GEORGE MEREDITH

VITTORIA. COMPLETE

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I

From Monte Motterone you survey the Lombard plain. It is a towering dome of green among a hundred pinnacles of grey and rust-red crags. At dawn the summit of the mountain has an eagle eye for the far Venetian boundary and the barrier of the Apennines; but with sunrise come the mists. The vast brown level is seen narrowing in; the Ticino and the Sesia waters, nearest, quiver on the air like sleepy lakes; the plain is engulphed up to the high ridges of the distant Southern mountain range, which lie stretched to a faint cloud-like line, in shape like a solitary monster of old seas crossing the Deluge. Long arms of vapour stretch across the urn-like valleys, and gradually thickening and swelling upward, enwrap the scored bodies of the ashen-faced peaks and the pastures of the green mountain, till the heights become islands over a forgotten earth. Bells of herds down the hidden run of the sweet grasses, and a continuous leaping of its rivulets, give the Motterone a voice of youth and homeliness amid that stern company of Titan-heads, for whom the hawk and the vulture cry. The storm has beaten at them until they have got the aspect of the storm. They take colour from sunlight, and

are joyless in colour as in shade. When the lower world is under pushing steam, they wear the look of the revolted sons of Time, fast chained before scornful heaven in an iron peace. Day at last brings vigorous fire; arrows of light pierce the mist-wreaths, the dancing draperies, the floors of vapour; and the mountain of piled pasturages is seen with its foot on the shore of Lago Maggiore. Down an extreme gulf the full sunlight, as if darting on a jewel in the deeps, seizes the blue-green lake with its isles. The villages along the darkly-wooded borders of the lake show white as clustered swans; here and there a tented boat is visible, shooting from terraces of vines, or hanging on its shadow. Monte Boscero is unveiled; the semicircle of the Piedmontese and the Swiss peaks, covering Lake Orta, behind, on along the Ticinese and the Grisons, leftward toward and beyond the Lugano hills, stand bare in black and grey and rust-red and purple. You behold a burnished realm of mountain and plain beneath the royal sun of Italy. In the foreground it shines hard as the lines of an irradiated Cellini shield. Farther away, over middle ranges that are soft and clear, it melts, confusing the waters with hot rays, and the forests with darkness, to where, wavering in and out of view like flying wings, and shadowed like wings of archangels with rose and with orange and with violet, silverwhite Alps are seen. You might take them for mystical streaming torches on the border-ground between vision and fancy. They lean as in a great flight forward upon Lombardy.

The curtain of an early autumnal morning was everywhere

lifted around the Motterone, save for one milky strip of cloud that lay lizard-like across the throat of Monte Boscero facing it, when a party of five footfarers, who had met from different points of ascent some way below, and were climbing the mountain together, stood upon the cropped herbage of the second plateau, and stopped to eye the landscape; possibly also to get their breath. They were Italians. Two were fair-haired muscular men, bronzed by the sun and roughly bearded, bearing the stamp of breed of one or other of the hill-cities under the Alps. A third looked a sturdy soldier, squareset and hard of feature, for whom beauties of scenery had few awakening charms. The remaining couple were an old man and a youth, upon whose shoulder the veteran leaned, and with a whimsical turn of head and eye, indicative of some playful cast of mind, poured out his remarks upon the objects in sight, and chuckled to himself, like one who has learnt the necessity to appreciate his own humour if he is disposed to indulge it. He was carelessly wrapped about in long loose woollen stuff, but the youth was dressed like a Milanese cavalier of the first quality, and was evidently one who would have been at home in the fashionable Corso. His face was of the sweetest virile Italian beauty. The head was long, like a hawk's, not too lean, and not sharply ridged from a rapacious beak, but enough to show characteristics of eagerness and promptitude. His eyes were darkest blue, the eyebrows and long disjoining eyelashes being very dark over them, which made their colour precious. The nose was straight

and forward from the brows; a fluent black moustache ran with the curve of the upper lip, and lost its line upon a smooth olive cheek. The upper lip was firmly supported by the under, and the chin stood freely out from a fine neck and throat.

After a space an Austrian war-steamer was discerned puffing out of the harbour of Laveno.

"That will do," said the old man. "Carlo, thou son of Paolo, we will stump upward once more. Tell me, hulloa, sir! are the best peaches doomed to entertain vile, domiciliary, parasitical insects? I ask you, does nature exhibit motherly regard, or none, for the regions of the picturesque? None, I say. It is an arbitrary distinction of our day. To complain of the intrusion of that black-yellow flag and foul smoke-line on the lake underneath us is preposterous, since, as you behold, the heavens make no protestation. Let us up. There is comfort in exercise, even for an ancient creature such as I am. This mountain is my brother, and flatters me not—I am old."

"Take my arm, dear Agostino," said the youth.

"Never, my lad, until I need it. On, ahead of me, goat! chamois! and teach me how the thing used to be done in my time. Old legs must be the pupils of young ones mark that piece of humility, and listen with respectfulness to an old head by-and-by."

It was the autumn antecedent to that memorable Spring of the great Italian uprising, when, though for a tragic issue, the people of Italy first felt and acted as a nation, and Charles Albert,

called the Sword of Italy, aspired, without comprehension of the passion of patriotism by which it was animated, to lead it quietly into the fold of his Piedmontese kingship.

There is not an easier or a pleasanter height to climb than the Motterone, if, in Italian heat, you can endure the disappointment of seeing the summit, as you ascend, constantly flit away to a farther station. It seems to throw its head back, like a laughing senior when children struggle up for kissings. The party of five had come through the vines from Stresa and from Baveno. The mountain was strange to them, and they had already reckoned twice on having the topmost eminence in view, when reaching it they found themselves on a fresh plateau, traversed by wild water-courses, and browsed by Alpine herds; and again the green dome was distant. They came to the highest chalet, where a hearty wiry young fellow, busily employed in making cheese, invited them to the enjoyment of shade and fresh milk. "For the sake of these adolescents, who lose much and require much, let it be so," said Agostino gravely, and not without some belief that he consented to rest on behalf of his companions. They allowed the young mountaineer to close the door, and sat about his fire like sagacious men. When cooled and refreshed, Agostino gave the signal for departure, and returned thanks for hospitality. Money was not offered and not expected. As they were going forth the mountaineer accompanied them to the step on the threshold, and with a mysterious eagerness in his eyes, addressed Agostino.

"Signore, is it true?—the king marches?"

"Who is the king, my friend?" returned Agostino. "If he marches out of his dominions, the king confers a blessing on his people perchance."

"Our king, signore!" The mountaineer waved his finger as from Novara toward Milan.

Agostino seemed to awaken swiftly from his disguise of an absolute gravity. A red light stood in his eyeballs, as if upon a fiery answer. The intemperate fit subsided. Smoothing dawn his mottled grey beard with quieting hands, he took refuge in his habitual sententious irony.

"My friend, I am not a hare in front of the king, nor am I a ram in the rear of him: I fly him not, neither do I propel him. So, therefore, I cannot predict the movements of the king. Will the wind blow from the north to-morrow, think you?"

The mountaineer sent a quick gaze up the air, as to descry signs.

"Who knows?" Agostino continued, though not playing into the smiles of his companions; "the wind will blow straight thither where there is a vacuum; and all that we can state of the king is, that there is a positive vacuum here. It would be difficult to predict the king's movements save by such weighty indications."

He laid two fingers hard against the rib which shields the heart. It had become apparently necessary for the speaker to relieve a mind surcharged with bile at the mention of the king; for, having done, he rebuked with an amazed frown the indiscretion of Carlo, who had shouted, "The Carbonaro king!"

"Carlo, my son, I will lean on your arm. On your mouth were better," Agostino added, under his voice, as they moved on.

"Oh, but," Carlo remonstrated, "let us trust somebody. Milan has made me sick of late. I like the look of that fellow."

"You allow yourself, my Carlo, an immense indulgence in permitting yourself to like the look of anything. Now, listen—Viva Carlo Alberto!"

The old man rang out the loyal salutation spiritedly, and awoke a prompt response from the mountaineer, who sounded his voice wide in the keen upper air.

"There's the heart of that fellow!" said Agostino. "He has but one idea—his king! If you confound it, he takes you for an enemy. These free mountain breezes intoxicate you. You would embrace the king himself if you met him here."

"I swear I would never be guilty of the bad joke of crying a 'Viva' to him anywhere upon earth," Carlo replied. "I offend you," he said quickly.

The old man was smiling.

"Agostino Balderini is too notoriously a bad joker to be offended by the comments of the perfectly sensible, boy of mine! My limbs were stiff, and the first three steps from a place of rest reminded me acutely of the king's five years of hospitality. He has saved me from all fatigue so long, that the necessity to exercise these old joints of mine touched me with a grateful sense of his royal bounty. I had from him a chair, a bed, and a table: shelter from sun and from all silly chatter. Now I want a chair or

a bed. I should like to sit at a table; the sun burns me; my ears are afflicted. I cry 'Viva!' to him that I may be in harmony with the coming chorus of Italy, which I prophetically hear. That young fellow, in whom you confide so much, speaks for his country. We poor units must not be discordant. No! Individual opinion, my Carlo, is discord when there is a general delirium. The tide arriving, let us make the best of the tide. My voice is wisdom. We shall have to follow this king!"

"Shall we!" uttered one behind them gruffly. "When I see this king swallow one ounce of Austrian lead, I shall not be sorry to follow him!"

"Right, my dear Ugo," said Agostino, turning round to him; "and I will then compose his hymn of praise. He has swallowed enough of Austrian bread. He took an Austrian wife to his bed. Who knows? he may some day declare a preference for Austrian lead. But we shall have to follow him, or stay at home drivelling."

Agostino raised his eyes, that were glazed with the great heat of his frame.

"Oh, that, like our Dante, I had lived in the days when souls were damned! Then would I uplift another shout, believe me! As things go now, we must allow the traitor to hope for his own future, and we simply shrug. We cannot plant him neck-deep for everlasting in a burning marl, and hear him howling. We have no weapons in these times—none! Our curses come back to roost. This is one of the serious facts of the century, and controls violent language. What! are you all gathered about me? Oracles must be

moving, too. There's no rest even for them, when they have got a mountain to scale."

A cry, "He is there!" and "Do you see him?" burst from the throats of men surrounding Agostino.

Looking up to the mountain's top, they had perceived the figure of one who stood with folded arms, sufficiently near for the person of an expected friend to be descried. They waved their hats, and Carlo shot ahead. The others trod after him more deliberately, but in glad excitement, speculating on the time which this sixth member of the party, who were engaged to assemble at a certain hour of the morning upon yonder height, had taken to reach the spot from Omegna, or Orta, or Pella, and rejoicing that his health should be so stout in despite of his wasting labours under city smoke.

"Yes, health!" said Agostino. "Is it health, do you think? It's the heart of the man! and a heart with a mill-stone about it —a heart to breed a country from! There stands the man who has faith in Italy, though she has been lying like a corpse for centuries. God bless him! He has no other comfort. Viva l'Italia!"

The exclamation went up, and was acknowledged by him on the eminence overhanging them; but at a repetition of it his hand smote the air sideways. They understood the motion, and were silent; while he, until Carlo breathed his name in his hearing, eyed the great scene stedfastly, with the absorbing simple passion of one who has endured long exile, and finds his clustered visions of it confronting the strange, beloved, visible life:—the lake in

the arms of giant mountains: the far-spreading hazy plain; the hanging forests; the pointed crags; the gleam of the distant rose-shadowed snows that stretch for ever like an airy host, mystically clad, and baffling the eye as with the motions of a flight toward the underlying purple land.

CHAPTER II

He was a man of middle stature, thin, and even frail, as he stood defined against the sky; with the complexion of the student, and the student's aspect. The attentive droop of his shoulders and head, the straining of the buttoned coat across his chest, the air as of one who waited and listened, which distinguished his figure, detracted from the promise of other than contemplative energy, until his eyes were fairly seen and felt. That is, until the observer became aware that those soft and large dark meditative eyes had taken hold of him. In them lay no abstracted student's languor, no reflex burning of a solitary lamp; but a quiet grappling force engaged the penetrating look. Gazing upon them, you were drawn in suddenly among the thousand whirring wheels of a capacious and a vigorous mind, that was both reasoning and prompt, keen of intellect, acting throughout all its machinery, and having all under full command: an orbed mind, supplying its own philosophy, and arriving at the sword-stroke by logical steps,—a mind much less supple than a soldier's; anything but the mind of a Hamlet. The eyes were dark as the forest's border is dark; not as night is dark. Under favourable lights their colour was seen to be a deep rich brown, like the chestnut, or more like the hazel-edged sunset brown which lies upon our western rivers in the winter floods, when night begins to shadow them.

The side-view of his face was an expression of classic beauty

rarely now to be beheld, either in classic lands or elsewhere. It was severe; the tender serenity of the full bow of the eyes relieved it. In profile they showed little of their intellectual quality, but what some might have thought a playful luminousness, and some a quick pulse of feeling. The chin was firm; on it, and on the upper lip, there was a clipped growth of black hair. The whole visage widened upward from the chin, though not very markedly before it reached the broad-lying brows. The temples were strongly indented by the swelling of the forehead above them: and on both sides of the head there ran a pregnant ridge, such as will sometimes lift men a deplorable half inch above the earth we tread. If this man was a problem to others, he was none to himself; and when others called him an idealist, he accepted the title, reading himself, notwithstanding, as one who was less flighty than many philosophers and professedly practical teachers of his generation. He saw far, and he grasped ends beyond obstacles: he was nourished by sovereign principles; he despised material present interests; and, as I have said, he was less supple than a soldier. If the title of idealist belonged to him, we will not immediately decide that it was opprobrious. The idealized conception of stern truths played about his head certainly for those who knew and who loved it. Such a man, perceiving a devout end to be reached, might prove less scrupulous in his course, possibly, and less remorseful, than revolutionary Generals. His smile was quite unclouded, and came softly as a curve in water. It seemed to flow with,

and to pass in and out of, his thoughts, to be a part of his emotion and his meaning when it shone transiently full. For as he had an orbed mind, so had he an orbed nature. The passions were absolutely in harmony with the intelligence. He had the English manner; a remarkable simplicity contrasting with the demonstrative outcries and gesticulations of his friends when they joined him on the height. Calling them each by name, he received their caresses and took their hands; after which he touched the old man's shoulder.

"Agostino, this has breathed you?"

"It has; it has, my dear and best one!" Agostino replied. "But here is a good market-place for air. Down below we have to scramble for it in the mire. The spies are stifling down below. I don't know my own shadow. I begin to think that I am important. Footing up a mountain corrects the notion somewhat. Yonder, I believe, I see the Grisons, where Freedom sits. And there's the Monte della Disgrazia. Carlo Alberto should be on the top of it, but he is invisible. I do not see that Unfortunate."

"No," said Carlo Ammiani, who chimed to his humour more readily than the rest, and affected to inspect the Grisons' peak through a diminutive opera-glass. "No, he is not there."

"Perhaps, my son, he is like a squirrel, and is careful to run up t'other side of the stem. For he is on that mountain; no doubt of it can exist even in the Boeotian mind of one of his subjects; myself, for example. It will be an effulgent fact when he gains the summit."

The others meantime had thrown themselves on the grass at the feet of their manifestly acknowledged leader, and looked up for Agostino to explode the last of his train of conceits. He became aware that the moment for serious talk had arrived, and bent his body, groaning loudly, and uttering imprecations against him whom he accused of being the promoter of its excruciating stiffness, until the ground relieved him of its weight. Carlo continued standing, while his eyes examined restlessly the slopes just surmounted by them, and occasionally the deep descent over the green-glowing Orta Lake. It was still early morning. The heat was tempered by a cool breeze that came with scents of thyme. They had no sight of human creature anywhere, but companionship of Alps and birds of upper air; and though not one of them seasoned the converse with an exclamation of joy and of blessings upon a place of free speech and safety, the thought was in their hunted bosoms, delicious as a woodland rivulet that sings only to the leaves overshadowing it.

They were men who had sworn to set a nation free,—free from the foreigner, to begin with.

(He who tells this tale is not a partisan; he would deal equally toward all. Of strong devotion, of stout nobility, of unswerving faith and self-sacrifice, he must approve; and when these qualities are displayed in a contest of forces, the wisdom of means employed, or of ultimate views entertained, may be questioned and condemned; but the men themselves may not be.)

These men had sworn their oath, knowing the meaning of

it, and the nature of the Fury against whom men who stand voluntarily pledged to any great resolve must thenceforward match themselves. Many of the original brotherhood had fallen, on the battle-field, on the glacis, or in the dungeon. All present, save the youthfuller Carlo, had suffered. Imprisonment and exile marked the Chief. Ugo Corte, of Bergamo, had seen his family swept away by the executioner and pecuniary penalties. Thick scars of wounds covered the body and disfigured the face of Giulio Bandinelli. Agostino had crawled but half-a-year previously out of his Piedmontese cell, and Marco Sana, the Brescian, had in such a place tasted of veritable torture. But if the calamity of a great oath was upon them, they had now in their faithful prosecution of it the support which it gives. They were unwearied; they had one object; the mortal anguish they had gone through had left them no sense for regrets. Life had become the field of an endless engagement to them; and as in battle one sees beloved comrades struck down, and casts but a glance at their prostrate forms, they heard the mention of a name, perchance, and with a word or a sign told what was to be said of a passionate glorious heart at rest, thanks to Austrian or vassal-Sardinian mercy.

So they lay there and discussed their plans.

"From what quarter do you apprehend the surprise?" Ugo Corte glanced up from the maps and papers spread along the grass to question Carlo ironically, while the latter appeared to be keeping rigid watch over the safety of the position. Carlo puffed

the smoke of a cigarette rapidly, and Agostino replied for him:—"From the quarter where the best donkeys are to be had."

It was supposed that Agostino had resumed the habit usually laid aside by him for the discussion of serious matters, and had condescended to father a coarse joke; but his eyes showed no spark of their well-known twinkling solicitation for laughter, and Carlo spoke in answer gravely:—"From Baveno it will be."

"From Baveno! They might as well think to surprise hawks from Baveno. Keep watch, dear Ammiani; a good start in a race is a kick from the Gods."

With that, Corte turned to the point of his finger on the map. He conceived it possible that Carlo Ammiani, a Milanese, had reason to anticipate the approach of people by whom he, or they, might not wish to be seen. Had he studied Carlo's face he would have been reassured. The brows of the youth were open, and his eyes eager with expectation, that showed the flying forward of the mind, and nothing of knotted distrust or wary watchfulness. Now and then he would move to the other side of the mountain, and look over upon Orta; or with the opera-glass clasped in one hand beneath an arm, he stopped in his sentinel-march, frowning reflectively at a word put to him, as if debating within upon all the bearings of it; but the only answer that came was a sharp assent, given after the manner of one who dealt conscientiously in definite affirmatives; and again the glass was in requisition. Marco Sana was a fighting soldier, who stated what he knew, listened, and took his orders. Giulio Bandinelli was also little

better than the lieutenant in an enterprise. Corte, on the other hand, had the conspirator's head,—a head like a walnut, bulging above the ears,—and the man was of a sallying temper. He lay there putting bit by bit of his plot before the Chief for his approval, with a careful construction, that upon the expression of any doubt of its working smoothly in the streets of Milan, caused him to shout a defensive, "But Carlo says yes!"

This uniform character of Ammiani's replies, and the smile of Agostino on hearing them, had begun to strike the attention of the soldierly Marco Sana. He ran his hand across his shorn head, and puffed his burnt red mole-spotted cheeks, with a sidelong stare at the abstracted youth, "Said yes!" he remarked. "He might say no, for a diversion. He has yeses enough in his pay to earn a Cardinal's hat. 'Is Milan preparing to rise?' 'Yes.'—'Is she ready for the work?' 'Yes.'—'Is the garrison on its guard?' 'Yes.'—'Have you seen Barto Rizzo?' 'Yes.'—'Have the people got the last batch of arms?' 'Yes.'—And 'Yes,' the secret is well kept; 'Yes,' Barto Rizzo is steadily getting them together. We may rely on him: Carlo is his intimate friend: Yes, Yes:—There's a regiment of them at your service, and you may shuffle them as you will. This is the help we get from Milan: a specimen of what we may expect!"

Sana had puffed himself hot, and now blew for coolness.

"You are,"—Agostino addressed him,—"philosophically totally wrong, my Marco. Those affirmatives are fat worms for the catching of fish. They are the real pretty fruit of the

Hesperides. Personally, you or I may be irritated by them: but I'm not sure they don't please us. Were Carlo a woman, of course he should learn to say no;—as he will now if I ask him, Is she in sight? I won't do it, you know; but as a man and a diplomatist, it strikes me that he can't say yes too often."

"Answer me, Count Ammiani, and do me the favour to attend to these trifles for the space of two minutes," said Corte. "Have you seen Barto Rizzo? Is he acting for Medole?"

"As mole, as reindeer, and as bloody northern Raven!" ejaculated Agostino: "perhaps to be jackal, by-and-by. But I do not care to abuse our Barto Rizzo, who is a prodigy of nature, and has, luckily for himself, embraced a good cause, for he is certain to be hanged if he is not shot. He has the prophetic owl's face. I have always a fancy of his hooting his own death-scrip. I wrong our Barto:—Medole would be the jackal, if it lay between the two."

Carlo Ammiani had corrected Corte's manner to him by a complacent readiness to give him distinct replies. He then turned and set off at full speed down the mountain.

"She is sighted at last," Agostino murmured, and added rapidly some spirited words under his breath to the Chief, whose chin was resting on his doubled hand.

Corte, Marco, and Giulio were full of denunciations against Milan and the Milanese, who had sent a boy to their councils. It was Brescia and Bergamo speaking in their jealousy, but Carlo's behaviour was odd, and called for reproof. He had come as

the deputy of Milan to meet the Chief, and he had not spoken a serious word on the great business of the hour, though the plot had been unfolded, the numbers sworn to, and Brescia, and Bergamo, and Cremona, and Venice had spoken upon all points through their emissaries, the two latter cities being represented by Sana and Corte.

"We've had enough of this lad," said Corte. "His laundress is following him with a change of linen, I suppose, or it's a scent-bottle. He's an admirable representative of the Lombard metropolis!" Corte drawled out the words in prodigious mimicry. "If Milan has nothing better to send than such a fellow, we'll finish without her, and shame the beast that she is. She has been always a treacherous beast!"

"Poor Milan!" sighed the Chief; "she lies under the beak of the vulture, and has twice been devoured; but she has a soul: she proves it. Ammiani, too, will prove his value. I have no doubt of him. As to boys, or even girls, you know my faith is in the young. Through them Italy lives. What power can teach devotion to the old?"

"I thank you, signore," Agostino gesticulated.

"But, tell me, when did you learn it, my friend?"

In answer, Agostino lifted his hand a little boy's height from the earth.

The old man then said: "I am afraid, my dear Corte, you must accept the fellowship of a girl as well as of a boy upon this occasion. See! our Carlo! You recognize that dancing speck

below there?—he has joined himself—the poor lad wishes he could, I dare swear!—to another bigger speck, which is verily a lady: who has joined herself to a donkey—a common habit of the sex, I am told; but I know them not. That lady, signor Ugo, is the signorina Vittoria. You stare? But, I tell you, the game cannot go on without her; and that is why I have permitted you to knock the ball about at your own pleasure for these forty minutes."

Corte drew his under-lip on his reddish stubble moustache. "Are we to have women in a conference?" he asked from eye to eye.

"Keep to the number, Ugo; and moreover, she is not a woman, but a noble virgin. I discern a distinction, though you may not. The Vestal's fire burns straight."

"Who is she?"

"It rejoices me that she should be so little known. All the greater the illumination when her light shines out! The signorina Vittoria is a cantatrice who is about to appear upon the boards."

"Ah! that completes it." Corte rose to his feet with an air of desperation. "We require to be refreshed with quavers and crescendos and trillets! Who ever knew a singer that cared an inch of flesh for her country? Money, flowers, flattery, vivas! but, money! money! and Austrian as good as Italian. I've seen the accursed wenches bow gratefully for Austrian bouquets:—bow? ay, and more; and when the Austrian came to them red with our blood. I spit upon their polluted cheeks! They get us an ill name wherever they go. These singers have no country. One

—I knew her—betrayed Filippo Mastalone, and sang the night of the day he was shot. I heard the white demon myself. I could have taken her long neck till she twisted like a serpent and hissed. May heaven forgive me for not levelling a pistol at her head! If God, my friends, had put the thought into my brain that night!"

A flush had deadened Corte's face to the hue of nightshade.

"You thunder in a clear atmosphere, my Ugo," returned the old man, as he fell back calmly at full length.

"And who is this signorina Vittoria?" cried Corte.

"A cantatrice who is about to appear upon the boards, as I have already remarked: of La Scala, let me add, if you hold it necessary."

"And what does she do here?"

"Her object in coming, my friend? Her object in coming is, first, to make her reverence to one who happens to be among us this day; and secondly, but principally, to submit a proposition to him and to us."

"What's her age?" Corte sneered.

"According to what calendar would you have it reckoned? Wisdom would say sixty: Father Chronos might divide that by three, and would get scarce a month in addition, hungry as he is for her, and all of us! But Minerva's handmaiden has no age. And now, dear Ugo, you have your opportunity to denounce her as a convicted screecher by night. Do so."

Corte turned his face to the Chief, and they spoke together for some minutes: after which, having had names of noble

devoted women, dead and living, cited to him, in answer to brutal bellowings against that sex, and hearing of the damsel under debate as one who was expected and was welcome, he flung himself upon the ground again, inviting calamity by premature resignation. Giulio Bandinelli stretched his hand for Carlo's glass, and spied the approach of the signorina.

"Dark," he said.

"A jewel of that complexion," added Agostino, by way of comment.

"She has scorching eyes."

"She may do mischief; she may do mischief; let it be only on the right Side!"

"She looks fat."

"She sits doubled up and forward, don't you see, to relieve the poor donkey. You, my Giulio, would call a swan fat if the neck were not always on the stretch."

"By Bacchus! what a throat she has!"

"And well interjected, Giulio! It runs down like wine, like wine, to the little ebbing and flowing wave! Away with the glass, my boy! You must trust to all that's best about you to spy what's within. She makes me young—young!"

Agostino waved his hand in the form of a salute to her on the last short ascent. She acknowledged it gracefully; and talking at intervals to Carlo Ammiani, who footed briskly by her side, she drew by degrees among the eyes fixed on her, some of which were not gentle; but hers were for the Chief, at whose feet, when

dismounted by Ammiani's solicitous aid, she would have knelt, had he not seized her by her elbows, and put his lips to her cheek.

"The signorina Vittoria, gentlemen," said Agostino.

CHAPTER III

The old man had introduced her with much of the pride of a father displaying some noble child of his for the first time to admiring friends.

"She is one of us," he pursued; "a daughter of Italy! My daughter also; is it not so?"

He turned to her as for a confirmation. The signorina pressed his fingers. She was a little intimidated, and for the moment seemed shy and girlish. The shade of her broad straw hat partly concealed her vivid features.

