

less Natalie, with her head reclining against the marble face of her friend!

Poor Natalie! Why must Marianne succeed in awaking thee from thy swoon? Why did you not let her continue in her insensibility, Marianne? In sleep, she at least would not have realized that she was now left entirely alone, entirely abandoned, with no one to defend her against her cruel and artful enemies, of whose existence she never once dreamed!

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## CHAPTER XL.

### INTRIGUES.

COUNT ORLOFF lay in a comfortable, careless position upon his divan, leisurely smoking his long Turkish pipe. Before him stood Joseph Ribas, laughingly relating in his own comic manner the occurrences of the preceding night.

"You are a wonderful man," said Orloff, when Joseph had finished. "You have honestly earned your epaulets, and to-day you will for the first time appear at my dinner-table as a Russian officer. Ah, I prophesy a great future for you. You have the requisite skill and address to make your fortune. You are shrewd, daring, and you recoil from no means, finding them all good and useful when they forward your aims. With such principles one may go far in this world, and Russia in fact offers you the best opportunity for bringing all these fine talents into use."

"And, moreover, I commenced my Russian career with

a good omen," said Joseph. "I have placed a murder at the head of my Russian deeds! That is a promising commencement, is it not, Sir Count? You must know that better than any one."

"Indeed yes, I must best know that," said the count, laughing, and continually stroking his long black beard. "By a fair and well-timed murder one can always make his fortune in Russia. A well-timed and well-executed murder is with us often rewarded with a barony and the title of count. Indeed, sometimes with the highest and tenderest imperial favor and grace. Ah, a murder at the right moment is an excellent thing, only one must be quite sure of himself, and not fail of hitting the right man. An unsuccessful murder is a very bad, and, indeed, a very dangerous thing. I would have nothing to do with one, and never have had any thing to do with one. Whatever I have undertaken I have always boldly and successfully accomplished. The good Emperor Peter III. knew that, and consequently trembled when I, with Passeb and Bariatinsky, entered his chamber. The good emperor! He did not tremble long, it was soon finished. Yes, yes, that was a deed done at the right time, and therefore has the great Catharine been so grateful to us, and honoured us above all the illustrious grandees of her empire."\*

"My little opening murder has, indeed, less significance," sighed Joseph Ribas. "What was it but to help a

\* Of the tragic and horrible events connected with Catharine's accession to the throne, and of the strangulation of Peter, in which he took so active a part, Orloff spoke in Rome with the greatest freedom and evident pleasure.—Gorani, vol. ii., p. 23.



humble musician to the blessedness and harmony of the spheres!"

"But that musician was your brother!"

Ribas shrugged his shoulders. "That is, he was so considered; but in reality I believe he was only a half-brother. My mother, of blessed memory, had many little adventures, and I think Carlo's birth was somewhat connected with them. Nor am I sure that it was not a necessary work to kill him, as it was surely my duty to avenge my father's injured honor, which is all I have done! Upon these grounds has a good, honest priest this day given me absolution, and I now stand before you pure and sinless as a maiden! We can therefore begin anew, your excellency. Have you still any commands for me?"

"You now have a very noble and sublime part to play," said Orloff, laughing. "You must now appear as the benefactor of our Russian princess, and as the mediating forerunner of my own person!"

"That will be indeed a charming rôle," said Ribas, rubbing his hands with delight. "I shall admirably acquit myself as benefactor and mediator. But give me some details, Sir Count!"

"You shall have them," said Orloff, "from the mouth of Stephano.—Stephano!"

The person called immediately appeared at the door of a side-room.

"Stephano," said Orloff, "now to the work, friend. The courier who arrived to-day has brought us good news and full powers. Count Paul Raczinsky is sent to Siberia for high-treason—his property is confiscated and falls to the

state. I have an unlimited power, signed by the empress herself, to seize and sell his possessions here in the name of the empress. Take with you some attorney and officers and go to this villa. But, first of all, help our little Joseph Ribas to his uniform and epaulets, that he may be properly costumed for a rescuer and benefactor. And now, away with you! Instruct him well, Stephano. Ah, I should like to be present at this delightful comedy!"

And Count Orloff broke out into a hearty laugh.

"This whole affair is very entertaining and romantic," he said to himself, as soon as he was alone. "I am truly very thankful to Catharine for intrusting it to me. I love the adventurous and romantic. Indeed, whom else could she have chosen for this business? I should like to know who would dare to enter the lists with me, the Russian Hercules, and who would be so bold as to contend with me for this prize?"

Thus speaking, he rose from the divan and stepped to the great Venetian mirror, before which he long remained attentively viewing himself.

"Ahem! this tender Empress Catharine knows how to judge of manly beauty," murmured he, with a self-satisfied smile, "and I cannot blame her for so often giving me the preference over my brother Gregory. Besides, I shall first appear before this little Princess Natalie in my antique dress. Catharine has often told me I was enchanting in my antique costume. Well, we will also let this enchantment work a little here. But first we must think of what is nearest to us. This Corilla has rendered us a service, and we must be grateful. They say she loves diamonds. I shall



therefore send her these diamonds which her *élève* Joseph Ribas last night made the property of the Russian crown. And with them I will send a little billet, written with my own hand. Who knows but that this will give her more pleasure than the sparkling brilliants!"

