

pened, and Consuelo in her disguise was really a handsome lad. It was then in this holy house that she passed her time in devotion, dividing her hours between the precious canon and the good Joseph, since the time she left Venice? Well, Zingarella, let us not make each other uneasy. We know each other's secrets, and the empress, who wishes to know everything, will be able to blame neither the one nor the other."

"Suppose even I had a secret," said Consuelo, "you know nothing of it. I, however, learned yours, when I had a conversation of an hour's duration with the empress, three days, Corilla, before you made your engagement."

"And you sought to injure me?" said Corilla, becoming flushed with anger.

"Had I told her what I knew of you, your engagement never would have been made. If you are now employed, it is because I was unwilling to take an advantage of my opportunities."

"But why did you not? You must have been a great fool," said Corilla with a candor and perversity of heart, which were wonderful to see.

Consuelo and Joseph could not repress a smile as they heard her. Joseph's was full of contempt—that of Consuelo was angelic and looked to heaven.

"Yes, madam," said she, with overpowering gentleness, "I am foolish, as you say I am, and am glad of it."

"No! no! my child; for I have an engagement and you have not," said Corilla amazed and reckless. "They told me at Venice that you had no mind, and never could succeed. That is the only truth Anzoleto ever uttered about you. What then? that is not my fault. Had I been in your place, I would have told all I knew of la Corilla, and would have represented myself as a virgin and as a saint. The empress would have believed it, and I would have supplanted every rival."

At first contempt was more powerful than indignation. Consuelo and Haydn laughed loud and long, and la Corilla who, in becoming aware of what she called the impotence of her rival, lost the aggressive bitterness which had characterised her, drew up a chair near the fire, and sought to resume the conversation, for the purpose of sounding the strong and weak points of her adversaries. Just then her eye fell on the canon, whom she had not previously seen, because the latter, guided by an instinct of prudence peculiar to his profession, had, by a gesture, bidden the fat nurse and her children to stand before him, until he should have gathered the purport of what was going on.

CHAPTER XCII.

AFTER the insinuation which she had uttered a few minutes previously, about the connections between Consuelo and the priest, the appearance of the latter had on Corilla almost the effect of the head of Medusa. She gradually, though, recovered her mind, when she reflected that she had spoken Venetian, and at once spoke to him in German, with that mixture of embarrassment and effrontery which

is the characteristic of an immodest woman. The canon, ordinarily polished and polite in his own house, did not quit his seat and did not even return her salute. Corilla, who had asked about him in Vienna, had heard all say he was extremely well-bred, passionately fond of music, and absolutely incapable of lecturing a woman, especially a singer, severely. She had intended to go and see him and to fascinate him so that he would not be able to scold her. Though in matters of this kind, she had the kind of sense in which Consuelo was deficient, she had that negligence and disregard of propriety which is the consequence of disorder, idleness, and—though this may seem perhaps extravagant—evil deportment. In persons of gross organizations all these things are linked together. Weakness of body and mind make intrigue powerless, and Corilla, who had an instinctive perception of perfidy of every kind, had not often sufficient capacity to lead a plot to a successful termination. She had therefore postponed from day to day her visit to the canon; and when she found him so cold and stern, began to be visibly disconcerted.

Then seeking to resume her position by a *coup de main*, she said to Consuelo, who yet held Angela in her arms—"Well, why do you not suffer me to kiss my child and place it at his reverence's feet, that—"

"*Dame Corilla*," said the canon, in the dry and mocking tone in which he had previously said *Dame Bridget*, "suffer that child to be unmolested." Then speaking Italian with a great deal of elegance, though perhaps too slowly and with too much accent, he continued, without uncovering himself—"I have been listening to you for a quarter of an hour, and though not very familiar with your *patois*, I have heard enough to authorise me to say that you are the most impudent person of your sex I ever met with. I think, however, you are rather stupid than depraved, rather contemptible than dangerous. You have no idea of the beautiful, and it would be useless to seek to make you comprehend it. I have but one thing to say; this young girl, this virgin as you called her just now in derision, has been sullied by your having spoken to her, and you shall do so no more. The child you have given birth to shall not be sullied by your touch; so do not lay your hands on it. Consuelo has said, 'it is a holy thing,' and I know it is. Through her intercession I took charge of it, and did not fancy that the perverse instincts it inherited from you one day might make me repent having done so. We have been told that divine goodness gives to every being the power to know and practice virtue, and we have resolved to teach it what is right, and render it amiable and docile. Henceforth, then, do not look on this child as your own. You have abandoned it, and given it up. It does not belong to you. You have deposited a sum of money to pay for its education." He made a sign to the gardener's wife, who on an intimation from him a few minutes before, had taken a bag with a seal attached to it, from the chest. This was what Corilla had sent with her daughter to the priest, and which had never been opened. He took the bag and threw it at Corilla's feet. "We have nothing to do with that, nor do we wish to. Now I beg you to leave my house and never enter it again, under any possible pretext. On these conditions, and provided you will never open your mouth in relation to the circumstances which made me acquainted with you, we will promise the most absolute silence in relation to all that relates to you. If you act in any other manner I warn you; I have more means than you fancy, to inform her imperial majesty of the state of affairs; and you may

see the wreaths thrown at your feet on the stage and the applause of your admirers, changed into a sojourn of several years in a Magdalen convent."

When he had concluded, the canon arose and by a sign bade the nurse take the child, and Consuelo and Joseph go to the other end of the room. He then pointed out the door to Corilla, who, terrified, pale, and trembling, left convulsively and half-crazed, without knowing whither she went or what had happened.

During this kind of imprecation the canon felt like an honest man who gradually had from indignation become terribly excited. Consuelo and Joseph had never before seen him angry. A priest though, never loses the habit of command, and the air of royal rule which passes into the blood and which in an instant betrayed the bastard of Augustus II., covered the canon, perhaps unknown to himself, with a kind of irresistible majesty.

La Corilla, to whom, perhaps, no man had ever spoken in such terms of austere truth before, felt more terror and alarm than her most furious lovers had ever inspired in their wildest displays of fury and revenge. An Italian, and therefore superstitious, she was terrified at the priest and his anathema, and fled through the garden while the canon, exhausted by an effort so contrary to his habit of enjoyment and pleasure, fell back on his chair pale and exhausted.

