

The Picture: – A Dramatic Sketch.¹

Characters.
Colantonio del Fiore.
Angelo Solario.
Laura.
Lisabetta.

SCENE – An Artist's Painting Room – Flower-pieces finished and unfinished on the walls and the easel – a large picture covered with a veil in the front.

Colantonio. -- Lisabetta.

Col. GOOD LISABETTA, know'st thou of my daughter,
Madonna² Laura? I have sought in vain
Her chamber and her garden bower.

Lis. She's still
At vespers³, signor.

Col. Aye, I might have guess'd--
My fair and pensive nun! She flies the light
And vain companionship of this gay city;
Shunning alike woman her gossip, man
Her vassal; coy, demure, retiring, shy,
Were all made up of the still garden where
My flowers grow, and this cool quiet room
Where my old hand, not yet deprived by age
Of its accustom'd skill, lends them new life
On canvas. But to seek the lonely church,
Where, closely veil'd, at vesper-hour she steals
To muse and pray, my gentle daughter ne'er
Forsakes her home.

Lis. In truth, she is too sad.
But, good padronè, 'tis thy fault. A maid
So fair, so rich, should have been match'd long since
With some gay cavalier. That vow of thine,
That save a painter, a great painter, none
Should wed Madonna Laura, may perchance
Keep the Madonna Laura long a maid.
For of rare artists some are old, and some
Are wedded, and some love their single state
More than a fair young bride. 'Tis certain none
Hath wooed her to thy heart's content;--and she--
Alas, poor child!--likes none of them.

Col. Sage nurse,

Dost love a secret?

Lis. Aye.

Col. A secret too

That thou may'st tell?

Lis. Canst thou doubt that?

Col. Then listen

Hast to the jewelers and merchants, furnish

A wardrobe for a princess;--to the cooks,

Confectioners, and spice-men; let us have

A banquet fit for kings;--send round the city

To bid my friends and kindred;--for the morrow

Is Laura's bridal.

Lis. And her husband?

Col. One

Whose name hath darted into fame, as the star

Of evening springs to light.

Lis. Hast seen him?

[end page 1]

Col. No.

But I have seen the master-work by which

He wooes her;--yonder curtain'd--hark! She comes.

No word of this to her.

LAURA *enters*.

My Laura!

Laura. Take

My veil ,good nurse; the heat is stifling.

[*Exit Lisabetta.*]

Father,

What would'st thou of me? Julio says that twice

Thou call'dst for Laura.

Col. I would say to thee--

Sit here by me, thy hand in mine:--this hand

So soft and warm, yet trembling, as it knew

Its destiny, is claim'd, my Laura.

Laura. Claim'd!

Col. Aye, by a lover, dearest.

Laura. Lover!

Col. Say

A husband, sweet-one, if it please thee better.

Laura. By whom?

Col. A painter, who hath come from Rome

To seek thy love.

Laura. Love! Do I know him?

Col. No.

Laura. Doth he know me?

Col. He says that he has seen
My beauteous daughter—here's his letter!--Surely
I think he loves thee.

Laura. Loves me! If he did,
I love not him! And wherefore must I wed?
Art weary of me, father?

Col. Sweet one, no!

Laura. Am I a burthen in thy house?

Col. The joy!
The pride! the sunshine!

Laura. Pr'ythee, then, let me bide
In this dear home, and wear away my days
In ministering to thee. I have been
No thriftless housewife. Trust me thou would'st miss
Thine own poor Laura, when some menial hand
Shook up thy pillow, when some menial tread
Broke rudely on thy slumbers;--thou would'st miss
The soft light touch of love,--and at thy meals,
Thy solitary meals, and the sweet hour
Of morning meeting, and the tend'rer time
That blends a blessing with good-night!--Oh father,
Why would'st thou send me from thee?

Col. Didst thou think
I could part from thee? Go to! we are sick
In worldly pelf; thy spouse shall dwell with us here,
Here in the home thou lovest. Thou shalt not quit
Thy pretty garden bower, thy myrtle shade
For winter, or the summer walk, where grapes
Hang through the trellis arch amidst their rich
And clustering leaves. Thou shalt dwell here, as now,
In thine own pleasant home, thy old found father
Blessing thee still at morn and eve. But wed,
Wed, my own Laura! Thou art mine only child,
[end page 2]

The child of mine old age, and I would fain
Live thy fair childhood o'er again, would see
Thy beauty multiplied, would taste that fondest
And tend'rest ecstasy, a grandsire's love.
Besides, thou know'st my vow. King have ere now,
If chronicles say sooth, offer'd their heirs
The prize of valor, of brute strength; I held thee
At higher prize, my Laura, when I swore
None but a victor in the noble field

Of art should win thee, save a painter none
Should call thee wife.

