



The Abbess of Castro
Stendhal
(Translator: C K Scott Moncrieff)

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About Stendhal:

Marie-Henri Beyle (January 23, 1783 – March 23, 1842), better known by his penname Stendhal, was a 19th century French writer. Known for his acute analysis of his characters' psychology, he is considered one of the earliest and foremost practitioners of the realism in his two novels *Le Rouge et le Noir* (The Red and the Black, 1830) and *La Chartreuse de Parme* (The Charterhouse of Parma, 1839). Source: Wikipedia

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Chapter 1

We have so often been shewn in melodrama the Italian brigands of the sixteenth century, and so many people have spoken of them without any real knowledge, that we have come to hold the most erroneous ideas of what they were like. Speaking generally, one may say that these brigands were the *Opposition* to the vile governments which, in Italy, took the place of the mediaeval Republics. The new tyrant was, as a rule, the wealthiest citizen of the defunct Republic, and, to win over the populace, would adorn the town with splendid churches and fine pictures. Such were the Polentini of Ravenna, the Manfredi of Faenza, the Riario of Imola, the Cani of Verona, the Bentivoglio of Bologna, the Visconti of Milan, and lastly, the least bellicose and most hypocritical of all, the Medici of Florence. Among the historians of these little States none has dared to relate the countless poisonings and assassinations ordered by the fear that used to torment these petty tyrants; these grave historians were in their pay. When you consider that each of these tyrants was personally acquainted with each of the Republicans by whom he knew himself to be execrated (the Tuscan Grand Duke Cosimo, for instance, knew Strozzi), and that several of these tyrants died by the hand of the assassin, you will understand the profound hatreds, the eternal distrust which gave so much spirit and courage to the Italians of the sixteenth century, and such genius to their artists. You will see these profound passions preventing the birth of that really rather absurd prejudice which was called honour in the days of Madame de Sévigné, and consists first and foremost in sacrificing one's life to serve the master whose subject one is by birth, and to please the ladies. In the sixteenth century, a man's activity and his real worth could not be displayed in France, nor win admiration, except by bravery on the field of battle or in duels; and, as women love bravery, and above all daring, they became the supreme judges of a man's worth. Then was born the *spirit of gallantry*, which led to the destruction, one after another, of all the passions, including love, in the interests of that cruel tyrant whom we all obey: namely, vanity. Kings protected vanity, and with good reason, hence the power of the riband.

In Italy, a man distinguished himself by *all forms* of merit, by famous strokes with the sword as by discoveries in ancient manuscripts: take Petrarch, the idol of his time; and a woman of the sixteenth century loved a man who was learned in Greek as well as, if not more than she would have loved a man famous for his martial valour. Then one saw passions, and not the habit of gallantry. That is the great difference between Italy and France, that is why Italy has given birth to a Raphael, a Giorgione, a Titian, a Correggio, while France produced all those gallant captains of the sixteenth century, so entirely forgotten to-day, albeit each of them had killed so vast a number of enemies.

I ask pardon for these homely truths. However it be, the atrocious and *necessary* acts of vengeance of the petty Italian tyrants of the middle ages won over the hearts of their peoples to the brigands. The brigands were hated when they stole horses, corn, money, in a word everything that was necessary to support life; but, in their heart of hearts, the people were for them, and the village girls preferred to all the rest the boy who once in his life had been obliged *andare alia macchia*, that is to say to flee to the woods and take refuge among the brigands, in consequence of some over-rash action.

And even in our own day everyone dreads, unquestionably, an encounter with brigands; but when they are caught and punished everyone is sorry for them. The fact is that this people, so shrewd, so cynical, which laughs at all the publications issued under the official censure of its masters, finds its favourite reading in little poems which narrate with ardour the lives of the most renowned brigands. The heroic element that it finds in these stories thrills the artistic vein that still survives in the lower orders, and besides, they are so weary of the official praise given to certain people, that everything of this sort which is not official goes straight to the heart. It must be explained that the lower classes in Italy suffer from certain things which the traveller would never observe, were he to live ten years in the country. For instance, fifteen years ago, before governments in their wisdom had suppressed the brigands, [Footnote: Gasparone, the last of the brigands, made terms with the Government in 1826; he was confined in the citadel of Civita-Vecchia with thirty-two of his men. It was the want of water on the heights of the Apennines, where he had taken refuge, that obliged him to make terms. He was a man of spirit, with a face that is not easily forgotten.] it was not uncommon to see certain of their exploits punish the iniquities of the *Governors* of small towns. These Governors, absolute magistrates whose emoluments do not amount to more than twenty scudi monthly, are naturally at the disposal

of the most important family of the place, which by this simple enough method oppresses its enemies. If the brigands did not always succeed in punishing these despotic little Governors, they did at least make fools of them, and defy their authority, which is no small matter in the eyes of this quick-witted race. A satirical sonnet consoles them for all their misfortunes, and never do they forget an injury. That is another fundamental difference between the Italian and the Frenchman.

In the sixteenth century, had the Governor of a township sentenced to death a poor inhabitant who had incurred the hatred of the leading family, one often found brigands attacking the prison in an attempt to set free the victim; on the other hand the powerful family, having no great faith in the nine or ten soldiers of the government who were set to guard the prison, would raise at its own expense a troop of temporary soldiers. These latter, who were known as *bravi*, would install themselves in the neighbourhood of the prison, and make it their business to escort to the place of execution the poor devil whose death had been bought. If the powerful family included a young man, he would place himself at the head of these improvised soldiers.

This state of civilisation makes morality groan, I admit; in our day we have the duel, dulness, and judges are not bought and sold; but these sixteenth century customs were marvellously well adapted to create men worthy of the name.

Many historians, praised even to-day in the hack literature of the academies, have sought to conceal this state of affairs, which, about the year 1550, was forming such great characters. At the time, their prudent falsehoods were rewarded with all the honours which the Medici of Florence, the Este of Ferrara, the Viceroy of Naples and so forth had at their disposal. One poor historian, named Giannone, did seek to raise a corner of the veil, but as he ventured only to tell a very small part of the truth, and even then only by using ambiguous and obscure expressions, he made himself extremely tedious, which did not prevent him from dying in prison at the age of eighty-two, on March 7th, 1758.

The first thing to be done, then, if one wishes to learn the history of Italy, is on no account to read the authors generally commended; nowhere has the value of a lie been better appreciated, nowhere has lying been better rewarded. [Footnote: Paolo Giovio, Bishop of Como, Aretino, and a hundred others less amusing, whom the dulness that they diffuse has saved from disrepute, Robertson, Roscoe are full of lies. Guicciardini sold himself to Cosimo I, who treated him with contempt. In our time, Coletta and Pignotti have told the truth, the latter with the constant

fear of being disgraced, although he refused to allow his work to be printed until after his death.]

The earliest histories to be written in Italy, after the great wave of barbarism in the ninth century, make mention already of the brigands, and speak of them as though they had existed from time immemorial. (See Muratori's collection.) When, unfortunately for the general welfare, for justice, for good government, but fortunately for the arts, the mediaeval Republics were overthrown, the most energetic among the Republicans, those who loved freedom more than the majority of their fellow-citizens, took refuge in the forests. Naturally a populace harassed by the Baglioni, the Malatesta, the Bentivoglio, the Medici, etc., loved and respected their enemies. The cruelties of the petty tyrants who succeeded the first usurpers, the cruelties, for instance, of Cosimo, the first Duke of Florence, who had the Republicans who had fled to Venice, and even to Paris, slain, furnished recruits to these brigands. To speak only of the times in which our heroine lived, about the year 1550, Alfonso Piccolomini, Duca di Monte Mariano, and Marco Sciarra led with success armed bands which, in the neighbourhood of Albano, used to brave the Pope's soldiers, who at that time were very brave indeed. The line of operations of these famous chiefs, whom the populace still admire, extended from the Po and the marshes of Ravenna as far as the woods that then covered Vesuvius. The forest of la Faggiola, rendered so famous by their exploits, and situated five leagues from Rome, on the way to Naples, was the headquarters of Sciarra, who, during the Pontificate of Gregory XIII, had often several thousands of men under his command. The detailed history of this illustrious brigand would appear incredible to the present generation, for the reason that no one would ever be able to understand the motives of his actions. He was not defeated until 1592. When he saw that his affairs were in a desperate state, he made terms with the Venetian Republic, and transferred himself to its service, with the most devoted, or most criminal (as you please) of his men. At the request of the Roman Government, Venice, which had signed a treaty with Sciarra, had him put to death, and sent his brave soldiers to defend the Isle of Candia against the Turks. But Venice in her wisdom knew well that a deadly plague was raging in Candia, and in a few days the five hundred soldiers whom Sciarra had brought to the service of the Republic were reduced to sixty-seven.

This forest of la Faggiola, whose giant trees screen an extinct volcano, was the final scene of the exploits of Marco Sciarra. Every traveller will tell you that it is the most impressive spot in that marvellous Roman

Cam-pagna, whose sombre aspect appears made for tragedy. It crowns with its dusky verdure the summit of Monte Albano.

It is to a volcanic eruption centuries earlier than the foundation of Rome that we owe this splendid mountain. At an epoch before any of the histories, it rose in the midst of the vast plain which at one time extended from the Apennines to the sea. Monte Cavi, which rises surrounded by the dusky shade of la Faggiola, is its culminating point: it is visible from all sides, from Terracina and Ostia as well as from Rome and Tivoli, and it is the mountain of Albano, covered now with palaces, which closes to the south that Roman horizon so familiar to travellers. A convent of Blackfriars has taken the place, on the summit of Monte Cavi, of the temple of Jupiter Feretrius, where the Latin peoples came to sacrifice in common and to confirm the bonds of a sort of religious federation. Protected by the shade of magnificent chestnuts, the traveller arrives after some hours at the enormous blocks which mark the ruins of the temple of Jupiter; but beneath this dark shade, so delicious in that climate, even to-day, the traveller peers anxiously into the depths of the forest; he is afraid of brigands. On reaching the summit of Monte Cavi, we light a fire in the ruins of the temple, to prepare our meal. From this point, which commands the whole of the Roman Campagna, we perceive, to the west of us, the sea, which seems to be within a stone's throw, although three or four leagues away; we can distinguish the smallest vessels; with the least powerful glass, we can count the people who are journeying to Naples on board the steamer. To all the other points of the compass, the view extends over a magnificent plain, which is bounded on the east by the Apennines above Palestrina, and to the north by Saint Peter's and the other great buildings of Rome. Monte Cavi being of no great height, the eye can make out the minutest details of this sublime landscape, which might well dispense with any historical association, and yet every clump of trees, every fragment of ruined wall, catching the eye in the plain or on the slopes of the mountain, recalls one of those battles, so admirable for their patriotism and their valour, which Livy has put on record.

And we to-day can still follow, on our way to the enormous blocks, the remains of the temple of Jupiter Feretrius, which serve as a wall to the garden of the Blackfriars, the triumphal road travelled long ago by the first Kings of Rome. It is paved with stones cut with great regularity; and, in the middle of the forest of la Faggiola, we come upon long sections of it.

On the lip of the crater which, filled now with clear water, has become the charming lake of Albano, five or six miles in circumference, so deeply

embedded in its socket of lava, stood Alba, the mother of Rome, which Roman policy destroyed in the days of the first kings. Its ruins, however, still exist. Some centuries later, a quarter of a league from Alba, on the slope of the mountain that faces the sea, arose Albano, the modern city; but it is divided from the lake by a screen of rocks which hide the lake from the city and the city from the lake. When one sees it from the plain, its white buildings stand out against the dark, profound verdure of the forest so dear to the brigands and so often made famous, which crowns the volcanic mountain on every side.

Albano, which numbers to-day five or six thousand inhabitants, had not three thousand in 1540, when there flourished, in the highest rank of the nobility, the powerful family of Campireali, whose misfortunes we are about to relate.

I translate this story from two bulky manuscripts, one Roman, the other Florentine. At great risk to myself, I have ventured to reproduce their style, which is more or less that of our old legends. So fine and restrained a style as is fashionable at the present day would, I feel, have been too little in keeping with the events recorded, and less still with the reflexions of the writers. They wrote about the year 1598. I crave the reader's indulgence as well for them as for myself.

Chapter 2

"Having committed to writing so many tragic histories," says the author of the Florentine manuscript, "I shall conclude with that one which, among them all, it most pains me to relate. I am going to speak of that famous Abbess of the Convent of the Visitation at Castro, Elena de' Campireali, whose trial and death caused so great a stir in the high society of Rome and of Italy. As far back as 1555, brigands reigned in the neighbourhood of Rome, the magistrates were sold to the powerful families. In the year 1572, which was that of the trial, Gregory XIII, Buoncompagni, ascended the Throne of Saint Peter. This holy pontiff combined all the apostolic virtues but has been blamed for a certain weakness in his civil government: he was unable either to select honest judges or to suppress the brigands; he burdened his soul with crimes which he could not punish. He felt that, in inflicting the death penalty, he was taking upon himself a terrible responsibility. The result of this attitude was to people with an almost innumerable host of brigands the roads that lead to the eternal city. To travel with any security, one had to be a friend of the brigands. The forest of la Faggiola, lying astride of the road that runs to Naples by Albano, had long been the headquarters of a government unfriendly to that of His Holiness, and on several occasions Rome was obliged to treat, as one power with another, with Marco Sciarra, one of the kings of the forest. What gave these brigands their strength was that they had endeared themselves to their peasant neighbours.

"This charming town of Albano, so close to the brigand headquarters, witnessed the birth, in 1542, of Elena de' Campireali. Her father was reckoned the wealthiest patrician of the district, and in this capacity had married Vittoria Carafa, who owned a large estate in the Kingdom of Naples. I could name several old men still living who knew both Vittoria Carafa and her daughter quite well. Vittoria was a model of prudence and sense; but despite all her cleverness she could not avert the ruin of her family. And this is curious: the terrible misfortunes which are to form the melancholy subject of my story cannot, it seems to me, be ascribed especially to any of the actors whom I am going to present to

the reader: I see people who are unfortunate, but truly I cannot find any that are to be blamed. The extreme beauty and tender heart of the young Elena were two great perils for her, and form an excuse for Giulio Branciforte, her lover, just as the absolute want of sense of Monsignor Cittadini, Bishop of Castro, may excuse him also up to a certain point. He had owed his rapid advancement in the scale of ecclesiastical dignities to the honesty of his conduct, and above all to the most noble bearing and most regularly handsome features that one could hope to meet. I find it written of him that one could not set eyes on him without loving him.

"As I do not wish to flatter anyone, I shall make no attempt to conceal the fact that a holy friar of the Convent of Monte Cavi, who had often been surprised, in his cell, floating at a height of several feet from the ground, like Saint Paul, when nothing but divine grace could maintain him in that extraordinary posture, [Footnote: Even to-day, this singular position is regarded by the populace of the Roman Campagna as a sure sign of sanctity. About the year 1826, a monk of Albano was seen many times raised from the ground by divine grace. Many miracles were ascribed to him; people came from a radius of twenty leagues to receive his blessing; women, belonging to the highest ranks of society, had seen him floating in his cell three feet from the ground. Suddenly he vanished.] had prophesied to Signor de' Campireali that his family would be extinguished with him, and that he would have but two children, each of whom was to perish by a violent death. It was on account of this prophecy that he could find no one to marry in the district, and went to seek his fortune at Naples, where he was lucky enough to find great possessions and a wife capable, by her intelligence, of averting his evil destiny, had such a thing been possible. This Signor de' Campireali was considered a most honourable man, and dispensed charity lavishly; but he lacked spirit, which meant that gradually he withdrew from the annual visit to Rome, and ended by passing almost the whole year in his palazzo at Albano. He devoted himself to the cultivation of his estates, situated in that rich plain which extends from the city to the sea. On the advice of his wife, he caused the most splendid education to be given to his son Fabio, a young man extremely proud of his birth, and his daughter Elena, who was a marvel of beauty, as may be seen to this day from her portrait, which is preserved in the Farnese collection. Since I began to write her history I have gone to the palazzo Farnese to consider the mortal envelope which heaven had bestowed upon this woman, whose grim destiny caused so much stir in her own time, and even now still finds a

place in human memory. The shape of the head is an elongated oval, the brow is very large, the hair of a dark gold. Her general air is on the whole one of gaiety; she had large eyes with a profound expression, and chestnut eyebrows that formed a perfectly traced arch. The lips are very thin, and you would say that the lines of her mouth had been drawn by the famous painter Correggio. Viewed amid the portraits which hang on either side of hers in the Farnese gallery, she has the air of a queen. It is very seldom that an air of gaiety is found in combination with majesty.

"Having spent eight whole years as a boarder in the Convent of the Visitation in the town of Castro, now destroyed, to which, in those days, the majority of the Roman princes sent their daughters, Elena returned to her home, but did not leave the convent without first making an oblation of a splendid chalice to the high altar of the church. No sooner had she returned to Albano than her father summoned from Rome, at a considerable salary, the celebrated poet Cecchino, then a man of great age; he enriched Elena's mind with the finest passages of the divine Virgil, and of Petrarch, Ariosto and Dante, his famous disciples."

Here the translator is obliged to omit a long dissertation on the varying degrees of fame which the sixteenth century assigned to these great poets. It would appear that Elena knew Latin. The poetry that she was made to learn spoke of love, and of a love that would seem to us highly ridiculous, were we to come across it in 1839; I mean the passionate love that feeds on great sacrifices, that can exist only when wrapped in mystery, and borders always on the most dreadful calamities.

Such was the love that was inspired in Elena, then barely seventeen, by Giulio Branciforte. He was one of her neighbours, and very poor; he lived in a wretched house built on the side of the mountain, a quarter of a league from the town, amid the ruins of Alba, and on the edge of the precipice of one hundred and fifty feet, screened with foliage, which surrounds the lake. This house, which stood within the sombre and splendid shade of the forest of la Faggiola, was afterwards demolished, when the convent of Palazzuola was built. The poor young man had no advantages beyond his lively and light-hearted manner and the unfeigned indifference with which he endured his misfortunes. The most that could be said in his favour was that his face was expressive without being handsome. But he was understood to have fought gallantly under the command of Prince Colonna, and among his *bravi*, in two or three highly dangerous enterprises. Despite his poverty, despite his want of good looks, he possessed nevertheless, in the eyes of all the young women of Albano, the heart that it would have been most gratifying to win. Well

received everywhere, Giulio Branciforte had made none but the easiest conquests, until the moment when Elena returned from the convent of Castro. "When, shortly afterwards, the great poet Cecchino moved from Rome to the palazzo Campireali, to teach the girl literature, Giulio, who knew him, sent him a set of Latin verses on the good fortune that had befallen him in his old age, in seeing so fine a pair of eyes fastened upon his own, and so pure a heart become perfectly happy when he deigned to bestow his approval upon its thoughts. The jealousy and disgust of the girls to whom Giulio had been paying attention before Elena's return soon rendered vain every precaution that he might take to conceal a dawning passion, and I must confess that this affair between a young man of two and twenty and a girl of seventeen was carried on in a fashion of which prudence could not approve. Three months had not gone by before Signer de' Campireali observed that Giulio Branciforte was in the habit of passing unduly often beneath the windows of his palazzo (which is still to be seen about half way along the high road that leads up to the lake)."

Freedom of speech and rudeness, natural consequences of the liberty which Republics tolerate, and the habit of giving way to passions not yet subdued by the manners of a monarchy appear unconcealed in the first steps taken by Signer de' Campireali. On the very day on which he had taken offence at the frequent appearance of young Branci-forte, he addressed him in these terms:

"How is it you dare loiter about like this all day in front of my house, and have the impertinence to stare up at my daughter's windows, you who have not even a coat to your back? Were I not afraid that such an action might be misinterpreted by my neighbours, I should give you three gold sequins, and you would go to Rome and buy yourself a more decent jacket. At any rate my eyes and my daughter's would not be offended any more by the sight of your rags."

Elena's father no doubt exaggerated: young Branci-forte's clothes were by no means rags; they were made of the plainest materials; but, although spotlessly clean and often brushed, it must be admitted that their appearance betokened long wear. Giulio was so cut to the heart by Signor Campireali's reproaches that he ceased to appear by day outside his house.

As we have said, the two lines of arches, remains of an ancient aqueduct, which formed the main walls of the house built by Branciforte's father and left by him to his son, were no more than five or six hundred yards from Albano. In coming down from this higher ground to the

modern city, Giulio was obliged to pass by the palazzo Campireali. Elena soon remarked the absence of the singular young man who, her friends told her, had abandoned all other society in order to consecrate himself wholly to the pleasure which he appeared to find in gazing at her.

