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THE BRIDE OF FATE

A TALE: FOUNDED UPON EVENTS IN THE EARLY HISTORY OF VENICE

BY W. GILMORE SIMMS

It was a glad day in Venice. The eve of the feast of the Purification had arrived, and all those maidens of the Republic, whose names had been written in the "Book of Gold," were assembled with their parents, their friends and lovers – a beautiful and joyous crowd – repairing, in the gondolas provided by the Republic, to the church of San Pietro de Castella, at Olivolo, which was the residence of the Patriarch. This place was on the extreme verge of the city, a beautiful and isolated spot, its precincts almost without inhabitants, a ghostly and small priesthood excepted, whose grave habits and taciturn seclusion seemed to lend an additional aspect of solitude to the neighborhood. It was, indeed, a solitary and sad-seeming region, which, to the thoughtless and unmeditative, might be absolutely gloomy. But it was not the less lovely as a place suited equally for the picturesque and the thoughtful; and, just now, it was very far from gloomy or solitary. The event which was in hand was decreed to enliven it in especial degree, and, in its consequences, to impress its characteristics on the memory for long generations after. It was the day of St. Mary's Eve – a day set aside from immemorial time for a great and peculiar festival. All, accordingly, was life and joy in the sea republic. The marriages of a goodly company of the high-born, the young and the beautiful, were to be celebrated on this occasion, and in public, according to the custom. Headed by the Doge himself, Pietro Candiano, the city sent forth its thousands. The ornamented gondolas plied busily from an early hour in the morning, from the city to Olivolo; and there, amidst music and merry gratulations of friends and kindred, the lovers disembarked. They were all clad in their richest array. Silks, which caught their colors from the rainbow, and jewels that had inherited, even in their caverns, their beauties from the sun and stars, met the eye in all directions. Wealth had put on all its riches, and beauty, always modest, was not satisfied with her intrinsic loveliness. All that could delight the eye, in personal decorations and nuptial ornaments, was displayed to the eager gaze of curiosity, and, for a moment, the treasures of the city were transplanted to the solitude and waste.

But gorgeous and grand as was the spectacle, and joyous as was the crowd, there were some at the festival, some young, throbbing hearts, who, though deeply interested in its proceedings, felt any thing but gladness. While most of the betrothed thrilled only with rapturous anticipations that might have been counted in the strong pulsations that made the bosom heave rapidly beneath the close pressure of the virgin zone, there were yet others, who felt only that sad sinking of the heart which declares nothing but its hopelessness and desolation. There were victims to be sacrificed as well as virgins to be made happy, and girdled in by thousands of the brave and goodly – by golden images and flaunting banners, and speaking symbols – by music and by smiles – there were more hearts than one that longed to escape from all, to fly away to some far solitude, where the voices of such a joy as was now present could vex the defrauded soul no more. As the fair procession moved onward and up

through the gorgeous avenues of the cathedral to the altar-place, where stood the venerable Patriarch in waiting for their coming, in order to begin the solemn but grateful rites, you might have marked, in the crowding column, the face of one meek damsel, which declared a heart very far removed from hope or joyful expectation. Is that tearful eye – is that pallid cheek – that lip, now so tremulously convulsed – are these proper to one going to a bridal, and that her own? Where is her anticipated joy? It is not in that despairing vacancy of face – not in that feeble, faltering, almost fainting footstep – not, certainly, in any thing that we behold about the maiden, unless we seek it in the rich and flaming jewels with which she is decorated and almost laden down; and these no more declare for her emotions than the roses which encircle the neck of the white lamb, as it is led to the altar and the priest. The fate of the two is not unlike, and so also is their character. Francesca Ziani is decreed for a sacrifice. She was one of those sweet and winning, but feeble spirits, which know how to submit only. She has no powers of resistance. She knows that she is a victim; she feels that her heart has been wronged even to the death, by the duty to which it is now commanded; she feels that it is thus made the cruel but unwilling instrument for doing a mortal wrong to the heart of another; but she lacks the courage to refuse, to resist, to die rather than submit. Her nature only teaches her submission; and this is the language of the wo-begone, despairing glance – but one – which she bestows, in passing up the aisle, upon one who stands beside a column, close to her progress, in whose countenance she perceives a fearful struggle, marking equally his indignation and his grief.

Giovanni Gradenigo was one of the noblest cavaliers of Venice – but nobleness, as we know, is not always, perhaps not often, the credential in behalf of him who seeks a maiden from her parents. He certainly was not the choice of Francesca's sire. The poor girl was doomed to the embraces of one Ulric Barberigo, a man totally destitute of all nobility, that alone excepted which belonged to wealth. This shone in the eyes of Francesca's parents, but failed utterly to attract her own. She saw, through the heart's simple, unsophisticated medium, the person of Giovanni Gradenigo only. Her sighs were given to him, her loathings to the other. Though meek and finally submissive, she did not yield without a remonstrance, without mingled tears and entreaties, which were found unavailing. The ally of a young damsel is naturally her mother, and when she fails her, her best human hope is lost. Alas! for the poor Francesca! It was her mother's weakness, blinded by the wealth of Ulric Barberigo, that rendered the father's will so stubborn. It was the erring mother that wilfully beheld her daughter led to the sacrifice, giving no heed to the heart which was breaking, even beneath its heavy weight of jewels. How completely that mournful and desponding, that entreating and appealing glance to her indignant lover, told her wretched history. There he stood, stern as well as sad, leaning, as if for support, upon the arm of his kinsman, Nicolo Malapieri. Hopeless, helpless, and in utter despair, he thus lingered, as if under a strange and fearful fascination, watching the progress of the proceedings which were striking fatally, with every movement, upon the sources of his own hope and happiness. His resolution rose with his desperation, and he suddenly shook himself free from his friend.

"I will not bear this, Nicolo," he exclaimed, "I must not suffer it without another effort, though it be the last."

"What would you do, Giovanni," demanded his kinsman, grasping him by the wrist as he spoke, and arresting his movement.

"Shall I see her thus sacrificed – delivered to misery and the grave! Never! they shall not so lord it over true affections to their loss and mine. Francesca was mine – is mine – even now, in the very sight of Heaven. How often hath she vowed it! Her glance avows it now. My lips shall as boldly declare it again; and as Heaven has heard our vows, the church shall hear them. The Patriarch shall hear. Hearts must not be wronged – Heaven must not thus be defrauded. That selfish, vain woman, her mother – that mercenary monster, miscalled her father, have no better rights than mine – none half so good. They shall hear me. Stand by me, Nicolo, while I speak!"

This was the language of a passion, which, however true, was equally unmeasured and imprudent. The friend of the unhappy lover would have held him back.

"It is all in vain, Giovanni! Think! my friend, you can do nothing now. It is too late; nor is there any power to prevent this consummation. Their names have been long since written in the 'Book of Gold,' and the Doge himself may not alter the destiny!"

"The Book of Gold!" exclaimed the other. "Ay, the 'Bride of Gold!' but we shall see!" And he again started forward. His kinsman clung to him.

"Better that we leave this place, Giovanni. It was wrong that you should come. Let us go. You will only commit some folly to remain."

"Ay! it is folly to be wronged, and to submit to it, I know! folly to have felt and still to feel! folly, surely, to discover, and to live after the discovery, that the very crown that made life precious is lost to you forever! What matter if I should commit this folly! Well, indeed, if they who laugh at the fool, taste none of the wrath that they provoke."

"This is sheer madness, Giovanni."

"Release me, Nicolo."

The kinsman urged in vain. The dialogue, which was carried on in under tones, now enforced by animated action, began to attract attention. The procession was moving forward. The high anthem began to swell, and Giovanni, wrought to the highest pitch of frenzy by the progress of events, and by the opposition of Nicolo, now broke away from all restraint, and hurried through the crowd. The circle, dense and deep, had already gathered closely about the altar-place, to behold the ceremony. The desperate youth made his way through it. The crowd gave way at his approach, and under the decisive pressure of his person. They knew his mournful history – for when does the history of love's denial and defeat fail to find its way to the world's curious hearing. Giovanni was beloved in Venice. Such a history as his and Francesca's was sure to beget sympathy, particularly with all those who could find no rich lovers for themselves or daughters, such as Ulric Barberigo. The fate of the youthful lovers drew all eyes upon the two. A tearful interest in the event began to pervade the assembly, and Giovanni really found no such difficulty as would have attended the efforts of any other person to approach the sacred centre of the bridal circle. He made his way directly for the spot where Francesca stood. She felt his approach and presence by the most natural instincts, though without ever daring to lift her eye to his person. A more deadly paleness than ever came over her, and as she heard the first sounds of his voice, she faltered and grasped a column for support. The Patriarch, startled by the sounds of confusion, rose from the sacred cushions, and spread his hands over the assembly for silence; but as yet he failed to conceive the occasion for commotion. Meanwhile, the parents and relatives of Francesca had gathered around her person, as if to guard her from an enemy. Ulric Barberigo, the millionaire, put on the aspect of a man whose word was law on 'change. He, too, had his retainers, all looking daggers at the intruder. Fortunately for Giovanni, they were permitted to wear none at these peaceful ceremonials. Their looks of wrath did not discourage the approach of our lover. He did not seem, indeed, to see them, but gently putting them by, he drew near to the scarcely conscious maiden. He lifted the almost lifeless hand from her side, and pressing it within both his own, a proceeding which her mother vainly endeavored to prevent, he addressed the maiden with all that impressiveness of tone which declares a stifled but still present and passionate emotion in the heart. His words were of a touching sorrow.

