

VITTORIA

By

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***Free*editorial** 

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The smoke of a pistol-shot thinned away while there was yet silence.

"It is a saving of six charges of Austrian ammunition," said Pericles.

Vittoria stared at the scene, losing faith in her eyesight. She could in fact see no distinct thing beyond what appeared as an illuminated copper medallion, held at a great distance from her, with a dead man and a towering female figure stamped on it.

The events following were like a rush of water on her senses. There was fighting up the street of the village, and a struggle in the space where Rinaldo had fallen; successive yellowish shots under the rising moonlight, cries from Italian lips, quick words of command from German in Italian, and one sturdy bull's roar of a voice that called across the tumult to the Austro-Italian soldiery, "Venite fratelli!—come, brothers, come under our banner!" She heard "Rinaldo!" called.

This was a second attack of the volunteers for the rescue of their captured comrades. They fought more desperately than on the hill outside the village: they fought with steel. Shot enfiladed them; yet they bore forward in a scattered body up to that spot where Rinaldo lay, shouting for him. There they turned,—they fled.

Then there was a perfect stillness, succeeding the strife as quickly, Vittoria thought, as a breath yielded succeeds a breath taken.

She accused the heavens of injustice.

Pericles, prostrate on the floor, moaned that he was wounded. She said, "Bleed to death!"

"It is my soul, it is my soul is wounded for you, Sandra."

"Dreadful craven man!" she muttered.

"When my soul is shaking for your safety, Sandra Belloni!" Pericles turned his ear up. "For myself—not; it is for you, for you."

Assured of the cessation of arms by delicious silence he jumped to his feet.

"Ah! brutes to fight. It is 'immonde;' it is unnatural!"

He tapped his finger on the walls for marks of shot, and discovered a shot-hole in the wood-work, that had passed an arm's length above her head, into which he thrust his finger in an intense speculative meditation, shifting eyes from it to her, and throwing them aloft.

He was summoned to the presence of Count Karl, with whom he found Captain Weisspriess, Wilfrid, and officers of jagers and the Italian battalion. Barto Rizzo's wife was in a corner of the room. Weisspriess met him with a very civil greeting, and introduced him to Count Karl, who begged him to thank Vittoria for the aid she had afforded to General Schoneck's emissary in crossing the Piedmontese lines. He spoke in Italian. He agreed to conduct Pericles to a point on the route of his march, where Pericles and his precious prima donna—"our very good friend," he said, jovially—could escape the risk of unpleasant mishaps, and arrive at Trent and cities of peace by easy stages. He was marching for the neighbourhood of Vicenza.

A little before dawn Vittoria came down to the carriage. Count Karl stood at the door to hand her in. He was young and handsome, with a soft flowing blonde moustache and pleasant eyes, a contrast to his brother Count Lenkenstein. He repeated his thanks to her, which Pericles had not delivered; he informed her that she was by no means a prisoner, and was simply under the guardianship of friends—"though perhaps, signorina, you will not esteem this gentleman to be one of your friends." He pointed to Weisspriess. The officer bowed, but kept aloof. Vittoria perceived a singular change in him: he had become pale and sedate. "Poor fellow! he has had his dose," Count Karl said. "He is, I beg to assure you, one of your most vehement admirers."

A piece of her property that flushed her with recollections, yet made her grateful, was presently handed to her, though not in her old enemy's presence, by a soldier. It was the silver-hilted dagger, Carlo's precious gift, of which Weisspriess had taken possession in the mountain-pass over the vale of Meran, when he fought the duel with Angelo. Whether intended as a peace-offering, or as a simple restitution, it helped Vittoria to believe that Weisspriess was no longer the man he had been.

The march was ready, but Barto Rizzo's wife refused to move a foot. The officers consulted. She, was brought before them. The soldiers swore with jesting oaths that she had been carefully searched for weapons, and only wanted a whipping. "She must have it," said Weisspriess. Vittoria entreated that she might have a place beside her in the carriage. "It is more than I would have asked of you; but if you are not afraid of her," said Count Karl, with an apologetic shrug.

Her heart beat fast when she found herself alone with the terrible woman.

Till then she had never seen a tragic face. Compared with this tawny colourlessness, this evil brow, this shut mouth, Laura, even on the battle-field, looked harmless. It was like the face of a dead savage. The eyeballs were full on Vittoria, as if they dashed at an obstacle, not embraced an image. In proportion as they seemed to widen about her, Vittoria shrank. The whole woman was blood to her gaze.

When she was capable of speaking, she said entreatingly:

"I knew his brother."

Not a sign of life was given in reply.

Companionship with this ghost of broad daylight made the flattering Tyrolese feathers at both windows a welcome sight.

Precautions had been taken to bind the woman's arms. Vittoria offered to loosen the cords, but she dared not touch her without a mark of assent.

"I know Angelo Guidascarpi, Rinaldo's brother," she spoke again.

The woman's nostrils bent inward, as when the breath we draw is keen as a sword to the heart. Vittoria was compelled to look away from her.

At the mid-day halt Count Karl deigned to justify to her his intended execution of Rinaldo—the accomplice in the slaying of his brother Count Paula. He was evidently eager to obtain her good opinion of the Austrian military. "But for this miserable spirit of hatred against us," he said, "I should have espoused an Italian lady;" and he asked, "Why not? For that matter, in all but blood we Lenkensteins are half Italian, except when Italy menaces the empire. Can you blame us for then drawing the sword in earnest?"

He proffered his version of the death of Count Paul. She kept her own silent in her bosom.

Clelia Guidascarpi, according to his statement, had first been slain by her brothers. Vittoria believed that Clelia had voluntarily submitted to death and died by her own hand. She was betrothed to an Italian nobleman of Bologna, the friend of the brothers. They had arranged the marriage; she accepted the betrothal. "She loved my brother, poor thing!" said Count Karl. "She concealed it, and naturally. How could she take a couple of wolves into her confidence? If she had told the pair of ruffians that she was plighted to an Austrian, they would have quieted her at an earlier period. A woman! a girl—signorina! The intolerable cowardice amazes me. It amazes me that you or anyone can uphold the character of such brutes. And when she was dead they lured my brother to the house and slew him; fell upon him with daggers, stretched him at the foot of her coffin, and then—what then?—ran! ran for their lives. One has gone to his account. We shall come across the other. He is among that volunteer party which attacked us yesterday. The body was carried off by them; it is sufficient testimony that Angelo Guidascarpi is in the neighbourhood. I should be hunting him now but that I am under orders to march South-east."

The story, as Vittoria knew it, had a different, though yet a dreadful, colour.

"I could have hanged Rinaldo," Count Karl said further. "I suppose the rascals feared I should use my right, and that is why they sent their mad baggage of a woman to spare any damage to the family pride. If I had been a man to enjoy vengeance, the rope would have swung for him. In spite of provocation, I shall simply shoot the other; I pledge my word to it. They shall be paid in coin. I demand no interest."

Weisspriess prudently avoided her. Wilfrid held aloof. She sat in garden shade till the bugle sounded. Tyrolese and Italian soldiers were gibing at her haggard companion when she entered

the carriage. Fronting this dumb creature once more, Vittoria thought of the story of the brothers. She felt herself reading it from the very page. The woman looked that evil star incarnate which Laura said they were born under.

This is in brief the story of the Guidascarpi.

They were the offspring of a Bolognese noble house, neither wealthy nor poor. In her early womanhood, Clelia was left to the care of her brothers. She declined the guardianship of Countess Ammiani because of her love for them; and the three, with their passion of hatred to the Austrians inherited from father and mother, schemed in concert to throw off the Austrian yoke. Clelia had soft features of no great mark; by her colouring she was beautiful, being dark along the eyebrows, with dark eyes, and a surpassing richness of Venetian hair. Bologna and Venice were married in her aspect. Her brothers conceived her to possess such force of mind that they held no secrets from her. They did not know that the heart of their sister was struggling with an image of Power when she uttered hatred of it. She was in truth a woman of a soft heart, with a most impressionable imagination.

There were many suitors for the hand of Clelia Guidascarpi, though her dowry was not the portion of a fat estate. Her old nurse counselled the brothers that they should consent to her taking a husband. They fulfilled this duty as one that must be done, and she became sorrowfully the betrothed of a nobleman of Bologna; from which hour she had no cheerfulness. The brothers quitted Bologna for Venice, where there was the bed of a conspiracy. On their return they were shaken by rumours of their sister's misconduct. An Austrian name was allied to hers in busy mouths. A lady, their distant relative, whose fame was light, had withdrawn her from the silent house, and made display of her. Since she had seen more than an Italian girl should see, the brothers proposed to the nobleman her betrothed to break the treaty; but he was of a mind to hurry on the marriage, and recollecting now that she was but a woman, the brothers fixed a day for her espousals, tenderly, without reproach. She had the choice of taking the vows or surrendering her hand. Her old nurse prayed for the day of her espousals to come with a quicker step.

One night she surprised Count Paul Lenkenstein at Clelia's window. Rinaldo was in the garden below. He moved to the shadow of a cypress, and was seen moving by the old nurse. The lover took the single kiss he had come for, was led through the chamber, and passed unchallenged into the street. Clelia sat between locked doors and darkened windows, feeling colder to the brothers she had been reared with than to all other men upon the earth. They sent for her after a lapse of hours. Her old nurse was kneeling at their feet. Rinaldo asked for the name of her lover. She answered with it. Angelo said, "It will be better for you to die: but if you cannot do so easy a thing as that, prepare widow's garments." They forced her to write three words to Count Paul, calling him to her window at midnight. Rinaldo fetched a priest: Angelo laid out two swords. An hour before the midnight, Clelia's old nurse raised the house with her cries. Clelia was stretched dead in her chamber. The brothers kissed her in turn, and sat, one at her head, one at her feet. At midnight her lover stood among them. He was gravely saluted, and bidden to look upon the dead body. Angelo said to him, "Had she lived you should have wedded her hand. She is gone of her own free choice, and one of us follows her." With the sweat of anguish on his forehead, Count

Paul drew sword. The window was barred; six male domestics of the household held high lights in the chamber; the priest knelt beside one corpse, awaiting the other.

Vittoria's imagination could not go beyond that scene, but she looked out on the brother of the slain youth with great pity, and with a strange curiosity. The example given by Clelia of the possible love of an Italian girl for the white uniform, set her thinking whether so monstrous a fact could ever be doubled in this world. "Could it happen to me?" she asked herself, and smiled, as she half-fashioned the words on her lips, "It is a pretty uniform."

Her reverie was broken by a hiss of "Traitor!" from the woman opposite.

She coloured guiltily, tried to speak, and sat trembling. A divination of intense hatred had perhaps read the thought within her breast: or it was a mere outburst of hate. The woman's face was like the wearing away of smoke from a spot whence shot has issued. Vittoria walked for the remainder of the day. That fearful companion oppressed her. She felt that one who followed armies should be cast in such a frame, and now desired with all her heart to render full obedience to Carlo, and abide in Brescia, or even in Milan—a city she thought of shyly.

The march was hurried to the slopes of the Vicentino, for enemies were thick in this district. Pericles refused to quit the soldiers, though Count Karl used persuasion. The young nobleman said to Vittoria, "Be on your guard when you meet my sister Anna. I tell you, we can be as revengeful as any of you: but you will exonerate me. I do my duty; I seek to do no more."

At an inn that they reached toward evening she saw the innkeeper shoot a little ball of paper at an Italian corporal, who put his foot on it and picked it up. The soldier subsequently passed through the ranks of his comrades, gathering winks and grins. They were to have rested at the inn, but Count Karl was warned by scouts, which was sufficient to make Pericles cling to him in avoidance of the volunteers, of whom mainly he was in terror. He looked ague-stricken. He would not listen to her, or to reason in any shape. "I am on the sea—shall I trust a boat? I stick to a ship," he said. The soldiers marched till midnight. It was arranged that the carriage should strike off for Schio at dawn. The soldiers bivouacked on the slope of one of the low undulations falling to the Vicentino plain. Vittoria spread her cloak, and lay under bare sky, not suffering the woman to be ejected from the carriage. Hitherto Luigi had avoided her. Under pretence of doubling Count Karl's cloak as a pillow for her head, he whispered, "If the signorina hears shots let her lie on the ground flat as a sheet." The peacefulness surrounding her precluded alarm. There was brilliant moonlight, and the host of stars, all dim; and first they beckoned her up to come away from trouble, and then, through long gazing, she had the fancy that they bent and swam about her, making her feel that she lay in the hollows of a warm hushed sea. She wished for her lover.

Men and officers were lying at a stone's-throw distant. The Tyrolese had lit a fire for cooking purposes, by which four of them stood, and, lifting hands, sang one of their mountain songs, that seemed to her to spring like clear water into air, and fall wavering as a feather falls, or the light about a stone in water. It lulled her to a half-sleep, during which she fancied hearing a broad imitation of a cat's-call from the mountains, that was answered out of the camp, and a talk of officers arose in connection with the response, and subsided. The carriage was in the shadows of

the fire. In a little while Luigi and the driver began putting the horses to, and she saw Count Karl and Weisspriess go up to Luigi, who declared loudly that it was time. The woman inside was aroused. Weisspriess helped to drag her out. Luigi kept making much noise, and apologized for it by saying that he desired to awaken his master, who was stretched in a secure circle among the Tyrolese. Presently Vittoria beheld the woman's arms thrown out free; the next minute they were around the body of Weisspriess, and a shrewd cry issued from Count Karl. Shots rang from the outposts; the Tyrolese sprang to arms; "Sandra!" was shouted by Pericles; and once more she heard the 'Venite fratelli!' of the bull's voice, and a stream of volunteers dashed at the Tyrolese with sword and dagger and bayonet. The Austro-Italians stood in a crescent line—the ominous form of incipient military insubordination. Their officers stormed at them, and called for Count Karl and for Weisspriess. The latter replied like a man stifling, but Count Karl's voice was silent.

