

Sunrise eBook

Sunrise by William Black

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CHAPTER I.

A first interview.

One chilly afternoon in February, while as yet the London season had not quite begun, though the streets were busy enough, an open barouche was being rapidly driven along Piccadilly in the direction of Coventry Street; and its two occupants, despite the dull roar of vehicles around them, seemed to be engaged in eager conversation. One of these two was a tall, handsome, muscular-looking man of about thirty, with a sun-tanned face, piercing gray eyes, and a reddish-brown beard cropped in the foreign fashion; the other, half hidden among the voluminous furs of the carriage, was a pale, humpbacked lad, with a fine, expressive, intellectual face, and large, animated, almost woman-like eyes. The former was George Brand, of Brand Beeches, Bucks, a bachelor unattached, and a person of no particular occupation, except that he had tumbled about the world a good deal, surveying mankind with more or less of interest or indifference. His companion and friend, the bright-eyed, beautiful-faced, humpbacked lad, was Ernest Francis D'Agincourt, thirteenth Baron Evelyn.

The discussion was warm, though the elder of the two friends spoke deprecatingly, at times even scornfully.

"I know what is behind all that," he said. "They are making a dupe of you, Evelyn. A parcel of miserable Leicester Square conspirators, plundering the working-man of all countries of his small savings, and humbugging him with promises of twopenny-halfpenny revolutions! That is not the sort of thing for you to mix in. It is not English, all that dagger and dark-lantern business, even if it were real; but when it is only theatrical—when they are only stage daggers—when the wretched creatures who mouth about assassination and revolution are only swaggering for half-pence—bah! What part do you propose to play?"

"I tell you it has nothing to do with daggers and dark lanterns," said the other with even greater warmth. "Why will you run your head against a windmill? Why must you see farther into a mile-stone than anybody else? I wonder, with all your travelling, you have not got rid of some of that detestable English prejudice and suspicion. I tell you that when I am allowed, even as an outsider, to see something of this vast organization for the defence of the oppressed, for the protection of the weak, the vindication of the injured, in every country throughout the globe—when I see the splendid possibilities before it—when I find that even a useless fellow like myself may do some little thing to lessen the mighty mass of injustice and wrong in the world—well, I am not going to stop to see that every one of my associates is of pure English birth, with a brother-in-law on the Bench, and an uncle in the House of Lords. I am glad enough to have something to do that is worth doing; something to believe in; something to hope for. You—what do you believe in? What is there in heaven or earth that you believe in?"

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"Suppose I say that I believe in you, Evelyn?" said his friend, quite good-naturedly; "and some day, when you can convince me that your newly discovered faith is all right, you may find me becoming your meek disciple, and even your apostle. But I shall want something more than Union speeches, you know."

By this time the carriage had passed along Coventry Street, turned into Prince's Street, and been pulled up opposite a commonplace-looking house in that distinctly dingy thoroughfare, Lisle Street, Soho.

"Not quite Leicester Square, but near enough to serve," said Brand, with a contemptuous laugh, as he got out of the barouche, and then, with the greatest of care and gentleness, assisted his companion to alight.

They crossed the pavement and rang a bell. Almost instantly the door was opened by a stout, yellow-haired, blear-eyed old man, who wore a huge overcoat adorned with masses of shabby fur, and who carried a small lamp in his hand, for the afternoon had grown to dusk. The two visitors were evidently expected. Having given the younger of them a deeply respectful greeting in German, the fur-coated old gentleman shut the door after them, and proceeded to show the way up a flight of narrow and not particularly clean wooden stairs.

"Conspiracy doesn't seem to pay," remarked George Brand, half to himself.

On the landing they were confronted by a number of doors, one of which the old German threw open. They entered a large, plainly furnished, well-lit room, looking pretty much like a merchant's office, though the walls were mostly hung with maps and plans of foreign cities. Brand looked round with a supercilious air. All his pleasant and friendly manner had gone. He was evidently determined to make himself as desperately disagreeable as an Englishman can make himself when introduced to a foreigner whom he suspects. But even he would have had to confess that there was no suggestion of trap-doors or sliding panels in this ordinary, business-like room; and not a trace of a dagger or a dark lantern anywhere.

Presently, from a door opposite, an elderly man of middle height and spare and sinewy frame walked briskly in, shook hands with Lord Evelyn, was introduced to the tall, red-bearded Englishman (who still stood, hat in hand, and with a portentous stiffness in his demeanor), begged his two guests to be seated, and himself sat down at an open bureau, which was plentifully littered with papers.

"I am pleased to meet you, Mr. Brand," he said, speaking carefully, and with a considerable foreign accent. "Lord Evelyn has several times promised me the honor of making your acquaintance."

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Mr. Brand merely bowed: he was intent on making out what manner of man this suspected foreigner might be; and he was puzzled. At first sight Ferdinand Lind appeared to be about fifty or fifty-five years of age; his closely cropped hair was gray; and his face, in repose, somewhat care-worn. But then when he spoke there was an almost youthful vivacity in his look; his dark eyes were keen, quick, sympathetic; and there was even a certain careless ease about his dress—about the turned-down collar and French-looking neck-tie, for example—that had more of the air of the student than of the pedant about it. All this at the first glance. It was only afterward you came to perceive what was denoted by those heavy, seamed brows, the firm, strong mouth, and the square line of the jaw. These told you of the presence of an indomitable and inflexible will. Here was a man born to think, and control, and command.

“With that prospect before me,” he continued, apparently taking no notice of the Englishman’s close scrutiny, “I must ask you, Mr. Brand—well, you know, it is merely a matter of form—but I must ask you to be so very kind as to give me your word of honor that you will not disclose anything you may see or learn here. Have you any objection?”

Brand stared, then said, coldly,

“Oh dear, no. I will give you that pledge, if you wish it.”

“It is so easy to deal with Englishmen,” said Mr. Lind, politely. “A word, and it is done. But I suppose Lord Evelyn has told you that we have no very desperate secrets. Secrecy, you know, one must use sometimes; it is an inducement to many—most people are fond of a little mystery; and it is harmless.”

Brand said nothing; Lord Evelyn thought he might have been at least civil. But when an Englishman is determined on being stiff, his stiffness is gigantic.

“If I were to show you some of the tricks of this very room,” said this grizzled old foreigner with the boyish neck-tie, “you might call me a charlatan; but would that be fair? We have to make use of various means for what we consider a good end, a noble end; and there are many people who love mystery and secrecy. With you English it is different—you must have everything above-board.”

The pale, fine face of the sensitive lad sitting there became clouded over with disappointment. He had brought this old friend of his with some vague hope that he might become a convert, or at least be sufficiently interested to make inquiries; but Brand sat silent, with a cold indifference that was only the outward sign of an inward suspicion.

“Sometimes, it is true,” continued Mr. Lind, in nowise disconcerted, “we stumble on the secrets of others. Our association has innumerable feelers: and we make it our business to know what we can of everything that is going on. For example, I could tell

you of an odd little incident that occurred last year in Constantinople. A party of four gentlemen were playing cards there in a private room."

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Brand started. The man who was speaking took no notice.

"There were two Austrian officers, a Roumanian count, and an Englishman," he continued, in the most matter-of-fact way. "It was in a private room, as I said. The Englishman was, after a time, convinced that the Roumanian was cheating; he caught his wrist—showed the false cards; then he managed to ward off the blow of a dagger which the Roumanian aimed at him, and by main force carried him to the door and threw him down-stairs. It was cleverly done, but the Englishman was very big and strong. Afterward the two Austrian officers, who knew the Verdt family, begged the Englishman never to reveal what had occurred; and the three promised secrecy. Was not that so?"

The man looked up carelessly. The Englishman's apathy was no longer visible.

"Y-yes," he stammered.

"Would you like to know what became of Count Verdt?" he asked, with an air of indifference.

"Yes, certainly," said the other.

"Ah! Of course you know the Castel' del Ovo?"

"At Naples? Yes."

"You remember that out at the point, beside the way that leads from the shore to the fortress, there are many big rocks, and the waves roll about there. Three weeks after you caught Count Verdt cheating at cards, his dead body was found floating there."

"Gracious heavens!" Brand exclaimed, with his face grown pale. And then he added, breathlessly, "Suicide?"

Mr. Lind smiled.

"No. Reassure yourself. When they picked out the body from the water, they found the mouth gagged, and the hands tied behind the back."

Brand stared at this man.

"Then you—?" He dared not complete the question.

"I? Oh, I had nothing to do with it, any more than yourself. It was a Camorra affair."

He had been speaking quite indifferently; but now a singular change came over his manner.



“And if I *had* had something to do with it?” he said, vehemently; and the dark eyes were burning with a quick anger under the heavy brows. Then he spoke more slowly, but with a firm emphasis in his speech. “I will tell you a little story; it will not detain you, sir. Suppose that you have a prison so overstocked with political prisoners that you must keep sixty or seventy in the open yard adjoining the outer wall. You have little to fear; they are harmless, poor wretches; there are several old men—two women. Ah! but what are the poor devils to do in those long nights that are so dark and so cold? However they may huddle together, they freeze; if they keep not moving, they die; you find them dead in the morning. If you are a Czar you are glad of that, for your prisons are choked; it is very convenient. And, then suppose you have a clever fellow who finds out a narrow passage between the implement-house and the wall; and he says, ‘There, you can work all night at digging a passage out; and

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who in the morning will suspect?' Is not that a fine discovery, when one must keep moving in the dark to prevent one's self stiffening into a corpse? Oh yes; then you find the poor devils, in their madness, begin to tear the ground up; what tools have they but their fingers, when the implement-house is locked? The poor devils!—old men, too, and women; and how they take their turn at the slow work, hour after hour, week after week, all through the long, still nights! Inch by inch it is; and the poor devils become like rabbits, burrowing for a hole to reach the outer air; and do you know that, after a time, the first wounds heal, and your fingers become like stumps of iron—"

He held out his two hands; the ends of the fingers were seamed and corrugated, as if they had been violently scalded. But he could not hold them steady—they were trembling with the suppressed passion that made his whole frame tremble.

"Relay after relay, night after night, week after week, month after month, until those poor devils of rabbits had actually burrowed a passage out into the freedom of God's world again. And some said the Czar himself had heard of it, and would not interfere, for the prisons were choked; and some said the wife of the governor was Polish, and had a kind heart; but what did it matter when the time was drawing near? And always this clever fellow—do you know, sir, his name was Verdt too?—encouraging, helping, goading these poor people on. Then the last night—how the miserable rabbits of creatures kept huddled together, shivering in the dark, till the hour arrived! and then the death-like stillness they found outside; and the wild wonder and fear of it; and the old men and the women crying like children to find themselves in the free air again. Marie Falevitch—that was my sister-in-law—she kissed me, and was laughing when she whispered, '*Eljen a haza!*' I think she was a little off her head with the long, sleepless nights."

He stopped for a second; his throat seemed choked.

"Did I tell you they had all got out?—the poor devils all wondering there, and scarcely knowing where to go. And now suppose, sir—ah! you don't know anything about these things, you happy English people—suppose you found the black night around you all at once turned to a blaze of fire—red hell opened on all sides of you, and the bullets plowing your comrades down; the old men crying for mercy, the young ones falling only with a groan; the women—my God! Did you ever hear a woman shriek when she was struck through the heart with a bullet? Marie Falevitch fell at my feet, but I could not raise her—I was struck down too. It was a week after that I came to my senses. I was in the prison, but the prison was not quite so full. Czars and governors have a fine way of thinning prisons when they get too crowded."

These last words were spoken in a calm, contemptuous way; the man was evidently trying hard to control the fierce passion that these memories had stirred up. He had

clinched one hand, and put it firmly on the desk before him, so that it should not tremble.

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"Well, now, Mr. Brand," he continued, slowly, "let us suppose that when you come to yourself again, you hear the rumors that are about: you hear, for example, that Count Verdt—that exceedingly clever man—has been graciously pardoned by the Czar for revealing the villanous conspiracy of his fellow-prisoners; and that he has gone off to the South with a bag of money. Do you not think that you would remember the name of that clever person? Do you not think you would say to yourself, 'Well, it may not be to-day, or to-morrow, or the next day: *but some day?*'"

Again the dark eyes glowed; but he had a wonderful self-control.

"You would remember the name, would you not, if you had your sister-in-law, and your only brother, and six or seven of your old friends and comrades all shot on the one night?"

"This was the same Count Verdt?" Brand asked, eagerly.

"Yes," said the other, after a considerable pause. Then he added, with an involuntary sigh, "I had been following his movements for some time; but the Camorra stepped in. They are foolish people, those Camorristi—foolish and ignorant. They punish for very trifling offences, and they do not make sufficient warning of their punishments. Then they are quite imbecile in the way they attempt to regulate labor."

He was now talking in quite a matter-of-fact way. The clinched hand was relaxed.

"Besides," continued Ferdinand Lind, with the cool air of a critic, "their conduct is too scandalous. The outer world believes they are nothing but an association of thieves and cut-throats; that is because they do not discountenance vulgar and useless crime; because there is not enough authority, nor any proper selection of members. In the affairs of the world, one has sometimes to make use of queer agents—that is admitted; and you cannot have any large body of people without finding a few scoundrels among them. I suppose one might even say that about your very respectable Church of England. But you only bring a society into disrepute—you rob it of much usefulness—you put the law and society against it—when you make it the refuge of common murderers and thieves."

"I should hope so," remarked George Brand. If this suspected foreigner had resumed his ordinary manner, so had he; he was again the haughty, suspicious, almost supercilious Englishman.

Poor Lord Evelyn! The lad looked quite distressed. These two men were so obviously antipathetic that it seemed altogether hopeless to think of their ever coming together.

"Well," said Mr. Lind, in his ordinary polished and easy manner, "I must not seek to detain you; for it is a cold night to keep horses waiting. But, Mr. Brand, Lord Evelyn



dines with us to-morrow evening; if you have nothing better to do, will you join our little party? My daughter, I am sure, will be most pleased to make your acquaintance.”

“Do, Brand, there’s a good fellow;” struck in his friend. “I haven’t seen anything of you for such a long time.”

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"I shall be very happy indeed," said the tall Englishman, wondering whether he was likely to meet a goodly assemblage of sedition-mongers at this foreign persons table.

"We dine at a quarter to eight. The address is No. — Curzon Street; but perhaps you had better take this card."

So they left, and were conducted down the staircase by the stout old German; and scrambled up into the furs of the barouche.

"So he has a daughter?" said Brand, as the two friends together drove down to Buckingham Street, where they were to dine at his rooms.

"Oh, yes; his daughter Natalie," said Lord Evelyn, eagerly. "I am so glad you will see him to-morrow night!"

"And they live on Curzon Street," said the other, reflectively. "H'm! Conspiracy *does* pay, then!"

CHAPTER II.

Pleadings.

"Brother Senior Warden, your place in the lodge?" said Mr. Brand, looking at the small dinner-table.

"You forget," his companion said. "I am only in the nursery as yet—an Illuminatus Minor, as it were. However, I don't think I can do better than sit where Waters has put me; I can have a glimpse of the lights on the river. But what an extraordinary place for you to come to for rooms!"

They had driven down through the glare of the great city to this silent and dark little thoroughfare, dismissed the carriage at the foot, climbed up an old-fashioned oak staircase, and found themselves at last received by an elderly person, who looked a good deal more like a bronzed old veteran than an ordinary English butler.

"Halloo, Waters!" said Lord Evelyn. "How are you? I don't think I have seen you since you threatened to murder the landlord at Cairo."

"No, my lord," said Mr. Waters, who seemed vastly pleased by this reminiscence, and who instantly disappeared to summon dinner for the two young men.

"Extraordinary?" said Brand, when they had got seated at table. "Oh no; my constant craving is for air, space, light and quiet. Here I have all these. Beneath are the Embankment gardens; beyond that, you see, the river—those lights are the steamers at

anchor. As for quiet, the lower floors are occupied by a charitable society; so I fancied there would not be much traffic on the stairs."

The jibe passed unheeded; Lord Evelyn had long ago become familiar with his friend's way of speaking about men and things.

"And so, Evelyn, you have become a pupil of the revolutionaries," George Brand continued, when Waters had put some things before them and retired—"a student of the fine art of stabbing people unawares? What an astute fellow that Lind must be—I will swear it never occurred to one of the lot before—to get an English milord into their ranks! A stroke of genius! It could only have been projected by a great mind. And then look at the effect throughout Europe if an English milord were to be found with a parcel of Orsini bombs in his possession! every ragamuffin from Naples to St. Petersburg would rejoice; the army of cutthroats would march with a new swagger."

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His companion said nothing; but there was a vexed and impatient look on his face.

“And our little daughter—is she pretty? Does she coax the young men to play with daggers?—the innocent little thing! And when you start with your dynamite to break open a jail, she blows you a kiss?—the charming little fairy! What is it she has embroidered on the ribbons round her neck?—’*Mort aux rois?*’ ‘*Sic semper tyrannis?*’ No; I saw a much prettier one somewhere the other day: ‘*Ne si pasce di fresche ruggiade, ma di sangue di membra di re.*’ Isn’t it charming? It sounds quite idyllic, even in English: ‘*Not for you the nourishment of freshening dews, but the blood of the limbs of kings!*’ The pretty little stabber—is she fierce?”

“Brand, you are too bad!” said the other, throwing down his knife and fork, and getting up from the table. “You believe in neither man, woman, God, nor devil!”

“Would you mind handing over that claret jug?”

“Why,” he said, turning passionately toward him, “it is men like you, who have neither faith, nor hope, nor regret, who are wandering aimlessly in a nightmare of apathy and indolence and indifference, who ought to be the first to welcome the new light breaking in the sky. What is life worth to you? You have nothing to hope for—nothing to look forward to—nothing you can kill the aimless with. Why should you desire to-morrow? To-morrow will bring you nothing different from yesterday; you will do as you did yesterday and the day before yesterday. It is the life of a horse or an ox—not the life of a human being, with the sympathies and needs and aspirations of a man. What is the object of living at all?”

“I really don’t know,” said the other, simply.

But this pale hump-backed lad, with the fine nostrils, the sensitive mouth, the large forehead, and the beautiful eyes, was terribly in earnest. He forgot about his place at table. He kept walking up and down, occasionally addressing his friend directly, at other times glancing out at the dark river and the golden lines of the lamps. And he was an eloquent speaker, too. Debarred from most forms of physical exercise, he had been brought up in a world of ideas. When he went to Oxford, it was with some vague notion of subsequently entering the Church; but at Oxford he became speedily convinced that there was no Church left for him to enter. Then he fell back on aestheticism—worshipped Carpaccio, adored Chopin, and turned his rooms at Merton into a museum of old tapestry, Roman brass-work, and Venetian glass. Then he dabbled a little in Comtism; but very soon he threw aside that gigantic make-believe at believing. Nevertheless, whatever was his whim of the moment, it was for him no whim at all, but a burning reality. And in this enthusiasm of his there was no room left for shyness. In fact, these two companions had been accustomed to talk frankly; they had long ago abandoned that self-consciousness which ordinarily restricts the conversation of young Englishmen to monosyllables. Brand was a good listener and his friend an eager,

impetuous, enthusiastic speaker. The one could even recite verses to the other: what greater proof of confidence?

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And on this occasion all this prayer of his was earnest and pathetic enough. He begged this old chum of his to throw aside his insular prejudices and judge for himself. What object had he in living at all, if life were merely a routine of food and sleep? In this selfish isolation, his living was only a process of going to the grave—only that each day would become more tedious and burdensome as he grew older. Why should he not examine, and inquire, and believe—if that was possible? The world was perishing for want of a new faith: the new faith was here.

At this phrase George Brand quickly raised his head. He was accustomed to these enthusiasms of his friend; but he had not yet seen him in the character of an apostle.

“You know it as well as I, Brand; the last great wave of religion has spent itself; and I suppose Matthew Arnold would have us wait for the mysterious East, the mother of religions, to send us another. Do you remember ‘Obermann?’—

“In his cool hall, with haggard eyes,
The Roman noble lay;
He drove abroad, in furious guise,
Along the Appian Way;

“He made a feast, drank fierce and fast,
And crowned his head with flowers—
No easier nor no quicker passed
The impracticable hours.

“The brooding East with awe beheld
Her impious younger world.
The Roman tempest swelled and swelled,
And on her head was hurled.

“The East bowed low before the blast,
In patience, deep disdain;
She let the legions thunder past,
And plunged in thought again.”

The lad had a sympathetic voice; and there was a curious, pathetic thrill in the tones of it as he went on to describe the result of that awful musing—the new-born joy awakening in the East—the victorious West veiling her eagles and snapping her sword before this strange new worship of the Child—

“And centuries came, and ran their course,
And, unspent all that time,
Still, still went forth that Child’s dear force,
And still was at its prime.”

But now—in these later days around us!—

“Now he is dead! Far hence He lies
In the lorn Syrian town;
And on his grave, with shining eyes,
The Syrian stars look down.”

The great divine wave had spent itself. But were we to sit supinely by—this was what he asked, though not precisely in these consecutive words, for sometimes he walked to and fro in his eagerness, and sometimes he ate a bit of bread, or sat down opposite his friend for the purpose of better confronting him—to wait for that distant and mysterious East to send us another revelation? Not so. Let the proud-spirited and courageous West, that had learned the teachings of Christianity but never yet applied them—let the powerful West establish a faith of her own: a faith in the future of humanity itself—a faith in future of recompense and atonement to the vast multitudes of mankind who had toiled so long and so grievously—a faith demanding instant action and endeavor and self-sacrifice from those who would be its first apostles.

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"The complaining millions of men
Darken in labor and pain."

And why should not this Christianity, that had so long been used to gild the thrones of kings and glorify the ceremonies of priests—that had so long been monopolized by the rich and the great and the strong, whom its Founder despised and denounced—why should it not at length come to the help of those myriads of the poor and the weak and the suffering whose cry for help had been for so many centuries disregarded? Here was work for the idle, hope for the hopeless, a faith for them who were perishing for want of a faith.

"You say all this is vague—a vision—a sentiment?" he said, talking in the same eager way. "Then that is my fault. I cannot explain it all to you in a few words. But do not run away with the notion that it is mere words—a St. Simonian dream of perfectibility, or anything like that. It is practical; it exists; it is within reach of you. It is a definite and immense organization; it may be young as yet, but it has courage and splendid aims; and now, with a great work before it, it is eager for aid. You yourself, when you see a child run over, or a woman starving of hunger, or a blind man wanting to cross a street, are you not ready with your help—the help of your hands or of your purse? Multiply these by millions, and think of the cry for help that comes from all parts of the world. If you but knew, you could not resist. I as yet know little—I only hear the echo of the cry; but my veins are burning; I shall have the gladness of answering 'Yes,' however little I can do. And after all, is not that something? For a man to live only for himself is death."

"But you know, Evelyn," said his friend, though he did not quite know what to answer to all this outburst, "you must be more cautious. Those benevolent schemes are very noble and very captivating; but sometimes they are in the hands of rather queer people. And besides, do you quite know the limits of this big society? I thought you said something about vindicating the oppressed. Does it include politics?"

"I do not question; I am content to obey," said Lord Evelyn.

"That is not English; unreasoning and blind obedience is mere folly."

"Perhaps so," said the other, somewhat absently; "but I suppose a man accepts whatever satisfies the craving of his own heart. And—and I should not like to go alone on this new thing, Brand. Will you not come some little way with me? If you think I am mistaken, you may turn back; as for me—well, if it were only a dream, I think I would rather go with the pilgrims on their hopeless quest than stay with the people who come out to wonder at them as they go by. You remember—

"Who is your lady of love, oh ye that pass
Singing? And is it for sorrow of that which was
That ye sing sadly, or dream of what shall be?"



For gladly at once and sadly it seems ye sing.
—Our lady of love by you is un beholden;
For hands she hath none, nor eyes, nor lips, nor golden
Treasure of hair, nor face nor form; but we
That love, we know her more fair than anything.”

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Yes; he had certainly a pathetic thrill in his voice; but now there was something else—something strange—in the slow and monotonous cadence that caught the acute ear of his friend. And again he went on, but absently, almost as if he were himself listening—

“—Is she a queen, having great gifts to give?
—Yea, these; that whoso hath seen her shall not live
Except he serve her sorrowing, with strange pain,
Travail and bloodshedding and bitterest tears;
And when she bids die he shall surely die.
And he shall leave all things under the sky,
And go forth naked under sun and rain,
And work and wait and watch out all his years.”

“Evelyn,” said George Brand, suddenly, fixing his keen eyes on his friend’s face, “where have you heard that? Who has taught you? You are not speaking with your own voice.”

“With whose, then?” and a smile came over the pale, calm, beautiful face, as if he had awakened out of a dream.

“That,” said Brand, still regarding him, “was the voice of Natalie Lind.”

CHAPTER III.

In A house in Curzon street.

Armed with a defiant scepticism, and yet conscious of an unusual interest and expectation, George Brand drove up to Curzon Street on the following evening. As he jumped out of his hansom, he inadvertently glanced at the house.

“Conspiracy has not quite built us a palace as yet,” he said to himself.

The door was opened by a little German maid-servant, as neat and round and rosy as a Dresden china shepherdess, who conducted him up-stairs and announced him at the drawing-room. It was not a large room; but there was more of color and gilding in it than accords with the severity of modern English taste; and it was lit irregularly with a number of candles, each with a little green or rose-red shade. Mr. Lind met him at the door. As they shook hands, Brand caught a glimpse of another figure in the room—apparently that of a tall woman dressed all in cream-white, with a bunch of scarlet geraniums in her bosom, and another in her raven-black hair.

“Not the gay little adventuress, then?” was his instant and internal comment. “Better contrived still. The inspired prophetess. Obviously not the daughter of this man at all. Hired.”

But when Natalie Lind came forward to receive him, he was more than surprised; he was almost abashed. During a second or two of wonder and involuntary admiration, he was startled out of his critical attitude altogether. For this tall and striking figure was in reality that of a young girl of eighteen or nineteen, who had the beautifully formed bust, the slender waist, and the noble carriage that even young Hungarian girls frequently have. Perhaps the face, with its intellectual forehead and the proud and firmly cut mouth, was a trifle too calm and self-reliant for a young girl:

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but all the softness of expression that was wanted, all the gentle and gracious timidity that we associate with maidenhood, lay in the large, and dark, and lustrous eyes. When, by accident, she turned aside, and he saw the outline of that clear, olive-complexioned face, only broken by the outward curve of the long black lashes, he had to confess to himself that, adventuress or no adventuress, prophetess or no prophetess, Natalie Lind was possessed of about the most beautiful profile he had ever beheld, while she had the air and the bearing of a queen.

Her father and he talked of the various trifling things of the moment; but what he was chiefly thinking of was the singular calm and self-possession of this young girl. When she spoke, her dark, soft eyes regarded him without fear. Her manner was simple and natural to the last degree; perhaps with the least touch added of maidenly reserve. He was forced even to admire the simplicity of her dress—cream or canary white it was, with a bit of white fur round the neck and round the tight wrists. The only strong color was that of the scarlet geraniums which she wore in her bosom, and in the splendid masses of her hair; and the vertical sharp line of scarlet of her closed fan.

Once only, during this interval of waiting, did he find that calm serenity of hers disturbed. He happened to observe the photograph of a very handsome woman near him on the table. She told him she had had a parcel of photographs of friends of hers just sent over from Vienna: some of them very pretty. She went to another table, and brought over a handful. He glanced at them only a second or two.

"I see they are mostly from Vienna: are they Austrian ladies?" he asked.

"They live in Austria, but they are not Austrians," she answered. And then she added, with a touch of scorn about the beautiful mouth, "Our friends and we don't belong to the women-floggers!"

"Natalie!" her father said; but he smiled all the same.

"I will tell you one of my earliest recollections," she said: "I remember it very well. Kossuth was carrying me round the room on his shoulder. I suppose I had been listening to the talk of the gentlemen; for I said to him, 'When they burned my papa in effigy at Pesth, why was I not allowed to go and see?' And he said—I remember the sound of his voice even now—'Little child, you were not born then. But if you had been able to go, do you know what they would have done to you? They would have flogged you. Do you not know that the Austrians flog women? When you grow up, little child, your papa will tell you the story of Madame von Maderspach.'" Then she added, "That is one of my valued recollections, that when I was a child I was carried on Kossuth's shoulders."



“You have no similar reminiscence of Gorgey, I suppose?” Brand said, with a smile.

He had spoken quite inadvertently, without the slightest thought in the world of wounding her feelings. But he was surprised and shocked by the extraordinary effect which this chance remark produced on the tall and beautiful girl standing there; for an instant she paused, as if not knowing what to say. Then she said proudly, and she turned away as she did so,

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“Perhaps you are not aware that there are some names you should not mention in the presence of a Hungarian woman.”

What was there in the tone of the voice that made him rapidly glance at her eyes, as she turned away, pretending to carry back the photographs? He was not deceived. Those large dark eyes were full of sudden, indignant tears; she had not turned quite quickly enough to conceal them.

Of course, he instantly and amply apologized for his ignorance and stupidity; but what he said to himself was, “That child is not acting. She may be Lind’s daughter, after all. Poor thing! she is too beautiful, and generous, and noble to be made the decoy of a revolutionary adventurer.”

At this moment Lord Evelyn arrived, throwing a quick glance of inquiry toward his friend, to see what impression, so far, had been produced. But the tall, red-bearded Englishman maintained, as the diplomatists say, an attitude of the strictest reserve. The keen gray eyes were respectful attentive, courteous—especially when they were turned to Miss Lind; beyond that, nothing.

Now they had not been seated at the dinner-table more than a few minutes before George Brand began to ask himself whether it was really Curzon Street he was dining in. The oddly furnished room was adorned with curiosities to which every capital in Europe would seem to have contributed. The servants, exclusively women, were foreign; the table glass and decorations were all foreign; the unostentatious little banquet was distinctly foreign. Why, the very bell that had summoned them down—what was there in the soft sound of it that had reminded him of something far away? It was a haunting sound, and he kept puzzling over the vague association it seemed to call up. At last he frankly mentioned the matter to Miss Lind, who seemed greatly pleased.

“Ah, did you like the sound?” she said, in that low and harmonious voice of hers. “The bell was an invention of my own; shall I show it to you?”

The Dresden shepherdess, by name Anneli, being despatched into the hall, presently returned with an object somewhat resembling in shape a Cheshire cheese, but round at the top, formed of roughly filed metal of a lustrous yellow-gray. Round the rude square handle surmounting it was carelessly twisted a bit of old orange silk; other decoration there was none.

“Do you see what it is now?” she said. “Only one of the great bells the people use for the cattle on the Campagna. Where did I get it? Oh, you know the Piazza Montenara, in Rome, of course? There is a place there where they sell such things to the country people. You could get one without difficulty, if you are not afraid of being laughed at as

a mad Englishman. That bit of embroidered ribbon, though, I got in an old shop in Florence.”

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Indeed, what struck him further was, not only the foreign look of the little room and its belongings, but also the extraordinary familiarity with foreign cities shown by both Lind and his daughter. As the rambling conversation went on (the sonorous cattle-bell had been removed by the rosy-cheeked Anneli), they appeared to be just as much at home in Madrid, in Munich, in Turin, or Genoa as in London. And it was no vague and general tourist's knowledge that these two cosmopolitans showed; it was rather the knowledge of a resident—an intimate acquaintance with persons, streets, shops, and houses. George Brand was a bit of a globe-trotter himself, and was entirely interested in this talk about places and things that he knew. He got to be quite at home with those people, whose own home seemed to be Europe. Reminiscences, anecdotes flowed freely on; the dinner passed with unconscious rapidity. Lord Evelyn was delighted and pleased beyond measure to observe the more than courteous attention that his friend paid to Natalie Lind.

But all this while what mention was there of the great and wonderful organization—a mere far-off glimpse of which had so captured Lord Evelyn's fervent imagination? Not a word. The sceptic who had come among them could find nothing either to justify or allay his suspicions. But it might safely be said that, for the moment at least, his suspicions as regarded one of those two were dormant. It was difficult to associate trickery, and conspiracy, and cowardly stabbing, with this beautiful young Hungarian girl, whose calm, dark eyes were so fearless. It is true that she appeared very proud-spirited, and generous, and enthusiastic; and you could cause her cheek to pale whenever you spoke of injury done to the weak, or the suffering, or the poor. But that was different from the secret sharpening of poniards.

Once only was reference made to the various secret associations that are slowly but eagerly working under the apparent social and political surface of Europe. Some one mentioned the Nihilists. Thereupon Ferdinand Lind, in a quiet and matter-of-fact way, without appearing to know anything of the *personnel* of the society, and certainly without expressing any approval of its aims, took occasion to speak of the extraordinary devotion of those people.

"There has been nothing like it," said he, "in all the history of what men have done for a political cause. You may say they are fanatics, madmen, murderers; that they only provoke further tyranny and oppression; that their efforts are wholly and solely mischievous. It may be so; but I speak of the individual and what he is ready to do. The sacrifice of their own life is taken almost as a matter of course. Each man knows that for him the end will almost certainly be Siberia or a public execution; and he accepts it. You will find young men, well-born, well-educated, who go away from their friends and their native place, who go into a remote

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village, and offer to work at the commonest trade, at apprentices' wages. They settle there; they marry; they preach nothing but the value of honest work, and extreme sobriety, and respect for superiors. Then, after some years, when they are regarded as beyond all suspicion, they begin, cautiously and slowly, to spread abroad their propaganda—to teach respect rather for human liberty, for justice, for self-sacrifice, for those passions that prompt a nation to adventure everything for its freedom. Well, you know the end. The man may be found out—banished or executed; but the association remains. The Russians at this moment have no notion how wide-spread and powerful it is.”

“The head-quarters, are they in Russia itself?” asked Brand, on the watch for any admission.

“Who knows?” said the other, absently. “Perhaps there are none.”

“None? Surely there must be some power to say what is to be done, to enforce obedience?”

“What if each man finds that in himself?” said Lind, with something of the air of a dreamer coming over the firm and thoughtful and rugged face. “It may be a brotherhood. All associations do not need to be controlled by kings and priests and standing armies.”

“And the end of all this devotion, you say is Siberia or death?”

“For the man, perhaps; for his work, not. It is not personal gain or personal safety that a man must have in view if he goes to do battle against the oppression that has crushed the world for centuries and centuries. Do you not remember the answer given to the Czar by Michael Bestoujif when he was condemned? It was only the saying of a peasant; but it is one of the noblest ever heard in the world. ‘I have the power to pardon you,’ said the Czar to him, ‘and I would do so if I thought you would become a faithful subject.’ What was the answer? ‘Sire,’ said Michael Bestoujif, ‘that is our great misfortune, that the Emperor can do everything, and that there is no law.’”

“Ah, the brave man!” said Natalie Lind, quickly and passionately, with a flash of pride in her eyes. “The brave man! If I had a brother, I would ask him, ‘When will you show the courage of Michael Bestoujif?’”

Lord Evelyn glanced at her with a strange, admiring, proud look. “If she had a brother!” What else, even with all his admiration and affection for her, could he hope to be?

Presently they wandered back into other and lighter subjects; and Brand, at least, did not notice how the time was flying. When Natalie Lind rose, and asked her father

whether he would have coffee sent into the smoking-room, or have tea in the drawing-room, Brand was quite astonished and disappointed to find it so late. He proposed they should at once go up to the drawing-room; and this was done.

They had been speaking of musical instruments at dinner; and their host now brought them some venerable lutes to examine—curiosities only, for most of the metal strings were broken. Beautiful objects, however, they were, in inlaid ivory or tortoise-shell and ebony; made, as the various inscriptions revealed, at Bologna, or Padua, or Venice; and dating, some of them, as far back as 1474. But in the midst of all this, Brand espied another instrument on one of the small tables.

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"Miss Lind," said he, with some surprise, "do you play the zither?"

"Oh yes, Natalie will play you something," her father said, carelessly; and forthwith the girl sat down to the small table.

George Brand retired into a corner of the room. He was passionately fond of zither music. He thought no more about that examination of the lutes.

"Do you know one who can play the zither well?" says the proverb. "If so, rejoice, for there are not two in the world." However that might be, Natalie Lind could play the zither, as one eager listener soon discovered. He, in that far corner, could only see the profile of the girl (just touched with a faint red from the shade of the nearest candle, as she leaned over the instrument), and the shapely wrists and fingers as they moved on the metallic strings. But was that what he really did see when the first low tremulous notes struck the prelude to one of the old pathetic *Volkslieder* that many a time he had heard in the morning, when the fresh wind blew in from the pines; that many a time he had heard in the evening, when the little blue-eyed Kathchen and her mother sung together as they sat and knitted on the bench in front of the inn? Suddenly the air changes. What is this louder tramp? Is it not the joyous chorus of the home-returning huntsmen; the lads with the slain roedeer slung round their necks; that stalwart Bavarian keeper hauling at his mighty black hound; old father Keinitz, with his three beagles and his ancient breech-loader, hurrying forward to get the first cool, vast, splendid bath of the clear, white wine? How the young fellows come swinging along through the dust, their faces ablaze against the sunset! Listen to the far, hoarse chorus!

"Dann kehr ich von der Haide,
Zur hauslich stillen Freude,
Ein frommer Jagersmann!
Ein frommer Jagersmann!
Halli, hallo! halli, hallo!
Ein frommer Jagersmann!"

White wine now, and likewise the richer red!—for there is a great hand-shaking because of the Mr. Englishman's good fortune in having shot three bucks: and the little Kathchen's eyes grow full, because they have brought home a gentle-faced hind, likewise cruelly slain. And Kathchen's mother has whisked inside, and here are the tall schoppen on the table; and speedily the long, low room is filled with the tobacco-smoke. What! another song, you thirsty old Keinitz, with the quavering voice? But there is a lusty chorus to that too; and a great clinking of glasses; and the Englishman laughs and does his part too, and he has called for six more schoppen of red.... But hush, now! Have we come out from the din and the smoke to the cool evening air? What is that one hears afar in the garden? Surely it is the little Kathchen and her mother singing

together, in beautiful harmony, the old, familiar, tender *Lorelei*! The zither is a strange instrument—it speaks.

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And when Natalie Lind, coming to this air, sung in a low contralto voice an only half-suggested second, it seemed to those in the room that two women were singing—the one with a voice low and rich and penetrating, the other voice clear and sweet like the singing of a young girl. “*Die Luft ist kuhl und es dunkelt, und ruhig fliesset der Rhein.*” Was it, indeed, Kathchen and her mother? Were they far away in the beautiful pine-land, with the quiet evening shining red over the green woods, and darkness coming over the pale streams in the hollows? When Natalie Lind ceased, the elder of the two guests murmured to himself, “Wonderful! wonderful!” The other did not speak at all.

She rested her hands for a moment on the table.

“Natalushka,” said her father, “is that all?”

“I will not be called Natalushka, papa,” said she; but again she bent her hands over the silver strings.

And these brighter and gayer airs now—surely they are from the laughing and light-hearted South? Have we not heard them under the cool shade of the olive-trees, with the hot sun blazing on the garden-paths of the Villa Reale; and the children playing; and the band busy with its dancing *canzoni*, the gay notes drowning the murmur and plash of the fountains near? Look now!—far beneath the gray shadow of the olive-trees—the deep blue band of the sea; and there the double-sailed barca, like a yellow butterfly hovering on the water; and there the large martingallo, bound for the cloud-like island on the horizon. Are they singing, then, as they speed over the glancing waves?... “*O dolce Napoli! O suol beato!*” ... for what can they sing at all, as they leave us, if they do not sing the pretty, tender, tinkling “Santa Lucia?”

“Venite all’ agile
Barchetta mia!
Santa Lucia!
Santa Lucia!”

... The notes grow fainter and fainter. Are the tall maidens of Capri already looking out for the swarthy sailors, that these turn no longer to the shores they are leaving?... “*O dolce Napoli! O suol beato!*” ... Fainter and fainter grow the notes on the trembling string, so that you can scarcely tell them from the cool plashing of the fountains ... “*Santa Lucia!... Santa Lucia!*”....

“Natalushka,” said her father, laughing, “you must take us to Venice now.”

The young Hungarian girl rose, and put the zither aside.

“It is an amusement for the children,” she said.



She went to the piano, which was open, and took down a piece of music—it was Kucken's "Maid of Judah." Now, hitherto, George Brand had only heard her murmur a low, harmonious second to one or other of the airs she had been playing; and he was quite unprepared for the passion and fervor which her rich, deep, resonant, contralto voice threw into this wail of indignation and despair. This was the voice of a woman, not of a girl; and it was with the proud passion of a woman that she seemed to send this cry to Heaven for reparation, and justice, and revenge. And surely it was not only of the sorrows of the land of Judah she was thinking!—it was a wider cry—the cry of the oppressed, and the suffering, and the heart-broken in every clime—

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“O blest native land! O fatherland mine!
How long for thy refuge in vain shall I pine?”

He could have believed there were tears in her eyes just then; but there were none, he knew, when she came to the fierce piteous appeal that followed—

“Where, where are thy proud sons, so lordly in might?
All mown down and fallen in blood-welling fight!
Thy cities are ruin, thy valleys lie waste,
Their summer enchantment the foe hath erased.
O blest native land! how long shalt decline?
When, when will the Lord cry, ‘Revenge, it is Mine!’”

The zither speaks; but there is a speech beyond that of the zither. The penetrating vibration of this rich and pathetic voice was a thing not easily to be forgotten. When the two friends left the house, they found themselves in the chill darkness of an English night in February. Surely it must have seemed to them that they had been dwelling for a period in warmer climes, with gay colors, and warmth, and sweet sounds around them. They walked for some time in silence.

“Well,” said Lord Evelyn, at last, “what do you think of them?”

“I don’t know,” said the other, after a pause. “I am puzzled. How did you come to know them?”

“I came to know Lind through a newspaper reporter called O’Halloran. I should like to introduce you to him too.”

George Brand soon afterward parted from his friend, and walked away down to his silent rooms over the river. The streets were dark and deserted, and the air was still; yet there seemed somehow to be a tremulous, passionate, distant sound in the night. It was no tinkling “Santa Lucia” dying away over the blue seas in the south. It was no dull, sonorous bell, suggesting memories of the far Campagna. Was it not rather the quick, responsive echo that had involuntarily arisen in his own heart, when he heard Natalie Lind’s thrilling voice pour forth that proud and indignant appeal,

“When, when will the Lord cry, ‘Revenge, it is Mine!’”

CHAPTER IV.

A STRANGER.

Ferdinand Lind was in his study, busy with his morning letters. It was a nondescript little den, which he also used as library and smoking-room; its chief feature being a collection



of portraits—a most heterogeneous assortment of engravings, photographs, woodcuts, and terra-cotta busts. Wherever the book-shelves ceased, these began; and as there were a great number of them, and as the room was small, Mr. Lind's friends or historical heroes sometimes came into odd juxtaposition. In any case, they formed a strange assemblage—Arndt and Korner; Stein; Silvio Pellico and Karl Sand cheek by jowl; Pestal, Comte, Cromwell, Garibaldi, Marx, Mazzini, Bem, Kossuth, Lassalle, and many another writer and fighter. A fine engraving of Napoleon as First Consul was hung over the mantel-piece, a pipe-rack intervening between it and a fac-simile of the warrant for the execution of Charles I.

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Something in his correspondence had obviously annoyed the occupant of this little study. His brows were bent down, and he kept his foot nervously and impatiently tapping on the floor. When some one knocked, he said, "Come in!" almost angrily, though he must have known who was his visitor.

"Good-morning, papa!" said the tall Hungarian girl, coming into the room with a light step and a smile of welcome on her face.

"Good-morning, Natalie!" said he, without looking up. "I am busy this morning."

"Oh, but, papa," said she, going over, and stooping down and kissing him, "you must let me come and thank you for the flowers. They are more beautiful than ever this time."

"What flowers?" said he, impatiently.

"Why," she said, with a look of astonishment, "have you forgotten already? The flowers you always send for my birthday morning."

But instantly she changed her tone.

"Ah! I see. Good little children must not ask where the fairy gifts come from. There, I will not disturb you, papa."

She touched his shoulder caressingly as she passed.

"But thank you again, papa Santa Claus."

At breakfast, Ferdinand Lind seemed to have entirely recovered his good-humor.

"I had forgotten for the moment it was your birthday, Natalie," said he. "You are quite a grown woman now."

Nothing, however, was said about the flowers, though the beautiful basket stood on a side-table, filling the room with its perfume. After breakfast, Mr. Lind left for his office, his daughter setting about her domestic duties.

At twelve o'clock she was ready to go out for her accustomed morning walk. The pretty little Anneli, her companion on these excursions, was also ready; and together they set forth. They chatted frankly together in German—the ordinary relations between mistress and servant never having been properly established in this case. For one thing, they had been left to depend on each other's society during many a long evening in foreign towns, when Mr. Lind was away on his own business. For another, Natalie Lind had, somehow or other, and quite unaided, arrived at the daring conclusion that servants were human beings; and she had been taught to regard human beings as her

brothers and sisters, some more fortunate than others, no doubt, but the least fortunate having the greatest claim on her.

“Fraulein,” said the little Saxon maid, “it was I myself who took in the beautiful flowers that came for you this morning.”

“Yes?”

“Yes, indeed; and I thought it was very strange for a lady to be out so early in the morning.”

“A lady!” said Natalie Lind, with a quick surprise. “Not dressed all in black?”

“Yes, indeed, she was dressed all in black.”

The girl was silent for a second or two. Then she said, with a smile,

“It is not right for my father to send me a black messenger on my birthday—it is not a good omen. And it was the same last year when we were in Paris; the *concierge* told me. Birthday gifts should come with a white fairy, you know, Anneli—all silver and bells.”

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“Fraulein,” said the little German girl, gravely, “I do not think the lady who came this morning would bring you any ill fortune, for she spoke with such gentleness when she asked about you.”

“When she asked about me? What was she like, then, this black messenger?”

“How could I see, Fraulein?—her veil was so thick. But her hair was gray; I could see that. And she had a beautiful figure—not quite as tall as you, Fraulein; I watched her as she went away.”

“I am not sure that it is safe, Anneli, to watch the people whom Santa Claus sends,” the young mistress said, lightly. “However, you have not told me what the strange lady said to you.”

“That will I now tell you, Fraulein,” said the other, with an air of importance. “Well, when I heard the knock at the door, I went instantly; I thought it was strange to hear a knock so early, instead of the bell. Then there was the lady; and she did not ask who lived there, but she said, ‘Miss Lind is not up yet? But then, Fraulein, you must understand, she did not speak like that, for it was in English, and she spoke very slowly, as if it was with difficulty. I would have said, ‘Will the *gnadige Frau* be pleased to speak German?’ but I was afraid it might be impertinent for a maid-servant to address a lady so. Besides, Fraulein, she might have been a French lady, and not able to understand our German.”

“Quite so, Anneli. Well?”

“Then I told her I believed you were still in your room. Then she said, still speaking very slowly, as if it was all learned, ‘Will you be so kind as to put those flowers just outside her room, so that she will get them when she comes out?’ And I said I would do that. Then she said, ‘I hope Miss Lind is very well;’ and I said, ‘Oh yes.’ She stood for a moment just then, Fraulein, as if not knowing whether to go away or not; and then she asked again if you were quite well and strong and cheerful, and again I said, ‘Oh yes;’ and no sooner had I said that than she put something into my hand and went away. Would you believe it, Fraulein? it was a sovereign—an English golden sovereign. And so I ran after her and said, ‘Lady, this is a mistake,’ and I offered her the sovereign. That was right, was it not, Fraulein?”

“Certainly.”

“Well, she did not speak to me at all this time. I think the poor lady has less English even than I myself; but she closed my hand over the sovereign, and then patted me on the arm, and went away. It was then that I looked after her. I said to myself, ‘Well, there is only one lady that I know who has a more beautiful figure than that—that is my mistress.’ But she was not so tall as you, Fraulein.”

Natalie Lind paid no attention to this adroit piece of flattery on the part of her little Saxon maid.

“It is very extraordinary, Anneli,” she said, after awhile; then she added, “I hope the piece of gold you have will not turn to dust and ashes.”

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"Look at it, Fraulein," said Anneli, taking out her purse and producing a sound and solid English coin, about which there appeared to be no demonology or witchcraft whatsoever.

They had by this time got into Park Lane; and here the young mistress's speculations about the mysterious messenger of Santa Claus were suddenly cut short by something more immediate and more practical. There was a small boy of about ten engaged in pulling a wheelbarrow which was heavily laden with large baskets—probably containing washing; and he was toiling manfully with a somewhat hopeless task. How he had got so far it was impossible to say; but now that his strength was exhausted, he was trying all sorts of ineffectual dodges—even tilting up the barrow and endeavoring to haul it by the legs—to get the thing along.

"If I were a man," said Natalie Lind, "I would help that boy."

Then she stepped from the pavement.

"Little boy," she said, "where are you taking that barrow?"

The London *gamin*, always on the watch for sarcasm, stopped and stared at her. Then he took off his cap and wiped his forehead; it was warm work, though this was a chill February morning. Finally he said,

"Well, I'm agoin' to Warrington Crescent, Maida Vale. But if it's when I am likely to git there—bust me if I know."

She looked about. There was a good, sturdy specimen of the London loafer over at the park railings, with both hands up at his mouth, trying to light his pipe. She went across to him.

"I will give you half a crown if you will pull that barrow to Warrington Crescent, Maida Vale." There was no hesitation in her manner; she looked the loafer fair in the face.

He instantly took the pipe from his mouth, and made some slouching attempt at touching his cap.

"Thank ye, miss. Thank ye kindly"—and away the barrow went, with the small boy manfully pushing behind.

The tall, black-eyed Hungarian girl and her rosy-cheeked attendant now turned into the Park. There were a good many people riding by—fathers with their daughters, elderly gentlemen very correctly dressed, smart young men with a little tawny mustache, clear blue eyes, and square shoulders.

"Many of those Englishmen are very handsome," said the young mistress, by chance.

“Not like the Austrians, Fraulein,” said Anneli.

“The Austrians? What do you know about the Austrians?” said the other, sharply.

“When my uncle was ill at Prague, Fraulein,” the girl said, “my mother took me there to see him. We used to go out to the river, and go half-way over the tall bridge, and then down to the ‘Sofien-Insel.’ Ah, the beautiful place!—with the music, and the walks under the trees; and there we used to see the Austrian officers. These *were* handsome, with there beautiful uniforms, and waists like a girl; and the beautiful gloves they wore, too! —even when they were smoking cigarettes.”

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Natalie Lind was apparently thinking of other things. She neither rebuked nor approved Anneli's speech; though it was hard that the little Saxon maid should have preferred to the sturdy, white-haired, fair-skinned warriors of her native land the elegant young gentlemen of Francis Joseph's army.

"They are handsome, those Englishmen," Natalie Lind was saying, almost to herself, "and very rich and brave; but they have no sympathy. All their fighting for their liberty is over and gone; they cannot believe there is any oppression now anywhere; and they think that those who wish to help the sufferers of the world are only discontented and fanatic—a trouble—an annoyance. And they are hard with the poor people and the weak; they think it is wrong—that you have done wrong—if you are not well off and strong like themselves. I wonder if that was really an English lady who wrote the 'Cry of the Children.'"

"I beg your pardon, Fraulein."

"Nothing, Anneli. I was wondering why so rich a nation as the English should have so many poor people among them—and such miserable poor people; there is nothing like it in the world."

They were walking along the broad road leading to the Marble Arch, between the leafless trees. Suddenly the little Saxon girl exclaimed, in an excited whisper,

"Fraulein! Fraulein!"

"What is it, Anneli?"

"The lady—the lady who came with the flowers—she is behind us. Yes; I am sure."

The girl's mistress glanced quickly round. Some distance behind them there was certainly a lady dressed altogether in black, who, the moment she perceived that these two were regarding her, turned aside, and pretended to pick up something from the grass.

"Fraulein, Fraulein," said Anneli, eagerly; "let us sit down on this seat. Do not look at her. She will pass."

The sudden presence of this stranger, about whom she had been thinking so much, had somewhat unnerved her; she obeyed this suggestion almost mechanically; and waited with her heart throbbing. For an instant or two it seemed as if that dark figure along by the trees were inclined to turn and leave; but presently Natalie Lind knew rather than saw that this slender and graceful woman with the black dress and the deep veil was approaching her. She came nearer; for a second she came closer; some little white thing was dropped into the girl's lap, and the stranger passed quickly on.

“Anneli, Anneli,” the young mistress said, “the lady has dropped her locket! Run with it—quick!”

“No, Fraulein,” said the other, quite as breathlessly, “she meant it for you. Oh, look, Fraulein!—look at the poor lady—she is crying.”

The sharp eyes of the younger girl were right. Surely that slender figure was being shaken with sobs as it hurried away and was lost among the groups coming through the Marble Arch! Natalie Lind sat there as one stupefied—breathless, silent, trembling. She had not looked at the locket at all.

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"Anneli," she said, in a low voice, "was that the same lady? Are you sure?"

"Certain, Fraulein," said her companion, eagerly.

"She must be very unhappy," said the girl. "I think, too, she was crying."

Then she looked at the trinket that the stranger had dropped into her lap. It was an old-fashioned silver locket formed in the shape of a heart, and ornamented with the most delicate filagree work; in the centre of it was the letter N in old German text. When Natalie Lind opened it, she found inside only a small piece of paper, on which was written, in foreign-looking characters, "*From Natalie to Natalushka.*"

"Anneli, she knows my name!" the girl exclaimed.

"Would you not like to speak to the poor lady, Fraulein?" said the little German maid, who was very much excited, too. "And do you not think she is sure to come this way again—to morrow, next day, some other day? Perhaps she is ill or suffering, or she may have lost some one whom you resemble—how can one tell?"

CHAPTER V.

PIONEERS.

Before sitting down to breakfast, on this dim and dreary morning in February, George Brand went to one of the windows of his sitting-room and looked abroad on the busy world without. Busy indeed it seemed to be—the steamers hurrying up and down the river, hansoms whirling along the Embankment, heavily laden omnibuses chasing each other across Waterloo Bridge, the underground railway from time to time rumbling beneath those wintry-looking gardens, and always and everywhere the ceaseless murmur of a great city. In the midst of all this eager activity, he was only a spectator. Busy enough the world around him seemed to be; he alone was idle.

Well, what had he to look forward to on this dull day, when once he had finished his breakfast and his newspapers? It had already begun to drizzle; there was to be no saunter up to the park. He would stroll along to his club, and say "Good morning" to one or two acquaintances. Perhaps he would glance at some more newspapers. Perhaps, tired of reading news that did not interest, and forming opinions never to be translated into action, he would take refuge in the library. Somehow, anyhow, he would desperately tide over the morning till lunch-time.

Luncheon would be a break; but after—? He had not been long enough in England to become familiar with the whist-set; similarly, he had been too long abroad to be proficient in English billiards, even if he had been willing to make either whist or pool the pursuit of his life. As for afternoon calls and tea-drinking, that may be an interesting

occupation for young gentlemen in search of a wife, but it is too ghastly a business for one who has no such views. What then? More newspapers? More tedious lounging in the hushed library? Or how were the “impracticable hours” to be disposed of before came night and sleep?

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George Brand did not stay to consider that, when a man in the prime of health and vigor, possessed of an ample fortune, unfettered by anybody's will but his own, and burdened by neither remorse nor regret, nevertheless begins to find life a thing too tedious to be borne, there must be a cause for it. On the contrary, instead of asking himself any questions, he set about getting through the daily programme with an Englishman's determination to be prepared for the worst. He walked up to his club, the Waldegrave, in Pall Mall. In the morning-room there were only two or three old gentlemen, seated in easy-chairs near the fire, and grumbling in a loud voice—for apparently one or two were rather deaf—about the weather. Brand glanced at a few more newspapers. Then a happy idea occurred to him; he would go up to the smoking-room and smoke a cigarette.

In this vast hall of a place there were only two persons—one standing with his back to the fire, the other lying back in an easy-chair. The one was a florid, elderly gentleman, who was first cousin to a junior Lord of the Treasury, and therefore claimed to be a profound authority on politics, home and foreign. He was a harmless poor devil enough, from whom a merciful Providence had concealed the fact that his brain-power was of the smallest. His companion, reclining in the easy-chair, was a youthful Fine Art Professor; a gelatinous creature, a bundle of languid affectations, with the added and fluttering self-consciousness of a school-miss. He was absently assenting to the propositions of the florid gentleman; but it is probable that his soul was elsewhere.

These propositions were to the effect that leading articles in a newspaper were a mere impertinence; that he himself never read such things; that the business of a newspaper was to supply news; and that an intelligent Englishman was better capable of forming a judgment on public affairs than the hacks of a newspaper-office. The intelligent Englishman then proceeded to deliver his own judgment on the question of the day, which turned out to be—to Mr. Brand's great surprise—nothing more nor less than a blundering and inaccurate *resume* of the opinions expressed in a leading article in that morning's *Times*. At length this one-sided conversation between a jackanapes and a jackass became too intolerable for Brand, who threw away his cigarette, and descended once more into the hall.

"A gentleman wishes to see you, sir," said a boy; and at the same moment he caught sight of Lord Evelyn.

"Thank God!" he exclaimed, hurrying forward to shake his friend by the hand. "Come, Evelyn, what are you up to? I can't stand England any longer; will you take a run with me?—Algiers, Egypt, anywhere you like. Let us drop down to Dover in the afternoon, and settle it there. Or what do you say to the Riviera? we should be sure to run against some people at one or other of the towns. Upon my life, if you had not turned up, I think I should have cut my throat before lunch-time."

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"I have got something better for you to do than that," said the other; "I want you to see O'Halloran. Come along; I have a hansom here. We shall just catch him at Atkinson's, the book-shop, you know."

"Very well; all right," Brand said, briskly: this seemed to be rather a more cheerful business than cutting one's throat.

"He's at his telegraph-wire all night," Lord Evelyn said, in the hansom. "Then he lies down for a few hours' sleep on a sofa. Then he goes along to his rooms in Pimlico for breakfast; but at Atkinson's he generally stops for awhile on his way, to have his morning drink."

"Oh, is that the sort of person?"

"Don't make any mistake. O'Halloran may be eccentric in his ways of living, but he is one of the most remarkable men I have ever run against. His knowledge, his reading—politics, philosophy, everything, in short—the brilliancy of his talking when he gets excited, even the extraordinary variety of his personal acquaintance—why, there is nothing going on that he does not know about."

"But why has this Hibernian genius done nothing at all?"

"Why? You might as well try to kindle a fire with a flash of lightning. He has more political knowledge and more power of brilliant writing than half the editors in London put together; but he would ruin any paper in twenty-four hours. His first object would probably be to frighten his readers out of their wits by some monstrous paradox; his next to show them what fools they had been. I don't know how he has been kept on so long where he is, unless it be that he deals with news only. I believe he had to be withdrawn from the gallery of the House; he was very impatient over the prosy members and his remarks about them began to reach the Speaker's ear too frequently."

"I gather, then, that he is merely a clever, idle, Irish vagabond, who drinks."

"He does not drink. And as for his Irish name I suppose he must be Irish either by descent or birth; but he is continually abusing Ireland and the Irish. Probably, however, he would not let anybody else do so."

Mr. Atkinson's book-shop in the Strand was a somewhat dingy-looking place, filled with publications mostly of an exceedingly advanced character. Mr. Atkinson himself claimed to be a bit of a reformer; and had indeed brought himself, on one or two occasions, within reach of the law by issuing pamphlets of a somewhat too fearless aim. On this occasion he was not in the shop; so the two friends passed through, ascended a dark little stair, and entered a room which smelled strongly of tobacco-smoke.



The solitary occupant of this chamber, to whom Brand was immediately introduced, was a man of about fifty, carelessly if not even shabbily dressed, with large masses of unkempt hair, and eyes, dark gray, deep-set, that had very markedly the look of the eyes of a lion. The face was worn and pallid, but when lit up with excitement it was capable of much expression; and Mr. O'Halloran, when he did become excited, got very much excited indeed. He had laid aside his pipe, and was just finishing his gin and soda-water, taken from Mr. Atkinson's private store.

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However, the lion so seldom roars when it is expected to roar. Instead of the extraordinary creature whom Lord Evelyn had been describing, Brand found merely an Irish newspaper-reporter, who was either tired, or indifferent, or sleepy. They talked about some current topic of the hour for a few minutes; and then Mr. O'Halloran, with a yawn, rose and said he must go home for breakfast.

"Stay a bit, O'Halloran," Lord Evelyn said, in despair; "I—I wanted—the fact is, Mr. Brand has been asking me about Ferdinand Lind—"

"Oh," said the bushy-headed man, with a quick glance of scrutiny at the tall Englishman. "No, no," he added, with a smile, addressing himself directly to Brand, "it is no use your touching anything of that kind. You would want to know too much. You would want to have the earth dug away from over the catacombs before you went below to follow a solitary guide with a bit of candle. You could never be brought to understand that the cardinal principle of all secret societies has been that obedience is an end and aim in itself, and faith the chiefest of all the virtues. You wouldn't take anything on trust; you have the pure English temperament."

Brand laughed, and said nothing. But O'Halloran sat down again, and began to talk in an idle, hap-hazard sort of fashion of the various secret societies, religious, social, political that had become known to the world; and of their aims, and their working, and how they had so often fallen away into the mere preservation of mummeries, or declared themselves only by the commission of useless deeds of revenge.

"Ah," said Brand, eagerly, "that is precisely what I have been urging on Lord Evelyn. How can you know, in joining such an association, that you are not becoming the accomplices of men who are merely planning assassination? And what good can come of that? How are you likely to gain anything by the dagger? The great social and political changes of the world come in tides; you can neither retard them nor help them by sticking pins in the sand."

"I am not so sure," said the other, doubtfully. "A little wholesome terrorism has sometimes played its part. The 1868 amnesty to the Poles in Siberia was not so long after—not more than a year after, I think—that little business of Berezowski. Faith, what a chance that man had!"

"Who?"

"Berezowski," said he, with an air of contemplation. "The two biggest scoundrels in the world in one carriage; and he had two shots at them. Well, well, Orsini succeeded better."

"Succeeded?" said George Brand. "Do you call that success? He had the reward that he richly merited, at all events."

“You do not think he was successful?” he said, calmly. “Then you do not know how the kingdom of Italy came by its liberty. Who do you think was the founder of that kingdom of Italy?—which God preserve till it become something better than a kingdom! Not Cavour, with all his wiliness; not your Galantuomo, the warrior who wrote up Aspromonte in the face of all the world as the synonyme for the gratitude of kings; not Garibaldi, who, in spite of Aspromonte, has become now merely the *concierge* to the House of Savoy. The founder of the kingdom of Italy was Felix Orsini—and whether heaven or hell contains him, I drink his health!”

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He suited the action to the word. Brand looked on, not much impressed.

“That is all nonsense, O’Halloran!” Lord Evelyn said, bluntly.

“I tell you,” O’Halloran said, with some vehemence, “that the 14th of January, 1858, kept Louis Napoleon in such a state of tremor, that he would have done a good deal more than lend his army to Sardinia to sweep the Austrians out rather than abandon himself to the fate that Cavour plainly and distinctly indicated. But for the threat of another dose of Orsini pills, do you think you would ever have heard of Magenta and Solferino?”

He seemed to rouse himself a bit now.

“No,” he said, “I do not approve of assassination as a political weapon. It seldom answers. But it has always been the policy of absolute governments, and of their allies the priests and the police, to attribute any murders that might occur to the secret societies, and so to terrify stupid people. It is one of the commonest slanders in history. Why, everybody knows how Fouché humbugged the First Napoleon, and got up vague plots to prove that he, and he alone, knew what was going on. When Karl Sand killed Kotzebue—oh, of course, that was a fine excuse for the German kings and princes to have another raid against free speech, though Sand declared he had nothing in the world to do with either the Tugendbund or any such society. Who now believes that Young Italy killed Count Rossi? Rossi was murdered by the agents of the clericals; it was distinctly proved. But any stick is good enough to beat a dog with. No matter what the slander is, so long as you can get up a charge, either for the imprisoning of a dangerous enemy or for terrifying the public mind. You yourself, Mr. Brand—I can see that your only notion of the innumerable secret societies now in Europe is that they will probably assassinate people. That’s what they said about the Carbonari too. The objects of the Carbonari were plain as plain could be; but no sooner had General Pepe kicked out Ferdinand and put in a constitutional monarch, than Austria must needs attribute every murder that was committed, to those detestable Carbonari, so that she should call upon Prussia and Russia to join her in strangling the infant liberties of Europe. You see, we can’t get at those Royal slanderers. We can get at a man like Sir James Graham, when we force him to apologize in the House of Commons for having said that Mazzini instigated the assassination of the spies Emiliani and Lazzareschi.”

“But, good heavens!” exclaimed Brand, “does anybody doubt that that was a political double murder?”

O’Halloran shrugged his shoulders, and smiled.

“You may call it murder if you like; others might call it a fitting punishment. But all I was asking you to do was to remove from your mind that bugbear that the autocratic governments of Europe have created for their own uses. No secret society—if you except those Nihilists, who appear to have gone mad altogether—I say, no secret

society of the present day recognizes political assassination as a normal or desirable weapon; though it may have to be resorted to in extreme cases. You, as an individual, might, in certain circumstances, lawfully kill a man; but that is neither the custom, nor the object, nor the chief thought of your life."

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"And are there many of these societies?" Brand asked.

O'Halloran had carelessly lit himself another pipe.

"Europe is honey-combed with them. They are growing in secret as rapidly as some kindred societies are growing in the open. Look at the German socialists—in 1871 they polled only 120,000 votes; in 1874 they polled 340,000: I imagine that Herr Furst von Bismarck will find some difficulty in suppressing that Frankenstein monster he coquetted so long with. Then the Knights of Labor in America: you will hear something of them by-and-by, or I am mistaken. In secret and in the open alike there is a vast power growing and growing, increasing in volume and bulk from hour to hour, from year to year, God only knows in what fashion it will reveal itself. But you may depend on it that when the spark does spring out of the cloud—when the clearance of the atmosphere is due—people will look back on 1688, and 1798, and 1848 as mere playthings. The Great Revolution is still to come; it may be nearer than some imagine."

He had grown more earnest, both in his manner and his speech.

"Well," George Brand said, "timid people may reassure themselves. Where there are so many societies, there will be as many different aims. Some, like the wilder German socialists, will want a general participation of property; others a demolition of the churches and crucifixion of the priests; others the establishment of a Universal Republic. There may be a great deal of powder stored up, but it will all go off in different directions, in little fireworks."

A quick light gleamed in those deep-set, lion-like eyes.

"Very well said!" was the scornful comment. "The Czar himself could not have expressed his belief, or at least his hope, more neatly. But let me tell you, sir, that the masses of mankind are not such hopeless idiots as are some of the feather-headed orators and writers who speak for them; and that you will appeal to them in vain if you do not appeal to their sense of justice, and their belief in right, and in the eternal laws of God. You may have a particular crowd go mad, or a particular city go mad; but the heart of the people beats true, and if you desire a great political change, you must appeal to their love of fair and honest dealing as between man and man. And even if the aims of these societies are diverse, what then? What would you think, now, if it were possible to construct a common platform, where certain aims at least could be accepted by all, and become bonds to unite those who are hoping for better things all over the earth? That did not occur to you as a possible thing, perhaps? You have only studied the ways of kings and governments—each one for itself. 'Come over my boundary, and I will cleave your head; or, rather, I will send my common people to do it, for a little blood-letting from time to time is good for that vile and ignorant body.' But the vile and ignorant body may

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begin to tire of that recurrent blood-letting, and might perhaps even say, 'Brother across the boundary, I have no quarrel with you. You are poor and ignorant like myself; the travail of the earth lies hard on you; I would rather give you my hand. If I have any quarrel, surely it is with the tyrants of the earth, who have kept both you and me enslaved; who have taken away our children from us; who have left us scarcely bread. How long, O Lord, how long? We are tired of the reign of Caesar; we are beaten down with it; who will help us now to establish the reign of Christ?'

He rose. Despite the unkempt hair, this man looked quite handsome now, while this serious look was in his face. Brand began to perceive whence his friend Evelyn had derived at least some of his inspiration.

"Meanwhile," O'Halloran said, with a light, scornful laugh, "Christianity has been of excellent service to Caesar; it has been the big policeman of Europe. Do you think these poor wretches would have been so patient if they had not believed there was some compensation reserved for them beyond the grave? They would have had Caesar by the throat by this time."

"Then that scheme of co-operation you mentioned," Brand said, somewhat hastily—for he saw that O'Halloran was about to leave—"that is what Ferdinand Lind is working at?"

The other started.

"I cannot give you any information on that point," said O'Halloran, gravely. "And I do not think you are likely to get much anywhere if you are only moved by curiosity, however sympathetic and well-wishing."

He took up his hat and stick.

"Good-bye, Mr. Brand," said he; and he looked at him with a kindly look. "As far as I can judge, you are now in the position of a man at a partly opened door, half afraid to enter, and too curious to draw back. Well, my advice to you is—Draw back. Or at least remember this: that before you enter that room you must be without doubt—and *without fear*."

CHAPTER VI.

BON VOYAGE!

Fear he had none. His life was not so valuable to him that he would have hesitated about throwing himself into any forlorn-hope, provided that he was satisfied of the justice of the cause. He had dabbled a little in philosophy, and not only believed that



the ordinary altruistic instincts of mankind could be traced to a purely utilitarian origin, but also that, on the same theory, the highest form of personal gratification might be found in the severest form, of self-sacrifice. He did not pity a martyr; he envied him. But before the martyr's joy must come the martyr's faith. Without that enthusiastic belief in the necessity and nobleness and value of the sacrifice, what could there be but physical pain and the despair of a useless death?

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But, if he had no fear, he had a superabundance of doubt. He had not all the pliable, receptive, imaginative nature of his friend, Lord Evelyn. He had more than the ordinary Englishman's distrust of secrecy. He was not to be won over by the visions of a St. Simon, the eloquence of a Fourier, the epigrams of a Proudhon: these were to him but intellectual playthings, of no practical value. It was, doubtless, a novelty for a young man brought up as Lord Evelyn had been to associate with a gin-drinking Irish reporter, and to regard him as the mysterious apostle of a new creed; Brand only saw in O'Halloran a light-headed, imaginative, talkative person, as safe to trust to for guidance as a will-o'-the-wisp. It is true that for the time being he had been thrilled by the passionate fervor of Natalie Lind's singing; and many a time since he could have fancied that he heard in the stillness of the night that pathetic and vibrating appeal—

"When, when will the Lord cry, 'Revenge, it is mine?'"

But he dissociated her from her father's schemes altogether. No doubt she was moved by the generous enthusiasm of a young girl. She had a warm, human, sympathetic heart; the cry of the poor and the suffering appealed to her; and she was confident in the success of projects of which she had been prudently kept ignorant. This was George Brand's reading. He would not have Natalie Lind associated with Leicester Square and a lot of garlic-eating revolutionaries.

"But who is this man Lind?" he asked, impatiently, of Lord Evelyn. He had driven up to his friend's house in Clarges Street, had had luncheon with him, and they were now smoking a cigarette in the library.

"You mean his nationality?" said his friend, laughing. "That has puzzled me, too. He seems, at all events, to have had his finger in a good many pies. He escaped into Turkey with Bem, I know: and he has been imprisoned in Russia; and once or twice I have heard him refer to the amnesty that was proclaimed when Louis Napoleon was presented with an heir. But whether he is Pole, or Jew, or Slav, there is no doubt about his daughter being a thorough Hungarian."

"Not the least," said Brand, with decision. "I have seen lots of women of that type in Pesth, and in Vienna, too: if you are walking in the Prater you can always tell the Hungarian women as they drive past. But you rarely see one as beautiful as she is."

After awhile Lord Evelyn said,

"This is Natalie's birthday. By-and-by I am going along to Bond Street to buy some little thing for her."

"Then she allows you to make her presents?" Brand said, somewhat coldly.

“She and I are like brother and sister now,” said the pale, deformed lad, without hesitation. “If I were ill, I think she would be glad to come and look after me.”

“You have already plenty of sisters who would do that.”

“By-the-way, they are coming to town next week with my mother. You must come and dine with us some night, if you are not afraid to face the chatter of such a lot of girls.”

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"Have they seen Miss Lind?"

"No, not yet."

"And how will you explain your latest craze to them, Evelyn? They are very nice girls indeed, you know; but—but—when they set full cry on you—I suppose some day I shall have to send them a copy of a newspaper from abroad, with this kind of thing in it: *'Compeared yesterday before the Correctional Tribunal, Earnest Francis D'Agincourt, Baron Evelyn, charged with having in his possession two canisters of an explosive compound and fourteen empty missiles. Further, among the correspondence of the accused was found—'*"

"*'A letter from an Englishman named Brand,'*" continued Lord Evelyn, as he rose and went to the window, "*'apparently written under the influence of nightmare.'* Come, Brand, I see the carriage is below. Will you drive with me to the jeweller's?"

"Certainly," said his friend; and at this moment the carriage was announced. "I suppose it wouldn't do for me to buy the thing? You know I have more money to spend on trinkets than you have."

They were very intimate friends indeed. Lord Evelyn only said, with a smile,

"I am afraid Natalie wouldn't like it."

But this choosing of a birthday present was a terrible business. The jeweller was as other jewellers: his designs were mostly limited to the representation of two objects—a butterfly for a woman, and a horseshoe for a man. At last Brand, who had been walking about from time to time, espied, in a distant case, an object which instantly attracted his attention. It was a flat piece of wood or board, covered with blue velvet; and on this had been twined an unknown number of yards of the beautiful thread-like gold chain common to the jewellers' shop-windows in Venice.

"Here you are, Evelyn," Brand said at once. "Why not buy a lot of this thin chain, and let her make it into any sort of decoration that she chooses?"

"It is an ignominious way out of the difficulty," said the other: but he consented; and yard after yard of the thread-like chain was unrolled. When allowed to drop together, it seemed to go into no compass at all.

They went outside.

"What are you going to do now, Brand?"

The other was looking cheerless enough.

"I?" he said, with the slightest possible shrug. "I suppose I must go down to the club, and yawn away the time till dinner."

"Then why not come with me? I have a commission or two from my sisters—one as far out as Notting Hill; but after that we can drive back through the Park and call on the Linds. I dare say Lind will be home by that time."

Lord Evelyn's friend was more than delighted. As they drove from place to place he was a good deal more talkative than was his wont; and, among other things, confessed his belief that Ferdinand Lind seemed much too hard-headed a man to be engaged in mere visionary enterprises. But somehow the conversation generally came round to Mr. Lind's daughter; and Brand seemed very anxious to find out to what degree she was cognizant of her father's schemes. On this point Lord Evelyn knew nothing.

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At last they arrived at the house in Curzon Street, and found Mr. Lind just on the point of entering. He stayed to receive them; went up-stairs with them to the drawing-room, and then begged them to excuse him for a few minutes. Presently Natalie Lind appeared.

How this man envied his friend Evelyn the frank, sister-like way in which she took the little present, and thanked him, for that and his kind wishes!

"Ah, do you know," she said, "what a strange birthday gift I had given me this morning? See!"

She brought over the old-fashioned silver locket, and told them the whole story.

"Is it not strange?" she said. "'*From Natalie to Natalushka*:' that is, from myself to myself. What can it mean?"

"Have you not asked your father, then, about his mysterious messenger?" Brand said. He was always glad to ask this girl a question, for she looked him so straight in the face with her soft, dark eyes, as she answered,

"He has only now come home. I will directly."

"But why does your father call you Natalushka, Natalie?" asked Lord Evelyn.

There was the slightest blush on the pale, clear face.

"It was a nickname they gave me, I am told, when I was child. They used to make me angry."

"And now, if one were to call you Natalushka?"

"My anger would be too terrible," she said, with a smile. "Papa alone dares to do that."

Presently her father came into the room.

"Oh, papa," said she, "I have discovered who the lady is whom you got to bring me the flowers. And see! she has given me this strange little locket. Look at the inscription—'*From Natalie to Natalushka*.'"

Lind only glanced at the locket. His eyes were fixed on the girl.

"Where did you see the—the lady?" he asked, coldly.

"In the Park. But she did not stay a moment, or speak; she hurried on, and Anneli thought she was crying. I almost think so too. Who was it, papa? May I speak to her, if I see her again?"



Mr. Lind turned aside for a moment. Brand, who was narrowly watching him, was convinced that the man was in a passion of rage. But when he turned again he was outwardly calm.

“You will do nothing of the kind, Natalie,” he said in measured tones. “I have warned you before against making indiscriminate acquaintances; and Anneli, if she is constantly getting such stupidities into her head, must be sent about her business. I do not wish to hear anything more about it. Will you ring and ask why tea has not been sent up?”

The girl silently obeyed. Her father had never spoken to her in this cold, austere tone before. She sat down at a small table, apart.

Mr. Lind talked for a minute or two with his guests; then he said,

“Natalie, you have the zither there; why do you not play us something?”

She turned to the small instrument, and, after a second or two, played a few notes: that was all. She rose and said, “I don’t think I can play this afternoon, papa;” and then she left the room.

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Mr. Lind pretended to converse with his guests as before; and tea came in; but presently he begged to be excused for a moment, and left the room. George Brand rose, and took a turn or two up and down.

"It would take very little," he muttered—for his teeth were set—"to make me throw that fellow out of the window!"

"What do you mean?" Lord Evelyn said, in great surprise.

"Didn't you see? She left the room to keep from crying. That miserable Polish cutthroat—I should like to kick him down-stairs!"

But at this moment the door opened, and father and daughter entered, arm-in-arm. Natalie's face was a little bit flushed, but she was very gentle and affectionate; they had made up that brief misunderstanding, obviously. And she had brought in her hand a mob-cap of black satin: would Lord Evelyn allow her to try the effect of twisting those beautiful golden threads through it?

"Natalushka," said her father, with great good-humor, "it is your birthday. Do you think you could persuade Lord Evelyn and Mr. Brand to come to your dinner-party?"

It was then explained to the two gentlemen that on this great anniversary it was the custom of Mr. Lind, when in London, to take his daughter to dine at some French or Italian restaurant in Regent Street or thereabouts. In fact, she liked to play at being abroad for an hour or two; to see around her foreign faces, and hear foreign tongues.

"I am afraid you will say that it is very easy to remind yourself of the Continent," said Mr. Lind, smiling—"that you have only to go to a place where they give you oily food and bad wine."

"On the contrary," said Brand, "I should think it very difficult in London to imagine yourself in a foreign town; for London is drained. However, I accept the invitation with pleasure."

"And I," said Lord Evelyn. "Now, must we be off to dress?"

"Not at all," said Natalie. "Do you not understand that you are abroad, and walking into a restaurant to dine? And now I will play you a little invitation—not to dinner; for you must suppose you have dined—and you come out on the stairs of the hotel, and step into the black gondola."

She went along to the small table, and sat down to the zither. There were a few notes of prelude; and then they heard the beautiful low voice added to the soft tinkling sounds. What did they vaguely make out from that melodious murmur of Italian?

Behold the beautiful night—the wind sleeps drowsily—the silent shores slumber in the dark:

“Sul placido elemento
Vien meco a navigar!”

The soft wind moves—as it stirs among the leaves—it moves and dies—among the murmur of the water:

“Lascia l’amico tetto
Vien meco a navigar!”

Now on the spacious mantle—of the already darkening heavens—see, oh, the shining wonder—how the white stars tremble:

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“Ai raggi della luna
Vien meco a navigar!”

Where were they? Surely they have passed out from the darkness of the narrow canal, and are away on the broad bosom of the lagoon. The Place of St. Mark is all aglow with its golden points of fire; the yellow radiance spreads out into the night. And that other wandering mass of gold—the gondola hung round with lamps, and followed by a dark procession through the silence of the waters—does not the music come from thence? Listen, now:

“Sul l’onde addormentate
Vien meco a navigar!”

Can they hear the distant chorus, in there at the shore where the people are walking about in the golden glare of the lamps?

“Vien meco a navigar!
Vien meco a navigar!”

Or can some faint echo be carried away out to yonder island, where the pale blue-white radiance of the moonlight is beginning to touch the tall dome of San Giorgio?

“—a navigar!
—a navigar!”

“It seems to me,” said Lord Evelyn, when the girl rose, with a smile on her face, “that you do not need to go into Regent Street when you want to imagine yourself abroad.”

Natalie looked at her watch.

“If you will excuse me, I will go and get ready now.”

Well, they went to the big foreign restaurant; and had a small table all to themselves, in the midst of the glare, and the heat, and the indiscriminate Babel of tongues. And, under the guidance of Mr. Brand, they adventured upon numerous articles of food which were more varied in their names than in their flavor; and they tasted some of the compounds, reeking of iris-root, that the Neapolitans call wine, until they fell back on a flask of Chianti, and were content; and they regarded their neighbors, and were regarded in turn. In the midst of it all, Mr. Lind, who had been somewhat preoccupied, said suddenly.

“Natalie, can you start with me for Leipzig to-morrow afternoon?”

She was as prompt as a soldier.

“Yes, papa. Shall I take Anneli or not?”

“You may if you like.”

After that George Brand seemed to take very little interest in this heterogeneous banquet: he stared absently at the foreign-looking people, at the hurrying waiters, at the stout lady behind the bar. Even when Mr. Lind told his daughter that her black satin mob-cap, with its wonderful intertwistings of Venetian chain, looked very striking in a mirror opposite, and when Lord Evelyn eagerly gave his friend the credit of having selected that birthday gift, he did not seem to pay much heed. When, after all was over, and he had wished Natalie “*Bon voyage*” at the door of the brougham, Lord Evelyn said to him,

“Come along to Clarges Street now and smoke a cigar.”

“No, thanks!” he said. “I think I will stroll down to my rooms now.”

“What is the matter with you, Brand? You have been looking very glum.”

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"Well, I have been thinking that London is a depressing sort of a place for a man to live in who does not know many people. It is very big, and very empty. I don't think I shall be able to stand it much longer."

CHAPTER VII.

IN SOLITUDE.

A blustering, cold morning in March; the skies lowering, the wind increasing, and heavy showers being driven up from time to time from the black and threatening south-west. This was strange weather to make a man think of going to the seaside; and of all places at the seaside to Dover, and of all places in Dover to the Lord Warden Hotel, which was sure to be filled with fear-stricken foreigners, waiting for the sea to calm. Waters, as he packed the small portmanteau, could not at all understand this freak on the part of his master.

"If Lord Evelyn calls, sir," he said at the station, "when shall I say you will be back?"

"In a few days, perhaps. I don't know."

He had a compartment to himself; and away the train went through the wet and dismal and foggy country, with the rain pouring down the panes of the carriage. The dismal prospect outside, however, did not matter much to this solitary traveller. He turned his back to the window, and read all the way down.

At Dover the outlook was still more dismal. A dirty, yellow-brown sea was rolling heavily in, springing white along the Admiralty Pier; gusts of rain were sweeping along the thoroughfare between the station and the hotel; in the hotel itself the rooms were occupied by a miscellaneous collection of dissatisfied folk, who aimlessly read the advertisements in Bradshaw, or stared through the dripping windows at the yellow waves outside. This was the condition of affairs when George Brand took up his residence there. He was quite alone; but he had a sufficiency of books with him; and so deeply engaged was he with these, that he let the ordinary coffee-room discussions about the weather pass absolutely unheeded.

On the second morning a number of the travellers plucked up heart of grace and embarked, though the weather was still squally. George Brand was not in the least interested as to the speculations of those who remained about the responsibilities of the passage. He drew his chair toward the fire, and relapsed into his reading.

This day, however, was varied by his making the acquaintance of a little old French lady, which he did by means of her two granddaughters, Josephine, and Veronique. Veronique, having been pushed by Josephine, stumbled against Mr. Brand's knee, and would inevitably have fallen into the fireplace had he not caught her. Thereupon the



little old lady, hurrying across the room, and looking very much inclined to box the ears of both Josephine and Veronique, most profusely apologized, in French, to monsieur. Monsieur replying in that tongue, said it was of no consequence whatever. Then madame greatly delighted at finding some one, not a waiter, to whom she could speak in her own language, continued the conversation, and very speedily made monsieur the confident of all her hopes and fears about that terrible business the Channel passage. No doubt monsieur was also waiting for this dreadful storm to abate?

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Monsieur quickly perceived that so long as this voluble little old lady—who was as yellow as a frog, and had beady black eyes, but whose manner was exceedingly charming—chose to attach herself to him, his pursuit of knowledge was not likely to be attended with much success, so he shut the book on his finger, and pleasantly said to her,

“Oh no, madame; I am only waiting here for some friends.”

Madame was greatly alarmed: surely they would not cross in such frightful weather? Monsieur ventured to think it was not so very bad. Then the little French lady glanced out at the window, and threw up her hands, and said with a shudder,

“Frightful! Truly frightful. What should I do with those two little ones ill, and myself ill? The sea might sweep them away!”

Mr. Brand, having observed something of the manners of Josephine and Veronique, was inwardly of opinion that the sea might be worse employed: but what he said was —

“You could take a deck-cabin, madame.”

Madame again shuddered.

“Your friends are English, no doubt, monsieur; the English are not so much afraid of storms.”

“No, madame, they are not English; but I do not think they would let such a day as this, for example, hinder them. They are not likely, however, to be on their way back for a day or two. To-morrow I may run over to Calais, just on the chance of crossing with them again.”

Here was a mad Englishman, to be sure! When people, driven by dire necessity, had their heart in their mouth at the very notion of encountering that rough sea, here was a person who thought of crossing and returning for no reason on earth—a trifling compliment to his friends—a pleasure excursion—a break in the monotony of the day!

“And I shall be pleased to look after the little ones, madame,” said he, politely, “if you are going over.”

Madame thanked him very profusely; but assured him that so long as the weather looked so stormy she could not think of intrusting Josephine and Veronique to the mercy of the waves.

Now, if George Brand had little hope of meeting his friends that day, he acted pretty much as if he were expecting some one. First of all, he had secured a saloon-carriage

in the afternoon mail-train to London—an unnecessary luxury for a bachelor well accustomed to the hardships of travel. Then he had managed to procure a handsome bouquet of freshly-cut flowers. Finally, there was some mysterious arrangement by which fruit, cakes, tea, and wine were to be ready at a moment's notice in the event of that saloon-carriage being required.

Then, as soon as the rumor went through the hotel that the vessel was in sight, away he went down the pier, with his coat-collar tightly buttoned, and his hat jammed down. What a toy-looking thing the steamer was, away out there in the mists or the rain, with the brown line of smoke stretching back to the horizon! She was tossing and rolling a good deal among the brown waves: he almost hoped his friends were not on board. And he wished that all the more when he at length saw the people clamber up the gangway—a miserable procession of half-drowned folk, some of them scarcely able to walk. No; his friends were not there. He returned to the hotel, and to his books.

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But the attentions of Josephine and Veronique had become too pressing; so he retired from the reading-room, and took refuge in his own room up-stairs. It fronted the sea. He could hear the long, monotonous, continuous wash of the waves: from time to time the windows rattled with the wind.

He took from his portmanteau another volume from that he had been reading, and sat down by the window. But he had only read a line or two when he turned and looked absently out on the sea. Was he trying to recall, amidst all that confused and murmuring noise, some other sound that seemed to haunt him?

“Who is your lady of love, oh ye that pass
Singing?”

Was he trying to recall that pathetic thrill in his friend Evelyn’s voice which he knew was but the echo of another voice? He had never heard Natalie Lind read: but he knew that that was how she had read, when Evelyn’s sensitive nature had heard and been permeated by the strange tremor. And now, as he opened the book again, whose voice was it he seemed to hear, in the silence of the small room, amidst the low and constant murmur of the waves?

“—And ye shall die before your thrones be won.
—Yea, and the changed world and the liberal sun
Shall move and shine with out us, and we lie
Dead; but if she too move on earth and live—
But if the old world, with all the old irons rent,
Laugh and give thanks, shall we be not content?
Nay, we shall rather live, we shall not die,
Life being so little, and death so good to give.

* * * * *

“—But ye that might be clothed with all things pleasant,
Ye are foolish that put off the fair soft present,
That clothe yourselves with the cold future air;
When mother and father, and tender sister and brother,
And the old live love that was shall be as ye,
Dust, and no fruit of loving life shall be.
—She shall be yet who is more than all these were,
Than sister or wife or father unto us or mother.”

He turned again to the window, to the driven yellow sea, and the gusts of rain. Surely there was no voice to be heard from other and farther shores?



“—Is this worth life, is this to win for wages?
Lo, the dead mouths of the awful gray-grown ages,
The venerable, in the past that is their prison,
In the outer darkness, in the unopening grave,
Laugh, knowing how many as ye now say have said—
How many, and all are fallen, are fallen and dead:
Shall ye dead rise, and these dead have not risen?
—Not we but she, who is tender and swift to save.

“—Are ye not weary, and faint not by the way,
Seeing night by night devoured of day by day,
Seeing hour by hour consumed in sleepless fire?
Sleepless: and ye too, when shall ye too sleep?
—We are weary in heart and head, in hands and feet,
And surely more than all things sleep were sweet,
Than all things save the inexorable desire
Which whoso knoweth shall neither faint nor weep.”

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He rose, and walked up and down for a time. What would one not give for a faith like that?

“—Is this so sweet that one were fain to follow?
Is this so sure where all men’s hopes are hollow,
Even this your dream, that by much tribulation
Ye shall make whole flawed hearts, and bowed necks straight?
—Nay, though our life were blind, our death were fruitless,
Not therefore were the whole world’s high hope rootless;
But man to man, nation would turn to nation,
And the old life live, and the old great world be great.”

With such a faith—with that “inexorable desire” burning in the heart and the brain—surely one could find the answer easy enough to the last question of the poor creatures who wonder at the way-worn pilgrims,

“—Pass on then, and pass by us and let us be,
For what light think ye after life to see?
And if the world fare better will ye know?
And if man triumph who shall seek you and say?”

That he could answer for himself, at any rate. He was not one to put much store by the fair soft present; and if he were to enter upon any undertaking such as that he had had but a glimpse of, neither personal reward nor hope of any immediate success would be the lure. He would be satisfied to know that his labor or his life had been well spent. But whence was to come that belief? whence the torch to kindle the sacred fire?

The more he read, during these days of waiting, of the books and pamphlets he had brought with him, the less clear seemed the way before him. He was struck with admiration when he read of those who had forfeited life or liberty in this or the other cause; and too often with despair when he came to analyze their aims. Once or twice, indeed, he was so moved by the passionate eloquence of some socialist writer that he was ready to say, “Well, the poor devils have toiled long enough; give them their turn, let the revolution cost what it may!” And then immediately afterward: “What! Stir up the unhappy wretches to throw themselves on the bayonets of the standing armies of Europe? There is no emancipation for them that way.”

But when he turned from the declamation and the impracticable designs of this impassioned literature to the vast scheme of co-operation that had been suggested rather than described to him, there seemed more hope. If all these various forces that were at work could be directed into one channel, what might they not accomplish? Weed out the visionary, the impracticable, the anarchical from their aims; and then what might not be done by this convergence of all these eager social movements? Lind, he argued with himself, was not at all a man likely to devote himself to optimistic dreams.

Further than that—and here he was answering a suspicion that again and again recurred to him—what if, in such a great social movement, men were to be found who were only playing for their own hand? That was the case in every such combination. But false or self-seeking agents neither destroyed the nobleness of the work nor could defeat it in the end if it were worthy to live. They might try to make for themselves what use they could of the current, but they too were swept onward to the sea.

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So he argued, and communed, and doubted, and tried to believe. And all through it—whether he paced up and down by the sea in the blustering weather, or strolled away through the town and up the face of the tall white cliff, or lay awake in the dark night, listening to the rush and moan of the waves—all through these doubts and questions there was another and sweeter and clearer sound, that seemed to come from afar—

“She shall be yet who is more than all these were,
Than sister or wife or father unto us or mother.”

However loud the sea was at night, that was the sound he heard, clear and sweet—the sound of a girl’s voice, that had joy in it, and faith in the future, and that spoke to him of what was to be.

Well, the days passed; and still his friends did not come. He had many trips across, to while away the time: and had become great friends with the stout, black-haired French captain. He had conveyed Josephine and Veronique and their little grandmother safely over, and had made them as comfortable as was possible under trying circumstances. And always and every day there were freshly-cut flowers and renewed fruit, and a re-engaged saloon-carriage waiting for those strangers who did not come; until both hotel people and railway people began to think Mr. Brand as mad as the little French lady assured herself he was, when he said he meant to cross the Channel twice for nothing.

At last—at last! He had strolled up to the Calais station, and was standing on the platform when the train came in. But there was no need for him to glance eagerly up and down at the now opening doors; for who was this calmly regarding him—or rather regarding him with a smile of surprise? Despite the big furred cloak and the hood, he knew at once; he darted forward, lifted the lower latch and opened the door, and gave her his hand.

“Oh, how do you do, Mr. Brand?” said she, with a pleasant look of welcome. “Who could have expected to meet you here?”

He was confused, embarrassed, bewildered. This voice so strangely recalled those sounds that had been haunting him for days. He could only stammer out,

“I—I happened to be at Dover, and thought I would run over here for a little bit. How lucky you are—it is such a beautiful day for crossing.”

“That is good news; I must tell papa,” said Natalie, cheerfully, as she turned again to the open door.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DISCOVERY.

“And you are going over too? And to London also? Oh, that will be very nice.”

It seemed so strange to hear this voice, that had for days sounded to him as if it were far away, now quite close, and talking in this friendly and familiar fashion. Then she had brought the first of the spring with her. The air had grown quite mild: the day was clear and shining; even the little harbor there seemed bright and picturesque in the sun. He had never before considered Calais a very beautiful place.

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And as for her; well, she appeared pleased to have met with this unexpected companion; and she was very cheerful and talkative as they went down to the quay, these two together. And whether it was that she was glad to be relieved from the cramped position of the carriage, or whether it was that his being taller than she gave countenance to her height, or whether it was merely that she rejoiced in the sweet air and the exhilaration of the sunlight, she seemed to walk with even more than her usual proudness of gait. This circumstance did not escape the eye of her father, who was immediately behind.

“Natalie,” said he, peevishly, “you are walking as if you wore a sword by your side.”

She did not seem sorely hurt.

“Du Schwert an meiner Linken!” she said, with a laugh. “It is my military cloak that makes you think so, papa.”

Why, even this cockle-shell of a steamer looked quite inviting on so pleasant a morning. And there before them stretched the blue expanse of the sea, with every wave, and every ripple on every wave, flashing a line of silver in the sunlight. No sooner were they out of the yellow-green waters of the harbor than Mr. Brand had his companions conducted on to the bridge between the paddle-boxes; and the little crop-haired French boy brought them camp-stools, and their faces were turned toward England.

“Ah!” said Natalie, “many a poor wretch has breathed more freely when at last he found himself looking out for the English shore. Do you remember old Anton Pepczinski and his solemn toast, papa?”

She turned to George Brand.

“He was an old Polish gentleman, who used to come to our house in the evening, he and a few others of his countrymen, to smoke and play chess. But always, some time during the evening, he would say, ‘Gentlemen, a Pole is never ungrateful. I call on you to drink this toast: *To the white chalk-line beyond the sea!*’” And then she added, quickly, “If I were English, how proud I should be of England!”

“But why?” he said.

“Because she has kept liberty alive in Europe,” said the girl, proudly; “because she offers an exile to the oppressed, no matter from whence they come; because she says to the tyrant, ‘No, you cannot follow.’ Why, when even your beer-men your dray-men know how to treat a Haynau, what must the spirit of the country be? If only those fine fellows could have caught Windischgratz too!”

Her father laughed at her vehemence; Brand did not. That strange vibration in the girl’s voice penetrated him to the heart.

“But then,” said he, after a second or two, “I have been amusing myself for some days back by reading a good deal of political writing, mostly by foreigners; and if I were to believe what they say, I should take it that England was the most superstitious, corrupt, enslaved nation on the face of the earth! What with its reverence for rank, its worship of the priesthood—oh, I cannot tell you what a frightful country it is!”

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"Who were the writers?" Mr. Lind asked.

Brand named two or three, and instantly the attention of the others seemed arrested.

"Oh, that is the sort of literature you have been reading?" he said, with a quick glance.

"I have had some days' idleness."

"Excuse me," said the other, with a smile; "but I think you might have spent it better. That kind of literature only leads to disorder and anarchy. It may have been useful at one time; it is useful no longer. Enough of ploughing has been done: we want sowing done now—we want writers who will build up instead of pulling down. Those Nihilists," he added, almost with a sigh, "are becoming more and more impracticable. They aim at scarcely anything beyond destruction."

Here Natalie changed the conversation. This was too bright and beautiful a day to admit of despondency.

"I suppose you love the sea, Mr. Brand?" she said. "All Englishmen do. And yachting—I suppose you go yachting?"

"I have tried it; but it is too tedious for me," said Brand. "The sort of yachting I like is in a vessel of five thousand tons, going three hundred and eighty miles a day. With half a gale of wind in your teeth in the 'rolling Forties,' then there is some fun."

"I must go over to the States very soon," Mr. Lind said.

"Papa!"

"The worst of it is," her father said, without heeding that exclamation of protest, "that I have so much to do that can only be done by word of mouth."

"I wish I could take the message for you," Brand said, lightly. "When the weather looks decent, I very often take a run across to New York, put up for a few days at the Brevoort House, and take the next ship home. It is very enjoyable, especially if you know the officers. Then the bagman—I have acquired a positive love for the bagman."

"The what?" said Natalie.

"The bagman. The 'commy' his friends call him. The commercial traveller, don't you know? He is a most capital fellow—full of life and fun, desperately facetious, delighting in practical jokes: altogether a wonderful creature. You begin to think you are in another generation—before England became melancholy—the generation, for example, that roared over the adventures of Tom and Jerry."

