

ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

**"MY NOVEL" —
VOLUME 12**

Edward Bulwer-Lytton
"My Novel" — Volume 12

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BOOK TWELFTH

INITIAL CHAPTER

WHEREIN THE CAXTON FAMILY REAPPEAR

"Again," quoth my father,—"again behold us! We who greeted the commencement of your narrative, who absented ourselves in the midcourse when we could but obstruct the current of events, and jostle personages more important,—we now gather round the close. Still, as the chorus to the drama, we circle round the altar with the solemn but dubious chant which prepares the audience for the completion of the appointed destinies; though still, ourselves, unaware how the skein is to be unravelled, and where the shears are to descend."

So there they stood, the Family of Caxton,—all grouping round me, all eager officiously to question, some over-anxious prematurely to criticise.

"Violante can't have voluntarily gone off with that horrid count," said my mother; "but perhaps she was deceived, like Eugenia by Mr. Bellamy, in the novel of 'CAMILLA'."

"Ha!" said my father, "and in that case it is time yet to steal a hint from Clarissa Harlowe, and make Violante die less of a broken heart than a sullied honour. She is one of those girls who ought to be killed! All things about her forebode an early tomb!"

"Dear, dear!" cried Mrs. Caxton, "I hope not!"

"Pooh, brother," said the captain, "we have had enough of the tomb in the history of poor Nora. The whole story grows out of a grave, and if to a grave it must return—if, Pisistratus, you must kill somebody—kill Levy."

"Or the count," said my mother, with unusual truculence. "Or Randal Leslie," said Squills. "I should like to have a post-mortem cast of his head,—it would be an instructive study."

Here there was a general confusion of tongues, all present conspiring to bewilder the unfortunate author with their various and discordant counsels how to wind up his story and dispose of his characters.

"Silence!" cried Pisistratus, clapping his hands to both ears. "I can no more alter the fate allotted to each of the personages whom you honour with your interest than I can change your own; like you, they must go where events lead there, urged on by their own characters and the agencies of others. Providence so pervadingly governs the universe, that you cannot strike it even out of a book. The author may beget a character, but the moment the character comes into action, it escapes from his hands,—plays its own part, and fulfils its own inevitable doom."

"Besides," said Squills, "it is easy to see, from the phrenological development of the organs in those several heads which Pisistratus has allowed us to examine, that we have seen no creations of mere fiction, but living persons, whose true history has set in movement their various bumps of Amativeness, Constructiveness, Acquisitiveness, Idealty, Wonder, Comparison, etc. They must act, and they must end, according to the influences of their crania. Thus we find in Randal Leslie the predominant organs of Constructiveness, Secretiveness, Comparison, and Eventuality, while Benevolence, Conscientiousness, Adhesiveness, are utterly nil. Now, to divine how such a man must

end, we must first see what is the general composition of the society in which he moves, in short, what other gases are brought into contact with his phlogiston. As to Leonard, and Harley, and Audley Egerton, surveying them phrenologically, I should say that—"

"Hush!" said my father, "Pisistratus has dipped his pen in the ink, and it seems to me easier for the wisest man that ever lived to account for what others have done than to predict what they should do. Phrenologists discovered that Mr. Thurtell had a very fine organ of Conscientiousness; yet, somehow or other, that erring personage contrived to knock the brains out of his friend's organ of Individuality. Therefore I rise to propose a Resolution,—that this meeting be adjourned till Pisistratus has completed his narrative; and we shall then have the satisfaction of knowing that it ought, according to every principle of nature, science, and art, to have been completed differently. Why should we deprive ourselves of that pleasure?"

"I second the motion," said the captain; "but if Levy be not hanged, I shall say that there is an end of all poetical justice."

"Take care of poor Helen," said Blanche, tenderly: "nor, that I would have you forget Violante."

"Pish! and sit down, or they shall both die old maids." Frightened at that threat, Blanche, with a deprecating look, drew her stool quietly near me, as if to place her two /proteges/ in an atmosphere mesmerized to matrimonial attractions; and my mother set hard to work—at a new frock for the baby. Unsoftened by these undue female influences, Pisistratus wrote on at the dictation of the relentless Fates. His pen was of iron, and his heart was of granite. He was as insensible to the existence of wife and baby as if he had never paid a house bill, nor rushed from a nursery at the sound of an infant squall. O blessed privilege of Authorship!

"O testudinis aureae
Dulcem quae strepitum, Pieri, temperas!
O mutis quoque piscibus
Donatura cyeni, si libeat, sonum!"

["O Muse, who dost temper the sweet sound of the golden shell of the tortoise,
and couldst also give, were it needed, to silent fishes the song of the swan."]

CHAPTER II

It is necessary to go somewhat back in the course of this narrative, and account to the reader for the disappearance of Violante.

It may be remembered that Peschiera, scared by the sudden approach of Lord L'Estrange, had little time for further words to the young Italian, than those which expressed his intention to renew the conference, and press for her decision. But the next day, when he re-entered the garden, secretly and stealthily, as before, Violante did not appear. And after watching round the precincts till dusk, the count retreated, with an indignant conviction that his arts had failed to enlist on his side either the heart or the imagination of his intended victim. He began now to revolve and to discuss with Levy the possibilities of one of those bold and violent measures, which were favoured by his reckless daring and desperate condition. But Levy treated with such just ridicule any suggestion to abstract Violante by force from Lord Lansmere's house, so scouted the notions of nocturnal assault, with the devices of scaling windows and rope-ladders, that the count reluctantly abandoned that romance of villany so unsuited to our sober capital, and which would no doubt have terminated in his capture by the police, with the prospect of committal to the House of Correction.

Levy himself found his invention at fault, and Randal Leslie was called into consultation. The usurer had contrived that Randal's schemes of fortune and advancement were so based upon Levy's aid and connivance, that the young man, with all his desire rather to make instruments of other men, than to be himself their instrument, found his superior intellect as completely a slave to Levy's more experienced craft, as ever subtle Genius of air was subject to the vulgar Sorcerer of earth.

His acquisition of the ancestral acres, his anticipated seat in parliament, his chance of ousting Frank from the heritage of Hazeldean, were all as strings that pulled him to and fro, like a puppet in the sleek, filbert-nailed fingers of the smiling showman, who could exhibit him to the admiration of a crowd, or cast him away into dust and lumber.

Randal gnawed his lip in the sullen wrath of a man who bides his hour of future emancipation, and lent his brain to the hire of the present servitude, in mechanical acquiescence. The inherent superiority of the profound young schemer became instantly apparent over the courage of Peschiera and the practised wit of the baron.

"Your sister," said Randal, to the former, "must be the active agent in the first and most difficult part of your enterprise. Violante cannot be taken by force from Lord Lansmere's,—she must be induced to leave it with her own consent. A female is needed here. Woman can best decoy woman."

"Admirably said," quoth the count; "but Beatrice has grown restive, and though her dowry, and therefore her very marriage with that excellent young Hazeldean, depend on my own alliance with my fair kinswoman, she has grown so indifferent to my success that I dare not reckon on her aid. Between you and me, though she was once very eager to be married, she now seems to shrink from the notion; and I have no other hold over her."

"Has she not seen some one, and lately, whom she prefers to poor Frank?"

"I suspect that she has; but I know not whom, unless it be that detested L'Estrange."

"Ah, well, well. Interfere with her no further yourself, but have all in readiness to quit England, as you had before proposed, as soon as Violante be in your power."

"All is in readiness," said the count. "Levy has agreed to purchase a famous sailing-vessel of one of his clients. I have engaged a score or so of determined outcasts, accustomed to the sea,—Genoese, Corsicans, Sardinians, ex-Carbonari of the best sort,—no silly patriots, but liberal cosmopolitans, who have iron at the disposal of any man's gold. I have a priest to perform the nuptial service, and deaf to any fair lady's 'No.' Once at sea, and wherever I land, Violante will lean on my arm as Countess of Peschiera."

"But Violante," said Randal, doggedly, determined not to yield to the disgust with which the count's audacious cynicism filled even him—"but Violante cannot be removed in broad daylight at once to such a vessel, nor from a quarter so populous as that in which your sister resides."

"I have thought of that too," said the count; "my emissaries have found me a house close by the river, and safe for our purpose as the dungeons of Venice."

"I wish not to know all this," answered Randal, quickly; "you will instruct Madame di Negra where to take Violante.—my task limits itself to the fair inventions that belong to intellect; what belongs to force is not in my province. I will go at once to your sister, whom I think I can influence more effectually than you can; though later I may give you a hint to guard against the chance of her remorse. Meanwhile as, the moment Violante disappears, suspicion would fall upon you, show yourself constantly in public surrounded by your friends. Be able to account for every hour of your time—"

"An alibi?" interrupted the *ci-devant* solicitor.

"Exactly so, Baron. Complete the purchase of the vessel, and let the count man it as he proposes. I will communicate with you both as soon as I can put you into action. To-day I shall have much to do; it will be done."

As Randal left the room, Levy followed him.

"What you propose to do will be well done, no doubt," quoth the usurer, linking his arm in Randal's; "but take care that you don't get yourself into a scrape, so as to damage your character. I have great hopes of you in public life; and in public life character is necessary,—that is, so far as honour is concerned."

"I damage my character!—and for a Count Peschiera!" said Randal, opening his eyes. "I! What do you take me for?"

The baron let go his hold.

"This boy ought to rise very high," said he to himself, as he turned back to the count.

CHAPTER III

Randal's acute faculty of comprehension had long since surmised the truth that Beatrice's views and temper of mind had been strangely and suddenly altered by some such revolution as passion only can effect; that pique or disappointment had mingled with the motive which had induced her to accept the hand of his rash young kinsman; and that, instead of the resigned indifference with which she might at one time have contemplated any marriage that could free her from a position that perpetually galled her pride, it was now with a repugnance, visible to Randal's keen eye, that she shrank from the performance of that pledge which Frank had so dearly bought. The temptations which the count could hold out to her to become his accomplice in designs of which the fraud and perfidy would revolt her better nature had ceased to be of avail. A dowry had grown valueless, since it would but hasten the nuptials from which she recoiled. Randal felt that he could not secure her aid, except by working on a passion so turbulent as to confound her judgment. Such a passion he recognized in jealousy. He had once doubted if Harley were the object of her love; yet, after all, was it not probable? He knew, at least, of no one else to suspect. If so, he had but to whisper, "Violante is your rival. Violante removed, your beauty may find its natural effect; if not, you are an Italian, and you will be at least avenged." He saw still more reason to suppose that Lord L'Estrange was indeed the one by whom he could rule Beatrice, since, the last time he had seen her, she had questioned him with much eagerness as to the family of Lord Lansmere, especially as to the female part of it. Randal had then judged it prudent to avoid speaking of Violante, and feigned ignorance; but promised to ascertain all particulars by the time he next saw the marchesa. It was the warmth with which she had thanked him that had set his busy mind at work to conjecture the cause of her curiosity so earnestly aroused, and to ascribe that cause to jealousy. If Harley loved Violante (as Randal himself had before supposed), the little of passion that the young man admitted to himself was enlisted in aid of Peschiera's schemes. For though Randal did not love Violante, he cordially disliked L'Estrange, and would have gone as far to render that dislike vindictive, as a cold reasoner, intent upon worldly fortunes, will ever suffer mere hate to influence him.

"At the worst," thought Randal, "if it be not Harley, touch the chord of jealousy, and its vibration will direct me right."

Thus soliloquizing, he arrived at Madame di Negra's.

Now, in reality the marchesa's inquiries as to Lord Lansmere's family had their source in the misguided, restless, despairing interest with which she still clung to the image of the young poet, whom Randal had no reason to suspect. That interest had become yet more keen from the impatient misery she had felt ever since she had plighted herself to another. A wild hope that she might yet escape, a vague regretful thought that she had been too hasty in dismissing Leonard from her presence,—that she ought rather to have courted his friendship, and contended against her unknown rival,—at times drew her wayward mind wholly from the future to which she had consigned herself. And, to do her justice, though her sense of duty was so defective, and the principles which should have guided her conduct were so lost to her sight, still her feelings towards the generous Hazeldean were not so hard and blunted but what her own ingratitude added to her torment; and it seemed as if the sole atonement she could make to him was to find an excuse to withdraw her promise, and save him from herself. She had caused Leonard's steps to be watched; she had found that he visited at Lord Lansmere's; that he had gone there often, and stayed there long. She had learned in the neighbourhood that Lady Lansmere had one or two young female guests staying with her. Surely this was the attraction—here was the rival!

Randal found Beatrice in a state of mind that answered his purpose; and first turning his conversation on Harley, and noting that her countenance did not change, by little and little he drew forth her secret.

Then said Randal, gravely, "If one whom you honour with a tender thought visits at Lord Lansmere's house, you have, indeed, cause to fear for yourself, to hope for your brother's success in the object which has brought him to England; for a girl of surpassing beauty is a guest in Lord Lansmere's house, and I will now tell you that that girl is she whom Count Peschiera would make his bride."

As Randal thus spoke, and saw how his listener's brow darkened and her eye flashed, he felt that his accomplice was secured. Violante! Had not Leonard spoken of Violante, and with such praise? Had not his boyhood been passed under her eyes? Who but Violante could be the rival? Beatrice's abrupt exclamations, after a moment's pause, revealed to Randal the advantage he had gained. And partly by rousing her jealousy into revenge, partly by flattering her love with assurances that, if Violante were fairly removed from England, were the wife of Count Peschiera, it would be impossible that Leonard could remain insensible to her own attractions; that he, Randal, would undertake to free her honourably from her engagement to Frank Hazeldean, and obtain from her brother the acquittal of the debt which had first fettered her hand to that confiding suitor,—he did not quit the marchesa until she had not only promised to do all that Randal might suggest, but impetuously urged him to mature his plans, and hasten the hour to accomplish them. Randal then walked some minutes musing and slow along the streets, revolving the next meshes in his elaborate and most subtle web. And here his craft luminously devised its masterpiece.

