

CHAPTER V.

THE REGATTA.

PRINCE EUGENE was watching the little French clock on the marble mantelpiece of his dressing-room, wondering, in his impatience, whether it ever would strike the hour of twelve, the hour at which he was to witness the departure of the Strozzi for the regatta.

Mademoiselle Victorine had delivered her mistress's message, and the heart of her lover was once more bounding with joy. His eyes flashed with a light which, except on a day of battle, had never been seen within their sad depths since the dreadful period of his parting with Laura. Forgotten was all the anguish of those three long years; forgotten all doubts, forgotten all fears. She loved him; she was true to her vows, and he would bear her away from her ravisher to the spouse that was hers before Heaven.

But how long—how unspeakably long—the hours that intervened between him and happiness! He was wishing for some interruption that would break this monotonous waiting, when the door opened, and Conrad came forward.

"My lord, I have found a commissionnaire for you; one who professes to know Venice and its golden book by heart."

"Introduce him at once: I wish to speak with him."

Conrad opened the door and signed to some one without, when the commissionnaire advanced and bowed.

"Why are you masked?" asked the prince, who remembered the warning which Laura had sent him the day previous.

"Eccellenza, every Venetian of good character has a right to wear a mask during the carnival."

"And every criminal can take advantage of the right," replied Eugene. "Behind a mask every man has a good character, for nobody knows who he is."

"I beg pardon, excellenza. The republican fathers, through their sbirri, know every man in Venice. If you will take the trouble to look around you in the market-place, you will see

how now and then a masker is touched on the shoulder, when his mask drops at once, or he escapes among the crowd to avoid public exposure."

"Then, I suppose that a stranger has no hope of seeing the beautiful women here?" observed Eugene, smiling.

"Pardon me; to-day, at the regatta, no masks will be worn, and your excellency will see all the beauty of Venice, both patrician and plebeian."

"Why, then, do *you* wear a mask?"

"I wear it habitually, having a fancy to go about incognito."

"Nevertheless, you must remove it now, for I cannot take a man into my service incognito."

The man raised his left hand, withdrew the mask, and revealed to sight a face that was colorless save where it had been marked with a deep-red scar from temple to jaw.

"You are indeed conspicuous, and not to be mistaken by those who have seen you once. Whence came this scar?"

"I received it two years ago, excellenza, at the taking of Prevosa."

"You have been a soldier, then?" asked Eugene, his countenance at once expressing interest.

"I have, indeed; and but for the loss of my right hand by the sabre of an infernal Turk, I would be a soldier still."

"You have written the conquests of the republic upon your body, my friend," said Eugene, kindly. "But your mutilations are so many orders of valor; they are the ineffaceable laurels which victory places on a brave man's brow."

A slight flush overspread the sallow face of the ex-soldier, and his eyes sought the floor.

Eugene contemplated him for several moments with the sympathy—even the respect—which a military man feels for extraordinary bravery, as attested by such wounds as these.

"With what manner of weapon were you cut in the face?" said he. "Not with a sabre, for the scar is curved."

"It was not a sabre-cut, excellenza," replied the man, in a low, tremulous voice. "I was in the breech, fighting hand to hand with a Turk, whom I had just overthrown. While I was

stooping over his prostrate body, he drew forth a yataghan and gashed my face as you see."

"I knew it was a dagger-thrust," replied Eugene. "Well, this scar shall be your best recommendation to me, for I, too, am a soldier."

"Eccellenza, I thank you, but I have other and weighty recommendations from my employers. Moreover, here is my license as commissionnaire from the Signiory."

So saying, he would have handed the prince a document with a large seal appended to it, but Eugene waved it away.

"I prefer the license to serve that is written on your body, my friend. You have been a brave soldier, you will therefore be a faithful servant. You say that you are well acquainted with Venice?"

"Ay, indeed, signor; I know every palace and every den, every nobleman and every bravo, in Venice."

"You are, then, the very man I need. Make your terms with my secretary. But be loyal to me, and remember that the scar you had received in your country's service was the only recommendation I required when I took you into mine."

"Eccellenza!" exclaimed the man, kneeling, and raising the prince's doublet to his lips, "I will bear it in mind, and serve you faithfully."

"I believe you, my brave! Rise and tell me your name."

"Antonio, signor."

"Antonio.—Well, Antonio, you accompany me to the regatta to-day."

"My lord," said Conrad, entering the room, "your gondola is below, and his highness the Elector of Bavaria is here."

