

## CHAPTER XLII.

## THE RUSSIAN OFFICER.

WITH Carlo's death, Natalie had lost her last friend; with the stolen money and diamonds, Marianne was robbed of her last pecuniary means. But Natalie paid no attention to Marianne's lamentations. What cared she for poverty and destitution—what knew she of these outward treasures, of this wealth consisting in gold and jewels? Natalie knew only that she had been robbed of a noble, spiritual possession—that they had murdered the friend who had consecrated himself to her with such true and devoted love, and, weeping over his body, she dedicated to him the tribute of a tear of the purest gratitude, of saddest lamentation.

But so imperfect is the world that it often leaves no time for mourning—that in the midst of our sorrow it causes us to hear the prosaic voices of reality and necessity, compelling us to dry our eyes and turning our thoughts from painfully-sweet remembrances of a lost happiness to the realities of practical life.

Natalie's delicately-sensitive soul was to experience this rough contact of reality, and, with an internal shudder, must she bend under the rough hand of the present.

Pale, breathless, trembling, rushed Marianne into the room where Natalie, in solitary mourning, was weeping for her lost friend.

"We are ruined, hopelessly ruined!" screamed Marianne. "They will drive us from our last possession, they

will turn us out of our house! All the misfortunes of the whole world break over and crush us!"

The young maiden looked at her with a calm, clear glance.

"Then let them crush us," she quietly said. "It is better to be crushed at once than to be slowly and lingeringly wasted!"

"But you hear me not, princess," shrieked Marianne, wringing her hands. "They will drive us from here, I tell you; they will expel you from your house!"

"And who will do that?" asked the young maiden, proudly rising with flashing eyes. "Who dares threaten me in my own house?"

"Without are soldiers and bailiffs and the officers of the Russian embassy. They have made a forcible entrance, and with force they will expel you from the house. They are already sealing the doors and seizing everything in the house."

A dark purple glow for a moment overspread Natalie's cheeks, and her glance was flame. "I will see," said she, "who has the robber-like boldness to dispute my possession of my own property!"

With proud steps and elevated head she strode through the room to the door opening upon the corridor.

The bailiffs and soldiers, who had been placed there, respectfully stood aside. Natalie paid no attention to them, but immediately advanced to the officer who, with a loud voice, was just then commanding them to seal all the doors and see that nothing was taken from the rooms.

"I wish to know," said Natalie, with her clear, silver-

toned voice—"I wish to know by what right people here force their way into my house, and what excuse you have for this shameless conduct?"

The officer, who was no other than Stephano, bowed to her with a slightly ironical smile.

"Justice needs no excuse," said he. "On the part and by command of her illustrious majesty, the great Empress Catharine, I lay an attachment upon this house and all it contains. It is from this hour the sacred possession of her Russian majesty."

"It is the exclusive property of the Count Paulo!" proudly responded Natalie.

"It was the property of Count Paul Rasczinsky," said Stephano. "But convicted traitors have no property. This criminal count has been convicted of high-treason. The mercy of the empress has indeed changed the sentence of death into one of eternal banishment to Siberia, but she has been pleased to approve the confiscation of all he possessed. In virtue of this approval, and by permission of the holy Roman government, I attach this house and its contents!"

Natalie no longer heard him. Almost unconscious lay she in Marianne's arms. Paulo was lost, sentenced to death, imprisoned, and banished for life—that was all she had heard and comprehended—this terrible news had confused and benumbed her senses.

"Sir!" implored Marianne, pressing Natalie to her bosom, "you will at least have some mercy upon this young maiden; you will not thrust us out upon the streets; you will grant us a quiet residence in this house until

we can collect our effects and secure what is indisputably ours!"

"Every thing in this house is the indisputable property of the empress!" roughly responded Stephano.

"But not ourselves, I hope!" excitedly exclaimed Marianne. "This imperial power does not extend over our persons?"

