V.

IT was understood that Don Ippolito should come every morning at ten o'clock, and read and talk with Miss Vervain for an hour or two; but Mrs. Vervain's hospitality was too aggressive for the letter of the agreement. She oftener had him to breakfast at nine, for, as she explained to Ferris, she could not endure to have him feel that it was a mere mercenary transaction, and there was no limit fixed for the lessons on these days. When she could, she had Ferris come too, and she missed him when he did not come. "I like that bluntness of his," she professed to her daughter, "and I don't mind his making light of me. You are so apt to be heavy if you're not made light of occasionally. I certainly shoul'dn't want a son to be so respectful and obedient as you are, my dear."

The painter honestly returned her fond-
ness; and with not much greater reason. He saw that she took pleasure in his talk, and enjoyed it even when she did not understand it; and this is a kind of flattery not easy to resist. Besides, there was very little ladies' society in Venice in those times, and Ferris, after trying the little he could get at, had gladly denied himself its pleasures, and consorted with the young men he met at the caffès, or in the Piazza. But when the Vervains came, they recalled to him the younger days in which he had delighted in the companionship of women. After so long disuse, it was charming to be with a beautiful girl who neither regarded him with distrust nor expected him to ask her in marriage because he sat alone with her, rode out with her in a gondola, walked with her, read with her. All young men like a house in which no ado is made about their coming and going, and Mrs. Vervain perfectly understood the art of letting him make himself at home. He perceived with amusement that this amiable lady, who never did an ungraceful thing nor wittingly said an ungracious one, was very much of a Bohemian at heart,—the gentlest and most blameless of the tribe, but still lawless,
—whether from her campaigning married life, or the rovings of her widowhood, or by natural disposition; and that Miss Vervain was inclined to be conventionally strict, but with her irregular training was at a loss for rules by which to check her mother’s little waywardnesses. Her anxious perplexity, at times, together with her heroic obedience and unswerving loyalty to her mother, had something pathetic as well as amusing in it. He saw her tried almost to tears by her mother’s helpless frankness,—for Mrs. Vervain was apparently one of those ladies whom the intolerable surprise of having anything come into their heads causes instantly to say or do it,—and he observed that she never tried to pass off her endurance with any feminine arts; but seemed to defy him to think what he would of it. Perhaps she was not able to do otherwise: he thought of her at times as a person wholly abandoned to the truth. Her pride was on the alert against him; she may have imagined that he was covertly smiling at her, and she no doubt tasted the ironical flavour of much of his talk and behaviour, for in those days he liked to qualify his devotion to the Vervains with a certain
nonchalant slight, which, while the mother openly enjoyed it, filled the daughter with anger and apprehension. Quite at random, she visited points of his informal manner with unmeasured reprisal; others, for which he might have blamed himself, she passed over with strange caprice. Sometimes this attitude of hers provoked him, and sometimes it disarmed him; but whether they were at feud, or keeping an armed truce, or, as now and then happened, were in an _entente cordiale_ which he found very charming, the thing that he always contrived to treat with silent respect and forbearance in Miss Vervain was that sort of aggressive tenderness with which she hastened to shield the foibles of her mother. That was something very good in her pride, he finally decided. At the same time, he did not pretend to understand the curious filial self-sacrifice which it involved.

Another thing in her that puzzled him was her devoutness. Mrs. Vervain could with difficulty be got to church, but her daughter missed no service of the English ritual in the old palace where the British and American tourists assembled once a week with their guide-books in one pocket and their prayer-
books in the other, and buried the tomahawk under the altar. Mr. Ferris was often sent with her; and then his thoughts, which were a young man's, wandered from the service to the beautiful girl at his side,—the golden head that punctiliously bowed itself at the proper places in the liturgy: the full lips that murmured the responses; the silken lashes that swept her pale cheeks as she perused the morning lesson. He knew that the Vervains were not Episcopalians when at home, for Mrs. Vervain had told him so, and that Florida went to the English service because there was no other. He conjectured that perhaps her touch of ritualism came from mere love of any form she could make sure of.

The servants in Mrs. Vervain's lightly ordered household, with the sympathetic quickness of the Italians, learned to use him as the next friend of the family, and though they may have had their decorous surprise at his untrammelled footing, they probably excused the whole relation as a phase of that foreign eccentricity to which their nati ă is so amiable. If they were not able to cast the same mantle of charity over Don Ippolito's allegiance,—and doubtless they had their
reserves concerning such frankly familiar treatment of so dubious a character as priest,—still as a priest they stood somewhat in awe of him; they had the spontaneous loyalty of their race to the people they served, and they never intimated by a look that they found it strange when Don Ippolito freely came and went. Mrs. Vervain had quite adopted him into her family; while her daughter seemed more at ease with him than with Ferris, and treated him with a grave politeness which had something also of compassion and of child-like reverence in it. Ferris observed that she was always particularly careful of his supposable sensibilities as a Roman Catholic, and that the priest was oddly indifferent to this deference, as if it would have mattered very little to him whether his church was spared or not. He had a way of lightly avoiding, Ferris fancied, not only religious points on which they could disagree, but all phases of religion as matters of indifference. At such times Miss Vervain relaxed her reverential attitude, and used him with something like rebuke, as if it did not please her to have the representative of even an alien religion slight his office; as if her respect were for his priest-
hood and her compassion for him personally. That was rather hard for Don Ippolito, Ferris thought, and waited to see him snubbed outright some day, when he should behave without sufficient gravity.

The blossoms came and went upon the pomegranate and almond trees in the garden, and some of the earliest roses were in their prime; everywhere was so full leaf that the wantonest of the strutting nymphs was forced into a sort of decent seclusion, but the careless naiad of the fountain burnt in sunlight that subtly increased its fervours day by day, and it was no longer beginning to be warm, it was warm, when one morning Ferris and Miss Vervain sat on the steps of the terrace, waiting for Don Ippolito to join them at breakfast.

By this time the painter was well on with the picture of Don Ippolito which the first sight of the priest had given him a longing to paint, and he had been just now talking of it with Miss Vervain.

"But why do you paint him simply as a priest?" she asked. "I should think you would want to make him the centre of some famous or romantic scene," she added, gravely looking into his eyes as he sat with
his head thrown back against the balustrade.

"No, I doubt if you think," answered Ferris, "or you'd see that a Venetian priest doesn't need any tawdry accessories. What do you want? Somebody administering the extreme unction to a victim of the Council of Ten? A priest stepping into a confessional at the Frari—tomb of Canova in the distance, perspective of one of the naves, and so forth—with his eye on a pretty devotee coming up to unburden her conscience? I've no patience with the follies people think and say about Venice!"

Florida stared in haughty question at the painter.

"You're no worse than the rest," he continued with indifference to her anger at his bluntness. "You all think that there can be no picture of Venice without a gondola or a Bridge of Sighs in it. Have you ever read the Merchant of Venice, or Othello? There isn't a boat nor a bridge nor a canal mentioned in either of them; and yet they breathe and pulsate with the very life of Venice. I'm going to try to paint a Venetian priest so that you'll know him without a bit of conventional Venice near him."
“It was Shakespeare who wrote those plays,” said Florida. Ferris bowed in mock suffering from her sarcasm. “You’d better have some sort of symbol in your picture of a Venetian priest, or people will wonder why you came so far to paint Father O’Brien.”

“I don’t say I shall succeed,” Ferris answered. “In fact I’ve made one failure already, and I’m pretty well on with a second; but the principle is right, all the same. I don’t expect everybody to see the difference between Don Ippolito and Father O’Brien. At any rate, what I’m going to paint at is the lingering pagan in the man, the renunciation first of the inherited nature, and then of a personality that would have enjoyed the world. I want to show that baffled aspiration, apathetic despair, and rebellious longing which you catch in his face when he’s off his guard, and that suppressed look which is the characteristic expression of all Austrian Venice. Then,” said Ferris, laughing, “I must work in that small suspicion of Jesuit which there is in every priest. But it’s quite possible I may make a Father O’Brien of him.”

“You won’t make a Don Ippolito of him,” said Florida, after serious consideration of
his face to see whether he was quite in earnest, "if you put all that into him. He has the simplest and openest look in the world," she added warmly, "and there's neither pagan, nor martyr, nor rebel in it."

Ferris laughed again. "Excuse me; I don't think you know. I can convince you"—

Florida rose, and looking down the garden path, said, "He's coming;" and as Don Ippolito drew near, his face lighting up with a joyous and innocent smile, she continued absently, "he's got on new stockings, and a different coat and hat."

