

THE WHITE SISTER*

BY F. MARION CRAWFORD

AUTHOR OF "MR. ISAACS," "CORLEONE," "FAIR MARGARET,"
"THE PRIMA DONNA," ETC.

"I CANNOT help it," said Filmore Durand quietly. "I paint what I see. If you are not pleased with the likeness, I shall be only too happy to keep it."

The *marchesa* protested. It was only a very small matter, she said—a something in the eyes, or in the angle of the left eyebrow, or in the turn of the throat; she could not tell where it was, but it gave her niece a little air of religious ecstasy that was not natural to her. If the master would only condescend to modify the expression the least bit, all would be satisfactory.

Instead of condescending, Filmore Durand smiled rather indifferently, and gave his pallet and brushes to his man, who was already waiting at his elbow to receive them. For the great American portrait painter detested all sorts of litter, such as a painting-table, brush-jars, and the like, as much as his great predecessor Lenbach ever did; and when he was at work his old servant brought him a brush, a tube of color, a knife, or a pencil, as each was needed, from a curtained recess where everything was kept ready and in order.

"I like it as it is," said Giovanni Severi, resting his hands on the hilt of his saber, as he sat looking thoughtfully from the portrait to the original.

The young girl smiled, pleased by his approbation of the likeness, which she herself thought good, though it was by no means flattered. On the contrary, it made her look older than she was, and much more sad; for though the spring laughed in her eyes when she looked at the officer to whom people said she was engaged, their counterparts in the portrait were deep and grave.

Certain irregularities of feature, too, were more apparent in the painting than in nature. For instance, there was a very marked difference between the dark eyebrows; for whereas the right one made a perfect curve, the other turned up quite sharply toward the forehead at the inner end, as if it did not wish to meet its fellow; and the *Marchesa del Prato* was quite sure that Angela's delicate nose had not really that aquiline and almost ascetic look which the great master had given it. In fact, the middle-aged woman almost wished that it had, for of all things that could happen, she would have been best pleased that her niece by marriage should turn out to have a vocation and should disappear into some religious order as soon as possible. But as this was not likely, the next best thing would be that she should make haste to marry Giovanni Severi, who was, in fact, of precisely the same opinion.

Filmore Durand glanced from one to another of the three in quick succession, stroked his rather bristly mustache, and lit a cigarette, not because he wanted to smoke, but because he could not help it, which is a very different thing. Then he looked at his picture and forgot that he was not alone with it; and it still pleased him, after a fashion, though he was not satisfied with what he had done.

It was often said of Durand that his portraits were prophetic; and often, again, that his brushes were knives and scalpels that dissected his sitters' characters upon the canvas like an anatomical preparation.

"I cannot help it," he always said. "I paint what I see."

It was not his fault if pretty Donna

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Angela Chiaromonte had thrown a white veil over her dark hair, just to try the effect of it, the very first time she had been brought to his studio, or that she had been standing beside an early fifteenth-century altar and altar-piece which he had just bought and put up at one end of the great hall in which he painted. He was not to blame if the veiling had fallen on each side of her face, like a nun's head-dress, nor if her eyes had grown shadowy at that moment by an accident of light or expression, nor yet if her tender lips had seemed to be saddened by a passing thought. She had not put on the veil again, and he had not meant that a suggestion of suffering ecstatically borne should dim her glad girlhood in his picture; but he had seen the vision once, and it had come out again under his brush, in spite of him, as if it were the necessary truth over which Angela's outward expression was molded like a lovely mask, but which must be plainly visible in her face to every one who had once had a glimpse of it.

The painter contemplated his work in silence from within an Olympian cloud of cigarette-smoke that almost hid him from the others, who now exchanged a few words in Italian, which he only half understood. They spoke English with him, as they would have spoken French with a Frenchman, and probably even German with a German, for modern Roman society has a remarkable gift of tongues and is very accomplished in other ways.

"What I think most remarkable," said the Marchesa del Prato, who detested her husband's pretty niece, "is that he has not made a Carlo Dolci picture of you, my dear. With your face, it would have been so easy, you know!"

Giovanni Severi's hands moved a little and the scabbard of his saber struck one of his spurs with a sharp clink; for he was naturally impatient and impulsive, as any one could see from his face. It was lean and boldly cut. His cheeks were dark from exposure rather than by nature; there were reddish lights in his short brown hair, and his small but vigorous mustache was that of a rather fair man who has lived much in sun and wind in a hot climate. His nose

was Roman and energetic, his mouth rather straight and hard; yet few would have thought his face remarkable but for the eyes, which betrayed his nature at a glance. They were ardent rather than merely bold, and the warm, reddish-brown iris was shot with little golden points that coruscated in the rays of the sun, but emitted a fiery light of their own when his temper was roused.

If his look had been less frank and direct, or if his other features had suggested any bad quality, his eyes would probably have been intolerably disagreeable to meet; as it was, they warned all comers that their possessor was one of those uncommon and dangerous men who go to the utmost extremes when they believe themselves in the right, and are constitutionally incapable of measuring danger or considering consequences when they are roused. Giovanni Severi was about eight and twenty, and wore the handsome uniform of the Staff College. He had not liked the *marchesa's* remark, and the impatient little clink of his scabbard against his spur only preceded his answer by a second.

"Happily for Angela," he said, "we are not in the studio of a caricaturist."

The *marchesa*, who could be near-sighted on occasion, put up her tortoiseshell-mounted eyeglass and looked at him aggressively; but as he returned her gaze with steadiness, she soon turned away.

"You are extremely rude," she said coldly.

For she herself made clever caricatures in water-colors, and she knew what Giovanni meant. Angela's mother had been a very devout woman, and had died young, but had incurred the hatred of the *marchesa* by marrying the very man whom the latter had picked out for herself. He was the elder of two brothers, and the *marchesa* had reluctantly consented to marry the other, who had a much less high-sounding title and a far smaller fortune. She had revenged herself in various small ways, and had often turned her brother-in-law's wife to ridicule by representing her as an ascetic medieval saint, in contorted attitudes of ecstasy, with sunken cheeks and eyes like saucers full of ink.

