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

Glows 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 disparted; so the silken hood,

Intensely blue, lay on my hair. Fool! Fool! The very puppet of a dream! *He* wasA 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.

1. 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.
2. “Vespers, evening prayers of thanksgiving and praise in Roman Catholic and certain other Christian liturgies.”
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. Votary: “a sworn adherent;” Guerdon: “reward, recompense.”
6. Linnet: “a common small brownish Old World finch.”
7. Curvet: “a prancing leap of a horse in which the hind legs are raised just before the forelegs touch the ground.”
8. 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.
9. 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.”

1. 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.
2. 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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