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VENDETTA

Honore de Balzac

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Chapter I. Prologue

In the year 1800, toward the close of October, a foreigner, accompanied by a woman and a little girl, was standing for a long time in front of the palace of the Tuileries, near the ruins of a house recently pulled down, at the point where in our day the wing begins which was intended to unite the chateau of Catherine de Medici with the Louvre of the Valois.

The man stood there with folded arms and a bowed head, which he sometimes raised to look alternately at the consular palace and at his wife, who was sitting near him on a stone. Though the woman seemed wholly occupied with the little girl of nine or ten years of age, whose long black hair she amused herself by handling, she lost not a single glance of those her companion cast on her. Some sentiment other than love united these two beings, and inspired with mutual anxiety their movements and their thoughts. Misery is, perhaps, the most powerful of all ties.

The stranger had one of those broad, serious heads, covered with thick hair, which we see so frequently in the pictures of the Caracci. The jet black of the hair was streaked with white. Though noble and proud, his features had a hardness which spoiled them. In spite of his evident strength, and his straight, erect figure, he looked to be over sixty years of age. His dilapidated clothes were those of a foreign country. Though the faded and once beautiful face of the wife betrayed the deepest sadness, she forced herself to smile, assuming a calm countenance whenever her husband looked at her.

The little girl was standing, though signs of weariness were on the youthful face, which was tanned by the sun. She had an Italian cast of countenance and bearing, large black eyes beneath their well arched brows, a native nobleness, and candid grace. More than one of those who passed them felt strongly moved by the mere aspect of this group, who made no effort to conceal a despair which seemed as deep as the expression of it was simple. But the flow of this fugitive sympathy, characteristic of Parisians, was dried immediately; for as soon as the stranger saw himself the object of attention, he looked at his observer with so savage an air that the boldest lounger hurried his step as though he had trod upon a serpent.

After standing for some time undecided, the tall stranger suddenly passed his hand across his face to brush away, as it were, the thoughts that were ploughing furrows in it. He must have taken some desperate resolution. Casting a glance upon his wife and daughter, he drew a dagger from his breast and gave it to his companion, saying in Italian:—

“I will see if the Bonapartes remember us.”

Then he walked with a slow, determined step toward the entrance of the palace, where he was, naturally, stopped by a soldier of the consular guard, with whom he was not permitted a long discussion. Seeing this man’s obstinate determination, the sentinel presented his bayonet in the form of an ultimatum. Chance willed that the guard was changed at that moment, and the corporal very obligingly pointed out to the stranger the spot where the commander of the post was standing.

“Let Bonaparte know that Bartolomeo di Piombo wishes to speak with him,” said the Italian to the captain on duty.

In vain the officer represented to Bartolomeo that he could not see the First Consul without having previously requested an audience in writing; the Italian insisted that the soldier should go to Bonaparte. The officer stated the rules of the post, and refused to comply with the order of this singular visitor. Bartolomeo frowned heavily, casting a terrible look at the captain, as if he made him responsible for the misfortunes that this refusal might occasion. Then he kept silence, folded his arms tightly across his breast, and took up his station under the portico which serves as an avenue of communication between the garden and the court-yard of the Tuileries. Persons who will things intensely are very apt to be helped by chance. At the moment when Bartolomeo di Piombo seated himself on one of the stone posts which was near the entrance, a carriage drew up, from which Lucien Bonaparte, minister of the interior, issued.

“Ah, Loucian, it is lucky for me I have met you!” cried the stranger.

These words, said in the Corsican patois, stopped Lucien at the moment when he was springing under the portico. He looked at his compatriot, and recognized him. At the first word that Bartolomeo said in his ear, he took the Corsican away with him.

Murat, Lannes, and Rapp were at that moment in the cabinet of the First Consul. As Lucien entered, followed by a man so singular in appearance as Piombo, the conversation ceased. Lucien took Napoleon by the arm and led him into the recess of a window. After exchanging a few words with his brother, the First Consul made a sign with his hand, which Murat and Lannes obeyed by retiring. Rapp pretended not to have seen it, in order to remain where he was. Bonaparte then spoke to him sharply, and the aide-de-camp, with evident unwillingness, left the room. The First Consul, who listened for Rapp’s step in the adjoining salon, opened the door suddenly, and found his aide-de-camp close to the wall of the cabinet.

“Do you choose not to understand me?” said the First Consul. “I wish to be alone with my compatriot.”

“A Corsican!” replied the aide-de-camp. “I distrust those fellows too much to—”

The First Consul could not restrain a smile as he pushed his faithful officer by the shoulders.

“Well, what has brought you here, my poor Bartolomeo?” said Napoleon.

“To ask asylum and protection from you, if you are a true Corsican,” replied Bartolomeo, roughly.

“What ill fortune drove you from the island? You were the richest, the most—”

“I have killed all the Portas,” replied the Corsican, in a deep voice, frowning heavily.

The First Consul took two steps backward in surprise.

“Do you mean to betray me?” cried Bartolomeo, with a darkling look at Bonaparte. “Do you know that there are still four Piombos in Corsica?”

Lucien took an arm of his compatriot and shook it.

“Did you come here to threaten the savior of France?” he said.

Bonaparte made a sign to Lucien, who kept silence. Then he looked at Piombo and said:—

“Why did you kill the Portas?”

“We had made friends,” replied the man; “the Barbantis reconciled us. The day after we had drunk together to drown our quarrels, I left home because I had business at Bastia. The Portas remained in my house, and set fire to my vineyard at Longone. They killed my son Gregorio. My daughter Ginevra and my wife, having taken the sacrament that morning, escaped; the Virgin protected them. When I returned I found no house; my feet were in its ashes as I searched for it. Suddenly they struck against the body of Gregorio; I recognized him in the moonlight. ‘The Portas have dealt me this blow,’ I said; and, forthwith, I went to the woods, and there I called together all the men whom I had ever served,—do you hear me, Bonaparte?—and we marched to the vineyard of the Portas. We got there at five in the morning; at seven they were all before God. Giacomo declares that Eliza Vanni saved a child, Luigi. But I myself bound him to his bed before setting fire to the house. I have left the island with my wife and child without being able to discover whether, indeed, Luigi Porta is alive.”

Bonaparte looked with curiosity at Bartolomeo, but without surprise.

“How many were there?” asked Lucien.

“Seven,” replied Piombo. “All of them were your persecutors in the olden times.”

These words roused no expression of hatred on the part of the two brothers.

“Ha! you are no longer Corsicans!” cried Piombo, with a sort of despair. “Farewell. In other days I protected you,” he added, in a reproachful tone. “Without me, your mother would never have reached Marseille,” he said, addressing himself to Bonaparte, who was silent and thoughtful, his elbow resting on a mantel-shelf.

“As a matter of duty, Piombo,” said Napoleon at last, “I cannot take you under my wing. I have become the leader of a great nation; I command the Republic; I am bound to execute the laws.”

“Ha! ha!” said Bartolomeo, scornfully.

“But I can shut my eyes,” continued Bonaparte. “The tradition of the Vendetta will long prevent the reign of law in Corsica,” he added, as if speaking to himself. “But it *must* be destroyed, at any cost.”

Bonaparte was silent for a few moments, and Lucien made a sign to Piombo not to speak. The Corsican was swaying his head from right to left in deep disapproval.

“Live here, in Paris,” resumed the First Consul, addressing Bartolomeo; “we will know nothing of this affair. I will cause your property in Corsica to be bought, to give you enough to live on for the present. Later, before long, we will think of you. But, remember, no more vendetta! There are no woods here to fly to. If you play with daggers, you must expect no mercy. Here, the law protects all citizens; and no one is allowed to do justice for himself.”

“He has made himself the head of a singular nation,” said Bartolomeo, taking Lucien’s hand and pressing it. “But you have both recognized me in misfortune, and I am yours, henceforth, for life or death. You may dispose as you will of the Piombos.”

With these words his Corsican brow unbent, and he looked about him in satisfaction.

“You are not badly off here,” he said, smiling, as if he meant to lodge there himself. “You are all in red, like a cardinal.”

“Your success depends upon yourself; you can have a palace, also,” said Bonaparte, watching his compatriot with a keen eye. “It will often happen that I shall need some faithful friend in whom I can confide.”

A sigh of joy heaved the vast chest of the Corsican, who held out his hand to the First Consul, saying:—

“The Corsican is in you still.”

Bonaparte smiled. He looked in silence at the man who brought, as it were, a waft of air from his own land,—from that isle where he had been so miraculously saved from the hatred of the “English party”; the land he was never to see again. He made a sign to his brother, who then took Piombo away. Lucien inquired with interest as to the financial condition of the former protector of their family. Piombo took him to a window and showed him his wife and Ginevra, seated on a heap of stones.

“We came from Fontainebleau on foot; we have not a single penny,” he said.

Lucien gave his purse to his compatriot, telling him to come to him the next day, that arrangements might be made to secure the comfort of the family. The value of Piombo’s property in Corsica, if sold, would scarcely maintain him honorably in Paris.

Fifteen years elapsed between the time of Piombo’s arrival with his family in Paris and the following event, which would be scarcely intelligible to the reader without this narrative of the foregoing circumstances.

Chapter II. The Studio

Servin, one of our most distinguished artists, was the first to conceive of the idea of opening a studio for young girls who wished to take lessons in painting.

About forty years of age, a man of the purest morals, entirely given up to his art, he had married from inclination the dowerless daughter of a general. At first the mothers of his pupils bought their daughters themselves to the studio; then they were satisfied to send them alone, after knowing the master's principles and the pains he took to deserve their confidence.

It was the artist's intention to take no pupils but young ladies belonging to rich families of good position, in order to meet with no complaints as to the composition of his classes. He even refused to take girls who wished to become artists; for to them he would have been obliged to give certain instructions without which no talent could advance in the profession. Little by little his prudence and the ability with which he initiated his pupils into his art, the certainty each mother felt that her daughter was in company with none but well-bred young girls, and the fact of the artist's marriage, gave him an excellent reputation as a teacher in society. When a young girl wished to learn to draw, and her mother asked advice of her friends, the answer was, invariably: "Send her to Servin's."

Servin became, therefore, for feminine art, a specialty; like Herbault for bonnets, Leroy for gowns, and Chevet for eatables. It was recognized that a young woman who had taken lessons from Servin was capable of judging the paintings of the Musee conclusively, of making a striking portrait, copying an ancient master, or painting a genre picture. The artist thus sufficed for the educational needs of the aristocracy. But in spite of these relations with the best families in Paris, he was independent and patriotic, and he maintained among them that easy, brilliant, half-ironical tone, and that freedom of judgment which characterize painters.

He had carried his scrupulous precaution into the arrangements of the locality where his pupils studied. The entrance to the attic above his apartments was walled up. To reach this retreat, as sacred as a harem, it was necessary to go up a small spiral staircase made within his own rooms. The studio, occupying nearly the whole attic floor under the roof, presented to the eye those vast proportions which surprise inquirers when, after attaining sixty feet above the ground-floor, they expect to find an artist squeezed into a gutter.

This gallery, so to speak, was profusely lighted from above, through enormous panes of glass furnished with those green linen shades by means of which all artists arrange the light. A quantity of caricatures, heads drawn at a stroke, either in color or with the point of a knife, on walls painted in a dark gray, proved that, barring a difference in expression, the most distinguished young girls have as much fun and folly in their minds as men. A small stove with a large pipe, which described a fearful zigzag before it reached the upper regions of the roof, was the necessary and infallible ornament of the room. A shelf ran round the walls, on which were models in plaster, heterogeneously placed, most of them covered with gray dust. Here and there, above this shelf, a head of Niobe, hanging to a nail, presented her pose of woe; a Venus smiled; a hand thrust itself forward like that of a pauper asking alms; a few

“ecorches,” yellowed by smoke, looked like limbs snatched over-night from a graveyard; besides these objects, pictures, drawings, lay figures, frames without paintings, and paintings without frames gave to this irregular apartment that studio physiognomy which is distinguished for its singular jumble of ornament and bareness, poverty and riches, care and neglect. The vast receptacle of an “atelier,” where all seems small, even man, has something of the air of an Opera “coulisse”; here lie ancient garments, gilded armor, fragments of stuffs, machinery. And yet there is something mysteriously grand, like thought, in it; genius and death are there; Diana and Apollo beside a skull or skeleton, beauty and destruction, poesy and reality, colors glowing in the shadows, often a whole drama, motionless and silent. Strange symbol of an artist’s head!

At the moment when this history begins, a brilliant July sun was illuminating the studio, and two rays striking athwart it lengthwise, traced diaphanous gold lines in which the dust was shimmering. A dozen easels raised their sharp points like masts in a port. Several young girls were animating the scene by the variety of their expressions, their attitudes, and the differences in their toilets. The strong shadows cast by the green serge curtains, arranged according to the needs of each easel, produced a multitude of contrasts, and the piquant effects of light and shade. This group was the prettiest of all the pictures in the studio.

A fair young girl, very simply dressed, sat at some distance from her companions, working bravely and seeming to be in dread of some mishap. No one looked at her, or spoke to her; she was much the prettiest, the most modest, and, apparently, the least rich among them. Two principal groups, distinctly separated from each other, showed the presence of two sets or cliques, two minds even here, in this studio, where one might suppose that rank and fortune would be forgotten.

But, however that might be, these young girls, sitting or standing, in the midst of their color-boxes, playing with their brushes or preparing them, handling their dazzling palettes, painting, laughing, talking, singing, absolutely natural, and exhibiting their real selves, composed a spectacle unknown to man. One of them, proud, haughty, capricious, with black hair and beautiful hands, was casting the flame of her glance here and there at random; another, light-hearted and gay, a smile upon her lips, with chestnut hair and delicate white hands, was a typical French virgin, thoughtless, and without hidden thoughts, living her natural real life; a third was dreamy, melancholy, pale, bending her head like a drooping flower; her neighbor, on the contrary, tall, indolent, with Asiatic habits, long eyes, moist and black, said but little, and reflected, glancing covertly at the head of Antinous.

Among them, like the “jocoso” of a Spanish play, full of wit and epigrammatic sallies, another girl was watching the rest with a comprehensive glance, making them laugh, and tossing up her head, too lively and arch not to be pretty. She appeared to rule the first group of girls, who were the daughters of bankers, notaries, and merchants,—all rich, but aware of the imperceptible though cutting slights which another group belonging to the aristocracy put upon them. The latter were led by the daughter of one of the King’s ushers, a little creature, as silly as she was vain, proud of being the daughter of a man with “an office at court.” She was a girl who always pretended to understand the remarks of the master at the first word, and seemed to do her work as a favor to him. She used an eyeglass, came very much dressed, and always late, and entreated her companions to speak low.