"And is it thus, my Francesca, that I must look upon thee for the last time? Henceforth are we to be dead to one another? Is it thus that I am to hear that, forgetful of thy virgin vows to Gradenigo, thou art here calling Heaven to witness that thou givest thyself and affections to another?"

"Not willingly, O! not willingly, Giovanni, as I live! I have not forgotten – alas! I cannot forget that I have once vowed myself to thee. But I pray thee to forget, Giovanni. Forget me and forgive – forgive!"

Oh! how mournfully was this response delivered. There was a dead silence through the assembly; a silence which imposed a similar restraint even upon the parents of the maiden, who had showed a desire to arrest the speaker. They had appealed to the Patriarch, but the venerable man

was wise enough to perceive that this was the last open expression of a passion which must have its utterance in some form, and if not this, must result in greater mischief. His decision tacitly sanctioned the interview as we have witnessed. It was with increased faltering, which to the bystanders seemed almost fainting, that the unhappy Francesca thus responded to her lover. Her words were little more than whispers, and his tones, though deep, were very low and subdued, as if spoken while the teeth were shut. There was that in the scene which brought forward the crowd in breathless anxiety to hear, and the proud heart of the damsel's mother revolted at an exhibition in which her position was by no means a grateful one. She would have wrested, even by violence, the hand of her daughter from the grasp of Giovanni; but he retained it firmly, the maiden herself being scarcely conscious that he did so. His eye was sternly fixed upon the mother, as he drew Francesca toward himself. His words followed his looks:

"Have you not enough triumphed, lady, in thus bringing about your cruel purpose, to the sacrifice of two hearts – your child's no less than mine. Mine was nothing to you – but hers! what had she done that you should trample upon hers? This hast thou done! Thou hast triumphed! What would'st thou more? Must she be denied the mournful privilege of saying her last parting with him to whom she vowed herself, ere she vows herself to another! For shame, lady; this is a twofold and a needless tyranny!"

As he spoke, the more gentle and sympathizing spirits around looked upon the stern mother with faces of the keenest rebuke and indignation. Giovanni once more addressed himself to the maiden.

"And if you do not love this man, my Francesca, why is it that you so weakly yield to his solicitings? Why submit to this sacrifice at any instance? Have they strength to subdue thee? – has he the art to ensnare thee? – canst thou not declare thy affections with a will? What magic is it that they employ which is thus superior to that of love? – and what is thy right – if heedless of the affections of *thy* heart – to demand the sacrifice of *mine*? Thou hadst it in thy keeping, Francesca, as I fondly fancied I had thine!"

"Thou hadst – thou hast! – "

"Francesca, my child!" was the expostulating exclamation of the mother; but it failed, except for a single instant, to arrest the passionate answer of the maiden.

"Hear me and pity, Giovanni, if you may not forgive! Blame me for my infirmity – for the wretched weakness which has brought me to this defeat of thy heart – this desolation of mine – but do not doubt that I have loved thee – that I shall ever – "

"Stay!" commanded the imperious father.

"What is it thou wouldst say, Francesca? Beware!" was the stern language of the mother.

The poor girl shrunk back in trembling. The brief impulse of courage which the address of her lover, and the evident sympathy of the crowd, had imparted, was gone as suddenly as it came. She had no more strength for the struggle; and as she sunk back nerveless, and closed her eyes as if fainting under the terrible glances of both her parents, Giovanni dropped her hand from his grasp. It now lay lifeless at her side, and she was sustained from falling by some of her sympathizing companions. The eyes of the youth were bent upon her with a last look.

"It is all over then," he exclaimed. "Thy hope, unhappy maiden, like mine, must perish because of thy weakness. Yet there will be bitter memories for this," he exclaimed, and his eye now sought the mother – "bitter, bitter memories! Francesca, farewell! Be happy if thou canst!"

She rushed toward him as he moved away, recovering all her strength for this one effort. A single and broken sentence – "Forgive me, O forgive!" – escaped her lips, as she sunk senseless upon the floor. He would have raised her, but they did not suffer him.

"Is this not enough, Giovanni?" said his friend reproachfully. "Seest thou not that thy presence but distracts her?"

"Thou art right, Nicolo; let us go. I am myself choking – undo me this collar! – There! Let us depart."

The organ rolled its anthem – a thousand voices joined in the hymn to the Virgin, and as the sweet but painful sounds rushed to the senses of the youth he darted through the crowd, closely followed by his friend. The music seemed to pursue him with mockery. He rushed headlong from the temple, as if seeking escape from some suffocating atmosphere in the pure breezes of heaven, and hurried forward with confused and purposeless footsteps. The moment of his disappearance was marked by the partial recovery of Francesca. She unclosed her eyes, raised her head and looked wildly around her. Her lips once more murmured his name.

"Giovanni!"

"He is gone," was the sympathizing answer from more than one lip in the assembly; and once more she relapsed into unconsciousness.

CHAPTER II

Giovanni Gradenigo was scarcely more conscious than the maiden when he left. He needed all the guidance of his friend.

"Whither?" asked Nicolo Malapiero.

"What matter! where thou wilt," was the reply.

"For the city then;" and his friend conducted him to the gondola which was appointed to await them. In the profoundest silence they glided toward the city. The gondola stopped before the dwelling of Nicolo, and he, taking the arm of the sullen and absent Giovanni within his own, ascended the marble steps, and was about to enter, when a shrill voice challenged their attention by naming Giovanni.

"How now, signor," said the stranger. "Is it thou? Wherefore hast thou left Olivolo? Why didst thou not wait the bridal."

The speaker was a strange, dark-looking woman, in coarse woollen garments. She hobbled as she walked, assisted by a heavy staff, and seeming to suffer equally from lameness and from age. Her thin depressed lips, that ever sunk as she spoke into the cavity of the mouth, which, in the process of time, had been denuded of nearly all its teeth; her yellow wrinkled visage, and thin gray hairs, that escaped from the close black cap which covered her head, declared the presence of very great age. But her eye shone still with something even more lively and impressive than a youthful fire. It had a sort of spiritual intensity. Nothing, indeed, could have been more brilliant, or, seemingly, more unnatural. But hers was a nature of which we may not judge by common laws. She was no common woman, and her whole life was characterized by mystery. She was known in Venice as the "Spanish Gipsy;" was supposed to be secretly a Jewess, and had only escaped from being punished as a sorceress by her profound and most exemplary public devotions. But she was known, nevertheless, as an enchantress, a magician, a prophetess; and her palmistry, her magic, her symbols, signs and talismans, were all held in great repute by the superstitious and the youthful of the ocean city. Giovanni Gradenigo himself, obeying the popular custom, had consulted her; and now, as he heard her voice, he raised his eyes, and started forward with the impulse of one who suddenly darts from under the gliding knife of the assassin. Before Nicolo could interfere, he had leapt down the steps, and darted to the quay from which the old woman was about to step into a gondola. She awaited his coming with a smile of peculiar meaning, as she repeated her inquiry:

"Why are not you at Olivolo?"

He answered the question by another, grasping her wrist violently as he spoke.

"Did you not promise that she should wed with me – that she should be mine – mine only?"

"Well!" she answered calmly, without struggling or seeking to extricate her arm from the strong hold which he had taken upon it.

"Well! and even now the rites are in progress which bind her to Ulric Barberigo!"

"She will never wed Ulric Barberigo," was the quiet answer. "Why left you Olivolo?" she continued.

"Could I remain and look upon these hated nuptials – could I be patient and see her driven like a sheep to the sacrifice? I fled from the spectacle, as if the knife of the butcher were already in my own heart."

