

Vittoria — Volume 4 eBook

Vittoria — Volume 4 by George Meredith

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THE OPERA OF CAMILLA

She was dressed like a noble damsel from the hands of Titian. An Italian audience cannot but be critical in their first glance at a prima donna, for they are asked to do homage to a queen who is to be taken on her merits: all that they have heard and have been taught to expect of her is compared swiftly with the observation of her appearance and her manner. She is crucially examined to discover defects. There is no boisterous loyalty at the outset. And as it was now evident that Vittoria had chosen to impersonate a significant character, her indications of method were jealously watched for a sign of inequality, either in her, motion, or the force of her eyes. So silent a reception might have seemed cruel in any other case; though in all cases the candidate for laurels must, in common with the criminal, go through the ordeal of justification. Men do not heartily bow their heads until they have subjected the aspirant to some personal contest, and find themselves overmatched. The senses, ready to become so slavish in adulation and delight, are at the beginning more exacting than the judgement, more imperious than the will. A figure in amber and pale blue silk was seen, such as the great Venetian might have sketched from his windows on a day when the Doge went forth to wed the Adriatic a superb Italian head, with dark banded hair-braid, and dark strong eyes under unabashed soft eyelids! She moved as, after long gazing at a painting of a fair woman, we may have the vision of her moving from the frame. It was an animated picture of ideal Italia. The sea of heads right up to the highest walls fronted her glistening, and she was mute as moonrise. A virgin who loosens a dove from her bosom does it with no greater effort than Vittoria gave out her voice. The white bird flutters rapidly; it circles and takes its flight. The voice seemed to be as little the singer's own.

The theme was as follows:—Camilla has dreamed overnight that her lost mother came to her bedside to bless her nuptials. Her mother was folded in a black shroud, looking formless as death, like very death, save that death sheds no tears. She wept, without change of voice, or mortal shuddering, like one whose nature weeps: 'And with the forth-flowing of her tears the knowledge of her features was revealed to me.' Behold the Adige, the Mincio, Tiber, and the Po!—such great rivers were the tears pouring from her eyes. She threw apart the shroud: her breasts and her limbs were smooth and firm as those of an immortal Goddess: but breasts and limbs showed the cruel handwriting of base men upon the body of a martyred saint. The blood from those deep gashes sprang out at intervals, mingling with her tears. She said:



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'My child! were I a Goddess, my wounds would heal. Were I a Saint, I should be in Paradise. I am no Goddess, and no Saint: yet I cannot die. My wounds flow and my tears. My tears flow because of no fleshly anguish: I pardon my enemies. My blood flows from my body, my tears from my soul. They flow to wash out my shame. I have to expiate my soul's shame by my body's shame. Oh! how shall I tell you what it is to walk among my children unknown of them, though each day I bear the sun abroad like my beating heart; each night the moon, like a heart with no blood in it. Sun and moon they see, but not me! They know not their mother. I cry to God. The answer of our God is this:—"Give to thy children one by one to drink of thy mingled tears and blood:—then, if there is virtue in them, they shall revive, thou shalt revive. If virtue is not in them, they and thou shall continue prostrate, and the ox shall walk over you." From heaven's high altar, O Camilla, my child, this silver sacramental cup was reached to me. Gather my tears in it, fill it with my blood, and drink.'

The song had been massive in monotonous, almost Gregorian in its severity up to this point.

'I took the cup. I looked my mother in the face. I filled the cup from the flowing of her tears, the flowing of her blood; and I drank!'

Vittoria sent this last phrase ringing out forcefully. From the inveterate contralto of the interview, she rose to pure soprano in describing her own action. 'And I drank,' was given on a descent of the voice: the last note was in the minor key—it held the ear as if more must follow: like a wail after a triumph of resolve. It was a masterpiece of audacious dramatic musical genius addressed with sagacious cunning and courage to the sympathizing audience present. The supposed incompleteness kept them listening; the intentness sent that last falling (as it were, broken) note travelling awakingly through their minds. It is the effect of the minor key to stir the hearts of men with this particular suggestiveness. The house rose, Italians—and Germans together. Genius, music, and enthusiasm break the line of nationalities. A rain of nosegays fell about Vittoria; evvivas, bravas, shouts—all the outcries of delirious men surrounded her. Men and women, even among the hardened chorus, shook together and sobbed. 'Agostino!' and 'Rocco!' were called; 'Vittoria!' 'Vittoria!' above all, with increasing thunder, like a storm rushing down a valley, striking in broad volume from rock to rock, humming remote, and bursting up again in the face of the vale. Her name was sung over and over—'Vittoria! Vittoria!' as if the mouths were enamoured of it.

'Evviva la Vittoria a d' Italia!' was sung out from the body of the house.

An echo replied—

"'Italia a il premio della Vittoria!'" a well-known saying gloriously adapted, gloriously rescued from disgrace.

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But the object and source of the tremendous frenzy stood like one frozen by the revelation of the magic the secret of which she has studiously mastered. A nosegay, the last of the tributary shower, discharged from a distance, fell at her feet. She gave it unconsciously preference over the rest, and picked it up. A little paper was fixed in the centre. She opened it with a mechanical hand, thinking there might be patriotic orders enclosed for her. It was a cheque for one thousand guineas, drawn upon an English banker by the hand of Antonio-Pericles Agriolopoulos; freshly drawn; the ink was only half dried, showing signs of the dictates of a furious impulse. This dash of solid prose, and its convincing proof that her Art had been successful, restored Vittoria's composure, though not her early statuesque simplicity. Rocco gave an inquiring look to see if she would repeat the song. She shook her head resolutely. Her opening of the paper in the bouquet had quieted the general ebullition, and the expression of her wish being seen, the chorus was permitted to usurp her place. Agostino paced up and down the lobby, fearful that he had been guilty of leading her to anticlimax.

He met Antonio-Pericles, and told him so; adding (for now the mask had been seen through, and was useless any further) that he had not had the heart to put back that vision of Camilla's mother to a later scene, lest an interruption should come which would altogether preclude its being heard. Pericles affected disdain of any success which Vittoria had yet achieved. 'Wait for Act the Third,' he said; but his irritable anxiousness to hold intercourse with every one, patriot or critic, German, English, or Italian, betrayed what agitation of exultation coursed in his veins. 'Aha!' was his commencement of a greeting; 'was Antonio-Pericles wrong when he told you that he had a prima donna for you to amaze all Christendom, and whose notes were safe and firm as the footing of the angels up and down Jacob's ladder, my friends? Aha!'

'Do you see that your uncle is signalling to you?' Countess Lena said to Wilfrid. He answered like a man in a mist, and looked neither at her nor at the General, who, in default of his obedience to gestures, came good-humouredly to the box, bringing Captain Weisspriess with him.

'We 're assisting at a pretty show,' he said.

'I am in love with her voice,' said Countess Anna.

'Ay; if it were only a matter of voices, countess.'

'I think that these good people require a trouncing,' said Captain Weisspriess.

'Lieutenant Pierson is not of your opinion,' Countess Anna remarked. Hearing his own name, Wilfrid turned to them with a weariness well acted, but insufficiently to a jealous observation, for his eyes were quick under the carelessly-dropped eyelids, and ranged keenly over the stage while they were affecting to assist his fluent tongue.



Countess Lena levelled her opera-glass at Carlo Ammiani, and then placed the glass in her sister's hand. Wilfrid drank deep of bitterness. 'That is Vittoria's lover,' he thought; 'the lover of the Emilia who once loved me!'



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General Pierson may have noticed this by-play: he said to his nephew in the brief military tone: 'Go out; see that the whole regiment is handy about the house; station a dozen men, with a serjeant, at each of the backdoors, and remain below. I very much mistake, or we shall have to make a capture of this little woman to-night.'

'How on earth,' he resumed, while Wilfrid rose savagely and went out with his stiffest bow, 'this opera was permitted to appear, I can't guess! A child could see through it. The stupidity of our civil authorities passes my understanding—it's a miracle! We have stringent orders not to take any initiative, or I would stop the Fraulein Camilla from uttering another note.'

'If you did that, I should be angry with you, General,' said Countess Anna.

'And I also think the Government cannot do wrong,' Countess Lena joined in.

The General contented himself by saying: 'Well, we shall see.'

Countess Lena talked to Captain Weisspriess in an undertone, referring to what she called his dispute with Carlo Ammiani. The captain was extremely playful in rejoinders.

'You iron man!' she exclaimed.

'Man of steel would be the better phrase,' her sister whispered.

'It will be an assassination, if it happens.'

'No officer can bear with an open insult, Lena.'

'I shall not sit and see harm done to my old playmate, Anna.'

'Beware of betraying yourself for one who detests you.'

A grand duo between Montini and Vittoria silenced all converse. Camilla tells Camillo of her dream. He pledges his oath to discover her mother, if alive; if dead, to avenge her. Camilla says she believes her mother is in the dungeons of Count Orso's castle. The duo tasked Vittoria's execution of florid passages; it gave evidence of her sound artistic powers.

'I was a fool,' thought Antonio-Pericles; 'I flung my bouquet with the herd. I was a fool! I lost my head!'

He tapped angrily at the little ink-flask in his coat-pocket. The first act, after scenes between false Camillo and Michiella, ends with the marriage of Camillo and Camilla;—a quatuor composed of Montini, Vittoria, Irma, and Lebruno. Michiella is in despair; Count Orso is profoundly sonorous with paternity and devotion to the law. He has restored to



Camilla a portion of her mother's sequestrated estates. A portion of the remainder will be handed over to her when he has had experience of her husband's good behaviour. The rest he considers legally his own by right of (Treaties), and by right of possession and documents his sword. Yonder castle he must keep. It is the key of all his other territories. Without it, his position will be insecure. (Allusion to the Austrian argument that the plains of Lombardy are the strategic defensive lines of the Alps.)



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Agostino, pursued by his terror of anticlimax, ran from the sight of Vittoria when she was called, after the fall of the curtain. He made his way to Rocco Ricci (who had given his bow to the public from his perch), and found the maestro drinking Asti to counteract his natural excitement. Rocco told Agostino, that up to the last moment, neither he nor any soul behind the scenes knew Vittoria would be able to appear, except that she had sent a note to him with a pledge to be in readiness for the call. Irma had come flying in late, enraged, and in disorder, praying to take Camilla's part; but Montini refused to act with the seconda donna as prima donna. They had commenced the opera in uncertainty whether it could go on beyond the situation where Camilla presents herself. 'I was prepared to throw up my baton,' said Rocco, 'and publicly to charge the Government with the rape of our prima donna. Irma I was ready to replace. I could have filled that gap.' He spoke of Vittoria's triumph. Agostino's face darkened. 'Ha!' said he, 'provided we don't fall flat, like your Asti with the cork out. I should have preferred an enthusiasm a trifle more progressive. The notion of travelling backwards is upon me forcibly, after that tempest of acclamation.'

'Or do you think that you have put your best poetry in the first Act?' Rocco suggested with malice.

'Not a bit of it!' Agostino repudiated the idea very angrily, and puffed and puffed. Yet he said, 'I should not be lamenting if the opera were stopped at once.'

'No!' cried Rocco; 'let us have our one night. I bargain for that. Medole has played us false, but we go on. We are victims already, my Agostino.'

'But I do stipulate,' said Agostino, 'that my jewel is not to melt herself in the cup to-night. I must see her. As it is, she is inevitably down in the list for a week's or a month's incarceration.'

Antonio-Pericles had this, in his case, singular piece of delicacy, that he refrained from the attempt to see Vittoria immediately after he had flung his magnificent bouquet of treasure at her feet. In his intoxication with the success which he had foreseen and cradled to its apogee, he was now reckless of any consequences. He felt ready to take patriotic Italy in his arms, provided that it would succeed as Vittoria had done, and on the spot. Her singing of the severe phrases of the opening chant, or hymn, had turned the man, and for a time had put a new heart in him. The consolation was his also, that he had rewarded it the most splendidly—as it were, in golden italics of praise; so that her forgiveness of his disinterested endeavour to transplant her was certain, and perhaps her future implicit obedience or allegiance bought. Meeting General Pierson, the latter rallied him.

'Why, my fine Pericles, your scheme to get this girl out of the way was capitally concerted. My only fear is that on another occasion the Government will take another view of it and you.'



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Pericles shrugged. 'The Gods, my dear General, decree. I did my best to lay a case before them; that is all.'

'Ah, well! I am of opinion you will not lay many other cases before the Gods who rule in Milan.'

'I have helped them to a good opera.'

'Are you aware that this opera consists entirely of political allusions?'

General Pierson spoke offensively, as the urbane Austrian military permitted themselves to do upon occasion when addressing the conquered or civilians.

'To me,' returned Pericles, 'an opera—it is music. I know no more.'

'You are responsible for it,' said the General, harshly. 'It was taken upon trust from you.'

'Brutal Austrians!' Pericles murmured. 'And you do not think much of her voice, General?'

'Pretty fair, sir.'

'What wonder she does not care to open her throat to these swine!' thought the changed Greek.

Vittoria's door was shut to Agostino. No voice within gave answer. He tried the lock of the door, and departed. She sat in a stupor. It was harder for her to make a second appearance than it was to make the first, when the shameful suspicion cruelly attached to her had helped to balance her steps with rebellious pride; and more, the great collected wave of her ambitious years of girlhood had cast her forward to the spot, as in a last effort for consummation. Now that she had won the public voice (love, her heart called it) her eyes looked inward; she meditated upon what she had to do, and coughed nervously. She frightened herself with her coughing, and shivered at the prospect of again going forward in the great nakedness of stagelights and thirsting eyes. And, moreover, she was not strengthened by the character of the music and the poetry of the second Act:—a knowledge of its somewhat inferior quality may possibly have been at the root of Agostino's dread of an anticlimax. The *seconda donna* had the chief part in it—notably an aria (Rocco had given it to her in compassion) that suited Irma's pure shrieks and the tragic skeleton she could be. Vittoria knew how low she was sinking when she found her soul in the shallows of a sort of jealousy of Irma. For a little space she lost all intimacy with herself; she looked at her face in the glass and swallowed water, thinking that she had strained a dream and confused her brain with it. The silence of her solitary room coming upon the blaze of light the colour and clamour of the house, and the strange remembrance of the recent impersonation of an ideal character, smote her with the sense of her having fallen from a mighty eminence, and that she lay



in the dust. All those incense-breathing flowers heaped on her table seemed poisonous, and reproached her as a delusion. She sat crouching alone till her tirewomen called; horrible talkative things! her own familiar maid Giacinta being the worst to bear with.