In this second group were several girls with exquisite figures and distinguished features, but there was little in their glance or expression that was simple and candid. Though their attitudes were elegant and their movements graceful, their faces lacked frankness; it was easy to see that they belonged to a world where polite manners form the character from early youth, and the abuse of social pleasures destroys sentiment and develops egotism.

But when the whole class was here assembled, childlike heads were seen among this bevy of young girls, ravishingly pure and virgin, faces with lips half-opened, through which shone spotless teeth, and on which a virgin smile was flickering. The studio then resembled not a studio, but a group of angels seated on a cloud in ether.

By mid-day, on this occasion, Servin had not appeared. For some days past he had spent most of his time in a studio which he kept elsewhere, where he was giving the last touches to a picture for the Exposition. All of a sudden Mademoiselle Amelie Thirion, the leader of the aristocrats, began to speak in a low voice, and very earnestly, to her neighbor. A great silence fell on the group of patricians, and the commercial party, surprised, were equally silent, trying to discover the subject of this earnest conference. The secret of the young *ultras* was soon revealed.

Amelie rose, took an easel which stood near hers, carried it to a distance from the noble group, and placed it close to a board partition which separated the studio from the extreme end of the attic, where all broken casts, defaced canvases and the winter supply of wood were kept. Amelie's action caused a murmur of surprise, which did not prevent her from accomplishing the change by rolling hastily to the side of the easel the stool, the box of colors, and even the picture by Prudhon, which the absent pupil was copying. After this coup d'etat the Right began to work in silence, but the Left discoursed at length.

"What will Mademoiselle Piombo say to that?" asked a young girl of Mademoiselle Matilde Roguin, the lively oracle of the banking group.

"She's not a girl to say anything," was the reply; "but fifty years hence she'll remember the insult as if it were done to her the night before, and revenge it cruelly. She is a person that I, for one, don't want to be at war with."

"The slight these young ladies mean to put upon her is all the more unkind," said another young girl, "because yesterday, Mademoiselle Ginevra was very sad. Her father, they say, has just resigned. They ought not to add to her trouble, for she was very considerate of them during the Hundred Days. Never did she say a word to wound them. On the contrary, she avoided politics. But I think our *ultras* are acting more from jealousy than from party spite."

"I have a great mind to go and get Mademoiselle Piombo's easel and place it next to mine," said Matilde Roguin. She rose, but second thoughts made her sit down again.

"With a character like hers," she said, "one can't tell how she would take a civility; better wait events."

"Ecco la," said the young girl with the black eyes, languidly.

The steps of a person coming up the narrow stairway sounded through the studio. The words: "Here she comes!" passed from mouth to mouth, and then the most absolute silence reigned.

To understand the importance of the ostracism imposed by the act of Amelie Thirion, it is necessary to add that this scene took place toward the end of the month of July,

1815. The second return of the Bourbons had shaken many friendships which had held firm under the first Restoration. At this moment families, almost all divided in opinion, were renewing many of the deplorable scenes which stain the history of all countries in times of civil or religious wars. Children, young girls, old men shared the monarchial fever to which the country was then a victim. Discord glided beneath all roofs; distrust dyed with its gloomy colors the words and the actions of the most intimate friends.

Ginevra Piombo loved Napoleon to idolatry; how, then, could she hate him? The emperor was her compatriot and the benefactor of her father. The Baron di Piombo was among those of Napoleon's devoted servants who had co-operated most effectually in the return from Elba. Incapable of denying his political faith, anxious even to confess it, the old baron remained in Paris in the midst of his enemies. Ginevra Piombo was all the more open to condemnation because she made no secret of the grief which the second Restoration caused to her family. The only tears she had so far shed in life were drawn from her by the twofold news of Napoleon's captivity on the "Bellerophon," and Labedoyere's arrest.

The girls of the aristocratic group of pupils belonged to the most devoted royalist families in Paris. It would be difficult to give an idea of the exaggerations prevalent at this epoch, and of the horror inspired by the Bonapartists. However insignificant and petty Amelie's action may now seem to be, it was at that time a very natural expression of the prevailing hatred. Ginevra Piombo, one of Servin's first pupils, had occupied the place that was now taken from her since the first day of her coming to the studio. The aristocratic circle had gradually surrounded her. To drive her from a place that in some sense belonged to her was not only to insult her, but to cause her a species of artistic pain; for all artists have a spot of predilection where they work.

Nevertheless, political prejudice was not the chief influence on the conduct of the Right clique of the studio. Ginevra, much the ablest of Servin's pupils, was an object of intense jealousy. The master testified as much admiration for the talents as for the character of his favorite pupil, who served as a conclusion to all his comparisons. In fact, without any one being able to explain the ascendancy which this young girl obtained over all who came in contact with her, she exercised over the little world around her a prestige not unlike that of Bonaparte upon his soldiers.

The aristocracy of the studio had for some days past resolved upon the fall of this queen, but no one had, as yet, ventured to openly avoid the Bonapartist. Mademoiselle Thirion's act was, therefore, a decisive stroke, intended by her to force the others into becoming, openly, the accomplices of her hatred. Though Ginevra was sincerely loved by several of these royalists, nearly all of whom were indoctrinated at home with their political ideas, they decided, with the tactics peculiar to women, that they should do best to keep themselves aloof from the quarrel.

On Ginevra's arrival she was received, as we have said, in profound silence. Of all the young women who had, so far, come to Servin's studio, she was the handsomest, the tallest, and the best made. Her carriage and demeanor had a character of nobility and grace which commanded respect. Her face, instinct with intelligence, seemed to radiate light, so inspired was it with the enthusiasm peculiar to Corsicans,—which does not, however, preclude calmness. Her long hair and her black eyes and lashes expressed passion; the corners of her mouth, too softly defined, and the lips, a trifle too marked, gave signs of that kindliness which strong beings derive from the consciousness of their strength.

By a singular caprice of nature, the charm of her face was, in some degree, contradicted by a marble forehead, on which lay an almost savage pride, and from which seemed to emanate the moral instincts of a Corsican. In that was the only link between herself and her native land. All the rest of her person, her simplicity, the easy grace of her Lombard beauty, was so seductive that it was difficult for those who looked at her to give her pain. She inspired such keen attraction that her old father caused her, as matter of precaution, to be accompanied to and from the studio. The only defect of this truly poetic creature came from the very power of a beauty so fully developed; she looked a woman. Marriage she had refused out of love to her father and mother, feeling herself necessary to the comfort of their old age. Her taste for painting took the place of the passions and interests which usually absorb her sex.

“You are very silent to-day, mesdemoiselles,” she said, after advancing a little way among her companions. “Good-morning, my little Laure,” she added, in a soft, caressing voice, approaching the young girl who was painting apart from the rest. “That head is strong,—the flesh tints a little too rosy, but the drawing is excellent.”

Laure raised her head and looked tenderly at Ginevra; their faces beamed with the expression of a mutual affection. A faint smile brightened the lips of the young Italian, who seemed thoughtful, and walked slowly to her easel, glancing carelessly at the drawings and paintings on her way, and bidding good-morning to each of the young girls of the first group, not observing the unusual curiosity excited by her presence. She was like a queen in the midst of her court; she paid no attention to the profound silence that reigned among the patricians, and passed before their camp without pronouncing a single word. Her absorption seemed so great that she sat down before her easel, opened her color-box, took up her brushes, drew on her brown sleeves, arranged her apron, looked at her picture, examined her palette, without, apparently, thinking of what she was doing. All heads in the group of the bourgeoises were turned toward her. If the young ladies in the Thirion camp did not show their impatience with the same frankness, their sidelong glances were none the less directed on Ginevra.

“She hasn’t noticed it!” said Mademoiselle Roguin.

At this instant Ginevra abandoned the meditative attitude in which she had been contemplating her canvas, and turned her head toward the group of aristocrats. She measured, at a glance, the distance that now separated her from them; but she said nothing.

“It hasn’t occurred to her that they meant to insult her,” said Matilde; “she neither colored nor turned pale. How vexed these girls will be if she likes her new place as well as the old! You are out of bounds, mademoiselle,” she added, aloud, addressing Ginevra.

The Italian pretended not to hear; perhaps she really did not hear. She rose abruptly; walked with a certain deliberation along the side of the partition which separated the adjoining closet from the studio, and seemed to be examining the sash through which her light came,—giving so much importance to it that she mounted a chair to raise the green serge, which intercepted the light, much higher. Reaching that height, her eye was on a level with a slight opening in the partition, the real object of her efforts, for the glance that she cast through it can be compared only to that of a miser discovering Aladdin’s treasure. Then she sprang down hastily and returned to her place, changed the position of her picture, pretended to be still dissatisfied with the light, pushed a table close to the partition, on which she placed a chair, climbed

lightly to the summit of this erection, and again looked through the crevice. She cast but one glance into the space beyond, which was lighted through a skylight; but what she saw produced so strong an effect upon her that she tottered.

“Take care, Mademoiselle Ginevra, you’ll fall!” cried Laure.

All the young girls gazed at the imprudent climber, and the fear of their coming to her gave her courage; she recovered her equilibrium, and replied, as she balanced herself on the shaking chair:—

“Pooh! it is more solid than a throne!”

She then secured the curtain and came down, pushed the chair and table as far as possible from the partition, returned to her easel, and seemed to be arranging it to suit the volume of light she had now thrown upon it. Her picture, however, was not in her mind, which was wholly bent on getting as near as possible to the closet, against the door of which she finally settled herself. Then she began to prepare her palette in the deepest silence. Sitting there, she could hear, distinctly, a sound which had strongly excited her curiosity the evening before, and had whirled her young imagination across vast fields of conjecture. She recognized the firm and regular breathing of a man whom she had just seen asleep. Her curiosity was satisfied beyond her expectations, but at the same time she felt saddled by an immense responsibility. Through the opening in the wall she had seen the Imperial eagle; and upon the flock bed, faintly lighted from above, lay the form of an officer of the Guard. She guessed all. Servin was hiding a proscribed man!

She now trembled lest any of her companions should come near here to examine her picture, when the regular breathing or some deeper breath might reveal to them, as it had to her, the presence of this political victim. She resolved to keep her place beside that door, trusting to her wits to baffle all dangerous chances that might arise.

“Better that I should be here,” thought she, “to prevent some luckless accident, than leave that poor man at the mercy of a heedless betrayal.”

This was the secret of the indifference which Ginevra had apparently shown to the removal of her easel. She was inwardly enchanted, because the change had enabled her to gratify her curiosity in a natural manner; besides, at this moment, she was too keenly preoccupied to perceive the reason of her removal.

Nothing is more mortifying to young girls, or, indeed, to all the world, than to see a piece of mischief, an insult, or a biting speech, miss its effect through the contempt or the indifference of the intended victim. It seems as if hatred to an enemy grows in proportion to the height that enemy is raised above us. Ginevra’s behavior was an enigma to all her companions; her friends and enemies were equally surprised; for the former claimed for her all good qualities, except that of forgiveness of injuries. Though, of course, the occasions for displaying that vice of nature were seldom afforded to Ginevra in the life of a studio, still, the specimens she had now and then given of her vindictive disposition had left a strong impression on the minds of her companions.

After many conjectures, Mademoiselle Roguin came to the conclusion that the Italian’s silence showed a grandeur of soul beyond all praise; and the banking circle, inspired by her, formed a project to humiliate the aristocracy. They succeeded in that aim by a fire of sarcasms which presently brought down the pride of the Right coterie.

Madame Servin's arrival put a stop to the struggle. With the shrewdness that usually accompanies malice, Amelie Thirion had noticed, analyzed, and mentally commented on the extreme preoccupation of Ginevra's mind, which prevented her from even hearing the bitterly polite war of words of which she was the object. The vengeance Mademoiselle Roguin and her companions were inflicting on Mademoiselle Thirion and her group had, therefore, the fatal effect of driving the young *ultras* to search for the cause of the silence so obstinately maintained by Ginevra di Piombo. The beautiful Italian became the centre of all glances, and she was henceforth watched by friends and foes alike.

It is very difficult to hide even a slight emotion or sentiment from fifteen inquisitive and unoccupied young girls, whose wits and mischief ask for nothing better than secrets to guess, schemes to create or baffle, and who know how to find too many interpretations for each gesture, glance, and word, to fail in discovering the right one.

At this moment, however, the presence of Madame Servin produced an interlude in the drama thus played below the surface in these various young hearts, the sentiments, ideas, and progress of which were expressed by phrases that were almost allegorical, by mischievous glances, by gestures, by silence even, more intelligible than words. As soon as Madame Servin entered the studio, her eyes turned to the door near which Ginevra was seated. Under present circumstances the fact of this glance was not lost. Though at first none of the pupils took notice of it, Mademoiselle Thirion recollected it later, and it explained to her the doubt, fear, and mystery which now gave something wild and frightened to Madame Servin's eyes.

"Mesdemoiselles," she said, "Monsieur Servin cannot come to-day."

Then she went round complimenting each young girl, receiving in return a volume of those feminine caresses which are given as much by the tones of the voice and by looks as by gestures. She presently reached Ginevra, under the influence of an uneasiness she tried in vain to disguise. They nodded to each other in a friendly way, but said nothing; one painted, the other stood looking at the painting. The breathing of the soldier in the closet could be distinctly heard, but Madame Servin appeared not to notice it; her feigned ignorance was so obvious that Ginevra recognized it at once for wilful deafness. Presently the unknown man turned on his pallet.

The Italian then looked fixedly at Madame Servin, who said, without the slightest change of face:—

"Your copy is as fine as the original; if I had to choose between the two I should be puzzled."

"Monsieur Servin has not taken his wife into his confidence as to this mystery," thought Ginevra, who, after replying to the young wife's speech with a gentle smile of incredulity, began to hum a Corsican "canzonetta" to cover the noise that was made by the prisoner.

It was so unusual a thing to hear the studious Italian sing, that all the other young girls looked up at her in surprise. Later, this circumstance served as proof to the charitable suppositions of jealousy.

Madame Servin soon went away, and the session ended without further events; Ginevra allowed her companions to depart, and seemed to intend to work later. But, unconsciously to herself, she betrayed her desire to be left alone by impatient glances, ill-disguised, at the pupils who were slow in leaving. Mademoiselle Thirion, a cruel enemy to the girl who excelled her in everything, guessed by the instinct of

jealousy that her rival's industry hid some purpose. By dint of watching her she was struck by the attentive air with which Ginevra seemed to be listening to sounds that no one else had heard. The expression of impatience she now detected in her companion's eyes was like a flash of light to her.