Natalie did not know who Tom and Jerry were; but that was of little consequence; for at this moment they began to descry “the white chalk-line beyond the sea”—the white line of the English coast. And they went on chatting cheerfully; and the sunlight flashed its diamonds on the blue waters around them, and the white chalk cliffs became more distinct.

“And yet it seems so heartless for one to be going back to idleness,” Natalie Lind said, absently. “Papa works as hard in England as anywhere else; but what can I do? To think of one going back to peaceful days, and comfort, and pleasant friends, when others have to go through such misery, and to fight against such persecution! When Vjera Sassulitch offered me her hand—”

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She stopped abruptly, with a quick, frightened look, first at George Brand, then at her father.

"You need not hesitate, Natalie," her father said, calmly. "Mr. Brand has given me his word of honor he will reveal nothing he may hear from us."

"I do not think you need be afraid," said Brand; but all the same he was conscious of a keen pang of mortification. He, too, had noticed that quick look of fright and distrust. What did it mean, then? "*You are beside us, you are near to us; but you are not of us, you are not with us.*"

He was silent, and she was silent too. She seemed ashamed of her indiscretion, and would say nothing further about Vjera Sassulitch.

"Don't imagine, Mr. Brand," said her father, to break this awkward silence, "that what Natalie says is true. She is not going to be so idle as all that. No; she has plenty of hard work before her—at least, I think it hard work—translating from the German into Polish."

"I wish I could help," Brand said, in a low voice. "I do not know a word of Polish."

"You help?" she said, regarding him with the beautiful dark eyes, that had a sudden wonder in them. "Would you, if you knew Polish?"

He met that straight, fearless glance without flinching; and he said "Yes," while they still looked at each other. Then her eyes fell; and perhaps there was the slightest flush of embarrassment, or pleasure, on the pale, handsome face.

But how quickly her spirits rose! There was no more talk of politics as they neared England. He described the successive ships to her; he called her attention to the strings of wild-duck flying up Channel; he named the various headlands to her. Then, as they got nearer and nearer, the little Anneli had to be sought out, and the various travelling impedimenta got together. It did not occur to Mr. Lind or his daughter as strange that George Brand should be travelling without any luggage whatever.

But surely it must have occurred to them as remarkable that a bachelor should have had a saloon-carriage reserved for himself—unless, indeed, they reflected that a rich Englishman was capable of any whimsical extravagance. Then, no sooner had Miss Lind entered this carriage, than it seemed as though everything she could think of was being brought for her. Such flowers did not grow in railway-stations—especially in the month of March. Had the fruit dropped from the telegraph-poles? Cakes, wine, tea, magazines and newspapers appeared to come without being asked for.

"Mr. Brand," said Natalie, "you must be an English Monte Cristo: do you clap your hands, and the things appear?"

But a Monte Cristo should never explain. The conjuror who reveals his mechanism is no longer a conjuror. George Brand only laughed, and said he hoped Miss Lind would always find people ready to welcome her when she reached English shores.

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As they rattled along through those shining valleys—the woods and fields and homesteads all glowing in the afternoon sun—she had put aside her travelling-cloak and hood, for the air was quite mild. Was it the drawing off of the hood, or the stir of wind on board the steamer, that had somewhat disarranged her hair?—at all events, here and there about her small ear or the shapely neck there was an escaped curl of raven-black. She had taken off her gloves, too: her hands, somewhat large, were of a beautiful shape, and transparently white. The magazines and newspapers received not much attention—except from Mr. Lind, who said that at last he should see some news neither a week old nor fictitious. As for these other two, they seemed to find a wonderful lot to talk about, and all of a profoundly interesting character. With a sudden shock of disappointment George Brand found that they were almost into London.

His hand-bag was at once passed by the custom-house people; and he had nothing to do but say good-bye. His face was not over-cheerful.

“Well, it was a lucky meeting,” Mr. Lind said. “Natalie ought to thank you for being so kind to her.”

“Yes; but not here,” said the girl, and she turned to him. “Mr. Brand, people who have travelled so far together should not part so quickly: it is miserable. Will you not come and spend the evening with us?”

“Natalie will give us something in the way of an early dinner,” said Mr. Lind, “and then you can make her play the zither for you.”

Well, there was not much hesitation about his accepting. That drawing-room, with its rose-and-green-shaded candles, was not as other drawing-rooms in the evening. In that room you could hear the fountains plashing in the Villa Reale, and the Capri fishermen singing afar, and the cattle-bells chiming on the Campagna, and the gondolas sending their soft chorus across the lagoon. When Brand left his bag in the cloak-room at the station he gave the porter half a crown for carrying thither, which was unnecessary. Nor was there any hopeless apathy on his face as he drove away with these two friends through the darkening afternoon, in the little hired brougham. When they arrived in Curzon Street, he was even good enough to assist the timid little Anneli to descend from the box; but this was in order that he might slip a tip into the hand of the coachman. The coachman scarcely said “Thank you.” It was not until afterward that he discovered he had put half a sovereign into his breeches-pocket as if it were an ordinary sixpence.

Natalie Lind came down to dinner in a dress of black velvet, with a mob-cap of rose-red silk. Round her neck she wore a band of Venetian silver-work, from the centre of which was suspended the little old-fashioned locket she had received in Hyde Park. George Brand remembered the story, and perhaps was a trifle surprised that she should wear so conspicuously the gift of a stranger.

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She was very friendly, and very cheerful. She did not seem at all fatigued with her travelling; on the contrary, it was probably the sea-air and the sunlight that had lent to her cheek a faint flush of color. But at the end of dinner her father said.

“Natalushka, if we go into the drawing-room, and listen to music, after so long a day, we shall all go to sleep. You must come into the smoking-room with us.”

“Very well, papa.”

“But, Miss Lind,” the other gentleman remonstrated, “a velvet dress—tobacco-smoke—”

“My dresses must take their chance,” said Miss Lind. “I wear them to please my friends, not to please chance acquaintances who may call during the day.”

And so they retired to the little den at the end of the passage; and Natalie handed Mr. Brand a box of cigars to choose from, and got down from the rack her father’s long-stemmed, red-bowled pipe. Then she took a seat in the corner by the fire, and listened.

The talk was all about that anarchical literature that Brand had been devouring down at Dover; and he was surprised to find how little sympathy Lind had with writing of that kind, though he had to confess that certain of the writers were personal friends of his own. Natalie sat silent, listening intently, and staring into the fire.

At last Brand said,

“Of course, I had other books. For example, one I see on your shelves there.” He rose, and took down the “Songs before Sunrise.” “Miss Lind,” he said, “I am afraid you will laugh at me; but I have been haunted with the notion that you have been teaching Lord Evelyn how to read poetry, or that he has been unconsciously imitating you. I heard him repeat some passages from ‘The Pilgrims,’ and I was convinced he was reproducing something he had heard from you. Well—I am almost ashamed to ask you—”

A touch of embarrassment appeared on the girl’s face, and she glanced at her father.

“Yes, certainly, Natalie; why not?”

“Well,” she said, lightly, “I cannot read if I am stared at. You must remain as you are.”

She took the book from him, and passed to the other side of the room, so that she was behind them both. There was silence for an instant or two as she turned over the leaves.

Then the silence was broken; and if Brand was instantly assured that his surmise was correct, he also knew that here was a more pathetic cadence—a prouder ring—than any that Lord Evelyn had thrown into the lines. She read at random—a passage here, a

passage there—but always it seemed to him that the voice was the voice of a herald proclaiming the new awakening of the world—the evil terrors of the night departing—the sunlight of liberty and right and justice beginning to shine over the sea. And these appeals to England!

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“Oh thou, clothed round with raiment of white waves,
Thy brave brows lightening through the gray wet air,
Thou, lulled with sea-sounds of a thousand caves,
And lit with sea-shine to thy inland lair,
Whose freedom clothed the naked souls of slaves
And stripped the muffled souls of tyrants bare,
Oh, by the centuries of thy glorious graves,
By the live light of the earth that was thy care,
Live, thou must not be dead,
Live; let thy armed head
Lift itself up to sunward and the fair
Daylight of time and man,
Thine head republican,
With the same splendor on thine helmless hair
That in his eyes kept up a light
Who on thy glory gazed away their sacred sight.”

The cry there was in this voice! Surely his heart answered,

“Oh Milton’s land, what ails thee to be dead!”

Was it in this very room, he wondered, that the old Polish refugee was used to lift up his trembling hand and bid his compatriots drink to “the white chalk-line beyond the sea?” How could he forget, as he and she sat together that morning, and gazed across the blue waters to the far and sunlit line of coast, the light that shone on her face as she said, “If I were English, how proud I should be of England!” And this England of her veneration and her love—did it not contain some, at least, who would answer to her appeal?

Presently Natalie Lind shut the book and gently laid it down, and stole out of the room. She was gone only for a few seconds. When she returned, she had in her hand a volume of sketches, of which she had been speaking during dinner.

He did not open this volume at once. On the contrary, he was silent for a little while; and then he looked up, and addressed Natalie, with a strange grave smile on his face.

“I was about to tell your father, Miss Lind, when you came in, that if I could not translate for you, or carry a message across the Atlantic for him, he might at least find something else that I can do. At all events, may I say that I am willing to join you, if I can be of any help at all?”

Ferdinand Lind regarded him for a second, and said, quite calmly,

“It is unnecessary. You have already joined us.”

CHAPTER IX.

A NIGHT IN VENICE.

The solitary occupant of this railway-carriage was apparently reading; but all the same he looked oftener at his watch than at his book. At length he definitely shut the volume and placed it in his travelling-bag. Then he let down the carriage-window, and looked out into the night.

The heavens were clear and calm; the newly-risen moon was but a thin crescent of silver; in the south a large planet was shining. All around him, as it seemed, stretched a vast plain of water, as dark and silent and serene as the overarching sky. Then, far ahead, he could catch a glimpse of a pale line stretching across the watery plain—a curve of the many-arched viaduct along which the train was thundering; and beyond that again, and low down at the horizon, two or three minute and dusky points of orange. These lights were the lights of Venice.

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This traveller was not much hampered with luggage. When finally the train was driven into the glare of the station, and the usual roar and confusion began, he took his small bag in his hand and rapidly made his way through the crowd; then out and down the broad stone steps, and into a gondola. In a couple of minutes he was completely away from all that glare and bustle and noise; nothing around him but darkness and an absolute silence.

The city seemed as the City of the Dead. The tall and sombre buildings on each side of the water-highway were masses of black—blackest of all where they showed against the stars. The ear sought in vain for any sound of human life; there was nothing but the lapping of the water along the side of the boat, and the slow, monotonous plash of the oar.

Father and farther into the silence and the darkness; and now here and there a window, close down to the water, and heavily barred with rectangular bars of iron, shows a dull red light; but there is no sound, nor any passing shadow within. The man who is standing by the hearse-like cabin of the gondola observes and thinks. These black buildings; the narrow and secret canals; the stillness of the night: are they not suggestive enough—of revenge, a quick blow, and the silence of the grave? And now, as the gondola still glides on, there is heard a slow and distant tolling of bells. The Deed is done, then?—no longer will the piteous hands be thrust out of the barred window—no longer will the wild cry for help startle the passer-by in the night-time. And now again, as the gondola goes on its way, another sound—still more muffled and indistinct—the sound of a church organ, with the solemn chanting of voices. Are they praying for the soul of the dead? The sound becomes more and more distant; the gondola goes on its way.

The new-comer has no further time for these idle fancies. At the Rialto bridge he stops the gondola, pays the man, and goes ashore. Then, rapidly ascending the steps, he crosses the bridge, descends the other side, and again jumps into a gondola. All this the work of a few seconds.

But it was obvious he had been expected. He gave no instructions to the two men in this second gondola. They instantly went to work, and with a rapid and powerful stroke sent the boat along—with an occasional warning cry as they swept by the entrance to one or other of the smaller canals. Finally, they abruptly left the Grand Canal, close by the Corte d'Appello, and shot into a narrow opening that seemed little more than a slit between the buildings.

Here they had to go more cautiously; the orange light of their lamp shining as they passed on the empty archways, and on the iron-barred windows, and slimy steps. And always this strange silence in the dead or sleeping city, and the monotonous plash of the oars, and the deep low cry of “Sia premi!” or “Sia stali!” to give warning of their

approach. But, indeed, that warning was unnecessary; they were absolutely alone in this labyrinth of gloomy water-ways.

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At length they shot beneath a low bridge, and stopped at some steps immediately beyond. Here one of the men, getting out, proceeded to act as guide to the stranger. They had not far to go. They passed first of all into a long, low, and foul-smelling archway, in the middle of which was a narrow aperture protected by an iron gate. The man lit a candle, opened the gate, and preceded his companion along a passage and up a stone staircase. The atmosphere of the place was damp and sickly; the staircase was not more than three feet in width; the feeble glimmer of the candle did but little to dispel the darkness. Even that was withdrawn; for the guide, having knocked thrice at a door, blew out the candle, and retreated down-stairs.

"The night is dark, brother."

"The dawn is near."

Instantly the door was thrown open; the dark figure of a man was seen against the light; he said, "Come in! come in!" and his hand was outstretched. The stranger seemed greatly surprised.

"What, you, Calabressa!" he exclaimed. "Your time has not yet expired!"

"What, no? My faith, I have made it expire!" said the other, airily, and introducing a rather badly pronounced French word or two into his Italian. "But come in, come in; take a seat. You are early; you may have to wait."

He was an odd-looking person, this tall, thin, elderly man, with the flowing yellow-white hair and the albino eyes. There was a semi-military look about his braided coat; but, on the other hand, he wore the cap of a German student—of purple velvet, with a narrow leather peak. He seemed to be proud of his appearance. He had a gay manner.

"Yes, I am escaped. Ah, how fine it is! You walk about all day as you please; you smoke cigarettes; you have your coffee; you go to look at the young English ladies who come to feed the pigeons in the place."

He raised two fingers to his lips, and blew a kiss to all the world.

"Such complexions! A wild rose in every cheek! But listen, now; this is not about an English young lady. I go up to the Church of St. Mark—besides the bronze horses. I am enjoying the air, when I hear a sound; I turn; over there I see open windows; ah! the figure in the white dressing-gown! It is the *diva* herself. They play the *Barbiere* to-night, and she is practicing as she dusts her room. *Una voce poco fa*—it thrills all through the square. She puts the ornaments on the mantel-piece straight. *Lo giurai, la vincerò!*—she goes to the mirror and makes the most beautiful attitude. Ah, what a spectacle—the black hair all down—the white dressing-gown—*In sono docile*"—and again he kissed his two fingers. Then he said,

“But now, you. You do not look one day older. And how is Natalie?”

“Natalie is well, I believe,” said the other, gravely.

“You are a strange man. You have not a soft heart for the pretty creatures of the world; you are implacable. The little Natalushka, then; how is she?”

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"The little Natalushka is grown big now; she is quite a woman."

"A woman! She will marry an Englishman, and become very rich: is not that so?"

"Natalie—I mean, Natalushka will not marry," said the other coldly. "She knows she is very useful to me. She knows I have no other."

"*Maintenant*: the business—how goes that?"

"Elsewhere, well; in England, not quite so well," said Ferdinand Lind. "But what can you expect? The English think they have no need of co-operation, except to get their groceries cheap. Why, everything is done in the open air there. If a scoundrel gets a lash too many in prison, you have it before Parliament next week. If a school-boy is kicked by his master, you have all the newspapers in the country ablaze. The newspapers govern England. A penny journal has more power than the commander-in-chief."

"Then why do you remain in England?"

"It is the safest for me, personally. Then there is most to be done there. Again, it is the head-quarters of money. Do you see, Calabressa? One must have money, or one cannot work."

The albino-looking man lit a cigarette.

"You despair, then, of England? No, you never despair."

"There is a prospect. The Southern Englishman is apathetic; he is interested only, as I have said, in getting his tea and sugar cheap. But the Northern Englishman is vigorous. The trades' associations in the North are vast, powerful, wealthy; but they are suspicious of anything foreign. Members join us; the associations will not. But what do you think of this, Calabressa: if one were to have the assistance of an Englishman whose father was one of the great iron-masters; whose name is well known in the north; who has a large fortune, and a strong will?"

"You have got such a man?"

"Not yet. He is only a Friend. But if I do not misjudge him, he will be a Companion soon. He is a man after my own heart; once with us, all the powers of the earth will not turn him back."

"And his fortune?"

"He will help us with that also, no doubt."

“But how did it occur to Providence to furnish you with an assistant so admirably equipped?”

“Do you mean how did I chance to find him? Through a young English lord—an amiable youth, who is a great friend of Natalie’s—of Natalushka’s. Why, he has joined us, too—”

“An English milord!”

“Yes; but it is merely from poetical sympathy. He is pleasant and warm-hearted, but to us not valuable; and he is poor.”

At this moment a bell rung, apparently in the adjoining apartment. Calabressa jumped from his chair, and hastened to a door on his left, which he opened. A *portiere* prevented anything being seen in the chamber beyond.

“Has the summons been answered?” a voice asked, from the other side.

“Yes, sir,” said Calabressa. “Brother Lind is here.”

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"That is well."

The door was again shut, and Calabressa resumed his seat.

"Brother Lind," said he, in a low voice, though he leaned back in his chair, and still preserved that gay manner, "I suppose you do not know why you have been summoned?"

"Not I."

"*Bien*. But suppose one were to guess? Suppose there is a gentleman somewhere about who has been carrying his outraging of one's common notions of decency just a little too far? Suppose it is necessary to make an example? You may be noble, and have great wealth, and honor, and smiles from beautiful women; but if some night you find a little bit of steel getting into your heart, or if some morning you find your coffee as you drink it burn all the way down until you can feel it burn no more—what then? You must bid good-bye to your mistresses, and to your gold plates and feasts, and your fountains spouting perfumes, and all your titles; is not that so?"

"But who is it?" said Lind, suddenly bending forward.

The other regarded him for a moment, playfully.

"What if I were to mention the '*Starving Cardinal*'?"

"Zaccatelli!" exclaimed Lind, with a ghastly pallor appearing for a moment in the powerful iron-gray face.

Calabressa only laughed.

"Oh yes, it is beautiful to have all these fine things. And the unhappy devils who are forced to pawn their last sticks of furniture at the Monte di Pieta, rather than have their children starve when bread is dear; how it must gratify them to think of his Eminence seizing the funds of that flourishing institution to buy up the whole of the grain in the Papal States! What an admirable speculation! How kind to the poor, on the part of the Secretary to the Vicar of Christ! What!—do you think because I am a cardinal I am not to make a profit in corn? I tell you those people have no business to be miserable—they have no business to go and pawn their things; if I am allowed to speculate with the funds, why not? *Allons donc!*—It is a devilish fine world, merry gentlemen!"

"But—but why have they summoned me?" Lind said, in the same low voice.

"Who knows?" said the other, lightly. "I do not. Come, tell me more about the little Natalushka. Ah, do I not remember the little minx, when she came in, after dinner,

among all those men, with her '*Eljen a haza!*' What has she grown to? what has she become?"

"Natalie is a good girl," said her father; but he was thinking of other things.

"Beautiful?"

"Some would say so."

"But not like the English young ladies?"

"Not at all."

"I thought not. I remember the black-eyed little one—with her pride in Batthyany, and her hatred in Gorgey, and all the rest of it. The little Empress!—with her proud eyes, and her black eyelashes. Do you remember at Dunkirk, when old Anton Pepczinski met her for the first time? '*Little Natalushka, if I wait for you, will you marry me when you grow up?*'" Then the quick answer, "*I am not to be called any longer by my nursery name; but if you will fight for my country, I will marry you when I grow up.*"

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Light-hearted as this man Calabressa was, having escaped from prison, and eagerly inclined for chatter, after so long a spell of enforced silence, he could not fail to perceive that his companion was hardly listening to him.

“Mais, mon frere, a quoi bon le regarder?” he said, peevishly. “If it must come, it will come. Or is it the poor cardinal you pity? That was a good name they invented for him, anyway—*il cardinale affamatore*.”

Again the bell rung, and Ferdinand Lind started. When he turned to the door, it was with a look on his face of some anxiety and apprehension—a look but rarely seen there. Then the *portiere* was drawn aside to let some one come through: at the same moment Lind caught a brief glimpse of a number of men sitting round a small table.

The person who now appeared, and whom Lind saluted with great respect, was a little, sallow-complexioned man, with an intensely black beard and mustache, and a worn expression of face. He returned Lind’s salutation gravely, and said,

“Brother, the Council thank you for your prompt answer to the summons. Meanwhile, nothing is decided. You will attend here to-morrow night.”

“At what hour, Brother Granaglia?”

“Ten. You will now be conveyed back to the Rialto steps; from thence you can get to your hotel.”

Lind bowed acquiescence; and the stranger passed again through the *portiere* and disappeared.

CHAPTER X.

VACILLATION.

“Evelyn, I distrust that man Lind.”

The speaker was George Brand, who kept impatiently pacing up and down those rooms of his, while his friend, with a dreamy look on the pale and fine face, lay back in an easy-chair, and gazed out of the clear panes before him. It was night; the blinds had not been drawn; and the row of windows, framed by their scarlet curtains, seemed a series of dark-blue pictures, all throbbing with points of golden fire.

“Is there any one you do not distrust?” said Lord Evelyn, absently.

“I hope so. But with regard to Lind: I had distinctly to let him know he must not assume that I am mixed up in any of his schemes until I definitely say so. When, in answer to

my vague proposal, he told me I had already pledged myself, I confess I was startled for a moment. Of course it was all very well for him afterward to speak of my declared sympathy, and of my promise to reveal nothing, as being quite enough, at least for the earlier stage. If that is so, you may easily acquire adherents. But either I join with a definite pledge, or not at all."

"I am inclined to think you had better not join," said Lord Evelyn, calmly.

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After that there was silence; and Brand's companion lay and looked on the picture outside, that was so dark and solemn and still. In the midst of all that blaze of various and trembling lights was the unseen river—unseen but for the myriad reflections that showed the ripples of the water; then the far-reaching rows of golden stars, spanning the bridges, and marking out the long Embankment sweep beyond St. Thomas's Hospital. On the other side black masses of houses—all their commonplace detail lost in the mysterious shadow; and over them the silver crescent of the moon just strong enough to give an edge of white to a tall shot-tower. Then far away in the east, in the clear dark sky, the dim gray ghost of a dome; scarcely visible, and yet revealing its presence; the great dome of St. Paul's.

This beautiful, still scene—the silence was so intense that the footfall of a cab-horse crossing Waterloo Bridge could be faintly heard, as the eye followed the light slowly moving between the two rows of golden stars—seemed to possess but little interest for the owner of these rooms. For the moment he had lost altogether his habitual air of proud reserve.

"Evelyn," he said, abruptly, "was it not in these very rooms you insisted that, if the work was good, one need not be too scrupulous about one's associates?"

"I believe so," said the other, indifferently: he had almost lost hope of ever overcoming his friend's inveterate suspicion.

"Well," Brand said, "there is something in that. I believe in the work that Lind is engaged in, if I am doubtful about him. And if it pleases you or him to say that I have joined you merely because I express sympathy, and promise to say nothing, well and good. But you: you are more than that?"

The question somewhat startled Lord Evelyn; and his pale face flushed a little.

"Oh yes," he said; "of course. I—I cannot precisely explain to you."

"I understand. But, if I did really join, I should at least have you for a companion."

Lord Evelyn turned and regarded him.

"If you were to join, it might be that you and I should never see each other again in this world. Have I not told you?—Your first pledge is that of absolute obedience; you have no longer a right to your own life; you become a slave, that others may be free."

"And you would have me place myself in the power of a man like Lind?" Brand exclaimed.

"If it were necessary," said Lord Evelyn, "I should hold myself absolutely at the bidding of Lind; for I am convinced he is an honest man, as he is a man of great ability and

unconquerable energy and will. But you would no more put yourself in Lind's power than in mine. Lind is a servant, like the rest of us. It is true he has in some ways a sort of quasi-independent position, which I don't quite understand; but as regards the Society that I have joined, and that you would join, he is a servant, as you would be a servant. But what is the use of talking? Your temperament isn't fitted for this kind of work."

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"I want to see my way clear," Brand said, almost to himself.

"Ah, that is just it; whereas, you must go blindfold."

Thereafter again silence. The moon had risen higher now; and the paths in the Embankment gardens just below them had grown gray in the clearer light. Lord Evelyn lay and watched the light of a hansom that was rattling along by the side of the river.

"Do you remember," said Brand, with a smile, "your repeating some verses here one night; and my suspecting you had borrowed the inspiration somewhere? My boy, I have found you out. What I guessed was true. I made bold to ask Miss Lind to read, that evening I came up with them from Dover."

"I know it," said Lord Evelyn, quietly.

"You have seen her, then?" was the quick question.

"No; she wrote to me."

"Oh, she writes to you?" the other said.

"Well, you see, I did not know her father had gone abroad, and I called. As a rule, she sees no one while her father is away; on the other hand, she will not say she is not at home if she is at home. So she wrote me a note of apology for refusing to see me; and in it she told me you had been very kind to them, and how she had tried to read, and had read very badly, because she feared your criticism—"

"I never heard anything like it!" Brand said; and then he corrected himself. "Well, yes, I have; I have heard you, Evelyn. You have been an admirable pupil."

"Now when I think of it," said his friend, putting his hand in his breast-pocket, "this letter is mostly about you, Brand. Let me see if there is anything in it you may not see. No; it is all very nice and friendly."

He was about to hand over the letter, when he stopped.

"I do believe," he said, looking at Brand, "that you are capable of thinking Natalie wrote this letter on purpose you should see it."

"Then you do me a great injustice," Brand said, without anger. "And you do her a great injustice. I do not think it needs any profound judge of character to see what that girl is."

"For that is one thing I could never forgive you, Brand."

"What?"

“If you were to suspect Natalie Lind.”

This was no private and confidential communication that passed into Brand's hand, but a frank, gossiping, sisterly note, stretching out beyond its initial purpose. And there was no doubt at all that it was mostly about Brand himself; and the reader grew red as he went on. He had been so kind to them at Dover; and so interested in her papa's work; and so anxious to be of service and in sympathy with them. And then she spoke as if he were definitely pledged to them; and how proud she was to have another added to the list of her friends. George Brand's face was as red as his beard when he folded up the letter. He did not immediately return it.

“What a wonderful woman that is!” said he, after a time. “I did not think it would be left for a foreigner to teach me to believe in England.”

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Lord Evelyn looked up.

“Oh,” Brand said, instantly, “I know what you would ask: ‘What is my belief worth?’ ‘How much do I sympathize?’ Well, I can give you a plain answer: a shilling in the pound income-tax. If England is this stronghold of the liberties of Europe—if it is her business to be the lamp-bearer of freedom—if she must keep her shores inviolate as the refuge of those who are oppressed and persecuted, well, then, I would pay a shilling income-tax, or double that, treble that, to give her a navy that would sweep the seas. For a big army there is neither population, nor sustenance, nor room; but I would give her such a navy as would let her put the world to defiance.”

“I wish Natalie would teach you to believe in a few other things while she is about it,” said his friend, with a slight and rather sad smile.

“For example?”

“In human nature a little bit, for example. In the possibility of a woman being something else than a drawing-room peacock, or worse. Do you think she could make you believe that it is possible for a woman to be noble-minded, unselfish, truth-speaking, modest, and loyal-hearted?”

“I presume you are describing Natalie Lind herself.”

“Oh,” said his friend, with a quick surprise, “then you admit there may be an exception, after all? You do not condemn the whole race of them now, as being incapable of even understanding what frank dealing is, or honor, or justice, or anything beyond their own vain and selfish caprices?”

George Brand went to the window.

“Perhaps,” said he, “my experience of women has been unfortunate, unusual. I have not had much chance, especially of late years, of studying them in their quiet domestic spheres. But otherwise I suppose my experience is not unusual. Every man begins his life, in his salad days, by believing the world to be a very fine thing, and women particularly to be very wonderful creatures—angels, in short, of goodness, and mercy, and truth, and all the rest of it. Then, judging by what I have seen and heard, I should say that about nineteen men out of twenty get a regular facer—just at the most sensitive period of their life; and then they suddenly believe that women are devils, and the world a delusion. It is bad logic; but they are not in a mood for reason. By-and-by the process of recovery begins: with some short, with others long. But the spring-time of belief, and hope, and rejoicing—I doubt whether that ever comes back.”

He spoke without any bitterness. If the facts of the world were so, they had to be accepted.

“I swallowed my dose of experience a good many years ago,” he continued, “but I haven’t got it out of my blood yet. However, I will admit to you the possibility of there being a few women like Natalie Lind.”

“Well, this is better, at all events,” Lord Evelyn said, cheerfully.

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"Beauty, of course, is a dazzling and dangerous thing," Brand said; "for a man always wants to believe that fine eyes and a sweet voice have a sweet soul behind them. And very often he finds behind them something in the shape of a soul that a dog or a cat would be ashamed to own. But as for Natalie Lind, I don't think one can be deceived. She shows too much. She vibrates too quickly—too inadvertently—to little chance touches. I did suspect her, I will confess. I thought she was hired to play the part of decoy. But I had not seen her for ten minutes before I was convinced she was playing no part at all."

"But goodness gracious, Brand, what are we coming to?" Lord Evelyn said, with a laugh. "What! We already believe in England, and patriotism, and the love of freedom? And we are prepared to admit that there is one woman—positively, in the world, one woman—who is not a cheat and a selfish coquette? Why, where are we to end?"

"I don't think I said only one woman," Brand replied, quite good-naturedly; and then he added, with a smile, "You ask where we are to end. Suppose I were to accept your new religion, Evelyn? Would that please you? And would it please her, too?"

"Ah!" said his companion, looking up with a quick glance of pleasure. But he would argue no more.

"Perhaps I have been too suspicious. It is a habit; I have had to look after myself pretty much through the world; and I don't overvalue the honesty of people I don't know. But when I once set my hand to the work, I am not likely to draw back."

"You could be of so much more value to them than I can," said Lord Evelyn, wistfully. "I don't suppose you spend more than half of your income."

"Oh, as to that," said Brand, at once, "that is a very different matter. If they like to take myself and what I can do, well and good; money is a very different thing."

His companion raised himself in his chair; and there was surprise on his face.

"How can you help them so well as with your money?" he cried. "Why, it is the very thing they want most."

"Oh, indeed!" said Brand, coldly. "You see, Evelyn, my father was a business man; and I may have inherited a commercial way of looking at things. If I were to give away a lot of money to unknown people, for unknown purposes, I should say that I was being duped, and that they were putting the money in their own pocket."

"My dear fellow!" Lord Evelyn protested; "the need of money is most urgent. There are printing-presses to be kept going; agents to be paid; police-spies to be bribed—there is an enormous work to be done, and money must be spent."

“All the same,” said Brand, who was invariably most resolved when he was most quiet in his manner, “I shall prefer not running the chance of being duped in that direction. Besides, I am bound in honor not to do anything of the kind. I can fling myself away—this is my own lookout; and my life, or the way I spend it, is not of great consequence to me. But my father’s property, if anything happens to me, ought to go intact to my sister’s boys, to whom, indeed, I have left it by will. I will say to Lind, ‘Is it myself or my money that is wanted: you must choose.’”

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"The question would be an insult."

"Oh, do you think so? Very well; I will not ask it. But that is the understanding." Then he added, more lightly, "Why, would you have the Pilgrim start with his pocket full of sovereigns? His staff and his wallet are all he is entitled to. And when one is going to make a big plunge, shouldn't one strip?"

There was no answer; for Lord Evelyn's quick ear had caught the sound of wheels in the adjacent street.

"There is my trap," he said, looking at his watch as he rose.

Waters brought the young man his coat, and then went out to light him down-stairs.

"Good-night, Brand. Glad to see you are getting into a wholesomer frame of mind. I shall tell Natalie you are now prepared to admit that there is in the world at least one woman who is not a cheat."

"I hope you will not utter a word to Miss Lind of any of the nonsense we have been talking," said Brand, hastily, and with his face grown red.

"All right. By-the-way, when are you coming up to see the girls?"

"To-morrow afternoon: will that do?"

"Very well; I shall wait in."

"Let me see if I remember the order aright," said Brand, holding up his fingers and counting. "Rosalys, Blanche, Ermentrude, Agnes, Jane, Frances, Geraldine: correct?"

"Quite. I think their mother must forget at times. Well, good-night."

"Good-night—good-night!"

Brand returned to the empty room, and threw wide open one of the windows. The air was singularly mild for a night in March; but he had been careful of his friend. Then he dropped into an easy-chair, and opened a letter.

It was the letter from Natalie Lind, which he had held in his hand ever since, eagerly hoping that Evelyn would forget it—as, in fact, he had done. And now with what a strange interest he read and re-read it; and weighed all its phrases; and tried to picture her as she wrote these lines; and studied even the peculiarities of the handwriting. There was a quaint, foreign look here and there—the capital B, for example, was written in German fashion; and that letter occurred a good many times. It was Mr. Brand, and Mr. Brand, over and over again—in this friendly and frank gossip, which had all the

brightness of a chat over a new acquaintance who interests one. He turned to the signature. "*Your friend, Natalie.*"

Then he walked up and down, slowly and thoughtfully; but ever and again he would turn to the letter to see that he had quite accurately remembered what she had said about the delight of the sail from Calais, and the beautiful flowers at Dover and her gladness at the prospect of their having this new associate and friend. Then the handwriting again. The second stroke of the N in her name had a little notch at the top—German fashion. It looked a pretty name, as she wrote it.

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Then he went to the window, and leaned on the brass bar, and looked out on the dark and sleeping world, with its countless golden points of fire. He remained there a long time, thinking—of the past, in which he had fancied his life was buried; of the present, with its bewildering uncertainties; of the future, with its fascinating dreams. There might be a future for him, then, after all; and hope; and the joy of companionship? Surely that letter meant at least so much.

But then the boundlessness, the eager impatience, of human wishes! Farther and farther, as he leaned and looked out, without seeing much of the wonderful spectacle before him, went his thoughts and eager hopes and desires. Companionship; but with whom? And might not the spring-time of life come back again, as it was now coming back to the world in the sweet new air that had begun to blow from the South? And what message did the soft night-wind bring him but the name of Natalie? And Natalie was written in the clear and shining heavens, in letters of fire and joy; and the river spoke of Natalie; and the darkness murmured Natalie.

But his heart, whispering to him—there, in the silence of the night, in the time when dreams abound, and visions of what may be—his heart, whispering to him, said—
“Natalushka!”

CHAPTER XI.

A COMMISSION.

When Ferdinand Lind looked out the next day from the window of his hotel, it was not at all the Venice of chromolithography that lay before him. The morning was wild, gray, and gloomy, with a blustering wind blowing down from the north; the broad expanse of green water ruffled and lashed by continual squalls; the sea-gulls wheeling and dipping over the driven waves; the dingy masses of shipping huddled along the wet and deserted quays; the long spur of the Lido a thin black line between the green sea and purple sky; and the domed churches over there, and the rows of tall and narrow and grumbling palaces overlooking the canals nearer at hand, all alike dismal and bedraggled and dark.

When he went outside he shivered; but at all events these cold, damp odors of the sea and the rainy wind were more grateful than the mustiness of the hotel. But the deserted look of the place! The gondolas, with their hearse-like coverings on, lay empty and untended by the steps, as if waiting for a funeral procession. The men had taken shelter below the archways, where they formed groups, silent, uncomfortable, sulky. The few passers-by on the wet quays hurried along with their voluminous black cloaks wrapped round their shoulders, and hiding most of the mahogany-colored faces. Even the plague of beggars had been dispersed; they had slunk away shivering into the foul-

smelling nooks and crannies. There was not a soul to give a handful of maize to the pigeons in the Place of St. Mark.

But when Lind had got round into the Place, what was his surprise to find Calabressa having his breakfast in the open air at a small table in front of a *café*. He was quite alone there; but he seemed much content. In fact, he was laughing heartily, all to himself, at something he had been reading in the newspaper open before him.

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"Well," said Lind, when they had exchanged salutations, "this is a pleasant sort of a morning for one to have one's breakfast outside!"

"My faith," said Calabressa, "if you had taken as many breakfasts as I have shut up in a hole, you would be glad to get the chance of a mouthful of fresh air. Sit down, my friend."

Lind glanced round, and then sat down.

"My good friend Calabressa," he said presently, "for one connected as you are with certain persons, do you not think now that your costume is a little conspicuous? And then your sitting out here in broad daylight—"

"My friend Lind," said he, with a laugh, "I am as safe here as if I were in Naples, which I believe to be the safest place in the world for one not in good odor with the authorities. And if there was a risk, would I not run it to hear my little nightingale over there when she opens the casements? Ah! she is the most charming Rosina in the world."

"Yes, yes," said Lind. "I am not speaking of you. But—the others. The police must guess you are not here for nothing."

"Oh, the others? Rest assured. The police might as well try to put their fingers on a globule of quicksilver. It is but three days since they left the Piazza del Popolo, Torre del Greco. To-morrow, if their business is finished to-night, they will vanish again; and I shall be dismissed."

"If their business is finished?" repeated Lind, absently. "Yes; but I should like to know why they have summoned me all the way from England. They cannot mean—"

"My dear friend Lind," said Calabressa, "you must not look so grave. Nothing that is going to happen is worth one's troubling one's self about. It is the present moment that is of consequence; and at the present moment I have a joke for you. You know Armfeldt, who is now at Berne: they had tried him only four times in Berlin; and there was only a little matter of nine years' sentence against him. Listen."

He took up the *Osservatore*, and read out a paragraph, stating that Dr. Julius Armfeldt had again been tried *in contumaciam*, and sentenced to a further term of two years' imprisonment, for seditious writing. Further, the publisher of his latest pamphlet, a citizen of Berne, had likewise been sentenced in his absence to twelve months' imprisonment.

"Do they think Armfeldt will live to be a centenarian, that they keep heaping up those sentences against him? Or is it as another inducement for him to go back to his native country and give himself up? It is a great joke, this childish proceeding; but a Government should not declare itself impotent. It is like the Austrians when they

hanged you and the others in effigy. Now I remember, the little Natalushka was grieved that she was not born then; for she wished to see the spectacle, and to have killed the people who insulted her father.”

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"I am afraid it is no joke at all," Lind said, gloomily. "Those Swiss people are craven. What can you expect from a nation of hotel-waiters? They cringe before every bully in Europe; you will find that, if Bismarck insists, the Federal Council will expel Armfeldt from Switzerland directly. No; the only safe refuge nowadays for the reformers, the Protestants the pioneers of Europe, is England; and the English do not know it; they do not think of it. They are so accustomed to freedom that they believe that is the only possible condition, and that other nations must necessarily enjoy it. When you talk to them of tyranny, of political persecution, they laugh. They cannot understand such a thing existing. They fancy it ceased when Bomba's dungeons were opened."

"For my part," said Calabressa, lighting a cigarette, and calling for a small glass of cognac, "I am content with Naples."

"And the protection of pickpockets?"

"My friend," said the other, coolly, "if you refer to the most honorable the association of the Camorristi, I would advise you not to speak too loud."

Calabressa rose, having settled his score with the waiter.

"Allons!" said he. "What are you going to do to day?"

"I don't know," said Lind, discontentedly. "May the devil fly away with this town of Venice! I never come here but it is either freezing or suffocating."

"You are in an evil humor to-day, friend Lind; you have caught the English spleen. Come, I have a little business to do over at Murano; the breeze will do you good. And I will tell you the story of my escape."

The time had to be passed somehow. Lind walked with his companion along to the steps, descended, and jumped into a gondola, and presently they were shooting out into the turbulent green water that the wind drove against the side of the boat in a succession of sharp shocks. Seated in the little funereal compartment, they could talk without much fear of being heard by either of the men; and Calabressa began his tale. It was not romantic. It was simply a case of bribery; the money to effect which had certainly not come out of Calabressa's shallow pockets. In the midst of the story—or, at least, before the end of it—Lind said, in a low voice,

"Calabressa, have you any sure grounds for what you said about Zaccatelli?"

His companion glanced quickly outside.

"It is you are now indiscreet," he said, in an equally low voice. "But yes; I think that is the business. However," he added, in a gayer tone, "what matter? To-day is not to-

morrow; to-morrow will shift for itself.” And therewith he continued his story, though his listener seemed singularly preoccupied and thoughtful.

They arrived at the island, got out, and walked into the court-yard of one of the smaller glass-works. There were one or two of the workmen passing; and here something occurred that seemed to arrest Lind’s attention.

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"What, here also?" said he, in a low voice.

"Every one; the master included. It is with him I have to do this little piece of business. Now you will be so good as to wait for a short time, will you not?—and it is warm in there; I will be with you soon."

Lind walked into the large workshop, where there were a number of people at work, all round the large, circular, covered caldron, the various apertures into which sent out fierce rays of light and heat. He walked about, seemingly at his ease; looking at the apprentices experimenting; chatting to the workmen. And at last he asked one of these to make for him a little vase in opalescent glass, that he could take to his daughter in England; and could he put the letter N on it somewhere? It was at least some occupation, watching the quick and dexterous handling under which the little vase grew into form, and had its decoration cleverly pinched out, and its tiny bits of color added. The letter N was not very successful; but then Natalie would know that her father had been thinking of her at Venice.

This excursion at all events tided over the forenoon; and when the two companions returned to the wet and disconsolate city, Calabressa was easily persuaded to join his friend in some sort of mid-day meal. After that, the long-haired albino-looking person took his leave, having arranged how Lind was to keep the assignation for that evening.

The afternoon cleared up somewhat; but Ferdinand Lind seemed to find it dull enough. He went out for an aimless stroll through some of the narrow back streets, slowly making his way among the crowd that poured along these various ways. Then he returned to his hotel, and wrote some letters. Then he dined early; but still the time did not seem to pass. He resolved on getting through an hour or so at the theatre.

A gondola swiftly took him away through the labyrinth of small and gloomy canals, until at length the wan orange glare shining out into the night showed him that he was drawing near one of the entrances to the Fenice. If he had been less preoccupied—less eager to think of nothing but how to get the slow hours over—he might have noticed the strangeness of the scene before him: the successive gondolas stealing silently up through the gloom to the palely lit stone steps; the black coffins appearing to open; and then figures in white and scarlet opera-cloaks getting out into the dim light, to ascend into the brilliant glare of the theatre staircase. He, too, followed, and got into the place assigned to him. But this spectacular display failed to interest him. He turned to the bill, to remind him what he had to see. The blaze of color on the stage—the various combinations of movement—the resounding music—all seemed part of a dream; and it annoyed him somehow. He rose and left.

The intervening time he spent chiefly in a *café* close by the theatre, where he smoked cigarettes and appeared to read the newspapers. Then he wandered away to the spot appointed for him to meet a particular gondola, and arrived there half an hour too soon.

But the gondola was there also. He jumped in and was carried away through the silence of the night.

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When he arrived at the door, which was opened to him by Calabressa, he contrived to throw off, by a strong effort of will, any appearance of anxiety. He entered and sat down, saying only,

“Well!—what news?”

Calabressa laughed slightly; and went to a cupboard, and brought forth a bottle and two small glasses.

“If you were Zaccatelli,” he said, “I would say to you, ‘My Lord,’ or ‘Your Excellency,’ or whatever they call those flamingoes with the bullet heads, ‘I would advise you to take a little drop of this very excellent cognac, for you are about to hear something, and you will need steady nerves.’ Meanwhile, Brother Lind, it is not forbidden to you and me to have a glass. The Council provide excellent liquor.”

“Thank you, I have no need of it,” said Lind, coldly. “What do you mean about Zaccatelli?”

“This,” said the other, filling himself out a glass of the brandy, and then proceeding to prepare a cigarette. “If the moral scene of the country, too long outraged, should determine to punish the Starving Cardinal, I believe he will get a good year’s notice to prepare for his doom. You perceive? What harm does sudden death to a man? It is nothing. A moment of pain; and you have all the happiness of sleep, indifference, forgetfulness. That is no punishment at all: do you perceive?”

Calabressa continued, airily—

“People are proud when they say they do not fear death. The fools! What has any one to fear in death? To the poor it means no more hunger, no more imprisonment, no more cold and sickness, no more watching of your children when they are suffering and you cannot help; to the rich it means no more triumph of rivals, and envy, and jealousy; no more sleepless nights and ennui of days; no more gout, and gravel, and the despair of growing old. Death! It is the great emancipation. And people talk of the punishment of death!”

He gave a long whistle of contempt.

“But,” said he, with a smile, “it is a little bit different if you have to look forward to your death on a certain fixed day. Then you begin to overvalue things—a single hour of life becomes something.”

He added, in a tone of affected condolence—

“Then one wouldn’t wish to cause any poor creature to say his last adieux without some preparation. And in the case of a cardinal, is a year too little for repentance? Oh, he will put it to excellent use.”

“Very well, very well,” said Ferdinand Lind, with an impatient frown gathering over the shaggy eyebrows. “But I want to know what I have to do with all this?”

“Brother Lind,” said the other, mildly, “if the Secretary Granaglia, knowing that I am a friend of yours, is so kind as to give me some hints of what is under discussion, I listen, but I ask no questions. And you—I presume you are here not to protest, but to obey.”

“Understand me, Calabressa: it was only to you as a friend that I spoke,” said Lind, gravely. And then he added, “The Council will not find, at all events, that I am recusant.”

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A few minutes afterward the bell rung, and Calabressa jumped to his feet; while Lind, in spite of himself, started. Presently the *portiere* was drawn aside, and the little sallow-complexioned man whom he had seen on the previous evening entered the room. On this occasion, however, Calabressa was motioned to withdraw, and immediately did so. Lind and the stranger were left together.

"I need scarcely inform you, Brother Lind," said he, in a slow and matter-of-fact way, "that I am the authorized spokesman of the Council."

As he said this, for a moment he rested his hand on the table. There was on the forefinger a large ring, with a red stone in it, engraved. Lind bowed acquiescence.

"Calabressa has no doubt informed you of the matter before the Council. That is now decided; the decree has been signed. Zaccatelli dies within a year from this day. The motives which have led to this decision may hereafter be explained to you, even if they have not already occurred to you; they are motives of policy, as regards ourselves and the progress of our work, as well as of justice."

Ferdinand Lind listened, without response.

"It has further been decided that the blow be struck from England."

"England!" was the involuntary exclamation.

"Yes," said the other, calmly. "To give full effect to such a warning it must be clear to the world that it has nothing to do with any private revenge or low intrigue. Assassination has been too frequent in Italy of late. The doubting throughout the world must be convinced that we have agents everywhere; and that we are no mere local society for the revenging of private wrongs."

Lind again bowed assent.

"Further," said the other, regarding him, "the Council charge you with the execution of the decree."

Lind had almost expected this: he did not flinch.

"After twelve months' grace granted, you will be prepared with a sure and competent agent who will give effect to the decree of the Council; failing such a one, the duty will devolve on your own shoulders."

"On mine!" he was forced to exclaim. "Surely—"

"Do you forget," said the other, calmly, "that sixteen years ago your life was forfeited, and given back to you by the Council?"

“So I understood,” said Lind. “But it was not my life that was given me then!—only the lease of it till the Council should claim it again. However!”

He drew himself up, and the powerful face was full of decision.

“It is well,” said he. “I do not complain. If I exact obedience from others, I, too, obey. The Council shall be served.”

“Further instructions shall be given you. Meanwhile, the Council once more thank you for your attendance. Farewell, brother!”

“Farewell, brother!”

When he had gone, and the bell again rung, Calabressa reappeared. Lind was too proud a man to betray any concern.



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"It is as you told me, Calabressa," said he, carelessly, as his friend proceeded to light him down the narrow staircase. "And I am charged with the execution of their vengeance. Well; I wish I had been present at their deliberations, that is all. This deed may answer so far as the continental countries are concerned; but, so far as England is concerned, it will undo the work of years."

"What!—England!" exclaimed Calabressa, lightly—"where they blow up a man's house with gunpowder, or dash vitriol in his face, if he works for a shilling a day less wages?—where they shoot landlords from behind hedges if the rent is raised?—where they murder policemen in the open street, to release political prisoners? No, no, friend Lind; I cannot believe that."

"However, that is not my business, Calabressa. The Council shall be obeyed. I am glad to know you are again at liberty; when you come to England you will see how your little friend Natalie has grown."

"Give a kiss from me to the little Natalushka," said he, cheerfully; and then the two parted.

CHAPTER XII.

JACTA EST ALEA.

"Natalie," said her father, entering the breakfast-room, "I have news for you to-day. This evening Mr. Brand is to be initiated."

The beautiful, calm face betrayed no surprise.

"That is always the way," she answered, almost absently. "One after the other they go in; and I only am left out, alone."

"What," he said, patting her shoulder as he passed, "are you still dreaming of reviving the *Giardiniere*? Well, it was a pretty idea to call each sister in the lodge by the name of a flower. But nowadays, and in England especially, if women intermeddled in such things, do you know what they would be called? *Petroleuses!*"

"Names do not hurt," said the girl, proudly.

"No, no. Rest content, Natalie. You are initiated far enough. You know all that needs to be known; and you can work with us, and associate with us like the rest. But about Brand; are you not pleased?"

"I am indeed pleased, papa."

“And I am more than pleased,” said Lind, thoughtfully. “He will be the most important accession we have had for many a day. Ah, you women have sharp eyes; but there are some things you cannot see—there are some men whose character you cannot read.”

Natalie glanced up quickly; and her father noticed that surprised look.

“Well,” said he, with a smile, “what now is your opinion of Mr. Brand?”

Instantly the soft eyes were cast down again, and a faint tinge of color appeared in her face.

“Oh, my opinion, papa?” said she, as if to gain time to choose her words. “Well, I should call him manly, straightforward—and—and very kind—and—and very English—”

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"I understand you perfectly, Natalie," her father said, with a laugh. "You and Lord Evelyn are quite in accord. Yes, and you are both thoroughly mistaken. You mean, by his being so English, that he is cold, critical, unsympathetic: is it not so? You resent his being cautious about joining us. You think he will be but a lukewarm associate—suspecting everything—fearful about going too far—a half-and-half ally. My dear Natalie, that is because neither Lord Evelyn nor you know anything at all about that man."

The faint color in the girl's cheeks had deepened; and she remained silent, with her face downcast.

"The pliable ones," her father continued, "the people who are moved by fine talking, who are full of amiable sentiments, and who take to work like ours as an additional sentiment—you may initiate a thousand of them, and not gain an atom of strength. It is a hard head that I want, and a strong will; a man determined to have no illusions at the outset; a man who, once pledged, will not despair or give up in the face of failure, difficulty, or disappointment, or anything else. Brand is such a man. If I were to be disabled tomorrow, I would rather leave my work in his hands than in the hands of any man I have seen in this country."

Was it to hide the deepening color in her face that the girl went round to her father, and stood rather behind him, and put her hand on his shoulder, and stooped down to his ear.

"Papa," said she, "I—I hope you don't think I have been saying anything against Mr. Brand. Oh no. How could I do that—when he has been so kind to us—and—and just now especially, when he is about to become one of us? You must forget what I said about his being English, papa; after all, it is not for us to say that being English is anything else than being kind, and generous, and hospitable. And I am exceedingly pleased that you have got another associate, and that we have got another good friend, in England."

"Alors, as Calabressa would say, you can show that you are pleased, Natalie," her father said, lightly, "by going and writing a pretty little note, asking your new friend, Mr. Brand, to dine with us to-night, after the initiation is over, and I will ask Evelyn, if I see him."

But this proposal in no wise seemed to lessen the girl's embarrassment. She still clung about the back of her father's chair.

"I would rather not do that, papa," said she, after a second.

"Why? why?" said he.

“Would it not look less formal for you to ask him, papa? You see, it is once or twice that we have asked him to dine with us without giving him proper notice—”

“Oh, that is nothing—nothing at all. A bachelor with an evening disengaged is glad enough to fill it up anyhow. Well, if you would rather not write, Natalie, I will ask him myself.”

“Thank you, papa,” said she, apparently much relieved, and therewith she went back to her seat, and her father turned to his newspaper.

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The day passed, and the evening came. As six o'clock was striking, George Brand presented himself at the little door in Lisle street, Soho, and was admitted. Lind had already assured him that, as far as England was concerned, no idle mummeries were associated with the ceremony of initiation; to which Brand had calmly replied, that if mummeries were considered necessary, he was as ready as any one to do his part of the business. Only he added that he thought the unknown powers had acted wisely—so far as England was concerned—in discarding such things.

When he entered the room, his first glance round was reassuring. There were six persons present besides Lind, and they did not at all suggest the typical Leicester Square foreigner. On the contrary, he guessed that four out of the six were either English or Irish; and two of them he recognized, though they were unknown to him personally. The one was a Home Rule M.P., ferocious enough in the House of Commons, but celebrated as the most brilliant, and amiable, and fascinating of diners-out; the other was an Oxford don, of large fortune and wildly Radical views, who wrote a good deal in the papers. There was a murmur of conversation going on, which ceased as Lind briefly introduced the new-comer.

The ceremony, if ceremony it could be called, was simple enough. The candidate for admission was required to sign a printed document, solemnly pledging himself to devote his life, and the labor of his hands and brain, to the work of the association; to implicitly obey any command reaching him from the Council, or communicated through an officer of the first degree; and to preserve inviolable secrecy. Brand read this paper through twice, and signed it. It was then signed by the seven witnesses. He was further required to inscribe his signature in a large volume, which contained a list of members of a particular section. That done, the six strangers present shook him by the hand, and left.

He looked round surprised. Had he been dreaming during these brief five minutes? Yet he could hear the noise of their going down-stairs.

"Well," said Mr. Lind, with a smile, "it is not a very terrible ceremony, is it? Did you expect prostrations at the altar; and blindfold gropings, and the blessing of the dagger? When you come to know a little more of our organization, of its extent and its power, you will understand how we can afford to dispense with all those theatrical ways of frightening people into obedience and secrecy."

"I expected to find Evelyn here," said George Brand. He was in truth, just a little bit bewildered as yet. He had been assured that there would be no foolish mummeries or fantastic rites of initiation; but all the same he had been much occupied with this step he was about to take; he had been thinking of it much; he had been looking forward to something unknown; and he had been nerving himself to encounter whatever might come before him. But that five minutes of silence; the quick reading and signing of a

paper; the sudden dispersion of the small assemblage: he could scarcely believe it was all real.

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"No," Lind said, "Lord Evelyn is not yet an officer. He is only a Companion in the third degree, like yourself."

"A what?"

"A Companion in the third degree. Surely you read the document that you signed?"

It was still lying on the table before him. He took it up; yes, he certainly was so designated there. Yet he could not remember seeing the phrase, though he had, before signing, read every word twice over.

"And now, Mr. Brand," his companion said, seating himself at the other side of the table, "when you have got over your surprise that there should be no ceremony, it will become my duty to give you some idea—some rough idea—of the mechanism and aims of our association, and to show you in what measure we are allied with other societies. The details you will become acquainted with by-and-by; that will be a labor of time. And you know, of course, or you have guessed, that there are no mysteries to be revealed to you, no profound religious truths to be communicated, no dogmas to be accepted. I am afraid we are very degenerate descendants of the Mystics, and the Illuminati, and all the rest of them; we have become prosaic; our wants are sadly material. And yet we have our dreams and aspirations, too; and the virtues that we exact—obedience, temperance, faith, self-sacrifice—are not ignoble. Meanwhile, to begin. I think you may prepare yourself to be astonished."

But astonishment was no word for the emotion experienced by the newly admitted member when Ferdinand Lind proceeded to give him, with careful facts and sober computations, some rough outline of the extent and power of this intricate and far-reaching organization. Hitherto the word "International" had with him been associated with the ridiculous fiasco at Geneva; but here was something, not calling itself international, which aimed at nothing less than knitting together the multitudes of the nations, not only in Europe, but in the English and French and German speaking territories beyond the seas, in a solemn league—a league for self-protection and mutual understanding, for the preservation of international peace, the spread of knowledge, the outbraving of tyranny, the defiance of religious intolerance, the relief of the oppressed, the help of the poor, and the sick, and the weak. This was no cutthroat conspiracy or wild scheme of confiscation and plunder; but a design for the establishment of wide and beneficent law—a law which should protect, not the ambition of kings, not the pride of armies, not the revenues of priests, but the rights and the liberties of those who were "darkening in labor and pain." And this message, that could go forth alike to the Camorristi and the Nihilists; to the Free Masons and the Good Templars; to the Trades-unionists and the Knights of Labor—to all those masses of men moved by the spirit of co-operation—"See, brothers, what we have to show you. Some of you are aiming at chaos and perdition; others putting

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wages as their god and sovereign; others content with a vague philanthropy almost barren of results. This is all the help we want of you—to pledge yourselves to associate with us, to accept our modest programme of actual needs, to give help to those who are in want or trouble, to promise that you will stand by us in the time to come. And when the time does come; when we are combined; when knowledge is abroad, and mutual trust, who will say 'yes' if the voice of the people in every nation murmurs 'No?' What priest will reimpose the Inquisition on us; what king drive us to shed blood that his robes may have the richer dye; what policeman in high places endeavor to stamp out our God-given right of free speech? It is so little for you to grant; it is so much for you, and for us, to gain!"

These were not the words he uttered—for Lind spoke English slowly and carefully—but they were the spirit of his words. And as he went on describing to this new member what had already been done, what was being done, and the great possibilities of the future, Brand began to wonder whether all this gigantic scheme, with its simple, bold, and practical outlines, were the work of this one man. He ventured by-and-by to hint at some such question.

"Mine?" Lind said, frankly, "Ah no! not the inspiration of it. I am only the mechanic putting brick and brick together; the design is not mine, nor that of any one man. It is an aggregate project—a speculation occupying many a long hour of imprisonment—a scheme to be handed from one to the other, with alterations and suggestions."

"But even your share of it—how can one man control so much?" Brand said; for he easily perceived what a mass of detail had to pass through this man's hands.

"I will tell you," said the other. "Because every stone added to the building is placed there for good. There is no looking back. There are no pacifications of revolt. No questions; but absolute obedience. You see, we exact so little: why should any one rebel? However, you will learn more and more as you go on; and soon your work will be appointed you. Meanwhile, I thank you, brother."

Lind rose and shook his hand.

"Now," said he, "that is enough of business. It occurred to me this morning that, if you had nothing else to do this evening, you might come and dine with us, and give Natalie the chance of meeting you in your new character."

"I shall be most pleased," said Brand; and his face flushed.

"I telegraphed to Evelyn. If he is in town, perhaps he will join us. Shall we walk home?"

"If you like."

So they went out together into the glare and clamor of the streets. George Brand's heart was very full with various emotions; but, not to lose altogether his English character, he preserved a somewhat critical tone as he talked.

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"Well, Mr. Lind," he said, "so far as I can see and hear, your scheme has been framed not only with great ability, but also with a studied moderation and wisdom. The only point I would urge is this—that, in England, as little as possible should be said about kings and priests. A great deal of what you said would scarcely be understood here. You see, in England it is not the Crown nowadays which instigate or insists on war; it is Parliament and the people. Dynastic ambitions do not trouble us. There is no reason whatever why we here should hate kings when they are harmless."

"You are right; the case is different," Lind admitted. "But that makes adhesion to our programme all the easier."

"I was only speaking of the police of mentioning things which might alarm timid people. Then as for the priests; it may be the interest of the priests in Ireland to keep the peasantry ignorant; but it is certainly not so in England. The Church of England fosters education—"

"Are not your clergymen the bitterest enemies of the School Board schools?"

"Well, they may dislike seeing education dissociated from religion—that is natural, considering what they believe; but they are not necessary enemies of education. Perhaps I am a very young member to think of making such a suggestion. But the truth is, that when an ordinary Englishman hears anything said against kings and priests, he merely thinks of kings and priests as he knows them—and as being mostly harmless creatures nowadays—and concludes that you are a Communist wanting to overturn society altogether."

"Precisely so. I told Natalie this morning that if she were to be allowed to join our association her English friends would imagine her to be *petroleuse*."

"Miss Lind is not in the association?" Brand said, quickly.

"As yet no women have been admitted. It is a difficulty; for in some societies with which we are partly in alliance women are members. Ah, such noble creatures many of them are, too! However, the question may come forward by-and-by. In the mean time, Natalie, without being made aware of what we are actually doing—that, of course, is forbidden—knows something of what our work must be, and is warm in her sympathy. She is a good help, too: she is the quickest translator we have got."

"Do you think," Brand said, somewhat timidly, but with a frown on his face, "that it is fair to put such tedious labor on the shoulders of a young girl? Surely there are enough of men to do the work?"

"You shall propose that to her yourself," Lind said laughing.

Well, they arrived at the house in Curzon Street, and, when they went up-stairs to the drawing-room, they found Lord Evelyn there. Natalie Lind came forward—with less than usual of her graciously self-possessed manner—and shook hands with him briefly, and said, with averted look,

“I am glad to see you, Mr. Brand.”

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Now, as her eyes were cast down, it was impossible that she could have noticed the quick expression of disappointment that crossed his face. Was it that she herself was instantly conscious of the coldness of her greeting, and anxious to atone for that? Was it that she plucked up heart of grace? At all events, she suddenly offered him both her hands with a frank courage; she looked him in the face with the soft, tender, serious eyes; and then, before she turned away, the low voice said,

“Brother, I welcome you!”

CHAPTER XIII.

SOUTHWARD.

After a late, cold, and gloomy spring, a glimpse of early summer shone over the land; and after a long period of anxious and oftentimes irritating and disappointing travail—in wet and dismal towns, in comfortless inns, with associates not always to his liking—George Brand was hurrying to the South. Ah, the thought of it, as the train whirled along on this sunlit morning! After the darkness, the light; after fighting, peace; after the task-work, a smile of reward! No more than that was his hope; but it was a hope that kept his heart afire and glad on many a lonely night.

At length his companion, who had slept steadily on ever since they had entered the train at Carlisle, at about one in the morning, awoke, rubbed his eyes, and glanced at the window.

“We are going to have a fine day at last, Humphreys,” said Brand.

“They have been having better weather in the South, sir.”

The man looked like a well-dressed mechanic. He had an intelligent face, keen and hard. He spoke with the Newcastle burr.

“I wish you would not call me ‘sir,’” Brand said, impatiently.

“It comes natural, somehow, sir,” said the other, with great simplicity. “There is not a man in any part of the country, but would say ‘sir’ to one of the Brands of Darlington. When Mr. Lind telegraphed to me you were coming down, I telegraphed back, ‘Is he one of the Brands of Darlington?’ and when I got his answer I said to myself, ‘Here is the man to go to the Political Committee of the Trades-union Congress: they won’t fight shy of him.’”

“Well, we have no great cause to grumble at what has been done in that direction; but that infernal *Internationale* is doing a deal of mischief. There is not a trades-unionist in the country who does not know what is going on in France. A handful of irresponsible

madmen trying to tack themselves on to the workmen's association—well, surely the men will have more sense than to listen. The *congres ouvrier* to change its name, and to become the *congres revolutionnaire*! When I first went to Jackson, Molyneux, and the others, I found they had a sort of suspicion that we wanted to make Communists of them and tear society to pieces.”

“You have done more in a couple of months, sir, than we all have done in the last ten years,” his companion said.

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"That is impossible. Look at—"

He named some names, certain of them well known enough.

The other shook his head.

"Where we have been they don't believe in London professors, and speech-makers, and chaps like that. They know that the North is the backbone and the brain of England, and in the North they want to be spoken to by a North-countryman."

"I am a Buckinghamshire man."

"That may be where you live, sir: but you are one of the Brands of Darlington," said the other, doggedly.

By-and-by they entered the huge, resounding station.

"What are you going to do to-night, Humphreys? Come and have some dinner with me, and we will look in afterward at the Century."

Humphreys looked embarrassed for a moment.

"I was thinking of going to the Coger's Hall, sir," said he, hitting upon an excuse. "I have heard some good speaking there."

"Mostly bunkum, isn't it?"

"No, sir."

"All right. Then I shall see you to-morrow morning in Lisle Street. Good-bye."

He jumped into a hansom, and was presently rattling away through the busy streets. How sweet and fresh was the air, even here in the midst of the misty and golden city! The early summer was abroad; there was a flush of green on the trees in the squares. When he got down to the Embankment, he was quite surprised by the beauty of the gardens; there were not many gardens in the towns he had chiefly been living in.

He dashed up the narrow wooden stairs.

"Look alive now, Waters: get my bath ready."

"It is ready, sir."

"And breakfast!"

"Whenever you please, sir."

He took off his dust-smothered travelling-coat, and was about to fling it on the couch, when he saw lying there two pieces of some brilliant stuff that were strange to him.

“What are these things?”

“They were left, sir, by Mr. ——, of Bond Street, on approval. He will call this afternoon.”

“Tell him to go to the devil!” said Brand, briefly, as he walked off into his bedroom.

Presently he came back.

“Stay a bit,” said he; and he took up the two long strips of silk-embroidered stuff—Florentine work, probably, of about the end of the sixteenth century. The ground was a delicate yellowish-gray, with an initial letter worked in various colors over it. Mr. ——, of Bond Street, knew that Brand had often amused his idle hours abroad in picking up things like this, chiefly as presents to lady friends, and no doubt thought they would be welcome enough, even for bachelors’ rooms.

“Tell him I will take them.”

“But the price, sir?”

“Ask him his price; beat him down; and keep the difference.”

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After bath and breakfast there was an enormous pile of correspondence awaiting him; for not a single letter referring to his own affairs had been forwarded to him for over two months. He had thrown his entire time and care into his work in the North. And now that these arrears had to be cleared off, he attacked the business with an obvious impatience. Formerly he had been used to dawdle over his letters, getting through a good portion of the forenoon with them and conversations with Waters about Buckinghamshire news. Now, even with that omniscient factotum by his side, his progress was slow, simply because he was hurried. He made dives here and there, without system, without settlement. At last, looking at his watch, he jumped up; it was half-past eleven.

"Some other time, Waters—some other time; the man must wait," he said to the astonished but patient person beside him. "If Lord Evelyn calls, tell him I shall look in at the Century to-night."

"Yes, sir."

Some half-hour thereafter he was standing in Park Lane, his heart beating somewhat quickly, his eyes fixed eagerly on two figures that were crossing the thoroughfare lower down to one of the gates leading into Hyde Park. These were Natalie Lind and the little Anneli. He had known that he would see her thus; he had imagined the scene a thousand times; he had pictured to himself every detail—the trees, the tall railings, the spring flowers in the plots, and the little rosy-cheeked German girl walking by her mistress's side; and yet, now that this familiar thing had come true, he trembled to behold it; he breathed quickly; he could not go forward to her and hold out his hand. Slowly, for they were walking slowly, he went along to the gate and entered after them; cautiously, lest she should turn suddenly and confront him with her eyes; drawn, and yet fearing to follow. She was talking with some animation to her companion; though even in this profound silence he could not hear the sound of her voice. But he could see the beautiful oval of her face! and sometimes, when she turned with a laugh to the little Anneli, he caught a glimpse of the black eyes and eyelashes, the smiling lips and brilliant teeth; and once or twice she put out the palm of her right hand with a little gesture which, despite her English dress, would have told a stranger that she was of foreign ways. But the look of welcome, the smile of reward that he had been looking forward to?

Well, Mr. Lind was in America; and during his absence his daughter saw but few visitors. There was no particular reason why, supposing that George Brand met Natalie in the street, he should not go up and shake hands with her; and many a time, in these mental pictures of his of her morning walk with the rosy-cheeked Anneli, he imagined himself confronting her under the shadow of the trees, and perhaps walking some way with her, to listen once more to the clear, low vibrations of her musical voice. But no sooner

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had he seen her come into Park Lane—the vision became real—than he felt he could not go up and speak to her. If he had met her by accident, perhaps he might; but to watch her, to entrap her, to break in on her wished-for isolation under false pretences—all that he suddenly felt to be impossible. He could follow her with his heart; but the sound of her voice, the touch of her hand, the smile of her calm, beautiful, dark eyes, were as remote for him as if she, too, were beyond the broad Atlantic.

He was not much given to introspection and analysis; daring the past two months more especially he had been far too busy to be perpetually asking “Why? why?”—the vice of indolence. It was enough that, in the cold and the wet, there was a fire in his heart that kept him glad with thinking of the fair days to come; and that, in the foggy afternoons or the lonely nights when he was alone, and perhaps despondent or impatient over the stupidity or the contumacy he had had to encounter, there came to him the soft murmur of a voice from far away—proud, sad, and yet full of consolation and hope:

“—But ye that might be clothed with all things pleasant,
Ye are foolish that put off the fair soft present,
That clothe yourself with the cold future air;
When mother and father, and tender sister and brother,
And the old live love that was shall be as ye,
Dust and no fruit of loving life shall be.
—She shall be yet who is more than all these were,
Than sister or wife or father unto us, or mother.”

He could hear her voice: he could see the beautiful face grow pale with its proud fervor; he could feel the soft touch of her hand when she came forward and said, “Brother, I welcome you!”

And now that she was there before him, the gladness in his heart at the mere sight of her was troubled with a trembling fear and pain. She was but a stone’s-throw in front of him; but she seemed far away. The world was young around her; and she belonged to the time of youth and of hope; life, that he had been ready to give up as a useless and aimless thing, was only opening out before her, full of a thousand beauties, and wonders, and possibilities. If only he could have taken her hand, and looked into her eyes, and claimed that smile of welcome, he would have been nearer to her. Surely, in one thing at least they were in sympathy. There was a bond between them. If the past had divided them, the future would bring them more together. Did not the Pilgrims go by in bands, until death struck down its victims here and there?

Natalie knew nothing of all this vague longing, and doubt, and pain in the breast of one who was so near her. She was in a gay mood. The morning was beautiful; the soft wind after the rain brought whiffs of scent from the distant rose-red hawthorn. Though

she was here under shadow of the trees, the sun beyond shone on the fresh and moist grass; and at the end of the glades there were glimpses of brilliant color in the foliage—the glow of the laburnum, the lilac blaze of the rhododendron bushes. And how still the place was! Far off there was a dull roar of carriages in Piccadilly; but here there was nothing but the bleating of the sheep, the chirp of the young birds, the stir of the wind among the elms. Sometimes he could now catch the sound of her voice.

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She was in a gay humor. When she got to the Serpentine—the north bank was her favorite promenade; she could see on the other side, just below the line of leaves, the people passing and repassing on horseback; but she was not of them—she found a number of urchins wading. They had no boat; but they had the bung of a barrel, which served, and that they were pushing through the water with twigs and sticks; their shapeless boots they had left on the bank. Now, as it seemed to Brand, who was watching from a distance, she planned a scheme. Anneli was seen to go ahead of the boys, and speak to them. Their attention being thus distracted, the young mistress stepped rapidly down to the tattered boots, and dropped something in each. Then she withdrew, and was rejoined by her maid; they walked away without waiting to see the result of their machinations. But George Brand, following by-and-by, heard one of the urchins call out with wonder that he had found a penny in his shoe; and this extraordinary piece of news brought back his comrades, who rather mechanically began to examine their footgear too. And then the amazement!—and the looks around!—and the examination of the pence, lest that treasure should vanish away! Brand went up to them.

“Look hear you young stupid; don’t you see that tall lady away along there by the boat-house—why don’t you go and thank her?”

But they were either too shy or too incredulous; so he left them. He did not forget the incident.

Perhaps it was that the heavens had grown dark in the southwest, threatening a shower; but, at all events, Natalie soon returned and set out on her homeward way, giving this unknown spy some trouble to escape observation. But when she had passed, he again followed, now with even greater unrest and pain at his heart. For would not she soon disappear, and the outer world grow empty, and the dull hours have to be faced? He had come to London with such hope and gladness; now the very sunlight was to be taken out of his life by the shutting of a door in Curzon Street.

Fate, however, was kinder to him than he had dared to hope. As Natalie was returning home, he ventured to draw a little nearer to her, but still with the greatest caution, for he would have been overcome with shame if she had detected him dogging her footsteps in this aimless, if innocent manner. And now that she had got close to her own door, he had drawn nearer still—on the other side of the street; he so longed to catch one more glimpse of the dark eyes smiling, and the mobile, proud mouth. But just as the door was being opened from within, a man who had evidently been watching his chance thrust himself before the two women, barring their way, and proceeded to address Natalie in a vehement, gesticulating fashion, with much clinching of his fists and throwing out of his arms. Anneli had shrunk back a step, for the man was uncouth and unkempt; but the young mistress stood erect and firm, confronting the beggar, or madman, or whoever he was, without the slightest sign of fear.

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This was enough for George Brand. He was not thrusting himself unfairly on her seclusion if he interposed to protect her from menace. Instantly he crossed the road.

"Who are you? What do you want?" This was what he said; but what he did was to drive the man back a couple of yards.

A hand was laid on his arm quickly.

"He is in trouble," Natalie said, calmly. "He wants to see papa; he has come a long way; he does not understand that papa is in America. If you could only convince him—But you do not talk Russian."

"I can talk English," said Brand, regarding the maniac-looking person before him with angry brows. "Will you go indoors, Miss Lind, and leave him to me. I will talk an English to him that he will understand."

"Is that the way you answer an appeal for help?" said she, with gentle reproof. "The man is in trouble. If I persuade him to go with you, will you take him to papa's chambers? Either Beratinsky or Heinrich Reitzei will be there."

"Reitzei is there."

"He will hear what this man has to say. Will you be so kind?"

"I will do anything to rid you of this fellow, who looks more like a madman than a beggar."

She stepped forward and spoke to the man again—her voice sounded gentle and persuasive to Brand, in this tongue which he could not understand. When she had finished, the uncouth person in the tattered garments dropped on both knees on the pavement, and took her hand in his, and kissed it in passionate gratitude. Then he rose, and stood with his cap in his hand.

"He will go with you. I am so sorry to trouble you, Mr. Brand; and I have not even said, 'How do you do?'"

To hear this beautiful voice after so long a silence—to find those calm, dark, friendly eyes regarding him—bewildered him, or gave him courage, he knew not which. He said to her, with a quick flush on his forehead,

"May I come back to tell you how I succeed?"

She only hesitated for a second.

"If you have time. If you care to take the trouble."



He carried away with him the look of her face—that filled his heart with sunlight. In the hansom, into which he bundled his unkempt companion, if only he had known enough Russian, he would have expressed gratitude to him. Beggar or maniac, or whatever he was, had he not been the means of procuring for George Brand that long-coveted, long-dreamed-of smile of welcome?

CHAPTER XIV.

A RUSSIAN EPISODE.

“Is that the way you answer an appeal for help?” With that gentle protest still lingering in his ear, he was not inclined to be hard on this unfortunate wretch who was in the cab with him; and yet at the same time he was resolved to prevent any repetition of the scene he had just witnessed. At the last he discovered that the man had picked up in his wanderings a little German. His own German was not first-rate; it was fluent, forcible, and accurate enough, so far as hotels and railway-stations were concerned; elsewhere it had a tendency to halt, blunder, and double back on itself. But, at all events, he managed to convey to his companion the distinct intimation that any further troubling of that young lady would only procure for him broken head.

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The dull, stupid, savage-looking face betrayed no sign of intelligence. He repeated the warning again and again; and at last, at the phrase “that young lady,” the dazed small eyes lit up somewhat, and the man clasped his hands.

“Ein Engel!” he said, apparently to himself. “Ein Engel—ein Engel! Ach Gott—wie schon—wie gemuthlich!”

“Yes, yes, yes,” Brand said, “that is all very well; but one is not permitted to annoy angels—to trouble them in the street. Do you understand that that means punishment—one must be punished—if one returns to the house of that young lady? Do you understand?”

The man regarded him with the small, deep-set eyes again sunk into apathy.

“Ihr Diener, Herr,” said he, submissively.

“You understand you are not to go back to the house of the young lady?”

“Ihr Diener, Herr.”

There was nothing to be got out of him, or into him; so Brand waited until he should get help of Heinrich Reitzei, Lind’s *locum tenens*.

Reitzei was in the chambers—at Lind’s table, in fact. He was a man of about twenty-eight or thirty, slim and dark, with a perfectly pallid face, a small black mustache carefully waxed, and an affectedly courteous smile. He wore a *pince-nez*; was fond of slang, to show his familiarity with English; and aimed at an English manner, too. He seemed bored. He regarded this man whom Brand introduced to him without surprise, with indifference.

“Hear what this fellow has to say,” Brand said, “will you? and give him distinctly to understand that if he tries again to see Miss Lind, I will break his head for him. What idiot could have given him Lind’s private address?”

The man was standing near the door, stolid apparently, but with his small eyes keenly watching. Reitzei said a word or two to him. Instantly he went—he almost sprung—forward; and this movement was so unexpected that the equanimity of the pallid young man received a visible shock, and he hastily drew out a drawer a few inches. Brand caught sight of the handle of a revolver.

But the man was only eager to tell his story, and presently Reitzei had resumed his air of indifference. As he proceeded to translate for Brand’s benefit, in interjectional phrases, what this man with the trembling hands and the burning eyes was saying, it was strange to mark the contrast between the two men.



“His name Kirski,” the younger man was saying, as he eyed, with a cool and critical air, the wild look in the other’s face. “A carver in wood, but cannot work now, for his hands tremble, through hunger and fatigue—through drink, I should say—native of a small village in Kiev—had his share of the Communal land—but got permission from the Commune to spend part of the year in Kiev itself—sent back all his taxes duly, and money too, because—oh, this is it?—daughter of village Elder—young, beautiful, of course—left an orphan, with three brothers—and their share of the land too much for them. Ah, this is the story, then, my friend? Married, too—young, beautiful, good—yes, yes, we know all that—”

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There were tears running down the face of the other man. But these he shook away; and a wilder light than ever came into his eyes.

“He goes to Kiev as usual, foolish fellow; now I see what all the row is about. When he returns, three months after, he goes to his house. Empty. The neighbors will not speak. At last one says something about Pavel Michaieloff, the great proprietor, whose house and farm are some versts away—my good fellow, you have got the palsy, or is it drink?—he goes and seeks out the house of Pavel—yes, yes, the story is not new—Pavel is at the open window, smoking—he goes up to the window—there is a woman inside—when she sees him she utters a loud scream, and rushes for protection to the man Michaieloff—then all the fat is in the fire naturally—”

The Russian choked and gasped; drops of perspiration stood on his forehead; he looked wildly around.

“Water?” said Reitzei. “Poor devil, you need some water to cool down your excitement. You are making as much fuss as if that kind of thing had never happened in the world before.”

But he rose and got him some water, which the man drained eagerly; then he continued his story with the same fierce and angry vehemence.

“Well, yes, he had something to complain of, certainly,” Reitzei said, translating all that incoherent passion into cool little phrases. “Not a fair fight. Pavel summons his men from the court-yard—men with whips—dogs, too—he is lashed and driven along the roads, and the dogs tear at him! Oh yes, my good friend, you have been badly used; but you have come a long way to tell your story. I must ask him how the mischief he got here at all.”

But here Reitzei paused and stared. Something the man said—in an eager, low voice, with his sunken small eyes all afire—startled him out of his critical air.

“Oh, that is it, is it?” he said, eyeing him. “He will do any thing for us—he will commit a murder—ten murders—if only we give him money, a knife, and help to kill the man Michaieloff. Well, he is a lively sort of person to let loose on society.”

“The man is clearly mad,” Brand said.

“The man was madder who sent him to us,” Reitzei answered. “I should not like to be in his shoes if Lind hears that this maniac was allowed to see his daughter.”

The wretched creature standing there glanced eagerly from one to the other, with the eyes of a wild animal, seeking to gather something from their looks; then he went forward to the table, and stooped down and spoke to Reitzei still further, in the same low, fierce voice, his whole frame meanwhile shaking with his excitement. Reitzei said

something to him in reply, and motioned him back. He retired a step or two, and then kept watching the faces of the two men.

“What are you going to do with him?” Brand said.

Reitzei shrugged his shoulders.

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"I know what I should like to do with him if I dared," he said, with a graceful smile.

"There is a friend of mine not a hundred miles away from that very Kiev who wants a little admonition. Her name is Petrovna, she is the jail-matron of a female penitentiary; she is just a little too fierce at times. Murderers, thieves, prostitutes: oh yes, she can be civil enough to them; but let a political prisoner come near her—one of her own sex, mind—and she becomes a devil, a tigress, a vampire. Ah, Madame Petrovna and I may have a little reckoning some day. I have asked Lind again and again to petition for a decree against her; but no, he will not move; he is becoming Anglicized, effeminate."

"A decree?" Brand said.

The other smiled, with an affectation of calm superiority.

"You will learn by-and-by. Meanwhile, if I dared, what I should like to do would be to give our friend here plenty of money, and not one but two knives, saying to him. 'My good friend, here is one knife for Michaeloff, if you like; but first of all here is this knife for that angel in disguise, Madame Petrovna, of the Female Penitentiary in Novolevsk. Strike sure and hard!'"

For one instant his affectation forsook him, and there was a gleam in his eyes. This was but a momentary relapse from his professed indifference.

"Well, Mr. Brand, I suppose I must take over this madman from you. You may tell Miss Lind she need not be frightened."

"I should not think Miss Lind was in the habit of being frightened," said Brand, coldly.

"Ah, no; doubtless not. Well, I shall see that this fellow does not trouble her again. What fine tidings we had of your work in the North! You have been a power; you have moved mountains."

"I have moved John Molyneux," said Brand, with a laugh, "and in these days that is a more difficult business."

"Fine news from Spain, too," said Reitzei, glancing at some letters. "From Valladolid, Barcelona, Ferrol, Saragossa—all the same story: coalition, coalition. Salmero will be in London next week."

"But you have not told me what you are going to do with this man yet; you must stow the combustible piece of goods somewhere. Poor devil, his sufferings have made a pitiable object of him."

"My dear friend," said Reitzei, "You don't suppose that a Russian peasant would feel so deeply a beating with whips, or the worrying of dogs, or even the loss of his wife? Of

course, all together, it was something of a hard grind. He must have been constitutionally insane, and that woke the whole thing up.”

“Then he should be confined. He is a lunatic at large.”

“I don’t think he would harm anybody,” Reitzei said, regarding the man as if he were a strange animal. “I would not shut up a dog in a lunatic asylum; I would rather put a bullet through his head. And this fellow—if we could humbug him a little, and get him to his work again—I know a man in Wardour Street who would do that for me—and see what effect the amassing of a little English money might have on him. Better a miser than a wild beast. And he seems a submissive sort of creature. Leave him to me, Mr. Brand.”

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Brand began to think a little better of Reitzei, whom hitherto he had rather disliked. He handed him five pounds, to get some clothes and tools for the man, who, when he was told of this generosity, turned to Brand and said something to him in Russian which set Reitzei laughing.

“What is it he says?”

“He said, ‘Little Father, you are worthy to become the husband of the angel: may the day come soon!’ I suppose the angel is Miss Lind; she must have been very kind to the man.”

“She only spoke to him; but her voice can be kind,” said Brand, rather absently, and then he left.

Away went the hansom back to Curzon Street. He said to himself that it was not for nothing that this unfortunate wretch Kirski had wandered all the way from the Dnieper to the Thames. He would look after this man. He would do something for him. Five pounds only? And he had been the means of securing this interview, if only for three of four minutes; after the long period of labor and hope and waiting he might have gone without a word at all but for this over-troubled poor devil.

And now—now he might even see her alone for a couple of minutes in the hushed little drawing-room; and she might say if she had heard about what had been done in the North, and about his eagerness to return to the work. One look of thanks; that was enough. Sometimes, by himself up there in the solitary inns, the old fit had come over him; and he had laughed at himself, and wondered at this new fire of occupation and interest that was blazing through his life, and asked himself, as of old, to what end—to what end? But when he heard Natalie Lind’s voice, there was a quick good-bye to all questioning. One look at the calm, earnest eyes, and he drank deep of faith, courage, devotion. And surely this story of the man Kirski—what he could tell her of it—would be sufficient to fill up five minutes, eight minutes, ten minute, while all the time he should be able to dwell on her eyes, whether they were downcast, or turned to his with their frank, soft glance. He should be in the perfume of the small drawing-room. He would see the Roman necklace Mazzini had given her gleam on her bosom as she breathed.

He did not know what Natalie Lind had been about during his absence.

“Anneli, Anneli—hither, child!” she called in German. “Run up to Madame Potecki, and ask her to come and spend the afternoon with me. She must come at once, to lunch with me; I will wait.”

“Yes, Fraulein. What music, Fraulein?”

“None; never mind any music. But she must come at once.”

“Schon, Fraulein,” said the little Anneli, about to depart.

Her young mistress called her back, and paused, with a little hesitation.

“You may tell Elizabeth,” said she, with an indifferent air, “that it is possible—it is quite possible—it is at least possible—I may have two friends to lunch with me; and she must send at once if she wants anything more. And you could bring me back some fresh flowers, Anneli?”

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"Why not, Fraulein?"

"Go quick, then, Anneli—fly like a roe—*durch Wald und auf der Haide!*"

And so it came about that when George Brand was ushered into the scented little drawing-room—so anxious to make the most of the invaluable minutes—he found himself introduced first of all to Madame Potecki, a voluble, energetic little Polish gentlewoman, whose husband had been killed in the Warsaw disturbances of '61, and who now supported herself in London by teaching music. She was eager to know all about the man Kirski, and hoped that he was not wholly a maniac, and trusted that Mr. Brand would see that her dear child—her adopted daughter, she might say—was not terrified again by the madman.

"My dear madame," said Brand, "you must not imagine that it was from terror that Miss Lind handed over the man to me—it was from kindness. That is more natural to her than terror."

"Ah, I know the dear child has the courage of an army," said the little old lady, tapping her adopted daughter on the shoulder with the fan. "But she must take care of herself while her papa is away in America."

Natalie rose; and of course Brand rose also, with a sudden qualm of disappointment, for he took that as the signal of his dismissal; and he had scarcely spoken a word to her.

"Mr. Brand," said she, with some little trifle of embarrassment, "I know I must have deprived you of your luncheon. It was so kind of you to go at once with the poor man. Would it save you time—if you are not going anywhere—I thought perhaps you might come and have something with madame and myself. You must be dying of hunger."

He did not refuse the invitation. And behold! when he went down-stairs, the table was already laid for three; had he been expected, he asked himself? Those flowers there, too: he knew it was no maid-servant's fingers that had arranged and distributed them so skilfully.

How he blessed this little Polish lady, and her volubility, and her extravagant, subtle, honest flattery of her dear adopted daughter! It gave him liberty to steep himself in the rich consciousness of Natalie's presence; he could listen in silence for the sound of her voice—he could covertly watch the beauty of her shapely hands—without being considered preoccupied or morose. All he had to do was to say, "Yes, madame," or "Indeed, madame," the while he knew that Natalie Lind was breathing the same air with him—that at any moment the large, lustrous dark eyes might look up and meet his. And she spoke little, too; and had scarcely her usual frank self-confidence: perhaps a chance reference of Madame Potecki to the fact that her adopted daughter had been brought up without a mother had somewhat saddened her.



The room was shaded in a measure, for the French silk blinds were down; but there was a soft golden glow prevailing all the same. For many a day George Brand remembered that little luncheon-party; the dull, bronze glow of the room; the flowers; the soft, downcast eyes opposite him; the bright, pleasant garrulity of the little Polish lady; and always—ah, the delight of it!—that strange, trembling, sweet consciousness that Natalie Lind was listening as he listened—that almost he could have heard the beating of her heart.

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And a hundred and a hundred times he swore that, whoever throughout the laboring and suffering world might regret that day, the man Kirski should not.

CHAPTER XV.

NEW FRIENDS.

It was a Sunday afternoon in Hyde Park, in this pleasantly opening summer; and there was a fair show of “the quality” come out for their accustomed promenade, despite the few thunder-showers that had swept across from the South. These, in fact, had but served to lay the dust, and to bring out the scent of the hawthorns and lilacs, so that the air was sweet with perfume; while the massive clouds, banking up in the North, formed a purple background to show up the young green foliage of the trees, all wet with rain, and shimmering tremulously in the sunlight.

George Brand and his friend Evelyn sat in the back row of chairs, watching the people pass and repass. It was a sombre procession, but that here and there appeared a young English girl in her pale spring costume—paler than the fresh glow of youth and health on her face, and that here and there the sunlight, wandering down through the branches, touched a scarlet sunshade—just then coming into fashion—until that shone like a beautiful spacious flower among the mass of green.

When they had been silently watching the people for some little time, Brand said, almost to himself,

“How very unlike those women she is!”

“Who? Oh, Natalie Lind,” said the other, who had been speaking of her some minutes before. “Well, that is natural and I don’t say it to their disadvantage. I believe most girls are well-intended enough; but, of course, they grow up in a particular social atmosphere, and it depends on that what they become. If it is rather fast, the girl sees nothing objectionable in being fast too. If it is religious, the god of her idolatry is a bishop. If it is sporting, she thinks mostly about horses. Natalie is exceptional, because she has been brought up in exceptional circumstances. For one thing, she has been a good deal alone; and she has formed all sorts of beautiful idealisms and aspirations—”

The conversation dropped here; for at the moment Lord Evelyn espied two of his sisters coming along in the slow procession.

“Here come two of the girls,” he said to his friend. “How precious demure they look!”

Brand at once rose, and went out from the shadow of the trees, to pay his respects to the two young ladies.

“How do you do, Miss D’Agincourt? How do you do, Miss Frances?”

Certainly no one would have suspected these two very graceful and pleasant-looking girls of being madcap creatures at home. The elder was a tall and slightly-built blonde, with large gray eyes set wide apart; the younger a gentle little thing, with brownish eyes, freckles, and a pretty mouth.

“Mamma?” said the eldest daughter, in answer to his inquires. “Oh, she is behind, bringing up the rear, as it were. We have to go in detachment, or else the police would come and read the riot act against us. Francie and I are the vanguard; and she feels such a good little girl, marching along two and two, just as if she were back at Brighton.”

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The clear gray eyes—quite demure—glanced in toward the shadows of the trees.

“I see you have got Evelyn there, Mr. Brand. Who is the extraordinary person he is always talking about now—the Maid of Saragossa, or Joan of Arc, or something like that? Do you know her?”

“I suppose you mean Miss Lind.”

“I know he has persuaded mamma to go and call on her, and get her to dine with us, if she will come. Now, I call that kind.”

“If she accepts, you mean?”

“No, I mean nothing of the sort. Good-bye. If we stay another minute, we shall have the middle detachments overlapping the vanguard. En avant, Francie! Vorwärts!”

She bowed to him, and passed on in her grave and stately manner: more calmly observant, demurer eyes were not in the Park.

He ran the gauntlet of the whole family, and at last encountered the mamma, who brought up the rear with the youngest of her daughters. Lady Evelyn was a tall, somewhat good-looking, elderly lady, who wore her silver-white hair in old-fashioned curls. She was an amiable but strictly matter-of-fact person, who beheld her daughters' mad humors with surprise as well as alarm. What were they forever laughing at? Besides, it was indecorous. She had not conducted herself in that manner when she lived in her father's home.

Lady Evelyn, who was vaguely aware that Brand knew the Linds, repeated her daughter's information about the proposed visit, and said that if Miss Lind would come and spend the evening with them, she hoped Mr. Brand would come too.

“These girls do tease dreadfully, I know,” said their mamma; “but perhaps they will behave a little better before a stranger.”

Mr. Brand replied that he hoped Miss Lind would accept the invitation—for during her father's absence she must be somewhat dull—but that even without the protection of her presence he was not afraid to face those formidable young ladies. Whereupon Miss Geraldine—who was generally called the baby, though she was turned thirteen—glanced at him with a look which said, “Won't you catch it for that!” and the mamma then bade him good-bye, saying that Rosalys would write to him as soon as the evening was arranged.

He had not long to wait for that expected note. The very next night he received it. Miss Lind was coming on Thursday; would that suit him? A quarter to eight.

He was there punctual to the moment. The presence of the whole rabble of girls in the drawing-room told him that this was to be a quite private and domestic dinner-party; on other occasions only two or three of the phalanx—as Miss D’Agincourt described herself and her sisters—were chosen to appear. And, on this especial occasion, there was a fine hubbub of questions and raillery going on—which Brand vainly endeavored to meet all at once—when he was suddenly rescued. The door was opened, and Miss Lind was announced. The clamor ceased.

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She was dressed in black, with a red camellia in her bosom, and another in the magnificent black hair. Brand thought he had never seen her look so beautiful, and at once so graciously proud and gentle. Lady Evelyn went forward to meet her, and greeted her very kindly indeed. She was introduced to one or two of the girls. She shook hands with Mr. Brand, and gave him a pleasant smile of greeting. Lady Evelyn had to apologize for her son's absence; he had only gone to write a note.

The tall, beautiful Hungarian girl seemed not in the least embarrassed by all these curious eyes, that occasionally and covertly regarded her while pretending not to do so. Two of the young ladies there were older than she was, yet she seemed more of a woman than any of them. Her self-possession was perfect. She sat down by Lady Evelyn, and submitted to be questioned. The girls afterward told their brother they believed she was an actress, because of the clever manner in which she managed her train.

But at this moment Lord Evelyn made his appearance in great excitement, and with profuse apologies.

"But the fact is," said he, producing an evening paper, "the fact is—just listen to this, Natalie: it is the report of a police case."

At his thus addressing her by her Christian name the mother started somewhat, and the demure eyes of the girls were turned to the floor, lest they should meet any conscious glance.

"Here is a fellow brought before the Hammersmith magistrate for indulging in a new form of amusement. Oh, very pretty! very nice! He had only got hold of a small dog and he was taking it by the two forelegs, and trying how far he could heave it. Very well; he is brought before the magistrates. He had only heaved the dog two or three times; nothing at all, you know. You think he will get off with a forty shillings fine, or something like that. Not altogether! Two months' hard labor—*two solid months' hard labor*; and if I had my will of the brute," he continued, savagely, "I would give ten years' hard labor, and bury him alive when he came out. However, two months' hard labor is something. I glory in that magistrate; I have just been up-stairs writing a note asking him to dine with me. I believe I was introduced to him once."

"Evelyn quite goes beside himself," his mother said to her guest, with half an air of apology, "when he reads about cruelty like that."

"Surely it is better than being callous," said Natalie, speaking very gently.

They went in to dinner; and the young ladies were very well behaved indeed. They did not at all resent the fashion in which the whole attention of the dinner-table was given to the stranger.

“And so you like living in England?” said Lady Evelyn to her.

“I cannot breathe elsewhere,” was the simple answer.

“Why,” said the matter-of-fact, silver-haired lady, “if this country is notorious for anything, it is for its foggy atmosphere!”

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"I think it is famous for something more than that," said the girl, with just a touch of color in the beautiful face; for she was not accustomed to speak before so many people. "Is it not more famous for its freedom? It is that that makes the air so sweet to breathe."

"Well, at all events, you don't find it very picturesque as compared with other countries. Evelyn tells me you have travelled a great deal."

"Perhaps I am not very fond of picturesqueness," Natalie said, modestly. "When I am travelling through a country I would rather see plenty of small farms, thriving and prosperous, than splendid ruins that tell only of oppression and extravagance, and the fierceness of war."

No one spoke; so she made bold to continue—but she addressed Lady Evelyn only.

"No doubt it is very picturesque, as you go up the Rhine, or across the See Kreis, or through the Lombard plains, to see every height crowned with its castle. Yes, one cannot help admiring. They are like beautiful flowers that have blossomed up from the valleys and the plains below. But who tilled the land, that these should grow there on every height? Are you not forced to think of the toiling wretches who labored and labored to carry stone by stone up the crest of the hill? They did not get much enjoyment out of the grandeur and picturesqueness of the castles."

"But they gave that labor for their own protection," Lady Evelyn said, with a smile. "The great lords and barons were their protectors."

"The great lords and barons said so, at least," said the girl, without any smile at all, "and I suppose the peasantry believed them; and were quite willing to leave their vineyards and go and shed their blood whenever the great lords and barons quarrelled among themselves."

"Well said! well said!" Brand exclaimed, quickly; though, indeed, this calm, gentle-eyed, self-possessed girl was in no need of any champion.

"I am afraid you are a great Radical, Miss Lind," said Lady Evelyn.

"Perhaps it is your English air, Lady Evelyn," said the girl, with a smile.

Lord Evelyn's mother, notwithstanding her impassive, unimaginative nature, soon began to betray a decided interest in this new guest, and even something more. She was attracted, to begin with, by the singular beauty of the young Hungarian lady, which was foreign-looking, unusual, picturesque. She was struck by her perfect self-possession, and by the ease and grace of her manner, which was rather that of a mature woman than of a girl of nineteen. But most of all she was interested in her odd talk and opinions, which she expressed with such absolute simplicity and frankness. Was it, Lady Evelyn asked herself, that the girl had been brought up so much in the society of

men—that she had neither mother nor sisters—that she spoke of politics and such matters as if it the most natural thing in the world for women, of whatever age, to consider them as of first importance?

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But one chance remark that Natalie made, on the impulse of the moment, did for the briefest possible time break down that charming self-confidence of hers, and show her—to the wonderment of the English girls—the prey of an alarmed embarrassment. George Brand had been talking of patriotism, and of the scorn that must naturally be felt for the man who would say of his country, “Well, it will last my time. Let me enjoy myself when I can. What do I care about the future of other people?” And then he went on to talk of the larger patriotism that concerned itself not merely with one’s fellow-countrymen but with one’s fellow-mortals; and how the stimulus and enthusiasm of that wider patriotism should be proportionately stronger; and how it might seek to break down artificial barriers of political systems and religious creeds. Patriotism was a beautiful flame—a star; but here was a sun. Ordinary, to tell the truth, Brand was but an indifferent speaker—he had all an Englishman’s self-consciousness; but now he spoke for Natalie alone, and minded the others but little. Presently Lady Evelyn said, with a smile,

“You, too, Miss Lind, are a reformer, are you not? Evelyn is very mysterious, and I can’t quite make out what he means; but at all events it is very kind of you to spare us an evening when you must be so deeply engaged.”

“I?” said Natalie. “Oh no, it is very little that I can do. The work is too difficult and arduous for women, perhaps. But there is one thing that women can do—they can love and honor those who are working for them.”