One summer evening, towards midnight, Elena's window stood open, the girl herself was enjoying the sea breeze which makes itself felt quite distinctly on the hillside of Albano, albeit the town is divided from the sea by a plain three leagues in width. The night was dark, the silence profound; one could have heard a leaf fall to the ground. Elena, leaning upon her window sill, may have been thinking of Giulio, when she caught sight of something like the soundless wing of a nocturnal bird which passed gently to and fro close to her window. She drew back in alarm. It never occurred to her that this object might be being held up by some passer-by: the second storey of the palazzo, from which her window looked, was more than fifty feet from the ground. Suddenly she thought she identified a bunch of flowers in this strange article which amid a profound silence kept passing to and fro outside the window on the sill of which she was leaning; her heart beat violently. These flowers appeared to her to be fastened to the extremity of two or three of those canne, a large kind of reed not unlike the bamboo, which grow in the Roman Campagna, and send up shoots to a height of twenty or thirty feet. The flexibility of the reeds and the strength of the breeze made it difficult for Giulio to keep his nosegay exactly opposite the window from which he supposed that Elena might be looking out, and besides, the night was so dark that from the street one could make out nothing at that height. Standing motionless inside her window, Elena was deeply stirred. To take these flowers, would not that be an admission? Not that she experienced any of the feelings to which an adventure of this sort would give rise, in our day, in a girl of the best society prepared for life by a thorough education. As her father and her brother Fabio were in the house, her first thought was that the least sound would be followed by a shot from an arquebus aimed at Giulio; she was moved to pity by the risk which that poor young man was running. Her second thought was that, although she as yet knew him very slightly, he was nevertheless the person she loved best in the world after her own family. At length, after hesitating for some minutes, she took the nosegay, and, as she touched the flowers in the intense darkness, could feel that a note was tied to the stem of one of them; she ran to the great staircase to read this note by the light of the lamp that burned before the image of the Madonna. "How rash!" she said to herself when the opening lines had made her blush

with joy; "If anyone sees me, I am lost, and my family will persecute that poor young man for ever." She returned to her room and lighted the lamp. This was an exquisite moment for Giulio, who, ashamed of his action and as though to hide himself even in the pitch darkness, had flattened himself against the enormous trunk of one of those weirdly shaped evergreen oaks which are still to be seen opposite the palazzo Campireali.

In his letter Giulio related with the most perfect simplicity the crushing reprimand that had been addressed to him by Elena's father. "I am poor, it is true," he went on, "and you would find it hard to imagine the whole extent of my poverty. I have only my house which you may have observed beneath the ruins of the Alban aqueduct; round the house is a garden which I cultivate myself, and live upon its produce. I also possess a vineyard which is leased at thirty scudi a year. I do not know, really, why I love you; certainly I cannot suggest that you should come and share my poverty. And yet, if you do not love me, life has no further value for me; it is useless to tell you that I would give it a thousand times over for you. And yet, before your return from the convent, that life was by no means wretched; on the contrary, it was filled with the most dazzling dreams. So that I can say that the sight of happiness has made me unhappy. To be sure, no one in the world would then have dared to say the things to me with which your father lashed me; my dagger would have done him prompt justice. Then, with my courage and my weapons, I reckoned myself a match for anyone; I wanted nothing. Now it is all altered: I have known fear. I have written too much; perhaps you despise me. If, on the other hand, you have any pity for me, in spite of the poor clothes that cover me, you will observe that every night, when twelve strikes from the Capuchin convent at the top of the hill, I am hiding beneath the great oak, opposite the window at which I never cease to gaze, because I suppose it to be that of your room. If you do not despise me as your father does, throw me down one of the flowers from your nosegay, but take care that it is not caught on one of the cornices, or on one of the balconies of your palazzo."

This letter was read many times; gradually Elena's eyes filled with tears; she tenderly examined this splendid nosegay, the flowers of which were tied together with a strong silken cord. She tried to pull out a flower, but failed; then she was seized with remorse. Among Roman girls, to pull out a flower, to damage in any way a nosegay given in love, means risking the death of that love. Fearing lest Giulio might be growing impatient, she ran to her window; but, on reaching it, suddenly

reflected that she was too easily visible, the lamp flooding the room with light. Elena could not think what signal she might allow herself to give; it seemed as though there were none that did not say a great deal too much.

Covered with shame, she ran back into her room. But time was flying; suddenly an idea occurred to her which threw her into unspeakable confusion: Giulio would think that, like her father, she despised his poverty! She saw a little specimen of a precious marble lying on her table, tied it in her handkerchief and threw the handkerchief down to the foot of the oak opposite her window. She then made a sign that he was to go; she heard Giulio obey her; for, as he went away, he no longer sought to muffle the sound of his step. When he had reached the summit of the girdle of rocks which separates the lake from the last houses of Albano, she heard him singing words of love; she made him signals of farewell, this time less timid, then began to read his letter again.

The following evening, and every evening after this there were similar letters and assignations; but as everything is observed in an Italian village, and as Elena was by far the greatest heiress in the place, Signor de' Campireali was informed that every evening, after midnight, a light was seen in his daughter's room; and, what was far more extraordinary, the window was open, and indeed Elena stood there as though she were in no fear of *zanzare* (an extremely troublesome kind of midge, which greatly spoils the fine evenings in the Roman Campagna. Here I must once again crave the reader's indulgence. When one is trying to understand the ways of foreign countries, one must expect to find very grim ideas, very different from our own). Signor de' Campireali made ready his own arquebus and his son's. That evening, as the clock struck a quarter to twelve, he called Fabio, and the two stole out, making as little sound as possible, on to a great stone balcony which projected from the first floor of the palazzo immediately beneath Elena's window. The massive pillars of the stone balustrade gave them breast-high cover from the fire of any arquebus that might be aimed at them from without. Midnight struck; father and son could hear quite distinctly a slight sound from beneath the trees which bordered the street opposite their palazzo; but, and this filled them with surprise, no light appeared at Elena's window. This girl, so simple until then, and' to all appearances a child, from the spontaneity of her movements, had changed in character since she had been in love. She knew that the slightest imprudence jeopardised her lover's life; if a gentleman of the importance of her father killed a poor man like Giulio Branciforte, he could clear himself by disappearing for

three months, which he would spend at Naples; during that time, his friends in Rome would settle the matter, and all would be ended with the offer of a silver lamp costing some hundreds of scudi to the altar of the Madonna in fashion at the moment. That day, at luncheon, Elena had read on her father's features that he had some grave cause for anger, and, from the way in which he watched her when he thought that he was not observed, she concluded that she herself was largely responsible for this anger. She went at once and sprinkled a little dust on the stocks of the five splendid arquebuses which her father kept hanging by his bed. She covered also with a fine layer of dust his swords and daggers. All day she shewed a wild gaiety, running incessantly from top to bottom of the house; at every moment she went to the windows, quite determined to make Giulio a negative signal, should she be so fortunate as to catch sight of him. But there was no chance of that: the poor fellow had been so profoundly humiliated by the onslaught made on him by the rich Signer de' Campireali, that by day he never appeared in Albano; duty alone brought him there on Sundays to the parochial mass. Elena's mother, who adored her and could refuse her nothing, went out with her three times that day, but all in vain: Elena saw no sign of Giulio. She was in despair. What were her feelings when, on going towards nightfall to examine her father's weapons, she saw that two arquebuses had been loaded, and that almost all the swords and daggers had been handled. She was distracted from her mortal anxiety only by the extreme care she took to appear to suspect nothing. On retiring to bed at ten o'clock, she turned the key in the door of her room, which opened into her mother's ante-room, then remained glued to her window, leaning upon the sill in such a way as not to be visible from without. One may judge of the anxiety with which she heard the hours strike: it was no longer a question of the reproaches which she often heaped on herself for the rapidity with which she had attached herself to Giulio, which might render her less worthy in his eyes of love. This day did more to strengthen the young man's position than six months of constancy and protestations. "What is the use of lying?" Elena said to herself. "Do I not love him with all my heart and soul?"

At half past eleven she saw quite plainly her father and brother ambush themselves on the great stone balcony beneath her window. A minute or two after midnight had sounded from the Capuchin convent, she heard quite plainly also the step of her lover, who stopped beneath the great oak; she noticed with joy that her father and brother seemed to

have heard nothing: it required the anxiety of love to distinguish so faint a sound.

"Now," she said to herself, "they are going to kill me, but at all costs they must not intercept this evening's letter, they would persecute my poor Giulio for ever." She made the sign of the Cross, and, holding on with one hand to the iron balcony of her window, leaned out, thrusting herself as far forward as possible over the street. Not a quarter of a minute had passed when the nosegay, fastened as usual to a long cane, came brushing against her arms. She seized the nosegay, but, as she wrenched it vigorously from the cane to the end of which it was tied, she caused the said cane to strike against the stone balcony. At once two arquebus shots rang out, followed by complete silence. Her brother Fabio, not knowing, in the darkness, whether what was tapping violently against the balcony might not be a cord with the help of which Giulio was climbing down from his sister's room, had fired at her balcony; next day she found the mark of the bullet, which had flattened itself against the iron. Signer de' Campireali had fired into the street, beneath the stone balcony, for Giulio had made some noise in catching the cane as it fell. Giulio, for his part, hearing a noise above his head, had guessed what would follow, and had taken cover beneath the projection of the balcony.

Fabio quickly reloaded his arquebus, and, heedless of anything that his father might say, ran to the garden of the house, quietly opened a little door which gave on one of the adjoining streets and stole out on tip-toe to see for himself who the people were that were walking beneath the balcony of the palazzo. At that moment Giulio who, this evening, was well escorted, was within twenty paces of him, flattened against a tree. Elena, leaning from her balcony and trembling for her lover, at once began a conversation at the top of her voice with her brother, whom she could hear moving in the street; she asked him if he had killed the robbers.

"Do not imagine that I am taken in by your wicked tricks!" he called up to her from the street which he was exploring in every direction, "but prepare your tears, I am going to kill the insolent wretch who dares to approach your window."

No sooner had these words been uttered than Elena heard her mother knock at the door of her room.

She made haste to open it, saying that she could not conceive how the door had come to be locked.

"No make-believe with me, my dear angel," her mother told her; "your father is furious, and will perhaps kill you: come and lie down with me in my bed; and, if you have a letter, give it to me, I will hide it."

Elena said to her:

"Here is the nosegay; the letter is hidden among the flowers."

Scarcely were mother and daughter in bed, when Signer de' Campireali entered his wife's room; he came from her oratory, to which he had paid a visit, overturning everything in it. What impressed Elena, was that her father, pale as a spectre, was acting in a slow, deliberate fashion, like a man who has entirely made up his mind. "I am as good as dead!" she said to herself.

"We rejoice that we have children," said her father as he passed by his wife's bed on his way to his daughter's room, trembling with rage, but affecting a perfect calm; "we rejoice that we have children, we ought rather to shed tears of blood when those children are girls. Great God! Is it indeed possible! Their loose conduct is capable of destroying the honour of a man who in sixty years has never given anyone the slightest hold over him."

So saying, he passed into his daughter's room.

"I am lost," Elena told her mother, "the letters are beneath the pedestal of the crucifix, beside the window."

At once the mother sprang out of bed and ran after her husband; she shouted out to him the most senseless things imaginable, to stimulate his anger; in this she was entirely successful. The old man became furious, he broke everything in his daughter's room; but the mother was able to remove the letters unobserved. An hour later, when Signor de' Campireali had returned to his own room next door to his wife's, and all was quiet in the house, the mother said to her daughter:

"Here are your letters, I have no wish to read them, you see what they might have cost us! If I were you, I would burn them. Good night, kiss me."

Elena returned to her own room, dissolved in tears; it seemed to her that, after these words from her mother, she no longer loved Giulio. Then she made ready to burn his letters; but, before destroying them, could not refrain from reading them again. She read them so carefully and so often that the sun was already high in the heavens when at length she determined to listen to the voice of reason.

On the following day, which was a Sunday, Elena walked to the parish church with her mother; fortunately, her father did not follow them. The first person on whom her eyes fell in church was Giulio Branciforte. A

glance at him assured her that he was not injured. Her happiness knew no bounds; the events of the night were a million leagues away from her memory. She had prepared five or six little notes scribbled on old scraps of paper stained with a mixture of earth and water, such as might naturally be found lying on the floor of a church; each of these 'notes contained the same warning:

"They have discovered all, except his name. He must not appear again in the street; a certain person will come here often."

Elena let fall one of these scraps of paper; a glance was sufficient to warn Giulio, who picked it up and vanished. On her return home, an hour later, she found on the great staircase of the palazzo a fragment of paper which attracted her attention by its exact resemblance to those of which she had made use that morning. She took possession of it, without even her mother's noticing anything; and read:

"In three days he will return from Rome, where he is forced to go. There will be singing by daylight, on market-days, above the din made by the peasants, about ten o'clock."

This departure for Rome seemed to Elena strange. "Does it mean that he is afraid of my brother's arquebus?" she asked herself sadly. Love pardons everything, except a deliberate absence; that being the worst of tortures. Instead of passing in a delightful dream and being wholly occupied in weighing the reasons that one has for loving one's lover, life is then agitated by cruel doubts. "But, after all, can I believe that he no longer loves me?" Elena asked herself during the three long days of Branciforte's absence. Suddenly her grief gave way to a wild joy: on the third day, she saw him appear in the full light of noon, strolling in the street in front of her father's palazzo. He was wearing new, almost grand clothes. Never had the nobility of his bearing and the gay and courageous simplicity of his features shone to better advantage; never either, before that day, had there been so much talk in Albano of Giulio's poverty. It was the men, the young men especially, who repeated that cruel word; the women, and especially the girls, never wearied in their praises of his fine appearance.

Giulio spent the whole day walking about the town; he appeared to be making up for the months of seclusion to which his poverty had condemned him. As befits a man in love, Giulio was well armed beneath his new tunic. Apart from his dirk and dagger, he had put on his *giacco* (a sort of long waistcoat of chain mail, extremely uncomfortable to wear, but a cure, to these Italian hearts, for a sad malady, the piercing attacks of which were incessantly felt in that age, I mean the fear of being killed

at the street corner by one of the enemies one knew oneself to have). On the day in question, Giulio hoped for a glimpse of Elena, and moreover felt some repugnance at the thought of being left to his own company in his lonely house: for the following reason. Banuccio, an old soldier of his father, after having served with him in ten campaigns in the troops of various *condottieri*, and finally in those of Marco Sciarra, had followed his captain when the latter's wounds forced him to retire. Captain Branciforte had reasons for not living in Rome: he was exposed there to the risk of meeting the sons of men whom he had killed; even at Albano, he was by no means anxious to place himself entirely at the mercy of constituted authority. Instead of buying or leasing a house in the town, he preferred to build one so situated that its occupant could see visitors approaching a long way off. He found amid the ruins of Alba an admirable site: one could, unobserved by indiscreet visitors, slip away into the forest where ruled his old friend and patron, Prince Fabrizio Colonna. Captain Branciforte gave no thought to his son's future. When he retired from the service, only fifty years old, but riddled with wounds, he calculated that he had still some ten years of life, and, having built his house, spent every year a tenth part of what he had collected in the lootings of towns and villages in which he had had the honour to take part.

He purchased the vineyard which brought in a rental of thirty scudi to his son as a retort to the sneer of a burgess of Albano, who had said to him, one day when he was disputing hotly over the interests and honour of the town, that it was evidently right and proper for so rich a proprietor as himself to give advice to the *ansioni* of Albano. The captain bought the vineyard, and announced that he would buy any number more: then, meeting his critic in a solitary place, killed him with a pistol shot.

After eight years of this sort of life, the captain died; his supporter Ranuccio adored Giulio; nevertheless, weary of idleness, he took service once again in Prince Colonna's band. He often came to see *his son Giulio*, for so he called him, and, on the eve of a perilous assault which the Prince was about to face in his fortress of la Petrella, he had taken Giulio with him to fight. Finding him to be extremely brave:

"You must be mad," he told him, "and very easily satisfied, to be living on the outskirts of Albano like the humblest and poorest of its inhabitants, when with what I have seen you do and your father's name you might be a brilliant soldier of fortune among us, and, what is more, make your fortune."

Giulio was tormented by these words; he knew the Latin that had been taught him by a priest, but, as his father had always laughed at

everything that the priest said apart from his Latin, he had absolutely no education. At the same time, despised for his poverty, isolated in his lonely house, he had acquired a certain common-sense which, by its boldness, would have astonished men of learning. For instance, before falling in love with Elena, and without knowing why, he loved war, but he felt a repugnance towards pillage, which, in the eyes of his father the captain and of Ranuccio, was like the short play intended to raise a laugh which follows the noble tragedy. Since he had been in love with Elena, this commonsense, the fruit of his solitary reflexions, had been torturing Giulio. So light-hearted before, he now dared not consult anyone as to his doubts, his heart was full of passion and misery. What would not Signer de' Campireali say if he knew him to be a soldier of fortune? This time, his reproaches would not be without foundation! Giulio had always reckoned upon the military profession, as a sure resource when he should have spent the price of the gold chains and other jewels which he had found in his father's strong-box. If Giulio had no scruple as to carrying off (he, so poor) the daughter of the rich Signor de' Campireali, it was because in those days fathers disposed of their property after their death as they pleased, and Signor de' Campireali might very well leave his daughter a thousand scudi as her entire fortune. Another problem kept Giulio's imagination closely occupied: first of all, in what city should he install young Elena after he had married her and carried her off from her father? Secondly, with what money was he to support her?

When Signor de' Campireali addressed to him that stinging reproach which he had felt so keenly, Giulio remained for two days a victim to the most violent rage and grief; he could not make up his mind either to kill the insolent old man, or to let him live. He passed whole nights in tears; at length he decided to consult Ranuccio, the one friend that he had in the world; but would that friend understand him? It was in vain that he sought for Ranuccio throughout the forest of la Faggiola, he was obliged to take the road to Naples, past Velletri, where Ranuccio was in command of an ambuscade: he was waiting there, with a large company, for Ruiz d'Avalos, a Spanish General, who was proceeding to Rome by land, forgetting that, not long since, before a large audience, he had spoken with contempt of the soldiers of fortune of the Colonna band. His chaplain reminded him most opportunely of this little circumstance, and Ruiz d'Avalos decided to charter a vessel and to approach Rome by sea.

As soon as Captain Ranuccio had heard Giulio's story:

"Describe to me exactly," he said to him, "the person of this Signer de' Campireali, that his imprudence may not cost the life of some worthy

inhabitant of Albano. As soon as the business that is keeping us here is brought to an end one way or the other, you will take yourself off to Rome, where you will take care to shew yourself in the inns and other public places at all hours of the day; you must not let anyone suspect you, on account of your love for the daughter."

Giulio had great difficulty in calming the anger of his father's old comrade. He was obliged to lose his temper.

"Do you suppose that I am asking you for your sword?" he said finally. "Surely I have a sword, myself! I ask you for good advice."

Ranuccio ended every speech with these words:

"You are young, you have no wounds; the insult was public: a man who has lost his honour is despised, even by women."

Giulio told him that he desired time for further reflexion as to what his heart wished, and despite the protestations of Ranuccio, who was quite determined that he should take part in the attack upon the Spanish General's escort, where, he said, there would be honour to be won, not to mention the doubloons, Giulio returned alone to his little house. It was there that, the day before that on which Signor de' Campireali fired an arquebus at him, he had entertained Ranuccio and his corporal, who had come there from the neighbourhood of Velletri. Ranuccio employed force to open the little iron strong box in which his patron, Captain Branciforte, used to lock up the gold chains and other jewels which he did not choose to convert into cash immediately after an expedition. He found in it two scudi.

"I advise you to become a monk," he said to Giulio, "you have all the necessary virtues: love of poverty, here is a proof of it; humility, you allow yourself to be blackguarded in the public street by a rich townsman of Albano; you want only hypocrisy and gluttony."

Ranuccio insisted on putting fifty doubloons into the iron box.

"I give you my word," he said to Giulio, "that if within a month from to-day Signor de' Campireali is not buried with all the honours due to his nobility and wealth, my corporal here present will come with thirty men to pull down your little house and burn your wretched furniture. Captain Branciforte's son must not cut a poor figure in this world, on the strength of being in love."

