

Paul Riverston and I were exploring, one day; we had passed in our gondola through silent waters, deep, dark, and cool—we were out of the ordinary track of tourists. We came at last to a very ancient palace; the front was one mass of magnificent sculpture, the water flowed under the tall, dark archways—there was something so old, so desolate, so strange, and so picturesque about it that I turned at once to our boatman. I must explain that Paul and I spoke Italian well.

"What building is that?" I asked. He shrugged his shoulders. "The Palazzo Carini," he replied; "it is one of the oldest in Venice."

"Why is it empty—why is it falling into decay?"

"The Carinis no longer live there, signor. It has not been inhabited for some generations past. There is an old retainer of the family residing there now. When the Carinis pension off their servants, they send them to the palace. Sometimes there are three or four living there; at present there is but one."

We had drawn nearer to the palace and could see the magnificent carvings of fruit, flowers, fawns, and satyrs. Our gondola stood under the dark, frowning archway.

"I should like to see the palace, Paul," I said.

The boatman shrugged his shoulders.

It was such a sad place—so sad, so dark, so dreary for a bright summer's day—he thought the signor would not care for it; besides, there was a ghost story belonging to it—a strange, weird story that frightened everyone away.

"The very thing I should like to hear. I know a hundred English ghost stories. I never heard one in Italy," said Paul.

"Old Nicoli will show you the palace," said the boatman. "I will wait for you at some little distance in the blessed sunshine, where ghosts do not come."

I must confess to a feeling of awe as we passed under the grim portals, and our footsteps sounded in the quiet, desolate place; the very sound of our voices seemed to reverberate and re-echo with a ghostly noise. It was so dark, so silent, the lofty rooms were all quiet as death itself, the rich tapestry hung in tatters, the few pictures looked mouldy, the old-fashioned furniture, of which there was very little left, was all worm-eaten.

"You wish to go over the palace, signor," said old Nicoli. "It is a sad sight, all ruin and desolation and death."

He looked very woebegone, this ancient servant, but he brightened up at the sight of the handsome gratuity dropped into his hand by Paul.

He took us through long vaulted halls, through mouldering rooms, and we came at last into what had evidently been a picture gallery, some few portraits of ancient Venetian counsellors in their robes of state, of ladies in court attire; at the end of the gallery there was a picture covered with green baize.

"What is that?" I asked, touching the cover as though to undraw it.

"Do not touch that!" cried Nicoli. "Do not look at that picture, signor!"

"What is it?" I asked.

"It is the portrait of the most illustrious the Princess Elinore Carini, who was considered the loveliest lady in Venice."

"Then by all means let me see it." He stoutly refused.

"Why will you not?" I asked, almost angrily.

"Because, sir," he said, solemnly, "after she was dead, she came back to this word again."

I did not laugh; there was something in the desolate and solitary aspect of the place, in the solemn look on the man's face, that took all inclination to smile for me.

"I have no fear," I said; "and I would give much to see the picture."

He slowly undrew the long green curtain, and we gazed upon a face of almost divine beauty. The face of a young girl, so lovely, so fair, that we looked on it with reverent eyes, as one gazes upon a pictured angel's face. I could not describe it; there was something of patrician loveliness, of almost regal command, mingled with the sweetest and most winning grace. The perfect face was crowned by a wealth of golden hair, it fell down her white shoulders like a glittering veil.

We looked long, with silent admiration.

"You say she came back again after she died?" I asked.

"She did indeed, sir; not one, but dozens of people saw her."

"Will you tell me the story, I should like to hear it so much," said Paul.

He consented, after a time, and as I heard it, I give it to you—not in old Nicoli's language. You will find the same story, too, amongst the legends of Venice.

Long years ago, the young Prince Luigi Carini succeeded to the title and estates of his father. He was one of the wealthiest and handsomest young men in Italy, and there was much wonder among the Venetian maidens as to whom he would ask to share his heart and name. There were two young ladies then in Venice, who bore the palm from all others. One was Beatrice D'Isola, the other Elinore D'Alicante, Beatrice had a true Venetian face, dark, passionate, and splendid; Elinore was called the Star of Venice, for she had a face as fair as an English rose, and golden hair, that shone like sunbeams.

