Select Literature.

BIANCA,
OR SFORZA'S TOWER.

During the rule of that cruel and heartless tyrant, Filippo-Maria Visconti, Duke of Milan, there dwelt upon the borders of Lago Maggiore a Milanese nobleman, named Ludovico Count de Ricci. He was at this time a widower, with an only daughter, just seventeen years old, of exceeding beauty, and, for the period she lived in, singularly accomplished; that is, she could read and write, play upon the harp, and was said to be fond of the study of astrology and history.

The Count de Ricci was in his sixty-fifth year, but still hale and vigorous. Having been a great warrior in his youth, he grew stern and rigorous in his old age; and notwithstanding his great revenues, he was somewhat parsimonious. He shut himself up, with his young and lovely daughter, in his feudal fortress, where he kept only a few retainers, neither receiving or visiting the neighbors in his vicinity. Still his daughter was gratified in every wish of her heart, for the stern old Count dearly loved her.

The castle enjoyed a most glorious view over the wide expanse of Lago Maggiore and its lovely islands, and also the beautiful country surrounding Bavino. It may be thought that Bianca led but a joyless life, shut up in the old castle, with no other amusements than strolling through the extensive gardens into the great picture-gallery, and the magnificent armoury, where hung armour of all sorts—chain armour and plate armour—helmets like eagles and griffins, with wonderfully curious visors, which often puzzled the fair girl, when looking at them, to conceive how the bearers contrived to breathe or exist with such a load of ugly iron on their heads; to say nothing of all which encumbered their bodies.

Though Bianca acquired the credit of being an adept in astrology and botany, she knew scarcely anything of those sciences. She loved dearly to gaze into the clear vault of heaven, when the stars sparkled brightly, or when the moon shone, to view, from one of the castle turrets, the lunar beams resting upon the islands that lay tranquil and still, with the clear water rippling on their shores. Then, with her favorite maiden, Lucia, she wandered amid the exquisite scenery that surroundeed her abode, and gathered the innumerable wild-flowers and plants which abounded in that favored region. The castle of the Count de Ricci was within a league of Bavino, surrounded by fields of maize, mulberry and chesnut trees, the net vine climbing and twisting itself amid the branches of the loftiest trees. The air of this delightful country was mild and balmy, and the scent of sweet flowers filled it with fragrance. Even in winter, when the hills, covered with snow, present an aspect somewhat cheerless, the eye rests with delight upon the Borromeo Isles, which seem to retain perpetual verdure and beauty. At the period of our tale, however, these islands remained almost in the state in which nature created them. To the Count Vitaliano Borromeo they owe their magnificent gardens, terraces and pavilions.

On one of these Islands, the most barren of the three, and called the Island of Fishers, the old Count de Ricci had built a lofty tower; and his daughter Bianca, who loved to spend some of the summer days there, had it tastefully fitted up with several apartments, and a large garden surrounding it. There she frequently retired during the heats of summer, with her two female attendants, and remained there for weeks. At that period there were no inhabitants. Now it contains near two hundred and a church, though the buildings offer a strange, but not unpleasing contrast to the magnificence of Isola Bella.

The old Count de Ricci was highly connected; and at one time lived in great splendor at the court of the ferocious and bloodthirsty tyrant, Giovanni Maria. The Countess de Ricci was the sister of the unfortunate wife of this tyrant duke; who, in the end, was assassinated by some of the nobles; and, to the surprise of the court, and the indignation of the nobility, his wife, Beatrice Tenda, married immediately after his succession, Filippo-Maria. Somewhat disgusted, the Count retired from court, and lived in the seclusion of his castle, refusing the new duke his request that he would reside in Milan.

