

BJØRNSTJERNE BJØRNSON

# CAPTAIN MANSANA & MOTHER'S HANDS

# **Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson Captain Mansana & Mother's Hands**

*[http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio\\_book/?art=36363798](http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=36363798)*

*Captain Mansana & Mother's Hands:*

# Содержание

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE	4
CAPTAIN MANSANA	6
AUTHOR'S PREFACE	6
CHAPTER I	8
CHAPTER II	22
CHAPTER III	29
CHAPTER IV	43
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	45

# Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson Captain Mansana & Mother's Hands

## BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

*[The two somewhat anomalous stories which are here published together have little in common except the difficulty of finding a place for them in the category of Bjørnson's works.]*

*"Captain Mansana," under the title of "Kaptejn Mansana, en Fortælling fra Italien," was originally printed, in 1875, in the Norwegian periodical "Fra Fjeld og Dal." It did not appear in book form until August 1879, when it was published, in a paper cover with a startling illustration, in Copenhagen. "Captain Mansana" was written at Aulestad. It was almost immediately published in a Swedish, and later in a German, translation.*

*A Norwegian magazine, entitled "Nyt Tidsskrift," was started in Christiania in 1882, and continued to represent extreme liberal views in Norway until 1887, when it ceased to appear. In 1892 an attempt was made to resuscitate this periodical, under the general editorship of J. E. Sars. The first number of this new series appeared in November of that year, the opening article being the story of "Mors hænder" ("Mother's Hands"). It was reprinted in*

*August 1894, in the collection called, "Nye Fortællinger." It is now for the first time translated into English.*

*E. G.]*

# CAPTAIN MANSANA

## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

The following note was prefixed by the author to the first edition of "Captain Mansana: an Italian Tale":

This story was originally published, several years ago, in a Danish Christmas Annual, "From Hill and Dale," which was edited by Mr. H. J. Greensteen. "Captain Mansana" has already run through two editions in German, and many friends have urged the author to republish it, in a separate form, and in his own tongue.

The following remarks seem necessary in consequence of some criticisms which have appeared in the Danish and Swedish press. The narrative, in all essential particulars, is based on facts, and those of its incidents which appear most extraordinary, are absolutely historical, the minutest details being in some cases reproduced. Mansana himself is drawn from life. The achievements credited to him in these pages, are those he actually performed; and his singular experiences are here correctly described, so far, at least, as they bear upon his psychological development.

The causes which induced me to make him the subject of the following sketch may be found in a few lines of Theresa Leaney's letter, with which the story closes. The

reader should compare Theresa's observations on Mansana, with the account of Lassalle, given contemporaneously with the original publication of this story, by Dr. Georg Brandes in his work on the "Nineteenth Century." Any one who studies the masterly portrait painted by Brandes, will observe that the inner forces which shaped Lassalle's destiny are precisely the same as those that swayed Mansana. No doubt Lassalle, with his fertile intellect, his commanding personality, and his inexhaustible energy, touches a far higher level of interest. Still, the phase of character is similar in the two cases, and it struck me at the time as curious, that both Dr. Brandes and myself should have had our attention simultaneously directed to it.

*BJÖRNSTJERNE BJÖRNSON*

# CHAPTER I

I was on my way to Rome, and as I entered the train at Bologna, I bought some newspapers to read on my journey. An item of news from the capital, published in one of the Florence journals, immediately arrested my attention. It carried me back thirteen years, and brought to mind a former visit I had paid to Rome, and certain friends with whom I had lived in a little town in the vicinity, at the time when Rome was still under the Papal rule.

The newspaper stated that the remains of the patriot Mansana had been exhumed from the Cemetery of the Malefactors in Rome, at the petition of the inhabitants of his native town, and that in the course of the next few days, they were to be received by the town council and escorted by deputations from various patriotic associations in Rome and the neighbouring cities to A—, Mansana's birthplace. A monument had been prepared there, and a ceremonial reception awaited the remains: the deeds of the martyred hero were at length to receive tardy acknowledgment.

It was in the house of this Mansana that I had lodged thirteen years before; his wife and his younger brother's wife had been my hostesses. Of the two brothers themselves, one was at that time in prison in Rome, the other in exile in Genoa. The newspaper recapitulated the story of the elder Mansana's career. With all, except the latter portion, I was already pretty well acquainted,



and for that reason I felt a special desire to accompany the procession, which was to start from the Barberini Palace in Rome the following Sunday, and finish its journey at A—.

On the Sunday, at seven o'clock in the morning of a grey October day, I was at the place of assembly. There was collected a large number of banners, escorted by the delegates, who had been selected by the various associations: six men, as a rule, from each. I took up my position near a banner that bore the legend: "The Fight for the Fatherland," and amongst the group which surrounded it. They were men in red shirts, with a scarf round the body, a cloak over the shoulders, trousers thrust into high boots, and broad-leaved plumed hats. But what faces these were! How instinct with purpose and determination! Look at the well-known portrait of Orsini, the man who threw bombs at Napoleon III.; in him you have the typical Italian cast of countenance often seen in the men who had risen against the tyranny in Church and State, braving the dungeon and the scaffold, and had leagued themselves together in those formidable organisations from which sprang the army that liberated Italy. Louis Napoleon had himself been a member of one of these associations, and he had sworn, like all his comrades, that whatsoever position he might gain, he would use it to further Italy's unity and happiness, or in default that he would forfeit his own life. It was Orsini, his former comrade in the Carbonari, who reminded Napoleon of his oath, after he had become Emperor of the French. And Orsini did it in the manner best calculated to make the Emperor realise

the fate which awaited him if he failed to keep his pledge.

