QUEEN MARGARET AND KING MALCOLM.

GEORGE WEATHERLY.

Quiver for December.

[Margaret was her warlike husband's teacher in the faith of Christ; and often she would read the New Testament to him, explaining its divine lessons of humility, charity, and piety.]

In the grand historic pages
Of the records of the past
There are pictures of dark ages,
That we love to think will last.

Then man battled fiercely, madly,
But, in every hall from strife,
Margaret taught her husband gladly
From the precious Book of Life.

Such a picture, lit with glory,
Like a jewel richly set,
Gleams before us in the story
Of the Scotch queen, Margaret.

When the world was waiting dumbly,
Seeking vainly for a guide,
This good queen was gazing humbly
At the the Saviour crucified.

Often kneeling clothed and reverent
To the story of the cross,
Till with tears his fierce eyes glistened,
Till he counted glory loss.

Pleasant picture this we're keeping—
One we love and gaze upon
Bringing harvest worth the reaping
From the ages that are gone.

APOSTROPHE TO NIGHT.

MRS. E. V. WILSON.

St. Louis Magazine.

O night, It watched so patiently for thee,
With the cool darkness and the silent stars
The sun went out beyond his western bars
"And now," I said, "the night will comfort me.

And care, and sorrow from my heart will flee
But, ah! false friend, thou hast deceived me so,
I long for morn to come that thou mayest go,
And I no more thy haunting ghosts may see
With their sad eyes, where tears have ceased to flow.

Better the day, its sunshine, crowds and glare,
Then the pale things with faces of despair
That come with thee and mock me in my woe
Henceforth, O! night, a dreadful foe thou it be,
For thou hast leagued thy evil with memory.

THE WOMAN IN RED.

A Thrilling Italian Story of the Last Century.

BY GEORGE W. M. REYNOLDS.

CHAPTER II.

FRANCESCA AND COUNT CLAUDIO.

Some of the crowd dispersed, among whom were Bravadura and Spada, but Fiaramonte remained.

"He will surely pass this way presently," he said, "nor will she be long behind him. I know this is the thirty-sixth evening. Count Claudio little think, that the father of Francesca Donati, instead of being the wealthy noble he is thought, is utterly ruined. Twas a singular chance by which I gained the information; I will use it. The young Count has shown me kindness, and bad though I be, gratitude is not yet dead in my breast. He has served me; I will now serve him.

While he was thus thinking, Count Claudio approached; and halting in the square, looked around as though expecting some one.

"Count Claudio, a word with you," said Fiaramonte, going up to him.

"What now, fellow?" said the Count, haughtily. "What would you with me?"

"You do not know me, Count; no matter—I know you. You once did me a kindness; I can now return it."

"Ha! speak on."

"You are waiting here for the Lady Francesca Donati, daughter of the Count and Countess of that name. Am I not right?"

"How knew you my private affairs? This is an impertinence."

"It is not so meant. What I have to say concerns the Count Donati."

"Speak on."

"He is reputed wealthy—is it not so?"

"It is."

"He is a beggar."

"Impossible! He is immensely rich?"

"So people think; but they are wrong. Listen to my words, Count Claudio. This morning, the Count Donati received a letter from Venice, where the Count is, and this letter contained news that he is utterly ruined and that his only hope was that she might borrow a hundred and fifty thousand ducats, and restore to him at once. She has endeavored to do so in several places, and failed."

"A hundred and fifty thousand ducats! The Count utterly ruined! It seems impossible. How know you this, my good fellow?"

"I cannot give my authority, but what I say you may rely upon."

"This is most marvelous," said Count Claudio to himself. "Can it, indeed, be true? If so, it is most deeply unfortunate. I love Francesca; but I am deeply in debt, and to wed her without the promised dowry would be madness. I dare not; and yet how can I relinquish her?—so lovely and so loving, her gentle heart would break."

Neither Count Claudio nor Fiaramonte observed the door of Rudiga's house open, and herself upon the threshold. But the people who still remained noticed her, and shrank back awe-stricken at the terrible looks of the supposed sorceress. She heard all the conversation relating to the ruin of Count Donati, and more which afterward passed between Count Claudio and the other. Then, apparently satisfied, she drew back and closed the door.

While the young Count and Fiaramonte were yet conversing, another personage appeared on the scene. This was a lady dressed in black and closely veiled. She advanced to a group standing some distance from the house and asked—

"Can you direct me to the abode of one Rudiga, a fortune-teller?"

"The Women in Red!—the sorceress!" cried several. "Yes, madam—it is there."

The lady hesitated, as if uncertain whether to advance or not.