"Weisspriess! here, to me!" the captain sang out in Italian.

"Ammiani! here, to me!" was replied.

Vittoria struck her hands together in electrical gladness at her lover's voice and name. It rang most cheerfully. Her home was in the conflict where her lover fought, and she muttered with ecstasy, "We have met! we have met!" The sound of the keen steel, so exciting to dream of, paralyzed her nerves in a way that powder, more terrible for a woman's imagination, would not have done, and she could only feebly advance. It was a spacious moonlight, but the moonlight appeared to have got of a brassy hue to her eyes, though the sparkle of the steel was white; and she felt too, and wondered at it, that the cries and the noise went to her throat, as if threatening to choke her. Very soon she found herself standing there, watching for the issue of the strife, almost as dead as a weight in scales, incapable of clear vision.

Matched against the Tyrolese alone, the volunteers had an equal fight in point of numbers, and the advantage of possessing a leader; for Count Karl was down, and Weisspriess was still entangled in the woman's arms. When at last Wilfrid got him free, the unsupported Tyrolese were giving ground before Carlo Ammiani and his followers. These fought with stern fury, keeping close up to their enemy, rarely shouting. They presented something like the line of a classic bow, with its arrow-head; while the Tyrolese were huddled in groups, and clubbed at them, and fell back for space, and ultimately crashed upon their betraying brothers in arms, swinging rifles and flying. The Austro-Italians rang out a Viva for Italy, and let them fly: they were swept from the scene.

Vittoria heard her lover addressing his followers. Then he and Angelo stood over Count Karl, whom she had forgotten. Angelo ran up to her, but gave place the moment Carlo came; and Carlo drew her by the hand swiftly to an obscure bend of the rolling ground, and stuck his sword in the earth, and there put his arms round her and held her fast.

"Obey me now," were his first words.

"Yes," she answered.

He was harsh of eye and tongue, not like the gentle youth she had been torn from at the door of La Scala.

"Return; make your way to Brescia. My mother is in Brescia. Milan is hateful. I throw myself into Vicenza. Can I trust you to obey?"

"Carlo, what evil have you heard of me?"

"I listen to no tales."

"Let me follow you to Vicenza and be your handmaid, my beloved."

"Say that you obey."

"I have said it."

He seemed to shut her in his heart, so closely was she enfolded.

"Since La Scala," she murmured; and he bent his lips to her ear, whispering, "Not one thought of another woman! and never till I die."

"And I only of you, Carlo, and for you, my lover, my lover!"

"You love me absolutely?"

"I belong to you."

"I could be a coward and pray for life to live to hear you say it."

"I feel I breathe another life when you are away from me."

"You belong to me; you are my own?"

"You take my voice, beloved."

"And when I claim you, I am to have you?"

"Am I not in your hands?"

"The very instant I make my claim you will say yes?"

"I shall not have strength for more than to nod."

Carlo shuddered at the delicious image of her weakness.

"My Sandra! Vittoria, my soul! my bride!"

"O my Carlo! Do you go to Vicenza? And did you know I was among these people?"

"You will hear everything from little Leone Rufo, who is wounded and accompanies you to Brescia. Speak of nothing. Speak my name, and look at me. I deserve two minutes of blessedness."

"Ah! my dearest, if I am sweet to you, you might have many!"

"No; they begin to hum a reproach at me already, for I must be marching. Vicenza will soon bubble on a fire, I suspect. Comfort my mother; she wants a young heart at her elbow. If she is alone, she feeds on every rumour; other women scatter in emotions what poisons her. And when my bride is with her, I am between them."

"Yes, Carlo, I will go," said Vittoria, seeing her duty at last through tenderness.

Carlo sprang from her side to meet Angelo, with whom he exchanged some quick words. The bugle was sounding, and Barto Rizzo audible. Luigi came to, her, ruefully announcing that the volunteers had sacked the carriage behaved worse than the Austrians; and that his padrone, the signor Antonio-Pericles, was off like a gossamer. Angelo induced her to remain on the spot where she stood till the carriage was seen on the Schio road, when he led her to it, saying that Carlo had serious work to do. Count Karl Lenkenstein was lying in the carriage, supported by Wilfrid and by young Leone Rufo, who sat laughing, with one eye under a cross-bandage and an arm slung in a handkerchief. Vittoria desired to wait that she might see her lover once more; but Angelo entreated her that she should depart, too earnestly to leave her in doubt of there being good reason for it and for her lover's absence. He pointed to Wilfrid: "Barto Rizzo captured this man; Carlo has released him. Take him with you to attend on his superior officer." She drew Angelo's observation to the first morning colours over the peaks. He looked up, and she knew that he remembered that morning of their flight from the inn. Perhaps he then had the image of his brother in his mind, for the colours seemed to be plucking at his heart, and he said, "I have lost him."

"God help you, my friend!" said Vittoria, her throat choking.

Angelo pointed at the insensible nobleman: "These live. I do not grudge him his breath or his chances; but why should these men take so much killing? Weisspriess has risen, as though I struck the blow of a babe. But we one shot does for us! Nevertheless, signorina," Angelo smiled firmly, "I complain of nothing while we march forward."

He kissed his hand to her, and turned back to his troop. The carriage was soon under the shadows of the mountains.

CHAPTER XXXIV

EPISODES OF THE REVOLT AND THE WAR THE DEEDS OF BARTO RIZZO—THE MEETING AT ROVEREDO

At Schio there was no medical attendance to be obtained for Count Karl, and he begged so piteously to be taken on to Roveredo, that, on his promising to give Leone Rufo a pass, Vittoria decided to work her way round to Brescia by the Alpine route. She supposed Pericles to have gone off among the Tyrolese, and wished in her heart that Wilfrid had gone likewise, for he continued to wear that look of sad stupefaction which was the harshest reproach to her. Leone was unconquerably gay in spite of his wounds. He narrated the doings of the volunteers, with proud eulogies of Carlo Ammiani's gallant leadership; but the devices of Barto Rizzo appeared to have struck his imagination most. "He is positively a cat—a great cat," Leone said. "He can run a day; he can fast a week; he can climb a house; he can drop from a crag; and he never lets go his hold. If he says a thing to his wife, she goes true as a bullet to the mark. The two make a complete piece of artillery. We are all for Barto, though our captain Carlo is often enraged with him. But there's no getting on without him. We have found that."

Rinaldo and Angelo Guidascarpì and Barto Rizzo had done many daring feats. They had first, heading about a couple of dozen out of a force of sixty, endeavoured to surprise the fortress Rocca d'Anfo in Lake Idro—an insane enterprise that touched on success, and would have been an achievement had all the men who followed them been made of the same desperate stuff. Beaten off, they escaped up the Val di Ledro, and secretly entered Trent, where they hoped to spread revolt, but the Austrian commandant knew what a quantity of dry wood was in the city, and stamped his heel on sparks. A revolt was prepared notwithstanding the proclamation of imprisonment and death. Barto undertook to lead a troop against the Buon Consiglio barracks, while Angelo and Rinaldo cleared the ramparts. It chanced, whether from treachery or extra-vigilance was unknown, that the troops paid domiciliary visits an hour before the intended outbreak, and the three were left to accomplish their task alone. They remained in the city several days, hunted from house to house, and finally they were brought to bay at night on the roof of a palace where the Lenkenstein ladies were residing. Barto took his dagger between his teeth and dropped to the balcony of Lena's chamber. The brothers soon after found the rooftrap opened to them, and Lena and Anna conducted them to the postern-door. There Angelo asked whom they had to thank. The terrified ladies gave their name; upon hearing which, Rinaldo turned and said that he would pay for a charitable deed to the extent of his power, and would not meanly allow them to befriend persons who were to continue strangers to them. He gave the name of Guidascarpì, and relieved his brother, as well as himself, of a load of obligation, for the ladies raised wild screams on the instant. In falling from the walls to the road, Rinaldo hurt his foot. Barto lifted him on his back, and journeyed with him so till at the appointed place he met his wife, who dressed the foot, and led them out of the line of pursuit, herself bending under the beloved load. Her adoration of Rinaldo was deep as a mother's, pure as a virgin's, fiery as a saint's. Leone Rufo dwelt on it the more fervidly from seeing Vittoria's expression of astonishment. The woman led them to a cave in the rocks, where she had stored provision and sat two days expecting the signal from Trent. They saw numerous bands of soldiers set out along the valleys—merry men whom it was Barto's pleasure to beguile by shouts, as a relief for his

parched weariness upon the baking rock. Accident made it an indiscretion. A glass was levelled at them by a mounted officer, and they had quickly to be moving. Angelo knew the voice of Weisspriess in the word of command to the soldiers, and the call to him to surrender. Weisspriess followed them across the mountain track, keeping at their heels, though they doubled and adopted all possible contrivances to shake him off. He was joined by Count Karl Lenkenstein on the day when Carlo Ammiani encountered them, with the rear of Colonel Corte's band marching for Vicenza. In the collision between the Austrians and the volunteers, Rinaldo was taken fighting upon his knee-cap. Leone cursed the disabled foot which had carried the hero in action, to cast him at the mercy of his enemies; but recollection of that sight of Rinaldo fighting far ahead and alone, half-down-like a scuttled ship, stood like a flower in the lad's memory. The volunteers devoted themselves to liberate or avenge him. It was then that Barto Rizzo sent his wife upon her mission. Leone assured Vittoria that Angelo was aware of its nature, and approved it—hoped that the same might be done for himself. He shook his head when she asked if Count Ammiani approved it likewise.

"Signorina, Count Ammiani has a grudge against Barto, though he can't help making use of him. Our captain Carlo is too much of a mere soldier. He would have allowed Rinaldo to be strung up, and Barto does not owe him obedience in those things."

"But why did this Barto Rizzo employ a woman's hand?"

"The woman was capable. No man could have got permission to move freely among the rascal Austrians, even in the character of a deserter. She did, and she saved him from the shame of execution. And besides, it was her punishment. You are astonished? Barto Rizzo punishes royally. He never forgives, and he never persecutes; he waits for his opportunity. That woman disobeyed him once—once only; but once was enough. It occurred in Milan, I believe. She released an Austrian, or did something—I don't know the story exactly—and Barto said to her, 'Now you can wash out your crime and send your boy to heaven unspotted, with one blow.' I saw her set out to do it. She was all teeth and eyes, like a frightened horse; she walked like a Muse in a garden."

Vittoria discovered that her presence among the Austrians had been known to Carlo. Leone alluded slightly to Barto Rizzo's confirmed suspicion of her, saying that it was his weakness to be suspicious of women. The volunteers, however, were all in her favour, and had jeered at Barto on his declaring that she might, in proof of her willingness to serve the cause, have used her voice for the purpose of subjugating the wavering Austro-Italians, who wanted as much coaxing as women. Count Karl had been struck to earth by Barto Rizzo. "Not with his boasted neatness, I imagine," Leone said. In fact, the dagger had grazed an ivory portrait of a fair Italian head wreathed with violets in Count Karl's breast.

Vittoria recognized the features of Violetta d'Isorella as the original of the portrait.

They arrived at Roveredo late in the evening. The wounded man again entreated Vittoria to remain by him till a messenger should bring one of his sisters from Trent. "See," she said to Leone, "how I give grounds for suspicion of me; I nurse an enemy."

"Here is a case where Barto is distinctly to blame," the lad replied. "The poor fellow must want nursing, for he can't smoke."

Anna von Lenkenstein came from Trent to her brother's summons. Vittoria was by his bedside, and the sufferer had fallen asleep with his head upon her arm. Anna looked upon this scene with more hateful amazement than her dull eyelids could express. She beckoned imperiously for her to come away, but Vittoria would not allow him to be disturbed, and Anna sat and faced her. The sleep was long. The eyes of the two women met from time to time, and Vittoria thought that Barto Rizzo's wife, though more terrible, was pleasanter to behold, and less brutal, than Anna. The moment her brother stirred, Anna repeated her imperious gesture, murmuring, "Away! out of my sight!" With great delicacy of touch she drew the arm from the pillow and thrust it back, and then motioning in an undisguised horror, said, "Go." Vittoria rose to go.

"Is it my Lena?" came from Karl's faint lips.

"It is your Anna."

"I should have known," he moaned.

Vittoria left them.

Some hours later, Countess Lena appeared, bringing a Trentino doctor. She said when she beheld Vittoria, "Are you our evil genius, then?" Vittoria felt that she must necessarily wear that aspect to them.

Still greater was Lena's amazement when she looked on Wilfrid. She passed him without a sign.

Vittoria had to submit to an interview with both sisters before her departure. Apart from her distress on their behalf, they had always seemed as very weak, flippant young women to her, and she could have smiled in her heart when Anna pointed to a day of retribution in the future.