"You were wrong; but the fates have spoken, and their decrees are unchangeable. I tell you I have seen your bridal with Francesca Ziani. No Ulric weds that maiden. She is reserved for you alone. You alone will interchange with her the final vows before the man of God. But hasten, that this may find early consummation. I have seen other things! Hasten – but hasten not alone, nor without your armor! A sudden and terrible danger hangs over San Pietro di Castella, and all within its walls. Gather your friends, gather your retainers. Put on the weapons of war and fly thither with all your

speed. I see a terrible vision, even now, of blood and struggle! I behold terrors that frighten even me! Your friend is a man of arms. Let your war-galleys be put forth, and bid them steer for the Lagune of Caorlo. There will you win Francesca, and thenceforth shall you wear her – you only – so long as it may be allowed you to wear any human joy!"

Her voice, look, manner, sudden energy, and the wild fire of her eyes, awakened Giovanni to his fullest consciousness. His friend drew nigh – they would have conferred together, but the woman interrupted them.

"You would deliberate," said she, "but you have no time! What is to be done must be done quickly. It seems wild to you, and strange, and idle, what I tell you, but it is nevertheless true; and if you heed me not now bitter will be your repentance hereafter. You, Giovanni, will depart at least. Heed not your friend – he is too cold to be successful. He will always be safe, and do well, but he will do nothing further. Away! if you can but gather a dozen friends and man a single galley, you will be in season. But the time is short. I hear a fearful cry – the cry of women – and the feeble shriek of Francesca Ziani is among the voices of those who wail with a new terror! I see their struggling forms, and floating garments, and disheveled hair! Fly, young men, lest the names of those whom Venice has written in her Book of Gold, shall henceforth be written in a Book of Blood!"

The reputation of the sybil was too great in Venice to allow her wild predictions to be laughed at. Besides, our young Venetians – Nicolo no less than Giovanni, in spite of what the woman had spoken touching his lack of enthusiasm – were both aroused and eagerly excited by her speech. Her person dilated as she spoke – her voice seemed to come up from a fearful depth, and went thrillingly deep into the souls of the hearers. They were carried from their feet by her predictions. They prepared to obey her counsels. Soon had they gathered their friends together, enough to man three of the fastest galleys of the city. Their prows were turned at once toward the Lagune of Caorlo, whither the woman had directed them. She, meanwhile, had disappeared, but the course of her gondola lay for Olivolo.

CHAPTER III

It will be necessary that we should go back in our narrative but a single week before the occurrence of these events. Let us penetrate the dim and lonesome abode on the confines of the "Jewish Quarter," but not within it, where the "Spanish Gipsy" delivered her predictions. It is midnight, and still she sits over her incantations. There are vessels of uncouth shape and unknown character before her. Huge braziers lie convenient, on one of which, amidst a few coals, a feeble flame may be seen to struggle. The atmosphere is impregnated with a strong but not ungrateful perfume, and through its vapors objects appear with some indistinctness. A circular plate of brass or copper – it could not well be any more precious metal – rests beneath the eye and finger of the woman. It is covered with strange and mystic characters, which she seems busily to explore, as if they had a real significance in her mind. She evidently united the highest departments of her art with its humblest offices; and possessed those nobler aspirations of the soul, which, during the middle ages, elevated in considerable degree the professors of necromancy. But our purpose is not now to determine her pretensions. We have but to exhibit and to ascertain a small specimen of her skill in the vulgar business of fortune-telling – an art which will continue to be received among men, to a greater or less extent, so long as they shall possess a hope which they cannot gratify, and feel a superstition which they cannot explain. Our gipsy expects a visiter. She hears his footstep. The door opens at her bidding and a stranger makes his appearance. He is a tall and well made man, of stern and gloomy countenance, which is half concealed beneath the raised foldings of his cloak. His beard, of enormous length, is seen to stream down upon his breast; but his cheek is youthful, and his eye is eagerly and anxiously bright. But for a certain repelling something in his glance, he might be considered a very handsome man – perhaps by many persons he was thought so. He advanced with an air of dignity and power. His deportment and manner – and when he spoke, his voice – all seemed to denote a person accustomed to command. The woman did not look up as he approached – on the contrary she seemed more intent than ever in the examination of the strange characters before her. But a curious spectator might have seen that a corner of her eye, bright with an intelligence that looked more like cunning than wisdom, was suffered to take in all of the face and person of the visiter that his muffling costume permitted to be seen.

"Mother," said the stranger, "I am here."

"You say not who you are," answered the woman.

"Nor shall say," was the abrupt reply of the stranger. "That, you said, was unnecessary to your art – to the solution of the questions that I asked you."

"Surely," was the answer. "My art, that promises to tell thee of the future, would be a sorry fraud could it not declare the present – could it not say who thou art, as well as what thou seekest."

"Ha! and thou knowest!" exclaimed the other, his hand suddenly feeling within the folds of his cloak, as he spoke, as if for a weapon, while his eye glared quickly around the apartment, as if seeking for a secret enemy.

"Nay, fear nothing," said the woman calmly. "I care not to know who thou art. It is not an object of my quest, otherwise it would not long remain a secret to me."

"It is well! mine is a name that must not be spoken among the homes of Venice. It would make thee thyself to quail couldst thou hear it spoken."

"Perhaps! but mine is not the heart to quail at many things, unless it be the absolute wrath of Heaven. What the violence or the hate of man could do to this feeble frame, short of death, it has already suffered. Thou knowest but little of human cruelty, young man, though thy own deeds be cruel!"

"How knowest thou that my deeds are cruel?" was the quick and passionate demand, while the form of the stranger suddenly and threateningly advanced. The woman was unmoved.

"Saidst thou not that there was a name that might not be spoken in the homes of Venice? Why should thy very name make the hearts of Venice to quail unless for thy deeds of cruelty and crime? But I see further. I see it in thine eyes that thou art cruel. I hear it in thy voice that thou art criminal. I know, even now, that thy soul is bent on deeds of violence and blood, and the very quest that brings thee to me now is less the quest of love than of that wild and selfish passion which so frequently puts on his habit."

"Ha! speak to me of that! This damsel, Francesca Ziani! 'Tis of her that I would have thee speak. Thou saidst that she should be mine, yet lo! her name is written in the "Book of Gold," and she is allotted to this man of wealth, this Ulric Barberigo."

"She will never be the wife of Ulric Barberigo."

"Thou saidst she should be mine."

"Nay; I said not that."

"Ha! – but thou liest!"

"No! Anger me not, young man! I am slower, much slower to anger than thyself – slower than most of those who still chafe within this mortal covering – yet am I mortal like thyself, and not wholly free from such foolish passions as vex mortality. Chafe me, and I will repulse thee with scorn. Annoy me, and I close upon thee the book of fate, leaving thee to the blind paths which thy passions have ever moved thee to take."

The stranger muttered something apologetically.

"Make me no excuses. I only ask thee to forbear and submit. I said not that Francesca Ziani should be *thine*! I said only that I beheld her in thy arms."

"And what more do I ask!" was the exulting speech of the stranger, his voice rising into a sort of outburst, which fully declared the ruffian, and the sort of passions by which he was governed.

"If that contents thee, well!" said the woman, coldly, her eye perusing with a seeming calmness the brazen plate upon which the strange characters were inscribed.

"That, then, thou promisest still?" demanded the stranger.

"Thou shalt see for thyself," was the reply. Thus speaking the woman slowly arose and brought forth a small chafing-dish, also of brass or copper, not much larger than a common plate. This she placed over the brazier, the flame of which she quickened by a few smart puffs from a little bellows which lay beside her. As the flame kindled, and the sharp, red jets rose like tongues on either side of the plate, she poured into it something like a gill of a thick tenacious liquid, that looked like, and might have been, honey. Above this she brooded for awhile with her eyes immediately over the vessel; and the keen ear of the stranger, quickened by excited curiosity, could detect the muttering of her lips, though the foreign syllables which she employed were entirely beyond his comprehension. Suddenly, a thick vapor went up from the dish. She withdrew it from the brazier and laid it before her on the table. A few moments sufficed to clear the surface of the vessel, the vapor arising and hanging languidly above her head.

"Look now for thyself and see!" was her command to the visiter; she herself not deigning a glance upon the vessel, seeming thus to be quite sure of what it would present, or quite indifferent to the result. The stranger needed no second summons. He bent instantly over the vessel, and started back with undisguised delight.

"It is she!" he exclaimed. "She droops! whose arm is it that supports her – upon whose breast is it that she lies – who bears her away in triumph?"

"Is it not thyself?" asked the woman, coldly.

"By Hercules, it is! She is mine! She is in my arms! She is on my bosom! I have her in my galley! She speeds with me to my home! I see it all, even as thou hast promised me!"