The first time I saw Orsini's portrait the idea flashed across my mind that ten thousand such men might conquer the world. And now, as I stood here, I had before me those whom the same feeling for their country's wrongs had animated with the same intense passion. Over that passion a kind of repose had fallen now, but the gloomy and lowering brows showed that it was not the tranquillity of content. The medals on their breasts proved that they had been present at Porta San Pancrazio in 1849 (when Garibaldi, though outnumbered by the French troops, twice forced them to retreat), in 1858, at the Lake of Garda, in 1859 in Sicily and Naples. And it was probable enough, though there were no medals to testify to *that* fact, that the history of their lives would have revealed their share in the day of Mentana. This is one of those battlefields which is not recognised by the Government, but which has burnt itself most deeply into the hearts of the people, as Louis Napoleon learnt to his cost. He had formally secured the help of Italy against the Germans in 1870; the remembrance of Mentana made it impossible for King and Government to carry out the agreement. It would have been as much as Victor Emmanuel's throne was worth to have done that.

The contrast between this dark and formidable determination of the Italians, and their mocking gaiety and reckless levity, is just as marked as that, between the resolute countenances of the Orsini type, such as I noticed here, and the frivolous faces, which express nothing but a contemptuous superiority

or mere indifference. Faces of this type were also to be seen among the spectators, or among the delegates who accompanied the banners inscribed "The Press," "Freethought," "Freedom for Labour," and so on. Involuntarily I thought, it is this element of frivolity among one half of the population that brings out a sterner element of resolution in the other half. The greater, the more general, this frivolity, the stronger and fiercer must be the passionate energy of those who would prevail against it. And through my brain there coursed reminiscences of the past history of Italy, with its contrasts of strange levity and dark purpose. Backward and forward my thoughts swayed, from Brutus to Orsini, from Catiline to Cæsar Borgia, from Lucullus to Leo X., from Savonarola to Garibaldi. Meanwhile the company got itself in motion, the banners streamed out, loud-voiced street-vendors offered for sale leaflets and pamphlets containing accounts of Mansana's career, and the procession passed into the Via Felice. Silence greeted it as it moved on. The lofty houses showed few spectators at this early hour, fewer still as the procession turned into the Via Venti-Settembre, past the Quirinal; but the onlookers were somewhat more numerous as the party came down into the Forum and passed out of the city by the Colosseum to the Porta Giovanni. Outside the gate the hearse, which had been provided by the Municipality and driven by its servants, was in waiting. This hearse was immediately set in motion. Close behind it walked two young men, one in civil costume, the other in the uniform of an officer of the Bersaglieri. Both were tall, spare,

muscular, with small heads and low foreheads; resembling one another in build and features, and yet infinitely different. They were the sons of the dead Mansana.

I could recall them as boys of thirteen or fourteen, and the episode round which my recollection of them gathered was curious enough: I remembered their old grandmother throwing stones at these boys as they stood laughing, beyond her reach. I had a sudden distinct vision of the old woman's keen, angry eyes, of her sinewy, wrinkled hands, her grey bristling hair round her coffee-coloured face; and now, as I looked at the boys, I could almost have said that the stones she threw had not missed their mark, and were deep in their hearts still.

How the grandmother had hated them! Had they given her no special cause for this hatred? Assuredly they had, for hate breeds hate, and strife strife. But how did it begin? I was not with them at the time, but it was not difficult to understand the origin of it all.

She had been left a widow early in life, this old lady; and all the interest and sympathy she gained by her comeliness and charm she tried to turn into a source of profit for herself and her two sons, the elder of whom was now lying here in his coffin. They were the only beings on earth she loved, and love them she did with a passionate frenzy of which the lads themselves eventually grew weary. Then, too, when they understood the species of cunning that lay in the use she made of her opportunities as a fascinating young widow, to gain material advantages for her sons, they began to feel a certain contempt for her. And so

they turned from her, and threw all their energies into the ideas of Italian freedom and Italian unity which they had acquired from young and ardent companions. Their mother's narrow and frantic absorption in her own personal interests and affections made them only the more anxious to sacrifice everything for the common welfare.

In force of character, these boys not merely equalled their mother, but excelled her. Thus there arose a bitter struggle, in which in the end she succumbed; but not until the young men's connections with the secret associations had procured for them a circle of acquaintance that extended far beyond the town and the society to which her family belonged. Each of them brought home a bride from a household of a higher social standing than their mother's, with a trousseau better than hers had been, and a dowry which, as she was bound to acknowledge, was respectable. This silenced her for awhile; it was clear that the business of playing the patriot had its advantages.

But the time came when both sons were forced to flee; when the elder was taken and imprisoned; when the most atrocious public extortion was practised; and when ruffianly officials regarded the defenceless widows as their prey. Their house had to be mortgaged, and then first one and then the other of their two vineyards; and finally one of their fields was seized by the mortgagees. And thus it came about that these ladies of gentle birth, friends from childhood, had to work like servants in the fields, the vineyard, and the house; they had to take lodgers, and

wait on them; and worse than all this, to listen to words of insult and contumely, and that from others besides the clergy, who, under the Papal rule, were absolute masters in the town. For at that time few paid any tribute of respect to the wives of the men who had made sacrifices for their country, or, like them, looked forward to the triumph of freedom, enlightenment, and justice. Now, indeed, in the end the old woman had won! But what did victory mean? Tears for her slighted affection, her rejected counsels, her ruined property; and she would rise and curse the sons who had deceived and plundered her, till a single glance from her elder daughter-in-law drove her back to the chimney corner, where she used to sit and pass her time in silent torpor, while this mood was upon her. Then she would sally out, and if she met her grandsons, in whom she sorrowfully noticed the same keen glance under the low brows, which she had first loved and afterwards learned to fear in her own sons, she would draw them to her with a torrent of angry words. She would warn them against their father's example, and inveigh against the people, as a mere rabble, not worth the sacrifice of a farthing, to say nothing of the loss of fortune, family, and freedom; and she would rail at her sons, the fathers of these boys, as the handsomest, but most ungrateful and impracticable children whom any mother in the town had brought to manhood. And pushing them angrily from her, the unhappy woman would address the boys in accents of half-distracted appeal: "Do try and have more sense, you good-for-nothing scoundrels, you, instead of standing there and