Amelie was the last of the pupils to leave the studio; from there she went down to Madame Servin's apartment and talked with her for a moment; then she pretended to have left her bag, ran softly back to the studio, and found Ginevra once more mounted on her frail scaffolding, and so absorbed in the contemplation of an unknown object that she did not hear the slight noise of her companion's footsteps. It is true that, to use an expression of Walter Scott, Amelie stepped as if on eggs. She hastily withdrew outside the door and coughed. Ginevra quivered, turned her head, saw her enemy, blushed, hastened to alter the shade to give meaning to her position, and came down from her perch leisurely. She soon after left the studio, bearing with her, in her memory, the image of a man's head, as beauteous as that of the Endymion, a masterpiece of Girodet's which she had lately copied.

"To banish so young a man! Who can he be? for he is not Marshal Ney—"

These two sentences are the simplest expression of the many ideas that Ginevra turned over in her mind for two days. On the third day, in spite of her haste to be first at the studio, she found Mademoiselle Thirion already there, having come in a carriage.

Ginevra and her enemy observed each other for a long time, but they made their faces impenetrable. Amelie had seen the handsome head of the mysterious man, but, fortunately, and unfortunately also, the Imperial eagles and uniform were so placed that she did not see them through the crevice in the partition. She was lost in conjectures. Suddenly Servin came in, much earlier than usual.

"Mademoiselle Ginevra," he said, after glancing round the studio, "why have you placed yourself there? The light is bad. Come nearer to the rest of the young ladies and pull down that curtain a little."

Then he sat down near Laure, whose work deserved his most cordial attention.

"Well, well!" he cried; "here, indeed, is a head extremely well done. You'll be another Ginevra."

The master then went from easel to easel, scolding, flattering, jesting, and making, as usual, his jests more dreaded than his reprimands. Ginevra had not obeyed the professor's order, but remained at her post, firmly resolved not to quit it. She took a sheet of paper and began to sketch in sepia the head of the hidden man. A work done under the impulse of an emotion has always a stamp of its own. The faculty of giving to representations of nature or of thought their true coloring constitutes genius, and often, in this respect, passion takes the place of it. So, under the circumstances in which Ginevra now found herself, the intuition which she owed to a powerful effect upon her memory, or, possibly, to necessity, that mother of great things, lent her, for the moment, a supernatural talent. The head of the young officer was dashed upon the paper in the midst of an awkward trembling which she mistook for fear, and in which a physiologist would have recognized the fire of inspiration. From time to time she glanced furtively at her companions, in order to hide the sketch if any of them came near her. But in spite of her watchfulness, there was a moment when she did not see the eyeglass of the pitiless Amelie turned full upon the drawing from the shelter of a great portfolio. Mademoiselle Thirion, recognizing the portrait of the

mysterious man, showed herself abruptly, and Ginevra hastily covered the sheet of paper.

“Why do you stay there in spite of my advice, mademoiselle?” asked the professor, gravely.

The pupil turned her easel so that no one but the master could see the sketch, which she placed upon it, and said, in an agitated voice:—

“Do you not think, as I do, that the light is very good? Had I not better remain here?”

Servin turned pale. As nothing escapes the piercing eyes of malice, Mademoiselle Thirion became, as it were, a sharer in the sudden emotion of master and pupil.

“You are right,” said Servin; “but really,” he added, with a forced laugh, “you will soon come to know more than I do.”

A pause followed, during which the professor studied the drawing of the officer’s head.

“It is a masterpiece! worthy of Salvator Rosa!” he exclaimed, with the energy of an artist.

All the pupils rose on hearing this, and Mademoiselle Thirion darted forward with the velocity of a tiger on its prey. At this instant, the prisoner, awakened, perhaps, by the noise, began to move. Ginevra knocked over her stool, said a few incoherent sentences, and began to laugh; but she had thrown the portrait into her portfolio before Amelie could get to her. The easel was now surrounded; Servin descanted on the beauty of the copy which his favorite pupil was then making, and the whole class was duped by this stratagem, except Amelie, who, slipping behind her companions, attempted to open the portfolio where she had seen Ginevra throw the sketch. But the latter took it up without a word, and placed it in front of her. The two young girls then looked at each other fixedly, in silence.

“Come, mesdemoiselles, take your places,” said Servin. “If you wish to do as well as Mademoiselle di Piombo, you mustn’t be always talking fashions and balls, and trifling away your time as you do.”

When they were all reseated before their easels, Servin sat down beside Ginevra.

“Was it not better that I should be the one to discover the mystery rather than the others?” asked the girl, in a low voice.

“Yes,” replied the painter, “you are one of us, a patriot; but even if you were not, I should still have confided the matter to you.”

Master and pupil understood each other, and Ginevra no longer feared to ask:—

“Who is he?”

“An intimate friend of Labedoyere, who contributed more than any other man, except the unfortunate colonel, to the union of the 7th regiment with the grenadiers of Elba. He was a major in the Imperial guard and was at Waterloo.”

“Why not have burned his uniform and shako, and supplied him with citizen’s clothes?” said Ginevra, impatiently.

“He will have them to-night.”

“You ought to have closed the studio for some days.”

“He is going away.”

“Then they’ll kill him,” said the girl. “Let him stay here with you till the present storm is over. Paris is still the only place in France where a man can be hidden safely. Is he a friend of yours?” she asked.

“No; he has no claim upon me but that of his ill-luck. He came into my hands in this way. My father-in-law, who returned to the army during the campaign, met this young fellow, and very cleverly rescued him from the claws of those who captured Labedoyere. He came here to defend the general, foolish fellow!”

“Do you call him that!” cried Ginevra, casting a glance of astonishment at the painter, who was silent for a moment.

“My father-in-law is too closely watched to be able to keep him in his own house,” he resumed. “So he brought him to me, by night, about a week ago. I hoped to keep him out of sight in this corner, the only spot in the house where he could be safe.”

“If I can be useful to you, employ me,” said Ginevra. “I know the Marechal de Feltre.”

“Well, we’ll see,” replied the painter.

This conversation lasted too long not to be noticed by all the other girls. Servin left Ginevra, went round once more to each easel, and gave such long lessons that he was still there at the hour when the pupils were in the habit of leaving.

“You are forgetting your bag, Mademoiselle Thirion,” said the professor, running after the girl, who was now condescending to the work of a spy to satisfy her jealousy.

The baffled pupil returned for the bag, expressing surprise at her carelessness; but this act of Servin’s was to her fresh proof of the existence of a mystery, the importance of which was evident. She now ran noisily down the staircase, and slammed the door which opened into the Servins’ apartment, to give an impression that she had gone; then she softly returned and stationed herself outside the door of the studio.

Chapter III. Labedoyere's Friend

When the painter and Ginevra thought themselves alone, Servin rapped in a peculiar manner on the door of the dark garret, which turned at once on its rusty and creaking hinges. Ginevra then saw a tall and well-made young man, whose Imperial uniform set her heart to beating. The officer had one arm in a sling, and the pallor of his face revealed sharp suffering. Seeing an unknown woman, he recoiled.

Amelie, who was unable to look into the room, the door being closed, was afraid to stay longer; she was satisfied with having heard the opening of the garret door, and departed noiselessly.

"Fear nothing," said the painter to the officer. "Mademoiselle is the daughter of a most faithful friend of the Emperor, the Baron di Piombo."

The young soldier retained no doubts as to Ginevra's patriotism as soon as he saw her.

"You are wounded," she said.

"Oh! it is nothing, mademoiselle," he replied; "the wound is healing."

Just at this moment the loud cries of the vendors of newspapers came up from the street: "Condemned to death!" They all trembled, and the soldier was the first to hear a name that turned him pale.

"Labedoyere!" he cried, falling on a stool.

They looked at each other in silence. Drops gathered on the livid forehead of the young man; he seized the black tufts of his hair in one hand with a gesture of despair, and rested his elbow on Ginevra's easel.

"After all," he said, rising abruptly, "Labedoyere and I knew what we were doing. We were certain of the fate that awaited us, whether from triumph or defeat. He dies for the Cause, and here am I, hiding myself!"

He rushed toward the door of the studio; but, quicker than he, Ginevra reached it, and barred his way.

"Can you restore the Emperor?" she said. "Do you expect to raise that giant who could not maintain himself?"

"But what can I do?" said the young man, addressing the two friends whom chance had sent to him. "I have not a relation in the world. Labedoyere was my protector and my friend; without him, I am alone. To-morrow I myself may be condemned; my only fortune was my pay. I spent my last penny to come here and try to snatch Labedoyere from his fate; death is, therefore, a necessity for me. When a man decides to die he ought to know how to sell his life to the executioner. I was thinking just now that the life of an honest man is worth that of two traitors, and the blow of a dagger well placed may give immortality."

This spasm of despair alarmed the painter, and even Ginevra, whose own nature comprehended that of the young man. She admired his handsome face and his

delightful voice, the sweetness of which was scarcely lessened by its tones of fury. Then, all of a sudden, she poured a balm upon the wounds of the unfortunate man:—

“Monsieur,” she said, “as for your pecuniary distress, permit me to offer you my savings. My father is rich; I am his only child; he loves me, and I am sure he will never blame me. Have no scruple in accepting my offer; our property is derived from the Emperor; we do not own a penny that is not the result of his munificence. Is it not gratitude to him to assist his faithful soldiers? Take the sums you need as indifferently as I offer them. It is only money!” she added, in a tone of contempt. “Now, as for friends,—those you shall have.”

She raised her head proudly, and her eyes shone with dazzling brilliancy.

“The head which falls to-morrow before a dozen muskets will save yours,” she went on. “Wait till the storm is over; you can then escape and take service in foreign countries if you are not forgotten here; or in the French army, if you are.”

In the comfort that women give there is always a delicacy which has something maternal, foreseeing, and complete about it. But when the words of hope and peace are said with grace of gesture and that eloquence of tone which comes from the heart, and when, above all, the benefactress is beautiful, a young man does not resist. The prisoner breathed in love through all his senses. A rosy tinge colored his white cheeks; his eyes lost something of the sadness that dulled them, and he said, in a peculiar tone of voice:—

“You are an angle of goodness—But Labedoyere!” he added. “Oh, Labedoyere!”

At this cry they all three looked at one another in silence, each comprehending the others’ thoughts. No longer friends of twenty minutes only, they were friends of twenty years.

“Dear friend,” said Servin, “can you save him?”

“I can avenge him.”

Ginevra quivered. Though the stranger was handsome, his appearance had not influenced her; the soft pity in a woman’s heart for miseries that are not ignoble had stifled in Ginevra all other emotions; but to hear a cry of vengeance, to find in that proscribed being an Italian soul, devotion to Napoleon, Corsican generosity!—ah! that was, indeed, too much for her. She looked at the officer with a respectful emotion which shook his heart. For the first time in her life a man had caused her a keen emotion. She now, like other women, put the soul of the stranger on a par with the noble beauty of his features and the happy proportions of his figure, which she admired as an artist. Led by accidental curiosity to pity, from pity to a powerful interest, she came, through that interest, to such profound sensations that she felt she was in danger if she stayed there longer.

“Until to-morrow, then,” she said, giving the officer a gentle smile by way of a parting consolation.

Seeing that smile, which threw a new light on Ginevra’s features, the stranger forgot all else for an instant.

“To-morrow,” he said, sadly; “but to-morrow, Labedoyere—”

Ginevra turned, put a finger on her lips, and looked at him, as if to say: “Be calm, be prudent.”

And the young man cried out in his own language:

“Ah! Dio! che non vorrei vivere dopo averla veduta?—who would not wish to live after seeing her?”

The peculiar accent with which he pronounced the words made Ginevra quiver.

“Are you Corsican?” she cried, returning toward him with a beating heart.

“I was born in Corsica,” he replied; “but I was brought, while very young, to Genoa, and as soon as I was old enough for military service I enlisted.”

The beauty of the young man, the mighty charm lent to him by his attachment to the Emperor, his wound, his misfortunes, his danger, all disappeared to Ginevra’s mind, or, rather, all were blended in one sentiment,—a new and delightful sentiment. This persecuted man was a child of Corsica; he spoke its cherished language! She stood, for a moment, motionless; held by a magical sensation; before her eyes was a living picture, to which all human sentiments, united by chance, gave vivid colors. By Servin’s invitation, the officer had seated himself on a divan, and the painter, after removing the sling which supported the arm of his guest, was undoing the bandages in order to dress the wound. Ginevra shuddered when she saw the long, broad gash made by the blade of a sabre on the young man’s forearm, and a moan escaped her. The stranger raised his head and smiled to her. There was something touching which went to the soul, in the care with which Servin lifted the lint and touched the lacerated flesh, while the face of the wounded man, though pale and sickly, expressed, as he looked at the girl, more pleasure than suffering. An artist would have admired, involuntarily, this opposition of sentiments, together with the contrasts produced by the whiteness of the linen and the bared arm to the red and blue uniform of the officer.

At this moment a soft half-light pervaded the studio; but a parting ray of the evening sunlight suddenly illuminated the spot where the soldier sat, so that his noble, blanched face, his black hair, and his clothes were bathed in its glow. The effect was simple enough, but to the girl’s Italian imagination it was a happy omen. The stranger seemed to her a celestial messenger, speaking the language of her own country. He thus unconsciously put her under the spell of childhood’s memories, while in her heart there dawned another feeling as fresh, as pure as her own innocence. For a short, very short moment, she was motionless and dreamy, as though she were plunged in boundless thought. Then she blushed at having allowed her absorption to be noticed, exchanged one soft and rapid glance with the wounded man, and fled with the vision of him still before her eyes.

The next day was not a class-day, but Ginevra came to the studio, and the prisoner was free to sit beside her easel. Servin, who had a sketch to finish, played the part of mentor to the two young people, who talked to each other chiefly in Corsican. The soldier related the sufferings of the retreat from Moscow; for, at nineteen years of age, he had made the passage of the Beresins, and was almost the last man left of his regiment. He described, in words of fire, the great disaster of Waterloo. His voice was music itself to the Italian girl. Brought up as a Corsican, Ginevra was, in some sense, a child of Nature; falseness was a thing unknown to her; she gave herself up without reserve to her impressions; she acknowledged them, or, rather, allowed them to be seen without the affectations of petty and calculating coquetry, characteristic of Parisian girlhood. During this day she sat more than once with her palette in one hand, her brushes in another, without touching a color. With her eyes fastened on the officer, and her lips slightly apart, she listened, in the attitude of painting a stroke which was never painted. She was not surprised to see such softness in the eyes of the

young man, for she felt that her own were soft in spite of her will to keep them stern and calm. After periods like this she painted diligently, without raising her head, for he was there, near her, watching her work. The first time he sat down beside her to contemplate her silently, she said, in a voice of some emotion, after a long pause:—

"Does it amuse you to see me paint?"