Stephano roughly replied: "The door stands open, go! But go directly, or I shall be compelled to arrest you for opposing the execution of the laws, and stirring up sedition!"

"Yes, let us go," cried Natalie, who had recovered her consciousness—"let us go, Marianne. Let us not remain a moment longer in a house belonging to that barbarous Russian empress who has condemned the noble Count Paulo as a criminal, and, robber-like, taken forcible possession of his property!"

And, following the first impulse of her noble pride, the young maiden took Marianne by the hand and drew her away.

"They, at least, shall not forcibly eject us," said she; "no, no, we will go of our own free will, self-banished!"

"But where shall we go?" cried Marianne, wringing her hands.

"Where God wills!" solemnly responded the young maiden.

"And upon what shall we live?" wailed Marianne. "We are now totally destitute and helpless. How shall we live?"

"We will work!" said Natalie, firmly. A peculiar calm

had come over her. Misfortune had awakened a new quality in her nature, sorrow had struck a new string in her being; she was no longer the delicate, gentle, suffering, unresisting child; she felt in herself a firm resolution, a bold courage, an almost joyful daring, and an invincible calmness.

"Work! *You* will work, princess?" whispered Marianne.

"I will learn it!" said she, and with a constantly quickened step they approached the outlet of the garden.

The gate which led out into the street was wide open; soldiers in the Russian uniform had been stationed before it, keeping back with their carbines the curious Romans who crowded around in great numbers, glad of an opportunity to get a peep into the so-long-closed charmed garden.

"See, there she comes, the garden fairy!" cried they all, as Natalie neared the gate.

"How beautiful she is, how beautiful!" they loudly exclaimed.

"That is a real fairy, a divinity!"

Natalie heard none of these expressions of admiration—she had but one object, one thought. She wished to leave the garden; she wished to go forth; she had no regrets, no complaints, for this lost paradise; she only wished to get out of it, even if it was to go to her death.

But the soldiers stationed at the gate opposed her progress.

Natalie regarded them with terror and amazement.

"They cannot, at least, oppose my voluntary resigna-

tion of my property," said she. "Away with these muskets and sabres! I would pass out!"

And the young maiden boldly advanced a step. But those weapons stretched before her like a wall, and Natalie was now overcome by anguish and despair; the inconsolable feeling of her total abandonment, of her miserable isolation. Tears burst from her eyes, her pride was broken, she was again the trembling young girl, no longer the heroic woman; she wept, and in tremulous tone, with folded hands, she implored of these rough soldiers a little mercy, a little compassion.

They understood not her language, they had no sympathy; but the crowd were touched by the tears of the beautiful girl and by the sad lamentations of her companion. They screamed, they howled, they insulted the soldiers, they swore to liberate the two women by force, if the soldiers any longer refused them a passage. Dumb, unshaken, immovable, like a wall stood the soldiers with their weapons stretched forth.

Through the hissing and tumult a loud and commanding voice was suddenly heard to ask, "What is going on here? What means this disturbance?" An officer made his way through the crowd, and approached the garden gate. The soldiers respectfully gave way, and he stepped into the garden.

"Oh, sir," said Natalie, turning to him her tearful face, "if you are an honorable man, have compassion for an abandoned and unprotected maiden, and command these soldiers, who seem to obey you, to let me and my companion go forth unhindered."

The Russian officer, Joseph Ribas, bowed low and respectfully to her. "If it is the Princess Tartaroff whom I have the honor of addressing," said he, "I must in the name of my illustrious lord, beg your pardon for what has improperly occurred here; at his command I come to set it all right!"

Thus speaking, he returned to the soldiers, and in a low tone exchanged some words with their leader. The latter bowed respectfully, and at his signal the soldiers shut the gate and retired into the street.

"Am I to be detained here as a prisoner?" exclaimed Natalie. "Am I not allowed to leave this garden?"

"Your grace, preliminarily, can still consider this garden as your own property," he respectfully responded. "I am commanded to watch that no one dare to disturb you here, and for this purpose my lord respectfully requests that you will have the goodness to permit me to remain in your house as the guardian of your safety."

