

he at once put it on Chili's finger, saying some words like a clergyman, and then he kissed her and Mamma scolded him, for Chili was not a child but *une jeune fille comme il faut*, and she made Chili take it off at once. But after Uncle Horace had gone up to town again she wore the ring on her third finger for a whole week, although Mamma told her not. When Isabelle asked her if it was real diamonds, she said yes, and that *c'était son anneau de fiançailles*. She soon lost it to please Mamma, and Lelis supposed Uncle Horace would give her a new one and a better one, for he seemed to like her the best, while Lord Ivo liked Matalina because of her lovely pink cheeks.

The girls were both very fond of Mamma and Papa, who didn't interfere with them much but left it all to Mamma. And Mamma had got very fond of them, though she sometimes told Emmeline that she did not quite like their characters. They were, she said—and Uncle Horace had partly agreed with her—beautiful savages with a veneer of French manners and thought murder a far more venial sin than omitting to go to confession regularly, and didn't even do that. Chilina had said, when Mamma tried to make her see that bandits after all were wicked men who were outlawed because they had taken life: "*Bah! Qui ne tue pas quelque fois?*" Chilina was thin and more bloodthirsty than Matalina, who was fattish and cared for her dinner and was far severer as a governess. Once Mamma did think she had detected some sign of feeling in Matalina when she said that the blackbirds in her country were *magnifiques!* Mamma said, "How? Size or song?" and Matalina told her that they fed them on myrtle seeds and arbutus berries, which made them very good, and that thousands of pots were sent every year to Marseilles.

Mamma took Chili and Matalina to parties with her nearly every night, and all three used to come into the children's nursery just before the cab came, to show their dresses. The lessons went on all the same, but the morning after the party both Matalina and Chili seemed rather tired out with being up late and went into such tempers! As the children got more used to their young governesses they began to tease them and play tricks on them, hiding their false hair and jumping out on them suddenly from behind doors, and Mamma, of course, scolded them, but Matalina and Chili thought not half enough. And at Whitby, that second year they were in England, they took to bolting upstairs and barricading themselves into their rooms. Papa, who was an

Oxford man, would say softly to Mamma: "Aspiritas Corsicorum!" The end of it was that, in the winter, the children were sent to school and Monsieur de St. Brice appeared again, as polite as ever, and took them home. Their Mamma, he said, was failing and *avait besoin de leur soins*. The sisters had cried and cried and thrown themselves on the neck of Madame Marguerite, who had cried too, but she really could not keep them. They expected so much and were so short-tempered and gave so much trouble, putting the servants out by lying in bed in the mornings, eating *pralines*, sticking the sheets and leaving their clothes all over the room, and did not do much teaching.

So she gave them each a good sealskin jacket, and all the painters who had painted them gave them little sketches as souvenirs and they had to go. Mamma saw them off to Dover, and Papa—actually Papa—brought the children to the station. Uncle Horace did not go. He was away on his wedding tour. But his only son, Cecil, who was grown up and cross at being given a step-mother, came, and their mother invited him back to stop with them at Lancaster Gate, where Lelis attached herself to him and liked to sit on the arm of his chair while he was reading.

From Vivario the girls had written beautiful letters to their dear Madame Marguerite and sent her pictures of Vivario where they declared themselves *ennuyées à mourir*. Also copies of *Voceri* and words of charms which they said they had had to wait for till Christmas Eve—since no one would recite them at any other time—how to call up the spirits and make your gun efficacious. Mamma was always very much interested in the superstitions and ways of foreigners.

Then, five years later, the mother of the girls died, and large envelopes with inch-wide margins of black as if, Mamma said, the whole River of Styx had overflowed and left a sediment, came, informing Madame Marguerite Cranmer of *la perte cruelle* that about a hundred and twenty persons, all enumerated, had come to make in Madame Veuve Maymart and desiring the prayers of Madame Marguerite for the departed. Her two daughters, of course, headed the list, followed by *beaux pères* and *belles mères* and brothers and brothers-in-law and cousins and even Uncles German.

Two years later more rivers of black, but the name of Micheline Maymart was not in the list but all by itself on the top, where her mother had been before. It did not say what she had died of,

but Mamma said it was a kind of decline and that she must have died unmarried, for her name was still Maymart. Soon after Micheline's death Matalina, supposed to be very old at thirty, determined not to *coiffer Sainte Catherine*, as she said, married an individual called Andrea Bonelli, who belonged to the famous bandit family of the Bella Coscie, with whom the mistress of the inn had always maintained the most friendly relations. This particular Bonelli *avait bien eu du tracas avec le gouvernement*. . . . Some murders. . . . He was now, however, honoured and respected and had been made Mayor of his native place. He had compounded of course, Mamma said, with the powers that be and adroitly placed presents now and again. Mamma had been given to understand that it was really Chilina he had wanted if she hadn't died. She had been on the point of taking him, out of sheer boredom, just before she came to England, but it was not a good marriage—naturally. He was not Mayor of Vivario then, but still *alla campagna*, and her mother had hoped that the trip *l'en distrairerait un peu*.

Lelis, interested in everything that concerned Cecil and his father, after Mamma had died had no one to ask about these things but Emmeline. Emmeline kept house and settled everything and chose to send Lelis off to school after she was grown up so that she might forget Cecil, who, Emmeline considered, was too old for her since he was now well over thirty and Lelis only nineteen. It was hoped that absence might have its effect on both; Cecil might propose and Lelis have strength to refuse him. But before she left Lelis jolly well made Emmeline tell her all she knew about the two Princesses in the Hovel.

Well, Emmeline had said, pleased with Lelis for consenting to go to Paris, well, Uncle Horace was dead and his wife too, but Emmeline did not think Uncle Horace had behaved very well about it! Emmeline wasn't at all sure from what she had heard Mamma say that it wasn't imputed to *him* that Micheline Maynard had died of a broken heart. Uncle Horace had certainly encouraged her to think and her people to think he took a special interest in her. He never took the slightest interest in Matalina. And Cecil—she was careful to rub this in—was cold and heartless like his father! Then she proceeded to tell her little sister all their mother had told her and that she had picked up from the servants at the time when she was a sharp and noticing young person of fifteen.

Papa and Mamma, after they had been all the winter cruising about, had persuaded Uncle Horace to take them on to Corsica. Papa wanted to get a sketch of Corte, the citadel on the rock, and of course Mamma always played up to him. She could do nearly everything with Uncle Horace except prevent him smoking himself to death, which he did in the end. So they sailed to Ajaccio and put up at the very good hotel there, and, a few days later, took a carriage to drive to Corte—it was the only way you could go—there were no railways then. Papa stopped at Corte ensnared by a view, and the others went on to a place called Vivarion, where there was supposed to be a goodish inn that Edward Lear, one of Mamma's friends, had told her of. The roads, Mamma said, were beautiful, all bordered by a kind of scrub they call the *maquis*—or *macchia* in Italian. Fancy, Emmeline said, all white heather growing as high as a child and men hiding in it who had murdered other men for the sake of revenge, and so had to fly from the police who looked for them and never found them, for the local people were in league with these creatures and told them whenever the police were coming, because they had only carried out the practice of the country to avenge a murderer who was avenging a murder before, and so it went on for ever. They grew quite rich and had cows and vineyards and carried orange-coloured gourds for water at the sides of their belts, like the one Mamma brought home that hung by the right-hand corner of the mantelpiece, procured for her by the Maymarts from Antonio Bonelli, actually the head of the Bella Coscie.

It rained the day they all went to Vivario, as it always does rain in those beastly mountain countries, and a nice job they had, Mamma said, picking their way up the approach to the inn, which was like a watercourse or worse—a drain. An ordinary farmyard midden was right under the windows—all rotting straw and manure and things. The ground floor was stables, like in a north-country peel tower, where they kept cows, pigs and fowls, and it smelt so that Sir Frederick Barton held his nose going up the stone steps outside the wall of the house, the only way to the restaurant on the second floor! They were awfully glad they had not arranged to stay all night. The dining-room had flitches of bacon hanging from the ceiling, and the ceiling itself just dirty brown canvas looped up here and there like an old market woman's petticoat, hiding God knows what! Mamma thought of the bats hanging in the old barn at Uncle Horace's place at Hedingham and made

up her mind to fly as soon as they had had something to eat, retrieve Papa at Corte and get back to nice, comparatively civilised Ajaccio. The landlady, a handsome, dignified old thing, came and talked to them while they ate something sticky which made Mamma feel sick, but it was all there was, she said, except a sort of mess of pottage made of chestnuts that they said was the national dish. The Corsicans all looked like hungry, shabby Esaus, Mamma said, and all the time she was trying to eat she kept hearing voices either from the ceiling under the canvas or from the door of one of the rooms opening out of the *salle*, which were locked—Mamma had got up and tried it while the landlady was out of the room. But presently it was opened from the inside and Matalina and Chilina came out. And the hostess, seeming actually afraid of them, introduced them as *mes filles*, who had been educated in a convent in France by their guardian. For she was a widow and he carried one of *les plus beau noms de France*. And on the other side of that locked door were the two rooms which he had had furnished for her daughters, and would Mamma like to see it? And Mamma—you know how romantic she was!—scented a situation at once. They were both so perfectly lovely. Matalina had a complexion that alone would make her a beauty in London, and their hair was beautifully done and their nails attended to, and their manners—countesses at least! She said she would love to and in she went. I don't suppose it was anything so very wonderful but, after the other, it was a revelation of magnificence. Brass French bedsteads and mirrors on the mantelpieces, and a smart dressing-table with ivory brushes on it and, in the sitting-room, embroidered cushions and *causeuses*, and a marble table in the middle with books and albums on it and good pictures. And yet, in the midst of all this comfort and luxury, Mamma's heart, she said, bled for those two poor things; they looked so terribly unhappy! Their eyes, especially Chilina's—the brown-faced one and least good-looking—were like those of stricken deer—desperate—a captive begging for someone to rescue her!

The men, of course, had not been invited in. The girls were evidently as particular as we should be, but while Mamma was in there making friends, Uncle Horace and Sir Frederick seem to have been making up their minds. Sir Frederick was wild about the one with the complexion and wanted to paint her immediately as Fredegonda. She was the eldest though much the most attractive, but Uncle Horace, Mamma said, had made up his mind to

actually *marry* the youngest. So when Mamma came back he sent Sir Frederick off to the kitchen where the mother was, to pay the bill, and took Mamma outside on the step and suggested that she should go back and invite her two young friends to come along with them, and he would give them a trip on the yacht somewhere or other. And Mamma, thinking of Chilina's sad eyes, agreed and Madame mère was approached and told of the splendid yacht *en rade* at Ajaccio, and all that, and brought to admit that she was rather worried about Chilina—*que cette enfant avait eu des crises affreuses* lately. But the old lady was cunning and probably desired to verify a little, so she said to-morrow would be soon enough and they would come down to Ajaccio by diligence when they had got their things ready. And I suppose the verifications were satisfactory, the tonnage of the yacht, the number of the crew, the obvious devotion of the rich English milord and the rest of it impressed the mother. Perhaps the daughters had a say in it, for next day they appeared with their boxes, all agog for the trip—but it was to Paris! And the guardian was telegraphed for—I don't know by whom—and he saw Papa, which did the trick. Everyone always took to dear Papa and trusted him—you know what an obvious good darling he looked! and arrangements were made. There were even some documents. I know that Uncle Horace gave Mamma four hundred pounds towards the girls' keep in London, as Papa wasn't, as you know, so very rich *then*, but Mamma promptly passed it on to buy clothes with in Paris. I've seen their receipt. She did say that, if they liked, they might take it out in teaching her children French and embroidery, for they spoke beautiful French and sewed like angels. They did try, as you know, but naturally they cared more for going out to parties than drumming French into three naughty children. They had an immense success among the artists anyway, though that doesn't lead to marrying. Sir Frederick didn't paint Matalina as *Fredegonda*—he disapproved always of Mamma's bringing them away, old crabstick!—but Alma Tadema did. Rossetti admired Chilina and did her as "*Sidonia*." Mamma used to take her to sit. She just looked like *Sidonia*, he said—sad and wilful, gentle and vindictive, Matalina got two offers, both from artists. But it all fell through, though Mamma did her best, regarding herself as rather pledged to get them off. For some time people considered Chilina the proper prey of Uncle Horace, but, poor girl, she began to look more and more delicate. She ate too many cakes

and *dragées*, I always thought. Uncle Horace was such an old flirt and difficult to please, and somehow he faded out and Mamma was pretty annoyed with him. Poor wretch, he was getting old and had smoked till his digestion gave out and he wanted looking after, so he fell back into the hands of Mrs. James that he had had for ages, who knew him through and through and was able to be what he wanted—a sort of nurse—which Chilina never could have been. She was beautiful, I grant you, but selfish and lazy—a born aristocrat. I sometimes wonder—I suppose I oughtn't to say this to you, a maiden, but you're going to be married and then you'll know all there is to know—I shouldn't be surprised if the father of Chilina and Matalina weren't different people—and that might have been why the mother let them go and try their chances away from people who knew about it—that and their *manque de dot*. Of course there was the so-called guardian, but he was poorish, like all French aristocrats. Well, Mamma played fair. They had the gayest of times here. She hadn't me to take out, so she could give them all her attention. She treated those two girls as if they had been her own daughters and worked hard at finding them husbands, counting, of course, all the time on Uncle Horace for one of them. Monsieur de St. Brice was enraged when he realised that Uncle Horace had not meant anything, although Mamma explained to him that Uncle Horace had not bound himself to do more than give two pretty girls a nice sail, and it was her fault they were brought to London.

“As I tell you,” Emmeline wound up, “I think he was a selfish pig and was probably responsible for the early death of Chilina.”

Yes, it was fate. Lelis knew that Matalina still lived in Corsica. She had seen an amateur photograph of Vivario which Matalina had sent to Mrs. Cranmer and had sneaked it. A row of tall houses not unlike those in the Marylebone Road as you drive along to King's Cross, with small straight windows right up to the top, under the overhanging forest of Vizza-Vona. No white at all showed over their roofs. Depressing—yet, when Cecil proposed and Emmeline, as head of the family, gave her consent reluctantly—“I don't approve of cousins marrying, and Cecil is too old for you and has been a long time making up his mind—he's going to be fat and like his father. I won't say he isn't as fond of you as he can be of anyone, and he's a famous author and will, I daresay, give you what he can spare from his books.” Lelis declared that

she meant to go to Corsica for her honeymoon. Emmeline said it was absurd to want to go and look up Matalina, who would probably rather have nothing more to do with them. She had ceased writing long ago. No one knew what had happened or been said . . . it was surely better to let sleeping dogs lie than go poking them up, making sudden irruptions into their lairs. Why not go to Minorca for Cecil's chest, which he always says isn't strong, looking all the time as if he could fell an ox. . . .

The "sleeping dog" clause intrigued the younger sister, but when she pressed for more information her elder told her to go to Cecil, who had been old enough when it happened to know all about it. But Lelis had much better not, for Cecil had been devoted to his father and the episode of the Corsican Sisters, whichever way you looked at it, didn't reflect credit on Uncle Horace, who was and behaved as selfish as they make them, though perhaps not more than Cecil. . . .

"Leave Cecil alone!" Lelis said pettishly. "Cecil is *not* selfish and would give his life for me as soon as look at me, whatever you may say."

"He'd find it less trouble, perhaps?" said Emmeline, "for you are an *exigeante* child, you know, Lelis. We've spoiled you, Isabelle and I, you being the youngest."

Isabelle was now a nun and Lelis was more like Emmeline's daughter than a sister.

Cecil, whose mind was now set on his *Life of Cromwell*—not the interesting one, but Henry VIII's friend, which he had accepted a commission to write, gave Lelis her choice. She chose Corsica and he agreed, but he made short work of her questions. He told her to go for the history to Gregorovius and for the flora and fauna to Barry, whose book he had reviewed once when interested in arboriculture, among other things. There was *Travels*, by Edward Lear, who also wrote the Nonsense books, and, oh yes, there was the *Tour of Lady Susan Nottingham*, a sort of distant relation of the De La Gardes, now probably dead, whom he fancied had in her book described the Mademoiselles on their native heath. Lady Susan had gone there, he believed, in the very year of the girls' return from their English visit. He hadn't read it, oh no: "the usual feminine gup about countries they know nothing about and don't want to, except to assess the various capacities for discomfort at the various hotels."

Cecil was rather contemptuous of women's work! He liked



women silly, Emmeline said, and was only marrying Lelis because she shone pre-eminently in that particular.

Lady Susan Nottingham's book *was* rather "gup," but there was one pregnant sentence which was tacked on to a silly account of the village of Vivario—"the jewel of all the setting, for there Romance still lived and there I came in contact with it. A distant relation of mine of the ancient Huguenot family of De La Garde told me the rights—or the wrongs—of it a few years before she died, but I do not print it here as the actors in the tiny tragedy may still be living."

Lelis looked up Lady Susan in Debrett, found her address and wrote to her heretofore unclaimed relation, telling her who she was. In time she received a letter accepting her as a relation and ending formally :

"If a little word-sketch of the quaint stay of herself and two young men under the chaperonage of a month-old bride and bridegroom at Vivario would interest Miss Lelis Cranmer, Lady Susan will try to recall some of the incidents.

"We reached Vivario on a Saturday evening, having decided to spend Sunday there. It was not luxurious——" Here followed a description of the midden approach, together with the main steps being outside and the *salle à manger*, which Lelis was beginning to know like the palm of her hand. "Of two doors securely locked, one was opened for us and gave on to two very small bedrooms. This was all the accommodation at our disposal, but from the shape of the house there were plenty of others, though it was obvious someone slept on six chairs in the *salle à manger*.

"The inn was decidedly on the down grade—neglected—much worse surely than it had been when our friends had been there. The handsome, surly hostess evidently did not care to have clients at all and gave us a horrid supper. In our bedroom Gertrude Talbot and I concocted some mulled claret over a spirit lamp and served it in the tiny wash-basin. We had one. Walter and Jane Scrope, in the other room, had none. The two boys, as far as I know, camped out on the six chairs. And so to bed. I noticed a cloud on Walter's usually cheerful face next morning. Jane looked pensive and said she had been disturbed by movements in the locked-up room. It was all very puzzling, but we went an expedition into the mountain and forgot about it till we came back to a most wretched supper.

