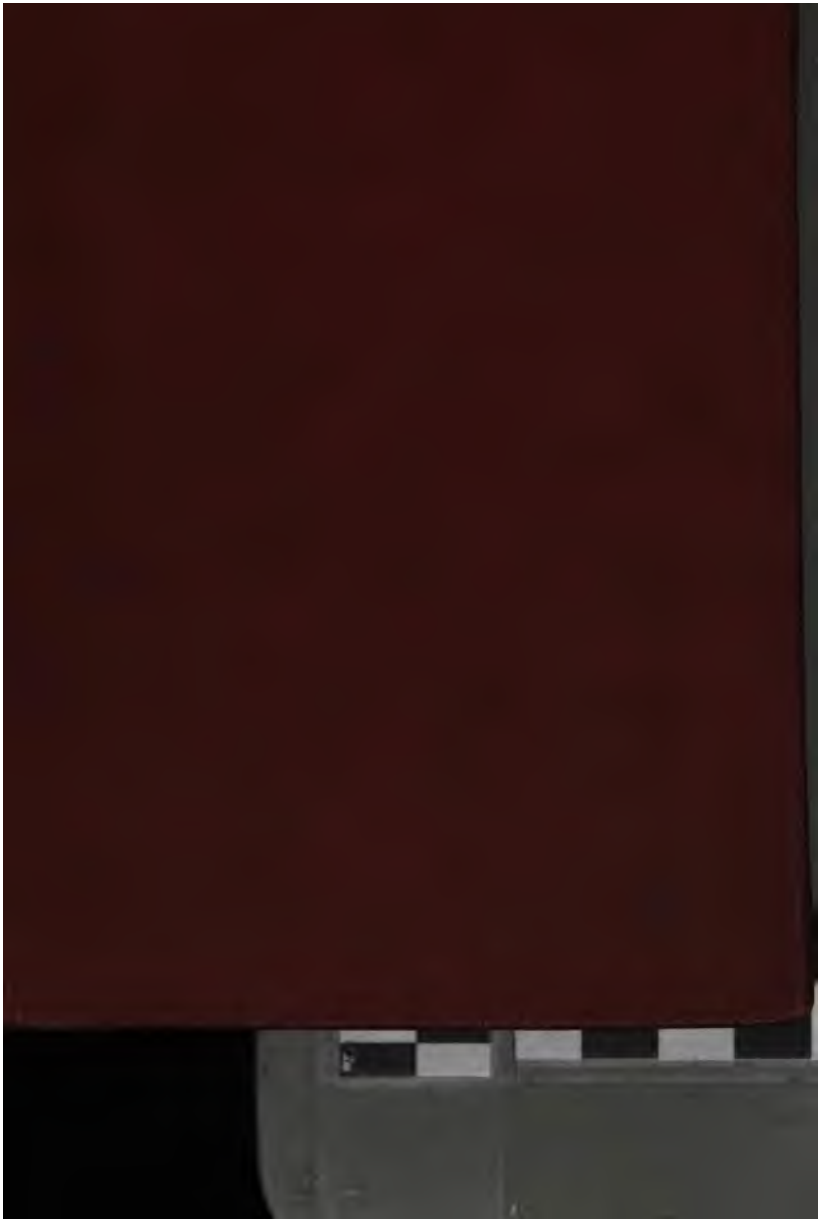

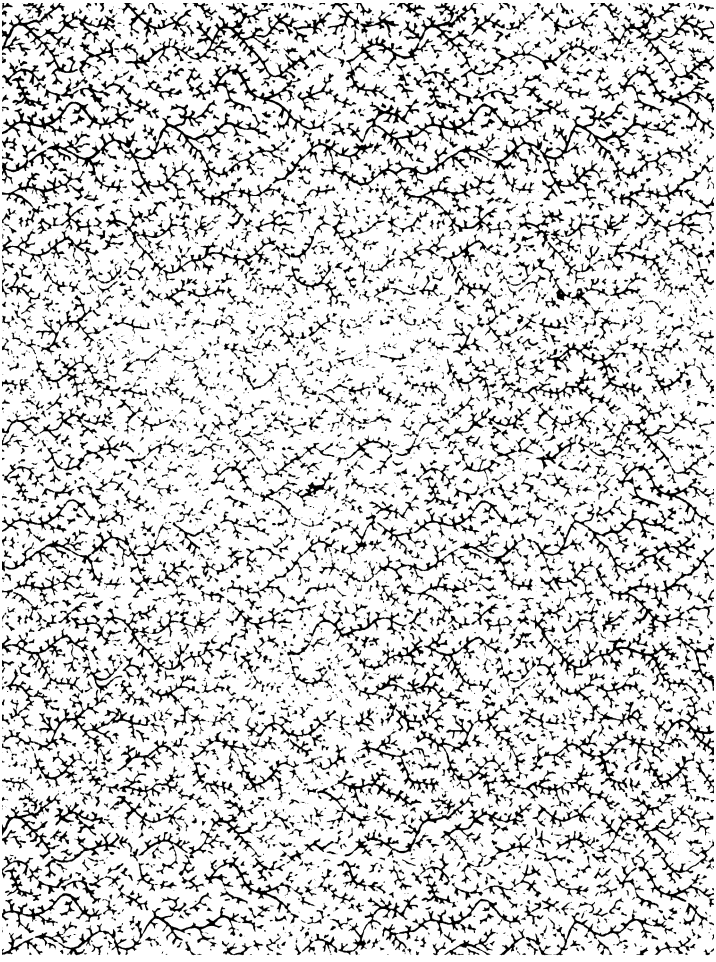

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A RAINY JUNE

DON GESUALDO

LA STREGA
AND OTHER STORIES

BY

OUIDA, pseud. of
Louise De la Ramée,
AUTHOR OF
"TWO OFFENDERS," "ARIADNE," "MOTHS," ETC. ETC.

LEIPZIG
BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ
1899.

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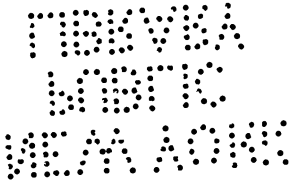

LA STREGA.

LA STREGA.

LA STREGA, the Witch, she had been called these many years, this old and feeble woman who was gathering simples in a meadow by the side of a stream. She had names, her baptismal name, her family name, and the name of her dead husband: dead so long ago in the days of the Fifty-Eight. But no one ever called her any of these. She was only La Strega. Even her church-name of Pià was never heard. People dreaded her, shunned her, despised her; but they sought her always after dark, when they might not be seen by others. They had faith in her magical and sinister powers. She had charms for disease, for

accidents, for warts, for tumours, for snake-bites, for many other things; but what she was most famous for in the neighbourhood were her imprecations and her love-charms.

When she cursed anyone under a full moon it made the blood of the boldest run cold to hear her, and when she gave a lover a bean, or a berry, which she had charmed, he was sure to find favour in the sight of one who had been adamant to his prayers.

So all the hillside folks believed, and she was horrible to them; but she was honoured by them, as such supernatural powers are always loathed yet revered in lonely places where superstition is rooted in the soil like the mandrake.

Within a stone's-throw of her a girl was lying by the edge of the stream, face downwards among the blue bugle and ragged robin, an empty water-barrel and a copper scoop beside her.

She was lying face downward, resting on her elbows, her hands twisted in her rich auburn hair.

"To get him back! To get him back, I would give my soul to hell!" she muttered, as she twisted like a snake which has been struck a brutal blow across the spine.

She was the laughing-stock of the country-side, a few scattered farms lying hidden among woods on a hillside in the Garfagnana. She was the beauty of the district; she was proud, wilful, dominant, amorous, and she had been forsaken for another woman.

Publicly forsaken! All the world, her little world of half a hundred souls who came together from their scattered homesteads at the small church on holy-days and feast-days, knew it, for everyone had known that Avellino Conti was her *damo* in the fullest, sweetest, meaning of that word.

She did not see the old woman gathering simples near, but the old woman saw her, and heard her also. Her despair was so visible, her anguish so absorbed her, that Pià, who never

spoke to a human creature by daylight, ventured to draw near.

"What is the matter, my handsome wench?" she ventured to ask.

The girl looked up, her face convulsed with grief and passion. She recognised the Strega. A shudder of disgust and fear ran through her; it was as if the Evil One she had invoked had lost not a moment in replying to her. But her desperation was stronger in her than her terror.

"Give him back to me and take my soul!" she muttered.

She clutched her hair savagely with both hands; she bit furiously at the stems of the grasses with her white, even teeth; her eyes were dry and blazed with lurid pain. No one was willing to be seen speaking with the evil woman by daylight. Whoever sought her counsels went to her but after nightfall. But Fedalma was in that delirium of distress and passion which makes the mind it ravages dull and insensible of all ex-

cept itself. She stared through blinding tears at the Strega. "Give me back my love, and take my soul!" she repeated.

She was the daughter of a charcoal-burner, known in the country as Febo Nero (Black Phœbus); she had lived all her life in the chestnut woods, under the great trees, amongst the grass and the ling and the broom, seeing only the sheep and the goats and their keepers who came up to the hills of the Garfagnana in summer. Avellino came with them, a fair, lithe, bold youth, with a garment of goat-skins, and a long wand in his hand, and bare feet, and a wallet, and an accordion slung at his back, and a bit of meadow-sweet behind his ear. Their love-tale had been told there, under the big trees, in the hot balmy weather, with the bees buzzing in the stillness and the flocks asleep. Neither of them heeded the green, calm, silent nature round them, or the blue sky of day, or the stars throbbing in the dark. All the book of nature, like all other books,

was naught to them; they only read each other's eyes, they only knew the instincts and appetites of their young and ardent lives and followed them as the flocks followed theirs. But they were happy: unreasoning and but semi-conscious of happiness, also, as the flocks were. All that summer was so good—ah, heavens! so good! She tore up the strong dog's-foot grasses in handfuls as she thought of it.

Then, with All Saints' Day, Avellino, with the sheep and the goats, had gone away from the woods down to the plains, as shepherds always do when the first bite of winter nips the still green leaves. And he had not said to her "Come with me"; he had only said "Fioriranno le rose!" and laughed, meaning that their loves would flower again like the wild roses in the thickets. The charcoal-burner said to his girl, "Summer love means no marriage," but he did not distress himself. The wench was a strong, fine, helpful girl; he was better pleased that she should stay in his hut and

help carry the logs to the burning. The winter was like the ice-hell of Dante to Fedalma, but she had been sustained by the hope and the promise of spring. "A Pasquà fioriranno le rose," she said to herself, and held her fast-beating, passionate heart in such patience as she could, working hard at the charcoal, because thus she tired herself and got a dull, heavy sleep, in which her throbbing pulses were for awhile still.

With Easter the chestnuts and the early roses did blossom, and the flocks came up the steep, winding paths into the higher woods, and Avellino came with them. But in passing he saw the white-faced girl Mercede, who sat spinning at the lattice of the old farmhouse by the weir, and had seen how white her throat was where the coral circled it. For this, therefore, Fedalma writhed like a bruised snake where she lay on the earth, and bit the tough stems of the dog-grass.

The old woman said nothing more, but went on plucking herbs when she found any which were

edible, and the girl shook herself with a dreary yet passionate gesture, and began to fill her water-barrel at the stream under the flags. When it was full she raised it on to her head and strode through the grass with bare, wet feet, heedless of asp or adder.

Once Pià smiled to herself as she bent over the herbs she was uprooting. Those silly wenches, breaking their hearts over mannerless rogues who are not worth the yellow bread they break, and who care more for a penn'orth of drink than for all the girls in creation! She knew that Avellino was a ruddy, well-built, blue-eyed lad, strong as a young steer, and as rough. There was no marriage-ring in his pocket; in his veins there was nothing but riot and licence. What could that young fool hope for? When the sheep have cropped the sweetness off a patch of pasture they move on elsewhere, do they not? It is nature, thought Pià, who had once, long before, dwelt in towns and seen other suns than this which

rose so late and set so early beyond the hills. She was content; she had caught a simpleton.

She had no magic except her cunning and her superior intelligence, but these sufficed to bring such credulous fools to supply her larder, and of all fools she liked best the amorous ones. "I might have said five white pieces," she thought regretfully; "the girl would have procured them somehow or other. Five white pieces make a lira."

With moonrise that night Fedalma kept her tryst. The moon was in its third quarter and rose late, and she left the house stealthily by one of its unglazed windows, for fear her father should awake and ask what she was about, stirring at that hour.

"Here are the white pieces," she said, when the old woman opened to her.

Pià took them with a ravenous movement in her wrinkled, bony hand.

"What shall I do? What shall I do?" asked the girl, with feverish impatience.

They stood face to face on the floor of beaten mud; the elder small and frail and bent, the younger tall and straight and full of colour, health, and force; but the strong was the suppliant, and the weak was the disposer of fate.

A tallow wick burned in a little flat tin pan of oil, and shed a fitful light on the dark brows, the tempestuous eyes, the parted, panting lips of the girl as she muttered, "What shall I do? What shall I do?"

She was ready to do anything, to give herself away to any unnameable horror, as she had given her white pieces into that hungry hand. She was horribly afraid; a nameless terror clutched at her heart and made it stand still; she believed that the place she stood in, the air she breathed here, the fingers which clutched her coins, were all bewitched, bedevilled, unspeakable in their powers of evil. But passion was stronger in her than fear.

"Tut, tut, young one; not so fast!" said Pia,

with the ghost of a smile on her face. "What you would have me do will take time——"

"Time!"

Time! She had thought that some familiar, some imp, or some angel, would dart down that moonbeam which fell across the floor, and take his orders and herself straightway to where the faithless lover slept on his bed of leaves amidst his flock. Time! Was not love a lightning, like that white fire in storm which came none knew whence, and lit up all the woods, and blinded some, and perhaps slew some, and left others alone—none knew why, except that it was the wish and the whim of that messenger of heaven?

"Time? Why time?" she repeated. "He only lived by my breath such a little while ago!"

"You young fool!" thought wise Pià; but, aloud, she said, in a whisper, "Child, he has been bewitched. That is easy to see. You are fine and fair as a peach-bough in blossom, but

to him now you seem as a mere rank thistle-head, for the lad is bewitched."

"By Mercede?"

"By no other."

"If I killed her?"

"That would be of no use. The spell would remain. These ills lie deeper than young things like you can dream. Tell me all—of you, of him, of her. Nay, have no fear. What is unseen about us shall not hurt you. They are under my yoke."

Fedalma shuddered; her eyes glanced, like a nervous, hunted animal's, here and there around her, from the cobweb-hung walls to the smoke-begrimed roof of the hut, from the barred wooden door to the hole in the roof through which the moonlight shone down and glistened on the white hair of the Strega as it strayed from under her coif. What demons might not be listening? What surety had she that the old one could keep them harmless and invisible? There was a faggot of

knotted and crooked sticks in one corner; to her excited fancy they were imps who grinned at her and waited——

"Speak, or get you gone," said Pià, with authority; for she knew nothing, not even the name of the faithless lover, and she needed to know to act with any skill.

"This, then—oh, this!" said Fedalma in desperation. "Listen! My heart is within me as a charred coal, though my breast is all flame and a thousand snakes tear at my flesh. He lived but through me. We were as two cherries on one stalk. Brook-water was as wine when we drank it from each other's lips. The sheep alone knew. They were kind. Not one of them bleated when we met in their fold in the dark, soft nights. A few months ago it was still the same with us. Oh, the blessed hours, the hot smell of the flock, the scent of the mint and the thyme—I shall have them in my nostrils forever, when I am wretched and old like you! And now, and

now it is no more—it is like the cut grass; all is over; he has no eyes but for her; it is for her that the door of the fold opens."

She screamed aloud, again and again, with her torture, as though she were a lamb of the fold brought to slaughter. Then she broke down into a tempest of sobs.

"Be quiet, and tell me more," said the Strega.

It was many moments before Fedalma even heard her; many more before she was calm enough to answer. When she could be brought to speak with any degree of composure, the old woman extracted from her all her brief history, with the skill of a superior intelligence turning a poorer one inside-out for its pleasure. She learned, too, which was what most mattered to her, that the girl was very poor, and could not anyhow be made to yield much profit. Still, one never knows; love-sick mortals are like those cripples who will rob, or steal, or do anything under the sun to get money enough to hang up a garland

or place a candle before their patron saint, who can make, if he will, the lame walk and the blind see. Passion? What was it but the most violent of all fevers? Pià had not forgotten. She, too, long, long before, had known what it was to have the heart turn to a cold cinder in a breast still full of flame. She heard in silence, her small, keen eyes under their wrinkled lids gleaming shrewdly in the fitful light from the saucer of oil.

"You have it badly, the eternal evil," she muttered, with a touch of pity. "Well, well; what I can do I will."

"What can you do?"

"'Tis not for the like of you to know. Those who serve me treat ill the rash and the curious, as serves such irreverent fools aright. Wear this between your breasts. Turn it every night once, twice, thrice, and say, 'Powers, help me! Powers, help me! Powers, help me!' as you turn it. Come again in a week and bring four pieces,

some onions, and a pullet whose neck has been wrung, not cut."

She took out of a packet worn under her skirt a black bean, and muttered over it, and spat on it, and gave it to Fedalma, whose young, strong hand shook like a leaf in a wind as she took it.

"I have no money," she said woefully. "The onions I can get, and the pullet I will try and get; but the money----"

"Without the money do not come back," said the elder woman sharply. "If you come back without it, there is one who will leave the mark of his talons upon you; aye, and upon your face, too—your handsome face that is like a Pentecost rose."

The girl shuddered, and cowered like a beaten animal.

"I will do what I can, mother," she said humbly. "Is there hope? Will there be hope?"

"Aye, like enough, if you don't anger the ones

unseen. Get you gone. Your father may miss you, and will be down in another hour."

Fedalma undid the barred door, trembling, and, once beyond its threshold, fled like a hunted hare over the turf, bearing in her breast, between her skin and her stays, the magical black bean, which seemed to her to lacerate her flesh with a thousand thorns. A thing of sorcery, a gift of the Strega—a devil, for aught she knew, shut up in that shape! What would her poor dead mother have said, who had been such a pious soul? What would the Madonna do to her for taking part with the wicked thus?

But she kept the bean in her bosom nevertheless, and went on through the woods as fast as the darkness and roughness of their paths permitted to her. She had committed more than a sin; but she was ready to do worse still, only to get him back, the thankless, worthless, fickle, cruel knave! The old woman Pià, left alone in her hut, barred her door again, put the white

pieces in a bag which she kept under a stone on the hearth, ate a sorry meal of endive and hard crusts which bruised and pricked her toothless gums, blew out the little light, and stretched herself on her bed of dried leaves and heather.

"Poor wench!" she thought; "she has a look of my Isola."

It was many years since her daughter Isola had been upon the earth, many, many years, but she lived in memory to Pià; in that shrivelled, hard old heart, closed to all except the love of gain and the cunning of her trade, there was one small place still open to a tenderer thought. For sake of the girl's likeness to the long-buried Isola, she said to herself that she would try and help this poor forsaken fool. She would rob her, because that was habit and wisdom, but she would help her if possible: not with her black arts, of which the Strega knew better than anyone else the worthlessness, but with such skill as age and experience can give.

"But save me, saints in glory!" she thought, when she lay on the heather and stared up at the stars throbbing beyond the square hole in the roof. "'Twere easier to pull down those twinklers from the sky than to turn back a man's fancy when it has had its course and fled away. A passion spent is dead as a rotting rat."

There are many things you can mould in this world, but not a man's amorous fancy. She knew Avellino by look and repute; a fine fellow to the sight, but nothing more; ruddy, and with bold, bright, insolent eyes, which challenged women to resist him if they dare; a youth who spoiled a girl's life as indifferently as he wrung a bird's neck or threw down on the wayside a lamb too young to walk, too puny to be worth the trouble of carrying.

One day in the same week the flock of Avellino was resting at noon, when the Strega came near, timidly, lamely, with an old hoe in her hand and an old creel on her back.

"May I pick up a little dung?" she said humbly.

Avellino was ill-pleased, but he was afraid to refuse her—she was the Strega. She began to rake up the damp, black droppings of the sheep. He did not prevent her. She could call down blindness on him or murrain on the sheep, he thought. It was never well to cross such people. She raked up a few of the black balls, then stopped to breathe.

"'Tis ill to be old, young man," she said. "You'll know that one day, if you live, comely and strong as you be now."

Avellino laughed.

"'Tis far off me," he said carelessly: then wondered in affright, could she, maybe, smite him into old age with a curse? "Take a snack of cheese, mother," he said, with a tremor in his voice, as he cut off a slice of the ricotto, made from the curds of the milk of his ewes. She took it with humble thanks, and sat down on the

roots of a tree and pulled a crust from her pocket.

"'Tis a heart as good as your handsome face that you have, my lad," she said, with fervent blessings.

Avellino watched her with apprehension. She looked very old and poor and feeble; but people said she had such strength for evil that, the paler and frailer and more crooked she grew, the stronger and the wickeder grew her powers for mischief. He was horribly frightened, and the colour left his cheeks; but he was fascinated; if he pleased her, propitiated her, might she not have good in her gifts as well, or, at least, only evil for others? Her renown was great on this hillside, though the hatred and terror of her were still greater. He gazed at her agape. Such a little, thin, pale, withered creature—was it possible that she had troops of devils and imps under her orders? He would have driven his

flocks away, but he had three ewes in labour and no one with him.

"You make many a young heart ache for you, you rogue," said Pià, munching the edge of the cheese.

Avellino smiled: the smile of the conquering booby, his vanity, for a moment, being superior to his fear.

"They're mostly fools," he said with ungallant scorn, as he kicked a wether in the groin.

"That is a hard word, boy."

"'Tis a true word. Say, all fools, and 'twill be truer."

He grinned, pleased with his own wit and his own courage in exchanging speech with the Strega.

"Poor fools, indeed," thought Pià, "to let the fresh dews of their dawn be drunk up by the fierce sun of his coarse wooing!"