It was spoken impulsively—probably the girl was thinking only of her father. But at the moment she happened to look up, and there were Rosalys D’Agincourt’s calmly observant eyes fixed on her. Then some vague echo of what she had said rushed in upon her; she was bewildered by the possible interpretation others might put on the words; and the quick, sensitive blood mounted to her forehead. But fortunately Lady Evelyn, who had missed the whole thing, happened at this very instant to begin talking of orchids, and Natalie struck in with great relief. So that little episode went by.

And, as dinner went on, Brand became more and more convinced that this family was the most delightful family in England. Just so much restraint had left their manner as to render those madcap girls exceedingly frank and good-natured in the courtesy they showed to their guest, and to admit her as a confidante into their ways of bantering each other. And one would herself come round to shift the fire-screen behind Miss Lind to precisely the proper place; and another said that Miss Lind drank water because Evelyn had been so monstrously stupid as not to have any Hungarian wine for her; and another asked if she might call on Miss Lind the following afternoon, to take her to some place where some marvellous Japanese curiosities were on view. Then, when they left for the drawing-room, the eldest Miss D’Agincourt put her arm within the arm of their guest, and said,

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"Now, dear Miss Lind, please understand that, if there was any stranger here at all, we should not dream of asking you to sing. Ermentrude and I take all that on our shoulders; we squawk for the whole of the family. But Evelyn has told us so much about your singing—"

"Oh, I will sing for you if you wish it," said Natalie, without hesitation.

Some little time thereafter Brand was walking up and down the room below, slowly and thoughtfully: he was not much of a wine-drinker.

"Evelyn," he said, suddenly, "I shall soon be able to tell you whether I owe you a life-long gratitude. I owe you much already. Through you I have got some work to do in the world; I am busy, and content. But there is a greater prize."

"I think I can guess what you mean," his companion said, calmly.

"You do?" said the other, with a quick look. "And you do not think I am mad?—to go and ask her to be my wife before she has given me a single word of hope?"

"She has spoken to others about you: I know what she thinks of you," said Lord Evelyn. Then the fine, pale face was slightly flushed. "To tell you the truth, Brand, I thought of this before you ever saw her."

"Thought of what?" said the other, with a stare of surprise.

"That you would be the right sort of man to make a husband for her: she might be left alone in the world at any moment, without a single relation, and scarcely a friend."

"Women don't marry for these reasons," said the other, somewhat absently. "And yet, if she were to think of it, it would not be as if I were withdrawing her from everything she takes an interest in. We should be together. I am eager to go forward, even by myself; but with her for a companion—think of that!"

"I have thought of it," said Lord Evelyn, with something of a sad smile. "Often. And there is no man in England more heartily wishes you success than I do. Come, let us go up to the drawing-room."

They went out into the hall. Some one was playing a noisy piece up-stairs; it was safe to speak. And then he said,

"Shall I tell you something, Brand?—something that will keep you awake all this night, and not with the saddest of thinking? If I am not mistaken, I fancy you have already 'stole bonny Glenlyon away.'"

CHAPTER XVI.

A LETTER.

Black night lay over the city, and silence; the river flowed unseen through the darkness; but a thousand golden points of fire mapped out the lines of the Embankment and the long curves of the distant bridges. The infrequent sounds that could be heard were strangely distinct, even when they were faint and remote. There was a slight rustling of wind in the trees below the window.

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But the night and the silence brought him neither repose nor counsel. A multitude of bewildering, audacious hopes and distracting fears strove for mastery in his mind, upsetting altogether the calm and cool judgment on which he prided himself. His was not a nature to harbor illusions; he had a hard way of looking at things; and yet—and yet—might not this chance speech of Lord Evelyn have been something more than a bit of good-humored raillery? Lord Evelyn was Natalie's intimate friend; he knew all her surroundings; he was a quick observer; he was likely to know if this thing was possible. But, on the other hand, how was it possible that so beautiful a creature, in the perfect flower of her youth, should be without a lover? He forced himself to remember that she and her father seemed to see no society at all. Perhaps she was too useful to him, and he would not have her entangle herself with many friends. Perhaps they had led too nomadic a life. But even in hotels abroad, how could she have avoided the admiration she was sure to evoke? And in Florence, mayhap, or Mentone, or Madrid; and here he began to conjure up a host of possible rivals, all foreigners, of course, and all equally detestable, and to draw pictures for him of *tables d'hôte*, with always the one beautiful figure there, unconscious, gentle, silent, but drawing to her all men's eyes.

There was but the one way of putting an end to this maddening uncertainty. He dared not claim an interview with her; she might be afraid of implying too much by granting it; various considerations might dictate a refusal. But he could write; and, in point of fact, writing-materials were on the table. Again and again he had sat down and taken the pen in his hand, only to get up as often and go and stare out into the yellow glare of the night. For an instant his shadow would fall on the foliage of the trees below, and then pass away again like a ghost.

At two-and-twenty love is reckless, and glib of speech; it takes little heed of the future; the light straw-flame, for however short a period, leaps up merrily enough. But at two-and-thirty it is more alive to consequences; it is not the present moment, but the duration of life, that it regards; it seeks to proceed with a sure foot. And at this crisis, in the midst of all this irresolution, that was unspeakably vexatious to a man of his firm nature, Brand demanded of himself his utmost power of self-control. He would not imperil the happiness of his life by a hasty, importunate appeal. When at length he sat down, determined not to rise until he had sent her this message, he forced himself to write—at the beginning, at least—in a roundabout and indifferent fashion, so that she should not be alarmed. He began by excusing his writing to her, saying he had scarcely ever had a chance of talking to her, and that he wished to tell her something of what had happened to him since the memorable evening on which he had first met her at her father's

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house. And he went on to speak to her of a friend of his, who used to amuse himself with the notion that he would like to enter himself at a public school and go through his school life all over again. There he had spent the happiest of his days; why should he not repeat them? If only the boys would agree to treat him as one of themselves, why should he not be hail-fellow-well-met with them, and once more enjoy the fun of uproarious pillow-battles and have smuggled tarts and lemonade at night, and tame rabbits where no rabbits should be, and a profound hero-worship for the captain of the school Eleven, and excursions out of bounds, when his excess of pocket-money would enable him to stand treat all round? "Why not?" this friend of his used to say. "Was it so very impossible for one to get back the cares and interests, the ambitions, the amusements, the high spirits of one's boyhood?" And if he now were to tell her that a far greater miracle had happened to himself? That at an age when he had fancied he had done and seen most things worth doing and seeing, when the past seemed to contain everything worth having, and there was nothing left but to try how the tedious hours could be got over; when a listless *ennui* was eating his very heart out—that he should be presented, as it were, with a new lease of life, with stirring hopes and interests, with a new and beautiful faith, with a work that was a joy in itself, whether any reward was to be or no? And surely he could not fail to express to Lord Evelyn and to herself his gratitude for this strange thing.

These are but the harsh outlines of what, so far, he wrote; but there was a feeling in it—a touch of gladness and of pathos here and there—that had never before been in any of his writing, and of which he was himself unconscious.

But at this point he paused, and his breathing grew quick. It was so difficult to write in these measured terms. When he resumed, he wrote more rapidly.

What wonder, he made bold to ask her, if amidst all this bewildering change some still stranger dream of what might be possible in the future should have taken possession of him? She and he were leagued in sympathy as regarded the chief object of their lives; it was her voice that had inspired him; might he not hope that they should go forward together, in close friendship at least, if there could be nothing more? And as to that something more, was there no hope? He could give himself no grounds for any such hope; and yet—so much had happened to him, and mostly through her, that he could set no limit to the possibilities of happiness that lay in her generous hands. When he saw her among others, he despaired; when he thought of her alone, and of the gentleness of her heart, he dared to hope. And if this declaration of his was distressing to her, how easy it was for her to dismiss and forget it. If he had dared too much, he had himself to blame. In any case, she need not fear that

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her refusal should have the effect of dissociating them in those wider interests and sympathies to which he had pledged himself. He was not one to draw back. And if he had alarmed or offended her, he appealed to her charity—to that great kindness which she seemed eager to extend to all living creatures. How could such a vision of possible happiness have arisen in his mind without his making one effort, however desperate, to realize it? At the worst, she would forgive.

This was, in brief, the substance of what he wrote; but when, after many an anxious re-reading, he put the letter in an envelope, he was miserably conscious how little it conveyed of all the hope and desire that had hold of his heart. But then, he argued with himself, if she inclined her ear so far, surely he would have other and better opportunities of pleading with her; whereas, if he had been dreaming of impossibilities, then he and she would meet the more easily in the future that he had not given too vehement an expression to all the love and admiration he felt for her. He could not sacrifice her friendship also—her society—the chances of listening from time to time to the musical low, soft voice.

Carrying this fateful letter in his hand, he went down stairs and out into the cool night air. And now he was haunted by a hundred fears. Again and again he was on the point of turning back to add something, to alter something, to find some phrase that would appeal more closely to her heart. And then all of a sudden he convinced himself that he should not have written at all. Why not have gone to see her, at any risk, to plead with herself? But then he would have had to write to beg for a *tete-a-tete* interview; and would not that be more distinctly alarming than this roundabout epistle, which was meant to convey so much indirectly? Finally, he arrived at the pillar letter-box: and this indisputable fact brought an end to his cogitations. If he had gone walking onward he would have wasted the night in fruitless counsel. He would have repeated again and again the sentences he had used; striven to picture her as she read; wondered if he ought not still to go back and strengthen his prayer. But now it was to be yes or no. Well, he posted the letter; and then he breathed more freely. The die was cast, for good or ill.

And, indeed, no sooner was the thing done than his spirits rose considerably, and he walked on with a lighter heart. This solitary London, all lamp-lit and silent, was a beautiful city. "*Schlaf selig und suss*," the soft stirring of the night-wind seemed to say: let her not dread the message the morning would bring! He thought of the other cities she must have visited; and if—ah, the dream of it!—if he and she were to go away together to behold the glories of the moonlight on the lagoon, and the wonders of the sunrise among the hills! He had been in Rome, he remembered, a wonderful coronet of rubies: would not that do for the beautiful black masses of hair? Or pearls? She did not appear to have much jewellery. Or rather—seeing that such things are possible between husband and wife—would she not accept the value, and far more than the

value, of any jewellery she could desire, to be given away in acts of kindness? That would be more like Natalie.

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He walked on, his heart full of an audacious joy; for now this was the picture before him; a Buckinghamshire hill; a red and white house among the beeches; and a spacious lawn looking out on the far and wooded plain, with its villages, and spires, and tiny curls of smoke. And this foreign young lady become an English house-mistress; proud of her nectarines and pineapples; proud of her Hungarian horses; proud of the quiet and comfort of the home she can offer to her friends, when they come for a space to rest from their labors.... "*Schlaf selig und süss!*" the night-wind seemed to say: "The white morning is bringing with it a message!"

To him the morning brought an end to all those golden dreams of the night. There action had set in. His old misgivings returned with redoubled force. For one thing, there was a letter from Reitzei, saying that the man Kirski had at length consented to begin to work at his trade, and that Miss Lind need fear no further annoyance; and somehow he did not like to see her name written in this foreign way of writing. She belonged to these foreigners; her cares and interests were not those of one who would feel at home in that Buckhamshire home; she was remote. And, of course, in her manifold wanderings—in those hotels in which she had to pass the day, when her father was absent at his secret interviews—how could she avoid making acquaintances? Even among those numerous friends of her father's there must have been some one here or there to accompany her in her drives in the Prater, in her evenings at La Scala, in her morning walk along the Chiaja. He remembered how seldom he had seen her; she might have many more friends in London than he had dreamed of. Who could see her, and remain blind to her beauty? Who could know her, and remain insensible to the fascination of her enthusiasm, her faith in the right, her courage, her hope, her frank friendship with those who would help?

He was impatient with the veteran Waters this morning; and Waters was himself fractious, and inclined to resent sarcasm. He had just heard from Buckinghamshire that his substitute had, for some reason or other, intrusted the keys of the wine-cellar to one of the house-maids; and that that industrious person had seized the opportunity to tilt up all the port-wine she could lay her hands on in order to polish the bottles with a duster.

"Well," said his master, "I suppose she collected the cobwebs and sold them to a wine-merchant: they would be invaluable."

Waters said nothing, but resolved to have a word with the young woman when he went down.

The morning was fine; in any case, Brand could not have borne the distress of waiting in all day, on the chance of her reply coming. He had to be moving. He walked up to Lisle Street, and saw Reitzei, on the pretext of talking about Kirski.

“Lind will be back in a week,” said the pallid-faced smart young man. “He writes with great satisfaction, which always means something in his case. I should not wonder if he and his daughter went to live in the States.”

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"Oh, indeed," said Brand, coldly; but the words made his heart tremble.

"Yes. And if you would only go through the remaining degrees, you might take his place—who knows?"

"Who knows, indeed?" said Brand. "But I don't covet the honor."

There was something in his tone which made the other look up.

"I mean the responsibility," he said, quickly.

"You see," observed Reitzei, leaning back in his chair, "one must admit you are having rather hard lines. Your work is invaluable to us—Lind is most proud of it—but it is tedious and difficult, eh? Now if they were to give you something like the Syrian business—"

"What is that?"

"Oh, only one of the many duties the Society has undertaken," said Reitzei, carelessly. "Not that I approve because the people are Christians; it is because they are numerically weak; and the Mahomedans treat them shamefully. There is no one knows about it; no one to make a row about it; and the Government won't let the poor wretches import arms to defend themselves. Very well: very well, messieurs! But your Government allow the importation of guns for sport. Ha! and then, if one can find money, and an ingenious English firm to make rifle-barrels to fit into the sporting-gun stock can you conceive any greater fun than smuggling these barrels into the country? My dear fellow, it is glorious: we could have five hundred volunteers! But at the same time I say your work is more valuable to us. No one but an Englishman could do it. Every one knows of your success."

Brand thanked Reitzei for his good opinion, and rather absently took up his hat and left. Instinctively he made his way westward. He was sure to see her, at a distance, taking this morning stroll of hers: might he not guess something from her face as to what her reply would be? She could not have written so soon; she would take time to consider; even a refusal would, he knew, be gently worded.

In any case, he would see her; and if her answer gave no hope, it would be the last time on which he would follow that graceful figure from afar with his eyes, and wonder to himself what the low and musical voice was saying to Anneli. And as he walked on, he grew more and more downhearted. It was a certainty that, out of all those friends of her father's some one must have dreamed of possessing this beautiful prize for his own.

When, after not much waiting, he saw Natalie and Anneli cross into the Park, he had so reasoned himself into despair that he was not surprised—at least he tried to convince himself that he was not surprised—to perceive that the former was accompanied by a



stranger, the little German maid-servant walking not quite with them, and yet not altogether behind them. He could almost have expected this; and yet his eyes seemed hot, and he had some difficulty in trying to make out who this might be. And at this great distance he could only gather that he was foreign in appearance, and that he wore a peaked cap in place of a hat.

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He dared not follow them now; and he was about to turn away when he saw Natalie's new companion motion to her to sit down on one of the seats. He sat down, too; and he took her hand, and held it in his. What then?

This man looking on from a distance, with a bitter heart, had no thought against her. Was it not natural for so beautiful a girl to have a lover? But that this fellow—this foreigner—should degrade her by treating her as if she were a nursery-maid flirting with one of the soldiers from the barracks down there, this filled him with bitterness and hatred. He turned and walked away with a firm step. He had no ill thoughts of her, whatever message she might send him. At the worst, she had been generous to him; she had filled his life with love and hope; she had given him a future. If this dream were shattered, at least he could turn elsewhere, and say, "Labor, be thou my good."

Meanwhile, of this stranger? He had indeed taken Natalie Lind's hand in his, and Natalie let it remain there without hesitation.

"My little daughter," said he to her in Italian, "I could have recognized you by your hands. You have the hands of your mother: no one in the world had more beautiful hands than she had. And now I will tell you about her, if you promise not to cry any more."

It was Calabressa who spoke.

CHAPTER XVII.

CALABRESSA.

When Calabressa called at the house in Curzon Street he was at once admitted; Natalie recognizing the name as that of one of her father's old friends. Calabressa had got himself up very smartly, to produce an impression on the little Natalushka whom he expected to see. His military-looking coat was tightly buttoned; he had burnished up the gold braid of his cap; and as he now ascended the stairs he gathered the ends of his mustache out of his yellow-white beard and curled them round and round his fingers and pulled them out straight. He had already assumed a pleasant smile.

But when he entered the shaded drawing-room, and beheld this figure before him, all the dancing-master's manner instantly fled from him. He seemed thunderstruck; he shrunk back a little; his cap fell to the floor; he could not utter a word.

"Excuse me—excuse me, mademoiselle," he gasped out at length, in his odd French. "Ah, it is like a ghost—like other years come back—"

He stared at her.

"I am very pleased to see you, sir," said she to him, gently, in Italian.

"Her voice also—her voice also!" he exclaimed, almost to himself, in the same tongue. "Signorina, you will forgive me—but—when one sees an old friend—you are so like—ah, so like—"

"You are speaking of my mother?" the girl said, with her eyes cast down. "I have been told that I was like her. You knew her, signore?"

Calabressa pulled himself together somewhat. He picked up his cap; he assumed a more business-like air.

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"Oh yes, signorina, I knew her," he said, with an apparent carelessness, but he was regarding her all the same. "Yes, I knew her well. We were friends long before she married. What, are you surprised that I am so old? Do you know that I can remember you when you were a very little thing—at Dunkirk it was—and what a valiant young lady you were, and you would go to fight the Russians all by yourself! And you—you do not remember your mother?"

"I cannot tell," she said, sadly. "They say it is impossible, and yet I seem to remember one who loved me, and my grief when I asked for her and found she would never come back—or else that is only my recollection of what I was told by others. But what of that? I know where she is now: she is my constant companion. I know she loved me; I know she is always regarding me; I talk to her, so that I am never quite alone; at night I pray to her, as if she were a saint—"

She turned aside somewhat; her eyes were full of tears. Calabressa said quickly,

"Ah, signorina, why recall what is so sad? It is so useless. *Allons donc!* shall I tell you of my surprise when I saw you first? A ghost—that is nothing! It is true, your father warned me. He said, 'The little Natalushka is a woman now.' But how could one believe it?"

She had recovered her composure; she begged him to be seated.

"*Bien!* One forgets. Then my old mother—my dear young lady, even I, old as I am, have a mother—what does she do but draw a prize in the Austro-Hungarian lottery—a huge prize—enough to demoralize one for life—five thousand florins. More remarkable still, the money is paid. Not so remarkable, my good mother declares she will give half of it to an undutiful son, who has never done very well with money in this world. We come to the *denouement* quickly. 'What,' said I, 'shall I do with my new-found liberty and my new-found money? To the devil with banks! I will be off and away to the land of fogs to see my little friend Natalushka, and ask her what she thinks of the Russians now.' And the result? My little daughter, you have given me such a fright that I can feel my hands still trembling."

"I am very sorry," said she, with a smile. This gay manner of his had driven away her sad memories. It seemed quite natural to her that he should address her as "My little daughter."

"But where are the fogs? It is a paradise that I have reached—the air clear and soft, the gardens beautiful. This morning I said to myself, 'I will go early. Perhaps the little Natalushka will be going out for a walk; perhaps we will go together.' No, signorina," said he, with a mock-heroic bow, "it was not with the intention of buying you toys. But was I not right? Do I not perceive by your costume that you were about to go out?"

“That is nothing, signore,” said she. “It would be very strange if I could not give up my morning walk for an old friend of my father’s.”

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"*An contraire*, you shall not give up your walk," said he, with great courtesy. "We will go together; and then you will tell me about your father."

She accepted this invitation without the slightest scruple. It did not occur to her—as it would naturally have occurred, to most English girls—that she would rather not go walking in Hyde Park with a person who looked remarkably like the leader of a German band.

But Calabressa had known her mother.

"Ah, signore," said she, when they had got into the outer air, "I shall be so grateful to you if you will tell me about my mother. My father will not speak of her; I dare not awaken his grief again; he must have suffered much. You will tell me about her."

"My little daughter, your father is wise. Why awaken old sorrows? You must not spoil your eyes with more crying."

And then he went on to speak of all sorts of things, in his rapid, interjectional fashion—of his escape from prison mostly—until he perceived that she was rather silent and sad.

"Come then," said he, "we will sit down on this seat. Give me your hand."

She placed her hand in his without hesitation; and he patted it gently, and said how like it was to the hand of her mother.

"You are a little taller than she was," said he; "a little—not much. Ah, how beautiful she was! She had many sweethearts."

He was silent for a minute or two.

"Some of them richer, some of them of nobler birth than your father; and one of them her own cousin, whom all her family wanted her to marry. But you know, little daughter, your father is a very determined man—"

"But she loved him the best?" said the girl, quickly.

"Ah, no doubt, no doubt," said Calabressa. "He is very kind to you, is he not?"

"Oh yes. Who could be kinder? But about my mother, signore?"

Calabressa seemed somewhat embarrassed.

"To say the truth, little daughter, how am I to tell you? I scarcely ever saw her after she married. Before then, you must imagine yourself as you are to think of her picture: and she was very much beloved—and very fond of horses. Is not that enough to tell? Ah,

yes, another thing: she was very brave when there was any danger; and you know all the family were strong patriots; and one or two got into sad trouble. When her father—that is your grandfather, little daughter—when he failed to escape into Turkey after the assassination—”

Here Calabressa stopped, and then gave a slight wave of his hand.

“These are matters not interesting to you. But when her father had to seek a hiding-place she went with him in despite of everybody. I do not suppose he would be alive now but for her devotion.”

“Is my mother’s father alive?” the girl said, with eyes wide open.

“I believe so; but the less said about it the better, little daughter.”

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"Why has my father never told me?" she asked, with the same almost incredulous stare.

"Have I not hinted? The less said the better. There are some things no government will amnesty. Your grandfather was a good patriot, little daughter."

Thereafter for some minutes silence. Slight as was the information Calabressa had given her, it was of intensest interest to her. There was much for her to think over. Her mother, whom she had been accustomed to regard as a beautiful saint, placed far above the common ways of earth, was suddenly presented to her in a new light. She thought of her young, handsome, surrounded with lovers, proud-spirited and patriotic—a devoted daughter, a brave woman.

"You also loved her?" she said to Calabressa.

The man started. She had spoken quite innocently—almost absently: she was thinking that he, too, must have loved the brave young Hungarian girl as all the world loved her.

"I?" said Calabressa. "Oh yes, I was a friend of hers for many years. I taught her Italian; she corrected my Magyar. Once her horse ran way; I was walking, and saw her coming; there was a wagon and oxen, and I shouted to the man; he drew the oxen right across the road, and barred the way. Ah, how angry she used to be—she pretended to be—when they told her I had saved her life! She was a bold rider."

Presently Calabressa said, with a lighter air,

"Come, let us talk of something else—of you, *par exemple*. How do you like the English? You have many sweethearts among them, of course."

"No, signore, I have no sweethearts," said Natalie, without any trace of embarrassment.

"What! Is it possible? When I saw your father in Venice, and he told me the little Natalushka had grown to be a woman. I said to him, 'Then she will marry an Englishman.'"

"And what did he say?" the girl asked, with a startled look on her face.

"Oh, little, very little. If there was no possibility, why should he say much?"

"I have no sweethearts," said Natalie, simply; "but I have a friend—who wishes to be more than a friend. And it is now, when I have to answer him, it is now that I know what a sad thing it is to have no mother."

The pathetic vibration that Brand had noticed was in her voice; her eyes were downcast, her hands clasped. For a second or two Calabressa was silent.

"I am not idly curious, my little daughter," he said at length, and very gently; "but if you knew how long your mother and I were friends, you would understand the interest I feel in you, and why I came all this way to see the little Natalushka. So, one question, dear little one. Does your father approve?"

"Ah, how can I tell?"

He took her hand, and his face was grave.

"Listen now," said he; "I am going to give you advice. If your mother could speak to you, this is what she would say: Whatever happens—whatever happens—do not thwart your father's wishes."

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She wished to withdraw her hand, but he still held it.

"I do not understand you," she said. "Papa's wishes will always be for my happiness; why should I think of thwarting them?"

"Why, indeed? And again, why? It is my advice to you, my little daughter, whether you think your father's wishes are for your happiness or not—because, you know, sometimes fathers and daughters have different ideas—do not go against his will."

The hot blood mounted to Natalie's forehead—for the first time during this interview.

"Are you predicting strife, signore? I owe obedience to my father, I know it; but I am not a child. I am a woman, and have my own wishes. My papa would not think of thwarting them."

"Natalushka, you must not be angry with me."

"I am not angry, signore; but you must not suppose that I am quite a child."

"Pardieu, non!" said Calabressa. "I expected to find Natalushka; I find Natalie—ah, Heaven! that is the wonder and the sadness of it to me! I think I am talking to your mother: these are her hands. I listen to her voice: it seems twenty years ago. And you have a proud spirit, as she had: again I say—do not thwart your father's wishes, Natalie—rather, Natalushka!"

He spoke with such an obvious kindness and earnestness that she could not feel offended.

"And if you want any one to help you at any time, my little daughter—for who knows the ways of the world, and what may happen?—if your father is sent away, and you are alone, and you want some one to do something for you, then this is what you will say to yourself: 'There is that old fool Calabressa, who has nothing in the world to do but smoke cigarettes and twirl his mustache—I will send for Calabressa.' And this I promise, little one, that Calabressa will very soon be at your feet."

"I thank you signore."

"It is true, I may be away on duty, as your father might be; but I have friends at headquarters; I have done some service. And if I were to say, 'Calabressa wishes to be relieved from duty; it is the daughter of Natalie Berezolyi who demands his presence,' I know the answer: 'Calabressa will proceed at once to obey the commands of the daughter of Natalie Berezolyi.'"

"But who—"

“No, my little daughter, you must not ask that. I will tell you only that they are all-powerful; that they will protect you—with Calabressa as their agent; and before I leave this city I will give you my address, or rather I will give you an address where you will find some one who will guide you to me. May Heaven grant that there be no need. Why should harm come to one who is so beautiful and so gentle?”

“My mother—was she happy?” she said quickly.

“Little daughter,” said he, sharply, and he threw away her hand, “if you ask me any more questions about your mother you will make my heart bleed. Do you not understand so simple a thing as that, you who claim to be a woman? You have been stabbing me. Come, come: *allons!*—let us talk of something else—of your friend who wishes to be more than a friend—you wicked little one, who have no sweetheart! And what are those fools of English about? What? But tell me—is he one of us?”

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“Oh yes, signore,” said she; and instead of showing any shamefacedness, she turned toward him and regarded him with the fearless, soft dark eyes. “How could you think otherwise? And he is so brave and noble: he is not afraid of sacrificing those things that the English put such store by—”

“English?” said Calabressa.

“Yes,” said Natalie; and now she looked down.

“And what does your heart say?”

She spoke very gently in reply.

“Signor, I have not answered him yet; you cannot expect me to answer you.”

“A la bonne heure! Little traitress, to say she has no sweethearts! Happy Englishman! What, then, do I distress you? It is not so simple! It is an embarrassment, this proposal that he has made to you! But I will not trouble you further with my questions, little daughter: how can an old jail-bird like myself understand a young linnet-thing that has always been flying and fluttering about in happiness and the free air? Enfin, let us go! I perceive your little maid is tired of standing and staring; perhaps it is time for you to go back.”

She rose, and the three of them slowly proceeded along the gravelled path.

“Your father does not return until next week: must I wait a whole week in this desert of a town before seeing you again, petite?”

“Oh no,” said Natalie, smiling; “that is not necessary. If my papa were here now he would certainly ask you to dine with us to-night; may I do so in his place? You will not find much amusement; but Madame Potecki—you knew her husband, perhaps?”

“Potecki the Pole, who was killed?”

“Yes. She will play a little music for you. But there are so many amusements in London, perhaps you would rather not spend your evening with two poor solitary creatures like us.”

“My little daughter, to hear you speak, that is all I want; it takes twenty years away from my life; I do not know whether to laugh or to cry. But *courage*! we will put a good face on our little griefs. This evening—this evening I will pretend to myself something—I am going to live my old life over again—for an hour; I will blow a horn as soon as I have crossed the Erlau, and they will hear it up at the big house among the pines, where the lights are shining through the dark, and they will send a servant down to open the gates; and you will appear at the hall-door, and say, ‘Signor Calabressa, why do you make



such a noise to awaken the dogs?' And I will say, 'Dear Miss Berezolyi, the pine-woods are frightfully dark; may I not scare away the ghosts?'"

"It was my mother who received you," the girl said, in a low voice.

"It was Natalie then; to-night it will be Natalushka."

He spoke lightly, so as not to make these reminiscences too serious. But the conjunction of the two names seemed suddenly to startle the girl. She stopped, and looked him in the face.

"It was you, then," she said, "who sent me the locket?"

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"What locket?" he said, with surprise.

"The locket the lady dropped into my lap—'*From Natalie to Natalushka.*'"

"I declare to you, little daughter, I never heard of it."

The girl looked bewildered.

"Ah, how stupid I am!" she exclaimed. "I could not understand. But if they always called her Natalie, and me Natalushka—"

She paused for a moment to collect her thoughts.

"Signor Calabressa, what does it mean?" she said, almost wildly. "If one sends me a locket—'*From Natalie to Natalushka*'—was it my mother's? Did she intend it for me? Did she leave it for me with some one, long ago? How could it come into the hands of a stranger?"

Calabressa himself seemed rather bewildered—almost alarmed.

"My little daughter, you have no doubt guessed right," he said, soothingly. "Your mother may have meant it for you—and—and perhaps it was lost—and just recovered—"

"Signor Calabressa," said she—and he could have fancied it was her mother who was speaking in that low, earnest, almost sad voice—"you said you would do me an act of friendship if I asked you. I cannot ask my father; he seems too grieved to speak of my mother at any time; but do you think you could find out who the lady was who brought that locket to me? That would be kind of you, if you could do that."

CHAPTER XVIII.

HER ANSWER.

Humphreys, the delegate from the North, and O'Halloran, the Irish reporter, had been invited by George Brand to dine with him on this evening—Humphreys having to start for Wolverhampton next day—and the three were just sitting down when Lord Evelyn called in, uninvited, and asked if he might have a plate placed for him. Humphreys was anxious that their host should set out with him for the North in the morning; but Brand would not promise. He was obviously thinking of other things. He was at once restless, preoccupied, and silent.

"I hope, my lord, you have come to put our friend here in better spirits," said Humphreys, blushing a little as he ventured to call one of the Brands of Darlington his friend.

“What is the matter?”

At this moment Waters appeared at the door with a letter in his hand. Brand instantly rose, went forward to him and took the letter, and retired into an adjoining room. Without looking, he knew from whom it had come.

His hand was shaking as he opened the envelope; but the words that met his eyes were calm.

“My dear friend,—Your letter has given me joy and pain. Joy that you still adhere to your noble resolve; that you have found gladness in your life; that you will work on to the end, whatever the fruit of the work may be. But this other thought of yours—that only distresses me; it clouds the future with uncertainty and doubt, where there should only be clear faith. My dear friend,

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I must ask you to put away that thought. Let the *feu sacré* of the regenerator, the liberator, have full possession of you. How I should blame myself if I were to distract you from the aims to which you have devoted your life. I have no one to advise me; but this I know is *right*. You will, I think, not misunderstand me—you will not think it unmaidenly of me—if I confess to you that I have written these words with some pain, some touch of regret that all is not possible to you that you may desire. But for one soul on devotion. Do I express myself clearly?—you know English is not my native tongue. If we may not go through life together, in the sense that you mean, we need not be far apart; and you will know, as you go forward in the path of a noble duty, that there is not any one who regards you and the work you will do with a greater pride and affection than your friend,

NATALIE.”

What could it all mean? he asked himself. This was not the letter of a woman who loved another man; she would have been more explicit; she would have given sufficient reason for her refusal. He read again, with a beating heart, with a wild hope, that veiled and subtle expression of regret. Was it not that she was prepared to sacrifice forever those dreams of a secure and happy and loving life, that come naturally to a young girl, lest they should interfere with what she regarded as the higher duty, the more imperative devotion? In that case, it was for a firmer nature than her own to take this matter in hand. She was but a child; knowing nothing of the sorrows of the world, of the necessity of protection, of the chances the years might bring. Scarcely conscious of what he did—so eagerly was his mind engaged—he opened a drawer and locked the letter in. Then he went hastily into the other room.

“Evelyn,” said he, “will you take my place, like a good fellow? I shall be back as soon as I can. Waters will get you everything you want.”

“But about Wolverhampton, Mr. Brand?” shouted Humphreys after him.

There was no answer; he was half-way down the stairs.

When the hansom arrived in Curzon Street a hurried glance showed him that the dining-room was lit up. She was at home, then: that was enough. For the rest, he was not going to trouble himself with formalities when so beautiful a prize might still be within his reach.

He knocked at the door; the little Anneli appeared.

“Anneli,” said he, “I want to see Miss Lind for a moment—say I shall not detain her, if there is any one with her—”

“They are in the dining-room, sir; Madame Potecki, and a strange gentleman—”

“Ask your mistress to let me see her for one moment; don’t you understand?”

“They are just finishing dinner, sir: if you will step up to the drawing-room they will be there in a minute or two.”

But at last he got the little German maid to understand that he wished to see Miss Lind alone for the briefest possible time; and that she was to carry this message in an undertone to her mistress. By himself he made his way up-stairs to the drawing-room; the lamps were lit.

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He lifted books, photographs, and what not, with trembling fingers, and put them down again without knowing it. He was thinking, not looking. And he was trying to force himself into a masterful mood. She was only a child, he kept repeating to himself—only a child, who wanted guidance, instruction, a protecting hand. It was not her fancies, however generous and noble, that should shape the destinies of two lives. A beautiful child, ignorant of the world and its evil: full of dreams of impossible and unnecessary self-sacrifice, she was not one to ordain; surely her way in life was to be led, and cherished, and loved, trusting to the stronger hand for guidance and safety.

There was a slight rustle outside, and presently Natalie entered the room. She was pale—perhaps she looked all the paler that she wore the long, sweeping black dress she had worn at Lady Evelyn's. In silence she gave him her hand; he took it in both his.

"Natalie!"

It was a cry of entreaty, almost of pain; for this fond vision of his of her being only a child, to be mastered and guided, had fled the moment he caught sight of this tall and beautiful woman, whose self-command, despite that paleness and a certain apprehension in the dark eyes, was far greater than his own.

"Natalie, you must give me a clearer answer."

He tried to read the answer in her eyes; but she lowered them as she spoke.

"Was not my answer clear?" she said, gently. "I wished not to give you pain."

"But was all your answer there?" he said quickly. "Were there no other reasons? Natalie! don't you know that, if you regretted your decision ever so little—if you thought twice about it—if even now you can give me leave to hope that one day you will be my wife—there were no reasons at all in your letter for your refusing—none at all? If you love me even so little that you regret—"

"I must not listen to you," she said hurriedly. "No, no. My answer was best for us both. I am sorry if it pains you; but you have other things to think of; we have our separate duties in the world—duties that are of first importance. My dear friend," she continued, with an air of appeal, "don't you see how I am situated? I have no one to advise me—not even my father, though I can guess what he would say. I know what he would say; and my heart tells me that I have done right."

"One word," said he. "This you must answer me frankly. Is there no other reason for your refusal? Is your heart free to choose?"

She looked up and met his eyes for a moment: only for a moment.



"I understand you," she said, with some slight color mounting to the pale clear olive of her brow. "No, there is not any reason like that."

A quick, proud light leaped into his eyes.

"Then," said he, "I refuse to accept your refusal. Natalie, you will be my wife!"

"Oh, do not say that—do not think of it. I have done wrong even to listen, to let you speak—"

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"But what I say is true. I claim you, as surely as I now hold your hand—"

"Hush!"

There were two people coming into the room; he did not care if there were a regiment. He relinquished her hand, it is true; but there was a proud and grateful look on his face; he did not even turn to regard the new-comers.

These were Madame Potecki and Calabressa. The little Polish lady had misconstrued Natalie's parting words to mean that some visitors had arrived, and that she and Calabressa were to follow when they pleased. Now that they had appeared in the drawing-room, they could not fail to perceive how matters stood, and, in fact, the little gentlewoman was on the point of retiring. But Natalie was quite mistress of the situation. She reminded Madame Potecki that she had met Mr. Brand before. She introduced Calabressa to the stranger, saying that he was a friend of her father's.

"It is opportune—it is a felicitous circumstance," said Calabressa, in his nasal French. "Mademoiselle, behold the truth. If I do not have a cigarette after my food, I die—veritably I die! Now your friend, the friend of the house, surely he will take compassion on me; and we will have a cigarette together in some apartment."

Here he touched Brand's elbow, having sidled up to him. On any other occasion Brand would have resented the touch, the invitation, the mere presence of this theatrical-looking albino. But he was not in a captious mood. How could he refuse when he heard Natalie say, in her soft, low voice,

"Will you be so kind, Mr. Brand? Anneli will light up papa's little smoking-room."

Directly afterward he found himself in the small study, alone with this odd-looking person, whom he easily recognized as the stranger who had been walking in the Park with Natalie in the morning. Closer inspection rendered him less afraid of this rival.

Calabressa rolled a cigarette between his fingers, and lit it.

"I ask your pardon, monsieur. I ask your pardon beforehand. I am about to be impertinent; it is necessary. If you will tell me some things, I will tell you some things which it may be better for you to know. First, then, I assume that you wish to marry that dear child, that beautiful young lady up-stairs."

"My good friend, you are a little bit too outrageous," said Brand.

"Ah! Then I must begin. You know, perhaps, that the mother of this young lady is alive?"

"Alive!"



"I perceive you do not know," said Calabressa, coolly. "I thought you would know—I thought you would guess. A child might guess. She told me you had seen the locket—*Natalie to Natalushka*—was not that enough?"

"If Miss Lind herself did not guess that her mother was alive, how should I?"

"If you have been brought up for sixteen or eighteen years to mourn one as dead, you do not quickly imagine that he or she is not dead: you perceive?"

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"Well, it is extraordinary enough," said Brand, thoughtfully. "With such a daughter, if she has the heart of a mother at all, how could she remain away from her for sixteen years?"

A thought struck him, and his forehead colored quickly.

"There was no disgrace?"

At this word Calabressa started, and the small eyes flashed fire.

"I tell you, monsieur, that it is not in my presence that any one must mention the word disgrace and also the name of Natalie Berezolyi. No; I will answer—I myself—I will answer for the good name of Natalie Berezolyi, by the bounty of Heaven!"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"You are ignorant—you made a mistake. And I—well, you perceive, monsieur, that I am not ashamed to confess—I loved her; she was the radiant light, the star of my life!"

"La lumiere rayonnante, l'étoile de ma vie!"—the phrases sounded ridiculous enough when uttered by this histrionic person; but even his self-conscious gesticulation did not offend Brand. This man, at all events, had loved the mother of Natalie.

"Then it was some very powerful motive that kept mother and daughter apart?" said he.

"Yes; I cannot explain it all to you, if I quite know it all. But every year the mother comes with a birthday present of flowers for the child, and watches to see her once or twice; and then away back she goes to the retreat of her father. Ah, the devotion of that beautiful saint! If there is a heaven at all, Natalie Berezolyi will be among the angels."

"Then you have come to tell Natalie that her mother is alive. I envy you. How grateful the girl will be to you!"

"I? What, I? No, truly, I dare not. And that is why I wish to speak to you: I thought perhaps you would guess, or find out: then I say, do not utter a word! Why do I give you this secret? Why have I sought to speak with you, monsieur? Well, if you will not speak, I will. Something the little Natalushka said—to me she must always be the little Natalushka in name, though she is so handsome a woman now—something she said to me revealed a little secret. Then I said, 'Perhaps Natalushka will have a happier life than Natalie has had, only her husband must be discreet.' Now, monsieur, listen to me. What I said to Natalushka I say to you: do not thwart her father's wishes. He is a determined man, and angry when he is opposed."

"My good sir, other people may have an ounce or two of determination also. You mean that I must never let Natalie know that her mother is alive, for fear of Lind? Is that what you mean? Come, then!"

He strode to the door, and had his hand on the handle, when Calabressa jumped up and caught him, and interposed.

“For Heaven’s sake—for Heaven’s sake, monsieur, why be so inconsiderate, so rash?”

“Has the dread of this man frightened you out of your wits?”

“He is invulnerable—and implacable,” said Calabressa. “But he is a good friend when he has his own way. Why not be friends? You will have to ask him for his daughter. Consider, monsieur, that is something.”

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"Well, there is reason in that," Brand said, reflectively. "And I am inclined to be friendly with every one to-night, Signor Calabressa. It may be that Lind has his reasons; and he is the natural guardian of his daughter—at present. But she might have another guardian, Signor Calabressa?"

"The wicked one!—she has promised herself to you? And she told me she had no sweethearts, the rogue!"

"No, she has not promised. But what may not one dare to hope for, when one sees her so generous and kind? She is like her mother, is she not? Now I am going to slip away, Signor Calabressa; when you have had another cigarette, will you go up-stairs and explain to the two ladies that I have three friends who are now dining at my house, and I must get back to them?"

Calabressa rose, and took the taller man's hand in his.

"I think our little Natalushka is right in trusting herself to you; I think you will be kind to her; I know you will be brave enough to protect her. All very well. But you English are so headstrong. Why not a little caution, a little prudence, to smooth the way through life?"

Brand laughed: but he had taken a liking to this odd-looking man.

"Now, good-night, Signor Calabressa. You have done me a great service. And if Natalie's mother wishes to see her daughter—well, I think the opportunity will come. In the mean time, I will be quite cautious and prudent, and compromise nobody; even if I cannot wholly promise to tremble at the name of the Invulnerable and the Implacable."

"Ah, monsieur," said Calabressa, with a sigh, his gay gesticulation having quite left him, "I hope I have done no mischief. It was all for the little Natalushka. It will be so much better for you and for her to be on good terms with Ferdinand Lind."

"We will see," Brand said, lightly. "The people in this part of the world generally do as they're done by."

CHAPTER XIX.

AT THE CULTURVEREIN.

On calm reflection, Calabressa gave himself the benefit of his own approval; and, on the whole, was rather proud of his diplomacy. He had revealed enough, and not too much; he had given the headstrong Englishman prudent warnings and judicious counsel; he had done what he could for the future of the little Natalushka, who was the daughter of Natalie Berezolyi. But there was something more.

He went up-stairs.

“My dear little one,” he said, in his queer French, “behold me—I come alone. Your English friend sends a thousand apologies—he has to return to his guests: is it an English custom to leave guests in such a manner? Ah, Madame Potecki, there is a time in one’s life when one does strange things, is there not? When a farewell before strangers is hateful—impossible; when you rather go away silently than come before strangers and shake hands, and all the rest. What, wicked little one, you look alarmed! Is it a secret, then? Does not madame guess anything?”

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"I entreat you, Signor Calabressa, not to speak in riddles," said Natalie, hastily. "See, here is a telegram from papa. He will be back in London on Monday next week. You can stay to see him, can you not?"

"Mademoiselle, do you not understand that I am not my own master for two moments in succession? For this present moment I am; the next I may be under orders. But if my freedom, my holiday, lasts—yes, I shall be glad to see your father, and I will wait. In the mean time, I must use up my present moment. Can you give me the address of Vincent Beratinsky?"

She wrote it down for him; it was a number in Oxford Street.

"Now I will add my excuses to those of the tall Englishman," said he, rising. "Good-night, madame. Good-night, mademoiselle—truly, it is a folly to call you the little Natalushka, who are taller than your beautiful mother. But it was the little Natalushka I was thinking about for many a year. Good-night, wicked little one, with your secrets!"

He kissed her hand, bowed once more to the little Polish lady, and left.

When, after considerable difficulty—for he was exceedingly near-sighted—he made out the number in Oxford Street, he found another caller just leaving. This stranger glanced at him, and instantly said, in a low voice,

"The night is dark, brother."

Calabressa started; but the other gave one or two signs that reassured him.

"I knew you were in London, signore, and I recognized you; we have your photograph in Lisle Street. My name is Reitzei—"

"Ah!" Calabressa exclaimed, with a new interest, as he looked at the pallid-faced young man.

"And if you wish to see Beratinsky, I will take you to him. I find he is at the Culturverein: I was going there myself." So Calabressa suffered himself to be led away.

At this time the Culturverein used to meet in a large hall in a narrow lane off Oxford Street. It was an association of persons, mostly Germans, connected in some way or other with art, music, or letters—a merry-hearted, free-and-easy little band of people, who met every evening to laugh and talk and joke and generally forget the world and all its cares. The evening usually began with Bavarian beer, sonatas, and comic lectures; then Rhine wines began to appear, and of course these brought with them songs of love, and friendship, and patriotism; occasionally, when the older and wiser folk had gone, sweet champagne and a wild frolic prevailed until daylight came to drive the



revellers out. Beratinsky belonged to the Verein by reason of his having at one time betaken himself to water-color drawing, in order to keep himself alive.

When Calabressa entered the large, long hall, the walls of which were plentifully hung with sketches in color and cartoons in black and white, the *fertig!—los!* period had not arrived. On the contrary, the meeting was exceedingly demure, almost dull; for a German music professor, seated at the piano on the platform, was playing one of his own compositions, which, however beautiful, was of considerable length; and his audience had relapsed into half-hushed conversation over their light cigars and tall glasses of Bairisch.

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Beratsinsky had to come along to the entrance-hall to enter the names of his visitors in a book. He was a little man, somewhat corpulent, with bushy black eyebrows, intensely black eyes, and black closely-cropped beard. The head was rather handsome; the figure not.

"Ah, Calabressa, you have come alive again!" he said, speaking in pretty fair Italian. "We heard you were in London. What is it?"

The last phrase was uttered in a low voice, though there was no by-stander. But Calabressa, with a lofty gesture, replied,

"My friend, we are not always on commissions. Sometimes we have a little liberty—a little money—a notion in our head. And if one cannot exactly travel *en prince*, *n'importe!* we have our little excursion. And if one has one's sweetheart to see? Do you know, friend Beratsinsky, that I have been dining with Natalie—the little Natalushka, as, she used to be called?"

Beratsinsky glanced quickly at him with the black, piercing eyes.

"Ah, the beautiful child! the beautiful child!" Calabressa exclaimed, as if he was addressing some one not present. "The mouth sweet, pathetic, like that in Titian's Assumption: you have seen the picture in the Venice Academy? But she is darker than Titian's Virgin; she is of the black, handsome Magyar breed, like her mother. You never saw her mother, Beratsinsky?"

"No," said the other, rather surlily. "Come, sit down and have a cigar."

"A cigarette—a cigarette and a little cognac, if you please," said Calabressa, when the three companions had gone along to the middle of the hall and taken their seats. "Ah, it was such a surprise to me: the sight of her grown to be a woman, and the perfect, beautiful image of her mother—the very voice too—I could have thought it was a dream."

"Did you come here to talk of nothing but Lind's daughter?" said Beratsinsky, with scant courtesy.

"Precisely," remarked Calabressa, in absolute good-humor. "But before that a word."

He glanced round this assemblage of foreign-looking persons, no doubt guessing at the various nationalities indicated by physique and complexion—Prussian, Pole, Rhinelander, Swiss, and what not. If the company, in English eyes, might have looked Bohemian—that is to say, unconventional in manner and costume—the Bohemianism, at all events, was of a well-to-do, cheerful, good-humored character. There was a good deal of talking besides the music.

“These gentlemen,” said Calabressa, in a low voice, “are they friends—are they with us?”

“Only one or two,” said Beratinsky.

“You do not come here to proselytize, then?”

“One must amuse one's self sometimes,” said the little, fat, black-haired Pole, somewhat gruffly.

“Then one must take care what one says!”

“I presume that is generally the case, friend Calabressa.”

But Calabressa was not offended. He was interested in what was going on.

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“Par exemple,” he said, in his airy way, “que vient faire la le drole?”

The music had come to an end, and the spectacled professor had retired amidst a thunder of applause. His successor, who had attracted Calabressa’s attention, was a gentleman who had mounted on a high easel an immense portfolio of cartoons roughly executed in crayon; and as he exhibited them one by one, he pointed out their characteristics with a long stick, after the manner of a showman. His demeanor was serious; his face was grave; his tone was simple and business-like. But as he unfolded these rude drawings, Calabressa, who understood but little German, was more and more astonished to find the guttural laughter around him increase and increase until the whole place resounded with roars, while some of the old Herren held their sides in pain, as the tears of the gigantic mirth streamed down their cheeks. Those who were able hammered loud applause on the table before them; others rolled in their chairs; many could only lie back and send their merriment up to the reverberating roof in shrill shrieks and yells.

“In the name of Heaven, what is it all about?” said Calabressa. “Have the people gone mad?”

“Illustrations of German proverbs,” said Beratinsky, who, despite his surly manner, was himself forced to smile.

Well, Calabressa had indeed come here to talk about Lind’s daughter; but it was impossible, amidst this wild surging to and fro of Olympian laughter. At last, however, the showman came to an end of his cartoons, and solemnly made his bow, and amidst tumultuous cheering resumed his place among his companions.

There was a pause, given over to chatter and joking, and Calabressa quickly embraced this opportunity.

“You are a friend of the little Natalushka—of the beautiful Natalie, I should say, perhaps?”

“Lind’s daughter does not choose to have many friends,” said Beratinsky, curtly.

This was not promising; and, indeed, the corpulent little Pole showed great disinclination to talk about the young lady who had so laid hold of Calabressa’s heart. But Calabressa was not to be denied, when it was the welfare of the daughter of Natalie Berezolyi that was concerned.

“Yes, yes, friend Beratinsky, of course she is very much alone. It is rather a sad thing for a young girl to be so much alone.”

“And if she chooses to be alone?” said Beratinsky, with a sharpness that resembled the snarl of a terrier.

Perhaps it was to get rid of the topic that Beratinsky here joined in a clamorous call for “Nageli! Nageli!” Presently a fresh-colored young Switzer, laughing and blushing tremendously, went up to the platform and took his seat at the piano, and struck a few noisy chords. It was a Tyrolese song he sung, with a jodel refrain of his own invention:

“Hat einer ein Schatzerl,
So bleibt er dabei,
Er nimmt sie zum Weiberl,
Und liebt sie recht treu.
Dann fangt man die Wirthschaft
Gemeinschaftlich an,
Und liebt sich, und herzt sich
So sehr als man kann!”

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Great cheering followed the skilfully executed jodel. In the midst of it, one of the members rose and said, in German,

“Meine Herren! You know our good friend Nageli is going to leave us; perhaps we shall not see him again for many years. I challenge you to drink this toast: ‘Nageli, and his quick return!’ I say to him what some of the shopkeepers in our Father-land say to their customers, ‘Kommen Sie bald wieder!’”

Here there was a great shouting of “Nageli! Nageli!” until one started the chorus, which was immediately and sonorously sung by the whole assemblage,

“Hoch soll er leben!
Hoch soll er leben!
Dreimal hoch!”

Another pause, chiefly devoted to the ordering of Hochheimer and the lighting of fresh cigars. The souls of the sons of the Father-land were beginning to warm.

“Friend Beratinsky,” said the anxious-hearted albino, “perhaps you know that many years ago I knew the mother of Natalie Lind; she was a neighbor—a companion—of mine: and I am interested in the little one. A young girl sometimes has need of friends. Now, you are in a position—”

“Friend Calabressa, you may save your breath,” said the other, coldly. “The young lady might have had my friendship if she had chosen. She did not choose. I suppose she is old enough—and proud enough—to choose her own friends. Yes, yes, friend Calabressa, I have heard. But we will say nothing more: now listen to this comical fellow.”

Calabressa was not thinking of the young Englishman who now sat down at the piano; a strange suspicion was beginning to fill his mind. Was it possible, he began inwardly to ask, that Vincent Beratinsky had himself aspired to marry the beautiful Hungarian girl?

This good-looking young English fellow, with a gravity equal to that of the sham showman, explained to his audience that he was composing an operetta, of which he would give them a few passages. He was a skilful pianist. He explained, as his fingers ran up and down the keys, that the scene was in Ratcliffe Highway. A tavern: a hornpipe. Jack ashore. Unseemly squabbles: here there were harsh discords and shrill screams. Drunkenness: the music getting very helpless. Then the daylight comes—the chirping of sparrows—Jack wanders out—the breath of the morning stirs his memories—he thinks of other days. Then comes in Jack’s song, which neither Calabressa nor any one else present could say was meant to be comic, or pathetic, or a demoniac mixture of both. The accompaniment which the handsome young English fellow played was at once rhythmical, and low and sad, like the wash of waves:



“Oh, the days were long,
And the summers were long,
When Jane and I went courtin’;
The hills were blue beyond the sky;
The heather was soft where we did lie;
We kissed our fill, did Jane and I,
When Jane and I went courtin’.

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“When Jane and I went courtin’,
Oh, the days were long,
And the summers were long!
We walked by night beyond the quay;
Above, the stars; below, the sea;
And I kissed Jane, and Jane kissed me,
When Jane and I went courtin’.

“But Jane she married the sodger-chap;
An end to me and my courtin’.
And I took ship, and here I am;
And where I go, I care not a damn—
Rio, Jamaica, Seringapatam—
Good-bye to Jane and the courtin’.”

This second professor of gravity was abundantly cheered too when he rose from the piano; for the music was quaint and original with a sort of unholy, grotesque pathos running through it. Calabressa resumed:

“My good Beratinsky, what is it that you have heard?”

“No matter. Natalie Lind has no need of your good offices, Calabressa. She can make friends for herself, and quickly enough, too.”

Calabressa’s eyes were not keen, but his ears were; he detected easily the personal rancor in the man’s tone.

“You are speaking of some one: the Englishman?”

Beratinsky burst out laughing.

“Listen, Reitzei! Even my good friend Calabressa perceives. He, too, has encountered the Englishman. Oh yes, we must all give way to him, else he will stamp on our toes with his thick English boots. You, Reitzei: how long is he to allow you to retain your office?”

“Better for him if he does not interfere with me,” said the younger man. “I was always against the English being allowed to become officers. They are too arrogant; they want everything under their direction. Take their money, but keep them outside: that would have been my rule.”

“And this Englishman,” said Beratinsky, with a smile, though there was the light of malice in his eye, “this Englishman is not content with wanting to have the mastery of poor devils like you and me; he also wishes to marry the beautiful Natalie—the beautiful Natalie, who has hitherto been as proud as the Princess Brunhilda. Now, now, friend

Calabressa, do not protest. Every one has ears, has eyes. And when papa Lind comes home—when he finds that this Englishman has been making a fool of him, and professing great zeal when he was only trying to steal away the daughter—what then, friend Calabressa?”

“A girl must marry,” said Calabressa.

“I thought she was too proud to think of such things,” said the other, scornfully. “However, I entreat you to say no more. What concern have I with Natalie Lind? I tell you, let her make more new friends.”

Calabressa sat silent, his heart as heavy as lead. He had come with some notion that he would secure one other—powerful, and in all of Lind’s secrets—on whom Natalie could rely, should any emergency occur in which she needed help. But these jealous and envious taunts, these malignant prophecies, only too clearly showed him in what relation Vincent Beratinsky stood with regard to the daughter of Natalie Berezolyi and the Englishman, her lover.

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Calabressa sat silent. When some one began to play the zither, he was thinking not of the Culturverein in London, but of the dark pine woods above the Erlau, and of the house there, and of Natalie Berezolyi as she played in the evening. He would ask Natalushka if she, too, played the zither.

CHAPTER XX.

FIDELIO.

George Brand walked away from the house in Curzon Street in a sort of bewilderment of hope and happiness and gratitude. He would even try to accept Calabressa's well-meant counsel: why should he not be friends with everybody? The world had grown very beautiful; there was to be no more quarrelling in it, or envy, or malice.

In the dark he almost ran against a ragged little child who was selling flowers.

"Will you buy a rose-bud, sir?" said she.

"What?" he said, severely, "selling flowers at this time of night? Get away home with you and get your supper, and go to bed;" but he spoiled the effect of his sharp admonition by giving the girl all the silver he had in his pocket.

He found the little dinner-party in a most loquacious mood. O'Halloran in especial was in full swing. The internal economy of England was to be readjusted. The capital must be transferred to the centre of the real wealth and brain-power of the country—that is to say, somewhere about Leeds or Manchester. This proposition greatly pleased Humphreys, the man from the North, who was quite willing to let the Royal Academy, the South Kensington and National Galleries, and the British Museum remain in London, so long as the seat of government was transferred to Huddersfield or thereabouts. But O'Halloran drew such a harrowing picture of the effect produced on the South of England intellect by its notorious and intense devotion to the arts, that Humphreys was almost convicted of cruelty.

However, if these graceless people thought to humbug the hard-headed man from the North, he succeeded on one occasion in completely silencing his chief enemy, O'Halloran. That lover of paradox and idle speculation was tracing the decline of superstition to the introduction of the use of steam, and was showing how, wherever railways went in India, ghosts disappeared; whereupon the Darlington man calmly retorted that, as far as he could see, the railways in this country were engaged in making as many ghosts as they could possibly disperse in India. This flank attack completely surprised and silenced the light skirmisher, who sought safety in lighting another cigar.

More serious matters, however, were also talked about, and Humphreys was eager that Brand should go down to Wolverhampton with him next morning. Brand pleaded but for one day's delay. Humphreys reminded him that certain members of the Political Committee of the Trades-union Congress would be at Wolverhampton, and that he had promised to see them. After that, silence.

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At last, as Humphreys and O'Halloran were leaving, Brand said, with an effort,

"No, it is no use, Humphreys. I *must* remain in London one more day. You go down to-morrow; I shall come by the first train next morning. Molyneux and the others won't be leaving for some days."

"Very well, sir; good-night, sir."

Brand returned into the room, and threw himself into an easy-chair; his only companion now was his old friend Evelyn.

The younger man regarded him.

"I can tell the whole story, Brand; I have been reading it in your face. You were troubled and perplexed before you got that letter. It gave some hope. Off you went to see Natalie; you came back with something in your manner that told me you had seen her and had been received favorably. Now it is only one more day of happiness you hunger for, before going up to the hard work of the North. Well, I don't wonder. But, at the same time, you look a little too restless and anxious for a man who has just won such a beautiful sweetheart."

"I am not so lucky as that, Evelyn," said he, absently.

"What, you did not see her?"

"Oh yes, I saw her; and I hope. But of course one craves for some full assurance when such a prize is within reach; and—and I suppose one's nerves are a little excited, so that you imagine possibilities and dangers—"

He rose, and took a turn up and down the room.

"It is the old story, Evelyn. I distrust Lind."

"What has that to do with it?"

"As you say, what has that to do with it? If I had Natalie's full promise, I should care for nothing. She is a woman; she is not a school girl, to be frightened. If I had only that, I should start off for the North with a light heart."

"Why not secure it, then?"

"Perhaps it is scarcely fair to force myself on her at present until her father returns. Then she will be more her own mistress. But the doubt—I don't know when I may be back from the North—" At last he stopped short. "Yes, I will see her to-morrow at all hazards."

By-and-by he began to tell his friend of the gay-hearted old albino he had encountered at Lind's house; though in the mean time he reserved to himself the secret of Natalie's mother being alive.

"Lind must have an extraordinary faculty," he said at length, "of inspiring fear, and of getting people to obey him."

"He does not look a ferocious person," Lord Evelyn said, with a smile. "I have always found him very courteous and pleasant—frank, amiable, and all the rest of it."

"And yet here is this man Calabressa, an old friend of his; and he talks of Lind with a sort of mysterious awe. He is not a man whom you must think of thwarting. He is the Invulnerable, the Implacable. The fact is, I was inclined to laugh at my good friend Calabressa; but all the same, it was quite apparent that the effect Lind had produced on his mind was real enough."

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"Well, you know," said Lord Evelyn, "Lind has a great organization to control, and he must be a strict disciplinarian. It is the object of his life; everything else is of minor importance. Even you confess that you admire his tremendous power of work."

"Yes, I do. I admire his administrative capacity; it is wonderful. But I don't believe for a moment that it was his mind that projected this big scheme. That must have been the work of an idealist, perhaps of a dozen of them, all adding and helping. I think he almost said as much to me one night. His business is to keep the machinery in working order, and he does it to perfection."

"There is one thing about him: he never forgets, and he never forgives. You remember the story of Count Verdt?"

"I have cause to remember it. I thought for a moment the wretch had committed suicide because I caught him cheating."

"I have been told that Lind played with that fellow like a cat with a mouse. Verdt got hints from time to time that his punishment as a traitor was overtaking him; and yet he was allowed to live on in constant fear. And it was the Camorra, and not Lind, or any of Lind's friends, who finished him after all."

"Well, that was implacable enough, to be sure; to have death dogging the poor wretch's heels, and yet refusing to strike."

"For myself, I don't pity him much," said Lord Evelyn, as he rose and buttoned his coat. "He was a fool to think he could play such a trick and escape the consequences. Now, Brand, how am I to hear from you to-morrow? You know I am in a measure responsible."

"However it ends, I am grateful to you, Evelyn; you may be sure of that. I will write to you from Wolverhampton, and let you know the worst, or the best."

"The best, then: we will have no worsts."

He said good-bye, and went whistling cheerfully down the narrow oak staircase. He at least was not very apprehensive about the results of the next day's interview.

But how brief was this one day, with its rapidly passing opportunities; and then the stern necessity for departure and absence. He spent half the night in devising how best he could get speech of her, in a roundabout fashion, without the dread of the interference of friends. And at last he hit upon a plan which might not answer; but he could think of nothing else.

He went in the morning and secured a box at Covent Garden for that evening. Then he called at Lisle Street, and got Calabressa's address. He found Calabressa in his lodgings, shivering and miserable, for the day was wet, misty, and cold.

"You can escape from the gloom of our climate, Signor Calabressa," said he. "What do you say to going to the opera to-night?"

"Your opera?" said he, with a gesture indicative of still deeper despair. "You forget I come from the home, the nursery of opera."

"Yes," said Brand, good-naturedly. "Great singers train in your country, but they sing here: that is the difference. Do not be afraid; you will not be disappointed. See, I have brought you a box; and if you want companions, why not ask Miss Lind and Madame Potecki to go with you and show you the ways of our English opera-houses?"

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"Ah, the little Natalushka!" said Calabressa, eagerly. "Will she go? Do you think she will go? *Ma foi*, it is not often I have the chance of taking such a beautiful creature to the opera, if she will go! What must I do?"

"You will have to go and beg her to be kind to you. Say you have the box—you need not mention how: ask if she will escort you, she and Madame Potecki. Say it is a kindness: she cannot help doing a kindness."

"There you are right, monsieur: do not I see it in her eyes? can I not hear it in her voice?"

"Well, that you must do at once, before she goes out for her walk at noon."

"To go out walking on a day like this?"

"She will go out, nevertheless; and you must go and intercept her, and pray her to do you this kindness."

"*Après?*"

"You must come to me again, and we will get an English evening costume for you somehow. Then, two bouquets; I will get those for you, and send them to them to the box to await you."

"But you yourself, monsieur; will you not be of the party?"

"Perhaps you had better say nothing about me, signore; for one is so busy nowadays. But if I come into the stalls; if I see you and the ladies in the box, then I shall permit myself to call upon you; do you understand?"

"Parfaitement," said Calabressa, gravely. Then he laughed slightly. "Ah, monsieur, you English are not good diplomatists. I perceive that you wish to say more; that you are afraid to say more; that you are anxious and a little bit demure, like a girl. What you wish is this, is it not: if I say to Madame Potecki, 'Madame, I am a stranger; will you show me the promenade, that I may behold the costumes of the beautiful English ladies?' madame answers, 'Willingly.' We go to see the costumes of the beautiful English ladies. Why should you come? You would not leave the young lady all alone in the box?"

"Calabressa," he said, frankly, "I am going away to-morrow morning: do you understand that?"

Calabressa bowed gravely.

“To comprehend that is easy. Allons, let us play out the little plot for the amusement of that rogue of a Natalushka. And if she does not thank me—eh bien! perhaps her papa will: who knows?”

Before the overture began that evening, Brand was in his seat in the stalls; and he had scarcely sat down when he knew, rather than saw, that certain figures were coming into the box which he had been covertly watching. The opera was *Fidelio*—that beautiful story of a wife’s devotion and courage, and reward. As he sat and listened, he knew she was listening too; and he could almost have believed it was her own voice that was pleading so eloquently with the jailer to let the poor prisoner see the light of day for a few minutes in the garden. Would not that have been her prayer, too, in similar circumstances? Then Leonora, disguised as a youth, is forced to assist in the digging of her own husband’s grave, Pizarro enters; the unhappy prisoners are driven back to their cells and chains, and Leonora can only call down the vengeance of Heaven on the head of the tyrant.

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At the end of the act Brand went up to the box and tapped outside. It was opened from within, and he entered. Natalie turned to receive him; she was a little pale, he thought; he took a seat immediately behind her; and there was some general talk until the opening of the second act restored silence.

For him it was a strange silence, that the music outside did not disturb. Sitting behind her, he could study the beautiful profile and the outward curve of her dark eyelashes; he could see where here and there a delicate curl of the raven-black hair, escaping from the mob-cap of rose-red silk, lay about the small ear or wandered down to the shapely white neck; he could almost, despite the music, fancy he heard her breathe, as the black gossamer and scarlet flowers of an Indian shawl stirred over the shining satin dress. Her fan and handkerchief were perfumed with white-rose.

And to-morrow he would be in Wolverhampton, amidst grimy streets and dirty houses, in a leaden-hued atmosphere laden with damp and the fumes of chimneys, practically alone, with days of monotonous work before him, and solitary evenings to be spent in cheerless inns. What wonder if this seemed some brief vision of paradise—the golden light and glowing color, the soft strains of music, the scent of white-rose?

Doubtless Natalie had seen this opera of Fidelio many a time before; but she was always intently interested in music; and she had more than once expressed in Brand's hearing her opinion of the conduct of the ladies and gentlemen who make an opera, or a concert, or a play a mere adjunct to their own foolish laughter and tittle-tattle. She recognized the serious aims of a great artist; she listened with deep attention and respect; she could talk idly elsewhere and at other times. And so there was scarcely a word said—except of involuntary admiration—as the opera proceeded. But in the scene where the disguised wife discovers her husband in the prison—where, as Pizarro is about to stab him, she flings herself between them to protect him—Brand could see that Natalie Lind was fast losing her manner of calm and critical attention, and yielding to a profounder emotion. When Leonora reveals herself to her husband, and swears that she will save him, even such a juncture, from his vindictive enemy—

“Si, si, mio dolce amico,
La tua Eleonora ti salvera;
Affronto il suo furor!”

the girl gave a slight convulsive sob, and her hands were involuntarily clasped. Then, as every one knows, Leonora draws a pistol from her bosom and confronts the tyrant; a trumpet is heard in the distance; relief is near; and the act winds up with the joyful duet between the released husband and the courageous wife—“*Destin, destin ormai felice!*”

Here it was that Calabressa proposed he should escort Madame Potecki to the cooler air of the large saloon; and madame, who had been young herself, and guessed that the lovers might like to be alone for a few minutes, instantly and graciously acquiesced.

But Natalie rose also, a little quickly, and said that Madame Potecki and herself would be glad to have some coffee; and could that be got in the saloon?

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Madame Potecki and her companion led the way; but then Brand put his hand on the arm of Natalie and detained her.

“Natalie!” he said, in a low and hurried voice, “I am going away to-morrow. I don’t know when I shall see you again. Surely you will give me some assurance—some promise, something I can repeat to myself. Natalie, I know the value of what I am asking; you will give yourself to me?”

She stood by the half-shut door, pale, irresolute, and yet outwardly calm. Her eyes were cast down; she held her fan firmly with both hands.

“Natalie, are you afraid to answer?”

Then the young Hungarian girl raised her eyes, and bravely regarded him, though her face was still pale and apprehensive.

“No,” she said, in a low voice. “But how can I answer you more than this—that if I am not to give myself to you I will give myself to no other? I will be your wife, or the wife of no one. Dear friend, I can say no more.”

“It is enough.”

She went quickly to the front of the box; in both bouquets there were forget-me-nots. She hurriedly selected some, and returned and gave them to him.

“Whatever happens, you will remember that there was one who at least wished to be worthy of your love.”

Then they followed their friends into the saloon, and sat down at a small table, though Natalie’s hands were trembling so that she could scarcely undo her gloves. And George Brand said nothing; but once or twice he looked into his wife’s eyes.

CHAPTER XXI.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

When Ferdinand Lind told Calabressa that Natalie had grown to be a woman, he no doubt meant what he said; but he himself had not the least notion what the phrase implied. He could see, of course, that she had now a woman’s years, stature, self-possession; but, for all that, she was still to him only a child—only the dark-eyed, gentle, obedient little Natalushka, who used to be so proud when she was praised for her music, and whose only show of resolution was when she set to work on the grammar of a new language. Indeed, it is the commonest thing in the world for a son, or a daughter, or a friend to grow in years without those nearest them being aware of the fact, until

some chance circumstance, some crisis, causes a revelation, and we are astounded at the change that time has insidiously made.

Such a discovery was now about to confront Ferdinand Lind. He was to learn not only that his daughter had left the days of her childhood behind her, but also that the womanhood to which she had attained was of a fine and firm character, a womanhood that rung true when tried. And this is how the discovery was forced on him:

On his arrival in London, Mr. Lind drove first to Lisle Street, to pick up letters on his way home. Beratinsky had little news about business matters to impart; but, instead, he began—as Lind was looking at some of the envelopes—to drop hints about Brand. It was easy to see now, he said, why the rich Englishman was so eager to join them, and give up his life in that way. It was not for nothing. Mr. Lind would doubtless hear more at home; and so forth.

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Mr. Lind was thinking of other things; but when he came to understand what these innuendoes meant, he was neither angry nor impatient. He had much toleration for human weakness, and he took it that Beratinsky was only a little off his head with jealousy. He was aware that it had been Beratinsky's ambition to become his son-in-law: a project that swiftly came to an end through the perfect unanimity of father and daughter on that point.

"You are a fool, Beratinsky," he said, as he tied the bundle of letters together. "At your time of life you should not imagine that every one's head is full of philandering nonsense. Mr. Brand has something else to think of; besides, he has been in the midland counties all this time."

"Has he? Who, then, was taking your daughter to dinner-parties, to theatres—I don't know what?"

Lind dealt gently with this madness.

"Who told you?"

"I have eyes and ears."

"Put them to a better use, Beratinsky."

Then he left, and the hansom carried him along to Curzon Street. Natalie herself flew to the door when she heard the cab drive up: there she was to receive him, smiling a welcome, and so like her mother that he was almost startled. She caught his face in her two hands and kissed him.

"Ah, why did you not let me come to meet you at Liverpool?"

"There were too many with me, Natalie. I was busy. Now get Anneli to open my portmanteau, and you can find out for yourself all the things I have brought for you."

"I do not care for them, papa; I like to have you yourself back."

"I suppose you were rather dull, Natalushka, being all by yourself?"

"Sometimes. But I will tell you all that has happened when you are having breakfast."

"I have had breakfast, child. Now I shall get through my letters, and you can tell me all that has happened afterward."

This was equivalent to a dismissal; so Natalie went up-stairs, leaving her father to go into the small study, where lay another bundle of letters for him.

Almost the first that he opened was from George Brand; and to his amazement he found, not details about progress in the North, but a simple, straightforward, respectful demand to be permitted to claim the hand of Natalie in marriage. He did not conceal the fact that this proposal had already been made to Natalie herself; he ventured to hope that it was not distasteful to her; he would also hope that her father had no objections to urge. It was surely better that the future of a young girl in her position should be provided for. As regarded by himself, Mr. Lind's acquaintance with him was no doubt but recent and comparatively slight; but if he wished any further and natural inquiry into the character of the man to whom he was asked to intrust his daughter, Lord Evelyn might be consulted as his closest friend. And a speedy answer was requested.

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This letter was, on the whole, rather a calm and business-like performance. Brand could appeal to Natalie, and that earnestly and honestly enough; he felt he could not bring himself to make any such appeal to her father. Indeed, any third person reading this letter would have taken it to be more of the nature of a formal demand, or something required by the conventionalities; a request the answer to which was not of tremendous importance, seeing that the two persons most interested had already come to an understanding.

But Mr. Lind did not look at it in that light at all. He was at first surprised; then vexed and impatient, rather than angry; then determined to put an end to this nonsense at once. If he had deemed the matter more serious, he would have sat down and considered it with his customary fore thought; but he was merely irritated.

"Beratinsky was not so mad as I took him to be, after all," he said to himself. "Fortunately, the affair has not gone too far."

He carried the open letter up-stairs, and found Natalie in the drawing-room, dusting some pieces of Venetian glass.

"Natalie," he said, with an abruptness that startled her, and in a tone of anger which was just a little bit affected—"Natalie, what is the meaning of this folly?"

She turned and regarded him. He held the open letter in his hand. She said, calmly,

"I do not understand you."

This only vexed him the more.

"I ask you what you have been doing in my absence?" he said, angrily. "What have you been doing to entitle any man to write me such a letter as this? His affection! your future!—has he not something else to think of? And you—you seem not to have been quite so dull when I was away, after all! Well, it is time to have an end of it. Whatever nonsense may have been going on, I hope you have both of you come to your senses. Let me hear no more of it!"

Now she saw clearly what the letter must contain—what had stirred her father to such an unusual exhibition of wrath. She was a little pale, but not afraid. There was no tremor in her voice as she spoke.

"I am sorry, papa, you should speak to me like that. I think you forget that I am no longer a child. I have done nothing that I am ashamed of; and if Mr. Brand has written to you, I am willing to share the responsibility of anything he says. You must remember, papa, that I am a woman, and that I ought to have a voice in anything that concerns my own happiness."

He looked at her almost with wonder, as if he did not quite recognize her. Was this the gentle-natured little Natalushka, whose eyes would fill with tears if she was scolded even in fun?—this tall, self-possessed girl with the pale face, and the firm and even tones?

“Do you mean to tell me, Natalie, that it is with your consent Brand has written to me?” her father asked, with frowning brows.

“I did not know he would write. I expected he would.”

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"Perhaps," said he, with an ironical smile, "perhaps you have taken time by the forelock, and already promised to be his wife?"

The answer was given with the same proud composure.

"I have not. But I have promised, if I am not his wife, never to be the wife of any other man."

It was now that Lind began to perceive how serious this matter was. This was no school-girl, to be frightened out of a passing fancy. He must appeal to the reason of a woman; and the truth is, that if he had known he had this to undertake, he would not so hastily have gone into that drawing-room with the open letter in his hand.

"Sit down Natalie," he said, quite gently. "I want to talk to you. I spoke hastily; I was surprised and angry. Now let us see calmly how matters stand; I dare say no great harm has been done yet."

She took a seat opposite him; there was not the least sign of any girlish breaking down, even when he spoke to her in this kind way.

"I have no doubt you acted quite rightly and prudently when I was away; and as for Mr. Brand, well, any one can see that you have grown to be a good-looking young woman, and of course he would like to have a good-looking young wife to show off among the country people, and to go riding to hounds with him. Let us see what is involved in your becoming his wife, supposing that were ever seriously to be thought of. You give up all your old sympathies and friends, your interest in the work we have on hand, and you get transferred to a Buckinghamshire country-house to take the place of the old house-keeper. If you do not hear anything of what is going on—of our struggles—of your friends all over Europe—what of that? You will have the kitchen-garden to look after, and poultry to feed; and your neighbors will talk to you at dinner about foxes and dogs and horses and the clergyman's charities. It will be a healthy life, Natalie: perhaps you will get stout and rosy, like an English matron. But your old friends—you will have forgotten them."

"Never!—never!" she said, vehemently; and, despite herself, her eyes filled with tears.

"Then we will take Mr. Brand. The Buckinghamshire house is open again. An Englishman's house is his castle; there is a great deal of work in superintending it, its entertainments, its dependents. Perhaps he has a pack of foxhounds; no doubt he is a justice of the peace, and the terror of poachers. But in the midst of all this hunting, and giving of dinner-parties, and shooting of pheasants, do you think he has much time or thought for the future of the millions of poor wretches all over Europe who once claimed his care? Not much! That was in his days of irresponsible bachelorhood. Now he is

settled down—he is a country gentleman. The world can set itself right without him. He is anxious about the price of wheat.”

“Ah, how you mistake him, papa!” said she, proudly. And there was a proud light on her face too as she rose and quickly went to a small *escritoire* close by. A few seconds sufficed her to write a short note, which she brought back to her father.

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"There," said she, "I will abide by that test. If he says 'yes,' I will never see him again—never speak one word to him again."

Her father took the note and read it. It was as follows:

"My Dear Friend,—I am anxious about the future for both of us. If you will promise me, now and at once, to give up the work you are engaged in, I will be your wife, when and where you will.

NATALIE."

"Send it!" she said, proudly. "I am not afraid. If he says 'yes,' I will never see him again."

The challenge was not accepted. He tore the note in two and flung it into the grate.

"It is time to put an end to this folly," he said impatiently. "I have shown you what persistence in it would bring on yourself. You would be estranged from everything and every one you have hitherto been interested in; you would have to begin a new life, for which you are not fitted; you would be the means of doing our cause an irreparable injury. Yes, I say so frankly. The withdrawal of this man Brand, which would certainly follow, sooner or later, on his marriage, would be a great blow to us. We have need of his work; we have still more need of his money. And it is you, you of all people in the world, who would be the means of taking him away from us!"

"But it is not so, papa," she said in great distress. "Surely you do not think that I am begging to be allowed to become his wife? That is for him to decide; I will follow his wishes as far as I can—as far as you will allow me, papa. But this I know, that, so far from interfering with the work he has undertaken, it would only spur him on. Should I have thought of it otherwise? Ah, surely you know—you have said so to me yourself—he is not one to go back."

"He is an Englishman; you do not understand Englishmen," her father said; and then he added, firmly, "You are not to be deterred by what may happen to yourself. Well, consider what may happen to him. I tell you I will not have this risk run. George Brand is too valuable to us. If you or he persist in this folly, it will be necessary to provide against all contingencies by procuring his banishment."

"Banishment!" she exclaimed, with a quick and frightened look.

"That may not sound much to you," said her father, calmly, "for you have scarcely what may be called a native country. You have lived anywhere, everywhere. It is different with an Englishman, who has his birthplace, his family estate, his friends in England."

“What do you mean, papa?” said she, in a low voice. She had not been frightened by the fancy picture he had drawn of her own future, but this ominous threat about her lover seemed full of menace.

“I say that, at all hazards,” Lind continued, looking at her from under the bushy eyebrows, “this folly must be brought to an end. It is not expedient that a marriage between you and Mr. Brand should even be thought of. You have both got other duties, inexorable duties. It is my business to see that nothing comes in the way of their fulfilment. Do you understand?”

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She sat dumb now, with a vague fear about the future of her lover; for herself she had no fear.

"Some one must be sent to Philadelphia, to remain there probably for his lifetime. Do not drive me to send George Brand."

"Papa!" It was a cry of appeal; but he paid no heed. This matter he was determined to settle at once.

"Understand, this idle notion must be dropped; otherwise George Brand goes to the States forthwith, and remains there. Fortunately, I don't suppose the matter has gone far enough to cause either of you any deep misery. This is not what one would call a madly impassioned letter."

She scarcely perceived the sneer; some great calamity had befallen her, of which she as yet scarcely knew the extent; she sat mute and bewildered—too bewildered to ask why all this thing should be.

"That may not seem much to you," he said, in the same cold, implacable way. "But banishment for life from his native country, his home, his friends, is something to an Englishman. And if we are likely to lose his work in this country through a piece of sentimental folly, we shall take care not to lose it in America."

She rose.

"Is that all, papa?"

She seemed too stunned to say any more.

He rose also, and took her hand.

"It is better to have a clear understanding, Natalie. Some might say that I object to your marrying because you are a help to me, and your going away would leave the house empty. Perhaps you may have some kind friend put that notion into your head. But that is not the reason why I speak firmly to you, why I show you you must dismiss this fancy of the moment—if you have entertained it as well as he—as impossible. I have larger interests at stake; I am bound to sacrifice every personal feeling to my duty. And I have shown you what would be the certain result of such a marriage; therefore, I say, such a marriage is not to be thought of. Come, now, Natalie, you claim to be a woman: be a woman! Something higher is wanted from you. What would all our friends think of you if you were to sink into a position like that—the house-keeper of a country squire?"

She said nothing; but she went away to her own room and sat down, her face pale, her heart like lead. And all her thought was of this possible doom hanging over him if he

persisted; and she guessed, knowing something of him, whether he was likely to be dissuaded by a threat.

Then, for a second or so, a wild despairing fancy crossed her mind, and her fingers tightened, and the proud mouth grew firm. If it was through her that this penalty of banishment overtook him, why should she not do as others had done?

But no—that was impossible. She had not the courage to make such an offer. She could only sit and think; and the picture before her imagination was that of her lover sailing away from his native land. She saw the ship getting farther and farther away from English shores, until it disappeared altogether in a mist of rain—and tears.

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CHAPTER XXII.

EVASIONS.

It was in Manchester, whither he had gone to meet the famous John Molyneux, that George Brand awoke on this dull and drizzly morning. The hotel was almost full. He had been sent to the top floor; and now the outlook from the window was dismal enough—some slated roofs, a red chimney or two, and farther off the higher floors of a lofty warehouse, in which the first signs of life were becoming visible. Early as it was, there was a dull roar of traffic in the distance; occasionally there was the scream of a railway whistle.

Neither the morning nor the prospect was conducive to a cheerful view of life; and perhaps that was why, when he took in his boots and found in one of them a letter, deposited there by the chamber-maid, which he at once saw was in Ferdinand Lind's handwriting, that he instantly assumed, mentally, an attitude of defiance. He did not open the letter just then. He took time to let his opposition harden. He knew there would be something or somebody to fight. It was too much to expect that everything should go smoothly. If there was such a thing as a law of compensation, that beautiful dream-like evening at the opera—the light, the color, the softened music; the scent of white-rose; the dark, soft eyes, and the last pressure of the hand; the forget-me-nots he carried away with him—would have to be paid for somehow. And he had always distrusted Ferdinand Lind. His instinct assured him that this letter, which he had been looking for and yet dreading, contained a distinct refusal.

His instinct was completely at fault. The letter was exceedingly kind and suave. Mr. Lind might try to arouse his daughter from this idle day-dream by sharp words and an ominous threat; he knew that it was otherwise he must deal with Mr. George Brand.

* * * * *

"My dear Mr. Brand," he wrote, "as you may imagine, your letter has surprised me not a little, and pleased me too for a father naturally is proud to see his daughter thought well of; and your proposal is very flattering; especially, I may add, as you have seen so little of Natalie. You are very kind—and bold, and unlike English nature—to take her and family on trust as it were; for are not your countrymen very particular as to the relatives of those they would marry with? and of Natalie's relatives and friends how many have you seen? Excuse me if I do not quite explain myself; for writing in English is not as familiar to me as to Natalie, who is quite an Englishwoman now. Very well; I think it is kind of you to think so highly of my daughter as to offer her to make her your wife, you knowing so little of her. But there you do not mistake; she is worthy to be the wife of any one. If she ever marries, I hope she will be as good a wife as she has been a daughter."

"If she ever marries!" This phrase sounded somewhat ominous; and yet, if he meant to say "No," why not say it at once? Brand hastily glanced over the letter, to find something definite; but he found that would not do. He began again, and read with deliberation. The letter had obviously been written with care.

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"I have also to thank you, besides, for the very flattering proposal, for your care to put this matter before me at an early time. Regarding how little Natalie and you have seen each other, it is impossible that either her or your affection can be so serious that it is not fair to look on your proposal with some views as to expediency; and at an early time one can easily control one's wishes. I can answer for my daughter that she has always acted as I thought best for her happiness; and I am sure that now, or at any time, in whatever emergency, she would far prefer to have the decision rest with me, rather than take the responsibility on herself."

When George Brand came to this passage he read it over again; and his comment was, "My good friend, don't be too sure of that. It is possible that you have lived nineteen years with your daughter to very little purpose, so far as your knowledge of her character is concerned."

"Well, then, my dear sir," the letter proceeded, "all this being in such a way, might I ask you to reflect again over your proposal, and examine it from the view of expediency? You and I are not free agents, just to please ourselves when we like. Perhaps I was wrong in my first objection to your very flattering proposal; I believed you might, in marrying her, withdraw from the work we are all engaged in; I feared this as a great calamity—an injury done to many to gratify the fancy of one. But Natalie, I will confess, scorned me for that doubt; and, indeed, was so foolish as to propose a little hoax, to prove to me that, even if she promised to marry you as a reward, she could not get you to abandon our cause. 'No, no,' she said; 'that is not to be feared. He is not one to go back.'"

When George Brand read these words his breath came and went a little quickly. She should not find her faith in him misplaced.

"That is very well, very satisfactory, I said to her. We cannot afford to lose you, whatever happens. To return; there are more questions of expediency. For example, how can one tell what may be demanded of one? Would it be wise for you to be hampered with a wife when you know not where you may have to go? Again, would not the cares of a household seriously interfere with your true devotion to your labors? You are so happily placed! You are free from responsibilities: why increase them? At present Natalie is in a natural and comfortable position; she has grown accustomed to it; she is proud to know that she can be of assistance to us; her life is not an unhappy one. But consider—a young wife, separated from her husband perhaps by the Atlantic: in a new home, with new duties; anxious, terrified with apprehensions: surely that is not the change you would wish to see?"

For a second Brand was almost frightened by this picture, and a pang of remorse flashed through his heart. But then his common-sense reasserted itself. Why the Atlantic? Why should they be separated? Why should she be terrified with apprehensions?

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"As regards her future," her father continued, "I am not an old man; and if anything were to happen to me, she has friends. Nor will I say to you a word about myself, or my claim on her society and help; for parents have not the right to sacrifice the happiness of their children to their own convenience; it is so fortunate when they find, however, that there is no dispositions on the part of the young to break those ties that have been formed by the companionship of many years. It is this, my dear friend and colleague, that makes me thank you for having spoken so early; that I ask you to reconsider, and that I can advise my daughter, without the fear that I am acting in a tyrannical manner or thwarting any serious affection on her part. You will perceive I do not dictate. I ask you to think over whether it is wise for your own happiness—whether it would improve Natalie's probabilities of happiness—whether it would interfere in some measure with the work you have undertaken—if you continue to cherish this fancy, and let it grow on you. Surely it is better, for a man to have but one purpose in life. Nevertheless, I am open to conviction.

"That reminds me that there is another matter on which I should like to say a few words to you when there is the chance. If there is a break in the current of your present negotiations, shall you have time to run up to London? Only this: you will, I trust, not seek to see Natalie, or to write to her, until we have come to an understanding. Again I thank you for having spoken to me so early, before any mischief can have been done. Think over what I have said, my dear friend; and remember, above all things, where your chief duty lies.

"Yours sincerely, Ferdinand Lind."

* * * * *

He read this letter over two or three times, and the more he read it the more he was impressed with the vexatious conviction that it would be an uncommonly difficult thing to answer it. It was so reasonable, so sensible, so plausible. Then his old suspicions returned. Why was this man Lind so plausible? If he objected, why did he not say so outright? All these specious arguments: how was one to turn and twist, evading some, meeting others; and all the time taking it for granted that the happiness of two people's lives was to be dependent on such logic-chopping as could be put down on a sheet of paper?

Then he grew impatient. He would not answer the letter at all. Lind did not understand. The matter had got far ahead of this clever argumentation; he would appeal to Natalie herself; it was her "Yes" or "No" that would be final; not any contest and balancing of words. There were others he could recall, of more importance to him. He could almost hear them now in the trembling, low voice: "*I will be your wife, or the wife of no one. Dear friend, I can say no more.*" And again, when she gave him the forget-me-nots, "*Whatever*

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happens, you will remember that there was one who at least wished to be worthy of your love." He could remember the proud, brave look; again he felt the trembling of the hand that timidly sought his for an instant; he could almost scent the white-rose again, and hear the murmur of the people in the corridor. And this was the woman, into whose eyes he had looked as if they were the eyes of his wife, who was to be taken away from him by means of a couple of sheets of note-paper all covered over with little specious suggestions.

He thrust the letter into a pocket, and hurriedly proceeded with his dressing, for he had a breakfast appointment. Indeed, before he was ready, the porter came up and said that a gentleman had called for him, and was waiting for him in the coffee-room.

"Ask him what he will have for breakfast, and let him go on. I shall be down presently."

When Brand did at length go down, he found that his visitor had frankly accepted this permission, and had before him a large plate of corned-beef, with a goodly tankard of beer. Mr. John Molyneux, although he was a great authority among English workmen generally, and especially among the trades-unionists of the North, had little about him of the appearance of the sleek-haired demagogue as that person is usually represented to us. He was a stout, yeoman-looking man, with a frosty-red face and short silver-white whiskers; he had keen, shrewd blue eyes, and a hand that gave a firm grip. The fact is, that Molyneux had in early life been a farmer, and a well-to-do-farmer. But he had got smitten with the writings of Cobbett, and he began to write too. Then he took to lecturing—on the land laws, on Robert Owenism, on the Church of England, but more especially on co-operation. Finding, however, that all this pamphleteering and lecturing was playing ducks and drakes with his farming, and being in many respects a shrewd and sensible person, he resolved on selling out of his farm and investing the proceeds in the government stock of America, the country of his deepest admiration. In the end he found that he had about one hundred and fifty pounds a year, on which he could live very comfortably, while giving up all his time and attention to his energetic propagandism. This was the person who now gave Brand a hearty greeting, and then took a long draught at the tankard of ale.

"You see, Mr. Brand," said he, looking cautiously around, and then giving a sly wink. "I thought we might have a chat by ourselves in this corner."

Brand nodded; there was no one near them.

"Now I have been considering about what you told me; and last night I called on Professor —, of Owens College, ye know, and I had some further talk with him. Well, sir, it's a grand scheme—splendid; and I don't wonder you've made such progress as I hear of. And when all the lads are going in for it, what would they say if old John Molyneux kept out, eh?"

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"Why, they would say he had lost some of his old pluck; that's about what they would say, isn't it?" said Brand; though the fact was that he was thinking a good deal more about the letter in his pocket.

"There was one point, though, Mr. Brand, that I did not put before either Professor —— or yourself, and it is important. The point is, dibs."

"I beg your pardon," said Brand, absently; he was, in truth, recalling the various phrases and sentences in that letter of Ferdinand Lind.

"Dibs, sir—dibs," said the farmer-agitator, energetically. "You know what makes the mare go. And you know these are not the best of times; and some of the lads will be thinking they pay enough into their own Union. That's what I want to know, Mr. Brand, before I can advise any one. You need money; how do you get it? What's the damage on joining, and after?"

Brand pulled himself together.

"Oh, money?" said he. "That need not trouble you. We exact nothing. How could we ask people to buy a pig in a poke? There's not a working-man in the country but would put us down as having invented an ingenious scheme for living on other people's earnings. It is not money we want; it is men."

"Yes, yes," said Molyneux, looking rather puzzled. "But when you've got the machine, you want oil, eh? The basis of everything, sir, is dibs: what can ye do without it?"

"We want money, certainly," Brand said. "But we do not touch a farthing that is not volunteered. There are no compulsory subscriptions. We take it that the more a man sees of what we are doing, and of what has to be done, the more he will be willing to give according to his means; and so far there has been no disappointment."

"H'm!" said Molyneux, doubtfully. "I reckon you won't get much from our chaps."

"You don't know. It is wonderful what a touch of enthusiasm will do—and emulation between the local centers. Besides, we are always having accessions of richer folk, and these are expected to make up all deficiencies."

"Ah!" said the other. "I see more daylight that way. Now you, Mr. Brand, must have been a good fat prize for them, eh?"

The shrewd inquiring glance that accompanied this remark set George Brand laughing.

"I see, Mr. Molyneux, you want to get at the 'dibs' of everything. Well, I can't enlighten you any further until you join us: you have not said whether you will or not."

"I will!" said the other, bringing his fist down on the table, though he still spoke in a loud whisper. "I'm your man! In for a penny, in for a pound!"

"I beg your pardon," said Brand, politely, "but you are in for neither, unless you like. You may be in for a good deal of work, though. You must bring us men, and you will be let off both the penny and the pound. Now, could you run up with me to London to-night, and be admitted to-morrow, and get to know something of what we are doing?"

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“Is it necessary?”

“In your case, yes. We want to make you a person of importance.”

So at last Molyneux agreed, and they started for London in the evening; the big, shrew, farmer-looking man being as pleased as a child to have certain signs and passwords confided to him. Brand made light of these things—and, in fact, they were only such as were used among the outsiders; but Molyneux was keenly interested, and already pictured himself going through Europe and holding this subtle conversation with all the unknown companions whom chance might throw in his way.

But long ere he reached London the motion of the train had sent him to sleep; and George Brand had plenty of time to think over that letter, and to guess at what possible intention might lie under its plausible phrases. He had leisure to think of other things, too. The question of money, for example—about which Molyneux had been so curious with regard to this association—was one on which he himself was but slightly informed, the treasury department being altogether outside his sphere. He did not even know whether Lind had private means, or was enabled to live as he did by the association, for its own ends. He knew that the Society had numerous paid agents; no doubt, he himself could have claimed a salary, had it been worth his while. But the truth is that “dibs” concerned him very little. He had never been extravagant; he had always lived well within his income; and his chief satisfaction in being possessed of a liberal fortune lay in the fact that he had not to bother his head about money. There was one worry the less in life.

But then George Brand had been a good deal about the world, and had seen something of human life, and knew very well the power the possession of money gives. Why, this very indifference, this happy carelessness about pecuniary details, was but the consequence of his having a large fund in the background that he could draw on at will. If he did not overvalue his fortune, on the other hand he did not undervalue it; and he was about the last man in the world who could reasonably have been expected to part with it.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A TALISMAN.

Natalie Lind was busy writing at the window of the drawing-room in Curzon Street when Calabressa entered, unannounced. He had outstripped the little Anneli; perhaps he was afraid of being refused. He was much excited.

“Forgive me, signorina, if I startle you,” he said, rapidly, in his native tongue; “forgive me, little daughter. We go away to-night, I and the man Kirski, whom you saved from madness: we are ordered away; it is possible I may never see you again. Now listen.”

He took a seat beside her; in his hurry and eagerness he had for the moment abandoned his airy manner.

“When I came here I expected to see you a school-girl—some one in safe-keeping—with no troubles to think of. You are a woman; you may have trouble; and it is I, Calabressa, who would then cut off my right hand to help you. I said I would leave you my address; I cannot. I dare not tell any one even where I am going. What of that? Look well at this card.”

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He placed before her a small bit of pasteboard, with some lines marked on it.

“Now we will imagine that some day you are in great trouble; you know not what to do; and you suddenly, bethink yourself, ‘Now it is Calabressa, and the friends of Calabressa, who must help me—’”

“Pardon me, signore,” said Natalie, gently. “To whom should I go but to my father, if I were in trouble? And why should one anticipate trouble? If it were to come, perhaps one might be able to brave it.”

“My little daughter, you vex me. You must listen. If no trouble comes, well! If it does, are you any the worse for knowing that there are many on whom you can rely? Very well; look! This is the Via Roma in Naples.”

“I know it,” said Natalie: why should she not humor the good-natured old albino, who had been a friend of her mother’s?

“You go along it until you come to this little lane; it is the Vico Carlo; you ascend the lane—here is the first turning—you go round, and behold! the entrance to a court. The court is dark, but there is a lamp burning all day; go farther in, there are wine-vaults. You enter the wine-vaults, and say, ‘Bartolotti.’ You do not say, ‘Is Signor Bartolotti at home?’ or, ‘Can I see the illustrious Signor Bartolotti,’ but ‘Bartolotti,’ clear and short. You understand?”

“You give yourself too much trouble, signore.”

“I hope so, little daughter. I hope you will never have to search for these wine-vaults; but who knows? *Alors*, one comes to you, and says, ‘What is your pleasure, signorina?’ Then you ask, ‘Where is Calabressa?’ The answer to that? It may be, ‘We do not know,’ or it may be, ‘Calabressa is in prison again,’ or it may be, ‘Calabressa is dead.’ Never mind. When Calabressa dies, no one will care less than Calabressa himself.”

“Some one would care, signore; you have a mother.”

He took her hand.

“And a daughter, too,” he said, lightly; “if the wicked little minx would only listen. Then you know what you must say to the man whom you will see at the wine-vaults; you must say this, ‘Brother, I come with a message from Calabressa; it is the daughter of Natalie Berezolyi who demands your help.’ Then do you know what will happen? From the next morning you will be under the protection of the greatest power in Europe; a power unknown but invincible; a power that no one dares to disobey. Ah, little one, you will find out what the friends of Calabressa can do for you when you appeal to them!”

He smiled proudly.



"Allons! Put this card away in a secret place. Do not show it to any one; let no one know the name I confided to you. Can you remember it, little daughter?"

"Bartolotti."

"Good! Now that is one point settled; here is the next. You do not seem to have any portrait of your mother, my little one?"

"Ah, no!" she exclaimed, quickly; for she was more interested now. "I suppose my father could not bear to be reminded of his loss: if there is any portrait, I have not seen it; and how could I ask him?"

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He regarded her for a moment, and then he spoke more slowly than hitherto:

"Little Natalushka, I told you I am going away; and who knows what may happen to me? I have no money or land to leave to any one; if I had a wife and children, the only name I could leave them would be the name of a jailbird. If I were to leave a will behind me, it would read, 'My heart to my beloved Italia; my curse to Austria; and my—'Ah, yes, after all I have something to leave to the little Natalushka."

He put his hand, which trembled somewhat, into the breast of his coat, and brought out a small leather case.

"I am about to give you my greatest treasure, little one; my only treasure. I think you will value it."