grinning at me. Don't be like those silly mothers of yours in there, who are bewitched by my sons' madness. But, God knows, there are mad folks on all sides of me." Then she would thrust the lads from her, weeping, and bury herself in her retreat. As time went on, neither she nor the boys stood on ceremony with one another. They laughed at her, when she was in one of her fits of despondency, and she threw stones at them; and at last it came to this, that if they merely saw her sitting alone, they would call out, "Grandmamma, haven't you gone mad again?" and then the expected volley of stones would follow.

But why did the old woman hardly dare to utter a syllable in the presence of her daughter-in-law? For the same reason as that which had impelled her to keep silence before her sons in former times. Her own husband had been a man of delicate health, quite unequal to the strain of managing his worldly affairs; he had married her in order that she might supply his deficiencies. She had undoubtedly increased the value of his property; but in the process she wore him down. This man with his gentle smile, his varied intellectual interests, and his lofty ideals, suffered in her society. She could not destroy his nobler nature, but his peace of mind and content she did contrive to ruin. And yet the beauty of his character, which she had ignored while he lived, exercised its influence over her after he was dead; and when she saw it reanimated in the sons, or looking, as if in reproachful reminiscence of the past, through the pure eyes of her daughter-in-law, she felt herself subdued and overawed.

I have said the stones thrown by the grandmother seemed to have struck home in the grandsons and to have lodged deep in their hearts. Look at the two men as they walk in the procession! The younger—the one in civilian dress—had a smile round his somewhat thin lips, a smile in his small eyes; but it seemed to me that it would hardly be safe to presume on this. He had owed his advancement to his father's political friends, and had learnt, early in life, to show himself subservient and grateful, even when there was little enough gratitude in his heart.

But now turn to the elder of the two young men. The same small head, the same low brow, but with more breadth in both. No smile *there* on mouth or eyes; I could not conceive the wish to see him smile. Tall and lean like his brother, he had more bone and muscle; and while both young men had an appearance of athletic power, as if they could have leaped over the hearse, the elder gave you the further impression that he was actually longing to perform some such feat. The younger brother's half languid gait, that told of bodily strength impaired by disuse, had become in the elder an impatient elasticity as if he moved on springs. His thoughts were clearly elsewhere; his eyes wandered absently to and fro, and his pre-occupation was obvious enough to me later on, when I offered him my card and reminded him of our previous acquaintance.

Subsequently I got into conversation with several of the townsfolk, and I inquired what had become of the old lady. The question was received with a laugh, and the reply, volunteered



eagerly by several voices at once, that she had survived till the previous year, and had died at the age of ninety-five. I could see that her character was pretty well understood. With no less eagerness these gossips also informed me that she had lived to see the house freed from the mortgage, one vineyard bought back, and the whole property cleared of encumbrance. All this was the result of the gratitude felt towards the martyred patriot whose praises were now on every tongue, since he had become the great glory of his native town; for his life and his brother's constituted practically its only sacrifice to the cause of Italian liberation.

And the old woman had lived long enough to see all this!

I inquired after the wives of the two heroes. I was told that the younger had succumbed to her troubles—in particular to the crowning stroke of misfortune which had deprived her of her only child, a daughter. But the elder, the mother of the two young Mansanas, was still living. When the townsfolk spoke of her, their faces became graver, their voices more solemn; the story was told by one of the bystanders with occasional interpolations by the others, all however with a kind of seriousness which testified to the influence this noble, high-souled woman had obtained over them. I heard that she had found means to communicate with her husband while still in prison. She had been able to inform him that the Garibaldians had arranged for a rising in the town and an attack upon it from without, and that they were waiting for Mansana to escape in order that he might carry forward the movement in Rome itself. Escape he did, thanks to

his own strength of will, and his wife's acuteness and devotion. By her advice he feigned insanity; he screamed till his voice gave way, and indeed, till his strength was exhausted, for he had refused to touch food or drink. At the imminent risk of death he persevered in this pretence, till they sent him to an asylum for lunatics. Here his wife was able to visit him, and to arrange his flight. But when he had escaped from captivity, he would not leave the town; the important preparations on foot required his presence. His wife first nursed him back to health and then took part in his hazardous enterprise. What other man in his place, after this long imprisonment, would have resisted the temptation to secure his freedom by crossing the frontier, which was scarcely more than two or three miles distant? But one of those for whom he had risked life, and all that made life worth living, betrayed him. He was seized and imprisoned again; and with his loss the greater part of the scheme, in which he had been concerned, came to nothing, or resulted only in defeat on the frontier, and in the condemnation of thousands of the patriots to captivity or the scaffold in the capital or the provincial towns. Before the hour of deliverance came, Mansana was beheaded and committed to his grave among the dead companions of his imprisonment, the thieves and murderers, who lay buried in the great Cemetery of the Malefactors, whence his bones had been removed this day.

