

modesty would not permit her to think herself the most amiable ; and, so far from being jealous of the beauty of another, she perceived that many of her companions were very charming. ‘ A thought has just struck me,’ said Elmina ; ‘ let us each go and pick some favourite flower, and put it into a straw hat. Then let us throw the flowers up into the air, and she, whose flower is thrown the highest, shall be the beauty of the circle. All applauded this happy idea, and went to choose a favourite flower.

Among the companions of Elmina, was a young princess named Malinetta, who was very vain and very designing. She ran to a neighbouring field, and plucked a blue-bottle, which she put into the hat, after having artfully rolled the stalk round a little pebble.

The sly nymph’s intention may be easily divined. By this artifice, the flower became heavier, must in course, be thrown farther. The others chose, without any idea of deception, the flowers they preferred. One brought a ranunculus, another a primrose, and a third a lily of the vale. As for Elmina, she went into a thicket, to pick a wild rose, the flower she liked best. She saw a bush quite covered with roses ; but I cannot imagine why the modest Elmina chose one of the least and lightest.

At the instant they threw the flowers out of the hat, in order to see which would go the farthest, a light breeze wafted the wild rose aloft. It would soon, however, have sunk below the blue-bottle, but that a pretty butterfly fluttered round it, and bore it away. The gay group shouted at this little miracle. They crowned Elmina, and began to adorn her as the beauty of the circle. This was no difficult task ; for Elmina was extremely beautiful ; flowers were ready, and a brook flowed murmuring by. The princess, adorned and crowned, was seated on a kind of throne of turf ; and they began to dance and sing around her :

Nymphs, that now are cheerful seen,  
Where sweet violets deck the ground !  
Nymphs, that on th’ enamell’d green,  
Join the sprightly dance around !  
Lovely virgins, sing and play,  
Ever innocent and gay,  
And crown the fairest maid to-day.

While Health displays her roseate charms,  
Pluck the sweetest flow’rs you find ;  
Welcome Joy with open arms,  
And your brows with roses bind.  
Lovely virgins, sing and play,  
Ever innocent and gay,  
And crown the fairest maid to-day.

Their diversion was interrupted by an unexpected noise in the adjacent grove : and presently came from it a little old woman, who approached the pretty dancers. At first, they were greatly terrified, and would have run from the fancied danger. But the affable demeanour of the old lady, and the gentleness of her voice, soon allayed their fears. Her dress was a green robe, with a rush hat of the same colour, ornamented with a wreath of verdant foliage. In her hand, she had a green pot, in which was a little plant.

It was on account of this dress, that those who knew the venerable dame, called her *Verdurina*. ‘ My children,’ said she, ‘ I am not come to disturb your diversion. But I have heard Elmina sing a song, in which she mentions a *Flower that never fades*. I have seen her take a wild rose in the thicket ; and, from her choice, I have deemed her worthy of the inestimable present, I am going to make her. ‘ My daughter,’ she continued, accosting the young princess, who heard her with astonishment, ‘ take this plant, on which are four flowers and two buds. It is the *Flower that never fades*, and I make you a present of it. Tend it with the utmost care ; but know, my daughter, it is not by watering that you will preserve it. Look at this flower, whose hue is such a bright carnation : it is called the *Flower of Modesty*. As long as your cheeks glow with that lovely colour, this flower will preserve its hue in all its vivid beauty. The second flower, which is of the most spotless white, is called the *Flower of Virtue* ; and it will appear soiled, the moment you are inattentive to any of your duties. The third, of a yellow as bright as gold, is called the *Flower of Benevolence* ; and while you continue good, it will ever retain its lustre. The fourth is of a beautiful sky blue : it is called the *Flower of Gentleness*. Whenever Elmina is impatient or angry, the charming flower will droop. This bud, which is beginning to blow, will produce the *Flower of Understanding*. It will expand in proportion as you instruct yourself, and will, consequently, mark your improvement in knowledge. The other bud incloses the *Flower of Graces* : it will open imperceptibly, and will shed a lustre over all the other flowers.’ ‘ Ah ! Madam,’ exclaimed the princess, as she received the plant, ‘ how shall I acknowledge this inestimable gift ? Come with me, I entreat you. Lindorina will endeavour to convince you of her gratitude and mine.’ ‘ My daughter,’ said *Verdurina*, ‘ you cannot better express your gratitude, than in showing me, one day, this flower in all its beauty. I will return to this spot in three