That day she learned that his name was Luigi. Before separating, it was agreed between them that if, on class-days when they could not see each other, any important political event occurred, Ginevra was to inform him by singing certain Corsican melodies then agreed upon.

The following day Mademoiselle Thirion informed all the members of the class, under pledge of secrecy that Ginevra di Piombo had a lover, a young man who came during the hours for the lesson, and concealed himself in the garret beyond the studio.

"You, who take her part," she said to Mademoiselle Roguin, "watch her carefully, and you will see how she spends her time."

Ginevra was, therefore, observed with diabolical attention. They listened to her songs, they watched her glances. At times, when she supposed that no one saw her, a dozen pairs of eyes were furtively upon her. Thus enlightened, the girls were able to interpret truly the emotions that crossed the features of the beautiful Italian,—her gestures, the peculiar tones in which she hummed a tune, and the attention with which they saw her listen to sounds which only she could hear through the partition.

By the end of a week, Laure was the only one of Servin's fifteen pupils who had resisted the temptation of looking at Luigi through the crevice of the partition; and she, through an instinct of weakness, still defended her beautiful friend. Mademoiselle Roguin endeavored to make her wait on the staircase after the class dispersed, that she might prove to her the intimacy of Ginevra and the young man by entering the studio and surprising them together. But Laure refused to condescend to an act of espial which no curiosity could justify, and she consequently became the object of much reprobation.

Before long Mademoiselle Thirion made known that she thought it improper to attend the classes of a painter whose opinions were tainted with patriotism and Bonapartism (in those days the terms were synonymous), and she ceased her attendance at the studio. But, although she herself forgot Ginevra, the harm she had planted bore fruit. Little by little, the other young girls revealed to their mothers the strange events which were happening at the studio. One day Matilde Roguin did not come; the next day another girl was missing, and so on, till the last three or four who were left came no more. Ginevra and Laure, her little friend, were the sole occupants of the deserted studio for three or four days.

Ginevra did not observe this falling off, nor ask the cause of her companions' absence. As soon as she had invented means of communication with Luigi she lived in the studio in a delightful solitude, alone amid her own world, thinking only of the officer and the dangers that threatened him. Though a sincere admirer of noble characters that never betray their political faiths, she nevertheless urged Luigi to submit himself to the royal authority, that he might be released from his present life and remain in France. But to this he would not consent. If passions are born and nourished, as they say, under the influence of romantic causes, never did so many circumstances of that kind concur in uniting two young souls by one and the same

sentiment. The friendship of Ginevra for Luigi and that of Luigi for Ginevra made more progress in a month than a friendship in society would make in ten years. Adversity is the touchstone of character. Ginevra was able, therefore, to study Luigi, to know him; and before long they mutually esteemed each other. The girl, who was older than Luigi, found a charm in being courted by a youth already so grand, so tried by fate,—a youth who joined to the experience of a man the graces of adolescence. Luigi, on his side, felt an unspeakable pleasure in allowing himself to be apparently protected by a woman, now twenty-five years of age. Was it not a proof of love? The union of gentleness and pride, strength and weakness in Ginevra were, to him, irresistible attractions, and he was utterly subjugated by her. In short, before long, they loved each other so profoundly that they felt no need of denying to each other their love, nor yet of telling it.

One day, towards evening, Ginevra heard the accustomed signal. Luigi scratched with a pin on the woodwork in a manner that produced no more noise than a spider might make as he fastened his thread. The signal meant that he wished to come out of his retreat.

Ginevra glanced around the studio, and not seeing Laure, opened the door; but as she did so Luigi caught sight of the little pupil and abruptly retired. Surprised at his action, Ginevra looked round, saw Laure, and said, as she went up to the girl's easel:—

"You are staying late, my dear. That head seems to me finished; you only want a high-light,—see! on that knot of hair."

"You would do me a great kindness," said Laure, in a trembling voice, "if you would give this copy a few touches; for then I could carry away with me something to remind me of you."

"Willingly," said Ginevra, painting a few strokes on the picture. "But I thought it was a long way from your home to the studio, and it is late."

"Oh! Ginevra, I am going away, never to return," cried the poor girl, sadly.

"You mean to leave Monsieur Servin!" exclaimed Ginevra, less affected, however, by this news than she would have been a month earlier.

"Haven't you noticed, Ginevra, that for some days past you and I have been alone in the studio?"

"True," said Ginevra, as if struck by a sudden recollection. "Are all those young ladies ill, or going to be married, or are their fathers on duty at court?"

"They have left Monsieur Servin," replied Laure.

"Why?"

"On your account, Ginevra."

"My account!" repeated the Corsican, springing up, with a threatening brow and her eyes flashing.

"Oh! don't be angry, my kind Ginevra," cried Laure, in deep distress. "My mother insists on my leaving the studio. The young ladies say that you have some intrigue, and that Monsieur Servin allows the young man whom you love to stay in the dark attic. I have never believed these calumnies nor said a word to my mother about them. But last night Madame Roguin met her at a ball and asked her if she still sent me here. When my mother answered yes, Madame Roguin told her the falsehoods of

those young ladies. Mamma scolded me severely; she said I must have known it all, and that I had failed in proper confidence between mother and daughter by not telling her. Oh! my dear Ginevra! I, who took you for my model, oh! how grieved I am that I can't be your companion any longer."

"We shall meet again in life; girls marry—" said Ginevra.

"When they are rich," signed Laure.

"Come and see me; my father has a fortune—"

"Ginevra," continued Laure, tenderly. "Madame Roguin and my mother are coming to see Monsieur Servin to-morrow and reproach him; hadn't you better warn him."

A thunderbolt falling at Ginevra's feet could not have astonished her more than this revelation.

"What matter is it to them?" she asked, naively.

"Everybody thinks it very wrong. Mamma says it is immoral."

"And you, Laure, what do you say?"

The young girl looked up at Ginevra, and their thoughts united. Laure could no longer keep back her tears; she flung herself on her friend's breast and sobbed. At this moment Servin came into the studio.

"Mademoiselle Ginevra," he cried, with enthusiasm, "I have finished my picture! it is now being varnished. What have you been doing, meanwhile? Where are the young ladies; are they taking a holiday, or are they in the country?"

Laure dried her tears, bowed to Monsieur Servin, and went away.

"The studio has been deserted for some days," replied Ginevra, "and the young ladies are not coming back."

"Pooh!"

"Oh! don't laugh," said Ginevra. "Listen: I am the involuntary cause of the loss of your reputation—"

The artist smiled, and said, interrupting his pupil:—

"My reputation? Why, in a few days my picture will make it at the Exposition."

"That relates to your talent," replied the girl. "I am speaking of your morality. Those young ladies have told their mothers that Luigi was shut up here, and that you lent yourself—to—our love."

"There is some truth in that, mademoiselle," replied the professor. "The mothers of those young ladies are foolish women; if they had come straight to me I should have explained the matter. But I don't care a straw about it! Life is short, anyhow."

And the painter snapped his fingers above his head. Luigi, who had heard part of the conversation, came in.

"You have lost all your scholars," he cried. "I have ruined you!"

The artist took Luigi's hand and that of Ginevra, and joined them.

"Marry one another, my children," he said, with fatherly kindness.

They both dropped their eyes, and their silence was the first avowal they had made to each other of their love.

“You will surely be happy,” said Servin. “There is nothing in life to equal the happiness of two beings like yourselves when bound together in love.”

Luigi pressed the hand of his protector without at first being able to utter a word; but presently he said, in a voice of emotion:—

“To you I owe it all.”

“Be happy! I bless and wed you,” said the painter, with comic unction, laying his hands upon the heads of the lovers.

This little jest put an end to their strained emotion. All three looked at one another and laughed merrily. Ginevra pressed Luigi’s hand in a strong clasp, with a simplicity of action worthy of the customs of her native land.

“Ah ca, my dear children,” resumed Servin, “you think that all will go right now, but you are much mistaken.”

The lovers looked at him in astonishment.

“Don’t be anxious. I’m the only one that your romance will harm. But the fact is, Madame Servin is a little straitlaced; and I don’t really see how we are to settle it with her.”

“Heavens! and I forgot to tell you,” exclaimed Ginevra, “that Madame Roguin and Laure’s mother are coming here to-morrow to—”

“I understand,” said the painter.

“But you can easily justify yourself,” continued the girl, with a proud movement of her head. “Monsieur Luigi,” she added, turning to him with an arch look, “will no longer object to entering the royal service. Well, then,” after receiving a smile from the young man, “to-morrow morning I will send a petition to one of the most influential persons at the ministry of War,—a man who will refuse nothing to the daughter of the Baron di Piombo. We shall obtain a ‘tacit’ pardon for Captain Luigi, for, of course, they will not allow him the rank of major. And then,” she added, addressing Servin, “you can confound the mothers of my charitable companions by telling them the truth.”

“You are an angel!” cried Servin.

While this scene was passing at the studio the father and mother of Ginevra were becoming impatient at her non-return.

“It is six o’clock, and Ginevra not yet home!” cried Bartolomeo.

“She was never so late before,” said his wife.

The two old people looked at each other with an anxiety that was not usual with them. Too anxious to remain in one place, Bartolomeo rose and walked about the salon with an active step for a man who was over seventy-seven years of age. Thanks to his robust constitution, he had changed but little since the day of his arrival in Paris, and, despite his tall figure, he walked erect. His hair, now white and sparse, left uncovered a broad and protuberant skull, which gave a strong idea of his character and firmness. His face, seamed with deep wrinkles, had taken, with age, a nobler expression, preserving the pallid tones which inspire veneration. The ardor of passions still lived in the fire of his eyes, while the eyebrows, which were not wholly whitened, retained their terrible mobility. The aspect of the head was stern, but it conveyed the impression that Piombo had a right to be so. His kindness, his

gentleness were known only to his wife and daughter. In his functions, or in presence of strangers, he never laid aside the majesty that time had impressed upon his person; and the habit of frowning with his heavy eyebrows, contracting the wrinkles of his face, and giving to his eyes a Napoleonic fixity, made his manner of accosting others icy.

During the course of his political life he had been so generally feared that he was thought unsocial, and it is not difficult to explain the causes of that opinion. The life, morals, and fidelity of Piombo made him obnoxious to most courtiers. In spite of the fact that delicate missions were constantly intrusted to his discretion which to any other man about the court would have proved lucrative, he possessed an income of not more than thirty thousand francs from an investment in the Grand Livre. If we recall the cheapness of government securities under the Empire, and the liberality of Napoleon towards those of his faithful servants who knew how to ask for it, we can readily see that the Baron di Piombo must have been a man of stern integrity. He owed his plumage as baron to the necessity Napoleon felt of giving him a title before sending him on missions to foreign courts.

Bartolomeo had always professed a hatred to the traitors with whom Napoleon surrounded himself, expecting to bind them to his cause by dint of victories. It was he of whom it is told that he made three steps to the door of the Emperor's cabinet after advising him to get rid of three men in France on the eve of Napoleon's departure for his celebrated and admirable campaign of 1814. After the second return of the Bourbons Bartolomeo ceased to wear the decoration of the Legion of honor. No man offered a finer image of those old Republicans, incorruptible friends to the Empire, who remained the living relics of the two most energetic governments the world has ever seen. Though the Baron di Piombo displeased mere courtiers, he had the Darus, Drouots, and Carnots with him as friends. As for the rest of the politicians, he cared not a whiff of his cigar's smoke for them, especially since Waterloo.

Bartolomeo di Piombo had bought, for the very moderate sum which Madame Mere, the Emperor's mother, had paid him for his estates in Corsica, the old mansion of the Portenduere family, in which he had made no changes. Lodged, usually, at the cost of the government, he did not occupy this house until after the catastrophe of Fontainebleau. Following the habits of simple persons of strict virtue, the baron and his wife gave no heed to external splendor; their furniture was that which they bought with the mansion. The grand apartments, lofty, sombre, and bare, the wide mirrors in gilded frames that were almost black, the furniture of the period of Louis XIV. were in keeping with Bartolomeo and his wife, personages worthy of antiquity.

Under the Empire, and during the Hundred Days, while exercising functions that were liberally rewarded, the old Corsican had maintained a great establishment, more for the purpose of doing honor to his office than from any desire to shine himself. His life and that of his wife were so frugal, so tranquil, that their modest fortune sufficed for all their wants. To them, their daughter Ginevra was more precious than the wealth of the whole world. When, therefore, in May, 1814, the Baron di Piombo resigned his office, dismissed his crowd of servants, and closed his stable door, Ginevra, quiet, simple and unpretending like her parents, saw nothing to regret in the change. Like all great souls, she found her luxury in strength of feeling, and derived her happiness from quietness and work. These three beings loved each other too well for the externals of existence to be of value in their eyes.

Often, and especially after the second dreadful fall of Napoleon, Bartolomeo and his wife passed delightful evenings alone with their daughter, listening while she sang and played. To them there was a vast secret pleasure in the presence, in the slightest word of that child; their eyes followed her with tender anxiety; they heard her step in the court-yard, lightly as she trod. Like lovers, the three would often sit silently together, understanding thus, better than by speech, the eloquence of their souls. This profound sentiment, the life itself of the two old people, animated their every thought. Here were not three existences, but one,—one only, which, like the flame on the hearth, divided itself into three tongues of fire. If, occasionally, some memory of Napoleon's benefits and misfortunes, if the public events of the moment distracted the minds of the old people from this source of their constant solicitude, they could always talk of those interests without affecting their community of thought, for Ginevra shared their political passions. What more natural, therefore, than the ardor with which they found a refuge in the heart of their only child?

Until now the occupations of public life had absorbed the energy of the Baron di Piombo; but after leaving those employments he felt the need of casting that energy into the last sentiment that remained to him. Apart from the ties of parentage, there may have been, unknown to these three despotic souls, another powerful reason for the intensity of their reciprocal love: it was love undivided. Ginevra's whole heart belonged to her father, as Piombo's whole heart belonged to his child; and if it be true that we are bound to one another more by our defects than by our virtues, Ginevra echoed in a marvellous manner the passions of her father. There lay the sole imperfection of this triple life. Ginevra was born unyielding of will, vindictive, and passionate, like her father in his youth.

