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## ANGELA; AN HISTORICAL TALE.

### CHAPTER XI.—THE PROPHECY FULFILLED.

"Oh, welcome is the thought of thee,  
As the fragrance of an Eastern night!"

It was another of those fair Eastern nights towards the end of the month of October, about ten days after the scenes related in our last chapter. The blue waves of a Mediterranean gently kissed the sides of a galley which, with swelling sails, was gaily making its way towards the fair island of Malta. Yes, fair it had become beneath the sway of the brave Knights of St. John, though but a bare hundred years before a low rocky sandbank had received the heroic L'Isle Adam, with the poor remains of the devoted Rhodians, who clung to their beloved sovereign after the loss of their own fair island of roses. Earth had been brought in ship-loads from Sicily; gardens had been formed; a new city built and fortified; and it had gallantly sustained siege after siege, in which the sworn Knights of the Cross had redeemed their vows, and freely and nobly again shed their blood for the defence of Christendom.

And now the lights of the island of Gozo could almost be seen glimmering in the distance, and the low headlands lay stretching before the bows of the vessel, as she skimmed her way like a sea-bird o'er the dark blue waves.

On the deck of the galley reposed a maiden, her frail form wrapped in a long crimson mantle, which bore the eight-pointed cross embroidered on one side, while by her side reclined a knight, his elbow alone resting on the silken cushions that had been spread all around, and which supported the fair figure of his companion.

"Wrap it well around thee, Angela," said the knight; "the night-air may chill thee, and then I shall regret having given in to thy caprice of remaining all night on deck."

"Nay, Ferdinand," she replied; "it were for me to chide thee for not wearing thine own mantle; only I feel as if I were to refuse what is more dear and more sacred to me than an emperor's pail, were it to resign it."

"How so, sister mine?" said the knight playfully.

"Ah, Ferdinand, have I not read, have I not heard, have I not dreamed of the gallant Knights of St. John, till the brightest spot in all my happiness is, that a brother of Angela di Mendoza should wear their habit, take their vows, and be enrolled beneath their banner? One thing further alone remains."

"And what is that, Angela?" inquired her brother, nothing loth to hear the sweet voice of his sister sing the praises of the Order he loved more than his very life.

"Perhaps, when I am in a very communicative mood, I may tell thee," returned the maiden.

"And why not now?" persisted the knight.

"Because I want to know what brought you so luckily to Syria, just in time to carry me off, like a very pirate that you are, unknown to any one."

"We had been cruising in search of pirates," returned the knight; "you know one great use of our army is to protect pilgrims by sea on their way to the Holy Sepulchre, since we can no longer do so with our arms in our hands on the fair shores of Palestine. When we first touched at the island, on that beautiful moonlit night when you took me for a saint, Angela, we were on our way thither; and, to tell you true, never did storm make me do a thing more agreeable to my inclinations than forcing me to put into that little harbor at the back of the island."

"And wherefore?" said the maiden. "Did Angela hunt thy dreams while capturing pirates in the Archipelago, as much as she seems to have done while sleeping beneath the shade of the cave by the sea side?"

"Precisely," replied the knight; "and yet I would not go out of my way to find her. I left it in the hands of our Lady of Phalermos; for you must acknowledge that, without knowing more than you would vouchsafe to tell me while guiding me to the fountain, it was an adventure more befitting a knight-errant than a follower of the Holy Baptist to come again on purpose to look after thee. Hadst thou then told me enough to recognize thee—"

"All was rightly arranged," interrupted Angela, sighing; "and our Lady of Phalermos guided thee in time to protect me, though not to save him."

"Angela, wouldst thou begrudge him his crown?" murmured the young knight. "Ah, sister mine, the day may come when thou wilt have to see one more near to thee, even by the ties of blood, fall gloriously beneath the sword of the; and wilt thou weep pover him? Nay, Angela; I thought thee full of aspirations more befitting the sister of a Knight of the Cross.— Our gentle mother will read thee other lessons; for she is a very St. Sympherosa over her only son, and learnt the spirit meet for the wife of a

martyr, when she bound up our father's death-wounds on the plains of Granada, and tried in vain to staunch the flowing life-blood, as she pillowed his head on her faithful bosom."