When Signor de' Campireali and his son fired the two shots from their arquebuses, Ranuccio and the corporal had taken up their position beneath the stone balcony, and Giulio had the greatest possible difficulty in restraining them from killing Fabio, when that young man made an imprudent sally through the garden, as we have already related. The

argument that calmed Ranuccio was as follows: it is not right to kill a young man who may grow up and become of use in the world, while there exists an aged sinner more guilty than he, and fit only to fill a grave. The day after this adventure, Ranuccio disappeared into the forest, and Giulio set out for Rome. The joy which he felt in buying fine clothes with the doubloons which Ranuccio had given him, was cruelly marred by an idea quite extraordinary for that time, and one that foreboded the exalted destiny that was in store for him: he kept saying to himself: "Elena must be told who I am." Any other man of his age and period would have thought only of enjoying his love and carrying off Elena, without asking himself for a moment what was to become of her in six months' time, any more than what opinion she would form of himself.

On his return to Albano, and on the afternoon of the day on which he displayed before the eyes of all the town the fine clothes that he had brought back from Rome, Giulio learned from old Scotti, his friend, that Fabio had left the town on horseback, on a journey of three leagues to a property which his father owned in the plain, by the sea-coast. Later in the day, he saw Signor de' Campireali, accompanied by two priests, take the road leading to the magnificent avenue of evergreen oaks that crowns the edge of the crater in which the lake of Albano lies. Ten minutes later, an old woman boldly made her way into the palazzo de' Campireali, on the pretext of offering some fine fruit for sale; the first person that she met was the little maid Marietta, the confidential friend of her mistress Elena, who blushed to the whites of her eyes on receiving a fine nosegay. The letter concealed in the nosegay was of a preposterous length: Giulio related all his feelings since the night of the arquebus-shots; but, by a very singular piece of modesty, did not venture to confess what any other young man of his day would have been so proud to make known, namely that he was the son of a Captain famous for his adventures, and that he himself had already given proof of his valour in more than one combat. He felt that he could hear the reflexions which these deeds would inspire in old Campireali. It must be understood that in the sixteenth century the young women, their outlook being more akin to republican commonsense, esteemed a man far more highly for what he had done himself than for the riches amassed by his fathers or for their famous deeds. But it was principally the young women of humble birth that entertained these ideas. Those who belonged to the rich or noble class were afraid of the brigands, and, as is natural, had a great regard for nobility and opulence. Giulio ended his letter with the words: "I

do not know whether the more becoming clothes which I have brought back from Rome have made you forget the cruel insult that a person whom you respect addressed to me recently, with regard to my shabby appearance; I could have avenged myself, I ought to have done so, my honour commanded it; I refrained in consideration of the tears which my revenge would have brought to a pair of eyes that I adore. This may prove to you, if, unfortunately for me, you should still doubt it, that one can be extremely poor and yet have noble feelings. Apart from this, I have to reveal to you a terrible secret; I should certainly find no difficulty in telling it to any other woman; but somehow I shudder when I think of making it known to you. It is capable of destroying, in an instant, the love that you feel for me; no protestation on your part would satisfy me. I wish to read in your eyes the effect that this admission will produce. One of these days, at nightfall, I shall see you in the garden that lies behind the palazzo. That day, Fabio and your father will be away from home; when I have made certain that, notwithstanding their contempt for a poor and ill dressed young man, they cannot deprive us of three quarters of an hour or an hour of conversation, a man will appear beneath the windows of your palazzo, who will be shewing a tame fox to the village children. Later, when the *Angélus* rings, you will hear a shot fired from an arquebus in the distance; at that moment, go across to the wall of your garden, and, if you are not alone, sing. If all is silent, your slave will appear, trembling, at your feet, and will tell you things which will perhaps fill you with horror. Until that decisive day comes, a terrible day for me, I shall not take the risk again of offering you a nosegay at midnight; but about two o'clock in the morning I shall go by singing, and perhaps, watching from the great stone balcony, you will let fall a flower plucked by you in your garden. These may be the last signs of affection that you will give to the unhappy Giulio."

Three days after this, Elena's father and brother had gone on their horses to the property which they owned by the seashore; they were to start back shortly before sunset, so as to reach home about two o'clock in the morning. But, when the time came for them to take the road, not only their own two horses but every horse on the farm had disappeared. Greatly astonished by this audacious robbery, they hunted for their horses, which were not found until the following day in the forest of tall trees which lines the shore. The two *Campireali*, father and son, were obliged to return to Albano in a country cart drawn by oxen.

That evening, when Giulio was at Elena's feet, it was almost quite dark, and the poor girl was very glad of the darkness: she was appearing

for the first time before this man whom she loved tenderly, who knew very well that she loved him, but to whom after all she had never yet spoken.

One thing that she noticed restored a little of her courage: Giulio was paler and trembled more than she. She saw him at her knees: "Truly, I am not in a fit state to speak," he said to her. There followed some moments, apparently of great happiness; they gazed at one another, but without the power to utter a single word, motionless as a group wrought in marble, but a group full of expression. Giulio was on his knees, holding one of Elena's hands; she, with bent head, was studying him attentively.

Giulio knew well that, following the advice of his friends, the young debauchees of Rome, he ought to have made some attempt; but the idea horrified him. He was aroused from this state of ecstasy and, perhaps, of the keenest happiness that love can give, by this thought: the time was passing rapidly, the Campireali were drawing near their palazzo. He realised that with so scrupulous a nature as his he could not find any lasting happiness so long as he had not made to his mistress that terrible admission which would have seemed to his Roman friends so dense a piece of stupidity.

"I have spoken to you of an admission which perhaps I ought not to make to you," he said at length to Elena.

Giulio turned very pale; he added with difficulty and as though his breath were failing:

"Perhaps I am going to see those feelings vanish, the hope of which constitutes my life. You think me poor; that is not all: *I am a brigand and the son of a brigand.*"

At these words Elena, a rich man's daughter filled with all the fears of her caste, felt that she was going to faint; she was afraid of falling to the ground. "What a grief that will be for poor Giulio!" she thought: "he will imagine that I despise him." He was at her knees. In order not to fall she leaned upon him, and a little later fell into his arms, apparently unconscious. As we see, in the sixteenth century they liked exactitude in love stories. This was because the mind did not criticise these stories, the imagination felt them, and the passion of the reader identified itself with that of their heroes. The two manuscripts which we follow, and especially the one which presents certain turns of speech peculiar to the Florentine dialect, give in the fullest detail the history of all the meetings that followed. Danger took away all sense of guilt from the girl. Often the danger was extreme; but it did nought but inflame these two hearts

for which all the sensations that arose from their love were those of happiness. Several times Fabio and his father were on the point of surprising them. They were furious, believing themselves to be defied: common rumour informed them that Giulio was Elena's lover, and yet they could see nothing. Fabio, an impetuous young man and one proud of his birth, proposed to his father to have Giulio killed.

"So long as he remains in this world," he said to him, "my sister's life is a succession of the greatest dangers. Who knows but that at any moment our honour may oblige us to dip our hands in the blood of that obstinate girl? She has come to such a pitch of boldness that she no longer denies her love; you have seen her answer your reproaches only with a gloomy silence; very well, that silence is Giulio Branciforte's death sentence."

"Think of what his father was," replied Signer de' Campireali. "Certainly there is no difficulty in our going to spend six months in Rome, and, during that time, this Branciforte will disappear. But how do we know that his father, who, with all his crimes, was brave and generous, generous to the point of enriching many of his soldiers and remaining a poor man himself, how do we know that his father has not left friends behind him, either in the band of the Duca di Monte Mariano or in the Colonna band, which often occupies the woods of la Faggiola, half a league from us? In that case, we are all massacred without mercy, you, myself, and perhaps your unfortunate mother as well."

These conversations between the father and son, often repeated, were kept no secret from Vittoria Carafa, Elena's mother, and plunged her in despair. The upshot of Fabio's discussions with his father was that it did not become their honour to stand peacefully by and allow a continuance of the rumours that ran rife in Albano. Since it was not prudent to secure the disappearance of this young Branciforte who, every day, appeared more insolent than ever, and in addition, dressed now in magnificent clothes, carried his self-importance to the point of speaking, in the public thoroughfares, either to Fabio or to Signer de' Campireali himself, one, or possibly both of the following courses must be adopted: the whole family must return to live in Rome, or Elena must be sent back to the Convent of the Visitation at Castro, where she would remain until a suitable husband had been found for her.

Never had Elena confessed her love to her mother; daughter and mother loved one another tenderly, they spent their whole time together, and yet never had a single word been, uttered on this subject which interested them both almost equally. For the first time the almost exclusive subject of their thoughts was expressed in words when the mother gave

her daughter to understand that there was a question of removing the household to Rome, and perhaps of sending her back to spend some years in the Convent at Castro.

This conversation was imprudent on the part of Vittoria Carafa, and can be excused only by the unreasoning affection that she felt for her daughter. Elena, desperately in love, wished to prove to her lover that she was not ashamed of his poverty, and that her confidence in his honour knew no bounds. "Who would believe it?" cries the Florentine writer; "after all these daring assignations, attended with the risk of a horrible death, given in the garden, and once or twice even in her own room, Elena was pure! Strong in her virtue, she proposed to her lover that she should leave the palazzo, about midnight, by the garden, and spend the rest of the night in his little house built amid the ruins of Alba, more than a quarter of a league away. They disguised themselves as Franciscan friars. Elena was of tall stature, and, thus attired, appeared a young novice of eighteen or twenty. What is incredible, and shews plainly enough the finger of God, is that, in the narrow road cut through the rock, which still passes under the wall of the Capuchin convent, Giulio and his mistress, disguised as friars, met Signer de' Campireali and his son Fabio, who, followed by four servants well armed, and preceded by a page carrying a lighted torch, were returning from Castel Gandolfo, a town situated on the shore of the lake at no great distance. To allow the lovers to pass, the Campireali and their servants stood aside to the right and left of the road cut in the rock, which is about eight feet wide. How much better would it have been for Elena to be recognised at that moment! She would have been killed by a shot from her father's or her brother's pistol, and her punishment would have lasted but an instant: but heaven had ordered otherwise (*Dis aliter visum*).

"A further detail is added with regard to this strange encounter, which Signera de' Campireali, in her extreme old age, when almost a centenarian, used at times to relate in Rome in the presence of persons of weight, who, themselves of a great age, repeated it to me when my insatiable curiosity questioned them as to this matter and many' others.

"Fabio de' Campireali, who was a young man proud of his courage and extremely arrogant, observing that the elder of the friars gave no greeting either to his father or to himself when passing so close to them, exclaimed:

"'There's a conceited rascal of a friar! Heaven knows what he is going to do outside his convent, he and his friend, at this time of night! I don't know why I don't pull off their cowls; we should see their faces.'

"At these words, Giulio gripped his dirk under his friar's habit, and placed himself between Fabio and Elena. At that moment he was not more than a foot away from Fabio; but heaven ordered otherwise, and by a miracle calmed the fury of these two young men, who were presently to see each other at such close quarters."

In the prosecution of Elena de' Campireali in after years, an attempt was made to present this nocturnal expedition as a proof of her corruption. It was the delirium of a young heart inflamed by a mad love, but that heart was pure.

Chapter 3

It should be explained that the Orsini, the perpetual rivals of the Colonna, and all powerful at that time in the villages nearest to Rome, had recently procured the passing of a sentence of death, by the government courts, on a rich farmer named Baldassare Bandini, a native of la Petrella. It would take too long to relate here the various actions of which Bandini was accused: the majority would be crimes to-day, but could not be regarded in so severe a fashion in 1559. Bandini was imprisoned in a castle belonging to the Orsini, and situated in the mountains in the direction of Valmontone, six leagues from Albano. The *bargello* of Rome, accompanied by one hundred and fifty of his *sbirri*, spent a night on the road; he was coming to fetch Bandini to take him to Rome, to the Tordinona prison; Bandini had appeale'd to Rome from the sentence which condemned him to death. But, as we have said, he was a native of la Petrella, a fortress belonging to the Colonna; Bandini's wife appeared and publicly asked Fabrizio Colonna, who happened to be at la Petrella:

"Are you going to allow one of your faithful servants to die?"

Colonna replied:

"May I never, please God, be wanting in the respect I owe to the decisions of the courts of my Lord, the Pope!"

Immediately his soldiers received orders, and he sent word to all his supporters to hold themselves in readiness. The place of assembly was fixed in the neighbourhood of Valmontone, a little town built on the summit of a rock of moderate height, but with the rampart of a continuous and almost vertical precipice of from sixty to eighty feet.

It was to this town, which belonged to the Pope, that the supporters of the Orsini and the government *sbirri* had succeeded in conveying Bandini. Among the most zealous supporters of authority were numbered Signor de' Campireali and Fabio, his son, who, moreover, were distantly related to the Orsini. Giulio Branciforte and his father, on the other hand, had always been attached to the Colonna,

In circumstances in which it did not suit the Colonna to act openly, they had recourse to a very simple stratagem: the majority of the wealthy

Roman peasants, then as now, belonged to some confraternity or other of penitents. These penitents, whenever they appear in public, cover their heads with a piece of cloth which hides the face and is pierced with two holes opposite the eyes. When the Colonna did not wish to avow their part in any enterprise, they used to invite their supporters to put on their penitential dress before coming to join them.

After long preparations, the removal of Bandini, which for a fortnight had been the talk of the countryside, was fixed for a Sunday. On that day, at two o'clock in the morning, the governor of Valmontone had the bells rung in all the villages of the forest of la Faggiola. The peasants were to be seen emerging in considerable numbers from each village. (The customs of the mediaeval Republics, when one fought to obtain a certain thing which one desired, had preserved a great element of courage in the peasant heart; in these days, no one would stir.)

On the day in question a curious thing might have been observed: as the little troop of armed peasants issuing from every village reached the cover of the forest, it diminished by half; the supporters of the Colonna made their way to the place of assembly given out by Fabrizio. Their leaders appeared to be convinced that there would be no fighting that day: they had received orders that morning to spread this rumour. Fabrizio ranged the forest with the picked men of his supporters, whom he had mounted on the young and half-broken horses of his stud. He held a sort of review of the various detachments of peasants; but he said nothing to any of them, as a single word might prove compromising. Fabrizio was a large, lean man, of an incredible agility and strength: although barely forty-five years old, his hair and moustache were dazzlingly white, which greatly annoyed him: by this peculiarity he could be recognised in places where he would have preferred to pass unknown. As soon as the peasants caught sight of him, they cried: "*Evviva Colonna!*" and put on their cloth hoods. The Prince himself had his hood hanging over his chest, so as to be able to draw it on as soon as he came in sight of the enemy.

Which enemy did not keep him waiting: the sun had scarcely risen when about a thousand men, belonging to the Orsini party, and coming from the direction of Valmontone, entered the forest and passed within some three hundred yards of the supporters of Fabrizio Colonna, who had made his men lie down. A few minutes after the last of the Orsini troops forming this advance guard had filed past, the Prince ordered his men to move; he had decided to attack Bandini's escort a quarter of an hour after it should have entered the wood. At this point the forest is

littered with small rocks fifteen or twenty feet high; these are waves of lava, more or less ancient, on which the chestnuts flourish admirably, and almost entirely shut out the light of day. As these drifts of lava, more or less eaten away by time, make the ground very uneven, to avoid making the high road pass over a number of unnecessary little gradients, the lava has been cut into, and very often the road runs three or four feet below the level of the forest.

Near the place chosen by Fabrizio for the attack, was a clearing covered with vegetation and crossed at one end by the high road. Beyond this the road again entered the forest, which, at this point, choked with brambles and shrubs between the trunks of the trees, was altogether impenetrable. It was at a point a hundred paces within the forest and on either side of the road that Fabrizio posted his men. At a signal from the Prince, each of the peasants arranged his hood, and took his post with his arquebus behind a chestnut; the Prince's soldiers placed themselves behind the trees nearest to the road. The peasants had a definite order to fire only after the soldiers, and these were not to open fire until the enemy should be within twenty paces. Fabrizio made them hastily fell a score of trees, which, flung down with their branches upon the road, fairly narrow at that point and three feet below the level of the forest, blocked it entirely. Captain Ranuccio, with five hundred men, followed the advance guard; he had orders not to attack it until he should hear the first arquebus shots fired from the barricade that blocked the road. When Fabrizio Colonna saw his troops and the rest of his supporters properly posted, each behind his tree, and full of determination, he set off at a gallop with all those of his men who were mounted, among whom was to be seen Giulio Branciforte. The Prince took a path to the right of the high road, which led to the farther end of the clearing.

He had been gone but a few minutes when his men saw approaching in the distance, by the road from Valmontone, a numerous troop of men on horseback; these were the *sbirri* and the *bargello*, escorting Bandini, and the whole of the Orsini horsemen. In their midst was Baldassare Bandini, surrounded by four executioners clothed in red; they had orders to carry out the sentence of the court of first instance and to put Bandini to death, if they saw the supporters of the Colonna attempting to set him free.

Colonna's cavalry had barely arrived at the end of the clearing or meadow furthest from the road, when he heard the first arquebus shots fired by the ambushade which he had posted on the high road by the barricade. Immediately he ordered his horsemen to gallop, and made

them charge upon the four executioners clothed in red who surrounded Bandini.

We shall not attempt to follow the narrative of this little affair, which was over in three quarters of an hour; the Orsini party, taken by surprise, scattered in all directions; but, in the advance guard, the gallant Captain Ranuccio was killed, an event which had a fatal influence on the destiny of Branciforte. Barely had the latter dealt a few sabre thrusts, as he made his way towards the four men clothed in red, before he found himself face to face with Fabio de' Campireali.

Mounted upon a fiery horse, and wearing a gilded *giacca* (a coat of mail), Fabio cried:

"Who are these wretched creatures in masks? Cut their masks off with your sabres; this is how I do it!"

A moment later, Giulio Branciforte received a horizontal slash from Fabio's sabre across his brow. This blow had been so skilfully aimed that the cloth which covered his face fell to the ground, while at the same time his eyes were blinded by the blood that flowed from his wound, though the latter was not at all serious. Giulio reined in his horse, to give himself time to breathe and to wipe his face. He was anxious, at all costs, not to fight with Elena's brother; and his horse was already four paces from Fabio when he received a furious sabre thrust on the chest, which did not enter his body, thanks to his *giacca*, but did take away his breath for a moment. At the same time a voice shouted in his ear:

"*Ti conosco, porco!* I know you, you swine! So this is how you make money to replace your tatters!"

Giulio, stung to anger, forgot his original intention and turned on Fabio:

"*Ed in mal punto venisti!*" he cried. [Footnote: "And you have come at an unlucky moment!"]

After a succession of vigorous blows the garments that covered their coats of mail fell off in tatters. Fabio's coat of mail was gilded and splendid, Giulio's of the commonest kind.

"In what gutter did you pick up your *giacca*?" Fabio cried to him.

At that moment, Giulio found the opportunity which he had been seeking for the last half minute: Fabio's superb coat of mail did not fit closely enough round his throat, and Giulio aimed at his throat, which was bare in one place, a thrust that went home. Giulio's sword ran six inches into Fabio's breast, causing a huge jet of blood to spout forth.

"Take that for your insolence!" cried Giulio.

And he galloped towards the men dressed in red, two of whom were still in the saddle a hundred yards away. As he approached them, a third fell; but, just as Giulio came up to the fourth executioner, the latter, seeing himself surrounded by more than ten horsemen, fired a pistol point blank at the unfortunate Baldassare Bandini, who fell.

"Now, gentlemen, there is nothing more for us to do here!" cried Branciforte. "Let us sabre these rascals of *sbirri* who are making off everywhere,"

The others all followed him.

When, half an hour later, Giulio rejoined Fabrizio Colonna, that nobleman addressed him for the first time in his life. Giulio found him mad with rage; he had expected to see him in a transport of joy, in view of the victory, which was complete and due entirely to his good arrangement; for the Orsini had nearly three thousand men, and Fabrizio, on this occasion, had not been able to muster more than fifteen hundred.

"We have lost our gallant friend Ranuccio!" the Prince exclaimed, addressing Giulio. "I have just touched his body myself; it is cold already. Poor Baldassare Bandini is mortally wounded. So, properly speaking, we have not been successful. But the ghost of the gallant Captain Ranuccio will appear before Pluto with a good escort. I have given orders to hang all these rascally prisoners from the branches of the trees. Do your duty, gentlemen," he cried, raising his voice.

And he went off again at a gallop to the place where the advance guard had been engaged. Giulio had been more or less second in command of Ranuccio's company; he followed the Prince, who, on coming up to the body of that brave soldier, which lay surrounded by more than fifty of the enemy's dead, dismounted a second time to take Ranuccio's hand. Giulio followed his example, with tears in his eyes.

"You are very young," the Prince said to him, "but I see you covered with blood, and your father was a brave man, who received more than a score of wounds in the service of the Colonna. Take command of what is left of Ranuccio's company, and carry his body to our church of la Petrella; remember that you may perhaps be attacked on the way."

