CRAWFORD

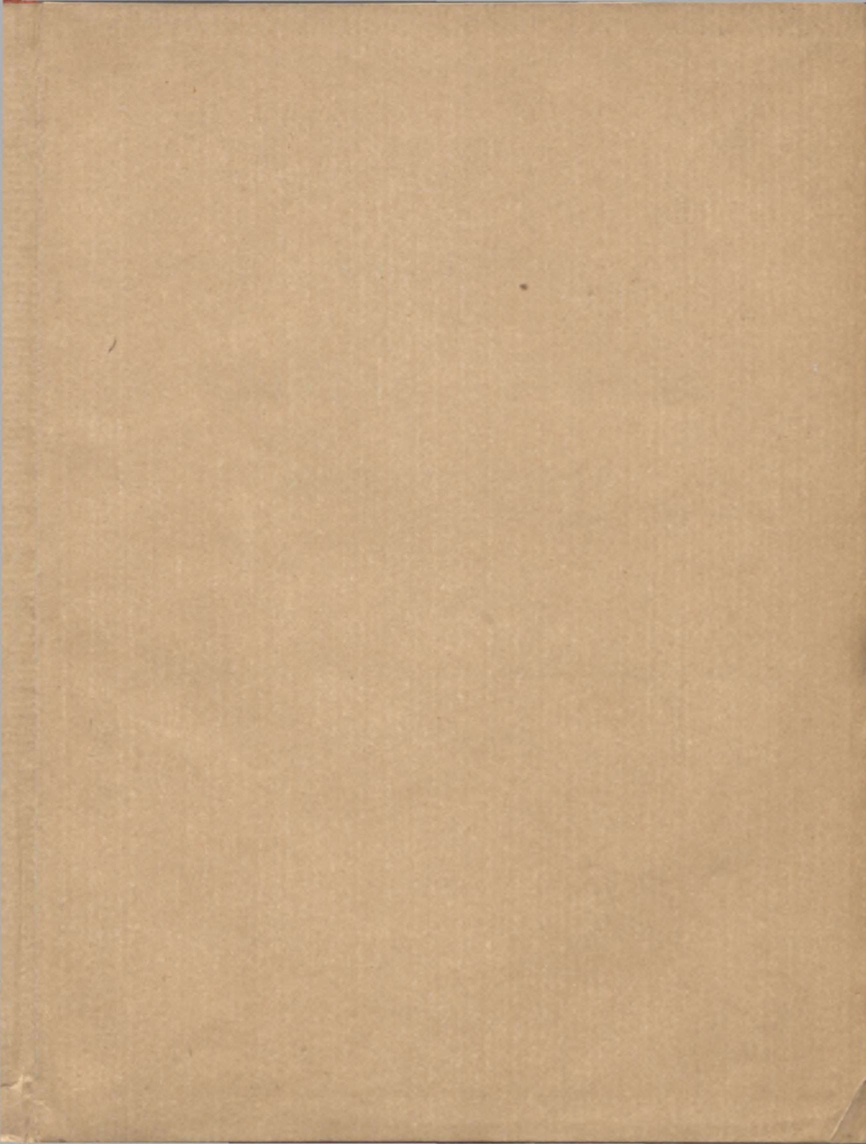
THE HEART OF ROME

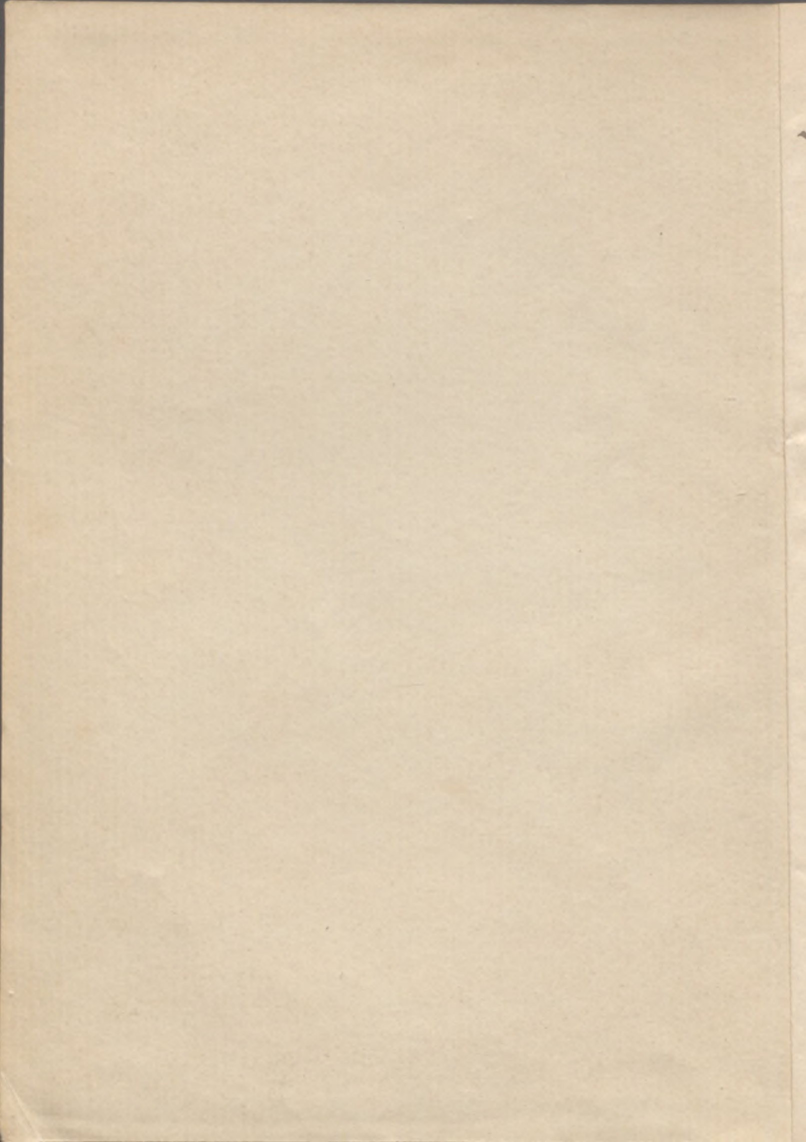
1

3695

TAUCHNITZ EDITION

h, 2 LVR





Magna Maria zu Solms. W.
31. 8. 1905.
30439

COLLECTION
OF
BRITISH AUTHORS

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

VOL. 3695.

THE HEART OF ROME. By F. MARION CRAWFORD.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

By the same Author,

MR. ISAACS	1 vol.
DOCTOR CLAUDIUS	1 vol.
TO LEEWARD	1 vol.
A ROMAN SINGER	1 vol.
AN AMERICAN POLITICIAN	1 vol.
ZOROASTER	1 vol.
A TALE OF A LONELY PARISH	2 vols.
SARACINESCA	2 vols.
MARZIO'S CRUCIFIX	1 vol.
PAUL PATOFF	2 vols.
WITH THE IMMORTALS	1 vol.
GREIFENSTEIN	2 vols.
SANT' ILARIO	2 vols.
A CIGARETTE-MAKER'S ROMANCE	1 vol.
KHALED	1 vol.
THE WITCH OF PRAGUE	2 vols.
THE THREE FATES	2 vols.
DON ORSINO	2 vols.
THE CHILDREN OF THE KING	1 vol.
PIETRO GHISLERI	2 vols.
MARION DARCHE	1 vol.
KATHARINE LAUDERDALE	2 vols.
THE RALSTONS	2 vols.
CASA BRACCIO	2 vols.
ADAM JOHNSTONE'S SON	1 vol.
TAQUISARA	2 vols.
A ROSE OF YESTERDAY	1 vol.
CORLEONE	2 vols.
VIA CRUCIS	2 vols.
IN THE PALACE OF THE KING	2 vols.
MARIETTA, A MAID OF VENICE	2 vols.
CECILIA	2 vols.

30439

THE

HEART OF ROME

A TALE OF THE "LOST WATER"

BY

F. MARION CRAWFORD

AUTHOR OF "SARACINESCA," "VIA CRUCIS," ETC. ETC.

COPYRIGHT EDITION

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1903.

02084/3695

1226573

THE HEART OF ROME.

CHAPTER I.

The Baroness Volterra drove to the Palazzo Conti in the heart of Rome at nine o'clock in the morning, to be sure of finding Donna Clementina at home. She had tried twice to telephone, on the previous afternoon, but the central office had answered that "the communication was interrupted." She was very anxious to see Clementina at once, in order to get her support for a new and complicated charity. She only wanted the name, and expected nothing else, for the Conti had very little ready money, though they still lived as if they were rich. This did not matter to their friends, but was a source of constant anxiety to their creditors, and to the good Pompeo Sassi, the steward of the ruined estate. He alone knew what the Conti

owed, for none of them knew much about it themselves, though he had done his best to make the state of things clear to them.

The big porter of the palace was sweeping the pavement of the great entrance, as the cab drove in. He wore his working clothes of grey linen with silver buttons bearing the ancient arms of his masters, and his third best gold-laced cap. There was nothing surprising in this, at such an early hour, and as he was a grave man with a long grey beard that made him look very important, the lady who drove up in the open cab did not notice that he was even more solemn than usual. When she appeared, he gave one more glance at the spot he had been sweeping, and then grounded his broom like a musket, folded his hands on the end of the broomstick and looked at her as if he wondered what on earth had brought her to the palace at that moment, and wished that she would take herself off again as soon as possible.

He did not even lift his cap to her, yet there was nothing rude in his manner. He behaved like a man upon whom someone intrudes when he is in great trouble.

The Baroness was rather more exigent in requiring respect from servants than most princesses of the Holy Roman Empire, for her position in the aristocratic scale was not very well defined.

She was not pleased, and spoke with excessive coldness when she asked if Donna Clementina was at home. The porter stood motionless beside the cab, leaning on his broom. After a pause he said in a rather strange voice that Donna Clementina was certainly in, but that he could not tell whether she were awake or not.

"Please find out," answered the Baroness, with impatience. "I am waiting," she added with an indescribable accent of annoyance and surprise, as if she had never been kept waiting before, in all the fifty years of her more or less fashionable life.

There were speaking-tubes in the porter's lodge, communicating with each floor of the great Conti palace, but the porter did not move.

"I cannot go upstairs and leave the door," he said.

"You can speak to the servant through the tube, I suppose!"

The porter slowly shook his massive head, and his long grey beard wagged from side to side.

"There are no servants upstairs," he said. "There is only the family."

"No servants? Are you crazy?"

"Oh no!" answered the man meditatively. "I do not think I am mad. The servants all went away last night after dinner, with their belongings. There were only sixteen left, men and women, for I counted them."

"Do you mean to say——" The Baroness stopped in the middle of her question, staring in amazement.

The porter now nodded, as solemnly as he had before shaken his head.

"Yes. This is the end of the house of Conti."

Then he looked at her as if he wished to be questioned, for he knew that she was not really a great lady, and guessed that in spite of her magnificent superiority and coldness she was not above talking to a servant about her friends.

"But they must have somebody," she said. "They

must eat, I suppose! Somebody must cook for them. They cannot starve!"

"Who knows? Who knows? Perhaps they will starve."

The porter evidently took a gloomy view of the case.

"But why did the servants go away in a body?" asked the Baroness, descending from her social perch by the inviting ladder of curiosity.

"They never were paid. None of us ever got our wages. For some time the family has paid nobody. The day before yesterday, the telephone company sent a man to take away the instrument. Then the electric light was cut off. When that happens, it is all over."

The man had heard of the phenomenon from a colleague.

"And there is nobody? They have nobody at all?"

The Baroness had always been rich, and was really trying to guess what would happen to people who had no servants.

"There is my wife," said the porter. "But she is

old," he added apologetically, "and the palace is big. Can she sweep out three hundred rooms, cook for two families of masters and dress the Princess's hair? She cannot do it."

This was stated with gloomy gravity. The Baroness also shook her head in sympathy.

"There were sixteen servants in the house yesterday," continued the porter. "I remember when there were thirty, in the times of the old Prince."

"There would be still, if the family had been wise," said the Baroness severely. "Is your wife upstairs?"

"Who knows where she is?" enquired the porter by way of answer, and with the air of a man who fears that he may never see his wife again. "There are three hundred rooms. Who knows where she is?"

The Baroness was a practical woman by nature and by force of circumstances; she made up her mind to go upstairs and see for herself how matters stood. The name of Donna Clementina might not just now carry much weight beside those of the patronesses of a complicated charitable organisation; in fact the poor lady

must be in a position to need charity herself rather than to dispense it to others. But the Baroness had a deep-rooted prejudice in favour of the old aristocracy, and guessed that it would afterwards be counted to her for righteousness if she could be the first to offer boundless sympathy and limited help to the distressed family.

It would be thought distinctly smart, for instance, if she should take the Princess, or even one of the unmarried daughters, to her own house for a few days, as a refuge from the sordid atmosphere of debt and ruin, and beyond the reach of vulgar creditors, one of whom, by the way, she knew to be her own excellent husband. The Princess was probably not aware of that fact, for she had always lived in sublime ignorance of everything connected with money, even since her husband's death; and when good Pompeo Sassi tried to explain things, telling her that she was quite ruined, she never listened to what he said. If the family had debts, why did he not borrow money and pay them? That was what he was paid for doing, after all. It was true that he had not been paid for a year or two, but that was a wretched detail. Economy? Had not the Princess

given up her second maid, as an extravagance? What more did the man expect?

The Baroness knew all this and reflected upon what she knew, as she deliberately got out of her cab at the foot of the grand staircase.

"I will go upstairs myself," she said.

"Padrona," observed the porter, standing aside with his broom.

He explained in a single word that she was at liberty to go upstairs if she chose, that it was not of the least use to go, and that he would not be responsible for any disappointment if she were afterwards not pleased. There is no language in the world which can say more in one word than the Italian, or less in ten thousand, according to the humour of the speaker.

The Baroness took no notice as she went up the stairs. She was not very tall, and was growing slowly and surely stout, but she carried her rather large head high and had cultivated importance, as a fine art, with some success. She moved steadily, with a muffled sound as of voluminous invisible silk bellows that opened and shut at each step; her outer dress was sombre, but fashionable, and she wore a long gold chain of

curious and fine workmanship to carry her hand-glass, for she was near-sighted. Her thick hair was iron-grey, her small round eyes were vaguely dark with greenish lights, her complexion was like weak coffee and milk, sallow, but smooth, even and healthy. She was a strong woman of fifty years, well used to the world and its ways; acquisitive, inquisitive and socially progressive; not knowing how to wish back anything from the past, so long as there was anything in the future to wish for; a good wife for an ambitious man.

The magnificent marble staircase already looked neglected; there were deep shadows of dust in corners that should have been polished, there was a coat of grey dust on the head and shoulders of the colossal marble statue of Commodus in the niche on the first landing; in the great window over the next, the armorial crowned eagle of the Conti, checky, argent and sable, had a dejected look, as if he were moulting.

It was in March, and though the sun was shining brightly outside, and the old porter wore his linen jacket, as if it were already spring, there was a cold draught down the staircase, and the Baroness instinctively made haste up the steps, and was glad when she reached the

big swinging door covered with red baize and studded with smart brass nails, which gave access to the grand apartment.

By force of habit, she opened it and went in. There used to be always two men in the outer hall, all day long, and sometimes four, ready to announce visitors or to answer questions, as the case might be. It was deserted now, a great, dismal, paved hall, already dingy with dust. One of the box-benches was open, and the tail of a footman's livery greatcoat which had been thrown in carelessly, hung over the edge and dragged on the marble floor.

The Baroness realised that the porter had spoken the truth and that all the servants had left the house, as the rats leave a sinking ship. One must really have seen an old ship sink in harbour to know how the rats look, black and grey, fat and thin, old and young, their tiny beads of eyes glittering with fright as they scurry up the hatches and make for every deck port and scupper, scrambling and tumbling over each other till they flop into the water and swim away, racing for safety, each making a long forked wake on the smooth

surface, with a steady quick ripple like the tearing of thin paper into strips.

The strong middle-aged woman who stood alone in the empty hall, knew nothing of sinking vessels or the ways of rats, but she had known incidentally of more than one catastrophe like this, in the course of her husband's ascendant career, and somehow he had always been mysteriously connected with each one. An evil-speaking old diplomatist had once said that he remembered Baron Volterra as a pawn-broking dealer in antiquities, in Florence, thirty years earlier; there was probably no truth in the story, but after Volterra was elected a Senator of the Kingdom, a member of the opposition had alluded to it with piquant irony and the result had been the exchange of several bullets at forty paces, whereby honour was satisfied without bloodshed. The seconds, who were well disposed to both parties, alone knew how much or how little powder there was in the pistols, and they were discreet men, who kept the secret.

The door leading to the antechamber was wide open, and the Baroness went on deliberately, looking about through her hand-glass, in the half light, for the

shutters were not all open. Dust everywhere, the dust that falls silently at night from the ancient wooden ceilings and painted beams of Roman palaces, the dust of centuries accumulated above and sifting for ever to the floors below. It was on the yellow marble pier tables, on the dim mirrors in their eighteenth-century frames, on the high canopy draped with silver and black beneath which the effigy of another big checky eagle seemed to be silently moulting under his antique crown, the emblem of a race that had lived almost on the same spot for eight hundred years, through good and bad repute, but in nearly uninterrupted prosperity. The Baroness, who hankered after greatness, felt that the gloom was a twilight of gods. She stood still before the canopy, the symbol of princely rank and privilege; the invisible silk bellows were silent for a few seconds, and she wondered whether there were any procurable sum which she and her husband would grudge in exchange for the acknowledged right to display a crowned eagle, checky, argent and sable, in their hall, under a canopy draped with their own colours. She sighed, since no one could hear her, and she went on. The sigh was not only for the hopelessness of ever

reaching such social greatness; it was in part the outward show of a real regret that it should have come to an untimely end. Her admiration of princes was as sincere as her longing to be one of them; she had at least the melancholy satisfaction of sympathising with them in their downfall. It brought her a little nearer to them in imagination if not in fact.

The evolution of the snob has been going on quickly of late, and quicker than ever since vast wealth has given so many of the species the balance of at least one sort of power in society. His thoughts are still the same, but his outward shape approaches strangely near to that of the human being. There are snobs now, who behave almost as nicely in the privacy of their homes as in the presence of a duchess. They are much more particular as to the way in which others shall behave to them. That is a test, by-the-bye. The snob thinks most of the treatment he receives from the world; the gentleman thinks first how he shall act courteously to others.

The Baroness went on and entered the outer reception room, and looking before her she could see through the open doors of the succeeding drawing-rooms, where

BIBLIOTEKA UNIWERSYTECKA W TORUNIU

the windows had been opened or perhaps not closed on the previous evening. It was all vast, stately and deserted. Only ten days earlier she had been in the same place at a great reception, brilliant with beautiful women and handsome men, alive with the flashing of jewels and decorations in the vivid light, full of the discreet noise of society in good-humour, full of faces she knew, and voices familiar, and of the moonlight of priceless pearls and the sunlight of historic diamonds; all of which manifestations she dearly loved.

Her husband had perhaps known what was coming, and how soon, but she had not. There was something awful in the contrast. As she went through one of the rooms a mouse ran from under the fringe of a velvet curtain and took refuge under an armchair. She had sat in that very chair ten days ago and the Russian ambassador had talked to her; she remembered how he had tried to extract information from her about the new issue of three and half per cent national bonds, because her husband was one of the financiers who were expected to "manipulate" the loan.

A portrait of a Conti in black velvet, by Velasquez, looked down, coldly supercilious, at the empty armchair

under which the mouse was hiding. It could make no difference, great or small, to him, whether the Baroness Volterra ever sat there again to talk with an ambassador; he had sat where he pleased, undisturbed in his own house, to the end of his days, and no one can take the past from the dead, except a modern German historian.

Not a sound broke the stillness, except the steady plash of the water falling into the fountain in the wide court, heard distinctly through the closed windows. The Baroness wondered if anyone were awake except the old porter downstairs. She knew the house tolerably well. Only the Princess and her two unmarried daughters slept in the apartment she had entered, far off, at the very end, in rooms at the corner overlooking the small square and the narrow street. The rest of the old palace was surrounded by dark and narrow streets, but the court was wide and full of sunshine. The only son of the house, though he was now the Prince, lived on the floor above, with his young wife and their only child, in what had been a separate establishment, after the old Roman custom.

The Baroness went to one of the embrasures of the

great drawing-room and looked through the panes at the windows of the upper storey. All that she could see were shut; there was not a sign of life in the huge building. Ruin had closed in upon it and all it held, softly, without noise and without pity.

It was their own fault, of course, but the Baroness was sorry for them, for she was not quite heartless, in spite of her hard face. The gloomiest landscape must have a ray of light in it, somewhere. It was all their own fault; they should have known better; they should have counted what they had instead of spending what they had not. But their fall was great, as everything had been in their prosperity, and it was interesting to be connected with it. She faintly hoped Volterra would keep the palace now that they could certainly never pay any more interest on the mortgage, and it was barely possible that she might some day live in it herself, though she understood that it would be in very bad taste to occupy it at once. But this was unlikely, for her husband had a predilection for a new house, in the new part of the city, full of new furniture and modern French pictures. He had a pronounced dislike for old things, including old pic-

tures and old jewelry, though he knew much about both. Possibly they reminded him of that absurd story, and of his duel at forty paces.

Volterra would sell the palace to the Vatican, with everything in it, and would look about for another lucrative investment. The Vatican bought all the palaces in the market for religious institutions, and when there were not enough "it" built the finest buildings in Rome for its own purposes. Volterra was mildly anti-clerical in politics, but he was particularly fond of dealing with the Vatican for real estate. The Vatican was a most admirable house of business, in his estimation, keen, punctual and always solvent; it was good for a financier to be associated with such an institution. It drove a hard bargain, but there was never any hesitation about fulfilling its obligations to the last farthing. Dreaming over one of his enormous Havanas after a perfect dinner, Baron Volterra, Senator of the Kingdom of Italy, often wondered whether the prosperity of the whole world would not be vastly increased if the Vatican would consent to be the general financial agent for the European nations. Such stability as there would be, such order! Above all, such guarantees of good faith! Besides all

that, there were its cordial relations with the United States, that is to say, with the chief source of the world's future wealth! The Senator's strongly-marked face grew sweetly thoughtful as he followed his own visions in the air, and when his wife spoke of living in an antiquated Roman palace and buying an estate with an old title attached to it, which the King might graciously be pleased to ratify, he playfully tapped his wife's sallow cheek with two fat fingers and smiled in a way that showed how superior he was to such weakness. It was not even worth while to say anything.

Once more the Baroness sighed as she turned from the window. She meant to have her own way in the end, but it was hard to wait so long. She turned from the window, glanced at a beautiful holy family by Bonifazio which hung on the opposite wall above an alabaster table, estimated its value instinctively and went into the next drawing-room.

As she passed through the door, a low cry of pain made her start and hesitate, and she stood still. The degree of her acquaintance with the members of the family was just such that she would not quite dare to intrude upon them if they had given way to an expres-

sion of pardonable weakness under their final misfortune, whereas if they were bearing it with reasonable fortitude she could allow herself to offer her sympathy and even some judicious help.

She stood still and the sound was repeated, the pitiful little tearless complaint of a young thing suffering alone. It was somewhere in the big room, hidden amongst the furniture; which was less stiffly arranged here than in the outer apartments. There were books and newspapers on the table, the fireplace was half-full of the ashes of a burnt-out fire, there were faded flowers in a tall vase near the window, there was the undefinable presence of life in the heavier and warmer air. At first the Baroness had thought that the cry came from some small animal, hurt and forgotten there in the great catastrophe; a moment later she was sure that there was someone in the room.

She moved cautiously forward in the direction whence the sound had come. Then she saw the edge of a fawn-coloured cloth skirt on the red carpet by an armchair. She went on, hesitating no longer. She had seen the frock only a day or two ago, and it belonged to Sabina Conti.

A very fair young girl was kneeling in the shadow, crouching over something on the floor. Her hair was like the pale mist in the morning, tinged with gold. She was very slight, and as she bent down, her slender neck was dazzling white above the collar of her frock. She was trembling a little.

"My dear Sabina, what has happened?" asked the Baroness Volterra, leaning over her with an audible crack in the region of the waist.

At the words the girl turned up her pale face, without the least start of surprise.

"It is dead," she said, in a very low voice.

The Baroness looked down, and saw a small bunch of yellow feathers lying on the floor at the girl's knees; the poor little head with its colourless beak lay quite still on the red carpet, upon one side, as if it were resting.

"A canary," observed the Baroness, who had never had a pet in her life, and had always wondered how anyone could care for such stupid things.

But the violet eyes gazed up to hers reproachfully and wonderingly.

"It is dead."

That should explain everything; surely the woman must understand. Yet there was no response. The Baroness stood upright again, grasping her parasol and looking down with a sort of respectful indifference. Sabina said nothing, but took up the dead bird very tenderly, as if it could still feel that she loved it, and she pressed it softly to her breast, bending her head to it, and then kissing the yellow feathers. When it was alive it used to nestle there, almost as it lay now. It had been very tame.

"I suppose a cat killed it," said the Baroness, wishing to say something.

Sabina shook her head. She had found it lying there, not wounded, its feathers not torn—just dead. It was of no use to answer. She rose to her feet, still holding the tiny body against her bosom, and she looked at the Baroness, mutely asking what had brought her there, and wishing that she would go away.

"I came to see your sister," said the elder woman, with something like apology in the tone.

Sabina was still very pale, and her delicate lips were pressed together, but there were no tears in her eyes, as she waited for the Baroness to say more.

"Then I heard the bad news," the latter continued. "I heard it from the porter."

Sabina looked at her quietly. If she had heard the bad news, why had she not gone away? The Baroness began to feel uncomfortable. She almost quailed before the pale girl of seventeen, slender as a birch sapling in her light frock.

"It occurred to me," she continued nervously, "that I might be of use."

"You are very kind," Sabina answered, with the faintest air of surprise, "but I really do not see that you could do anything."

"Perhaps your mother would allow you to spend a few days with me—until things are more settled," suggested the Baroness.

"Thank you very much. I do not think she would like that. She would not wish me to be away from her just now, I am sure. Why should I leave her?"

The Baroness Volterra did not like to point out that the Princess Conti might soon be literally homeless.

"May I ask your mother?" she enquired. "Should you like to come to me for a few days?"

"If my mother wishes it."

"But should you like to come?" persisted the elder woman.

"If my mother thinks it is best," answered Sabina, avoiding the Baroness's eyes, as she resolutely avoided answering the direct question.

But the Baroness was determined if possible to take in one of the family, and it had occurred to her that Sabina would really be less trouble than her mother or elder sister. Clementina was the eldest and was already looked upon as an old maid. She was intensely devout, and that was always troublesome, for it meant that she would insist upon going to church at impossibly early hours, and must have fish-dinners on Fridays. But it would certainly be conferring a favour on the Princess to take Sabina off her hands at such a time. The devout Clementina could take care of herself. With her face, the Baroness reflected, she would be safe among Cossacks; besides, she could go into a retreat, and stay there, if necessary. Sabina was quite different.

The Princess thought so too, as it turned out. Sabina took the visitor to her mother's door, knocked, opened

and then went away, still pressing her dead canary to her bosom, and infinitely glad to be alone with it at last.

There was confusion in the Princess Conti's bedroom, the amazing confusion which boils up about an utterly careless woman of the great world, if she be accidentally left without a maid for twenty-four hours. It seemed as if everything the Princess possessed in the way of clothes, necessary and unnecessary, had been torn from wardrobes and chests of drawers by a cyclone and scattered in every direction, till there was not space to move or sit down in a room which was thirty feet square.

Princess Conti was a very stout woman of about the same age as her visitor, but not resembling her in the least. She had been beautiful, and still kept the dazzling complexion and magnificent eyes for which she had been famous. It was her boast that she slept eight hours every night, without waking, whatever happened, and she always advised everybody to do the same, with an airy indifference to possibilities which would have done credit to a doctor.

She was dressed, or rather wrapped, in a magnificent purple velvet dressing-gown, trimmed with sable, and

tied round her ample waist with a silver cord, her rather scanty hair stood out about her head like a cloud in a high wind, and her plump hands were encased in a pair of old white gloves, which looked oddly out of place. She was standing in the middle of the room, and she smiled calmly as the Baroness entered. On a beautiful inlaid table beside her stood a battered brass tray with an almost shapeless little brass coffee-pot, a common earthenware cup, chipped at the edges, and three pieces of doubtful-looking sugar in a tiny saucer, also of brass. The whole had evidently been brought from a small *café* near by, which had long been frequented by the servants from the palace.

Judging from her smile, the Princess seemed to think total ruin rather an amusing incident. She had always complained that the Romans were very dull; for she was not a Roman herself, but came of a very great old Polish family, the members of which had been distinguished for divers forms of amiable eccentricity during a couple of centuries.

She looked at the Baroness, and smiled pleasantly, showing her still perfect teeth.

"I always said that this would happen," she observed. "I always told my poor husband so."

As the Prince had been dead ten years, the Baroness thought that he might not be wholly responsible for the ruin of his estate, but she discreetly avoided the suggestion. She began to make a little apology for her visit.

"But I am delighted to see you!" cried the Princess. "You can help me to pack. You know I have not a single maid, not a woman in the house, nor a man either. Those ridiculous servants fled last night as if we had the plague!"

"So you are going out of town?" enquired the Baroness, laying down her parasol.

"Of course. Clementina has decided to be a nun, and is going to the convent this morning. So sensible of her, poor dear! It is true that she has made up her mind to do it three or four times before now, but the circumstances were different, and I hope this will be final. She will be much happier."