All hurried to his assistance, though Consuelo looked after the trembling and vacillating steps of Corilla. She saw her fall at the end of the alley on the grass, either from having trembled in her trouble, or because her strength could no longer support her. Led away by her kindness, and finding the scene which had passed too great for her powers, she left the canon in charge of Joseph, and ran to aid her rival, who was suffering from a violent nervous attack. Unable to soothe her, and not daring to bring her back to the priory, she sought to keep her from falling and digging her hands in the ground. Corilla was perfectly insane for some time, but when she recognised the person who had come to her assistance, and who wished to soothe her, she became at once quiet and her face assumed a bluish pallor. Her lips became fixed and remained silent, and her icy eyes were fixed on the ground, as if she dared not lift them. She suffered herself passively to be taken to the carriage which waited for her, and was assisted into it by her rival without speaking a word. "You are very ill," said Consuelo, terrified at the change of her expression. "Let me go with you for some distance, I can easily return on foot." Corilla said nothing, but repulsed her brusquely, with an expression it was impossible to interpret. Suddenly sobbing aloud, she hid her face in one hand, and with the other bade the coachman drive on, at the same time putting down the blind between her and her generous enemy.

On the next day, at the last rehearsal of *Antigone*, Consuelo was at her post, and waited for Corilla to begin. The latter sent her servant to say that she would come in half an hour. Caffariello was loud in his curses, and said he was not subject to the orders of such a creature, at the same time acting as if he would leave at once. Madame Tesi, though pale and ill, wished to witness this rehearsal, for the purpose of laughing at la Corilla's expense. She had caused a property sofa to be brought and placed at the O. P. entrance, painted like a curtain, gathered up in the back in what in French stage language is known as *manteau d'arlequin*. She soothed her friend, and insisted

on waiting for la Corilla, fancying that she delayed coming only because she was unwilling to see her. At last la Corilla came, more pale and languid even than Madame Tesi herself, who seemed to revive when she saw her in this condition. Instead of throwing off her cloak and hood with the great airs which she was used to put on, she sat on the throne at the back of the stage and spoke thus to Holzbaüer, "Mr. Manager, I assure you that I am very sick, that I have no voice, and have passed a terrible night—" (With whom?" said Tesi, languidly to Caffariello.) I cannot, therefore, go through to-morrow's rehearsal, unless I resume the *role* of Ismene, and you give that of Berenice to another person."

"What, madam?" said Holzbaüer, as if he had been stricken down by a thunderbolt. "Is it on the eve of the production of an opera, when the court has appointed the hour, you tell us of such a misfortune? Is it possible. I can consent to it under no circumstances—"

"You must," said she in her natural voice, which was far from mild. "I am engaged for second parts, and there is nothing to oblige me to undertake the first. From kindness alone I undertook to replace la Signora Tesi, and also for the purpose of preventing any interruptions to the pleasures of the court—now I am too ill to keep my promise, and you cannot make me sing unless I please."

"My dear, you will be made to sing *by order*. If you sing badly, we will be prepared for it. This is a small misfortune compared with those you have met with during your life. It is too late, though, for you to repent. You have presumed too much on your resources. You will make a *fiasco*; that is nothing to us. I will sing so that people shall forget there is such a personage as Berenice—La Porporina also as Ismene will reward the public, and all but you will be satisfied. This will be a lesson by which you can profit, and which will never happen to you again."

"You are much mistaken about the reason why I refuse," said la Corilla. "Were I not sick I would sing the part perhaps as well as another. As, though, I cannot, there is one here who will sing it as well as it ever has been sung in Vienna, and she will be able to do it to-morrow. The opera then will not be postponed, and I will resume cheerfully the role of Ismene, which does not fatigue me."

"Do you think that Madame Tesi will be well enough to-morrow to sing her own part?"

"I know perfectly well that Madame Tesi will not be able to sing for a long time," said la Corilla, speaking so that the former could hear her voice distinctly. "See how she is changed! Her appearance is terrible. I said, though, you had a perfect Berenice—one who is incomparable and superior to all others. Here she is," said she, rising and placing her hand in Consuelo's for the purpose of drawing her amid the agitated group which stood around herself.

"Do you mean me?" said Consuelo, who fancied that she dreamed.

"I mean you," said Corilla, forcing her convulsively to the throne—"Now, Porporina, you are queen. You have the highest rank. I placed you in that position, for I owed you that atonement. Do not forget it."

In his distress, Holzbaüer, on the very eve of failing, and being forced to resign, could not refuse the aid which was tendered him. From the manner in which Consuelo sang Ismene, he saw clearly

enough that she could sing Berenice in a most superior manner. In spite of his dislike to her and Porpora, he now had but one apprehension, that she would not play the part.

She seriously protested that she would not, and cordially clasping Corilla's hands, besought her not to make a sacrifice which did herself so little good, at the same time that, to her rival, it was the most terrible expiation and the most abject atonement which could be imposed on her. Corilla was fixed in her determination. Madame Tesi, terrified at the danger which menaced her, was anxious to try her voice, and resume her *role*, even if she died immediately after, for she was really ill; she did not, though, dare to do so. At an imperial theatre of those days, artistes could not be so capricious as the good-humored sovereign of our times, the *public*, permits them to indulge in. The court expected to see a new Berenice: it had been announced, and the empress relied on it.

"Come," said Caffariello to Consuelo, "make up your mind at once."

On this occasion, for the first time in her life, Consuelo showed that which had been all through her life la Corilla's characteristic. Let us record it.

"I do not know the part—I never studied it," said Consuelo. "I will not be able to learn it by to-morrow."

"You have heard it. You know it, therefore," said Porpora, in a voice of thunder, "you will sing it to-morrow. Come, no more grimaces, and let all this pretence end.—Mr. Director let the violins strike up.—You, Berenice, take your place; no sheet of music when a *role* has been read thrice—it should be known by heart—I say you know it."

"No, tutto, O Berenice,"

Sang Corilla, resuming the *role* of Ismene,—

"Tu non aprì il tuo cor."

"And now," thought Corilla, who estimated Consuelo's pride by her own, "*all she knows of me will seem trivial.*"

Consuelo, whose prodigious memory and power of acquisition, Porpora was well acquainted with, sang her *role*, music and words, without any hesitation. Madame Tesi was so much amazed at her words and play that she became much worse, and went home before the rehearsal of the second act. On the next day Consuelo had prepared her dress, and the little points of her part, and gone over all the music, with attention, by five o'clock. Her success was complete, and the empress said, as she left the theatre, "That is an admirable young girl, and I must find her a husband; I will think of it."

On the next day, she began to rehearse the *Zenobia* of Metastasio, with words by Predieri. Corilla yet insisted on her taking the first part, and on this occasion Madame Holzbauer took the second. As she was a better artist than Corilla, this opera was much better studied than the other.

Metastasio was delighted to see that his poetry, which during the wars had been neglected, returning into favor at court, and becoming the rage in Vienna. He no longer thought of his wrongs; and pressed by the kindness of the empress and the duty of his office to write new operatic dramas, he prepared himself by the study of the Greek and Latin classics, to produce one of those *chef d'œuvres*

which the Italians of Vienna and the Germans of Italy placed boldly, and at once, above the tragedies of Corneille, Racine, Shakspeare, Calderon, and every one else, to have the pleasure of telling him so to his face, without blushing at it.