"Now, gentlemen, if you please, the number is complete, and we may proceed to business," said Agostino, formally but as he conducted the signorina to place her at the feet of the Chief, she beckoned to her servant, who was holding the animal she had ridden. He came up to her, and presented himself in something of a military posture of attention to her commands. These were that he should take the poor brute to water, and then lead him back to Baveno, and do duty in waiting upon her mother. The first injunction was received in a decidedly acquiescent manner. On hearing the second, which directed his abandonment of his post of immediate watchfulness over her safety, the man flatly objected with a "Signorina, no."

He was a handsome bright-eyed fellow, with a soldier's frame and a smile as broad and beaming as laughter, indicating much of

that mixture of acuteness, and simplicity which is a characteristic of the South, and means no more than that the extreme vivacity of the blood exceeds at times that of the brain.

A curious frown of half-amused astonishment hung on the signorina's face.

"When I tell you to go, Beppo!"

At once the man threw out his fingers, accompanied by an amazingly voluble delivery of his reasons for this revolt against her authority. Among other things, he spoke of an oath sworn by him to a foreign gentleman, his patron,—for whom, and for whomsoever he loved, he was ready to pour forth his heart's blood,—to the effect that he would never quit her side when she left the roof of her house.

"You see, Beppo," she remonstrated, "I am among friends."

Beppo gave a sweeping bow, but remained firm where he stood. Ammiani cast a sharp hard look at the man.

"Do you hear the signorina's orders?"

"I hear them, signore."

"Will you obey them?"

She interposed. "He must not hear quick words. Beppo is only showing his love for his master and for me. But you are wrong in this case, my Beppo. You shall give me your protection when I require it; and now, you are sensible, and must understand that it is not wanted. I tell you to go."

Beppo read the eyes of his young mistress.

"Signorina,"—he stooped forward mysteriously,—"signorina,

that fellow is in Baveno. I saw him this morning."

"Good, good. And now go, my friend."

"The signor Agostino," he remarked loudly, to attract the old man; "the signor Agostino may think proper to advise you."

"The signor Agostino will laugh at nothing that you say to-day, Beppo. You will obey me. Go at once," she repeated, seeing him on tiptoe to gain Agostino's attention.

Beppo knew by her eyes that her ears were locked against him; and, though she spoke softly, there was an imperiousness in her voice not to be disregarded. He showed plainly by the lost rigidity of his attitude that he was beaten and perplexed. Further expostulations being disregarded, he turned his head to look at the poor panting beast under his charge, and went slowly up to him: they walked off together, a crest-fallen pair.

"You have gained the victory, signorina," said Ugo Corte.

She replied, smiling, "My poor Beppo! it's not difficult to get the best of those who love us."

"Ha!" cried Agostino; "here is one of their secrets, Carlo. Take heed of it, my boy. We shall have queens when kings are fossils, mark me!"

Ammiani muttered a courtly phrase, whereat Corte yawned in very grim fashion.

The signorina had dropped to the grass, at a short step from the Chief, to whom her face was now seriously given. In Ammiani's sight she looked a dark Madonna, with the sun shining bright gold through the edges of the summer hat, thrown back from

her head. The full and steady contemplative eyes had taken their fixed expression, after a vanishing affectionate gaze of an instant cast upon Agostino. Attentive as they were, light played in them like water. The countenance was vivid in repose. She leaned slightly forward, clasping the wrist of one hand about her knee, and the sole of one little foot showed from under her dress.

Deliberately, but with no attempt at dramatic impressiveness, the Chief began to speak. He touched upon the condition of Italy, and the new lilt animating her young men and women. "I have heard many good men jeer," he said, "at our taking women to our counsel, accepting their help, and putting a great stake upon their devotion. You have read history, and you know what women can accomplish. They may be trained, equally as we are, to venerate the abstract idea of country, and be a sacrifice to it. Without their aid, and the fire of a fresh life being kindled in their bosoms, no country that has lain like ours in the death-trance can revive. In the death-trance, I say, for Italy does not die!"

"True," said other voices.

"We have this belief in the eternal life of our country, and the belief is the life itself. But let no strong man among us despise the help of women. I have seen our cause lie desperate, and those who despaired of it were not women. Women kept the flame alive. They worship in the temple of the cause."

Ammiani's eyes dwelt fervidly upon the signorina. Her look, which was fastened upon the Chief, expressed a mind that listened to strange matter concerning her very little. But when

the plans for the rising of the Bergamascs and Brescians, the Venetians, the Bolognese, the Milanese, all the principal Northern cities, were recited, with a practical emphasis thrown upon numbers, upon the readiness of the organized bands, the dispositions of the leaders, and the amount of resistance to be expected at the various points indicated for the outbreak, her hands disjoined, and she stretched her fingers to the grass, supporting herself so, while her extended chin and animated features told how eagerly her spirit drank at positive springs, and thirsted for assurance of the coming storm.

"It is decided that Milan gives the signal," said the Chief; and a light, like the reflection of a beacon-fire upon the night, flashed over her.

He was pursuing, when Ugo Corte smote the air with his nervous fingers, crying out passionately, "Bunglers! are we again to wait for them, and hear that fifteen patriots have stabbed a Croat corporal, and wrestled hotly with a lieutenant of the guard? I say they are bunglers. They never mean the thing. Fifteen! There were just three Milanese among the last lot—the pick of the city; and the rest were made up of Trentini, and our lads from Bergamo and Brescia; and the order from the Council was, 'Go and do the business!' which means, 'Go and earn your ounce of Austrian lead.' They went, and we gave fifteen true men for one poor devil of a curst tight blue-leg. They can play the game on if we give them odds like that. Milan burns bad powder, and goes off like a drugged pistol. It's a nest of bunglers, and

may it be razed! We could do without it, and well! If it were a family failing, should not I too be trusting them? My brother was one of the fifteen who marched out as targets to try the skill of those hell-plumed Tyrolese: and they did it thoroughly —shot him straight here." Corte struck his chest. "He gave a jump and a cry. Was it a viva for Milan? They swear that it was, and they can't translate from a living mouth, much more from a dead one; but I know my Niccolo better. I have kissed his lips a thousand times, and I know the poor boy meant, 'Scorn and eternal distrust of such peddling conspirators as these!' I can deal with traitors, but these flash-in-the-pan plotters—these shaking, jelly-bodied patriots!—trust to them again? Rather draw lots for another fifteen to bare their breasts and bandage their eyes, and march out in the grey morning, while the stupid Croat corporal goes on smoking his lumpy pipe! We shall hear that Milan is moving; we shall rise; we shall be hot at it; and the news will come that Milan has merely yawned and turned over to sleep on the other side. Twice she has done this trick, and the garrison there has sent five regiments to finish us—teach us to sleep soundly likewise! I say, let it be Bergamo; or be it Brescia, if you like; or Venice: she is ready. You trust to Milan, and you are fore-doomed. I would swear it with this hand in the flames. She give the signal? Shut your eyes, cross your hands flat on your breasts: you are dead men if you move. She lead the way? Spin on your heels, and you have followed her!"

Corte had spoken in a thick difficult voice, that seemed to

require the aid of his vehement gestures to pour out as it did like a water-pipe in a hurricane of rain. He ceased, red almost to blackness, and knotted his arms, that were big as the cable of a vessel. Not a murmur followed his speech. The word was, given to the Chief, and he resumed:—"You have a personal feeling in this case, Ugo. You have not heard me. I came through Paris. A rocket will soon shoot up from Paris that will be a signal for Christendom. The keen French wit is sick of its compromise-king. All Europe is in convulsions in a few months: to-morrow it may be. The elements are in the hearts of the people, and nothing will contain them. We have sown them to reap them. The sowing asks for persistency; but the reaping demands skill and absolute truthfulness. We have now one of those occasions coming which are the flowers to be plucked by resolute and worthy hands: they are the tests of our sincerity. This time now rapidly approaching will try us all, and we must be ready for it. If we have believed in it, we stand prepared. If we have conceived our plan of action in purity of heart, we shall be guided to discern the means which may serve us. You will know speedily what it is that has prompted you to move. If passion blindfolds you, if you are foiled by a prejudice, I also shall know. My friend, the nursing of a single antipathy is a presumption that your motive force is personal—whether the thirst for vengeance or some internal union of a hundred indistinct little fits of egoism. I have seen brave and even noble men fail at the ordeal of such an hour: not fail in courage, not fail in the strength of their desire; that was the

misery for them! They failed because midway they lost the vision to select the right instruments put in our way by heaven. That vision belongs solely to such as have clean and disciplined hearts. The hope in the bosom of a man whose fixed star is Humanity becomes a part of his blood, and is extinguished when his blood flows no more. To conquer him, the principle of life must be conquered. And he, my friend, will use all, because he serves all. I need not touch on Milan."

The signorina drew in her breath quickly, as if in this abrupt close she had a revelation of the Chief's whole meaning, and was startled by the sudden unveiling of his mastery. Her hands hung loose; her figure was tremulous. A murmur from Corte jarred within her like a furious discord, but he had not offended by refusing to disclaim his error, and had simply said in a gruff acquiescent way, "Proceed." Her sensations of surprise at the singular triumph of the Chief made her look curiously into the faces of the other men; but the pronouncing of her name engaged her attention.

"Your first night is the night of the fifteenth of next month?"

"It is, signore," she replied, abashed to find herself speaking with him who had so moved her.

"There is no likelihood of a postponement?"

"I am certain, signore, that I shall be ready."

"There are no squabbles of any serious kind among the singers?"

A soft dimple played for a moment on her lips. "I have heard

something."

"Among the women?"

"Yes, and the men."

"But the men do not concern you?"

"No, signore. Except that the women twist them."

Agostino chuckled audibly. The Chief resumed:

"You believe, notwithstanding, that all will go well? The opera will be acted; and you will appear in it?"

"Yes, signore. I know one who has determined on it, and can do it."

"Good. The opera is Camilla?"

She was answering with an affirmative, when Agostino broke in,—"Camilla! And honour to whom honour is due! Let Caesar claim the writing of the libretto, if it be Caesar's! It has passed the censorship, signed Agostino Balderini—a disaffected person out of Piedmont, rendered tame and fangless by a rigorous imprisonment. The sources of the tale, O ye grave Signori Tedeschi? The sources are partly to be traced to a neat little French vaudeville, very sparkling—Camille, or the Husband Asserted; and again to a certain Chronicle that may be mediaeval, may be modern, and is just, as the great Shakespeare would say, 'as you like it.'"

Agostino recited some mock verses, burlesquing the ordinary libretti, and provoked loud laughter from Carlo Ammiani, who was familiar enough with the run of their nonsense.

"Camilla is the bride of Camillo. I give to her all the brains,

which is a modern idea, quite! He does all the mischief, which is possibly mediaeval. They have both an enemy, which is mediaeval and modern. None of them know exactly what they are about; so there you have the modern, the mediaeval, and the antique, all in one. Finally, my friends, Camilla is something for you to digest at leisure. The censorship swallowed it at a gulp. Never was bait so handsomely taken! At present I have the joy of playing my fish. On the night of the fifteenth I land him. Camilla has a mother. Do you see? That mother is reported, is generally conceived, as dead. Do you see further? Camilla's first song treats of a dream she has had of that mother. Our signorina shall not be troubled to favour you with a taste of it, or, by Bacchus and his Indian nymphs, I should speedily behold you jumping like peas in a pan, like trout on a bank! The earth would be hot under you, verily! As I was remarking, or meant to be, Camilla and her husband disagree, having agreed to. 'Tis a plot to deceive Count Orso—aha? You are acquainted with Count Orso! He is Camilla's antenuptial guardian. Now you warm to it! In that condition I leave you. Perhaps my child here will give you a taste of her voice. The poetry does much upon reflection, but it has to ripen within you—a matter of time. Wed this voice to the poetry, and it finds passage 'twixt your ribs, as on the point of a driven blade. Do I cry the sweetness and the coolness of my melons? Not I! Try them."

The signorina put her hand out for the scroll he was unfolding, and cast her eyes along bars of music, while Agostino called a

"Silenzio tutti!" She sang one verse, and stopped for breath.

Between her dismayed breathings she said to the Chief: —"Believe me, signore, I can be trusted to sing when the time comes."

"Sing on, my blackbird—my viola!" said Agostino. "We all trust you. Look at Colonel Corte, and take him for Count Orso. Take me for pretty Camillo. Take Marco for Michiela; Giulio for Leonardo; Carlo for Cupid. Take the Chief for the audience. Take him for a frivolous public. Ah, my Pippo!" (Agostino laughed aside to him). "Let us lead off with a lighter piece; a trifle-tra-la-la! and then let the frisky piccolo be drowned in deep organ notes, as on some occasions in history the people overrun certain puling characters. But that, I confess, is an illustration altogether out of place, and I'll simply jot it down in my notebook."

Agostino had talked on to let her gain confidence. When he was silent she sang from memory. It was a song of flourishes: one of those be-flowered arias in which the notes flicker and leap like young flames. Others might have sung it; and though it spoke favourably of her aptitude and musical education, and was of a quality to enrapture easy, merely critical audiences, it won no applause from these men. The effect produced by it was exhibited in the placid tolerance shown by the uplifting of Ugo Corte's eyebrows, which said, "Well, here's a voice, certainly." His subsequent look added, "Is this what we have come hither to hear?"

Vittoria saw the look. “Am I on my trial before you?” she thought; and the thought nerved her throat. She sang in strong and grave contralto tones, at first with shut eyes. The sense of hostility left her, and left her soul free, and she raised them. The song was of Camilla dying. She pardons the treacherous hand, commending her memory and the strength of her faith to her husband:—

> “Beloved, I am quickly out of sight:
> I pray that you will love more than my dust.
>
> Were death defeat, much weeping would be right;
> ‘Tis victory when it leaves surviving trust.
> You will not find me save when you forget
> Earth’s feebleness, and come to faith, my friend,
> For all Humanity doth owe a debt
> To all Humanity, until the end.”

Agostino glanced at the Chief to see whether his ear had caught note of his own language.

The melancholy severity of that song of death changed to a song of prophetic triumph. The signorina stood up. Camilla has thrown off the mask, and has sung the name “Italia!” At the recurrence of it the men rose likewise.

> “Italia, Italia, shall be free!”

Vittoria gave the inspiration of a dying voice: the conquest of death by an eternal truth seemed to radiate from her. Voice and features were as one expression of a rapture of belief built upon pathetic trustfulness.

"Italia, Italia shall be free!"

She seized the hearts of those hard and serious men as a wind takes the strong oak-trees, and rocks them on their knotted roots, and leaves them with the song of soaring among their branches. Italy shone about her; the lake, the plains, the peaks, and the shouldering flushed snowridges. Carlo Ammiani breathed as one who draws in fire. Grizzled Agostino glittered with suppressed emotion, like a frosted thorn-bush in the sunlight. Ugo Corte had his thick brows down, as a man who is reading iron matter. The Chief alone showed no sign beyond a half lifting of the hand, and a most luminous fixed observation of the fair young woman, from whom power was an emanation, free of effort. The gaze was sad in its thoughtfulness, such as our feelings translate of the light of evening.

She ceased, and he said, "You sing on the night of the fifteenth?"

"I do, signore."

"It is your first appearance?"

She bent her head.

"And you will be prepared on that night to sing this song?"

"Yes, signore."

"Save in the event of your being forbidden?"

"Unless you shall forbid me, I will sing it, signore."

"Should they imprison you?—"

"If they shoot me I shall be satisfied to know that I have sung a song that cannot be forgotten."

The Chief took her hand in a gentle grasp.

"Such as you will help to give our Italy freedom. You hold the sacred flame, and know you hold it in trust."

"Friends,"—he turned to his companions,—"you have heard what will be the signal for Milan."

CHAPTER IV

It was a surprise to all of them, save to Agostino Balderini, who passed his inspecting glance from face to face, marking the effect of the announcement. Corte gazed at her heavily, but not altogether disapprovingly. Giulio Bandinelli and Marco Sana, though evidently astonished, and to some extent incredulous, listened like the perfectly trusty lieutenants in an enterprise which they were. But Carlo Ammiani stood horror-stricken. The blood had left his handsome young olive-hued face, and his eyes were on the signorina, large with amazement, from which they deepened to piteousness of entreaty.

"Signorina!—you! Can it be true? Do you know?—do you mean it?"

"What, signor Carlo?"

"This; will you venture to do such a thing?"

"Oh, will I venture? What can you think of me? It is my own request."

"But, signorina, in mercy, listen and consider."

Carlo turned impetuously to the Chief. "The signorina can't know the danger she is running. She will be seized on the boards, and shut up between four walls before a man of us will be ready, —or more than one," he added softly. "The house is sure to be packed for a first night; and the Polizia have a suspicion of her. She has been off her guard in the Conservatorio; she has talked of

a country called Italy; she has been indiscreet;—pardon, pardon, signorina! but it is true that she has spoken out from her noble heart. And this opera! Are they fools?—they must see through it. It will never,—it can't possibly be reckoned on to appear. I knew that the signorina was heart and soul with us; but who could guess that her object was to sacrifice herself in the front rank,—to lead a forlorn hope! I tell you it's like a Pagan rite. You are positively slaying a victim. I beg you all to look at the case calmly!"

A burst of laughter checked him; for his seniors by many years could not hear such veteran's counsel from a hurried boy without being shrewdly touched by the humour of it, while one or two threw a particular irony into their tones.

"When we do slay a victim, we will come to you as our augur, my Carlo," said Agostino.

Corte was less gentle. As a Milanese and a mere youth Ammiani was antipathetic to Corte, who closed his laughter with a windy rattle of his lips, and a "pish!" of some emphasis.

Carlo was quick to give him a challenging frown.

"What is it?" Corte bent his head back, as if inquiringly.

"It's I who claim that question by right," said Carlo.

"You are a boy."

"I have studied war."

"In books."

"With brains, Colonel Corte."

"War is a matter of blows, my little lad."

"Let me inform you, signor Colonel, that war is not a game

between bulls, to be played with the horns of the head."

"You are prepared to instruct me?" The fiery Bergamasc lifted his eyebrows.

"Nay, nay!" said Agostino. "Between us two first;" and he grasped Carlo's arm, saying in an underbreath, "Your last retort was too long-winded. In these conflicts you must be quick, sharp as a rifle-crack that hits echo on the breast-bone and makes her cry out. I correct a student in the art of war." Then aloud: "My opera, young man!—well, it's my libretto, and you know we writers always say 'my opera' when we have put the pegs for the voice; you are certainly aware that we do. How dare you to make calumnious observations upon my opera? Is it not the ripe and admirable fruit of five years of confinement? Are not the lines sharp, the stanzas solid? and the stuff, is it not good? Is not the subject simple, pure from offence to sensitive authority, constitutionally harmless? Reply!"

"It's transparent to any but asses," said Carlo.

"But if it has passed the censorship? You are guilty, my boy, of bestowing upon those highly disciplined gentlemen who govern your famous city—what title? I trust a prophetic one, since that it comes from an animal whose custom is to turn its back before it delivers a blow, and is, they remark, fonder of encountering dead lions than live ones. Still, it is you who are indiscreet,—eminently so, I must add, if you will look lofty. If my opera has passed the censorship! eh, what have you to say?"

Carlo endured this banter till the end of it came.

"And you—you encourage her!" he cried wrathfully. "You know what the danger is for her, if they once lay hands on her. They will have her in Verona in four-and-twenty hours; through the gates of the Adige in a couple of days, and at Spielberg, or some other of their infernal dens of groans, within a week. Where is the chance of a rescue then? They torture, too, they torture! It's a woman; and insult will be one mode of torturing her. They can use rods—"

The excited Southern youth was about to cover his face, but caught back his hands, clenching them.

"All this," said Agostino, "is an evasion, manifestly, of the question concerning my opera, on which you have thought proper to cast a slur. The phrase, 'transparent to any but asses,' may not be absolutely objectionable, for transparency is, as the critics rightly insist, meritorious in a composition. And, according to the other view, if we desire our clever opponents to see nothing in something, it is notably skilful to let them see through it. You perceive, my Carlo. Transparency, then, deserves favourable comment. So, I do not complain of your phrase, but I had the unfortunate privilege of hearing it uttered. The method of delivery scarcely conveyed a compliment. Will you apologize?"

Carlo burst from him with a vehement question to the Chief: "Is it decided?"

"It is, my friend," was the reply.

"Decided! She is doomed! Signorina! what can you know of this frightful risk? You are going to the slaughter. You will be

seized before the first verse is out of your lips, and once in their clutches, you will never breathe free air again. It's madness!—ah, forgive me!—yes, madness! For you shut your eyes; you rush into the trap blindfolded. And that is how you serve our Italy! She sees you an instant, and you are caught away;—and you who might serve her, if you would, do you think you can move dungeon walls?"

"Perhaps, if I have been once seen, I shall not be forgotten," said the signorina smoothly, and then cast her eyes down, as if she felt the burden of a little possible accusation of vanity in this remark. She raised them with fire.

"No; never!" exclaimed Carlo. "But, now you are ours. And —surely it is not quite decided?"

He had spoken imploringly to the Chief. "Not irrevocably?" he added.

"Irrevocably!"

"Then she is lost!"

"For shame, Carlo Ammiani;" said old Agostino, casting his sententious humours aside. "Do you not hear? It is decided! Do you wish to rob her of her courage, and see her tremble? It's her scheme and mine: a case where an old head approves a young one. The Chief says Yes! and you bellow still! Is it a Milanese trick? Be silent."

"Be silent!" echoed Carlo. "Do you remember the beast Marschatska's bet?" The allusion was to a black incident concerning a young Italian ballet girl who had been carried off

by an Austrian officer, under the pretext of her complicity in one of the antecedent conspiracies.

"He rendered payment for it," said Agostino.

"He perished; yes! as we shake dust to the winds; but she!—it's terrible! You place women in the front ranks—girls! What can defenceless creatures do? Would you let the van-regiment in battle be the one without weapons? It's slaughter. She's like a lamb to them. You hold up your jewel to the enemy, and cry, 'Come and take it.' Think of the insults! think of the rough hands, and foul mouths! She will be seized on the boards—"

"Not if you keep your tongue from wagging," interposed Ugo Corte, fevered by this unseasonable exhibition of what was to him manifestly a lover's frenzied selfishness. He moved off, indifferent to Carlo's retort. Marco Sana and Giulio Bandinelli were already talking aside with the Chief.

"Signor Carlo, not a hand shall touch me," said the signorina. "And I am not a lamb, though it is good of you to think me one. I passed through the streets of Milan in the last rising. I was unharmed. You must have some confidence in me."

"Signorina, there's the danger," rejoined Carlo. "You trust to your good angels once, twice—the third time they fail you! What are you among a host of armed savages? You would be tossed like weed on the sea. In pity, do not look so scornfully! No, there is no unjust meaning in it; but you despise me for seeing danger. Can nothing persuade you? And, besides," he addressed the Chief, who alone betrayed no signs of weariness; "listen, I beg

of you. Milan wants no more than a signal. She does not require to be excited. I came charged with several proposals for giving the alarm. Attend, you others! The night of the Fifteenth comes; it is passing like an ordinary night. At twelve a fire-balloon is seen in the sky. Listen, in the name of saints and devils!"

But even the Chief was observed to show signs of amusement, and the gravity of the rest forsook them altogether at the display of this profound and original conspiratorial notion.

"Excellent! excellent! my Carlo," said old Agostino, cheerfully. "You have thought. You must have thought, or whence such a conception? But, you really mistake. It is not the garrison whom we desire to put on their guard. By no means. We are not in the Imperial pay. Probably your balloon is to burst in due time, and, wind permitting, disperse printed papers all over the city?"

"What if it is?" cried Carlo fiercely.

"Exactly. I have divined your idea. You have thought, or, to correct the tense, are thinking, which is more hopeful, though it may chance not to seem so meritorious. But, if yours are the ideas of full-blown jackets, bear in mind that our enemies are coated and breeched. It may be creditable to you that your cunning is not the cunning of the serpent; to us it would be more valuable if it were. Continue."

"Oh! there are a thousand ways." Carlo controlled himself with a sharp screw of all his muscles. "I simply wish to save the signorina from an annoyance."

"Very mildly put," Agostino murmured assentingly.

"In our Journal," said Carlo, holding out the palm of one hand to dot the forefinger of the other across it, by way of personal illustration—"in our Journal we might arrange for certain letters to recur at distinct intervals in Roman capitals, which might spell out, 'This Night AT Twelve,' or 'At Once.'"

"Quite as ingenious, but on the present occasion erring on the side of intricacy. Aha! you want to increase the sale of your Journal, do you, my boy? The rogue!"

With which, and a light slap over Carlo's shoulder, Agostino left him.

The aspect of his own futile proposals stared the young man in the face too forcibly for him to nurse the spark of resentment which was struck out in the turmoil of his bosom. He veered, as if to follow Agostino, and remained midway, his chest heaving, and his eyelids shut.

"Signor Carlo, I have not thanked you." He heard Vittoria speak. "I know that a woman should never attempt to do men's work. The Chief will tell you that we must all serve now, and all do our best. If we fail, and they put me to great indignity, I promise you that I will not live. I would give this up to be done by anyone else who could do it better. It is in my hands, and my friends must encourage me."

"Ah, signorina!" the young man sighed bitterly. The knowledge that he had already betrayed himself in the presence of others too far, and the sob in his throat labouring to escape,

kept him still.

A warning call from Ugo Corte drew their attention. Close by the chalet where the first climbers of the mountain had refreshed themselves, Beppo was seen struggling to secure the arms of a man in a high-crowned green Swiss hat, who was apparently disposed to give the signorina's faithful servant some trouble. After gazing a minute at this singular contention, she cried—"It's the same who follows me everywhere!"

"And you will not believe you are suspected," murmured Carlo in her ear.

"A spy?" Sana queried, showing keen joy at the prospect of scotching such a reptile on the lonely height. Corte went up to the Chief. They spoke briefly together, making use of notes and tracings on paper. The Chief then said "Adieu" to the signorina. It was explained to the rest by Corte that he had a meeting to attend near Pella about noon, and must be in Fobello before midnight. Thence his way would be to Genoa.

"So, you are resolved to give another trial to our crowned ex-Carbonaro," said Agostino.

"Without leaving him an initiative this time!" and the Chief embraced the old man. "You know me upon that point. I cannot trust him. I do not. But, if we make such a tide in Lombardy that his army must be drawn into it, is such an army to be refused? First, the tide, my friend! See to that."

"The king is our instrument!" cried Carlo Ammiani, brightening.

"Yes, if we were particularly well skilled in the use of that kind of instrument," Agostino muttered.

He stood apart while the Chief said a few words to Carlo, which made the blood play vividly across the visage of the youth. Carlo tried humbly to expostulate once or twice. In the end his head was bowed, and he signified a dumb acquiescence.

"Once more, good-bye." The Chief addressed the signorina in English.

She replied in the same tongue, "Good-bye," tremulously; and passion mounting on it, added—"Oh! when shall I see you again?"

"When Rome is purified to be a fit place for such as you."

In another minute he was hidden on the slope of the mountain lying toward Orta.

CHAPTER V

Beppo had effected a firm capture of his man some way down the slope. But it was a case of check that entirely precluded his own free movements. They hung together intertwisted in the characters of specious pacificator and appealing citizen, both breathless.

"There! you want to hand me up neatly; I know your vanity, my Beppo; and you don't even know my name," said the prisoner.

"I know your ferret of a face well enough," said Beppo. "You dog the signorina. Come up, and don't give trouble."

"Am I not a sheep? You worry me. Let me go."

"You're a wriggling eel."