"I shall not seek to have you assassinated," Anna said; "do not suppose that I mean the knife or the pistol. But your day will come, and I can wait for it. You murdered my brother Paul: you have tried to murder my brother Karl. I wish you to leave this place convinced of one thing:—you shall be repaid for it."

There was no direct allusion either to Weisspriess or to Wilfrid.

Lena spoke of the army. "You think our cause is ruined because we have insurrection on all sides of us: you do not know our army. We can fight the Hungarians with one hand, and you Italians with the other—with a little finger. On what spot have we given way? We have to weep, it is true; but tears do not testify to defeat; and already I am inclined to pity those fools who have taken part against us. Some have experienced the fruits of their folly."

This was the nearest approach to a hint at Wilfrid's misconduct.

Lena handed Leone's pass to Vittoria, and drawing out a little pocket almanac, said, "You proceed to Milan, I presume. I do not love your society; mademoiselle Belloni or Campa: yet I do not mind making an appointment—the doctor says a month will set my brother on his feet again,—I will make an appointment to meet you in Milan or Como, or anywhere in your present territories, during the month of August. That affords time for a short siege and two pitched battles."

She appeared to be expecting a retort.

Vittoria replied, "I could beg one thing on my knees of you, Countess Lena."

"And that is—?" Lena threw her head up superbly.

"Pardon my old friend the service he did me through friendship."

The sisters interchanged looks. Lena flushed angrily.

Anna said, "The person to whom you allude is here."

"He is attending on your brother."

"Did he help this last assassin to escape, perchance?"

Vittoria sickened at the cruel irony, and felt that she had perhaps done ill in beginning to plead for Wilfrid.

"He is here; let him speak for himself: but listen to him, Countess Lena."

"A dishonourable man had better be dumb," interposed Anna.

"Ah! it is I who have offended you."

"Is that his excuse?"

Vittoria kept her eyes on the fiercer sister, who now declined to speak.

"I will not excuse my own deeds; perhaps I cannot. We Italians are in a hurricane; I cannot reflect. It may be that I do not act more thinkingly than a wild beast."

"You have spoken it," Anna exclaimed.

"Countess Lena, he fights in your ranks as a common soldier. He encounters more than a common soldier's risks."

"The man is brave,—we knew that," said Anna.

"He is more than brave, he is devoted. He fights against us, without hope of reward from you. Have I utterly ruined him?"

"I imagine that you may regard it as a fact that you have utterly ruined him," said Anna, moving to break up the parting interview. Lena turned to follow her.

"Ladies, if it is I who have hardened your hearts, I am more guilty than I thought." Vittoria said no more. She knew that she had been speaking badly, or ineffectually, by a haunting flatness of sound, as of an unstrung instrument, in her ears: she was herself unstrung and dispirited, while the recollection of Anna's voice was like a sombre conquering monotony on a low chord, with which she felt insufficient to compete.

Leone was waiting in the carriage to drive to the ferry across the Adige. There was news in Roveredo of the king's advance upon Rivoli; and Leone sat trying to lift and straighten out his wounded arm, with grimaces of laughter at the pain of the effort, which resolutely refused to acknowledge him to be an able combatant. At the carriage-door Wilfrid bowed once over Vittoria's hand.

"You see that," Anna remarked to her sister.

"I should have despised him if he had acted indifference," replied Lena.

She would have suspected him—that was what her heart meant; the artful show of indifference had deceived her once. The anger within her drew its springs much more fully from his refusal to respond to her affection, when she had in a fit of feminine weakness abased herself before him on the night of the Milanese revolt, than from the recollection of their days together in Meran. She had nothing of her sister's unforgivingness. And she was besides keenly curious to discover the nature of the charm Vittoria threw on him, and not on him solely. Vittoria left Wilfrid to better chances than she supposed. "Continue fighting with your army," she said, when they parted. The deeper shade which traversed his features told her that, if she pleased, her sway might still be active; but she had no emotion to spare for sentimental regrets. She asked herself whether a woman who has cast her lot in scenes of strife does not lose much of her womanhood and something of her truth; and while her imagination remained depressed, her answer was sad. In that mood she pitied Wilfrid with a reckless sense of her inability to repay him for the harm she had done him. The tragedies written in fresh blood all about her, together with that ever-present image of the fate of Italy hanging in the balance, drew her away from personal reflections. She felt as one in a war-chariot, who has not time to cast more than a glance on the fallen. At the place where the ferry is, she was rejoiced by hearing positive news of the proximity of the Royal army. There were none to tell her that Charles Albert had here made his worst move by leaving Vicenza to the operations of the enemy, that he might become master of a point worthless when Vicenza fell into the enemy's hands. The old Austrian Field-Marshal had eluded him at Mantua on that very night when Vittoria had seen his troops in motion. The daring Austrian flank-march on Vicenza, behind the fortresses of the Quadrilateral, was the capital stroke of the campaign. But the presence of a Piedmontese vanguard at Rivoli flushed the Adige with confidence, and Vittoria went on her way sharing the people's delight. She reached Brescia to hear that Vicenza had fallen. The city was like a landscape smitten black by the thunder-cloud.

Vittoria found Countess Ammiani at her husband's tomb, stiff, colourless, lifeless as a monument attached to the tomb.

CHAPTER XXXV

CLOSE OF THE LOMBARD CAMPAIGN—VITTORIA'S PERPLEXITY

The fall of Vicenza turned a tide that had overflowed its barriers with force enough to roll it to the Adriatic. From that day it was as if a violent wind blew East over Lombardy; flood and wind breaking here and there a tree, bowing everything before them. City, fortress, and battle-field resisted as the eddy whirls. Venice kept her brave colours streaming aloft in a mighty grasp despite the storm, but between Venice and Milan there was this unutterable devastation,—so sudden a change, so complete a reversal of the shield, that the Lombards were at first incredulous even in their agony, and set their faces against it as at a monstrous eclipse, as though the heavens were taking false oath of its being night when it was day. From Vicenza and Rivoli, to Sommacampagna, and across Monte Godio to Custozza, to Volta on the right of the Mincio, up to the gates of Milan, the line of fire travelled, with a fantastic overbearing swiftness that, upon the map, looks like the zig-zag elbowing of a field-rocket. Vicenza fell on the 11th of June; the Austrians entered Milan on the 6th of August. Within that short time the Lombards were struck to the dust.

Countess Ammiani quitted Brescia for Bergamo before the worst had happened; when nothing but the king's retreat upon the Lombard capital, after the good fight at Volta, was known. According to the king's proclamation the Piedmontese army was to defend Milan, and hope was not dead. Vittoria succeeded in repressing all useless signs of grief in the presence of the venerable lady, who herself showed none, but simply recommended her accepted daughter to pray daily. "I can neither confess nor pray," Vittoria said to the priest, a comfortable, irritable ecclesiastic, long attached to the family, and little able to deal with this rebel before Providence, that would not let her swollen spirit be bled. Yet she admitted to him that the countess possessed resources which she could find nowhere; and she saw the full beauty of such inimitable grave endurance. Vittoria's foolish trick of thinking for herself made her believe, nevertheless, that the countess suffered more than she betrayed, was less consoled than her spiritual comforter imagined. She continued obstinate and unrepentant, saying, "If my punishment is to come, it will at least bring experience with it, and I shall know why I am punished. The misery now is that I do not know, and do not see, the justice of the sentence."

Countess Ammiani thought better of her case than the priest did; or she was more indulgent, or half indifferent. This girl was Carlo's choice;—a strange choice, but the times were strange, and the girl was robust. The channels of her own and her husband's house were drying on all sides; the house wanted resuscitating. There was promise that the girl would bear children of strong

blood. Countess Ammiani would not for one moment have allowed the spiritual welfare of the children to hang in dubitation, awaiting their experience of life; but a certain satisfaction was shown in her faint smile when her confessor lamented over Vittoria's proud stony state of moral revolt. She said to her accepted daughter, "I shall expect you to be prepared to espouse my son as soon as I have him by my side;" nor did Vittoria's silent bowing of her face assure her that strict obedience was implied. Precise words—"I will," and "I will not fail"—were exacted. The countess showed some emotion after Vittoria had spoken. "Now, may God end this war quickly, if it is to go against us," she exclaimed, trembling in her chair visibly a half-minute, with dropped eyelids and lips moving.

Carlo had sent word that he would join his mother as early as he was disengaged from active service, and meantime requested her to proceed to a villa on Lago Maggiore. Vittoria obtained permission from the countess to order the route of the carriage through Milan, where she wished to take up her mother and her maid Giacinta. For other reasons she would have avoided the city. The thought of entering it was painful with the shrewdest pain. Dante's profoundly human line seemed branded on the forehead of Milan.

The morning was dark when they drove through the streets of Bergamo. Passing one of the open places, Vittoria beheld a great concourse of volunteer youth and citizens, all of them listening to the voice of one who stood a few steps above them holding a banner. She gave an outcry of bitter joy. It was the Chief. On one side of him was Agostino, in the midst of memorable heads that were unknown to her. The countess refused to stay, though Vittoria strained her hands together in extreme entreaty that she might for a few moments hear what the others were hearing. "I speak for my son, and I forbid it," Countess Ammiani said. Vittoria fell back and closed her eyes to cherish the vision. All those faces raised to the one speaker under the dark sky were beautiful. He had breathed some new glory of hope in them, making them shine beneath the overcast heavens, as when the sun breaks from an evening cloud and flushes the stems of a company of pine-trees.

Along the road to Milan she kept imagining his utterance until her heart rose with music. A delicious stream of music, thin as poor tears, passed through her frame, like a life reviving. She reached Milan in a mood to bear the idea of temporary defeat. Music had forsaken her so long that celestial reassurance seemed to return with it.

Her mother was at Zotti's, very querulous, but determined not to leave the house and the few people she knew. She had, as she told her daughter, fretted so much on her account that she hardly knew whether she was glad to see her. Tea, of course, she had given up all thoughts of; but now coffee was rising, and the boasted sweet bread of Lombardy was something to look at! She trusted that Emilia would soon think of singing no more, and letting people rest: she might sing when she wanted money. A letter recently received from Mr. Pericles said that Italy was her child's ruin, and she hoped Emilia was ready to do as he advised, and hurry to England, where singing did not upset people, and people lived like real Christians, not——Vittoria flapped her hand, and would not hear of the unchristian crimes of the South. As regarded the expected defence of Milan, the little woman said, that if it brought on a bombardment, she would call it unpardonable wickedness, and only hoped that her daughter would repent.

Zotti stood by, interpreting the English to himself by tones. "The amiable donnina is not of our persuasion," he observed. "She remains dissatisfied with patriotic Milan. I have exhibited to her my dabs of bread through all the processes of making and baking. It is in vain. She rejects analogy. She is wilful as a principessina: 'Tis so! 'tis not so! 'tis my will! be silent, thou! Signora, I have been treated in that way by your excellent mother."

"Zotti has not been paid for three weeks, and he certainly has not mentioned it or looked it, I will say, Emilia."

"Zotti has had something to think of during the last three weeks," said Vittoria, touching him kindly on the arm.

The confectioner lifted his fingers and his big brown eyes after them, expressive of the unutterable thoughts. He informed her that he had laid in a stock of flour, in the expectation that Carlo Alberto would defend the city: The Milanese were ready to aid him, though some, as Zotti confessed, had ceased to effervesce; and a great number who were perfectly ready to fight regarded his tardy appeal to Italian patriotism very coldly. Zotti set out in person to discover Giacinta. The girl could hardly fetch her breath when she saw her mistress. She was in Laura's service, and said that Laura had brought a wounded Englishman from the field of Custoza. Vittoria hurried to Laura, with whom she found Merthyr, blue-white as a corpse, having been shot through the body. His sister was in one of the Lombard hamlets, unaware of his fall; Beppo had been sent to her.

They noticed one another's embrowned complexions, but embraced silently. "Twice widowed!" Laura said when they sat together. Laura hushed all speaking of the war or allusion to a single incident of the miserable campaign, beyond the bare recital of Vittoria's adventures; yet when Vicenza by chance was mentioned, she burst out: "They are not cities, they are living shrieks. They have been made impious for ever. Burn them to ashes, that they may not breathe foul upon heaven!" She had clung to the skirts of the army as far as the field of Custoza. "He," she said, pointing to the room where Merthyr lay,— "he groans less than the others I have nursed. Generally, when they looked at me, they appeared obliged to recollect that it was not I who had hurt them. Poor souls! some ended in great torment. 'I think of them as the happiest; for pain is a cloak that wraps you about, and I remember one middle-aged man who died softly at Custoza, and said, 'Beaten!' To take that thought as your travelling companion into the gulf, must be worse than dying of agony; at least, I think so."

Vittoria was too well used to Laura's way of meeting disaster to expect from her other than this ironical fortitude, in which the fortitude leaned so much upon the irony. What really astonished her was the conception Laura had taken of the might of Austria. Laura did not directly speak of it, but shadowed it in allusive hints, much as if she had in her mind the image of an iron roller going over a field of flowers—hateful, imminent, irresistible. She felt as a leaf that has been flying before the gale.