But, aloud, she flattered him deftly and

turned him inside-out, as was her habit. There was little to find or to note, only a handsome lout's triumphal conceit and unkind contempt for what he had won and done with, and the obstinate bent of a new fancy growing on the ashes of those burned-out and cold. Mercede, she learned, was as yet obdurate, had not yet come to the sheep-fold at nightfall, as that impassioned simpleton, Fedalma, had done to her cost. Mercede was wise, coy, willing and not willing, aiming at the nuptial ring and the priestly blessing, things which for the errant shepherd had no savour.

"If I wed her, you know, I shall leave her," he said candidly; "leave her when the chestnut-leaves fall, as sure as November will come round. There are others down in the vales, on the plains, in the towns."

And he grinned again and bit a spike of grass, proud of his victories as a conquering male

pigeon when it struts to and fro with ruff erect and breast swollen with triumph.

"Mercede has brothers," said Pià significantly. "They'd follow you. Men are beaten or stabbed on the plains as easily as on the hills."

"A fig for their sticks and stilettos!" said Avellino stoutly. "I'm a match for all three."

"In strength, aye, aye," said Pià. "But no one's a match for a shot fired from behind a tree on a dark night. Mercede is like to cost you dear, my crowing cockerel."

Avellino was ill-pleased; he was used to courtships short and fierce and sweet and soon over; the woman paid for the pleasure of it; that was how things should be, in his opinion.

"You could lay a spell on them, mother?" he said, after a time, in a tentative, frightened murmur.

"I can do many things," replied the Strega darkly.

"You could make their knives bend like steel

and their sticks like touchwood," said Avellino, recalling histories he had heard of her incantations. "'Twould be a good deed, for what call have they to come between their sister and me?"

Pià nodded gravely. "They will come between." After a pause, she added, "They are three to one."

"The foul fiend take them!" said Avellino, and then was aghast at what he had said, for might she not resent and revenge the mention of her master?

"He will take you, more like," said Pià, with sombre emphasis.

Avellino felt his veins grow as cold as though he were swimming in a winter flood to save his drowning flock.

"Speak him fair for me, speak him fair, mother," he said, with terror; "you see him every sixth night, they say." His teeth chattered as he spoke; he put his hand in the pocket of his

goat-skin breeches; he had a few coppers there only; he held them out shyly.

Pià clutched them; habit was strong in her, and her ways could not change.

"'Tis nothing," she said, as she counted them. "Get a crown."

"A crown!" he repeated, with a gasp.

"Aye, a crown."

"I will make you pay through your nose, you cur!" she thought, "and I will drive you to the church-altar, but not with Mercede."

Avellino was dumb with conflicting emotions, his dread of the devil and his sense of his own impotency struggling with his poverty. He was very poor; he had scarcely anything he could call his own except an old lute and his pipe. The flock was not his, and the wage he had as shepherd was very small.

"A crown! a crown!" he muttered—the broad silver pieces of an earlier and more solid time still circulate in remote places.

"No less. Do as you like, my pretty lad," said Pià, "and the Powers of Darkness will strengthen the hands of Mercede's brothers."

"I will try, mother; I will try," muttered Avellino. The brothers of Mercede were a very real and fleshly peril, but the ghostly terrors of the Unseen were more horrible to him, for of what use against the latter would be his stout sinews and his slim knife?

Pià took up her creel with the sheep's droppings.

"When shall I see you again, mother?" he said timidly. "If you would like another little snack of cheese——"

"I will be at the ford where you water your sheep the day after to-morrow, at sunset," said Pià, and the cheese went into her pocket with the bronze pieces. He would bring the silver crown, she was sure of that. Pià was pleased with her machinations as she went home over the heather-clad slopes. She thought she held her fish at the

end of her line. She meant to play on his fears and his foibles until she should detach him from his new passion and drag him back to his earlier fealty. She meant to make him atone to Fedalma, whom she had not named because she took more devious and secretive paths to reach her goal, and did not show what was in her brain, lying close-hid there like a hare in the heather. Meantime there was no reason why she should not wring what she could out of this heartless, handsome lad.

The next night Fedalma appeared. She was trembling, and her gown was rent in several places, and her arms were scratched and bruised and bleeding.

"'Twas a thorn brake I fell into," she said hurriedly. But that was not the truth. She had been to a hen-roost miles off and had stolen a plump pullet from its perch and wrung its neck. But in getting back over the fence she had been attacked by a watch-dog belonging to the place,

and had hurt herself on the rough wood of the fence as well. But of this she said nothing, and Pià asked no questions, but took the fowl, with the white pieces and the roots, as the saints in the churches take votive offerings, in silence.

"You have nothing to tell me?" said the girl in breathless anxiety.

"It works, it works," said the Strega vaguely.

"You have seen him?"

"No. Why should I see him, you foolish thing? 'Tis not with mortal ways that the Unseen Powers move and conquer."

Fedalma shuddered.

"The stars are in your favour," continued Pià. "I looked in the well at dead of night twenty-four hours ago. Your star shone clear; his and hers were obscured."

"But were they *together?*" screamed the girl. In her ignorant, rustic soul something of the imperious passion of Francesca da Rimini stirred. Together even in torture. What joy!

"They were apart," said the old woman.

A wave of ecstasy swept over Fedalma's stormy heart, and her face burned and lightened with rapture. She dropped down on the mud floor of the hut and kissed the Strega's feet, bound in rags and cased in dust.

"What shall I render you?" she cried, with sobs of delight.

Pià was touched, and bade her get up. "The lad cannot be worth all that," she said, not unkindly. "You are giving a vat of good wine for a pail of muddy water. Think twice. This youth has tired of you. Have pride——"

Fedalma shook her head. Reason said nothing to her. No argument could touch her. She was blind and deaf to everything except her passion. "I shall be proud when he wears my clematis-flower behind his ear once more!" she cried. "I shall be proud when on his lute he sings again to his sheep in my name! I shall be proud when once again he says 'Love of

my soul, life of my life!' to me—to me, and Mercede sits alone, counting the days that are dead! I shall be proud then—then only. Oh, mother! you are old, so old; but are you so old indeed that you have wholly forgotten your youth?"

"You are mad, poor wench," said Pià; but though her words were harsh, her voice was not so. Ah, yes! The divine delirium! She remembered it. Its fires burned on the horizon of her memory across the black, dim waste of fifty years and more. And this girl was like Isola, Isola who had died from a stab between the shoulder-blades given her by her lover, a soldier from the Basilicata, one feast-day, when he was hot with wine.

"Men are all alike," she muttered. "They are not worth a thought. If only we knew that whilst it was time! Get up, child; get up. I tell you that the stars favour you. He will be yours

again, but it will take time. It will take time, and——"

Fedalma did not rise; she crouched upon the floor; her eyes shone and flashed in the dark; the wick in the oil had flickered and gone out slowly.

"You will be true to me, mother?" she muttered. "You will be true, for pity's sake?"

"I will do all I can," said Pià, and she was sincere. "I have others beside you to think of. There is Black Maria, who is afraid of her delivery; and there is Giana Leonilda, whose lame child must be charmed straighter; and there is the sick cow of Annibale to be cured; but I will do more for you than for any. Does the amulet I gave you turn of itself sometimes?"

"I don't know," answered the girl in a frightened voice. "Yes, I think so. Is that a good sign?"

"Surely. As it turns, so will your lad turn to you in his dreams, and from dreaming to doing

'tis but a step. Go away now, child, and come back in three days. Bring what you can. I will pray the Powers to be content."

"I have nothing. Father has nothing. I had to steal the pullet——"

"Well, well; bring what you can."

That was as much generosity in the ways of her life as the avarice of her habits could reach. She refrained from exacting any especial fee, since the girl had Isola's eyes and Isola's cheeks like apricots.

She pulled Fedalma up off the floor and shoved her to the door; she herself was so little and so fleshless and so aged, but she had a strength of steel in her wrists. She had heard a tap at the wooden shutter of the aperture which served as a window. She expected Annibale to come to her about his cow, and she never chose that two of her clients should meet. She had the charm for the cow ready—a little bit of wood with some signs burned on it with a red-hot skewer and

some powdered mandrake root tied to it, wrapped in a small bag. Annibale was to pay well for this.

"I will make him go to church with her," she thought when she was alone, and the man Annibale had gone away, carrying his charm with reverence and fear, and warned to tie it round the cow's neck when the moon first showed herself, and as he did so to say, "Guai, guai, guai, a chi me fa patai!" a rough rhyme which he went saying to himself for fear he should forget it all the four miles over the hills which parted his homestead from the Strega's hut; it was to be tied on with hemp; tied on with anything else but hemp the spell would be broken.

"I will make him go to church with her," thought Pià again, as she looked at the pullet. It was a fat, fine bird; its poor head hung down by its broken neck; it was scarcely cold. She did not dream of eating it; she had never eaten such a thing in her life. She could get a couple of

lire or a lira and a half for it from the wife of a forest-guard who was marrying a daughter that week and would be making feast. Something more perhaps even that woman would give, for she had come to the Strega not long before to get a charm, and was afraid her husband should know it, since he held that all doings with the devil or the devil's agents should take whoever played with such hell-fire straight down into the fire itself. She would make the shepherd lad atone to Fedalma; the girl was worth a score such as he. Fedalma would be wretched perhaps; she would have a hard life and a faithless spouse; she would bear children unpitied, more untended than the ewes; she would tramp along the roads autumn and spring, to and fro, from hill to plain and plain to hill, with the flocks; she would have to pasture them and water them and fold them, for Avellino would surely put all his toil on her shoulders. She would be miserable, but, then, she would have had her own way and wish, and

won her own man, and what can a woman hope for more?

So she was true to her word for Fedalma's sake, and went at sunset two days later to the ford. The ford was where a mountain-stream coming down through the woods became in summer-time, at a level place, quiet enough and shallow enough for sheep to drink there without danger from the impetuosity of the water. In autumn and winter and early spring it was in flood and drowned man or beast at its pleasure; but now, when midsummer was past, it was shallow, and the flock drank fearlessly.

Pià followed the course of the stream through the myrtles and oleanders which fringed it, and saw the place where, broad and shallow and interspersed with dry patches of sand and stone, the stream was quiet. The flock was there, slaking its thirst, and the shepherd was sitting, swinging his legs above his sheep on a fallen tree. The light was warm on the water and the hills were

deep in colour as the old woman took the crown from Avellino, whose fingers released it unwillingly and whose eyes gleamed with suspicion and curiosity and a dim, angry sense that he was being duped. He, like Fedalma, had stolen the offering to the Unseen Powers; he had stolen it out of his employer's canvas bag, of which he knew the hiding-place: a fine, broad, sparkling silver scudo, which had been for years secreted with other pieces of the good old Ducal times. And having run the risk and done the sin for her, he had taken one for himself also.

"What will you do for it, mother?" he muttered.

"You want a spell laid on your Mercede's brothers?"

"Aye, any you like, that will make them blind or keep them harmless!"

Pià nodded. "They shall be limp as linen in the water," she said mysteriously. "They shall be sightless as the pups born yesterday, as

the worm that tunnels the earth. Never fear, lad; they shall kiss you on both cheeks if you wish."

"No, no," said the youth uneasily. "If they let me alone 'twill be enough. Shut their eyes; that is best."

He was afraid of those three men.

"Of Mercede you are sure?"

"Whew!" said Avellino, tossing his head back saucily and snapping his fingers in the air.

"What is it you see in her so fine? That wench of Febo's, that you've broken the heart of, is twice as good to look at as such a little flimsy thing."

Avellino's smile broadened. He had few words at command, but his face was very eloquent. He snapped his fingers in the air again.

"She's the stone of an eaten peach," he said, with much contempt.

"You beast!" thought Pià; and if she had really possessed the powers she assumed, she would have had him flung into the deep pool which the stream made amongst the rocks below—a pool deep as a grave even in summer heats.

"Say, rather, she's the young peach-tree itself. She 'd bear fine fruit if the sun reached her."

Avellino scowled and lit his pipe.

"I didn't give you the crown to talk of that fool."

"Take your crown," said Pià, "and deal with Mercede's brothers on a dark night, unhelped, as best you may."

She threw the crown down between them. It cut her to the heart to risk its loss, but she knew the craven temper of the lad—there was not much fear of losing it.

He was instantly alarmed, remembered that she was not the feeble crone she looked, sat sheepish on the tree-stump for a moment, doubt-

ing, fearing, hesitating, longing to pick up the silver piece, fearing his foes and the devil. Then he said entreatingly, "I did but jest. Nay, I know 'tis bad to joke with wise women like you. Take the crown and keep it, good mother. I meant no affront. Take it, take it, and keep them off me, the men and the devils both."

He picked up the scudo and tendered it to her timidly.

She took it with an air of condescension and reluctance. "'Tis not me you offend," she said sternly. "'Tis all those around you in the air, who can cleave your tongue in twain, make your eyes balls of blood, palsy your limbs, and cause your teeth to fall out, if they choose."

His ruddy skin grew white. He believed her. He fancied his sight was failing him; he felt his teeth with his hand.

"Respect that of which you cannot judge," said Pià sternly. "Be humble as you are daft."

He hung his head, abashed, like a chidden child. This little, grey, shrivelled woman was invested with all the majesty of the unutterable and inconceivable terrors which were associated with her.

What a small thing was a bit of the root of the meadow-coltsfoot, and yet it could kill a sheep in three minutes; he knew it, for he had seen it do so. This dreadful little old creature was, amongst men and women, what the coltsfoot was amongst other grasses. He was helpless before her as the sheep under the poison. If she left him his life and took his good looks, what would life be to him?—he who was as vain of his curly locks, and his ruddy cheeks, and his lusty limbs, as was of hers any village beauty who stuck gold pins in her hair and carnations in her bodice as he passed under her window or by her threshold as he went through hamlet and township in April and November. Often and often when he was watering the flock did he lean down

and look, like Narcissus, at his own image in the water between the flags. His beauty was the May-fly with which he won his fish.

"Don't disfigure me, don't deform me!" he muttered in terror. "I will get you more of those pieces if you will only make them leave me alone!"

"It is not alone silver pieces that they will have."

"What then?"

His voice and his face were scared. If she wanted gold, he could not get it. There was no gold in the canvas bag, nor anywhere in the province that he knew. He had heard of gold, but he had never seen it.

"They will have obedience," said Pià.

Obedience!

The priests talked of obedience, but who gave it them? Were the unclean spirits stronger than the saints? Yes, no doubt; the coltsfoot was stronger than the meadow grasses, stronger, a

vast deal stronger, than the dews which came down from heaven. Then he remembered horrible stories told, as lads and lasses sat stripping the maize and shelling the walnuts round the brazier on farmhouse hearths, of gruesome errands ordered by the evil ones, of midnight rides behind witches, of commands to cut out living hearts from cradled children or tear fangs from venomous wood-snakes. What use was it having stolen the crown if he got no more in return than this, and became the slave of the Strega? He struggled to say this, to free himself, to laugh at the old crone, and tell her to go to her master, the devil; but the words died in his throat, his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth. Fear paralysed him.

"I can spend no more time with you," said Pià sternly. "Look to yourself, and don't blame me when you lie gasping in a thicket with the blood gurgling out of you where Mercede's brothers shall have let daylight into your belly."

Then she turned her back on him and went, as it seemed to him, with incredible swiftness through the bushes that grew by the line of the water.

"Stop, mother, stop!" he said with a gasp, squeezing his throat with his hand to push his voice out of it.

But Pià would not stop. She knew how to deal with male creatures.

Of course, he could have overtaken her with a stride or two; of course, he could have clutched and killed her, if he had wished, in a moment—that is, he could have done so if she had been an ordinary woman, and if the virus of terror had not been corroding his veins. As it was, he stood motionless, as if rooted to the soil. She knew that he would come and implore her aid that night or the next. She did not even look back, but hurried on, her black shawl over her head, the gnats stinging her naked feet. She was sure that she held the rogue fast. She would drive

him through his terrors to marry Fedalma. The broken vase should be mended; if in the future it would only hold thistle-seeds and thorns, she could not help that. Who breaks pays. It is a fair saying, but seldom a true one. She meant to make it true in this instance.

She took his crown as she took the girl's pullet, but she was loyal in her double-faced, secretive way to them both. When Fedalma came on the next evening to her, she said mysteriously, "All goes well. The Unseen favour you."

The girl quivered with rapture.

"They will make Mercede unlovely and undesirable in his sight. More I do not know yet," said Pià. "That is much, eh?"

"Aye, indeed!"

Fedalma laughed and sobbed in the hysteria of a passionate hope. "The bean turned of itself three times last night," she murmured under her breath.

"Surely," said Pià, with the calmness of one to whom such miracles in nature are familiar.

"I am so frightened when it moves," said the girl, still laughing and weeping; "I can hardly hold myself from plucking it off me. I feel such terror of it; it pricks sometimes, and one knows 'tis alive—more than alive."

"Surely," said Pià, nodding her head with significance. "Mind you don't ever anger it. 'Twould burn your reed roof over your head."

Fedalma shuddered. It requires some courage to keep what you firmly believe to be the devil between your skin and your shift.

"But they do meet still?" she said, with jealousy and misgiving. "I am sure 'twas they I saw down by the cane-brake by Silvio's mill. I was far off, but I am sure."

"You mistake," said Pià. "The spirits who are against you make you see those false visions. Believe naught that you see or hear; only believe what I tell you."

Fedalma was only too willing to doubt the evidence of her own senses in such a matter. She went humbly and happily away, borne up by the wings of faith and of hope, leaving four more white pieces and some fresh onions with the Strega; how she had got them Pià did not ask.

She was on her bed for the night, for she was tired and footsore from the long walk to the ford, when she heard a scratch at the door.

"Who's there?" she asked.

"Avellino," said the young shepherd's voice.

Pià got up; she never undressed from one year's end to the other. She only undid her black shawl and hung it on a nail for the night. After satisfying herself that it was really Avellino, she let him enter, and eagerly eyed what he had brought. He had brought a lamb. It had died of disease and cost him nothing. He had cut its throat and skinned it.

Pià smelt it and guessed its end.

"'Tis carrion," she said with a shrewd smile.

"Thank-you for naught. I have a mind to send your flock the foot-rot."

"She is a witch indeed!" thought her visitor. Who else could have known the creature's end when he had cut its throat and skinned it?

He swore that it had been sucking its dam when he had killed it.

"You are a fool to lie to me," said Pià. Nevertheless she took the poor little carcase and hung it up beside her black shawl.

"What do you come here for?" she said sternly. "I have done with you. You were down by Silvio's mill last eve with your new wench. Do you think nobody has eyes?"

"We were in the canes where they're so thick and tall," stammered the youth, sorely disquieted.

"They may be thick and tall. They are not so thick and not so tall that steel and shot would not pierce them."

Avellino trembled like a leaf.

"How d' you know, mother?"

"There is naught I do not know," said Pià darkly. "What is proof against shot and steel cannot hold against me—or against those I serve," she added in a tone which chilled his blood to ice.

He left her presence more certain than ever that she could dispose of him here and hereafter as she chose. He had been for an instant sorely moved to strangle her and put her body under her own hearthstone, but he had not courage. That small wizen face of hers, looking smaller than ever and more than ever wizen with the wisps of her white hair uncovered, was so plainly the face of one not human and not mortal. She had told him he must obey or perish of murrain with his whole flock. And obey in what? In nothing less than in marriage with the girl he had forsaken. All the good cheese, and the silver crown, and the dead lamb, thrown away only to hear such an order from the foul fiends as this! He groaned aloud as he went through the

heather. He knew that sooner or later he would have to do what the Powers of Evil told him.

The magic which Pià did exercise was the potency of suggestion; she knew nothing of the meaning of her gift, but she had an almost illimitable power over these uninstructed minds, so dim, so timorous, so credulous. She steered them as the fisherman of the lagoon steers his rowing-boat, netting what he will. Her life had been for more years than she could count lonely and miserable; but two things in it were dear to her: the pot full of bronze and white money, of which nobody divined the existence, and her arbitrary exercise of her power over others. He was a fool; and Pià, who was a clever if unlettered woman, had no pity for fools. He was a selfish brute, too; and she had suffered from just such a fair-faced rascal in her own early years—years which across the gulf of half a century could still stretch out their sting and touch her with sharp pains.

Three weeks passed, and turn by turn she

saw her young people, and terrified the one and consoled the other, and moulded and shaped their thoughts to her liking, and got, now from the one, now from the other, such offerings as by sacrifice or theft they could bring to her: poor presents, indeed, but to her precious. The girl grew more impatient as she grew more sanguine; the youth became more docile as he became more cowed.

The fruit was growing ripe for the plucking, she thought; she must not, she knew, dawdle on too long; their passions were lighted tow; they must be fanned or put out without wavering, or the flames might run amuck through fresh fields over which she would have no control.

So one night when the girl came to her hut she said to her:

"Child, you wish for a bed of thorns because you think it a bed of roses. Well, you shall have it and lie on it. Your fellow will marry you. When once he is wed then you will keep him, if you

are not a fool; but I fear you are a fool," she said to Fedalma.

Fedalma smiled, the defiant, radiant sunrise-smile of assured happiness.

"Oh, mother! dear mother!" she cried in ecstasy, "what can I give you for all you give me? I was a fool; yes. I was afraid of the bean in my breast."

For Pià had brought Avellino to that point; by threats, by coaxings, by insinuation, by the dominant force of superior intelligence, she had kneaded his foolish and fearsome brains until she had made them ductile to take the shape she wished. He had consented to all she suggested; he went meek, if sullen, on the road along which she drove him. He submitted to what she ordered, and the priest was spoken with; the one who was nearest, who said Mass once a month at a little grey church amongst the pine-woods. The religious marriage is still often the only one that peasants in remote places think needful: the law

counts for little with them. The matter was kept hushed and quiet. Pià wished it to be so; she was afraid if the light of day was let in on her work it might be undone; she worked best in the dark, as the bats do. She wanted no one to know her share in the lovers' reconciliation. Mercede might move; her brothers might also; silence and secrecy were safest.

And one night, in her little hut, she brought about their meeting, and pushed the reluctant faithless swain into the arms of the woman who loved him with such unmerited persistence and passion.

"What can I render you, oh you wondrous one?" cried Fedalma to her, when the young shepherd, sorely discomfited and scarcely concealing his discomfiture, had kissed her and promised the church, and gone out into the night air, which was blowing hot and sullen under a sirocco wind. "What shall I render you? How shall I labour

for you? Nothing in all my life long that I can do will I refuse."