"Next morning the married pair looked still more puzzled, and

Jane Scrope said that a most extraordinary state of affairs existed in the inn. She had peeped through the keyhole of the locked door and then had pumped a sort of maid they called O Jù. The hostess had two daughters, it appeared, marvels of cleverness and beauty, who occupied the two other rooms, furnished splendidly. Jane did not mention her eavesdropping, but sent some sort of message to the young ladies. I don't know how she did it but, by midday, she had managed a visit to *ces demoiselles*. Their rooms were arranged in the height of comfort and they received her nicely and were very good-looking themselves, but rather sour, but well dressed, and their hair was arranged far better than us travellers.

"I was too young in those days to be taken into my chaperon's confidence. She vouchsafed no theories as we all went back to Ajaccio, but I gathered from one of the boys that the two beautiful young women were 'under a cloud'—fancy there being foreign clouds as well as English ones!—and weren't well spoken of in the village, and this it was made their mother so reticent and disagreeable. She was trying to repair her fault by not letting them out of her sight. They were what the French call *en pénitence*—in prison, I call it. It appears that, years ago, they had run away, the two of them, with an English milord on his yacht, *the mother consenting*, but that both returned without a ring. No one would marry either of them after that. My memory hardly serves me here, but I believe there was one man—a brigand, Tommy said—who had vowed to avenge the insult if the English milord ever came back to gloat over the ruin he had made. Of course the heartless villain hadn't put in an appearance up to date."

Old Sir Frederick Barton was still alive—grown older and crustier. Lelis wrote to him.

"Yes," he wrote, "I do remember the dirty little hotel at Vivario and its ladder entrance where the fowls stalked up to bed at night. Thank God we were only there for a lunch! I couldn't have stood more. The landlady was an extremely handsome peasant woman who looked as if *elle avait fait des siennes*. Do you know what that means? And she had two most surprising daughters who came out of an inner chamber somewhere while we were eating, dressed up like Parisiennes. I gathered that they did not do a stroke of work to help their mother, but just beamed forth now and again. Your Uncle De La Garde was so struck by one of them that he insisted on carrying her off; the other sister, by far the handsomest in my opinion, was thrown in as chaperon."

I fancy I heard later, through Lear, that they were French, the offspring of the jolly landlady and of noble blood on the other side. The old Marquis de St. Brice, whose grandmother had been Bedchamber Woman to Marie Antoinette and perished in the sack of the Tuileries in 1791, was their Papa and had insisted on their being bred up as ladies.

“But, my dear child, I have heard no more of them. I left the yacht *subito* at Leghorn—a difference of opinion with your Uncle Horace—God rest his soul! And they must all be dead by now.”

Yes, it was Fate. She would go. But she did not talk of Corsica yet. Before setting out on her honeymoon she had informed herself of the possibilities of going there from Marseilles, or from Nice, and, if you were keen on a short passage, Leghorn. But she consented to go to Avignon, Arles, and St. Rémy, where Cecil rather wanted to investigate the defects in the architectural plans of the Roman builders who, it seemed of *malice prepense*, went in for want of symmetry, evidenced in the Arch of Marius at St. Rémy, slightly out of the square and the perpendicular, and the Maison Carée at Nîmes with one pillar less on the *left* side—was it? Lelis only half understood, but she agreed that St. Rémy would be very nice, for she and Cecil could climb up the little Alpilles and wander over the ruins of the Château d'Amour.

Cecil was lovely to go about with; he told you all about everything in his languid, slightly detached voice, and it was your fault if you didn't understand. He was lucid enough but he knew so much and assumed you did . . . and didn't much care whether you did or not.

He was a very tall, golden-haired, fresh-complexioned Englishman. The supposed Huguenot descent of the De La Gardes did not show in him. Emmeline always said he looked like a German, the country where he was educated and where he got his thoroughness. Through the sedentary author's life he led he was inclined to be stout, and of body he was lazy, though of mind active. He was admirably good-tempered though he hardly ever smiled, and never with his eyes. They were blue and quite inexpressive. He had lovely hands with which he made gestures, and clumsy feet on which he hated walking, though he could lift anything. A weary giant. With the lever of his voice he could wheedle you into any plan he chose to conceive, however inconvenient, if he had set his mind on it. On the other hand, if he didn't very much care, he

gave way with a grace. She adored him ! He adored her, and wondered why he had not found it out sooner. She was not more than nineteen now. It was because they had been brought up together and the schoolgirl—long-nosed, with a pigtail, and the sort of thin, spanking legs that seem inevitable and universal then—was odious to him. He was fond of children and they of him, but he made a good gap in between while girls grew up into women. Then as feminine as you please, with all the feminine foibles, waists, Chinese feet if you like, mendacity, greediness, impure thoughts—those queer demoralising conventual confessions ! But courage—always courage, even if you pretended to be afraid, so as to be in the picture. She had been well educated, could add up—and *subtract*, Emmeline said—knew her dates, sang, danced, drew a little, spoke three languages and wrote a beautiful hand, but her mind was just a fair, white sheet for him to make impressionist splashes on. Cecil liked them like that. Lelis, by the time she married him, was well able to appreciate Cecil's attitude to the half of civilisation. Sexual knowledge notwithstanding, she was quite expert at playing the sweet simpleton on occasion, entirely unhampered by her knowledge. Another reason for which Cecil liked her was that she was just a little straight-laced, even *dévoté*, through the training of her two sisters, Emmeline, a martinet, and Isabelle, a nun. She was made for love—to corrupt if one liked—but one wouldn't. One would only open her mind and let her see the difference, or want of difference, between good and evil.

Her looks, he said, were actually suggested by the coat of arms quartered by the old Huguenot families of Cranmer and De La Garde—"a hand holding a lily in full bloom on an azure field *sémé* gold trefoils." He would always have liked to dress her in blue and gold, though, of course, he did not object to tweeds in travelling, and Lelis, who observed some rather stringent sartorial rules, did not object to being just a little Pre-Raphaelite in the evenings.

That was what she was. A glowing figure out of a tapestry, with golden hair, sloping shoulders, a rather narrow chest, a pale but healthy complexion less roses than lilies, and a small mouth with pearly teeth that she wore always a little open—pathetically . . . like the mediæval maiden whom knights fight for till their blood dyes the grass, watching the combat, never knowing if the luck will not be against her particular knight and so empower the other

to carry her off. She would look well, Cecil said, naked, tied to a tree and lots of blood about. Those were the sort of things he said that put Emmeline against him!

So, for the present, holding her strong desire in reserve, Lelis was quite happy wandering with Cecil over the pastures of Provence, noting the grass that tinkled with dryness and was bleached with sun, listening to the sheep bells or creeping along the crumbling, low, grey walls to watch the lizards, oppressed by her shadow, disappearing into crannies. Sometimes, to know again what shade was, they would descend into the dank and dark Roman quarries under the hills, or ascend those hills in search of a breeze, the bride easily reaching and sitting on the topmost peak of a little Alpille deriding her mate who toiled after her. Or listening at sunset to the yellow-bellied frogs' evening song—Brek-kek-kek-coax-coax!—or in her stall beside Cecil in the funny Pathé Cinema theatre. But always, always at the back of her mind were the snows of Monte D'Oro, the chestnut trees of Bocognano, the gorges of L'Inzecca and the rainbows of Fium' Orbe, the Blind River.

One day, after they had been to Aigues Mortes, St. Gilles and Montmajour and she had given Cecil a real go at old churches, she told him that she had written to Matalina at Vivario—Madame Bonelli. He did not seem to take it in, he was so busy looking for the old rings in the quay by the town wall among the reeds, to which St. Louis had moored his boats when he started for the Crusades. And then she began to tempt him with *bouillabaisse* at Marseilles—Cecil and she were by way of being pioneers in new and out-of-the-way greedy dishes—and led him on to tell her about the Corsican dish, Peverata. Once, above Corte, people had such a glut of wine that they threw some of it away into the Restonica and, presently, the drunken trout came floating on their backs down to Corte. A child could tickle them and catch them. So now, as they did then, the Cortesians cook them first in oil and then in a sort of *soupe au vin*, with tomatoes and salt and vegetables and—the rest is pepper—*poivre, encore du poivre et toujours du poivre!* And it's delicious.

She spoke of going to Corsica again at night, as if it were a settled thing—she had found that a good way with Cecil. She said, "Marseilles is really so near; we ought to run across and see Napoleon's birthplace."

Cecil smiled.

“Why run? Eighteen hours by sea.”

“We’re both good sailors, and once we are at Ajaccio we might go up into the interior, and see Matalina, that is, if she ever answers my letter. You said I might write it.”

“I didn’t. You did.”

“She may be dead, but, if by any chance she asks us up to stay, you will be able to get some shooting—moufflon is the thing in Corsica.”

“There are none left.”

“Oh, well then, fishing in the Tavignano or the Restonica?”

“Neither. The Gravona. My dear, you forget, I’m an author and neither fish nor shoot. I’ll stop quietly down in the hotel here and get on with Cromwell, and you can go into the interior and look up your old governess and beat up ancient scandals with her to your heart’s content.”

“Fancy coming all the way to Corsica to write a life of Cromwell! Oh no, Cecil. I could not go without you. The roads are good but not safe.”

“Both. Perfectly. Bandits don’t go for travellers. They might for me, conceivably. . . .”

“Cecil, don’t tease me. Whatever should they go for you for?”

“I don’t know. . . .” He used his ordinary fence of vague, pathetic, engaging negation. “There’s a blood feud now in full swing that has been going on since the seventeenth century. The Sampieri and the Alesani. . . .” He became oratorical. “If all the blood shed on the *verdammte* island, as my professor used to say, was made visible, the name of a part might be given to a whole. Isola Rossa—Les Îles Sanguinaires—red porphyry over a land-locked lake of crimson. . . . In thirty years twenty-eight thousand persons fell in these silly quarrels about trifles—a dog, a date, a measurement, a sister seduced or an acre of land misappropriated. Of course they were shamefully governed under the Genoese. Justice was venal.”

“I don’t know exactly what that means.”

“It means that there was no pretence of justice—not for Corsicans, at least—so they were obliged to take the law into their own hands. Unfortunately they are an affectionate, clinging sort of people. The highest term of endearment is ‘brother,’ and ‘brother’ is taken to include the whole clan, down to cousins’ cousins and uncles’ uncles. . . . So, when one man has done

another in for a perfectly good reason as morality goes in this island, there is nothing for him but *schioppetto*, *stiletto* or *strada*—gun, dagger or get out. There's no disgrace ; it's an honour, on the contrary. *Qui se venge se purifie*. Time was when no respectable family in the island was without a relative away for his health or gone abroad for his country's good. But Monsieur le Brigand is perfectly safe as long as he stops in these mountain gorges with their secret ways leading down to the sea, where he can see reluctant pursuers and faint-hearted gendarmes coming a mile off and take his measures accordingly. They're not keen on catching him. The one danger for a bandit really is the farcical one of running up against another bandit who happens to have an outstanding grudge against him. . . .”

—“ Like a Gilbert and Sullivan play,” Lelis said.

—“ While below, all his kinsmen know perfectly well that it isn't only an eye for an eye but somebody else's eye for somebody else's tooth and immediately *cappar le fenestre*—block up all the windows with feather-beds, mattresses and straw, leaving only little holes to shoot out of. All the houses are built for defence with small, high windows. One man, Jean de Vescovato, and his wife Santia, lived for seven years like that—never daring to look out of the window or to go out, and the moment he did put his nose out of the door he was shot.”

“ Oh, do go on, Cecil. These people do so interest me.”

“ They don't me.” He had been talking about them for an hour. “ I cannot get up the slightest interest for a people so devoid of all art feeling—proper feeling of any kind. Shabby and sullen ; mindless and lazy. Yet, the soil is so fertile that they say, if you were to thrust a broom-handle into the ground it would flower. But, for Monsieur le Corsican, goats and chestnuts are what potatoes and pigs are for the Irishman. Six of each will feed his family and his pig too, and there are twenty-four different ways of cooking them. Once the French Government thought of cutting down all the trees so as to make the beggars work instead of lounging about all day with firearms, gossiping while their women at home compose *voceri* and invent hellish tortures for the *curé* in the next village.

“ The Vendetta habit has grown upon them, women and all, until the smell of powder's incense to their nostrils. It's just the result of national boredom—the protest of a country for hundreds of years under alien rule, like Ireland. They've got to have some

fun of their lives. And it's a great game! You know even if you were to give a burglar a competence he would still go on burgling for the sake of the excitement. And the dull, urban cracking of cribs by night is nothing to the outdoor amusement of stalking your object, day in day out, through the *mâquis* that conceals pursued from pursuer and vice versa. *E bugiardo come la scopa*—the heather is a traitor, or, rather, an impartial arbitrator between two combatants. Imagine a wall six feet high——”

“Made of—?” she inquired in his ear, from where she lay sleepily, her head on his shoulder, on the one arm-chair.

“Cypress, olive, dwarf oak, sycamore, evergreen, thorn, box, ilex, lentisk, arbutus, oleander, laurustinus, flowering myrtle, wild vine, cytisus—the common weed of Corsica—clematis, rhododendron, tamarisk. . . .”

She said, “It's like saying over something to send you to sleep. . . .”

“And I do that, don't I? Boring you?” But he went on: “The white heather is, of course, the foundation of the *macchia* and the arena of the bandit. They're quite smart people really, like gladiators or prize-fighters. They have gardens and flocks of cattle and vineyards, and Grand Duchesses beg to be allowed to pay them visits up in their fastnesses. They date their letters from the *Palazzo Verde* and get herdsmen to put them in the post—drop them in the *boîte* of the diligence—and their friends send them food and get game in return. . . .”

“What Duchess?” Lelis asked. “I must go to bed.”

“Saxe Weimar, I believe. Look here. I see you mean to take me to Corsica and get me killed. I know that you've actually a letter in your pocket from your barbaric governess. Confess?”

She confessed. She thought it was wonderful how Cecil could see a letter through her clothes.

“Well, we'll go. It's not very healthy for me, but we'll go.”

“Why, Cecil? Your throat?”

“Yes, dear. My throat or my head or, more likely, my stomach. That's the worst place, especially if you've dined well. But probably I shan't dine well, there. . . .”

He put her off his knee. He spoke fast, for him.

“Yes, dear. You'll soon get rid of me there and marry a nice bandit and reign in the Green Palace of Pentica—not Piccadilly—and have Duchesses walk up and call on you. It's all the same.”



Lelis did not much like Ajaccio, where they landed. She soon got used to the novelty of the hedges of orange and palms bordering the streets ; Napoleon's house bored her—the shops were poor and she wanted something for Emmeline. Strolling along the main street with Cecil before their train started for Vivario, she pulled up in front of the window of a bric-à-brac shop. It displayed a tray of cheap ornaments and two things that looked like gigantic penknives made in white bone and inlaid with black spirals and markings and set with the, to her, magic word *Vendetta*.

Just right for Emmeline ! She darted in and Cecil slowly followed her. The shopman seemed asleep, dozing by his fire, pipe in mouth, and the *Corriere di Bastia* open on his knees.

“ Isn't he afraid his things will get stolen ? ”

“ Oh, no. They're beasts, not thieves.”

Lelis began to rummage in the trays while the salesman shrugged himself awake. . . .

“ *Madame désire un souvenir ?* Alas ! These are new daggers—not very sharp. I could not sell Monsieur one of these *comme souvenir de la belle Corse*. Monsieur is going up into the interior ? Monsieur would probably like a gun ? Here is one I can recommend . . . thin—*calibre étroit*—but carrying very far.”

“ We want one of these,” Lelis said sturdily, holding out a dagger she had selected.

“ *Mais non, Madame. Comme souvenir, Madame ferait mieux* to buy, from a peasant, a dagger that has been—used.”

He spoke without intention ; he had taken their absurd measure—mad and rich English who wanted the real thing to show to their friends at home. The man, moreover, was entirely under the dominion of his silly, pretty wife. She cried out :

“ Oh yes, Cecil, let us have the real thing, of course. A real Corsican knife—perhaps with blood on it ? How nice of the man to tell us—not want to cheat us. . . . No, Cecil, you *don't* want a gun.”

For Cecil was actually in treaty for one, though everyone knew that he didn't shoot and that, if he could, moufflon was practically extinct. She was rather distressed and showed it. As they left the shop, Lelis carrying the silly gun, Cecil said :

“ Don't be cross with me, dear. One had to buy something, *richissime* as we are, and those stylets were common—quite unworthy of you. . . . *Cane Canisti . . . !*” he hummed. “ Give me the gun. That man is quite right ; the gun is the only fit memento

of Corsica. *Cane Canisti, Putra Ascendisti, Ó Christú Offendisti.* Translate if you can——”

She was astounded that he knew it. She began :

“ Dear little dog—Smoke, ascend——”

“ No ! Go off, go off—Or God will be angry. For the gun is the life, and if it refuses, like a horse at a fence, the man's done. So he consults a witch and gets a charm said over it. ‘ Holy Mother of God, arrange that I may meet my enemy to-morrow and kill him without anything happening to me at all, at all ! ’ Extraordinary, tragic fatuity ! ”

“ Yes, it does sound mean. But, fancy going into a jeweller's shop in Dover or Folkestone, on landing, and being recommended to buy a knife that *has already been used* on somebody ! I am enjoying myself, aren't you ? ”

“ Surely,” said Cecil serenely. He was so nice to go about with.

Corsica had begun well with daggers and things, but she was annoyed when the railway, leaving behind the streets of palms and gardens of orange trees like those she had seen in Egypt, the green embankments with railwaymen's gardens of giant cactus lying about sprouting like cabbages, ascended into a region of quiet fields and gentle streams meandering. “ One might as well be in Surrey ! ” she said disappointedly.

Cecil was humming something. “ Do you remember,” he asked her, “ that song of Handel's your mother used to sing at Bamborough ? *O Gentle Peace, with Plenty Crowned !* Yes, I prefer pastoral landscape—mountains are stagy—too like a set scene. They frighten me with their clumsy primitiveness. Great purple monsters at play . . . giants waiting, hands on haunches . . . ironical . . . up there where we are slowly, surely going . . . It will be very imposing and very ugly. You don't get very far in this country without thinking of Hell and Salvator Rosa.”