It was the month of June, and Bianca crossed over to the Island of Fishers, with her usual attendants, and took up her abode in the tower, intending to spend some weeks there. For the period she lived in, she had a choice collection of manuscripts. She was fond of painting, and painted well. She had a handsome barge, for recreation on the lake; a beautiful garden to walk in, and musical instruments to play upon. Altogether, the fair Bianca seemed to want nothing on earth to make her happy. Yet she felt not in her usual spirits. She had left her father somewhat disturbed and uneasy at intelligence from Milan. Filippo-Maria, though by no means a warlike prince, was, nevertheless, a keen observer; and, from the moment he became Duke, he resolved to augment his territories, by no means scrupulous as to the means. The famous Francesco Carmagnola, from a simple cuirassier had become one of the greatest captains in Italy. One by one, all the petty tyrants of Lombardy were conquered by him. As he gained power, the Duke increased in wickedness and tyranny, and committed many acts fully as bad as his predecessor. From his wife, though she was nearly twenty years older than himself, he gained his throne; but once firmly seated, he determined to get rid of her. Having a presentiment of her fate, she dispatched a courier to the Count de Ricci, requesting him to come to Milan, as she feared the Duke had designs against her fair name, if not her life. The Count, therefore, resolved to go to Milan, shortly after his daughter's departure for the Tower of Fishers. He left his castle with a dozen or so of armed retainers, and proceeded to Milan; for he was greatly attached to his late wife's sister, and he hoped to be of some assistance to her, in shielding her from the designs of her tyrannical husband, intending to form a strong party amongst the old nobility.

The Lady Bianca passed a fortnight in perfect tranquility on the little Island of Pescatore; but, at the end of that period, she began to wonder that no tidings reached her of her father's proceedings, and she felt considerable uneasiness about the Duchess, whom she remembered, when a little girl, to have been very fond of her.

One very fine tranquil evening, just half an hour before sunset, Bianca was seated at the open window of her favorite chamber in the tower, looking out upon the glassy surface of the lake, undisturbed by the slightest breath of air. As the sun reached the horizon, the vast body of water resembled a sheet of gold. Just then her attention was caught by the appearance of two boats rowing rapidly across the lake. Presently, she perceived the leading one turn its bow for the Island of Fishers; and, as it came nearer, she could see distinctly that it was impelled over the water by one man. It was an extremely light, buoyant skiff; and, being vigorously pulled, went swiftly over the smooth surface of the lake. Nevertheless, the other boat, a long galley-kind of craft, came even more rapidly onwards, and it became very evident to Bianca, that the last boat pursued the first. Her attention thus became excited, and, calling her maid, Lucia, they both anxiously watched the progress of the boats. The galley was pulled by four oarsmen; and in her stern stood two men, both in armour, for the last rays of the sun fell upon their steel harness, which sparkled glaringly in the eyes of the maidens. As the skiff approached, the Count's daughter could plainly perceive that the person who rowed was evidently a young Signor, for he wore a plumed cap, and his attire was such as a gentleman of rank might wear. He appeared as if he pulled for his life; and those who pursued, seemed as if they thirsted for his blood, for fierce oaths and violent execrations burst from the lips of the two figures in armour in the galley, exciting the four men to pull with might and main, and prevent the fugitive from landing on the Island of Fishers.

Bianca no sooner heard the words of the men in the barge, than she said to Lucia, 'run, girl, and call old Tomaso and his son, or blood will be shed.' And, snatching up her mantle and hood, she hurried from the chamber, with the intention of preventing, if she could, an assassination under the very walls of the Tower. On gaining the open door of the edifice, Bianca saw Lucia and the old gardener come hurrying from the garden at the back. The gardener looked pale and much frightened, as Lucia had told him that a murder would be perpetrated on the beach before the Tower. Heedless of the old man's representations that she was running into danger, Bianca fled towards the beach, and beheld a sight that, for an instant, caused her cheek to blanch and her heart to beat with horror. The young Signor in the skiff had leaped ashore as soon as his boat touched the beach, and was instantly followed by the two armed men in the barge; for when Bianca looked towards the lake, she seen the three figures engaged with swords; and in the same instant one of the men cased in steel staggered and fell; while the other, before the youth could recover his sword, run his weapon right through his unarmed breast. The youth fell back if slain. A wild shriek escaped the lips of Lucia as Bianca rushed towards the spot, calling out in loud tones on the assassins to beware how they committed murder on the lands of the Count de Ricci. Two men now jumped from the barge; and before the Count's daughter reached the spot, they lifted the wounded man in armour into the boat; the other man sprang into the boat, and the next instant they pulled rapidly out into the lake, rowing in the direction of Isola Bella.

