

The Passing of Cesare.

BY HELEN PITKIN.



HER detractors called her unprincipled; the cleverest man in her set had told her that she went unchanged undeservedly, but the license of this speech had only made her laugh the reply: "I shall never venture aquatics, then, for fear that I cheat the rope," which was not pretty, for dying is ever a serious ceremony and should be hushedly considered. But the incorrigible coquette remembers nothing but self-love, especially when she abuses it most.

However, as one must be amused, it would be too bad not to indulge one's selected diversion, and Jacqueline, who fancied herself more than an embryo musical composer, and who wrote ambitious sonatas and thunderous fugues and themes during the day, found the vanquishing of man the most thorough refreshment and deliverance from the effects of work after her serious hours. It was a pity that Jacqueline was rich and pampered. Had she been poor she might have been forced to show what there was in her; as it was, she debased her aptness to a public pose, grew nervous and high strung over her hours of composition, and her opinion of self grew likewise more and more exalted. When dusk came and the throes of production were well-nigh over, Jacqueline would throw aside her stub pens and manuscript sheets and leave her music studio for her bedroom; she never closed her piano.

There, after she had bathed luxuriously, her maid would roll the waving yellow hair into the likeness of a coronet, array her in the clinging muslins or soft chiffons that she loved, tie a necklace of milk-white pearls around her whiter throat, or fasten her bodice with clasps of topaz that brought out the yellow-brown lights in her wide eyes.

There was a legend in the family Farston that Jacqueline had flirted with a park officer at the age of ten months, routing her

jealous French maid and gaining forthwith the admiration of the gentleman in blue. This charge Jacqueline met by simply avowing that her sense of the fitness of things, even at that period, was too keen to permit of such a disregard of caste. But at any rate she had kept up the practise of conquest ever since, and reckoned among her *attachés* gentlemen with whom a discriminating park officer would hesitate to associate.

At the age of twenty-two the beautiful Miss Farston had made a record which her family boasted of. Three hidalgos had sailed from over the seas to look upon her face and woo; barons, knights of Albion, a Japanese, a Sandwicher, — in fact, there was another legend which asserted that all manner of man had sued at her shrine save a Moor and a Chinaman, and when this was cited Jacqueline would look suddenly brighter and remind one that her life was still very young.

To her father and Miss Pauline these coquetries caused no disquiet. They marveled only at the tact with which their dear one disposed of her homagers. Truth to tell, Jacqueline did not dispose of many of them, and distinguished each of her suitors impartially as “one of the gentlemen to whom I am engaged.”

She was, to give her credit, skilful in her maneuvers. She outgeneraled the man who can always tell when a woman is deceiving him; she changed her mood to correspond with whatever converser occupied the moment. By one she was believed to be ingenuous, another idealized her, another deified her, another was ravished by her spirit, another with her timorousness. One admirer sent her Kant and Trench, another, “The Lives of the Saints and Martyrs,” while the cleverest man she knew, — one Dave Goddard, — who, withal, was not clever enough to doubt her, kept her curtained shelf stocked with Bourget and Flaubert, and the rest of the modern French fraternity. This man, too, sent her Jacqueminot roses in their season, and when he ran out of town bothered himself with telegrams descriptive of his adoration, which he somehow believed no one in telegraphic employ would understand, and all this appealed immeasurably to Miss Farston’s sense of the romantic. Then there was the violet love, he who sent them in fresh bunches to adorn, crystallized to munch, and enamelled and bediamond to wear. He was a journalist and wrote

verses to her about herself, which she set to music, more or less original, on violet-tinted note paper scented with orris. The lily-of-the-valley devotee was a pure-minded young scholar who, in offering a handful of the fragile flowers on one occasion, said: "I present you a mirror," which had moved Jacqueline almost to the point of reconsidering her rejection of his suit.

"Flora of Flora-land" her father named her, and cheerfully encouraged the purchase of confections suggestive of her various tributes. Thus her violet tea gowns and rose dinner gowns and daisy dancing dresses were builded upon the themes of flowers.