“ Darling Cecil, if it really becomes too terrible I shall come across and sit on your knee.”

She waited, and soon she became afraid of mountains too—of nearly everything. The last hour had been enough to try anybody's nerves. Egypt, then back to Surrey, and then a stupendous sort of Wales or Scotland, a land where a Skiddaw or a Grampian would have made the effect of a hillock that a mole throws up in a night. Yes, it was Doré, or Salvator Rosa, in full blast, splendid, imposing, not ugly but tremendously uncomfortable. One violent sensation after another. But all the while, like Cecil

in his corner with his newspaper that he continued to read, the little, single, baby-line of railway wound in and out reasonably, persuasively, poised one moment on the crests of limestone crags crocketed like cathedrals, the next flung tenuous as the strand of a spider's web over torrents rolling soundless beneath, except when enormous, apparently insuperable obstacles made of granite and porphyry intercepted them, withstood them. Lelis would laugh with delight like a child when sudden waterfalls, steaming and hissing with cold, not heat, tossed up showers, prismatic in the sunbeams that caught them on their sudden elevation, against the very carriage windows. Grey spirals of stone raised themselves up from beds of green that were the tufted tops and plumes of giant pines, whose stark branchless trunks stood presumably rooted in the river-bed below. And, looking down, Lelis could catch a glimpse of the road that wound along the side of the river, its width supported on uneven wooden baulks that stretched out over the stream . . . a serene, well-kept, useable road. . . .

Higher and higher they mounted till the road only showed like a white selvedge to the brown ribbon it ran beside, and Lelis gave up seeking for minutiae of civilisation and raised her eyes steadfastly to what she was told where Monte Rotondo and Monte D'Oro poised high in the blue crystalline sky.

Cecil sat amused and calm on the other side of the carriage while, blotted into her corner with her feet drawn under her, she attempted to express her sense of altered values, her human quailing before spectacular immensities. . . .

"It's like at Earl's Court," she murmured, "when they forced me into the switchback and I had to clutch somebody. But you're reading! . . . Or I keep imagining that I'm Zazel looping the loop over precipices and gulfs. . . . One doesn't know if the mountains or the gorges are uppermost. . . ."

Cecil said that that last was rather good, and filled his pipe. What she wanted, and he may have lazily guessed it though he said nothing, was that he should come across to her corner and take her in his arms and hold her there, letting her survey and absorb these wonders from the shelter of his big human personality. He did not do it. Perhaps he was hardening her? He talked to her about some engineering problems suggested to him by his paper, and his phrases, though happy and well chosen, were not particularly reassuring; for instance:

"The French are clever—and reckless. These slight, tipsome

bridges that we're on—flung so artlessly across nothing—*le néant*. . . .”

He went on to remark that this railway represented France's gift to Corsica when she colonised her, and had cost over five hundred thousand francs for the hundred and eighty-five miles it served, and that the French had since repented their generosity, since the Corsican chicaners had put their heads together and sold them the land for it at forty times its value, and would neither work it nor pay for it. They were, nevertheless, awfully proud of their baby engines and tiny carriages and their pace of twelve miles an hour. Then he went on to the *déboisement* of Corsica that was going on, which would eventually be its ruin and end. The water would be lost to them, since the soil of the denuded hillsides would go down to choke up the mouths of the streams. . . . Saw-mills, of which Corsica was full, were all wrong. The sale of timber should be reduced, not increased. The heath, too, was going for briar and wood pipes and the chestnut trees all being cut down for pyrogallic acid.

She murmured, “I almost wish, darling, that we hadn't come.”

“You *would* come, darling,” Cecil answered her with seriousness. “On your little head be it.”

If he had not used the qualifying adjective Lelis would have screamed. And presently—for the rainbow showers and variegated spray had implied rain—rain became a really important factor of the landscape, the merciful mountain rain which falls more or less as a matter of course, meekening the horrors, softening the spikes and jags, deadening the roar and flattening the ridges of the river's flow. The young girl was used to that sort of thing at Coniston and Aviemore. She complained of it there, but here it seemed to allay the anguish, to sober and to soothe her. She was excited hideously, drunk with the exhilaration of high altitudes, overwhelmed by the spectacle of forests voluptuously overhanging the high-shouldered cliffs, stunned by prehistoric noises, the bellowing of mastodon waterfalls, the deeper but more terrifying roar of rivers in spate so that the patient, even drip of rain against the windows making the usual soothing and monotonous impact on her town-bred ear was welcome.

And now the scenery grew quieter, uglier, less like Salvator and more like Mürren. But it was nice to get out of the portentous gorges of porphyry and granite, the grey-green, moss-covered boulders of limestone that held, vice-like, the gnarled and twisted

bones of trees full-boughed, prisoned monsters whose arms and legs were writhing in agony, caught for ever between two precipices till they rotted. . . .

The little railway was forging up through Vizza-Vona, that great unearthly forest that is nearly a fourth part of Corsica, composed, Cecil said, mainly of Lariccio (*Pinus larix*), the trees, some of them, four hundred years old . . . sheerly impenetrable in places . . . people got lost there—well lost. . . .

Among the pines were large patches of chestnut whose red and brown branches, mixed with the soft new green of the beeches, reminded Lelis of a young woman's face wigged with red false hair. Cecil was teaching her to make comparisons—find juxtapositions. And he was now murmuring what Virgil said to Dante following him into the dark wood of Purgatory—" *My son, my son, here is Agony—but not Death. . . .*" How Cecil and she understood one another !

Ghisone on the station boards, and the Gravona that had been treacly-brown in the groves of night that they had come through, born again but not regenerate, brawled by the side of the even white road from Ajaccio, which stretched along on a level with the carriage. Its innocent green banks were dotted with tiny lilac crocuses that Lelis would have liked to get out and pick. There were cheerful noises, too ; music, the fluting of the *zufoli*, the drone of the *cornemuse* and the crackling of whips and the hoarse " *Huè youp !*" with which drivers, in their pink cotton smocks, cheered on their faltering, ill-fed beasts. The road was dotted with wayfarers, men wearing the shaggy *pilone* of which she had heard, but mostly brown velvet coats and always the leathern cartridge belt and gun on shoulder. Women were mostly in black or blue homespun, and on their heads—yes—the famous *mandile* ! There was a lot, especially on the children, of a peculiar shade of venous red that set Lelis's teeth on edge as did unripe currants. Some of the women, broad-hatted, rode astride with an umbrella held up to protect their merchandise. To the random sound of flageolet and bagpipe that filled the little street, little black kids waltzed standing on their hind legs, and a sardonic bear danced, for it was market day in Bocognano.

Bocognano, the wickedest village in Corsica except Sullacaro and Sartine . . . drenched in blood, so Cecil had told her. A row of cheerless houses each sheltered its mournful chestnut tree, the colour of old, caked, dried blood, stupid and sullen yet crying for

more. Blood inherent, blood all over, even in the fresh shed pink of the little children's frocks. Their parents must wilfully choose that shade. . . .

"No, I never, never will come here," she said aloud. "There will be the same dear little kids in Vivario—the most virtuous village in Corsica."

Things were already more cheerful. Greenhouse shrubs under the sheltering eyebrows, as it were, of Monte D'Oro, where the thaw was making ragged the pure white expanse beyond where eagles circled.

"Tattone," said Cecil suddenly, coming over to her. "Eight hundred and two metres altitude. Gatti di Vivario the next stop. Prepare to receive the embraces of your barbaric governess. Take mine first. Perhaps I shall not want to kiss you afterwards?"

"How do you know she will come to meet us?"

"She *has* come. I see her standing on the platform with her husband—and an old maid with a wheelbarrow."

Cecil could see true. Vivario station was like any other station, peasants getting in, peasants getting out, but, on the wide, windy platform a group of three stood steadfast, waiting till the dispersion of all the others should define their guests. The woman was dressed in black relieved by white, like any prosperous bourgeoisie of Passy or Asnières. By her side was a little oldish man wearing a pointed bonnet, a sort of Phrygian cap or biretta. His hair, iron-grey and lots of it, fell over a red handkerchief twisted round his neck four-fold instead of a collar. He looked like a workman beside his wife. The woman standing with them respectfully, was bare-headed except for a spotted scarf wound round her brow and falling in a coloured streak down her shoulder. She maintained a hand barrow with a tarpaulin over it, and when Lelis saw this was designed for their luggage she was glad she was in the habit of travelling light.

"*Mon Mari!*" the lady, introducing the peasant, said.

"Mine!" said Lelis, shivering in the windy rain, giving over her handbag to Cecil so as to receive in full the welcome of the horrid individual with the greasy, unshaven chin, hard black eyebrows and little tufts of hair jutting out of his ears.

"*Permettez, Madame Lélis, que je vous embrasse.*"

Cecil's protest, for English form's sake about carrying the luggage, disregarded—people never understood Cecil's French very well, somehow—the four preceded the maid and her hand-cart

full of luggage up the miry white road with the rain spinning in the puddle holes, through the railway arch like any suburban London one towards a dreary, dowdy row of tall houses backing against the mountain side. Each boasted a tiny garden in front where the retreating snow reminded Lelis of very white linen laid out to dry. Up above them no sky was to be seen because of the overhanging forest just as it was in her photographs at home.

“And this is Italy?” she whispered to Cecil. She was already thinking that Matalina, when she had been carried off to *la froide* and *perfide Angleterre*, had by no means received so considerable a shock and that her return might have been a far greater one.

“No, Corsica!” Cecil said. He was grave and unhappy—obviously not taken with the Mayor of Vivario, who was walking between him and his Lelis. Perhaps he was wondering if the embrace would be repeated *journalièrement*? Lelis was determined to see that it should not.

“Vivario is a *station d'été*. It has a thousand inhabitants,” Cecil was saying to them in French. “It lies in a natural amphitheatre. . . .”

These members of the indigenous population were probably aware of these statistics, and Lelis could see for herself that the main street was just a shelf in the mountains, all ridgy and twisted round the sides of a big wide bowl with a river at the bottom of it. But she was mostly keeping her eyes on the ground, picking her way among pigs and goats that got between her legs and nearly threw her down among the pushed-up stickiness.

“*Par ici!*” said Matalina suddenly, with no sense of shame leading her guests up the track of a watercourse. There were three separate streams—or drains—flowing down the gentle slope of natural sand rock which they avoided, picking out the ruts. A patch of the midden spoken of by Lady Susan lingered in a corner under the north wall of the house where a brown horse was standing, crook-kneed, in dirty stained straw. Lelis shuddered and mentally condemned all Catholic countries.

They mounted the famous outside steps, washed clean by the rain and betraying no sign of fowls, which had been probably trained by now to go to bed another way.

“And here’s your Aunt Susan’s canvas *velarium!*” Cecil whispered as they were conducted into the *salle à manger*, “sagging perhaps a little lower down as if some stupid, inglorious heaven was about to fall on us.”

“And six cats,” said Lelis quite reconciled.

And for them, there was a very large, half-attic room whose floor gleamed mica-like with many washings. There was one door on the north looking towards Ajaccio whence they had come, with a glass pane in it, leading on to a balcony, and a window looking south, but dark at noonday because of the mountain behind and the overhanging forest. A window that Lelis decided not to look out of, or draw its clean white dimity curtains because it would depress her. The two large beds, placed in opposite corners, had, for Lelis looked, a gay-coloured rug and two white blankets each. The roof was just looped-up canvas like the other rooms, and hung so low on the two sides where the beds were that anyone lying in them could touch it with a hand. There was, over the mantelpiece, a replica of Rossetti's portrait of Chilina. There were two *prie-Dieu* chairs and a *bénitier* and sacred pictures over each bed.

“*La belle Matalina,*” said Cecil, “appears to have turned *dévoté*. *Quand la poitrine descend, vertu se relève !* She would fade early. Her chief merit, I understand, was complexion.”

And : “They are not running this place as an inn any more,” as a knock at the door summoned them to supper. Matalina, who had probably cooked it, was standing formally to receive them draped in a priceless, black lace Spanish shawl. Her husband, at her side, still wore his mousy biretta and red handkerchief. The meal was very good ; sweetbreads and *broccio* and some unspecified fruits crystallised by Matalina and covered with syrup. Cecil, who hated sweets but was eating them out of politeness, made a secret wry face, and also when cloudy home-made wine was poured into his glass. As soon as a course was ready to be removed Matalina clapped her hands like an Eastern potentate and called loudly, “*Ò Jù !*” Then the old serving-maid, whose name was Julia, appeared quickly from the kitchen close at hand. Lelis fancied, though she had never heard of Julia, that she might have waited on her mother and Uncle Horace when she was a girl and pretty instead of something like an old game-bag wrinkled and brown. One knew what might have happened then if Uncle Horace had stayed a week instead of a couple of hours and been subjugated by the maid instead of the mistress !

After the meal they passed into the salon, which had been much modernised since the two young girls had sat in it eating out their hearts. Heavy red rep curtains were drawn across the sash



windows, and the firelight from the large English grate flickered on their folds and the yard or so of material which lay in pools on the floor under the sills, for warmth perhaps. The room was very hot and smothery—the fire must have been lit all day and the curtains drawn too. Leaving the pale blue metallic-looking chairs to his guests, the host took his seat on a velvet upholstered one that might have come out of the Tottenham Court Road and stooped forward so that he sat almost under the marble shelf of an English mantelpiece. And, were it not for her consciousness of the black hood of forest hanging like a menace over this side of the house, Lelis might very well have imagined herself to be in some railway or commercial hotel in England.

The room for the moment had no other illumination but that of the fire, to which Monsieur Bonelli, his head almost between his knees, attended ostentatiously every other minute. One could see nothing of his face. He looked like a wolf with his great ears that stuck up beyond the swathes of his cap and the strong tufts of grey hair growing out of them. They could not see well. There was nothing for the strangers to do but try to make conversation, and that was difficult, for, though the old man was supposed to understand French, he seemed more nearly deaf than his wife had cared to own and she had left the room. . . .

Presently she came back carrying a heavy lamp. Cecil rose to help her, and his hostess invited him to observe what he had been sitting on. In the solid gloom she held up the lamp to show off what was surely her proudest possession, the two sofas and the six arm-chairs covered entirely with glistening bead tapestry in pale shades, the work during long years of her hands and those of her sister. Somehow, the fact that Cecil had been sitting on Chilina's handiwork gave Lelis quite a turn. Though why not? The guests admired these monuments of misdirected labour, and then Matalina, gratified, set down the lamp on the table and bade them draw up and peruse the albums containing likenesses of the family, which were laid on it diagonally.

The portraits of the Pancrazie of Muracciole, a hamlet of Vivario, were multiple. Madame Pancrazie was Monsieur Bonelli's sister. Among them, the head of the family after Andrea, Monsieur Regulus Pancrazie, Capitaine de Gendarmerie at Bastia, was repugnant to Lelis and distrusted by her at first sight. She hated the stupid, half-modernised face where new and ill-digested ideas seemed to contend with primordial savagery. Matalina

mentioned his name and title each time his likeness appeared till Lelis was sick of the sound of it. Matalina was doing it to please her husband, who liked the sound of it. He said several times: "*Il faut l'inviter ici, ma femme.*" Her "*Oui, oui, Andrea,*" was proudly servile. He spoke again clearly; he seemed to have got the distance, and the portrait of the Captain had perhaps stimulated him. "Show Cecc' Anton' the portrait of Jacques Bonelli. *Il est très beau.*"

"Very handsome indeed," said Lelis dutifully, confronted with the likeness of an individual standing in a clearing of the forest in front of two other armed men, with his gun raised, as if expecting to be attacked. The host got up and stumbled to the table.

"Yes, that is *my* uncle, the famous Jacques Bonelli, the head of the Bella Coscie, the family to which I belong. That is I standing behind him. I was with him then, *alla campagna.*" Matalina looked uncomfortable. "He is there still—has been for years. He is rich. He did his duty. He has never let anyone give him *rimbecco*. Never has it happened in our family. We avenge, we of the Bonelli, but we never forget a kindness or spite a pretty woman."

"Yes, Jacques is good," Matalina said, "When he was starving once, Maman sent him food, and a year after, when she took my sister and me for a picnic in Vizza-Vona, Bonelli sent down a boy with a *magnifique* basket of strawberries from their gardens in Penticca. And I have a letter from him. . . ."

She showed it. It was not exactly a nice letter, being neither more nor less than a threat of vengeance unless a request of his was complied with—a post as a diligence driver for one of his people. . . . But it was certainly signed "*Votre bandit dévoué.*"

"He might have been my relation and yours," Cecil whispered to his wife.

Old Andrea had gone back to his fireside, and still desultorily, they turned over pages. Lelis wanted to get to one of Chilina. Likenesses of Matalina constantly occurred, but Matalina had a habit of turning over quickly or laying her hand on them saying, "*Moi, je suis plutôt laid ! C'est Chili qu'il faut voir.*"

And presently Lelis recognised the exotic features of Michelina, sharp, delicate, yearning, full of a graceful, wilful discontent as of one determined to be under a doom she had not character enough to carry proudly. But there was a picture of her in costume in which she looked capable of murder, Lelis thought—a changed woman, older, more passionate. And another, so beautiful that it

seemed to take Cecil by assault, he who had always pretended to despise her, the girl who, after all, ought to have been his stepmother. Ah, but then she would never have got Cecil, for Cecil would not have objected to his father's giving him a nice pretty young stepmother like Chilina and so would never have come to live with them in Lancaster Gate and got fond of Lelis. Uncle Horace's naughtiness had turned out well for her.

Cecil, actually surprised into briskness, exclaimed: "Why, that's not Chilina, is it? She looks like one of Les Vierges des Rochers. Such wonderful *morbidezza*. . . ."

It sounded rather rude. The old Corsican lifted his head. Never having heard of the book or the Italianate artistic phrase either, he may have thought that the Englishman was insulting his wife's sister. He had an ugly look. . . . Presently he rose, tottered slightly, crossed the room and kissed the hand of Mrs. De La Garde with a certain old-fashioned dignity. In Cecil's direction he gave a curt nod and went out.

