francis refused the midday meal; Merton ate his in sober silence, thinking and considering on painful matters.

When the great heat of the day had declined and the city began to stir again to business and pleasure, the doctor came--an elegant gentleman in a silk-lined coach.

He could make little of Francis Moutray's case; declared the illness to be malaria, and advised his instant return to his own country or a colder climate, or at least to the hills or the sea; if the patient was obstinate in going on to Rome, he could only say that it was very dangerous. As he was leaving, Merton stopped him in the hall.

"Sir," said the servant, "I can tell you something about my master's case that you would not learn from him. I hope your honour will excuse me, but I am alone here with this gentleman, and would like the support of your advice and wisdom."

The doctor was both interested and courteous. The two went into the parlour overlooking the street; Doctor Pallavincini seated himself, clasping the knob of his malacca cane, and Merton stood respectfully before him.

"Speak in Italian," said the doctor pleasantly. "You use my language better than I do yours."

"First, sir," replied Merton, "will you tell me quite frankly what is the matter with my master? I neither love him nor know him, but in a way

he is my countryman, and in a way he is in my charge--for every sane man feels responsible for those whose wits are unsettled." Pallavincini gave him a quick look.

"This is what is the matter with your master," he replied: "An attack of malaria taken long since and recurrent--a kind of feverish ague, also a great sickness of the whole body, brought on, I should hazard, by great sickness of the mind. He is probably a man of hot passions who, for all his life, has repressed them, as you Northerners do. I think too, but here I am only guessing, that he has lately had some great shock which has almost destroyed his mental balance--the sort of shock that might lead to melancholia--to madness--to anything."

"Thank you, sir," said Merton. "I know nothing of Mr. Moutray's history save that he lately lost his wife."

"Why is he here now in Italy?"

"That I do not know either, sir, save that he is in search of a countryman of his, and resolute not to go back until he finds him."

"Ah," said the doctor thoughtfully.

"But what I wished to tell you, sir, what I wished to consult you about, was this--Mr. Moutray is a haunted man."

"Ah," repeated the doctor again; then he added slowly, "A haunted man?"

"Perhaps your honour does not believe that is possible."

"Tell me about this haunting," answered Pallavincini quietly.

"Tis a child, sir, a little child, finely dressed and always weeping."

"That is very likely," returned the Italian. "Your master is in that state of mind when he would be sure to suffer from hallucinations."

"But other people have heard and seen--it."

"Who?"

"The first time was in a village inn; the maid saw a child on Mr. Moutray's bed with a prayer book in his hand--so did I, and several others, but the thing disappeared. When my master was told he refused to sleep there another night, and went on to Pisa by the next diligence, and on the journey was the child crying--every one heard it. At Empoli we saw him pass into a church, and this illness of to-day, sir, follows the appearance of the child this morning, in this very inn, as you can confirm by questioning the people here."

The doctor sat thoughtful a moment, then answered slowly:

"This is all very possible--but it--the child, the crying, remains a delusion of Mr. Moutray's brain."

Merton looked puzzled.

"When others have seen it, sir?"

"Yes--that is simply that his thought is so intense that he is able to project the form of it in visible shape. It is an abstruse subject. People under a delusion will sometimes project a perfume--what he sees and hears no one can tell, but his agony, his mental suffering, his almost insanity, is sent out in this vision of the child, which he is quite unable to control. The worse he becomes, the more the mind masters the body, the stronger will become the haunting--which may change in form; if he completely recovers, the hallucination will disappear. Probably there has been some child in his life, certainly there has been some great grief, or wrong, or crime."

"Thank you, sir," replied Merton. "After all, your explanation comes to the same thing."

"As what?"

"As what we ignorant people would say, sir, that it was a spirit or ghost haunting a man to madness or the grave."

"As you, say, it comes to much the same thing," admitted the doctor, rising. "Science and superstition join hands in these things--we none of us know really any of the truth of it. Your master should have some distraction, a strong passion--a great interest--if not--" he slightly shrugged his shoulders over the incomplete sentence. "If Mr. Moutray insists on going to Rome there is nothing I can do--I will send some cordials--but that...!"

"One thing more, sir--did you like Mr. Moutray--did he seem to you *honest*?"

"How could I tell?" answered Pallavincini, "a man sick and discordant in his mind. He was not very courteous. Why do you ask such a question?--"

"Because, sir," answered Merton seriously, "we do not believe an innocent man is ever haunted, and if Mr. Moutray is some villain--"

"Put that out of your mind," interrupted the doctor. "Whatever he has done, he is suffering now in a way you or I can hardly imagine. Get him back to England as soon as possible. And one last word of advice--if you meet this man your master is looking for, contrive to give him some warning of Mr. Moutray's state."

The journey from Florence to Rome was to Francis one long darkness along which he fumbled painfully, accompanied only by the footsteps and the crying of a child.

The hot Italian spring, the gorgeous Italian scenery, the gay towns, the pleasant people--all these were to him the phantom world, bodiless and unsubstantial, and the real world about him was filled with his horrible memories, the crowding figures of his hideous dreams, whose feet kept pace with his, who slept in his bed at night, and sat at his table and rode beside the coach, and foremost and most substantial of them was the crying child, sometimes heard, sometimes seen, never altogether absent or silent.

Francis did not easily resign himself into the keeping of these horrors; his strong reason, his stern faith, struggled hard before they were completely overthrown. Disabled as he was with sickness he yet fought desperately against the utter despair that threatened him.

"When I have met Allan Forsythe," he said continually to himself, "all will be well. God is urging me to the last act of justice, the last expiation."

But though he still used the name of God he was no longer sure that he had not fallen to the mastership of the Devil; all issues were confused to him, heaven seemed most unreal, most distant, though he was very sure of hell. He would have willingly slain himself had he been sure of gaining peace that way; fear kept him alive--the fear that what he was enduring now was nothing compared to what he would have to endure through all eternity if he took his own life now.

His one hope lay in Allan Forsythe--first, to obtain from him *the truth*, to have her sin, her foulness confirmed; secondly, to kill him and redeem himself by this act of justice on one hideous in the sight of

Heaven.

And behind, or mingled with this wild mystical feeling was the sheer animal lust of hatred, the man's desire to kill the person who had wronged him; as ever with Francis Moutray, "the spirit lusted after the things of the body," and in the conflict his wretched soul was rent. Yet here the two joined issue--by the death of Allan Forsythe the fanatic would please God, the brute would please himself.

He had begun to be reckless of consequences, to look no further than this deed as the very end and proper culmination of his life.

The old visions of a new existence at Glenillich with Stacy Wigram, of living there as his father had lived, of blotting out the past and purifying himself with good works--with which he had comforted himself in Edinburgh--were now lost, burnt away by the sun of Italy.

Now he thought only of killing Allan Forsythe--beyond, all was chaos.

When he reached Rome, where he knew his enemy to be, the splendid city gleamed before him with a poisonous beauty: the thousand idolatrous churches rose amid heathen temples and wanton palaces; the singing of sweet and ribald songs mingled with the chanting of processions of priests; flaunting women, painted and masked, jostled nuns folded in the hypocrisy of their vocation; the lights from a thousand resorts of vice and disorder, pleasure and license, mingled with the rays of lamps hanging before shrines containing fair female saints with languishing eyes; from the narrow streets rose a smell of flowers, of incense, of foulness, the song of prayers, the shout of a fight, the flash of a knife, and the gleam from a church window.

Thus Francis saw Rome; it was to him like the forecourts of hell.

He lodged in the "Albergo del Sole" in a close lane or alley off the Corso. Day and night the air was stifling, heavy with the smell of greasy cooking and the close emanations of the heat; day and night the noise from the adjacent cafes, the shouts of street vendors, the rattling of chariots and horses over the cobbles was incessant.

Merton suggested that his master should move to a quieter, cooler place, even if it was without the walls, but Francis preferred to remain; it would only be for a few days at most, he said, and then they would return.

Merton brightened with relief at this, and became as eager as his master to find this Mr. Forsythe, whose appearance would put an end to their quest.

They were, as it chanced, quite near the Palazzo Muti, which stood in a little piazzetta the other side of the Corso, and near the beautiful Colonna Palazzo with the delicate bridges connecting the palace with the wonderful gardens on the other side of the road. Near too the church of the Holy Apostles, where the last unfortunate Stuart and his saintly wife had lain in state to hold their last court before the vaults of San Pietro closed over their failure.

The morning after his arrival, Francis sent Merton to make careful inquiries as to the whereabouts of Mr. Forsythe.

The servant found the Palazzo Muti changed from what it had been a few years ago when he had last known Rome.

Since then James Stuart had died, Charles Stuart had come home from nearly twenty years of miserable wanderings, and the Stuart cause, that once seemed so fair and hopeful, was dimmed and fallen.

No longer was the exile's palace the centre of all fashion and wealth. The Count of Albany, reduced in means, in fame, in reputation, was no longer regarded in the city of his brother as he had been during his brilliant youth; his residence was neglected. As often as not he was in Florence, or at Frascati with his brother the Cardinal of York, whose wealth, character, and position alone maintained the dignity of the family. But now the Count was in Rome, and Merton learnt from the doorkeeper of the Palazzo Muti that Mr. Forsythe was there too, and lodging in the palace.