She meant every word she said; her cheeks were once more like Pentecost roses, her great eyes shone with rapture and pride; he was hers once more; she would get him and keep him from pale Mercede and from every other female thing born of woman; he was responseless as a cold bar of black iron, it was true, but within her was the flame which would make the iron, however stubborn, grow red-hot and bend.

"He'll ill-treat you," muttered Pià, wishing her work undone.

Fedalma laughed with vain, rapturous incredulity. "Nay, nay, not he," she said proudly. "My arm is strong and my heart is warm; I shall hold him so close he shall never see that another woman is living. I may die on the stony road in childbirth, like one of his ewes, and maybe I shall; but I'll never cease to bless you, mother, for what you've done for me."

"Well, well," said Pià, touched more than she chose to show; "you're a crazy wench, my poor girl, but you've a grateful soul. That's more than can be said of most."

The thing was done.

The false wooer was dragged back and tied to his destiny with charmed ropes which he did not dare to break. Fedalma drank the waters of Paradise.

She had nothing of her own with which to show her gratitude. She stole a pair of ducklings at sore risk, and brought them to the Strega, and she walked ten miles to a chapel famous for its miracles, and prayed to the Madonna to pardon her if she had done wrong in stealing the birds, and still more wrong in using black arts.

"Do not be angry with me or with the old one," she said passionately to the Holy Mary in whom she believed. "If the saints would only hear a little quicker we should not turn to the devil."

And then she prayed to have mercy shown to Pià, and prayed that the aged soul might be cleansed and accepted before death; "for if she have helped us with unholy ways, yet she has done a holy thing," she said as she lay prostrate before the shrine, not knowing very clearly what she meant, but striving with all the might of her gratitude to have the witch who had aided her assoiled and pardoned; for happiness did not make her, as it makes many wiser than she, selfish in her joy. The priests would have told her that she committed an inexcusable sin in praying for the soul of a sorceress, for the soul of a daughter and wife of the fiend; that even to breathe such a name in a consecrated place was heresy, blasphemy, damnation eternal.

But she did pray, though she prayed in trembling; for had she not still the enchanted bean in her bosom?

"She has done so much for me, something I must risk for her," she thought as she kissed the

waxen foot of the Madonna; it was the same thought as when she had stolen the ducks. The very ignorant know not what they feel, nor why they act; they are incapable alike of analysis or synthesis; but sometimes their spontaneous and almost unconscious acts are beautiful.

With her heart beating high in her breast, she went down from the mountain sanctuary to which she had climbed as the day drew near its close. She had to walk ten miles and more back to her father's cabin in the woods, but the descent was easy. The autumnal weather was radiant, and the whole hillside and the woods below were bathed in golden light. She was so happy, so fearless, she could have kissed the bewitched bean in her bosom!

She sang aloud in her gladness of spirit one of the amorous invocations of the province. Her clear and loud notes rang through the solitude; a whitethroat in a pine-tree answered her as she passed.

She was so happy! Her idol might be sullen for awhile, resentful, reluctant; but he would be hers. Surely she would know, as she had said to Pià, how to heat and to bend the iron. He had loved her so ardently only a few months before, it would be strange indeed if she could not fan that flame into fury once more.

"He will be mine—mine—mine!" she sang, as if it were the burden of a ballad, as she went, erect and glorious in the pride of her strength and her triumph, over the fallen fir-needles which strewed the path.

When she entered into the lower woods, the woods of chestnut and beach, it was evening; the little brown owls were flying through the trees. Up above, where the sanctuary stood, the mountains had still the light of the sun, but here on the lower hills it was already almost dark. In the gloom before her father's hut there was a little group of men. She approached them, un-

suspecting, scarcely noting them, full of her own emotions, singing still.

They broke away from each other at sight of her, and stood apart like persons afraid. Her father, Febo Nero, alone ran towards her, gesticulating wildly without a word. Her heart stood still with a prescience of ill.

"What is it?" she asked.

Febo clutched her arm. "Did you lie when you said you were to wed with your *damo?* Come, say!"

"I am to wed with him," she answered. "Who dares say not?"

Febo broke into a rude, harsh laugh: he was an unkind man.

"You double fool!" he said savagely. "Was it not enough to let him [illegible] you once? He's gone, and Mercede of Cecco too; and the sheep left unguarded and unfed, and his master here crazy with rage. And he's gone to the sea-coast, they say, and he'll sail for Brazil straight away.

Mercede took her dower out of the pitcher under the walnut-tree; she knew where 'twas kept, and 'tis gone with her. Aye, you fool—you double and triple fool! I've a mind to stone you till you're dead, as one stones a toad."

She swept him aside with a gesture superb in its authority, and went to where the employer of Avellino stood, an old, shrewd, weather-beaten man.

"Is it true?" she said in her throat.

"Aye, for certain 'tis true," he answered; "and my flock left alone, unwatered, unfed, unwatched —a miracle they're not stolen. Lord, lass, how you look! You're better without the scoundrel. Let him go to the Americas, and be damned!"

But she did not pause to hear his rough consolation; she put her head down, as a cow, enraged and bereaved, lowers hers to attack, and tore along the path of the wood in the gloaming, and soon was lost to sight.

The men looked at one another, unkindly

diverted, yet vaguely afraid. Febo cursed her with savage heartiness. Swift as the wind, lightning-footed as Nemesis, she rushed through the familiar glades, breaking bracken and bramble in her headlong flight. She never paused, but flew over the rough stones, the long grass, the rivulets, the wild sage and thyme, until she reached the place where the Strega dwelt. It was now quite dark.

She flung herself against the door. Its wooden bar was fastened within, but the wood was old and yielded to her violent impetus. She entered. Pià was on her knees beside the cold hearth counting the money which she kept in a hole under the stones. As she rose, startled at the crash of the door forced open, Fedalma threw herself upon her, clutched the old, wrinkled throat, and crushed it between her hands.

"You deceived me, you spawn of hell!" she screamed, as the old woman writhed in her grasp.

In vain did the Strega struggle to get herself free; the fingers of Fedalma were more cruel than a tiger's fangs. "You deceived me!" she hissed again and again.

"No—no—no!" said the old woman, as, in one supreme effort, she wrenched herself free for a moment from that strangling grasp.

"You deceived me!" cried the girl. Her face was black with passion, her lips were drawn back from her clenched teeth: she was mad with agony and rage. She held the throat of the Strega with her left hand alone, and with her right hand plucked from her bosom the black bean.

"Eat your devil and die!" she cried with a hideous laugh, as she forced the jaws of Pià open, and thrust the bean into her tonsils, down, down, deep down, till it choked the gullet; and with her left hand she meanwhile squeezed harder and harder the muscles of the quivering throat.

In another moment Pià could no longer

struggle, and in a few seconds more her face grew livid, then purple, then livid again; she ceased to gasp; she ceased to breathe; her feet kicked the air convulsively for an instant; then she was dead.

With all her might Fedalma raised the body high above her head, shook it as though it were an empty sack, and dashed it on the stones. It fell heavily and never moved. She had her vengeance.

EL BRUG.

EL BRUG.

"You must not speak if you are spoken to, Palma," said her mother. "If they ask you questions you must say nothing in reply; nothing, do you hear? Nothing. You must not say what is untrue, but neither must you tell the truth. Be silent, only silent, whatever they may say or do. Do you understand me, my beloved?"

"Of course I understand," said Palma.

She was a child of ten years old, strong and tall for her age; lithe, agile, and flexible as a stem of the bamboos in their old garden. She was fair, with the warm, bright fairness of a Veronese angel; her skin was like the snows of the Lombard

Alps when the sunrise makes them flush; her eyes were dark, wide-open, fearless, under level brows.

She answered her young mother briefly: "I understand."

Her mother, Silvia Dolabella, looked at her wistfully. It was a frail bark to which to trust so much sacred treasure.

"Your father's life is in your hands," she murmured.

Palma nodded. There was a gleam of impatience in her eyes as of one who thought, "What need is there to say the same thing twice?" She was a child of few words.

"Darling, do not be so cold," murmured Silvia Dolabella. "You are so very young to lay such a load upon you; it breaks my heart."

Palma pushed her fair hair up off her brow. "I am little," she said, "but I am strong. You should not doubt me, mother. He never does."

She meant her father.

"I do not doubt you, love," said her mother.

"But you are a little *angiolino* in bronze; you are hard, Palma. When I clasp you to my breast you are hard and cold, not as other children are. And you are not with me as you are with him; you love him most, Palma."

The poor woman wept.

The child coloured. She did not deny the charge.

"It is different," she said, after a pause. "But I love you, mother, too. Only you want it said, and it teases me to say it. Things like that do not want talking of; they lie down, down, down, deep down—down ever so far."

"You are a strange creature; you are out of my reach," said her mother with a sigh. "You have heard of too many grave things and heard too much strange talk for your years. You should be as the kids that frolic and lambs that frisk."

"And they are hung up on nails and bled to death," said Palma.

She had seen them hung up so, in dusky,

cavernous places in the old streets of her native town, and the piteous bleating rang in her ears at night, and the scent of blood on the air was smelt by her in her dreams, and she had always refused to eat of Easter lamb or of Pentecost kid. Her mother had only laughed good-naturedly, but her father had said, in his pleasant, serious tones, "Little one, you do well."

That had been in the old happy days at Gallarate, days which seemed so very long ago to Palma, and to her mother also—the days before Lelio Dolabella's arrest, when they had all been living together in the old thirteenth-century house built in what was in ancient times called the Piazza of Pasquée.

Dolabella was a young man: he had married early a pretty and not very wise young girl; he was an advocate by calling, but all his heart and soul and mind were centred in the burdens of the people and the doctrines of the future. He was extremely beloved in Gallarate, and his

slender form, his handsome face, his far-reaching, silvery voice, were well known all over the Lombard province. In an evil day for him the attention of those in authority was drawn to his public addresses.

It was at the time when Francesco Crispi was imitating, in his brutal burlesque, the proscriptions of Sylla; martial law was everywhere established, the prisons were full of young men who had done no crime save to denounce conscription and desire liberty, and Dolabella was arrested with other of his fellow-citizens under the usual accusation of inciting to class-hatred and revolt against authority. For this his wife said to his child, "You must never speak; neither the truth nor a lie."

"They may cut me in pieces, they will not make me say a word," thought the child, as others as valorous had vowed it before her on the old Italiote soil.

They had been so happy together in the old home, which was now ruined, like a bird's-nest

shaken down in a storm. The house was still over their heads, indeed; the dear old, dark, kind house, with gleams of gold on its cornices, and faded, frescoed shapes upon its chamber walls, with its great arched nail-studded door, and its winding stone stair, and its nook of garden-ground between machicolated walls, green and damp with overgrowth of bay and laurel.

But he who had been its sunlight and its keystone, its keeper and master, was there no more, would never be there again. His step would fall no more on the old stones of the silent street; his smile would brighten no more the gloom of the vaulted stair. Never again would she sit in the recess of the grated window watching through the bars for his coming. Even though he escaped, even though he lived, there he would never come again. She knew that, and it was a knowledge too heavy for her years. She was only a young child, and she knew the *"maggior dolore"* of Dante.

"He has done no harm," she said to an old man, his friend and her godfather.

"He has loved men," said the old Garibaldian bitterly. "There is no beast so ingrate to those who serve it, so base to betray, so quick to forget, as the human beast."

"I know," said Palma, and it seemed to her as if she had lived hundreds of years, and was old as the little church of San Pietro, hard by, which they said had been there before the advent of Christ.

She had been sitting with her father under the old cypress in the garden one sunny forenoon, when the guards had entered without warning or explanation, and had laid their hands on him, and had put their irons on his wrist, holding their revolvers to his temples. "What is my crime?" he had said, with serenity; they had not replied, except with oaths, and two of them had pushed him out through the garden postern door, forcing the child aside, while others had rifled the house,

and ransacked his desks and coffers, and sequestrated his papers.

"Be quiet, love; I shall be back in an hour; it is a mistake," he had said; and then the garden-door had been shut on him, and she had been left alone, while the armed men had broken open locks, and emptied cabinets, and piled letters and documents together and sealed them.

But he had not come back; not in an hour, or in a day, or in a week, or in a month. He had been taken away to another town, in another province, to be judged by martial law, and they heard naught from him, only of him from rumour, and friends, and the Liberal press. Her mother had a little money, not much: they lived on this; the old grey house was their own. Her mother sold her beautiful pearls and the old silver plate and other things of value to send to pay for his defence by lawyers. But no defence by counsel was allowed to such prisoners as he, except such

as might be made by some military man selected for that purpose by the court.

Neither Palma nor her mother had understood much; they were like a doe and a fawn who see the stag, their sole protector, pulled down by hounds afar off, and strain their eyes and ears, and scream piteously, and are unheeded and unpitied.

Their neighbours and friends did not, indeed, forsake them, but were timid in showing sympathy, for fear of being drawn into any trouble themselves. A great terror was on the country at that time, in the ninety-fourth year of this dying nineteenth century. All the Gallaratese knew that Lelio Dolabella was innocent as a white windflower of any ill-doing; but he was accused of treason, of conspiracy, of agitation, of setting class against class, of preaching subversive doctrine. They were afraid to show him and his any sympathy, lest they should draw down upon them-

selves suspicion and domiciliary visits and arbitrary arrest.

Bad government is like a virus in the blood of the people; it poisons the very marrow of their spine and makes the manliest a craven. When you cannot sit at a *café* table without a spy elbowing you, or walk a step without hearing the click of spurs and sabres behind you, or discuss the news in your daily journal in the street without the risk of a hand gripping your shoulder, you lose nerve, you cease to be yourself, to use the expression of Georges Darian, you are not a coward, but you are a craven.

When her mother said in Palma's hearing that the sorrow and misery would not have come on them if only he would have minded his own welfare, and occupied himself with his own affairs, and let the State bide in its own wickedness and the people look to their own grievances, Palma's eyes seemed to burn up her very soul; those eyes said without words: "You are his wife, I am his

child; we belong to him; cannot we, at least, be worthy of him?"

Poor Silvia sighed and was mute. She did not dare to say, but she thought: What good had he done with his eloquence and his altruism? Had not other young men gone into exile or prison through his influence? Were not other women made desolate like her? And what had his efforts changed? Were not his proselytes scattered like sheep, those strayed who were not slaughtered? What had he been able to alter? What had he gained in return for their desolated hearths, their severed lives, their broken hearts? She loved him dearly, but she felt bitterly against him for the wreck he had made of their happiness.

She was a young woman, rather helpless, a little pleasure-loving in a harmless, feminine way; her husband had been torn from her, her home had been ruined, her money had been confiscated; she saw herself, for no fault, shunned by her old

acquaintances; she was frightened, cowed, miserable; it was not wonderful if she wished that her lot had been cast with those who heeded neither politics nor people, if it seemed to her that charity should lie first at home. But when she had said this thing she was afraid of the look which came on her child's face. Never had she seen on it so much scorn.

The little city of Gallarate is despoiled of most of that beauty which it possessed in the time of Visconti and Caracciolo, and the curse of modernity has fallen upon it, heavier and more destroying than the mailed hand of Frederic Barbarossa. But there are still to be found in it ancient nooks of peace, and nobly designed houses, like the house of the Dolabella, and beyond it there still stretches, in all its wild and natural freedom, the solitude of vast, unbroken moorlands, covered by what is called, in the dialect of the district, *el brug:* the heather. The fumes of gaseous vapours and the clouds of factory smoke

may hang over the town, and bawling vendors and fussing clerks may throng the great colonnaded court of its Broletto, but neither stench nor uproar reaches the vast silences of the Brughiera, where the odour of musk and thyme, and the hum of bees, and the whirr of wings alone are smelt and heard.

Before her father's arrest, the very happiest hours of her always happy life had been passed on the Brughiera, especially on that great portion of it which lies between seven villages, and is known by the name of Gradanasca, or Malpensa, for it is these moors which lie nearest of all to the gates of Gallarate.

Her father went there to read the works of the leaders of his school of thought, and to write his memoranda for those improvised lectures with which he stirred the souls and roused the spirits of the operatives of the town—weavers, spinners, glass-workers, button-makers, coppersmiths—who were moved by him as by no other, because he,

born a citizen of Gallarate, addressed them in that strange and resonant dialect which is unintelligible to all outside the limits of what was once the great Castrum Seprium. Dolabella was a man of fine culture and academic training; but the local dialect was dear to him as to Gallaratese of all classes, with its sonorous vocables, its resonant consonants, and its picturesque images. One of the greatest crimes imputed to him was that he used the vernacular in his addresses to the populace, and opposed the use of anything else in the public schools; and therefore he was idolised by the people and understood even by the rude husbandmen of the plain, who flock into the town with their raw silk, their hay, and their grapes, and to whom no single word of Italian, or even of Milanese, is comprehensible.

"It was these dialects which were spoken at Legnano, the Marathon of Lombardy," Dolabella replied to his accusers. *"L'altera parola che il Cantò dirà."*

But this reply was regarded by the military tribunal as a revolutionary insolence, and cost him dear.

Palma, although she could read and write Italian, never spoke anything except the dialect, and therefore the heath she loved so well, with its white bells and its honey odour, was to her as to the people, *el brug*. She always wore a little sprig of it in her belt or in her bosom; while she was shut up in the town it spoke to her of the wide sea of blossom, of the fresh pungent smell, of the clear azure sky, of the hawk and kite sailing aloft, of the plover and the lark nesting in its shelter, of the hare nibbling at its shoots.

Her mother had never at any time gone to the moors; she was one of the many women to whom all outside the streets seems barbarous and desolate. Now that Palma was alone she would not let the child go to them.

"Without your father you would be lost in those dreadful wild places," she said obstinately.

Palma replied: "In the blackest night I should find my way."

"Who would show it you?"

"Who shows theirs to the shrew-mouse and the mole?"

She pined for the Brughiera. She was so used to its solitudes, its liberties, its vast horizons, its sweet, savage odours; her father had seemed to her king of its wilderness. Her mother took her every morning and evening to pray for their prisoner in the little church of San Pietro; but it seemed to her that she could pray for him so much better and so much more hopefully if she could only get out to the open heaths. It was now the time when the heath was in blossom, all its little bells full of honey.

Once she asked her old godfather to take her to the Gradanasca. But he said, "Your mother says no, dear. We must not add to her sorrows."

So she was cooped up in the town and the long, empty, mournful days slipped away, and they had no news, and the police stalked in and out of the house whenever they chose, and seized the letters which came by post and peered into the cupboards and coffers.

"Then they wonder that mild men grow into murderous anarchists," whispered the old volunteer. "It was not for this that we fought with the Milanese in the Cinque Giornate, and that Garibaldi harangued us, the fifth regiment of his levies, from the balcony yonder in the Via Arnella."

The child knew by heart all the history of those times; her grandfather and two of his sons had been killed in the 'Sixty-six, and no one knew the place where their graves were made.

Her great sorrowful eyes looked at the men of the Questura when they came about the house with such hatred and disdain that they menaced her with oath and gesture. "'Twere best that

this little mastiff bitch-pup should be strung up by the neck," said the brigadier; but they had not as yet received permission to slaughter children, though, as the brigadier observed, if you killed a swarm of vipers, why not also the progeny of Socialists and Anti-Monarchists? The public weal should go, he said, before all.

One day they learned through the public press that Dolabella had escaped from the prison of Milan, in which he had been vainly awaiting his trial for many months, having been constantly called up for examination and remanded. It seemed to Palma as if the very Angel of the Annunciation had brought the tidings, coming into the house on a ray of heavenly light, as he was portrayed in the old pictures.

She was mute, but her face was so transfigured that the men of the Questura, who redoubled their vigilance around and about the house, said to one another, "The little beast knows where he is."

But neither she nor her mother knew, and only at dead of night in their chamber did they dare to whisper to each other, "We shall hear from him; maybe we shall see him; he will dare anything to come to see us if he be living."

And Palma thought, "If he have really got free he has come to the Brughiera." Did not he and she know what an impenetrable shelter the heath afforded? Had they not explored old subterranean chambers, vaults of dismantled fortresses, caves of vanished peoples, lairs of animals, in the tufa and the sandy soil? Over that vast and unbroken level could not anyone, lying unseen under the heath, see the approach of a foe leagues away? Oh yes! if he were living, if he were really at liberty, it was to his own beloved Brughiera that he would surely come.

She knew one place of all others which she and he had explored together—a lower chamber or dungeon of some long-vanished *rocca*, or fortress, completely hidden by the heather growth,

and tapestried by the moneywort and the ivy-leaved toad-flax. They had cleared it a little, and put seats of moss in it, and there had passed many of the hot hours of midsummer days, while the sun tried in vain to penetrate its cool green twilight. That was where he would come if he had indeed escaped. The improbability that he would be able to come so far without recapture did not occur to her. She was accustomed to think that he could work miracles.

The persuasion that he was on the Brughiera grew so strong on her that she felt as intense an instinct to escape there as any poor wild bird taken among the heath and caged in Gallarate. When her mother one night, frightened, joyful, tremulous, awoke her from sleep, told her that he was indeed as near them as the Gradanasca, and would come disguised if he could to bid them farewell before he crossed the Alps, Palma was not surprised; she had been so sure of it.

"Palma, listen, my love," said her mother

breathlessly. "Idaliccio has been here; he has brought me word that your father is on the Brughiera."

"Ah!" The child's whole face became radiant with light; but she was not surprised; she had felt so certain that he would come there, sooner or later.

Idaliccio was a peasant who occupied a farm belonging to them at Cardena, one of the seven hamlets which fringe the great moors. He was a rough old fellow, but of kind heart, and much attached to Dolabella, though he had always predicted that his master's eloquence would land him, one day or another, in prison.

"But we must not let him come here, child," said her mother. "Do not you understand? They are always watching the house. He will be taken like a bird in a net. Oh, my love!"

She threw her arms forward on the table, and, leaning her forehead on them, wept passionately.

The light died out of Palma's face. No, he must not come home. It was his home no longer; it was a sad, prison-like place, where men of the police came in and out at their pleasure, and whence joy had flown with privacy.

"Someone must tell him not to venture here," she said. "Will Idaliccio?"

