

weak eyes and crying out with pain, we shall quietly draw our little fish into our net, and take her home without opposition!"

"And if the fish will not go into the net?"

"It must go in!" impatiently cried Orloff. "Bah! have I at the right time succeeded in towing our emperor, God bless him! into eternity, and shall I doubt in the fulness of time of enclosing this beautiful child in my arms? Look at me, Stephano—what is wanting for it in me? Are not all these beautiful women of Rome enraptured with the Russian Hercules? How, then, can it be that a woman of my own country can withstand me? The preliminaries are the main thing, and if we only had some one to prepare her for my appearance, all would then go well. And such a one we will find, thanks to our rubles! But enough of politics for the present, Stephano. Call my valet. It is time for my toilet, and that is a very important affair."

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## CHAPTER XXXV.

### CORILLA.

CORILLA was alone. Uneasy, full of stormy thoughts, she impetuously walked back and forth, occasionally uttering single passionate exclamations, then again thoughtfully staring at vacancy before her. She was a full-blooded, warm Italian woman, that will neither love nor hate with the whole soul, and nourishes both feelings in her bosom with equal strength and with equal warmth. But, in her, hatred

exhaled as quickly as love; it was to her only the champagne-foam of life, which she sipped for the purpose of a slight intoxication—as in her intoxication only did she feel herself a poetess, and in a condition for improvisation.

"I must at any rate be in love," said she, "else I should lose my poetic fame. With cool blood and a tranquil mind there is no improvising and poetizing. With me all must be stirring and flaming, every nerve of my being must glow and tremble, the blood must flash like fire through my veins, and the most glowing wishes and ardent longings, be it love or be it hate, must be stirring within me in order to poetize successfully. And this cannot be comprehended by delicate and discreet people; this low Roman populace even venture to call me a coquette, only because I constantly need a new glow, and because I constantly seek new emotions and new inspirations for my muse."

Love, then, for the improvisatrice Corilla, was nothing more than a strong wine with which she refreshed and strengthened her fatigued poetic powers for renewed exertions; it was in a manner the tow which she threw upon the expiring fire of her fantasy, to make it flash up in clear and bright flames.

It was only in this way that she loved Carlo, and wept for him, except that in this case her love had been of a longer duration, because it was *he* who gave up and left *her*! That was what made her hatred so glowing, that was what made her seek the life of the woman for whom Carlo had deserted her.



"This is a new situation," said she, "which I am called to live through and to feel. But a poetess must have experienced all feelings, or she could not describe them. For my part, I do not believe in the revelations of genius—I believe only in experiences. One can describe only what one has felt and experienced. Whoever may attempt to describe the flavor of an orange, must first have tasted it!"

That this attempt to murder Natalie had failed, was to her a matter of little moment. She had experienced the emotion of it, and just the same would it have been a matter of indifference to her had the dagger pierced Natalie's breast—she was sufficiently a child of the South to consider a murder as only a venial sin, for which the priest could grant absolution.

There was only one thing which exclusively occupied Corilla, following and tormenting her day and night, and that was her poetic fame. She desired that her name should stand high in the world, glorified by all Europe, and for this purpose she desired above all things to be crowned as a poetess in the capitol of the holy city; for this fame she would willingly have given many years of her life.

That was the aim of all her efforts, and how much would she not have borne, ventured, and suffered for its attainment! How many intrigues were planned, how much cunning and dissimulation, flattery, and hypocrisy, had been employed for that purpose, and all, all as yet in vain!

Therefore it was that Corilla now wept, and with occa-

sional outbreaks of passionate exclamations violently paced her room. Her cheeks glowed, her eyes flashed—she was very beautiful in this state of excitement. That she must have acknowledged to herself as her glance accidentally encountered her own face in the glass.

With a smile of satisfaction she remained standing before the mirror, and almost angrily she said:

"Ah, why am I now alone, why does no one see me in my beautiful glow? My face might now produce some effect, and gain me friends! Why, then, am I now alone?"

But it seems that Corilla had only to express a wish in order to see it suddenly fulfilled; for the door was at that moment opened, and a servant announced Count Alexis Orloff.

Corilla smiled with delight, and let that smile remain upon her lips, as she very well knew it was becoming to her, and that she had conquered many hearts with it; but secretly her heart throbbed with fear, and timidly she asked herself, "What can that Russian count want of me?"

But with a cheerful face she advanced to receive him; she seemed not to remark that a dark cloud lay upon his brow, and that his features bore an almost threatening expression.

"He is a barbarian," thought she, and barbarians must be treated differently from other men. I must flatter this lion, in order to fetter him!"

"It is a serious matter that brings me to you, signora," said Alexis, gloomily.

"A serious matter?" she cheerfully asked. "Ah, then



I pity you, count. It is difficult to speak with me of serious matters!"

"You rather do them!" said Alexis, carelessly throwing himself upon a divan. "You would not play with such serious things as, for instance, a dagger, and therefore you hurl it from you, altogether indifferent whether you thereby quite accidentally pierce the heart of another."