Like many other people, Giovanni had

seen some of these drawings, for the resentful *marchesa* had not destroyed them when the Princess Chiaromonte died; but no one had yet been unkind enough to tell Angela of their existence. The girl did not like her aunt by marriage, it was true, but with a singularly simple and happy disposition, and a total absence of vanity, she had apparently inherited her mother's almost saintly patience, and she bore the *marchesa's* treatment with a cheerful submission which exasperated the elder woman much more than any show of temper could have done.

Just now, seeing that trouble of some sort was imminent, she made a diversion by coming down from the low movable platform on which her chair had been placed for the sitting, and she spoke to the artist while she studied her own portrait. Durand was a very thin man, and so tall that Angela had to look very high to see his face as she stood beside him.

"I could never be as good as the picture looks," she said in English, with a little laugh, "nor so dreadfully in earnest! But it is very nice of you to think that I might!"

"You will never be anything but good," answered Filmore Durand, "and it's not necessarily dreadful to be in earnest about it."

"You are a moralist, I see," observed the *marchesa*, putting on a sweet smile as she rose and came forward, followed by Giovanni.

"I don't know," replied the painter. "What is a moralist?"

"A person who is in earnest about other people's morals," suggested Angela gaily.

"Really!" cried the *marchesa* with a most emphatic English pronunciation of the word. "One would think that you had been brought up in a Freemasons' lodge!"

In view of the fact that Angela's father was one of the very last survivors of the "intransigent" clericals, this was quite the most cutting speech the *marchesa* could think of. But Filmore Durand failed to see the point.

"What has Freemasonry to do with morality?" he inquired with bland surprise.

"Nothing at all," answered the *mar-*

chesa smartly, "for it is the religion of the devil."

"Dear me!" The artist smiled. "What strong prejudices you have in Rome!"

"Are you a Freemason?" the noble lady asked with evident nervousness; and she glanced from his face to Angela, and then at the door.

"Well—no—I'm not," the painter admitted with a slight drawl, and evidently amused. "But, then, I'm not a moralist either, though I suppose I might be both and yet go on painting about the same."

"I think not," said the *marchesa*, so stiffly that Giovanni almost laughed aloud. "We must be going," she added, suddenly relaxing to graciousness again. "It has been such a privilege to see you day after day, my dear Mr. Durand, and to watch you working in your own surroundings. My brother-in-law will come to-morrow. I have no doubt that he will be much pleased with the portrait of his daughter."

Filmore Durand smiled indifferently, but with politeness, as he bowed over the *marchesa's* hand. He did not care a straw whether Angela's father liked the picture or not, being in love with it himself, and much more anxious to keep it than to be paid for it.

"When shall I see you again?" Giovanni had asked of Angela, almost in a whisper, while the *marchesa* was speaking.

Instead of answering, she shook her head, for she could not decide at once, but as her glance met his a delicate radiance tinged her cheeks for a moment, as if the rosy light of a clear dawn were reflected in her face. The young soldier's eyes flashed as he watched her; he drew his breath audibly, and then bit his upper lip as if to check the sound and the sensation that had caused it. Angela heard and saw, for she understood what moved him, so far as almost childlike simplicity can have intuition of what most touches a strong man.

She was less like the portrait now than a moment earlier. Her lips, just parting in a little half-longing, half-troubled smile, were like dark rose-leaves damp with dew. Her eyelids drooped at the corners for an instant, and the

translucent little nostrils quivered at the mysterious thrill that stirred her maiden being.

The two young people had not known each other quite a year, for she had never seen Giovanni till she had left the convent to go out into society, and to take her place at her widowed father's table as his only child; but at their first meeting the young soldier had felt that of all women he had known, none but Angela Chiaromonte had ever called his nature to hers with the longing cry of the natural mate.

At first she was quite unconscious of her power, and for a long time he looked in vain for the slightest outward sign that she was moved when she saw him making his way to her in a crowded drawing-room, or coming upon her suddenly out of doors when she was walking in the villa with her old governess, the excellent Mme. Bernard, or riding in the Campagna with her father. Giovanni's duties were light, and he had plenty of time to spare; and his pertinacity in finding her would have been compromising if he had been less ingeniously tactful. It was by no means easy to meet her in society either, for, in spite of recent social developments, Prince Chiaromonte still clung to the antiquated political mythology of Blacks and Whites, and strictly avoided the families whom he always persisted in calling "liberals," on the ground that his father had called them so in 1870, when he was a small boy.

It was not until he had bored himself to extinction in the conscientious effort to take the girl out that he appealed to his sister-in-law to help him, though he knew that neither she nor his brother was truly clerical at heart. Even then, if it had been clear to him that Giovanni Severi had made up his mind to marry Angela if he married at all, the prince would have forced himself to bear agonies of boredom night after night, rather than entrust his daughter to the *mar-chesa*; but such an idea had never entered his head, and he would have scouted the suggestion that Angela would ever dare to encourage a young man of whom he had not formally approved. While she was meeting Giovanni almost daily, and dancing with him almost every

evening, her father was slowly negotiating an appropriate marriage for her with the eldest son of certain friends who were almost as clerical and "intransigent" as himself.

This young man was a limp degenerate, with a pale face, a weak mouth, and an inherited form of debility which made him fall asleep wherever he was, if nothing especial happened to keep his eyes open. Not only did he always sleep from ten at night till nine the next morning with the regularity of an idiot, but he went to sleep wherever he sat down—in church, at dinner, and even when he was driving. Neither his own parents nor Prince Chiaromonte looked upon this as a serious drawback in the matter of marriage. A man who slept all day and all night was a man out of mischief, not likely to grumble or to make love to his neighbor's wife; he would therefore be a model husband. When he fell asleep in the drawing-room in summer, his consort would sit beside him and brush away the flies; in winter, she would be careful to cover him up lest he should catch cold; at mass she could prick him with a hat-pin to keep him awake; as for the rest, she would bear one of the oldest names in Europe, her husband would be a strictly religious and moral person, and she would be very rich.