"No," answered Silvia, her voice choked by weeping. "The old coward says he brought the message for sake of your father and of us; but he is so scared with fear at what he has done that he has gone away to his brother, the fisherman on the Olmo. Your father nearly killed him with terror, starting up before him in the gloaming."

"And my father said?"

"Only this: 'Go tell my wife and child I am in hiding here; I will come into Gallarate tomorrow night at all costs to see them, for I must put the Alps between me and them.'"

"Put the Alps between us?"

"Aye, it is his only chance of life, dear. Staying here he will be caught, sooner or later, and cast back in prison."

"I see." Palma's face grew very grave with the premature age of a great suffering.

The water dripped in the garden, the clock ticked, the sounds which are heard in all old houses in the stillness of night seemed to creep on the silence like living things. Palma sat up in her bed with her eyes wide open, full of pain.

"Let me go," she said at last.

"You—to the Brughiera?"

The poor young mother wept convulsively again, and cried to the Madonna to help her, for her burden was greater than she could bear.

"Hush, mother; people in the street may hear you," said the child. "Yes, I will go. I know the Gradanasca as you know your chair at church. He is hid in our old dungeon there—that we may be sure."

In the end she had her way; and Silvia Dolabella thought her cold and strange, and said to her, "You are like a little statue of bronze; you bruise my breast."

All that night neither the child nor she could sleep; they thought he might arrive, that they might hear some tap at the shutter, some step on the flags; they only heard the sound of the water dripping from the pipe in the garden wall, the chirp of crickets in the artichokes, the tolling of the hours from city clocks.

Palma's eyes were wide-open and sleepless; she saw her mother's red tear-laden lids with impatience. She was very pale, but her face was resolute. At four of the clock she was ready to go upon her quest. She wore a homespun smock-shaped linen frock; she had but to put on an apron of many colours and a large yellow kerchief over her head to look like a peasant's child; she put on wooden shoes, and took with her a flask of wine and a roll of bread. She withdrew her-

self a little impatiently from her mother's embraces, and with her cheeks wet from her mother's tears, not her own, she went out of the garden doorway, which opened on a paven lane.

She was as happy as a prisoned dove let loose, as bold as had been those three doves which had alighted and sat on the Italian Carroccio throughout the carnage of Legnano, striking terror with their white wings into the soul of Barbarossa's self. She was going to find her father, and she was going to see the heather in blossom.

It was now the dark which precedes the dawn.

There was no one in the lane, or in the piazza beyond it. Unquestioned and uninterrupted, she got outside the nearest barrier of the town and took the road she knew so well, which led to the Gradanasca. She met a cart or a waggon now and then, oxen-drawn, loaded with fruit or hay or cans of milk, or the brooms made on the moors of the Brughiera. But no one noticed her; a

little girl with a yellow kerchief over her head and shoulders. The dawn had come when she had passed out into the open country. The sunrise lighted the range of the Lombard Alps when she saw the first plant of heather. She knelt down by it and crossed herself and said a pater. Then she kissed it: the beloved *brug* which she had not seen so long.

Soon, as far as her eyes could reach, she saw nothing but the *brug*, a vast expanse of rose and green and white and purpling crimson under the changes of light and shadow; wide as the sea and as mutable in colour, bounded only by the distant snow-lines of the lower Apennines. Its pungent, sweet odour came to her on the breeze; the familiar buzz of innumerable bees filled the silence; high above sailed great white clouds, a hawk hung poised against the blue.

The child's heart heaved; the tears which had not fallen for her mother's woe ran down her cheeks in this intense rapture. She stood waist-

high in the branching heather, and kissed it again and again. Then she gathered her courage up in her hands, as they say here, and sought for the little track which led to the vault of the *rocca*. She went cautiously, hiding herself under the thickly growing plants, as the hare did, and the quail, the partridge and the polecat, the fern-owl and the windover, and all other hunted and harassed creatures.

There was not a soul in sight; it was not the season for cutting and carting the heather, or for shooting; the sole living thing she was the least likely to see would be some old man or woman looking for mushrooms. As far as the sight could range there was nothing but heather: acres on acres of heather, lying in the glow of earliest summer. She had never been there unaccompanied before; her father had always been with her, and to him the Brughiera had been familiar from earliest boyhood. Palma had nothing now to guide her but memory, and the

moors were almost as level and as trackless as a desert of Africa. Childlike, she had never realised until she reached them the great difficulty of her task. She had never even noticed whether the ruin of the *rocca* was to north, south, east, or west. She had always run in her father's footsteps, taking no heed herself. But in the far distance she saw an old grey round tower; she remembered that he had told her that tower had once been a pigeon-cote, a *columbarium,* and was still the nesting-place of wild birds. She remembered also that this tower had been upon their left when they had approached the site of the *rocca,* but always very, very far away, looking black among the rosy and purpled stretches of the moors. So she went to the right, and in the contrary direction from the pigeon-cote. She conquered her weakness, and pressed on through the shrubs which reluctantly yielded her a passage. But a sense of the immense difficulty of her task came over her. The *rocca* was on the right of

the dovecote, and almost in a straight line with it, but far away; that was all she knew, all she had for guidance.

If she had had only a dog to aid her! But their dog, a spaniel, who had been four years older than herself, had died in the very month of her father's arrest. If he had only been with her—poor, dear, good Morino—he would have remembered better than she could. For the vastness, the silence, the splendour of colour, the immense tracks of flowering land stretching away on every side, began to fill her with a sense of awe, and to bewilder her.

She walked on and on till the sinews of her legs ached and her step became less sure. The shrubs were in many places stiff and stubborn; her hands were torn in parting them to make a passage. The vertical sun beat through the kerchief on to her thick, curling hair and began to make her headache. Sitting up in her little white bed, it had seemed so easy to find her

father on the Brughiera; but the reality of the search was hard. The reality which she did not even yet herself realise was that she was lost upon these moors. She rested a little while upon the ground and broke off a corner of the loaf and ate it. The wine she did not touch; it was for him. There was a runlet of water near her, almost dry but clear. She drank from it, making a cup of her hands. The bees were buzzing all around her above the blossoms of the *brug*. It was a pleasant, mirthful, cheerful sound, and banished her fears. The air was absolutely still except for those humming sounds. The sky and the plain looked immense. The towers and roofs of the town had long before sunk below the horizon. To the north there was always the snow-line of the Alps.

She recalled a story her mother had told her, to cure her passion for the moors, of a child of six, a little boy, who had been lost on Gradanasca, and who had been found dead after three days'

useless search, and whose footmarks had shown that he had wandered round and round like an ass in a mill till he had fallen down and perished.

But she was sustained by the courage of a great devotion, and she said to herself, "He has no one else to save him, only his little girl." And she threw back her head-covering, for the sun began to mount in the heavens, and scanned the wide expanse of blossoming heather, whose colours melted in the distance into the softest hues of opal and of amethyst.

A leveret scampered past her feet, a kestrel sailed across the blue, a black-cap sang; his voice near, himself unseen; she felt a sob rise in her throat, and her eyes grew dim. Where was he?

Under the ground at her feet? Beneath the purple cloud of the blossoms? Far away or near? Where was the buried *rocca?* Would no mole tell her who knew the underground way?

No falcon who flew above so high and must know everything?

She saw an owl asleep, leaning as is the habit of his family, against the stem of a heather plant grey as himself. She stretched out her hand to stroke him. "Where is the road, dear owl? You must know—you who can see when all is dark?"

But the owl, annoyed and bewildered by being awakened in broad day, said nothing, and hobbled out of sight drowsily, and went to continue his slumbers under other plants of heather. There was nothing to tell where the place which she sought for was. She had now left the *columbarium* out of sight on the eastern moors, and she walked on aimlessly, stumbling often over the thick, entangled roots of the heaths; once she stumbled over a dust-adder which looked like a root; it hissed but did no more. The sense stole on her that she might walk thus for hours, days, weeks, and be no nearer to her goal.

And, unless she found him, he might go down into Gallarate that very night, and fall into the hands of the police.

Cold dews of anguish stood on her fair, warm face; she could have screamed aloud, but she set her teeth and kept in her cries; child as she was, she knew that if she lost her self-control she would lose her senses.

She could tell by the position of the sun that it was now afternoon. She had been wandering thus many hours; her poor mother at home, weeping and praying, counting the moments on the clock!

"Oh, I have not been good to her! I have not been good! I have thought only of him!" she said to her own heart in repentance; and she thought of her little bed, of the blessed palm hung above it, of the old green garden between the stone walls, of the grey cat, of the evening meal, of the big cento-foglio roses in the old blue

Savona vase—of all the familiar things which she might never see again.

"But if I can only save him!" she thought; if she could only save him, they might carry her home dead.

The thought that he might go home that very night if no one warned him was like a knife being turned in an open wound. She had been so foolish to be sure that she should know her way on the Gradanasca! Yet, again, who was there to come if she had not? Idaliccio could have done, of course; but Idaliccio, in terror and selfishness, had gone to the Olmo river, forsaking his master in trial.

It was now three o'clock on the midsummer afternoon. She could not tell the hour precisely, but she guessed it; she had been ten hours away from home. The sense of solitude and helplessness began to weigh on her like a leaden hand, pressing her down into the earth. She

was very tired; she dropped down like a lame lamb, and fell asleep amongst the heather, too fatigued to have either fear or reflection, or even anxiety, conscious in her. She slept soundly, dreamlessly, on the warm sand, the close-woven stems of the plants shielding her from the sun. She had put off her heavy, hard shoes, and her little stuff jacket; the dull white of her homespun frock made a point as of light amongst the shadows of the blossomed *brug*. It caught the keen eyes of a mounted guard riding afar off, pushing his horse with difficulty through the heather growth. He with two others had come out from the barracks at the Cascinale on the search for Lelio Dolabella.

He rode up to where the child was lying asleep, her cheek upon the sand, her small feet in the sun. He saw the flask of wine. He thought, "She has been sent to carry food, and a message." He got off his horse and stood beside her; he was a man of Gallarate; he re-

cognised the fugitive's little daughter. He stooped and grasped her shoulder.

"Get up, *bimba mia.*"

Violently awakened from her deep, dreamless, merciful sleep, Palma had for the moment no sense of where she was or of who spoke to her. The sun dazzled her eyes; the buzzing of the bees was in her ears. The guard pulled her up on her feet with little courtesy.

"You are that outlaw's child," he said, and shook her roughly. "You are going to him."

Then she understood. She remembered at the same time as consciousness returned to her that she must say nothing.

"Speak!" said the man, getting angry, and he struck the pommel of his sword with his clenched fist. She did not speak.

The guard put his hands trumpetwise to his mouth and shouted to his comrades, who were some distance off, their horses' heads and their own accoutrements showing above the heather.

They came at as quick a pace as they could through the network of shrubs.

"Look here," he said to them, "this is the daughter of Dolabella. Of course, she knows where he is hid. But the little mumchance will not speak."

He shook her again.

"Where is your father, little one?" said one of the new-comers. "Only say that and we will let you go. We know he is on the Brughiera. 'Tis no use your being obstinate."

She might have been of wood or stone for any sign she gave of hearing them.

"I have a mind to blow your brains out, you little wretch!" said the first-comer; and he picked up the flask, smelt it, tasted it, then took a long draught and passed the rest to his comrades.

The horses were pawing, snorting, shivering under the torment of the flies; the sun was at its hottest; the men had been out some hours

and were ill-disposed to waste their time there on a little rebel who was dumb as a Gesu carved in stone.

"Come with us to those who will make you confess," said the first-comer, and he took a stout bit of cord out of his breeches-pocket and bound her right wrist to his stirrup.

But the milder man interposed: he had children of his own.

"If you drag her through the heather you will kill her," he said; "she is but a small female thing."

"She is big enough to speak," said her captor with an oath.

But Palma did not speak.

"Look here," said the other one to her, "show us where your father is, my dear, and I will take you to the town before me on my saddle. Nobody shall hurt you. You will have a nice ride, and be home by sunset."

She might have told them that she did not

know where her father was, but they would not have believed her, and it was best and simplest to say nothing at all. That was the only idea which stood out clear in the confusion and the terror of her mind; she must not say a word. Whatever she might say they would turn in some way against him.

The three armed men and the three fretting horses were towering above her; they looked colossal in the blazing light; the rosy and purple haze of the heather looked like a sea of flame. Where was her father? At any moment he might be seen and taken. The thought of his peril numbed her to her own.

"Swing her up on your saddle if you do not like me to make her run tied to mine," said the man who had found her to the one who had thought it would be cruel to tie her to the stirrup-leather. The guard addressed bent down and swung her by her right arm and the belt of her frock up on to the saddle in front of him.

"Hold on by the horse's mane if you do not wish to roll off," he said to her, and the three riders began their slow trot across the moor in the direction of what was once a large dairy-farm in the last century, and is still called the Cascinale, though it is now changed into the barracks of a battalion of infantry, the only pile of buildings which breaks the solitude of the Gradanasca. It is difficult riding through the heather, which in many places is as high as a horse's girths; if they had gone fast she would have fallen, giddy as she was from fear, from fasting, from grief, and from the unusual motion. Jeering and joking at their comrade for his load, the other men pushed their way through the tangle, and he who was burdened by her followed, keeping hold with his right hand on the child's skirts, lest she should at all risks slide to the ground and run away. The sound of the horses' hoofs muffled on the turf alternated with the other sound of the bending and breaking of the plants, the whirr of

wings as birds flew up affrighted, the jingle of the chains, the bits, the scabbards.

For awhile she lost consciousness; the sun beat on the back of her neck, a deadly terror, a sickly heat, a burning thirst consumed her, and ended in insensibility.

The horses paced on and on, now trotting where they could, now pushing their flanks through the heather; it was two hours from the time they had discovered her when they at last drew rein before the outhouses and outposts of what had been the old dairy-farm. The men were hot, jaded, hungry, ill-disposed. The one who carried her on his saddle swung her roughly to the ground, shaking consciousness into her by the shock of her body on the stones. The others dashed some water on her face from a tank in the courtyard. The one who had been the first to find her stooped, and tied her wrists behind her back; then he gave her a kick. "Get up, you spawn of rebellion," he said. There were

many soldiers in the yard; they looked on with indifference. He left her lying on the stones and went indoors to make his report of the day's work.

She was but half-conscious still; her limbs were sore and aching from the long jolting ride; she lay on her side, her hands tied behind her; the soldiers came and stared, and made their jokes; she was wet from the water thrown over her; mosquitoes swarmed on her face; her linen frock was stained with all the colours of the moors and heavy with gathered sand.

They left her lying there, on the pavement of the court, like a bundle of hay or a fagot of brambles; there was no fear that she could set herself free.

After a time her captor came, and took hold of her, and pulled her up on to her feet. Then he drove her before him to the interior of the building, to a small, bare room, into the presence of his superiors. She reeled and tottered, and with

difficulty kept herself from falling. Every limb seemed broken and every nerve seemed bleeding.

"She is a little child," said the commandant of the Carabineers in surprise; and he asked her gently, "You are the daughter of Lelio Dolabella?"

Palma was silent.

"Why do you not reply?"

She was mute.

"Why were you on the Brughiera?"

She gave no answer.

"You know where your father is?"

She said nothing.

"We will compel you to speak," said the officer, losing his temper, though he still felt surprise and compassion. She was so small, so bruised and broken, so miserable-looking, like any little leveret bathed in its mother's blood. He

saw that she could scarcely stand, and bade her sit down. She dropped upon the stone bench near her. She looked no more than a heap of wet, sand-stained leaves.

"If you remain thus obdurate you will force me to punish you," he said to her; and he tried with every question, argument, threat, and persuasion to make her speak, but in vain.

"She will die or go mad," he thought, "but she will not speak."

Her first captor, standing erect beside her, smiled in triumph. He had told his captain that the little wretch would not speak.

"Take her away," said his superior at last, out of patience. "Put her in a cell. Let a woman search her; she may carry some missive, some plan of conspiracy. Then untie her and leave her alone. Hunger and darkness will unlock her lips."

His orders were carried out to the letter. A

woman stripped her, finding nothing on her; her clothes were bundled on again hurriedly; her arms were untied, but she was left to sit or lie on the damp brick pavement as best she could. Then the door was shut and barred on the outside. Within was an impenetrable darkness. She was not afraid of the dark. She was used to sleep without a light. But darkness in this dread stone place was not a soft and friendly thing, like the dark in her own dear little room at home, where the stoup of holy water hung close to her bed, and her parents slept in the next chamber.

Shriek after shriek rose to her lips, but she repressed them by putting her fingers in her mouth and holding her tongue to keep it mute. From her cries they would have learnt nothing, but she felt that they would dishonour her father and encourage his enemies.

The hours passed on no sound reached her, for the cell was in an isolated part of the build-

ing, adjoining the cattle-stables; no one remembered her. She was worse than nothing in the eyes of her captors—less in their sight than a newt or a locust. The child of a rebel, of an Anarchist, what matter if she lost her reason or died of terror in that underground room? Such seed of the devil was best spilt, and stamped on, and destroyed. The commandant, who had been more interested in her resistance, was playing cards and had forgotten her. The child of a revolutionist, what mattered if such trash as that died of fright, were stung by scorpions, or were eaten by rats? She had deserved any fate by her contumelious obstinacy.

She lay on the stones, her arms outstretched and her head resting on them. She tried not to think of all the horrible, unknown things which might have been creeping and crawling near her; after all, her father would have said they were "the little children of Nature" as much as she was so. But it is difficult for the mind of a man

to resist the impression of terror made by total darkness and by captivity in an unfamiliar place. For a little girl it was impossible. She felt that her brain was going, that she would soon be dead or worse than dead.

A key groaned in the rusty lock, a flood of light flashed over her. It was the woman, who returned to tempt her.

"Only tell what you know," she said again, "and you shall have such a feast; water and wine too, as much as you like; and with the morning be back at your mother's house. Why be such a little wicked fool? You are bound to obey authority. We all are."

The woman sent to her had been ordered to spare no effort to terrify or to persuade her, but she had succeeded in neither. The child remained dumb. She was in pain all over her body, bruised and sore and stiff; her mind was dulled, her throat was parched; but she did not forget

that she had one supreme duty to fulfil—the duty of silence.

"You are very little to be so mulish," said the woman. "You should be soundly flogged."

Palma scarcely heard the words. Her ears were full of booming sounds like the buzzing of the bees in the heather multiplied a thousand-fold.

The woman, irate, snatched up the lamp and went out with it, locking the door again on the outside. Once more the impenetrable darkness descended.

Hunger and thirst tormented her; never before in her life had she ever wanted for anything or had an appetite unsatisfied; she was now sick for want of food, fevered by want of water, racked by pain of every kind.

The woman entered more than once, bringing bread, soup, and fruit, and a flask of water. She put them before Palma, but out of her reach.

"You shall have all these if you will only speak."

Palma shut her eyes not to see them, and made a motion of refusal with her head.

The woman left her for an hour, and then returned, with the tray in her hand. "You will speak now, eh?"

Palma shook her head.

The wolf of hunger and the shark of thirst were together tearing at her entrails, but she would not yield.

"It is impious to defy authority," said the woman, who was a brigadier's wife. "Your father is a bad man, setting class against class, and defying the law."

Palma's eyes blazed with wrath as they looked upward; but she did not answer in words.

"Come," said her temptress, "thirsty you must be." She poured out from a flask she carried some bright cold water into a glass.

All the child's frame thrilled and writhed in longing for the draught, but she covered her eyes with her hands not to see it.

"You little beast!" cried the woman savagely. "You should be thrown down the well and drink your fill there once and for ever. I shall go say so to the commandant. The well in the court has no bottom. It goes to the centre of the earth, they say."

A shudder ran through the child from head to foot, but she did not speak.

"Come," said the brigadier's wife in wheedling tones, "'tis so little to do. Just say where your father is, and you shall come and eat of the best, and sleep in my daughter's bed, and at morning away to your mother, who will say you have done well. For, poor soul! she must lose her husband; she need keep her child."

The argument was subtle and penetrating, but Palma was proof against its sophism. She made

no answer. "Poor, poor mother!" she thought, but she did not open her lips.

The woman tried all persuasions she could think of, then, furious at her failure, for success would have brought credit and reward, she dashed the flask of water down on Palma's body, and with zest saw it shiver into atoms and the good spring water flow away useless over the child's clothes and the stones of the floor.

Palma did not speak.

"Stay where you are, you dumb toad!" the brigadier's wife cried with violence. "At dawn the scorpions will come out of their holes and find you."

Then she went out, slamming the door behind her, the key again grating in the rusty lock. The child, sick with terror, turned on her side and lapped the spilt water on the ground; it was but little she could get thus and rather tortured than assuaged her burning thirst; the pieces of broken

glass, too, cut her lips. She dragged herself up painfully upon her knees, and then up on to her feet; there was a little blessed gleam of light; it was a moon-ray shining through the narrow slit of the unglazed window. From the open air there came to her the sweet wild smell of the blossoming *brug*. The familiar light and the friendly scent restored her fainting senses, steadied her dizzy brain; she thought, with a gleam of hope, could she get out by that loophole?

It was no more than a loophole, very narrow, and at least two meters above her head.

From her captors she knew she could expect no pity; such prisoners as she are protected neither by youth nor old age.

All that the police does is well done, and deaths in the cells are never inquired into; a complaisant surgeon is always ready to write the cause down under the name of some natural disease or stroke of fate.

Palma had heard much of these things from

listening to the conversation of the young men who came to her father's house. Young as she was, she knew she would have no mercy from her jailers, illegal though her detention might be. The window looked cruelly narrow, but then she was very slight of form, and her linen frock, wet through, clung close to her.

There was nothing in the cell by which she could scale the wall; it was entirely bare; but in the wall itself there were projections and irregularities, made by stones jutting out beyond others, and in one place an iron stanchion. She had been taught agility in climbing by her father, but she was now so feeble from exhaustion and fatigue and hunger, so feverish from fear and misery and ill-treatment, that she had scarcely the power to drag herself up to the wall. She could not tell, either, what there might be upon the other side; by the smell of the heather, she thought it opened on the moors, but she could not be certain.