And now his widow was there to await all that was left of him. Shrouded in her long dark mantle, she stood in front of the crowd that filled the flag-bedecked churchyard of Mansana's

native town. The monumental tomb was finished, and that day, after the funeral ceremony was over, it was to be unveiled amid the thunder of cannon, answered by the blaze of bonfires from the mountains when darkness had set in.

Up towards the hill country, across the dusty yellow of the Campagna, our procession threaded its way. We passed from one mountain town to another; and everywhere, far as the eye could travel, it lighted on bareheaded crowds of spectators. The populace from all the neighbouring villages had gathered on the line of route. Bands of music filled the narrow streets with sound, bunting and coloured cloths hung from the windows, wreaths were thrown as the procession passed, flowers were strewn before it, handkerchiefs waved, and not a few eyes gleamed bright through tears. So we came at last to Mansana's native place, where the enthusiasm with which we were received mounted to the highest pitch, and where our numbers were now augmented by large crowds of persons who had joined us on the march and accompanied us for a considerable distance.

The throng was densest in and about the churchyard. But as a foreigner I was courteously allowed to make my way through, and was enabled to take up my position not far from the widowed lady. Many of the bystanders were moved to tears to see her, standing there with that still gaze of hers upon the coffin, the funeral wreaths, the silent crowds. But she did not weep; for all this pomp and ceremony could not give her back what she had lost, nor could it add one jot to the honours her own heart had

long since rendered to the dead. She looked upon it all as upon something she had seen and known years ago. How beautiful she still was, I thought; and that not merely because of the noble curves that time had not yet wholly swept from brow and cheek, nor because of the eyes, which once had been the loveliest in the town, and indeed were so even when I knew her thirteen years before, in spite of the many tears they had shed. But more than all this, was the halo of truth and purity that surrounded her form, her movements, her face, her expression. This was as visible to the beholder as light itself, and like the light it transfigured what it touched. Treachery and deceit felt its influence the moment they came beneath her glance, and before she had had occasion to utter a syllable.

Never shall I forget the meeting between her and her sons. Both young men embraced and kissed her. She held each of them clasped in her arms for some moments as if she were praying over them. A deep hush fell on the spectators, and several men mechanically bared their heads. The younger Mansana, whom his mother had embraced first, drew back with his handkerchief at his eyes. The elder brother stood rooted to the spot when she had released him from her clasp. She looked long and intently upon him. Following her eyes, the gaze of the whole multitude was riveted upon him, while his cheek crimsoned under the ordeal. Her expression was full of an unfathomable insight, a sorrow beyond the reach of words. How often have I recalled it since! But the son, even while he reddened, relaxed no whit

the stern directness of his gaze at her, and it was clear enough that she felt obliged to avert her own eyes lest they should rouse him to defiant anger. Here, in sharp antithesis to one another, the two divergent tendencies and contrasted characteristics of their family stood revealed.

## CHAPTER II

By the scene which I had witnessed my memory was long haunted; but not so much by a recollection of the impressive part which the mother had played, as by the defiant countenance, the tall, muscular figure, and the athletic bearing, of the young officer of the Bersaglieri. I was curious to learn something of his history, and discovered, to my surprise, that it was the daring exploits of this son, which, by recalling attention to the father, were responsible for the tardy honours now accorded to the latter's memory. I felt I had struck upon something characteristically Italian. The father, the mother, the speeches, the procession, the beauties of the scene at the last ceremony in the graveyard, the watch-fires on the mountains—of all these not a word more was spoken. Until the moment that we separated in Rome itself, we were entertained with anecdotes concerning this officer of the Bersaglieri.

It seemed that as a boy he had served with Garibaldi, and had shown such promise that his father's friends had thought it worth while to send him to a military academy. As was the case with so many Italians in those days, he was entrusted with a command before he had passed his final examination; but as he speedily distinguished himself, he had not long to wait before obtaining his regular commission. One act of daring made his name known all over Italy, even before he had served in

battle. He was out with a reconnoitring party, and chanced to be making his way, unaccompanied by any of his companions, to the summit of a wooded hill; when through the thicket, he saw a horse; then, catching sight of another, he drew nearer, and discovered a travelling carriage, and, finally, perceived a little group of persons—a lady and two servants—encamped in the long grass. He immediately recognised the lady; for, some days previously, she had driven up to the Italian advanced guard, and sought refuge from the enemy, of whom she professed great alarm. She had been allowed to pass through the lines; but instead of continuing her journey, she had evidently found her way back to this retreat by another route, and was now resting there with her attendants. The horses looked as if they had received severe treatment, and had been driven furiously all through the night; it was evident they could go no further without rest. All this Mansana took in at a glance.

It was a Sunday morning. The Italian troops were resting on the march; mass had just been celebrated, and the men were at breakfast, when the outposts suddenly saw young Mansana galloping towards them, carry a lady before him and with two riderless horses secured to his saddle-girth. The lady was a spy from the enemy's camp; her two attendants—officers of the enemy's force—were lying wounded in the forest. The lady was promptly recognised, and Mansana's "evviva" was echoed and re-echoed by a thousand voices. The camp was immediately broken up, as it was more than likely that the enemy was in

dangerous proximity, and every one realised that the quick presence of mind of this Giuseppe Mansana alone had saved the whole vanguard from the trap prepared for them.

I have many more anecdotes to tell of him, but in order that they shall be properly appreciated, I must mention that he was universally considered the best fencer and gymnast in the army; on this point, I never, then or afterwards, heard more than one opinion.