He opened the case and handed it to her; inside there was a miniature, painted on ivory; it might have been a portrait of Natalie herself. For some time the girl did not say a word, but her eyes slowly filled with tears.

"She was very beautiful signore," she murmured.

"Ah little daughter," he said, cheerfully, "I am glad to see the portrait in safe-keeping at last. Many a risk I have run with it; many a time I have had to hide it. And you must hide it too; let no one see it but yourself. But now you will give me one of your own in exchange, my little one; and so the bargain is complete."

She went to the small table adjoining to hunt among the photographs.

"And lastly, one more point, Signorina Natalushka," said Calabressa, with the air of one who had got through some difficult work. "You asked me once to find out for you who was the lady from whom you received the little silver locket. Well, you see, that is now out of my power. I am going away. If you are still curious, you must ask some one else; but is it not natural to suppose that the locket may have been stolen a great many years ago, and at last the thief resolves to restore it? No matter; it is only a locket."

She returned with a few photographs for him to chose from. He picked out two.

"There is one for me; there is one for my old mother. I will say to her, 'Do you remember the young Hungarian lady who came to see you at Spezia? Put on your spectacles now, and see whether that is not the same young lady. Ah, good old mother; can you see no better than that?—that is not Natalie Berezolyi at all; that is her daughter, who lives in England. But she has not got the English way; she is not content when she herself is comfortable; she thinks of others; she has an ear for voices afar off.' That is what I shall say to the old mother."

He put the photographs in his pocket.

“In the mean time, my little daughter,” said he, “now that our pressing business is over, one may speak at leisure: and what of you, now? My sight is not very good; but even my eyes can see that you are not looking cheerful enough. You are troubled, Natalushka, or you would not have forgotten to thank me for giving you the only treasure I have in the world.”

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The girl's pale face flushed, and she said, quickly,

"There are some things that are not to be expressed in words, Signor Calabressa. I cannot tell you what I think of your kindness to me."

"Silence! do you not understand my joking? *Eh, bien*; let us understand each other. Your father has spoken to me—a little, not much. He would rather have an end to the love affair, *n'est ce pas*?"

"There are some other things that are not to be spoken of," the girl said, in a low voice, but somewhat proudly.

"Natalushka, I will not have you answer me like that. It is not right. If you knew all my history, perhaps you would understand why I ask you questions—why I interfere—why you think me impertinent—"

"Oh no, signore; how can I think that?"

She had her mother's portrait in her hand; she was gazing into the face that was so strangely like her own.

"Then why not answer me?"

She looked up with a quick, almost despairing look.

"Because I try not to think about it," she said, hurriedly. "Because I try to think only of my work. And now, Signor Calabressa, you have given me something else to think about; something to be my companion when I am alone; and from my heart I thank you."

"But you speak as if you were in great grief, my little one. It is not all over between you and your lover?"

"How can I tell? What can I say?" she exclaimed; and for a moment her eyes looked up with the appealing look of a child. "He does not write to me. I may not write to him. I must not see him."

"But then there may be reasons for delay and consideration, little Natalushka; your father may have reasons. And your father did not speak to me as if it were altogether impossible. What he said was, in effect, 'We will see—we will see.' However, let us return to the important point: it is my advice to you—you cannot have forgotten it—that whatever happens, whatever you may think, do not, little one, seek to go against your father's wishes. You will promise me that?"

"I have not forgotten, signore; but do you not remember my answer? I am no longer a child. If I am to obey, I must have reasons for obeying."

"What?" said he smiling. "And you know that one of our chief principles is that obedience is a virtue in itself?"

"I do not belong to your association, Signor Calabressa."

"The little rebel!"

"No, no, signore; do not drive me into a false position. I cannot understand my father, who has always been so kind to me; it is better not to speak of it: some day, when you come back, Signore Calabressa, you will find it all a forgotten story. Some people forget so readily; do they not?"

The trace of pathetic bitterness in her speech did not escape him.

"My child," said he, "you are suffering; I perceive it. But it may soon be over, and your joy will be all the greater. If not, if the future has trouble for you, remember what I have told you. *Allons donc!* Keep up a brave heart; but I need not say that to the child of the Berezolyis."

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He rose, and at the same moment a bell was heard below.

"You are not going, Signore Calabressa? That must be my father."

"Your father!" he exclaimed; and he seemed confused. Then he added, quickly, "Ah, very well. I will see him as I go down. Our business, little one, is finished; is it not? Now repeat to me the name I mentioned to you."

"Bartolotti?"

"Excellent, excellent! And you will keep the portrait from every one's eyes but your own. Now, farewell!"

He took her two hands in his.

"My beautiful child," said he, in rather a trembling voice, "may Heaven keep you as true and brave as your mother was, and send you more happiness. I may not see England again—no, it is not likely; but in after-years you may sometimes think of old Calabressa, and remember that he loved you almost as he once loved another of your name."

Surely she must have understood. He hurriedly kissed her on the forehead, and said, "Adieu, little daughter!" and left. And when he had gone she sunk into the chair again, and clasped both her hands round her mother's portrait and burst into tears.

Calabressa made his way down-stairs, and, at the foot, ran against Ferdinand Lind.

"Ah, amico mio," said he, in his gay manner. "See now, we have been bidding our adieux to the little Natalushka—the rogue, to pretend to me she had no sweetheart! Shall we have a glass of wine, *mon capitaine*, before we imbark?"

"Yes, yes," said Lind, though without any great cordiality. "Come into my little room."

He led him into the small study, and presently there was wine upon the table. Calabressa was exceedingly vivacious, and a little difficult to follow, especially in his French. But Lind allowed him to rattle on, until by accident he referred to some meeting that was shortly to take place at Posilipo.

"Well, now, Calabressa," said Lind, with apparent carelessness, as he broke off a bit of biscuit and poured out a glass of wine for himself, "I suppose you know more about the opinions of the Council now than any one not absolutely within itself."

"I am a humble servant only, friend Lind," he remarked, as he thrust his fingers into the breast of his military-looking coat—"a humble servant of my most noble masters. But sometimes one hears—one guesses—*mais a quel propos cette question, monsieur mon camarade?*"

Lind regarded him; and said, slowly,

“You know, Calabressa, that some seventeen years ago I was on the point of being elected a member of the Council.”

“I know it,” said the other, with a little embarrassment.

“You know why—though you do not know the right or the wrong of it—all that became impossible.”

Calabressa nodded. It was delicate ground, and he was afraid to speak.

“Well,” said Lind, “I ask you boldly—do you not think I have done enough in these sixteen or seventeen years to reinstate myself? Who else has done a tithe of the work I have done?”

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"Friend Lind, I think that is well understood at head-quarters."

"Very well, then, Calabressa, what do you think? Consider what I have done; consider what I have now to do—what I may yet do. There is this Zaccatelli business. I do not approve of it myself. I think it is a mistake, as far as England is concerned. The English will not hear of assassination, even though it is such a criminal as the *cardinale affamatore* who is to be punished. But though I do not approve, I obey. Some one from the English section will fulfil that duty: it is something to be considered. Then money; think of the money I have contributed. Without English money what would have been done? when there is any new levy wanted, it is to England—to me—they apply first; and at the present moment their cry for money is more urgent than ever. Very well, then, my Calabressa; what do you think of all this?"

Calabressa seemed somewhat embarrassed.

"Friend Lind, I am not so far into their secrets as that. Being in prison so long, one loses terms of familiarity with many of one's old associates, you perceive. But your claims are undoubted, my friend; yes, yes, undoubted."

"But what do you think, Calabressa?" he said; and that affectation of carelessness had now gone: there was an eager look in the deep-set eyes under the bushy eyebrows. "What do you yourself think of my chance? It ought to be no chance; it ought to be a certainty. It is my due. I claim it as the reward of my sixteen years' work, to say nothing of what went before."

"Ah, *naturellement, sans doute, tu as raison, mon camarade,*" said the politic Calabressa, endeavoring to get out of the difficulty with a shrug of his shoulders. "But—but—the more one knows of the Council the more one fears prying into its secrets. No, no; I do what I am told; for the rest my ears are closed."

"If I were on the Council, Calabressa," said Lind, slowly, "you would be treated with more consideration. You have earned as much."

"A thousand thanks, friend Lind," said the other; "but I have no more ambitions now. The time for that is past. Let them make what they can out of old Calabressa—a stick to beat a dog with; as long as I have my liberty and a cigarette, I am content."

"Ah, well," said Lind, resuming his careless air, "you must not imagine I am seriously troubled because the Council have not as yet seen fit to think of what I have done for them. I am their obedient servant, like yourself. Some day, perhaps, I may be summoned."

"*A la bonne heure!*" said Calabressa, rising. "No, no more wine. Your port-wine here is glorious—it is a wine for the gods; but a very little is enough for a man. So, farewell, my

good friend Lind. Be kind to the beautiful Natalushka, if that other thing that I spoke of is impossible. If the bounty of Heaven had only given me such a daughter!"

"Kirski will meet you at the station," said Lind. "Charing Cross, you remember; eight sharp. The train is 8.25."

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"I will be there."

They shook hands and parted; the door was shut. Then, in the street outside, Calabressa glanced up at the drawing-room windows just for a second.

"Ah, little daughter," he said to himself as he turned away, "you do not know the power of the talisman I have given you. But you will not use it. You will be happy; you will marry the Englishman; you will have little children round your knee; and you will lead so busy and glad a life, year after year, that you will never have a minute to sit down and think of old Calabressa, or of the stupid little map of Naples he left with you."

CHAPTER XXIV.

AN ALTERNATIVE.

Once again the same great city held these two. When George Brand looked out in the morning on the broad river, and the bridges, and the hurrying cabs and trains and steamers, he knew that this flood of dusky sunshine was falling also on the quieter ways of Hyde Park and semi-silent thoroughfares adjoining. They were in the same city, but they were far apart. An invisible barrier separated them. It was not to Curzon Street that he directed his steps when he went out into the still, close air and the misty sunlight.

It was to Lisle Street that he walked; and all the way he was persuading himself to follow Calabressa's advice. He would betray no impatience, however specious Lind might be. He would shut down that distrust of Natalie's father that was continually springing up in his mind. He would be considerate to the difficulties of his position, ready to admit the reasonableness of his arguments, mindful of the higher duties demanded of himself. But then—but then—he bethought him of that evening at the theatre; he remembered what she had said; how she had looked. He was not going to give up his beautiful, proud-natured sweetheart as a mere matter of expediency, as the conclusion of a clever bit of argument.

When he entered Mr. Lind's room he found Heinrich Reitzei its sole occupant. Lind had not yet arrived: the pallid-faced young man with the *pince-nez* was in possession of his chair. And no sooner had George Brand made his appearance than Reitzei rose, and, with a significant smile, motioned the new-comer to take the vacant seat he had just quitted.

"What do you mean?" Brand said, naturally taking another chair, which was much nearer him.

"Will you not soon be occupying this seat *en permanence*?" Reitzei said, with affected nonchalance.

“Lind has abdicated, then, I presume,” said Brand, coldly: this young man’s manner had never been very grateful to him.

Reitzei sunk into the seat again, and twirled at his little black waxed mustache.

“Abdicated? No; not yet,” he said with an air of indifference. “But if one were to be translated to a higher sphere?—there is a vacancy in the Council.”

“Then he would have to live abroad,” said Brand, quickly.

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The younger man did not fail to observe his eagerness, and no doubt attributed it to a wrong cause. It was no sudden hope of succeeding to Lind's position that prompted the exclamation; it was the possibility of Natalie being carried away from England.

"He would have to live in the place called nowhere," said Reitzei, with a calm smile. "He would have to live in the dark—in the middle of the night—everywhere and nowhere at the same moment."

Brand was on the point of asking what would then become of Natalie, but he forbore. He changed the subject altogether.

"How is that mad Russian fellow getting on—Kirski? Still working?"

"Yes; at another kind of work. Calabressa has undertaken to turn his vehemence into a proper channel—to let off the steam, as it were, in another direction."

"Calabressa?"

"Kirski has become the humble disciple of Calabressa, and has gone to Genoa with him."

"What folly is this!" Brand said. "Have you admitted that maniac?"

"Certainly; such force was not to be wasted."

"A pretty disciple! How much Russian does Calabressa know?"

"Gathorne Edwards is with them; it is some special business. Both Calabressa and Kirski will be capital linguists before it is over."

"But how has Edwards got leave again from the British Museum?"

Reitzei shrugged his shoulders.

"I believe Lind wants to buy him over altogether. We could pay him more than the British Museum."

At this moment there was a sound outside of some one ascending the stair, and directly afterward Mr. Lind entered the room. As he came in Reitzei left.

"How do you do, Mr. Brand?" Lind said, shaking his visitor's hand with great warmth. "Very glad to see you looking so well; hard work does not hurt you, clearly. I hope I have not incommoded you in asking you to run up to London?"

"Not at all," Brand said. "Molyneux came up with me last night."

“Ah! You have gained him over?”

“Quite.”

“Again I congratulate you. Well, now, since we have begun upon business, let us continue upon business.”

He settled himself in his chair, as if for some serious talk. Brand could not help being struck by the brisk, vivacious, energetic look of this man; and on this morning he was even more than usually smartly dressed. Was it his daughter who had put that flower in his button-hole?

“I will speak frankly to you, and as clear as I can in my poor English. You must let me say, without flattery, that we are all very indebted to you—very proud of you; we are glad to have you with us. And now that you see farther and farther about our work, I trust you are not disappointed. You understand at the outset you must take so much on trust.”

“I am not in the least disappointed; quite the reverse,” Brand said; and he remembered Calabressa, and spoke in as friendly a way as possible. “Indeed, many a time I am sorry one cannot explain more fully to those who are only inquiring. If they could only see at once all that is going on, they would have no more doubt. And it is slow work with some of them.”

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"Yes, certainly; no doubt. Well, to return, if you please: it is a satisfaction you are not disappointed; that you believe we are doing a good work; that you go with us. Very well. You have advanced grade by grade; you see nothing to repent of; why not take the final step?"

"I don't quite understand you," he said, doubtfully.

"I will explain. You have given yourself to us—your time, your labor, your future; but the final step of self-sacrifice—is it so very difficult? In many cases it is merely a challenge: we say, 'Show that you can trust us even for your very livelihood. Become absolutely dependent on us, even for your food, your drink, your clothes.' In your case, I admit, it is something more: it is an invitation to a very considerable self-sacrifice. All the more proof that you are not afraid."

"I do not think I am afraid," said Brand, slowly; "but—"

"One moment. The affair is simple. The officers of our society—those who govern—those from whom are chosen the members of the Council—that Council that is more powerful than any government in Europe—those officers, I say, are required first of all to surrender every farthing of personal property, so that they shall become absolutely dependent on the Society itself—"

Brand looked a trifle bewildered: more than that, resentful and indignant, as if his common-sense had received a shock.

"It is a necessary condition," Lind continued, without eagerness—rather as if he were merely enunciating a theory. "It insures absolute equality; it is a proof of faith. And you may perceive that, as I am alive, they do not allow one to starve."

The slight smile that accompanied this remark was meant to be reassuring. Certainly, Mr. Lind did not starve; if the society of which he was a member enabled him to live as he did in Curzon Street, he had little to complain of.

"You mean," said George Brand, "that before I enter this highest grade, next to the Council, I must absolutely surrender my entire fortune to you?"

"To the common fund of the Society—yes," was the reply; uttered as a matter of course.

"But there is no compulsion?"

"Certainly not. On this point every one is free. You may remain in your present grade if you please."

"Then I confess to you I don't see why I should change," Brand said, frankly. "Cannot I work as well for you just as I am?"

“Perhaps; perhaps not,” said the other, easily. “But you perceive, further, that the fact of our not exacting subscriptions from the poorer members of our association makes it all the more necessary that we should have voluntary gifts from the richer. And as regards a surplus of wealth, of what use is that to any one? Am I not granted as much money as one need reasonably want? And just now there is more than ever a need of money for the general purposes of the Society: Lord Evelyn gave us a thousand pounds last week.”

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Brand flushed red.

"I wish you had told me," he said; "I would rather have given you five thousand. You know he cannot afford it."

"The greater the merit of the sacrifice," said his companion calmly.

This proposal was so audacious that George Brand was still a little bewildered; but the fact was that, while listening very respectfully to Mr. Lind, he had been thinking more about Natalie; and it was the most natural thing in the world that some thought of her should now intervene.

"Another thing, Mr. Lind," said he, though he was rather embarrassed. "Even if I were to make such a sacrifice, as far as I am concerned; if I were to run the risk for myself alone, that might all be very well; but supposing I were to marry, do you think I should like my wife to run such a risk—do you think I should be justified in allowing her? And surely *you* ought not to ask *me*. It is your own daughter—"

"Excuse me, Mr. Brand," said the other, blandly but firmly. "We will restrict ourselves to business at the present moment, if you will be so kind. I wrote to you all that occurred to me when I had to consider your very flattering proposal with regard to my daughter; I may now add that, if any thought of her interfered with your decision in this matter, I should still further regret that you had ever met."

"You do not take the view a father would naturally take about the future of his own daughter," said Brand, bluntly.

Lind was not in the least moved by this taunt.

"I should allow neither the interests of my daughter nor my own interests to interfere with my sense of duty," said he. "Do you know me so little? Do you know her so little? Ah, then you have much to learn of her!"

Lind looked at him for a second or two, and added, with a slight smile,

"If you decide to say no, be sure I will not say a word of it to her. No; I will still leave the child her hero in her imagination. For when I said to her, 'Natalie, an Englishman will do a good deal for the good of the people—he will give you his sympathy, his advice, his time, his labor—but he will not put his hand in his pocket;' then she said, 'Ah, but you do not understand Mr. Brand yet, papa; he is with us; he is not one to go back.'"

"But this abandonment of one's property is so disproportionate in different cases—"

"The greater the sacrifice, the greater the merit," returned the other: then he immediately added, "But do not imagine I am seeking to persuade you. I place before



you the condition on which you may go forward and attain the highest rank, ultimately perhaps the greatest power, in this organization. Ah, you do not understand what that is as yet. If you knew, you would not hesitate very long, I think.”

“But—but suppose I have no great ambition,” Brand remonstrated. “Suppose I am quite content to go on doing what I can in my present sphere?”

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"You have already sworn to do your utmost in every direction. On this one point of money, however, the various Councils have never departed from the principle that there must be no compulsion. On any other point the Council orders; you obey. On this point the voluntary sacrifice has, as I say, all the more merit; and it is not forgotten. For what are you doing? You are yielding up a superabundance that you cannot use, so that thousands and thousands of the poor throughout the world may not be called on to contribute their pence. You are giving the final proof of your devotion. You are taking the vow of poverty and dependence, which many of the noblest brotherhoods the world has seen have exacted from their members at the very outset; but in your case with the difference that you can absolutely trust to the resources of an immense association—"

"Yes, as far as I am concerned," Brand said, quickly. "But I ask you whether I should be justified in throwing away this power to protect others. May I appeal to Natalie herself? May I ask her?"

"I am afraid, Mr. Brand," said the other, with the same mild firmness, "I must request you in the meantime to leave Natalie out of consideration altogether. This is a question of duty, of principle; it must regulate our future relations with each other; pray let it stand by itself."

Brand sat silent for a time. There were many things to think over. He recalled, for example, though vaguely, a conversation he had once had with Lord Evelyn, in which this very question of money was discussed, and in which he had said that he would above all things make sure he was not being duped. Moreover, he had intended that his property, in the event of his dying unmarried, should go to his nephews. But it was not his sister's boys who were now uppermost in his mind.

He rose.

"You cannot expect me to give you a definite answer at once," he said, almost absently.

"No; before you go, let me add this," said the other, regarding his companion with a watchful look: "the Council are not only in urgent need of liberal funds just now, but also, in several directions, of diligent and exceptional service. The money contribution which they demand from England I shall be able to meet somehow, no doubt; hitherto I have not failed them. The claim for service shall not find us wanting, either, I hope; and it has been represented to me that perhaps you ought to be transferred to Philadelphia, where there is much to be done at the present moment."

This suggestion effectually awoke Brand from his day-dream.

"Philadelphia!" he exclaimed.

“Yes,” said the other, speaking very slowly, as if anxious that every word should have weight. “My visit, short as it was, enabled me to see how well one might employ one’s whole lifetime there—with such results as would astonish our good friends at headquarters, I am sure of that. True, the parting from one’s country might be a little painful at first; but that is not the greatest of the sacrifices that one should be prepared to submit to. However,” he added, rather more lightly, “this is still to be decided on; meanwhile I hope, and I am sure you hope too, Mr. Brand, that I shall be able to satisfy the Council that the English section does not draw back when called on for its services.”

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"No doubt—no doubt," Brand said; but the pointed way in which his companion had spoken did not escape him, and promised to afford him still further food for reflection.

But if this was a threat, he would show no fear.

"Molyneux wishes to get back North as soon as possible," he said, in a matter-of-fact way, just as if talking of commonplace affairs the whole time. "I suppose his initiation could take place to-morrow night?"

"Certainly," said Mr. Lind, following his visitor to the door. "And you must certainly allow me to thank you once more, my dear Mr. Brand, for your service in securing to us such an ally. I should like to have talked with you about your experiences in the North; but you agree with me that the suggestion I have made demands your serious consideration first—is it not so?"

Brand nodded.

"I will let you know to-morrow," said he. "Good-morning!"

"Good-morning!" said Mr. Lind, pleasantly; and then the door was shut.

He was attended down-stairs by the stout old German, who, on reaching the front-door, drew forth a letter from his pocket and handed it to him with much pretence of mystery. He was thinking of other things, to tell the truth; and as he walked along he regarded the outside of the envelope with but little curiosity. It was addressed, "*All' Egregio Signore, Il Signor G. Brand.*"

"No doubt a begging letter from some Leicester Square fellow," he thought.

Presently, however, he opened the letter, and read the following message, which was also in Italian:

"The beautiful caged little bird sighs and weeps, because she thinks she is forgotten. A word of remembrance would be kind, if her friend is discreet and secret. Above all, no open strife. This from one who departs. Farewell!"

CHAPTER XXV.

A FRIEND'S ADVICE.

This must be said for George Brand, that while he was hard and unsympathetic in the presence of those whom he disliked or distrusted, in the society of those whom he did like and did trust he was docile and acquiescent as a child, easily led and easily persuaded. When he went from Lind's chamber, which had been to him full of an

atmosphere of impatience and antagonism, to Lord Evelyn's study, and found his friend sitting reading there, his whole attitude changed; and his first duty was to utter a series of remonstrances about the thousand pounds.

"You can't afford it, Evelyn. Why didn't you come to me? I would have given it to you a dozen times over rather than you should have paid it."

"No doubt you would," said the pale lad. "That is why I did not come to you."

"I wish you could get it back."

"I would not take it back. It is little enough I can do; why not let me give such help as I can? If only those girls would begin to marry off, I might do more. But there is such a band of them that men are afraid to come near them."

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"I think it would be a pity to spoil the group," said Brand. "The country should subscribe to keep them as they are—the perfect picture of an English family. However, to return: you must promise me not to commit any of these extravagances again. If any appeal is made to you, come to me."

But here a thought seemed to strike him;

"Ah," he said, "I have something to tell you. Lind is trying to get me to enter the same grade of officership with himself. And do you know what the first qualification is?—that you give up every penny you possess in the world."

"Well?"

"Well!"

The two friends stared at each other—the one calmly inquisitive, the other astounded.

"I thought you would have burst out laughing!" Brand exclaimed.

"Why?" said the other. "You have already done more for them—for us—than that: why should you not do all in your power? Why should you not do all that you can, and while you can? Look!"

They were standing at the window. On the other side of the street far below them were some funeral carriages; at this precise moment the coffin was being carried across the pavement.

"That is the end of it. I say, why shouldn't you do all that you can, and while you can?"

"Do you want reasons? Well, one has occurred to me since I came into this room. A minute ago I said to you that you must not repeat that extravagance; and I said if you were appealed to again you could come to me. But what if I had already surrendered every penny in the world? I wish to retain in my own hands at least the power to help my friends."

"That is only another form of selfishness," said Lord Evelyn, laughing. "I fear you are as yet of weak faith, Brand."

He turned from the light, and went and sunk into the shadow of a great arm-chair.

"Now I know what you are going to do, Evelyn," said his friend. "You are going to talk me out of my common-sense; and I will not have it. I want to show you why it is impossible I should agree to this demand."

"If you feel it to be impossible, it is impossible."

“My dear fellow, is it reasonable?”

“I dislike things that are reasonable.”

“There is but one way of getting at you. Have you thought of Natalie?”

“Ah!” said the other, quickly raising himself into an expectant attitude.

“You will listen now, I suppose, to reason, to common-sense. Do you think it likely that, with the possibility of her becoming my wife, I am going to throw away this certainty and leave her to all chances of the world? Lind says that the Society amply provides for its officers. Very well; that is quite probable. I tell him that I am not afraid for myself; if I had to think of myself alone, there is no saying what I might not do, even if I were to laugh at myself for doing it. But how about Natalie? Lind might die. I might be sent away to the ends of the earth. Do you think I am going to leave her at the mercy of a lot of people whom she never saw?”

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Lord Evelyn was silent.

“Besides, there is more than that,” his friend continued, warmly. “You may call it selfishness, if you like, but if you love a woman and she gives her life into your hands—well, she has the first claim on you. I will put it to you: do you think I am going to sell the Beeches—when—when she might live there?”

Lord Evelyn did not answer.

“Of course I am willing to subscribe largely,” his friend continued; “and Natalie herself would say yes to that. But I am not ambitious. I don’t want to enter that grade. I don’t want to sit in Lind’s chair when he gets elected to the Council, as has been suggested to me. I am not qualified for it; I don’t care about it; I can best do my own work in my own way.”

At last Lord Evelyn spoke; but it was in a meditative fashion, and not very much to the point. He lay back in his easy-chair, his hands clasped behind his head, and talked; and his talk was not at all about the selling of Hill Beeches in Buckinghamshire, but of much more abstract matters. He spoke of the divine wrath of the reformer—what a curious thing it was, that fiery impatience with what was wrong in the world; how it cropped up here and there from time to time; and how one abuse after another had been burnt up by it and swept away forever. Give the man possessed of this holy rage all the beauty and wealth and ease in the world, and he is not satisfied; there is something within him that vibrates to the call of humanity without; others can pass by what does not affect themselves with a laugh or a shrug of indifference; he only must stay and labor till the wrong thing is put right. And how often had he been jeered at by the vulgar of his time; how Common-Sense had pointed the finger of scorn at him; how Respectability had called him crazed! John Brown at Harper’s Ferry is only a ridiculous old fool; his effort is absurd; even gentlemen in the North feel an “intellectual satisfaction” that he is hanged, because of his “preposterous miscalculation of possibilities.” Yes, no doubt; you hang him, and there is an end; but “his soul goes marching on,” and the slaves are freed! You want to abolish the Corn-laws?—all good society shrieks at you at first: you are a Radical, a regicide, a Judas Iscariot; but in time the nation listens, and the poor have cheap bread. “Mazzini is mad!” the world cries: “why this useless bloodshed? It is only political murder.” Mazzini is mad, no doubt: but in time the beautiful dream of Italy—of “Italia, the world’s wonder, the world’s care”—comes true. And what matter to the reformer, the agitator, the dreamer, though you stone him to death, or throw him to the lions, or clap him into a nineteenth-century prison and shut his mouth that way? He has handed on the sacred fire. Others will bear the torch; and he who is unencumbered will outstrip his fellows. The wrong must be put right.

And so forth, and so forth. Brand sat and listened, recognizing here and there a proud, pathetic phrase of Natalie’s, and knowing well whence the inspiration came; and as he listened he almost felt as though that beautiful old place in Buckinghamshire was

slipping through his fingers. The sacrifice seemed to be becoming less and less of a sacrifice; it took more and more the form of a duty; would Natalie's eyes smile approval?

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Brand jumped up, and took a rapid turn or two up and down the room.

"I won't listen to you, Evelyn. You don't know anything about money-matters. You care for nothing but ideas. Now, I come of a commercial stock, and I want to know what guarantee I have that this money, if I were to give it up, would be properly applied. Lind's assurances are all very well—"

"Oh yes, of course; you have got back to Lind," said Lord Evelyn, waking up from his reveries. "Do you know, my dear fellow, that your distrust of Lind is rapidly developing into a sharp and profound hatred?"

"I take men as I find them. Perhaps you can explain to me how Lind should care so little for the future of his daughter as to propose—with the possibility of our marrying—that she should be left penniless?"

"I can explain it to myself, but not to you; you are too thorough an Englishman."

"Are you a foreigner?"

"I try to understand those who are not English. Now, an Englishman's theory is that he himself, and his wife and children—his domestic circle, in fact—are the centre of creation; and that the fate of empires, as he finds that going one way or the other in the telegrams of the morning paper, is a very small matter compared with the necessity of Tom's going to Eton, or Dick's marrying and settling down as the bailiff of the Worcestershire farm. That is all very well; but other people may be of a different habit of mind. Lind's heart and soul are in his present work; he would sacrifice himself, his daughter, you, or anybody else to it, and consider himself amply justified. He does not care about money, or horses, or the luxury of a big establishment; I suppose he has had to live on simple fare many a time, whether he liked it or not, and can put up with whatever happens. If you imagine that you may be cheated by a portion of your money—supposing you were to adopt his proposal—going into his pocket as commission, you do him a wrong."

"No, I don't think that," Brand said, rather unwillingly. "I don't take him to be a common and vulgar swindler. And I can very well believe that he does not care very much for money or luxury or that kind of thing, so far as he himself is concerned. Still, you would think that the ordinary instinct of a father would prevent his doing an injury to the future of his daughter—"

"Would he consider it an injury. Would she?"

"Well," Brand said, "she is very enthusiastic, and noble, and generous, and does not know what dependence or poverty means. But he is a man of the world, and you would think he would look after his own kith and kin."

“Yes, that is a wholesome conservative English sentiment, but it does not rule the actions of everybody.”

“But common sense—”

“Oh, bother common sense! Common-sense is only a grocer that hasn’t got an idea beyond ham-and-eggs.”

“Well, if I am only a grocer,” Brand said, quite submissively, “don’t you think the grocer, if he were asked to pay off the National Debt, ought to say, ‘Gentlemen, that is a praiseworthy object; but in the meantime wouldn’t it be advisable for me to make sure that my wife mayn’t have to go on the parish?’”

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Thereafter there was silence for a time, and when Brand next spoke it was in a certain, precise, hard fashion, as if he wished to make his meaning very clear.

"Suppose, Evelyn," he said, "I were to tell you what has occurred to me as the probable explanation of Lind's indifference about the future of his daughter, would you be surprised?"

"I expect it will be wrong, for you cannot do justice to that man; but I should like to hear it."

"I must tell you he wrote me a letter, a shilly-shallying sort of letter, filled with arguments to prove that a marriage between Natalie and myself would not be expedient, and all the rest of it: not absolutely refusing his consent, you understand, but postponing the matter, and hoping that on further reflection, et caetera, et caetera. Well, do you know what my conclusion is?—that he is definitely resolved I shall not marry his daughter; and that he is playing with me, humbugging me with the possibility of marrying her, until he induces me to hand him over my fortune for the use of the Society. Stare away as you like; that is what I believe to be true."

He rose and walked to the window, and looked out.

"Well, Evelyn, whatever happens, I have to thank you for many things. It has been all like my boyhood come back again, but much more wonderful and beautiful. If I have to go to America, I shall take with me at least the memory of one night at Covent Garden. She was there—and Madame Potecki—and old Calabressa. It was *Fidelio* they were playing. She gave me some forget-me-nots."

"What do you mean by going to America?" Lord Evelyn said.

Brand remained at the window for a minute or two, silent, and then he returned to his chair.

"You will say I am unjust again. But unless I am incapable of understanding English—such English as he speaks—this is his ultimatum: that unless I give my property, every cent of it, over to the Society, I am to go to America. It is a distinct and positive threat."

"How can you say so!" the other remonstrated. "He has just been to America himself, without any compulsion whatever."

"He has been to America for a certain number of weeks. I am to go for life—and, as he imagines, alone."

His face had been growing darker and darker, the brows lowering ominously over the eyes.

“Now, Brand,” his friend said, “you are letting your distrust of this man Lind become a madness. What if he were to say to-morrow that you might marry Natalie the day after?”

The other looked up almost bewildered.

“I would say he was serving some purpose of his own. But he will not say that. He means to keep his daughter to himself, and he means to have my money.”

“Why, you admitted, a minute ago, that even you could not suspect him of that!”

“Not for himself—no. Probably he does not care for money. But he cares for ambition—for power; and there is a vacancy in the Council. Don’t you see? This would be a tremendous large sum in the eyes of a lot of foreigners: they would be grateful, would they not? And Natalie once transferred to Italy, I could console myself with the honor and dignity of Lind’s chair in Lisle Street. Don’t you perceive?”

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"I perceive this—that you misjudge Lind altogether. I am sure of it. I have seen it from the beginning—from the moment you set your foot in his house. And you tried to blind yourself to the fact because of Natalie. Now that you imagine that he means to take Natalie from you, all your pent-up antagonism breaks loose. Meanwhile, what does Natalie herself say?"

"What does she say?" he repeated, mechanically. He also was lying back in his chair, his eyes gazing aimlessly at the window. But whenever anyone spoke of Natalie, or whenever he himself had to speak of her, a quite new expression came into his face; the brows lifted, the eyes were gentle. "What does she say? Why, nothing. Lind requested me neither to see her nor write to her; and I thought that reasonable until I should have heard what he had to say to me. There is a message I got half an hour ago—not from her."

He handed to Lord Evelyn the anonymous scroll that he had received from the old German.

"Poor old Calabressa!" he said. "Those Italians are always very fond of little mysteries. But how he must have loved that woman?"

"Natalie's mother?"

"Yes," said the other, absently. "I wonder he has never gone to see his sweetheart of former years."

"What do you mean?"

Brand started. It was not necessary that Lord Evelyn should in the mean time be intrusted with that secret.

"He told me that when he saw Natalie it was to him like a vision from the dead; she was so like her mother. But I must be off, Evelyn; I have to meet Molyneux at two. So that is your advice," he said, as he went to the door—"that I should comply with Lind's demand; or—to put it another way—succumb to his threat?"

"It is not my advice at all—quite the contrary. I say, if you have any doubt or distrust—if you cannot make the sacrifice without perfect faith and satisfaction to yourself—do not think of it."

"And go to America?"

"I cannot believe that any such compulsory alternative exists. But about Natalie, surely you will send her a message; Lind cannot object to that?"



“I will send her no message; I will go to her,” the other said, firmly. “I believe Lind wishes me not to see her. Within the duties demanded of me by the Society, his wishes are to me commands; elsewhere and otherwise neither his wishes nor his commands do I value more than a lucifer-match. Is that plain enough, Evelyn?”

And so he went away, forgetting all the sage counsel Calabressa had given him; thinking rather of the kindly, thoughtful, mysterious little message the old man had left behind him, and of the beautiful caged bird that sighed and wept because she thought she was forgotten. She should not think that long!

CHAPTER XXVI.

A PROMISE.

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This was a dark time indeed for Natalie Lind—left entirely by herself, ignorant of what was happening around her, and haunted by vague alarms. But the girl was too proud to show to any one how much she suffered. On the contrary, she reasoned and remonstrated with herself; and forced herself to assume an attitude of something more than resignation, of resolution. If it was necessary that her father should be obeyed, that her lover should maintain this cruel silence, even that he and she should have the wide Atlantic separate them forever, she would not repine. It was not for her who had so often appealed to others to shrink from sacrifice herself. And if this strange new hope that had filled her heart for a time had to be finally abandoned, what of that? What mattered a single life? She had the larger hope; there was another and greater future for her to think about; and she could cherish the thought that she at least had done nothing to imperil or diminish the work to which so many of her friends had given their lives.

But silence is hard to bear. Ever since the scene with her father, a certain undeclared estrangement had prevailed between these two; and no reference whatsoever had been made to George Brand. Her lover had sent her no message—no word of encouragement, of assurance, or sympathy. Even Calabressa had gone. There remained to her only the portrait that Calabressa had given her; and in the solitude of her own room many a time she sat and gazed at the beautiful face with some dim, wondering belief that she was looking at her other self, and that she could read in the features some portion of her own experiences, her own joys and sorrows. For surely those soft, dark, liquid eyes must have loved and been beloved? And had they too filled with gladness when a certain step had been heard coming near? and they looked up with trust and pride and tenderness, and filled with tears again in absence, when only the memory of loving words remained? She recalled many a time what Calabressa had said to her—“My child, may Heaven keep you as true and brave as your mother was, and send you more happiness.” Her mother, then, had not been happy? But she was brave, Calabressa had said: when she loved a man, would she not show herself worthy of her love?

This was all very well; but in spite of her reasoning and her forced courage, and her self-possession in the presence of others, Natalie had got into the habit of crying in the quietude of her own room, to the great distress of the little Anneli, who had surprised her once or twice. And the rosy-cheeked German maid guessed pretty accurately what had happened; and wondered very much at the conduct of English lovers, who allowed their sweethearts to pine and fret in solitude without sending them letters or coming to see them. But on this particular afternoon Anneli opened the door, in answer to a summons, and found outside a club commissioner whom she had seen once or twice before; and when he gave her a letter, addressed in a handwriting which she recognized, and ask for an answer, she was as much agitated as if it had come from her own sweetheart in Gorlitz. She snatched it from the man, as if she feared he would take it back. She flew with it up-stairs, breathless. She forgot to knock at the door.

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“Oh, Fraulein, it is a letter!” said she, in great excitement, “and there is to be an answer —”

Then she hesitated. But the good-sense of the child told her she ought to go.

“I will wait outside, Fraulein. Will you ring when you have written the answer?”

When Natalie opened the letter she was outwardly quite calm—a little pale, perhaps; but as she read it her heart beat fast. And it was her heart that instantly dictated the answer to this brief and simple appeal:

“My Natalie,—It is your father’s wish that I should not see you. Is it your wish also? There is something I would like to say to you.”

It was her heart that answered. She rose directly. She never thought twice, or even once, about any wish, or menace, or possible consequence. She went straight to her desk, and with a shaking hand wrote these lines:

“My Own,—Come to me now, at any time—when you please. Am I not yours?

Natalie.”

Despite herself, she had to pause, to steady her hand—and because her heart was beating so fast that she felt choked—before she could properly address the envelope. Then she carried the letter to Anneli, who she knew was waiting outside. That done, she shut herself in again, to give herself time to think, though in truth she could scarcely think at all. For all sorts of emotions were struggling for the mastery of her—joy and a proud resolve distinctly predominant. It was done, and she would abide by it. She was not given to fear.

But she tried hard to think. At last her lover was coming to her; he would ask her what she was prepared to do: what would she answer?

Then, again, the joy of the thought that she was about to see him drove every other consideration out of her mind. How soon might he be here? Hurriedly she went to a jar of flowers on the table, chose some scarlet geraniums, and turned to a mirror. Her haste did not avail much, for her fingers were still trembling: but that was the color he had said, on one occasion, suited her best. She had not been wearing flowers in her hair of late.

From time to time, for a second or so, some thought of her father intervened. But then her father had only enjoined her to dismiss forever the hope of her marrying the man to whom she had given her heart and her life: that could not prevent her loving him, and seeing him, and telling him that her love was his. She wished the geraniums were less

rose-red and more scarlet in hue. It was the scarlet he had approved of—that evening that he and she the little Polish lady had dined together.

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She had not long to wait. With a quick, intense consciousness she heard the hansom drive up, and the rapid knock that followed; her heart throbbed through the seconds of silence; then she knew that he was ascending the stair; then it seemed to her as if the life would go out of her altogether. But when he flung the door open and came toward her; when he caught her two hands in his—one hand in each hand—and held them tight; when, in a silence that neither cared to break, he gazed into her rapidly moistening eyes—then the full tide of joy and courage returned to her heart, and she was proud that she had sent him that answer. For some seconds—to be remembered during a life time—they regarded each other in silence; then he released her hands, and began to put back the hair from her forehead as if he would see more clearly into the troubled deeps of her eyes; and then, somehow—perhaps to hide her crying—she buried her face in his breast, and his arms were around her, and she was sobbing out all the story of her waiting and her despair.

“What!” said he, cheerfully, to calm and reassure her, “the brave Natalie to be frightened like that!”

“I was alone,” she murmured. “I had no one to speak to; and I could not understand. Oh, my love, my love, you do not know what you are to me!”

He kissed her; her cheeks were wet.

“Natalie,” said he in a low voice, “don’t forget this: we may be separated—that is possible—I don’t know; but if we live fifty years apart from each other—if you never hear one word more from me or of me—be sure of this, that I am thinking of you always, and loving you, as I do at this moment when my arms are around you. Will you remember that? Will you believe that—always?”

“I could not think otherwise,” she answered. “But now that you are with me—that I can hear you speak to me—” And at this point her voice failed her altogether; and he could only draw her closer to him, and soothe and caress her, and stroke the raven-black hair that had never before thrilled his fingers with its soft, strange touch.

“Perhaps,” she said at last, in a broken and hesitating voice, “you will blame me for having said what I have said. I have had no girl-companions; scarcely any woman to tell me what I should do and say. But—but I thought you were going to America—I thought I should never see you again—I was lonely and miserable; and when I saw you again, how could I help saying I was glad? How could I help saying that, and more?—for I never knew it till now. Oh, my love, do you know that you have become the whole world to me? When you are away from me, I would rather die than live!”

“Natalie—my life!”



“I must say that to you—once—that you may understand—if we should never see each other again. And now—”

She gently released herself from his embrace, and went and sat down by the table. He took a chair near her and held her hand. She would not look up, for her eyes were still wet with tears.

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"And now," she said, making a great effort to regain her self-control, "you must tell me about yourself. A woman may have her feelings and fancies, and cry over them when she is afraid or alone; that is nothing; it is the way of the world. It is a man's fate that is of importance."

"You must not talk like that, Natalie," said he gravely. "Our fate is one. Without you, I don't value my life more than this bit of geranium-leaf; with you, life would be worth having."

"And you must not talk like that either," she said. "Your life is valuable to others. Ah, my dear friend, that is what I have been trying to console myself with of late. I said, 'Well, if he goes away and does not see me again, will he not be freer? He has a great work to do; he may have to go away from England for many years; why should he be encumbered with a wife?'"

"It was your father, I presume, who made those suggestions to you?" said Brand, regarding her.

"Yes; papa said something like that," she answered, quite innocently. "That is what would naturally occur to him; his work has always the first place in his thoughts. And with you, too; is it not so?"

"No."

She looked up quickly.

"I will be quite frank with you, Natalie. You have the first place in my thoughts; I hope you ever will have, while I am a living man. But cannot I give the Society all the work that is in me equally well, whether I love you or whether I don't, whether you become my wife or whether you do not? I have no doubt your father has been talking to you as he has been talking to me."

She placed her disengaged hand on the top of his, and said, gently,

"My father perhaps does not quite understand you; perhaps he is too anxious. I, for one, am not anxious—about *that*. Do you know how I trust you, my dearest of friends? Sometimes I have said to myself, 'I will ask him for a pledge. I will say to him that he must promise, that he must swear to me, that whatever happens as between him and me, nothing, nothing, nothing in all the world will induce him to give up what he has undertaken;' but then again I have said to myself, 'No, I can trust him for that.'"

"I think you may, Natalie," said he, rather absently. "And yet what could have led me to join such a movement but your own noble spirit—the glamour of your voice—the thanks of your eyes? You put madness into my blood with your singing."



“Do you call it madness?” she said, with a faint flush in the pale olive face. “Is it not rather kindness—is it not justice to others—the desire to help—something that the angels in heaven must feel when they look down and see what a great misery there is in the world?”

“I think you are an angel yourself, Natalie,” said he, quite simply, “and that you have come down and got among a lot of people who don’t treat you too well. However, we must come to the present moment. You spoke of America; now what do you know about that?”

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The abrupt question startled her. She had been so overjoyed to see him—her whole soul was so buoyant and radiant with happiness—that she had quite forgotten or dismissed the vague fears that had been of late besetting her. But she proceeded to tell him, with a little hesitation here and there, and with a considerable smoothing down of phrases, what her father had said to her. She tried to make it appear quite reasonable. And all she prayed for was that, if he were sent to America, if they had to part for many years, or forever, she should be permitted to say good-bye to him.

“We are not parted yet,” said Brand, briefly.

The fact was, he had just got a new key to the situation. So that threat about America could serve a double purpose? He was now more than ever convinced that Ferdinand Lind was merely playing off and on with him until this money question should be settled; and that he had been resolved all the time that his daughter should not marry. He was beginning to understand.

“Natalie,” said he, slowly, “I told you I had something to say to you. You know your father wrote to me in the North, asking me neither to see you nor write to you until some matter between him and me was settled. Well, I respected his wish until I should know what the thing was. Now that I do know, it seems to me that you are as much concerned as any one; and that it is not reasonable, it is not possible, I should refrain from seeing you and consulting you.”

“No one shall prevent your seeing me, when it is your wish,” said the girl, in a low voice.

“This, then, is the point: you know enough about the Society to understand, and there is no particular secret. Your father wishes me to enter the higher grade of officers, under the Council; and the first condition is that one surrenders up every farthing of one’s property.”

“Yes?”

He stared at her. Her “Yes?”—with its affectionate interest and its absolute absence of surprise—was almost the exact equivalent of Lord Evelyn’s “Well?”

“Perhaps you would advise me to consent?” he said, almost in the way of a challenge.

“Ah, no,” she said, with a smile. “It is not for me to advise on such things. What you decide for yourself, that will be right.”

“But you don’t understand, my darling. Supposing I were ambitious of getting higher office, which I am not; supposing I were myself willing to sell my property to swell the funds of the Society—and I don’t think I should be willing in any case—do you think I would part with what ought to belong to my wife—to you, Natalie? Do you think I would

have you marry a beggar—one dependent on the indulgence of people unknown to him?”

And now there was a look of real alarm on the girl's face.

“Ah!” she said, quickly. “Is not that what my father feared? You are thinking of me when you should think of others. Already I—I—interfere with your duty; I tempt you—”

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"My darling, be calm, be reasonable. There is no duty in the matter; your father acknowledges that himself. It is a proposal I am free to accept or reject, as I please; and now I promise you that, as you won't give me any advice, I shall decide without thinking of you at all. Will that satisfy you?"

She remained silent for a second or two, and then she said thoughtfully,

"Perhaps you could decide just as if there were no possibility of my ever being your wife?"

"To please you, I will assume that too."

Then she said, after a bit,

"One word more, dearest; you must grant me this—that I may always be able to think of it when I am alone and far from you, and be able to reassure myself: it is the promise I thought I could do so well without. Now you will give it me?"

"What promise?"

"That whatever happens to you or to me, whatever my father demands of me, and wherever you may have to go, you will never withdraw from what you have undertaken."

He met the earnest, pleading look of those beautiful eyes without flinching. His heart was light enough, so far as such a promise was concerned. Heavier oaths than that lay on him.

"That is simple enough, Natalie," said he. "I promise you distinctly that nothing shall cause me to swerve from my allegiance to the Society; I will give absolute and implicit obedience, and the best of such work as I can do. But they must not ask me to forget my Natalie."

She rose, still holding his hand, and stood by him, so that he could not quite see her face. Then she said, in a very low voice indeed,

"Dearest, may I give you a ring?—you do not wear one at all—"

"But surely, Natalie, it is for me to choose a ring for you?"

"Ah, it is not that I mean," she said, quickly, and with her face flushing. "It is a ring that will remind you of the promise you have given me to-day—when we may not be able to see each other."

CHAPTER XXVII.

KIRSKI.

To this pale student from the Reading-room of the British Museum, as he stands on a bridge crossing one of the smaller canals, surely the scene around him must seem one fitted to gladden the heart; for it is Venice at mid-day, in glowing sunlight: the warm cream-white fronts of the marble palaces and casemented houses, the tall campanili with their golden tips, the vast and glittering domes of the churches, all rising fair and dream-like into the intense dark-blue of a cloudless sky. How the hot sunlight brings out all the beautiful color of the place—the richly laden fruit-stalls in the Riva dei Schiavoni; the russet and saffron sails of the vessels; the canal-boats coming in to the steps with huge open tuns of purple wine to be ladled out with copper buckets; and then all around the shining, twinkling plain of the green-hued sea, catching here and there a reflection from the softly red walls of San Giorgio and the steel-gray gleaming domes of Santa Maria della Salute.

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Then the passers-by: these are not like the dusky ghosts that wander through the pale-blue mists of Bloomsbury. Here comes a buxom water-carrier, in her orange petticoat and sage-green shawl, who has the two copper cans at the end of the long piece of wood poised on her shoulders, pretty nearly filled to the brim. Then a couple of the gayer gondoliers in white and blue, with fancy waist-belts, and rings in their ears. A procession of black-garbed monks wends slowly along; they have come from the silence of the Armenian convent over there at the horizon. Some wandering minstrels shoot their gondola into the mouth of the canal, and strike up a gay waltz, while they watch the shaded balconies above. Here is a Lascar ashore from the big steamer that is to start for Alexandria on the morrow. A company of soldiers, with blue coats, canvas trousers, and white gaiters, half march and half trot along to the quick, crackling music of the buglers. A swarthy-visaged maiden, with the calm brow of a Madonna, appears in the twilight of a balcony, with a packet of maize in her hand, and in a minute or two she is surrounded with a cloud of pigeons. Then this beggar—a child of eight or ten—red-haired and blue-eyed: surely she has stepped out of one of Titian's pictures? She whines and whimpers her prayers to him; but there is something in her look that he has seen elsewhere. It belongs to another century.

From these reveries Mr. Gathorne Edwards was aroused by some one tapping him on the shoulder. It was Calabressa.

"My dear Monsieur Edouarts," said he, in a low voice—for the red-haired little beggar was still standing there expectant—"he has gone over to the shipping-place. We must follow later on. Meanwhile, regard this letter that has just been forwarded to me. Ah, you English do not forget your promises!"

Edwards threw a piece of money to the child, who passed on. Then he took the letter and read it. It was in French.

* * * * *

"Dear Calabressa,—I want you to tell me what you have done with Yakov Kirski. They seem unwilling to say here, and I do not choose to inquire further. But I undertook to look after him, and I understood he was getting on very well, and now you have carried him off. I hope it is with no intention of allowing him to go back to Russia, where he will simply make an attempt at murder, and fall into the hands of the police. Do not let the poor devil go and make a fool of himself. If you want money to send him back to England, show this letter, or forward it to Messrs. —, who will give you what you want.

"Your friend, George Brand.

"P.S.—I have seen your beautiful caged little bird. I can say no more at present, but that she shall not suffer through any neglect of mine."

* * * * *

“What is that about the caged bird?” said Edwards.

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“Ah, the caged bird?” said Calabressa. “The caged bird?—do you see, that is a metaphor. It is nothing; one makes one’s little joke. But I was saying, my dear friend, that you English do not promise, and then forget. No; he says, ‘I will befriend this poor devil of a Kirski;’ and here he comes inquiring after him. Now I must answer the letter; you will accompany me, Monsieur Edouarts? Ten minutes in my little room, and it is done.”

So the two walked away together. This Edwards who now accompanied Calabressa was a man of about thirty, who looked younger; tall, fair, with a slight stoop, a large forehead, and blue eyes that stared near-sightedly through spectacles. The ordinary expression of his face was grave even to melancholy, but his occasional smile was humorous, and when he laughed the laugh was soft and light like that of a child. His knowledge of modern languages was considered to be almost unrivalled, though he had travelled but little.

When, in this little room, Calabressa had at length finished his letter and dusted it over with sand, he was not at all loath to show it to this master of modern speech. Calabressa was proud of his French; and if he would himself have acknowledged that it was perhaps here and there of doubtful idiom and of phonetic spelling, would he not have claimed for it that it was fluent, incisive, and ornate?

“My valued friend, it is not permitted me to answer your questions in precise terms; but he to whom you have had the goodness to extend your bountiful protection is well and safe, and under my own care. No; he goes not back to Russia. His thoughts are different; his madness travels in other directions; it is no longer revenge, it is adoration and gratitude that his heart holds. And you, can you not guess who has worked the miracle? Think of this: you have a poor wretch who is distracted by injuries and suffering; he goes away alone into Europe; he is buffeted about with the winds of hunger and thirst and cold: he cannot speak; he is like a dog—a wild beast that people drive away from their door. And all at once some one addresses him in gentle tones: it is the voice of an angel to him! You plough and harrow the poor wretch’s heart with suffering and contempt and hopelessness, until it is a desert, a wilderness; but some one, by accident, one day drops a seed of kindness into it, and behold! the beautiful flower of love springing up, and all the man’s life going into it! Can you understand—you who ought to understand? Were you not present when the bewildered, starved, hunted creature heard that gentle voice of pity, like an angel speaking from heaven? And if the beautiful girl, who will be the idol of my thoughts through my remaining years, if she does not know that she has rescued a human soul from despair, you will tell her—tell her from me, from Calabressa. What would not Kirski do for her? you might well ask. The patient regards the physician who has cured him with gratitude: this is more than gratitude, it is worship. What she has preserved she owns; he would give his life to her, to you, to any one whom she regards with affection. For myself, I do not say such things; but she may count on me also, while one has yet life.

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"I am yours, and hers, Calabressa."

* * * * *

The letter was handed to Gathorne Edwards with a proud air; and he read it, and handed it back.

"This man Kirski is not so much of a savage as you imagine," he said. "He learns quickly, and forgets nothing. He can repeat all the articles of membership; but it is No. 5 that he is particularly fond of. You have not heard him go over it, Calabressa?"

"I? No. He does not waste my time that way."

"His pronunciation," continued the younger man, with a smile, "is rather like the cracking of dry twigs. 'Article 5. Whatever punishment may be decreed against any Officer, Companion, or Friend of the Society may be vicariously borne by any other Officer, Companion, or Friend who of his own full and free consent acts as substitute; the original offender becoming thereby redeemed, acquitted, and released.' And then he invariably adds: 'Why not make me of some use? To myself my life is nothing.'"

At this moment there was a tapping at the door.

"It is himself," said Edwards.

"Enter!" Calabressa called out.

The man who now came into the room was a very different looking person from the wild, unkempt creature who had confronted Natalie Lind in Curzon Street. The voluminous red beard and mustache had been cropped; he wore the clothes of a decent workman, with a foreign touch here and there; he was submissive and docile in look.

"Well, where have you been, my friend?" Calabressa said to him in Italian.

Kirski glanced at Gathorne Edwards, and began to speak to him in Russian.

"Will you explain for me, little father? I have been to many churches."

"The police will not suspect him if he goes there," said Calabressa, laughing.

"And to the shops in the Piazza San Marco, where the pictures are of the saints."

"Well?"

"Little father, I can find no one of the saints so beautiful as that one in England that the Master Calabressa knows."

Calabressa laughed again.

“Allons, mon grand enfant! Tell him that if it is only a likeness he is hunting for, I can show him one.”

With that he took out from his breast-pocket a small pocket book, opened it, found a certain photograph, and put it on the table, shoving it over toward Kirski. The dim-eyed Russian did not dare to touch it; but he stooped over it, and he put one trembling hand on each side of it, as if he would concentrate the light, and gazed at this portrait of Natalie Lind until he could see nothing at all for the tears that came into his eyes. Then he rose abruptly, and said something rapidly to Edwards.

“He says, ‘Take it away, or you will make me a thief. It is worth more than all the diamonds in the world.’”

Calabressa did not laugh this time. He regarded the man with a look in which there was as much pity as curiosity.

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"The poor devil!" he said. "Tell him I will ask the beautiful saint whom he worships so to send him a portrait of herself with her own hands. I will. She will do as much as that for her friend Calabressa."

This had scarcely been translated to Kirski when, in his sudden gratitude, he caught Calabressa's hand and kissed it.

"Tell him, also," Calabressa said, good-naturedly, "that if he is hungry before dinner-time there is sausage and bread and beer in the cupboard. But he must not stir out till we come back. Allons, mon bon camarade!"

Calabressa lit another cigarette, and the two companions sallied forth. They stepped into a gondola, and presently they were being borne swiftly over the plain of light-green water. By-and-by they plunged into a varied and picturesque mass of shipping, and touched land again in front of a series of stores. The gondola was ordered to await their return.

Calabressa passed without question through the lower floor of this particular building, where the people were busy with barrels of flour, and led the way up-stairs until he stopped at a certain door. He knocked thrice and entered. There was a small, dark man seated at a table, apparently engaged with some bills of lading.

"You are punctual, Brother Calabressa."

"Your time is valuable, Brother Granaglia. Let me present to you my comrade Signor Edouarts, of whom I wrote to you."

The sallow-faced little man with the tired look bowed courteously, begged his guests to be seated, and pushed toward them a box of cigarettes.

"Now, my Calabressa," said he, "to the point. As you guess, I am pressed for time. Seven days hence will find me in Moscow."

"In Moscow!" exclaimed Calabressa. "You dare not!"

Granaglia waved his hand a couple of inches.

"Do not protest. It may be your turn to-morrow. And my good friend Calabressa would find Moscow just about as dangerous for him as for me."

"Monsieur le Secretaire, I have no wish to try. But to the point, as you say. May one ask how it stands with Zaccatelli?"

Granaglia glanced at the Englishman.

“Of course he knows everything,” Calabressa explained instantly. “How otherwise should I have brought him with me?”

“Well, Zaccatelli has received his warning.”

“Who carried it?”

“I.”

“You! You are the devil! You thrust your head into the lion’s den!”

The black-eyed, worn-faced little man seemed pleased. An odd, dry smile appeared about the thin lips.

“It needed no courage at all, friend Calabressa. His Eminence knows who we are, no one better. The courage was his. It is not a pleasant thing when you are told that within a certain given time you will be a dead man; but Zaccatelli did not blanch; no, he was very polite to me. He paid us compliments. We were not like the others, Calabressa. We were good citizens and Christians; even his Holiness might be induced to lend an ear; why should not the Church and we be friends?”

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Calabressa burst out laughing.

“Surely evil days have fallen on the Pope, Brother Granaglia, when one of his own Cardinals proposes that he should at last countenance a secret society. But his Eminence was mad with fear—was it not so? He wanted to win you over with promises, eh? Idle words, and no more. He feeds you on wind, and sends you away, and returns to his mistresses and his wines and his fountains of perfume?”

“Not quite so,” said the other, with the same dry smile, “His Eminence, as I say to you, knows as well as any one in Europe who and what we are, and what is our power. The day after I called on him with my little message, what does he do—of his own free-will, mind you—but send back the daughter of old De Bedros to her home, with a pledge to her father that she shall have a dowry of ten thousand lire when she marries. The father is pleased, the daughter is not. She sits and cries. She talks of herself getting at him with a stiletto.”

He took a cigarette, and accepted a light from Calabressa.

“Further,” he continued, “his Eminence is so kind as to propose to give the Council an annual subsidy from his own purse of thirty thousand lire.”

“Thirty thousand lire!” Calabressa exclaimed.

But at this point even Granaglia began to laugh.

“Yes, yes, my friend,” he said, apparently apostrophizing the absent Cardinal. “You know, then, who we are, and you do not wish to give up all pleasures. No; we are to become the good boy among secret societies; we are to have the blessing of the Pope; we are to fight Prince Bismarck for you. Prince Bismarck has all his knights and his castles on the board; but what are they against an angelic host of bishops and some millions of common pawns? Prince Bismarck wishes to plunge Europe again into war. The church with this tremendous engine within reach, says, No. Do you wish to find eight men—eight men, at the least—out of every company of every regiment in all your *corps d’armee* throw down their rifles at the first onset of battle? You will shoot them for mutiny? My dear fellow, you cannot, the enemy is upon you. With eight men out of each company throwing down their weapons, and determined either to desert or die, how on earth can you fight at all? Well, then, good Bismarck, you had better make your peace with the Church, and rescind those Falk laws. What do you think of that scheme, Calabressa? It was ingenious, was it not, to have come into the head of a man under sentence of death?”

“But the thirty thousand lire, Brother Granaglia. It is a tremendous bribe.”

“The Council does not accept bribes, Brother Calabressa,” said the other, coldly,

“It is decided, then, that the decree remains to be executed?”

“I know nothing to the contrary. But if you wish to know for certain, you must seek the Council. They are at Naples.”

He pulled an ink-bottle before him, and made a motion with his forefinger.

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"You understand?"

"Yes, yes," Calabressa answered. "And I will go on to Naples, Brother Granaglia; for I have with me one who I think will carry out the wishes of the Council effectively, so far as his Eminence the Cardinal is concerned."

"Who is he?" said the other, but with no great interest.

"Yakov Kirski. He is a Russian."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A CLIMAX.

It was a momentous decision that George Brand had to arrive at; and yet he scarcely seemed to be aware of it. The man had changed so much during these past six months.

"Do you know, Evelyn," he was saying to his friend, on the very evening on which his answer was to be given to Ferdinand Lind, "I am beginning to look on that notion of my going to America with anything but dislike. Rather the opposite, indeed. I should like to get rid of a lot of old associations, and start in a new and wider field. With another life to lead, don't you want another sort of world to live it in?"

Lord Evelyn regarded him. No one had observed with a closer interest the gradual change that had come over this old friend of his. And he was proud of it, too; for had it not been partly of his doing?

"One does not breathe free air here," Brand continued, rather absently—as if his mental vision was fixed on the greater spaces beyond the seas. "With a new sort of life beginning, wouldn't it be better to start it under new conditions—feeling yourself unhampered—with nothing around to disturb even the foolishness of your dreams and hopes? Then you could work away at your best, leaving the result to time."

"I know perfectly what all that means," Lord Evelyn said. "You are anxious to get away from Lind. You believe in your work, but you don't like to be associated with him."

"Perhaps I know a little more than you, Evelyn," said Brand, gently, "of Lind's relation to the society. He does not represent it to me at all. He is only one of its servants, like ourselves. But don't let us talk about him."

"You *must* talk about him," Lord Evelyn said, as he pulled out his watch. "It is now seven. At eight you go to the initiation of Molyneux, and you have promised to give Lind his answer to-night. Well?"

Brand was playing idly with a pocket-pencil. After a minute or two, he said,

“I promised Natalie to consider this thing without any reference to her whatever—that I would decide just as if there was no possibility of her becoming my wife. I promised that; but it is hard to do, Evelyn. I have tried to imagine my never having seen her, and that I had been led into this affair solely through you. Then I do think that if you had come to me and said that my giving up every penny I possess would forward a good work—would do indirect benefit to a large number of people, and so forth—I do think I could have said, ‘All right, Evelyn; take it.’ I never cared much for money; I fancy I could get on pretty well on a sovereign a week. I say that if you had come to me with this request—”

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"Precisely," Lord Evelyn said, quickly. "You would have said yes, if I had come to you. But because it is Lind, whom you distrust, you fall away from the height of self-sacrifice, and regard the proposal from the point of view of the Waldegrave Club. Mind you, I am not counselling you one way or the other. I am only pointing out to you that it is your dislike of Lind that prevents your doing what you otherwise would have done."

"Very well," said the other, boldly. "Have I not reason to distrust him? How can I explain his conduct and his implied threats except on the supposition that he has been merely playing with me, as far as his daughter is concerned; and that as soon as I had handed over this property I should find it out? Oh, it is a very pretty scheme altogether! This heap of English money transferred to the treasury; Lind at length achieving his ambition of being put on the Council; Natalie carried off to Italy; and myself granted the honor of stepping into Lind's shoes in Lisle Street. On the other hand: 'Refuse, and we pack you off to America.' Now, you know, Evelyn, one does not like to be threatened into anything!"

"Then you have decided to say, No?"

He did not answer for a second or two; when he did, his manner was quite changed.

"I rather think I know what both you and Natalie would have me do, although you won't say so explicitly. And if you and she had come to me with this proposal, do you think there would have been any difficulty? I should have been satisfied if she had put her hand in mine, and said, 'Thank you.' Then I should have reminded her that she was sacrificing something too."

He relapsed into silence again; Lord Evelyn was vaguely conscious that the minutes were passing by, and that his friend seemed as far off as ever from any decision.

"You remember the old-fashioned rose-garden, Evelyn?"

"At the beeches? Yes."

"Don't you think Natalie would like the view from that side of the house? And if she chose that side, I was thinking of having a conservatory built all the length of the rooms, with steps opening out into the rose-garden. She could go out there for a stroll of a morning."

So these had been his dreams.

"If I go to America," he said presently, "I should expect you to look after the old place a little bit. You might take your sisters there occasionally, and turn them loose; it wants a woman's hand here and there. Mrs. Alleyne would put you all right; and of course I should send Waters down, and give up those rooms in Buckingham Street."



"But I cannot imagine your going to America, somehow," Lord Evelyn said. "Surely there is plenty for you to do here."

"I will say this of Lind, that he is not an idle talker. What he says he means. Besides, Molyneux can take up my work in the North; he is the very man."

Again silence. It was now half-past seven.

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"I wish, though, it had been something more exciting," Brand said. "I should not have minded having a turn at the Syrian business; I am not much afraid of risking my neck. There is not much danger in Philadelphia."

"But look here, Brand," said Lord Evelyn, regarding him attentively. "You are speaking with great equanimity about your going to America; possibly you might like the change well enough; but do I understand you that you are prepared to go alone?"

Brand looked up; he understood what was meant.

"If I am ordered—yes."

He held out his right hand; on the third finger there was a massive gold ring—a plain hoop, without motto or design whatever.

"There," said he, "is the first ring I ever wore. It was given to me this afternoon, to remind me of a promise; and that promise is to me more binding than a hundred oaths."

He rose with a sigh.

"Ah, well, Evelyn, whatever happens we will not complain. There have been compensations."

"But you have not told me what answer you mean to give to Lind."

"Suppose I wait until I see him before deciding?"

"Then you will say, No. You have allowed your distrust of him to become a sort of mania, and the moment you see him the mere sight of him will drive you into antagonism."

"I tell you what I wish I could do, Evelyn," said the other, laughing: "I wish I could turn over everything I have got to you, and escape scot-free to America and start my own life free and unencumbered."

"And alone?"

His face grew grave again.

"There is nothing possible else!" said he.

It was nearly eight o'clock when he left. As he walked along Piccadilly, a clear and golden twilight was shining over the trees in the Green Park. All around him was the roar of the London streets; but it was not that that he heard. Was it not rather the sound

of a soft, low voice, and the silvery notes of the zither? His memory acted as a sea-shell, and brought him an echo from other days and other climes.

“Behold the beautiful night—the wind sleeps drowsily—the silent shores slumber in the dark:

“Sul placido elemento
Vien meco a navigar!

“The soft wind moves—as it stirs among the leaves—it moves and dies—among the murmur of the water:

“Lascia l’amico tetto,
Vien meco a navigar!

“Now on the spacious mantle—of the already darkening heavens—see, oh the shining wonder—how the white stars tremble:

“Sul l’onde addormentate
Vien meco a navigar!”

This was the voice that he heard amidst the roar of the London streets. Would he hear it far away on the wide Atlantic, with the shores of England hidden behind the mists of rain? To-night was to decide what the future of his life was to be.

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If Natalie had appeared at this moment, and said to him, "Dearest, let it be as my father wishes;" or if Lord Evelyn had frankly declared to him that it was his duty to surrender his possessions to this Society to which he had devoted his life, there would have been not a moment's hesitation. But now he was going to see a man whom he suspected and was inclined to hate, and his nature began to harden. It would be a question between one man of the world and another. Sentiment would be put aside. He would no longer be played with. A man should be master of his own affairs.

This was what he said to himself. But he had quite forgotten his determination to consider this matter as if no Natalie existed; and his resolve to exclude sentiment altogether did not interfere with the fact that always, if unconsciously, there remained in his mind a certain picture he had been dreaming a good deal about of late. It was a picture of an old-fashioned rose-garden in the light of an English summer morning, with a young wife walking there, herself taller and fairer than any flower. Would she sing, in her gladness, the songs of other lands, to charm the sweet English air? There was that one about *O dolce Napoli!—o suol beato!*—

When he got to Lisle Street, every one had arrived except Molyneux himself. Mr. Lind was gravely polite to him. Of course no mention could then be made about private affairs; the talk going on was all about the East, and how certain populations were faring.

Presently the pink-faced farmer-agitator was ushered in, looking a little bit alarmed. But this frightened look speedily disappeared, and gave place to one of mild astonishment, as he appeared to recognize the faces of one or two of those in the room. The business of the evening, so far as the brief formalities were concerned, was speedily got over, and five of the members of the small assembly immediately left.

"Now, Mr. Molyneux," said Ferdinand Lind, pleasantly, "Mr. Brand and I have some small private matters to talk over: will you excuse us if we leave you for a few minutes? Here are some articles of our association which you may look over in the mean time. May I trouble you to follow me, Mr. Brand?"

Brand followed him into an inner and smaller room, and sat down.

"You said you would have your mind made up to-day with regard to the proposal I put before you," Mr. Lind observed, with a matter-of-fact air, as he drew in his chair to the small table.

Brand simply nodded, and said "Yes." He was measuring his man. He thought his manner was a good deal too suave.

"But allow me to say, my dear Mr. Brand, that, as far I am concerned, there is no hurry. Have you given yourself time? It is a matter of moment; one should consider."

“I have considered.”

His tone was firm: one would have thought he had never had any hesitation at all. But his decision had not been definitely arrived at until, some quarter of an hour before, he had met Ferdinand Lind face to face.

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"I may say at once that I prefer to remain in my present grade."

He was watching Lind as he spoke. There was a slight, scarcely perceptible, movement of the eyebrows; that was all. The quiet courtesy of his manner remained undisturbed.

"That is your decision, then?" he said, just as if some trifling matter had been arranged.

"Perhaps I need not bother you with my reasons," Brand continued, speaking slowly and with precision, "but there are several."

"I have no doubt you have given the subject serious consideration," said Mr. Lind, without expressing any further interest or curiosity.

Now this was not at all what George Brand wanted. He wanted to have his suspicions allayed or confirmed. He wanted to let this man know how he read the situation.

"One reason I may as well name to you, Mr. Lind," said he, being forced to speak more plainly. "If I were to marry, I should like to give my wife a proper home. I should not like her to marry a pauper—one dependent on the complaisance of other people. And really it has seemed to me strange that you, with your daughter's future, your daughter's interests to think of, should have made this proposal—"

Lind interrupted him with a slight deprecatory motion of the hand.

"Pardon me," said he. "Let us confine ourselves to business, if you please."

"I presume it is a man's business to provide for the future of his wife," said Brand, somewhat hotly, his pride beginning to kick against this patronizing graciousness of manner.

"I must beg of you, my dear sir," said Mr. Lind, with the same calm courtesy, "to keep private interests and projects entirely outside of this matter, which relates to the Society alone, and your duty, and the wishes of those with whom you are associated. You have decided?—very well. I am sorry; but you are within your right."

"How can you talk like that?" said Brand, bluntly. "Sorry that your daughter is not to marry a beggar?"

"I must decline to have Natalie introduced into this subject in any way whatever," said Mr. Lind.

"Let us drop the subject, then," said Brand, in a friendly way, for he was determined to have some further enlightenment. "Now about Natalie. May I ask you plainly if you have any objection to a marriage between her and myself?"

The answer was prompt and emphatic.

“I have every objection. I have said before that it would be inexpedient in many ways. It is not to be thought of.”

Brand was not surprised by this refusal; he had expected it; he had put the question as a matter of form.

“Now one other question, Mr. Lind, and I shall be satisfied,” said he, watching the face of the man opposite him with a keen scrutiny. “Was it ever your intention, at any time, to give your consent to our marriage, in any circumstances whatever?”

Ferdinand Lind was an admirable actor.

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"Is it worth while discussing imaginary things—possibilities only?" he said, carelessly.

"Because, you see," continued Brand, who was not to be driven from his point, "any plain and ordinary person, looking from the outside at the whole affair, might imagine that you had been merely temporizing with me, neither giving nor refusing your consent, until I had handed over this money; and that, as you had never intended to let your daughter marry, that was the reason why you did not care whether I retained a penny of my own property or not."

Lind did not flinch for an instant; nor was there the slightest trace of surprise, or annoyance, or resentment in his look. He rose and pushed back his chair.

"Suppose we let outsiders think what they please, Mr. Brand," said he, with absolute composure. "We have more serious matters to attend to."

Brand rose also. He guessed what was coming, and he had nerved himself to face it. The whole course of this man's action was now as clear to him as noonday.

"I have been considering further the suggestion I mentioned to you the other day, that you should go over to some of the big American cities," said Mr. Lind, almost with an indifferent air as he turned over some papers. "We are strong there; you will find plenty of friends; but what is wanted is cohesion, arrangement, co-operation. Now you say yourself this Mr. Molyneux would be an admirable successor to you in the North?"

"None better," said Brand. This sentence of banishment had been foreseen; he knew how to encounter it when it came.

"I think, on the whole, it would be advisable then. When could you go?"

"I could start to-night," he said. But then, despite himself, a blush of embarrassment mounted to his forehead, and he added quickly, "No; not to-night. The day after to-morrow."

"There is no need for any such great hurry," said Mr. Lind, with his complaisant smile. "You will want much direction, many letters. Come, shall we join your friend in the other room?"

The two men, apparently on the best of terms, went back to Molyneux, and the talk became general. George Brand, as he sat there, kept his right hand shut tight, that so he could press the ring that Natalie had given him; and when he thought of America, it was almost with a sense of relief. She would approve; he would not betray his promise to her. But if only that one moment were over in which he should have to bid her farewell!

CHAPTER XXIX.

A GOOD-NIGHT MESSAGE.

Brand had nerved himself for that interview; he had determined to betray neither surprise nor concern; he was prepared for the worst. When it was intimated to him that hence-forth his life was to be lived out beyond the seas, he had appeared to take it as a matter of course. Face to face with his enemy, he would utter no protest. Then, had he not solemnly promised to Natalie that nothing in the world should tempt him from his allegiance? Why should he shrink from going to America, or prefer London to Philadelphia? He had entered into a service that took no heed of such things.

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But when he had parted from Lind and Molyneux, and got out into the sombre glare of the night-world of London, and when there was no further need for that forced composure, he began more clearly to recognize his position, and his heart grew heavy. This, then, was the end of those visions of loving companionship and constant and sustaining sympathy with which he had dared to fill the future. He had thought little of anything that might be demanded from him so long as he could anticipate Natalie's approval, and be rewarded with a single glance of gratitude from the proud, dark, beautiful eyes. What mattered it to him what became of himself, what circumstances surrounded them, so long as he and she were together? But now a more terrible sacrifice than any he had dreamed of had to be made. The lady of love whom the Pilgrims had sworn to serve was proving herself inexorable indeed:

“—Is she a queen, having great gifts to give?
—Yea, these; that whoso hath seen her shall not live
Except to serve her sorrowing, with strange pain,
Travail and bloodshedding and bitterer tears;
And when she bids die he shall surely die.
And he shall leave all things under the sky,
And go forth naked under sun and rain,
And work and wait and watch out all his years.”

When Lord Evelyn had asked him whether he was prepared to go to America *alone*, he had clasped the ring that Natalie had given him, and answered “Yes.” But that was as a matter of theory. It was what he might do, in certain possible circumstances. Now that he had to face the reality, and bethink him of the necessity of taking Natalie's hand for the last time, his heart sank within him.

He walked on blindly through the busy streets, seeing nothing around him. His memory was going over the most trivial incidents connected with Natalie, as if every look of hers, every word she had uttered, was now become something inexpressibly precious. Were there not many things he could carry away with him to the land beyond the seas? No distance or time could rob him of the remembrance of that night at the opera—the scent of white rose—her look as she gave him the forget-me-nots. Then the beautiful shining day as they drew near to Dover, and her pride about England, and the loosened curls of hair that blew about her neck. On the very first evening on which he had seen her—she sitting at the table and bending over the zither—her profile touched by the rose-tinted light from the shade of the candle—the low, rich voice, only half heard, singing the old, familiar, tender *Lorelei*. He felt the very touch of her fingers on his arm when she turned to him with reproving eyes: “*Is that the way you answer an appeal for help?*” That poor devil of a Kirski—what had become of him? He would find out from Reitzei; and, before leaving England, would take care that something should be done for the luckless outcast. He should have cause to remember all his life-long that Natalie Lind had interfered in his behalf.

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Without knowing well how he got there, Brand found himself in Curzon Street. He walked on, perhaps with some vague notion that he might meet Natalie herself, until he arrived at the house. It was quite dark; there was no light in any of the windows; Anneli had not even lit the gas-jet in the narrow hall. He turned away from the door that he felt was now barred against him forever, and walked back to Clarges Street.

Lord Evelyn was out; the man did not know when he would be home again. So Brand turned away from that door also, and resumed his aimless wanderings, busy with those pictures of the past. At length he got down to Buckingham Street, and almost mechanically made his way toward his own rooms.

He had reached his door, however, when he heard some one speaking within.

"I might have known," he said to himself. "That is so like Evelyn."

It was indeed Lord Evelyn, who was chatting familiarly with old Waters. But the moment Brand entered he ceased, and a look of anxiety, and even alarm, appeared instantly on the fine, sensitive, expressive face.

"What is the matter, Brand? Are you ill?"

"No," said the other, dropping into a chair; "only tired—and worried, perhaps. Waters, get me a biscuit and a glass of sherry. Now, when I think of it, I ought to feel tired—I have eaten nothing since eight o'clock this morning."

Lord Evelyn jumped to his feet.

"Come off at once, Brand. We will go up to the Strand and get you something to eat. Gracious goodness, it is nearly ten o'clock!"

"No, no, never mind. I have something to talk to you about, Evelyn."

"But why on earth had Waters no dinner waiting for you?"

"I did not tell him—I forgot. Never mind; I will have some supper by-and-by. I called on you, Evelyn, about half an hour ago; I might have known you would be here."

Lord Evelyn paused for a second or two, while Waters came in and went out again. Then he said,

"I can tell by your face, Brand, that something has happened."

"Nothing that I had not foreseen."

"Did you consent or refuse?"

"I refused."

"Well?"

"Then, as I knew he would, he suggested that I might as well get ready to start for America as soon as possible."

Brand was speaking in a light and scornful way; but his face was careworn, and his eyes kept turning to the windows and the dark night outside, as if they were looking at something far away.

"About Natalie?" Lord Evelyn asked.

"Oh, he was frank enough. He dropped all those roundabout phrases about the great honor, and so forth. He was quite plain. 'Not to be thought of.'"

Lord Evelyn remained silent for some time.

"I am very sorry, Brand," he said at length; and then he continued with some hesitation—"Do you know—I have been thinking that—that though it's a very extreme thing for a man to give up his fortune—a very extreme thing—I can quite understand how the proposal looked to you very monstrous at first—still, if you put that in the balance as against a man's giving up his native country and the woman whom he is in love with—don't you see—the happiness of people of so much more importance than a sum of money, however large—"

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"My dear fellow," said Brand, interrupting him, "there is no such alternative—there never was any such alternative. Do you not think I would rather give up twenty fortunes than have to go and bid good-bye to Natalie? It is not a question of money. I suspected before—I know now—that Lind never meant to let his daughter marry. He would not definitely say no to me while he thought I could be persuaded about this money business; as soon as I refused that, he was frank and explicit enough. I see the whole thing clearly enough now. Well, he has not altogether succeeded."

His eye happened to light on the ring on his finger, and the frown on his face lifted somewhat.

"If I could only forget Lind; if I could forget why it was that I had to go to America, I should think far less of the pain of separation. If I could go to Natalie, and say, 'Look at what we must do, for the sake of something greater than our own wishes and dreams,' then I think I could bid her good-bye without much faltering; but when you know that it is unnecessary—that you are being made the victim of a piece of personal revenge—how can you look forward with any great enthusiasm to the new life that lies before you? That is what troubles me, Evelyn."

"I cannot argue the matter with you," his friend said, looking down, and evidently much troubled himself. "I cannot help remembering that it was I let you in for all this—"

"Don't say that, Evelyn," Brand broke in, quickly. "Do you think I would have it otherwise? Once in America, I shall no doubt forget how I came to go there. I shall have something to do."

"I—I was going to say that—that perhaps you are not quite fair to Lind. You impute motives that may not exist."

Lord Evelyn flushed a little; it was almost as if he were excusing or defending one he had no particular wish to defend; but all the same, with some hesitation, he continued,

"Consider Lind's position. Mind, your reading of his conduct is only pure assumption. It is quite possible that he would be really and extremely surprised if he knew that you fancied he had been allowing personal feelings to sway his decision. But suppose this—suppose he is honestly convinced that you would be of great service in America. He has seen what you can do in the way of patient persuading of people. I know he has plenty around him who can do the risky business—men who have been adventurous all their lives—who would like nothing better than to be commissioned to set up a secret printing-press next door to the Commissary of Police in St. Petersburg. I say he has plenty of people like that; but very few who have persistence and patience enough to do what you have been doing in the north of England. He told me so himself. Very well. Suppose he thinks that what you have been doing this man Molyneux can carry on?"

Suppose, in short, that, if he had no daughter at all, he would be anxious to send you to the States?"

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Brand nodded. There was no harm in letting his friend have his theory.

“Very well. Now suppose that, having this daughter, he would rather not have her marry. He says she is of great service to him; and his wish to have her with him always would probably exaggerate that service, unconsciously to himself, if it were proposed to take her away. That is only natural.”

Brand again assented.

“Very well. He discovers that you and she are attached to each other. Probably he does not consider it a very serious affair, so far; but he knows that if you remain in London it would probably become so. Now, Natalie is a girl of firm character; she is very gentle, but she is not a fool. If you remained in London she would probably marry you, whether her father liked it or not, if she thought it was right. He knows that; he knows that the girl is capable of acting on her own judgment. Now put the two things together. Here is this opportune service on which you can be sent. That, according to his view, will be a good thing of itself; it will also effectually prevent a marriage which he thinks would be inexpedient. Don’t you see that there may be no personal revenge or malice in the whole affair? He may consider he is acting quite rightly, with regard to the best interests of everybody concerned.”

“I am sick of him, Evelyn—of hearing of him—of thinking of him,” Brand said, impatiently. “Come, let us talk of something else. I wish the whole business of starting for America were over, and I had only the future to think about.”

“That is not likely,” said Lord Evelyn, gently. “You cannot cut yourself away from everything like that. There will be *some* memories.”

Waters here appeared with a tray, and speedily placed on the table a lobster, some oysters, and a bottle of Chablis.

“There you are, Evelyn; have some supper.”

“Not unless you have some.”

“By-and-by—”

“No, now.”

So the two friends drew in their chairs.

“I have been thinking,” said Lord Evelyn—with a slight flush, for he was telling a lie—“I have been thinking for some time back I should like to go to America for a year or two. There are some political phases I should like to study.”

Brand looked at him.

“You never thought of it before to-night. But it is like you to think of it now.”

“Oh, I assure you,” said the other, hastily, “there are points of great interest in the political life of America that one could only properly study on the spot—hearing the various opinions, don’t you know—and seeing how the things practically work. I should have gone long before now, but that I dreaded the passage across. When do you go?”

“It is not settled yet.”

“What line shall you go by?”

“I don’t know.”

Lord Evelyn paused for a moment; then he said,

“I’ll go with you, Brand.”

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Well, he had not the heart even to protest; for he thoroughly understood the generous friendship that had prompted such an offer. He might remonstrate afterward; now he would not. On the contrary, he began to speak of his experience of the various lines; of the delight of the voyage to any one not abnormally sensitive to sea-sickness; of the humors of the bagmen; of the occupations and amusements on board; of dolphins, fog-horns, icebergs, rope-quoits, grass-widows, and the chances of poker. It was all a holiday excursion, then? The two friends lit their cigars and went back to their arm-chairs. The tired and haggard look on George Brand's face had for the moment been banished.

But by-and-by he said, rather absently,

"I suppose, hereafter, Natalie and you will have many a talk over what has happened. And you will go there just as usual, and spend the evening, and hear her read, or listen to her singing with the zither. It seems strange. Perhaps she will be able to forget altogether—to cut this unhappy episode out of her life, as it were." Then he added, as if speaking to himself, "No, she is not likely to forget."

Lord Evelyn looked up.

"In the mean time, does she know about your going?"

"I presume not—not yet. But I must see her and tell her unless, indeed, Lind should try to prevent that too. He might lay injunctions on her that she was not to see me again."

"That is true," his friend said. "He might command. But the question is whether she would obey. I have known Natalie Lind longer than you have. She is capable of thinking and acting for herself."

Nothing further was said on this point; they proceeded to talk of other matters. It was perhaps a quarter of an hour afterward—close on eleven o'clock—that Waters knocked at the door and then came into the room.

"A letter for you, sir."

A quick glance at the envelope startled him.

"How did you get it?" he said instantly.

"A girl brought it, sir, in a cab. She is gone again. There was no answer, she said."

Waters withdrew. Brand hastily opened the letter, and read the following lines, written in pencil, apparently with a trembling hand:

“Dearest,—I spent this evening with Madame Potecki. My father came for me, and on the way home has told me something of what has occurred. It was for the purpose of telling me that you and I must not meet again—never, never. My own, I cannot allow you to pass a single night, or a single hour, thinking such a thing possible. Have I not promised to you? When it is your wish to see me, come to me: I am yours. Good-night, and Heaven guard you!

“NATALIE.”

George Brand turned to his friend.

“This,” said he; but his lip trembled, and he stopped for a second. Then he continued: “This is a message from her, Evelyn. And I know what poor old Calabressa would say of it, if he were here. He would say: ‘This is what might have been expected from the daughter of Natalie Berezolyi!’”

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"She knows, then?"

"Yes," said he, still looking at the hastily written lines in pencil, "and it is as you imagined. Her father has told her we must not see each other again, and she has refused to be bound by any such injunction. I rather fancy she thinks he must have conveyed the same intimation to me; at all events, she has written at once to assure me that she will not break her promise to me. It was kindly meant; was it not? I wish Anneli had waited for a second."

He folded up the letter and put it in his pocket-book: it was one more treasure he should carry with him to America. But when, later on, Evelyn had left, he took it out again, and re-read again and again the irregular, hurried, pencilled lines, and thought of the proud, quick, generous spirit that had prompted them. And was she still awake and thinking? And could her heart hear, through the silence of the night, the message of love and gratitude that he sent her? "*Good-night, and Heaven guard you!*" It had been a troubled and harassing day for him; but this tender good-night message came in at the close of it like a strain of sweet music that he would carry with him into the land of dreams.

CHAPTER XXX.

SOME TREASURES.

The next morning Natalie was sitting alone in the little dining-room, dressed ready to go out. Perhaps she had been crying a little by herself; but at all events, when she heard the sound of some one being admitted at the front-door and coming into the passage, she rose, with a flush of pleasure and relief appearing on her pale and saddened face. It was Madame Potecki.

"Ah, it is so good of you to come early," said Natalie to her friend, with a kind of forced cheerfulness. "Shall we start at once? I have been thinking and thinking myself into a state of misery; and what is the use of that?"

"Let me look at you," said the prompt little music mistress, taking both her hands, and regarding her with her clear, shrewd blue eyes. "No; you are not looking well. The walk will do you good, my dear. Come away, then."

But Natalie paused in the passage, with some appearance of embarrassment. Anneli was standing by the door.

"Remember this, Anneli; if any one calls and wishes to see me—and particularly wishes to see me—you will not say, 'My mistress is gone out;' you will say, 'My mistress is gone to the South Kensington Museum with Madame Potecki.' Do you understand that, Anneli?"

“Yes, Fraulein; certainly.”

Then they left, going by way of the Park. And the morning was fresh and bright; the energetic little Polish lady was more talkative and cheerful than ever; the girl with her had only to listen, with as much appearance of interest as was possible, considering that her thoughts were so apt to wonder away elsewhere.

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"My dear, what a lovely morning for us to go and look at my treasures! The other day I was saying to myself, 'There is my adopted daughter Natalie, and I have not a farthing to leave her. What is the use of adopting a child if you have nothing to leave her? Then I said to myself, 'Never mind; I will teach her my theory of living; that will make her richer than a hundred legacies will do.' Dear, dear! that was all the legacy my poor husband left to me."

She passed her hand over her eyes.

"Don't you ever marry a man who has anything to do with politics, my child. Many a time my poor Potecki used to say to me, 'My angel, cultivate contentment; you may have to live on it some day.'"

"And you have taken his advice, madame; you are very content."

"Why? Because I have my theory. They think that I am poor. It is poor Madame Potecki, who earns her solitary supper by 'One, two, three, four; one, two, three, four;' who has not a treasure in the world—except a young Hungarian lady, who is almost a daughter to her. Well, well; but you know my way of thinking, my dear, you laugh at it; I know you do. You say, 'That mad little Madame Potecki.' But some day I will convince you."

"I am willing to be taught now, madame—seriously. Is it not wise to be content?"

"I am more than content, my dear; I am proud, I am vain. When I think of all the treasures that belong to the public, and to me as one of the public—the Turner landscapes in the National Gallery; the books and statues in the British Museum; the bronzes and china and jewellery at South Kensington—do you not think, my dear, that I am thankful I have no paltry little collection in my own house that I should be ashamed of? Then look at the care that is taken of them. I have no risk. I am not disheartened for a day because a servant has broken my best piece of Nankin blue. I have no trouble and no thought; it is only when I have a little holiday that I say to myself, 'Well, shall I go and see my Rembrandts? Or shall I look over my cases of Etruscan rings? Or shall I go and feast my eyes on the *bleu de roi* of a piece of jewelled Sevres?' Oh, my love!"

She clasped her hands in ecstasy. Her volubility had outrun itself and got choked.

"I will show you three vases," said she, presently, in almost a solemn way—"I will show you three vases, in white and brown crackle, and put all the color in the whole of my collection to shame. My dear, I have never seen in the world anything so lovely—the soft cream-white ground, the rich brown decoration—the beautiful, bold, graceful shape; and they only cost sixty pounds!—sixty pounds for three, and they are worth a kingdom! Why—But really, my dear Natalie, you walk too fast. I feel as if I were being marched off to prison!"

“Oh, I beg your pardon!” said the girl, laughing. “I am always forgetting; and papa scolds me often enough for it.”

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"Have you heard what I told you about those priceless vases in the South Kensington?"

"I am most anxious to see them, I assure you."

"My blue-and-white," Madame Potecki continued, seriously, "I am afraid is not always of the best. There are plenty of good pieces, it is true; but they are not the finest feature of the collection. Oh! the Benares brocades—I had forgotten them. Ah, my dear, these will make you open your eyes!"

"But don't you get bewildered, madame, with having to think of so many possessions?" said Natalie, respectfully.

"No," said the other, in a matter-of-fact way; "I take them one by one. I pay a morning call here, a morning call there, when I have no appointments, just to see that everything is going on well."

Presently she said,

"Ah, well, my dear, we are poor weak creatures. Here and there, in my wanderings I have met things that I almost coveted; but see what an impossible, monstrous collection they would make! Let me think, now. The Raphael at Dresden; two Titian portraits in the Louvre; the Venus of Milo—not the Medici one at all; I would not take it; I swear I would not accept it, that trivial little creature with the yellow skin!"

"My dear friend, the heavens will fall on you!" her companion exclaimed.

"Wait a moment," said the little music-mistress, reflectively. "I have not completed my collection. There is a Holy Family of Botticelli's—I forget where I saw it. And the bust of the Empress Messalina in the Uffizi: did you ever notice it, Natalie?"

"No."

"Do not forget it when you are in Florence again. You won't believe any of the stories about her when you see the beautiful refined face; only don't forget to remark how flat the top of her head is. Well, where are we, my dear? The bronze head of the goddess in the Castellani collection: I would have that; and the fighting Temeraire. Will these do? But then, my dear, even if one had all these things, see what a monstrous collection they would make. What should I do with them in my lodgings, even if I had room? No; I must be content with what I have."

By this time they had got down into South Kensington and were drawing near one of Madame Potecki's great treasure houses.

“Then, you see, my dear Natalie,” she continued, “my ownership of these beautiful things we are going to see is not selfish. It can be multiplied indefinitely. You may have it too; any one may have it, and all without the least anxiety!”

“That is very pleasant also,” said the girl, who was paying less heed now. The forced cheerfulness that had marked her manner at starting had in great measure left her. Her look was absent; she blindly followed her guide through the little wicket, and into the hushed large hall.

The silence was grateful to her; there was scarcely any one in the place. While Madame Potecki busied herself with some catalogue or other, the girl turned aside into a recess, to look at a cast of the effigy on the tomb of Queen Eleanor of Castile. A tombstone stills the air around it. Even this gilt plaster figure was impressive; it had the repose of the dead.

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But she had not been standing there for a couple of seconds when she heard a well-known voice behind her.

“Natalie!”

She knew. There was neither surprise nor shamefacedness in her look when she turned and saw George Brand before her. Her eyes were as fearless as ever when they met his; and they were glad, too, with a sudden joy; and she said, quickly,

“Ah, I thought you would come. I told Anneli.”

“It was kind of you—and brave—to let me come to see you.”

“Kind?” she said. “How could I do otherwise?”

“But you are looking tired, Natalie.”

“I did not sleep much last night. I was thinking.”

The tears started to her eyes; she impatiently brushed them aside.

“I know what you were thinking. That is why I came so early to see you. You were blaming yourself for what has happened. That is not right. You are not to blame at all. Do you think I gave you that promise for nothing?”

“You were always like that,” she said in a low voice. “Very generous and unselfish. Yes, I—I—was miserable; I thought if you had never known me—”

“If I had never known you! You think that would be a desirable thing for me!—”

But at this moment the hurried, anxious, half-whispered conversation had to cease, for Madame Potecki came up. Nor was she surprised to find Mr. Brand there. On the contrary, she said that her time was limited, and that she could not expect other people to care for old porcelain as much as she did; and if Mr. Brand would take her dear daughter Natalie to see some pictures in the rooms up-stairs, she would come and find her out by-and-by.

“Not at all, dear madame,” said Natalie, with some slight flush. “No. We will go with you to see the three wonderful vases.”

So they went, and saw the three crackle vases, and many another piece of porcelain and enamel and bronze; but always the clever little Polish woman took care that she should be at some other case, so that she could not overhear what these two had to say to each other. And they had plenty to say.

“Why, Natalie, where is your courage? What is the going to America? It cannot be for ever and ever.”

“But even then,” she said, in a low, hesitating voice. “If you were never to see me again, you would blame me for it all. You would regret.”

“How can I regret that my life was made beautiful to me, if only for a time? It was worth nothing to me before. And you are forgetting all about the ring, and my promise to you.”

This light way of talking did not at all deceive her. What had been torturing her all the night long was the fancy, the suspicion, that her father was sending her lover to America, not solely with a view to the work he should have to undertake there, but to insure a permanent separation between herself and him. That was the cruel bit of it. And she more than ever admired the manliness of this man, because he would make no complaint to her. He had uttered no word of protest, for fear of wounding her. He did not mention her father to her at all; but merely treated this project of going to America as if it were a part of his duty that had to be cheerfully accepted.

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"After I have once said good-bye to you Natalie" said he, "it will not be so bad for me. I shall have my work."

"When do you go?" she asked, with rather a white face.

"I don't know yet. It may be a matter of days. You will let me see you again, my darling—soon?"

"I shall be here every morning, if you wish it" she answered.

"To-morrow, then?"

"To-morrow, at eleven. Anneli will come with me. I should have waited in on the hope of seeing you this morning; but it was an old engagement with Madame Potecki. Ah, how good she is! Do you see how she pretends to be interested in those things?"

"I will send her a present of some old china before I leave England," said Brand.

"No, no," said Natalie, with a faint smile appearing on the sad face. "It would destroy her theory. She does not care for anything at home so long as she possesses these public treasures. She is very content. Indeed, she earns enough to be charitable. She has many poor dependents."

By-and-by Madame Potecki, with great evident reluctance, confessed that she had to return, as one of her pupils would be at her house by half-past twelve. But would not Mr. Brand take her dear adopted child to see some of the pictures? It was a pity that she should be dragged away, and so forth.

But Natalie promptly put an end to these suggestions by saying that she would prefer to return with Madame Potecki; and, it being now past twelve, as soon as they got outside she engaged a cab. George Brand saw them off, and then returned into the building. He wished to look again at the objects she had looked at, to recollect every word she had uttered; to recall the very tones in which she had spoken. And this place was so hushed and quiet.

Meanwhile, as the occupants of the cab were journeying northward, Natalie took occasion to say to her companion, with something of a heightened color,

"You must not imagine, dear madame, that I expected to see Mr. Brand at the Museum when I promised to go with you."

"But what if you had expected, my child?" said the good-natured music-mistress. "What harm is there?"

“But this morning I did expect him to come, and that is why I left the message with Anneli,” continued the girl. “Because, do you know, madame, he is going to America; and when he goes I may not see him for many years.”

“My child!” the demonstrative little woman exclaimed, catching hold of the girl’s hand.

But Natalie was not inclined to be sympathetic at this moment.

“Now I wish you, dear Madame Potecki,” she continued in a firm voice, “to do me a favor. I would rather not speak to my father about Mr. Brand. I wish you to tell him for me that so long as Mr. Brand remains in England I shall continue to see him; and that as I do not choose he should come to my father’s house, I shall see him as I saw him this morning.”

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"My love, my love, what a frightful duty! Is it necessary?"

"It is necessary that my father should know, certainly."

"But what responsibility!"

"You have no responsibility whatever. Anneli will go with me. All that I ask of you, dear Madame Potecki, is to take the message to my father. You will; will you not?"

"More than that I will do for you," said the little woman, boldly. "I see there is unhappiness; you are suffering, my child. Well, I will plunge into it; I will see your father: this cannot be allowed. It is a dangerous thing to interfere—who knows better than I? But to sit near you is to be inspired; to touch your hand is to gain the courage of a giant. Yes, I will speak to your father; all shall be put right."

The girl scarcely heard her.

"There is another thing I would ask of you," she said, slowly and wistfully, "but not here. May I come to you when the lesson is over?"