It was necessary, during any interval that might elapse between Violante's disappearance and her departure from England, in order to divert suspicion from Peschiera (who might otherwise be detained), that some cause for her voluntary absence from Lord Lansmere's should be at least assignable; it was still more necessary that Randal himself should stand wholly clear from any surmise that he could have connived at the count's designs, even should their actual perpetrator be discovered or conjectured. To effect these objects, Randal hastened to Norwood, and obtained an interview with Riccabocca. In seeming agitation and alarm, he informed the exile that he had reason to know that Peschiera had succeeded in obtaining a secret interview with Violante, and he feared had made a certain favourable impression on her mind; and speaking as if with the jealousy of a lover, he entreated Riccabocca to authorize Randal's direct proposals to Violante, and to require her consent to their immediate nuptials.

The poor Italian was confounded with the intelligence conveyed to him; and his almost superstitious fears of his brilliant enemy, conjoined with his opinion of the susceptibility to outward attractions common to all the female sex, made him not only implicitly credit, but even exaggerate, the dangers that Randal intimated. The idea of his daughter's marriage with Randal, towards which he had lately cooled, he now gratefully welcomed.

But his first natural suggestion was to go, or send, for Violante, and bring her to his own house. This, however, Randal artfully opposed.

"Alas! I know," said he, "that Peschiera has discovered your retreat, and surely she would be far less safe here than where she is now!"

"But, diavolo! you say the man has seen her where she is now, in spite of all Lady Lansmere's promises and Harley's precautions."

"True. Of this Peschiera boasted to me. He effected it not, of course, openly, but in some disguise. I am sufficiently, however, in his confidence—any man may be that with so audacious a braggart—to deter him from renewing his attempt for some days. Meanwhile, I or yourself will leave discovered some surer home than this, to which you can remove, and then will be the proper time to take back your daughter. And for the present, if you will send by me a letter to enjoin her to receive me as her future bridegroom, it will necessarily divert all thought at once from the count; I shall be able to detect by the manner in which she receives me, how far the count has overstated the effect he pretends to have produced. You can give me also a letter to Lady Lansmere, to prevent your daughter

coming hither. Oh, sir, do not reason with me. Have indulgence for my lover's fears. Believe that I advise for the best. Have I not the keenest interest to do so?"

Like many a man who is wise enough with pen and paper before him, and plenty of time wherewith to get up his wisdom, Riccabocca was flurried, nervous, and confused when that wisdom was called upon for any ready exertion. From the tree of knowledge he had taken grafts enough to serve for a forest; but the whole forest could not spare him a handy walking-stick. The great folio of the dead Machiavelli lay useless before him,— the living Machiavelli of daily life stood all puissant by his side. The Sage was as supple to the Schemer as the Clairvoyant is to the Mesmerist; and the lean slight fingers of Randal actually dictated almost the very words that Riccabocca wrote to his child and her hostess.

The philosopher would have liked to consult his wife; but he was ashamed to confess that weakness. Suddenly he remembered Harley, and said, as Randal took up the letters which Riccabocca had indited,

"There, that will give us time; and I will send to Lord L'Estrange and talk to him."

"My noble friend," replied Randal, mournfully, "may I entreat you not to see Lord L'Estrange until at least I have pleaded my cause to your daughter,—until, indeed, she is no longer under his father's roof?"

"And why?"

"Because I presume that you are sincere when you deign to receive me as a son-in-law, and because I am sure that Lord L'Estrange would hear with distaste of your disposition in my favour. Am I not right?"

Riccabocca was silent.

"And though his arguments would fail with a man of your honour and discernment, they might have more effect on the young mind of your child. Think, I beseech you, the more she is set against me, the more accessible she may be to the arts of Peschiera. Speak not, therefore, I implore you, to Lord L'Estrange till Violante has accepted my hand, or at least until she is again under your charge; otherwise take back your letter,— it would be of no avail."

"Perhaps you are right. Certainly Lord L'Estrange is prejudiced against you; or rather, he thinks too much of what I have been, too little of what I am."

"Who can see you, and not do so? I pardon him." After kissing the hand which the exile modestly sought to withdraw from that act of homage, Randal pocketed the letters; and, as if struggling with emotion, rushed from the house.

Now, O curious reader, if thou wilt heedfully observe to what uses Randal Leslie put those letters,—what speedy and direct results he drew forth from devices which would seem to an honest simple understanding the most roundabout, wire-drawn wastes of invention,—I almost fear that in thine admiration for his cleverness, thou mayest half forget thy contempt for his knavery.

But when the head is very full, it does not do to have the heart very empty; there is such a thing as being top-heavy!

CHAPTER IV

Helen and Violante had been conversing together, and Helen had obeyed her guardian's injunction, and spoken, though briefly, of her positive engagement to Harley. However much Violante had been prepared for the confidence, however clearly she had divined that engagement, however before persuaded that the dream of her childhood was fled forever, still the positive truth, coming from Helen's own lips, was attended with that anguish which proves how impossible it is to prepare the human heart for the final verdict which slays its future. She did not, however, betray her emotion to Helen's artless eyes; sorrow, deep-seated, is seldom self-betrayed. But, after a little while, she crept away; and, forgetful of Peschiera, of all things that could threaten danger (what danger could harm her more!) she glided from the house, and went her desolate way under the leafless wintry trees. Ever and anon she paused, ever and anon she murmured the same words: "If she loved him, I could be consoled; but she does not! or how could she have spoken to me so calmly! how could her very looks have been so sad! Heartless! heartless!"

Then there came on her a vehement resentment against poor Helen, that almost took the character of scorn or hate,—its excess startled herself. "Am I grown so mean?" she said; and tears that humbled her rushed to her eyes. "Can so short a time alter one thus? Impossible!"

Randal Leslie rang at the front gate, inquired for Violante, and, catching sight of her form as he walked towards the house, advanced boldly and openly. His voice startled her as she leaned against one of the dreary trees, still muttering to herself,—forlorn. "I have a letter to you from your father, Signorina," said Randal; "but before I give it to your hands, some explanation is necessary. Condescend, then, to hear me." Violante shook her head impatiently, and stretched forth her hand for the letter. Randal observed her countenance with his keen, cold, searching eye; but he still withheld the letter, and continued, after a pause,

"I know that you were born to princely fortunes; and the excuse for my addressing you now is, that your birthright is lost to you, at least unless you can consent to a union with the man who has despoiled you of your heritage,—a union which your father would deem dishonour to yourself and him. Signorina, I might have presumed to love you, but I should not have named that love, had your father not encouraged me by his assent to my suit."

Violante turned to the speaker, her face eloquent with haughty surprise. Randal met the gaze unmoved. He continued, without warmth, and in the tone of one who reasons calmly, rather than of one who feels acutely,

"The man of whom I spoke is in pursuit of you. I have cause to believe that this person has already intruded himself upon you. Ah, your countenance owns it; you have seen Peschiera? This house is, then, less safe than your father deemed it. No house is safe for you but a husband's. I offer to you my name,—it is a gentleman's; my fortune, which is small; the participation in my hopes of the future, which are large. I place now your father's letter in your hand, and await your answer." Randal bowed slightly, gave the letter to Violante, and retired a few paces.

It was not his object to conciliate Violante's affection, but rather to excite her repugnance, or at least her terror,—we must wait to discover why; so he stood apart, seemingly in a kind of self-confident indifference, while the girl read the following letter:

"My child, receive with favour Mr. Leslie. He has my consent to address you as a suitor. Circumstances of which it is needless now to inform you render it essential to my very peace and happiness that your marriage should be immediate. In a word, I have given my promise to Mr. Leslie, and I confidently leave it to the daughter of my House to redeem the pledge of her anxious and tender father."

The letter dropped from Violante's hand. Randal approached, and restored it to her. Their eyes met. Violante recoiled.

"I cannot marry you," said she, passionately.

"Indeed?" answered Randal, dryly. "Is it because you cannot love me?"

"Yes."

"I did not expect that you would as yet, and I still persist in my suit. I have promised to your father that I would not recede before your first unconsidered refusal."

"I will go to my father at once."

"Does he request you to do so in his letter? Look again. Pardon me, but he foresaw your impetuosity; and I have another note for Lady Lansmere, in which he begs her ladyship not to sanction your return to him (should you so wish) until he come or send for you himself. He will do so whenever your word has redeemed his own."

"And do you dare to talk to me thus, and yet pretend to love me?"

Randal smiled ironically.

"I pretend but to wed you. Love is a subject on which I might have spoken formerly, or may speak hereafter. I give you some little time to consider. When I next call, let me hope that we may fix the day for our wedding."

"Never!"

"You will be, then, the first daughter of your House who disobeyed a father; and you will have this additional crime; that you disobeyed him in his sorrow, his exile, and his fall."

Violante wrung her hands.

"Is there no choice, no escape?"

"I see none for either. Listen to me. I love you, it is true; but it is not for my happiness to marry one who dislikes me, nor for my ambition to connect myself with one whose poverty is greater than my own. I marry but to keep my plighted faith with your father, and to save you from a villain you would hate more than myself, and from whom no walls are a barrier, no laws a defence. One person, indeed, might perhaps have preserved you from the misery you seem to anticipate with me; that person might defeat the plans of your father's foe,—effect, it might be, terms which could revoke his banishment and restore his honours; that person is—"

"Lord L'Estrange?"

"Lord L'Estrange!" repeated Randal, sharply, and watching her pale parted lips and her changing colour; "Lord L'Estrange! What could he do? Why did you name him?"

Violante turned aside. "He saved my father once," said she, feelingly.

"And has interfered, and trifled, and promised, Heaven knows what, ever since: yet to what end? Pooh! The person I speak of your father would not consent to see, would not believe if he saw her; yet she is generous, noble, could sympathize with you both. She is the sister of your father's enemy, the Marchesa di Negra. I am convinced that she has great influence with her brother,—that she has known enough of his secrets to awe him into renouncing all designs on yourself; but it is idle now to speak of her."

"No, no," exclaimed Violante. "Tell me where she lives—I will see her."

"Pardon me, I cannot obey you; and, indeed, her own pride is now aroused by your father's unfortunate prejudices against her. It is too late to count upon her aid. You turn from me,—my presence is unwelcome. I rid you of it now. But welcome or unwelcome, later you must endure it—and for life."

Randal again bowed with formal ceremony, walked towards the house, and asked for Lady Lansmere. The countess was at home. Randal delivered Riccabocca's note, which was very short, implying that he feared Peschiera had discovered his retreat, and requesting Lady Lansmere to retain Violante, whatever her own desire, till her ladyship heard from him again.

The countess read, and her lip curled in disdain. "Strange!" said she, half to herself.

"Strange!" said Randal, "that a man like your correspondent should fear one like the Count di Peschiera. Is that it?"

"Sir," said the countess, a little surprised, "strange that any man should fear another in a country like ours!"

"I don't know," said Randal, with his low soft laugh; "I fear many men, and I know many who ought to fear me; yet at every turn of the street one meets a policeman!"

"Yes," said Lady Lansmere. "But to suppose that this profligate foreigner could carry away a girl like Violante against her will, —a man she has never seen, and whom she must have been taught to hate!"

"Be on your guard, nevertheless, I pray you, madam; 'Where there's a will there's a way!'"

Randal took his leave, and returned to Madame di Negra's. He stayed with her an hour, revisited the count, and then strolled to Limmer's.

"Randal," said the squire, who looked pale and worn, but who scorned to confess the weakness with which he still grieved and yearned for his rebellious son, "Randal, you have nothing now to do in London; can you come and stay with me, and take to farming? I remember that you showed a good deal of sound knowledge about thin sowing."

"My dear sir, I will come to you as soon as the general election is over."

"What the deuce have you got to do with the general election?"

"Mr. Egerton has some wish that I should enter parliament; indeed, negotiations for that purpose are now on foot."

The squire shook his head. "I don't like my half-brother's politics."

"I shall be quite independent of them," cried Randal, loftily; "that independence is the condition for which I stipulate."

"Glad to hear it; and if you do come into parliament, I hope you'll not turn your back on the land?"

"Turn my back on the land!" cried Randal, with devout horror. "Oh, sir, I am not so unnatural!"

"That's the right way to put it," quoth the credulous squire; "it is unnatural! It is turning one's back on one's own mother. The land is a mother—"

"To those who live by her, certainly,—a mother," said Randal, gravely.

"And though, indeed, my father starves by her rather than lives, and Rood Hall is not like Hazeldean, still—I—"

"Hold your tongue," interrupted the squire; "I want to talk to you. Your grandmother was a Hazeldean."

"Her picture is in the drawing-room at Rood. People think me very like her."

"Indeed!" said the squire. "The Hazeldeans are generally inclined to be stout and rosy, which you are certainly not. But no fault of yours. We are all as Heaven made us. However, to the point. I am going to alter my will,"—(said with a choking gulp). "This is the rough draft for the lawyers to work upon."

"Pray, pray, sir, do not speak to me on such a subject. I cannot bear to contemplate even the possibility of—of—"

"My death? Ha, ha! Nonsense. My own son calculated on the date of it by the insurance-tables. Ha, ha, ha! A very fashionable son, eh! Ha, ha!"

"Poor Frank! do not let him suffer for a momentary forgetfulness of right feeling. When he comes to be married to that foreign lady, and be a father himself, he—"

"Father himself!" burst forth the squire. "Father to a swarm of sallow-faced Popish tadpoles! No foreign frogs shall hop about my grave in Hazeldean churchyard. No, no. But you need not look so reproachful,— I 'm not going to disinherit Frank."

"Of course not," said Randal, with a bitter curve in the lip that rebelled against the joyous smile which he sought to impose on it.

"No; I shall leave him the life-interest in the greater part of the property; but if he marry a foreigner, her children will not succeed,— you will stand after him in that case. But—now don't interrupt me—but Frank looks as if he would live longer than you, so small thanks to me for my good intentions, you may say. I mean to do more for you than a mere barren place in the entail. What do you say to marrying?"

"Just as you please," said Randal, meekly.

"Good. There's Miss Sticktorights disengaged,—great heiress. Her lands run onto Rood. At one time I thought of her for that graceless puppy of mine. But I can manage more easily to make up the match for you. There's a mortgage on the property; old Sticktorights would be very glad to pay it off. I'll pay it out of the Hazeldean estate, and give up the Right of Way into the bargain. You understand?"