At first the servant was giving his message—which was simply to ask for an appointment for Mr. Moutray—and leaving; then, in obedience to his own instincts of fear and curiosity and the warnings of the doctor at Florence, he asked if he might see Mr. Forsythe.

The doorkeeper spoke to an untidy footman, who seemed to hesitate about taking the message.

"Tell the gentleman," said Merton firmly, "that I have a message from Mr. Moutray of Glenillich—an important message."

At that the fellow, used to an atmosphere of intrigue and restless mystery, turned away on the errand; after a few minutes he returned and told Merton to follow.

They proceeded through the palace, once splendidly decorated and equipped, and now showing sad signs of neglect and decay, the result of poverty and an indifferent owner.

Merton was shown into a little chamber at the back overlooking the garden, in which grew several cypress trees.

This little room was well kept and luxuriously furnished with silk tapestries, painted walls, and gilt and satin chairs, and adorned by

several rich pictures of the later Italian school and several pieces of antique sculpture. A crystal vase of tuberose stood on a small tulip-wood bookcase filled with fine volumes; the pungent, exotic scent of the flowers filled the small chamber almost overpoweringly.

Merton looked at once and with intense curiosity at the gentleman who was seated before a light desk lusted with gold, and who had turned in his cushioned seat to face the door.

The servant beheld a man very elegant, very exact in his apparel, which was of fine, pale-grey cloth--a handsome man, but with features a little too fine, a little worn, a little blanched, whose blonde hair was carefully dressed and slightly powdered, whose delicate contours were emphasized by the black velvet round his throat above his exquisite lace cravat.

"If I could understand the servant's pronunciation, you are from Glenillich?" he asked.

"From Mr. Moutray of Glenillich, sir," replied Merton. He was a little confused, because Allan Forsythe was not what he had expected him to be--in any way.

"We call him Glenillich in Scotland," returned Allan quietly. "You are English, I think?"

"Yes, sir. Mr. Moutray's English servant."

"And he is in Rome?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"At the 'Albergo del Sole,' sir."

There was a silence of a few minutes, during which Allan kept his eyes, clear and cold as water, on Merton.

"What is your message?" he asked at length.

"My message was simply this, sir, that you would be pleased to name a time to see Mr. Moutray; and I could have easily left it with the doorkeeper--but I made bold to see you myself, sir."

"For what reason?"

"It is hard for me to explain myself, sir. I am in a difficult position--if you are a friend of my master--"

"Let us understand one another," interposed Allan. "You are new in Glenillich's service, I think--I do not remember seeing you before?"

"He engaged me in London, sir, for this journey. I know nothing of him at all."

Merton slightly emphasized this last statement, and the sharpness of Allan's look became intensified. The servant, gathering courage with the force of his own statements, continued:

"Mr. Moutray is a sick man, sir--he should not be in this country at ail; even in Florence he was advised that he went on to Rome at the peril of his life. He would come, however, he was so desirous of seeing you."

Allan showed neither surprise nor confusion.

"What is his sickness?"

Merton seized the chance.

"Largely of the mind, sir--indeed he is very strange--hardly sane, one might say; the doctor in Florence admitted so much."

He hesitated, longing to add about the apparition of the child, but not daring to.

"And do you know in the least what is his business with me?" asked Allan.

Merton was quick enough to interpret the remark as an admission of interest and attention, and a consent to listen further.

"Not at all, sir. But to meet you seems the passionate object of his life."

"And you do not know," pursued Mr. Forsythe, still cautiously feeling his way through the labyrinth of a mystery, "of anything that may have happened to--agitate or unsettle Mr. Moutray?"

"His Scotch valet told me that he had recently lost his wife, sir."

"That," said Allan carefully, "I knew before I left Edinburgh. He has not come to Italy to see any of her family?"

"Her family? Was she an Italian, sir?" cried Merton, opening his eyes.

"Yes; of a noble family. Did you not know?--does it surprise you?"

"It does surprise me, sir, very much, because my master seems to hate this country and all in it. He certainly is here for no purpose but to find you."

"That is surely strange. I should not have thought he would have left Scotland now--so soon. Do you know with whom he left the child?"

"The child, sir?" asked Merton eagerly. "His son--I suppose you would not know."

The servant paled and lowered his voice.

"Would you tell me what the child was like, sir?" he said. "How old?"

"Why," said Allan, surprised at the man's peculiar look, "he was six, I think, or seven--unusually quaint--fair--"

"Richly dressed?"

"When his mother was alive at least," answered Allan sadly.

"Did you, sir, ever see him in a suit of dark puce colour with gold enrichments, and a cravat of fine lace, very long in the ends?"

"Yes, I have," replied Allan, startled, for in such a dress he had last seen Elphin Moutray, a solitary little figure, passing through the corridors of Glenillich House.

"Then," declared Merton solemnly, "it is he--by Heaven it is he! Did you know he was dead, sir?"

"Dead?" cried Allan, "dead? The child dead?"

"He is dead, sir, but not at peace. He is walking--I have seen him--here in Italy."

"Your master's sick fancies have affected you," said Allan.

Merton shook his head.

"Others have seen him too, sir. Mostly he is crying quietly and has a Papist prayer book in his hand."

At this last particular Allan's composure suddenly forsook him, shattered by utter horror and amazement. How, unless indeed instructed by some supernatural truth, did this fellow know that Elphin had ever held a Papist prayer book--a fact unknown even to Francis--unknown to all now save the child, the priest, and Allan himself?

He could but conclude that the servant knew more than he disclosed, and that his tale was some shield or trap.

"I do not think the child is dead," he said with a great effort, controlling himself.

Merton saw he was suspected.

"Sir," he replied, "if you ask Mr. Moutray he will tell you that I know nothing of his affairs at all. I did not know of the existence of his son. But such a child as I describe, I and others have seen about my master. And Mr. Moutray is strange, sir--the doctor in Florence told me I should warn you before he met you that he was strange; if I have been too bold, forgive it, sir."

Despite all the protest of his incredulity, Allan was dreadfully convinced.

A sensation of helplessness overtook him; he felt himself face to face with a mystery of horrid darkness which would presently reveal some unspeakable tragedy.

And he had believed himself secure from that piteous past; he had not thought ever to see Francis Moutray again--hardly to ever hear his name. He was busy creating for himself new interests, a new mode of life, principally with the object of forgetting what had been so sad, so strange, and so unfortunate.

And now he was suddenly faced by the past, revived and made more horrible by mystery; what had sent Francis hotly on his track?

Allan knew it could be no pleasant business.

"I must see your master," he said to Merton. "Without seeing him I can understand nothing--thank you for what you have told me--I think you did well."

He was slightly paler, his very straight brows slightly knitted, otherwise he retained the ease and quiet of his usual manner. Merton admired him. He saw he was moved and controlling himself and doing it well; he was the kind of man Merton would have liked to have as master. The servant contrasted him very favourably with Francis; he had a finer air of quality, more of the elegance of breed, apart from his greater calm and serenity; serving him, Merton thought, would have been to serve one on whom it would have been easy to rely--Merton had never felt that of Francis Moutray.

"I hope you do not think that I have been forward, sir?" he asked, with the anxious desire of the inferior to stand well with some one he respects.

"I am glad that you have spoken," responded Allan. "I understand your anxiety. Glenillich was always--difficult. He should have brought one of his own servants with him as well."

"I wish he had, sir," replied Merton heartily.

"I will speak to you after I have seen your master," said Allan, "after I have judged for myself what state he is in; in all events be assured that I shall urge him to return to Scotland."

"I thank your honour," said the servant earnestly. "And I beg you to remember that Mr. Moutray is--in a strange state."

This was plainly said as a warning; Allan's light lashes fluttered.

"I will remember," he replied. "Does your master expect me at his inn?"

"He spoke of coming here, sir."

"Then tell him I am at his service this afternoon."

VIII

Allan Forsythe, sitting alone in the silence of his room in the Muti Palace, awaited the coming of Francis; strange thoughts occupied his mind, dim but sure apprehensions filled his heart.

The new life that he had been so resolutely creating had been broken down and lay in shreds about him, Scotland that he had tried to forget was vividly before him, the old days he had consigned to oblivion had revived; he was once more drawn into connexion with Francis Moutray, which meant connexion with Stacy Wigram, with the boy, with Glenillich--with the dead--with her--with Giovanna.

After leaving Glenillich he had gone straight to Edinburgh, just escaping the great snowstorm, and there he had shut himself in his room, struggling with the new tumult in his soul; when he had brought himself to calmness he had decided to go to Italy earlier this year and lose remembrance of Giovanna in the intrigues that formed his lifework.

The day on which he had taken this resolution he had gone to Stacy Wigram, naturally, with the same instinct that had sent Francis there, because she seemed an element of peace, almost a beatitude in the turmoil and passion of daily life.

And she had met him with the news she had that day received from Francis, a brief letter that the delayed express had brought through the snow.