"And who is this generous man?" asked Natalie.

"He is a man who has made a solemn vow to protect innocence everywhere, when he finds it threatened!" solemnly responded Joseph Ribas. "He is a man who is ready to shed his blood for the Princess Tartaroff, who is surrounded by enemies and dangers; a man," he continued, in a lower tone, "who knows and loves your friend and guardian, Count Paulo, and will soon bring you secret and sure news from him!"

"He knows Count Paulo!" joyfully exclaimed Natalie. "Oh, then all is well. I may safely confide in whoever

knows and loves Count Paulo, for he must bear in his bosom a noble heart!"

And turning to Joseph Ribas with a charming smile, she said, "Sir, lead me now where you will. We will both gladly follow you!"

"Let us, first of all, go into the villa, and send away those troublesome people!" said the Russian officer, preceding the two women to the house.

The bailiffs and soldiers were still there, occupied with sealing the doors and closets. Joseph Ribas approached them with angry glances, and, turning to Stephano, said, "Sir, I shall call you to account for this over-hasty and illegal proceeding!"

"I am in my right!" morosely answered Stephano. "Here is the command to attach this villa. It has fallen to the Russian crown as the property of the traitor Rasczinsky."

"There is only the one error to be corrected," said Joseph Ribas, "that this villa was not the property of Count Rasczinsky, as he some months ago sold it to his friend, my master. And as, so far as I know, the illustrious count, my master, never was a traitor, you will please to respect his property!"

"You will first have to authenticate your assertions!" responded Stephano, with a rude laugh.

"Here is the documental authentication!" said Joseph Ribas, handing a paper to Stephano. The latter, after attentively reading the documents, bowed reverentially, and said: "Sir, it appears that I was certainly mistaken. This deed of gift is *en règle*, and is undersigned by his grace the

Russian ambassador. You will pardon me, as I only acted according to my orders."

Joseph Ribas answered Stephano's reverential bow with a haughty nod. "Go," said he, "take off the seals in the quickest possible time, and then away with you!"

But as Stephano was about retiring with his people, Joseph Ribas beckoned him back again.

"You have, therefore, recognized this deed of gift?" asked he, and as Stephano assented, he continued: "You therefore cannot deny that my master is the undisputed possessor of this villa, and can do with it according to his pleasure?"

"I do not deny it at all!" growled Stephano.

Joseph Ribas then drew forth another paper, which he also handed Stephano. "You will also recognize this deed of gift to be regular and legal! It is likewise undersigned and authenticated by our ambassador."

Stephano, having attentively read it, almost indignantly said:

"It is all right. But the count is crazy, to give away so fine a property!"

And still grumbling, he departed with his people.

Clinging to Marianne's side, Natalie had observed the whole proceeding with silent wonder; and, with the astonishment of innocence and inexperience, she comprehended nothing of the whole scene, nor was a suspicion awakened in her childish pure soul.

"He is, then, really going?" she asked, as Stephano was slowly moving off.

"Yes, he is going," said Joseph Ribas, "and will never

venture to disturb you again. Henceforth you will be in undisputed possession of your property. My lord has made this villa and garden forever yours by a regular legal deed of gift."

"And who is your lord?" asked Natalie. "Tell me his name—tell me where I may find him, that I may return him my thanks?"

"Yes, conduct us to him," said the weeping Marianne. "Let me clasp his feet and implore his further protection for my poor helpless princess."

"My lord desires no thanks," proudly responded Ribas. "He does good for its own sake, and protects innocence because that is the duty of every knight and nobleman."

"At least tell me his name, that I may pray for him," sobbed Marianne.

"Yes, his name," said Natalie, with a charming smile. "Ah, how I shall love that name!"