The Princess stirred the muddy coffee in the chipped earthenware cup, and then sipped it thoughtfully, sipped it again, and made a face.

"You see my breakfast," she said, and then laughed, as if the shabby brass tray were a part of the train of amusing circumstances. "The porter's wife went and got it at some dirty little *café,*" she added.

"How dreadful!" exclaimed the Baroness, with more real sympathy in her voice than she had yet shown.

"I assure you," the Princess answered serenely, "that I am glad to have any coffee at all. I always told poor dear Paolo that it would come to this."

She swallowed the rest of the coffee with a grimace, and set down the cup. Then, with the most natural gesture in the world, she pushed the tray a little way across the inlaid table, towards the Baroness, as she would have pushed it towards her maid, and as if she wished the thing taken away. She did it merely from force of habit, no doubt.

Baroness Volterra understood well enough, and for a moment she affected not to see. The Princess had the blood of Polish kings in her veins, mingled with that of several mediatised princes, but that was no reason why she should treat a friend like a servant; especially as the friend's husband practically owned the palace and its contents, and had lent the money with

which the high and mighty lady and her son had finally ruined themselves. Yet so overpowering is the moral domination of the born aristocrat over the born snob, that the Baroness changed her mind, and humbly took the obnoxious tray away and set it down on another table near the door.

"Thank you so much," said the Princess graciously. "It smells, you know."

"Of course," answered the Baroness. "It is not coffee at all! It is made of chicory and acorns."

"I do not know what it is made of," said the Princess, without interest, "but it has an atrociously bad smell, and it has made a green stain on my handkerchief."

She looked at the bit of transparently fine linen with which she had touched her lips, and threw it under the table.

"And Sabina?" began the Baroness. "What shall you do with her?"

"I wish I knew! You see, my daughter-in-law has a little place somewhere in the Maremma. It is an awful hole, I believe, and very unhealthy, but we shall have to stay there for a few days. Then I shall go to

Poland and see my brother. I am sure he can arrange everything at once, and we shall come back to Rome in the autumn, of course, just as usual. Sassi told me only last week that two or three millions would be enough. And what is that? My brother is so rich!"

The stout Princess shrugged her shoulders carelessly, as if a few millions of francs more or less could really not be such a great matter. Somebody had always found money for her to spend, and there was no reason why obliging persons should not continue to do the same. The Baroness showed no surprise, but wondered whether the Princess might not have to lunch, and dine too, on some nauseous little mess brought to her on a battered brass tray. It was quite possible that she might not find five francs in her purse; it was equally possible that she might find five thousand; the only thing quite sure was that she had not taken the trouble to look, and did not care a straw.

"Can I be of any immediate use?" asked the Baroness with unnecessary timidity. "Do you need ready money?"

"Ready money?" echoed the Princess with alacrity.

"Of course I do! I told you, Sassi says that two or three millions would be enough to go on with."

"I did not mean that. I am afraid——"

"Oh!" ejaculated the Princess with a little disappointment. "Nothing else would be of any use. Of course I have money for any little thing I need. There is my purse. Do you mind looking? I know I had two or three thousand francs the other day. There must be something left. Please count it. I never can count right, you know."

The Baroness took up the mauve morocco pocketbook to which the Princess pointed. It had a clasp in which a pretty sapphire was set; she opened it and took out a few notes and silver coins, which she counted.

"There are fifty-seven francs," she said.

"Is that all?" asked the Princess with supreme indifference. "How very odd!"

"You can hardly leave Rome with so little," observed the Baroness. "Will you not allow me to lend you five hundred? I happen to have a five hundred franc note in my purse, for I was going to pay a bill on my way home."

"Thanks," said the Princess. "That will save me the trouble of sending for Sassi. He always bores me dreadfully with his figures. Thank you very much."

"Not at all, dear friend," the Baroness answered. "It is a pleasure, I assure you. But I had thought of asking if you would let Sabina come and stay with me for a little while, until your affairs are more settled."

"Oh, would you do that?" asked the Princess with something like enthusiasm. "I really do not know what to do with the girl. Of course, I could take her to Poland and marry her there, but she is so peculiar, such a strange child, not at all like me. It really would be immensely kind of you to take her, if your husband does not object."

"He will be delighted."

"Yes," acquiesced the Princess calmly. "You see," she continued in a meditative tone, "if I sent her to stay with any of our cousins here, I am sure they would ask her all sorts of questions about our affairs, and she is so silly that she would blurt out everything she fancied she knew, whether it were true or not—about my son and his wife, you know, and then, the money

questions. Poor Sabina! she has not a particle of tact! It really would be good of you to take her. I shall be grateful."

"I will bring my maid to pack her things," suggested the Baroness.

"Yes. If she could only help me to pack mine too! Do you think she would?"

"Of course!"

"You are really the kindest person in the world," said the Princess. "I was quite in despair, when you came. Just look at those things!"

She pointed to the chairs and sofas, covered with clothes and dresses.

"But your boxes, where are they?" asked the Baroness.

"I have not the least idea! I sent the porter's wife to try and find them, but she has never come back. She is so stupid, poor old thing!"

"I think I had better bring a couple of men-servants," said the Baroness. "They may be of use. Should you like my carriage to take you to the station? Anything I can do——"

The Princess stared, as if quite puzzled.

"Thanks, but we have plenty of horses," she said.

"Yes, but you said that all your servants had left last night. I supposed the coachman and grooms were gone too."

"I daresay they are!" The Princess laughed. "Then we will go in cabs. It will be very amusing. By-the-bye, I wonder whether those brutes of men thought of leaving the poor horses anything to eat, and water! I must really go and see. Poor beasts! They will be starving. Will you come with me?"

She moved towards the door, really very much concerned, for she loved horses.

"Will you go down like that?" asked the Baroness aghast, glancing at the purple velvet dressing-gown, and noticing, as the Princess moved, that her feet, on which she wore small kid slippers, were stockingless.

"Why not? I shall not catch cold. I never do."

The Baroness would have given anything to be above caring whether anyone should ever see her, or not, on the stairs of her house in a purple dressing-gown, without stockings and with her hair standing on end; and she pondered on the ways of the aristocracy she adored, especially as represented by her excellency

Marie-Sophie-Hedwige-Zenaïde-Honorine-Pia Rubomirska, Dowager Princess Conti. Ever afterwards she associated purple velvet and bare feet with the idea of financial catastrophe, knowing in her heart that even ruin would seem bearable if it could bring her such magnificent indifference to the details of commonplace existence.

At that moment, however, she felt that she was in the position of a heaven-sent protectress to the Princess.

"No," she said firmly. "I will go myself to the stables, and the porter shall feed the horses if there is no groom. You really must not go downstairs looking like that!"

"Why not?" asked the Princess, surprised. "But of course, if you will be so kind as to see whether the horses need anything, it is quite useless for me to go myself. You will promise? I am sure they are starving by this time."

The Baroness promised solemnly, and said that she would come back within an hour, with her servants, to take away Sabina and to help the Princess's preparations. In consideration of all she was doing the Princess kissed her on both her sallow cheeks as she took her

leave. The Princess attached no importance at all to this mark of affectionate esteem, but it pleased the Baroness very much.

Just as the latter was going away, the door opened suddenly, and a weak-looking young man put in his head.

"Mamma! Mamma!" he cried, in a thin tone of distress, almost as if he were going to cry.

He was nearly thirty years old, though he looked younger. He was thin, and pale, with a muddy and spotted complexion, and his scanty black hair grew far back on his poorly developed forehead. His eyes had a look that was half startled, half false. Though he was carefully dressed he had not shaved, because he could not shave himself and his valet had departed with the rest of the servants. He was the Princess's only son, himself the present Prince, and the heir of all the Conti since the year eleven hundred.

"Mamma!"

"What is the matter, sweetheart?" asked the Princess, with ready sympathy. "Your hands are quite cold! Are you ill?"

"The child! Something has happened to it—we do

not know—it looks so strange—its eyes are turned in and it is such a dreadful colour—do come——"

But the Princess was already on her way, and he spoke the last words as he ran after her. She turned her head as she went on.

"For heaven's sake send a doctor!" she cried to the Baroness, and in a moment she was gone, with the weak young man close at her side.

The Baroness nodded quickly, and when all three reached the door she left the two to go upstairs and ran down, with a tremendous puffing of the invisible silk bellows.

"The Prince's little girl is very ill," she said, as she passed the porter, who was now polishing the panes of glass in the door of his lodge, because he had done the same thing every morning for twenty years.

He almost dropped the dingy leather he was using, but before he could answer, the cab passed out, bearing the Baroness on her errand.

CHAPTER II.

SIGNOR POMPEO SASSI sat in his dingy office and tore his hair, in the good old literal Italian sense. His elbows rested on the shabby black oilcloth glued to the table, and his long knotted fingers twisted his few remaining locks, on each side of his head, in a way that was painful to see. From time to time he desisted for an instant, and held up his open hands, the fingers quivering with emotion, and his watery eyes were turned upwards, too, as if directing an unspoken prayer to the dusty rafters of the ceiling. The furrows had deepened of late in his respectable, trust-inspiring face, and he was as thin as a skeleton in leather.

His heart was broken. On the big sheet of thick hand-made paper, that lay on the desk, scribbled over with rough calculations in violet ink, there were a number of trial impressions of the old stamp he had once been so proud to use. It bore a rough representation of the Conti eagle, encircled by the legend:

"Eccellentissima Casa Conti." When his eyes fell upon it, they filled with tears. The Most Excellent House of Conti had come to a pitiful end, and it had been Pompeo Sassi's unhappy fate to see its fall. Judging from his looks, he was not to survive the catastrophe very long.

He loved the family, and yet he disliked every member of it personally except Sabina. He loved the "Eccellentissima Casa," the checky eagle, the Velasquez portraits and his dingy office, but he never had spoken with the Princess, her son, his wife, or his sister Clementina, without a distinct feeling of disapproving aversion. The old Prince had been different. In him Sassi had still been able to respect those traditional Ciceronian virtues which were inculcated with terrific severity in the Roman youth of fifty years ago. But the Prince had died prematurely at the age of fifty, and with him the Ciceronian traditions had ended in Casa Conti, and their place had been taken by the caprices of the big, healthy, indolent, extravagant Polish woman, by the miserable weaknesses of a degenerate heir, and the fanatic religious practices of Donna Clementina.

Sassi was sure that they all three hated him or despised him, or both; yet they could not spare him. For different reasons, they all needed money, and they had long been used to believing that no one but Sassi could get it for them, since no one else knew how deeply the family was involved. He always made difficulties, he protested, he wrung his hands, he warned, he implored; but caprice, vice and devotion always overcame his objections, and year after year the exhausted estate was squeezed and pressed and mortgaged and sold, till it had yielded the uttermost farthing. Then, one day, the whole organisation of Casa Conti stood still; the unpaid servants fled, the unpaid tradesmen refused to trust any longer, the unpaid holders of mortgages foreclosed, the Princess departed to Poland, the Prince slunk away to live on what was left of his wife's small estate, Donna Clementina buried herself in a convent to which she had given immense sums, the Conti palace was for sale, and Pompeo Sassi sat alone in his office, tearing his hair, while the old porter sat in his lodge downstairs peeling potatoes.

It was not for himself that the old steward of

the estate was in danger of being totally bald. He had done for himself what others would not allow him to do for them, a proceeding which affords some virtuous people boundless satisfaction, though it procured him none at all. He was provided for in his old age. During more than thirty years he had saved and scraped and invested and added to the little sum of money left him by his father, an honest old notary of the old school, until he possessed what was a very comfortable competence for a childless old man. He had a small house of his own near the Pantheon, in which he occupied two rooms, letting the rest, and he had a hundred thousand francs in government bonds, besides a few acres of vineyard on the slope of Monte Mario.

More than once, in the sincerity of his devotion to the family he served, he had thought of sacrificing all he possessed in an attempt to stave off final ruin; but a very little reflexion had convinced him that all he had would be a mere drop in the flood of extravagance, and would forthwith disappear with the rest into the bottomless pit of debt.

Even that generous temptation was gone now. The

house having collapsed, its members appeared to him only in their true natures, a good-for-nothing young man, tainted with a mortal disease, a foolish mother, a devout spinster threatened with religious mania, and the last descendant of the great old race, one little girl-child not likely to live, and perhaps better dead. In their several ways they had treated him as the contemptible instrument of their inclinations; they were gone from his life and he was glad of it, when he thought of each one separately. Yet, collectively, he wished them all in the palace again, even a month ago, even on the day before the exodus; good, bad, indifferent, no matter what, they had been Casa Conti still, to the end, the family he had served faithfully, honestly and hopelessly for upwards of a third of a century. That might seem to be inconsistent, but it was the only consistency he had ever known, and it was loyalty, of a kind.

But there was one whom he wished back for her own sake; there was Donna Sabina. When he thought of her, his hands fell from his head at last, and folded themselves over the scrawled figures on the

big sheet of paper, and he looked long and steadily at them, without seeing them at all.

He wondered what would become of her. He had seen her on the last day and he should never forget it. Before going away with the Baroness Volterra she had found her way to his dark office, and had stood a few moments before the shabby old table, with a small package in her hand. He could see the slight figure still, when he closed his eyes, and her misty hair against the cold light of the window. She had come to ask him if he would bury her dead canary, somewhere under the sky where there was grass and it would not be disturbed. Where could she bury it, down in the heart of Rome? She had wrapped it in a bit of pink satin and had laid it in a little brown cardboard box which had been full of chocolates from Ronzi and Singer's in Piazza Colonna. She pushed back the lid a finger's breadth and he saw the pink satin for a second. She laid the box before him. Would he please do what she asked? Very timidly she slipped a simple little ring off her finger, one of those gold ones with the sacred monogram

which foreigners insist upon calling "Pax." She said she had bought it with her own money, and could give it away. She wished to give it to him. He protested, refused, but the fathomless violet eyes gazed into his very reproachfully. He had always been so kind to her, she said; would he not keep the little ring to remember her by?

So he had taken it, and that same day he had gone all the way to his lonely vineyard on Monte Mario carrying the chocolate box in his hands, and he had buried it under the chestnut-tree at the upper end, where there was some grass; and the breeze always blew there on summer afternoons. Then he had sat on the roots of the tree for awhile, looking towards Rome.

He would have plenty of time to go to the vineyard now, for in a little while he should have nothing to do, as the palace was going to be sold. When he got home, he wrote a formal letter to Donna Sabina, informing her that he had fulfilled the commands she had deigned to give him, and ventured to subscribe himself her Excellency's most devoted humble and grateful servant, as indeed he was, from the bottom

of his heart. In twenty-four hours he received a note from her, written in a delicate tall hand, not without character, on paper bearing the address of Baron Volterra's house in Via Ludovisi. She thanked him in few words, warmly and simply. He read the note several times and then put it away in an old-fashioned brass bound secretary, of which he always kept the key in his pocket. It was the only word of thanks he had received from any living member of the Conti family.

A month had passed since then, but as he sat at his desk it was all as vivid as if it had happened yesterday.

He was in his office to-day because he had received notice that someone was coming to look at the palace with a view to buying it, and he considered it his duty to show it to possible purchasers. Baron Volterra had sent him word in the morning, and he had come early. Then, as he sat in his old place, the ruin of the great house had enacted itself again before his eyes, so vividly that the pain had been almost physical. And then, he had fallen to

thinking of Sabina, and wondering what was to become of her.

That was the history of one half-hour in his life, on a May afternoon, but the whole man was in it, what he had been thirty years earlier, and a month ago, what he was to-day and what he would be to the end of his life.

CHAPTER III.

If Sabina had known what was before her when she got into the Baroness Volterra's carriage and was driven up to the Via Ludovisi followed by a cab with her luggage, she would probably have begged leave to go with her elder sister to the convent. Her mother would most likely have refused the permission, and she would have been obliged to accept the Volterra's hospitality after all, but she would have had the satisfaction of having made an effort to keep her freedom before entering into what she soon looked upon as slavery.

Her mother would have considered this another evidence of the folly inherent in all the Conti family. Sabina lived in a luxurious house, she was treated with consideration, she saw her friends, and desirable young men saw her. What more could she wish?

All this was true. The Baroness was at great pains to make much of her, and the Baron's manner to her

was at once flattering, respectful and paternal. During the first few days she had discovered that if she accidentally expressed the smallest wish it was instantly fulfilled, and this was so embarrassing that she had since taken endless pains never to express any wish at all. Moreover not the slightest allusion to the misfortunes of her family was ever made before her, and if she was in total ignorance of the state of affairs, she was at least spared the humiliation of hearing that the palace was for sale, and might be sold any day, to anyone who would pay the price asked.

From time to time the Baroness said she hoped that Sabina had good news of her mother, but showed no curiosity in the matter, and the girl always answered that she believed her mother to be quite well. Indeed she did believe it, for she supposed that if the Princess were ill someone would let her know. She wrote stiff little letters herself, every Sunday morning, and addressed them to her uncle's place in Poland; but no one ever took the least notice of these conscientious communications, and she wondered why she sent them, after all. It was a remnant of the sense of duty to her parents

instilled into her in the convent, and she could not help clinging to it still, from habit.

She had a few friends of her own age, and they came to see her now and then. They were mostly companions of her recent convent days, and they asked her many questions, to most of which she had no answer. She noticed that they looked surprised, but they were well brought up girls, and kept their reflections to themselves, until they were at home.

The Conti had fewer near relations than most Roman families, for of late they had not been numerous. The Prince's only sister had died childless, the dowager Princess was a Pole, and her daughter-in-law was a Tuscan. Sabina and her generation had therefore no first cousins; and those who were one degree or more removed were glad that they had not been asked to take charge of the girl after the catastrophe. It would have been all very well merely to give her a room and a place at table, but the older ones shook their heads, and said that before long the Baroness Volterra would have to dress her too, and give her pocket-money. Her good-for-nothing brother would not do anything for her, if he could, and the Princess, who was amusing herself in

Poland, if not in Paris, was capable of forgetting her existence for a year at a time.

All these things greatly enhanced the outward and visible merit of the Volterra couple, but made Sabina's position daily less endurable. So the Baroness laid up treasures in heaven while Sabina unwillingly stored trouble on earth.

She was proud, to begin with. It was bad enough to have been ordered by her mother to accept the hospitality of people she did not like, but it was almost unbearable to realise by degrees that she was living on their effusive charity. If she had been as vain as she was proud, she would probably have left their house to take refuge in her sister's convent, for her vanity could not have borne the certainty that all society knew what her position was. The foundation of pride is the wish to respect oneself, whatever others may think; the mainspring of vanity is the craving for the admiration of others, no matter at what cost to one's self-respect. In the Conti family these qualities and defects were unevenly distributed, for while pride seemed to have been left out in the character of Sabina's brother, who was vain and arrogant, she herself was as unspoilt by vanity

as she was plentifully supplied with the characteristic which is said to have caused Lucifer's fall, but which has been the mainstay of many a greatly-tempted man and woman. Perhaps what is a fault in angels may seem to be almost a virtue in humanity, compared with the meanness of worse failings.

Sabina was not suspicious, yet she could not help wondering why the Baroness had been so very anxious to take her in, and sometimes she thought that the object might be to marry her to one of Volterra's two sons. One was in a cavalry regiment stationed in Turin, the other was in the diplomacy and was now in Washington. They were both doing very well in their careers and their father and mother often talked of them.

The Baron was inclined to be playful now and then.

"Ah, my dear young lady," he would cry, shaking one fat finger at Sabina across the dinner table, "take care, take care! You will lose your heart to both my boys and sow discord in my family!"

At this he never failed to laugh, and his wife responded with a smile of motherly pride, followed by a discreet side glance at Sabina's delicate face. Then the finely-pencilled eyebrows were just the least bit more

arched for a second, and the slender neck grew slightly straighter, but that was all, and the Baron did not even see the change. Sometimes Sabina said nothing, but sometimes she asked if the sons were coming home on leave. No, they were not coming at present. In the spring Volterra and his wife generally spent a few weeks in Turin, to see the elder son, on their way to Aix and Paris, but his brother could hardly expect to come home for another year. Then the couple would talk about both the young men, until Sabina's attention wandered, and she no longer heard what they were saying.

She did not believe that they really thought of trying to marry her to one of the sons. In her own opinion they could gain nothing by it; she had no dowry now, and her mother had always talked of marriage as a business transaction. It did not occur to her that they could care to be allied with a ruined family, and that her mere name could be worth anything in their scale of values. They were millionaires, of course, and even the dowry which she might formerly have expected would have been nothing compared with their fortune; but her mother had always said that rich people were the very people who cared

the most for money. That was the reason why they were rich. This explanation was so logical that Sabina had accepted it as the true one.

Her knowledge of the world was really limited to what she had learned from her mother, after she had come back from the convent six months before the crash, and it was an odd mixture of limitations and exaggerations. When the Princess was in a good humour she believed in everybody, when she was not, which was when she had no money to throw away, she attributed the basest motives to all mankind. According to her moods, she had encouraged Sabina to look forward to a life of perpetual pleasure, or had assured her with energy that all men were liars, and that the world was a wretched place after all. It was true that the Princess entertained the cheerful view more often than not, which was perhaps fortunate for her daughter; but in her heart the young girl felt that she would have to rely on her own commonsense to form any opinion of life, and as her position became more difficult, while the future did not grow more defined, she tried to think connectedly about it all, and to reach some useful conclusion.

It was not easy. In her native city, living under the roof of people who held a strong position in the society to which she belonged, though they had not been born to it, she was as completely isolated as if she had been suddenly taken away and set down amongst strangers in Australia. She was as lonely as she could have been on a desert island.

The Volterra couple were radically, constitutionally, congenitally different from the men and women she had seen in her mother's house. She could not have told exactly where the difference lay, for she was too young, and perhaps too simple. She did not instinctively like them, but she had never really felt any affection for her mother either, and her own brother and sister had always repelled her. Her mother had sometimes treated her like a toy, but more often as a nuisance and a hindrance in life, to be kept out of the way as much as possible, and married off on the first opportunity. Yet Sabina knew that far down in her nature there was a mysterious tie of some sort, an intuition that often told her what her mother would say or do, though she herself would have spoken and acted otherwise. She had felt it even with her brother

and sister, but she could not feel it at all with the Baron or his wife. She never could guess what they might do or say under the most ordinary circumstances, nor what things they would like and dislike, nor how they would regard anything she said or did; least of all could she understand why they were so anxious to keep her with them.

It was all a mystery, but life itself was mysterious, and she was little more than a child in years though she had never had what one calls a real childhood.

She often used to sit by her window, the sliding blinds partly drawn together, but leaving a space through which she looked down at the city, with a glimpse of Saint Peter's in the distance against the warm haze of the low Campagna. Rome seemed as far from her then as if she saw it in a vision a thousand miles away, and the very faint sounds from the distance were like voices in a dream. Then, if she closed her eyes a moment, she could see the dark streets about the Palazzo Conti, and the one open corner of the palace, high up in the sunlight; she could smell the acrid air that used to come up to her in

the early morning when the panes were opened, damp and laden with odours not sweet but familiar in the heart of Rome; odours compounded of cabbages, stables, cheese and mud, and occasionally varied by the fumes of roasting coffee, or the sour vapours from a wine cart that was unloading stained casks, all wet with red juice, at the door of the wine shop far below, a dark little wine shop with a dry bush stuck out through a smoky little grated window, and a humble sign displaying the prices of drink in roughly painted blue and red figures. For her room had looked upon the narrowest and darkest of the streets, though it had been stately enough within, and luxuriously furnished, besides containing some objects of value and beauty over which there would be much bidding and squabbling of amateurs and experts when the great sale took place.

It had been gloomy and silent and loveless, the life down there; and yet she would have gone back to it if she could, from the sunshine of the Via Ludovisi, and from the overpowering freshness of the Volterra house, where everything was modern, and polished, and varnished, and in perfect condition, suggesting that

things had been just paid for. She had not liked the old life, but she liked her present surroundings even less, and at times she felt a furious longing to leave them suddenly, without warning; to go out when no one would notice her, and never to come back; to go she knew not where, out into the world, risking she knew not what, a high-born, penniless, fair-haired girl not yet eighteen.

What would happen, if she did? She rarely laughed, but she would laugh at that, when she thought of the consternation her flight would produce. How puzzled the fat Baron would look, how the Baroness's thin mouth would be drawn down at the corners! How the invisible silk bellows would puff as she ran up and downstairs, searching the house for Sabina!

There was more than one strain of wild blood in the delicate girl's veins, and the spring had come suddenly, with a bursting out of blossom and life and colour, and a twittering of nesting birds in the old gardens, and a rush of strange longings in her heart.

Then Sabina told herself that there was nothing

to keep her where she was, but her own will, and that no one would really care what became of her in the wide world; certainly not her mother, who had never written her so much as a line, nor sent her a message, since they had parted on the day of the catastrophe; certainly not her brother; probably not even her sister, whose whole being was absorbed in the tyrannical government of what she called her soul. Sabina, in her thoughts, irreverently compared Clementina's soul to a race-horse, and her sister to a jockey, riding it cruelly with whip and spur to the goal of salvation, whether it liked it or not.

Sabina rose from her seat by the window, when she thought of liberty, and she walked up and down her room, driven by something she could not understand, and yet withheld by something she understood even less. For it was not fear, nor reflection, nor even commonsense nor the thought of giving pain to anyone that hindered her from leaving the house at such moments. It was not even the memory of the one human being who had hitherto loved her, and for whom she had felt affection and gratitude, one of the nuns at the convent school, a brave, quiet little lady

who made her believe in good. She meant to do no harm if she were free, and the nun would not really blame her, if she knew the truth.

It was not that. It was the secret conviction that there was harm in the world from which mere courage could not protect her; it was the sort of instinct that warns young animals not to eat plants that are poisonous; it was the maiden intuition of a strange and unknown danger.

She sat down again disconsolately. It was absurd, of course, and she could not run away. Where could she go? She had no money, and she would have to starve or beg before one day was out. She would be homeless, she would be driven to some house of charity, for a meal and a place to sleep, or else to sleep out under the sky. That would be delightful for once. She had always longed to sleep out of doors once, to feel the breeze playing with her feathery hair in the dark, to watch the constellations turning slowly westwards, to listen to the night sounds, to the low rhythmical piping of the tree toad, the sorrowful cry of the little southern owl and the tolling of the hour in a far-off belfry.

But it might rain. At the idea, Sabina laughed again. It would be very unpleasant to be caught in a shower while napping on a bench in a public garden. Besides, if the policemen found her there, an extremely young lady, extremely well dressed but apparently belonging to no one, they would in all likelihood ask her name, and she would have to tell them who she was; and then she would be brought back to Baron Volterra's house, unless they thought it more prudent to take her to a lunatic asylum.

At that stage in her imaginings it was generally time to go out with the Baroness for the daily drive, which began with the leaving of cards and notes, then led to the country or one of the villas, and generally ended in a turn or two through the Corso before coming home. The worst part of the daily round was dinner when the Baron was at home. It was then that she felt most strongly the temptation to slip out of the house and never to come back. Often, however, he and his wife dined out, and then Sabina was served alone by two solemn menservants, so extremely correct that they reminded her a little of her old home. These were the pleasantest evenings she spent during that spring, for

when dinner was over she was free to go to her own room and curl herself up in a big armchair with a book, and read or dream till bedtime, as she pleased.

When she was alone, her life seemed less objectless, less inexplicably empty, less stupidly incomprehensible, less lonely than in the company of those excellent people with whom she had nothing in common, but to whom she felt that she was under a great obligation. In their company, it was as if her life had stopped suddenly at the beginning and was never to go on again, as if she had stuck fast like a fly in a drop of amber, as if nothing of interest could ever happen to her though she might live a hundred years.

She could hardly remember anything which had given her great pleasure. She did not remember to have been ever radiantly happy, though she could not recall much unhappiness since she had left the convent school. The last thing that had really hurt her had been the death of her pet canary, and she had kept her feelings to herself as well as she could, with the old aristocratic instinct of hiding pain.

It was all idle and strangely empty, and yet hard to understand. She would have been much surprised if

she could have guessed how much its emptiness interested other people in Rome; how the dowagers chattered about her over their tea, abusing her mother and all her relations for abandoning her like a waif; how the men reasoned about Baron Volterra's deep-laid schemes, trying to make out that his semi-adoption of Sabina, as they called it, must certainly bode ruin to someone, since he had never in his life done anything without a financial object; how the young girls unanimously declared that the Baroness wanted Sabina for one of her sons, because she was such a dreadful snob; how Cardinal Della Crusca shook his wise old head knowingly, as he, who knew so much, always did on the rare occasions when he knew nothing about the matter in hand; how a romantic young English secretary of Embassy christened her the Princess in the Tower; and how old Pompeo Sassi went up to his vineyard on Monte Mario every Sunday and Thursday and sat almost all the afternoon under the chestnut-tree thinking about her and making unpractical plans of his own.

CHAPTER IV.

If Baron Volterra did not choose to sell the Palazzo Conti to the first comer, he doubtless knew his own business best, and he was not answerable to everyone for his opinion that the fine old building was worth a good deal more than the highest offer he had yet received. Everybody knew that the palace was for sale, and some of the attempts made to buy it were openly discussed. A speculator had offered four hundred thousand francs for it, a rich South American had offered half a million; it was rumoured that the Vatican would give five hundred and fifty thousand, provided that the timbers of the carved ceilings were in good condition, but Volterra steadily refused to allow any of the carvings to be disturbed in order to examine the beams. During several days a snuffy little man with a clever face poked about with a light in dark places between floors, trying to find out whether the wood were

sound or rotten, and asking all sorts of questions of the old porter, and of two workmen who went with him, and who had been employed in repairs in the palace, as their fathers had been before them, perhaps for generations. But their answers were never quite satisfactory, and the snuffy man disappeared to the mysterious regions beyond the Tiber, and did not come back.