A deep flush of joy overspread Eugene's countenance as he advanced to welcome his friend. Max Emmanuel had chosen the gorgeous costume of a Russian boyar. His dress was of dark-blue velvet, bordered with sables, and buttoned up to the throat with immense brilliants. On his head he wore a Russian cap, with a heron's plume fastened in front by a rosette of opals and diamonds.

Eugene surveyed him with undisguised admiration. "You are as gloriously handsome as a Grecian demi-god," cried he,

enthusiastically. "I pity the lovely women of Venice to-day, when they come within sight of the hero of Buda."

"I absolve them all from tribute except one," returned Max.

"What! In love already!"

"My dear young friend, I saw yesterday on a balcony a black-haired beauty far beyond peri or houri of my imagination!—majestic as Juno, voluptuous as Venus, with eyes that maddened, and smile that ravished me. Unless I find this houri, I am a lost, broken-hearted man!"

"Then you have not yet begun your siege?"

"Impossible to begin it. The Duke of Modena was with me, and you know what an enterprising roué he is. To have pointed her out to him would have been to retreat with loss. So I was obliged to say nothing: but I will see her again if, to do so, I have to reduce Venice to a heap of ashes!"

"Peace, thou insatiable conqueror, or amorous ambition will intoxicate you. You are certainly just the very cavalier to storm and take the citadel of a woman's heart; but you are the Elector of Bavaria, a reigning prince, and son-in-law of the Emperor of Austria."

"My dear Eugene, no ugly moral reflections, as you love me! I am here to enjoy the glow of the warm blood that dances through my veins—to sip the ambrosia that pleasure holds to my lips—in short, I am, body and soul, a son of the short-lived carnival that begins to-day. Don't preach; but pray if you like, for my success, and help me in my need."

"Help you? I should like to know how I am to do that!" said Eugene, laughing. "But stay—I have a man in my service who professes to know everybody in Venice. So, if you should see your houri to-day, point her out, and doubtless Antonio will tell us her name. Ah! Twelve o'clock at last!—Come, come, let us go."

"You have not made your toilet, Eugene. What costume have you selected?"

"The very respectable one of a little abbé," was the reply.

"Respectable, if you will, but excessively unbecoming, and unworthy of the Prince of Savoy. I perceive that you, at least, have no wish to make conquests to-day."

"No—all my victories I hope to win by the help of my good sword."

"Do you go with me in my gondola, reverend sir?"

"I in your magnificent gondola, at the side of such a Phoebus-Apollo! I might well despair of making conquests in such company; and, for aught you know, I may be desirous of attracting the attention of some fair lady who is not taken by appearances."

The elector looked up in surprise. He had never heard an expression like this from Eugene's lips before; and now he saw clearly that his demeanor had changed, that his eye was restless and bright, his cheek flushed, his whole countenance beaming with some inward hope or realized joy.

"Eugene," said he, touching his friend's shoulder, "Venice holds the secret of your love; and you have tidings that have lightened your heart. I read them in your eyes, which are far from being as discreet as your lips."

"Perhaps so; but the secrets of love are sacred—sacred as those of the confessional. Nevertheless, I may confide in you sooner than you expect, for I may need your help as well as you mine."

The two young men went out arm in arm, followed by the suite of the elector, and, behind them, by Conrad and Antonio.

"Who is that mask?" asked Max, as he passed by.

"My new commissionnaire, Antonio—he that is to tell us the name of your belle."

They were by this time on the marble stairs that led to the water, where side by side lay the superb gilded gondola of the Elector of Bavaria and the inconspicuous one of the Prince of Savoy.

As the two princes were descending the stairs, a gayly-dressed nobleman sprang from the gondola of the elector, and advanced respectfully to meet them.

"Monsieur le Marquis de Villars," said Max, bowing, "I am happy to see that you have accepted a seat with me."

"It is an honor for which I am deeply grateful, your highness," replied the marquis; "and one which I accept in the name of my gracious sovereign, for whom alone such a compliment can be intended."

"You are mistaken, marquis; I invited you that I might enjoy the pleasure of your company to-day. Allow me, Prince of Savoy, to introduce to you the Marquis de Villars, the French ambassador to the court of Bavaria."

"There is no necessity for us to know each other," replied Eugene. "The marquis is a Frenchman, and I have no love for that nation; particularly for those who are favorites of Monsieur Louvois. Adieu, your highness."