"I do not understand you, count," said Corilla, without embarrassment, but at the same time she looked at him with such a charming and enticing expression, that Alexis involuntarily smiled.

"I will make myself intelligible to you," said he, in a milder tone. "You must understand, that I know you, Corilla. That assassin who followed the Princess Tartaroff at the festival of Cardinal Bernis, was employed by you, Signora Maddalena Morelli Fernandez, called Corilla!"

"And what if it were true, Signor Alexis Orloff, called the handsome Northern Hercules?" asked she, roguishly imitating his grave seriousness. "If it were really true, what further?"

Alexis looked in her face with an expression of astonishment. "You are wonderfully bold!" said he.

"None but slaves are without courage!" responded she. "Freedom is the mother of boldness!"

"You do not, then, deny the hiring of that bravo?"

"I only deny your right to inquire," said she.

"I have a right to it," he responded with vehemence. "This Princess Tartaroff is a subject of the Empress of Russia, my mistress, who watches over and protects all her subjects with maternal tenderness."

"That good, tender empress!" exclaimed Corilla, with an ambiguous smile. "But in order properly to watch and preserve all her children and subjects, she should keep them in her own country. Take this Princess Tartaroff with you to Russia, and then she will be safe from our Italian daggers. Take her with you; that will be the best way!"

"You, then, very heartily hate this poor little princess?" asked Alexis, laughing.

"Yes," said she, after a short reflection, "I hate her. And would you know why, signor? Not for her beauty, not for her youth, but for her talents! And she has great talents! Ah, there was a time when I hated her, although I knew her not. But now, now it is different. I now not only hate, but fear her! For she can rival me, not only in love, but in fame! Ah, you should have seen her on that evening! She was like a swan to look at, and her song was like the dying strains of the swan. And all shouted applause, and all the women wept; indeed, I myself wept, not from emotion, but with rage, with bitterness, for they had forgotten me—forgotten, for this new poetess; they overwhelmed her with flatteries, leaving me alone and unnoticed! And yet you ask me if I hate her!"

Quite involuntarily had she suffered herself to be carried away by her own vehemence, her inward glowing rage. With secret pleasure Count Orloff read in her features that this was no comedy which she thus improvised, but was truth and reality.

"If you so think and feel," said he, "then we may soon understand each other, signora. A real hatred is of as much value as a real love; indeed, often of much greater.



One can more safely confide in hatred, as it is more enduring. I will therefore confide in you, signora, if you will swear to me to betray no word of what I shall tell you."

"I swear it!" was Corilla's response.

"Listen, then! This Princess Tartaroff is an impostor; no princely blood flows in her veins, and if she gives herself out to be a princess, it is because she therewith connects plans of high-treason. More I need not say to you, except that my illustrious empress has charged me to bring this fraudulent princess to her at St. Petersburg, that she may there receive her punishment! This I have sworn to do, and must redeem my promise to transport her from here, without exciting attention, and without subjecting her to any personal injury. Do you now comprehend why I come?"

"I comprehend," said Corilla. "An empress would avenge herself, and therefore a poor poetess must forego her own little private revenge! But how, if I should not believe a word of this long story; if I should consider it a fable invented by you to assure the safety of your princess?"

"That you may be compelled to believe it, listen further to me."

And Alexis Orloff spoke long and zealously to her, affording her a glance into his most secret intrigues, into his finely-matured plans, while Corilla followed him with intense expectation and warmly-glowing cheeks.

"I comprehend it all, all!" said she, when Alexis had finally ended; "it is a deep and at the same time an infernal plan—a plan which must excite the envy and respect of Satan himself!"

"And yourself?" laughingly asked Alexis.

"Oh, I," said she—"I belong, perhaps, to the family of devils, and therefore take pleasure in aiding you! You need a negotiator who has a wide conscience and an eloquent tongue! I can furnish you with such a one. Ah, that will make a droll story. Said you not that the singer Carlo watched this golden treasure like a dragon? Well, it shall be his brother who shall contend with this dragon. His own brother—will not that be pleasant, count?"

"And are you sure of him?" asked Count Orloff. "How if his brother should win him from us?"

"Have no anxiety; this Carlo Ribas is so virtuous that he hates no one so much as his brother Joseph, merely because he passed some years in the galleys for forgery. He is now free, and has secretly come here. As he was aware that I knew his brother, he came to me to beg for my countenance and support. I will send him to you."

"And you will also not forget my request, that you will in all societies speak of the great love which the Empress Catharine cherishes for her near relation, the Princess Tartaroff?"

"I will not forget it. In your hands, count, I lay my revenge—you will free me from this rival?"

"That will I," said he, with an inhuman laugh. "And when the work is completed, and you have faithfully stood by me, then, signora, you may be sure of the gratitude of the empress. Catharine is the exalted protectress of the muses, and in the fulness of her grace she will not forget the poetess Corilla. You may expect an imperial reward."