One glorious summer day Jacqueline stepped out upon the balcony which extended from her bedchamber into an ilex shade, and which adjoined nearly that next. Her mandolin hung from an arm by a broad gold-colored ribbon, but the little instrument was mute and somber against its background of white muslin. For several months the adjoining balcony had been empty. To-day, however, Jacqueline noted, with a surprised quiver of the eyelids, that it was occupied by a young man who sat in an easy chair perusing the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. A swift glance showed her that he was slight and dark, and distinguished by that man-of-the-world aspect which marks well-born foreigners. As she appeared, he looked up, caught the glance she sent him, then resumed his reading. Jacqueline allowed her mandolin to hang untouched. In a moment more she had re-entered her room.

The following evening Jacqueline stepped upon her gallery at moonrise. The handsome young foreigner was standing not two yards away, looking down upon the imps in the street. His face turned towards the light figure of Miss Farston, who bowed to him coldly. He returned the salute without apparent surprise and resumed his survey of the gamins below. This incident occurred for several evenings successively; on the fourth Miss Farston approached the railing nearest him.

"Monsieur!"

The Italian's face evinced no surprise, neither did it show antipathy.

"I hope you will forgive my addressing you so unceremoniously. I am prompted by the interest I feel in the Spoffords, who

lived in your house till a month ago. They are abroad, I know. Have you any tidings of them?"

Jacqueline had spoken in French. One is always sure that educated foreigners know French.

The Italian regretted that he could not enlighten mademoiselle. He had only rented the house himself, which, by the way, was too large, as he was quite alone with his valet.

Did monsieur like the city?

Ah, yes, the social life was delightful; the De Lisles, the Caruthers, the Beldens —

Ah! Monsieur had met the Caruthers? Intimate friends of her own. Then Miss Farston hoped they would meet again, and — ah, yes, she would be obliged to inquire elsewhere for the Spoffords. And she wished him a very good evening.

When these young persons were formally introduced to each other at the Caruthers a week later, Miss Farston looked so unconscious one never would have believed she had arranged the meeting. That night she was so bewildering that the Chevalier Cesare Rubini almost lost his habitual self-possession. Then, too, so comprehensively she talked music, and every one told him how faithfully she had studied counterpoint and harmony and how wonderful her compositions were. Indeed, they said, the sonatas she had written must be absolutely sublime because they were just like Wagner, without tune or melody, and it was hinted that a long one-act grand opera she had conceived was superb; she had evolved both libretto and score and it was some day to be presented by great singers. And how demure she was, and how daring, and how timid, and how reckless, and how devout! Signore Rubini thought he misunderstood the French in which all these conflicting opinions reached him.

The days wore on, a daily meeting occurring somehow between the interesting young neighbors. Usually Jacqueline would appear on her balcony at dusk with her mandolin and would trill darling little melodies of her own composition. A conversation followed invariably over the hard iron barrier between them, there was a sigh exchanged, a bunch of yellow roses given in tribute for Jacqueline's *aria appassionata*. He seemed to exist within the radius of her window, and always to carry a knot of golden bloom

to be presented to Miss Farston when she favored him with an interview. She wore his yellow roses in her yellow hair and at the bosom of her white organdies, and composed a waltz "To His Roses," which the Chevalier played better than she. Then, perhaps, for several days there would be no sign of her; only a strain of song would reach him through the thick walls, and her canaries would chirrup between the laces at her windows as though to mock him. These cruelties were premeditated and they were long agonies to the Chevalier. But she had been born without a heart, she would tell you with a shrug, and coquetry was really her only amusement.

One afternoon the Chevalier offered himself as a son-in-law to Mr. Farston, who turned the matter over to his daughter, who promptly declined the honor. Why? She could not have told you. Why not? For the same reason. She simply could not contemplate marriage with serenity. The Chevalier wrote her an honorable note of farewell whose tenor so gratified her that she threw a yellow rose in his doorway as she passed on her way to mass. It was their talismanic flower and she knew it would speak of her.

There was another chance meeting on the galleries that evening, and a betrothal. It was all so romantic; the fellow was so handsome, so musical, and his softly spoken Italian endearments were so perfectly new. She besought him to keep the affair secret, beaming upon him in the white glory of the moon as she swore she adored him, and excused her primary rejection on the score of nationality and his alleged heresies.