And without vouchsafing a word to the French ambassador, Eugene entered his gondola.

"I must apologize for my friend," said the courteous Max Emmanuel to the marquis. "He has been sorely injured both by the King of France and his minister. Forget his bluntness, then, I beseech you, and forgive his unpleasant remark."

"He is your highness's friend, and that at once earns his forgiveness," replied De Villars. "But that the friend of the Elector of Bavaria should be the enemy of my sovereign I deeply regret; for he may prejudice your highness against the King of France. He may transfer his aversion to—"

"Let us rather suppose that I may transfer my love of France to him," said Max Emmanuel. "But let us eschew politics, and enjoy the bliss of the hour. To-day la bella Venezia puts forth all her charms. And as the swift gondolas skim over the green waters of the lagoon, so flies my heart toward my bellissima Venetiana!"

At twelve o'clock, Laura left her dressing-room to join the Marquis de Strozzi and his sister in the drawing-room below.

"Great heavens, how beautiful!" cried Lucretia, embracing her. "I have not been wise in placing myself so near you, bewitching Laura. Ottario, do look at her; did you ever see such a vision of beauty?"

"Pray do not force the marquis to praise me," said Laura; "you are perfectly aware that I am indifferent to his approbation. But as regards beauty in Venice, where beautiful women abound, the Countess Canossa is acknowledged to be la bellezza delle belle. And to think that nobody will see you to-day in my closed gondola!"

"You adhere to your resolution to have your gondola curtailed?" asked the marquis.

"Yes," replied Laura, without bestowing a glance upon him.

"And I rejoice to know it," exclaimed he, passionately, "for I alone will drink in all your beauty. For me alone have you worn this becoming costume."

"You know perfectly well that my dress was chosen by your sister."

"Catharine Cornaro was by adoption a Venetian," returned Strozzi, "and since you have willingly donned her dress, I must accept it as an earnest of your consent to appear as the wife of a Venetian noble."

To this taunt Laura made no reply. She gave her hand to the countess, and they passed into the corridors together. The walls were hung with *chefs-d'œuvres* of Titian, Tintoretto, Paul Veronese, and Gioberti, all gorgeously framed in Italian style; and between each picture was a mirror that extended from floor to ceiling. Through these magnificent halls went Laura, as regardless of their splendor as of the passionate glances of the man who walked by her side, so near and yet so far, so very far away from her heart.

The gondola that awaited them was an heir-loom of the Strozzi, and was never used except on gala-days. It was well known to the Venetians, every one of whom was accustomed to point to it with pride, saying, "There goes the bucentoro of the Strozzi!"

As Laura was about to step into this glittering bucentoro, the gondoliers around, delighted with her beauty, shouted, "Evviva la Marchesa Strozzi!" To their great astonishment, the marchesa, instead of bowing and smiling as is usual on such occasions, gave no other evidence of having heard their greeting than that which by a frown and a flash of her dark eyes might be construed into a signal of displeasure, as she disappeared behind the silken hangings of the bucentoro.

The centre of the gondola was supported by gilded pillars, surmounted by a canopy of silk and gold. Behind this canopy was a sort of pavilion, bordered by seats cushioned with gold brocade. In the centre was a table, of costly material and make, on which stood a golden vase of rare flowers. The pil-

lars also were wreathed with flowers, which appeared to be carried from column to column by flying Cupids that were holding up the garlands in their chubby little hands. In short, the temple was worthy of the divinities, one of whom was light-hearted and coquettish, the other proud and serious. Between them was the Marquis de Strozzi, in the rich habit of a Greek corsair—a character which his handsome, sinister face was well fitted to represent. His gloomy black eyes were fixed upon Laura, while his hands toyed with a silken cord that hung from the pillar against which he was leaning.

The eyes of the countess were fixed upon the cord, and presently she raised them with a glance of inquiry to her brother. He nodded, and his sister smiled. Then throwing herself back among the cushions, she raised her little foot to a gilded stool that was before her, and leaning her head against the pillar, looked out upon the waters with an expression that might have become Danaë awaiting her shower of gold.

Laura, on the contrary, wore a look of resolve that seemed inappropriate to the scene and the occasion. But her thoughts were far away from the frivolities that interested Lucretia. She had determined that, in presence of all Venice and of the foreigners that had assembled there to celebrate the carnival, she would burst asunder the compulsory ties that bound her to Strozzi. Before the world she would give the lie to that simulated bridal, and fly to him who was, by all the laws of God, her true and only spouse.

