

## PART II.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### THE DUSTING OF THE BOOKS.

IT was now more than three weeks since Bernardine's return to London. She had gone back to her old home, at her uncle's second-hand book-shop. She spent her time in dusting the books, and arranging them in some kind of order; for old Zerviah Holme had ceased to interest himself much in his belongings, and sat in the little inner room reading as usual Gibbon's *History of Rome*. Customers might please themselves about coming: Zerviah Holme had never cared about amassing money, and now he cared even less than before. A frugal breakfast, a frugal dinner, a box full of snuff, and a shelf full of Gibbon were the old man's only require-

ments: an undemanding life, and therefore a loveless one; since the less we ask for, the less we get.

When Malvina his wife died, people said, "He will miss her."

But he did not seem to miss her; he took his breakfast, his pinch of snuff, his Gibbon, in precisely the same way as before, and in the same quantities.

When Bernardine first fell ill, people said: "He will be sorry. He is fond of her in his own queer way."

But he did not seem to be sorry. He did not understand anything about illness. The thought of it worried him; so he put it from him. He remembered vaguely that Bernardine's father had suddenly become ill, that his powers had all failed him, and that he lingered on, just a wreck of humanity, and then died. That was twenty years ago. Then he thought of Bernardine, and said to himself, "History repeats itself." That was all.

Unkind? No: for when it was told him that she must go away, he looked at her wonderingly, and then went out. It was very rarely that he went out. He came back with fifty pounds.

"When that is done," he told her, "I can find more."

Went she went away, people said: "He will be lonely."

But he did not seem to be lonely. They asked him once, and he said: "I always have Gibbon."

And when she came back, they said: "He will be glad."

But her return seemed to make no difference to him.

He looked at her in his usual sighless manner, and asked her what she intended to do.

"I shall dust the books," she said.

"Ah, I dare say they want it," he remarked.

"I shall get a little teaching to do," she continued. "And I shall take care of you."

"Ah," he said vaguely. He did not understand what she meant. She had never been very

near to him, and he had never been very near to her. He had taken but little notice of her comings and goings; she had either never tried to win his interest or had failed: probably the latter. Now she was going to take care of him.

This was the home to which Bernardine had returned. She came back with many resolutions to help to make his old age bright. She looked back now, and saw how little she had given of herself to her aunt and her uncle. Aunt Malvina was dead, and Bernardine did not regret her. Uncle Zerviah was here still; she would be tender with him, and win his affection. She thought she could not begin better than by looking after his books. Each one was dusted carefully. The dingy old shop was restored to cleanliness. Bernardine became interested in her task. "I will work up the business," she thought. She did not care in the least about the books; she never looked into them except to clean them; but she was thankful to have the occupation at hand: something to help her over

a difficult time. For the most trying part of an illness is when we are ill no longer; when there is no excuse for being idle and listless, when, in fact, we could work if we would: then is the moment for us to begin on anything which presents itself, until we have the courage and the inclination to go back to our own particular work: that which we have longed to do, and about which we now care nothing.

So Bernardine dusted books, and sometimes sold them. All the time she thought of the Disagreeable Man. She missed him in her life. She had never loved before, and she loved him. The forlorn figure rose before her, and her eyes filled with tears. Sometimes the tears fell on the books and spotted them.

Still, on the whole, she was bright, but she found things difficult. She had lost her old enthusiasms, and nothing yet had taken their place. She went back to the circle of her acquaintances, and found that she had slipped away from touch with them. Whilst she had

been ill, they had been busily at work on matters social and educational and political. She thought them hard, the women, especially; they thought her weak. They were disappointed in her; she was now looking for the more human qualities in them, and she, too, was disappointed.

"You have changed," they said to her: "but then, of course, you have been ill, haven't you?"

With these strong, active people to be ill and useless is a reproach. And Bernardine felt it as such. But she had changed, and she herself perceived it in many ways. It was not that she was necessarily better, but that she was different; probably more human and probably less self-confident. She had lived in a world of books, and she had burst through that bondage and come out into a wider and a freer land.

New sorts of interests came into her life. What she had lost in strength she had gained in tenderness. Her very manner was gentler, her mode of speech less assertive. At least, this was the

criticism of those who had liked her but little before her illness.

"She has learnt," they said amongst themselves. And they were not scholars. They *knew*.