Merthyr's wound was severe: Vittoria could not leave him. Her resolution to stay in Milan brought her into collision with Countess Ammiani, when the countess reminded her of her promise, sedately informing her that she was no longer her own mistress, and had a primary duty

to fulfil. She offered to wait three days, or until the safety of the wounded man was medically certified to. It was incomprehensible to her that Vittoria should reject her terms; and though it was true that she would not have listened to a reason, she was indignant at not hearing one given in mitigation of the offence. She set out alone on her journey, deeply hurt. The reason was a feminine sentiment, and Vittoria was naturally unable to speak it. She shrank with pathetic horror from the thought of Merthyr's rising from his couch to find her a married woman, and desired most earnestly that her marriage should be witnessed by him. Young women will know how to reconcile the opposition of the sentiment. Had Merthyr been only slightly wounded, and sound enough to seem to be able to bear a bitter shock, she would not have allowed her personal feelings to cause chagrin to the noble lady. The sight of her dear steadfast friend prostrate in the cause of Italy, and who, if he lived to rise again, might not have his natural strength to bear the thought of her loss with his old brave firmness, made it impossible for her to act decisively in one direct line of conduct.

Countess Ammiani wrote brief letters from Luino and Pallanza on Lago Maggiore. She said that Carlo was in the Como mountains; he would expect to find his bride, and would accuse his mother; "but his mother will be spared those reproaches," she added, "if the last shot fired kills, as it generally does, the bravest and the dearest."

"If it should!"—the thought rose on a quick breath in Vittoria's bosom, and the sentiment which held her away dispersed like a feeble smoke, and showed her another view of her features. She wept with longing for love and dependence. She was sick of personal freedom, tired of the exercise of her will, only too eager to give herself to her beloved. The blessedness of marriage, of peace and dependence, came on her imagination like a soft breeze from a hidden garden, like sleep. But this very longing created the resistance to it in the depths of her soul. 'There was a light as of reviving life, or of pain comforted, when it was she who was sitting by Merthyr's side, and when at times she saw the hopeless effort of his hand to reach to hers, or during the long still hours she laid her head on his pillow, and knew that he breathed gratefully. The sweetness of helping him, and of making his breathing pleasant to him, closed much of the world which lay beyond her windows to her thoughts, and surprised her with an unknown emotion, so strange to her that when it first swept up her veins she had the fancy of her having been touched by a supernatural hand, and heard a flying accord of instruments. She was praying before she knew what prayer was. A crucifix hung over Merthyr's head. She had looked on it many times, and looked on it still, without seeing more than the old sorrow. In the night it was dim. She found herself trying to read the features of the thorn-crowned Head in the solitary night. She and it were alone with a life that was faint above the engulfing darkness. She prayed for the life, and trembled, and shed tears, and would have checked them; they seemed to be bearing away her little remaining strength. The tears streamed. No answer was given to her question, "Why do I weep?" She wept when Merthyr had passed the danger, as she had wept when the hours went by, with shrouded visages; and though she felt the difference in the springs of her tears, she thought them but a simple form of weakness showing shade and light.

These tears were a vanward wave of the sea to follow; the rising of her voice to heaven was no more than a twitter of the earliest dawn before the coming of her soul's outcry.

"I have had a weeping fit," she thought, and resolved to remember it tenderly, as being associated with her friend's recovery, and a singular masterful power absolutely to look on the Austrians marching up the streets of Milan, and not to feel the surging hatred, or the nerveless despair, which she had supposed must be her alternatives.

It is a mean image to say that the entry of the Austrians into the reconquered city was like a river of oil permeating a lake of vinegar, but it presents the fact in every sense. They demanded nothing more than submission, and placed a gentle foot upon the fallen enemy; and wherever they appeared they were isolated. The deepest wrath of the city was, nevertheless, not directed against them, but against Carlo Alberto, who had pledged his honour to defend it, and had forsaken it. Vittoria committed a public indiscretion on the day when the king left Milan to its fate: word whereof was conveyed to Carlo Ammiani, and he wrote to her.

"It is right that I should tell you what I have heard," the letter said. "I have heard that my bride drove up to the crowned traitor, after he had unmasked himself, and when he was quitting the Greppi palace, and that she kissed his hand before the people—poor bleeding people of Milan! This is what I hear in the Val d'Intelvi:—that she despised the misery and just anger of the people, and, by virtue of her name and mine, obtained a way for him. How can she have acted so as to give a colour to this infamous scandal? True or false, it does not affect my love for her. Still, my dearest, what shall I say? You keep me divided in two halves. My heart is out of me; and if I had a will, I think I should be harsh with you. You are absent from my mother at a time when we are about to strike another blow. Go to her. It is kindness; it is charity: I do not say duty. I remember that I did write harshly to you from Brescia. Then our march was so clear in view that a little thing ruffled me. Was it a little thing? But to applaud the Traitor now! To uphold him who has spilt our blood only to hand the country over to the old gaolers! He lent us his army like a Jew, for huge interest. Can you not read him? If not, cease, I implore you, to think at all for yourself.

"Is this a lover's letter? I know that my beloved will see the love in it. To me your acts are fair and good as the chronicle of a saint. I find you creating suspicion—almost justifying it in others, and putting your name in the mouth of a madman who denounces you. I shall not speak more of him. Remember that my faith in you is unchangeable, and I pray you to have the same in me.

"I sent you a greeting from the Chief. He marched in the ranks from Bergamo. I saw him on the line of march strip off his coat to shelter a young lad from the heavy rain. He is not discouraged; none are who have been near him.

"Angelo is here, and so is our Agostino; and I assure you he loads and fires a carbine much more deliberately than he composes a sonnet. I am afraid that your adored Antonio-Pericles fared badly among our fellows, but I could gather no particulars.

"Oh! the bright two minutes when I held you right in my heart. That spot on the Vicentino is alone unclouded. If I live I will have that bit of ground. I will make a temple of it. I could reach it blindfolded."

A townsman of Milan brought this letter to Vittoria. She despatched Luigi with her reply, which met the charge in a straightforward affirmative.

"I was driving to Zotti's by the Greppi palace, when I saw the king come forth, and the people hooted him. I stood up, and petitioned to kiss his hand. The people knew me. They did not hoot any more for some time.

"So that you have heard the truth, and you must judge me by it. I cannot even add that I am sorry, though I strive to wish that I had not been present. I might wish it really, if I did not feel it to be a cowardly wish.

"Oh, my Carlo! my lover! my husband! you would not have me go against my nature? I have seen the king upon the battle-field. He has deigned to speak to me of Italy and our freedom. I have seen him facing our enemy; and to see him hooted by the people, and in misfortune and with sad eyes!—he looked sad and nothing else—and besides, I am sure I know the king. I mean that I understand him. I am half ashamed to write so boldly, even to you. I say to myself you should know me, at least; and if I am guilty of a piece of vanity, you should know that also. Carlo Alberto is quite unlike other men. He worships success as, much; but they are not, as he is, so much bettered by adversity. Indeed I do not believe that he has exact intentions of any sort, or ever had the intention to betray us, or has done so in reality, that is, meaningly, of his own will. Count Medole and his party did, as you know, offer Lombardy to him; and Venice gave herself—brave, noble Venice! Oh! if we two were there—Venice has England's sea-spirit. But, did we not flatter the king? And ask yourself, my Carlo, could a king move in such an enterprise as a common person? Ought we not to be in union with Sardinia? How can we be if we reject her king? Is it not the only positive army that, we can look to—I mean regular army? Should we not; make some excuses for one who is not in our position?

"I feel that I push my questions like waves that fall and cannot get beyond—they crave so for answers agreeing to them. This should make me doubt myself, perhaps; but they crowd again, and seem so conclusive until I have written them down. I am unworthy to struggle with your intellect; but I say to myself, how unworthy of you I should be if I did not use my own, such as it is! The poor king; had to conclude an armistice to save his little kingdom. Perhaps we ought to think of that sternly. My heart is; filled with pity.

"It cannot but be right that you should know the worst; of me. I call you my husband, and tremble to be permitted to lean my head on your bosom for hours, my sweet lover! And yet my cowardice, if I had let the king go by without a reverential greeting from me, in his adversity, would have rendered me insufferable to myself. You are hearing me, and I am compelled to say, that rather than behave so basely I would forfeit your love, and be widowed till death should offer us for God to join us. Does your face change to me?

"Dearest, and I say it when the thought of you sets me almost swooning. I find my hands clasped, and I am muttering I know not what, and I am blushing. The ground seems to rock; I can barely breathe; my heart is like a bird caught in the hands of a cruel boy: it will not rest. I fear everything. I hear a whisper, 'Delay not an instant!' and it is like a furnace; 'Hasten to him! Speed!' and I seem to totter forward and drop—I think I have lost you—I am like one dead.

"I remain here to nurse our dear friend Merthyr. For that reason I am absent from your mother. It is her desire that we should be married.

"Soon, soon, my own soul!

"I seem to be hanging on a tree for you, swayed by such a teasing wind.

"Oh, soon! or I feel that I shall hate any vestige of will that I have in this head of mine. Not in the heart—it is not there!

"And sometimes I am burning to sing. The voice leaps to my lips; it is quite like a thing that lives apart—my prisoner.

"It is true, Laura is here with Merthyr.

"Could you come at once?—not here, but to Pallanza? We shall both make our mother happy. This she wishes, this she lives for, this consoles her—and oh, this gives me peace! Yes, Merthyr is recovering! I can leave him without the dread I had; and Laura confesses to the feminine sentiment, if her funny jealousy of a rival nurse is really simply feminine. She will be glad of our resolve, I am sure. And then you will order all my actions; and I shall be certain that they are such as I would proudly call mine; and I shall be shut away from the world. Yes; let it be so! Addio. I reserve all sweet names for you. Addio. In Pallanza:—no not Pallanza—Paradise!

"Hush! and do not smile at me:—it was not my will, I discover, but my want of will, that distracted me.

"See my last signature of—not Vittoria; for I may sign that again and still be Emilia Alessandra Ammiani.

"SANDRA BELLONI"

The letter was sealed; Luigi bore it away, and a brief letter to Countess Ammiani, in Pallanza, as well.

Vittoria was relieved of her anxiety concerning Merthyr by the arrival of Georgiana, who had been compelled to make her way round by Piacenza and Turin, where she had left Gambier, with Beppo in attendance on him. Georgiana at once assumed all the duties of head-nurse, and the more resolutely because of her brother's evident moral weakness in sighing for the hand of a fickle girl to smooth his pillow. "When he is stronger you can sit beside him a little," she said to Vittoria, who surrendered her post without a struggle, and rarely saw him, though Laura told her that his frequent exclamation was her name, accompanied by a soft look at his sister—"which would have stirred my heart like poor old Milan last March," Laura added, with a lift of her shoulders.

Georgiana's icy manner appeared infinitely strange to Vittoria when she heard from Merthyr that his sister had become engaged to Captain Gambier.

"Nothing softens these women," said Laura, putting Georgiana in a class.

"I wish you could try the effect of your winning Merthyr," Vittoria suggested.

"I remember that when I went to my husband, I likewise wanted every woman of my acquaintance to be married." Laura sighed deeply. "What is this poor withered body of mine now? It feels like an old volcano, cindery, with fire somewhere:—a charming bride! My dear, if I live till my children make me a grandmother, I shall look on the love of men and women as a toy that I have played with. A new husband? I must be dragged through the Circles of Dante before I can conceive it, and then I should loathe the stranger."

News came that the volunteers were crushed. It was time for Vittoria to start for Pallanza, and she thought of her leave-taking; a final leave-taking, in one sense, to the friends who had cared too much for her. Laura delicately drew Georgiana aside in the sick-room, which she would not quit, and alluded to the necessity for Vittoria's departure without stating exactly wherefore: but Georgiana was a Welshwoman. Partly to show her accurate power of guessing, and chiefly that she might reprove Laura's insulting whisper, which outraged and irritated her as much as if "Oh! your poor brother!" had been exclaimed, she made display of Merthyr's manly coldness by saying aloud, "You mean, that she is going to her marriage." Laura turned her face to Merthyr. He had striven to rise on his elbow, and had dropped flat in his helplessness. Big tears were rolling down his cheeks. His articulation failed him, beyond a reiterated "No, no," pitiful to hear, and he broke into childish sobs. Georgiana hurried Laura from the room. By-and-by the doctor was promptly summoned, and it was Georgiana herself, miserably humbled, who obtained Vittoria's sworn consent to keep the life in Merthyr by lingering yet awhile.

Meantime Luigi brought a letter from Pallanza in Carlo's handwriting. This was the burden of it:

"I am here, and you are absent. Hasten!"

CHAPTER XXXVI

A FRESH ENTANGLEMENT

The Lenkenstein ladies returned to Milan proudly in the path of the army which they had followed along the city walls on the black March midnight. The ladies of the Austrian aristocracy generally had to be exiles from Vienna, and were glad to flock together even in an alien city. Anna and Lena were aware of Vittoria's residence in Milan, through the interchange of visits between the Countess of Lenkenstein and her sister Signora Piaveni. They heard also of Vittoria's prospective and approaching marriage to Count Ammiani. The Duchess of Graatli, who had forborne a visit to her unhappy friends, lest her Austrian face should wound their

sensitiveness, was in company with the Lenkensteins one day, when Irma di Karski called on them. Irma had come from Lago Maggiore, where she had left her patron, as she was pleased to term Antonio-Pericles. She was full of chatter of that most worthy man's deplorable experiences of Vittoria's behaviour to him during the war, and of many things besides. According to her account, Vittoria had enticed him from place to place with promises that the next day, and the next day, and the day after, she would be ready to keep her engagement to go to London, and at last she had given him the slip and left him to be plucked like a pullet by a horde of volunteer banditti, out of whose hands Antonio-Pericles—"one of our richest millionaires in Europe, certainly our richest amateur," said Irma—escaped in fit outward condition for the garden of Eden.

