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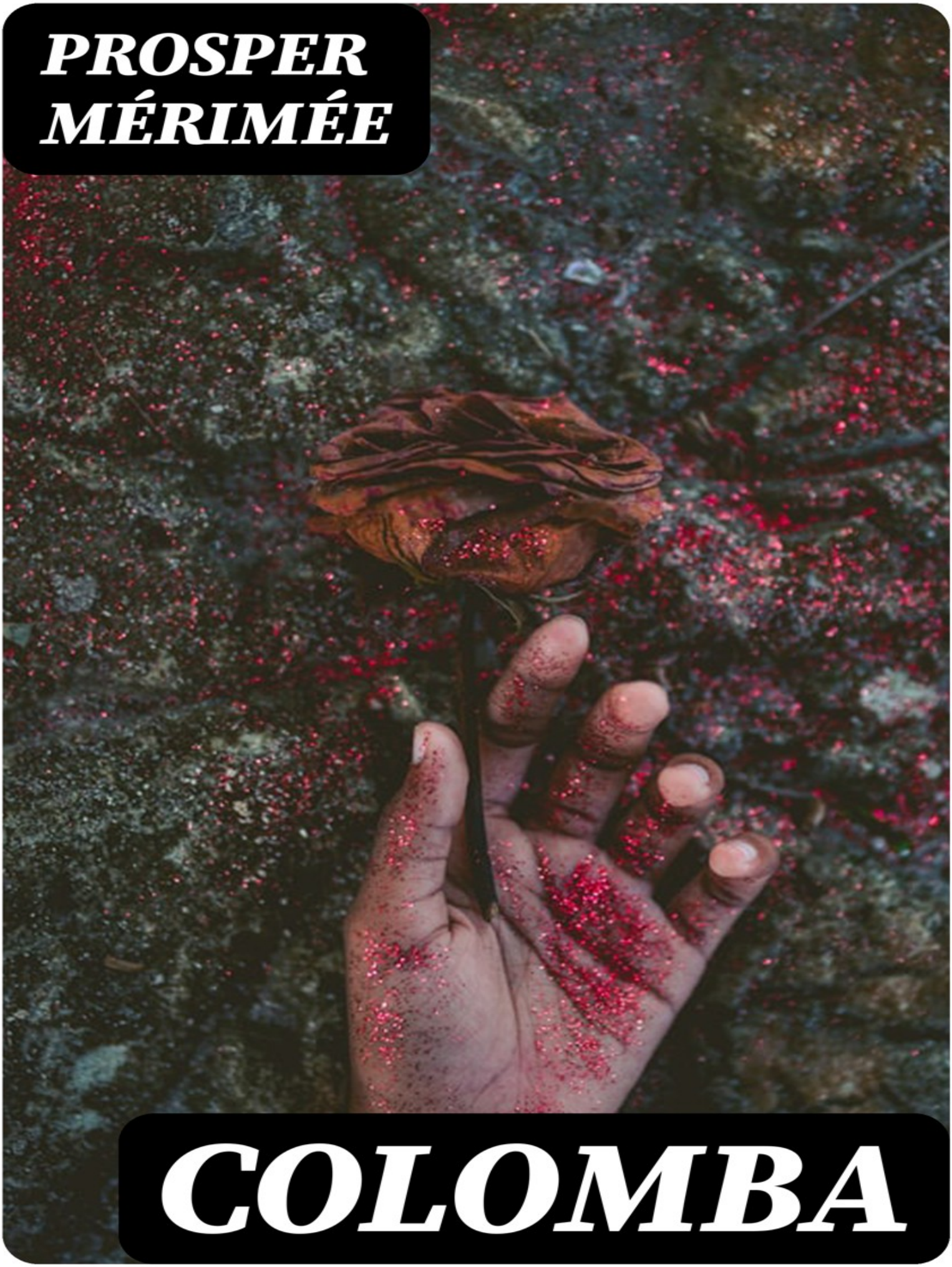

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CHAPTER I

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“Pe far la to vendetta,
Sta sigur’, vasta anche ella.”

