

# CORLEONE

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# CORLEONE

A Tale of Sicily

By F. MARION CRAWFORD

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## CHAPTER I

'If you never mean to marry, you might as well turn priest, too,' said Ippolito Saracinesca to his elder brother, Orsino, with a laugh.

'Why?' asked Orsino, without a smile. 'It would be as sensible to say that a man who had never seen some particular thing, about which he has heard much, might as well put out his eyes.'

The young priest laughed again, took up the cigar he had laid upon the edge of the piano, puffed at it till it burned freely, and then struck two or three chords of a modulation. A sheet of ruled paper on which several staves of music were roughly jotted down in pencil stood on the rack of the instrument.

Orsino stretched out his long legs, leaned back in his low chair, and stared at the old gilded rosettes in the square divisions of the carved ceiling. He was a discontented man, and knew it, which made his discontent a matter for self-reproach, especially as it was quite clear to him that the cause of it lay in himself.

He had made two great mistakes at the beginning of life, when barely of age, and though neither of them had ultimately produced any serious material consequences, they had affected his naturally melancholic temper and had brought out his inherited hardness of disposition. At the time of the great building speculations in Rome, several years earlier, he had foolishly involved himself with his father's old enemy, Ugo del Ferice, and had found himself at last altogether in the latter's power, though not in reality his debtor. At the same time, he

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had fallen very much in love with a young widow, who, loving him very sincerely in her turn, but believing, for many reasons, that if she married him she would be doing him an irreparable injury, had sacrificed herself by marrying Del Ferice instead, selling herself to the banker for Orsino's release, without the latter's knowledge. When it was all over, Orsino had found himself a disappointed man at an age when most young fellows are little more than inexperienced boys, and the serious disposition which he inherited from his mother made it impossible for him to throw off the

impression received, and claim the youth, so to speak, which was still his.

Since that time, he had been attracted by women, but never charmed; and those that attracted him were for the most part not marriageable, any more than the few things which sometimes interested and amused him were in any sense profitable. He spent a good deal of money in a careless way, for his father was generous; but his rather bitter experience when he had attempted to occupy himself with business had made him cool and clear-headed, so that he never did anything at all ruinous. The hot temper which he had inherited from his father and grandfather now rarely, if ever, showed itself, and it seemed as though nothing could break through the quiet indifference which had become a second outward nature to him. He had travelled much, of late years, and when he made an effort his conversation was not uninteresting, though the habit of looking at both sides of every question made it cold and unenthusiastic. Perhaps it was a hopeful sign that he generally had a definite opinion as to which of two views he preferred, though he would not take any trouble to convince others that he was right.

In his own family, he liked the company of Ippolito best. The latter was about two years younger than he, and very different from him in almost every way. Orsino was tall, strongly built, extremely dark; Ippolito was of medium height, delicately made, and almost fair by comparison. Orsino had lean brown hands, well knit at the base, and broad at the knuckles; Ippolito's were slender and white, and rather nervous, with blue veins at the joints, the tips of the fingers pointed, the thumb unusually delicate and long, the nails naturally polished.

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The elder brother's face, with its large and energetic lines, its gravely indifferent expression and dusky olive hue, contrasted at every point with the features of the young priest, soft in outline,

modelled in wax rather than chiselled in bronze, pale and a little transparent, instead of swarthy,—feminine, perhaps, in the best sense of the word, as it can be applied to a man. Ippolito had the clear, soft brown eyes which very gifted people so often have, especially musicians and painters of more talent than power. But about the fine, even, and rather pale lips there was the unmistakable stamp of the ascetic temperament, together with an equally sure indication of a witty humour which could be keen, but would rather be gentle. Ippolito was said to resemble his mother's mother, and was notably different in appearance and manner from the rest of the numerous family to which he belonged.

He was a priest by vocation rather than by choice. Had he chosen deliberately a profession congenial to his gifts, he would certainly have devoted himself altogether to music, though he would probably never have become famous as a composer; for he lacked the rough creative power which hews out great conceptions, though he possessed in a high degree the taste and skill which can lightly and lovingly and wisely impart fine detail to the broad beauty of a well-planned whole. But by vocation he was a priest, and the strength of the conviction of his conscience left the gifts of his artistic intelligence no power to choose. He was a churchman with all his soul, and a musician with all his heart.

Between the two brothers there was that sort of close friendship which sometimes exists between persons who are too wholly different to understand each other, but whose non-understanding is a constant stimulant of interest on both sides. In the midst of the large and peaceable patriarchal establishment in which they lived, and in which each member made for himself or herself an existence which had in it a certain subdued individuality, Orsino and Ippolito were particularly associated, and the priest, when he was at home, was generally to be found in his elder brother's sitting-room, and kept a good many of his possessions there.