Some people, knowing the ways of the Romans, might have inferred that the two workmen, a mason and a carpenter, had not been treated by Baron Volterra in such a way as to make them give a favourable report; and as he seemed perfectly indifferent about the result this is quite possible. At all events the carpenter made out that he could not get at the beams in question, without moving the decorations which covered them, and the mason affirmed that it was quite impossible to get a view of the foundations of the north-west corner of the palace, which were said to be weak, without knocking a hole through a wall upon which depended such solidity as there was. It was useless, he said. The snuffy gentleman could ask the Baron, if he pleased, and the Baron could do what he liked since the property now

belonged to him: but he, the mason, would not lay hand to pick or crowbar without the Baron's express authorisation. The Baron was a Senator of the Kingdom, said the mason, and could therefore of course send him to penal servitude in the galleys for life, if he pleased. That is the average Roman workman's idea of justice. The snuffy expert, who looked very much like a poor priest in plain clothes, though he evidently knew his business, made no reply, nor any attempt to help the mason's conscience with money.

But he stood a little while by the wall, with his lantern in his hands, and presently put his ear to the damp stones, and listened.

"There is running water somewhere not far off," he said, looking keenly at the workman.

"It is certainly not wine," answered the man, with a rough laugh, for he thought it a very good joke.

"Are there any 'lost waters' under the palace?" asked the expert.

"I do not know," replied the mason, looking away from the lantern towards the gloom of the cellars.

"I believe," said the snuffy gentleman, setting down

his lantern, and taking a large pinch from a battered silver snuff-box, on which the arms of Pius Ninth were still distinguishable, "I believe that the nearest 'lost water' to this place is somewhere under the Vicolo dei Soldati."

"I do not know."

The expert skilfully inserted the brown dust into his nostrils with his right thumb, scarcely wasting a grain in the operation.

"You do not seem to know much," he observed, thoughtfully, and took up his lantern again.

"I know what I have been taught," replied the mason without resentment.

The expert glanced at him quickly, but said nothing more. His inspection was finished, he led the way out of the intricate cellars as if he knew them by heart, though he had only passed through them once, and he left the palace on foot when he had brushed some of the dust from his shabby clothes.

The porter looked enquiringly at the two men, as they filled little clay pipes that had cane stems, standing under the deep entrance.

"Not even the price of half a litre of wine," said the mason in answer to the mute question.

"Church stuff," observed the carpenter, discontentedly.

The porter nodded gravely, and the men nodded to him as they went out into the street. They had nothing more to do that day, and they turned into the dark little wine-shop, where the withered bush stuck out of the blackened grating. They sat down opposite each other, with the end of the grimy board of the table between them, and the carpenter made a sign. The host brought a litre measure of thin red wine and set it down between them with two tumblers. He was ghastly pale, flabby and sullen, with a quarter of an inch of stubbly black beard on his unhealthy face.

The carpenter poured a few drops of wine into one of the tumblers, shook it about, turned it into the other, shook it again, and finally poured it on the unctuous stone floor beside him. Then he filled both glasses to the brim, and both men drank in silence.

They repeated the operation, and after the second glass there was not much left in the measure. The

flabby host had retired to the gloomy vaults within, where he played cards with a crony by the light of a small smoking lamp with a cracked chimney.

"That was the very place, was it not?" asked the carpenter at last, in a low tone, and almost without moving his lips.

The mason said nothing, but shrugged his shoulders, in a sort of enigmatic assent. Both drank again, and after a long time the carpenter smiled faintly.

"He was looking for the 'lost water,'" he said, in a tone of contempt.

The faint smile slowly reflected itself in the mason's face. The two finished their wine, lit their pipes again, left the price of their drink on the table without disturbing the host and went away.

So far as any outsider could have judged, the expert's curiosity and the few words exchanged by the workmen referred to the so-called "lost water," which might be somewhere under the north-west corner of the Palazzo Conti, and no one unacquainted with subterranean Rome could possibly have understood what any of the three meant.

The "lost waters" of Rome are very mysterious. Here and there, under old streets and far down amongst the foundations of ancient palaces, there are channels of running water which have no apparent connection with any of the aqueducts now restored and in use. It is a water that comes no one knows whence and finds its way to the Tiber, no one knows how. It is generally clear and very cold, and in the days when the aqueducts were all broken and most people drank of the river, the "lost water" was highly prized. It appears in the most unexpected places, sometimes in great quantities and seriously interfering with any attempt to lay the foundations of a new building, sometimes black and silent, under a huge flagstone in an old courtyard, sometimes running with an audible rush through hidden passages deeper than the deepest cellars. It has puzzled archæologists, hydraulic engineers and architects for generations, its presence has never been satisfactorily explained, there seems not to be any plan of the city which shows its whereabouts, and the modern improvements of the Tiber's banks do not appear to have affected its occult courses. By tradition handed down from father to son, certain workmen, chiefly masons and

always genuine Romans, claim to know more about it than other people; but that is as much as can be said. It is known as the "lost water," and it rises and falls, and seeks different levels in unaccountable ways, as water will when it is confined under the earth but is here and there confronted by the pressure of the air.

But though the old-fashioned Roman workman still looks upon all traditional information about his trade as secret and never to be revealed, that fact alone might seem insufficient to account for the behaviour of Gigi the carpenter and of Toto the mason under the particular circumstances here narrated, still less for the contempt they showed for the snuffy expert who was apparently looking for the "lost water." An invisible witness would have gathered that they had something of more importance to conceal. To the expert, their conduct and answers must have been thoroughly unsatisfactory, for the Vatican was even said to have refused to pay the additional fifty thousand francs, on the ground that the state of the foundations was doubtful and that the timbers of the upper storey were not sound.

Baron Volterra's equanimity was not in the least disturbed by this. On the contrary, instead of setting

the price lower, he frankly told all applicants, through his agent, that he was in no hurry to sell, as he had reason to believe that the land about the Palazzo Conti would soon rise in value. He had settled with the representatives of the Conti family and it was said that he had behaved generously. The family had nothing left after the crash, which might partially account for such an exhibition of generosity; but it was hinted that Baron Volterra had given them the option of buying back the palace and some other property upon which he had foreclosed, if they should be able to pay for it in ten years.

Soon after the visit of the snuffy expert, Volterra's agent informed the porter that a gentleman had taken the small apartment on the intermediate storey, which had formerly been occupied by a chaplain but had been disused for years. It had been part of the Contis' folly that they had steadily refused to let any part of the vast building since the old Prince's death.

On the following day, the new-comer moved in, with his belongings, consisting of a small quantity of new furniture, barely sufficient for himself and his one servant, and a number of very heavy cases, which turned out to

be full of books. Gigi, the carpenter, was at once sent for to put up plain shelves for these, and he took stock of the lodger while the latter was explaining what he wanted.

"He is a gentleman," said Gigi to Toto, that very evening, as they stood filling their pipes at the corner of the Vicolo dei Soldati. "His name is Malipieri. He is as black as the horses at a funeral of the first class, and he is not a Roman."

"Who knows what race of animal this may be?" Toto was not in a good humour.

"He is of the race of gentlemen," asserted Gigi confidently.

"Then he will end badly," observed Toto. "Let us go and drink. It is better."

"Let us go and drink," repeated Gigi. "You have a sensible thought sometimes. I think this man is an engineer, or an architect. He wants a draughtsman's table."

"Evil befall his little dead ones, whatever he is," returned the other, by way of welcome to the young man who had moved into the palace.

"He advanced me ten francs to buy wood for the

shelves," said Gigi, who was by far the more cheerful of the two.

"Come and drink," returned Toto, relevantly or irrelevantly. "That is much better."

So they turned into the wine-shop.

CHAPTER V.

BARON VOLTERRA introduced Marino Malipieri to the two ladies. The guest had come punctually, for the Baron had looked at his watch a moment before he was announced, and it was precisely eight o'clock.

Malipieri bowed to the Baroness, who held out her hand cordially, and then to Sabina.

"Donna Sabina Conti," said the Baron with extreme distinctness, in order that his guest should be quite sure of the young girl's identity.

Sabina looked down modestly, as the nuns had told her to do when a young man was introduced to her. At the same moment Malipieri's eyes turned quietly and quickly to the Baron, and a look of intelligence passed between the two men. Malipieri understood that Sabina was one of the family in whose former palace he was living. Then he glanced again at the young girl for one moment, before making a commonplace remark to

the Baroness, and after that Sabina felt that she was at liberty to look at him.

She saw a very dark man of average height, with short black hair that grew rather far back from his very white forehead, and wearing a closely clipped black beard and moustache which did not by any means hide the firm lines of the mouth and chin. From the strongly marked eyebrows downward his face was almost of the colour of newly cast bronze, and the dusky hue contrasted oddly with the clear whiteness of his forehead. He was evidently a man who had lately been living much out of doors under a burning sun. Sabina thought that his very bright black eyes and boldly curved features suggested a young hawk, and he had a look of compact strength and a way of moving which betrayed both great energy and extreme quickness.

But there was something more, which Sabina recognised at the first glance. She felt instantly that he was not like the Baron and his wife; that he belonged in some way to the same variety of humanity as herself; that she would understand him when he spoke, that she would often feel intuitively what he was going to say next, and that he would understand her.

She listened while he talked to the Baroness. He had a slight Venetian accent, but his voice had not the soft Venetian ring. It was a little veiled, and though not at all loud it was somewhat harsh. Sabina did not dislike the manly tone, though it was not musical, nor the Venetian pronunciation, although that was unfamiliar. In countries like Italy and Germany, which have had many centres and many historical capital cities, almost all educated people speak with the accents of their several origins, and are rather tenacious of the habit than anxious to get rid of it, generally maintaining that their own pronunciation is the right one.

"Signor Malipieri," said the Baron to Sabina, as they went in to dinner, "is the celebrated archæologist."

"Yes," Sabina answered, as if she knew all about him, though she had never heard him mentioned.

Malipieri probably overheard the Baron's speech, but he took no notice of it. At dinner, he seemed inclined to be silent. The Baron asked him questions about his discoveries, to which he gave rather short an-

swers, but Sabina gathered that he had found something extraordinary in Carthage. She did not know where Carthage was, and did not like to ask, but she remembered that Marius had sat there among some ruins. Perhaps Malipieri had found his bones, for no one had ever told her that Marius did not continue to sit among the ruins to his dying day. She connected him vaguely with Æneas and another person called Regulus. It was all rather uncertain.

What she saw clearly was that the Baron wished to make Malipieri feel at his ease, but that Malipieri's idea of being at his ease was certainly not founded on a wish to talk about himself. So the conversation languished for some time.

The Baroness, who knew about as much about Carthage as Sabina, made a few disconnected remarks, interspersed with laudatory allusions to the young man's immense learning, for she wished to please her husband, though she had not the slightest idea why Malipieri was asked to dinner. Finding that he was not perceptibly flattered by what she said, she began to talk about the Venetian aristocracy, for she knew that his

name was historical, and she recognised in him at once the characteristics of the nobility she worshipped. Malipieri smiled politely, and in answer to a direct question admitted that his mother had been a Gradenigo.

The Baroness was delighted at this information.

"To think," she said, "that by a mere accident you and Donna Sabina should meet here, the descendants of two of the oldest families of the Italian aristocracy!"

"I am a republican," observed Malipieri quietly.

"You!" cried the Baroness in amazement. "You, the offspring of such races as the Malipieri and the Gradenigo a republican, a socialist, an anarchist!"

"There is a difference," said Malipieri with a smile. "A republican is not an anarchist!"

"I can never believe it," answered the Baroness solemnly.

She ate a few green peas and shook her head.

"I went to Carthage because I was condemned to three years' confinement in prison," replied Malipieri with calm.

"Prison!" exclaimed the Baroness in horror, and she

looked at her husband, mutely asking why in the world he had brought a convict to their table.

The Baron smiled benignly, as he disposed of an ample mouthful of green peas, before he spoke.

"Signor Malipieri," he said, when he had swallowed the last one, "founded and edited a republican newspaper in the north of Italy."

"And you were sent to prison for that?" asked Sabina, with indignation.

"It is one thing to send a man to prison," said Malipieri. "It is another to make him go there. I escaped to Switzerland, and I came back to Italy quite lately, after the amnesty."

"I am amazed!" The Baroness looked at the servants timidly, as if she expected the butler and the footman to express their disapprobation of the guest.

"I have left politics for the present," Malipieri replied, looking at Sabina and smiling.

"Of course!" cried the Baroness. "But——" she stopped short.

"My wife," said the financier with a grin, "is afraid you have dynamite about you."

"How absurd!" The Baroness felt that she was ridiculous. "But I do not understand how you can be friends," she added, glancing from her husband to Malipieri.

"We are at least on good terms of acquaintance," said the younger man a little markedly.

Sabina liked the speech and the way in which it was spoken.

"We have a common ground for it in our interest in antiquities. Is it not true, Signor Malipieri?"

The Baron looked at him and smiled again, as if there were a secret between them, and Malipieri glanced at Sabina.

"It is quite true," he said gravely. "The Baron has read all I have written about Carthage."

Volterra possessed a sort of rough social tact, together with the native astuteness and great knowledge of men which had made him rich and a Senator. He suddenly became voluble and led the conversation in a new direction, which it followed till the end of dinner.

Several people came in afterwards, as often happened, before the coffee was taken away. They were chiefly men in politics, and two of them brought their

wives with them. They were not the sort of guests whom the Baroness preferred, for they were not by any means all noble Romans, but they were of importance to her husband and she took great pains to make them welcome. To one she offered his favourite liqueur, which happened to be a Sicilian ratafia; for another she made the Baron send for some of those horribly coarse black cigars known as Tuscans, which some Italians prefer to anything else; for a third, she ordered fresh coffee to be especially made. She took endless trouble.

Malipieri seemed to know none of the guests, and he took advantage of the Baroness's preoccupation for their comforts to sit down by Sabina. He did not look at her, and she thought he looked bored, as he sat a moment in silence. Then a thin deputy with a magnificent forehead and thick grey hair began to hold forth on the subject of a projected divorce law and the guests gathered round him. Sabina had never heard of Sidney Smith, but she had a suspicion that nobody could be as great as the speaker looked. While she was thinking of this, Malipieri spoke to her in a low voice.

"I suppose that you are stopping in the house," he said.

"Yes."

Sabina turned her eyes a little, but did not look straight at him. She saw, however, that he was still watching the people in the room, and still looked bored, and she was quite unprepared for what followed.

"Are the affairs of your family finally settled?" he enquired, without changing his tone.

Sabina was so much surprised that she waited a moment before answering. Her first instinct was to ask him stiffly why he put such a question, and she would have replied to it in that way if it had come from any other guest in the room; but she changed her mind almost instantly.

"No one has told me anything," she said simply, in a low voice.

Malipieri turned his head a little with a quick movement, and clasped his brown hands over one knee.

"You know nothing?" he asked. "Nothing whatever about the matter?"

"Nothing."

He bit his lip as if he were indignant, and were repressing an exclamation.

"No one has written to me—for a long time," Sabina said, after a moment.

She had been on the point of saying that she had never received a line from any member of her family since the crash, but that seemed to sound like a confidence, and what she really said was quite true.

"Has not the Senator told you anything either?" Malipieri asked.

"No. I suppose he does not like to speak about our misfortunes before me."

"Have you, I mean you yourself, any interest in the Palazzo Conti now? Can you tell me that?"

"I know nothing—nothing!" Sabina repeated the word with a slight tremor, for just then she felt her position more keenly than ever before. "Why do you ask?"

She could not help putting the question which rose to her lips the second time, but there was no coldness in her voice. She was very lonely, and she felt

that Malipieri was speaking from some honourable motive.

"I am living in the palace," Malipieri answered.

Sabina looked up quickly, with an expression of interest in her pale young face. The thought that the man beside her was living in her old home was like a bond of acquaintance.

"Really?" she cried. "In which part of the house?"

"Do not seem interested, please," said Malipieri, suddenly looking very bored again. "If you do, we shall not be allowed to talk. I am living in the little apartment on the intermediate storey. They tell me that a chaplain once lived there."

"I know where it is," answered Sabina, "but I was never in the rooms. They used to be shut up, I think."

The deputy who was haranguing on the subject of divorce seemed to be approaching his peroration. His great voice filled the large room with incessant noise, and everybody seemed anxiously waiting for a chance to contradict him. Malipieri was in no danger of being overheard.

"If it happens," he said, "that I wish to communicate with you on a matter of importance, how can I reach you best?"

He asked the question quite naturally, as if he had known Sabina all his life. At first she was so much surprised that she could hardly speak.

"I—I do not know," she stammered.

She had never received letters from anyone but her own family or her school friends, and a very faint colour rose in her pale cheek. Malipieri looked more bored and weary than ever.

"It may be absolutely necessary for me to write to you before long," he said. "Shall I write by post?"

Sabina hesitated.

"Is there no one in all Rome whom you can trust to bring a note and give it to you when you are alone?"

"There is Signor Sassi," Sabina answered almost instinctively. "But really, why should you——"

"How can I find Sassi?" asked Malipieri, interrupting the question. "Who is he?"

"He was our agent. Is he gone? The old porter will know where to find him. I think he lived near

the palace. But perhaps the porter has been sent away too."

"He is still there. Have you been made to sign any papers since you have been here?"

"No."

"Will you promise me something?"

Sabina could not understand how it was that a man who had been a stranger two hours earlier was speaking to her almost as if he were an intimate friend, still less why she no longer felt that she ought to check him and assert her dignity.

"If it is right, I will promise it," she answered quietly, and looking down.

"It is right," he said. "If the Senator, or anyone else asks you to sign a paper, will you promise to consult me before doing so?"

"But I hardly know you!" she laughed, a little shyly.

"It is of no use to waste time and trouble on social conventions," said Malipieri. "If you do not trust me, can you trust this Sassi?"

"Oh yes!"

"Then consult him. I will make him consult me,

and it will be the same—and ten times more conventional and proper."

He smiled.

"Will you promise that?" he asked.

"Yes. I promise. But I wish you would tell me more."

"I wish I could. But I hardly know you!" He smiled again, as he repeated her own words.

"Never mind that! Tell me!"

"No. I cannot. If there is trouble I will tell you everything—through Sassi, of course."

Sabina laughed, and all at once she felt as if she had known him for years.

At that moment the deputy finished his speech, and all who had anything to say in answer said it at once, in order to lose no time, while the speaker re-lighted his villainous black cigar, puffing tremendously.

The Baroness suddenly remembered Sabina and Malipieri in the corner, and after screaming out several incoherent phrases, which might have been taken for applause or dissent and were almost lost in the general din, she moved across the room.

"It is atrocious!" she cried, as she reached Sabina. "I hope you have not heard a word he said!"

"When a man has such a voice as that, it is impossible not to hear him," said Malipieri, rising and answering before Sabina had time to speak.

Sabina rose, too, rather reluctantly.

"And of course you agreed with everything he said," the Baroness replied. "All anarchists do!"

"I beg your pardon. I do not agree with him at all, and I am really not an anarchist."

He smiled politely, and Sabina noticed with an unaccountable little thrill of satisfaction that the smile was quite different from the one she had seen in his face more than once while they had been talking together. As for the deputy's discourse, she had not heard a word of it.

The Baroness sat down on the sofa, and Sabina slipped away. She was not supposed to be in society yet, as she was not quite eighteen, and there was certainly no reason why she should stay in the drawing-room that evening, while there were many reasons why she should go away. The Baroness breathed an audible sigh of relief when she was gone, for it was never pos-

sible to predict what some excited politician might say before her in the heat of argument.

In the silence of her own room she sat down to think over the unexpected events of the evening. Very young girls love to look forward to the moment when they shall be able to "think" of what has happened, after they have met men they are inclined to like, and who interest them. But when the time really comes they hardly ever think at all. They see pictures, they hear voices, they feel again what they have felt, they laugh, they shed tears all alone, and they believe they are thinking, or even reasoning. Their little joys come back to them, the little triumphs of their vanity, and also all the little hurts their sensitiveness has suffered, and which men do not often guess and still more rarely understand.

There must be some original reason why all boys call girls silly, and all girls think boys stupid. It must be part of the first manifestation of that enormous difference which exists between the point of view of men and women in after life.

Women are, in a sense, the embodiment of practice, while men are the representatives of theory. In practice,

in a race for life, the runner who jumps everything in his way is always right, unless he breaks his neck. In theory, he is as likely to break his neck at the first jump as at the second, and the chances of his coming to grief increase quickly, always in theory, as he grows tired. So theory says that it is safer never to jump at all, but to go round through the gates, or wade ignominiously through the water. Women jump; men go round. The difference is everything. Women believe in what often succeeds in practice, and they take all risks and sometimes come down with a crash. Men theorise about danger, make elaborate calculations to avoid it and occasionally stick in the mud. When women fall at a stone wall they scream, when men are stuck in a bog they swear. The difference is fundamental. In nine cases out of ten it is the woman who enjoys the ecstatic delight of saying "I told you so," and there are plenty of women who would ask no greater joy in paradise than to say so to their husbands for ever and ever. Indeed eternal reward and punishment could thus be at once combined and distributed in a simple manner.

Sabina took her first fence that evening, for when she put out her candle she was sure that Malipieri was

already her friend, and that she could trust him in any emergency. Moreover, though she would not have acknowledged it, she inwardly hoped that some emergency might not be far in the future.

But Malipieri walked all the way from the Via Ludovisi to the Palazzo Conti, which is more than a mile, without noticing that he had forgotten to light the cigar he had taken out on leaving Volterra's house.

CHAPTER VI.

MALIPIERI had the Palazzo Conti to himself. The main entrance was always shut now, and only a small postern, cut in one side of the great door, was left ajar. The porter loafed about in the great court with his broom and his pipe; in the morning his wife went upstairs and opened a few windows, merely as a formality, and late in the afternoon she shut them again. Malipieri's man generally went out twice every day, carrying a military dinner-pail, made in three sections, which he brought back half an hour later. Malipieri sometimes was not seen for several days, but sometimes he went out in the morning and did not come back till dark. Now and then, things were delivered for him at the door, a tin of oil for his lamps, a large box of candles, packages of odd shapes, sometimes very heavy, and which the porter was told to handle with care.

The old man tried to make acquaintance with Mali-

pieri's man, but found it less easy than he had expected. In the first place, Masin came from some outlandish part of Italy where an abominable dialect was spoken, and though he could speak school Italian when he pleased, he chose to talk to the porter in his native jargon, when he talked at all. He might just as well have spoken Greek. Secondly, he refused the porter's repeated offers of a litre at the wine-shop, always saying something which sounded like a reference to his delicate health. As he was evidently as strong as an ox, and as healthy as a savage or a street dog, the excuse carried no conviction. He was a big, quiet fellow, with china blue eyes and a reddish moustache. The porter was not used to such people, nor to servants who wore moustaches, and was inclined to distrust the man. On the other hand, though Masin would not drink, he often gave the porter a cigar, with a friendly smile.

One day, in the morning, Baron Volterra came to see Malipieri, and stayed over an hour, a part of which time the two men spent in the courtyard, walking up and down in the north-west corner, and then taking some measurements with a long tape which Malipieri produced from his pocket. When the Baron went away

he stopped and spoke with the porter. First he gave him five francs; then he informed him that his wages would be raised in future by that amount; and finally he told him that Signor Malipieri was an architect and would superintend the repairs necessary to the foundations at the north-west corner, that while the work was going on even the little postern door was to be kept shut all day, and no one was to be admitted on any condition without Signor Malipieri's express permission. The fat Baron fixed his eyes on the porter's with an oddly hard look, and said that he himself might come at any moment to see how the work was going on, and that if he found anybody inside the gate without Signor Malipieri's authority, it would be bad for the porter. During this conversation, Malipieri stood listening, and when it ended he nodded, as if he were satisfied, and after shaking hands with the Baron he went up the grand staircase without a word.

It was all very mysterious, and the porter shook his head as he turned into his lodge after fastening the postern; but he said nothing to his wife about what had passed.

From what he had been told, he now naturally ex-

pected that a number of masons would come in a day or two in order to begin the work of strengthening the foundations; but no one came, and everything went on as usual, except that the postern was kept shut. He supposed that Malipieri was not ready, but he wisely abstained from asking questions. Then Malipieri asked him for the address of Pompeo Sassi, and wrote it down in his pocket-book, and went out. That was on the morning after he had dined at the Baron's house, for it was not his habit to waste time when he wanted information.

Sassi received Malipieri in a little sitting-room furnished with a heterogeneous collection of utterly useless objects, all of which the old agent treasured with jealous affection, and daily recommended to the care of the elderly woman who was his only servant. The sofa and chairs had been new forty years ago, and though the hideous red-and-green stuffs with which they were covered were still tolerably vivid in colour, the legs did not look safe, and Malipieri kept his feet well under him and sat down cautiously. Two rickety but well-dusted tables were loaded with ancient knick-nacks, dating from the early part of the second French Empire,

with impossibly ugly little figures carved out of cheap alabaster, small decayed photograph albums, and ingeniously bad wax flowers under glass shades. On the walls hung bad lithographs of Pius Ninth, Napoleon Third and Metternich, with a large faded photograph of old Prince Conti as a young man. Malipieri looked at it curiously, for he guessed that it represented Sabina's father. The face was clean-shaven, thin and sad, with deep eyes and fair hair that looked almost white now, as if the photograph had grown old with the man, while he had lived.

Sassi sat down opposite his visitor. He wore a black cloth cap with a green tassel, and rubbed his hands slowly while he waited for Malipieri to speak. The latter hesitated a moment and then went to the point at once.

"You were the agent of the Conti estate for many years," he said. "I know the Senator Volterra and have met Donna Sabina. I understand that her mother has left her under the charge of the Senator's wife, and seems to have forgotten her existence. The young lady is apparently without resources of her own, and it is not clear what would become of her if the Volterra couple

should not find it convenient to keep her with them. Is that the state of affairs?"

Sassi nodded gravely. Then he looked keenly at the young man, and asked him a question.

"May I inquire why you take an interest in Donna Sabina Conti?"

Malipieri returned the other's gaze quietly.

"I am an architect, called in by the Senator to superintend some work on the palace. The Senator, as you know, took over the building when he foreclosed the mortgage, and he has not yet sold it, though he has refused several good offers. I have an idea that he believes it to be very valuable property. If this should turn out to be true, and if he should have made a very profitable transaction, he ought in honour, if not in law, to make over a part of the profits to Donna Sabina, who has practically been cheated of her share in her father's estate. Her mother, and her brother and sister, spent everything they could lay hands on, whereas she never had anything. Is that true?"

"Quite true, quite true," repeated Sassi sadly.

"And if Donna Sabina were to call them to ac-

count, I fancy the law would take a rather unpleasant view of what they did. I have heard that sort of thing called stealing when the persons who did it were not princes and princesses, but plain people like you and me. Do you happen to think of any better word?"

Sassi was silent. He had eaten the bread of the Conti all his life. He glanced at the faded photograph of the Prince, as if to explain, and Malipieri understood.

"You are an honourable man," he said. "I can no more tell you why I wish to help Donna Sabina to her rights, if she has any, than I can explain a great many things I have done in my life. When I see a dog kicked, I always kick the man, if I can, and I do not remember to have regretted any momentary unpleasantness that has followed in such cases. I have only seen Donna Sabina once, but I mean to help her if possible. Now tell me this. Has she any legal claim in the value of the palace or not?"

"I am afraid not," Sassi answered.

"Do you know whether she was ever induced to sign any release of her guardians?"

"She never did."

"That might be bad for them. That is all I wished to know. Thank you."

Malipieri rose to take his leave.

"If anything of importance happens, can you communicate with Donna Sabina?" he asked.

"I can write to her," Sassi answered. "I suppose she would receive me if I went to the house."

"That would be better."

"Excuse me," said the old man, before opening the door to let his visitor out, "am I right in supposing that the work the Baron wishes done is connected with the foundations?"

"Yes."

"At the north-west corner within the courtyard?"

"Yes," answered Malipieri, looking at him attentively. "Do you happen to know anything about the condition of that part of the palace?"

"Most people," Sassi replied, "have now forgotten that a good deal of work was done there long ago, under Pope Gregory Sixteenth."

"Indeed? I did not know that. What was the result?"

"The workmen came across the 'lost water.' It rose suddenly one day and one of them was drowned. I believe his body was never recovered. Everything was filled in again after that. For my own part I do not think the building is in any danger."

"Perhaps not," said Malipieri, suddenly looking bored. "I only carry out the Senator's wishes," he added, as if with an afterthought. "It is my business to find out whether there is danger or not."

He took his leave and went away, convinced that the old agent knew about other things besides Sabina's friendless condition, but unwilling to question him just then. The information Sassi had volunteered was interesting but not useful. Malipieri thought he himself knew well enough where the "lost water" was, under the Palazzo Conti.

It was not far from Sassi's house to the palace, but he walked very slowly through the narrow streets, and stopped more than once, deliberately looking back, as if he were trying to keep the exact direction of some point in his mind, and he seemed interested in the gutters, and in the walls, at their base, just above the pave-

ment. At the corner of the Vicolo dei Soldati he saw a little marble tablet let into the masonry and yellow with age. He stopped a moment and read the inscription. Then he turned away with a look of annoyance, for it set forth that "by order of the most Eminent Vicar all persons were warned not to empty garbage there, on pain of a fine." It was a forgotten document of the old papal administration, as he could have told without reading it if he had known Rome better. From the corner he counted his paces and then stopped again and examined the wall and the pavement minutely.