"At two: yes."

So it was that Natalie called on her friend shortly after two o'clock and was shown into the little parlor. She was rather pale. She sat down at one side of the table.

"I wished to ask your advice, dear Madame Potecki," she said, in a low voice, and with her eyes down. "Now you must suppose a case. You must suppose that—that two people love each other—better—better than anything else in the world, and that they are ready to sacrifice a great deal for each other. Well, the man is ordered away! it is a banishment from his own country, perhaps forever; and he is very brave about it, and will not complain. Now you must suppose that the girl is very miserable about his going away, and blames herself; and perhaps—perhaps wishes—to do something to show she understands his nobleness—his devotion; and she would do anything in the world, Madame Potecki—to prove her love to him—"

"But, child, child, why do you tremble so?"

"I wish you to tell me, Madame Potecki—I wish you to tell me—whether—you would consider it unwomanly—unmaidenly—for her to go and say to him, 'You are too brave and unselfish to ask me to go with you. Now I offer myself to you. If you must go, why not I—your wife?'"

Madame Potecki started up in great alarm.

"Natalie, what do you mean?"



“I only—wished to—to ask—what you would think.”

She was very pale, and her lips were tremulous; but she did not break down. Madame Potecki was apparently far more agitated than she was.

“My child, my child, I am afraid you are on the brink of some wild thing!”

“Is that that I have repeated to you what a girl ought to do?” Natalie said, almost calmly. “Do you think it is what my mother would have done, Madame Potecki? They have told me she was a brave woman.”

CHAPTER XXXI.

IN A GARDEN AT POSILIPO.

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—Prends mon coeur, me dit-elle,
Oui, mais a la chapelle,
Sois mon petit....
—Plait-il
Ton petit?
—Sois mon petit mari!"

—It was Calabressa who was gayly humming to himself; and it was well that he could amuse himself with his *chansons* and his cigarettes, for his friend Edwards was proving anything but an attentive companion. The tall, near-sighted, blond-faced man from the British Museum was far too much engrossed by the scene around him. They were walking along the quays at Naples; and it so happened that at this moment all the picturesque squalor and lazy life of the place were lit up by the glare reflected from a wild and stormy sunset. The tall, pink-fronted houses; the mules and oxen with their brazen yokes and tinkling bells; the fruit-sellers, and fish-sellers, and water-carriers, in costumes of many hues; the mendicant friars with their cloak and hood of russet-brown; the priests black and clean-shaven; the groups of women, swarthy of face, with head-dresses of red or yellow, clustered round the stalls; the children, in rags of brown, and scarlet, and olive-green, lying about the pavement as if artists had posed them there—all these formed a picture which was almost bewildering in its richness of color, and was no doubt rendered all the more brilliant because of the powerful contrast with the dark and driven sea. For the waters out there were racing in before a stiff breeze, and springing high on the fortresses and rocks; and the clouds overhead were seething and twisting, with many a sudden flash of orange; and then, far away beyond all this color and motion and change, rose the vast and gloomy bulk of Vesuvius, overshadowed and thunderous, as if the mountain were charged with a coming storm.

Calabressa grew impatient, despite his careless song.

—Me seras tu fidele....
—Comme une tourterelle.
—Eh bieu, ca va....
Ca va!
—Ca me va!
—Comme ca, ca me va!

—*Diable*, Monsieur Edouarts! You are very silent. You do not know where we are going, perhaps?"

Edwards started, as if he were waking from a reverie.

"Oh yes, Signor Calabressa," said he, "I am not likely to forget that. Perhaps I think more seriously about it than you. To you it is nothing. But I cannot forget, you see, that you and I are practically conniving at a murder."



“Hush, hush, my dear friend!” said Calabressa, glancing round. “Be discreet! And what a foolish phrase, too! You—you whose business is merely to translate; to preach; to educate a poor devil of a Russian—what have you to do with it? And to speak of murder! Bah! You do not understand the difference, then, between killing a man as an act of private anger and revenge, and executing a man for crimes against society? My good friend Edouarts, you have lived all your life among books, but you have not learned any logic—no!”



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Edwards was not inclined to go into any abstract argument

"I will do what I have been appointed to do," he said, curtly; "but that cannot prevent my wishing that it had not to be done at all."

"And who knows?" said Calabressa, lightly. "Perhaps, if you are so fearful about your small share, your very little share—it is no more than that of the garcon who helps one on with his coat: is he accessory, too, if a rogue has to be punished?—is he responsible for the sentence, also, if he brushes the boots of the judge?—or the servant of the court who sweeps out the room, is he guilty if there is a miscarriage of justice? No, no; my dear friend Edouarts, do not alarm yourself. Then, I was saying, perhaps it may not be necessary, after all. You perceived, my friend, that when the proposal of his eminence the Cardinal was mentioned, the Secretary Granaglia smiled, and I, thoughtless, laughed. You perceived it, did you not?"

By this time they were in the Chiaja, beyond the Villa Reale; and there were fewer people about. Calabressa stopped and confronted his companion. For the purposes of greater emphasis, he rested his right elbow in the palm of his left hand, while his forefinger was at the point of his nose.

"What?" said he, in this striking attitude, "what if we were both fools—ha? The Secretary Granaglia and myself—what if we were both fools?"

Calabressa abandoned his pose, linked his arm within that of his companion, and walked on with him.

"Come, I will implant something in your mind. I will throw out a fancy; it may take root and flourish; if not, who is the worse? Now, if the Council were really to entertain that proposal of Zaccatelli?"

He regarded his friend Edouarts.

"You observed, I say, that Granaglia smiled: to him it was ludicrous. I laughed: to me it was farcical—the chatter of a *bavard*. The Pope become the patron of a secret society! The priests become our friends and allies! Very well, my friend; but listen. The little minds see what is absurd; the great minds are serious. Granaglia is a little devil of courage; but he is narrow; he is practical; he has no imagination. I: what am I?—careless, useless, also a *bavard*, if you will. But it occurred to me, after all, when I began to think—what a great man, a great mind, might say to this proposal. Take a man like Lind: see what he could make of it! 'Do not laugh at it any more, Calabressa,' said I to myself, 'until you hear the opinion of wiser men than yourself.'"

He gripped Edwards's arm tight.

“Listen. To become the allies of the priests it is not necessary to believe everything the priests say. On the other hand, they need not approve all that we are doing, if only they withdraw their opposition. Do you perceive the possibility now? Do you think of the force of that combination? The multitudes of the Catholics encouraged to join!—the Vatican the friend and ally of the Council of the Seven Stars!”

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He spoke the last words in a low voice, but he wore a proud look.

“And if this proposal were entertained,” said Edwards, meditatively, “of course, they would abandon this other business.”

“My good friend,” said Calabressa, confidentially, “I know that Lind, who sees things with a large vision, is against it. He consents—as you consent to do your little outside part—against his own opinion. More; if he had been on the Council the decree would never have been granted, though De Bedros and a dozen of his daughters had demanded it. ‘Calabressa,’ he said to me, ‘it will do great mischief in England if it is known that we are connected with it.’ Well, you see, all this would be avoided if they closed with the Cardinal’s offer.”

“You are sanguine, Signor Calabressa,” said the other.

“Besides, the thirty thousand lire!” said Calabressa, eagerly. “Do you know what that is? Ah, you English have always too much money!”

“No doubt,” said Edwards, with a smile. “We are all up to the neck in gold.”

“Thirty thousand lire a year, and the favor of the Vatican; what fools Granaglia and I were to laugh! But perhaps we will find that the Council were wiser.”

They had now got out to Posilipo, and the stormy sunset had waned, leaving the sky overclouded and dusk. Calabressa, having first looked up and down the road, stopped by the side of a high wall, over which projected a number of the broken, gray-green, spiny leaves of the cactus—a hedge at the foot of the terrace above.

“*Peste!*” said he. “How the devil is one to find it out in the dark?”

“Find what out?”

“My good friend,” said he, in a whisper, “you are not able by chance to see a bit of thread—a bit of red thread—tied round one of those big leaves?”

Edwards glanced up.

“Not I.”

“Ah, well, we must run the risk. Perhaps by accident there may be a meeting.”

They walked on for some time, Calabressa becoming more and more watchful. They paused to let a man driving a wagon and a pair of oxen go by; and then Calabressa, enjoining his companion to remain where he was, went on alone.

The changing sky had opened somewhat overhead, and there was a wan twilight shining through the parted clouds. Edwards, looking after Calabressa, could have fancied that the dark figure had disappeared like a ghost; but the old albino had merely crossed the road, opened the one half of a huge gate, and entered a garden.

It was precisely like the gardens of the other villas along the highway—cut in terraces along the steep side of the hill, with winding pathways, and marble lions here and there, and little groves of orange and olive and fig trees; while on one side the sheer descent was guarded by an enormous cactus hedge. The ground was very unequal: on one small plateau a fountain was playing—the trickling of the water the only sound audible in the silence.

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Calabressa took out his pocket-book, and tore a leaf from it.

"The devil!" he muttered to himself. "How is one to write in the dark?"

But he managed to scrawl the word "Barsanti;" then he wrapped the paper round a small pebble and approached the fountain. By putting one foot on the edge of the stone basin beneath he could reach over to the curved top, and there he managed to drop the missive into some aperture concealed under the lip. He stepped back, dried his hand with his handkerchief, and then went down one of the pathways to a lower level of the garden.

Here he easily found the entrance to an ordinary sort of grotto—a narrow cave winding inward and ending in a piece of fancy rockwork down which the water was heard to trickle. But he did not go to the end—he stopped about half-way and listened. There was no sound whatever in the dark, except the splash of the tiny water-fall.

Then there was a heavy grating noise, and in the black wall before him appeared a vertical line of orange light. This sudden gleam was so bewildering to the eyes that Calabressa could not see who it was that come out to him; he only knew that the stranger waited for him to pass on into the outer air.

"It is cooler here. To your business, friend Calabressa."

The moment Calabressa recognized this tall, military-looking man, with the closely cropped bullet-head and long silver-white mustache, he whipped off his cap, and said, anxiously,

"A thousand pardons, Excellency! a thousand pardons! Do I interrupt? May not I see Fossati?"

"It is unnecessary. There is much business to-night. One must breathe the air sometimes."

Calabressa for once had completely lost his *sang-froid*. He could not speak for stammering.

"I assure you, your Excellency, it is death to me to think that I interrupt you."

"But why did you come, then, my friend? To the point."

"Zaccatelli," the other managed to get out.

"Well?"

"There was a proposal. Some days ago I saw Granaglia."

“Well?”

“Pardon me, Excellency. If I had known, not for worlds would I have called you—”

“Come, come my Calabressa,” said the other, good-naturedly. “No more apologies. What is it you have to say?—the proposal made by the Cardinal? Yes; we know about that.”

“And it has not been accepted?—the decree remains?”

“You waste your breath, my friend. The decree remains, certainly. We are not children; we do not play. What more, my Calabressa?”

But Calabressa had to collect his thoughts. Then he said, slowly,

“It occurred to me when I was in England—there was a poor devil there who would have thrown away his life in a useless act of revenge—well—”

“Well, you brought him over here,” said the other, interrupting him. “Your object? Ah, Lind and you being old comrades; and Lind appearing to you to be in a difficulty. But did Lind approve?”

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"Not quite," said Calabressa, still hesitating. "He allowed us to try. He was doubtful himself."

"I should have thought so," said the other, ironically. "No, good Calabressa; we cannot accept the services of a maniac. The night has got dark; I cannot see whether you are surprised. How do we know? The man Kirski has been twice examined—once in Venice, once this morning, when you went down to the *Luisa*; the reports the same. What! To have a maniac blundering about the gates, attracting every one's notice by his gibberish; then he is arrested with a pistol or a knife in his hand; he talks nonsense about some Madonna; he is frightened into a confession, and we become the laughing-stock of Europe! Impossible, impossible, my Calabressa: where were your wits? No wonder Lind was doubtful—"

"The man is capable of being taught," said Calabressa, humbly.

"We need not waste more breath, my friend. To-night Lind will be reminded why it was necessary that the execution of this decree was intrusted to the English section: he must not send any Russian madman to compromise us."

"Then I must take him back, your Excellency!"

"No; send him back—with the English scholar. You will remain in Naples, Calabressa. There is something stirring that will interest you."

"I am at your service, Excellency."

"Good-night, dear friend."

The figure beside him had disappeared almost before he had time to return the salutation, and he was left to find his way down to the gate, taking care not to run unawares on one of the long cactus spines. He discovered Edwards precisely where he had left him.

"Ah, Monsieur Edouarts, now you may clap your hands—now you may shout an English 'hurrah!' For you, at all events, there is good news."

"That project has been abandoned, then?" said Edwards, eagerly.

"No, no, no!" said Calabressa, loftily; as if he had never entertained such a possibility. "Do you think the Council is to be played with—is to be bribed by so many and so many lire? No, no. Its decree is inviolable."

"Well, then?"

“Well, then, some stupidities of our Russian friend have saved you: they know everything, these wonderful people: they say, ‘No; we will not trust the affair to a madman.’ Do you perceive? What you have to do now is to take Kirski back to England.”

“And I am not wanted any longer?” said the other, with the same eagerness.

“I presume not. I am. I remain in Naples. For you, you are free. Away to England! I give you my blessing; and to-night—to-night you will give me a bottle of wine.”

But presently he added, as they still walked on,

“Friend Edouarts, do you think I should be humiliated because my little plan has been refused? No: it was born of idleness. My freedom was new to me; over in England I had nothing to do. And when Lind objected, I talked him over. *Peste*, if those fellows of Society had not got at the Russian, all might have been well.”

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"You will forgive my pointing out," said Edwards, in quite a facetious way, "that all would not have been so well with me, for one. I am very glad to be able to wash my hands of it. You shall have not only one but two bottles of wine with supper, if you please."

"Well, friend Edouarts. I bring you the good news, but I am not the author of it. No; I must confess, I would rather have had my plan carried out. But what matter? One does one's best from time to time—the hours go by—at the end comes sleep, and no one can torment you more."

They walked on for a time in silence. And now before them lay the wonderful sight of Naples ablaze with a dusky yellow radiance in the dark; and far away beyond the most distant golden points, high up in the black deeps of the sky, the constant, motionless, crimson glow of Vesuvius told them where the peaks of the mountain, themselves unseen towered above the sea.

By-and-by they plunged into the great murmuring city.

"You are going back to England, Monsieur Edouarts. You will take Kirski to Mr. Brand, he will be reinstated in his work; Englishmen do not forget their promises. Then I have another little commission for you."

He went into one of the small jeweller's shops, and, after a great deal of haggling—for his purse was not heavy, and he knew the ways of his countrymen—he bought a necklace of pink coral. It was carefully wrapped in wool and put into a box. Then they went outside again.

"You will give this little present, my good friend Edouarts—you will take it, with my compliments, to my beautiful, noble child Natalie; and you will tell her that it did not cost much, but it is only a message—to show her that Calabressa still thinks of her, and loves, her always."

CHAPTER XXXII.

FRIEND AND SWEETHEART.

Madame Potecki was a useful enough adviser in the small and ordinary affairs of everyday life, but face to face with a great emergency she became terrified and helpless.

"My dear, my dear," she kept repeating, in a flurried sort of way, "you must not do anything rash—you must not do anything wild. Oh, my dear, take care! it is so wicked for children to disobey their parents!"

“I am no longer a child, Madame Potecki; I am a woman: I know what seems to me just and unjust; and I only wish to do right.” She was now quite calm. She had mastered that involuntary tremulousness of the lips. It was the little Polish lady who was agitated.

“My dear Natalie, I will go to your father. I said I would go—even with your message—though it is a frightful task. But how can I tell him that you have this other project in your mind? Oh, my dear, be cautious! don’t do anything you will have to repent of in after-years!”

“You need not tell him, dear Madame Potecki, if you are alarmed,” said the girl. “I will tell him myself, when I have come to a decision. So you cannot say what one ought to do in such circumstances? You cannot tell me what my mother, for example, would have done in such a case?”

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"Oh, I can; I can, my dear," said the other, eagerly. "At least I can tell you what is best and safest. Is it not for a girl to go by her father's advice—her father's wishes? Then she is safe. Anything else is wild, dangerous. My dear, you are far too impulsive. You do not think of consequences. It is all the affair of the moment with you, and how you can do some one you love a kindness at the instant. Your heart is warm, and you are quick to act. All the more reason, I say, that you should go by some one else's judgment; and who can guide you better than your own father?"

"I know already what my father wishes," said Natalie.

"Then why not go by that, my dear? Be sure it is the safest. Do you think I would take it on me to say otherwise? Ah, my clear child, romance is very beautiful at your age; but one may sacrifice too much for it."

"It is not a question of romance at all," said Natalie, looking down. "It is a question of what it is right that a girl should do, in faithfulness to one whom she loves. But perhaps it is better not to argue it, for one sees so differently at different ages. And I am very grateful to you, dear Madame Potecki, for agreeing to take that message to my father; but I will tell him myself."

She rose. The little woman came instantly and caught her by both hands.

"Is my child going to quarrel with me because I am old and unsympathetic?"

"Oh no; do not think that!" said Natalie, quickly.

"What you say is quite true, my dear; different ages see differently. When I was at your age, perhaps I was as liable as anyone to let my heart get the better of my head. And do I regret it?" The little woman sighed. "Many a time they warned me against marrying one who did not stand well with the authorities. But I—I had my opinions, too; I was a patriot, like the rest. We were all mad with enthusiasm. Ah, the secret meetings in Warsaw!—the pride of them!—we girls would not marry one who was not a patriot. But that is all over now; and here am I an old woman, with nothing left but my old masters, and my china, and my 'One, two, three, four; one, two, three, four.'"

Here a knock outside warned Natalie that she must leave, another pupil, no doubt, having arrived; and so she bade good-bye to her friend, not much enlightened or comforted by her counsel.

That evening Mr. Lind brought Beratinsky home with him to dinner—an unusual circumstance, for at one time Beratinsky had wished to become a suitor for Natalie's hand, and had had that project very promptly knocked on the head by Lind himself. Thereafter he had come but seldom to the house, and never without a distinct invitation. On this evening the two men talked almost exclusively between themselves,

and Natalie was not sorry to be allowed to remain an inattentive listener. She was thinking of other things.

When Beratinsky had gone, Lind turned to his daughter, and said to her pleasantly,

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"Well, Natalie, what have you been about to-day?"

"First of all," said she, regarding him with those fearless eyes of hers, "I went to South Kensington Museum with Madame Potecki. Mr. Brand was there."

His manner changed instantly.

"By appointment?" he said, sharply.

"No," she answered. "I thought he would call here, and I told Anneli where we had gone."

Lind betrayed no expression of annoyance. He only said, coldly,

"Last night I told you it was my wish that he and you should have no further communication with each other."

"Yes; but is it reasonable, is it fair, is it possible, papa?" she said, forgetting for a moment her forced composure. "Do you think I can forget why he is going away?"

"Apparently you do not know why he is going away," her father said. "He is going to America because his duty commands that he should; because he has work to do there of more importance than sentimental entanglements in this country. He understands himself the necessity of his going."

The girl's cheeks burnt red, and she sat silent. How could she accuse her own father of prevarication? But the crisis was a momentous one.

"You forget, papa," she said at length, in a low voice, "that when you returned from abroad and got Mr. Brand's letter, you came to me. You said that if there was any further question of a—a marriage—between Mr. Brand and myself, you would have to send him to America. I was to be the cause of his banishment."

"I spoke hastily—in anger," her father said, with some impatience. "Quite apart from any such question, Mr. Brand knows that it is of great importance some one like himself should go to Philadelphia; and at the moment I don't see any one who could do as well. Have you anything further to say?"

"No, papa—except good night." She kissed him on the forehead and went away to her own room.

That was a night of wild unrest for Natalie Lind. It was her father himself who had represented to her all that banishment from his native country meant to an Englishman; and in her heart of hearts she believed that it was through her this doom had befallen George Brand. She knew he would not complain. He professed to her that it was only

in the discharge of an ordinary duty he was leaving England: others had suffered more for less reason; it was nothing; why should she blame herself? But all the same, through this long, restless, agonizing night she accused herself of having driven him from his country and his friends, of having made an exile of him. And again and again she put before herself the case she had submitted to Madame Potecki; and again and again she asked herself what her own mother would have done, with her lover going away to a strange land.

In the morning, long before it was light, and while as yet she had not slept for a second, she rose, threw a dressing-gown round her, lit the gas, and went to the little *escritoire* that stood by the window. Her hand was trembling when she sat down to write, but it was not with the cold. There was a proud look on her face. This was what she wrote:

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"My lover and husband,—You are going away from your own country, perhaps forever; and I think it is partly through me that all this has happened. What can I do? Only this; that I offer to go with you, if you will take me. I am your wife; why should you go alone?"

There was no signature. She folded the paper, and placed it in an envelope, and carefully locked it up. Then she put out the light and went back to bed again, and fell into a sound, happy, contented sleep—the untroubled sleep of a child.

Then in the morning how bright and light-hearted she was!

Anneli could not understand this change that had suddenly come over her young mistress. She said little, but there was a happy light on her face; she sung "Du Schwert an meiner Linken" in snatches, as she was dressing her hair; and she presented Anneli with a necklace of Turkish silver coins.

She was down at South Kensington Museum considerably before eleven o'clock. She idly walked Anneli through the various rooms, pointing out to her this and that; and as the little Dresden maid had not been in the Museum before, her eyes were wide open at the sight of such beautiful things. She was shown masses of rich tapestry and cases of Japanese lacquer-work; she was shown collections of ancient jewellery and glass; she went by sunny English landscapes, and was told the story of solemn cartoons. In the midst of it all George Brand appeared; and the little German girl, of her own accord, and quite as deftly as Madame Potecki, devoted herself to the study of some screens of water-colors, just as if she were one of the Royal Academy pupils.

"We have been looking over Madame Potecki's treasures once more," said Natalie. He was struck by the happy brightness of her face.

"Ah, indeed!" said he; and he went and brought a couple of chairs, that together they might regard, if they were so minded, one of those vast cartoons. "Well, I have good news, Natalie. I do not start until a clear week hence. So we shall have six mornings here—six mornings all to ourselves. Do you know what that means to me?"

She took the chair he offered her. She did not look appalled by this intelligence of his early departure.

"It means six more days of happiness: and do you not think I shall look back on them with gratitude? And there is not to be a word said about my going. No; it is understood that we cut off the past and the future for these six days. We are here; we can speak to each other; that is enough."

"But how can one help thinking of the future?" said she, with a mock mournfulness. "You are going away alone."

“No, not quite alone.”

She looked up quickly.

“Why, you know what Evelyn is—the best-hearted of friends,” he said to her. “He insists on going over to America with me, and even talks of remaining a year or two. He pretends to be anxious to study American politics.”

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He could not understand why she laughed—though it was a short, quick, hysterical laugh, very near to tears.

“You remind me of one of Mr. Browning’s poems,” she said, half in apology. “It is about a man who has a friend and a sweetheart. You don’t remember it, perhaps?”

He thought for a moment.

“The fact is,” he said, “that when I think of Browning’s poems, all along the line of them, there are some of them seem to burn like fire, and I cannot see the others.”

“This is a very modest little one,” said she. “It is a poor poet starving in a garret; and he tells you he has a friend beyond the sea; and he knows that if he were to fall ill, and to wake up out of his sickness, he would find his friend there, tending him like the gentlest of nurses, even though he got nothing but grumblings about his noisy boots. And the—the poor fellow—”

She paused for a second.

“He goes on to tell about his sweetheart—who has ruined him—to whom he has sacrificed his life and his peace and fame—and what would she do? He says,

“‘She
—I’ll tell you—calmly would decree
That I should roast at a slow fire,
If that would compass her desire
And make her one whom they invite
To the famous ball to-morrow night.’

That is—the difference—between a friend and a sweetheart—”

He did not notice that she spoke rather uncertainly, and that her eyes were wet.

“What do you mean, Natalie?”

“That it is a good thing for you that you have a friend. There is one, at all events—who will—who will not let you go away alone.”

“My darling!” he said, “what new notion is this you have got into your head? You do not blame yourself for that too? Why, you see, it is a very simple thing for Lord Evelyn, who is an idle man, and has no particular ties binding him, to spend a few months in the States; and when he once finds out that the voyage across is one of the pleasantest holidays a man can take, I have no doubt I shall see him often enough. Now, don’t let us talk any more about that—except this one point. Have you promised your father that you will not write to me?”



“Oh no; how could I?”

“And may I write to you?”

“I shall live from week to week expecting your letters,” she said simply.

“Then we shall not say another word about it,” said he, lightly. “We have six days to be together: no one can rob us of them. Come, shall we go and have a look at the English porcelain that is on this floor? We have whole heaps of old Chelsea and Crown Derby and that kind of thing at the Beeches: I think I must try and run down there before I go, and send you some. What use is it to me?”

“Oh no, I hope you won’t do that,” she said quickly, as she rose.

“You don’t care about it, perhaps?”

She seemed embarrassed for a moment.

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"For old china?" she said, after a moment. "Oh yes, I do. But—but—I think you may find something happen that would make it unnecessary—I mean it is very kind of you—but I hope you will not think of sending me any."

"What do you mean? What is about to happen?"

"It is all a mystery and a secret as yet," she said, with a smile. She seemed so much more light-hearted than she had been the day before.

Then, as they walked by those cases, and admired this or that, she would recur to this forth-coming departure of his, despite of him. And she was not at all sad about it. She was curious; that was all. Was there any difficulty in getting a cabin at short notice? It was from Liverpool the big steamers sailed, was it not? And it was a very different thing, she understood, travelling in one of those huge vessels, and crossing the Channel in a little cockle-shell. He would no doubt make many friends on board. Did single ladies ever make the voyage? Could a single lady and her maid get a cabin to themselves? It would not be so very tedious, if one could get plenty of books. And so forth, and so forth. She did not study the Chelsea shepherdesses very closely.

"I'll tell you what I wish you would do, Natalie," said he.

"I will do it," she answered.

"When Lord Evelyn comes back—some day I wish you would take Anneli with you for a holiday—and Evelyn would take you down to have a look over the Beeches. You could be back the same night. I should like you to see my mother's portrait."

She did not answer.

"Will you do that?"

"You will know before long," she said, in a low voice, "why I need not promise that to you. But that, or anything else I am willing to do, if you wish it."

The precious moments sped quickly. And as they walked through the almost empty rooms—how silent these were, with the occasional foot-falls on the tiled floors, and once or twice the distant sounding of a bell outside!—again and again he protested against her saying another word about his going away. What did it matter? Once the pain of parting was over, what then? He had a glad work before him. She must not for a moment think she had anything to do with it. And he could not regret that he had ever met her, when he would have these six mornings of happy intercommunion to think over, when the wide seas separated them?

"Natalie," said he, reproachfully, "do you forget the night you and I heard *Fidelio* together? And you think I shall regret ever having seen you."

She smiled to herself. Her hand clasped a certain envelope that he could not see.

Then the time came for their seeking out Anneli. But as they were going through the twilight of a corridor she stopped him, and her usually frank eyes were downcast. She took out that envelope.

“Dearest,” she said, almost inaudibly, “this is something I wish you to read after Anneli and I am gone. I think you will—you will not misunderstand me. If you think—it is—it is too bold, you will remember that I have—no mother to advise me; and—and you will be kind, and not answer. Then I shall know.”

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Ten minutes thereafter he was standing alone, in the broad daylight outside, reading the lines she had written early that morning, and in every one of them he read the firm and noble character of the woman he loved. He was almost bewildered by the proud-spirited frankness of her message to him; and involuntarily he thought of the poor devil of a poet in the garret who spoke of his faithful friend and his worthless mistress.

“One is fortunate indeed to have a friend like Evelyn,” he said to himself. “But when and has, besides that, the love of a woman like this—then the earth holds something worth living for.”

He looked at the brief, proud, pathetic message again—“*I am your wife: why should you go alone?*” It was Natalie herself speaking in every word.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

INTERVENTION.

The more that Madame Potecki thought over the communication made to her by Natalie, the more alarmed she became. Her pupils received but a very mechanical sort of guidance that afternoon. All through the “One, two, three, four; one, two, three, four” she was haunted by an uneasy consciousness that her protest had not been nearly strong enough. The girl had not seemed in the least impressed by her counsel. And suppose this wild project were indeed carried out, might not she, that is, Madame Potecki, be regarded as an accomplice if she remained silent and did not intervene?

On the other hand, although she and Ferdinand Lind were friends of many years standing, she had never quite got over a certain fear of him. She guessed pretty well what underlay that pleasant, plausible exterior of his. And she was not at all sure that, if she went to Mr. Lind and told him that in such and such circumstances his daughter meant to go to America as the wife of George Brand, the first outburst of his anger might not fall on herself. She was an intermeddler. What concern of hers was it? He might even accuse her of having connived at the whole affair, especially during his absence in Philadelphia.

But after all, the little Polish lady was exceedingly fond of this girl; and she resolved to go at all hazards and see whether something could not be done to put matters straight. She would call at the chambers in Lisle Street, and make sure of seeing Mr. Lind alone. She would venture to remind him that his daughter was grown up—a woman, not to be treated as a child. As she had been altogether on the father’s side in arguing with Natalie, so she would be altogether on the daughter’s side in making these representations to Mr. Lind. Perhaps some happy compromise would result.



She was, however, exceedingly nervous when, on the following afternoon, she called at Lisle Street, and was preceded up-stairs by the stout old German. In the room into which she was shown Reitzei was seated. Reitzei received her very graciously; they were old friends. But although Madame Potecki on ordinary occasions was fond of listening to the sound of her own voice, she seemed now quite incapable of saying anything. Reitzei had been fortunate enough to hear the new barytone sing at a private house on the previous evening; she did not even ask what impression had been produced.

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Then Mr. Lind came into the room, and Reitzei left.

“How do you do, Madame Potecki?” said he, somewhat curtly.

She took it that he was offended because she had come on merely private affairs to his place of business; and this did not tend to lessen her embarrassment. However, she made a brave plunge.

“You are surprised,” she said, “to find me calling upon you here, are you not? Yes; but I will explain. You see, my dear friend, I wished to see you alone—”

“Yes, yes, Madame Potecki; I understand. What is your news?”

“It is—about Natalie,” she managed to say, and then all the methods of beginning that she had studied went clean out of her mind; and she was reduced to an absolute silence.

He did not seem in the least impatient.

“Yes; about Natalie?” he repeated, taking up a paper-knife, and beginning to write imaginary letters on the leather of the desk before him.

“You will say to me, ‘Why do you interfere?’” the little woman managed to say at last. “Meddlers do harm; they are not thanked. But then, my dear friend, Natalie is like my own child to me; for her what would I not do?”

Mr. Lind could not fail to see that his visitor was very nervous and agitated: perhaps it was to give her time to compose herself that he said, leisurely,

“Yes, Madame Potecki; I know that you and she are great friends; and it is a good thing that the child should have some one to keep her company; perhaps she is a little too much alone. Well, what do you wish to say about her? You run no risk with me. You will not be misunderstood. I know you are not likely to say anything unkind about Natalie.”

“Unkind!” she exclaimed; and now she had recovered herself somewhat. “Who could do that? Oh no, my dear friend; oh no!”

Here was another awkward pause.

“My dear Madame Potecki,” said Mr. Lind, with a smile, “shall I speak for you? You do not like to say what you have come to say. Shall I speak for you? This is it, is it not? You have become aware of that entanglement that Natalie has got into. Very well. Perhaps she has told you. Perhaps she has told you also that I have forbidden her to have any communication with—well, let us speak frankly—Mr. Brand. Very well. You

go with her to the South Kensington Museum; you meet Mr. Brand there. Naturally you think if that comes to my ears I shall suspect you of having planned the meeting; and you would rather come and assure me that you had nothing to do with it. Is it so?"

"My dear friend," said Madame Potecki, quickly, "I did not come to you about myself at all! What am I? What matters what happens to an old woman like me? It is not about myself, it is about Natalie that I have come to you. Ah, the dear, beautiful child!—how can one see her unhappy, and not try to do something? Why should she be unhappy? She is young, beautiful, loving; my dear friend, do you wonder that she has a sweetheart?—and one who is so worthy of her, too: one who is not selfish, who has courage, who will be kind to her. Then I said to myself, 'Ah, what a pity to have father and daughter opposed to each other!' Why might not one step in and say, 'Come, and be friends. You love each other: do not have this coldness that makes a young heart so miserable!'"

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She had talked quickly and eagerly at last; she was trembling with excitement, she had her eyes fixed on his face to catch the first symptom of acquiescence.

But, on the contrary, Mr. Lind remained quite impassive, and he said, coldly,

“This is a different matter altogether, Madame Potecki. I do not blame you for interfering; but I must tell you at once that your interference is not likely to be of much use. You see, there are reasons which I cannot explain to you, but which are very serious, why any proposal of marriage between Mr. Brand and Natalie is not to be entertained for a moment. The thing is quite impossible. Very well. She knows this; she knows that I wish all communication between them to cease; nevertheless, she says she will see him every day until he goes. How can you wonder that she is unhappy? Is it not her own doing?”

“If she was in reality my child, that is not the way I would speak,” said the little woman, boldly.

“Unfortunately, my dear Madame Potecki,” said Mr. Lind, blandly, “I cannot, as I say, explain to you the reasons which make such a marriage impossible, or you yourself would say it was impossible. Very well, then. If you wish to do a service to your friend Natalie—if you wish to see her less unhappy, you know what advice to give her. A girl who perseveres in wilful disobedience is not likely to be very contented in her mind.”

Madame Potecki sat silent and perplexed. This man seemed so firm, so reasonable, so assured, it was apparently hopeless to expect any concession from him. And yet what was the use of her going away merely to repeat the advice she had already given?

“And in any case,” he continued, lightly, “it is not an affair for you to be deeply troubled about, my dear Madame Potecki; on the contrary, it is a circumstance of little moment. If Natalie chooses to indulge this sentiment—well, the fate of empires does not hang on it, and in a little while it will be all right. Youth soon recovers from small disappointments; the girl is not morbid or melancholy. Moreover, she has plenty to occupy her mind with: do not fear that she will be permanently unhappy.”

All this gave Natalie’s friend but scant consolation. She knew something of the girl, she knew it was not a light matter that had made her resolve to share banishment with her lover rather than that he should depart alone.

“Yes, she is acting contrary to my wishes,” continued Mr. Lind, who saw that his visitor was anxious and chagrined. “But why should you vex yourself with that, my dear madame?—why, indeed? It is only for a few days. When Mr. Brand leaves for America, then she will settle down to her old ways. This episode of sentiment will soon be forgotten. Do not fear for your friend Natalie; she has a healthy constitution; she is not likely to sigh away her life.”

“But you do not understand, Mr. Lind!” Madame Potecki exclaimed suddenly. “You do not understand. When he leaves for America, there is to be an end? No! You are not aware, then, that if he goes to America, Natalie will go also?”

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She had spoken quickly, breathlessly, not taking much notice of her words, but she was appalled by the effect they produced. Lind started, as if he had been struck; and for a second, as he regarded her, the eyes set under the heavy brows burnt like coals, and she noticed a curious paleness in his face, especially in the lips. But this lasted only for an instant. When he spoke, he was quite calm, and was apparently considering each word.

"Are you authorized to bring me this message?" he said, slowly.

"Oh no; oh no!" the little woman exclaimed. "I assure you, my dear friend, I came to you because I thought something was about to happen—something that might be prevented. Ah, you don't know how I love that darling child; and to see her unhappy, and resolved, perhaps, to make some great mistake in her life, how could I help interfering?"

"So," continued Lind, apparently weighing every word, "this is what she is bent on! If Brand goes to America, she will go with him?"

"I—I—am afraid so," stammered Madame Potecki. "That is what I gathered from her—though it was only an imaginary case she spoke of. But she was pale, and trembling, and how could I stand by and not do something?"

He did not answer; his lips were firm set. Unconsciously he was pressing the point of the paper-knife into the leather; it snapped in two. He threw the pieces aside, and said, with a sudden lightness of manner,

"Ah, well, my dear madame, you know young people are sometimes very headstrong, and difficult to manage. We must see what can be done in this case. You have not told Natalie you were coming to me?"

"No. She asked me at first; then she said she would tell you herself."

He regarded her for a second.

"There is no reason why you should say you have been here?"

"Perhaps not, perhaps not," Madame Potecki said, doubtfully. "No; there is no necessity. But if one were sure that the dear child were to be made any happier—"

She did not complete the sentence.

"I think you may leave the whole affair in my hands, my dear Madame Potecki," said Lind, in his usual courteous fashion. He spoke, indeed, as if it were a matter of the most trifling importance. "I think I can promise you that Natalie shall not be allowed to imperil the happiness of her life by taking any rash steps. In the mean time, I am your

debtor that you have come and told me. It was considerate of you, Madame Potecki; I am obliged to you."

The little woman was practically dismissed. She rose, still doubtful, and hesitated. But what more could she say?

"I am not to tell her, then?" she said.

"If you please, not."

When he had graciously bowed her out, he returned to his seat at the desk; and then the forced courtesy of his manner was abandoned. His brows gathered down; his lips were again firm set; he bent one of the pieces of the paper-knife until that snapped too; and when some one knocked at the door, he answered sharply in German.

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It was Gathorne Edwards who entered.

“Well, you have got back?” he said, with but scant civility. “Where is Calabressa?”

The tall, pale, stooping man looked round with some caution.

“There is no one—no one but Reitzei,” said Lind, impatiently.

“Calabressa is detained in Naples—the General’s orders,” said the other, in rather a low voice. “I did not write—I thought it was not safe to put anything on paper; more especially as we discovered that Kirski was being watched.”

“No wonder,” said Lind, scornfully. “A fool of a madman being taken about by a fool of a mountebank!”

Edwards stared at him. Surely this man, who was usually the most composed, and impenetrable, and suave of men, must have been considerably annoyed thus to give way to a petulant temper.

“But the result, Edwards: well?”

“Refused!”

Lind laughed sardonically.

“Who could have doubted? Of course the council do not think that I approved of that mad scheme?”

“At all events, sir,” said Edwards, submissively, “you permitted it.”

“Permitted it! Yes; to please old Calabressa, who imagines himself a diplomatist. But who could have doubted what the end would be? Well, what further?”

“I understand that a message is on its way to you from the council,” said the other, speaking in still lower tones, “giving further instructions. They consider it of great importance that—it—should be done by one of the English section; so that no one may imagine it arises from a private revenge.”

Lind was toying with one of the pieces of the broken paper-knife.

“Zaccatelli has had the warning,” Edwards continued. “Granaglia took it. The Cardinal is mad with fright—will do anything.”

Lind seemed to rouse himself with an effort.

“I beg your pardon, friend Edwards. I did not hear. What were you saying?”

"I was saying that the Cardinal had had the decree announced to him, and is mad with fear, and he will do anything. He offers thirty thousand lire a year; not only that, but he will try to get his Holiness to give his countenance to the Society. Fancy, as Calabressa says, what the world would say to an alliance between the Vatican and the SOCIETY OF THE SEVEN STARS!"

Lind seemed incapable of paying attention to this new visitor, so absorbed was he in his own thoughts. He had again to rouse himself forcibly.

"Yes," he said, "you were saying, friend Edwards, that the Starving Cardinal had become aware of the decree. Yes; well, then?"

"Did you not hear, sir? He thinks there should be an alliance between the Vatican and the Society."

"His Eminence is jocular, considering how near he is to the end of his life," said Lind, absently.

"Further," Edwards continued, "he has sent back the daughter of old De Bedros, who, it seems, first claimed the decree against him; and he is to give her a dowry of ten thousand lire when she marries. But all these promises and proposals do not seem to have weighed much with the council."

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Here Edwards stopped. He perceived plainly that Lind—who sat with his brows drawn down, and a sombre look on his face—was not listening to him at all. Presently Lind rose, and said,

“My good Edwards, I have some business of serious importance to attend to at once. Now you will give me the report of your journey some other time. To-night—at nine o’clock?”

“Yes, sir; if that will suit you.”

“Can you come to my house in Curzon Street at nine?”

“Yes, certainly.”

“Very well. I am your debtor. But stay a moment. Of course, I understand from you that nothing that has happened interferes with the decree against our excellent friend the Cardinal?”

“So it appears.”

“The Council are not to be bought over by idle promises?”

“Apparently not.”

“Very well. Then you will come to-night at nine; in my little study there will be no interruption; you can give me all the details of your holiday. Ha, my friend Edwards,” he added more pleasantly, as he opened the door for his visitor, “would it not be better for you to give up that Museum altogether, and come over to us? Then you would have many a pleasant little trip.”

“I suspect the Museum is most likely to give me up,” said Edwards, with a laugh, as he descended the narrow twilight stairs.

Then Lind returned to his desk, and sat down. A quarter of an hour afterward, when Reitzei came into the room, he found him still sitting there, without any papers whatsoever before him. The angry glance that Lind directed to him as he entered told him that the master did not wish to be disturbed; so he picked up a book of reference by way of excuse, and retreated into the farther room, leaving Lind once more alone.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AN ENCOUNTER.



This was an October morning, in the waning of the year; and yet so bright and clear and fresh was it, even in the middle of London, that one could have imagined the spring had returned. The world was full of a soft diffused light, from the pale clouds sailing across the blue to the sheets of silver widening out on the broad bosom of the Thames; but here and there the sun caught some shining surface—the lip of a marble fountain, the glass of a lamp on the Embankment, or the harness of some merchant-prince's horses prancing into town—and these were sharp jewel-like gleams amidst the vague general radiance. The air was sweet and clear; the white steam blown from the engines on Hungerford Bridge showed that the wind was westerly. Two lovers walked below, in the Embankment gardens, probably listening but little to the murmur of the great city around them. Surely the spring had come again, and youth and love and hope! The solitary occupant of this chamber that overlooked the gardens and the shining river did not stay to ask why his heart should be so full of gladness, why this beautiful morning should yield him so much delight. He was thinking chiefly that on such a morning Natalie would be abroad soon; she loved the sunlight and the sweet air.

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It was far too fine a morning, indeed, to spend in a museum, even with all Madame Potecki's treasures spread out before one. So, instead of going to South Kensington, he went straight up to Curzon Street. Early as he was, he was not too early, for he was leisurely walking along the pavement when, ahead of him, he saw Natalie and her little maid come forth and set out westward. He allowed them to reach the park gates; then he overtook them. Anneli fell a little way behind.

Now, whether it was the brightness of the morning had raised her spirits, or that she had been reasoning herself into a more courageous frame of mind, it was soon very clear that Natalie was not at all so anxious and embarrassed as she had shown herself the day before when they parted.

"There was no letter from you this morning," she said, with a smile, though she did not look up into his face. "Then I have offered myself to you, and am refused?"

"How could I write?" he said. "I tried once or twice, and then I saw I must wait until I could tell you face to face all that I think of your bravery and your goodness. And now that I see you Natalie, it is not a bit better: I can't tell you; I am so happy to be near you, to be beside you, and hear your voice, that I don't think I can say anything at all."

"I am refused, then?" said she, shyly.

"Refused!" he exclaimed. "There are some things one cannot refuse—like the sunshine. But do you know what a terrible sacrifice you are making?"

"It is you, then, who are making no sacrifice at all," she said, reproachfully. "What do I sacrifice more than every girl must sacrifice when she marries? England is not my home as it is your home; we have lived everywhere; I have no childhood's friends to leave, as many a girl has."

"Your father—"

"After a little while my father will scarcely miss me; he is too busy."

But presently she added,

"If you had remained in England I should never have been your wife."

"Why?" he said with some surprise.

"I should never have married against my father's wishes," she said, thoughtfully. "No. My promise to you was that I would be your wife, or the wife of no one. I would have kept that promise. But as long as we could have seen each other, and been with each other from time to time, I don't think I could have married against my father's wish. Now it is quite different. Your going to America has changed it all. Ah, my dear friend, you

don't know what I suffered one or two nights before I could decide what was right for me to do!"

"I can guess," he said, in a low voice, in answer to that brief sigh of hers.

Then she grew more cheerful in manner.

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"But that is all over; and now, am I accepted? I think you are like Naomi: it was only when she saw that Ruth was very determined to go with her that she left off protesting. And I am to consider America as my future home? Well, at all events, one will be able to breathe freely there. It is not a country weighed down with standing armies and conscriptions and fortifications. How could one live in a town like Coblenz, or Metz, or Brest? The poor wretches marching this way and marching that—you watch them from your hotel window—the young men and the middle-aged men—and you know that they would rather be away at their farms, or in their factories, or saw-pits, or engine-houses, working for their wives and children—"

"Natalie," said he, "you are only half a woman: you don't care about military glory."

"It is the most mean, the most cruel and contemptible thing under the sun!" she said, passionately. "What is the quality that makes a great hero—a great general—nowadays? Courage? Not a bit. It is callousness!—an absolute indifference to the slaughtering of human lives! You sit in your tent—you sit on horseback—miles away from the fighting; and if the poor wretches are being destroyed here or there in too great quantities, if they are ridden down by the horses and torn to pieces by the mitrailleuses, 'Oh, clap on another thousand or two: the place must be taken at all risks.' Yes, indeed; but not much risk to you! For if you fail—if all the thousands of men have been hurled against the stone and lead only to be thrown back crushed and murdered—why, you have fought with great courage—you, the great general, sitting in your saddle miles away; it is *you* who have shown extraordinary courage!—but numbers were against you: and if you win, you have shown still greater courage; and the audacity of the movement was so and so; and your dogged persistence was so and so; and you get another star for your breast; and all the world sings your praises. And who is to court-martial a great hero for reckless waste of human life? Who is to tell him that he is a cruel-hearted coward? Who is to take him to the fields he has saturated with blood, and compel him to count the corpses; or to take him to the homesteads he has ruined throughout the land, and ask the women and sons and the daughters what they think of this marvellous courage? Oh no; he is away back in the capital—there is a triumphal procession; all we want now is another war-tax—for the peasant must pay with his money as well as with his blood—and another levy of the young men to be taken and killed!"

This was always a sore point with Natalie; and he did not seek to check her enthusiasm with any commonplace and obvious criticisms. When she got into one of these moods of proud indignation, which was not seldom, he loved her all the more. There was something in the ring of her voice that touched him to the heart. Such noble, quick, generous sympathy seemed to him far too beautiful and rare a thing to be met by argument and analysis. When he heard that pathetic tremulousness in her voice, he was ready to believe anything. When he looked at the proud lips and the moistened eyes, what cause that had won such eloquent advocacy would he not have espoused?

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"Ah, well, Natalie," said he, "some day the mass of the people of the earth will be brought to see that all that can be put a stop to, if they so choose. They have the power: *Zahlen regieren die Welt*; and how can one be better employed than in spreading abroad knowledge, and showing the poorer people of the earth how the world might be governed if they would only ally themselves together? It would be more easy to persuade them if we had all of us your voice and your enthusiasm."

"Mine?" she said. "A woman's talking is not likely to be of much use. But," she added, rather hesitatingly, "at least—she can give her sympathy—and her love—to those who are doing the real work."

"And I am going to earn yours, Natalie," said he, cheerfully, "to such a degree as you have never dreamed of, when you and I together are away in the new world. And that reminds me now you must not be frightened; but there is a little difficulty. Of course you thought of nothing, when you wrote those lines, but of doing a kindness; that was like you; your heart speaks quickly. Well—"

He himself seemed somewhat embarrassed.

"You see, Natalie, there would be no difficulty at all if you and I could get married within the next few days."

Her eyes were cast down, and she was silent.

"You don't think it possible you could get your father to consent?" he said, but without much hope.

"Oh no, I think not; I fear not," she said, in a low voice.

"Then you see, Natalie," he continued—and he spoke quite lightly, as if it was merely an affair of a moment—"there would be this little awkwardness: you are not of age; unless you get your father's consent, you cannot marry until you are twenty-one. It is not a long time—"

"I did not think of it," she said, very hurriedly, and even breathlessly. "I only thought it—it seemed hard you should go away alone—and I considered myself already your wife—and I said, 'What ought I to do?' And now—now you will tell me what to do. I do not know—I have no one to ask."

"Do you think," said he, after a pause, "that you would forget me, if you were to remain two years in England while I was in America?"

She regarded him for a moment with those large, true eyes of hers; and she did not answer in words.

"There is another way; but—it is asking too much," he said.

"What is it?" she said, calmly.

"I was thinking," he said, with some hesitation, "that if I could bribe Madame Potecki to leave her music-lessons—and take charge of you—and bring you to America—and you and she might live there until you are twenty-one—but I see it is impossible. It is too selfish. I should not have thought of it. What are two years, Natalie?"

The girl answered nothing; she was thinking deeply. When she next spoke, it was about Lord Evelyn, and of the probability of his crossing to the States, and remaining there for a year or two; and she wanted to know more about the great country beyond the seas, and what was Philadelphia like.

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Well, it was not to be expected that these two, so busy with their own affairs, were likely to notice much that was passing around them, as the forenoon sped rapidly away, and Natalie had to think of getting home again. But the little German maid servant was not so engrossed. She was letting her clear, observant blue eyes stray from the pretty young ladies riding in the Row to the people walking under the trees, and from them again to the banks of the Serpentine, where the dogs were barking at the ducks. In doing so she happened to look a little bit behind her; then suddenly she started, and said to herself, '*Herr Je!*' But the little maid had her wits about her. She pretended to have seen nothing. Gradually, however, she lessened the distance between herself and her young mistress; then, when she was quite up to her, and walking abreast with her, she said, in a low, quick voice.

"Fraulein! Fraulein!"

"What is it, Anneli?"

George Brand was listening too. He wondered that the girl seemed so excited, and yet spoke low, and kept her eyes fixed on the ground.

"Ah, do not look round, Fraulein!" said she, in the same hurried way. "Do not look round! But it is the lady who gave you the locket. She is walking by the lake. She is watching you."

Natalie did not look round. She turned to her companion, and said, without any agitation whatever,

"Do you remember, dearest? I showed you the locket, and told you about my mysterious visitor. Now Anneli says she is walking by the side of the lake. I may go and speak to her, may I not? Because it was so wicked of Calabressa to say some one had stolen the locket, and wished to restore it after many years. I never had any such locket."

She was talking quite carelessly; it was Brand himself who was most perturbed. He knew well who that stranger must be, if Anneli's sharp eyes had not deceived her.

"No, Natalie," he said, quickly, "you must not go and speak to her; and do not look round, either. Perhaps she does not wish to be seen: perhaps she would go away. Leave it to me, my darling; I will find out all about her for you."

"But it is very strange," said the girl. "I shall begin to be afraid of this emissary of Santa Claus if she continues to be so mysterious; and I do not like mystery: I think, dearest, I must go and speak to her. She can not mean me any harm. She has brought me flowers again and again on my birthday, if it is the same. She gave me the little locket I showed you. Why may not I stop and speak to her?"

“Not now, my darling,” he said, putting his hand on her arm. “Let me find out about her first.”

“And how are you going to do that? In a few minutes, perhaps, she goes away; and when will you see her again? It is many months since Anneli saw her last; and Anneli sees everything and everybody.”

“We will cross the bridge,” said he, in a low voice, for he knew not how near the stranger might be, “and walk on to Park Lane. Anneli must tell us how far she follows. If she turns aside anywhere I will bid you good-bye and see where she goes. Do you understand, Natalie?”

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She certainly did not understand why he should speak so seriously about it.

“And I am to be marched like a prisoner? I may not turn my head?”

She began to be amused. He scarcely knew what to say to her. At last he said, earnestly,

“Natalie, it is of great importance to you that I should see this lady—that I should try to see her. Do as I bid you, my dearest.”

“Then you know who she is?” said Natalie, promptly.

“I have a suspicion, at all events; and—and—something may happen—that you will be glad of.”

“What, more mysterious presents?” the girl said, lightly; “more messages from Santa Claus?”

He could not answer her. The consciousness that this might be indeed Natalie’s mother who was so near to them; the fear of the possible consequences of any sudden disclosure; the thought that this opportunity might escape him, and he leaving in a few days for America: all these things whirled through his brain in rapid and painful succession. But there was soon to be an end of them. Natalie, still obediently following his instructions, and yet inclined to make light of the whole thing, and himself arrived at the gates of the park; Anneli, as formerly, being somewhat behind. Receiving no intimation from her, they crossed the road to the corner of Great Stanhope Street. But they had not proceeded far when Anneli said,

“Ah, Fraulein, the lady is gone! You may look after her now. See!”

That was enough for George Brand. He had no difficulty in making out the dark figure that Anneli indicated; and he was in no great hurry, for he feared the stranger might discover that she was being followed. But he breathed more freely when he had bidden good-bye to Natalie, and seen her set out for home.

He leisurely walked up Park Lane, keeping an eye from time to time on the figure in black, but not paying too strict attention, lest she should turn suddenly and observe him. In this way he followed her up to Oxford Street; and there, in the more crowded thoroughfare, he lessened the distance between them considerably. He also watched more closely now, and with a strange interest. From the graceful carriage, the beautiful figure, he was almost convinced that that, indeed, was Natalie’s mother; and he began to wonder what he would say to her—how he would justify his interference.

The stranger stopped at a door next a shop in the Edgware Road; knocked, waited, and was admitted. Then the door was shut again.



It was obviously a private lodging-house. He took a half-crown in his hand to bribe the maid-servant, and walked boldly up to the door and knocked. It was not a maid-servant who answered, however; it was a man who looked something like an English butler, and yet there was a foreign touch about his dress—probably, Brand thought, the landlord. Brand pulled out a card-case, and pretended to have some difficulty in getting a card from it.

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"The lady who came in just now—" he said, still looking at the cards.

"Madame Berezolyi? Yes, sir."

His heart jumped. But he calmly took out a pencil, and wrote on one of the cards, in French, "*One who knows your daughter would like to see you.*"

"Will you be so kind as to take up that card to Madame Berezolyi? I think she will see me. I will wait here till you come down."

The man returned in a couple of minutes.

"Madame Berezolyi will be pleased to see you, sir; will you step this way?"

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE MOTHER.

This beautiful, pale, trembling mother: she stood there, dark against the light of the window; but even in the shadow how singularly like she was to Natalie, in the tall, slender, elegant figure, the proud set of the head, the calm, intellectual brows, and the large, tender, dark eyes, as soft and pathetic as those of a doe—only this woman's face was worn and sad, and her hair was silver-gray.

She was greatly agitated, and for a second or two incapable of speech. But when he began in French to apologize for his intrusion, she eagerly interrupted him.

"Ah, no, no!" she said, in the same tongue. "Do not waste words in apology. You have come to tell me about my child, my Natalie: Heaven bless you for it; it is a great kindness. To-day I saw you walking with her—listening to her voice—ah, how I envied you!—and once or twice I thought of going to her and taking her hand, and saying only one word—'Natalushka!'"

"That would have been a great imprudence," said he gravely. "If you wish to speak to your daughter—"

"If I wish to speak to her!—if I wish to speak to her!" she exclaimed; and there were tears in her voice, if there were none in the sad eyes.

"You forget, madame, that your daughter has been brought up in the belief that you died when she was a mere infant. Consider the effect of any sudden disclosure."

"But has she never suspected? I have passed her; she has seen me. I gave her a locket: what did she think?"



“She was puzzled, yes; but how would it occur to the girl that any one could be so cruel as to conceal from her all those years the fact that her mother was alive?”

“Then you yourself, monsieur—”

“I knew it from Calabressa.”

“Ah, my old friend Calabressa! And he was here, in London, and he saw my Natalie. Perhaps—”

She paused for a second.

“Perhaps it was he who sent the message. I heard—it was only a word or two—that my daughter had found a lover.”

She regarded him. She had the same calm fearlessness of look that dwelt in Natalie’s eyes.

“You will pardon me, monsieur. Do I guess right? It is to you that my child has given her love?”

“That is my happiness,” said he. “I wish I were better worthy of it.”

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She still regarded him very earnestly, and in silence.

“When I heard,” she said, at length, in a low voice, “that my Natalie had given her love to a stranger, my heart sunk. I said, ‘More than ever is she away from me now;’ and I wondered what the stranger might be like, and whether he would be kind to her. Now that I see you, I am not so sad. There is something in your voice, in your look, that tells me to have confidence in you: you will be kind to Natalie.”

She seemed to be thinking aloud: and yet he was not embarrassed by this confession, nor yet by her earnest look; he perceived how all her thoughts were really concentrated on her daughter.

“Her father approves?” said this sad-faced, gray-haired woman.

“Oh no; quite the contrary.”

“But he is kind to her?” she said, quickly, and anxiously.

“Oh yes,” he answered. “No doubt he is kind to her. Who could be otherwise?”

She had been so agitated at the beginning of this interview that she had allowed her visitor to remain standing. She now asked him to be seated, and took a chair opposite to him. Her nervousness had in a measure disappeared; though at times she clasped the fingers of both hands together, as if to force herself to be composed.

“You will tell me all about it, monsieur; that I may know what to say when I speak to my child at last. Ah, heavens, if you could understand how full my heart is: sixteen years of silence! Think what a mother has to say to her only child after that time! It was cruel—cruel—cruel!”

A little convulsive sob was the only sign of her emotion, and the fingers were clasped together.

“Pardon me, madame,” said he, with some hesitation; “but, you see, I do not know the circumstances—”

“You do not know why I dared not speak to my own daughter?” she said, looking up in surprise. “Calabressa did not tell you?”

“No. There were some hints I did not understand.”

“Nor of the reasons that forced me to comply with such an inhuman demand? Alas! these reasons exist no longer. I have done my duty to one whose life was sacred to me; now his death has released me from fear; I come to my daughter now. Ah, when I

fold her to my heart, what shall I say to her—what but this?—'Natalushka, if your mother has remained away from you all these years, it was not because she did not love you.'"

He drew his chair nearer, and took her hand.

"I perceive that you have suffered, and deeply. But your daughter will make amends to you. She loves you now; you are a saint to her; your portrait is her dearest possession —"

"My portrait?" she said, looking rather bewildered. "Her father has not forbidden her that, then?"

"It was Calabressa who gave it to her quite recently."

She gently withdrew her hand, and glanced at the table, on which two books lay, and sighed.

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"The English tongue is so difficult," she said. "And I have so much—so much—to say! I have written out many things that I wish to tell her; and have repeated them, and repeated them; but the sound is not right—the sound is not like what my heart wishes to say to her."

"Reassure yourself, madame, on that point," said he, cheerfully: "I should imagine there is scarcely any language in Europe that your daughter does not know something of. You will not have to speak English to her at all."

She looked up with bright eagerness in her eyes.

"But not Magyar?"

"I do not know for certain," he said, "for I don't know Magyar myself; but I am almost convinced she must know it. She has told me so much about her countrymen that used to come about the house; yes, surely they would speak Magyar."

A strange happy light came into the woman's face; she was communing with herself—perhaps going over mentally some tender phrases, full of the soft vowel sounds of the Magyar tongue.

"That," said she, presently, and in a low voice, "would be my crowning joy. I have thought of what I should say to her in many languages; but always 'My daughter, I love you,' did not have the right sound. In our own tongue it goes to the heart. I am no longer afraid: my girl will understand me."

"I should think," said he, "you will not have to speak much to assure her of your love."

She seemed to become a great deal more cheerful; this matter had evidently been weighing on her mind.

"Meanwhile," she said, "you promised to tell me all about Natalie and yourself. Her father does not approve of your marrying. Well, his reasons?"

"If he has any, he is careful to keep them to himself," he said. "But I can guess at some of them. No doubt he would rather not have Natalie marry; it would deprive him of an excellent house-keeper. Then again—and this is the only reason he does give—he seems to consider it would be inexpedient as regards the work we are all engaged in—"

"You!" she said, with a sudden start. "Are you in the Society also?"

"Certainly, madame."

"What grade?"

He told her.

“Then you are helpless if he forbids your marriage.”

“On the contrary, madame, my marriage or non-marriage has nothing whatever to do with my obedience to the Society.”

“He has control over Natalie—”

“Until she is twenty-one,” he answered promptly.

“But,” she said, regarding him with some apprehension in her eyes, “you do not say—you do not suggest—that the child is opposed to her father—that she thinks of marrying you, when she may legally do so, against his wish?”

“My dear madame,” said he, “it will be difficult for you to understand how all this affair rests until you get to know something more about Natalie herself. She is not like other girls. She has courage; she has opinions of her own: when she thinks that such and such a thing is right, she is not afraid to do it, whatever it may be. Now, she believes her father’s opposition to be unjust; and—and perhaps there is something else that has influenced her: well, the fact is, I am ordered off to America, and—and the girl has a quick and generous nature, and she at once offered to share what she calls my banishment.”

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"To leave her father's house!" said the mother, with increasing alarm.

Brand looked at her. He could not understand this expression of anxious concern. If, as he was beginning to assure himself, Lind was the cause of that long and cruel separation between mother and daughter, why should this woman be aghast at the notion of Natalie leaving such a guardian? Or was it merely a superstitious fear of him, similar to that which seemed to possess Calabressa?

"In dealing with your daughter, madame," he continued, "one has to be careful not to take advantage of her forgetfulness of herself. She is too willing to sacrifice herself for others. Now to-day we were talking—as she is not free to marry until she is twenty-one—about her perhaps going over to America under the guardianship of Madame Potecki —"

"Madame Potecki."

"She is a friend of your daughter's—almost a mother to her; and I am not sure but that Natalie would willingly do that—more especially under your guardianship, in preference to that of Madame Potecki—"

"Oh no, no!" she exclaimed, instantly. "She must not dare her father like that. Oh, it would be terrible! I hope you will not allow her."

"It is not a question of daring; the girl has courage enough for anything," he said coolly. "The thing is that it would involve too great a sacrifice on her part; and I was exceedingly selfish to think of it for a moment. No; let her remain in her father's house until she is free to act as her own mistress; then, if she will come to me, I shall take care that a proper home is provided for her. She must not be a wanderer and a stranger."

"But even then, when she is free to act, you will not ask her to disobey her father? Oh, it will be too terrible!"

Again he regarded her with amazement.

"What do you mean, madame? What is terrible? Or is it that you are afraid of him? Calabressa spoke like that."

"You do not know of what he is capable," she said, with a sigh.

"All the more reason," he said, directly, "why she should be removed from his guardianship. But permit me to say, madame, that I do not quite share your apprehensions. I have seen nothing of the bogey kind about your husband. Of course, he is a man of strong will, and he does not like to be thwarted: without that strength of character he could not have done what he has done. But he also knows that his daughter is no longer a child, and when the proper time comes you will find that his



common sense will lead him to withdraw an opposition which would otherwise be futile. Do I explain myself clearly? My dear madame, have no anxiety about the future of your daughter. When you see herself, when you speak to her, you will find that she is one who is not given to fear."

For a moment the apprehensive look left her face. She remained silent, a happier light coming into her eyes.

"She is not sad and sorrowful, then?" she said, presently.

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"Oh no; she is too brave."

"What beautiful hair she has!" said this worn-faced woman with the sad eyes. "Ah, many a time I have said to myself that when I take her to my heart I will feel the beautiful soft hair; I will stroke it; her head will lie on my bosom, and I will gather courage from her eyes: when she laughs my heart will rejoice! I have lived many years in solitude—in secret, with many apprehensions; perhaps I have grown timid and fearful; once I was not so. But I have been troubling myself with fears; I have said, 'Ah, if she looks coldly on me, if she turns away from me, then my heart will break!'"

"I do not think you have much to fear," said he, regarding the beautiful, sad face.

"I have tried to catch the sound of her voice," she continued, absently, and her eyes were filled with tears, "but I could not do that. But I have watched her, and wondered. She does not seem proud and cold."

"She will not be proud or cold to you," he said, "when she is kindness and gentleness to all the world."

"And—and when shall you see her again?" she asked, timidly.

"Now," he said. "If you will permit me, I will go to her at once. I will bring her to you."

"Oh no!" she exclaimed hastily drying her eyes. "Oh no! She must not find a sad mother, who has been crying. She will be repelled. She will think, 'I have enough of sadness.' Oh no, you must let me collect myself: I must be very brave and cheerful when my Natalie comes to me. I must make her laugh, not cry."

"Madame," said he, gravely, "I may have but a few days longer in England: do you think it is wise to put off the opportunity? You see, she must be prepared; it would be a terrible shock if she were to know suddenly. And how can one tell what may happen tomorrow or next day? At the present moment I know she is at home; I could bring her to you directly."

"Just now?" she said; and she began to tremble again. She rose and went to a mirror.

"She could not recognize herself in me. She would not believe me. And I should frighten her with my mourning and my sadness."

"I do not think you need fear, madame."

She turned to him eagerly.

"Perhaps you would explain to her? Ah, would you be so kind! Tell her I have seen much trouble of late. My father has just died, after years of illness; and we were kept in

perpetual terror. You will tell her why I dared not go to her before: oh no! not that—not that!”

“You forget, madame, that I myself do not know.”

“It is better she should not know—better she should not know!” she said, rapidly. “No, let the girl have confidence in her father while she remains in his house. Perhaps some time she may know; perhaps some one who is a fairer judge than I will tell her the story and make excuses: it must be that there is some excuse.”

“She will not want to know; she will only want to come to you.”

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“But half an hour, give me half an hour,” she said, and she glanced round the room. “It is so poor a chamber.”

“She will not think of the chamber.”

“And the little girl with her—she will remain down-stairs, will she not? I wish to be alone, quite alone, with my child.” Her breath came and went quickly, and she clasped her fingers tight. “Oh, monsieur, my heart will break if my child is cold to me!”

“That is the last thing you have to fear,” said he, and he rose. “Now calm yourself, madame. Recollect, you must not frighten your daughter. And it will be more than half an hour before I bring her to you; it will take more than that for me to break it to her.”

She rose also; but she was obviously so excited that she did not know well what she was doing. All her thoughts were about the forth-coming interview.

“You are sure she understands the Magyar?” she said again.

“No, I do not know. But why not speak in French to her?”

“It does not sound the same—it does not sound the same: and a mother—can only—talk to her child—”

“You must calm yourself, dear madame. Do you know that your daughter believes you to have been a miracle of courage and self-reliance? What Calabressa used to say to her was this: ‘Natalushka, when you are in trouble you will be brave; you will show yourself the daughter of Natalie Berezolyi.’”

“Yes, yes,” she said, quickly, as she again dried her eyes, and drew herself up. “I beg you to pardon me. I have thought so much of this meeting, through all these years, that my hearts beats too quickly now. But I will have no fear. She will come to me; I am not afraid: she will not turn away from me. And how am I to thank you for your great kindness?” she added, as he moved to the door.

“By being kind to Natalie when I am away in America,” said he. “You will not find it a difficult task.”

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE VELVET GLOVE.

Ferdinand Lind sat alone, after Gathorne Edwards had gone, apparently deep buried in thought. He leaned forward over his desk, his head resting on his left hand, while in his right hand he held a pencil, with which he was mechanically printing letters on a sheet

of blotting-paper before him. These letters, again and again repeated, formed but one phrase: THE VELVET GLOVE. It was as if he were perpetually reminding himself, during the turnings and twistings of his sombre speculations, of the necessity of being prudent and courteous and suave. It was as if he were determined to imprint the caution on his brain—drilling it into himself—so that in no possible emergency could it be forgotten. But as his thoughts went farther afield, he began to play with the letters, as a child might. They began to assume decorations. THE VELVET GLOVE appeared surrounded with stars; again furnished with duplicate lines; again breaking out into rays. At length he rose, tore up the sheet of blotting-paper, and rung a hand-bell twice.

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Reitzei appeared.

"Where will Beratinsky be this evening?"

"At the Culturverein: he sups there."

"You and he must be here at ten. There is business of importance."

He walked across the room, and took up his hat and stick. Perhaps at this moment the caution he had been drilling into himself suggested some further word. He turned to Reitzei, who had advanced to take his place at the desk.

"I mean if that is quite convenient to you both," he said, courteously. "Eleven o'clock, if you please, or twelve?"

"Ten will be quite convenient," Reitzei said.

"The business will not take long."

"Then we can return to the Culturverein: it is an exhibition night: one would not like to be altogether absent."

These sombre musings had consumed some time. When Lind went out he found it had grown dark; the lamps were lit; the stream of life was flowing westward. But he seemed in no great hurry. He chose unfrequented streets; he walked slowly; there was less of the customary spring and jauntiness of his gait. In about half an hour he had reached the door of Madame Potecki's house.

He stood for some seconds there without ringing. Then, as some one approached, he seemed waken out of a trance. He rung sharply, and the summons was almost immediately answered.

Madame Potecki was at home, he learned, but she was dining.

"Never mind," said he, abruptly: "she will see me. Go and ask her."

A couple of minutes thereafter he was shown into a small parlor, where Madame Potecki had just risen to receive him; and by this time a singular change had come over his manner.

"I beg your pardon—I beg a thousand pardons, my dear Madame Potecki," said he, in the kindest way, "for having interrupted you. Pray continue. I shall make sure you forgive me only if you continue. Ah, that is well. Now I will take a chair also."

Madame Potecki had again seated herself, certainly; but she was far too much agitated by this unexpected visit to be able to go on with her repast. She was alarmed about Natalie.

“You are surprised, no doubt, at my coming to see you,” said he, cheerfully and carelessly, “so soon after you were kind enough to call on me. But it is only about a trifle; I assure you, my dear Madame Potecki, it is only about a trifle, and I must therefore insist on your not allowing your dinner to get cold.”

“But if it is about Natalie—”

“My dear madame, Natalie is very well. There is nothing to alarm you. Now you will go on with your dinner, and I will go on with my talking.”

Thus constrained, madame again addressed herself to the small banquet spread before her, which consisted of a couple of sausages, some pickled endive, a piece of Camembert cheese, and a tiny bottle of Erlauer. Mr. Lind turned his chair to the fire, put his feet on the fender, and lay back. He was rather smartly dressed this evening, and he was pleasant in manner.

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"Natalie ought to be grateful to you, madame," said he lightly, "for your solicitude about her. It is not often one finds that in one who is not related by blood."

"I have no one now left in the world to love but herself," said madame; "and then you see, my dear friend Lind, her position appeals to one: it is sad that she has no mother."

"Yes, yes," said Lind, with a trifle of impatience. "Now you were good enough to come and tell me this afternoon, madame, about that foolish little romance that Natalie has got into her head. It was kind of you; it was well-intentioned. And after all, although that wish of hers to go to America can scarcely be serious, it is but natural that romantic ideas should get into the head of a younger girl—"

"Did not I say that to her?" exclaimed Madame Potecki, eagerly; "and almost in these words too. And did not I say to her, 'Ah, my child, you must take care; you must take care!'"

"That also was good advice," said Lind, courteously; "and no doubt Natalie laid it to her heart. No, I am not afraid of her doing anything very wild or reckless. She is sensible; she thinks; she has not been brought up in an atmosphere of sentiment. One may say this or that on the spur of the moment, when one is excited; but when it comes to action, one reasons, one sees what one's duty is. Natalie may have said something to you, madame, about going to America, but not with any serious intention, believe me."

"Perhaps not," said Madame Potecki, with considerable hesitation.

"Very well, then," said Mr. Lind, as he rose, and stood before the chimney-piece mirror, and arranged the ends of his gracefully tied neckerchief. "We come to another point. It was very kind of you, my dear madame, to bring me the news—to tell me something of that sort had been said; but you know what ill-natured people will remark. You get no appreciation. They call you tale-bearer!"

Madame colored slightly.

"It is ungenerous; it is not a fair requital of kindness; but that is what is said," he continued. "Now, I should not like any friend of Natalie's to incur such a charge on her account, do you perceive, madame? And, in these circumstances, do you not think that it would be better for both you and me to consider that you did not visit me this afternoon; that I know nothing of what idle foolishness Natalie has been talking? Would not that be better? As for me, I am dumb."

"Oh, very well, my dear friend," said madame, quickly. "I would not for the world have Natalie or any one think that I was a mischief-maker—oh no! And did I not promise to you that I should say nothing of my having called on you to-day? It is already a promise."

He turned round and regarded her.

“Precisely so,” he said. “You did promise; it was kind of you; and for myself, you may rely on my discretion. Your calling on me—what you repeated to me—all that is obliterated: you understand?”

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Madame Potecki understood that very well: but she could not quite make out why he should have come to her this evening, apparently with no object beyond that of reminding her of her promise to say nothing of her visit to Lisle Street.

He lifted his hat from an adjacent chair.

“Now I will leave you to finish your dinner in quiet. You forgive me for interrupting you, do you not? And you will remember, I am sure, not to mention to any one about your having called on me to-day? As for me, it is all wiped out: I know nothing. Adieu, and thanks.”

He shook hands with her in a very friendly manner, and then left, saying he could open the outer door for himself.

He got home in time for dinner: he and Natalie dined together, and he was particularly kind to her; he talked in Magyar, which was his custom when he wished to be friendly and affectionate; he made no reference to George Brand whatsoever.

“Natalie,” said he, casually, “it was not fair that you were deprived of a holiday this year. You know the reason—there were too many important things going forward. But it is not yet too late. You must think about it—think where you would like to go for two or three weeks.”

She did not answer. It was on that morning that she had placed her written offer in her lover’s hands; so far there had been no reply from him.

“And Madame Potecki,” her father continued; “she is not very rich; she has but little change. Why not take her with you instead of Anneli?”

“I should like to take her away for a time,” said the girl, in a low voice. “She lives a monotonous life; but she has always her pupils.”

“Some arrangement could be made with them, surely,” her father said, lightly; and then he added, “Paris is always the safest place to go to when one is in doubt. There you are independent of the weather; there are so many things to see and to do if it rains. Will you think of it, Natalushka?”

“Yes, papa,” she said, though she felt rather guilty. But she was so grateful to have her father talk to her in this friendly way again, after the days of estrangement that had passed, that she could not but pretend to fall in with his schemes.

“And I will tell you another thing,” said Mr. Lind. “I intend to buy you some furs, Natalie, for the winter. These we will get in Paris.”

“I am too much of an expense to you already, papa.”



“You forget,” said he, with mock gravity, “that you give me your invaluable services as house-keeper, and that so far you have received no salary.”

There was a knock at the outer door.

“Is it nine o’clock already?” he said, in an altered tone.

“Whom do you expect, papa?”

“Gathorne Edwards.”

“Then I will send you in coffee to the study.”

But presently Anneli came into the room.

“Pardon, Fraulein, but the gentleman wishes to see you for one minute.”

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"Let him come in here, then."

Edwards came in, and shook hands with Natalie in an embarrassed manner. Then he produced a little packet.

"I have a commission, Miss Lind. It is from Signor Calabressa. He sends you this necklace, and says I am to tell you that he thinks of you always."

The message had been in reality that Calabressa "thought of her and loved her always." But Edwards was a shy person, and did not like to pronounce the word "love" to this beautiful girl, who regarded him with such proud, frank eyes.

"He has not returned with you, then?"

"No."

"But you can send him a message?"

"I will when I hear of his address."

"Then you will tell him—will you be so kind?—that the little Natalushka—that is myself," she said, smiling; "you will tell him that the little Natalushka thanks him, and is not likely to forget him."

The interview between the new visitor and Mr. Lind was speedily got over. Lind excused himself for giving Edwards the trouble of this second appointment by saying he had been much engrossed with serious business during the day. There was, indeed, little new to be communicated about the Kirski and Calabressa escapade, though Edwards repeated the details as minutely as possible. He accepted a cigar, and left.

Then Lind got his overcoat and hat and went out of the house. A hansom took him along to Lisle Street: he arrived there just as ten was striking.

There were two men at the door; they were Beratinsky and Reitzei. All three entered and went up the narrow stair in the dark, for the old German had gone. There was some fumbling for matches on the landing; then a light was procured, and the gas lit in the central room. Mr. Lind sat down at his desk; the other two drew in chairs. The whole house was intently silent.

"I am sorry to take you away from your amusements," said he, civilly enough; "but you will soon be able to return to them. The matter is of importance. Edwards has returned."

Both men nodded; Reitzei had, in fact, informed his companion.

“As I anticipated, Calabressa’s absurd proposal has been rejected, if not even scoffed at. Now, this affair must not be played with any longer. The Council has charged us, the English section, with a certain duty; we must set about having it performed at once.”

“There is a year’s grace,” Beratinsky observed, but Lind interrupted him curtly.

“There may be a year’s grace or less allowed to the infamous priest; there is none allowed to us. We must have our agent ready. Why, man, do you think a thing like that can be done off-hand, without long and elaborate planning?”

Beratinsky was silenced.

“Are we to have the Council think that we are playing with them? And that was not the only thing in connection with the Calabressa scheme which you, Reitzei, were the first to advocate. Every additional person whom you let into the secret is a possible weak point in the carrying out of the design; do you perceive that? And you had to let this man Edwards into it.”

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"But he is safe."

Lind laughed.

"Safe? Yes; because he knows his own life would not be worth a half-franc piece if he betrayed a Council secret. However, that is over: no more about it. We must show the Council that we can act and promptly."

There was silence for a second or two.

"I have no need to wait for the further instructions of the Council," Lind resumed. "I know what they intend. They intend to make it clear to all Europe that this is not a Camorra act of vengeance. The Starving Cardinal has thousands of enemies; the people curse and groan at him; if he were stabbed by an Italian, 'Oh, another of those Camorristi wretches!' would be the cry. The agent must come from England, and, if he is taken red-handed, then let him say if he likes that he is connected with an association which knows how to reach evil-doers who are beyond the ordinary reach of the law; but let him make it clear that it is no Camorra affair: you understand?"

"Yes, yes," said both men.

"Now you know what the Council have ordained," continued Lind, calmly, "that no agent shall be appointed to undertake any service involving immediate peril to life without a ballot among at least four persons. It was absurd of Calabressa to imagine that they would abrogate their own decree, merely because that Russian madman was ready for anything. Well, it is not expedient that this secret should be confided to many. It is known to four persons in this country. We are three of the four."

The two men started.

"Yes," he said boldly, and he regarded each of them in turn. "That is my proposal: that we ourselves form three of the ballot of four. The fourth must be an Englishman."

"Edwards?" said Beratinsky. Reitzei was thinking too much of his own position to speak.

"No," said Lind, calmly playing with his pencil, "Edwards is a man of books, not of action. I have been thinking that the fourth ought to be—George Brand."

He watched them both. Reitzei was still preoccupied; but the small black eyes of Beratinsky twinkled eagerly.

"Yes, yes, yes! Very good! There we have our four. For myself, I am not afraid; not I!"

"And you, Reitzei; are you satisfied?" said Lind merely as a matter of form.

The younger man started.

“Oh yes, the Council must be obeyed,” said he, absently.

“Gentlemen,” said Lind, rising, “the business is concluded. Now you may return to your Culturverein.”

But when the others had risen, he said, in a laughing way, “There is only one thing I will add: you may think about it at your leisure. The chances are three to one, and we all run the same risk; but I confess I should not be sorry to see the Englishman chosen; for, you perceive, that would make the matter clear enough. They would not accuse an Englishman of complicity with the Camorra—would they, Reitzei? If the lot fell to the Englishman, I should not be disappointed—would you, Beratinsky?”



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Beratsky, who was about to leave, turned sharply and the coal-black eyes were fixed intently on Lind's face.

"I?" he said. "Not I! We will talk again about it, Brother Lind."

Reitzei opened the door, Lind screwed out the gas, and then the three men descended the wooden staircase, their footsteps sounding through the silent house.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

SANTA CLAUS.

To save time Brand jumped into a hansom and drove down to Curzon Street. He was too much preoccupied to remember that Natalie had wished him not to come to the house. Anneli admitted him, and showed him up-stairs into the drawing-room. In a couple of seconds or so Natalie herself appeared.

"Well," said she lightly, "you have come to tell me about Santa Claus? You have discovered the mysterious messenger?"

She shut the door and went forward to him.

"What is the matter?" she said, quickly: there was something in his look that alarmed her.

He caught both her hands in his, and held them tight.

"Nothing to frighten you, at all events," said he: "no, Natalie I have good news for you. Only—only—you must be brave."

It was he who was afraid; he did not know how to begin.

"That locket there," said he, regarding the little silver trinket. "Have you ever thought about it?—why do you wear it?"

"Why do I wear it?" she said, simply. "Because one day that Calabressa was talking to me it occurred to me that the locket might have belonged to my mother, and that some one had wished to give it to me. He did not say it was impossible. It was his talk of Natalie and Natalushka that put it in my head; perhaps it was a stupid fancy."

"Natalie, the locket did belong to your mother."



“Ah, you know, then?” she said, quickly, but with nothing beyond a bright and eager interest. “You have seen that lady? Well, what does she say?—was she angry that you followed her? Did you thank her for me for all those presents of flowers?”

“Natalie,” said he almost in despair, “have you never thought about it—about the locket? Have you never thought of what might be possible?”

“I do not understand you,” she said, with a bewildered air. “What is it? why do you not speak?”

“Because I am afraid. See, I hold your hands tight because I am afraid. And yet it is good news: your heart will be filled with joy; your life will be quite different from to-day ever after. Natalie, cannot you imagine for yourself—something beautiful happening to you—something you may have dreamed of—”

She became a little pale, but she maintained her calmness.

“Dearest,” said she, “why are you afraid to tell me. You hold my hands: do they tremble?”

“But, Natalie, think!” he said. “Think of the locket; it was given you by one who loved you—who has loved you all these years—and been kept away from you—and now she is waiting for you.”

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He studied her face intently: there was nothing there but a vague bewilderment. He grew more and more to fear the effect of the shock.

"Yes, yes. Can you not think, now, if it were possible that one whom you have always thought to be dead—whom you have loved all through your life—if it were she herself—"

She withdrew her hands from his, and caught the back of a chair. She was ghastly pale; for a second she did not speak.

"You will kill me—if it is not true," she said, in a low voice, and still staring at him with frightened, bewildered eyes.

"Natalie, it is true," said he, stepping forward to catch her by the arm, for he thought she was going to fall.

She sunk into a chair, and covered her face with her hands—not to cry, but to think. She had to reverse the belief of a lifetime in a second.

But suddenly she started up, her face still white, her lips firm.

"Take me to her; I must see her; I will go at once."

"You shall not," he said, promptly; but he himself was beginning to breathe more freely. "I will not allow you to see her until you are perfectly calm."

He put his hand on her arm gently.

"Natalie," said he, "you must calm yourself—for her sake. She has been suffering; she is weak; any wild scene would do her harm. You must calm yourself, my darling; you must be the braver of the two; you must show yourself very strong—for her sake."

"I am quite calm," she said, with pale lips. She put her left hand over her heart. "It is only my heart that beats so."

"Well, in a little while—"

"Now—now!" she pleaded, almost wildly. "I must see her. When I try to think of it, it is like to drive me mad; I cannot think at all. Let us go!"

"You must think," he said firmly; "you must think of what you are going to say; and your dress, too. Natalie, you must take that piece of scarlet ribbon away; one who is nearly related to you has just died."

She tore it off instantly.



“And you know Magyar, don’t you, Natalie?”

“Oh yes, yes.”

“Because your mother has been learning English in order to be able to speak to you.”

Again she placed her hand over her heart, and there was a look of pain on her face.

“My dearest, let us go! I can bear no more: my heart will break! See, am I not calm enough? Do I tremble?”

“No, you are very courageous,” he said, looking at her doubtfully.

“Let us go!—let us go!”

Her entreaties overcame his scruples. The things she had thrown aside on coming in from her morning walk still lay there; she hastily put them on; and she herself led the way down-stairs. He put her into the hansom, and followed; the man drove off. She held her lover’s hand tight, as a sign of her gratitude.

“Mind, I depend on you, Natalie,” he said.

“Oh, do not fear,” she said, rather wildly; “why should one fear? It seems to me all a strange sort of dream; and I shall waken out of it by-and-by, and go back to the house. Why should I be surprised to see her, when she is my constant companion? And do you think I shall not know what to say?—I have talked to her all my life.”

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But when they had reached the house, and were admitted, this half-hysterical courage had fled.

“One moment, dearest; give me one moment,” she said, at the foot of the stairs, as if her breath failed her, and she put her hand on his arm.

“Now, Natalie,” he whispered, “you must think of your mother as an invalid—not to be excited, you understand; there is to be no scene.”

“Yes, yes,” she said, but she scarcely heard him.

“Now go,” he said, “and I will wait here.”

“No, I wish you to come,” she said.

“You ought to be alone with her.”

“I wish you to come,” she repeated; and she took his hand.

They went up-stairs; the door was wide open; a figure stood in the middle of the room. Natalie entered first; she was very white, that was all. It was the other woman who was trembling—trembling with anxious fears, and forgetful of every one of the English phrases she had learned.

The girl at the door hesitated but for a moment. Breathless, wondering, she beheld this vision—worn as the face was, she recognized in it the features she had learned to love; and there were the dark and tender eyes she had so often held commune with when she was alone. It was only because she was so startled that she thus hesitated; the next instant she was in her mother’s arms held tight there, her head against her bosom.

Then the mother began, in her despair,

“My—my daughter—you—do—know me?”

But the girl, not looking up, murmured some few words in a language Brand did not understand; and at the sound of them the mother uttered a wild cry of joy, and drew her daughter closer to her, and laid her streaming, worn, sad face on the beautiful hair. They spoke together in that tongue; the sounds were soft and tender to the ear; perhaps it was the yearning of love that made them so.

Then Natalie remembered her promise. She gently released herself; she led her mother to a sofa, and made her sit down; she threw herself on her knees beside her, and kissed her hand; then she buried her head in her mother’s lap. She sobbed once or twice; she was determined not to give way to tears. And the mother stroked the soft hair of the girl, which she could hardly see, for her eyes were full; and from time to time

she spoke to her in those gentle, trembling tones, bending over her and speaking close to her ear. The girl was silent; perhaps afraid to awake from a dream.

"Natalie," said George Brand.

She sprung to her feet.

"Oh, I beg your pardon—I beg your pardon!" she said, hurriedly. "I had forgotten—"

"No, you have not forgotten," he said, with a smile. "You have remembered; you have behaved well. Now that I have seen you through it, I am going; you ought to be by yourselves."

"Oh no!" she said, in a bewildered way. "Without you I am useless: I cannot think. I should go on talking and talking to my mother all day, all night—because—because my heart is full. But—but one must do something. Why is she here? She will come home with me—now!"

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“Natalie,” said he, gravely, “you must not even mention such a thing to her: it would pain her. Can you not see that there are sufficient reasons why she should not go, when she has not been under your father’s roof for sixteen years?”

“And why has my father never told me?” the girl said, breathlessly.

“I cannot say.”

She thought for a moment; but she was too excited to follow out any train of thinking.

“Ah,” she said, “what matter? I have found a great treasure. And you, you shall not go: it will be we three together now. Come!”

She took his hand; she turned to her mother; her face flushed with shyness. She said something, her eyes turned to the ground, in that soft musical language he did not understand.

“I know, my child,” the mother answered in French, and she laughed lightly despite her wet eyes. “Do you think one cannot see?—and I have been following you like a spy!”

“Ah, then,” said the girl, in the same tongue, “do you see what lies they tell? They say when the mother comes near her child, the heart of the child knows and recognizes her. It is not true! it is not true!—or perhaps one has a colder heart than the others. You have been near to me, mother; I have watched, as you went away crying, and all I said was, ‘Ah, the poor lady, I am sorry for her!’ I had no more pity for you than Anneli had. Anneli used to say, ‘Perhaps, fraulein, she has lost some one who resembles you.’”

“I had lost you—I had lost you,” the mother said, drawing the girl toward her again. “But now I have found you again, Natalushka. I thank God for his goodness to me. I said to myself, ‘If my child turns away from me, I will die!’ and I thought that if you had any portrait of me, it would be taken when I was young, and you would not care for an old woman grown haggard and plain—”

“Oh, do you think it is for smooth portraits that I care?” the girl said, impetuously. She drew out from some concealed pocket a small case, and opened it. “Do you think it is for smooth faces one cares? There—I will never look at it again!”

She threw it on to the table with a proud gesture.

“But you had it next your heart, Natalushka,” said her mother, smiling.

“But I have you in my heart, mother: what do I want with a portrait?” said the girl.

She drew her daughter down to her again, and put her arm once more round her neck.



"I once had hair like yours, Natalushka, but not so beautiful as yours, I think. And you wore the locket, too? Did not that make you guess? Had you no suspicion?"

"How could I—how could I?" she asked. "Even when I showed it to Calabressa—"

Here she stopped suddenly.

"Did he know, mother?"

"Oh yes."

"Then why did he not tell me? Oh, it was cruel!" she said, indignantly.

"He told me, Natalie," George Brand said.

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"You knew?" the girl said, turning to him with wide eyes.

"Yes; and Calabressa, when he told me, implored me never to tell you. Well, perhaps he thought it would give you needless pain. But I was thinking, within the last few days, that I ought to tell you before I left for America."

"Do you hear, mother?" the girl said, in a low voice. "He is going away to America—and alone. I wished to go; he refuses."

"Now I am going away much more contented, Natalie, since you will have a constant companion with you. I presume, madame, you will remain in England?"

The elder woman looked up with rather a frightened air.

"Alas, monsieur, I do not know! When at last I found myself free—when I knew I could come and speak to my child—that was all I thought of."

"But you wish to remain in England: is it not so?"

"What have I in the world now but this beautiful child—whose heart is not cold, though her mother comes so late to claim her?"

"Then be satisfied, madame. It is simple. No one can interfere with you. But I will provide you, if you will allow me, with better lodgings than these. I have a few days' idleness still before me."

"That is his way, mother," Natalie said, in a still lower voice. "It is always about others he is thinking—how to do one a kindness."

"I presume," he said, in quite a matter-of-fact way, "that you do not wish your being in London to become known?"

She looked up timidly, but in truth she could hardly take her attention away from this newly-found daughter of hers for a single second. She still continued stroking the soft hair and rounded cheek as she said,

"If that is possible."

"It would not be long possible in an open thoroughfare like this," he said; "But I think I could find you a small old-fashioned house down about Brompton, with a garden and a high wall. I have passed such places occasionally. There Natalie could come to see you, and walk with you. There is another thing," he said, in a matter-of-fact way, taking out his watch. "It is now nearly two o'clock. Now, dear madame, Natalie is in the habit of having luncheon at one. You would not like to see your child starve before your eyes?"

The elder woman rose instantly; then she colored somewhat.

"No doubt you did not expect visitors," George Brand said, quickly. "Well, what do you say to this? Let us get into a four-wheeled cab, and drive down to my chambers. I have an indefatigable fellow, who could get something for us in the desert of Saharra."

"What do you say, child?"

Natalie had risen too: she was regarding her mother with earnest eyes, and not thinking much about luncheon.

"I will do whatever you wish," she was saying: but suddenly she cried, "Oh, I am indeed so happy!" and flung her arms round her mother's neck, and burst into a flood of tears for the first time. She had struggled long; but she had broken down at last.

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“Natalie,” said George Brand, pretending to be very anxious about the time, “could you get your mother’s things for her? I think we shall be down there by a quarter past two.”

She turned to him with her streaming eyes.

“Yes, we will go with you. Do not let us be separated.”

“Then look sharp,” said he, severely.

Natalie took her mother into the adjoining room. Brand, standing at the window, succeeded in catching the eye of a cab-man, whom he signaled to come to the door below. Presently the two women appeared.

“Now,” he said, “Miss Natalie, there is to be no more crying.”

“Oh no!” she said, smiling quite radiantly. “And I am so anxious to see the rooms—I have heard so much of them from Lord Evelyn.”

She said nothing further then, for she was passing before him on her way out. In doing so, she managed, unseen, to pick up the miniature she had thrown on the table. She had made believe to despise that portrait very much; but all the same, as they went down the dark staircase, she conveyed it back to the secret little pocket she had made for it—next her heart.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A SUMMONS.

“Mother,” said the girl, in the soft-sounding Magyar, as these two were together going down-stairs, “give me your hand; let me hold it tight, to make sure. All the way here I kept terrifying myself by thinking it must be a dream; that I should wake, and find the world empty without you, just as before. But now—now with your hand in mine, I am sure.”

“Natalushka, you can hear me speak also. Ghosts do not speak like this, do they?”

Brand had preceded them to open the door. As Natalie was passing him she paused for a second, and regarded him with the beautiful, tender, dark eyes.

“I am not likely to forget what I owe to you,” she said in English.

He followed them into the cab.

“What you owe to me?” he said, lightly. “You owe me nothing at all. But if you wish to do me a good turn, you may pretend to be pleased with whatever old Waters can get together for you. The poor old fellow will be in a dreadful state. To entertain two ladies, and not a moment of warning! However, we will show you the river, and the boats and things, and give him a few minutes’ grace.”

Indeed, it was entirely as a sort of harmless frolic that he chose to regard this present excursion of theirs. He was afraid of the effect of excessive emotion on this worn woman, and he was anxious that she should see her daughter cheerful and happy. He would not have them think of any future; above all, he would have nothing said about himself or America; it was all an affair of the moment—the joyous re-union of mother and daughter—a pleasant morning with London all busy and astir—the only serious thing in the whole world the possible anxieties and struggles of the venerable major-domo in Buckingham Street.

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He had not much difficulty in entertaining these two guests of his on their way down. They professed to be greatly interested in the history and antiquities of the old-fashioned little thoroughfare over the river; arrived there, they regarded with much apparent curiosity the houses pointed out to them as having been the abode of illustrious personages: they examined the old water gate; and, in ascending the oak staircase, they heard of painted ceilings and what not with a deep and respectful attention. But always these two had each other's hand clasped tight, and occasionally Natalie murmured a little snatch of Magyar. It was only to make sure, she explained.

Before they reached the topmost story they heard a considerable noise overhead. It was a one-sided altercation; broken and piteous on the one hand, voluble and angry on the other.

"It sounds as if Waters were having a row with the man in possession," Brand said.

They drew nearer.

"Why, Natalie, it is your friend Kirski!"

Brand was following his two guests up-stairs; and so could not interfere between the two combatants before they arrived. But the moment that Natalie appeared on the landing there was a dead silence. Kirski shrunk back with a slight exclamation, and stood looking from one to the other with a frightened air. She advanced to him and asked him what was the matter, in his native tongue. He shrunk farther back. The man could not or would not speak. He murmured something to himself, and stared at her as if she were a spectre.

"He has got a letter for you, sir," Waters said; "I have seen the address; and he will neither leave it nor take it. And as for what he has been trying to say, Lord A'mighty knows what it is—I don't."

"Very well—all right," Brand said. "You leave him to us. Cut away and get some luncheon—whatever you can find—at once."

But Natalie had gone nearer to the Russian, and was talking to him in that fearless, gentle way of hers. By-and-by he spoke, in an uncertain, almost gasping voice. Then he showed her a letter; and, in obedience to something she said, went timidly forward and placed it in Brand's hand.

*"A Monsieur,
M. George Brand, Esq.,
Londres."*

This was the superscription; and Brand recognized the handwriting easily enough.

“The letter is from Calabressa,” he said obviously. “Tell him not to be alarmed. We shall not eat him, however hungry we may be.”

Kirski had recovered himself somewhat, and was speaking eagerly to her, in a timid, anxious, imploring fashion. She listened in silence; but she was clearly somewhat embarrassed, and when she turned to her lover there was some flush of color on her face.

“He talks some wild things,” she said, “and some foolish things; but he means no harm. I am sorry for the poor man. He is afraid you are angry with him; he says he promised never to try to see me; that he would not have come if he had known. I have told him you are not angry; that it is not his fault; that you will show that you are not angry.”

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But first of all Brand ushered his guests into the long, low-roofed chamber, and drew the portieres across the middle, so that Waters might have an apartment for his luncheon preparations. Then he opened the letter. Kirski remained at the door, with his cap in his hand.

* * * * *

“My much-esteemed friend,”—Calabressa wrote, in his ornate, ungrammatical, and phonetic French—“the poor devil who is the bearer of this letter is known to you, and yet not altogether known to you. You know something of his conversion from a wild beast into a man—from the tiger into a devotee; but you do not, my friend, perhaps entirely know how his life has become absorbed in one worship, one aspiration, one desire. The means of the conversion, the instrument, you know, have I not myself before described it to you? The harassed and bleeding heart, crushed with scorn and filled with despair—how can a man live with that in his bosom? He wishes to die. The world has been too cruel to him. But all at once an angel appears; into the ruins of the wasted life a seed of kindness is dropped, and then behold the beautiful flower of love springing up—love that becomes a worship, a religion! Yes, I have said so much before to you; now I say more; now I entreat you not to check this beautiful worship—it is sacred. This man goes round the churches; he stands before the pictures of the saints; he wanders on unsatisfied: he says there is no saint like the beautiful one in England, who healed him with her soft words when he was sick to death. But now, my dear Monsieur Brand, I hear you say to yourself, ‘What is my friend Calabressa after now? Has he taken to the writings of pious sermons? Is he about to shave his head and put a rope round his waist? My faith, that is not like that fellow Calabressa!’ You are right, my friend. I describe the creation of the devotee; it is a piece of poetry, as one might say. But your devotee must have his amulet; is it not so? This is the meaning and prayer of my letter to you. The bearer of it was willing to do us a great service; perhaps—if one must confess it—he believed it was on behalf of the beautiful Natalushka and her father that he was to undertake the duty that now devolves on some other. One must practice a little *finesse* sometimes; what harm is there? Very well. Do you know what he seeks by way of reward—what he considers the most valuable thing in the world? It is a portrait of his saint, you understand? That is the amulet the devotee would have. And I do not further wish to write to her; no, because she would say, ‘What, that is a little matter to do for my friend Calabressa.’ No; I write to you—I write to one who has knowledge of affairs—and I say to myself, ‘If he considers it prudent, then he will ask the beautiful child to give her portrait to this one who will worship it.’ I have declared to him that I will make the request; I make it. Do not consider

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it a trifling matter; it is not to him; it is the crown of his existence. And if he says, 'Do you see, this is what I am ready to do for her—I will give my life if she or her friends wish it;' then I say—I, Calabressa—that a portrait at one shilling, two shillings, ten shillings, is not so very much in return. Now, my dear friend, you will consider the prudence of granting his request and mine. I believe in his faithfulness. If you say to him, 'The beautiful lady who was kind to you wishes you to do this or do that; or wishes you never to part with this portrait; or wishes you to keep silence on this or on that,' you may depend on him. I say so. Adieu! Say to the little one that there is some one who does not forget her. Perhaps you will never hear from Calabressa again: remember him not as a madcap, but as one who wishes you well. To-morrow I start for Cyprus—then farther—with a light heart. Adieu!