Matalina explained: "He is tired. He goes to couch himself, for he sleeps badly. *Des mauvais rêves!* And then he wakes, *tout en sueur.*"

When the sound of Andrea's carpet slippers had faded away—the guests had no notion where the Bonellis slept—Matalina opened the album again and took out one of the cards that was loose, and which Lelis was sure she had previously covered with her hand, and gave it to Cecil.

"Behold, Cecc' Anton'," she said, "the portrait of **Monsieur** *votre père!*"

Lelis had never seen one of him. "Oh, let me look!" she said. "He is my father too—now."

"*Oui—heureusement,*" Madame Bonelli permitted herself to say with, so it struck Lelis, unnecessary emphasis. Rather seriously she addressed her husband. "Take care of her, Cecc' Anton', *cela te vaudra bien.*"

"She takes care of *me*," Cecil said, kissing the hand of Madame Bonelli very nicely and then that of his wife, murmuring, "*Mon petit paravent!*" so that Matalina might hear.

Matalina smiled, the beautiful large smile of a peasant Madonna, and Lelis saw suddenly how fair a woman she had been and how un-Corsican she looked. . . . so much more like her ancestress who had stood by the French Queen and lost her life. She idly took up the *carte de visite* from Cecil's indifferent hand

and turned it over. Three letters were written on the back in the beautiful hand-writing, clear and delicate, like a line engraving, that the two sisters used—forming a word? ORA.

“Why is it Ora?” she asked.

“’Ora. ’Orazio,” Cecil replied. “Short for Horace, is it not, Madame Bonelli?”

“Oh, you *must* call her Matalina!” Lelis cried, while Matalina put the photograph back, whispering: “It was Chili’s. We found it under her pillow after she was dead. *Maintenant, mes enfants, il est temps de nous coucher.* I give you both rendezvous at ten o’clock in this room. We will go out and I will show you our beautiful Vivario, where I hope you will both be very happy *pendant votre petit séjour.*”

The women kissed. Lelis wanted Cecil to kiss Matalina too, but his finer sense rejected that parade of affection as a mistake. . . . But he raked out the ashes of the fire while she put brown holland covers on the six chairs and the two sofas.

“My treasure, don’t you see you have just charmed them both? You are just my shield, my mascot. You save it. As I told Madame Bonelli, you make up by your sweetness for my bad habit of getting myself disliked. Don’t you see they only tolerate me for your sake? I’m sure I don’t know what would happen to me if you weren’t there.”

“If it wasn’t for me you wouldn’t be here at all.”

“No. . . . That’s that!” he said oracularly, lying down in his bed and pulling the clothes over his ears. “So won’t you come into mine, my protectress, and let me go to sleep in your arms?”

Of course she came over—she had always meant to do it—pattering over the bare shining boards, first extinguishing the little lamp that was placed on the table in the middle and lighting the odd candle they had brought with them, stuck in a soap-dish, to illumine the last stage to Cecil’s bed. She kept it alight long after he had gone to sleep with her kind arms round him, for she could not sleep so easily the first night in a new room. She disliked what Cecil kept calling the Velarium. It was less like the soft yellow sky that hung over Whistler’s exhibition than a dowdy, wigwam tent cover, such as she had observed in a visit to the Wild West. It was dirty and it drooped, and a biggish bit of it, that she could see from Cecil’s bed but not from hers, had come away, there in the left-hand corner. Nothing, she supposed, could be

done to improve matters except some root-and-branch alteration, but she made up her mind to ask Matalina to have the flap nailed up so as to keep in the rats, spiders, bats, she knew not what, that possibly infested the roof. . . .

Next morning, when Julia had brought in the trays with their breakfasts, Cecil and Lelis discussed them and their last night's meal too.

"I don't like *broccio*," she confessed. "What is it?"

"Chestnuts. Bruised in curdled milk or cream. All the children are reared on it. They must be born fierce—not tired. One wonders what they would grow to if they were nurtured on Lemco or Liebig instead of the mild chestnut?"

"And what's this jam?"

"Arbutus. Little red berries you'll see when you go out. I can't say I like it."

"But you *must* like the honey, Cecil. Matalina sends for it all the way to Ajaccio, she told me."

"I wish they would send for a nice bottle of whisky when they are about it. Those sweet home-made wines are awful. Well. . . . Get up!"

He went sedulously to sleep again, and Lelis, half dressed, feeling strangely alone with Cecil withdrawn from her in sleep, wandered out through the door with a window top that gave egress to the tiny unsubstantial wooden balcony serving their room only, which had been that of the girls. It represented an expensive treat that poor *Maman* Maymart had prepared for Chilina when she was ill, against her recovery. Perhaps Chilina had sat there with her face turned towards Ajaccio, where she had enshipped for the accomplishment of her doom? She had perhaps never been quite strong enough to do that. It would be a trial to anyone's nerves. Lelis felt as if she were on one of those swinging cradles on which painters stand to paint inaccessible wall surfaces every London spring . . . going on now. . . .

In London . . . there would be the Park opposite—cheery, chirruping, of an *eau de Nil* green colour, and beyond, Knightsbridge and its cupolas. Here, in Corsica, there was nothing but a deadly waste of heath between her and a town. A series of shaded curtains, walls of hazy-coloured morning air through which showed hummocks that were actually mountains with names! Leagues and leagues of them, all much the same, forming a

rumpled counterpane of greyish, purple and lapis-blue, tedious, self-sufficient, complacent in their great simplicity. She dominated the world from her balcony, but it was so high up that she felt it sliding away from her, little, untidy, dishevelled incident of civilisation that she was, with no backing, no consequence in these parts. She saw the old road bisecting the new one on the curve of the bowl's rim, grey and straight, like an iron path laid for a switchback. It was Roman, Cecil said. Immediately below her, under the wall so that she could have dropped a powder-puff on its neck, stood the poor old derelict horse, patient as animals are, drooping, spavined, galled, with his red sores glaring up at her from its manger—a heap of rotting straw flung down anyhow. She could not stand it but went in and woke Cecil, saying: “Darling, I do not like this place.”

“You *would* come, dear. Why not?”

“It is so—high.” She knew it was no use talking to him about the horse.

“Not worse than Switzerland.”

“I’ve never been there. Perhaps that’s why I’m so overpowered by this. I feel, ever since we came on that sort of cloud-capped railway, as if I were a pilot in an aeroplane—caught in a pocket of the air, you know—hardly moving—liable to nose down any blessed minute!”

“I,” said Cecil, “have my little imaginations too. I fancy I am gone to bed with a nice glass of whisky, on a comfortable, well-stuffed mattress poised in space. That doesn’t worry me, for I persuade myself that it is all a matter of imagination, and that I am quite safe—unless I fidget. But otherwise in no more danger than I am in my own bed—and some beds *are* pretty high—that I sleep on quite confidently all the night through and never think of falling off, when one might easily break one’s leg—getting out the wrong side.”

Lelis did her hair and Cecil shaved, as he said, more by the light of reason than by the looking-glass, and then, seeing no one, they issued forth from their apartment and through the *salle à manger* to the salon opposite where Ò Jù, as Lelis would call her, was “doing” the grate like any English servant. The curtains only were slightly drawn, and of as vile a red as ever by the light of day. They observed that the cushions, placed carefully on the red chairs and pink sofas which Julia had uncovered for their use, were

yellow. They sat down stiffly on a cold and glassy chair each and looked about. There were Empire mirrors, a little fly-blown, and a smaller one in a dull frame that Cecil looked even a little excited about.

"Brass?" she said contemptuously.

"Worth fabulous sums," he said. "And the Captain of Gendarmerie will mop it up. Get her to give it you."

There were framed oil paintings which Cecil said were good but nothing much, side by side with photographic reproductions of Queen Victoria and the Shah of Persia and Alexandra with her pendant lock smiling on Napoleon le Grand with his white plastron.

"Look at the Bryant and May's match-box and the silver bell from the rue de Rivoli, put like relics in the place of honour!"

"Perhaps Mamma gave it them. I think we oughtn't——" Lelis began as Julia gathered up her tools and, muttering that she would tell Madame, who had been up all night with Monsieur, who had not been able to sleep but who had now gone out, left the room.

"Matalina is determined to begin with the church," Lelis told him. "Quite modern, I gather, but you must be polite, then perhaps we can get her to tell us things—she's rather shy of giving Corsica away, you know. Pretends that everything is changed since Mamma was here and that they're all as reformed and civilised as you and I. When I asked her to take us to one of those places where a murder has been committed and that Mamma said were all along the road...."

"*Mucchio*. Everyone who passes throws a branch or a stone, and sometimes there is a sort of cross made out of two transverse sticks...."

"Yes, Mamma saw two when she was here. But Matalina sticks to it that there are none and that the Vendetta is all over now."

"That's all nonsense! I read in the *Eveil de Corse*, just before I left Ajaccio, an account of what they are pleased to call a *rixé sanglante* at Olivesa between Paolo Paoletti and Francesco Sarti, who killed Monsieur Dominique Sarti, Cultivateur, because he had refused to carry out a contract to marry a female Paoletti. The scandal was great. The mother of the girl took to drink. It appears that Sarti had taken her daughter for a trial trip, as they still do in Wales, and then sent her back to her family with a child beginning...."

Matalina appeared, dressed *en bonne bourgeoise* out of one of the great Paris stores. She carried an old-fashioned reticule with her monogram, M. M., in gold on it, and wore her large gold filigree earrings that suited her, but not in the daytime.

The street was drier since last night. There was no rain and everybody in Vivario seemed to be out of doors. It was market day. Bells were jangling ; a man was playing a concertina against another man who turned a barrel organ. The dancing bear had come on from Bocognano and the children were half pleased, half frightened. One little nervous, pink-pinafores child attracted Lelis very much and she tried to make friends with it.

“ *Andemmi, O zité!* ” In vain ; it cried and its black-robed mother rushed forward and clasped it to her so that it looked like a splash of blood all up her breast.

The road widened and they came to a shabby little square with the famous Fountain of Diana in the middle where all the men of Vivario lounged, apparently armed to the teeth, at eleven o'clock in the morning. Each man had his leathern *carchera* slung to his hip and a gun on his shoulder, all except the old Mayor of Vivario, who wore still the pointed cap and red scarf folded many times round his parched neck they had seen him in last night, unarmed. Matalina didn't speak to her husband as they passed him. Cecil said to his wife carelessly :

“ They are gossiping about us. Consulting how best to rob and murder us—saying that we must, of course, be millionaires to be able to afford to come here, travelling about for the sake of *agrément*. And see the little cobbler at his bench cobbling away at the boots of these lazy louts, giving them that splendid appetiser—watching somebody else work.”

“ *Le Scandale ! Le Scandale et La Politique, c'est le fléau de La Corse,* ” Matalina said, showing that she had understood. She was looking anxiously up a side alley where a little crowd appeared to be gathering. She cried to them suddenly over her shoulder : “ *Vite ! Vite ! Partons !* ” and began to walk very fast, jostling her friends Madame Buttafoce and Madame Ciaccaldi, cronies to whom she had just introduced her guests. Cecil, seeing no need for haste, stooped and picked up Madame Buttafoce's parcels for her, whispering to Lelis who helped him : “ She is furious with old Pinsuto for wasting his time at the fountain and getting into *rixes* ! ”

“ Why do you call him Pinsuto ? ”



“They all do. Because he wears that pointed cap. And also Barba-in-Orecchie—Andrew Beard in the Ears—because of the hair sprouting out of them.”

They had rejoined their hostess, who was now surrounded by a rabble of boys and girls, led by a stooping, ragged figure of a woman, wild-eyed, vociferating. . . .

Then Matalina turned to them: “*C’est la Folle! O mon Dieu! N’écoutez pas!*” she murmured, while the tall woman, poking her face right under the broad-brimmed hat which the honoured Madame Bonelli was wearing, shouted into her ear words of which Lelis only partly gathered the drift. She seemed to be abusing Matalina . . . calling her by her maiden name, taunting her with her long golden earrings . . . reviling her for entertaining—for taking the hand of the son of a dog. . . . Jacarone! Was there no one in her family who had the courage? . . . What of *le beau Regulus*? . . .

Cecil brushed the woman aside with what seemed a pat of his paw, like a bear, but without hurting her. He took Matalina’s arm while Lelis trotted behind, and hurried her into the churchyard by the little swing gate. Out of breath, red as flame, Matalina stood still awhile, crossing herself and murmuring, “*Ne faites pas attention, je vous en prie! C’est la Folle—La Folle de Vivario . . .*” as if the creature was an institution. Then, crossing herself once for all, she led them away from the gravel path among the more untended graves. She walked unevenly; her long black gown brushing the short grass that grew close up in a stiff fringe round the headstones, prodding as she went with the stick of her umbrella to find one that had evidently been grown over. She said to Lelis over her shoulder once:

“You must go to Bocognano or Sullacaro to find what you want. Here, not. Here in Vivario we are civilised. No murder has been committed here for over a hundred years and never will be again. . . . *Ah, la voici, la pierre funéraire! Lisez, Monsieur le Professeur!*” She spoke with an enchanting smile of fellowship—“And then you will believe what I tell you.”

Cecil scraped away the weeds that had nearly covered the block of stone and read with a ceremonious gravity which helped to calm Madame Bonelli, who was still quivering:

“*Maledictus qui percussit clam proximus et dicat omnis populus Amen.* Cursed be he that smites his neighbour and let all the people say Amen. It refers to a Vendetta of the seventeenth century, an awful,

memorable, terrible one that came to involve nearly every family in the island—made it into a shambles. People who had never spoken to each other, had not even a bowing acquaintance with each other, espoused a quarrel with which they had not conceivably anything to do, for the sake of pride and bloodthirstiness ; the murderer even paying someone else to do his dirty work for him.”

Cecil had really done nothing but abuse Corsica and Corsicans since he came. It was becoming a *tic* with him. Lelis did so wish he wouldn't. And always forgetting that Madame Bonelli had spent nearly a couple of years in England and understood a good deal more English than he supposed. She had grasped what he said, and for once his wife was not sorry that Cecil should receive a set-down.

“ *Jeune homme*, it is foolish to talk like that, *plûtôt offensant* for me that am a Corsican. Be sure that if one of us was to kill another for money his friends even would give him *rimbecco*, call him Taddun-âghin. . . . No, no, Cecc' Anton', murders are committed for the sake of punishing a crime that has been committed—for the honour of a family, or for friendship ! ”

She had called Cecil by his pet name to show she had forgiven him for insulting her. But the Corsican strain was uppermost. Lelis, looking at her clear firm brows and obstinate little nose, felt sure that if she had been a man she would have been up and at him. Cecil would be getting himself killed one of these days if he would not try to show more regard for the feelings of other people.

The zest, if there had been any, had gone out of the walk. They went on a little way down the road that curved so suddenly that they soon found themselves facing Vivario over the valley. Matalina then faintly suggested that they should turn round. Over there, where they were coming in Muracciole, the village, by the collection of sawmills, lived the Pancrazie, her husband's relations, *des gens* with whom she preferred to have little to do. They were *très avares—mêmes méchants*. They did not like her, but were just waiting for Andrea to die, as he must soon, for he was very aged, and then they would come into his money. Yes, their son was the Regulus Andrea had spoken of, *un assez brave garçon*. It was his mother, the *vieille sorcière* that Matalina did not like. But Regulus was *plûtôt bien* and very useful to his uncle, managing well his affairs for him since they would so soon be his own. *Tant pis !*

They turned back the way they had come.

"This afternoon," Lelis whispered to him, "we shall be able to go out alone now she has done us proud this morning. We will go *Pa li lozzi*—among the rocks and the wild places."

The road to the river where they decided to go lay past the Fountain of Diana, where Andrea Bonelli was standing among his fellow-citizens as usual. He did not even acknowledge them. This reminded Lelis of La Folle, and she begged her husband to tell her what the mad woman had said and why she had made that grab at Matalina's earrings.

"What she said was that she had better have had a gold ring than gold earrings. It was a neat gibe. If Matalina had been a man it was tantamount to giving her *rimbecco*. *Rimbeccare*—to insult you in public, to reproach you for not having avenged a relation—your father or your cousin or brother, or uncle as the case may be. It is the most awful thing you can do to anyone. It is horrible. I watched her nice bourgeoisie French face submerge and all the Italian congestions of hate and revengefulness flame up in it for one little moment."

"I only saw her get red."

She was silent, but as they passed under the railway arch to the river of her dreams—she had only heard it moaning—not seen it—Lelis said :

"It was about us, then?"

"I suppose so. What does it matter?"

"Cecil, don't you blame Uncle Horace at all?"

Cecil took no notice. He was off on one of the disquisitions that always interested but somehow offended her. Matalina and the Corsican complex generally she thought was beginning to get upon her nerves. . . .

"Poor Madame Bonelli is, of course, French on one side, but her mother appears to have been pure Corsican peasant. One of those Latin Valkyrie, War maidens, inciters to murder, who keep bloody shirts under their linen chests to remind them—every time they lift it to get a clean sheet—that they are forgetting to jog suitably and often enough their men-kind. I don't suppose you'd ever see it now done properly, but the scenes at the *ghirdato*—the wake—would have interested you. Howling and moaning and posturing, body-gashing and other Sadic rites in a darkened room, all the men sitting round armed to the teeth; cursing low to

the women's screeching. These are experts paid a regular fee to do it and give good value in horror. And, when the séance is over and the Voceratrice—or Principal Boy—is lying on the floor in a state of coma, wrapped in her veil, there's the *cunfortu'* to look forward to—a big supper set out in the next room to comfort them before they set off on their gun work. Vociferating is a thirsty job. . . .”

He went on though she said nothing and was in less sympathy with him than usual.

