

cardinal, and withdrew into his study, the door of which he carefully closed after him.

There was he long heard to walk the room with measured steps. Then all was still. No one ventured to disturb him. Hours passed. Lorenzo, with a fearful presentiment, knelt before the door. He laid his ear to the keyhole and tried to listen. All was still within, nothing stirred. At length he ventured to call the pope's name—at first low and tremulously, then louder and more anxiously, and as no answer was received, he at last ventured to open the door.

At his writing-table sat the pope; his face deadly pale, with staring eyes and great drops of perspiration on his forehead. Immovable sat he there, his right hand, which held a pen, resting on a parchment lying upon the table before him.

Like an image of wax, so stiff, so motionless was he, that Lorenzo, shuddering, made the sign of the cross upon his brow. Then, noiselessly advancing, he timidly and anxiously touched the pope's shoulder. Ganganelli shuddered, and a slight trembling pervaded his members; he then drew a long breath, and, casting a dull glance at his faithful friend, said:

"Lorenzo, let my coffin be ordered, and pray for my soul. I have just now signed my own death-sentence. See, there it lies. I have signed the decree abolishing the order of the Jesuits! I must therefore die, Lorenzo. It is all over and past with our shady place and our recreations. My murderers are already prowling around me, for I tell you I have myself signed my death-sentence!"*

* The pope's own words.—See Gorani, vol. ii., p. 41.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE FESTIVAL OF CARDINAL BERNIS.

AND this day of the festival had finally come. With what joyful impatience, with what anxious desire, had Natalie looked forward to it—how had she importuned her friend, Count Paulo, with questions about Cardinal Bernis, about the people she would meet there, about the manners and usages with which she would have to conform!

"I am anxious and fearful," said she, with amiable modesty; "they will find occasion to laugh at me, and you will be compelled to blush for me, Paulo. But you must tell these wise men and great ladies that it is my very first appearance in society, and that they must have consideration for the awkwardness and ineptitude of a poor child who knows nothing of the world, its forms, or its laws."

"For you no excuse will be necessary," responded Paulo, pressing the delicate tips of her fingers to his lips. "Only be quite yourself, perfectly true and open, inoffensive and cheerful! Forget that you are in an assemblage; imagine yourself to be in our garden, under the trees and among the flowers, and speak to people as you speak to your trees and flowers."

"But will the people give me as true and cordial answers as my trees and flowers?" asked Natalie, thoughtfully.

"They will say to you more beautiful and more flattering things," said Paulo, smiling. "But now, Natalie, it is time to be thinking of your toilet. See, the sun is already

sinking behind the pines, and the sky begins to redden! The time to go will soon arrive, and your first triumph awaits you!"

"Oh, it will not have long to wait," said Natalie, laughing, and, light and graceful as a gazelle, she tripped to the house.

Count Paulo gazed after her with a melancholy rapture. "And I am to leave this angel," thought he, "to lose the brightest and noblest jewel of my life, and drive myself out of paradise. And wherefore all this? Perhaps to chase a phantom that will never become a reality, to follow a chimera which may be only a meteor that dances before me and dissolves into mist when I think to reach it? No, no, the world is not worth so much that one should sell himself and his soul's happiness for its splendor and its greatness. Natalie herself shall decide. Loves she me, and is she satisfied with the quiet circumscribed existence that I can henceforth only offer her, then away, ye vain dreams and ye proud desires for greatness; then shall I be, if not the greatest, certainly the happiest of human beings!"

It was a wonderfully brilliant festival that Cardinal Bernis had to-day prepared for his guests—a festival hitherto unequalled in Rome. The walls were decorated with garlands and festoons of flowers, the flaming candelabras among which found their reflection in the tall Venetian mirrors that rose in their golden frames from the floor to the ceilings; and in the corners of the rooms were niches, here furnished with orange-trees, and there with heavy silk curtains, behind which were grottoes adorned with shells, in the midst of which were fountains where splashed