Greatly agitated at the scene she had witnessed, Bianca, followed by her maiden and the trembling gardener and his son, reached the beach where lay the stranger to all appearance dead. By his side lay his broken sword. Had it not broked, he would probably have defeated his antagonists; for he was a tall and powerful young man of scarcely more than twenty-five years of age.

''Merciful Heaven!' ejaculated Bianca, 'I fear he is slain! What can be done?' And kneeling down, she perceived the blood flowing copiously from a wound in the right breast. But he was not dead; for after a few moments, Lucia called out—

'Dear mistress, he breathes!'

'He, thanks be to Heaven!' cried the Count's daughter. 'Do you, Marco, (speaking to the stupified gardener's son) take the skiff, row to the castle, and bring back old Jerome. He is a skilful leech Bring with you, also, two of the men well armed, for fear these assassins should return.'

'The Lady Bianca, though only seventeen years of age, was, nevertheless, a courageous and high-spirited maiden, possessing considerable presence of mind, and a most generous and amiable disposition. With Lucia's assistance she stanched the blood; but the stranger, though they bathed his temples with all kinds of restoratives in their possession, still remained quite senseless. He nevertheless breathed somewhat stronger. How to get him to the Tower, puzzled them all; for he was much too heavy for old Tomaso, even with their assistance, and night was coming on. However, Bianca insisted upon trying to move him, even if it was only to the shelter of the boat-house, which was close beside the spot. Though pale as death, and his eyes closed, yet it was easy to perceive that the stranger was eminently handsome, and his attire rich. The sword he had broken had a jewelled hilt, but was more an ornamental, than a serviceable weapon.

With great difficulty the fair girl and her assistants drew the stranger within the shed, during which time he groaned several times. Having laid him upon some sails, a little wine was poured down his throat. Lucia had procured a lamp, and in a very short time, to Bianca's infinite relief, the stranger opened his eyes very feebly, and almost immediately reclosed them. The castle was little more than two miles from the tower, therefore, as the water was smooth, and the skiff light, Marco, in little more than an hour, returned with the leech and the two of the castle retainers. The stranger was then carried into the tower, and consigned to the care of the leech and the kind-hearted old dame, who superintended the culinary department. Bianca then retired to her chamber to converse with Lucia upon the strange adventure of the evening.

To say that the fair Bianca felt no curiosity concerning the handsome stranger, would be unnatural even in this romantic age. But at that period, when chivalry had not totally perished, and when maidens of rank thought it not beneath their dignity to attend to the sufferings of wounded knights, such an event as that which had occurred before her own eyes was sure not only to excite her curiosity, but strongly awaken her sympathy for the sufferer.

Three days passed over, and still the stranger's condition did not warrant any very strong hope that he would survive the terrible sword-thrust he had received. But on the fourth and fifth day he got visibly better. Bianca herself attending to the administration of the remedies prescribed.

At the end of a week he was able to converse; and Bianca was informed by the old dame who principally attended to his wants, that he earnestly implored an interview with her. He had left his couch, and was sitting in an easy chair, propped with pillows. When Bianca heard this request her heart beat somewhat quicker. She rose, and, followed by the old dame, proceeded to the chamber of the invalid, in one of the lower rooms of the tower.

As she entered the apartment, with a little more color in her cheek than usual, the stranger made an effort to rise, but grew deadly pale from the exertion; and the maiden, seeing his languid look, stepped forward, and holding out her hand, as if to stay any further effort, said in her melodious voice—

'I pray you keep your chair. You are not yet capable of any exertion.'

The stranger took the hand held out before she could withdraw it, and most humbly and respectfully, and with something of deep devotion in the manner, kissed it, saying—

'Ah, lady, you have been a ministering angel to me. A life's service cannot repay your gift to me of life. Yet, cruel fate! from me you must receive tidings that will pain your heart.'