Thus thought Laura, while far away from the crowds that from gondola to gondola were greeting one another, the bucentoro pursued its solitary way over the water. She had managed to draw aside the curtain and to look around for him who to her filled the world with his presence. At last she saw him. He was there—there! and he saw her, for his gondola changed its course, and came nearer. Like an arrow it sped across the waters, taking heed of no impediments, dashing into the midst of other gondolas, as reckless as a pirate of the consternation it created among the bewildered gondoliers, who were forced to give it passage, or be dashed aside like so much spray; while Eugene's gaze was fixed upon the golden bark of the Strozzi—the argosy that bore such precious freight. At

last they neared it, and Eugene could see the little white hand, holding a bouquet of roses from between the crimson hangings of the pavilion. His eyes brightened, and his whole being seemed transfigured. Gallant and comely he looked—a knight worthy of any woman's love.

The Elector of Bavaria had seen all the movements of Eugene's gondola. He had seen it suddenly change its course, and had watched the prince pointing with uplifted hand to some object in the distance, which, to judge by his bearing, one would have supposed was a breach to mount. Max Emmanuel had smiled and said to himself: "In yonder direction lies Eugene's love-secret. We had better follow, for we may be useful in time of need. He seems to me to be too bashful to manage an intrigue with skill."

So the elector gave orders to follow the gondola of the Prince of Savoy; and now his gondoliers, too, were rowing for their lives, while many a bright eye was turned admiringly upon his tall, graceful form.

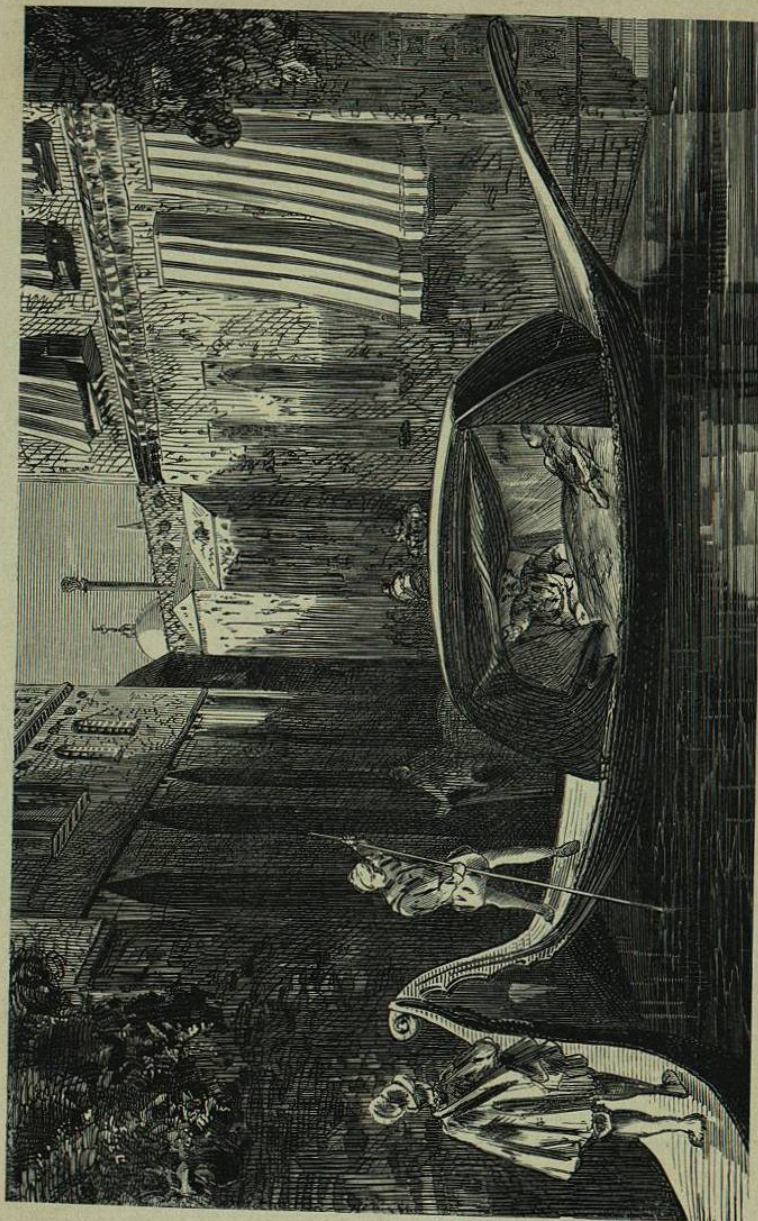
Laura was not the only person that was looking out from the curtained bucentoro. The marquis, too, had seen the two approaching gondolas; and now, as the foremost one came full in view, he passed his arm outside, and, while Laura's head was turned away, made a sign to Antonio, who responded with another.