What more could any woman ask? Evidently nothing, and Prince Chiaromonte therefore continued to negotiate the marriage in the old-fashioned manner, without the least intention of speaking about it to Angela till everything was altogether settled between the family lawyers, and the wedding could take place in six weeks. It was not the business of young people to fathom the intentions of their all-wise parents, and meanwhile Angela was free to go to parties with her aunt, and her intended husband was at liberty to sleep as much as he liked.

The negotiations would probably occupy another two or three months, for the family lawyers had disagreed as to the number of times that Angela should be allowed to take the carriage out every day, and this had to be stipulated in the marriage-contract, besides the number of dishes there were to be at luncheon and

dinner, and the question whether, if Angela took coffee after her meals, it should be charged to her husband, who took none, or against the income arising from her dowry. The family lawyers were both old and experienced men, and they understood these difficult matters thoroughly, but neither would have felt that he was doing his duty to his client if he had not quarreled with the other over each point. From week to week each reported progress to his employer, and, on the whole, the two fathers felt that matters were going on very well, without any undue delay.

But the Fates frowned grimly on the marriage and on all things connected with it, for on the very morning when Filmore Durand finished Angela's portrait, and before she had left his studio in the Palazzo Borghese, something happened which not only put a stop to the leisurely labors of the two lawyers, but which profoundly changed Angela's existence, and was the cause of her having a story quite different from that of a good many young girls who are in love with one man but are urged by their parents to marry another. The interest of this tale, if it has any, lies in no such simple conflict of forces as that, and it is enough to know that while her father had been busy over her marriage, Angela Chiaromonte had fallen in love with Giovanni Severi, and had, indeed, as much as promised to marry him; and that a good many people, including the Marchesa del Prato, already suspected this, though they had not communicated their suspicions to the girl's father, partly because he was not liked, and partly because he hardly ever showed himself in the world.

The situation is thus clearly explained, so far as it was known to the persons concerned at the moment when the great unforeseen flashed from its hiding-place and hurled itself into their midst.

As Filmore Durand went with the *marchesa* toward the entrance hall, followed by the young people, he called his man to open the outer door; but almost at the same moment he heard his voice at the telephone. The servant was a Swiss, who spoke German, English, and Italian, and had followed the artist for many years, and his name was Abra-

ham Ambuhl. He was evidently answering an inquiry about the *marchesa* just as he heard her step.

"The lady is here," he said. "She is coming to the telephone herself."

He looked round as the four approached, for the instrument was placed on the right side of the large door that opened upon the landing.

"Some one for your ladyship," he said in English, holding out the receiver to the *marchesa*.

She took it and put it to her ear, repeating the usual Italian formula.

"Ready—with whom am I speaking? Yes. I am the Marchesa del Prato, she herself. What is it?"

There was a pause while she listened, and then Angela saw her face change suddenly.

"Dead?" she shrieked into the telephone. "Half an hour ago?"

She still held the receiver to her ear, but she was stretching out her left hand as if she needed support. Durand took her by the arm and elbow, prepared to hold her up if she showed signs of fainting. Angela was already on her other side.

"Who is dead?" the girl asked quietly enough, but with evident anxiety.

"Your father," answered the *marchesa* with such sudden and brutal directness that Giovanni started forward, and Durand stared in surprise, for he knew enough Italian to understand as much as that.

Angela made two steps backward, slowly and mechanically, like a blind man who has unexpectedly run against a wall. Like the blind, too, she instinctively held out her hands before her, as if to assure herself that she was getting out of reach of the obstacle. Her face had turned very white, and her eyes were half closed.

The *marchesa* no longer seemed to be in need of support, and watched her with a curious expression.

"My poor child!" she cried in a tone of conventional sympathy. "I should have broken the news to you gradually—"

"You should, indeed!" answered Giovanni with stern emphasis.

He was already leading Angela to one of the nearest of the high-backed

chairs that stood ranged against the dark-green wall of the hall. She sat down, steadying herself by his arm.

"Run over by a motor-car almost at his own door," said the *marchesa*, in a lower tone and in English, as she turned slightly toward Durand. "Killed on the spot! It is too awful! My poor brother-in-law!"

"Get some brandy and some cold water," said the artist to Ambuhl, watching the girl's pale face and twitching hands.

"Yes," said Giovanni, who was bending over her anxiously. "Bring something quickly! I fear that she is going to faint."

But Angela was not fainting, nor even half-unconscious. She had felt as if something hard had struck her between the eyes, without quite stunning her. She attempted to get up, but realized her weakness and waited a moment before trying again. Then she rose to her feet with an effort, and stood straight and rigid before her aunt, her eyes quite open now.

"Come!" she said almost imperiously and in a voice unlike her own.

In a moment they were gone, and the artist was standing before the portrait he had finished, looking into its eyes as if it were alive. He had been deeply shocked by what had just happened, and was sincerely sorry for Angela, though he had not the least idea whether she had loved her father or not; but his face was calm and thoughtful again, now that she was gone, and expressed a quiet satisfaction which had not been there before. For it seemed to him that the picture was a precious reality, and that the young girl who had sat for it was only nature's copy, and not perfect at that; and perhaps the reality would not be taken from him, now, since Prince Chiaramonte had come to an untimely end.

The prospect of keeping the canvas was exceedingly pleasing to Filmore Durand. He had never painted anything that had disappointed him less, or that he was less willing to part with. During the last day or two he had even thought of making a replica of it for the prince in order to keep the original, for no copy, though it were made by

himself most conscientiously, could ever be quite so good. But now that the prince was dead, it was not unlikely that the heirs, if there were any besides Angela, would be glad to avoid paying a large sum for a picture they did not want. He was sure, from the young girl's manner, that she would no more care to possess a portrait of herself than a colored postcard of the Colosseum or a plaster cast of one of Canova's dancing-girls. This was not flattering to the artist, it was true, but in the present case he would rather keep his own painting than have it appreciated ever so highly by any one else.