"Thick veiled," she muttered to herself, "no one would recognize the Countess Constanza Donati. I must adventure it. 'Tis our last hope. This woman—this sorceress—they say possesses fabulous wealth. I will bring my diamonds, my jewels, and offer them as security for the money I require. It is a fortunate idea, and I see in it the means of our salvation. I will hasten for them and return."

No sooner had she gone than Fiaramonte, who had been intently watching her, and who seemed struck by her voice and appearance, said to Count Claudio:

"Count, know you the purpose of that woman's visit here?"

"Not I." was the careless reply; "perhaps to have her fortune told."

"No, it is not to have her fortune told, but to borrow money."

"To borrow money? Indeed! And how does that interest me?"

"She comes to borrow 150,000 ducats."

"A large sum, truly, but nothing to me."

"Know you who the lady is?"

"Not I; nor do I care."

"Do not be too sure. It is the Countess Constanza Donati, mother of the Lady Francesca."

"Ha! say you so? Are you sure?"

"Quite."

"And her object?"

"I have told you."

"Can it be so? What means have you of knowing?"

"I cannot tell you; but trust me, I speak truth."

"It is strange, very strange," mused Count Claudio. "The fellow has the air of truth."

"See who comes yonder across the bridge," said Fiaramonte, interrupting him, and pointing with his finger.

"Ha! 'tis she—francesca—my heart's love!"

"Remember, Count, she's no longer the wealthy heiress, but the daughter of a ruined man."

"Perdition seize the thought! it is madness. I cannot give her up, and yet to wed her would be rank folly. My affairs are now in so bad a state as to make a marriage with a wealthy lady absolutely indispensable."

Such were the muttered thoughts of the young Count Claudio as, torn by conflicting emotions—wound now by his love, now by his interest and the desperate nature of his fortunes—his mind wandered first one way, then the other. But as the fair Francesca Donati approached, self-interest and expediency were blotted away in the sunshine of her presence he lived but for her.

He hastened to meet her.

"Francesca! dearest, best beloved, again I behold you! Your bright beauty has dissipated the gloom which was gathering around. I am again happy.

"Happy! Have you, then, been otherwise, Claudio?"

"No, no, Francesca! not unhappy. How could I be so when blessed with your love? But I have heard things which disquiet me concerning your father, Francesca."

"Ah! I trust nothing is wrong. Do you know, Claudio, what I fear? I fear has been all day in a terrible state of excitement. But a short time ago she left me to go and asked for my diamond tiara. What can it mean?"

Claudio groaned inwardly.

"It is, then, true," he thought. "She is about to pledge her jewels in order to raise the money." But not wishing to alarm her, he dissembled his feelings.

"Oh, doubtless it is merely some trifling anxiety, dear Francesca," he said, "Do not suffer it to trouble you."

"But it does trouble me, Claudio," said the young girl.

"Do you know, I often think that my dear mother has some secret grief which weighs her down. Frequently, on looking up suddenly, I notice her regarding me in a mournful manner. Her eyes suffused with tears; and once or twice she has let fall expressions as though she feared to lose me. What can it mean?"

The eyes and ears of Claudio were taken up with his fair companion, that he paid but little attention to other objects. And south to say, the fair Francesca might be pleaded as an excuse for any amount of inadvertance to what was passing around.

Seldom even among the daughters of sunny Italy was so perfect a specimen of feminine beauty to be found. Unlike the generality of her countrywomen, she was not dark, but fair. Her hair was of a bright brown color, her eyes dark blue, her complexion a happy blending of the blonde and brunette, with all the delicacy and delicacy of the former, wanting the pallor which so often characterizes fair beauties. Her features were faultless in outline, while the expression was so soft and lovable as to double the effect of her great beauty. The type of her face was neither Roman nor Greek, but Italian style of beauty, but rather a mixture of both, with perhaps the aquiline predominating. However, to attempt the task of description is hopeless, we must leave the reader to imagine the graces of her form and beauty, the small classic head, its crown round with luxuriant masses of hair; the delicate hands, small feet, gently swelling bust, and figure such as might modeled after the antique; and all the various graces with which Dame Nature had taken delight in adorning her.

Claudio was endeavoring to dispel her melancholy and foreboding, she drinking in his words, which fell like music on her ear, when both were startled by a voice close beside them.

"Lady, your hand, and I will tell your fortune."

Francesca, turning quickly, gave utterance to a faint cry.

There, close beside her, stood the dreaded sorceress, known as Rudiga, the Woman in Red. Her eyes were bent on the young girl's face with a penetrating glance, which seemed to exercise a strange, weird charm.

Francesca shuddered involuntarily, she knew not why.