The gondolas were now so close that their occupants were easily recognized. Strozzi saw Eugene's passionate gaze, and guessed that it had been returned, although the face of his wife had been averted, so that he had not seen the act.

At this moment Laura turned, and gave a quick, searching glance around the pavilion.

"You are looking for me?" asked Strozzi, with a singular smile. "I am here, my wife, to protect you from all danger; and as I am weary of standing, and as there is no seat for me beside you, I will take the place that my heart covets most."

And, before Laura could prevent him, he had thrown himself at full length, had clasped her feet, and raised them over his knee, so that they had the appearance of having been placed in that familiar position by her own will. He then pulled the silken cord which he had held all this while in his



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hand, and the curtains of the pavilion were rolled up, exposing its three occupants to the view of the whole Venetian world. On one side lay Lucretia, in her Danaë-like position, and on the other, gazing with the rapture of an accepted lover into the face of the marchioness, lay Strozzi. The picture was unequivocally that of a pair of lovers, and those who knew her not as his wife were convinced that in Laura they beheld the mistress of the Marquis de Strozzi.

"*Evviva!*" shouted the enraptured multitude, dazzled by the beauty of the tableau. No one heard Laura's despairing entreaty for release from a posture so humiliating. Nor had any one heard the exclamation of delight that burst from the lips of the elector, as in Lucretia he recognized his houri.

"There she is!" exclaimed he to the French ambassador.

"Who?" asked the latter, in astonishment.

"The most beautiful woman that ever distracted a susceptible man," was the reply. "Do you not know her?"

"I regret to say that I do not, but I will make it my duty to discover her abode, and communicate the discovery to your highness."

"Thank you," began the elector. But suddenly he stopped, and gazed intently upon Prince Eugene, who was standing at the stern of his gondola, only a few feet distant from the bucentoro of the Strozzi. The elector directed his gondoliers to approach that of the prince, and, springing from one boat to the other, he laid his hand on Eugene's shoulder.

"Friend," said he, "I do not desire to force myself into your confidence; but lest I become your unconscious rival, answer me one question. Is that lady there, in the red-velvet dress, the object of your unhappy attachment?"

"No, dear Max," replied Eugene, with his eyes fixed steadfastly upon Laura.

"Truly?"

"Truly, I do not know her; but if you ask Antonio, he will tell you."

With these few words Eugene turned away, and, in a low voice, promised a rich reward to his gondoliers if they would but touch the gondola of the Marquis Strozzi.

The elector beckoned to Antonio. "Who is that lady in the gilded gondola close by?" said he.

"Which one, your highness?"

"The one in red velvet."

"That is the Countess Lucretia Canossa, sister of the Marquis de Strozzi."

"Is she married?"

"Yes, your highness, to a man who has squandered her fortune; so that but for her brother she would be penniless."

The elector thanked Antonio, and leaped back into his own gondola. The Marquis de Villars, meanwhile, who knew that gondoliers were the news-givers of Venice, had ascertained quite as much of the position of the countess as Max Emmanuel had done during his short absence.

"I can answer your highness's question now," whispered he. "I have learned every thing concerning her that it is needful to know from the gondoliers."

"And I, too, know all that I care to know," replied the elector; "so here am I, like Rinaldo before the enchanted gardens of Armida: I must and will enter!"

"Of course you will. What woman can withstand the fascinations of the handsomest cavalier in Europe?" observed the marquis; adding to himself: "And thank Heaven that I know the Armida of his longings, for she must draw this Rinaldo, not only into her own toils, but into those of France."

Eugene was standing on the edge of his gondola, his passionate gaze fixed upon the group that had been disclosed by the rising of Strozzi's silk curtain. What could it mean? Oh! it was horrible! To see Laura lying back in a position so voluptuous, her feet clasped in Strozzi's arms, his eyes so lovingly triumphant, was like a poisoned dagger to the heart of her unhappy lover. Had she called him thither to make him the sport of his successful rival? The very thought was madness: and yet Laura feigned not to see him; her eyes were steadily cast down.

