

"She is saved!" cried Carlo, sinking back toward Count Paulo, and pointing with a happy smile to Natalie, who, awaking from her momentary stupefaction, stretched forth her arms toward the count.

"Paulo," she whispered low, "let us hasten from here! I dread these people! I fear them! Let us go! But take him with us, that they may not kill him, my saviour, my friend Carlo!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE DEPARTURE.

THE morning dawned. Count Paulo rose from the arm-chair in which he had passed the night. He had occupied the whole fearfully anxious night in writing; he now laid the pen aside and stood up.

His face had an expression of firmness and decision; he had formed a firm resolution, had come to an irrevocable determination.

With a firm step advancing to the door opening into the adjoining chamber, he called to his friend Cecil.

The latter immediately made his appearance, and, entering the count's chamber, laconically said: "All is ready."

Count Paulo smiled sadly. "You are then sure there are no other means of saving her and ourselves?" he asked.

"None whatever," said Cecil. "Every moment's delay increases her and your danger. The occurrence of last night is a proof of it. They sought the death of Natalie—

without Carlo's help she would have been murdered, and all our plans would have come to an end."

"Her life is threatened, and yet you can urge me to go and leave her here alone and unprotected?"

"Was it you who saved her from the danger of last night?" asked Cecil. "Believe me, it is your presence that threatens her with the most danger. Precisely because you are at her side, they suspect her and watch her every step; the circumstance that she is with you creates distrust, and in Natalie they will think they see her whose mysterious flight has long been known in Russia. And Catharine will have her tracked in all countries and upon all routes. Therefore, save Natalie, by seeming to give her up. Return home and relate to them a fable of a false princess by whom you had been deceived, and whom you abandoned as soon as you discovered the deception. They will everywhere lend you a believing ear, as people gladly believe what they wish, and by this means only can you assure the future of Natalie and yourself."

"That is all just and true. I myself have so seen and recognized it," said the count; "and yet, my friend, I nevertheless still waver, and it seems to me that an internal voice warns me against that which I am about to do!"

Cecil smilingly shook his head. "Trust not such voices," said he; "it is the whispering of demons who envelop themselves in our own wishes, who entice us to what we would, by seeming to warn us against what we fear. Nothing but your departure can give you safety. Leave Natalie here in quiet solitude, and without you she will be well concealed in the solitude of this garden, and

you, in the mean time, will pursue your affairs in Russia, and deceive the enemy, while you yourself seem to be the deceived party. They threaten you with the confiscation of your property, and they will fulfil those threats if you do not obey the call of the government. Go, therefore, go! We will secretly sell your property; and when this is accomplished, then, laden with treasure, let us return to Natalie, no longer fearing their threats."

"And when all this is done," exclaimed Count Paulo, glowing, "it shall be our task to conduct Natalie back in triumph to the country to which she belongs, there to place the diadem upon her fair brows, and to raise her above all other mortal beings!"

"God grant us the attainment of our ends!" sighed Cecil.

"We must and shall attain them!" responded Paulo, with enthusiasm. "I must fulfil this great task of my life, or die! Away, now, with all wavering or hesitation! What must be, shall be! They shall not say of the man who took compassion upon the deserted and threatened orphan and raised her for his objects, that he gave up his plans on account of his own egotistical wishes, and pusillanimously failed to finish the work he began! No, no, history shall not so speak of me. It shall at least represent me as a brave man capable of sacrificing his heart and his life for the attainment of his higher ends! Seal these letters, Cecil. They contain my last will, and my bequest to Natalie, which I wish to place in her own hands. Ah, Cecil, I have been an enthusiastic fool until this hour! I thought—alas, what did I not think and dream!—I thought that

all these plans and objects were not worth so much as one sole smile of her lips, and that if she would say to me 'I love thee,' this sweet word would not be too dearly purchased with an imperial crown. Perhaps, ah, perhaps, I think so yet, but I will never more suffer myself to be swayed by such thoughts. We must go—Natalie's happiness demands it. And besides, she will not lack friends and protectors. It was not without an object that I last evening presented her to the most notable people of Rome; not without an object that I consented to her showing herself as a poetess. They now know her name, which is repeated with highest praise in every quarter of the city; all Rome is to-day enthusiastic in her praise, and all Rome will protect and defend her. Add to which, I shall yet recommend her to the special protection of Cardinal Bernis!"

"And it was exactly in his house where she was almost murdered!" said Cecil. "Without that singer, Carlo, she would have been forever lost! If, then, you would choose a protector for her, let it be Carlo."

Count Paulo's brow darkened. "This singer loves her!" said he.

"Precisely for that reason," smilingly responded Cecil. "One who loves will best know how to protect her."

Count Paulo made no answer; he continued thoughtfully walking back and forth. Then he said with decision: "Seal these letters, Cecil. I will take them to Natalie myself."

"You will, then, see her again?" asked Cecil, while folding the letters. "You will render the parting more painful!"

