

Allen Grant

# Babylon. Volume 3



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**Babylon. Volume 3**

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### CHAPTER XXIX. A VIEW OF ROME, By Hiram Winthrop

In the midst of an undulating sunlit plain, fresh with flowers in spring, burnt and yellow in summer and autumn, a great sordid shrivelled city blinks and festers visibly among the rags and tatters in the eye of day. Within its huge imperial walls the shrunken modern town has left a broad skirt of unoccupied hillocks; low mounds covered by stunted straggling vineyards, or broken here and there by shabby unpicturesque monasteries, with long straight pollard-lined roads stretching interminably in dreary lines between the distant boundaries. In the very centre, along some low flats that bound a dull, muddy, silent river, the actual inhabited city itself crouches humbly beneath the mouldering ruins of a nobler age. A shapeless mass of dingy, weather-stained, discoloured, tile-roofed buildings, with all its stucco peeling in the sun, it lies crowded and jammed into a narrow labyrinth of tortuous alleys, reeking with dirt, and rich in ragged filthy beggars. One huge lazaretto of sin and pestilence, choked with the accumulated rubbish and kitchen-middens of forty centuries – that was Hiram Winthrop's Rome – the Rome which fate and duty compelled him to exchange for the wild woods and the free life of untrammelled nature.

Step into one of the tortuous alleys, and you see this abomination of desolation even more distinctly, under the pitiless all-exposing glare of an Italian sky. The blotchy walls rise so high into the air to right and left, that they make the narrow lane gloomy even at midday; and yet, the light pours down obliquely upon the decaying plaster with so fierce a power that every rent and gap and dirt-stain stands out distinctly, crying in vain to the squalid tenants in the dens within to repair its unutterable dilapidation. Beneath, the little slippery pavement consists of herringbone courses of sharp stones; overhead, from ropes fastened across the street, lines of rags and tatters flutter idly in the wind, proving (what Hiram was otherwise inclined to doubt) that people at Rome *do* sometimes ostensibly wash their garments, or at least damp them. Dark gloomy shops line either side; shops windowless and doorless, entered and closed by shutters, and just rendered visible by the feeble lamp that serves a double duty as lightener of the general darkness, and taper to the tiny painted shrine of the wooden Madonna. A world of hungry ragged men, hungry dirty slatternly women, hungry children playing in the gutter, hungry priests pervading the very atmosphere – that on a closer view was Rome as it appeared to Hiram Winthrop.

To be sure, there was a little more of it. Up towards the Corso and Piazza del Popolo, there was a gaunt, modern Haussmannised quarter, the Rome of the strangers – cleaner by a fraction, whiter by a great deal, less odorous by a trifle, but still to Hiram Winthrop utterly flat, stale, and unprofitable. The one Rome was ugly, if picturesque; the other Rome was modern, and not even ugly.

Work at Seguin's studio was also to Hiram a wretched mockery of an artistic training. The more he saw of the French painter, the more he disliked him: and what was worse, the dislike was plainly mutual. For Audouin's sake, because Audouin had wished it, Hiram went on working feebly at historical pictures which he hated and could never possibly care for; but he panted to be free from the wretched bondage at once and for ever. Two years after his arrival in Rome, where he was now living upon the little capital he had derived from the sale of the deacon's farm, Hiram determined, on Audouin's strenuous advice, by letter delivered, to send a tentative painting to Paris for the Salon. Seguin watched it once or twice in the course of its completion, but he only shrugged his lean shoulders ominously, and muttered incomprehensible military oaths to himself, which he had picked up half

a century before from his father, the ex-corporal. (On the strength of that early connection with the army, Seguin, in spite of his shrivelled frame, still affected a certain swaggering military air and bearing upon many occasions.) When it was finished, he looked at it a trifle contemptuously, and then murmured: 'Good. That will finish him. After that – ' An ugly grimace did duty for the rest of the sentence.

Still, Hiram sent it in, as Audouin had desired of him; and in due time received the formal intimation from the constituted authorities of the Salon that his picture had been rejected. He knew it would be, and yet he felt the disappointment bitterly. Sitting alone in his room that evening (for he would not let even Colin share his sorrow) he brooded gloomily by himself, and began to reflect seriously that after all his whole life had been one long and wretched failure. There was no denying it, he had made a common but a fatal error; he had mistaken the desire to paint for the power of painting. He saw it all quite clearly now, and from that moment his whole career seemed in his eyes to be utterly dwarfed and spoiled and blighted.

There was only one part of each of those four years of misery at Rome that Hiram could ever afterwards look back upon with real pleasure. Once every summer, he and Colin started off together for a month's relaxation in the Tyrol or Switzerland. On those trips, Hiram forgot all the rest of his life altogether, and lived for thirty clear days in a primitive paradise. His sketch-book went always with him, and he even ventured to try his hand upon a landscape or two in oils, now that he was well out of the way of Seguin's chilly magisterial interference. Colin Churchill always praised them warmly: 'But then Colin, you know' (Hiram said to himself). 'is always such a generous enthusiastic fellow. He has such a keen artistic eye himself, of course, that he positively reads beauty into the weakest efforts of any other beginner. Still, I do feel that I can put my soul into drawing these rocks and mountains, which I never can do in painting a dressed-up model in an artificial posture, and pretending that I think she's really Cleopatra. If one had the genuine Cleopatra to paint, now, exactly as she threw herself naturally down upon her own Egyptian sofa, why that might possibly be quite another matter. But, even so, Cleopatra could never have moved me half so much as the gloss on the chestnuts and the shimmer of the cloud-light on the beautiful purple water down below there.'

Sometimes, too, Hiram took Colin with him out into the Campagna; not that he loved the Campagna – there was an odour of Rome about it; but still at least it was a sort of country, and to Hiram Winthrop that was everything. One day, in his fourth year in Italy, he was sitting on a spring afternoon with Colin beside the arches of a broken aqueduct in that great moorland, which he had been using as the foreground for a little water-colour. He had finished his sketch, and was holding it at different angles before him, when Colin suddenly broke the silence by saying warmly: 'Some day, Winthrop, I'm sure you must sell them.'

Hiram shook his head despondently. 'No, no, Churchill,' he answered with a half-angry wave of his disengaged hand. 'Even while I was at Seguin's, I knew I could never do anything worth looking at, and since I took this little studio myself, I feel sure of it. It's only your kindness that makes you think otherwise.'

Colin took the sketch from him for a moment and eyed it carefully. 'My dear fellow,' he said at last, 'believe me, you're mistaken. Just look at that! Why, Winthrop, I tell you candidly, I'm certain there's genius in it.'