These, two or three of them, drew her nearer to them. She was alone there with the old man, and, though better, needed care. They mothered her as well as they could, at first timidly, and then with that sweet despotism which is for us all an easy yoke to bear. They were drawn to her as they had never been drawn before. They felt that she was no longer analyzing them, weighing them in her intellectual balance, and finding them wanting; so they were free with her now, and revealed to her qualities at which she had never guessed before.

As the days went on, Zerviah began to notice that things were somehow different. He found some flowers near his table. He was reading about Nero at the time; but he put aside his Gibbon, and fondled the flowers instead. Bernardine did not know that.

One morning when she was out, he went into the shop and saw a great change there. Some one had been busy at work. The old man was pleased: he loved his books, though of late he had neglected them.

"She never used to take any interest in them," he said to himself "I wonder why she does now."

He began to count upon seeing her. When she came back from her outings, he was glad. But she did not know. If he had given any sign of welcome to her during those first difficult days, it would have been a great encouragement to her.

He watched her feeding the sparrows. One day when she was not there, he went and did the same. Another day when she had forgotten, he surprised her by reminding her.

"You have forgotten to feed the sparrows," he said. "They must be quite hungry."

That seemed to break the ice a little. The next morning when she was arranging some books in the old shop, he came in and watched her

"It is a comfort to have you," he said. That was all he said, but Bernardine flushed with pleasure.

"I wish I had been more to you all these years," she said gently.

He did not quite take that in: and returned hastily to Gibbon.

Then they began to stroll out together. They had nothing to talk about: he was not interested in the outside world, and she was not interested in Roman History. But they were trying to get nearer to each other: they had lived years together, but they had never advanced a step; now they were trying, she consciously, he unconsciously. But it was a slow process, and pathetic, as everything human is.

"If we could only find some subject which we both liked," Bernardine thought to herself. "That might knit us together."

Well, they found a subject; though, perhaps, it was an unlikely one. The cart-horses: those great, strong, patient toilers of the road attracted

their attention, and after that no walk was without its pleasure or interest. The brewers' horses were the favorites, though there were others, too, which met with their approval. He began to know and recognize them. He was almost like a child in his new-found interest. On Whit Monday they both went to the cart-horse parade in Regent's Park. They talked about the enjoyment for days afterwards.

"Next year," he told her, "we must subscribe to the fund, even if we have to sell a book."

He did not like to sell his books: he parted with them painfully, as some people part with their illusions.

Bernardine bought a paper for herself every day; but one evening she came in without one. She had been seeing after some teaching, and had without any difficulty succeeded in getting some temporary light work at one of the high schools. She forgot to buy her newspaper.

The old man noticed this. He put on his

shabby felt hat, and went down the street, and brought in a copy of the *Daily News*.

"I don't remember what you like, but will this do?" he asked.

He was quite proud of himself for showing her this attention, almost as proud as the Disagreeable Man, when he did something kind and thoughtful.

Bernardine thought of him, and the tears came into her eyes at once. When did she not think of him? Then she glanced at the front sheet, and in the death column her eye rested on his name: and she read that Robert Allitsen's mother had passed away. So the Disagreeable Man had won his freedom at last. His words echoed back to her:

"But I know how to wait: if I have not learnt anything else, I have learnt how to wait. And some day I shall be free. And then...."

## CHAPTER II.

### BERNARDINE BEGINS HER BOOK.

AFTER the announcement of Mrs. Allitsen's death, Bernardine lived in a misery of suspense. Every day she scanned the obituary, fearing to find the record of another death, fearing and yet wishing to know. The Disagreeable Man had yearned for his freedom these many years, and now he was at liberty to do what he chose with his poor life. It was of no value to him. Many a time she sat and shuddered. Many a time she began to write to him. Then she remembered that after all he had cared nothing for her companionship. He would not wish to hear from her. And besides, what had she to say to him?

A feeling of desolation came over her. It was not enough for her to take care of the old man who was drawing nearer to her every day; nor

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was it enough for her to dust the books, and serve any chance customers who might look in. In the midst of her trouble she remembered some of her old ambitions; and she turned to them for comfort as we turn to old friends.

"I will try to begin my book," she said to herself. "If I can only get interested in it, I shall forget my anxiety."

But the love of her work had left her. Bernardine fretted. She sat in the old book shop, her pen unused, her paper uncovered. She was very miserable.

Then one evening when she was feeling that it was of no use trying to force herself to begin her book, she took her pen suddenly, and wrote the following prologue.