Laura. Alas!

Col. And I have quell'd
The father's natural longing to extend
His race; and, marveling at thy coldness, joy'd
To see thee turn from the proud cavaliers
Of the gay city, with a gentle scorn
That waved away their wooings as the hand
Fans off the flies in summer time,--have joy'd
To see my virgin flower hang in the shade
From year to year, fresh, dewy, beautiful,
As when it burst the bud--

Laura. Oh flatt'rer, fie!

Col. Nestling within its bower, so that no soil
Of the rude world came near it, scarcely kiss'd
By the hot breath of the sun. But now, my *Laura*,
(*uncovering the picture,*)
Look on that picture; needs no practised eye
To scan its beauty. Art sits triumphing
Like nature there, with daylight life and youth.
Almost the vital breath hangs on those lips
Of parted coral; almost the warm blood
Glow in the modest cheek, and tender thought
Dwells in the fair broad forehead. 'Tis a young
Madonna. Look at the soft downcast eye,
The head bent downward! Look! Hast thou ne'er seen
Such features?

Laura (to herself.) 'Tis myself! Younger and fairer.
But such as love—And so my braided locks
I wore parted; so the silken hood,
Intensely blue, lay on my hair. Fool! Fool!
The very puppet of a dream! *He was*
A soldier, a brave soldier!

Col. He who painted
That picture loves thee, claims thee, the rich guerdon
Of excellence in art; with noble pride
He wooes as Theseus erst Hippolyta⁴,
Conquering his lovelier bride.

Laura. Hast seen him?

Col. No.

Laura. His name?

Col. Zingaro?

Laura (to herself) Fool! fool! fool! to think

Because a dream, or some strange trick of the sense,
Of memory, or fancy, some sweet sound
Passing along the air—I had been sitting
Within the bower he loved, entranced in thought,
Fond dreamy thought of him, through the hot noon,
And then I heart the nightingale afar
Or distant viol from the bay, and straight
Deem'd 'twas his fav'rite air—Fool! fool! His hand
[end page 3]

Wielded the sword and shield, and deftly rein'd
The manèged steed! Little he reck'd of brush
Or palette;--then the time!--long, long ere now,
Hath he forgotten his poor Laura! Man
Loves on till hope be dead, then love dies too;
'Tis only woman lays her silly heart
In hope's cold urn, and in that fun'ral nest
Broods o'er her love.

Col. Well! hast thou gazed thy fill?
It likes me, dearest, that with quivering lips
And mutter'd words, and cheeks with passion pale,
Thou look'st on yonder picture. It hath thaw'd
Thy maiden coldness. I will send forthwith
To summon this Zingaro.

Laura. Father, stay!
Listen! I am about to tell a tale
Too long unutter'd. Listen! Thou hast talk'd
Of maiden coldness. I have loved, I love
With all the ardor that our burning sun
Strikes into woman's heart. Nay, start not, father,
Nor put me from thee thus! I'll tell thee all.
Thou hast no cause to blush for me; I loved
Deeply and fervidly, but chastely, father,
As ever priestess of old Rome adored
Her god Apollo⁵.

Col. Whom?

Laura. Dost thou remember
Young Angelo Solario, the son
Of our rich neighbour?

Col. He! Why he hath left
Naples these ten years!

Laura. And for ten long years
Dwelt in my heart.

Col. Aye, I remember now,
The count Solario one proposed to join

Our children's hands.

Laura. Oh good old man!

Col. It wrought within me
Some marvel that he would abase his son
To wed a painter's daughter.

Laura. Kind old man!

Col. But I had vow'd thee ev'n before thy birth
To my great art; its votary if a boy;
If a weak girl, its guerdon⁶. Thus I said
To count Solario; 'Pluck from thy hot son
The sword he loves o'erwell, and bid him wield
The peaceful pencil; then, if Heaven have given
The painter's eye, the painter's hand, and (rarest
And needfulest of all) that inward beam
Genius, of painter and of poet bright
And glorious heritage!--Then when, matured
By time and patient toil, he shall achieve
Some master-work of art, then bid him come,
And he shall woo my daughter.' The old man
Laugh'd; and the gallant—I bethink me now
That Angelo was there—curl'd his proud lip,
And fix'd his flashing eye, and tightlier grasp'd
His jewel'd sword.

Laura. Spake he?

Col. No word. He went
Forth to the wars that very week; and then
[end page 4]

The father died;--Why, Laura mine, thou wast
A girl when he departed!

Laura. Old enough
To love. The day he said Farewell, I wrote
Sixteen in my short book of life. Ten years
This very day! Oh old enough for love!

Col. For fancy, flickering fancy; such as girl
Waste on a momentary toy, a flower,
A linnet⁷, an embroider'd robe.