Giulio was not attacked, but he killed with a stroke of his sword one of his own men, who said that he was too young to be in command. This rash act proved successful, because Giulio was still covered with Fabio's blood. All along the road, he found the trees loaded with men who were being hanged. This hideous spectacle, combined with the death of Ranuccio, and more especially with that of Fabio, drove him almost mad.

His only hope was that the name of Fabio's conqueror would remain unknown.

We pass over the military details. Three days after the battle, he was able to return to spend a few hours at Al-bano; he told his friends there that a violent fever had detained him in Rome, where he had been obliged to keep his bed all the week.

But he was treated everywhere with a marked respect; the most important persons of the town made haste to greet him; some rash fellows even went so far as to call him *Signor Capitano*. He had passed several times in front of the palazzo Campireali, which he found entirely shut up, and, as the newly made Captain was extremely shy when it came to asking certain questions, it was not until the middle of the day that he managed to take it upon himself to say to Scotti, an old man who had always treated him kindly:

"But where are the Campireali? I see their palazzo shut up."

"My friend," replied Scotti with a sudden grimness, "that is a name which you must never utter. Your friends are quite convinced that it was he who attacked you, and they will say so everywhere; but, after all, he was the chief obstacle to your marriage; after all, his death leaves his sister immensely rich, and she is in love with you. It may even be added, and indiscretion becomes a virtue at this moment, it may even be added that she loves you to the extent of going to pay you a visit at night in your little house at Alba. So it may be said, in your interest, that you were husband and wife before the fatal combat at the Ciampi." (This was the name given in the district to the fight which we have described.)

The old man broke off, because he saw that Giulio was in tears.

"Let us go up to the inn," said Giulio. Scotti followed him; they were given a room the door of which they locked, and Giulio asked the old man's leave to tell him everything that had happened in the last week. This long story finished:

"I can see quite well from your tears," said the old man, "that nothing in your conduct was premeditated; but Fabio's death is none the less a very terrible event for you. It is absolutely essential that Elena tells her mother that you have been her husband for some time."

Giulio made no reply; this the old man ascribed to a praiseworthy discretion. Absorbed in deep meditation, Giulio was asking himself whether Elena, enraged by the death of a brother, would do justice to his delicacy; he repented of what had happened before. Afterwards, at his request, the old man told him frankly of everything that had occurred in Albano on the day of the fight. Fabio having been killed about half past

six in the morning, more than six leagues from Albano, incredible as it might sound, by nine o'clock people had begun to speak of his death. Towards midday they had seen old Campireali, in floods of tears and supported by his servants, making his way to the Capuchin convent. Shortly afterwards, three of those good fathers, mounted on the best horses of the Campireali stable, and followed by a number of servants, had taken the road to the village of the Ciampi, in the neighbourhood of which the battle had been fought. Old Campireali was absolutely determined to accompany them; but he had been dissuaded, on the grounds that Fabrizio Colonna was furious (no one knew why) and might easily do him' an ill turn should he be taken prisoner.

That evening, towards midnight, the forest of la Faggiola had seemed to be on fire: this was all the monks and all the poor of Albano who, each carrying a huge lighted candle, went out to meet the body of young Fabio.

"I shall not conceal from you," the old man went on, lowering his voice as though he had been afraid of being overheard, "that the road which leads to Valmontone and to the Ciampi... ."

"Well?" said Giulio.

"Well, that road passes by your house, and they say that when Fabio's body reached that point, the blood gushed out from a horrible wound which he had in his throat."

"How terrible!" cried Giulio, springing to his feet.

"Calm yourself, my friend," said the old man, "you can see for yourself that you must know all. And now I may tell you that your presence here, to-day, has seemed a trifle premature. If you should do me the honour to consult me, I should add, Captain, that it is not advisable for you to appear in Albano for another month. I have no need to warn you that it would not be prudent to shew yourself in Rome. We do not yet know what course the Holy Father is going to adopt towards the Colonna; it is thought that he will accept the statement of Fabrizio, who professes that he heard of the fight at the Ciampi only from common rumour; but the Governor of Rome, who is out and out Orsini, is furious and would be only too glad to have one of Fabrizio's gallant soldiers hanged, nor would Fabrizio himself have any reasonable grounds for complaint, since he swears that he took no part in the fight. I shall go farther, and, although you have not asked me for it, take the liberty of giving you a piece of military advice: you are popular in Albano, otherwise you would not be able to stay here in safety. Bear in mind that you have been walking about the town for some hours, that one of the Orsini's

supporters might imagine that you were defying him, or at least think it an easy opportunity of winning a fine reward. Old Campireali has repeated a thousand times that he will give his richest estate to whoever kills you. You ought to have brought down to Albano some of the soldiers you have in your house."

"I have no soldiers in my house."

"In that case, Captain, you are mad. This inn has a garden, we are going to leave by the garden, and escape through the vineyards. I shall accompany you; I am an old man, and unarmed; but if we meet any ill-disposed persons, I shall talk to them, and at least be able to let you gain time."

Giulio was broken-hearted. Dare we mention the nature of his madness? As soon as he had learned that the palazzo Campireali was shut up and that its occupants had left for Rome, he had formed the plan of going to revisit that garden where so often he had conversed with Elena. He even hoped to see once again her bedroom, where he had been received when her mother was away. He felt the need of reassuring himself against her anger, by the sight of the places in which she had been so loving to him.

Branciforte and the chivalrous old man met with no misadventure as they followed the little paths that run through the vineyards and climb towards the lake.

Giulio made his companion tell him once more the details of young Fabio's burial. The body of that gallant young man, escorted by a crowd of priests, had been taken to Rome, and buried in the chapel of his family, in the Convent of Sant' Onofrio, on the summit of the Janiculum. It had been observed, as something extremely unusual, that, on the eve of the ceremony, Elena had been taken back by her father to the Convent of the Visitation, at Castro; this had confirmed the common report which insisted that she was secretly married to the soldier of fortune who had had the misfortune to kill her brother.

On nearing his own house, Giulio found the corporal of his company and four of his men; they told him that their old captain used never to leave the forest without having some of his men at hand. The Prince had said many times that, whenever anyone wished to have himself killed by his own rashness, he must first resign his commission, so as not to cast upon him the responsibility for avenging another death.

Giulio Branciforte realised the soundness of these ideas, of which until that moment he had been completely ignorant. He had supposed, as young nations suppose, that war consisted only in fighting with personal

courage. He at once complied with the Prince's wishes, only giving himself time to embrace the wise old man who had been so chivalrous as to accompany him to his house.

But, not many days later, Giulio, half mad with melancholy, returned to visit the palazzo Campireali. As night was falling, he and three of his men, disguised as Neapolitan merchants, made their way into Albano. He presented himself alone at the house of Scotti; he learned that Elena was still confined in the convent of Castro. Her father, who believed her to be married to the man whom he called his son's murderer, had sworn never to set eyes on her again. He had not seen her even when he was taking her to the convent. Her mother's affection seemed, on the contrary, to have increased, and she often left Rome to go and spend a day or two with her daughter.

Chapter 4

"If I do not justify myself to Elena," Giulio told himself as he made his way back, by night, to the quarters which his company were occupying in the forest, "she will come to regard me as a murderer. Heaven knows what stories they have been telling her about this fatal fight!"

He went to receive his orders from the Prince in his stronghold of la Petrella, and asked leave to go to Castro. Fabrizio Colonna frowned:

"The matter of the little disturbance is not yet settled with His Holiness. You must understand that I have told the truth, namely that I knew nothing whatever of that encounter, of which I was not even informed until the following day, here, in my castle of la Petrella. I have every reason to believe that His Holiness will finally accept this sincere statement. But the Orsini are powerful, and everybody is saying that you distinguished yourself in the skirmish. The Orsini go so far as to pretend that a number of prisoners were hanged from the branches of the trees. You know how little truth there is in that; but we may expect reprisals."

The profound astonishment revealed in the young captain's artless gaze amused the Prince: he decided, however, seeing such a display of innocence, that it would be as well to speak more plainly.

"I see in you," he went on, "that absolute bravery which has made the name of Branciforte famous throughout Italy. I hope that you will shew that loyalty towards my house which made your father so dear to me, and which I have sought to reward in you. The standing order among my troops is this: never tell the truth about anything that relates to me or to my men. If, at the moment when you are obliged to speak, you see no advantage in any particular falsehood, lie at random, and avoid as you would avoid a mortal sin ever uttering a word of the truth. You can understand that, taken in conjunction with other information, it may put people on the track of my plans. I know, as it happens, that you have a little love affair in the convent at Castro; you may go and waste a fortnight in that town, where the Orsini are certain to have friends, and even agents. Call on my steward, who will pay you two hundred sequins. The affection that I had for your father," the Prince added with a smile,

"prompts me to give you a few instructions as to the best way of carrying out this amorous and military undertaking. You and three of your men will be disguised as merchants; you will not forget to lose your temper with one of your companions, who will make a show of being always drunk, and will make plenty of friends for himself by standing wine to all the vagabonds of Castro... . Apart from that," the Prince went on, with a change of tone, "if you are taken by the Orsini and put to death, never confess your true name, still less that you belong to me. I have no need to advise you to make a circuit of all the small towns, and always to enter by the gate farthest from the road by which you arrive."

Giulio's heart was melted by this fatherly advice, coming from a man who was ordinarily so solemn. At first the Prince smiled at the tears which he saw gathering in the young man's eyes; then his own voice altered. He slipped off one of the many rings which he wore on his fingers; as he took it, Giulio kissed that hand, famous for so many great deeds.

"My father would never have told me so much," the young man cried enthusiastically.

Two days later, shortly before dawn, he passed within the walls of the small town of Castro; five soldiers followed him, disguised like himself: two of them kept to themselves and appeared not to know either him or the other three. Even before entering the town, Giulio caught sight of the Convent of the Visitation, a vast building surrounded by dark walls, and not unlike a fortress. He hastened to the church, which was magnificent. The nuns, all of them noble and mostly belonging to wealthy families, competed among themselves in their pride for the privilege of enriching this church, the only part of the convent that was exposed to the public gaze. It had become a custom that whichever of these ladies the Pope appointed Abbess, from a list of three names presented to him by the Cardinal Protector of the Order of the Visitation, made a considerable offering, intended to perpetuate her name. Any whose offering was inferior to that of the previous Abbess was despised, and her family as well.

Giulio made his way trembling through this magnificent building, resplendent with marble and gilding. As a matter of fact, he paid little attention to the marble or the gilding; he felt that Elena's eyes were upon him. The high altar, he was told, had cost more than eight hundred thousand francs; but his gaze, scorning the treasures of the high altar, was directed at a gilded grating, nearly forty feet high, and divided into three sections by a pair of marble pillars. This grating, whose vast mass made

it appear almost terrifying, rose behind the high altar, and separated the nuns' choir from the church itself, which was open to all the faithful.

Giulio told himself that behind this gilded grating were assembled, during the services, the nuns and their boarders. To this inner church might repair, at any hour of the day, a nun or a boarder who felt a desire to pray; it was upon this circumstance, known to the world at large, that the poor lover's hopes were based.

It was true that an immense black curtain screened the inner side of the grating; but "that curtain," thought Giulio, "cannot entirely block the view for the boarders when they look into the public church, since I, who am unable to approach within a certain distance of it, can see quite well, through the curtain, the windows that light the choir, and can even make out the smallest architectural details." Each bar of this magnificent grating was armed with a strong spike, pointed towards the worshippers.

Giulio chose a place where he would be clearly visible, opposite the left hand side of the grating, in the most brightly lighted part of the church; there he spent his time hearing masses. As he saw no one near him but peasants, he had hopes of being observed, even through the black curtain which draped the inside of the grating. For the first time in his life, this simple young man sought to create an effect; he dressed himself with care; he scattered alms broadcast as he entered and left the church. His men and himself paid endless attentions to all the workmen and small tradesmen who had any dealings with the convent. It was not, however, until the third day that he at last had hopes of conveying a letter to Elena. By his orders, his men closely followed the two lay sisters whose duty it was to purchase some of the provisions for the convent; one of them was on friendly terms with a small merchant. One of Giulio's soldiers, who had been in religion, made friends with this merchant, and promised him a sequin for each letter that should be conveyed to the boarder Elena de' Campireali.

"What!" said the merchant at the first overture that was made to him in the matter, "a letter to the *brigand's wife*!"

This name was already in common use in Castro, and Elena had not been there a fortnight: so swiftly does anything that seizes hold of the imagination circulate among this people, passionately interested in all exact details!

The merchant added:

"At least, she is married! But how many of our ladies have not that excuse, and yet receive a great deal more than letters from outside."

In this first letter, Giulio related with endless details everything that had occurred on the fatal day marked by the death of Fabio: "Do you hate me?" he said in conclusion.

Elena replied in a few lines that, without hating anyone, she was going to employ the rest of her life in trying to forget the man by whose hand her brother had perished.

Giulio made haste to reply; after inveighing against his fate, in a style imitated from Plato and in fashion at the time:

"So you wish," he went on, "to forget the Word of God handed down to us in the Holy Scriptures? God says: woman shall leave her family and her parents to follow her husband. Dare you pretend that you are not my wife? Remember the night of Saint Peter's day. As dawn was beginning to appear behind Monte Cavi, you flung yourself at my feet; I was good enough to grant you a respite; you were mine, had I wished to take you; you could not resist the love which you then felt for me. Suddenly it occurred to me that, as I had told you many times that I had long since offered you the sacrifice of my life and of all that I might hold most dear in the world, you were in a position to reply, although you never did, that all these sacrifices, not being marked by any outward action, might well be no more than imaginary. An idea, hard to bear, but fundamentally just, dawned upon me. I reflected that it was not for nothing that chance was presenting me with the opportunity of sacrificing in your interest the greatest happiness that I could ever have dreamed of. You were already in my arms, and defenceless, remember; your own lips dared not refuse. At that moment the morning *Angélus* rang from the convent of Monte Cavi, and, by a miracle, the sound reached our ears. You said to me: 'Make this sacrifice to the Holy Madonna, the mother of all purity.' I had already, a moment earlier, had the idea of this supreme sacrifice, the only real sacrifice that I should ever have an opportunity of making for you. I felt it strange that the same idea should have occurred to you. The distant sound of that *Angelus* touched me, I confess; I granted your request. The sacrifice was not entirely for you; I believed that I was placing our future union under the protection of the Madonna. At that time I supposed that the objections would come not from you, faithless one, but from your rich and noble family. Had there not been some supernatural intervention, how could that *Angelus* have reached our ears from so great a distance, carried over the tree-tops of half the forest, stirred at that moment by the morning breeze? Then, you remember, you threw yourself at my feet; I rose, I took from my bosom the cross which I carry there, and you swore upon that cross, which is here before me, and

by your own eternal damnation, that in whatever place you might at any time be, whatever might at any time happen, as soon as I should give you the order, you would place yourself entirely at my disposal, as you were at the moment when the Angelus from Monte Cavi travelled so far to strike your ear. We then repeated devoutly two *Hail Marys* and two *Our Fathers*. Very well, by the love which you then felt for me, or else, if you have forgotten it, as I fear, by your eternal damnation, I order you to receive me to-night, in your room or in the garden of the Convent of the Visitation."

The Italian author carefully reports many long letters written by Giulio Branciforte after this one; but he gives only extracts from the replies of Elena de' Campireali. After the lapse of two hundred and seventy-eight years, we are so remote from the sentiments of love and religion which fill these letters, that I have been afraid of their seeming wearisome.

It appears from these letters that Elena finally obeyed the order contained in this one, of which we have given an abridged translation. Giulio found a way of penetrating into the convent; we may conclude from a certain passage that he disguised himself as a woman. Elena received him, but only at the grating of a window on the ground floor looking out to the garden. To his unspeakable grief, Giulio found that this girl, so tender and indeed so passionate before, had become like a stranger to him; she treated him almost with civility. In admitting him to the garden, she had yielded almost exclusively to the obligation of her oath. Their meeting was brief: after a few moments, Giulio's pride, excited a little, perhaps, by the events that had occurred in the last fortnight, succeeded in prevailing over his intense grief.

"I see before me now," he said to himself, "only the tomb of that Elena who, at Albano, seemed to have given herself to me for life."

Immediately, the important thing for Giulio was to conceal the tears with which the polite turns of speech that Elena adopted in addressing him bathed his cheeks. When she had finished speaking and justifying a change that was so natural, she said, after the death of a brother, Giulio said to her, speaking very slowly:

"You are not abiding by your oath, you do not receive me in a garden, you are not on your knees before me, as you were for a minute after we had heard the Angelus from Monte Cavi. Forget your oath if you can; as for me, I forget nothing; may God help you!"

So saying, he left the barred window before which he might still have remained for nearly an hour. Who would have said, a moment earlier, that he would of his own free will cut short this meeting for which he

had so longed! This sacrifice rent his heart; but he felt that he might well deserve Elena's scorn if he replied to her *civilities* otherwise than by abandoning her to her own remorse.

Before dawn, he left the convent. At once he mounted his horse, giving orders to his men to wait for him at Castro for a full week, then to return to the forest. At first he rode towards Rome.

"What! I am going away from her!" he said to himself at every yard: "What! We have become strangers to one another! Oh, Fabio! How amply you are avenged!"

The sight of the men whom he passed on the road increased his anger; he urged his horse across country and made his way towards the deserted and uncultivated tract by the seashore. When he was no longer disturbed by meeting these placid peasants whose lot he envied, he drew breath; the aspect of this wild spot was in keeping with his despair and lessened his rage; then he was able to give himself up to the consideration of his sad fate.

"At my age," he said to himself, "I have one resource left: to love some other woman!"

At this melancholy thought, he felt his despair increase twofold; he saw only too clearly that there was for him but one woman in the world. He pictured to himself the torment that he would suffer should he venture to utter the word love to any woman but Elena: the idea tore his heart.

He was seized with a fit of bitter laughter. "Here I am," he thought, "exactly like those heroes in Ariosto who travel alone through desert lands, when they have to forget that they have found their mistress in the arms of some other knight... . And yet she is not so much to blame," he told himself, bursting into tears after this fit of wild laughter; "her faithlessness does not reach the point of loving another. That keen, pure spirit has allowed herself to be led astray by the dreadful accounts that have been given her of me; no doubt I have been represented to her as having armed myself for that fatal expedition only in the secret hope of finding an opportunity of killing her brother. They will have gone farther still: they will have credited me with the sordid calculation that once her brother was dead she would become the sole heiress of an immense property... . And I have been fool enough to leave her for a whole fortnight a prey to the wiles of my enemies! It must be admitted that if I am most unfortunate, heaven has also furnished me with singularly little sense with which to conduct my life! I am a most miserable, most

contemptible creature! My life has been of use to no one, and to myself least of all."

At that moment, young Branciforte had an inspiration very rare in that age: his horse was going along the water's edge, and every now and then was being splashed by the waves; he had the idea of urging the animal into the sea, and so ending the dreadful fate that overhung him. What was he to do henceforward, after the one person in the world who had ever made him feel the existence of happiness had abandoned him? Then suddenly another idea stopped him short.

"What are the pains that I am enduring," he said to himself, "compared with those which I shall suffer in a moment, once this wretched life is ended? Elena will no longer be simply indifferent to me, as she is in reality; I shall see her in the arms of a rival, and that rival will be some young Roman noble, rich and *highly esteemed*; for, to rend my heart, the devils will seek out the most cruel visions, as is their duty. So I shall never succeed in finding forgetfulness of Elena, even in death; far from it, my passion for her will be doubled, because that is the surest means which the Eternal Power can find of punishing me for the fearful sin which I shall have committed."

To banish the temptation finally, Giulio began devoutly reciting the *Hail Mary*. It was on hearing the morning Angelus, the prayer sacred to the Madonna, that he had been carried away before, and led to a generous action which he now regarded as the greatest mistake of his life. But, from a sense of reverence, he did not venture to go farther and express the whole of the idea that had seized hold of his mind.

"If, by the Madonna's inspiration, I have fallen into a fatal error, ought she not, in her infinite justice, to bring about some circumstance which will restore my happiness?"

This idea of the justice of the Madonna gradually banished his despair. He raised his head, and saw facing him, beyond Albano and the forest, that Monte Cavi, covered in its dusky greenery, and the holy convent whose morning Angelus had led him into what he now called his appalling stupidity. The unexpected sight of that holy place comforted him.