Count Karl was lying on the sofa, and went into endless invalid's laughter at the picture presented by Irma of the 'wild man' wanderings of poor infatuated Pericles, which was exaggerated, though not intentionally, for Irma repeated the words and gestures of Pericles in the recital of his tribulations. Being of a somewhat similar physical organization, she did it very laughably. Irma declared that Pericles was cured of his infatuation. He had got to Turin, intending to quit Italy for ever, when—"he met me," said Irma modestly.

"And heard that the war was at an end," Count Karl added.

"And he has taken the superb Villa Ricciardi, on Lago Maggiore, where he will have a troupe of singers, and perform operas, in which I believe I may possibly act as prima donna. The truth is, I would do anything to prevent him from leaving the country."

But Irma had more to say; with "I bear no malice," she commenced it. The story she had heard was that Count Ammiani, after plighting himself to a certain signorina, known as Vittoria Campa, had received tidings that she was one of those persons who bring discredit on Irma's profession. "Gifted by nature, I can acknowledge," said Irma; "but devoured by vanity—a perfect slave to the appetite for praise; ready to forfeit anything for flattery! Poor signor Antonio-Pericles!—he knows her." And now Count Ammiani, persuaded to reason by his mother, had given her up. There was nothing more positive, for Irma had seen him in the society of Countess Violetta d'Isorella.

Anna and Lena glanced at their brother Karl.

"I should not allude to what is not notorious," Irma pursued. "They are always together. My dear Antonio-Pericles is most amusing in his expressions of delight at it. For my part, though she served me an evil turn once,—you will hardly believe, ladies, that in her jealousy of me she was guilty of the most shameful machinations to get me out of the way on the night of the first performance of Camilla,—but, for my part, I bear no malice. The creature is an inveterate rebel, and I dislike her for that, I do confess."

"The signorina Vittoria Campa is my particular and very dear friend," said the duchess.

"She is not the less an inveterate rebel," said Anna.

Count Karl gave a long-drawn sigh. "Alas, that she should have brought discredit on Fraulein di Karski's profession!"

The duchess hurried straightway to Laura, with whom was Count Serabiglione, reviewing the present posture of affairs from the condescending altitudes of one that has foretold it. Laura and Amalia embraced and went apart. During their absence Vittoria came down to the count and listened to a familiar illustration of his theory of the relations which should exist between Italy and Austria, derived from the friendship of those two women.

"What I wish you to see, signorina, is that such an alliance is possible; and, if we supply the brains, as we do, is by no means likely to be degrading. These bears are absolutely on their knees to us for good fellowship. You have influence, you have amazing wit, you have unparalleled beauty, and, let me say it with the utmost sadness, you have now had experience. Why will you not recognize facts? Italian unity! I have exposed the fatuity—who listens? Italian freedom! I do not attempt to reason with my daughter. She is pricked by an envenomed fly of Satan. Yet, behold her and the duchess! It is the very union I preach; and I am, I declare to you, signorina, in great danger. I feel it, but I persist. I am in danger" (Count Serabiglione bowed his head low) "of the transcendent sin of scorn of my species."

The little nobleman swayed deplorably in his chair. "Nothing is so perilous for a soul's salvation as that. The one sane among madmen! The one whose reason is left to him among thousands who have forsaken it! I beg you to realize the idea. The Emperor, as I am given to understand, is about to make public admission of my services. I shall be all the more hated. Yet it is a considerable gain. I do not deny that I esteem it as a promotion for my services. I shall not be the first martyr in this world, signorina."

Count Serabiglione produced a martyr's smile.

"The profits of my expected posts will be," he was saying, with a reckoning eye cast upward into his cranium for accuracy, when Laura returned, and Vittoria ran out to the duchess. Amalia repeated Irma's tattle. A curious little twitching of the brows at Violetta d'Isorella's name marked the reception of it.

"She is most lovely," Vittoria said.

"And absolutely reckless."

"She is an old friend of Count Ammiani's."

"And you have an old friend here. But the old friend of a young woman—I need not say further than that it is different."

The duchess used the privilege of her affection, and urged Vittoria not to trifle with her lover's impatience.

Admitted to the chamber where Merthyr lay, she was enabled to make allowance for her irresolution. The face of the wounded man was like a lake-water taking light from Vittoria's presence.

"This may go on for weeks," she said to Laura.

Three days later, Vittoria received an order from the Government to quit the city within a prescribed number of hours, and her brain was racked to discover why Laura appeared so little indignant at the barbarous act of despotism. Laura undertook to break the bad news to Merthyr. The parting was as quiet and cheerful as, in the opposite degree, Vittoria had thought it would be melancholy and regretful. "What a Government!" Merthyr said, and told her to let him hear of any changes. "All changes that please my friends please me."

Vittoria kissed his forehead with one grateful murmur of farewell to the bravest heart she had ever known. The going to her happiness seemed more like going to something fatal until she reached the Lago Maggiore. There she saw September beauty, and felt as if the splendour encircling her were her bridal decoration. But no bridegroom stood to greet her on the terrace-steps between the potted orange and citron-trees. Countess Ammiani extended kind hands to her at arms' length.

"You have come," she said. "I hope that it is not too late."

Vittoria was a week without sight of her lover: nor did Countess Ammiani attempt to explain her words, or speak of other than common daily things. In body and soul Vittoria had taken a chill. The silent blame resting on her in this house called up her pride, so that she would not ask any questions; and when Carlo came, she wanted warmth to melt her. Their meeting was that of two passionless creatures. Carlo kissed her loyally, and courteously inquired after her health and the health of friends in Milan, and then he rallied his mother. Agostino had arrived with him, and the old man, being in one of his soft moods, unvexed by his conceits, Vittoria had some comfort from him of a dull kind. She heard Carlo telling his mother that he must go in the morning. Agostino replied to her quick look at him, "I stay;" and it seemed like a little saved from the wreck, for she knew that she could speak to Agostino as she could not to the countess. When his mother prepared to retire, Carlo walked over to his bride, and repeated rapidly and brightly his inquiries after friends in Milan. She, with a pure response to his natural-unnatural manner, spoke of Merthyr Powys chiefly: to which he said several times, "Dear fellow!" and added, "I shall always love Englishmen for his sake."

This gave her one throb. "I could not leave him, Carlo."

"Certainly not, certainly not," said Carlo. "I should have been happy to wait on him myself. I was busy; I am still. I dare say you have guessed that I have a new journal in my head: the Pallanza Iris is to be the name of it;—to be printed in three colours, to advocate three principles, in three styles. The Legitimists, the Moderates, and the Republicans are to proclaim themselves in its columns in prose, poetry, and hotch-potch. Once an editor, always an editor. The authorities suspect that something of the sort is about to be planted, so I can only make occasional visits

here:—therefore, as you will believe,"—Carlo let his voice fall—"I have good reason to hate them still. They may cease to persecute me soon."

He insisted upon lighting his mother to her room. Vittoria and Agostino sat talking of the Chief and the minor events of the war—of Luciano, Marco, Giulio, and Ugo Corte—till the conviction fastened on them that Carlo would not return, when Agostino stood up and said, yawning wearily, "I'll talk further to you, my child, tomorrow."

She begged that it might be now.

"No; to-morrow," said he.

"Now, now!" she reiterated, and brought down a reproof from his fore-finger.

"The poetic definition of 'now' is that it is a small boat, my daughter, in which the female heart is constantly pushing out to sea and sinking. 'To-morrow' is an island in the deeps, where grain grows. When I land you there, I will talk to you."

She knew that he went to join Carlo after he had quitted her.

Agostino was true to his promise next day. He brought her nearer to what she had to face, though he did not help her vision much. Carlo had gone before sunrise.

They sat on the terrace above the lake, screened from the sunlight by thick myrtle bushes. Agostino smoked his loosely-rolled cigarettes, and Vittoria sipped chocolate and looked upward to the summit of Motterone, with many thoughts and images in her mind.

He commenced by giving her a love-message from Carlo. "Hold fast to it that he means it: conduct is never a straight index where the heart's involved," said the chuckling old man; "or it is not in times like ours. You have been in the wrong, and your having a good excuse will not help you before the deciding fates. Woman that you are! did you not think that because we were beaten we were going to rest for a very long while, and that your Carlo of yesterday was going to be your Carlo of to-day?"

Vittoria tacitly confessed to it.

"Ay," he pursued, "when you wrote to him in the Val d'Intelvi, you supposed you had only to say, 'I am ready,' which was then the case. You made your summer and left the fruits to hang, and now you are astounded that seasons pass and fruits drop. You should have come to this place, if but for a pair of days, and so have fixed one matter in the chapter. This is how the chapter has run on. I see I talk to a stunned head; you are thinking that Carlo's love for you can't have changed: and it has not, but occasion has gone and times have changed. Now listen. The countess desired the marriage. Carlo could not go to you in Milan with the sword in his hand. Therefore you had to come to him. He waited for you, perhaps for his own preposterous lover's sake as much as to make his mother's heart easy. If she loses him she loses everything, unless he

leaves a wife to her care and the hope that her House will not be extinct, which is possibly not much more the weakness of old aristocracy than of human nature.

"Meantime, his brothers in arms had broken up and entered Piedmont, and he remained waiting for you still. You are thinking that he had not waited a month. But if four months finished Lombardy, less than one month is quite sufficient to do the same for us little beings. He met the Countess d'Isorella here. You have to thank her for seeing him at all, so don't wrinkle your forehead yet. Luciano Romara is drilling his men in Piedmont; Angelo Guidascarpi has gone there. Carlo was considering it his duty to join Luciano, when he met this lady, and she has apparently succeeded in altering his plans. Luciano and his band will go to Rome. Carlo fancies that another blow will be struck for Lombardy. This lady should know; the point is, whether she can be trusted. She persists in declaring that Carlo's duty is to remain, and—I cannot tell how, for I am as a child among women—she has persuaded him of her sincerity. Favour me now with your clearest understanding, and deliver it from feminine sensations of any description for just two minutes."

Agostino threw away the end of a cigarette and looked for firmness in Vittoria's eyes.

"This Countess d'Isorella is opposed to Carlo's marriage at present. She says that she is betraying the king's secrets, and has no reliance on a woman. As a woman you will pardon her, for it is the language of your sex. You are also denounced by Barto Rizzo, a madman—he went mad as fire, and had to be chained at Varese. In some way or other Countess d'Isorella got possession of him; she has managed to subdue him. A sword-cut he received once in Verona has undoubtedly affected his brain, or caused it to be affected under strong excitement. He is at her villa, and she says—perhaps with some truth—that Carlo would in several ways lose his influence by his immediate marriage with you. The reason must have weight; otherwise he would fulfil his mother's principal request, and be at the bidding of his own desire. There; I hope I have spoken plainly."

Agostino puffed a sigh of relief at the conclusion of his task.

Vittoria had been too strenuously engaged in defending the steadiness of her own eyes to notice the shadow of an assumption of frankness in his.

She said that she understood.

She got away to her room like an insect carrying a load thrice its own size. All that she could really gather from Agostino's words was, that she felt herself rocking in a tower, and that Violetta d'Isorella was beautiful. She had striven hard to listen to him with her wits alone, and her sensations subsequently revenged themselves in this fashion. The tower rocked and struck a bell that she discovered to be her betraying voice uttering cries of pain. She was for hours incapable of meeting Agostino again. His delicate intuition took the harshness off the meeting. He led her even to examine her state of mind, and to discern the fancies from the feelings by which she was agitated. He said shrewdly and bluntly, "You can master pain, but not doubt. If you show a sign of unhappiness, remember that I shall know you doubt both what I have told you, and Carlo as well."

Vittoria fenced: "But is there such a thing as happiness?"

"I should imagine so," said Agostino, touching her cheek, "and slipperiness likewise. There's patience at any rate; only you must dig for it. You arrive at nothing, but the eternal digging constitutes the object gained. I recollect when I was a raw lad, full of ambition, in love, and without a franc in my pockets, one night in Paris, I found myself looking up at a street lamp; there was a moth in it. He couldn't get out, so he had very little to trouble his conscience. I think he was near happiness: he ought to have been happy. My luck was not so good, or you wouldn't see me still alive, my dear."

Vittoria sighed for a plainer speaker.