Not in this part of the book, which has already become too long and discursive, will we exhaust yet more the reader's patience, which ere now has been perhaps worn out, by telling him what we think of Metastasio. We will only repeat what Consuelo whispered to Joseph.

"My dear Beppo, you cannot conceive how difficult it is to play those *roles*, said to be so sublime and pathetic. True, the words are well arranged, and flow easily from the tongue in singing, but when one thinks of the personage, I do not see where not only emotion but a serious face is to be found in pronouncing them. What a strange fancy then it is to make antiquity act according to the sentiment of to-day, and represent intrigues, passions, and moral thoughts, which perhaps in the memoirs of Baron Trenck, the Margrave of Bareith, and the Princess of Culmbach, would not be out of place, but which are nonsense in the lips of Berenice, and Arsinoe. When I was getting well at the Giants' Castle, Count Albert used often to read me to sleep, as he thought. I did not sleep, though, but heard every word. He read to me the Greek tragedies of Eschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides slowly, but with distinctness and without hesitation, having the Greek text before him. He understood the ancient and modern tongues so thoroughly that it seemed an admirably well made translation. He made it extremely faithful, he said, because he wished me to see, in the scrupulous exactness of his rendering, the extreme simplicity of the Greek genius. My God! what grandeur, and what images, what poetry, and soberness of diction! what pure and strong characters! what energetic situations! what deep and true agony! what lacerating and terrible scenes he displayed to me! I was yet feeble, and with my imagination still under the influence of the violent excitement which had produced my attack, I was overpowered by what I heard, and fancied myself, as I heard Antigone, Clytemnestra, Medea or Alectra, and that really and personally, I figured in those bloody dreams—not in the theatre looking at the foot-lights—but in the terrible solitude, amid gaping caverns, neath the columns of antique temples, or by the dreary hearth where the dead were wept for while vengeance was plotted against the living. I heard the sad chorus of the Trojan women, and of the Dardan captives. The Eumenides danced around me to what strange rhythm and to what infernal modulation. I cannot now think of it without a recollection of pleasure and terror, which makes me yet tremble. I shall never have on the stage, in the realization of my dreams, the same emotions and power which at that time filled both my heart and head. Then I became aware that I was a tragedienne, forming conceptions of which no actress had furnished me a model. Then I comprehended the drama, tragic effect, and theatrical poetry. As Albert read, I improvised in my own mind a chant in which I followed all I heard. I sometimes caught myself in the attitude and with the physiognomy of the persons who spoke; and he often paused with terror fancying that an Andromache or Ariadne lay before him. Ah,—I learned and acquired more in the course of one month than I shall in a lifetime of Metastasio's dramas. If the composers had not inspired the music with the sentiment and truth which is so deficient in the plot, I fancy I would die of disgust at the Grand-Duchess Zenobia, speaking with

the Landgrave Egle, and hearing Field-Marshal Rhadamistus disputing with Zopyrus, a Cornet of Pandours. Oh! all this is false, false as possible, my poor Beppo; false as our costumes are, false as the powdered wig of Caffariello Tiridates, as a Pompadour undress of Madame Holzbauer in an Armenian pastoral; like the rose-colored stockings of Prince Demetrius: and these scenes which look as much like Asia as Metastasio is like Homer."

"What you say," said Haydn, "explains to me why, when I write operas for the stage, if I ever reach such a climax, I feel less inspiration than when I write oratories. There the puerile artifices of the stage never contradict the truth of sentiment, in that symphonic circle where sentiment is everything and all is music—where the soul is uttered to the ear and not to the eye—it seems to me that the composer may expound all revealed to him, and lead the hearer into regions truly exalted."

As she spoke thus, Joseph and Consuelo were waiting for the company to come to rehearsal, and were walking up and down the long back scene, which at night was to represent the river Araxes, but which by day-light seemed only a vast band of indigo, with here and there a spot of ochre, to represent the mountains of Caucasus. Every one knows that these back scenes are placed the one in front of the other, so as to be rolled up on a cylinder, whenever the scene changes. In the interval which separates them from each other, the actors during the rehearsal walk to and fro; scene-shifters lie down and exchange snuff-boxes, while the oil from badly secured lamps falls on them. During the day, the actors walk up and down these dark passages, repeating the words of their parts, or talking of their business matters. Sometimes they hear little conversations not intended for them, or ascertain the secrets of others, between whom and themselves hangs a whole gulf, or a public sea.

Luckily, Metastasio was not on the other shore of the Araxes, while the inexperienced Consuelo thus uttered her artistic indignation to Haydn. The rehearsal began. It was the second time Zenobia had been called, and all passed off so well that the musicians in the orchestra applauded, as they are in the habit of doing, by tapping with their bows on the tops of their violins. The music of Predieri was charming, and Porpora conducted it with an enthusiasm that of Hasse could not call forth. The character of Tiridates was one of Caffariello's triumphs, and he did not complain that a dress had been prepared like that which would not be out of place in an opera, taken from the story of Celadon, and Clytander. If Consuelo thought her role not at all consonant with that of her heroine of antiquity, she was at least satisfied that it was really feminine. In a manner it recalled to her the situation in which she had been placed between Albert and Anzoletto. Completely oblivious of all the localities, and thinking to represent merely human sentiments, she felt that in this air she was sublime—

"Voi legete in ogni cor,
Voi sapete, O i giusti Dei,
Se non puri, voti miei,
Se innocente e la pietà."

At that moment she felt conscious of a deserved triumph and of true emotion; she needed only the look of Caffariello, who on that occasion was not restrained by the glance of la Tesi, and who really admired her, to confirm what she was already sensible of, the certainty

of producing on every one, under all possible conditions, the greatest effect with this *morceau*. She was thus reconciled to her part—satisfied with the opera, with herself, and, in one word, with the theatre. In spite of the imprecations she had uttered but a moment before, she could not resist one of those sudden palpitations which are so profound, unexpected and powerful, that it is impossible for any one not an artist to understand what centuries of labor, deception and suffering can be atoned for in an hour.

 CHAPTER XCIII.