—Vocero du Niolo.

Early in the month of October, 181-, Colonel Sir Thomas Nevil, a distinguished Irish officer of the English army, alighted with his daughter at the Hotel Beauveau, Marseilles, on their return from a tour in Italy. The perpetual and universal admiration of enthusiastic travellers has produced a sort of reaction, and many tourists, in their desire to appear singular, now take the *nil admirari* of Horace for their motto. To this dissatisfied class the colonel’s only daughter, Miss Lydia, belonged. “The Transfiguration” has seemed to her mediocre, and Vesuvius in eruption an effect not greatly superior to that produced by the Birmingham factory chimneys. Her great objection to Italy, on the whole, was its lack of local colour and character. My readers must discover the sense of these expressions as best they may. A few years ago I understood them very well myself, but at the present time I can make nothing of them. At first, Miss Lydia had flattered herself she had found things on the other side of the Alps which nobody had ever before seen, about which she could converse *avec les honnetes gens*, as M. Jourdain calls them. But soon, anticipated in every direction by her countrymen, she despaired of making any fresh discoveries, and went over to the party of the opposition. It is really very tiresome not to be able to talk

abut the wonders of Italy without hearing somebody say “Of course you know the Raphael in the Palazzo—— at ——? It is the finest thing in Italy!” and just the thing *you* happen to have overlooked! As it would take too long to see everything, the simplest course is to resort to deliberate and universal censure.

At the Hotel Beauveau Miss Lydia met with a bitter disappointment. She had brought back a pretty sketch of the Pelasgic or Cyclopean Gate at Segni, which, as she believed, all other artists had completely overlooked. Now, at Marseilles, she met Lady Frances Fenwick, who showed her her album, in which appeared, between a sonnet and a dried flower, the very gate in question, brilliantly touched in with sienna. Miss Lydia gave her drawing to her maid—and lost all admiration for Pelasgic structures.

This unhappy frame of mind was shared by Colonel Nevil, who, since the death of his wife, looked at everything through his daughter’s eyes. In his estimation, Italy had committed the unpardonable sin of boring his child, and was, in consequence, the most wearisome country on the face of the earth. He had no fault to find, indeed, with the pictures and statues, but he was in a position to assert that Italian sport was utterly wretched, and that he had been obliged to tramp ten leagues over the Roman Campagna, under a burning sun, to kill a few worthless red-legged partridges.

The morning after his arrival at Marseilles he invited Captain Ellis—his former adjutant, who had just been spending six weeks in Corsica—to dine with him. The captain told Miss Lydia a story about bandits, which had the

advantage of bearing no resemblance to the robber tales with which she had been so frequently regaled, on the road between Naples and Rome, and he told it well. At dessert, the two men, left alone over their claret, talked of hunting—and the colonel learned that nowhere is there more excellent sport, or game more varied and abundant, than in Corsica. “There are plenty of wild boars,” said Captain Ellis. “And you have to learn to distinguish them from the domestic pigs, which are astonishingly like them. For if you kill a pig, you find yourself in difficulties with the swine-herds. They rush out of the thickets (which they call *maquis*) armed to the teeth, make you pay for their beasts, and laugh at you besides. Then there is the mouflon, a strange animal, which you will not find anywhere else—splendid game, but hard to get—and stags, deer, pheasants, and partridges—it would be impossible to enumerate all the kinds with which Corsica swarms. If you want shooting, colonel, go to Corsica! There, as one of my entertainers said to me, you can get a shot at every imaginable kind of game, from a thrush to a man!”