She knew, however, that where she was she had no mercy to hope for, that the scorpions would feel pity sooner than her jailers, and that knowledge spurred her to superhuman effort. She grasped the first projecting stone with her toes, and set her nails to clutch another higher up; she lifted herself high enough to grasp the iron stanchion, and, clinging to that, pulled herself higher and higher upward, with the movement of a woodpecker climbing a tree.

The smell of the heaths came into her nostrils, the moon-ray fell across her face; they gave her courage. She managed, slipping and bruising her feet and hands, to reach the window and look out; all she saw was the wide expanse of the Brughiera lying peacefully in the light of the moon. But the opening was so narrow that she feared she could never force herself through it; and if she fell head downward? Well, even that, she thought, were better than to stay here to be starved or beaten to death or perish of thirst. At

least, thus she would die quickly and disappoint her father's pursuers. She put her head through the aperture, then she drew her shoulders together, making them as narrow as she could; then she forced herself through the opening, bruising and tearing the skin of her arms. She could by no possibility turn so as to descend feet foremost; she could only push herself through and go down head foremost to whatever might wait for her below. And this she did. When her knees were on a level with the coping of the window, she thrust herself through the aperture; her own weight overbalanced her, and she fell, thus, as a man falls who tries to fly. By good fortune there was a pile of dried heather underneath the wall; it was elastic and yielded under her. She was stunned for a few moments, but was not otherwise hurt except for scratches and bruises on her bare limbs. She was able to look about her, and realised that there was no barrier between her and the open country.

The high walls of the barracks loomed behind and above her, but facing her there was the open moorland. She heard some dogs bark on the other side of the building; hurt and half-senseless as she was, she gathered herself up and stumbled across the stretch of turf which parted her from the open moor. She drew in new strength from the knowledge of her freedom and the smell of the dear wild *brug;* she ran on and on, like a poor little broken-kneed pony, falling often, but getting up again and going onward, bruising and dashing herself against the heather, but having no sense except of recovered liberty. The stars grew larger, the moon grew higher; perhaps hours had passed; she did not know. Suddenly her limbs gave way under her, and she dropped, powerless to do more, struck down by utter exhaustion, like a bird felled by a stone. But she fell among the heather, and it closed over her and hid her from sight, so that when the armed men rode out over the moorland in pursuit of their lost prey they

passed within a few yards and never saw her, but saw only the moonlit blossoms of the flowering heaths.

The heather sheltered her, as if it returned the affection which she had conceived for it; and the timid creatures of the night which hid among it stirred around her and did her no harm. The toad drank the night dews, the little brown owl hunted the moth, the water-beetle boomed through the dark. The child remained motionless and senseless, in a stupor which resembled death.

When the first faint grey of the dawn came on the eastern edge of the moors, an old man with a mule, the animal carrying large panniers, came across the heather by a narrow track which he knew. It was the old peasant of Cardano, Idaliccio. He had repented him of his cowardice and desertion, and when on his way to the Olmo water had turned back, and taken his mule out

of its stall, and gone on to the Brughiera at evening, and at nightfall had made his way to the place where Lelio Dolabella was in hiding, which was not the *rocca*, and warned him not to enter Gallarate, but to make his way with all speed across the Splügen into Switzerland. Now, after speeding his master on his northward way, he was returning to his own homestead at Cardano, his mule's panniers filled with yellow sand as reason for his presence on the moorland, were any wanted.

He had heard nothing of Palma's wandering, but, as they passed the place where she lay, his mule dropped its head towards the ground and stopped and whinnied; it knew her well, for she had often given it bits of bread and carrots when she had come to the peasant's dwelling on the edge of the moor, or when the old man had brought his beast into the town. Idaliccio, who was well aware that his mule was wiser than he, looked to see

what was under the heather, and recognised the child.

He guessed at once why she had come there. She looked to him as if she were dead, but he put his old horny hand to her lips and felt her breath warm upon it, though the pulse of her heart was too faint to be heard.

He stood still a few moments in doubt, then shovelled the sand out of his panniers, cut some heather with the billhook which always hung at his waistband, laid the plants across the mule's back from pannier to pannier, and raising the child in his arms, placed her gently on them as on her bed. Then, with a piece of rope which was in one of the panniers, he bound her safely to the mule's back amid the heaths.

"She was always so fond of the *brug,*" he thought. "Poor little soul! she came after her father, and got lost, no doubt."

Then he turned his back on his village and

took his way slowly across the moor, knowing nothing of the search which the mounted guards had made for her. Going as he did, perforce, at a foot-pace, walking beside her lest she should slip downward, it was noon before he reached the gates of Gallarate; he had covered her with heather to keep off the sun-rays and the flies.

"'Tis my grandchild as I am taking in to hospital; she had a bad fall on Gradanasca, and is stupid from it; she has hurt her head," he said to the men at the toll-house, and moved the bundles of heath that they might see the human burden he carried.

They looked, and let him pass, after thrusting their hands into the panniers to make sure that they were empty.

And so he took her in safety home to the old grey kindly house in the Piazza of Pasquée.

When she regained consciousness, which was

not until many days later, she was in her own little bed under the bleached palm.

"I never spoke!" she cried aloud. "Tell him I never spoke!"

Silvia Dolabella kissed her small bruised feet.

RUFFO AND RUFF.

RUFFO AND RUFF.

RUFFO was only twelve years of age, but he remembered so many, many things, which had no likeness to anything in his present existence, that he thought he must be very old indeed. He never spoke of these unforgotten things to anyone except Ruff, when they were together at night in the straw of some stable or the lumber of some loft. Ruff was always deeply interested, having a past of his own of which he could not speak, but which was always making a faithful and tender heart ache wistfully.

What Ruffo remembered were blue seas, sweet-smelling hills, big golden fruits, a hut among the

tamarisks, a woman who set him astride on her neck and shoulders and ran with him into the salt and sparkling foam, laughing and singing, and lifting her face to his kisses. Who was she? What were they? When had it all been?

Sometimes on dirty stalls in the ugly English streets, with gas-jets glaring over them, he saw the round yellow fruits which he had played with amongst the flowers—poor oranges in exile, so wrinkled, so dusty, so closely crammed in crates or baskets, with the gas instead of the sun shining on them. When he saw them he always remembered more of the country of his birth, and cried himself to sleep, with Ruff's paws clasped round his neck.

He had been born in a seaside village near Reggio, in Calabria, and his name was Ruffo Anillino. So much was on the municipal paper given with him, which changed hands as he changed masters.

He had been very little when his father had

been drowned in a hurricane, and his mother had a year later died of cholera, and those relatives who remained sold him to a foreign trader who dealt in children, and who took him away in a ship.

That he did not recollect clearly, for he had been sold many times since then, and had been miserable always, and beaten and hungry, and dragged through various countries and into many cities and towns, so that his mind was a dull, confused grey mass in which only his earliest memories were clear and sweet.

He was very small for his age, for he had never had enough to eat; very pale and thin, with big dark eyes, which had the same patient, tired sadness in them as had Ruff's, the Toby-dog.

They both belonged to a Punch and Judy show—a poor show—which was always moving from place to place, and was never invited to exhibit in houses at children's parties, but found its

public at country fairs and in common streets, by wharf-sides and on village greens.

It was, perhaps, not worse for him than if he had been sold to the sulphur mines, as so many thousands of children are sold in Sicily; but he was sold as utterly as they are, and was as helpless as any poor pony in the coal-pits, or any hapless ass turning a merry-go-round at a school-feast, or beaten by excursionists in Epping Forest, or on Hampstead Heath. He did not even dream of trying to end his servitude; he had not the faintest notion of where to go or what to seek; he knew nothing of any kind: his only art was to make Punch play when his owners were too drunk to do so, or, when they took the show themselves, to grind the barrel-organ and blow on the Pandean pipes.

But with these people his unhappy little lot was less wretched than he had been before.

When they drank they beat him, but when they were sober they were not unkind. He liked

the wandering life better than the organ-grinding in London and other big towns; and then there was Ruff, his comrade, his consoler, his fellow-sufferer, and fellow-slave.

Ruff was a little silver-grey Skye terrier. He had been a happy and handsome little dog once, who had slept on ladies' laps and on carriage cushions, played on green lawns and eaten sugar, worn silver bells and known pet names; but the young girl who had loved him had died in her eighteenth year. Her parents, with true human selfishness, gave him away, because the sight of him increased their pain. Naturally, he escaped from the big strange London house to which he was taken, and tried to find his old home and was lost in the maze of the stony streets of Belgravia and clawed up by the Punch man, whose Toby had died three days before. He was shaved and faked that he might not be known, kept on a chain, thrashed, and dressed, and forced to play. His heart and his spirit were broken, but he did

not die. Dogs, like men, often call on death in vain.

One day a little pale, dark-eyed, shivering lad was brought by his owners to share his misery, and from that day Ruffo and Ruff consoled each other.

When they were beaten they crept away and kissed each other, and the pain seemed less. When their stomachs were empty and their bodies cold, they clung to each other in the straw, and sobbed themselves to sleep. When there was any sun, and there had been any food, and in the rests between the exhibitions the puppets lay in their box, and the man and his wife were at the alehouse, Ruffo and Ruff strayed away by themselves unnoticed on some gorse-covered common, down some lonely lane, through some cowslip meadows, or over some tracks of heather. Often stones were thrown at them, sometimes they were kicked through a hedge, often they were told that these fields and commons "weren't for the likes of

them;" but at other times some good-natured woman gave them a drink of milk, some cottage girl a bit of bread, or an old labourer, resting his rheumatism in the sun, shared with them his rusty bacon and crusty loaf.

"Why yee and yer cur ain't nought but skin and bone," said an old gaffer once. "Play-actin' is ye? Aye, that's a bad trade."

"Would they take us on one of the farms, do you think, sir?" asked Ruffo in his plaintive broken English.

"Naw, they oodn't, child," said the old man, pleased to be called "sir." "Ye'd not be a scrap o' use, and farmers doan't cotton to furriners."

"Are we furriners?" asked Ruffo, vaguely understanding the disqualification.

"Ees, ye be—leastways, dawg I dawn't know; but there's no doubt ye've some tarnation lingo o' yer own, my lad; ye speak so mighty queer."

"Do I, sir?" asked Ruffo sorrowfully; he could not see in what his speech differed from that of the natives. "Ruff is English," he added, in the hope that his companion would find more favour than himself.

But the labourer shook his head.

"Dawgs they hev a bad time o't nowadays. He's a play-actin' dawg is yourn; he aren't a ratter; nobody 'd take him nowhere."

"What is a ratter, Ruff?" asked Ruffo, as they went away under the shade of hawthorn trees. Ruff did not know. Before this miserable time of "play-actin'," he had been always with his dear young mistress, driving behind her ponies, trotting in her shadow, leaping to catch her tennis-ball, running to pick up her glove, sleeping on her pretty white bed.

His soft dark eyes, so like Ruffo's own, looked up woefully; they said as plainly as words could have done, "Oh, if I could tell you about her! Oh, why did she go away, and leave me?"

He trotted on slowly and sadly by Ruffo's side, thinking wistfully and wearily, as dogs do think so often, of a life which they have loved and lost. He wondered, as Ruffo wondered, where had it all been? When had it all been? What had he done that he should be so cruelly punished? Where was his dear Lady Helen? He remembered lying on her bed during her illness, and being frightened because at the last she was so cold and silent; and being carried away by force from her side, and locked up in a distant room by the housekeeper; and after that he had never seen her again, and he had been sent away from the home where he had been so happy with her, though he did not think he had done anything wrong to deserve such punishment; he had heard them say she was dead. What did "dead" mean?

Ruff's little mind worried over all these questions, and memories, and sorrows, as he went down the green cart-track under the hawthorns,

even as Ruffo's mind wandered back to the shining silver shore, and the blue water, and the green boughs with their fruit of gold, and the smiling face of the young mother, rosy and warm with the sun. Neither of them could clearly understand what they had lost, or why they had lost it, but their hearts ached none the less for that.

Then, after an hour or two of freedom and peace, they returned to their bondage; to the whip and the drudgery, and the toil of the performances in the lanes and streets of the small boroughs, where the show was most welcome.

But these brief hours of peace and liberty kept them alive; kept them from sinking under the privations and punishments which were their daily lot, for though they both tried to do their best, Todd and his wife were never contented, and were almost always more or less in drink.

Whenever the receipts were meagre, both Ruffo

and Ruff were beaten, though it was no fault of theirs if the audience was a scanty one or the neighbourhood very poor.

More than once Todd had been fined for cruelty to them, but that did no good either to the boy or the dog. He paid the money, but they paid in added pain.

"Pray, sir, don't summon him," said Ruffo one day to a benevolent person, indignant to see the wheals and cuts on the child's skin. "He only gives it us worse the more he has to pay."

"But he should have a month in gaol!" said the philanthropist.

"And when he came out, sir, he'd kill us both, sir."

"But I would put you in an industrial school, where he could not get at you."

"And Ruff, please?"

"Oh! the dog? The dog would be taken by the police."

"Then I'll stay with Todd," said Ruffo, and,

to the gentleman's indignant surprise, he took to his heels as fast as he could run, followed closely by Ruff, and darted into a dark alley and was lost to sight.

To Ruffo's relief, Todd left that little town the same afternoon, having taken fright at questions that had been asked of him there concerning his right to the child.

"I bought him. Didn't I buy him, the little dirty wretch?" he said to his wife. "Gave three good yellow-boys for him, and that's two more than he's wuth—lazy forrin scum as he be."

Mrs. Todd demurred. To her Ruffo was very useful; she made him cook and sweep, and fetch and carry, and buy drink for her unknown to her husband, and even wash her clothes in running water; and he was such a little fool she could make him do anything if she gave the dog a good meal. "He'd rayther the dawg ate then himself," she said to her friends. "He must be a dratted, half-witted little simpleton. Never seed

a lad in all my days as 'ud raythe a dawg ate than hisself."

But however foolish he might be, he was well worth the three pounds he had cost to his owners.

If he could only get back to the sun and the sea and the oranges, and take Ruff there! Alas! he did not know it, but he had little brothers and cousins yonder, where the oranges grew, as ill off as himself and, perhaps, worse off; little fair-haired slaves of the sulphur, little *Carusi*, half-naked, half-blind, toiling up and down all day long with the blistering mineral on their backs, sold into bondage as he had been, and seeing no hope or likelihood of deliverance from one year's end to the other. Poor little *Carusi!* They only saw the sun through their smarting, reddened eyes; the lizards played on the grass, but they toiled from dawn to dark; the oranges grew ripe in the warm sea wind, but no drop of the juice of the fruit moistened their parched cracked lips;

—poor little slaves of the great grinding wheel of Commerce, born where all Nature is glad, except themselves and the weary, footsore mules who toil with them.

But Ruffo knew nothing of their fate; he only knew his own troubles and Ruff's, as they trudged along the dust and the slush of English roads, in company with Punch and Judy. Ruffo pushed a hand-cart on which the show, taken to pieces, was packed, and when Todd was not with them, or was in a good humour, he made Ruff a little bed on the cart to save his poor little tired feet, Ruff got soon footsore, having all his previous life been used to running on garden lawns and in grassy lanes, and to being driven about lying on carriage cushions.

The hand-cart was heavy, and the roads were usually bad from either drought or rain, and the child's strength was exceedingly small.

One day he and the cart reached a little town on the western border of Hampshire, seven

miles from the sea; it was ancient and cheerful and quiet, with its streets touching fields and woods, and its scanty population neighbourly and kind. Todd had relations there, and stayed longer than it was his usual habit to remain in one place, and Ruffo and Ruff had time to grow popular there. Their owners were jealous and apprehensive of interference; but even they saw that it was in their interests to let the boy and the dog become friends with those inclined to befriend them. Mrs. Todd contented herself with emptying Ruffo's pockets whenever she could, and giving Ruff nothing at all to eat, alleging that he got so much from other folks that he grew fat and lazy.

"I'll teach you to go a-whining to folks as if ye weren't fed," said Mrs. Todd, so that the more fortunate he was in getting something to eat from the public pity the more unfortunate was he in incurring her wrath and feeling it likewise on his poor little bones.

The Todds had a good many old friends in and around this place, and Ruffo and Ruff obtained more leisure than usual because the performances were less frequent than in larger and less hospitable neighbourhoods. Punch and Judy remained undisturbed in their box, and the boy and the dog could escape into the pleasant country round about the little borough. One morning early they had got out thus into the country whilst their owners were sleeping the heavy sleep of the drunkard. The air was sweet and fresh, for it was midsummer; birds sang; cattle standing in shallow reaches of reedy water looked so contented and peaceful that Ruffo wished he were one of them. It was an old-fashioned bit of rural England, with thatched houses hidden in orchards, and a tall spire rising amidst tall elms, and sandy roads, narrow and grass-grown, running up and down under overhanging hawthorns and high banks fragrant with flowers. Ruffo felt the peace of it all sink into his little tired soul.

Ruff rambled a little here and there, eating a blade or two of dog-grass, paddling his often cracked and sore little feet in the rivulets of water, remembering just such lanes as this, or just such mornings as this, when he had been Lady Helen's pet, with his silver bell on his blue ribbon. When had that been? Why could he never find that place? Why, in all his wanderings, could he never see it again? What makes dogs suffer so much and so long is the great constancy of their affections and tenacity of their memories coupled to that cruel bondage and the impossibility of following their instincts in which nine out of ten of them spend their unpitied lives?

Ruffo was thinking how glad he would be if they both could get taken on one of these farms which looked so pleasant to him, and of whose bereaved cow-mothers in their stalls, and poor calf-children sent to slaughter, and hardly-worked cart-horses, and starved sheepdogs, and chickens choked with crammed gullets, and poisoned black-

birds and mavises in the orchards he knew nothing: the green fields looked so fresh and cool and quiet, the sheep so white and fat, the great stacks of corn so promising of plenty.

In the midst of his reverie a thing of steel, half-beast, half-bird, all made of metal, whizzed down the grassy lane and knocked him over, grazed him, maimed him, and vanished, a shrill, unkind laugh whistling through the air.

Ruff, roused from his reverie, dashed after the offender with an angry volley of barks; but the bicycle was already out of sight in the green haze of the leafy distance.

Ruff ran back to his fallen friend and covered him with kisses, whining eloquently.

"It doesn't hurt much," said Ruffo to console him, though showers of sparks seemed to fill the air, and a buzzing like a swarm of bees was in his ears; he felt himself anxiously all over. If anything in him were broken, what would his master say to him? They would drive him away,

or send him to a hospital, he thought, and then what would happen? He would never see Ruff: Ruff would be taken away with the show to who could tell what villages or towns and unknown places.

"I think I'm quite whole, Ruff; he didn't break me," he said, after stretching and pinching each of his limbs, as he had seen men do when they had a fall or an accident; he ached all over, but he had no bones fractured or sprained.

"How glad I am it wasn't you, Ruff!—it would have killed you, the wicked byke!" he murmured to the dog, who whined again, but now, with pleasure, leaping up into his arms.

A large shadow loomed across the sunlit turf of the lane.

"What be you a-doin' here? Tramps, I reckon," said a big, burly man who came through a break in the hedge; he was one of the policemen of the town, but he had his house and his family under the hawthorn trees in this lane.

Ruffo knew what "tramp" meant; he hurried to pull of his little shabby hat and answer.

"Oh no, sir, we are not tramps," he said, in very frightened tones. "Ruff is dog Toby, and I'm the pipes."

"What rot's that?" bawled the man.

"Please, sir, it's truth," said Ruffo, piteously. "If you ask for Mr. Todd at the——"

"Ye're Todd's brat, are you?" said the giant, standing over them in grim contempt. "Todd's a blaggard, and ye're a little rip; been stealin' eggs, I'll be bound. Let me catch ye at it!"

Ruffo's small brown thin face grew red. At times, when there was a safe occasion, Todd made him get inside fowl-houses and bring him out eggs, or even a plump pullet. He did not like doing it—he never did it on his own account—but it was always with Todd a question of prompt obedience or the stick; and Todd, who was shrewd, had come to perceive that it hurt Ruffo more to see Ruff beaten than it did to be beaten himself.

"Let me catch ye at it!" said the big man, savagely; and to confirm his threat he took Ruffo's ragged jacket in his hand, lifted him up by it, and shook him.

Ruffo screamed, for he already felt sore and aching all over from his fall. Ruff flew at the constable's legs.

"Down, Ruff—oh dear, Ruff, don't!—pray, pray, pray don't!" he cried in terror, for it was not the first time that Ruff had taken his part and suffered cruelly for it.

"Get out, you vermin!" said the man, and gave a kick which would have brained or crippled the little dog if he had not dodged it and got between Ruffo's ankles, growling and waiting for attack.

Ruffo fell on his knees.

"Kill me, sir! I don't mind. Do kill me, if you like; but pray, pray don't hurt Ruff. He doesn't mean to be rude. He only wants to take care of me."

"Ye're a pretty pair!" said the man; but he took his hand off Ruffo's jacket. "Todd 'll hear my mind about ye."

Ruffo shivered; but he was silent, pressing his knees convulsively upon Ruff's sides to keep him quiet.

"Ye'll be in gaol afore new moon, and yer little beast 'll get his dose of arsenic," said the man. "Hi, be off with ye both, or I won't answer to keep my hands off of ye."

Ruffo stumbled stupidly on to his feet, caught Ruff in his arms, and took to flight as fast as his aching limbs would let him go over the grassy wheel-tracks of the steep country lane.

He clasped Ruff to his chest closer and closer as he stumbled on his way, hugging him so tightly that the little dog was half stifled. But they were both safe for the present hour.

The big burly man looked after them with unfriendly eyes.

"Long's muzzlin' regulation 'll soon be coming

round to us," he said to himself, "and then we'll pay 'em out—the dirty little furrin brat and his darned cur: there ought to be one law all over the country for vagabones and dawgs."

Ruffo and Ruff reached the pot-house where Todd and his wife, and Punch and his wife, were housed on the outskirts of the little rural town, and got back to the loft in which they slept before the absence of either had been noticed by their owners. In an hour's time they went out with the show and with Mrs. Todd alone, for her husband was still sleeping off his drink; Ruff imprisoned in his usual costume, and Ruffo staggering under the weight of the theatre.

