

Current Literature.

DAME AUTUMN WITH A MOURNFUL FACE

Summer is dead: too soon her radiant shape  
Beneath a humid pall of leaves is laid;  
Too soon is fled the swallow, to escape  
The biting wind, and winter's cruel shade.

The Signor American.

I.  
It was in the tapistry at Pisa that Berry first saw her. He had just entered the door as she uttered a few clear soprano notes; and in a moment was awakened that peculiar echo that once heard, is never forgotten—a seeming multitude of voices in unearthly tender sweetness taking up the strain and waiting it to the highest heavens.

as she passed him, and he noticed a sad, uneasy smile play upon her face.  
Her gray-whiskered escort had passed near the entrance, conversing with Molino, and Berry caught some words which seemed to apply to himself. Coming forward the gentleman scanned him over thoroughly, which scrutiny Berry returned as long as the bald head was in sight.

II.  
Three or four days passed without Berry's catching as much as a glimpse of Signorina Bianca Vanni. He learned that much of bland Molino, and that the gentleman was Count Barbensi, her guardian; but beyond their names Molino knew nothing, so he said; though Berry felt that in that particular Molino held as little reverence for truth as in some others. The count and Molino were too often in conversation to be such entire strangers to each other.

Berry tried to pump the Europe's sole waiter, but he was apparently the dullest of mortals, and knew nothing. Even with the stimulus of ten francs it took this Giulio two days to discover but little more than Molino had told and he imparted his information as though it were a great state secret, that must be spoken only after a mysterious caution in closing all the dining room doors.

The voice ceased a moment, and was beginning a second aria, when it was hushed by a great, gruff "ahem!" followed by the heavy tread of that bewickered count sounding upon the court pavement. He glared up at the windows about the court, and went into the hotel at a stride. Berry could have numbered the stone steps of the flight that led above listening to the count's thump, thump, thumping feet, as he ascended.

"It was the Signorina Bianca that sang," said foolish Giulio, as he laddled out Berry's soup.  
The table was usually ornamented with a dish of flowers, but on that day the bouquet appeared finer than common; and before the count could be asked, Molino glanced into the dining room, calling Giulio out. At once Berry heard them in the passageway, parleying in furious tones about some flowers; though directly Molino re-entered, all smiling and suave, followed by Giulio. Molino explained that he had as usual provided two bouquets, one for the count's table and the other for Berry's; but that stupid Giulio's dog had been allowed to get at one and pull it all to pieces. Molino could not say whose bouquet was destroyed, though Giulio had declared that it was the count's. No doubt, he was perfectly right. It would be a great disappointment to the Signorina, who loved flowers, and who never dined without them; but as she was just about to take her dinner none could be had in time.

Berry was not ill pleased for the opportunity, and handing his flowers to Giulio, ordered him to bear them to Signorina Bianca, with his compliments. He also mentally resolved that Giulio's dog should have a new collar, and regretted having said that very morning, as he had rolled that animal of low degree over for snapping at his heels, that such curs were only fit to drown.

"And tell them how stupid thou hast been," said Molino, as Giulio left the room with the flowers. Then, turning to Berry, "Ah, sir, you have charmed that Giulio; he will have it that nothing is half good enough for the Signor American."  
"Molino was out of the room changing the courses when Giulio, in great trepidation, returned, bearing the flowers, which he replaced on the table, without uttering a word, and began nervously shifting some of the dishes.  
"What does this mean?" demanded Berry, seeing that Giulio had no idea of explaining.  
"Sir—ah, you see, Signorina Bianca does not care for flowers, and when she does, Count Barbensi will furnish them."  
"Who said that?"  
"The Signorina."  
"I don't believe you!" said Berry, indignantly.  
Giulio glanced at the doors, and then, drawing near to Berry, said in a whisper: "No, it is a great lie; it was the count who said that, and he swore de-r-r—edifically—I'm quite frightened! He is a grand villain, this count, and he bullies the Signorina; her maid, Nina, told me last night. But I tell you, sir, Nina can be a great hypocrite! She also bullies the Signorina one-half the time, to please the count, and not be sent away, and cries her eyes out the other half, and prays to the Madonna because she has to be so wicked. Nina loves the Signorina, but the count thinks she is a tiger. Ah!"