### CHAPTER III.

#### FAILURE AND SUCCESS: A PROLOGUE.

FAILURE and Success passed away from Earth, and found themselves in a Foreign Land. Success still wore her laurel wreath which she had won on Earth. There was a look of ease about her whole appearance; and there was a smile of pleasure and satisfaction on her face, as though she knew she had done well and had deserved her honors.

Failure's head was bowed: no laurel wreath encircled it. Her face was wan and pain-engraved. She had once been beautiful and hopeful, but she had long since lost both hope and beauty. They stood together, these two, waiting for an audience with the Sovereign of the Foreign Land. An old grey-haired man came to them and asked their names.

"I am Success," said Success, advancing a

step forward, and smiling at him, and pointing to her laurel-wreath.

He shook his head.

"Ah," he said, "do not be too confident. Very often things go by opposites in this land. What you call Success, we often call Failure; what you call Failure, we call Success. Do you see those two men waiting there? The one nearer to us was thought to be a good man in your world; the other was generally accounted bad. But here we call the bad man good, and the good man bad. That seems strange to you. Well, then, look yonder. You considered that statesman to be sincere; but we say he was insincere. We chose as our poet-laureate a man at whom your world scoffed. Ay, and those flowers yonder: for us they have a fragrant charm; we love to see them near us. But you do not even take the trouble to pluck them from the hedges where they grow in rich profusion. So, you see, what we value as a treasure, you do not value at all."



Then he turned to Failure.

"And your name?" he asked kindly, though indeed he must have known it.

"I am Failure," she said sadly.

He took her by the hand.

"Come, now, Success," he said to her: "let me lead you into the Presence-Chamber."

Then she who had been called Failure, and was now called Success, lifted up her bowed head, and raised her weary frame, and smiled at the music of her new name. And with that smile she regained her beauty and her hope. And hope having come back to her all her strength returned.

"But what of her?" she asked regretfully of the old grey-haired man; "must she be left?"

"She will learn," the old man whispered. "She is learning already. Come, now, we must not linger."

So she of the new name passed into the Presence-Chamber.

But the Sovereign said:

"The world needs you, dear and honored worker. You know your real name: do not heed what the world may call you. Go back and work, but take with you this time unconquerable hope."

So she went back and worked, taking with her unconquerable hope, and the sweet remembrance of the Sovereign's words, and the gracious music of her Real Name.

## CHAPTER IV.

## THE DISAGREEABLE MAN GIVES UP HIS FREEDOM.

THE morning after Bernardine began her book, she and old Zerviah were sitting together in the shop. He had come from the little inner room where he had been reading Gibbon for the last two hours. He still held the volume in his hand; but he did not continue reading, he watched her arranging the pages of a dilapidated book.

Suddenly she looked up from her work.

"Uncle Zerviah," she said brusquely, "you have lived through a long life, and must have passed through many different experiences. Was there ever a time when you cared for people rather than books?"

"Yes," he answered a little uneasily. He was not accustomed to have questions asked of him.

"Tell me about it," she said.

"It was long ago," he said half dreamily, "long before I married Malvina. And she died. That was all."

"That was all," repeated Bernardine, looking at him wonderingly. Then she drew nearer to him.

"And you have loved, Uncle Zerviah? And you were loved?"

"Yes, indeed," he answered softly.

"Then you would not laugh at me if I were to unburden my heart to you?"

For answer, she felt the touch of his old hand on her head. And thus encouraged, she told him the story of the Disagreeable Man. She told him how she had never before loved any one until she loved the Disagreeable Man.

It was all very quietly told, in a simple and dignified manner: nevertheless, for all that, it was an unburdening of her heart; her listener being an old scholar who had almost forgotten the very name of love.

She was still talking and he was still listening, when the shop door creaked. Zerviah crept quietly away, and Bernardine looked up.

The Disagreeable Man stood at the counter.

"You little thing," he said; "I have come to see you. It is eight years since I was in England."

Bernardine leaned over the counter.

"And you ought not to be here now," she said, looking at his thin face. He seemed to have shrunk away since she had last seen him.

"I am free to do what I choose," he said. "My mother is dead."

"I know," Bernardine said gently. "But you are not free."

He made no answer to that, but slipped into the chair.

"You look tired," he said. "What have you been doing?"

"I have been dusting the books," she answered, smiling at him. "You remember you told me I should be content to do that.

The very oldest and shabbiest have had my tenderest care. I found the shop in disorder. You see it now."

"I should not call it particularly tidy now," he said grimly. "Still, I suppose you have done your best. Well, and what else?"

