

**GEORGE  
MEREDITH**

VITTORIA,  
VOLUME 4

**George Meredith**  
**Vittoria. Volume 4**

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*Vittoria – Volume 4:*

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# George Meredith

## Vittoria – Volume 4

### CHAPTER XX

### THE OPERA OF CAMILLA

She was dressed like a noble damsel from the hands of Titian. An Italian audience cannot but be critical in their first glance at a prima donna, for they are asked to do homage to a queen who is to be taken on her merits: all that they have heard and have been taught to expect of her is compared swiftly with the observation of her appearance and her manner. She is crucially examined to discover defects. There is no boisterous loyalty at the outset. And as it was now evident that Vittoria had chosen to impersonate a significant character, her indications of method were jealously watched for a sign of inequality, either in her, motion, or the force of her eyes. So silent a reception might have seemed cruel in any other case; though in all cases the candidate for laurels must, in common with the criminal, go through the ordeal of justification. Men do not heartily bow their heads until they have subjected the aspirant to some personal contest, and find themselves overmatched. The senses, ready to become so slavish in adulation and delight, are at the beginning more exacting than

the judgement, more imperious than the will. A figure in amber and pale blue silk was seen, such as the great Venetian might have sketched from his windows on a day when the Doge went forth to wed the Adriatic a superb Italian head, with dark banded hair-braid, and dark strong eyes under unabashed soft eyelids! She moved as, after long gazing at a painting of a fair woman, we may have the vision of her moving from the frame. It was an animated picture of ideal Italia. The sea of heads right up to the highest walls fronted her glistening, and she was mute as moonrise. A virgin who loosens a dove from her bosom does it with no greater effort than Vittoria gave out her voice. The white bird flutters rapidly; it circles and takes its flight. The voice seemed to be as little the singer's own.

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

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

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

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

Vittoria sent this last phrase ringing out forcefully. From the inveterate contralto of the interview, she rose to pure soprano in describing her own action. 'And I drank,' was given on a

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

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

An echo replied—

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

But the object and source of the tremendous frenzy stood like one frozen by the revelation of the magic the secret of which

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

He met Antonio-Pericles, and told him so; adding (for now the mask had been seen through, and was useless any further) that he had not had the heart to put back that vision of Camilla's mother to a later scene, lest an interruption should come which would altogether preclude its being heard. Pericles affected disdain of any success which Vittoria had yet achieved. 'Wait for Act the Third,' he said; but his irritable anxiousness to hold intercourse with every one, patriot or critic, German, English, or Italian, betrayed what agitation of exultation coursed in his veins. 'Aha!'

was his commencement of a greeting; 'was Antonio-Pericles wrong when he told you that he had a prima donna for you to amaze all Christendom, and whose notes were safe and firm as the footing of the angels up and down Jacob's ladder, my friends? Aha!'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Anna.

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

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

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

'You iron man!' she exclaimed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

He tapped angrily at the little ink-flask in his coat-pocket. The first act, after scenes between false Camillo and Michiella, ends with the marriage of Camillo and Camilla;—a quatuor composed of Montini, Vittoria, Irma, and Lebruno. Michiella is in despair; Count Orso is profoundly sonorous with paternity and devotion to the law. He has restored to Camilla a portion of her mother's sequestered estates. A portion of the remainder will be handed over to her when he has had experience of her husband's good behaviour. The rest he considers legally his own by right of (Treaties), and by right of possession and documents his sword. Yonder castle he must keep. It is the key of all his other territories. Without it, his position will be insecure. (Allusion to the Austrian argument that the plains of Lombardy are the strategic defensive lines of the Alps.)

Agostino, pursued by his terror of anticlimax, ran from the sight of Vittoria when she was called, after the fall of the curtain. He made his way to Rocco Ricci (who had given his bow to

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

'Or do you think that you have put your best poetry in the first Act?'

Rocco suggested with malice.

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

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

Agostino.'

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

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

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

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

'Ah, well! I am of opinion you will not lay many other cases before the

Gods who rule in Milan.'

'I have helped them to a good opera.'

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

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

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

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

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

'Pretty fair, sir.'

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

Vittoria's door was shut to Agostino. No voice within gave answer. He tried the lock of the door, and departed. She sat in a stupor. It was harder for her to make a second appearance than it was to make the first, when the shameful suspicion cruelly attached to her had helped to balance her steps with rebellious pride; and more, the great collected wave of her ambitious years of girlhood had cast her forward to the spot, as in a last effort for consummation. Now that she had won the public voice (love, her heart called it) her eyes looked inward; she meditated upon what she had to do, and coughed nervously. She frightened herself with

her coughing, and shivered at the prospect of again going forward in the great nakedness of stagelights and thirsting eyes. And, moreover, she was not strengthened by the character of the music and the poetry of the second Act:—a knowledge of its somewhat inferior quality may possibly have been at the root of Agostino's dread of an anticlimax. The *seconda donna* had the chief part in it—notably an aria (Rocco had given it to her in compassion) that suited Irma's pure shrieks and the tragic skeleton she could be. Vittoria knew how low she was sinking when she found her soul in the shallows of a sort of jealousy of Irma. For a little space she lost all intimacy with herself; she looked at her face in the glass and swallowed water, thinking that she had strained a dream and confused her brain with it. The silence of her solitary room coming upon the blaze of light the colour and clamour of the house, and the strange remembrance of the recent impersonation of an ideal character, smote her with the sense of her having fallen from a mighty eminence, and that she lay in the dust. All those incense-breathing flowers heaped on her table seemed poisonous, and reproached her as a delusion. She sat crouching alone till her tirewomen called; horrible talkative things! her own familiar maid Giacinta being the worst to bear with.