It was a fine evening, with a south wind after rain; many people were out in their cottage gardens or strolling along the roads and streets. It was known to be one of their last appearances in that town, and they had considerable success. Ruffo's back and limbs ached terribly, but he tried not to think about them, and played on

the pipes with as much spirit as though he had been a little fairy making music in the glades of Arcady. Ever and again he looked up at Ruff above him on the platform of the show, and smiled at him; and Ruff looked down and wagged his tail where it peeped out from under the little red coat in which he was dressed, so sadly to his own discomfort.

When the performance was ended Ruff walked about amongst the people holding a little tray strapped to his right paw. It was the part of all his compulsory duties which he hated the most. To stand, or walk erect, is always very painful to any dog, and strains their muscles cruelly, and Ruff was wounded in his pride as well; he could not endure to beg, he who had been Lady Helen's darling, and had the blue blood of Scotland in his veins. Ruffo could never bear to see him in that cap and coat begging to the laughing, jeering, unkind idlers, and as soon as he dared he slipped in through the throng and unstrapped the tray

from the little dog's paws, and went round himself, to spare his friend, and the tray was soon heavy with pence, and there were even a few sixpences and threepenny-bits amongst them that evening.

Ruffo's face always touched the well-springs of pity in the hearts of some of the mothers; it was such a wan and weary little face; with its great starry eyes, and the thick auburn curls, dusty and tangled, above the low brow.

"He looks homesick, he dew," said one of the matrons. "Yer come from over seas, don't ye, little man?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Ruffo, humbly: he knew that he had been brought over a wild waste of waters, and that they called those waters a sea.

The good soul went into a baker's shop and bought some stale rolls and a square of gingerbread, and shoved them into Ruffo's pocket.

"Eat 'em when ye get home, child; ye look more'n half-starved."

Ruffo's eyes glistened; for once he hoped he and Ruff would have enough to eat when they went to bed.

But Mrs. Todd was looking at him from where she stood in the distance, guarding the theatre and the puppets. He was never allowed to keep anything that the public gave him. He might learn to get habits of independence. She wrenched the bread and cake away from him as soon as she could do so unseen, and then boxed his ears because he burst out crying, and cuffed Ruff because in sympathy he howled.

"Gived yer, was it? Yer own, was it? I'll teach yer to think as the likes o' you can have proputty!" she said viciously, and drummed on his head with the wooden money-tray.

And Ruff and he were sent supperless to their bed in the straw.

"That good woman said 'home,' Ruff—what is 'home'?" said Ruffo, hugging his fellow-victim

in the dark. "We haven't any home, Ruff, you and I haven't any."

Ruff would have said, if he could have spoken: "We have made a home in each other's heart."

They sobbed themselves to sleep—the painful, restless, fitful sleep of those whose stomachs are empty—and Ruffo dreamed of the bright blue sea and the shining sand, and the feathery tamarisks, and Ruff dreamed of his lost little lady as he had seen her last—so white, so still, with her golden hair lying on the pillows, and her motionless hands crossed on her chest, the small soft hands which had never touched him save to caress.

Who cared what dreams they had, or what hunger they felt, a little Italian beggar boy and a dog Toby?

Ruffo was sorry when a few days later he heard Todd say that they should move on the day after the morrow. Todd seldom stayed long

in any place; he was nowhere popular with authority, and small thefts from poultry yards and fruit gardens and rabbit hutches were always more frequent in any neighbourhood he honoured with his presence.

"'Tis fine bright weather, and we'll best move on across the Dossetshire border," Ruffo heard him say to his wife, who demurred that they were doing very well where they were.

"Ay, ay, well enough, but 'tis allers best to keep moving;" said Todd. Movement was agreeable to Todd; he went third class by rail himself everywhere, and left his "old woman" to toil on foot as she might, driving on Ruffo before her; sometimes getting a lift on a carrier's cart, but not often, being afraid to let her little slaves out of her sight. "He may go and hide somewheres with that dawg," she said to herself. "Child'en is that ongrateful."

But for four days more they were to remain in this friendly little town with its grass-grown

hilly streets and its square church tower where the owls built, and its sweet scents of hay, and of strawberries blown in from the surrounding country.

The little town had a market, and a market day, when there were many country people and much open-air traffic, and loud bleating of frightened sheep, and lowing of calves, and cackling of hens, and crowing of barn-door monarchs, and heaps of fresh vegetables and sheaves of herbs and big bunches of homely roses, wallflowers, and clove pinks.

Above the market stalls with their leathern awnings and wooden trestles there was a blue sky, and it made that vague but unforgotten past stir in Ruffo's mind as he stared up at it. It was so seldom he saw a blue sky now; and then, by that train of connecting thoughts to which learned people give a long name, there came back to him the memories of the seashore, and the orange boughs, and the laughing face of his mother, and

he ceased to see anything that was actually around him.

"Was there iver yer like? Drat ye fur dreamin' and gapin'! Wake up, and custoom the dawg!" screamed Jane Todd in his ear.

Ruffo started and opened frightened eyes upon the scene before him; the low homely houses, the ranges of stalls and skips and barrows, the country folks jostling one another; the solemn grey church closing one end of the square. He took up Ruff tenderly and put on his little red coat, his frill, and his cap and feather, then kissed the little dog upon his nose to lessen the humiliation. No amount of usage ever made his travesty less hateful to poor Ruff, and his eyes as dark and almost as large as Ruffo's own, and equally full of wondering dumb sorrow, gazed woefully out from the shade of the plumed cap which was tied under his chin, and which, he felt, made him look so ridiculous.

Some street boys were looking on and laugh-

ing and pointing at him. Ruffo made haste to disappear with him behind the drapery of the show.

"There is nothing to mock at us for, darling Ruffie!" he murmured to his fellow-sufferer. "Oh, if I could only run in on them with a knife!"

For Ruffo had slumbering in him, though chilled and slackened by privation and fear, the hot blood of Sicilian mariners who had been wont for generations to pay affronts with steel. When the English children grinned and pointed at his beloved four-footed friend he felt all his hot blood boil in his little jaded, tired body. He was a gentle little soul, with almost all spirit beaten out of him, but he came of a fiery and dauntless race, and he would not have been a Calabrian if he had not felt a jeer still more unendurable than a blow.

"Laugh! Laugh!" Laugh!" he said, with his small white teeth clenched; "laugh, you boors,

you asses! You are not worth one hair of Ruff's head!"

"What bosh be yer a-mutterin'?" said Mrs. Todd. "Why, them boys could smash yer in a jiffey, as if yer was a dumbledore. Yer mind and keep a civil tongue in yer 'ead. 'Tis well for ye as yer speaks so queer-like as yer bain't easy onderstood. 'Ere, give me the dawg and get yer out with the music."

Ruffo obeyed, for her heavy hands pushed him outside the curtain, and the pipes and the triangle duly announced the approaching performance of Mr. Punch, whilst Mrs. Todd within grasped Ruff and the puppets to begin the familiar, but ever-attractive tragedy. At the sound of the "music" the street boys, already in front of the show, were joined by others; children ran from all quarters, servants who had their market baskets well filled upon their arms stopped on their way home; waggoners, carters, yokels, and idlers joined the throng, and even the market-

women under their awnings turned their heads towards Mr. Punch's temple and momentarily forgot their customers and remembered their childhood.

Suddenly a big man strode through the crowd and up to the little theatre.

"Stop that 'ere performance," he said, in a loud, authoritative voice. "Dawg aren't muzzled."

Ruffo lifted his eyes and ceased to blow on the Pandea pipe and jingle the triangle.

He recognised the man who had collared and threatened him in the lane ten days before.

"Stop that 'ere performance," repeated the man, "muzzle the dawg!"

Muzzle Toby! The throng laughed jeeringly, but murmured. Punch was popular, the policeman was not.

"Muzzle the dawg," said the Jack-in-office; "matter o' public safety. Where's the owner?"

Ruffo threw the triangle down on the stones and darted between the curtains.

"Oh, ma'am! oh, ma'am! they're after Ruff! Give him to me and let me run!"

"What?" bawled Mrs. Todd, who did not understand.

It was the moment of dog Toby's ever-effective appearance, and she clutched him fiercely round the throat. Ruffo clasped him round the body; Ruff struggled to get out of the woman's hands and escape to his friend. The red rough face of the constable showed itself at the aperture over the limp forms of Punch, and of Judy lying prone upon their wooden platform.

"Stop this 'ere performance," repeated the constable, "leastways, till yer dawg be muzzled."

"Muzzled? What rot be ye a-talkin'?" said Mrs. Todd, her head and shoulders with Ruff clutched under her arm appearing above the bodies of Punch and Judy.

"Rot? I'll see yer rotted!" said the guardian of the public weal. "Law kem down 'ere last night. My lords' horders. Board o' Agricultur'.

Every dawg en the County to be muzzled for a year: wire wore muzzle. What's yer mane? Wheer's yer 'abitation? What's yer callin'? Wheer's yer receipt for dog-tax?"

"He ain't a dog; he's a Toby!" screamed Mrs. Todd. "He can't act if he's muzzled. Irvin' hisself couldn't act in a muzzle, ye know that, man. Git away and let the show go on——"

"I'll run yer in at onst, with yer cur and yer little shaver, if ye don't kip a civil tongue in yer head," yelled the man in authority.

The crowd behind him, though still laughing, began to mutter rebelliously.

"Dog can't act if ye strap his mouth up," said a sturdy blacksmith; "and there ought to be some notice aforehand to the public."

"Don't yer cheek me, or it'll be the wuss for yes," said the constable, turning round ominously. "The law's the law, and shell be respecket as long as I'm in the force. Ye all o' ye know Job

Perrett. Woman, what's yer callin'? Where's yer receipt for dog-tax?"

"Woman! *Me!* Hoity-toity!" screamed Jane Todd in great wrath, but inwardly quaking and quailing, and throttling poor Ruff under her bony arm. "And Lord! sakes, Mr. Perrett! ye knows us well enow. We've a-bin this round full twenty year, if one, my man and me, and as for this pore little Toby——Hold yer row, child, can't ye? Ye'll only make matters worse."

These last words she whispered savagely to Ruffo, who clung to her skirts and to Ruff.

"Let 'em go on! Let 'em go on!" shouted several people in the crowd.

"'Tain't fair to stop 'em in the middle," said the sturdy smith.

Another constable came up.

"Ye can summon 'em, Job. Summon 'em. That'll do."

"Ay, that'll do," said the crowd.

"There's lots o' dogs loose. Take 'em first,"

chimed Mrs. Todd. "This pore little Toby can't hurt nobody."

"We'll take 'em up, all on 'em, don't ye fear," said Job Perrett, grimly. "But this 'ere Toby-dog's a wicious cur, and dangerous to the public safety. He's a'out a muzzle in a public place. The law's the law, aren't it the law, Garge?"

George, who was his fellow-constable, assented somewhat unwillingly.

"Summon 'em. That'll do," he said again, for the crowd was getting more and more out of temper, ill-pleased with the muzzling order in all its aspects, and irritated at having the show stopped. At this moment Ruff succeeded in his frantic struggles to free himself from the suffocating grasp of Jane Todd, and even from the beloved hands of Ruffo. He had recognised Ruffo's enemy of the hawthorn lane, and leaped on to the little platform where the fallen forms of Punch and Judy were lying, and flew at the constable, his whole little person quivering with rage, his eyes

blazing, and his small white teeth gleaming. Job Perrett sprang backwards in a paroxysm of terror, and the crowd, delighted, cheered the dog. Ruff, for the moment victorious, stood upon the ledge barking and growling furiously, his frill trembling in his spasms of rage, his cap and feather fallen on the ground, his tail vibrating in fury beyond the lappets of the coat. He paid no heed to Ruffo's prayers and trembling appeals; he had driven back a foe; he was pleased and glad once more after so many miserable years.

"Ye're a good pluckt one, ye are!" shouted the smith, and the crowd cheered the little dog again, and pelted the policemen with derisive names.

Ruff was very small, but in these moments he looked almost as large as a lion where he stood above the prostrate puppets with his head held up in fearless wrath, challenging his foe to come near him again if he dared.

"Summon 'em, summon 'em," muttered his

comrade George to Job Perrett. "That'll do. Summon 'em."

"Summon 'em?" shrieked Perrett. "Summon 'em—when they bring a mad dog in public? Look at 'im! 'E's ravin' mad! I've a duty to perform, and I'll do it!"

Little Ruff stood on the ledge above the form of Punch, showing his pretty pearl-like teeth and drawing his breath fast and furiously; all his gallant Scottish blood was on fire; for once he was wholly deaf to the voice of his friend. All the bondage of five cruel years was forgotten; he was once more Lady Helen's darling, defying all the bullies and all the cowards of the world.

"I've a duty to do, and I'll do it," cried Job Perrett. "Yah, yer little brute!—take that!"

And with all the force of a very strong man, strung to the highest pitch by personal terror, he swung his truncheon above his head and brought it down with murderous weight on the little silvery head of Ruff.

Ruff dropped like a stone; his skull was fractured.

A sullen roar of censure rose up from the indignant crowd.

"Which be the brute now?" cried the blacksmith.

"The poor dear little dog, he hadn't done naught!" cried an apple-woman.

The storm of hisses grew loud; the constable left the show and faced the angry throng, nervously conscious that they had public opinion against them.

"Ye bully blackguards!" screamed Jane Todd. "Todd will be fit to kill me when he hears o'. Ye've spoilt my gains for the Lord knows how long. 'Tis Black Saturday with a vengeance Afore we'll be able to train another Toby——"

She leaned out over the aperture, yelling and sobbing, thinking only of her lost receipts and of the difficulty of training a Toby.

In the noise, the confusion, the bawling, the

sympathy of the crowd, the turbulence of her own outcries and lamentation she never looked down at the little murdered dog, or saw that Ruffo, who had caught him as he fell, had rushed out of the show with the warm, quivering body of his little friend clasped tightly to his chest.

Ruffo thought that he was only stunned. He ran with the fleetness of a hunted hare through two or three of the narrow old streets which twisted round about the market place, and never paused until he reached a farrier's shop in a dusky lane. The farrier had a few days before praised Ruff as a "rare thoro'bred un," and had said it was a cruel shame to see such a dog come down to a Punch's show. Ruffo rushed breathless into the shop, and found the good man there.

"Oh, sir, look at him, please!" he cried. "The wicked man has struck him—struck him on his head. Pray—pray do look at him; do save him!"

The farrier, startled, put on his spectacles,

and bent down to look at the little dog in the boy's arms.

"Ay, ay! What a pity!" he said sadly. "My poor lad, he isn't hurt; he's dead!"

"Dead!"

"Dead, sure enough. Look at that," said the farrier, gently touching the blood-stained, fractured little skull. "Who did it? 'Twas a brutal deed."

"Dead!" repeated Ruffo, stupidly.

He had not understood; he had known that Ruff was cruelly injured, but because the body was still warm and the eyes still open he had not thought that it was death. He stood still, holding Ruff to him, the dark blood staining his shirt.

"Don't look like that, child," said the old man earnestly. "The poor little dog's dead, sure enough; but 'twas no fault o' yours, I'm sure. Who did it?"

Ruffo did not answer, or even seem to hear;

his gaze was strained and fixed, his small brown face ashen grey.

"Leave the body with me," said the old man, meaning to be kind. "I've a bit o' garden at the back. I'll bury him decent-like, under the elder-tree. You can come and dig the hole, if you like."

Ruffo still did not seem to hear; he kept the head of Ruff pressed to him.

"The blood's a-spoiling your clothes," said the farrier. "What's the matter, child? Don't look like that. They'll give ye another dog. Come out into my bit o' garden."

He stretched his hand out to take the body of Ruff, meaning well, but Ruffo shrank from him in a spasm of terror.

"Do not touch him, or I will kill you!" he hissed through his white pointed teeth, as white and as pointed as were poor little Ruff's; his eyes were strained open to an abnormal size; his whole frame was convulsed. He rushed from the shop

and was out of sight down the lane before the farrier had time to get to the doorway and call after him to come back, saying no harm had been meant.

Once across the threshold, Ruffo ran on and on, blindly and aimlessly, along the crooked lane which was silent and empty, for its inhabitants were at the market square.

Nobody stopped him, or even gave a thought to him—a little, ill-clad, hungry-looking being—with his tangled curls blowing in the north-west wind. He held the body of Ruff close to his chest, and the poor little blood-stained head rested upon his right shoulder.

He ran on at first at a furious speed, then at a more halting trot, then at a laboured, breathless pace; but he covered much ground, and had soon passed the limits of the small town and gained the outlying country.

He was dimly conscious that all was calm and cool around him; that there were no more

walls or houses; that there were groves and hedges and tall trees in their stead, great wide green fields, and a slow, winding river.

But he continued to run onward, though his feet were sore and all his bones were aching.

Of physical pain he had no consciousness. All he was sensible of was that Ruff was dead—that he was all alone.

He ran on because he had only one instinct left: to get away from the brutal town, from the men and women, from the people who had killed Ruff, and who would take Ruff out of his arms and thrust him out of sight under the earth.

Some haymakers looked at him.

"What's that queer-looking little chap about?" said one.

Another answered:

"He've got a cur he's a-goin' to drown," said another, for from the distance of the meadow in which they were moving, they could not see that the dog was dead.

"He looks rare queer," said the first man, b they did not think any more about him.

He had no clear thought, no definite obje All he knew was that Ruff was dead, and th they wanted to take the body of his friend aw from him. He ran on as a hunted creature do on the mere mad instinct to escape. He had idea where to go, or what he meant to do; only wanted to escape from everyone and hi himself with Ruff.

His little, dirty, shabby figure toiled on alo the roads, passing from sunshine to shade, a out of shade into sunshine, unmolested, ur roads ceased, all cultivated land was far behi him, and wide moors covered with gorse stretch to the north, to the west, to the east. On t south was a plain, but a liquid plain: shinii silver, radiant, rippling, moving, heaving. It w only the estuary by Christchurch, but the ti was high, and the noon was bright, and t water, usually so dull and sad, sparkled in t

unwonted light, and tumbled and played joyously, blown by the south-west wind.

Ruffo, standing amongst the sand of the mainland, saw the width of waters for the first time since he had been brought to these English shores. He thought it was the blue sea of his memories, the southern sea of his lost home.

"Eccomi! Eccomi!" he cried, in the tongue of his childhood. He was here. Did the sea not know him?

The sea was safety, refuge, peace. The sea would take him home!

With the body of Ruff clasped to his breast, and the small blood-stained head lying on his shoulder, he ran down the slope of the downs to the beach below, and across the beach to the fringe of foam. The glad water leaped up and frolicked about his weary limbs, and kissed his bruised feet, and washed white the stunned brain of little Ruff.

"Eccomi! Eccomi!" he cried again, and with the dog's body locked in his arms he ran farther, and farther, and farther into the fresh cool waves.

The sea was merciful, and took them both.

In their death they were not divided.

TOTO.

TOTO.

THEY had a small shop, a very small one, in a narrow passage which debouched from the Rue des Francs-Bourgeois, and passed behind the tower of the Hôtel Barbette. It is a sorry time for *le petit commerce* in Paris, as in all other cities; the great establishments destroy the humble little traders. It is difficult to live on *le petit commerce* in any town, still more difficult to do so in great capitals. But they managed to pay their way; they had their customers, faithful if few; they spent little on themselves, and they were able to put something by for a rainy day. They had been in this same shop ever since their

marriage forty years before: a bit of old Lutetia, possibly unaltered from the day when Louis d'Orléans rode out to his death from the Barbette.

It was a shop and a dwelling-house in one, with a high roof and deep eaves and mullioned windows. When the door opened there were two steps which led down into the shop; and above the door was one of the old gilded and painted signs, the Pot aux Roses, which creaked when the wind was high, and pleased the sparrows as a perch. At the Pot aux Roses they sold wooden toys and tapes and threads and linens, and the like. Nanon subsequently looked to the one and Charlot to the other. They were Nanon and Charlot to the whole neighbourhood. No one except the tax-collectors and the postmen ever called them Monsieur and Madame Dulac. They were merry little people, short of stature, vivacious, bright-eyed, quite contented with their lot, very fond of each other, and although thrifty, very

charitable. They had both been born in this Quarter of The Temple, and seldom went out of their faubourg except on summer Sundays to one of the woods or villages near.

They had seen many changes since they had first come there on their wedding-day, when the Pot aux Roses had been fresh painted and gilded, and the Prince President had been at the Elysée. But the storms had passed and burst over Paris without touching them; they hid themselves like two birds during rain, and when each tempest was past, came out to chirp and twitter again. They had the old gay temper of France, which is vanishing from the race under the influence of German beer and militarism, and machines, and absinthe, and science. They had had their sorrows, sharp and sad; they had lost two children in early infancy, and a nephew they loved dearly had been shot in the Siege of Paris; but all that was now far away, and they were happy in a simple, pleasant, kindly way, which showed itself

in doing all they could for those less fortunate.

"For fortunate we are; *faut le dire, hein?*" said Charlot very frequently; and, though he knew it not, they were most fortunate of all in their contented dispositions and their mutual affection. There are many such cheerful *bourgeois* interiors in Paris, but not one was more cheerful than theirs. They had good health, good appetites, good tempers, good neighbours, and if many would have thought it a hard life to serve in a little dark shop all day, and spend the evenings counting up sous and centimes, they did not think so. They were used to it, and they gained enough by it to keep themselves and to afford one luxury—Toto. Toto, who ate as much as two dragoons, and for whom they were obliged to pay his tax regularly to have civic permission for him to live.

One cold, wet, windy autumn night, boys had been stoning Toto in the Rue Vieille du Temple;

Toto, being then a shapeless mass of dirty wool, got out by himself, no one knew how, from some stable-yard or travelling circus. Charlot, who had been to the green-grocer's and poulterer's to buy his Sunday dinner, was going home in that windy night; he drove the boys off, and, after some hesitation, invited the frightened, friendless bundle of wool to waddle after him in the gaslight. There was scarcely anyone about; the night was chilly and wet; he reached home with his foundling in safety, having been obliged to take it up in his arms for the last few yards.

"It is very dirty," said Nanon, when he and the pup reached the Pot aux Roses.

"It is very wet," said Charlot.

"It will be a great trouble," said Nanon.

"I will take the trouble."