The stockings were indeed new, and the hat was not the accustomed nicchio, but a new silk cylinder with a very worldly, curling brim. Don Ippolito's coat, also, was of a more mundane cut than the tulare; he wore a waistcoat and small-clothes, meeting the stockings at the knee with a sprightly buckle. His person showed no traces of the snuff with which it used to be so plentifully dusted; in fact, he no longer took snuff in the presence of the ladies. The first week he had noted an inexplicable uneasiness in them when he drew forth that blue cotton handkerchief after the solace of a pinch.
Shortly afterwards, being alone with Florida, he saw her give a nervous start at its appearance. He blushed violently and put it back into the pocket from which he had half drawn it, and whence it never emerged again in her presence. The contessina, his former pupil, had not shown any aversion to Don Ippolito's snuff or his blue handkerchief; but then the contessina had never rebuked his finger-nails by the tints of rose and ivory with which Miss Vervain's hands bewildered him. It was a little droll how anxiously he studied the ways of these Americans, and conformed to them as far as he knew. His English grew rapidly in their society, and it happened sometimes that the only Italian in the day's lesson was what he read with Florida, for she always yielded to her mother's wish to talk, and Mrs. Vervain preferred the ease of her native tongue. He was Americanising in that good lady's hands as fast as she could transform him, and he listened to her with trustful reverence, as to a woman of striking though eccentric mind. Yet he seemed finally to refer every point to Florida, as if with an intuition of steadier and stronger character in her; and now, as he ascended
the terrace steps in his modified costume, he looked intently at her. She swept him from head to foot with a glance, and then gravely welcomed him with unchanged countenance.

At the same moment, Mrs. Vervain came out through one of the long windows, and, adjusting her glasses, said with a start, "Why, my dear Don Ippolito, I shouldn't have known you!"

"Indeed, madama?" asked the priest, with a painful smile. "Is it so great a change? We can wear this dress as well as the other, if we please."

"Why, of course it's very becoming and all that, but it does look so out of character," Mrs. Vervain said, leading the way to the breakfast room. "It's like seeing a military man in a civil coat."

"It must be a great relief to lay aside the uniform now and then, mother," said Florida, as they sat down. "I can remember that papa used to be glad to get out of his."

"Perfectly wild," assented Mrs. Vervain. "But he never seemed the same person. Soldiers and—clergymen—are so much more stylish in their own dress—not stylish exactly, but taking; don't you know?"
"There, Don Ippolito," interposed Ferris, "you had better put on your talare and your nicchio again. Your abbate's dress isn't acceptable, you see."

The painter spoke in Italian, but Don Ippolito answered—with certain blunders which it would be tedious to reproduce—in his patient, conscientious English, half sadly, half playfully, and glancing at Florida, before he turned to Mrs. Vervain, "You are as rigid as the rest of the world, madama. I thought you would like this dress, but it seems that you think it a masquerade. As madamigella says, it is a relief to lay aside the uniform, now and then, for us who fight the spiritual enemies as well as for the other soldiers. There was one time, when I was younger and in the subdiaconate orders, that I put off the priest's dress altogether, and wore citizen's clothes, not an abbate's suit like this. We were in Padua, another young priest and I, my nearest and only friend, and for a whole night we walked about the streets in that dress, meeting the students, as they strolled singing through the moonlight; we went to the theatre and to the caffè—we smoked cigars, all the time laughing and trembling to think
of the tonsure under our hats. But in the morning we had to put on the stockings and the talare and the nicchio again."

Don Ippolito gave a melancholy laugh. He had thrust the corner of his napkin into his collar; seeing that Ferris had not his so, he twitched it out, and made a feint of its having been all the time in his lap. Everyone was silent as if something shocking had been said; Florida looked with grave rebuke at Don Ippolito, whose story affected Ferris like that of some girl's adventure in men's clothes. He was in terror lest Mrs. Vervain should be going to say it was like that; she was going to say something; he made haste to forestall her, and turn the talk on other things.

The next day the priest came in his usual dress, and he did not again try to escape from it.
VI.

ONE afternoon, as Don Ippolito was posing to Ferris for his picture of a Venetian Priest, the painter asked, to make talk, "Have you hit upon that new explosive yet, which is to utilise your breech-loading cannon? Or are you engaged upon something altogether new?"

"No," answered the other uneasily, "I have not touched the cannon since that day you saw it at my house; and as for other things, I have not been able to put my mind to them. I have made a few trifles which I have ventured to offer the ladies."

Ferris had noticed the ingenious reading-desk which Don Ippolito had presented to Florida, and the footstool, contrived with springs and hinges so that it would fold up into the compass of an ordinary portfolio, which Mrs. Vervain carried about with her.
A FOREGONE CONCLUSION:

An odd look, which the painter caught at and missed, came into the priest's face as he resumed: "I suppose it is the distraction of my new occupation, and of the new acquaintances—so very strange to me in every way—that I have made in your amiable countrywomen, which hinders me from going about anything in earnest, now that their munificence has enabled me to pursue my aims with greater advantages than ever before. But this idle mood will pass, and in the meantime I am very happy. They are real angels, and madama is a true original."

"Mrs. Vervain is rather peculiar," said the painter, retiring a few paces from his picture, and quizzing it through his half-closed eyes. "She is a woman who has had affliction enough to turn a stronger head than hers could ever have been," he added kindly. "But she has the best heart in the world. In fact," he burst forth, "she is the most extraordinary combination of perfect fool and perfect lady I ever saw."

"Excuse me; I don't understand," blankly faltered Don Ippolito.

"No; and I'm afraid I couldn't explain to you," answered Ferris.
There was a silence for a time, broken at last by Don Ippolito, who asked, "Why do you not marry madamigella?"

He seemed not to feel that there was anything out of the way in the question, and Ferris was too well used to the childlike directness of the most manœuvring of races to be surprised. Yet he was displeased, as he would not have been if Don Ippolito were not a priest. He was not of the type of priests whom the American knew from the prejudice and distrust of the Italians; he was alienated from his clerical fellows by all the objects of his life, and by a reciprocal dislike. About other priests there were various scandals; but Don Ippolito was like that pretty match-girl of the Piazza, of whom it was Venetianly answered, when one asked if so sweet a face were not innocent, "Oh yes, she is mad!" He was of a purity so blameless, that he was reputed crack-brained by the caffè-gossip that in Venice turns its searching light upon whomever you mention; and from his own association with the man Ferris perceived in him an apparent single-heartedness such as no man can have but the rarest of Italians. He was the albino of his species; a grey crow, a white fly; he
was really this, or he know how to seem it
with an art far beyond any common deceit.
It was the half expectation of coming some
time upon the lurking duplicity in Don
Ippolito, that continually enfeebled the
painter in his attempts to portray his
Venetian priest, and that gave its undecided
unsatisfactory character to the picture be-
fore him—its weak hardness, its provoking
superficiality. He expressed the traits of
melancholy and loss that he imagined in
him, yet he always was tempted to leave
the picture with a touch of something sinister
in it, some airy and subtle shadow of
selfish design.

He stared hard at Don Ippolito while this
perplexity filled his mind, for the hundredth
time; then he said, stifly, "I don’t know.
I don’t want to marry anybody. Besides," he
added, relaxing into a smile of helpless
amusement, "it’s possible that Miss Ver-
vain might not want to marry me."

"As to that," replied Don Ippolito, "you
never can tell. All young girls desire to be
married, I suppose," he continued with a
sigh. "She is very beautiful, is she not?
It is seldom that we see such a blonde in
Italy. Our blondes are dark; they have
auburn hair, and blue eyes, but their complexions are thick. Miss Vervain is blonde as the morning light; the sun’s gold is in her hair, his noonday whiteness in her dazzling throat; the flush of his coming is on her lips; she might utter the dawn!"

"You’re a poet, Don Ippolito," laughed the painter. "What property of the sun is in her angry-looking eyes?"

"His fire! Ah, that is her greatest charm! Those strange eyes of hers, they seem full of tragedies. She looks made to be the heroine of some stormy romance; and yet how simply patient and good she is!"

"Yes," said Ferris, who often responded in English to the priest’s Italian; and he added half musingly in his own tongue, after a moment, "but I don’t think it would be safe to count upon her. I’m afraid she has a bad temper. At any rate, I always expect to see smoke somewhere when I look at those eyes of hers. She has wonderful self-control, however; and I don’t exactly understand why. Perhaps people of strong impulses have strong wits to overrule them; it seems no more than fair."

"Is it the custom," asked Don Ippolito,
after a moment, "for the American young ladies always to address their mammas as mother?"

"No; that seems to be a peculiarity of Miss Vervain's. It's a little formality that I should say served to hold Mrs. Vervain in check."

"Do you mean that it repulses her?"

"Not at all. I don't think I could explain," said Ferris, with a certain air of regretting to have gone so far in comment on the Vervains. He added recklessly, "Don't you see that Mrs. Vervain sometimes does and says things that embarrass her daughter, and that Miss Vervain seems to try to restrain her?"