waters rendered fragrant by oil of roses and other essences. And ever-new surprises, new grottoes and groves in those rich halls offered themselves to the eyes of the beholders. Now one suddenly found himself in a quiet boudoir lighted only by a solitary lamp, where the most artistic engravings and the rarest drawings were spread out upon a table; then again one entered a hall sparkling with a thousand lights and resounding with music, where the gayly-dressed crowd undulated in mazy waves; then again grottoes opened here and there, or one stepped out through the open doors into the garden where one could enjoy the balsamic coolness of the evening in walks brilliantly lighted with colored lamps, or listen to the music of performers concealed in the shrubbery, or, again, fleeing from the throng and the lights, seek a resting-place upon some grassy bank or under some myrtle-bush, whether for solitary musing or for encircling in sweet and silent familiarity the waist of some chosen fair one who understanding the stolen glance, had strayed here unnoticed.

But the central point of the festival was the monstrous gigantic hall which the cardinal had caused to be erected in the centre of the garden expressly for this occasion. The walls of muslin and flowers were held together by more than a hundred gilded pillars, the girandoles attached to each of which diffused a sea of light. Silken carpets covered the floor, and the *plafond* of this gigantic hall was formed by the thousand-starred arch of heaven. Here, also, niches and grottoes were everywhere to be found; in them one could, in the midst of the constantly moving and noisy crowd, enjoy quiet and repose.

Only one of these niches was inaccessible, as it appears, to the company, and yet it was precisely this which excited the curiosity of all, and which all, whispering, approached, anxious to get a peep behind the closed thick silken curtains, before which two richly gallooned servants of the cardinal walked back and forth with solemn earnestness, but respectfully requesting every one to comply with the cardinal's wishes and not approach the mysterious drapery, but await his own time for the solution of the enigma! A few steps led up to this closed and covered niche; these steps were strewn with roses, that was plainly seen; but, to what did these steps lead, and what was thus carefully concealed?

A precious surprise, certainly, for it was the forte of the cardinal to prepare surprises for the agreeable entertainment of his guests. The ladies and gentlemen, the cardinals and princes of the Church, crowded around him begging for an explanation of the mystery, a disclosure of the secret.

"I am myself uninitiated," said Cardinal Bernis, laughing; "some divinity may have taken a seat there, or perhaps it is a sphinx which will from thence give us the solution of her enigma. But let us see what belated guests are now coming to us."

And the cardinal with zealous precipitation approached the principal entrance to the hall, the *portières* of which had just been drawn aside, and behind was seen Natalie at the hand of Paulo.

As if blinded by the sudden flood of light, she stood for a moment still, a purple glow flushing her delicate cheeks,

and clinging to Paulo's arm, she whispered: "Protect me, Paulo, I am so frightened by this crowd!"

Just at that moment the doorkeeper cried with a loud voice: "Princess Natalie Tartaroff and Count Paulo!"

At the sound of these strange names all glanced toward the door, and all flaming, curious, prying eyes were fixed with astonishment and admiration upon the young maiden.

But Natalie did not remark it. She glanced at Paulo with a glad smile, and a proud happiness beamed from her features. She had, then, a name; she was no longer an abandoned, nameless orphan. At length the enigma of her birth was solved, and what she had so often prayed for, Count Paulo had vouchsafed her as a surprise to-day.

He had at the same time announced her name to herself and the world, and she not only had a name, but she was a princess; she took a rank in the company, and Count Paulo and Carlo had no reason to be ashamed of her. But where was Carlo? At the thought of him this feeling of effervescing pride vanished from the young maiden's heart; she even forgot that she was a princess, to remember only that Carlo, her music-teacher, had promised her to be present at this festival, and to wonder that she could not discover him in this gay and confused assemblage.

She did not remark that, since her appearance, a deep stillness had supervened in the hall, that all eyes were upon her, that people secretly whispered to each other, and gave utterance to murmured expressions of astonishment and delight; she saw not how the beauties here and there turned pale and indignantly bit their proud lips; she saw not how the eyes of the men glowed and flashed, and what eagerly-

lusting glances the cardinals and princes of the Church cast upon her.

She was so unconstrained, this charming child, she knew not how handsome she was. But she was to-day of a wonderfully touching beauty. Like a white and delicate lily stood she there in the heavy white satin robe that enveloped her graceful form, and the brilliants that adorned her hair, neck, and arms, shone and sparkled like sun-lighted dew-drops in the calyx of the flower. So beautiful was she that even Cardinal Bernis stood speechless and as if blinded before her, finding no expression for his joyful surprise and astonishment.