Giovanna was dead, Francis wrote, killed by a fall from an unmanageable horse; he added nothing.

Allan had taken the news with the just horror, the surprise and grief that Stacy expected of him--no more.

But all his plans instantly changed; by the time he had reached his rooms--through a town that was black and unreal--he had resolved to leave the country for ever.

He suddenly sickened of the long deception in which he lived; he would declare his religious and political faith and reside in a country where both were tolerated; he would sell all he possessed in Scotland and make his home for ever in Italy.

Some remorse touched him at leaving Elphin; he wondered how the little child would bear his secret, lonely lamp of faith in the dark life of Glenillich; he resolved to speak to Father Hilton when he should next see him; he dreamt of telling Francis of the boy's baptism and adopting him himself when his father cast him out, as he most certainly would; that, however, would seem a wrong to the memory of Giovanna, to the secret he shared with her, and from which she had never absolved him.

Yet he would dearly have liked to have had the child--all that was left of her now on the earth she had so beautified.

He had not stopped to arrange anything--his one imperative need had been to get away from the grey skies that had looked on her death, and the cold earth that had entombed her loveliness and

sadness.

He had left on the instant for Italy, and only when at Florence had he begun to put his project of voluntary exile into practice by making arrangements to sell all his property in Scotland and purchase a villa and lands outside Rome; he had openly declared his religion, not caring now who reported him in Scotland, and he had openly attached himself to the person of his king, as he considered the Count of Albany.

He had no longer any delusions as to the Stuart cause: he saw that it was hopeless, abandoned, despised; he saw that Charles Stuart, the once gallant young Prince whose name was a glory and a romance still in Scotland, who had been the radiant hero of the elder Forsythe and of his own early youth, had become an embittered, disappointed, violent man, drink-sodden and broken in mind and body.

But it was his cause and his king, it was the devotion and toil of his life, and he intended to resign the rest of his days to the same useless labour of love.

For one thing there was nothing else for him to do.

With his native dispatch, care, and caution he had engaged himself at once with the party who were endeavouring to secure a German Princess for the hand of Charles Stuart, a match which the adherents of the fallen royalty desperately hoped might grace and mend their cause.

It was in this work that Allan was engaged when the coming of Merton had broken all his peace.

Never for a breath had he thought that he would see or hear from

Francis again; he sincerely believed that he was utterly indifferent to the cousin of his one-time betrothed, and that Francis had probably completely forgotten him already.

Now he had to come to a different conclusion. What did Francis know? what did he hope to know?

Why this passionate following through a dangerous heat? (for Francis could not be aware that it was Allan's intention never to return to Scotland) what was this mysterious illness, this talk of the phantom of a child?

Could Elphin be dead--was he walking because he had died without confession and the viaticum? All the awful stories he had heard of such things flashed through his troubled mind.

He was both startled and dismayed--more so than he had ever known himself.

Yet his conscience was clear; there was no wrong with which Francis could reproach him--or Giovanna.

His attitude towards his faith justified him in his action with regard to the child.

He had obeyed God and therefore had no need to answer to man.

Nor could he think he had wronged Francis in that last interview with Giovanna.

Soul to soul they had spoken, or so it seemed to him now, and that was no matter of Francis--in Allan's eyes Francis and been wrong from the first.

Allan saw the sad story very simply; he could not perhaps understand

the passion which had swept Francis into his fatal marriage, but he had observed it and knew it was there, and he could understand how Francis, having fallen in his own eyes, by a surrender to an overwhelming desire for one who embodied all his creed and training had taught him to hate, should seek to redeem himself by persuading his own soul that he had acted from spiritual reasons--that he had taken the woman not because she was fair, but because he wished to snatch her from eternal perdition and, this, by an austerity of conduct which strove to crush, in the creature whom he had taken to himself, all those qualities which had first aroused his love.

This Allan had seen clearly from the first and hated Francis for it; he was a bigot himself, and necessity (since there was in him none of the stuff of which martyrs are made) had led him into subterfuge and deceit; but he was no hypocrite, he had that advantage of his easy, lax faith, and he detested the hypocrisy of the heretic in Francis, a hypocrisy, to him, always associated with the inhumanly serene and impossibly austere doctrines of the extreme forms of Protestantism.

"The man will not even allow his own humanity," thought Allan, "and he is more human than many."

If Giovanna had ceased to love Francis the bond between them would have been broken in Allan's eyes (and in her own) and he would have had no shame in taking her away.

He did not consider her as married--a little further in love, and he might have married her himself--in any case he would have regarded Francis as the one who had wronged her, not himself.

There he felt no shame nor hesitation in facing Francis--confusion and dread at facing some unknown horror did grip him, but he was not afraid of Francis.

Yet he had no wish to be disturbed by this intrusion on his new-found peace, his serene occupation; he did not want the turmoil of emotion, the sickness of hate, the bitterness of memory introduced into his life.

He almost wished he had refused to see the man; yet even as he wished it his enemy was shown into his presence.

For a second Allan kept his eyes down; he was resolving that he would not be tempted or surprised into anything that would disturb his even life; he had avoided suffering always--had fled from it twice, from Glenillich when he had spoken to Giovanna, from Edinburgh when he had heard of her death, and it should not overtake him now.

There were possibilities of pain, of agony, of tragedy behind the present situation; Allan was resolute to ignore and avoid them.

Francis came slowly into the room, walking heavily. Allan did not think him much changed though he was of an unhealthy pallor and wore silver-rimmed spectacles of smoked glass.

His brown cloth and black satin vesture was too rich and cumbrous for such heat; he seemed now, as always, dressed for the cold and rain.

Allan rose and held out his hand.

"I did not expect to see you in Italy, Glenillich," he said.

Francis did not take his hand or answer; he came straight to the desk beside Allan and laid on it his closed fist.

When he lifted his hand he showed a golden coin of the Emperor Aurelian.

"Have you come all this way to return me this?" asked Allan quietly.

"No," said Francis evenly, "but I found that I already had one in my collection. I would not deprive you."

Allan was amazed; he had prepared himself for rough violence; now he divined that Francis, like himself, was meaning to keep all tragedy in the background, that he too, for some purpose of his own, would be quite cool and reasonable.

Mr. Forsythe seated himself and waited, ignoring the insult of the other's greeting; he meant if possible to ignore everything sooner than be betrayed into pain.

Francis too meant to endure anything--until he had got to know--*the truth*.

So the two faced each other, cold, guarded, curious, hostile.

Francis seated himself and pulled off his gloves, loosening a finger at a time.

"You came here especially to see me?" asked Allan.

"Especially to see you."

"Will you not take off those glasses? There is no glare here."

With his now bare hands Francis removed the spectacles and slipped them into his pocket. Allan marked at once his changed eyes, wild, uncontrolled, and staring, and he thought of what the man Merton had said.

"I hear you are a Papist and a Jack," remarked Francis.

"As I have always been."

"Secretly."

"Secretly--whom was I bound to tell? The only one who had any right to know--your cousin--I told. Miss Wigram knew."

"Why," asked Francis in a voice that sounded dead, "did you not marry Stacy?"

"I think I told you," replied Allan, with himself well in hand.

"Was it because you were in love with another woman and she knew it?"

Allan kept his eyes fixed on the golden Aurelian.

"Have you come from Scotland to ask me that?" he said quietly.

"Will you answer me?" demanded Francis.

"Perhaps, when you have shown your right to question me."

"I will ask you another question which you cannot deny my right to put--did you and Giovanna Odaleschi baptize my son with Papist rites?"

Allan calmly returned his look.

"Why do you approach me like this?" he asked. "Why put these useless questions?"

"Why?" echoed Francis. "It is certainly folly, for you will lie to me as you have lied all your life long." Allan did not stir.

"I know the story," continued Francis, "but not all of it. Now I must have the *whole* truth."

Allan smiled.

"To whom is that known?" he said. "Certainly not to me. And seeing she is dead will you not let it all alone? It is so useless."

"No," said Francis, "this is the adjustment."

Scorn shadowed Allan's pale face.

"Do you think you can adjust anything?"

"It is God's adjustment and I am His instrument," replied Francis. "His instrument for many things."

"God's adjustment will not be in this world," said Allan.

Francis started and shuddered as if he had been stung with a whip.

"I have redeemed myself," he cried. "I am not afraid to die--but *she* has gone to everlasting torment."

"Have you no pity for her seeing she is dead?--have you no shame?--are you not fearful to speak so, when, if she is damned, she is damned for you?"

"In despite of me," said Francis with a ghastly look. "But you would be her advocate, you who were her lover."

Without passion Allan confronted him.

"You think that, do you?" he answered. "Did she so waste herself on such as you! Did you not even know her or the quality of her affection

and her loyalty?"

"You were her lover," repeated Francis.

"In that I loved her--yes. I think I did love her--she was like a benediction in a dusty life. There was never any man in her world but you--if you do not know that, you are a fool, Glenillich."

"I knew you would lie to me," said Francis with a certain fierce satisfaction, "but despite you I will find out the truth."