"I thought," returned Don Ippolito, meditatively, "that the signorina was always very tenderly submissive to her mother."

"Yes, so she is," said the painter dryly, and looked in annoyance from the priest to the picture, and from the picture to the priest.

After a minute, Don Ippolito said, "They must be very rich to live as they do."

"I don't know about that," replied Ferris. "Americans spend and save in ways differ-
ent from the Italians. I daresay the Vervains find Venice very cheap after London and Paris and Berlin."

"Perhaps," said Don Ippolito, "if they were rich, you would be in a position to marry her."

"I should not marry Miss Vervain for her money," answered the painter, sharply.

"No, but if you loved her, the money would enable you to marry her."

"Listen to me, Don Ippolito. I never said that I loved Miss Vervain, and I don't know how you feel warranted in speaking to me about the matter. Why do you do so?"

"I? Why? I could not but imagine that you must love her. Is there anything wrong in speaking of such things? Is it contrary to the American custom? I ask pardon from my heart if I have done anything amiss."

"There is no offence," said the painter, with a laugh, "and I don't wonder you thought I ought to be in love with Miss Vervain. She is beautiful, and I believe she's good. But if men had to marry because women were beautiful and good, there isn't one of us could live single a day. Besides, I'm the victim of another passion,—
I'm labouring under an unrequited affection for Art."

"Then you do not love her?" asked Don Ippolito, eagerly.

"So far as I'm advised at present, no, I don't."

"It is strange!" said the priest, absently, but with a glowing face.

He quitted the painter's and walked swiftly homeward with a triumphant buoyancy of step. A subtle content diffused itself over his face, and a joyful light burnt in his deep eyes. He sat down before the piano and organ as he had arranged them, and began to strike their keys in unison; this seemed to him for the first time childish. Then he played some lively bars on the piano alone; they sounded too light and trivial, and he turned to the other instrument. As the plaint of the reeds arose, it filled his sense like a solemn organ-music, and transfigured the place; the notes swelled to the ample vault of a church, and at the high altar he was celebrating the mass in his sacerdotal robes. He suddenly caught his fingers away from the keys; his breast heaved, he hid his face in his hands.
VII.

FERRIS stood cleaning his palette, after Don Ippolito was gone, scraping the colours together with his knife, and neatly buttering them on the palette's edge, while he wondered what the priest meant by pumping him in that way. Nothing, he supposed, and yet it was odd. Of course, she had a bad temper—

He put on his hat and coat and strolled vaguely forth, and in an hour or two came by a roundabout course to the gondola station nearest his own house. There he stopped, and after an absent contemplation of the boats, from which the gondoliers were clamouring for his custom, he stepped into one and ordered the man to row him to a gate on a small canal opposite. The gate opened, at his ringing, into the garden of the Vervains.

Florida was sitting alone on a bench near
the fountain. It was no longer a ruined fountain; the broken-nosed naiad held a pipe above her head, and from this rose a willowy spray high enough to catch some colours of the sunset then striking into the garden, and fell again in a mist around her, making her almost modest.

"What does this mean?" asked Ferris, carelessly taking the young girl's hand. "I thought this lady's occupation was gone."

"Don Ippolito repaired the fountain for the landlord, and he agreed to pay for filling the tank that feeds it," said Florida. "He seems to think it a hard bargain, for he only lets it play about half an hour a day. But he says it's very ingeniously mended. He didn't believe it could be done. It is pretty."

"It is, indeed," said the painter, with a singular desire, going through him like a pang, likewise to do something for Miss Vervain. "Did you go to Don Ippolito's house the other day, to see his traps?"

"Yes; we were very much interested. I was sorry that I knew so little about inventions. Do you think there are many practical ideas amongst his things? I hope there
are—he seemed so proud and pleased to show them. Shouldn’t you think he had some real inventive talent?"

"Yes, I think he has; but I know as little about the matter as you do." He sat down beside her, and picking up a twig from the gravel, pulled the bark off in silence. Then, "Miss Vervain," he said, knitting his brows, as he always did when he had something on his conscience, and meant to ease it at any cost, "I’m the dog that fetches a bone and carries a bone; I talked Don Ippolito over with you the other day, and now I’ve been talking you over with him. But I’ve the grace to say that I’m ashamed of myself."

"Why need you be ashamed?" asked Florida. "You said no harm of him. Did you of us?"

"Not exactly; but I don’t think it was quite my business to discuss you at all. I think you can’t let people alone too much. For my part, if I try to characterise my friends, I fail to do them perfect justice, of course; and yet the imperfect result remains representative of them in my mind; it limits them and fixes them; and I can’t get them back again into the undefined and the ideal where they really belong. One ought
never to speak of the faults of one's friends: it mutilates them; they can never be the same afterwards."

"So you have been talking of my faults?" said Florida, breathing quickly. "Perhaps you could tell me of them to my face."

"I should have to say that unfairness was one of them. But that is common to the whole sex. I never said I was talking of your faults. I declared against doing so, and you immediately infer that my motive is remorse. I don't know that you have any faults. They may be virtues in disguise. There is a charm even in unfairness. Well, I did say that I thought you had a quick temper,"—

Florida coloured violently.

—"but now I see that I was mistaken," said Ferris with a laugh.

"May I ask what else you said?" demanded the young girl, haughtily.

"Oh, that would be a betrayal of confidence," said Ferris, unaffected by her hauteur.

"Then why have you mentioned the matter to me at all?"

"I wanted to clear my conscience, I suppose, and sin again. I wanted to talk with you about Don Ippolito."
Florida looked with perplexity at Ferris's face, while her own slowly cooled and paled.

"What did you want to say of him?" she asked calmly.

"I hardly know how to put it: that he puzzles me, to begin with. You know I feel somewhat responsible for him."

"Yes."

"Of course, I never should have thought of him, if it hadn't been for your mother's talk that morning coming back from San Lazzaro."

"I know," said Florida, with a faint blush.

"And yet, don't you see, it was as much a fancy of mine, a weakness for the man himself, as the desire to serve your mother, that prompted me to bring him to you."

"Yes, I see," answered the young girl.

"I acted in the teeth of a bitter Venetian prejudice against priests. All my friends here—they're mostly young men with the modern Italian ideas, or old liberals—hate and despise the priests. They believe that priests are full of guile and deceit, that they are spies for the Austrians, and altogether evil."

"Don Ippolito is welcome to report our
most secret thoughts to the police," said Florida, whose look of rising alarm relaxed into a smile.

"Oh," cried the painter, "how you leap to conclusions! I never intimated that Don Ippolito was a spy. On the contrary, it was his difference from other priests that made me think of him for a moment. He seems to be as much cut off from the church as from the world. And yet he is a priest, with a priest's education. What if I should have been altogether mistaken? He is either one of the openest souls in the world, as you have insisted, or he is one of the closest."

"I should not be afraid of him in any case," said Florida; "but I can't believe any wrong of him."

Ferris frowned in annoyance. "I don't want you to; I don't, myself. I've bungled the matter, as I might have known I would. I was trying to put into words an undefined uneasiness of mine, a quite formless desire to have you possessed of the whole case as it had come up in my mind. I've made a mess of it," said Ferris, rising with a rueful air. "Besides, I ought to have spoken to Mrs. Vervain."
"Oh no," cried Florida, eagerly springing to her feet beside him. "Don't! Little things wear upon my mother, so. I'm glad you didn't speak to her. I don't misunderstand you, I think; I expressed myself badly," she added, with an anxious face. "I thank you very much. What do you want me to do?"

By Ferris's impulse they both began to move down the garden path toward the water-gate. The sunset had faded out of the fountain, but it still lit the whole heaven, in whose vast blue depths hung light whiffs of pinkish cloud, as ethereal as the draperies that floated after Miss Vervain as she walked with a splendid grace beside him—no awkwardness now, or self-constraint in her. As she turned to Ferris, and asked in her deep tones, to which some latent feeling imparted a slight tremor, "What do you want me to do?" the sense of her willingness to be bidden by him gave him a delicious thrill. He looked at the superb creature, so proud, so helpless; so much a woman, so much a child; and he caught his breath before he answered. Her gauzes blew about his feet in the light breeze that lifted the foliage; she was a little near-
sighted, and in her eagerness she drew
closer to him, fixing her eyes full upon his
with a bold innocence. "Good heavens!
Miss Vervain," he cried with a sudden
blush, "it isn't a serious matter. I'm a
fool to have spoken to you. Don't do any-
thing. Let things go on as before. It isn't
for me to instruct you."

"I should have been very glad of your
advice," she said, with a disappointed,
almost wounded manner, keeping her eyes
upon him. "It seems to me we are always
going wrong"--

She stopped short, with a flush and then
a pallor.