"I have been trying to take care of my old uncle," she said. "We are just beginning to understand each other a little. And he is beginning to feel glad to have me. When I first discovered that, the days became easier to me. It makes us into dignified persons when we find out that there is a place for us to fill."

"Some people never find it out," he said.

"Probably like myself, they went on for a long time without caring," she answered. "I think I have had more luck than I deserve."

"Well," said the Disagreeable Man. "And you are glad to take up your life again?"

"No," she said quietly. "I have not got as far as that yet. But I believe that after some little time I may be glad: I hope so, I am

working for that. Sometimes I begin to have a keen interest in everything. I wake up with an enthusiasm. After about two hours I have lost it again."

"Poor little child," he said tenderly. "I, too, know what that is. But you *will* get back to gladness: not the same kind of satisfaction as before; some other satisfaction, that compensation which is said to be included in the scheme."

"And I have begun my book," she said, pointing to a few sheets lying on the counter; that is to say, I have written the Prologue."

"Then the dusting of the books has not sufficed?" he he said, scanning her curiously!

"I wanted not to think of myself," Bernardine said. "Now that I have begun it, I shall enjoy going on with it. I hope it will be a companion to me."

"I wonder whether you will make a failure or a success of it?" he remarked. "I wish I could have seen."

"So you will," she said. "I shall finish it, and you will read it in Petershof."

"I shall not be going back to Petershof," he said. "Why should I go there now?"

"For the same reason that you went there eight years ago," she said.

"I went there for my mother's sake," he said.

"Then you will go there now for my sake," she said deliberately.

He looked up quickly.

"Little Bernardine," he cried, "my little Bernardine—is it possible that you care what becomes of me?"

She had been leaning against the counter, and now she raised herself, and stood erect, a proud, dignified little figure.

"Yes, I do care," she said simply, and with true earnestness. "I care with all my heart. And even if I did not care, you know you would not be free. No one is free. You know that better than I do. We do not belong to ourselves: there are countless people depend-

ing on us, people whom we have never seen, and whom we never shall see. What we do, decides what they will be."

He still did not speak.

"But it is not for those others that I plead," she continued. "I plead for myself. I can't spare you, indeed, indeed I can't spare you!—"

Her voice trembled, but she went on bravely.

"So you will go back to the mountains," she said. "You will live out your life like a man. Others may prove themselves cowards, but the Disagreeable Man has a better part to play."

He still did not speak. Was it that he could not trust himself to words? But in that brief time, the thoughts which passed through his mind were such as to overwhelm him. A picture rose up before him: a picture of a man and woman leading their lives together, each happy in the other's love; not a love born of fancy, but a love based on comradeship and true understanding of the soul. The picture faded, and the Disagreeable Man raised his eyes

and looked at the little figure standing near him.

"Little child, little child," he said wearily, "since it is your wish, I will go back to the mountains."

Then he bent over the counter, and put his hand on hers.

"I will come and see you to-morrow," he said, "I think there are one or two things I want to say to you."

The next moment he was gone.

In the afternoon of that same day Bernardine went to the city. She was not unhappy: she had been making plans for herself. She would work hard, and fill her life as full as possible. There should be no room for unhealthy thought. She would go and spend her holidays in Petershof. There would be pleasure in that for him and for her. She would tell him so to-morrow. She knew he would be glad.

"Above all," she said to herself, "there shall

be no room for unhealthy thought. I must cultivate my garden."

That was what she was thinking of at four in the afternoon: how she could best cultivate her garden.

At five she was lying unconscious in the accident-ward of the New Hospital: she had been knocked down by a wagon, and terribly injured.

"She will not recover," the doctor said to the nurse. "You see she is sinking rapidly. Poor little thing!"

At six she regained consciousness, and opened her eyes. The nurse bent over her. Then she whispered:

"Tell the Disagreeable Man how I wish I could have seen him to-morrow. We had so much to say to each other. And now——"

The brown eyes looked at the nurse so entreatingly. It was a long time before she could forget the pathos of those brown eyes.

A few minutes later, she made another sign as

though she wished to speak. Nurse Katharine bent nearer. Then she whispered:

"Tell the Disagreeable Man to go back to the mountains, and begin to build his bridge: it must be strong and——"

Bernardine died.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE BUILDING OF THE BRIDGE.

ROBERT ALLITSEN came to the old bookshop to see Zerviah Holme before returning to the mountains. He found him reading Gibbon. These two men had stood by Bernardine's grave.

"I was beginning to know her," the old man said.

"I have always known her," the young man said. "I cannot remember a time when she has not been part of my life."