The summer wore on with varying degrees of happiness for the Chevalier. At times he was ravished with joy, at others in the throes of suspicion, distrust, and fear. It was not merely that her moods were so changeable, that she was so wholly at the mercy of the inspirations and enervations of production that were necessary to her genius, as she would tell him when she grew weary of his complaints. That which plunged the Chevalier into the blackest despair was the fact that his betrothed was one person when they were alone and quite a different one in the presence of other men, perhaps for the reason that she was too sure of him. "When we are on the little galleries alone," he would say, "you are the most

charming creature in the world. But in the world I hate you, I hate you!" And Jacqueline would only smile. It made so little difference to her.

Then she grew tired of her contract, and that same clever man whom she had known so long beginning to understand her, balked; a performance that by no means improved the Chevalier's position, for she threw all her powers into the recapture of the first. This gave her a new interest, and she determined to let Rubini go once for all. She sent for him and told him frankly that she was tired.

He wept, stormed, pleaded. She was inexorable.

"I love you to folly!" he cried. "Have mercy, have mercy! I will revere you like the Madonna! I will worship you above the angels! Miserable that I am, I cannot live without you. Suspicious fool though you know me to be, I will learn to do and to think as you would have me."

But Jacqueline was only bored. Really the conference was too long. She could be assured of monsieur's esteem?

Then the Chevalier folded his arms and looked very terrible. She observed with her morbid appreciation of detail that the very pores of his skin had coarsened.

"You will marry no other. I will see to that!"

She had heard this manner of speech before, often enough.

"I do not intend to marry, really," she answered. "My art, you know—"

The Chevalier seized her wrists and wrung them in rage.

"Listen! You will strive for fame. You will never reach it. I am jealous of that because it is all you love. Ah, what a creation is a human being with a heart!" He flung her away, breathing terribly hard. He walked to the door.

"Hear me," he said. "I shall live as long as I can without you. Then I shall come,—do you understand me?—and I shall take you with me when I quit this earth. Farewell!"

Jacqueline was a trifle alarmed. She was afraid he would kill them both then and there. But he only rushed out into the street like a madman. Next day he left the country.

For a week Jacqueline was unnerved, and at times almost desired his return. Her old zealotry came back to her, however, without the commission of any further folly, and she devoted her-

self to writing a hymn to Love which she meant should immortalize her, and to the conversion of the clever man who had begun to doubt. Soon the cotillons and opera of the advancing season distracted her mind, and as she heard nothing from the Chevalier Cesare Rubini, she gradually ceased to think of him. Besides, the time approached for the presentation of "Thetis," her one-act grand opera which her indulgent father had arranged to produce in the ball-room of their country house in the spring, and the last twinge of remorse was deadened by this new and anxious joy. The orchestral score had been arranged, the musicians engaged, and several of the artists of the city opera company were prepared to assume the *rôles*. Already the advance notices were fulsomely complimentary, and her own small world waited in delighted apprehension of the merit and prestige of the work.

The 5th of May was the date set for the production of the opera. On the evening of the 4th Jacqueline stole out into the moonlit garden, her nerves tingling with half-painful anticipation of the morrow. The last rehearsal was a past reality; in the morning the guests would arrive, and the program for their entertainment was complete. The violins were rehearsing in a wing off the main house, and the first tenor was chanting in the woods in a way that only tenors have. Jacqueline listened a little wearily. For five weeks she had lived in and for her opera, and the lassitude of reaction was heavy upon her. In spite of her weariness, however, she felt strangely wakeful, so she stood out on the terrace until she grew cold, bathed in the white light of the moon, filling her soul with its balm and content. Presently the clever man who knew her best of all followed her there, and looked down at her as though she were a child; a full knowledge of that strange nature had curiously enough restored to her the allegiance that half knowledge had threatened. For in her weakness and childish delusions she appealed more to his manhood than in the days when he had adored her as a girl of his set and only that. Tonight she looked curiously slight and small in her white organdy that showed mist-like in the argent twilight, and she was very pale and dark around the eyes, the shadows of her lashes, no doubt, they were so long. Her tawny hair glistened with a weird iridescence in the moonlight; her bare shoulders and arms looked

frail. She gave evidence of being one who lived essentially on nerves.

"Jacqueline," the man whispered, "it was on a night like this that in passing your town manse I heard the tinkle of a mandolin, the contralto of your speaking tones, and smelt the warm fragrance of yellow roses. One dropped from the paradise above as though it wanted to come to me. See, here it is." He disclosed a few brown leaves in his wallet.