“ Ceremonial, you see, is good for the savage soul. Organised murder and full observance of its pleasant formalities acts as a derivative to the emotions, a sort of cupping or letting blood of the Ego, like women's easy tears. It is primarily a woman's occasion and they do it very well—as well as Drury Lane in the old days. The most striking *voceri* get published. Here is one I remember *très faisandée* : ‘ Oh, if I had a child—I would cut up my bloody apron—to make him a waistcoat.’ And I have heard tell of another Colomba who had a down on the curate who refused to toll the bell for her dead lover, reasonably enough perhaps, since the murderer was the curate's own brother. Listen. ‘ Oh, Matteo, my pheasant—I would that I had in a basket—The entrails of the curate—That I might take them with my teeth—And feel them with my hands. Excommunicating wretch of a curate—Dog who eats the sacraments—May'st thou burst with suffering.’ Pretty, isn't it ? ”

“ Cecil, how you do seem to hate these people ! ”

“ No. I hate nothing and I hope nothing hates me. I am just an observer.”

“ I'm not so sure,” said Lelis lightly. “ I believe old Pinsuto does. I've watched him watching you.”

They dropped into the Post Office, which was quite French, to send a letter to Emmeline and tell her what a success Corsica was, and then Lelis enticed Cecil into the scrub, which came nearly up to her chin.

“ Is this your famous *mâquis* ? It's just the ordinary white heather, only taller and better, that they sell in London streets for fourpence a spray and that I wanted to give you, darling, for many and many a long year when you simply wouldn't propose ! ”

“ Little ridiculous thing in a pigtail ! Well, you've got me now and got me here, and what more do you want ? ”

“ Kiss me here, in your old *mâquis* ! ”

Cecil embraced her willingly and then they found a waste

patch, where the heather had been burnt, and got easily down to the bottom of the bowl and started to walk along the river bed till they should strike the old Roman road they saw from their window, back to Vivario. It was just like some of the rivers of Yorkshire and Cumberland she had known, only more entangled, more interrupted with every sort of untrammelled growth, so that she was prevented from progressing by the leaps and bounds she used in England. They were, so Cecil informed her, a full hour doing a quarter of a mile, crawling, creeping from one stone to another since there was not room to take off for a jump or stand upright. The hat of Lelis was pulled off her head, her hair caught by straggling boughs that seemed like envious polyps seizing their prey—pale, ashen-grey arms and tentacles. . . . She would not give in or get up on to the bank so near ; she set her teeth, put her hat in her pocket, bound up her hair and got on with it, though she had a horrid feeling that the wood, thus spread over a floor of moving water, was bewitched. Cecil, who toiled after her, looked as bewildered as if he had been puzzling out some Greek text—which he would certainly have preferred doing. . . . He was annoyed at her superior progress and begged her several times to stop and wait for him.

“Poor big darling, it’s worse for you. You can’t possibly get through places I can in the same time. Let me!—it’s like the Lion and the Mouse.” She pushed a bough away for him . . . .

Then Cecil confessed to being nervous about *her*.

“I pick my way and keep my eyes down for fear they get put out by these twigs, and then the crackling of your feet stops and I get thinking that when I raise my eyes I shall perhaps see you before me caught by your hair in the fork of a bough. . . . Phyllis, hanging for Demophöon.”

Lelis fancied herself as the Greek nymph and delighted in a husband who could stand quite still on a slippery stone and quote Chaucer to her. How queer he was ! Such a mixture ! Then she would stop, console him with a tippy sort of kiss and resume the struggle, fighting her way inch by inch, pushing the woven branches aside, calculating which bough or sapling would give way soonest and which it would be wisest to skirt round ; taking into account the pools, some shallow and some deep, some foaming like light beer, others dank and deadly still, like the deep fat they do not begin to cook in till it exhibits a thin, devilish blue flame rising among the brown flakes of grease. What about Malmignatto,

the poisonous spider that Ô Jù had told her of? She would have given her life to cut it all and get out on the bank. . . .

"Cecil, it is like the dream I often have," she said when at last they struck the road that would lead them up to Vivario and their dinner. "I dream I am lost in a wood of little trees, with water under them, just like this, and in my dream I'm afraid and realise that I have to get out quick, for the wood is evil."

"Death at the end of the dream, perhaps? But not for you—yet!" he said softly. "The obstructionist maze that life is! . . . It was fighting, fighting all the way, and tree trunks flung in my path like mad. Do you know where that comes from? But here is undoubtedly a mild Purgatory which all of us at least have deserved in the shape of these ruts that the Roman chariots must have dug in the limestone when they were here. They are the exact span of the Roman chariot; just so the English carts are made to-day!"

"All right for the charioteers, but awfully hard for the feet."

"Oh, the feet of the ancients would be so caked with solid dirt that it would act like a sole on which they padded, softly—a mud plaster so hard to get off that kings, eager for votes, set to work to wash subjects' feet to show humility. I am thinking. . . ."

He thought, but all he said was: "Oh, darling, darling!" twice repeated, and he did not speak any more all the way home.

The kid was stickier than usual at dinner and the wine sourer. Matalina scolded Cecil for taking his wife into such places. Why choose *ce sale chemin* when there was a nice new road? *La petite* was exhausted and Matalina would send her to bed early.

Lelis was not so much exhausted as profoundly jarred. Her education was perhaps being taken too fast. Her brain was beginning to be a farrago of Browning parodies, poems of Chaucer, Roman chariots and dirty feet; classical allusions, poetical images and savage philosophy combined with a want of ordinary human sympathy verging at times on brutality.

Cecil! In the end it was! And Cecil it always would be. Cecil was the rough, hairy polyp that was strangling her charity, her faith, her decencies. He was not . . . quite . . . Fancy, she had never once been able to talk to him about the horse agonising there at the foot of their bedroom window! Emmeline had been right. He was like his father . . . cynical . . . heartless. . . .

Frankness itself she was. The poor child put to him when he

came up some questions she had framed whose answers, if he did answer them, would explain what was perplexing and agitating her.

But there was more. . . .

"It's the way my mind works," Cecil said. "My brain fastens on some things—not the sort of thing that yours would, though it is a very good mind, dear. . . . But"—he looked at her blearedly—"that isn't what you are put out with me for. . . . I could tell you. . . . Your dear little remarks only signify a Freudian circumlocution."

"Cecil, you irritate me when you will assume that you know what I am thinking of. You've done it before. . . ."

She was decidedly out of temper, a rose dashing its own petals away—down to the dank earth. . . .

He said gravely, drawing a strand of her hair through his fingers: "You are worrying about my father and my attitude towards—what he is supposed to have done."

She got off his knee and flung away to the window. Thence she spoke quietly:

"Cecil, how badly, exactly, did your father behave that time he was here with Mamma? What actual promise did he make?"

"Not badly at all. No promise." Cecil answered. "As a matter of fact this girl—the one he flirted with—married all right. Matalina is now the honoured wife of the honourable mayor of her native village."

"No, his girl didn't, Cecil. *His* girl was Chilina, who died."

A quality of Cecil's intensive sort of memory was that he remembered only what he intended to remember and put the rest severely away—threw it down the chute of memory and abandoned it in word and deed. He came up to her and kissed her. But it was not enough.

"Well, whichever one it was"—looking up with her peculiar pertinacity, as of a child determined to get to the bottom of the breaking of a doll or the loss of a toy—"if he was keen enough on her to want to induce Mamma to bring her back to England for him, why didn't he marry her when he got her there? Was it because she was an innkeeper's daughter?"

"Perhaps. Perhaps she was too elegant—used her knife too correctly? My father was rather a connoisseur in *la femme*—as I am." He kissed her again. "But in point of fact, either of the girls

was far superior to the woman he eventually did marry and who meant all along to get him as soon as she became a widow."

"But Mamma did seem to think that it was Chilina he ought to have made an honest woman of!"

"Don't, don't use that phrase. It has an entirely different connotation; Chilina was chaste."

"They don't seem to think so here. And once, I remember, long after they went back and Chilina would be called *passée*, there was a man who would have taken her but couldn't afford to marry unless he could sell a certain stone quarry he had on his hands. Mamma wrote at once to Uncle Horace and suggested his buying it because it would be a good opportunity of repairing the past—that was her very phrase."

"My dear child, let me tell you that there was actually nothing to repair. Aunt Margaret was only being, as usual, sentimental about things. This is the story as I see it. Those girls were just pining for a little life—not love—that they could get here at home by a humblish local marriage. Father had a *bon mouvement*—he had them sometimes—as well as an eye for beauty which, as he knew and everybody knows, is an asset which makes a woman perfectly independent if she is given half a chance. He gave it them. He suggested to Aunt Margaret that they should both—both, mind you—be taken for a jaunt on his yacht, and perhaps a little further, to Paris. And your mother had taken such a strong fancy to them by then, that or a pitifulness, that she proposed to the guardian to take them all the way back with her and give them a glimpse of the gay world, and she allowed them by way of exchange to pretend to teach you children French. It was a bargain between her and the girls. There was no question of my father at all. He'd somebody in Paris at that time himself. Anyway, he cast them all off at the Gare du Nord, loading them with all these Palais Royal ornaments and knick-knacks we see here, gold chains and necklaces and earrings, and then quietly went back to join his yacht. And do you suppose that old St. Brice, who is at least a gentleman, one of the oldest noblesse, would have come to England and flung his ægis over the whole affair if it hadn't been all right? Just a matter of money! They were a quite ordinary pair though you have chosen to throw a mantle of romance over them. . . . Weave what tales you like about them, but don't, for God's sake, try to implicate my father, who's got enough sins to his account not to need saddling with the seduction of a Corsican



peasant girl, as heartless and selfish as they make them I assure you. They were as glad to get away from this God-forsaken place as I shall be."

She became suddenly mercurial—pert. "Cecil dear, you've just come. Do try to enjoy it as I am doing, every moment of the day. To-morrow I am going to tackle *Ò Jù* again and get some more out of her. She's very much excited about the *Folle*. She says *Jacarone*, or *Jaccaccio*, means 'great dog,' a term of enormous contempt."

"Yes, all words ending in *accio* are."

"And you should just hear her grizzling! It gets me. Everything nearly is a portent. The crowing of a cock, a dog barking, meeting a troop of pigs—things one does all the time. And a light upon the housetops that you can't account for means the death of a person."

"Ah, the light upon the pillars of the hall of Odysseus when Athene had set on the slaughter. That's rather an interesting one. Any more?"

"What's most awfully frightening is a little drum beaten in the street by a spirit if anyone's death is really decreed. Then the dead themselves come to the house to make it known."

"I believe Julia wants to frighten you and make you want me to take you away."

"Oh, no. She likes us. The idea is that old *Barba-in-Orecchie* is going to die, and all those dreadful people on the other side of the river down there come in, and poor *Matalina* will have to lie on the straw."

"We'll take her back to England with us and she shall have charge of the linen cupboard. Darling, don't talk so much to Julia. She upsets you so that you'll be going on your knees for me to take you home. Till then . . ."

He sent her back to her own bed and went to sleep before she had crossed the room, with one look at the tattered flap which she always forgot to ask Julia to see to.

"*Andare co salute!*" *Matalina*, looking strangely frail and worn, bade her guests Godspeed as they started for one of their walks *pa li lozzi*, up to the *Sommet de la Paille* and at least as far as the Genoese tower. It was warm and they were clad as lightly as they could contrive to be. *Lelis* was bareheaded and swung her flat, local straw hat by the tassel which was its trimming.

“Do you notice,” she asked her husband, doing all the talking, for Cecil was always fairly taciturn going uphill—it taxed his chest so, “that when Matalina asked us if it was *Cola* or *Fala* to-day she seemed rather relieved when we said *Cola*. She doesn’t seem to approve of *Fala*, down through the village. I don’t believe she cares for us to go out alone at all.”

“What else can she do? She obviously hates walking herself, and I don’t see old Pinsuto leaving his sessions at the Fountain to escort us.”

Lelis said, “I don’t believe he ever washes or takes that red thing off his neck. He sleeps in his cap for fear he catches cold in his ears, Julia told me.”

“My dear, you expect too much of an old brigand—bandit—I beg his pardon. Sleeping in your clothes is a habit you acquire in the *mâquis*, when you may be surprised at any moment. And, as for the cap, there are doubtless twenty mortal murders on his crown, so no wonder he prefers to keep it covered up. He doesn’t like me and I don’t like him. . . . Look here, dear, that beastly Captain Regulus is coming to-night and he’ll offer to take you out. I can’t stand against the military, so perhaps this is the last walk you and I shall have in peace together and, my word, it is going to be heavenly! I wish that Venus’ car with the doves would drive across that azure field and carry me off to her Court. I always did believe she held it on a peak in Corsica and now I know it. And at her beautiful white feet, while the doves that bring her wait in attendance, sit the successful generals, the heroes that were her lovers, on little tufts of moss and asphodel. This is the very place. We will get as near as we can to the top and lie down and hope the car will come and take me.” He seemed to walk on in a dream. . . .

“More likely an eagle will mistake me for a kid in my white dress and snap me up. Julia says they do that.”

At first the road was almost reassuringly English-looking, hedges on each side, though not of quick-set or trimmed, but composed of laurustinus and arbutus and quite tall prickly pear. Now and again they came across a sickening, writhing mass in the middle of the way—caterpillars fallen in their bags, grown too heavy, from the boughs of the trees and mangled and crushed to death by their own weight. . . .

Higher and higher, till the little cortège of obsequious children that always accompanied the first stages of their walks crying, “*Sou! Sou! Inglese!*” and offering the tiniest of nosegays

made of wild flowers to the lady, which Lelis bought and lost immediately as one loses a pin, dropped off, tired of following them.

She began to experience again the awful feeling which had visited her the morning after their arrival, of having risen too high as it were for her own ballast, like a sort of escaped balloon.

They had not met a single human being since the children of Vivario had left them. The English road suddenly ended and they turned, in a flash, how they knew not, there was no gate, no worldly gradation, into regions *pa li lozzi* indeed, into one of the wild, unconfined places of the world where goats alone, with their nimble black feet, scrambled and skipped and fed. And high—so high that it hurt ! . . .

They stopped and stood attentive, a little way from each other. They were almost alienated from each other by the stately, airy grandeur that made them paltry and their great love inconsiderable. They were intoxicated with still, cold ether so that they hardly knew what they were or felt ; the air was so heady it seemed to make them want to leap from this half-mile or so of green sward that was actually the top of a huge mountain across to one of the other mountains, just as high, rising round them on all sides : the width of the ravine that divided, only half betrayed by the film walls of haze between.

Cecil said softly : “ You won’t believe me, but I was made for a hermit. I could live happy here—yes—for a hundred or so of years, and wait for Venus to fetch me.”

What did it matter—the vain and conceited things her Cecil said ? This was the pole, the hub of the universe. They were both, for the moment, supernal beings. Now to her, his pretty notion of the Goddess of Love holding her Court on a flowery mound surrounded by her *fidèles*, Paris, Hector, Tristan and all the great lovers of the world, seemed conceivable enough, only, disappointment here as on earth, she saw no profusion of spring flowers on a velvety sward breaking into violet and crocus flames, only the withered bells of asphodel, so dry that they positively tinkled under her little, softly-stepping foot. Since she had been in Corsica—and yet it was spring—she had never seen the pretty flowers her mother had told her of—it was either too early or too late for them, perhaps ? Where was the red and silver cytissus—the

common weed of Corsica—the goldy-brown lavender, the coronella and the cyclamen? Here was nothing but short, close herbage, cropped clean; dry and discoloured, like Sappho's love-ravaged cheek. And it was April!

They abandoned the idea of the Genoese tower, which they thought they faintly descried about half a mile away by the difference of colour—it was like a spaniel dog squatting against the rock—to the south.

“Don't let us bother—this is so beautiful!” Cecil said, and they sat down and began to consider the ways of cohorts of large, black, shiny beetles that Lelis did not mind, somehow, out here as one would in a London kitchen, for they looked so clean and so smart. Kneeling down the lovers watched the beetles endeavouring to make their own, and carry away to their families in the cleft of some tiny tussock of grass, the little black balls left by the ghosts. Before long both were absorbed in this amusement, each selecting a beetle and racing it. They wanted to see how soon their respective insects would, pushing it with their heads, try to negotiate a lump as large again as themselves up a long and weary road that represented a mountain, oft stumbling and forced to let go and begin all over again from the bottom.

“What on earth does the beetle want it for?” Lelis asked and, for once, Cecil, his restless ego lulled and pacified by the soft sweet, ambient sunlight that flowed in all round him, did not hasten to inform her. He lay on his side and she did too. She could half see, against the wire-drawn blue upon blue of the sky, the eagles circling. . . . They were foraging, like the beetles, for their daily bread, and so cruel over it, with horrible forked talons and hooded eyes! She feared to see one of the darling little kids, frisking and caracoling with that peculiar, irresponsible movement of theirs, all round them, seized by the slack of its back and borne uncomplaining to the obscene lair, away there in the pathless, trackless wastes of green.

The idea quite took possession of her. The rotundity of her own hip as she lay prone must be awfully conspicuous on this rounded height, as if offered actually for acceptance. Might not, she timorously asked Cecil, giggling but afraid—might not an eagle, espying her, imagine her to be his proper prey? Cecil laughingly replied that such would probably be her fate. No beautiful, amorous goddess stooping from a golden car for her, Lelis, just a modern English girl, a unit of no particular value, as Cecil had often

told her, who could practise no arts of any sort, do nothing but love! . . .

Cecil, that cruel, mysterious, fascinating genius, ill to do with, hysterical, babyish, weak in certain ways, was for the moment as happy as she had ever seen him. He was not even thinking of her except perhaps kindly, as a child whom he had taken for a walk. He adored children. Perhaps in his inward soul, tortuous but sincere, he was actually hoping to be carried off to her own domain by the goddess, wishing to have some such glorious ending to his life as might befall a poet—for a man must get tired always of observing, never feeling. . . . Only she knew his one regret, if the car of the Queen of Heaven were really to come, would be, not that he was leaving her, but that he would not be there to write about it, illumine the world with the glory, the style of his translation.

Cecil remained rapt and she became very violently bored . . . she so hated long silences. Cecil was drinking it in . . . enjoying it . . . but alone, selfishly. Surely their enjoyment of a scene like this should be mutual and his pleasure not cause him to neglect her so? She thought she would try to talk to him, to enter into communication with him somewhat on the lines of his own thoughts.

Poetry? . . .

"Cecil," she began, pettishly and, stung by her tiny lash, he turned over like a large obedient lamb, kissed her and turned back again, hiding his face, laying his golden crown on the pillow of his two arms.