Eugene was determined to know the worst; he would not retreat until conviction had chased away this deadly suspense. Slowly his gondola came near and more near, while in that of his rival its approach was watched by two of its occupants,

both of whom knew equally well for what purpose it was coming.

Laura gathered up all her strength for one effort, and freed her feet from Strozzi's clasp.

"You are a wretch!" exclaimed she with indignation. "If you pollute me again with the touch of your hands, I will drown myself here, in your very sight."

"Oh no; you will throw yourself overboard, that Prince Eugene may plunge after you. Listen to me, Marchioness de Strozzi. I am perfectly acquainted with the nature of the stratagem you proposed to put into execution to-day. But I tell you that as sure as the gondola of the prince touches mine, and you make the least movement of your hand or foot, he dies."

"Vain threat!" exclaimed she, surveying him with contemptuous disbelief.

"You think so? Let me prove to you the contrary. Do you see the mask behind Prince Eugene? He is the man that will do the deed. Observe his motions while I speak a word or two, ostensibly to my rowers—really to him."

And the marquis called out, as though to his gondoliers, "Are you ready?"

The words were no sooner spoken, than the mask bowed his head, and drew from his cloak a poniard, which he raised and held suspended over the back of Eugene's neck.

Laura uttered a cry and fell back among the cushions, while Strozzi, hanging over her with the air of an enamoured lover, whispered: "The gondola almost touches ours. Make but the smallest sign—lift but a finger, and I swear that I will give the signal for his death!"

"O God! do not kill him!" was all that the wretched girl had strength to say.

The gondolas met. Eugene stood erect on the stern of his boat, his right arm extended toward her whom he loved. But alas! she came not. She did not even turn her head; for Antonio was there, his poniard uplifted, and Eugene's life depended upon her obedience.

"Traitor!" exclaimed the prince, as Strozzi's bucentoro shot ahead, and the red-silk curtains, falling heavily down,

shut out the fearful tableau that had been prepared to torture and exasperate him.

Laura had swooned, and her fall had been remarked by the gondoliers.

"Poor thing," said one of them, "she has a paroxysm of insanity."

"How insanity?" asked Conrad.

"Everybody in Venice has heard of the lunacy of the Marchioness de Strozzi," was the reply. "It is for that reason that she never goes out. The marquis perhaps thought she might be trusted to see the regatta; but he was mistaken. You must have remarked how closely he watched her for fear of some catastrophe."

"Insane, is she?" said Eugene, with quivering lip, to Antonio.

"Pazza per amore," replied he, with a shrug. Then, coming closer to the prince, he added, "The marquis gives out that his wife is crazy, and, as nobody ever sees her, nobody is any the wiser."

"And you? What think you, Antonio?"

"I do not believe it, for I know the signora well."

"You know her?" said Eugene, touching Antonio on the shoulder.

"Yes. She it is who recommended me to take service with your highness, and to tell you that you might trust me."

"Oh, I do trust you, good Antonio. Did I not say that the scar on your face was your best recommendation?"

"Yes, excellenza; and I will not forget it."

"Can you explain to me the mystery of the scene we have just witnessed?"

"Yes, excellenza. The marchesa intended to leap into this gondola and fly with you from Venice; but, as she attempted to rise, the marquis showed her a dagger, and swore that if she moved hand or foot he would spring into your highness's boat and kill you."

"And I cursed her!" thought Eugene, "and she heard my cruel words. Oh Laura, my Laura! when will I lie at thy feet to implore forgiveness? Home," cried he aloud, to the

gondoliers. Then, in a whisper, he added to Antonio, "I must speak with you as soon as we are alone."

All this time Laura lay insensible in the bucentoro, her husband gazing intently upon her pallid face. The Countess Lucretia was wearied to death with the whole performance.

"Fratillo," said she, "I hope that you have done with me, and that you intend to return with your sentimental beauty to the palace."

Without removing his eyes from Laura, Strozzi bent his head, while the countess went on:

"My gondola, your handsome present, is just behind us, and I must say that it is worthy of Aphrodite herself. Pity that no goddess should grace such a lovely sea-shell. Have I your permission to occupy it, and leave this stifling atmosphere of love?"

"Go, go," answered Strozzi, impatiently.

"Thanks!" was Lucretia's heartfelt reply; and, opening the curtains, she beckoned to her gondoliers, and stepped gracefully from the bucentoro to her own dainty bark.