Late in the afternoon he stopped before the closed gateway of the Palazzo Chiaramonte, and pushed the little postern that stood ajar. The big porter was within, already dressed in deep mourning, and standing dejectedly before the door of his lodge. The painter asked in broken Italian if the bad news was true, and the man nodded gravely, pointing to the gates. They would not be shut unless the master were dead. Durand asked after Donna Angela, but the porter was not communicative. She had come in with her aunt, and both were up-stairs; he suspected the painter of being a foreign newspaper correspondent, and would say nothing more.

The American thanked him and went away; after all, he had come to make sure that the prince was really dead, and he was conscious that his wish to keep the portrait was the only motive of his inquiry.

He strolled away through the crowded streets, blowing such clouds of cigarette-smoke about him that people looked at him in surprise. It was almost sunset, in February, and it was just before Lent. Rome is at her gayest then, though the old Carnival is as dead and gone as Pio Nono, Garibaldi, the French military occupation, and all that made the revival of Italy in the nineteenth century the most thrilling romance that ever stirred the world's sympathy and roused Italian passion. Durand was not old enough to remember those times, and he had never been in Rome at all till he was nearly thirty years old and on the first wave of his high success; but he had read about the old days, and to his

unspoiled sight and vivid imagination Rome was still romantic and the greatest city in the world, past or present; and somehow when he thought of his picture and of Angela's face, and remembered the scene at the telephone, he felt that he was himself just within the sphere of some mysterious and tragic action which he could not yet understand, but which might possibly affect his own life.

II

THE excellent Mme. Bernard had been Angela's governess before the child had been sent to the convent of the Trinità dei Monti, and whenever she was at home for the holidays, and also during the brief interval between her leaving school and going into society; and after that, during the winter which preceded Prince Chiaramonte's death, she had accompanied the motherless girl to concerts and had walked with her almost daily in the mornings. She was one of those thoroughly trustworthy, sound-minded, well-educated Frenchwomen of the middle class, of whom many are to be found in the provinces, though the type is rare in Paris. Nearly fifty years of age, she had lived twenty years in Rome, always occupying the same little apartment in a respectable street of Trastevere,* where she had a spare room which she was glad to let to any French or English lady of small means who might chance to visit Rome for a few months in the winter and spring.

Angela sent her maid for Mme. Bernard on the day of the catastrophe, since her aunt neither offered to take her in at once nor seemed inclined to suggest any arrangement for the future. The *marchesa* did, indeed, take charge of everything in the Palazzo Chiaramonte within an hour of her brother-in-law's death. She locked the drawers of his private desk herself, sent for the notary, and had the customary seals placed on the doors of the inner apartments "in the name of the heirs." She spoke with the undertaker, and made every arrangement for the lying in state of the body during the following night and day.

* Trastevere ("Across the Tibur") is the quarter of Rome on the right bank of the Tibur, south of the Vatican. It is a respectable working-class district.

She saw to the erection of the temporary altar at which masses for the dead would be celebrated almost without interruption from midnight to noon by sixteen priests in succession. She gave full instructions to the effect that the men-servants should take their turn of duty in regular watches, day and night, until the funeral; and, finally, left the palace, after showing herself to be an exceedingly practical woman.

When she went away, she was holding her handkerchief to her eyes with both hands. She also forgot her parasol; but she remembered it as she was just going out by the postern, her carriage being outside because the gates were shut, and she sent her footman back for it and for the little morocco bag in which she carried her handkerchief and card-case. It was a small matter, but the porter, the footman, and the butler up-stairs all remembered it afterward, and the footman himself, while coming down, took the trouble to look into the little wallet, and saw that the card-case was there, but nothing else; for the *marchesa* sometimes carried certain little cigarettes in it, which the man had found particularly good. But to-day there was not even one.

Mme. Bernard arrived in tears, for she was a warm-hearted woman, and was overcome with sympathy for the lonely girl. She found Angela sitting by a small fire in her own little morning-room on the upper floor. A tray with something to eat had been set beside her, she knew not by whom, but she had not tasted anything. Her eyes were dry, but her hands were burning, and when she was conscious of feeling anything she knew that her head ached. She had forgotten that she had sent for the governess, and looked at her with a vaguely wondering expression, as if she took the little Frenchwoman in black for a new shadow in her dream.

But presently mechanical consciousness returned, though without much definite sensation, and she let Mme. Bernard have her way in everything, not making the slightest resistance or offering the smallest suggestion. She even submitted to being fed like a little child, with small mouthfuls of things that had no taste whatever for her.

By and by, there was a dressmaker in the room, with an assistant, and servants brought a number of big handboxes with lids covered with black oilcloth. Angela's maid was there, too, and they tried one thing after another on her, ready-made garments for the first hours of mourning. Then they were gone, and she was dressed in black, and the room was filled with the unmistakable odor of black crape, which is not like anything else in the world.

Again time passed, and she was kneeling at a faldstool in the great hall downstairs; but a dark screen had been placed so that she could not be seen by any one who came in to kneel at the rail that divided the upper part of the hall from the lower. She saw nothing herself—nothing but a knight of Malta, in his black cloak with the great white Maltese cross on his shoulder, lying asleep on his back; and on each side of him three enormous wax torches were burning in silver candlesticks taller than a tall man.

Quite at the end of the hall, five paces from the knight's motionless head, three priests in black and silver vestments were kneeling before a black altar, reciting the penitential Psalms in a quiet, monotonous voice, verse and verse, the one in the middle leading; and Angela automatically joined the two assistants in responding, but so low that they did not hear her.

The knight bore a resemblance to her father, that was all. Perhaps it was only a waxen image she saw, or a wraith in that long dream of hers, of which she could not quite remember the beginning. She knew that she was nothing to the image, and that it was nothing to her. While her lips repeated the grand dirge of the king-poet in St. Jerome's noble old Latin words, her thoughts followed broken threads, each cut short by a question that lacks an answer, by the riddle man has asked of the sky and the sea and the earth since the beginning: "What does it mean?"