As a pupil and half servant of Porpora, Haydn, who was fond of music, and was anxious to study even under a material point of view, the consistency of operas, obtained permission to go behind the scenes when Consuelo sang. For a few days he observed that Porpora, who had at first been ill disposed to admit him behind the scenes, authorised him to come even before he ventured to ask leave. Something new had suggested itself to the maestro. Maria Theresa, while speaking of music to the Venetian ambassador, had returned to her fixed *matrimonia*. She told him how glad she would be to see this great singer fixed at Vienna as the wife of her teacher's pupil, Haydn. She asked the ambassador about the latter, of whom he spoke highly, assuring her that he had great musical capacities, and moreover that he was an excellent Catholic. Her majesty asked him to bring about the marriage, and promised to give the young couple a household. The idea seemed very suitable to Korner, who was fond of Joseph, to whom he had already made an allowance of sixty-two francs a month to enable him to commence his musical studies without difficulty. This plan the ambassador urged on Porpora, who, fearing that Consuelo would persist in her idea of marrying a gentleman and leaving the stage, after much hesitation and resistance, (he wished his pupil to remain unloving and unmarried,) was at last persuaded. To make a decided impression, the ambassador had determined to show him Haydn's compositions, and to tell him that the trio-serenade he expressed such a high opinion of, was by Beppo. Porpora had confessed that Haydn had the germ of great capacity, that he could give it a good direction, and aid him to write for the voice; in fine, that a singer married to a composer might be extremely lucky. The youth of the pair, and their small means, made industry a matter of necessity, and Consuelo would thus be bound to the theatre. The maestro yielded. He, like Consuelo, had received no reply from Riesenburg. This silence made him apprehend some resistance to his plans, some scheme of the young count. "If I can marry," said he, "or at least promise Consuelo to another, I shall have nothing to fear in that quarter."

The difficulty lay in inducing Consuelo to consent. Persuasion would have the effect of inducing her to resist. With his Neapolitan wit, he came to the conclusion that the force of circumstances must bring about a change in her mind. She liked Beppo; and though he had subdued his passion for her, he exhibited too much zeal and devotion for Porpora, to imagine that he was not deeply in love. He thought that by not interfering with their association, he would give

him the means of inducing her to accede to his wishes. That by gradually informing him of the empress's wishes and of his own consent, he would inspire him with courage, eloquence, and persuasion. He therefore ceased at once his tyranny and brutality, and gave a free vent to the expansion of their fraternal devotion, flattering himself that things would come right more certainly than if he interfered directly with them.

Porpora, in not entertaining any doubt of success, committed a great error. He exposed Consuelo's fair fame to slander; for it was only necessary for Joseph to be seen behind the scenes twice with her, to dispose all the people of the theatre to proclaim far and wide the existence of an amour. Poor Consuelo, confiding and unsuspecting, as chaste, pure hearts ever are, had no suspicion of the danger, and therefore could take no precaution against it. Therefore on the day after this rehearsal of Zenobia, eyes were on the watch and tongues were busy at every entrance; behind every scene, there was between the actors, chorus, and employées of all degrees, a malignant or kind observation, fault-finding or benevolent, about the scandal of this intrigue, or the open avowal of the mutual understanding.

Consuelo, fully occupied by her part, thinking only of her part and artistic emotions, heard and foresaw nothing. Haydn, who was a dreamer, and was always enwrapped by the opera being sung, and the one he meditated in his musical mind, heard here and there some remarks which he did not understand, so far was he from flattering any vain hope. When, as he passed, he heard any equivocal remark, any piquant observation, he looked up, cast his eyes around him, glanced at the victim of this satire, and if he did not see her, resumed his contemplation.

Between each act of the opera there was a *buffa* interlude: on this occasion was to be performed *l'Impressario delle Canarie*, a collection of gay and very amusing scenes, by Metastasio. La Corilla, who played the part of a whimsical, perverse and absolute prima-donna, was perfect; and her success in this trifle consoled her for the sacrifice of the great part of Zenobia. During the rehearsal of this piece, and while waiting for the third act to be called, Consuelo, who was somewhat worried by her part, went behind the back scene, between the horrible valley, overhung by mountains and precipices, which was the first decoration, and the good river Araxes, on the banks of which were the most beautiful hills, which were to appear in the third set to delight the sensible spectator. She walked to and fro rather rapidly, when Joseph brought her fan, which she had left on the prompter's table, and which she used with much satisfaction. The instinct of his heart, and the intentional pre-occupation of Porpora, led Joseph mechanically to his friend's side; and from their habit of confidence and want of reserve, Consuelo received him joyously. In this double sympathy, at which not even the angels in heaven would have blushed, destiny resolved to find the commencement of strange misfortunes. We are well satisfied that women who read romances, and who are always anxious to come to the end, will at once be eager to know what. We must beg them, though, to be patient.

"Well, my friend," said Joseph, smiling, and offering Consuelo his hand, "it seems to me you are no longer so dissatisfied with the drama of our illustrious abbe, and that you found your 'prayer'—an open window, through which the demon of your genius will henceforth contrive to soar."

"Then you think I sung well?"

"Do you not see my eyes are red?"

"You wept, yes. That is well; I am satisfied with having made you do so."

"As if it were the first time. You are an artist, though, Consuelo, as Porpora wishes. The fire of success is enkindled in you. When you sang in the depths of the Böhmer-wald, you saw me weep, and did so too, to keep me company, touched by the very beauty of your own song. Now all is changed, and you quiver with pleasure at my tears. Courage, Consuelo, you are now a prima-donna, in the fullest sense of the term."

"Do not say so my beloved. I shall never be like her." As she spoke, she pointed to Corilla, who was then singing on the stage, just in front of the back scene.

"Do not be angry; I mean to say that the god of inspiration has conquered you. It is in vain that your cold reason, your austere philosophy, and your memory of Riesenburg have contended against the spirit of Python. He now occupies and overwhelms you. Confess that you are overcome with pleasure. I feel your arm tremble in mine, your face is animated, and I never before saw you look as you do now. No, you were not more agitated or inspired when Count Albert read you the Greek tragedies."

"What a wrong you do me," said Consuelo, growing pale, and at the same time withdrawing her arm from Joseph's. "Why do you utter that name here? It is holy, and should not be breathed in this temple of folly. It is a terrible name, which, like a thunderbolt, dispels at night all the illusions and phantoms of golden dreams."

"Well, Consuelo, do you wish me to tell you the truth?" Haydn after a moment's hesitation said. "You can never make up your mind to marry that man."

"Hush, hush! I promised to do so."

"Well, if you keep your promise you can never be happy with him. You leave the theatre? give up your artist life? It is too late. You have tasted a pleasure, the absence of which would torment your existence."

"I am afraid of you, Beppo. Why say such things to-day?"

"I do not know; and I speak almost under compulsion, as it were; I think when we go home I will write something sublime. What I will write will perhaps be very commonplace, but for a quarter of an hour I will be full of genius."

"How gay, how tranquil you are, while I, amid this fever of pride and glory of which you speak, experience bitter grief, and wish at the same time to laugh and cry."

"You suffer—I am sure you must. At the very time you feel your power ready to burst forth, a sad thought seizes and chills you."

"Yes it is the case—and why?"

"It means that you are an artist, and that you have made a duty, an obligation abominable in the eyes of God, and hateful to yourself—I mean the renunciation of art."