"So come down as soon as you can, and court the young lady yourself."

Randal expressed his thanks with much grateful eloquence; and he then delicately insinuated, that if the squire ever did mean to bestow upon him any pecuniary favours (always without injury to Frank), it would gratify him more to win back some portions of the old estate of Rood, than to have all the acres of the Sticktorights, however free from any other incumbrance than the amiable heiress.

The squire listened to Randal with benignant attention. This wish the country gentleman could well understand and sympathize with. He promised to inquire into the matter, and to see what could be done with old Thornhill.

Randal here let out that Mr. Thornhill was about to dispose of a large slice of the ancient Leslie estate through Levy, and that he, Randal, could thus get it at a more moderate price than would be natural, if Mr. Thornhill knew that his neighbour the squire would bid for the purchase.

"Better say nothing about it either to Levy or Thornhill."

"Right," said the squire. "No proprietor likes to sell to another proprietor, in the same shire, as largely acred as himself: it spoils the balance of power. See to the business yourself; and if I can help you with the purchase (after that boy is married,—I can attend to nothing before), why, I will."

Randal now went to Egerton's. The statesman was in his library, settling the accounts of his house-steward, and giving brief orders for the reduction of his establishment to that of an ordinary private gentleman.

"I may go abroad if I lose my election," said Egerton, condescending to assign to his servant a reason for his economy; "and if I do not lose it, still, now I am out of office, I shall live much in private."

"Do I disturb you, sir?" said Randal, entering.

"No; I have just done."

The house-steward withdrew, much surprised and disgusted, and meditating the resignation of his own office,—in order, not like Egerton, to save, but to spend. The house steward had private dealings with Baron Levy, and was in fact the veritable X. Y. of the "Times," for whom Dick Avenel had been mistaken. He invested his wages and perquisites in the discount of bills; and it was part of his own money that had (though unknown to himself) swelled the last L5,000 which Egerton had borrowed from Levy.

"I have settled with our committee; and, with Lord Lansmere's consent," said Egerton, briefly, "you will stand for the borough, as we proposed, in conjunction with myself. And should any accident happen to me,—that is, should I vacate this seat from any cause,—you may succeed to it, very shortly perhaps. Ingratiate yourself with the electors, and speak at the public-houses for both of us. I shall stand on my dignity, and leave the work of the election to you. No thanks,—you know how I hate thanks. Good-night."

"I never stood so near to fortune and to power," said Randal, as he slowly undressed. "And I owe it but to knowledge,—knowledge of men, life, of all that books can teach us."

So his slight thin fingers dropped the extinguisher on the candle, and the prosperous Schemer laid himself down to rest in the dark. Shutters closed, curtains drawn—never was rest more quiet, never was room more dark!

That evening, Harley had dined at his father's. He spoke much to Helen, scarcely at all to Violante. But it so happened that when later, and a little while before he took his leave, Helen, at his request, was playing a favourite air of his, Lady Lausmere, who had been seated between him and Violante, left the room, and Violante turned quickly towards Harley.

"Do you know the Marchesa di Negra?" she asked, in a hurried voice.

"A little. Why do you ask?"

"That is my secret," answered Violante, trying to smile with her old frank, childlike archness. "But, tell me, do you think better of her than of her brother?"

"Certainly. I believe her heart to be good, and that she is not without generous qualities."

"Can you not induce my father to see her? Would you not counsel him to do so?"

"Any wish of yours is a law to me," answered Harley, gallantly. "You wish your father to see her? I will try and persuade him to do so. Now, in return, confide to me your secret. What is your object?"

"Leave to return to my Italy. I care not for honours, for rank; and even my father has ceased to regret their loss. But the land, the native land—Oh, to see it once more! Oh, to die there!"

"Die! You children have so lately left heaven, that ye talk as if ye could return there, without passing through the gates of sorrow, infirmity, and age! But I thought you were content with England. Why so eager to leave it? Violante, you are unkind to us,—to Helen, who already loves you so well." As Harley spoke, Helen rose from the piano, and approaching Violante, placed her hand caressingly on the Italian's shoulder. Violante shivered, and shrunk away. The eyes both of Harley and Helen followed her. Harley's eyes were very grave and thoughtful.

"Is she not changed—your friend?" said he, looking down.

"Yes, lately; much changed. I fear there is something on her mind,— I know not what."

"Ah," muttered Harley, "it may be so; but at your age and hers, nothing rests on the mind long. Observe, I say the mind,—the heart is more tenacious."

Helen sighed softly, but deeply.

"And therefore," continued Harley, half to himself, "we can detect when something is on the mind,—some care, some fear, some trouble. But when the heart closes over its own more passionate sorrow, who can discover, who conjecture? Yet you at least, my pure, candid Helen,—you might subject mind and heart alike to the fabled window of glass."

"Oh, no!" cried Helen, involuntarily.

"Oh, yes! Do not let me think that you have one secret I may not know, or one sorrow I may not share. For, in our relationship, that would be deceit."

He pressed her hand with more than usual tenderness as he spoke, and shortly afterwards left the house.

And all that night Helen felt like a guilty thing,—more wretched even than Violante.

CHAPTER V

Early the next morning, while Violante was still in her room, a letter addressed to her came by the post. The direction was in a strange hand. She opened it, and read, in Italian, what is thus translated:—

I would gladly see you, but I cannot call openly at the house in which you live. Perhaps I may have it in my power to arrange family dissensions,—to repair any wrongs your father may have sustained. Perhaps I may be enabled to render yourself an essential service. But for all this it is necessary that we should meet and confer frankly. Meanwhile time presses, delay is forbidden. Will you meet me, an hour after noon, in the lane, just outside the private gate of your gardens? I shall be alone, and you cannot fear to meet one of your own sex, and a kinswoman. Ah, I so desire to see you! Come, I beseech you.

BEATRICE.

Violante read, and her decision was taken. She was naturally fearless, and there was little that she would not have braved for the chance of serving her father. And now all peril seemed slight in comparison with that which awaited her in Randal's suit, backed by her father's approval. Randal had said that Madame di Negra alone could aid her in escape from himself. Harley had said that Madame di Negra had generous qualities; and who but Madame di Negra would write herself a kinswoman, and sign herself "Beatrice"?

A little before the appointed hour, she stole unobserved through the trees, opened the little gate, and found herself in the quiet, solitary lane. In a few minutes; a female figure came up, with a quick, light step; and throwing aside her veil, said, with a sort of wild, suppressed energy, "It is you! I was truly told. Beautiful! beautiful! And oh! what youth and what bloom!"

The voice dropped mournfully; and Violante, surprised by the tone, and blushing under the praise, remained a moment silent; then she said, with some hesitation,

"You are, I presume, the Marchesa di Negra? And I have heard of you enough to induce me to trust you."

"Of me! From whom?" asked Beatrice, almost fiercely. "From Mr Leslie, and—and—"

"Go on; why falter?"

"From Lord L'Estrange."

"From no one else?"

"Not that I remember."

Beatrice sighed heavily, and let fall her veil. Some foot-passengers now came up the lane; and seeing two ladies, of mien so remarkable, turned round, and gazed curiously.

"We cannot talk here," said Beatrice, impatiently; "and I have so much to say, so much to know. Trust me yet more; it is for yourself I speak. My carriage waits yonder. Come home with me,—I will not detain you an hour; and I will bring you back."

This proposition startled Violante. She retreated towards the gate with a gesture of dissent. Beatrice laid her hand on the girl's arm, and again lifting her veil, gazed at her with a look half of scorn, half of admiration.

"I, too, would once have recoiled from one step beyond the formal line by which the world divides liberty from woman. Now see how bold I am. Child, child, do not trifle with your destiny. You may never again have the same occasion offered to you. It is not only to meet you that I am here; I must know something of you,—something of your heart. Why shrink? Is not the heart pure?"

Violante made no answer; but her smile, so sweet and so lofty, humbled the questioner it rebuked.

"I may restore to Italy your father," said Beatrice, with an altered voice. "Come!"

Violante approached, but still hesitatingly. "Not by union with your brother?"

"You dread that so much then?"

"Dread it? No. Why should I dread what is in my power to reject. But if you can really restore my father, and by nobler means, you may save me for—"

Violante stopped abruptly; the marchesa's eyes sparkled.

"Save you for—ah! I can guess what you leave unsaid. But come, come! more strangers, see; you shall tell me all at my own house. And if you can make one sacrifice, why, I will save you all else. Come, or farewell forever!"

Violante placed her hand in Beatrice's, with a frank confidence that brought the accusing blood into the marchesa's cheek.

"We are women both," said Violante; "we descend from the same noble House; we have knelt alike to the same Virgin Mother; why should I not believe and trust you?"

"Why not?" muttered Beatrice, feebly; and she moved on, with her head bowed on her breast, and all the pride of her step was gone.

They reached a carriage that stood by the angle of the road. Beatrice spoke a word apart to the driver, who was an Italian, in the pay of the count; the man nodded, and opened the carriage door. The ladies entered. Beatrice pulled down the blinds; the man remounted his box, and drove on rapidly. Beatrice, leaning back, groaned aloud. Violante drew nearer to her side. "Are you in pain?" said she, with her tender, melodious voice; "or can I serve you as you would serve me?"

"Child, give me your hand, and be silent while I look at you. Was I ever so fair as this? Never! And what deeps—what deeps roll between her and me!"

She said this as of some one absent, and again sank into silence; but continued still to gaze on Violante, whose eyes, veiled by their long fringes, drooped beneath the gaze.

Suddenly Beatrice started, exclaiming, "No, it shall not be!" and placed her hand on the check-string.

"What shall not be?" asked Violante, surprised by the cry and the action. Beatrice paused; her breast heaved visibly under her dress.

"Stay," she said slowly. "As you say, we are both women of the same noble House; you would reject the suit of my brother, yet you have seen him; his the form to please the eye, his the arts that allure the fancy. He offers to you rank, wealth, your father's pardon and recall. If I could remove the objections which your father entertains, prove that the count has less wronged him than he deems, would you still reject the rank and the wealth and the hand of Giulio Franzini?"

"Oh, yes, yes; were his hand a king's!"

"Still, then, as woman to woman—both, as you say, akin, and sprung from the same lineage—still, then, answer me, answer me, for you speak to one who has loved—Is it not that you love another? Speak."

"I do not know. Nay, not love,—it was a romance; it is a thing impossible. Do not question,—I cannot answer." And the broken words were choked by sudden tears.

Beatrice's face grew hard and pitiless. Again she lowered her veil, and withdrew her hand from the check-string; but the coachman had felt the touch, and halted. "Drive on," said Beatrice, "as you were directed."

Both were now long silent,—Violante with great difficulty recovering from her emotion, Beatrice breathing hard, and her arms folded firmly across her breast.

Meanwhile the carriage had entered London; it passed the quarter in which Madame di Negra's house was situated; it rolled fast over a bridge; it whirled through a broad thoroughfare, then through defiles of lanes, with tall blank dreary houses on either side. On it went, and on, till Violante suddenly took alarm. "Do you live so far?" she said, drawing up the blind, and gazing in dismay on the strange, ignoble suburb. "I shall be missed already. Oh, let us turn back, I beseech you!"

"We are nearly there now. The driver has taken this road in order to avoid those streets in which we might have been seen together,—perhaps by my brother himself. Listen to me, and talk of-of the lover whom you rightly associate with a vain romance. 'Impossible,'—yes, it is impossible!"

Violante clasped her hands before her eyes, and bowed down her head. "Why are you so cruel?" said she. "This is not what you promised. How are you to serve my father, how restore him to his country? This is what you promised!"

"If you consent to one sacrifice, I will fulfil that promise. We are arrived."

The carriage stopped before a tall, dull house, divided from other houses by a high wall that appeared to enclose a yard, and standing at the end of a narrow lane, which was bounded on the one side by the Thames. In that quarter the river was crowded with gloomy, dark-looking vessels and craft, all lying lifeless under the wintry sky.

The driver dismounted and rang the bell. Two swarthy Italian faces presented themselves at the threshold. Beatrice descended lightly, and gave her hand to Violante. "Now, here we shall be secure," said she; "and here a few minutes may suffice to decide your fate."

As the door closed on Violante, who, now waking to suspicion, to alarm, looked fearfully round the dark and dismal hall, Beatrice turned: "Let the carriage wait."

The Italian who received the order bowed and smiled; but when the two ladies had ascended the stairs he re-opened the street-door, and said to the driver, "Back to the count, and say, 'All is safe.'"

The carriage drove off. The man who had given this order barred and locked the door, and, taking with him the huge key, plunged into the mystic recesses of the basement and disappeared. The hall, thus left solitary, had the grim aspect of a prison,—the strong door sheeted with iron, the rugged stone stairs, lighted by a high window grimed with the dust of years, and jealously barred, and the walls themselves abutting out rudely here and there, as if against violence even from within.

CHAPTER VI

It was, as we have seen, without taking counsel of the faithful Jemima that the sage recluse of Norwood had yielded to his own fears and Randal's subtle suggestions, in the concise and arbitrary letter which he had written to Violante; but at night, when churchyards give up the dead, and conjugal hearts the secrets hid by day from each other, the wise man informed his wife of the step he had taken. And Jemima then—who held English notions, very different from those which prevail in Italy, as to the right of fathers to dispose of their daughters without reference to inclination or repugnance—so sensibly yet so mildly represented to the pupil of Machiavelli that he had not gone exactly the right way to work, if he feared that the handsome count had made some impression on Violante, and if he wished her to turn with favour to the suitor he recommended,—that so abrupt a command could only chill the heart, revolt the will, and even give to the audacious Peschiera some romantic attraction which he had not before possessed,—as effectually to destroy Riccabocca's sleep that night. And the next day he sent Giacomo to Lady Lansmere's with a very kind letter to Violante and a note to the hostess, praying the latter to bring his daughter to Norwood for a few hours, as he much wished to converse with both. It was on Giacomo's arrival at Knightsbridge that Violante's absence was discovered. Lady Lansmere, ever proudly careful of the world and its gossip, kept Giacomo from betraying his excitement to her servants, and stated throughout the decorous household that the young lady had informed her she was going to visit some friends that morning, and had no doubt gone through the garden gate, since it was found open; the way was more quiet there than by the high-road, and her friends might have therefore walked to meet her by the lane. Lady Lansmere observed that her only surprise was that Violante had gone earlier than she had expected. Having said this with a composure that compelled belief, Lady Lansmere ordered the carriage, and, taking Giacomo with her, drove at once to consult her son.