Hiram smiled bitterly. 'No, no, not genius, I assure you,' he answered with a sigh, 'but only the longing for it. You have genius, I have nothing more than aspiration.'

Yet in his own heart, when Colin once more declared he was mistaken, Hiram Winthrop, looking at that delicate sketch, did almost for the moment pluck up courage again, and agree with his friend that if only the public would but smile upon him, he, too, might really do something worth the looking at.

He went home, indeed, almost elated, after so many months of silent dejection, by that new-born hope. When he reached their rooms in the alley (for Colin, in his desire to save, still stood by

him, in spite of altered fortunes) he found a large official envelope of French pattern lying casually upon the table. He knew it at once; it bore the official seal of the Académie Française. He tore open the letter hastily. Was it possible that this time they might really have hung him? What did it say? Let him see... A stereotyped form... 'Regret to announce to you... great claims upon their attention... compelled to refuse admission to the painting submitted to their consideration by M. Winthrop.'

Hiram let the letter drop out of his hands without a word. For the third time, then, his picture had been rejected for the Paris Salon!

A day or two later, the agent to whom he always confided his works for the necessary arrangements, wrote to him with florid French politeness on the subject of its final disposal. Last year he had been able to give Monsieur but forty francs for his picture, while the year before he had felt himself justified in paying sixty. Unfortunately, neither of these pictures had yet been sold; Monsieur's touch evidently did not satisfy the exacting Parisian public. This year, he regretted to tell Monsieur, he would be unable to offer him anything for the picture itself; but he would take back the frame at an inestimable depreciation on the original figure. He trusted to merit Monsieur's honoured commands upon future occasions.

Those four pounds were all the money Hiram had yet earned, in four years, by the practice of his profession; and the remains of the deacon's patrimony would hardly now suffice to carry him through another winter.

But then, that winter, Gwen was coming.

If it had not been for the remote hope of still seeing Gwen before he left Rome for ever, Hiram was inclined to think the only bed he would have slept in, that dreary, weary, disappointing night, was the bed of the Tiber.

## CHAPTER XXX. MINNA'S RESOLUTION

As Minna Wroe opened her eyes that morning in the furnished house in the Via Clementina, she could hardly realise even now that she was actually at Rome, and within half-an-hour's walk of dear Colin.

Yes, that was mainly how the Eternal City, the capital of art, the centre of Christendom, the great museum of all the ages, envisaged itself as of course to the frank barbarism of poor wee Minna's simple little bosom. Some of us, when we go to Rome, see in it chiefly a vast historical memory – the Forum, the Colosseum, the arch of Titus, the ruined Thermæ, the Palace of the Caesars. Some of us see in it rather a magnificent panorama of ancient and modern art, the Vatican, St. Peter's, the Apollo, the Aphrodite, the great works of Michael Angelo, and Raphael, and the spacious broad-souled Renaissance painters. Some see in it a modern gimcrack Italian metropolis; some, a fashionable English winter residence; some, a picturesque, quaint old-world mediæval city; some, a Babylon doomed before long to a terrible fiery destruction; and some, a spiritual centre of marvellous activity, with branches that ramify out in a thousand directions over the entire civilised and barbarous world. But Minna Wroe thought of that wonderful composite heterogeneous Rome for the most part merely as the present home and actual arena of Colin Churchill, sculptor, at Number 84 in the Via Colonna.

It had been a grand piece of luck for Minna, the chance that brought her the opportunity of taking that long-looked-for, and much desired journey. To be sure, she had been very happy in her own way down in the pretty little rural Surrey village. Mr. O'Donovan was the kindest and most fatherly old clergyman that ever lived; and though he *did* bother her just a little now and then with teaching in the Sunday school and conducting the Dorcas society, and taking charge of the Mothers' meeting, still he was so good and gentle and sympathetic to her at all times, that Minna could easily have forgiven him for twice as much professional zeal as he ever himself displayed in actual reality. Yet for all that, though the place was so pretty, and the work so light, and the four little girls on the whole such nice pleasant well-behaved little mortals, Minna certainly did miss Colin very terribly. Some employers would doubtless have said to themselves when they saw the governess moping and melancholy in spite of all the comfort that was provided for her: 'Well, what more on earth that girl can possibly be wanting really passes my poor finite comprehension.' But Mr. O'Donovan knew better. He was one of those people who habitually and instinctively put themselves in the place of others; and when on Sunday mornings after the letter with the twenty-five centesimi stamp had arrived at the rectory, he saw poor Minna moving about the house before church, looking just a trifle tearful, he said to himself with a shake of his dear kindly old broken-nosed head: 'Ah well, ah well; young people will be young people; and I've often noticed that however comfortable a girl of twenty-two may be in all externals, why, God bless my soul, if she's got a lover five hundred miles away, she can't help crying a bit about him every now and then – and very natural!' Minna gratefully observed too, that on all such occasions Mr. O'Donovan treated her with more than his usual consideration, and seemed to understand exactly what it was that made her rather sharper than her wont with the small feelings of the four little ones.

And Mr. O'Donovan never forgot his promise to Minna to look out for a family who were going to Rome and who wanted an English governess. 'But, bless my soul,' he thought to himself, 'who on earth would ever have believed beforehand what a precious difficult thing it is to find a person who fulfils at once both the conditions? People going to Rome, dozens of 'em; people wanting a governess, dozens of 'em also; but people going to Rome *and* wanting a governess, I regret to say, not a soul to be heard of. Sounds just like a Senate House problem, when I was a young fellow at Cambridge: if out of x A's there are y B's and z C's, what are the chances that any B is also a C?

Answer, precious little.' Indeed, the good old parson even went the length of putting an advertisement into the *Guardian* twice a year, without saying a word about it to Minna: 'A Clergyman

(beneficed) wishes to recommend highly qualified Young Lady as English nursery Governess to a Family wintering at Rome.’ But he never got a single answer. ‘Dear, dear,’ the kind old gentleman muttered to himself, on each such occasion when the post passed by day after day without bringing him a single one of the expected applications, ‘that’s always the way, unfortunately. Advertise that you want a governess, and you have fifty poor young girls answering at once, wasting a penny stamp a-piece, and waiting eagerly to know whether you’ll be kindly pleased to engage ‘em. Advertise that you want a place as governess, and never a soul will take a moment’s notice of you. Supply and demand, I believe they call it in the newspapers; supply and demand; but in a Christian country one might have imagined they’d have got something more charitable to give us by this time than the bare gospel of Political Economy. When I was young, we didn’t understand Political Economy; and Mr. Malthus, who wrote about it, used to be considered little better than a heathen. Still, I’ve done my duty, as far as I’ve been able; that’s one comfort. And if I can’t succeed in getting a place for George Wroe’s daughter to go and join this wonderful clever lover of hers at Rome (confound the fellow, he’s making a pot of money I see by the papers; why the dickens doesn’t he send over and fetch her?) – well anyhow, dear Lucy’s children are getting the benefit of her attention, meanwhile, and what on earth I should do without her now, I’m sure I haven’t the slightest conception.’