"No!" he exclaimed; "it is impossible that the Madonna should abandon me. If Elena had been my wife, as her love allowed and my dignity as a man required, the account given to her of her brother's death would have found in her heart the memory of the bond that attached her to me. She would have told herself that she belonged to me long before the fatal chance which, on a field of battle, brought me face to face with Fabio. He was two years older than I; he was more skilled in arms, bolder in every

way, stronger. A thousand reasons would have occurred to my wife to prove that it was not I that had sought that combat. She would have remembered that I had never shewn the slightest feeling of hatred towards her brother, even when he fired his arquebus at me. I can recall that at our first meeting, after my return from Rome, I said to her: 'What would you have? Honour required it; I cannot blame a brother!'"

His hope restored by his devotion to the Madonna, Giulio urged on his horse and in a few hours arrived at his company's cantonment. He found his men standing to arms: they were about to take the road that runs from Naples to Rome past Monte Cassino. The young captain changed horses, and marched with his men. There was no fighting that day. Giulio never asked himself why they were on the march; it mattered little to him. The moment that he found himself at the head of his soldiers, a new vision of his destiny appeared to him.

"I am simply and solely a fool," he said to himself; "I did wrong to leave Castro; Elena is probably less to blame than I in my anger imagined. No, she cannot have ceased to belong to me, that pure and simple heart, in which I have beheld the first dawn of love! She was steeped in so sincere a passion for me! Has she not offered, ten times and more, to fly with me, poor as I am, and to have ourselves married by one of the friars of Monte Cavi? At Castro I ought, first of all, to have obtained a second assignation, and made her listen to reason. Really, passion makes me as distracted as a child! God! Why have I not a friend to whom I can turn for advice! The same course of action seems to me execrable, and, the next minute, excellent."

On the evening of that day, as they left the high road to return to the forest, Giulio rode up to the Prince and asked whether he might stay for a few days longer at the place he knew of.

"You can go to the devil!" cried Fabrizio, "do you think this is the time to bother me with your childish nonsense?"

An hour later, Giulio set off again for Castro. He found his men there, but he did not know how to write to Elena, after the summary fashion in which he had left her. His first letter contained only these words: "May I be received to-morrow evening?"

Similarly, "*You may come,*" was all the answer he received.

After Giulio's departure, Elena had imagined herself to be abandoned for ever. Then she had felt the whole force of the argument urged by that poor young man who was so unhappy: she was his wife before he had had the misfortune to encounter her brother on a field of battle.

On this occasion, Giulio was by no means received with the polite turns of speech which had struck him as so cruel at their former meeting. It was true that Elena appeared to him only behind the shelter of her barred window; but she was trembling, and as Giulio was extremely reserved and his language [Footnote: In Italy the fashion of addressing a person as *tu*, *voi* or *Lei* marks the degree of intimacy. The word *tu*, a survival from the Latin, has a more restricted application than in France.] almost that which he would have used to address a stranger, it was Elena's turn to feel all the cruelty that exists in the almost official tone when it follows the most tender intimacy. Giulio, who was especially afraid of having his soul torn asunder by some cold speech proceeding from Elena's heart, had adopted a lawyer's tone to prove that Elena was his wife long before the fatal combat at the Ciampi. Elena let him speak, because she was afraid of being overcome by tears if she answered him otherwise than with a few brief words. Finally, seeing that she was on the point of betraying herself, she bade her lover come again the next day. Giulio, who was reasoning like a lover, left the garden deep in thought; he could not bring his uncertainty to the point of deciding whether he had been well or ill received; and as military ideas, inspired by conversation with his comrades, were beginning to take root in his brain:

"One day," he said to himself, "I shall perhaps have to come and carry off Elena."

And he began to consider the ways of entering the garden by force. As the convent was very rich and offered grand opportunities of pillage, it had in its pay a great number of menservants, mostly old soldiers; they were housed in a sort of barrack the barred windows of which overlooked the narrow passage which, from the outer gate of the convent, carved out of a sombre wall more than eighty feet high, led to the inner gate guarded by the portress. On the left of this narrow passage rose the barrack, on the right the wall of the garden, thirty feet high. The front of the convent, on the public square, was a massive wall black with age, and offered no openings save the outer gate and one small window through which the soldiers could see what went on outside. One may imagine the grim effect of this great black wall pierced only by a gate strengthened with broad iron bands fastened to it by enormous nails, and a single small window four feet high and eighteen inches broad.

We shall not attempt to follow the author of the original manuscript in his long account of the successive assignations which Giulio obtained from Elena. The tone mutually adopted by the lovers had once more

become entirely intimate, as in the past in the garden at Albano; only Elena had never consented to come down to the garden. One night Giulio found her profoundly thoughtful: her mother had come from Rome to see her, and was staying for some days in the convent. This mother was so loving, she had always shewn such delicacy in her treatment of what she supposed to be her daughter's affections, that the latter felt a profound remorse at being obliged to deceive her; for, after all, would she ever dare to tell her that she was receiving the man who had robbed her of her son? Elena ended by admitting frankly to Giulio that if this mother who was so good to her should question her in a certain way, she would never have the strength to answer her with lies. Giulio was fully aware of the danger of his position; his fate depended on the chance which might dictate certain words to Signora de' Cam-pireali. On the following night he said to her, with a resolute air:

"To-morrow I shall come earlier, I shall detach one of the bars of this grating, you will come down to the garden, I shall take you to a church in the town, where a priest who is devoted to me will marry us. Before daylight you will be back in this garden. Once you are my wife, I shall have nothing more to fear, and if your mother insists upon it, as an expiation of the fearful misfortune which we all equally deplore, I will consent to anything, were it even that I must spend some months without seeing you."

As Elena appeared terrified by this proposal, Giulio added:

"The Prince summons me back to his side; honour and all sorts of reasons oblige me to go. My proposal is the only one that can assure our future happiness; if you do not agree to it, let us separate for ever, here, at this moment. I shall leave you with a sense of remorse at my rashness. *I trusted in your word of honour*, you are unfaithful to the most sacred of oaths, and I hope that in the course of time the contempt which your fickleness rightly inspires in me may cure me of this love which has been for too long the bane of my life."

Elena burst into tears:

"Great God!" she exclaimed, weeping, "how terrible for my mother!"

In the end, she agreed to the proposal that had been made to her.

"But," she added, "some one may see us, going or coming; think of the scandal that would arise, consider the fearful position in which my mother would find herself placed; let us wait until she goes, which will be in a few days."

"You have succeeded in making me doubt what was to me the holiest, the most sacred thing in the world: my confidence in your word. To-

morrow night we will be married, or else we see one another now for the last time, on this side of the grave."

Poor Elena could make no answer save by her tears, her heart was torn especially by the cruel and decided tone which Giulio had adopted. Had she then really merited his contempt? Could this be that same lover who was formerly so docile and so tender? At length she agreed to what had been ordered of her. Giulio withdrew. From that moment, Elena awaited the coming of the following night in an alternation of the most rending anxieties. Had she been prepared for certain death, her anguish would have been less keen; she could have found some encouragement in the thought of Giulio's love and of her mother's tender affection. The rest of that night passed in the most agonising changes of mind. There were moments when she decided to tell her mother all. Next day, she was so pale when she appeared in her mother's presence, that the latter, forgetting all her wise resolutions, flung herself upon her daughter's bosom, crying:

"What is happening? Great God! Tell me what you have done, or what you are going to do? If you were to take a dagger and thrust it into my heart, you would hurt me less than by this cruel silence which I see you adopt with me."

Her mother's intense affection was so evident to Elena, she saw so clearly that her mother, instead of exaggerating her feelings, was seeking to moderate her expression of them, that in the end she was overcome; she fell at her feet. Her mother, who was trying to find out what the fatal secret might be, having exclaimed that Elena was shunning her society, Elena replied that, next day and every day after that, she would spend all her time with her, but she besought her not to question her further.

This indiscreet utterance was speedily followed by a full confession. Signora de' Campireali was horrified to hear that her son's murderer was so close at hand. But this grief was followed by an outburst of keen and pure joy. Who could describe her delight when she learned that her daughter had never failed in her duties?

Immediately all the plans of this prudent mother were completely changed; she felt herself entitled to employ a stratagem to outwit a man who was nothing to her. Elena's heart was torn by the most cruel impulses of passion: the sincerity of her confession could not have been greater; this tormented soul was in need of relief. Signora de' Campireali, who had begun to think that anything was permissible, devised a chain of reasoning too long to be reported here. She had no difficulty in proving to her unhappy daughter that, instead of a clandestine marriage,

which always leaves a stain upon a woman's reputation, she would obtain a public and perfectly honourable marriage, if she would only agree to postpone for a week the act of obedience which she owed to so high-minded a lover.

Signora de' Campireali herself would return to Rome; she would explain to her husband that, long before the fatal combat at the Ciampi, Elena had been married to Giulio. The ceremony had been performed on that very night when, disguised in a religious habit, she had met her father and brother by the shore of the lake, on the road cut through the rock which runs by the walls of the Capuchin convent. The mother took good care not to leave her daughter all that day, and finally, towards evening, Elena wrote her lover an ingenuous and, to our ideas, extremely touching letter, in which she told him of the inward struggle that had torn her heart. She ended by begging him on her knees for a week's respite: "As I write you," she added, "this letter for which a messenger of my mother's is waiting, it seems to me that I was utterly wrong to tell her everything. I think I see you angry, your eyes look at me with hatred; my heart is torn by the most cruel remorse. You will say that I have a very weak, very cowardly, very contemptible nature; I admit it, my dear angel. But try to imagine the scene: my mother, in floods of tears, was almost at my feet. Then it became impossible for me not to tell her that a certain reason prevented me from consenting to do what she asked; and, once I had been so weak as to utter those rash words, I do not know what change occurred in me, but it became almost impossible for me not to tell her everything that had passed between us. So far as I can remember, I felt that my heart, robbed of all its strength, stood in need of advice. This I hoped to find in a mother's words... I forgot, my friend, that that beloved mother had an interest opposed to yours. I forgot my first duty, which is to obey you, and apparently I am incapable of feeling true love, which is said to withstand every trial. Despise me, my Giulio; but, in God's name, do not cease to love me. Carry me off if you wish, but do me the justice to admit that, if my mother had not happened to be here in the convent, the most horrible dangers, shame itself, nothing in the world could have prevented me from obeying your orders. But that mother is so good; so clever; so generous; remember what I told you at the time; when my father burst into my room, she rescued your letters which I had no means of hiding: then, when the danger was over, she gave them back to me without wishing to read them, and without a single word of reproach! In the same way, all my life long, she has been to me, as she was at that moment, supreme. You can see whether I ought

to love her, and yet, when I write to you (it is a horrible thing to say) I feel that I hate her. She has announced that on account of the heat she wishes to spend the night in a tent in the garden; I hear the tapping of the mallets, they are putting up the tent now; impossible for us to meet to-night. I am even afraid that the boarders' dormitory may be locked, as well as the two doors of the spiral staircase, a thing which is never done. These precautions would make it impossible for me to come down to the garden, even if I thought that it would have any effect in calming your anger. Oh, how I would give myself to you at this moment, if I had the means! How I should run to that church where they are going to marry us!"

This letter concludes with a couple of pages of mad sentences, in which I notice certain impassioned arguments which seem to be imitated from the philosophy of Plato. I have suppressed several elegances of this sort in the letter I have just translated.

Giulio Branciforte was amazed when he received it about an hour before the evening Angelus; he had just completed his arrangements with the priest. He was beside himself with rage.

"She has no need to advise me to carry her off, the weak, cowardly creature!"

And he set off at once for the forest of la Faggiola.

Meanwhile, Signora de' Campireali's position was as follows: her husband lay on his deathbed, the impossibility of avenging himself on Branciforte was carrying him slowly to the grave. In vain had he made his agents offer considerable sums to Roman *bravi*; none of these was prepared to attack one of the *caporali*, as they were called, of Prince Colonna; they were too certain of being exterminated, themselves and their families. It was not a year since an entire village had been burned to punish the death of one of Colonna's soldiers, and all those of the inhabitants, men and women alike, who tried to flee into the country, had their hands and feet tied together with ropes, and were then tossed into the blazing houses.

Signora de' Campireali had large estates in the Kingdom of Naples; her husband had ordered her to send there for assassins, but she had made only a show of obedience: she imagined her daughter to be irrevocably bound to Giulio Branciforte. Acting on this supposition, she thought that Giulio should go and serve for a campaign or two in the Spanish armies, which were then making war on the rebels in Flanders. If he survived, that would, she thought, be a sign that God did not disapprove of a necessary marriage; in that case she would give her daughter

the estates which she owned in the Kingdom of Naples; Giulio Branciforte would take the name of one of these estates, and would go with his wife to spend a few years in Spain. After all these trials perhaps she would have the heart to see him. But the whole aspect of things had been changed by her daughter's confession: the marriage was no longer a necessity: far from it, and while Elena was writing her lover the letter which we have translated, Signora de' Campireali wrote to Pescara and Chieti, ordering her farmers to send to her at Castro a party of trustworthy men capable of a bold stroke. She did not conceal from them that it was a question of avenging the death of Fabio, their young master. The courier who conveyed these letters set off before the end of the day.

Chapter 5

But, two days later, Giulio was back in Castro, bringing with him eight of his men who had volunteered to follow him and expose themselves to the anger of the Prince, who had sometimes punished with death enterprises of the sort on which they were engaging. Giulio had five men at Castro, he arrived with eight more; and yet fourteen soldiers, however brave, seemed to him insufficient for his task, for the convent was like a fortress.

One had first to pass, by force or by guile, through the outer gate of the convent; then to proceed along a passage more than fifty yards in length. On the left, as has been said, rose the barred windows of a sort of barrack in which the nuns had placed thirty or forty menservants, old soldiers. From these barred windows a hot fire would be opened as soon as the alarm should be given.

The reigning Abbess, who had a head on her shoulders, was afraid of the exploits of the Orsini chiefs, Prince Colonna, Marco Sciarra, and all the others that held sway in the neighbourhood. How was one to hold out against eight hundred determined men, suddenly occupying a little town like Castro and imagining the convent to be full of gold?

As a rule, the Visitation of Castro had fifteen or twenty *bravi* in the barrack to the left of the passage which led to the inner gate of the convent; on the right of this passage was a great wall, impossible to break through; at the end of the passage one came upon an iron gate opening upon a pillared hall; beyond this hall was the great courtyard of the convent. This iron gate was guarded by the portress.

When Giulio, followed by his eight men, had come within three leagues of Castro, he halted in a lonely inn until the heat of the day should be past. It was only there that he announced his intention; he then traced in the dust of the courtyard the plan of the convent which he was going to attack.

"At nine o'clock this evening," he said to his men, "we sup outside the town; at midnight we enter; we shall find your five comrades who will be waiting for us near the convent. One of them, who will be mounted,

will pretend to be a courier arriving from Rome to summon Signora de' Campireali to the bedside of her husband, who is dying. We shall try to get without noise past the outer gate of the convent, which is there, close to the barrack," he said, pointing to it on his plan in the dust. "If we were to begin our fight at the first gate, we should be making it easy for the nuns' *bravi* to shoot us down with their arquebuses while we were still in the little square, here, outside the convent, or while we were going along the narrow passage which leads from the first gate to the second. This second gate is of iron, but I have the key.

"It is true that there are enormous iron rods, or valets, fastened to the wall at one end, and these, when they are in position, prevent the two halves of the gate from opening. But as these two iron rods are too heavy for the portress to be able to handle them, I have never seen them in position; and yet I have passed ten times and more through this iron gate. I expect to pass through it again to-night without difficulty. You understand that I have friends inside the convent; my object is to carry off a boarder, not a nun; we must not use our arms except in the last extremity. If we should begin the fight before reaching this second gate with the iron bars, the portress would not fail to call two old gardeners, men of seventy, who sleep inside the convent, and the old men would fix in position the iron bars of which I have spoken. Should this misfortune befall us, we shall be obliged, in order to pass the gate, to destroy the wall, which will take ten minutes; in any case, I shall advance first towards the gate. One of the gardeners is in my pay; but I have taken good care, as you can imagine, not to speak to him of the abduction I have in mind. Once past this second gate, we turn to the right, and come to the garden; as soon as we are in the garden, the fight begins, we must go for everyone we see. You will of course use only your swords and dirks, a single shot from an arquebus would set the whole town stirring, and we might be attacked on coming out. Not that with thirteen men such as you I have any misgivings about getting through a little place like that: certainly no one would dare come down to the street; but many of the townsfolk have arquebuses, and they would fire from the windows. In that case, we should have to keep close to the walls of the houses, so much for that. Once you are in the convent garden, you will say in a low voice to every man that shews his face: *Retire*; you will kill with your dirks any that does not immediately obey. I shall go up into the convent by the little door from the garden, with those of you that are near me; three minutes later I shall come down with one or two women whom we shall carry in our arms, without allowing them to walk. We shall then go

quickly out of the convent and the town. I shall leave two of you near the gate, they will fire twenty rounds from their arquebuses, one every minute, to frighten the townsfolk and keep them at a distance."

Giulio repeated this explanation a second time.

"Do you quite understand?" he asked his men. "It will be dark in that hall; on the right the garden, on the left the courtyard; you must not lose your way."

"Count on us!" cried the soldiers.

Then they went off to drink; the corporal did not follow them but asked leave to speak to the captain.

"Nothing could be simpler," he said to him, "than your honour's plan. I have already forced two convents in my time; this will make the third; but there are not enough of us. If the enemy oblige us to pull down the wall that supports the hinges of the second gate, we must bear in mind that the *bravi* in the barrack will not be idle during that long operation; they will kill seven or eight of your men with arquebus shots, and after that they may seize the lady from us as we come out. That is what happened to us in a convent near Bologna: they killed five of our men, we killed eight of theirs, but the captain did not get the lady. I suggest to your honour two things: I know four peasants close to this inn where we are now, who have served gallantly under Sciarra, and for a sequin will fight all night like lions. They may perhaps steal some silver from the convent; that does not matter to you, the sin is upon their heads, you simply pay them to secure a lady, that is all. My second suggestion is this: Ugone is a fellow with some education, and very quick; he was a doctor when he killed his brother-in-law and took to the *macchia*. You might send him, an hour before nightfall, to the gate of the convent; he will ask to take service there, and will manage so well that he will be admitted to the guardroom; he will fill the nuns' servants with liquor; more than that, he is quite capable of wetting the matches of their arquebuses."

Unfortunately, Giulio accepted the corporal's suggestion. As the man was leaving his presence, he added:

"We are going to attack a convent, that means *major excommunication*, and besides, this convent is under the immediate protection of the Madonna... ."

"I hear you!" cried Giulio, as though aroused by the last words. "Stay here with me."

The corporal shut the door and came back to repeat the Rosary with Giulio. Their prayers lasted for fully an hour. At dusk, they took the road again.

As midnight struck, Giulio, who had entered Castro by himself about eleven o'clock, returned to fetch his party outside the gate. He entered the town with his eight soldiers, who had been joined by three peasants, well armed; adding to these the five soldiers whom he already had in the town, he found himself at the head of a band of sixteen resolute men; two were disguised as servants, they had put on loose shirts of black cloth to hide their *giacchi* (coats of mail), and they wore no plumes in their caps.

At half past twelve, Giulio, who had cast himself for the part of courier, arrived at a gallop at the gate of the convent, making a great noise, and shouting to the inmates to open at once to a courier sent by the Cardinal. He was pleased to see that the soldiers who answered him through the little window, by the side of the outer gate, were more than half drunk already. Complying with the custom, he handed in his name on a slip of paper; a soldier went to give this to the portress, who had the key of the second gate, and on important occasions had to arouse the Abbess. For three mortal quarters of an hour he was kept waiting for an answer; during this time, Giulio had great difficulty in keeping his troop silent: some of the townsfolk were even beginning timidly to open their windows, when a favourable reply at length arrived from the Abbess. Giulio entered the guard-room by means of a ladder five or six feet in length, which was let down to him from the little window, the *bravi* of the convent not wishing to give themselves the trouble of opening the great gate: this ladder he climbed, followed by the two soldiers disguised as servants. As he jumped from the window sill into the guard-room, he caught the eye of Ugone; the whole of the guard were drunk, thanks to his efforts. Giulio told the man in charge that three servants of the Campireali household, whom he had armed like soldiers to serve as his escort on the road, had found a place where there was good brandy for sale, and asked that they might come up instead of cooling their heels on the square; this request was unanimously granted. As for himself, accompanied by his two men, he went down by the staircase which led from the guard-room into the passage.

"Try to open the big gate," he said to Ugone.