Harley's quick intellect had scarcely recovered from the shock upon his emotions before Randal Leslie was announced. "Ah," said Lady Lansmere, "Mr. Leslie may know something. He came to her yesterday with a note from her father. Pray let him enter."

The Austrian prince approached Harley. "I will wait in the next room," he whispered. "You may want me if you have cause to suspect Peschiera in all this."

Lady Lansmere was pleased with the prince's delicacy, and, glancing at Leonard, said, "Perhaps you, too, sir, may kindly aid us, if you would retire with the prince. Mr. Leslie may be disinclined to speak of affairs like these, except to Harley and myself."

"True, madam, but beware of Mr. Leslie."

As the door at one end of the room closed on the prince and Leonard, Randal entered at the other, seemingly much agitated.

"I have just been to your house, Lady Lansmere. I heard you were here; pardon me if I have followed you. I have called at Knightsbridge to see Violante, learned that she had left you. I implore you to tell me how or wherefore. I have the right to ask: her father has promised me her hand." Harley's falcon eye had brightened tip at Randal's entrance. It watched steadily the young man's face. It was clouded for a moment by his knitted brows at Randal's closing words; but he left it to Lady Lansmere to reply and explain. This the countess did briefly.

Randal clasped his hands. "And has she not gone to her father's? Are you sure of that?"

"Her father's servant has just come from Norwood."

"Oh, I am to blame for this! It is my rash suit, her fear of it, her aversion! I see it all! "Randal's voice was hollow with remorse and despair. "To save her from Peschiera, her father insisted on her immediate marriage with myself. His orders were too abrupt, my own wooing too unwelcome. I knew her high spirit; she has fled to escape from me. But whither, if not to Norwood,—oh, whither? What other friends has she, what relations?"

"You throw a new light on this mystery," said Lady Lansmere; "perhaps she may have gone to her father's after all, and the servant may have crossed, but missed her on the way. I will drive to Norwood at once."

"Do so,—do; but if she be not there, be careful not to alarm Riccabocca with the news of her disappearance. Caution Giacomo not to do so. He would only suspect Peschiera, and be hurried to some act of violence."

"Do not you, then, suspect Peschiera, Mr. Leslie?" asked Harley, suddenly.

"Ha! is it possible? Yet, no. I called on him this morning with Frank Hazeldean, who is to marry his sister. I was with him till I went on to Knightsbridge, at the very time of Violante's disappearance. He could not then have been a party to it."

"You saw Violante yesterday. Did you speak to her of Madame di Negra?" asked Harley, suddenly recalling the questions respecting the marchesa which Violante had addressed to him.

In spite of himself, Randal felt that he changed countenance. "Of Madame di Negra? I do not think so. Yet I might. Oh, yes, I remember now. She asked me the marchesa's address; I would not give it."

"The address is easily found. Can she have gone to the marchesa's house?"

"I will run there, and see," cried Randal, starting up. "And I with you. Stay, my dear mother. Proceed, as you propose, to Norwood, and take Mr. Leslie's advice. Spare our friend the news of his daughter's loss—if lost she be—till she is restored to him. He can be of no use mean while. Let Giacomo rest here; I may want him."

Harley then passed into the next room, and entreated the prince and Leonard to await his return, and allow Giacomo to stay in the same room.

He then went quickly back to Randal. Whatever might be his fears or emotions, Harley felt that he had need of all his coolness of judgment and presence of mind. The occasion made abrupt demand upon powers which had slept since boyhood, but which now woke with a vigour that would have made even Randal tremble, could he have detected the wit, the courage, the electric energies, masked under that tranquil self-possession. Lord L'Estrange and Randal soon reached the marchesa's house, and learned that she had been out since morning in one of Count Peschiera's carriages. Randal stole an alarmed glance at Harley's face. Harley did not seem to notice it.

"Now, Mr. Leslie, what do you advise next?"

"I am at a loss. Ah, perhaps, afraid of her father, knowing how despotic is his belief in paternal rights, and how tenacious he is of his word once passed, as it has been to me, she may have resolved to take refuge in the country, perhaps at the Casino, or at Mrs. Dale's, or Mrs. Hazeldean's. I will hasten to inquire at the coach-office. Meanwhile, you—"

"Never mind me, Mr. Leslie. Do what you think best. But, if your surmises be just, you must have been a very rude wooer to the high-born lady you aspired to win."

"Not so; but perhaps an unwelcome one. If she has indeed fled from me, need I say that my suit will be withdrawn at once? I am not a selfish lover, Lord L'Estrange."

"Nor I a vindictive man. Yet, could I discover who has conspired against this lady, a guest under my father's roof, I would crush him into the mire as easily as I set my foot upon this glove. Good-day to you, Mr. Leslie."

Randal stood still for a few moments as Harley strided on; then his lip sneered as it muttered, "Insolent! But does he love her? If so, I am avenged already."

CHAPTER VII

Harley went straight to Peschiera's hotel. He was told that the count had walked out with Mr. Frank Hazeldean and some other gentlemen who had breakfasted with him. He had left word, in case any one called, that he had gone to Tattersall's to look at some horses that were for sale. To Tattersall's went Harley. The count was in the yard leaning against a pillar, and surrounded by fashionable friends. Lord L'Estrange paused, and, with an heroic effort at self-mastery, repressed his rage. "I may lose all if I show that I suspect him; and yet I must insult and fight him rather than leave his movements free. Ah, is that young Hazeldean? A thought strikes me!" Frank was standing apart from the group round the count, and looking very absent and very sad. Harley touched him on the shoulder, and drew him aside unobserved by the count.

"Mr. Hazeldean, your uncle Egerton is my dearest friend. Will you be a friend to me? I want you."

"My Lord—"

"Follow me. Do not let Count Peschiera see us talking together."

Harley quitted the yard, and entered St. James's Park by the little gate close by. In a very few words he informed Frank of Violante's disappearance and of his reasons for suspecting the count. Frank's first sentiment was that of indignant disbelief that the brother of Beatrice could be so vile; but as he gradually called to mind the cynical and corrupt vein of the count's familiar conversation, the hints to Peschiera's prejudice that had been dropped by Beatrice herself, and the general character for brilliant and daring profligacy which even the admirers of the count ascribed to him, Frank was compelled to reluctant acquiescence in Harley's suspicions; and he said, with an earnest gravity very rare to him,

"Believe me, Lord L'Estrange, if I can assist you in defeating a base and mercenary design against this poor young lady, you have but to show me how. One thing is clear, Peschiera was not personally engaged in this abduction, since I have been with him all day; and—now I think of it—I begin to hope that you wrong him; for he has invited a large party of us to make an excursion with him to Boulogne next week, in order to try his yacht, which he could scarcely do if—"

"Yacht, at this time of the year! a man who habitually resides at Vienna—a yacht!"

"Spendquick sells it a bargain, on account of the time of year and other reasons; and the count proposes to spend next summer in cruising about the Ionian Isles. He has some property on those isles, which he has never yet visited."

"How long is it since he bought this yacht?"

"Why, I am not sure that it is already bought,—that is, paid for. Levy was to meet Spendquick this very morning to arrange the matter. Spendquick complains that Levy screws him."

"My dear Mr. Hazeldean, you are guiding me through the maze. Where shall I find Lord Spendquick?"

"At this hour, probably in bed. Here is his card."

"Thanks. And where lies the vessel?"

"It was off Blackwall the other day. I went to see it, 'The Flying Dutchman,'—a fine vessel, and carries guns."

"Enough. Now, heed me. There can be no immediate danger to Violante, so long as Peschiera does not meet her, so long as we know his movements. You are about to marry his sister. Avail yourself of that privilege to keep close by his side. Refuse to be shaken off. Make what excuses for the present your invention suggests. I will give you an excuse. Be anxious and uneasy to know where you can find Madame di Negra."

"Madame di Negra!" cried Frank. "What of her? Is she not in Curzon Street?"

"No; she has gone out in one of the count's carriages. In all probability the driver of that carriage, or some servant in attendance on it, will come to the count in the course of the day; and in order to get rid of you, the count will tell you to see this servant, and ascertain yourself that his sister is safe. Pretend to believe what the man says, but make him come to your lodgings on pretence of writing there a letter for the marchesa. Once at your lodgings, and he will be safe; for I shall see that the officers of justice secure him. The moment he is there, send an express for me to my hotel."

"But," said Frank, a little bewildered, "if I go to my lodgings, how can I watch the count?"

"It will not then be necessary. Only get him to accompany you to your lodgings, and part with him at the door."

"Stop, stop! you cannot suspect Madame di Negra of connivance in a scheme so infamous. Pardon me, Lord L'Estrange; I cannot act in this matter,—cannot even hear you except as your foe, if you insinuate a word against the honour of the woman I love."

"Brave gentleman, your hand. It is Madame di Negra I would save, as well as my friend's young child. Think but of her, while you act as I entreat, and all will go well. I confide in you. Now, return to the count."

Frank walked back to join Peschiera, and his brow was thoughtful, and his lips closed firmly. Harley had that gift which belongs to the genius of Action. He inspired others with the light of his own spirit and the force of his own will. Harley next hastened to Lord Spendquick, remained with that young gentleman some minutes, then repaired to his hotel, where Leonard, the prince, and Giacomo still awaited him.

"Come with me, both of you. You, too, Giacomo. I must now see the police. We may then divide upon separate missions."

"Oh, my dear Lord," cried Leonard, "you must have had good news. You seem cheerful and sanguine."

"Seem! Nay, I am so! If I once paused to despond—even to doubt—I should go mad. A foe to baffle, and an angel to save! Whose spirits would not rise high, whose wits would not move quick to the warm pulse of his heart?"

CHAPTER VIII

Twilight was dark in the room to which Beatrice had conducted Violante. A great change had come over Beatrice. Humble and weeping, she knelt beside Violante, hiding her face, and imploring pardon. And Violante, striving to resist the terror for which she now saw such cause as no woman-heart can defy, still sought to soothe, and still sweetly assured forgiveness.

Beatrice had learned, after quick and fierce questions, which at last compelled the answers that cleared away every doubt, that her jealousy had been groundless, that she had no rival in Violante. From that moment the passions that had made her the tool of guilt abruptly vanished, and her conscience startled her with the magnitude of her treachery. Perhaps had Violante's heart been wholly free, or she had been of that mere commonplace, girlish character which women like Beatrice are apt to despise, the marchesa's affection for Peschiera, and her dread of him, might have made her try to persuade her young kinswoman at least to receive the count's visit,—at least to suffer him to make his own excuses, and plead his own cause. But there had been a loftiness of spirit in which Violante had first defied the marelies's questions, followed by such generous, exquisite sweetness, when the girl perceived how that wild heart was stung and maddened, and such purity of mournful candour when she had overcome her own virgin bashfulness sufficiently to undeceive the error she detected, and confess where her own affections were placed, that Beatrice bowed before her as mariner of old to some fair saint that had allayed the storm.

"I have deceived you!" she cried, through her sobs; "but I will now save you at any cost. Had you been as I deemed,—the rival who had despoiled all the hopes of my future life,—I could without remorse have been the accomplice I am pledged to be. But now you—Oh, you, so good and so noble—you can never, be the bride of Peschiera. Nay, start not; he shall renounce his designs forever, or I will go myself to our emperor, and expose the dark secrets of his life. Return with me quick to the home from which I ensnared you."

Beatrice's hand was on the door while she spoke. Suddenly her face fell, her lips grew white; the door was locked from without. She called,—no one answered; the bell-pull in the room gave no sound; the windows were high and barred,—they did not look on the river, nor the street, but on a close, gloomy, silent yard, high blank walls all round it; no one to hear the cry of distress, rang it ever so loud and sharp.

Beatrice divined that she herself had been no less ensnared than her companion; that Peschiera, distrustful of her firmness in evil, had precluded her from the power of reparation. She was in a house only tenanted by his hirelings. Not a hope to save Violante from a fate that now appalled her seemed to remain. Thus, in incoherent self-reproaches and frenzied tears, Beatrice knelt beside her victim, communicating more and more the terrors that she felt, as the hours rolled on, and the room darkened, till it was only by the dull lamp which gleamed through the grimy windows from the yard without, that each saw the face of the other.

Night came on; they heard a clock from some distant church strike the hours. The dim fire had long since burned out, and the air became intensely cold. No one broke upon their solitude,—not a voice was heard in the house. They felt neither cold nor hunger,—they felt but the solitude, and the silence, and the dread of something that was to come.

At length, about midnight, a bell rang at the street door; then there was the quick sound of steps, of sullen bolts withdrawn, of low, murmured voices. Light streamed through the chinks of the door to the apartment, the door itself opened. Two Italians bearing tapers entered, and the Count di Peschiera followed.

Beatrice sprang up, and rushed towards her brother. He laid his hand gently on her lips, and motioned to the Italians to withdraw. They placed the lights on the table, and vanished without a word.

Peschiera then, putting aside his sister, approached Violante.

"Fair kinswoman," said he, with an air of easy but resolute assurance, "there are things which no man can excuse, and no woman can pardon, unless that love, which is beyond all laws, suggests excuse for the one, and obtains pardon for the other. In a word, I have sworn to win you, and I have had no opportunities to woo. Fear not; the worst that can befall you is to be my bride! Stand aside, my sister, stand aside."

"Giulio Franzini, I stand between you and her; you shall strike me to the earth before you can touch even the hem of her robe!"

"What, my sister! you turn against me?"

"And unless you instantly retire and leave her free, I will unmask you to the emperor."

"Too late, /mon enfant!/ You will sail with us. The effects you may need for the voyage are already on board. You will be witness to our marriage, and by a holy son of the Church. Then tell the emperor what you will."

With a light and sudden exertion of his strength, the count put away Beatrice, and fell on his knee before Violante, who, drawn to her full height, death-like pale, but untrembling, regarded him with unutterable disdain.