"There will be the tax to pay," persisted Nanon.

"I will go without my *piquette.*"

"He will destroy everything."

"We will keep him in the yard."

"There is no shape nor make in him."

"That is because he is young."

"He must be kept in the yard."

"Yes, yes; in the yard—yes," replied Charlot, who was practised in the art of giving an inch to get an ell. The yard had once been a portion of an old palace court: it was spacious, flagged, and contained beside its well a large fig-tree.

The puppy whimpered. Nanon ran into the kitchen for some bread.

"Now he has eaten with us he must stay. The very savages would say that," said Charlot. And the waif was put for that night in the wood-cellar. It was raining too heavily to turn him out in the yard.

That was now seven years ago, and the stray dog was still at the Pot aux Roses. With time he had shown himself to be a magnificent Newfoundland dog, black except for one white spot on his chest and one white glove; a very monarch and

god amongst dogs, grave as Buddha, powerful as Zeus, kind as Krishna.

When his nose was out of the shop doorway his tail was in the little room behind. He was a Colossus in a nutshell; but he was as happy as his owners, and he was the idol of the neighbourhood. There was always eager competition for the honour of taking Toto for his daily swim in the Seine.

Charlot was a good walker, and the apothecary had told him to walk to keep down his tendency to stoutness, and often in the very early mornings or the late evenings he left the shop to his wife and took Toto to Bercy, or to Charenton, along the quays, or over one of the bridges, and even sometimes to Vincennes and St. Mandé on Sundays; to Nogent, where Toto could plunge in the Marne as much as he pleased; to the Lac Dumesnil, where he was sure to get sugar and biscuits and cutlets from the merry-makers at the *café* of the two little isles; or to Join-

ville-le-Pont, where he was welcomed as a comrade by the oarsmen and swimmers who assembled there. He and Charlot became an attraction to the *canotiers* at that double bend where Marne and Seine embrace, and Toto used to swim now with one canoe now with another, and dive and go after sticks, and steer himself with his great tail. Sunday would not have been Sunday on the water without him to a great many frequenters of the river.

No doubt in that little house, in that city life, Toto had not had all the freedom he deserved. No doubt he would have liked to see the meadows and the woods oftener than now and then on a *fête*-day; no doubt his fine instincts and his vast strength were cribbed, cabined, and confined. But he had always about him that affection which to the dog, as to the child, makes up for so much else that may be lacking in his home. They both loved him, Charlot the more ardently of the two, and they

were very proud of him: he was so big, and so beautiful; and he had saved the lives of people —once at Charenton, when a wherry had been upset by a river steamer; and once one bitter black night when in the ice-cold muddy water by the Pont d'Austerlitz a woman had been drowning.

A little paragraph had been put in the *Gaulois* about this latter good action, and Charlot cut it out and framed it under a photograph of the hero. It hung in the shop, and everyone saw it and read it, and to those who might otherwise have missed it, Charlot said, as he served them over the counter, "It is in print what Toto did—yes—over there; you can read it; I cut it out of the *Gaulois*. I was with him, such a night as it was! Ink-black, with broken ice in the Seine, and he in the water—pong! pouf! as if it were summer, without waiting a moment once he had seen that poor drowning creature struggling. The light from the bridge was on her."

Many new customers, as well as old ones, came to the Pot aux Roses to see the dog who had been mentioned in the *Gaulois*, and, of course, all of them bought something, and the till was the fuller for it.

"See the injustice of it," said Nanon, proud and pleased, yet vexed. "What Toto did at Charenton was really finer than what he did off the Pont d'Austerlitz, because there were three of them at Charenton, and he saved all three, one after another; and he had to fight with the swirl and froth that were made by the paddles of the *mouche* which had upset the wherry; but, ouf! no one of the newspapers noticed that, and so no body ever asked to see him then—not even th lads he had saved, if you will believe it."

"That is the way of the world," said Charl with his cheery laugh. "Toto did not do it praise or for profit; he did it because his g big heart told him. He would do the same

a Tropmann, for a Bismarck, for—for—even for a *sergent-de-ville!*"

He selected the worst epithet he could think of.

"Christian charity!" he continued. "Ah, *ma mie,* if you want to see Christian charity, you must leave your priests and come to Toto."

Charlot was not so fond of the church as his wife, and often let her go alone to Mass, whilst he smoked his best tobacco in the yard under the fig-tree with Toto stretched out on the flags.

"Give me your hand, my friend," he would say often, and Toto would lift up his right foot, the one with a white glove, and have it solemnly shaken. Then Charlot would call him "dear little cabbage," "sweet little pigeon," "angel of the hearth," "glory of the quarter," and many other caressing epithets, to which Toto responded with a bang of his tail on the stones; the tail which Charlot called *le plumeau de paradis!*

"What a child you are, Charlot!" said his wife, when she came back with her prayer-book in her hand; but she smiled as she said it, for Charlot, childish as he might be, never forgot to keep the charcoal alive and look at the simmering broth in her absence; he had always, too, laid the table ready with its washed radishes and its modest pint of wine, its long baker's roll, its sugared flat cake, its old flowered Rouen plates, and its oil and vinegar and lemon waiting their combination for that crown of a French feast, the salad. Toto did not care for the salad, but he did care very much for what was left of the stewed meat and the sweet cake, which came to him as *bonnes bouches* after his own solid meal on ship-biscuits and dried fish.

On the whole he was a very happy dog. He was the darling of the quarter; he knew all of the children by their names; he let the shoemaker's three-year-old baby ride on his back; he carried the slates and school-books in his mouth;

he would sit erect, grave as a judge, while Aimée and Jeannot, the tailor's children, explained their lessons to him; he was friends with all the dogs around, for the biggest of them was so small beside him that they evoked that magnanimity which was his most marked characteristic. Even when a little *loulou* which belonged to a notary near flew at him every morning, he only shook his leonine head and walked onward in peace. The notary's *loulou* was convinced that Toto was a coward. So was the notary's wife. The only quarrel which was ever heard over the counter of the Pot aux Roses came out of this.

"Your big hippopotamus has no courage," said the notary's wife, a stout, red-faced lady in a yellow wig, to Nanon, of whom she had been buying some needles and thread.

"No courage!" echoed Nanon, her little bright brown eyes sparkling. "Say that again, Madame Viret, if you will be so good."

"I will say it again, and ten times again, and twenty times again," said the notary's wife. "My *loulou* has the spirit of a lion, but your rhinoceros is a poltroon. Large animals and big men are often the poorest in temper."

"Your little fox is a little devil," retorted Nanon furiously, forgetful of her commercial interests. "He is a spitfire, a bully, a fiend. Toto is but too good to him, he could snap him up in one mouthful if he chose; he refrains because Toto is truly great—truly great, Madame—he would not soil his teeth with your little bully and bastard."

"If I only come here to be insulted," Madame Viret began very hotly, growing red in the face, for she was a choleric woman, and liked her wine at breakfast and dinner.

"Insulted! What did you call our angel? A hippopotamus—a rhinoceros! Is that not insult? I tell you if Charlot but lifted one finger, Toto

would kill your little bastard with a single stroke of his paw!"

"I will never buy a paper of pins in your den again if I live fifty years!"

"Ah, Madame, there is no fear of that! People who love the juice of the grape too well——"

"What! After all you owe to my custom; paying you three times over the prices of the Bon Marché for your rubbish!"

"Nanon, *ma mie!* Oh, Madame, pray, pray, a thousand pardons! But you did say 'hippo-potamus,' and you did say 'rhinoceros'! I was in the kitchen peeling the potatoes, but I heard," cried Charlot, as he rushed into the shop, very greatly alarmed, for the notary was a man of weight in the neighbourhood.

"She said 'juice of the grape'!" cried the notary's lady. "Your wife said, 'juice of the grape,' Monsieur! It is libel! I will tell my hus-

band. He will summon her. Juice of the grape! And your prices, which are a score of times higher than those of the Printemps! I will never come down into your dusky hole again! No, not if the Prussians come back and burn down every shop except yours! And Pierrot a bastard, a bastard! It is libel! My husband will make you pay!"

"Pierrot is a lovely little dog, *pur sang,*" murmured Charlot very conciliatingly. "But he does fly at Toto."

"Because Toto is a poltroon!" said the notary's wife. Then Charlot himself flung prudence to the winds and cried, "A poltroon! If Toto is a poltroon, then so was Alexander and Cæsar, and Charlemagne and Napoléon Premier!"

And Nanon muttered, "If I did say 'juice of the grape,' many people say worse of you, Madame. Many people say 'drinks of the American Bars.'"

Then the notary's wife, incensed and outraged, threw the packet of needles and thread which

she had bought down on the counter, and Nanon gathered up the sous she had received for them, and cast them forth into the gutter, and Toto, having heard his own name uttered by his master amidst all this pother, came into the shop from his broken slumbers under the fig-tree.

"A poltroon, you, Toto!" cried Charlot. "So were the Trois Mousquetaires then, so were the Sept Fils d'Aymon, so was the great Roland himself."

Toto, seeing the bronze coins lying in the gutter, went out, put his paw on them, and picked them up with his teeth one by one, then trotted off, as he had been taught to do, to the baker's round the corner and received in return a pound of *gauffres* in a paper bag, which he brought intact to his friends at the Pot aux Roses. They had been too absorbed in vexation and misgiving to see what he was doing, but when he laid the bag of *gauffres* between them on the counter they kissed him.

"What intelligence!" cried Nanon.

"What honesty!" cried Charlot.

"What kindheartedness!"

"What a memory!"

"He deserves one," said Charlot, and gave him two.

"But I must send her the needles and thread since he has spent her money," said Nanon.

She did so by Aimée, the tailor's little daughter; and the notary's wife refused to take them, and the little girl went backwards and forwards with the packet a great many times until, getting tired and being less honest than Toto, she fibbed about the matter, told Nanon that the notary's wife had kept them, and in reality kept them herself.

The breach between the Pot aux Roses and the notary's house remained impassable.

"You told her she drank! How can she forgive that?" said Charlot. "If she did not drink

she might, perhaps, forgive it; but when she does——!" He shook his head.

To lose a customer so regular and so influential as Madame Viret was no light matter, but Nanon would have let herself be chopped in fine pieces like parsley for a potage rather than take any steps towards apology. "We do not want their sous," she said proudly, but she would not have been a Parisian shopkeeper if she had not known that no single sou is ever flouted by the wise. The notary, who was a meek man, regretted his *bézique* and his *eau sucré* with his lost friend, Charlot; but his wife told him that he was a miserable creature not to summon Toto and his owner before the tribunal, and he dared make no movement towards reconciliation.

Three months had gone by thus when one day Charlot and Toto, walking on the Quai de Bercy, saw Madame Viret with her Pierrot walking some yards ahead, the little *loulou,* with his tail

curled over his back, very smart with silver bells and a blue bow of ribbon.

On the other side of the road there was a large Ulm dog. Pierrot, with his habitual impertinence, darted across the road and flew at the foreigner. The German hound bore the attack for a second or two, then struck Pierrot down with one of his huge paws, and would then and there have ended his days, had not Toto seen the danger, and thinking, no doubt, "He has always been rude to me, but he is a neighbour and a compatriot, this big fellow is a Prussian, and the odds are unfair," he rushed across the road before Charlot had realised what he was about, and threw himself forcibly upon the Ulm hound's back. The German let go the *loulou* to turn upon his mightier assailant. Pierrot scampered off in terror to his mistress, and Toto and the Ulm hound looked at each other and measured their respective forces, growling low.

Happily, there were no policemen near to

ıake mischief; the passers-by did not inter-ere; Charlot watched, breathless and agonised; fadame Viret watched too, clasping her Pierrot, hose blue ribbon was torn and bedraggled.

For one—two—three minutes the two stately ombatants stood facing each other like human uellists; their attitude was superb; then some-ıing in Toto's gaze cowed the other; something ı his regard said "You are in the wrong—go." he German dog felt that he had met his master; ery stiffly, very slowly, very reluctantly, he cknowledged himself vanquished. He turned nd went away without fighting; not afraid, but umbled and rebuked, like Launcelot by Arthur. oto stood like a rock until his adversary had isappeared, then he shook himself and trotted p to Charlot; some working-men who had looked n cheered him. Madame Viret burst into tears.

"And I called him a coward! And he has aved Pierrot's life!"

Everything was forgotten and forgiven. Charlot

and the notary played *bézique* that evening, and Madame Viret told the tale for the seventieth time to an admiring crowd around the counter of the Pot aux Roses.

Even Pierrot conquered his natural temper so far that he never again flew at his saviour.

Thus slipped the pleasant years away; and with each season Toto grew in dignity and was held in higher consideration by his neighbours. All round the tower of Louis d'Orléans, people loved and were proud of the hero of the Pot aux Roses, who had avenged Sédan.

When, in the winter evenings, the lamp was lit, and the two little people talked together of their early life, of their courtship and marriage, of their dear children, of all which had been and all which might have been, they always wound up by looking at Toto asleep in the warmth on his bit of carpet, and saying in chorus: "But we have had many mercies, and we have Toto."

And they looked forward with just confidence and natural hope to a green old age.

But they had reckoned without that fiend which everywhere ruins the natural lives of the people, seizes and wastes their earnings, poisons and kills their wholesome pleasures: that fiend which is named the State, and which is always equally a devil whatever its disguise be called—Republic, Empire, or Monarchy.

Charlot had often been worried by fine, by interference, by citation for this, that, and the other; he had always dreaded the sight of a printed paper, he had always heard with a quickened pulse the step of the police on the pavement, but he had been prudent, he had been fortunate, and no great trouble had ever come upon him since the days of the Siege of Paris.

He had many friends, too, even in the Administration; he was so kind himself, so cheery, pleasant, and sociable, other men could not be very morose with him.

"No one can tell why the Good God mad spiders and beetles and *sergents-de-ville,*" he sai once; but all the rest of the races upon eart seemed to him amiable and agreeable. Nanc thought less well of the world on the whole: h always told her she had a defective digestio pessimism was spleen. And then they laughe together, for the notion of associating pessimis or dyspepsia with his little, round, bright-eye chirping tomtit of a wife struck both as ver comical.

One morning in one month of June, whe all Paris was gay with green leaves, glancin waters, red geraniums, and the sunshine mad mirth even in the warehouses of Bercy, and th mad-house of Charenton, Toto was lying outsid the shop-door waiting for the hour to come fo his splash and his swim in the Seine. Ther was no one in the shop itself; Nanon was millin coffee, and Charlot was shelling peas; each coul leave in a moment if a customer entered. Th

sun-rays came into the little dusky interior of their kitchen, and lighted up the gilded frame in the shop which contained the paragraph from the *Gaulois* about Toto's exploit by the Pont d'Austerlitz.

As Nanon turned the handle of the coffee-mill, and Charlot cracked the pea-pods, they heard a loud, deep-toned bay; it was the bark of the grand dog, in anger; they heard also voices, outcries, the sound of stamping feet, the jingle of scabbards, the oaths of men. They both became as white as the linen of Nanon's coif and Charlot's apron.

"Toto!" they exclaimed out in one breath, and both rushed into the street.

That which they had always so piteously dreaded had happened. The dog-snatchers, with their protecting posse of police, had come into the passage at the moment when Toto was basking in the sun under the sign of the Pot aux Roses.

The murderous noose was round his noble throat. He had sprung to his feet and was struggling against the brutes half strangled.

"Messieurs! Messieurs!" shrieked Charlot, "stop, for the love of Heaven!"

"Let go! He is choking!" screamed Nanon. "Let go, let go!"

"He pays his tax."

"He has saved two lives."

"Messieurs! Messieurs! Enter my shop and see! There is the bit out of the *Gaulois* framed."

"He is choking!"

"You will kill him!"

"There is his silver medal in there. Come and see it; his medal for life saved!"

"Let me pay any fine—any fine—what you will!"

"Oh, God help me! They are strangling him!"

Nanon seized the noose in her hands and

wrenched it open; Charlot flung himself on the man who had thrown it.

"Resistance to authority!" shouted the police.

"Yes! Yes! A hundred times yes! Resistance to the death!" shrieked Charlot. "We are good citizens. We pay all that is asked of us. We have lived here for forty years. We deserve respect and——"

The brigadier in command dealt him a blow in the chest with the pommel of his sword. Charlot reeled back against the wall of his house. Toto, feeling Nanon's hands round him, and the noose loosening, aided her efforts with a weighty wrench of his great shoulders, and rushed to his fallen master. The guards seized Nanon and flung her as if she were a rag into the middle of the road.

"Arrest them both!" said the brigadier. "They revolt against authority."

Toto saw two men seize Charlot; with one

bound he sprang upon them; and they lay prostrate in the gutter.

"The dog is mad!" cried the brigadier, and he plucked his revolver from his belt and fired between the dog's eyes. Toto dropped like a stone, his brains oozed out upon the pavement. Charlot saw from where he leaned, sick and dizzy, against the wall of his house. With a shrill scream he fell forward on the body of his dead friend, his face bathed in blood.

"He is dead, too; so best," said the brigadier, and he kicked the bodies of the man and the dog where they were lying one on the other.

A crowd had assembled, and at the windows and in the doorways the people who dwelt in all the houses near were looking on, horrified, grieved, but paralysed by their fear of the police. Nanon lay insensible upon the stones; Madame Viret ran to her, and raised her head and wiped her temple, which was cut and bleeding.

The brigadier wrote his *procès-verbal* in his

note-book. It began: "Whereas, resistance to authority——"

He foresaw praise and promotion which would accrue to him for his zeal in defence of authority: it is such servants as these that the State prizes.

His narration set forth how he had slain a rabid animal at great risk in his own defence, and for the public safety; he felt sure that the Pasteur Institute would send him some recompense; perhaps put even his statue in the garden here, beside that of the Swiss shepherd who beat a dog to death with his sabots.

That night the notary and his wife buried by stealth the body of Toto in a cherry orchard which they possessed at St. Mandé, and buried with him the little gilded frame which held the record of the human life he had saved by the Pont d'Austerlitz.

Nanon was lying on her bed with the wounds on her temple and forehead bandaged, and her brain dulled with morphine. In the shop, on the

counter, a mattress was spread, and on the mattress there was stretched the body of Charlot The medical certificate of his death wrote down its cause as hemiplegia. The populace was quiet for fear of the police, but it muttered low and bitterly savage words, and many small traders near closed their shutters.

The Pot aux Roses was never opened as a shop again.

Nanon partially recovered her health, but she was childish and stupid ever after that day. She lived for more than a year, but she never fully recovered her senses. She murmured, "Charlot —Toto" almost incessantly, and spent the whole of her time, from dawn to dark, in watching for them, looking up and down the street from what had been so long the shop door.

Then, one night, in her sleep, she also died, —from the breaking of a blood-vessel on the brain.

The old house has been pulled down this

summer, and the sign of the Pot aux Roses has been broken up and sold for matchwood.

Four years have gone by, and everyone has forgotten Nanon and Charlot, and the grass grows long over their graves in the Cemetery of Mont Parnasse, as over that of Toto in the orchard at St. Mandé. Only now and then Madame Viret still says to little Pierrot:

"Ah, ce pauvre Toto! C'était un brave!"

A BASKET OF PLUMS.

A BASKET OF PLUMS.

"How it grows!" said the young man, looking with pride and affection up at a tree he had planted. It was a plum-tree, of the kind which gives the golden luscious plums which in England are called greengage, in France and in Italy, *claudée.* He had planted it against a south-east wall, and it had thriven well, liking its position and rewarding the care he took of it. He knew little of fruit or plants, but an old gardener had told him what to do with this tree, and it had flourished.

He had been fifteen years old when he had set it in the earth, and he was now twenty. His

daily occupation was to mend the roads of his commune, but he worked in his little bit of garden after sunset and before the day's work began.

His name was Paolino Sizzo; he maintained his mother and sister; his father was dead. His little grey house, with its red-brown roof, stood amongst the fields and hills of a rural commune called Marignalee, to the right of the Certosa of Val d'Ema. He was spared military service because he was the only son of his mother.

The lives of all of them were hard, but they did not think so, for they knew no other. When they had oil enough for their beans and a big round loaf in the cupboard, they were content. The mother spun and made their clothes.

The little daughter Ernesta went to and fro to the village school, and did not do much else than play and laugh, and eat as much bread as she could get; but she was a merry girl, and made sunshine in the house, and she showed all

her pretty teeth as white as a young dog's in glee, when there was anything extra to eat on Sundays.

"You spoil the child," grumbled the mother, when he brought a little gift of sweetstuff or fruit for his sister; but while she said it she was pleased and grateful that her son was so good to his sister instead of spending his spare pence in gambling or on drink.

When they were all out, the door of the little house was locked and it was left to itself. There was nothing to steal except a few copper vessels. Only when the plums were ripening Paolino said to his mother, "Stay and see nobody takes them, mother," and then the widow would rest, sitting on a wooden bench by the door and spinning, for both he and she knew that if she were not watched the nimble hands of Ernesta would play havoc with the fruit; not speaking of the village children and the big rats who would run down from the roof.

She herself was a bent, worn woman; grey-haired before her time, for she was not yet forty; but she went out to work most days; hard work —washing, cutting corn, turning hay, gathering tomatoes, shelling beans in the hot sun; and this kind of labour ages soon when it is not substantiated by good food.

The work of Paolino was one which took him out in all weathers; and his tools were heavy and large; and the constant rooting up of the roadside grass was a tiresome labour, ever renewing itself, never really done. But he liked his work. He could rest, when the hour of rest came, under the hedges of hazel and dog-rose, and he knew everybody who passed by, whether gentle-folks or poor folks, and at the cottages he would have a chat and a draught of watered wine, and at the villa gates he would sometimes get a franc if it were Easter time or Christmas. Of course, he was only an underling at his age, but he hoped to be the head man on those roads

in due time as his father had been. He had no other or higher aim in life. He was quite content.

After all it was a life of some interest to anyone like this youth, who had interest in all that passed around him. His sphere indeed was limited by the mile-stones, and measured not quite three kilometres, but he knew every living creature, human, equine, bovine, or canine, that passed over his roads, and knew all about them.