Bianca's cheek grew pale, as, sinking into a seat, she exclaimed—

'Evil tidings! my father! Can you know anything of him? My connections are so few, that evil tidings must relate to him.'

'Alas!' replied the stranger, 'such is the case! But be not alarmed more than is needful, for my tidings effect not his life.'

'Good Heavens! Then what has happened? My dear father. And how came you, a stranger, to know of his misfortune—for such, I suppose, your tidings mean?'

'Misfortune, dear lady, it certainly is. But not to keep you in suspense, let me state that the object of your father in coming to Milan was to serve that cruelly-injured lady, the Duchess.'

'Holy Virgin, my aunt!' responded Bianca. 'What has occurred to her?'

'Your aunt!' echoed the stranger, in a low voice, and looking extremely dejected. 'I did not know the Duchess was your aunt. Worse and worse!' Then looking up into the agitated maiden's face, he added—'Your father, dear lady, immediately on reaching Milan, was seized, with all his attendants, and, by order of Filippo-Maria, imprisoned in the fortress of Camagna, in order that he might not interfere with his cruel and frightful designs upon the life of his Duchess.'

'Ah, Madonna!' cried Bianca, 'I felt it. Something of evil hung upon my spirits all this last month—I felt an unaccountable depression. My poor father, in his old age, a prisoner! Alas! the tyrant may take his life!'

'No, lady, no,' said the stranger. 'The Duke will never injure the Count de Ricci. The deed for which he imprisoned him—' he paused, hesitated, and then added, in a low, mournful voice—'is done. He will be liberated shortly.'

'What deed is done?' demanded the maiden, nerving herself to hear the worst, and fixing her eyes on the stranger. 'Keep me not, I pray you, in suspense. What of my aunt?'

To be continued

ALMANACK FOR MAY..

MOON'S PHASES.

First Quarter, 2d day, 11h. 52m., morning.
Full Moon, 10th day, 4h. 11m., afternoon.
Last Quarter, 18th day, 2h. 27m., morning.
New Moon, 24th day, 6h. 37m., afternoon.

DAY MONTH.	DAY WEEK.	SUN rises	SUN sets	High Water	Moon sets	Day's length.
		h m	h m	h m	h m	h m
1	Monday	4 51	7 4	8 8	0 5	14 13
2	Tuesday	49	5	3 54	0 44	16
3	Wednesday	47	6	4 39	1 16	19
4	Thursday	46	7	5 52	1 45	22
5	Friday	45	8	6 4	2 12	24
6	Saturday	44	9	6 46	2 38	25
7	Sunday	43	10	7 28	3 4	27
8	Monday	42	12	8 12	3 32	30
9	Tuesday	41	13	8 58	4 3	32
10	Wednesday	40	14	9 22	rises	34
11	Thursday	39	16	9 46	8 9	37
12	Friday	38	17	10 35	9 4	39
13	Saturday	36	18	11 27	9 55	42
14	Sunday	35	19	even.	10 42	44
15	Monday	34	20	1 12	11 23	46
16	Tuesday	33	21	2 4	11 58	49
17	Wednesday	31	23	2 56	morn.	52
18	Thursday	30	24	3 48	0 37	54
19	Friday	29	25	4 39	1 9	56
20	Saturday	28	26	5 31	1 43	58
21	Sunday	27	27	6 25	2 17	15 0
22	Monday	26	28	7 20	2 53	2
23	Tuesday	25	29	8 17	3 34	4
24	Wednesday	24	30	9 15	sets	7
25	Thursday	23	31	10 15	8 18	10
26	Friday	22	32	11 9	9 13	11
27	Saturday	21	33	morn	10	13
28	Sunday	20	35	0 58	10 40	15
29	Monday	19	36	1 47	11 15	17
30	Tuesday	18	39	2 33	11 46	18
31	Wednesday	17	37	3 18	morn	20

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Charlottetown, Nov 4, 1863. 1y