"Catch me fast by the tail then, and don't hold me by the middle."

"You want frightening, my pretty fellow!"

"If that's true, my Beppo, somebody made a mistake in sending you to do it. Stop a moment. You're blown. I think you gulp down your minestra too hot; you drink beer."

"You dog the signorina! I swore to scotch you at last."

"I left Milan for the purpose—don't you see? Act fairly, my Beppo, and let us go up to the signorina together decently."

"Ay, ay, my little reptile! You'll find no Austrians here. Cry out to them to come to you from Baveno. If the Motterone grew just one tree! Saints! one would serve."

"Why don't you—fool that you are, my Beppo!—pray to the saints earlier? Trees don't grow from heaven."

"You'll be going there soon, and you'll know better about it."

"Thanks to the Virgin, then, we shall part at some time or other!"

The struggles between them continued sharply during this exchange of intellectual shots; but hearing Ugo Corte's voice, the prisoner's confident audacity forsook him, and he drew a long tight face like the mask of an admonitory exclamation addressed to himself from within.

"Stand up straight!" the soldier's command was uttered.

Even Beppo was amazed to see that the man had lost the power to obey or to speak.

Corte grasped him under the arm-pit. With the force of his huge fist he swung him round and stretched him out at arm's length, all collar and shanks. The man hung like a mole from the twig. Yet, while Beppo poured out the tale of his iniquities, his eyes gave the turn of a twinkle, showing that he could have answered one whom he did not fear. The charge brought against him was, that for the last six months he had been untiringly spying on the signorina.

Corte stamped his loose feet to earth, shook him and told him to walk aloft. The flexible voluble fellow had evidently become miserably disconcerted. He walked in trepidation, speechless, and when interrogated on the height his eyes flew across the angry visages with dismal uncertainty. Agostino perceived

that he had undoubtedly not expected to come among them, and forthwith began to excite Giulio and Marco to the worst suspicions, in order to indulge his royal poetic soul with a study of a timorous wretch pushed to anticipations of extremity.

"The execution of a spy," he preluded, "is the signal for the ringing of joy-bells on this earth; not only because he is one of a pestiferous excess, in point of numbers, but that he is no true son of earth. He escaped out of hell's doors on a windy day, and all that we do is to puff out a bad light, and send him back. Look at this fellow in whom conscience is operating so that he appears like a corked volcano! You can see that he takes Austrian money; his skin has got to be the exact colour of Munz. He has the greenish-yellow eyes of those elective, thrice-abhorred vampyres who feed on patriot-blood. He is condemned without trial by his villainous countenance, like an ungrammatical preface to a book. His tongue refuses to confess, but nature is stronger:—observe his knees. Now this is guilt. It is execrable guilt. He is a nasty object. Nature has in her wisdom shortened his stature to indicate that it is left to us to shorten the growth of his offending years. Now, you dangling soul! answer me:—what name hailed you when on earth?"

The fan, with no clearly serviceable tongue, articulated, "Luigi."

"Luigi! the name Christian and distinctive. The name historic:-Luigi Porco?"

"Luigi Saracco, signore."

"Saracco: Saracco: very possibly a strip of the posterity of cut-throat Moors. To judge by your face, a Moor undoubtedly: glib, slippery! with a body that slides and a soul that jumps. Taken altogether, more serpent than eagle. I misdoubt that little quick cornering eye of yours. Do you ever remember to have blushed?"

"No, signore," said Luigi.

"You spy upon the signorina, do you?"

"You have Beppo's word for that," interposed Marco Sana, growling.

"And you are found spying on the mountain this particular day! Luigi Saracco, you are a fellow of a tremendous composition. A goose walking into a den of foxes is alone to be compared to you,—if ever such goose was! How many of us did you count, now, when you were, say, a quarter of a mile below?"

Marco interposed again: "He has already seen enough up here to make a rope of florins."

"The fellow's eye takes likenesses," said Giulio.

Agostino's question was repeated by Corte, and so sternly that Luigi, beholding kindness upon no other face save Vittoria's, watched her, and muttering "Six," blinked his keen black eyes piteously to get her sign of assent to his hesitated naming of that number. Her mouth and the turn of her head were expressive to him, and he cried "Seven."

"So; first six, and next seven," said Corte.

"Six, I meant, without the signorina," Luigi explained.

"You saw six of us without the signorina! You see we are six

here, including the signorina. Where is the seventh?"

Luigi tried to penetrate Vittoria's eyes for a proper response; but she understood the grave necessity for getting the full extent of his observations out of him, and she looked as remorseless as the men. He feigned stupidity and sullenness, rage and cunning, in quick succession.

"Who was the seventh?" said Carlo.

"Was it the king?" Luigi asked.

This was by just a little too clever; and its cleverness, being seen, magnified the intended evasion so as to make it appear to them that Luigi knew well the name of the seventh.

Marco thumped a hand on his shoulder, shouting—"Here; speak out! You saw seven of us. Where has the seventh one gone?"

Luigi's wits made a dash at honesty. "Down Orta, signore."

"And down Orta, I think, you will go; deeper down than you may like."

Corte now requested Vittoria to stand aside. He motioned to her with his hand to stand farther, and still farther off; and finally told Carlo to escort her to Baveno. She now began to think that the man Luigi was in some perceptible danger, nor did Ammiani disperse the idea.

"If he is a spy, and if he has seen the Chief, we shall have to detain him for at least four-and-twenty hours," he said, "or do worse."

"But, Signor Carlo,"—Vittoria made appeal to his humanity,

—"do they mean, if they decide that he is guilty, to hurt him?"

"Tell me, signorina, what punishment do you imagine a spy deserves?"

"To be called one!"

Carlo smiled at her lofty method of dealing with the animal.

"Then you presume him to have a conscience?"

"I am sure, Signor Carlo, that I could make him loathe to be called a spy."

They were slowly pacing from the group, and were on the edge of the descent, when the signorina's name was shrieked by Luigi. The man came running to her for protection, Beppo and the rest at his heels. She allowed him to grasp her hand.

"After all, he is my spy; he does belong to me," she said, still speaking on to Carlo. "I must beg your permission, Colonel Corte and Signor Marco, to try an experiment. The Signor Carlo will not believe that a spy can be ashamed of his name.—Luigi!"

"Signorina!"—he shook his body over her hand with a most plaintive utterance.

"You are my countryman, Luigi?"

"Yes, signorina."

"You are an Italian?"

"Certainly, signorina!"

"A spy!"

Vittoria had not always to lift her voice in music for it to sway the hearts of men. She spoke the word very simply in a mellow soft tone. Luigi's blood shot purple. He thrust his fists against

his ears.

"See, Signor Carlo," she said; "I was right. Luigi, you will be a spy no more?"

Carlo Ammiani happened to be rolling a cigarette-paper. She put out her fingers for it, and then reached it to Luigi, who accepted it with singular contortions of his frame, declaring that he would confess everything to her. "Yes, signorina, it is true; I am a spy on you. I know the houses you visit. I know you eat too much chocolate for your voice. I know you are the friend of the Signora Laura, the widow of Giacomo Piaveni, shot—shot on Annunciation Day. The Virgin bless him! I know the turning of every street from your house near the Duomo to the signora's. You go nowhere else, except to the maestro's. And it's something to spy upon you. But think of your Beppo who spies upon me! And your little mother, the lady most excellent, is down in Baveno, and she is always near you when you make an expedition. Signorina, I know you would not pay your Beppo for spying upon me. Why does he do it? I do not sing 'Italia, Italia shall be free!' I have heard you when I was under the maestro's windows; and once you sang it to the Signor Agostino Balderini. Indeed, signorina, I am a sort of guardian of your voice. It is not gold of the Tedeschi I get from the Signor Antonio Pericles."

At the mention of this name, Agostino and Vittoria laughed out.

"You are in the pay of the Signor Antonio-Pericles," said Agostino. "Without being in our pay, you have done us the

service to come up here among us! Bravo! In return for your disinterestedness, we kick you down, either upon Baveno or upon Stresa, or across the lake, if you prefer it.—The man is harmless. He is hired by a particular worshipper of the signorina's voice, who affects to have first discovered it when she was in England, and is a connoisseur, a millionaire, a Greek, a rich scoundrel, with one indubitable passion, for which I praise him. We will let his paid eavesdropper depart, I think. He is harmless."

Neither Ugo nor Marco was disposed to allow any description of spy to escape unscotched. Vittoria saw that Luigi's looks were against him, and whispered: "Why do you show such cunning eyes, Luigi?"

He replied: "Signorina, take me out of their hearing, and I will tell you everything."

She walked aside. He seemed immediately to be inspired with confidence, and stretched his fingers in the form of a grasshopper, at which sight they cried: "He knows Barto Rizzo —this rascal!" They plied him with signs and countersigns, and speedily let him go. There ensued a sharp snapping of altercation between Luigi and Beppo. Vittoria had to order Beppo to stand back.

"It is a poor dog, not of a good breed, signorina," Luigi said, casting a tolerant glance over his shoulder. "Faithful, but a poor nose. Ah! you gave me this cigarette. Not the Virgin could have touched my marrow as you did. That's to be remembered by-and-by. Now, you are going to sing on the night of the fifteenth

of September. Change that night. The Signor Antonio-Pericles watches you, and he is a friend of the Government, and the Government is snoring for you to think it asleep. The Signor Antonio-Pericles pacifies the Tedeschi, but he will know all that you are doing, and how easy it will be, and how simple, for you to let me know what you think he ought to know, and just enough to keep him comfortable! So we work like a machine, signorina. Only, not through that Beppo, for he is vain of his legs, and his looks, and his service, and because he has carried a gun and heard it go off. Yes; I am a spy. But I am honest. I, too, have visited England. One can be honest and a spy. Signorina, I have two arms, but only one heart. If you will be gracious and consider! Say, here are two hands. One hand does this thing, one hand does that thing, and that thing wipes out this thing. It amounts to clear reasoning! Here are two eyes. Were they meant to see nothing but one side! Here is a tongue with a line down the middle almost to the tip of it—which is for service. That Beppo couldn't deal double, if he would; for he is imperfectly designed—a mere dog's pattern! But, only one heart, signorina—mind that. I will never forget the cigarette. I shall smoke it before I leave the mountain, and think—oh!"

Having illustrated the philosophy of his system, Luigi continued: "I am going to tell you everything. Pray, do not look on Beppo! This is important. The Signor Antonio-Pericles sent me to spy on you, because he expects some people to come up the mountain, and you know them; and one is an Austrian

officer, and he is an Englishman by birth, and he is coming to meet some English friends who enter Italy from Switzerland over the Moro, and easily up here on mules or donkeys from Pella. The Signor Antonio-Pericles has gold ears for everything that concerns the signorina. 'A patriot is she!' he says; and he is jealous of your English friends. He thinks they will distract you from your studies; and perhaps"—Luigi nodded sagaciously before he permitted himself to say—"perhaps he is jealous in another way. I have heard him speak like a sonnet of the signorina's beauty. The Signor Antonio-Pericles thinks that you have come here to-day to meet them. When he heard that you were going to leave Milan for Baveno, he was mad, and with two fists up, against all English persons. The Englishman who is an Austrian officer is quartered at Verona, and the Signor Antonio Pericles said that the Englishman should not meet you yet, if he could help it."

Victoria stood brooding. "Who can it be,—who is an Englishman, and an Austrian officer, and knows me?"

"Signorina, I don't know names. Behold, that Beppo is approaching like the snow! What I entreat is, that the signorina will wait a little for the English party, if they come, so that I may have something to tell my patron. To invent upon nothing is most unpleasant, and the Signor Antonio can soon perceive whether one swims with corks. Signorina, I can dance on one rope—I am a man. I am not a midge—I cannot dance upon nothing."

The days of Vittoria's youth had been passed in England. It

was not unknown to her that old English friends were on the way to Italy; the recollection of a quiet and a buried time put a veil across her features. She was perplexed by the mention of the Austrian officer by Luigi, as one may be who divines the truth too surely, but will not accept it for its loathsomeness. There were Englishmen in the army of Austria. Could one of them be this one whom she had cared for when she was a girl? It seemed hatefully cruel to him to believe it. She spoke to Agostino, begging him to remain with her on the height awhile to see whether the Signor Antonio-Pericles was right; to see whether Luigi was a truth-teller; to see whether these English persons were really coming. "Because," she said, "if they do come, it will at once dissolve any suspicions you may have of this Luigi. And I always long so much to know if the Signor Antonio is correct. I have never yet known him to be wrong."

"And you want to see these English," said Agostino. He frowned.

"Only to hear them. They shall not recognize me. I have now another name; and I am changed. My hat is enough to hide me. Let me hear them talk a little. You and the Signor Carlo will stay with me, and when they come, if they do come, I will remain no longer than just sufficient to make sure. I would refuse to know any of them before the night of the fifteenth; I want my strength too much. I shall have to hear a misery from them; I know it, I feel it; it turns my blood. But let me hear their voices! England is half my country, though I am so willing to forget her and give

all my life to Italy. Stay with me, dear friend, my best father! humour me, for you know that I am always charming when I am humoured."

Agostino pressed his finger on a dimple in her cheeks. "You can afford to make such a confession as that to a greybeard. The day is your own. Bear in mind that you are so situated that it will be prudent for you to have no fresh relations, either with foreigners or others, until your work is done,—in which, my dear child, may God bless you!"

"I pray to him with all my might," Vittoria said in reply.

After a consultation with Agostino, Ugo Corte and Marco and Giulio bade their adieux to her. The task of keeping Luigi from their clutches was difficult; but Agostino helped her in that also. To assure them, after his fashion, of the harmlessness of Luigi, he seconded him in a contest of wit against Beppo, and the little fellow, now that he had shaken off his fears, displayed a quickness of retort and a liveliness "unknown to professional spies and impossible to the race," said Agostino; "so absolutely is the mind of man blunted by Austrian gold. We know that for a fact. Beppo is no match for him. Beppo is sententious; ponderously illustrative; he can't turn; he is long-winded; he, I am afraid, my Carlo, studies the journals. He has got your journalistic style, wherein words of six syllables form the relief to words of eight, and hardly one dares to stand by itself. They are like huge boulders across a brook. The meaning, do you, see, would run of itself, but you give us these

impedimenting big stones to help us over it, while we profess to understand you by implication. For my part, I own, that to me, your parliamentary, illegitimate academic, modern crocodile phraseology, which is formidable in the jaws, impenetrable on the back, can't circumvent a corner, and is enabled to enter a common understanding solely by having a special highway prepared for it,—in short, the writing in your journals is too much for me. Beppo here is an example that the style is useless for controversy. This Luigi baffles him at every step."

"Some," rejoined Carlo, "say that Beppo has had the virtue to make you his study."

Agostino threw himself on his back and closed his eyes. "That, then, is more than you have done, signor Tuquoque. Look on the Bernina yonder, and fancy you behold a rout of phantom Goths; a sleepy rout, new risen, with the blood of old battles on their shroud-shirts, and a North-east wind blowing them upon our fat land. Or take a turn at the other side toward Orta, and look out for another invasion, by no means so picturesque, but preferable. Tourists! Do you hear them?"

Carlo Ammiani had descried the advanced troop of a procession of gravely-heated climbers ladies upon donkeys, and pedestrian guards stalking beside them, with courier, and lacqueys, and baskets of provisions, all bearing the stamp of pilgrims from the great Western Island.

CHAPTER VI

A mountain ascended by these children of the forcible Isle, is a mountain to be captured, and colonized, and absolutely occupied for a term; so that Vittoria soon found herself and her small body of adherents observed, and even exclaimed against, as a sort of intruding aborigines, whose presence entirely dispelled the sense of romantic dominion which a mighty eminence should give, and which Britons expect when they have expended a portion of their energies. The exclamations were not complimentary; nevertheless, Vittoria listened with pleased ears, as one listens by a brookside near an old home, hearing a music of memory rather than common words. They talked of heat, of appetite, of chill, of thirst, of the splendour of the prospect, of the anticipations of good hotel accommodation below, of the sadness superinduced by the reflection that in these days people were found everywhere, and poetry was thwarted; again of heat, again of thirst, of beauty, and of chill. There was the enunciation of matronly advice; there was the outcry of girlish insubordination; there were sighings for English ale, and namings of the visible ranges of peaks, and indicatings of geographical fingers to show where Switzerland and Piedmont met, and Austria held her grasp on Lombardy; and "to this point we go to-night; yonder to-morrow; farther the next day," was uttered, soberly or with excitement, as befitted the age of the speaker.

Among these tourists there was one very fair English lady, with long auburn curls of the traditionally English pattern, and the science of Paris displayed in her bonnet and dress; which, if not as graceful as severe admirers of the antique in statuary or of the mediaeval in drapery demand, pleads prettily to be thought so, and commonly succeeds in its object, when assisted by an artistic feminine manner. Vittoria heard her answer to the name of Mrs. Sedley. She had once known her as a Miss Adela Pole. Amidst the cluster of assiduous gentlemen surrounding this lady it was difficult for Vittoria's stolen glances to discern her husband; and the moment she did discern him she became as indifferent to him as was his young wife, by every manifestation of her sentiments. Mrs. Sedley informed her lord that it was not expected of him to care, or to pretend to care, for such scenes as the Motterone exhibited; and having dismissed him to the shade of an umbrella near the provision baskets, she took her station within a few steps of Vittoria, and allowed her attendant gentlemen to talk while she remained plunged in a meditative rapture at the prospect. The talk indicated a settled scheme for certain members of the party to reach Milan from the Como road. Mrs. Sedley was asked if she expected her brother to join her here or in Milan.

"Here, if a man's promises mean anything," she replied languidly.

She was told that some one waved a handkerchief to them from below.

"Is he alone?" she said; and directing an operaglass upon the slope of the mountain, pursued, as in a dreamy disregard of circumstances: "That is Captain Gambier. My brother Wilfrid has not kept his appointment. Perhaps he could not get leave from the General; perhaps he is married; he is engaged to an Austrian Countess, I have heard. Captain Gambier did me the favour to go round to a place called Stresa to meet him. He has undertaken the journey for nothing. It is the way with all journeys though this" (the lady had softly reverted to her rapture) "this is too exquisite! Nature at least does not deceive."

Vittoria listened to a bubbling of meaningless chatter, until Captain Gambier had joined Mrs. Sedley; and at him, for she had known him likewise, she could not forbear looking up. He was speaking to Mrs. Sedley, but caught the look, and bent his head for a clearer view of the features under the broad straw hat. Mrs. Sedley commanded him imperiously to say on.

"Have you no letter from Wilfrid? Has the mountain tired you? Has Wilfrid failed to send his sister one word? Surely Mr. Pericles will have made known our exact route to him? And his uncle, General Pierson, could—I am certain he did—exert his influence to procure him leave for a single week to meet the dearest member of his family."

Captain Gambier gathered his wits to give serviceable response to the kindled lady, and letting his eyes fall from time to time on the broad straw hat, made answer—"Lieutenant Pierson, or, in other words, Wilfrid Pole—"

The lady stamped her foot and flushed.

"You know, Augustus, I detest that name."

"Pardon me a thousandfold. I had forgotten."

"What has happened to you?"

Captain Gambier accused the heat.

"I found a letter from Wilfrid at the hotel. He is apparently kept on constant service between Milan, and Verona, and Venice. His quarters are at Verona. He informs me that he is to be married in the Spring; that is, if all continues quiet; married in the Spring. He seems to fancy that there may be disturbances; not of a serious kind, of course. He will meet you in Milan. He has never been permitted to remain at Milan longer than a couple of days at a stretch. Pericles has told him that she is in Florence. Pericles has told me that Miss Belloni has removed to Florence."

"Say it a third time," the lady indulgently remarked.

"I do not believe that she has gone."

"I dare say not."

"She has changed her name, you know."

"Oh, dear, yes; she has done something fantastic, naturally! For my part, I should have thought her own good enough."

"Emilia Alessandra Belloni is good enough, certainly," said Captain Gambier.

The shading straw rim had shaken once during the colloquy. It was now a fixed defence.

"What is her new name?" Mrs. Sedley inquired.

"That I cannot tell. Wilfrid merely mentions that he has not

seen her."

"I," said Mrs. Sedley, "when I reach Milan, shall not trust to Mr. Pericles, but shall write to the Conservatorio; for if she is going to be a great cantatrice, really, it will be agreeable to renew acquaintance with her. Nor will it do any mischief to Wilfrid, now that he is engaged. Are you very deeply attached to straw hats? They are sweet in a landscape."

Mrs. Sedley threw him a challenge from her blue eyes; but his reply to it was that of an unskilled youth, who reads a lady by the letters of her speech:—"One minute. I will be with you instantly. I want to have a look down on the lake. I suppose this is one of the most splendid views in Italy. Half a minute!"

Captain Gambier smiled brilliantly; and the lady, perceiving that polished shield, checked the shot of indignation on her astonished features, and laid it by. But the astonishment lingered there, like the lines of a slackened bow. She beheld her ideal of an English gentleman place himself before these recumbent foreign people, and turn to talk across them, with a pertinacious pursuit of the face under the bent straw hat. Nor was it singular to her that one of them at last should rise and protest against the continuation of the impertinence.

Carlo Ammiani, in fact, had opened matters with a scrupulously-courteous bow.

"Monsieur is perhaps unaware that he obscures the outlook?"

"Totally, monsieur," said Captain Gambier, and stood fast.

"Will monsieur do me the favour to take three steps either to

the right or to the left?"

"Pardon, monsieur, but the request is put almost in the form of an order."

"Simply if it should prove inefficacious in the form of a request."

"What, may I ask, monsieur, is your immediate object?"

"To entreat you to behave with civility."

"I am at a loss, monsieur, to perceive any offence."

"Permit me to say, it is lamentable you do not know when you insult a lady."

"I have insulted a lady?" Captain Gambier looked profoundly incredulous. "Oh! then you will not take exception to my assuming the privilege to apologize to her in person?"

Ammiani arrested him as he was about to pass.

"Stay, monsieur; you determine to be impudent, I perceive; you shall not be obtrusive."

Vittoria had tremblingly taken old Agostino's hand, and had risen to her feet. Still keeping her face hidden, she walked down the slope, followed at an interval by her servant, and curiously watched by the English officer, who said to himself, "Well, I suppose I was mistaken," and consequently discovered that he was in a hobble.

A short duologue in their best stilted French ensued between him and Ammiani. It was pitched too high in a foreign tongue for Captain Gambier to descend from it, as he would fain have done, to ask the lady's name. They exchanged cards and formal

salutes, and parted.

The dignified altercation had been witnessed by the main body of the tourists. Captain Gambier told them that he had merely interchanged amicable commonplaces with the Frenchman,—"or Italian," he added carelessly, reading the card in his hand. "I thought she might be somebody whom we knew," he said to Mrs. Sedley.

"Not the shadow of a likeness to her," the lady returned.

She had another opinion when later a scrap of paper bearing one pencilled line on it was handed round. A damsel of the party had picked it up near the spot where, as she remarked, "the foreigners had been sitting." It said:—

"Let none who look for safety go to Milan."

CHAPTER VII

A week following the day of meetings on the Motterone, Luigi the spy was in Milan, making his way across the Piazza de' Mercanti. He entered a narrow court, one of those which were anciently built upon the Oriental principle of giving shade at the small cost of excluding common air. It was dusky noon there through the hours of light, and thrice night when darkness fell. The atmosphere, during the sun's short passage overhead, hung with a glittering heaviness, like the twinkling iron-dust in a subterranean smithy. On the lower window of one of the houses there was a board, telling men that Barto Rizzo made and mended shoes, and requesting people who wished to see him to make much noise at the door, for he was hard of hearing. It speedily became known in the court that a visitor desired to see Barto Rizzo. The noise produced by Luigi was like that of a fanatical beater of the tomtom; he knocked and banged and danced against the door, crying out for his passing amusement an adaptation of a popular ballad:—"Oh, Barto, Barto! my boot is sadly worn: The toe is seen that should be veiled from sight. The toe that should be veiled like an Eastern maid: like a sultan's daughter: Shocking! shocking! One of a company of ten that were living a secluded life in chaste privacy! Oh, Barto, Barto! must I charge it to thy despicable leather or to my incessant pilgrimages? One fair toe! I fear presently the corruption of the

remaining nine: Then, alas! what do I go on? How shall I come to a perfumed end, who walk on ten indecent toes? Well may the delicate gentlemen sneer at me and scorn me: As for the angelic Lady who deigns to look so low, I may say of her that her graciousness clothes what she looks at: To her the foot, the leg, the back: To her the very soul is bared: But she is a rarity upon earth. Oh, Barto, Barto, she is rarest in Milan! I might run a day's length and not find her. If, O Barto, as my boot hints to me, I am about to be stripped of my last covering, I must hurry to the inconvenient little chamber of my mother, who cannot refuse to acknowledge me as of this pattern: Barto, O shoemaker! thou son of artifice and right-hand-man of necessity, preserve me in the fashion of the time: Cobble me neatly: A dozen wax threads and I am remade:—Excellent! I thank you! Now I can plant my foot bravely: Oh, Barto, my shoemaker! between ourselves, it is unpleasant in these refined days to be likened at all to that preposterous Adam!"

The omission of the apostrophes to Barto left it one of the ironical, veiled Republican, semi-socialistic ballads of the time, which were sung about the streets for the sharpness and pith of the couplets, and not from a perception of the double edge down the length of them.

As Luigi was coming to the terminating line, the door opened. A very handsome sullen young woman, of the dark, thick-browed Lombard type, asked what was wanted; at the same time the deep voice of a man; conjecturally rising from a lower floor,

called, and a lock was rattled. The woman told Luigi to enter. He sent a glance behind him; he had evidently been drained of his sprightliness in a second; he moved in with the slackness of limb of a gibbeted figure. The door shut; the woman led him downstairs. He could not have danced or sung a song now for great pay. The smell of mouldiness became so depressing to him that the smell of leather struck his nostrils refreshingly. He thought: "Oh, Virgin! it's dark enough to make one believe in every single thing they tell us about the saints." Up in the light of day Luigi had a turn for careless thinking on these holy subjects.

Barto Rizzo stood before him in a square of cellarage that was furnished with implements of his craft, too dark for a clear discernment of features.

"So, here you are!" was the greeting Luigi received.

It was a tremendous voice, that seemed to issue from a vast cavity. "Lead the gentleman to my sitting-room," said Barto. Luigi felt the wind of a handkerchief, and guessed that his eyes were about to be bandaged by the woman behind him. He petitioned to be spared it, on the plea, firstly, that it expressed want of confidence; secondly, that it took him in the stomach. The handkerchief was tight across his eyes while he was speaking. His hand was touched by the woman, and he commenced timidly an ascent of stairs. It continued so that he would have sworn he was a shorter time going up the Motterone; then down, and along a passage; lower down, deep into corpse-climate; up again, up another enormous mountain; and once

more down, as among rats and beetles, and down, as among faceless horrors, and down, where all things seemed prostrate and with a taste of brass. It was the poor fellow's nervous imagination, preternaturally excited. When the handkerchief was caught away, his jaw was shuddering, his eyes were sickly; he looked as if impaled on the prongs of fright. It required just half a minute to reanimate this mercurial creature, when he found himself under the light of two lamps, and Barto Rizzo fronting him, in a place so like the square of cellarage which he had been led to with unbandaged eyes, that it relieved his dread by touching his humour. He cried, "Have I made the journey of the Signor Capofinale, who visited the other end of the world by standing on his head?"