The young prince loved the Lady Elinore best, and he married her and took her home to the palace, at that time one of the most magnificent in Venice. They were exceedingly happy,

and Lady Beatrice showed no jealousy or anger because her fairer rival had won the day.

They gave grand balls and *festes*—all Venice loved the lovely and gracious young princess; her husband worshipped her, and they were universally cited as the happiest people known.

In time, the Princess Elinore had a little son, a most lovely child, who had his father's dark eyes and his mother's golden curls. There is a picture still extant in one of the Italian galleries, of the princely father, the lovely young mother, and the beautiful child.

He was a very sensitive child, strange to say, for he came of a knightly race; he was nervous, easily frightened, terrified almost into convulsions at the darkness or any sudden noise.

How tenderly the young princess loved him, how carefully she guarded him from all fears, how she sang him to sleep with soft lullabies, clasping him in her own white arms. His little crib was placed by her side, that in the night she might look at him and touch him.

It was beautiful to see how the little fellow loved his mother.

"Mamma! mamma!" he would cry holding out his pretty hands. "I love you—I love you!" He would hide his curly head in his mother's neck: "I love you mamma." He thought of nothing else.

There came a sad day for Venice—a day when a bad fever broke out, and carried the people away by hundreds. The lovely young Princess Elinore was the first almost to sicken of it. How they fought against it; how they summoned in hot haste the cleverest doctors, the most skillful of nurses; but all was in vain—the fiat had gone forth—she must die.

Her senses came to her perfectly before she died. Her husband, half mad with sorrow, was kneeling by her side. She held out her hands to him.

"Darling," she said. "Caro mio, you have been very good to me, and I have been very happy. You will let me see my little one, my little Leo, before I die?"

He told her yes, she should see the child. The sun was setting, and the last golden rays lingered on the lovely dying face.

"Luigi," she whispered, "I love you very much, and I grieve to leave you; but you are young yet, dearest, and you will, perhaps, when your first sorrow is over, find someone to take my place; but no one, no woman in all the wide world can take my place with little Leo; no one can love him so much, or be so careful of him—he is so nervous, so delicate. Oh, Luigi, my heart is heavy to leave. Caro mio, will you make to me one sweet, sacred promise?"

"I will," he sobbed.

"If in the after-years someone comes here to take my place, will you swear to me that you will make her be kind to my little Leo—swear it on this cross?"

"I swear it!" he said. "I shall never marry again, Elinore; but if, as you say, in the after-years, I should do so, then I swear to you Leo shall be my first care."

She thanked him with loving words, and the dying eyes were turned eagerly to watch for her child.

"Mamma! mamma!" he was heard crying, and when the door was opened he ran into the room, ran with his little outstretched hands to his mother's side.

"Mamma, are you going away? Take me with you—take me with you."

He sobbed out the words, hiding his little face on the loving breast that should pillow it no more.

"Oh, take me with you!" he cried.

With all her feeble strength she gathered him in her arms, and raised his face to hers. The death-damp lay on her brow; her soul seemed to be fluttering at her lips.

"I cannot, my darling," she gasped, "I would if I could; but, Leo, Leo, after I am gone, if you are very unhappy, call me, sweet, call me, and I will come. I would burst all bonds to get to you. Call me—cry 'Mamma'—and I shall hear you."

Then the feeble arms relaxed their hold.

"You will remember, Luigi?" she whispered.

"I will remember, my wife, my love," and then she bent her fair young head and died.

How he grieved for her all Venice knows. For many days his life was despaired of. And she was laid to rest in the gloomy old family vault of the Carinis. This vault was about five minutes' walk from the palace; there was a bridge to cross to get to it; the water did not reach it; and there the lovely young Princess Elinore was laid to rest.

Three years afterwards, when little Leo was nearly six years old, the young prince married again. He espoused the Lady Beatrice, and brought her home to the palace, as he had done his first wife.

The Princess Beatrice was very beautiful, but very haughty. No one loved her as they had done the gentle Lady Elinore. She was passionately attached to her husband; she loved him with the deepest love, but she hated the child who had his mother's golden hair—hated him with fierce, hot hatred.

On the day when Prince Carini brought the Lady Beatrice home, he took her to the nursery where the child was at play.

"Leo," he said, "come and kiss your mamma."