"I will it!" said Paulo, with decision, and, taking the letters, he left the room with a firm and resolute step.

He found Natalie in her room. She did not hear him coming, and thus did not turn to receive him. She was sitting motionless at the window and dejectedly looking out into the garden, her head supported by her hand.

The events of the previous evening had made a great change in her. She now felt older, more experienced, more earnest. A dark shadow had passed over her sun-bright happiness, a dark power had threateningly approached her; the seriousness of life had been suddenly unfolded to her and had brushed off the ether-dust of harmless and joyful peace from her childish soul. The happy child had become a conscious maiden, and new thoughts, new feelings had sprung up within her. The first tears of sorrow had, with a mighty creative power, called all these slumbering blossoms of her heart into existence and activity, and her unconscious feelings had become conscious thoughts.

But what had not happened, what had she not experienced and felt since last evening? First, had not a new happiness broken in upon her, had she not now a name, was she not a princess? Then, had she not achieved a triumph—a triumph in the presence of Corilla? But then, also, how many *desillusions* had she not experienced in a few hours? How had her heart been cooled by the rich flow of words in Corilla's poesy! Her whole soul had languished for the acquaintance of a poetess, and she had heard only a rhymed

work of art. And then the last terrible event! Why had they wished to murder her? Who were her unknown enemies, and why had she enemies?

"I should have been dead had he not rescued me!" murmured she, and her lovely face was illuminated by a sunny smile. "Yes, without Carlo I should have been lost—I have to thank him for my life! Oh," said she then aloud, "to him therefore belongs my existence, and for every joy I am yet capable of feeling I am indebted to him, my friend Carlo! Ah, how shall I ever be able to reward him for all this happiness?"

And while she was thus speaking, Count Paulo, pale and silent, stood behind her; she saw him not, and after a pause she continued: "How strange it is! To-day, when I think of him, my heart beats as never before, and I feel in it something like heavenly bliss, and yet at the same time like profound sorrow. Ah, what can it be, and why do I, to-day, think only of him? I could weep because he does not yet come! How strange it all is, and at the same time how sad! Seems it not to me that I love Carlo more than any one else, more even than Paulo, who formerly was the dearest to me? How is it now, and am I, then, really so ungrateful to Paulo?"

Count Paulo still stood behind her, pale and silent. A painfully ironic smile flitted over his face, and he thought: "I came to ask a question, and Natalie has already given me the answer before I had time to ask it. Perhaps it is better thus. I have now nothing to ask!"

The young maiden became more and more deeply absorbed in her thoughts. Count Paulo laid his hand lightly

upon her shoulder. She was startled, and involuntarily cried, "Carlo!"

"No, Paulo!" said he, with a melancholy smile, "but at all events a friend, Natalie, though a friend who is about to leave you!"

"You leave me?" she anxiously exclaimed.

"That means only outwardly, only with my body, never with my soul," said he, deeply moved. "That, Natalie, will remain with you eternally, that will never leave you—do you hear, never! Always remember this, my charming child, my sweet blossom! Never entertain a doubt of me; and if my voice does not reach you, if you receive no news of me, then think not, 'Paulo has abandoned me!' no; then think only, 'Paulo is dead, but my name was the last to linger upon his lips, and his last sigh was for me!'"

"You desert me?" said she, wringing her hands. "What am I, what shall I do, without you? You have been my protector and my reliance, my teacher and my friend! Alas, you were all to me, and I have ever looked up to you as my lord and father."

Count Paulo sadly smiled. "Love me always as your father," said he; "while I live you shall never be an orphan, that I swear to you!"

"And must you go," cried she, clinging to him; "well, then let me go with you! You will be my father—well, I demand my right as your daughter; to accompany her father is a daughter's right."

"No," he firmly said, "you must remain while I go; but I go for you, to assure your future power and splendor. Remember this, Princess Natalie, forget it not; and when

one day they brand me as a traitor, then say: 'No, he was no traitor, for he loved me!' And now hear what I have yet to say," continued the count, after a pause, while the still weeping Natalie looked up to him through her tears. "But look at me, Natalie—no, not that sad glance, I cannot bear it! Leave me my self-possession and my courage, for I need them! Weep not!"

And Natalie, drying her eyes with her long locks, sought to smile.

"I no longer weep," said she, "I listen to you."

Paulo placed two sealed letters in her hand.

"Swear to me," said he, "to hold these letters sacred as your most precious possession."

"I swear it!" said she.

"Swear to me to discover them to no human eye, to betray their possession to no human ear! Swear it to me by the memory of your mother, who now looks down from heaven upon you and receives your oath!"

"Then she is dead?" said the young maiden, sadly drooping her head upon her breast.

"You have not yet sworn!" said he.

The young maiden raised her head, and, turning her eyes toward heaven as if in the hope of encountering the tender maternal glance, she solemnly said: "By the sacred memory of my mother I swear to discover these papers to no human eye, to betray their existence to no human ear, but to hold them sacred as my most precious and mysterious treasure!"