"She loved you," Zerviah said. "She was telling me so the very morning when you came."

Then, with a tenderness which was almost foreign to him, Zerviah told Robert Allitsen how Bernardine had opened her heart to him. She

had never loved any one before: but she had loved the Disagreeable Man.

"I did not love him because I was sorry for him," she had said. "I loved him for himself." Those were her very words.

"Thank you," said the Disagreeable Man. "And God bless you for telling me."

Then he added:

"There were some few loose sheets of paper on the counter. She had begun her book. May I have them?"

Zerviah placed them in his hand.

"And this photograph," the old man said kindly. "I will spare it for you."

The picture of the little thin eager face was folded up with the papers.

The two men parted.

Zerviah Holme went back to his Roman History. The Disagreeable Man went back to the mountains: to live his life out there, and to build his bridge, as we all do, whether con-

sciously or unconsciously. If it breaks down,  
we build it again.

“We will build it stronger this time,” we say  
to ourselves.

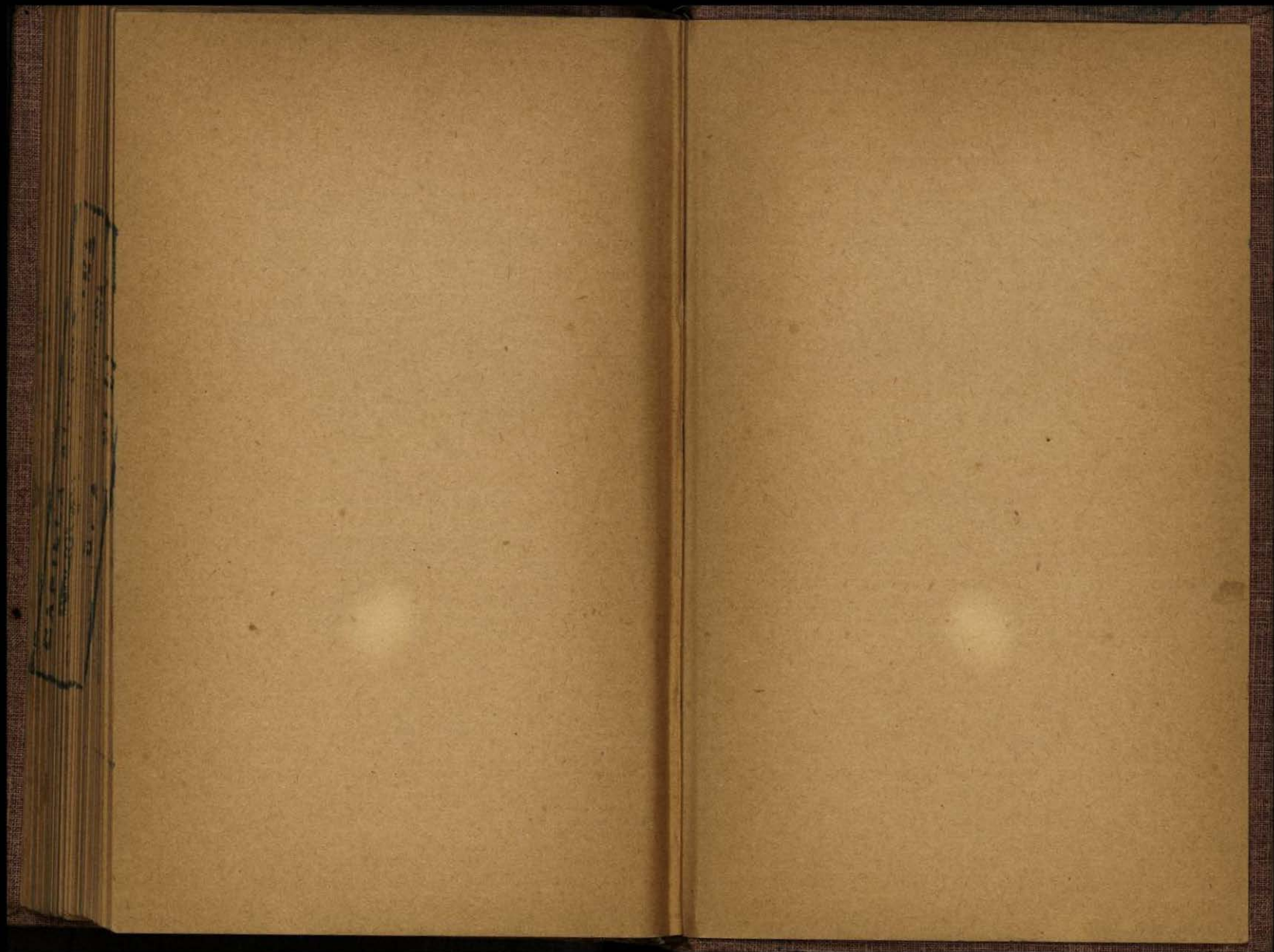
So we begin once more.