Barto Rizzo rolled out a burly laugh.

"Sit," he said. "You're a poor sweating body, and must needs have a dry tongue. Will you drink?"

"Dry!" quoth Luigi. "Holy San Carlo is a mash in a wine-press compared with me."

Barto Rizzo handed him a liquor, which he drank, and after gave thanks to Providence. Barto raised his hand.

"We're too low down here for that kind of machinery," he said. "They say that Providence is on the side of the Austrians. Now then, what have you to communicate to me? This time I let you come to my house trust at all, trust entirely. I think that's the proverb. You are admitted: speak like a guest."

Luigi's preference happened to be for categorical

interrogations. Never having an idea of spontaneously telling the whole truth, the sense that he was undertaking a narrative gave him such emotions as a bad swimmer upon deep seas may have; while, on the other hand, his being subjected to a series of questions seemed at least to leave him with one leg on shore, for then he could lie discreetly, and according to the finger-posts, and only when necessary, and he could recover himself if he made a false step. His ingenious mind reasoned these images out to his own satisfaction. He requested, therefore, that his host would let him hear what he desired to know.

Barto Rizzo's forefinger was pressed from an angle into one temple. His head inclined to meet it: so that it was like the support to a broad blunt pillar. The cropped head was flat as an owl's; the chest of immense breadth; the bulgy knees and big hands were those of a dwarf athlete. Strong colour, lying full on him from the neck to the forehead, made the big veins purple and the eyes fierier than the movements of his mind would have indicated. He was simply studying the character of his man. Luigi feared him; he was troubled chiefly because he was unaware of what Barto Rizzo wanted to know, and could not consequently tell what to bring to the market. The simplicity of the questions put to him was bewildering: he fell into the trap. Barto's eyes began to get terribly oblique. Jingling money in his pocket, he said:—"You saw Colonel Corte on the Motterone: you saw the Signor Agostino Balderini: good men, both! Also young Count Ammiani: I served his father, the General, and jogged the lad

on my knee. You saw the Signorina Vittoria. The English people came, and you heard them talk, but did not understand. You came home and told all this to the Signor Antonio, your employer number one. You have told the same to me, your employer number two. There's your pay."

Barto summed up thus the information he had received, and handed Luigi six gold pieces. The latter, springing with boyish thankfulness and pride at the easy earning of them, threw in a few additional facts, as, that he had been taken for a spy by the conspirators, and had heard one of the Englishmen mention the Signorina Vittoria's English name. Barto Rizzo lifted his eyebrows queerly. "We'll go through another interrogatory in an hour," he said; "stop here till I return."

Luigi was always too full of his own cunning to suspect the same in another, until he was left alone to reflect on a scene; when it became overwhelmingly transparent. "But, what could I say more than I did say?" he asked himself, as he stared at the one lamp Barto had left. Finding the door unfastened, he took the lamp and lighted himself out, and along a cavernous passage ending in a blank wall, against which his heart knocked and fell, for his sensation was immediately the terror of imprisonment and helplessness. Mad with alarm, he tried every spot for an aperture. Then he sat down on his haunches; he remembered hearing word of Barto Rizzo's rack:—certain methods peculiar to Barto Rizzo, by which he screwed matters out of his agents, and terrified them into fidelity. His personal dealings with Barto

were of recent date; but Luigi knew him by repute: he knew that the shoemaking business was a mask. Barto had been a soldier, a schoolmaster: twice an exile; a conspirator since the day when the Austrians had the two fine Apples of Pomona, Lombardy and Venice, given them as fruits of peace. Luigi remembered how he had snapped his fingers at the name of Barto Rizzo. There was no despising him now. He could only arrive at a peaceful contemplation of Barto Rizzo's character by determining to tell all, and (since that seemed little) more than he knew. He got back to the leather-smelling chamber, which was either the same or purposely rendered exactly similar to the one he had first been led to.

At the end of a leaden hour Barto Rizzo returned.

"Now, to recommence," he said. "Drink before you speak, if your tongue is dry."

Luigi thrust aside the mention of liquor. It seemed to him that by doing so he propitiated that ill-conceived divinity called Virtue, who lived in the open air, and desired men to drink water. Barto Rizzo evidently understood the kind of man he was schooling to his service.

"Did that Austrian officer, who is an Englishman, acquainted with the Signor Antonio-Pericles, meet the lady, his sister, on the Motterone?"

Luigi answered promptly, "Yes."

"Did the Signorina Vittoria speak to the lady?"

"No."

"Not a word?"

"No."

"Not one communication to her?"

"No: she sat under her straw hat."

"She concealed her face?"

"She sat like a naughty angry girl."

"Did she speak to the officer?"

"Not she!"

"Did she see him?"

"Of course she did! As if a woman's eyes couldn't see through straw-plait!"

Barto paused, calculatingly, eye on victim.

"The Signorina Vittoria," he resumed, "has engaged to sing on the night of the Fifteenth; has she?"

A twitching of Luigi's muscles showed that he apprehended a necessary straining of his invention on another tack.

"On the night of the Fifteenth, Signor Barto Rizzo? That's the night of her first appearance. Oh, yes!"

"To sing a particular song?"

"Lots of them! ay-aie!"

Barto took him by the shoulder and pressed him into his seat till he howled, saying, "Now, there's a slate and a pencil. Expect me at the end of two hours, this time. Next time it will be four: then eight, then sixteen. Find out how many hours that will be at the sixteenth examination."

Luigi flew at the torturer and stuck at the length of his

straightened arm, where he wriggled, refusing to listen to the explanation of Barto's system; which was that, in cases where every fresh examination taught him more, they were continued, after regularly-lengthening intervals, that might extend from the sowing of seed to the ripening of grain. "When all's delivered," said Barto, "then we begin to correct discrepancies. I expect," he added, "you and I will have done before a week's out."

"A week!" Luigi shouted. "Here's my stomach already leaping like a fish at the smell of this hole. You brute bear! it's a smell of bones. It turns my inside with a spoon. May the devil seize you when you're sleeping! You shan't go: I'll tell you everything —everything. I can't tell you anything more than I have told you. She gave me a cigarette—there! Now you know:—gave me a cigarette; a cigarette. I smoked it—there! Your faithful servant!"

"She gave you a cigarette, and you smoked it; ha!" said Barto Rizzo, who appeared to see something to weigh even in that small fact. "The English lady gave you the cigarette?"

Luigi nodded: "Yes;" pertinacious in deception. "Yes," he repeated; "the English lady. That was the person. What's the use of your skewering me with your eyes!"

"I perceive that you have never travelled, my Luigi," said Barto. "I am afraid we shall not part so early as I had supposed. I double the dose, and return to you in four hours' time."

Luigi threw himself flat on the ground, shrieking that he was ready to tell everything—anything. Not even the apparent desperation of his circumstances could teach him that a promise

to tell the truth was a more direct way of speaking. Indeed, the hitting of the truth would have seemed to him a sort of artful archery, the burden of which should devolve upon the questioner, whom he supplied with the relation of "everything and anything."

All through a night Luigi's lesson continued. In the morning he was still breaking out in small and purposeless lies; but Barto Rizzo had accomplished his two objects: that of squeezing him, and that of subjecting his imagination. Luigi confessed (owing to a singular recovery of his memory) the gift of the cigarette as coming from the Signorina Vittoria. What did it matter if she did give him a cigarette?

"You adore her for it?" said Barto.

"May the Virgin sweep the floor of heaven into her lap!" interjected Luigi. "She is a good patriot."

"Are you one?" Barto asked.

"Certainly I am."

"Then I shall have to suspect you, for the good of your country."

Luigi could not see the deduction. He was incapable of guessing that it might apply forcibly to Vittoria, who had undertaken a grave, perilous, and imminent work. Nothing but the spontaneous desire to elude the pursuit of a questioner had at first instigated his baffling of Barto Rizzo, until, fearing the dark square man himself, he feared him dimly for Vittoria's sake; he could not have said why. She was a good patriot: wherefore the reason for wishing to know more of her? Barto Rizzo had

compelled him at last to furnish a narrative of the events of that day on the Motterone, and, finding himself at sea, Luigi struck out boldly and swam as well as he could. Barto disentangled one succinct thread of incidents: Vittoria had been commissioned by the Chief to sing on the night of the Fifteenth; she had subsequently, without speaking to any of the English party, or revealing her features "keeping them beautifully hidden," Luigi said, with unaccountable enthusiasm—written a warning to them that they were to avoid Milan. The paper on which the warning had been written was found by the English when he was the only Italian on the height, lying thereto observe and note things in the service of Barto Rizzo. The writing was English, but when one of the English ladies—"who wore her hair like a planed shred of wood; like a torn vine; like a kite with two tails; like Luxury at the Banquet, ready to tumble over marble shoulders" (an illustration drawn probably from Luigi's study of some allegorical picture, —he was at a loss to describe the foreign female head-dress)—when this lady had read the writing, she exclaimed that it was the hand of "her Emilia!" and soon after she addressed Luigi in English, then in French, then in "barricade Italian" (by which phrase Luigi meant that the Italian words were there, but did not present their proper smooth footing for his understanding), and strove to obtain information from him concerning the signorina, and also concerning the chances that Milan would be an agitated city. Luigi assured her that Milan was the peacefullest of cities —a pure babe. He admitted his acquaintance with the Signorina

Vittoria Campa, and denied her being "any longer" the Emilia Alessandra Belloni of the English lady. The latter had partly retained him in her service, having given him directions to call at her hotel in Milan, and help her to communicate with her old friend. "I present myself to her to-morrow, Friday," said Luigi.

"That's to-day," said Barto.

Luigi clapped his hand to his cheek, crying wofully, "You've drawn, beastly gaoler! a night out of my life like an old jaw-tooth."

"There's day two or three fathoms above us," said Barto; "and hot coffee is coming down."

"I believe I've been stewing in a pot while the moon looked so cool." Luigi groaned, and touched up along the sleeves of his arms: that which he fancied he instantaneously felt.

The coffee was brought by the heavy-browed young woman. Before she quitted the place Barto desired her to cast her eyes on Luigi, and say whether she thought she should know him again. She scarcely glanced, and gave answer with a shrug of the shoulders as she retired. Luigi at the time was drinking. He rose; he was about to speak, but yawned instead. The woman's carelessly-dropped upper eyelids seemed to him to be reading him through a dozen of his contortions and disguises, and checked the idea of liberty which he associated with getting to the daylight.

"But it is worth the money!" shouted Barto Rizzo, with a splendid divination of his thought. "You skulker! are you not paid

and fattened to do business which you've only to remember, and it'll honey your legs in purgatory? You're the shooting-dog of that Greek, and you nose about the bushes for his birds, and who cares if any fellow, just for exercise, shoots a dagger a yard from his wrist and sticks you in the back? You serve me, and there's pay for you; brothers, doctors, nurses, friends,—a tight blanket if you fall from a housetop! and masses for your soul when your hour strikes. The treacherous cur lies rotting in a ditch! Do you conceive that when I employ you I am in your power? Your intelligence will open gradually. Do you know that here in this house I can conceal fifty men, and leave the door open to the Croats to find them? I tell you now—you are free; go forth. You go alone; no one touches you; ten years hence a skeleton is found with an English letter on its ribs—"

"Oh, stop! signor Barto, and be a blessed man," interposed Luigi, doubling and wriggling in a posture that appeared as if he were shaking negatives from the elbows of his crossed arms. "Stop. How did you know of a letter? I forgot—I have seen the English lady at her hotel. I was carrying the signorina's answer, when I thought 'Barto Rizzo calls me,' and I came like a lamb. And what does it matter? She is a good patriot; you are a good patriot; here it is. Consider my reputation, do; and be careful with the wax."

Barto drew a long breath. The mention of the English letter had been a shot in the dark. The result corroborated his devotional belief in the unerringness of his own powerful

intuition. He had guessed the case, or hardly even guessed it—merely stated it, to horrify Luigi. The letter was placed in his hands, and he sat as strongly thrilled by emotion, under the mask of his hard face, as a lover hearing music. "I read English," he remarked.

After he had drawn the seal three or four times slowly over the lamp, the green wax bubbled and unsnapped. Vittoria had written the following lines in reply to her old English friend:—

> "Forgive me, and do not ask to see me until we have passed the fifteenth of the month. You will see me that night at La Scala. I wish to embrace you, but I am miserable to think of your being in Milan. I cannot yet tell you where my residence is. I have not met your brother. If he writes to me it will make me happy, but I refuse to see him. I will explain to him why. Let him not try to see me. Let him send by this messenger. I hope he will contrive to be out of Milan all this month. Pray let me influence you to go for a time. I write coldly; I am tired, and forget my English. I do not forget my friends. I have you close against my heart. If it were prudent, and it involved me alone, I would come to you without a moment's loss of time. Do know that I am not changed, and am your affectionate
> *"Emilia."*

When Barto Rizzo had finished reading, he went from the chamber and blew his voice into what Luigi supposed to be a hollow tube.

"This letter," he said, coming back, "is a repetition of the

Signorina Vittoria's warning to her friends on the Motterone. The English lady's brother, who is in the Austrian service, was there, you say?"

Luigi considered that, having lately been believed in, he could not afford to look untruthful, and replied with a sprightly "Assuredly."

"He was there, and he read the writing on the paper?"

"Assuredly: right out loud, between puff-puff of his cigar."

"His name is Lieutenant Pierson. Did not Antonio-Pericles tell you his name? He will write to her: you will be the bearer of his letter to the signorina. I must see her reply. She is a good patriot; so am I; so are you. Good patriots must be prudent. I tell you, I must see her reply to this Lieutenant Pierson." Barto stuck his thumb and finger astride Luigi's shoulder and began rocking him gently, with a horrible meditative expression. "You will have to accomplish this, my Luigi. All fair excuses will be made, if you fail generally. This you must do. Keep upright while I am speaking to you! The excuses will be made; but I, not you, must make them: bear that in mind. Is there any person whom you, my Luigi, like best in the world?"

It was a winning question, and though Luigi was not the dupe of its insinuating gentleness, he answered, "The little girl who carries flowers every morning to the caffe La Scala."

"Ah! the little girl who carries flowers every morning to the caffe La Scala. Now, my Luigi, you may fail me, and I may pardon you. Listen attentively: if you are false; if you are guilty

of one piece of treachery:—do you see? You can't help slipping, but you can help jumping. Restrain yourself from jumping, that's all. If you are guilty of treachery, hurry at once, straight off, to the little girl who carries flowers every morning to the caffe La Scala. Go to her, take her by the two cheeks, kiss her, say to her 'addio, addio,' for, by the thunder of heaven! you will never see her more."

Luigi was rocked forward and back, while Barto spoke in level tones, till the voice dropped into its vast hollow, when Barto held him fast a moment, and hurled him away by the simple lifting of his hand.

The woman appeared and bound Luigi's eyes. Barto did not utter another word. On his journey back to daylight, Luigi comforted himself by muttering oaths that he would never again enter into this trap. As soon as his eyes were unbandaged, he laughed, and sang, and tossed a compliment from his finger-tips to the savage-browed beauty; pretended that he had got an armful, and that his heart was touched by the ecstasy; and sang again: "Oh, Barto, Barto! my boot is sadly worn. The toe is seen," etc., half-way down the stanzas. Without his knowing it, and before he had quitted the court, he had sunk into songless gloom, brooding on the scenes of the night. However free he might be in body, his imagination was captive to Barto Rizzo. He was no luckier than a bird, for whom the cage is open that it may feel the more keenly with its little taste of liberty that it is tied by the leg.

CHAPTER VIII

The importance of the matters extracted from Luigi does not lie on the surface; it will have to be seen through Barto Rizzo's mind. This man regarded himself as the mainspring of the conspiracy; specially its guardian, its wakeful Argus. He had conspired sleeplessly for thirty years; so long, that having no ideal reserve in his nature, conspiracy had become his professional occupation,—the wheel which it was his business to roll. He was above jealousy; he was above vanity. No one outstripping him cast a bad colour on him; nor did he object to bow to another as his superior. But he was prepared to suspect every one of insincerity and of faithlessness; and, being the master of the machinery of the plots, he was ready, upon a whispered justification, to despise the orders of his leader, and act by his own light in blunt disobedience. For it was his belief that while others speculated he knew all. He knew where the plots had failed; he knew the man who had bent and doubled. In the patriotic cause, perfect arrangements are crowned with perfect success, unless there is an imperfection of the instruments; for the cause is blessed by all superior agencies. Such was his governing idea. His arrangements had always been perfect; hence the deduction was a denunciation of some one particular person. He pointed out the traitor here, the traitor there; and in one or two cases he did so with a mildness that made those fret

at their beards vaguely who understood his character. Barto Rizzo was, it was said, born in a village near Forli, in the dominions of the Pope; according to the rumour, he was the child of a veiled woman and a cowled paternity. If not an offender against Government, he was at least a wanderer early in life. None could accuse him of personal ambition. He boasted that he had served as a common soldier with the Italian contingent furnished by Eugene to the Moscow campaign; he showed scars of old wounds: brown spots, and blue spots, and twisted twine of white skin, dotting the wrist, the neck, the calf, the ankle, and looking up from them, he slapped them proudly. Nor had he personal animosities of any kind. One sharp scar, which he called his shoulder knot, he owed to the knife of a friend, by name Sarpo, who had things ready to betray him, and struck him, in anticipation of that tremendous moment of surprise and wrath when the awakened victim frequently is nerved with devil's strength; but, striking, like a novice, on the bone, the stilet stuck there; and Barto coolly got him to point the outlet of escape, and walked off, carrying the blade where the terrified assassin had planted it. This Sarpo had become a tradesman in Milan—a bookseller and small printer; and he was unmolested. Barto said of him, that he was as bad as a few odd persons thought himself to be, and had in him the making of a great traitor; but, that as Sarpo hated him and had sought to be rid of him for private reasons only, it was a pity to waste on such a fellow steel that should serve the Cause. "While I live," said Barto, "my enemies

have a tolerably active conscience."

The absence of personal animosity in him was not due to magnanimity. He doubted the patriotism of all booksellers. He had been twice betrayed by women. He never attempted to be revenged on them; but he doubted the patriotism of all women. "Use them; keep eye on them," he said. In Venice he had conspired when he was living there as the clerk of a notary; in Bologna subsequently while earning his bread as a petty schoolmaster. His evasions, both of Papal sbirri and the Austrian polizia, furnished instances of astonishing audacity that made his name a byword for mastery in the hour of peril. His residence in Milan now, after seven years of exile in England and Switzerland, was an act of pointed defiance, incomprehensible to his own party, and only to be explained by the prevalent belief that the authorities feared to provoke a collision with the people by laying hands on him. They had only once made a visitation to his house, and appeared to be satisfied at not finding him. At that period Austria was simulating benevolence in her Lombardic provinces, with the half degree of persuasive earnestness which makes a Government lax in its vigilance, and leaves it simply open to the charge of effeteness. There were contradictory rumours as to whether his house had ever been visited by the polizia; but it was a legible fact that his name was on the window, and it was understood that he was not without elusive contrivances in the event of the authorities declaring war against him.

Of the nature of these contrivances Luigi had just learnt

something. He had heard Barto Rizzo called 'The Miner' and 'The Great Cat,' and he now comprehended a little of the quality of his employer. He had entered a very different service from that of the Signor Antonio-Pericles, who paid him for nothing more than to keep eye on Vittoria, and recount her goings in and out; for what absolute object he was unaware, but that it was not for a political one he was certain. "Cursed be the day when the lust of gold made me open my hand to Barto Rizzo!" he thought; and could only reflect that life is short and gold is sweet, and that he was in the claws of the Great Cat. He had met Barto in a wine-shop. He cursed the habit which led him to call at that shop; the thirst which tempted him to drink: the ear which had been seduced to listen. Yet as all his expenses had been paid in advance, and his reward at the instant of his application for it; and as the signorina and Barto were both good patriots, and he, Luigi, was a good patriot, what harm could be done to her? Both she and Barto had stamped their different impressions on his waxen nature. He reconciled his service to them separately by the exclamation that they were both good patriots.

The plot for the rising in Milan city was two months old. It comprised some of the nobles of the city, and enjoyed the good wishes of the greater part of them, whose payment of fifty to sixty per cent to the Government on the revenue of their estates was sufficient reason for a desire to change masters, positively though they might detest Republicanism, and dread the shadow of anarchy. These looked hopefully to Charles Albert. Their

motive was to rise, or to countenance a rising, and summon the ambitious Sardinian monarch with such assurances of devotion, that a Piedmontese army would be at the gates when the banner of Austria was in the dust. Among the most active members of the prospectively insurgent aristocracy of Milan was Count Medole, a young nobleman of vast wealth and possessed of a reliance on his powers of mind that induced him to take a prominent part in the opening deliberations, and speedily necessitated his hire of the friendly offices of one who could supply him with facts, with suggestions, with counsel, with fortitude, with everything to strengthen his pretensions to the leadership, excepting money. He discovered his man in Barto Rizzo, who quitted the ranks of the republican section to serve him, and wield a tool for his own party. By the help of Agostino Balderini, Carlo Ammiani, and others, the aristocratic and the republican sections of the conspiracy were brought near enough together to permit of a common action between them, though the maintaining of such harmony demanded an extreme and tireless delicacy of management. The presence of the Chief, whom we have seen on the Motterone, was claimed by other cities of Italy. Unto him solely did Barto Rizzo yield thorough adhesion. He being absent from Milan, Barto undertook to represent him and carry out his views. How far he was entitled to do so may be guessed when it is stated that, on the ground of his general contempt for women, he objected to the proposition that Vittoria should give the signal. The proposition was Agostino's. Count

Medole, Barto, and Agostino discussed it secretly: Barto held resolutely against it, until Agostino thrust a sly-handed letter into his fingers and let him know that previous to any consultation on the subject he had gained the consent of his Chief. Barto then fell silent. He despatched his new spy, Luigi, to the Motterone, more for the purpose of giving him a schooling on the expedition, and on his return from it, and so getting hand and brain and soul service out of him. He expected no such a report of Vittoria's indiscretion as Luigi had spiced with his one foolish lie. That she should tell the relatives of an Austrian officer that Milan was soon to be a dangerous place for them;—and that she should write it on paper and leave it for the officer to read,—left her, according to Barto's reading of her, open to the alternative charges of imbecility or of treachery. Her letter to the English lady, the Austrian officer's sister, was an exaggeration of the offence, but lent it more the look of heedless folly. The point was to obtain sight of her letter to the Austrian officer himself. Barto was baffled during a course of anxious days that led closely up to the fifteenth. She had written no letter. Lieutenant Pierson, the officer in question, had ridden into the city once from Verona, and had called upon Antonio-Pericles to extract her address from him; the Greek had denied that she was in Milan. Luigi could tell no more. He described the officer's personal appearance, by saying that he was a recognizable Englishman in Austrian dragoon uniform;—white tunic, white helmet, brown moustache;—ay! and eh! and oh! and ah! coming frequently from his mouth;

that he stood square while speaking, and seemed to like his own smile; an extraordinary touch of portraiture, or else a scoff at insular self-satisfaction; at any rate, it commended itself to the memory. Barto dismissed him, telling him to be daily in attendance on the English lady.

Barto Rizzo's respect for the Chief was at war with his intense conviction that a blow should be struck at Vittoria even upon the narrow information which he possessed. Twice betrayed, his dreams and haunting thoughts cried "Shall a woman betray you thrice?" In his imagination he stood identified with Italy: the betrayal of one meant that of both. Falling into a deep reflection, Barto counted over his hours of conspiracy: he counted the Chief's; comparing the two sets of figures he discovered, that as he had suspected, he was the elder in the patriotic work therefore, if he bowed his head to the Chief, it was a voluntary act, a form of respect, and not the surrendering of his judgement. He was on the spot: the Chief was absent. Barto reasoned that the Chief could have had no experience of women, seeing that he was ready to trust in them. "Do I trust to my pigeon, my sling-stone?" he said jovially to the thickbrowed, splendidly ruddy young woman, who was his wife; "do I trust her? Not half a morsel of her!" This young woman, a peasant woman of remarkable personal attractions, served him with the fidelity of a fascinated animal, and the dumbness of a wooden vessel. She could have hanged him, had it pleased her. She had all his secrets: but it was not vain speaking on Barto Rizzo's part; he was master of her will;

and on the occasions when he showed that he did not trust her, he was careful at the same time to shock and subdue her senses. Her report of Vittoria was, that she went to the house of the Signora, Laura Piaveni, widow of the latest heroic son of Milan, and to that of the maestro Rocco Ricci; to no other. It was also Luigi's report.

"She's true enough," the woman said, evidently permitting herself to entertain an opinion; a sign that she required fresh schooling.

"So are you," said Barto, and eyed her in a way that made her ask, "Now, what's for me to do?"

He thought awhile.

"You will see the colonel. Tell him to come in corporal's uniform. What's the little wretch twisting her body for? Shan't I embrace her presently if she's obedient? Send to the polizia. You believe your husband is in the city, and will visit you in disguise at the corporal's hour. They seize him. They also examine the house up to the point where we seal it. Your object is to learn whether the Austrians are moving men upon Milan. If they are-I learn something. When the house has been examined, our court here will have rest for a good month ahead; and it suits me not to be disturbed. Do this, and we will have a red-wine evening in the house, shut up alone, my snake! my pepper-flower!"

It happened that Luigi was entering the court to keep an appointment with Barto when he saw a handful of the polizia burst into the house and drag out a soldier, who was in the

uniform, as he guessed it to be, of the Prohaska regiment. The soldier struggled and offered money to them. Luigi could not help shouting, "You fools! don't you see he's an officer?" Two of them took their captive aside. The rest made a search through the house. While they were doing so Luigi saw Barto Rizzo's face at the windows of the house opposite. He clamoured at the door, but Barto was denied to him there. When the polizia had gone from the court, he was admitted and allowed to look into every room. Not finding him, he said, "Barto Rizzo does not keep his appointments, then!" The same words were repeated in his ear when he had left the court, and was in the street running parallel with it. "Barto Rizzo does not keep his appointments, then!" It was Barto who smacked him on the back, and spoke out his own name with brown-faced laughter in the bustling street. Luigi was so impressed by his cunning and his recklessness that he at once told him more than he wished to tell:—The Austrian officer was with his sister, and had written to the signorina, and Luigi had delivered the letter; but the signorina was at the maestro's, Rocco Ricci's, and there was no answer: the officer was leaving for Verona in the morning. After telling so much, Luigi drew back, feeling that he had given Barto his full measure and owed to the signorina what remained.