"His name is his own secret," said Ribas. "The world, indeed, knows and blesses him, calling him the bravest of the brave. But it is his command that you shall never be informed of it. He desires nothing, no thanks, no acknowledgments—he wishes only to secure your peace and happiness, and thus redeem the solemn vow he made to his friend, Count Paulo Raszinsky, to guard and preserve you as a father, and to watch over you as your tutelary genius!"

"Thanks, thanks, my God!" cried Marianne, with her arms raised toward heaven. "Thou sendest us help in our need, Thou hast mercy on suffering innocence, and sendest her a saviour in her greatest distress!"

The young maiden said nothing. Her radiant glance was directed heavenward, and, folding her hands over her bosom, with a happy, grateful smile she murmured :

"I am therefore no longer alone, I have a friend who watches over and protects me. Whoever he may be, he is sent by Count Paulo. Whatever may be his name, I shall be forever grateful to him!"

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### CHAPTER XLIII.

#### ANTICIPATION.

FROM that day had a new and marvellous life commenced for Natalie. She felt herself surrounded by a dreamy, magic, fantastic, supernatural life; it seemed as if some invisible genius hovered over her, listening to all her thoughts, realizing all her wishes! And Joseph Ribas was the merry, always-cheerful, always-serviceable Kobold of this invisible deity!

"My lord is not satisfied with the modest furnishing of your villa," said he to Natalie, on the first day. "He begs to be allowed to adorn your chamber with a splendor suited to your rank and your future greatness!"

"And in what is my future greatness to consist?" asked the young maiden, with curiosity.

"That will be made known to you at the proper time," mysteriously replied Joseph Ribas.

"Who will tell me?"

"He, the count."

"I shall therefore see him!" she joyfully exclaimed.

"Perhaps! Will you, however, first allow me to have your room properly furnished?"

"This villa belongs to your lord," said Natalie. "It is for him, as lord and master, to do as he pleases in it."

And satisfied, Ribas hastened away, to return in a few hours with more than fifty workmen and artists, in order to commence the improvements.

Until now the villa had been finished and furnished with simple elegance. One missed nothing necessary for comfort or convenience, for pleasantness or taste. But it was still only the elegant and fashionable residence of a private person. Now, as by the stroke of a magic wand, this villa in a few days was converted into the splendid palace of some sultan or caliph. There were heavy Turkish carpets on the floors, velvet curtains with gold embroidery at the windows and on the walls, the richest and most comfortable divans and arm-chairs, covered with gold-embroidered stuffs; vases ornamented with the most costly precious stones, noble bronze statues, beautiful paintings, and between them the rarest ornaments, glistening with jewels, which modern times have designated by the name of ribs; there were delicate little trifles of inestimable value, and with refined taste and judgment every thing was sought out which luxury and convenience could demand. With childish astonishment and ecstasy, Natalie wandered through these rooms, which she hardly recognized in their splendid ornamentation, and stood before these treasures of trifles which she hardly dared to touch.

"This lord must be either a magician or a nabob,"

thoughtfully remarked Marianne; "it must have required millions to effect all this."

Natalie asked neither whether he was a magician, a millionaire, or a nabob; she only thought she was to see him, and be allowed to thank him—nothing further.

"Will he come now?" she constantly asked of the humble and slavishly devoted Joseph Ribas; "will he come now that his house is prepared for his reception?"

"It is adorned only for you, princess," humbly replied Ribas. "The count, my master, wishes for nothing but to see you in a habitation worthy of you!"

But what was this luxury, what cared she for these treasures the value of which she was incapable of estimating, and which were indifferent to her? She who had no conception of wealth or of money!—she, who knew not that there was poverty in the world, and who, raised in an Eden separated from the world, had no idea that hunger had ever made its appearance within it—she knew only the sorrows of the happy, the deprivations of the rich; she had never had either to struggle against real misfortune or to experience real want and deprivation.