At last, however, after one of these regular six-monthly notices the rector happened to come down to breakfast one morning, and found a letter in a strange foreign-looking hand lying beside his porridge on the dining-room table. He turned it over and looked anxiously at the back: – yes, it was just as he hoped and feared; it bore a London post-mark, and had a Byzantine-look-ing coronet embossed upon it in profuse gilding and brilliantly blazoned heraldic colours. The old man’s heart sank within him. ‘Confound it,’ he said to himself, half-angrily, ‘I do believe I’ve gone and done my duty this time with a regular vengeance. This is an answer to the advertisement at last, and it’s an application from somebody or other to carry off dear little Miss Wroe to Rome as somebody’s governess. Hang it all, how shall I ever manage, at my age too, to accommodate myself to another young woman! I won’t open it now. I can’t open it now. If I open it before prayers and breakfast, and it really turns out to be quite satisfactory, I shall break down over it, I know I shall; and then little Miss Wroe will see I’ve been crying about it, and refuse to leave us – she’s a good girl, and if she knew how much I valued her, she’d refuse to leave us; and so after all she’d never get to join this sculptor son of young Sam Churchill’s that she’s for ever thinking of. I’ll put it away till after breakfast. Perhaps indeed it mayn’t be at all the thing for her – which would be very lucky – no, I mean unlucky; – well, there, there, what a set of miserable selfish wretched creatures we are really, whenever it comes to making even a small sacrifice for one another. Con O’Donovan, my boy, you know perfectly well in your heart of hearts you were half-wishing that that poor girl wasn’t going at last to join her lover that she’s so distracted about; and yet after that, you have the impudence to get up in the pulpit every Sunday morning, and preach a sermon about our duty to others to your poor parishioners – perhaps, even out of the fifth chapter of Matthew, you confounded hypocrite! It seems to me there’s a good deal of truth in that line of Tennyson’s, though it sounds so cynical:

*However we brave it out, we men are a little breed!*

Upon my soul, when I come to think of it, I’m really and truly quite ashamed of myself.’

Do you ever happen to have noticed that the very men who have the smallest possible leaven of littleness, or meanness, or selfishness, in their own natures are usually the exact ones who most often bitterly reproach themselves for their moral shortcomings in this matter?

When the rector came to open the envelope by-and-by in his own study, he found it contained a letter in French from a Russian countess, then in London, who proposed spending the winter in Italy. ‘Madame had seen M. O’Donovan’s Advertisement in a journal of his country, and would be glad to learn from Monsieur some particulars about the young lady whom he desired to recommend to families. Madame required a governess for one little girl, and proposed a salary of 2,500 francs.’ The old man’s eyes brightened at the idea of so large an offer – one hundred pounds sterling – and

then he laid down the letter again, and cried gently to himself, as old people sometimes do, for a few minutes. After that, he reflected that Georgey Wroe's daughter was a very good girl, and deserved any advancement that he could get for her; and Georgey was a fine young fellow himself, and as clever a hand at managing a small smack in a squall off the Chesil as any fisherman, bar none, in all England. God bless his soul, what a run that was they had together, the night the 'Sunderbund' East Indiaman went to pieces off Deadman's Bay, from Seaton Bar right round the Bill to Lulworth! He could mind even now the way the water broke over the gunwale into Georgey's face, and how Georgey laughed at the wind, and swore it was a mere breeze, and positively whistled to it. Well, well, he would do what he could for Georgey's daughter, and he must look out (with a stifled sigh) for some other good girl to take care of Lucy's precious little ones.

So he sat down and wrote off such a glowing account of Minna's many virtues to the Russian countess in London – an account mainly derived from his own calm inner belief as to what a perfect woman's character ought to be made up of – that the Russian countess wrote back to say she would engage Mdlle. Wroe immediately, without even waiting to see her. Till he got that answer, Mr. O'Donovan never said a word about the matter to Minna, for fear she might be disappointed; but as soon as it arrived, and he had furtively dried his eyes behind his handkerchief, lest she should see how sorry he was to lose her, he laid the two letters triumphantly down before her, and said, in a voice which seemed as though he were quite as much interested in the event as she was: 'There you see, my dear, I've found somebody at last for you to go to Rome with.' Minna's head reeled and her eyes swam as she read the two letters to herself with some difficulty (for her French was of the strictly school-taught variety); but as soon as she had spelt out the meaning to her own intense satisfaction, she flung her arms round old Mr. O'Donovan's neck, and kissed him twice fervently. Mr. O'Donovan's eyes glistened, and he kissed her in return gently on her forehead. She had grown to be to him almost like a daughter, and he loved her so dearly that it was a hard wrench to part from her. 'And you know, my dear,' he said to her with fatherly tenderness, 'you won't mind my mentioning it to you, I'm sure, because I need hardly tell you how much interest I take in my old friend Georgey's daughter; but I think it's just as well the lady's a foreigner, and especially a Russian, because they're not so particular, I believe, about the conventionalities of society as our English mothers are apt to be; and you'll probably get more opportunities of seeing young Churchill when occasion offers than you would have done if you'd happened to have gone abroad with an English family.'

When Minna went away from the country rectory, at very short notice, some three weeks later, Mary the housemaid observed, with a little ill-natured smile to the other village gossips, that it wasn't before it was time, neither; for the way that that there Miss Wroe, as she called herself, had been carrying on last month or two along of poor old master, and him a clergyman, too, and old enough to know better, but there, what can you expect, for everybody knows what an old gentleman is when a governess or anybody can twist him round her little finger, was that dreadful that really she often wondered whether a respectable girl as was always brought up quite decent and her only a fisherman's daughter, too, as master hisself admitted, but them governesses, when they got theirselves a little eddication and took a sitooation, was that stuck-up and ridiculous, not but what *she* made her always keep her place, for that matter, for *she* wasn't going to be put down by none of your governesses, setting themselves up to be ladies when they wasn't no better nor she was, but at any rate it was a precious good thing she was gone now before things hadn't gone no further, for if she'd stayed, why, of course, there wouldn't have been nothing left for her to do, as had always lived in proper families, but to go and give notice herself afore she'd stop in such a sitooation.