He himself arrived without the least trouble at the iron gate. There he found the good portress, who told him that as it was past midnight, if he entered the convent, the Abbess would be obliged to report it to the Bishop; accordingly she sent word asking him to hand his dispatches to a young sister whom she had sent to receive them. To which Giulio replied that in the confusion surrounding the sudden decline of Signor de'

Campireali, he had been given nothing but a simple letter of credit written by the doctor, and had been ordered to communicate all the details by word of mouth to the dying man's wife and daughter, should those ladies still be in the convent, and in any event to the Lady Abbess. The portress went to convey this message. There remained by the gate only the young sister sent down by the Abbess. Giulio while he talked and joked with her, slipped his hands through the great iron bars of the gate, and, still laughing, attempted to open it. The sister, who was very timid, was alarmed and took the pleasantry amiss; then Giulio, seeing that a considerable amount of time had passed, was rash enough to offer her a handful of sequins, begging her to open the gate for him, adding that he was too tired to wait any longer. He saw quite well that he was doing a foolish thing, says the historian: it was with steel and not with gold that he should have acted, but he had no heart for that: nothing could have been easier than to seize the sister, who was not a foot away from him on the other side of the gate. At his offer of the sequins, the girl took fright. She said afterwards that, from the way in which Giulio addressed her, she realised quite clearly that he was not a mere courier: "He will be the lover of one of our nuns," she thought, "who has come to keep an assignation," and she was devout. Seized with horror, she began to tug with all her strength the rope of a little bell which hung in the great courtyard, and at once made din enough to arouse the dead.

"The fight begins," said Giulio to his men; "look out for yourselves!"

He took his key, and, slipping his arm between the iron bars, opened the gate, to the complete despair of the young sister, who fell on her knees and began to recite the *Hail Mary*, crying out against the sacrilege. Again at this moment, Giulio ought to have silenced the girl, but had not the heart to do so: one of his men seized hold of her and clapped his hand to her mouth.

At that moment Giulio heard an arquebus fired in the passage behind him. Ugone had opened the main gate; the remainder of the soldiers were entering without a sound, when one of the *bravi*, less drunk than the rest, came up to one of the barred windows, and, in his astonishment at seeing so many people in the passage, forbade them with an oath to come any farther. The only thing was to make no answer and to continue to advance towards the iron gate; this was what the first of the soldiers did; but the man who came last of all, and who was one of the peasants recruited in the afternoon, fired a pistol shot at this servant who was speaking from the window, and killed him. This pistol shot, in the dead of night, and the shouts of the drunken men as they saw their comrade

fall, awoke the soldiers of the convent, who were spending the night in bed, and had not had an opportunity of tasting Ugone's wine. Nine or ten of the *bravi* of the convent rushed into the passage half dressed, and began vigorously to attack Branciforte's men.

As we have said, this racket began at the moment when Giulio had succeeded in opening the iron gate. Followed by his two soldiers, he dashed into the garden, and ran towards the little door of the boarders' stair; but he was greeted by five or six pistol shots. His two men fell, he himself received a bullet in his right arm. These pistol shots had been fired by Signora de' Campireali's people, who, by her orders, were spending the night in the garden, authorised to do so by a special dispensation which she had obtained from the Bishop. Giulio ran by himself towards the little door, so well known to him, which led from the garden to the boarders' stair. He did all he could to force it open, but it was firmly shut. He searched for his men, who made no attempt to reply; they were dying; in the pitch darkness he ran into three of the Campireali servants against whom he defended himself with his knife.

He ran into the hall, towards the iron gate, to call his soldiers; he found this gate shut: the pair of heavy iron rods had been put in position and padlocked by the old gardeners, who had been aroused by the young sister's pealing of the bell.

"I am cut off," Giulio said to himself.

He repeated this to his men; in vain did he attempt to force one of the padlocks with his sword: had he succeeded, he would have raised one of the iron rods, and opened one side of the gate. His sword broke in the ring of the padlock; at the same moment he was wounded in the shoulder by one of the servants who had come in from the garden; he turned round, and resting his back against the iron gate, found himself being attacked by a number of men. He defended himself with his dirk; fortunately, the darkness being unbroken, almost all the sword strokes landed on his coat of mail. He received a painful wound in the knee; he flung himself upon one of the men who had lunged too far to reach him with his sword, killed him by stabbing him in the face with his knife, and was lucky enough to gain possession of the man's sword. From that moment he thought himself safe; he took his stand on the left-hand side of the gate, towards the courtyard. His men, who had hastened to his assistance, fired five or six pistol shots between the iron bars of the gate and sent the servants flying. Nothing was visible in the hall except in the flash of these pistol shots.

"Do not fire in my direction!" cried Giulio to his men.

"Now you are caught like a mouse in a trap," the corporal said to him with the utmost coolness, speaking through the bars; "we have three men killed. We are going to break down the jamb of the gate on the opposite side to where you are; do not come near, the bullets will be falling on us; there seem to be some of the enemy in the garden still."

"Those rascally servants of the Campireali," said Giulio.

He was still speaking to the corporal, when further pistol shots, aimed at the sound of their voices and coming from the part of the hall that led to the garden, were fired at them. Giulio took shelter in the portress's lodge, which was on the left as one entered; to his great joy he found a lamp burning with an almost imperceptible glimmer before the image of the Madonna; he took it with many precautions not to extinguish it; he noticed with regret that he was trembling. He examined the wound in his knee, which was giving him great pain; the blood was flowing copiously.

As he cast his eyes round him, he was greatly surprised at recognising, in a woman who had fainted in a wooden armchair, little Marietta, Elena's confidential maid; he shook her vigorously.

"Why, Signor Giulio," she exclaimed, weeping, "are you going to kill Marietta, your friend?"

"Nothing of the sort; say to Elena that I beg pardon for having disturbed her sleep, and bid her remember the Angelus on Monte Cavi. Here is a nosegay which I plucked in her garden at Albano; but it is stained a little with blood; wash it before you give it to her."

At that moment, he heard a volley of arquebus shots fired in the passage; the nuns' *bravi* were attacking his men.

"Tell me, where is the key of the little door?" he said to Marietta.

"I do not see it; but here are the keys of the padlocks of the iron bars which keep the great gate shut. You can get out."

Giulio took the keys and dashed out of the lodge.

"Stop trying to break down the wall," he said to his soldiers. "I have the key of the gate at last."

There was a moment of complete silence, while he tried to open a padlock with one of the small keys; he had mistaken the key, he tried the other; at length, he opened the padlock; but just as he was lifting the iron rod, he received a pistol shot, fired at him almost point blank, in his right arm. At once he felt that his arm refused to obey him.

"Lift up the iron valet," he cried to his men.

He had no need to tell them.

By the flash of the pistol shot, they had seen the hooked end of the iron rod almost out of the ring in the gate; when it was clear of the ring, they let it fall. Then it was possible to push open one side of the gate; the corporal entered, and said to Giulio, carefully lowering his voice:

"There is nothing more to be done, there are only three or four of us now unwounded, five are dead."

"I am losing blood," replied Giulio. "I feel that I am going to faint; tell them to carry me away."

While Giulio was speaking to the gallant corporal, the soldiers in the guard-room fired three or four more arquebus shots, and the corporal fell dead. Fortunately, Ugone had heard the order given by Giulio, he called two of the soldiers by name, and these picked up their captain. As after all he did not faint, he ordered them to carry him to the end of the garden, to the little door. This order made the men swear; they obeyed, nevertheless.

"A hundred sequins to the man who opens that door!" cried Giulio.

But it resisted the efforts of three furious men. One of the old gardeners, installed in a window on the second floor, fired a number of pistol shots at them, which served to lighten their path.

After vain efforts to break down the door, Giulio fainted completely away; Ugone told the soldiers to carry the captain out as quickly as possible. He himself went into the portress's lodge, out of which he flung little Marietta, telling her in a terrifying voice to make her escape, and never to say that she had recognised him. He pulled out the straw from the bed, broke several chairs and set fire to the room. When he saw the fire well started, he made off as fast as he could run, through a rain of arquebus shots fired by the *bravi* in the convent.

It was not until he had gone some hundred and fifty yards from the Visitation that he found the captain, who, in a dead faint, was being carried rapidly away. A few minutes later, they were out of the town; Ugone called a half, he had now only four soldiers with him; he sent two back into the town, with orders to fire their arquebuses every five minutes.

"Try to find your wounded comrades," he told them, "and leave the town before daybreak; we are going to follow the path towards the Croce Rossa. If you can start a fire anywhere, do so without fail."

When Giulio recovered consciousness, they had gone three leagues from the town, and the sun was already high above the horizon. Ugone made his report.

"Your troop consists now of only five men, of whom three are wounded. Two of the peasants who are alive have received a reward of two sequins each, and have fled; I have sent the two men who are not wounded to the nearest village to fetch a surgeon."

The surgeon, an old man trembling with fear, arrived presently mounted upon a magnificent ass; the men had had to threaten to set fire to his house before he would make up his mind to come. They were obliged also to dose him with brandy to make him fit to work, so great was his fear. Finally he set to work; he told Giulio that his injuries were of no consequence.

"The wound in the knee is not dangerous," he went on, "but it will make you limp all your life, if you do not keep absolutely still for the next two or three weeks."

The surgeon dressed the wounds of the men. Ugone made a sign with his eye to Giulio; two sequins were bestowed on the surgeon, who was speechless with gratitude; then, on the pretext of thanking him, they made him drink such a quantity of brandy that finally he fell into a deep sleep. This was what they desired. They carried him into a neighbouring field, and wrapped four sequins in a scrap of paper which was slipped into his pocket: it was the price of his ass, on which were set Giulio and one of the soldiers who was wounded in the leg. They went to spend the period of the midday heat in an ancient ruin by the edge of a pond; they marched all night, avoiding the villages, which were few in number upon that road, and at length, on the third morning, at sunrise, Giulio, carried by his men, awoke in the heart of the forest of la Faggiola, in the charcoal-burner's hut which was his headquarters.

Chapter 6

On the morning after the fight, the nuns of the Visitation were horrified to find nine dead bodies in their garden and in the passage that led from their outer gate to the gate with the iron bars; eight of their *bravi* were wounded. Never had there been such a panic in the convent: it was true that they had, now and again, heard arquebus shots fired in the square, but never such a quantity of shots fired in the garden, in the middle of the nuns' buildings and beneath their windows. The affair had lasted fully an hour and a half, and during that time the disorder had been complete inside the convent. Had Giulio Branciforte had the least understanding with any of the sisters or boarders, he must have been successful: all that was needed was to open to him one of the many doors that led into the garden; but, wild with indignation and with resentment of what he called the perjury of young Elena, Giulio had sought to carry everything before him by main force. He would have felt that he was failing in his duty to himself, had he confided his plan to anyone who could repeat it to Elena. And yet a single word to her little Marietta would have sufficed to assure his success: she would have opened one of the doors leading into the garden, and one man even appearing in the dormitories of the convent, with that terrible accompaniment of arquebus shots heard from without, would have been obeyed to the letter. At the sound of the first shot, Elena had trembled for the life of her lover, and her one thought had been to fly with him.

How are we to depict her despair when little Marietta told her of the fearful wound Giulio had received in his knee, from which she had seen the blood flowing in torrents? Elena detested her own cowardice and pusillanimity:

"I was weak enough to say a word to my mother, and Giulio's blood has been shed; he might have lost his life in that sublime assault in which it was his courage that did everything."

The *bravi*, when admitted to the parlour, had said to the nuns, who were all agog to hear them, that never in their lives had they witnessed valour comparable to that of the young man dressed as a courier who

directed the efforts of the brigands. If all the rest listened to these tales with the keenest interest, one may judge of the intense passion with which Elena asked these *bravi* for a detailed account of the young chief of the brigands. After the long stories which she made them, and also the old gardeners, tell her, she felt that she no longer loved her mother at all. There was indeed a moment of extremely heated discussion between these two women who had loved each other so tenderly on the eve of the fight; Signora de' Campireali was shocked by the bloodstains which she saw on the flowers of a certain nosegay from which Elena refused to be parted for a single instant.

"You ought to throw away those flowers covered with blood."

"It was I who caused that noble blood to be spilt, and it flowed because I was weak enough to say a word to you."

"You still love, your brother's murderer?"

"I love my husband, who, to my eternal misfortune, was attacked by my brother."

After this reply, not a single word passed between Signora de' Campireali and her daughter during the three more days which the Signora spent in the convent.

On the day following her departure, Elena managed to escape, taking advantage of the confusion that prevailed at the two gates of the convent, owing to the presence of a large number of masons who had been let into the garden and were engaged in erecting new fortifications there. Little Marietta and she were disguised as workmen. But the townsfolk were keeping a strict guard at the gates of the town. Elena had considerable difficulty in getting out. Finally, the same small merchant who had conveyed Branciforte's letters to her consented to let her pass as his daughter, and to escort her as far as Albano. There Elena found a hiding-place with her nurse, whom her generosity had enabled to open a little shop. No sooner had she arrived, than she wrote to Branciforte, and the nurse found, not without great trouble, a man willing to risk his life by entering the forest of la Faggiola without having the password of Colonna's troops.

The messenger dispatched by Elena returned after three days, in great consternation; for one thing, he had been unable to find Branciforte, and, as the questions which he continued to put with regard to the young captain had ended by making him suspected, he had been obliged to take flight.

"There can be no doubt about it, poor Giulio is dead," Elena said to herself, "and it is I that have killed him! Such was bound to be the

consequence of my wretched weakness and cowardice; he should have loved a strong woman, the daughter of one of Prince Colonna's captains."

The nurse thought that Elena was going to die. She went up to the Capuchin convent, standing by the road cut in the rock, where Fabio and his father had once met the lovers in the middle of the night. The nurse spoke at great length to her confessor, and, beneath the seal of the sacrament, admitted to him that young Elena de' Campi-reali wished to go and join Giulio Branciforte, her husband, adding that she was prepared to place in the church of the convent a silver lamp of the value of one hundred Spanish piastres.

"A hundred piastres!" replied the friar angrily. "And what will become of our convent, if we incur the anger of Signor de' Campireali? It was not a hundred piastres, but a good thousand, that he gave us for going to fetch his son's body from the battlefield at the Ciampi, not to speak of the wax."

It must be said to the honour of the convent that two elderly friars, having discovered where precisely Elena was, went down to Albano and paid her a visit, originally with the intention of inducing her by hook or crook to take up her abode in the palazzo of her family: they knew that they would be richly rewarded by Signora de' Campireali. The whole of Albano was ringing with the report of Elena's flight and of the lavish promises made by her mother to anyone who could give her news of her daughter. But the two friars were so touched by the despair of poor Elena, who believed Giulio Branciforte to be dead, that, so far from betraying her by revealing to her mother the place in which she had taken refuge, they agreed to serve as her escort as far as the fortress of la Petrella. Elena and Marietta, once more disguised as workmen, repaired on foot and by night to a certain spring in the forest of la Faggiola, a league from Albano. The friars had sent mules there to meet them, and, when day had come, the party set out for la Petrella. The friars, who were known to be under the Prince's protection, were greeted everywhere with respect by the soldiers whom they met in the forest; but it was not so with the two little men who accompanied them: the soldiers began by staring at them in the most forbidding manner and came up to them, then burst out laughing and congratulated the friars on the charms of their muleteers.

"Silence, impious wretches; know that all is being done under Prince Colonna's orders," replied the friars as they proceeded on their way.

But poor Elena was unlucky; the Prince was not at la Petrella, and when, three days later, on his return, he at length granted her an audience, he showed himself most stern.

"Why do you come here, Signorina? What means this ill-advised action? Your woman's chatter has cost the lives of seven of the bravest men in Italy, and that is a thing which no man in his senses will ever forgive you. In this world, one must wish a thing or not wish it. It is doubtless in consequence of similar chatter that Giulio Branci-forte has just been declared guilty of sacrilege, and sentenced to be tortured for two hours with red-hot pincers, and then burned as a Jew, he, one of the best Christians I know! How could anyone, without some abominable chattering on your part, have invented so horrible a lie as to say that Giulio Branci-forte was at Castro on the day of the attack on the convent? All my men will tell you that they saw him that day here at la Petrella, and that in the evening I sent him to Velletri.

"But is he alive?" Elena cried for the tenth time, bursting into tears.

"He is dead to you," replied the Prince. "You shall never set eyes on him again. I advise you to return to your convent at Castro; try to commit no more indiscretions, and I order you to leave la Petrella within an hour from now. Above all, never mention to anyone that you have seen me, or I shall find a way of punishing you."

Poor Elena was broken-hearted at meeting with such a reception from that famous Prince Colonna, for whom Giulio felt so much respect, and whom she loved because Giulio loved him.

Whatever Prince Colonna might choose to say, this action on Elena's part was by no means ill-advised. If she had come to la Petrella three days earlier, she would have found there Giulio Branciforte; the wound in his knee rendered him incapable of marching, and the Prince had him carried to the market town of Avezzano, in the Kingdom of Naples. At the first news of the terrible sentence upon Giulio Branciforte which, purchased by Signor de' Campireali, denounced him as guilty of sacrilege and of violating a convent, the Prince had seen that, should he have occasion to protect Branciforte, he would have to reckon without three-fourths of his men. This was a sin against the Madonna, to whose protection each of these brigands supposed himself to have a special claim. Had there been a *bargello* in Rome sufficiently daring to come and arrest Giulio Branciforte in the heart of the forest of la Faggiola, he might have been successful.

On reaching Avezzano, Giulio took the name of Fontana, and the men who carried him there were discreet. On their return to la Petrella, they

announced with sorrow that Giulio had died on the way, and from that moment each of the Prince's soldiers knew that a dagger would find its way to the heart of any who should pronounce that fatal name.

It was in vain therefore that Elena, on her return to Albano, wrote letter after letter, and spent, on their transmission to Branciforte, all the sequins that she possessed. The two aged friars, who had become her friends, for extreme beauty, says the Florentine chronicler, cannot fail to exercise some sway, even over hearts hardened by the vilest selfishness and hypocrisy; the two friars, we say, warned the poor girl that it was in vain that she might seek to convey a word to Branciforte: Colonna had declared that he was dead, and certainly Giulio would not appear in public again unless the Prince chose. Elena's nurse informed her, with tears, that her mother had at length succeeded in discovering her retreat, and that the strictest orders had been given that she should be forcibly taken to the palazzo Campireali, in Albano. Elena realised that, once inside that palazzo, her imprisonment might be one of unbounded severity, and that they would succeed in cutting her off absolutely from any communication with the outer world, whereas at the Convent of Castro she would have, for receiving and sending letters, the same facilities as all the other nuns. Besides, and this was what brought her to a decision, it was in the garden of that convent that Giulio had shed his blood for her: she could gaze once more upon that wooden armchair in the portress's lodge on which he had sat for a moment to examine the wound in his knee; it was there that he had given Marietta that nosegay stained with blood which never left her person. And so she went sadly back to the Convent of Castro, and here one might bring her history to an end: it would be well for her, and for the reader also. For we are now about to observe the gradual degradation of a noble and generous nature.

Prudent measures and the falsehoods of civilisation, which for the future are going to assail her on every side, will take the place of the sincere impulses of vigorous and natural passions. The Roman chronicler here sets down a most artless reflexion: because a woman has taken the trouble to bring into the world a beautiful daughter, she assumes that she has the talent necessary to direct that daughter's life, and because, when the daughter is six years old, she said to her and was justified in saying: "Miss, put your collar straight," when the daughter is eighteen and she herself fifty, when the daughter has as much intelligence as her mother and more, the mother, carried away by the mania for ruling, thinks that she has the right to direct her daughter's life and even to

employ falsehood. We shall see that it was Vittoria Carafa, Elena's mother, who, by a succession of adroit measures, most skilfully planned, brought about the death of that dearly loved daughter, after keeping her in misery for twelve years, a lamentable result of the mania for ruling.

Before his death, Signor de' Campireali had had the joy of seeing published in Rome the sentence that condemned Giulio Branciforte to be tortured for two hours with red-hot irons in the principal squares of Rome, then to be burned on a slow fire, and his ashes flung into the Tiber. The frescoes in the cloisters of Santa Maria Novella, at Florence, still survive to show us how these cruel sentences upon the sacrilegious were carried out. As a rule, a numerous guard was required to prevent the outraged populace from forestalling the headsman in their office. Everyone regarded himself as an intimate friend of the Madonna. Signor de' Campireali had had the sentence read over to him again a few moments before his death, and had given the *avvocato* who had procured it his fine estate lying between Albano and the sea. This *avvocato* was by no means devoid of merit. Branciforte was condemned to this terrible punishment, and yet no witness had professed to have recognised him beneath the clothing of that young man disguised as a courier, who seemed to be directing with such authority the movements of the assailants. The magnificence of the reward set all the intriguers of Rome in a stir. There was then at court a certain *fratone* (monk), a deep man and one capable of anything, even of forcing the Pope to give him the Hat; he looked after the affairs of Prince Colonna, and that terrible client earned him great consideration. When Signora de' Campireali saw her daughter once more safely at Castro, she sent for this *fratone*.