"Cecil, last night Ò Jù, sang, or rather recited, to me part of of the very *vocero* that a famous local poetess had composed and sung herself at the funeral of her cousin and schoolfellow, Chilina Maymart."

"Oh, do let me . . ." Cecil began. Then, as he was kind and adored her, he raised his head from this reverie, coupled with the soothing study of the efforts of his beetle and said: "Yes. Can you recite it to me, dear?"

"Not quite all—some. Chili's funeral was a most wonderful affair, Ò Jù says. People came from miles round. Old Madame Pancrazie carried on dreadfully, threatening to dye herself with lampblack——"

—"Resinous wood they get somewhere down in Asco that will warm you and light you as well as dye you. Go on, dear. What was done at Chilina's funeral?"

“The women, Ò Jù and Matalina and Annadea Pancrazio,” Lelis began, delighted to be allowed to tell Cecil something, “first washed her face and braided her hair and folded her hands in front, all tied with ribands, and put a bouquet there and a bridal wreath on her head and her tiny little French shoes, that had cost a lot, on her feet. And then they laid her on a table in her shroud and lit tapers and the priests came, and after that they prayed all night. And at dawn they put her out, table and all, in the front of the house and everybody came to say good-bye——”

“I know. Old professionals, mopping and mowing like the witches in *Macbeth*—pointing at vacancy—pretending to smell blood—*Di Sangue Sentù!* . . .”

“It was not a murder, only a young girl that had died, so there was none of that. It was Chilina de Carcheto of Orrezza, her own cousin, who said the *vocero* for the Snowdrop of Vivario.”

“A very brown snowdrop, if I remember. Well, give me the poem—what you remember of it.”

“Ò Jù gave it me to read, but I’ve rather forgotten it. But Chilina de Carcheto’s idea was to assume that Chili was not really dead and that if you talked at her long enough you might persuade her to get up. They scolded her, even. . . . I can’t remember, but it was something like this: *O my cousin with the lovely hands*—They made a great deal of her pretty hands and her spinning and her skill in needlework. You know mother had dozens of pillow-cases that you’ve slept on embroidered with our initials that Chili made. Emmeline has some of them now. Well, they set to work to praise her and beg her to rise—and go to Carcheto and be married . . . think of that! But, of course, she doesn’t move, and the cousin is very cross with her—pretends to be. Look at her this morning, she says how cruel she has become! *Once a sugared almond—Now she is as bitter as gall* . . . and so on. But she never moves and they give it up and let her go. You’d think after all this praise they’d send her to Paradise, but no, she seems to have to pass through a sort of Hades place, for they say: *The place where Chili has to go—There the sun never shines—There they never light a fire. . . .*”

“Hades, as you say. Purgatory the Christians make it. Go on, dear. It’s very nice.”

“But why Purgatory for Chili? Was it because she was supposed to be wicked, or not quite good—something she had done to make God want to keep her in a half-way place till she had been just a

little punished? I hardly think they can have thought ill of her—in that way. For one verse was: *The young men of the neighbourhood—In her presence—Were like lighted torches—But full of reverence.* Cecil, don't you think that idea poetical?"

"Well, it's what our ancestors would have called Gothic. Barbarous ideas rough hewn—a mixture of passion and superstition—like that Norse stuff I hate. The terrible rugged Sagas! . . . Even recited in your pretty little voice it is, to me, out of keeping with the clearness and distinction of this mountain top."

"But, Cecil, my dear, don't you see the pathos—the feeling in it?"

"I don't value feeling unless subordinated to purposes of art."

Lelis, her wits cleared and freshened by the inspiring air, her moral sense, that was, after all, founded so surely on the teaching of the years of her orphan tutelage, strongly alert, stood up to him.

"But this does. I know what you mean. You've taught me to think, Cecil, and it comes back on you. All this that we have somehow got into, till I can hardly sleep at night for thinking of it, is just like a story, and a very sad one as I see it, and it's one of which our family—we are all De La Gardes, remember, and fled from our native country for our Faith once, so we ought to be moral—we are all to blame. It *was* a crime, what Uncle Horace did, and my mother helped him to—let us call it transplanting these girls from their home."

"You may call it a rape if you like. A cruel eagle, swooping down on a young kidlet—two young kidlets—and flying off with them to his lair for the quite ordinary purpose of eating them. Jupiter, in the form of an old, stoutish millionaire with a well-appointed yacht—a pleasanter mode of conveyance, surely, than a bull's back—taking off two complaisant Europas, with a chaperon thrown in, all the way to England. There's nothing to feel guilty about, my darling. They were, as far as I can see, entirely mean, heartless and frivolous; they just loved money and comfort and fine clothes and nice food, and there was going to be plenty of that and the chance of a good marriage into the bargain. Believe me, they were delighted to be raped."

"Ah, but not to be sent back again, disgraced, without a wedding ring between them, only a few old wages of sin in the shape of a bag with a gold monogram and a pair of earrings *en toc*. I've had them in my hand and they're not real. And what's

worse, a set of new, luxurious habits that they'd never have a chance of gratifying without him, and then off he went and married and they were returned to their mother, like lost luggage that has been wandering for a year! I think that smart salon is pathetic! The broken-hearted mother furnishing apartments for her returned prodigals—regardless! Doing what she could to find them husbands, and Uncle Horace didn't even help by buying the stone quarry at Vezzani that would have made it possible, for one of them at least. They must have seemed to their mother like changelings when they came back, soured and disappointed—not married, which is all that sort of person thinks of. The mother said mildly in a letter to Mamma that they were *plûtôt changées* and that *les pauvrettes* could no longer put up with their poor home and their shabby working mother, and turned against the food that was all she could afford to give them. I believe it was what killed her; she only lived to forty-eight and she was a fine, healthy woman, Sir Frederick said. And they—they were practically dead too. Rather hard, don't you think, to be dead at twenty-four and, what is worse, ill thought of, so that when Chili died even her best friends thought she was not fit for Heaven—only Purgatory! Cecil, you *must* feel."

"You *shall* feel!" Cecil said, mimicking her, "—Father's sins, too!" He spoke still from under his crossed arms, watching a beetle. . . . "Well, I suppose I shall be the one to suffer for them. I have always, all my life, suffered for the faults or aberrations of others. This crocky chest of mine—if my father hadn't been the sort of man you make him out to be, I suppose I should have escaped the doom of bronchitis—that'll finish me."

He turned his face to her. "Darling, that was quite a neat tirade of yours—you're going to grow into a wonderful woman! Yes, that's a compensation: I've got you and you're enough to make up for everything I've missed, and nearly as much as I deserve. . . . Darling, I can say that I came to this place to please you and gave you the chance of scolding me here, on the very Hill of Venus! I have been patient. Count that to me, dear."

He got up heavily. "I'm so tired of that beetle. He keeps on slippery-sliding down and down and down again—like me. He'll never do it—nor shall I!"

He was alluding to his writing, Lelis knew, rather above people's heads. He got up. He looked rather flushed, as if the blood had gone to his head. . . .



But he loved her. For on the top of this lonely peak, with everything falling away, as it were, all round, he embraced her with a fervour she had never before noticed in him. He was changed. . . . A male Undine, perhaps . . . ?

Reeling almost, with their mutual violence, they stood for a moment staring at and gloating on each other. . . .

Presently, hand in hand, they walked to one of the edges of the half-mile or so of level green sward that Cecil insisted on calling the Hill of Venus, and looked across, their eyes bleared by emotion, at the peak opposite, whose crown was on a level with their eyes grown practised in grandeurs of scale so that they were aware that there might be nearly a mile between the two terrific precipices that the Gravona, in its gorge divided.

"The mountains are like animals dressed up in green *pilone*," she said in a voice that trembled, huddling against him in the sudden fear that beset her lest she or he should fall off the end of the world. She was a little light-headed, bewildered and broken by the violence of their coming together, the strength and fervidness of her husband's embrace—so like a parting one. All that had gone before was nothing ; in their union that had lasted for thirty days she had never known such perfect bliss and absolute communion. How she was going to love him ! A man who could kiss her like that !

Though Cecil appeared fairly calm, stoical as ever, she knew that he was not calm. He began to talk, exaggerating a little more than usual. Statistics to cover emotion ! How like him !

"That green mantle that you speak of is just the tufted tops over—old, old trees—over four hundred years old, some of them, on the Torre di Vizza-Vona, red pines, with their trunks kept raw by the pushing and shoving of battalions of younger ones, growing against each other, in the endeavour to get up to the sunlight, every tree pushing and thrusting at every other tree, getting entwined in hideous embraces, foes for life or locked in death. You've seen Landseer's brutal picture of the two dying stags with horns intertwisted. . . . And on the top it looks just like a calm green sea without waves, for all the commotion, like a heavy ground swell at sea, that goes on underneath continually, livelier, fiercer, spring by spring as now. There's not room for any large animal to rove in it or for a man to stand upright ; some bough would intercept and strangle him in a moment's march. It's left to the trees to fight it out. I dare wager that there's not a habitation, a hut,

not a human being within a dozen miles or so, except behind us on the Vivario side."

"What about a shelter for bandits?"

"It would be inconvenient for a bandit to hide himself there, even if he could manage to breathe because he couldn't see anyone coming."

"No one could get to *him*, then," said Lelis, who was recovering.

And, as she spoke, a thin, breathing spiral of blue smoke out of the shoulder of the mountain opposite peered courageously, crept out slowly, gathering strength gradually. . . . They stood together, petrified, she : he like one surveying an apparition that boded no good. . . . She was outraged, averse, maddened by the sudden publicity.

"Who? Who?" she moaned. "There is someone there! You liar, Cecil! We weren't alone. . . . They've seen us!"

Cecil, like a mere man in the street, caught hold of her and maintained her stoically lest she fell. Yet he was bewildered by her agony, deafened by her shrill, ugly scream, her useless cry for help—against him—that faded away in the unregarding silence just as the symbolic burst of smoke that had upset her so, dissipated itself on the wide, free air.

They were not done with it. His quiet eyes and her terrified ones watched more smoke come . . . heartier . . . firmer . . . more opaque . . . till at last it was a column that belched fire, a sturdy yellow flame flashing out of its pale purple aura. . . .

"Take me away, Cecil. Quick! You must run. . . ."

He obeyed her.

Lelis got over her fright when they descended the mountain, but Cecil, quiet but secretly flustered, was not happy for the rest of the day. He was put out as well by what Madame Bonelli told them at lunch, a meal where, for once, old Barba-in-Orecchie, still retained by his club at the Fountain of Diana, was not present. Lelis ate better without the sight of his red twisted neckcloth and greasy cap, which, she said, always deprived her of appetite.

Matalina said that her husband *avait des affaires*—some legal business which had cropped up suddenly and which was rather too much for him *à son âge*. He had sent a telegram to his nephew, Regulus, who happened to be staying with *les siens* at Muracciole, to come over at once and assist him.

Cecil said, to say something :

“ I shall show him my gun and tell him all about the moufflon I have *not* shot.”

This was because he was rather hurt with Matalina for what she had said when they told her about the smoke coming out of the hill. Unable to gather from the vague descriptions of Lelis, in which Cecil did not help at all, of the locality of the smoke burst she had hinted that perhaps Monsieur had deceived himself about the thickness of the trees— that the *calibre des arbres* varied a good deal and that there were clearings, perhaps, in the mountain haze not distinguished very well? . . .

She called him, to-day, *Monsieur*, Lelis noticed, instead of Cecc' Anton', or N'ton, to which further pitch of intimacy she had risen. Indeed Matalina appeared queerish altogether ; sad, grave, *rentrée*.

She did not rise to it at all when Cecil, as a result of his wife's lecture, did his best to be nice to her and wantonly suggested that she should pack her things and come back with them to England on a visit.

“ *Puaretta !* ” she said once for no apparent reason, looking at Lelis. It was a sort of turning of the tables. Mrs. Cecil De la Garde and the invalid wife of an inconsiderable Corsican Mayor ! Why should Matalina commiserate her, Lelis thought ? And after lunch, when Cecil had gone to his room to write, but really to lie down, she slipped out to the kitchen, told Julia and asked her bluntly why Madame had pitied her.

“ You are very young,” Julia said, “ and he—he is older, and it is not natural. . . . *Perdona.*”

Lelis then felt the necessity to convince this old servant, a woman she would never see again, for really she didn't much like being here, of her happiness with Cecil, his suitability, his goodness, how her very life depended on him and how, some day, she hoped to have a little child.

“ *Pour le venger,*” the old woman said, as if in spite of herself. Then : “ Ah, it will never end.”

It never could, she said. Men were so savage. Ah, why had not Cecc' Anton' been born a Corsican, and then Lelis would have had to live in Vivario and old Julia would have held her baby in her arms. . . . She wished that Lelis would not go these long walks, so far away from the village. . . . The other day, when she came up from the river, she had looked as if she had met a ghost. It was

really not safe. Would Lelis give the old woman a promise? . . .

"But, if my husband wills it?" the young wife answered.

"Then if Madame cannot promise I must give Madame a charm that I got from the *strega*, Maria of Calamiccia last Christmas Eve—very powerful. I got it then—it is well always to have a charm against *la mala morte*. *Saluté a noi!* Or the bite of the Malmignatto that crawls in the heather down in the valley. Could Madame persuade Cecc' Anton' to wear it?"

Lelis was sure she couldn't persuade her husband to wear anything in that line. She asked Julia what had upset Madame Bonelli at lunch and why was old Monsieur Bonelli sending for his nephew?

"*Ce n'est rien!*" the old woman answered contemptuously. "Une rixe at the Fountain."

"I knew it," said Lelis.

"It is true Pietro Nungiola insulted Bonelli, but what can he do? He is so old."

"Pietro Nungiola gave him *rimbecco*, eh?" She was afraid, after she had blurted this out, that she had hurt Julia's Corsican susceptibilities, but Julia nodded, adding: "It is not for him, *ce vieux!*"

The dinner which ensued was nearly as dull and disagreeable as Cecil predicted it would be. Matalina had the migraine and did not exert herself to distribute the honours of the conversation between the two young men, as her position as hostess might have enabled her to do. Monsieur le Capitaine Regulus Pancrazio was pert and pedantic and contradicted Cecil, herself and his aunt indiscriminately, as inferior persons will, when justified by facts in doing so. Cecil's scrupulous politeness scarcely masked his intolerance that flashed out now and then in a scholastic but insinuating insolence contemptuously adapted to the understanding of the other.

Lelis tried her best. When Matalina led them all back into the warmly coloured but chilly salon, Lelis asked them if they would like her to dance for them. She was a pupil of the most famous ballet-master of the day and she knew that Cecil, at least, loved to see her do it.

The table was moved on one side and she performed. The obvious and freely expressed admiration of Regulus Pancrazio aggravated Cecil's ill temper. She could see that he even resented

the deep, long gaze, the almost insane consideration which old Andrea from his chair near the fireplace gave to the queer postures and gestures assumed one after another, by the beautiful lithe young woman, of which in all his long life he had probably never seen the like. Lelis did not mind his senile stare. She liked Andrea better than she had ever liked him before and, as for Captain Regulus, she was used to the gambollings of immature puppies of any nationality round women who were not for them. Presently, graceful even in her calculated gestures of weariness, she dropped down beside the young man on the blue and pink beaded sofa uncovered for the occasion, and set to work to give him a chance to placate her particular owner. He must know *something* about Corsica that Cecil didn't know. She framed her questions with a view to gaining information that might somehow or other be of use to Cecil, though not for the Life of Cromwell, of which he was by way of writing a chapter every morning, dictating it to her.

But Cecil frowned when she flightily asked Regulus what he thought about the national habit and its bearing on Corsican politics. The young Corsican answered coldly, as indeed all of them did, that it existed no longer. Changing the subject very obviously he asked Madame what monuments she had seen—the Birthplace at Ajaccio—the house of Gaffori—had his aunt shown her L'Inzecca?

“L'Inzecca?” Matalina murmured in a way that excited Lelis, “L'Inzecca!” as if it were somewhere far away and yet important—the resort of some terrible form of dragon which it was almost death to meet; “I have never been there myself. *C'est plutôt terrifiant.*”

Her nephew interrupted her smartly.

“*Du tout ! C'est magnifique.* I see that I must myself take Madame De La Garde there, some day in my new *carriole.*”

And Lelis found herself engaged to go with him, some day—Cecil also, of course, or so she took it. She thought that Cecil really ought to see this famous place, the dreadfully deep and long defile over three kilos in length, so Regulus said, through which Fium' Orbe, the Blind River, flows sightless and dumb till it comes to Kyrie and Christeleison guarding Ghisone, on the side of Monte Calvi. Then, irritated by obstruction, it tosses its churned up rage in foam to the very tops of the twin peaks, and splashing on the road cut in the limestone half-way down that is propped on wooden balks, the slats projecting a good yard or so over the river,

so that walking along and looking down one can see the water below.

“ *Bien, Madame, c'est convenu.* I return the day after to-morrow to take you there.”

Matalin interposed : “ No, Regulus, it is not safe. The parapet is, I hear, broken in three places. It was never mended properly where the cart and horses of Pe' Ciaccaldi went over last year. He had got the trees too far across and they swung out at the turn and brushed away the wall. He was drowned.”

“ The fool was sitting swinging his legs out over the stream as they will do. They are careless like that and, of course—— ” A shrug, “ *Cela arrive quelque fois.* ”

“ *Même souvent !* ” Matalina said determinedly. “ Do not seek to persuade her, Regulus. I forbid it.”

“ But,” said Lelis, “ we shan't have an absurd load of tree trunks and be sitting on the end of them swinging our legs out, so we shall be all right, I shall engage Monsieur to drive very carefully.”

“ Madame, you have courage ! ” old Barba-in-Orecchie said suddenly, looking up from his place. She was quick to see the admiration in the glance he gave her, like a fire that flickers long and searchingly before it goes out. Poor old boy ! He looked ill, she thought, and full of good-will to them all. She bade Cecil go up and fetch his gun and show it to the Captain.

She fetched it. Cecil seemed disinclined to show the gun or perhaps merely disinclined to move.