And Mrs. Upjohn, the doctor's wife, smiled blandly when Mary spoke to her about it, and said in a grave tone of severe moral censure: 'Well, there, Mary, you oughtn't to want to meddle with your master's business, whatever you may happen to fancy. Not but what Miss Wroe herself certainly did behave in a most imprudent and unladylike manner; and I can't deny, of course, that she's laid herself open to every word of what you say about her. But then, you know, Mary, she isn't a lady; and, after all,

what can you expect from such a person?' To which Mary, having that profound instinctive contempt for her own class which is sometimes begotten among the essentially vulgar by close unconscious introspection, immediately answered: 'Ah, what indeed!' and went on unrebuked with her ill-natured gossip. So high and watchful is social morality amid the charming Arcadian simplicity of our outlying English country villages.

But poor little Minna, waking up that very morning in the Via Clementina, never heeded their venomous backbiting one bit, and thought only of going to see her dear Colin. What a surprise it would be to him to see her, to be sure; for Minna, fearful that the scheme might fall through before it was really settled, had written not a word to him about it beforehand, and meant to surprise him by dropping in upon him quite unexpectedly at his studio without a single note of warning.

'Ah, my dear,' the countess said to her, when Minna, trembling, asked leave to go out and visit her cousin – that dim relationship, so inevitable among country folk from the same district, had certainly more than once done her good service – 'you have then a parent at Rome, a sculptor? Yes, yes, I recall it; that good Mr. O'Donovan made mention to me of this parent. He prayed me to let you have the opportunity from time to time of visiting him. These are our first days at Rome. For the moment, Olga will demand her vacations: she will wish to distract herself a little with the town, before she applies herself seriously to her studies of English. Let us say to-day, then: let us say this very morning. You can go, my child: you can visit your parent: and if his studio encloses anything of artistic, you pass me the word, I go to see it. But if they have the instinct of the family strong, these English! I find that charming; it is delicious: it is all that there is of most pure and poetical. She wishes to visit her cousin, who is a sculptor and whom she has not seen, it is now a long time; and she blushes and trembles like a French demoiselle who comes from departing the day itself from the gates of the convent. One would say, a lover. I find it most admirable, this affection of the family, this lasting reminiscence of the distant relations. We others in Russia, we have it too: we love the parent: but not with so much empressment. I find that trait there altogether essentially English.'

Mrs. Upjohn would have considered the countess 'scarcely respectable,' and would have avoided her acquaintance carefully, unless indeed she happened to be introduced to her by the squire's lady, in which case, of course, her perfect propriety would have been sufficiently guaranteed: but, after all, which of them had the heart the most untainted? To the pure all things are pure: and contrariwise.

So Minna hastened out into those unknown streets of Rome, and by the aid of her self-taught Italian (which was a good deal better than her French, so potent a tutor is love) she soon found her way down the Corso, and off the side alley into the narrow sunless Via Colonna. She followed the numbers down to the familiar eighty-four of Colin's letters, and there she saw upon the door a little painted tin-plate, bearing in English the simple inscription: 'Mr. C. Churchill's Studio.' Minna's heart beat fast for a moment as she mounted the stairs unannounced, and stood within the open door of Colin's modelling room.

A few casts and other sculptor's properties filled up the space between the door and the middle of the studio. Minna paused a second, and looked timidly from behind them at the room beyond. She hardly liked to come forward at once and claim acquaintance: it seemed so strange and unwomanly so to announce herself, now that she had actually got to face it. A certain unwonted bashfulness appeared somehow or other to hold her back; and Minna, who had her little superstitions still, noted it in passing as something ominous. There were two people visible in the studio – both men; and they were talking together quite earnestly, Minna could see, about somebody else who was obviously hidden from her by the Apollo in the foreground. One of them was a very handsome young man in a brown velvet coat, with a loose Rembrandtesque hat of the same stuff stuck with artistic carelessness on one side of his profuse curls: her heart leaped up at once as she recognised with a sudden thrill that that was Colin – transfigured and glorified a little by success, but still the same dear old Colin as ever, looking the very image of a sculptor, as he stood there, one arm poised lightly on his hip, and turning towards his companion with some wonderful grace that no other race of men save only

artists can ever compass. Stop, he was speaking again now; and Minna, all unconscious of listening or prying, bent forward to catch the sound of those precious words as Colin uttered them.

‘She’s splendid, you know, Winthrop,’ Colin was saying enthusiastically, in a voice that had caught a slight Italian trill from Maragliano, unusual on our sterner English lips: ‘she’s grand, she’s beautiful, she’s terrible, she’s magnificent. Upon my word, in all my life I never yet saw any woman one-half so glorious or so Greek as Cecca. I’m proud of having discovered her; immensely proud. I claim her as my own property, by right of discovery. A lot of other fellows would like to inveigle her away from me; but they won’t get her: Cecca’s true metal, and she sticks to her original inventor. What a woman she is, really! Now did you ever see such a perfectly glorious arm as that one?’

Minna reeled, almost, as she stood there among the casts and properties, and felt half inclined on the spur of the moment to flee away unseen, and never again speak or write a single word to that perfidious Colin. Cecca, indeed! Cecca! Cecca! Who on earth was this woman Cecca, she would like to know; and what on earth did the faithless Colin ever want with her? Splendid, grand, beautiful, glorious, terrible, magnificent! Oh, Colin, Colin, how could you break her poor little heart so? Should she go back at once to the countess, and not even let Colin know she had ever come to Rome at all to see him? It was too horrible, too sudden, too crushing, too unexpected!

The other man looked towards the unseen Cecca – Minna somehow felt in her heart that Cecca was there, though she couldn’t see her – and answered with an almost imperceptible American accent, ‘She’s certainly very beautiful, Churchill, very beautiful. My dear fellow, I sincerely congratulate you.’

Congratulate you! What! had it come to that? Oh horror! oh shame! had Colin been grossly deceiving her? Had he not only made love in her absence to that black-eyed Italian woman of whom she had always been so much afraid, but had he even made her an offer of marriage, without ever mentioning a word about it to her, Minna? The baseness, the deceit, the wickedness of it! And yet – this Minna thought with a sickening start – was it really base, was it really deceitful, was it really wicked? Colin had never said he would marry her; he had never been engaged to her – oh no, during all those long weary years of doubt and hesitation she had always known he wasn’t engaged to her – she had known it, and trembled. Yes, he was free; he was his own master; he could do as he liked: she was only his little cousin Minna: what claim, after all, had she upon him?