When he went home to his supper he had all sorts of news: the marquis had bought a beautiful young horse, bay mule, black points; the priest's little dog had been washed and clipped; the miller had had his pocket picked in the town; a tramp had been found getting over the gates of one villa, the children at another were ill with fever; the crockery cart, as it made its rounds, had lost a wheel and several bits of earthenware had tumbled into the ditch and been broken; the

knife-grinder had said that there had been a great fire at a factory in the city; the baker's little brown donkey had fallen and cut its knees; the foreign lady who had the large greyhounds had passed him and spoken kindly to him; the Father had gone by on his cob and had nodded and called out, *"La Madre? Com' 'l sta?"* And all these pieces of local intelligence interested his mother and Ernesta, as the telegrams in the morning papers interest ourselves. Every day there was, of course, someone or something different to the previous day, if it were only that the vicar had on new buckled shoes, or that the little ducklings of a neighbour were thriving finely, or that the Franciscan friar had a bad cough.

Whenever she heard that the priest or the miller or the steward or the friar had inquired for her, his mother was a proud and happy woman. Paolino did not tell her that they seldom stopped to hear the answer. "Of course," he

thought, "it is only just done out of politeness; they don't really care."

The vicar did care, perhaps; he who lived on the crest of the hill at the church with the tall white tower. He was a good man, fond of long walks, in which he was always followed by his little white fox-dog; and he knew the mother Rosina well, for she was always in her place at mass and vespers, and the only sins she had to confess after much searching of her heart were that she had envied her neighbour's good luck with her chickens or had been gluttonous in eating too much ricatto, a rude sort of imitation of cream cheese made with sour milk, and highly in favour with country people.

This was in the summer; and in the winter there were the tales to tell of flood in the city or perhaps even snow; of how the pedlar had been blown down coming from the hills; of the water-mill wheels being frozen; or of how the priest's

little dog had grown his thick furry coat again in readiness for the cold.

Paolino himself, having a feeling for these things, noted also when the violets came, and the primroses showed first; when the hawthorn in the hedges blossomed: when the nightingale first sang; but these matters did not interest his women, and so he very rarely indeed spoke of them. But without saying anything to anyone, he noticed the earliest swallow, the passing of the sea-birds down the green, Greve water, the flavouring of the bryony, the dog-rose, and the fox-glove in the hedges which fringed his roads; and he would in all probability have gone on doing this for many years of the twentieth century had not the Municipal Office, which dealt with roads and their menders, come to a new and, for him, disastrous decision. It decided that it had too many rural road-menders in its employment, and decided to dismiss one-fifth of the men in its pay.

It was one day in mid-winter that this resolve of his superiors was made known to Paolino. He had gone into the city, as usual on a Saturday, for his weekly wage, and, when he had received it, was told in the curtest manner possible that his services would be required no longer.

He could not understand. He could not believe. Indeed, he was so stupid and tiresome in his manner and his incredulity that the official who made the communication grew impatient, and shouted to him that there were gendarmes both inside and out of the Communal Palace for refractory persons.

"But what have I done? Tell me where my fault is?" asked the poor lad, holding his week's wage in his outstretched palm.

"You have done nothing," said the official, contemptuously. "You have no fault that I know of, but you are struck off the rolls; you are not wanted any longer."

The cruel fact was some minutes longer before it could insert itself into the boy's brain, in which a thousand hammers seemed beating and a thousand bells ringing.

"But we shall starve!" he cried, as soon as he did comprehend. "Mother and Nesta have nobody to look to, only me!"

"With that we have nothing to do," said the official, and added, "there is always work to be found by those who are really willing to do it."

"But give me a reason! Give me a reason!" screamed Paolino, his blood getting hot, and sparks dancing before his eyes.

"The reason is clear," said the official, loftily. "The Municipality does not want you. You are dismissed."

Then as Paolino in his youthful ignorance and desperation most unwisely lifted up his voice and poured forth objurgations on the Municipality, as a lost dog throws up its head and howls to the empty air, the clerks, whom power made po-

tentates, lost all patience with him, summoned the guards, and bade them take the fellow out into the square. He was creating a disturbance. He was led roughly into the courtyard and into the sunshine.

"Go home, you fool," said one of the guards, "and thank your lucky stars you are not locked up. If there's anything against you another time it will go hard with you."

"But they will starve! They will starve!" screamed the boy, getting a crowd around him, who were ready to take sides with him though they had no idea what his wrongs might be.

"What is the matter?" cried the crowd.

"The matter!" shouted Paolino. "They send me away when I've no fault, and my father on these roads before me, and——"

His words were cut short by the guards lifting him off his feet and pitching him head foremost through a van door which another guard held

open at that moment, as the sinister-looking vehicle lumbered out of the Communal court-yard. The door was banged upon him; he was in a prison van, in company with seven other young men who were being moved from the Tribunal to the Murate.

"A lesson does no harm to these youngsters in these revolutionary times," thought the Commissary of Police, to whom he was brought after some hours' detention; he considered the guards had been too zealous, but he did not say so. He merely cautioned the prisoner to be careful to abstain in future from causing any disturbance in the public streets, and then set him free.

Paolino's head was hung down, his face was red and sullen, the tears coursed down his cheeks.

"We shall starve. We shall starve," he repeated. "Why am I sent away? I am not in fault."

"Oh, into that I cannot enter," said the Commissary. "The Municipality paid you weekly?"

"Yes, and father before me."

"Then it is fully within its rights to dismiss you without notice. If you complain you will be more stringently punished."

They pushed him out of the Commissary's presence, hustled and jostled till he was as bewildered as a sheep being driven to the shambles. He found himself again in the open air and at liberty to go home.

"Oh, Lord, how shall I tell them?" he said with a groan, and then for the first time he perceived that he had lost the week's wages. As they had cuffed and banged him about, to get him, despite his struggles, into the van, the flimsy paper money had slipped out of his hand and gone—who knows where?

Paolino dropped on a stone under an old church, hid his face in his hands, and sobbed bitterly. When he had come down into the city

it had been ten o'clock; it was now four in the afternoon; he had eaten nothing, but he felt no hunger. He was bruised and aching in many parts of his body from the rough usage he had received.

He got up with pain, and took his way across the town towards his home.

It chanced to be a Corso day in Carnival, and he met the gay holiday-making stream of human beings, and the grand carriage-horses with their flowers and streamers to their ears. A bouquet struck him on the cheek as he went.

He bore the pleasure-seeking crowds no ill-will, for he had no ill-will in him, but the contrast of their festival and his sorrow hurt him. He walked as quickly as his bruised limbs would take him to get out of the gates and into the green country roads where he was never to work any more.

"I must have done something and they won't

tell me what," he thought, racking his brain to think what his offence could possibly have been.

It was quite dark when he reached the little house in the hilly lane where his home was. His mother was standing at the door with a lighted oil wick in an old brass lamp in her hand.

"Oh! the dear Mother of us all be praised!" she cried, in joyous agitation. "Dear lad, I did think as how you had been run over by the carnival folks, or something worse. Where have you been all the livelong day?"

Paolino did not answer her, but walked slowly past her into the cottage and threw himself heavily on a rush-bottomed chair.

"I've lost it," he said, stupidly, showing her his empty hands.

"Lost your wages? Oh, Lord, save us!"

"Lost your wages, you ass?" echoed the girl Nesta.

"I've been in prison," said Paolino, heavily, as if he had not heard them. "We shall starve. They don't want me on the road any more. They've done with me."

There was nothing heard for a few moments, but the shrill outcries of the woman and girl.

"Oh, my poor boy, my poor boy!" sobbed the mother.

"He's been in prison; he's done something; they wouldn't have sent him else!" said the little sister.

Paolino did not hear what either of them said.

"Father worked on these roads forty years," he muttered, "and I've been on them ever since I was breeched; and I'm not to go on them any more, and they won't say what I've done, and they put me in prison for asking."

"But the week's wage—the week's wage!" cried the mother. "Did you say you lost it?"

He nodded assent.

"He's drunk it away!" said the little sister. "Look at him. He's dead drunk. Can't you see, mother? He's drunk it all away."

"Oh! Nesta, for shame!" said the mother; but the thought was her own. These disordered clothes, these unwilling words, this improbable tale, this heavy sullen reddened face, were they not all due to drink? Rosina Sizzo would sooner have believed the church tower was walking across the hills than believe that her son could be dismissed from his labour on the roads that had been his father's before him.

Yes, it was drink. Her little daughter had said out the thought which she had herself no courage to put into words; she was so ashamed. She threw her gown over her head and leaned against the wall of the room, sobbing aloud. Nesta went up to her brother and shook him with both hands.

"Aren't you ashamed, you bibber? If you'd

come to take me to the Corso as you promised, you wouldn't have got in this state and lost your money through swilling wine in the town."

Paolino slowly raised his head and looked at her.

"Is that what you think, little girl? You're wrong. I've been good to you from your cradle, Nesta. You might have said something kinder. The trouble there is on me is more for you and the mother than it is for myself."

Then he rose, and pushing her aside drank thirstily from a can of water and went up the ricketty wooden stair to his bed. His mother cast the gown from her head and ran after him.

"Come and tell me all, my boy! Mother forgives, and the child is but a saucy ignorant minx."

But Paolino would not answer or open his door to her.

"'Tis drink, mother!" said Nesta, with her

red lips curled in all the scorn of superior wisdom. "'Tis drink. You'll see in the morning."

But in the morning all the school children told Ernesta that they had heard their parents say over-night that her brother was one of some score of road-menders who had been dismissed through no fault of their own by the Commune.

In the morning also when the girl was off to school Paolino told his mother all which had taken place. The night's rest of sleep due to intense fatigue had calmed and sobered him.

"I must get some other work," he said, and went up to the tall white tower on the crest of the hill and spoke with the vicar.

"But I shall never be any good now that I'm sent off the roads," he said, with the great tears in his eyes.

The roads were to him like his ship to a sailor, his flag to a soldier. He could not be-

lieve that he was never again to keep them clean, and watch the people go to and fro on them, and eat his noon-tide lump of bread under their flowering hedges, amongst their dock leaves and cuckoo pint. Why had he been dismissed and others retained?

The vicar explained to him that it was a mere question of economy, and that the matter was regulated by seniority, but his little fox-dog would have understood him better than his parishioner.

The good man also tried to influence the few influential people whom he knew, and himself petitioned the Municipality in favour of the young man; but he merely received the usual polite negative formalities in return, and nothing was altered. Paolino had been dismissed; for the authorities he was dead and buried.

He tried with all his might to get other work, but it was difficult to do so. A dismissal, even

caused by no fault, but entirely based on the beautiful exactitude and unrelenting necessity of political economy, always is a black mark against a person's name, though he or she may do their best to efface it.

Paolino could not understand why Felice Biggoni, an old schoolfellow, remained on the roads and he was turned off them. That was the only view of the question that he could be made to see. The injustice of it burdened him, hurt him, ate into him like a corrosive acid.

He did whatever work came to hand—field-work, errands, driving a cart, carrying corn to the mill, hedging and ditching, or whatever it might be, but he did it with no pleasure in the labour. He took home his day's pay faithfully, but he had no joy in doing so; he did not forget Nesta's words on the evening of his return. He had always been a light-hearted, mirthful, contented lad, now he was dull, slow, ill at ease. He had

been in a prison van, in a prison cell, and it seemed to him as if the taint of them was always on him, on his lips, on his hands, on his soul; and that others saw it.

"It is not the prison which taints us, it is the crime for which we go there," said the priest; "you were really innocent of any offence, therefore you come out unsoiled, clean as a white pigeon."

But it was of no use to philosophise; no reasoning could reach the mind of Paolino; it was too simple, too unlearned, too obstinate. Wrong had been done him; that was all he knew.

"Troubles," as someone has said, "are gregarious; they never come alone." To add to his, Rosina fell ill. It was no definite malady, it was the giving way of the system under long toil and too poor nourishment. In the medical vocabulary this is called Marasma; the poor call it a "break-

ing-up." To Rosina, for her son to be sent off the roads was as great a blow as it was to him. It had been the patent of nobility of the Sizzos to be Communal servants one after another —father and son for generation after generation. They had always thought it a fine thing to serve the Commune; they had always taken a special pride in their work, which was a public work, and in the highways, with their hedges and shrines and leafy corners and grey walls, on which they worked from dawn to dusk. When her son lost his place on the road it was like the seeds of some mortal disease sown in her. She grew weaker and weaker, though she managed to keep the little house in order and put the soup over the fire, and sew and spin a little. She grew more unwell every day; and Paolino, so slow of comprehension in some things, was quick to see these signs of debility and decay.

He did his utmost for her and for his thankless little sister; but that all was very small for

the gains of a man at odd jobs, which was he could get now, and never either considera or certain. As *cantoniere* the weekly pay was s and good, and the sense of being a public serv was a cause of pride and of respect from oth Everyone is civil to a *cantoniere,* with his mu cipal badge—even though he be clearing up n or rooting up nettles.

Now he was nothing; a poor fellow asking be hired by those nearly as poor as hims And he had lost all his pleasant acquaintan He no longer saw the ladies and their dogs, gentry and their horses, the drivers and shephe and men in their little carts going to and frc the town. They might have been all dead what he saw of them, working as he did remote fields or barns or workshops or n houses, and seeing nothing of who went by tween the familiar hedgerows.

He got home late in the evening, and ate frugal meal silently, and went to his bed of s

ing under the roof, seeing very well that his sister had never forgiven him or altered her opinion as to the cause of their woes.

She was only fourteen, but she was shrewd, sharp and selfish. He had tended to make her so by his indulgence, and the poisoned thorn which rankled in her soul was the knowledge that while a *cantoniere's* sister might have married fairly well, the sister of a day labourer seeking odd jobs might pine in vain for a suitor.

"Don't you see, Nesta, how ill mother looks?" he said to her one day.

"Who made her so?" said the girl, rudely.

"It is not my fault," said the poor lad, humbly.

"Whose?" said Nesta, shrugging her shoulders. "You make the vicar believe so, but I'm not such a fool as he. They don't put people in prison for nothing."

"I will turn you out of the house if you dare say such things to me!" cried Paolino, white with rage and pain.

"They will put you in prison again if you do," said Nesta. "If I never marry, it will be your fault."

"Marry! You are a chit of a child."

"Nanna's Lena marries come Pentecost, and she is only a year older than I am," replied Nesta, with her face on fire with her wrongs. "And where shall I get a dower? Will you give me anything to buy my necklace with, or even to buy my clothes?"

She returned so perpetually to this theme, and rung the changes on it so persistently that she ended in making her brother feel really guilty towards her; and she was so tall of her age, so precocious, and conceited, that she did really appear like a marriageable maiden to him.

"I have spoilt her chances," he said, sadly,

to his mother. "But, indeed, it was no fault of mine. Do—do—believe that, mother."

"I never doubted it for a moment, my dear," said Rosina, and she thought sincerely that she never had.

"Why should Felice be kept on and I sent off?" said Paolino, brooding on the greatest wrong of all.

His mother shook her head and groaned.

"Why, my dear lad, Felice's brother's brother-in-law by a first marriage is gardener to the syndic's daughter's husband's cousin. He could get a word spoken for him in high quarters; everything goes by favour and by having the right word said at the right minute to the right person. We haven't anybody to speak for us, except the vicar up yonder, and the clergy's word does more harm than good nowadays."

For Rosina, though illiterate and simple, was intelligent, and knew a little of how the world

wagged beyond those hawthorn and hazel he which bounded the only sphere she had known.

"Nothing would matter," she said with a h sigh, "if I were only as strong as I used to b am like a log on you now."

"No, mother; no, no," said Paolino, with a in his throat. His heart was full; he wante say so much but he did not know how to pu feelings into words. His mother could speak but he had never been able to do so. He only been able to keep his roads in good o and that they would not let him do any long

Rosina grew so weak that they called in parish doctor, who said little but ordered medi and good food, strong broth and wines.

He might as well have ordered the stars from the skies.

Paolino sold his own watch to get the m cine, but that was not of much use without nou ment, and they could not buy good food.

if they could have bought it they would not have known how to cook it.

"You will be well again, mother, when the warm weather comes," said Paolino.

"Let us hope so, dear," said Rosina. But in her own mind she thought "When the heat does come it will finish me."

And she lay awake tormented by anxiety for her children. Paolino had lost his sheet anchor and would drift nobody could say how or where, and Nesta was a young creature who without control would in all likelihood go very far wrong.

"Oh, let me live! Let me live!" prayed the poor mother.

But those prayers were not heard. There are so many similar.

And one night in the hot windless summer she died, so quietly that the girl Nesta, sleeping on the same mattress, was not awakened from her sound childlike slumber, and waking at sunrise found herself beside a corpse. Her shrieks

brought Poalino indoors, reaching his ears as he mounted the hill path behind the house to go to a day's work in the pine-woods. He had done no work for four days.

His grief was less violent than Nesta's, but it was intense. It froze him into sullenness and silence, as his dismissal from the Commune had done. She was dead, and it was his fault.

The priest came, and the doctor to certify the death; he sat stolidly by the bed and did not speak to them.

At last, frightened by his look and his silence, the vicar touched his arm.

"Shall the parish bury her, dear boy?" he asked gently. "You know, to-morrow at latest."

Paolino sprang to his feet.

"No," he said, with a furious oath. "No. She always said, 'When I die, bury me decently. Don't let the parish touch me. I have been a decent woman.' No, the parish shall not touch her."

"Have you the means?" said the priest. "Something I can contribute, but little; you know I am very poor."

Paolino looked wildly around the room. There were only a few pence in the house.

"I will find the means," he said, hoarsely.

"It will waste the money, Paolino," said Nesta between her sobs. "The parish would do what was right."

He cast a glance at her of scorn and loathing; then with one long look at the figure on the bed, he left the chamber.

"I hope he will do nothing rash," said the priest uneasily.

"He will go and get drunk," said Nesta, lighting a little oil wick under a print of the Madonna.

"Hush!" said the priest severely, pointing to the bed.

Paolino went up first to the loft where he slept, took his Sunday clothes, and rolled them up in a

bundle. Then he went downstairs, set the ladder against the wall where his plum tree grew, and began to gather the plums. These were the largest number the tree had yet borne. He had kept them carefully from rot, and caterpillar, and his sister's eager fingers. He had always said to himself, "They shall be for mother. They shall get her good food as far as they can."

He had intended to gather them on the following Sunday and take them and sell them in the town, and bring her back meat and wine. And now he meant to sell them to help to bury her. To keep her from the pauper funeral she had dreaded.

They would not bring very much, but perhaps, he thought, with what his clothes would fetch, it would suffice.

When gathered they filled a goodly basket of beautiful, golden, cleanly fruit, free from bruise or blemish.

The women who came to lay out the dead saw him on the ladder, and cried out:

"What! At work, and your mother scarce cold on her bed? Fie! For shame of you, Paolino!"

But he heeded them not and gathered every plum on the tree.

Then he took up the basket and the bundle, and walked towards the town gates, from which he was distant about two miles.

He walked quickly over the dust of the hot summer day. It was early still, and he passed people he knew going towards the town, but he took no notice of them. At the gate there was a great press, and a great struggle, the string of carts, live cattle and poultry, loads of wood and straw, numbers of country people with eggs and butter, vegetables, homespun linen.

Here he was made to wait a long time. When his plums were at last weighed and the duty on

Mechanically, he continued to cry aloud, "Plums! Fine plums! Who will buy?"

Hearing that cry, two Communal Guards coming over the bridge turned and looked at him and spoke to one another. A little child had just stopped her father before the plum basket, which Paolino lowered on to the stones that she might be able to see into it, when the guards stopped in front of him.

"You have licence to sell in the streets?" said one of them. Paolino looked up, not comprehending the question, and his face grew dark and hard as he saw by their garb who they were. They repeated the question angrily.

"The fruit is my own. I grew it," he answered, and bent down to give the child a dozen plums. With a stroke of his sword one of the guards turned the basket over and sent the remaining fruit rolling in the dust.

"You are selling in the streets without licence.

You must come with us," they said to him, and without more preface put their hands on his collar, one on each side of him.

The little child screamed, the passers-by stopped, the traffic was suspended.

"What has the lad done?" asked a foreigner.

"That is no business of yours," said the guards.

A brigadier, hastening up, explained: "He is disturbing the public and hawking fruit without a licence; therefore, he must come before the Commissary. We have his name down; he is dangerous; he was in trouble and disorderly a few months ago."

Paolino stood between his captors, breathing hard, like a young bull tied to a stake.

"Let me go; let me go," he muttered. "It is for her burial. She died in the night. Let me go!"

There was a murmur of sympathy from the people who had gathered round.

"Let him go," said several voices. "Someone is dead. Let him go."

"Yes, she is dead!" he cried, turning to his unknown friends. "They took me up before for no fault, and it killed her. I did no harm then; I don't do any now. Tell them to let me go, or she will be buried like a pauper, and it was the one thing she feared—the one thing she prayed against. Tell them to let me go!"

A tiger may let go, a crocodile, a python, but not a Communal guard. His captors heard the ominous murmur of protest in the momentarily increasing throng. Two drew their revolvers, and pointed them at his head, the third, with a rapid, unforeseen movement, tied his hands behind him.

"He is an Anarchist," said the crowd, and fell back a little, their sympathies chilled, their personal terrors awakened.

"Let me go! Let me go!" screamed Paolino. "I am doing no wrong. The fruit is my own. I planted the tree. Help me! Help me! Good

people, help me! She died last night. I must go and bury her. My mother! My mother! Oh, Lord!"

But the fickle support of the populace had already abandoned him and left him to his fate.

The guards gagged him and drove him between them over the bridge. The last plums, which had rolled against the footway, were picked up and eaten by ragged boys.

When he was taken before the Commissary that official recognised him.

"Again, so soon!" he said, severely. "You must be a confirmed law-breaker."

He was taken back to his cell, handcuffed.

The day passed and the night. When he did not return to his home his little sister said, "There! did I not tell you? He is lying drunk in some ditch."

The poor dead woman was buried by the parish. The money for the plums had been confiscated by the authorities. When Paolino's trial

came on he appeared imbecile. He was sentenced to three days' imprisonment for having hawked fruit in the streets without a licence, but he was condemned to seven months' imprisonment for disorderly conduct and resistance to the police, though he had made none.

This is how Anarchists are multiplied by law.

THE END.

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