It was a big room, with an old carved and gilded ceiling,

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three tall windows opening to the floor, two doors, a marble fireplace, a thick old carpet, and a great deal of furniture of many old and new designs, arranged with no regard to anything except usefulness, since Orsino was not afflicted with artistic tastes, nor with any undue appreciation of useless objects. Ippolito's short grand piano occupied a prominent position near the middle window, and not far from it was Orsino's deep chair, beside which stood a low table covered with books and reviews. For, like most discontented and disappointed people who have no real object in life, Orsino Saracinesca read a good deal, and hankered after interest in fiction because he found none in reality. Ippolito, on the contrary, read little, and thought much.

After Orsino had answered his remark about marriage, the priest busied himself for some time with his music, while his brother stared at the ceiling in silence, listening to the modulations and the fragments of tentative melody and experimental harmony, without in the least understanding what the younger man was trying to express. He was fond of any musical sound, in an undefined way, as most Italians are, and he knew by experience that if he let Ippolito alone something pleasant to hear would before long be evolved. But Ippolito stopped suddenly and turned half round on the piano stool, with a quick movement habitual to him. He leaned forward towards Orsino, tapping the ends of his fingers lightly against one another, as his wrists rested on his knees.

'It is absurd to suppose that in all Rome, or in all Europe, for that matter, there is nobody whom you would be willing to marry.'

'Quite absurd, I suppose,' answered Orsino, not looking at his brother.

'Then you have not really looked about you for a wife. That is clear.'



'Perfectly clear. I do not argue the point. Why should I? There is plenty of time, and besides, there is no reason in the world why I should ever marry at all, any more than you. There are our two younger brothers. Let them take wives and continue the name.'

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'Most people think that marriage may be regarded as a means of happiness,' observed Ippolito.

'Most people are imbeciles,' answered Orsino gloomily.

Ippolito laughed, watching his brother's face, but he said nothing in reply.

'As a general rule,' Orsino continued presently, 'talking is a question of height and not of intelligence. The shorter men and women are, the more they talk; the taller they are, the more silent they are, in nine cases out of ten. Of course there are exceptions, but you can generally tell at a glance whether any particular person is a great talker. Brains are certainly not measurable by inches. Therefore conversation has nothing to do with brains. Therefore most people are fools.'

'Do you call that an argument?' asked the priest, still smiling.

'No. It is an observation.'

'And what do you deduce from it?'

'From it, and from a great many other things, I deduce and conclude that what we call society is a degrading farce. It encourages talking, when no one has anything to say. It encourages marriage, without love. It sets up fashion against taste, taste against sense, and sense against heart. It is a machinery for promoting emotion among the unfeeling. It is a—'

Orsino stopped, hesitating.

'Is it anything else?' asked Ippolito mildly.

'It is a hell on earth.'

'That is exactly what most of the prophets and saints have said since David,' remarked the priest, moving again in order to find his half-smoked cigar, and then carefully relighting it. 'Since that is your opinion, why not take orders? You might become a prophet or a saint, you know. The first step towards sanctity is to despise the pomps and vanities of this wicked world. You seem to have taken the first step at a jump, with both feet. And it is the first step that costs the most, they say. Courage! You may go far.'

'I am thinking of going further before long,' said Orsino gravely, as though his brother had spoken in earnest. 'At

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all events, I mean to get away from all this,' he added, as though correcting himself.

'Do you mean to travel again?' inquired Ippolito.

'I mean to find something to do. Provided it is respectable, I do not care what it is. If I had talent, like you, I would be a musician, but I would not be an amateur, or I would be an artist, or a literary man. But I have no talent for anything except building tenement houses, and I shall not try that again. I would even be an actor, if I had the gift. Perhaps I should make a good farmer, but our father will not trust me now, for he is afraid that I should make ruinous experiments if he gave me the management of an estate. This is certainly not the time for experiments. Half the people we know are ruined, and the country is almost bankrupt. I do not wish to try experiments. I would work, and they tell me to marry. You cannot understand. You are only an amateur yourself, after all, Ippolito.'

'An amateur musician—yes.'

'No. You are an amateur priest. You support your sensitive soul on a sort of religious ambrosia, with a good deal of musical nectar. Your ideal is to be Cardinal-Protector of the Arts. You are clever and astonishingly good by nature, and you deserve no credit for either. That is probably why I like you. I hate people who deserve credit, because I deserve none myself. But you do not take your clerical profession seriously, and you are an amateur, a dilettante of the altar. If you do not have distractions about the vestments you wear when you are saying mass, it is because you have an intimate, unconscious artistic conviction that they are beautiful and becoming to you. But if the choir responded a flat "Amen" to your "per omnia sæcula sæculorum," it would set your teeth on edge and upset your devout intention at the beginning of the Preface. Do you think that a professional musician would be disturbed in conducting a great orchestra by the fact that his coat collar did not fit?'