What could it mean? The senseless facts were there, plain enough. That morning she had seen her father, she had kissed his hand in the old-fashioned way, and he had kissed her forehead, and they had exchanged a few words,

as usual. She remembered that for the thousandth time she had wished that his voice would soften a little, and that he would put his arms round her and draw her closer to him. But he had been just as always, for he was bound and stiffened in the unwieldy armor of his conventional righteousness.

Angela had read of the Puritans in history, and an Englishman might smile at the thought that she could not fancy the sternest of them as more thoroughly puritanical than her father, who had been brought up by Jesuits from his childhood. But such as he was, he had been her father that morning. The motionless figure of the knight of Malta on the black velvet pall was not he, nor a likeness of him, nor anything human at all. It was the outward visible presence of death, it was a dumb thing that knew the answer to the riddle but could not tell it; in a way, it was the riddle itself.

While her half-stunned intelligence stumbled among chasms of thought that have swallowed up transcendent genius, her lips unconsciously said the penitential Psalms after the priests at the altar. At the convent she had been a little vain of knowing them by heart better than the nuns themselves, for she had a good memory, and she had often been rebuked for taking pride in her gift. It was not her fault if the noble poetry meant nothing to her at the most solemn hour of her life, though its deep human note had appealed profoundly to her the last time she had repeated the words. Nothing meant anything now, in the face of the unanswered riddle; nothing but the answer to that riddle could have any meaning.

The great apostle of modern thought asked three questions: "What can I know? As a reasoning being, what is it my duty to do in life? What may I dare to hope hereafter?" Angela had never even heard of Kant; she only asked what it all meant; and the knight of Malta was silent under the steady yellow light of his six wax torches. Perhaps the white cross on his cloak was the answer, but the emblem was too far from words for mere humanity to understand it. She wished they would take him away, for he was not her father,

and she would be far better able to pray alone in her own room than in the stately presence of that one master whom all living things fear—man and bird and beast, and whatsoever has life in the sea.

III

THREE days later Angela sat alone in her morning-room, reading a letter from Giovanni Severi. All was over now—the lying in state, the funeral at the small parish church, the interment in the cemetery of San Lorenzo, where the late prince had built a temporary tomb for himself and his family, under protest, because modern municipal regulations would not allow even such a personage as he to be buried within the walls, in his own family vault, at Santa Maria del Popolo.

He had been confident that even if he did not live to see the return of the Pope's temporal power, his remains would soon be solemnly transferred to the city, to rest with those of his fathers; and he looked forward to his resurrection from a sepulcher better suited to his earthly rank and spiritual worth than a brick vault in a public cemetery, within a hundred yards of the thrice-anathematized crematorium, and of the unhalloved burial-ground set aside for Freemasons, anarchists, Protestants, and Jews. But no man can fairly be blamed for wishing to lie beside his forefathers, and if Prince Chiaromonte had failed to see that the destiny of Italy had outmeasured the worldly supremacy of the Vatican in the modern parallelogram of forces, that had certainly been a fault of judgment rather than of intention. He had never wavered in his fidelity to his ideal, nor had he ever voluntarily submitted to any law imposed by the "usurper."

"That excellent Chiaromonte is so extremely clerical," Pope Leo XIII had once observed to his secretary, with his quiet smile.

But Angela missed her father constantly, not understanding that he had systematically forced her to look to him as the judge and master of her existence, and she wondered a little why she almost longed for his grave nod, and his stern frown of disapproval, and even for the daily and hourly reproof under which

she had so often chafed. Mme. Bernard had been installed in the palace since the day of the fatal accident, and she was kindness personified, full of consideration and forethought; yet the girl was very lonely and miserable from morning till night, and when she slept she dreamed of the dead knight of Malta's face, of the yellow light of the wax torches, and the voices of the priests.

On the fourth day a letter came from Giovanni, the first she had ever received from him. She did not even know his handwriting, and she looked at the signature before reading the note, to see who had written to her so soon. When she understood that it was Severi, a sudden flood of sunshine broke upon her gloom. The bright morning sun had indeed been shining through the window for an hour, but she had not known it till then.

It was not a love-letter. Giovanni used those grammatically illogical but superfinely courteous forms which make high Italian a mystery to strangers who pick up a few hundred words for daily use and dream that they understand the language. He used the first person for himself, but spoke of her in the third singular;* he began with: "Most gentle Donna Angela," and he signed his full name at the end of a formal phrase setting forth his profoundly respectful homage.

She would have been much surprised, and perhaps offended, if he had expressed himself in any more familiar way. Brought up as she had been under the most old-fashioned code in Europe when at home, and under the frigid rule of the ladies of the Sacred Heart when she was at school, any familiarity of language seemed to her an outrage on good manners, and might even be counted a sin if she condescended to it in speaking with a man who was not yet her husband, nor even formally betrothed to her. She had been made to address her father in the third person feminine singular ever since she had learned to talk, precisely as Giovanni wrote to her; and if she

* In addressing a stranger or a superior, Italians use the feminine pronoun *ella* (she) and the third person singular of the verb; as, *Ella ha il mio cappello*—literally, "She has my hat," or, as we might say in English, "Your lordship has my hat." The pronoun *ella* may be explained as standing for *vossignoria* (your lordship, or ladyship).

prayed to the Deity with the less formal second person plural, this was doubtless because the Italian prayers had been framed in less refined and courteous times than her own.

In spite of his stiff grammar, however, Giovanni managed to write things that brought the color to her face and the light to her eyes. He said, for instance, that he was coming to see her that very afternoon; that, in order not to attract attention in the street, he would wear civilian's dress, and that he hoped she would not only receive him, but would send Mme. Bernard out of the room for a little while, so that he might speak to her alone.

The proposal was so delightful, and yet so disturbing, that Angela thought it must be wicked, and tried to examine her conscience at once; but it shut up like an oyster taken out of the water and pretended to be perfectly insensible, turn it and probe it how she would.

So she gave it up; and she did so the more readily because it would be quite impossible to see Giovanni that afternoon, enchanting as the prospect would have been. Her aunt, the *marchesa*, had sent word that she was coming at four o'clock with the lawyer to explain Angela's position to her, and it was impossible to say how long the two might stay.