"Your hand, young lady," said the reputed sorceress again, while a smile full of strange meaning broke out on her face.

There was something so tender in her words, so mournful in a pathos in the smile which accompanied them, that the girl felt reassured, and, though not without misgiving, extended her little hand to the fortune-teller.

The latter was murmuring to herself words which neither Francesca nor Claudio could understand, never for an instant removing her eyes from her face—those dark, flashing eyes, which seemed as though they would read the inmost heart of all upon whom their glance fell.

Let us listen to the murmured thoughts of the Woman in Red:

"The voice of nature is strong within me. I feel an irresistible impulse that at last I behold my child. The chain of evidence is not complete, but my heart tells me I am right."

"Come, come," said Claudio, roughly interrupting her; "release the lady's hand. What means this idle mummery?"

Rudiga removed her eyes from Francesca, and turned her angry gaze on the young man.

"Rash young man, beware how you offend me."

"What! do our threaten me? Away with you! I fear not your black spells and enchantments—'tis all imposture, as is thy fortune-telling."

"They said you were Count Claudio," she said, "do they not?"

"Call me Count Claudio! What mean you, woman?"

"Do you remember your mother?" she asked, abruptly, fixing her eyes on his face.

"My mother?—no. She died while I was yet too young. But a truce to this idle folly; begone, woman, or I will have you scourged through the streets."

Rudiga's eyes flashed fire. She dropped Francesca's hand and Francesca, and confronted Claudio, defiantly.

"Empty-brained coxcomb, you dare to threaten me! Beware! you know not whom you are. I know—"

"What know you?"

"More than I choose to say at your bidding. You think yourself nobly born, do you not? I know better; your mother was an honest but poor village woman, and I held her in my arms as she yielded up her life, murdered——"

"Vile impositor, you lie!"

"I have bid you beware how you answer me, again I repeat the warning."

"I defy you and your pretended arts. Come, Francesca, let us leave this mad woman, or I shall be compelled to order her arrest."

Rudiga suddenly clutched Francesca by the arm.

"Stay; you go not so. What would you with this girl? What claim have you on her? The voice of nature is strong within me. I know her mother."

"What raving is this? You know her mother, the Countess Donati? I do not believe it.

"It is false; her mother was not the Countess Donati."

"Unhand me lady vile wretch," cried Claudio, furiously.

"By what right do you dare tell me to do so—me—*me?* Who are you that claim her? Know you who she is?"

Francesca, pale and trembling, was almost ready to faint while this violent scene went on. The populace, too, crowded around, attracted by the altercation between the sorceress and Count Claudio.

Rudiga was rapidly working herself up to a pitch of uncontrollable excitement. Instead of releasing Francesca she held her arm with yet firmer grip

"The woman is mad—mad!" exclaimed Claudio, trying to drag Francesca away.

"No, no; not mad, rash boy. You know not who she is. Soo—see by this token I know her."

Then, as quick as thought, she tore the dress from Francesca's left shoulder, leaving the flesh bare. A sharpery, almost a shriek, broke from the Woman in Red.

"I know it. I know it—it's she," and then, before Francesca, who was dreadfully terrified, could escape, she cried, "I have found you at last."

Claudio now rushed forward and attempted by force to drag Rudiga away. He succeeded in his object; but in the struggle an ivory cross which Francesca wore around her neck became detached, and remained in the hand of the sorcelled sorceress. Claudio cried out, furiously:

"Sacrilege! Sacrilege! This accursed hag—this witch—has torn a crucifix from the bosom of a Christian maiden."

Then arose on all sides the cry:

"Sacrilege! sacrilege! Stone her down her the witch."

And with these words the mob began to pelt around Rudiga, and she was in imminent danger of her life. But just when her peril seemed most imminent, and even as the fierce populace drew nearer, ready to shower blows at her, Francesca rushed forward with a shriek.

"No, no," she cried; "I will save her. It was an accident; the poor woman did not mean to steal the cross. You shall not harm her. If she must go, I will do with her."

The mob, at a moment before intent on murder, fell back before the magic of Francesca's bright beauty, and Rudiga, the Woman in Red, owed her safety to the Christ an maiden.

"Tis the voice of nature," cried Rudiga—"Naomi, Naomi, come to my arms." You were lost, and are found.

But for Francesca this was quite mad. She had pitied the poor old woman, whom she feared to have seen killed before her eyes, and had, therefore, not without risk to herself, saved her from the fury of the mob. But as to the meaning of this strange woman's vehement demonstrations of affection to herself, she could only say—"Naomi, she was in utter ignorance. She could only think her mad, and was—Claudio's words, which fell like music on her ear, when both were startled by a voice close beside them.

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