The Corsican had taken pleasure in developing these savage sentiments in the heart of his daughter, precisely as a lion teaches the lion-cubs to spring upon their prey. But this apprenticeship to vengeance having no means of action in their family life, it came to pass that Ginevra turned the principle against her father; as a child she forgave him nothing, and he was forced to yield to her. Piombo saw nothing more than childish nonsense in these fictitious quarrels, but the child was all the while acquiring a habit of ruling her parents. In the midst, however, of the tempests which the father was fond of exciting, a look, a word of tenderness, sufficed to pacify their angry souls, and often they were never so near to a kiss as when they were threatening each other vehemently.

Nevertheless, for the last five years, Ginevra, grown wiser than her father, avoided such scenes. Her faithfulness, her devotion, the love which filled her every thought, and her admirable good sense had got the better of her temper. And yet, for all that, a very great evil had resulted from her training; Ginevra lived with her father and mother on the footing of an equality which is always dangerous.

Piombo and his wife, persons without education, had allowed Ginevra to study as she pleased. Following her caprices as a young girl, she had studied all things for a time, and then abandoned them,—taking up and leaving each train of thought at will, until, at last, painting had proved to be her dominant passion. Ginevra would have made a noble woman had her mother been capable of guiding her studies, of enlightening her mind, and bringing into harmony her gifts of nature; her defects came from the fatal education which the old Corsican had found delight in giving her.

After marching up and down the room for some time, Piombo rang the bell; a servant entered.

“Go and meet Mademoiselle Ginevra,” said his master.

“I always regret our carriage on her account,” remarked the baroness.

“She said she did not want one,” replied Piombo, looking at his wife, who, accustomed for forty years to habits of obedience, lowered her eyes and said no more.

Already a septuagenarian, tall, withered, pale, and wrinkled, the baroness exactly resembled those old women whom Schnetz puts into the Italian scenes of his “genre” pictures. She was so habitually silent that she might have been taken for another Mrs. Shandy; but, occasionally, a word, look, or gesture betrayed that her feelings still retained all the vigor and the freshness of their youth. Her dress, devoid of coquetry, was often in bad taste. She usually sat passive, buried in a low sofa, like a Sultana Valide, awaiting or admiring her Ginevra, her pride, her life. The beauty, toilet, and grace of her daughter seemed to have become her own. All was well with her if Ginevra was happy. Her hair was white, and a few strands only were seen above her white and wrinkled forehead, or beside her hollow cheeks.

“It is now fifteen days,” she said, “since Ginevra made a practice of being late.”

“Jean is so slow!” cried the impatient old man, buttoning up his blue coat and seizing his hat, which he dashed upon his head as he took his cane and departed.

“You will not get far,” said his wife, calling after him.

As she spoke, the porte-cochere was opened and shut, and the old mother heard the steps of her Ginevra in the court-yard. Bartolomeo almost instantly reappeared, carrying his daughter, who struggled in his arms.

Chapter IV. Love

“Here she is, my Ginevra, Ginevrettina, Ginevrola, mia Ginevra bella!” cried the old man.

“Oh, father, you hurt me!”

Instantly Ginevra was put down with an air of respect. She nodded her head with a graceful movement at her mother, who was frightened by her cry, as if to say, “Don’t be alarmed, it was only a trick to get away.”

The pale, wan face of the baroness recovered its usual tones, and even assumed a look of gayety. Piombo rubbed his hands violently,—with him the surest symptom of joy; he had taken to this habit at court when he saw Napoleon becoming angry with those of his generals and ministers who served him ill or committed blunders. When, as now, the muscles of his face relaxed, every wrinkle on his forehead expressed benevolence. These two old people presented at this moment precisely the aspect of a drooping plant to which a little water has given fresh life after long dryness.

“Now, to dinner! to dinner!” cried the baron, offering his large hand to his daughter, whom he called “Signora Piombellina,”—another symptom of gayety, to which Ginevra replied by a smile.

“Ah ca!” said Piombo, as they left the table, “your mother has called my attention to the fact that for some weeks you have stayed much longer than usual at the studio. It seems that painting is more to you than your parents—”

“Oh, father!”

“Ginevra is preparing some surprise for us, I think,” said the mother.

“A picture of your own! will you bring us that?” cried the Corsican, clapping his hands.

“Yes, I am very much occupied at the studio,” replied Ginevra, rather slowly.

“What is the matter, Ginevra? You are turning pale!” cried her mother.

“No!” exclaimed the young girl in a tone of resolution,—“no! it shall never be said that Ginevra Piombo acted a lie.”

Hearing this singular exclamation, Piombo and his wife looked at their daughter in astonishment.

“I love a young man,” she added, in a voice of emotion.

Then, not venturing to look at her parents, she lowered her large eyelids as if to veil the fire of her eyes.

“Is he a prince?” asked her father, ironically, in a tone of voice which made the mother quail.

“No, father,” she said, gently, “he is a young man without fortune.”

“Is he very handsome?”

“He is very unfortunate.”

“What is he?”

“Labedoyere’s comrade; he was proscribed, without a refuge; Servin concealed him, and—”

“Servin is a good fellow, who has done well,” cried Piombo; “but you, my daughter, you do wrong to love any man, except your father.”

“It does not depend on me to love, or not to love,” replied Ginevra, still gently.

“I flattered myself,” continued her father, “that my Ginevra would be faithful to me until I died; and that my love and that of her mother would suffice her till then; I did not expect that our tenderness would find a rival in her soul, and—”

“Did I ever reproach you for your fanaticism for Napoleon?” said Ginevra. “Have you never loved any one but me? Did you not leave me for months together when you went on missions. I bore your absence courageously. Life has necessities to which we must all submit.”

“Ginevra!”

“No, you don’t love me for myself; your reproaches betray your intolerable egotism.”

“You dare to blame your father’s love!” exclaimed Piombo, his eyes flashing.

“Father, I don’t blame you,” replied Ginevra, with more gentleness than her trembling mother expected. “You have grounds for your egotism, as I have for my love. Heaven is my witness that no girl has ever fulfilled her duty to her parents better than I have done to you. I have never felt anything but love and happiness where others often see obligation. It is now fifteen years that I have never left your protecting wing, and it has been a most dear pleasure to me to charm your life. But am I ungrateful for all this in giving myself up to the joy of loving; is it ingratitude to desire a husband who will protect me hereafter?”

“What! do you reckon benefits with your father, Ginevra?” said Piombo, in a dangerous tone.

A dreadful pause then followed, during which no one dared to speak. Bartolomeo at last broke the silence by crying out in a heart-rending tone:—

“Oh! stay with us! stay with your father, your old father! I cannot have you love another man. Ginevra, you will not have long to await your liberty.”

“But, father, remember that I need not leave you; we shall be two to love you; you will learn to know the man to whose care you bequeath me. You will be doubly cherished by me and by him,—by him who is my other self, by me who am all his.”

“Oh! Ginevra, Ginevra!” cried the Corsican, clenching his fists; “why did you not marry when Napoleon brought me to accept the idea? Why did you not take the counts and dukes he presented to you?”

“They loved me to order,” said the girl. “Besides, they would have made me live with them, and I did not wish to leave you alone.”

“You don’t wish to leave me alone,” said Piombo, “and yet you marry!—that is leaving me alone. I know you, my daughter; in that case, you would cease to love us. Elisa,” he added, looking at his wife, who remained motionless, and as if stupefied, “we have no longer a daughter; she wishes to marry.”

The old man sat down, after raising his hands to heaven with a gesture of invoking the Divine power; then he bowed himself over as if weighed down with sorrow.

Ginevra saw his agitation, and the restraint which he put upon his anger touched her to the heart; she expected some violent crisis, some ungovernable fury; she had not armed her soul against paternal gentleness.

“Father,” she said, in a tender voice, “no, you shall never be abandoned by your Ginevra. But love her a little for her own sake. If you know how he loves me! Ah! *He* would never make me unhappy!”

“Comparisons already!” cried Piombo, in a terrible voice. “No, I can never endure the idea of your marriage. If he loved you as you deserve to be loved he would kill me; if he did not love you, I should put a dagger through him.”

The hands of the old man trembled, his lips trembled, his body trembled, but his eyes flashed lightnings. Ginevra alone was able to endure his glance, for her eyes flamed also, and the daughter was worthy of the sire.

“Oh! to love you! What man is worthy of such a life?” continued Piombo. “To love you as a father is paradise on earth; who is there worthy to be your husband?”

“*He*,” said Ginevra; “he of whom I am not worthy.”

“He?” repeated Piombo, mechanically; “who is *he*?”

“He whom I love.”

“How can he know you enough to love you?”

“Father,” said Ginevra, with a gesture of impatience, “whether he loves me or not, if I love him—”

“You love him?” cried Piombo.

Ginevra bent her head softly.

“You love him more than you love us?”

“The two feelings cannot be compared,” she replied.

“Is one stronger than the other?”

“I think it is,” said Ginevra.

“You shall not marry him,” cried the Corsican, his voice shaking the window-panes.

“I shall marry him,” replied Ginevra, tranquilly.

“Oh, God!” cried the mother, “how will this quarrel end? Santa Virgina! place thyself between them!”

The baron, who had been striding up and down the room, now seated himself; an icy sternness darkened his face; he looked fixedly at his daughter, and said to her, in a gentle, weakened voice,—

“Ginevra, no! you will not marry him. Oh! say nothing more to-night—let me think the contrary. Do you wish to see your father on his knees, his white hairs prostrate before you? I supplicate you—”

“Ginevra Piombo does not pass her word and break it,” she replied. “I am your daughter.”

“She is right,” said the baroness. “We are sent into the world to marry.”

“Do you encourage her in disobedience?” said the baron to his wife, who, terrified by the word, now changed to marble.

“Refusing to obey an unjust order is not disobedience,” said Ginevra.

“No order can be unjust from the lips of your father, my daughter. Why do you judge my action? The repugnance that I feel is counsel from on high, sent, it may be, to protect you from some great evil.”

“The only evil could be that he did not love me.”

“Always *he*!”

“Yes, always,” she answered. “He is my life, my good, my thought. Even if I obeyed you he would be ever in my soul. To forbid me to marry him is to make me hate you.”

“You love us not!” cried Piombo.

“Oh!” said Ginevra, shaking her head.

“Well, then, forget him; be faithful to us. After we are gone—you understand?”

“Father, do you wish me to long for your death?” cried Ginevra.

“I shall outlive you. Children who do not honor their parents die early,” said the father, driven to exasperation.

“All the more reason why I should marry and be happy,” she replied.

This coolness and power of argument increased Piombo’s trouble; the blood rushed violently to his head, and his face turned purple. Ginevra shuddered; she sprang like a bird on her father’s knee, threw her arms around his neck, and caressed his white hair, exclaiming, tenderly:—

“Oh, yes, yes, let me die first! I could never survive you, my father, my kind father!”

“Oh! my Ginevra, my own Ginevra!” replied Piombo, whose anger melted under this caress like snow beneath the rays of the sun.

“It was time you ceased,” said the baroness, in a trembling voice.

“Poor mother!”

“Ah! Ginevretta! mia bella Ginevra!”

And the father played with his daughter as though she were a child of six. He amused himself by releasing the waving volume of her hair, by dandling her on his knee; there was something of madness in these expressions of his love. Presently his daughter scolded while kissing him, and tried, by jesting, to obtain admission for Luigi; but her father, also jesting, refused. She sulked, then returned to coax once more, and sulked again, until, by the end of the evening, she was forced to be content with having impressed upon her father’s mind both her love for Luigi and the idea of an approaching marriage.

The next day she said no more about her love; she was more caressing to her father than she had ever been, and testified the utmost gratitude, as if to thank him for the consent he seemed to have given by his silence. That evening she sang and played to him for a long time, exclaiming now and then: “We want a man’s voice for this nocturne.” Ginevra was an Italian, and that says all.

At the end of a week her mother signed to her. She went; and Elisa Piombo whispered in her ear:—

“I have persuaded your father to receive him.”

“Oh! mother, how happy you have made me!”

That day Ginevra had the joy of coming home on the arm of her Luigi. The officer came out of his hiding-place for the second time only. The earnest appeals which Ginevra made to the Duc de Feltre, then minister of war, had been crowned with complete success. Luigi’s name was replaced upon the roll of officers awaiting orders. This was the first great step toward better things. Warned by Ginevra of the difficulties he would encounter with her father, the young man dared not express his fear of finding it impossible to please the old man. Courageous under adversity, brave on a battlefield, he trembled at the thought of entering Piombo’s salon. Ginevra felt him tremble, and this emotion, the source of which lay in her, was, to her eyes, another proof of love.

“How pale you are!” she said to him when they reached the door of the house.

“Oh! Ginevra, if it concerned my life only!—”

Though Bartolomeo had been notified by his wife of the formal presentation Ginevra was to make of her lover, he would not advance to meet him, but remained seated in his usual arm-chair, and the sternness of his brow was awful.

“Father,” said Ginevra, “I bring you a person you will no doubt be pleased to see,—a soldier who fought beside the Emperor at Mont-Saint-Jean.”

The baron rose, cast a sidelong glance at Luigi, and said, in a sardonic tone:—

“Monsieur is not decorated.”

“I no longer wear the Legion of honor,” replied Luigi, timidly, still standing.

Ginevra, mortified by her father’s incivility, dragged forward a chair. The officer’s answer seemed to satisfy the old servant of Napoleon. Madame Piombo, observing that her husband’s eyebrows were resuming their natural position, said, by way of conversation:

“Monsieur’s resemblance to a person we knew in Corsica, Nina Porta, is really surprising.”

“Nothing could be more natural,” replied the young man, on whose face Piombo’s flaming eyes now rested. “Nina was my sister.”

“Are you Luigi Porta?” asked the old man.

“Yes.”

Bartolomeo rose, tottered, was forced to lean against a chair and beckon to his wife. Elisa Piombo came to him. Then the two old people, silently, each supporting the other, left the room, abandoning their daughter with a sort of horror.

Luigi Porta, bewildered, looked at Ginevra, who had turned as white as a marble statue, and stood gazing at the door through which her father and mother had disappeared. This departure and this silence seemed to her so solemn that, for the first time, in her whole life, a feeling of fear entered her soul. She struck her hands together with great force, and said, in a voice so shaken that none but a lover could have heard the words:—

“What misery in a word!”

“In the name of our love, what have I said?” asked Luigi Porta.

“My father,” she replied, “never spoke to me of our deplorable history, and I was too young when we left Corsica to know anything about it.”

“Are we in vendetta?” asked Luigi, trembling.