"I promise thee nothing. I but show thee only what is written."

"And when and how shall this be effected?"

"How, I know not," answered the woman, "this is withheld from me. Fate shows what her work is only as it appears when done, but not the manner of the doing."

"But when will this be?" was the question.

"It must be ere she marries with Ulric Barberigo, for him she will never marry."

"And it is appointed that he weds with her on the day of St. Mary's Eve. That is but a week from hence, and the ceremony takes place – "

"At Olivolo."

"Ha! at Olivolo!" and a bright gleam of intelligence passed over the features of the stranger, from which his cloak had by this time entirely fallen. The woman beheld the look, and a slight smile, that seemed to denote scorn rather than any other emotion, played for a moment over her shriveled and sunken lips.

"Mother," said the stranger, "must all these matters be left to fate?"

"That is as thou wilt."

"But the eye of a young woman may be won – her heart may be touched – so that it shall be easy for fate to accomplish her designs. I am young; am indifferently well fashioned in person, and have but little reason to be ashamed of the face which God has given me. Beside, I have much skill in music, and can sing to the guitar as fairly as most of the young men of Venice. What if I were to find my way to the damsel – what if I play and sing beneath her father's palace? I have disguises, and am wont to practice in various garments; I can – "

The woman interrupted him.

"Thou mayest do as thou wilt. It is doubtless as indifferent to the fates what thou doest, as it will be to me. Thou hast seen what I have shown – I can no more. I am not permitted to counsel thee. I am but a voice; thou hast all that I can give thee."

The stranger lingered still, but the woman ceased to speak, and betrayed by her manner that she desired his departure. Thus seeing, he took a purse from his bosom and laid it before her. She did not seem to notice the action, nor did she again look up until he was gone. With the sound of his retreating footsteps, she put aside the brazen volume of strange characters which seemed her favorite study, and her lips slowly parted in soliloquy,

"Ay! thou exultest, fierce ruffian that thou art, in the assurance that fate yields herself to thy will! Thou shall, indeed, have the maiden in thy arms, but it shall profit thee nothing; and that single triumph shall exact from thee the last penalties which are sure to follow on the footsteps of a trade like thine. Thou thinkest that I know thee not, as if thy shallow masking could baffle eyes and art like mine; but I had not shown thee thus much, were I not in possession of yet further knowledge – did I not see that this lure was essential to embolden thee to thy own final overthrow. Alas! that in serving the cause of innocence, in saving the innocent from harm, we cannot make it safe in happiness. Poor Francesca, beloved of three, yet blest with neither! Thou shalt be wedded, yet be no bride; shall gain all that thy fond young heart craveth, yet gain nothing! Be spared the embraces of him thou loathest, yet rest in his arms whom thou hast most need to fear, and shalt be denied, even when most assured, the only embrace which might bring thee blessings! Happy at least that thy sorrows shall not last thee long – their very keenness and intensity being thy security from the misery which holds through years like mine!"

Let us leave the woman of mystery – let us once more change the scene. Now pass we to the pirate's domain at Istria, a region over which, at the period of our narrative, the control of Venice was feeble, exceedingly capricious, and subject to frequent vicissitudes. At this particular time, it was maintained by the fiercest band of pirates that ever swept the Mediterranean with their bloody prows.

CHAPTER IV

It was midnight when the galley of the chief glided into the harbor of Istria. The challenge of the sentinel was answered from the vessel, and she took her place beside the shore, where two other galleys were at anchor. Suddenly her sails descended with a rattle; a voice hailed throughout the ship, was answered from stem to stern, and a deep silence followed. The fierce chief of the pirates, Pietro Barbaro, the fiercest, strongest, wisest, yet youngest of seven brothers, all devoted to the same fearful employment, strode in silence to his cabin. Here, throwing himself upon a couch, he prepared rather to rest his limbs than to sleep. He had thoughts to keep him wakeful. Wild hopes, and tenderer joys than his usual occupations offered, were gleaming before his fancy. The light burned dimly in his floating chamber, but the shapes of his imagination rose up before his mind's eye not the less vividly because of the obscurity in which he lay. Thus musing over expectations of most agreeable and exciting aspect, he finally lapsed away in sleep.

He was suddenly aroused from slumber by a rude hand that lay heavily on his shoulder.

"Who is it?" he asked of the intruder.

"Gamba," was the answer.

"Thou, brother!"

"Ay," continued the intruder; "and here are all of us."

"Indeed! and wherefore come you? I would sleep – I am weary. I must have rest."

"Thou hast too much rest, Pietro," said another of the brothers. "It is that of which we complain – that of which we would speak to thee now."

"Ha! this is new language, brethren! Answer me – perhaps I am not well awake; am I your captain, or not?"

"Thou art – the fact seems to be forgotten by no one but thyself. Though the youngest of our mother's children, we made thee our leader."

"For what did ye this, my brothers, unless that I might command ye?"

"For this, in truth, and this only, did we confer upon thee this authority. Thou hadst shown thyself worthy to command – "

"Well!"

"Thy skill – thy courage – thy fortitude – "

"In brief, ye thought me best fitted to command ye?"

"Yes."

"Then I command ye hence! Leave me, and let me rest!"

"Nay, brother, but this cannot be;" was the reply of another of the intruders. "We must speak with thee while the night serves us, lest thou hear worse things with the morrow. Thou art, indeed, our captain; chosen because of thy qualities of service, to conduct and counsel us; but we chose thee not that thou shouldst sleep! Thou wert chosen that our enterprises might be active and might lead to frequent profit."

"Has it not been so?" demanded the chief.

"For a season it was so, and there was no complaint of thee."

"Who now complains?"

"Thy people – all!"

"And can ye not answer them?"

"No! for we ourselves need an answer! We, too, complain."

"Of what complain ye?"

"That our enterprises profit us nothing."

"Do ye not go forth in the galleys? Lead ye not, each of you, an armed galley? Why is it that your enterprises profit ye nothing?"

"Because of the lack of our captain."

"And ye can do nothing without me; and because ye are incapable, I must have no leisure for myself."

"Nay, something more than this, Pietro. Our enterprises avail us nothing, since you command that we no longer trouble the argosies of Venice. Venice has become thy favorite. Thou shieldest her only, when it is her merchants only who should give us spoil. This, brother, is thy true offence. For this we complain of thee; for this thy people complain of thee. They are impoverished by thy new-born love for Venice, and they are angry with thee. Brother, their purpose is to depose thee?"

"Ha! and ye – "

"We are men as well as brethren. We cherish no such attachment for Venice as that which seems to fill thy bosom. When the question shall be taken in regard to thy office, our voices shall be against thee, unless – "

There was a pause. It was broken by the chief.

"Well, speak out. What are your conditions?"

"Unless thou shalt consent to lead us on a great enterprise against the Venetians. Hearken to us, brother Pietro. Thou knowest of the annual festival at Olivolo, when the marriage takes place of all those maidens, whose families are favorites of the Signiory, and whose names are written in the "Book of Gold" of the Republic."

The eyes of the pirate chief involuntarily closed at the suggestion, but his head nodded affirmatively. The speaker continued.

"It is now but a week when this festival takes place. On this occasion assemble the great, the noble and the wealthy of the sea city. Thither they bring all that is gorgeous in their apparel, all that is precious among their ornaments and decorations. Nobility and wealth here strive together which shall most gloriously display itself. Here, too, is the beauty of the city – the virgins of Venice – the very choice among her flocks. Could there be prize more fortunate? Could there be prize more easy of attainment? The church of San Pietro di Castella permits no armed men within its holy sanctuaries. There are no apprehensions of peril; the people who gather to the rites are wholly weaponless. They can offer no defense against our assault; nor can this be foreseen? What place more lonely than Olivolo? Thither shall we repair the day before the festival, and shelter ourselves from scrutiny. At the moment when the crowd is greatest, we will dart upon our prey. We lack women; we desire wealth. Shall we fail in either, when we have in remembrance the bold deeds of our ancient fathers, when they looked with yearning on the fresh beauties of the Sabine virgins? These Venetian beauties are our Sabines. Thou, too, if the bruit of thy followers do thee no injustice, thou, too, hast been overcome by one of these. She will doubtless be present at this festival. Make her thine, and fear not that each of thy brethren will do justice to his tastes and thine own. Here, now, thou hast all. Either thou agreest to that which thy people demand, or the power departs from thy keeping. Fabio becomes our leader!"

There was a pause. At length the pirate-chief addressed his brethren.