Barto probably read nothing of the mind of his spy, but understood that it was a moment for distrust of him. Vittoria and her mother lodged at the house of one Zotti, a confectioner, dwelling between the Duomo and La Scala. Luigi, at Barto's

bidding, left word with Zotti that he would call for the signorina's answer to a certain letter about sunrise. "I promised my Rosellina, my poppyheaded sipper, a red-wine evening, or I would hold this fellow under my eye till the light comes," thought Barto misgivingly, and let him go. Luigi slouched about the English lady's hotel. At nightfall her brother came forth. Luigi directed him to be in the square of the Duomo by sunrise, and slipped from his hold; the officer ran after him some distance. "She can't say I was false to her now," said Luigi, dancing with nervous ecstasy. At sunrise Barto Rizzo was standing under the shadow of the Duomo. Luigi passed him and went to Zotti's house, where the letter was placed in his hand, and the door shut in his face. Barto rushed to him, but Luigi, with a vixenish countenance, standing like a humped cat, hissed, "Would you destroy my reputation and have it seen that I deliver up letters, under the noses of the writers, to the wrong persons?—ha! pestilence!" He ran, Barto following him. They were crossed by the officer on horseback, who challenged Luigi to give up the letter, which was very plainly being thrust from his hand into his breast. The officer found it no difficult matter to catch him and pluck the letter from him; he opened it, reading it on the jog of the saddle as he cantered off. Luigi turned in a terror of expostulation to ward Barto's wrath. Barto looked at him hard, while he noted the matter down on the tablet of an ivory book. All he said was, "I have that letter!" stamping the assertion with an oath. Half-an-hour later Luigi saw Barto in the saddle, tight-

legged about a rusty beast, evidently bound for the South-eastern gate, his brows set like a black wind. “Blessings on his going!” thought Luigi, and sang one of his street-songs:—“O lemons, lemons, what a taste you leave in the mouth! I desire you, I love you, but when I suck you, I’m all caught up in a bundle and turn to water, like a wry-faced fountain. Why not be satisfied by a sniff at the blossoms? There’s gratification. Why did you grow up from the precious little sweet chuck that you were, Marietta? Lemons, O lemons! such a thing as a decent appetite is not known after sucking at you.”

His natural horror of a resolute man, more than fear (of which he had no recollection in the sunny Piazza), made him shiver and gave his tongue an acid taste at the prospect of ever meeting Barto Rizzo again. There was the prospect also that he might never meet him again.

CHAPTER IX
IN VERONA

The lieutenant read these lines, as he clattered through the quiet streets toward the Porta Tosa:

'DEAR FRIEND,—I am glad that you remind me of our old affection, for it assures me that yours is not dead. I cannot consent to see you yet. I would rather that we should not meet.

'I thought I would sign my name here, and say, "God bless you, Wilfrid; go!"

'Oh! why have you done this thing! I must write on. It seems like my past life laughing at me, that my old friend should have come here in Italy, to wear the detestable uniform. How can we be friends when we must act as enemies? We shall soon be in arms, one against the other. I pity you, for you have chosen a falling side; and when you are beaten back, you can have no pride in your country, as we Italians have; no delight, no love. They will call you a mercenary soldier. I remember that I used to have the fear of your joining our enemies, when we were in England, but it seemed too much for my reason.

'You are with a band of butchers. If I could see you and tell you the story of Giacomo Piaveni, and some other things, I believe you would break your sword instantly.

'There is time. Come to Milan on the fifteenth. You will see

me then. I appear at La Scala. Promise me, if you hear me, that you will do exactly what I make you feel it right to do. Ah, you will not, though thousands will! But step aside to me, when the curtain falls, and remain—oh, dear friend! I write in honour to you; we have sworn to free the city and the country—remain among us: break your sword, tear off your uniform; we are so strong that we are irresistible. I know what a hero you can be on the field: then, why not in the true cause? I do not understand that you should waste your bravery under that ugly flag, bloody and past forgiveness.

'I shall be glad to have news of you all, and of England. The bearer of this is a trusty messenger, and will continue to call at the hotel. A. is offended that I do not allow my messenger to give my address; but I must not only be hidden, I must have peace, and forget you all until I have done my task. Addio. We have both changed names. I am the same. Can I think that you are? Addio, dear friend.

'VITTORIA.'

Lieutenant Pierson read again and again the letter of her whom he had loved in England, to get new lights from it, as lovers do when they have lost the power to take single impressions. He was the bearer of a verbal despatch from the commandant in Milan to the Marshal in Verona. At that period great favour was shown to Englishmen in the Austrian service, and the lieutenant's uncle being a General of distinction, he had a sort of semi-attachment to the Marshal's staff, and was hurried to and fro,

for the purpose of keeping him out of duelling scrapes, as many of his friendlier comrades surmised. The right to the distinction of exercising staff-duties is, of course, only to be gained by stout competitorship in the Austrian service; but favour may do something for a young man even in that rigorous school of Arms. He had to turn to Brescia on his way, and calculated that if luck should put good horses under him, he would enter Verona gates about sunset. Meantime; there was Vittoria's letter to occupy him as he went.

We will leave him to his bronzing ride through the mulberries and the grapes, and the white and yellow and arid hues of the September plain, and make acquaintance with some of his comrades of that proud army which Vittoria thought would stand feebly against the pouring tide of Italian patriotism.

The fairest of the cities of the plain had long been a nest of foreign soldiery. The life of its beauty was not more visible then than now. Within the walls there are glimpses of it, that belong rather to the haunting spirit than to the life. Military science has made a mailed giant of Verona, and a silent one, save upon occasion. Its face grins of war, like a skeleton of death; the salient image of the skull and congregating worms was one that Italian lyrists applied naturally to Verona.

The old Field-Marshal and chief commander of the Austrian forces in Lombardy, prompted by the counsels of his sagacious adlatus, the chief of the staff, was engaged at that period in adding some of those ugly round walls and flanking bastions to

Verona, upon which, when Austria was thrown back by the first outburst of the insurrection and the advance of the Piedmontese, she was enabled to plant a sturdy hind-foot, daring her foes as from a rock of defence.

A group of officers, of the cavalry, with a few infantry uniforms skirting them, were sitting in the pleasant cooling evening air, fanned by the fresh springing breeze, outside one of the Piazza Bra caffes, close upon the shadow of the great Verona amphitheatre. They were smoking their attenuated long straw cigars, sipping iced lemonade or coffee, and talking the common talk of the garrison officers, with perhaps that additional savour of a robust immorality which a Viennese social education may give. The rounded ball of the brilliant September moon hung still aloft, lighting a fathomless sky as well as the fair earth. It threw solid blackness from the old savage walls almost to a junction with their indolent outstretched feet. Itinerant street music twittered along the Piazza; officers walked arm-in-arm; now in moonlight bright as day, now in a shadow black as night: distant figures twinkled with the alternation. The light lay like a blade's sharp edge around the massive circle. Of Italians of a superior rank, Verona sent none to this resort. Even the melon-seller stopped beneath the arch ending the Stradone Porta Nuova, as if he had reached a marked limit of his popular customers.

This isolation of the rulers of Lombardy had commenced in Milan, but, owing to particular causes, was not positively defined there as it was in Verona. War was already rageing between the

Veronese ladies and the officers of Austria. According to the Gallic Terpsichorean code, a lady who permits herself to make election of her partners and to reject applicants to the honour of her hand in the dance, when that hand is disengaged, has no just ground of complaint if a glove should smite her cheek. The Austrians had to endure this sort of rejection in Ballrooms. On the promenade their features were forgotten. They bowed to statues. Now, the officers of Austria who do not belong to a Croat regiment, or to one drawn from any point of the extreme East of the empire, are commonly gentlemanly men; and though they can be vindictive after much irritation, they may claim at least as good a reputation for forbearance in a conquered country as our officers in India. They are not ill-humoured, and they are not peevishly arrogant, except upon provocation. The conduct of the tender Italian dames was vexatious. It was exasperating to these knights of the slumbering sword to hear their native waltzes sounding of exquisite Vienna, while their legs stretched in melancholy inactivity on the Piazza pavement, and their arms encircled no ductile waists. They tried to despise it more than they disliked it, called their female foes Amazons, and their male by a less complimentary title, and so waited for the patriotic epidemic to pass.

A certain Captain Weisspriess, of the regiment named after a sagacious monarch whose crown was the sole flourishing blossom of diplomacy, particularly distinguished himself by insisting that a lady should remember him in public places.

He was famous for skill with his weapons. He waltzed admirably; erect as under his Field-Marshal's eye. In the language of his brother officers, he was successful; that is, even as God Mars when Bellona does not rage. Captain Weisspriess (Johann Nepomuk, Freiherr von Scheppenhausen) resembled in appearance one in the Imperial Royal service, a gambling General of Division, for whom Fame had not yet blown her blast. Rumour declared that they might be relatives; a little-scrupulous society did not hesitate to mention how. The captain's moustache was straw-coloured; he wore it beyond the regulation length and caressed it infinitely. Surmounted by a pair of hot eyes, wavering in their direction, this grand moustache was a feature to be forgotten with difficulty, and Weisspriess was doubtless correct in asserting that his face had endured a slight equal to a buffet. He stood high and square-shouldered; the flame of the moustache streamed on either side his face in a splendid curve; his vigilant head was loftily posted to detect what he chose to construe as insult, or gather the smiles of approbation, to which, owing to the unerring judgement of the sex, he was more accustomed. Handsome or not, he enjoyed the privileges of masculine beauty.

This captain of a renown to come pretended that a superb Venetian lady of the Branciani family was bound to make response in public to his private signals, and publicly to reply to his salutations. He refused to be as a particle in space floating airily before her invincible aspect. Meeting her one evening, ere sweet Italy had exiled herself from the Piazza, he bowed, and

stepping to the front of her, bowed pointedly. She crossed her arms and gazed over him. He called up a thing to her recollection in resonant speech. Shameful lie, or shameful truth, it was uttered in the hearing of many of his brother officers, of three Italian ladies, and of an Italian gentleman, Count Broncini, attending them. The lady listened calmly. Count Broncini smote him on the face. That evening the lady's brother arrived from Venice, and claimed his right to defend her. Captain Weisspriess ran him through the body, and attached a sinister label to his corpse. This he did not so much from brutality; the man felt that henceforth while he held his life he was at war with every Italian gentleman of mettle. Count Broncini was his next victim. There, for a time, the slaughtering business of the captain stopped. His brother officers of the better kind would not have excused him at another season, but the avenger of their irritation and fine vindicator of the merits of Austrian steel, had a welcome truly warm, when at the termination of his second duel he strode into mess, or what serves for an Austrian regimental mess.

It ensued naturally that there was everywhere in Verona a sharp division between the Italians of all classes and their conquerors. The great green-rinded melons were never wheeled into the neighbourhood of the whitecoats. Damsels were no longer coquettish under the military glance, but hurried by in couples; and there was much scowling mixed with derisive servility, throughout the city, hard to be endured without that hostile state of the spirit which is the military mind's refuge in

such cases. Itinerant musicians, and none but this fry, continued to be attentive to the dispensers of soldi.

The Austrian army prides itself upon being a brotherhood. Discipline is very strict, but all commissioned officers, when off duty, are as free in their intercourse as big boys. The General accepts a cigar from the lieutenant, and in return lifts his glass to him. The General takes an interest in his lieutenant's love-affairs: nor is the latter shy when he feels it his duty modestly to compliment his superior officer upon a recent conquest. There is really good fellowship both among the officers and in the ranks, and it is systematically encouraged.

The army of Austria was in those days the Austrian Empire. Outside the army the empire was a jealous congery of intriguing disaffected nationalities. The same policy which played the various States against one another in order to reduce all to subserviency to the central Head, erected a privileged force wherein the sentiment of union was fostered till it became a nationality of the sword. Nothing more fatal can be done for a country; but for an army it is a simple measure of wisdom. Where the password is MARCH, and not DEVELOP, a body of men, to be a serviceable instrument, must consent to act as one. Hannibal is the historic example of what a General can accomplish with tribes who are thus, enrolled in a new citizenship; and (as far as we know of him and his fortunes) he appears to be an example of the necessity of the fusing fire of action to congregated aliens in arms. When Austria was fighting

year after year, and being worsted in campaign after campaign, she lost foot by foot, but she held together soundly; and more than the baptism, the atmosphere of strife has always been required to give her a healthy vitality as a centralized empire. She knew it; this (apart from the famous promptitude of the Hapsburgs) was one secret of her dauntless readiness to fight. War did the work of a smithy for the iron and steel holding her together; and but that war costs money, she would have been an empire distinguished by aggressiveness. The next best medicinal thing to war is the military occupation of insurgent provinces. The soldiery soon feel where their home is, and feel the pride of atomies in unitive power, when they are sneered at, hooted, pelted, stabbed upon a gross misinterpretation of the slightest of moral offences, shamefully abused for doing their duty with a considerate sense of it, and too accurately divided from the inhabitants of the land they hold. In Italy, the German, the Czech, the Magyar, the Croft, even in general instances the Italian, clung to the standard for safety, for pay, for glory, and all became pre-eminently Austrian soldiers; little besides.

It was against a power thus bound in iron hoops, that Italy, dismembered, and jealous, and corrupt, with an organization promoted by passion chiefly, was preparing to rise. In the end, a country true to itself and determined to claim God's gift to brave men will overmatch a mere army, however solid its force. But an inspired energy of faith is demanded of it. The intervening chapters will show pitiable weakness, and such a schooling of

disaster as makes men, looking on the surface of things, deem the struggle folly. As well, they might say, let yonder scuffling vagabonds up any of the Veronese side-streets fall upon the patrol marching like one man, and hope to overcome them! In Vienna there was often despair: but it never existed in the Austrian camp. Vienna was frequently double-dealing and time-serving her force in arms was like a trained man feeling his muscle. Thus, when the Government thought of temporizing, they issued orders to Generals whose one idea was to strike the blow of a mallet.

At this period there was no suspicion of any grand revolt being in process of development. The abounding dissatisfaction was treated as nothing more than the Italian disease showing symptoms here and there, and Vienna counselled measures mildly repressive,—'conciliating,' it was her pleasure to call them. Her recent commands with respect to turbulent Venice were the subject of criticism among the circle outside the Piazza Gaffe. An enforced inactivity of the military legs will quicken the military wits, it would appear, for some of the younger officers spoke hotly as to their notion of the method of ruling Venezia. One had bidden his Herr General to 'look here,' while he stretched forth his hand and declared that Italians were like women, and wanted—yes, wanted—(their instinct called for it) a beating, a real beating; as the emphatic would say in our vernacular, a thundering thrashing, once a month:-'Or so,' the General added acquiescingly. A thundering thrashing, once a month or so, to these unruly Italians, because they are

like women! It was a youth who spoke, but none doubted his acquaintance with women, or cared to suggest that his education in that department of knowledge was an insufficient guarantee for his fitness to govern Venezia. Two young dragoon officers had approached during the fervid allocution, and after the salute to their superior, caught up chairs and stamped them down, thereupon calling for the loan of anybody's cigar-case. Where it is that an Austrian officer ordinarily keeps this instrument so necessary to his comfort, and obnoxious, one would suppose, to the rigid correctness of his shapely costume, we cannot easily guess. None can tell even where he stows away his pocket-handkerchief, or haply his purse. However, these things appear on demand. Several elongated cigar-cases were thrust forward, and then it was seen that the attire of the gallant youngsters was in disorder.

'Did you hunt her to earth?' they were asked.

The reply trenched on philosophy; and consisted in an inquiry as to who cared for the whole basketful—of the like description of damsels, being implied. Immoderate and uproarious laughter burst around them. Both seemed to have been clawed impartially. Their tightfitting coats bulged at the breast or opened at the waist, as though buttons were lacking, and the whiteness of that garment cried aloud for the purification of pipeclay. Questions flew. The damsel who had been pursued was known as a pretty girl, the daughter of a blacksmith, and no prolonged resistance was expected from one of her class. But, as it came out, she had

said, a week past, 'I shall be stabbed if I am seen talking to you'; and therefore the odd matter was, not that she had, in tripping down the Piazza with her rogue-eyed cousin from Milan, looked away and declined all invitation to moderate her pace and to converse, but that, after doubling down and about lonely streets, the length of which she ran as swiftly as her feet would carry her, at a corner of the Via Colomba she allowed herself to be caught—wilfully, beyond a doubt, seeing that she was not a bit breathed—allowed one quick taste of her lips, and then shrieked as naturally as a netted bird, and brought a hustling crowd just at that particular point to her rescue: not less than fifty, and all men. 'Not a woman among them!' the excited young officer repeated.

A veteran in similar affairs could see that he had the wish to remain undisturbed in his bewilderment at the damsel's conduct. Profound belief in her partiality for him perplexed his recent experience rather agreeably. Indeed, it was at this epoch an article of faith with the Austrian military that nothing save terror of their males kept sweet Italian women from the expression of their preference for the broad-shouldered, thick-limbed, yellow-haired warriors—the contrast to themselves which is supposed greatly to inspirit genial Cupid in the selection from his quiver.

'What became of her? Did you let her go?' came pestering remarks, too absurd for replies if they had not been so persistent.

'Let her go? In the devil's name, how was I to keep my hold of her in a crowd of fifty of the fellows, all mowing, and hustling, and elbowing—every rascal stinking right under my nose like the

pit?'

"Hem!' went the General present. 'As long as you did not draw! Unsheathe, a minute.'

He motioned for a sight of their naked swords.

The couple of young officers flushed.

'Herr General! Pardon!' they remonstrated.

'No, no. I know how boys talk; I've been one myself. Tutt! You tell the truth, of course; but the business is for me to know in what! how far! Your swords, gentlemen.'

'But, General!'

'Well? I merely wish to examine the blades.'

'Do you doubt our words?'

'Hark at them! Words? Are you lawyers? A soldier deals in acts. I don't want to know your words, but your deeds, my gallant lads. I want to look at the blades of your swords, my children. What was the last order? That on no account were we to provoke, or, if possibly to be avoided, accept a collision, etc., etc. The soldier in peace is a citizen, etc. No sword on any account, or for any excuse, to be drawn, etc. You all heard it? So, good! I receive your denial, my children. In addition, I merely desire to satisfy curiosity. Did the guard clear a way for you?'

The answer was affirmative.

'Your swords!'

One of them drew, and proffered the handle.

The other clasped the haft angrily, and with a resolute smack on it, settled it in the scabbard.

'Am I a prisoner, General?'

'Not at all!'

'Then I decline to surrender my sword.'

Another General officer happened to be sauntering by. Applauding with his hands, and choosing the Italian language as the best form of speech for the enunciation of ironical superlatives, he said:

'Eccellentemente! most admirable! of a distinguished loftiness of moral grandeur: "Then I decline," etc.: you are aware that you are quoting? "as the drummerboy said to Napoleon." I think you forgot to add that? It is the same young soldier who utters these immense things, which we can hardly get out of our mouths. So the little fellow towers! His moral greatness is as noisy as his drum. What's wrong?'

'General Pierson, nothing's wrong,' was replied by several voices; and some explained that Lieutenant Jenna had been called upon by General Schoneck to show his sword, and had refused.

The heroic defender of his sword shouted to the officer with whom General Pierson had been conversing: 'Here! Weisspriess!'

'What is it, my dear fellow? Speak, my good Jenna!'

The explanation was given, and full sympathy elicited from Captain Weisspriess, while the two Generals likewise whispered and nodded.

'Did you draw?' the captain inquired, yawning. 'You needn't say it in quite so many words, if you did. I shall be asked by the General presently; and owing to that duel pending 'twixt you and

his nephew, of which he is aware, he may put a bad interpretation on your pepperiness.'

'The devil fetch his nephew!' returned the furious Lieutenant Jenna. 'He comes back to-night from Milan, and if he doesn't fight me to-morrow, I post him a coward. Well, about that business! My good Weisspriess, the fellows had got into a thick crowd all round, and had begun to knead me. Do you understand me? I felt their knuckles.'

'Ah, good, good!' said the captain. 'Then, you didn't draw, of course. What officer of the Imperial service would, under similar circumstances! That is my reply to the Emperor, if ever I am questioned. To draw would be to show that an Austrian officer relies on his good sword in the thick of his enemies; against which, as you know, my Jenna, the Government have issued an express injunction button. Did you sell it dear?'

'A fellow parted with his ear for it.'

Lieutenant Jenna illustrated a particular cut from a turn of his wrist.

'That oughtn't to make a noise?' he queried somewhat anxiously.

'It won't hear one any longer, at all events,' said Captain Weisspriess; and the two officers entered into the significance of the remark with enjoyment.

Meantime General Pierson had concluded an apparently humorous dialogue with his brother General, and the later, now addressing Lieutenant Jenna, said: 'Since you prefer surrendering

your person rather than your sword—it is good! Report yourself at the door of my room to-night, at ten. I suspect that you have been blazing your steel, sir. They say, 'tis as ready to flash out as your temper.'

Several voices interposed: 'General! what if he did draw!'

'Silence. You have read the recent order. Orlando may have his Durindarda bare; but you may not. Grasp that fact. The Government wish to make Christians of you, my children. One cheek being smitten, what should you do?'

'Shall I show you, General?' cried a quick little subaltern.

'The order, my children, as received a fortnight since from our old Wien, commands you to offer the other cheek to the smiter.'

'So that a proper balance may be restored to both sides of the face,' General Pierson appended.

'And mark me,' he resumed. 'There may be doubts about the policy of anything, though I shouldn't counsel you to cherish them: but there's no mortal doubt about the punishment for this thing.' The General spoke sternly; and then relaxing the severity of his tone, he said, 'The desire of the Government is to make an army of Christians.'

'And a precious way of doing it!' interjected two or three of the younger officers. They perfectly understood how hateful the Viennese domination was to their chiefs, and that they would meet sympathy and tolerance for any extreme of irony, provided that they showed a disposition to be subordinate. For the bureaucratic order, whatever it was, had to be obeyed. The

army might, and of course did, know best: nevertheless it was bound to be nothing better than a machine in the hands of the dull closeted men in Vienna, who judged of difficulties and plans of action from a calculation of numbers, or from foreign journals —from heaven knows what!

General Schoneck and General Pierson walked away laughing, and the younger officers were left to themselves. Half-a-dozen of them interlaced arms, striding up toward the Porta Nuova, near which, at the corner of the Via Trinita, they had the pleasant excitement of beholding a riderless horse suddenly in mid gallop sink on its knees and roll over. A crowd came pouring after it, and from the midst the voice of a comrade hailed them. 'It's Pierson,' cried Lieutenant Jenna. The officers drew their swords, and hailed the guard from the gates. Lieutenant Pierson dropped in among their shoulders, dead from want of breath. They held him up, and finding him sound, thumped his back. The blade of his sword was red. He coughed with their thumpings, and sang out to them to cease; the idle mob which had been at his heels drew back before the guard could come up with them. Lieutenant Pierson gave no explanation except that he had been attacked near Juliet's tomb on his way to General Schoneck's quarters. Fellows had stabbed his horse, and brought him to the ground, and torn the coat off his back. He complained in bitter mutterings of the loss of a letter therein, during the first candid moments of his anger: and, as he was known to be engaged to the Countess Lena von Lenkenstein, it was conjectured by his comrades that

this lady might have had something to do with the ravishment of the letter. Great laughter surrounded him, and he looked from man to man. Allowance is naturally made for the irascibility of a brother officer coming tattered out of the hands of enemies, or Lieutenant Jenna would have construed his eye's challenge on the spot. As it was, he cried out, 'The letter! the letter! Charge, for the honour of the army, and rescue the letter!' Others echoed him: 'The letter! the letter! the English letter!' A foreigner in an army can have as much provocation as he pleases; if he is anything of a favourite with his superiors, his fellows will task his forbearance. Wilfrid Pierson glanced at the blade of his sword, and slowly sheathed it. 'Lieutenant Jenna is a good actor before a mob,' he said. 'Gentlemen, I rely upon you to make no noise about that letter; it is a private matter. In an hour or so, if any officer shall choose to question me concerning it, I will answer him.'

The last remnants of the mob had withdrawn. The officer in command at the gates threw a cloak over Wilfrid's shoulders; and taking the arm of a friend Wilfrid hurried to barracks, and was quickly in a position to report himself to his General, whose first remark, 'Has the dead horse been removed?' robbed him of his usual readiness to equivocate. 'When you are the bearer of a verbal despatch, come straight to quarters, if you have to come like a fig-tree on the north side of the wall in Winter,' said General Schoneck, who was joined presently by General Pierson.

'What 's this I hear of some letter you have been barking about all over the city?' the latter asked, after returning his nephew's

on-duty salute.

Wilfrid replied that it was a letter of his sister's treating of family matters.

The two Generals, who were close friends, discussed the attack to which he had been subjected. Wilfrid had to recount it with circumstance: how, as he was nearing General Schoneck's quarters at a military trot, six men headed by a leader had dashed out on him from a narrow side-street, unhorsed him after a struggle, rifled the saddlebags, and torn the coat from his back, and had taken the mark of his sword, while a gathering crowd looked on, hooting. His horse had fled, and he confessed that he had followed his horse. General Schoneck spoke the name of Countess Lena suggestively. 'Not a bit,' returned General Pierson; 'the fellow courts her too hotly. The scoundrels here want a bombardment; that 's where it lies. A dose of iron pills will make Verona a healthy place. She must have it.'

General Schoneck said, 'I hope not,' and laughed at the heat of Irish blood. He led Wilfrid in to the Marshal, after which Wilfrid was free to seek Lieutenant Jenna, who had gained the right to a similar freedom by pledging his honour not to fight within a stipulated term of days. The next morning Wilfrid was roused by an orderly coming from his uncle, who placed in his hands a copy of Vittoria's letter: at the end of it his uncle had written, 'Rather astonishing. Done pretty well; but by a foreigner. "Affection" spelt with one "f." An Italian: you will see the letters are emphatic at "ugly flag"; also "bloody and past forgiveness" very large; the

copyist had a dash of the feelings of a commentator, and did his (or her) best to add an oath to it. Who the deuce, sir, is this opera girl calling herself Vittoria? I have a lecture for you. German women don't forgive diversions during courtship; and if you let this Countess Lena slip, your chance has gone. I compliment you on your power of lying; but you must learn to show your right face to me, or the very handsome feature, your nose, and that useful box, your skull, will come to grief. The whole business is a mystery. The letter (copy) was directed to you, brought to me, and opened in a fit of abstraction, necessary to commanding uncles who are trying to push the fortunes of young noodles pretending to be related to them. Go to Countess Lena. Count Paul is with her, from Bologna. Speak to her, and observe her and him. He knows English—has been attached to the embassy in London; but, pooh! the hand's Italian. I confess myself puzzled. We shall possibly have to act on the intimation of the fifteenth, and profess to be wiser than others. Something is brewing for business. See Countess Lena boldly, and then come and breakfast with me.'

Wilfrid read the miserable copy of Vittoria's letter, utterly unable to resolve anything in his mind, except that he would know among a thousand the leader of those men who had attacked him, and who bore the mark of his sword.