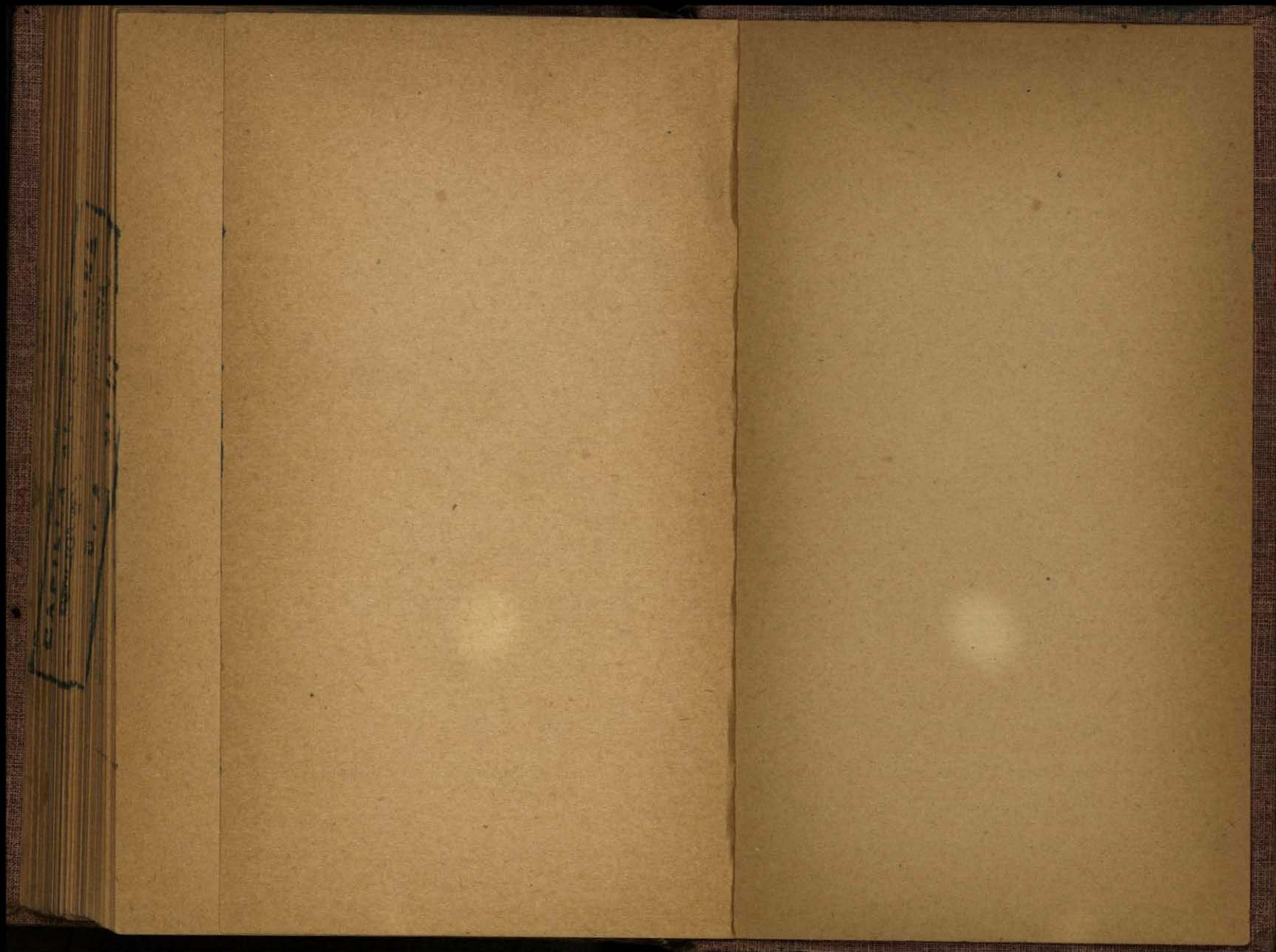
We are very patient.

And meanwhile the years pass.

THE END.







CAPILLA ALFONSINA

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