At that moment Colin turned, and looked almost towards her, without seeing her. She could have cried out ‘Colin!’ as she saw his beautiful face and his kindly eyes – too kindly to be untrue, surely – turned nearly upon her; but Cecca, Cecca, the terrible unseen Cecca, somehow restrained her. And Cecca, too, had actually accepted him. Didn’t the Yankee man he called Winthrop say, ‘I congratulate you’? There was only one meaning possible to put upon such a sentence. Accept him! Why, how could any woman conceivably refuse him? as he moved forward there with his delicate clear-cut face, a face in which the aesthetic temperament stood confessed so unmistakably – Minna could hardly blame this unknown Cecca if she fell in love with him. But for herself – oh, Colin, Cohn, Colin, it was too cruel.

She would at least see Cecca before she stole away unperceived for ever; she would see what manner of woman this was that had enticed away Colin Churchill’s love from herself, if indeed he had ever loved her, which was now at least far more than doubtful. So she moved aside gently behind the clay figures, and came in sight of the third person.

It was the exact Italian beauty of her long-nursed girlish terrors! A queenly dark woman, with supple statuesque figure and splendidly set head, was standing before the two young artists in an attitude half studied pose, half natural Calabrian peasant gracefulness. Her brown neck and arms were quite bare; her large limbs were scarcely concealed below by a short and clinging sculpturesque kirtle. She was looking towards Colin with big languishing eyes, and her smile – for she was smiling – had something in it of that sinister air that northerners often notice among even the most beautiful women of the Mediterranean races. It was plain that she couldn’t understand what her two admirers were saying in their foreign language; but it was plain also that she knew they were praising her

extraordinary beauty, and her eyes flashed forth accordingly with evident pride and overflowing self-satisfaction. Cecca was beautiful, clearly beautiful, both in face and figure, with a rich, mature southern beauty (though in years perhaps she was scarcely twenty), and Minna was forced in spite of herself to admire her form; but she felt instinctively there was something about the girl that she would have feared and dreaded, even if she hadn't heard Colin Churchill speaking of her with such unstinted and unhesitating admiration. So this was Cecca! So this was Cecca! And so this was the end, too, of all her long romantic day-dream!

As she stood there, partly doubting whether to run away or not, Cecca caught sight of her half hidden behind the Apollo, and turning to Colin, cried out sharply in a cold, ringing, musical voice as clear and as cold as crystal, 'See, see; a signorina! She waits to speak with you.'

Colin looked round carelessly, and before Minna could withdraw his eyes met hers in a sudden wonder.

'Minna!' he cried, rushing forward eagerly to meet her, 'Minna! Minna! Why, it must be Minna! How on earth did you manage to get to Rome, little woman? and why on earth didn't you let me know beforehand you were really coming?'

He tried to kiss her as he spoke, but Minna, half doubtful what she ought to do, with swimming brain and tearful eyes, held him off mechanically by withdrawing herself timidly a little, and gave him her hand instead with strange coldness, much to his evident surprise and disappointment.

'She's too modest to kiss me before Winthrop and Cecca,' Colin thought to himself a little nervously; 'but no matter – Winthrop, this is my cousin from England, Miss Wroe, that I've so often spoken to you about.'

His cousin from England! His cousin!! His cousin!!! Ah, yes, that was all he meant by it nowadays clearly. He wanted to kiss her, but merely as a cousin; all his heart, it seemed, was only for this creature he called Cecca, who stood there scowling at her so savagely from under her great heavy eyebrows. He had gone to Rome, as she feared so long ago, and had fallen into the clutches of that dreaded terrible Italian woman.

'Well, Minna,' Colin said, looking at her so tenderly that even Minna herself half believed he must be still in earnest, 'and so you've come to Italy, have you? My dear little girl, why didn't you write and tell me all about it? You've broken in upon me so unexpectedly.' ('So I see,' thought Minna.) 'Why didn't you write and let me know beforehand you were coming to see me?'

Minna's heart prompted her inwardly to answer with truth, 'Because I wanted to surprise you, Colin;' but she resisted the natural impulse, much against the grain, and answered instead with marked chilliness, 'Because I didn't know my movements were at all likely to interest you.'

As they two spoke, Hiram Winthrop noticed half unconsciously that Cecca's eyes were steadily riveted upon the newcomer, and that the light within them had changed instantaneously from the quiet gleam of placid self-satisfaction to the fierce glare of rising anger and jealous suspicion.

Colin still held Minna's hand half doubtfully in his, and looked with his open face all troubled into her pretty brown eyes, wondering vaguely what on earth could be the meaning of this unexpected coldness of demeanour.

'Tell me at least how you got here, little woman,' he began again in his soft, gentle voice, with quiet persuasiveness. 'Whatever brought you here, Minna, I'm so glad, so very glad to see you. Tell me how you came, and how long you're going to stop with me.'

Minna sat down blankly on the one chair that stood in the central area of the little studio, not because she wanted to stay there any longer, but because she felt as if her trembling knees were positively giving way beneath her. 'I've taken a place as governess to a Russian girl, Colin,' she answered shortly; 'and I've come to Rome with my pupil's mother.'

Colin felt sure by the faintness of her voice that there was something very serious the matter. 'Minna dearest,' he whispered to her half beneath his breath, 'you aren't well, I'm certain. I'll send away my friend and my model, and then you must tell me all about it, like a dear good little woman.'

Minna started, and her face flushed suddenly again with mounting colour. 'Your model,' she cried, pointing half contemptuously towards the scowling Cecca. 'Your model! Is that woman over there a model, then?'

'Yes, certainly,' Colin answered lightly.

'This lady's a model, Minna. We call her Cecca – that's short for Francesca, you know – and she's my model for a statue of a Spartan maiden I'm now working upon.'

But Cecca, though she couldn't follow the words, had noticed the contemptuous tone and gesture with which Minna had scornfully spoken of 'that woman,' and she knew at once in her hot Italian heart that she stood face to face with a natural enemy. An enemy and a rival. For Cecca, too, had in her own way her small fancies and her bold ambitions.

'She's very beautiful, isn't she?' Hiram Winthrop put in timidly, for he saw with his keen glance that Cecca's handsome face was growing every moment blacker and blacker, and he wanted to avert the coming explosion.

'Well, not so very beautiful to my mind,' Minna answered, with studied coolness, putting her head critically a little on one side, and staring at the model as if she had been made of plaster of Paris; 'though I must say you gentlemen seemed to be admiring her immensely when I came into the room a minute or two ago. I confess she doesn't exactly take my own personal fancy.'

'What is the signorina saying?' Cecca broke in haughtily, in Italian. She felt sure from the scornful tone of Minna's voice that it must at least be something disparaging.