There was nothing to be seen at all different from the pavement and the wall for many yards farther on and farther back, and Malipieri apparently abandoned the search, for he now walked on quickly till he reached the entrance of the palace, on the other side, and went in.

From the low door of the wine-shop, Toto, the mason, had seen him, and stood watching him till he was out of sight.

"He does not know where it is," Toto said, sitting down again opposite Gigi.

"Engineers know everything," retorted the carpenter.

"If this one knew anything, he would not have stood there looking at the stones. I do not suppose the municipality is going to put up a monument to my grandfather, whom may the Lord preserve in glory!"

At this Gigi laughed, for he knew that Toto's grandfather had been drowned in the "lost water" somewhere deep down under that spot, and had never been found. The two men drank in silence. After a long time Toto spoke again.

"A woman," he said, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"A woman drowned him?" asked Gigi. "How could a woman do it?"

"A man did it. But it was for jealousy of a woman."

"The man was a mason, I suppose," suggested Gigi.

"Of course. He was working with the others in the morning, and he knew where they would be after dinner. He did not come back with them, and half an

hour after they had gone down the water came. How many times have I told you that?"

"It is always a new tale," answered Gigi. "It gives me pleasure to hear it. Your father was a young man then, was he not?"

"Eighteen." Toto lighted his pipe.

"And the man who did it died soon afterwards?" Gigi said.

"Of course," said Toto. "What else could my father do? He killed him. It was the least he could have done. My father is also in Paradise."

"Requiescat!" ejaculated the carpenter devoutly.

"Amen," answered Toto. "He killed him with a mattock."

"It was well done," observed Gigi with satisfaction. "I suppose," he continued after a pause, "that if anybody went down there now, you could let in the water."

"Why should I? I do not care what they do. If they send for me, I may serve them. If they think they can do without me, let them try. I do not care a cabbage!"

"Perhaps not," Gigi answered thoughtfully. "But

it must be a fine satisfaction to know that you can drown them all, like rats in a hole."

"Yes," said Toto, "it is a fine satisfaction."

"And even to know that you can make the water come before they begin, so that they can never do anything without you."

"That too," assented the mason.

"They would pay you a great deal to help them, if they could not pump the water out. There is no one else in Rome who knows how to turn it off."

Gigi made the remark tentatively, but Toto did not answer.

"You will need someone to help you," suggested the carpenter in an insinuating tone.

"I can do it alone."

"It is somewhere in the cellars of number thirteen, is it not?" asked Gigi.

He would have given all he had to know what Toto knew, and the bargain would have been a very profitable one, no doubt. But though the mason was his closest friend there were secrets of the trade which Toto would not reveal to him.

"The numbers in the street were all changed ten years ago," Toto answered.

He rose from his seat by the grimy table, and Gigi followed his example with a sigh of disappointment. They were moderate men, and hardly ever drank more than their litre of their wine. Toto smelt of mortar and his fustian clothes and hairy arms were generally splashed with it. Gigi smelt of glue and sawdust, and there were plentiful marks of his calling on his shiny old cloth trousers and his coarse linen shirt. Toto's face was square, stony and impenetrable; Gigi's was sharp as a bill and alive with curiosity. Gigi wore a square paper cap; Toto wore a battered felt hat of no shape at all. On Sundays and holidays they both shaved and turned out in immaculate white shirts, well brushed broadcloth and decent hats, recognisable to each other but not to their employers.

Malipieri was accosted by a stranger at the gate of the palace. The porter, faithfully obedient to his orders, was standing inside the open postern, completely blocking it with his bulk, and when Malipieri came up the visitor was still parleying with him.

"This gentleman is asking for you, sir," said the old man.

The individual bowed politely and stepped back a little. He had a singularly worthy appearance, Malipieri thought, and he would have inspired confidence if employed in a bank; his thick grey hair was parted in the middle, and at first sight Malipieri felt perfectly sure that it was parted down the back. His brown eyes were very wide open, and steady, his slightly grizzled moustache was neither twisted straight up at the ends in the imperial German manner, nor straight out like a cat's whiskers, nor waxed to fine points in the old French fashion. It grew naturally and was rather short, but it hid his mouth almost completely. The man was extremely well dressed in half-mourning, wore dark grey gloves and carried a plain black stick. He spoke quietly and Malipieri thought he recognised the Genoese accent.

"Signor Marino Malipieri?"

"Yes," answered the architect, in a tone that asked the visitor's name in return.

"My name is Vittorio Bruni. May I have a few words with you?"

"Certainly," Malipieri answered, with considerable coolness.

"Thank you. I have been much interested by your discoveries in Carthage and if you would allow me to ask you one or two questions——"

"Pray come in."

"Thanks. After you."

"After you," insisted Malipieri, standing aside.

They went in. Before shutting the postern, the porter looked out into the street. It was almost deserted. Two men were standing together near the corner, apparently arguing some question, and stopping in their walk in order to talk more at their ease, as Romans often do. The porter shut the little door with a clang and went back to his lodge. Malipieri and his visitor were already on the stairs.

Malipieri let himself in with a small latch-key, for he had ordered a modern patent lock to be put on his door as soon as he moved into the house. Masin appeared almost at once, however, and stood waiting for his master at the door of the sitting-room, like a large, placid mastiff. Malipieri nodded to him and went in with Signor Bruni.

They sat down by the open window and Signor Bruni began to talk. In a few minutes it became evident that whether the man knew anything of the subject or not he had read everything that Malipieri had written, and remembered most of it by heart. He spoke fluently and asked intelligent questions. He had never been to Carthage, he said, but he thought of making the trip to Tunis during the following winter. Yes, he was a man of leisure, though he had formerly been in business; he had a taste for archæology, and did not think it was too late to cultivate it, in a modest way, for his own pleasure. Of course, he could never hope to accomplish anything of importance, still less to become famous like Malipieri. It was merely a taste, and was better than nothing as an interest in life.

Malipieri protested that he was not famous, but agreed with Signor Bruni about other matters. It was better to follow a serious pursuit than to do nothing with one's life.

"Or to dash into politics," suggested Bruni carelessly, as if he had thought of trying that.

Perhaps he had heard of Malipieri's republican newspaper, but if he had thought of drawing the young

man into conversation about it, he was disappointed. Malipieri continued to agree with him, listening attentively to all he said without once looking bored.

"And now," continued Bruni presently, "if it is not indiscreet, may I ask whether you have any new field of discovery in view?"

The phrases ran along as if they had been all prepared beforehand. The accent was now decidedly Genoese, and Malipieri, who was a Venetian, disliked it.

"Not at present," he said. "I have undertaken a little professional work in Rome, and I am trying to learn more about the Phœnician language."

"That is beyond me!" Bruni smiled pleasantly.

Malipieri looked at him a moment.

"If you are going to look into Carthaginian antiquities," he said, with much gravity, "I strongly advise you to study Phœnician."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Bruni with a sigh of regret, "I had hoped it might not be necessary."

He rose to take his leave, but as if seeing the bookshelves for the first time, asked permission to look at their contents. Malipieri saw that his glance ran sharply

along the titles of the volumes, and that he was reading them as quickly as he could.

"I suppose you live here quite alone," he said.

"Yes. I have a servant."

"Of course. They tell me that Baron Volterra has not decided what he will do with the palace, and will not give a lease of it to anyone."

"I do not know what he means to do," answered Malipieri, looking at the straight part down the back of his worthy visitor's hair, as the latter bent to look at the books.

"I suppose he lends you this apartment, as a friend," said Bruni.

"No. I pay rent for it."

Signor Bruni was becoming distinctly inquisitive, thought Malipieri, who answered coldly. Possibly the visitor perceived the hint, for he now finally took his leave. In spite of his protestations Malipieri went all the way downstairs with him, and let him out himself, just as the porter came out of his lodge at the sound of their footsteps.

Signor Bruni bowed a last time, and then walked briskly away. By force of habit, the porter looked up

and down the street before shutting the door after him, and he was somewhat surprised to see that the two men whom he had noticed half an hour earlier had only just finished their argument and turned to go on as Signor Bruni passed them. Then the porter watched them all three till they disappeared round the corner. At the same moment, from the opposite direction, Toto reached the door of the palace, and greeted the porter with a rough good-evening.

"I have forgotten the name of this palace," he added, by way of a joke, meaning that he had not been called to do any work for a long time. "Perhaps you can tell me what it is called."

"It used to be a madhouse," returned the porter in the same strain. "Now that the madmen are gone, a mole lives here. I kept the door open for the lunatics, and they all got out. I keep it shut for the mole, when he does not shut it himself."

"I will come in and smoke a pipe with you," said Toto. "We will talk of old times."

The porter shook his head, and blocked the way.

"Not if you were the blessed soul of my father

come back from the dead," he said. "The Baron's instructions are to let no one in without the mole's orders."

"But I am an old friend," objected Toto.

"Not if you were my mother, and the Holy Father, and Saint Peter, and all the souls of Purgatory at once," answered the porter.

"May an apoplexy seize you!" observed Toto pleasantly, and he went off, his pipe in his mouth.

The porter shrugged his shoulders at the imprecation, shut the door reluctantly, and went in to supper. Upstairs, Malipieri stood at his open window, smoking and watching the old fountain in the court. It was evening, and a deep violet light filled the air and was reflected in the young man's bronzed face. He was very thoughtful now, and was not aware that he heard the irregular splash of the water in the dark basin at the feet of the statue of Hercules, and the eager little scream of the swallows as they shot past him, upward to the high old eaves, where their young were, and downwards almost to the gravel of the court, and in wide circles and madly sudden curves. The violet light faded softly, and the dusk drank the last drop of

it, and the last swallow disappeared under the eaves; but still Malipieri leaned upon the stone window-sill, looking down.

For a long time he thought of Signor Bruni. He wondered whether he had ever seen the man before, or whether the face only seemed familiar because it was the type of a class of faces all more or less alike, all intensely respectable and not without refinement, expressing a grave reticence that did not agree with the fluent speech, and a polite reserve at odds with the inquisitive nature that revealed itself.

Malipieri was inclined to think he had never met Bruni, but somehow the latter recalled the hot times in Milan, and his short political career, and the association was not to the man's advantage. He could not recall the name at all. It was like any other, and rather especially unobtrusive. Anybody might be called Vittorio Bruni, and Vittorio Bruni might be anybody, from a senator to a shoemaker; but if he had been a senator, or any political personage, Malipieri would have heard of him.

There was something very odd, too, about his knowledge of Carthaginian antiquities, which was entirely

limited to the contents of Malipieri's own pamphlets. He knew nothing of the Egyptians and very little about the Greeks, beyond what Malipieri had necessarily written about both. He had talked much as a man does who has read up an unfamilar subject in order to make a speech about it, and though the speech is skilful, an expert can easily detect the shallowness of attainment behind it.

There could be only one reason why anyone should take so much trouble; the object was evidently to make Malipieri's acquaintance, in the absence of an ordinary introduction. And yet Signor Bruni had quite forgotten to give his card with his address, as almost any Italian would have done under the circumstances, whether he expected the meeting to be followed by another or not. Malipieri spent most of his time in his rooms, but he knew very well that he might go about Rome for weeks and not come across the man again.

He recalled the whole conversation. He had in the first place expected that Bruni would be inquisitive about the palace, and perhaps ask to be shown over it, but it was only at the last that he had put one or two questions which suggested an interest in the building,

and then he had at once taken the hint given him by Malipieri's cold tone, and had not persisted. On the other hand he had looked carefully at the titles of the books on the shelves, as if in search of something.

Then Malipieri was conscious again of the association, in his own mind, between the man's personality and his own political experiences, and he suddenly laughed aloud.

"What a precious fool I am!" he thought. "The man is nothing but a detective!"

The echo of his laugh came back to him from across the dusky court in rather a ghostly way.

The evening air was all at once chilly, and he shut his window and called for Masin, who instantly appeared with a lamp. Masin was always ready, and, indeed, possessed many qualities excellent in a faithful servant, among which gratitude to Malipieri held a high place.

He had something to be grateful for, which is not, however, always a cause of gratitude in the receiver of favours and mercies. He had been a convict, and had served a term of several years in penal servitude. The sentence had been passed upon him for having stabbed

a man in the back, in a drunken brawl, but Masin had steadily denied the charge, and the evidence against him had been merely circumstantial. It had happened in Rome, where Masin had worked as a mason during the construction of the new Courts of Justice. He was from the far north of Italy, and was, of course, hated by his companions, as only Italians of different parts of the country can hate one another. To shield one of themselves, they unanimously gave evidence against Masin; the jury was chiefly composed of Romans, the judge was a Sicilian, and Masin had no chance. Fortunately for him, the man lived, though much injured; if he had died, Masin would have got a life sentence. It was an old story; false witnesses, a prejudiced jury, and a judge who, though willing to put his prejudices aside, had little choice but to convict.

Masin had been sent to Elba to the penitentiary, had been a "good-behaviour man" from first to last, and his term had been slightly abridged in consequence. When he was discharged, he went back to the north. Malipieri had found him working as a mason when some repairs were being made in the cathedral of Milan, and had taken a fancy to him. Masin had told

his story simply and frankly, explaining that he found it hard to get a living at all since he had been a convict, and that he was trying to save enough money to emigrate to New York. Malipieri had thought over the matter for a week, speaking to him now and then, and watching him, and had at last proposed to take him into his own service. Later, Masin had helped Malipieri to escape, had followed him into exile, and had been of the greatest use to him during the excavations in Carthage, where he had acted as body-servant, foreman, and often as a trusted friend.

He was certainly not an accomplished valet, but Malipieri did not care for that. He was sober, he was honest, he was trustworthy, he was cool in danger, and he was very strong. Moreover, he was an excellent and experienced mason, a fact of little or no use in the scientific treatment of shoes, trousers, silk hats, hairbrushes, and coffee, but which had more than once been valuable to Malipieri during the last few years. Finally, his gratitude to the man who had believed in his innocence was deep and lasting. Masin would really have given his life to save Malipieri's, and would have been glad to give it.

He set the lamp down on the table, and waited for orders, his blue eyes quietly fixed on his master.

"I never saw that gentleman before," said Malipieri, setting some papers in order, under the bright light, but still standing. "Did you look at his face?"

"Yes, sir," answered Masin, and waited.

"What sort of man should you take him to be?"

"A spy, sir," replied Masin promptly.

"I think you are right," Malipieri answered. "We will begin work to-morrow morning."

"Yes, sir."

Malipieri ate his supper without noticing what Masin brought him, and then installed himself with his shaded lamp at his work-table. He took from the drawer a number of sketches of plans and studied them attentively, by a rather odd process.

He had drawn only one plan on heavy paper, in strong black lines. An architect would have seen at once that it represented a part of the foundations of a very large building; and two or three persons then living in Rome might have recognised the plan of the cellars under the northwest corner of the Palazzo Conti—certainly not more than two or three, one of whom was the

snuffy expert who had come from beyond the Tiber, and another was Baron Volterra. Toto, the mason, could have threaded the intricate ways in the dark, but could assuredly have made nothing of the drawings. On the other hand, the persons who were acquainted with them did not know what Toto knew, and he was not at all inclined to impart his knowledge to anyone, for reasons best known to himself.

Furthermore, an architect would have understood at a glance that the plan was incomplete, and that there was some reason why it could not be completed. A part of it was quite blank, but in one place the probable continuation of a main wall not explored, or altogether inaccessible, was indicated by dotted lines.

Besides this main drawing, Malipieri had several others made on tracing paper to the same scale, which he laid over the first, and moved about, trying to make the one fit the other, and in each of these the part which was blank in the one underneath was filled in according to different imaginary plans. Lastly, he had a large transparent sheet on which were accurately laid out the walls and doors of the ground floor of the palace at the north-west corner, and in this there was

marked a square piece of masonry, shaded as if to represent a solid pilaster, and which came over the unexplored part of the cellars. Sometimes Malipieri placed this drawing over the first, and then one of the others on both, trying to make the three agree. It was like an odd puzzle, and there was not a word written on any of the plans to explain what they meant. On most of the thin ones there were blue lines, indicating water, or at least its possible course.

The imaginary architect, if he could have watched the real one, would have understood before long that the latter was theorising about the probable construction of what was hitherto inaccessible, and about the probable position of certain channels through which water flowed, or might be expected to flow. He would also have gathered that Malipieri could reach no definite conclusion unless he could break through one of two walls in the cellar, or descend through an opening in the floor above, which would be by far the easiest way. He might even have wondered why Malipieri did not at once adopt the latter expedient. It is not a serious matter to make an aperture through a vault, large enough to allow the passage of a man's body, and it

could not be attended with any danger to the building. It would be much less safe and far more difficult to cut a hole through one of the main foundation walls, which might be many feet thick and yet not wholly secure. Nevertheless the movements made by the point of Malipieri's pencil showed that he was contemplating that method of gaining an entrance.

CHAPTER VII.

SABINA had been more than two months in Baron Volterra's house, when she at last received a line from her mother. The short letter was characteristic and was, after all, what the girl had expected, neither more nor less. The Princess told her that for the present she must stay with the "kind friends" who had offered her a home; that everything would be right before long; that if she needed any advice she had better send for Sassi, who had always served the family faithfully; that gowns were going to be short next year, which would be becoming to Sabina when she "came out," because she had small feet and admirable ankles; and that the weather was heavenly. The Princess added that she would send her some pocket-money before long, and that she was trying to find the best way of sending it.

In spite of her position Sabina smiled at the last

sentence. It was so like her mother to promise what she would never perform, that it amused her. She sat still for some time with the letter in her hand and then took it to the Baroness, for she felt that it was time to speak out and that the interview could not be put off any longer. The Baroness was writing in her boudoir. She wrote her letters on large sheets of an especial paper, stamped with her initials, over which appeared a very minute Italian baron's coronet, with seven points; it was so small that one might easily have thought that it had nine, like a count's, but it was undeniably smart and suggested an assured position in the aristocracy. No one quite remembered why the late King had made Volterra a baron, but he undoubtedly had done so, and no one disputed Volterra's right to use the title.

Sabina read her letter aloud, and the Baroness listened attentively, with a grave expression.

"Your dear mother——" she began in a soothing tone.

"She is not my 'dear mother' at all," said Sabina interrupting her. "She is not any more 'dear' to me than I am to her."

"Oh!" exclaimed the Baroness, affecting to be shocked by the girl's heartlessness.

"If it were not for my 'dear mother,' I should not be a beggar," said Sabina.

"A beggar! What a word!"

"There is no other, that I know of. I am living on your charity."

"For heaven's sake, do not say such things!" cried the Baroness.

"There is nothing else to say. If you had not taken me in and lodged me and fed me, I should like to know where I should be now. I am quite sure that my 'dear mother' would not care, but I cannot help wondering what is to become of me. Are you surprised?"

"Are you not provided for here?" The question was put in a tone almost of deprecation.

"Provided for! I am surrounded with every sort of luxury, when I ought to be working for my living."

"Working!" The Baroness was filled with horror. "You, my dear, the daughter of a Roman Prince! You, working for your living! You, a Conti!"

Sabina smiled and looked down at her delicate hands.

"I cannot see what my name has to do with it," she said. "It is not much to be proud of, considering how my relatives behave."

"It is a great name," said the Baroness solemnly and emphatically.

"It was once," Sabina answered, leaning back in the low chair she had taken, and looking at the ceiling. "My mother and my brother have not added lustre to it, and I would much rather be called Signorina Emilia Moscetti and be a governess, than be Sabina Conti and live on charity. I have no right to what I do not possess and cannot earn."

"My dear child! This is rank socialism! I am afraid you talked too long with Malipieri the other night."

"There is a man who works, though he has what you call a great name," observed Sabina. "I admire that. He was poor, I suppose—perhaps not so poor as I am—and he made up his mind to earn his living and a reputation."

"You are quite mistaken," said the Baroness drily.

Sabina looked at her in surprise.

"I thought he was a distinguished architect and engineer," she answered.

"Yes. But he was never poor, and he will be very rich some day."

"Indeed!" Sabina seemed rather disappointed at the information.

There was a little pause, and the Baroness looked at her unfinished letter as if she wished that Sabina would go away. She had foreseen that before long the girl would make some protest against her position as a perpetual guest in the house, but had no clear idea of how to meet it. Sabina seemed so very decided.

"We have done our best to make you feel at home, like one of the family," the Baroness said presently, in a rather injured tone.

Sabina did not wish to be one of the family at all, but she knew that she was under great obligations to her hosts, and she did not wish to be thought ungrateful.

"You have been more than kind," she answered gently, "and I shall never forget it. You have taken

more trouble for me in two or three months than my mother in all my life. Please do not imagine that I am not thankful for all you have done."

The words were spoken sincerely, and when Sabina was very much in earnest there was something at once convincing and touching in her voice. The Baroness's sallow cheek actually flushed with pleasure, and she was impelled to leave her seat and kiss Sabina affectionately. She was restrained by a reasonable doubt as to the consequences of such demonstrative familiarity, though she would not have hesitated to kiss the girl's mother under like circumstances.

"It was the least we could do," she said, knowing very well that the phrase meant nothing.

"Excuse me," Sabina objected, "but there was no reason in the world why you should do anything at all for me! In the natural course of things I should either have been sent to the country with my sister-in-law, or to the convent with Clementina."

"You would have been very unhappy, my dear child."

"I do not know which would have been worse,"

said Sabina frankly. "They both hate me, and I hate them."

"Dear me!" exclaimed the Baroness, shocked again, or pretending to be.

"In our family," Sabina answered calmly, "we all hate each other."

"I am sure your sister Clementina is far too religious to feel hatred for anyone."

"You do not know her!" Sabina laughed, and looked at the ceiling. "She hates 'the wicked' with a mortal hatred!"

"Perhaps you mean that she hates wickedness, my dear," suggested the Baroness in a moralising tone.

"Not at all!" laughed the young girl. "She would like to destroy everybody who is not like her, and she would begin with her own family. She used to tell me that I was doomed to eternal flames because I loved my canary better than I loved her. I did. It was quite true. As for my brother, she said he was wicked, too. I quite believe he is, but she had a friendly understanding with him, because they used to make Signor Sassi get money for them both. In the end they got so much that there was nothing left. Her share all

went to convents and extraordinary charities, and his went heaven knows where!"

"And yours?" asked the Baroness, to see what she would say.

"I suppose it went to them too, like everything else, and to my mother, who spent a great deal of money. At all events, none of us have anything now. That is why I want to work."

"It is an honourable impulse, no doubt," the Baroness said, in a tone of meditative disapproval.

Sabina leaned forward, her chin on her hand.

"You think I am too young," she said. "And I really know nothing, except bad French and dancing. I cannot even sew, at least, not very well, and I cannot cook." She laughed. "I once made some very good toast," she added, thoughtfully.

"You must marry," said the Baroness. "You must make a good marriage."

"No one will marry me, because I have no dowry," answered Sabina with perfect simplicity.

"Some men marry girls who have none. You are very pretty, you know."

"So my mother used to tell me when she was in a

good humour. But Clementina always said I was hideous, that my eyes were like a little pig's, quite inside my head, and that my hair was grey, like an old woman's, and that I was as thin as a grasshopper."

"You are very pretty," the Baroness repeated with conviction; "and I am sure you would make a good wife."

"I am afraid not!" Sabina laughed. "We are none of us good, you know. Why should I be?"

The Baroness disapproved.

"That is a flippant speech," she said, severely.

"I do not feel flippant at all. I am very serious. I wish to earn my living."

"But you cannot——"

"But I wish to," answered Sabina, as if that settled the question.

"Have you always done what you wished?" asked the Baroness wisely.

"No, never. That is why I mean to begin at once. I am sure I can learn to be a maid, or to make hats, or feed babies with bottles. Many girls of eighteen can."

The Baroness shrugged her shoulders in a decidedly

plebeian way. Sabina's talk seemed very silly to her, no doubt, but she felt slightly foolish herself just then. At close quarters and in the relative intimacy that had grown up between them, the descendant of all the Conti had turned out to be very different from what the financier's wife had expected, and it was not easy to understand her. Sometimes the girl talked like a woman of the world, and sometimes like a child. Her character seemed to be a compound of cynicism and simplicity, indifference and daring, gentleness, hardness and pride, all wonderfully amalgamated under a perfectly self-possessed manner, and pervaded by the most undeniable charm. It was no wonder that the poor Baroness was as puzzled as a hen that has hatched a swan.

Sabina had behaved perfectly, so far; the Baroness admitted this, and it had added considerably to her growing social importance to be regarded as the girl's temporary guardian. Even royalty had expressed its approval of her conduct and its appreciation of her generosity, and it was one of the Baroness's chief ambitions to be noticed by royalty. She had shown a good deal of tact, too, for she was woman enough to

guess what the girl must feel, and how hard it must be to accept so much without any prospect of being able to make a return. So far, however, matters had gone very well, and she had really begun to look forward to the glory of presenting Sabina in society during the following winter, and of steering her to a rich marriage, penniless though she was.

But this morning she had received a new impression which disturbed her. It was not that she attached much importance to Sabina's wild talk about working for a living, for that was absurd, on the face of it; but there was something daring in the tone, something in the little careless laugh which made her feel that the delicate girl might be capable of doing very unexpected and dangerous things. The sudden conviction came upon her that Sabina was of the kind that run away and make love matches, and otherwise break through social conventions in a manner quite irreparable. And if Sabina did anything of that sort, the Baroness would not only lose all the glory she had gained, but would of course be severely blamed by Roman society, which would be an awful calamity if it did not amount to a social fall. She alone knew how hard she had worked

to build up her position, and she guessed how easily an accident might destroy it. Her husband had his politics and his finance to interest him, but what would be left to his wife if she once lost her hold upon the aristocracy? Even the smile of royalty would not make up for that, and royalty would certainly not smile if Sabina, being in her charge, did anything very startlingly unconventional.

Sabina was quite conscious that the Baroness did not understand; indeed, she had not really expected to be understood, and when she saw the shrug of the shoulders that answered her last speech she rose quietly and went to the window. The blinds were drawn together, for it was now late in May, but she could see down to the street, and as she looked she started a little.

"There is Signor Malipieri!" she cried, and it was clear that she was glad.

The Baroness uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Are you sure?" she asked.

Yes, Sabina was quite sure. He had just driven up to the door in a cab. Now he was paying the cabman,

too, instead of making him wait. The Baroness glanced at the showy little clock set in turquoises, which stood on her writing-table, and she put away her unfinished letter.

"We will ask him to stay to luncheon," she said, in a decided tone.

After sending up to ask if he would be received Malipieri entered the room with an apology. He said that he had hoped to find the Baron in, and had been told that he might come at any moment. The Baroness thereupon asked the visitor to stay to luncheon, and Malipieri accepted, and sat down.

It had always amused Sabina to watch how the Baroness's manner changed when anyone appeared whom she did not know very well. Her mouth assumed a stereotyped smile, she held her head a little forward and on one side, and she spoke in quite another tone. But just now Sabina did not notice these things. She was renewing her impression of Malipieri, whom she had only seen once and in evening dress. She liked him even better now, she thought, and it would have pleased her to look at him longer.

Their eyes met in a glance as he told the Baroness that he had come to see Volterra on a matter of business. He did not explain what the business was, and at once began to talk of other things, as if to escape possible questions. Sabina thought he was paler than before, or less sunburnt, perhaps; at all events, the contrast between his very white forehead and his bronzed face was less strong. She could see his eyes more distinctly, too, than she had seen them in the evening, and she liked their expression better, for he did not look at all bored now. She liked his voice, too, for the slight harshness that seemed always ready to command. She liked the man altogether, and was conscious of the fact, and wished she could talk with him again, as she had talked that evening on the sofa in the corner, without fear of interruption.

That was impossible, and she listened to what he said. It was merely the small talk of a man of the world who knows that he is expected to say something not altogether dull, and takes pains to be agreeable, but Sabina felt all through it a sort of sympathy which she missed very much in the Volterra household, the certainty of fellowship which people who have been

brought up in similar surroundings feel when they meet in an atmosphere not their own.

A few minutes after he had come, a servant opened the door and said that the Baron wished to speak to the Baroness at the telephone. She rose, hesitated a moment and went out, leaving the two young people together.

"I have seen Sassi," said Malipieri in a low voice, as soon as the door was shut.

"Yes," answered Sabina, with a little interrogation.

She was very much surprised to hear a slight tremor in her own voice as she uttered the one word.

"I like him very much," Malipieri continued. "He is a good friend to you. He said that if anything of importance happened he would come and see you."

"I shall be glad," Sabina said.

"Something is happening, which may bring him. Be sure to see him alone, when he comes."

"Yes, but what is it? What can possibly happen that can make a difference?"

Malipieri glanced at the door, fearing that the Baroness might enter suddenly.

"Can you keep a secret?" he asked quickly.

"Of course! Tell me!" She leaned forward with eager interest, expecting his next words.

"Did you ever hear that something very valuable is said to be hidden somewhere under the palace?"

Sabina's face fell and the eagerness faded from her eyes instantly. She had often heard the story from her nurses when she had been a little girl, and she did not believe a word of it, any more than she believed that the marble statue of Cardinal Conti in the library really came down from its pedestal on the eve of All Souls' and walked through the state apartments, or the myth about the armour of Francesco Conti, of which the nurses used to tell her that on the anniversary of the night of his murder his eyes could be seen through the bars of the helmet, glowing with the infernal fire. As for any hidden treasure, she was quite positive that if it existed her brother and sister would have got at it long ago. Malipieri sank in her estimation as soon as he mentioned it. He was only a Venetian, of course, and could not be expected to know much about Rome, but he must be very weak-minded if he could be imposed upon by such nonsense. Her delicate lip curled with a little contempt.