“ *Eh, bien, Monsieur,* ” Regulus said, when he was told the price Cecil had paid for his gun, “ *eh bien, vous ne l'avez pas volé.* That old man, Saverio—I know him—he knew what he was about. *Inglesi ? Cheat them !* is his motto. This weapon is no good for shooting game, which I presume was Monsieur's purpose in buying it ? And there is no moufflon nearer than Asco, and perhaps not there—very scarce. I counsel you to ask Dominique Saverio to refund you the money when you pass again through Ajaccio on the return journey.”

He sat with his legs jauntily crossed by the round table on which the light of the lamp reached hardly as far as the edge, fingering the new gun that he had very deliberately laid down on it. Occasional gleams from the fire played fitfully on the shiny barrel and on the Captain's polished, yellow, rather Napoleonic face, the nose and profile strongly set out in the fairly constant flickering of the flame and the tall shadows grouped all round waiting to

fall in. So Lelis oftenest saw his side face as he talked although he was looking at her—very much looking at her. He was trying to get up a flirtation and Cecil thought so too, for he was sitting all scrunched up, his arms folded tightly across his chest as he always wore them when something which good breeding prevented him from openly resenting occurred to vex him. He was not going to let this little military grasshopper think that he was afraid of his wife with him !

Lelis thought the gun, that cruel, slim, slinking thing, not unlike the Captain in his tightly buttoned, well-made uniform. He was the first Corsican she had seen who was not wearing the arcana of death at his side. Perhaps it was Corsican manners to unsling your cartridge belt in the evenings—or, he had a knife !

No ! She and Cecil would *not* go with him in his carriage to L'Inzecca. A lunge with it ! . . .

Andrea seemed deeply interested in Cecil's acquisition. "*Calibre très étroit,*" he kept repeating in the course of his mutterings that no one seemed to take any notice of.

The Captain went on talking, glaring slyly at her and fingering the weapon lovingly the while. The young girl, distressed by his egregious admiration, was also obsessed by an absurd notion that there was some sort of sympathy between Cecil and his new gun. For every time the young officer's long, thin hand, tipped with well-kept nails, slid adroitly down the length of the *étroit calibre* and back again, her husband's body seemed to wince as if someone touched, somewhere on it, a secret sore. It was nerves. Poor Cecil was not used to firearms. He was no sportsman and that made him thoughtful about the more serious uses that guns might be put to besides the providence of game for the table. He should not be worried. She said, hardly prettily and quite peremptorily, to the Captain, "Give it me !" and then, to cover her *brusquerie*, set to work to play the baby. With her fair hair and blue eyes she could, *à ravir*. Setting the heavy gun down on the table with a bit of a clatter she covered it with one hand, looking by stealth to see if Cecil minded *her* touching it. . . . He did not seem to.

The Captain, on the other side of the table, was looking at Cecil too and his sneer for Cecil and his possessive eyes for her maddened the young bride. She pretended she could not master the trick of opening the gun so as to look in at the sort of hinge where it parted asunder in the middle. Both men smiled at her efforts. Of course, she knew how to open it ! But she was irritated

by them. She would be silly—sillier if she chose—and she peered elfishly up the barrel as if it was an opera glass.

“ It just fits——”

“ —*les beaux yeux de ma mie*,” was the Captain’s offensive interjection. She went on, to cover his insolence, not worth resenting, feeling that she had better not work Cecil up to be rude to him—

“ Like the rim of a lorgnon, isn’t it, Matalina ? *Drôle de lognon* for a lady, the barrel of a gun ! ”

“ There have been men, Madame,” the young man said gravely, “ who have spent the best part of their lives looking down the barrel of a gun—*braqué* on them for seven years, like Pe’ Juan Vescovato—you have heard of him ?—and it got him at last.”

“ Yes, I know that story——” Lelis began, but Madame Bonelli interrupted :

“ *Laissez donc*, Regulus. I don’t like it. You are trying to frighten the child and give her *des cauchemars*.”

“ Yes, I think I will go to bed,” Lelis, hearing herself called a child, said piteously. A long shiver went all down her body. She put a finger on the gun of which she was now desperately afraid with the unselfish idea of carrying it upstairs with her. But Cecil made a face at her. Of course it was too heavy. He must bring it.

She always did go first, as a matter of fact. She looked shy and adorable. The young man hastened to escort her to the door and open it for her. A rush of cold air met her ; then a man’s hot breath. . . . She escaped across the *salle*, holding her hand to her face.

In their room the window was open and the wind was making the canvas ceiling wave and billow. There seemed a perfect hurricane up in the place above. It was full of flapping, empty noises. Cecil’s hideous, uncanny Velarium—harbouring not butterflies but bats, not yellow but dun, blotched and pock-marked with flies’ feet, not really dirty but seeming so—weighed upon her as if Hell, that she deserved for her first infidelity, instead of Heaven was falling over her head, She was but a sinner. She wished Cecil would be quick and come. He couldn’t be very happy down there ?

All Cecil said when he did come was, “ Hullo ! The wind seems to be getting up ? And the Captain is coming back to-morrow. Two things I hate ! ”

She kept to her own bed this night and Cecil went to sleep at once, as he always did when he was cross. It had that effect on



him and he woke always from these hard-bitten sleeps as if nothing had happened. But she lay listening to the sound of talking that came from the *salle à manger*. Old Andrea seemed to have wakened up. She fancied it was his voice predominating :

“ *Je saurai bien . . . m'arranger . . . avec . . . Un tel . . .* ”

Or was that the hateful Regulus speaking? It was no use trying to make out. Then she remembered that Cecil hadn't brought up his gun after all, and perhaps the Captain, who so loved it, might be arranging to carry it off? She did not choose to risk his seeing her in her attractive undress even if she had dared to go across the *salle* to the salon and fetch it.

The men's voices, now raised, now grumbling, showed they were still at it. . . . *Une rixe*? They were always having *rixes*, these people! But not, at any rate, a *rixé snaglante*, for uncle and nephew were obviously in the best of relations.

The voices suddenly ceased, and she was so tired that the wind did not keep her awake. She slept. Julia, when she came in with their breakfasts in the morning, remarked :

“ *Soyez content. He is gone.* ”

Lelis worried a little over the *contentement* that she was supposed to have. Had Julia seen? In her pink *douillet* peignoir affronting the grey of a cold and windy morning she pursued Julia into the kitchen where she stooped over the tall pot propped on a brazier in which she seemed to do all her cooking, though Madame used a smart Belgian stove. Lelis sat down on the lowest rung of the ladder in the corner, with her peignoir grouped in folds under her to keep the cold away, and began :

“ *Ô Jù, tell me something.* ”

Julia, melting some bacon in some butter, the foundation of her stew that was to make Cecil rather ill—it could not be helped, they were guests—looked up, and it may have been the result of stooping over the brazier, but her parchment cheeks were almost pink and she looked happy. Strange, thought Lelis, that anyone should look happy in this wild, cold, windy, out-of-the-world place where modern beastliness yet had made its way. The Capitaine had tried to kiss her in the passage last night, as she left the room, and had partially succeeded in buffeting her cheek and she had not yet dared to tell Cecil and, of course, she would never think of telling Matalina for decency's sake. But that was why she had been short with Cecil last night, because she did not like to let him kiss her so soon without knowing, and as she had

given no reason, Cecil now was cross and asleep. She thought she would stop with old Julia for a bit and leave Cecil to miss her when he woke—again. Julia was, on the whole, the person she liked best here. She asked her boldly what had been done about the *rix* at the Fountain? Was it settled?

Julia got up, leaving her stew simmering on the brazier thing, and answered Lelis as one recalled from thoughts of a pleasant solution of a difficulty to the rehearsing and necessary details of it.

“Regulus is gone to Muracciole to see his mother, who is still alive. He told Andrea before he left to think no more about it, and that if Pietro Nungiola repeated his words, *qu’il aurait affaire à lui et qu’il saurait bien s’arranger d’un tel. . . .*”

The words she had heard through the wall!

Julia continued: “All will be well.” She made the sign of the Cross. “Everything has now arranged itself. Madame knows now, and I too know, for Madame has condescended to tell me. Chili herself came to the bedside of Madame in the night and said: “*O ma sœur chérie*, lament for me no more, for I now have the certainty that I shall be among the Blessed.” Madame had not answered though her heart bled and her body was nearly torn asunder, for everyone knows that if you answer a spirit you die. “*Mais Madame en est tout reconfortée*, this morning, and she is going early to the church to put flowers on the grave of Chilina, which duty she had neglected lately, and to pray *longuement* for the young Madame and her *maritu* and for the *fiddola* to come.”

Lelis blushed, even before the old woman, who went on eagerly:

“And, Madame, when you leave us, as this tells me you soon will”—she had in her hand what appeared to be the bone of some animal, warm, smooth and oily, on which she pretended to be able to foretell the future—“the left shoulder-blade, Madame, for the right deceives. And so, Madame, when you go back to your own country you will tell your friends and relations that we Corsicans are *des braves gens* who forgive their enemies and pray for them.”

Lelis took very little notice of Julia’s recommendation. She was aghast at what Chilina’s ghost had revealed in her speech to her sister, or rather, their idea of her present circumstances. So then, her own people, her sister and her nurse, still imagined Chilina weeping and waiting in Purgatory for her sin. And the words, full of the ancient, ineluctable passion of her race with

which old Julia, returning to her stew, dismissed her were like a smouldering menace, a fire that a little stoking would lash and cause to flare up again.

Julia spoke : “ *Qui se venge se purifie mais, aussi, je veux bien croire,* he who knows how to forgive. Madame says that and that now Andrea will go straight to Paradise when he dies. . . . Go out now, *pa li lozzi*—to the river—where you will.”

Matalina sent them a message to say she feared she had caught a cold in church that morning but hoped she would be well enough to see them later, and would they *faire une belle promenade*.

They obeyed her listlessly. They had been in the island exactly five days and already its wild charm had worn off : its horror grown on them. Lelis could not be persuaded by Cecil, who hated going uphill, to go down again to the river, dark at noonday, its encumbered bed crossed and crossed again with malign growth of trees. She would go any way except there or past the Fountain ; she could not bear the sight of the old man standing there abusing people, making mischief, getting himself insulted. . . . So they wandered up the English-looking road, not meaning to go very far because it was windy. Lelis tried to take an interest in the black kids gambolling up and down the funny little gardens made up on rows of terraces without walls, in which the villagers carried on a sort of intensive cultivation. She made incursions on them as usual with a view to tempting some little black kid or other to come and speak to her. But it annoyed Cecil, this morning.

“ You must not,” he said. “ It upsets me, if you don’t mind. . . . You don’t understand these people a bit for all your confabs with that disgusting old Julia. Some one of them might shoot you at sight, interfering with their gardens . . . treading down the soil . . . you really can’t behave here as if you were at home.”

The lingering intonation he laid on the last two words struck her. She returned demurely to the path and put her hand in his:

“ Cecil, I sometimes wonder if you like being here—much? . . . Do you do it for me? ”

“ Of course I do, darling, and that’s doing it for myself. But I own that I see red here—not in the ordinary sense of the term but literally ! . . . I detest the universal note of red that is everywhere ! In the children’s frocks—that dreadful crude hot pink, like blood newly spilled. In the chestnuts, old, caked on, but live—crying for revenge——”

“Or like the man’s bloody shirt in the lid of the box that is left to remind them.”

“You delight in the *macabre*, darling, as an intelligent school-mistress might,” Cecil said, righting himself. “I sometimes think you go out of your way to give yourself a *frisson*. You talk of the poor horse standing in the straw under the balcony and then say, quite seriously, that you have to lean out on purpose to see it!”

“Even if I don’t look out I know it’s there all the time, and that comes to the same thing. Lifting its poor front leg—and all those patches on its back that mean sores and that get larger and larger every day. Its bones seem to be coming out of its skin. I asked Matalina, and she says it belongs to the Buttafoce and has nothing to do with her. . . .”

“Poor brute! It’s got no soul—like its masters. They’ve no souls and no nerves—and no smelling-bottles! Pouah!”

He drew a long breath as they passed the usual heap of writhing caterpillars on the road:

“But, what I really mean is, although you are kind-hearted and feel for animals, you have no projective imagination. Now I—I have heard so much of it all lately—your Vendetta stunt and all—that I swear I never go out these days without feeling a knife in my back!”

“Oh, Cecil!”

“Yes. It’s perhaps indigestion. I’m always faintish with that eternal, sticky, greasy kid we have to eat and those awful home-made wines——”

“But you like the honey, Cecil?”

“—That the poor thing gets for us all the way from Ajaccio. We are putting her, you know, to a great deal of expense—one way and another. I fancy they live much more simply when they are alone.”

“Cecil—do you think—that we are perhaps overstaying our welcome?”

“I think she would be rather relieved if we begin to talk about going, one of these days, soon.”

Lelis’s very chancy hat blew away and Cecil, rather lumberingly, retrieved it. As he handed it to her he saw she was crying.

“I *hate* wind,” she murmured unconvincingly.

“Darling, I see I must take you away. This place has got on your nerves. When could we be ready?”

"To-morrow," she said, like a child that is much comforted.

"If we went early, we might stop and see Corte—go the other way by Les Îles Rousses."

"We can't get away from the red, you see," she said, "Les Îles Sanguinaires ! Is it shorter ?"

"Yes, a little, and a much better passage. Not so short as Leghorn, of course, but I rather want to see Corte."

"All right. I don't care much about Corte, but you say it's a better passage——"

"Yes, for you don't have to go round Cap Corso."

Her face was like April. "I say ! I wonder how much I ought to give Julia ? She isn't at all a common servant and has told me a lot I wanted to know. . . ."

"Thoroughly disturbed you, the old witch !"

"She's given me a charm—a sort of dull glowing stone, like an alexandrite that shines green by day and red at night. It's quite a good ring, Cecil. I can tell. Like some of those Uncle Horace had in his collection. She made me promise not to show it you till we are home again."

"I expect my father gave it to Chilina, or she took it ! All right ! We'll sell it at once. Oh, and give Julia a five-pound note. They always like money best."

"Cecil, *you'll* tell them, won't you ?" Lelis begged as they turned to go downhill. It was getting rather dark and the noise of the Gravona, moaning and chiding, came to them rather clearly.

"I'm afraid the wind is getting up," she said.

"Then we will wait. Be guided by circumstances. Darling, I can't tell you how glad I am we've decided to go."

"Darling, promise me you won't suddenly want to stop a night in Corte, or something ?"

"Not I," he said sturdily.

"For I've been thinking," she asserted with violence, "that I'd rather risk being sick till I died of it than stop another night in this island. I'd have liked, if there was any sort of boat train, to take it and get off to-night before dinner."

"I'm afraid there is no way," he said. "But still, going in the morning early you will at least miss the Capitaine, who is coming back at noon to complete your subjugation and, I confess, that will please me. Shall you mind ?"

"I never want to see his snub face again," she said sternly.

When she got home to England she would tell Cecil what the Captain had done.

"I see you have taken Corsica and everything it produces *en aversion*," Cecil said. "And I—I should hate to leave even my bones with them."

He lay down on his bed—he always said he could think better like that—and while she stood, peering low into the glass that was so inconvenient, to dress her hair, poured forth softly without bitterness a little litany of complaints, of arraignments of Fate as one to whom she destines and has always destined the worst.

"Corsica! A land of difficulties, stress and pain. Blood is the least of it. That walk in the forest river bed, like the wood in Dante! Your prevailing dream of striving . . . Freudian anxiety. . . ."

He resumed. "And this is the end of it all! A few talks and walks and to put people against us! The walks that frighten you and the meals that give me indigestion and black thoughts. We have gained more than a little aversion. . . . It is a fact that we have not gone down here. There is something wrong."

He turned like a shruggish child and laid his face in his hands. She flew to him.

"Cecil, darling—it is indigestion. Kiss me! Thank God we are going!"

Cecil was psychic. She felt he was right. Madame Bonelli made the merest polite opposition to their going! That it was, of course, windy. Though the English did not mind these crossings as much as the French. On the other hand, it might get worse, so they would be lucky to get away before. She herself had *attrapé un rhume*, Lelis knew, and sat wrapped up in her white *châle d'Inde* that Sir Frederick Barton had given her. She said she should never cross the Manche again. Their invitation, with which they had hoped to placate her, thus was quenched at the very beginning. It was old Pinsuto who showed perturbation. Lelis had not known he was such an excitable old fellow! He said, part in patois that his wife translated into French for him, with a peremptoriness that only might have been an effort at politeness, that he wished them to stop till his nephew came back. Lelis shook her pretty head at him—she did not hate him so much now that she was going to see the last of him so soon, he was quite a picturesque figure—and said that they must be a deal of trouble to Matalina. Matalina, faintly protesting, did not accede to his request that she should beg Madame Lelis to reconsider her decision. Andrea, getting up,

straightening his back and walking up and down the little room, gave his wife a nasty look out of the eyes where all the go that was left to him resided. He bullied her, of course; he exercised a patriarchal power over this educated woman who knew so much more of the decencies of life than he did, having benefited by having lived nearly two years in the heart of London civilisation. Presently, wearied out, Andrea sat down again but continued to whine out maxims—observations on the duties of Corsican hospitality as he saw them, the dangers of travelling *par ce vent*. . . . It was not safe. He himself had never crossed the sea, but he knew it was no place for a woman in a storm.

They said good-night and left the maniacal old creature in a dumb rage. Matalina would have her work cut out to soothe him. He did not want them to stay really—it was only self-will and temper at being thwarted that made his cruel eyes gleam and his hands twitch so. They both agreed in the stillness of their bedchamber that he was perhaps thinking of the disappointment of Regulus on being deprived of his drive with a pretty woman. Cecil gave Lelis some instances of his queer power of reading the thoughts of others and of leading them to confide in him. When you come to look into it you found it was always to Cecil that the secrets of the heart of persons who publicly exhibited aversion to him, had been confided.

“That common young man is the apple of his eye,” he told Lelis, who, since last night, hated to hear the name of Regulus. “He is the cause of terrific ructions between Andrea and his wife. Do you know why she looks after his health so carefully? She told me.”

“Told *you*, Cecil?”