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Now, Michiella, by making love to Leonardo, Camillo's associate, discovers that Camillo is conspiring against her father. She utters to Leonardo very pleasant promises indeed, if he will betray his friend. Leonardo, a wavering baritone, complains that love should ask for any return save in the coin of the empire of love. He is seduced, and invokes a malediction upon his head should he accomplish what he has sworn to perform. Camilla reposes perfect confidence in this wretch, and brings her more doubtful husband to be of her mind.

Camillo and Camilla agree to wear the mask of a dissipated couple. They throw their mansion open; dicing, betting, intriguing, revellings, maskings, commence. Michiella is courted ardently by Camillo; Camilla trifles with Leonardo and with Count Orso alternately. Jealous again of Camilla, Michiella warns and threatens Leonardo; but she becomes Camillo's dupe, partly from returning love, partly from desire for vengeance on her rival. Camilla persuades Orso to discard Michiella. The infatuated count waxes as the personification of portentous burlesque; he is having everything his own way. The acting throughout—owing to the real gravity of the vast basso Lebruno's burlesque, and Vittoria's archness—was that of high comedy with a lurid background. Vittoria showed an enchanting spirit of humour. She sang one bewitching barcarole that set the house in rocking motion. There was such melancholy in her heart that she cast herself into all the flippancy with abandonment. The Act was weak in too distinctly revealing the finger of the poetic political squib at a point here and there. The temptation to do it of an Agostino, who had no other outlet, had been irresistible, and he sat moaning over his artistic depravity, now that it stared him in the face. Applause scarcely consoled him, and it was with humiliation of mind that he acknowledged his debt to the music and the singers, and how little they owed to him.

Now Camillo is pleased to receive the ardent passion of his wife, and the masking suits his taste, but it is the vice of his character that he cannot act to any degree subordinately in concert; he insists upon positive headship!—(allusion to an Italian weakness for sovereignties; it passed unobserved, and chuckled bitterly over his excess of subtlety). Camillo cannot leave the scheming to her. He pursues Michiella to subdue her with blandishments. Reproaches cease upon her part. There is a duo between them. They exchange the silver keys, which express absolute intimacy, and give mutual freedom of access. Camillo can now secrete his followers in the castle; Michiella can enter Camilla's blue-room, and ravage her caskets for treasonable correspondence. Artfully she bids him reflect on what she is forfeiting for him; and so helps him to put aside the thought of that which he also may be imperilling.



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Irma's shrill crescendos and octave-leaps, assisted by her peculiar attitudes of strangulation, came out well in this scene. The murmurs concerning the sour privileges to be granted by a Lazzeruola were inaudible. But there has been a witness to the stipulation. The ever-shifting baritone, from behind a pillar, has joined in with an aside phrase here and there. Leonardo discovers that his fealty to Camilla is reviving. He determines to watch over her. Camillo now tosses a perfumed handkerchief under his nose, and inhales the coxcombical incense of the idea that he will do all without Camilla's aid, to surprise her; thereby teaching her to know him to be somewhat a hero. She has played her part so thoroughly that he can choose to fancy her a giddy person; he remarks upon the frequent instances of girls who in their girlhood were wild dreamers becoming after marriage wild wives. His followers assemble, that he may take advantage of the exchanged key of silver. He is moved to seek one embrace of Camilla before the conflict—she is beautiful! There was never such beauty as hers! He goes to her in the fittest preparation for the pangs of jealousy. But he has not been foremost in practising the uses of silver keys. Michiella, having first arranged with her father to be before Camillo's doors at a certain hour with men-at-arms, is in Camilla's private chamber, with her hand upon a pregnant box of ebony wood, when she is startled by a noise, and slips into concealment. Leonardo bursts through the casement window. Camilla then appears. Leonardo stretches the tips of his fingers out to her; on his knees confesses his guilt and warns her. Camillo comes in. Thrusting herself before him, Michiella points to the stricken couple 'See! it is to show you this that I am here.' Behold occasion for a grand quatuor!

While confessing his guilt to Camilla, Leonardo has excused it by an emphatic delineation of Michiella's magic sway over him. (Leonardo, in fact, is your small modern Italian Machiavelli, overmatched in cunning, for the reason that he is always at a last moment the victim of his poor bit of heart or honesty: he is devoid of the inspiration of great patriotic aims.) If Michiella (Austrian intrigue) has any love, it is for such a tool. She cannot afford to lose him. She pleads for him; and, as Camilla is silent on his account, the cynical magnanimity of Camillo is predisposed to spare a fangless snake. Michiella withdraws him from the naked sword to the back of the stage. The terrible repudiation scene ensues, in which Camillo casts off his wife. If it was a puzzle to one Italian half of the audience, the other comprehended it perfectly, and with rapture. It was thus that *young Italy* had too often been treated by the compromising, merely discontented, dallying aristocracy. Camilla cries to him, 'Have faith in me! have faith in me! have faith in me!' That is the sole answer to his accusations, his threats of eternal loathing, and generally blustering sublimities. She cannot defend herself; she only knows her innocence. He is inexorable, being the guilty one of the two. Turning from him with crossed arms, Camilla sings:



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'Mother! it is my fate that I should know
Thy miseries, and in thy footprints go.
Grief treads the starry places of the earth:
In thy long track I feel who gave me birth.
I am alone; a wife without a lord;
My home is with the stranger—home abhorr'd!—
But that I trust to meet thy spirit there.
Mother of Sorrows! joy thou canst not share:
So let me wander in among the tombs,
Among the cypresses and the withered blooms.
Thy soul is with dead suns: there let me be;
A silent thing that shares thy veil with thee.'

The wonderful viol-like trembling of the contralto tones thrilled through the house. It was the highest homage to Vittoria that no longer any shouts arose nothing but a prolonged murmur, as when one tells another a tale of deep emotion, and all exclamations, all ulterior thoughts, all gathered tenderness of sensibility, are reserved for the close, are seen heaping for the close, like waters above a dam. The flattery of beholding a great assembly of human creatures bound glittering in wizard subservience to the voice of one soul, belongs to the artist, and is the cantatrice's glory, pre-eminent over whatever poor glory this world gives. She felt it, but she felt it as something apart. Within her was the struggle of Italy calling to Italy: Italy's shame, her sadness, her tortures, her quenchless hope, and the view of Freedom. It sent her blood about her body in rebellious volumes. Once it completely strangled her notes. She dropped the ball of her chin in her throat; paused without ceremony; and recovered herself. Vittoria had too severe an artistic instinct to court reality; and as much as she could she from that moment corrected the underlinings of Agostino's libretto.

On the other hand, Irma fell into all his traps, and painted her Austrian heart with a prodigal waste of colour and frank energy:

'Now Leonardo is my tool:
Camilla is my slave:
And she I hate goes forth to cool
Her rage beyond the wave.
Joy! joy!
Paid am I in full coin for my caressing;
I take, but give nought, ere the priestly blessing.'

A subtle distinction. She insists upon her reverence for the priestly (papistical) blessing, while she confides her determination to have it dispensed with in Camilla's case. Irma's known sympathies with the Austrian uniform seasoned the ludicrousness of many of the double-edged verses which she sang or declaimed in recitative. The irony of applauding her vehemently was irresistible.



Camilla is charged with conspiracy, and proved guilty by her own admission.

The Act ends with the entry of Count Orso and his force; conspirators overawed; Camilla repudiated; Count Orso imperially just; Leonardo chagrined; Camillo pardoned; Michiella triumphant. Camillo sacrifices his wife for safety. He holds her estates; and therefore Count Orso, whose respect for law causes him to have a keen eye for matrimonial alliances, is now paternally willing, and even anxious to bestow Michiella upon him when the Pontifical divorce can be obtained; so that the long-coveted fruitful acres may be in the family. The chorus sings a song of praise to Hymen, the 'builder of great Houses.' Camilla goes forth into exile. The word was not spoken, but the mention of 'bread of strangers, strange faces, cold climes,' said sufficient.



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'It is a question whether we ought to sit still and see a firebrand flashed in our faces,' General Pierson remarked as the curtain fell. He was talking to Major de Pymont outside the Duchess of Graatli's box. Two General officers joined them, and presently Count Serabiglione, with his courtly semi-ironical smile, on whom they straightway turned their backs. The insult was happily unseen, and the count caressed his shaven chin and smiled himself onward. The point for the officers to decide was, whether they dared offend an enthusiastic house—the fiery core of the population of Milan—by putting a stop to the opera before worse should come.

Their own views were entirely military; but they were paralyzed by the recent pseudo-liberalistic despatches from Vienna; and agreed, with some malice in their shrugs, that the odium might as well be left on the shoulders of the bureau which had examined the libretto. In fact, they saw that there would be rank peril in attempting to arrest the course of things within the walls of the house.

'The temper this people is changeing oddly,' said General Pierson. Major de Pymont listened awhile to what they had to say, and returned to the duchess. Amalia wrote these lines to Laura:—

'If she sings that song she is to be seized on the wings of the stage. I order my carriage to be in readiness to take her whither she should have gone last night. Do you contrive only her escape from the house. Georges de P. will aid you. I adore the naughty rebel!'

Major de Pymont delivered the missive at Laura's box. He went down to the duchess's chasseur, and gave him certain commands and money for a journey. Looking about, he beheld Wilfrid, who implored him to take his place for two minutes. De Pymont laughed. 'She is superb, my friend. Come up with me. I am going behind the scenes. The unfortunate impresario is a ruined man; let us both condole with him. It is possible that he has children, and children like bread.'

Wilfrid was linking his arm to De Pymont's, when, with a vivid recollection of old times, he glanced at his uniform with Vittoria's eyes. 'She would spit at me!' he muttered, and dropped behind.

Up in her room Vittoria held council with Rocco, Agostino, and the impresario, Salvolo, who was partly their dupe. Salvolo had laid a freshly-written injunction from General Pierson before her, bidding him to exclude the chief solo parts from the Third Act, and to bring it speedily to a termination. His case was, that he had been ready to forfeit much if a rising followed; but that simply to beard the authorities was madness. He stated his case by no means as a pleader, although the impression made on him by the prima donna's success caused his urgency to be civil.

'Strike out what you please,' said Vittoria.



Agostino smote her with a forefinger. 'Rogue! you deserve an imperial crown. You have been educated for monarchy. You are ready enough to dispense with what you don't care for, and what is not your own.'

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Much of the time was lost by Agostino's dispute with Salvolo. They haggled and wrangled laughingly over this and that printed aria, but it was a deplorable deception of the unhappy man; and with Vittoria's stronger resolve to sing the incendiary song, the more necessary it was for her to have her soul clear of deceit. She said, 'Signor Salvolo, you have been very kind to me, and I would do nothing to hurt your interests. I suppose you must suffer for being an Italian, like the rest of us. The song I mean to sing is not written or printed. What is in the book cannot harm you, for the censorship has passed it; and surely I alone am responsible for singing what is not in the book—I and the maestro. He supports me. We have both taken precautions' (she smiled) 'to secure our property. If you are despoiled, we will share with you. And believe, oh! in God's name, believe that you will not suffer to no purpose!'

Salvolo started from her in a horror of amazement. He declared that he had been miserably deceived and entrapped. He threatened to send the company to their homes forthwith. 'Dare to!' said Agostino; and to judge by the temper of the house, it was only too certain, that if he did so, La Scala would be a wrecked tenement in the eye of morning. But Agostino backed his entreaty to her to abjure that song; Rocco gave way, and half shyly requested her to think of prudence. She remembered Laura, and Carlo, and her poor little frightened foreign mother. Her intense ideal conception of her duty sank and danced within her brain as the pilot-star dances on the bows of a tossing vessel. All were against her, as the tempest is against the ship. Even light above (by which I would image that which she could appeal to pleading in behalf of the wisdom of her obstinate will) was dyed black in the sweeping obscuration; she failed to recollect a sentence that was to be said to vindicate her settled course. Her sole idea was her holding her country by an unseen thread, and of the everlasting welfare of Italy being jeopardized if she relaxed her hold. Simple obstinacy of will sustained her.

You mariners batten down the hatchways when the heavens are dark and seas are angry. Vittoria, with the same faith in her instinct, shut the avenues to her senses—would see nothing, hear nothing. The impresario's figure of despair touched her later. Giacinta drove him forth in the act of smiting his forehead with both hands. She did the same for Agostino and Rocco, who were not demonstrative.

They knew that by this time the agents of the Government were in all probability ransacking their rooms, and confiscating their goods.

'Is your piano hired?' quoth the former.

'No,' said the latter, 'are your slippers?'

They went their separate ways, laughing.

CHAPTER XXI

THE THIRD ACT

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The libretto of the Third Act was steeped in the sentiment of Young Italy. I wish that I could pipe to your mind's hearing any notion of the fine music of Rocco Ricci, and touch you to feel the revelations which were in this new voice. Rocco and Vittoria gave the verses a life that cannot belong to them now; yet, as they contain much of the vital spirit of the revolt, they may assist you to some idea of the faith animating its heads, and may serve to justify this history.

Rocco's music in the opera of Camilla had been sprung from a fresh Italian well; neither the elegiac-melodious, nor the sensuous-lyrical, nor the joyous buffo; it was severe as an old masterpiece, with veins of buoyant liveliness threading it, and with sufficient distinctness of melody to enrapture those who like to suck the sugarplums of sound. He would indeed have favoured the public with more sweet things, but Vittoria, for whom the opera was composed, and who had been at his elbow, was young, and stern in her devotion to an ideal of classical music that should elevate and never stoop to seduce or to flatter thoughtless hearers. Her taste had directed as her voice had inspired the opera. Her voice belonged to the order of the simply great voices, and was a royal voice among them. Pure without attenuation, passionate without contortion, when once heard it exacted absolute confidence. On this night her theme and her impersonation were adventitious introductions, but there were passages when her artistic pre-eminence and the sovereign fulness and fire of her singing struck a note of grateful remembered delight. This is what the great voice does for us. It rarely astonishes our ears. It illumines our souls, as you see the lightning make the unintelligible craving darkness leap into long mountain ridges, and twisting vales, and spires of cities, and inner recesses of light within light, rose-like, toward a central core of violet heat.

At the rising of the curtain the knights of the plains, Rudolfo, Romualdo, Arnaldo, and others, who were conspiring to overthrow Count Orso at the time when Camillo's folly ruined all, assemble to deplore Camilla's banishment, and show, bereft of her, their helplessness and indecision. They utter contempt of Camillo, who is this day to be Pontifically divorced from his wife to espouse the detested Michiella. His taste is not admired.