"Oh," at length he smilingly said, with a low bow, "I shall have to quarrel with Count Paulo! He promised us the presence of a mortal woman, and now he leads into our circle a divinity who must look down upon us poor human beings with a smile of contempt."

Natalie smiled. "I know," said she, with her clear, sweet, childish voice—"I know that Cardinal Bernis is a poet, and therefore it will not be very difficult for him to change a young maiden into a divinity. Nor is this the first time he has done so! I remember a lovely poem of his, the complaint of a shepherd, who considers the object of his love a divinity because she is so beautiful, and at last she proves to be no divinity, but on the contrary a regular little quarrelsome wrangler, who has nothing beautiful about her but her hands and face. Take care, cardinal, that it does not prove with you and me as with the shepherd in your charming poem!"

She said that with such childish ingenuousness, and in

so cheerful and jesting a tone, that the cardinal listened to her as if intoxicated, and with unconcealed admiration he looked into that delicate, childishly pure face, over which no trace of sorrow nor any sigh of care had ever yet passed.

Without answering, he took her arm, and, beckoning Count Paulo to his side, led the princess to the circle of ladies.

Behind those closed curtains that still concealed the mysterious niche it had meanwhile become stirring. Busy servants hastened hither and thither, lighting the lamps and arranging the festoons and draperies. It seems they had here erected a little stage, and the large wall-picture that formed the background of this stage bore the appearance of a decoration. A side curtain, serving as a partition, formed a second room, which seemed destined for a sort of greenroom, in the centre of which was a large and well-lighted mirror, and before it stood a young woman regarding herself with the greatest attention, here plucking at her dress and there arranging her train or an ornament. She was evidently the one who was to appear upon the stage; her costume betrayed it. It was not the fashionable costume of the day, such as was worn by the distinguished ladies of Roman society; it was an ideal Greek dress that seemed to have been made for the purpose of displaying and rendering yet more voluptuous and enticing the great beauty of the wearer.

She was very beautiful, this woman, with her sparkling black eyes and dark shining hair, which had been gathered into a Grecian knot behind—beautiful, with the laurel-wreath resting upon her high forehead—beautiful, in the

transparent Grecian robe which only so far concealed the luxuriant forms of her full figure as to allow them to be divined—beautiful, with those full, round, and entirely uncovered arms, with their jewelled bracelets—beautiful, with her graceful neck, her fully exposed, naked shoulders, and her voluptuously swelling bosom.

She was, in her appearance, a Greek, only her face was not Grecian. It was wanting in the noble forms, the still cheerfulness and repose of Grecian beauty, modest even in its voluptuousness. It was only the face of a sensual and passionate Roman woman, and no Lais would have ventured such a smile as played upon the dark-red lips of this Roman woman, or such glowing glances as she shot like arrows from her dark eyes.

Standing before the glass, she viewed herself, her lips murmuring low words, occasionally turning her eyes from the mirror to the little table standing near it, upon which lay several open books.

What murmured she, and what read she in those books? Singular! she was uttering single, isolated, unconnected words, which had nothing in common with each other but the sound of melody; they were rhymes, but without connection or sense, without inward mental correlation.

“So,” she now said to herself, with a satisfied smile, “I am now perfectly armed and prepared. All these rhymes of Tasso and Petrarch are now implanted in my mind and ready for use, and I have not to fear embarrassment in repeating any of them. Ah, they shall admire me, these good Romans. I will animate and inflame them, and excite all my enamored cardinals to such an ecstasy that they must

finally prevail upon the silly, obstinate old pope against his own will to fulfil my only desire. I will attain my end, even if I am compelled to pawn my honor and my salvation for it! Bah! honor; what can honor be to a woman? Beauty is our honor, further nothing! And fair, it seems to me, I yet am! And if I am fair,” she more glowingly continued, after a pause, “how comes it that Carlo has ceased to love me? Ah, the false one, to betray and desert me when I love him most!”