CHAPTER XXXVII

ON LAGO MAGGIORE

Carlo's hours were passed chiefly across the lake, in the Piedmontese valleys. When at Pallanza he was restless, and he shunned the two or three minutes of privacy with his betrothed which the rigorous Italian laws besetting courtship might have allowed him to take. He had perpetually the look of a man starting from wine. It was evident that he and Countess d'Isorella continued to hold close communication, for she came regularly to the villa to meet him. On these occasions Countess Ammiani accorded her one ceremonious interview, and straightway locked herself in her room. Violetta's grace of ease and vivacity soared too high to be subject to any hostile judgement of her character. She seemed to rely entirely on the force of her beauty, and to care little for those who did not acknowledge it. She accepted public compliments quite royally, nor was Agostino backward in offering them. "And you have a voice, you know," he sometimes said aside to Vittoria; but she had forgotten how easily she could swallow great praise of her voice; she had almost forgotten her voice. Her delight was to hang her head above inverted mountains in the lake, and dream that she was just something better than the poorest of human creatures. She could not avoid putting her mind in competition with this brilliant woman's, and feeling eclipsed; and her weakness became pitiable. But Countess d'Isorella mentioned once that Pericles was at the Villa Ricciardi, projecting magnificent operatic entertainments. The reviving of a passion to sing possessed Vittoria like a thirst for freedom, and instantly confused all the reflected images within her, as the fury of a sudden wind from the high Alps scourges the glassy surface of the lake. She begged Countess Ammiani's permission that she might propose to Pericles to sing in his private operatic company, in any part, at the shortest notice.

"You wish to leave me?" said the countess, and resolutely conceived it.

Speaking to her son on this subject, she thought it necessary to make some excuse for a singer's instinct, who really did not live save on the stage. It amused Carlo; he knew when his mother was really angry with persons she tried to shield from the anger of others; and her not seeing the wrong on his side in his behaviour to his betrothed was laughable. Nevertheless she had divined the case more correctly than he: the lover was hurt. After what he had endured, he supposed, with all his forgiveness, that he had an illimitable claim upon his bride's patience. He told his another to speak to her openly.

"Why not you, my Carlo?" said the countess.

"Because, mother, if I speak to her, I shall end by throwing out my arms and calling for the priest."

"I would clap hands to that."

"We will see; it may be soon or late, but it can't be now."

"How much am I to tell her, Carlo?"

"Enough to keep her from fretting."

The countess then asked herself how much she knew. Her habit of receiving her son's word and will as supreme kept her ignorant of anything beyond the outline of his plans; and being told to speak openly of them to another, she discovered that her acquiescing imagination supplied the chief part of her knowledge. She was ashamed also to have it thought, even by Carlo, that she had not gathered every detail of his occupation, so that she could not argue against him, and had to submit to see her dearest wishes lightly swept aside.

"I beg you to tell me what you think of Countess d'Isorella; not the afterthought," she said to Vittoria.

"She is beautiful, dear Countess Ammiani."

"Call me mother now and then. Yes; she is beautiful. She has a bad name."

"Envy must have given it, I think."

"Of course she provokes envy. But I say that her name is bad, as envy could not make it. She is a woman who goes on missions, and carries a husband into society like a passport. You have only thought of her beauty?"

"I can see nothing else," said Vittoria, whose torture at the sight of the beauty was appeased by her disingenuous pleading on its behalf.

"In my time Beauty was a sinner," the countess resumed. "My confessor has filled my ears with warnings that it is a net to the soul, a weapon for devils. May the saints of Paradise make bare the

beauty of this woman. She has persuaded Carlo that she is serving the country. You have let him lie here alone in a fruitless bed, silly girl. He stayed for you while his comrades called him to Vercelli, where they are assembled. The man whom he salutes as his Chief gave him word to go there. They are bound for Rome. Ah me! Rome is a great name, but Lombardy is Carlo's natal home, and Lombardy bleeds. You were absent—how long you were absent! If you could know the heaviness of those days of his waiting for you. And it was I who kept him here! I must have omitted a prayer, for he would have been at Vercelli now with Luciano and Emilio, and you might have gone to him; but he met this woman, who has convinced him that Piedmont will make a Winter march, and that his marriage must be delayed." The countess raised her face and drooped her hands from the wrists, exclaiming, "If I have lately omitted one prayer, enlighten me, blessed heaven! I am blind; I cannot see for my son; I am quite blind. I do not love the woman; therefore I doubt myself. You, my daughter, tell me your thought of her, tell me what you think. Young eyes observe; young heads are sometimes shrewd in guessing."

Vittoria said, after a pause, "I will believe her to be true, if she supports the king." It was hardly truthful speaking on her part.

"How can Carlo have been persuaded!" the countess sighed.

"By me?" Vittoria asked herself, and for a moment she was exulting.

She spoke from that emotion when it had ceased to animate her.

"Carlo was angry with the king. He echoed Agostino, but Agostino does not sting as he did, and Carlo cannot avoid seeing what the king has sacrificed. Perhaps the Countess d'Isorella has shown him promises of fresh aid in the king's handwriting. Suffering has made Carlo Alberto one with the Republicans, if he had other ambitions once. And Carlo dedicates his blood to Lombardy: he does rightly. Dear countess—my mother! I have made him wait for me; I will be patient in waiting for him. I know that Countess d'Isorella is intimate with the king. There is a man named Barto Rizzo, who thinks me a guilty traitress, and she is making use of this man. That must be her reason for prohibiting the marriage. She cannot be false if she is capable of uniting extreme revolutionary agents and the king in one plot, I think; I do not know." Vittoria concluded her perfect expression of confidence with this atoning doubtfulness.

Countess Ammiani obtained her consent that she would not quit her side.

After Violetta had gone, Carlo, though he shunned secret interviews, addressed his betrothed as one who was not strange to his occupation and the trial his heart was undergoing. She could not doubt that she was beloved, in spite of the colourlessness and tonelessness of a love that appealed to her intellect. He showed her a letter he had received from Laura, laughing at its abuse of Countess d'Isorella, and the sarcasms levelled at himself.

In this letter Laura said that she was engaged in something besides nursing.

Carlo pointed his finger to the sentence, and remarked, "I must have your promise—a word from you is enough—that you will not meddle with any intrigue."

Vittoria gave the promise, half trusting it to bring the lost bloom of their love to him; but he received it as a plain matter of necessity. Certain of his love, she wondered painfully that it should continue so barren of music.

"Why am I to pledge myself that I will be useless?" she asked. "You mean, my Carlo, that I am to sit still, and watch, and wait."

He answered, "I will tell you this much: I can be struck vitally through you. In the game I am playing, I am able to defend myself. If you enter it, distraction begins. Stay with my mother."

"Am I to know nothing?"

"Everything—in good time."

"I might—might I not help you, my Carlo?"

"Yes; and nobly too. And I show you the way."

Agostino and Carlo made an expedition to Turin. Before he went, Carlo took her in his arms.

"Is it coming?" she said, shutting her eyelids like a child expecting the report of firearms.

He pressed his lips to the closed eyes. "Not yet; but are you growing timid?"

His voice seemed to reprove her.

She could have told him that keeping her in the dark among unknown terrors ruined her courage; but the minutes were too precious, his touch too sweet. In eyes and hands he had become her lover again. The blissful minutes rolled away like waves that keep the sunshine out at sea.

Her solitude in the villa was beguiled by the arrival of the score of an operatic scena, entitled "HAGAR," by Rocco Ricci, which she fancied that either Carlo or her dear old master had sent, and she devoured it. She thought it written expressly for her. With HAGAR she communed during the long hours, and sang herself on to the verge of an imagined desert beyond the mountain-shadowed lake and the last view of her beloved Motterone. Hagar's face of tears in the Brerawas known to her; and Hagar in her 'Addio' gave the living voice to that dumb one. Vittoria revelled in the delicious vocal misery. She expanded with the sorrow of poor Hagar, whose tears refreshed her, and parted her from her recent narrowing self-consciousness. The great green mountain fronted her like a living presence. Motterone supplied the place of the robust and venerable patriarch, whom she reproached, and worshipped, but with a fathomless burdensome sense of cruel injustice, deeper than the tears or the voice which spoke of it: a feeling of subjected love that was like a mother's giving suck to a detested child. Countess Ammiani saw the abrupt alteration of her step and look with a dim surprise. "What do you conceal from me?" she asked, and supplied the answer by charitably attributing it to news that the signora Piaveni was coming.

When Laura came, the countess thanked her, saying, "I am a wretched companion for this boiling head."

Laura soon proved to her that she had been the best, for after very few hours Vittoria was looking like the Hagar on the canvas.

A woman such as Violetta d'Isorella was of the sort from which Laura shrank with all her feminine power of loathing; but she spoke of her with some effort at personal tolerance until she heard of Violetta's stipulation for the deferring of Carlo's marriage, and contrived to guess that Carlo was reserved and unfamiliar with his betrothed. Then she cried out, "Fool that he is! Is it ever possible to come to the end of the folly of men? She has inflamed his vanity. She met him when you were holding him waiting, and no doubt she commenced with lamentations over the country, followed by a sigh, a fixed look, a cheerful air, and the assurance to him that she knew it—uttered as if through the keyhole of the royal cabinet—she knew that Sardinia would break the Salasco armistice in a month:—if only, if the king could be sure of support from the youth of Lombardy."

"Do you suspect the unhappy king?" Vittoria interposed.

"Grasp your colours tight," said Laura, nodding sarcastic approbation of such fidelity, and smiling slightly. "There has been no mention of the king. Countess d'Isorella is a spy and a tool of the Jesuits, taking pay from all parties—Austria as well, I would swear. Their object is to paralyze the march on Rome, and she has won Carlo for them. I am told that Barto Rizzo is another of her conquests. Thus she has a madman and a fool, and what may not be done with a madman and a fool? However, I have set a watch on her. She must have inflamed Carlo's vanity. He has it, just as they all have. There's trickery: I would rather behold the boy charging at the head of a column than putting faith in this base creature. She must have simulated well," Laura went on talking to herself.

"What trickery?" said Vittoria.

"He was in love with the woman when he was a lad," Laura replied, and pertinently to Vittoria's feelings. This threw the moist shade across her features.

Beppo in Turin and Luigi on the lake were the watch set on Countess d'Isorella; they were useless except to fortify Laura's suspicions. The Duchess of Graatli wrote mere gossip from Milan. She mentioned that Anna of Lenkenstein had visited with her the tomb of her brother Count Paul at Bologna, and had returned in double mourning; and that Madame Sedley—"the sister of our poor ruined Pierson"—had obtained grace, for herself at least, from Anna, by casting herself at Anna's feet,—and that they were now friends.

Vittoria felt ashamed of Adela.

When Carlo returned, the signora attacked him boldly with all her weapons; reproached him; said, "Would my husband have treated me in such a manner?" Carlo twisted his moustache and stroked his young beard for patience. They passed from room to balcony and terrace, and Laura

brought him back into company without cessation of her fire of questions and sarcasms, saying, "No, no; we will speak of these things publicly." She appealed alternately to Agostino, Vittoria, and Countess Ammiani for support, and as she certainly spoke sense, Carlo was reduced to gloom and silence. Laura then paused. "Surely you have punished your bride enough?" she said; and more softly, "Brother of my Giacomo! you are under an evil spell."

Carlo started up in anger. Bending to Vittoria, he offered her his hand to lead her out, They went together.

"A good sign," said the countess.

"A bad sign!" Laura sighed. "If he had taken me out for explanation! But tell me, my Agostino, are you the woman's dupe?"

"I have been," Agostino admitted frankly.

"You did really put faith in her?"

"She condescends to be so excessively charming."

"You could not advance a better reason."

"It is one of our best; perhaps our very best, where your sex is concerned, signora."

"You are her dupe no more?"

"No more. Oh, dear no!"

"You understand her now, do you?"

"For the very reason, signora, that I have been her dupe. That is, I am beginning to understand her. I am not yet in possession of the key."

"Not yet in possession!" said Laura contemptuously; "but, never mind. Now for Carlo."

"Now for Carlo. He declares that he never has been deceived by her."

"He is perilously vain," sighed the signora.

"Seriously"—Agostino drew out the length of his beard—"I do not suppose that he has been—boys, you know, are so acute. He fancies he can make her of service, and he shows some skill."

"The skill of a fish to get into the net!"

"My dearest signora, you do not allow for the times. I remember"—Agostino peered upward through his eyelashes in a way that he had—"I remember seeing in a meadow a gossamer

running away with a spider-thread. It was against all calculation. But, observe: there were exterior agencies at work: a stout wind blew. The ordinary reckoning is based on calms. Without the operation of disturbing elements, the spider-thread would have gently detained the gossamer."

"Is that meant for my son?" Countess Ammiani asked slowly, with incredulous emphasis.

Agostino and Laura, laughing in their hearts at the mother's mysterious veneration for Carlo, had to explain that 'gossamer' was a poetic, generic term, to embrace the lighter qualities of masculine youth.

A woman's figure passed swiftly by the window, which led Laura to suppose that the couple outside had parted. She ran forth, calling to one of them, but they came hand in hand, declaring that they had seen neither woman nor man. "And I am happy," Vittoria whispered. She looked happy, pale though she was.

"It is only my dreadful longing for rest which makes me pale," she said to Laura, when they were alone. "Carlo has proved to me that he is wiser than I am."

"A proof that you love Carlo, perhaps," Laura rejoined.

"Dearest, he speaks more gently of the king."

"It may be cunning, or it may be carelessness."

"Will nothing satisfy you, wilful sceptic? He is quite alive to the Countess d'Isorella's character. He told me how she dazzled him once."

"Not how she has entangled him now?"

"It is not true. He told me what I should like to dream over without talking any more to anybody. Ah, what a delight! to have known him, as you did, when he was a boy. Can one who knew him then mean harm to him? I am not capable of imagining it. No; he will not abandon poor broken Lombardy, and he is right; and it is my duty to sit and wait. No shadow shall come between us. He has said it, and I have said it. We have but one thing to fear, which is contemptible to fear; so I am at peace."