"Your Reverence will be lavishly rewarded, if he will be so kind as to help to bring to a successful issue the very simple affair which I am going to explain to him. In a few days' time, the sentence condemning Giulio Branciforte to a terrible punishment is to be published and made effective in the Kingdom of Naples also. I request Your Reverence to read this letter from the Viceroy, a relative of mine, by the way, who deigns to inform me of this news. In what land can Branciforte seek an asylum? I shall have fifty thousand piastres conveyed to the Prince, with the request that he will give the whole sum, or a part of it, to Giulio Branciforte, on condition that he goes to serve the King of Spain, my Sovereign, against the rebels in Flanders. The Viceroy will give a brevet as captain to Branciforte, and in order that the sentence for sacrilege, which I hope to have made operative in Spain also, may not hamper him at all in his career, he will go by the name of Barone Lizzara; that is a small property

which I have in the Abruzzi, and shall find a way of making over to him, by means of fictitious sales. I do not suppose Your Reverence has ever seen a mother treat her son's murderer like this. For five hundred piastres we could long since have been rid of the hateful creature; but we had no wish to fall foul of Colonna. Be so good, therefore, as to point out to him that my respect for his rights is costing me sixty or eighty thousand piastres. I never wish to hear that Branciforte mentioned again; that is all, and you will present my compliments to the Prince."

The *fratone* said that in two or three days he would be going in the direction of Ostia, and Signora de' Campireali handed him a ring worth a thousand piastres.

A few days later, the *fratone* reappeared in Rome, and told Signora de' Campireali that he had not informed the Prince of her plan, but that within a month young Branciforte would have taken ship for Barcelona, where she would be able to convey to him, through one of the bankers of that city, the sum of fifty thousand piastres.

The Prince found considerable difficulty in handling Giulio. Whatever the risk he must for the future run in Italy, the young lover could not make up his mind to leave that country. In vain did the Prince suggest to him that Signora de' Campireali might die; in vain did he promise that, in any event, after three years, Giulio might return to visit his native land; Giulio shed copious tears, but consent he would not. The Prince was obliged to request him to go, as a personal service to himself; Giulio could refuse nothing to his father's friend; but, first and foremost, he wished to take his orders from Elena. The Prince deigned to take charge of a long letter; and, what was more, gave Giulio permission to write to her from Flanders once every month. At length the despairing lover embarked for Barcelona. All his letters were burned by the Prince, who did not wish Giulio ever to return to Italy. We have forgotten to mention that, although anything like ostentation was utterly alien to his character, the Prince had felt himself obliged to say, in order to bring matters to a successful issue, that it was he himself who thought fit to assure a small fortune of fifty thousand piastres to the only son of one of the most faithful servants of the house of Colonna. Poor Elena was treated like a Princess in the Convent of Castro. Her father's death had put her in possession of a considerable fortune, and a vast inheritance would accrue to her in time. On the occasion of her father's death she made a gift of five ells of black cloth to all such of the inhabitants of Castro or of the district who announced that they wished to wear mourning for Signor de' Campireali. She was still in the first days of her bereavement when, by the

hand of a complete stranger, a letter was brought to her from Giulio. It would be hard to describe the rapture with which that letter was opened, though no less hard to describe the intense grief which followed her perusal of it. And yet it was indeed in Giulio's handwriting; she examined it with the closest scrutiny. The letter spoke of love; but what love, great heavens! Nevertheless, it was Signora de' Campireali, who was so clever, that had composed it. Her intention was to begin the correspondence with seven or eight letters of impassioned love; she wished thus to prepare the way for the next letters, in which the writer's passion would seem to die gradually away.

We may pass briefly over ten years of an unhappy life. Elena supposed herself to be completely forgotten, and yet had scornfully refused the overtures of the most distinguished young noblemen in Rome. She did, however, hesitate for a moment, when mention was made to her of young Ottavio Colonna, the eldest son of the famous Fabrizio, who had received her so coldly, long ago, at la Petrella. She felt that, being absolutely obliged to take a husband in order to provide a protector for the lands which she owned in the Roman States and in the Kingdom of Naples, it would be less repulsive to her to bear the name of a man whom Giulio had once loved. Had she agreed to this marriage, Elena would very soon have found out the truth about Giulio Branciforte. The old Prince Fabrizio spoke often and with enthusiasm of the superhuman valour shown by Colonel Lizzara (Giulio Branciforte), who, just like the heroes of the old romances, was seeking to distract his mind by gallant actions from the unfortunate love affair which made him indifferent to all pleasures. He imagined Elena to be long since married; Signora de' Campireali had surrounded him, too, with falsehood.

Elena was half reconciled to that wildest of mothers. She, passionately anxious to see her daughter married, asked her friend, old Cardinal Santi-Quattro, Protector of the Visitation, who was going to Castro, to announce in confidence to the senior sisters in the convent that his visit to them had been delayed by an act of grace. The good Pope Gregory XIII, moved to pity for the soul of a brigand named Giulio Branciforte, who had once tried to break into their cloister, had been pleased, on learning of his death, to revoke the sentence that declared him guilty of sacrilege, being fully convinced that, beneath the load of such a condemnation, he would never be able to escape from Purgatory, assuming that Branciforte, taken by surprise in Mexico and massacred by rebellious natives, had been so fortunate as to go no farther than Purgatory. This news put the whole Convent of Castro in a stir; it reached the ears of

Elena, who at once began to indulge in all the foolish acts of vanity that the possession of a great fortune can inspire in a person who is profoundly vexed. From that moment, she never left her room. It should be explained that, in order to be able to install herself in the little portress's lodge in which Giulio had taken refuge for a moment on the night of the assault, she had had half the convent rebuilt. With infinite pains and, in the sequel, a scandal which it was extremely difficult to hush up, she had succeeded in laying hands on, and in taking into her service the three *bravi* employed by Branciforte who still survived out of the five that had got away from the fight at Castro. Among these was Ugone, now old and crippled by wounds. The arrival of these three men had caused considerable murmuring; but in the end the fear that Elena's proud nature inspired in the whole convent had prevailed, and every day they were to be seen, dressed in her livery, coming to take her orders at the outer grill, and often giving long answers to her questions, which were always on the same subject.

After the six months of seclusion and detachment from all the things of this world which followed the announcement of Giulio's death, the first sensation to awaken this heart already broken by a misfortune without remedy and a long period of boredom was one of vanity.

A little time since, the Abbess had died. According to custom, Cardinal Santi-Quattro, who was still Protector of the Visitation, despite his great age of ninety-two years, had drawn up the list of the three ladies from among whom the Pope would select an Abbess. It required some very serious reason to make His Holiness read the last two names on the list; as a rule he contented himself with running his pen through those names, and the nomination was made.

One day, Elena was at the window of what had been the portress's lodge, and had now become one end of the wing of new buildings erected by her. This window stood not more than two feet above the passage once watered by the blood of Giulio and now forming part of the garden. Elena's eyes were firmly fixed on the ground. The three ladies whose names, as had been known for some days, formed the Cardinal's list of possible successors to the late Abbess, came past Elena's window. She did not see them, and in consequence could not greet them. One of the three ladies was offended, and remarked in a loud voice to the other two:

"A fine thing for a boarder to flaunt her room before everybody."

Aroused by these words, Elena raised her eyes and encountered three hostile stares.

"Very well," she said to herself as she shut the window without greeting them, "I've played the lamb in this convent quite long enough; it's time I became a wolf, if only to give a little variety to the curious gentlemen of the town."

An hour later, one of her servants, dispatched as a courier, carried the following letter to her mother, who for the last ten years had been living in Rome, and had managed to acquire great influence there.

"Most respected Mother,

"Every year you give me three hundred thousand francs upon my birthday; I make use of that money to do foolish things, perfectly honourable things I must say, but foolish nevertheless. Although it is long since you have mentioned the matter, I know that there are two ways in which I can shew my gratitude for all the thoughtful care you have taken of me. I will never marry, but I would gladly become *Abbess of this Convent*; what has given me the idea is that the three ladies whose names our Cardinal Santi-Quattro has placed on the list which he will present to His Holiness are my enemies, and, whichever of them be chosen, I may expect every sort of annoyance. Offer the usual flowers on my birthday to all the right people; let us first have the nomination postponed for six months,—which will make the Prioress of the Convent, my dearest friend, who is now holding the reins, wild with joy. That alone will afford me some happiness, and it is very seldom that I can use that word in speaking of your daughter. I think my idea absurd; but if you see any chance of success, in three days I will take the white veil, eight years of residence in the convent, without a night's absence, entitling me to six months' exemption. The dispensation is never refused, and costs forty scudi.

"I am with respect, my venerable mother," etc.

On reading this letter, Signora de' Campireali's joy knew no bounds. When it reached her, she was bitterly regretting that she had sent word to her daughter of Branciforte's death; she foresaw some mad action, she was even afraid lest her daughter might decide to go to Mexico to visit the spot where Branciforte was said to have been massacred, in which case it was highly probable that she would learn in Madrid the true name of Colonel Lizzara. On the other hand, what her daughter demanded in the letter was the most difficult, one might even say the most preposterous thing in the world. That a young girl who was not even in religion, and was known only for a mad love affair with a brigand, should be set at the head of a convent in which all the Roman Princes had relatives professed! "But," thought Signora de' Campireali, "they say that

every cause can be pleaded, and, if so, won." In her reply, Vittoria Carafa gave her daughter grounds for hope; that daughter, as a rule, wished only for the most absurd things, but, on the other hand, she very soon tired of them. In the evening, while seeking any information that, nearly or remotely, bore upon the Convent of Castro, she learned that for some months past her friend Cardinal Santi-Quattro had been extremely cross: he wished to marry his niece to Don Ottavio Colonna, the eldest son of that Prince Fabrizio, who has been so often mentioned in the course of this narrative. The Prince offered him his second son, Don Lorenzo, because, in order to bolster up his own fortune, fantastically compromised by the war which the King of Naples and the Pope, reconciled at last, were waging against the brigands of la Faggiola, it was essential that his eldest son's wife should bring a dowry of six hundred thousand piastres (3,210,000 francs) to the House of Colonna. Now Cardinal Santi-Quattro, even by disinheriting in the most preposterous fashion all the rest of his family, could only offer a fortune of three hundred and eighty or four hundred thousand piastres.

Vittoria Carafa spent the evening and part of the night in having these reports confirmed by all the friends of old Santi-Quattro. Next day, about seven o'clock, she sent in her name to the old Cardinal.

"Your Eminence," she said to him, "we are neither of us young; it is useless our trying to deceive one another by giving fine names to things that are not fine; I have come to propose to you something mad; all that I can say in defence of it is that it is not abominable; but I must admit that I find it supremely ridiculous. When there was some talk of a marriage between Don Ottavio Colonna and my daughter Elena, I formed an affection for the young man, and, on the day of his marriage, I will hand over to you two hundred thousand piastres in land or in money, which I shall ask you to convey to him. But, in order to enable a poor widow like myself to make so enormous a sacrifice, I require that my daughter Elena, who is at present twenty-seven years old, and since the age of nineteen has never spent a night out of the convent, be made *Abbess of Castro*; but first of all the election must be postponed for six months; it is all quite canonical."

"What are you saying, Signora?" cried the old Cardinal in horror; "His Holiness himself could not perform what you come here and ask of a poor, helpless old man."

"Did I not tell Your Eminence that the thing was absurd: fools will call it madness; but the people that are well informed of what goes on at court will say that our Excellent Prince, good Pope Gregory XIII, has

chosen to reward Your Eminence's long and loyal services by facilitating a marriage which the whole of Rome knows Your Eminence to desire. Besides, it is perfectly possible, quite canonical, I will vouch for it; my daughter is going to take the white veil to-morrow."

"But the simony, Signora!" cried the old man in a terrible voice.

Signora de' Campireali prepared to go.

"What is that paper you are leaving behind you?"

"It is the list of the estates which I should present as the equivalent of two hundred thousand piastres, should that be preferred to ready money; the change of proprietor could be kept secret for a very long time: for instance, the House of Colonna might bring actions against me which I should proceed to lose... ."

"But the simony, Signora, the fearful simony!"

"The first thing to be done is to put off the election for six months; to-morrow I shall call to receive Your Eminence's orders."

I feel that there is need of an explanation, for readers born north of the Alps, of the almost official tone of several passages in this dialogue: let me remind them that, in strictly Catholic countries, the majority of discussions of unpleasant subjects end in the confessional; and then it is anything but a trivial matter whether one has made use of a respectful or of an ironical expression.

In the course of the following day, Vittoria Carafa learned that, owing to a grave error in point of fact which had been discovered in the list of three ladies submitted to fill the vacant post of Abbess of Castro, that election was postponed for six months: the second lady upon the list had a renegade in her family; one of her great-uncles had turned Protestant at Udine.

Signora de' Campireali felt herself impelled to approach Prince Fabrizio Colonna, to whose House she was about to offer so notable an increase in its patrimony. After trying for two days, she succeeded in obtaining an appointment in a village near Rome, but she came away quite alarmed by her audience; she had found the Prince, ordinarily so calm, so greatly taken up with the military glory of Colonel Lizzara (Giulio Branciforte), that she had decided it to be completely useless to ask him to keep silent on that head. The Colonel was to him like a son, and, what was more, a favourite pupil. The Prince spent his time reading and re-reading certain letters that came to him from Flanders. What would become of the cherished plan to which Signora de' Campireali had sacrificed so much in the last ten years, were her daughter to learn of the existence and fame of Colonel Lizzara?

I must pass over in silence a number of circumstances which do, indeed, portray the manners of that age but seem to me wearisome to relate. The author of the Roman manuscript has taken endless pains to arrive at the exact date of these details which I suppress.

Two years after Signora de' Campireali's meeting with Prince Colonna, Elena was Abbess of Castro; but the old Cardinal Santi-Quattro had died of grief after this great act of simony. At that time Castro had as Bishop the handsomest man at the Papal Court, Monsignor Francesco Cittadini, a noble of the city of Milan. This young man, remarkable for his modest graces and his tone of dignity, had frequent dealings with the Abbess of the Visitation, especially with regard to the new cloister with which she proposed to adorn her convent. This young Bishop Cittadini, then twenty-nine years old, fell madly in love with the beautiful Abbess. In the legal proceedings which followed, a year later, a number of nuns, whose evidence was taken, report that the Bishop made his visits to the Convent as frequent as possible, and often said to their Abbess: "Elsewhere I command, and, I am ashamed to say, find some pleasure in doing so; in your presence, I obey like a slave, but with a pleasure that far surpasses that of commanding elsewhere. I find myself under the influence of a superior being; were I to try, I could have no other will than hers, and I would rather see myself, to all eternity, the last of her slaves than reign as king out of her sight."

The witnesses relate that often, in the middle of these elegant speeches, the Abbess would order him to be silent, and in harsh language which implied scorn.

"To tell the truth," another witness goes on, "the Signora used to treat him like a servant; when that happened the poor Bishop would lower his eyes, and begin to weep, but he never went away. He found a fresh excuse every day for coming to the Convent, which greatly scandalised the nuns' confessors and the enemies of the Abbess. But the Lady Abbess was strongly defended by the Prioress, her dearest friend, who carried on the internal government under her immediate orders.

"You know, my noble sisters (she used to say), that ever since that thwarted passion which our Abbess felt in her earliest girlhood for a soldier of fortune, her ideas have always been very odd; but you all know that there is this remarkable element in her character, that she never changes her mind about people for whom she has shown her contempt. Well, never, in the whole of her life, probably, has she said so many insulting words as she has uttered in our presence to poor Monsignor

Cittadini. Every day, we see him submit to treatment which makes us blush for his high office."

"Yes," replied the scandalised sisters, "but he comes again the day after; so, after all, he cannot be so ill treated, and, however that may be, this suggestion of intrigue is damaging to the reputation of the Holy Order of the Visitation."

The sternest master would never address to the clumsiest servant one quarter of the abuse which, day after day, the proud Abbess heaped upon this young Bishop whose manners were so unctuous; but he was in love, and had brought from his own country the fundamental maxim that once an undertaking of this sort has been begun, one has to think only about the end and not to consider the means.

"After all," said the Bishop to his confidant, Cesare del Bene, "the true scorn is that felt for the lover who has desisted from the attack before being compelled to do so by superior forces."

Now my sad task will be confined to giving an extract, of necessity extremely dry, from the criminal proceedings which led to Elena's death. These proceedings, which I have read in a library the name of which I am obliged to keep private, occupy no fewer than eight folio volumes. The questions and arguments are in the Latin tongue, the answers in Italian. I find that during the month of November, 1572, about eleven o'clock at night, the young Bishop betook himself alone to the door of the church by which the faithful are admitted throughout the day; the Abbess herself opened this door to him, and allowed him to follow her. She received him in a room which she often occupied, one that communicated by a secret door with the galleries built over the aisles of the church. Barely an hour elapsed before the Bishop, in great bewilderment, was sent packing; the Abbess herself conducted him to the door of the church, and addressed him in these very words:

"Return to your Palace, and leave my sight at once. Farewell, Monsignore; you fill me with horror; I feel that I have given myself to a lackey."

Three months later, however, came Carnival. The people of Castro were famous for the festivities which they held among themselves at this season, the whole town being filled with the clamour of the masquerades. Not one of these failed to pass beneath a little window which gave a feeble light to a certain stable in the Convent. We need not be surprised to hear that three months before Carnival this stable had been converted into a parlour, which was never empty during the days of masquerade. In the midst of all the popular absurdities, the Bishop came past in his coach; the Abbess made him a signal, and, the following night, at one

o'clock, he appeared without fail at the door of the church. He entered, but, within three-quarters of an hour, was angrily dismissed. Since the first assignation, in the month of November, he had continued to come to the Convent almost every week. A slight air of rather foolish triumph was to be observed on his face; this everyone noticed, but it had the special effect of greatly shocking the proud nature of the young Abbess. On Easter Monday, among other occasions, she treated him like the meanest of mankind, and addressed to him words which the humblest workman in the Convent would not have borne. Nevertheless, a few days later, she gave him a signal, on receiving which the handsome Bishop presented himself without fail at the door of the church; she had sent for him to let him know that she was with child. On hearing this, says the official account, the young man turned pale with horror and became absolutely *stupid with fear*. The Abbess took fever; she sent for the doctor, and made no mystery to him about her condition. The man knew his patient's generous nature, and promised to help her out of the difficulty. He began by putting her in touch with a woman of humble station, young and good looking, who, without bearing the title of midwife, had the necessary acquirements. Her husband was a baker. Elena was taken with the conversation of this woman, who informed her that, in order to carry out the plans by which she hoped to save her, it was necessary that she should have two other women in her confidence inside the Convent.

"A woman like yourself, well and good, but one of my equals? Never! Leave my presence."

The midwife withdrew. But, a few hours later, Elena, feeling it not to be prudent to expose herself to the risk of the woman's chattering, summoned the doctor, who sent the woman back to the Convent, where she was liberally rewarded. This woman swore that, even had she not been called back, she would never have divulged the secret that had been confided to her; but she declared once again that, if there were not, inside the Convent, two women devoted to the Abbess's interests and conversant with everything, she herself could have no hand in the matter. (No doubt, she was thinking of the possible charge of infanticide.) After prolonged reflexion, the Abbess decided to entrust this terrible secret to Donna Vittoria, Prioress of the Convent, of the ducal family of C——, and to Donna Bernards, daughter of the Marchese P——. She made them swear on their breviaries that they would never utter a word, even at the stool of penitence, of what she was about to confide to them. The ladies stood frozen with terror. They admit, in their examination, that, having in mind the proud nature of their Abbess, they expected to

hear a confession of murder. The Abbess said to them, quite simply and coolly:

"I have failed in all my duties; I am with child."

Donna Vittoria, the Prioress, deeply moved and troubled on account of the ties of friendship which for so many years had bound her to Elena, and not urged by any idle curiosity, exclaimed with tears in her eyes:

"And who is the bold wretch that has committed this crime?"

"I have not told even my confessor; judge whether I am likely to tell you!"