"Thou art right, Ferdinand," returned the maiden; "my sighs are womanly weakness, unworthy of her who has so often thought and felt she would have stood on the battlefields of Rhodes, and watched the live-long night beside the saintly form of L'Isle Adam, had she lived in those days. O Ferdinand!" she continued, raising herself in a burst of enthusiasm which she now had found one to appreciate, "have you ever seen that beautiful island, with its gardens of roses, and its flowing streams, and its flowery valleys? Is that crescent-shaped harbor, with its glittering palaces, and its tapering spires, always to be in the hands of the foes of Christ?— Oh, shame on those who suffered the brave defenders of Christendom to battle it out alone against an innumerable host, and never move their fingers to help them! And then, when the poor, sickly, yet devoted, crowd gathered round their sovereign and their father, and he tenderly bade them follow his footsteps, even though he himself was a homeless wanderer, was there nothing but the barren rock of Malta that could be given as the portion of the Knights of the Cross?"

"Nay, talk not against Malta," returned the knight; "though there spoke out the brave blood of Mendoza."

"Mendoza, Mendoza!" echoed Angela. "I have dreamt over the fair land of Italy, till I can scarcely brook other blood to be mingled in my veins. You are called Ferdinand; but Angela is my name, and it speaks of Italy to me.— What was our mother's name? Mayhap that were more befitting me."

"Nay," replied her brother; "wait till our mother tells thee as many romances of beautiful Spain, when thou wilt no longer prefer the name of Santa Croce to that of Mendoza."

"Santa Croce!" murmured Angela. "Ay, it lifts me up indeed; in religion it shall be mine. Nay, start not, Ferdinand; for this is the one thing further that remains to be accomplished; and I vowed it on that night, when, leaning over the parapet of the lone churchyard of St. John's, I was sadly musing, as my wont used to be, that I was a nameless creature, and that this was the only bar that seemed to make me unwilling to be the Spouse of Christ. And then, Ferdinand, you stood before me, as if in answer to my prayer; our Lady of Phalermos had granted my petition; my name and kindred were restored to me; and once I have seen my mother's face, and heard her sweet voice, and knelt once more for her blessing, the vow must be accomplished."

"I blame thee not, Angela," returned the knight; "happy are they who give their hearts to God, in the first spring of their youth and beauty! Only one thing I ask: wait awhile, and let our mother see her long-lost treasure for some time and then bethink thee of an Order that befits thy rank and name."

"I vowed to be His beneath the habit of St. John," said the maiden musingly. "I then thought of the St. John before me; but he told me that 'in other lands' the great St. John was to be 'my guard, my refuge, and my rest!'"

"Because in his prophetic spirit," returned the knight, "he foresaw what was to happen to thee; and that verily the great St. John in other lands, and in Malta itself, hath the Nuns as well as the Knights of the Holy Sepulchre."

A flash of joyful surprise beamed from the maiden's dark eyes at the moment.

"Say you so, Ferdinand? Now, then, indeed my path is plain; but there is one thing more he said: a dark cloud of sorrow and trial was coming over me; first my name and kindred were to be restored, and then he made me promise to be faithful unto Christ, if needs were, unto death!"

"And has not the dark cloud been over thee, sweet one?" said her brother.

"But my faith has not been tried, Ferdinand," she replied; "other virtues have, and he has obtained me grace to be faithful, I hope; but I have not yet been called upon to confess the faith of Christ even unto death, and none of his words will fall to the ground, I am convinced."

"Brood not over the morrow," replied the knight; "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof, Angela dearest," he added, seeing her thoughtful brow, and eyes now swimming in tears; for, with all her heroism, Angela could not yet face the thought of her Father with anything like calmness.

"The wind has died away," he continued, "and I fear me we shall not find ourselves nearer La Valetta till morning. I quite hoped to have found ourselves anchored there before midnight."

"A sail, Sir Knight," said Girolamo, coming up hastily at this moment, "bearing down to the right. They have the wind on them still, but we scarcely make any way through the water."