"It seemed yesterday not to be so, but to-day it does. The reason is, that my nerves are out of order, and that agitation has always a bad effect on me. I always dreamed that they controlled or influenced me. I had always gone on the stage with calmness and with careful and modest attention. To-day all is changed, and were I now to go on the stage it seems to me I would commit some sublime folly or ex-

travagance. The reins of my will escape from my control. To-morrow I trust this will not be the case, for my emotion approximates nearly to delirium and agony."

"My poor friend, I fear this will always be the case, or rather I hope so, for your power exists in this emotion alone. I have heard from every musician and actor I ever met, that but for this delirium or trouble they were powerless, and that instead of being calmed by age, they always became more impassioned to every embrace of their demon."

"This is a great mystery," said Consuelo, with a sigh. "It seems to me that the vanity and jealousy of others, the base craving for success, cannot to-morrow so completely change my being. No; I assure you, when singing Zenobia's prayer, and the duo with Tiridates, the passion and power of Caffariello bore me along on the wings of a tempest as it were. I did not think of the public, nor of my rivals, not even of myself. I was Zenobia; I thought of the immortal gods of Olympus with a truly Christian fervor, and was filled with love for good Caffariello, whom, after the ritornella, I could not look at without a smile. All this is strange, and I begin to think the dramatic art is a perpetual lie, and that God punishes us by madness, making us really believe what we seek to impose on others with. No, it is not permitted to man to abuse all the passions and emotions of real life, and make a sport of them. He wishes us to keep our souls pure and holy for true affections. When we violate this wish He strikes and punishes us."

"God—God—the will of God; yes, Consuelo, there is the mystery; who can penetrate His designs in relation to us? Would he give us from our very cradle those instincts of art, which no passion can stifle, if he forbade the use we are called to make of them? Why, in my very childhood, did I dislike the sports of my companions? Why, as soon as I became my own master, did I study music with a diligence from which nothing could divert me, and an assiduity which would have killed any other child of my age? Rest was wearying to me, and from toil I obtained energy. So, too, was it with you, Consuelo. You have told me a hundred times, when we listened to each other's story, that we might almost fancy we heard our own. So the hand of God is in everything, and all power, all inclination, is His work, even when we do not see the object. You are born artistic, and you must follow the behest of your organization. Whoever interferes with it will inflict on you a more terrible death than that of the tomb."

"Beppo," said Consuelo, terrified and almost unconscious, "if you were really my friend I know what you would do."

"What, dear Consuelo? Is not my very life yours?"

"You would kill me to-morrow, when the curtain fell, when I was become truly an artist, really inspired, for the first and last time."

"Ah!" said Joseph, with a sad gayety, "I had rather kill Count Albert or myself."

At that time Consuelo turned toward the wing, which opened directly in front of her, and looked at it with an expression of most melancholy thought.

The interior of a large theatre by daylight presents so different an appearance from that it wears when seen from the front, and by night, that it is impossible for one who has not seen it to form any idea of it. Nothing is more sad or sombre than the dark hall, deserted and silent. Were any human form to show itself distinctly in the boxes,

closed like vaults, it would seem a spectre, and make the oldest actor shrink back. The faint melancholy light, which penetrates from the windows in the roof of the back of the stage, glances across rude scaffolding and dusty beams and planks. On the stage, stripped of all perspective, the eye is amazed at the narrow space in which so many persons and passions are represented, and where they feign majestic motion, imposing crowds, irrepressible outbreaks to the spectator's eye, but which are calculated and meted out, line by line, to avoid confusion together, or contact with the fixtures. If the stage seems narrow and contracted, the height of the building destined to contain all these decorations, and to move all these machines, seems immense, when separated from all hangings, festooned clouds, the architectural cornices, and the green bows, which occupy so much of the space before the spectator. In its real disproportion, this height seems austere, and in looking on the stage one feels as if in a dungeon; in looking upward, one feels as if in some gothic church, either ruined or unfinished, for all around is rough, shapeless, fantastic, and incoherent. Ladders in disorder, just where the machinist needs them, thrown against others half indistinct amid the confusion, masses of plank, roughly sawed, decorations turned wrong side out, without any meaning, cords mingled together, like hieroglyphics. Numberless fragments, pulleys, wheels, which seem to belong to some unknown instrument of torture, resemble one of the dreams which visit us just before we wake, in which, amid our efforts to awake, we see the most incomprehensible things. All is vague and floating, and everything seems out of place. We see a man quietly at work on a rafter, which seems supported by spiders' threads, and might almost seem a sailor, grasping the rope of a vessel, or a gigantic rat, gnawing at worm-eaten planks. We hear words from we know not whence. They are eighty feet above, and the whimsical echoes filling all the corners of the strange dome, distinct or confused, as you pass to right or left, sound mysterious indeed. A terrible noise shakes the scaffolding, and is prolonged with a distinct hiss. Is the roof falling? Has one of these frail balconies been shattered and thrown down? No, it is only a sleeping scene-shifter, or a cat in search of a mouse, leaping across precipices and labyrinths hanging in air. Before you grow used to these objects and these noises you are afraid. You do not know what is the matter, and against what apparitions to be prepared. You understand nothing, and what neither the senses nor the mind comprehends, what is uncertain and unknown, always alarms the logic of the senses. The only thing we can understand when we penetrate for the first time this chaos is, that we are about to witness some wild revelry of a mysterious alchemy.

Consuelo, then, lost in thought, suffered her eyes to wander over the strange edifice, and the poetry of this disorder for the first time revealed itself to her. At each extremity of the passage formed by the two scenes was a dark passage, up and down which, from time to time, figures moved like shadows. Once she saw one of these shadows pause, as if to speak to her, and thought she saw a gesture made to attract her attention.

"Is that Porpora?" she asked Joseph.

"No," said he. "Probably some one sent to tell you the third act is about to begin."

Consuelo increased her pace and walked towards the figure, the features of which she could not distinguish. When, though, about

three paces from it, and when about to question it, the figure passed rapidly behind, down the next wing, and went behind all the scenes to the back of the stage.

"That person seems to have been eavesdropping," said Joseph.

"He seems to have hidden himself," added Consuelo who had noticed the haste with which he avoided being seen. "I know not why, but I am afraid."

She went on the stage and rehearsed the last act, towards the end of which she again felt the enthusiasm she had previously experienced. When she wanted to put on her cloak to leave, she was dazzled by a sudden light, a window above having been opened, and the sun-light falling immediately before her. The contrast of this with the previous darkness, for a moment blinded her, and she walked two or three steps at hazard, and suddenly met in the wing the same person in the black cloak who had previously made her uneasy. She saw him confusedly, yet seemed to recognise him. She uttered a cry, and rushed towards him; but he had already gone, and she could not find him.