Laura. For love,
Woman's intense and passionate love. I've seen
Ten times the changing seasons wax and fade,
Have seen the spring-tide of my youth pass by
In absence, hopelessness, despair, and still
The thought within my heart, the voice that lived
Within mine ear, the image in mine eye,
Was Angelo. His loved idea hath been

My sole reality. All waking things,
The common pageants of this work-dayworld,
Pass'd by me as a dream, confused, unmark'd,
Forgotten! Then I lived, then my soul woke,
When in the myrtle arbor, where erewhile
We spent our childish hours, I could sit
Alone up-coil'd into myself, and must
On him till memory would conjure back
The very image of his sparkling youth
Before mine eyes; the light elastic form
Whose every motion was a bound, whose walk
A gay curvet⁸ as springy as the pace
Of his own Barbary steed; the face as dark
Even as a Moor's, but brighten'd by a smile
Vivid as noonday sunshine, eyes that flash'd
An insupportable light, and close black curls
Beneath the plumed cap,--I saw them all!
And in mine ear the very sound would dwell
Of that farewell which was a vow, that voice
Which in a tone of prophecy would cry,
'Laura, I'll wed thee yet!'

Col. This is a phrensy.

Laura. Oh, father, it is love!

Col. Laura, my sweet one,
The fault is mine. Thou hast been left o'erlong
Lonely and uncompanion'd, till vain dreams,
And thoughts vainer than dreams, have overborne
Thy better reason. Ten years, and thou hear'st
Nothing of Angelo! or he is dead,
Or thou forgotten.

Laura. Father, listen, father!
Last night—I should have said there was an air,
A rich yet simple strain, whose burthen well
Because our summer seas, joyous or sad
As the deft singer in his varying mood
Hurried or stay'd the measure, always sweet,
Most exquisitely sweet! That air from boyhood
Angelo loved; would carol as he walk'd
Along the streets; sing whilst his plashing oar
Kept time; and ever and anon a snatch
Of the familiar strain might travelers list,
Crossing the sharp sound of his horse's tread.
That strain by constant and peculiar use
Became his very own, belong'd to him

[end page 5]

As her sweet music to the nightingale,
Unmatch'd of any. From a little child,
I knew those notes; for so would Angelo
Summon his fairy playmate;--'twas the lure
Of gamesome innocence, the call of love,
For ten years past unsounded,--till last night
Ling'ring in pensive musings in my bower,
I heard once more the strain.

Col. A dream! a dream!

Laura. Sure as I live, the sound was there. 'Twas not
The vision which at pleasure fancy calls
Or chases. I arose, I walk'd; yet still
That air in its old sweetness, each division
Musical as a mermaid's song, was borne
Upon the breeze, though faintlier heard and faintlier
As I receded. It was Angelo,
Or of those noises of the air which oft
Wait round the living, when the parting soul
Of the beloved-one seeks its Heaven,--the knell
Which the Death-Angel⁹ rings.

(Music without.)

Hark!

Col. I hear nothing.

(Music without and nearer.)

Aye now!

Laura. My Angelo, alive or dead,
I will be thine, thine only!

(Music again without.)

Hark again!

Col. I shame to have harken'd to this tale. My Laura,
I tell thee tho art vow'd and dedicate
To genius, to Zingaro.

(Angelo Solario enters behind, unperceived by either speaker.)

Laura. I will never

Wed other man than Angelo. Thy vow
Is sacrilegious, father, and unblest
As his, the judge of Israel, his, the king
Of men, whose sacrificial knife drank deep
The innocent blood in Aulis¹⁰. I have wept
When I have heard the tale of Jephtha's¹¹ daughter
Or poor Iphigenia¹²; yet their lot,
Measured with mind, was blessedness. They died.
But I should linger out a martyrdom

Of loveless life. There is no law of earth
Or Heaven that vests thee with a power to barter
Thy living child for yon vain shadow. Give
Thy ducats¹³ to Zingaro. Stay me not!
I'll to a nunnery—hold me not! Unless
To list my vow that nor by force or fraud
Will I e'er wed--

An. (advancing.) Oh fairest constancy!
Oh miracle of woman's faith!

Laura. 'Tis he!
His very self! This hand that presses mine,
These eyes that gaze on me---Just so he looked,
Just so he spake.--Oh surely I have dreamt
This ten-years' absense! It was yesterday
We parted!

An. Loveliest, most beloved, I come
To claim thee.

[end page 6]

Col. She is promised.

An. To Zingaro?

Col. Even so, good signor.

Laura. Never! Never!