“Yes. I have heard my mother say that the Portas killed my brother and burned our house. My father then massacred the whole family. How is it that you survived?—for you were tied to the posts of the bed before they set fire to the house.”

“I do not know,” replied Luigi. “I was taken to Genoa when six years old, and given in charge of an old man named Colonna. No detail about my family was told to me. I knew only that I was an orphan, and without property. Old Colonna was a father to me; and I bore his name until I entered the army. In order to do that, I had to show my certificate of birth in order to prove my identity. Colonna then told me, still a mere child, that I had enemies. And he advised me to take Luigi as my surname, and so evade them.”

“Go, go, Luigi!” cried Ginevra. “No, stay; I must go with you. So long as you are in my father’s house you have nothing to fear; but the moment you leave it, take care! you will go from danger to danger. My father has two Corsicans in his service, and if he does not lie in wait to kill you, they will.”

“Ginevra,” he said, “this feud, does it exist between you and me?”

The girl smiled sadly and bowed her head. Presently she raised it, and said, with a sort of pride:—

“Oh, Luigi, our love must be pure and sincere, indeed, to give me strength to tread the path I am about to enter. But it involves a happiness that will last throughout our lives, will it not?”

Luigi answered by a smile, and pressed her hand.

Ginevra comprehended that true love could despise all vulgar protestations at such a moment. This calm and restrained expression of his feelings foreshadowed, in some sense, their strength and their duration.

The destiny of the pair was then and there decided. Ginevra foresaw a cruel struggle, but the idea of abandoning Luigi—an idea which may have floated in her soul—vanished completely. His forever, she dragged him suddenly, with a desperate sort of energy, from her father’s house, and did not leave him till she saw him reach the house where Servin had engaged a modest lodging.

By the time she reached home, Ginevra had attained to that serenity which is caused by a firm resolution; no sign in her manner betrayed uneasiness. She turned on her father and mother, whom she found in the act of sitting down to dinner, a glance of exceeding gentleness devoid of hardihood. She saw that her mother had been weeping; the redness of those withered eyelids shook her heart, but she hid her emotion. No one touched the dinner which was served to them. A horror of food is one of the chief symptoms which reveal a great crisis in life. All three rose from table without having addressed a single word to one another.

When Ginevra had placed herself between her father and mother in the great and gloomy salon, Piombo tried to speak, but his voice failed him; he tried to walk, but he had no strength in his legs. He returned to his seat and rang the bell.

“Pietro,” he said, at last, to the footman, “light the fire; I am cold.”

Ginevra trembled, and looked at her father anxiously. The struggle within him must have been horrible, for his face was distorted. Ginevra knew the extent of the peril before her, but she did not flinch. Bartolomeo, meanwhile, cast furtive glances at his daughter, as if he feared a character whose violence was the work of his own hands.

Between such natures all things must be extreme. The certainty of some impending change in the feelings of father and daughter gave to the worn and weary face of the baroness an expression of terror.

“Ginevra, you love the enemy of your family,” said Piombo, at last, not daring to look at his daughter.

“That is true,” she replied.

“You must choose between us. Our vendetta is a part of our being. Whoso does not share my vengeance is not a member of my family.”

“My choice is made,” replied Ginevra, calmly.

His daughter’s tranquillity misled Bartolomeo.

“Oh! my dear child!” he cried, letting her see his eyes moistened with tears, the first and only tears he ever shed in life.

“I shall be his wife,” said Ginevra, abruptly.

Bartolomeo seemed dazed for a moment, but he recovered his coolness instantly, and replied:—

“The marriage will not take place in my lifetime; I will never consent to it.”

Ginevra kept silence.

“Ginevra,” continued the baron, “have you reflected that Luigi is the son of the man who killed your brother?”

“He was six years old when that crime was committed; he was, therefore, not guilty of it,” she replied.

“He is a Porta!” cried Bartolomeo.

“I have never shared that hatred,” said Ginevra, eagerly. “You did not bring me up to think a Porta must be a monster. How could I know that one of those whom you thought you had killed survived? Is it not natural that you should now yield your vendetta to my feelings?”

“A Porta!” repeated Piombo. “If his father had found you in your bed you would not be living now; he would have taken your life a hundred times.”

“It may be so,” she answered; “but his son has given me life, and more than life. To see Luigi is a happiness without which I cannot live. Luigi has revealed to me the world of sentiments. I may, perhaps, have seen faces more beautiful than his, but none has ever charmed me thus; I may have heard voices—no, no, never any so melodious! Luigi loves me; he will be my husband.”

“Never,” said Piombo. “I would rather see you in your coffin, Ginevra.”

The old Corsican rose and began to stride up and down the salon, dropping the following sentences, one by one, after pauses which betrayed his agitation.

“You think you can bend my will. Undeceive yourself. A Porta shall never be my son; that is my decree. Let there be no further question of this between us. I am Bartolomeo di Piombo; do you hear me, Ginevra?”

“Do you attach some mysterious meaning to those words?” she asked, coldly.

“They mean that I have a dagger, and that I do not fear man’s justice. Corsicans explain themselves to God.”

“And I,” said the daughter, rising, “am Ginevra Piombo, and I declare that within six months I shall be the wife of Luigi Porta. You are a tyrant, my father,” she added, after a terrifying pause.

Bartolomeo clenched his fists and struck them on the marble of the chimneypiece.

“Ah! we are in Paris!” he muttered.

Then he was silent, crossed his arms, bowed his head on his breast, and said not another word during the whole evening.

After once giving utterance to her will, Ginevra affected inconceivable coolness. She opened the piano and sang, played charming nocturnes and scherzos with a grace and sentiment which displayed a perfect freedom of mind, thus triumphing over her father, whose darkling face showed no softening. The old man was cruelly hurt by this tacit insult; he gathered in this one moment the bitter fruits of the training he had given to his daughter. Respect is a barrier which protects parents as it does children, sparing grief to the former, remorse to the latter.

The next day, when Ginevra sought to leave the house at the hour when she usually went to the studio, she found the gates of the mansion closed to her. She said nothing, but soon found means to inform Luigi Porta of her father’s severity. A chambermaid, who could neither read nor write, was able to carry letters between the lovers. For five days they corresponded thus, thanks to the inventive shrewdness of the youth.

The father and daughter seldom spoke to each other. Both were nursing in the depths of their heart a sentiment of hatred; they suffered, but they suffered proudly, and in silence. Recognizing how strong were the ties of love which bound them to each other, they each tried to break them, but without success. No gentle thought came, as formerly, to brighten the stern features of Piombo when he contemplated his Ginevra. The girl had something savage in her eye when she looked at her father; reproach sat enthroned on that innocent brow; she gave herself up, it is true, to happy thoughts, and yet, at times, remorse seemed to dull her eyes. It was not difficult to believe that she could never enjoy, peacefully, any happiness which caused sorrow to her parents.

With Bartolomeo, as with his daughter, the hesitations of this period caused by the native goodness of their souls were, nevertheless, compelled to give way before their pride and the rancor of their Corsican nature. They encouraged each other in their anger, and closed their eyes to the future. Perhaps they mutually flattered themselves that the one would yield to the other.

At last, on Ginevra’s birthday, her mother, in despair at the estrangement which, day by day, assumed a more serious character, meditated an attempt to reconcile the father and daughter, by help of the memories of this family anniversary. They were all three sitting in Bartolomeo’s study. Ginevra guessed her mother’s intention by the timid hesitation on her face, and she smiled sadly.

At this moment a servant announced two notaries, accompanied by witnesses. Bartolomeo looked fixedly at these persons, whose cold and formal faces were grating to souls so passionately strained as those of the three chief actors in this scene. The old man turned to his daughter and looked at her uneasily. He saw upon her face a smile of triumph which made him expect some shock; but, after the manner of savages, he affected to maintain a deceitful indifference as he gazed at the notaries with an assumed air of calm curiosity. The strangers sat down, after being invited to do so by a gesture of the old man.

“Monsieur is, no doubt, M. le Baron di Piombo?” began the oldest of the notaries.

Bartolomeo bowed. The notary made a slight inclination of the head, looked at Ginevra with a sly expression, took out his snuff-box, opened it, and slowly inhaled a pinch, as if seeking for the words with which to open his errand; then, while uttering them, he made continual pauses (an oratorical manoeuvre very imperfectly represented by the printer’s dash—).

“Monsieur,” he said, “I am Monsieur Roguin, your daughter’s notary, and we have come—my colleague and I—to fulfil the intentions of the law and—put an end to the divisions which—appear—to exist—between yourself and Mademoiselle, your daughter,—on the subject—of—her—marriage with Monsieur Luigi Porta.”

This speech, pedantically delivered, probably seemed to Monsieur Roguin so fine that his hearer could not at once understand it. He paused, and looked at Bartolomeo with that peculiar expression of the mere business lawyer, a mixture of servility with familiarity. Accustomed to feign much interest in the persons with whom they deal, notaries have at last produced upon their features a grimace of their own, which they take on and off as an official “pallium.” This mask of benevolence, the mechanism of which is so easy to perceive, irritated Bartolomeo to such an extent that he was forced to collect all the powers of his reason to prevent him from throwing Monsieur Roguin through the window. An expression of anger ran through his wrinkles, which caused the notary to think to himself: “I’ve produced an effect.”

“But,” he continued, in a honeyed tone, “Monsieur le baron, on such occasions our duties are preceded by—efforts at—conciliation—Deign, therefore, to have the goodness to listen to me—It is in evidence that Mademoiselle Ginevra di Piombo—attains this very day—the age at which the law allows a respectful summons before proceeding to the celebration of a marriage—in spite of the non-consent of the parents. Now—it is usual in families—who enjoy a certain consideration—who belong to society—who preserve some dignity—to whom, in short, it is desirable not to let the public into the secret of their differences—and who, moreover, do not wish to injure themselves by blasting with reprobation the future of a young couple (for—that is injuring themselves), it is usual, I say—among these honorable families—not to allow these summonses—to take place—or remain—a monument to—divisions which should end—by ceasing—Whenever, monsieur, a young lady has recourse to respectful summons, she exhibits a determination too marked to allow of a father—of a mother,” here he turned to the baroness, “hoping or expecting that she will follow their wishes—Paternal resistance being null—by reason of this fact—in the first place—and also from its being nullified by law, it is customary—for every sensible man—after making a final remonstrance to his child—and before she proceeds to the respectful summons—to leave her at liberty to—”

Monsieur Roguin stopped, perceiving that he might talk on for two hours without obtaining any answer; he felt, moreover, a singular emotion at the aspect of the man

he was attempting to convert. An extraordinary revolution had taken place on Piombo's face; his wrinkles, contracting into narrow lines, gave him a look of indescribable cruelty, and he cast upon the notary the glance of a tiger. The baroness was mute and passive. Ginevra, calm and resolute, waited silently; she knew that the notary's voice was more potent than hers, and she seemed to have decided to say nothing. At the moment when Roguin ceased speaking, the scene had become so terrifying that the men who were there as witnesses trembled; never, perhaps, had they known so awful a silence. The notaries looked at each other, as if in consultation, and finally rose and walked to the window.

"Did you ever meet people born into the world like that?" asked Roguin of his brother notary.

"You can't get anything out of him," replied the younger man. "In your place, I should simply read the summons. That old fellow isn't a comfortable person; he is furious, and you'll gain nothing whatever by arguing with him."

Monsieur Roguin then read a stamped paper, containing the "respectful summons," prepared for the occasion; after which he proceeded to ask Bartolomeo what answer he made to it.

"Are there laws in France which destroy paternal authority?—" demanded the Corsican.

"Monsieur—" said Roguin, in his honeyed tones.

"Which tear a daughter from her father?—"

"Monsieur—"

"Which deprive an old man of his last consolation?—"

"Monsieur, your daughter only belongs to you if—"

"And kill him?—"

"Monsieur, permit me—"

There is nothing more horrible than the coolness and precise reasoning of notaries amid the many passionate scenes in which they are accustomed to take part.

The forms that Piombo saw about him seemed, to his eyes, escaped from hell; his repressed and concentrated rage knew no longer any bounds as the calm and fluted voice of the little notary uttered the words: "permit me." By a sudden movement he sprang to a dagger that was hanging to a nail above the fireplace, and rushed toward his daughter. The younger of the two notaries and one of the witnesses threw themselves before Ginevra; but Piombo knocked them violently down, his face on fire, and his eyes casting flames more terrifying than the glitter of the dagger. When Ginevra saw him approach her she looked at him with an air of triumph, and advancing slowly, knelt down. "No, no! I cannot!" he cried, flinging away the weapon, which buried itself in the wainscot.

"Well, then! have mercy! have pity!" she said. "You hesitate to be my death, and you refuse me life! Oh! father, never have I loved you as I do at this moment; give me Luigi! I ask for your consent upon my knees: a daughter can humiliate herself before her father. My Luigi, give me my Luigi, or I die!"

The violent excitement which suffocated her stopped her words, for she had no voice; her convulsive movements showed plainly that she lay, as it were, between life and death. Bartolomeo roughly pushed her from him.

“Go,” he said. “The wife of Luigi Porta cannot be a Piombo. I have no daughter. I have not the strength to curse you, but I cast you off; you have no father. My Ginevra Piombo is buried here,” he said, in a deep voice, pressing violently on his heart. “Go, leave my house, unhappy girl,” he added, after a moment’s silence. “Go, and never come into my sight again.”

So saying, he took Ginevra by the arm to the gate of the house and silently put her out.

“Luigi!” cried Ginevra, entering the humble lodging of her lover,—“my Luigi, we have no other fortune than our love.”

“Then am I richer than the kings of the earth!” he cried.

“My father and my mother have cast me off,” she said, in deepest sadness.

“I will love you in place of them.”

“Then let us be happy,—we WILL be happy!” she cried, with a gayety in which there was something dreadful.

Chapter V. Marriage

The day after Ginevra was driven from her father's house she went to ask Madame Servin for asylum and protection until the period fixed by law for her marriage to Luigi.

Here began for her that apprenticeship to trouble which the world strews about the path of those who do not follow its conventions. Madame Servin received her very coldly, being much annoyed by the harm which Ginevra's affair had inflicted on her husband, and told her, in politely cautious words, that she must not count on her help in future. Too proud to persist, but amazed at a selfishness hitherto unknown to her, the girl took a room in the lodging-house that was nearest to that of Luigi. The son of the Portas passed all his days at the feet of his future wife; and his youthful love, the purity of his words, dispersed the clouds from the mind of the banished daughter; the future was so beautiful as he painted it that she ended by smiling joyfully, though without forgetting her father's severity.