"What is the matter?" said Joseph, handing her her cloak. Have you struck against any of the scenes? Are you hurt?"

"No," said she; "but I have seen Count Albert."

"Count Albert here?—are you sure? Is it possible?"

"It is—it is certain," said Consuelo, leading him away. She then began to pass up and down the wings, and looked into every recess. Joseph assisted her in the search, though he was satisfied she was mistaken, while Porpora called impatiently for her to come home. Consuelo found no one in the least like Albert, and when she was compelled to go with the maestro, she saw all the persons who had been on the stage pass before her, several of whom wore cloaks, not unlike the one which had attracted her attention.

"It matters not," said she to Joseph, in a low tone, "but I saw him."

"It is an ocular delusion," said Haydn. "Had Count Albert been here, he would have spoken, and you tell me that he fled twice as you approached him."

"I cannot say it was really he; and as you say, Joseph, 'it was a vision, perhaps. Oh! I wish to leave at once, to go to Bohemia. I am sure he is in danger and needs me.'"

"I see that among other things, dear Consuelo, he has communicated his madness to you. Regain your senses, I beseech you, and be assured if Count Albert be in Vienna, he will come to see you before the day pass over your head."

This hope revived Consuelo, and she increased her pace with Beppo, leaving Porpora behind her, not out of humor at the idea of being left alone by her on this occasion. Consuelo, though, thought neither of Beppo nor the maestro. She hurried home, and, all panting, ran to her room, where she found no one. Joseph afterwards asked if any one had enquired for them during their absence. The servants answered that no one had done so. Consuelo waited anxiously all day long, but to no purpose. At evening, and up to a late hour at night, she carefully examined all who passed or crossed the street. She seemed, ever and anon, to see some one come to the door and pause, but these persons always passed by, singing or coughing, until they became lost in the distance. Consuelo, satisfied that she had a waking dream, went to sleep; and, on the next day, the impression being dissipated, she confessed to Joseph, that, in fact, she had recog-

nised none of the features of the person in question. The general appearance of his form, the fashion and style of the mantle, a pale face, and something dark beneath the chin, which might be either a beard or the shadow of the hat, deeply defined in the fitful light of the theatre, had sufficed to persuade her that she saw Count Albert.

"If such a man as he whom you have so often described to me, had been in the theatre," said Joseph, "there are so many people moving about that his negligée air, his long beard, and his black hair would have attracted attention—now, I have asked every one, even the door-keepers, who admit no person without knowing and receiving authority to do so, and no stranger has been seen to-day."

"Well, then, it is certain that I dreamed—I was beside myself. I was thinking of Albert, and his shadow came. Some one stood before me whom I thought to be him. My head has become very weak. I am certain that I wept in the bottom of my heart, and something very extraordinary has happened, and something also absurd."

"Think no more of it," said Joseph, "and do not weary yourself with fancies. Go over your part, and think of that to-night."

CHAPTER XCIV.

DURING the day, Consuelo, from her windows, saw a strange troupe defile towards the square. They were rough-looking, healthy, and robust men, with long moustaches, and straps of leather bound round their bare legs, like the old buskins; they had on their heads pointed hats, and in their belts four pistols. Their arms were bare to the elbows, and in their hand was a long Albanian carbine. Over all this was a long red cloak.

"Is this a masquerade?" asked Consuelo of the canon, who had come to visit her; "we are not in the carnival, I think."

"Look at these men," said the canon, "for it will be long before we see them again, if God wills to perpetuate Maria Theresa's reign. See with what curiosity the people look at them, though; in their faces you may see something of disgust and terror. Vienna, in its days of anguish and distress, has received them more kindly than she does now."

"Are these Slavonian brigands, of whom we heard so much in Bohemia, where they have done so much mischief?"

"Yes; they are the fragments of the famous Croatian bandits, whom the celebrated cousin Francis of your friend Frederick Von Trenck, made free, and reduced to the most absolute subjection, so as to make them almost regular troops in Maria Theresa's service. Look! there is that terrible hero, Trenck, with the burnt neck, as our soldiers call him: this famous partisan, the shrewdest, coldest, the most useful of the warlike years which have passed by, the greatest boaster and robber of his age, beyond doubt, but also the most robust, the most active, and fabulously brave of modern days. That is Trenck, the Pandour, the savage chief of a band as savage as himself."

Francis Von Trenck was even taller than his cousin Frederick. He was six feet high, and his scarlet cloak, fastened to his neck by a ruby

brooch, covered a whole museum of Turkish artillery, set with gems of which his belt was the arsenal. Pistols, crooked sabres, and cutlasses, nothing was wanting to give him the air of a most skilful stager. As a cap ornament he wore a little scythe of gold, four blades of which overhung his brow. His aspect was horrible; the explosion of a barrel of gunpowder had disfigured and given him a diabolical aspect. One could not look at him without a shudder, said all the memoirs of the day.

"That then is the monster, the enemy of humanity," said Consuelo, looking back with horror. "Bohemia will long recall his march—cities burned and sacked, old women cut to pieces, and women outraged. The fields exhausted by contributions, harvests ruined, flocks destroyed, when they could not be driven off—ruin, desolation, fire and waste everywhere. Poor Bohemia! ever the rendezvous of battle, theatre of every tragedy!"

"Yes; poor Bohemia! victim of all fury, arena of all contests," said the canon, resuming the conversation, "Francis Von Trenck has renewed the sad excesses of John Ziska. Unconquered, like him, he gave no quarter, and the terror of his name was so great that his advance-guard has often taken places while his main body was fighting four miles off. Of him may be said as of Attila, 'that the grass never grew where his horse's hoof had stood.' The conquered will curse him to the fourth generation."

The Pandour leader was soon lost in the distance; but Consuelo and the cannon continued to see defile before him his magnificently caparisoned horses which his gigantic Croat Hussars led by the bridle.

"What you see is, as it were but a spangle of his wealth. Mules and wagons, loaded with arms, pictures, gems, ingots of gold and silver, are perpetually seen on the roads to his estates in Slavonia. There he keeps that treasury which could pay a king's ransom thrice. He dines from the gold service he took from the King of Prussia, at Soran, where the king himself was so near being taken. Some say he was but a quarter of an hour too late; others that he really took him, and made him pay a high price for his liberty. Be patient. The Pandour Trenck perhaps will not long enjoy his riches and glory. It is said that a criminal trial awaits him, and the most terrible accusations have been brought against him, and that the empress has a great dread of him. They say those of the Croats who have not taken their own discharge, are about to be incorporated in the imperial army and governed in the Prussian fashion. As for him, I have no great idea of the recompenses and rewards which await him at court."

"They have, it is said, saved the imperial crown."