Meanwhile, she must send word to Giovanni not to come, for it would not suffice that he should be refused admittance at the gate, since he might chance to present himself just when the *marchesa* drove up, which would produce a very bad impression. Angela was ashamed to send her maid with a note to a young officer, and she would not trust one of the men-servants; she turned for advice to Mme. Bernard, who was her only confidante.

"What am I to do?" she asked when she had explained everything. "He is always at the War Office at this time, and he may not even go home before he comes here. I see no way but to send a note."

"He would certainly go home to change his clothes," answered the practical Frenchwoman; "but it is not necessary for you to write. I will telephone to the War Office, and if the count is there I will explain everything."

Angela looked at her doubtfully.

"But, then, the servant who telephones will know," she objected.

"The servant? Why? I do not understand. I shall speak myself. No one will be there to hear."

"Yourself? My father never could, and I never was shown how to do it. Are you sure you understand the thing? It is very complicated, I believe."

Mme. Bernard was not surprised, for she knew the ways of the Palazzo Chiaramonte; but she smiled, and assured the young girl that a telephone was not really such a dangerous instrument as she had been led to believe.

"I once tried to make a few stitches with a sewing-machine," Angela said, apparently in explanation.

"A telephone is different," Mme. Bernard answered gravely. "Shall I ask the count to come to-morrow at four o'clock, instead of to-day?"

Angela hesitated, and then blushed faintly.

"Do you think—" she began, but she stopped and hesitated. "He would be angry, I am sure—" She seemed to be suddenly distressed.

"Your father?" asked the Frenchwoman, guessing what she meant. "My dear princess—"

"Oh, please don't call me that!" cried Angela. "You never do—"

"You see, you are a great personage now, my dear child," Mme. Bernard answered, "and I am no longer your governess—"

"But you are my friend, dear, dear Mme. Bernard! Indeed, I think you are my only friend now!"

And thereupon Angela threw her arms round the little woman's neck and kissed her very affectionately. Mme. Bernard's fresh face beamed with pleasure.

"Thank you, my dear," she answered. "And as for your father, my child, he is without doubt in heaven; and that means that he now judges you by your intentions, and no longer by appearances only."

This sage little speech reassured Angela, though she soon afterward asked herself whether it was quite loyal to allow any one to say that the prince had ever judged her "by appearances only." But while she was making this reflection, Mme. Bernard was already telephoning

to Giovanni, who was at the War Office, as Angela supposed, and he answered with alacrity that he would come to the palace on the following afternoon and ask to see Mme. Bernard on a matter of business. It was really her business to teach French, as all the servants knew, and if they thought that the young officer came to ask about some lessons for himself or a friend, so much the better.

Mme. Bernard was naturally practical, and Giovanni was by nature quick-witted; so the matter was settled in a few words, to the satisfaction of both; and when Angela was merely told that he was coming, she was much more pleased than she was willing to show, and she said no more about her father's hypothetical disapproval.

That afternoon she received the Marchesa del Prato and her lawyer in the second of the outer drawing-rooms down-stairs. It was cold there, but she had not quite dared to order a fire to be made, because the prince had never allowed fires except in the inner rooms, which were still closed under the notarial seals. The place had a certain grandeur of its own, for the massive decorations, the heavy furniture, and the rich brocade curtains all dated from the best period of Louis XIV's reign. On the walls there were four or five first-rate pictures, the largest of which was a magnificent portrait of a former Chiaromonte by Vandyke; there was a "Holy Family" by Guercino, another by Bonifacio, a "Magdalen" by Andrea del Sarto, and one or two smaller paintings of no inconsiderable value.

But at that hour the light was bad, for the afternoon had turned cold and rainy after a beautiful morning, and at four o'clock it was still too early to have lamps. A few moments after the hour, a servant opened the door, held the curtains aside, and announced the visitor.

"Her excellency, the Princess Chiaromonte!"

Angela started slightly at the name. The last Princess Chiaromonte who had passed through that doorway had been her mother, and in her solitude the girl had not even been told that her uncle had already assumed the title of the head of the house. The lackey paid no

attention whatever to the quiet man in black who followed the princess, holding his hat against his chest with both hands and advancing with a bowing motion at every step, as if he were saluting the family chairs as he passed them. Angela vaguely remembered his solemnly obsequious face.

Her aunt seemed to have grown taller and larger, as she bent to imprint a formal kiss on the girl's cheek, and then sat down in one of the huge old easy chairs, while the lawyer seated himself at a respectful distance on an ottoman stool with his high hat on his knees. Angela took her place at one end of the stiff sofa that stood directly under the Vandyke portrait, and she waited for her aunt to speak.

The princess had evidently prepared herself, for she spoke clearly and did not pause for some time.

"Your uncle has a slight attack of influenza," she said; "otherwise he would have come with me, and I should have been more than glad if he himself could have explained the whole situation to you instead of leaving that painful duty to me. You are well aware, my dear Angela, that your father always clung to the most prejudiced traditions of the intransigent clericals, and could never be induced to conform to any of the new regulations introduced by the Italian government. In point of fact, I do not think he quite realized that the old order had passed away when he was a mere boy, and that the new was to be permanent, if not everlasting. If he had, he would have acted very differently, I am sure, and would have made my present duty much easier than it is. Are you quite certain that you understand that?"

Angela was quite certain that she did, and nodded quietly, though she could not see how her father's political convictions could affect her own present situation.

"I have no doubt," continued the princess, "that he brought you up to consider yourself the heiress of all his fortune, though not of the title, which naturally goes to the eldest male heir. Am I right?"

"He never told me anything about my inheritance," Angela replied.

"So much the better. It will be easier for me to explain your rather unusual position. In the first place, I must make it clear to you that your father and mother declined to go before the mayor at the Capitol when they were married, in spite of the regulations which had then been in force a number of years. They were devout Catholics, and the blessing of the church was enough for them. According to your father, to go through any form of civil ceremony, before or after the wedding, was equivalent to doubting the validity of the sacrament of marriage."