That always I made you no charge; and he growled much, but believed me. Now I shall be ruined if we do not say that Giulio is a blundering pig; I pray you will not refuse me."  
Berry had no desire to be ousted from the Europe, which Molino vowed the count could insist upon for cause; so he said nothing further about the bawlers being returned, though mentally resolving various rash projects of revenge.  
As Berry went to his room that night, he saw the maid Nina approaching along the passage. It was the second time he had seen her, the first being an occasion when she had blundered into his dining room. She was a rather coarse-looking woman of an awkward gait, always appearing with a great ugly hood slouched over her head, though to no loss to the lovers of the beautiful. When Berry and she had nearly met, he slackened his pace to have a better look at her. She hesitated, and, without turning her head, said in a not unpleasant voice, "Signorina Bianca wishes to thank you for your beautiful flowers; it was very kind in you to send them; and she begs that you will not charge her with the rude message with which they are returned."  
"Assure the Signorina that I did not for a moment, and that if I can ever do her a service, she has but to command me," said Berry, gallantly, as Nina hastily moved away.

III.  
Giulio, as Berry learned to know him better, proved far from stupid when safe out of ear-shot of Molino; and as he and Nina became acquainted, had always some new bit of revelation in regard to Bianca, until the situation was pretty well explained. Once in the hotel Count Barbensi had been left several years before the sole guardian of Bianca and her considerable wealth; and being a powerful though needy person, he had recently made violent love to his ward, with an eye to her fortune. A gentle repulse, instead of reminding him of his sacred trust, had only caused him to unmask his true character; and, having persuaded Bianca to leave her native city of Ferrara, ostensibly to visit the baths of Lucca, he had brought her to Pisa, away from all knowledge of her friends. Once in the hotel Molino, a creature of the count, though he loved only one's gold, and in the care of Nina, a supposed willing tool, the count had given Bianca to either favorably consider his suit or the alternative of a convent life at Rome, where, from the near-at-hand port of Leghorn, she could be easily taken in a few hours. Whenever she went out of the hotel the count was at her side, and she, therefore, preferred to remain within doors, where, save at meals, she could avoid his presence.

"But the other signor, the one she does admire, where is he all this time?" asked Berry of Giulio, trying to make it appear by the tones of his voice that it was a matter of indifference to him if there were a dozen or so.  
"Nina says there is none; but then Signorina Bianca hates the count. Nina, sir, has a little dagger, long and sharp, and says if it must be she will so!" tapping Berry lightly, but very suggestively on the breast; "but I think she brags; she is afraid of the count."  
"The old gray-headed wretch!" said Berry, half to himself. "What a dastardly action to work upon the fears of a young, tender heart!" Then to Giulio, after a pause, "Why doesn't she appeal to your courts? There are laws that certainly will protect her, troubled as the times are."  
"Ah! but, my brave sir, who will tell the law? The next morning he would be missing and perhaps he would be in the sea."  
"And has she no friends who will dare this much for her?"  
Giulio sorrowfully shook his head. "In England, Nina says, there are many good friends; the signorina's; but they tell me England is very far from here, and time is passing. The count is a great man; I would not like to be in his way, I tell you, sir, for he will stop at nothing. Ah, I'm afraid there is no help for the signorina!"

"There is some help for her," said Berry, slowly, and with a significant determination. Giulio started back in alarm and amazement and a diabolical grin, but safely upon the table.  
"Excuse me, sir, but I think that you do not know this count; he is like the lion that roars." You have the brave heart, and can fence and shoot well, no doubt—I hear that all of signor's countrymen shoot very fine—but you cannot see in the dark; and—ah; certainly it shall be as you command. I wish you well, but shall weep much if my brave gentleman comes to harm."

Berry smiled and held out a gold piece to Giulio, who stood by him with his countenance troubled and his hands clasped.  
"No, excuse me, a thousand pardons!" said he, slipping back from the coin. "I do not wish to pay twice, as Molino; my pay will be Nina. I have said, don't cross the count, with my lips; but my heart says, yes, yes—you see, sir, how it is with me."  
Giulio, however, was prevailed upon to take the gold, with the understanding that he was to spend it for a trunk for Nina, who was to be warned to watch for an opportunity to speak with Berry. It was not a pleasant prospect for Berry to contemplate what had been done with unscrupulous means; but from all that distressed womanhood, even though she had not been young, lovely and free, all the possible dangers of Italy would not have not intimidated him. He possessed, as Giulio had said, "the brave heart." The several specimens of the men of Italy, whom Berry had become acquainted with at the different cities he visited rapidly depicted a preconceived and strong aversion to them as a nation, which to Molino, a Frenchman, he chanced to disclose on his first night in Pisa. Molino had at first strongly endeavored to remove the prejudice, as with a persistent zeal that Berry finally told him, with considerable warmth, was wasted upon him. Molino for some reason, was undoubtedly disappointed at his failure; but on the second day, when they exchanged a few words, he admitted with unblinking inconsistency that he, too, really thought very lightly of the signors; and after that he seemed to take a quiet delight in repeating their shortcomings. Berry's instant repugnance to the count, growing each day, had further increased this antipathy.