You scorn me now," said he, throwing into his features an expression of humility and admiration, "and I cannot wonder at it. But, believe me, that until the scorn yield to a kinder sentiment, I will take no advantage of the power I have gained over your fate."

"Power!" said Violante, haughtily. "You have ensnared me into this house, you have gained the power of a day; but the power over my fate, —no!"

"You mean that your friends have discovered your disappearance, and are on your track. Fair one, I provide against your friends, and I defy all the laws and police of England. The vessel that will bear you from these shores waits in the river hard by. Beatrice, I warn you,—be still, unhand me. In that vessel will be a priest who shall join our hands, but not before you will recognize the truth, that she who flies with Giulio Peschiera must become his wife or quit him as the disgrace of her House, and the scorn of her sex."

"O villain! villain!" cried Beatrice.

"Peste, my sister, gentler words. You, too, would marry. I tell no tales of you. Signorina, I grieve to threaten force. Give me your hand; we must be gone."

Violante eluded the clasp that would have profaned her, and darting across the room, opened the door, and closed it hastily behind her. Beatrice clung firmly to the count to detain him from pursuit. But just without the door, close, as if listening to what passed within, stood a man wrapped from head to foot in a large boat cloak. The ray of the lamp that beamed on the man glittered on the barrel of a pistol which he held in his right hand.

"Hist!" whispered the man in English, and passing his arm round her; "in this house you are in that ruffian's power; out of it, safe. Ah, I am by your side,—I, Violante!"

The voice thrilled to Violante's heart. She started, looked up, but nothing was seen of the man's face, what with the hat and cloak, save a mass of raven curls, and a beard of the same hue.

The count now threw open the door, dragging after him his sister, who still clung round him.

"Ha, that is well!" he cried to the man, in Italian. "Bear the lady after me, gently; but if she attempt to cry out, why, force enough to silence her, not more. As for you, Beatrice, traitress that you are, I could strike you to the earth, but—No, this suffices." He caught his sister in his arms as he spoke, and regardless of her cries and struggles, sprang down the stairs.

The hall was crowded with fierce, swarthy men. The count turned to one of them, and whispered; in an instant the marchesa was seized and gagged. The count cast a look over his shoulder; Violante was close behind, supported by the man to whom Peschiera had consigned her, and who was pointing to Beatrice, and appeared warning Violante against resistance.

Violante was silent, and seemed resigned. Peschiera smiled cynically, and, preceded by some of his hirelings, who held torches, descended a few steps that led to an abrupt landing-place between

the hall and the basement story. There a small door stood open, and the river flowed close by. A boat was moored on the bank, round which grouped four men, who had the air of foreign sailors. At the appearance of Peschiera, three of these men sprang into the boat, and got ready their oars. The fourth carefully re-adjusted a plank thrown from the boat to the wharf, and offered his arm obsequiously to Peschiera. The count was the first to enter, and, humming a gay opera air, took his place by the helm. The two females were next lifted in, and Violante felt her hand pressed almost convulsively by the man who stood by the plank. The rest followed, and in another minute the boat bounded swiftly over the waves towards a vessel that lay several furlongs adown the river, and apart from all the meaner craft that crowded the stream. The stars struggled pale through the foggy atmosphere; not a word was heard within the boat, —no sound save the regular splash of the oars. The count paused from his lively tune, and gathering round him the ample fold of his fur pelisse, seemed absorbed in thought. Even by the imperfect light of the stars, Peschiera's face wore an air of sovereign triumph. The result had justified that careless and insolent confidence in himself and in fortune, which was the most prominent feature in the character of the man, who, both bravo and gamester, had played against the world with his rapier in one hand and cogged dice in the other. Violante, once in a vessel filled by his own men, was irretrievably in his power. Even her father must feel grateful to learn that the captive of Peschiera had saved name and repute in becoming Peschiera's wife. Even the pride of sex in Violante herself must induce her to confirm what Peschiera, of course, intended to state,—namely, that she was a willing partner in a bridegroom's schemes of flight towards the altar rather than the poor victim of a betrayer, and receiving his hand but from his mercy. He saw his fortune secured, his success envied, his very character rehabilitated by his splendid nuptials. Ambition began to mingle with his dreams of pleasure and pomp. What post in the Court or the State too high for the aspirations of one who had evinced the most incontestable talent for active life,—the talent to succeed in all that the will had undertaken? Thus mused the count, half-forgetful of the present, and absorbed in the golden future, till he was aroused by a loud hail from the vessel and the bustle on board the boat, as the sailors caught at the rope flung forth to them.

He then rose and moved towards Violante. But the man who was still in charge of her passed the count lightly, half-leading, half-carrying his passive prisoner. "Pardon, Excellency," said the man, in Italian, "but the boat is crowded, and rocks so much that your aid would but disturb our footing." Before Peschiera could reply, Violante was already on the steps of the vessel, and the count paused till, with elated smile, he saw her safely standing on the deck. Beatrice followed, and then Peschiera himself; but when the Italians in his train also thronged towards the sides of the boat, two of the sailors got before them, and let go the rope, while the other two plied their oars vigorously, and pulled back towards shore. The Italians burst into an amazed and indignant volley of execrations. "Silence," said the sailor who had stood by the plank, "we obey orders. If you are not quiet, we shall upset the boat. We can swim; Heaven and Monsignore San Giacomo pity you if you cannot!"

Meanwhile, as Peschiera leaped upon deck, a flood of light poured upon him from lifted torches. That light streamed full on the face and form of a man of commanding stature, whose arm was around Violante, and whose dark eyes flashed upon the count more luminously than the torches. On one side this man stood the Austrian prince; on the other side (a cloak, and a profusion of false dark locks, at his feet) stood Lord L'Estrange, his arms folded, and his lips curved by a smile in which the ironical humour native to the man was tempered with a calm and supreme disdain. The count strove to speak, but his voice faltered.

All around him looked ominous and hostile. He saw many Italian faces, but they scowled at him with vindictive hate; in the rear were English mariners, peering curiously over the shoulders of the foreigners, and with a broad grin on their open countenances. Suddenly, as the count thus stood perplexed, cowering, stupefied, there burst from all the Italians present a hoot of unutterable scorn, "Il traditore! il traditore!" (the traitor! the traitor!)

The count was brave, and at the cry he lifted his head with a certain majesty.

At that moment Harley, raising his hand as if to silence the hoot, came forth from the group by which he had been hitherto standing, and towards him the count advanced with a bold stride.

"What trick is this?" he said, in French, fiercely. "I divine that it is you whom I can single out for explanation and atonement."

"/Pardieu, Monsieur le Comte,/" answered Harley, in the same language, which lends itself so well to polished sarcasm and high-bred enmity, "let us distinguish. Explanation should come from me, I allow; but atonement I have the honour to resign to yourself. This vessel—"

"Is mine!" cried the count. "Those men, who insult me, should be in my pay."

"The men in your pay, Monsieur le Comte, are on shore, drinking success to your voyage. But, anxious still to procure you the gratification of being amongst your own countrymen, those whom I have taken into my pay are still better Italians than the pirates whose place they supply; perhaps not such good sailors; but then I have taken the liberty to add to the equipment of a vessel which cost me too much to risk lightly, some stout English seamen, who are mariners more practised than even your pirates. Your grand mistake, Monsieur le Comte, is in thinking that the 'Flying Dutchman' is yours. With many apologies for interfering with your intention to purchase it, I beg to inform you that Lord Spendquick has kindly sold it to me. Nevertheless, Monsieur le Comte, for the next few weeks I place it—men and all—at your service."

Peschiera smiled scornfully.

"I thank your Lordship; but since I presume that I shall no longer have the travelling companion who alone could make the voyage attractive, I shall return to shore, and will simply request you to inform me at what hour you can receive the friend whom I shall depute to discuss that part of the question yet untouched, and to arrange that the atonement, whether it be due from me or yourself, may be rendered as satisfactory as you have condescended to make the explanation."

"Let not that vex you, Monsieur le Comte; the atonement is, in much, made already; so anxious have I been to forestall all that your nice sense of honour would induce so complete a gentleman to desire. You have ensnared a young heiress, it is true; but you see that it was only to restore her to the arms of her father. You have juggled an illustrious kinsman out of his heritage; but you have voluntarily come on board this vessel, first, to enable his Highness the Prince Von ———, of whose rank at the Austrian Court you are fully aware, to state to your emperor that he himself has been witness of the manner in which you interpreted his Imperial Majesty's assent to your nuptials with a child of one of the first subjects in his Italian realm; and, next, to commence by an excursion to the seas of the Baltic the sentence of banishment which I have no doubt will accompany the same act that restores to the chief of your House his lands and his honours."

The count started.

"That restoration," said the Austrian prince, who had advanced to Harley's side, "I already guarantee. Disgrace that you are, Giulio Franzini, to the nobles of the Empire, I will not leave my royal master till his hand strike your name from the roll. I have here your own letters, to prove that your kinsman was duped by yourself into the revolt which you would have headed as a Catiline, if it had not better suited your nature to betray it as a Judas. In ten days from this time, these letters will be laid before the emperor and his Council."

"Are you satisfied, Monsieur le Comte," said Harley, "with your atonement so far? If not, I have procured you the occasion to render it yet more complete. Before you stands the kinsman you have wronged. He knows now, that though, for a while, you ruined his fortunes, you failed to sully his hearth. His heart can grant you pardon, and hereafter his hand may give you alms. Kneel then, Giulio Franzini, kneel at the feet of Alphonso, Duke of Serrano."

The above dialogue had been in French, which only a few of the Italians present understood, and that imperfectly; but at the name with which Harley concluded his address to the count, a simultaneous cry from those Italians broke forth.

"Alphonso the Good! Alphonso the Good! Viva, viva, the good Duke of Serrano!"

And, forgetful even of the count, they crowded round the tall form of Riccabocca, striving who should first kiss his hand, the very hem of his garment.

Riccabocca's eyes overflowed. The gaunt exile seemed transfigured into another and more kingly man. An inexpressible dignity invested him. He stretched forth his arms, as if to bless his countrymen. Even that rude cry, from humble men, exiles like himself, consoled him for years of banishment and penury.

"Thanks, thanks," he continued; "thanks! Some day or other, you will all perhaps return with me to the beloved land!"

The Austrian prince bowed his head, as if in assent to the prayer.

"Giulio Franzini," said the Duke of Serrano,—for so we may now call the threadbare recluse of the Casino,—"had this last villanous design of yours been allowed by Providence, think you that there is one spot on earth on which the ravisher could have been saved from a father's arm? But now, Heaven has been more kind. In this hour let me imitate its mercy;" and with relaxing brow the duke mildly drew near to his guilty kinsman.

From the moment the Austrian prince had addressed him, the count had preserved a profound silence, showing neither repentance nor shame. Gathering himself up, he had stood firm, glaring round him like one at bay. But as the duke now approached, he waved his hand, and exclaimed, "Back, pedant; back; you have not triumphed yet. And you, prating German, tell your tales to our emperor. I shall be by his throne to answer,—if, indeed, you escape from the meeting to which I will force you by the way." He spoke, and made a rush towards the side of the vessel. But Harley's quick wit had foreseen the count's intention, and Harley's quick eye had given the signal by which it was frustrated. Seized in the gripe of his own watchful and indignant countrymen, just as he was about to plunge into the stream, Peschiera was dragged back, pinioned clown. Then the expression of his whole countenance changed; the desperate violence of the inborn gladiator broke forth. His great strength enabled him to break loose more than once, to dash more than one man to the floor of the deck; but at length, overpowered by numbers, though still struggling, all dignity, all attempt at presence of mind gone, uttering curses the most plebeian, gnashing his teeth, and foaming at the mouth, nothing seemed left of the brilliant Lothario but the coarse fury of the fierce natural man.

Then still preserving that air and tone of exquisite imperturbable irony, which the highest comedian might have sought to imitate in vain, Harley bowed low to the storming count.

"Adieu, Monsieur le Comte, adieu! The vessel which you have honoured me by entering is bound to Norway. The Italians who accompany you were sent by yourself into exile, and, in return, they now kindly promise to enliven you with their society, whenever you feel somewhat tired of your own. Conduct the count to his cabin. Gently there, gently. Adieu, Monsieur le Comte, adieu! et bon voyage."

Harley turned lightly on his heel, as Peschiera, in spite of his struggles, was now fairly carried down to the cabin.

"A trick for the trickster," said L'Estrange to the Austrian prince. "The revenge of a farce on the would-be tragedian."

"More than that,—he is ruined."

"And ridiculous," quoth Harley. "I should like to see his look when they land him in Norway." Harley then passed towards the centre of the vessel, by which, hitherto partially concealed by the sailors, who were now busily occupied, stood Beatrice,—Frank Hazeldean, who had first received her on entering the vessel, standing by her side; and Leonard, a little apart from the two, in quiet observation of all that had passed around him. Beatrice appeared but little to heed Frank; her dark eyes were lifted to the dim starry skies, and her lips were moving as if in prayer; yet her young lover was speaking to her in great emotion, low and rapidly.

"No, no, do not think for a moment that we suspect you, Beatrice. I will answer for your honour with my life. Oh, why will you turn from me; why will you not speak?"

"A moment later," said Beatrice, softly. "Give me one moment yet." She passed slowly and falteringly towards Leonard, placed her hand, that trembled, on his arm, and led him aside to the verge of the vessel. Frank, startled by her movement, made a step as if to follow, and then stopped short and looked on, but with a clouded and doubtful countenance. Harley's smile had gone, and his eye was also watchful.

It was but a few words that Beatrice spoke, it was but a sentence or so that Leonard answered; and then Beatrice extended her hand, which the young poet bent over, and kissed in silence. She lingered an instant; and even by the starlight, Harley noted the blush that overspread her face. The blush faded as Beatrice returned to Frank. Lord L'Estrange would have retired,—she signed to him to stay.