"Is that the great secret?" she asked. "I thought you were in earnest."

"The Senator is," observed Malipieri drily.

"If the old gentleman has made you believe that he is, he must have some very deep scheme. He does not like to seem foolish."

Malipieri did not answer at once, but he betrayed no annoyance. In the short silence, he could hear the Baroness's powerful voice yelling at the telephone. It ceased suddenly, and he guessed that she was coming back.

"If I find anything, I wish you to see it before any-one else does," he said quickly.

"That would be very amusing!" Sabina laughed in-credulously, just as the door opened.

The Baroness heard the light laughter, and stood still with her hand on the latch, as if she had forgotten something. She was not a woman of sudden intuitions nor much given to acting on impulses, and when a new idea crossed her mind she almost always paused to think it over, no matter what she chanced to be doing. It was as if she had accidentally run against something which stunned her a little.

"What is it?" asked Sabina, very naturally.

The Baroness beckoned silently to her, and she rose.

"Only one moment, Signor Malipieri," said the Baroness, apologising for leaving him alone.

When she and Sabina were out of the room, she shut the door and went on a few paces before speaking.

"My husband has telephoned that he cannot leave the Senate," she said.

"Well?" Sabina did not understand.

"But Malipieri has come expressly to see him."

"He can see him at the Senate," suggested Sabina.

"But I have asked Malipieri to stay to luncheon. If I tell him that my husband is not coming, perhaps he will not stay after all."

"Perhaps not," echoed Sabina with great calmness.

"You do not seem to care," said the Baroness.

"Why should I?"

"I thought you liked him. I thought it would amuse you if he lunched with us."

Sabina looked at her with some curiosity.

"Did you tell the Baron that Signor Malipieri is here?" she asked carelessly.

"No," answered the Baroness, looking away. "As my husband said he could not come to luncheon, it seemed useless."

Sabina understood now, and smiled. This was the direct consequence of the talk which had preceded Malipieri's coming; the Baroness had at once conceived the idea of marrying her to Malipieri.

"What shall we do?" asked the Baroness.

"Whatever you think best," answered Sabina, with sudden meekness. "I think you ought at least to tell Signor Malipieri that the Baron is not coming. He may be in a hurry, you know. He may be wasting time."

The Baroness smiled incredulously.

"My dear," she said, "if he had been so very anxious to see my husband, he would have gone to the Senate first. It is near the palace."

She said no more, but led the way back to the morning-room, while Sabina reflected upon the possible truth of the last suggestion, and wondered whether

Malipieri had really made his visit for the sake of exchanging a few words with her than in order to see Volterra. The Baroness spoke to him as she opened the door.

"My husband has not come yet," she said. "We will not wait for him."

She rang the bell to order luncheon, and Malipieri glanced at Sabina's face, wondering what the Baroness had said to her, for it was not reasonable to suppose that the two had left the room in order to consult in secret upon the question of waiting for Volterra. But Sabina did not meet his look, and her pale young face was impenetrably calm, for she was thinking about what she had just discovered. She was as certain that she knew what had passed in the Baroness's thoughts, as if the latter had spoken aloud. The knowledge, for it amounted to that, momentarily chased away the recollection of what Malipieri had said.

It was rather amusing to be looked upon as marriageable, and to a man she already knew. Her mother had often talked to her with cynical frankness, telling her that she was to make the best match that could be obtained for her, naming numbers of young men

she had never seen and assuring her that likes and dislikes had nothing to do with matrimony. They came afterwards, the Princess said, and it generally pleased Providence to send a mild form of aversion as the permanent condition of the bond. But Sabina had never believed her mother, who had cheated her when she was a child, as many foolish and heartless women do, promising rewards which were never given, and excursions which were always put off and little joys which always turned to sorrows less little by far.

Moreover, her sister Clementina had told her that there was only one way to treat the world, and that was to leave it with the contempt it deserved; and she had heard her brother tell his wife in one of his miserable fits of weakly brutal anger that marriage was hell, and nothing else; to which the young princess had coldly replied that he was only where he deserved to be. Sabina had not been brought up with the traditional pious and proper views about matrimony, and if she did not think even worse of it, the merit was due to her own nature, in which there was much good and hardly any real evil.

But she could not escape from a little inherited and

acquired cynicism either, and while Malipieri chatted quietly during luncheon, an explanation of the whole matter occurred to her which was not pleasant to contemplate. The story about the treasure might or might not be true, but he believed in it, and so did Volterra. The Baron was therefore employing him to discover the prize. But Malipieri showed plainly that he wished her to possess it, if it were ever found, and perhaps he meant it to be her dowry, in which case it would come into his own hands if he could marry her. This was ingenious, if it was nothing else, and though Sabina felt that there was something mean about it, she resented the idea that he should expect her to think him a model of generosity when she hardly knew him.

She was therefore very quiet, and looked at him rather coldly when he spoke to her, but the Baroness put this down to her admirably correct manners, and was already beginning to consider how she could approach Malipieri on the subject of his marrying Sabina. She was quite in ignorance of the business which had brought him and her husband together, as Sabina now knew from many remarks she remembered. Volterra was accustomed to tell his wife what he had been doing

when the matter was settled, and she had long ago given up trying to make him talk of his affairs when he chose to be silent.

On the whole, so far as Sabina was concerned, the circumstances were not at first very favourable to the Baroness's newly formed plan on this occasion, though she did not know it. On the other hand, Malipieri discovered before luncheon was over, that Sabina interested him very much, that she was much prettier than he had realised at his first meeting with her, and that he had unconsciously thought about her a good deal in the interval.

CHAPTER VIII.

MALIPIERI was convinced before long that his doings interested someone who was able to employ men to watch him, and he connected the fact with Bruni's visit. He was not much disturbed by it, however, and was careful not to show that he noticed it at all. Naturally enough, he supposed that his short career as a promoter of republican ideas had caused him to be remembered as a dangerous person, and that a careful ministry was anxious to know why he lived alone in a vast palace, in the heart of Rome, knowing very few people and seeing hardly anyone except Volterra. The Baron himself was apparently quite indifferent to any risk in the matter, and yet, as a staunch monarchist and supporter of the ministry then in office, it might have been expected that he would not openly associate with the monarchy's professed enemies. That was his affair, as Malipieri had frankly told him at the beginning. For

the rest, the young architect smiled as he thought of the time and money the government was wasting on the supposition that he was plotting against it, but it annoyed him to find that certain faces of men in the streets were becoming familiar to him, quiet, blank faces of respectable middle-aged men, who always avoided meeting his eyes, and were very polite in standing aside to let him pass them on the pavement. There were now three whom he knew by sight, and he saw one of them every time he went out of the house. He knew what that meant. He had not the smallest doubt but that all three reported what they saw of his movements to Signor Vittorio Bruni, every day, in some particularly quiet little office in one of the government buildings connected with the Ministry of the Interior. It troubled him very little, since he was quite innocent of any political machinations for the present.

He had determined from the first not to employ any workmen to help him unless it should be absolutely necessary. He was strong and his practical experience in Carthage had taught him the use of pick and crowbar. Masin was equal to two ordinary men for such work, and could be trusted to hold his tongue.

Malipieri told the porter that he was exploring the foundations before attempting to strengthen them, and from time to time he gave him a little money. At first the old man offered to call Toto, who had always served the house, he said; but Malipieri answered that no help was needed in a mere preliminary exploration, and that another man would only be in the way. He made no secret of the fact that he was working with his own hands, however. Every morning, he and his servant went down into the north-west cellars by a winding staircase that was entered from a passage between the disused stables and the empty coach-house. Like every large Roman palace, the Palazzo Conti had two arched entrances, one of which had never been opened except on important occasions, when the carriages that drove in on the one side drove out at the other after their owner had alighted. This second gate was at the west end of the court, not far from the coach-house. To reach their work Malipieri and Masin had to go down the grand staircase and pass the porter's lodge. Masin wore the rough clothes of a working mason and Malipieri appeared in overalls and a heavy canvas jacket. Very soon the garments of both were so effectually

stained with mud, green mould and water that the two men could hardly have been distinguished from ordinary day labourers, even in broad daylight.

They began work on the very spot at which the snuffy little expert had stopped to listen to the water. It was evidently out of the question to break through the wall at the level of the cellar floor, for the water could be heard running steadily through its hidden channel, and if this were opened the cellars might be completely flooded. Besides, Malipieri knew that the water might rise unexpectedly to a considerable height.

It was therefore best to make the opening as high as possible, under the vault, which at that point was not more than ten feet from the ground. The simplest plan would have been to put up a small scaffolding on which to work, but there was no timber suitable for the purpose in the cellar, and Malipieri did not wish to endanger the secrecy of his operations by having any brought down. He therefore set to work to excavate an inclined aperture, like a tunnel, which began at a height of about five feet and was intended to slope up-

wards so as to reach the interior chamber at the highest point practicable.

It was very hard work at first, and it was not unattended by danger. Masin declared at the outset that it was impracticable without blasting. The wall appeared to be built of solid blocks of travertine stone, rough hewn on the face but neatly fitted together. It would take two men several days to loosen a single one of these blocks, and if they finally succeeded in moving it, it must fall to the ground at once, for their united strength would not have sufficed to lower it gently.

"The facing is stone," said Malipieri, "but we shall find bricks behind it. If we do not, we must try to get in by some other way."

In order to get any leverage at all, it was necessary to chisel out a space between the first block to be moved and those that touched it, an operation which occupied two whole days. Masin worked doggedly and systematically, and Malipieri imitated him as well as he could, but more than once nearly blinded himself with the flying chips of stone, and though he was strong his

hands ached and trembled at the end of the day, so that he could hardly hold a pen. To Masin it was easy enough, and was merely a question of time and patience. He begged Malipieri to let him do it alone, but the architect would not hear of that, since there was room for two to use their tools at the same time, at opposite ends of the block. He was in haste to get over the first obstacle, which he believed to be by far the most difficult, and he was not the kind of man to sit idly watching another at work without trying to help him.

On the third day they made an attempt to use a crowbar. They had two very heavy ones, but they did not try to use both, and united their strength upon one only. They might as well have tried to move the whole palace, and it looked as if they would be obliged to cut the block itself away with hammer and chisel, a labour of a fortnight, perhaps, considering the awkward position in which they had to work.

"One dynamite cartridge would do it!" laughed Malipieri, as he looked at the huge stone.

"Thank you, sir," answered Masin, taking the sug-

gestion seriously. "I have been in the galleys seven years, and that is enough for a lifetime. We must try and split it with wedges."

"There is no other way."

They had all the tools necessary for the old-fashioned operation; three drilling irons, of different sizes, and a small sledge-hammer, and they went to work without delay. Malipieri held the iron horizontally against the stone with both hands, turning it a little after Masin had struck it with the sledge. It was very exhausting after a time, as the whole weight of the tool was at first carried by Malipieri's uplifted hands. Moreover, if he forgot to grasp it very firmly, the vibration of the blow made the palms of his hands sting till they were numb. At regular intervals the men changed places, Masin held the drill and Malipieri took the hammer. Every now and then they raked out the dust from the deepening hole with a little round scoop made for the purpose and riveted to the end of a light iron rod a yard long.

Hour after hour they toiled thus together, far down under the palace, in the damp, close air, that was cold

and yet stifling to breathe. The hole was now over two feet deep.

Suddenly, as Masin delivered a heavy blow, the drill ran in an inch instead of recoiling in Malipieri's tight hold.

"Bricks," said Masin, resting on the haft of the long hammer.

Malipieri removed the drill, took the scoop and drew out the dust and minute chips. Hitherto the stuff had been grey, but now, as he held his hand under the round hole to catch what came, a little bit of dark red brick fell into his palm. He picked it out carefully and held it close to the bright unshaded lamp.

"Roman brick," he said, after a moment.

"We are not in Milan," observed Masin, by way of telling his master that he did not understand.

"Ancient Roman brick," said Malipieri. "It is just what I expected. This is part of the wall of an old Roman building, built of bricks and faced with travertine. If we can get this block out, the worst will be over."

"It is easier to drill holes in stone than in water,"

said Masin, who had put his ear to the hole. "I can hear it much louder now."

"Of course you can," answered Malipieri. "We are wasting time," he added, picking up the drill and holding it against the block at a point six inches higher than before.

Masin took his sledge again and hammered away with dogged regularity. So the work went on all that day, and all the next. And after that they took another tool and widened the holes, and then a third till they were two inches in diameter.

Masin suggested that they might drive an iron on through the brickwork, and find out how much of it there was beyond the stone, but Malipieri pointed out that if the "lost water" should rise it would pour out through the hole and stop their operations effectually. The entrance must incline upwards, he said.

They made long round plugs of soft pine to fit the holes exactly, each one scored with a channel a quarter of an inch deep, which was on the upper side when they had driven the plugs into their places, and was intended to lead the water along the wood, so as to wet

it more thoroughly. To do this Malipieri poked long cotton wicks into each channel with a wire, as far as possible. He made Masin buy half-a-dozen coarse sponges and tied one upon the upper end of each projecting plug. Finally he wet all the sponges thoroughly and wound coarse cloths loosely round them to keep in as much of the water as possible. By pouring on water from time to time the soft wood was to be ultimately wet through, the wicks leading the moisture constantly inward, and in the end the great block must inevitably split into halves. It is the prehistoric method, and there never was any other way of cleaving very hard stone until gunpowder first brought in blasting. It is slow, but it is quite sure.

The place where the two men had been working was many feet below the level of the courtyard, but the porter could now and then hear the sound of blows echoing under ground through the vast empty cellars, even when he stood near the great entrance.

Toto heard the noise too, one day, as he was standing still to light his pipe in the Vicolo dei Soldati. When it struck his ear he let the match burn out till it

singed his horny fingers. His expression became even more blank than usual, but he looked up and down the street, to see if he were alone, and upward at the windows of the house opposite. Nobody was in sight, but in order to place his ear close to the wall and listen, he made a pretence of fastening his shoe-string. The sound came to him from very far beneath, regular as the panting of an engine. He knew his trade, and recognised the steady hammering on the end of a stone drill, very unlike the irregular blows of a pickaxe or a crowbar. The "moles" were at work, and knew their business; sooner or later they would break through. But Toto could not guess that the work was being actually done by Malipieri and his servant, without help. One man alone could not do it, and the profound contempt of the artisan for any outsider who attempts his trade, made Toto feel quite sure that one or more masons had been called in to make a breach in the foundation wall. As he stood up and lighted his pipe at last, he grinned all alone, and then slouched on, his heart full of very evil designs. Had he not always been the mason of the Palazzo Conti? And his father before him? And his grandfather, who had lost his life down there, where the

moles were working? And now that he was turned out, and others were called in to do a particularly confidential job, should he not be revenged? He bit his pipe and thrust his rough hands deep into the pockets of his fustian trousers, and instead of turning into the wine-shop to meet Gigi, he went off for a walk by himself through all the narrow and winding streets that lie between the Palazzo Conti and Monte Giordano.

He came to no immediate conclusion, and moreover there was no great hurry. He knew well enough that it would take time to pierce the wall, after the drilling was over, and he could easily tell when that point was reached by listening every day in the Vicolo dei Soldati. It would still be soon enough to play tricks with the water, if he chose that form of vengeance, and he grinned again as he thought of the vast expense he could force upon Volterra in order to save the palace. But he might do something else. Instead of flooding the cellars and possibly drowning the masons who had ousted him, he could turn informer and defeat the schemes of Volterra and Malipieri, for he never doubted but that if they found anything of value

they meant to keep the whole profit of it to themselves.

He had the most vague notions of what the treasure might be. When the fatal accident had happened his grandfather had been the only man who had actually penetrated into the innermost hiding-place; the rest had fled when the water rose and had left him to drown. They had seen nothing, and their story had been handed down as a mere record of the catastrophe. Toto knew at least that the vaults had then been entered from above, which was by far the easier way, but a new pavement had long ago covered all traces of the aperture.

There was probably gold down there, gold of the ancients, in earthen jars. That was Toto's belief, and he also believed that when it was found it would belong to the government, because the government took everything, but that somehow, in real justice, it should belong to the Pope. For Toto was not only a genuine Roman of the people, but had always regarded himself as a sort of hereditary retainer of an ancient house.

His mind worked slowly. A day passed, and he

heard the steady hammering still, and after a second night he reached a final conclusion. The Pope must have the treasure, whatever it might be.

That, he decided, was the only truly moral view, and the only one which satisfied his conscience. It would doubtless be very amusing to be revenged on the masons by drowning them in a cellar, with the absolute certainty of never being suspected of the deed. The plan had great attractions. The masons themselves should have known better than to accept a job which belonged by right to him, and they undoubtedly deserved to be drowned. Yet Toto somehow felt that as there was no woman in the case he might some day, in his far old age, be sorry for having killed several men in cold blood. It was really not strictly moral, after all, especially as his grandfather's death had been properly avenged by the death of the murderer.

As for allowing the government to have a share in the profits of the discovery, that was not to be thought of. He was a Roman, and the Italian government was his natural enemy. If he could have turned all the "lost water" in the city upon the whole government

collectively, in the cellars of the Palazzo Conti, he would have felt that it was strictly moral to do so. The government had stolen more than two years of his life by making him serve in the army, and he was not going to return good for evil. With beautiful simplicity of reasoning he cursed the souls of the government's dead daily, as if it had been a family of his acquaintance.

But the Pope was quite another personage. There had always been popes, and there always would be till the last judgment, and everything connected with the Vatican would last as long as the world itself. Toto was a conservative. His work had always kept him among lasting things of brick and stone, and he was proud of never having taken a day's wages for helping to put up the modern new-fangled buildings he despised. The most lasting of all buildings in the world was the Vatican, and the most permanent institution conceivable was the Pope. Gigi, who made wretched, perishable objects of wood and nails and glue, such as doors and windows, sometimes launched into modern ideas. Toto would have liked to know how many times the doors and windows of the Palazzo Conti had been renewed since the walls had been built! He pitied Gigi always,

and sometimes he despised him, though they were good friends enough in the ordinary sense.

The Pope should have the treasure. That was settled, and the only question remaining concerned the means of transferring it to him when it was discovered.

CHAPTER IX.

One evening it chanced that the Volterra couple were dining out, and that Sabina, having gone up to her room to spend the evening, had forgotten the book she was reading and came downstairs half-an-hour later to get it. She opened the drawing-room door and went straight to the table on which she had left the volume. As she turned to go back she started and uttered a little cry, almost of terror.

Malipieri was standing before the mantelpiece, looking at her.

"I am afraid I frightened you," he said quietly. "Pray forgive me."

"Not at all," Sabina answered, resting the book she held in her hand upon the edge of the table. "I did not know anyone was here."

"I said I would wait till the Senator came home," Malipieri said.

"Yes." Sabina hesitated a moment and then sat down.

She smiled, perhaps at herself. In her mother's house it would have been thought extremely improper for her to be left alone with a young man during ten minutes, but she knew that the Baroness held much more modern views, and would probably be delighted that she and Malipieri should spend an hour together. He had been asked to luncheon again, but had declined on the ground of being too busy, much to the Baroness's annoyance.

Malipieri seated himself on a small chair at a discreet distance.

"I happened to know that they were going out," he said, "so I came."

Sabina looked at him in surprise. It was an odd way to begin a conversation.

"I wanted to see you alone," he explained. "I thought perhaps you would come down."

"It was an accident," Sabina answered. "I had left my book here. No one told me that you had come."

"Of course not. I took the chance that a lucky

accident might happen. It has, but I hope you are not displeased. If you are, you can turn me out."

"I could go back to my room." Sabina laughed. "Why should I be displeased?

"I have not the least idea whether you like me or not," answered Malipieri.

Sabina wondered whether all men talked like this, or whether it were not more usual to begin with a few generalities. She was really quite sure that she liked Malipieri, but it was a little embarrassing to be called upon to tell him so at once.

"If I wanted you to go away, I should not sit down," she said, still smiling.

"I hate conventions," answered Malipieri, "and I fancy that you do, too. We were both brought up in them, and I suppose we think alike about them."

"Perhaps."

Sabina turned over the book she still held, and looked at the back of it.

"Exactly," continued Malipieri. "But I do not mean that what we are doing now is so dreadfully unconventional after all. Thank heaven, manners have changed since I was a boy, and even in Italy we

may be allowed to talk together a few minutes without being suspected of planning a runaway marriage. I wanted to see you alone because I wish you to do something very much more 'improper,' as society calls it."

Sabina looked up with innocent and inquiring eyes, but said nothing in answer.

"I have found something," he said. "I should like you to see it."

"There is nothing so very terrible in that," replied Sabina, looking at him steadily.

"The world would think differently. But if you will trust me the world need never know anything about it. You will have to come alone. That is the difficulty."

"Alone?" Sabina repeated the word, and instinctively drew herself up a little.

"Yes."

A short silence followed, and Malipieri waited for her to speak, but she hesitated. In years, she was but lately out of childhood, but the evil of the world had long been near her in her mother's house, and she knew well enough that if she did

what he asked, and if it were known, her reputation would be gone. She was a little indignant at first, and was on the point of showing it, but as she met his eyes once more she felt certain that he meant no offence to her.

"You must have a very good reason for asking me to do such a dangerous thing," she said at last.

"The reasons are complicated," answered Malipieri.

"Perhaps I could understand, if you explained them."

"Yes, I am sure you can. I will try. In the first place, you know of the story about a treasure being concealed in the palace. I spoke of it the other day, and you laughed at it. When I began, I was not inclined to believe it myself, for it seems never to have been anything more than a tradition. One or two old chronicles speak of it. A Venetian ambassador wrote about it in the sixteenth century in one of his reports to his government, suggesting that the Republic should buy the palace if it were ever sold. I daresay you have heard that."

"No. It does not matter. You say you have found something—that is the important point."

"Yes; and the next thing is to keep the secret for the present, because so many people would like to know it. The third point of importance is that you should see the treasure before it is moved, before I can move it myself, or even see all of it."

"What is this treasure?" asked Sabina, with a little impatience, for she was really interested.

"All I have seen of it is the hand of what must be a colossal statue, of gilt bronze. On one of the fingers there is a ring with a stone which I believe to be a ruby. If it is, it is worth a great deal, perhaps as much as the statue itself."

Sabina's eyes had opened very wide in her surprise, for she had never really believed the tale, and even when he had told her that he had found something she had not thought it could be anything very valuable.

"Are you quite sure you have seen it?" she asked with childlike wonder.

"Yes. I lowered a light into the place, but I did not go down. There may be other things. They belong to you."

"To me? Why?" asked Sabina in surprise.

"For a good many reasons which may or may not be good in law but which are good enough for me. You were robbed of your dowry—forgive the expression. I cannot think of another word. The Senator got possession of the palace for much less than its market value, let alone what I have found. He sent for me because I have been fortunate in finding things, and he believed it just possible that there might be something hidden in the foundations. Your family spent long ago what he lent them on the mortgage, and Sassi assures me that you never had a penny of it. I mean you to have your share now. That is all."

Sabina listened quietly enough to the end.

"Thank you, very much," she said gravely, when he had finished.

Then there was another pause. To her imagination the possibilities of wealth seemed fabulous, and even Malipieri thought them large; but Sabina was not thinking of a fortune for its own sake. Of late none of her family had cared for money except to spend it without counting. What struck her first was that she would be free to leave the Volterras'

house, that she would be independent, and that there would be an end of the almost unbearable situation in which she had lived since the crash.

"If the Senator can keep it all for himself, he will," Malipieri observed, "and his wife will help him."

"Do you think this had anything to do with their anxiety to have me stay with them?" asked Sabina, and as the thought occurred to her the expression of her eyes changed.

"The Baroness knows nothing at all about the matter," answered Malipieri. "I fancy she only wanted the social glory of taking charge of you when your people came to grief. But her husband will take advantage of the obligation you are under. I suspect that he will ask you to sign a paper of some sort, very vaguely drawn up, but legally binding, by which you will make over to him all claim whatever on your father's estate."

"But I have none, have I?"

"If the facts were known to-morrow, your brother might at once begin an action to recover, on the equitable ground that by an extraordinary chain of

circumstances the property has turned out to be worth much more than anyone could have expected. Do you understand?"

"Yes. Go on."

"Very well. The Senator knows that in all probability the court would decide against your brother, who has the reputation of a spendthrift, unless your claim is pushed; but that any honest judge, if it were legally possible, would do his best to award you something. If you had made over your claim to Volterra, that would be impossible, and would only strengthen his case."

"I see," said Sabina. "It is very complicated."

"Of course it is. And there are many other sides to it. The Senator, on his part, is as anxious to keep the whole matter a secret as I am, for your sake. He has no idea that there is a colossal statue in the vaults. He probably hopes to find gold and jewels which could be taken away quietly and disposed of without the knowledge of the government."

"What has the government to do with it?"

"It has all sorts of claims on such discoveries, and especially on works of art. It reserves the right to buy

them from the owners at a valuation, if they are sold at all."

"Then the government will buy this statue, I suppose."

"In the end, unless it allows the Vatican to buy it."

"I do not see what is going to happen," said Sabina, growing bewildered.

"The Senator must make everything over to you before it is sold," answered Malipieri calmly.

"How can he be made to do that?"

"I do not know, but he shall."

"Do you mean that the law can force him to?"

"The law might, perhaps, but I shall find some shorter way."

Sabina was silent for a moment.

"But he employs you on this work," she said suddenly.

"Not exactly." Malipieri smiled. "I would not let Volterra pay me to grub underground for his benefit, any more than I would live in his house without paying him rent."

Sabina bit her lip and turned her face away suddenly, for the thoughtless words had hurt her.

"I agreed to make the search merely because I am interested in archæology," he continued. "Until I met you I did not care what might become of anything we found in the palace."

"Why should you care now?"

The question rose to her lips before she knew what she was saying, for what had gone before had disturbed her a little. It had been a very cruel speech, though he had not meant it. He looked at her thoughtfully.

"I am not quite sure why I care," he answered, "but I do."

Neither spoke for some time.

"I suppose you pity me," Sabina observed at last, rather resentfully.

He said nothing.

"You probably felt sorry for me as soon as you saw me," she continued, leaning back in her chair and speaking almost coldly. "I am an object of pity, of course!"

Malipieri laughed a little at the very girlish speech.

"No," he answered. "I had no thought of you in

that light. I liked you, the first time I saw you. That is much simpler than pitying."

He laughed again, but it was at himself.

"You treat me like a child," Sabina said with a little petulance. "You have no right to!"

"Shall I treat you like a woman, Donna Sabina?" he said, suddenly serious.

"Yes. I am sure I am old enough."

"If you were not, I should certainly not feel as I do towards you."

"What do you mean?"

"If you are a woman, you probably guess."

"No."

"You may be offended," suggested Malipieri.

"Not unless you are rude—or pity me." She smiled now.

"Is it very rude to like a person?" he asked. "If you think it is, I will not go on."

"I am not sure," said Sabina demurely, and she looked down.

"In that case it is wiser not to run the risk of offending you past forgiveness!"

It was very amusing to hear him talk, for no man

had ever talked to her in this way before. She knew that he was thought immensely clever, but he did not seem at all superior now, and she was glad of it. She should have felt very foolish if he had discoursed to her learnedly about Carthage and antiquities. Instead, he was simple and natural, and she liked him very much; and the little devil that enters into every woman about the age of sixteen and is not often cast out before fifty, even by prayer and fasting, suddenly possessed her.

"Rudeness is not always past forgiveness," she said, with a sweet smile.

Malipieri looked at her gravely and wondered whether he had any right to take up the challenge. He had never been in love with a young girl in his life, and somehow it did not seem fair to speak as he had been speaking. It was very odd that his sense of honour should assert itself just then. It might have been due to the artificial traditions of generations without end, before him. At the same time, he knew something of women and in her last speech he recognised the womanly cooing, the call of the mate, that has drawn men to happiness or destruction ever

since the world began. She was a mere girl, of course, but since he had said so much, she could not help tempting him to go to the end and tell her he loved her.

Though Malipieri did not pretend to be a model of all the virtues, he was thoroughly fair in all his dealings, according to his lights, and just then he would have thought it the contrary of fair to say what she seemed to expect. He knew instinctively that no one had ever said it to her before, which was a good reason for not saying it lightly; and he was sure that he could not say it quite seriously, and almost certain also that she had not even begun to be really in love herself, though he felt that she liked him. On the other hand—for in the flash of a second he argued the case—he did not feel that she was the hypothetical defenceless maiden, helpless to resist the wiles of an equally hypothetical wicked young man. She had been brought up by a worldly mother since she had left the convent where she had associated with other girls, most of whom also had worldly mothers; and some of the wildest blood in Europe ran in her veins.

On the whole, he thought it would be justifiable to tell her exactly what he felt, and she might do as she pleased about answering him.

"I think I shall fall in love with you before long," he said, with almost unnecessary calmness.

Sabina had not expected that the first declaration she received in her life would take this mild form, but it affected her much more strongly than she could understand. Her hand tightened suddenly on the book she held, and she noticed a little fluttering at her heart and in her throat, and at the same time she was conscious of a tremendous determination not to show that she felt anything at all, but to act as if she had heard just such things before, and more also.

"Indeed!" she said, with admirable indifference.

Malipieri looked at her in surprise. An experienced flirt of thirty could not have uttered the single word more effectively.

"I wonder whether you will ever like me better than you do now," he said, by way of answer.