That evening he had promised himself a stroll to the Cathedral, to note the effect of the moonlight upon its pillared facade. As he stood there, thinking on a very different subject from architecture, he noticed the hooded figure of Nina cross the piazza, and pause in the shade of the leaning tower. Berry was not long in joining her, and heard a corroboration, in vehement language, of all that he learned from Giulio. If he had entertained the slightest doubt of the propriety of throwing down the countlet in Bianca's behalf, it would all have vanished before Nina's passionately earnest tale. Without a moment's delay he would have rushed off and implored the aid of the law, but Nina with sound reason persuaded him of the futility of such a step in Bianca's case, particularly at that time. If the count was to be beaten, it was at his own game of plotting; once given the alarm, and Bianca would be spirited away where the count was all-powerful. Berry scribbled a few lines on the leaf of his note-book, offering his poor services in any way that Signorina Vanni might command, and spoke a number of verbal pledges in Nina's willing ear.

"The fortune of the brave reward you, signor! We shall now hope," said the joyful Nina as she turned away.  
"None but the brave deserve the fair," floated through Berry's mind, and somehow was mixed up with his dreams that night.

IV.  
Berry's ardor was a little dampened for the moment when, on the next morning, there was cautiously handed him this note:  
"I am sorry, and should say displeased that my loving, foolish maid, and simple, honest Giulio, have, unknown to me, undertaken to be my advocates, and would win a far more cannot chide them, my poor friends, yet I must decline to draw you, a compassionate stranger, into an unhappy plot, that can but bring trouble, perhaps death, for your reward. I fully appreciate the nobleness of your offer, shall always remember it, and now thank you from my heart most earnestly."  
"Sincerely indebted, BIANCA VANNI."  
Berry was not long in sending an answer to this note, but Nina expressed herself as being half wild from despair because of her mistress's continued refusal to expose him to any risk; or rather, as he judged from repeated language, she hesitated from utter hopelessness. Nina implored on her knees, Giulio reported: "And she said, sir, I believe with all my heart that Signor Berry can outwit the count and get you to your friends in England."

He finally prevailed with Nina to be granted a moment's interview in Molino's and the count's absence, and spoke with the eloquence of a generous hearted man. His words would become him, yet there seemed to be something in his bearing and speech, however praiseworthy, that apparently surprised, if not startled, the poor woman, and she turned towards Nina with a questioning look.  
"As even walls sometimes have ears," said Nina, intently, "and Signor Berry already knows everything, let us act. Signorina, permit me to introduce you to your brother, Signor Berry."  
"We should not accept, but cannot refuse, your assistance, brave brother," said Bianca, in chancing modestness. There were tears in her eyes, as she endeavored to call up a smile when she shook hands, and a moment later she was strongly affected. But as Nina calmed her, Berry saw her face light up with hope and courage, and he left their presence with thanks ringing in his ears.

It was running too much danger of a discovery, Nina thought, to hold another interview with Bianca; but through herself there was always a safe communication, and plans were suggested and gradually matured, while waiting for a favorable opportunity to execute them. Berry ventured with success to interpolate the words "sister and servant" after his own name in his passport, which all the powers that he was requested to know was an American citizen's.  
A most unexpected opportunity offered when the Count confided to his most zealous jailer, Nina, that he would be obliged to be away for a few days at Florence, on some political business. In preparation for assisting the plot, Nina urged him to allow them to go for the time to Lucca, as Bianca had often requested, where she would answer for the consequences.  
When the day was fixed for their visit to Lucca, Wednesday, Berry hinted to Molino that he thought of returning to Florence; he pinned for the beautiful signorinas of Florence. On Monday he took a flying visit down to Leghorn, and there engaged three passages in the Valery & Co's weekly steamer to Marselles, that would sail on Thursday evening. Tuesday evening he left Pisa for Florence, and when Molino begged that he would honor him with his hand at parting, he made that double faced publican wince in his grasp. Arriving at Florence, Berry immediately continued on to Lucca by way of Pistoja.  
The agreed signal that all was well was the candles seen burning in an upper window of a small pension on the Via Pozzorello, as Berry strolled down that street on Wednesday evening. While at Pisa he had smuggled many of her mistress's valuables and clothing out of her rooms and packed them in it. Another box of Bianca's had been mysteriously carried out of the hotel, ostensibly to be repaired against their return to Pisa, but it was really well filled, and Giulio was to see that a friend of his drove with it in good time to Leghorn.