The two ladies at once began to consider the best way of keeping this fatal secret from the rest of the convent. They decided first of all that the Abbess's bed should be removed from her own room, at the very centre of the building, to the Pharmacy, which had just been installed in the most remote part of the Convent, on the third floor of the great wing erected by Elena's generosity. It was in this spot that the Abbess gave birth to a male child. For three weeks the baker's wife had been concealed in the Prioress's apartment. As this woman was hurrying swiftly along the cloister carrying the child, it began to cry, and in her terror she took shelter in the cellar. An hour later, Donna Bernarda, assisted by the doctor, managed to open a little gate in the garden wall; the baker's wife hurriedly left the Convent, and, shortly afterwards, the town. On reaching the open country, still pursued by a wild terror, she took refuge in a little cave to which chance led her among some rocks. The Abbess wrote to Cesare del Bene, the Bishop's confidant and head valet, who hastened to the cave indicated; he was on horseback; he took the infant in his arms, and set off at a gallop for Montefiascone. The child was baptised there in the Church of Saint Margaret, and received the name of Alessandro. The landlady of the local inn had procured a nurse, on whom Cesare bestowed eight scudi: a crowd of women, who had gathered outside the church during the ceremony of baptism, called out persistently to Signor Cesare, demanding the name of the child's father.

"He is a great gentleman of Rome," Cesare told them, "who has allowed himself to make free with a poor village girl like yourselves."

So saying, he vanished.

All was going well so far in that immense convent, peopled with more than three hundred inquisitive women; no one had seen anything, no one had heard anything. But the Abbess had given the doctor some handfuls of sequins newly struck from the mint in Rome. The doctor gave several of these pieces to the baker's wife. The woman was pretty and her husband jealous; he searched in her box, found these pieces of

gold that shone so brightly, and, supposing them to be the price of her shame, forced her, with a knife at her throat, to tell him from whence they came. After some equivocation, the woman confessed the truth, and peace was made. The couple then began to discuss the use to which they should put so large a sum. The wife wished to pay various debts; but the husband thought it better to buy a mule, which was done. This mule created a scandal among the neighbours, who knew well the poverty of the couple. All the gossips in the town, friend and foe alike, came in turn to ask the baker's wife who was the generous lover who had enabled her to buy a mule. The woman, losing her temper, sometimes replied by telling the truth. One day when Cesare del Bene had been to see the child and came to give an account of his visit to the Abbess, she, although extremely unwell, dragged herself to the grating, and reproached him for the want of discretion shewn by the agents whom he employed. The Bishop, meanwhile, fell ill with fear; he wrote to his brothers in Milan to inform them of the false accusation that was being levelled against him: he appealed to them to come to his rescue. Although seriously ill, he made up his mind to leave Castro; but, before starting, he wrote to the Abbess:

"You know already that all that happened is public property. So, if you have any interest in saving not only my reputation, but perhaps my life, and in order to avoid a greater scandal, you might lay the blame on Gianbattista Doleri, who died two days ago; so that if, in this way, you do not repair your own honour, taine at least shall be no longer imperilled."

The Bishop summoned Don Luigi, Confessor to the Monastery of Castro.

"Deliver this," he said, "into the Lady Abbess's own hands."

She, upon reading this atrocious missive, cried out in the hearing of all that happened to be in the room:

"Thus the foolish virgins deserve to be treated who set the beauty of the body above that of the soul."

The rumour of all that was occurring at Castro came rapidly to the ears of the *terrible* Cardinal Farnese (he had given himself that reputation some years back, because he hoped, at the next conclave, to have the support of the *zealous* Cardinals). He at once gave orders to the *podestà* of Castro to have Bishop Cittadini arrested. All the Bishop's servants, fearing the *question*, took flight. Cesare del Bene alone remained faithful to his master, and swore to him that he would die in torments sooner than reveal anything that might damage him. Cittadini, seeing himself under

close guard in his own Palace, wrote again to his brothers, who arrived in haste from Milan. They found him detained in the Ronciglione prison.

I see from the Abbess's first examination that, while admitting her crime, she denied having had relations with the Bishop; her paramour had been Gianbattista Doleri, lawyer to the Convent.

On the 9th of September, 1575, Gregory XIII ordered that the trial should proceed with all haste and with the utmost rigour. A criminal judge, a fiscal and a commissary betook themselves to Castro and Ronciglione. Cesare del Bene, the Bishop's head valet, admitted only that he had taken an infant to a nurse. He was examined in the presence of Donna Vittoria and Donna Bernarda. He was put to the torture on consecutive days; his sufferings were acute; but, true to his word, he admitted only what it was impossible to deny, and the fiscal could extract nothing from him.

When it came to Donna Vittoria and Donna Bernarda, who had witnessed the tortures inflicted on Cesare, they admitted all that they had done. All the nuns were asked the name of the author of the crime; the majority replied that they had heard it said that it was the Bishop. One of the Sister Portresses repeated the offensive words which the Abbess had used to the Bishop when shewing him out of the church. She added: "When people talk in that tone, it means that they have long been making love to one another. And indeed Monsignore, who as a rule was remarkable for his excessive self-assurance, had quite a shamefaced air as he left the church,"

One of the sisters, examined in front of the instruments of torture, replied that the author of the crime must be the cat, because the Abbess had it constantly in her arms and was always fondling it. Another sister asserted that the author of the crime must be the wind, because, on days when there was a wind, the Abbess was happy and in a good humour; she would expose herself to the force of the wind on a belvedere which she had had built on purpose; and, when anyone came to ask a favour of her in this spot, she never refused it. The baker's wife, the nurse, the gossips of Montefiascone, frightened by the tortures which they had seen inflicted on Cesare, told the truth.

The young Bishop was ill or feigning illness at Ronciglione, which gave his brothers, supported by the credit and secret influence of Signora de' Campireali, an opportunity of prostrating themselves more than once at the Pope's feet, and asking him that the proceedings might be suspended until the Bishop should have recovered his health. Whereupon the terrible Cardinal Farnese increased the number of the soldiers that were

guarding him in his prison. As the Bishop could not be examined, the commissioners began all their sittings by subjecting the Abbess to a fresh examination. One day, after her mother had told her to have courage and to deny everything, she admitted all.

"Why did you first of all inculcate Gianbattista Doleri?"

"Out of pity for the Bishop's cowardice, and, besides, if he succeeds in saving his precious life, he will be able to provide for my son."

After this admission, the Abbess was confined in a room in the Convent of Castro, the walls of which, as well as its vaulting, were eight feet thick; the nuns would never speak of this dungeon without terror, and it went by the name of the monks' room; watch was kept there over the Abbess by three women.

The Bishop's health having slightly improved, three hundred *sbirri* or soldiers came for him to Ronciglione, and he was transported to Rome in a litter; he was confined in the prison called Corte Savella. A few days later, the sisters also were taken to Rome; the Abbess was placed in the Monastery of Santa Marta. Four sisters were inculpated: Donna Vittoria and Donna Bernarda, the sister through whom messages passed, and the portress who had heard the offensive words addressed to the Bishop by the Abbess.

The Bishop was examined by the Auditor of the Chamber, one of the chief personages in the judiciary. Torture was applied once again to the unfortunate Cesare del Bene, who not only admitted nothing, but said things which *caused inconvenience to the public ministry*; these earned him a fresh dose of torture. This preliminary punishment was inflicted similarly upon Donna Vittoria and Donna Bernarda. The Bishop denied everything, with vituperation, but with a fine stubbornness; he gave an account, in the fullest detail, of all that he had done upon the three evenings which he was known to have spent with the Abbess.

Finally the Abbess and Bishop were confronted, and, albeit she continued to tell the truth, she was subjected to torture. As she repeated what she had always said from her first confession, the Bishop, sticking to his part, covered her with abuse.

After a number of other measures, reasonable enough in principle, but marred by that spirit of cruelty which, after the reigns of Charles V and Philip II, prevailed too often in the Italian courts, the Bishop was sentenced to undergo perpetual imprisonment in the Castel Sant' Angelo; the Abbess to be detained for the term of her life in the Convent of Santa Marta, where she was. But already Signora de' Campireali, in the hope of saving her daughter, had set to work to have a subterranean passage

burrowed. This passage started from one of those sewers which are relics of the splendour of ancient Rome, and was to end in the deep cellar in which were deposited the mortal remains of the nuns of Santa Marta. This passage, which was barely two feet in width, was walled with planks, to keep back the earth on either side, and was roofed, as it advanced, with pairs of planks arranged like the sides of a capital A.

The tunnel was being bored about thirty feet below ground. The important thing was to carry it in the right direction; at every moment, wells and the foundations of old buildings obliged the workmen to turn aside. Another great difficulty arose as to the disposal of the earth, with which they did not know what to do; it appears that they sprinkled it during the night over all the streets of Rome. The citizens were astonished to see such a quantity of earth, fallen, as one might say, from heaven.

However large the sums Signora de' Campireali might spend in the attempt to save her daughter's life, her subterranean passage would doubtless have been discovered, but Pope Gregory XIII happened to die in 1585, and disorder reigned as soon as the See was vacant.

Elena was far from happy at Santa Marta; one may imagine whether common and distinctly poor nuns shewed zeal in annoying a very rich Abbess convicted of such a crime. She was eagerly awaiting the outcome of her mother's enterprise. But suddenly her heart was caught by strange emotions. Six months had already passed since Fabrizio Colonna, seeing the uncertain state of Gregory XIII's health, and having great plans for the interregnum, had sent one of his officers to Giulio Branciforte, now so widely known in the Spanish armies under the name of Colonel Lizzara. He recalled him to Italy; Giulio was burning to see his native land once more. He landed under a false name at Pescara, a small port on the Adriatic below Chieti, in the Abruzzi, and journeyed over the mountains to la Petrella. The Prince's joy caused general astonishment. He told Giulio that he had sent for him to make him his successor and to give him the command of his troops. To which Branciforte replied that, from the military point of view, it was no longer worth while to continue, as he was easily able to prove; if Spain ever seriously wished to do so, in six months, and at small cost to herself, she could wipe out all the soldiers of fortune in Italy.

"However," young Branciforte added, "if you wish it, Prince, I am ready to take the field. You will always find in me a successor to the gallant Ramicelo, who was killed at the Ciampi."

Before Giulio's arrival, the Prince had ordered, as he alone could order, that no one at la Petrella should dare to speak of Castro or of the Abbess's trial; the penalty of death, without hope of respite, was held out as a deterrent from any rash word. In the course of the affectionate greetings with which he welcomed Branciforte, he asked him on no account to go to Albano without himself, and his method of carrying out the expedition was to occupy the town with a thousand of his men, and to post an advance guard of twelve hundred on the road to Rome. One may imagine poor Giulio's state when the Prince, having sent for old Scotti, who was still alive, to the house in which he had established his headquarters, made him come up to the room in which he himself was sitting with Branciforte. As soon as the two old friends had flung themselves into each other's arms:

"Now, my poor Colonel," he said to Giulio, "be prepared for the worst."

Whereupon he snuffed the candle and left the room, turning the key on the friends.

Next day Giulio, who preferred not to leave his room, sent to the Prince to ask leave to return to la Petrella, and not to see him for some days. But his messenger returned to say that the Prince had disappeared, with all his troops. During the night, he had heard of the death of Gregory XIII; he had forgotten his friend Giulio and was scouring the country. There remained with Giulio only some thirty men belonging to Ranuccio's old company. The reader is aware that in those days, during a vacancy of the See, the law no longer ran, everyone thought of gratifying his own passions, and there was no force but brute force; that is why, before the end of the day, Prince Colonna had already hanged more than fifty of his enemies.

As for Giulio, albeit he had not forty men with him, he made bold to march upon Rome.

All the servants of the Abbess of Castro had remained faithful to her; they were lodged in humble houses near the Convent of Santa Marta. The death agony of Gregory XIII had lasted for more than a week; Signora de' Campireali was eagerly awaiting the troubled days that would follow his death before attacking the final fifty yards of her tunnel. As it had to pass through the cellars of several inhabited houses, she was greatly afraid lest she might be unable to keep from public knowledge the completion of her undertaking.

On the second day after Branciforte's arrival at la Petrella, the three of Giulio's old *bravi*, whom Elena had taken into her service, appeared to

have gone mad. Although everyone knew only too well that she was in the strictest isolation, and guarded by nuns who hated her, Ugone, one of the *bravi*, came to the gate of the Convent and made the strangest request that he should be allowed to see his mistress, and without delay. He was refused admission and turned from the door. In his desperation, the man remained outside, and began to distribute baiocchi (copper coins) among all the persons employed in the service of the Convent who passed in or out, saying to them these precise words: "*Rejoice tenth me; Signor Giulio Branciforte has arrived, he is alive: tell this to your friends.*"

Ugone's two companions spent the day in bringing him fresh supplies of *baiocchi*, which they continued to distribute day and night, always repeating the same words, until there was not one *baiocco* left. But the three *bravi*, taking turns, continued none the less to keep guard at the gate of the Convent of Santa Marta, still addressing to all that passed them the same words, followed by an obsequious salute: "*Signor Giulio has arrived,*" etc. These worthy fellows' plan was successful: less than thirty-six hours after the giving of the first *baiocco*, poor Elena, down in her cell, in solitary confinement, knew that *Giulio was alive*; the words threw her into a sort of frenzy:

"Oh, my mother!" she cried, "what harm you have wrought me!"

A few hours later, the astonishing news was confirmed by little Marietta, who, by making a sacrifice of all her golden ornaments, obtained leave to accompany the sister who took the prisoner her meals. With tears of joy Elena flung herself into her arms.

"This is very pleasant," she said to her, "but I shall not be with you much longer."

"Indeed no!" said Marietta. "I am sure that before this Conclave is ended, your imprisonment will be changed to an ordinary banishment."

"Ah, my dear, to see Giulio again! And to see him, with this guilt on my head!"

In the middle of the third night after this conversation, part of the floor of the church fell in with a loud noise; the nuns of Santa Marta thought that their convent was going to collapse. Their commotion was extreme, everyone was calling out that there had been an earthquake. About an hour after the subsidence of the marble pavement of the church, Signora de"Campireali, preceded by the three *bravi* in Elena's service, made her way into the dungeon by the underground passage.

"Victory, victory, Signora!" cried the *bravi*.

Elena was in a mortal fear; she thought that Giulio Branciforte was with them. She was quite reassured, and her features resumed their stern

expression when the men told her that they were escorting Signora de' Campireali, and that Giulio was still at Albano, which he had just invaded with several thousand troops.

She waited for some moments, and then Signora de' Campireali appeared; she was walking with great difficulty, on the arm of her *scudiere*, who was in full costume, with sword on hip; but his gorgeous coat was all soiled with earth.

"Oh, my dear Elena, I have come to rescue you!" cried Signora de' Campireali.

"And how do you know that I wish to be rescued?"

Signora de' Campireali was left speechless; she stared helplessly at her daughter; she seemed greatly agitated.

"Well, my dear Elena," she said at length, "fate compels me to confess to you an action which was perhaps natural enough, after the misfortunes that had befallen our family, but of which I repent, and beg that you will forgive me for it: Giulio... Branciforte... is alive... "

"And it is because he is alive that I have no wish to live."

Signora de' Campireali did not at first grasp her daughter's meaning, then she besought her with the most tender supplications; but she could obtain no answer. Elena had turned to her crucifix and was praying without listening to her. In vain, for a whole hour, did Signora de' Campireali make every effort to win from her a word or a look. At length, her daughter, losing patience, said to her:

"It was beneath the marble of this crucifix that his letters were hidden, in my little room at Albano; it had been better to let my father stab me! Go, and leave some gold with me."

As Signora de' Campireali tried to continue speaking to her daughter, disregarding the signs of alarm shewn by her *scudiere*, Elena lost patience.

"Let me, at least, have an hour of freedom; you have poisoned my life, you wish to poison my death as well."

"We shall still have command of the passage for two or three hours; I venture to hope that you will change your mind!" exclaimed Signora de' Campireali, bursting into tears.

And she made her way out by the underground passage.

"Ugone, stay with me," said Elena to one of her *bravi*, "and see you are well armed, my lad, for you may have to defend me. Let me see your dirk, your sword, your dagger."

The old soldier shewed her these weapons, all in good condition.

"Good; now wait there, outside my cell; I am going to write Giulio a long letter which you will hand to him yourself; I do not wish it to pass through any hands but yours, having nothing with which to seal it. You may read the whole of the letter. Put in your pockets all the gold my mother has left there, I need for myself only fifty sequins; place them on my bed."

Having said these words, Elena sat down to write.

"I have not the least doubt of you, my dear Giulio; if I take my departure, it is because I should die of grief in your arms, at the sight of what would have been my happiness, had I not committed a sin. You are not to imagine that I have ever loved any creature in the world after you; far from it, my heart was filled with the bitterest contempt for the man whom I admitted to my room. My sin was solely one of distraction, and, if you like, of wantonness. Think that my spirit, greatly weakened after the futile attempt which I made at la Petrella, where the Prince whom I revered, because you loved him, received me so cruelly; think, I say, that my spirit, greatly weakened, had been assailed by twelve years of falsehood. Everything round me was lying and false, and I knew it. I received first of all some thirty letters from you; imagine the rapture with which, at first, I used to tear them open. But, as I read them, my heart froze. I examined the writing, I recognised your hand, but not your heart. Think that this first falsehood cankered the essence of my life, so that I could open a letter in your writing without any pleasure! The detestable announcement of your death finally killed in me anything that might yet survive from the happy days of our youth. My first intention, as you can well understand, was to go to see with my eyes and touch with my hands the Mexican shore upon which they said that the savages had massacred you; had I carried out that idea... we should be happy new, for, in Madrid, whatever the number and craftiness of the spies that a watchful hand might have managed to dispose round about me, as I myself would have appealed to every heart in which there remained a trace of pity and of goodness, it is probable that I should have arrived at the truth; for already, my Giulio, your gallant deeds had attracted the attention of the whole world towards you, and perhaps someone in Madrid knew that you were Branciforte. Would you like me to tell you what prevented our happiness? First of all, the memory of the atrocious, humiliating reception the Prince gave me at la Petrella; what a chain of obstacles to surmount between Castro and Mexico! You see, my heart had already lost its motive power. Then I had an impulse of vanity. I had erected huge buildings in the Convent, in order to be able to take as my own

room the portress's lodge, in which you took shelter on the night of the assault. One day, I was looking at the ground which, for my sake, you had watered with your blood; I heard a contemptuous utterance, raised my head, saw spiteful faces; to avenge myself, I decided to become Abbess. My mother, who knew quite well that you were alive, made heroic efforts to secure that preposterous nomination. The position was nothing, for me, but a source of trouble; it completed the debasement of my nature; I took pleasure often in proving my power by the suffering of others; I committed acts of injustice. I saw myself, at the age of thirty, virtuous according to the world, rich, respected, and yet completely wretched. Then there appeared that poor man, who was goodness itself, but foolishness personified. The effect of his foolishness was that I bore with his first suggestions. My heart had been made so wretched by everything that surrounded me after your departure, that it had no longer the strength to resist the slightest temptation. Shall I confess to you something really indelicate? Yes, for I remember that everything is permitted to the dead. When you read these lines, the worms will be devouring this so-called beauty, which should have been all yours. Well, I must out with this matter which distresses me; I did not see why I should not make trial of the coarser side of love, like all our Roman ladies; I had a lascivious thought, but I was never able to give myself to that man without a feeling of horror and disgust which destroyed all the pleasure. I saw you always at my side, in the garden of our palazzo at Albano, when the Madonna inspired in you that thought, apparently so noble, but one that has, after my mother, been the bane of our lives. You were not at all threatening, but tender and good as you always were, you looked at me, then I felt moments of anger with that other man, and went so far as to beat him with all my strength. This is the whole truth, my dear Giulio: I did not wish to die without telling you it, and I thought also that perhaps this conversation with you might take away from me the idea of dying. It makes me see all the more clearly what would have been my joy on greeting you again, had I kept myself worthy of you. I order you to live and to continue that military career which caused me so much joy when I heard of your success. What would my joy have been, great God, had I received your letters, especially after the battle of Achenne! Live, and recall often to your mind the memory of Ranuccio, killed at the Ciampi, and that of Elena, who, not to read a reproach in your eyes, lies dead at Santa Marta."

Having written this, Elena went up to the old soldier, whom she found sleeping; she took his dirk from him, without his noticing the loss, then aroused him.

"I have finished," she told him; "I am afraid of our enemies' seizing the passage. Go at once, take my letter which is on the table, and give it yourself to Giulio, *yourself*, do you understand? In addition to that, give him this handkerchief, tell him that I love him no more at this moment than I have always loved him, always, remember!"

Ugone was on his feet but made no move.

"Off with you!"

"Signora, have you really decided? Signor Giulio loves you so!"

"And I too, I love him, take the letter and give it to him yourself."

"Very well, may God bless you as you deserve!"

Ugone went and speedily returned; he found Elena dead; the dirk was in her heart.

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