"Calabressa."

* * * * *

He handed the letter to Natalie's mother. The elder woman read the letter carefully. She laughed quietly; but there were tears in her eyes.

"It is like my old friend Calabressa," she said. "Natalushka, they want you to give your portrait to this poor creature who adores you. Why not? Calabressa says he will do whatever you tell him. Tell him, then, not to part with it; not to show it to any one, and not to say to any one he has seen either you or me here. Is not that simple? Tell him to come here to-morrow or next day; you can send the photograph to Mr. Brand."

The girl went to the door, and said a few words to Kirski. He said nothing in reply, but sunk on his knees, as he had done in Curzon Street, and took her hand and kissed it; then he rose, and bowed respectfully to the others, and left.

Presently Waters came in and announced that luncheon was on the table; the portieres were drawn aside; they passed into the farther end of the apartment, and sat down. The banquet was not a sumptuous one, and there were no flowers on the table; but it was everything that any human being could have done in fifteen minutes; and these were bachelors' rooms. Natalie took care to make a pretty speech in the hearing of Mr. Waters.

"Yes, but you eat nothing," the host said. "Do you think your mother will have anything if she sees you indifferent?"

Presently the mother, who seemed to be much amused with something or other, said in French,

“Ah, my friend, I did not think my child would be so deceitful. I did not think she would deceive you.”

The girl stared with wide eyes.

“She pretended to tell you what this poor man said to her,” said the mother, with a quiet smile. “She forgot that some one else than herself might know Russian.”

Natalie flushed red.

“Mother!” she remonstrated. “I said he had spoken a lot of foolish things.”

“After all,” said the mother, “he said no more than what Calabressa says in the letter. You have been kind to him; he regards you as an angel; he will give you his life; you, or any one whom you love. The poor man! Did you see how he trembled?”

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Natalie turned to George Brand.

“He said something more than that,” said she. “He said he had undertaken some duty, some service, that was expected to have cost him his life. He did not know what it was: do you?”

“I do not,” said he, answering frankly the honest look of her eyes. “I can scarcely believe any one was foolish enough to think of intrusting any serious duty to a man like that. But still Calabressa hints as much; and I know he left England with Calabressa.”

“Natalushka,” the mother said, cautiously, and yet with an anxious scrutiny, “I have often wondered—whether you knew much—much about the Society.”

“Oh no, mother! I am allowed to translate, and sometimes I hear that help is to be given here or there; but I am in no secrets at all. That is my misfortune.”

The mother seemed much relieved.

“It is not a misfortune, child. You are happier as you are, I think. Then,” she added, with a quick glance, “you have never heard of one—Bartolotti?”

“No,” she answered; but directly afterwards she exclaimed, “Oh yes, yes! Bartolotti, that is the name Calabressa gave me. He said if ever I was in very serious trouble, I was to go to Naples; and that was the password. But I thought to myself, ‘If I am in trouble, why should I not go to my own father?’”

The mother rose and went to the girl, and put her arm round her daughter’s neck, and stooped down.

“Natalushka,” said she, earnestly, “you are wiser than Calabressa. If you are in trouble, do not seek any help that way. Go to your father.”

“And to you, mother,” said she, drawing down the worn, beautiful face and kissing it. “Why not to you also? Why not to you both?”

The mother smiled, and patted the girl’s head, and then returned to the other side of the table. Waters brought in some fruit, fresh from Covent Garden.

He also brought in a letter, which he put beside his master’s plate. Brand did not even look at it; he pushed it aside, to give him more room. But in pushing it aside he turned it somewhat and Natalie’s eye happening to fall on the address, she perceived at once that it was in the handwriting of her father.

“Dearest,” said she, in a low voice, and rather breathlessly, “the letter is from papa.”

“From your father?” said he, without any great concern. Then he turned to Natalie’s mother. “Will you excuse me? My friends are determined to remind me of their existence to-day.”

But this letter was much shorter than Calabressa’s, though it was friendly enough.

“My Dear Mr. Brand,” it ran,—“I am glad to hear that you acted with so much promptitude that your preparations for departure are nearly complete. You are soldier-like. I have less scruples, therefore, in asking you to be so kind as to give me up to-morrow evening from half-past nine onward, for the consideration of a very serious order that has been transmitted to us from the Council. You will perceive that this claims precedence over any of our local arrangements; and as it may even involve the abandonment of your voyage to America, it will be advisable to give it immediate consideration. I trust the hour of half-past nine will not interfere with any engagement.

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"Your colleague and friend, Ferdinand Lind."

This was all that an ordinary reader would have seen in the letter; but Brand observed also, down at the left-hand corner, a small mark in green color. That tiny arrow, with the two dots—the whole almost invisible—changed the letter from an invitation into a command. It signified "On business of the Council."

He laid down the letter, and said lightly to Natalie,

"Now I have some news for you. I may not have to go to America after all."

"You are not going to America?" she said, in a bewildered way. "Oh, if it were possible—if it were possible!" she murmured, "I would say I was too happy. God is too good to me—to have them both given back to me in one day—both of them in one day—"

"Natalie," said he, gently, "it is only a possibility, you know."

"But it is possible!" she said; and there was a quick, strange, happy light in her face. "It is possible, is it not?"

Then she glanced at her mother; and her face, that had been somewhat pale, was pale no longer; the blood mounted to her forehead; her eyes were downcast.

"It would please you, would it not?" she said, somewhat formally and in a low and timid voice. The mother, unobserved, smiled.

"Oh yes," he said, cheerfully. "But even if I go to America, expect your mother and you to be arriving at Sandy Hook; and what then? In a couple of years—it is not a long time—I should have a small steamer there to meet you, and we could sail up the bay together."

Luncheon over, they went to the window, and greatly admired the view of the gardens below and the wide river beyond; and they went round the room examining the water-colors, and bits of embroidery, and knickknacks brought from many lands, and they were much interested in one or two portraits. Altogether they were charmed with the place, though the elder lady said, in her pretty, careful French, that it was clear no woman's hand was about, otherwise there would have been white curtains at the windows besides those heavy straight folds of red. Brand said he preferred to have plenty of light in the room; and, in fact, at this moment the sunlight was painting squares of beautiful color on the faded old Turkey-carpet. All this time Natalie had shown much reserve.

When the mother and daughter were in the cab together going to Edgware Road—George Brand was off by himself to Brompton—the mother said,

“Natalushka, why was your manner so changed to Mr. Brand, after you heard he might not be going to America?”

The girl hesitated for a moment, and her eyes were lowered.

“You see, mother,” she said, with some embarrassment, “when one is in great trouble and difficulty—and when you wish to show sympathy—then, perhaps, you speak too plainly. You do not think of choosing very prudent words; your heart speaks for you; and one may say things that a girl should not be too ready to confess. That is when there is great trouble, and you are grieved for some one. But—but—when the trouble goes away—when it is all likely to come right—one remembers—”

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The explanation was rather stammering and confused.

“But at least, mother,” she added, with her eyes still downcast, “at least I can be frank with you. There is no harm in my telling you that I love you.”

The mother pressed the hand that she held in hers.

“And if you tell me often enough, Natalushka, perhaps I shall begin to believe you.”

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A NEW HOME.

George Brand set out house-hunting with two exceptional circumstances in his favor: he knew precisely what he wanted, and he was prepared to pay for it. Moreover, he undertook the task willingly and cheerfully. It was something to do. It would fill in a portion of that period of suspense. It would prevent his harassing himself with speculations as to his own future—speculations which were obviously useless until he should learn what was required of him by the Council.

But none the less was he doomed to the house-hunter's inevitable disappointment. He found, in the course of his devious wanderings through all sorts of out-of-the way thoroughfares within a certain radius from Brompton Church, that the houses which came nearest to his ideal cottage in a walled garden were either too far away from Hyde Park, or they were not to be let, or they were to be let unfurnished. So, like a prudent person, he moderated his desires, and began to cast about for any furnished house of fairly cheerful aspect, with a garden behind. But here again he found that the large furnished houses were out of the question, because they were unnecessarily expensive, and that the smaller ones were mostly to be found in slummy streets; while in both cases there was a difficulty about servants. The end of it was that he took the first floor of an old-fashioned house in Hans Place, being induced to do so partly because the landlady was a bright, pleasant-looking little Frenchwoman, and partly because the rooms were furnished and decorated in a fashion not common to lodging-houses.

Then came the question of terms, references, and what not; and on all of these points Mr. Brand showed himself remarkably complaisant. But when all this was done he sat down, and said,

“Now I wish you to understand me clearly, madame. This lady I have told you about has come through much trouble; you are to be kind to her, and I will see you do not lose by it. Her daughter will come to see her frequently, perhaps every day; I suppose the young lady's maid can remain down-stairs somewhere.”

“Oh yes, sir.”

“Very well. Now if you will be so good as to get me pen and ink I will give you a check for fifty-two pounds—that is, a pound a week for a year. You see, there are a number of little kindnesses you could show this poor lady that would be all the more appreciated if they were not put down in a book and charged for: you understand? You could find out, perhaps, from time to time some little delicacy she is fond of. Then flowers: there is a good florist’s shop in Sloane Street is there not?”

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"Oh yes, sir."

She brought the ink, and he drew out the check.

"Then when the young lady comes to see her mother you will be very attentive and kind to her too. You must not wait for them to ask for this or that; you must come up to the door and say 'Will not the young lady have a cup of chocolate?' or whatever you can suggest—fruit, biscuits, wine, or what not. And as these little extras will cost you something, I cannot allow you to be out of pocket; so here is a fund for you to draw from; and, of course, not a word to either of the ladies. I think you understand?"

"Perfectly, sir," said madame.

"Then, if I hear that you have been very kind and obliging, I suppose one might be allowed from time to time to send you a little present—something to beautify your house with? You have pretty rooms; you have shown great taste in decorating them."

"Oh, not I, sir," said the little Frenchwoman; "I took the house as it stands from Mr. ——."

"The architect," said Brand. "Ah, that explains. But I am surprised he should have used gas."

"That was my doing," said the landlady, with some pride. "It is a great improvement. It is so convenient, is it not?"

"My dear madame," said Brand, seriously, "it cannot be convenient to have one's lungs poisoned with the smoke of London gas. You must on no account allow this lady who is coming to your house to sit through the long evenings with gas blazing over her head all the time; why, she would have continual headache. No, no, you must get a couple of lamps—one for the piano there, and a smaller reading-one for this little table by the fire. Then these sconces, you will get candles for them, of course; red ones look pretty—not pink, but red."

The French landlady seemed rather dismayed. She had been all smiles and courtesy so far; but now the bargain did not promise to be so profitable if this was the way she was to begin. But Brand pulled out his watch.

"If you will allow me," said he, "I will go and get a few things to make the room look homely. You see this lady must be made as comfortable as possible, for she will see no one but her daughter, and all the evenings she will be alone. Now will you be so good as to have the fire lit? And these little things I am about to get for you, of course they will become your property; only you need not say who presented them to you, you perceive?"



The little woman's face grew happy again, and she assured him fervently and repeatedly that he might trust her to do her best for this lady about whom he seemed so anxious.

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It was almost dusk when he went out; most of the shops in Sloane Street had their windows lit. He set about this further task of his with an eager delight. For although it was ostensibly for Natalie's mother that he was buying this and buying that, there was an underlying consciousness that Natalie herself would be pleased—that many and many a time she would occupy that pretty little sitting-room, that perhaps she might guess who it was who had been so thoughtful about her mother and herself. Fortunately Sloane Street is an excellent shopping thoroughfare; he got everything he wanted—even wax candles of the proper tint of red. He first of all went to the florist's and got fruit and flowers enough to decorate a hall. Then from shop to shop he wandered, buying books here, a couple of lamps there, a low, softly-cushioned easy-chair, a fire-screen, pastils, tins of sweet biscuits, a dozen or two of Hungarian wine, a tea-making apparatus, a box of various games, some white rose scent, and he was very near adding a sewing-machine, but thought he would wait to see whether she understood the use of that instrument. All these and many other articles were purchased on the explicit condition that they were to be delivered in Hans Place within the following half-hour.

Then he went back to the lodging-house, carrying in his hand the red candles. These he placed himself in the sconces, and lit them; the effect was good, now that the fire was blazing cheerfully. One by one the things arrived; and gradually the lodging-house sitting-room grew more and more like a home. He put the flowers here and there about the place, the little Frenchwoman having brought him such, small jars and vases as were in her possession—these fortunately including a couple of bits of modern Venetian glass. The reading-lamp was lit and put on the small table; the newly imported easy-chair was drawn to the fire; some books and the evening papers scattered about. He lit one of the pastils, put the fire-screen in its place, and had a last look round.

Then he got into a hansom and drove up to the house in the Edgware Road. He was immediately admitted and shown up-stairs. Natalie's mother rose to receive him; he fancied she had been crying.

"I am come to take you to your new rooms," he said, cheerfully. "They are better than these."

"Ah, that is kind of you," she said, also speaking in French; "but in truth what do I care where I am? My heart is full of joy. It is enough for me to sit quiet and say to myself, 'My child loves me. She has not turned away from me. She is more beautiful even than I had believed; and she has a good heart. I have no longer any fear.'"

"Yes, madame," said he, "but you must not sit quiet and think like that, or you will become ill, and then how are you to go out walking with Natalie? You have many things to do, and many things to decide on. For example, you will have to explain to her how it is you may not go to her father's house. At this moment what other thing than that do you imagine she is thinking about? She will ask you."

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"I would rather not tell her," said the mother, absently; "it is better she should not know."

He hesitated for a second or two.

"Then it is impossible that a reconciliation between your husband and yourself—"

"Oh no, no!" she said, somewhat sadly; "that is impossible, now."

"And you are anxious he should not know that you and your daughter see each other."

"I am not so anxious," she said. "I have faith in Natalushka: I can perceive her courage. But perhaps it would be better."

"Very well. Then come to these other rooms I have got for you; they are in a more secluded neighborhood."

"Very well, monsieur. I have but few things with me. I will be ready soon."

In less than half an hour after that the French landlady was receiving her new guest; and so eager was she to show to the English gentleman her gratitude for his substantial presents, that her officious kindness was almost burdensome.

"I thank you," said the new-comer, with a smile, as the landlady brought her a cushion for her back the moment she sat down in the easy chair, "but I am not yet an invalid."

Then would madame have some tea? Or perhaps madame had not dined? There was little in the house; but something could be prepared at once; from to-morrow morning madame's instructions would be fulfilled to the letter. To get rid of her, Brand informed her that madame had not dined, and would be glad to have anything that happened to be in the house. Then she left, and he was about to leave also.

"No," said the beautiful mother to him, with a smile on the pale face. "Sit down; I have something to say to you."

He sat down, his hat still in his hand.

"I have not thanked you," she said. "I see who has done all this: do you think a stranger would know to have the white-rose scent for me that Natalie uses? She was right: you are kind—you think of others."

"It is nothing—it is nothing," he said, hastily, and with all an Englishman's embarrassment.

"My dear friend," said his companion, with a grave kindness in her tone, and a look of affectionate interest in her eyes, "I am going to prove my gratitude to you. I am going to prevent—what do you call it?—a lover's quarrel."

He started.

"Yesterday," she continued, still regarding him in that kindly way, "before we left your rooms, Natalushka was very reserved toward you; was it not so? I perceived it; and you?"

"I—I thought she was tired," he stammered.

"To-morrow you are to fetch her here; and what if you find her still more reserved—even cold toward you? You will be pained, perhaps alarmed. Ah, my dear friend, life is made very bitter sometimes by mistakes; so it is that I must tell you the reason. The child loves you; be sure of that. Yes; but she thinks that she has been too frank in saying so—in time of trouble and anxiety; and now—now that you are perhaps not going to America—now that perhaps all the trouble is over—now she is beginning to think she ought to be a little more discreet, as other young ladies are. The child means no harm, but you and she must not quarrel."

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He took her hand to bid her good-bye.

“Natalie and I are not likely to quarrel,” said he, cheerfully. “Now I am going away. If I stayed, you would do nothing but talk about her, whereas it is necessary that you should have some dinner, then read one of these books for an hour or so, then go to bed and have a long, sound night’s rest. You must be looking your brightest when she comes to see you to-morrow.”

And indeed, as it turned out subsequently, this warning; of the mother’s was not wholly unnecessary. Next day at eleven o’clock, as had previously been arranged, Brand met Natalie at the corner of Great Stanhope Street to escort her to the house to which her mother had removed. He had not even got into the park with her when he perceived that her manner was distinctly reserved. Anneli was with her, and she kept talking from time to time to the little maid, who was thus obliged, greatly against her will, to walk close to her mistress. At last Brand said,

“Natalie, have I offended you?”

“Oh no!” she said, in a hurried, low voice.

“Natalie,” said he, very gently, “I once heard of a wicked creature who was determined to play the hypocrite, and might have done a great deal of mischief, only she had a most amiable mother, who stepped in and gave somebody else a warning. Did you ever hear of such a wicked person?”

The blood mounted to her face. By this time Anneli had taken leave to fall behind.

“Then,” said the girl, with some hesitation, and yet with firmness, “you will not misunderstand me. If all the circumstances are to be altered, then—then you must forget what I have said to you in moments of trouble. I have a right to ask it. You must forget the past altogether.”

“But it is impossible!”

“It is necessary.”

For some minutes they walked on in silence. Then he felt a timid touch on his arm; her hand had been laid there, deprecatingly, for a moment.

“Are you angry with me?”

“No, I am not,” said he, frankly, “for the very reason that what you ask is impossible, unnecessary, absurd. You might as well ask me to forget that I am alive. In any case, isn’t it rather too soon? Are you so sure that all the trouble is past? Wait till the storm is

well over, and we are going into port, then we will put on our Sunday manners to go ashore."

"I am afraid you are angry with me," she said again, timidly.

"You could not make me, if you tried," he said, simply; "but I am proud of you, Natalie——proud of the courage and clearness and frankness of your character, and I don't like to see you fall away from that, and begin to consider what a school-mistress would think of you."

"It is not what any one may think of me that I consider; it is what I think of myself," she answered, in the same low voice.

They reached Hans Place. The mother was at the door of the room to welcome them. She took her daughter by the hand and led her in.

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“Look round, Natalushka,” she said. “Can you guess who has arranged all this for me—for me and for you?”

The girl almost instantly turned—her eyes cast down—and took her lover’s hand, and kissed it in silence. That was all.

Then said he, lightly, as he shoved the low easy-chair nearer the fire,

“Come, madame, and sit down here; and you, Natalushka, here is a stool for you, that you will be able to lean your head on your mother’s knee. There; it is a very pretty group: do you know why I make you into a picture? Well, you see, these are troubled times; and one has one’s work to do; and who can tell what may happen? But don’t you see that, whatever may happen, I can carry away with me this picture; and always, wherever I may be, I can say to myself that Natalie and her mother are together in the quiet little room, and that they are happy. Now I must bid you good-bye; I have a great deal of business to-day with my solicitor. And the landlady, madame: how does she serve you?”

“She overwhelms me with kindness.”

“That is excellent,” said he, as he shook hands with them and, against both their protests, took his leave.

He carried away that picture in his mind. He had left these two together, and they were happy. What mattered it to him what became of himself?

It was on the evening of that day that he had to obey the summons of the Council.

CHAPTER XL.

A CONCLAVE.

Punctual to the moment George Brand arrived in Lisle Street. He was shown into an inner room, where he found Lind seated at a desk, and Reitzei and Beratinsky standing by the fireplace. On an adjacent table where four cups of black coffee, four small glasses, a bottle of brandy, and a box of cigarettes.

Lind rose to receive him, and was very courteous indeed—apologizing for having had to break in on his preparations for leaving, and offering him coffee, cigarettes, and what not. When the new-comer had declined these, Lind resumed his place and begged the others to be seated.

“We will proceed to business at once, gentlemen,” said he, speaking in quite an ordinary and matter-of-fact way, “although, I will confess to you, it is not business entirely to my

liking. Perhaps I should not say so. This paper, you see, contains my authorization from the Council to summon you and to explain the service they demand: perhaps I should merely obey, and say nothing. But we are friends; we can speak in confidence.”

Here Reitzei, who was even more pallid than usual, and whose fingers seemed somewhat shaky, filled one of the small glasses of brandy, and drank it off.

“I do not say that I hesitate,” continued Lind—“that I am reluctant, because the service that is required from us—from one of us four—is dangerous—is exceedingly dangerous. No,” he said, with a brief smile, “as far as I am myself concerned, I have carried my life in my hands too often to think much about that. And you, gentlemen, considering the obligations you have accepted, I take it that the question of possible harm to yourselves is not likely to interfere with your obedience to the commands of the Council.”

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"As for me," said Reitzei, eagerly and nervously, "I tell you this, I should like to have something exciting now—I do not care what. I am tired of this work in London; it is slow, regular, like the ticking of a clock. I am for something to stir the blood a little. I say that I am ready for anything."

"As for me," said Beratinsky, curtly, "no one has ever yet called me a coward."

Brand said nothing; but he perceived that this was something unusually serious, and almost unconsciously he closed his right hand that he might feel the clasp of Natalie's ring. There was no need to appeal to his oaths of allegiance.

Lind proceeded, in a graver fashion,

"Yes, I confess that personally I am for avoiding violence, for proceeding according to law. But then the Council would say, perhaps, 'Are there not injuries for which the law gives no redress? Are there not those who are beyond the power of the law? And we, who have given our lives to the redressing of wrongs, to the protection of the poor, to the establishment of the right, are we to stand by and see the moral sense of the community outraged by those in high places, and say no word, and lift no hand?'"

He took up a book that was lying on the table, and opened it at a marked page.

"Yes," he said, "there are occasions on which a man may justly take the law into his own hands; may break the law, and go beyond it, and punish those whom the law has failed to punish; and the moral sense of the world will say, 'Well done!' Did you ever happen to read, Mr. Brand, the letter written by Madame von Maderspach?"

Brand started at the mention of the name: it recalled the first evening on which he had seen Natalie. What strange things had happened since then! He answered that he did not know of Madame von Maderspach's letter.

"By chance I came across it to-day," said Lind, looking at the book. "Listen: 'I was torn from the arms of my husband, from the circle of my children, from the hallowed sanctuary of my home, charged with no offence, allowed no hearing, arraigned before no judge. I, a woman, wife, and mother, was in my own native town, before the people accustomed to treat me with respect, dragged into a square of soldiers, and there scourged with rods. Look, I can write this without dropping dead! But my husband killed himself. Robbed of all other weapons, he shot himself with a pocket-pistol. The people rose, and would have killed those who instigated these horrors, but their lives were saved by the interference of the military.' Very well. Von Maderspach took his own way; he shot himself. But if, instead of doing that, he had taken the law into his own hands, and killed the author of such an outrage, do you think there is a human being in the world who would have blamed him?"

He appealed directly to Brand. Brand answered calmly, but with his face grown rather white, "I think if such a thing were done to—to my wife, I would have a shot at somebody."

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Perhaps Lind thought that it was the recital of the wrongs of Madame von Maderspach that had made this man's face grow white, and given him that look about the mouth; but at all events he continued, "Exactly so. I was only seeking to show you that there are occasions on which a man might justly take the law into his own hands. Well, then, some would argue—I don't say so myself, but some would say—that what a man may do justly an association may do justly. What would the quick-spreading civilization of America have done but for the Lynch tribunals? The respectable people said to themselves, 'it is question of life or death. We have to attack those scoundrels at once, or society will be destroyed. We cannot wait for the law: it is powerless.' And so when the president had given his decision, out they went and caught the scoundrels, and strung them up to the nearest tree. You do not call them murderers. John Lynch ought to have a statue in every Western State in America."

"Certainly, certainly!" exclaimed Reitzei, reaching over and filling out another glass of brandy with an unsteady hand. He was usually an exceedingly temperate person. "We are all agreed. Justice must be done, whether the law allows or not; I say the quicker the better."

Lind paid no heed to him, but proceeded quietly, "Now I will come more directly to what is required of us by the Council; I have been trying to guess at their view of the question; perhaps I am altogether wrong; but no matter. And I will ask you to imagine yourselves not here in this free country of England, where the law is strong—and not only that, but you have a public opinion that is stronger still—and where it is not possible that a great Churchman should be a man living in open iniquity, and an oppressor and a scoundrel—I will ask you to imagine yourselves living in Italy, let one say in the Papal Territory itself, where the reign of Christ should be, and where the poor should be cared for, if there is Christianity still on the earth. And you are poor, let us say; hardly knowing how to scrape together a handful of food sometimes; and your children ragged and hungry; and you forced from time to time to go to the Monte di Pieta to pawn your small belongings, or else you will die, or you will see your children die before your eyes."

"Ah, yes, yes!" exclaimed Reitzei. "That is the worst of it—to see one's children die! That is worse than one's own hunger."

"And you," continued Lind, quietly, but still with a little more distinctness of emphasis, "you, you poor devils, you see a great dignitary of the Church, a great prince among priests, living in shameless luxury, in violation of every law, human and divine, with the children of his mistresses set up in palaces, himself living on the fat of the land. What law does he not break, this libertine, this usurer? What makes the corn dear, so that you cannot get it for your starving children?—what but this

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plunderer, this robber, seizing the funds that extremity has dragged from the poor in order to buy up the grain of the States? A pretty speculation! No wonder that you murmur and complain; that you curse him under your breath, that you call him *il cardinale affamatore*. And no wonder, if you happen to belong to a great association that has promised to see justice done, no wonder you come to that association and say, 'Masters, why cannot justice be done now? It is too long to wait for the Millennium. Remove this oppressor from the face of the earth: down with the Starving Cardinal!'"

"Yes, yes, yes!" cried Reitzei, excitedly. Beratinsky sat silent and sullen. Brand, with some strange foreboding of what was coming, still sat with his hand tight closed on Natalie's ring.

"More," continued Lind—and now, if he was acting, it was a rare piece of acting, for wrath and indignation gathered on his brow, and increased the emphasis of his voice—"it is not only your purses, it is not only your poor starved homesteadings that are attacked, it is the honor of your women. Whose sister or daughter is safe? Mr. Brand, one of your English poets has made the poor cry to the rich,

"Our sons are your slaves by day,
Our daughters your slaves by night.'

But what if some day a poor man—I will tell you his name—his name is De Bedros; he is not a peasant, but a helpless, poor old man—what if this man comes to the great association that I have mentioned and says, wringing his hands, 'My Brothers and Companions, you have sworn to protect the weak and avenge the injured: what is your oath worth if you do not help me now? My daughter, my only daughter, has been taken from me, she has been stolen from my side, shrieking with fear, and I thrown bleeding into the ditch. By whom? By one who is beyond the law; who laughs at the law; who is the law! But you—you will be the avengers. Too long has this monster outraged the name of Christ and insulted the forbearance of his fellow creatures: my Brothers, this is what I demand from your hands—I demand from the SOCIETY OF THE SEVEN STARS—I demand from you, the Council—I demand, my Brothers and Companions, a decree of death against the monster Zaccatelli!'"

"Yes, yes, yes, the decree!" shouted Reitzei, all trembling. "Who could refuse it? Or I myself—"

"Gentlemen," said Lind, calmly, "the decree has been granted. Here is my authority; read it."

He held out the paper first of all to Brand, who took it in both his hands, and forced himself to go over it. But he could not read it very carefully; his heart was beating

quickly; he was thinking of a great many things all at once—of Lord Evelyn, of Natalie, of his oaths to the Society, even of his Berkshire home and the beech-woods. He handed on the paper to Reitzei, who was far too much excited to read it at all. Beratinsky merely glanced at it carelessly, and put it back on the table.

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"Gentlemen," Lind continued, returning to his unemotional manner, "personally, I consider it just that this man, whom the law cannot or does not choose to reach, should be punished for his long career of cruelty, oppression, and crime, and punished with death! but, as I confessed to you before, I could have wished that that punishment had not been delivered by our hands. We have made great progress in England; and we have been preaching nothing but peace and good-will, and the use of lawful means of amelioration. If this deed is traced to our Society, as it almost certainly will be, it will do us a vast amount of injury here; for the English people will not be able to understand that such a state of affairs as I have described can exist, or that this is the only remedy. As I said to you before, it is with great reluctance that I summoned you here to-night—"

"Why so, Brother Lind?" Reitzei broke in, and again he reached over for the bottle. "We are not cowards, then?"

Beratsinsky took the bottle from him and put it back on the table.

Reitzei did not resent this interference; he only tried to roll up a cigarette, and did not succeed very well with his trembling fingers.

"You will have seen," said Lind, continuing as if there had been no interruption, "why the Council have demanded this duty of the English section. The lesson would be thrown away altogether—a valuable life belonging to the Society would be lost—if it were supposed that this was an act of private revenge. No; the death of Cardinal Zaccatelli will be a warning that Europe will take to heart. At least," he added, thoughtfully, "I hope it will prove to be so, and I hope it will be unnecessary to repeat the warning."

"You are exceedingly tender-hearted, Brother Lind," said Reitzei. "Do you pity this man, then? Do you think he should flourish his crimes in the face of the world for another twenty, thirty years?"

"It is unnecessary to say what I think," observed Lind, in the same quiet fashion. "It is enough for us that we know our duty. The Council have commanded; we obey."

"Yes; but let us come to the point, Brother Lind," said Beratsinsky, in a somewhat surly fashion. "I do not much care what happens to me; yet one wishes to know."

"Gentlemen," said Lind, composedly, "you know that among the ordinances of the Society is one to the effect that no member shall be sent on any duty involving peril to his life without a ballot among at least four persons. As this particular service is one demanding great secrecy and circumspection, I have considered it right to limit the ballot to four—to ourselves, in fact."

There was not a word said.

“That the duty involves peril to life is obvious; it will be a miracle if he who undertakes this affair should escape. As for myself, you will perceive by the paper you have read that I am commissioned by the Council to form the ballot, but not instructed to include myself. I could avoid doing so if I chose, but when I ask my friends to run a risk, I am willing to take the same risk. For the rest, I have been in as dangerous enterprises before.”

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He leaned over and pulled toward him a sheet of paper. Then he took a pair of scissors and cut the sheet into four pieces; these he proceeded to fold up until they were about the size of a shilling, and identically alike. All the time he was talking.

“Yes, it will be a dangerous business,” he said, slowly, “and one requiring great forethought and caution. Then I do not say it is altogether impossible one might escape; though then the warning, the lesson of this act of punishment might not be so effective: they might mistake it for a Camorra affair, though the Cardinal himself already knows otherwise.”

He opened a bottle of red ink that stood by.

“The simplest means are sufficient,” said he. “This is how we used to settle affairs in ’48.”

He opened one of the pieces of paper, and put a cross in red on it, which he dried on the blotting-paper. Then he folded it up again, threw the four pieces into a pasteboard box, put down the lid, and shook the box lightly.

“Whoever draws the red cross,” he said, almost indifferently, “carries out the command of the Council. Have you anything to say, gentlemen—to suggest?”

“Yes,” said Reitzei, boldly.

Lind regarded him.

“What is the use of the ballot?” said the pallid-faced young man. “What if one volunteers? I should myself like to settle the business of the scoundrelly Cardinal.”

Lind shook his head.

“Impossible. Calabressa thought of a volunteer; he was mad! There must be a ballot. Come; shall we proceed?”

He opened the box and put it before Beratinsky. Beratinsky took out one of the papers, opened it, glanced at it, crumpled it up, and threw it into the fire.

“It isn’t I, at all events,” he said.

It was Reitzei next. When he glanced at the paper he had drawn, he crushed it together with an oath, and dashed it on the floor.

“Of course, of course,” he exclaimed, “just when I was eager for a bit of active service. So it is you, Brother Lind, or our friend Brand who is to settle the business of the Starving Cardinal.”

Calmly, almost as a matter of course, Lind handed the box to George Brand; and he, being a proud man, and in the presence of foreigners, was resolved to show no sign of emotion whatever. When he took out the paper and opened it, and saw his fate there in the red cross, he laid it on the table before him without a word. Then he shut his hand on Natalie's ring.

"Well," said Lind, rather sadly, as he took out the remaining paper without looking at it, and threw aside the box, "I almost regret it, as between you and me. I have less of life to look forward to."

"I would like to ask one question," said Brand, rising: he was perfectly firm.

"Yes?"

"The orders of the Council must be obeyed. I only wish to know whether—when—when this thing comes to be done—I must declare my own name?"

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"Not at all—not at all!" Lind said, quickly. "You may use any name you like."

"I am glad of that," he said. Then, with the same proud, impassive firmness, he made an appointment for the next day, got his hat and coat, bade his companions good-night, and went down-stairs into the cold night air. He could not realize as yet all that had happened, but his first quick, instinctive thought had been,

"Ah, not that—not the name that my mother bore!"

CHAPTER XLI.

IN THE DEEPS.

The sudden shock of the cold night air was a relief to his burning brain; and so also as he passed into the crowded streets, was the low continuous thunder all around him. The theatres were coming out; cabs, omnibuses, carriages added to the muffled roar; the pavements were thronged with people talking, laughing, jostling, calling out one to the other. He was glad to lose himself in this seething multitude; he was glad to be hidden by the darkness; he would try to think.

But his thoughts were too rapid and terrible to be very clear. He only vaguely knew—it was a consciousness that seemed to possess both heart and brain like a consuming fire—that the beautiful dreams he had been dreaming of a future beyond the wide Atlantic, with Natalie living and working by his side, her proud spirit cheering him on, and refusing to be daunted—these dreams had been suddenly snatched away from him; and in their stead, right before him, stood this pitiless, inexorable fate. He could not quite tell how it had all occurred, but there at least was the horrible certainty, staring him right in the face. He could not avoid it; he could not shut his eyes to it, or draw back from it; there was no escape. Then some wild desire to have the thing done at once possessed him. At once—at once—and then the grave would cover over his remorse and despair. Natalie would forget; she had her mother now to console her. Evelyn would say, "Poor devil, he was not the first who got into mischief by meddling in schemes without knowing how far he might have to go." Then amidst all this confused din of the London streets, what was the phrase that kept ringing in his ears?—"And when she bids die he shall surely die!" But he no longer heard the pathetic vibration of Natalie Lind's voice; the words seemed to him solemn, and distant, and hopeless, like a knell. But only if it were over—that was again his wild desire. In the grave was forgetfulness and peace.

Presently a curious fancy seized him. At the corner of Windmill Street a ragged youth was bawling out the name of a French journal. Brand bought a copy of the journal, passed on, and walked into an adjacent cafe, and took a seat at one of the small

tables. A waiter came to him, and he mechanically ordered coffee. He began to search this newspaper for the array of paragraphs usually headed *Tribunaux*.

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At last, in the corner of the newspaper, he found that heading, though under it there was nothing of any importance or interest. But it was the heading itself that had a strange fascination for him. He kept his eyes fixed on it. Then he began to see detached phrases and sentences—or, perhaps, it was only in his brain that he saw them: “The Assassination of Count Zaccatelli! The accused, an Englishman, who refuses to declare his name, admits that he had no personal enmity—commanded to execute this horrible crime—a punishment decreed by a society which he will not name—confesses his guilt—is anxious to be sentenced at once, and to die as soon as the law permits.... This morning the assassin of Cardinal Zaccatelli, who has declared his name to be Edward Bernard, was executed.”

He hurriedly folded up the paper, just as if he were afraid of some one overlooking and reading these words, and glanced around. No one was regarding him. The cafe was nearly full, and there was plenty of laughing and talking amidst the glare of the gas. He slunk out of the place, leaving the coffee untasted. But when he had got outside he straightened himself up, and his face assumed a firmer expression. He walked quickly along to Clarges Street. The Evelyns’ house was dark from top to bottom; apparently the family had retired for the night. “Perhaps he is at the Century,” Brand said to himself, as he started off again. But just as he got to the corner of the street a hansom drove up, and the driver taking the corner too quickly, sent the wheel on to the curb.

“Why don’t you look where you’re going to?” a voice called out from the inside of the cab.

“Is that you, Evelyn?” Brand cried.

“Yes, it is,” was the reply; and the hansom was stopped, and Lord Evelyn descended. “I am happy to say that I can still answer for myself. I thought we were in for a smash.”

“Can you spare me five minutes?”

“Five hours if you like.”

The man was paid; the two friends walked along the pavement together.

“I am glad to have found you after all, Evelyn,” Brand said. “The fact is, my nerves have had a bad shake.”

“I never knew you had any. I always fancied you could drive a fire-brigade engine full gallop along the Strand on a wet night, with the theatres coming out.”

“A few minutes’ talk with you will help me to pull myself together again. Need we go into the house?”

“We sha’n’t wake anybody.”

They noiselessly went into the house, and passed along the hall until they reached a small room behind the dining-room. The gas was lit, burning low. There were biscuits, seltzer-water, and spirits on the table.

Lord Evelyn was in the act of turning the gas higher, when he happened to catch sight of his friend. He uttered a quick exclamation. Brand, who sat down in a chair, was crying, with his hands over his face, like a woman.

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“Great heavens, what is it, Brand?”

That confession of weakness did not last long. Brand rose to his feet impatiently, and took a turn or two up and down the small room.

“What is it? Well, I have received my sentence to-night, Evelyn. But it isn’t that—it is the thought of those I shall leave behind—Natalie, and those boys of my sister’s—if people were to find out after all that they were related to me!”

He was looking at the things that presented themselves to his own mind; he forgot that Evelyn could not understand; he almost forgot that he was speaking aloud. But by-and-by he got himself better under control. He sat down again. He forced himself to speak calmly: the only sign of emotion was that his face was rather pale, and his eyes looked tired and harassed.

“Yes, I told you my nervous system had got a shock, Evelyn; but I think I have got over it. It won’t do for me in my position to abandon one’s self to sentiment.”

“I wish you would tell me what you mean.”

Brand regarded him.

“I cannot tell you the whole thing, but this will be enough. The Council have decreed the death of a certain person, and I am appointed his executioner.”

“You are raving mad!”

“Perhaps it would be better if I were,” he said, with a sigh. “However, such is the fact. The ballot was taken to-night; the lot fell to me. I have no one to blame except myself.”

Lord Evelyn was too horrified to speak. The calm manner of his companion ought to have carried conviction with it; and yet—and yet—how could such a thing be possible?

“Yes, I blame myself,” Brand said, “for not having made certain reservations when pledging myself to the Society. But how was one to think of such things? When Lind used to denounce the outrages of the Nihilists, and talk with indignation of the useless crimes of the Camorra, how could one have thought it possible that assassination should be demanded of you as a duty?”

“But Lind,” Lord Evelyn exclaimed—“surely Lind does not approve of such a thing?”

“No, he does not,” Brand answered. “He says it will prove a misfortune—”

“Then why does he not protest?”

“Protest against a decree of the Council!” the other exclaimed. “You don’t know as much as I do, Evelyn, about that Council. No, I have sworn obedience, and I will obey.”

He had recovered his firmness; he seemed resigned—even resolved. It was his friend who was excited.

“I tell you all the oaths in the world cannot compel a man to commit murder,” Evelyn said, hotly.

“Oh, they don’t call it murder,” Brand replied, without any bitterness whatever; “they call it a punishment, a warning to the evil-doers of Europe. And no doubt this man is a great scoundrel, and cannot be reached by the law; and then, besides, one of the members of the Society, who is poor and old, and who has suffered grievous wrong from this man, has appealed to the Council to avenge him. No; I can see their positions. I have no doubt they believe they are acting justly.”

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"But you yourself do not think so."

"My dear fellow, it is not for the private soldier to ask whether his sovereign has gone to war justly or unjustly. It is his business to obey commands—to kill, if need be—according to his oath."

"Why, you are taking the thing as a matter of course," Lord Evelyn cried, indignantly. "I cannot believe if possible yet! And—and if it were possible—consider how I should upbraid myself: it was I who led you into this affair, Brand."

"Oh no," said the other, absently.

He was staring into the smouldering fire; and for a second or two he sat in silence. Then he said, slowly and thoughtfully,

"I am afraid I have led a very selfish life. Natalie would not say so; she is generous. But it is true. Well, this will make some atonement. She will know that I kept my word to her. She gave me that ring, Evelyn."

He held out his hand for a moment

"It was a pledge that I should never draw back from my allegiance to the Society. Well, neither she nor I then fancied this thing could happen; but now I am not going to turn coward. You saw me show the white feather, Evelyn, for a minute or two: I don't think it was about myself; it was about her—and—and one or two others. You see our talking together has sent off all that nervous excitement; now we can speak about business—"

"I will not—I will not!" Evelyn said, still greatly moved. "I will go to Lind himself. I will tell him that no duty of this kind was ever contemplated by any one joining here. It may be all very well for Naples or Sicily; it won't do for the people on this side the Channel: it will ruin his work: he must appeal—I will drive him to it!"

"My dear fellow," Brand said, quietly, "I told you Lind has accepted the execution of this affair with reluctance. He knows it will do our work—well, my share in it will be soon over—no good. But in this business there is no appeal. You are only a companion; you don't know what stringent vows you have to undertake when you get into the other grades. Moreover, I must tell you this thing to his credit. He is not bound to take the risk of the ballot himself, but he did to-night. It is all over and settled, Evelyn. What is one man's life, more or less? People go to throw away hundreds of thousands of lives 'with a light heart.' And even if this affair should give a slight shock to some of our friends here, the effect will not be permanent. The organization is too big, too strong, too eager, to be really injured by such a trifle. I want to talk about business matters now."

“I won’t hear you—I will not allow this,” Lord Evelyn protested, trembling with excitement.

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"You must hear me; the time is short," Brand said, with decision. "When this thing has to be done I don't know; I shall probably hear to-morrow; but I must at once take steps to prevent shame falling on the few relatives I have. I shall pretend to set out on some hunting-expedition or other—Africa is a good big place for one to lose one's self in—and if I do not return, what then? I shall leave you my executor, Evelyn; or, rather, it will be safer to do the whole thing by deed of gift. I shall give my eldest sister's son the Buckinghamshire place; then I must leave the other one something. Five hundred pounds at four per cent, would pay that poor devil Kirski's rent for him, and help him on a bit. Then I am going to make you a present, Evelyn; so you see you shall benefit too. Then as for Natalie—or rather, her mother—"

"Her mother!" Evelyn stared at him.

"Natalie's mother is in London: you will learn her story from herself," Brand continued, briefly. "In the mean time, do not tell Lind until she permits you. I have taken rooms for her in Hans Place, and Natalie will no doubt go to see her each day; but I am afraid the poor lady is not very well off, for the family has always been in political troubles. Well, you see, Evelyn, I could leave you a certain sum, the interest of which you could manage to convey to her in some roundabout and delicate way that would not hurt her pride. You could do this, of course."

"But you are talking as if your death was certain!" Lord Evelyn exclaimed, rather wildly. "Even if it is all true, you might escape."

Brand turned away his head as he spoke.

"Do you think, then," he said, slowly, "that, even if that were possible, I should care to live red-handed? The Council cannot demand that of me too. If there is one bullet for him, the next one will be for myself; and if I miss the first shot I shall make sure about the second. There will be no examination of the prisoner, as far as I am concerned. I shall leave a paper stating the object and cause of my attempt; but I shall go into it nameless, and the happiest thing I can hope for is that forgetfulness will gather round it and me as speedily as may be."

Lord Evelyn was deeply distressed. He could no longer refuse to believe; and inadvertently he bethought himself of the time when he had besought and entreated this old friend of his to join the great movement that was to regenerate Europe. Was this the end, then—a vulgar crime?—the strong, manly, generous life to be thrown away, and Natalie left broken-hearted?

"What about her?" he asked, timidly.

"About Natalie, do you mean?" said Brand, starting somewhat. "Curiously enough, I was thinking about her also. I was wondering whether it could be concealed from her

—whether it would not be better to let her imagine with the others that I had got drowned or killed somewhere. But I could not do that. The uncertainty would hang over her for years. Better the sharp pain, at once—of parting; then her mother must take charge of her and console her, and be kind to her. What I fear most is that she may blame herself—she may fancy that she is some how responsible—”

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"It is I, surely, who must take, that blame on myself," said Lord Evelyn, sadly. "But for me, how could you have been led into joining the Society?"

"Neither she nor you have anything to reproach yourselves with. What was my life worth to me when I joined? Then for a time I saw a vision of what may yet be in the world—of what will be, please God; and what does it matter if one here or one there falls out of the ranks?—the great army is moving on: and for a time there were others visions. Poor Natalie!—I am glad her mother has come to her at last."

He rose.

"I wish I could offer you a bed here," Lord Evelyn said.

"I have a great many things to arrange to-night," he answered, simply. "Perhaps I may not be able to get to bed at all."

Lord Evelyn hesitated.

"When can I see you to-morrow?" he said at length. "You know I am going to Lind the first thing in the morning."

Brand stopped abruptly.

"I must absolutely forbid your doing anything of the kind," said he, firmly. "This is a matter of the greatest secrecy; there is to be no talking about it; I have given you some hint, and the same I shall give to Natalie, and there an end." He added, "Your interference would be quite useless, Evelyn. The matter is not in Lind's hands."

He bade his friend good-night.

"Thank you for letting me bore you so long. You see, I expected talking over the thing would drive off that first shock of nervousness. Now I am going to play the part of Karl Sand with indifference. When you hear of me, you will think I must have been brought up by the Tugendbund or the Carbonari, or some of those societies."

This cheerfulness did not quite deceive Lord Evelyn. He bade his friend good-night with some sadness; his mind was not at ease about the share he attributed to himself in this calamity.

When Brand reached his chambers in Buckingham Street there was a small parcel awaiting him. He opened it, and found a box with, inside, a tiny nosegay of sweet-smelling flowers. These were not half as splendid as those he had got the previous afternoon for the rooms in Hans Place, but there was something accompanying them that gave them sufficient value. It was a strip of paper, and on it was written—"From Natalie and from Natalushka, with more than thanks."



“I will carry them with me,” he thought to himself, “until the day of my death. Perhaps they may not have quite withered by then.”

CHAPTER XLII.

A COMMUNICATION.

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Now, he said to himself, he would think no more; he would act. The long talk with Lord Evelyn had enabled him to pull himself together; there would be no repetition of that half-hysterical collapse. More than one of his officer-friends had confessed to him that they had spent the night before their first battle in abject terror, but that that had all gone off as soon as they were called into action. And as for himself, he had many things to arrange before starting on this hunting-expedition, which was to serve as a cloak for another enterprise. He would have to write at once, for example, to his sister—an invalid widow, who passed her life alternately on the Riviera and in Switzerland—informing her of his intended travels. He would have to see that a sufficient sum was left for Natalie's mother, and put into discreet hands. The money for the man Kirski would have to be properly tied up, lest it should prove a temptation. Why, those two pieces of Italian embroidery lying there, he had bought them months ago, intending to present them to Natalie, but from time to time the opportunity had been missed. And so forth, and so forth.

But despite all this fortitude, and these commonplace and practical considerations, his eyes would wander to that little handful of flowers lying on the table, and his thoughts would wander farther still. As he pictured to himself his going to the young Hungarian girl, and taking her hand, and telling her that now it was no longer a parting for a couple of years, but a parting forever, his heart grew cold and sick. He thought of her terrified eyes, of her self-reproaches, of her entreaties, perhaps.

"I wish Evelyn would tell her," he murmured aloud, and he went to the window. "Surely it would be better if I were never to see her again."

It was a long and agonizing night, despite all his resolutions. The gray morning, appearing palely over the river and the bridges, found him still pacing up and down there, with nothing settled at all, no letter written, no memoranda made. All that the night had done was to increase a hundred-fold his dread of meeting Natalie. And now the daylight only told him that that interview was coming nearer. It had become a question of hours.

At last, worn out with fatigue and despair, he threw himself on a couch hard by, and presently sunk into a broken and troubled sleep. For now the mind, emancipated from the control of the will, ran riot; and the quick-changing pictures that were presented to him were full of fearful things that shook his very life with terror. Awake he could force himself to think of this or that; asleep, he was at the mercy of this lurid imagination that seemed to dye each successive scene in the hue of blood. First of all, he was in a great cathedral, sombre and vast, and by the dim light of the candles he saw that some solemn ceremony was going forward. Priests, mitred and robed, sat in a semicircle in front of the altar;

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on the altar-steps were three figures; behind the altar a space of gloom, from whence issued the soft, clear singing of the choristers. Then, suddenly, into that clear sweet singing broke a loud blare of trumpets; a man bounded on to the altar-steps; there was the flash of a blade—a shriek—a fall; then the roar of a crowd, sullen, and distant, and awful. It is the cry of a great city; and this poor crouching fugitive, who hides behind the fountain in the Place, is watching for his chance to dart away into some place of safety. But the crowd have let him pass; they are merciful; they are glad of the death of their enemy; it is only the police he has to fear. What lane is dark enough? What ruins must he haunt, like a dog, in the night-time? But the night is full of fire, and the stars overhead are red, and everywhere there is a roar and a murmur—the *assassination of the Cardinal!*

Well, it is quieter in this dungeon; and soon there will be an end, and peace. But for the letters of fire that burns one's brain the place would be as black as night; and it is still as night; one can sit and listen. And now that dull throbbing sound—and a strain of music—is it the young wife who, all unknowing, is digging her husband's grave? How sad she is! She pities the poor prisoner, whoever he may be. She would not dig this grave if she knew: she calls herself *Fidelio*; she is faithful to her love. But now—but now—though this hole is black as night, and silent, and the waters are lapping outside, cannot one know what is passing there? There are some who are born to be happy. Ah, look at the faithful wife now, as she strikes off her husband's fetters—listen to the glad music, *destin ormai felice!*—they take each other's hand—they go away proudly into the glad daylight—husband and wife together for evermore. This poor prisoner listens, though his heart will break. The happy music grows more and more faint—the husband and wife are together now—the beautiful white day is around them—the poor prisoner is left alone: there is no one even coming to bid him farewell.

The sleeper moaned in his sleep, and stretched out his hand as if to seek some other hand.

“No one—not even a word of good-bye!” he murmured.

But then the dream changed. And now it was a wild and windy day in the blowing month of March, and the streams in this Buckinghamshire valley were swollen, and the woods were bare. Who are these two who come into the small and bleak church-yard? They are a mother and daughter; they are all in black; and the face of the daughter is pale, and her eyes filled with tears. Her face is white, and the flowers she carries are white, and that is the white tombstone there in the corner—apart from the others. See how she kneels down at the foot of the grave, and puts the flowers lightly on the grass, and clasps her trembling hands, and prays.

“*Natalie—my wife!*” he calls in his sleep.

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And behold! the white tombstone has letters of fire written on it, and the white flowers are changed to drops of blood, and the two black figures have hurried away and disappeared. How the wind tears down this wide valley, in which there is no sign of life. It is so sad to be left alone.

Well, it was about eight o'clock when he was awakened by the entrance of Waters. He jumped up, and looked around, haggard and bewildered. Then his first thought was,

"A few more nights like this, and Zaccatelli will have little to fear."

He had his bath and breakfast; all the time he was forcing himself into an indignant self-contempt. He held out his hand before him, expecting to see it tremble: but no. This reassured him somewhat.

A little before eleven he was at the house in Hans Place. He was immediately shown up-stairs. Natalie's mother was there to receive him, she did not notice he looked tired.

"Natalie is coming to you this morning?" he said.

"Oh yes; why not? It gives her pleasure, it gives me joy. But I will not keep the child always in the house; no, she must have her walk. Yesterday, after you had left, we went to a very secluded place—a church not far from here, and a cemetery behind."

"Oh, yes; I know," he said. "But you might have chosen a more cheerful place for your walk."

"Any place is cheerful enough for me when my daughter is with me," said she, simply; "and it is quiet."

George Brand sat with his hands clinched. Every moment he thought he should hear Natalie knock at the door below.

"Madame," he said, with some little hesitation, "something has happened of serious importance—I mean, of a little importance. When Natalie comes I must tell her—"

"And you wish to see her alone, perhaps?" said the mother, lightly. "Why not? And listen—it is she herself, I believe!"

A minute afterward the door was opened, and Natalie entered, radiant, happy, with glad eyes. Then she started when she saw George Brand there, but there was no fear in her look. On the contrary, she embraced her mother; then she went to him, and said, with a pleased flush in her face,

"I had no message this morning. You did not care, then, for our little bunch of flowers?"

He took her hand, and held it for a second.

“I thought I should see you to-day, Natalie; I have something to tell you.”

Her face grew graver.

“Is it something serious?”

“Well,” said he, to gain time, for the mother was still in the room, “it is serious or not serious, as you like to take it. It does not involve the fate of a nation, for example.”

“It is mysterious, at all events.”

At this moment the elder woman took occasion to slip noiselessly from the room.

“Natalie,” said he, “sit down here by me.”

She put the footstool on which she was accustomed to sit at her mother’s side close to his chair, and seated herself. He took her hand and held it tight.

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"Natalie," said he, in a low voice—and he was himself rather pale—"I am going to tell you something that may perhaps startle you, and even grieve you; but you must keep command over yourself, or you will alarm your mother—"

"You are not in danger?" she cried, quickly, but in a low voice: there was something in his tone that alarmed her.

"The thing is simple enough," he said, with a forced composure. "You know that when one has joined a certain Society, and especially when one has accepted the responsibilities I have, there is nothing that may not be demanded. Look at this ring, Natalie."

"Yes, yes," she said, breathlessly.

"That is a sufficient pledge, even if there were no others. I have sworn allegiance to the Society at all hazards; I cannot retreat now."

"But is it so very terrible?" she said, hurriedly. "Dearest, I will come over to you in America. I have told my mother; she will take me to you—"

"I am not going to America, Natalie."

She looked up bewildered.

"I have been commissioned to perform another duty, more immediate, more definite. And I must tell you now, Natalie, all that I dare tell you: you must be prepared; it is a duty which will cost me my life!"

"Your life?" she repeated, in a bewildered, wild way, and she hastily drew her hand away from his. "Your life?"

"Hush, Natalie!"

"You are to die!" she exclaimed, and she gazed with terror-stricken eyes into his face. She forgot all about his allegiance to the Society; she forgot all about her theories of self-sacrifice; she only heard that the man she loved was doomed, and she said, in a low, hoarse voice, "And it is I, then, who have murdered you!"

"Natalie!" he cried, and he would have taken her hand again, but she withdrew from him, shuddering. She clasped her hands over her face.

"Oh, do not touch me," she said, "do not come near me. I have murdered you: it is I who have murdered you!"

“For Heaven’s sake, Natalie, be calm!” he said to her, in a low, earnest voice. “Think of your mother: do not alarm her. You knew we might be parted for years—well, this parting is a little worse to bear, that is all—and you, who gave me this ring, you are not going to say a word of regret. No, no, Natalushka, many thousands and thousands of people in the world have gone through what stands before us now, and wives have parted from their husbands without a single tear, so proud were they.”

She looked up quickly; her face was white.

“I have no tears,” she said, “none! But some wives have gone with their husbands into the danger, and have died too—ah, how happy that were for any one!—and I, why may not I go? I am not afraid to die.”

He laid his hand gently on the dark hair.

“My child, it is impossible,” he said; and then he added, rather sadly, “It is not an enterprise that any one is likely to gain any honor by—it is far from that; but it has to be undertaken—that is enough. As for you—you have your mother to care for now; will not that fill your life with gladness?”

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"How soon—do—you go away?" she asked, in a low voice.

"Almost immediately," he said, watching her. She had not shed a single tear, but there was a strange look on her face. "Nothing is to be said about it. I shall be supposed to have started on a travelling-expedition, that is all."

"And you go—forever?"

"Yes."

She rose.

"We shall see you yet before you go?"

"Natalie," he said, in despair, "I had come to try to say good-bye to you; but I cannot, my darling, I cannot! I must see you again."

"I do not understand why you should wish to see again one like me," she said, slowly, and the voice did not sound like her own voice. "I have given you over to death: and, more than that, to a death that is not honorable; and, yet I cannot even tell you that I am grieved. But there is pain here." She put her hand over her heart; she staggered back a little bit; he caught her.

"Natalie—Natalie!"

"It is a pain that kills," she said, wildly.

"Natalie, where is your courage? I give my life without question; you must bear your part too."

She still held her hand over her bosom.

"Yet," she said, as if she had not heard him, "that is what they say; it kills, this pain in the heart. Why not—if one does not wish to live?"

At this moment the door was opened, and the mother came into the room.

"Madame," said Brand, quickly, "come and speak to your daughter. I have had to tell her something that has upset her, perhaps, for a moment; but you will console her; she is brave."

"Child, how you tremble, and how cold your hands are!" the mother cried.

"It does not matter, mother. From every pain there is a release, is there not?"

"I do not understand you, Natalushka?"

“And I—and I, mother—”

She was on the point of breaking down, but she held firm. Then she released herself from her mother’s hold, and went forward and took her lover’s hand, and regarded him with the sad, fearless, beautiful eyes.

“I have been selfish,” she said; “I have been thinking of myself, when that is needless. For me there will be a release—quickly enough: I shall pray for it. Now tell me what I must do: I will obey you.”

“First, then,” said he, speaking in a low voice, and in English, so that her mother should not understand, “you must make light of this affair, or you will distress your mother greatly, and she is not able to bear distress. Some day, if you think it right, you may tell her; you know nothing that could put the enterprise in peril; she will be as discreet and silent as yourself, Natalie. Then you must put it out of your mind, my darling, that you have any share in what has occurred. What have I to regret? My life was worthless to me; you made it beautiful for a time; perhaps, who knows, it may after all turn out to have been of some service, and then there can be no regret at all. They think so, and it is not for me to question.”

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"May I not tell my mother now?" she said, imploringly. "Dearest, how can I speak to her, and be thinking of you far away?"

"As you please, Natalie. The little I have told you or Evelyn can do no harm, so long as you keep it among yourselves."

"But I shall see again?" It was her heart that cried to him.

"Oh yes, Natalie," he said, gravely. "I may not have to leave England for a week or two. I will see you as often as I can until I go, my darling, though it may only be torture to you."

"Torture?" she said, sadly. "That will come after—until there is an end of the pain."

"Hush, you must not talk like that. You have now one with you whom it is your duty to support and console. She has not had a very happy life either, Natalie."

He was glad now that he was able to leave this terror-stricken girl in such tender hands. And as for himself, he found, when he had left, that somehow the strengthening of another had strengthened himself. He had less dread of the future; his face was firm; the time for vain regrets was over.

CHAPTER XLIII.

A QUARREL.

Meanwhile, almost immediately after George Brand had left the house in Lisle Street, Reitzei and Beratinsky left also. On shutting the street-door behind them, Beratinsky bade a curt good-night to his companion, and turned to go; but Reitzei, who seemed to be in very high spirits, stayed him.

"No, no, friend Beratinsky; after such a fine night's work I say we must have a glass of wine together. We will walk up to the Culturverein."

"It is late," said the other, somewhat ungraciously.

"Never mind. An hour, three-quarters of an hour, half an hour, what matter? Come," said he, laying hold of his arm and taking him away unwillingly, "it is not polite of you to force me to invite myself. I do not suppose it is the cost of the wine you are thinking of. Mark my words: when I am elected a member, I shall not be stingy."

Beratinsky suffered himself to be led away, and together the two walked up toward Oxford Street. Beratinsky was silent, and even surly: Reitzei garrulous and self-satisfied.

“Yes, I repeat it; a good night’s work. For the thing had to be done; there were the Council’s orders; and who so appropriate as the Englishman? Had it been you or I, Beratinsky, or Lind, how could any one of us have been spared? No doubt the Englishman would have been glad to have Lind’s place, and Lind’s daughter, too: however, that is all settled now, and very well done. I say it was very well done on the part of Lind. And what did you think of my part, friend Beratinsky?”

“I think you made a fool of yourself, friend Reitzei,” said the other, abruptly.

Reitzei was a vain young man, and he had been fishing for praise.

“I don’t know what you mean,” he said, angrily.

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"What I mean I say," replied the other, with something very like cool contempt. "I say you made a fool of yourself. When a man is drunk, he does his best to appear sober; you, being sober, tried to appear drunk, and made a fool of yourself."

"My friend Beratinsky," said the younger man, hotly, "you have a right to your own opinion—every man has that; but you should take care not to make an ass of yourself by expressing it. Do not speak of things you know nothing about—that is my advice to you."

Beratinsky did not answer; and the two walked on in silence until they reached the *Verein*, and entered the long, resounding hall, which was nearly empty. But the few members who remained were making up for their paucity of numbers by their mirth and noise. As Beratinsky and his companion took their seats at the upper end of the table the chairman struck his hammer violently, and commanded silence.

"Silentium, meine Herren!" he thundered out. "I have a secret to communicate. A great honor has been done one of our members, and even his overwhelming modesty permits it to be known at last. Our good friend Josef Hempel has been appointed Hof-maler to the Grand-duke of ——. I call in you to drink his health and the Grand-duke's too!"

Then there was a quick filling of glasses; a general uprising; cries of "Hempel! Hempel!" "The Duke!" followed by a resounding chorus—

"Hoch sollen sie leben!
Hoch sollen sie leben!
Dreimal hoch!"—

that echoed away down the empty hall. Then the tumult subsided; and the president, rising, said gravely,

"I now call on our good friend Hempel to reply to the toast, and to give us a few remarks on the condition of art in the Grand Duchy of ——, with some observations and reflections on the altered position of the Duchy since the unification of our Fatherland."

In answer to this summons there rose to his feet a short old gentleman, with a remarkably fresh complexion, silvery-white hair, and merry blue eyes that peered through gold-rimmed spectacles. He was all smiles and blushes; and the longer they cheered the more did he smile and blush.

"Gentlemen," he said; and this was the signal for further cheering; "Gentlemen," said the blushing orator, at length, "our friend is at his old tricks. I cannot make a speech to you—except this: I ask you to drink a glass of champagne with me. Kellner—Champagner!"

And he incontinently dropped into his seat again, having forgotten altogether to acknowledge the compliment paid to himself and the Grand-duke.

However, this was like the letting in of water; for no sooner had the two or three bottles ordered by Herr Hempel been exhausted than one after another of his companions seemed to consider it was their turn now, and loud-shouted orders were continually being administered to the busy waiter. Wine flowed and sparkled; cigars were freely exchanged; the volume of conversation rose in tone, for all were speaking at once; the din became fast and furious.

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In the midst of all this Reitzei alone sat apart and silent. Ever since coming into the room the attention of Beratinsky had been monopolized by his neighbor, who had just come back from a great artistic *fete* in some German town, and who, dressed as the Emperor Barbarossa, and followed by his knights, had ridden up the big staircase into the Town-hall. The festivities had lasted for a fortnight; the Staatsweinkeller had furnished liberal supplies; the Princess Adelheid had been present at the crowning ceremony. Then he had brought with him sketches of the various costumes, and so forth. Perhaps it was inadvertently that Beratinsky so grossly neglected his guest.

The susceptible vanity of Reitzei had been deeply wounded before he entered, but now the cup of his wrath was filled to overflowing. The more champagne he drank—and there was plenty coming and going—the more sullen he became. For the rest, he had forgotten the circumstance that he had already drunk two glasses of brandy before his arrival, and that he had eaten nothing since mid-day.

At length Beratinsky turned to him.

“Will you have a cigar, Reitzei?”

Reitzei’s first impulse was to refuse to speak; but his wrongs forced him. He said, coldly,

“No, thanks; I have already been offered a cigar by the gentleman next me. Perhaps you will kindly tell me how one, being sober, had any need to pretend to be sober?”

Beratinsky stared at him.

“Oh, you are thinking about that yet, are you?” he said, indifferently; and at this moment, as his neighbor called his attention to some further sketches, he again turned away.

But now the souls of the sons of the Fatherland, warmed with wine, began to think of home and love and patriotism, and longed for some more melodious utterances than this continuous guttural clatter. Silence was commanded. A handsome young fellow, slim and dark, clearly a Jew, ascended the platform, and sat down at the piano; the bashful Hempel, still blushing and laughing, was induced to follow; together they sung, amidst comparative silence, a duet of Mendelssohn’s, set for tenor and barytone, and sung it very well indeed. There was great applause, but Hempel insisted on retiring. Left to himself, the young man with the handsome profile and the finely-set head played a few bars of prelude, and then, in a remarkably clear and resonant voice, sung Braga’s mystical and tender serenade, the “*Legende Valaque*,” amidst a silence now quite secured. But what was this one voice or that to all the passion of music demanding utterance? Soon there was a call to the young gentleman to play an accompaniment; and a huge black-a-vised Hessian, still sitting at the table, held up his brimming glass, and began, in a voice like a hundred kettle-drums,

“Ich nehm’ mein Glaschen in die Hand:”

then came the universal shout of the chorus, ringing to the roof,



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“Vive la Compagneia!”

Again the raucous voice bawled aloud,

“Und fahr’ damit in’s Unterland:”

and again the thunder of the chorus, this time prolonged, with much beating of time on the table, and jangling of wine-glasses,

“Vive la Compagneia!

Vive la, vive la, vive la, va! vive la, vive la, hopsasa!

Vive la Compagneia!”

And so on to the end, the chorus becoming stormier and more thunderous than ever; then, when peace had been restored, there was a general rising, though here and there a final glass was drunk with “stosst an! setzt an! fertig! los!” and its attendant ceremonies. The meeting had broken up by common consent; there was a shuffling of footsteps, and some disjointed talking and calling down the empty hall, were the lights were already being put out.

Reitzei had set silent during all this chorus-singing, though ordinarily, being an excitable person, and indeed rather proud of his voice, he was ready to roar with any one; and in silence, too, he walked away with Beratinsky, who either was or appeared to be quite unconscious of his companion’s state of mind. At length Reitzei stopped short—Oxford Street at this time of the morning was perfectly silent—and said,

“Beratinsky, I have a word to say to you.”

“Very well,” said the other, though he seemed surprised.

“I may tell you your manners are none of the best.”

Beratinsky looked at him.

“Nor your temper,” said he, “one would think. Do you still go back to what I said about your piece of acting? You are a child, Reitzei.”

“I do not care about that,” said Reitzei, contemptuously, though he was not speaking the truth: his self-satisfaction had been grievously hurt. “You put too great a value on your opinion, Beratinsky; it is not everything that you know about: we will let that pass. But when one goes into a society as a guest, one expects to be treated as a guest. No matter; I was among my own countrymen: I was well enough entertained.”

“It appears so,” said Beratinsky, with a sneer: “I should say too well. My dear friend Reitzei, I am afraid you have been having a little too much champagne.”

"It was none that you paid for, at all events," was the quick retort. "No matter; I was among my own countrymen: they are civil; they are not niggardly."

"They can afford to spend," said the other, laughing sardonically, "out of the plunder they take from others."

"They have fought for what they have," the other said, hotly. "Your countrymen—what have they ever done? Have they fought? No; they have conspired, and then run away."

But Beratinsky was much too cool-blooded a man to get into a quarrel of this kind; besides, he noticed that Reitzei's speech was occasionally a little thick.

"I would advise you to go home and get to bed, friend Reitzei," said he.

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"Not until I have said something to you, Mr. Beratinsky," said the other with mock politeness. "I have this to say, that your ways of late have been a little too uncivil; you have been just rather too insolent, my good friend. Now I tell you frankly it does not do for one in your position to be uncivil and to make enemies."

"For one in my position!" Beratinsky repeated, in a tone of raillery.

"You think it is a joke, then, what happened to-night?"

"Oh, that is what you mean; but if that is my position, what other is yours, friend Reitzei?"

"You pretend not to know. I will tell you: that was got up between you and Lind; I had nothing to do with it."

"Ho! ho!"

"You may laugh; but take care you do not laugh the other way," said the younger man, who had worked himself into a fury, and was all the madder on account of the cynical indifference of his antagonist. "I tell you I had nothing to do with it; it was your scheme and Lind's; I did as I was bid. I tell you I could make this very plain if—"

He hesitated.

"Well—if what?" Beratinsky said, calmly.

"You know very well. I say you are not in a position to insult people and make enemies. You are a very clever man in your own estimation, my friend Beratinsky; but I would give you the advice to be a little more civil."

Beratinsky regarded him for a second in silence.

"I scarcely know whether it is worth while to point out certain things to you, friend Reitzei, or whether to leave you to go home and sleep off your anger."

"My anger, as you call it, is not a thing of the moment. Oh, I assure you it has nothing to do with the champagne I have just drunk, and which was not paid for by you, thank God! No; my anger—my wish to have you alter your manner a little—has been growing for some time; but it is of late, my dear Beratinsky, that you have become more unbearable than ever."

"Don't make a fool of yourself, Reitzei; I at least am not going to stand in the streets talking nonsense at two in the morning. Good-night!"

He stepped from the pavement on to the street, to cross.

“Stop!” said Reitzei, seizing his arm with both hands.

Beratsinsky shook him off violently, and turned. There might have been a blow; but Reitzei, who was a coward, shrunk back.

Beratsinsky advanced.

“Look here, Reitzei,” he said, in a low voice, “I think you are sober enough to understand this. You were throwing out vague threats about what you might do or might not do; that means that you think you could go and tell something about the proceedings of to-night: you are a fool!”

“Very well—very well.”



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"Perhaps you do not remember, for example, Clause I., the very first clause in the Obligations binding on Officers of the Second Degree; you do not remember that, perhaps?" He was now talking in a quietly contemptuous way; the little spasm of anger that had disturbed him when Reitzei put his hands on his arm had immediately passed away. "The punishment for any one revealing, for any reason or purpose whatever, what has been done, or is about to be done by orders of the Council, or by any one acting under these orders—you remember the rest, my friend?—the punishment is death! My good Reitzei, do not deprive me of the pleasure of your companionship; and do not imagine that you can force people to be polite to you by threats; that is not the way at all. Go home and sleep away your anger; and do not imagine that you have any advantage in your position, or that you are less responsible for what has been done than any one."

"I am not so sure about that," said Reitzei, sullenly.

"In the morning you will be sure," said the other, compassionately, as if he were talking to a child.

He held out his hand.

"Come, friend Reitzei," said he, with a sort of pitying kindness, "you will find in the morning it will be all right. What happened to-night was well arranged, and well executed; everybody must be satisfied. And if you were a little too exuberant in your protestations, a little too anxious to accept the work yourself, and rather too demonstrative with your tremblings and your professions of courage and your clutching at the bottle: what then? Every one is not a born actor. Every one must make a mistake sometimes. But you won't take my hand?"

"Oh, Mr. Beratinsky," said the other, with profound sarcasm, "how could you expect it? Take the hand of one so wise as you, so great as you, such a logician as you are? It would be too much honor; but if you will allow me I will bid you good-night."

He turned abruptly and left. Beratinsky stood for a moment or so looking after him; then he burst into a fit of laughter that sounded along the empty street. Reitzei heard the laughing behind him.

CHAPTER XLIV.

TWICE-TOLD TALE.

When the door had closed on George Brand, Natalie stood for a second or two uncertain, to collect her bewildered thoughts. She heard his footsteps growing fainter and fainter: the world seemed to sway around her; life itself to be slipping away. Then suddenly she turned, and seized her mother by both her hands.



“Child, child, what is the matter?” the mother cried, terrified by the piteous eyes and white lips.

“Ah, you could not have guessed,” the girl said, wildly, “you could not have guessed from his manner what he has told me, could you? He is not one to say much; he is not one to complain. But he is about to lose his life, mother—to lose his life! and it is I who have led him to this; it is I who have killed him!”

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"Natalie," the mother exclaimed, turning rather pale, "you don't know what you are saying."

"But it is true; do not you understand, mother?" the girl said, despairingly. "The Society has given him some duty to do—now, at once—and it will cost him his life. Oh, do you think he complains?—no, he is not one to complain. He says it is nothing; he has pledged himself; he will obey; and what is the value of his one single life? That is the way he talks, mother. And the parting between him and me—that is so near, so near now—what is that, when there are thousands and thousands of such every time that war is declared? I am to make light of it, mother; I am to think it is nothing at all—that he should be going away to die!"

She had been talking quite wildly, almost incoherently; she had not observed that her mother had grown paler than ever; nor had she heard the half-murmured exclamation of the elder woman,

"No, no—not the story twice told; he could not do that!"

Then, with an unusual firmness and decision, she led her daughter to the easy-chair, and made her sit down.

"Natalie," she said, in earnest and grave tones, without any excitement whatever, "you have told me your father was very much against you marrying Mr. Brand."

There was no answer. The girl sitting there could only think of that terrible thing facing her in the immediate future.

"Natalie," said her mother, firmly, "I wish you to listen. You said your father was opposed to your marriage—that he would not hear of it; and you remember telling me how Mr. Brand had refused to hand over his property to the Society; and you talked of going to America if Mr. Brand were sent? Natalie, this is your father's doing!"

She looked up quickly, not understanding. The elder woman flushed slightly, but continued in clear and even tones.

"Perhaps I am wrong, Natalushka; perhaps I should not teach you to suspect your father. But that is how I see it—this is what I believe—that Mr. Brand, if what you say is true, is to be sacrificed, not in the interests of the Society, but because your father is determined to get him out of the way."

"Oh, mother, it is impossible! How could any one be so cruel?"

"It would be strange if the story were to be twice told," the mother said, absently. Then she took a stool beside her daughter, and sat down beside her, and took one of her hands in both hers. It was a reversal of their ordinary position.



“Listen, Natalie; I am going to tell you a story,” she said, with a curious resignation and sadness in her voice. “I had thought it might be unnecessary to tell it to you; when Mr. Brand spoke of it, I said no. But you will judge for yourself, and it will distract your mind for a little. You must think of a young girl something like yourself, Natalushka; not so handsome as you are, but a little pretty, and with many friends. Oh yes, many friends, for

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at that time the family were in very brilliant society and had large estates: alas! the estates were soon all lost in politics, and all that remained to the family was their name and some tales of what they had done. Well, this young lady, among all her friends, had one or two sweethearts, as was natural—for there were a great coming and going then, before the troubles broke out, and many visitors at the house—only every one thought she ought to marry her cousin Konrad, for they had been brought up together, and this cousin Konrad was a good-looking young man, and amiable, and her parents would have approved. Are you sure you are listening to my story, Natalushka?”

“Oh yes, mother,” she said, in a low voice; “I think I understand.”

“Well,” continued the mother, with rather a sad smile, “you know a girl does not always choose the one whom her friends choose for her. Among the two or three sweethearts—that is, those who wished to be sweethearts, do you understand, Natalushka?—there was one who was more audacious, perhaps, more persistent than the others; and then he was a man of great ambition, and of strong political views; and the young lady I was telling you about, Natalushka, had been brought up to the political atmosphere, and had opinions also. She believed this man was capable of doing great things; and her friends not objecting, she, after a few years of waiting, owing to the troubles of political matters, married him.”

She was silent for a moment or two.

“Yes, they were married,” she continued, with a sigh, “and for a time every thing was happy, though the political affairs were so untoward, and cost much suffering and danger. The young wife only admired her husband’s determined will, his audacity, his ambition after leadership and power. But in the midst of all this, as time went on, he began to grow jealous of the cousin Konrad; and Konrad, though he was a light-hearted young fellow, and meaning no harm whatever, resented being forbidden to see his cousin. He refused to cease visiting the house, though the young wife begged him to do so. He was very proud and self-willed, you must know, Natalushka. Well, the husband did not say much, but he was morose, and once or twice he said to his wife, ‘It is not your fault that your cousin is impertinent; but let him take care.’ Then one day an old friend of his wife’s father came to her, and said, ‘Do you know what has happened? You are not likely to see your cousin Konrad again. The Russian General —, whom we bribed with twenty-four thousand rubles to give us ten passports for crossing the frontier, now refuses to give them, and Konrad has been sent to kill him, as a warning to the others; he will be taken, and hanged.’ I forgot to tell you, Natalushka, that the girl I am speaking of was in all the secrets of the association which had been started. You are more fortunate; you know nothing.”

The interest of the listener had now been thoroughly aroused. She had turned toward her mother, and had put her remaining hand over hers.

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“Well, this friend hinted something more; he hinted that it was the husband of this young wife who had sent Konrad on this mission, and that the means employed had not been quite fair.”

“Mother, what do you mean?” Natalie said, breathlessly.

“I am telling you a story that really happened, Natalushka,” said the mother, calmly, and with the same pathetic touch in her voice. “Then the young wife, without consideration—so anxious was she to save the life of her cousin—went straight to the highest authorities of the association, and appealed to them. The influence of her family aided her. She was listened to; there was an examination; what the friend had hinted was found to be true; the commission was annulled; Konrad was given his liberty!”

“Yes, yes!” said Natalie, eagerly.

“But listen, Natalushka; I said I would tell you the whole story; it has been kept from you for many a year. When it was found that the husband had made use of the machinery of the association for his own ends—which, it appears, was a great crime in their eyes—he was degraded, and forbidden all hope of joining the Council, the ruling body. He was in a terrible rage, for he was mad with ambition. He drove the wife from his house—rather, he left the house himself—and he took away with him their only child, a little girl scarcely two years old; and he threatened the mother with the most terrible penalties if ever again she should speak to her own child! Natalushka, do you understand me? Do you wonder that my face is worn with grief? For sixteen years that mother, who loved her daughter better than anything in the world, was not permitted to speak to her, could only regard her from a distance, and not tell her how she loved her.”

The girl uttered a cry of compassion, and wound her arms round her mother’s neck.

“Oh, the cruelty of it!—the cruelty of it, mother! But why did you not come to me? Do you think I would not have left everything to go with you—you, alone and suffering?”

For a time the mother could not answer, so deep were her sobs.

“Natalushka,” she said at length, in a broken voice, “no fear of any danger threatening myself would have kept me from you; be sure of that. But there was something else. My father had become compromised—the Austrians said it was assassination; it was not!” For a second some hot blood mounted to her cheeks. “I say it was a fair duel, and your grandfather himself was nearly killed; but he escaped, and got into hiding among some faithful friends—poor people, who had known our family in better times. The Government did what they could to arrest him; he was expressly exempted from the amnesty, this old man, who was wounded, who was incapable of movement almost, whom every one expected to die from day to day, and a word would have betrayed him

and destroyed him. Can you wonder, Natalushka, with that threat hanging over me—that menace

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that the moment I spoke to you meant that my father would be delivered to his enemies—that I said 'No, not yet will I speak to my little daughter; I cannot sacrifice my father's life even to the affection of a mother! But soon, when I have given him such care and solace as he has the right to demand from me, then I will set out to see my beautiful child—not with baskets of flowers, haunting the door-steps—not with a little trinket, to drop in her lap, and perhaps set her mind thinking—no, but with open arms and open heart, to see if she is not afraid to call me mother.'"

"Poor mother, how you must have suffered," the girl murmured, holding her close to her bosom. "But with your powerful friends—those to whom you appealed to before—why did you not go to them, and get safety from the terrible threat hanging over you? Could they not protect him, my grandfather, as they saved your cousin Konrad?"

"Alas, child, your grandfather never belonged to the association! Of what use was he to them—a sufferer expecting each day to be his last, and not daring to move beyond the door of the peasant's cottage that sheltered him? many a time he used to say to me, 'Natalie, go to your child. I am already dead; what matters it whether they take me or not? You have watched the old tree fade leaf by leaf; it is only the stump that cumpers the ground. Go to your child; if they try to drag me from here, the first mile will be the end; and what better can one wish for?' But no; I could not do that."

Natalie had been thinking deeply; she raised her head, and regarded her mother with a calm, strange look.

"Mother," she said, slowly, "I do not think I will ever enter my father's house again."

The elder woman heard this declaration without either surprise or joy. She said, simply,

"Do not judge rashly or harshly, Natalushka. Why have I refrained until now from telling you the story but that I thought it better—I thought you would be happier if you continued to respect and love your father. Then consider what excuses may be made for him—"

"None!" the girl said, vehemently. "To keep you suffering for sixteen years away from your only child, and with the knowledge that at any moment a word on his part might lead out your father to a cruel death—oh, mother mother, you may ask me to forgive, but not to excuse!"

"Ambition—the desire for influence and leadership—is his very life," the mother said, calmly. "He cares more for that than anything in the world—wife, child, anything, he would sacrifice to it. But now, child," she said, with a concerned look, "can you understand why I have told you the story?"

Natalie looked up bewildered. For a time the interest of this story, intense as it had been to her, had distracted her mind from her own troubles; though all through she been conscious of some impending gloom that seemed to darken the life around her.

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"It was not merely to tell you of my sufferings, Natalushka," the mother said at once, gently and anxiously; "they are over. I am happy to be beside you; if you are happy. But when a little time ago you told me of Mr. Brand being ordered away to this duty, and of the fate likely to befall him, I said to myself, 'Ah, no; surely it cannot be the story told twice over. He would not dare to do that again.'"

The girl turned deadly pale.

"My child, that is why I asked you. Mr. Brand disappointed your father, I can see, about the money affair. Then, when he might have been got out of the way by being sent to America, you make matters worse than ever by threatening to go with him."

The girl did not speak, but her eyes were terrified.

"Natalie," the mother said gently, "have I done wrong to put these suspicions into your mind? Have I done wrong to put you into antagonism with your father? My child I cannot see you suffer without revealing to you what I imagine may be the cause—even if it were impossible to fight against it—even if one can only shudder at the cruelty of which some are capable: we can pray God to give us resignation."

Natalie Lind was not listening at all; her face was white, her lips firm, her eyes fixed.

"Mother," she said at length, in a low voice, and speaking as if she were weighing each word, "if you think the story is being told again, why should it not be carried out? You appealed, to save the life of one who loved you. And I—why may not I also?"

"Oh, child, child!" the mother cried in terror, laying hold of her arm. "Do not think of it: anything but that! You do not know how terrible your father is when his anger is aroused: look at what I have suffered. Natalushka, I will not have you lead the life that I have led; you must not, you dare not, interfere!"

The girl put her hand aside, and sprung to her feet. No longer was she white of face. The blood of the Berezolyis was in her cheeks; her eyes were dilated; her voice was proud and indignant.

"And I," she said, "if this is true—if this is possible—Oh, do you think I am going to see a brave man sent to his death, shamelessly, cruelly, and not do what I can to save him? It is not for you, mother, it is not for one who bears the name that you bear to tell me to be afraid. What I did fear was to live, with him dead. Now—"

The mother had risen quickly to her feet also, and sought to hold her daughter's hands.

"For the sake of Heaven, Natalushka!" she pleaded. "You are running into a terrible danger—"

“Do I care, mother? Do I look as if I cared?” she said, proudly.

“And for no purpose, Natalushka; you will only bring down on yourself the fury of your father, and he will make your life as miserable as he has made mine. And what can you do, child? what can you do but bring ruin on yourself? You are powerless: you have no influence with those in authority as I at one time had. You do not know them: how can you reach them?”

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"You forget, mother," the girl said, triumphantly; "was it not you yourself who asked me if I had ever heard of one Bartolotti?"

The mother uttered a slight cry of alarm.

"No, no, Natalushka, I beg of you—"

The girl took her mother in her arms and kissed her. There was a strange joy in her face; the eyes were no longer haggard, but full of light and hope.

"You dear mother," she said, as she gently compelled her to be seated again, "that is the place for you. You will remain here, quiet, undisturbed by any fears; no one shall molest you; and when you have quite recovered from all your sufferings, and when your courage has returned to you, then I will come back and tell you my story. It is story for story, is it not?"

She rung the bell.

"Pardon me, dear mother; there is no time to be lost. For once I return to my father's house—yes, there is a card there that I must have—"

"But afterward, child, where do you go?" the mother said, though she could scarcely find utterance.

"Why, to Naples, mother; I am an experienced traveller; I shall need no courier."

The blood had mounted into both cheek and forehead; her eyes were full of life and pride; even at such a moment the anxious, frightened mother was forced to think she had never seen her daughter look so beautiful.

The door opened.

"Madame, be so good as to tell Anneli that I am ready."

She turned to her mother.

"Now, mother, it is good-bye for I do not know how long."

"Oh no, it is not, child," said the other, trembling, and yet smiling in spite of all her fears. "If you are going to travel, you must have a courier. I will be your courier, Natalushka."

"Will you come with me, mother?" she cried, with a happy light leaping to her eyes. "Come, then—we will give courage to each other, you and I, shall we not? Ah, dear mother, you have told me your story only in time; but we will go quickly now—you and I together!"



CHAPTER XLV.

SOUTHWARD.

After so much violent emotion the rapid and eager preparations for travel proved a useful distraction. There was no time to lose; and Natalie very speedily found that it was she herself who must undertake the duties of a courier, her mother being far too anxious and alarmed. Once or twice, indeed, the girl, regarding the worn, sad face, almost repented of having accepted that impulsive offer, and would have proposed to start alone. But she knew that, left in solitude, the poor distressed mother would only torture herself with imaginary fears. As for herself, she had no fear; her heart was too full to have any room for fear. And yet her hand trembled a little as she sat down to write these two messages of farewell. The first ran thus:

“My Father,—To-day, for the first time, I have heard my mother’s story from herself. I have looked into her eyes; I know she speaks the truth. You will not wonder then that I leave your house—that I go with her; there must be some one to try to console her for all she has suffered, and I am her daughter. I thank you for many years of kindness, and pray God to bless you.

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Natalie."

The next was easier to write.

"Dearest,—My mother and I leave England to-night. Do not ask why we go, or why I have not sent for you to come and say good-bye. We shall be away perhaps only a few days; in any case you must not go until we return. Do not forget that I must see you again."

Natalie."

She felt happier when she had written these two notes. She rose from the table and went over to her mother.

"Now, mother, tell me how much money you have," she said, with a highly practical air. "What, have I startled you, poor little mother? I believe your head is full of all kinds of strange forebodings; and yet they used to say that the Berezolyis were all of them very courageous."

"Natalushka, you do not know what danger you are rushing into," the mother said, absently.

"I again ask you, mother, a simple question: how much money have you?"

"I? I have thirty pounds or thereabout, Natalie; that is my capital, as it were; but next month my cousins will send me—"

"Never mind about next month, mother dear. You must let me rob you of all your thirty pounds; and, just to make sure, I will go and borrow ten pounds more from Madame Potecki. Madame is not so very poor; she has savings; she would give me every farthing if I asked her. And do you think, little mother, if we come back successful—do you think there will be a great difficulty about paying back the loan to Madame Potecki?"

She was quite gay, to give her mother courage; and she refused to leave her alone, a prey to these gloomy forebodings. She carried her off with her in the cab to Curzon Street, and left her in the cab while she entered the house with Anneli. Anneli cried a little when she was receiving her mistress's last instructions.

"Am I never to see you again, Fraulein?" she sobbed. "Are you never coming back to the house any more?"

"Of course you will see me again, you foolish girl, even if I do not come back here. Now you will be careful, Anneli, to have the wine a little warmed before dinner, and see that your master's slippers are in the study by the fire; and the coffee—you must make the coffee yourself, Anneli—"



“Oh yes, indeed, Fraulein, I will make the coffee,” said Anneli, with a fresh flowing of tears. “But—but may not I go with you, Fraulein?—if you are not coming back here any more, why may I not go with you? I am not anxious for wages, Fraulein—I do not want any wages at all; but if you will take me with you—”

“Now, do not be foolish, Anneli. Have you not a whole house to look after? There, take these keys; you will have to show that you can be a good house-mistress, and sensible, and not childish.”

At the door she shook hands with the sobbing maid, and bade her a cheerful good-bye. Then she got into the cab and drove away to Madame Potecki’s lodgings. Finally, by dexterous management, she succeeded in getting her mother and herself to Charing Cross Station in time to catch the afternoon express to Dover.

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It is probable that, now the first excitement of setting out was over, and the two women-folk left to themselves in the solitude of a compartment, Natalie might have begun to reflect with some tremor of the heart on the very vagueness of the task she had undertaken. But she was not permitted to do so. The necessity of driving away her mother's forebodings prevented her indulging in any of her own. She was forced to be careless, cheerful, matter-of-fact.

"Natalushka," the mother said, holding her daughter's hand, "you have been brought up in ignorance. You know only the romantic, the beautiful side of what is going on; you do not know what these men are ready to do—what has been done—to secure the success of their schemes. And for you, a girl, to interfere, it is madness, Natalushka. They will laugh at you, perhaps; perhaps it may be worse; they may resent your interference, and ask who has betrayed their secrets."

"Are they so very terrible, then?" said the girl, with a smile, "when Lord Evelyn—ah, you do not know him yet, mother; but he is as gentle as a woman—when he is their friend; and when Mr. Brand is full of admiration for what they are doing; and when Calabressa—Now, mother, is Calabressa likely to harm any one? And it was Calabressa himself who said to me, 'Little daughter, if ever you are in great trouble, go to Naples. You will find friends there.' No, mother, it is no use your trying to frighten me. No; let us talk about something sensible; for example, which way is the wind?"

"How can I tell, Natalushka?"

The girl laughed—rather a forced laugh, perhaps; she could not altogether shake off the consciousness of the peril that surrounded her lover.

"Why, mother, you are a pretty courier! You are about to cross the Channel, and you do not know which way the wind is, or whether the sea is rough, or anything. Now I will tell you; it is I who am the courier. The wind is northeast; the sea was quite smooth yesterday evening; I think we shall have a comfortable passage. And do you know why I have brought you away by this train? Don't you know that I shall get you down to Dover in time to give you something nice for dinner; then, if the sea is quite smooth, we go on board before the people come; then we cross over to Calais and go to a hotel there; then you get a good, long, sound sleep, you little mother, and the next day—that is to-morrow—about noon, I think, we go easily on to Paris. What do you think of that, now?"

"Whatever you do will be right, Natalushka; you know I have never before had a daughter to look after me."

Natalie's programme was fulfilled to the letter, and with good fortune. They dined in the hotel, had some tea, and then went down through the dark clear night to the packet. The sea was like a mill-pond; there was just sufficient motion of the water to make the

reflections of the stars quiver in the dark. The two women sat together on deck; and as the steamer gradually took them away from the lights of the English coast, Natalie sung to her mother, in a low voice, some verses of an old Magyar song, which were scarcely audible amidst the rush of water and the throbbing of the paddles.

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Next day the long and tedious railway journey began; and here again Natalie acted as the most indefatigable and accomplished of couriers.

“How do you manage it, Natalushka?” said the mother, as she got into the *coupe*, to this tall and handsome young lady who was standing outside, and on whom everybody seemed to wait. “You get everything you want, and without trouble.”

“It is only practice, with a little patience,” she said, simply, as she opened her flask of white-rose scent and handed it up to her mother.

Necessarily, it was rail all the way for these two travellers. Not for them the joyous assembling on the Mediterranean shore, where Nice lies basking in the sun like a pink surf thrown up by the waves. Not for them the packing of the great carriage, and the swinging away of the four horses with their jingling bells, and the slow climbing of the Cornice, the road twisting up the face of the gray mountains, through perpetual lemon-groves, with far below the ribbed blue sea. Not for them the leisurely trotting all day long through the luxuriant beauty of the Riviera—the sun hot on the ruddy cliffs of granite, and on the terraces of figs and vines and spreading palms; nor the rattling through the narrow streets of the old walled towns, with the scarlet-capped men and swarthy-visaged women shrinking into the door-ways as the horses clatter by; nor the quiet evenings in the hotel garden, with the moon rising over the murmuring sea, and the air sweet with the perfumes of the south. No. They climbed a mountain, it is true, but it was behind an engine; they beheld the Mont Cenis snows, but it was from the window of a railway-carriage. Then they passed through the black, resounding tunnel, with, after a time, its sudden glares of light; finally the world seemed to open around them; they looked down upon Italy.

“Many a one has died for you, and been glad,” said the girl, almost to herself, as she gazed abroad on the great valleys, with here and there a peak crowned with a castle or a convent, with the vine-terraced hills showing now and again a few white dots of houses, and beyond and above all these the far blue mountains, with their sharp line of snow.

Then they descended, and passed through the luxuriant yellow plains—the sunset blazing on the rows of willows and on the square farm-houses with their gaudy picture over the arched gateway; while always in the background rose the dark masses of the mountains, solemn and distant, beyond the golden glow of the fields. They reached Turin at dusk, both of them very tired.

So far scarcely anything had been said about the object of their journey, though they could have talked in safety even in railway-carriages, as they spoke to each other in Magyar. But Natalie refused to listen to any dissuading counsel; when her mother began, she would say, “Dear little mother, will you have some white rose for your forehead and your fingers?”

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From Turin they had to start again early in the morning. They had by this time grown quite accustomed to the plod, plodding of the train; it seemed almost one of the normal and necessary conditions of life. They went down by Genoa, Spezia, Pisa, Sienna, and Rome, making the shortest possible pauses.

One night the windows of a sitting-room in a hotel at the western end of Naples were opened, and a young girl stepped out on to the high balcony, a light shawl thrown over her head and shoulders. It was a beautiful night; the air sweet and still; the moonlight shining over the scarcely stirring waters of the bay. Before her rose the vast bulk of the Castello dell' Ovo, a huge mass of black shadow against the silvery sea and the lambent sky: then far away throbbed the dull orange lights of the city; and beyond these, again, Vesuvius towered into the clear darkness, with a line of sharp, intense crimson marking its summit. Through the perfect silence she could hear the sound of the oars of a boat, itself unseen; and over the whispering waters came some faint and distant refrain, "*Addio! addio!*" At length even these sounds ceased, and she was alone in the still, murmuring beautiful night.

She looked across to the great city. Who were her unknown friends there? What mighty power was she about to invoke on the morrow? There was no need for her to consult the card that Calabressa had given her; again and again, in the night-time, when her mother lay asleep, she had studied it, and wondered whether it would prove the talisman the giver had called it. She looked at this great city beside the sea, and only knew that it was beautiful in the moonlight; she had no fear of anything that it contained. And then she thought of another city, far away in the colder north, and she wondered if a certain window were open there, overlooking the river and the gas-lamp and the bridges, and whether there was one there thinking of her. Could not the night-wind carry the speech and desire of her heart?—"Good-night, good-night.... Love knows no fear.... Not yet is our life forever broken for us."

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE BEECHES.

On the same night Lord Evelyn was in Brand's rooms, arguing, expostulating, entreating, all to no purpose. He was astounded at the calmness with which this man appeared to accept the terrible task imposed on him, and at the stoical indifference with which he looked forward to the almost certain sacrifice of his own life.

"You have become a fanatic of fanatics!" he exclaimed, indignantly.

George Brand was staring out of the windows into the dark night, somewhat absently.

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"I suppose," he answered, "all the great things that have been done in the world have been founded in fanaticism. All that I can hope for now is that this particular act of the Council may have the good effect they hope from it. They ought to know. They see the sort of people with whom they have to deal. I should have thought, with Lind, that it was unwise—that it would shock, or even terrify; but my opinion is neither here nor there. Further talking is of no use, Evelyn; the thing is settled; what I have to consider now, as regards myself, is how I can best benefit a few people whom I am interested in, and you can help me in that."

"But I appeal to yourself—to your conscience!" Lord Evelyn cried, almost in despair. "You cannot shift the responsibility to them. You are answerable for your own actions. I say you are sacrificing your conscience to your pride. You are saying to yourself, 'Do these foreigners think that I am afraid?'"

"I am not thinking of myself at all," said Brand, simply; "that is all over. When I swore to give myself to this Society—to obey the commands of the Council—then my responsibility ceased. What I have to do is to be faithful to my oath, and to the promise I have made." Almost unconsciously he glanced at the ring that Natalie had given him. "You would not have me skulk back like a coward? You would not have me 'play and not pay?' What I have undertaken to do I will do."

Presently he added,

"There is something you could do, Evelyn. Don't let us talk further of myself: I said before, if a single man drops out of the ranks, what matter?—the army marches on. And what has been concerning me of late is the effect that this act of the Council may have on our thousands of friends throughout this country. Now, Evelyn, when—when the affair comes off, I think you would do a great deal of good by pointing out in the papers what a scoundrel this man Zaccatelli was; how he had merited his punishment, and how it might seem justifiable to the people over there that one should take the law into one's own hands in such an exceptional case. You might do that, Evelyn, for the sake of the Society. The people over here don't know what a ruffian he is, and how he is beyond the ordinary reach of the law, or how the poor people have groaned under his iniquities. Don't seek to justify me; I shall be beyond the reach of excuse or execration by that time; but you might break the shock, don't you see?—you might explain a little—you might intimate to our friends who have joined us here that they had not joined any kind of Camorra association. That troubles me more than anything. I confess to you that I have got quite reconciled to the affair, as far as any sacrifice on my own part is concerned. That bitterness is over; I can even think of Natalie."

The last words were spoken slowly, and in a low voice; his eyes were fixed on the night-world outside. What could his friend say? They talked late into the night; but all his remonstrances and prayers were of no avail as against this clear resolve.

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"What is the use of discussion?" was the placid answer. "What would you have me do?—break my oaths—put aside my sacred promise made to Natalie, and give up the Society altogether? My good fellow, let us talk of something less impossible."

And indeed, though he deprecated discussion on this point, he was anxious to talk. The fact was that of late he had come to fear sleep, as the look of his eyes testified. In the daytime, or as long as he could sit up with a companion, he could force himself to think only of the immediate and practical demands of the hour; vain regrets over what might have been—and even occasional uneasy searchings of conscience—he could by an effort of will ignore. He had accepted his fate; he had schooled himself to look forward to it without fear; henceforth there was to be no indecision, no murmur of complaint. But in the night-time—in dreams—the natural craving for life asserted itself; it seemed so sad to bid good-bye forever to those whom he had known and loved; and mostly always it was Natalie herself who stood there, regarding him with streaming eyes, and wringing her hands, and sobbing to him farewell. The morning light, or the first calls in the thoroughfare below, or the shrieking of some railway-whistle on Hungerford Bridge brought an inexpressible relief by banishing these agonizing visions. No matter how soon Waters was astir, he found his master up before him—dressed, and walking up and down the room, or reading some evening newspaper of the previous day. Sometimes Brand occupied himself in getting ready his own breakfast, but he had to explain to Waters that this was not meant as a rebuke—it was merely that, being awake early, he wished for some occupation.