They pass off. Camillo appears. He is, as he knows, little better than a pensioner in Count Orso's household. He holds his lands on sufferance. His faculties are paralyzed. He is on the first smooth shoulder-slope of the cataract. He knows that not only was his jealousy of his wife groundless, but it was forced by a spleenful pride. What is there to do? Nothing, save resignedly to prepare for his divorce from the conspiratrix Camilla and espousals with Michiella. The cup is bitter, and his song is mournful. He does the rarest thing a man will do in such a predicament—



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he acknowledges that he is going to get his deserts. The faithfulness and purity of Camilla have struck his inner consciousness. He knows not where she may be. He has secretly sent messengers in all directions to seek her, and recover her, and obtain her pardon: in vain. It is as well, perhaps, that he should never see her more. Accursed, he has cast off his sweetest friend. The craven heart could never beat in unison with hers.

'She is in the darkness: I am in the light. I am a blot upon the light; she is light in the darkness.'

Montini poured this out with so fine a sentiment that the impatience of the house for sight of its heroine was quieted. But Irma and Lebruno came forward barely under tolerance.

'We might as well be thumping a tambourine,' said Lebruno, during a caress. Irma bit her underlip with mortification. Their notes fell flat as bullets against a wall.

This circumstance aroused the ire of Antonio-Pericles against the libretto and revolutionists. 'I perceive,' he said, grinning savagely, 'it has come to be a concert, not an opera; it is a musical harangue in the marketplace. Illusion goes: it is politics here!'

Carlo Ammiani was sitting with his mother and Luciano breathlessly awaiting the entrance of Vittoria. The inner box-door was rudely shaken: beneath it a slip of paper had been thrust. He read a warning to him to quit the house instantly. Luciano and his mother both counselled his departure. The detestable initials 'B. R.,' and the one word 'Sbirri,' revealed who had warned, and what was the danger. His friend's advice and the commands of his mother failed to move him. 'When I have seen her safe; not before,' he said.

Countess Ammiani addressed Luciano: 'This is a young man's love for a woman.'

'The woman is worth it,' Luciano replied.

'No woman is worth the sacrifice of a mother and of a relative.'

'Dearest countess,' said Luciano, 'look at the pit; it's a cauldron. We shall get him out presently, have no fear: there will soon be hubbub enough to let Lucifer escape unseen. If nothing is done to-night, he and I will be off to the Lago di Garda to-morrow morning, and fish and shoot, and talk with Catullus.'

The countess gazed on her son with sorrowful sternness. His eyes had taken that bright glazed look which is an indication of frozen brain and turbulent heart—madness that sane men enamoured can be struck by. She knew there was no appeal to it.



A very dull continuous sound, like that of an angry swarm, or more like a rapid mufed thrumming of wires, was heard. The audience had caught view of a brown-coated soldier at one of the wings. The curious Croat had merely gratified a desire to have a glance at the semicircle of crowded heads; he withdrew his own, but not before he had awakened the wild beast in the throng. Yet a little while and the roar of the beasts would have burst out. It was thought that Vittoria had been seized or interdicted from appearing. Conspirators—the knights of the plains—meet: Rudolfos, Romualdos, Arnoldos, and others,—so that you know Camilla is not idle. She comes on in the great scene which closes the opera.

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It is the banqueting hall of the castle. The Pontifical divorce is spread upon the table. Courtly friends, guards, and a choric bridal company, form a circle.

'I have obtained it,' says Count Orso: 'but at a cost.'

Leonardo, wavering eternally, lets us know that it is weighted with a proviso: *If Camilla shall not present herself within a certain term, this being the last day of it.* Camillo comes forward. Too late, he has perceived his faults and weakness. He has cast his beloved from his arms to clasp them on despair. The choric bridal company gives intervening strophes. Cavaliers enter. 'Look at them well,' says Leonardo. They are the knights of the plains. 'They have come to mock me,' Camillo exclaims, and avoids them.

Leonardo, Michiella, and Camillo now sing a trio that is tricuspidato, or a three-pointed manner of declaring their divergent sentiments in harmony. The fast-gathering cavaliers lend masculine character to the choric refrains at every interval. Leonardo plucks Michiella entreatingly by the arm. She spurns him. He has served her; she needs him no more; but she will recommend him in other quarters, and bids him to seek them. 'I will give thee a collar for thy neck, marked "Faithful." It is the utmost I can do for thy species.' Leonardo thinks that he is insulted, but there is a vestige of doubt in him still. 'She is so fair! she dissembles so magnificently ever!' She has previously told him that she is acting a part, as Camilla did. Irma had shed all her hair from a golden circlet about her temples, barbarian-wise. Some Hunnish grandeur pertained to her appearance, and partly excused the infatuated wretch who shivered at her disdain and exulted over her beauty and artfulness.

In the midst of the chorus there is one veiled figure and one voice distinguishable. This voice outlives the rest at every strophe, and contrives to add a supplemental antiphonic phrase that recalls in turn the favourite melodies of the opera. Camillo hears it, but takes it as a delusion of impassioned memory and a mere theme for the recurring melodious utterance of his regrets. Michiella hears it. She chimes with the third notes of Camillo's solo to inform us of her suspicions that they have a serpent among them. Leonardo hears it. The trio is formed. Count Orso, without hearing it, makes a quatuor by inviting the bridal couple to go through the necessary formalities. The chorus changes its measure to one of hymeneals. The unknown voice closes it ominously with three bars in the minor key. Michiella stalks close around the rank singers like an enraged daughter of Attila. Stopping in front of the veiled figure, she says: 'Why is it thou wearest the black veil at my nuptials?'

'Because my time of mourning is not yet ended.'

'Thou standest the shadow in my happiness.'

'The bright sun will have its shadow.'



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'I desire that all rejoice this day.'

'My hour of rejoicing approaches.'

'Wilt thou unveil?'

'Dost thou ask to look the storm in the face?'

'Wilt thou unveil?'

'Art thou hungry for the lightning?'

'I bid thee unveil, woman!'

Michiella's ringing shriek of command produces no response.

'It is she!' cries Michiella, from a contracted bosom; smiting it with clenched hands.

'Swift to the signatures. O rival! what bitterness hast thou come hither to taste.'

Camilla sings aside: 'If yet my husband loves me and is true.'

Count Orso exclaims: 'Let trumpets sound for the commencement of the festivities. The lord of his country may slumber while his people dance and drink!'

Trumpets flourish. Witnesses are called about the table. Camillo, pen in hand, prepares for the supreme act. Leonardo at one wing watches the eagerness of Michiella. The chorus chants to a muted measure of suspense, while Camillo dips pen in ink.

'She is away from me: she scorns me: she is lost to me. Life without honour is the life of swine. Union without love is the yoke of savage beasts. O me miserable! Can the heavens themselves plumb the depth of my degradation?'

Count Orso permits a half-tone of paternal severity to point his kindly hint that time is passing. When he was young, he says, in the broad and benevolently frisky manner, he would have signed ere the eye of the maiden twinkled her affirmative, or the goose had shed its quill.

Camillo still trifles. Then he dashes the pen to earth.

'Never! I have but one wife. Our marriage is irrevocable. The dishonoured man is the everlasting outcast. What are earthly possessions to me, if within myself shame faces me? Let all go. Though I have lost Camilla, I will be worthy of her. Not a pen no pen; it is the sword that I must write with. Strike, O count! I am here: I stand alone. By the



edge of this sword, I swear that never deed of mine shall rob Camilla of her heritage;
though I die the death, she shall not weep for a craven!

The multitude break away from Camilla—veiled no more, but radiant; fresh as a star
that issues through corrupting vapours, and with her voice at a starry pitch in its clear
ascendency:

'Tear up the insufferable scroll!—
O thou, my lover and my soul!
It is the Sword that reunites;
The Pen that our perdition writes.'

She is folded in her husband's arms.

Michiella fronts them, horrid of aspect:—

'Accurst divorced one! dost thou dare
To lie in shameless fondness there?
Abandoned! on thy lying brow
Thy name shall be imprinted now.'

Camilla parts from her husband's embrace:

'My name is one I do not fear;
'Tis one that thou wouldst shrink to hear.
Go, cool thy penitential fires,
Thou creature, foul with base desires!'



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Camillo (facing Count Orso).

'The choice is thine!'

Count Orso (draws).

'The choice is made!'

Chorus (narrowing its circle).

'Familiar is that naked blade.
Of others, of himself, the fate
How swift 'tis Provocation's mate!'

Michiella(torn with jealous rage).

'Yea; I could smite her on the face.
Father, first read the thing's disgrace.
I grudge them, honourable death.
Put poison in their latest breath!'

Orso (his left arm extended).

'You twain are sundered: hear with awe
The judgement of the Source of Law.'

Camilla (smiling confidently).

'Not such, when I was at the Source,
It said to me;—but take thy course.'

Orso (astounded).

'Thither thy steps were bent?'

Michiella(spurning verbal controversy).

'She feigns!
A thousand swords are in my veins.
Friends! soldiers I strike them down, the pair!'

Camillo (on guard, clasping his wife).

'Tis well! I cry, to all we share.
Yea, life or death, 'tis well! 'tis well!'



Michiella(stamps her foot).

'My heart 's a vessel tossed on hell!'

Leonardo (aside).

'Not in glad nuptials ends the day.'

Orso (to Camilla).

'What is thy purpose with us?—say !'

Camilla (lowly).

'Unto my Father I have crossed
For tidings of my Mother lost.'

Orso.

'Thy mother dead!'

Camilla.

'She lives!'

Michiella.

'Thou liest!

The tablets of the tomb defiest!
The Fates denounce, the Furies chase
The wretch who lies in Reason's face.'

Camilla.

'Fly, then; for we are match'd to try
Which is the idiot, thou or I'

Michiella.

Graceless Camilla!'

Orso

'Senseless girl!
I cherished thee a precious pearl,
And almost owned thee child of mine.'

Camilla.

'Thou kept'st me like a gem, to shine,
Careless that I of blood am made;
No longer be the end delay'd.
'Tis time to prove I have a heart—
Forth from these walls of mine depart!
The ghosts within them are disturb'd



Go forth, and let thy wrath be curb'd,
For I am strong: Camillo's truth
Has arm'd the visions of our youth.
Our union by the Head Supreme
Is blest: our severance was the dream.
We who have drunk of blood and tears,
Knew nothing of a mortal's fears.
Life is as Death until the strife
In our just cause makes Death as Life.'

Orso
'Tis madness?'

Leonardo.
'Is it madness?'



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Camilla.

'Men!

'Tis Reason, but beyond your ken.
There lives a light that none can view
Whose thoughts are brutish:—seen by few,
The few have therefore light divine
Their visions are God's legions!—sign,
I give you; for we stand alone,
And you are frozen to the bone.
Your palsied hands refuse their swords.
A sharper edge is in my words,
A deadlier wound is in my cry.
Yea, tho' you slay us, do we die?
In forcing us to bear the worst,
You made of us Immortals first.
Away! and trouble not my sight.'

Chorus of Cavaliers: *Rudolfo, Romualdo, Arnaldo*, and others.

'She moves us with an angel's might.
What if his host outnumber ours!
'Tis heaven that gives victorious powers.'

[They draw their steel. *Orso*, simulating gratitude for their devotion to him, addresses them as to pacify their friendly ardour.]

Michiellato Leonardo (supplicating).

'Ever my friend I shall I appeal
In vain to see thy flashing steel?'

Leonardo (finally resolved).

'Traitor! pray, rather, it may rest,
Or its first home will be thy breast.'

Chorus of Bridal Company.

'The flowers from bright Aurora's head
We pluck'd to strew a happy bed,
Shall they be dipp'd in blood ere night?
Woe to the nuptials! woe the sight!'

Rudolfo, Romualdo, Arnaldo, and the others, advance toward *Camillo*. *Michiella* calls to them encouragingly that it were well for the deed to be done by their hands. They bid



Camillo to direct their lifted swords upon his enemies. Leonardo joins them. Count Orso, after a burst of upbraidings, accepts Camillo's offer of peace, and gives his bond to quit the castle. Michiella, gazing savagely at Camilla, entreats her for an utterance of her triumphant scorn. She assures Camilla that she knows her feelings accurately.

'Now you think that I am overwhelmed; that I shall have a restless night, and lie, after all my crying's over, with my hair spread out on my pillow, on either side my face, like green moss of a withered waterfall: you think you will bestow a little serpent of a gift from my stolen treasures to comfort me. You will comfort me with a lock of Camillo's hair, that I may have it on my breast to-night, and dream, and wail, and writhe, and curse the air I breathe, and clasp the abominable emptiness like a thousand Camillos. Speak!'

The dagger is seen gleaming up Michiella's wrist; she steps on in a bony triangle, faced for mischief: a savage Hunnish woman, with the hair of a Goddess—the figure of a cat taking to its forepaws. Close upon Camilla she towers in her whole height, and crying thrice, swift as the assassin trebles his blow, 'Speak,' to Camilla, who is fronting her mildly, she raises her arm, and the stilet flashes into Camilla's bosom.



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'Die then, and outrage me no more.'

Camilla staggers to her husband. Camillo receives her falling. Michiella, seized by Leonardo, presents a stiffened shape of vengeance with fierce white eyes and dagger aloft. There are many shouts, and there is silence.

Camilla, supported by *Camillo*.

'If this is death, it is not hard to bear.
Your handkerchief drinks up my blood so fast
It seems to love it. Threads of my own hair
Are woven in it. 'Tis the one I cast
That midnight from my window, when you stood
Alone, and heaven seemed to love you so!
I did not think to wet it with my blood
When next I tossed it to my love below.'

Camillo (cherishing her).

'Camilla, pity! say you will not die.
Your voice is like a soul lost in the sky.'

Camilla.

'I know not if my soul has flown; I know
My body is a weight I cannot raise:
My voice between them issues, and
I go Upon a journey of uncounted days.
Forgetfulness is like a closing sea;
But you are very bright above me still.
My life I give as it was given to me
I enter on a darkness wide and chill.'

Camillo.

'O noble heart! a million fires consume
The hateful hand that sends you to your doom.'

Camilla.

'There is an end to joy: there is no end
To striving; therefore ever let us strive
In purity that shall the toil befriend,
And keep our poor mortality alive.
I hang upon the boundaries like light
Along the hills when downward goes the day



I feel the silent creeping up of night.
For you, my husband, lies a flaming way.'