At tea, the captain once more delighted Lydia with the tale of a *vendetta transversale* (A vendetta in which vengeance falls on a more or less distant relation of the author of the original offence.), even more strange than his first story, and he thoroughly stirred her enthusiasm by his descriptions of the strange wild beauty of the country, the peculiarities of its inhabitants, and their primitive hospitality and customs. Finally, he offered her a pretty little stiletto, less remarkable for its shape and copper mounting than for its origin. A famous bandit had given it to Captain Ellis, and

had assured him it had been buried in four human bodies. Miss Lydia thrust it through her girdle, laid it on the table beside her bed, and unsheathed it twice over before she fell asleep. Her father meanwhile was dreaming he had slain a mouflon, and that its owner insisted on his paying for it, a demand to which he gladly acceded, seeing it was a most curious creature, like a boar, with stag's horns and a pheasant's tail.

"Ellis tells me there's splendid shooting in Corsica," said the colonel, as he sat at breakfast, alone with his daughter. "If it hadn't been for the distance, I should like to spend a fortnight there."

"Well," replied Miss Lydia, "why shouldn't we go to Corsica? While you are hunting I can sketch—I should love to have that grotto Captain Ellis talked about, where Napoleon used to go and study when he was a child, in my album."

It was the first time, probably, that any wish expressed by the colonel had won his daughter's approbation. Delighted as he was by the unexpected harmony on their opinions, he was nevertheless wise enough to put forward various objections, calculated to sharpen Miss Lydia's welcome whim. In vain did he dwell on the wildness of the country, and the difficulties of travel there for a lady. Nothing frightened her; she liked travelling on horseback of all things; she delighted in the idea of bivouacking in the open; she even threatened to go as far as Asia Minor—in short, she found an answer to everything. No Englishwoman had ever been to Corsica; therefore she must go. What a pleasure it would be, when she got back to St. James's Place, to exhibit her album! "But, my dear creature, why do

you pass over that delightful drawing?" "That's only a trifle —just a sketch I made of a famous Corsican bandit who was our guide." "What! you don't mean to say you have been to Corsica?"

As there were no steamboats between France and Corsica, in those days, inquiries were made for some ship about to sail for the island Miss Lydia proposed to discover. That very day the colonel wrote to Paris, to countermand his order for the suite of apartments in which he was to have made some stay, and bargained with the skipper of a Corsican schooner, just about to set sail for Ajaccio, for two poor cabins, but the best that could be had. Provisions were sent on board, the skipper swore that one of his sailors was an excellent cook, and had not his equal for *bouilleabaisse*; he promised mademoiselle should be comfortable, and have a fair wind and a calm sea.

The colonel further stipulated, in obedience to his daughter's wishes, that no other passenger should be taken on board, and that the captain should skirt the coast of the island, so that Miss Lydia might enjoy the view of the mountains.

CHAPTER II

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On the day of their departure everything was packed and sent on board early in the morning. The schooner was to sail with the evening breeze. Meanwhile, as the colonel and his daughter were walking on the Canebiere, the skipper addressed them, and craved permission to take on board one of his relations, his eldest son's godfather's second cousin, who was going back to Corsica, his native country, on important business, and could not find any ship to take him over.

"He's a charming fellow," added Captain Mattei, "a soldier, an officer in the Infantry of the Guard, and would have been a colonel already if *the other* (meaning Napoleon) had still been emperor!"

"As he is a soldier," began the colonel—he was about to add, "I shall be very glad he should come with us," when Miss Lydia exclaimed in English:

"An infantry officer!" (Her father had been in the cavalry, and she consequently looked down on every other branch of the service.) "An uneducated man, very likely, who would be sea-sick, and spoil all the pleasure of our trip!"

The captain did not understand a word of English, but he seemed to catch what Miss Lydia was saying by the pursing up of her pretty mouth, and immediately entered upon an elaborate panegyric of his relative, which he wound up by declaring him to be a gentleman, belonging to a family of *corporals*, and that he would not be in the very least in the colonel's way, for that he, the skipper, would undertake to

stow him in some corner, where they should not be aware of his presence.