"Swear, further" said Count Paulo, "that whenever a danger may threaten you, you will sooner forget all other

things than these papers, that they shall be the first which you will endeavor to save. Yes, swear to me that you will ever bear them upon your heart and never permit them to be separated from you!"

"I swear it!" said Natalie. "I will defend the possession of these papers, if necessary, with my life!"

"And thereby will you defend your honor," said Paulo, "for your honor rests in these papers. Yet ask me not what they contain. You must not yet know; there is danger in knowing their contents! But when a whole year has passed without my return or your hearing from me, and if in this whole year no messenger comes to you from me, then, Natalie, then open these letters; you will then possess my testament, and you will consider it a sacred duty to execute it!"

Natalie, sobbing, said: "Ah, why did not that dagger pierce my heart yesterday? I should then have died while I was yet happy?"

"You will yet do so!" said Count Paulo, with a slight tincture of bitterness; "Carlo and your future yet remain to you!"

She looked at him with a clear, bright glance, but without answering. She had again become an enigma to herself. Now, when her friend, when Paulo, was about to leave her, it seemed to her she had done wrong to love another, even for a moment, better than him, her benefactor and protector; indeed, as if she in fact loved no one so well as him, as if she could resign and leave all others to insure Paulo's permanent presence!

But she was suddenly startled, and a glowing flush over-

spread her cheeks. She had, quite accidentally, glanced through the window into the garden, and had there discovered Carlo, as with slow and hesitating steps he descended the alley leading to the villa.

Count Paulo had followed her glance, and, as he now observed the singer, he said: "He shall henceforth be your protector! Promise me to love him as a brother. Will you?"

He looked at her with a fixed and searching gaze, and she cast not down her eyes before that penetrating and interrogating glance, but met it directly with clear and innocent eyes.

"Yes, I will love him as a brother!" she said.

"One thing more, and then let us part!" said Paulo. "Marianne is honest and true—let her never leave you. I have amply provided her with funds for the necessary expenses for the next six months, and I hope long before the expiration of that time to send a further supply. If I do not, then conclude I am dead, for only with my life can I be robbed of the sweet duty of caring for you! And now let me go to Carlo!"

Slightly nodding to her, he hastily left the room.

At that moment Carlo mounted the steps leading to the door of the villa. Paulo met him with a hearty greeting.

"Let us go down into the garden," said he, "I have many things to say to you."

The two men remained a long time in the garden. Natalie, standing at the window, occasionally saw them, arm in arm, at some turning of the walks, and then they would again disappear as they pursued their way in earnest

conversation. Strange thoughts flitted through the soul of the young maiden, and when she saw the two thus wandering, arm in arm, she thoughtfully asked herself: "Which is it, then, that I most love? Is it Carlo, is it Paulo?"

"I now understood you perfectly," said Count Paulo, as they again approached the house after a long and earnest conversation. "Yes, it seems to me I know you as myself, and know I can confide in you. You have perfectly tranquillized me, and I thank you for your confidence. It was then Corilla, that vain improvisatrice, who would have destroyed her? That is consoling, and I can now depart with a lighter heart. Against such attacks you will be able to protect her."

"I will protect her against every attack," responded Carlo. "You have my oath that the secret you have confided to me shall be held sacred, and you have thereby secured her from every outbreak of my passion. She stands so high above me that I can only adore her as my saint, can love her only as one loves the unattainable stars!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

AN HONEST BETRAYER.

AT about the same time Cecil was hastening through the streets of Rome, often looking back to see if any one was following him, and viewing with suspicious eyes every one whom he met. He finally stopped before the backdoor of a palace, and, after having satisfied himself that he had

not been followed, he lightly knocked three times at the door. Upon its being opened, a grim, bearded Russian face presented itself.

Cecil drew a ring from his bosom and showed it to the porter.

"Quick! conduct me to his excellency," said he.

The Russian nodded his recognition of the token, and beckoned Cecil to follow him. After a short reflection, Cecil entered and the door was closed.

Guided by his conductor through a labyrinth of rooms and corridors, Cecil finally succeeded in reaching a little boudoir, whose heavily-curtained windows hardly admitted a ray of dim twilight.

The conductor, bidding Cecil to wait here, left him alone.

In a few moments a concealed door was opened, and a man of a tall, proud form entered.

"At length!" he said, on perceiving Cecil. "I had begun to doubt your coming."

"I waited until I could bring you decisive intelligence, your excellency," said Cecil.

"And you bring it to-day?" quickly asked the unknown.

"In an hour we leave Rome for St. Petersburg!"

Uttering a loud cry of joy, the stranger walked the room in visible commotion. Cecil followed him with timid, anxious glances, and, as he still kept silence, Cecil said:

"Your excellency, I have truly performed what you required of me. I have persuaded the count to make the journey, notwithstanding his opposition to it, and, as you