"It is rather tiresome to be without company," thought she, as she was rowed away; "but solitude is better than concealment behind those hateful curtains of Ottavio's. I wonder who is the handsome cavalier that seemed to be struck with me a while ago? One of the foreign princes, I imagine, for he had a star on his breast. Ah!—There he is, staring at me with all the power of his splendid eyes."

And the beautiful Lucretia, pretending not to see the elector, sank gracefully back among her white satin cushions.

"Row toward the piazzetta," said she to her gondoliers, "but go in a direction contrary to that taken by yonder large gondola filled with cavaliers."

"That of the Elector of Bavaria? Yes, signora."

"Ah!" thought she, delighted, "he is the Elector of Bavaria, son-in-law of the Emperor of Germany. It would be worth my while to entice so handsome a prince from his loyalty to an emperor's daughter!"

Scarcely had the gondola of the countess altered its course, before the elector ordered pursuit.

"Do you see that gondola there, fashioned like a sea-shell,

and cushioned in white satin, Montgelas?" said he to his chamberlain.

"Yes, your highness."

"Say to the gondoliers that we follow in its track. Whether we see the regatta or not is of no consequence, so we keep in view of that Venus in the conch-shell."

The Marquis de Villars had pretended to be in earnest conversation with his neighbor, but he heard every word of this order.

"Yes, indeed," thought he. "The countess must be bought, if her price be a million."

Lucretia vouchsafed not a glance that could be detected at her pursuers; but she saw every thing, and exulted at her conquest. "Oh, emperor's daughter, emperor's daughter!" said she, "your husband is falling into my toils. They say you are handsome, but your elector's eyes tell me that I am handsomer than you!"

And so she beguiled her solitude, while in the bucentoro Laura still lay in her swoon, and Strozzi gazed enamoured upon her beauty.

"Beautiful as Aurora!" murmured he, "beautiful as a dew-gemmed rose; beautiful as the evening star! I love you—I love you to madness, and you must, you shall be mine!"

He bent over her, and, now that she had no power to resist him, he covered her face with passionate kisses. But his kisses restored her to life, and with a shudder she raised her hands, and threw him off.

"Touch me again, and I will plunge this dagger in your false heart!" cried she, drawing a poniard from her bosom.

"I would not care, so I could say that you were mine before I died!"

"Would that you *were* dead, that I might fly to him whose wife I am, in the sight of Heaven!"

"Put up your dagger," said Strozzi, coldly, while a look of venom chased away the love that had beamed in his eye. "I will not trouble you again."

"You have betrayed me a second time, liar and impostor that you are!" exclaimed Laura, replacing her dagger. "You have deceived my lover into the belief that I am false to him,

but, believe me, he shall know the truth. God will protect him from you and your bravi, and He will avenge my wrongs! Now, order these curtains to be raised. It is better to be gazed at by the multitude, some of whom have hearts and souls, than to sit in this pavilion within sight of you! And bid your gondoliers take me home to my prison, where, God be thanked! I can sometimes be alone with my own thoughts!"

Strozzi obeyed like a cowed hound. He lifted the curtains, and ordered the men to row to the palace.

Laura's eyes sought the gondola of her lover, but she could not see it. It had left the regatta, and had already landed at the stairs of the Palazza Capello.

CHAPTER VI.

THE NEGOTIATOR.

COUNTESS LUCRETIA CANOSSA had just risen, and lay reclining on a faded ottoman, attired in a *négligé*, which was any thing but elegant, or appropriate to a beauty. She had rung several times for her breakfast, but her waiting-maid had not seemed to hear the summons, for nobody came at the call.

The countess, however, was so absorbed in her day-dreams, that she forgot her breakfast. For a time her thoughts dwelt upon the singular scene that had taken place in the bucentoro. She knew nothing of the complications relating thereunto; she had but witnessed the approach of the gondola which she supposed to be that of her sister-in-law's lover; had seen her brother's extraordinary excitement, and had guessed that some disappointment connected with the presence of the insignificant little personage in that gondola had caused Laura to fall into a swoon. She felt sincerely sorry for her unhappy sister-in-law, but the countess was not inclined to sentiment; so she dismissed the mystery of Laura's troubles with a sigh, and fell to thinking of the Elector of Bavaria.

He had followed her all day, and well had she perceived that he had had eyes for no one but herself. And when she