In that, however, the handsome Count Orloff was mistaken. The poetess Corilla therein resembled to a hair the prima-donnas and heroines of the stage of the present day. She attached a great value to diamonds, and knowing that Russia was very rich in gold and diamonds, she always had an especially bewitching smile for Russian grandees. Had Count Orloff come in person to bring the diamonds, she would undoubtedly have more admired him, apparently been more pleased with his presence than with his costly gift; but, as he was not there, there was no necessity for dissimulation.

She read Count Orloff's billet with a satisfied smile; but soon laid it aside for the delight of examining the jewels.

"How that shines, and how that sparkles," said the exhilarated poetess; "not even a lover's eyes flash so brightly, nor is his smile so proud, so full of rich certainty, as the sparkling of these gems! They are enchanters, and a word from me can change these *solitaires* and rosettes into a beautiful villa, or into a fragrant park with silent arbors, intoxicating odors, and sweetly-singing birds. All that is promised me by these stones—a lover's promises do not express half so much. And only to think that it is Carlo, my former lover, to whom I am indebted for these diamonds! From love to him I wished to destroy Natalie, and

that wish procured me the favor of the Russian count, and consequently these brilliants. Poor Carlo! these diamonds outlast you. How bright and beautiful were your glances that are now extinguished by death—but this cruel, inexorable death has no power over diamonds! It cannot strangle these as thou wert strangled, poor Carlo! I shall remember thee this evening, Carlo, and hope the thought of thee may inspire me for a right beautiful improvisation on death! I shall take pains to bring to mind thy beautiful form overflowed with blood. Yes, it will inspire in me a very effective improvisation, and I will at the same time make a selection from my dear poets of some striking rhymes upon death and the grave. And when I have the rhymes, the thoughts and words will come of themselves. Rhymes, rhymes, these are the main things with poets!"

And while the improvisatrice was thus speaking to herself, she had mechanically adorned her person with the brilliants, attaching the beautiful collar to her neck, the long pendants to her ears, and placing the splendid diadem upon her brow.

She looked exceedingly beautiful in these ornaments, and consequently rejoiced that her friend Cardinal Francesco Albani came at this precise moment.

"He will be ravished?" said she, with a smile, advancing to meet him with the proud and imposing dignity of a queen.

"You are beautiful as a goddess!" exclaimed the cardinal, "and whoever sees you thus has seen the protecting divinity of ancient Rome, the sublime Juno, queen of heaven!"



"Were I Juno, would you consent to be my Vulcan?" roguishly asked Corilla.

"No," said Albani, laughing; "the noble Juno was not exactly true to her Vulcan, and I require a faithful love! Would you be that, Corilla?"

"We shall see," said she, changing the arrangement of the diadem before the glass—"we shall see, my worthy friend. But forget not the conditions—first the laurel-crown!"

"You shall have it!" triumphantly responded the cardinal.

"Are you certain of that?" asked Corilla, with flashing eyes and glowing cheeks.

Cardinal Francesco Albani smiled mysteriously.

"Pope Ganganelli is ill," said he, "and it is thought he will die!"

## CHAPTER XLI.

### THE DOOMING LETTER.

GROANING, supported by his faithful Lorenzo's arm, Pope Ganganelli slowly moved through the walks of his garden. Some months had passed since the suppression of the order of the Jesuits—how had these few months changed poor Clement! Where was the peace and cheerfulness of his face, where was the sublime expression of his features, the firm and noble carriage of his body—where was it all?

Trembling, shattered, with distorted features, and with

dull, half-closed eyes, crawled he about with groans, his brow wrinkled, his lips compressed by pain and inward sorrow.

No one dared to remain with him; he spoke to no one. But Lorenzo was yet sometimes able to drive away the clouds from his brow, and to recall a faint smile to his thin pale lips.

He had also to-day succeeded in this, and for the first time in several weeks had Ganganelli, yielding to his prayers, consented to a walk in the garden of the Quirinal.

"This air refreshes me," said the pope, breathing more freely; "it seems as if it communicated to my lungs a renewed vital power and caused the blood to flow more rapidly in my veins. Lorenzo, this is a singularly fortunate day for me, and I will make the most of it. Come, we will repair to our Franciscan Place!"

"That is an admirable idea," said Lorenzo, delighted. "If your holiness can reach it, you will recover your health, and all will again be well."

Ganganelli sighed, and glanced toward heaven with a sad smile.

"Health!" said he. "Ah, Lorenzo, that word reminds me of a lost paradise. The avenging angel has driven me from it, and I shall never see it again."

"Say not so!" begged Lorenzo, secretly wiping a tear from his cheek. "No, say not so, you will certainly recover!"

"Yes, recover!" replied the pope. "For death is a recovery, and in the end perhaps the most real."

They silently walked on, and making a path through