A dark flush of anger now overspread her cheeks, and threateningly raising her hands, with compressed lips she continued: “And to desert me for another woman—me, the pride and delight of all Rome; me, whom all the princes and cardinals worship! Ah, while thousands lie at my feet, imploring for a glance or a smile, this little, unknown singer dares to scorn me and deride my love!”

“And why should he not dare it?” asked a voice behind her, and the face of a young man became visible.

“Carlo!” she cried, hastening to meet him with outspread arms.

He almost ungently checked her. “You forget,” said he, “that this little, insignificant, and unknown singer loves you no longer, Corilla! Grant, then, henceforth to the thousands who languish at your feet a few of your enticing smiles and glowing glances—I have nothing against it, and am not at all jealous!”

“But you should be!” cried she, stamping her feet with rage. “I tell you I will not suffer you to leave me; I will be loved by you, and no one shall you dare to look at, and no one shall you dare to love, but me alone.”

Carlo broke out into a scornful laugh, and then seriously and proudly said: "I am a Neapolitan, and with us men do not allow themselves to be constrained to love, and no woman there dares utter the command, 'Thou shalt love me!'—I will not, Signora Corilla!"

"You will not!" screamed she, gnashing her teeth. "Then woe to you and to her!"

"I fear no serpents!" said Carlo, laughing, "and if an adder attempts to sting me, I tread it under foot!"

"But fear at least for her you love!" she threateningly said. "Oh, you think I shall not be able to discover this secret love of yours, and not spy out this new divinity to whom you have consecrated your heart? Tremble therefore now, for I know her! I know the garden in which she lives, and there is a place in the wall just opposite her favorite seat; whoever knows that place and possesses a steady hand and a sharp dagger will know how to hurl it so as to pierce her bosom."

Carlo felt a deadly terror, he felt his heart stand still, but he collected himself and said, with a contemptuous smile: "Cardinal Francesco Albani indeed possesses among his *bravi* many such skilful hands, and surely it will not require many of your highly-prized glances to induce him to favor you with the loan of one of them."

The signora slightly bit her lips. "You mock me," she almost sadly said, "and yet you should remember that it is only love that makes me so savage and fills my heart with a thirst for vengeance! Carlo, I so warmly love you!"

And the beautiful, glowing woman humbly and imploringly bent before her beloved.

The latter laughingly said: "How well you know how to say that—with what variations and modulations! I yesterday heard you say the same to Cardinal Albani; to be sure, it sounded a little different, but not less warm and glowing!"

"You know why I do that!" said she. "He is an enamored fool, whom I would win with tender words that I may make him my instrument. You know the object for which I strive, and which I must attain at any price! Ah, Carlo, when once they have crowned me in the capitol, then, I am sure, you will be compelled to love me again!"

"Never again!" he harshly and roughly said.

"Is that your last word?" shrieked she, with flashing eyes and the wild rage of a tigress.

"It is my last word!"

She flew to him like a mad person, seized his hands and fixedly stared him in the face.

"Ungrateful!" said she, gnashing her teeth. "Is it thus you reward my love, is this your return for all I have done for you? Can you forget that it was I who withdrew you from poverty and baseness? What were you but a poor, unnoticed singer in the streets, on whom people bestowed scanty alms? Was it not I who rescued you from that shame, and clothed you and gave you a home? Was it not I who gave you a name and procured you consideration and respect by making you my singer and companion, and allowing you to play upon the harp at my improvisations? How has not all Rome admired you when you sang the canzones I wrote for you, thereby procuring you honor and respectability, and making you a popular man from a

low beggar? Go, you cannot leave me, for you are my creature, my property!"

He wildly thrust her aside, and his eyes flashed with indignation. "Signora," said he, his lips tremulous with rage, "you have rent the last band that bound me to you, and in twitting me of your benefits you have annihilated them! We now have nothing in common with each other, except perhaps mutual hatred, and that, I hope, will have a longer duration than our love!"

And Carlo turned toward the door. Corilla rushed after him with an exclamation of terror.

"You will leave me now!" cried she, with anguish, "now, in this hour when you are so indispensable to me? now, when I am to celebrate a new triumph before this notable assembly? when all eyes are expectantly turned to the curtain behind which I am to appear? No, no, Carlo, from compassion remain with me only one hour, only this evening!"