Soon after the close of the war, while Mansana was quartered in Florence, a story was told, in one of the military *cafés*, of a certain Belgian officer, who, a couple of weeks previously, had been a frequent visitor to the place. It had been discovered that this officer was, in reality, in the Papal service, and that, on his return to Rome, he had amused himself and his comrades by giving insulting accounts of the Italian officers, whom, with few exceptions, he described as ignorant parade-puppets, chiefly distinguished for their childish vanity. This aroused great indignation amongst the officers of the garrison in Florence, and no sooner did young Mansana hear the tale than he straightway left the *café*, and applied to his colonel for leave of absence for six days. This being granted him, he went home, bought himself a suit of plain clothes, and started away, then and there, by the shortest route for Rome. Crossing the frontier where the woods were thickest, he found himself three days afterwards in the Papal capital, where, in the officers' *café* on the Piazza Colonna, he quickly perceived his Belgian officer. He went up to him, and



quietly asked him to come outside. He then gave him his name, and requested him to bring a friend, and follow to some place beyond the city gates, in order that the reputation of the Italian officers might be vindicated by a duel. Mansana's reliance on the honour of the Belgian left the latter no alternative; without delay he found a friend, and within three hours he was a dead man.

Young Mansana promptly set off on his return journey, through the forests, to Florence. He was careful not to mention where he had spent his period of leave; but the news travelled to Florence from Rome, and he was put under arrest for having left the town, and for having, besides, crossed the frontier without special permission. His brother officers celebrated his release by giving a banquet in his honour, and the king conferred on him a decoration.

Shortly after this he was stationed at Salerno. It was the duty of the troops to help in the suppression of the smuggling which was being vigorously carried on along the coast; and Mansana, going out one day in civilian dress, to obtain information, discovered at a certain hostelry that a ship, with smuggled goods on board, was lying in the offing, out of sight of land, but with evident intention of making for the shore under cover of night. He went home, changed his clothes, took with him two trusty followers, and as evening came on, rowed out from the shore in a small, light boat. I heard this story told and confirmed on the spot; I have heard it since from other sources, and I have subsequently seen confirmatory accounts in the newspapers; but, notwithstanding

all this corroboration, it is still inconceivable to me how Mansana, with only his two men, could have succeeded in boarding the smuggler and compelling her crew of sixteen to obey his orders, and bring their vessel to anchor in the roadstead.

After the taking of Rome, in which, and in the inundations which occurred soon afterwards, Mansana specially distinguished himself, he was sitting one evening outside the very *café* in which he had challenged the Belgian Papal officer. There he overheard some of his comrades, just returned from an entertainment, talking of a certain Hungarian. This gentleman had been drinking pretty freely, and, whilst under the influence of the insidious Italian wines, had boasted of the superiority of his compatriots; and on being courteously contradicted he had worked himself up to the assertion that one Hungarian would be a match for three Italians. The officers, listening to this tale of brag, all laughed with the exception of Giuseppe Mansana, who at once inquired where the Hungarian could be found? He asked the question in a tone of perfect unconcern, without even raising his eyes or taking his cigarette from his lips. He was told that the Hungarian had just been conducted home. Mansana rose to leave.

"Are you going?" they asked.

"Yes, of course," he replied.

"But you are surely not going to the Hungarian?" asked one of the officers good-humouredly.

But there was not much good-humour in Giuseppe Mansana.

"Where else should I be going?" he replied curtly, as he left the *café*.

His friends followed him in the vain hope of persuading him that a drunken man could not reasonably be called to account for everything he might say. But Mansana's only answer was: "Have no fear, I know how to take all that into consideration."

The Hungarian lived, as the Italians say, *primo piano*—that is, on the second floor, in a large house in Fratina. The first-floor windows of Italian town houses, are, as a rule, protected by iron bars. Swinging himself up by these, Mansana, in less than a minute, was standing on the balcony outside the Hungarian's room. Smashing one of the panes of glass, he opened the window and disappeared within. The striking of a light was the next thing visible to his companions below. What happened next they were never able to discover; they heard no further sound, and Mansana kept his own secret. All they knew was that after a few minutes, Mansana and the Hungarian—the latter in his shirt-sleeves—appeared upon the balcony; and the Hungarian, in excellent French, acknowledged that he had taken more wine than was good for him that evening, and apologised for what he had said; undoubtedly, an Italian was as good as a Hungarian any day. Mansana then descended the balcony in the same way as that by which he had gone up.

Anecdotes of every possible variety were showered upon us—anecdotes from the battlefield, the garrison, and society, including stories of athletic feats testifying to powers of

endurance in running such as I have never heard equalled; but I think that those I have already selected present a sufficiently vivid picture of a man in whom the combination of presence of mind, courage, and high sense of honour, with bodily strength, energy and general dexterity, was likely to excite among his friends high expectations as to his future, even whilst giving them some cause for grave anxiety.

How it came about that, during the following winter and spring, Giuseppe Mansana engaged the attention of thousands of persons, including that of the present writer, will appear in the course of our story.

## CHAPTER III

As Giuseppe Mansana followed his father's bones to their last resting-place, looking, even on that sad and solemn occasion, as though he would fain leap over the funeral-car, it was plain enough that he was under the spell of his first burning dream of love. Later on, in the course of that same evening, he took the train to Ancona, where his regiment was quartered. There lived the woman he loved, and nothing but the sight of her could assuage the fire of passion that flamed in his heart.

Giuseppe Mansana was in love with a woman whose temperament was not dissimilar to his own: a woman who must be conquered, and who had captivated hundreds without herself yielding to the spell of any lover. Of her a local poet at Ancona, in a wild burst of passion, had written some verses to the following effect:

"The spirit of all evil things,  
The light that comes from Hell,  
In your dark beauty, burns and stings,  
And holds me with its spell.

"In your deep eyes I see it shine,  
It dances in your veins like wine,  
Throbs in your smile, your glance of fire,  
Your siren laugh, that wakes desire.