CHAPTER X
THE POPE'S MOUTH

Barto Rizzo had done what he had sworn to do. He had not found it difficult to outstrip the lieutenant (who had to visit Brescia on his way) and reach the gates of Verona in advance of him, where he obtained entrance among a body of grape-gatherers and others descending from the hills to meet a press of labour in the autumnal plains. With them he hoped to issue forth unchallenged on the following morning; but Wilfrid's sword had made lusty play; and, as in the case when the order has been given that a man shall be spared in life and limb, Barto and his fellow-assailants suffered by their effort to hold him simply half a minute powerless. He received a shrewd cut across the head, and lay for a couple of hours senseless in the wine-shop of one Battista—one of the many all over Lombardy who had pledged their allegiance to the Great Cat, thinking him scarcely vulnerable. He read the letter, dizzy with pain, and with the frankness proper to inflated spirits after loss of blood, he owned to himself that it was not worth much as a prize. It was worth the attempt to get possession of it, for anything is worth what it costs, if it be only as a schooling in resolution, energy, and devotedness: —regrets are the sole admission of a fruitless business; they show the bad tree;—so, according to his principle of action,

he deliberated; but he was compelled to admit that Vittoria's letter was little else than a repetition of her want of discretion when she was on the Motterone. He admitted it, wrathfully: his efforts to convict this woman telling him she deserved some punishment; and his suspicions being unsatisfied, he resolved to keep them hungry upon her, and return to Milan at once. As to the letter itself, he purposed, since the harm in it was accomplished, to send it back honourably to the lieutenant, till finding it blood-stained, he declined to furnish the gratification of such a sight to any Austrian sword. For that reason, he copied it, while Battista's wife held double bandages tight round his head: believing that the letter stood transcribed in a precisely similar hand, he forwarded it to Lieutenant Pierson, and then sank and swooned. Two days he lay incapable and let his thoughts dance as they would. Information was brought to him that the gates were strictly watched, and that troops were starting for Milan. This was in the dull hour antecedent to the dawn. 'She is a traitress!' he exclaimed, and leaping from his bed, as with a brain striking fire, screamed, 'Traitress! traitress!' Battista and his wife had to fling themselves on him and gag him, guessing him as mad. He spoke pompously and theatrically; called himself the Eye of Italy, and said that he must be in Milan, or Milan would perish, because of the traitress: all with a great sullen air of composure and an odd distension of the eyelids. When they released him, he smiled and thanked them, though they knew, that had he chosen, he could have thrown off a dozen of them,

such was his strength. The woman went down on her knees to him to get his consent that she should dress and bandage his head afresh. The sound of the regimental bugles drew him from the house, rather than any immediate settled scheme to watch at the gates.

Artillery and infantry were in motion before sunrise, from various points of the city, bearing toward the Palio and Zeno gates, and the people turned out to see them, for it was a march that looked like the beginning of things. The soldiers had green twigs in their hats, and kissed their hands good-humouredly to the gazing crowd, shouting bits of verses:

'I'm off! I'm off! Farewell, Mariandl! if I come back a sergeant-major or a Field-Marshal, don't turn up your nose at me: Swear you will be faithful all the while; because, when a woman swears, it's a comfort, somehow: Farewell! Squeeze the cow's udders: I shall be thirsty enough: You pretty wriggler! don't you know, the first cup of wine and the last, I shall float your name on it? Luck to the lads we leave behind! Farewell, Mariandl!'

The kindly fellows waved their hands and would take no rebuff. The soldiery of Austria are kindlier than most, until their blood is up. A Tyrolese regiment passed, singing splendidly in chorus. Songs of sentiment prevailed, but the traditions of a soldier's experience of the sex have informed his ballads with strange touches of irony, that help him to his (so to say) philosophy, which is recklessness. The Tyroler's 'Katchen' here, was a saturnine Giulia, who gave him no response, either of eye

or lip.

'Little mother, little sister, little sweetheart, 'ade! ade!' My little sweetheart, your meadow is half-way up the mountain; it's such a green spot on the eyeballs of a roving boy! and the chapel just above it, I shall see it as I've seen it a thousand times; and the cloud hangs near it, and moves to the door and enters, for it is an angel, not a cloud; a white angel gone in to pray for Katerlein and me: Little mother, little sister, little sweetheart, 'ade! ade!' Keep single, Katerlein, as long as you can: as long as you can hold out, keep single: 'ade!"

Fifteen hundred men and six guns were counted as they marched on to one gate.

Barto Rizzo, with Battista and his wife on each side of him, were among the spectators. The black cock's feathers of the Tyrolese were still fluttering up the Corso, when the woman said, 'I 've known the tail of a regiment get through the gates without having to show paper.'

Battista thereupon asked Barto whether he would try that chance. The answer was a vacuous shake of the head, accompanied by an expression of unutterable mournfulness. 'There's no other way,' pursued Battista, 'unless you jump into the Adige, and swim down half-a-mile under water; and cats hate water—eh, my comico?'

He conceived that the sword-cut had rendered Barto imbecile, and pulled his hat down his forehead, and patted his shoulder, and bade him have cheer, patronizingly: but women do not so

lightly lose their impression of a notable man. His wife checked him. Barto had shut his eyes, and hung swaying between them, as in drowsiness or drunkenness. Like his body, his faith was swaying within him. He felt it borne upon the reeling brain, and clung to it desperately, calling upon chance to aid him; for he was weak, incapable of a physical or mental contest, and this part of his settled creed that human beings alone failed the patriotic cause as instruments, while circumstances constantly befriended it—was shocked by present events. The image of Vittoria, the traitress, floated over the soldiery marching on Milan through her treachery. Never had an Austrian force seemed to him so terrible. He had to yield the internal fight, and let his faith sink and be blackened, in order that his mind might rest supine, according to his remembered system; for the inspiration which points to the right course does not come during mental strife, but after it, when faith summons its agencies undisturbed—if only men will have the faith, and will teach themselves to know that the inspiration must come, and will counsel them justly. This was a part of Barto Rizzo's sustaining creed; nor did he lose his grasp of it in the torment and the darkness of his condition.

He heard English voices. A carriage had stopped almost in front of him. A General officer was hat in hand, talking to a lady, who called him uncle, and said that she had been obliged to decide to quit Verona on account of her husband, to whom the excessive heat was unendurable. Her husband, in the same breath, protested that the heat killed him. He adorned the statement with

all kinds of domestic and subterranean imagery, and laughed faintly, saying that after the fifteenth—on which night his wife insisted upon going to the Opera at Milan to hear a new singer and old friend—he should try a week at the Baths of Bormio, and only drop from the mountains when a proper temperature reigned, he being something of an invalid.

'And, uncle, will you be in Milan on the fifteenth?' said the lady; 'and Wilfrid, too?'

'Wilfrid will reach Milan as soon as you do, and I shall undoubtedly be there on the fifteenth,' said the General.

'I cannot possibly express to you how beautiful I think your army looks,' said the lady.

'Fine men, General Pierson, very fine men. I never saw such marching—equal to our Guards,' her husband remarked.

The lady named her Milanese hotel as the General waved his plumes, nodded, and rode off.

Before the carriage had started, Barto Rizzo dashed up to it; and 'Dear good English lady,' he addressed her, 'I am the brother of Luigi, who carries letters for you in Milan—little Luigi!—and I have a mother dying in Milan; and here I am in Verona, ill, and can't get to her, poor soul! Will you allow me that I may sit up behind as quiet as a mouse, and be near one of the lovely English ladies who are so kind to unfortunate persons, and never deaf to the name of charity? It's my mother who is dying, poor soul!'

The lady consulted her husband's face, which presented the total blank of one who refused to be responsible for an opinion

hostile to the claims of charity, while it was impossible for him to fall in with foreign habits of familiarity, and accede to extraordinary petitions. Barto sprang up. 'I shall be your courier, dear lady,' he said, and commenced his professional career in her service by shouting to the vetturino to drive on. Wilfrid met them as he was trotting down from the Porta del Palio, and to him his sister confided her new trouble in having a strange man attached to her, who might be anything. 'We don't know the man,' said her husband; and Adela pleaded for him: 'Don't speak to him harshly, pray, Wilfrid; he says he has a mother dying in Milan.' Barto kept his head down on his arms and groaned; Adela gave a doleful little grimace. 'Oh, take the poor beggar,' said Wilfrid; and sang out to him in Italian: 'Who are you—what are you, my fine fellow?' Barto groaned louder, and replied in Swiss-French from a smothering depth: 'A poor man, and the gracious lady's servant till we reach Milan.'

'I can't wait,' said Wilfrid; 'I start in half-an-hour. It's all right; you must take him now you've got him, or else pitch him out—one of the two. If things go on quietly we shall have the Autumn manoeuvres in a week, and then you may see something of the army.' He rode away. Barto passed the gates as one of the licenced English family.

Milan was more strictly guarded than when he had quitted it. He had anticipated that it would be so, and tamed his spirit to submit to the slow stages of the carriage, spent a fiery night in Brescia, and entered the city of action on the noon of the

fourteenth. Safe within the walls, he thanked the English lady, assuring her that her charitable deed would be remembered aloft. He then turned his steps in the direction of the Revolutionary post-office. This place was nothing other than a blank abutment of a corner house that had long been undergoing repair, and had a great bank of brick and mortar rubbish at its base. A stationary melonseller and some black fig and vegetable stalls occupied the triangular space fronting it. The removal of a square piece of cement showed a recess, where, chiefly during the night, letters and proclamation papers were deposited, for the accredited postman to disperse them. Hither, as one would go to a caffe for the news, Barto Rizzo came in the broad glare of noon, and flinging himself down like a tired man under the strip of shade, worked with a hand behind him, and drew out several folded scraps, of which one was addressed to him by his initials. He opened it and read:

'Your house is watched.

'A corporal of the P… ka regiment was seen leaving it this morning in time for the second bugle.

'Reply:—where to meet.

'Spies are doubled, troops coming.

'The numbers in Verona; who heads them.

'Look to your wife.

'Letters are called for every third hour.'

Barto sneered indolently at this fresh evidence of the small amount of intelligence which he could ever learn from others.

He threw his eyes all round the vacant space while pencilling in reply:—'V. waits for M., but in a box' (that is, Verona for Milan). 'We take the key to her.

'I have no wife, but a little pupil.

'A Lieutenant Pierson, of the dragoons; Czech white coats, helmets without plumes; an Englishman, nephew of General Pierson: speaks crippled Italian; returns from V. to-day. Keep eye on him;—what house, what hour.'

Meditating awhile, Barto wrote out Vittoria's name and enclosed it in a thick black ring.

Beneath it he wrote

'The same on all the play-bills.

'The Fifteenth is cancelled.

'We meet the day after.

'At the house of Count M. to-night.'

He secreted this missive, and wrote Vittoria's name on numbers of slips to divers addresses, heading them, 'From the Pope's Mouth,' such being the title of the Revolutionary postoffice, to whatsoever spot it might in prudence shift. The title was entirely complimentary to his Holiness. Tangible freedom, as well as airy blessings, were at that time anticipated, and not without warrant, from the mouth of the successor of St. Peter. From the Pope's Mouth the clear voice of Italian liberty was to issue. This sentiment of the period was a natural and a joyful one, and endowed the popular ebullition with a sense of unity and a stamp of righteousness that the abstract idea of liberty

could not assure to it before martyrdom. After suffering, after walking in the shades of death and despair, men of worth and of valour cease to take high personages as representative objects of worship, even when these (as the good Pope was then doing) benevolently bless the nation and bid it to have great hope, with a voice of authority. But, for an extended popular movement a great name is like a consecrated banner. Proclamations from the Pope's Mouth exacted reverence, and Barto Rizzo, who despised the Pope (because he was Pope, doubtless), did not hesitate to make use of him by virtue of his office.

Barto lay against the heap of rubbish, waiting for the approach of his trained lad, Checco, a lanky simpleton, cunning as a pure idiot, who was doing postman's duty, when a kick, delivered by that youth behind, sent him bounding round with rage, like a fish in air. The marketplace resounded with a clapping of hands; for it was here that Checco came daily to eat figs, and it was known that the 'povero,' the dear half-witted creature, would not tolerate an intruder in the place where he stretched his limbs to peel and suck in the gummy morsels twice or thrice a day. Barto seized and shook him. Checco knocked off his hat; the bandage about the wound broke and dropped, and Barto put his hand to his forehead, murmuring: 'What 's come to me that I lose my temper with a boy—an animal?'

The excitement all over the triangular space was hushed by an imperious guttural shout that scattered the groups. Two Austrian officers, followed by military servants, rode side by side. Dust

had whitened their mustachios, and the heat had laid a brown-red varnish on their faces. Way was made for them, while Barto stood smoothing his forehead and staring at Checco.

'I see the very man!' cried one of the officers quickly. 'Weisspriess, there's the rascal who headed the attack on me in Verona the other day. It's the same!

'Himmel!' returned his companion, scrutinizing the sword-cut, 'if that's your work on his head, you did it right well, my Pierson! He is very neatly scored indeed. A clean stroke, manifestly!'

'But here when I left Milan! at Verona when I entered the North-west gate there; and the first man I see as I come back is this very brute. He dogs me everywhere! By the way, there may be two of them.'

Lieutenant Pierson leaned over his horse's neck, and looked narrowly at the man Barto Rizzo. He himself was eyed as in retort, and with yet greater intentness. At first Barto's hand was sweeping the air within a finger's length of his forehead, like one who fought a giddiness for steady sight. The mist upon his brain dispersing under the gaze of his enemy, his eyeballs fixed, and he became a curious picture of passive malice, his eyes seeming to say: 'It is enough for me to know your features, and I know them.' Such a look from a civilian is exasperating: it was scarcely to be endured from an Italian of the plebs.

'You appear to me to want more,' said the lieutenant audibly to himself; and he repeated words to the same effect to his

companion, in bad German.

'Eh? You would promote him to another epaulette?' laughed Captain Weisspriess. 'Come off. Orders are direct against it. And we're in Milan—not like being in Verona! And my good fellow! remember your bet; the dozen of iced Rudesheimer. I want to drink my share, and dream I'm quartered in Mainz—the only place for an Austrian when he quits Vienna. Come.'

'No; but if this is the villain who attacked me, and tore my coat from my back,' cried Wilfrid, screwing in his saddle.

'And took your letter took your letter; a particular letter; we have heard of it,' said Weisspriess.

The lieutenant exclaimed that he should overhaul and examine the man, and see whether he thought fit to give him into custody. Weisspriess laid hand on his bridle.

'Take my advice, and don't provoke a disturbance in the streets. The truth is, you Englishmen and Irishmen get us a bad name among these natives. If this is the man who unhorsed you and maltreated you, and committed the rape of the letter, I'm afraid you won't get satisfaction out of him, to judge by his look. I'm really afraid not. Try it if you like. In any case, if you halt, I am compelled to quit your society, which is sometimes infinitely diverting. Let me remind you that you bear despatches. The other day they were verbal ones; you are now carrying paper.'

'Are you anxious to teach me my duty, Captain Weisspriess?'

'If you don't know it. I said I would "remind you." I can also teach you, if you need it.'

'And I can pay you for the instruction, whenever you are disposed to receive payment.'

'Settle your outstanding claims, my good Pierson!'

'When I have fought Jenna?'

'Oh! you're a Prussian—a Prussian!' Captain Weisspriess laughed. 'A Prussian, I mean, in your gross way of blurting out everything. I've marched and messed with Prussians—with oxen.'

'I am, as you are aware, an Englishman, Captain Weisspriess. I am due to Lieutenant Jenna for the present. After that you or any one may command me.'

'As you please,' said Weisspriess, drawing out one stream of his moustache. 'In the meantime, thank me for luring you away from the chances of a street row.'

Barto Rizzo was left behind, and they rode on to the Duomo. Glancing up at its pinnacles, Weisspriess said:

'How splendidly Flatschmann's jagers would pick them off from there, now, if the dogs were giving trouble in this part of the city!'

They entered upon a professional discussion of the ways and means of dealing with a revolutionary movement in the streets of a city like Milan, and passed on to the Piazza La Scala. Weisspriess stopped before the Play-bills. 'To-morrow's the fifteenth of the month,' he said. 'Shall I tell you a secret, Pierson? I am to have a private peep at the new prima donna this night. They say she's charming, and very pert. "I do not

interchange letters with Germans." Benlomik sent her a neat little note to the conservatorio—he hadn't seen her only heard of her, and that was our patriotic reply. She wants taming. I believe I am called upon for that duty. At least, my friend Antonio-Pericles, who occasionally assists me with supplies, hints as much to me. You're an engaged man, or, upon my honour, I wouldn't trust you; but between ourselves, this Greek—and he's quite right—is trying to get her away from the set of snuffy vagabonds who are prompting her for mischief, and don't know how to treat her.'

While he was speaking Barto Rizzo pushed roughly between them, and with a black brush painted the circle about Vittoria's name.

'Do you see that?' said Weisspriess.

'I see,' Wilfrid retorted, 'that you are ready to meddle with the reputation of any woman who is likely to be talked about. Don't do it in my presence.'

It was natural for Captain Weisspriess to express astonishment at this outburst, and the accompanying quiver of Wilfrid's lip.

'Austrian military etiquette, Lieutenant Pierson,' he said, 'precludes the suspicion that the officers of the Imperial army are subject to dissension in public. We conduct these affairs upon a different principle. But I'll tell you what. That fellow's behaviour may be construed as a more than common stretch of incivility. I'll do you a service. I'll arrest him, and then you can hear tidings of your precious letter. We'll have his confession published.'

Weisspriess drew his sword, and commanded the troopers in

attendance to lay hands on Barto; but the troopers called, and the officer found that they were surrounded. Weisspriess shrugged dismally. 'The brute must go, I suppose,' he said. The situation was one of those which were every now and then occurring in the Lombard towns and cities, when a chance provocation created a riot that became a revolt or not, according to the timidity of the ruling powers or the readiness of the disaffected. The extent and evident regulation of the crowd operated as a warning to the Imperial officers. Weisspriess sheathed his sword and shouted, 'Way, there!' Way was made for him; but Wilfrid lingered to scrutinize the man who, for an unaccountable reason, appeared to be his peculiar enemy. Barto carelessly threaded the crowd, and Wilfrid, finding it useless to get out after him, cried, 'Who is he? Tell me the name of that man?' The question drew a great burst of laughter around him, and exclamations of 'Englishman! Englishman!' He turned where there was a clear way left for him in the track of his brother officer.

Comments on the petty disturbance had been all the while passing at the Caffe La Scala, where sat Agostino Balderini, with, Count Medole and others, who, if the order for their arrest had been issued, were as safe in that place as in their own homes. Their policy, indeed, was to show themselves openly abroad. Agostino was enjoying the smoke of paper cigarettes, with all prudent regard for the well-being of an inflammable beard. Perceiving Wilfrid going by, he said, 'An Englishman! I continue to hope much from his countrymen. I have no right to do so,

only they insist on it. They have promised, and more than once, to sail a fleet to our assistance across the plains of Lombardy, and I believe they will—probably in the watery epoch which is to follow Metternich. Behold my Carlo approaching. The heart of that lad doth so boil the brain of him, he can scarcely keep the lid on. What is it now? Speak, my son.'

Carlo Ammiani had to communicate that he had just seen a black circle to Vittoria's name on two public playbills. His endeavour to ape a deliberate gravity while he told the tale, roused Agostino's humouristic ire.

'Round her name?' said Agostino.

'Yes; in every bill.'

'Meaning that she is suspected!'

'Meaning any damnable thing you like.'

'It's a device of the enemy.'

Agostino, glad of the pretext to recur to his habitual luxurious irony, threw himself back, repeating 'It 's a device of the enemy. Calculate, my son, that the enemy invariably knows all you intend to do: determine simply to astonish him with what you do. Intentions have lungs, Carlo, and depend on the circumambient air, which, if not designedly treacherous, is communicative. Deeds, I need not remark, are a different body. It has for many generations been our Italian error to imagine a positive blood relationship—not to say maternity itself—existing between intentions and deeds. Nothing of the sort! There is only the intention of a link to unite them. You perceive? It's much to

be famous for fine intentions, so we won't complain. Indeed, it's not our business to complain, but Posterity's; for fine intentions are really rich possessions, but they don't leave grand legacies; that is all. They mean to possess the future: they are only the voluptuous sons of the present. It's my belief, Carlino, from observation, apprehension, and other gifts of my senses, that our paternal government is not unacquainted with our intention to sing a song in a certain opera. And it may have learnt our clumsy method of enclosing names publicly, at the bidding of a non-appointed prosecutor, so to, isolate or extinguish them. Who can say? Oh, ay! Yes! the machinery that can so easily be made rickety is to blame; we admit that; but if you will have a conspiracy like a Geneva watch, you must expect any slight interference with the laws that govern it to upset the mechanism altogether. Ah-a! look yonder, but not hastily, my Carlo. Checco is nearing us, and he knows that he has fellows after him. And if I guess right, he has a burden to deliver to one of us.'

Checco came along at his usual pace, and it was quite evident that he fancied himself under espionage. On two sides of the square a suspicious figure threaded its way in the line of shade not far behind him. Checco passed the cafe looking at nothing but the huge hands he rubbed over and over. The manifest agents of the polizia were nearing when Checco ran back, and began mouthing as in retort at something that had been spoken from the cafe as he shot by. He made a gabbling appeal on either side, and addressed the pair of apparent mouchards, in what, if intelligible,

should have been the language of earnest entreaty. At the first word which the caffe was guilty of uttering, a fit of exasperation seized him, and the exciteable creature plucked at his hat and sent it whirling across the open-air tables right through the doorway. Then, with a whine, he begged his followers to get his hat back for him. They complied.

'We only called "Illustrissimo!"' said Agostino, as one of the men returned from the interior of the caffe hat in hand.

'The Signori should have known better—it is an idiot,' the man replied. He was a novice: in daring to rebuke he betrayed his office.

Checco snatched his hat from his attentive friend grinning, and was away in a flash. Thereupon the caffe laughed, and laughed with an abashing vehemence that disconcerted the spies. They wavered in their choice of following Checco or not; one went a step forward, one pulled back; the loiterer hurried to rejoin his comrade, who was now for a retrograde movement, and standing together they swayed like two imperfectly jolly fellows, or ballet bandits, each plucking at the other, until at last the maddening laughter made them break, reciprocate cat-like hisses of abuse, and escape as they best could—lamentable figures.

'It says well for Milan that the Tedeschi can scrape up nothing better from the gutters than rascals the like of those for their service,' quoth Agostino. 'Eh, Signor Conte?'

'That enclosure about La Vittoria's name on the bills is correct,' said the person addressed, in a low tone. He turned and

indicated one who followed from the interior of the caffe.

'If Barto is to be trusted she is not safe,' the latter remarked. He produced a paper that had been secreted in Checco's hat. Under the date and the superscription of the Pope's Mouth, 'LA VITTORIA' stood out in the ominous heavily-pencilled ring: the initials of Barto Rizzo were in a corner. Agostino began smoothing his beard.

'He has discovered that she is not trustworthy,' said Count Medole, a young man of a premature gravity and partial baldness, who spoke habitually with a forefinger pressed flat on his long pointed chin.

'Do you mean to tell me, Count Medole, that you attach importance to a communication of this sort?' said Carlo, forcing an amazement to conceal his anger.

'I do, Count Ammiani,' returned the patrician conspirator.

'You really listen to a man you despise?'

'I do not despise him, my friend.'

'You cannot surely tell us that you allow such a man, on his sole authority, to blacken the character of the signorina?'

'I believe that he has not.'

'Believe? trust him? Then we are all in his hands. What can you mean? Come to the signorina herself instantly. Agostino, you now conduct Count Medole to her, and save him from the shame of subscribing to the monstrous calumny. I beg you to go with our Agostino, Count Medole. It is time for you—I honour you for the part you have taken; but it is time to act according to your

own better judgement.'

Count Medole bowed.

'The filthy rat!' cried Ammiani, panting to let out his wrath.

'A serviceable dog,' Agostino remarked correctingly. 'Keep true to the form of animal, Carlo. He has done good service in his time.'

'You listen to the man?' Carlo said, now thoroughly amazed.

'An indiscretion is possible to woman, my lad. She may have been indiscreet in some way I am compelled to admit the existence of possibilities.'

'Of all men, you, Agostino! You call her daughter, and profess to love her.'

'You forget,' said Agostino sharply. 'The question concerns the country, not the girl.' He added in an underbreath, 'I think you are professing that you love her a little too strongly, and scarce give her much help as an advocate. The matter must be looked into. If Barto shall be found to have acted without just grounds, I am certain that Count Medole'—he turned suavely to the nobleman—'will withdraw confidence from him; and that will be equivalent to a rope's-end for Barto. We shall see him to-night at your house?'

'He will be there,' Medole said.

'But the harm's done; the mischief's done! And what's to follow if you shall choose to consider this vile idiot justified?' asked Ammiani.

'She sings, and there is no rising,' said Medole.

'She is detached from the patriotic battery, for the moment: it will be better for her not to sing at all,' said Agostino. 'In fact, Barto has merely given us warning that—and things look like it—the Fifteenth is likely to be an Austrian feast-day. Your arm, my son. We will join you to-night, my dear Count. Now, Carlo, I was observing, it appears to me that the Austrians are not going to be surprised by us, and it affords me exquisite comfort. Fellows prepared are never more than prepared for one day and another day; and they are sure to be in a state of lax preparation after a first and second disappointment. On the contrary, fellows surprised'—Agostino had recovered his old smile again—'fellows surprised may be expected to make use of the inspirations pertaining to genius. Don't you see?'

'Oh, cruel! I am sick of you all!' Carlo exclaimed. 'Look at her; think of her, with her pure dream of Italy and her noble devotion. And you permit a doubt to be cast on her!'

'Now, is it not true that you have an idea of the country not being worthy of her?' said Agostino, slyly. 'The Chief, I fancy, did not take certain facts into his calculation when he pleaded that the conspiratrix was the sum and completion of the conspirator. You will come to Medole's to-night, Carlo. You need not be too sweet to him, but beware of explosiveness. I, a Republican, am nevertheless a practical exponent of the sacrifices necessary to unity. I accept the local leadership of Medole—on whom I can never look without thinking of an unfeathered pie; and I submit to be assisted by the man Barto Rizzo. Do thou likewise, my

son. Let your enamoured sensations follow that duty, and with a breezy space between. A conspiracy is an epitome of humanity, with a boiling power beneath it. You're no more than a bit of mechanism—happy if it goes at all!'

Agostino said that he would pay a visit to Vittoria in the evening. Ammiani had determined to hunt out Barto Rizzo and the heads of the Clubs before he saw her. It was a relief to him to behold in the Piazza the Englishman who had exchanged cards with him on the Motterone. Captain Gambier advanced upon a ceremonious bow, saying frankly, in a more colloquial French than he had employed at their first interview, that he had to apologize for his conduct, and to request monsieur's excuse. 'If,' he pursued, 'that lady is the person whom I knew formerly in England as Mademoiselle Belloni, and is now known as Mademoiselle Vittoria Campa, may I beg you to inform her that, according to what I have heard, she is likely to be in some danger to-morrow?' What the exact nature of the danger was, Captain Gambier could not say.

Ammiani replied: 'She is in need of all her friends,' and took the pressure of the Englishman's hand, who would fair have asked more but for the stately courtesy of the Italian's withdrawing salute. Ammiani could no longer doubt that Vittoria's implication in the conspiracy was known.

CHAPTER XI
LAURA PIAVENI

After dark on the same day antecedent to the outbreak, Vittoria, with her faithful Beppo at her heels, left her mother to run and pass one comforting hour in the society of the Signora Laura Piaveni and her children.