Camillo.

'I lose your eyes: I lose your voice: 'tis faint.
Ah, Christ! see the fallen eyelids of a saint.'

Camilla.

'Our life is but a little holding, lent
To do a mighty labour: we are one
With heaven and the stars when it is spent
To serve God's aim: else die we with the sun.'

She sinks. Camillo droops his head above her.

The house was hushed as at a veritable death-scene. It was more like a cathedral service than an operatic pageant. Agostino had done his best to put the heart of the creed of his Chief into these last verses. Rocco's music floated them in solemn measures, and Vittoria had been careful to articulate throughout the sacred monotony so that their full meaning should be taken.

In the printed book of the libretto a chorus of cavaliers, followed by one harmless verse of Camilla's adieux to them, and to her husband and life, concluded the opera.

'Let her stop at that—it's enough!—and she shall be untouched,' said General Pierson to Antonio-Pericles.

'I have information, as you know, that an extremely impudent song is coming.'

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The General saw Wilfrid hanging about the lobby, in flagrant disobedience to orders. Rebuking his nephew with a frown, he commanded the lieutenant to make his way round to the stage and see that the curtain was dropped according to the printed book.

'Off, mon Dieu! off!' Pericles speeded him; adding in English, 'Shall she taste prison-damp, zat voice is killed.'

The chorus of cavaliers was a lamentation: the keynote being despair: ordinary libretto verses.

Camilla's eyes unclose. She struggles to be lifted, and, raised on Camillo's arm, she sings as if with the last pulsation of her voice, softly resonant in its rich contralto. She pardons Michiella. She tells Count Orso that when he has extinguished his appetite for dominion, he will enjoy an unknown pleasure in the friendship of his neighbours. Repeating that her mother lives, and will some day kneel by her daughter's grave—not mournfully, but in beatitude—she utters her adieu to all.

At the moment of her doing so, Montini whispered in Vittoria's ear. She looked up and beheld the downward curl of the curtain. There was confusion at the wings: Croats were visible to the audience. Carlo Ammiani and Luciano Romara jumped on the stage; a dozen of the noble youths of Milan streamed across the boards to either wing, and caught the curtain descending. The whole house had risen insurgent with cries of 'Vittoria.' The curtain-ropes were in the hands of the Croats, but Carlo, Luciano, and their fellows held the curtain aloft at arm's length at each side of her. She was seen, and she sang, and the house listened.

The Italians present, one and all, rose up reverently and murmured the refrain. Many of the aristocracy would, doubtless, have preferred that this public declaration of the plain enigma should not have rung forth to carry them on the popular current; and some might have sympathized with the insane grin which distorted the features of Antonio-Pericles, when he beheld illusion wantonly destroyed, and the opera reduced to be a mere vehicle for a fulmination of politics. But the general enthusiasm was too tremendous to permit of individual protestations. To sit, when the nation was standing, was to be a German. Nor, indeed, was there an Italian in the house who would willingly have consented to see Vittoria silenced, now that she had chosen to defy the Tedeschi from the boards of La Scala. The fascination of her voice extended even over the German division of the audience. They, with the Italians, said: 'Hear her! hear her!' The curtain was agitated at the wings, but in the centre it was kept above Vittoria's head by the uplifted arms of the twelve young men:—

'I cannot count the years,
That you will drink, like me,
The cup of blood and tears,



Ere she to you appears:—
Italia, Italia shall be free!

So the great name was out, and its enemies had heard it.



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'You dedicate your lives
To her, and you will be
The food on which she thrives,
Till her great day arrives
Italia, Italia shall be free!' She asks you but for faith!
Your faith in her takes she
As draughts of heaven's breath,
Amid defeat and death:—
Italia, Italia shall be free!'

The prima donna was not acting exhaustion when sinking lower in Montini's arms. Her bosom rose and sank quickly, and she gave the terminating verse:—

'I enter the black boat
Upon the wide grey sea,
Where all her set suns float;
Thence hear my voice remote
Italia, Italia shall be free!'

The curtain dropped.

CHAPTER XXII

WILFRID COMES FORWARD

An order for the immediate arrest of Vittoria was brought round to the stage at the fall of the curtain by Captain Weisspriess, and delivered by him on the stage to the officer commanding, a pothered lieutenant of Croats, whose first proceeding was dictated by the military instinct to get his men in line, and who was utterly devoid of any subsequent idea. The thunder of the house on the other side of the curtain was enough to disconcert a youngster such as he was; nor have the subalterns of Croat regiments a very signal reputation for efficiency in the Austrian Service. Vittoria stood among her supporters apart; pale, and 'only very thirsty,' as she told the enthusiastic youths who pressed near her, and implored her to have no fear. Carlo was on her right hand; Luciano on her left. They kept her from going off to her room. Montini was despatched to fetch her maid Giacinta with cloak and hood for her mistress. The young lieutenant of Croats drew his sword, but hesitated. Weisspriess, Wilfrid, and Major de Pymont were at one wing, between the Italian gentlemen and the soldiery. The operatic company had fallen into the background, or stood crowding the side places of exit. Vittoria's name was being shouted with that angry, sea-like, horrid monotony of iteration which is more suggestive of menacing impatience and the positive will of the people, than varied, sharp, imperative calls. The people had got the lion in their throats. One shriek from her would bring them, like a torrent, on the boards, as the officers well knew; and every



second's delay in executing the orders of the General added to the difficulty of their position. The lieutenant of Croats strode up to Weisspriess and Wilfrid, who were discussing a plan of action vehemently; while, amid hubbub and argument, De Pymont studied Vittoria's features through his opera-glass, with an admirable simple languor.

Wilfrid turned back to him, and De Pymont, without altering the level of his glass, said, 'She's as cool as a lemon-ice. That girl will be a mother of heroes. To have volcanic fire and the mastery of her nerves at the same time, is something prodigious. She is magnificent. Take a peep at her. I suspect that the rascal at her right is seizing his occasion to plant a trifle or so in her memory—the animal! It's just the moment, and he knows it.'



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De Pymont looked at Wilfrid's face.

'Have I hit you anywhere accidentally?' he asked, for the face had grown dead-white.

'Be my friend, for heaven's sake!' was the choking answer. 'Save her! Get her away! She is an old acquaintance of mine—of mine, in England. Do; or I shall have to break my sword.'

'You know her? and you don't go over to her?' said De Pymont.

'I—yes, she knows me.'

'Then, why not present yourself?'

'Get her away. Talk Weisspriess down. He is for seizing her at all hazards. It's madness to provoke a conflict. Just listen to the house! I may be broken, but save her I will. De Pymont, on my honour, I will stand by you for ever if you will help me to get her away.'

'To suggest my need in the hour of your own is not a bad notion,' said the cool Frenchman. 'What plan have you?'

Wilfrid struck his forehead miserably.

'Stop Lieutenant Zettlich. Don't let him go up to her. Don't—'

De Pymont beheld in astonishment that a speechlessness such as affects condemned wretches in the supreme last minutes of existence had come upon the Englishman.

'I'm afraid yours is a bad case,' he said; 'and the worst of it is, it's just the case women have no compassion for. Here comes a parlementaire from the opposite camp. Let's hear him.'

It was Luciano Romara. He stood before them to request that the curtain should be raised. The officers debated together, and deemed it prudent to yield consent.

Luciano stipulated further that the soldiers were to be withdrawn.

'On one wing, or on both wings?' said Captain Weisspriess, twinkling eyes oblique.

'Out of the house,' said Luciano.

The officers laughed.

'You must confess,' said De Pymont, affably, 'that though the drum does issue command to the horse, it scarcely thinks of doing so after a rent in the skin has shown



its emptiness. Can you suppose that we are likely to run when we see you empty-handed? These things are matters of calculation.'

'It is for you to calculate correctly,' said Luciano.

As he spoke, a first surge of the exasperated house broke upon the stage and smote the curtain, which burst into white zigzags, as it were a breast stricken with panic.

Giacinta came running in to her mistress, and cloaked and hooded her hurriedly.

Enamoured; impassioned, Ammiani murmured in Vittoria's ear: 'My own soul!'

She replied: 'My lover!'

So their first love-speech was interchanged with Italian simplicity, and made a divine circle about them in the storm.

Luciano returned to his party to inform them that they held the key of the emergency.

'Stick fast,' he said. 'None of you move. Whoever takes the first step takes the false step; I see that.'

'We have no arms, Luciano.'



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'We have the people behind us.'

There was a fiercer tempest in the body of the house, and, on a sudden, silence. Men who had invaded the stage joined the Italian guard surrounding Vittoria, telling that the lights had been extinguished; and then came the muffled uproar of universal confusion. Some were for handing her down into the orchestra, and getting her out through the general vomitorium, but Carlo and Luciano held her firmly by them. The theatre was a raging darkness; and there was barely a light on the stage. 'Santa Maria!' cried Giacinta, 'how dreadful that steel does look in the dark! I wish our sweet boys would cry louder.' Her mistress, almost laughing, bade her keep close, and be still. 'Oh! this must be like being at sea,' the poor creature whined, stopping her ears and shutting her eyes. Vittoria was in a thick gathering of her defenders; she could just hear that a parley was going on between Luciano and the Austrians. Luciano made his way back to her. 'Quick!' he said; 'nothing crows a mob like darkness. One of these officers tells me he knows you, and gives his word of honour—he's an Englishman—to conduct you out: come.'

Vittoria placed her hands in Carlo's one instant. Luciano cleared a space for them. She heard a low English voice.

'You do not recognize me? There is no time to lose. You had another name once, and I have had the honour to call you by it.'

'Are you an Austrian?' she exclaimed, and Carlo felt that she was shrinking back.

'I am the Wilfrid Pole whom you knew. You are entrusted to my charge; I have sworn to conduct you to the doors in safety, whatever it may cost me.'

Vittoria looked at him mournfully. Her eyes filled with tears. 'The night is spoiled for me!' she murmured.

'Emilia!'

'That is not my name.'

'I know you by no other. Have mercy on me. I would do anything in the world to serve you.'

Major de Pymont came up to him and touched his arm. He said briefly: 'We shall have a collision, to a certainty, unless the people hear from one of her set that she is out of the house.'

Wilfrid requested her to confide her hand to him.

'My hand is engaged,' she said.



Bowing ceremoniously, Wilfrid passed on, and Vittoria, with Carlo and Luciano and her maid Giacinta, followed between files of bayonets through the dusky passages, and downstairs into the night air.

Vittoria spoke in Carlo's ear: 'I have been unkind to him. I had a great affection for him in England.'

'Thank him; thank him,' said Carlo.

She quitted her lover's side and went up to Wilfrid with a shyly extended hand. A carriage was drawn up by the kerbstone; the doors of it were open. She had barely made a word intelligible; when Major de Pymont pointed to some officers approaching. 'Get her out of the way while there's time,' he said in French to Luciano. 'This is her carriage. Swiftly, gentlemen, or she's lost.'



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Giacinta read his meaning by signs, and caught her mistress by the sleeve, using force. She and Major de Pymont placed Vittoria, bewildered, in the carriage; De Pymont shut the door, and signalled to the coachman. Vittoria thrust her head out for a last look at her lover, and beheld him with the arms of dark-clothed men upon him. La Scala was pouring forth its occupants in struggling roaring shoals from every door. Her outcry returned to her deadened in the rapid rolling of the carriage across the lighted Piazza. Giacinta had to hold her down with all her might. Great clamour was for one moment heard by them, and then a rushing voicelessness. Giacinta screamed to the coachman till she was exhausted. Vittoria sank shuddering on the lap of her maid, hiding her face that she might plunge out of recollection.

The lightnings shot across her brain, but wrote no legible thing; the scenes of the opera lost their outlines as in a white heat of fire. She tried to weep, and vainly asked her heart for tears, that this dry dreadful blind misery of mere sensation might be washed out of her, and leave her mind clear to grapple with evil; and then, as the lurid breaks come in a storm-driven night sky, she had the picture of her lover in the hands of enemies, and of Wilfrid in the white uniform; the torment of her living passion, the mockery of her passion by-gone. Recollection, when it came back, overwhelmed her; she swayed from recollection to oblivion, and was like a caged wild thing. Giacinta had to be as a mother with her. The poor trembling girl, who had begun to perceive that the carriage was bearing them to some unknown destination, tore open the bands of her corset and drew her mistress's head against the full warmth of her bosom, rocked her, and moaned over her, mixing comfort and lamentation in one offering, and so contrived to draw the tears out from her, a storm of tears; not fitfully hysterical, but tears that poured a black veil over the eyeballs, and fell steadily streaming. Once subdued by the weakness, Vittoria's nature melted; she shook piteously with weeping; she remembered Laura's words, and thought of what she had done, in terror and remorse, and tried to ask if the people would be fighting now, but could not. Laura seemed to stand before her like a Fury stretching her finger at the dear brave men whom she had hurled upon the bayonets and the guns. It was an unendurable anguish. Giacinta was compelled to let her cry, and had to reflect upon their present situation unaided. They had passed the city gates. Voices on the coachman's box had given German pass-words. She would have screamed then had not the carriage seemed to her a sanctuary from such creatures as foreign soldiers, whitecoats; so she cowered on. They were in the starry open country, on the high-road between the vine-hung mulberry trees. She held the precious head of her mistress, praying the Saints that strength would soon come to her to talk of their plight, or chatter a little comfortingly at least; and but for the singular sweetness which it shot thrilling to her woman's heart, she would have been fretted when Vittoria, after one long-drawn wavering sob, turned her lips to the bared warm breast, and put a little kiss upon it, and slept.



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CHAPTER XXIII

FIRST HOURS OF THE FLIGHT

Vittoria slept on like an outworn child, while Giacinta nodded over her, and started, and wondered what embowelled mountain they might be passing through, so cold was the air and thick the darkness; and wondered more at the old face of dawn, which appeared to know nothing of her agitation. But morning was better than night, and she ceased counting over her sins forward and backward; adding comments on them, excusing some and admitting the turpitude of others, with 'Oh! I was naughty, padre mio! I was naughty—she huddled them all into one of memory's spare sacks, and tied the neck of it, that they should keep safe for her father-confessor. At such times, after a tumult of the blood, women have tender delight in one another's beauty. Giacinta doted on the marble cheek, upturned on her lap, with the black unbound locks slipping across it; the braid of the coronal of hair loosening; the chance flitting movement of the pearly little dimple that lay at the edge of the bow of the joined lips, like the cradling hollow of a dream. At whiles it would twitch; yet the dear eyelids continued sealed.