Early on the morning after this last despairing protest on the part of Lord Evelyn, Brand drove up to Paddington Station, on his way to pay a hurried visit to his Buckinghamshire home. Nearly all his affairs had been settled in town; there remained some arrangements to be made in the country. Lord Evelyn was to have joined him in this excursion, but at the last moment had not put in an appearance; so Brand jumped in just as the train was starting, and found himself alone in the carriage.

The bundle of newspapers he had with him did not seem to interest him much. He was more than ever puzzled to account for the continued silence of Natalie. Each morning he had been confidently expecting to hear from her—to have some explanation of her sudden departure—but as the days went by, and no message of any sort arrived, his wonder became merged in anxiety. It seemed so strange that she should thus absent herself, when she had been counting on each day on which she might see him as if it were some gracious gift from Heaven.

All that he was certain of in the matter was that Lind knew no more than himself as to where Natalie had gone. One afternoon, going out from his rooms into Buckingham Street, he caught sight of Beratinsky loitering about farther up the little thoroughfare, about the corner of John Street. Beratinsky's back was turned to him, and so he took advantage of the moment to open the gate, for which he had a private key, leading

down to the old York Gate; from thence he made his way round by Villiers Street, whence he could get a better view of the little black-a-vised Pole's proceedings.

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He speedily convinced himself that Beratinsky, though occasionally he walked along in the direction of Adam Street, and though sometimes he would leisurely stroll up to the Strand, was in reality keeping an eye on Buckingham Street and he had not the least doubt that he himself was the object of this surveillance. He laughed to himself. Had these wise people in Lisle Street, then, discovering that Natalie's mother was in London, arrived at the conclusion that she and her daughter had taken refuge in so very open a place of shelter? When Beratinsky was least expecting any such encounter, Brand went up and tapped him on the shoulder.

"How do you do, Mr. Beratinsky?" said he, when the other wheeled round. "This is not the most agreeable place for a stroll. Why do you not go down to the Embankment Gardens?"

Beratinsky was angry and confused, but did not quite lose his self-command.

"I am waiting for some one," he said, curtly.

"Or to find out about some one? Well, I will save you some trouble. Lind wishes to know where his wife and daughter are, I imagine."

"Is that unnatural?"

"I suppose not. I heard he had been down to Hans Place, where Madame Lind was staying."

"You knew, then?" the other said, quickly.

"Oh yes, I knew. Now, if you will be frank with me, I may be of some assistance to you. Lind does not know where his wife and daughter are?"

"You know he does not."

"And you—perhaps you fancied that one or other might be sending a message to me—might call, perhaps—or even that I might have got them rooms for the time being?"

The Englishman's penetrating gray eyes were difficult to avoid.

"You appear to know a good deal, Mr. Brand," Beratinsky said, somewhat sulkily. "Perhaps you can tell me where they are now?"

"I can tell you where they are not, and that is in London."

The other looked surprised, then suspicious.

“Oh, believe me or not, as you please: I only wish to save you trouble. I tell you that, to the best of my belief, Miss Lind and her mother are not in London, nor in this country even.”

“How do you know?”

“Pardon me; you are going too far. I only tell you what I believe. In return, as I have saved you some trouble, I shall expect you to let me know if you hear anything about them. Is that too much to ask?”

“Then you really don’t know where they are?” Beratinsky said, with a quick glance.

“I do not; but they have left London—that I know.”

“I am very much obliged to you,” said the other, more humbly. “I wish you good evening, Mr. Brand.”

“Stay a moment. Can you tell me what Yacov Kirski’s address is? I have something to arrange with him before I leave England.”

He took out his note-book, and put down the address that Beratinsky gave him. Then the latter moved away, taking off his hat politely, but not shaking hands.

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Brand was amused rather than surprised at this little adventure; but when day after day passed, and no tidings came from Natalie, he grew alarmed. Each morning he was certain there would be a letter; each morning the postman rung the bell below, and Waters would tumble down the stairs at breakneck speed, but not a word from Natalie or her mother.

At the little Buckinghamshire station at which he stopped he found a dog-cart waiting to convey him to Hill Beeches; and speedily he was driving away through the country he knew so well, now somewhat desolate in the faded tints of the waning of the year; and perhaps, as he drew near to the red and white house on the hill, he began to reproach himself that he had not made the place more his home. Though the grounds and shrubberies were neat and trim enough, there was a neglected look about the house itself. When he entered, his footsteps rung hollow on the uncarpeted floors. Chintz covered the furniture; muslin smothered the chandeliers; everything seemed to be locked up and put away. And this comely woman of sixty or so who came forward to meet him—a smiling, gracious dame, with silvery-white hair, and peach-like cheeks, and the most winning little laugh—was not her first word some hint to the young master that he had been a long time away, and how the neighbors were many a time asking her when a young mistress was coming to the Beeches, to keep the place as it used to be kept in the olden days?

“Ah well, sir, you know how the people do talk,” she said, with an apologetic smile. “And there was Mrs. Diggles, sir, that is at the Checkers, sir, and she was speaking only the other day, as it might be, about the old oak cupboard, that you remember, sir, and she was saying, ‘Well, I wouldn’t give that cupboard to Mahster Brand, though he offered me twenty pound for it years ago—twenty pound, not a farthing less. My vather he gave me that cupboard when I was married, and ten shillings was what he paid for it: and then there was twenty-five shillings paid for putting that cupboard to rights. And then the wet day that Mahster Brand was out shooting, and the Checkers that crowded that I had to ask him and the other gentleman to go into my own room, and what does he say but, “Mrs. Diggles, I will give you twenty pound for that cupboard of yourn, once you knock off the feet and the curly bit on the top.” Law, how the gentle-folk do know about sech things: that was exactly what my vather he paid the twenty-five shillings for. But how could I give him my cupboard for twenty pound when I had promised it to my nephew? When I’m taken, that cupboard my nephew shall have.’ Well, sir, the people do say that Mrs. Diggles and her nephew have had a quarrel; and this was what she was saying to me—begging your pardon, sir—only the other day, as it might be; says she, ‘Mrs. Alleyne, this is what I will do: when your young mahster brings home a wife to the Beeches, I will make his lady a wedding-present of that cupboard of mine—that I will, if so be as she is not too proud to accept it from one in my ’umble station. It will be a wedding-present, and the sooner the better,’ says she—begging of your pardon, sir.”

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"It is very kind of her, Mrs. Alleyne. Now let me have the keys, if you please; I have one or two things to see to, and I will not detain you now."

She handed him the keys and accepted her dismissal gratefully, for she was anxious to get off and see about luncheon. Then Brand proceeded to stroll quietly, and perhaps even sadly, through the empty and resounding rooms that had for him many memories.

It was a rambling, old-fashioned, oddly-built house, that had been added on to by successive generations, according to their needs, without much reference to the original design. It had come into the possession of the Brands of Darlington by marriage: George Brand's grandfather having married a certain Lady Mary Heaton, the last representative of an old and famous family. And these lonely rooms that he now walked through—remarking here and there what prominence had been given by his mother to the many trophies of the chase that he himself had sent home from various parts of the world—were hung chiefly with portraits, whose costumes ranged from the stiff frill and peaked waist of Elizabeth to the low neck and ringleted hair of Victoria. But there was in an inner room which he entered another collection of portraits that seemed to have a peculiar fascination for him—a series of miniatures of various members of the Heaton and Brand families, reaching down even to himself, for the last that was added had been taken when he was a lad, to send to his mother, then lying dangerously ill at Cannes. There was her own portrait, too—that of a delicate-looking woman with large, lustrous, soft eyes and wan cheeks, who had that peculiar tenderness and sweetness of expression that frequently accompanies consumption. He sat looking at these various portraits a long time, wondering now and again what this or that one may have suffered or rejoiced in; but more than all he lingered over the last, as if to bid those beautiful tender eyes a final farewell.

He was startled by the sound of some vehicle rattling over the gravel outside; then he heard some one come walking through the echoing rooms. Instantly, he scarcely knew why he shut down the lid of the case in front of him.

"Missed the train by just a second," Lord Evelyn said, coming into the room; "I am awfully sorry."

"It doesn't matter," Brand answered; "but I am glad you have come. I have everything squared up in London, I think; there only remains to settle a few things down here."

He spoke in quite a matter-of-fact way—so much so that his friend forgot to utter any further and unavailing protest.

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"You know I am supposed to be going away abroad for a long time," he continued. "You must take my place, Evelyn, in a sort of way, and I will introduce you to-day to the people you must look after. There is a grandson of my mother's nurse, for example: I promised to do something for him when he completed his apprenticeship; and two old ladies who have seen better days—they are not supposed to accept any help, but you can make wonderful discoveries about the value of their old china, and carry it off to Bond Street. I will leave you plenty of funds; before my nephew comes into the place there will be sufficient for him and to spare. But as for yourself, Evelyn, I want you to take some little souvenir—how about this?"

He went and fetched a curious old silver drinking-cup, set round the lip and down the handle with uncut rubies and sapphires.

"I don't like the notion of the thing at all," Lord Evelyn said, rather gloomily; but it was not the cup that he was refusing thus ungraciously.

"After a time people will give me up for lost; and I have left you ample power to give any one you can think of some little present, don't you know, as a memento—whatever strikes your own fancy. I want Natalie to have that Louis XV. table over there—people rather admire the inlaid work on it, and the devices inside are endless. However, we will make out a list of these things afterward. Will you drive me down to the village now? I want you to see my pensioners."

"All right—if you like," Lord Evelyn said; though his heart was not in the work.

He walked out of this little room and made his way to the front-door, fancying that Brand would immediately follow. But Brand returned to that room, and opened the case of miniatures. Then he took from his pocket a little parcel, and unrolled it: it was a portrait of Natalie—a photograph on porcelain, most delicately colored, and surrounded with an antique silver frame. He gazed for a minute or two at the beautiful face, and somehow the eyes seemed sad to him. Then he placed the little portrait—which itself looked like a miniature—next the miniature of his mother, and shut the case and locked it.

"I beg your pardon, Evelyn, for keeping you waiting," he said, at the front-door. "Will you particularly remember this—that none of the portraits here are to be disturbed on any account whatever?"

CHAPTER XLVII.

AT PORTICI.

Natalie slept far from soundly the first night after her arrival in Naples; she was glad when the slow, anxious hours, with all their bewildering uncertainties and forebodings, were over. She rose early, and dressed quickly; she threw open the tall French

windows to let in the soft silken air from the sea; then she stepped out on the balcony to marvel once more—she who knew Naples well enough—at the shining beauty around her.

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It was a morning to give courage to any one; the air was fresh and sweet; she drank deep of the abundant gladness and brightness of the world. The great plain of waters before her shimmered and sparkled in millions of diamonds; with here and there long splashes of sunny green, and here and there long splashes of purple where the seaweed showed through. The waves sprung white on the projecting walls of the Castello dell' Ovo, and washed in on the shore with a soft continuous murmur; the brown-sailed fishing-boats went by, showing black or red as they happened to be in sunshine or shadow. Then far away beyond the shining sea the island of Capri lay like a blue cloud on the horizon; and far away beyond the now awakening city near her rose Vesuvius, the twin peaks dark under some swathes of cloud, the sunlight touching the lower slopes into a yellowish green, and shining on the pink fringe of villas along the shore. On so fair and bright a morning hope came as natural to her as singing to a bird. The fears of the night were over; she could not be afraid of what such a day should bring forth.

And yet—and yet—from time to time—and just for a second or so—her heart seemed to stand still. And she was so silent and preoccupied at breakfast, that her mother remarked it; and Natalie had to excuse herself by saying that she was a little tired with the travelling. After breakfast she led her mother into the reading-room, and said, in rather an excited way,

“Now, mother, here is a treat for you; you will get all the English papers here, and all the news.”

“You forget, Natalie,” said her mother, smiling, “that English papers are not of much use to me.”

“Ah, well, the foreign papers,” she said, quickly. “You see, mother, I want to go along to a chemist’s to get some white rose.”

“You should not throw it about the railway carriages so much, Natalushka,” the unsuspecting mother said, reprovingly. “You are extravagant.”

She did not heed.

“Perhaps they will have it in Naples. Wait until I come back, mother; I shall not be long.”

But it was not white-rose scent that was in her mind as she went rapidly away and got ready to go out; and it was not in search of any chemist’s shop that she made her way to the Via Roma. Why, she had asked herself that morning, as she stood on the balcony, and drank in the sunlight and the sweet air, should she take the poor tired mother with her on this adventure? If there was danger, she would brave it by herself. She walked quickly—perhaps anxious to make the first plunge.



She had no difficulty in finding the Vico Carlo, though it was one of the narrowest and steepest of the small, narrow, and steep lanes leading off the main thoroughfare into the masses of tall and closely-built houses on the side of the hill. But when she looked up and recognized the little plate bearing the name at the corner, she turned a little pale; something, she knew not what, was now so near.

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And as she turned into this narrow and squalid little alley, it seemed as if her eyes, through some excitement or other, observed the objects around her with a strange intensity. She could remember each and every one of them afterward—the fruit-sellers bawling, and the sellers of acidulated drinks out-roaring them; the shoemakers already at work at their open stalls; mules laden with vegetables; a negro monk, with his black woolly head above the brown hood; a venerable letter-writer at a small table, spectacles on nose and pen in hand, with two women whispering to him what he was to write for them. She made her way up the steep lane, through the busy, motley, malodorous crowd, until she reached the corner pointed out to her by Calabressa.

But he had not told her which way to turn, and for a second or two she stood in the middle of the crossing, uncertain and bewildered. A brawny-looking fellow, apparently a butcher, addressed her; she murmured some thanks, and hastily turned away, taking to the right. She had not gone but a few yards when she saw the entrance to a court which, at least, was certainly as dark as that described by Calabressa. She was half afraid that the man who had spoken to her was following her; and so, without further hesitation, she plunged into this gloomy court-yard, which was apparently quite deserted.

She was alone, and she looked around. A second convinced her that she had hit upon the place, as it were by accident. Over her head swung an oil-lamp, that threw but the scantiest orange light into the vague shadows of the place; and in front of her were the open windows of what was apparently a wine-shop. She did not stay to reflect. Perhaps with some little tightening of the mouth—unknown to herself—she walked forward and entered the vaults.

Here, again, no one was visible; there were rows of tuns, certainly, and a musty odor in the place, but no sign of any trade or business being carried on. Suddenly out of the darkness appeared a figure—so suddenly indeed as to startle her. Had this man been seen in ordinary daylight, he would no doubt have looked nothing worse than a familiar type of the fat black-a-vised Italian—not a very comely person, it is true, but not in any way horrible—but now these dusky shadows lent something ghoulis-looking to his bushy head and greasy face and sparkling black eyes.

“What is the pleasure of the young lady?” he said, curtly.

Natalie had been startled.

“I wished to inquire—I wished to mention,” she stammered, “one Bartolotti.”

But at the same time she was conscious of a strange sinking of the heart. Was this the sort of creature who was expected to save the life of her lover?—this the sort of man to pit against Ferdinand Lind? Poor old Calabressa—she thought he meant well, but he boasted, he was foolish.

This heavy-faced and heavy-bodied man in the dusk did not reply at once. He turned aside, saying,

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"Excuse me, signorina, it is dark here; they have neglected to light the lamps as yet."

Then, with much composure, he got a lamp, struck a match, and lit it. The light was not great, but he placed it deliberately so that it shone on Natalie, and then he calmly investigated her appearance.

"Yes, signorina, you mentioned one Bartolotti," he remarked, in a more respectful tone.

Natalie hesitated. According to Calabressa's account, the mere mention of the name was to act as a talisman which would work wonders for her. This obese person merely stood there, awaiting what she should say.

"Perhaps," she said, in great embarrassment, "you know one Calabressa?"

"Ah, Calabressa!" he said, and the dull face lighted up with a little more intelligence.

"Yes, of course, one knows Calabressa."

"He is a friend of mine," she said. "Perhaps, if I could see him, he would explain to you —"

"But Calabressa is not here; he is not even in this country, perhaps."

Then silence. A sort of terror seized her. Was this the end of all her hopes? Was she to go away thus? Then came a sudden cry, wrung from her despair.

"Oh, sir, you must tell me if there is no one who can help me! I have come to save one who is in trouble, in danger. Calabressa said to me, 'Go to Naples; go to such and such a place; the mere word Bartolotti will give you powerful friends; count on them; they will not fail one who belongs to the Berezolyis.' And now—"

"Your pardon, signorina: have the complaisance to repeat the name."

"Berezolyi," she answered, quickly; "he said it would be known."

"I for my part do not know it; but that is of no consequence," said the man. "I begin to perceive what it is that you demand. It is serious. I hope my friend Calabressa is justified. I have but to do my duty."

Then he glanced at the young lady—or, rather, at her costume.

"The assistance you demand for some one, signorina: is it a sum of money—is it a reasonable, ordinary sum of money that would be in the question, perhaps?"

"Oh no, signore; not at all!"

“Very well. Then have the kindness to write your name and your address for me: I will convey your appeal.”

He brought her writing materials; after a moment's consideration she wrote—“*Natalie Lind, the daughter of Natalie Berezolyi. Hotel ——.*” She handed him the paper.

“A thousand thanks, signorina. To-day, perhaps to-morrow, you will hear from the friends of Calabressa. You will be ready to go where they ask you to go?”

“Oh yes, yes, sir!” she exclaimed. “How can I thank you?”

“It is unnecessary,” he said, taking the lamp to show her the way more clearly. “I have the honor to wish you good-morning, signorina.” And again he bowed respectfully. “Your most humble servant, signorina.”

She returned to the hotel, and found that her mother had gone up-stairs to her own room.

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“Natalushka, you have been away trying to find some one?”

“Yes, mother,” the girl said, rather sadly.

“Why did you go alone?”

“I thought I would not tire you, dear mother.”

Then she described all the circumstances of her morning’s visit.

“But why should you be so sad, Natalushka?” the mother said, taking her daughter’s hand; “don’t you know that fine palaces may have rusty keys? Oh, I can reassure you on that point. You will not have to deal with persons like your friend the wine-merchant—not at all. I know at least as much as that, child. But you see, they have to guard themselves.”

Natalie would not leave the hotel for a moment. She pretended to read; but every person who came into the reading-room caused her to look up with a start of apprehensive inquiry. At last there came a note for her. She broke open the envelope hurriedly, and found a plain white card, with these words written on it:

“Be at the Villa Odelschalchi, Portici, at four this afternoon.”

Joy leaped to her face again.

“Mother, look!” she cried, eagerly. “After all, we may hope.”

“This time you shall not go alone, Natalushka.”

“Why not, mother? I am not afraid.”

“I may be of use to you, child. There may be friends of mine there—who knows? I am going with you.”

In course of time they hired a carriage, and drove away through the crowded and gayly-colored city in the glow of the afternoon. But they had sufficient prudence, before reaching Portici, to descend from the carriage and proceed on foot. They walked quietly along, apparently not much interested in what was around them. Presently Natalie pressed her mother’s arm, they were opposite the Villa Odelschalchi—there was the name on the flat pillars by the gate.

This great plain building, which might have been called a palazzo rather than a villa, seemed, on the side fronting the street, to be entirely closed—all the casements of the windows being shut. But when they crossed to the gate, and pulled the big iron handle

that set a bell ringing, a porter appeared—a big, indolent-looking man, who regarded them calmly, to see which would speak first.

Natalie simply produced the card that had been sent to her.

“This is the Villa Odelschalchi, I perceive,” she said.

“Oh, it is you, then, signorina?” the porter said, with great respect. “Yes, there was one lady to come here at four o’clock—”

“But the signora is my mother,” said Natalie, perhaps with a trifle of impatience.

The man hesitated for a moment, but by this time Natalie, accompanied by her mother, had passed through the cool gray archway into the spacious tessellated court, from which rose on each hand a wide marble staircase.

“Will the signorina and the signora her mother condescend to follow me?” the porter said, leading the way up one of the staircases, the big iron keys still in his hand.

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They were shown into an antechamber, but scantily furnished, and the porter disappeared. In a minute or two there came into the room a small, sallow-complexioned man, who was no other than the Secretary Granaglia. He bowed, and, as he did so, glanced from the one to the other of the visitors with scrutiny.

"It is no doubt correct, signorina," said he, addressing himself to Natalie, "that you have brought the signora your mother with you. We had thought you were alone, from the message we received. No matter; only"—and here he turned to Natalie's mother—"only, signora, you will renew your acquaintance with one who wishes to be known by the name of Von Zoesch. I have no doubt the signora understands."

"Oh, perfectly, perfectly!" said the elder woman: she had been familiar with these prudent changes of name all her life.

The Secretary Granaglia bowed and retired.

"It is some one who knows you, mother?" Natalie said, breathlessly.

"Oh, I hope so!" the other answered. She was a little pale, and her fingers were tightly clasped.

Then a heavier step was heard in the empty corridors outside. The door was opened; there appeared a tall and soldierly-looking man, about six feet three in height and perfectly erect, with closely-cropped white hair, a long white mustache, a reddish face, and clear, piercing, light-blue eyes. The moment the elder woman saw him she uttered a slight cry—of joy, it seemed, and surprise—and sprung to her feet.

"Stefan!"

"Natalie!" he exclaimed, in turn with an almost boyish laugh of pleasure, and he came forward to her with both hands outstretched, and took hers. "Why, what good wind has brought you to this country? But I beg a thousand pardons—"

He turned and glanced at Natalie.

"My child," she said, "let me present you to my old friend, General—"

"Von Zoesch," he interrupted, and he took Natalie's hand at the same time. "What, you are the young lady, then, who bearded the lion in his den this morning?—and you were not afraid? No, I can see you are a Berezolyi; if you were a man you would be forever getting yourself and your friends into scrapes, and risking your neck to get them out again. A Berezolyi, truly! 'The more beautiful daughter of a beautiful mother!' But the little scamp knew his insulting iambics were only fit to be thrown into the fire when he made that unjust comparison. Ah, you young people have fresh complexions and bright eyes on your side, but we old people prefer our old friends."

“I hope so, sir,” said Natalie, with her eyes bent down.

“And had your father no other messenger that he must employ you?” said this erect, white-haired giant, who regarded her in a kindly way; “or is it that feather-brained fellow Calabressa who has got you to intercede for him? Rest assured. Calabressa will soon be in imminent peril of being laid by the heels, and he is therefore supremely happy.”

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Before the girl could speak he had turned to the mother.

“Come, my old friend, shall we go out into the garden? I am sorry the reception-rooms in the villa are all dismantled; in truth, we are only temporary lodgers. And I have a great many questions to ask you about old friends, particularly your father.”

“Stefan, can you not understand why I have permitted myself to leave Hungary?”

He glanced at her deep mourning.

“Ah, is that so? Well, no one ever lived a braver life. And how he kept up the old Hungarian traditions!—the house a hotel from month’s end to month’s end: no questions asked but ‘Are you a stranger? then my house is yours.’”

He led the way down the stairs, chatting to this old friend of his; and though Natalie was burning with impatience, she forced herself to be silent. Was it not all in her favor that this member of the mysterious Council should recur to these former days, and remind himself of his intimacy with her family? She followed them in silence: he seemed to have forgotten her existence.

They passed through the court-yard, and down some broad steps. The true front of the building was on this seaward side—a huge mass of pink, with green casements. From the broad stone steps a series of terraces, prettily laid out, descended to a lawn; but, instead of passing down that way, the tall, soldierly-looking man led his companion by a side-flight of steps, which enabled them to enter an *allee* cut through a mass of olives and orange and lemon trees. There were fig-trees along the wall by the side of this path; a fountain plashed coolly out there on the lawn, and beyond the opening showed the deep blue of the sea, with the clear waves breaking whitely on the shores.

They sat down on a garden-seat; and Natalie, sitting next her mother, waited patiently and breathlessly, scarcely hearing all this talk about old companions and friends.

At last the general said,

“Now about the business that brought you here: is it serious?”

“Oh yes, very,” the mother said, with some color of excitement appearing in her worn face; “it is a friend of ours in England: he has been charged by the Society with some duty that will cost him his life; we have come to intercede for him—to ask you to save him. For the sake of old times, Stefan—”

“Wait a moment,” said the other, looking grave. “Do you mean the Englishman?”

“Yes, yes; the same.”

“And who has told you what it is purposed to have done?” he asked, with quite a change in his manner.

“No one,” she answered, eagerly; “we guess that it is something of great danger.”

“And if that is so, are you unfamiliar with persons having to incur danger? Why not an Englishman as well as another? This is an extraordinary freak of yours, Natalie; I cannot understand it. And to have come so far when any one in England—any one of us, I mean—could have told you it was useless.”



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"But why useless, if you are inclined to interfere?" she said, boldly, "and I think my father's family have some title to consideration."

"My old friend," said he, in a kindly way, "what is there in the world I would not do for you if it were within my power? But this is not. What you ask is, to put the matter shortly, impossible—impossible!"

In the brief silence that followed the mother heard a slight sigh: she turned instantly, and saw her daughter, as white as death, about to fall. She caught her in her arms with a slight cry of alarm.

"Here, Stefan, take my handkerchief—dip it in the water—quick!"

The huge, bullet-headed man strode across the lawn to the fountain. As he returned, and saw before him the white-lipped, unconscious girl, who was supported in her mother's arms, he said to himself, "Now I understand."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

AN APPEAL.

This sudden and involuntary confession of alarm and despair no doubt told her story more clearly than anything else could have done. General von Zoesch as he chose to call himself, was excessively concerned; he held her hand till he saw the life returning to the pale, beautiful face: he was profuse and earnest in his apologies.

"My dear young lady I beg a thousand pardons!—I had no idea of alarming you; I had no idea you were so deeply interested; come, take my arm, and we will walk down into the open, where the sea-air is cool. I beg a thousand pardons."

She had pulled herself together with a desperate effort of will.

"You spoke abruptly, signore; you used the word *impossible*! I had imagined it was unknown to you."

Her lips were rather pale; but there was a flush of color returning to her face, and her voice had something of the old proud and pathetic ring in it.

"Yes," she continued, standing-before him, with her eyes downcast, "I was told that when great trouble came upon me or mine I was to come here—to Naples—and I should find myself under the protection of the greatest power in Europe. My name—my mother's name—was to be enough. And this is the result, that a brave man, who is our friend and dear to us, is threatened with a dishonorable death, and the very power that

imposed it on him—the power that was said to be invincible, and wise, and generous—is unable or unwilling to stir hand or foot!”

“A dishonorable death, signorina?”

“Oh, signore,” she said, with a proud indignation, “do not speak to me as if I were a child. Cannot one see what is behind all this secrecy? Cannot one see that you know well what has been done in England by your friends and colleagues? You put this man, who is too proud, too noble, to withdraw from his word, on a service that involves the certain sacrifice of his life! and there is no honor attached to this sacrifice—so he himself has admitted. What does that mean?—what can it mean—but assassination?”

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He drew back his head a little bit, as if startled, and stared at her.

“My dear young lady—”

But her courage had not returned to her for nothing. She raised the beautiful, dark, pathetic eyes, and regarded him with an indignant fearlessness.

“That is what any one might guess,” she said. “But there is more. Signore, you and your friends meditate the assassination of the King of Italy! and you call on an Englishman—an Englishman who has no love of secret and blood-stained ways—”

“Stefan!” the mother cried, quickly, and she placed her hand on the general’s arm; “do not be angry. Do not heed her—she is a child—she is quick to speak. Believe me, there are other reasons for our coming to you.”

“Yes, yes, my friend Natalie; all in good time. But I am most anxious to put myself right with the signorina your daughter first of all. Now, my dear young lady,” he said, taking her hand, and putting it on his arm, and gently compelling her to walk with him toward the opener space where the sea-air was cool, “I again apologize to you for having spoken unwittingly—”

“Oh, signore, do not trouble about that! It is no matter of courtesy or politeness that is in the question: it is the life of one of one’s dearest friends. There are other times for politeness.”

“Stefan,” the mother interposed, anxiously, “do not heed her—she is agitated.”

“My dear Natalie,” said the general, smiling, “I admire a brave woman as I admire a brave man. Do not I recognize another of you Berezolyis? The moment you think one of your friends is being wronged, fire and water won’t prevent you from speaking out. No, no, my dear young lady,” he said, turning to the daughter, “you cannot offend me by being loyal and outspoken.”

He patted her hand, just as Calabressa had done.

“But I must ask you to listen for a moment, to remove one or two misconceptions. It is true I know something of the service which your English friend has undertaken to perform. Believe me, it has nothing to do with the assassination of the King of Italy—nothing in the world.”

She lifted her dark eyes for a second, and regarded him steadily.

“I perceive,” said he, “that you pay me the compliment of asking me if I lie. I do not. Reassure yourself: there are no people in this country more loyal to the present dynasty than my friends and myself. We have no time for wild Republican projects.”

She looked somewhat bewildered. This speculation as to the possible nature of the service demanded of George Brand had been the outcome of many a night's anxious self-communing; and she had indulged in the wild hope that this man, when abruptly challenged, might have been startled into some avowal. For then, would not her course have been clear enough? But now she was thrown back on her former perplexity, with only the one certainty present to her mind—the certainty of the danger that confronted her lover.

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"My dear young lady," he said, "it is useless for you to ask what that service is, for I shall refuse to answer you. But I assure you that you have my deepest sympathy, and I have seen a good deal of suffering from similar causes. I do not seek to break into your confidence, but I think I understand your position; you will believe me that it is with no light heart that I must repeat the word *impossible*. Need I reason with you? Need I point out to you that there is scarcely any one in the world whom we might select for a dangerous duty who would not have some one who would suffer on his account? Who is without some tie of affection that must be cut asunder—no matter with what pain—when the necessity for the sacrifice arises? You are one of the unhappy ones; you must be brave; you must try to forget your sufferings, as thousands of wives and sweethearts and daughters have had to forget, in thinking that their relatives and friends died in a good cause."

Her heart was proud and indignant no longer; it had grown numbed. The air from the sea felt cold.

"I am helpless, signore," she murmured; "I do not know what the cause is. I do not know what justification you have for taking this man's life."

He did not answer that. He said,

"Perhaps, indeed, it is not those who are called on to sacrifice their life for the general good who suffer most. They can console themselves with thinking of the result. It is their friends—those dearest to them—who suffer, and who many a time would no doubt be glad to become their substitutes. It is true that we—that is, that many associations—recognize the principle of the vicarious performance of duties and punishments; but not any one yet has permitted a woman to become substitute for a man."

"What made you think of that, signore?" she asked, regarding him.

"I have known some cases," he said, evasively, "where such an offer, I think, would have been made."

"It could not be accepted?"

"Oh no."

"Not even by the power that is the greatest in Europe?" she said, bitterly—"that is invincible and all-generous? Oh, signore, you are too modest in your pretensions! And the Berezolyis—they have done nothing, then, in former days to entitle them to consideration; they are but as anybody in the crowd who might come forward and intercede for a friend; they have no old associates, then, and companions in this Society, that they cannot have this one thing granted them—that they cannot get this

one man's life spared to him! Signore, your representatives mistake your powers; more than that, they mistake the strength of your memory, and your friendship!"

The red face of the bullet-headed general grew redder still, but not with anger.

"Signorina," he said, evidently greatly embarrassed, "you humiliate me. You—you do not know what you ask—"

He had led her back to the garden-seat; they had both sat down; he did not notice how her bosom was struggling with emotion.

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"You ask me to interfere—to commit an act of injustice—"

"Oh, signore, signore, this is what I ask!" she cried, quite overcome; and she fell at his feet, and put her clasped hands on his knees, and broke into a wild fit of crying; "this is what I ask of you, signore—this is what I beg from you on my knees—I ask you to give me the life of—of my betrothed!"

She buried her face in her hands; her frame was shaken with her sobs.

"Little daughter," said he, greatly agitated, "rise; come, remain here for a few moments; I wish to speak to your mother—alone. Natalie!"

The elder woman accompanied him a short distance across the lawn; they stood by the fountain.

"By Heaven, I would do anything for the child!" he said, rapidly; "but you see, dear friend, how it is impossible. Look at the injustice of it. If we transferred this duty to another person, what possible excuse could we make to him whom we might choose?"

He was looking back at the girl.

"It will kill her, Stefan," the mother said.

"Others have suffered also."

The elder woman seemed to collect herself a little.

"But I told you we had not said everything to you. The poor child is in despair; she has not thought of all the reasons that induced us to come to you. Stefan, you remember my cousin Konrad?"

"Oh yes, I remember Konrad well enough," said the general, absently, for he was still regarding the younger Natalie, who sat on the bench, her hands clasped, her head bent down. "Poor fellow, he came to a sad end at last; but he always carried his life in his hands, and with a gay heart too."

"But you remember, do you not, something before that?" the mother said, with some color coming into her face. "You remember how my husband had him chosen—and I myself appealed—and you, Stefan, you were among the first to say that the Society must inquire—"

"Ah, but that was different, Natalie. You know why it was that that commission had to be reversed."

“Do I know? Yes. What else have I had to think about these sixteen or seventeen years since my child was separated from me?” she said, sadly. “And perhaps I have grown suspicious; perhaps I have grown mad to think that what has happened once might happen again.”

“What?” he said, turning his clear blue eyes suddenly on her.

She did not flinch.

“Consider the circumstances, Stefan, and say whether one has no reason to suspect. The Englishman, this Mr. Brand, loves Natalie; she loves him in return; my husband refuses his consent to the marriage; and yet they meet in opposition to his wishes. Then there is another thing that I cannot so well explain, but it is something about a request on my husband's part that Mr. Brand, who is a man of wealth, should accept a certain offer, and give over his property to the funds of the Society.”

“I understand perfectly,” her companion said, calmly. “Well?”

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"Well, Mr. Brand, thinking of Natalie's future, refuses. But consider this, Stefan, that it had been hinted to him before that in case of his refusal, he might be sent to America to remain there for life."

"I perceive, my old friend, that you are reading in your own interpretations into an ordinary matter of business. However—"

"But his refusal was immediately followed by that arrangement. He was ordered to go to America. My husband, no doubt considered that that would effectually separate him and Natalie—"

"Again you are putting in your own interpretation."

"One moment, Stefan. My child is brave; she thought an injustice was being done; she thought it was for her sake that her lover was being sent away, and then she spoke frankly; she said she would go with him."

"Yes?" He was now listening with more interest.

"You perceive then, my dear friend, my husband was thwarted in every way. Then it was, and quite suddenly, that he reversed this arrangement about America, and there fell on Mr. Brand this terrible thing. Knowing what I know, do you not think I had fair cause for suspicion? And when Natalie said, 'Oh, there are those abroad who will remove this great trouble from us,' then I said to myself, 'At all events, the Society does not countenance injustice; it will see that right has been done.'"

The face of the man had grown grave, and for some time he did not speak.

"I see what you suggest, Natalie," he said at length. "It is a serious matter. I should have said your suspicions were idle—that the thing was impossible—but for the fact that it has occurred before. Strange, now, if old ———, whose wisdom and foresight the world is beginning to recognize now, should be proved to be wise on this point too, as on so many others. He used always to say to us: 'When once you find a man unfaithful, never trust him after. When once a man has allowed himself to put his personal advantage before his duty to such a society as yours, it shows that somewhere or other there is in him the leaven of a self-seeker, which is fatal to all societies. Impose the heaviest penalties on such an offence; cast him out when you have the opportunity.' It would be strange, indeed; it would be like fate; it would appear as though the thing were in the blood, and must come out, no matter what warning the man may have had before. You know, Natalie, what your husband had to endure for his former lapse?"

She nodded her head.

For some time he was again silent, and there was a deeper air of reflection on his face than almost seemed natural to it, for he looked more of a soldier than a thinker.

"If there were any formality," he said, almost to himself, "in the proceedings, one might have just cause to intervene. But your husband, my Natalie," he continued, addressing her directly, "is well trusted by us. He has done us long and faithful service. We should be slow to put any slight upon him, especially that of suspicion."

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"That, Stefan," said Natalie's mother, with courage, "is a small matter, surely, compared with the possibility of your letting this man go to his death unjustly. You would countenance, then, an act of private revenge? That is the use you would let the powers of your Society be put to? That is not what Janecki, what Rausch, what Falevitch looked forward to."

The taunt was quite lost on him; he was calmly regarding Natalie. She had not stirred. After that one outburst of despairing appeal there was no more for her to say or to do. She could wait, mutely, and hear what the fate of her lover was to be.

"Unfortunately," said the general, turning and looking up at the vast pink frontage of the villa, "There are no papers here that one can appeal to. I only secured the temporary use of the villa, as being a more fitting place than some to receive the signorina your daughter. But it is possible the Secretary may remember something; he has a good memory. Will you excuse me, Natalie, for a few moments?"

He strode away toward the house. The mother went over to her daughter, and put a hand on her shoulder.

"Courage, Natalushka! You must not despair yet. Ah, my old friend Stefan has a kind heart; there were tears in his eyes when he turned away from your appeal to him. He does not forget old associates."

Von Zoesch almost immediately returned, still looking preoccupied. He drew Natalie's mother aside a few steps, and said,

"This much I may tell you, Natalie: in the proceedings four were concerned—your husband, Mr. Brand, Beratinsky, Reitzei. What do you know of these last two?"

"I? Alas, Stefan, I know nothing of them!"

"And we here little. They are your husband's appointment. I may also tell you, Natalie, that the Secretary is also of my opinion, that it is very unlikely your husband would be so audacious as to repeat his offence of former years, by conspiring to fix this duty on this man to serve his own interests. It would be too audacious, unless his temper had outrun his reason altogether."

"But you must remember, Stefan," she said, eagerly, "that there was no one in England who knew that former story. He could not imagine that I was to be, unhappily, set free to go to my daughter—that I should be at her side when this trouble fell on her—"

"Nevertheless," said he, gently interrupting her, "you have appealed to us: we will inquire. It will be a delicate affair. If there has been any complicity, any unfairness, to summon these men hither would be to make firmer confederates of them than ever. If one could get at them separately, individually—"

He kept pressing his white mustache into his teeth with his forefinger.

“If Calabressa were not such a talker,” he said, absently. “But he has ingenuity, the feather-brained devil.”

“Stefan, I could trust everything to Calabressa,” she said.

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"In the mean time," he said, "I will not detain you. If you remain at the same hotel we shall be able to communicate with you. I presume your carriage is outside?"

"It is waiting for us a little way off."

He accompanied them into the tessellated court-yard, but not to the gate. He bade good-bye to his elder friend; then he took the younger lady's hand and held it, and regarded her.

"Figliuola mia," he said, with a kindly glance, "I pity you if you have to suffer. We will hope for better things: if it is impossible, you have a brave heart."

When they had left he went up the marble staircase and along the empty corridor until he reached a certain room.

"Granaglia, can you tell me where our friend Calabressa may happen to be at this precise moment?"

"At Brindisi, I believe, Eccellenza."

"At Brindisi still. The devil of a fellow is not so impatient as I had expected. Ah, well. Have the goodness to send for him, friend Granaglia, and bid him come with speed."

"Most willingly, Eccellenza."

CHAPTER XLIX.

AN EMISSARY.

One warm, still afternoon Calabressa was walking quickly along the crowded quays of Naples, when he was beset by a more than usually importunate beggar—a youth of about twelve, almost naked.

"Something for bread, signore—for the love of God—my father taken to heaven, my mother starving—bread, signore—"

"To the devil with you!" said Calabressa.

"May you burst!" replied the polite youth, and he tried to kick Calabressa's legs and make off at the same time.

This feat he failed in, so that, as he was departing, Calabressa hit him a cuff on the side of the head which sent him rolling. Then there was a howl, and presently there was a universal tumult of women, calling out, "Ah, the German! ah, the foreigner!" and so forth,

and drawing threateningly near. Calabressa sought in his pockets for a handful of small copper coins, turned, threw them high in the air, and did not stay to watch the effect of the shower on the heads of the women, but walked quietly away.

However, in thus suddenly turning, he had caught sight—even with his near-sighted eyes—of an unwholesome-looking young man, pale, clean-shaven, with bushy black hair, whom he recognized. He appeared to pay no attention, but walked quickly on. Taking one or two unnecessary turnings, he became convinced that the young man, as he had suspected, was following him: then, without more ado, and even without looking behind him, he set out for his destination, which was Posilipo.

In due course of time he began to ascend the wooded hill with its villas and walls and cactus-hedges. At a certain turning, where he could not be observed by any one behind him, he turned sharp off to the left, and stood behind a wooden gate; a couple of minutes afterward the young man came along, more rapidly now, for he no doubt fancied that Calabressa had disappeared ahead.

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Calabressa stepped out from his hiding-place, went after him, and tapped him on the shoulder. He turned, stared, and endeavored to appear angry and astonished.

"Oh yes, to be sure," said Calabressa, with calm sarcasm, "at your disposition, signore. So we were not satisfied with selling photographs and pebbles to the English on board the steamer; we want to get a little Judas money; we sell ourselves to the weasels, the worms, the vermin—"

"Oh, I assure you, signore—" the shaven-faced youth exclaimed, much more humbly.

"Oh, I assure you too, signore," Calabressa continued, facetiously. "And you, you poor innocent, you have not been with the weasels six weeks when you think you will try your nose in tracking me. Body of Bacchus, it is too insolent!"

"I assure you, signore—"

"Now, behold this, my friend: we must give children like you a warning. If you had been a little older, and not quite so foolish, I should have had you put on the Black List of my friends the Camorristi—you understand? But you—we will cure you otherwise. You know the Englishman's yacht that has come into the Great Harbor—"

"Signore, I beg of you—"

"Beg of the devil!" said Calabressa, calmly. "Between the Englishman's yacht and the Little Mole you will find a schooner moored—her name. *La Svezia*; do not forget—*La Svezia*. To-morrow you will go on board of her, ask for the captain, go down below, and beg him to be so kind as to give you twelve stripes—"

"Signore—"

"Another word, *mouchard*, and I make it twenty. He will give you a receipt, which you will sign, and bring to me; otherwise, down goes your name on the list. Which do you prefer? Oh, we will teach some of you young weasels a lesson! I have the honor to wish you a good morning."

Calabressa touched his hat politely, and walked on, leaving the young man petrified with rage and fear.

By-and-by he began to walk more leisurely and with more circumspection, keeping a sharp lookout, as well as his near-sighted eyes allowed, on any passer-by or vehicle he happened to meet. At length, and with the same precautions he had used on a former occasion, he entered the grounds of the villa he had sought out in the company of Gathorne Edwards, and made his way up to the fountain on the little plateau. But now his message had been previously prepared; he dropped it into the receptacle concealed

beneath the lip of the fountain, and then descended the steep little terraces until he got round to the entrance of the grotto.

Instead of passing in by this cleft in the rockwork, however, he found awaiting him there the person who had summoned him—the so-called General Von Zoesch. Calabressa was somewhat startled, but he said, “Your humble servant, Eccellenza,” and removed his cap.

“Keep your hat on your head, friend Calabressa,” said the other, good-naturedly; “you are as old as I am.”

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He seated himself on a projecting ledge of the rockwork, and motioned to Calabressa to do likewise on the other side of the entrance. They were completely screened from observation by a mass of olive and fig trees, to say nothing of the far-stretching orange shrubbery beyond.

"The Council have paid you a high compliment, my Calabressa," the general said, plunging at once into the matter. "They have resolved to intrust you with a very difficult mission."

"It is a great honor."

"You won't have to risk your neck, which will no doubt disappoint you, but you will have to show us whether there is the stuff of a diplomatist in you."

"Oh, as for that, Eccellenza," Calabressa said confidently, "one can be a *bavard* at times, for amusement, for nonsense; and one can at times be silent when there is necessity."

"You know of the affair of Zaccatelli. The agent has been found, as we desired in England. I understand you know him; his name is Brand."

Calabressa uttered an exclamation.

"Eccellenza, do you know what you have said? You pierce my heart. Why he of all those in England? He is the betrothed of Natalie's daughter—the Natalie Berezolyi, Eccellenza, who married Ferdinand Lind—"

"I know it," said the other, calmly. "I have seen the young lady. She is a beautiful child."

"She is more than that—she is a beautiful-souled child!" said Calabressa, in great agitation, "and she has a tender heart. I tell you it will kill her, Eccellenza! Oh, it is infamous! it is not to be thought of!" He jumped to his feet and spoke in a rapid, excited way. "I say it is not to be thought of. I appeal—I, Calabressa—to the honorable the members of the Council: I say that I am ready to be his substitute—they cannot deny me—I appeal to the laws of the Society—"

"Calm yourself—calm yourself," said the general; but Calabressa would not be calm.

"I will not have my beautiful child have this grief put upon her!—you, Eccellenza, will help my appeal to the Council—they cannot refuse me—what use am I to anybody or myself? I say that the daughter of my old friend Natalie shall not have her lover taken from her; it is I, Calabressa, who claim to be his substitute!"

"Friend Calabressa, I desire you to sit down and listen. The story is brief that I have to tell you. This man Brand is chosen by the usual ballot. The young lady does not know

for what duty, of course, but believes it will cost him his life. She is in trouble; she recollects your giving her some instructions; what does she do but start off at once for Naples, to put her head right into the den of the black bear Tommaso!”

“Ah, the brave little one! She did not forget Calabressa and the little map, then?”

“I have seen her and her mother.”

“Her mother, also? Here, in Naples, now?”

“Yes.”

“Great Heaven! What a fool I was to come through Naples and not to know—but I was thinking of that little viper.”

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"You will now be good enough to listen, my Calabressa."

"I beg your Excellency's pardon a thousand times."

"It appears that both mother and daughter are beset with the suspicion that this duty has been put upon their English friend by unfair means. At first I said to myself these suspicions were foolish; they now appear to me more reasonable. You, at all events, are acquainted with the old story against Ferdinand Lind; you know how he forfeited his life to the Society; how it was given back to him. You would think it impossible he would risk such another adventure. Well, perhaps I wrong him; but there is a possibility; there are powerful reasons, I can gather, why he should wish to get rid of this Englishman."

Calabressa said nothing now, but he was greatly excited.

"We had been urging him about money, Calabressa mio—that I will explain to you. It has been coming in slowest of all from England, the richest of the countries, and just when we had so much need. Then, again, there is a vacancy in the Council, and Lind has a wish that way. What happens? He tries to induce the Englishman to take an officership and give us his fortune; the Englishman refuses; he says then, 'Part from my daughter, and go to America.' The daughter says, 'If he goes, I follow.' You perceive, my friend, that if this story is true, and it is consecutive and minute as I received it, there was a reason for our colleague Lind to be angry, and to be desirous of making it certain that this Englishman who had opposed him should not have his daughter."

"I perceive it well, Eccellenza. Meanwhile?"

"Meanwhile, that is all. Only, when an old friend—when one who has such claims on our Society as a Berezolyi naturally has—comes and tells you such a story, you listen with attention and respect. You may believe, or you may not believe; one prefers not to believe when the matter touches upon the faith of a colleague who has been trustworthy for many years. But at the same time, if the Council, being appealed to, and being anxious above all things that no wrong should be done, were to find an agent—prudent, silent, cautious—who might be armed with plenary powers of pardon, for example, supposing there were an accomplice to be bribed—if the Council were to commission such a one as you, my Calabressa, to institute inquiries, and perhaps to satisfy those two appellants that no injustice has been done, you would undertake the task with diligence, with a sense of responsibility, would you not?"

"With joy—with a full heart, Eccellenza!" Calabressa exclaimed.

"Oh no, not at all—with prudence and disinterestedness; with calmness and no prejudice; and, above all, with a resolution to conceal from our friend and colleague Lind that any slight of suspicion is being put upon him."

“Oh, you can trust me, Eccellenza!” Calabressa said, eagerly.

“Let me do this for the sake of the sweetheart of my old age—that is that beautiful-souled little one; and if I cannot bring her peace and security one way—mind, I go without prejudice—I swear to you I go without bias—I will harm no one even in intention—but this I say, that if I fail that way there is another.”

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"You have seen the two men, Beratinsky and Reitzei, who were of the ballot along with Lind and the Englishman. To me they are but names. Describe them to me."

"Beratinsky," said Calabressa, promptly, "a bear—surly, pig-headed; Reitzei, a fop—sinuous, petted."

"Which would be the more easily started, for example?" the tall man said, with a smile.

"Oh, your Excellency, leave that to me," Calabressa answered. "Give me no definite instructions: am I not a volunteer?—can I not do as I please, always with the risk that one may knock me over the head if I am impertinent?"

"Well, then, if you leave it to your discretion, friend Calabressa, to your ingenuity, and your desire to have justice without bias, have you money?"

"Not at all, Excellenza."

"The Secretary Granaglia will communicate with you this evening. You can start at once?"

"By the direct train to-morrow morning at seven. Excellenza." Then he added, "Oh, the devil!"

"What now?"

"There was a young fellow, Excellenza, committed the imprudence of dogging my footsteps this afternoon. I know him. I stopped him and referred him to the captain of the schooner *La Svezia*: he was to bring me the receipt to morrow."

"Never mind," said the general, laughing; "we will look after him when he goes on board. Now do you understand, friend Calabressa, the great delicacy of the mission the Council have intrusted to you? You must be patient, sure, unbiassed; and if, as I imagine, Lind and you were not the best of friends at one time in your life, you must forget all that. You are not going as the avenger of his daughter; you are going as the minister of justice—only you have power behind you; that you can allow to be known indirectly. Do you understand?"

"It is as clear as the noonday skies. Confide in me, Excellenza." The other rose.

"Use speed, my Calabressa. Farewell!"

"One word, Excellenza. If it is not too great a favor, the hotel where my beautiful Natalushka and her mother are staying?"

The other gave him the name of the hotel; and Calabressa, saluting him respectfully, departed, making his way down through the terraces of fruit-trees under the clear twilight skies.

Calabressa walked back to Naples, and to the hotel indicated, which was near the Castello dell' Ovo. No sooner had the hotel porter opened for him the big swinging doors than he recollected that he did not know for whom he ought to ask; but at this moment Natalie came along the corridor, dressed and ready to go out.

"My little daughter!" he exclaimed, taking her by both hands, "did not I say you would soon find me when there was need?"

"Will you come up-stairs and see my mother, Signor Calabressa?" said she. "You know why she and I are together now?—my grandfather is dead."

"Yes, I will go and see your mother," said he, after a second: she did not notice the strange expression of his face during that brief hesitation.

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There was a small sitting-room between the two bedrooms; Natalie conducted him into it, and went into the adjoining chamber for her mother. A minute after these two friends and companions of former days met. They held each other's hand in silence for a brief time.

"My hair was not so gray when you last saw me," the worn-faced woman said, at length, with a smile.

Calabressa could not speak at all.

"Mother," the girl said, to break in on this painful embarrassment, "you have not seen Signor Calabressa for so long a time. Will he not stay and dine with us? the *table-d'hôte*, is at half-past six."

"Not the *table-d'hôte*, my little daughter," Calabressa said. "But if one were permitted to remain here, for example—"

"Oh yes, certainly."

"There are many things I wish to speak about; and so little time. To-morrow morning I start for England."

"For England?"

"Most certainly, little daughter. And you have a message, perhaps, for me to carry? Oh, you may let it be cheerful," he said, with his usual gay optimism. "I tell you—I myself, and I do not boast—let it be cheerful! What did I say to you? You are in trouble; I said to you, count upon having friends!"

Calabressa did stay; and they had a kind of meal in this room; and there was a great deal to talk over between the two old friends. But on all matters referring to the moment he preserved a resolute silence. He was not going to talk at the very outset. He was going to England—that was all.

But as he was bidding good-bye to Natalie, he drew her a step or two into the passage.

"Little child," said he, in a low voice, "your mother is suffering because of your sorrow. It is needless. I assure you all will be well: have I spoken in vain before? It is not for one bearing the name that you have to despair."

"Good-bye, then, Signor Calabressa."

"*Au revoir*, child: is not that better?"



CHAPTER L.

A WEAK BROTHER.

George Brand was sitting alone in these rooms of his, the lamps lit, the table near him covered with papers. He had just parted with two visitors—Molyneux and a certain learned gentleman attached to Owens College—who had come to receive his final plans and hints as to what still lay before them in the north. On leaving, the fresh-colored, brisk-voiced Molyneux had said to him,

“Well, Mr. Brand, seeing you so eager about what has to be done up there, one might wonder at your leaving us and going off pleasuring. But no matter; a man must have his holiday; so I wish you a pleasant journey, and we’ll do our best till you come back.”

So that also was settled. In fact, he had brought all his affairs up to a point that would enable him to start at any moment. But about Natalie? He had not heard from her through any channel whatever. He had not the least idea whither she had gone. Moreover, he gathered from Reitzei that her father—who, in Reitzei’s opinion, could at once have discovered where she was—refused to trouble himself in the matter, and, indeed, would not permit her name to be mentioned in his presence.

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He leaned back in his chair with a sigh. Of what value to him now were these carefully calculated suggestions about districts, centres, conveners, and what not? And yet he had appeared deeply interested while his two visitors were present. For the time being the old eagerness had stirred him; the pride he had taken in his own work. But now that was passed from him; he had relinquished his stewardship; and as he absently gazed out into the black night before him, his thoughts drifted far away. He was startled from his reverie by some one knocking at the door. Immediately after Gathorne Edwards entered.

"Waters said I should find you alone," said the tall, pale, blue-eyed student. "I have come to you about Kirski."

"Sit down. Well?"

"It's a bad business," he said, taking a chair, and looking rather gloomy and uncomfortable. "He has taken to drink badly. I have been to him, talked to him, but I have no influence over him, apparently. I thought perhaps you might do something with him."

"Why, I cannot even speak to him!"

"Oh, he is accustomed to make much out of a few words; and I would go with you."

"But what is the occasion of all this? How can he have taken to drink in so short a time?"

"A man can drink himself into a pretty queer state in a very short time when he sets his mind to it," Edwards said. "He has given up his work altogether, and is steadily boozing away the little savings he had made. He has gone back to his blood and kill, too; wants some one to go with him to murder that fellow out in Russia who first of all took his wife, and then beat him and set dogs on him. The fact is, Calabressa's cure has gone all to bits."

"It is a pity. The unfortunate wretch has had enough trouble. But what is the cause of it?"

"It is rather difficult to explain," said Edwards with some embarrassment. "One can only guess, for his brain is muddled, and he maunders. You know Calabressa's flowery, poetical interpretation. It was Miss Lind, in fact, who had worked a miracle. Well, there was something in it. She was kind to him, after he had been cuffed about Europe, and a sort of passion of gratitude took possession of him. Then he was led to believe at that time that—that he might be of service to her or her friends, and he gave up his projects of revenge altogether—he was ready for any sacrifice—and, in fact, there was a project

—” Edwards glanced at his companion; but Brand happened at that moment to be looking out of the window.

“Well, you see, all that fell through; and he had to come back to England disappointed; then there was no Calabressa to keep him up to his resolutions: besides that, he found out—how, I do not know—that Miss Lind had left London.”

“Oh, he found that out?”

“Apparently. And he says he is of no further use to anybody; and all he wants is to kill the man Michaeloff, and then make an end of himself.”

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Brand rose at once.

"We must go and see the unfortunate devil, Edwards. His brain never was steady, you know, and I suppose even two or three days' hard drinking has made him wild again. And just as I had prepared a little surprise for him!"

"What?" Edwards asked, as he opened the door.

"I have made him a little bequest that would have produced him about twenty pounds a year, to pay his rent. It will be no kindness to give it to him until we see him straight again."

But Edwards pushed the door to again, and said in a low voice,

"Of course, Mr. Brand, you must know of the Zaccatelli affair?"

Brand regarded him, and said, calmly,

"I do. There are five men in England who know of it; you and I are two of them."

"Well," said Edwards, eagerly, "if such a thing were determined on, wouldn't it have been better to let this poor wretch do it? He would have gloried in it; he had the enthusiasm of the martyr just then; he thought he was to be allowed to do something that would make Miss Lind and her friends forever grateful to him."

"And who put it into his head that Miss Lind knew anything about it?—Calabressa, I suppose."

Edwards colored slightly.

"Well, yes—"

"And it was Calabressa who intrusted such a secret as that to a maniac—"

"Pardon me, Kirski never knew specifically what lay before him; but he was ready for anything. For my own part, I was heartily glad when they sent him back to England. I did not wish to have any hand in such a business, however indirectly; and, indeed, I hope they have abandoned the whole project by this time."

"It might be wiser, certainly," said Brand, with an indifferent air.

"If they go on with it, it will make a fearful noise in Europe," said Edwards, contemplatively. "The assassination of a cardinal! Well, his life has been scandalous enough—but still, his death, in such a way—"

"It will horrify people, will it not?" Brand said, calmly; "and his murderer will be execrated and howled at throughout Europe, no doubt!"

"Well, yes; you see, who is to know the motives?"

"There won't be a single person to say a single word for him," said Brand, absently. "It is an enviable fate, isn't it, for some wretched mortal? No matter, Edwards; we will go and look up this fellow Kirski now."

They went out into the night—it was cold and drizzling—and made their way up into Soho. They knocked at the door of a shabby-looking house; and Kirski's landlady made her appearance. She was very angry when his name was mentioned; of course he was not at home; they would find him in some public-house or other—the animal!

"But he pays his rent, doesn't he?" Brand remonstrated.

Oh yes, he paid his rent. But she didn't like a wild beast in the house. It was decent lodgings she kept; not a Wombwell's Menagerie.

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"I am sure he gives you no trouble, ma'am," said Edwards, who had seen something of the meek and submissive way the Russian conducted himself in his lodgings.

This she admitted, but promptly asked how she was to know she mightn't have her throat cut some night? And what was the use of her talking to him, when he didn't know two words of a Christian language?

They gathered from this that the good woman had been lecturing her docile lodger, and had been seriously hurt because of his inattention. However, she at last consented to give them the name of the particular public-house in which he was likely to be found, and they again set off in quest of him.

They found him easily. He was seated in a corner of the crowded and reeking bar-room by himself, nursing a glass of gin-and-water with his two trembling hands. When they entered, he looked up and regarded them with bleared, sunken eyes, evidently recognized them, and then turned away sullenly.

"Tell him I am not come to bully him," said Brand quickly. "Tell him I am come about some work. I want a cabinet made by a first-class workman like himself."

Edwards went forward and put his hand on the man's shoulder and spoke to him for some time; then he turned to Brand.

"He says, 'No use; no use.' He cannot work any more. They won't give him help to kill Pavel Michaieloff. He wishes to die."

"Ask him, then, what the young lady who gave him her portrait will think of him if she hears he is in this condition. Ask him how he has dared to bring her portrait into a place like this."

When this was conveyed to Kirski, he seemed to arouse himself somewhat; he even talked eagerly for a few seconds; then he turned away again, as if he did not wish to be seen.

"He says," Edwards continued, "that he has not, that he would not bring that portrait into any such place. He was afraid it might be found—it might be taken from him. He made a small casket of oak, carved by his own hands, and lined it with zinc; he put the photograph in it, and hid himself in the trees of St. James's Park—at least, I imagine that St. James's Park is what he means—at night. Then he buried it there. He knows the place. When he has killed Michaieloff he will come back and dig it up."

"The poor devil—his brain is certainly going, drink or no drink. What is to be done with him, Edwards?"

“He says the young lady has gone away. He cares for nothing. He is of no use. He despairs of getting enough money to take him back to Russia.”

After a great deal of persuasion, however, they got him to leave the public-house with them and return to his lodgings. They got him some tea and some bread-and-butter, and made him swallow both. Then Edwards, under his friend’s instructions, proceeded to impress on Kirski that the young lady was only away from London for a short time: that she would be greatly distressed if she were to hear he had been

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misconducting himself; that, if he returned to his work on the following morning, he would find that his master would overlook his absence; and that finally, he was to abandon his foolish notions about going to Russia, for he would find no one to assist him; whereas, on the other hand, if he went about proclaiming that he was about to commit a crime, he would be taken by the police and shut up. All this, and a great deal more, they tried to impress on him; and Edwards promised to call the next evening and see how he was getting on.

It was late when Brand and Edwards again issued out into the wet night; and Edwards, having promised to post a line to Kirski's employers, so that they should get it in the morning, said good-bye, and went off to his own lodgings. Brand walked slowly home through the muddy streets. He preferred the glare and the noise to the solitude of his own rooms. He even stood aimlessly to watch a theatre come out; the people seemed so careless and joyous—calling to each other—making feeble jokes—passing away under their umbrellas into the wet and shining darkness.

But at length, without any definite intention, he found himself at the foot of the little thoroughfare in which he lived; and he was about to open the door with his latch-key when out of the dusk beyond there stepped forth a tall figure. He was startled, it is true, by the apparition of this tall, white-haired man in the voluminous blue cloak, the upturned hood of which half concealed his face, and he turned with a sort of instinct of anger to face him.

"Monsieur mon frere, you have arrived at last!" said the stranger, and instantly he recognized in the pronunciation of the French the voice of Calabressa.

"What!" he said; "Calabressa?"

The other put a finger on his arm.

"Hush!" he said. "It is a great secret, my being here; I confide in you. I would not wait in your rooms—my faith no! for I said to myself, 'What if he brings home friends who will know me, who will ask what the devil Calabressa is doing in this country.'"

Brand had withdrawn his hand from the lock.

"Calabressa," he said, quickly, "you, if anybody knows, must know where Natalie and her mother are. Tell me!"

"I will directly; but may I point out to you, my dear Monsieur Brand, that it rains—that we might go inside? Oh yes, certainly, I will tell you when we can say a word in secret, in comfort. But this devil of a climate! What should I have done if I had not bought myself



this cloak in Paris? In Paris it was cold and wet enough; but one had nothing like what you have here. Sapriski! my fingers are frozen.”

Brand hurried him up-stairs, put him into an easy-chair, and stirred up the fire.

“Now,” said he, impatiently—“now, my dear Calabressa, your news!”

Calabressa pulled out a letter.

“The news—voila!”

Brand tore open the envelope; these were the contents:

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* * * * *

“Dearest,—This is to adjure you not to leave England for the present—not till you hear from me—or until we return. Have patience, and hope. You are not forgotten. My mother sends you her blessing.

Your Betrothed.”

* * * * *

“But there is no address!” he exclaimed. “Where are they?”

“Where are they? It is no secret, do you see? They are in Naples.”

“In Naples!”

“Oh, I assure you, my dear friend, it is a noble heart, a brave heart, that loves you. Many a day ago I said to her, ‘Little child, when you are in trouble, go to friends who will welcome you; say you are the daughter of Natalie Berezolyi; say to them that Calabressa sent you.’ And you thought she was in no trouble! Ah, did she not tell me of the pretty home you had got for the poor mother who is my old friend? did she not tell me how you thought they were to be comfortable there, and take no heed of anything else? But you were mistaken. You did not know her. She said, ‘My betrothed is in danger: I will take Calabressa at his word: before any one can hinder me, or interfere, I will go and appeal, in the name of my family, in the name of myself!’ Ah, the brave child!”

“But appeal to whom?” said Brand, breathlessly.

“To the Council, my friend!” said Calabressa with exultation.

“But gracious heavens!” Brand cried, with his hand nervously clutching the arm of his chair, “is the secret betrayed, then? Do they think I will shelter myself behind a woman?”

“She could betray no secret,” Calabressa said, triumphantly, “she herself not knowing it, do you not perceive? But she could speak bravely!”

“And the result?”

“Who knows what that may be? In the mean time, this is the result—I am here!”

At another moment this assumption of dignity would have been ludicrous; but Brand took no heed of the manner of his companion; his heart was beating wildly. And even when his reason forced him to see how little he could expect from this intervention—when he remembered what a decree of the Council was, and how irrevocable the doom

he had himself accepted—still the thought uppermost in his mind was not of his own safety or danger, but rather of her love and devotion, her resolve to rescue him, her quick and generous impulse that knew nothing of fear. He pictured her to himself in Naples, calling upon this nameless and secret power, that every man around him dreaded, to reverse its decision! And then the audacity of her bidding him hope! He could not hope; he knew more than she did. But his heart was full of love and of gratitude as he thought of her.

“My dear friend,” said Calabressa, lowering his voice, “my errand is one of great secrecy. I have a commission which I cannot altogether explain to you. But in the mean time you will be so good as to give me—*in extense*, with every particular—the little history of how you were appointed to—to undertake a certain duty.”

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"Unfortunately, I cannot," Brand said, calmly; "these are things one is not permitted to talk about."

"But I must insist on it, my dear friend."

"Then I must insist on refusing you."

"You are trustworthy. No matter: here is something which I think will remove your suspicions, my good friend—or shall we not rather say your scruples?"

He took from his pocket-book a card, and placed it somewhat ostentatiously on the table. Brand examined it, and then stared at Calabressa in surprise.

"You come with the authority of the Council?"

"By the goodness of Heaven," Calabressa exclaimed with a laugh, "you have arrived at the truth this time!"

CHAPTER LI.

THE CONJURER.

There was no mistaking the fact that Calabressa had come armed with ample authority from the Council, and yet it was with a strange reluctance that Brand forced himself to answer the questions that Calabressa proceeded to put to him. He had already accepted his doom. The bitterness of it was over. He would rather have let the past be forgotten altogether, and himself go forward blindly to the appointed end. Why those needless explanations and admissions?

Moreover, Calabressa's questions, which had been thought over during long railway journeys, were exceedingly crafty. They touched here and there on certain small points, as if he were building up for himself a story. But at last Brand said, by way of protest,

"Look here, Calabressa. I see you are empowered to ask me any questions you like—and I am quite willing to answer—about the business of the Council. But really, don't you see, I would rather not speak of private matters. What can the Council want to know about Natalie Lind? Leave her out of it, like a good fellow."

"Oh yes, my dear Monsieur Brand," said Calabressa, with a smile, "leave her out of it, truly, when she has gone to the Council; when the Council have said, 'Child, you have not appealed to us for nothing;' when it is through her that I have travelled all through the cold and wet, and am now sitting here. Remember this, my friend, that the beautiful Natalushka is now a—what do you call it?—a *ward*" (Calabressa put this word in English into the midst of his odd French), "and a *ward* of a sufficiently powerful court, I



can assure you, monsieur! Therefore, I say, I cannot leave the beautiful child out. She is of importance to me; why am I here otherwise? Be considerate, my friend; it is not impertinence; it is not curiosity."

Then he proceeded with his task; getting, in a roundabout, cunning, shrewd way, at a pretty fair version of what had occurred. And he was exceedingly circumspect. He endeavored, by all sorts of circumlocutions, to hide from Brand the real drift of his inquiry. He would betray suspicion of no one. His manner was calm, patient, almost indifferent. All this time Brand's thoughts were far away. He was speaking to Calabressa, but he was thinking of Naples.

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But when they came to Brand's brief description of what took place in Lisle Street on the night of the casting of the lot, Calabressa became greatly excited, though he strove to appear perfectly calm.

"You are sure," he said, quickly, "that was precisely what happened?"

"As far as I know," said Brand, carelessly. "But why go into it? If I do not complain, why should any one else?"

"Did I say that any one complained?" observed the astute Calabressa.

"Then why should any one wish to interfere? I am satisfied. You do not mean to say, Calabressa, that any one over there thinks that I am anxious to back out of what I have undertaken—that I am going down on my knees and begging to be let off? Well, at all events, Natalie does not think that," he added, as if it did not matter much what any other thought.

Calabressa was silent; but his eyes were eager and bright, and he was quickly tapping the palm of his left hand with the forefinger of the right. Then he regarded Brand with a sharp, inquisitive look. Then he jumped to his feet.

"Good-night, my friend," he said, hurriedly.

But Brand rose also, and sought to detain him.

"No, no, my good Calabressa, you are not going yet; you have kept me talking for your amusement; now it is your turn. You have not yet told me about Natalie and her mother."

"They are well—they are indeed well, I assure you," said Calabressa, uneasily. He was clearly anxious to get away. By this time he had got hold of his cloak and swung it round his shoulders.

"Calabressa, sit down, and tell me something about Natalie. What made her undertake such a journey? Is she troubled? Is she sad? I thought her life was full of interest now, her mother being with her."

Calabressa had got his cap, and had opened the door.

"Another time, dear Monsieur Brand, I will sit down and tell you all about the beautiful, brave child, and my old friend her mother. Yes, yes—another time—to-morrow—next day. At present one is overwhelmed with affairs, do you see?"

So saying, he forced Brand to shake hands with him, and went out, shutting the door behind him.

But no sooner had he got into the street than the eager, talkative, impulsive nature of the man, so long confined, broke loose. He took no heed that it was raining hard. He walked fast; he talked aloud to himself in his native tongue, in broken interjectional phrases; occasionally he made use of violent gestures, which were not lessened in their effect by the swaying cape of his cloak.

“Ah, those English—those English!” he was excitedly saying—“such children!—blue, clear eyes that see nothing—the devil! why should they meddle in such affairs? To play at such a game!—fool’s mate; scholar’s mate; asses and idiots’ mate—they have scarcely got a pawn out, and they are wondering what they will do, when whizz! along comes the queen,

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and she and the bishop have finished all the fine combinations before they were ever begun! And you, you others, imps of hell, to play that old foolish game again! But take care, my friends, take care; there is one watching you, one waiting for you, who does not speak, but who strikes! Ah, it is a pretty game; you, you sullen brute; you, you fop and dandy; but when you are sitting silent round the board, behold a dagger flashes down and quivers into the wood! No wonder your eyes burn! you do not know whence it has come? But the steel-blade quivers; is it a warning?"

He laughed aloud, but there were still omnibuses and cabs in the street; so he was not heard. Indeed, the people who were on the pavement were hurrying past to get out of the rain, and took no notice of the old albino in the voluminous cloak.

"Natalushka," said he, quite as if he were addressing some one before him, "do you know that I am trudging through the mud of this infernal city all for you? And you, little sybarite, are among the fine ladies of the reading-room at the hotel, and listening to music, and the air all scented around you. Never mind; if only I had a little bird that could fly to you with a message—ah, would you not have pleasant dreams to-night? Did I not tell you to rely on Calabressa? He chatters to you; he tries to amuse you; but he is not always Policinella. No, not always Policinella: sometimes he is silent and cunning; sometimes—what do you think?—he is a conjurer. Oh yes, you are not seen, you are not heard; but when you have them round the board, whirr! comes the gleaming blade and quivers in the wood! You look round; the guilty one shakes with the palsy; his wits go; his startled tongue confesses. Then you laugh; you say, 'That is well done;' you say, 'Were they wrong in giving this affair to Calabressa?'"

Now, whether it was that his rapid walking helped to relieve him of this over-excitement, or whether it was that the soaking rain began to make him uncomfortable, he was much more staid in demeanor when he got up to the little lane in Oxford Street where the Culturverein held its meetings. Of course, he did not knock and demand admission. He stopped some way down the street, on the other side, where he found shelter from the rain in a door-way, and whence he could readily observe any one coming out from the hall of the Verein. Then he succeeded in lighting a cigarette.

It was a miserable business, this waiting in the cold, damp night air; but sometimes he kept thinking of how he would approach Reitzei in the expected interview; and sometimes he thought of Natalie; and again, with his chilled and dripping fingers he would manage to light a cigarette. Again and again the door of the hall was opened, and this or the other figure came out from the glare of the gas into the dark street; but so far no Reitzei. It was now nearly one in the morning.

Finally, about a quarter past one, the last batch of boon companions came out, and the lights within were extinguished. Calabressa followed this gay company, who were

laughing and joking despite the rain, for a short way; but it was clear that neither Beratinsky nor Reitzei was among them. Then he turned, and made his way to his own lodgings, where he arrived tired, soaked through, but not apparently disheartened.

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Next morning he was up betimes, and at a fairly early hour walked along to Coventry Street, where he took up his station at the east corner of Rupert Street, so that he could see any one going westward, himself unseen. Here he was more successful. He had not been there ten minutes when Reitzei passed. Calabressa hastened after him, overtook him, and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Ah, Calabressa!" said Reitzei, surprised, but in noway disconcerted.

"I wish to speak with you," said Calabressa, himself a little agitated, though he did not show it.

"Certainly; come along. Mr. Lind will arrive soon."

"No, alone. I wish to speak to you alone."

Calabressa looked around. The only place of shelter he saw was a rather shabby restaurant, chiefly used as a supper-room, and at this moment having the appearance of not being yet woke up. Reitzei was in a compliant mood. He suffered himself to be conducted into this place, to the astonishment of one or two unwashed-looking waiters, who were seated and reading the previous evening's papers. Calabressa and Reitzei sat down at one of the small tables; the former ordered some coffee, the latter a bottle of soda-water.

By this time Calabressa had collected himself for the part he was about to play.

"Well, my friend," said he, cheerfully, "what news? When is Europe to hear the fate of the Cardinal?"

"I don't know; I know very little about it," said Reitzei, glancing at him rather suspiciously.

"It is a terrible business," said Calabressa, reflectively, "a decree of the Council. You would think that one so powerful, so well protected, would be able to escape, would you not? But he himself knows better. He knows he is as powerless as you might be, for example, or myself."

"Oh, as for that," said Reitzei, boldly, "he knows he has deserved it: what more? He has had his little fling, now comes the settlement of the score."

"And I hear that our friend Brand is to be the instrument of justice: how strange! He has not been so long with us."

"That is Mr. Lind's affair: it has nothing to do with me," said Reitzei, shortly.



“Well,” said Calabressa, toying with his coffee-cup. “I hope I shall never be tempted to do anything that might lead the Council to condemn me. Fancy such a life; every moment expecting some one to step up behind you with a knife or a pistol, and the end sure! I would take Provana’s plan. The poor devil; as soon as he heard he had been condemned he could not bear living. He never thought of escape: a few big stones in the pockets of his coat, and over he slips into the Arno. And Mesentskoff: you remember him? His only notion of escape was to give himself up to the police—twenty-five years in the mines. I think Provana’s plan was better.”

Reitzei became a little uneasy, or perhaps only impatient.

“Well, Calabressa,” he said, “one must be getting along to one’s affairs—”

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"Oh yes, yes, truly," Calabressa said. "I only wished to know a little more about the Cardinal. You see he cannot give himself up like Mesentskoff, though he might confess to a hundred worse things than the Russian ever did. Provana—well, you know the Society has always been inexorable with regard to its own officers: and rightly, too, Reitzei, is it not so? If one finds malversation of justice among those in a high grade, should not the punishment be exemplary? The higher the power, the higher the responsibility. You, for example, are much too shrewd a man to risk your life by taking any advantage of your position as one of the officers—"

"I don't understand you, Calabressa," the other said, somewhat hotly.

"I only meant to say," Calabressa observed, carelessly, "that the punishment for malversation of justice on the part of an officer is so terrible, so swift, and so sure, that no one but a madman would think of running the risk—"

"Yes, but what has that to do with me?" Reitzei said, angrily.

"Nothing, my dear friend, nothing," said Calabressa, soothingly. "But now, about this selection of Mr. Brand—"

Reitzei turned rather pale for a second; but said instantly, and with apparent anger,

"I tell you that is none of my business. That is Mr. Lind's business. What have I to do with it?"

"Do not be so impatient, my friend," said Calabressa, looking at his coffee. "We will say that, as usual, there was a ballot. All quite fair. No man wishes to avoid his duty. It is the simplest thing in the world to mark one of your pieces of paper with a red mark: whoever receives the marked paper undertakes the commission. All is quite fair, I say. Only you know, I dare say, the common, the pitiful trick of the conjurer who throws a pack of cards on the table, backs up. You take one, look at it privately, return it, and the cards are shuffled. Without lifting the cards at all he tells you that the one you selected was the eight of diamonds: why? It is no miracle: all the cards are eight of diamonds; though you, you poor innocent, do not know that. It is a wretched trick," added Calabressa, coolly.

Reitzei drank off the remainder of his soda-water at a gulp. He stared at Calabressa in silence, afraid to speak.

"My dear friend Reitzei," said Calabressa, at length raising his eyes and fixing them on his companion, "you could not be so insane as to play any trick like that?—having four pieces of paper, for example, all marked red, the marks under the paper? You would not enter into any such conspiracy, for you know, friend Reitzei, that the punishment is—death!"



The man had turned a ghastly gray-green color. He was apparently choking with thirst, though he had just finished the soda-water. He could not speak.

Calabressa calmly waited for him; but in his heart he was saying exultingly, "*Ha! the dagger quivers in the board: his eyes are starting from his head; is it Calabressa or Cagliostro that has paralyzed him?*"

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At length the wretched creature opposite him gasped out,

“Beratinsky—”

But he could say no more. He motioned to a waiter to bring him some soda-water.

“Yes, Beratinsky?” said Calabressa, calmly regarding the livid face.

“—has betrayed us!” he said, with trembling lips. In fact, there was no fight in him at all, no angry repudiation; he was helpless with this sudden bewilderment of fear.

“Not quite,” said Calabressa; and he now spoke in a low, eager voice. “It is for you to save yourself by forestalling him. It is your one chance; otherwise the decree; and good-bye to this world for you! See—look at this card—I say it is your only chance, friend Reitzei—for I am empowered by the Council to promise you, or Beratinsky, or any one, a free pardon on confession. Oh, I assure you the truth is clear: has not one eyes? You, poor devil, you cannot speak: shall I go to Beratinsky and see whether he can speak?”

“What must I do—what must I do?” the other gasped, in abject terror. Calabressa, regarding this exhibition of cowardice, could not help wondering how Lind had allowed such a creature to associate with him.

Then Calabressa, sure of victory, began to breathe more freely. He assumed a lofty air.

“Trust in me, friend Reitzei. I will instruct you. If you can persuade the Council of the truth of your story, I promise you they will absolve you from the operations of a certain Clause which you know of. Meanwhile you will come to my lodgings and write a line to Lind, excusing yourself for the day; then this evening I dare say it will be convenient for you to start for Naples. Oh, I assure you, you owe me thanks: you did not know the danger you were in; hereafter you will say, ‘Well, it was no other than Calabressa who pulled me out of that quagmire.’”

A few minutes thereafter Calabressa was in a telegraph-office, and this was the message he despatched:

* * * * *

“Colonna, London: to Bartolotti, Vicolo Isotta, No. 15, Naples. Ridotto will arrive immediately, colors down. Send orders for Luigi and Bassano to follow.”

* * * * *

“It is a bold stroke,” he was saying to himself, as he left the office, “but I have run some risks in my time. What is one more or less?”

CHAPTER LII.

FIAT JUSTITIA.

This scheme of Calabressa's had been so rapidly conceived and put in execution, that he had had no time to think of its possible or certain consequences, in the event of his being successful. His immediate and sole anxiety was to make sure of his captive. There was always the chance that a frightened and feeble creature like Reitzei might double back; he might fly to Lind and Beratinsky, and seek security in a new compact; for who could prove any thing if the three were to maintain their innocence? However,

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as Calabressa shrewdly perceived, Reitzei was in the dark as to how much the Council knew already. Moreover, he had his suspicions of Beratinsky. If there was to be a betrayal, he was clearly resolved to have the benefit of it. Nevertheless, Calabressa did not lose sight of him for a moment. He took him to his, Calabressa's lodgings; kept assuring him that he ought to be very grateful for being thus allowed to escape; got him to write and despatch a note to Lind, excusing himself for that day and the next, and then proceeded to give him instructions as to what he should do in Naples. These instructions, by-the-way, were entirely unnecessary; it is no part of Calabressa's plan to allow Reitzei to arrive in Naples alone.

After a mid-day meal, Calabressa and Reitzei walked up to the lodgings of the latter, where he got a few travelling things put together. By-and-by they went to the railway station, Calabressa suggesting that it was better for Reitzei to get away from London as soon as possible. The old albino saw his companion take his seat in the train for Dover, and then turned away and re-entered the busy world of the London streets.

The day was fine after the rain; the pavements were white and dry; he kept in the sunlight for the sake of the warmth; but he had not much attention for the sights and sounds around him. Now that this sudden scheme promised to be entirely successful, he could consider the probable consequences of that success; and, as usual, his first thought was about Natalie.

"Poor child—poor child!" he said to himself, rather sadly. "How could she tell how this would end? If she saves the life of her lover, it is at the cost of the life of her father. The poor child!—must misfortune meet her whichever way she turns?"

And then, too, some touch of compunction or even remorse entered into his own bosom. He had been so eager in the pursuit? he had been so anxious to acquit himself to the satisfaction of the Council, that he had scarcely remembered that his success would almost certainly involve the sacrifice of one who was at least an old colleague. Ferdinand Lind and Calabressa had never been the very best of friends; during one period, indeed, they had been rivals; but that had been forgotten in the course of years, and what Calabressa now remembered was that Lind and he had at least been companions in the old days.

"Seventeen years ago," he was thinking, "he forfeited his life to the Society, and they gave it back to him. They will not pardon him this time. And who is to take the news to Natalie and the beautiful brave child? Ah, what will she say? My God, is there no happiness for any one in this world?"

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He was greatly distressed; but in his distress he became desperate. He would not look that way at all. He boldly justified himself for what he had done, and strove to regard it with satisfaction. What if both Lind and Beratinsky were to suffer; had they not merited any punishment that might befall them? Had they not compassed the destruction of an innocent man? Would it have been better, then, that George Brand should have become the victim of an infamous conspiracy? *Fiat justitia!*—no matter at what cost. Natalie must face the truth. Better that the guilty should suffer than the innocent. And he, Calabressa, for one, was not going to shirk any responsibility for what might happen. He had obeyed the orders of the Council. He had done his duty: that was enough.

He forced himself not to think of Natalie, and of the dismay and horror with which she would learn of one of the consequences of her appeal. This was a matter between men—to be settled by men: if the consciences of women were tender, it could not be helped. Calabressa walked faster and faster, as if he were trying to get away from something that followed and annoyed him. He pretended to himself that he was deeply interested in a shop-window here or there; occasionally he whistled; he sung “Vado a Napoli in barchetta” with forced gayety; he twisted his long white moustache, and then he made his way down to Brand’s rooms.

Here he was also very gay.

“Now, my dear Monsieur Brand, to-day I have idleness; to-day I will talk to you; yesterday I could not.”

“Unfortunately,” said Brand, “our positions are reversed now, for here is a letter from Lind wanting me to go up to Lisle Street. It seems Reitzei has had to go off into the country, leaving a lot of correspondence—”

“You are, then, on good terms with Lind?” Calabressa interposed, quickly.

“Yes; why not?” said Brand, with a stare.

“I, also—I say, why not? It is excellent. Then you have no time for my chatter?” said Calabressa, carelessly regarding the open letter.

“At least you can tell me something about Natalie and her mother. Are they well? What hotel are they at?”

Calabressa laughed.

“Yes, yes, my friend Monsieur Brand, you say, ‘Are they well?’ What you mean is, ‘What has taken them to Naples?’ *Bien*, you are right to wonder; you will not have to wonder long. A little patience; you will hear something; do not be surprised. And you have no message, for example, by way of reply to the letter I brought you?”



"You are returning to Naples, then?"

"To-night. I will take a message for you: if you have no time now, send it to me at Charing Cross. Meanwhile, I take my leave."

Calabressa rose, but was persuaded to resume his seat.

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"I see," said he, again laughing, "that you have a little time to hear about the two wanderers. Oh, they are in a good hotel, I assure you; pretty rooms; you look over to Capri; quite near you the Castello dell' Ovo; and underneath your windows the waves—a charming view! And the little Natalushka, she has not lost her spirits: she says to me, 'Dear Mr. Calabressa, will you have the goodness to become my champion?' I say to her, 'Against all the world!' 'Oh no,' she answers, 'not quite so much as that. It is a man who sells agates and pebbles, and such things; and no matter when I go out, he will follow me, and thrust himself before me. Dear Mr. Calabressa, I do not want agates and pebbles, and he is more importunate than all the others put together; and the servants of the hotel can do nothing with him.' Oh, I assure you, it would have made you laugh—her pretence of gravity! I said nothing—not I; what is the use of making serious promises over trifles? But when I went out I encountered the gentleman with the agates and pebbles. 'Friend,' said I, 'a word with you. Skip, dance, be off with you to the steps of some other hotel; your presence is not agreeable here.' 'Who are you?' said he, naturally. 'No matter,' said I; 'but do you wish to be presented with two dozen of the school-master's sweetmeats?' 'Who are you?' said he again. Then I took him by the ear and whispered something to him. By the blood of Saint Peter, Monsieur Brand, you should have heard the quick snap of his box, and seen the heels of him as he darted off like an antelope! I tell you the grave-faced minx, that mocking Natalushka, who makes fun of old people like me—well, she shall not any more be troubled with agates and pebbles!"

"Then she is quite cheerful and happy?" said Brand, somewhat wondering.

"Sometimes," Calabressa said, more gravely. "One cannot always be anxious; one has glimpses of hope; then the spirit rises; the eyes laugh. You, for example, you do not seem much cast down?"

Brand avoided his inquisitive look, and merely said,

"One must take things as one finds them. There is no use repining over what happens."

Calabressa now rose and took his cap; then he laid it down on the table again.

"One moment before I go, my dear Monsieur Brand. I told you to expect news; perhaps you will not understand. Shall I show you something to help? Regard this: it is only a little trick; but it may help you to understand when the news comes to you."

He took from his pocket a piece of white paper, square, and with apparently nothing on it. He laid it on the table, and produced a red pencil.

"May I trouble you for a small pair of scissors, my dear friend?"

Brand stepped aside to a writing-desk, and brought him the scissors; he was scarcely thinking of Calabressa, at all; he was thinking of the message he would send to Naples.

Calabressa slowly and carefully cut the piece of paper into four squares, and proceeded to fold these up. Brand looked on, it is true, but with little interest; and he certainly did not perceive that his companion had folded three of these pieces with the under side inward, the fourth with the upper side inward, while this had the rough edges turned in a different direction from the other three.

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"Now, Mr. Brand," said Calabressa, calmly, "if one were drawing lots, for example, what more simple than this? I take one of these pieces—you see there is nothing on it—I print a red cross with my pencil; there, it is folded again, and they all go into my cap."

"Enough, Calabressa," Brand said, impatiently; "you show me that you have questioned me closely enough. There is enough said about it."

"I ask your pardon, my dear friend, there is not," said Calabressa, politely; "for this is what I have to say now: draw one of the pieces of paper."

Brand turned away.

"It is not a thing to be gone over again, I tell you; I have had enough of it; let it rest."

"It must not rest. I beg of you—my friend, I insist—"

He pressed the cap on him. Brand, to get rid of him, drew one of the papers and tossed it on to the table. Calabressa took it up, opened it, and showed him the red cross.

"Yes, you are again unfortunate, my dear Monsieur Brand. Fate pursues you, does it not? But wait one moment. Will you open the other three papers?"

As Brand seemed impatient, Calabressa himself took them out and opened them singly before him. On each and all was the same red mark.

But now Brand was indifferent no longer

"What do you mean, Calabressa?" he said, quickly.

"I mean," said Calabressa, regarding him, "that one might prepare a trick by which you would not have much chance of escape."

Brand caught him by the arm.

"Do you mean that these others—" He could not complete the sentence; his brain was in a whirl; was this why Natalie had sent him that strange message of hope?

Calabressa released himself, and took his cap, and said,

"I can tell you nothing, my dear friend—nothing. My lips are sealed for the present. But surely one is permitted to show you a common little trick with bits of paper!"

"But you *must* tell me what you mean," said Brand, breathlessly, and with his face still somewhat pale. "You suggest there has been a trick. That is why you have come from Naples? What do you know? What is about to happen? For God's sake, Calabressa,

don't have any mystification about it: what is it that you know—that you suspect—that you have heard?"

"My dear friend," said Calabressa, with some anxiety, "perhaps I have been indiscreet. I know nothing: what can I know? But I show you a trick—if only to prepare you for any news—and you think it is very serious. Oh no; do not be too hopeful—do not think it is serious—think it was a foolish trick—"

And so, notwithstanding all that Brand could do to force some definite explanation from him, Calabressa succeeded in getting away, promising to carry to Natalie any message Brand might send in the evening; and as for Brand himself, it was now time for him to go up to Lisle Street, so that he had something else to think of than idle mystifications.

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For this was how he took it in the end: Calabressa was whimsical, fantastic, mysterious; he had been playing with the notion that Brand had been entrapped into this service; he had succeeded in showing himself how it might have been done. The worst of it was—had he been putting vain hopes into the mind of Natalie? Was this the cause of her message? In the midst of all this bewildering uncertainty, Brand set himself to the work left unfinished by Reitzei, and found Ferdinand Lind as pleasant and friendly a colleague as ever.

But a few days after he was startled by being summoned back to Lisle Street, after he had gone home in the afternoon. He found Ferdinand Lind as calm and collected as usual, though he spoke in a hard, dry voice. He was then informed that Lind himself and Beratinsky were about to leave London for a time; that the Council wished Brand to conduct the business at Lisle Street as best he could in their absence; and that he was to summon to his aid such of the officers of the Society as he chose. He asked no explanations, and Lind vouchsafed none. There was something unusual in the expression of the man's face.

Well, Brand installed himself in Lisle Street, and got along as best he could with the assistance of Gathorne Edwards and one or two others. But not one of them, any more than himself, knew what had happened or was happening. No word or message of any kind came from Calabressa, or Lind, or the Society, or any one. Day after day Brand got through his work with patience, but without interest; only for the time being, these necessities of the hour beguiled him from thinking of the hideous, inevitable thing that lay ahead in his life.

When news did come, it was sudden and terrible. One night he and Edwards were alone in the rooms in Lisle Street, when a letter, sent through a roundabout channel, was put into his hands. He opened it carelessly, glanced at the beginning of it, then he uttered an exclamation; then, as he read on, Edwards noticed that his companion's face was ghastly pale, even to his lips.

"Gracious heavens!—Edwards, read it!" he said, quite breathlessly. He dropped the letter on the table. There was no wild joy at his own deliverance in this man's face, there was terror rather; it was not of himself at all he was thinking, but of the death-agony of Natalie Lind when she should hear of her father's doom.

"Why, this is very good news, Brand," Edwards cried, wondering. "You are released from that affair—"

But then he read farther, and he, too, became agitated.

"What—what does it mean? Lind, Beratinsky, Reitzei accused of conspiracy—misusing the powers intrusted to them as officers of the Society—Reitzei acquitted on giving evidence—Lind and Beratinsky condemned!"

Edwards looked at his companion, aghast, and said,

“You know what the penalty is, Brand?”

The other nodded. Edwards returned to the letter, reading aloud, in detached scraps, his voice giving evidence of his astonishment and dismay.



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"Beratinsky, allowed the option of undertaking the duty from which you are released, accepts—it is his only chance, I suppose—poor devil! what chance is it, after all?" He put the letter back on the table. "What is all this that has happened, Brand?"

Brand did not answer. He had risen to his feet; he stood like one bound with chains; there was suffering and an infinite pity in the haggard face.

"Why is not Natalie here?" he said; and it was strange that two men so different from each other as Brand and Calabressa should in such a crisis have had the same instinctive thought. The lives and fates of men were nothing; it was the heart of a girl that concerned them. "They will tell her—some of them over there—they will tell her suddenly that her father is condemned to die! Why is she—among—among strangers?"

He pulled out his watch hastily, but long ago the night-mail had left for Dover. At this moment the bell rung below, and he started; it was unusual for them to have a visitor at such an hour.

"It is only that drunken fool Kirski," Edwards said. "I asked him to come here to-night."

CHAPTER LIII.

THE TRIAL.

It was a dark, wet, and cold night when Calabressa felt his way down the gangway leading from the Admiralty Pier into the small Channel steamer that lay slightly rolling at her moorings. Most of the passengers who were already on board had got to leeward of the deck-cabins, and sat huddled up there, undistinguishable bundles of rugs. For a time he almost despaired of finding out Reitzei, but at last he was successful; and he had to explain to this particular bundle of rugs that he had changed his mind, and would himself travel with him to Naples.

It was a dirty night in crossing, and both suffered considerably; the difference being that, as soon as they got into the smooth waters of Calais harbor, Calabressa recovered himself directly, whereas Reitzei remained an almost inanimate heap of wrappings, and had to be assisted or shoved up the steep gangway into the glare of the officials' lamps. Then, as soon as he had got into a compartment of the railway-carriage, he rolled himself up in a corner, and sought to forget his sufferings in sleep.

Calabressa was walking up and down on the platform. At length the bell rung, and he was about to step into the compartment, when he found himself preceded by a lady.

"I beg your pardon, madame," said he, politely, "but it is a carriage for smokers."

“And if one wishes to smoke, one is permitted—is it not so?” said the stranger, cheerfully.

Calabressa at once held open the door for her, and then followed. These three had the compartment to themselves.

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She was a young lady, good-looking, tall, bright-complexioned, with brown eyes that had plenty of fire in them, and a pleasant smile that showed brilliant teeth. Calabressa, sitting opposite her, judged that she was an Austrian, from the number of bags and knickknacks she had, all in red Russia leather, and from the number of trinkets she wore, mostly of polished steel or silver. She opened a little tortoise-shell cigarette-case, took out a cigarette, and gracefully accepted the light that Calabressa offered her. By this time the train had started, and was thundering through the night.

The young lady was very frank and affable; she talked to her companion opposite—Reitzei being fast asleep—about a great many things; she lit cigarette after cigarette. She spoke of her husband moreover; and complained that he should have to go and fight in some one else's quarrel. Why could not ladies who went to the tables at Monte Carlo keep their temper, that a perfectly neutral third person should be summoned to fight a duel on behalf of one of them?

"You are going to rejoin him, then, madame?" said Calabressa.

"Not at all," she said, laughing. "I have my own affairs."

After some time, she said, with quite a humorous smile,

"My dear sir, I hope I do not keep you from sleeping. But you are puzzled about me; you think you have seen me before, but cannot tell where."

"There you are perfectly right, madame."

"Think of the day before yesterday. You were crossing in the steamer. You were so good as to suggest to a lady on board that nearer the centre vessel would be safer for her—"

He stared at her again. Could this be the same lady who, on the day that he crossed, was seated right at the stern of the steamer her brown hair flying about with the wind, her white teeth flashing as she laughed and joked with the sailors, her eyes full of life and merriment as she pitched up and down? Calabressa, before the paroxysms of his woe overtook him, had had the bravery to go and remonstrate with this young lady, and to tell her she would be more comfortable nearer the middle of the boat; but she had laughingly told him she was a sailor's daughter, and was not afraid of the sea. Well, this handsome young lady opposite certainly laughed like that other, but still—

"Oh," she said, "do I puzzle you with such a simple thing? My hair was brown the day before yesterday, it is black to-day; is that a sufficient disguise? *Pardieu*, when I went to a music-hall in London that same night to see some stupid nonsense—bah! such stupid nonsense I have never seen in the world—I went dressed as a man. Only for exercise, you perceive: one does not need disguises in London."

Calabressa was becoming more and more mystified, and she saw it, and her amusement increased.

“Come, my friend,” she said, “you cannot deny that you also are political?”

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"I, madame?" said Calabressa, with great innocence.

"Oh yes. And you are not on the side of the big battalions, eh?"

"I declare to you, madame—"

She glanced at Reitzei.

"Your friend sleeps sound. Come, shall I tell you something? You did not say a word, for example, when you stepped on shore, to a gentleman in a big cloak who had a lantern—"

"Madame, I beg of you!" he exclaimed, in a low voice, also glancing at Reitzei.

"What!" she said, laughing. "Then you have the honor of the acquaintance of my old friend Biard? The rogue, to take a post like that! Oh, I think my husband could speak more frankly with you; I can only guess."

"You are somewhat indiscreet, madame," said Calabressa, coldly.

"I indiscreet?" she said, flickering off the ash of her cigarette with a finger of the small gloved hand. Then she said, with mock seriousness, "How can one be indiscreet with a friend of the good man Biard? Come, I will give you a lesson in sincerity. My husband is gone to fight a duel, I told you; yes, but his enemy is a St. Petersburg general who belonged to the Third Section. They should not let Russians play at Monte Carlo; it is so easy to pick a quarrel with them. And now about myself; you want to know what I am—what I am about. Ah, I perceive it, monsieur. Well, this time, on the other hand, I shall be discreet. But if you hear of something within a few weeks—if the whole of the world begins to chatter about it—and you say, 'Well, that woman had pluck'—then you can think of our little conversation during the night. We must be getting near Amiens, is it not so?"

She took from her traveling-bag a small apparatus for showering eau-de-cologne in spray, and with this sprinkled her forehead; afterward removing the drops with a soft sponge, and smoothing her rebellious black hair. Then she took out a tiny flask and cup of silver.

"Permit me, monsieur, to give you a little cognac, after so many cigarettes. I fear you have only been smoking to keep me company—"

"A thousand thanks, madame!" said Calabressa, who certainly did not refuse. She took none herself; indeed, she had just time to put her bags in order again when the train slowed into Amiens station; and she, bidding her bewildered and bewitched companion a most courteous farewell, got out and departed.

Calabressa himself soon fell asleep, and did not wake until they were near Paris. By this time the bundle of rugs in the corner had begun to show signs of animation.

“Well, friend Reitzei you have had a good sleep,” said Calabressa, yawning, and stretching his arms.

“I have slept a little.”

“You have slept all night—what more? What do you know, for example, of the young lady who was in the carriage?”

“I saw her come in,” Reitzei said, indifferently, “and I heard you talking once or twice. What was she?”

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"There you ask me a pretty question. My belief is that she was either one of those Nihilist madwomen, or else the devil himself in a new shape. At any rate, she had some good cognac."

"I should like some coffee now, Signor Calabressa; and you?"

"I would not refuse it."