"The truth!" exclaimed Allan. "Why do you harp on that? You know all you will know this side the grave. If you slander her through spite and malice--you know in your heart you are wrong--if in your soul you believe what you say, who can enlighten you? Go and leave me in peace, Glenillich."

Francis did not move.

"Did you suffer when you heard she was dead?" he asked.

Allan slowly flushed.

"I suffered," he said. "I would wrong her memory to deny it."

"She was disfigured," said Francis--"horribly--I supposed you loved her for her beauty--as I did? She was not beautiful when she died. She is not beautiful now. Do you ever think of her as she is now? Corruption--decay--there is little left for us to dispute over--corruption--decay. She is buried with those cursed trinkets you brought her lying heavy on her face. Would you like to go into Glenillich vaults and steal her from me now?"

Allan recoiled from him.

"Leave me in peace," he repeated hoarsely. "You shall not provoke me."

"I want the truth," insisted Francis, leaning forward. "Your confession--she never confessed. I want to know how it happened--how long you fooled me, when the boy was baptized, why you left that night--I want to see her letters. I want to know how often you met--"

"Stop," said Allan. "Sanity would not put such questions, nor honestly listen. Her one sin was loving you--her great madness too. She was good and true--were you the same you would know it."

"The child is dead," said Francis.

Allan heard Merton's words ringing in his ears; his lips trembled.

"Dead," repeated Francis Moutray; "therefore I have no object in the world but to get the truth from you--judge then if I shall not obtain my wish."

Allan looked at him levelly.

"You have had the truth--you get no more from me," he replied.

"The day--she died--I had some of the truth from the child; before that I had guessed at it. I was not so foolish but I had guessed about you and her--then I found the child with his Papist book and learned some more from him. Now I will have the rest from you."

"Why did you not ask her?" demanded Allan.

"I have told you--that same day she was killed--mauled--maimed--struck into the silence of damnation by the judgment of God."

Allan, staring at Francis, paled as if he was going to faint.

"Killed?" he cried, as if the words were struck out of him. "O Christ, I believe that you murdered her!"

Francis rose; he smiled, and the blood rushed into his face and stained his eyes.

"Do you think so?" he said. "I tell you it was God."

Allan leant across the desk in the attitude of a sick man, and did not answer.

"How much you cared! How you must suffer!" said Francis softly. "I wish you had seen her at the last. I have found out enough for to-day, but you will see me again before long."

Without another word he left the room.

Allan put his hand before his eyes and sat motionless.

IX

Francis returned to his inn with a sensation of pleasure and satisfaction supporting his weakness. His goal was achieved now, he had his enemy in his sight, in his power too, he felt.

He rejoiced and gloated over that; it was in his power to torture Allan, torture the truth from him, and then slay him.

He had tortured him to-day, he had seen the pale face grow ashy, the fine features quiver; he knew that Allan had suffered for all his composure. He amused himself too by thinking how easy it would have been to have killed his enemy to-day in the rich little cabinet of the Muti Palace—he might have shot him, as they had wanted him to shoot the horse who had thrown Giovanna; he might have stabbed

him as he leant mute across the gold lusted desk; he might have fallen on him and strangled him with his bare hands--the fever had not so far enfeebled him that he had not strength enough for that.

But he had saved and cherished his revenge--not now, nor to-morrow, but soon would he kill Allan Forsythe.

In the meanwhile he was vague as to his plans, as to his next move; a mental lassitude was over him. He was not in anguish as he had recently been, for his hauntings had ceased, but he seemed incapable of action.

Returning to his unspeakably hot chamber in the "Del Sole," he threw himself on the bed behind the mosquito nets, and lay there, half insensible of his surroundings, staring at the bars of gold like molten metal which the sun sent through the slats of the shutters.

Meanwhile the other man remained as Francis had left him--like a creature stunned.

Presently he stirred, and took from a back drawer of the desk a letter he had received in Florence from Stacy Wigram.

In this letter she told him, as a matter that could not fail to have an intense if painful interest for both of them, the manner of Giovanna's death. She had not learnt it from Francis, whom she had not seen before she wrote, but from the architect who should have designed the new church at Glenillich.

His acquaintance Stacy had made the previous summer through Francis, and meeting him in the Lawnmarket the very day of his arrival in Edinburgh (and a few days before the coming of Francis), she had stopped to talk to him of the tragedy of Glenillich--of which he was very full--and had taken him home in her coach, and in the

dark withdrawing-room Allan remembered so well he had told her the whole sad recital.

Allan compared this with what Francis had just told him, and found the whole slipped together to form one ghastly truth.

The truth!

Francis had come to Italy to find the truth, but it was Allan to whom the truth had come, he thought.

He put it together thus: Francis, half-mad with jealousy and suspicion already, had returned home to find his guest gone and his wife abroad--somehow he had surprised the secret of the baptism out of the child--he had set out to find Giovanna, he had returned, saying he had not overtaken her.

Presently a search-party had gone forth and found Giovanna dying near Ardnamurchan. She had said she had been thrown from her horse, she had shown a piteous anxiety to say something before she died--had said nothing, only--it was an accident.

Allan wondered if she had lied, as Desdemona had lied, to save her lord--had she even with her last breath striven to do him service?

Doubtless her horse had bolted with her, doubtless she had been thrown, but supposing Francis had met her first?

He had not been from the house long enough to go to Ardnamurchan--but he might have met her far away, the maddened horse might have galloped miles before she was thrown.

But how had he slain her?

Allan recalled the story of Ardnamurchan--the way the last man who

had lived there had slain his wife--struck her down in the stables and murdered her with her riding-whip.

Francis had said she was disfigured, hideous--O God, if he had slain her thus--beaten the beauty and life out of her thus!

Allan was shaken with dread and horror unspeakable; violence had always been as foreign to him as passion, and his cold fastidiousness had always shrunk from even the mention of tales of blood and crime.

And of all violence he had always most abhorred that which caused a man to murder a woman; much as he had lived in Italy where it was considered natural and even honourable for a man to destroy a woman who had given him just cause of offence, he still retained an unspeakable horror of such actions, and now, at the thought that Giovanna had been the victim of brutal fury and mistaken wrath, his whole soul sickened. Bitterly he blamed himself for having left Glenillich in such haste--he should have stayed to face Francis.

It had been his old weakness, the love of the easy way, the dread of suffering--the desire to avoid the climax--and now into what unspeakable difficulties and sufferings had that action not led him. He saw himself in his own eyes as a wretched coward to have forsaken her--but how could he have known?

Known that the child would betray them--known what Francis really was?

He tried to persuade himself that he was mistaken, that she had really died by accident, but deep in his soul the dreadful conviction remained unshaken.

He could scarcely recall what Francis had said to his involuntary

accusation forced from him by that sudden awful flash of perception, but he knew that Francis had left the room calmly; could he be a murderer?

Then the child--dead--doubtless of grief and shock; Merton's tale of the strangeness of his master and the phantom.

What could it all mean save that one thing Allan strove so hard not to believe?

Francis hated him, had followed him to Rome to say how much he hated him--must he not then have hated her, even more?

Another detail from Stacy's letter suddenly sprang into his anguished mind.

Francis had refused to have her horse shot.

Allan's thoughts became unbearable; he had vowed that nothing should disturb his peace, that Francis should not break in upon the quiet of his new life--but the resolve had been useless, destiny had wrenched from his hands his control of his own life--he was face to face with an unconquerable credence in a fact that shook the very foundations of his soul.

He did not know what to do; he would have gone to Emilia, Giovanna's sister, and her husband, the Orsini Prince, but they were in France, on a political errand of the Papal Court, and there was no other to whom he could go.

He hesitated between the predominant instincts of his nature, which were all for quiet, serenity, and ease, and other instincts of his nature but lately aroused, hate, remorse, love, and desire for revenge.

At one moment he wished to flee, yet a third time, to once again

escape consequences, to shut the whole thing out of his life: the next he wished to track down the crime, to bring Francis to justice, to know him lodged in the Tolbooth, to know him hanged and his memory execrated.

And in the suffering of the conflict he cursed Francis Moutray for the pain he endured.

He longed for Stacy Wigram--longed to seek her advice, to make her his confidante in this monstrous horror that had been forced into his orderly peace.

And then suddenly he thought of another woman--the Contessa Odaleschi--Giovanna's mother.

Allan only knew her very slightly; she had come to Rome from Bologna a few days before, and he had seen her once, by chance, driving in the Corso.

He had never sought her out to tell her of her daughter's death or the part he had played in executing Mr. Middleton's commission; he had rather avoided renewing his slender acquaintance with her, through his great dread of reviving the past--and even he, though he was lax where Francis was severe, did not care overmuch to think of Vittoria Odaleschi as the mother of Giovanna.

Now she occurred to him with a sort of relief; he knew that she was capable, resolute, brave, unscrupulous; he believed that she had loved Giovanna.

He thought that if he could persuade her that Francis had murdered her daughter he need trouble himself no more about the matter; she would revenge herself and swiftly; all scandal apart, there were already several deaths at her door.

To deliver Francis to the justice of the Contessa Vittoria would be the same as to deliver him to the justice of the Scotch law.