The colonel and Miss Nevil thought it peculiar that there should be Corsican families in which the dignity of corporal was handed down from father to son. But, as they really believed the individual in question to be some infantry corporal, they concluded he was some poor devil whom the skipper desired to take out of pure charity. If he had been an officer, they would have been obliged to speak to him and live with him; but there was no reason why they should put themselves out for a corporal—who is a person of no consequence unless his detachment is also at hand, with bayonets fixed, ready to convey a person to a place to which he would rather not be taken.

“Is your kinsman ever sea-sick?” demanded Miss Nevil sharply.

“Never, mademoiselle, he is as steady as a rock, either on sea or land!”

“Very good then, you can take him,” said she.

“You can take him!” echoed the colonel, and they passed on their way.

Toward five o’clock in the evening Captain Mattei came to escort them on board the schooner. On the jetty, near the captain’s gig, they met a tall young man wearing a blue frock-coat, buttoned up to his chin; his face was tanned, his eyes were black, brilliant, wide open, his whole appearance intelligent and frank. His shoulders, well thrown back, and his little twisted mustache clearly revealed the soldier—for at that period mustaches were by no means common, and the National Guard had not carried the habits and

appearance of the guard-room into the bosom of every family.

When the young man saw the colonel he doffed his cap, and thanked him in excellent language, and without the slightest shyness, for the service he was rendering him.

“Delighted to be of use to you, my good fellow!” said the colonel, with a friendly nod, and he stepped into the gig.

“He’s not very ceremonious, this Englishman of yours,” said the young man in Italian, and in an undertone, to the captain.

The skipper laid his forefinger under his left eye, and pulled down the corners of his mouth. To a man acquainted with the language of signs, this meant that the Englishman understood Italian, and was an oddity into the bargain. The young man smiled slightly and touched his forehead, in answer to Mattei’s sign, as though to indicate that every Englishman had a bee in his bonnet. Then he sat down beside them, and began to look very attentively, though not impertinently, at his pretty fellow-traveller.

“These French soldiers all have a good appearance,” remarked the colonel in English to his daughter, “and so it is easy to turn them into officers.” Then addressing the young man in French, he said, “Tell me, my good man, what regiment have you served in?” The young man nudged his second cousin’s godson’s father gently with his elbow, and suppressing an ironic smile, replied that he had served in the Infantry of the Guard, and that he had just quitted the Seventh Regiment of Light Infantry.

“Were you at Waterloo? You are very young!”

“I beg your pardon, colonel, that was my only campaign.”

“It counts as two,” said the colonel.

The young Corsican bit his lips.

“Papa,” said Miss Lydia in English, “do ask him if the Corsicans are very fond of their Buonaparte.”

Before the colonel could translate her question into French, the young man answered in fairly good English, though with a marked accent:

“You know, mademoiselle, that no man is ever a prophet in his own country. We, who are Napoleon’s fellow-countrymen, are perhaps less attached to him than the French. As for myself, though my family was formerly at enmity with his, I both love and admire him.”

“You speak English!” exclaimed the colonel.

“Very ill, as you may perceive!”

Miss Lydia, though somewhat shocked by the young man’s easy tone, could not help laughing at the idea of a personal enmity between a corporal and an emperor. She took this as a foretaste of Corsican peculiarities, and made up her mind to note it down in her journal.

“Perhaps you were a prisoner in England?” asked the colonel.

“No, colonel, I learned English in France, when I was very young, from a prisoner of your nation.”

Then, addressing Miss Nevil:

“Mattei tells me you have just come back from Italy. No doubt, mademoiselle, you speak the purest Tuscan—I fear you’ll find it somewhat difficult to understand our dialect.”

“My daughter understands every Italian dialect,” said the colonel. “She has the gift of languages. She doesn’t get it from me.”