She was wondering, too, but it was not likely that she would admit it.

"I am very fickle," she replied, with a perfectly self-possessed little laugh.

"So am I," Malipieri answered, following her lead. "My most desperate love affairs have never lasted more than a month or two."

"You have had a great many, I daresay," Sabina observed, with no show of interest. She was amazed and delighted to find how easy it was to act her new part.

"And you," he asked, laughing, "how often have you been in love already?"

"Let me see!"

She turned her eyes to his, without turning her head, and letting the book lie in her lap she pretended to count on her fingers. He watched her gravely, and nodded as she touched each finger, as if he were counting with her. Suddenly she dropped both hands and laughed gaily.

"How childish you are!" she exclaimed.

"How deliciously frank you are!" he retorted, laughing with her.

It was mere banter, and not witty at that, but they were growing intimate in it, much faster than either of

them realised, for it was the first time they had been able to talk together quite without constraint, and it was the very first time Sabina had ever had a chance of talking as she pleased to a man whom she really thought young.

Moreover they were quite modern young people, and therefore entirely devoid of all the sentimentality and "world-sorrow" which made youth so delightfully gloomy and desperately cynical, without the least real cynicism, in the middle of the nineteenth century. In those days no young man who showed a ray of belief in anything had a chance with a woman, and no woman had a chance with men unless she had a hidden sorrow. Women used to construct themselves a secret and romantic grief in those times, with as much skill as they bestowed on their figure and face, and there were men who spent hours in reading Schopenhauer in order to pick out and treasure up a few terribly telling phrases; and love-making turned upon the myth that life was not worth living.

We have changed all that now; whether for better or worse, the social historians of the future will decide for us after we are dead, so we need not trouble our

heads about the decision unless we set up to be moralists ourselves. The enormous tidal wave of hypocrisy is retiring, and if the shore discovered by the receding waves is here and there horribly devastated and hopelessly bare, it is at least dry land.

The wave covered everything for a long time, from religion to manners, from science to furniture, and we who are old enough to remember, and not old enough to regret, are rubbing our eyes and looking about us, as on a new world, amazed at having submitted so long to what we so heartily despised, glad to be able to speak our minds at last about many things, and astounded that people should at last be allowed to be good and suffered to be bad, without the affectation of seeming one or the other, in a certain accepted manner governed by fashion, and imposed by a civilised and perfectly intolerant society.

While progress advances, it really looks as if humanity were reverting to its types, with an honest effort at simplicity. There is a revival of the moral individuality of the Middle Ages. The despot proudly says, like Alexander, or Montrose in love, that he will reign, and he will reign alone; and he does. The

financier plunders mankind and does not pretend that he is a long-lost type of philanthropist. The anarchist proclaims that it is virtuous to kill kings, and he kills them. The wicked do not even make a pretence of going to church on Sundays. If this goes on, we shall have saints before long.

Hypocrisy has disappeared even from literature, since no one who now writes books fit to read can be supposed to do so out of respect for public opinion, still less from any such base motive as a desire for gain.

Malipieri and Sabina both felt that they had been drawn much nearer together by what had sounded like idle chatter, and yet neither of them was inclined to continue talking in the same way. Moreover time was passing quickly, and there was a matter to be decided before they parted. Malipieri returned to the subject of his discovery, and his desire that Sabina should see it.

"But I cannot possibly come to the palace alone," she objected. "It is quite out of the question. Even if——" she stopped.

"What?" he asked.

"Even if I were willing to do it——" she hesitated again.

"You are not afraid, are you?" There was a slight intonation of irony in his question.

"No, I am not afraid." She paused a moment. "I suppose that if I saw a way of coming, I would come," she said, then. "But I see no way. I cannot go out alone. Everyone would know it. There would be a terrible fuss about it!"

The idea evidently amused her.

"Could you come with Sassi?" asked Malipieri presently. "He is respectable enough for anything."

"Even that would be thought very strange," answered Sabina. "I have no good reason to give for going out alone with him."

"You would not give any reason till afterwards, and when it is over there cannot really be anything to be said about it. The Baroness goes out every afternoon. You can make an excuse for staying at home to-morrow, and then you will be alone in the house. Sassi will call for you in a closed cab and bring you to the palace, and I will be at the door to receive you. The chances are that you will be at home again before the Baroness

comes in, and she will never know that you have been out. Does that look very hard?"

"No, it looks easy."

"What time shall Sassi call for you to-morrow?" asked Malipieri, who wished to settle the matter at once.

"At five o'clock," answered Sabina, after a moment's thought.

"At five to-morrow, then. You had better not wear anything very new. The place where the statue lies is not a drawing-room, you know, and your frock may be spoilt."

"Very well."

She glanced at the clock, looked at Malipieri as if hesitating, and then rose.

"I shall go back to my room now," she said.

"Yes. It is better. They may come in at any moment." He had risen also.

Their eyes met again, and they smiled at each other, as they realised what they were doing, that they had been nearly an hour together, unknown to anyone, and had arranged something very like a clandestine meeting for the next day. Sabina put out her hand.

"At five o'clock," she said again. "Good-night."

He felt her touch for the first time since they had met. It was light and elastic as the pressure of a very delicate spring, perfectly balanced and controlled. But she, on her side, looked down suddenly and uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Oh! How rough your hand is!"

He laughed, and held out his palm which was callous as a day labourer's.

"My man and I have done all the work ourselves," he said, "and it has not been play."

"It must be delightful!" answered Sabina with admiration. "I wish I was a man! We could have done it together."

She went to the door, and she turned to smile at him again as she laid her hand on the knob. He remembered her afterwards as she stood there a single moment with the light on her misty hair and white cheeks, and the little shadow round her small bare throat. He remembered that he would have given anything to bring her back to the place where she had sat. There was much less doubt in his mind

as to what he felt then than had been a few minutes earlier.

Half an hour after Sabina had disappeared Malipieri and Volterra were seated in deep armchairs in the smoking-room, the Baron having sent his wife to bed a few minutes after they had come in. She obeyed meekly as she always did, for she had early discovered that, although she was a very energetic woman, Volterra was her master and that it was hopeless to oppose his slightest wish. It is true that in return for the most absolute obedience the fat financier gave her the strictest fidelity and all the affection of which he was capable. Like more than one of the great modern freebooters, the Baron's private life was very exemplary, yet his wife would have been willing to forgive him something if she might occasionally have had her own way.

This evening he was not in good humour, as Malipieri found out as soon as they were alone together. He chewed the end of the enormous Havana he had lighted, he stuck his feet out straight in front of him, resting his heels on the floor and turning his shining patent leather toes straight up, he folded his hands

upon the magnificent curve of his white waistcoat, and leaning his head well back he looked steadily at the ceiling. All these were very bad signs, as his wife could have told Malipieri if she had stayed in the room.

Malipieri smoked in silence for some time, entirely forgetting him and thinking of Sabina.

"Well, Mr. Archæologist," the Baron said at last, allowing his big cigar to settle well into one corner of his mouth, "there is the devil to pay."

He spoke as if the trouble were Malipieri's fault. The younger man eyed him coldly.

"What is the matter?" he enquired, without the least show of interest.

"You are being watched," answered Volterra, still looking at the ceiling. "You are now one of those interesting people whose movements are recorded like the weather, every twelve hours."

"Yes," said Malipieri. "I have known that for some time."

"The next time you know anything so interesting, I wish you would inform me," replied Volterra.

His voice and his way of speaking irritated Malipieri. The Baroness had been better educated than her husband from the first; she was more adaptable and she had really learned the ways of the society she loved, but the Baron was never far from the verge of vulgarity, and he often overstepped it.

"When you asked me to help you," Malipieri said, "you knew perfectly well what my political career had been. I believe you voted for the Bill which drove me out of the country."

"Did I?" The Baron watched the smoke of his cigar curling upwards.

"I think you did. Not that I bear you the least malice. I only mean that you might very naturally expect that I should be thought a suspicious person, and that detectives would follow me about."

"Nobody cares a straw for your politics," retorted Volterra rudely.

"Then I shall be the more free to think as I please," Malipieri answered with calm.

"Perfectly so. In the meantime it is not the Ministry of the Interior that is watching you. The present Ministry

does not waste time and money on such nonsense. You are being watched because you are suspected of trying to get some statues or pictures out of Italy, in defiance of the Pacca law."

"Oh!" Malipieri blew a whiff of smoke out with the ejaculation, for he was surprised.

"I have it from one of the cabinet," Volterra continued. "He told me the facts confidentially after dinner. You see, as you are living in my house, the suspicion is reflected on me."

"In your house?"

"The Palazzo Conti is my house," answered the Baron, taking his cigar from his mouth for the first time since he had lighted it, and holding it out at arm's length with a possessive sweep while he leaned back and looked at the ceiling again. "It all belongs to me," he said. "I took it for the mortgage, with everything in it."

"By-the-bye," said Malipieri, "what became of that Velasquez, and those other pictures?"

"Was there a Velasquez?" inquired the Baron carelessly, without changing his attitude.

"Yes. It was famous all over Europe. It was a family portrait."

"I remember! It turned out to be a copy after all."

"A copy!" repeated Malipieri incredulously.

"Yes, the original is in Madrid," answered the Baron with imperturbable self-possession.

"And all those other pictures turned out to be copies, too, I daresay," suggested Malipieri.

"Every one of them. It was a worthless collection."

"In that case it was hardly worth while to take so much trouble in getting them out of the country secretly." Malipieri smiled.

"That was the dealer's affair," answered Volterra without the least hesitation. "Dealers are such fools! They always make a mystery of everything."

Malipieri could not help admiring the proportions and qualities of the Baron's lies. The financier was well aware that Malipieri knew the pictures to be genuine beyond all doubt. The disposal of them had been well managed, for when Malipieri moved into the palace there was not a painting of value left on the

walls, yet there had been no mention of them in the newspapers, nor any gossip about them, and the public at large believed them to be still in their places. As a matter of fact most of them were already in France and England, and the Velasquez was in Saint Petersburg.

"I understand why you are anxious that the Palazzo Conti should not be watched just now," Malipieri said. "For my part, as I do not believe in your government, I cannot be expected to believe in its laws. It is not my business whether you respect them yourselves or not."

"Who is breaking the law?" asked the Baron roughly. "It is absurd to talk in that way. But as the government has taken it into its head to suspect that you do, it is not advisable for me, who am a staunch supporter of the government, to see too much of you. I am sure you must understand that—it is so simple."

"In other words?" Malipieri looked at him coldly, waiting for an explanation.

"I cannot afford to have it said that you are living in the palace for the purpose of helping dealers to

smuggle objects of art out of the country. That is what I mean."

"I see. But what objects of art do you mean, since you have already sent away everything there was?"

"It is believed that you had something to do with that ridiculous affair of the copies," said Volterra, his voice suddenly becoming oily.

"They were gone when I moved in."

"I daresay they were. But it would be hard to prove, and of course the people who bought the pictures from the dealer insist that they are genuine, so that there may be trouble some day, and you may be annoyed about the things if you stay here any longer."

"You mean that you advise me to leave Rome. Is that it?" Malipieri now spoke with the utmost indifference, and glanced carelessly at the end of his cigar as he knocked the ash into the gold cup at his side.

"You certainly cannot stay any longer in the palace," Volterra said, in an advisory and deprecatory tone.

"You seem to be badly frightened," observed Malipieri. "I really cannot see why I should change my quarters until we have finished what we are doing."

"I am afraid you will have to go. You are looked upon as very 'suspicious.' It would not be so bad, if your servant had not been a convict."

"How do you know that?" Malipieri asked with sudden sternness.

"Everything of that sort is known to the police," answered Volterra, whose manner had become very mild. "Of course you have your own reasons for employing such a person."

"He is an innocent man, who was unjustly convicted."

"Oh, indeed! Poor fellow! Those things happen sometimes, I know. It is more than kind of you to employ him. Nevertheless, you cannot help seeing that the association of ideas is unfortunate and gives a bad impression. The man was never proved to be innocent, and when he had served his term, he was involved as your servant in your political escapade. You do not mind my speaking of that matter lightly? It is the safest way to look at it, is it not? Yes. The trouble

is that you and your man are both on the black book, and since the affair has come to the notice of the government my colleagues are naturally surprised that you should both be living in a house that belongs to me."

"You can explain to your colleagues that you have let the apartment in the palace to me, and that as I pay my rent regularly you cannot turn me out without notice." Malipieri smiled indifferently.

"Surely," said the Baron, affecting some surprise, "if I ask you, as a favour, to move somewhere else, you will do so!"

To tell the truth, he was not prepared for Malipieri's extreme forbearance, for he had expected an outbreak of temper, at the least, and he still feared a positive refusal. Instead, the young man did not seem to care a straw.

"Of course," he said, "if you ask it as a favour, I cannot refuse. When should you like me to go?"

"You are really too kind!" The Baron was genuinely delighted and almost grateful—as near to feeling gratitude, perhaps, as he had ever been in his life. "I should hate to hurry you," he continued.

"But really, since you are so very good, I think the sooner you can make it convenient to move, the better it will be for everyone."

"I could not manage to pack my books and drawings so soon as to-morrow," said Malipieri.

"Oh no! certainly not! By all means take a couple of days about it. I could not think of putting you to any inconvenience."

"Thanks." Malipieri smiled pleasantly. "If I cannot get off by the day after to-morrow, I shall certainly move the day after that."

"I am infinitely obliged. And now that this unpleasant matter is settled, owing to your wonderful amiability, do tell me how the work is proceeding."

"Fairly well," Malipieri answered. "You had better come and see for yourself before I go. Let me see. To-morrow I shall have to look about for a lodging. Could you come the day after to-morrow? Then we can go down together."

"How far have you got?" asked Volterra, with a little less interest than might have been expected.

"I am positively sure that there is an inner chamber, where I expected to find it," Malipieri answered, with

perfect truth. "Perhaps we can get into it when you come."

"I hope so," said the Baron, watching the other's face from the corner of his eye.

"I have made a curious discovery in the course of the excavation," Malipieri continued. "The pillar of masonry which you showed me is hollow after all. It was the shaft of an oubliette which must have opened somewhere in the upper part of the house. There is a well under it."

"Full of water?"

"No. It is dry. We shall have to pass through it to get to the inner chamber. You shall see for yourself—a very singular construction."

"Was there nothing in it?"

"Several skeletons," answered Malipieri indifferently. "One of the skulls has a rusty knife driven through it."

"Dear me!" exclaimed the Baron, shaking his fat head. "Those Conti were terrible people! We must not tell the Baroness these dreadful stories. They would upset her nerves."

Malipieri had not supposed Volterra's wife to be

intensely sensitive. He moved, as if he meant to take his leave presently.

"By-the-bye," he said, "whereabouts should you recommend me to look for a lodging?"

The Baron reflected a moment.

"If I were you," he said, "I would go to a hotel. In fact, I think you would be wiser to leave Rome for a time, until all these absurd stories are forgotten. The least I can do is to warn you that you may be exposed to a good deal of annoyance if you stay here. The minister with whom I was talking this evening told me as much in a friendly way."

"Really? That was very kind of him. But what do you mean by the word 'annoyance?' It is rather vague. It is one thing to suspect a man of trying to evade the Pacca law; it is quite another matter to issue a warrant of arrest against him."

"Oh, quite," answered Volterra readily. "I did not mean that, of course, though when one has once been arrested for anything, innocent or not, our police always like to repeat the operation as soon as possible, just as a matter of principle."

"In other words, if a man has once been sus-

pected, even unjustly, he had better leave his country for ever."

The Baron shrugged his big round shoulders, and drew a final puff from his cigar before throwing the end away.

"Injustice is only what the majority thinks of the minority," he observed. "If you do not happen to be a man of genius, the first step towards success in life is to join the majority."

Malipieri laughed as he rose to his feet, reflecting that in delivering himself of this piece of worldly wisdom the Baron had probably spoken the truth for the first time since they had been talking.

"Shall we say the day after to-morrow, about five o'clock?" asked Malipieri before going.

"By all means. And let me thank you again for meeting my views so very obligingly."

"Not at all."

So Malipieri went home to think matters over, and the Baron sat a long time in his chair, looking much pleased with himself and apparently admiring a magnificent diamond which he wore on one of his thick fingers.

CHAPTER X.

MALIPIERI was convinced that Volterra not only knew exactly how far the work under the palace had proceeded, but was also acquainted with the general nature of the objects found in the inner chamber, beyond the well shaft. The apparent impossibility of such a thing was of no importance. The Baron would never have been so anxious to get rid of Malipieri unless he had been sure that the difficult part of the work was finished and that the things discovered were of such dimensions as to make it impossible to remove them secretly. Malipieri knew the man and guessed that if he could not pocket the value of everything found in the excavations by disposing of the discoveries secretly, he would take the government into his confidence at once, as the surest means of preventing anyone else from getting a share.

What was hard to understand was that Volterra should know how far the work had gone before Malipieri had told him anything about it. That he did

know, could hardly be doubted. He had practically betrayed the fact by the mistake he had made in assuring himself that Malipieri was willing to leave the house, before even questioning him as to the progress made since they had last met. He had been a little too eager to get rid of the helper he no longer needed.

It did not even occur to Malipieri that Masin could have betrayed him, yet so far as it was possible to judge, Masin was the only living man who had looked into the underground chamber. As he walked home, he recalled the conversation from beginning to end, and his conviction was confirmed. Volterra had been in a bad temper, nervous, a little afraid of the result and therefore inclined to talk in a rough and bullying tone. As soon as he had ascertained that Malipieri was not going to oppose him, he had become oily to obsequiousness.

On his part Malipieri had accepted everything Volterra proposed, for two reasons. In the first place he would not for the world have had the financier think that he wanted a share of the treasure, or any remuneration for what he had done. Secondly, he

knew that possession is nine points of the law, and that if anything could ever be obtained for Sabina it would not be got by making a show of violent opposition to the Baron's wishes. If Malipieri had refused to leave his lodging in the palace, Volterra could have answered by filling the house with people in his own employ, or by calling in government architects, archæologists and engineers; and taking the whole matter out of Malipieri's hands.

The first thing to be ascertained was, who had entered the vaults and reported the state of the work to Volterra. Malipieri might have suspected the porter himself, for it was possible that there might be another key to the outer entrance of the cellar; but there was a second door further in, to which Masin had put a patent padlock, and even Masin had not the key to that. The little flat bit of steel, with its irregular indentations, was always in Malipieri's pocket. As he walked, he felt for it, and it was in its place, with his silver pencil-case and the small pen-knife he always carried for sharpening pencils.

The porter could not possibly have picked that lock; indeed, scarcely anyone could have done so with-

out injuring it, and Malipieri had locked it himself at about seven o'clock that evening. Even if the porter could have got in by any means, Malipieri doubted whether he could have reached the inner chamber of the vaults. There was some climbing to be done, and the man was old and stiff in the joints. The place was not so easy to find as might have been supposed, either, after the first breach in the Roman wall was past. Malipieri intended to improve the passage the next morning, in order to make it more practicable for Sabina.

He racked his brains for an explanation of the mystery, and when he reached the door of the palace, after eleven o'clock, he had come to the conclusion that in spite of appearances there must be some entrance to the vaults of which he knew nothing, and it was all-important to find it. He regretted the Quixotic impulse which had restrained him from exploring everything at once. It would have been far better to go to the end of his discovery, and he wondered why he had not done so. He would not have insulted himself by supposing that Sabina could believe him capable of taking the gem from the ring of the statue, in other

words, of stealing, since whoever the rightful owner might be, nothing in the vault could possibly belong to him, and he regarded it all as her property, though he doubted whether he could ever obtain for her a tenth part of the value it represented. He had acted on an impulse, which was strengthened until it looked plausible by the thought of the intense pleasure he would take in showing her the wonderful discovery, and in leading her safely through the mysterious intricacies of the strange place. It had been a very selfish impulse after all, and if he really let her come the next day, there might even be a little danger to her.

He let himself in and locked the postern door behind him. The porter and his wife were asleep and the glass window of the lodge door was quite dark. Malipieri lighted a wax taper and went upstairs.

Masin was waiting, and opened when he heard his master's footsteps on the landing. As a rule, he went to bed, if Malipieri went out in the evening; both men were usually tired out by their day's work.

"What is the matter?" Malipieri asked.

"There is somebody in the vaults," Masin answered.

"I had left my pipe on a stone close to the padlocked door and when you were gone I took a lantern and went down to get it. When I came near the door I was sure I heard someone trying it gently from the other side. I stopped to listen and I distinctly heard footsteps going away. I ran forward and tried to find a crack, to see if there were a light, but the door is swollen with the dampness and fits tightly. Besides, by the time I had reached it the person inside must have got well away."

"What time was it?" asked Malipieri, slipping off his light overcoat.

"You went out at nine o'clock, sir. It could not have been more than half an hour later."

"Light both lanterns. We must go down at once. See that there is plenty of oil in them."

In five minutes both men were ready.

"You had better take your revolver, sir," suggested Masin.

Malipieri laughed.

"I have had that revolver since I was eighteen," he said, "and I have never needed it yet. Our tools are there, and they are better than firearms."

They went down the staircase quietly, fearing to wake the porter, and kept close to the north wall till they reached the further end of the courtyard. When they had passed the outer door at the head of the winding staircase, Malipieri told Masin to lock it after them.

"We cannot padlock the other door from the inside," he explained, "for there are no hasps. If the man managed to pass us he might get out this way."

He led the way down, making as little noise as possible. Masin held up his lantern, peering into the gloom over Malipieri's shoulder.

"No one could pass the other door without breaking it down," Malipieri said.

They reached the floor of the cellars, which extended in both directions from the foot of the staircase, far to the left by low, dark vaults like railway tunnels, and a short distance to the right, where they ended at the north-west corner. The two men turned that way, but after walking a dozen yards, they turned to the left and entered a damp passage barely wide enough for them both abreast. It ended at the padlocked

door, and before unlocking the latter Malipieri laid his ear to the rough panel and listened attentively. Not a sound broke the stillness. He turned the key, and took off the padlock and slipped it into his pocket before going on. Without it the door could not be fastened.

The passage widened suddenly beyond, in another short tunnel ending at the outer foundation wall of the palace. In this tunnel, on the right-hand side, was the breach the two men had first made in order to gain access to the unexplored region. Now that there was an aperture, the running water on the other side could be heard very distinctly, like a little brook in a rocky channel, but more steady. Both men examined the damp floor carefully with their lanterns, in the hope of finding some trace of footsteps; but the surface was hard and almost black, and where there had been a little slime their own feet had rubbed it off, as they came and went during many days. The stones and rubbish they had taken from the wall had been piled up and hardened to form an inclined causeway by which to reach the irregular hole. This was now just big enough to allow a man to walk through it,

bending almost double. Masin lighted one of the lamps, which they generally left at that place, and set it on a stone.

Malipieri began to go up, his stick in his right hand, the lantern in his left.

"Let me go first, sir," said Masin, trying to pass him.

"Nonsense!" Malipieri answered sharply, and went on.

Masin kept as close to him as possible. He had picked up the lightest of the drilling irons for a weapon. It must have weighed at least ten pounds and it was a yard long. In such a hand as Masin's a blow from it would have broken a man's bones like pipe stems.

The wall was about eight feet thick, and when Malipieri got to the other end of the hole he stopped and looked down, holding out his lantern at arm's length. He could see nothing unusual, and he heard no sound, except the gurgle of the little black stream that ran ten feet below him. He began to descend. The masonry was very irregular, and sloped outwards towards the ground, so that some of the irregularities made rough steps here and there, which he knew by

heart. Below, several large fragments of Roman brick and cement lay here and there, where they had fallen in the destruction of the original building. It was not hard to get down, and the space was not large. It was bounded by the old wall on one side, and most of the other was taken up by a part of a rectangular mass of masonry, of rough mediæval construction, which projected inward.

The place was familiar, but Malipieri looked about him carefully, while Masin was climbing down. Along the base of the straight wall there was a channel about two feet wide, through which the dark water flowed rapidly. It entered from the right-hand corner, by a low, arched aperture, through which it seemed out of the question that a man could crawl, or even an ordinary boy of twelve. When they had first come to this place Masin had succeeded in poking in a long stick with a bit of lighted wax taper fastened to it, and both men had seen that the channel ran on as far as it could be seen, with no widening. At the other end of the chamber it ran out again by a similar conduit. What had at first surprised Malipieri had been that the water did not enter from the side of

the foundations near the Vicolo dei Soldati, but ran out that way. He had also been astonished at the quantity and speed of the current. A channel a foot deep and two feet wide, carries a large quantity of water if the velocity be great, and Malipieri had made a calculation which had convinced him that if the outflow were suddenly closed, the small space in which he now stood would in a few minutes be full up to within three or four feet of the vault. He would have given much to know whence the water came and whither it went, and what devilry had made it rise suddenly and drown a man when the excavations had been made under Gregory Sixteenth.

From below, the place where an entrance had then been opened was clearly visible. The vault had been broken into and had afterwards been rebuilt from above. The bits of timber which had been used for the frame during the operation were still there, a rotting and mouldy nest for hideous spiders and noisome creatures that haunt the dark.

The air was very cold, and was laden with the indescribable smell of dried slime which belongs to deep wells which have long been almost quite dry. It was

clearly a long time since the little stream had overflowed its channel, but at the first examination he had made Malipieri had understood that in former times the water had risen to within three feet of the vault. Up to that height there was a thin coating of the dry mud, which peeled off in irregular scales if lightly touched. The large fragments of masonry that half covered the floor were all coated in the same way with what had once been a film of slime.

The air, though cold, could be breathed easily, and the lights did not grow dim in it as they do in subterranean places where the atmosphere is foul. The stream of water, flowing swiftly in its deep channel from under the little arch, brought plentiful ventilation into it. Above, there was no aperture in the vaulting, but there was one in the mediæval masonry that projected into the chamber. There, on the side towards the right, where the water flowed in, Malipieri had found a narrow slit, barely wide enough to admit a man's open hand and wrist, but nearly five feet high, evidently a passage intended for letting the water flow into the interior of the construction when it overflowed its channel and rose above the floor of the chamber.

At first Malipieri had supposed that this aperture communicated with some ancient and long-forgotten drain by which the water could escape to the Tiber; it was not until he had gained an entrance to the hollow mass of masonry that he understood the hideous use to which it had been applied.

It had not been hard to enlarge it. Anyone who has worked among ruins in Italy could tell us, even blindfold, the difference between the work done in ancient times and that of the Middle Ages. Roman brickwork is quite as compact as solid sandstone, but mediæval masonry was almost invariably built in a hurry by bad workmen, of all sorts of fragments embedded in poorly mingled cement, and it breaks up with tolerable ease under a heavy pickaxe.

In half a day Malipieri and Masin had widened the slit to a convenient passage, but as soon as it had been possible to squeeze through, the architect had gone in. He never forgot what he felt when he first looked about him. Masin could not follow him until many blows of the pick had widened the way for his bulkier frame.

Malipieri stopped at the entrance now, holding his lantern close to the ground, and looking for traces of

footsteps. He found none, but as he was about to move forward he uttered an exclamation of surprise, and picked up a tiny object which he held close to the light. It was only a wax match, of which the head had been broken off when it had been struck, so that it had not been lighted. That was all, but neither he nor Masin carried wax matches in the vaults, because the dampness soon made them useless. They took common sulphur matches in tin match-boxes. Besides, this was an English wax-light, as anyone could tell at a glance, for it was thicker, and stiffer, and longer than the cheaper Italian ones.

Malipieri drew back and showed it to his man, who examined it, understood, and put it into his pocket without a word. Then they both went in through the aperture in the wall.

The masonry outside was rectangular, as far as it could be seen. Inside, it was built like a small circular cistern, smoothly cemented, and contracting above in a dome, that opened by a square hole to the well-shaft above. Like the stones in the outer chamber, the cement was coated with scales of dried mud. The shaft was now certainly closed at the top, for in

the daytime not a ray of light penetrated into its blackness.

The lanterns illuminated the place completely, and the two men looked about, searching for some new trace of a living being. The yellow light fell only on the remains of men dead long ago. Some of the bones lay as they had lain since then, when the drowned bodies had gently reached the floor as the "lost water" subsided. Malipieri had not touched them, nor Masin either. Two skeletons lay at full length, face downwards, as a drowned body always sinks at last, when decay has done its loathsome work. A third lay on its side, in a frightfully natural attitude, the skull a little raised up and resting against the cemented wall, the arms stretched out together, the hands still clutching a rusty crowbar. This one was near the entrance, and if, in breaking their way in, Malipieri and Masin had not necessarily destroyed the cement on each side of the slit, they would have found the marks where the dead man's crowbar had worked desperately for a few minutes before he had been drowned. Malipieri had immediately reflected that the unfortunate wretch, who was evidently the mason of whom Sassi had told him, had

certainly not entered through the aperture formerly made from above in the outer chamber, since the narrow slit afforded no possible passage to the well. That doubtless belonged to some other attempt to find the treasure, and the fact that the mason's skeleton lay inside would alone have showed that he had got in from above, most likely through a low opening just where the dome began to curve inward. A further search had discovered some bits of wood, almost rotted to powder, which had apparently once been a ladder.

A much less practised eye than the architect's would have understood at a glance that if a living man were let down through the shaft in the centre of the dome, and left on the floor, he could not possibly get up even as far as the other hole, since the smooth cement offered not the slightest hold; and that if the outflow of the stream from the first chamber were arrested, the water would immediately fill it and rise simultaneously in the well, to drown the victim, or to strip his bones by its action, if he had been allowed to die of hunger or thirst. It was clear, too, that if the latter form of death were chosen, he must have suffered to the last minute of his life the agony of hearing the

stream flowing outside, not three paces from him, beyond the slit. Human imagination could hardly invent a more hideously cruel death-trap, nor one more ingeniously secret from the world without.