Looking at shut eyelids when you love the eyes beneath, is more or less a teasing mystery that draws down your mouth to kiss them. Their lashes seem to answer you in some way with infantine provocation; and fine eyelashes upon a face bent sideways, suggest a kind of internal smiling. Giacinta looked till she could bear it no longer; she kissed the cheek, and crooned over it, gladdened by a sense of jealous possession when she thought of the adored thing her mistress had been overnight. One of her hugs awoke Vittoria, who said, 'Shut my window, mother,' and slept again fast. Giacinta saw that they were nearer to the mountains. Mountain-shadows were thrown out, and long lank shadows of cypresses that climbed up reddish-yellow undulations, told of the sun coming. The sun threw a blaze of light into the carriage. He shone like a good friend, and helped Giacinta think, as she had already been disposed to imagine, that the machinery by which they had been caught out of Milan was amicable magic after all, and not to be screamed at. The sound medicine of sleep and sunlight was restoring livelier colour to her mistress. Giacinta hushed her now, but Vittoria's eyes opened, and settled on her, full of repose.

'What are you thinking about?' she asked.

'Signorina, my own, I was thinking whether those people I see on the hill-sides are as fond of coffee as I am.'



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Vittoria sat up and tumbled questions out headlong, pressing her eyes and gathering her senses; she shook with a few convulsions, but shed no tears. It was rather the discomfort of their position than any vestige of alarm which prompted Giacinta to project her head and interrogate the coachman and chasseur. She drew back, saying, 'Holy Virgin! they are Germans. We are to stop in half-an-hour.' With that she put her hands to use in arranging and smoothing Vittoria's hair and dress—the dress of Camilla—of which triumphant heroine Vittoria felt herself an odd little ghost now. She changed her seat that she might look back on Milan. A letter was spied fastened with a pin to one of the cushions. She opened it, and read in pencil writing:

'Go quietly. You have done all that you could do for good or for ill. The carriage will take you to a safe place, where you will soon see your friends and hear the news. Wait till you reach Meran. You will see a friend from England. Avoid the lion's jaw a second time. Here you compromise everybody. Submit, or your friends will take you for a mad girl. Be satisfied. It is an Austrian who rescues you. Think yourself no longer appointed to put match to powder. Drown yourself if a second frenzy comes. I feel I could still love your body if the obstinate soul were out of it. You know who it is that writes. I might sign "Michiella" to this: I have a sympathy with her anger at the provoking Camilla. Addio! From La Scala.'

The lines read as if Laura were uttering them. Wrapping her cloak across the silken opera garb, Vittoria leaned back passively until the carriage stopped at a village inn, where Giacinta made speedy arrangements to satisfy as far as possible her mistress's queer predilection for bathing her whole person daily in cold water. The household service of the inn recovered from the effort to assist her sufficiently to produce hot coffee and sweet bread, and new green-streaked stracchino, the cheese of the district, which was the morning meal of the fugitives. Giacinta, who had never been so thirsty in her life, became intemperately refreshed, and was seized by the fatal desire to do something: to do what she could not tell; but chancing to see that her mistress had silken slippers on her feet, she protested loudly that stouter foot-gear should be obtained for her, and ran out to circulate inquiries concerning a shoemaker who might have a pair of country overshoes for sale. She returned to say that the coachman and his comrade, the German chasseur, were drinking and watering their horses, and were not going to start until after a rest of two hours, and that she proposed to walk to a small Bergamasc town within a couple of miles of the village, where the shoes could be obtained, and perhaps a stuff to replace the silken dress. Receiving consent, Giacinta whispered, 'A man outside wishes to speak to you, signorina. Don't be frightened. He pounced on me at the end of the village, and had as little breath to speak as a boy in love. He was behind us all last night on the carriage. He mentioned you by name. He is quite commonly dressed, but he's a gallant gentleman, and exactly like our Signor Carlo. My dearest lady, he'll be company for you while I am absent. May I beckon him to come into the room?'



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Vittoria supposed at once that this was a smoothing of the way for the entrance of her lover and her joy. She stood up, letting all her strength go that he might the more justly take her and cherish her. But it was not Carlo who entered. So dead fell her broken hope that her face was repellent with the effort she made to support herself. He said, 'I address the Signorina Vittoria. I am a relative of Countess Ammiani. My name is Angelo Guidascari. Last night I was evading the sbirri in this disguise by the private door of La Scala, from which I expected Carlo to come forth. I saw him seized in mistake for me. I jumped up on the empty box-seat behind your carriage. Before we entered the village I let myself down. If I am seen and recognized, I am lost, and great evil will befall Countess Ammiani and her son; but if they are unable to confront Carlo and me, my escape ensures his safety!'

'What can I do?' said Vittoria.

He replied, 'Shall I answer you by telling you what I have done?'

'You need not, signore!

'Enough that I want to keep a sword fresh for my country. I am at your mercy, signorina; and I am without anxiety. I heard the chasseur saying at the door of La Scala that he had the night-pass for the city gates and orders for the Tyrol. Once in Tyrol I leap into Switzerland. I should have remained in Milan, but nothing will be done there yet, and quiet cities are not homes for me.'

Vittoria began to admit the existence of his likeness to her lover, though it seemed to her a guilty weakness that she should see it.

'Will nothing be done in Milan?' was her first eager question.

'Nothing, signorina, or I should be there, and safe!'

'What, signore, do you require me to help you in?'

'Say that I am your servant.'

'And take you with me?'

'Such is my petition.'

'Is the case very urgent?'

'Hardly more, as regards myself, than a sword lost to Italy if I am discovered. But, signorina, from what Countess Ammiani has told me, I believe that you will some day be my relative likewise. Therefore I appeal not only to a charitable lady, but to one of my own family.'



Vittoria reddened. 'All that I can do I will do.'

Angelo had to assure her that Carlo's release was certain the moment his identity was established. She breathed gladly, saying, 'I wonder at it all very much. I do not know where they are carrying me, but I think I am in friendly hands. I owe you a duty. You will permit me to call you Beppo till our journey ends.'

They were attracted to the windows by a noise of a horseman drawing rein under it, whose imperious shout for the innkeeper betrayed the soldier's habit of exacting prompt obedience from civilians, though there was no military character in his attire. The innkeeper and his wife came out to the summons, and then both made way for the chasseur in attendance on Vittoria. With this man the cavalier conversed.



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'Have you had food?' said Vittoria. 'I have some money that will serve for both of us three days. Go, and eat and drink. Pay for us both.'

She gave him her purse. He received it with a grave servitorial bow, and retired.

Soon after the chasseur brought up a message. Herr Johannes requested that he might have the honour of presenting his homage to her: it was imperative that he should see her. She nodded. Her first glance at Herr Johannes assured her of his being one of the officers whom she had seen on the stage last night, and she prepared to act her part. Herr Johannes desired her to recall to mind his introduction to her by the Signor Antonio-Pericles at the house of the maestro Rocco Ricci. 'It is true; pardon me,' said Vittoria.

He informed her that she had surpassed herself at the opera; so much so that he and many other Germans had been completely conquered by her. Hearing, he said, that she was to be pursued, he took horse and galloped all night on the road toward Schloss Sonnenberg, whither, as it had been whispered to him, she was flying, in order to counsel her to lie 'perdu' for a short space, and subsequently to conduct her to the schloss of the amiable duchess. Vittoria thanked him, but stated humbly that she preferred to travel alone. He declared that it was impossible: that she was precious to the world of Art, and must on no account be allowed to run into peril. Vittoria tried to assert her will; she found it unstrung. She thought besides that this disguised officer, with the ill-looking eyes running into one, might easily, since he had heard her, be a devotee of her voice; and it flattered her yet more to imagine him as a capture from the enemy—a vanquished subservient Austrian. She had seen him come on horseback; he had evidently followed her; and he knew what she now understood must be her destination.

Moreover, Laura had underlined 'it is an Austrian who rescues you.' This man perchance was the Austrian. His precise manner of speech demanded an extreme repugnance, if it was to be resisted; Vittoria's reliance upon her own natural fortitude was much too secure for her to encourage the physical revulsions which certain hard faces of men create in the hearts of young women.

'Was all quiet in Milan?' she asked.

'Quiet as a pillow,' he said.

'And will continue to be?'

'Not a doubt of it.'

'Why is there not a doubt of it, signore?'



'You beat us Germans on one field. On the other you have no chance. But you must lose no time. The Croats are on your track. I have ordered out the carriage.'

The mention of the Croats struck her fugitive senses with a panic.

'I must wait for my maid,' she said, attempting to deliberate.

'Ha! you have a maid: of course you have! Where is your maid?'

'She ought to have returned by this time. If not, she is on the road.'



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'On the road? Good; we will pick up the maid on the road. We have not a minute to spare. Lady, I am your obsequious servant. Hasten out, I beg of you. I was taught at my school that minutes are not to be wasted. Those Croats have been drinking and what not on the way, or they would have been here before this. You can't rely on Italian innkeepers to conceal you.'

'Signore, are you a man of honour?'

'Illustrious lady, I am.'

She listened simply to the response without giving heed to the prodigality of gesture. The necessity for flight now that Milan was announced as lying quiet, had become her sole thought. Angelo was standing by the carriage.

'What man is this?' said Herr Johannes, frowning.

'He is my servant,' said Vittoria.

'My dear good lady, you told me your servant was a maid. This will never do. We can't have him.'

'Excuse me, signore, I never travel without him.'

'Travel! This is not a case of travelling, but running; and when you run, if you are in earnest about it, you must fling away your baggage and arms.'

Herr Johannes tossed out his moustache to right and left, and stamped his foot. He insisted that the man should be left behind.

'Off, sir! back to Milan, or elsewhere,' he cried.

'Beppo, mount on the box,' said Vittoria.

Her command was instantly obeyed. Herr Johannes looked her in the face. 'You are very decided, my dear lady.' He seemed to have lost his own decision, but handing Vittoria in, he drew a long cigar from his breastpocket, lit it, and mounted beside the coachman. The chasseur had disappeared.

Vittoria entreated that a general look-out should be kept for Giacinta. The road was straight up an ascent, and she had no fear that her maid would not be seen. Presently there was a view of the violet domes of a city. 'Is it Bergamo?—is it Brescia?' she longed to ask, thinking of her Bergamasc and Brescian friends, and of those two places famous for the bravery of their sons: one being especially dear to her, as the birthplace of a genius of melody, whose blood was in her veins. 'Did he look on these mulberry trees?—did he look on these green-grassed valleys?—did he hear these falling waters?'



she asked herself, and closed her spirit with reverential thoughts of him and with his music. She saw sadly that they were turning from the city. A little ball of paper was shot into her lap. She opened it and read: 'An officer of the cavalry.—Beppo.' She put her hand out of the window to signify that she was awake to the situation. Her anxiety, however, began to fret. No sight of Giacinta was to be had in any direction. Her mistress commenced chiding the absent garrulous creature, and did so until she pitied her, when she accused herself of cowardice, for she was incapable of calling out to the coachman to stop. The rapid motion subdued

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such energy as remained to her, and she willingly allowed her hurried feelings to rest on the faces of rocks impending over long ravines, and of perched old castles and white villas and sub-Alpine herds. She burst from the fascination as from a dream, but only to fall into it again, reproaching her weakness, and saying, 'What a thing am I!' When she did make her voice heard by Herr Johannes and the coachman, she was nervous and ashamed, and met the equivocating pacification of the reply with an assent half-way, though she was far from comprehending the consolation she supposed that it was meant to convey. She put out her hand to communicate with Beppo. Another ball of pencilled writing answered to it. She read: 'Keep watch on this Austrian. Your maid is two hours in the rear. Refuse to be separated from me. My life is at your service. — Beppo.'

Vittoria made her final effort to get a resolve of some sort; ending it with a compassionate exclamation over poor Giacinta. The girl could soon find her way back to Milan. On the other hand, the farther from Milan, the less the danger to Carlo's relative, in whom she now perceived a stronger likeness to her lover. She sank back in the carriage and closed her eyes. Though she smiled at the vanity of forcing sleep in this way, sleep came. Her healthy frame seized its natural medicine to rebuild her after the fever of recent days.

She slept till the rocks were purple, and rose-purple mists were in the valleys. The stopping of the carriage aroused her. They were at the threshold of a large wayside hostelry, fronting a slope of forest and a plunging brook. Whitecoats in all attitudes leaned about the door; she beheld the inner court full of them. Herr Johannes was ready to hand her to the ground. He said: 'You have nothing to fear. These fellows are on the march to Cremona. Perhaps it will be better if you are served up in your chamber. You will be called early in the morning.'

She thanked him, and felt grateful. 'Beppo, look to yourself,' she said, and ran to her retirement.

'I fancy that 's about all that you are fit for,' Herr Johannes remarked, with his eyes on the impersonator of Beppo, who bore the scrutiny carelessly, and after seeing that Vittoria had left nothing on the carriage-seats, directed his steps to the kitchen, as became his functions. Herr Johannes beckoned to a Tyrolese maid-servant, of whom Beppo had asked his way. She gave her name as Katchen.

'Katchen, Katchen, my sweet chuck,' said Herr Johannes, 'here are ten florins for you, in silver, if you will get me the handkerchief of that man: you have just stretched your finger out for him.'



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According to the common Austrian reckoning of them, Herr Johannes had adopted the right method for ensuring the devotion of the maidens of Tyrol. She responded with an amazed gulp of her mouth and a grimace of acquiescence. Ten florins in silver shortened the migratory term of the mountain girl by full three months. Herr Johannes asked her the hour when the officers in command had supper, and deferred his own meal till that time. Katchen set about earning her money. With any common Beppo it would have been easy enough—simple barter for a harmless kiss. But this Beppo appeared inaccessible; he was so courtly and so reserved; nor is a maiden of Tyrol a particularly skilled seductress. The supper of the officers was smoking on the table when Herr Johannes presented himself among them, and very soon the inn was shaken with an uproar of greeting. Katchen found Beppo listening at the door of the salle. She clapped her hands upon him to drag him away.