"Love-sick," was Laura's mental comment. Yet when Carlo explained his position to her next day, she was milder in her condemnation of him, and even admitted that a man must be guided by such brains as he possesses. He had conceived that his mother had a right to claim one month from him at the close of the war; he said this reddening. Laura nodded. He confessed that he was irritated when he met the Countess d'Isorella, with whom, to his astonishment, he found Barto Rizzo. She had picked him up, weak from a paroxysm, on the high-road to Milan. "And she tamed the brute," said Carlo, in admiration of her ability; "she saw that he was plot-mad, and she set him at work on a stupendous plot; agents running nowhere, and scribbles concentrating in her work-basket. You smile at me, as if I were a similar patient, signora. But I am my own agent. I

have personally seen all my men in Turin and elsewhere. Violetta has not one grain of love for her country; but she can be made to serve it. As for me, I have gone too far to think of turning aside and drilling with Luciano. He may yet be diverted from Rome, to strike another blow for Lombardy. The Chief, I know, has some religious sentiment about Rome. So might I have; it is the Head of Italy. Let us raise the body first. And we have been beaten here. Great Gods! we will have another fight for it on the same spot, and quickly. Besides, I cannot face Luciano and tell him why I was away from him in the dark hour. How can I tell him that I was lingering to bear a bride to the altar? while he and the rest—poor fellows! Hard enough to have to mention it to you, signora!"

She understood his boyish sense of shame. Making smooth allowances for a feeling natural to his youth and the circumstances, she said, "I am your sister, for you were my husband's brother in arms, Carlo. We two speak heart to heart: I sometimes fancy you have that voice: you hurt me with it more than you know; gladden me too! My Carlo, I wish to hear why Countess d'Isorella objects to your marriage."

"She does not object."

"An answer that begins by quibbling is not propitious. She opposes it."

"For this reason: you have not forgotten the bronze butterfly?"

"I see more clearly," said Laura, with a start.

"There appears to be no cure for the brute's mad suspicion of her," Carlo pursued: "and he is powerful among the Milanese. If my darling takes my name, he can damage much of my influence, and—you know what there is to be dreaded from a fanatic."

Laura nodded, as if in full agreement with him, and said, after meditating a minute, "What sort of a lover is this!"

She added a little laugh to the singular interjection.

"Yes, I have also thought of a secret marriage," said Carlo, stung by her penetrating instinct so that he was enabled to read the meaning in her mind.

"The best way, when you are afflicted by a dilemma of such a character, my Carlo," the signora looked at him, "is to take a chess-table and make your moves on it. 'King—my duty;' 'Queen—my passion;' 'Bishop—my social obligation;' 'Knight—my what-you-will and my round-the-corner wishes.' Then, if you find that queen may be gratified without endangering king, and so forth, why, you may follow your inclinations; and if not, not. My Carlo, you are either enviably cool, or you are an enviable hypocrite."

"The matter is not quite so easily settled as that," said Carlo.

On the whole, though against her preconception, Laura thought him an honest lover, and not the player of a double game. She saw that Vittoria should have been with him in the critical hour of defeat, when his passions were down, and heaven knows what weakness of our common manhood, that was partly pride, partly love-craving, made his nature waxen to every impression; a season, as Laura knew, when the mistress of a loyal lover should not withhold herself from him. A nature tender like Carlo's, and he bearing an enamoured heart, could not, as Luciano Romara had done, pass instantly from defeat to drill. And vain as Carlo was (the vanity being most intricate and subtle, like a nervous fluid), he was very open to the belief that he could diplomatize as well as fight, and lead a movement yet better than follow it. Even so the signora tried to read his case.

They were all, excepting Countess Ammiani ("who will never, I fear, do me this honour," Violetta wrote, and the countess said, "Never," and quoted a proverb), about to pass three or four days at the villa of Countess d'Isorella. Before they set out, Vittoria received a portentous envelope containing a long scroll, that was headed "YOUR CRIMES," and detailing a list of her offences against the country, from the revelation of the plot in her first letter to Wilfrid, to services rendered to the enemy during the war, up to the departure of Charles Albert out of forsaken Milan.

"B. R." was the undisguised signature at the end of the scroll.

Things of this description restored her old war-spirit to Vittoria. She handed the scroll to Laura; Laura, in great alarm, passed it on to Carlo. He sent for Angelo Guidascari in haste, for Carlo read it as an ante-dated justificatory document to some mischievous design, and he desired that hands as sure as his own, and yet more vigilant eyes, should keep watch over his betrothed.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

VIOLETTA D'ISORELLA

The villa inhabited by Countess d'Isorella was on the water's edge, within clear view of the projecting Villa Ricciardi, in that darkly-wooded region of the lake which leads up to the Italian-Swiss canton.

Violetta received here an envoy from Anna of Lenkenstein, direct out of Milan: an English lady, calling herself Mrs. Sedley, and a particular friend of Countess Anna. At the first glance Violetta saw that her visitor had the pretension to match her arts against her own; so, to sound her thoroughly, she offered her the hospitalities of the villa for a day or more. The invitation was accepted. Much to Violetta's astonishment, the lady betrayed no anxiety to state the exact terms of her mission: she appeared, on the contrary, to have an unbounded satisfaction in the society of

her hostess, and prattled of herself and Antonio-Pericles, and her old affection for Vittoria, with the wildest simplicity, only requiring to be assured at times that she spoke intelligible Italian and exquisite French. Violetta supposed her to feel that she commanded the situation. Patient study of this woman revealed to Violetta the amazing fact that she was dealing with a born bourgeoisie, who, not devoid of petty acuteness, was unaffectedly enjoying her noble small-talk, and the prospect of a footing in Italian high society. Violetta smiled at the comedy she had been playing in, scarcely reproaching herself for not having imagined it. She proceeded to the point of business without further delay.

Adela Sedley had nothing but a verbal message to deliver. The Countess Anna of Lenkenstein offered, on her word of honour as a noblewoman, to make over the quarter of her estate and patrimony to the Countess d'Isorella, if the latter should succeed in thwarting—something.

Forced to speak plainly, Adela confessed she thought she knew the nature of that something.

To preclude its being named, Violetta then diverged from the subject.

"We will go round to your friend the signor Antonio-Pericles at Villa Ricciardi," she said. "You will see that he treats me familiarly, but he is not a lover of mine. I suspect your 'something' has something to do with the Jesuits."

Adela Sedley replied to the penultimate sentence: "It would not surprise me, indeed, to hear of any number of adorers."

"I have the usual retinue, possibly," said Violetta.

"Dear countess, I could be one of them myself!" Adela burst out with tentative boldness.

"Then, kiss me."

And behold, they interchanged that unsweet feminine performance.

Adela's lips were unlocked by it.

"How many would envy me, dear Countess d'Isorella!"

She really conceived that she was driving into Violetta's heart by the great high-road of feminine vanity. Violetta permitted her to think as she liked.

"Your countrywomen, madame, do not make large allowances for beauty, I hear."

"None at all. But they are so stiff! so frigid! I know one, a Miss Ford, now in Italy, who would not let me have a male friend, and a character, in conjunction."

"You are acquainted with Count Karl Lenkenstein?"

Adela blushingly acknowledged it.

"The whisper goes that I was once admired by him," said Violetta.

"And by Count Ammiani."

"By count? by milord? by prince? by king?"

"By all who have good taste."

"Was it jealousy, then, that made Countess Anna hate me?"

"She could not—or she cannot now."

"Because I have not taken possession of her brother."

"I could not—may I say it?—I could not understand his infatuation until Countess Anna showed me the portrait of Italy's most beautiful living woman. She told me to look at the last of the Borgia family."

Violetta laughed out clear music. "And now you see her?"

"She said that it had saved her brother's life. It has a star and a scratch on the left cheek from a dagger. He wore it on his heart, and an assassin struck him there: a true romance. Countess Anna said to me that it had saved one brother, and that it should help to avenge the other. She has not spoken to me of Jesuits."

"Nothing at all of the Jesuits?" said Violetta carelessly. "Perhaps she wishes to use my endeavours to get the Salaseo armistice prolonged, and tempts me, knowing I am a prodigal. Austria is victorious, you know, but she wants peace. Is that the case? I do not press you to answer."

Adela replied hesitatingly: "Are you aware, countess, whether there is any truth in the report that Countess Lena has a passion for Count Ammiani?"

"Ah, then," said Violetta, "Countess Lena's sister would naturally wish to prevent his contemplated marriage! We may have read the riddle at last. Are you discreet? If you are, you will let it be known that I had the honour of becoming intimate with you in Turin—say, at the Court. We shall meet frequently there during winter, I trust, if you care to make a comparison of the Italian with the Austrian and the English nobility."

An eloquent "Oh!" escaped from Adela's bosom. She had certainly not expected to win her way with this estimable Italian titled lady thus rapidly. Violetta had managed her so well that she was no longer sure whether she did know the exact nature of her mission, the words of which she had faithfully transmitted as having been alone confided to her. It was with chagrin that she saw Pericles put his fore-finger on a salient dimple of the countess's cheek when he welcomed them.

He puffed and blew like one working simultaneously at bugle and big drum on hearing an allusion to Vittoria. The mention of the name of that abominable traitress was interdicted at Villa Ricciardi, he said; she had dragged him at two armies' tails to find his right senses at last: Pericles was cured of his passion for her at last. He had been mad, but he was cured—and so forth, in the old strain. His preparations for a private operatic performance diverted him from these fierce incriminations, and he tripped busily from spot to spot, conducting the ladies over the tumbled lower floors of the spacious villa, and calling their admiration on the desolation of the scene. Then they went up to the maestro's room. Pericles became deeply considerate for the master's privacy. "He is my slave; the man has ruined himself for la Vittoria; but I respect the impersonation of art," he said under his breath to the ladies as they stood at the door; "hark!" The piano was touched, and the voice of Irma di Karski broke out in a shrill crescendo. Rocco Ricci within gave tongue to the vehement damnatory dance of Pericles outside. Rocco struck his piano again encouragingly for a second attempt, but Irma was sobbing. She was heard to say: "This is the fifteenth time you have pulled me down in one morning. You hate me; you do; you hate me." Rocco ran his fingers across the keys, and again struck the octave for Irma. Pericles wiped his forehead, when, impenitent and unteachable, she took the notes in the manner of a cock. He thumped at the door violently and entered.

"Excellent! horrid! brava! abominable! beautiful! My Irma, you have reached the skies. You ascend like a firework, and crown yourself at the top. No more to-day; but descend at your leisure, my dear, and we will try to mount again by-and-by, and not so fast, if you please. Ha! your voice is a racehorse. You will learn to ride him with temper and judgement, and you will go. Not so, my Rocco? Irma, you want repose, my dear. One thing I guarantee to you—you will please the public. It is a minor thing that you should please me."

Countess d'Isorella led Irma away, and had to bear with many fits of weeping, and to assent to the force of all the charges of vindictive conspiracy and inveterate malice with which the jealous creature assailed Vittoria's name. The countess then claimed her ear for half-a-minute.

"Have you had any news of Countess Anna lately?"

Irma had not; she admitted it despondently. "There is such a vile conspiracy against me in Italy—and Italy is a poor singer's fame—that I should be tempted to do anything. And I detest la Vittoria. She has such a hold on this Antonio-Pericles, I don't see how I can hurt her, unless I meet her and fly at her throat."

"You naturally detest her," said the countess. "Repeat Countess Anna's proposal to you."

"It was insulting—she offered me money."

"That you should persuade me to assist you in preventing la Vittoria's marriage to Count Ammiani?"

"Dear lady, you know I did not try to persuade you."

"You knew that you would not succeed, my Irma. But Count Ammiani will not marry her; so you will have a right to claim some reward. I do not think that la Vittoria is quite idle. Look out for yourself, my child. If you take to plotting, remember it is a game of two."

"If she thwarts me in one single step, I will let loose that madman on her," said Irma, trembling.

"You mean the signor Antonio-Pericles?"

"No; I mean that furious man I saw at your villa, dear countess."

"Ah! Barto Rizzo. A very furious man. He bellowed when he heard her name, I remember. You must not do it. But, for Count Ammiani's sake, I desire to see his marriage postponed, at least."

"Where is she?" Irma inquired.

The countess shrugged. "Even though I knew, I could not prudently tell you in your present excited state."

She went to Pericles for a loan of money. Pericles remarked that there was not much of it in Turin. "But, countess, you whirl the gold-pieces like dust from your wheels; and a spy, my good soul, a lovely secret emissary, she will be getting underpaid if she allows herself to want money. There is your beauty; it is ripe, but it is fresh, and it is extraordinary. Yes; there is your beauty." Before she could obtain a promise of the money, Violetta had to submit to be stripped to her character, which was hard; but on the other hand, Pericles exacted no interest on his money, and it was not often that he exacted a return of it in coin. Under these circumstances, ladies in need of money can find it in their hearts to pardon mere brutality of phrase. Pericles promised to send it to the countess on one condition; which condition he cancelled, saying dejectedly, "I do not care to know where she is. I will not know."

"She has the score of Hagar, wherever she is," said Violetta, "and when she hears that you have done the scene without her aid, you will have stuck a dagger in her bosom."