One morning the servant of the lodging house brought to Ginevra's room a number of trunks and packages containing stuffs, linen, clothes, and a great quantity of other articles necessary for a young wife in setting up a home of her own. In this welcome provision she recognized her mother's foresight, and, on examining the gifts, she found a purse, in which the baroness had put the money belonging to her daughter, adding to it the amount of her own savings. The purse was accompanied by a letter, in which the mother implored the daughter to forego the fatal marriage if it were still possible to do so. It had cost her, she said, untold difficulty to send these few things to her daughter; she entreated her not to think her hard if, henceforth, she were forced to abandon her to want; she feared she could never again assist her; but she blessed her and prayed for her happiness in this fatal marriage, if, indeed, she persisted in making it, assuring her that she should never cease to think of her darling child. Here the falling tears had effaced some words of the letter.

"Oh, mother!" cried Ginevra, deeply moved.

She felt the impulse to rush home, to breathe the blessed air of her father's house, to fling herself at his feet, to see her mother. She was springing forward to accomplish this wish, when Luigi entered. At the mere sight of him her filial emotion vanished; her tears were stopped, and she no longer had the strength to abandon that loving and unfortunate youth. To be the sole hope of a noble being, to love him and then abandon him!—that sacrifice is the treachery of which young hearts are incapable. Ginevra had the generosity to bury her own grief and suffering silently in her soul.

The marriage day arrived. Ginevra had no friend with her. While she was dressing, Luigi fetched the witnesses necessary to sign the certificate of marriage. These witnesses were worthy persons; one, a cavalry sergeant, was under obligations to Luigi, contracted on the battlefield, obligations which are never obliterated from the heart of an honest man; the other, a master-mason, was the proprietor of the house in which the young couple had hired an apartment for their future home. Each witness brought a friend, and all four, with Luigi, came to escort the bride. Little accustomed to social functions, and seeing nothing in the service they were rendering to Luigi but a simple matter of business, they were dressed in their ordinary clothes,

without any luxury, and nothing about them denoted the usual joy of a marriage procession.

Ginevra herself was dressed simply, as befitted her present fortunes; and yet her beauty was so noble and so imposing that the words of greeting died away on the lips of the witnesses, who supposed themselves obliged to pay her some usual compliments. They bowed to her with respect, and she returned the bow; but they did so in silence, looking at her with admiration. This reserve cast a chill over the whole party. Joy never bursts forth freely except among those who are equals. Thus chance determined that all should be dull and grave around the bridal pair; nothing reflected, outwardly, the happiness that reigned within their hearts.

The church and the mayor's office being near by, Luigi and Ginevra, followed by the four witnesses required by law, walked the distance, with a simplicity that deprived of all pomp this greatest event in social life. They saw a crowd of waiting carriages in the mayor's court-yard; and when they reached the great hall where the civil marriages take place, they found two other wedding-parties impatiently awaiting the mayor's arrival.

Ginevra sat down beside Luigi at the end of a long bench; their witnesses remained standing, for want of seats. Two brides, elaborately dressed in white, with ribbons, laces, and pearls, and crowned with orange-blossoms whose satiny petals nodded beneath their veils, were surrounded by joyous families, and accompanied by their mothers, to whom they looked up, now and then, with eyes that were content and timid both; the faces of all the rest reflected happiness, and seemed to be invoking blessings on the youthful pairs. Fathers, witnesses, brothers, and sisters went and came, like a happy swarm of insects disporting in the sun. Each seemed to be impressed with the value of this passing moment of life, when the heart finds itself within two hopes,—the wishes of the past, the promises of the future.

As she watched them, Ginevra's heart swelled within her; she pressed Luigi's arm, and gave him a look. A tear rolled from the eyes of the young Corsican; never did he so well understand the joys that his Ginevra was sacrificing to him. That precious tear caused her to forget all else but him,—even the abandonment in which she sat there. Love poured down its treasures of light upon their hearts; they saw nought else but themselves in the midst of the joyous tumult; they were there alone, in that crowd, as they were destined to be, henceforth, in life. Their witnesses, indifferent to what was happening, conversed quietly on their own affairs.

"Oats are very dear," said the sergeant to the mason.

"But they have not gone up like lime, relatively speaking," replied the contractor.

Then they walked round the hall.

"How one loses time here," said the mason, replacing a thick silver watch in his fob.

Luigi and Ginevra, sitting pressed to one another, seemed like one person. A poet would have admired their two heads, inspired by the same sentiment, colored in the same tones, silent and saddened in presence of that humming happiness sparkling in diamonds, gay with flowers,—a gayety in which there was something fleeting. The joy of those noisy and splendid groups was visible; that of Ginevra and Luigi was buried in their bosom. On one side the tumult of common pleasure, on the other, the delicate silence of happy souls,—earth and heaven!

But Ginevra was not wholly free from the weaknesses of women. Superstitious as an Italian, she saw an omen in this contrast, and in her heart there lay a sense of terror, as invincible as her love.

Suddenly the office servant, in the town livery, opened a folding-door. Silence reigned, and his voice was heard, like the yapping of a dog, calling Monsieur Luigi da Porta and Mademoiselle Ginevra di Piombo. This caused some embarrassment to the young pair. The celebrity of the bride's name attracted attention, and the spectators seemed to wonder that the wedding was not more sumptuous. Ginevra rose, took Luigi's arm, and advanced firmly, followed by the witnesses. A murmur of surprise, which went on increasing, and a general whispering reminded Ginevra that all present were wondering at the absence of her parents; her father's wrath seemed present to her.

"Call in the families," said the mayor to the clerk whose business it was to read aloud the certificates.

"The father and mother protest," replied the clerk, phlegmatically.

"On both sides?" inquired the mayor.

"The groom is an orphan."

"Where are the witnesses?"

"Here," said the clerk, pointing to the four men, who stood with arms folded, like so many statues.

"But if the parents protest—" began the mayor.

"The respectful summons has been duly served," replied the clerk, rising, to lay before the mayor the papers annexed to the marriage certificate.

This bureaucratic decision had something blighting about it; in a few words it contained the whole story. The hatred of the Portas and the Piombos and their terrible passions were inscribed on this page of the civil law as the annals of a people (contained, it may be, in one word only,—Napoleon, Robespierre) are engraved on a tombstone. Ginevra trembled. Like the dove on the face of the waters, having no place to rest its feet but the ark, so Ginevra could take refuge only in the eyes of Luigi from the cold and dreary waste around her.

The mayor assumed a stern, disapproving air, and his clerk looked up at the couple with malicious curiosity. No marriage was ever so little festal. Like other human beings when deprived of their accessories, it became a simple act in itself, great only in thought.

After a few questions, to which the bride and bridegroom responded, and a few words mumbled by the mayor, and after signing the registers, with their witnesses, duly, Luigi and Ginevra were made one. Then the wedded pair walked back through two lines of joyous relations who did not belong to them, and whose only interest in their marriage was the delay caused to their own wedding by this gloomy bridal. When, at last, Ginevra found herself in the mayor's court-yard, under the open sky, a sigh escaped her breast.

"Can a lifetime of devotion and love suffice to prove my gratitude for your courage and tenderness, my Ginevra?" said Luigi.

At these words, said with tears of joy, the bride forgot her sufferings; for she had indeed suffered in presenting herself before the public to obtain a happiness her parents refused to sanction.

“Why should others come between us?” she said with an artlessness of feeling that delighted Luigi.

A sense of accomplished happiness now made the step of the young pair lighter; they saw neither heaven, nor earth, nor houses; they flew, as it were, on wings to the church. When they reached a dark little chapel in one corner of the building, and stood before a plain undecorated altar, an old priest married them. There, as in the mayor’s office, two other marriages were taking place, still pursuing them with pomp. The church, filled with friends and relations, echoed with the roll of carriages, and the hum of beadles, sextons, and priests. Altars were resplendent with sacramental luxury; the wreaths of orange-flowers that crowned the figures of the Virgin were fresh. Flowers, incense, gleaming tapers, velvet cushions embroidered with gold, were everywhere. When the time came to hold above the heads of Luigi and Ginevra the symbol of eternal union,—that yoke of satin, white, soft, brilliant, light for some, lead for most,—the priest looked about him in vain for the acolytes whose place it was to perform that joyous function. Two of the witnesses fulfilled it for them. The priest addressed a hasty homily to the pair on the perils of life, on the duties they must, some day, inculcate upon their children,—throwing in, at this point, an indirect reproach to Ginevra on the absence of her parents; then, after uniting them before God, as the mayor had united them before the law, he left the now married couple.

“God bless them!” said Vergniaud, the sergeant, to the mason, when they reached the church porch. “No two creatures were ever more fitted for one another. The parents of the girl are foolish. I don’t know a braver soldier than Colonel Luigi. If the whole army had behaved like him, ‘l’autre’ would be here still.”

This blessing of the old soldier, the only one bestowed upon their marriage-day, shed a balm on Ginevra’s heart.

They parted with hearty shakings of hand; Luigi thanked his landlord.

“Adieu, ‘mon brave,’” he said to the sergeant. “I thank you.”

“I am now and ever at your service, colonel,—soul, body, horses, and carriages; all that is mine is yours.”

“How he loves you!” said Ginevra.

Luigi now hurried his bride to the house they were to occupy. Their modest apartment was soon reached; and there, when the door closed upon them, Luigi took his wife in his arms, exclaiming,—

“Oh, my Ginevra! for now you are mine, here is our true wedding. Here,” he added, “all things will smile upon us.”

Together they went through the three rooms contained in their lodging. The room first entered served as salon and dining-room in one; on the right was a bedchamber, on the left a large study which Luigi had arranged for his wife; in it she found easels, color-boxes, lay-figures, casts, pictures, portfolios,—in short, the paraphernalia of an artist.

“So here I am to work!” she said, with an expression of childlike happiness.

She looked long at the hangings and the furniture, turning again and again to thank Luigi, for there was something that approached magnificence in the little retreat. A bookcase contained her favorite books; a piano filled an angle of the room. She sat down upon a divan, drew Luigi to her side, and said, in a caressing voice, her hand in his,—

"You have good taste."

"Those words make me happy," he replied.

"But let me see all," said Ginevra, to whom Luigi had made a mystery of the adornment of the rooms.

They entered the nuptial chamber, fresh and white as a virgin.

"Oh! come away," said Luigi, smiling.

"But I wish to see all."

And the imperious Ginevra looked at each piece of furniture with the minute care of an antiquary examining a coin; she touched the silken hangings, and went over every article with the artless satisfaction of a bride in the treasures of her wedding outfit.

"We begin by ruining ourselves," she said, in a half-joyous, half-anxious tone.

"True! for all my back pay is there," replied Luigi. "I have mortgaged it to a worthy fellow named Gigonnet."

"Why did you do so?" she said, in a tone of reproach, through which could be heard her inward satisfaction. "Do you believe I should be less happy in a garret? But," she added, "it is all charming, and—it is ours!"

Luigi looked at her with such enthusiasm that she lowered her eyes.

"Now let us see the rest," she cried.

Above these three rooms, under the roof, was a study for Luigi, a kitchen, and a servant's-room. Ginevra was much pleased with her little domain, although the view from the windows was limited by the high wall of a neighboring house, and the court-yard, from which their light was derived, was gloomy. But the two lovers were so happy in heart, hope so adorned their future, that they chose to see nothing but what was charming in their hidden nest. They were there in that vast house, lost in the immensity of Paris, like two pearls in their shell in the depths of ocean; to all others it might have seemed a prison; to them it was paradise.

The first few days of their union were given to love. The effort to turn at once to work was too difficult; they could not resist the charm of their own passion. Luigi lay for hours at the feet of his wife, admiring the color of her hair, the moulding of her forehead, the enchanting socket of her eyes, the purity and whiteness of the two arches beneath which the eyes themselves turned slowly, expressing the happiness of a satisfied love. Ginevra caressed the hair of her Luigi, never weary of gazing at what she called his "belta folgorante," and the delicacy of his features. She was constantly charmed by the nobility of his manners, as she herself attracted him by the grace of hers.

They played together, like children, with nothings,—nothings that brought them ever back to their love,—ceasing their play only to fall into a revery of the "far niente." An air sung by Ginevra reproduced to their souls the enchanting lights and shadows of their passion. Together, uniting their steps as they did their souls, they roamed about

the country, finding everywhere their love,—in the flowers, in the sky, in the glowing tints of the setting sun; they read it in even the capricious vapors which met and struggled in the ether. Each day resembled in nothing its predecessors; their love increased, and still increased, because it was a true love. They had tested each other in what seemed only a short time; and, instinctively, they recognized that their souls were of a kind whose inexhaustible riches promised for the future unceasing joys.

Theirs was love in all its artlessness, with its interminable conversations, unfinished speeches, long silences, oriental reposes, and oriental ardor. Luigi and Ginevra comprehended love. Love is like the ocean: seen superficially, or in haste, it is called monotonous by common souls, whereas some privileged beings can pass their lives in admiring it, and in finding, ceaselessly, the varying phenomena that enchant them.

Soon, however, prudence and foresight drew the young couple from their Eden; it was necessary to work to live. Ginevra, who possessed a special talent for imitating old paintings, took up the business of copying, and soon found many customers among the picture-dealers. Luigi, on his side, sought long and actively for occupation, but it was hard for a young officer whose talents had been restricted to the study of strategy to find anything to do in Paris.

At last, weary of vain efforts, his soul filled with despair at seeing the whole burden of their subsistence falling on Ginevra, it occurred to him to make use of his handwriting, which was excellent. With a persistency of which he saw an example in his wife, he went round among the layers and notaries of Paris, asking for papers to copy. The frankness of his manners and his situation interested many in his favor; he soon obtained enough work to be obliged to find young men to assist him; and this employment became, little by little, a regular business. The profits of his office and the sale of Ginevra's pictures gave the young couple a competence of which they were justly proud, for it was the fruit of their industry.

This, to the busy pair, was the happiest period of their lives. The days flowed rapidly by, filled with occupation and the joys of their love. At night, after working all day, they met with delight in Ginevra's studio. Music refreshed their weariness. No expression of regret or melancholy obscured the happy features of the young wife, and never did she utter a complaint. She appeared to her Luigi with a smile upon her lips and her eyes beaming. Each cherished a ruling thought which would have made them take pleasure in a labor still more severe; Ginevra said in her heart that she worked for Luigi, and Luigi the same for Ginevra.