'What right have you to be leaning your head there?' she said, and threatened to make his proceedings known. Beppo had no jewel to give, little money to spare. He had just heard Herr Johannes welcomed among the officers by a name that half paralyzed him. 'You shall have anything you ask of me if you will find me out in a couple of hours,' he said. Katchen nodded truce for that period, and saw her home in the Oberinntal still nearer—twelve mountain goats and a cow her undisputed property. She found him out, though he had strayed through the court of the inn, and down a hanging garden to the borders of a torrent that drenched the air and sounded awfully in the dark ravine below. He embraced her very mildly. 'One scream and you go,' he said; she felt the saving hold of her feet plucked from her, with all the sinking horror, and bit her under lip, as if keeping in the scream with bare stitches. When he released her she was perfectly mastered. 'You do play tricks,' she said, and quaked.

'I play no tricks. Tell me at what hour these soldiers march.'

'At two in the morning.'

'Don't be afraid, silly child: you're safe if you obey me. At what time has our carriage been ordered?'

'At four.'

'Now swear to do this:—rouse my mistress at a quarter past two: bring her down to me.'

'Yes, yes,' said Kitchen, eagerly: 'give me your handkerchief, and she will follow me. I do swear; that I do; by big St. Christopher! who's painted on the walls of our house at home.'



Beppo handed her sweet silver, which played a lively tune for her temporarily—vanished cow and goats. Peering at her features in the starlight, he let her take the handkerchief from his pocket.

‘Oh! what have you got in there?’ she said.

He laid his finger across her mouth, bidding her return to the house.

‘Dear heaven!’ Katchen went in murmuring; ‘would I have gone out to that soft-looking young man if I had known he was a devil.’



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Angelo Guidascarpì was aware that an officer without responsibility never sleeps faster than when his brothers-in-arms have to be obedient to the reveille. At two in the morning the bugle rang out: many lighted cigars were flashing among the dark passages of the inn; the whitecoats were disposed in marching order; hot coffee was hastily swallowed; the last stragglers from the stables, the outhouses, the court, and the straw beds under roofs of rock, had gathered to the main body. The march set forward. A pair of officers sent a shout up to the drowsy windows, 'Good luck to you, Weisspriess!' Angelo descended from the concealment of the opposite trees, where he had stationed himself to watch the departure. The inn was like a sleeper who has turned over. He made Katchen bring him bread and slices of meat and a flask of wine, which things found a place in his pockets: and paying for his mistress and himself, he awaited Vittoria's foot on the stairs. When Vittoria came she asked no questions, but said to Katchen, 'You may kiss me'; and Kitchen began crying; she believed that they were lovers daring everything for love.

'You have a clear start of an hour and a half. Leave the high-road then, and turn left through the forest and ask for Bormio. If you reach Tyrol, and come to Silz, tell people that you know Katchen Giesslinger, and they will be kind to you.'

So saying, she let them out into the black-eyed starlight.

CHAPTER XXIV

ADVENTURES OF VITTORIA AND ANGELO

Nothing was distinguishable for the flying couple save the high-road winding under rock and forest, and here and there a coursing water in the depths of the ravines, that showed like a vein in black marble. They walked swiftly, keeping brisk ears for sound of hoof or foot behind them. Angelo promised her that she should rest after the morning light had come; but she assured him that she could bear fatigue, and her firm cheerfulness lent his heart vigour. At times they were hooded with the darkness, which came on them as if, as benighted children fancy, their faces were about to meet the shaggy breast of the forest. Rising up to lighter air, they had sight of distant twinklings: it might be city, or autumn weed, or fires of the woodmen, or beacon fires: they glimmered like eyelets to the mystery of the vast unseen land. Innumerable brooks went talking to the night: torrents in seasons of rain, childish voices now, with endless involutions of a song of three notes and a sort of unnoted clanging chorus, as if a little one sang and would sing on through the thumping of a tambourine and bells. Vittoria had these fancies: Angelo had none. He walked like a hunted man whose life is at stake.

'If we reach a village soon we may get some conveyance,' he said.

'I would rather walk than drive,' said Vittoria; 'it keeps me from thinking!



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'There is the dawn, signorina!

Vittoria frightened him by taking a seat upon a bench of rock; while it was still dark about them, she drew off Camilla's silken shoes and stockings, and stood on bare feet.

'You fancied I was tired,' she said. 'No, I am thrifty; and I want to save as much of my finery as I can. I can go very well on naked feet. These shoes are no protection; they would be worn out in half-a-day, and spoilt for decent wearing in another hour.'

The sight of fair feet upon hard earth troubled Angelo; he excused himself for calling her out to endure hardship; but she said, 'I trust you entirely.' She looked up at the first thin wave of colour while walking.

'You do not know me,' said he.

'You are the Countess Ammiani's nephew.'

'I have, as I had the honour to tell you yesterday, the blood of your lover in my veins.'

'Do not speak of him now, I pray,' said Vittoria; 'I want my strength!

'Signorina, the man we have left behind us is his enemy;—mine. I would rather see you dead than alive in his hands. Do you fear death?'

'Sometimes; when I am half awake,' she confessed. 'I dislike thinking of it.'

He asked her curiously: 'Have you never seen it?'

'Death?' said she, and changed a shudder to a smile; 'I died last night.'

Angelo smiled with her. 'I saw you die!

'It seems a hundred years ago.'

'Or half-a-dozen minutes. The heart counts everything'

'Was I very much liked by the people, Signor Angelo?'

'They love you.'

'I have done them no good.'

'Every possible good. And now, mine is the duty to protect you.'

'And yesterday we were strangers! Signor Angelo, you spoke of sbirri. There is no rising in Bologna. Why are they after you? You look too gentle to give them cause.'



'Do I look gentle? But what I carry is no burden. Who that saw you last night would know you for Camilla? You will hear of my deeds, and judge. We shall soon have men upon the road; you must be hidden. See, there: there are our colours in the sky. Austria cannot wipe them out. Since I was a boy I have always slept in a bed facing East, to keep that truth before my eyes. Black and yellow drop to the earth: green, white, and red mount to heaven. If more of my countrymen saw these meanings!—but they are learning to. My tutor called them Germanisms. If so, I have stolen a jewel from my enemy.'

Vittoria mentioned the Chief.

'Yes,' said Angelo; 'he has taught us to read God's handwriting. I revere him. It's odd; I always fancy I hear his voice from a dungeon, and seeing him looking at one light. He has a fault: he does not comprehend the feelings of a nobleman. Do you think he has made a convert of our Carlo in that? Never! High blood is ineradicable.'



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'I am not of high blood,' said Vittoria.

'Countess Ammiani overlooks it. And besides, low blood may be elevated without the intervention of a miracle. You have a noble heart, signorina. It may be the will of God that you should perpetuate our race. All of us save Carlo Ammiani seem to be falling.'

Vittoria bent her head, distressed by a broad beam of sunlight. The country undulating to the plain lay under them, the great Alps above, and much covert on all sides. They entered a forest pathway, following chance for safety. The dark leafage and low green roofing tasted sweeter to their senses than clear air and sky. Dark woods are home to fugitives, and here there was soft footing, a surrounding gentleness,— grass, and moss with dead leaves peacefully flat on it. The birds were not timorous, and when a lizard or a snake slipped away from her feet, it was amusing to Vittoria and did not hurt her tenderness to see that they were feared. Threading on beneath the trees, they wound by a valley's incline, where tumbled stones blocked the course of a green water, and filled the lonely place with one onward voice. When the sun stood over the valley they sat beneath a chestnut tree in a semicircle of orange rock to eat the food which Angelo had procured at the inn. He poured out wine for her in the hollow of a stone, deep as an egg-shell, whereat she sipped, smiling at simple contrivances; but no smile crossed the face of Angelo. He ate and drank to sustain his strength, as a weapon is sharpened; and having done, he gathered up what was left, and lay at her feet with his eyes fixed upon an old grey stone. She, too, sat brooding. The endless babble and noise of the water had hardened the sense of its being a life in that solitude. The floating of a hawk overhead scarce had the character of an animated thing. Angelo turned round to look at her, and looking upward as he lay, his sight was smitten by spots of blood upon one of her torn white feet, that was but half-nestled in the folds of her dress. Bending his head down, like a bird beaking at prey, he kissed the foot passionately. Vittoria's eyelids ran up; a chord seemed to snap within her ears: she stole the shamed foot into concealment, and throbbed, but not fearfully, for Angelo's forehead was on the earth. Clumps of grass, and sharp flint-dust stuck between his fists, which were thrust out stiff on either side of him. She heard him groan heavily. When he raised his face, it was white as madness. Her womanly nature did not shrink from caressing it with a touch of soothing hands.

She chanced to say, 'I am your sister.'

'No, by God! you are not my sister,' cried the young man. 'She died without a stain of blood; a lily from head to foot, and went into the vault so. Our mother will see that. She will kiss the girl in heaven and see that.' He rose, crying louder: 'Are there echoes here?' But his voice beat against the rocks undoubted.



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She saw that a frenzy had seized him. He looked with eyes drained of human objects; standing square, with stiff half-dropped arms, and an intense melody of wretchedness in his voice.

'Rinaldo, Rinaldo!' he shouted: 'Clelia!—no answer from man or ghost. She is dead. We two said to her die! and she died. Therefore she is silent, for the dead have not a word. Oh! Milan, Milan! accursed betraying city! I should have found my work in you if you had kept faith. Now here am I, talking to the strangled throat of this place, and can get no answer. Where am I? The world is hollow: the miserable shell! They lied. Battle and slaughter they promised me, and enemies like ripe maize for the reaping-hook. I would have had them in thick to my hands. I would have washed my hands at night, and eaten and drunk and slept, and sung again to work in the morning. They promised me a sword and a sea to plunge it in, and our mother Italy to bless me. I would have toiled: I would have done good in my life. I would have bathed my soul in our colours. I would have had our flag about my body for a winding-sheet, and the fighting angels of God to unroll me. Now here am I, and my own pale mother trying at every turn to get in front of me. Have her away! It's a ghost, I know. She will be touching the strength out of me. She is not the mother I love and I serve. Go: cherish your daughter, you dead woman!'

Angelo reeled. 'A spot of blood has sent me mad,' he said, and caught for a darkness to cross his sight, and fell and lay flat.

Vittoria looked around her; her courage was needed in that long silence.

She adopted his language: 'Our mother Italy is waiting for us. We must travel on, and not be weary. Angelo, my friend, lend me your help over these stones.'

He rose quietly. She laid her elbow on his hand; thus supported she left a place that seemed to shudder. All the heavy day they walked almost silently; she not daring to probe his anguish with a question; and he calm and vacant as the hour following thunder. But, of her safety by his side she had no longer a doubt. She let him gather weeds and grasses, and bind them across her feet, and perform friendly services, sure that nothing earthly could cause such a mental tempest to recur. The considerate observation which at all seasons belongs to true courage told her that it was not madness afflicting Angelo.

Near nightfall they came upon a forester's hut, where they were welcomed by an old man and a little girl, who gave them milk and black bread, and straw to rest on. Angelo slept in the outer air. When Vittoria awoke she had the fancy that she had taken one long dive downward in a well; and on touching the bottom found her head above the surface. While her surprise was wearing off, she beheld the woodman's little girl at her feet holding up one end of her cloak, and peeping underneath, overcome



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by amazement at the flashing richness of the dress of the heroine Camilla. Entering into the state of her mind spontaneously, Vittoria sought to induce the child to kiss her; but quite vainly. The child's reverence for the dress allowed her only to be within reach of the hem of it, so as to delight her curiosity. Vittoria smiled when, as she sat up, the child fell back against the wall; and as she rose to her feet, the child scampered from the room. 'My poor Camilla! you can charm somebody, yet,' she said, limping; her visage like a broken water with the pain of her feet. 'If the bell rings for Camilla now, what sort of an entry will she make?' Vittoria treated her physical weakness and ailments with this spirit of humour. 'They may say that Michiella has bewitched you, my Camilla. I think your voice would sound as if it were dragging its feet after it just as a stork flies. O my Camilla! don't I wish I could do the same, and be ungraceful and at ease! A moan is married to every note of your treble, my Camilla, like December and May. Keep me from shrieking!'

The pangs shooting from her feet were scarce bearable, but the repression of them helped her to meet Angelo with a freer mind than, after the interval of separation, she would have had. The old woodman was cooking a queer composition of flour and milk sprinkled with salt for them. Angelo cut a stout cloth to encase each of her feet, and bound them in it. He was more cheerful than she had ever seen him, and now first spoke of their destination. His design was to conduct her near to Bormio, there to engage a couple of men in her service who would accompany her to Meran, by the Val di Sole, while he crossed the Stelvio alone, and turning leftward in the Tyrolese valley, tried the passage into Switzerland.

Bormio, if, when they quitted the forest, a conveyance could be obtained, was no more than a short day's distance, according to the old woodman's directions. Vittoria induced the little girl to sit upon her knee, and sang to her, but greatly unspirited the charm of her dress. The sun was rising as they bade adieu to the hut.

About mid-day they quitted the shelter of forest trees and stood on broken ground, without a path to guide them. Vittoria did her best to laugh at her mishaps in walking, and compared herself to a Capuchin pilgrim; but she was unused to going bareheaded and shoeless, and though she held on bravely, the strong beams of the sun and the stony ways warped her strength. She had to check fancies drawn from Arabian tales, concerning the help sometimes given by genii of the air and enchanted birds, that were so incessant and vivid that she found herself sulking at the loneliness and helplessness of the visible sky, and feared that her brain was losing its hold of things. Angelo led her to a half-shaded hollow, where they finished the remainder of yesterday's meat and wine. She set her eyes upon a gold-green lizard by a stone and slept.



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'The quantity of sleep I require is unmeasured,' she said, a minute afterwards, according to her reckoning of time, and expected to see the lizard still by the stone. Angelo was near her; the sky was full of colours, and the earth of shadows.

'Another day gone!' she exclaimed in wonderment, thinking that the days of human creatures had grown to be as rapid and (save toward the one end) as meaningless as the gaspings of a fish on dry land. He told her that he had explored the country as far as he had dared to stray from her. He had seen no habitation along the heights. The vale was too distant for strangers to reach it before nightfall. 'We can make a little way on,' said Vittoria, and the trouble of walking began again. He entreated her more than once to have no fear. 'What can I fear?' she asked. His voice sank penitently: 'You can rely on me fully when there is anything to do for you.'

'I am sure of that,' she replied, knowing his allusion to be to his frenzy of yesterday. In truth, no woman could have had a gentler companion.

On the topmost ridge of the heights, looking over an interminable gulf of darkness they saw the lights of the vale. 'A bird might find his perch there, but I think there is no chance for us,' said Vittoria. 'The moment we move forward to them the lights will fly back. It is their way of behaving.'