"My Lord," she said, very firmly, "I cannot accuse you of harshness to my sinful and unhappy brother. His offence might perhaps deserve a heavier punishment than that which you inflict with such playful scorn. But whatever his penance, contempt now or poverty later, I feel that his sister should be by his side to share it. I am not innocent if he be guilty; and, wreck though he be, nothing else on this dark sea of life is now left to me to cling to. Hush, my Lord! I shall not leave this vessel. All that I entreat of you is, to order your men to respect my brother, since a woman will be by his side."

"But, Marchesa, this cannot be; and—"

"Beatrice, Beatrice—and me!—our betrothal? Do you forget me?" cried Frank, in reproachful agony.

"No, young and too noble lover; I shall remember you ever in my prayers. But listen. I have been deceived, hurried on, I might say, by others, but also, and far more, by my own mad and blinded heart,—deceived, hurried on, to wrong you and to belie myself. My shame burns into me when I think that I could have inflicted on you the just anger of your family, linked you to my own ruined fortunes,—my own—"

"Your own generous, loving heart!—that is all I asked!" cried Frank.

"Cease, cease! that heart is mine still!" Tears gushed from the Italian's eyes.

"Englishman, I never loved you; this heart was dead to you, and it will be dead to all else forever. Farewell. You will forget me sooner than you think for,—sooner than I shall forget you, as a friend, as a brother—if brothers had natures as tender and as kind as yours! Now, my Lord, will you give me your arm? I would join the count."

"Stay; one word, Madame," said Frank, very pale, and through his set teeth, but calmly, and with a pride on his brow which had never before dignified its habitual careless expression,— "one word. I may not be worthy of you in anything else, but an honest love, that never doubted, never suspected, that would have clung to you though all the world were against,—such a love makes the meanest man of worth. One word, frank and open. By all that you hold most sacred in your creed, did you speak the truth when you said that you never loved me?"

Beatrice bent down her head; she was abashed before this manly nature that she had so deceived, and perhaps till then undervalued.

"Pardon, pardon," she said, in reluctant accents, half-choked by the rising of a sob.

At her hesitation, Frank's face lighted as if with sudden hope. She raised her eyes, and saw the change in him, then glanced where Leonard stood, mournful and motionless. She shivered, and added firmly,

"Yes, pardon; for I spoke the truth, and I had no heart to give. It might have been as wax to another,—it was of granite to you." She paused, and muttered inly, "Granite, and—broken!"

Frank said not a word more. He stood rooted to the spot, not even gazing after Beatrice as she passed on, leaning on the arm of Lord L'Estrange. He then walked resolutely away, and watched the boat that the men were now lowering from the side of the vessel. Beatrice stopped when she came near the place where Violante stood, answering in agitated whispers her father's anxious questions. As she stopped, she leaned more heavily upon Harley. "It is your arm that trembles now, Lord L'Estrange,"

said she, with a mournful smile, and, quitting him ere he could answer, she bowed down her head meekly before Violante. "You have pardoned me already," she said, in a tone that reached only the girl's ear, "and my last words shall not be of the past. I see your future spread bright before me under those steadfast stars. Love still; hope and trust. These are the last words of her who will soon die to the world. Fair maid, they are prophetic!"

Violante shrunk back to her father's breast, and there hid her glowing face, resigning her hand to Beatrice, who pressed it to her bosom. The marchesa then came back to Harley, and disappeared with him in the interior of the vessel.

When Harley again came on deck, he seemed much flurried and disturbed. He kept aloof from the duke and Violante, and was the last to enter the boat, that was now lowered into the water.

As he and his companions reached the land, they saw the vessel in movement, gliding slowly down the river. "Courage, Leonard, courage!" murmured Harley. "You grieve, and nobly. But you have shunned the worst and most vulgar deceit in civilized life; you have not simulated love. Better that yon poor lady should be, awhile, the sufferer from a harsh truth, than the eternal martyr of a flattering lie! Alas, my Leonard! with the love of the poet's dream are linked only the Graces; with the love of the human heart come the awful Fates!"

"My Lord, poets do not dream when they love. You will learn how the feelings are deep in proportion as the fancies are vivid, when you read that confession of genius and woe which I have left in your hands."

Leonard turned away. Harley's gaze followed him with inquiring interest, and suddenly encountered the soft dark grateful eyes of Violante. "The Fates, the Fates!" murmured Harley.

CHAPTER IX

We are at Norwood in the sage's drawing-room. Violante has long since retired to rest. Harley, who had accompanied the father and daughter to their home, is still conversing with the former.

"Indeed, my dear Duke," said Harley

"Hush, hush! Diavolo, don't call me Duke yet; I am at home here once more as Dr. Riccabocca."

"My dear doctor, then, allow me to assure you that you overrate my claim to your thanks. Your old friends, Leonard and Frank Hazeldean, must come in for their share. Nor is the faithful Giacomo to be forgotten."

"Continue your explanation."

"In the first place, I learned, through Frank, that one Baron Levy, a certain fashionable money-lender, and general ministrant to the affairs of fine gentlemen, was just about to purchase a yacht from Lord Spendquick on behalf of the count. A short interview with Spendquick enabled me to outbid the usurer, and conclude a bargain by which the yacht became mine,—a promise to assist Spendquick in extricating himself from the claws of the money-lender (which I trust to do by reconciling him with his father, who is a man of liberality and sense) made Spendquick readily connive at my scheme for outwitting the enemy. He allowed Levy to suppose that the count might take possession of the vessel; but affecting an engagement, and standing out for terms, postponed the final settlement of the purchase-money till the next day. I was thus master of the vessel, which I felt sure was destined to serve Peschiera's infamous design. But it was my business not to alarm the count's suspicions; I therefore permitted the pirate crew he had got together to come on board. I knew I could get rid of them when necessary. Meanwhile, Frank undertook to keep close to the count until he could see and cage within his lodgings the servant whom Peschiera had commissioned to attend his sister. If I could but apprehend this servant, I had a sanguine hope that I could discover and free your daughter before Peschiera could even profane her with his presence. But Frank, alas! was no pupil of Machiavelli. Perhaps the count detected his secret thoughts under his open countenance, perhaps merely wished to get rid of a companion very much in his way; but, at all events, he contrived to elude our young friend as cleverly as you or I could have done,—told him that Beatrice herself was at Roehampton, had borrowed the count's carriage to go there, volunteered to take Frank to the house, took him. Frank found himself in a drawing-room; and after waiting a few minutes, while the count went out on pretence of seeing his sister, in pirouetted a certain distinguished opera-dancer! Meanwhile the count was fast back on the road to London, and Frank had to return as he could. He then hunted for the count everywhere, and saw him no more. It was late in the day when Frank found me out with this news. I became seriously alarmed. Peschiera might perhaps learn my counter-scheme with the yacht, or he might postpone sailing until he had terrified or entangled Violante into some—In short, everything was to be dreaded from a man of the count's temper. I had no clew to the place to which your daughter was taken, no excuse to arrest Peschiera, no means even of learning where he was. He had not returned to Mivart's. The Police was at fault, and useless, except in one valuable piece of information. They told me where some of your countrymen, whom Peschiera's perfidy had sent into exile, were to be found. I commissioned Giacomo to seek these men out, and induce them to man the vessel. It might be necessary, should Peschiera or his confidential servants come aboard, after we had expelled or drawn off the pirate crew, that they should find Italians whom they might well mistake for their own hirelings. To these foreigners I added some English sailors who had before served in the same vessel, and on whom Spendquick assured me I could rely. Still these precautions only availed in case Peschiera should resolve to sail, and defer till then all machinations against his captives. While, amidst my fears and uncertainties, I was struggling still to preserve presence of mind, and rapidly discussing with the Austrian prince if any other steps could be taken, or if our sole resource was to repair to the vessel and take the chance of what might ensue, Leonard suddenly and quietly entered

my room. You know his countenance, in which joy or sadness is not betrayed so much by the evidence of the passions as by variations in the intellectual expression. It was but by the clearer brow and the steadier eye that I saw he had good tidings to impart."

"Ah," said Riccabocca,—for so, obeying his own request, we will yet call the sage,—"ah, I early taught that young man the great lesson inculcated by Helvetius. 'All our errors arise from our ignorance or our passions.' Without ignorance and without passions, we should be serene, all-penetrating intelligences."

"Mopsticks," quoth Harley, "have neither ignorance nor passions; but as for their intelligence —"

"Pshaw!" interrupted Riccabocca,—"proceed."

"Leonard had parted from us some hours before. I had commissioned him to call at Madame di Negra's, and, as he was familiarly known to her servants, seek to obtain quietly all the information he could collect, and, at all events, procure (what in my haste I had failed to do) the name and description of the man who had driven her out in the morning, and make what use he judged best of every hint he could gather or glean that might aid our researches. Leonard only succeeded in learning the name and description of the coachman, whom he recognized as one Beppo, to whom she had often given orders in his presence. None could say where he then could be found, if not at the count's hotel. Leonard went next to that hotel. The man had not been there all the day. While revolving what next he should do, his eye caught sight of your intended son-in-law, gliding across the opposite side of the street. One of those luminous, inspiring conjectures, which never occur to you philosophers, had from the first guided Leonard to believe that Randal Leslie was mixed up in this villanous affair."

"Ha! He?" cried Riccabocca. "Impossible! For what interest, what object?"

"I cannot tell, neither could Leonard; but we had both formed the same conjecture. Brief: Leonard resolved to follow Randal Leslie, and track all his movements. He did then follow him, unobserved,—and at a distance, first to Audley Egerton's house, then to Eaton Square, thence to a house in Bruton Street, which Leonard ascertained to be Baron Levy's. Suspicious that, my clear sage?"

"Diavolo, yes!" said Riccabocca, thoughtfully.

"At Levy's, Randal stayed till dusk. He then came out, with his cat-like, stealthy step, and walked quickly into the neighbourhood of Leicester Square. Leonard saw him enter one of those small hotels which are appropriated to foreigners. Wild, outlandish fellows were loitering about the door and in the street. Leonard divined that the count or the count's confidants were there."

"If that can be proved," cried Riccabocca, "if Randal could have been thus in communication with Peschiera, could have connived at such perfidy, I am released from my promise. Oh, to prove it!"

"Proof will come later, if we are on the right track. Let me go on. While waiting near the door of this hotel, Beppo himself, the very man Leonard was in search of, came forth, and, after speaking a few words to some of the loitering foreigners, walked briskly towards Piccadilly. Leonard here resigned all further heed of Leslie, and gave chase to Beppo, whom he recognized at a glance. Coming up to him, he said quietly, 'I have a letter for the Marchesa di Negra. She told me I was to send it to her by you. I have been searching for you the whole day.' The man fell into the trap, and the more easily, because—as he since owned in excuse for a simplicity which, I dare say, weighed on his conscience more than any of the thousand-and-one crimes he may have committed in the course of his illustrious life—he had been employed by the marchesa as a spy upon Leonard, and, with an Italian's acumen in affairs of the heart, detected her secret."

"What secret?" asked the innocent sage.

"Her love for the handsome young poet. I betray that secret, in order to give her some slight excuse for becoming Peschiera's tool. She believed Leonard to be in love with your daughter, and jealousy urged her to treason. Violante, no doubt, will explain this to you. Well, the man fell into the trap. 'Give me the letter, Signor, and quick.'

"It is at a hotel close by; come there, and you will have a guinea for your trouble.'

"So Leonard walked our gentleman into my hotel; and having taken him into my dressing-room, turned the key and there left him. On learning this capture, the prince and myself hastened to see our prisoner. He was at first sullen and silent; but when the prince disclosed his rank and name (you know the mysterious terror the meaner Italians feel for an Austrian magnate), his countenance changed, and his courage fell. What with threats and what with promises, we soon obtained all that we sought to know; and an offered bribe, which I calculated at ten times the amount the rogue could ever expect to receive from his spendthrift master, finally bound him cheerfully to our service, soul and body. Thus we learned the dismal place to which your noble daughter had been so perfidiously ensnared. We learned also that the count had not yet visited her, hoping much from the effect that prolonged incarceration might have in weakening her spirit and inducing her submission. Peschiera was to go to the house at midnight, thence to transport her to the vessel. Beppo had received orders to bring the carriage to Leicester Square, where Peschiera would join him. The count (as Leonard surmised) had taken skulking refuge at the hotel in which Randal Leslie had disappeared. The prince, Leonard, Frank (who was then in the hotel), and myself held a short council. Should we go at once to the house, and, by the help of the police, force an entrance, and rescue your daughter? This was a very hazardous resource. The abode, which, at various times, had served for the hiding-place of men haunted by the law, abounded, according to our informant, in subterranean vaults and secret passages, and had more than one outlet on the river. At our first summons at the door, therefore, the ruffians within might not only escape themselves, but carry off their prisoner. The door was strong, and before our entrance could be forced, all trace of her we sought might be lost. Again, too, the prince was desirous of bringing Peschiera's guilty design home to him,—anxious to be able to state to the emperor, and to the great minister his kinsman, that he himself had witnessed the count's vile abuse of the emperor's permission to wed your daughter. In short, while I only thought of Violante, the prince thought also of her father's recall to his dukedom. Yet, still to leave Violante in that terrible house, even for an hour, a few minutes, subjected to the actual presence of Peschiera, unguarded save by the feeble and false woman who had betrayed and might still desert her—how contemplate that fearful risk? What might not happen in the interval between Peschiera's visit to the house and his appearance with his victim on the vessel? An idea flashed on me: Beppo was to conduct the count to the house; if I could accompany Beppo in disguise, enter the house, myself be present?—I rushed back to our informant, now become our agent; I found the plan still more feasible than I had at first supposed. Beppo had asked the count's permission to bring with him a brother accustomed to the sea, and who wished to quit England. I might personate that brother. You know that the Italian language, in most of its dialects and varieties of patois—Genoese, Piedmontese, Venetian—is as familiar to me as Addison's English! Alas! rather more so. Presto! the thing was settled. I felt my heart, from that moment, as light as a feather, and my sense as keen as the dart which a feather wings. My plans now were formed in a breath, and explained in a sentence. It was right that you should be present on board the vessel, not only to witness your foe's downfall, but to receive your child in a father's arms. Leonard set out to Norwood for you, cautioned not to define too precisely for what object you were wanted, till on board.