"And I shall gratefully receive it," said Corilla, with a



smile. "A poetess is always poor and in want of assistance. The muses lavish upon their votaries all joys but those of wealth."

"Ah!" exclaimed Corilla, when the count had left her, "I shall in the end obtain all I desire. I shall not only be crowned with fame, but blessed with wealth, which is a blessing almost equal to that of fame! Money has already founded many a reputation, but not always has fame attracted money to itself! I shall be rich as well as famous!"

"That you already are!" exclaimed the Cardinal Francesco Albani, who unremarked had just entered the room.

"I am not," said she, with vehemence, "for they refuse me the prize of fame! Have you been with the pope, your eminence, and what did he say?"

"I come directly from him."

"Well, and what says he?"

"What he always says to me—no!"

Corilla stamped her feet violently, and her eyes flashed lightnings.

"How beautiful you are now!" tenderly remarked the cardinal, throwing an arm around her.

She rudely thrust him back. "Touch me not," said she, "you do not deserve my love. You are a weakling, as all men are. You can only coo like a pigeon, but when it comes to action, then sinks your arm, and you are powerless. Ah, the woman whom you profess to love begs of you a trifling service, the performance of which is of the highest importance to her, the greatest favor, and you will not fulfil

her request while yet swearing you love her! Go! you are a cold-hearted man, and wholly undeserving of Corilla's love!"

"But," despairingly exclaimed the cardinal, you require of me a service that it is not in my power to perform. Ask something else, Corilla—ask a human life, and you shall have it! But I cannot give what is not mine. You demand a laurel crown, which only the pope has the power to bestow, and he has sworn that you shall not have it so long as he lives!"

"Will he, then, live eternally?" cried Corilla, beside herself with rage.

The cardinal gave her an astonished and interrogating glance. But his features suddenly assumed a wild and malicious expression, and violently grasping Corilla's hand, he murmured:

"You are right! 'Will he, then, live forever?' Bah! even popes are mortal men. And if we should choose for his successor a man better disposed toward you than—Corilla," said the cardinal, interrupting himself, and in spite of her resistance pressing her to his bosom—"Corilla, swear once more to me that you will be mine, and only mine, as soon as I procure your coronation in the capitol! Swear it once more!"

She gave him such a sweet, enticing, and voluptuous smile that the cardinal trembled with desire and joy.

"When you in the capitol adorn Corilla with the laurel-crown, then will she willingly lay her myrtle crown at your feet," said she, with a charming expression of maiden modesty.



The cardinal again pressed her passionately to his bosom.

"You shall have the laurel crown, and your myrtle crown is mine!" he excitedly exclaimed. "You will soon see whether Francesco is a cold-hearted man! Farewell, Corilla!"

And with a hasty salute he left the room. The astonished Corilla dismissed him with a smile.

"If it is to succeed at all, it can be only through him," said she. "Poor Francesco, he will bring me a full laurel crown! And what can I give him in return? An exfoliated myrtle crown, that is all! No heart with it!"

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## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### THE HOLY CHAFFERERS.

CARDINAL FRANCESCO ALBANI, meantime, hastened through the streets with the sprightliness of youth. He noticed neither the respectful salutations and knee-bendings of those he passed, nor their visible shuddering and alarm when under the cardinal's hat they recognized the fierce and inhuman Francesco Albani.

He stopped before the palace of Cardinal Juan Angelo Braschi. The equipage of the new cardinal was drawn up before his door.

"Ah," gleefully remarked Albani, "he is therefore yet at home, and I shall meet with him!"

Hastily entering the palace, and pushing past the serv-

ant who would have preceded him, he entered the cardinal's cabinet unannounced.

"Be not troubled, your eminence," said Albani, with a smile, "I will not detain you long. I know your habits, and know that Signora Malveda usually expects you at this hour, because Cardinal Rezzonico is not then with her! But I have something important to say to you. You know I am a man who, without forms and circumlocutions, always come directly to the point. I do so now. You desire to be the successor of Ganganelli?"

Braschi turned pale, and timidly cast down his eyes.

"Why are you shocked?" cried Albani. "Every cardinal hopes and wishes to become the father of Christendom—that is natural; I should also wish it for myself, but I know that that cannot be. I have permitted these lord cardinals who, in the conclave, invoke the Holy Spirit, to look too much into my cards. I was not so prudent as you, Braschi, and therefore you are much the more likely to become God's vicegerent! Would you not like to be pope, if Ganganelli should happen to die? And how high would you hold my voice—how much would it be worth to you?"

"More than all I possess, infinitely more!" said the shrewd Braschi. "Were I sure of your voice, I might then have a definite hope of becoming a pope; for your voice carries many others with it. How, then, can you expect me to estimate what is inestimable?"

"Would you give me twenty thousand?" asked Albani.\*

\* Gorani (vol. ii., p. 131) says of this cardinal: "He is excessively vindictive, and keeps in his pay many so-called *bravi*, to whom he de-