Ippolito smiled good humouredly, but did not answer.

'Very well,' continued Orsino at once, 'you are only an amateur priest. It does not matter, since you are happy. You get through life very well. You do not even pretend

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that you do any real work. Your vocation, as you call it, was a liking for the state of priesthood, not for the work of a priest. Now I do not care about any state in particular, but I want work of some sort, at any cost. I was never happy but once, during that time when I worked with Contini and got into trouble. I preferred it to this existence, even when we got into Del Ferice's clutches. Anything rather than this.'

'I thought you had grown indifferent,' said Ippolito.

'Indifferent? Yes, I am indifferent—as a machine is indifferent when the fire is out and there is no steam. But if the thing could

think, it would want work, as I do. It would not be satisfied to rust to pieces. You ought to know a little theology. Are we put into the world with a purpose, or not? Is there an intention in our existence, or is there not? Am I to live through another forty or fifty years of total inactivity because I happen to be born rich, and in a position—well, a position which is really about as enviable as that of a fly in a pot of honey? We are stuck in our traditions, just as the fly is in the honey—'

'I like them,' said Ippolito quietly.

'I know you do. So does our father. They suit you both. Our father is really a very intelligent man, but too much happiness and too much money have paralysed him. His existence seems to have been a condition of perpetual adoration of our mother.'

'He has made her happy. That is worth something.'

'She has made him happy. They have made each other happy. They have devoured a lifetime of happiness together in secret, as though it were their lawful prey. As they never wanted anything else, they never found out that the honey of traditions is sticky, and that they could not move if they would.'

'They are fond of us—'

'Of course. We have none of us done anything very bad. We are a part of their happiness. We are also a part of their dullness; for they are dull, and their happiness makes us dull too.'

'What an idea!'

'It is true. What have we accomplished, any of us four

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brothers? What shall we ever accomplish? We are ornaments on the architecture of our father's and mother's happiness. It is rather a

negative mission in life, you must admit. I am glad that they are happy, but I should like to be something more than a gargoyle on their temple.'

'Then marry, and have a temple of your own!' laughed Ippolito. 'And gargoyles of your own, too.'

'But I do not want that sort of happiness. Marriage is not a profession. It is not a career.'

'No. At least you might not turn a dilettante husband, as you say that I am an amateur priest.' Ippolito laughed again.

Orsino laughed dryly, but did not answer, not being in a humour for jesting. He leaned back in his chair again, and looked at the carved ceiling and thought of what it meant, for it was one of those ceilings which are only to be found in old Roman palaces, and belong intimately to the existence which those old dwellings suggest. Orsino thought of the grim dark walls outside, of the forbidding gateway, of the heavily barred windows on the lower story, of the dark street at the back of the palace, and the mediævalism of it all was as repugnant to him as the atmosphere of a prison.

He had never understood his father nor his grandfather, who both seemed born for such an existence, and who certainly thrived in it; for the old Prince was over ninety years of age, and his son, Sant' Ilario, though now between fifty and sixty, was to all intents and purposes still a young man. Orsino was perhaps as strong as either of them. But he did not believe that he could last as long. In the midst of an enforced idleness he felt the movement of the age about him, and he said to himself that he was in the race of which they were only spectators, and that he was born in times when it was impossible to stand still. It is true that, like many young men of to-day, he took movement for progress and change for improvement, and he had no very profound understanding of the

condition of his own or of other countries. But the movement and the change are facts from which no one can escape who has had a modern education.

Giovanni Saracinesca, Orsino's father, known as Prince of Sant' Ilario, since the old Prince Saracinesca was still living, had

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not had a modern education, and his mother had died when he was a mere child. Brought up by men, among men, he had reached manhood early, in close daily association with his father and with a strong natural admiration for him, though with an equally strong sense of personal independence.

Orsino's youth had been different. He was not an only son as Sant' Ilario had been, but the eldest of four brothers, and he had been brought up by his mother as well as by his father and grandfather. There had been less room for his character to develop freely, since the great old house had been gradually filled by a large family. At the same time there had also been less room for old-fashioned prejudices and traditions than formerly, and a good deal less respect for them, as there had been, too, a much more lively consciousness of the outer world's movements. The taking of Rome in 1870 was the death-blow of mediævalism; and the passing away of King Victor Emmanuel and of Pope Pius the Ninth was the end of Italian romanticism, if one may use the expression to designate all that concatenation of big and little events which make up the thrilling story of the struggle for Italian unity. After the struggle for unity, began the struggle for life,—more desperate, more dangerous, but immeasurably less romantic. There is all the difference which lies between banking and fighting.