Angelo glanced round desperately. Farther on along the ridge his eye caught sight of a low smouldering fire. When he reached it he had a great disappointment. A fire in the darkness gives hopes that men will be at hand. Here there was not any human society. The fire crouched on its ashes. It was on a little circular eminence of mossed rock; black sticks, and brushwood, and dry fern, and split logs, pitchy to the touch, lay about; in the centre of them the fire coiled sullenly among its ashes, with a long eye like a serpent's.

'Could you sleep here?' said Angelo.

'Anywhere!' Vittoria sighed with droll dolefulness.

'I can promise to keep you warm, signorina.'

'I will not ask for more till to-morrow, my friend.'

She laid herself down sideways, curling up her feet, with her cheek on the palm of her hand.

Angelo knelt and coaxed the fire, whose appetite, like that which is said to be ours, was fed by eating, for after the red jaws had taken half-a-dozen sticks, it sang out for more, and sent up flame leaping after flame and thick smoke. Vittoria watched the scene through a thin division of her eyelids; the fire, the black abyss of country, the stars, and the sentinel figure. She dozed on the edge of sleep, unable to yield herself to it wholly.



She believed that she was dreaming when by-and-by many voices filled her ears. The fire was sounding like an angry sea, and the voices were like the shore, more intelligible, but confused in shriller clamour. She was awakened by Angelo, who knelt on one knee and took her outlying



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hand; then she saw that men surrounded them, some of whom were hurling the lighted logs about, some trampling down the outer rim of flames. They looked devilish to a first awakening glance. He told her that the men were friendly; they were good Italians. This had been the beacon arranged for the night of the Fifteenth, when no run of signals was seen from Milan; and yesterday afternoon it had been in mockery partially consumed. 'We have aroused the country, signorina, and brought these poor fellows out of their beds. They supposed that Milan must be up and at work. I have explained everything to them.'

Vittoria had rather to receive their excuses than to proffer her own. They were mostly youths dressed like the better class of peasantry. They laughed at the incident, stating how glad they would have been to behold the heights all across the lakes ablaze and promising action for the morrow. One square-shouldered fellow raised her lightly from the ground. She felt herself to be a creature for whom circumstance was busily plotting, so that it was useless to exert her mind in thought. The long procession sank down the darkness, leaving the low red fire to die out behind them.

Next morning she awoke in a warm bed, possessed by odd images of flames that stood up like crowing cocks, and cowered like hens above the brood. She was in the house of one of their new friends, and she could hear Angelo talking in the adjoining room. A conveyance was ready to take her on to Bormio. A woman came to her to tell her this, appearing to have a dull desire to get her gone. She was a draggled woman, with a face of slothful anguish, like one of the inner spectres of a guilty man. She said that her husband was willing to drive the lady to Bormio for a sum that was to be paid at once into his wife's hand; and little enough it was which poor persons could ever look for from your patriots and disturbers who seduced orderly men from their labour, and made widows and ruined households. This was a new Italian language to Vittoria, and when the woman went on giving instances of households ruined by a husband's vile infatuation about his country, she did not attempt to defend the reckless lord, but dressed quickly that she might leave the house as soon as she could. Her stock of money barely satisfied the woman's demand. The woman seized it, and secreted it in her girdle. When they had passed into the sitting-room, her husband, who was sitting conversing with Angelo, stretched out his hand and knocked the girdle.

'That's our trick,' he said. 'I guessed so. Fund up, our little Maria of the dirty fingers'-ends! We accept no money from true patriots. Grub in other ground, my dear!'

The woman stretched her throat awry, and set up a howl like a dog; but her claws came out when he seized her.

'Would you disgrace me, old fowl?'

'Lorenzo, may you rot like a pumpkin!'



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The connubial reciprocities were sharp until the money lay on the table, when the woman began whining so miserably that Vittoria's sensitive nerves danced on her face, and at her authoritative interposition, Lorenzo very reluctantly permitted his wife to take what he chose to reckon a fair portion of the money, and also of his contempt. She seemed to be licking the money up, she bent over it so greedily.

'Poor wretch!' he observed; 'she was born on a hired bed.'

Vittoria felt that the recollection of this woman would haunt her. It was inconceivable to her that a handsome young man like Lorenzo should ever have wedded the unsweet creature, who was like a crawling image of decay; but he, as if to account for his taste, said that they had been of a common age once, when he married her; now she had grown old. He repeated that she 'was born on a hired bed.' They saw nothing further of her.

Vittoria's desire was to get to Meran speedily, that she might see her friends, and have tidings of her lover and the city. Those baffled beacon-flames on the heights had become an irritating indicative vision: she thirsted for the history. Lorenzo offered to conduct her over the Tonale Pass into the Val di Sole, or up the Val Furva, by the pass of the Corno dei Tre Signori, into the Val del Monte to Pejo, thence by Cles, or by Bolzano, to Meran. But she required shoeing and refitting; and for other reasons also, she determined to go on to Bormio. She supposed that Angelo had little money, and that in a place such as Bormio sounded to her ears she might possibly obtain the change for the great money-order which the triumph of her singing had won from Antonio-Pericles. In spite of Angelo's appeals to her to hurry on to the end of her journey without tempting chance by a single pause, she resolved to go to Bormio. Lorenzo privately assured her that there were bankers in Bormio. Many bankers, he said, came there from Milan, and that fact she thought sufficient for her purpose. The wanderers parted regretfully. A little chapel, on a hillock off the road, shaded by chestnuts, was pointed out to Lorenzo where to bring a letter for Angelo. Vittoria begged Angelo to wait till he heard from her; and then, with mutual wavings of hands, she was driven out of his sight.

CHAPTER XXV

ACROSS THE MOUNTAINS

After parting from Vittoria, Angelo made his way to an inn, where he ate and drank like a man of the fields, and slept with the power of one from noon till after morning. The innkeeper came up to his room, and, finding him awake, asked him if he was disposed to take a second holiday in bed. Angelo jumped up; as he did so, his stiletto slipped from under his pillow and flashed.



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'That's a pretty bit of steel,' said the innkeeper, but could not get a word out of him. It was plain to Angelo that this fellow had suspicions. Angelo had been careful to tie up his clothes in a bundle; there was nothing for the innkeeper to see, save a young man in bed, who had a terrible weapon near his hand, and a look in his eyes of wary indolence that counselled prudent dealings. He went out, and returned a second and a third time, talking more and more confusedly and fretfully; but as he was again going to leave, 'No, no,' said Angelo, determined to give him a lesson, 'I have taken a liking to your company. Here, come here; I will show you a trick. I learnt it from the Servians when I was three feet high. Look; I lie quite still, you observe. Try to get on the other side of that door and the point of this blade shall scratch you through it.'

Angelo laid the blue stilet up his wrist, and slightly curled his arm. 'Try,' he repeated, but the innkeeper had stopped short in his movement to the door. 'Well, then, stay where you are,' said Angelo, 'and look; I'll be as good as my word. There's the point I shall strike.' With that he gave the peculiar Servian jerk of the muscles, from the wrist up to the arm, and the blade quivered on the mark. The innkeeper fell back in admiring horror. 'Now fetch it to me,' said Angelo, putting both hands carelessly under his head. The innkeeper tugged at the blade. 'Illustrious signore, I am afraid of breaking it,' he almost whimpered; 'it seems alive, does it not?'

'Like a hawk on a small bird,' said Angelo; 'that's the beauty of those blades. They kill, and put you to as little pain as a shot; and it's better than a shot in your breast—there's something to show for it. Send up your wife or your daughter to take orders about my breakfast. It's the breakfast of five mountaineers; and don't "Illustrious signore" me, sir, either in my hearing or out of it. Leave the knife sticking.'

The innkeeper sidled out with a dumb salute. 'I can count on his discretion for a couple of hours,' Angelo said to himself. He knew the effect of an exhibition of physical dexterity and strength upon a coward. The landlord's daughter came and received his orders for breakfast. Angelo inquired whether they had been visited by Germans of late. The girl told him that a German chasseur with a couple of soldiers had called them up last night.

'Wouldn't it have been a pity if they had dragged me out and shot me?' said Angelo.

'But they were after a lady,' she explained; 'they have gone on to Bormio, and expect to catch her there or in the mountains.'

'Better there than in the mountains, my dear; don't you think so?'

The girl said that she would not like to meet those fellows among the mountains.

'Suppose you were among the mountains, and those fellows came up with you; wouldn't you clap your hands to see me jumping down right in front of you all?' said Angelo.



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'Yes, I should,' she admitted. 'What is one man, though!'

'Something, if he feeds like five. Quick! I must eat. Have you a lover?'

'Yes.'

'Fancy you are waiting on him.'

'He's only a middling lover, signore. He lives at Cles, over Val Pejo, in Val di Non, a long way, and courts me twice a year, when he comes over to do carpentering. He cuts very pretty Madonnas. He is a German.'

'Ha! you kneel to the Madonna, and give your lips to a German? Go.'

'But I don't like him much, signore; it's my father who wishes me to have him; he can make money.'

Angelo motioned to her to be gone, saying to himself, 'That father of hers would betray the Saints for a handful of florins.'

He dressed, and wrenched his knife from the door. Hearing the clatter of a horse at the porch, he stopped as he was descending the stairs. A German voice said, 'Sure enough, my jolly landlord, she's there, in Worms—your Bormio. Found her at the big hotel: spoke not a syllable; stole away, stole away. One chopin of wine! I'm off on four legs to the captain. Those lads who are after her by Roveredo and Trent have bad noses. "Poor nose—empty belly." Says the captain, "I stick at the point of the cross-roads." Says I, "Herr Captain, I'm back to you first of the lot." My business is to find the runaway lady-pretty Fraulein! pretty Fraulein! lai-ai! There's money on her servant, too; he's a disguised Excellency—a handsome boy; but he has cut himself loose, and he go hang. Two birds for the pride of the thing; one for satisfaction— I 'm satisfied. I've killed chamois in my time. Jacob, I am; Baumwalder, I am; Feckelwitz, likewise; and the very devil for following a track. Ach! the wine is good. You know the song?

"He who drinks wine, he may cry with a will,
Fortune is mine, may she stick to me still."

'I give it you in German—the language of song! my own, my native 'lai-ai-lai-ai-la-la-lai-ai-i-ie!

"While stars still sit
On mountain tops,
I take my gun,
Kiss little one
On mother's breast.
Ai-iu-e!



My pipe is lit,
I climb the slopes,
I meet the dawn
A little one
On mother's breast.
Ai-aie: ta-ta-tai: iu-iu-iu-e!"

'Another chopin, my jolly landlord. What's that you're mumbling? About the servant of my runaway young lady? He go hang! What——?'

Angelo struck his foot heavily on the stairs; the innkeeper coughed and ran back, bowing to his guest. The chasseur cried, 'I 'll drink farther on-wine between gaps!' A coin chinked on the steps in accompaniment to the chasseur's departing gallop. 'Beast of a Tedesco,' the landlord exclaimed as he picked up the money; 'they do the reckoning—not we. If I had served him with the worth of this, I should have had the bottle at my head. What a country ours is! We're ridden over, ridden over!' Angelo compelled the landlord to sit with him while he ate like five mountaineers. He left mere bones on the table. 'It's wonderful,' said the innkeeper; 'you can't know what fear is.'



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'I think I don't,' Angelo replied; 'you do; cowards have to serve every party in turn. Up, and follow at my heels till I dismiss you. You know the pass into the Val Pejo and the Val di Sole.' The innkeeper stood entrenched behind a sturdy negative. Angelo eased him to submission by telling him that he only wanted the way to be pointed out. 'Bring tobacco; you're going to have an idle day,' said Angelo: 'I pay you when we separate.' He was deaf to entreaties and refusals, and began to look mad about the eyes; his poor coward plied him with expostulations, offered his wife, his daughter, half the village, for the service: he had to follow, but would take no cigars. Angelo made his daughter fetch bread and cigars, and put a handful in his pocket, upon which, after two hours of inactivity at the foot of the little chapel, where Angelo waited for the coming of Vittoria's messenger, the innkeeper was glad to close his fist. About noon Lorenzo came, and at once acted a play of eyes for Angelo to perceive his distrust of the man and a multitude of bad things about him he was reluctant, notwithstanding Angelo's ready nod, to bring out a letter; and frowned again, for emphasis to the expressive comedy. The letter said:

'I have fallen upon English friends. They lend me money. Fly to Lugano by the help of these notes: I inclose them, and will not ask pardon for it. The Valtellina is dangerous; the Stelvio we know to be watched. Retrace your way, and then try the Engadine. I should stop on a breaking bridge if I thought my companion, my Carlo's cousin, was near capture. I am well taken care of: one of my dearest friends, a captain in the English army, bears me company across. I have a maid from one of the villages, a willing girl. We ride up to the mountains; to-morrow we cross the pass; there is a glacier. Val di Non sounds Italian, but I am going into the enemy's land. You see I am well guarded. My immediate anxiety concerns you; for what will our Carlo ask of me? Lose not one moment. Away, and do not detain Lorenzo. He has orders to meet us up high in the mountain this evening. He is the best of servants but I always meet the best everywhere—that is, in Italy. Leaving it, I grieve. No news from Milan, except of great confusion there. I judge by the quiet of my sleep that we have come to no harm there.

'Your faithfulest

'*Vittoria.*'

Lorenzo and the innkeeper had arrived at an altercation before Angelo finished reading. Angelo checked it, and told Lorenzo to make speed: he sent no message.

'My humanity,' Angelo then addressed his craven associate, 'counsels me that it's better to drag you some distance on than to kill you. You're a man of intelligence, and you know why I have to consider the matter. I give you guide's pay up to the glacier, and ten florins buon'mano. Would you rather earn it with the blood of a countryman? I can't let that tongue of yours be on the high-road of running Tedeschi: you know it.



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'Illustrious signore, obedience oils necessity,' quoth the innkeeper. 'If we had but a few more of my cigars!'

'Step on,' said Angelo sternly.

They walked till dark and they were in keen air. A hut full of recent grass-cuttings, on the border of a sloping wood, sheltered them. The innkeeper moaned for food at night and in the morning, and Angelo tossed him pieces of bread. Beyond the wood they came upon bare crag and commenced a sharper ascent, reached the height, and roused an eagle. The great bird went up with a sharp yelp, hanging over them with knotted claws. Its shadow stretched across sweeps of fresh snow. The innkeeper sent a mocking yelp after the eagle.

'Up here, one forgets one is a father—what's more, a husband,' he said, striking a finger on the side of his nose.