There were two daughters of a parasitical Italian nobleman, of whom one had married the patriot Giacomo Piaveni, and one an Austrian diplomatist, the Commendatore Graf von Lenkenstein. Count Serabiglione was traditionally parasitical. His ancestors all had moved in Courts. The children of the House had illustrious sponsors. The House itself was a symbolical sunflower constantly turning toward Royalty. Great excuses are to be made for this, the last male descendant, whose father in his youth had been an Imperial page, and who had been nursed in the conception that Italy (or at least Lombardy) was a natural fief of Austria, allied by instinct and by interest to the holders of the Alps. Count Serabiglione mixed little with his countrymen,—the statement might be inversed,—but when, perchance, he was among them, he talked willingly of the Tedeschi, and voluntarily declared them to be gross, obstinate, offensive-bears, in short. At such times he would intimate in any cordial ear that the serpent was probably a match for the bear in a game of skill, and that the

wisdom of the serpent was shown in his selection of the bear as his master, since, by the ordination of circumstances, master he must have. The count would speak pityingly of the poor depraved intellects which admitted the possibility of a coming Kingdom of Italy united: the lunatics who preached of it he considered a sort of self-elected targets for appointed files of Tyrolese jagers. But he was vindictive against him whom he called the professional doctrinaire, and he had vile names for the man. Acknowledging that Italy mourned her present woes, he charged this man with the crime of originating them:—and why? what was his object? He was, the count declared in answer, a born intriguer, a lover of blood, mad for the smell of it!—an Old Man of the Mountain; a sheaf of assassins; and more—the curse of Italy! There should be extradition treaties all over the world to bring this arch-conspirator to justice. The door of his conscience had been knocked at by a thousand bleeding ghosts, and nothing had opened to them. What was Italy in his eyes? A chess-board; and Italians were the chessmen to this cold player with live flesh. England nourished the wretch, that she might undermine the peace of the Continent.

Count Serabiglione would work himself up in the climax of denunciation, and then look abroad frankly as one whose spirit had been relieved. He hated bad men; and it was besides necessary for him to denounce somebody, and get relief of some kind. Italians edged away from him. He was beginning to feel that he had no country. The detested title 'Young Italy'

hurried him into fits of wrath. 'I am,' he said, 'one of the Old Italians, if a distinction is to be made.' He assured his listeners that he was for his commune, his district, and aired his old-Italian prejudices delightedly; clapping his hands to the quarrels of Milan and Brescia; Florence and Siena—haply the feuds of villages—and the common North-Italian jealousy of the chief city. He had numerous capital tales to tell of village feuds, their date and origin, the stupid effort to heal them, and the wider consequent split; saying, 'We have, all Italians, the tenacity, the unforgiveness, the fervent blood of pure Hebrews; and a little more gaiety, perhaps; together with a love of fair things. We can outlive ten races of conquerors.'

In this fashion he philosophized, or forced a kind of philosophy. But he had married his daughter to an Austrian, which was what his countrymen could not overlook, and they made him feel it. Little by little, half acquiescing, half protesting, and gradually denationalized, the count was edged out of Italian society, save of the parasitical class, which he very much despised. He was not a happy man. Success at the Imperial Court might have comforted him; but a remorseless sensitiveness of his nature tripped his steps.

Bitter laughter rang throughout Lombardy when, in spite of his efforts to save his daughter's husband, Giacomo Piaveni suffered death. No harder blow had ever befallen the count: it was as good as a public proclamation that he possessed small influence. To have bent the knee was not afflicting to this

nobleman's conscience: but it was an anguish to think of having bent the knee for nothing.

Giacomo Piaveni was a noble Italian of the young blood, son of a General loved by Eugene. In him the loss of Italy was deplorable. He perished by treachery at the age of twenty-three years. So splendid was this youth in appearance, of so sweet a manner with women, and altogether so-gentle and gallant, that it was a widowhood for women to have known him: and at his death the hearts of two women who had loved him in rivalry became bound by a sacred tie of friendship. He, though not of distinguished birth, had the choice of an almost royal alliance in the first blush of his manhood. He refused his chance, pleading in excuse to Count Serabiglione, that he was in love with that nobleman's daughter, Laura; which it flattered the count to hear, but he had ever after a contempt for the young man's discretion, and was observed to shrug, with the smooth sorrowfulness of one who has been a prophet, on the day when Giacomo was shot. The larger estates of the Piaveni family, then in Giacomo's hands, were in a famous cheese-making district, producing a delicious cheese:—'white as lambkins!' the count would ejaculate most dolefully; and in a rapture of admiration, 'You would say, a marble quarry when you cut into it.' The theme was afflicting, for all the estates of Giacomo were for the time forfeit, and the pleasant agitation produced among his senses by the mention of the cheese reminded him at the same instant that he had to support a widow with two children. The

Signora Piaveni lived in Milan, and the count her father visited her twice during the summer months, and wrote to her from his fitful Winter residences in various capital cities, to report progress in the settled scheme for the recovery of Giacomo's property, as well for his widow as for the heirs of his body. 'It is a duty,' Count Serabiglione said emphatically. 'My daughter can entertain no proposal until her children are duly established; or would she, who is young and lovely and archly capricious, continue to decline the very best offers of the Milanese nobility, and live on one flat in an old quarter of the city, instead of in a bright and handsome street, musical with equipages, and full of the shows of life?'

In conjunction with certain friends of the signora, the count worked diligently for the immediate restitution of the estates. He was ably seconded by the young princess of Schyll-Weilingen, —by marriage countess of Fohrendorf, duchess of Graatli, in central Germany, by which title she passed,—an Austrian princess; she who had loved Giacomo, and would have given all for him, and who now loved his widow. The extreme and painful difficulty was that the Signora Piaveni made no concealment of her abhorrence of the House of Austria, and hatred of Austrian rule in Italy. The spirit of her dead husband had come to her from the grave, and warmed a frame previously indifferent to anything save his personal merits. It had been covertly communicated to her that if she performed due submission to the authorities, and lived for six months in good legal, that is to say, nonpatriotic

odour, she might hope to have the estates. The duchess had obtained this mercy for her, and it was much; for Giacomo's scheme of revolt had been conceived with a subtlety of genius, and contrived on a scale sufficient to incense any despotic lord of such a glorious milch-cow as Lombardy. Unhappily the signora was more inspired by the remembrance of her husband than by consideration for her children. She received disaffected persons: she subscribed her money ostentatiously for notoriously patriotic purposes; and she who, in her father's Como villa, had been a shy speechless girl, nothing more than beautiful, had become celebrated for her public letters, and the ardour of declamation against the foreigner which characterized her style. In the face of such facts, the estates continued to be withheld from her governance. Austria could do that: she could wreak her spite against the woman, but she respected her own law even in a conquered land: the estates were not confiscated, and not absolutely sequestrated; and, indeed, money coming from them had been sent to her for the education of her children. It lay in unopened official envelopes, piled one upon another, quarterly remittances, horrible as blood of slaughter in her sight. Count Serabiglione made a point of counting the packets always within the first five minutes of a visit to his daughter. He said nothing, but was careful to see to the proper working of the lock of the cupboard where the precious deposits were kept, and sometimes in forgetfulness he carried off the key. When his daughter reclaimed it, she observed, 'Pray believe me quite as

anxious as yourself to preserve these documents.' And the count answered, 'They represent the estates, and are of legal value, though the amount is small. They represent your protest, and the admission of your claim. They are priceless.'

In some degree, also, they compensated him for the expense he was put to in providing for his daughter's subsistence and that of her children. For there, at all events, visible before his eyes, was the value of the money, if not the money expended. He remonstrated with Laura for leaving it more than necessarily exposed. She replied,

'My people know what that money means!' implying, of course, that no one in her house would consequently touch it. Yet it was reserved for the count to find it gone.

The discovery was made by the astounded nobleman on the day preceding Vittoria's appearance at La Scala. His daughter being absent, he had visited the cupboard merely to satisfy an habitual curiosity. The cupboard was open, and had evidently been ransacked. He rang up the domestics, and would have charged them all with having done violence to the key, but that on reflection he considered this to be a way of binding faggots together, and he resolved to take them one by one, like the threading Jesuit that he was, and so get a Judas. Laura's return saved him from much exercise of his peculiar skill. She, with a cool 'Ebbene!' asked him how long he had expected the money to remain there. Upon which, enraged, he accused her of devoting the money to the accursed patriotic cause. And here they came

to a curious open division.

'Be content, my father,' she said; 'the money is my husband's, and is expended on his behalf.'

'You waste it among the people who were the cause of his ruin!' her father retorted.

'You presume me to have returned it to the Government, possibly?'

'I charge you with tossing it to your so-called patriots.'

'Sir, if I have done that, I have done well.'

'Hear her!' cried the count to the attentive ceiling; and addressing her with an ironical 'madame,' he begged permission to inquire of her whether haply she might be the person in the pay of Revolutionists who was about to appear at La Scala, under the name of the Signorina Vittoria. 'For you are getting dramatic in your pose, my Laura,' he added, familiarizing the colder tone of his irony. 'You are beginning to stand easily in attitudes of defiance to your own father.'

'That I may practise how to provoke a paternal Government, you mean,' she rejoined, and was quite a match for him in dialectics.

The count chanced to allude further to the Signorina Vittoria.

'Do you know much of that lady?' she asked.

'As much as is known,' said he.

They looked at one another; the count thinking, 'I gave to this girl an excess of brains, in my folly!'

Compelled to drop his eyes, and vexed by the tacit defeat, he

pursued, 'You expect great things from her?'

'Great,' said his daughter.

'Well, well,' he murmured acquiescingly, while sounding within himself for the part to play. 'Well-yes! she may do what you expect.'

'There is not the slightest doubt of her capacity,' said his daughter, in a tone of such perfect conviction that the count was immediately and irresistibly tempted to play the part of sagacious, kindly, tolerant but foreseeing father; and in this becoming character he exposed the risks her party ran in trusting anything of weight to a woman. Not that he decried women. Out of their sphere he did not trust them, and he simply objected to them when out of their sphere: the last four words being uttered staccato.

'But we trust her to do what she has undertaken to do,' said Laura.

The count brightened prodigiously from his suspicion to a certainty; and as he was still smiling at the egregious trap his clever but unskilled daughter had fallen into, he found himself listening incredulously to her plain additional sentence:—'She has easy command of three octaves.'

By which the allusion was transformed from politics to Art. Had Laura reserved this cunning turn a little further, yielding to the natural temptation to increase the shock of the antithetical battery, she would have betrayed herself: but it came at the right moment: the count gave up his arms. He told her that this

Signorina Vittoria was suspected. 'Whom will they not suspect!' interjected Laura. He assured her that if a conspiracy had ripened it must fail. She was to believe that he abhorred the part of a spy or informer, but he was bound, since she was reckless, to watch over his daughter; and also bound, that he might be of service to her, to earn by service to others as much power as he could reasonably hope to obtain. Laura signified that he argued excellently well. In a fit of unjustified doubt of her sincerity, he complained, with a querulous snap:

'You have your own ideas; you have your own ideas. You think me this and that. A man must be employed.'

'And this is to account for your occupation?' she remarked.

'Employed, I say!' the count reiterated fretfully. He was unmasking to no purpose, and felt himself as on a slope, having given his adversary vantage.

'So that there is no choice for you, do you mean?'

The count set up a staggering affirmative, but knocked it over with its natural enemy as soon as his daughter had said, 'Not being for Italy, you must necessarily be against her:—I admit that to be the position!'

'No!' he cried; 'no: there is no question of "for" or "against," as you are aware. "Italy, and not Revolution": that is my motto.'

'Or, in other words, "The impossible,"' said Laura. 'A perfect motto!'

Again the count looked at her, with the remorseful thought: 'I certainly gave you too much brains.'

He smiled: 'If you could only believe it not impossible!'

'Do you really imagine that "Italy without Revolution" does not mean "Austria"?' she inquired.

She had discovered how much he, and therefore his party, suspected, and now she had reasons for wishing him away. Not daring to show symptoms of restlessness, she offered him the chance of recovering himself on the crutches of an explanation. He accepted the assistance, praising his wits for their sprightly divination, and went through a long-winded statement of his views for the welfare of Italy, quoting his favourite Berni frequently, and forcing the occasion for that jolly poet. Laura gave quiet attention to all, and when he was exhausted at the close, said meditatively, 'Yes. Well; you are older. It may seem to you that I shall think as you do when I have had a similar, or the same, length of experience.'

This provoking reply caused her father to jump up from his chair and spin round for his hat. She rose to speed him forth.

'It may seem to me!' he kept muttering. 'It may seem to me that when a daughter gets married—addio! she is nothing but her husband.'

'Ay! ay! if it might be so!' the signora wailed out.

The count hated tears, considering them a clog to all useful machinery. He was departing, when through the open window a noise of scuffling in the street below arrested him.

'Has it commenced?' he said, starting.

'What?' asked the signora, coolly; and made him pause.

'But-but-but!' he answered, and had the grace to spare her ears. The thought in him was: 'But that I had some faith in my wife, and don't admire the devil sufficiently, I would accuse him point-blank, for, by Bacchus! you are as clever as he.'

It is a point in the education of parents that they should learn to apprehend humbly the compliment of being outwitted by their own offspring.

Count Serabiglione leaned out of the window and saw that his horses were safe and the coachman handy. There were two separate engagements going on between angry twisting couples.

'Is there a habitable town in Italy?' the count exclaimed frenziedly. First he called to his coachman to drive away, next to wait as if nailed to the spot. He cursed the revolutionary spirit as the mother of vices. While he was gazing at the fray, the door behind him opened, as he knew by the rush of cool air which struck his temples. He fancied that his daughter was hurrying off in obedience to a signal, and turned upon her just as Laura was motioning to a female figure in the doorway to retire.

'Who is this?' said the count.

A veil was over the strange lady's head. She was excited, and breathed quickly. The count brought forward a chair to her, and put on his best court manner. Laura caressed her, whispering, ere she replied: 'The Signorina Vittoria Romana!—Biancolla!—Benarriva!' and numerous other names of inventive endearment. But the count was too sharp to be thrown off the scent. 'Aha!' he said, 'do I see her one evening before the term appointed?' and

bowed profoundly. 'The Signorina Vittoria!'

She threw up her veil.

'Success is certain,' he remarked and applauded, holding one hand as a snuff-box for the fingers of the other to tap on.

'Signor Conte, you—must not praise me before you have heard me.'

'To have seen you!'

'The voice has a wider dominion, Signor Conte.'

'The fame of the signorina's beauty will soon be far wider. Was Venus a cantatrice?'

She blushed, being unable to continue this sort of Mayfly-shooting dialogue, but her first charming readiness had affected the proficient social gentleman very pleasantly, and with fascinated eyes he hummed and buzzed about her like a moth at a lamp. Suddenly his head dived: 'Nothing, nothing, signorina,' he said, brushing delicately at her dress; 'I thought it might be paint.' He smiled to reassure her, and then he dived again, murmuring: 'It must be something sticking to the dress. Pardon me.' With that he went to the bell. 'I will ring up my daughter's maid. Or Laura—where is Laura?'

The Signora Piaveni had walked to the window. This antiquated fussiness of the dilettante little nobleman was sickening to her.

'Probably you expect to discover a revolutionary symbol in the lines of the signorina's dress,' she said.

'A revolutionary symbol!—my dear! my dear!' The count

reproved his daughter. 'Is not our signorina a pure artist, accomplishing easily three octaves? aha! Three!' and he rubbed his hands. 'But, three good octaves!' he addressed Vittoria seriously and admonishingly. 'It is a fortune-millions! It is precisely the very grandest heritage! It is an army!'

'I trust that it may be!' said Vittoria, with so deep and earnest a ring of her voice that the count himself, malicious as his ejaculations had been, was astonished. At that instant Laura cried from the window: 'These horses will go mad.'

The exclamation had the desired effect.

'Eh?—pardon me, signorina,' said the count, moving half-way to the window, and then askant for his hat. The clatter of the horses' hoofs sent him dashing through the doorway, at which place his daughter stood with his hat extended. He thanked and blessed her for the kindly attention, and in terror lest the signorina should think evil of him as 'one of the generation of the hasty,' he said, 'Were it anything but horses! anything but horses! one's horses!—ha!' The audible hoofs called him off. He kissed the tips of his fingers, and tripped out.

The signora stepped rapidly to the window, and leaning there, cried a word to the coachman, who signalled perfect comprehension, and immediately the count's horses were on their hind-legs, chafing and pulling to right and left, and the street was tumultuous with them. She flung down the window, seized Vittoria's cheeks in her two hands, and pressed the head upon her bosom. 'He will not disturb us again,' she said, in quite a

new tone, sliding her hands from the cheeks to the shoulders and along the arms to the fingers'-ends, which they clutched lovingly. 'He is of the old school, friend of my heart! and besides, he has but two pairs of horses, and one he keeps in Vienna. We live in the hope that our masters will pay us better! Tell me! you are in good health? All is well with you? Will they have to put paint on her soft cheeks to-morrow? Little, if they hold the colour as full as now? My Sandra! amica! should I have been jealous if Giacomo had known you? On my soul, I cannot guess! But, you love what he loved. He seems to live for me when they are talking of Italy, and you send your eyes forward as if you saw the country free. God help me! how I have been containing myself for the last hour and a half!'

The signora dropped in a seat and laughed a languid laugh.

'The little ones? I will ring for them. Assunta shall bring them down in their night-gowns if they are undressed; and we will muffle the windows, for my little man will be wanting his song; and did you not promise him the great one which is to raise Italy-his mother, from the dead? Do you remember our little fellow's eyes as he tried to see the picture? I fear I force him too much, and there's no need-not a bit.'

The time was exciting, and the signora spoke excitedly. Messing and Reggio were in arms. South Italy had given the open signal. It was near upon the hour of the unmasking of the great Lombard conspiracy, and Vittoria, standing there, was the beacon-light of it. Her presence filled Laura with transports of

exultation; and shy of displaying it, and of the theme itself, she let her tongue run on, and satisfied herself by smoothing the hand of the brave girl on her chin, and plucking with little loving tugs at her skirts. In doing this she suddenly gave a cry, as if stung.

'You carry pins,' she said. And inspecting the skirts more closely, 'You have a careless maid in that creature Giacinta; she lets paper stick to your dress. What is this?'

Vittoria turned her head, and gathered up her dress to see.

'Pinned with the butterfly!' Laura spoke under her breath.

Vittoria asked what it meant.

'Nothing—nothing,' said her friend, and rose, pulling her eagerly toward the lamp.

A small bronze butterfly secured a square piece of paper with clipped corners to her dress. Two words were written on it:—

'SEI SOSPETTA.'

CHAPTER XII
THE BRONZE BUTTERFLY

The two women were facing one another in a painful silence when Carlo Ammiani was announced to them. He entered with a rapid stride, and struck his hands together gladly at sight of Vittoria.

Laura met his salutation by lifting the accusing butterfly attached to Vittoria's dress.

'Yes; I expected it,' he said, breathing quick from recent exertion. 'They are kind—they give her a personal warning. Sometimes the dagger heads the butterfly. I have seen the mark on the Play-bills affixed to the signorina's name.'

'What does it mean?' said Laura, speaking huskily, with her head bent over the bronze insect. 'What can it mean?' she asked again, and looked up to meet a covert answer.

'Unpin it.' Vittoria raised her arms as if she felt the thing to be enveloping her.

The signora loosened the pin from its hold; but dreading lest she thereby sacrificed some possible clue to the mystery, she hesitated in her action, and sent an intolerable shiver of spite through Vittoria's frame, at whom she gazed in a cold and cruel way, saying, 'Don't tremble.' And again, 'Is it the doing of that 'garritrice magrezza,' whom you call 'la Lazzeruola?' Speak. Can

you trace it to her hand? Who put the plague-mark upon you?'

Vittoria looked steadily away from her.

'It means just this,' Carlo interposed; 'there! now it 's off; and, signorina, I entreat you to think nothing of it,—it means that any one who takes a chief part in the game we play, shall and must provoke all fools, knaves, and idiots to think and do their worst. They can't imagine a pure devotion. Yes, I see—"Sei sospetta." They would write their 'Sei sospetta' upon St. Catherine in the Wheel. Put it out of your mind. Pass it.'

'But they suspect her; and why do they suspect her?' Laura questioned vehemently. 'I ask, is it a Conservatorio rival, or the brand of one of the Clubs? She has no answer.'

'Observe.' Carlo laid the paper under her eyes.

Three angles were clipped, the fourth was doubled under. He turned it back and disclosed the initials B. R. 'This also is the work of our man-devil, as I thought. I begin to think that we shall be eternally thwarted, until we first clear our Italy of its vermin. Here is a weazel, a snake, a tiger, in one. They call him the Great Cat. He fancies himself a patriot,—he is only a conspirator. I denounce him, but he gets the faith of people, our Agostino among them, I believe. The energy of this wretch is terrific. He has the vigour of a fasting saint. Myself—I declare it to you, signora, with shame, I know what it is to fear this man. He has Satanic blood, and the worst is, that the Chief trusts him.'

'Then, so do I,' said Laura.

'And I,' Vittoria echoed her.

A sudden squeeze beset her fingers. 'And I trust you,' Laura said to her. 'But there has been some indiscretion. My child, wait: give no heed to me, and have no feelings. Carlo, my friend—my husband's boy—brother-in-arms! let her teach you to be generous. She must have been indiscreet. Has she friends among the Austrians? I have one, and it is known, and I am not suspected. But, has she? What have you said or done that might cause them to suspect you? Speak, Sandra mia.'

It was difficult for Vittoria to speak upon the theme, which made her appear as a criminal replying to a charge. At last she said, 'English: I have no foreign friends but English. I remember nothing that I have done.—Yes, I have said I thought I might tremble if I was led out to be shot.'

'Pish! tush!' Laura checked her. 'They flog women, they do not shoot them. They shoot men.'

'That is our better fortune,' said Ammiani.

'But, Sandra, my sister,' Laura persisted now, in melodious coaxing tones. 'Can you not help us to guess? I am troubled: I am stung. It is for your sake I feel it so. Can't you imagine who did it, for instance?'

'No, signora, I cannot,' Vittoria replied.

'You can't guess?'

I cannot help you.'

'You will not!' said the irritable woman. 'Have you noticed no one passing near you?'

'A woman brushed by me as I entered this street. I remember

no one else. And my Beppo seized a man who was spying on me, as he said. That is all I can remember.'

Vittoria turned her face to Ammiani.

'Barto Rizzo has lived in England,' he remarked, half to himself. 'Did you come across a man called Barto Rizzo there, signorina? I suspect him to be the author of this.'

At the name of Barto Rizzo, Laura's eyes widened, awakening a memory in Ammiani; and her face had a spectral wanness.

'I must go to my chamber,' she said. 'Talk of it together. I will be with you soon.'

She left them.

Ammiani bent over to Vittoria's ear. 'It was this man who sent the warning to Giacomo, the signora's husband, which he despised, and which would have saved him.

It is the only good thing I know of Barto Rizzo. Pardon her.'

'I do,' said the girl, now weeping.

'She has evidently a rooted superstitious faith in these revolutionary sign-marks. They are contagious to her. She loves you, and believes in you, and will kneel to you for forgiveness by-and-by. Her misery is a disease. She thinks now, "If my husband had given heed to the warning!"

'Yes, I see how her heart works,' said Vittoria. 'You knew her husband, Signor Carlo?'

'I knew him. I served under him. He was the brother of my love. I shall have no other.'

Vittoria placed her hand for Ammiani to take it. He joined his

own to the fevered touch. The heart of the young man swelled most ungovernably, but the perils of the morrow were imaged by him, circling her as with a tragic flame, and he had no word for his passion.

The door opened, when a noble little boy bounded into the room; followed by a little girl in pink and white, like a streamer in the steps of her brother. With shouts, and with arms thrown forward, they flung themselves upon Vittoria, the boy claiming all her lap, and the girl struggling for a share of the kingdom. Vittoria kissed them, crying, 'No, no, no, Messer Jack, this is a republic, and not an empire, and you are to have no rights of "first come"; and Amalia sits on one knee, and you on one knee, and you sit face to face, and take hands, and swear to be satisfied.'

'Then I desire not to be called an English Christian name, and you will call me Giacomo,' said the boy.

Vittoria sang, in mountain-notes, 'Giacomo!—Giacomo—Giac-giac-giac.. como!'

The children listened, glistening up at her, and in conjunction jumped and shouted for more.

'More?' said Vittoria; 'but is the Signor Carlo no friend of ours? and does he wear a magic ring that makes him invisible?'

'Let the German girl go to him,' said Giacomo, and strained his throat to reach at kisses.

'I am not a German girl,' little Amalia protested, refusing to go to Carlo Ammiani under that stigma, though a delightful haven of open arms and knees, and filliping fingers, invited her.

‘She is not a German girl, O Signor Giacomo,’ said Vittoria, in the theatrical manner.

‘She has a German name.’

‘It’s not a German name!’ the little girl shrieked.

Giacomo set Amalia to a miauling tune.

‘So, you hate the Duchess of Graatli!’ said Vittoria. ‘Very well. I shall remember.’

The boy declared that he did not hate his mother’s friend and sister’s godmother: he rather liked her, he really liked her, he loved her; but he loathed the name ‘Amalia,’ and could not understand why the duchess would be a German. He concluded by miauling ‘Amalia’ in the triumph of contempt.

‘Cat, begone!’ said Vittoria, promptly setting him down on his feet, and little Amalia at the same time perceiving that practical sympathy only required a ring at the bell for it to come out, straightway pulled the wires within herself, and emitted a doleful wail that gave her sole possession of Vittoria’s bosom, where she was allowed to bring her tears to an end very comfortingly. Giacomo meanwhile, his body bent in an arch, plucked at Carlo Ammiani’s wrists with savagely playful tugs, and took a stout boy’s lesson in the art of despising what he coveted. He had only to ask for pardon. Finding it necessary, he came shyly up to Vittoria, who put Amalia in his way, kissing whom, he was himself tenderly kissed.

‘But girls should not cry!’ Vittoria reproved the little woman.

‘Why do you cry?’ asked Amalia simply.

'See! she has been crying.' Giacomo appropriated the discovery, perforce of loudness, after the fashion of his sex.

'Why does our Vittoria cry?' both the children clamoured.

'Because your mother is such a cruel sister to her,' said Laura, passing up to them from the doorway. She drew Vittoria's head against her breast, looked into her eyes, and sat down among them. Vittoria sang one low-toned soft song, like the voice of evening, before they were dismissed to their beds. She could not obey Giacomo's demand for a martial air, and had to plead that she was tired.

When the children had gone, it was as if a truce had ended. The signora and Ammiani fell to a brisk counterchange of questions relating to the mysterious suspicion which had fallen upon Vittoria. Despite Laura's love for her, she betrayed her invincible feeling that there must be some grounds for special or temporary distrust.

'The lives that hang on it knock at me here,' she said, touching under her throat with fingers set like falling arrows.

But Ammiani, who moved in the centre of conspiracies, met at their councils, and knew their heads, and frequently combated their schemes, was not possessed by the same profound idea of their potential command of hidden facts and sovereign wisdom. He said, 'We trust too much to one man. We are compelled to trust him, but we trust too much to him. I mean this man, this devil, Barto Rizzo. Signora, signora, he must be spoken of. He has dislocated the plot. He is the fanatic of the revolution, and

we are trusting him as if he had full sway of reason. What is the consequence? The Chief is absent he is now, as I believe, in Genoa. All the plan for the rising is accurate; the instruments are ready, and we are paralyzed. I have been to three houses to-night, and where, two hours previously, there was union and concert, all are irresolute and divided. I have hurried off a messenger to the Chief. Until we hear from him, nothing can be done. I left Ugo Corte storming against us Milanese, threatening, as usual, to work without us, and have a Bergamasc and Brescian Republic of his own. Count Medole is for a week's postponement. Agostino smiles and chuckles, and talks his poetisms.'