Ferris returned her look with one of
comical dismay. This apparent readiness
of Miss Vervain's to be taken command of
daunted him, on second thoughts. "I wish
you'd dismiss all my stupid talk from your
mind," he said. "I feel as if I'd been
guiltily trying to set you against a man
whom I like very much, and have no reason
not to trust, and who thinks me so much
his friend, that he couldn't dream of my
making any sort of trouble for him. It
would break his heart I'm afraid, if you
treated him in a different way from that in


which you've treated him till now. It's really touching to listen to his gratitude to you and your mother. It's only conceivable on the ground that he has never had friends before in the world. He seems like another man, or the same man come to life. And it isn't his fault that he's a priest. I suppose," he added, with a sort of final throe, "that a Venetian family wouldn't use him with the frank hospitality you've shown, not because they distrusted him at all, perhaps, but because they would be afraid of other Venetian tongues."

This ultimate drop of venom, helplessly distilled, did not seem to rankle in Miss Vervain's mind. She walked now with her face turned from his, and she answered coldly, "We shall not be troubled. We don't care for Venetian tongues."

They were at the gate. "Good-bye," said Ferris, abruptly, "I'm going."

"Won't you wait and see my mother?" asked Florida, with her awkward self-constraint again upon her.

"No, thanks," said Ferris, gloomily. "I haven't time. I just dropped in for a moment, to blast an innocent man's reputation, and destroy a young lady's peace of mind."
“Then you needn't go, yet,” answered Florida coldly, “for you haven't succeeded.”

“Well, I've done my worst,” returned Ferris, drawing the bolt.

He went away, hanging his head in amazement and disgust at himself for his clumsiness and bad taste. It seemed to him a contemptible part, first to embarrass them with Don Ippolito's acquaintance, if it was an embarrassment, and then try to sneak out of his responsibility by these tardy cautions; and if it was not going to be an embarrassment, it was folly to have approached the matter at all.

What had he wanted to do, and with what motive? He hardly knew. As he battled the ground over and over again, nothing comforted him save the thought that, bad as it was to have spoken to Miss Vervain, it must have been infinitely worse to speak to her mother.
VIII.

IT was late before Ferris forgot his chagrin in sleep, and when he woke the next morning, the sun was making the solid green blinds at his window odorous of their native pine woods with its heat, and thrusting a golden spear at the heart of Don Ippolito’s effigy where he had left it on the casel.

Marina brought a letter with his coffee. The letter was from Mrs. Vervain, and it entreated him to come to lunch at twelve, and then join them on an excursion, of which they had all often talked, up the Canal of the Brenta. “Don Ippolito has got his permission—think of his not being able to go to the mainland without the Patriarch’s leave! and can go with us to-day. So I try to make this hasty arrangement. You must come—it all depends upon you.”

“Yes, so it seems,” groaned the painter, and went.

In the garden he found Don Ippolito and Florida, at the fountain where he had
herself parted with her the evening before; and he observed with a guilty relief that Don Ippolito was talking to her in the happy unconsciousness habitual with him.

Florida cast at the painter a swift glance of latent appeal and intelligence, which he refused, and in the same instant she met him with another look, as if she now saw him for the first time, and gave him her hand in greeting. It was a beautiful hand; he could not help worshipping its lovely forms, and the lily whiteness and softness of the back, the rose of the palm and finger-tips.

She idly resumed the great Venetian fan which hung from her waist by a chain. "Don Ippolito has been talking about the villeggiatura on the Brenta in the old days," she explained.

"Oh, yes," said the painter, "they used to have merry times in the villas then, and it was worth while being a priest, or at least an abbate di casa. I should think you would sigh for a return of those good old days, Don Ippolito. Just imagine, if you were abbate di casa with some patrician family about the close of the last century, you might be the instructor, companion, and spiritual adviser of Illustrissima at the
theatres, card-parties, and masquerades, all winter; and at this season, instead of going up the Brenta for a day's pleasure with us barbarous Yankees, you might be setting out with Illustrissima and all the 'Strissimi and 'Strissime, big and little, for a spring villeggiatura there. You would be going in a gilded barge, with songs and fiddles and dancing, instead of a common gondola, and you would stay a month, walking, going to parties and caffès, drinking chocolate and lemonade, gaming, sonneteering, and butterflying about generally."

"It was doubtless a beautiful life," answered the priest, with simple indifference. "But I never have thought of it with regret, because I have been preoccupied with other ideas than those of social pleasures, though perhaps they were no wiser."

Florida had watched Don Ippolito's face while Ferris was speaking, and she now asked gravely, "But don't you think their life nowadays is more becoming to the clergy?"

"Why, madamigella? What harm was there in those gaieties? I suppose the bad features of the old life are exaggerated to us."

"They couldn't have been worse than the
amusements of the hard-drinking, hard-riding, hard-swearimg, fox-hunting English parsons about the same time," said Ferris. "Besides, the abbate di casa had a charm of his own, the charm of all rococo things, which, whatever you may say of them, are somehow elegant and refined, or at least refer to elegance and refinement. I don't say they’re ennobling, but they’re fascinating. I don’t respect them, but I love them. When I think about the past of Venice, I don’t care so much to see any of the heroically historical things; but I should like immensely to have looked in at the Ridotto, when the place was at its gayest with wigs and masks, hoops and small-clothes, fans and rapiers, bows and courtesies, whispers and glances. I daresay I should have found Don Ippolito there in some becoming disguise."

Florida looked from the painter to the priest and back to the painter, as Ferris spoke, and then she turned a little anxiously toward the terrace, and a shadow slipped from her face as her mother came rustling down the steps, catching at her drapery, and shaking it into place. The young girl hurried to meet her, lifted her arms for what promised an embrace, and with firm hands
set the elder lady’s bonnet straight with her forehead.

"I’m always getting it on askew," Mrs. Vervain said for greeting to Ferris. "How do you do, Don Ippolito? But I suppose you think I’ve kept you long enough to get it on straight for once. So I have. I am a fuss, and I don’t deny it. At my time of life, it’s much harder to make yourself shipshape than it is when you’re younger. I tell Florida that anybody would take her for the old lady, she does seem to give so little care to getting up an appearance."

"And yet she has the effect of a stylish young person in the bloom of youth," observed Ferris, with a touch of caricature.

"We had better lunch with our things on," said Mrs. Vervain, "and then there needn’t be any delay in starting. I thought we would have it here," she added, as Nina and the house-servant appeared with trays of dishes and cups. "So that we can start in a real picnicky spirit. I knew you’d think it a womanish lunch, Mr. Ferris—Don Ippolito likes what we do—and so I’ve provided you with a chicken salad; and I’m going to ask you for a taste of it; I’m really hungry."

There was salad for all, in fact; and it
was quite one o’clock before the lunch was ended, and wraps of just the right thickness and thinness were chosen, and the party were comfortably placed under the striped linen canopy of the gondola, which they had from a public station, the house-gondola being engaged that day. They rowed through the narrow canal skirting the garden out into the expanse before the Giudecca, and then struck across the lagoon towards Fusina, past the island-church of San Giorgio in Alga, whose beautiful tower has flushed and darkened in so many pictures of Venetian sunsets, and past the Austrian lagoon forts with their coronets of guns threatening every point, and the Croatian sentinels pacing to and fro on their walls. They stopped long enough at one of the customs barges to declare to the swarthy, amiable officers the innocence of their freight, and at the mouth of the Canal of the Brenta they paused before the station while a policeman came out and scanned them. He bowed to Don Ippolito’s cloth, and then they began to push up the sluggish canal, shallow and overrun with weeds and mosses, into the heart of the land.

The spring, which in Venice comes in the softening air and the perpetual azure of the
heavens, was renewed to their senses in all its miraculous loveliness. The garden of the Vervains had indeed confessed it in opulence of leaf and bloom, but there it seemed somehow only like a novel effect of the artifice which had been able to create a garden in that city of stone and sea. Here a vernal world suddenly opened before them, with wide-stretching fields of green under a dome of perfect blue; against its walls only the soft curves of far-off hills were traced, and near at hand the tender forms of full-foliaged trees. The long garland of vines that festoons all Italy seemed to begin in the neighbouring orchards; the meadows waved their tall grasses in the sun, and broke in poppies as the sea-waves break in iridescent spray; the well-grown maize shook its gleaming blades in the light; the poplars marched in stately procession on either side of the straight, white road to Padua, till they vanished in the long perspective. The blossoms had fallen from the trees many weeks before, but the air was full of the vague sweetness of the perfect spring, which here and there gathered and defined itself as the spicy odour of the grass cut on the shore of the canal, and drying in the mellow heat of the sun.
A FOREGONE CONCLUSION.