'She says you are beautiful, Signora Cecca,' Colin answered hurriedly, with a sidelong deprecatory glance at Minna. 'Bella bella, bella, bellissima.'

'Bellissima, si, bellissima,' Minna echoed, half frightened, she knew not why; for she felt dimly conscious in her own little mind that they were all three thoroughly afraid in their hearts of the beautiful, imperious Italian woman.

'It is a lie,' Cecca murmured to herself quietly. 4 But it doesn't matter. She was saying that she didn't admire me, and the Englishman and the American tried to stop her. The sorceress! I hate her!

## CHAPTER XXXI. COUSINS

They stood all four looking at one another mutely for a few minutes longer, and then Colin broke the ominous silence by saying as politely as he was able, 'Signora Cecca, this lady has come to see me from England, and we are relations. We have not met for many years. Will you excuse my dismissing you for this morning?'

Cecca made a queenly obeisance to Colin, dropped a sort of saucy Italian curtsey to Minna, nodded familiarly to Hiram, and swept out of the studio into the dressing-room without uttering another word.

'She'll go off to Bazzoni's, I'm afraid,' Hiram said, with a sigh of relief, as she shut the door noiselessly and cautiously behind her. 'He's downright anxious to get her, and she's a touchy young woman, that's certain.'

'I'm not at all afraid of that,' Colin answered, smiling; 'she's a great deal too true to me for any such tricks as those, I'm sure, Winthrop. She really likes me, I know, and she won't desert me even for a pique, though I can easily see she's awfully offended.'

'Well, I hope so,' Hiram replied gravely. 'She's far too good a model to be lost. Goodbye, Churchill. – Good morning, Miss Wroe. I hope you'll do me the same honour as you've done your cousin, by coming to take a look some day around my studio.'

'Well, Minna,' Colin said as soon as they were alone, coming up to her and offering once more to kiss her – 'why, little woman, what's the matter? Aren't you going to let me kiss you any longer? We always used to kiss one another in the old days, you know, in England.'

'But now we're both of us quite grown up, Colin,' Minna answered, somewhat pettishly, 'so of course that makes all the difference.'

Cohn couldn't understand the meaning of this chilliness; for Minna's late letters, written in the tremor of delight at the surprise she was preparing for him, had been more than usually affectionate; and it would never have entered into his head for a moment to suppose that she could have misinterpreted his remarks about Cecca, even if he had known that she had overheard them. To a sculptor, such criticism of a model, such enthusiasm for the mere form of the shapely human figure, seem so natural and disinterested, so much a necessary corollary of his art, that he never even dreams of guarding against any possible misapprehension. So Colin only bowed his head in silent wonder, and answered slowly, 'But then you know, Minna, we're cousins. Surely there can be no reason why cousins when they meet shouldn't kiss one another.' He couldn't have chosen a worse plea at that particular moment; for as he said it, the blood rushed from Minna's cheeks, and she trembled with excitement at that seeming knell to all her dearest expectations. 'Oh, well, if you put it upon that ground, Colin,' she faltered out half tearfully, 'of course we may kiss one another – as cousins.'

Colin seized her in his arms at the word, and covered her pretty little gipsy face with a string of warm, eager kisses. Even little Minna, in her fright and anxiety, could not help imagining to herself that those were hardly what one could call in fairness mere everyday cousinly embraces. But her evil genius made her struggle to release herself, according to the code of etiquette which she had learnt as becoming from her friends and early companions; and she pushed Colin away after a moment's doubtful acquiescence, with a little petulant gesture of half-affected anger. The philosophic observer may indeed note that among the English people only women of the very highest breeding know how to let themselves be kissed by their lovers with becoming and unresisting dignity. Tennyson's Maud, when her cynic admirer kissed her for the first time, 'took the kiss sedately.' I fear it must be admitted that under the same circumstances Minna Wroe, dear little native-born lady though she was, would have felt it incumbent upon her as a woman and a maiden to resist and struggle to the utmost of her power.

As for Colin, having got rid of that first resistance easily enough, he soon settled in his own mind to his own entire satisfaction that Minna had been only a little shy of him after so long an absence, and had perhaps been playing off a sort of mock-modest coyness upon him, in order to rouse him to an effective aggression. So he said no more to her about the matter, but asked her full particulars as to her new position and her journey; and even Minna herself, disappointed as she was, could not help opening out her full heart to dear old Colin, and telling him all about everything that had happened to her in the last six weeks, except her inner hopes and fears and lamentations. Yes, she had come to Rome to live – she didn't say 'on purpose to be near you, Colin' – and they would have abundant opportunities of seeing one another frequently; and Madame was very kind, for an employer, you know – as employers go – you can't expect much, of course, from an employer. And Colin showed her all his busts and statues; and Minna admired them profoundly with a genuine admiration. And then, what prices he got for them! Why, Colin, really nowadays you're become quite a gentleman! And Colin, to whom that social metamorphosis had long grown perfectly familiar, laughed heartily at the naïve remark and then looked round with a touch of professional suspicion, for fear some accidental patron might have happened to come in and overhear the simple little confession. Altogether, their conversation got very close and affectionate and cousinly.

At last, after they had talked about everything that most concerned them both, save only the one thing that concerned them both more than anything, Minna asked in as unconcerned a tone as she could muster up, 'And this model, Colin – Cecca, I think you called her – what of her?'

Colin's eye lighted up with artistic enthusiasm as he answered warmly, 'Oh, she's the most beautiful girl in all Rome, little woman. I found her out by accident last year, at a village in Calabria where Winthrop and I had gone for a Christmas holiday; and I induced her to come to Rome and go in for a model's life as a profession. Isn't she just magnificent, Minna?'

'Very magnificent indeed, I dare say,' Minna answered coldly; 'but not to my mind by any means pleasing.'

'I wonder you think that,' Colin said in frank astonishment: for he was too much a sculptor even to suspect that Minna could take any other view of his model except the purely artistic one. 'She was the original of that Nymph Bathing of mine that you see over yonder.'

Minna looked critically at the Nymph Bathing – a shameless hussy, truly, if ever there was one – and answered in a chilly voice, 'I like it the least of all your statues, if you care to have my opinion, Colin.'

'Well, now, I'm awfully sorry for that, Minna,' Colin went on seriously, regarding the work with that despondent eye with which one always views one's own performances after hearing by any chance an adverse criticism; 'for I rather liked the nymph myself, you know, and I can generally rely upon your judgment as being about the very best to be had anywhere in the open market. There's no denying, little woman, that you've got a born taste somehow or other for the art of sculpture.'