Now, Michiella, by making love to Leonardo, Camillo's associate, discovers that Camillo is conspiring against her father. She utters to Leonardo very pleasant promises indeed, if he will betray his friend. Leonardo, a wavering baritono, complains that love should ask for any return save in the coin of the empire of

love. He is seduced, and invokes a malediction upon his head should he accomplish what he has sworn to perform. Camilla reposes perfect confidence in this wretch, and brings her more doubtful husband to be of her mind.

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

and the singers, and how little they owed to him.

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

Irma's shrill crescendos and octave-leaps, assisted by her peculiar attitudes of strangulation, came out well in this scene. The murmurs concerning the sour privileges to be granted by a Lazzeruola were inaudible. But there has been a witness to the stipulation. The ever-shifting baritono, from behind a pillar, has joined in with an aside phrase here and there. Leonardo discovers that his fealty to Camilla is reviving. He determines to watch over her. Camillo now tosses a perfumed handkerchief under his nose, and inhales the coxcombical incense of the idea that he will do all without Camilla's aid, to surprise her; thereby

teaching her to know him to be somewhat a hero. She has played her part so thoroughly that he can choose to fancy her a giddy person; he remarks upon the frequent instances of girls who in their girlhood were wild dreamers becoming after marriage wild wives. His followers assemble, that he may take advantage of the exchanged key of silver. He is moved to seek one embrace of Camilla before the conflict:—she is beautiful! There was never such beauty as hers! He goes to her in the fittest preparation for the pangs of jealousy. But he has not been foremost in practising the uses of silver keys. Michiella, having first arranged with her father to be before Camillo's doors at a certain hour with men-at-arms, is in Camilla's private chamber, with her hand upon a pregnant box of ebony wood, when she is startled by a noise, and slips into concealment. Leonardo bursts through the casement window. Camilla then appears. Leonardo stretches the tips of his fingers out to her; on his knees confesses his guilt and warns her. Camillo comes in. Thrusting herself before him, Michiella points to the stricken couple 'See! it is to show you this that I am here.' Behold occasion for a grand quatuor!

While confessing his guilt to Camilla, Leonardo has excused it by an emphatic delineation of Michiella's magic sway over him. (Leonardo, in fact, is your small modern Italian Machiavelli, overmatched in cunning, for the reason that he is always at a last moment the victim of his poor bit of heart or honesty: he is devoid of the inspiration of great patriotic aims.) If Michiella (Austrian intrigue) has any love, it is for such a tool.

She cannot afford to lose him. She pleads for him; and, as Camilla is silent on his account, the cynical magnanimity of Camillo is predisposed to spare a fangless snake. Michiella withdraws him from the naked sword to the back of the stage. The terrible repudiation scene ensues, in which Camillo casts off his wife. If it was a puzzle to one Italian half of the audience, the other comprehended it perfectly, and with rapture. It was thus that YOUNG ITALY had too often been treated by the compromising, merely discontented, dallying aristocracy. Camilla cries to him, 'Have faith in me! have faith in me! have faith in me!' That is the sole answer to his accusations, his threats of eternal loathing, and generally blustering sublimities. She cannot defend herself; she only knows her innocence. He is inexorable, being the guilty one of the two. Turning from him with crossed arms, Camilla sings:

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

A silent thing that shares thy veil with thee.'

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

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

'Now Leonardo is my tool:

Camilla is my slave:

And she I hate goes forth to cool

Her rage beyond the wave.

Joy! joy!

Paid am I in full coin for my caressing;

I take, but give nought, ere the priestly blessing.'

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

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

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

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

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

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

'If she sings that song she is to be seized on the wings of the stage.

I order my carriage to be in readiness to take her whither she should

have gone last night. Do you contrive only her escape from the house.

Georges de P. will aid you. I adore the naughty rebel!"

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

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

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

'Strike out what you please,' said Vittoria.

Agostino smote her with a forefinger. 'Rogue! you deserve an

imperial crown. You have been educated for monarchy. You are ready enough to dispense with what you don't care for, and what is not your own.'

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

Salvolo started from her in a horror of amazement. He declared that he had been miserably deceived and entrapped. He threatened to send the company to their homes forthwith. 'Dare to!' said Agostino; and to judge by the temper of the house, it was only too certain, that if he did so, La Scala would be a wrecked tenement in the eye of morning. But Agostino backed his entreaty to her to abjure that song; Rocco gave way, and half shyly requested her to think of prudence. She remembered

Laura, and Carlo, and her poor little frightened foreign mother. Her intense ideal conception of her duty sank and danced within her brain as the pilot-star dances on the bows of a tossing vessel. All were against her, as the tempest is against the ship. Even light above (by which I would image that which she could appeal to pleading in behalf of the wisdom of her obstinate will) was dyed black in the sweeping obscuration; she failed to recollect a sentence that was to be said to vindicate her settled course. Her sole idea was her holding her country by an unseen thread, and of the everlasting welfare of Italy being jeopardized if she relaxed her hold. Simple obstinacy of will sustained her.

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

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

'Is your piano hired?' quoth the former.

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

They went their separate ways, laughing.

# CHAPTER XXI

## THE THIRD ACT

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

# Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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