The unhappy mason's ladder had perhaps broken with his weight, or his light had gone out, and he had then been unable to find the horizontal aperture, but he had probably entered through the latter, when he had met his fate. The fact was, as Malipieri afterwards guessed, that the hole through the vault outside had been made hastily after the accident, in the hope of recovering the man's body, but that it had been at once closed again because it appeared to open over a deep pit full of still water.

A stout rope ladder now dangled from the lateral aperture in the dome, which Malipieri had immediately understood to have been made to allow the water to overflow when the well was full. He had also felt tolerably sure that the well itself had not been originally constructed for the deadly use to which it had evidently been put to in later times, but for the purpose of confining the water in a reservoir that could be easily cleaned, since it could be easily emptied, and in

which the supply could be kept at a permanent level, convenient for drawing it from above. In the days when all the ancient aqueducts of Rome were broken, a well of the "lost water" was a valuable possession in houses that were turned into fortresses at a moment's notice and were sometimes exposed to long and desperate sieges.

In order to reach the horizontal opening, Malipieri had climbed upon Masin's sturdy shoulders, steadying himself as well as he might till he had laid his hands on the edge of the orifice. As he hung there, Masin had held up the handle of a pickaxe as high as he could reach against the smooth wall, as a crossbar on which Malipieri had succeeded in getting a slight foothold, enough for a man who was not heavy and was extraordinarily active. A moment later he had drawn himself up and inward. At the imminent risk of his life, as he afterwards found, he had crawled on in total darkness till the way widened enough for him to turn round and get back. He had then lowered a string he had with him, and had drawn up a lantern first, then the end of a coil of rope, then the tools for carrying on the exploration. The rest had been easy. Masin had

climbed up by the rope, after making knots in it, and when Malipieri had called out from the inner place to which he had retired with the end, that it was made fast. But the light showed the architect that in turning round, he had narrowly escaped falling into an open shaft, of which he could not see the bottom, but which was evidently meant for the final escape of the overflowing water.

There was room to pass this danger, however, and they had since laid a couple of stout boards over it, weighted with stones to keep them in place. Beyond, the passage rose till it was high enough for a man to walk upright. Judging from the elevation now reached this passage was hollowed in the thickness of one of the main walls of the palace, and it was clear that the water could not reach it. A few yards from the chasm, it inclined quickly downwards, and at the end there were half a dozen steps, which evidently descended to a greater depth than the floor of the first outer chamber.

So far as it had hitherto been possible to judge, there was no way of getting to these last steps, except that opened by the two men, and leading through the

dry well. In former times, there might have been an entrance through the wall at the highest level, but if it had ever existed it had been so carefully closed that no trace of it could now be found.

This tedious explanation of a rather complicated construction has been necessary to explain what afterwards happened. Reducing it to its simplest terms, it becomes clear that if the water rose, a person in the passage, or anywhere beyond the overflow shaft could not possibly get back through the well, though he would apparently be safe from drowning if he stayed where he was; and to the best of Malipieri's knowledge there was no other way out. Anyone caught there would have to wait till the water subsided, and if that did not happen he would starve to death.

The two men stood still and listened. They could still distinguish the faint gurgling of the water, very far off, but that was all.

"I believe you heard a rat," said Malipieri, discontentedly, after a long pause.

"Rats do not carry English wax matches," observed Masin.

"They eat them when they can find them," an-

swered Malipieri. "They carry them off, and hide them, and drop them, too. And a big rat running away makes a noise very like a man's footsteps."

"That is true," assented Masin. "There were many of them in the prison, and I sometimes thought they were the keepers when I heard them at night."

"At all events, we will go to the end," said Malipieri, beginning to walk down the inclined way, and carrying his lantern low, so as not to be dazzled by the light.

Masin followed closely, grasping his drilling-iron, and still expecting to use it. The end of the passage had once been walled up, but they had found the fragments of brick and mortar lying much as they had fallen when knocked away. It was impossible to tell from which side the obstacle had been destroyed.

Going further, they stepped upon the curve of a tunnel vault, and were obliged to stoop low to avoid striking against another overhead. The two vaults had been carefully constructed, one outside the other, leaving a space of about five feet between them. The one under their feet covered the inner chamber in which Malipieri had seen the bronze statue. He and Masin had made a hole a little on one side of the middle, in

order not to disturb the keystones, working very carefully lest any heavy fragments should fall through; for they had at once been sure that if anything was to be found, it must be concealed in that place. Before making the opening, they had thoroughly explored the dark curved space from end to end and from side to side, but could discover no aperture. The inner vault had never been opened since it had been built.

Malipieri, reconstructing the circumstances of the accident in the last century, came to the conclusion that the mason who had been drowned had been already between the vaults, when some of the men behind had discovered that the water was rising in the well, and that they had somehow got out in time, but that their unfortunate companion had come back too late, or had perished while trying to break his way out by the slit, through which the water must have been rushing in. How they had originally entered the place was a mystery. Possibly they had been lowered from above, down the well-shaft, but it was all very hard to explain. The only thing that seemed certain was that the treasure had never been seen by anyone since it had been closed in under the vault, ages ago. Mali-

pieri had not yet found time to make a careful plan of all the places through which he had passed. There were so many turns and changes of level, that it would be impossible to get an accurate drawing without using a theodolite or some similar instrument of precision. From the measurements he had taken, however, and the rough sketches he had made, he believed that the double vault was not under the palace itself, but under the open courtyard, at the depth of about forty feet, and therefore below the level of the Tiber at average high water.

Both men now knelt by the hole, and Masin thrust his lantern down to the full length of his arm. The light shone upon the vast hand of the statue, and made a deep reflection in the great ruby of the ring, as if the gem was not a stone, but a little gold cup filled with rich wine. The hand itself, the wrist and the great muscles of the chest on which it lay, seemed of pure gold. But Malipieri's eyes fixed themselves on something else. There were marks on the bright surface of the metal which had not been there when he had looked at it in the afternoon; there were patches of dust, and there were several small scratches, which might have been made by the nails of heavy shoes.

"You were right after all," said Malipieri, withdrawing the lantern and setting it down beside him. "The man is here."

Masin's china blue eyes brightened at the thought of a possible fight, and his hold tightened again on his drill.

"What shall we do with him?" he asked, looking down into the hole.

Cunning, as the Italian peasant is by nature, Masin made a sign to his master that the man, if he were really below, could hear all that was said.

"Shall I go down and kill him, sir?" Masin enquired with a quiet grin and raising his voice a little.

"I am not sure," Malipieri answered, at once entering into his man's scheme. "He is caught in his own trap. It is not midnight yet, and there is plenty of time to consider the matter. Let us sit here and talk about it."

He now turned himself and sat beside the hole, placing his lantern near the edge. He took out a cigar and lit it carefully. Masin sat on the other side, his drill in his hand.

"If he tries to get out while we are talking," he said, "I can break his skull with a touch of this."

"Yes," Malipieri answered, puffing at his cigar. "There is no hurry. Keep your iron ready."

"Yes, sir," Masin made the heavy drill ring on the stones of the vault.

A pause followed.

"Have you got your pipe with you?" asked Malipieri presently. "We must talk over this quietly."

"Yes, sir. Will you hold the iron while I get a light? He might try to jump out, and he may have firearms. Thank you, sir."

Masin produced a short black pipe, filled it and lighted it.

"I was thinking, sir," he said as he threw away the wooden match, "that if we kill him here we may have trouble in disposing of his body. Thank you, sir," he added as he took over the drill again and made it clang on the stones.

"There will be no trouble about that," Malipieri answered, speaking over the hole. "We can drop him down the overflow shaft in the passage."

"Where do you think the shaft leads, sir?" asked Masin, grinning with delight.

"To some old drain and then to the Tiber, of

course. The body will be found in a week or two, jammed against the pier of some bridge, probably at the island of Saint Bartholomew."

"Yes, sir. But the drain is dry now. The body will lie at the bottom of the shaft, where we drop it, and in a few days the cellars will be perfumed."

He laughed roughly at his horrible joke, which was certainly calculated to affect the nerves of the intruder who was meant to hear it. Malipieri began to wonder when the man would give a sign of life.

"We can fill the well by plugging the arch in the outer chamber," he suggested. "Then the water will pour down the shaft and wash the body away."

"Yes, sir," assented Masin. "That is a good idea. Shall I go down and kill him now, sir?"

"Not yet," Malipieri answered, knocking the ash from his cigar. "We have not finished smoking, and there is no hurry. Besides, it occurs to me that if we drive anything into the hole when the water runs out, we shall not be able to get the plug away afterwards. Then we ourselves could never get here again."

A long silence followed. From time to time Masin made a little noise with the drill.

"Perhaps the fellow is asleep," he observed pleasantly at last. "So much the better, he will wake in Paradise!"

"It is of no use to run any risks," said Malipieri. "If we go down to kill him he may kill one of us first, especially if he has a revolver. There is no hurry, I tell you. Do you happen to know how long it takes to starve a man to death?"

"Without water, a man cannot live a week, sir. That is the best idea you have had yet."

"Yes. We will wall him up in the vault. That is easy enough. Those boards that are over the shaft will do to make a little frame, and the stones are all here, just as we got them out. We can fasten up the frame with ends of rope."

"We have no mortar, sir."

"Mud will do as well for such a small job," answered Malipieri. "We can easily make enough. Give me your iron, in case he tries to get out, and go and get the boards and the rope."

Masin began to rise.

"In a week we can come and take him out," he

remarked, in a matter of fact way. "By that time he will be dead, and we can have his grave ready."

He laughed again, as he thought of the sensations his cheerful talk must produce in the mind of the man below.

"Yes," said Malipieri. "We may as well do it at once and go to bed. It is of no use to sit up all night talking about the fellow's body. Go and get the rope and the boards."

Masin was now on his feet and his heavy shoes made a grinding noise on the stones. At that moment a sound was heard from below, and Malipieri held up a finger and listened. Somebody was moving in the vault.

"You had better stay where you are," said Malipieri, speaking down. "If you show yourself I will drop a stone on your head."

A hollow voice answered him from the depths.

"Are you Christians," it asked, "to wall a man up alive?"

"That is what we are going to do," Malipieri answered coolly. "Have you anything to say? It will not

take us long to do the job, so you had better speak at once. How did you get in?"

"If I am to die without getting out, why should I tell you?" inquired the voice.

Malipieri looked at Masin.

"There is a certain sense in what the man says, sir," Masin said thoughtfully.

"My good man," said Malipieri speaking down, "we do not want anybody to know the way to this place for a few days, and as you evidently know it better than we do, we intend to keep you quiet."

"If you will let me out, I can serve you," answered the man below. "There is nobody in Rome who can serve you as I can."

"Who are you?" asked Malipieri.

"Are you going to let me out, Signor Malipieri?" inquired the man. "If you are, I will tell you."

"Oh? You know my name, do you?"

"Perfectly. You are the engineer engaged by the Senator Volterra to find the treasure."

"Yes. Quite right. What of that?"

"You have found it," answered the other. "Of what use will it be to kill me? I cannot take that

statue away in my waistcoat pocket, if you let me out, can I?"

"You had better not make too many jokes, my man, or we will put the boards over this hole in five minutes. If you can really be of use to me, I will let you out. What is your name?"

"Toto," answered the voice sullenly.

"Yes. That means Theodore, I suppose. Now make haste, for I am tired of waiting. What are you, and how did you get in?"

"I was the mason of the palace, until the devil flew away with the people who lived in it. I know all the secrets of the house. I can be very useful to you."

"That changes matters, my friend. I have no doubt you can be useful if you like, though we have managed to find one of the secrets without you. It happens to be the only one we wanted to know."

"No," answered Toto. "There are two others. You do not know how I got in, and you do not know how to manage the 'lost water.'"

"That is true," said Malipieri. "But if I let you out you may do me harm, by talking before it is time.

The government is not to know of this discovery until I am ready."

"The government!" exclaimed Toto contemptuously, from his hiding-place. "May an apoplexy seize it! Do you take me for a spy? I am a Christian."

"I begin to think he is, sir," put in Masin, knocking the ash from his pipe.

"I think so too," said Malipieri. "Throw away that iron, Masin. He shall show himself, at all events, and if we like his face we can talk to him here."

Masin dropped the drill with a clang. Toto's hairy hand appeared, grasping the golden wrist of the statue, as he raised himself to approach the hole.

"He is a mason, as he says," said Masin, catching sight of the rough fingers.

"Did you take me for a coachman?" inquired Toto, thrusting his shaggy head forward cautiously, and looking up through the aperture.

"Before you come up here," Malipieri answered, "tell me how you got in?"

"You seem to know so much about the overflow shaft that I should think you might have guessed.

If you do not believe that I came that way, look at my clothes!"

He now crawled upon the body of the statue, and Malipieri saw that he was covered with half-dried mud and ooze.

"You got through some old drain, I suppose, and found your way up."

"It seems so," answered Toto, shaking his shoulders, as if he were stiff.

"Are you going to let him go free, sir?" asked Masin, standing ready. "If you do, he will be down the shaft, before you can catch him. These men know their way underground like moles."

"Moles, yourselves!" answered Toto in a growl, putting his head up above the level of the vault.

Masin measured him with his eye, and saw that he was a strong man, probably much more active than he looked in his heavy, mud-plastered clothes.

"Get up here," said Malipieri.

Toto obeyed, and in a moment he sat on the edge of the hole, his legs dangling down into it.

"Not so bad," he said, settling himself with a grunt of satisfaction.

"I like you, Master Toto," said Malipieri. "You might have thought that we really meant to kill you, but you did not seem much frightened."

"There is no woman in the affair," answered Toto. "Why should you kill me? And I can help you."

"How am I to know that you will?" asked Malipieri.

"I am a man of honour," Toto replied, turning his stony face to the light of the lanterns.

"I have not a doubt of it, my friend," returned Malipieri, without conviction. "Just now, the only help I need of you, is that you should hold your tongue. How can I be sure that you will do that? Does anyone else know the way in through the drain?"

"No. I only found it to-night. If there is a day's rain in the mountains and the Tiber rises even a little, nobody can pass through it. The lower part is barely above the level of the river now."

"How did you guess that you could get here by that way?"

"We know many secrets in our trade, from father to son," answered Toto gruffly.

"You must have lifted the boards, with the stones

on them, to get out of the shaft. Why did you put them back in their place?"

"You seem to think I am a fool! I did not mean to let you know that I had been here, so I put them back, of course. I supposed that I could get out through the cellars, but you have put a padlock on the inner door."

"Is there any way of turning water into that shaft?"

"Only by filling the well, I think. If the Tiber rises, the water will back up the shaft through the drain. That is why the ancients who built the well made another way for the water to run off. When the river is swollen in a flood it must be much higher in the shaft than the bottom of the well, and if the 'lost water' were running in all the time, the air would probably make it back, so that the shaft would be useless and the well would be soiled with the river water."

"You evidently know your trade, Master Toto," said Masin, with some admiration for his fellow-craftsman's clear understanding.

"You know yours," retorted Toto, who was seldom at a loss, "for just now you talked of killing like a professional assassin."

This pleasing banter delighted Masin, who laughed heartily, and patted Toto on the back.

"We shall be good friends," he said.

"In this world one never knows," Toto answered philosophically. "What are you going to do?"

"You must come back with us to my apartment," said Malipieri, who had been considering the matter. "You must stay there a couple of days, without going out. I will pay you for your time, and give you a handsome present, and plenty to eat and drink. After that you will be free to go where you please and say what you like, for the secret will be out."

"Thank you," answered Toto without enthusiasm. "Are you going to tell the government about the treasure?"

"The Senator will certainly inform the government, which has a right to buy it."

To this Toto said nothing, but he lifted his legs out of the hole and stood up, ready to go. Malipieri and Masin took up their lanterns.

CHAPTER XI.

MASIN led the way back, Toto followed and Malipieri went last, so that the mason was between his two captors. They did not quite trust him, and Masin was careful not to walk too fast where the way was so familiar to him, while Malipieri was equally careful not to lag behind. In this order they reached the mouth of the overflow shaft, covered with the loaded boards. Masin bent down and examined them, for he wished to convince himself that the stones had been moved since he had himself placed them there. A glance showed that this was the case, and he was about to go on, when he bent down again suddenly and listened, holding up his hand.

"There is water," he said, and began to lift off the stones, one by one.

Toto helped him quickly. There were only three or four, and they were not heavy. When the mouth of the shaft was uncovered all three knelt down and listened, instinctively lowering their lanterns into the

blackness below. The shaft was not wider than a good sized old-fashioned chimney, like those in Roman palaces, up and down which sweeps can just manage to climb.

The three men listened, and distinctly heard the steady falling of a small stream of water upon the stones at the bottom.

"It is raining," Toto said confidently, but he was evidently as much surprised by the sound as the others. "There must be some communication with the gutters in the courtyard," he added.

"There is probably a thunderstorm," answered Malipieri. "We can hear nothing down here."

"If I had gone down again, I should have been drowned," Toto said, shaking his head. "Do you hear? Half the water from the courtyard must be running down there!"

The sound of the falling stream increased to a hollow roar.

"Do you think the water can rise in the shaft?" asked Malipieri.

"Not unless the river rises and backs into it," replied Toto. "The drain is large below."

"That cannot be 'lost water,' can it?"

"No. That is impossible."

"Put the boards in their place again," Malipieri said. "It is growing late."

It was done in a few moments, but now the dismal roar of the water came up very distinctly through the covering. Malipieri had been in many excavations, and in mines, too, but did not remember that he had ever felt so strongly the vague sense of apprehension that filled him now. There is something especially gloomy and mysterious about the noise of unexplained water heard at a great depth under the earth and coming out of darkness. Even the rough men with him felt that.

"It is bad to hear," observed Masin, putting one more stone upon the boards, as if the weight could keep the sound down.

"You may say that!" answered Toto. "And in this tomb, too!"

They went on, in the same order as before. The passage to the dry well had been so much enlarged that by bending down they could walk to the top of the rope ladder. Malipieri went down first, with his lantern. Toto followed, and while Masin was descend-

ing, stood looking at the bones of the dead mason, and at the skull that grinned horribly in the uncertain yellow glare.

He took a half-burnt candle from his pocket, and some sulphur matches, and made a light for himself, with which he carefully examined the bones. Malipieri watched him.

"The man who was drowned over sixty years ago," said the architect.

"This," answered Toto, with more feeling than accuracy, "is the blessed soul of my grandfather."

"He shall have Christian burial in a few days," Malipieri said gravely.

Toto shrugged his shoulders, not irreverently, but as if to say that when a dead man has been without Christian burial sixty years, it cannot make any difference whether he gets it after all or not.

"The crowbar is still good," Toto said, stooping down to disengage it from the skeleton's grasp.

But Malipieri laid a hand on his shoulder, for it occurred to him that the mason, armed with an iron bar, might be a dangerous adversary if he tried to escape.

"You do not need that just now," said the architect.

Toto glanced at Malipieri furtively and saw that he was understood. He stood upright, affecting indifference. They went on, through the breach to which the slit had been widened. Toto moved slowly, and held his candle down to the running water in the channel.

"There is plenty of it," he observed.

"Where does it come from?" asked Malipieri, suddenly, in the hope of an unguarded answer.

"From heaven," answered Toto, without hesitation; "and everything that falls from heaven is good," he added, quoting an ancient proverb.

"What would happen if we closed the entrance, so that it could not get in at all?"

"The book of wisdom," Toto replied, "is buried under Pasquino. How should I know what would happen?"

"You know a good many things, my friend."

Malipieri understood that the man would not say more, and led the way out.

"Good-bye, grandpapa," growled Toto, waving his

hairy hand towards the well. "Who knows whether we shall meet again?"

They went on, and in due time emerged into the upper air. It was raining heavily, as Toto had guessed, and before they had reached the other end of the courtyard they were drenched. But it was a relief to be out of doors, and Malipieri breathed the fresh air with keen delight, as a thirsty man drinks. The rain poured down steadily and ran in rivers along the paved gutters, and roared into the openings that carried it off. Malipieri could not help thinking how it must be roaring now, far down at the bottom of the old shaft, led thither through deep-buried and long-forgotten channels.

Upstairs, Masin was inclined to be friendly with his fellow-craftsman, and gave him dry clothes to sleep in, and bread and cheese and wine in his own room. In spite of his experiences, Masin had never known how to be suspicious. But as Malipieri looked once more at the man's stony face and indistinguishable eyes, he thought differently of his prisoner. He locked the outer door and took the key of the patent lock with him when he went to bed at last.

It does not often rain heavily in Rome, late in the spring, for any long time, but when Malipieri looked out the next morning, it was still pouring steadily, and the sky over the courtyard was uniformly grey. It is apparently a law of nature that exceptions should come when least wanted.

In spite of the weather Malipieri went out, however, and did not even send for a cab. The porter was in a particularly bad humour and eyed him distrustfully, for he had been put to the trouble of cleaning the stairs where the three men had left plentiful mud in their track during the night. Malipieri nodded to the old man as usual, and was about to go out, but turned back and gave him five francs. Thus mollified the porter at once made a remark about the atrocious weather and proceeded to ask how the work was progressing.

"I have explored a good deal," answered Malipieri. "The Senator is coming to-morrow, and you had better sweep carefully. He looks at everything, you know."

He went out into the pouring rain, keeping a sharp lookout from under the edge of the umbrella he held low over his head. He had grown cautious of late. As

he expected, he came upon one of the respectable men he now met so often, before he had turned into the Piazza Agonale. The respectable man was also carrying his umbrella low, and looking about him as he walked along at a leisurely pace. Malipieri hailed a cab.

Even in wet weather there are no closed cabs in that part of Rome. One is protected from the wet, more or less, by the hood and by a high leathern apron which is hooked to it inside. The cabman, seated under a huge standing umbrella, bends over and unhooks it on one side for you to get in and out.

Malipieri employed the usual means of eluding pursuit. He gave an address and told the man to drive fast, got out quickly on reaching the house, enquired for an imaginary person with a foreign name, who, he was of course told, did not live there, got in again and had himself driven to Sassi's door, sure of losing his pursuer, if the detective followed him in another cab. Then he paid the man two fares, to save time, and went in. He had never taken the trouble to do such a thing since his political adventures, but he was now very anxious not to let it be known that he

had any dealings with the former agent of the Conti family.

The matter was settled easily enough and to his satisfaction. Old Sassi worshipped Sabina, and was already fully persuaded that whatever could be found under the palace should belong to her, as also that she had a right to see what was discovered before Volterra did, and before anything was moved. He was at least as Quixotic in his crabbed fashion as Malipieri himself; and besides, he really could not see that there was the least harm or danger in the scheme. It certainly would have been improper for Malipieri to go and fetch the young lady himself, but it was absurd to suppose that a man over sixty could be blamed for accompanying a girl of eighteen on a visit to her old home, in her own interest, especially when the man had been all his life employed by her family in a position of trust and confidence. Finally, Sassi hated Volterra with all his heart, as the faithful adherents of ruined gentlefolks often hate those who have profited by their ruin.

Sassi, as an old Roman, predicted that the weather would improve in the afternoon. Malipieri advised

him nevertheless to keep the hood of his cab raised when he brought Sabina to the palace. To this Sassi answered that he should of course get a closed carriage from a livery stable, and an argument followed which took some time. In the opinion of the excellent old agent, it would be almost an affront to fetch the very noble Donna Sabina in a vehicle so plebeian as a cab, and it was with the greatest difficulty that Malipieri made him understand that a cab was much safer on such an occasion.

What was important was that the weather should be fine, for otherwise the Baroness might not go out, and the whole scheme would fail. In that case, it must be arranged for the following day, and Malipieri would find an excuse for putting off Volterra's visit.

He left the house on foot. So far, he had not allowed himself to think too much of the future, and had found little time for such reflexion. He was a man who put all his energy into what he was doing, and was inclined to let consequences take care of themselves rather than waste thought in providing for them. He believed he was doing what was just and

honourable, and if there was a spice of adventure and romance in it, that only made it the more easy to do. The only danger he could think of was that Sabina might slip in one of the difficult passages and hurt her foot a little, or might catch cold in the damp vaults. Nothing else could happen.

He congratulated himself on having got Toto in his power, since Toto was the only man who understood the ways of the "lost water." If he had before suspected that there was anyone at large in Rome who knew as much he would have hesitated. But he had made the discovery of the man and had taken him prisoner at the same moment, and all danger in that quarter seemed to be removed.

As for the material difficulty, he and Masin could smoothe the way very much in two or three hours, and could substitute a solid wooden ladder for the one of rope in the well. Sabina was young, slight, and probably active, and with a little help she would have no difficulty in reaching the inner chamber. It might be well to cover the skeletons. Young girls were supposed to be sensitive about such things, and Malipieri had no experience of their ways. Nevertheless he had

an inward conviction that Sabina would not go into hysterics at the sight.

Old Sassi might not be able to get up the ladder, but once beyond the reach of social observation, he would trust Sabina to Malipieri and Masin for a quarter of an hour, and he could wait in the outer cellar. Malipieri had prepared him for this, and he had made no objection, only saying that he should like to see the treasure himself if it could possibly be managed. In his heart, Malipieri hoped that it would prove too much for the old man and that he might have the pleasure of showing Sabina what he had found without having the old agent at his elbow. Toto would be locked in, upstairs, for the day. He could not get out by the door, and he would not risk breaking his legs by jumping from the window. The intermediate storey of the Palazzo Conti was far too high for that.

Malipieri calculated that if Sassi were punctual, Sabina would be at the door of the palace at a quarter past five. At five minutes past, he came down, and sent the porter on an errand which would occupy at least half an hour even if executed with

despatch. Masin would keep the door, he said. The old man was delighted to have an excuse for going out, and promised himself to spend a comfortable hour in a wineshop if he could find a friend. His wife, as there was so little to do, had found some employment in a laundry to which she went in the morning and which kept her out all day. No one would see Sabina and Sassi enter, and if it seemed advisable they could be got out in the same way. No one but Masin and Malipieri himself need ever know that they had been in the palace that afternoon.

It was all very well prepared, by a man well accustomed to emergencies, and it was not easy to see how anything could go wrong. Even allowing more time than was necessary, Sabina's visit to the vaults could not possibly occupy much more than an hour.

CHAPTER XII.

MALIPIERI was beginning to realise that his work in the vaults had been watched with much more interest than he had supposed possible, and that in some way or other news of his progress had reached various quarters. In the first place, his reputation was much wider than he knew, and many scholars and archæologists throughout Europe had been profoundly impressed both by what he had discovered and by the learning he had shown in discussing his discoveries. It followed that many were curious to see what he would do next, and there were paragraphs about him in grave reviews, and flattering references to him in speeches made at learned conventions. He had friends whose names he had never heard, and enemies, too, ready to attack him on the one side and to defend him on the other. Some praised his modesty, and others called it affectation. His experience of the wider world was short, so far, and he did not understand that it had

taken people a year to appreciate his success. He had hoped for immediate recognition of his great services to archæology, and had been somewhat disappointed because that recognition had not been instantaneous. Like most men of superior talent, in the same situation, when praise came in due time and abundantly, he did not care for it because he was already interested in new work. To the man of genius the past is always insignificant as compared with the future. When Goethe, dying, asked for "more light," he may or may not have merely meant that he wished the window opened because the room seemed dark to his failing eyes; the higher interpretation which has been put upon his last words remains the true one, in the spirit, if not in the letter. He died, as he had lived, the man of genius looking forward, not backward, to the last, crying for light, more light, thinking not of dying and ending, of living, hoping, doing, winning.

Besides the general body of students and archæologists, the Italian government was exceedingly interested in Malipieri's explorations. The government is rightly jealous in such matters, and does its very best to keep all artistic objects of real value in the country.

It is right that this should be so. The law relating to the matter was framed by Cardinal Pacca, under the papal administration many years ago, and the modern rulers have had the intelligence to maintain it and enforce it. Like other laws it is frequently broken. In this it resembles the Ten Commandments and most other rules framed by divine or human intelligence for the good of mankind and the advancement of civilisation. The most sanguine lovers of their fellow-men have always admitted the existence of a certain number of flagitious persons who obstinately object to being good. David, who was hasty, included a large proportion of humanity amongst "the wicked;" Monsieur Drumont limited the number to David's descendants; and Professor Lombroso, whatever he may really mean, conveys the impression that men of genius, criminals and lunatics are different manifestations of the same thing; as diamonds, charcoal and ham fat are all carbon and nothing else. We should be thankful for the small favours of providence in excepting us from the gifted minority of madmen, murderers and poets and making us just plain human beings, like other people.

There is no international law forbidding a man from making digressions when he is telling a story.

Malipieri was watched by the government, as Volterra had told him, because it was feared in high quarters that if he found anything of value under the palace, he would try to get it out of the country. He had always hated the government and had got himself into trouble by attacking the monarchy. Besides, it was known in high quarters that Senator Baron Volterra held singular views about the authenticity of works of art. It would be inconvenient to have a scandal in the Senate about the Velasquez and the other pictures; on the other hand, if anything more of the same sort should happen, it would be very convenient indeed to catch a pair of culprits in the shape of Malipieri, a pardoned political offender, and his ex-convict servant.

Then, too, in quite another direction, the Vatican was very anxious to buy any really good work of art which might be discovered, and would pay quite as much for it as government itself. Therefore the Vatican was profoundly interested in Malipieri on its own account.