“Would mademoiselle understand, for instance, these lines from one of our Corsican songs in which a shepherd says to his shepherdess:
“S’entrassi ‘ndru paradisu santu, santu,
E nun truvassi a tia, mi n’escriria.”

(“If I entered the holy land of paradise
and found thee not, I would depart!”)

—*Serenata di Zicavo*.

Miss Lydia did understand. She thought the quotation bold, and the look which accompanied it still bolder, and replied, with a blush, “Capisco.”

“And are you going back to your own country on furlough?” inquired the colonel.

“No, colonel, they have put me on half-pay, because I was at Waterloo, probably, and because I am Napoleon’s fellow-countryman. I am going home, as the song says, low in hope and low in purse,” and he looked up to the sky and sighed.

The colonel slipped his hand into his pocket, and tried to think of some civil phrase with which he might slip the gold coin he was fingering into the palm of his unfortunate enemy.

“And I too,” he said good-humouredly, “have been put on half-pay, but your half-pay can hardly give you enough to buy tobacco! Here, corporal!” and he tried to force the gold coin into the young man’s closed hand, which rested on the gunwale of the gig.

The young Corsican reddened, drew himself up, bit his lips, and seemed, for a moment, on the brink of some angry

reply. Then suddenly his expression changed and he burst out laughing. The colonel, grasping his gold piece still in his hand, sat staring at him.

“Colonel,” said the young man, when he had recovered his gravity, “allow me to offer you two pieces of advice—the first is never to offer money to a Corsican, for some of my fellow-countrymen would be rude enough to throw it back in your face; the second is not to give people titles they do not claim. You call me ‘corporal,’ and I am a lieutenant—the difference is not very great, no doubt, still——”

“Lieutenant! Lieutenant!” exclaimed Sir Thomas. “But the skipper told me you were a corporal, and that your father and all your family had been corporals before you!”

At these words the young man threw himself back and laughed louder than ever, so merrily that the skipper and his two sailors joined the chorus.

“Forgive me, colonel!” he cried at last. “The mistake is so comical, and I have only just realized it. It is quite true that my family glories in the fact that it can reckon many corporals among its ancestors—but our Corsican corporals never wore stripes upon their sleeves! Toward the year of grace 1100 certain villages revolted against the tyranny of the great mountain nobles, and chose leaders of their own, whom they called *corporals*. In our island we think a great deal of being descended from these tribunes.”

“I beg your pardon, sir,” exclaimed the colonel, “I beg your pardon a thousand times! As you understand the cause of my mistake, I hope you will do me the kindness of forgiving it!” and he held out his hand.

“It is the just punishment of my petty pride,” said the young man, still laughing, and cordially shaking the Englishman’s hand. “I am not at all offended. As my friend Mattei has introduced me so unsuccessfully, allow me to introduce myself. My name is Orso della Rebbia; I am a lieutenant on half-pay; and if, as the sight of those two fine dogs of yours leads me to believe, you are coming to Corsica to hunt, I shall be very proud to do you the honours of our mountains and our *maquis*—if, indeed, I have not forgotten them altogether!” he added, with a sigh.

At this moment the gig came alongside the schooner, the lieutenant offered his hand to Miss Lydia, and then helped the colonel to swing himself up on deck. Once there, Sir Thomas, who was still very much ashamed of his blunder, and at a loss to know what he had better do to make the man whose ancestry dated from the year 1100 forget it, invited him to supper, without waiting for his daughter’s consent, and with many fresh apologies and handshakes. Miss Lydia frowned a little, but, after all, she was not sorry to know what a corporal really was. She rather liked there guest, and was even beginning to fancy there was something aristocratic about him—only she thought him too frank and merry for a hero of romance.

“Lieutenant della Rebbia,” said the colonel, bowing to him, English fashion, over a glass of Madeira, “I met a great many of your countrymen in Spain—they were splendid sharp-shooters.”

“Yes, and a great many of them have stayed in Spain,” replied the young lieutenant gravely.