"I know it! yet 'tis better far,  
My empress, at your feet to lie,  
Than be as other lovers are,  
And happy live, and peaceful die.

"Yea, better have loved thee and perished,  
Sphinx-woman, in darkness and tears,  
Than be loved by another and cherished,  
Through the long, uneventful, dull years."

She was the daughter of an Austrian general and of a lady who had belonged to one of the noblest families in Ancona. That a woman in this position should marry the chief of the hated foreign garrison caused at the time a good deal of resentment. And the indignation was, if possible, increased by the fact that the husband was quite an elderly man, while the bride was a lovely girl of eighteen. Possibly she had been tempted by the general's fortune, which was very large, especially as she had lived in her ancestral palace in a condition of absolute poverty. It is a state of affairs common enough in Italy, where the family palace is often held as mere trust-property by the occupant, who has no sufficient revenue provided out of the estate to keep it in proper order. This was the case in the present instance. Still there may have been some other attraction in the general besides his wealth; for when he died, shortly after his daughter's birth, his widow went into complete retirement. She was never seen, except at

church, and by the priests. The friends, who had broken with her at the time of her marriage, but who now showed themselves extremely willing to renew their acquaintance with the rich and beautiful young widow, she kept steadily at a distance.

Meanwhile Ancona became Italian, and the Austrian general's widow, ill at ease amid the festivities, the illuminations, and the patriotic celebrations of her native town, quitted it and settled in Rome, leaving her empty palace and her deserted villa and grounds to offer their silent protest. But once settled in Rome the Princess Leaney laid aside the black veil, which she had always worn since her husband's death, threw open her *salons*, where all the leaders of the Papal aristocracy were to be seen, and annually contributed large sums to the Peter's pence and other ecclesiastical funds. These actions—the first as well as the last—accentuated the feeling against her in Ancona, and thanks to the efforts of the agents of the "Liberal" party, the sentiment found its echo in Rome. Of this she was herself quite aware; and indeed, when she drove out on Monte Pincio, in all her beauty and elegance, with her little daughter by her side, she could not fail to notice the hostile glances levelled at her by persons she recognised as inhabitants of her native town, as well as by others who were strangers to her. But this only roused in her a spirit of defiance; she continued to show herself regularly on Monte Pincio, and she again returned to Ancona when the summer exodus from Rome set in. Once more she opened her palace as well as her villa, and passed most of her time in the

latter residence in order to enjoy the sea-bathing. Though she was obliged to drive through the town to her house in the Corso, or to church, without exchanging greetings with a single human being, she persisted in taking this drive daily. When her daughter grew older, she allowed her to be present at the performances of plays and *tableaux vivants* at the evening parties, which the priests promoted under the patronage of the Bishop, in order to assist the collection of Peter's pence in Ancona; and so great was the beauty of the daughter, and the attractions of the mother, that many people would go to these entertainments who otherwise would certainly not have been seen there. As was natural, the girl caught her mother's proud spirit of defiance, and when, at the age of fourteen, she was left motherless, this spirit developed further, with such additions as youth and high courage would be likely to suggest. Rumour soon began to play with her name, more freely and more critically than even it had done with that of her mother, and her reputation extended over a wider area; for with an elderly lady as chaperon—a stiff, decorous person, admirably adapted for the office, who saw everything and said nothing—she travelled a good deal in foreign countries, from England to Egypt. But she so arranged her movements that she always contrived to spend the summer in Ancona and the autumn in Rome.

In due course the latter town, like the former, had become Italian; but in Rome, as well as in Ancona, she continued to display a kind of proud contempt for the governing faction,



and particularly for those members of it who tried, by every possible artifice, to gain the heart of a lady at once so rich and so handsome. It was rumoured, indeed, that some of the younger noblemen had entered into a sort of agreement to either conquer her or crush her; and whether there was any truth in the story or not, she certainly believed in it herself. The revenge she took upon those whom she suspected of designs upon her was to bring them to her feet by her fascinations, and then to repulse them scornfully; to render them frantic, first with hope, afterwards with disappointment. When she appeared on the Corso and Monte Pincio, driving her own horses, it was in a sort of triumphal progress, with her captives bound, as it were, to her chariot wheels. If this was not obvious to the general public, she herself was fully conscious of it, and so, indeed, were her victims. She would have been killed, or have met with a fate worse than death itself, but for the protection of a group of staunch admirers, who formed a faithful and adoring body-guard round her. Among these worshippers was the poet whose verses have already been quoted. In Ancona, more particularly, the young officers of the garrison either sighed for her in secret, or regarded her with unconcealed dislike.

At the very time when Giuseppe Mansana's regiment had been ordered to Ancona, she had hit upon a new caprice. She absolutely declined to take part in the fashionable gathering which, every evening, was in the habit of assembling and promenading in the Corso. Here, under the light of the moon

and stars and lamps, ladies were to be seen in evening toilettes, their faces half-hidden behind those fans they manipulated so dexterously; gentlemen in uniform, or dressed in the last new summer fashion, strolled up and down, exchanging greetings and jests, gathering about the tables where their friends sat eating ices or drinking coffee, passing from one to the other, and finally settling down into their seats, when a quartette party began to sing, or some band of wandering musicians to play, with zither, flute, and guitar. In this function Theresa Leaney resolutely declined to take part. So far from aiding with her presence this daily display of the fashion, beauty, and elegance of the town, she had devised a plan to throw it into disorder and confusion.