"Ye have spoken! ye threaten, too! This power, of which ye speak, is precious in your eyes. I value it not a zecchino; and wert thou to depose me to-morrow, I should be the master of ye in another month, did it please me to command a people so capricious. But think not, though I speak to ye in this fashion, that I deny your demand. I but speak thus to show ye that I fear you not. I will do as ye desire; but did not your own wishes square evenly with mine own, I should bide the issue of this struggle, though it were with knife to knife."

"It matters not how thou feelest, or what movest thee, Pietro, so that thou dost as we demand. Thou wilt lead us to this spoil?"

"I will."

"It is enough. It will prove to thy people that they are still the masters of the Lagune – that they are not sold to Venice."

"Leave me now."

The brethren took their departure. When they had gone, the chief spoke in brief soliloquy, thus:

"Verily, there is the hand of fate in this. Methinks I see the history once more, even as I beheld it in the magic liquor of the Spanish Gipsy. Why thought I not of this before, dreaming vainly like an idiot boy, as much in love with his music as himself, who hopes by the tinkle of his guitar to win his beauty from the palace of her noble sire, to the obscure retreats of his gondola. These brethren shall not vex me. They are but the creatures of a fate!"

CHAPTER V

Let us now return to Olivolo, to the altar-place of the church of San Pietro di Castella, and resume the progress of that strangely mingled ceremonial – mixed sunshine and sadness – which was broken by the passionate conduct of Giovanni Gradenigo. We left the poor, crushed Francesca, in a state of unconsciousness, in the arms of her sympathizing kindred. For a brief space the impression was a painful one upon the hearts of the vast assembly; but as the deep organ rolled its ascending anthems, the emotion subsided. The people had assembled for pleasure and an agreeable spectacle; and though sympathizing, for a moment, with the pathetic fortunes of the sundered lovers, quite as earnestly as it is possible for mere lookers-on to do, they were not to be disappointed in the objects for which they came. The various shows of the assemblage – the dresses, the jewels, the dignitaries, and the beauties – were quite enough to divert the feelings of a populace, at all times notorious for its levities, from a scene which, however impressive at first, was becoming a little tedious. Sympathies are very good and proper things; but the world seldom suffers them to occupy too much of its time. Our Venetians did not pretend to be any more humane than the rest of the great family; and the moment that Francesca had fainted, and Giovanni had disappeared, the multitude began to express their impatience of any further delay by all the means in their possession. There was no longer a motive to resist their desires, and simply reserving the fate of the poor Francesca to the last, or until she should sufficiently recover to be fully conscious of the sacrifice which she was about to make, the ceremonies were begun. There was a political part to be played by the Doge, in which the people took particular interest; and to behold which, indeed, was the strongest reason of their impatience. The government of Venice, as was remarked by quaint and witty James Howell, was a compound thing, mixed of all kinds of governments, and might be said to be composed of "a *grain* of monarchy, a *dose* of democracy, and a *dram*, if not an *ounce* of optimacy." It was in regard to this *dose* of democracy, that the government annually assigned marriage portions to twelve young maidens, selected from the great body of the people, of those not sufficiently opulent to secure husbands, or find the adequate means for marriage, without this help. To bestow these maidens upon their lovers, and with them the portions allotted by the state, constituted the first, and in the eyes of the masses, the most agreeable part of the spectacle. The Doge, on this occasion, who was the thrice renowned Pietro Candiano, "did his spiriting gently," and in a highly edifying manner. The bishop bestowed his blessings, and confirmed by the religious, the civil rites, which allied the chosen couples. To these succeeded the *voluntary* parties, if we may thus presume upon a distinction between the two classes, which we are yet not sure that we have a right to make. The high-born and the wealthy, couple after couple, now approached the altar, to receive the final benediction which committed them to hopes of happiness which it is not in the power of any priesthood to compel. No doubt there was a great deal of hope among the parties, and we have certainly no reason to suppose that happiness did not follow in every instance.

But there is poor Francesca Ziani. It is now her turn. Her cruel parents remain unsubdued and unsoftened by her deep and touching sorrows. She is made to rise, to totter forward to the altar, scarcely conscious of any thing, except, perhaps, that the worthless, but wealthy, Ulric Barberigo is at her side. Once more the mournful spectacle restores to the spectators all their better feelings. They perceive, they feel the cruelty of that sacrifice to which her kindred are insensible. In vain do they murmur "shame!" In vain does she turn her vacant, wild, but still expressive eyes, expressive because of their very soulless vacancy, to that stern, ambitious mother, whose bosom no longer responds to her child with the true maternal feeling. Hopeless of help from that quarter, she lifts her eyes to Heaven, and, no longer listening to the words of the holy man, she surrenders herself only to despair.

Is it Heaven that hearkens to her prayer? Is it the benevolent office of an angel that bursts the doors of the church at the very moment when she is called upon to yield that response which

dooms her to misery forever? To her ears, the thunders which now shook the church were the fruits of Heaven's benignant interposition. The shrieks of women on every hand – the oaths and shouts of fierce and insolent authority – the clamors of men – the struggles and cries of those who seek safety in flight or entreat for mercy – suggest no other idea to the wretched Francesca, than that she is saved from the embraces of Ulric Barberigo. She is only conscious that, heedless of her, and of the entreaties of her mother, he is the first to endeavor selfishly to save himself by flight. But her escape from Barberigo is only the prelude to other embraces. She knows not, unhappy child! that she is an object of desire to another, until she finds herself lifted in the grasp of Pietro Barbaro, the terrible chief of the Istrute pirates. He and his brothers have kept their pledges to one another, and they have been successful in their prey. Their fierce followers have subdued to submission the struggles of a weaponless multitude, who, with horror and consternation, behold the loveliest of their virgins, the just wedded among them, borne away upon the shoulders of the pirates to their warlike galleys. Those who resist them perish. Resistance was hopeless. The fainting and shrieking women, like the Sabine damsels, are hurried from the sight of their kinsmen and their lovers, and the Istrute galleys are about to depart with their precious freight. Pietro Barbaro, the chief, stands with one foot upon his vessel's side and the other on the shore. Still insensible, the lovely Francesca lies upon his breast. At this moment the skirt of his cloak is plucked by a bold hand. He turns to meet the glance of the Spanish Gypsy. The old woman leered on him with eyes that seemed to mock his triumph, even while she appealed to it.

"Is it not even as I told thee – as I showed thee?" was her demand.

"It is!" exclaimed the pirate-chief, as he flung her a purse of gold. "Thou art a true prophetess. Fate has done her work!"

He was gone; his galley was already on the deep, and he himself might now be seen kneeling upon the deck of the vessel, bending over his precious conquest, and striving to bring back the life into her cheeks.

"Ay, indeed!" muttered the Spanish Gipsy, "thou hast had her in thy arms, but think not, reckless robber that thou art, that fate has *done* its work. The work is but *begun*. Fate has kept its word to thee; it is thy weak sense that fancied she had nothing more to say or do!"

Even as she spoke these words, the galleys of Giovanni Gradenigo were standing for the Lagune of Caorlo. He had succeeded in collecting a gallant band of cavaliers who tacitly yielded him the command. The excitement of action had served, in some measure, to relieve the distress under which he suffered. He was no longer the lover, but the man; nor the man merely, but the leader of men. Giovanni was endowed for this by nature. His valor was known. It had been tried upon the Turk. Now that he was persuaded by the Spanish Gipsy, whom all believed and feared, that a nameless and terrible danger overhung his beloved, which was to be met and baffled only by the course he was pursuing, his whole person seemed to be informed by a new spirit. The youth, his companions, wondered to behold the change. There was no longer a dreaminess and doubt about his words and movements, but all was prompt, energetic, and directly to the purpose. Giovanni was now the confident and strong man. Enough for him that there *was* danger. Of this he no longer entertained a fear. Whether the danger that was supposed to threaten Francesca, was still suggestive of a hope – as the prediction of the Spanish Gipsy might well warrant – may very well be questioned. It was in the very desperation of his hope, perhaps, that his energies became at once equally well-ordered and intense. He prompted to their utmost the energies of others. He impelled all his agencies to their best exertions. Oar and sail were busy without intermission, and soon the efforts of the pursuers were rewarded. A gondola, bearing a single man, drifted along their path. He was a fugitive from Olivolo, who gave them the first definite idea of the foray of the pirates. His tidings, rendered imperfect by his terrors, were still enough to goad the pursuers to new exertions. Fortune favored the pursuit. In their haste the pirate galleys had become entangled in the lagune. The keen eye of Giovanni was the first to discover them.

First one bark, and then another, hove in sight, and soon the whole piratical fleet were made out, as they urged their embarrassed progress through the intricacies of the shallow waters.