"Naturally," Angela assented, as her aunt paused and looked at her.

"Very naturally." The princess's eyes began to glitter oddly, and the lawyer turned his hat uneasily on his knees. "Very naturally, indeed! Unfortunately for you, however, your father was not merely overlooking a municipal regulation, as he supposed; he was deliberately bidding defiance to the laws of Italy."

"What do you mean?" asked Angela rather nervously.

"It is very painful to explain," answered the elder woman with gleaming eyes and a disagreeable smile. "The plain truth is that, as your father and mother were not civilly married—civilly, you understand—they were not legally married at all, and the law will never admit that they were!"

Angela's hand tightened on the arm of the old sofa.

"Not married?" she cried. "My father and mother not married? It is impossible, it is monstrous—"

"Not 'legally' married, I said," replied the princess. "To be legally married, it is absolutely necessary to go before the mayor at the Capitol and have the civil ceremony properly performed. Am I right?" she asked, turning suddenly to the lawyer. "It is absolutely necessary, is it not?"

"Absolutely, excellency," the legal adviser answered. "Otherwise the children of the marriage are not legitimate."

"What does that mean?" asked Angela in a frightened tone.

"It means," explained the princess, "that in the eyes of the law you do not exist—"

Angela tried to laugh.

"But I do exist! Here I am, Angela Chiaromonte, to say that I am alive!"

"Angela, but not Chiaromonte," corrected the princess, hardly able to hide her satisfaction. "I am sorry to say that your dear father would not even submit to the regulation which requires all parents alike to declare the birth of children, and he paid a heavy fine for his refusal. The unfortunate consequence is that when your birth was entered at the municipality, you were put down in the official records as a foundling child whose parents refused to declare themselves."

"A foundling! I, a foundling!" Angela half rose in amazed indignation, but almost instantly sat down again, with an incredulous smile. "Either you are quite mad," she said, "or you are trying to frighten me for some reason I do not understand."

The princess raised her sandy eyebrows and looked at the lawyer, evidently meaning him to speak for her.

"That is your position, *signorina*," he said calmly. "You have, unhappily, no legal status, no legal name, and no claim whatever on the estate of his excellency Prince Chiaromonte, who was not married to your mother in the eyes of the law, and refused even to acknowledge you as his child by registering your birth at the mayoralty. Every inquiry has been made on your behalf, and I have here the certified copy of the register as it stands, declaring you to be a foundling. It was still in your father's power to make a will in your favor, *signorina*, and as the laws of entail no longer exist, his excellency may have left you his whole estate, real and personal, though his titles and dignities will in any case pass to his brother. I must warn you, however, that such a will might not prove valid in law, since his excellency did not even legally acknowledge you as his child. So far, no trace of a will has been found with his late excellency's notary, nor with his lawyer, nor deposited with his securities at his banker's. It is barely possible that some paper may exist in the rooms which are still closed, but I think it my duty to tell you that I do not expect to find anything of the kind when we break the seals to-mor-

row, in the presence of the heirs and witnesses."

He ceased speaking, and looked at the princess as if asking whether he should say more, for Angela had bent her head and quietly covered her eyes with one hand, and in this attitude she sat quite motionless in her place. The lawyer thought she was going to burst into tears, for he did not know her.

"That will do, Calvi," said the princess calmly. "You have made it all very clear, and you may retire for the present. The young lady is naturally overcome by the bad news, and would rather be alone with me for a little while, I dare say."

Signor Calvi rose, made a profound obeisance to the princess, scarcely bent his head to Angela, and retired, again seeming to bow to the family chairs as he passed each. The young girl dropped her hand and looked after him with a sort of dull curiosity. She was the last person in the world to take offense, or to suppose that any one meant to be rude to her, but it was impossible not to notice the lawyer's behavior. In his opinion she was suddenly nobody, and deserved no more notice than a shop-girl. She understood enough of human nature to be sure that he counted on the princess's approval.

The elder woman was watching her with a satisfaction she hardly tried to conceal. Her small hands were incased in marvelously fitting black gloves, though black gloves rarely fit so well as others, and were crossed on her knee over the little leather bag she always carried. She was leaning back in the great arm-chair, and the mourning she wore made her faultless complexion look even more brilliant than it was.

No one knew how near forty the princess might be, for she appeared in the "Almanach de Gotha" without a birthday, and only the date of her marriage was given; but the year was 1884, and people said it was impossible that she should have been less than seventeen when her parents had brought her to Rome and had tried to marry her to the elder of the Chiaromonte family. As twenty years had passed since they had succeeded in capturing the second son for their daughter, it was clear that she

could not be under thirty-seven. But her complexion was extraordinary, and, though she was a tall woman, she had preserved a figure which was almost that of a young girl.

Angela did not look directly at her enemy for some seconds after the lawyer had left the room, closing the door behind him, not loudly, yet quite audibly; but the young girl was the first to speak when she was sure that he was out of hearing.

"You hate me," she said at last. "What have I done to you?"

The princess was not timid, nor very easily surprised, but the question was so direct that she drew farther back into her chair with a quick movement, and her bright eyes sparkled angrily.

"In this world," she said, "the truth is always surprising and generally unpleasant. In consideration of what I have been obliged to tell you about yourself, I can easily excuse your foolish speech."

"You are very kind," Angela answered quietly enough, but in a tone that the princess did not like. "I was not asking your indulgence, but an explanation, no matter how disagreeable the rest of the truth may be. What have I done that you should hate me?"

The princess laughed contemptuously.

"The expression is too strong," she retorted. "Hatred would imply an interest in you and your possible doings which I am far from feeling, I assure you! Since it turns out that you are not even one of the family—"

She laughed again and raised her eyebrows still higher, instead of ending the speech.

"From what you say," Angela answered with a good deal of dignity, "I can only understand that if you followed your own inclination you would turn me out into the street."

"The law will do so without my intervention," answered the elder woman. "If my brother-in-law had even taken the trouble to acknowledge you as his child, without legitimizing you, you would have been entitled to a small allowance—perhaps two or three hundred francs a month—to keep you from starving. But as he has left no legal proof that you are his daughter, and since he

was not properly married to your mother, you can claim nothing, not even a name. You are, in fact, a destitute foundling, as Calvi just said."