At sunset, when the carriages of the fashionable world were turning homewards, she would drive out, with two unusually small Corsican ponies, which she had purchased that summer; and handling the reins herself, as she always did, she would pass through the streets of the town at a trot. She would choose the moment when the Corso was lighted up, and when the evening assembly was in full swing. On all sides friends and family groups were meeting; young men and maidens were exchanging stolen greetings; silent salutations were passing between wealthy patrons and their hangers-on; lovers, whose mistresses were absent, sighed their woes into the ears of confidants; officers tossed curt nods to their creditors, and high officials were receiving obsequious bows from their subordinates, anxiously hoping for the time when death would give them a chance of

promotion. And then—before the young ladies had had time to exhibit their latest Paris gowns in the course of one turn up and one down the promenade, and just as admiring young clerks were opening the conversation with their charmers, while officers were collecting in groups to criticise faces and figures, and the more distinguished members of the local aristocracy were preparing to hold their customary little court—just then our arrogant young damsel, with her stiff, elderly companion sitting by her side, would dash into the very midst of the well-dressed crowd. The two ponies were kept at a smart trot; and officers and young ladies, gentlemen and shop-assistants, family parties and whispering couples, had to separate in all haste, to avoid being driven over. A set of bells on the harness gave warning of the approach of the equipage before it was actually upon the saunterers, so that the police had no ground for interference. But this only intensified the irritation of those whom Theresa offended, first by declining to join their social circle, and secondly by breaking into it in this violent fashion.

On two evenings Giuseppe Mansana had gone to the Corso, and both times he had almost been run over by this reckless charioteer. He was fairly astounded by her audacity, and promptly ascertained who she was. On the third evening, as Theresa Leaney halted her horses at the usual spot outside the city, where she was accustomed to breathe them before beginning the rapid drive through the streets and the Corso, a tall man in military uniform suddenly stood before her and saluted.

"May I be permitted to introduce myself? My name is Giuseppe Mansana; I am an officer in the Bersaglieri, and I have made a bet that I will run a race with your two ponies from here to the town. I trust you do not object." It was nearly dusk, and under ordinary circumstances she could hardly have distinguished him clearly; but excitement will sometimes increase our powers of vision. Astonishment, and a certain amount of alarm—for there was something in the voice and bearing of this stranger that terrified her in spite of herself—gave her that courage which fear often inspires. Turning towards the small head and short face, which she could just discern through the twilight, she replied, "It appears to me that a gentleman would have asked my permission *before* he allowed himself to make such a wager; but after all an Italian officer—" She broke off, for she herself was frightened at what she had intended to say, and there ensued an ominous silence, which rendered her still more uneasy. Then she heard a hollow voice—there was always something hollow in Mansana's deep tones—which said:

"I have laid the wager with myself, and, truth to tell, I intend to make the attempt whether you give me permission or not."

"What do you mean?" said the girl, as she gathered up the reins. But the same moment she uttered a shriek, which was echoed more loudly by her chaperon, as both nearly fell from the carriage; for with a long whip, that neither of them had noticed, the officer struck a cutting blow over the backs of the two ponies, which started forward with a bound. Two grooms, who sat behind

their young mistress and had risen from their seats at a sign from her, to come to her assistance, were thrown back upon the ground. Neither of them could take part in the drive, which now began and was more exciting than long.

It has been said that Mansana's athletic accomplishments included great speed and endurance in running; indeed, there was probably no other exercise in which his training had been so complete. He had no difficulty in keeping pace with the cobs, at any rate at the start, when the animals, firmly held in by their mistress, trotted slowly and uncertainly. Theresa, in her anger, was ready to risk anything rather than submit to such humiliation, and, besides, she was anxious to gain time till her servants could come up. But just as she was succeeding in stopping the horses, the whip came whizzing down across their backs, and again they plunged forward. No word or cry passed Theresa's lips, but she drew at the reins so hard and persistently that the horses came near to a halt, till the lash smote upon their flanks again. Twice was the effort to stop repeated, and twice frustrated in the same rude manner, till both the driver and the beaten ponies felt the futility of the attempt. All through this the elder woman had clung screaming to the girl, both arms thrown round her waist; now she sank forward, in a kind of swoon of terror, and had to be forcibly restrained from falling out of the carriage. A flood of anger and dismay swept over Theresa; for a time the horses, the road, were blurred before her eyes, and at last she could hardly tell whether she still held the reins or not. She had, in fact,

allowed them to drop upon her lap; she took them up again, and with one arm thrown round the drooping figure of her chaperon, and both her hands grasping at the reins, she made yet another effort to regain command of the terrified ponies. But she soon perceived that they were now beyond all control. It had grown quite dark; high in the air, above the undergrowth of bushes, the tall poplars by the roadside seemed to be moving swiftly onward, and keeping pace, as it were, with the carriage. She no longer knew where she was. The only object she could clearly distinguish, except the horses, was the tall figure at their side—the spectral form that towered above the little animals, and kept steadily abreast of them. Where were they going? And like lightning the thought flashed upon her that they were not making for the town, that this stranger was not an officer, but a brigand, that she was being carried off to some distant hiding-place, and that presently the rest of the band would be upon her. In the agony of distress which this sudden apprehension raised, there broke from her the cry, "Stop, for God's sake. What is it you are doing? Can you not see—" She could say no more, for again she heard the lash whizzing through the air, and the crack of its stroke upon the backs of the horses, and felt herself whirled faster than ever along the road.

Swiftly as this wild flight itself, the thoughts chased one another through her mind.