Carlo smiled contemptuously. "I will remain," said he, "for I have promised *her* that she shall hear you!"

"She has therefore come?" cried Corilla, with an outburst of joy.

"She is now here," he laconically said.

Corilla no longer listened to him, she walked back and forth with a triumphant mien, a cruel, malicious smile playing upon her lips.

At this moment there was a slight knock at the door, which was opened, and a man who appeared upon the threshold glanced into the room with a grinning laugh.

Corilla gave him a sign, and at the same time pointed

at Carlo, who, having turned his back toward her, seemed to have no suspicion of what was occurring behind him. But he saw it, nevertheless, in the tall mirror that stood in the middle of the room; he saw Corilla make signs of intelligence with that man who was in the livery of Cardinal Francesco Albani; he saw the man make answer with his fingers, and then draw forth a dagger, which he threateningly swung over his head.

Oh, Carlo had very well understood what that man said, as he also did that language of the fingers, the much-used language of the Romans and Neapolitans.

The man had said: "She is here, that beautiful lady! She can no longer escape us!"

"You will strike her?" had Corilla asked.

The man had swung the dagger over his head and held up two fingers of his right hand. That signified: "In two hours she will be dead."

"Good! you shall be satisfied with me," had been Corilla's answer.

The door was again closed. Corilla turned smiling to Carlo, her former rancor seemed to have vanished; she was in high spirits.

"Carlo," said she, "how good you are not to leave me! Let us now begin. I feel myself glowing with inspiration. Ah, I shall enrapture these good Romans, I think!"

"How long will this improvisation last?" Carlo gruffly asked.

"Well, one or two hours, according to the delight we give our public."

"If this farce continues longer than an hour and a half, I shall throw down my harp and go away," said Carlo, in a tone of severity. "I swear it to you by the spirit of my mother! Remember it; I shall show you the time every quarter of an hour."

"You are a tyrant," said she, laughing. "But I suppose I must submit. Give, therefore, the signal that we are ready."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE IMPROVISATRICE.

ALL the guests of the cardinal were assembled in the gigantic hall, and all eyes were anxiously bent upon the mysterious curtain, which still remained closed.

Now resounded a little bell, and Cardinal Bernis smilingly turned to Natalie, who sat by his side.

"I think this mystery is about to be unveiled," said he.

"And I am quite anxious about it," said the young maiden, gracefully laying her hand upon her heart. My heart beats as violently as if a mystery were about to be unveiled in my own breast. Do you believe in presentiments, Sir Cardinal?"

Bernis had not time to answer her. Just at that moment the curtain drew up, a general "Ah!" of admiration was heard, and, suddenly carried away by their feelings, the whole audience broke into extravagant and long-enduring applause, crying and shouting, "*Evviva Corilla! l'improvisatrice Corilla!*"

And in fact it was an admirable picture which was there presented to the audience. Those flower-strewed steps led up to an altar, upon the centre of which, between wreaths of flowers, shot up two dark-red flames. Against that altar leaned, exalted and august as a Grecian priestess, the improvisatrice Corilla. Her eyes raised to the heavens, her features lighted up with a rosy glow by the red flames, her half-raised right arm resting upon an urn, while her left arm was stretched upward toward heaven, she thus resembled an inspired priestess, just receiving a message from on high, listening with ecstasy, with suppressed breath and parted lips, to the voice of the Deity, and forgetting the world in a blissful intoxication, she seemed about to take her flight to the empyrean!

And while Corilla, as if absorbed in spiritual contemplation, continued to stand immovable there, began the low notes of a harp, which, gradually becoming fuller and stronger, at length resounded in powerfully rushing and exultant tones. From Corilla all eyes were now turned upon Carlo, who, in the light dress of a Greek youth, his harp upon his arm, was leaning against a pomegranate tree placed in the background of the stage, and with his pale, serious face, with his noble, manly features, formed a beautiful contrast to the inspired and love-beaming priestess Corilla.

Natalie, feeling something like a slight puncture in her heart, involuntarily carried her hand to her bosom. It was a strange, a wonderful feeling, which stirred within her, partly partaking of joy at seeing and hearing her friend Carlo, as people were murmuring praises of his beauty, and