“She desires to keep him alive as long as she can to form a bulwark for her against the Pancrazie. She can just tolerate Regulus but pretends to like him, so as to keep her husband in a good humour with *her*. For, the moment the breath is out of his body, she knows—what old Pinsuto does not, because senile decay has already set in, and he is hardly aware how badly he has treated his wife in the matter of his will—that they intend to plant her out in some convent with a pittance and run this house as an inn again with his money. The Pancrazie are nearly starving down there at Muracciole. The sawmill is not productive. They come and whine to their uncle. Matalina informed me with tears in her eyes that no prayers on her part would make Pinsuto alter his will that’s made

in their favour. She does think, poor dear, that it is *plûtôt* unfair, and she plucked up courage to make him a scene to-night about Regulus. Nor does she approve, so she implied to me just before I came up, of Andrea pandering to the Captain's vices—keeping you *here* for him so that he can see you again and persuade you to let him take you to L'Inzecca. I don't either. . . . You seem depressed darling? ”

“ It's this wind.”

“ It will go down before morning, I can assure you. Look, the clouds are flying already before the moon. . . .”

They went out into the balcony together.

“ Julia,” said Lelis, in spite of Cecil's ban on her name, “ Julia is dying for us to go, for our own sakes. I suppose she thinks the wind might have got worse instead of better, as it has. I went in to her before dinner. The gale all day had evidently upset her dreadfully. Her eyes had gone right back into her head and she was jabbering away. . . .”

“ Yes, wind is considered very ominous here. The women up in the mountains cross themselves when it blows and say, Murder is abroad, or Murder is in the air.”

“ She kept muttering and shivering at every fresh gust and moaning Puaretto or Puaretta ! I comforted her, saying that, if she meant me, I wasn't puaretta at all, but very rich in all things, had got a nice husband to protect me through life and had been very happy here and didn't really mind being seasick. And she seemed to cheer up a bit when she saw that I really didn't mind the passage, and asked me if we liked Regulus ? She always calls you Cecc' Anton' or 'N'ton. Cheek ! I said I didn't object to Regulus just to please her, and then a great gust came that shook the house and rattled the canvas and made it bag over us—I was sitting on the ladder that leads up into it—and didn't I quit that ! Then she wrapped her face in her mandile and crouched down and I could get no more out of her, so I just shoved the five-pound note into her lap and came away.”

Cecil said, as he lay down, “ We shall get away to-morrow all right now that the wind has, like me, addressed itself to sleep. I'm glad, for I've sworn to myself to get you out of this before that fellow comes back. The impertinence of him ! Does he really think I will let a rascally Corsican take my wife about the country in his damned go-cart ? ”

Lelis, with her hair down in a fair cloud that shone whenever



she came within range of the lamp, was finding "forgets" and strapping and unstrapping valises. They were to leave Vivario de Lecca, reaching the shores of Corsica at seven. Madame Bonelli and Monsieur Bonelli, if he could be made to forgive them for the act of going, would accompany them to the station and Julia would take their luggage as she had brought it, in a hand-cart with a tarpaulin over it.

"I do hope Monsieur Bonelli won't think it necessary to kiss me, Cecil?"

"I had rather he did than that other fellow."

Oh, she would tell him all on the boat, or when they got to Nice, where they would stop at The Cimiez and become human, *i.e.* fashionable beings using powder-puffs, getting their shoes cleaned, and other adjuncts of civilisation.

Not now. They both were in need of a good night's rest.

All was packed. The portable clock, the little family portraits without which Lelis never travelled—the room was now a desert. But the moment she got into bed there would be an end of conversation, for Cecil was half asleep already, so she walked about, fingering distastefully the torn flap of canvas, giving it sundry tweaks which only brought it lower down. . . .

"I suppose, when we have gone, they'll do what I have been begging Matalina to have done ever since I came here. I can see it from your bed perfectly. It drops lower every day and it's all dark and black behind it, like Hell."

"I thought Hell was red. Never mind it. Put out the lamp and come in beside me."

"Yes, Cecil, I'm coming. I hope I've got everything in. . . . Lord's sake! I forgot the gun! We mustn't go off without it. It may be a do, but you can always give it away to someone."

"I did—to old Beard-in-the-ears. I told him he might keep it and give it away if he liked. He won't though. His eyes yearned for it."

"Of course they did. It's quite a good gun—for him. I don't believe that youth knew. He wanted to spite you, Cecil. I call it extravagant of you, dear."

"Well, anyhow, we should have lost it twenty-three times over on the way home, now shouldn't we? Do you remember the Provençal bread cupboard we lost at Avignon? That was you."

Lelis didn't like Barba-in-Orecchie having that gun. Her

accusation of extravagance was nonsense. They could afford nearly any extravagance. She was just annoyed that Andrea should have it. To get over her vexation before getting into bed she went to the door-window that looked over the valley, drew the dimity curtain and stepped out. Yes, the wind had gone down and a struggling, harassed moon coped with torn clouds that raced across it, obscuring it completely every now and then. When it shone itself free of them it seemed to ride high and light the world, but just now the clouds were masters and she could not see her landmarks, the mountains, out Ajaccio way. No matter; she was going home by another line; that dreadful initial journey of six days ago, past the sullen horror of Bocogano, she would never make again.

The wind, that had fairly dropped, souged wearily now and then in the crook of the valley below. Its everlasting whine made her think of the complaint of a child that is left behind. . . . And then the Cecaldis' dog, tied up somewhere nearer to her, howled at the moon, invisible behind the row of low houses just across the road by the Post Office . . . it lit them plainly . . . a bluish aura. . . .

She was going to-morrow. She wanted to say good-bye to the horse whose terrible lot she had hoped but failed to alleviate. She could never go near him to give him sugar for the stench. She could not very well go out and lean over the balustrade in her thin lace and chiffon nightgown. But she opened the half-door and spoke to it standing there at the foot of the wall. She felt moved to recite a sort of farewell speech in its direction. It soothed her to make it: it was like saying a prayer. . . .

"Poor old horse down there, good-bye! I did what I could for you. And now I hope you will soon die and get out of this, as we are going to do to-morrow. Yes, we are. Joy! You die, darling, die, and fulfil your mission to make good horseflesh, and thank God your very hard day is over."

The horse was a long way down but she could have sworn she heard it stir. Or something? There were noises—she heard them in this deep lull of the wind.

It was only ten o'clock. People were hardly in bed yet. Music . . . a soft, recurrent beat, as if someone was amusing himself with one of the weird national instruments, catamuse or zufoli . . . out there in the street by the Fountain of Diana. Or the wretched husband of Madame Buttafoce whose wife had locked him out,

trying to make her let him in, beating weakly at his own door.

She knew a few people here now whom she would never see again, for to-morrow they would be well off this island that was so giddy and strange, so grand and so pretty, so beautiful and so wicked ! It had disappointed her. Matalina had disappointed her—everything and everybody except *Ò Jù* ! It had been impossible to get to know Matalina or be very fond of her. She was so Corsican *au fond* and so full of merely peasant virtues. A country cow ! How could she have had the knowledge of Mamma, have shared her days and her thoughts—her bed even, at Brighton—and then come home and married that dreadful old man with his dreadful nephew ? Only poor Chili, who would have none of him and had preferred to die of love for her 'Ora, she felt she would have liked to know. . . . But she was better dead. . . . Uncle Horace would never have been kind to her.

But there was no doubt that Chili and Chili's death was what had made the visit so deplorable. The circumstances of it—perhaps the cause—rankled in the memory of the old man who had been cheated of Chilina by death and married her sister as a *pis aller*, and made him hate her Cecil because of his father's selfishness. Andrea had hardly spoken a word to Cecil and then only because of her. Lelis was confident that, if it had not been for her setting herself to charm her host, a *rixé*, not *sanglante* because of modern times, would have declared itself. . . . Funny how anxious Andrea had been to keep her from going away ! He would not have prayed Cecil to stay. He just hated him !

It was quite warm ! She was aware of the odours of the lentisk, the myrtle ; the thymy aromatic smell of Corsica rose to her nostrils. Heavenly ! But she knew she was overjoyed to think she would smell it no more.

She went in, closing the door part of the window gently for fear of disturbing Cecil and setting that magnificent but overworked brain going again. The little noise she made was repeated by another faint sound, from the left-hand corner of the room corresponding to the position of the ladder that led up in the kitchen through the canvas ceiling to—? Julia going up to bed ! If she slept up there ? Lelis did not suppose she did, really. There was nothing but rafters to sleep on. More likely a *natte* on the floor of the kitchen, put out of sight in the day. Highly insanitary ! But they were going. . . .

She extinguished the lamp, and as she would not, could not sleep alone this last night, she got into the big wide bed that was Cecil's. He was lying on his arms like a soldier, with his face to the wall.

Bother ! She had not drawn the window curtains quite together. The moon was out of the clouds again and the crude, steely light was coming in . . . there was a white patch on the middle of the floor and the walls of the room were gleaming like the white face of an invalid.

It was too much fog to get out again and perhaps it wouldn't last so strong—there were always clouds. . . .

Cecil was awake and he begged her to put her arms round him in the way he liked, so that he could feel them encircling his body. It was, he often said, the most poetical part of being married and the moment with her that he really liked best of all, for it gave him happy dreams and coloured them. The wonderful things Cecil said he saw when he was just going off ! Processions, tournaments—always something spectacular !

The position, though honourable, was dreadfully tiring but it never lasted long. Cecil went off to sleep long before her arms got cramp in them. She loved to feel their positions for about five minutes thus sublimely reversed, she, the little one, protecting the big one, Cecil wanted his hand held like a baby. He was afraid of the dark, he admitted it, or rather of the twilight—half-lights of any kind. When he lived with them in Lancaster Gate, Mamma and the housekeeper used to complain, Lelis remembered, of Cecil's habit, even in early spring and autumn, of turning the lights on all the way to the top just to light him to his room to dress. Light was a regular craze of his. He even had had engraved on one of his seals that dangled from his fob, where she had tried in vain to get him to hang Julia's ring and fetish, the motto that used to be over Victor Hugo's bed at Guernsey—*Nox, Mors, Lux*. Night, Death, Light ! . . .

He was probably off by now, she could tell by his breathing. No dreams, no processions, to-night. Yet, lest he should still be conscious of and miss her, she only half turned away from him, flapping one tired arm out towards the edge of the bed and leaving one under his head. That blessed moonlight illumination was still on, lying mostly on the left-hand corner by the hole in the ceiling that had come to possess such a devilish, alternate repulsion and fascination for her. The grand upheaval of marriage, she began

to think, had made her more nervous than she was before, certainly more excitable. . . .

But she contrived to lie on, still as death and the moonlight, her body stiffened, her bright eyes roving and returning over to the hateful cynosure. Proud and staunch, like a good nurse holding a baby or a good dog watching his master's body. Protecting her Protector. Her feeling for Cecil at this moment was more maternal than sexual ; he was less her lover than her master ; she was only a child permitted to caress the lord of her life—the parent of her mentality. She was growing up very slowly, making the very faintest spurts of original thinking and honest feeling under his direction. She would now and again spout her inadequate Victorian commonplaces and obey the precepts of her charming but behind-hand mother and sister. It was still in her to repeat her childish prayers—“ *Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,*” or “ *Matthew, Mark, Luke and John,*” and Cecil loved her to do it and never, never made fun of her. . . .

There was a text that Isabelle, the always *dévôte* and now a nun, who used to go about the house at Lancaster Gate sticking texts over people's beds, had placed in her little sister's room with special intention. For Lelis was indeed a mischievous, tricksome child and once had positively stolen half a box of chocolates.

The terrible and significant legend done in green and Gothic letters with gold blazoning impressed on Lelis for so many years now, for some reason or other, kept coming into her head. *Thou God Seest Me*. She felt just now exactly as she had been used to feel at Lancaster Gate when, in the course of the day that had seemed so long and was now so far back, she had done something that she knew she ought not to have done, and the message written on the wall, as it used to do, was jogging her little weak, much belaboured conscience—working on her to confess and be forgiven. It was nice to be forgiven, but one did not confess for the sake of that *only*, but because, anyhow, God had actually witnessed one's crime, whatever it was, and one would be found out sooner or later. She had done nothing now, unless it meant the act of receiving, and only very partially, the kiss of Captain Regulus, and that she fully meant to confess as soon as they got on dry land the other side. Such a teeny, teeny little infidelity might surely wait till to-morrow?

It was already to-morrow. She was convinced it was after twelve, though she could not leave Cecil or disturb him by hunting for his watch, which ought to be somewhere in the bed.

Oh dear ! She was absolutely convinced that God *was* looking, that His Eye of Awe was fixed on her, Unforgiving, out of the hole made by the torn flap of canvas over there in the corner on a level with the bed. That was where the canvas had sagged down to.

God's Eye, straight out of Heaven, looking down on her through a telescope, as she had looked up the barrel of Cecil's gun the night before. *Calibre étroit. . . .*

She flung both arms round Cecil and, over her shoulder, faced the corner of the room. She was fully awake—now. There *was* something like an eye there, a tiny circle on which the moonbeam was glinting. . . .

Or Julia's ring that someone was holding out for a finger to slip into ?

She could not stand it. It was a nightmare she had been having and that had carried on into wakingness. Cecil must free her from it. She spoke to him, putting her mouth close to his ear :

“ Cecil ! Cecil ! Wake, oh, wake ! I want you. You must take me in your arms a moment. . . . I've had a fright. That beastly flap. . . . ”

Cecil woke slowly, grudgingly, but he did not shake her off as people sometimes do brutally in their sleep. He kissed her hands as they came together under his chin. He perhaps hoped that it would content her and that she would let him slip into the chrism of sleep again. But that would not do, she could command him ; he must wake quite up, look round the room with those far, all-seeing eyes of his that missed nothing and tell her what a fool she was and that there was nothing there.

At last Cecil, the result of her insidious, strenuous pulling of him towards her, pivoted round a little. Holding her to him, for she appeared to desire it, his eyes, over her head as it lay on his breast, roved carefully all round the room to find out what it was that had so frightened his Dear.

Cecil's eyes needed not to rove long ; he had the faculty always of seeing nearly everything at a glance. What he saw now made him endeavour to put his young wife away from him as far as might be, which was not at all what she wanted. She held him as tightly as she could, covering him with her body. She was beside herself with fear and would have strangled him sooner than let him go. For, by the accelerated pulsation of Cecil's heart-beats, she felt that he had “ seen something ” too.

She lay panting, one lovely hip—the side away from him—bare, for her struggling had rolled her nightgown into a swathe, but the other side was pressed against him, her hair was over his face and her lips on his lips so that he could hardly get a word out. He contrived to say :

“Darling, you must let me go. . . . You *must*. I command you. This is for me.”

“First you must tell me,” she said in his ear—“First I must know what it is in that corner.”

“*Cane Canisti, Putra Ascendisti, Ó Christú—*”

She begged him not to put her off with nonsense. . . .

“Look here—lie beside me, will you, not *on* me ! I want my arms free. I want to. . . . Won't you, won't you, my darling ? Oh, Christ, what to do ? ”

A period of quiescence ensued. Cecil seemed for all the world to be thinking, as he did when he was writing, and she always kept quiet till he found the Word. There was no noise except the beating of their hearts and no particular need for her to move away from him. But his breathing was loud and full like the rhythm of a steam piston under her little airily bounding, frivolous heart. She said presently, rather as if she were asking him to abate a nuisance :

“Cecil, you aren't going to force me to turn round and look at it, whatever it is, so as to cure me of my silliness ? I shouldn't sleep any more, anyway. I daresay it's nothing . . . but can't you just tell me what it is in so many words, and then perhaps I could promise you to be sensible ? ”

Cecil said, quite clearly :

“In so many words, dear, it is . . . the Vengeance—the Vendetta of God. It won't be yet—not while you choose to lie where you are . . . but I can't let you, not for long. Still, perhaps a cramp . . . he is old. But we are in great danger. I am. Try and think of what I told you when we first came—that notion of lying with me on a mattress high up in space. We settled that no harm could befall us even then, unless we stirred or put a leg out of bed . . . over the edge.”

She wailed.

“Stop ! It is only to keep you quiet for a little. Be a good girl and stop crying and let me consider.”

Lelis promised and lay very still, her motor nerves paralysed by her unnamed terror, endeavouring to collect her ideas so as to

discover what Cecil had meant by that about the Mattress in Space—her own simile, only she had forgotten. Instead, she found herself repeating over and over again the wretched jingle—“*Cane Canisti . . . Cane Canisti . . .*” her mind trailing off before she got to the end of the phrase and she no wiser. . . .

Cecil said suddenly : “Where’s my gun ?”

“You said you had given it to old Andrea and I was cross.”

“Oh—ah !” He was silent again and presently he squeezed her wrist to stimulate her attention—

“Listen, darling, to me and endeavour to answer the questions I am going to ask you in French, or patois if you can manage it. Move a little, dear, so that my voice can be heard.”

He spoke quite calmly, but his forehead, as in shifting her position she grazed it, was moist with sweat. He must have been thinking very hard. And his poor heart as her ear slipped lower down seemed to her almost to have stopped beating.

“Cecil, is it a game ?”

“Rather like—only the conditions are a bit different—the Thought Reading game we used to put up, you and I, in Lancaster Gate, and take even your mother’s Herrn Professor in. I must say I prefer a decent German to these damned Italians. But it may fail for want of previous consultation. . . . I’m afraid you’ll not be able to get me. . . . But try. It’s all there is.”

Speaking loudly and formally he said to her in French that was not so good as hers :

“You were telling me, *ma cherie*, how your mother loved——” He muttered in English, “I forget their damned names !—That your mother and *ces demoiselles* were always together, from the moment they left their mother’s care, *n’est pas* ? She never permitted herself to lose sight of them—or left them alone with anyone for a single minute ?”

“With women, do you mean ? Of course she did.”

“Men—*avec des monsieurs*. My father—say Monsieur ‘Orazio—my father was never in a room alone with either of them ?”

“I expect not. We children never gave him a chance. We never left them tranquil for an instant.”

“Always in their petticoats, eh ? And my father, ‘Orazio, he was nearly always away on his yacht ?”

“Yes, generally . . .” She could not help qualifying, though his peremptory rejoinder, “In effect, always,” made her answer “Yes !” in a kind of little shout. What a stupid game, played at