"What does he mean to do? Who is he? Can he be one of those whom I have offended?" A hasty succession of figures

passed before her, but none of them at all resembled this man. But now the suggestion of revenge had seized hold upon her frightened imagination. What if this stranger had been deputed to take vengeance upon her for all her other victims? And if this was revenge, then worse things yet were in store for her. The tinkle of the horses' bells cut through the rumbling of the wheels; the sharp, shrill sound struck upon her like a cry of anguish, and in her terror she was ready to risk everything in a leap from the carriage. But no sooner did she relax her hold of her companion, than the latter rolled over in a senseless heap, and Theresa, in growing alarm and anxiety, could only lift up the fainting figure and support it across her lap. Thus she sat for a while, too perturbed for definite thought, till suddenly, at a turn of the road, she caught sight of the luminous haze that hung over the city, and for a moment felt that she was saved. But the sensation of relief passed like a flash, as the meaning of the whole scheme dawned upon her. This man was an emissary of vengeance from the Corso! And before the thought had assumed coherent shape in her mind, she cried out, "Ah! no further! no further!"

The echo of her own beseeching words, the jangle of the horses' bells, the mad movement of the poplars alongside, were all she had for answer, as they dashed on. No word came from the silent shape in front. There coursed through her mind a forecast of her pitiful progress through the city, driven onward by the lash, her swooning companion dragging on her arms, the crowd lining

the pavements to stare at her, the officers pressing forward to greet her with mocking applause and laughter; for that all this was planned by the officers, to wreak their anger upon her, she now felt certain. She bowed her head as if she were already in the midst of her tormentors. The next moment she could tell by the sound that the horses were slackening speed. They must be close to their destination; but would they stop before they reached it? She looked up with a sudden rush of awakened hope. She perceived why the pace had grown slower. Her captor had fallen back behind the horses; he was now close beside her, and presently she found herself listening to his hurried, laboured breathing, until she could hear nothing else, and all her agonising fear fastened on it. What if this man should fall, with the blood streaming from his lips, in the Corso itself? That blood would be upon her head, for it was her defiant pride which had challenged his desperate feat; and his friends would tear her to pieces in their anger.

"Spare yourself," she implored, "I am conquered—I yield."

But as if this attempt to soften him had roused him anew, he made a final effort. With two or three long strides he was abreast of the horses, who quickened their pace instinctively as they felt his approach, but not soon enough to escape a couple of swinging strokes from the whip.

And now clear before her shone the lights of the first gas-lamps, those round the Cavour memorial; presently they would be at the Corso and the miserable farce would begin. She felt a



mastering desire to weep, and yet no tears came; she could only bow her head upon her hands so that she might see nothing. Then of a sudden she heard his voice, though she could not distinguish the words; for the carriage was now rumbling over the paved causeway, and he was too exhausted to speak distinctly. She looked up, the man was gone! Merciful heavens! Had he fallen fainting to the earth? Her blood froze in her veins at the thought, but her fears were needless. She saw him walk slowly away, through the Corso, past the Café Garibaldi. Then she herself passed into the Corso, her horses at the trot, the crowd parting to let her through. She bent still lower over the rigid form of her friend, as it lay across her lap; shame and terror drove her onwards, as if with a scourge. A few minutes later, she was safely within the courtyard of her palace. Through the open gateway the horses had swung at full speed, so that it was a wonder the carriage was not upset or dashed to pieces. She was safe; but the strain had been too much for her, and she fainted away.

An old servant stood awaiting her arrival. He called for help, and the two ladies were carried upstairs. Presently the grooms who had been thrown from the carriage came up and related what had happened, so far at least as they knew it themselves. Ashamed and confused by the reproaches which the old retainer showered upon them for their clumsiness, they were only too willing to follow his advice, which was to hold their tongues, and say nothing about the affair. The horses had bolted, after a short halt, just as the grooms were about to mount to their seats. That

was the whole story.

## CHAPTER IV

When Princess Theresa Leaney came to herself again, all her strength and energy seemed gone from her. She would not rise, she scarcely touched her food, and allowed no one to remain near her. In silence her companion passed through the large mirror-room that adjoined the ante-room; in silence she returned when her duties were accomplished, and when she entered the small Gothic apartment which the princess occupied near the centre of the palace, she was still careful to observe the same silence. The servants followed her example. This elderly chaperon of Theresa's had been brought up in a convent, and had come out into the world with an exaggerated estimate of her acquirements and position. But ten or fifteen years' experience of the selfishness and crude egoism of youth had tended to dissipate such sentiments, and she eventually took a situation as a sort of superior companion in an aristocratic family. Slights and humiliations were inevitable in her position, but she bore them in silence, learning, as she grew older, to put up with many things; she grew reserved and taciturn, and applied herself diligently to the steady accumulation of money. With this object in view, she made a point of studying carefully the characters and habits of those she served, taking care that the information thus acquired should subsequently be of profit to both parties. It was her tactful knowledge of the character of the princess which had on this

particular occasion enjoined that strict silence should be kept.

Suddenly, after the lapse of a few days, there came from the princess's little Gothic room the curt command, "Pack up," and subsequently this was followed by the intimation that a long journey was in prospect. A little later the princess herself appeared. Still silent and languid, she moved slowly about the rooms, arranged some trivial matters, wrote a letter or two, and disappeared again. Next day came forth the order, "This evening at seven o'clock," and punctually at six o'clock she herself emerged, dressed in black travelling costume, followed by her maid, also dressed for a journey. The companion stood in readiness, waiting, before giving the man-servant the final order to close the luggage, till the princess had bestowed an approving glance on the contents. She had not as yet ventured to speak to the princess since the carriage adventure, but now, approaching her casually, she remarked in a low voice, with her eyes fixed on the courtyard, "The town knows nothing beyond the fact that the horses bolted with us." This remark was greeted by a look of haughty displeasure, which gradually changed to one of surprise and finally dismay.

# Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.