An. Sweetest,
Make no rash vows. If thou would'st crown my love,
Thou'lt wed Zingaro. Nay, snatch not away
This struggling hand!--the hand Zingaro won
For Angelo! Hast thou not read me yet?
Must I needs tell thee-----

Laura. Oh no, no, no, no!
Thou art he! Ye are one! And thou for me hast laid
Thy state aside, hast flung away thy sword,
Hast toil'd in silence and in secresy,
For me! for me! Father, speak to him! Father,
Speak to him!

Col. Calm thee, mine own Laura. Signor,
Thou hear'st her: says she sooth? Art thou indeed
The famed Zingaro? Is this master-work
Of painting thine?

An. Oh now I see that work,
That masterwork of nature, whose rare beauty
I strove to copy, faint and feeble seems
My portraiture! Such as it is, the piece
Is mine.

Col. My son!

An. My father!
Col. Wherefore change
 Thy name? and why not say--
An. Sir! When I left
 Thy presence, even when thou bad'st me wield
 The peaceful pencil, and by toil and time
 Climb the high steep of art, or ere I wooed
 Thy daughter, even as thou spak'st, my soul
 Was fix'd to its great purpose, and almost
 Had I flung at thy feet my sword, and vow'd
 To win the prize or die: yet fear and shame
 Master'd my speech, and I went forth resolved
 And silent.
Col. Whither didst thou go?
An. To Rome,
 The shrine of art, on love's own pilgrimage.
 My friends and kinsmen deem'd me at the camp;
 None save my father guess'd--and, when he died,
 I was of all forgotten.
Laura. Not of all.
An. Of all, save one the faithfulest. Meantime,
 A nameless student, day and night I toil'd
 For that dear faithful one. From my swart skin
 My laughing comrades call'd me oft in jest
*Zingaro**, till at least the name of scorn
 Was crown'd by fame. Oh very dear to me
 The name that won thee, Laura!

*Gipsy.--The groundwork of the foregoing scene will be found in Mr. Mills' very interst-ing
 'Travels of Theodore Ducas.' I have only taken the liberty to change the name of my hero
 from Antonio to Angelo. A similar anecdote has been related of several painters, especially
 of Quintin Matays, the celebrated blacksmith of Antwerp—though I have for obvious
 reasons preferred the Italian version of the story. What could one do with a blacksmith
 and a Dutch-man, and a man who painter misers counting their gold?

[end page 7]

Col. Will she wed
 Zingaro?

Laura. Will I!--Father, was my love
 A phrensy?

Col. Sweet-one, love and constancy
 Have wrought this blessedness. Receive thy bride,
 Thy twice-won bride, Zingaro!

Laura. He but gives
 My hand. My heart is Angelo's.

An. Mine! Mine!

Both mine!
M.

1. This dramatic sketch goes by two different names. When it appeared in *The Lady's Magazine* in May 1824, it was titled "The Picture," but the name was changed to "The Painter's Daughter" in the Hurst and Blackett publication in 1854 of *The Dramatic Works of Mary Russell Mitford, Vol. 2*. As this transcription was taken from *The Lady's Magazine*, the original title was used.
2. The title Madonna refers to the Virgin Mary, often depicted in art with the baby Jesus. Whenever she is alone, she is devoting herself to Christianity via praying or giving blessings.
3. "Vespers, evening prayers of thanksgiving and praise in Roman Catholic and certain other Christian liturgies."
4. Theseus is a Greek hero who led the Athenian army and killed the Minotaur. During the Trojan War, he met Hippolyta, the queen of the Amazons, and the two fell in love.
5. The priestess of Apollo at Delphi was called the Pythia. She often experienced "divinatory trances" said to have been the work of Apollo possessing her body.
6. Votary: "a sworn adherent;" Guerdon: "reward, recompense."
7. Linnet: "a common small brownish Old World finch."
8. Curvet: "a prancing leap of a horse in which the hind legs are raised just before the forelegs touch the ground."
9. This may refer to the Christian ideology of angels and death. "In Christian tradition, the Archangel Michael supervises all of the angels who work with dying people." There is no specific 'angel of death,' but it is believed that all angels who usher spirits into the afterlife work under Michael's supervision.
10. Aulis is an ancient Greek town that served as the scene of the sacrifice of Iphigenia (see footnote 12). It is also where "the Greek fleet set off the siege of Troy."
11. Jephthah was a judge of Israel who was a dominant figure in the Book of Judges, a book of the Old Testament. In order to defeat the non-Israelite groups of Hauran and Ammon, he had to sacrifice his daughter to Yahweh to fulfill a vow.
12. Iphigenia was the daughter of Agammemnon and Clytemnestra, the king and queen of Mycanae. She was sacrificed at Aulis by her father to the goddess Artemis in order to ensure his fleet's safe passage to Troy during the Trojan War.
13. Ducats: "a former European usually gold coin."

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