'And a cur, a traitor, carrion,' said Angelo.

'Ah, signore, one might know you were a noble. You can't understand our troubles, who carry a house on our heads, and have to fill mouths agape.'

'Speak when you have better to say,' Angelo replied.

'Padrone, one would really like to have your good opinion; and I'm lean as a wolf for a morsel of flesh. I could part with my buon'mano for a sight of red meat—oh! red meat dripping.'

'If,' cried Angelo, bringing his eyebrows down black on the man, 'if I knew that you had ever in your life betrayed one of us look below; there you should lie to be pecked and gnawed at.'

'Ah, Jacopo Cruchi, what an end for you when you are full of good meanings!' the innkeeper moaned. 'I see your ribs, my poor soul!'

Angelo quitted him. The tremendous excitement of the Alpine solitudes was like a stringent wine to his surcharged spirit. He was one to whom life and death had become as the yes and no of ordinary men: not more than a turning to the right or to the left. It surprised him that this fellow, knowing his own cowardice and his conscience, should consent to live, and care to eat to live.

When he returned to his companion, he found the fellow drinking from the flask of an Austrian soldier. Another whitecoat was lying near. They pressed Angelo to drink, and began to play lubberly pranks. One clapped hands, while another rammed the flask at the reluctant mouth, till Angelo tripped him and made him a subject for derision; whereupon they were all good friends. Musket on shoulder, the soldiers descended,



blowing at their finger-nails and puffing at their tobacco—lauter kaiserlicher (rank Imperial), as with a sad enforcement of resignation they had, while lighting, characterized the universally detested Government issue of the leaf.

‘They are after her,’ said Jacopo, and he shot out his thumb and twisted an eyelid. His looks became insolent, and he added: ‘I let them go on; but now, for my part, I must tell you, my worthy gentleman, I’ve had enough of it. You go your way, I go mine. Pay me, and we part. With the utmost reverence, I quit you. Climbing mountains at my time of life is out of all reason. If you want companions, I’ll signal to that pair of Tedeschi; they’re within hail. Would you like it? Say the word, if you would—hey!’



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Angelo smiled at the visible effect of the liquor.

'Barto Rizzo would be the man to take you in hand,' he remarked.

The innkeeper flung his head back to ejaculate, and murmured, 'Barto Rizzo! defend me from him! Why, he levies contribution upon us in the Valtellina for the good of Milan; and if we don't pay, we're all of us down in a black book. Disobey, and it's worse than swearing you won't pay taxes to the legitimate—perdition to it!—Government. Do you know Barto Rizzo, padrone? You don't know him, I hope? I'm sure you wouldn't know such a fellow.'

'I am his favourite pupil,' said Angelo.

'I'd have sworn it,' groaned the innkeeper, and cursed the day and hour when Angelo crossed his threshold. That done, he begged permission to be allowed to return, crying with tears of entreaty for mercy: 'Barto Rizzo's pupils are always out upon bloody business!' Angelo told him that he had now an opportunity of earning the approval of Barto Rizzo, and then said, 'On,' and they went in the track of the two whitecoats; the innkeeper murmuring all the while that he wanted the approval of Barto Rizzo as little as his enmity; he wanted neither frost nor fire. The glacier being traversed, they skirted a young stream, and arrived at an inn, where they found the soldiers regaling. Jacopo was informed by them that the lady whom they were pursuing had not passed. They pushed their wine for Angelo to drink: he declined, saying that he had sworn not to drink before he had shot the chamois with the white cross on his back.

'Come: we're two to one,' they said, 'and drink you shall this time!'

'Two to two,' returned Angelo: 'here is my Jacopo, and if he doesn't count for one, I won't call him father-in-law, and the fellow living at Cles may have his daughter without fighting for her.'

'Right so,' said one of the soldiers, 'and you don't speak bad German already.'

'Haven't I served in the ranks?' said Angelo, giving a bugle-call of the reveille of the cavalry.

He got on with them so well that they related the object of their expedition, which was, to catch a runaway young rebel lady and hold her fast down at Cles for the great captain—'unser tuchtiger Hauptmann.'

'Hadn't she a servant, a sort of rascal?' Angelo inquired.

'Right so; she had: but the doe's the buck in this chase.'



Angelo tossed them cigars. The valley was like a tumbled mountain, thick with crags and eminences, through which the river worked strenuously, sinuous in foam, hurrying at the turns. Angelo watched all the ways from a distant height till set of sun. He saw another couple of soldiers meet those two at the inn, and then one pair went up toward the vale-head. It seemed as if Vittoria had disconcerted them by having chosen another route.



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'Padrone,' said Jacopo to him abruptly, when they descended to find a resting-place, 'you are, I speak humbly, so like the devil that I must enter into a stipulation with you, before I continue in your company, and take the worst at once. This is going to be the second night of my sleeping away from my wife: I merely mention it. I pinch her, and she beats me, and we are equal. But if you think of making me fight, I tell you I won't. If there was a furnace behind me, I should fall into it rather than run against a bayonet. I've heard say that the nerves are in the front part of us, and that's where I feel the shock. Now we're on a plain footing. Say that I'm not to fight. I'll be your servant till you release me, but say I 'm not to fight; padrone, say that.'

'I can't say that: I'll say I won't make you fight,' Angelo pacified him by replying. From this moment Jacopo followed him less like a graceless dog pulled by his chain. In fact, with the sense of prospective security, he tasted a luxurious amazement in being moved about by a superior will, wafted from his inn, and paid for witnessing strange incidents. Angelo took care that he was fed well at the place where they slept, but himself ate nothing. Early after dawn they mounted the heights above the road. It was about noon that Angelo discerned a party coming from the pass on foot, consisting of two women and three men. They rested an hour at the village where he had slept overnight; the muskets were a quarter of a mile to the rear of them. When they started afresh, one of the muskets was discharged, and while the echoes were rolling away, a reply to it sounded in the front. Angelo, from his post of observation, could see that Vittoria and her party were marching between two guards, and that she herself must have perceived both the front and rearward couple. Yet she and her party held on their course at an even pace. For a time he kept them clearly in view; but it was tough work along the slopes of crag: presently Jacopo slipped and went down. 'Ah, padrone,' he said: 'I'm done for; leave me.'

'Not though I should have to haul you on my back,' replied Angelo. 'If I do leave you, I must cut out your tongue.'

'Rather than that, I'd go on a sprained ankle,' said Jacopo, and he strove manfully to conquer pain; limping and exclaiming, 'Oh, my little village! Oh, my little inn! When can a man say that he has finished running about the world! The moment he sits, in comes the devil.'

Angelo was obliged to lead him down to the open way, upon which they made slow progress.

'The noble gentleman might let me return—he might trust me now,' Jacopo whimpered.

'The devil trusts nobody,' said Angelo.

'Ah, padrone! there's a crucifix. Let me kneel by that.'



Angelo indulged him. Jacopo knelt by the wayside and prayed for an easy ankle and a snoring pillow and no wakeners. After this he was refreshed. The sun sank; the darkness spread around; the air grew icy. 'Does the Blessed Virgin ever consider what patriots have to endure?' Jacopo muttered to himself, and aroused a rare laugh from Angelo, who seized him under the arm, half-lifting him on. At the inn where they rested, he bathed and bandaged the foot.



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'I can't help feeling a kindness to you for it,' said Jacopo.

'I can't afford to leave you behind,' Angelo accounted for his attention.

'Padrone, we've been understanding one another all along by our thumbs. It's that old inn of mine—the taxes! we have to sell our souls to pay the taxes. There's the tongue of the thing. I wouldn't betray you; I wouldn't.'

'I'll try you,' said Angelo, and put him to proof next day, when the soldiers stopped them as they were driving in a cart, and Jacopo swore to them that Angelo was his intended son-in-law.

There was evidently an unusual activity among the gendarmerie of the lower valley, the Val di Non; for Jacopo had to repeat his fable more than once, and Angelo thought it prudent not to make inquiries about travellers. In this valley they were again in summer heat. Summer splendours robed the broken ground. The Val di Non lies toward the sun, banked by the Val di Sole, like the southern lizard under a stone. Chestnut forest and shoulder over shoulder of vineyard, and meadows of marvellous emerald, with here and there central partly-wooded crags, peaked with castle-ruins, and ancestral castles that are still warm homes, and villages dropped among them, and a river bounding and rushing eagerly through the rich enclosure, form the scene, beneath that Italian sun which turns everything to gold. There is a fair breadth to the vale: it enjoys a great oval of sky: the falls of shade are dispersed, dot the hollow range, and are not at noontide a broad curtain passing over from right to left. The sun reigns and also governs in the Val di Non.

'The grape has his full benefit here, padrone,' said Jacopo.

But the place was too populous, and too much subjected to the general eye, to please Angelo. At Cles they were compelled to bear an inspection, and a little comedy occurred. Jacopo, after exhibiting Angelo as his son-in-law, seeing doubts on the soldiers' faces, mentioned the name of the German suitor for his daughter's hand—the carpenter, Johann Spellmann, to whose workshop he requested to be taken. Johann, being one of the odd Germans in the valley, was well known: he was carving wood astride a stool, and stopped his whistling to listen to the soldiers, who took the first word out of Jacopo's mouth, and were convinced, by Johann's droop of the chin, that the tale had some truth in it; and more when Johann yelled at the Valtelline innkeeper to know why, then, he had come to him, if he was prepared to play him false. One of the soldiers said bluntly, that as Angelo's appearance answered to the portrait of a man for whom they were on the lookout, they would, if their countryman liked, take him and give him a dose of marching and imprisonment.



'Ach! that won't make my little Rosetta love me better,' cried Johann, who commenced taking up a string of reproaches against women, and pitched his carving-blade and tools abroad in the wood-dust.



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'Well, now, it 's queer you don't want to fight this lad,' said Jacopo; 'he's come to square it with you that way, if you think best.'

Johann spared a remark between his vehement imprecations against the sex to say that he was ready to fight; but his idea of vengeance was directed upon the abstract conception of a faithless womankind. Angelo, by reason of his detestation of Germans, temporarily threw himself into the part he was playing to the extent of despising him. Johann admitted to Jacopo that intervals of six months' duration in a courtship were wide jumps for Love to take.

'Yes; amor! amor!' he exclaimed with extreme dejection; 'I could wait. Well! since you've brought the young man, we'll have it out.'

He stepped before Angelo with bare fists. Jacopo had to interpose. The soldiers backed Johann, who now said to Angelo, 'Since you've come for it, we'll have it out.'

Jacopo had great difficulty in bringing him to see that it was a matter to talk over. Johann swore he would not talk about it, and was ready to fight a dozen Italians, man up man down.

'Bare-fisted?' screamed Jacopo.

'Hey! the old way! Give him knuckles, and break his back, my boy!' cried the soldiers; 'none of their steel this side of the mountain.'

Johann waited for Angelo to lift his hands; and to instigate his reluctant adversary, thumped his chest; but Angelo did not move. The soldiers roared.

'If she has you, she shall have a dolly,' said Johann, now heated with the prospect of presenting that sort of husband to his little Rosetta. At this juncture Jacopo threw himself between them.

'It shall be a real fight,' he said; 'my daughter can't make up her mind, and she shall have the best man. Leave me to arrange it all fairly; and you come here in a couple of hours, my children,' he addressed the soldiers, who unwillingly quitted the scene where there was a certainty of fun, on the assurance of there being a livelier scene to come.

When they had turned their heels on the shop, Jacopo made a face at Johann; Johann swung round upon Angelo, and met a smile. Then followed explanations.

'What's that you say? She's true—she's true?' exclaimed the astounded lover.

'True enough, but a girl at an inn wants hotter courting,' said Jacopo. 'His Excellency here is after his own sweetheart.'



Johann huzzaed, hugged at Angelo's hands, and gave a lusty filial tap to Jacopo on the shoulder. Bread and grapes and Tyrolese wine were placed for them, and Johann's mother soon produced a salad, eggs, and fowl; and then and there declared her willingness to receive Rosetta into the household, 'if she would swear at the outset never to have 'heimweh' (home-longing); as people—men and women, both—always did when they took a new home across a mountain.'

'She won't—will she?' Johann inquired with a dubious sparkle.



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'Not she,' said Jacopo.

After the meal he drew Johann aside. They returned to Angelo, and Johann beckoned him to leave the house by a back way, leading up a slope of garden into high vine-poles. He said that he had seen a party pass out of Cles from the inn early, in a light car, on for Meran. The gendarmerie were busy on the road: a mounted officer had dashed up to the inn an hour later, and had followed them: it was the talk of the village.

'Padrone, you dismiss me now,' said Jacopo.

'I pay you, but don't dismiss you,' said Angelo, and handed him a bank-note.

'I stick to you, padrone, till you do dismiss me,' Jacopo sighed.

Johann offered to conduct them as far as the Monte Pallade pass, and they started, avoiding the high road, which was enviably broad and solid. Within view of a village under climbing woods, they discerned an open car, flanked by bayonets, returning to Cles. Angelo rushed ahead of them down the declivity, and stood full in the road to meet the procession. A girl sat in the car, who hung her head, weeping; Lorenzo was beside her; an Englishman on foot gave employment to a pair of soldiers to get him along. As they came near at marching pace, Lorenzo yawned and raised his hand to his cheek, keeping the thumb pointed behind him. Including the girl, there were four prisoners: Vittoria was absent. The Englishman, as he was being propelled forward, addressed Angelo in French, asking him whether he could bear to see an unoffending foreigner treated with wanton violation of law. The soldiers bellowed at their captive, and Angelo sent a stupid shrug after him. They rounded a bend of the road. Angelo tightened the buckle at his waist.

'Now I trust you,' he said to Jacopo. 'Follow the length of five miles over the pass: if you don't see me then, you have your liberty, tongue and all.'

With that he doubled his arms and set forth at a steady run, leaving his companions to speculate on his powers of endurance. They did so complacently enough, until Jacopo backed him for a distance and Johann betted against him, when behold them at intervals taking a sharp trot to keep him in view.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

A common age once, when he married her; now she had grown old
Critical in their first glance at a prima donna
Forgetfulness is like a closing sea
He is inexorable, being the guilty one of the two
Her singing struck a note of grateful remembered delight
It rarely astonishes our ears. It illumines our souls



Madness that sane men enamoured can be struck by
Obedience oils necessity
Our life is but a little holding, lent To do a mighty labour
Simple obstinacy of will sustained her
The devil trusts nobody
Was born on a hired bed