"That is true. From the frontiers of Turkey to that of France they have spread terror, and captured the best defended places, and have conquered in the most desperate battles. Always the first to attack the front of an army, the head of a bridge, or the breach of a fort, they have won the admiration of our greatest generals and have forced our enemies to flight. The French everywhere gave way before them, and Frederick the Great grew pale, they say, like a common man, at their war-cry. No river was too rapid, no forest too dense, no marsh too deep, no rock too rugged, no torrents, or falls, or fire, could be found which they did not dare at all hours of the night, and at all seasons. Yes, certainly they have saved the crown of

Maria Theresa, far more than the old military tactics of all our generals and the ruse of our diplomats."

"If that be so, their crimes will be unpunished and their thefts sanctified."

"It may be they will be too severely punished."

"One never casts aside persons who have performed such services."

"Excuse me," said the canon maliciously. "When they are no longer needed."

"But was not every excess which they committed in the empire and the territories of the allies overlooked?"

"Certainly. When they were necessary, they were forgiven."

"And now?"

"When outrage is not necessary, they reproach themselves with having permitted it."

"And the great heart of Maria Theresa?"

"They have profaned the churches."

"I see. Trenck is lost, canon."

"Hush! That should not be said except in a whisper."

"Have you seen the Pandours?" said Joseph, coming into the room quite pale.

"Yes, with little pleasure."

"Well, did you not recognise them?"

"It is the first time I ever saw them. How should I know them?"

"No, it is not the first time, Consuelo. We saw them in the *Böhemer-wald*."

"Not to my knowledge."

"You have then forgot a hut where we passed a night, and where we saw ten or twelve men sleeping around us."

Consuelo remembered the hut, and having met these savage-looking persons, whom she, as well as Joseph, took for smugglers. Other emotions in which she had not participated, engraved on Joseph's memory all the circumstances of this stormy night. "Well," said he, "those smugglers who were not aware of our presence by their side, and who left in the morning with sacks and heavy bags, were Pandours. They had the arms, figures, moustaches, and cloaks which have just passed; and Providence, when he knew it not, protected us from the worst enemies we could possibly meet during all our travels."

"Certainly," said the canon, to whom Joseph had often detailed all the incidents of their journey. "These honest fellows had given themselves a leave of absence, as they are wont to do when their pockets are full; and they come to the frontier to return home by a long circuit, rather than travel through the empire with their booty, for they run some risk of being called on to account for it. Be assured, however, they did not reach home without difficulty, for on the road they kill and rob each other, so that none but the strongest of the party ever reaches their forests and caves. He brings with him the booty of his comrades."

The hour of performance came, and made Consuelo forget the sombre thoughts which Trenck's Pandours had evoked. She had no dressing-room, hitherto Madame Tesi having lent hers. On this occasion, though, la Tesi, offended at her success, had carried away the key, and the prima donna of the night was annoyed to find a place of refuge. These and similar treacheries are usual in theatres, for they irritate and disturb the rival, the temper of whom is sought to be of

fended. She loses time in finding a dressing-room, and is afraid she will find none. The hour advances, and as her companions pass her, they say, "What, not dressed yet! The curtain will soon rise." At last, after many efforts, by means of threats and menaces, a room is found, without, however, anything that is required. All the sewing-women's good-will having been gained by some malicious enemy—the costume either does not fit or is unfinished. The dressing-women wait on any one but the victim of this petty malice. The bell rings. The call-boy (the *butta fuori*) shouts down the corridors, (*Signore e Signori, si va cominciar.*) terrible words which frighten the debutante into a chill. She is not ready and hurries. She hurries, and breaks her corset-strings, she tears her cuffs, puts on her mantle awry, and her crown will fall as soon as she gains the stage. Trembling, angry, and nervous, with tears in her eyes, she must yet wear a celestial smile. She must have a pure and fresh voice, and restrain herself when she is almost choking with anger. Even coronets of flowers thrown at such a time on the stage conceal a thorn.

Fortunately for Consuelo, she met Corilla, who said, taking her hand, "Come into my dressing-room; la Tesi has flattered herself that she would serve you as she did me at the commencement of my engagement. I will, however, come to your aid, if it be only to foil her and make her angry. I will have that satisfaction at least. As you now go on, Porporina, there is danger of my seeing you far surpass me, as every time that I have met you has been the case. You will certainly forget how I act now to you, but will always remember what wrong I have done you."

"Wrong done me, Corilla?" said Consuelo, as she entered her rival's dressing-room and began her toilet behind the screen, while the German dressing-women divided their attentions between the two singers, who were able to speak Venetian without being understood. "Really, I do not know what wrong you have done me. I have forgotten all."

"The proof that you have not forgiven me is, that you speak to me as if you were a duchess, and seem to despise me?"

"Well, I do not remember any great wrong you have done me," said Consuelo, restraining her repugnance to familiarity with a woman who had so little in common with her.

"Is what you say true? Have you forgotten poor Zoto?"

"I was free and had a right to forget him. I have done so," said Consuelo, fastening her royal buskin, with a courage and freedom of will which confers on us at times the advantages of perfect use. She made then a brilliant *roulade* to keep herself in voice.

Corilla replied by another *roulade* for the same purpose. She then paused to say to her attendant, "Diavolo, you lace me too tight. Think you I am a Nuremburg doll? These Germans," said she in Venetian, "do not know what shoulders are. They would make us square as their own old women, if we would let them. Porporina, do not let them bundle you up to your ears as they did last time. It was absurd."

"Ah! my dear, that is the empress's order.—These ladies know it, and I would not make a difficulty about such a trifle."

"Trifle! one's shoulders a trifle?"

"I do not say so of yours, for they are beautiful as possible; but—"

"Hypocrite!" said Corilla, sighing; "you are ten years younger than I am, and the beauty of my shoulders is now traditional."

"You are the hypocrite," said Consuelo, terribly annoyed by this kind of conversation—and as she wished to end it, she began at once to sing.

"Be silent," said Corilla at once; "you drive a thousand poniards into my bosom. Ah! I would willingly yield you all my lovers—I am sure to find others. I can never, however, dispute with you in the matter of voice and manner. Hush! for I wish to strangle you."

Consuelo saw clearly that Corilla did not jest altogether, and that this mocking flattery concealed real suffering. After pausing an instant, the latter said, "How do you make that phrase?"

"Do you wish to make it? Well, I will give it to you," said Consuelo, with admirable grace. "Listen, I will teach you. Insert it to-night somewhere on your *role*—I will make another."

"Then it will be handsomer than this, and I will gain nothing!"

"No; I will make no change. Porpora does not like these things, and to-night he will have one reproach less to make me. See, here is the passage," and she passed it through the screen to Corilla, who began at once to study it. Consuelo assisted her, and after repeating it several times, succeeded perfectly. Their toilets were yet progressing.