His heart misgave him when he saw the rapture of joy that flashed in the little face. The child made one bound, thinking his own mother had come back again.

Then he looked with blank, dim eyes into the dark face.

"It is not mamma," he said; "my own mamma had a face like an angel, and hair like gold."

The little fellow turned quietly away with quivering lips, and Prince Carini took him in his arms, and covered his face with passionate kisses.

From that moment she hated him with a deep, deadly hate. It was never shown before the prince, seldom before the servants. The prince never dreamed of it, the servants knew it well. To his father, she affected great zeal for his education; she made rules which seemed very wise to him, but he knew perfectly well she could never carry them out. She affected to be most reluctant to punish him, but when the rules were broken punished he must be.

Does it seem unnatural that a woman should torture a child? Ah me, there is nothing, there is no one, so cruel under the wide heavens as a second wife jealous of a first wife's child.

There is no meanness, no cruelty such a woman does not descend to. She, the Princess Beatrice Carini condescended to torture her dead rival's child. She soon found out that he was nervous and easily frightened. Under pretence of talking to him, she told him frightful stories of goblins that hid themselves behind the curtains of the bed, of headless ladies in white robes who walked wailing and wringing their hands. Then she would send him on an errand, and if terrified to death at meeting one of these ladies, he hesitated, she punished him. She complained of him to the Prince, affecting much reluctance, but the boy was stubborn, she said, and disobedient.

"Give him some light punishment," said Prince Luigi.

"To tell you the truth, Luigi, I could not speak harshly to the little fellow."

"Beatrice, I love him too much. He has his mother's face."

Her hate leaped up to burning fury then, but she smiled a calm, deadly smile.

"I shall be sorry to hurt him," she said, "but I really think a little discipline needful for him."

Ah me, how she punished him! How she left deep, red marks on the thin, white arms. She had taken him into her own room, saying it was by the Prince's desire she did so. The nurses cried shame; and when she thought his cries might reach Luigi's ears, she sent him away.

That night Prince Luigi had a strange dream. He was lying in bed fast asleep, when the door of his chamber opened, and a bright light shone in the room. Then through the open door came his beloved wife Elinore, not dressed in a shroud, as he had seen her last, but wearing a white, flowing garment, her shining hair lying like a veil around her. She went straight up to him and bent her lovely face over him.

"Luigi," she whispered, "you have not kept your oath. You have brought some one in my place, but she is not kind to little Leo, she is very cruel, and I cannot bear it. I cannot rest. You must see to it."

The next moment she was gone. He woke up in a terrible fright. Ah! thank God, it was only a dream. He accounted for it by remembering how sorry he had felt yesterday when little Leo was punished.

And yet the vision was so vivid; it was Elinore's face—Elinore's voice. He resolved to see into it.

"Beatrice," he asked the next morning of his haughty wife, "are you kind to the little one?"

She looked at him with a smile.

"What a strange question, caro. Could I be anything but kind to a son of yours? Why do you ask me?"

"I felt uneasy about him. You love him, Beatrice, do you not?"

"Most certainly I do. Is he not your son, and poor Elinore's? I loved Elinore."

"Because, if you find him troublesome, I will send him away. I should not like your patience to be tried with him."

"My patience is not so easily disturbed," she said. "The child is like all other children, Luigi; he is no better and no worse. Still, as you know, he must be curbed. He has fault as well as virtues; his faults must be corrected."

"Yes, that is right enough. Do you think the servants are all kind to him?"

"They spoil him in the most absurd fashion possible," she replied. "More than half his faults spring from their over-indulgence. Will you tell me what has disturbed you, Luigi?"

"Only a dream," he replied. "I dreamt that Elinore came to me, and said her little son was not treated kindly."

The beautiful face grew livid with anger. It was not enough to have the dead woman's son growing up the beloved heir to her husband's place and name; it was not enough to know that the dead wife must be loved far better than she would ever be, but she must be annoyed with ridiculous dreams. Did it soften her heart towards the unfortunate child? alas! no. Her insane hate seemed redoubled. She dare not show it so openly, but it burned with fiercer violence than ever.

At length Prince Carini was obliged to leave home on business for some few days—he was going to Turin. He bade his little son "good-bye," with many tears.

"You will be good Leo—good and obedient, then I will bring you a little pony, and you shall ride."