"Courage, bold hearts!" cried Giovanni to his people; "they are ours! We shall soon be upon them. They cannot now escape us!"

The eye of the youthful leader brightened with the expectation of the struggle. His exulting, eager voice declared the strength and confidence of his soul, and cheered the souls of all around him. The sturdy oarsmen "gave way" with renewed efforts. The knights prepared their weapons for the conflict. Giovanni *signaled* the other galleys by which his own was followed.

"I am for the red flag of Pietro Barbaro himself. I know his banner. Let your galleys grapple with the rest. Cross their path – prevent their flight, and bear down upon the strongest. Do your parts, and fear not but we shall do ours."

With these brief instructions, our captain led the way with the Venetian galleys. The conflict was at hand. It came. They drew nigh and hailed the enemy. The parley was a brief one. The pirates could hope no mercy, and they asked none. But few words, accordingly, were exchanged between the parties, and these were not words of peace.

"Yield thee to the mercy of St. Mark!" was the stern summons of Giovanni, to the pirate-chief.

"St. Mark's mercy has too many teeth!" was the scornful reply of the pirate. "The worthy saint must strike well before Barbaro of Istria sues to him for mercy.

With the answer the galleys grappled. The Venetians leapt on board of the pirates, with a fury that was little short of madness. Their wrath was terrible. Under the guidance of the fierce Giovanni, they smote with an unforgiving vengeance. It was in vain that the Istrutes fought as they had been long accustomed. It needed something more than customary valor to meet the fury of their assailants. All of them perished. Mercy now was neither asked nor given. Nor, as it seemed, did the pirates care to live, when they beheld the fall of their fearful leader. He had crossed weapons with Giovanni Gradenigo, in whom he found his fate. Twice, thrice, the sword of the latter drove through the breast of the pirate. Little did his conqueror conjecture the import of the few words which the dying chief gasped forth at his feet, his glazed eyes striving to pierce the deck, as if seeking some one within.

"I have, indeed, had thee in my arms, but – "

There was no more – death finished the sentence! The victory was complete, but Giovanni was wounded. Pietro Barbaro was a fearful enemy. He was conquered, it is true, but he had made his mark upon his conqueror. He had bitten deep before he fell.

The victors returned with their spoil. They brought back the captured brides in triumph. That same evening preparations were made to conclude the bridal ceremonies which the morning had seen so fearfully arrested. With a single exception, the original distribution of the "brides" was persevered in. That exception, as we may well suppose, was Francesca Ziani. It was no longer possible for her unnatural parents to withstand the popular sentiment. The Doge himself, Pietro Candiano, was particularly active in persuading the reluctant mother to submit to what was so evidently the will of destiny. But for the discreditable baseness and cowardice of Ulric Barberigo, it is probable she never would have yielded. But his imbecility and unmanly terror in the moment of danger, had been too conspicuous. Even his enormous wealth could not save him from the shame that followed; and however unwillingly, the parents of Francesca consented that she should become the bride of Giovanni, as the only proper reward for the gallantry which had saved her, and so many more, from shame.

But where was Giovanni? His friends have been dispatched for him; why comes he not? The maid, now happy beyond her hope, awaits him at the altar. And still he comes not. Let us go back for a moment to the moment of his victory over the pirate-chief. Barbaro lies before him in the agonies of death. His sword it is which has sent the much dreaded outlaw to his last account. But he himself is wounded – wounded severely, but not mortally by the man whom he has slain. At this moment he received a blow from the axe of one of the brothers of Barbaro. He had strength left barely to

behold and to shout his victory, when he sunk fainting upon the deck of the pirate vessel. His further care devolved upon his friend, Nicolo, who had followed his footsteps closely through all the paths of danger. In a state of stupor he lies upon the couch of Nicolo, when the aged prophetess, the "Spanish Gipsy," appeared beside his bed.

"He is called," she said. "The Doge demands his presence. They will bestow upon him his bride, Francesca Ziani. You must bear him thither."

The surgeon shook his head.

"It may arouse him," said Nicolo. "We can bear him thither on a litter, so that he shall feel no pain."

"It were something to wake him from this apathy," mused the surgeon. "Be it as thou wilt."

Thus, grievously wounded, was the noble Giovanni borne into the midst of the assembly for each member of which he had suffered and done so much. The soft music which played around, awakened him. His eyes unclosed to discover the lovely Francesca, tearful, but hopeful, bending fondly over him. She declared herself his. The voice of the Doge confirmed the assurance; and the eye of the dying man brightened into the life of a new and delightful consciousness. Eagerly he spoke; his voice was but a whisper.

"Make it so, I pray thee, that I may live!"

The priest drew nigh with the sacred unction. The marriage service was performed, and the hands of the two were clasped in one.

"Said I not?" demanded an aged woman, who approached the moment after the ceremonial, and whose face was beheld by none but him whom she addressed. "She is thine!"

The youth smiled, but made no answer. His hand drew that of Francesca closer. She stooped to his kiss, and whispered him, but he heard her not. With the consciousness of the sweet treasure that he had won after such sad denial, the sense grew conscious no longer – the lips of the youth were sealed for ever. The young Giovanni, the bravest of the Venetian youth, lay lifeless in the embrace of the scarcely more living Francesca. It was a sad day, after all, in Venice, since its triumph was followed by so great a loss; but the damsels of the ocean city still declare that the lovers were much more blest in this fortune, than had they survived for the embrace of others less beloved.

[The touching and romantic incident upon which this little tale is founded, has been made use of by Mr. Rogers, in his poem of "Italy." It is one of those events which enrich and enliven, for romance, the early histories of most states and nations that ever arrive at character and civilization. It occurs in the first periods of Venetian story, about 932, under the Doge Candiano II. I have divided my sketch into *five* parts, having originally designed a dramatic piece with the same divisions. That I have since thought proper to write the tale in the narrative and not the dramatic form, is not because of any insusceptibility of the material to such uses. I still think that the story, as above given, might easily and successfully be dramatized, giving it a mixed character – that of the melo-dramatic opera, and only softening the close to a less tragical denouement.]

ODE TO THE MOON

BY MRS. E. C. KINNEY

I

Myriads have sung thy praise,
Fair Dian, virgin-goddess of the skies!
And myriads will raise
Their songs, as time yet onward flies,
To *thee*, chaste prompter of the lover's sighs,
And of the minstrel's lays!
Yet still exhaustless as a theme
Shall be thy name —
While lives immortal Fame —
As when to people the first poet's dream
Thy inspiration came.

II

None ever lived, or loved,
Who hath not thine oblivious influence felt —
As if a silver veil hid outward things,
While some bright spirit's wings
Mysteriously moved
The world of fancies that within him dwelt —
Regent of Night! whence is this charm in thee,
That sways the human soul with potent witchery?

III

When first the infant learns to look on high,
While twilight's drapery his heart appals,
Thy full-orbed presence captivates his eye;
Or when, 'mid shadows grim upon the walls,
Are sent thy pallid rays,
'Tis awe his bosom fills,
And trembling joy that thrills
His tiny frame, and fastens his young gaze:
Thy spell is on that heart,

And childhood may depart,
But it shall gather strength with youthful days;
For oft as thou, capricious moon!
Shalt wax and wane,
He, now perchance a love-sick swain,
Will watch thee at night's stilly noon,
Pouring his passion in an amorous strain:
Or, with the mistress of his soul —
Lighted by thy love-whispering beams —
In some secluded garden stroll,
Bewildered in ambrosial dreams;
Nor once suspect, while his full pulses move,
That thou, whom tides obey, may'st turn the tide of love!

IV

The watcher on the deep —
Though weary be his eye —
Forgets even drowsy sleep,
When thou art in the sky!
For with thine image on the silvery sea
A thousand forms of memory
Whirl in a mazy dance;
And when he upward looks to thee,
In thy far-reaching glance
There is a sacred bond of sympathy
'Twixt sea and land;
For on his native strand
That glance awakens kindred souls
To kindred thought,
And though the deep between them rolls,
Hearts are together brought;
While tears that fall from eyes at home,
And those that wet the sailor's cheek,
From the same sacred fountains come —
The same emotion speak.

V

The watcher on the land —
Who holds the burning hand
Of one whom scorching fever wastes —
Beholds thee, orient moon!
With reddened face, expanded in the east,
Till Superstition chills his breast,

While tremulous he hastes
To draw the curtains as thou journeyest on:
But when the far-spent night
Is streaked with dawning light,
Again, to look on thee,
He lifts the drapery,
And hope divine now triumphs over fear,
As in the zenith far
A pale, small orb thou dost appear,
While eastward rises morn's resplendent star!
And Fancy sees the passing soul ascend
Where thy mild glories with the azure blend.