As if this were not enough, Sabina's brother, the ruined Prince Conti, had got wind of the excavations and scented some possible advantage to himself, with the vague chance of more money to throw away on automobiles, at Monte Carlo, and in the company of a cosmopolitan young person of semi-Oriental extraction whose varied accomplishments had made her the talk of Europe.

Lastly, the Russian embassy was on the alert, for the dowager Princess had heard from her maid, who had heard it from her sister in Rome, who had learned it from the washerwoman, who had been told the secret by the porter's wife, that the celebrated Malipieri was exploring the north-west foundations of the palace. The Princess had repeated the story, and the legend which accounted for it, to her brother Prince Rubomirsky, who was a very great personage in his own country. And the Prince, though good-natured, foresaw that he might in time grow tired of giving his sister unlimited money; and it occurred to him that something might turn up under the palace, after all, to which she might have some claim. So he had used his influence in Saint Petersburg with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the

latter had instructed the Russian Ambassador in Rome to find out what he could about the excavations, without attracting attention; and Russian diplomatists have ways of finding out things without attracting attention, which are extremely great and wonderful. Also if Russia puts her paw upon anything and declares that it is the property of a Russian subject, it often happens that smaller people take their paws away hastily.

It follows that there must have been a good deal of quiet talk, in Rome, not overheard in society, about what Malipieri was doing in the Palazzo Conti, but as the people who occupied themselves with his affairs were particularly anxious that he should not know what they said, he was in ignorance of it. But Volterra was not. He had valuable friends, because his influence was of value, and he was informed of much that was going on. If he was anxious to get rid of the architect, it was not so much because he wanted for himself the whole price which the statue or statues might bring, as because he feared lest the government should suddenly descend upon Malipieri and make an enquiry which would involve also the question of the pictures. So far, Volterra had created the impression that the young man

had been concerned with a dealer in smuggling them out of the country; but in case of an investigation it could easily be proved that they were gone before Malipieri had arrived in Rome, in answer to Volterra's invitation. Besides, the Senator had discovered that the young archæologist was much more celebrated than was convenient. In private affairs there is nothing so tiresome and inconvenient as the presence of a celebrity. Burglars, when exercising their professional functions, are not accompanied by a brass band.

Toto was very docile and quiet all that day. Masin thought him philosophical, and continued to like him, after his fashion, providing him with a plentiful supply of tobacco, a good meal at noon, and a bottle of wine. The man's stony face was almost placid. At rare intervals he made a remark. After eating he looked out of the window and said rather regretfully that he thought the rain was over for the day.

Masin took this to mean that he wished he might go out, and offered him more wine by way of consolation. But Toto refused. He was a moderate man. Then he asked Masin how many rooms Malipieri occupied, and learned that the whole of the little apartment

was rented by the architect. The information did not seem to interest him much.

In the morning, when Malipieri had come back from his visit to Sassi, he had given Masin the keys of the vaults, and had told him to buy a stout ladder and take it into the dry well. But Toto said that this was a useless expense.

"There is a strong ladder about the right length, lying along the wall at the other end of the west cellar," he said. "You had better take that."

Malipieri looked at him and smiled.

"For a prisoner, you are very obliging," he said, and he gave him a five-franc note, which Toto took with a grunt of thanks.

Masin was gone an hour, during which time Malipieri busied himself in the next room, leaving the door open. He went out when Masin came back. When the two men were together Toto produced the five francs.

"Can you change?" he enquired.

"Why?" asked Masin with some surprise.

"Half is two francs fifty," answered Toto. "That is your share."

Masin laughed and shook his head.

"No," he said. "What is given to you is not given to me. Why should I share with you?"

"It is our custom," Toto replied. "Take your half."

Masin refused stoutly, but Toto insisted and grew angry at last. So Masin changed the note and kept two francs and fifty centimes for himself, reflecting that he could give the money back to Malipieri, since he had no sort of right to it. Toto was at once pacified.

When Malipieri returned, Masin went out and got dinner for all three, bringing it as usual in the three tin cases strapped one above the other.

Toto supposed that he was not to be left alone in the apartment that day; but at half-past four Malipieri entered the room, with a padlock and a couple of screw eyes in his hand.

"You would not think it worth while to risk jumping out," he said in a good-humoured tone. "But you might take it into your head to open the window, and the porter might be there, and you might talk to

him. Masin and I shall be out together for a little while."

Masin shut the tall window, screwed the stout little eyebolts into the frame and ran the bolt of the padlock through both. He gave the key to Malipieri. Toto watched the operation indifferently.

"If you please," he said, "I am accustomed to have a little wine about half-past five every day. I will pay for it."

He held out half a franc to Masin and nodded.

"Nonsense!" interposed Malipieri, laughing. "You are my guest, Master Toto." Masin brought a bottle and a glass, and a couple of cigars.

"Thank you, sir," said Toto politely. "I shall be very comfortable till you come back."

"You will find the time quite as profitable as if you were working," said Malipieri.

He nodded and went out followed by Masin, and Toto heard the key turned twice in the solid old lock. The door was strong, and they would probably lock the front door of the apartment too. Toto listened quietly till he heard it shut after them in the distance. Then

he rose and flattened his face against the window pane.

He waited some time. He could see one half of the great arched entrance, but the projecting stone jamb of the window hindered him from seeing more. It was very quiet, and he could hear footsteps below, on the gravel of the courtyard, if anyone passed.

At the end of ten minutes he heard a man's heavy tread, and knew that it was Masin's. Masin must have come out of the great archway on the side of it which Toto could not see. The steps went on steadily along the gravel. Masin was going to the vaults.

Toto waited ten minutes, and began to think that no one else was coming, and that Malipieri had left the palace, though he had been convinced that the architect and his man meant to go down to the vaults together. Just as he was beginning to give up the idea, he saw Sassi under the archway, in a tall hat, a black coat and gloves, and Malipieri was just visible for a moment as he came out too. He was unmistakably speaking to someone on his right, who was hidden from

Toto's view by the projecting stonework. His manner was also distinctly deferential. The third person was probably Baron Volterra.

The footsteps took a longer time to reach the other end of the court than Masin had occupied. After all was silent Toto listened breathlessly for five minutes more. There was not a sound.

He looked about him, then took up a chair, thrust one of the legs between the bolt and the body of the padlock and quietly applied his strength. The wood of the frames was old, and the heavy strain drew the screw eyes straight out.

Toto opened the window noiselessly and looked out with caution. No one was in sight. By this time the three were in the vaults, with Masin.

Toto knew every inch of the palace by heart, inside and out, and he knew that one of the cast-iron leaders that carried the rain from the roof to the ground was within reach of that particular window, on the left side. He looked out once more, up and down the courtyard, and then, in an instant, he was kneeling on the stone sill, he had grasped the iron leader with one hand, then with the other, swinging himself to it and

clutching it below with his rough boots. A few moments later he was on the ground, running for the great entrance. No one was there, no one saw him.

He let himself out quietly, shut the postern door after him, and slouched away towards the Vicolo dei Soldati.

CHAPTER XIII.

SABINA had the delightful sensation of doing something she ought not to do, but which was perfectly innocent; she had moreover the rarer pleasure, quite new to her, of committing the little social misdeed in the company of the first man she had ever liked in her life. She knew very well that old Sassi would not be able to reach the inner chamber of the excavation, and she inwardly hoped that Malipieri's servant would discreetly wait outside of it, so that she might be alone with Malipieri when she first set eyes on the wonderful statue. It was amusing to think how the nuns would have scolded her for the mere wish, and how her pious sister would have condemned her to eternal flames for entertaining the temptation.

Malipieri had told her to put on an old frock, as she might spoil her clothes in spite of the efforts he had made to enlarge and smoothe the way for her to pass.

Her mother had a way of calling everything old which she had possessed three months, and for once Sabina was of her mother's opinion. She had a very smart cloth costume, with a rather short skirt, which had come home in February, and which she had worn only four times because the spring had been warm. It was undoubtedly "old," for she could not wear it in summer, and next winter the fashion would change; and it had rained all the morning, so that the air was damp and cold. Besides, the costume fitted her slender figure to perfection—it was such a pity that it was old already, for she might never have another as smart. The least she could do was to try and wear it out when she had the chance. It was of a delicate fawn colour; it had no pocket and it was fastened in a mysterious way. The skirt was particularly successful, and, as has been said, it was short, which was a great advantage in scrambling about a damp cellar. In order to show that she was in earnest, she put on russet leather shoes. Her hat was large, because that was the fashion, but nothing could have been simpler; it matched the frock in colour, and no colour was so becoming to her clear girlish pallor and misty hair as light fawn.

Malipieri had carried out his intention of getting rid of the porter, and was waiting inside the open postern when the cab drove up. Hitherto he had only seen Sabina indoors, at luncheon and in the evening, and when he saw her now he received an altogether new impression. Somehow, in her walking dress, she seemed more womanly, more "grown up" as she herself would have called it. As she got out of the wretched little cab, and came forward to greet him, her grace stirred his blood. It was final; he was in love.

Her intuition told her the truth, of course. There was something in his look and voice which had not quite been in either on the previous evening. He had been glad, last night, because she had come to the drawing-room, as he had hoped that she would; but to-day he was more than glad, he was happy, merely because he saw her. There never was a woman yet that could not tell that difference at a glance.

She was proud of being loved by him, and as he walked by her side, she looked up at the blue sky above the courtyard, and was glad that the clouds had passed away, for it must be sweeter to be loved when there was sunshine overhead than when it rained; but

all the time, she saw his face, without looking at it, and it was after her own heart, and much to her liking. Besides, he was not only a manly man, and strong, and, of course, brave; he was already famous, and might be great some day; and she knew that he loved her, which was much to his advantage. As for being madly, wildly, desperately in love with him herself, she was not that yet; it was simply a very delicious sensation of being adored by somebody very sympathetic. Some women never get nearer to love than that, in all their lives, and are quite satisfied, and as they grow older they realise how much more convenient it is to be adored than to adore, and are careful to keep their likings within very manageable limits, while encouraging the men who love them to behave like lunatics.

Sabina was not of that kind; she was only very young, which, as Pitt pointed out, is a disadvantage but not a real crime.

They walked side by side, almost touching as they moved; they were drawn one to another, as all nature draws together those pairs of helpless atoms that are destined to one end.

Old Sassi went gravely with them. To him, it

was a sad thing to see Sabina come to the palace in a way almost clandestine, as if she had no right there, and he shook his head again and again, silently grieving over the departed glory of the Conti, and wishing that he could express his sympathy to the young girl in dignified yet tender language. But Sabina was not in need of sympathy just then. Life in the Volterra establishment had been distinctly more bearable since Malipieri's appearance on the scene, and her old existence in the palace had been almost as really gloomy as it now seemed to her to have been. Moreover, she was intensely interested in what Malipieri was going to show her.

Masin was waiting at the head of the winding stair with lanterns already lighted. When they had all entered, he turned the key. Sassi asked why he did this, and as they began to go down Malipieri explained that it was a measure of safety against the old porter's curiosity.

Sabina stepped carefully on the damp steps, while Malipieri held his lantern very low so that she could see them.

"I am sure-footed," she said, with a little laugh.

"This is the easiest part," he answered. "There are places where you will have to be careful."

"Then you will help me."

She thought it would be pleasant to rest her hand on his arm, where the way was not easy, and she knew instinctively that he hoped she would do so. They reached the floor of the cellar, and Masin walked in front, lighting the way. Sassi looked about him; he had been in the cellars two or three times before.

"They did not get in by this way when the first attempt was made," he said.

"No," answered Malipieri. "I cannot find out how they made an entrance."

"There used to be a story of an oubliette that was supposed to be somewhere in the house," said Sabina.

"I have found it. You will see it in a moment, for we have to pass through the bottom of it."

"How amusing! I never saw one."

They came to the first breach in the cellar wall. A small lamp had been placed on a stone in a posi-

tion to illuminate the entrance and was burning brightly. Masin had lighted two others, further on, and had covered the bones in the dry well with pieces of sacking. Malipieri went up the causeway first. At first he held out his hand to Sabina, but she shook her head and smiled. There would be no satisfaction in being helped over an easy place; she should like him to help her where it would need some strength and skill to do so. She drew her skirt round her and walked up unaided, and followed by Sassi, leaning on his stick with one hand and on Masin with the other.

The descent into the first chamber was less easy. Standing at the top, Sabina looked down at Malipieri who held his lantern to her feet. She felt a delicious little uneasiness now, and listened to the ghostly gurgle from the channel in the dark.

"What is that?" she asked, and her voice was a little awed by the darkness and strangeness of the place.

"The 'lost water.' It runs through here."

She listened a moment longer, and began to descend, placing her feet on the stones upon which

Malipieri laid his hand, one after another, to show her the way.

"Perhaps you might help me a little here," she said.

"If you will let me put your feet on the right step, it will be easier," he answered.

"Yes. Do that, please. Show me the place first."

"There. Do you see? Now!"

He laid his hand firmly upon her small russet shoe, guided the little foot to a safe position and steadied it there a moment.

"So," he said. "Now the next. There are only four or five more."

She was rather sorry that there were so few, for they seemed delightfully safe, or just dangerous enough to be amusing; she was not quite sure which. Women never analyse the present, unless it is utterly dull.

At the bottom of the descent, both looked up, and saw at a glance that poor old Sassi could never get down, even with assistance. He seemed unable to put his foot down without slipping, in spite of Masin's help.

"I think you had better not try it," said Malipieri quietly. "In a few days I am sure that the Senator will have a way broken through from above, and then it will be easy enough."

"Yes," answered the old man regretfully. "I will go back again to the other side and wait for you."

"I am so sorry," said Sabina untruthfully, but looking up with sympathy.

"Take Signor Sassi back to the cellar," said Malipieri to Masin. "Then you can follow us."

Sassi and Masin disappeared through the breach. Malipieri led the way into the dry well, where there was another light. In her haste to reach the end, Sabina did not even glance at the sacking that covered the skeletons.

"Can you climb a ladder?" asked Malipieri.

"Of course!" Such a question was almost a slight.

Malipieri went up nimbly with his lantern, and knelt on the masonry to hold the top of the ladder. Sabina mounted almost as quickly as he had done, till she reached the last few steps and could no longer

hold by the uprights. Then she put out her hands; he grasped them both and slid backwards on his knees as she landed safely on the edge. She had not felt that she could possibly fall, even if her feet slipped, and she now knew that he was strong, and that it was good to lean on him.

"You will have to stoop very low for a few steps," he said, taking up his lantern, and he kept his hold on one of her hands as he led her on. "It is not far, now," he added encouragingly, "and the rest is easy."

He guided her past the boards and stones that covered the overflow shaft, and down the inclined passage and the steps to the space between the vaults. A third lamp was burning here, close to the hole beneath which the statue lay. Malipieri lowered his lantern for her to see it.

She uttered an exclamation of surprise and delight. The pure gold that covered the bronze was as bright as if it had not lain in the vault for many centuries, twelve, fourteen, fifteen, no one could tell yet. The light fell into the huge ruby as into a tiny cup of wine.

"Can one get down?" asked Sabina breathlessly, after a moment's silence.

"Certainly. I have not gone down myself yet, but it is easy. I wanted you to be the first to see it all. You will have to sit on the edge and step upon the wrist of the statue."

Sabina gathered her skirt neatly round her and with a little help she seated herself as he directed.

"Are you sure it will not hurt it, to step on it?" she asked, looking up.

"Quite sure." Malipieri smiled, as he thought of Toto's hobnailed shoes. "When you are standing firmly, I will get down too, if there is room."

"It is not a very big hole," observed Sabina, letting herself down till her feet rested on the smooth surface. She did not quite wish to be as near him as that; at least, not yet.

"I will creep down over the arm," she said, "and then you can follow me. I hope there are no beasts," she added. "I hate spiders."

Malipieri lowered his lantern beside her, and she crept along towards the statue's head. In a few moments he was beside her, bringing both the lantern

and the lamp with him. They had both forgotten Masin's existence, as he had not yet appeared. Sabina looked about for spiders, but there were none in sight. The vault was perfectly dry, and there was hardly any dust clinging to the rough mortar that covered the stones. It was clear that the framework must have been carefully removed, and the place thoroughly cleaned, before the statue had been drawn into the vault from one end.

"He is perfectly hideous," said Sabina, as they reached the huge face. "But it is magnificent," she added, passing her gloved hand over the great golden features. "I wonder who it is meant for."

"A Roman emperor, as Hercules, I think," Malipieri answered. "It may be Commodus. We are so near that it is hard to know how the head would look if the statue were set up."

He was thinking very little of the statue just then, as he knelt on its colossal chest beside Sabina, and watched the play of the yellow light on her delicate face. There was just room for them to kneel there, side by side.

It was magnificent, as Sabina had said, the great glittering thing, lying all alone in the depths of the earth, an enormous golden demigod in his tomb.

"You are wonderful!" exclaimed Sabina, suddenly turning her face to Malipieri.

"Why?"

"To have found it," she explained.

"I wish I had found something more practical," he answered. "In my opinion this thing belongs to you, and I suppose it represents a small fortune. But the only way for you to get even a share of it will be by bringing a suit against Volterra. Half a dozen rubies like the one in the ring would have been enough for you, and you could have taken them home with you in your pocket."

"I am afraid I have none!" Sabina laughed.

"This one will be safe in mine," Malipieri answered.

"You are not going to take it?" cried Sabina, a little frightened.

"Yes. I am going to take it for you. I daresay it is worth a good deal of money."

"But—is it yours?"

"No. It is yours."

"I wonder whether I have any right to it." Sabina was perhaps justly doubtful about the proceeding.

"I do not care a straw for the government, or the laws, or Volterra, where you are concerned. You shall have what is yours. Shall we get down to the ground and see if there is anything else in the vault?"

He let himself slide over the left shoulder, and the lion's skin that was modelled over it, and Sabina followed him cautiously. But bending their heads they could now stand and walk, and there was a space fully five feet wide, between the statue and the perpendicular masonry from which the vault sprang.

Malipieri stopped short, with both lights in his hand, and uttered an exclamation.

"What is it?" asked Sabina. "Oh!" she cried, as she saw what he had come upon.

For some moments neither spoke, and they stood side by side, pressed against each other in the narrow way and gazing down, for before them lay the most beautiful marble statue Sabina had ever seen.

In the yellow light it was like a living woman asleep rather than a marble goddess, hewn and chipped, smoothed and polished into shape ages ago, by men's hands.

She lay a little turned to one side and away; the arm that was undermost was raised, so that the head seemed to be resting against it, though it was not; the other lying along and across the body, its perfect hand just gathering up a delicately futile drapery. The figure was whole and unbroken, of cream-like marble, that made soft living shadows in each dimple and hollow and seemed to quiver along the lines of beauty, the shoulder just edging forwards, the bent arm, the marvellous sweep of the limbs from hip to heel.

"It is a Venus, is it not?" asked Sabina with an odd little timidity.

"Aphrodite," answered Malipieri, almost unconciously.

It was not the plump, thick-ankled, doubtfully decent Venus which the late Greeks made for their Roman masters; it was not that at all. It was their

own Aphrodite, delicate, tender and deadly as the foam of the sea whence she came to them.

Sabina would scarcely have wondered if she had turned, and smiled, there on the ground, to brush the shadows of ages from her opening eyes, and to say "I must have slept," like a woman waked by her lover from a dream of kisses. That would have seemed natural.

Malipieri felt that he was holding his breath. Sabina was so close to him that it was as if he could feel her heart beating near his own, and as fast; and for a moment he felt one of those strong impulses which strong men know when to resist, but to resis, which is like wrestling against iron hands. He longed, as he had never longed for anything in his life, to draw her yet closer to him and to press his lips hard upon hers, without a word.

Instead, he edged away from her, and held the lights low beside the wonderful statue so that she might see it better; and Aphrodite's longing mouth, that had kissed gods, was curved with a little scorn for men.

The air was still and dry, and Sabina felt a strange

little thrill in her hair and just at the back of her neck. Perhaps, in the unknown ways of fruitful nature, the girl was dimly aware of the tremendous manly impulse of possession, so near her in that narrow and silent place. Something sent a faint blush to her cheek, and she was glad there was not much light, and she did not wish to speak for a little while.

"I hate to think that she has lain so long beside that gilded Roman monster," said Malipieri presently.

The vast brutality of the herculean emperor had not disgusted him at first; it had merely displeased his taste. Now, it became suddenly an atrocious contrast to the secret loveliness of unveiled beauty. That was a manly instinct in him, too, and Sabina felt it.

"Yes," she said, softly. "And she seems almost alive."

"The gods and goddesses live for ever," Malipieri answered, smiling and looking at her, in spite of himself.

Her eyes met his at once, and did not turn away.

He fancied that they grew darker in the shadow, and in the short silence.

"I suppose we ought to be going," she said, still looking at him. "Poor old Sassi is waiting in the cellar."

"We have not been all round the vault yet," he answered. "There may be something more."

"No, she has been alone with the monster, all these centuries. I am sure of it. There cannot be anything else."

"We had better look, nevertheless," said Malipieri. "I want you to see everything there is, and you cannot come here again—not in this way."

"Well, let us go round." Sabina moved.

"Besides," continued Malipieri, going slowly forward and lighting the way, "I am going to leave the palace the day after to-morrow."

"Why?" asked Sabina, in surprise.

"Because Volterra has requested me to go. I may have to leave Rome altogether."

"Leave Rome?"

Her own voice sounded harsh to her as she spoke the words. She had been so sure that he was in love

with her, she had begun to know that she would soon love him; and he was going away already.

"Perhaps," he answered, going on. "I am not sure."

"But——" Sabina checked herself and bit her lip.

"What?"

"Nothing. Go on, please. It must be getting late."

There was nothing more in the vault. They went all round the gilt statue without speaking, came back to the feet of the Aphrodite from the further side and stopped to look again. Still neither spoke for a long time. Malipieri held the lights in several positions, trying to find the best.

"Why must you leave Rome?" Sabina asked, at last, without turning her face to him.

"I am not sure that I must. I said I might, that was all."

Sabina tapped the ground impatiently with her foot.

"Why 'may' you have to go, then?" she asked a little sharply.

"Volterra may be able to drive me away. He will

try, because he is afraid I may wish to get a share in the discovery."

"Oh! Then you will not leave Rome, unless you are driven away?"

Malipieri tried to see her eyes, but she looked steadily down at the statue.

"No," he said. "Certainly not."

Sabina said nothing, but her expression changed and softened at once. He could see that, even in the play of the shadows. She raised her head, glanced at him, and moved to go on. After making a few steps in the direction of the aperture she stopped suddenly as if listening. Malpieri held his breath, and then he heard, too.

It was the unmistakable sound of water trickling faster and faster over stones. For an instant his blood stood will. Then he set the lamp down, grasped Sabina's wrist and hurried her along, carrying only the lantern.

"Come as fast as you can," he said, controlling his voice.

She understood that there was danger and obeyed without losing her head. As he helped her up through

the hole in the vault, she felt herself very light in his hands. In a moment he was beside her, and they were hurrying towards the inclined passage, bending low.

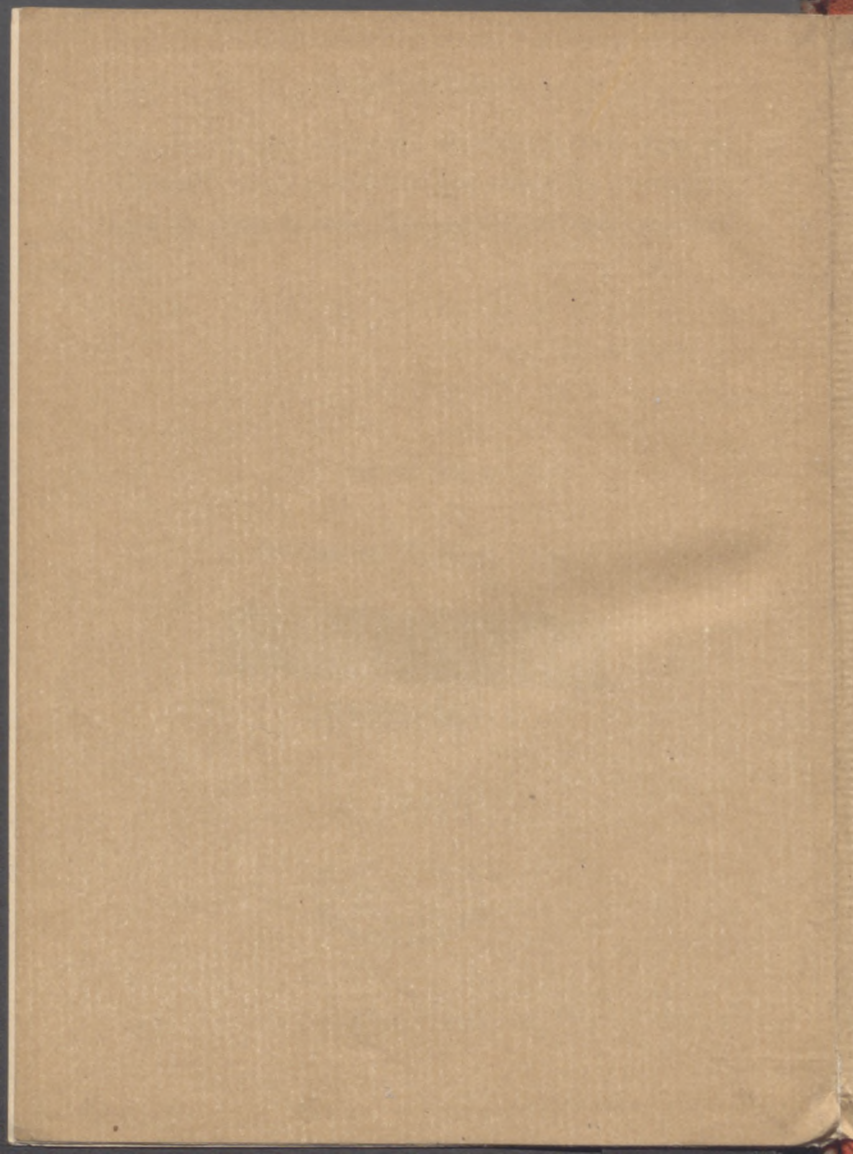
END OF VOL. I.

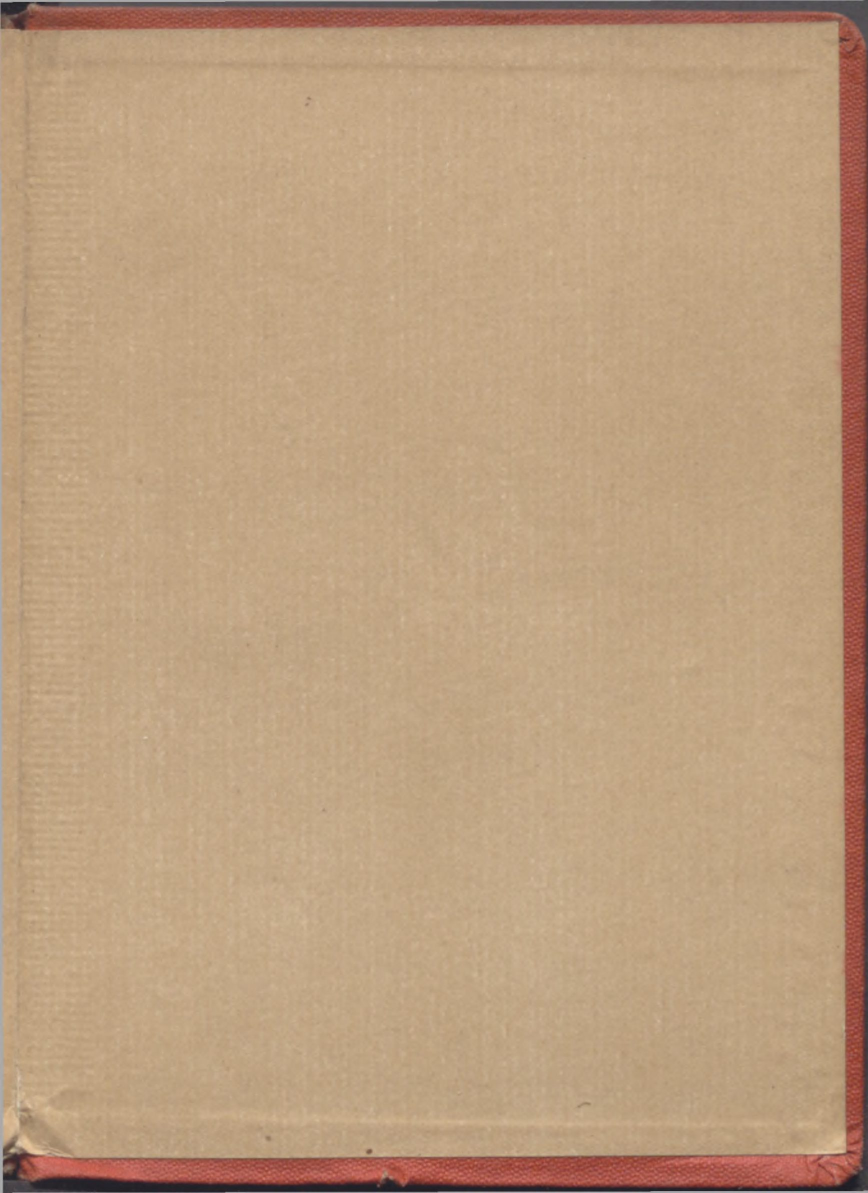
Biblioteka Główna UMK

300000755116

u.02084

PRINTING OFFICE OF THE PUBLISHER.





Biblioteka
Główna
UMK Toruń

1226573