The voyagers spoke from time to time of some peculiarity of the villas that succeeded each other along the canal. Don Ippolito knew a few of them, the gondoliers knew others; but after all, their names were nothing. These haunts of old-time splendour and idleness, weary of themselves, and unable to escape, are sadder than anything in Venice, and they belonged, as far as the Americans were concerned, to a world as strange as any to which they should go in another life,—the world of a faded fashion and an alien history. Some of the villas were kept in a sort of repair; some were even maintained in the state of old; but the most showed marks of greater or less decay, and here and there one was falling to ruin. They had gardens about them, tangled and wild-grown; a population of decrepit statues in the rococo taste strolled in their walks or simpered from their gates. Two or three houses seemed to be occupied; the rest stood empty, each

"Close latticed to the brooding heat,
   And silent in its dusty vines."

The pleasure-party had no fixed plan for the day further than to ascend the canal, and by and by take a carriage at some con-
venient village and drive to the famous Villa Pisani at Strà.

"These houses are very well," said Don Ippolito, who had visited the villa once, and with whom it had remained a memory almost as signal as that night in Padua when he wore civil dress, "but it is at Strà that you see something really worthy of the royal splendour of the patricians of Venice. Royal? The villa is now one of the palaces of the ex-Emperor of Austria, who does not find it less imperial than his other palaces." Don Ippolito had celebrated the villa at Strà in this strain ever since they had spoken of going up the Brenta: now it was the magnificent conservatories and orangeries that he sang, now the vast garden with its statued walks between rows of clipt cedars and firs, now the stables with their stalls for numberless horses, now the palace itself with its frescoed halls and treasures of art and virtu. His enthusiasm for the villa at Strà had become an amiable jest with the Americans. Ferris laughed at his fresh outburst; he declared himself tired of the gondola, and he asked Florida to disembark with him and walk under the trees of a pleasant street running on one side between the villas and the canal. "We are going to
A FOREGONE CONCLUSION

find something much grander than the Villa Pisani," he boasted, with a look at Don Ippolito.

As they sauntered along the path together, they came now and then to a stately palace like that of the Contarini, where the lions, that give their name to one branch of the family, crouch in stone before the grand portal; but most of the houses were interesting only from their unstoried possibilities to the imagination. They were generally of stucco, and glared with fresh whitewash through the foliage of their gardens. When a peasant's cottage broke their line, it gave, with its barns and straw-stacks and its beds of pot-herbs, a homely relief from the decaying gentility of the villas.

"What a pity, Miss Vervain," said the painter, "that the blessings of this world should be so unequally divided! Why should all this sketchable adversity be lavished upon the neighbourhood of a city that is so rich as Venice in picturesque dilapidation? It's pretty hard on us Americans, and forces people of sensibility into exile. What wouldn't cultivated persons give for a stretch of this street in the suburbs of Boston, or of your own Providence? I suppose the New Yorkers will be
setting up something of the kind one of these days, and giving it a French name—they'll call it Aux bords du Brenta. There was one of them carried back a gondola the other day to put on a pond in their new park. But the worst of it is, you can't take home the sentiment of these things."

"I thought it was the business of painters to send home the sentiment of them in pictures," said Florida.

Ferris talked to her in this way because it was his way of talking; it always surprised him a little that she entered into the spirit of it; he was not quite sure that she did; he sometimes thought she waited till she could seize upon a point to turn against him, and so give herself the air of having comprehended the whole. He laughed: "Oh yes, a poor little fragmentary, faded-out reproduction of their sentiment—which is 'as moonlight unto sunlight and as water unto wine,' when compared with the real thing. Suppose I made a picture of this very bit, ourselves in the foreground, looking at the garden over there where that amusing Vandal of an owner has just had his statues painted white: would our friends at home understand it? A whole history must be left unexpressed. I could only hint at an
entire situation. Of course, people with a taste for olives would get the flavour; but even they would wonder that I chose such an unsuggestive bit. Why, it is just the most maddeningly suggestive thing to be found here! And if I may put it modestly, for my share in it, I think we two young Americans looking on at this supreme excess of the rococo, are the very essence of the sentiment of the scene; but what would the honoured connoisseurs—the good folks who get themselves up on Ruskin and try so honestly hard to have some little ideas about art—make of us? To be sure they might justifiably praise the grace of your pose, if I were so lucky as to catch it, and your way of putting your hand under the elbow of the arm that holds your parasol,”—Florida seemed disdainfully to keep her attitude, and the painter smiled,—"but they wouldn't know what it all meant, and couldn't imagine that we were inspired by this rascally little villa to sigh longingly over the wicked past"—

"Excuse me," interrupted Florida, with a touch of trouble in her proud manner, "I'm not sighing over it, for one, and I don't want it back. I'm glad that I'm American, and that there is no past for me. I can't understand how you and Don Ippolito can speak
so tolerantly of what no one can respect," she added, in almost an aggrieved tone.

If Miss Vervain wanted to turn the talk upon Don Ippolito, Ferris by no means did; he had had enough of that subject yesterday; he got as lightly away from it as he could.

"Oh, Don Ippolito's a pagan, I tell you; and I'm a painter, and the rococo is my weakness. I wish I could paint it, but I can't; I'm a hundred years too late. I couldn't even paint myself in the act of sentimentalising it."

While he talked, he had been making a few lines in a small pocket sketch-book, with a furtive glance or two at Florida. When they returned to the boat, he busied himself again with the book, and presently he handed it to Mrs. Vervain.

"Why, it's Florida!" cried the lady.

"How very nicely you do sketch, Mr. Ferris!"

"Thanks, Mrs. Vervain; you're always flattering me."

"No, but seriously. I wish that I had paid more attention to my drawing when I was a girl. And now, Florida—she won't touch a pencil. I wish you'd talk to her, Mr. Ferris."

"Oh, people who are pictures needn't
trouble themselves to be painters,” said Ferris, with a little burlesque.

Mrs. Vervain began to look at the sketch through her tubed hand; the painter made a grimace. “But you’ve made her too proud, Mr. Ferris. She doesn’t look like that.”

“Yes she does—to those unworthy of her kindness. I have taken Miss Vervain in the act of scorning the rococo, and its humble admirer, me, with it.”

“I’m sure I don’t know what you mean, Mr. Ferris; but I can’t think that this proud look is habitual with Florida; and I’ve heard people say—very good judges—that an artist oughtn’t to perpetuate a temporary expression. Something like that.”

“It can’t be helped now, Mrs. Vervain: the sketch is irretrievably immortal. I’m sorry, but it’s too late.”

“Oh, stuff! As if you couldn’t turn up the corners of the mouth a little. Or something.”

“And give her the appearance of laughing at me? Never!”

“Don Ippolito,” said Mrs. Vervain, turning to the priest, who had been listening intently to all this trivial talk, “what do you think of this sketch?”
He took the book with an eager hand, and perused the sketch as if trying to read some secret there. After a minute he handed it back with a light sigh, apparently of relief, but said nothing.

"Well?" asked Mrs. Vervain.

"Oh! I ask pardon. No, it isn't my idea of madamigella. It seems to me that her likeness must be sketched in colour. Those lines are true, but they need colour to subdue them; they go too far, they are more than true."

"You're quite right, Don Ippolito," said Ferris.

"Then you don't think she always has this proud look?" pursued Mrs. Vervain.

The painter fancied that Florida quelled in herself a movement of impatience; he looked at her with an amused smile.

"Not always, no," answered Don Ippolito. "Sometimes her face expresses the greatest meekness in the world."

"But not at the present moment," thought Ferris, fascinated by the stare of angry pride which the girl bent upon the unconscious priest.

"Though I confess that I should hardly know how to characterise her habitual expression," added Don Ippolito.
"Thanks," said Florida, peremptorily. "I'm tired of the subject; it isn't an important one."

"Oh yes, it is, my dear," said Mrs. Ver-vain. "At least it's important to me, if it isn't to you; for I'm your mother, and really, if I thought you looked like this, as a general thing, to a casual observer, I should consider it a reflection upon myself." Ferris gave a provoking laugh as she continued sweetly, "I must insist, Don Ippolito: now did you ever see Florida look so?"

The girl leaned back, and began to wave her fan slowly to and fro before her face.

"I never saw her look so with you, dear madama," said the priest with an anxious glance at Florida, who let her fan fall folded into her lap, and sat still. He went on with priestly smoothness, and a touch of something like invoked authority, such as a man might show who could dispense indulgences and inflict penances. "No one could help seeing her devotedness to you, and I've admired from the first an obedience and tenderness that I have never known equalled. In all her relations to you, madamigella has seemed to me"—

Florida started forward. "You are not asked to comment on my behaviour to my
mother; you are not invited to speak of my conduct at all!” she burst out with sudden violence, her visage flaming, and her blue eyes burning upon Don Ippolito, who shrank from the astonishing rudeness as from a blow in the face. “What is it to you how I treat my mother?”

She sank back again upon the cushions, and opening the fan with a clash, swept it swiftly before her.