VI

Even on the face of Death thou lookest calm,
Fair Dian! as when watchful thou didst keep
Love's holy vigils o'er Endymion's sleep,
Drinking the breath of youth's perpetual balm.
Thy beams are kissing now
The icy brow
Of many a youth in slumber deep,
Who cannot yield to thee
The incense of Love's perfumed breath,
For no response gives Death!
Ah, 'tis a fearful sight to see
Thy lustre on a human face
Where the Promethean spark has left no trace,
As if it shone upon
The marble cold,
Of that famed ruin old —
The grand, but empty Parthenon!

VII

Dian, enchantress of all hearts!
While mine in song now worships thee,
From thy far-shooting bow the silver darts
Fall thick and fast on me:
Oh, beautiful in light and shade,
By thee is this fair landscape made!
Gems sparkle on the river's breast —
Now covered by an icy vest —
Upon the frozen hills
A regal glory shines!

And all the scene, as Fancy wills,
Shifts into new designs.
Yet night is still as Death's unbroken realms,
And solemnly thy light, wan orb, is cast
Through the arched branches of these reverend elms,
As though it through the Gothic windows passed
Of some old abbey or cathedral vast.

VIII

In awe my spirit kneels —
And seems before a hallowed shrine;
Yet not the majesty of Art it feels,
But Nature's law divine —
The presence of her mighty Architect!
Who piled these pyramidal hills sublime,
That still, pure moon, thy radiance will reflect,
And still defy the crumbling touch of Time:
Who built this temple of gigantic trees,
Where Nature's worshipers repair
To pray the heart's unuttered prayer,
Whose veiled thought the great Omniscient sees.

IX

Oh, I could wonder, and adore
Religious Night! and thee, her queen!
Till golden Phœbus should restore
His splendor to the scene!
But the same natural laws control
Thy motions and the poet's will;
So, that while tireless roves the soul,
This actual life must weary still.
And oh, inspirer of my song!
While close these eyes upon thy beams,
Watching, amid thy starry throng,
Be thou the goddess of my dreams.

MY BIRD

BY MRS. JANE C. CAMPBELL

Ring out, ring out, thy clear sweet note!
Art longing to be free —
To break thy bars and heavenward float?
My bird, this may not be.

Thou ne'er hast known another home
Than in that cage of thine,
And shouldst thou from its shelter roam,
Where meet a love like mine?

When the gay wealth of leaves and flowers
Wreathes every fragrant bough,
And hides thee all the summer hours
From noontide's sultry glow —

And when the limpid grass-fringed brook
Reflects thy yellow wing,
And thou may'st seek each quiet nook
Where sweets are blossoming —

And warble there the cheerful song
That oft has charmed mine ear,
Thou might'st, those leafy shades among,
Be happier far than here.

But when sad Autumn sheds abroad
The stillness of decay,
And leaves beneath the feet are trod
Where young winds love to play —

When icy chains the streams have bound,
Gems hang from every tree,
And but the snow-bird skims the ground,
Where would my trembler flee?

Ah, fold thy wing and rest thee there,
Nor trust deceitful skies,
Though balmy now the gentle air,
Dark tempests will arise.

And Freedom! 'tis a glorious word!

But should the rude winds come,
Then wouldst thou wish, my warbling bird,
For thine own quiet home.

My bird! I too would take my flight,
I long to soar away
To those far realms where all is bright,
Where beams an endless day.

I may not tread a holier sphere,
I may not upward move,
But bound like thee, I linger here
And trust a Father's love.

THE KNIGHTS OF THE RINGLET

BY GIFTIE

CHAPTER I

If to be seated, on a bright winter's day, before a glowing fire of anthracite, with one's feet on the fender, and one's form half-buried in the depths of a cushioned easy-chair, holding the uncut pages of the last novel, be indeed the practical definition of happiness, then Emma Leslie was to be envied as she sat thus cosily, one afternoon, listening to an animated discussion going on between an elderly lady and gentleman on the opposite side of the fire-place. The discussion ran on a grave subject – a very grave subject – one which has puzzled the heads of wise men, and turned the wits of weak ones. But though the argument grew every moment more close and earnest, the fair listener had the audacity to laugh, in clear, silvery tones, that told there was not one serious thought in her mind, as she said,

"Nay, good uncle, a truce to these generalities. If, as I imagine, all this talk upon woman's rights and woman's duties has been for my special edification, pray be more explicit and tell me what part I am to play in the general reform you propose?"

The gentleman thus addressed looked up at this interruption, and replied in a tone slightly acidified,

"For your benefit also has been your Aunt Mary's clear exposition of what woman may and should be. Perhaps you will profit as much by her suggestions as you seem to do by mine."

"Do not give me up as incorrigible just as I am coming to be taught how to be good," said Emma, with mock gravity. "With regard to this subject of temperance, of which you were just speaking, and upon which you say woman has so much influence, what shall I do? How can I reclaim the drunkard while I move in a circle where the degraded creatures are not admitted. They will not be influenced by a person who has no feelings or sympathies in common with them, even were it proper for me to descend to their level in order to help them."

"That may be. The tide of gay and fashionable life sweeps over and buries in oblivion the ruin its forms and ceremonies help to make. Yet there are some you might reach. Some who are just beginning to sink, and whom men cannot influence because they are too proud to own their danger."

"How less likely, then, would a woman be to influence them," replied Emma. "You know how men try to conceal their vices and foibles from us."

"True, but yet men do not suspect the weaker sex of doubting their power to reform themselves, and are therefore more willing to be advised and persuaded by them to abandon their bad habits, which have not yet become fixed vices. Woman's intuitive perception of what should be said, and the right moment to say it, men rarely possess; and this gives your sex a superiority over ours in the work of reform. Yet, alas! how often is this influence employed to lure the wandering feet further and further from the path of virtue."

"Beware, uncle, I'll have no slander," replied Emma, half vexed.

"It is not slander. How often have I seen you, Emma, with smiles and gay words, sipping that which, however harmless to you, is poison to some of your thoughtless companions. Were you pure in word and deed from all contamination in that behalf, how different would be your influence. Yet you refused to join the Temperance Society I am endeavoring to establish in our neighborhood."

"But you know," said Emma, with a proud curl of her ruby lip, "that I am in no danger. Why should my name be mixed with the common herd?"

"That is false pride, unworthy a true-hearted woman. To refuse to aid a reforming movement that will assist thousands, simply because it will not benefit you, because you do not need its help. I did not think you so selfish."

"I am not selfish. You shall not call me such ugly names," replied the niece, striving to turn the conversation from the serious turn it had taken. "You know very well it is only my humility that speaks. I don't think women have any right to form societies and make laws. All that honor and glory

I am willing to leave to men, and only ask for my sex the liberty of doing as they please in the humble station assigned to them by the 'lords of creation.' You may rule the world, and give orders, and we will – break them."

"Yes," said her uncle, rising to go, "you will break them, indeed – break all laws of justice, honor and humanity in your giddy course."

"Nay," said Emma, rising and holding his hands in hers as he was about to leave the room,

'Put down your hat, don't take your stick,
Now, prithee, uncle, stay.'

I will not let you go thinking me so naughty and saucy. Don't look so sober, or I shall certainly cry, and you know you hate scenes. I am really half convinced by your arguments, but were I to sign the pledge, what good would it do. I have no desire to go about with a sermon on my lips, and a frown on my brow, to bestow on all the luckless wights who 'touch, taste or handle.' It is not genteel to scold, and I fancy they might think me impertinent were I to advise. Who is there among my acquaintance who would not resent my interference with their habits in this respect?"

"There is your cousin, Edward," replied her uncle, seating himself again. "You know well how to lead him in your train through all kinds of fun and folly, perhaps you might induce him to sign the temperance pledge."

"But Edward is strictly temperate. He rarely takes even wine."

"True, and I don't think him in danger of becoming less so. But his position in society gives him great influence over the young men with whom he associates; and some who follow his example in refusing to sign the pledge, are unable to follow him in controlling their appetites."

"There is young Saville, too," said Aunt Mary. "It is whispered among his friends, that unless something arrests his course, he will ere long be ruined."

A flush passed over Emma's beautiful face as, in a tone of surprise and horror, she exclaimed, "What, George Saville! with his genius and eloquence – is he a slave to that vice?"

"They say," replied her aunt, "that much of his fiery eloquence arises from the fumes of brandy, and the sparkling wit that makes him so delightful is caught from the bubbles that dance on the wine-cup. When the excitement, thus produced, passes away, he is dull and spiritless."