Jacqueline shuddered. "I do not want to see it, Dave. I detect the odor of a dead flower, which means decay. I love to live so, myself, that I cannot look at anything that is done with life."

A firefly throbbed a beam in the dark and grew black again. Goddard replaced the shriveled petals carefully and smiled. "How is your Italian anyway? the last, I mean," he inquired.

"I never hear, but I wish I could see him — once more!"

She nervously pulled at the pomegranate branch that grew from a low tree beneath where they stood.

"Why?"

The old smile of conquest appeared in her eyes. "Well, I don't think I left a good impression. I am going to bed now. Good night, Dave. In another moonrise I shall be recognized — famous, perhaps, *n'est-ce-pas?* This is my last night of obscurity."

He grasped her fragile little hands in his and kissed them tenderly. "Why do you consume yourself for bubbles?" he asked her, with a spirit of anxious love in his voice, as she stood like a white cloud in the marble of the long window. "It is fame, perhaps, but what then?"

A golden circlet of fire burned up in her brown eyes. "It is my life," she whispered passionately, and vanished into the house.

Inside she went straight to her room and began to undress. Once she paused, as she stood brushing out her hair, and pressed her hand to her side, her heart clutched by a spasm that almost suffocated her. In a moment, however, it had passed, and Jacqueline ascribed the pain as due to indigestion. She snuffed out her candles and lay down in the moonlighted bed to sleep.

She dreamed consciously. That is to say, she knew she was sleeping and that her vagaries were unreal. She saw a concourse of great persons assembled to praise her masterpiece. The critics

were assuring her that it was a wonderful beginning, the first fruits of a sublime genius. Jacqueline trembled with a joy that was too strong for her to bear. Her intention grew to abandon the world and the puppets with whom she had so long amused herself, and turn all her powers to the labors for which she had been born. She became hot and cold. Her excessive ecstasy was almost disagreeable.

The applause is deafening. The boom of it goes to her head and gives her dizziness. Ah — who is this? Why, it is Dave Goddard — a bouquet — yellow roses, yellow roses, yellow roses — where had she seen roses just like them before? Well, no matter. Thetis is singing the grand aria to the accompaniment of musical fountains that had been her greatest effort. The harmonies lose themselves in the fury of an electrical storm, and the bassoons and oboes throb and moan to a pitch that is almost an agony. Then the voice — what a voice, to be sure! — it rises like liquid pearl above the abating dissonances, and the violins soar back to the wild melody led on by the diva's triumphant notes, and it is all hers! her own! Ah! here is Dave again. He places his hand upon his breast pocket, without answering, and then stretches it toward her with something dark in the palm. Is it the withered rose? No; it is a clot of blood!

She recoils and turns from the darkness to the moonlight, but something screens her from the pure ray. It is the shadow of a form.

"Come," it speaks. "I am quitting the earth, and I am here to fulfil my vow."

His hand held her heart fast. He gripped it with all his strength. She turned again, away from the moon, and the awful spasm passed. The vapory figure moved to the other side of the bed, following her; it seemed a shade less dark than the room.

"Come," said the voice again. "You were my death; if I am yours there will be no blame. Come."

"Let me see your face," she thought. He understood without her speaking. He turned toward the moon. "Yes," her mind answered, "you are Cesare." He neared his shadow and she tried to turn again. An old expedient occurred to her. "Do you love me still, Cesare?"

“It matters not,” said the voice. “Come.”

He laid his hand on her heart again ; the touch was cool enough to refresh. His fingers folded about it, close and closer. She writhed away from him, but he held her back by the heart all the while — and then there was peace.

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At ten o'clock Jacqueline had not arisen ; in an hour the guests would arrive. Miss Pauline read her newspaper and called Dave Goddard to surprise him with the facts of a published cablegram. “Is he Jacqueline's Italian ?” inquired Mr. Goddard casually. “It is too bad.”

Miss Pauline mounted to her niece's room. A pity to awaken her, but the suburban train was rarely overdue.

“My love,” she whispered, her voice growing gradually louder, “every one will be coming before our precious genius is awake. Will you get up now, little one ? Come, dear — why ! the child is like ice ! Jacqueline ! Open your eyes — look at me, darling ! — My God, you have taken her ! Dead ! Dead !”