Now, indeed, a deeper sorrow had entered into her life; she had lost her beloved paternal friend, Count Paulo; and Carlo, also, had been torn from her! That was certainly a more profound sorrow, and she had wept much for both of them,—but yet that was no real misfortune. She had never yet lost the whole substance of her life; for those two, however much she might always have loved them, had nevertheless, not entirely filled out her life; they had been a part of her happiness, but not that happiness itself.

And she awaited happiness! She awaited it with ecstasy and devotion, with feverish hope and glowing desire! She knew not and asked not in what this happiness was to consist, and yet her heart yearned for it; she called for this unknown and nameless happiness with a throbbing bosom and tremulously whispering lips!

She was so much alone, she had so much time for dreaming, and intoxicating herself with fantastic imaginations! She was surrounded by a fabulous world, and she was the fairy of that world! But out of that fabulous world she sometimes longed to be, out of the ideal into the real; she yearned for truth and actuality. Then she would call Joseph Ribas to her side and bid him relate to her of that unknown lord, his master.

He told her of his battles and his heroic deeds, of his wonderful acts of bravery, and the young maiden tremblingly and shudderingly listened to him. She feared this man, who had shed streams of blood, and whose enemies with their dying lips had lauded as the greatest of heroes! And Joseph Ribas smiled when he saw her turn pale and tremble, and he would speak to her of his generosity and humanity, of his knighthood and virtue; he related to her how, on one occasion, at the risk of his life he had protected and saved a persecuted young maiden; how on another he had taken pity on a helpless old man, and singly had defended him against a host of bloodthirsty enemies. He also spoke to her of the sorrow of his master on account of the ingratitude and deceptions he had experienced, and Natalie's eyes filled with tears as, with reproachful glances, she asked of Heaven how it could have permitted the virtue

of this noble unknown hero to be so severely tried, and the baseness of mankind to trouble him.

"That is it, then," Ribas would often say; "he diffuses happiness everywhere around him, while he himself has it not! He makes glad and cheerful faces wherever he appears, and his own is the only serious and sad brow. Mankind have made him hopeless, and for himself he no longer believes in happiness!"

Ah, how then did the heart of this innocent child tremble, and how she longed to find some means for restoring his belief in happiness.

"But why does he not come to those who love him?" asked she. "Why does he decline the thanks of those whose hearts are truly devoted to him? Ah, in our humid eyes and joy-beaming faces he would recognize the truthfulness of our feelings! Why, then, comes he not?"

"I will tell you," said Ribas, with a smile; "he hates women, because the only one he ever loved was false to him, and now his love is changed to ardent hatred of all women!"

"I shall therefore never see him!" sighed the girl, hanging her head with the sadness of disappointment.

This expectation, this constantly increasing impatience, rendered her inaccessible to any other feeling, any other thought. He of whom she did not know even the name, was sent by Paulo, and therefore had she believed and confided in him from the first. Now had she already forgotten that she had confided in him on Paulo's account; she believed in him on his own account, and Paulo had retreated

into the background. Occasionally also the bloody image of poor Carlo presented itself to her mind, and she secretly reproached herself for having mourned him for so short a time, for having so soon forgotten that faithful, self-sacrificing friend.

But even these reproaches were soon silenced when with a throbbing bosom she thought of this new friend, who like a divinity hovered over her at an infinite and unattainable distance, and whose mysteriously active nearness replaced both of those friends she had lost, and for whom she could no longer mourn.

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#### CHAPTER XLIV.

HE!

"It is now high time!" said Joseph Ribas, one day, as, coming from Natalie, he entered the boudoir of Count Alexis Orloff. "Now, your excellency, the right moment has come! You must now show yourself, or this curious child will consume herself with a longing that has changed her blood to fire! She thinks of nothing but you; with open eyes she dreams of you, and without the least suspicion that any one is listening to her, she speaks to you, ah, with what modest tenderness and with what humble devotion! I tell you, your excellency, you are highly blessed. There is no child more innocent, no woman more glowing with love. And she knows it not; no, she has not the least suspicion that she already loves you with enthusiasm, and thirsts for