He had better have left the hapless child in the jaws of a cruel wolf than in the hands of a jealous stepmother.

The little fellow was put to bed by his nurses

at the proper time, and they, finding him asleep, went downstairs; but Leo awoke, and remembering his papa was gone, began to cry and sob most bitterly.

Madame La Princesse, passing down the grand staircase, heard him. She went into his room; he was terrified at her, and cried louder than ever when he saw her. She told him quietly to cease crying—the little fellow sobbed all the louder.

"I shall look you up in the room alone, if you do not," she said.

He screamed with terror at the thought of it, and the princess kept her word. She took away the lamp and locked his door. She went to the nurses and told them what she had done. "He must be taught not to cry in that babyish way," she said; then Madame went to her own room. The servants grew desperate, for the screams of the terrified child were terrible to hear.

"I shall burst the door open," said the nurse, "even if I lose my place for it."

Then they heard the little voice calling in its agony of fear.

"Mamma! mamma! you said you would come, and I am afraid. Oh, mamma, do come!" No need to burst open the door—she had said she would break all bonds, and she did so.

"Mamma!" cried the child, and the terrified servants stood gasping and breathless. People crossing the bridge saw the white figure with its glittering veil of golden hair, not walking, but rather floating over the ground—a white figure, with its hands crossed on its breast, and a light on its face. A man standing close to the entrance of the Carini Vaults saw it come out of the door. It passed quietly and calmly along under the tall, dark archway, through the midst of the group of gossiping servants, who knew her at once—their well-loved mistress, the Lady Elinore—through the long vaulted hall, up the wide marble staircase to the door of the room, where the terrified child lay screaming.

"Mamma! mamma!"

"I am here!" said a voice they all remembered.

In trembling awe and wonder they had followed her, herding closely together. They saw her touch the door—the lock gave away; they heard the weeping stilled, the child's cry of delight; and then for one moment there was silence. The next, Lady Elinore came out of the room with the child tightly clasped in her arms, his little golden head pillowed on her breast. Slowly and gently she passed down. On the broad staircase, the princess running up to see what caused the strange uproar, met the dead mother holding the child in her arms. The princess fell down in a swoon; the white figure passed on through the archway—over the bridge, where people watched in horror as it passed by—into the vault, the door of which closed slowly after it. The terrified servants, drawn as it were by a spell, followed, and each one saw the figure of Lady Elinore re-enter the vault from whence it came.

A panic not to be described fell upon the whole city. At first people would have it that it was a hoax—that the child was missing. They sent in hot haste for the prince. The prince, the bishop, and the civil authorities entered the vault together. The story must be true, for the lid was no longer on Lady Elinore's coffin; but she lay there, beautiful yet, and, clasped in her arms, his little head pillowed on her breast, his little hands holding her tightly, lay Leo, the heir of the Carinis.

The prince bent down and tried to remove the child. No human power could do it, and the wonder was witnessed by the whole city. They made a larger coffin, and let mother and child together.

Prince Luigi never looked upon the face of Beatrice again. At his death the estates passed into the hands of a distant kinsman, and on account of that ghostly visitation, the palace has been uninhabited ever since.

I cannot account for the story. Paul and I heard it, and I believed it is true. We came away from the desolate old palace with heavy hearts.

There are more things possible than we know of. Who shall say that God did not permit that poor mother to return and take her only and beloved child from those cruel hands? I have always believed since I heard it that there will be heavy vengeance against those who ill-use a child.

LUXURY DEFENDED.

There is nothing else in this world quite so reasonable as luxury. It means pure air and delicate food, and swift and silent service at table, which leaves one able to listen and free to talk and safe to sparkle. It means having our friends about us when we need them, and the ability to fly from them to the ends of the earth when we need that, as we often do. It means that when we come out of theatre or concert, or fashionable church even, "sad from the breath of that diviner mood, that loftier air," (?) into the decidedly nether air of the tri-mountain streets, we are not to risk our precious and significant lives by breasting the bitter north wind and allowing it to buffet our exhausted lungs, but rather step into a cushioned carriage and roll softly and safely away. And if that carriage is one's own, and so one is tolerably sure that no infection is lurking in its broadcloth, how much better still! Again, there is the luxury of giving. How can you, a creature all benevolence—whereof I am a single monument—overlook that?