“Florida!” said her mother, gravely.

Ferris turned away in cold disgust, like one who has witnessed a cruelty done to some helpless thing. Don Ippolito’s speech was not fortunate at the best, but it might have come from a foreigner’s misapprehension, and at the worst it was good-natured and well-meant. “The girl is a perfect brute, as I thought in the beginning,” the painter said to himself. “How could I have ever thought differently? I shall have to tell Don Ippolito that I’m ashamed of her, and disclaim all responsibility. Pah! I wish I was out of this.”

The pleasure of the day was dead. It could not rally from that stroke. They went on to Strà, as they had planned, but the glory of the Villa Pisani was eclipsed for Don Ippolito. He plainly did not know
what to do. He did not address Florida again, whose savagery he would not probably have known how to resent if he had wished to resent it. Mrs. Vervain prattled away to him with unrelenting kindness; Ferris kept near him, and with affectionate zeal tried to make him talk of the villa, but neither the frescoes, nor the orangeries, nor the green-houses, nor the stables, nor the gardens could rouse him from the listless daze in which he moved, though Ferris found them all as wonderful as he had said. Amidst this heavy embarrassment no one seemed at ease but the author of it. She did not, to be sure, speak to Don Ippolito, but she followed her mother as usual with her assiduous cares, and she appeared tranquilly unconscious of the sarcastic civility with which Ferris rendered her any service.

It was late in the afternoon when they got back to their boat and began to descend the canal towards Venice, and long before they reached Fusina the day had passed. A sunset of melancholy red, streaked with level lines of murky cloud, stretched across the flats behind them, and faintly tinged with its reflected light the eastern horizon which the towers and domes of Venice had not yet
begun to break. The twilight came, and then through the overcast heavens the moon shone dim; a light blossomed here and there in the villas, distant voices called musically; a cow lowed, a dog barked; the rich, sweet breath of the vernal land mingled its odours with the sultry air of the neighbouring lagoon. The wayfarers spoke little; the time hung heavy on all, no doubt; to Ferris it was a burden almost intolerable to hear the creak of the oars and the breathing of the gondoliers keeping time together. At last the boat stopped in front of the police-station in Fusina; a soldier with a sword at his side and a lantern in his hand came out and briefly parleyed with the gondoliers; they stepped ashore, and he marched them into the station before him.

"We have nothing left to wish for now," said Ferris, breaking into an ironical laugh.

"What does it all mean?" asked Mrs. Vervain.

"I think I had better go see."

"We will go with you," said Mrs. Vervain.

"Pazienza!" replied Ferris.

The ladies rose; but Don Ippolito remained seated. "Aren't you going too, Don Ippolito?" asked Mrs. Vervain.
"Thanks, madama; but I prefer to stay here."

Lamentable cries and shrieks, as if the prisoners had immediately been put to the torture, came from the station as Ferris opened the door. A lamp of petroleum lighted the scene, and shone upon the figures of two fishermen, who bewailed themselves unintelligibly in the vibrant accents of Chiozza, and from time to time advanced upon the gondoliers, and shook their heads and beat their breasts at them. A few police-guards reclined upon benches about the room, and surveyed the spectacle with mild impassibility.

Ferris politely asked one of them the cause of the detention.

"Why, you see, signore," answered the guard amiably, "these honest men accuse your gondoliers of having stolen a rope out of their boat at Dolo."

"It was my blood, you know!" howled the elder of the fishermen, tossing his arms wildly abroad, "it was my own heart," he cried, letting the last vowel die away and rise again in mournful refrain, while he stared tragically into Ferris's face.

"What is the matter?" asked Mrs. Ver- vain, putting up her glasses, and trying
with graceful futility to focus the melodrama.

"Nothing," said Ferris; "our gondoliers have had the heart's blood of this respectable Dervish; that is to say, they have stolen a rope belonging to him."

"Our gondoliers! I don't believe it. They've no right to keep us here all night. Tell them you're the American consul."

"I'd rather not try my dignity on these underlings, Mrs. Vervain; there's no American squadron here that I could order to bombard Fusina, if they didn't mind me. But I'll see what I can do further in quality of courteous foreigner.—Can you perhaps tell me how long you will be obliged to detain us here?" he asked of the guard again.

"I am very sorry to detain you at all, signore. But what can I do? The commissary is unhappily absent. He may be here soon."

The guard renewed his apathetic contemplation of the gondoliers, who did not speak a word; the windy lamentation of the fishermen rose and fell fitfully. Presently they went out of doors and poured forth their wrongs to the moon.

The room was close, and with some trouble Ferris persuaded Mrs. Vervain to return to
the gondola, Florida seconding his argu-
ments with gentle good sense.

It seemed a long time till the commissary
came, but his coming instantly simplified
the situation. Perhaps because he had never
been able to befriend a consul in trouble
before, he befriended Ferris to the utmost.
He had met him with rather a brow-beating
air; but after a glance at his card, he gave a
kind of roar of deprecation and apology.
He had the ladies and Don Ippolito in, out
of the gondola, and led them to an upper
chamber, where he made them all repose
their honoured persons upon his sofas. He
ordered up his housekeeper to make them
coffee, which he served with his own hands,
excusing its hurried feebleness, and he stood
by, rubbing his palms together and smiling,
while they refreshed themselves.

"They need never tell me again that the
Austrians are tyrants," said Mrs. Vervain in
undertone to the consul.

It was not easy for Ferris to remind his
host of the malefactors; but he brought
himself to this ungraciousness. The com-
missary begged pardon, and asked him to
accompany him below, where he confronted
the accused and the accusers. The tragedy
was acted over again with blood-curdling
effectiveness by the Chiozzotti; the gondoliers maintaining the calm of conscious innocence.

Ferris felt outraged by the trumped-up charge against them.

"Listen, you others the prisoners," said the commissary. "Your padrone is anxious to return to Venice, and I wish to inflict no further displeasures upon him. Restore their rope to these honest men, and go about your business."

The injured gondoliers spoke in low tones together; then one of them shrugged his shoulders and went out. He came back in a moment and laid a rope before the commissary.

"Is that the rope?" he asked. "We found it floating down the canal, and picked it up that we might give it to the rightful owner. But now I wish to heaven we had let it sink to the bottom of the sea."

"Oh, a beautiful story!" wailed the Chiozzotti. They flung themselves upon the rope, and lugged it off to their boat; and the gondoliers went out too.

The commissary turned to Ferris with an amiable smile. "I am sorry that those rogues should escape," said the American.

"Oh," said the Italian, "they are poor fellows, it is a little matter; I am glad to have served you."
He took leave of his involuntary guests with effusion, following them with a lantern to the gondola.

Mrs. Vervain, to whom Ferris gave an account of this trial as they set out again on their long-hindered return, had no mind save for the magical effect of his consular quality upon the commissary, and accused him of a vain and culpable modesty.

"Ah," said the diplomatist, "there's nothing like knowing just when to produce your dignity. There are some officials who know too little,—like those guards; and there are some who know too much,—like the commissary's superiors. But he is just in that golden mean of ignorance where he supposes a consul is a person of importance."

Mrs. Vervain disputed this, and Ferris submitted in silence. Presently, as they skirted the shore to get their bearings for the route across the lagoon, a fierce voice in Venetian shouted from the darkness, "Indrio, indrio!" (Back, back!) and a gleam of the moon through the pale, watery clouds revealed the figure of a gendarme on the nearest point of land. The gondoliers bent to their oars, and sent the boat swiftly out into the lagoon.

"There, for example, is a person who
would be quite insensible to my greatness, even if I had the consular seal in my pocket. To him we are possible smugglers;¹ and I must say,” he continued, taking out his watch, and staring hard at it, “that if I were a disinterested person, and heard his suspicion met with the explanation that we were a little party out here for pleasure at half-past twelve A.M., I should say he was right. At any rate we won’t engage him in controversy. Quick, quick!” he added to the gondoliers, glancing at the receding shore, and then at the first of the lagoon forts which they were approaching. A dim shape moved along the top of the wall, and seemed to linger and scrutinise them. As they drew nearer, the challenge, “Wer da?” rang out.

The gondoliers eagerly answered with the one word of German known to their craft, “Freunde,” and struggled to urge the boat forward; the oar of the gondolier in front slipped from the high rowlock, and fell out of his hand into the water. The gondola lurched, and then suddenly ran aground on the shallow. The sentry halted, dropped

¹ Under the Austrians, Venice was a free port, but everything carried thence to the mainland was liable to duty.
his gun from his shoulder, and ordered them to go on, while the gondoliers clamoured back in the high key of fear, and one of them screamed out to his passengers to do something, saying that, a few weeks before, a sentinel had fired upon a fisherman and killed him.

"What's that he's talking about?" demanded Mrs. Vervain. "If we don't get on, it will be that man's duty to fire on us; he has no choice," she said, nerved and interested by the presence of this danger.