Indeed, during all this journey to Naples, Calabressa and his companion talked much more of the commonplace incidents and wants of travel than of the graver matters that lay before them. Calabressa was especially resolute in doing so. He did not like to look ahead. He kept reminding himself that he was simply the agent of the Council; he was carrying out their behests; the consequences were for others to deal with. He had fulfilled his commission; he had procured sufficient proof of the suspected conspiracy; if evil-doers were to be punished, was he responsible? *Fiat justitia!* he kept repeating to himself. He was answerable to the Council alone. He had done his duty.

But from time to time—and especially when they were travelling at night, and he was awake—a haunting dread possessed him. How should he appear before these two women in Naples? His old friend Natalie Berezolyi had been grievously wronged; she had suffered through long years; but a wife forgets much when her husband is about to die. And a daughter? Lind had been an affectionate father enough to this girl; these two had been companions all her lifetime; recent incidents would surely be forgotten in her terror over the fact that it was her own appeal to the Council that had wrought her father's death. And then he, Calabressa, what could he say? It was through him she had invoked these unknown powers; it was his counsel that had taken her to Naples; and he was the immediate instrument that would produce this tragic end.

He would not think of it. At the various places where they stopped he worried about food and drink, and angrily haggled about hotel-bills: he read innumerable stupid little newspapers from morning till night; he smoked Reitzei nearly blind. At last they reached Naples.

Within an hour after their arrival Calabressa, alone, was in Tommaso's wine-vaults talking to the ghoul-like occupant. A bell rung, faint and muffled, in the distance; he passed to the back of the vaults, and lit a candle that Tommaso handed him; then he followed what seemed, from the rumble overhead, some kind of subterranean corridor. But at the end of this long sub-way he began to ascend; then he reached some steps; finally, he was on an ordinary staircase, with daylight around him, and above him a landing with two doors, both shut.

Opening one of these doors, after having knocked thrice, he entered a large, bare chamber which was occupied by three men, all seated at a table which was covered with papers. One of them, Von Zoesch, rose.

“That is good; that is very well settled,” he said to the other two. “It is a good piece of work. Now here is this English business, and the report of our wily friend, Calabressa. What is it, Calabressa? We had your telegram; we have sent for Lind and Beratinsky; what more?”

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"Excellency, I have fulfilled your commission, I hope with judgment," Calabressa said, his cap in his hand. "I believe it is clear that the Englishman had that duty put upon him by fraudulent means."

"It is a pity if it be so; it will cost us some further trouble, and we have other things to think about at present." Then he added, lightly, "but it will please your young lady friend, Calabressa. Well?"

"Excellency, you forget it may not quite so well please her if it is found that her father was in the conspiracy," said Calabressa, submissively.

"Why not?" answered the bluff, tall soldier. "However, to the point, Calabressa. What have you discovered? and your proofs."

"I have none, your Excellency; but I have brought with me one of the four in the ballot who is willing to confess. Why is he willing to confess?" said Calabressa, with a little triumphant smile; "because he thinks the gentlemen of the Council know already."

"And you have frightened the poor devil, no doubt," said Von Zoesch, laughing.

"I have on the contrary, assured him of pardon," said Calabressa, gravely. "It is within the powers you gave me, Excellency. I have pledged my honor—"

"Oh yes, yes; very well. But do you mean to tell us, my good Calabressa," said this tall man, speaking more seriously, "that you have proof of these three—Lind, Beratinsky, Reitzei—having combined to impose on the Englishman? Not Lind, surely? Perhaps the other two—"

"Your Excellency, it is for you to investigate further and determine. I will tell you how I proceeded. I went to the Englishman, and got minute particulars of what occurred. I formed my own little story, my guess, my theory. I got hold of Reitzei, and hinted that it was all known. On my faith, he never thought of denying anything, he was so frightened! But regard this, Excellency; I know nothing. I can give you the Englishman's account; then, if you get that of Reitzei, and the two correspond, it is a good proof that Reitzei is not lying in his confession. It is for you to examine him, Excellency."

"No, it is not for me," the ruddy-faced soldier-looking man said, and then he turned to his two companions. The one was the Secretary Granaglia: the other was a broad-shouldered, elderly man, with strikingly handsome features of the modern Greek type, a pallid, wax-like complexion, and thoughtful, impenetrable eyes. "Brother Conventzi, I withdraw from this affair. I leave it in hands of the Council; one of the accused was in former days my friend; it is not right that I should interfere."

“And I also, Excellency,” said Calabressa, eagerly. “I have fulfilled my commission; may not I retire now also?”

“Brother Granaglia will take down your report in writing; then you are free, my Calabressa. But you will take the summons of the Council to your friend Reitzei; I suppose he will have to be examined before the others arrive.”

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And so it came about that neither the General von Zoesch nor Calabressa was present when the trial, if trial it could be called, took place. There were no formalities. In this same big bare room seven members of the Council sat at the table, Brother Conventz presiding, the Secretary Granaglia at the foot, with writing-materials before him. Ferdinand Lind and Beratinsky stood between them and the side-wall apparently impassive. Reitzei was nearer the window, pallid, uneasy, his eyes wandering about the room, but avoiding the place where his former colleagues stood.

The President briefly stated the accusation against them, and read Reitzei's account of his share in what had taken place. He asked if they had anything to deny or to explain.

Beratinsky was the first to speak.

"Illustrious Brethren of the Council," he began, as if with some set speech; but his color suddenly forsook him, and he halted and looked helplessly round. Then he said, wildly, "I declare that I am innocent—I say that I am innocent! I never should have thought of it, gentlemen. It was Lind's suggestion; he wished to get rid of the man; I declare I had nothing to gain. Gentlemen, judge for yourselves: what had I to gain?"

He looked from one to the other; the grave faces were mostly regarding Granaglia, who was slowly and carefully putting the words down.

Then Lind spoke, clearly and coldly:

"I have nothing to deny. What I did was done in the interests of the Society. My reward for my long services is that I am haled here like a pickpocket. It is the second time; it will be the last. I have done, now, with the labor of my life. You can reap the fruits of it. Do with me what you please."

The President rose.

"The gentlemen may now retire; the decision of the Council will be communicated to them hereafter."

A bell rung; Tommaso appeared; Lind and Beratinsky were conducted down the stairs and through the dark corridor. In a few seconds Tommaso returned, and performed a like office for Reitzei.

The deliberation of the Council were but of short duration. The guilt of the accused was clear; and clear and positive was the penalty prescribed by the articles of the Society. But, in consideration of the fact that Beratinsky had been led into this affair by Lind, it was resolved to offer him the alternative of his taking over the service from which Brand was released. This afforded but a poor chance of escape, but Beratinsky was in a desperate position. That same evening he accepted; and the Secretary Granaglia was

forthwith ordered to report the result of these proceedings to England, and give certain instructions as to the further conduct of business there.

The Secretary Granaglia performed this task with his usual equanimity. He was merely a machine registering the decrees of the Council; it was no affair of his to be concerned about the fate of Ferdinand Lind; he had even forgotten the existence of the two women who had been patiently waiting day after day at that hotel, alternately hoping and fearing to learn what had occurred.

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CHAPTER LIV.

PUT TO THE PROOF.

It was not at all likely that, at such a crisis, George Brand should pay much attention to the man Kirski, who was now ushered into the room. He left Edwards to deal with him. In any case he could not have understood a word they were saying, except through the interpretation of Edwards, and that was a tedious process. He had other things to think of.

Edwards was in a somewhat nervous and excited condition after hearing this strange news, and he grew both impatient and angry when he saw that Kirski was again half dazed with drink.

"Yes, I thought so!" he exclaimed, looking as fierce as the mild student-face permitted. "This is why you are not at the shop when I called to-day. What do you mean by it? What has become of your promises?"

"Little father, I have great trouble," said the man, humbly.

"You! You in trouble!" said Edwards, angrily. "You do not know what trouble is. You have everything in the world you could wish for. You have good friends, as much employment as you can want, fair wages, and a comfortable home. If your wife ran away from you, isn't it a good riddance? And then, instead of setting about your work like a good citizen, you think of nothing but murdering a man who is as far away from you as the man in the moon, and then you take to drinking, and become a nuisance to every one."

"Little father, I have many troubles, and I wish to forget."

"Your troubles!" said Edwards, though his anger was a little bit assumed: he wished to frighten the man into better ways. "What are your troubles? Think of that beautiful lady you are always talking about, who interested herself in you—the bigger fool she!—think of her trouble when she knows that her father is to die; and for what? Because he was not obedient to the laws of the Society. And he is punished with death; and you, have you been obedient? What has become of your promises to me?"

The man before him seemed at this moment to arouse himself. He answered nothing to the reproaches hurled at him; but said, with a glance of eager interest in the sunken eyes,

"Is she in great trouble, little father?"

This gleam of intelligence rather startled Edwards. He had been merely scolding a half-drunken poor devil, and had been incautious as to what he said. He continued, with greater discretion,

“Would she have her troubles made any the less if she knew how you were behaving? She was interested in you; many a time she asked about you—”

“Yes, yes,” the man said, slowly; and he was twisting about the cap that he held in his hand.

“And she gave you her portrait. Well, I am glad you knew you were not fit to retain such a gift. A young lady like that does not give her portrait to be taken into public-houses—”

“No more—do not say any more, little father,” Kirski said, though in the same humble way. “It is useless.”

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"Useless?"

"I will not go back to any public-house—never."

"So you said to me four days ago," Edwards answered.

"This time it is true," he said, though he did not lift his bleared eyes. "To-morrow I will take back the portrait, little father; it shall remain with me, in my room. I do not go back to any public-house, I shall be no more trouble." Then he said, timidly raising his eyes, "Does she weep—that beautiful one?"

"Yes, no doubt," said Edwards, hastily, and in some confusion. "Is it not natural? But you must not say a word about it; it is a secret. Think of it, and what one has to suffer in this world, and then ask yourself if you will add to the trouble of one who has been so kind to you. Now do I understand you aright? Is it a definite promise this time?"

"This time, yes, little father. You will have no more need to complain of me, I will not add to any one's trouble. To-morrow—no, to-night I take back the portrait; it is sacred; I will not add to any one's trouble."

There was something strange about the man's manner, but Edwards put it down to the effects of drink, and was chiefly concerned in impressing on the dazed intelligence before him the responsibility of the promises he had given.

"To-morrow, then, at nine you are at the shop."

"Assuredly, if you wish it, little father."

"Remember, it is the last chance your master will give you. He is very kind to give you this chance. To-morrow you begin a new course of conduct; and when the young lady comes back I will tell her of it."

"I will not add to her troubles, little father; you may be sure of it this time."

When he had gone, Brand turned to his companion. He still held that letter in his hands. His face, that had grown somewhat haggard of late, was even paler than usual.

"I suppose I ought to feel very glad, Edwards," he said. "This is a reprieve, don't you see, so far as I am concerned. And yet I can't realize it; I don't seem to care about it; all the bitterness was over—"

"You are too bewildered yet, Brand—no wonder."

"If only the girl and her mother were over here!" he said; and then he added, with a quick instinct of fear, "What will she say to me? When she appealed to the Council,

surely she could not have imagined that the result would be her father's death. But now that she finds it so—when she finds that, in order to rescue me, she has sacrificed him —”

He could not complete the sentence.

“But he has richly deserved it,” said Edwards.

“That is not what she will look to,” he said. “Edwards,” he added, presently, “I am going home now. This place stifles me. I hate the look of it. That table is where they played their little sleight-of-hand business; and oh! the bravery of the one and the indifference of the other, and Lind’s solemn exposition of duty and obedience, and all the rest of it! Well, what will be the result when this pretty story becomes known? Rascality among the very foremost officers of the Society! what are all those people who have recently joined us, who are thinking of joining us, likely to say? Are these your high-priests? Are these the apostles of self-sacrifice, and all the virtues?”

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"It is bad enough, but not irreparable," said Edwards, calmly. "If a member here or there falls out, the association remains; if one of its high officers betrays his trust, you see how swift and terrible the punishment is."

"I do not," said Brand. "I see that the paper decree is swift enough, but what about the execution of it? Have the Council a body of executioners?"

"I don't know about that," said Edwards, simply; "but I know that when I was in Naples with Calabressa, I heard of the fate of several against whom decrees had been pronounced; and I know that in every instance they anticipated their own fate; the horror of being continually on the watch was too much for them. You may depend on it, that is what Lind will do. He is a proud man. He will not go slinking about, afraid at every street-corner of the knife of the Little Chaffinch, or some other of those Camorra fellows —"

"Edwards," said Brand, hastily, "there is a taint of blood—of treachery—about this whole affair that sickens me. It terrifies me when I think of what lies ahead. I—I think I have already tasted death, and the taste is still bitter in the mouth. I must get into the fresh air."

Edwards got his coat and hat, and followed. He saw that his companion was strangely excited.

"If all this work—if all we have been looking forward to—were to turn out to be a delusion," Brand said, hurriedly, when they had got into the dark clear night outside, "that would be worse than the suicide of Ferdinand Lind or the disappearance of Beratinsky. If this is to be the end—if these are our companions—"

"But how can you suggest such a thing?" Edwards protested. "Your imagination is filled with blackness, Brand. You are disturbed, shocked, afraid. Why, who are your colleagues? What do you think of—" Here he mentioned a whole string of names, some of them those of well-known Englishmen. "Do you accuse them of treachery? Have you not perfect confidence in them? Have they not perfect confidence in the work we are all pledged to?"

But he could not shake off this horrible feeling. He wished to be alone, to fight with it; he did not even think of going to Lord Evelyn; perhaps it was now too late. Shortly afterward he bade Edwards good-night, and made his way to his rooms at the foot of Buckingham Street.

Waters had left the lights low; he did not turn them up. Outside lay the black night-world of London, hushed and silent, with its thousand golden points of fire. He was glad to be alone.



And yet an unknown feeling of dread was upon him. It seemed as if now for the first time he realized what a terrible destiny had nearly been his; and that his escape, so far from rendering him joyful, had left him still trembling and horrified. Hitherto his pride had conquered. Even as he had undertaken that duty, it was his pride that had kept him outwardly calm and indifferent. He would not show fear, he would not even show repugnance, before these men. And it was pride, too, that had taught him at length and successfully to crush down certain vague rebellions of conscience. He would not go back from his oath. He would not go back from the promise to which Natalie's ring bound him. He would go through with this thing, and bid farewell to life; further than that no one could have demands on him.

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But the sudden release from this dire pressure of will left his nerves somewhat unstrung. For the mere sake of companionship he would like to have taken Natalie's hand, to have heard her voice: that would have assured him, and given him courage. He knew not what dangers encompassed her, what agony she might not be suffering. And the night did not answer these sudden, wavering, confused questionings; the darkness outside was as silent as the grave.

Then a deeper gloom, almost touching despair, fell upon him. He saw in all those companions of his only so many dupes; the great hope of his life left him, the future became blank. He began to persuade himself that he had only toyed with that new-found faith; that it was the desperation of *ennui*, not a true hope, that had drawn him into this work; that henceforth he would have no right to call upon others to join in a vain undertaking. If such things as had just occurred were possible in this organization, with all its lofty aims and professions—if there was to be a background of assassination and conspiracy—why, this dream must go as others had done. Then what remained to him in life? He almost wished he had been allowed to go forward to this climax unknowing; to have gone with his heart still filled with faith; to be assured until the last moment that Natalie would remember how he had fulfilled his promise to her.

It was a dark night for him, within and without. But as he sat there at the window, or walked up and down, wrestling with these demons of doubt and despair, a dull blue light gradually filled the sky outside; the orange stars on the bridges grew less intense; the broad river became visible in the dusk. Then by-and-by the dull blue cleared into a pale steel-gray, and the forms of the boats could be made out, anchored in the stream there: these were the first indications of the coming dawn.

Somehow or other he ceased these restless paces of his, and was attracted to the window, though he gazed but absently on the slow change taking place outside—the world-old wonder of the new day rising in the east. Up into that steely-gray glides a soft and luminous saffron-brown; it spreads and widens; against it the far dome of St. Paul's becomes a beautiful velvet-purple. A planet, that had been golden when it was in the dusk near the horizon, has now sailed up into the higher heaven, and shines a clear silver point. And now, listen! the hushed and muffled sounds in the silence; the great city is awakening from its sleep—there is the bark of a dog—the rumble of a cart is heard. And still that saffron glow spreads and kindles in the east, and the dome of St. Paul's is richer in hue than ever; the river between the black-gray bridges, shines now with a cold light, and the gas-lamps have grown pale. And then the final flood of glory wells up in the eastern skies, and all around him the higher buildings catch here and there a swift golden gleam: the sunrise is declared; there is a new day born for the sons and daughters of men.

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The night had fled, and with it the hideous phantoms of the night. It seemed to him that he had escaped from the grave, and that he was only now shaking off the horror of it. Look at the beautiful, clear colors without; listen to the hum of the city awakening to all its cheerful activities; the new day has brought with it new desires, new hopes. He threw open the windows. The morning air was cold and sweet—the sparrows were beginning to chirp in the garden-plots below. Surely that black night was over and gone.

If only he could see Natalie for one moment, to assure her that he had succumbed but once, and for the last time, to despair. It was a confession he was bound to make; it would not lessen her trust in him. For now all through his soul a sweet, clear voice was ringing: it was the song the sunrise had brought him; it was the voice of Natalie herself, with all its proud pathos and fervor, as he had heard it in the olden days:

“A little time we gain from time
To set our seasons in some chime,
For harsh or sweet, or loud or low,
With seasons played out long ago—
And souls that in their time and prime
Took part with summer or with snow,
Lived abject lives out or sublime,
And had there chance of seed to sow
For service or disservice done
To those days dead and this their son.

“A little time that we may fill
Or with such good works or such ill
As loose the bonds or make them strong,
Wherein all manhood suffers wrong.
By rose-hung river and light-foot rill
There are who rest not; who think long
Till they discern, as from a hill,
At the sun’s hour of morning song,
Known of souls only, and those souls free,
The sacred spaces of the sea.”

Surely it was still for him and her together to stand on some such height, hand-in-hand, and watch the sunrise come over the sea and awakening world. They would forget the phantoms of the night, and the traitors gone down to Erubus; perhaps, for this new life together, they might seek a new clime. There was work for them still; and faith, and hope, and the constant assurance of love: the future might perchance be all the more beautiful because of these dark perils of the past.

As he lay thus communing with himself, the light shining in on his haggard face, Waters came into the room, and was greatly concerned to find that not only had his master not



been to bed, but that the supper left out for him the night before had not been touched. Brand rose, without betraying any impatience over his attendant's pertinacious inquiries and remonstrances. He went and got writing materials, and wrote as follows:

"Dear Evelyn,—If you could go over to Naples for me—at once—I would take it as a great favor. I cannot go myself. Whether or not, come to see me at Lisle Street to-day, by twelve.

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"Yours, G.B."

"Take this to Lord Evelyn, Waters; and if he is up get an answer."

"But your breakfast, sir. God bless me—"

"Never mind breakfast. I am going to lie down for an hour or two now: I have had some business to think over. Let me have some breakfast about eleven—when I ring."

"Very well, sir."

That was his phrase—he had had some business to think over. But it seemed to him, as he went into the adjacent room, that that night he had passed through worse than the bitterness of death.

CHAPTER LV.

CONGRATULATIONS.

The Secretary Granaglia, the business of the Council being over, carried the news to Von Zoesch. It was almost dark when he made his way up the steep little terraces in the garden of the villa at Posilipo. He found the tall general seated at the entrance to the grotto-like retreat, smoking a cigar in the dusk.

"You are late, Granaglia," he said.

"I had some difficulty in coming here," said the little man with the sallow face and the tired eyes. "The police are busy, or pretending to be. The Commendatore tells me that Zaccatelli has been stirring them up."

"Zaccatelli!" said Von Zoesch, with a laugh. "It will soon be time now for Zaccatelli to come down from his perch. Well, now, what is the result?"

Granaglia briefly recounted what had occurred: the other manifested no surprise.

"So this is the end of the Lind episode," he said, thoughtfully. "It is a pity that so able a man should be thrown away. He has worked well; I know of no one who will fill his place; but that must be seen to at once, Granaglia. How long have they given him?"

"A month, your Excellency. He wishes to go back to England to put his affairs in order. He has a firm nerve."

"He was a good-looking man when he was young," said Von Zoesch, apparently to himself. Then he added: "This Beratinsky, to whom the Zaccatelli affair has been

transferred—what do you think of him? There must be no bungling, Granaglia. What do you think of him—is he to be trusted?”

“Your Excellency, if I were to give you my own impression, I should say not in the least. He accepts this service—why? Because he is otherwise lost for certain, and here is a chance: it is perhaps better than nothing. But he does not go forward with any conviction of duty: what is he thinking but of his chance of running away?”

“And perhaps running away beforehand, for example?”

“Oh no, your Excellency; at least, that has been provided for. Caprone and the brother of Caprone will wait upon him until the thing is over; and what is more, he will receive a hint that these two humble attendants of his are keeping an eye on him.”

“Caprone dare not go to Rome.”

“He is ready to go anywhere. They might as well try to lay hands on a ghost.”

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Von Zoesch rose, and stretched his huge frame, and yawned.

“So this is the end of the episode Lind,” he said, idly. “It is a pity. But if a man plays a risky game and loses, he must pay. Perhaps the warning will be wholesome, Granaglia. Our friends must understand that our laws are not laid down for nothing, and that we are not afraid to punish offenders, even if these be among ourselves. I suppose there is nothing further to be done to-night?”

“I would ask your Excellency to remain here for a little time yet,” said the Secretary.

“Are they coming so near? We must get Calabressa to procure some of them a dozen or two on board the schooner. However—”

He sat down again, and lit another cigar.

“We must pay Calabressa a compliment, Granaglia; it was well done—very clever; it has all turned out just as he imagined; it is not the first time he has done us good service, with all his volubility. Oh yes; the rascal knows when to hold his tongue. At this moment, for example, he refuses to open his lips.

“Pardon, your Excellency; but I do not understand you.”

The general laughed a little, and continued talking—it was one way of passing the time.

“It is a good joke enough. The wily old Calabressa saw pretty clearly what the decision of the Council would be, and so he comes to me and entreats me to be the bearer of the news to Madame Lind and her daughter. Oh yes; it is good news, this deliverance of the Englishman; Madame Lind is an old friend of mine; she and her daughter will be grateful. But you perceive, Granaglia, that what the cunning old dog was determined to avoid was the reporting to Madame Lind that her husband had been sentenced. That was no part of the original programme. And now Calabressa holds his mouth shut; he keeps out of the way; it is left for me to go and inform the mother and daughter.”

His voice became more serious.

“The devil take it, it is no pleasant task at all! One is never sure how the brain of a woman will work; you start the engine, but it may plunge back the wrong way and strike you. Calabressa is afraid. The fox is hiding in some hole until it is all over.”

“Cannot I be of some service, your Excellency?” the Secretary said.

“No, no; but I thank you, friend Granaglia. It is a delicate matter; it must be approached with circumspection; and I as an old acquaintance of Madame Lind, ought not to shirk the duty.”

Apparently, it was not Calabressa only who had some dread of the difficulties of news-bearer.

"It is impossible for your Excellency to go near the hotel at present," said the Secretary, promptly.

But his chief refused to accept this offered means of escape.

"That is true, but it is not a difficulty. To-night, friend Granaglia, you will send a message to the hotel, bidding them be at the Villa Odelschalchi to-morrow morning at eleven—you understand?"

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“Certainly, your Excellency.”

“Then I will meet them, and take the risk. Everything must be settled off at once: we have wasted too much time over this affair, Granaglia. When does the Genoa Council meet?”

“On the Seventh.”

“To-morrow you must issue the summonses. Come, Granaglia, let us be stirring; it is cold. Where does Brother Conventz sleep to-night?”

“On board the schooner, your Excellency.”

“I also. To-morrow, at eleven, you will be at Portici; to-night you will send the message to the ladies at the hotel; and also, if you can, find out where that rogue Calabressa is hiding.”

That was the last of their talking. There was some locking up inside; then they passed down through the dark garden and out into the road. There was no one visible. They walked on in silence.

Punctually at eleven the next morning Natalie and her mother appeared at the iron gates of the Villa Odelschalchi and rang the bell. The porter appeared, admitted them, and then turned to the great white staircase, which Granaglia was at that moment seen to be descending.

“Will the ladies have the goodness to step into the garden?” said the Secretary, with grave courtesy. “General von Zoesch will be with them directly.”

He accompanied them as far as the top of the terrace, and then bowed and withdrew.

If Natalie Lind was agitated now, it was not with fear. There was a fresh animation of color in her cheek; her eyes were brilliant and excited; she spoke in low, eager whispers.

“Oh, I know what he is coming to tell us, mother—you need not be afraid: I shall see it in his face before he comes near—I think I shall be able to hear it in the sound of his steps. Have courage, mother! why do you tremble so? Remember what Calabressa said. They are so powerful they can do everything; and you and the General von Zoesch old friends, too. Look at this, mother: do you see what I have brought with me?”

She opened her purse—her fingers were certainly a little nervous—and showed her mother a folded-up telegraph form.



"I am going to telegraph to him, mother: surely it is from me he should hear the news first. And then he might come here, mother, to go back with us: you will rest a few days after so much anxiety."

"I hope, my darling, it will all turn out well," said the mother, turning quickly as she heard footsteps.

The next second Von Zoesch appeared, his face red with embarrassment; but still Natalie with her first swift glance saw that his eyes were smiling and friendly, and her heart leaped up with a bound.

"My dear young lady," said he, taking her hand, "forgive me for making such a peremptory appointment—"

"But you bring good news'?" she said, breathlessly. "Oh, sir, I can see that you have succeeded—yes, yes—the danger is removed—you have saved him!"

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"My dear young lady," said he smiling, but still greatly embarrassed, "it is my good fortune to be able to congratulate you. Ah, I thought that would bring some brightness to your eyes—"

She raised his hand, and kissed it twice passionately.

"Mother," she said, in a wild, joyful way, "will you not thank him for me? I do not know what I am saying—and then—"

The general had turned to her mother. Natalie quickly took out the telegraph-form, unfolded it, knelt down and put it on the garden-seat, and with trembling fingers wrote her message: "*You are saved! Come to us at once; my mother and I wait here for you;*" that was the substance of it. Then she rose, and for a second or two stood irresolute, silent, and shamefaced. Happily no one had noticed her. These two had gone forward, and were talking together in a low voice. She did not join them; she could not have spoken then, her heart was throbbing so violently with its newly-found joy.

"Stefan," said the mother—and there was a pleasant light in her sad eyes too—"I shall never forget the gratitude we owe you. I have nothing else to regard now but my child's happiness. You have saved her life to her."

"Yes, yes," he said, in stammering haste, "I am glad the child is happy. It would be a pity, at her time of life, and such a beautiful, brave young lady—yes, it would be a pity if she were to suffer: I am very glad. But there is another side to the question, Natalie; it refers to you. I have not such good news for you—that is, it depends on how you take it; but it is not good news—it will trouble you—only, it was inevitable—"

"What do you mean?" she said, calmly.

"Your husband," he said, regarding her somewhat anxiously.

"Yes," she said, without betraying any emotion.

"Well, you understand, we had not the power to release your English friend unless there had been injustice—or worse—in his being appointed. There was. More than that, it was very nearly a repetition of the old story. Your husband was again implicated."

She merely looked at him, waiting for him to continue.

"And the Council," he said, more embarrassed than ever, "had to try him for his complicity. He was tried and—condemned."

"To what?" she said, quite calmly.

"You must know, Natalie. He loses his life!"

She turned very pale.

“It was not so before,” she managed to say, though her breath came and went quickly.

“It was; but then he was pardoned. This time there is no hope.”

She stood silent for a second or two; then she said, regarding him with a sad look,

“You think me heartless, Stefan. You think I ought to be overwhelmed with grief. But—but I have been kept from my child for seventeen years. I have lived with the threat of the betrayal of my father hanging over me. The affection of a wife cannot endure everything. Still, I am—sorry—”

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Her eyes were cast down, and they slowly filled with tears. Von Zoesch breathed more freely. He was eagerly explaining to her how this result had become inevitable—how he himself had had no participation in it, and so forth—when Natalie Lind stepped quickly up to them, looking from the one to the other. She saw something was wrong.

“Mother, what is it?” she said, in vague fear. She turned to Von Zoesch. “Oh, sir, if there is something you have not told me—if there is trouble—why was it not to me that you spoke?”

She took hold of her mother’s hand.

“Mother, what is it?”

“My dear young lady,” said Von Zoesch, interposing, “you know that life is made up of both bitter and sweet—”

“I wish to know, signore,” she said, proudly, “what it is you have told my mother. If there is trouble, it is for her daughter to share it.”

“Well, then, dear young lady, I will tell you,” he said, “though it will grieve you also. I must explain to you. You cannot suppose that the happy news I deliver to you was the result of the will of any one man, or number of men. No. It was the result of the application of law and justice. Your—sweetheart, shall I call him?—was intrusted with a grave duty, which would most probably have cost him his life. In the ordinary way, no one could have released him from it, however much certain friends of yours here might have been interested in you, and grieved to see you unhappy. But there was this possibility—it was even a probability—that he had been selected for this service unfairly. Then, no doubt, if that could be proved, he ought to be released.”

“Yes, yes,” she said, impatiently.

“That was proved. Unfortunately, I have to tell you that among those convicted of this conspiracy was your father. Well, the laws of our association are strict—they are even terrible where a delinquent is in a position of high responsibility. My dear young lady, I must tell you the truth: your father has been adjudged guilty—and—and the punishment is—death!”

She uttered a quick, short cry of alarm, and turned with frightened eyes to her mother.

“Mother, is it true? is it true?”

The mother did not answer; she had clasped her trembling hands. Then the girl turned; there was a proud passion in her voice.



“Oh, sir, what tiger is there among you that is so athirst for blood? You save one man’s life—after intercession and prayer you save one man’s life—only to seize on that of another. And it is to me—it is to me, his daughter—that you come with congratulations! I am only a child; I am to be pleased: you speak of a sweetheart; but you do not tell me that you are about to murder my father! You give me my lover; in exchange you take my father’s life. Is there a woman in all the world so despicable as to accept her happiness at such a cost?”

Involuntarily she crushed up the telegram she held in her hand and threw it away from her.

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"It is not I, at all events," she exclaimed. "Oh, signore, you should not have mocked me with your congratulations. That is not the happiness you should offer to a daughter. But you have not killed him yet—there is time; let things be as they were; that is what my sweetheart, as you call him, will say; he and I are not afraid to suffer. Surely, rather that, than that he should marry a girl so heartless and cowardly as to purchase her happiness at the cost of her father's life?"

"My dear young lady," he said, with a great pity and concern in his face, "I can assure you what you think of is impossible. What is done cannot be undone."

Her proud indignation now gave way to terror.

"Oh no, signore, you cannot mean that! I cannot believe it! You have saved one man—oh, signore, for the love of Heaven, this other also! Have pity! How can I live, if I know that I have killed my father?"

He took both her hands in his, and strove to soothe down her wild terror and dismay. He declared to her she had nothing to do with it, no more than himself; that her father had been tried by his colleagues; that if he had not been, a fearful act of treachery would have been committed. She listened, or appeared to listen; but her lips were pale; her eyes had a strange look in them; she was breathless.

"Calabressa said they were all-powerful," she interrupted suddenly. "But are they all-powerful to slay only? Oh no, I cannot believe it! I will go to them; it cannot be too late; I will say to them that I would rather have died than appealed to them if I had known that this was to be the terrible result. And Calabressa—why did he not warn me? Or is he one of the blood-thirsty ones also—one of the tigers that crouch in the dark? Oh, signore, if they are all-powerful, they are all-powerful to pardon. May I not go to themselves?"

"It would be useless, my dear signorina," said Von Zoesch, with deep compassion in his voice. "I am sorry to grieve you, but justice has been done, and the decision is past recall. And do not blame poor old Calabressa—"

At this moment the bell of the outer gate rang, echoing through the empty house, and he started somewhat.

"Come, child," said her mother. "We have taken up too much of your time, Stefan. I wish there had been no drawback to your good news."

"At the present moment," he said, glancing somewhat anxiously toward the building, "I cannot ask you to stay, Natalie; but on some other occasion, and as soon as you please, I will give you any information you may wish. Remember, you have good friends here."

Natalie suffered herself to be led away. She seemed too horror-stricken to be able to speak. Von Zoesch accompanied them only to the terrace, and there bade them good-bye. Granaglia was waiting to show them to the gate. A few moments afterward they were in their carriage, returning to Naples.

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They sat silent for some time, the mother regarding her daughter anxiously.

“Natalushka, what are you thinking of?”

The girl started: her eyes were filled with a haunting fear, as if she had just seen some terrible thing. And yet she spoke slowly and sadly and wistfully.

“I was thinking, mother, that perhaps it was not so hard to be condemned to die; for then there would come an end to one’s suffering. And I was wondering whether there had been many women in the world who had to accuse themselves of taking a part in bringing about their own father’s death. Oh, I hope not—I hope not!”

A second afterward she added, with more than the bitterness of tears in her trembling voice, “And—and I was thinking of General von Zoesch’s congratulations, mother.”

CHAPTER LVI.

A COMMISSION.

Lord Evelyn obeyed his friend’s summons in considerable anxiety, if not even alarm; for he made no doubt that it had some connection with that mysterious undertaking to which Brand was pledged; but when he reached Lisle Street, and was shown into the larger room, no very serious business seemed going forward. Two or three of the best-known to him among the English members of the Society were present, grouped round a certain Irish M.P., who, with twinkling eyes but otherwise grave face, was describing the makeshifts of some provincial manager or other who could not pay his company their weekly salary. To the further surprise of the new-comer, also, Mr. Lind was absent; his chair was occupied by Gathorne Edwards.

He was asked to go into an inner room; and there he found Brand, looking much more like himself than he had done for some time back.

“It is awfully kind of you, Evelyn, to come at once. I heard you had returned to town yesterday. Well, what of the old people down in Wiltshire?”

Lord Evelyn was quite thrown off his guard by this frank cheerfulness. He forgot the uneasy forebodings with which he had left his house.

“Oh, capital old people!” he said, putting his hat and umbrella on the table—“excellent. But you see, Brand, it becomes a serious question if I have to bury myself in the country, and drink port-wine after dinner, and listen to full-blown, full-fed glorious old Tories, every time a sister of mine gets engaged to be married. And now that Rosalys has begun it, they’ll all take to it, one after the other, like sheep jumping a ditch.”

“They say Milbanke is a very nice young fellow,” said Brand.

“Petted, a little. But then, an only son, and heaps of money: perhaps its natural. I know he is a ghastly hypocrite,” added Lord Evelyn, who seemed to have some little grudge against his brother-in-law in prospect. “It was too bad of him to go egging on those old megatheria to talk politics until they were red in the face, denouncing Free-trade, and abusing the Ballot, and foretelling the ruin of the former as soon as the Education Act began to work. Then he pretended to be on their side—”

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"What did you do?"

"I sat quiet. I was afraid I might be eaten. I relapsed into contemplation; and began to compose a volume on 'Tory Types: Some Survivals in English Politics. For the Information of Town Readers.'"

"Well, now you have done your duty, and cemented the alliance between the two families—by drinking port-wine, I suppose—what do you say to a little pleasure-trip?"

"Oh, is that all?" he said, looking up quickly. "Is that what your note meant?"

"The fact is, Evelyn," he said, with a trifle of embarrassment, "Natalie and her mother are in Naples, and I don't know precisely in what circumstances. I am a little anxious about them—I should like to know more of their surroundings: why, for one thing, I don't know whether they have any money, even. I would go over myself, Evelyn, but the truth is I cannot—not very well. At least I ought not to go; and I thought, if you had time—being an old friend of Natalie's—you would like to see that she was all right.

"Where is Lind?" said Lord Evelyn, suddenly.

"Lind is in Italy also," said Brand, evasively.

"Not with them?"

"Oh no."

There was an awkward silence. At length Brand said,

"Something very serious has happened, Evelyn: and the question is whether, in the interests of the Society, it should not be kept a secret, if it is possible."

"I do not wish to know any secret," Lord Evelyn said, simply. "I am willing to go over to Naples at once, if I can be of any service."

"It is very kind of you; I thought you would say as much," Brand said, still hesitating. "But then I doubt whether you could be of much service unless you understood the whole situation of affairs. At present only two over here know what has occurred—Edwards and myself. Yes, I think you must know also. Read this letter; it came only last night."

He unlocked a drawer, took out a letter, and gave it to Lord Evelyn, who read it slowly. When he had finished, he put it on the table without a word.

"You understand?" Brand said, calmly. "That means that Lind is to be punished with death for treachery. Don't think about me; I've had a narrow escape, but I have



escaped—thanks to Natalie’s courage and decision. What I am concerned about is the effect that such a disclosure might have on the fortunes of the Society. Would it not provoke a widespread feeling of disgust? Wouldn’t there always be a suspicion?”

“But you yourself, Brand!” Evelyn exclaimed, in amazement. “Why, you—I thought you would be the first to resign, after such an escape.”

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"I have fought all through that, Evelyn," he said, absently. "It was my first impulse—I confess it. The thought of being associated with such men sickened me; I despaired; I wished they had never been found out, and that I had been let blindly go on to the end. Well, I got over the fit—with a struggle. It was not reasonable, after all. Surely one's belief in the future of the Society ought to be all the firmer that these black sheep have been thrust out? As for myself, at all events, I ought to have more hope, not less. I never did trust Lind, as you know; I believed in his work, in the usefulness of it, and the prospects of its success; but I never was at ease in his presence; I was glad to get away to my own work in the north. And now, with the way clearer, why should one think of giving up? To tell you the truth, Evelyn, I would give anything to be in America at the present moment, if only Natalie and her mother were in safety. There is a chance for us there bigger than anything Lind ever dreamed about. You know the Granges, the associations of the 'Patrons of Husbandry,' that were founded by the Scotchman Saunders? It is an immense social organization; the success of it has been quite unprecedented; they have an immense power in their hands. And it isn't only agriculture they deal with; they touch on politics here and there; they control elections; and the men they choose are invariably men of integrity. Well, now, don't you see this splendid instrument ready-made? From what I hear from Philadelphia—"

Lord Evelyn's thoughts were elsewhere than in Philadelphia.

"You must tell me about yourself, Brand!" he exclaimed. "Your life is no longer in danger, then? How has it happened?"

"Oh," said Brand, somewhat carelessly, "I don't know all the particulars as yet. What I do know is that Natalie and her mother disappeared from London; I had no idea whither they had gone. Then Calabressa turned up; and I heard that Natalie had appealed to the Council. Fancy, she, a young girl, had had the courage to go and appeal to the Council! Then Calabressa suspected something, I saw by his questions; then Lind, Beratinsky, and Reitzei appear to have been summoned to Naples. The result is in that letter; that is about all I know."

"And these others in there?" said Lord Evelyn, glancing to the door.

"They know nothing at all. That is what I am uncertain about: whether to leave the disappearance of Lind unaccounted for—merely saying he had been summoned away by the Council—or to let everybody who may hear of it understand that, powerful as he was, he had to succumb to the laws of the Society, and accept the penalty for his error. I am quite uncertain; I have no instructions. You might find out for me in Naples, Evelyn, if you went over there—you might find out what they consider advisable."

"You are in Lind's place, then?"

“Not at all,” said he, quickly, and with a slight flush. “Edwards and I are merely keeping the thing going until matters are settled. Did you notice whether Molyneux was in the next room when you came through?”

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"Yes he was."

"Then excuse me for a minute or two. I want to speak to you further about Naples."

Brand was gone some time, and Lord Evelyn was left to ponder over these strange tidings. To him they were very joyful tidings; for ever since that communication was made to him of the danger that threatened his friend's life, he had been haunted by the recollection that, but for him, Brand would in all probability have never heard of this association. It was with an infinite sense of personal relief that he now knew this danger was past. Already he saw himself on his way to Naples, to find out the noble girl who had taken so bold a step to save her lover. Not yet had darkness fallen over these two lives.

Brand returned, carefully shut the door after him, and seated himself on a corner of the table.

"You see, Evelyn," he said, quite in his old matter-of-fact way, "I can't pretend to have very much regret over what has happened to Lind. He tried to do me an ill turn, and he has got the worst of it; that is all. On the other hand, I bear him no malice: you don't want to hurt a man when he is down. I can guess that it isn't the death-penalty that he is thinking most of now. I can even make some excuse for him, now that I see the story plain. The temptation was great; always on the understanding that he was against my marrying his daughter; and that I had been sure of it for some time. To punish me for not giving up my property, to keep Natalie to himself, and to get this difficult duty securely undertaken all at once—it was worth while trying for. But his way of going about it was shabby. It was a mean trick. Well, there is nothing more to be said on that point: he has played—played a foul game—and lost."

He added, directly afterward,

"So you think you can go to Naples?"

"Certainly," said Evelyn, with promptness. "You don't know how glad I am about this, Brand. If you had come to grief over your relations with this Society, it would have been like a mill-stone hanging on my conscience all my life. And I shall be delighted to go to Italy for you. I should like to see the look on Natalie's face."

"You will probably find her in great trouble," Brand said, gravely.

"In trouble?"

"Naturally. Don't you see, Evelyn, she could not have foreseen that the result of her appeal would involve the destruction of her father. It is impossible to believe that she could have foreseen that. I know her; she would not have stirred hand or foot. And now that this has been discovered, it is not her father's guilt she will be thinking of; it is his



fate, brought about indirectly by herself. You may be sure, Evelyn, she will not be overjoyed at the present moment. All the more reason why one who knows her should be near her. I have no idea what sort of people are about her; I should be more satisfied if I knew you were there."

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"I am ready to go; I am ready to start this afternoon, as I say," Evelyn repeated; but then he added, with some hesitation: "But I am not going to play the part of a hypocrite, Brand. I could not pretend to sympathize with her, if that is the cause of her trouble; I should tell her it served her father right."

"You could not be so brutal if you tried, Evelyn," Brand said; "you might think so: you could not tell her so. But I have no fear: you will be discreet enough, and delicate enough, when you see her."

"And what am I to say from you?"

"From me?" he said. "Oh, you can say I thank her for having saved my life. That will be enough, I think; she will understand the rest."

"I mean, what do you advise her to do? Ought they to return to England?"

"I think so, certainly. Most likely she will be waiting there, trying to get the Council to reverse the sentence. Having been successful in the one case, the poor child may think she ought to succeed in the other. I fear that is too much to expect. However, if she is anxious, she may try. I should like to know there was somebody near her she could rely on—don't you understand, Evelyn?—to see that she is situated and treated as you would like one of your own sisters to be."

"I see what it is, Brand," Lord Evelyn said, laughing, "you are jealous of the foreigners. You think they will be using tooth-picks in her presence, and that kind of thing."

"I wish to know that she and her mother are in a good hotel," said Brand, simply, "with proper rooms, and attendance, and—and a carriage: women can't go walking through these beastly streets of Naples. The long and short of it is, Evelyn," he added, with some embarrassment, as he took out from his pocket-book two blank checks, and sat down at the table and signed them, "I want you to play the part of big brother to them, don't you know? And you will have to exercise skill as well as force. Don't you see, Calabressa is the best of fellows; but he would think nothing of taking them to stay in some vile restaurant, if the proprietor were politically inclined—"

"Yes, yes; I see: garlic; cigarettes during breakfast, right opposite the ladies; wine-glasses used as finger-glasses: well, you are a thorough Englishman, Brand!"

"I suppose, when your sisters go abroad, you see that they are directed to a proper hotel?" said Brand, somewhat angrily.

"I know this," said Evelyn, laughing, "that my sisters, and you, and Calabressa, and myself, all boiled together, wouldn't make half as good a traveller as Natalie Lind is. Don't you believe she has been led away into any slummy place, for the sake of politics

or anything else. I will bet she knows the best hotels in Naples as well as you do the Waldegrave Club."

"At any rate, you've got to play the big brother, Evelyn; and it is my affair, of course: I will not allow you to be out of pocket by it. Here are two checks; you can fill them in over there when you see how matters stand: —, at Rome, will cash them."

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"Do you mean to say I have to pay their hotel-bills?"

"If they have plenty of money, certainly not; but you must find out. You must take the bull by the horns. It is far more likely that they have so little money that they may be becoming anxious. Then you must use a firm hand—I mean with Natalie. Her mother will acquiesce. And you can tell Natalie that if she would buy something—some dress, or something—for the mother of old Calabressa, who is still living—at Spezia, I think—she would make the old chap glad. And that would be a mark of my gratitude also; you see, I have never had even the chance of thanking him as yet."

Lord Evelyn rose.

"Very well," said he, "I will send you a report of my mission. How am I to find them?"

"You must find them through Calabressa," he said, "for I have not got their address. So you can start this evening?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Then I will telegraph at once to Calabressa to let them know you are coming. Mind you, I am very grateful to you, Evelyn; though I wish I was going in your stead."

Lord Evelyn got some further instructions as to how he was to discover Calabressa on his arrival in Naples; and that evening he began his journey to the south. He set out, indeed, with a light heart. He knew that Natalie would be glad to have a message from England.

At Genoa he had to break the journey for a day, having some commission to perform on behalf of the Society: this was a parting bequest from Gathorne Edwards. Then on again; and in due time he entered Naples.

He scarcely noticed, as he entered the vehicle and drove away to his hotel, what bare-footed lads outside the station were bawling as they offered the afternoon papers to the newly-arrived passengers. What interest had he in Zaccatelli?

But what the news-venders were calling aloud was this:

"The death of the Cardinal Zaccatelli! Death of Zaccatelli! The death of the Cardinal Zaccatelli!"

CHAPTER LVII.

FAREWELL!

“Natalushka,” said the tender and anxious mother, laying her hand on the girl’s head, “you must bestir yourself. If you let grief eat into your heart like that, you will become ill; and what shall we do then, in a strange hotel? You must bestir yourself; and put away those sad thoughts of yours. I can only tell you again and again that it was none of your doing. It was the act of the Council: how could you help it? And how can you help it now? My old friend Stefan says it is beyond recall. Come, Natalushka, you must not blame yourself; it is the Council, not you, who have done this; and no doubt they think they acted justly.”

Natalie did not answer. She sighed slightly. Her eyes were turned toward the blue waters beyond the Castello dell’ Ovo.

“Child,” the mother continued, “we must leave Naples.”

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"Leave Naples!" the girl cried, with a sudden look of alarm; "having done nothing—having tried nothing?" Then she added, in a lower voice, "Well, yes, mother, I suppose it is true what they say, that one can do nothing by remaining. Perhaps—perhaps we ought to go; and yet it is terrible."

She shivered slightly as she spoke.

"You see, Natalushka," her mother said, determined to distract her attention somehow, "this is an expensive hotel; we must be thinking of what money we have left to take us back. We have been here some time; and it is a costly journey, all the way to England."

"Oh, but not to England—not to England, mother!" Natalie exclaimed, quickly.

"Why not to England, then?"

"Anywhere else, mother," the daughter pleaded. If you wish it, we will go away: no doubt General von Zoesch knows best; there is no hope. We will go away from Naples, mother; and—and you know I shall not be much of a tax on you. We will live cheaply somewhere; and perhaps I could help a little by teaching music, as Madame Potecki does. Whenever you wish it, I am ready to go."

"But why not to England?"

"I cannot tell you, mother."

She rose quickly, and passed into her own room and shut the door.

There she stood for a second or two, irresolute and breathless, like one who had just escaped into a place of refuge. Then her eyes fell on her writing desk, which was on a side-table, and open. Slowly, and with a strange, pained expression about her mouth, she went and sat down, and took out some writing materials, and absently and mechanically arranged them before her. Her eyes were tearless, but once or twice she sighed deeply. After a time she began to write with an unsteady hand:

"My Dearest,—You must let me send you a few lines of farewell; for it would be hard if, in saying good-bye, one were not permitted to say a kind word or two that could be remembered afterward. And your heart will have already told you why it is not for you and me now to look forward to the happiness that once seemed to lie before us. You know what a terrible result has followed from my rashness; but then you are free—that is something; for the rest, perhaps it is less misery to die, than to live and know that you have caused another's death. You remember, the night they played *Fidelio*, I told you I should always try to remain worthy of your love; and how could I keep that promise if I permitted myself to think of enjoying a happiness that was made possible at the cost of my father's life? You could not marry a woman so unnatural, so horrible: a marriage purchased at such a price would be foredoomed; there would be a guilty

consciousness, a life-long remorse. But why do I speak? Your heart tells you the same thing. There only remains for us to say good-bye, and to thank God for the gleam of happiness that shone on us for a little time.

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“And you, my dearest of friends, you will send me also a little message, that I can treasure as a remembrance of bygone days. And you must tell me also whether what has occurred has deterred you from going farther, or whether you still remain hoping for better things in the world, and resolved to do what you can to bring them about. That would be a great consolation to me, to know that your life still had a noble object. Then the world would not be quite blank, either for you or for me; you with your work, I with this poor, kind mother of mine, who needs all the affection I can give her. Then I hope to hear of you from time to time; but my mother and myself do not return to England.

“And now what am I to say, being so far away from you, that will sound pleasant to you, and that you will remember after with kindness? I look back now over the time since I have known you, and it appears a beautiful dream—anxious sometimes, and troubled, but always with a golden future before it that almost bewildered the eyes. And what am I to say of your goodness, so unvarying and constant; and your thoughtfulness; and your great unselfishness and outspokenness? When was there the least misunderstanding between us? I could read your heart like my own. Only once, you remember, was there a chance of a shadow coming between us—through my own folly; and yet perhaps it was only natural for a girl, fancying that everything was going to be smooth and happy in her life, to look back on what she had said in times of trouble, and to be afraid of having spoken with too little reserve. But then you refused to have even the slightest lovers’ quarrel; you laughed away my folly. Do you wonder if I was more than ever glad that I had given my life into your wise and generous guidance? And it is not now, when I am speaking to you for the last time, that I can regret having let you know what my feelings were toward you. Oh, my darling! you must not imagine, because these words that I am writing are cold and formal, that my heart beats any the less quickly when I think of you and the days we were together. I said to you that I loved you; I say to you now that I love you with my whole heart, and I have no feeling of shame. If you were here, I would look into your face and repeat it—I think without a blush; I would kiss you; I would tell you that I honor you; that I had looked forward to giving you all the trust and affection and devotion of a wife. That is because I have faith in you; my soul is open and clear to you; read, and if you can find there anything but admiration for your nobleness of heart, and earnest hopes for your happiness, and gratitude to you for all your kindness, then, and not otherwise, shall I have cause for shame.

“Now I have to send you my last word of good-bye—”

[She had borne up so far; but now she put the pen aside, and bent her head down on to her hands, and her frame was shaken with her sobbing. When she resumed, she could scarcely see for the bitter tears that kept welling her eyes.]

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“—and you think, looking at these cold words on the paper, that it was easy for me to do so. It has not been so easy. I pray God to bless you, and keep you brave and true and unselfish, and give you happiness in the success of your work. And I ask a line from you in reply—not sad, but something that I may look at from time to time, and that will make me believe you have plenty of interests and hopes in the world, and that you do not altogether regret that you and I met, and were friends, for a time.

NATALIE.”

This was a strange thing: she took another sheet of paper, and slowly and with a trembling hand wrote on it these words, “*Your Wife.*” That was all. No doubt it was the signature she had hoped one day to use. She regarded it long, and earnestly, and sadly, until, indeed, she could not see it for the tears that rose afresh into her eyes. Then she tore up the piece of paper hastily, folded her letter and addressed it, without sealing the envelope, and carried it into the other room.

“Read it mother,” she said; and she turned to the window to conceal her tear-stained face.

The mother opened the letter and glanced at it.

“You forget, child,” she said. “I know so little English. Tell me what it is you have written.”

So she was forced to turn; and apparently, as she spoke, she was quite calm; but there was a darkness underneath her eyes, and there was in her look something of the worn, sad expression of her mother’s face. Briefly and simply she repeated the substance of the letter, giving no reasons or justifications. She seemed to take it for granted that her decision was unavoidable, and would be seen to be so by every one.

“Natalushka,” the mother said, looking anxiously at the troubled face, “do you know what you are about to do? It is an act of expiation for something you have not committed.”

“Could I do otherwise?” she said. “You, mother: would you have me think of a marriage procured through my father’s death? It is too horrible!”

The mother went to her, and took her two hands.

“My poor child, are you to have no happier life than I have had, after all? When I used to see you, I used to say to myself, ‘Ah, my little Natalushka will never know what has befallen me—she will have a happy life!’ I could see you laughing as you walked in the gardens there. You looked so pleased, so content, so bright and cheerful. And now you also are to have a life of disappointment and sad memories—”

“Oh, you must not talk like that, mother,” the girl said, hastily, in a low voice. “Have I not you with me? We shall always be together, shall we not? And you know we shall not have time for brooding over what is past; we shall have much to do; we must make a pleasant small home somewhere. Oh, there are many, many people far worse off in the world than we are. So you must think of getting away from Naples, mother; and think of where you would like to live, and where I should be most likely to be able to earn a little. The years will teach us to forget—and—and—And now you know why I do not wish to go back to England.”

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Her eyes were cast down, but she was forcing herself to speak quite cheerfully.

“You see, mother, my knowing English is a great advantage. If we were to go to one of the towns on the Riviera, like Nice or Mentone, where so many English families are, one might get pupils who would want to learn English songs as well as Italian and German —”

“Yes, yes, Natalushka; but I am not going to have you slave for me. The little allowance that my cousins send me will do very well for us two, though you will not get so fine dresses. Then, you see, Natalushka, Mentone or Nice would be a dear place to live in.”

“Very well, mother,” said the girl, with the same apparent cheerfulness, “I will go down and post my letter, and at the same time get the loan of a guide book. Then we shall study the maps, and pick out a nice, quiet, remote little place, where we can live—and forget.”

The last two words were uttered to herself as she opened the door and went out. She sighed a little as she went down the staircase—that was all; she was thinking of things very far away. She passed into the hall, and went to the bureau for some postage-stamps. As she stood there, some one, unperceived, came up to her: it was Calabressa.

“Little daughter,” said he, in a trembling voice.

She uttered a slight cry, and shrunk back.

“Little daughter,” said he, holding out his hand.

But some strange instinct possessed her. She could not avoid touching his hand—or the tips of his fingers, rather—for one brief second; then she turned away from him with an involuntary shudder, and went back through the hall, her head bent down.

Calabressa stood looking after her for a moment or two, then he turned and left the hotel.

He walked quickly: there were tears running down his face. He looked neither to the right nor to the left; he was talking in a broken voice to himself; he repeated again and again, “No, she shall not turn away from me. She will be sorry for that soon. She will say she should not have crushed the heart of her old friend Calabressa.”

He walked out to Posilipo. Near the villa where he had formerly sought the representatives of the Council he passed an old woman who was selling fruit by the roadside. She glanced up at him, and said,

“The door is closed, signore.”

"The door must be opened, good mother," said he, scarcely regarding her as he hurried on.

Arrived in the garden of the villa, his summons brought out to the entrance of the grotto the Secretary Granaglia, who somewhat impatiently told him that it was quite impossible that any member of the Council should see him.

"And no doubt it is about that Lind affair?"

"Indirectly only," Calabressa said. "No, it concerns myself mostly."

"Quite enough time, the Council think, has been given to the Lind affair. I can tell you, my friend, there are more important matters stirring. Now, farewell; I am wanted within."

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However, by dint of much persuasion, Calabressa got Granaglia to take in a message to Von Zoesch. And, sure enough, his anticipations were correct; the good-natured, bluff old soldier made his appearance, and seemed glad to get a breath of fresh air for a minute or two.

"Well, well, Calabressa, what is it now? Are you not all satisfied? the young lady with her sweetheart, and all that? You rogue! you guessed pretty rightly; to tell them the news was no light matter; but by-and-by she will become reconciled. Her lover is to be envied; she is a beautiful child, and she has courage. Well, are they not satisfied?"

"I crave your pardon, Excellency, for intruding upon you," Calabressa said, in a sort of constrained voice. "It is my own affair that brings me here. I shall not waste your time. Your Excellency, I claim to be substitute for Ferdinand Lind."

The tall soldier burst out laughing.

"What the devil is the matter with you, Calabressa; have you gone mad?"

For a second Calabressa stood silent; his eyes downcast; his fingers working nervously with the cap he held in his hands.

"Your Excellency," he said, as if struggling to repress some emotion, "it is a simple matter. I have been to see the beautiful child you speak of; I addressed her, in the hall of the hotel; she turned away from me, shuddering, as if I were a murderer—from me, who loves her more than I love life. Oh, your Excellency, do not smile at it; it is not a girlish caprice; she has a noble heart; it is not a little thing that would make her cruel. I know what she thinks—that I have been the means of procuring her father's death. Be it so. I will give her father his life again. Take mine—what do I care?"

"Nonsense, nonsense, my Calabressa. The girl has bewitched you. One must talk to her. Take your life in exchange for that of Lind? Pooh! We cannot send good men after bad; you are too valuable to us; whereas he, if he were released, could be of no more use at all. It is a generous notion on your part, friend Calabressa, but it is quixotic; moreover, impossible."

"You forget, Excellency, that I can claim it," said Calabressa, firmly. "Under Article V. I can claim to be the substitute of Ferdinand Lind. Your Excellency yourself has not the power to refuse me. I call upon you to release Lind from the death-penalty: to-morrow I will take his place; then you can send a message to—to Natalie Berezolyi's daughter, that, if I have wronged her, I have made amends."

Von Zoesch grew more serious; he eyed Calabressa curiously. The elder man stood there trembling a little with nervous excitement, but with a firm look on his face: there was no doubt about his resolve.

“Friend Calabressa,” said Von Zoesch, in a kindly way, “it seems as if you had transferred your old love for Natalie Berezolyi to Natalie’s daughter, only with double intensity; but, you see, we must not allow you to sacrifice yourself merely because a girl turns her heel on you. It is not to be thought of. We cannot afford to lose you; besides, it is monstrous that the innocent should suffer, and the guilty go free—”

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"The articles of the Society, your Excellency—"

"That particular article, my Calabressa, was framed with a view to encourage self-sacrifice and generosity, no doubt, but not with a view, surely, to any such extreme madness as this. No. The fact is, I had no time to explain the circumstances of the case to the young lady, or I could easily have shown her how you were no more involved than herself in procuring the decree against her father. To-day I cannot; to-morrow I cannot; the day after to-morrow, I solemnly assure you, I will see her, and reason with her, and convince her that you have acted throughout as her best friend only could have done. You are too sensitive, my Calabressa: ah, is it not the old romance recalled that is making you so? But this I promise you, that she shall beg your pardon for having turned away from you."

"Then," said Calabressa, with a little touch of indignant pride, "then your Excellency imagines that it is my vanity that has been wounded?"

"No; it is your heart. And she will be sorry for having pained a true friend: is not that as it should be? Why, your proposal, if she agreed to it, what would be the result? You would stab her with remorse. For this momentary slight you would say, 'See, I have killed myself. Learn now that Calabressa loved you.' But that would be very like revenge, my Calabressa; and you ought not to think of taking revenge on the daughter of Natalie Berezolyi."

"Your Excellency—"

Calabressa was about to protest: but he was stopped.

"Leave it to me, my friend. The day after to-morrow we shall have more leisure. Meanwhile, no more thoughts of quixotism. *Addio!*"

CHAPTER LVIII.

A SACRIFICE.

It would be difficult to say whether Calabressa was altogether sincere in claiming to become the substitute for Ferdinand Lind, or whether he was not practising a little self-deception, and pacifying his wounded pride and affection by this outburst of generosity, while secretly conscious that his offer would not be accepted. However, what Calabressa had declared himself ready to do, in a fit of wild sentimentalism, another had already done, in terrible earnest. A useless life had suddenly become ennobled by a tragic and self-sacrificing death.

Two days after Lord Evelyn left for Naples, Brand and Gathorne Edwards were as usual in the chambers in Lisle Street, and, the business of the morning being mostly over,

they were chatting together. There was a brighter look on George Brand's face than there had been there for many a day.

"What an indefatigable fellow that Molyneux is!" Edwards was saying.

"It is a good thing some one can do something," Brand answered. "As for me, I can't settle down to anything. I feel as if I had been living on laughing-gas these last two days. I feel as if I had come alive again into another world, and was a little bit bewildered just as yet. However, I suppose we shall get shaken into our new positions by-and-by; and the sooner they let us know their final arrangements the better."



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"As for me," said Edwards, carelessly, "now that I have left the Museum I don't care where I may have to go."

At this moment a note was brought in by the old German, and handed to Edwards. He glanced at the straggling, almost illegible, address in pencil on the dirty envelope.

"Well, this is too bad," he said, impatiently.

"What is it?"

"That fellow Kirski. He is off again. I can see by his writing. He never was very good at it; but this is the handwriting of delirium tremens."

He opened the letter, and glanced at the first page.

"Oh yes," he said, in disgust, "he's off again, clearly."

"What does he say?"

"The usual rigmarole—only not quite so legible. The beautiful angel who was so kind to him—he has taken her portrait from its hiding-place—it is sacred now—no more public house—well, it looks rather as if he had been to several."

At this point, however, Edwards's pale, high forehead flushed a little.

"I wish I had not told him; but he speaks of Miss Lind being in trouble—and he says God never meant one so beautiful and kind as she to be in trouble—and if her father—"

His face grew grave.

"What is this?"

He turned the leaf suddenly, and glanced at the remainder of the letter.

"Good God! what does the man mean? What has he done?" he exclaimed.

His face was quite pale. The letter dropped from his hands. Then he jumped to his feet.

"Come, Brand—quick—quick!" he said, hurriedly. "You must come with me—"

"But what is the matter?" Brand said, following him in amazement.

"I don't know," said Edwards, almost incoherently. "He may be raving—it may only be drunkenness—but he says he is about to kill himself in place of Lind: the young lady

shall not be troubled—she was kind to him, and he is grateful. I am to send her a message.”

By this time the two friends were hurrying to the dingy little thoroughfare in which Kirski had his lodgings.

“Don’t alarm yourself, Edwards,” said Brand; “he has broken out again, that is all.”

“I am not so sure. He was at his work yesterday, and sober enough.”

“His brain may have given way, then; it was never very strong. But these continual ravings about murder or suicide are dangerous; they will develop into homicidal mania, most likely; and if he cannot get at his enemy Michaeloff he may do a mischief to somebody else.”

“I hope he has not done a mischief to himself already,” said Edwards, who had had more opportunities than his companion of studying the workings of Kirski’s disordered brain.

They reached the house and knocked at the door. The landlady made her appearance.

“Is Kirski in the house?” Edwards asked, eagerly.

“No, he ain’t,” she said, with but scant courtesy.

“Thank God!” he exclaimed, in great relief. “You are sure? He went out to his work as usual?”

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"How should I know?" said the woman, who was evidently not on good terms with her lodger.

"He had his breakfast as usual?"

"His breakfast!" she said scornfully. "No, he hadn't. He may pick up his breakfast about the streets, like a cat; but he don't have any 'ere. And a cat he is, sneaking up and down the stairs: how do I know whether he is in the house or whether he ain't?"

At this Edwards turned pale again with a sudden fear. Brand interposed.

"You don't know? Then show us his room; we will see for ourselves."

He passed the woman, leaving her to shut the door, and went into the small dark passage, waiting for her at the foot of the stairs. Grumbling to herself, she came along to show them the way. It did not pay her to waste her time like this, she said, for a lodger who took no food in the house, and spent his earnings in the gin-shop. She should not be surprised if they were to find him asleep at that time of the day. He had ways like a cat.

The landing they reached was as dark as the staircase; so that when she turned a handle and flung a door open there was a sudden glare of light. At the same moment she uttered a shrill scream, and retreated backward. She had caught a glimpse of some horrible thing—she hardly knew what. It was the body of the man Kirski lying prone upon the uncarpeted floor, his hands clinched. There was a dark pool of blood beside him.

Edwards sunk shuddering into a chair, sick and faint. He could neither move nor speak; he dared hardly look at the object lying there in the wan light. But Brand went quickly forward, and took hold of one of these clinched hands. It was quite cold. He tried to turn over the body, but relinquished that effort. The cause of death was obvious enough. Kirski had stabbed himself with one of the tools used in his trade; either he had deliberately lain down on the floor to make sure of driving the weapon home, or he had accidentally fallen so after dealing himself the fatal blow. Apparently he had been dead for some hours.

Brand rose. The landlady at the door was alternately screaming and sobbing; declaring that she was ruined; that not another lodger would come to her house.

"Be quiet, woman, and send to the police-station at once," Brand said. "Wait a moment: when did you last see this man?"

"This morning, sir—early this morning, sir," said she, in a profusion of tears over her prospective loss. "He came down-stairs with a letter in his hand, and there was twopence for my little boy to take it when he came home from school. How should I



know he had gone back, sir, to make away with himself like that, and ruin a poor widow woman, sir?"

"Have you a servant in the house?"

"No sir; no one but myself—and me dependent—"

"Then go at once to the police-station, and tell the inspector on duty what has happened. You can do that, can't you? You will do no good by standing crying there, or getting the neighbors in. I will stop here till you come back."

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She went away, leaving Brand and his paralyzed companion with this ghastly object lying prone on the floor.

"Poor devil!" Brand said; "his troubles are at an end now. I wonder whether I should lift him on to the bed, or wait until they come."

Then another thought struck him: and he turned quickly to his companion, who sat there horrified and helpless.

"Edwards," said he, "you must pull yourself together. The police will ask you what you know about this affair. Then you will have to give evidence before the coroner's inquest. There is nothing material for you to conceal; but still, no mention must be made of Lisle Street, do you understand?"

Edwards nodded. His face was of a ghastly white. Then he rose and said,

"Let us go somewhere else, Brand."

His companion took him down-stairs into the landlady's parlor, and got him a glass of water. Apparently there was not a human being in the house but themselves.

"Do you understand, Edwards? Give your private address—not Lisle Street. Then you can tell the story simply enough: that unfortunate fellow came all the way from Russia—virtually a maniac—you can tell them his story if you like; or shall I?"

"Yes, yes. It has been too much for me, Brand. You see, I had no business to tell him about Lind—"

"The poor wretch would have ended his days miserably anyhow, no doubt in a mad-house, and probably after killing some quite innocent person. By-the-way, they will ask you how you came to suspect. Where is that letter?"

Edwards took it from his pocket.

"Tear it up."

He did so; but Brand took the fragments and put them in his own pocket.

"You can tell them he wrote to you, and from the madness of the letter you thought something was wrong. You destroyed the letter. But where is Natalie's portrait?—that must not fall into their hands."

He instantly went up-stairs again, leaving his companion alone. There was something strange in his entering this room where the corpse lay; it seemed necessary for him to walk on tiptoe: he uncovered his head. A glance round the almost empty room speedily

showed him what he wanted; there was a small wooden casket in a dusky corner by the window, and that, he made no doubt, was the box the unhappy Kirski had made to contain Natalie's portrait, and that he had quite recently dug out from its place of concealment. Brand was surprised, however, to find the casket empty. Then he glanced at the fireplace; there was a little dust there, as of burnt card-board. Then he made sure that Kirski himself had taken steps to prevent the portrait falling into alien hands.

Beside the box, however, lay a piece of paper, written over in pencil. He took it up and made out it was chiefly ill-spelled Italian: "*Whatever punishment may be decreed against any Officer, Companion, or Friend of the Society, may be vicariously borne by any other Officer, Companion, or Friend, who, of his own full and free consent, acts as substitute—the original offender becoming thereby redeemed, acquitted, and released.*" Then followed some words which he could not make out at all.

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He carried the paper down-stairs.

"He appears to have burnt the photograph, Edwards; but he has left this—see."

Edwards glanced at the trembling scrawl with a slight shiver; the handwriting was the same as that he had received half an hour before.

"It is only Article V.," he said. "The poor fellow used to keep repeating that, after Calabressa and I taught him in Venice."

"But what is written below?"

Edwards forced himself to take the paper in his hands, and to scan more carefully its contents.

"It is Russian," he said, "but so badly written. *'My life is not endurable longer, but I shall die happy in being of service to the beautiful angel who was kind to me. Tell her she need not be in trouble any more. I forgive Pavel Michaeloff, as my masters desire. I do not wish my wife or my neighbors to know what I have done.'*"

"This we have no right to meddle with," Brand said, thoughtfully. "I will put it back where I got it. But you see, Edwards, you will have to admit that you were aware this poor wretch was in communication with some secret society or other. Further than that you need say nothing. The cause of his suicide is clear enough; the man was mad when he came to England with that wild craving for revenge in his brain."

Brand carried the paper up-stairs again, and placed it where he had found it. At the same moment there was a sound of footsteps below; and presently the police-officers, accompanied by the landlady and by Gathorne Edwards, who had somewhat recovered his composure, entered to hold their preliminary investigation. The notes that the inspector took down in his pocket-book were brief enough, and were mostly answers to questions addressed to Brand, regarding what he knew of the deceased man's circumstances. The police-surgeon had meanwhile had the body placed on the bed; he also was of opinion that the man had been dead some hours. Edwards translated for the inspector the writing on the paper found lying there, and said he believed Kirski had some connection with a secret society, but that it was obvious he had destroyed himself from despair; and that, indeed, the unhappy man had never been properly right in his mind since ever he had known him, though they had hoped, by getting him to do steady work and sure wages, to wean him away from brooding over the wrongs that had driven him from his native country. Edwards gave the officer his address, Brand saying that he had to leave England that same night, and would not be available for any further inquiry, but that his friend knew precisely as much about the case as himself. Then he and his companion left.

Edwards breathed more freely when he got out of the house, even into the murky atmosphere of Soho.

“It is a tragic end,” he said, “but perhaps it is the best that could have befallen him. I called yesterday at the shop, and found he was there, and sober, though I did not see him. I was surprised to find he had gone back.”

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"I thought he had solemnly promised you not to drink any more," Brand said.

"He had made the same promises before. He took to drink merely to forget—to drown this thing that was working in his brain. If he had lived, it would have been the old story over again. He would have buried the portrait in St. James's Park, as he did before, gone back to the gin-shop, and in course of time drank himself to death. This end is terrible enough, but there is a touch of something fine about it—it redeems much. What a worship the poor fellow had for Miss Lind, to be sure; because she was kind to him when he was half mad with his wrongs. I remember he used to go about the churches in Venice to see if any of the saints in the pictures were like her, but none satisfied him. You will send her a message of what he has done to repay her at last?"

"I will take it myself," said Brand, hastily. "I must go, Edwards. You must get —— or —— to come to these chambers—any one you may think of. I must go myself, and at once."

"To-night, then?"

"Yes, to-night. It is a pity I troubled Evelyn to go."

"He would stay a day, perhaps two days, in Genoa. It is just possible you might overtake him by going straight through."

"Yes," said Brand, with a strange smile on his face, as if he were looking at something far away, and it was scarcely to his companion that he spoke, "I think I will go straight through. I should not like any one but myself to take Natalie this news."

They walked back to the chambers, and Brand began to put things in order for his going.

"It is rather a shame," he said, during this business, "for one to be glad that this poor wretch has come to such an end; but what better could have happened to him, as you say? You will see about a decent funeral, Edwards; and I will leave you something to stop the mouth of that caterwauling landlady. You can tell them at the inquest that he has no relations in this country."

By-and-by he said,

"If there are any debts, I will pay them; and if no one has any objection I should like to have that casket, to show to—to Miss Lind. Did you see the carving on it?"

"I looked at it."

“He must have spent many a night working at that. Poor wretch, I wish I had looked after him more, and done more for him. One always feels that when people are dead, and it is too late.”

“I don’t see how you could have done more for him,” Edwards said, honestly enough: though indeed it was he himself who had been Kirski’s chief protector of late.

Before evening came Brand had put affairs in proper trim for his departure, and he left London with a lighter heart than had been his for a long time. But ever and anon, as he journeyed to the south, with a wonderful picture of joy and happiness before him, his mind would wander away back to the little room in Soho, and he could see the unhappy Russian lying dead, with the message left behind for the beautiful angel who had been kind to him; and he could not but think that Kirski would have died happier if he had known that Natalie herself would come some day and put flowers, tenderly and perhaps even with tears, on his grave. Who that knew her could doubt but that that would be her first act on returning to England? At least, Brand thought so.



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CHAPTER LIX.

NATALIE SPEAKS.

It was about five in the morning, and as yet dark, when George Brand arrived in Naples. He wrote a note asking Calabressa to call on him, and left it to be despatched by the porter of the hotel; then he lay down for an hour or two, without undressing, for he was somewhat fatigued with his continuous travelling.

On going down to breakfast he got Calabressa's answer, saying he was very sorry he could not obey the commands of his dear friend Monsieur Brand, because he was on duty; but that he could be found, if Monsieur Brand would have the goodness to seek out the wine-vaults of one Tommaso, in the Vicolo Isotta. There, also, Monsieur Brand would see some others.

Accordingly, after breakfast Brand set out, leisurely and observantly, for he did not think there was any great hurry. It was a beautiful, brisk, breezy morning, though occasionally a squall of rain swept across the roughened sea, blotting out Capri altogether. There were crisp gleams of white on the far plain, and there was a dazzling mist of sunlight and sea-foam where the waves sprung high on the rocks of the citadel; and even here in the busy streets there was a fresh sea-odor as the gusts of the damp wind blew along. Naples was alive and busy, but Brand regarded this swarming population with but little interest. He knew that none of his friends would be out and abroad so early.

In due time he found out the gloomy little court and the wine-vaults. Moreover, he had no trouble with the ghoulish Tommaso, who had apparently received his instructions. No sooner had Brand inquired for Calabressa than he was invited to follow his guide, who waddled along, candle in hand, like some over-grown orang-outang. At length they reached the staircase, where there was a little more light, and here he found Calabressa waiting to receive him. Calabressa seemed overjoyed.

"Yes, yes, my dear Monsieur Brand, you have arrived opportunely. You also will remonstrate with that beautiful child for having fallen out with her old friend Calabressa. Think of it! one who would wear his knees out to serve her; and when I go to the hotel —"

"One word, Calabressa," said Brand, as he followed him into a small empty room. "Tell me, is Lind in Naples?"

"Assuredly. He has petitioned for a year's grace: he wishes to join the Montenegrins."

"He will have more than a year's grace," said Brand, gravely. "Something has happened. You remember the man Kirski? Well, he has killed himself to release Lind."

“Just Heaven!” Calabressa exclaimed; but the exclamation was one of astonishment, not in the least of regret. On the contrary, he began to speak in tones of exultation.

“Ah, let us hear now what the beautiful child will say! For who was it that reclaimed that savage animal, and taught him the beautifulness of self-sacrifice, and showed him how the most useless life could be made serviceable and noble? Who but I? He was my pupil: I first watched the light of virtue beginning to radiate through his savage nature. That is what I will ask the beautiful Natalushka when I see her. Perhaps she will not again turn away from an old friend—”

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"You seem to forget, Calabressa, that your teaching has brought this man to his death," Brand said.

"Why not?" said Calabressa, with a perfectly honest stare. "Why not? Was it not well done? Was it not a fitting end? Why I, even I, who watched him long, did not expect to see that: his savagery falling away from him bit by bit; himself rising to this grand height, that he should give his life to save another: I tell you it is a beautiful thing; he has understood what I taught him; he has seen clear."

Calabressa was much excited, and very proud. It seemed to him that he had saved a soul as he remarked in his ornate French.

"Perhaps it has all happened for the best," Brand said; "perhaps it was the best that could have befallen that poor devil, too. But you are mistaken, Calabressa, about his reasons for giving up his life like that. It was not for the sake of a theory at all, admirable as your teachings may have been; it was for the sake of Natalie Lind. He heard she was in trouble, and he learned the cause of it. It was gratitude to her—it was love for her—that made him do this."

Calabressa changed his ground in an instant.

"Assuredly—assuredly, my dear friend: do you think I fail to understand that—I, who perceived that he worshipped that beautiful child as if she were a saint, and more than all the saints—do you think I cannot mark that—the sentiment of love, the fervor of worship, growing brighter and purer day by day until it burst into the beautiful flame of self-sacrifice? My faith! this must be told at once. Remain here a few moments, my dear Mr. Brand. This is news indeed."

"Wait a bit, Calabressa. I came to you to get the name of Natalie's hotel: and where is Lord Evelyn?"

"One moment—one moment," said the old albino, as he went out and shut the door behind him.

When Calabressa ceased to talk in French, he ceased to use roundabout literary sentimental metaphors; and his report, delivered in the next room, would appear to have been brief enough; for almost immediately he returned, accompanied by Von Zoesch, to whom Brand was introduced.

"I am honored in making your acquaintance," the tall soldier said, in a pleasant way. "I have heard much of you; you are a good worker; likewise you do not flinch when a duty is demanded of you. Perhaps, if you would only condescend to re-enforce the treasury sometimes, the Council would be still further grateful to you. However, we are not to

become beggars at a first interview—and that a short one, necessarily—for to-day we start for Genoa.”

“I am sorry for that,” Brand said, simply. “There were some representations I wished to lay before the Council—some very serious representations.”

“Perhaps some other time, then. In the meanwhile, our hands are full. And that reminds me that the news you bring makes one of my tasks to-day a pleasant one. Yes, I remember something of that maniac-fellow babbling about a saint and an angel—I heard of it. So it was your beautiful Miss Lind who was the saint and the angel? Well, do you know that I was about to give that young lady a very good scolding to-day?”

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Brand flushed quickly. The authority of the Council had no terrors for him where Natalie was concerned.

"I beg to remind you," he said, respectfully but firmly, "that the fact of Miss Lind's father being connected with the Society gives no one the right to intermeddle in her private affairs—"

"Oh, but, my dear sir," said Von Zoesch laughing. "I have ample right. Her mother Natalie and I are very old friends indeed. You have not seen the charming young lady, then, since your arrival?"

"No."

"Excellent—excellent! You shall come and hear the scolding I have to give her. Oh, I assure you it will not harm her much. Calabressa will bring you along to the Villa Odelschalchi, eleven sharp. We must not keep a lady—two ladies, indeed—waiting, after making an appointment."

He rose from the plain wooden chair on which he had been sitting; and his visitor had to rise also. But Brand stood reluctant to go, and his brows were drawn down.

"I beg your pardon," said he, "but if you are so busy, why not depute some friend of the young lady to carry her a message? A girl is easily frightened."

"No, no, my dear sir; having made an appointment, must we not keep it? Come, I shall expect you to make one of the party; it will be a pleasant little comedy before we go to more serious matters. *Au revoir!*" He bowed slightly, and withdrew.

Some little time afterward Brand, Evelyn, and Calabressa were driving along the rough streets in an open carriage. The presence of Lord Evelyn had been a last concession obtained from General von Zoesch by Calabressa.

"Why not?" Von Zoesch had said, good-naturedly; "he is one of us. Besides, there is nothing of importance at Portici. It is a little family party; it is a little comedy before we go to Genoa."

As they rattled along, Lord Evelyn was very talkative and joyous. He had seen Natalie the evening before, within an hour after his arrival. He was laughing at Brand for fearing she might have been induced to go to some wretched inn.

"I myself, did I not say to you it was a beautiful hotel?" said Calabressa, with a hurt air. "The most beautiful view in Naples."

"I think, after what she will hear to-day," said Evelyn, "she ought to ask us to dine there. That would be an English way of finishing up all her trials and troubles." But he turned

to Calabressa with a graver look. "What about Lind? Will they reinstate him now? Will they send him back to England?"

"Reinstate him in office?" said Calabressa, with a scornful smile. "My faith, no! Neither him nor Beratinsky. They will give them letters to Montenegro: isn't it enough?"

"Well, I think so. And Reitzei?"

"Reitzei has been stationed at Brindisi—one of our moral police; and lucky for him also."

When they arrived at the Villa Odelschalchi they were shown into a little anteroom where they found Granaglia, and he was introduced to the two strangers.

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"Who have come?" Calabressa said, in a low voice.

The little sallow-faced Secretary smiled.

"Several Brothers of the Council," he said. "They wish to see this young lady who has turned so many heads. You, for example, my Calabressa, are mad with regard to her. Well, they pay her a compliment. It is the first time any woman has been in the presence of the Council."

At this moment Von Zoesch came in, and hastily threw aside his travelling-cloak.

"Come, my friends," said he, and he took them with him, leaving Granaglia to receive the ladies when they should arrive.

The lofty and spacious apartment they now entered, on the other side of the corridor, was apparently one of a suite of rooms facing the sea. Its walls were decorated in Pompeian fashion, with simulated trellis-work, and plenty of birds, beasts, and fishes about; but the massive curtains and spreading chandeliers were all covered over as if the house had not been inhabited for some time. All that was displayed of the furniture of the chambers were some chairs of blue satin, with white and gold backs and legs; and these looked strange enough, seeing that they were placed irregularly round an oblong, rough deal table, which looked as if it had just come from the workshop of some neighboring carpenter. At or near this table several men, nearly all elderly, were sitting, talking carelessly to each other; one of them, indeed, at the farthest corner, was a venerable patriarch, who wore a large soft wide-awake over his snow-white hair. At the head of the table sat the handsome, pale-faced, Greek-looking man who has been mentioned as one Conventz. He was writing a letter, but stopped when Brand and Evelyn were introduced to him. Then Calabressa drew in some more of the gilt and blue chairs, and they sat down close by.

Brand kept anxiously looking toward the door. He had not long to wait. When it opened, Granaglia appeared, conducting into the room two figures dressed in black. These dark figures looked impressive in the great, white, empty room.

For a second Natalie stood bewildered and irresolute, seeing all these faces turned to her; and when her eyes fell on her lover, she turned deadly pale. But she went forward, along with her mother, to the two chairs brought for them by Granaglia, and they sat down. The mother was veiled. Natalie glanced at her lover again; there was a strange look in his face, but not of pain or fear.

"My dear young lady," said Von Zoesch, in his pleasantest way, "we have nothing but good news to communicate to you, so you must not be alarmed. You are among friends. We are going away to-day; we all wish to say good-bye to you, and wish you a happy journey back to England; that is all. But I will tell you that my first object in asking



you to come here was to give you a good rating; when you and I should have been alone together I would have asked you if you had no consideration for old friends, that you should have turned away from my colleague, Calabressa, and wounded him grievously. I would have reminded you that it was not he, but you yourself, who put the machinery in motion which secured your father's righteous conviction."

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"I ask you to spare me, signore," the girl said, in a low and trembling voice.

"Oh, I am not now going to scold you, my dear young lady. I intended to have done so. I intended to have shown you that you were wrong, and exceedingly ungrateful, and that you ought to ask pardon of my friend Calabressa. However, it is all changed. You need not fear him any more; you need not turn away from him. Your father is pardoned, and free!"

She looked up, uncertain, as if she had not heard aright.

"I repeat: your father is pardoned, and free. You shall learn how and why afterward. Meanwhile you have nothing before you, as I take it, but to reap the reward of your bravery."

She did not hear this last sentence. She had turned quickly to her mother.

"Mother, do you hear?" she said in a whisper.

"Yes, yes, child: thank God!"

"Now, you see, my dear young lady," Von Zoesch continued, "it is not a scolding, but good news I have given you; and nothing remains but that you should bid us good-bye, and say you are not sorry you appealed to us when you were in trouble, according to the advice of your good friend Calabressa. See, I have brought here with me a gentleman whom you know, and who will see you safe back to Naples, and to England; and another, his companion, who is also, I understand, an old friend of yours: you will have a pleasant party. Your father will be sent to join in a good cause, where he may retrieve his name if he chooses; you and your friends go back to England. So I may say that all your wishes are gratified at last, and we have nothing now but to say good-bye!"

The girl had been glancing timidly and nervously at the figures grouped round the table, and her breast was heaving. She rose; perhaps it was to enable herself to speak more freely; perhaps it was only out of deference to those seated there.

"No," she said, in a low voice, but it was heard clearly enough in the silence. "I—I would say a word to you—whom I may not see again. Yes, I thank you—from my heart; you have taken a great trouble away from my life. I—I thank you; but there is something I would say."

She paused for a second. She was very pale. She seemed to be nerving herself for some effort; and, strangely enough, her mother's hand, unseen, was stretched up to her, and she clasped it and held it tight. It gave her courage.

"It is true, I am only a girl; you are my elders, and you are men; but I have known good and brave men who were not ashamed to listen to what a woman thought was right; and

it is as a woman that I speak to you," she said; and her voice, low and timid as it was, had a strange, pathetic vibration in it, that went to the heart. "I have suffered much of late. I hope no other woman will ever suffer in the same way."

Again she hesitated, but for the last time.

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“Oh, gentlemen, you who are so powerful, you who profess to seek only mercy and justice and peace, why should you, also, follow the old, bad, cruel ways, and stain yourselves with blood? Surely it is not for you, the friends of the poor, the champions of the weak, the teachers of the people, to rely on the weapon of the assassin! When you go to the world, and seek for help and labor, surely you should go with clean hands—so that the wives and the sisters and the daughters of those who may join you may not have their lives made terrible to them. It is not a reign of terror you would establish on the earth! For the sake of those who have already joined you—for the sake of the far greater numbers who may yet be your associates—I implore you to abandon these secret and dreadful means. Surely, gentlemen, the blessing of Heaven is more likely to follow you and crown your work if you can say to every man whom you ask to join you, ‘You have women-folk around you. They have tender consciences, perhaps; but we will ask of you nothing that your sister or your wife or your daughter would not approve.’ Then good men will not be afraid of you; then brave men will not have to stifle their conscience in serving you; and whether you succeed or do not succeed, you will have walked in clear ways.”

Her mother felt that she was trembling; but her voice did not tremble—beyond that pathetic thrill in it which was always there when she was deeply moved.

“I have to beg your pardon, sir,” she said, addressing herself more particularly to Von Zoesch, but scarcely daring to lift her eyes. “But—but do not think that, when you have made everything smooth for a woman’s happiness, she can then think only of herself. She also may think a little about others; and even with those who are nearest and dearest to her, how can she bear to know that perhaps they may be engaged in something dark and hidden, something terrible—not because it involves danger but because it involves shame? Gentlemen, if you choose, you can do this. I appeal to you. I implore you. If you do not seek the co-operation of women—well, that is a light matter; you have our sympathy and love and gratitude—at least you can pursue ways and means of which women can approve; ways and means of which no one, man or woman, needs be ashamed. How otherwise are you what you profess to be—the lovers of what is just and true and merciful?”

She sat down, still all trembling. She held her mother’s hand. There was a murmur of sympathy and admiration.

Brand turned to Von Zoesch, and said, in a low voice,

“You hear, sir? These are the representations I had wished to lay before the Council. I have not a word to add.”

“We will consider by-and-by,” said Von Zoesch, rising. “It is not a great matter. Come to me in Genoa as you pass through.”

But the tall old gentleman with the long white hair had already risen and gone round to where the girl sat, and put his hand on her shoulder.

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"My noble child, you have spoken well," said he, in a quavering, feeble voice, "Forgive me that I come so near; my eyes are very weak now; and you—you do not recognize me any more?"

"Anton!" said the mother.

"Child," said he, still addressing Natalie, "it is old Anton Pepczinski who is speaking to you. But you are disturbed; and I have greatly changed, no doubt. No matter. I have travelled a long way to bring you my blessing, and I give it to you now: I shall not see you again in this world. You were always brave and good; be that to the end; God has given you a noble soul."

She looked up, and something in her face told him that she had recognized him, despite the changes time had made.

"Yes, yes," he said, in great delight; "you remember now that you used to bring me tobacco for my pipe, and ask if I would fight for your country; I can see it in your eyes, my child: you remember, then, the old Anton Pepczinski who used to bring you sweet things? Now come and take me to the English gentleman; I wish to speak to him. Tell me, does he love you—does he understand you?"

She was silent, and embarrassed.

"No! you will not speak?" the old man said, laughing; "you cast your eyes down again. See, now, how one changes! for in former days you made love openly enough—oh yes!—to me, to me myself—oh, my dear, I can remember. I can remember very well. I am not so old that I cannot remember."

Brand rose when he saw them coming. She regarded him earnestly for a brief second or two, and said something to him in English in an undertone, not understood by those standing round.

CHAPTER LX.

NEW SHORES.

The moonlight lay on the moving Atlantic, and filled the hollow world with a radiance soft and gray and vague; but it struck sharp and white on the polished rails and spars of this great steamer, and shone on the long and shapely decks, and on the broad track of foam that went away back and back and back until it was lost in the horizon. It was late; and nearly all the passengers had gone below. In the silence there was only heard the monotonous sound of the engines, and the continuous rush and seething of the waters as the huge vessel clove its way onward.

Out there by the rail, in the white light, Natalie Lind lay back in her chair, all wrapped up in furs, and her lover was by her side, on a rug on the deck, his hand placed over her hand.

“To-morrow, then, Natalie,” he was saying, “you will get your first glimpse of America.”

“So you see I have procured your banishment after all,” she said, with a smile.

“Not you,” was the answer. “I had thought of it often. For a new life, a new world; and it is a new life you and I are beginning together.”

Here the bell in the steering-room struck the half-hour; it was repeated by the lookout forward. The sound was strange, in the silence.

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"Do you know," he said, after a while, "after we have done a fair share of work, we might think ourselves entitled to rest; and what better could we do than go back to England for a time, and go down to the old place in Buckinghamshire? Then Mrs. Alleyne would be satisfied at last. How proud the old dame was when she recognized you from your portrait! She thought all her dreams had come true, and that there was nothing left but to the Checkers and carry off that old cabinet as a wedding present."

"Natalie," he said, presently, "how is it that you always manage to do the right thing at the right time? When Mrs. Alleyne took your mother and you in to the Checkers, and old Mrs. Diggles led you into her parlor and dusted the table with her apron, what made you think of asking her for a piece of cake and a cup of tea?"

"My dearest, I saw the cake in the bar!" she exclaimed.

"I believe the old woman was ready to faint with delight when you praised her currant-wine, and asked how she made it. You have a wonderful way of getting round people—whether by fair means or otherwise I don't know. Do you think if it had been anybody else but you who went to Von Zoesch in Genoa, he would have let Calabressa come with us to America?"

"Poor old Calabressa!" she said, laughing; "he is very brave now about the sea; but he was terribly frightened that bad night we had after leaving Queenstown."

Here some one appeared in the dusky recess at the top of the companion-stairs, and stepped out into the open.

"Are you people never coming below at all?" he said. "I have to inform you, Miss Natalie, with your mamma's compliments, that she can't get on with her English verbs because of that fat girl playing Strauss; and that she is going to her cabin, and wants to know when you are coming."

"Now, at once," said Natalie, getting up out of her chair. "But wait a moment, Evelyn: I cannot go without bidding good-night to Calabressa. Where is Calabressa?"

"Calabressa! Oh, in the smoking-room, betting like mad, and going in for all the mock-auctions. I expect some of them will sit up all night to get their first sight of the land. The pilot expects that will be shortly after daybreak."

"You will be in time for that, Natalie, won't you?" Brand asked.

"Oh yes. Good-night, Evelyn!" and she gave him her hand.

Brand went with her down the companion-stairs, carrying her rugs and shawls. In the corridor she turned to bid him good-night also.



“Dearest,” she said, in a low voice, “do you know what I have been trying all day—to get you to say one word, the smallest word, of regret?”

“But if I have no regret whatever, how can I express any?”

“Sure?”

He laughed, and kissed her.

“Good-night, my darling!”

“Good-night; God bless you!”

Then he made his way along the gloomy corridor again and up the broad zinc steps, and out into the moonlight. Evelyn was there, leaning with his arms on the hand-rail, and idly watching, far below, the gleams of light on the gray-black waves.

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"It is too fine a night to go below," he said. "What do you say, Brand—shall we wait up for the daylight and the first glimpse of America?"

"If you like," said Brand, taking out his cigar-case, and hauling along the chair in which Natalie had been sitting.

They had the whole of this upper deck to themselves, except when one or other of the officers passed on his rounds. They could talk without risk of being overheard: and they had plenty to talk about—of all that had happened of late, of all that might happen to them in this new country they were nearing.

"Well," he said, "Evelyn, that settlement in Genoa clinched everything, as far as I am concerned. I have no longer any doubt, any hesitation: there is nothing to be concealed now—nothing to be withheld, even from those who are content to remain merely as our friends. One might have gone on as before; for, after all, these death-penalties only attached to the officers; and the great mass of the members, not being touched by them, need have known nothing about them. But it is better now."

"It was Natalie's appeal that settled that," Lord Evelyn said, as he still watched the shining waves.

"The influence of that girl is extraordinary. One could imagine that some magnetism radiated from her; or perhaps it is her voice, and her clear faith, and her enthusiasm. When she said something to old Anton Pepczinski, on bidding him good-bye—not about herself, or about him, but about what some of us were hoping for—he was crying like a child! In other times she might have done great things: she might have led armies."

By-and-by he said,

"As for those decrees, what use were they? From all I could learn, only ten have been issued since the Society was in existence; and eight of those were for the punishment of officers, who ought merely to have been expelled. Of course you will get people like Calabressa, with a touch of theatrical-mindedness, who have a love for the terrorism such a thing can produce. But what use is it? It is not by striking down an individual here or there that you can help on any wide movement; and this great organization, that I can see in the future will have other things to do than take heed of personal delinquencies—except in so far as to purge out from itself unworthy members—its action will affect continents, not persons."

"You can see that—you believe that, Brand?" Lord Evelyn, said, turning and regarding him.

“Yes, I think so,” he answered, without enthusiasm, but with simple sincerity. Presently he said, “You remember, Evelyn, the morning we turned out of the little inn on the top of the Niessen, to see the sun rise over the Bernese Alps?”

“I remember it was precious cold,” said Lord Evelyn, almost with a shiver.

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"You remember, when we got to the highest point, we looked down into the great valleys, where the lakes and the villages were, and there it was still night under the heavy clouds. But before us, where the peaks of the Jungfrau, and the Wetterhorn, and the rest of them rose into the clear sky, there was a curious faint light that showed the day was coming. And we waited and watched, and the light grew stronger, and all sorts of colors began to show along the peaks. That was the sunrise. But down in the valleys everything was misty and dark and cold—everything asleep; the people there could see nothing of the new day we were looking at. And so I suppose it is with us now. We are looking ahead. We see, or fancy we see, the light before the others; but, sooner or later, they will see it also, for the sunrise is bound to come."

They continued talking, and they paced up and down the decks, while the half-hours and hours were struck by the bells. The moon was declining to the horizon. Long ago the last of the revellers had left the smoking-room, and there was nothing to interrupt the stillness but the surge of the waters.

Then again—

"Have you noticed Natalie's mother of late? It is a pleasure to watch the poor woman's face; she seems to drink in happiness by merely looking at her daughter; every time that Natalie laughs you can see her mother's eyes brighten."

"I have noticed a great change in Natalie herself," Evelyn said. "She is looking younger; she has lost that strange, half-apprehensive expression of the eyes; and she seems to be in excellent spirits. Calabressa is more devotedly her slave than ever."

"You should have seen him when Von Zoesch told him to pack up and be off to America."

By-and-by he said,

"You know, Evelyn, if you can't stay in America with us altogether—and that would be too much to expect—don't say anything as yet to Natalie about your going back. She has the notion that our little colony is to be founded as a permanency."

"Oh, I am in no hurry," said Evelyn, carelessly. "Things will get along at home well enough without me. Didn't I tell you that, once those girls began to go, they would go, like lightning? It is rough on Blanche, though, that Truda should come next. By-the-way, in any case, Brand, I must remain in America for your wedding."

"Oh, you will, will you?" said Brand. "Then that settles one point—you won't be going back very soon."

"Why?"



“Of course, Natalie and I won’t marry until she is of age; that is a good year and a half yet. Did you hear of Calabressa’s mad proposal that he should extort from Lind his consent to our marriage as the price of the good news that he, Calabressa, had to reveal? Like him, wasn’t it? an ingenious scheme.”

“What did you say?”

“Why, what could I say? I would not be put under any obligation to Lind on any account whatever. We can wait; it is not a long time.”

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The moonlight waned, and there was another light slowly declaring itself in the east. The two friends continued talking, and did not notice how that the cold blue light beyond the sea was gradually yielding to a silver-gray. The pilot and first mate, who were on the bridge, had just been joined by the captain.

The silver-gray in its turn gave place to a clear yellow, and high up one or two flakes of cloud became of a saffron-red. Then the burning edge of the sun appeared over the waves; the world lightened; the masts and funnels of the steamer caught the glory streaming over from the east. The ship seemed to waken also; one or two stragglers came tumbling up from below, rubbing their eyes, and staring strangely around them; but as yet no land was in sight.

The sunrise now flooded the sky and the sea; the number of those on deck increased; and at last there was an eager passing round of binoculars, and a murmur of eager interest. Those with sharp eyes enough could make out, right ahead, in the midst of the pale glow of the morning, a thin blue line of coast.

The great steamer surged on through the sunlit waters. And now even those who were without glasses could distinguish, here and there along that line of pale-blue land, a touch of yellowish-white; and they guessed that the new world there was already shining with the light of the new day. Brand felt a timid, small hand glide into his. Natalie was standing beside him, her beautiful black hair a trifle dishevelled, perhaps, and her eyes still bearing traces of her having been in the realm of dreams; but those eyes were full of tenderness, nevertheless, as she met his look. He asked her if she could make out that strip of coast beyond the shining waters.

“Can you see, Natalie? It is our future home!”

“Oh yes, I can see it,” she said; “and the sunrise is there before us: it is a happy sign.”

* * * * *

There remains to be added only this—that about the last thing Natalie Lind did before leaving England was to go and plant some flowers, carefully and tenderly, on Kirski’s grave; and that about the first thing she did on landing in America was to write to Madame Potecki, asking her to look after the little Anneli, and sending many loving messages: for this girl—or, rather, this beautiful child, as Calabressa would persist in calling her—had a large heart, that could hold many affections and many memories, and that was not capable of forgetting any one who had been kind to her.

THE END.

[Transcriber’s Note: obvious printer’s errors / misspellings have been corrected, please see the HTML version for detail.]