"Not," Pericles cried in despair, "not if she should hear Irma's Hagar! To the desert with Irma. It is the place for a crab-apple. Bravo, Abraham! you were wise."

Pericles added that Montini was hourly expected, and that there was to be a rehearsal in the evening.

When she had driven home, Violetta found Barto Rizzo's accusatory paper laid on her writing-desk. She gathered the contents in a careless glance, and walked into the garden alone, to look for Carlo.

He was leaning on the balustrade of the terrace, near the water-gate, looking into the deep clear lake-water. Violetta placed herself beside him without a greeting.

"You are watching fish for coolness, my Carlo?"

"Yes," he said, and did not turn to her face.

"You were very angry when you arrived?"

She waited for his reply.

"Why do you not speak, Carlino?"

"I am watching fish for coolness," he said.

"Meantime," said Violetta, "I am scorched."

He looked up, and led her to an arch of shade, where he sat quite silent.

"Can anything be more vexing than this?" she was reduced to exclaim.

"Ah!" said he, "you would like the catalogue to be written out for you in a big bold hand, possibly, with a terrific initials at the end of the page."

"Carlo, you have done worse than that. When I saw you first here, what crimes did you not accuse me of? what names did you not scatter on my head? and what things did I not, confess to? I bore the unkindness, for you were beaten, and you wanted a victim. And, my dear friend, considering that I am after all a woman, my forbearance has subsequently been still greater."

"How?" he asked. Her half-pathetic candour melted him.

"You must, have a lively memory for the uses of forgetfulness, Carlo, When you had scourged me well, you thought it proper to raise me up and give me comfort. I was wicked for serving the king, and therefore the country, as a spy; but I was to persevere, and cancel my iniquities by betraying those whom I served to you. That was your instructive precept. Have I done it or not? Answer, too have I done it for any payment beyond your approbation? I persuaded you to hope for Lombardy, and without any vaunting of my own patriotism. You have seen and spoken to the men I directed you to visit. If their heads master yours, I shall be reprobated for it, I know surely; but I am confident as yet that you can match them. In another month I expect to see the king over the Ticino once more, and Carlo in Brescia with his comrades. You try to penetrate my eyes. That's foolish; I can make them glass. Read me by what I say and what I do. I do not entreat you to trust me; I merely beg that you will trust your own judgement of me by what I have helped you to do hitherto. You and I, my dear boy, have had some trifling together. Admit that another woman would have refused to surrender you as I did when your unruly Vittoria was at last induced to come to you from Milan. Or, another woman would have had her revenge on discovering that she had been a puppet of soft eyes and a lover's quarrel with his mistress. Instead of which, I let you go. I am opposed to the marriage, it's true; and you know why."

Carlo had listened to Violetta, measuring the false and the true in this recapitulation of her conduct with cool accuracy until she alluded to their personal relations. Thereat his brows darkened.

"We had I some trifling together," he said, musingly.

"Is it going to be denied in these sweeter days?" Violetta reddened.

"The phrase is elastic. Suppose my bride were to hear it?"

"It was addressed to your ears, Carlo."

"It cuts two ways. Will you tell me when it was that I last had the happiness of saluting you, lip to lip?"

"In Brescia—before I had espoused an imbecile—two nights before my marriage—near the fountain of the Greek girl with a pitcher."

Pride and anger nerved the reply. It was uttered in a rapid low breath. Coming altogether unexpectedly, it created an intense momentary revulsion of his feelings by conjuring up his boyish love in a scene more living than the sunlight.

He lifted her hand to his mouth. He was Italian enough, though a lover, to feel that she deserved more. She had reddened deliciously, and therewith hung a dewy rosy moisture on her underlids. Raising her eyes, she looked like a cut orange to a thirsty lip. He kissed her, saying, "Pardon."

"Keep it secret, you mean?" she retorted. "Yes, I pardon that wish of yours. I can pardon much to my beauty."

She stood up as majestically as she had spoken.

"You know, my Violetta, that I am madly in love."

"I have learnt it."

"You know it:—what else would?... If I were not lost in love, could I see you as I do and let Brescia be the final chapter?"

Violetta sighed. "I should have preferred its being so rather than this superfluous additional line to announce an end, like a foolish staff on the edge of a cliff. You thought that you were saluting a leper, or a saint?"

"Neither. If ever we can talk together again, as we have done," Carlo said gloomily, "I will tell you what I think of myself."

"No, but Richelieu might have behaved.... Ah! perhaps not quite in the same way," she corrected her flowing apology for him. "But then, he was a Frenchman. He could be flighty without losing his head. Dear Italian Carlo! Yes, in the teeth of Barto Rizzo, and for the sake of the country, marry her at once. It will be the best thing for you; really the best. You want to know from me the whereabouts of Barto Rizzo. He may be in the mountain over Stresa, or in Milan. He also has

thrown off my yoke, such as it was! I do assure you, Carlo, I have no command over him: but, mind, I half doat on the wretch. No man made me desperately in love with myself before he saw me, when I stopped his raving in the middle of the road with one look of my face. There was foam on his beard and round his eyes; the poor wretch took out his handkerchief, and he sobbed. I don't know how many luckless creatures he had killed on his way; but when I took him into my carriage—king, emperor, orator on stilts, minister of police not one has flattered me as he did, by just gazing at me. Beauty can do as much as music, my Carlo."

Carlo thanked heaven that Violetta had no passion in her nature. She had none: merely a leaning toward evil, a light sense of shame, a desire for money, and in her heart a contempt for the principles she did not possess, but which, apart from the intervention of other influences, could occasionally sway her actions. Friendship, or rather the shadowy recovery of a past attachment that had been more than friendship, inclined her now and then to serve a master who failed distinctly to represent her interests; and when she met Carlo after the close of the war, she had really set to work in hearty kindness to rescue him from what she termed "shipwreck with that disastrous Republican crew." He had obtained greater ascendancy over her than she liked; yet she would have forgiven it, as well as her consequent slight deviation from direct allegiance to her masters in various cities, but for Carlo's commanding personal coolness. She who had tamed a madman by her beauty, was outraged, and not unnaturally, by the indifference of a former lover.

Later in the day, Laura and Vittoria, with Agostino, reached the villa; and Adela put her lips to Vittoria's ear, whispering: "Naughty! when are you to lose your liberty to turn men's heads?" and then she heaved a sigh with Wilfrid's name. She had formed the acquaintance of Countess d'Isorella in Turin, she said, and satisfactorily repeated her lesson, but with a blush. She was little more than a shade to Vittoria, who wondered what she had to live for. After the early evening dinner, when sunlight and the colours of the sun were beyond the western mountains, they pushed out on the lake. A moon was overhead, seeming to drop lower on them as she filled with light.

Agostino and Vittoria fell upon their theme of discord, as usual—the King of Sardinia.

"We near the vesper hour, my daughter," said Agostino; "you would provoke me to argumentation in heaven itself. I am for peace. I remember looking down on two cats with arched backs in the solitary arena of the Verona amphitheatre. We men, my Carlo, will not, in the decay of time, so conduct ourselves."

Vittoria looked on Laura and thought of the cannon-sounding hours, whose echoes rolled over their slaughtered hope. The sun fell, the moon shone, and the sun would rise again, but Italy lay face to earth. They had seen her together before the enemy. That recollection was a joy that stood, though the winds beat at it, and the torrents. She loved her friend's worn eyelids and softly-shut mouth; the after-glow of battle seemed on them; the silence of the field of carnage under heaven;—and the patient turning of Laura's eyes this way and that to speakers upon common things, covered the despair of her heart as with a soldier's cloak.

Laura met the tender study of Vittoria's look, and smiled.

They neared the Villa Ricciardi, and heard singing. The villa was lighted profusely, so that it made a little mock-sunset on the lake.

"Irma!" said Vittoria, astonished at the ring of a well-known voice that shot up in firework fashion, as Pericles had said of it. Incredulous, she listened till she was sure; and then glanced hurried questions at all eyes. Violetta laughed, saying, "You have the score of Rocco Ricci's Hagar."

The boat drew under the blazing windows, and half guessing, half hearing, Vittoria understood that Pericles was giving an entertainment here, and had abjured her. She was not insensible to the slight. This feeling, joined to her long unsatisfied craving to sing, led her to be intolerant of Irma's style, and visibly vexed her.

Violetta whispered: "He declares that your voice is cracked: show him! Burst out with the 'Addio' of Hagar. May she not, Carlo? Don't you permit the poor soul to sing? She cannot contain herself."

Carlo, Adela, Agostino, and Violetta prompted her, and, catching a pause in the villa, she sang the opening notes of Hagar's 'Addio' with her old glorious fulness of tone and perfect utterance.

The first who called her name was Rocco Ricci, but Pericles was the first to rush out and hang over the boat. "Witch! traitress! infernal ghost! heart of ice!" and in English "humbug!" and in French "coquin!":—these were a few of the titles he poured on her. Rocco Ricci and Montini kissed hands to her, begging her to come to them. She was very willing outwardly, and in her heart most eager; but Carlo bade the rowers push off. Then it was pitiful to hear the shout of abject supplication from Pericles. He implored Count Ammiani's pardon, Vittoria's pardon, for telling her what she was; and as the boat drew farther away, he offered her sums of money to enter the villa and sing the score of Hagar. He offered to bear the blame of her bad behaviour to him, said he would forget it and stamp it out; that he would pay for the provisioning of a regiment of volunteers for a whole month; that he would present her marriage trousseau to her—yes, and let her marry. "Sandra! my dear! my dear!" he cried, and stretched over the parapet speechless, like a puppet slain.

So strongly did she comprehend the sincerity of his passion for her voice that she could or would see nothing extravagant in this demonstration, which excited unrestrained laughter in every key from her companions in the boat. When the boat was about a hundred yards from the shore, and in full moonlight, she sang the great "Addio" of Hagar. At the close of it, she had to feel for her lover's hand blindly. No one spoke, either at the Villa Ricciardi, or about her. Her voice possessed the mountain-shadowed lake.

The rowers pulled lustily home through chill air.

Luigi and Beppo were at the villa, both charged with news from Milan. Beppo claiming the right to speak first, which Luigi granted with a magnificent sweep of his hand, related that Captain Weisspriess, of the garrison, had wounded Count Medole in a duel severely. He brought a letter to Vittoria from Merthyr, in which Merthyr urged her to prevent Count Ammiani's visiting Milan

for any purpose whatever, and said that he was coming to be present at, her marriage. She was reading this while Luigi delivered his burden; which was, that in a subsequent duel, the slaughtering captain had killed little Leone Rufo, the gay and gallant boy, Carlo's comrade, and her friend.

Luigi laughed scornfully at his rival, and had edged away—out of sight before he could be asked who had sent him. Beppo ignominiously confessed that he had not heard of this second duel. At midnight he was on horseback, bound for Milan, with a challenge to the captain from Carlo, who had a jealous fear that Luciano at Vercelli might have outstripped him. Carlo requested the captain to guarantee him an hour's immunity in the city on a stated day, or to name any spot on the borders of Piedmont for the meeting. The challenge was sent with Countess Ammiani's approbation and Laura's. Vittoria submitted.

That done, Carlo gave up his heart to his bride. A fight in prospect was the hope of wholesome work after his late indecision and double play. They laughed at themselves, accused hotly, and humbly excused themselves, praying for mutual pardon.

She had behaved badly in disobeying his mandate from Brescia.

Yes, but had he not been over-imperious?

True; still she should have remembered her promise in the Vicentino.

She did indeed; but how could she quit her wounded friend Merthyr?

Perhaps not: then, why had she sent word to him from Milan that she would be at Pallanza?

This question knocked at a sealed chamber. She was silent, and Carlo had to brood over something as well. He gave her hints of his foolish pique, his wrath and bitter baffled desire for her when, coming to Pallanza, he came to an empty house. But he could not help her to see, for he did not himself feel, that he had been spurred by silly passions, pique, and wrath, to plunge instantly into new political intrigue; and that some of his worst faults had become mixed up with his devotion to his country. Had he taken Violetta for an ally in all purity of heart? The kiss he had laid on the woman's sweet lips had shaken his absolute belief in that. He tried to set his brain travelling backward, in order to contemplate accurately the point of his original weakness. It being almost too severe a task for any young head, Carlo deemed it sufficient that he should say—and this he felt—that he was unworthy of his beloved.

Could Vittoria listen to such stuff? She might have kissed him to stop the flow of it, but kissings were rare between them; so rare, that when they had put mouth to mouth, a little quivering spire of flame, dim at the base, stood to mark the spot in their memories. She moved her hand, as to throw aside such talk. Unfretful in blood, chaste and keen, she at least knew the foolishness of the common form of lovers' trifling when there is a burning love to keep under, and Carlo saw that she did, and adored her for this highest proof of the passion of her love.

"In three days you will be mine, if I do not hear from Milan? within five, if I do?" he said.

Vittoria gave him the whole beauty of her face a divine minute, and bowed it assenting. Carlo then led her to his mother, before whom he embraced her for the comfort of his mother's heart. They decided that there should be no whisper of the marriage until the couple were one. Vittoria obtained the countess's permission to write for Merthyr to attend her at the altar. She had seen Weisspriess fall in combat, and she had perfect faith in her lover's right hand.

END OF VOLUME-7

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