Yet because Allan was so sure of this he could not go to Giovanna's mother, he could not connive at an Italian vendetta--a second murder.

Nor did he know how to approach the Contessa; a plain statement of what he thought he dare not give--he trembled to take such words upon his tongue.

And then he was not sure.

No, he could not go to Vittoria Odaleschi.

And so he sat, communing with himself in his misery while the golden day changed into the purple twilight, and the fireflies came out to float in and out the tall cypresses in the garden of the Palazzo Muti.

Before supper there was some business relating to the German marriage to discuss with the Count of Albany; that distracted his mind a little; in the evening he was engaged for a reception at the Colonna Palazzo, the last the family were giving before retiring to their country villa for the summer.

And when he entered the noble saloon, gilt painted, sumptuous, one of the most gorgeous in Rome, the first person whom he saw was she who had been so much in his thoughts that day, Vittoria Odaleschi.

It was not extraordinary that he should meet her there. He might, if he had reflected, have expected it, yet he took it as strange--an omen.

While he spoke to some of his acquaintances there, he was observing her, trying, almost wistfully, to trace in her some likeness to her dead daughter. She was seated at a little card table and talking

to two young cadets of the house of Colonna. She still retained her perfect figure and her attitude was extremely graceful; her gown was of blue and yellow, both colours so soft as to blend into one another; her hair was powdered an ashy white and veiled with a fine gauze which passed under her chin and folded over her bosom; she wore long ear-rings formed of clusters of seed pearls, and a braid of pearls hung round her neck and reached almost to her knees. Her face showed neither youth nor age, it was bleached or powdered to an unnatural fairness, in which her eyes showed very dark; her straight brows were painted with two fine lines, her lips with two delicate lines of pale scarlet.

She had not much look of Giovanna save only in her grace and finish and completeness.

Allan hoped that she would not see him, or would not know him, but no sooner had she glanced in his direction than she dismissed her cavaliers and unmistakably beckoned him with her chicken-skin fan.

There was nothing for Allan but to approach her; she received him quite pleasantly, referring to their acquaintance years ago in Rome and Bologna.

Then she said, quite directly:

"What is Francis Moutray doing in Rome?"

Allan was utterly at a loss; he was conscious of stammering as he made his feeble reply:

"Mr. Moutray is no friend of mine, Contessa,"

"But you know him," she announced quietly. "You are both Scotch."

"But we are different in faith, in politics—in everything," said Allan as

if he protested.

"The Count of Albany," insisted the lady, "told me you had mentioned to him the name of Francis Moutray, and that he was a relation of a lady you were to marry."

Allan remembered that he had told the Count that much on his last visit to Italy, doubtless in some idle gossip over the Odaleschi romance, when he had said he knew lover and lady in Scotland.

"I asked the Count," continued the Contessa, "because I thought he would know all the Scotchmen in Rome—he said this—gentleman was no adherent of his, but that you knew him."

Allan had now recovered his poise and inwardly resolved that he would tell her nothing.

"What is the object of these questions, Contessa?" he asked gently.

"I saw Francis Moutray in the Piazza Santa Lucinda, off the Corso, yesterday. I want to know why he is in Rome and alone."

"He himself can only tell you that, Contessa."

She looked at him steadily out of those still beautiful eyes that had seen so much and known so many tears.

"You know the story," she said, "all Italy knows it. Where is my daughter, Mr. Forsythe?—the Contessina Giovanna. Has he left her?—has she left him?—is she in Scotland?"

Some of the truth he felt he must tell her; he nerved himself by the sight of the splendid crowd passing to and fro; the sense of company gave him courage.

"Contessa, forgive me for sad news. I would another had been the first to tell you," he said sincerely.

"She is dead?" asked Vittoria quickly.

Allan bent his head.

"She was thrown from her horse and killed, early this year."

For a moment the Contessa did not speak, then she said, her voice still low and quiet:

"She had no children?"

"One little boy--he died soon after his mother."

Vittoria Odaleschi drew a deep sigh.

"So there is an end of that," she said, and stared absently across the room.

Allan was mute, oppressed by many thoughts. Vittoria Odaleschi spoke again.

"Some time ago I sent my daughter a few jewels--do you know if she received them?"

"Yes," said Allan. "I know she received them."

He felt it cruel not to tell her all he knew, but he also felt it wise.

"I am glad," replied the Contessa; then she added in the same even tone, "Do you know if he was kind to her?"

"They had a great affection for one another," evaded Allan.

"And she, did she never regret her God--her country--the old days?"

"I think so," hesitated Allan.

"And now--why is he in Rome?"

"I can only believe that he travels as a distraction, Contessa."

She slowly waved to and fro her fan; he noticed that her strange pale face looked much older and more fallen than he had observed at first.

"I should like to see Francis Moutray," she said; "if he made her happy I have no malice against him--that is finished--over. And he must have suffered--losing her--and the child."

"I think he has suffered, Contessa, He is very changed."

"You have seen him, then--spoken to him?"

Allan endeavoured to cover his slip.

"He came to see me at the Palazzo Muti--he knew I was there, and I think he had no other acquaintance in Rome."

"Where is he staying?"

Allan knew she could easily find this out from others if not from himself.

"At the Albergo del Sole--but--"

She interrupted him.

"I know what you would say--he hates me, and I had better leave him

alone--but that is all of the past."

She rose, looking very tall and slender, and caught together the long ends of the fine gauze on her bosom.

"I am staying at the Palazzo Orsini," she added. "Will you please come and see me there to-morrow after midday?" She smiled for the first time since she had spoken to him. "I am too old to receive cavaliers in the morning. I pray you to come--it is of some importance."

Complaisance and curiosity made him agree; he was, besides, no longer afraid of the Contessa, who had shown no desire to probe, nay, who had rather seemed indifferent.

She gave him her hand and then turned away through the crowd.

Looking at her tall lovely figure as it disappeared, he could almost persuade himself that he looked on Giovanna, and the useless tears stung his lids.

X

Allan found the Contessa in her apartments in the Orsini Palace; he was punctual to his appointment and found her alone and waiting for him.

The atmosphere of the place pleased Allan and soothed the uneasiness with which he had come to this interview; the room was noble and beautiful, with a certain air of loftiness and fineness that took all grossness from the worldly and material gorgeousness.

Three pillars of Numidian marble, yellow with age, supported hangings of a dead-coloured silk which were looped back from a

loggia shaded with a vine which opened on to a view of the Palatine hill, dark and rich with heavy trees against the heavy sky.

The windows which faced where the sun struck were veiled by curtains of this same hued silk, so the room was filled with subdued and shaded light, half rosy, half pearl, which yet gave the impression of great heat without.

The walls and ceiling were painted with the delicate and vivid arabesques of the Renaissance, the furniture was after the antique model, fine and slender and piled with tasselled cushions.

In one corner stood a case of religious books, and above them hung the smiling mask of a Greek Nike with wings bound to the smiling head.

In the centre of the scarlet white-and-black tessellated floor was sunk a small basin in which grew several strange irises and lilies with roots tangled in clear water, while from the centre rose a little fountain cooling the air.

And such should have been Giovanna's home, was Allan's instant thought, and he pictured her in snow-swept Glenillich.

Vittoria Odaleschi stood in the entrance to the loggia, her modern dress, with the hooped skirts and ruffled sleeves, seemed out of place in the classic room; her gown was all of the finest white muslin, but over her shoulders she had a scarf of the striped many-coloured Roman silk.

Her blanched hair was covered with a lace cap which fastened with lapels and a diamond stud under her chin.

She looked at Allan without saying a word. For all her careful paint he saw that she had been weeping terribly; she was haggard and near

as colourless as her hair or her gown; remembering what she had been, for the first time, he associated her with age.

"She is an old woman," he thought, and he felt a chill of grief and uneasiness; his epicurean nature did not like to contemplate the fading of beauty.

She moved to a seat and continued to gaze at him almost wistfully.

"Please tell me the truth now," she said; her manner was what it had always been, quiet, pleasant, almost practical--a strange manner for the woman she had been.

The truth! Allan was startled at hearing from her the same demand that he had heard from Francis--did he indeed hold the truth?

"I told you all I knew yesterday, Contessa," he answered.

"No--you told me what you chose I should know, and then I could not press you; now I want the truth, there is no need why you should not give it to me."

He was almost frightened that she should have so clearly read him; he felt foolish that he had tried to deceive her quick perception.

"Why do you conceal anything from me?" she insisted. "What is there to conceal? I have a right to know; I am her mother."

"What would you know?" he evaded.

"Everything."

"Indeed I am more ignorant than you imagine me."

He still strove to defend himself, but she brushed aside as nothing

his excuses.

"You know enough; I saw that yesterday. You knew *her* at least; I think you loved her--did you not love her, Mr. Forsythe?"

She spoke very gently, and he felt his whole being weaken; he could not answer, and he paced about in agitation, contrary to his habit.

"You must have loved her," continued Vittoria Odaleschi. "Well, I loved her too. Will you not be my friend since we both loved her? You are not happy--tell me all."