"It only remains for you to offer me your charity," Angela said.

"That was not my intention," returned the princess with a savage sneer. "I have talked it over with my husband, and we do not see why he should be expected to support his brother's—natural child!"

Angela rose from her seat without a word, and went quietly toward the door; but before she could reach it, the princess had followed her with a rush and a dramatic sweep of her black cloth skirt and plentiful crape, and had caught the girl by the wrist to bring her back to the middle of the great room.

"I shall not keep you long!" cried the angry woman. "You ask me what you have done that I should hate you, and I answer, nothing, since you are nobody! But I hated your mother, because she robbed me of the man I wanted, of the only man I ever loved—your father—and when I married his brother I swore that she should pay me for that, and she has! If she can see you as you are to-day, all heaven cannot dry her tears, for heaven itself cannot give you a name, since the one on her own tombstone is not hers by any right. I hope she sees you! Oh, I hope it was not for nothing that she fasted till she fainted, and prayed till she was hoarse, and knelt in damp churches till she died of it! I hope she has starved and whined her way to paradise and is looking down at this very moment, and can see her daughter turned out of my house, a pauper foundling, to beg her bread! I hope you are in a state of grace, as she is, and that the communion of saints brings you near enough together for her to see you!"

"You are mad," Angela said when the princess paused for breath. "You do not know what you are saying. Let go of my wrist and try to get back to your senses."

Whether the princess was really out of her mind, as seemed at least possible, or was only in one of her frequent fits of rage, the words had an instantaneous ef-

fect. She dropped Angela's wrist, drew herself up, and recovered her self-control in a few seconds; but there was still a dangerous glare in her cat-like eyes as she turned toward the window and faced the dull yellowish light of the late afternoon.

"You will soon find out that I have not exaggerated," she said, dropping from her late tone of fury to a note of icy coldness. "The seals will be removed to-morrow at noon, and I suppose no one can prevent you from being present if you choose. After that, you will make such arrangements for your own future as you see fit. I should recommend you to apply to one of the two convents on which my brother-in-law lavished nearly three millions of francs during his life. One or the other of them will certainly take you in without a dowry, and you will have at least a decent roof over your head."

With this practical advice the Princess Chiaromonte swept from the room, and Angela was left alone to ask herself whether such a sudden calamity as hers had ever before overtaken an innocent girl in Roman society.

She went back very slowly to the sofa, and sat down again under the great Vandyke portrait. Her eyes wandered from one object to another, as if she wished to make an inventory of the things that had seemed to be hers because they had been her father's; but she was far too completely dazed by what had happened to think very connectedly. Besides, though she did not dare let the thought give her courage, she still had a secret conviction that it was all a mistake, and that her father must have left some document which would be found among his papers the next day, and would clear away all this dreadful misunderstanding.

As for the rest of her aunt's story, no one had ever hinted at such a thing in her hearing; but Mme. Bernard would know the truth. There was little, indeed, which the excellent Frenchwoman did not know about the old Roman families, after having lived among them and taught their children French for nearly a quarter of a century. She was very discreet and might not wish to say much, but she certainly knew the truth in this case.

(To be continued)

THE BACKSLIDING OF MRS. HARDWIN J. FLAGG

BY ANNA McCLURE SHOLL

AUTHOR OF "THE HOUSE WITH MANY DOORS," ETC.

WITH A DRAWING BY THE KINNEYS

EVELYN VANCOURT emerged from the imaginary Adam room for which she was choosing the appliques, and read the card her assistant had just brought in. Her inspired look, which her helpers identified with the mood of creation, faded and was replaced by one of gentle stubbornness.

"No, I will not," she said in a sweet but emphatic voice, and turned again to her desk.

The assistant waited in delicate poise between acquiescence and a further plea. As an artist, Miss Vancourt belonged to no one but herself. As a business woman, she was in great part the creation of little Miss Lynch's diplomacy.

"I will not see Mrs. Hardwin J. Flagg," she added, noting Miss Lynch's hesitation. "It is impertinent of you to think for a moment that I would decorate that monstrous house on Fifth Avenue, beginning with a drawbridge and a moat, and ending in a delirium of mansard! I've heard there's an oubliette in the back drawing-room. They should drop a string of sausages into it, and seal it up!"

"But think what an influence for sweetness and light you might exert on the descendants of Hardwin J. Flagg," Miss Lynch pleaded. "Living in the ancestral home years hence, their taste corrected and their eyes purified by the beauty which you—"

"If they were purified, they wouldn't be rich enough to live there. Only grossness could afford the expense."

"Why are you so bitter against these poor Flaggs? What is their crime, ex-

cept that they want to buy their way into society? And they'll do it, or I don't know the great American daughter when I see her!"

The stroke told, as Miss Lynch meant it should. Evelyn Vancourt loved types of people as she loved pure Chippendale. She hesitated, and was lost.

"Is there a daughter?"

"There's literally nothing else. Her father built this house while she was in Europe, as a surprise to her; and it was—only not in the way he intended. Now, she has set out to redeem the interior, and she comes to you, her mother in her train. I pity the mother!"

Another stroke! Evelyn Vancourt loved the race of mothers.

"Is she downtrodden?"

"She's a martyr—a living sacrifice! You can see at one glance that she's dragged at the wheel of her daughter's ambitions. But you are keeping them waiting. Shall I take out a message?"

"It is good for them to wait," Evelyn said sternly. "It is a chastening to prepare them for the proper appreciation of Louis Seize. Tell me more. No, I'll see them. I'll go at once."

Mrs. Hardwin J. Flagg, of ample build and innocent, bewildered, motherly mien, sat on the edge of a chair in Miss Vancourt's outer office, trying to appease a marvelously pretty daughter, in whose expressive features impatience was clearly written. The girl's rustic ancestry had bestowed upon her the best that it could give in the freshness of her complexion, and in all the signs of strong and abundant health, veiled delicately by