"Frank, accompanied by Beppo (for there was yet time for these preparations before midnight), repaired to the yacht, taking Giacomo by the way. There our new ally, familiar to most of that piratical crew, and sanctioned by the presence of Frank, as the count's friend and prospective brother-in-law, told Peschiera's hirelings that they were to quit the vessel, and wait on shore under Giacomo's auspices till further orders; and as soon as the decks were cleared of these ruffians (save a few left to avoid suspicion, and who were afterwards safely stowed down in the hold), and as soon as Giacomo had lodged his convoy in a public house, where he quitted them drinking his health over unlimited rations of grog, your inestimable servant quietly shipped on board the Italians pressed into the service, and Frank took charge of the English sailors.

"The prince, promising to be on board in due time, then left me to make arrangements for his journey to Vienna by the dawn. I hastened to a masquerade warehouse, where, with the help of an ingenious stagewright artificer, I disguised myself into a most thorough-paced-looking cut-throat, and then waited the return of my friend Beppo with the most perfect confidence."

"Yet, if that rascal had played false, all these precautions were lost. /Cospetto!/ you were not wise," said the prudent philosopher.

"Very likely not. You would have been so wise, that by this time your daughter would have been lost to you forever."

"But why not employ the police?"

"First, Because I had already employed them to little purpose; secondly, Because I no longer wanted them; thirdly, Because to use them for my final catastrophe would be to drag your name, and your daughter's perhaps, before a police court,—at all events, before the tribunal of public gossip; and lastly, Because, having decided upon the proper punishment, it had too much of equity to be quite consistent with law; and in forcibly seizing a man's person, and shipping him off to Norway, my police would have been sadly in the way. Certainly my plan rather savours of Lope de Vega than of Blackstone. However, you see success atones for all irregularities. I resume: Beppo came back in time to narrate all the arrangements that had been made, and to inform me that a servant from the count had come on board just as our new crew were assembled there, to order the boat to be at the place where we found it. The servant it was deemed prudent to detain and secure. Giacomo undertook to manage the boat.

"I am nearly at the close of my story. Sure of my disguise, I got on the coach-box with Beppo. The count arrived at the spot appointed, and did not even honour myself with a question or glance. 'Your brother?' he said to Beppo; 'one might guess that; he has the family likeness. Not a handsome race yours! Drive on.'

"We arrived at the house. I dismounted to open the carriage-door. The count gave me one look. 'Beppo says you have known the sea.'

"'Excellency, yes. I am a Genoese.'

"'Ha! how is that? Beppo is a Lombard.'—Admire the readiness with which I redeemed my blunder.

"'Excellency, it pleased Heaven that Beppo should be born in Lombardy, and then to remove my respected parents to Genoa, at which city they were so kindly treated that my mother, in common gratitude, was bound to increase its population. It was all she could do, poor woman. You see she did her best.'

"The count smiled, and said no more. The door opened, I followed him; your daughter can tell you the rest."

"And you risked your life in that den of miscreants! Noble friend!"

"Risked my life,—no; but I risked the count's. There was one moment when my hand was on my trigger, and my soul very near the sin of justifiable homicide. But my tale is done. The count is now on the river, and will soon be on the salt seas, though not bound to Norway, as I had first intended. I could not inflict that frigid voyage on his sister. So the men have orders to cruise about for six days, keeping aloof from shore, and they will then land the count and the marchesa, by boat, on the French coast. That delay will give time for the prince to arrive at Vienna before the count could follow him."

"Would he have that audacity?"

"Do him more justice! Audacity, faith! he does not want for that. But I dreaded not his appearance at Vienna with such evidence against him. I dreaded his encountering the prince on the road, and forcing a duel, before his character was so blasted that the prince could refuse it; and the count is a dead shot of course,—all such men are!"

"He will return, and you—"

"I! Oh, never fear; he has had enough of me. And now, my dear friend, —now that Violante is safe once more under your own roof; now that my honoured mother must long ere this have been satisfied by Leonard, who left us to go to her, that our success has been achieved without danger, and, what she will value almost as much, without scandal; now that your foe is powerless as a reed floating on the water towards its own rot, and the Prince Von ———— is perhaps about to enter his carriage on the road to Dover, charged with the mission of restoring to Italy her worthiest son,—let me dismiss you to your own happy slumbers, and allow me to wrap myself in my cloak, and snatch a short sleep on the sofa, till yonder gray dawn has mellowed into riper day. My eyes are heavy, and if you stay here three minutes longer, I shall be out of reach of hearing, in the land of dreams. /Buona notte!/"

"But there is a bed prepared for you."

Harley shook his head in dissent, and composed himself at length on the sofa.

Riccabocca, bending, wrapped the cloak round his guest, kissed him on the forehead, and crept out of the room to rejoin Jemima, who still sat up for him, nervously anxious to learn from him those explanations which her considerate affection would not allow her to ask from the agitated and exhausted Violante. "Not in bed!" cried the sage, on seeing her. "Have you no feelings of compassion for my son that is to be? Just, too, when there is a reasonable probability that we can afford a son?"

Riccabocca here laughed merrily, and his wife threw herself on his shoulder, and cried for joy.

But no sleep fell on the lids of Harley L'Estrange. He started up when his host had left him, and paced the apartment, with noiseless but rapid strides. All whim and levity had vanished from his face, which, by the light of the dawn, seemed death-like pale. On that pale face there was all the struggle and all the anguish of passion.

"These arms have clasped her," he murmured; "these lips have inhaled her breath! I am under the same roof, and she is saved,—saved evermore from danger and from penury, and forever divided from me. Courage, courage! Oh, honour, duty; and thou, dark memory of the past,—thou that didst pledge love at least to a grave,—support, defend me! Can I be so weak!"

The sun was in the wintry skies when Harley stole from the house. No one was stirring except Giacomo, who stood by the threshold of the door, which he had just unbarred, feeding the house-dog. "Good-day," said the servant, smiling. "The dog has not been of much use, but I don't think the padrone will henceforth grudge him a breakfast. I shall take him to Italy, and marry him there, in the hope of improving the breed of our native Lombard dogs."

"Ah," said Harley, "you will soon leave our cold shores. May sunshine settle on you all!" He paused, and looked up at the closed windows wistfully.

"The signorina sleeps there," said Giacomo, in a husky voice, "just over the room in which you slept."

"I knew it," muttered Harley. "An instinct told me of it. Open the gate; I must go home. My excuses to your lord, and to all."

He turned a deaf ear to Giacomo's entreaties to stay till at least the signorina was up,—the signorina whom he had saved. Without trusting himself to speak further, he quitted the demesne, and walked with swift strides towards London.

CHAPTER X

Harley had not long reached his hotel, and was still seated before his untasted breakfast, when Mr. Randal Leslie was announced. Randal, who was in the firm belief that Violante was now on the wide seas with Peschiera, entered, looking the very personation of anxiety and fatigue. For like the great Cardinal Richelieu, Randal had learned the art how to make good use of his own delicate and somewhat sickly aspect. The cardinal, when intent on some sanguinary scheme requiring unusual vitality and vigour, contrived to make himself look a harmless sufferer at death's door. And Randal, whose nervous energies could at that moment have whirled him from one end of this huge metropolis to the other, with a speed that would have outstripped a prize pedestrian, now sank into a chair with a jaded weariness that no mother could have seen without compassion. He seemed since the last night to have galloped towards the last stage of consumption.

"Have you discovered no trace, my Lord? Speak, speak!"

"Speak! certainly. I am too happy to relieve your mind, Mr. Leslie. What fools we were! Ha, ha!"

"Fools—how?" faltered Randal.

"Of course; the young lady was at her father's house all the time."

"Eh? what?"

"And is there now."

"It is not possible!" said Randal, in the hollow, dreamy tone of a somnambulist. "At her father's house, at Norwood! Are you sure?"

"Sure."

Randal made a desperate and successful effort at self-control. "Heaven be praised!" he cried. "And just as I had begun to suspect the count, the marchesa; for I find that neither of them slept at home last night; and Levy told me that the count had written to him, requesting the baron to discharge his bills, as he should be for some time absent from England."

"Indeed! Well, that is nothing to us,—very much to Baron Levy, if he executes his commission, and discharges the bills. What! are you going already?"

"Do you ask such a question? How can I stay? I must go to Norwood,— must see Violante with my own eyes! Forgive my emotion—I—I—"

Randal snatched at his hat and hurried away. The low scornful laugh of Harley followed him as he went.

"I have no more doubt of his guilt than Leonard has. Violante at least shall not be the prize of that thin-lipped knave. What strange fascination can he possess, that he should thus bind to him the two men I value most,—Audley Egerton and Alphonso di Serrano? Both so wise too!— one in books, one in action. And both suspicious men! While I, so imprudently trustful and frank—Ah, that is the reason; our natures are antipathetic; cunning, simulation, falsehood, I have no mercy, no pardon for these. Woe to all hypocrites if I were a grand Inquisitor!"

"Mr. Richard Avenel," said the waiter, throwing open the door.

Harley caught at the arm of the chair on which he sat, and grasped it nervously, while his eyes became fixed intently on the form of the gentleman who now advanced into the room. He rose with an effort.

"Mr. Avenel!" he said falteringly. "Did I hear your name aright? Avenel!"

"Richard Avenel, at your service, my Lord," answered Dick. "My family is not unknown to you; and I am not ashamed of my family, though my parents were small Lansmere tradesfolks, and I am—ahem!—a citizen of the world, and well-to-do!" added Dick, dropping his kid gloves into his hat, and then placing the hat on the table, with the air of an old acquaintance who wishes to make

himself at home. Lord L'Estrange bowed and said, as he reseated himself (Dick being firmly seated already), "You are most welcome, sir; and if there be anything I can do for one of your name—"

"Thank you, my Lord," interrupted Dick. "I want nothing of any man. A bold word to say; but I say it. Nevertheless, I should not have presumed to call on your Lordship, unless, indeed, you had done me the honour to call first at my house, Eaton Square, No. — I should not have presumed to call if it had not been on business,—public business, I may say— NATIONAL business!"

Harley bowed again. A faint smile flitted for a moment to his lip, but, vanishing, gave way to a mournful, absent expression of countenance, as he scanned the handsome features before him, and, perhaps, masculine and bold though they were, still discovered something of a family likeness to one whose beauty had once been his ideal of female loveliness; for suddenly he stretched forth his hand, and said, with more than his usual cordial sweetness, "Business or not business, let us speak to each other as friends,—for the sake of a name that takes me back to Lansmere, to my youth. I listen to you with interest."

Richard Avenel, much surprised by this unexpected kindness, and touched, he knew not why, by the soft and melancholy tone of Harley's voice, warmly pressed the hand held out to him; and seized with a rare fit of shyness, coloured and coughed and hemmed and looked first down, then aside, before he could find the words which were generally ready enough at his command.

"You are very good, Lord L'Estrange; nothing can be handsomer. I feel it here, my Lord," striking his buff waistcoat,— "I do, 'pon my honour. But not to waste your time (time's money), I come to the point. It is about the borough of Lansmere. Your family interest is very strong in that borough; but excuse me if I say that I don't think you are aware that I too have cooked up a pretty considerable interest on the other side. No offence,—opinions are free. And the popular tide runs strong with us— I mean with me—at the impending crisis,—that is, at the next election. Now, I have a great respect for the earl your father, and so have those who brought me into the world—my father, John, was always a regular good Blue,—and my respect for yourself since I came into this room has gone up in the market a very great rise indeed,—considerable. So I should just like to see if we could set our heads together, and settle the borough between us two, in a snug private way, as public men ought to do when they get together, nobody else by, and no necessity for that sort of humbug, which is so common in this rotten old country. Eh, my Lord?"

"Mr. Avenel," said Harley, slowly, recovering himself from the abstraction with which he had listened to Dick's earlier sentences, "I fear I do not quite understand you; but I have no other interest in the next election for the borough of Lansmere than as may serve one whom, whatever be your politics, you must acknowledge to be—"

"A humbug!"

"Mr. Avenel, you cannot mean the person I mean. I speak of one of the first statesmen of our time,—of Mr. Audley Egerton, of—"

"A stiff-necked, pompous—"

"My earliest and dearest friend."

The rebuke, though gently said, sufficed to silence Dick for a moment; and when he spoke again, it was in an altered tone.

"I beg your pardon, my Lord, I am sure. Of course, I can say nothing disrespectful of your friend,—very sorry that he is your friend. In that case, I am almost afraid that nothing is to be done. But Mr. Audley Egerton has not a chance.

"Let me convince you of this." And Dick pulled out a little book, bound neatly in red.

"Canvass book, my Lord. I am no aristocrat. I don't pretend to carry a free and independent constituency in my breeches' pocket. Heaven forbid! But as a practical man of business, what I do is done properly. Just look at this book.

"Well kept, eh? Names, promises, inclinations, public opinions, and private interests of every individual Lansmere elector! Now, as one man of honour to another, I show you this book, and I think you will see that we have a clear majority of at least eighty votes as against Mr. Egerton."

"That is your view of the question," said Harley, taking the book and glancing over the names catalogued and ticketed therein. But his countenance became serious as he recognized many names familiar to his boyhood as those of important electors on the Lansmere side, and which he now found transferred to the hostile. "But surely there are persons here in whom you deceive yourself,—old friends of my family, staunch supporters of our party."

"Exactly so. But this new question has turned all old things topsy-turvy. No relying on any friend of yours. No reliance except in this book!" said Dick, slapping the red cover with calm but ominous emphasis.

"Now, what I want to propose is this: Don't let the Lansmere interest be beaten; it would vex the old earl,—go to his heart, I am sure."

Harley nodded.

"And the Lansmere interest need not be beaten, if you'll put up another man instead of this red-tapist. (Beg pardon.) You see I only want to get in one man, you want to get in another. Why not? Now, there 's a smart youth,—connection of Mr. Egerton's,—Randal Leslie. I have no objection to him, though he is of your colours. Withdraw Mr. Egerton, and I 'll withdraw my second man before it comes to the poll; and so we shall halve the borough slick between us. That's the way to do business,—eh, my Lord?"

"Randal Leslie! Oh, you wish to bring in Mr. Leslie? But he stands with Egerton, not against him."