And Orsino was aware of qualities and feelings and opinions in his father and mother which he did not possess, but which excited in him a sort of envy of what he regarded as their simplicity. Each

seemed to have wanted but one thing in life since he could remember them, and that was the other's love, in possessing which each was satisfied and happy. Times might change as they would, popes might die, kings might be crowned, parties might wrangle in political strife, and the whole country might live through its perilous joys of sudden prosperity and turn sour again in the ferment that follows failure,—it was all the same to Giovanni and Corona. As Orsino had told his brother, they had devoured a lifetime of happiness together in secret. He would have added that they had left none for others, and in a sense it might have been true. But he preferred not to say it, even to Ippolito;

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for it would have sounded bitter, whereas Orsino believed himself to be only indifferent.

Proud men and women hide their griefs and sufferings, when they have any. But there are some who are so very proud that they will hide their happiness also, as though it might lose some of its strength if anyone else could see it, or as if it could be spoiled by the light like a photograph not yet fixed. People sometimes call that instinct the selfishness of love, but it is more like a sort of respect for love itself which is certainly not vulgar, as all selfishness is.

It was not probable that either Giovanni or Corona should change in this respect, nor, indeed, in any other, for they had never been changeable or capricious people, and time had made solid their lives. To each other they were as they had always been, but to others Giovanni was a man advanced in middle life and the beautiful Corona Saracinesca was a rose of yesterday.

She could never be anything but beautiful, even if she should live to extreme old age; but those who had known her in her youth had begun to shake their heads sadly, lamenting the glory departed, and seeing only in recollection a vision of it, while they could not see

the value of what remained nor appreciate something which had come with years. Strangers who came to Rome and saw the Princess of Sant' Ilario for the first time, gazed in silent surprise at the woman who for nearly a quarter of a century had been the most beautiful in Europe, and they wondered whether, even now, anyone could be compared with her.

The degeneration of age had not taken hold upon her. The perfect features were as calm and regular as fate, the dark skin had still its clear, warm, olive tint, which very rarely changed at all perceptibly; her splendid eyes were truthful and direct still, beneath the strong black eyebrows. There were silver threads in the magnificent hair, but they were like the lights on a raven's wing. She was straight and strong and graceful still, she had been compared to velvet and steel—slighter perhaps than in her full perfection, for she had in her some of that good Saracen blood of the south, which seems to nourish only the stronger and the finer tissues, consuming in

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time all that is useless; wearing away the velvet, but leaving the steel intact almost to the very last.

There could be but one such woman in one race, and it seemed in some way natural that she should have been sisterless, and should have borne only sons. But as though nature would not be altogether defeated and stayed out of balance, the delicate feminine element had come to the surface in one of the Saracinesca men. It was too fine to be womanish, too high to be effeminate, as it showed itself in Ippolito, the priest-musician. But it was unmistakably something which was neither in the old Prince, nor in Giovanni, nor in any of the other three brothers, and it made between him and his mother a bond especially their own, which the rest acknowledged without understanding, and respected without feeling that Ippolito was preferred before them. For it was not a preference, but a stronger



mutual attraction, in which there was no implied unfairness to the rest.

It is one of the hardest things in the world to explain, and yet almost everyone understands it, for it has nothing to do with language, and everything to do with feeling. We human beings need language most to explain what is most remote from our humanity, and those who talk the most of feeling are often those that feel the least. For conveying a direct impression, what is the sharpened conciseness of Euclid, or the polished eloquence of Demosthenes, what is the sledgehammer word blow of Æschylus, or the lightning thrust of Dante's two-edged tongue, compared with a kiss, or a girl's blush, or the touch of a mother's hand—or the silent certainty of two-fold thought in one, which needs neither blush, nor touch, nor kiss to say that love is all, and all is love?

And that bond which is sometimes between mother and son is of this kind. It is not strange, either, that the father who looks on should misunderstand it, since it is the most especially human feeling which is often the least comprehensible to those who do not feel it, for the very reason that language cannot convey the impression of it to others. Nothing is less ridiculous than love, except death. Yet a man in love is very frequently ridiculous in the eyes of his friends and of the world, the more so in proportion as he shows the more plainly

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what he feels. Yet most of those who laugh at him have probably been in love themselves. A cynic would say that the humour of it lies in the grim certainty which others feel that it cannot last. Fear is terribly real to him who feels it, but a man who is frightened without cause is always laughable and generally contemptible. It is true that whereas we are all human and feel humanly, humanity is very hard to understand—because understanding is not feeling, any more than the knowledge of evil is temptation, or than the

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