'Until you hear from the Chief, nothing is to be done?' Laura said passionately. 'Are we to remain in suspense? Impossible! I cannot bear it. We have plenty of arms in the city. Oh, that we had cannon! I worship cannon! They are the Gods of battle! But if we surprise the citadel;—one true shock of alarm makes a mob of an army. I have heard my husband say so. Let there be no delay. That is my word.'

'But, signora, do you see that all concert about the signal is lost?'

'My friend, I see something'; Laura nodded a significant half-meaning at him. 'And perhaps it will be as well. Go at once. See that another signal is decided upon. Oh! because we are ready—ready. Inaction now is uttermost anguish—kills the heart. What number of the white butchers have we in the city to-night?'

'They are marching in at every gate. I saw a regiment

of Hungarians coming up the Borgo della Stella. Two fresh squadrons of Uhlans in the Corso Francesco. In the Piazza d'Armi artillery is encamped.'

'The better for Brescia, for Bergamo, for Padua, for Venice!' exclaimed Laura. 'There is a limit to their power. We Milanese can match them. For days and days I have had a dream lying in my bosom that Milan was soon to breathe. Go, my brother; go to Barto Rizzo; gather him and Count Medole, Agostino, and Colonel Corte—to whom I kiss my fingers—gather them together, and squeeze their brains for the one spark of divine fire in this darkness which must exist where there are so many thorough men bent upon a sacred enterprise. And, Carlo,'—Laura checked her nervous voice, 'don't think I am declaiming to you from one of my "Midnight Lamps."' (She spoke of the title of her pamphlets to the Italian people.) 'You feel among us women very much as Agostino and Colonel Corte feel when the boy Carlo airs his impetuosities in their presence. Yes, my fervour makes a philosopher of you. That is human nature. Pity me, pardon me, and do my bidding.'

The comparison of Ammiani's present sentiments to those of the elders of the conspiracy, when his mouth was open in their midst, was severe and masterful, for the young man rose instantly without a thought in his head.

He remarked: 'I will tell them that the signorina does not give the signal.'

'Tell them that the name she has chosen shall be Vittoria still;

but say, that she feels a shadow of suspicion to be an injunction upon her at such a crisis, and she will serve silently and humbly until she is rightly known, and her time comes. She is willing to appear before them, and submit to interrogation. She knows her innocence, and knowing that they work for the good of the country, she, if it is their will, is content to be blotted out of all participation:—all! She abjures all for the common welfare. Say that. And say, to-morrow night the rising must be. Oh! to-morrow night! It is my husband to me.'

Laura Piaveni crossed her arms upon her bosom.

Ammiani was moving from them with a downward face, when a bell-note of Vittoria's voice arrested him.

'Stay, Signor Carlo; I shall sing to-morrow night.'

The widow heard her through that thick emotion which had just closed her' speech with its symbolical sensuous rapture. Divining opposition fiercely, like a creature thwarted when athirst for the wells, she gave her a terrible look, and then said cajolingly, as far as absence of sweetness could make the tones pleasant, 'Yes, you will sing, but you will not sing that song.'

'It is that song which I intend to sing, signora.'

'When it is interdicted?'

'There is only one whose interdict I can acknowledge.'

'You will dare to sing in defiance of me?'

'I dare nothing when I simply do my duty.'

Ammiani went up to the window, and leaned there, eyeing the lights leading down to the crowding Piazza. He wished that he

were among the crowd, and might not hear those sharp stinging utterances coming from Laura, and Vittoria's unwavering replies, less frequent, but firmer, and gravely solid. Laura spent her energy in taunts, but Vittoria spoke only of her resolve, and to the point. It was, as his military instincts framed the simile, like the venomous crackling of skirmishing rifles before a fortress, that answered slowly with its volume of sound and sweeping shot. He had the vision of himself pleading to secure her safety, and in her hearing, on the Motterone, where she had seemed so simple a damsel, albeit nobly enthusiastic: too fair, too gentle to be stationed in any corner of the conflict at hand. Partly abased by the remembrance of his brainless intercessions then, and of the laughter which had greeted them, and which the signora had recently recalled, it was nevertheless not all in self-abasement (as the momentary recognition of a splendid character is commonly with men) that he perceived the stature of Vittoria's soul. Remembering also what the Chief had spoken of women, Ammiani thought 'Perhaps he has known one such as she.' The passion of the young man's heart magnified her image. He did not wonder to see the signora acknowledge herself worsted in the conflict.

'She talks like the edge of a sword,' cried Laura, desperately, and dropped into a chair. 'Take her home, and convince her, if you can, on the way, Carlo. I go to the Duchess of Graatli to-night. She has a reception. Take this girl home. She says she will sing: she obeys the Chief, and none but the Chief. We will not

suppose that it is her desire to shine. She is suspected; she is accused; she is branded; there is no general faith in her; yet she will hold the torch to-morrow night:—and what ensues? Some will move, some turn back, some run headlong over to treachery, some hang irresolute all are for the shambles! The blood is on her head.'

'I will excuse myself to you another time,' said Vittoria. 'I love you, Signora Laura.'

'You do, you do, or you would not think of excusing yourself to me,' said Laura. 'But now, go. You have cut me in two. Carlo Ammiani may succeed where I have failed, and I have used every weapon; enough to make a mean creature hate me for life and kiss me with transports. Do your best, Carlo, and let it be your utmost.'

It remained for Ammiani to assure her that their views were different.

'The signorina persists in her determination to carry out the programme indicated by the Chief, and refuses to be diverted from her path by the false suspicions of subordinates.' He employed a sententious phraseology instinctively, as men do when they are nervous, as well as when they justify the cynic's definition of the uses of speech. 'The signorina is, in my opinion, right. If she draws back, she publicly accepts the blot upon her name. I speak against my own feelings and my wishes.'

'Sandra, do you hear?' exclaimed Laura. 'This is a friend's interpretation of your inconsiderate wilfulness.'

Vittoria was content to reply, 'The Signor Carlo judges of me differently.'

'Go, then, and be fortified by him in this headstrong folly.' Laura motioned her hand, and laid it on her face.

Vittoria knelt and enclosed her with her arms, kissing her knees.

'Beppo waits for me at the house-door,' she said; but Carlo chose not to hear of this shadow-like Beppo.

'You have nothing to say for her save that she clears her name by giving the signal,' Laura burst out on his temperate 'Addio,' and started to her feet. 'Well, let it be so. Fruitless blood again! A 'rivederla' to you both. To-night I am in the enemy's camp. They play with open cards. Amalia tells me all she knows by what she disguises. I may learn something. Come to me to-morrow. My Sandra, I will kiss you. These shudderings of mine have no meaning.'

The signora embraced her, and took Ammiani's salute upon her fingers.

'Sour fingers!' he said. She leaned her cheek to him, whispering, 'I could easily be persuaded to betray you.'

He answered, 'I must have some merit in not betraying myself.'

'At each elbow!' she laughed. 'You show the thumps of an electric battery at each elbow, and expect your Goddess of lightnings not to see that she moves you. Go. You have not sided with me, and I am right, and I am a woman. By the way, Sandra

mia, I would beg the loan of your Beppo for two hours or less.'

Vittoria placed Beppo at her disposal.

'And you run home to bed,' continued Laura. 'Reason comes to you obstinate people when you are left alone for a time in the dark.'

She hardly listened to Vittoria's statement that the chief singers in the new opera were engaged to attend a meeting at eleven at night at the house of the maestro Rocco Ricci.

CHAPTER XIII
THE PLOT OF THE SIGNOR ANTONIO

There was no concealment as to Laura's object in making request for the services of Beppo. She herself knew it to be obvious that she intended to probe and cross-examine the man, and in her wilfulness she chose to be obtuse to opinion. She did not even blush to lean a secret ear above the stairs that she might judge, by the tones of Vittoria's voice upon her giving Beppo the order to wait, whether she was at the same time conveying a hint for guardedness. But Vittoria said not a word: it was Ammiani who gave the order. 'I am despicable in distrusting her for a single second,' said Laura. That did not the less encourage her to question Beppo rigorously forthwith; and as she was not to be deceived by an Italian's affectation of simplicity, she let him answer two or three times like a plain fool, and then abruptly accused him of standing prepared with these answers. Beppo, within his own bosom, immediately ascribed to his sagacious instinct the mere spirit of opposition and dislike to serve any one save his own young mistress which had caused him to irritate the signora and be on his guard. He proffered a candid admission of the truth of the charge; adding, that he stood likewise prepared with an unlimited number of statements. 'Questions, illustrious

signora, invariably put me on the defensive, and seem to cry for a return thrust; and this I account for by the fact that my mother—the blessed little woman now among the Saints!—was questioned, brows and heels, by a ferruginously—faced old judge at the momentous period when she carried me. So that, a question—and I show point; but ask me for a statement, and, ah, signora!' Beppo delivered a sweep of the arm, as to indicate the spontaneous flow of his tongue.

'I think,' said Laura, 'you have been a soldier, and a serving-man.'

'And a scene-shifter, most noble signora, at La Scala.'

'You accompanied the Signor Mertyrio to England when he was wounded?'

'I did.'

'And there you beheld the Signorina Vittoria, who was then bearing the name of Emilia Belloni?'

'Which name she changed on her arrival in Italy, illustrious signora, for that of Vittoria Campa—"sull' campo dells gloria"—ah! ah!—her own name being an attraction to the blow-flies in her own country. All this is true.'

'It should be a comfort to you! The Signor Mertyrio…'

Beppo writhed his person at the continuance of the questionings, and obtaining a pause, he rushed into his statement: 'The Signor Mertyrio was well, and on the point of visiting Italy, and quitting the wave-embraced island of fog, of beer, of moist winds, and much money, and much kindness, where great hearts

grew. The signorina corresponded with him, and with him only.'

'You know that, and will swear to it?' Laura exclaimed.

Beppo thereby receiving the cue he had commenced beating for, swore to its truth profoundly, and straightway directed his statement to prove that his mistress had not been politically (or amorously, if the suspicion aimed at her in those softer regions) indiscreet or blameable in any of her actions. The signorina, he said, never went out from her abode without the companionship of her meritorious mother and his own most humble attendance. He, Beppo, had a master and a mistress, the Signor Mertyrio and the Signorina Vittoria. She saw no foreigners: though—a curious thing!—he had seen her when the English language was talked in her neighbourhood; and she had a love for that language: it made her face play in smiles like an infant's after it has had suck and is full;—the sort of look you perceive when one is dreaming and hears music. She did not speak to foreigners. She did not care to go to foreign cities, but loved Milan, and lived in it free and happy as an earwig in a ripe apricot. The circumvallation of Milan gave her elbow-room enough, owing to the absence of forts all round—'which knock one's funny-bone in Verona, signora.' Beppo presented a pure smile upon a simple bow for acceptance. 'The air of Milan,' he went on, with less confidence under Laura's steady gaze, and therefore more forcing of his candour—'the sweet air of Milan gave her a deep chestful, so that she could hold her note as long as five lengths of a fiddle-bow:—by the body of Sant' Ambrogio, it was true!' Beppo stretched out his

arm, and chopped his hand edgeways five testificatory times on the shoulder-ridge. 'Ay, a hawk might fly from St. Luke's head (on the Duomo) to the stone on San Primo over Como, while the signorina held on her note! You listened, you gasped—you thought of a poet in his dungeon, and suddenly, behold, his chains are struck off!—you thought of a gold-shelled tortoise making his pilgrimage to a beatific shrine!—you thought—you knew not what you thought!'

Here Beppo sank into a short silence of ecstasy, and wakening from it, as with an ardent liveliness: 'The signora has heard her sing? How to describe it! Tomorrow night will be a feast for Milan.'

'You think that the dilettanti of Milan will have a delight tomorrow night?' said Laura; but seeing that the man's keen ear had caught note of the ironic reptile under the flower, and unwilling to lose further time, she interdicted his reply.

'Beppo, my good friend, you are a complete Italian—you waste your cleverness. You will gratify me by remembering that I am your countrywoman. I have already done you a similar favour by allowing you to air your utmost ingenuity. The reflection that it has been to no purpose will neither scare you nor instruct you. Of that I am quite assured. I speak solely to suit the present occasion. Now, don't seek to elude me. If you are a snake with friends as well as enemies, you are nothing but a snake. I ask you—you are not compelled to answer, but I forbid you to lie—has your mistress seen, or conversed and had correspondence with

any one receiving the Tedeschi's gold, man or woman? Can any one, man or woman, call her a traitress?'

'Not twice!' thundered Beppo, with a furrowed red forehead.

There was a noble look about the fellow as he stood with stiff legs in a posture, frowning—theatrical, but noble also; partly the look of a Figaro defending his honour in extremity, yet much like a statue of a French Marshal of the Empire.

'That will do,' said Laura, rising. She was about to leave him, when the Duchess of Graatli's chasseur was ushered in, bearing a missive from Amalia, her friend. She opened it and read:—

> 'BEST BELOVED,—Am I soon to be reminded bitterly that there is a river of steel between my heart and me?
>
> 'Fail not in coming to-night. Your new Bulbul is in danger. The silly thing must have been reading Roman history. Say not no! It intoxicates you all. I watch over her for my Laura's sake: a thousand kisses I shower on you, dark delicious soul that you are! Are you not my pine-grove leading to the evening star? Come, that we may consult how to spirit her away during her season of peril. Gulfs do not close over little female madcaps, my Laura; so we must not let her take the leap. Enter the salle when you arrive: pass down it once and return upon your steps; then to my boudoir. My maid Aennchen will conduct you. Addio. Tell this messenger that you come. Laura mine, I am for ever thy *'AMALIA.'*

Laura signalled to the chasseur that her answer was affirmative. As he was retiring, his black-plumed hat struck

against Beppo, who thrust him aside and gave the hat a dexterous kick, all the while keeping a decorous front toward the signora. She stood meditating. The enraged chasseur mumbled a word or two for Beppo's ear, in execrable Italian, and went. Beppo then commenced bowing half toward the doorway, and tried to shoot through, out of sight and away, in a final droop of excessive servility, but the signora stopped him, telling him to consider himself her servant until the morning; at which he manifested a surprising readiness, indicative of nothing short of personal devotion, and remained for two minutes after she had quitted the room. So much time having elapsed, he ran bounding down the stairs and found the hall-door locked, and that he was a prisoner during the signora's pleasure. The discovery that he was mastered by superior cunning, instead of disconcerting, quieted him wonderfully; so he put by the resources of his ingenuity for the next opportunity, and returned stealthily to his starting-point, where the signora found him awaiting her with composure. The man was in mortal terror lest he might be held guilty of a trust betrayed, in leaving his mistress for an hour, even in obedience to her command, at this crisis: but it was not in his nature to state the case openly to the signora, whom he knew to be his mistress's friend, or to think of practising other than shrewd evasion to accomplish his duty and satisfy his conscience.

Laura said, without smiling, 'The street-door opens with a key,' and she placed the key in his hand, also her fan to carry. Once out of the house, she was sure that he would not forsake

his immediate charge of the fan: she walked on, heavily veiled, confident of his following. The Duchess of Graatli's house neighboured the Corso Francesco; numerous carriages were disburdening their freights of fair guests, and now and then an Austrian officer in full uniform ran up the steps, glittering under the lamps. 'I go in among them,' thought Laura. It rejoiced her that she had come on foot. Forgetting Beppo, and her black fan, as no Italian woman would have done but she who paced in an acute quivering of the anguish of hopeless remembrances and hopeless thirst of vengeance, she suffered herself to be conducted in the midst of the guests, and shuddered like one who has taken a fever-chill as she fulfilled the duchess's directions; she passed down the length of the saloon, through a light of visages that were not human to her sensations.

Meantime Beppo, oppressed by his custody of the fan, and expecting that most serviceable lady's instrument to be sent for at any minute, stood among a strange body of semi-feudal retainers below, where he was soon singled out by the duchess's chasseur, a Styrian, who, masking his fury under jest, in the South-German manner, endeavoured to lead him up to an altercation. But Beppo was much too supple to be entrapped. He apologized for any possible offences that he might have committed, assuring the chasseur that he considered one hat as good as another, and some hats better than others: in proof of extreme cordiality, he accepted the task of repeating the chasseur's name, which was 'Jacob Baumwalder Feckelwitz,' a tolerable mouthful for an

Italian; and it was with remarkable delicacy that Beppo contrived to take upon himself the whole ridicule of his vile pronunciation of the unwieldy name. Jacob Baumwalder Feckelwitz offered him beer to refresh him after the effort. While Beppo was drinking, he seized the fan. 'Good; good; a thousand thanks,' said Beppo, relinquishing it; 'convey it aloft, I beseech you.' He displayed such alacrity and lightness of limb at getting rid of it, that Jacob thrust it between the buttons of his shirtfront, returning it to his possession by that aperture. Beppo's head sank. A handful of black lace and cedarwood chained him to the spot! He entreated the men in livery to take the fan upstairs and deliver it to the Signora Laura Piaveni; but they, being advised by Jacob, refused. 'Go yourself,' said Jacob, laughing, and little prepared to see the victim, on whom he thought that for another hour at least he had got his great paw firmly, take him at his word. Beppo sprang into the hall and up the stairs. The duchess's maid, ivory-faced Aennchen, was flying past him. She saw a very taking dark countenance making eyes at her, leaned her ear shyly, and pretending to understand all that was said by the rapid foreign tongue, acted from the suggestion of the sole thing which she did understand. Beppo had mentioned the name of the Signora Piaveni. 'This way,' she indicated with her finger, supposing that of course he wanted to see the signora very urgently.

Beppo tried hard to get her to carry the fan; but she lifted her fingers in a perfect Susannah horror of it, though still bidding him to follow. Naturally she did not go fast through the dark

passages, where the game of the fan was once more played out, and with accompaniments. The accompaniments she objected to no further than a fish is agitated in escaping from the hook; but 'Nein, nein!' in her own language, and 'No, no!' in his, burst from her lips whenever he attempted to transfer the fan to her keeping. 'These white women are most wonderful!' thought Beppo, ready to stagger between perplexity and impatience.

'There; in there!' said Aennchen, pointing to a light that came through the folds of a curtain. Beppo kissed her fingers as they tugged unreluctantly in his clutch, and knew by a little pause that the case was hopeful for higher privileges. What to do? He had not an instant to spare; yet he dared not offend a woman's vanity. He gave an ecstatic pressure of her hand upon his breastbone, to let her be sure she was adored, albeit not embraced. After this act of prudence he went toward the curtain, while the fair Austrian soubrette flew on her previous errand.

It was enough that Beppo found himself in a dark antechamber for him to be instantly scrupulous in his footing and breathing. As he touched the curtain, a door opened on the other side of the interior, and a tender gabble of fresh feminine voices broke the stillness and ran on like a brook coming from leaps to a level, and again leaping and making noise of joy. The Duchess of Graatli had clasped the Signora Laura's two hands and drawn her to an ottoman, and between kissings and warmer claspings, was questioning of the little ones, Giacomo and her goddaughter Amalia.

'When, when did I see you last?' she exclaimed. 'Oh! not since we met that morning to lay our immortelles upon his tomb. My soul's sister! kiss me, remembering it. I saw you in the gateway—it seemed to me, as in a vision, that we had both had one warning to come for him, and knock, and the door would be opened, and our beloved would come forth! That was many days back. It is to me like a day locked up forever in a casket of pearl. Was it not an unstained morning, my own! If I weep, it is with pleasure. But,' she added with precipitation, 'weeping of any kind will not do for these eyelids of mine.' And drawing forth a tiny gold-framed pocket-mirror she perceived convincingly that it would not do.

'They will think it is for the absence of my husband,' she said, as only a woman can say it who deplores nothing so little as that.

'When does he return from Vienna?' Laura inquired in the fallen voice of her thoughtfulness.

'I receive two couriers a week; I know not any more, my Laura. I believe he is pushing some connubial complaint against me at the Court. We have been married seventeen months. I submitted to the marriage because I could get no proper freedom without, and now I am expected to abstain from the very thing I sacrificed myself to get! Can he hear that in Vienna?' She snapped her fingers. 'If not, let him come and behold it in Milan. Besides, he is harmless. The Archduchess is all ears for the very man of whom he is jealous. This is my reply: You told me to marry: I obeyed. My heart 's in the earth, and I must have distractions. My present distraction is De Pyrmont, a good Catholic and a good Austrian

soldier, though a Frenchman. I grieve to say—it's horrible—that it sometimes tickles me when I reflect that De Pyrmont is keen with the sword. But remember, Laura, it was not until after our marriage my husband told me he could have saved Giacomo by the lifting of a finger. Away with the man!—if it amuses me to punish him, I do so.'

The duchess kissed Laura's cheek, and continued:—'Now to the point where we stand enemies! I am for Austria, you are for Italy. Good. But I am always for Laura. So, there's a river between us and a bridge across it. My darling, do you know that we are much too strong for you, if you mean anything serious tomorrow night?'

'Are you?' Laura said calmly.

'I know, you see, that something is meant to happen to-morrow night.'

Laura said, 'Do you?'

'We have positive evidence of it. More than that: Your Vittoria —but do you care to have her warned? She will certainly find herself in a pitfall if she insists on carrying out her design. Tell me, do you care to have her warned and shielded? A year of fortress-life is not agreeable, is not beneficial for the voice. Speak, my Laura.'

Laura looked up in the face of her friend mildly with her large dark eyes, replying, 'Do you think of sending Major de Pyrmont to her to warn her?'

'Are you not wicked?' cried the duchess, feeling that she

blushed, and that Laura had thrown her off the straight road of her interrogation. 'But, play cards with open hands, my darling, to-night. Look:—She is in danger. I know it; so do you. She will be imprisoned perhaps before she steps on the boards—who knows? Now, I—are not my very dreams all sworn in a regiment to serve my Laura?—I have a scheme. Truth, it is hardly mine. It belongs to the Greek, the Signor Antonio Pericles Agriolopoulos. It is simply'—the duchess dropped her voice out of Beppo's hearing—'a scheme to rescue her: speed her away to my chateau near Meran in Tyrol.' 'Tyrol' was heard by Beppo. In his frenzy at the loss of the context he indulged in a yawn, and a grimace, and a dance of disgust all in one; which lost him the next sentence likewise. 'There we purpose keeping her till all is quiet and her revolutionary fever has passed. Have you heard of this Signor Antonio? He could buy up the kingdom of Greece, all Tyrol, half Lombardy. The man has a passion for your Vittoria; for her voice solely, I believe. He is considered, no doubt truly, a great connoisseur. He could have a passion for nothing else, or alas!' (the duchess shook her head with doleful drollery) 'would he insist on written securities and mortgages of my private property when he lends me money? How different the world is from the romances, my Laura! But for De Pyrmont, I might fancy my smile was really incapable of ransoming an empire; I mean an emperor. Speak; the man is waiting to come; shall I summon him?'

Laura gave an acquiescent nod.

By this time Beppo had taken root to the floor. 'I am in the best place after all,' he said, thinking of the duties of his service. He was perfectly well acquainted with the features of the Signor Antonio. He knew that Luigi was the Signor Antonio's spy upon Vittoria, and that no personal harm was intended toward his mistress; but Beppo's heart was in the revolt of which Vittoria was to give the signal; so, without a touch of animosity, determined to thwart him, Beppo waited to hear the Signor Antonio's scheme.

The Greek was introduced by Aennchen. She glanced at the signora's lap, and seeing her still without her fan, her eye shot slyly up with her shining temple, inspecting the narrow opening in the curtain furtively. A short hush of preluding ceremonies passed.

Presently Beppo heard them speaking; he was aghast to find that he had no comprehension of what they were uttering. 'Oh, accursed French dialect!' he groaned; discovering the talk to be in that tongue. The Signor Antonio warmed rapidly from the frigid politeness of his introductory manner. A consummate acquaintance with French was required to understand him. He held out the fingers of one hand in regimental order, and with the others, which alternately screwed his moustache from its constitutional droop over the corners of his mouth, he touched the uplifted digits one by one, buzzing over them: flashing his white eyes, and shrugging in a way sufficient to madden a surreptitious listener who was aware that a wealth of meaning

escaped him and mocked at him. At times the Signor Antonio pitched a note compounded half of cursing, half of crying, it seemed: both pathetic and objurgative, as if he whimpered anathemas and had inexpressible bitter things in his mind. But there was a remedy! He displayed the specific on a third finger. It was there. This being done (number three on the fingers), matters might still be well. So much his electric French and gesticulations plainly asserted. Beppo strained all his attention for names, in despair at the riddle of the signs. Names were pillars of light in the dark unintelligible waste. The signora put a question. It was replied to with the name of the Maestro Rocco Ricci. Following that, the Signor Antonio accompanied his voluble delivery with pantomimic action which seemed to indicate the shutting of a door and an instantaneous galloping of horses—a flight into air, any-whither. He whipped the visionary steeds with enthusiastic glee, and appeared to be off skyward like a mad poet, when the signora again put a question, and at once he struck his hand flat across his mouth, and sat postured to answer what she pleased with a glare of polite vexation. She spoke; he echoed her, and the duchess took up the same phrase. Beppo was assisted by the triangular recurrence of the words and their partial relationship to Italian to interpret them: 'This night.' Then the signora questioned further. The Greek replied: 'Mademoiselle Irma di Karski.'

'La Lazzeruola,' she said.

The Signor Antonio flashed a bit of sarcastic mimicry, as

if acquiescing in the justice of the opprobrious term from the high point of view: but mademoiselle might pass, she was good enough for the public.

Beppo heard and saw no more. A tug from behind recalled him to his situation. He put out his arms and gathered Aennchen all dark in them: and first kissing her so heartily as to set her trembling on the verge of a betrayal, before she could collect her wits he struck the fan down the pretty hollow of her back, between her shoulder-blades, and bounded away. It was not his intention to rush into the embrace of Jacob Baumwalder Feckelwitz, but that perambulating chasseur received him in a semi-darkness where all were shadows, and exclaimed, 'Aennchen!' Beppo gave an endearing tenderness to the few words of German known to him: 'Gottschaf-donner-dummer!' and slipped from the hold of the astonished Jacob, sheer under his arm-pit. He was soon in the street, excited he knew not by what, or for what object. He shuffled the names he remembered to have just heard—'Rocco Ricci, and 'la Lazzeruola.' Why did the name of la Lazzeruola come in advance of la Vittoria? And what was the thing meant by 'this night,' which all three had uttered as in an agreement?—ay! and the Tyrol! The Tyrol—this night-Rocco Ricci la Lazzeruola!

Beppo's legs were carrying him toward the house of the Maestro Rocco Ricci ere he had arrived at any mental decision upon these imminent mysteries.

CHAPTER XIV
AT THE MAESTRO'S DOOR

The house of the Maestro Rocco Ricci turned off the Borgo della Stella. Carlo Ammiani conducted Vittoria to the maestro's door. They conversed very little on the way.

'You are a good swordsman?' she asked him abruptly.

'I have as much skill as belongs to a perfect intimacy with the weapon,' he answered.

'Your father was a soldier, Signor Carlo.'

'He was a General officer in what he believed to be the army of Italy. We used to fence together every day for two hours.'

'I love the fathers who do that,' said Vittoria.

After such speaking Ammiani was not capable of the attempt to preach peace and safety to her. He postponed it to the next minute and the next.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.