"Ah," said Dick, smiling as if to himself, "so I hear; and we could bring him in over Egerton without saying a word to you. But all our family respect yours, and so I have wished to do the thing handsome and open. Let the earl and your party be content with young Leslie."

"Young Leslie has spoken to you?"

"Not as to my coming here. Oh, no, that's a secret,—private and confidential, my Lord. And now, to make matters still more smooth, I propose that my man shall be one to your Lordship's own heart. I find you have been very kind to my nephew; does you credit, my Lord,—a wonderful young man, though I say it. I never guessed there was so much in him. Yet all the time he was in my house, he had in his desk the very sketch of an invention that is now saving me from ruin,—from positive ruin,—Baron Levy, the King's Bench, and almighty smash! Now, such a young man ought to be in parliament. I like to bring forward a relation,—that is, when he does one credit; 't is human nature and sacred ties—one's own flesh and blood; and besides, one hand rubs the other, and one leg helps on the other, and relations get on best in the world when they pull together; that is, supposing that they are the proper sort of relations, and pull one on, not down. I had once thought of standing for Lansmere myself,—thought of it very lately. The country wants men like me, I know that; but I have an idea that I had better see to my own business. The country may, or may not, do without me, stupid old thing that she is! But my mill and my new engines—there is no doubt that they cannot do without me. In short, as we are quite alone, and, as I said before, there 's no kind of necessity for that sort of humbug which exists when other people are present, provide elsewhere for Mr. Egerton, whom I hate like poison,—I have a right to do that, I suppose, without offence to your Lordship,—and the two youngers, Leonard Fairfield and Randal Leslie, shall be members for the free and independent borough of Lansmere!"

"But does Leonard wish to come into parliament?"

"No, he says not; but that's nonsense. If your Lordship will just signify your wish that he should not lose this noble opportunity to raise himself in life, and get something handsome out of the nation, I'm sure he owes you too much to hesitate,—'specially when 't is to his own advantage. And besides, one of us Avenels ought to be in parliament; and if I have not the time and learning, and so forth, and

he has, why, it stands to reason that he should be the man. And if he can do something for me one day—not that I want anything—but still a baronetcy or so would be a compliment to British Industry, and be appreciated as such by myself and the public at large,—I say, if he could do something of that sort, it would keep up the whole family; and if he can't, why, I'll forgive him."

"Avenel," said Harley, with that familiar and gracious charm of manner which few ever could resist, "Avenel, if as a great personal favour to myself—to me your fellow-townsmen (I was born at Lansmere)—if I asked you to forego your grudge against Audley Egerton, whatever that grudge be, and not oppose his election, while our party would not oppose your nephew's, could you not oblige me? Come, for the sake of dear Lansmere, and all the old kindly feelings between your family and mine, say 'yes, so shall it be.'"

Richard Avenel was almost melted. He turned away his face; but there suddenly rose to his recollection the scornful brow of Audley Egerton, the lofty contempt with which he, then the worshipful Mayor of Screwestown, had been shown out of the minister's office-room; and the blood rushing over his cheeks, he stamped his foot on the floor, and exclaimed angrily, "No; I swore that Audley Egerton should smart for his insolence to me, as sure as my name be Richard Avenel; and all the soft soap in the world will not wash out that oath. So there is nothing for it but for you to withdraw that man, or for me to defeat him. And I would do so, ay,—and in the way that could most gall him,—if it cost me half my fortune. But it will not cost that," said Dick, cooling, "nor anything like it; for when the popular tide runs in one's favour, 't is astonishing how cheap an election may be. It will cost him enough though, and all for nothing,—worse than nothing. Think of it, my Lord."

"I will, Mr. Avenel. And I say, in my turn, that my friendship is as strong as your hate; and that if it costs me, not half, but my whole fortune, Audley Egerton shall come in without a shilling of expense to himself, should we once decide that he stand the contest."

"Very well, my Lord,—very well," said Dick, stiffly, and drawing on his kid gloves; "we'll see if the aristocracy is always to ride over the free choice of the people in this way. But the people are roused, my Lord. The March of Enlightenment is commenced, the Schoolmaster is abroad, and the British Lion—"

"Nobody here but ourselves, my dear Avenel. Is not this rather what you call—humbug?"

Dick started, stared, coloured, and then burst out laughing, "Give us your hand again, my Lord. You are a good fellow, that you are. And for your sake—"

"You'll not oppose Egerton?"

"Tooth and nail, tooth and nail!" cried Dick, clapping his hands to his ears, and fairly running out of the room.

There passed over Harley's countenance that change so frequent to it,— more frequent, indeed, to the gay children of the world than those of consistent tempers and uniform habits might suppose. There is many a man whom we call friend, and whose face seems familiar to us as our own; yet, could we but take a glimpse of him when we leave his presence, and he sinks back into his chair alone, we should sigh to see how often the smile on the frankest lip is but a bravery of the drill, only worn when on parade.

What thoughts did the visit of Richard Avenel bequeath to Harley? It were hard to define them.

In his place, an Audley Egerton would have taken some comfort from the visit, would have murmured, "Thank Heaven! I have not to present to the world that terrible man as my brother-in-law." But probably Harley had escaped, in his reverie, from Richard Avenel altogether. Even as the slightest incident in the daytime causes our dreams at night, but is itself clean forgotten, so the name, so the look of the visitor, might have sufficed but to influence a vision, as remote from its casual suggester as what we call real life is from that life much more real, that we imagine, or remember, in the haunted chambers of the brain. For what is real life? How little the things actually doing around us affect the springs of our sorrow or joy; but the life which our dulness calls romance,—the sentiment, the remembrance, the hope, or the fear, that are never seen in the toil of our hands, never heard in

the jargon on our lips,—from that life all spin, as the spider from its entrails, the web by which we hang in the sunbeam, or glide out of sight into the shelter of home.

"I must not think," said Harley, rousing himself with a sigh, "either of past or present. Let me hurry on to some fancied future. 'Happiest are the marriages,' said the French philosopher, and still says many a sage, 'in which man asks only the mild companion, and woman but the calm protector.' I will go to Helen."

He rose; and as he was about to lock up his *escritoire*, he remembered the papers which Leonard had requested him to read. He took them from their deposit, with a careless hand, intending to carry them with him to his father's house. But as his eye fell upon the characters, the hand suddenly trembled, and he recoiled some paces, as if struck by a violent blow. Then, gazing more intently on the writing, a low cry broke from his lips. He reseated himself, and began to read.

CHAPTER XI

Randal—with many misgivings at Lord L'Estrange's tone, in which he was at no loss to detect a latent irony—proceeded to Norwood. He found Riccabocca exceedingly cold and distant; but he soon brought that sage to communicate the suspicions which Lord L'Estrange had instilled into his mind, and these Randal was as speedily enabled to dispel. He accounted at once for his visits to Levy and Peschiera. Naturally he had sought Levy, an acquaintance of his own,—nay, of Audley Egerton's, —but whom he knew to be professionally employed by the count. He had succeeded in extracting from the baron Peschiera's suspicious change of lodgment from Mivart's Hotel to the purlieu of Leicester Square; had called there on the count, forced an entrance, openly accused him of abstracting Violante; high words had passed between them,—even a challenge. Randal produced a note from a military friend of his, whom he had sent to the count an hour after quitting the hotel. This note stated that arrangements were made for a meeting near Lord's Cricket Ground, at seven o'clock the next morning. Randal then submitted to Riccabocca another formal memorandum from the same warlike friend, to the purport that Randal and himself had repaired to the ground, and no count had been forthcoming. It must be owned that Randal had taken all suitable precautions to clear himself. Such a man is not to blame for want of invention, if he be sometimes doomed to fail.

"I, then, much alarmed," continued Randal, "hastened to Baron Levy, who informed me that the count had written him word that he should be for some time absent from England. Rushing thence, in despair, to your friend Lord L'Estrange, I heard that your daughter was safe with you. And though, as I have just proved, I would have risked my life against so notorious a duellist as the count, on the mere chance of preserving Violante from his supposed designs, I am rejoiced to think that she had no need of my unskilful arm. But how and why can the count have left England after accepting a challenge? A man so sure of his weapon, too,—reputed to be as fearless of danger as he is blunt in conscience. Explain,—you who know mankind so well,—explain. I cannot." The philosopher could not resist the pleasure of narrating the detection and humiliation of his foe, the wit, ingenuity, and readiness of his friend. So Randal learned, by little and little, the whole drama of the preceding night. He saw, then, that the exile had all reasonable hope of speedy restoration to rank and wealth. Violante, indeed; would be a brilliant prize,—too brilliant, perhaps, for Randal, but not to be sacrificed without an effort. Therefore wringing convulsively the hand of his meditated father-in-law, and turning away his head as if to conceal his emotions, the ingenuous young suitor faltered forth that now Dr. Riccabocca was so soon to vanish into the Duke di Serrano, he—Randal Leslie of Rood, born a gentleman, indeed, but of fallen fortunes—had no right to claim the promise which had been given to him while a father had cause to fear for a daughter's future; with the fear ceased the promise. Alight Heaven bless father and daughter both!

This address touched both the heart and honour of the exile. Randal Leslie knew his man. And though, before Randal's visit, Riccabocca was not quite so much a philosopher but what he would have been well pleased to have found himself released, by proof of the young man's treachery, from an alliance below the rank to which he had all chance of early restoration, yet no Spaniard was ever more tenacious of plighted word than this inconsistent pupil of the profound Florentine. And Randal's probity being now clear to him, he repeated, with stately formalities, his previous offer of Violante's hand.

"But," still falteringly sighed the provident and far-calculating Randal —"but your only child, your sole heiress! Oh, might not your consent to such a marriage (if known before your recall) jeopardize your cause? Your lands, your principalities, to devolve on the child of an humble Englishman! I dare not believe it. Ah, would Violante were not your heiress!"

"A noble wish," said Riccabocca, smiling blandly, "and one that the Fates will realize. Cheer up; Violante will not be my heiress."

"Ah," cried Randal, drawing a long breath—"ah, what do I hear?"

"Hist! I shall soon a second time be a father. And, to judge by the unerring researches of writers upon that most interesting of all subjects, parturitive science, I shall be the father of a son. He will, of course, succeed to the titles of Serrano. And Violante—"

"Will have nothing, I suppose?" exclaimed Randal, trying his best to look overjoyed till he had got his paws out of the trap into which he had so incautiously thrust them.

"Nay, her portion by our laws—to say nothing of my affection—would far exceed the ordinary dower which the daughters of London merchants bring to the sons of British peers. Whoever marries Violante, provided I regain my estates, must submit to the cares which the poets assure us ever attend on wealth."

"Oh!" groaned Randal, as if already bowed beneath the cares, and sympathizing with the poets.

"And now, let me present you to your betrothed." Although poor Randal had been remorselessly hurried along what Schiller calls the "gamut of feeling," during the last three minutes, down to the deep chord of despair at the abrupt intelligence that his betrothed was no heiress after all; thence ascending to vibrations of pleasant doubt as to the unborn usurper of her rights, according to the prophecies of parturitive science; and lastly, swelling into a concord of all sweet thoughts at the assurance that, come what might, she would be a wealthier bride than a peer's son could discover in the matrimonial Potosi of Lombard Street,— still the tormented lover was not there allowed to repose his exhausted though ravished soul. For, at the idea of personally confronting the destined bride—whose very existence had almost vanished from his mind's eye, amidst the golden showers that it saw falling divinely round her— Randal was suddenly reminded of the exceeding bluntness with which, at their last interview, it had been his policy to announce his suit, and of the necessity of an impromptu falsetto suited to the new variations that tossed him again to and fro on the merciless gamut. However, he could not recoil from her father's proposition, though, in order to prepare Riccabocca for Violante's representation, he confessed pathetically that his impatience to obtain her consent and baffle Peschiera had made him appear a rude and presumptuous wooer. The philosopher, who was disposed to believe one kind of courtship to be much the same as another, in cases where the result of all courtships was once predetermined, smiled benignly, patted Randal's thin cheek, with a "Pooh, pooh, /pazzie!/" and left the room to summon Violante.

"If knowledge be power," soliloquized Randal, "ability is certainly good luck, as Miss Edgeworth shows in that story of Murad the Unlucky, which I read at Eton; very clever story it is, too. So nothing comes amiss to me. Violante's escape, which has cost me the count's L10,000, proves to be worth to me, I dare say, ten times as much. No doubt she'll have a hundred thousand pounds at the least. And then, if her father have no other child, after all, or the child he expects die in infancy, why, once reconciled to his Government and restored to his estates, the law must take its usual course, and Violante will be the greatest heiress in Europe. As to the young lady herself, I confess she rather awes me; I know I shall be henpecked. Well, all respectable husbands are. There is something scampish and ruffianly in not being henpecked." Here Randal's smile might have harmonized well with Pluto's "iron tears;" but, iron as the smile was, the serious young man was ashamed of it. "What am I about," said he, half aloud, "chuckling to myself and wasting time, when I ought to be thinking gravely how to explain away my former cavalier courtship? Such a masterpiece as I thought it then! But who could foresee the turn things would take? Let me think; let me think. Plague on it, here she comes."

But Randal had not the fine ear of your more romantic lover; and, to his great relief, the exile entered the room unaccompanied by Violante. Riccabocca looked somewhat embarrassed.

"My dear Leslie, you must excuse my daughter to-day; she is still suffering from the agitation she has gone through, and cannot see you."

The lover tried not to look too delighted.

"Cruel!" said he; "yet I would not for worlds force myself on her presence. I hope, Duke, that she will not find it too difficult to obey the commands which dispose of her hand, and intrust her happiness to my grateful charge."

"To be plain with you, Randal, she does at present seem to find it more difficult than I foresaw. She even talks of—"

"Another attachment—Oh, heavens!"

"Attachment, /pazzie!/ Whom has she seen? No, a convent! But leave it to me. In a calmer hour she will comprehend that a child must know no lot more enviable and holy than that of redeeming a father's honour. And now, if you are returning to London, may I ask you to convey to young Mr. Hazeldean my assurances of undying gratitude for his share in my daughter's delivery from that poor baffled swindler."

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