"Where, Brother Girolamo?" replied the knight, rising, and going towards the bows of the vessel. "So near Malta! It must be one of our own cruisers."

Angela remained alone. Her brother's last words would have taken away all fear had she conceived any at that moment; but her mind had wandered away to her last talk with her martyred Father, and the mystical words wherewith he had foreshadowed to her her future fate.— Calmly she prayed that, if other trials were yet in store for her, she might have strength to prove herself really worthy of the name of the martyr's adopted child; and a trusting peace seemed shed over her heart as she looked forward to the approaching meeting with her mother, whose memory still lived on within her after so many years of cruel separation. She almost fancied she was folded within her arms, and felt the maternal kiss upon her brow as she knelt for her first blessing; the joy of Ferdinand, the tears of all. How deliciously was Angela di Mendoza dreaming!

A bustle near her aroused her. Men were hurrying to and fro, arms were being prepared, the rowers swarming to their places on the oar-benches, and at the same instant her brother came up.

"Angela, my sister, the night is cold; you had better go below."

"Nay, Ferdinand," she replied, "Angela will not disgrace the name of Mendoza. There is danger."

He took her hand, and led her below.

"You are right," said he, as he hastily donned his armor; "a Turkish vessel is bearing down upon us, and another is in the distance. We may yet escape them by rowing; but the wind is in their favor. Be it as it may, stir not, Angela, from here. I charge thee, whatever happens, venture not on deck. Succor cannot fail to come ere long; and indeed I wonder at the infidels daring to venture so near the port. The cannon will, ere long, arouse our friends; but meantime we shall have to fight it out alone."

He gazed at her one moment, and she threw herself into his arms.

"Remember, loved one, we must be faithful unto death. Now is the moment of trial," he murmured, as he hastily clasped her to his bosom. "Stay here, and pray for us."

"Fear not for me, Ferdinand; God and our Blessed Lady be with you. If it be death, even death shall not part us."

He pointed to an image of our Lady of Phalermos which hung in the cabin, lighted by a lamp that burnt dimly before it; gave one look and a smile towards heaven, and burned away. The next moment Angela heard his musical tones on deck, as a shout of welcome greeted his appearance.

"For God and St. John, brothers! Hoist up the banner, and let you infidel dogs see that they cannot show the crescent unscathed so near where the cross reigns triumphant."

For a moment Angela looked round, as was her wont in an hour of danger, to realize her position. A dagger lying on the table struck her attention. She took it up and placed in her bosom, determined, if necessary, it should be used. She then collected whatever she could lay her hands on in the shape of bandages and linen, and laid them on one side, thinking, as she did so, that very soon she might be called upon to begin the duties of the life she had vowed to God in the Order of St. John. Every weapon that lay within her reach was taken down and placed in readiness; then, calmly turning to the image of our Lady of Phalermos, she knelt down, and with her face buried in her hands, awaited the sounds of the conflict.

She did not wait very long. A tremendous crash of a whole broadside was the first signal of the struggle. Then followed the crashing of armor, the shrieks of the wounded, the shouts and curses of the Turks as they jumped on the deck and were driven back, again and again, by the devoted bravery of that little band of heroes, but above all the din she could hear her brother's musical voice, clear and ringing as an silver bugle, foremost in the attack, first at every point of danger, encouraging his men to die sooner than yield. It was a fearful time; perhaps more fearful to her who knelt in that darkened cabin, knowing nothing of the result, than to those who were engaged in the struggle. At last she heard no more the knight's voice, though the battle ceased not, and in a few more moments the door hastily opened. She started up, rushed towards it, and perceived the faithful Girolamo bearing in the bleeding form of her brother.

"Mother of God!" he exclaimed, "my master, my master, they have done for him!"

"Away, away!" cried the knight, opening his eyes. "Girolamo, haste to thy post. Leave me here; and me not. Bid them hold on to the last. Succor is at hand, and the infidels perceive it not."