If only women would say what they mean to us! but they won't, so what's the use of bothering one's head about it? They'll make themselves and us unhappy for a twelvemonth together – lucky indeed if not for ever – by petting and fretting over some jealous fancy or other, some vague foolish suspicion, which, if they would but speak out frankly for a moment, might be dispelled and settled with a good hearty kiss in half a second. Our very unsuspectingness, our masculine downrightness and definiteness, make us slow to perceive their endless small tiffs and crooked questions; slow to detect the real meaning that underlies their unaccountable praise and blame of other people, given entirely from the point of view of their own marvellous subjective universe. The question whether Cecca was handsome or otherwise was to Colin Churchill a simple question of external aesthetics; he was as unprejudiced about it as he would have been in judging a Greek torso or a modern Italian statue. But to Minna it was mainly a question between her own heart and Colin's. If she had only told him then and there her whole doubt and trouble – confessed it, as a man would have confessed it, openly and simply, and asked at once for a straightforward explanation, she would have saved herself long weeks

of misery and self-torture and internal questionings. But she did not; and Colin, never doubting her misapprehension, dropped the matter lightly as one of no practical importance whatsoever.

So it came to pass that Minna let that first day at Rome slip by without having come to any understanding at all with Colin; and went home to Madame's still in doubt in her own troubled little mind whether or not she was really and truly quite engaged to him. Did he love her, or did he merely like her? Was she his sweetheart, or merely an old friend whom he had known and confided in ever since those dim old days at Wootton Mandeville? Minna could have cried her eyes out over that abstruse and difficult personal question. And Colin never even knew that the question had for one moment so much as once occurred to her.

'I may have one more kiss before you go, little woman,' Colin said to her tenderly, as she was on the point of leaving. Minna's eyes glistened brightly. 'One more kiss, you know, dear, for old times' sake, Minna.' Minna's eyes filled with tears, and she could hardly brush them away without his perceiving it. It was only for old times' sake, then, for old times' sake, not for love and the future. Oh, Colin, Colin, how bitter! how bitter!

'As a cousin, Colin?' she murmured interrogatively.

Cohn laughed a gay little laugh. 'Strictly as a cousin,' he answered merrily, lingering far longer on her lips, however, than the most orthodox cousinly affection could ever possibly have sufficed to justify.

Minna sighed and jumped away hastily. That night, in her own room, looking at Colin's photograph, and thinking of the dreadful Italian woman, and all the dangers that beset her round about, she muttered to herself ever so often, 'Strictly as a cousin, he said *strictly* as a cousin – for old times' sake – strictly as a cousin.'

There was only one real comfort left for her in all the dreary, gloomy, disappointing outlook. At least that horrid high-born Miss Gwen Howard-Russell (ugh, what a name!) had disappeared bodily altogether from off the circle of Cohn's horizon.

## CHAPTER XXXII. RE-ENTER GWEN

Lothrop Audouin and Hiram Winthrop were strolling arm in arm together down the Corso. Audouin had just arrived from Paris, having crossed from America only a week earlier.

Four years had made some difference in his personal appearance; his beard and hair were getting decidedly grizzled, and for the first time in his life Hiram noticed that his friend seemed to have aged a great deal faster and more suddenly than he himself had. But Audouin's carriage was still erect and very elastic; there was plenty of life and youth about him yet, plenty even of juvenile fire and originality.

'It's very disappointing certainly, Hiram,' he said, as they turned into the great thoroughfare of the city together, 'this delay in getting your talents recognised: but I have faith in you still; and to faith, you know, as the Hebrew preacher said, all things are possible. The great tardigrade world is hard to move; you need the pou sto of a sensation to get in the thin edge of your Archimedean lever. But the recognition will come, as sure as the next eclipse; meanwhile, my dear fellow, you must go on working in faith, and I surmise that in the end you will move mountains. If not Soracte just at once, my friend, well at any rate to begin upon the Monte Testaccio.'

Hiram smiled half sadly. 'But I haven't faith, you know, Mr. Audouin,' he answered, in as easy a tone as he could well muster. 'I begin to regard myself in the dismal light of a portentous failure. Like Peter, I feel myself sinking in the water, and have no one to take me by the hand and lift me out of it.'

Audouin answered only by an airy wave of his five delicate outspread fingers. 'And Miss Russell?' he asked after half a second's pause. 'Has she come to Rome yet? You know she said she would be here this winter.'

As he spoke, he looked deep into Hiram's eyes with so much meaning that Hiram felt his face grow hot, and thought to himself, 'What a wonderful man Mr. Audouin is, really! In spite of all my silence and reserve he has somehow managed to read my innermost secret. How could he ever have known that Miss Russell's was the hand I needed to lift me out of the Sea of Gennesaret!'

But how self-contained and self-centred even the best of us are at bottom! for Audouin only meant to change the subject, and the deep look in his eyes when he spoke about Gwen to Hiram had reference entirely to his own heart and not to his companion's.

'I haven't seen or heard anything of her yet,' Hiram answered shyly, 'but the season has hardly begun so far, and I calculate we may very probably find her at Rome in the course of the next fortnight.'

'How he looks down and hesitates!' Audouin thought to himself in turn as Hiram answered him. 'How on earth can he have succeeded in discovering and recognising my unspoken secret?'

So we walk this world together, cheek by jowl, yet all at cross purposes, each one thinking mainly of himself, and at the same time illogically fancying that his neighbour is not all equally engrossed on his own similarly important personality. We imagine he is always thinking about us, but he is really doing quite otherwise – thinking about himself exactly as we are.

They walked on a few steps further in silence, each engaged in musing on his own thoughts, and then suddenly a voice came from a jeweller's shop by the corner, 'Oh, papa, just look! Mr. Audouin and his friend the painter.'

As Gwen Howard-Russell uttered those simple words, two hearts went beating suddenly faster on the pavement outside, each after its own fashion. Audouin heard chiefly his own name, and thought to himself gladly, 'Then she has not forgotten me.' Hiram heard chiefly the end of the sentence, and thought to himself bitterly, 'And shall I never be more to her than merely that – "his friend the painter"?''

'Delighted to see you, Mr. Audouin,' the colonel said stiffly, in a voice which at once belied its own spoken welcome. 'And you too, Mr. – ur – Mr. – '

‘Winthrop, papa,’ Gwen suggested blandly; and Hiram was grateful to her even for remembering it.

‘Winthrop, of course,’ the colonel accepted with a decorous smile, as who should gracefully concede that Hiram had no doubt a sort of right in his own small way to some kind of cognomen or other. ‘And are you still painting, Mr. Winthrop?’

‘I am,’ Hiram answered shortly. [The subject was one that did not interest him.] ‘And you, Miss Russell? Have you come here to spend the winter?’