The words, and, even more, her manner and her look, softened and melted him almost to sudden uncontrollable tears; while she spoke he realized how he had loved Giovanna, how he had suffered since her loss, how blank all his life was and would be without her.

"Do not harden yourself to me," continued the Contessa. "You and I are perhaps the only two left who truly loved her."

Again she used the beautiful word "loved," and Allan was moved almost beyond bearing. He wanted to kneel beside this woman and tell her all his secret story and receive her comfort.

"It is true that I loved her," he answered, "and I would have taken her from him--I could have given her to her faith, her country, to you again, but she would not."

"She loved him to the end, then?" asked Vittoria quickly.

"Yes, to the end."

The Contessa drew a sharp breath.

"There is a thing I cannot understand--she cared--all those years--

she refused love, all the world--for *him*!"

"She was loyal and loving with him--always," said Allan.

"What was her life like?" asked the Contessa.

Allan's powers failed before the attempt to give this woman any idea of how her daughter had lived.

"You would not understand," he said.

"It was dull--dreary? She had no friends, no diversion?"

"Neither--and I think her life was both dull and lonely."

The Contessa sat looking out through the loggia at the majestic view of the Palatine, her pale profile, like a worn cameo, was towards Allan.

He felt, as he had felt during his one intimate interview with Giovanna, as if all his usual prudence and reserve was swept away and the best of him was roused and endowed with power to speak and act; he could not tell why he should feel thus nor what the power was that these women had over him, unless it was the power of their great frankness.

"What are you keeping back from me?" asked Vittoria. "What are you afraid I shall do?"

"I know very little," he replied, still trying to cling to his self-vow of silence.

"You know why Francis is in Rome," she retorted.

"I think he has followed me," said Allan; "so he declares, but he is

like one half-mad--his word is not to be taken."

"So--what does he know or think?"

"He tells me," answered Allan slowly, "that he thinks I was her lover. To say that he must be unbalanced in his mind."

Another aspect struck the Contessa.

"He said that--and left you?"

"And left me--but to seek me out again."

"He hates you?"

"I think so--most unjustly. Yet I never liked him."

"Then he hated her?"

Allan was silent.

"And she died suddenly--an accident, you say?"

Their glances met, and Allan paled.

He saw that she was fast coming to the same dreadful conclusion as had suddenly flashed on him, he realized that she was drawing the truth out of him slowly, gently, accurately.

And he revolted against his own secrecy and prudence as a wrong to both of them; he no longer was desirous of shielding Francis, of avoiding a climax to this bitter tale.

The calm, the sympathy of Vittoria nerved him and fired him; with every word she said he felt more keenly the monstrous behaviour of

Francis, the piteous fate of Giovanna.

He was encouraged by her as a child is encouraged by the caresses of his mother.

"Here, Contessa, is the truth," he said.

He told her everything--all the story as he had known it, heard it, guessed it, saw it--all of Giovanna's first coming to him and the baptism of the child--all his knowledge of her and Francis, his affection and pity and grief for her, his fatal visit to Glenillich with the jewels, and his flight, with the tragic following events which he had but so lately learnt.

Of these he told her what he had learnt before he left Edinburgh, what he had gathered from Stacy Wigram's letter, and what he had heard from Francis yesterday.

But he added nothing of his own horrible suspicion, of the instinctive accusation he had flung at Francis and the manner in which it had been received.

The Contessa listened with every nerve at attention, her eyes the whole while turned towards the softened light of the loggia--a luminous golden-green light trembling through the veil of the vine leaves--her long, fair hands folded in her lap, and her shoulders stooping a little.

She made no comment whatever, and her face expressed neither surprise nor terror nor dismay. Allan wondered if she could quite understand all he had said.

He was conscious of having spoken baldly, badly--it was difficult to convey to this Italian patrician the atmosphere of the home of a Scottish laird.

As he found himself trying to convey to Vittoria what her daughter's life had been, he realized from his own lame words, as he had never realized before, what Giovanna had done when she fled with Francis, and how heroically she had endured the consequences of that moment of passion.

When at length he finished, the Contessa sighed, once or twice heavily.

Allan believed she was much moved, though he had dwelt lightly, for his own sake, on Giovanna's death and said little of the details of it; yet nothing could soften the sheer tragedy of the story.

He felt the silence painful as he waited for her to speak; he stared at the strange coloured lilies and the little fountain whose faint splash had been the accompaniment of his tale, and waited.

Vittoria pulled a silk bell-rope behind her; a black page answered.

She asked him, in a low voice, to serve some fruit, and when he had left she lapsed into silence again.

Allan felt no desire to speak. The chamber was very lovely and peaceful now the evening airs were blowing in across the loggia; his mind was eased by having spoken, he felt a lassitude over mind and body.

The page returned with a silver gilt tray which he placed on a low table before the Contessa. It held several fine salvers of china and enamel piled with strawberries and cherries on ice, and several dishes of sweetmeats and cakes, amber-coloured Sicilian wine in long-necked bottles with silver corks, and red Roman wine stoppered with gold; there were two glasses, flushed with colour like

an opal.

Vittoria dropped a fragment of crystal ice in each, and poured out the strong pale wine; she handed one glass to Allan and drank her own almost eagerly, as if she thought that it would give her strength.

"It is very pleasant here, is it not?" she said at last. "A gracious life, you would say--a noble life?"

"Indeed both."

She turned to him with a look of passion.

"Is it just that she should be lying in that barbaric grave?"

Allan bowed his head.

"She should be here," continued the Contessa with a certain fierceness; "this is her place; she might have been a princess, as her sister is. She was very beautiful and lovable. I think of her often as she was when a little child. Every one loved her, Mr. Forsythe--every one."

Allan saw she still looked at the material side. It did not occur to her that Giovanna might after all have gained by her great love; Vittoria considered her as stolen away, entrapped, sacrificed. This was, perhaps, also Allan's view, since he was not much more inclined to consider spiritual things than was the Contessa.

"I remember," continued Vittoria, "he spoke to me of God, his God--how I hate the God of the heretics, how I loathe these Northern hypocrites."

"Francis is a bigot," said Allan, "a fanatic with all his blood turned sour in his veins and all his passions repressed to madness."

"Do you know why he has followed you here?" demanded Vittoria.

"Indeed I can see no reason in it, beyond the reason of a mad impulse."

The Contessa looked at him straightly.

"He means to murder you as he murdered her."

"Ah!" cried Allan, springing softly to his feet; he had noticed no words of this sentence save the three last, and they transfixed him.

"You too have guessed he did it," added Vittoria steadily.

"I did not dare to breathe it--I was not sure--"

"I do dare--I am very sure."

Allan took a step about the room.

"He shall answer it--he has answered it!"

Vittoria surveyed him keenly.

"What will you do?" she asked.

"I will challenge him," said Allan. "Would you not rather that than denounce him to the law?"

"We have no proof for the law," answered Vittoria, who had always seen the law laughed at and defied and evaded.

"We have no proof for ourselves," returned Allan.

"I need none," she returned.

Almost unconsciously he put himself in her hands; her calm, her swift perception, her air of power, had achieved a complete mastery over him; he was ready to do her bidding.

"Francis is coming to my villa to-morrow," he said; "I cannot see him at the Palazzo Muti. I will get the truth this time and deal with him accordingly."

"What does he say he wants to see you for?"

"He says--one last word before he leaves Rome."

"He will try to kill you," said Vittoria.

"I am on my guard."

The Contessa rose.

"I will come too. What is the hour? Where is your villa?"

"You?"

They faced each other.

"Have I no right to come?" she asked.

"Yes--if you wish to see him. But--Contessa--you will come alone?"

"Ah yes, alone," she replied, and her lids faintly flickered. "My dear," she added, "do not be frightened of me."

"I would settle this a man's way," he answered. "But I will write to you; it is the Villa Rosina--you know it? I have recently bought it."

"I know the place."

"As for the hour, I have not yet heard from Francis."

"You will let me know? I wish to speak to him, and he would not see me if I asked."

"I will let you know."

He took her hand; there was suddenly nothing more to be said between them.

In a little while he left.

As soon as she was alone, Vittoria ran into her bedroom and unlocked a drawer full of tiny embroidered clothes and old toys--Giovanna's things.

She clutched them to her breast and wept over them with the passion of a young woman, with the agony of a mother over the death of a little child.

XI

Allan, almost from the first, had not intended the Contessa to be present at his interview with Francis. Her instant perception of what he had perceived had strengthened his opinion; he was now almost certain that Giovanna had met her death by foul means, and he was prepared and even eager to wring a confession from Francis.

At their meeting in the Palazzo Muti, Allan had been at a disadvantage, feeling his way in the dark, uncertain of his antagonist and even of himself, and when the revelation had come it had left him too stunned to act.

Now it was different; he was prepared, armed at all points. He now

would demand *the truth*, and Francis would have to answer.

And afterwards Allan would challenge him; he was a good swordsman, something even of an expert, and Francis must be very bad, stiff, out of practice.

Allan thought he would kill him, and it caused him no alarm. He knew the Contessa thought he would defile his sword, but to him it was the most natural means of vengeance; he sickened at the long-drawn horrors of a Scottish trial, or the hired bravo that would doubtless be Vittoria Odaleschi's choice.