Before Consuelo had put on her dress, Corilla suddenly pushed aside the screen, and kissed her thankfully for the sacrifice she had made of the embellishment. It was not an impulse of pure gratitude that induced her to do so. She was also influenced by a wish to ascertain the fashion of her rival's corset, in order to detect any imperfection. Consuelo, however, did not lace; her waist was loose as possible, and her chaste and noble form was indebted to art for nothing. She saw la Corilla's idea, and smiling, thought—"You may examine my person and look into my heart, no falsehood is there."

"Zingarella," said Corilla, resuming, in spite of herself, her bitter, coarse tone; "do you then love Anzoletto no more?"

"Not in the least," said she with a smile.

"Yet he loved you well."

"No, no," said Consuelo, with the same air and the same expression of conviction.

"He told me so," said Corilla, fixing her clear blue eyes on her, expecting to find some sorrow and to awake some regret for the past, in her rival's heart.

Consuelo was not proud of her penetration, but, like all pure and sincere persons, she was amply able to combat an astute one. She no longer loved Anzoletto; she was not ignorant of suffering, of outraged self-esteem, and therefore allowed Corilla this triumph of vanity.

"He told you an untruth; he never loved me."

"But did you never love him?" said she, rather surprised than astonished at this confession.

Consuelo knew that she could not make a half-confession. Corilla wished to know all, and she resolved to satisfy her. She said: "I loved him dearly."

"And you own it? Have you no pride, child?"

"I had enough to overcome it."

"That is to say, you were philosopher enough to seek consolation from another? From that little Haydn, perhaps, who is as poor as possible?"

"That would be nothing. I have consoled myself with no one in the manner you mean."

"Ah! true; I forgot, you pretended. Do not say such things, my dear; you make yourself ridiculous."

"Then I will not, unless I am questioned; and I will not permit every one to do so. I have suffered you, dear Corilla, to take that liberty, but you must not abuse it, if you are my friend."

"You are a perfect mask," said Corilla. "You act the innocent. You have so much good sense, that I am inclined to think you pure, as I was when twelve years of age. Yet this is impossible. Ah, Zingarella, you are very shrewd, and can make men believe anything you please."

"I will make them believe nothing, for I will not permit them to be interested in my affairs enough to question me."

"That will be best. — They always make a bad use of our confessions, and no sooner wrest them from us than they take advantage of them. I see you know your own business. You are right in not wishing to inspire love. By not doing so you will have no trouble, no storms. You will act freely, without deceiving any one. I could not act so; amid my greatest successes I always committed some folly, which destroyed all. I conceive a passion for some poor devil, and then farewell fortune! Once I could have married Zustiniani. Yes, I could, for he adored me, but I could not bear him. That miserable Anzoleto, though, pleased me. I lost my position. Give me some advice; you will be my friend, will you not? You will preserve me from the weakness of my heart, and the effects of my scheming brain. To begin—I must tell you that for eight days I have had an inclination for a man the influence of whom rapidly decays, and who, in a short time, may be rather injurious than beneficial to one at court. He is worth millions, but may be ruined in an instant. I wish to separate myself from him before he drags me down in his own ruin. Ah! the devil plots against me, for here the man comes, and I feel the fire of jealousy rushing to my face. Shut the screen closely, Porporina, and do not move; I do not wish him to see you."

Consuelo closed the screen. She needed not Corilla's advice to avoid being examined by her lovers. A man's voice, musical and clear, though without freshness, was heard at the door. He tapped for form's sake, and came in without pausing for a reply.

"Horrible profession!" thought Consuelo. "No, I will not suffer myself to be influenced by the intoxication of the stage. Behind the scenes all things are impure."

She sat in a corner, deeply mortified at being in such company, and indignant and afraid at the manner in which Corilla had conversed with her. She had plunged at once into an abyss of corruption, of which she previously had no idea.

CHAPTER XCV.

WHILE, from fear of interruption, she hastily concluded her toilet, she heard the following dialogue in Italian:

"Why do you come here? I told you not to come to my dressing-room. The empress has, under the most severe penalty, forbidden us to receive any one but our brother artists here; and we can only see them when the business of the theatre requires it. See what you expose me to! I did not think things were so badly managed."

"When people pay well they go anywhere. Beggars are the only people who find any difficulty in going where they please. Come now, be more civil, or I will never see you again."

"Would to heaven that you never would! Go! Why do you not?"

"You seem to be so anxious, that I remain out of spite."

"I tell you unless you go I will send for the master of the theatre, and thus get rid of you."

"He can come as soon as he is tired of life."

"Are you mad? I tell you that you compromise me by this conduct, and make me violate a rule recently imposed by her majesty. You expose me either to a heavy fine or to discharge."

"Fine? I will pay your fine with my cane. As for a discharge, it is exactly what I want. I will take you to my estate, and there we will lead a delicious life."

"Follow such a brute as you? Never! Let us go out together, then, since you will not leave me alone."

"Alone, my charmer? I wish to be sure of that before I go. That screen is utterly out of place in such a small room. It seems to me if I pushed it over I would do you a service."

"Do not so, sir. A lady is dressing there. Brigand as you are would you kill or injure a woman?"

"A woman? Ah! that is a different matter. I wish, however, to see if that woman does not wear a sword."

The screen began to tremble, and Consuelo, who had finished her toilet, put on her mantle, and while the first fold of the screen was closing, tried to open the last, and escape through the door, which was only a few feet distant. Corilla, however, saw her intention, and said—"Be still, Porporina; if he did not find you he would be satisfied some man was hidden there, and would kill me." Consuelo resolved to come out, but la Corilla had closed the screen, and prevented her from doing so. Perhaps she hoped that by exciting his jealousy she would enkindle passion enough to keep him from observing the grace of her rival.

"If there be a lady there, let her answer me. Madam, are you dressed? Can I do homage to charms?"

"Sir," said Consuelo, in obedience to an intimation from Corilla, "keep your compliments for some one else, and excuse me. I am not visible."

"That means, this is precisely the time to look at you," said Corilla's lover, attempting to go behind the screen.

"Take care," said Corilla, with a forced laugh. "What if in place of a naked shepherdess you see a dowager?"

"Diable! But no; her voice is too fresh to belong to a person more than twenty years old. Besides, if she had not been pretty, you would have suffered me to see her long ago."

The screen was very high, and, in spite of his tallness, the lover could not see above it unless he threw down all the articles of Corilla's toilet, which hung on the chairs. Now, too, that he was not afraid that her inmate was a man, the game amused him.

"Madam," said he, "if you be old and ugly, I will respect your asylum. If though, you be young and handsome, do not let Corilla slander you, and only give me leave to pass the lines." Consuelo was silent. "Ah! on my word," said he, after a moment's silence, "I will not be duped. If you were old and ugly you would not bear to hear