The gondoliers leaped into the water and tried to push the boat off. It would not move, and without warning, Don Ippolito, who had sat silent since they left Fusina, stepped over the side of the gondola, and thrusting an oar under its bottom lifted it free of the shallow.

"Oh, how very unnecessary!" cried Mrs. Vervain, as the priest and the gondoliers clambered back into the boat. "He will take his death of cold."

"It's ridiculous," said Ferris. "You ought to have told these worthless rascals what to do, Don Ippolito. You've got yourself wet for nothing. It's too bad!"

"It's nothing," said Don Ippolito, taking his seat on the little prow deck, and quietly
dripping where the water would not incom-mode the others.

"Oh, here!" cried Mrs. Vermežn, gathering some shawls together, "make him wrap those about him. He'll die, I know he will—with that reeking shirt of his. If you must go into the water, I wish you had worn your abbate's dress. How could you, Don Ippolito?"

The gondoliers set their oars, but before they had given a stroke, they were arrested by a sharp "Halt!" from the fort. Another figure had joined the sentry, and stood looking at them.

"Well," said Ferris, "now what, I wonder? That's an officer. If I had a little German about me, I might state the situation to him."

He felt a light touch on his arm. "I can speak German," said Florida timidly.

"Then you had better speak it now," said Ferris.

She rose to her feet, and in a steady voice briefly explained the whole affair. The figures listened motionless; then the last comer politely replied, begging her to be in no uneasiness, made her a shadowy salute, and vanished. The sentry resumed his walk, and took no further notice of them.
"Brava!" said Ferris, while Mrs. Vervain babbled her satisfaction, "I will buy a German Ollendorff to-morrow. The language is indispensable to a pleasure excursion in the lagoon."

Florida made no reply, but devoted herself to restoring her mother to that state of defence against the discomforts of the time and place, which the common agitation had impaired. She seemed to have no sense of the presence of any one else. Don Ippolito did not speak again save to protect himself from the anxieties and reproaches of Mrs. Vervain, renewed and reiterated at intervals. She drowsed after a while, and whenever she woke she thought they had just touched her own landing. By fits it was cloudy and moonlight; they began to meet peasants' boats going to the Rialto market; at last, they entered the Canal of the Zattere, then they slipped into a narrow way, and presently stopped at Mrs. Vervain's gate; this time she had not expected it. Don Ippolito gave her his hand, and entered the garden with her, while Ferris lingered behind with Florida, helping her to put together the wraps strewn about the gondola.

"Wait!" she commanded, as they moved up the garden walk. "I want to speak
with you about Don Ippolito. What shall I do to him for my rudeness? You must tell me—you shall," she said in a fierce whisper, gripping the arm which Ferris had given to help her up the landing-stairs. "You are—older than I am!"

"Thanks. I was afraid you were going to say wiser. I should think your own sense of justice, your own sense of"—

"Decency. Say it, say it!" cried the girl passionately; "it was indecent, indecent—that was it!"

—"would tell you what to do," concluded the painter dryly.

She flung away the arm to which she had been clinging, and ran to where the priest stood with her mother at the foot of the terrace stairs. "Don Ippolito," she cried, "I want to tell you that I am sorry; I want to ask your pardon—how can you ever forgive me?—for what I said."

She instinctively stretched her hand towards him.

"Oh!" said the priest, with an indescribable, long, trembling sigh. He caught her hand in his, held it tight, and then pressed it for an instant against his breast.

Ferris made a little start forward.

"Now, that's right, Florida," said her
mother, as the four stood in the pale, estranging moonlight. "I'm sure Don Ippolito can't cherish any resentment. If he does, he must come in and wash it out with a glass of wine—that's a good old fashion. I want you to have the wine at any rate, Don Ippolito; it'll keep you from taking cold. You really must."

"Thanks, madama; I cannot lose more time, now; I must go home at once. Good-night."

Before Mrs. Vervain could frame a protest, or lay hold of him, he bowed and hurried out of the landgate.

"How perfectly absurd for him to get into the water in that way!" she said, looking mechanically in the direction in which he had vanished.

"Well, Mrs. Vervain, it isn't best to be too grateful to people," said Ferris, "but I think we must allow that if we were in any danger, sticking there in the mud, Don Ippolito got us out of it by putting his shoulder to the oar."

"Of course," assented Mrs. Vervain.

"In fact," continued Ferris, "I suppose we may say that, under Providence, we probably owe our lives to Don Ippolito's self-sacrifice and Miss Vervain's knowledge
of German. At any rate, it's what I shall always maintain."

"Mother, don't you think you had better go in?" asked Florida gently. Her gentleness ignored the presence, the existence of Ferris. "I'm afraid you will be sick after all this fatigue."

"There, Mrs. Vervain, it'll be no use offering me a glass of wine. I'm sent away, you see," said Ferris. "And Miss Vervain is quite right. Good-night."

"Oh—good-night, Mr. Ferris," said Mrs. Vervain, giving her hand. "Thank you so much."

Florida did not look towards him. She gathered her mother's shawl about her shoulders for the twentieth time that day, and softly urged her in-doors, while Ferris let himself out into the campo.
IX.

FLORIDA began to prepare the bed for her mother's lying down.

"What are you doing that for, my dear?" asked Mrs. Vervain. "I can't go to bed at once."

"But, mother"—

"No, Florida. And I mean it. You are too headstrong. I should think you would see yourself how you suffer in the end by giving way to your violent temper. What a day you have made for us!"

"I was very wrong," murmured the proud girl, meekly.

"And then the mortification of an apology; you might have spared yourself that."

"It didn't mortify me; I didn't care for it."

"No, I really believe you are too haughty to mind humbling yourself. And Don Ippolito had been so uniformly kind to us. I begin to believe that Mr. Ferris
caught your true character in that sketch. But your pride will be broken some day, Florida.”

“Won’t you let me help you undress, mother? You can talk to me while you’re undressing. You must try to get some rest.”

“Yes, I am all unstrung. Why couldn’t you have let him come in and talk a while? It would have been the best way to get me quieted down. But no—you must always have your own way. Don’t twitch me, my dear; I’d rather undress myself. You pretend to be very careful of me. I wonder if you really care for me.”

“Oh mother, you are all I have in the world!”

Mrs. Vervain began to whimper. “You talk as if I were any better off. Have I anybody besides you? And I have lost so many.”

“Don’t think of those things now, mother.”

Mrs. Vervain tenderly kissed the young girl. “You are good to your mother. Don Ippolito was right; no one ever saw you offer me disrespect or unkindness. There, there! Don’t cry, my darling. I think I had better lie down, and I’ll let you undress me.”
She suffered herself to be helped into bed, and Florida went softly about the room, putting it in order, and drawing the curtains closer to keep out the near dawn. Her mother talked a little while, and presently fell from incoherence to silence, and so to sleep.

Florida looked hesitatingly at her for a moment, and then set her candle on the floor, and sank wearily into an arm-chair beside the bed. Her hands fell into her lap; her head drooped sadly forward; the light flung the shadow of her face, grotesquely exaggerated and foreshortened, upon the ceiling.

By and by a bird piped in the garden; the shriek of a swallow made itself heard from a distance; the vernal day was beginning to stir from the light, brief drowse of the vernal night. A crown of angry red formed upon the candle wick, which toppled over in the socket and guttered out with a sharp hiss.

Florida started from her chair. A streak of sunshine pierced shutter and curtain. Her mother was supporting herself on one elbow in the bed, and looking at her as if she had just called to her.

"Mother, did you speak?" asked the girl.
Mrs. Vervain turned her face away; she sighed deeply, stretched her thin hands on the pillow, and seemed to be sinking—sinking down through the bed. She ceased to breathe, and lay in a dead faint.

Florida felt rather than saw it all. She did not cry out nor call for help. She brought water and cologne, and bathed her mother’s face, and then chafed her hands. Mrs. Vervain slowly revived; she opened her eyes, then closed them; she did not speak, but after a while she began to fetch her breath with the long and even respirations of sleep.

Florida noiselessly opened the door, and met the servant with a tray of coffee. She put her finger to her lip, and motioned her not to enter, asking in a whisper: “What time is it, Nina? I forgot to wind my watch.”

“It’s nine o’clock, signorina; and I thought you would be tired this morning, and would like your coffee in bed. Oh, misericordia!” cried the girl still in whisper, with a glance through the doorway, “you haven’t been in bed at all!”

“My mother doesn’t seem well. I sat down beside her, and fell asleep in my chair without knowing it.”
“Ah, poor little thing! Then you must drink your coffee at once. It refreshes.”

“Yes, yes,” said Florida, closing the door, and pointing to a table in the next room, “put it down here. I will serve myself, Nina. Go call the gondola, please. I am going out at once, and I want you to go with me. Tell Checa to come here and stay with my mother till I come back.”