‘Oh yes,’ Gwen replied, addressing herself, however, rather to Audouin than to Hiram. ‘You see we haven’t forgotten our promise. But we’re not stopping at the hotel this time, we’re at the Villa Panormi – just outside the town, you know, on the road to the Ponte Molle.

A cousin of ours, a dear stupid old fellow – ’

‘Gwen, my dear! now really you know – the Earl of Beaminster, Mr. Audouin.’

‘Yes, that’s his name; Lord Beaminster, and a dear old stupid as ever was born, too, I can tell you. Well, he’s taken the Villa Panormi for the season; it belongs to some poor wretched creature of a Roman prince, I believe (his grandfather was lackey to a cardinal), who’s in want of money dreadfully, and he lets it to my cousin to go and gamble away the proceeds at Monte Carlo. It’s just outside the Porta del Popolo, about a mile off; and the gardens are really quite delightful. You must both of you come there very often to see us.’

‘But really, Gwen, we must ask Beaminster first, you know, before we begin introducing our friends to him,’ the colonel interjected apologetically, casting down a furtive and uneasy glance at Hiram’s costume, which certainly displayed a most admired artistic disorder. ‘We ought to send him to call first at Mr. – ur – Winthrop’s studio.’

‘Of course,’ Gwen answered. ‘And so he shall go this very afternoon, if I tell him to. The dear old stupid always does whatever I order him.’

‘If we continue to take up the pavement in this way,’ Audouin put in gravely, ‘we shall get taken up ourselves by the active and intelligent police officers of a redeemed Italy. Which way are you going now, Miss Russell? towards the Piazza? Then we’ll go with you if you will allow us. – Hiram, my dear fellow, if you’ll permit me to suggest it, it’s very awkward walking four abreast on these narrow Roman side-walks – pavements, I mean; forgive the Americanism, Miss Russell. Yes, that’s better so. And when did you and the colonel come to Rome. Now tell me?’

In a moment, much to Hiram’s chagrin, and the colonel’s too, Audouin had managed to lead the way, *tête-à-tête* with Gwen, shuffling off the two others to follow behind, and get along as best they might in the background together. Now the colonel was not a distinguished conversationalist, and Hiram was hardly in a humour for talking, so after they had interchanged a few harmless conventionalities and a mild platitude or two about the weather, they both relapsed into moody silence, and occupied themselves by catching a scrap every now and then of what Gwen and Audouin were saying in front of them.

‘And that very clever Mr. Churchill, too, Mr. Audouin! I hear he’s getting on quite wonderfully. Lord Beaminster bought one of his groups, you know, and brought him into fashion – partly by my pushing, I must confess, to be quite candid – and now, I’m told, he’s commanding almost any price he chooses to ask in the way of sculpture. We haven’t seen him yet, of course, but I mean papa and my cousin to look him up in his own quarters at the very earliest opportunity.’

‘Oh, a clever enough young artist, certainly, but not really, Miss Russell, half so genuine an artist in feeling as my friend Winthrop.’

Hiram could have fallen on his neck that moment for that half-unconscious piece of kindly recommendation.

A few steps further they reached the corner of the Via de’ Condotti, and Gwen paused for a second as she looked across the street, with a little sudden cry of recognition. A handsome young man was coming round the corner from the Piazza di Spagna, with a gipsy-looking girl leaning lightly on

his arm, and talking to him with much evident animation. It was Colin and Minna, going out together on Minna's second holiday, to see the wonders of the Vatican and St. Peter's.

'Mr. Churchill!' Gwen cried, coming forward cordially to meet him. 'What a delightful rencontre! We were just talking of you.'

And here are other friends, you see, besides – Mr. Winthrop, my father, and Mr. Audouin.' Minna stood half aside in a little embarrassment, wondering who on earth the grand lady could be (she had penetration enough to recognise at once that she *was* a grand lady) talking so familiarly with our Colin.

'Miss Howard-Russell!' Colin cried on his side, taking her hand warmly. 'Then you've come back again! I'm so glad to see you! And you too, Mr. Audouin; this is really a great pleasure. – Miss Russell, I owe you so many thanks. It was you, I believe, who sent my first patron, Lord Beaminster, to visit my studio.'

'Oh, don't speak of it, please, Mr. Churchill. It's we who owe *you* thanks rather, for the pleasure your beautiful group of Autumn has given us. And dear stupid old Lord Beaminster used to amuse everybody so much by telling them how he wanted you to put a clock-dial in the place of the principal figure, until I managed at last to laugh him out of it. I made his life a burden to him, I assure you, by getting him to see how very ridiculous it was of him to try to spoil your lovely composition.'

They talked for a minute or two longer at the street corner, Gwen explaining once more to Colin how she and the colonel had come as Lord Beaminster's guests to the Villa Panormi; and meanwhile poor little Minna stood there out in the cold, growing redder every second, and boiling over with indignation to think that that horrid Miss Howard-Russell should have dropped down upon them from the clouds at the very wrong moment, just on purpose to make barefaced love so openly to her Colin.

It was Gwen herself, however, who first took notice of Minna, whom she saw standing a little apart, and looking very much out of it indeed among so many greetings of old acquaintances. 'And your friend?' she said to Colin kindly. 'You haven't introduced her to us yet. May we have the pleasure?' And she took a step forward with womanly gentleness to relieve the poor girl from her obvious embarrassment.

'Excuse me, Minna dear,' Colin said, taking her hand and leading her forward quietly.

'My cousin, Miss Wroe: Miss Howard-Bussell, Colonel Howard-Russell, Mr. Audouin, Mr. Winthrop.'

Minna bowed to them all stiffly with cheeks burning, and then fell back again at once angrily into her former position.

'And have you come to Rome lately, Miss Wroe?' Gwen asked of her with genuine kindness. 'Are you here on a visit to your cousin, whose work we all admire so greatly?'

'I came a week ago,' Minna answered defiantly, blurting out the whole truth (lest she should seem to be keeping back anything) and pitting her whole social nonentity, as it were, against the grand lady's assured position.

'I came a week ago; and I'm a governess to a little Russian girl here; and I'm going to stop all the winter.'

'That'll be very nice for all of us,' Gwen put in softly, with a look that might almost have disarmed Minna's hasty suspicions. 'And how exceedingly pleasant for you to have your cousin here, too! I suppose it was partly on that account, now, that you decided upon coming here?'

'It was,' Minna answered shortly, without vouchsafing any further explanation.

'And where are you going now, Mr. Churchill?' Gwen asked, seeing that Minna was clearly not in a humour for conversation. 'Are you showing your cousin the sights of Rome, I wonder?'

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