Sometimes, in the absence of her husband, the thought of the perfect happiness she might have had if this life of love could have been lived in the presence of her father and mother overcame the young wife; and then, as she felt the full power of remorse, she dropped into melancholy; mournful pictures passed like shadows across her imagination; she saw her old father alone, or her mother weeping in secret lest the inexorable Piombo should perceive her tears. The two white, solemn heads rose suddenly before her, and the thought came that never again should she see them except in memory. This thought pursued her like a presentiment.

She celebrated the anniversary of her marriage by giving her husband a portrait he had long desired,—that of his Ginevra, painted by herself. Never had the young artist done so remarkable a work. Aside from the resemblance, the glow of her beauty, the purity of her feelings, the happiness of love were there depicted by a sort of magic. This masterpiece of her art and her joy was a votive offering to their wedded felicity.

Another year of ease and comfort went by. The history of their life may be given in three words: *They were happy*. No event happened to them of sufficient importance to be recorded.

Chapter VI. Retribution

At the beginning of the year 1819 the picture-dealers requested Ginevra to give them something beside copies; for competition had so increased that they could no longer sell her work to advantage. Madame Porta then perceived the mistake she had made in not exercising her talent for “genre” painting, which might, by this time, have brought her reputation. She now attempted portrait-painting. But here she was forced to compete against a crowd of artists in greater need of money than herself. However, as Luigi and Ginevra had laid by a few savings, they were not, as yet, uneasy about the future.

Toward the end of the winter of that year Luigi worked without intermission. He, too, was struggling against competitors. The payment for writing had so decreased that he found it impossible to employ assistance; he was forced, therefore, to work a much longer time himself to obtain the same emolument. His wife had finished several pictures which were not without merit; but the dealers were scarcely buying those of artists with reputations; consequently, her paintings had little chance. Ginevra offered them for almost nothing, but without success.

The situation of the household now began to be alarming. The souls of the husband and wife floated on the ocean of their happiness, love overwhelmed them with its treasures, while poverty rose, like a skeleton, amid their harvest of joy. Yet, all the while, they hid from each other their secret anxiety. When Ginevra felt like weeping as she watched Luigi’s worn and suffering face, she redoubled her caresses; and Luigi, keeping his dark forebodings in the depths of his soul, expressed to his Ginevra the tenderest love. They sought a compensation for their troubles in exalting their feelings; and their words, their joys, their caresses became suffused, as it were, with a species of frenzy. They feared the future. What feeling can be compared in strength with that of a passion which may cease on the morrow, killed by death or want? When they talked together of their poverty each felt the necessity of deceiving the other, and they fastened with mutual ardor on the slightest hope.

One night Ginevra woke and missed Luigi from her side. She rose in terror. A faint light shining on the opposite wall of the little court-yard revealed to her that her husband was working in his study at night. Luigi was now in the habit of waiting till his wife was asleep, and then going up to his garret to write. Four o’clock struck. Ginevra lay down again, and pretended to sleep. Presently Luigi returned, overcome with fatigue and drowsiness. Ginevra looked sadly on the beautiful, worn face, where toil and care were already drawing lines of wrinkles.

“It is for me he spends his nights in writing,” she said to herself, weeping.

A thought dried her tears. She would imitate Luigi. That same day she went to a print-shop, and, by help of a letter of recommendation she had obtained from Elie Magus, one of her picture-dealers, she obtained an order for the coloring of lithographs. During the day she painted her pictures and attended to the cares of the household; then, when night came, she colored the engravings. This loving couple entered their nuptial bed only to deceive each other; both feigned sleep, and left it,—Luigi, as soon as he thought his wife was sleeping, Ginevra as soon as he had gone.

One night Luigi, burning with a sort of fever, induced by a toil under which his strength was beginning to give way, opened the casement of his garret to breathe the morning air, and shake off, for a moment, the burden of his care. Happening to glance downward, he saw the reflection of Ginevra's lamp on the opposite wall, and the poor fellow guessed the truth. He went down, stepping softly, and surprised his wife in her studio, coloring engravings.

"Oh, Ginevra!" he cried.

She gave a convulsive bound in her chair, and blushed.

"Could I sleep while you were wearing yourself out with toil?" she said.

"But to me alone belongs the right to work in this way," he answered.

"Could I be idle," she asked, her eyes filling with tears, "when I know that every mouthful we eat costs a drop of your blood? I should die if I could not add my efforts to yours. All should be in common between us: pains and pleasures, both."

"She is cold!" cried Luigi, in despair. "Wrap your shawl closer round you, my own Ginevra; the night is damp and chilly."

They went to the window, the young wife leaning on the breast of her beloved, who held her round the waist, and, together, in deep silence, they gazed upward at the sky, which the dawn was slowly brightening. Clouds of a grayish hue were moving rapidly; the East was growing luminous.

"See!" said Ginevra. "It is an omen. We shall be happy."

"Yes, in heaven," replied Luigi, with a bitter smile. "Oh, Ginevra! you who deserved all the treasures upon earth—"

"I have your heart," she said, in tones of joy.

"Ah! I complain no more!" he answered, straining her tightly to him, and covering with kisses the delicate face, which was losing the freshness of youth, though its expression was still so soft, so tender that he could not look at it and not be comforted.

"What silence!" said Ginevra, presently. "Dear friend, I take great pleasure in sitting up. The majesty of Night is so contagious, it awes, it inspires. There is I know not what great power in the thought: all sleep, I wake."

"Oh, my Ginevra," he cried, "it is not to-night alone I feel how delicately moulded is your soul. But see, the dawn is shining,—come and sleep."

"Yes," replied Ginevra, "if I do not sleep alone. I suffered too much that night I first discovered that you were waking while I slept."

The courage with which these two young people fought with misery received for a while its due reward; but an event which usually crowns the happiness of a household to them proved fatal. Ginevra had a son, who was, to use the popular expression, "as beautiful as the day." The sense of motherhood doubled the strength of the young wife. Luigi borrowed money to meet the expenses of Ginevra's confinement. At first she did not feel the fresh burden of their situation; and the pair gave themselves wholly up to the joy of possessing a child. It was their last happiness.

Like two swimmers uniting their efforts to breast a current, these two Corsican souls struggled courageously; but sometimes they gave way to an apathy which resembled the sleep that precedes death. Soon they were obliged to sell their jewels. Poverty

appeared to them suddenly,—not hideous, but plainly clothed, almost easy to endure; its voice had nothing terrifying; with it came neither spectres, nor despair, nor rags; but it made them lose the memory and the habits of comfort; it dried the springs of pride. Then, before they knew it, came want,—want in all its horror, indifferent to its rags, treading underfoot all human sentiments.

Seven or eight months after the birth of the little Bartolomeo, it would have been hard to see in the mother who suckled her sickly babe the original of the beautiful portrait, the sole remaining ornament of the squalid home. Without fire through a hard winter, the graceful outlines of Ginevra's figure were slowly destroyed; her cheeks grew white as porcelain, and her eyes dulled as though the springs of life were drying up within her. Watching her shrunken, discolored child, she felt no suffering but for that young misery; and Luigi had no courage to smile upon his son.

"I have wandered over Paris," he said, one day. "I know no one; can I ask help of strangers? Vergniaud, my old sergeant, is concerned in a conspiracy, and they have put him in prison; besides, he has already lent me all he could spare. As for our landlord, it is over a year since he asked me for any rent."

"But we are not in want," replied Ginevra, gently, affecting calmness.

"Every hour brings some new difficulty," continued Luigi, in a tone of terror.

Another day Luigi took Ginevra's pictures, her portrait, and the few articles of furniture which they could still exist without, and sold them for a miserable sum, which prolonged the agony of the hapless household for a time. During these days of wretchedness Ginevra showed the sublimity of her nature and the extent of her resignation.

Stoically she bore the strokes of misery; her strong soul held her up against all woes; she worked with unfaltering hand beside her dying son, performed her household duties with marvellous activity, and sufficed for all. She was even happy, still, when she saw on Luigi's lips a smile of surprise at the cleanliness she produced in the one poor room where they had taken refuge.

"Dear, I kept this bit of bread for you," she said, one evening, when he returned, worn-out.

"And you?"

"I? I have dined, dear Luigi; I want nothing more."

And the tender look on her beseeching face urged him more than her words to take the food of which she had deprived herself.

Luigi kissed her, with one of those kisses of despair that were given in 1793 between friends as they mounted the scaffold. In such supreme moments two beings see each other, heart to heart. The hapless Luigi, comprehending suddenly that his wife was starving, was seized with the fever which consumed her. He shuddered, and went out, pretending that some business called him; for he would rather have drunk the deadliest poison than escape death by eating that last morsel of bread that was left in his home.

He wandered wildly about Paris; amid the gorgeous equipages, in the bosom of that flaunting luxury that displays itself everywhere; he hurried past the windows of the money-changers where gold was glittering; and at last he resolved to sell himself to

be a substitute for military service, hoping that this sacrifice would save Ginevra, and that her father, during his absence, would take her home.

He went to one of those agents who manage these transactions, and felt a sort of happiness in recognizing an old officer of the Imperial guard.

“It is two days since I have eaten anything,” he said to him in a slow, weak voice. “My wife is dying of hunger, and has never uttered one word of complaint; she will die smiling, I think. For God’s sake, comrade,” he added, bitterly, “buy me in advance; I am robust; I am no longer in the service, and I—”

The officer gave Luigi a sum on account of that which he promised to procure for him. The wretched man laughed convulsively as he grasped the gold, and ran with all his might, breathless, to his home, crying out at times:—

“Ginevra! Oh, my Ginevra!”

It was almost night when he reached his wretched room. He entered very softly, fearing to cause too strong an emotion to his wife, whom he had left so weak. The last rays of the sun, entering through the garret window, were fading from Ginevra’s face as she sat sleeping in her chair, and holding her child upon her breast.

“Wake, my dear one,” he said, not observing the infant, which shone, at that moment, with supernatural light.

Hearing that voice, the poor mother opened her eyes, met Luigi’s look, and smiled; but Luigi himself gave a cry of horror; he scarcely recognized his wife, now half mad. With a gesture of savage energy he showed her the gold. Ginevra began to laugh mechanically; but suddenly she cried, in a dreadful voice:—

“The child, Luigi, he is cold!”

She looked at her son and swooned. The little Bartolomeo was dead. Luigi took his wife in his arms, without removing the child, which she clasped with inconceivable force; and after laying her on the bed he went out to seek help.

“Oh! my God!” he said, as he met his landlord on the stairs. “I have gold, gold, and my child has died of hunger, and his mother is dying, too! Help me!”

He returned like one distraught to his wife, leaving the worthy mason, and also the neighbors who heard him to gather a few things for the needs of so terrible a want, hitherto unknown, for the two Corsicans had carefully hidden it from a feeling of pride.

Luigi had cast his gold upon the floor and was kneeling by the bed on which lay his wife.

“Father! take care of my son, who bears your name,” she was saying in her delirium.

“Oh, my angel! be calm,” said Luigi, kissing her; “our good days are coming back to us.”

“My Luigi,” she said, looking at him with extraordinary attention, “listen to me. I feel that I am dying. My death is natural; I suffered too much; besides, a happiness so great as mine has to be paid for. Yes, my Luigi, be comforted. I have been so happy that if I were to live again I would again accept our fate. I am a bad mother; I regret you more than I regret my child—My child!” she added, in a hollow voice.

Two tears escaped her dying eyes, and suddenly she pressed the little body she had no power to warm.

“Give my hair to my father, in memory of his Ginevra,” she said. “Tell him I have never blamed him.”

Her head fell upon her husband’s arm.

“No, you cannot die!” cried Luigi. “The doctor is coming. We have food. Your father will take you home. Prosperity is here. Stay with us, angel!”

But the faithful heart, so full of love, was growing cold. Ginevra turned her eyes instinctively to him she loved, though she was conscious of nought else. Confused images passed before her mind, now losing memory of earth. She knew that Luigi was there, for she clasped his icy hand tightly, and more tightly still, as though she strove to save herself from some precipice down which she feared to fall.

“Dear,” she said, at last, “you are cold; I will warm you.”

She tried to put his hand upon her heart, but died.

Two doctors, a priest, and several neighbors came into the room, bringing all that was necessary to save the poor couple and calm their despair. These strangers made some noise in entering; but after they had entered, an awful silence filled the room.

While that scene was taking place, Bartolomeo and his wife were sitting in their antique chairs, each at a corner of the vast fireplace, where a glowing fire scarcely warmed the great spaces of their salon. The clock told midnight.

For some time past the old couple had lost the ability to sleep. At the present moment they sat there silent, like two persons in their dotage, gazing about them at things they did not see. Their deserted salon, so filled with memories to them, was feebly lighted by a single lamp which seemed expiring. Without the sparkling of the flame upon the hearth, they might soon have been in total darkness.

A friend had just left them; and the chair on which he had been sitting, remained where he left it, between the two Corsicans. Piombo was casting glances at that chair,—glances full of thoughts, crowding one upon another like remorse,—for the empty chair was Ginevra’s. Elisa Piombo watched the expressions that now began to cross her husband’s pallid face. Though long accustomed to divine his feelings from the changeful agitations of his face, they seemed to-night so threatening, and anon so melancholy that she felt she could no longer read a soul that was now incomprehensible, even to her.

Would Bartolomeo yield, at last, to the memories awakened by that chair? Had he been shocked to see a stranger in that chair, used for the first time since his daughter left him? Had the hour of his mercy struck,—that hour she had vainly prayed and waited for till now?

These reflections shook the mother’s heart successively. For an instant her husband’s countenance became so terrible that she trembled at having used this simple means to bring about a mention of Ginevra’s name. The night was wintry; the north wind drove the snowflakes so sharply against the blinds that the old couple fancied that they heard a gentle rustling. Ginevra’s mother dropped her head to hide her tears. Suddenly a sigh burst from the old man’s breast; his wife looked at him; he seemed to her crushed. Then she risked speaking—for the second time in three long years—of his daughter.

“Ginevra may be cold,” she said, softly.

Piombo quivered.

“She may be hungry,” she continued.

The old man dropped a tear.

“Perhaps she has a child and cannot suckle it; her milk is dried up!” said the mother, in accents of despair.

“Let her come! let her come to me!” cried Piombo. “Oh! my precious child, thou hast conquered me.”

The mother rose as if to fetch her daughter. At that instant the door opened noisily, and a man, whose face no longer bore the semblance of humanity, stood suddenly before them.

“Dead! Our two families were doomed to exterminate each other. Here is all that remains of her,” he said, laying Ginevra’s long black hair upon the table.

The old people shook and quivered as if a stroke of lightning had blasted them.

Luigi no longer stood before them.

“He has spared me a shot, for he is dead,” said Bartolomeo, slowly, gazing on the ground at his feet.

THE END

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