She poured out a cup of coffee with a trembling hand, and hastily drank it; then bathing her eyes, she went to the glass and bestowed a touch or two upon yesterday’s toilet, studied the effect a moment, and turned away. She ran back for another look, and the next moment she was walking down to the water-gate, where she found Nina waiting her in the gondola.

A rapid course brought them to Ferris’s landing. “Ring,” she said to the gondolier, “and say that one of the American ladies wishes to see the consul.”

Ferris was standing on the balcony over her, where he had been watching her approach in mute wonder. “Why, Miss Vervain,” he called down, “what in the world is the matter?”

“I don’t know. I want to see you,” said Florida, looking up with a wistful face.
"I'll come down."

"Yes, please. Or no, I had better come up. Yes, Nina and I will come up."

Ferris met them at the lower door and led them to his apartment. Nina sat down in the outer room, and Florida followed the painter into his studio. Though her face was so wan, it seemed to him that he had never seen it lovelier, and he had a strange pride in her being there, though the disorder of the place ought to have humbled him. She looked over it with a certain childlike, timid curiosity, and something of that lofty compassion with which young ladies regard the haunts of men when they come into them by chance; in doing this she had a haughty, slow turn of the head that fascinated him.

"I hope," he said, "you don't mind the smell," which was a mingled one of oil-colours and tobacco-smoke. "The woman's putting my office to rights, and it's all in a cloud of dust. So I have to bring you in here."

Florida sat down on a chair fronting the easel, and found herself looking into the sad eyes of Don Ippolito. Ferris brusquely turned the back of the canvas toward her. "I didn't mean you to see that. It isn't ready to show, yet," he said, and then he
stood expectantly before her. He waited for her to speak, for he never knew how to take Miss Vervain; he was willing enough to make light of her grand moods, but now she was too evidently unhappy for mocking; at the same time he did not care to invoke a snub by a prematurely sympathetic demeanour. His mind ran on the events of the day before, and he thought this visit probably related somehow to Don Ippolito. But his visitor did not speak, and at last he said: “I hope there’s nothing wrong at home, Miss Vervain. It’s rather odd to have yesterday, last night, and next morning all run together as they have been for me in the last twenty-four hours. I trust Mrs. Vervain is turning the whole thing into a good solid oblivion.”

“‘It’s about—it’s about—I came to see you’”—said Florida, hoarsely. “I mean,” she hurried on to say, “that I want to ask you who is the best doctor here?”

Then it was not about Don Ippolito. “Is your mother sick?” asked Ferris, eagerly. “She must have been fearfully tired by that unlucky expedition of ours. I hope there’s nothing serious?”

“No, no! But she is not well. She is very frail, you know. You must have
noticed how frail she is," said Florida, tremulously.

Ferris had noticed that all his countrywomen, past their girlhood, seemed to be sick, he did not know how or why; he supposed it was all right, it was so common. In Mrs. Vervain's case, though she talked a great deal about her ill-health, he had noticed it rather less than usual, she had so great spirit. He recalled now that he had thought her at times rather a shadowy presence, and that occasionally it had amused him that so slight a structure should hang together as it did—not only successfully, but triumphantly.

He said yes, he knew that Mrs. Vervain was not strong, and Florida continued: "It's only advice that I want for her, but I think we had better see some one—or know some one that we could go to in need. We are so far from any one we know, or help of any kind." She seemed to be trying to account to herself, rather than to Ferris, for what she was doing. "We mustn't let anything pass unnoticed."—She looked at him entreatingly, but a shadow, as of some wounding memory, passed over her face, and she said no more.

"I'll go with you to a doctor's," said Ferris kindly.
"No, please, I won't trouble you."
"It's no trouble."
"I don't want you to go with me, please. I'd rather go alone." Ferris looked at her perplexedly, as she rose. "Just give me the address, and I shall manage best by myself. I'm used to doing it."
"As you like. Wait a moment." Ferris wrote the address. "There," he said, giving it to her; "but isn't there anything I can do for you?"
"Yes," answered Florida with awkward hesitation, and a half-defiant, half-imploring look at him. "You must have all sorts of people applying to you, as a consul; and you look after their affairs—and try to forget them"—
"Well?" said Ferris.
"I wish you wouldn't remember that I've asked this favour of you; that you'd consider it a"—
"Consular service? With all my heart," answered Ferris, thinking for the third or fourth time how very young Miss Vervain was.
"You are very good; you are kinder than I have any right," said Florida, smiling piteously. "I only mean, don't speak of it to my mother. Not," she added, "but
what I want her to know everything I do; but it would worry her if she thought I was anxious about her. Oh! 'I wish I wouldn't.'

She began a hasty search for her handkerchief; he saw her lips tremble and his soul trembled with them.

In another moment, "Good-morning," she said briskly, with a sort of airy sob, "I don't want you to come down, please."

She drifted out of the room and down the stairs, the servant-maid falling into her wake.

Ferris filled his pipe and went out on his balcony again, and stood watching the gondola in its course toward the address he had given, and smoking thoughtfully. It was really the same girl who had given poor Don Ippolito that cruel slap in the face, yesterday. But that seemed no more out of reason than her sudden, generous, exaggerated remorse; both were of a piece with her coming to him for help now, holding him at a distance, flinging herself upon his sympathy, and then trying to snub him, and breaking down in the effort. It was all of a piece, and the piece was bad; yes, she had an ugly temper; and yet she had magnanimous traits too. These contradictions,
which in his reverie he felt rather than formulated, made him smile, as he stood on his balcony bathed by the morning air and sunlight, in fresh, strong ignorance of the whole mystery of women's nerves. These caprices even charmed him. He reflected that he had gone on doing the Vervains one favour after another in spite of Florida's childish petulances; and he resolved that he would not stop now; her whims should be nothing to him, as they had been nothing hitherto. It is flattering to a man to be indispensable to a woman so long as he is not obliged to it; Miss Vervain's dependent relation to himself in this visit gave her a grace in Ferris's eyes which she had wanted before.

In the meantime he saw her gondola stop, turn round, and come back to the canal that bordered the Vervain garden.

"Another change of mind," thought Ferris, complacently; and rising superior to the whole fitful sex, he released himself from uneasiness on Mrs. Vervain's account. But in the evening he went to ask after her. He first sent his card to Florida, having written on it, "I hope Mrs. Vervain is better. Don't let me come in if it's any disturbance." He looked for a moment at
what he had written, dimly conscious that it was patronising, and when he entered he saw that Miss Vervain stood on the defensive, and from some wilfulness, meant to make him feel that he was presumptuous in coming; it did not comfort him to consider that she was very young. "Mother will be in directly," said Florida in a tone that relegated their morning's interview to the age of fable.

Mrs. Vervain came in smiling and cordial, apparently better and not worse for yesterday's misadventures.

"Oh, I pick up quickly," she explained. "I'm an old campaigner, you know. Perhaps a little too old, now. Years do make a difference; and you'll find it out as you get on, Mr. Ferris."

"I suppose so," said Ferris, not caring to have Mrs. Vervain treat him so much like a boy. "Even at twenty-six, I found it pleasant to take a nap this afternoon. How does one stand it at seventeen, Miss Vervain?" he asked.

"I haven't felt the need of sleep," replied Florida indifferently, and he felt she'd, as an old fellow.

He had an empty, frivolous visit, to his thinking. Mrs. Vervain asked if he had seen
Don Ippolito, and wondered that the priest had not come about, all day. She told a long story; and at the end tapped herself on the mouth with her fan to punish a yawn.

Ferris rose to go. Mrs. Vervain wondered again in the same words why Don Ippolito had not been near them all day.

"Because he's a wise man," said Ferris with bitterness, "and knows when to time his visits." Mrs. Vervain did not notice his bitterness, but something made Florida follow him to the outer door.

"Why, it's moonlight!" she exclaimed; and she glanced at him as though she had some purpose of atonement in her mind.

But he would not have it. "Yes, there's a moon," he said moodily. "Good-night."

"Good-night," answered Florida, and she impulsively offered him her hand. He thought that it shook in his, but it was probably the agitation of his own nerves.

A sorrowsness that had been lifted from his heart came back; he walked home disappointed and defeated, he hardly knew why or in what. He did not laugh now to think how she had asked him that morning to forget her coming to him for help; he was outraged that he should have been repaid in this sort, and the rebuff with which his
sympathy had just been met was vulgar: there was no other name for it but vulgarity. Yet he could not relate this quality to the face of the young girl as he constantly beheld it in his homeward walk. It did not defy him or repulse him; it looked up at him wistfully as from the gondola that morning. Nevertheless he hardened his heart. The Vervains should see him next when they had sent for him. After all, one is not so very old at twenty-six.