And he did not wish her present at this interview. He felt warmly, even gratefully, towards her, and to her he would go afterwards and lay his action at her feet; but every instinct he possessed revolted against her presence at this scene.

He wrote, therefore, and told her so frankly; he had already seen that it was useless to use subterfuge with her, and he did not give her the hour of his appointment.

Vittoria was not surprised. She knew the type of man with whom she dealt, how far he would be useful to her and where he would fail her; neither was she nonplussed or even ruffled. She rather smiled at Allan's simplicity, for she had outwitted princes and the Pope himself, and done exactly what she wished, without fear of anything.

She had the Muti Palazzo watched, and when Mr. Forsythe left that mansion about two of the clock his going was instantly reported to her, and she had her horse made ready.

That morning Francis had told Merton to prepare for their departure the following day; he also wrote to Edinburgh, telling Stacy Wigram of his immediate return, and himself put all his personal articles

away; what need could there be to linger in this hateful land when he had killed Allan Forsythe?

His purpose with Allan was exactly Allan's purpose with him--to get from him the truth and then to kill him.

He felt no remorse nor any kind of hesitation, rather he looked forward with a feverish eagerness to the death of Allan as something that would set him at ease, restore his life to normal lines and redeem him before God.

The day was intensely hot--with that heat which is almost incredible to a Northerner--not a breath of wind stirred, and the city was full of white dust, of glaring light, of foul smells. Francis felt his illness increasing on him, his limbs were weak, his head burning and giddy, but this did not hinder his resolution.

Carefully he cleaned and polished, loaded and primed, his small and elegant wheel-lock pistol, put on the lightest suit he had, and told Merton to have his horse brought out.

It was not two o'clock, and Allan had told him that he would be at the villa between four and five--Francis had learnt that it was an hour and more's ride, and was starting now, regardless of the heat, when a messenger arrived.

Merton rapidly translated his message: he came from Mr. Forsythe, he said; that gentleman was detained by the Count of Albany, and could not be up at the villa till nearly seven.

Francis shivered with angry disappointment.

"Where is your master?" he demanded. "I will meet him in Rome."

For he thought Allan was suddenly afraid and trying to escape him.

"Unfortunately that is impossible, sir, since Mr. Forsythe is abroad with the Count--he had to go with him to Frascati this morning to consult His Eminence of York, and he can be at the villa, but not in Rome, to-day."

"How will he return?" asked Francis.

"Oh, he will sleep there, sir; though the house is not ready yet, there is the *fattore's* cottage. Mr. Forsythe often sleeps there. But you will be able to return if you wish, it is light till nearly nine, and a safe road."

"Have you come from Frascati?"

"This moment, sir, riding post-haste to prevent your honour starting."

Francis turned back into the inn without a word; he was now convinced that Allan did truly mean to see him, but the hours of waiting were none the less hateful.

"Your honour could hardly have started in this heat," said Merton, following him into the house; "in a couple of hours it will be cooler, now it is hardly safe."

But Francis would have defied the weather, as he would have defied anything to gain his object; it was the delay only that he dreaded.

Sullenly he went to his room and flung himself on his bed.

As soon as he was relaxed into an attitude of repose all the life seemed to run out of him, and he wondered if indeed he could have undertaken that long ride in the heat.

He cursed his weakness and lay still, his blood running at fever heat,

the air fiercely hot about him.

Through the slats of the shutters poured the merciless sun; even the marble floor was hot, even the bed, coverlet, and pillows, burned.

Francis slipped into a horrid sleep, tortured with confusedly figured dreams which he forgot on the instant he awoke.

He had been disturbed by some noise; with a start he sat up, staring round the room, which was filled with hot, dusty shadow.

The child's crying again--low, persistent, pitiful crying.

Francis sprang from the bed in a fury.

"What do you want?" he cried. "Are you damned because you had no priest? Be silent--blame her, not me!"

He was startled at the sound of his own voice, and a flash of reason checked him.

He felt his pulse, which was beating with a hideous rapidity.

"I have a high fever," he muttered, "naturally these delusions haunt me."

With a shudder he went to the basin and poured the tepid water over his face and neck.

This slightly revived him, but while he had his face hidden in the towel a great terror seized him, and he looked over his shoulder with unutterable anticipation.

The child was in the middle of the room, looking at him imploringly, and holding a prayer book with the Papist cross.

Francis tried to shriek, but the sound was caught and stifled in his throat.

He rushed at the child and tried to catch hold of it, and found himself standing with the torn mosquito-net of the bed in his hand.

"These dreams," he said, "these dreams."

With shaking fingers he pulled out his watch; it was past four.

He adjusted his attire hastily and descended to the little close courtyard. Merton who from the first had not liked this long expedition to see a gentleman who might be visited in Rome--an expedition too much of a piece with his master's strangeness--strove to dissuade him from going.

"Or at least take me with you, sir; you do not know the country or even the way."

Francis paid not the slightest attention.

"Come and meet me to-night about eight o'clock beyond the St. Giovanni Laterano Gate," he answered, and with this the servant had to be content.

The city was not yet aroused from noonday repose and stillness, very few people were abroad in the hot, dry streets. Francis made his way quickly to the gates, passed through the cluster of huts and cottages beyond the walls, and turned across the beautiful Roman campagna in the direction of the Sabine hills.

The rich and prosperous plain which swept to the gates of Rome was now in full beauty; there were not many dwelling-houses, for the malaria was rife even in these comparatively healthy districts, but the

fertile ground had been trained to the utmost advantage. The vines were already as high as a man, or hung in thick festoons from the little hawthorn trees; fields of rice, of grain, of maize, waved like a green sea, and orchards of peach and almond, apple and plum, grew about the lofty ruins of the Claudian Aqueduct.

The road was narrow and thick with white dust, yet pleasantly shaded with fig and acacia, and tall hedges of nut twined with honeysuckle and wild roses.

Lizards darted constantly across the way, and the lower air was full of bright and beautiful insects. Francis rode slowly, hating this opulent loveliness, looking constantly and fearfully behind.

He passed few people--one or two shepherds with flocks of black sheep, who put him on his way courteously; a few children who ran out from the scarce farmhouses and stood staring in the hedge to see him pass.

And when he had been riding nearly an hour he had left behind all the farmhouses, and entered a plantation of vines and figs.

In the distance, on the first spur of the hill, he saw a villa backed by a great grove of cypress trees that was black from the silver foliage of the olive that covered the mountainside.

An old man was leaning over work in the vineyard, he came slowly towards the road, pulling off suckers and throwing them down.

"Is that the Villa Rosina?" called Francis, reining up.

The peasant hastened his steps.

"That house," added Francis impatiently, "is it the Villa Rosina?"

He pointed with his whip.

"This is all the villa," returned the old man, "and that is the master's house."

Francis rode on.

He passed no one else; he endeavoured to distract his thoughts by considering what a fine property Allan had--his own Scottish lands seemed bare and miserable by contrast. A faint flicker of his one time intense interest in agriculture arrived as the cooler airs of approaching evening revived him, and the peaceful beauty of the region through which he rode soothed him, loathe it as he would.

He soon came to the bottom of the eminence on which the house stood, with the hills behind and Rome directly in front.

It was approached by two olive-bordered roads which ran curving upwards either side, embracing a sloping garden.

The house was bare, square, a faded rose colour, the straight line of the roof broken only by a large stone shield bearing a coat of arms; the bottom windows opened on to a noble terrace with a low marble balustrade which overlooked the campagna and the distant city.

Although there were trees behind and at each side, the house stood full in the sun and seemed as if never touched by shade.

All the shutters were closed, the place had an air of absolute desertion and silence.

Francis took the further road, and proceeded slowly by the left side of the garden wall. When he reached the top of the incline he found to his right a large iron gate which led directly to the front of the house and the terrace.

He looked in vain for any bell or knocker, and there was no dwelling visible save the mansion, no hut or cottage, nor peasant working.

But the gate was ajar; he dismounted and entered, leading his horse.

Before him the wide gravel path led straight to a short flight of steps ascending to the terrace; either side of the wall were ilex and laurel trees with clusters of amber-coloured foliage and long, tasselled blossoms among the old dark leaves; at the foot of them grew a tangle of neglected roses--huge roses, twenty or more on one stem--their bright pink colour showed marvellous in the cool depths of shade.

Francis paused; he had a sudden dreadful sense of being absolutely alone in the villa, a sudden conviction that Allan was not there.

He fastened his horse by the reins to one of the low boughs of the ilex, and went on alone; continually he looked behind, fearful of that piteous little figure. He was quite sure that the child was following him, but hoped he would not see him; if he should behold or hear him in this solitude he thought he should go mad.

He mounted the terrace in the hopes of finding an entrance to the house, but all was shut and barred.

Before him the rich campagna swept to a dazzling mist in the distance where the white dome of St. Peter gleamed, either side the yew and cypress rose up against the purple blue of the cloudless sky, behind was the vine and olive-covered slope of the hill, on all sides the luxurious country, gorgeous with the ripening harvest of grain and fruit and shimmering in the golden heat-rays.