“I shall never forget the behaviour of a Corsican battalion at the Battle of Vittoria,” said the colonel; “I have good reason to remember it, indeed,” he added, rubbing his chest. “All day long they had been skirmishing in the gardens, behind the hedges, and had killed I don’t know how many of our horses and men. When the retreat was sounded, they rallied and made off at a great pace. We had hoped to take our revenge on them in the open plain, but the scoundrels—I beg your pardon, lieutenant; the brave fellows, I should have said—had formed a square, and there was no breaking it. In the middle of the square—I fancy I can see him still—rode an officer on a little black horse. He kept close beside the standard, smoking his cigar as coolly as if he had been in a café. Every now and then their bugles played a flourish, as if to defy us. I sent my two leading squadrons at them. Whew! Instead of breaking the front of the square, my dragoons passed along the sides, wheeled, and came back in great disorder, and with several riderless horses—and all the time those cursed bugles went on playing. When the smoke which had hung over the battalion cleared away, I saw the officer still puffing at his cigar beside his eagle. I was furious, and led a final charge myself. Their muskets, foul with continual firing, would not go off, but the men had drawn up, six deep, with their bayonets pointed at the noses of our horses; you might have taken them for a wall. I was shouting, urging on my dragoons, and spurring my horse forward, when the officer I have mentioned, at length throwing away his cigar, pointed me out to one of his men, and I heard him say something like *‘Al capello bianco!’’*—I wore a white plume. Then I did not

hear any more, for a bullet passed through my chest. That was a splendid battalion, M. della Rebbia, that first battalion of the Eighteenth—all of them Corsicans, as I was afterward told!”

“Yes,” said Orso, whose eyes had shone as he listened to the story. “They covered the retreat, and brought back their eagle. Two thirds of those brave fellows are sleeping now on the plains of Vittoria!”

“And, perhaps, you can tell me the name of the officer in command?”

“It was my father—he was then a major in the Eighteenth, and was promoted colonel for his conduct on that terrible day.”

“Your father! Upon my word, he was a brave man! I should be glad to see him again, and I am certain I should recognise him. Is he still alive?”

“No, colonel,” said the young man, turning slightly pale.

“Was he at Waterloo?”

“Yes, colonel; but he had not the happiness of dying on the field of battle. He died in Corsica two years ago. How beautiful the sea is! It is ten years since I have seen the Mediterranean! Don’t you think the Mediterranean much more beautiful than the ocean, mademoiselle?”

“I think it too blue, and its waves lack grandeur.”

“You like wild beauty then, mademoiselle! In that case, I am sure you will be delighted with Corsica.”

“My daughter,” said the colonel, “delights in everything that is out of the common, and for that reason she did not care much for Italy.”

“The only place in Italy that I know,” said Orso, “is Pisa, where I was at school for some time. But I can not think, without admiration, of the Campo-Santo, the Duomo, and the Leaning Tower—especially of the Campo-Santo. Do you remember Orcagna’s ‘Death’? I think I could draw every line of it—it is so graven on my memory.”

Miss Lydia was afraid the lieutenant was going to deliver an enthusiastic tirade.

“It is very pretty,” she said, with a yawn. “Excuse me, papa, my head aches a little; I am going down to my cabin.”

She kissed her father on the forehead, inclined her head majestically to Orso, and disappeared. Then the two men talked about hunting and war. They discovered that at Waterloo they had been posted opposite each other, and had no doubt exchanged many a bullet. This knowledge strengthened their good understanding. Turning about, they criticised Napoleon, Wellington, and Blucher, and then they hunted buck, boar, and mountain sheep in company. At last, when night was far advanced, and the last bottle of claret had been emptied, the colonel wrung the lieutenant’s hand once more and wished him good-night, expressing his hope that an acquaintance, which had begun in such ridiculous fashion, might be continued. They parted, and each went to bed.