"I will revenge you or die!" said the faithful brother-at-arms, tears streaming in spite of himself down his cheeks. "Lady, this is your

work!" and laying into her arms the now insensible form of the knight, he rushed back to the conflict. Calmly and tearlessly she knelt beside him, and laid him gently on the floor. She pressed her hands against the pierced side, from whence the blood was flowing in torrents; endeavored to staunch the blood that poured from his gashed and wounded brow, and whispered in his ears the names of 'Jesus' and 'Mary.' He seemed to recognise her.

"Angela, my beloved, there is yet hope; tell my mother I died for the faith of Christ."

He had scarcely uttered the words when the fighting which had seemed to rage more on the other side of the vessel suddenly ceased, and a shout was raised by the Turks, while at the same moment a turbaned head was seen making its way into the cabin.

"Glorious!" he exclaimed, seizing the arm of the noble maiden, who had risen, and placed her slight form between him and the knight, and now stood waiting the blow of his uplifted sword, without a shrinking in her frame, or a failing in the bright eye that was fixed upon him; "renounce thy accursed faith, and I will spare thee for thy beauty; else—"

"Finish not thy threat, infidel," she replied boldly, making the holy sign, "but perform it.— I spurn thy false prophet, and a Christian I will live and die."

Another moment, and with a dull curse the scimitar of the infidel would have descended, when, with an almost superhuman effort of his ebbing strength, the knight raised himself, and with one blow of his sword the infidel's head half-severed on his shoulder. With one deep groan his arm fell motionless by his side, and he lay prostrate upon the apparently lifeless body of Ferdinand di Mendoza. At the same moment retreating footsteps were heard rushing from the vessel in confusion; and a feeble shout of triumph in Christian accents, which presently was echoed by a peal of artillery. Saccorers had arrived, and the Turks, in the instant of victory, abandoned their prize, which they had only taken when not one of that gallant little crew remained that was not dead or wounded.

When the Christians boarded the vessel and entered the cabin, they found what they at first thought three corpses lying together on the ground; for the form of the maiden who had fallen beside her brother was so covered with the mingled blood that flowed from her intended murderer and her preserver, that every feature in her state of insensibility, was quite unrecognisable; but Angela di Mendoza still lived.

CHAPTER XII.—THE HOME OF THE KNIGHT OF ST. JOHN.

"I knew thee when the dog tawned on thee; A mother's eyes are quick!"

Southeys' Roderick.

"Mother of Heaven!" were the first words that saluted the ears of the retiring Angela, "what doeth this maiden here?" and she felt herself lifted from the ground as tenderly as though in her mother's arms, and carried to a couch in a pair of stalwart mailed arms. The first thing that she saw was the benevolent manly face of a bronzed old knight, scarred and seamed with many a wound in defence of the Cross, leaning over her. "Why, 'tis a mere child; and, by my troth, as fair a one as my sweet sister Emilia was many a long year ago! Cheer thee, fair maiden," he continued, as he met the bewildered gaze of returning consciousness; "thou art in good hands, the hands of the brave Knights of the Cross, who would not harm a hair of thy head. Whence comest thou? and what is thy name?"

"Angela di Mendoza," murmured the still only half-conscious girl.

"Di Mendoza! Di Mendoza!" ejaculated the old knight; "and where is our brave brother-in-arms, Ferdinand di Mendoza?"

Sore repented the good knight that rash speech; for with a wild scream the maiden, everything suddenly rushing upon her mind, sprang from the couch and threw herself upon the floor beside the lifeless body of her brother.

"O Ferdinand! my brother, my brother!" she exclaimed. "Ab, Sir Knight," she added, trying in vain to raise his bloody brow,—"look not to me; there is yet hope—he may still be alive."

"And is this the good knight, Ferdinand di Mendoza?" said the old knight, who had not perceived the prostrate form of Ferdinand between the blood and the body of the Turk that covered it. "What, ho! my men, carry hence this senseless carion, and let us see to the life of this brother," he shouted, as several men-at-arms entered.

"Nay, maiden," he added to Angela, who was making trembling efforts, in vain, to loose his corslet and helmet, "I am more accustomed to this gear, and trust me, never could maiden hand do it more tenderly than will old Diego di Santa Croce."