Truly the place was fair as a dream; it was strange Allan should own this splendour. Francis wondered who the former family had been

and why they had sold their property...

So Allan was going to live here a Papist and a foreigner...Well, the place was beautiful, but poisonous--"Because of these things,"--yes, because of these things had Allan sold his soul, and because of them would the wrath of God descend on him.

Francis put his hand to his pistol, crossed the terrace, and passed round the avenue of cypress on the other side of the house.

The back was also laid out in a broad terrace or walk surrounded by a balustrade, either side of this stretched lovely but neglected flower-gardens, and behind, on the slope of the hill, were two other narrow stone terraces rising one above the other and connected by a winged staircase in the centre; in the curve formed by these two flights of steps was an elaborate fountain with sea-horses springing from the basin edge and in the centre a group of tritons blowing horns; all was of marble, stained now yellow and green with moss, and the water in the basin was choked with luscious water plants.

Beyond and above the fountain the two staircases joined in a single flight that led to another and higher terrace grown with roses, jasmine, and honeysuckle, and set with antique statues, and this opened on to an alley of old olive trees which went straight to the summit of the hill--the clear line of the horizon against the sky showed at the end between the opening of the lacing boughs.

Iron gates shut off the flower-gardens from the lowest terrace. Francis tried both and found them locked; here too was a large door into the house, but that also was locked, and all the windows this side were shuttered as firmly as they were on the other.

Francis felt as if he was closed into a prison; the place held both dread and terror for him, as if a deadly enemy, waiting to spring,

lurked behind the loveliness.

He wondered if Allan meant to come, if it was all some trick, or if he had really been delayed at Frascati.

"It does not matter," he thought fiercely; "if he does not come, I will shoot him in Rome, the first moment I see him, even if it be in the public street." He looked at his watch and saw that it was not yet much past six; he reckoned if he left for Rome at seven he could be through the gates before dark, and therefore he decided to wait awhile in case Allan came.

Yet waiting was a torture; he was afraid any moment that the child might reveal himself, and that was the one thing he could not bear.

It occurred to him that if he mounted to the upper terrace he could command a view of the whole villa; this would give him a sense of security.

Cautiously he ascended beside and behind the fountain until he gained the topmost terrace where the sweetness of the tumult of untended flowers was almost overpowering.

From there he could see over the flat roof of the house, down the slopes of corn and olive, fruit tree, and vine, across the rich plain to the white dome of St. Peter's, the resplendent and gorgeous prospect only cut by the dark austere lines of the noble cypress trees which grew either side of the house.

The place was unutterably lonely; the steady sunshine, still burning gold, seemed to emphasize this loneliness. Francis felt such an intense desire to escape that he left the flower-crowded terrace and passed into the avenue beyond which led directly to the summit of the hill.

This was covered with thick soft grass, the gnarled olives that twisted their boughs together overhead gave a complete shade; to right and left beyond them stretched other olive trees; in the silence of the heat it seemed some sacred grove, full of awe and mystery and haunted by spirits beautiful but baleful.

There were no flowers save the close humble blossoms of the wild thyme whose pungent scent was strong on the still air.

Francis climbed slowly up, up, instinctively attracted to the summit of the hill showing at the end of the avenue.

He thought that if he could reach that height and gaze on the view beneath he might leave behind the horrors that were so thickly gathering about him; he thought, somehow, if he reached the top the child would not be able to follow.

He was within a few paces of his goal when he heard a footstep.

He would not look back.

"No," he said aloud, "leave me--do not pursue me here. I know you are there whether I see you or not--keep away."

The footsteps came closer, and now he heard the rustling of a skirt.

He had gained the summit now, but he did not notice the view spread beneath him.

"Have you brought her too?" he cried. "I wondered how long she would remain in the vault at Glenillich!"

He turned about fiercely and found himself face to face with Vittoria Odaleschi.

At first he thought it was Giovanna, withered, blanched, and ghastly, and he put his hands before his eyes and cowered back.

The Contessa stood in the shade of the olives looking at him; her riding habit and her hat were of a dark gold colour, so that her figure blended with the deep shade.

"You know me?" she asked.

He recovered himself a little, but he was quivering like a dog under an upraised whip.

"I came here to see Allan Forsythe," he muttered.

"You will not see him. He was here two hours ago and returned to seek you in Rome. I sent the messenger that delayed you. I wished to see you here alone."

Hate and fury gave him strength.

"You! You! You dare to trick me and follow me! I have nothing to say to you."

He stared at her fiercely and his face had a merciless and hostile look.

"I am in no humour to meet you," he added.

"You came to kill Allan Forsythe, I think."

"And if I did? I shall kill him yet."

"As you killed her."

A convulsion shook him, he moved away from the summit of the hill into the shaded avenue where Vittoria stood.

"Who says I killed her?" he asked vaguely.

"I do. Two days ago I saw you in Rome. The moment I saw your face I knew you had done some wrong to her, and I got the truth from Allan Forsythe."

"You are a witch," said Francis with another shudder. "I say God slew her. She wrought my damnation. Allan Forsythe was her lover."

"I wish," returned the Contessa, "I could think that true. I wish she had had, in the hideous life that you inflicted on her, the refuge of the love even of such as Allan Forsythe. I wish he could have been another kind of man and taken her away by force and brought her back to me. I wish you could have had that open affront; but I am glad at least that you *believe* you did not hold her. I think she was foolish enough to love you always, but I am glad you think it was not so."

Francis moved away.

"Your words blast my ears," he said.

The Contessa did not heed him; resolved, quite fearless, she proceeded in her denunciation.

"She was mine, and you took her from me to a bitter exile--you took from her all she had and you gave her nothing in return. She was of a race so much higher than yours that your forbears might have been her forbears' servants, and yet you treated her as our men do not treat their fancies of a day, their bought dancing girls! After you had had her for seven years you murdered her to expiate the crime of loving her. What have you to answer me?"

"Nothing," replied Francis; "not to you do I justify myself--not to you am I answerable."

"Yes, to me," said Vittoria. "I am an Odaleschi and I call you to account for the Odaleschi! This issue is not between you and Allan Forsythe now, but between you and me."

Francis moved away and slowly descended the alley; his black-clad figure was merged in the shade, like hers; the light that penetrated the olive branches began to be tinged with a red colour, for the sun was fast sloping into the west.

Vittoria followed him; a long scarf of green silk hung round her neck and was wrapped round her right hand.

Francis looked at her over his shoulder.

"It is useless to speak to me, there can be no words between us," he said; "it was useless to force this meeting. I do not even hate you now. All that is over. I shall settle with Allan Forsythe, and then I shall return to Scotland, leaving your world for ever. I shall begin another life in which all this will be utterly forgotten."

He felt a certain satisfaction as he said this, a certain exaltation as he said this, a certain lift and relief as if his spirit had suddenly risen clear of horror and God had really smiled on him.

"You had your will and desire," said Vittoria, "and she paid--do you think it will end there, then? Are you not afraid of the final adjustment?"

She spoke slowly and quietly, walking a pace or so behind him; they had come almost to the first rose-grown terrace.

"I too have paid," answered Francis with a certain wildness. "My debt was with God and I have settled it. You cannot trouble me."

"Your account with me is not settled," replied the Contessa.

"Do not meddle with me--we are the world apart," he said.

"You meddled with us, and to us you must answer."

He had his feet on the top step of the terrace now; he turned and looked at her; his face was distorted as if he had been violently struck.

"Us?" he replied; "us?"

"She and I and the child."

Francis shivered.

"I never touched the child," he muttered.

He moved away, supporting himself by the balustrade and crushing the rose and the jasmine.

And as he spoke he saw the child, with his Popish prayer book, running up the wide, bare steps which the sun stained faintly red, running up and beckoning, running up with a look of malice.

Francis threw up his hands with a shriek.

"You cry out too soon," said Vittoria, and she cast away the green scarf that had wrapped her right hand.

As she spoke he turned towards her to shut out the sight of the approaching child, and she struck straight at his heart with the long

poniard the scarf had concealed.

Francis fell to his knees, and she, with a gesture intense with horror, loathing, and contempt, pushed him over with all her force, so that he fell down the first steps of the flight leading to the fountain.

He raised himself on one elbow and nodded at her.

"My heart is broken for my little son," he said, and dropped down on his face.

She sped past him and stood as if on guard, with her face towards the closed house and the cypress trees, until his last laments had died away.

Then she looked back; he had flung himself round so that his face was upturned, and she knew at once that he was dead.

The shadows were suddenly deepening; in the olive grove was already a sunless darkness; the poisonous emanations of the malarious damp were already beginning to taint the air, the dangerous coolness of the Italian sunset hour crept, like a cold breath, abroad.

Vittoria hastened down the steps, cast the dimmed poniard she still held into the silence of the fountain, hastened to where she had concealed her horse near the ilex trees by the entrance, mounted, and swiftly rode back to Rome.

Francis Moutray's animal, left in the great loneliness, moved restlessly and whinnied mournfully.

THE END

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