It was an easy matter for Berry to call in the Via Pozzorello on the next morning, and, as an old friend, to invite Bianca to take the air with her maid, and afterward, towards evening, to be standing with his sister and servant at the door on the Piazza. On one spectacle official asking some questions, Bianca must have them explained in English, and Berry translated her words into Italian not very lucidly, I doubt, as the official quickly craved his distinguished silence and fees. Ungainly Nina was not given a notice other than the remark of a porter that Tuscany was well rid of such statuary.  
On arriving at Marselles, to Berry's secret anger, his most valuable trunk, together with that box of Bianca's, was found to have been left on shore by the porters at Leghorn. However, the hope was held out that the missing baggage might arrive three days later on a sailing vessel of the company's leaving Leghorn a later hour than the steamer's departure.  
Nina, who seemed to be in a consuming state of unrest to have her beloved mistress quickly reach England, then proposed and arranged that they should hurry on to London, while Berry awaited the arrival of the missing baggage to follow. In England all were friends, and they could not too quickly make themselves safe from any pursuit.  
After an unusually quick passage the sailing vessel arrived at the end of but two days, and the missing trunks were found on board. Not many hours elapsed after Berry reached Paris from Marselles before he continued his journey to London, which he reached in the evening. He posted a note to Bianca at her hotel announcing his arrival, and that he would give himself the pleasure to call upon her in the morning.

With great promptness to the hour he had mentioned Berry called, was shown into the parlor of Bianca's suite of rooms, and there impatiently waited her appearance.  
As she entered, leaning upon the arm of a gentleman, Berry rose, and was startled by something familiar in his already challenged rival's face.  
"Yes, it is Nina—my husband," said Bianca, gaily advancing and frankly offering her hand. She had never looked prettier.  
"But if you had not known the count's disguise, I am sure you would not have recognized him."  
Berry tried to smile, but having touched her hand and bowed stiffly to the gentleman, he was glad to drop down on a chair.  
"My ever brave, good sir," she said, warmly, "you have saved my husband's life, dearer than my own. How can I ever repay you? What can we do for you?"  
"Do? Ah! nothing, nothing, I assure you," said Berry, lightly. Then, getting his eyes on his eyes on his hat, for which he had been looking, "A beautiful day, isn't it? just the season for you to enjoy England."  
There was a knock at the door, and, as it proved to be the maid, she entered, she excused herself for a moment.  
"Not going?" said Count C— as Berry aroused himself and immediately rose. "Stay

and go dine with us at Richmond;" and the count went on in his smiling, oily way, expressing his thanks for the obligations they were placed under. Berry afterwards recalled that he was induced to resent himself and listen to something about: "Political secrets betrayed—lose my head if caught—all sea-ports and roads watched—hiding at Pisa in woman's apparel Signor Berry's appearance—plans suggested by wife's father, half-headed count—Molina, Giulio, all assisted bravely, but nothing could have been accomplished without Signor Berry—very glad letter was satisfactory—must take dinner with them, and be forever one of the family."  
Berry must have declined the dinner, as late in the evening he found himself wandering about St. James's square, and concluded, from his weary feeling, that he must have walked miles, he drove to his hotel.

The letter alluded to was one that had missed Berry at Marselles, but was found forwarded on his return to his hotel. The count had thought well to write and explain that his wife, Bianca, knew nothing of the story that had moved Berry's indignation, nor of Berry's ignorance of what was hidden under Nina's hood. "We were apprehensive, my good father-in-law and I, that as your dislike to us signors was so great, you could not be induced to risk your life to save the life of one of us, and our first idea to confide all in you was abandoned. But we early saw that we had done you a very great injustice indeed; yet what then could we do?"  
It was a pleasure for Berry to know that Bianca was innocent of any deception; but he soon left London to escape the kindnesses that she, seconded by her husband, was anxious to pay him.  
Only last week Berry, who is still numbered among us bachelors, suddenly, and without any apparent reason, announced that his health—never better in his life—required him to seek a mild climate, such as Italy's, and he posted off without seeing more than half a dozen of his friends. Whether or not Count C—, who did not again enter public life, is sleeping with his fathers, and Berry have learned as much, I have not been able to determine, though availing myself of every source where such a question might be answered.—Overland Monthly.

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