"Santa Croce!" said the maiden, even in that

moment of agony struck by the name; "you are then his uncle!" and she burst into a passion of tears.

"Yes, yes, poor child," said the compassionate old knight; "there, weep on, poor little one, for truly thou needest it. These are no scenes for things so frail and fair as thou; and all the while he was undoing the young knight's armor, and examining the gashes with the very tenderness and skillfulness of a nurse, while his men-at-arms bore off and heaved overboard in a moment the still streaming body of the Saracen, all the while looking curiously on the scene before them. And strange indeed was it; the frail fragile form of the bewildered maiden contrasting with the bronzed manly figure of old Sir Diego, leaning together over the bleeding form and almost boyish beauty of the young Ferdinand.

"Cheer thee, maiden," he went on, as his practised hand was laid on the heart, from which the coat of mail and doublet had been now withdrawn. "He lives; it is but loss of blood; he will yet do well."

"My God, I thank Thee," ejaculated Angela. "Ah, Sir Knight, our Blessed Lady reward your charity to an orphan maid."

"Tut, tut," said the blunt old knight; "talk not to Diego di Santa Croce of thanks for tending the wounds of his own nephew, the son of his sister, when, as the vowed 'servant of the poor,' every man has a right to his services, and every maiden to the defence of his good sword. Would that I had only arrived sooner, to prevent all this mischief. Open your window, to let in the air, for he recovers; we will bear him to the couch and see to these wounds."

So saying, he took him up in his arms as easily and tenderly as he had borne Angela a few minutes before, and laid him down again upon the couch.

Slowly and languidly the young knight opened his eyes, roused to consciousness by the vigorous measures employed to staunch the blood. He cast his eyes on the face of his sister, who was leaning over him in tearless sorrow, as she actively banded all the necessary articles to the old knight, to facilitate the binding up of his wounds, now rapidly proceeding; he faintly murmured, "Deo gratias."

"Add to our Lady of Phalermos," ejaculated the delighted Sir Diego.

"Uncle?" were the next words, "you came to our rescue?" He looked first to one and then to the other of his companions, but could say no more.

"I understand thee," said the kind old knight; "thou wouldst commend this maiden to my care." Ferdinand looked his assent, and uttered the words, "Angela di Mendoza—my mother!"

"Hush thee, hush thee, Ferdinand," broke in the again weeping girl. "Think not of me; you cannot speak. I know already this is my uncle?" and taking the old knight's hand, she pressed it to her lips, while he, brushing away a tear, exclaimed:

"Rest tranquil, Ferdinand; Angela di Mendoza shall never want for a father's care as long as old Diego di Santa Croce lives; but I assure thee thy wounds are what many a brave knight hath got over before, and thou shalt yet live to defend and guard her thyself. Shake not thy head so mournfully; I tell thee thou hast no present need of shrift or priest; thou wilt do all that in our own Malta, whither we are hastening with swelling sails and favoring breeze."

"Tell him Angela," faintly whispered the knight—"tell him all; to him I commit you."

The old knight held a cordial to his lips, and listened to the fearful account given in a few words by the sorrowing maiden of her early years, her first meeting with the knight, the martyrdom of her protector, and the subsequent flight from the island of Syria.

"And it was well done, and like a gallant knight," said Sir Diego, in vain striving to repress a tear that made its way down his cheek; "but who killed you unbelieve whom I found lying here when I came in?"

Angela hid her face in the couch; for though at the moment she acted like a heroine, her woman's nature took the upper hand, and she could not think of that moment without a shudder.

"He offered her the Koran or death," said the wounded knight, his pale features slightly glowing with exultation; "she refused, and—"

"Like a true daughter of Mendoza and Santa Croce!" interrupted Sir Diego; "and thou hadst strength left to cut him down—was that it?"

Ferdinand looked his assent, while Angela lifted her wondering face, and said,

"Say, rather, uncle, as befits a simple Christian. Could I do otherwise when a Knight of the Cross lay covered with wounds at my feet? He showed me the way, I did but follow; and then my head reeled, and I fell like a foolish girl that shudders at the sight of blood; upon them both."

The bustle of reaching the harbor interrupted