"And will no one warn him – no one save him?" said Emma, thoughtfully.

"Who can do it so well as yourself?" said her uncle. "Is he not one of the worshipers at your shrine? Of what avail is it to be young and beautiful and wealthy, if the influence such accidents give be not employed in the cause of truth and virtue?"

Emma did not reply, and her uncle left the room, where she remained a long time in deep thought, roused and startled by the new ideas presented to her mind, for giddy and thoughtless as she seemed, she possessed a mind and heart capable of deep feeling and energetic action.

The same evening she was seated by the piano, drawing thence a flood of melody, while her Cousin Edward and George Saville stood beside her. But the attention of the latter seemed more absorbed by the fair musician than by the sweet sounds produced by her flying fingers; and directing his companion's attention to the soft brown hair that fell in long, shining ringlets around her pure brow, and over her snowy neck, he said, in a tone intended to reach his ear alone,

"What would you give to possess one of those curls?"

Low as were the words, Emma heard them, and pausing suddenly, said, "What would *you* give?"

"Any thing – every thing," said the young man, eagerly.

"Would you give your liberty – would you bind yourself to do my bidding?" asked the maiden, in a tone in which playful gayety strove to hide a deeper feeling.

"The liberty to disobey your will, lady, has long been lost," replied Saville, with a glance that well-nigh destroyed Emma's self-possession. "It were a small matter to acknowledge it by my vow."

"On that condition it is yours," said Emma, while the rich blush that mantled cheek and brow, made her more beautiful than ever as she severed from her queenly head one of the longest of the luxurient tresses with which nature had adorned it.

"Ma belle Emma," interposed Edward as she did this, "I cannot allow of such partiality. Let me take the oath of allegiance and gain an equal prize."

"Will you dare?" replied Emma, gayly. "Will you bow your haughty spirit to do my bidding? Beware, for when you have vowed, you are completely in my power."

"And a very tyrant you will be, no doubt, fair queen, yet I accept the vow. Royalty needs new disciples when there are so many deserters."

"Kneel, then, Cousin Edward, and you also, Mr. Saville, and rise Knights of the Ringlet, bound to serve in all things the will of your sovereign lady." So saying, she placed half the ringlet on the shoulder of each gentleman, as they knelt in mock humility before her. Some unutterable feeling seemed to compel Saville to *look* the thanks he would have spoken, but Edward, with a conscious privilege, seized her hand, and kissing it, exclaimed, as he threw himself into "an attitude,"

"Thy will, and thine alone,
For ever and a day,
By sea and land, through fire and flood,
We promise to obey."

CHAPTER II

About a month after, Edward and his cousin found themselves listening to the eloquent appeals of a well known temperance lecturer. He dwelt upon the woes and ruins of intemperance, and the responsibility of every one who did not do all in his power to remedy the evil. At the close of the lecture the pledge was passed among the audience. When it came to where they were sitting, Emma took it, and offering Edward her pencil, whispered, "Let the Knight of the Ringlet perform his vow." He looked at her inquiringly. She traced her own name beneath those written there, and bade him do the same. For an instant he hesitated, and was half offended with her for the stratagem, but good sense and politeness both forbade a refusal, and he complied.

It was a more delicate task to exert the same influence over the proud and sensitive George Saville, but at length the opportunity occurred.

One evening, as he mingled with the gay groups that filled the splendid drawing-rooms of the fashionable Mrs. B – , one of his acquaintance came up, and filling two glasses with wine that stood on the marble side-table, offered one to him. As he was raising it to his lips, a rose-bud fell over his shoulder into the glass, and a voice near him said, in low, musical tones, "Touch it not, Knight of the Ringlet, I command you by this token;" and turning, he saw Emma standing beside him. As she met his gaze, she passed her delicate hand through the dark curls that shaded her lovely face, and shaking her finger at him impressively, was lost in the crowd. Saville stood looking after her with a bewildered air, as if lost in thought, until the laugh of his companion recalled him to himself. "Excuse me," he said, putting down the glass. "You saw the spell flung over me, I am under oath to obey the behests of beauty."

Emma watched him through the evening, but he seemed to avoid her, and appeared thoughtful and sad. They did not meet again, until at a late hour; she was stepping into her carriage to return home, when suddenly he appeared at her side and assisting her into it, entreated, "Fair queen, permit the humblest of your most loyal subjects the honor of escorting you to the palace." She assented, and the carriage had no sooner started than in a voice, trembling with earnestness, he added. "and permit me to ask if your command this evening was merely an exercise of power, or did a deeper meaning lie therein?"

"I did mean to warn you," said Emma, gently, "that there was poison in the glass – slow, perchance, but sure."

"And do you think *me* in danger, Miss Leslie?"

"I think all in danger who do not adopt the rule of total abstinance; and, pardon me, if I say that with your excitable temperament, I imagine you to be in more than ordinary peril."

There was a long pause. When he spoke again his tones were calmer.

"I did not imagine I could ever become a slave to appetite. Often, while suffering from the fatigue induced by writing, I have taken brandy, and been revived by it. Sometimes before going to speak in public I have felt the need of artificial stimulus to invigorate my shattered nerves. Do you think that improper indulgence?"

"Do you not find," said Emma, "that this lassitude returns more frequently, and requires more stimulus to overcome it than formerly?"

"It is true," said he, thoughtfully; "yet I often speak with more fluency when under such excitement than I can possibly do at other times."

"Once it was not so," said Emma, kindly.

"Very true, but this kind of life wears on my system. I cannot get though with my public duties without help of this kind."

"Does not this show," replied Emma, that you have already somewhat impaired those noble powers with which you are endowed. Would it not be far nobler as well as safer to trust solely to yourself than to depend on the wild excitement thus induced?"

"It does, indeed; fool that I have been to think myself secure. But, thank heaven! I am yet master. I *can* control myself if I choose."

By this time they had arrived at the door of Miss Leslie's mansion.

"Let me detain you one moment," said Saville, as they stood upon the steps, "to ask you if you have heard others speak of this. Tell me truly," he added, as she hesitated. "Do the public know that I am not always master of myself?"

"I have heard it intimated you were injuring yourself in this way," replied Emma, in a low voice, doubtful how the intelligence would be received.

"And you," said the young man, fervently, "you were the kind angel who interposed to save me from the precipice over which I have well-nigh fallen. Be assured the warning shall not be in vain. A thousand thanks for this well-timed caution," he added, more cheerfully, as they parted, "the Knight of the Ringlet will not forget his vow."

For a few moments the joyous excitement of his spirit continued, as he thought of the interest in him which her conversation and actions had that evening evinced. But when the door closed and shut her fairy form from his sight, a shadow fell over his heart. Other feelings arose and whispered that after all it was but pity that actuated her. Love – would she not rather despise his weakness that had need of such a caution? Then came a sense of wounded pride, an idea that his confession had humbled him before her, and ere he reached his home he had become so deeply desponding that he was meditating taking passage for England, and doing a thousand other desperate things, so that he never again might see the gentle monitress who, he had persuaded himself, regarded him with pity that was more akin to disgust than love.

A letter received the next morning calling him into the country for a week, prevented his executing his rash designs; but a feeling, unaccountable even to himself, made him shun the places where he was accustomed to meet Emma, and made him miserable, till three or four weeks afterward, merely by accident, he found himself seated opposite to her at a concert. Was it fancy, or did she look sad and thoughtful; and why did her eye roam over the crowd, as if seeking some one it found not. So he thought to himself, till suddenly, in their gazing, his eyes met hers. Instantly she turned away, and then in a moment after, gave him an earnest, inquiring glance, full of troubled thought. At that look the demon which tormented him vanished, and a flood of inexpressible love filled his soul. He could not go to her, hemmed in as he was by the audience; but he did not cease looking at her through the evening. In vain; she gave no second look or sign of consciousness of his presence.

"She is offended with me," he soliloquized, as he went homeward; "and no wonder. How like a fool I have acted. I will go to her to-morrow and tell her all."

In the morning he called, but others had been before him, and the drawing-room was well supplied with loungers. He staid as long as decency would permit; but Miss Leslie was not at all cordial in her manner toward him, and the "dear five hundred friends" kept coming and going, so that no opportunity offered for the explanation. "I will go again this evening," said he to himself; and so he did. Emma stood at the window, beside a stand of magnificent plants, whose blossoms filled the room with fragrance. The lamps had not been lighted, and the moonlight fell like a halo of glory around her, as she stood in sad reverie that cast a pensive shade over her face, usually so brilliant in its beauty. So absorbed was she, that she did not hear the door open, and was unconscious of Saville's presence till he was at her side.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.