

similar to those this young man once fondly indulged in! If any such should happen to read these lines, it may interest them to know that the writer is not too old to sympathise with the aspirations of youth, or to make every charitable allowance for its weaknesses. They will the more readily believe this, when he assures them that he has been giving them a rough sketch of his own life, and that he has lived long enough to appreciate the wise counsels of wisdom and experience.

MELITA, THE BOHEMIAN GIRL

I

TOWARDS the close of a sultry summer day, a young Scotchman alighted from a travelling-carriage at a small inn in the village of Monterosa, in Italy. In reply to the obsequious landlord, with whom guests of the *milord* class were 'like angels' visits, few and far between, he announced his intention of remaining for a couple of days, desired to be shown to his room, and ordered coffee to be served in the parlour. In a few minutes he descended to the public-room of the inn, and with much relish sipped the cup of refreshing coffee which the landlord had brought in; and declining the cigars proffered by the latter, proceeded to fill and light a favourite meerschaum, and blowing clouds of fragrant smoke towards the low ceiling, was soon immersed in a brown-study.

The traveller, whose name was Frank Melville, was about twenty-eight years of age, and a good specimen of manly beauty. Exactly six feet 'in his stockings,' his figure was so well proportioned that you did not give him credit for more than the average height. His short, curly, light-brown hair fitly framed a countenance ruddy with health and sparkling with good-humour; while the deep blue eyes shone with intelligence. He was an artist, and had seized the first opportunity to put into execution a long-cherished intention of making a tour in Italy; and the desire of beholding fresh scenes had induced him to turn aside considerably from the well-beaten route pursued by the ordinary tourist.

He had hitherto experienced great pleasure in his tour. But nevertheless, when the shades of evening began to fall, he generally felt somewhat solitary, and longed for some companion with whom to compare notes and exchange ideas. On the particular evening on which our story opens, he felt more than usually restless and low-spirited. A craving for some excitement took possession of him. But in the quiet, secluded village of Monterosa, what excitement, mental or physical, could be found?

There being no other way open to him of passing the time, he decided to try a stroll. The narrow, irregular street of the village was almost deserted; nothing was to be seen except some children playing in the sand, and geese walking in long procession, cackling as they went

Striding rapidly onward, Melville soon came to the outskirts of the village, and plunged into the adjoining forest. The luxuriant leafage of the stately trees, which were in the full vigour of their growth, naturally obtained his chief admiration. The air was scented with the odour of fresh resin and mosses; while a perfect stillness, as of a sanctuary, prevailed, more fitted, however, to increase his depression, than to afford him the mental stimulus for which he craved. He had walked at a smart pace for some thirty minutes, when the sudden sinking of the sun and the deepening twilight warned him that it was time to retrace his steps. Turning back, he was soon conscious that he had lost his way, and began to lament his imprudence in venturing so far into an unknown and apparently trackless forest without having taken some bearings by which to shape his course.

Just as he was beginning to resign himself to a night under the trees, he discerned the smoke of a fire at no great distance, and heard in the still evening air the notes of a violin. A walk of a few minutes brought him to the scene. In the shelter of the walls of an old ruined castle were seated some twenty or thirty gipsies, grouped in every variety of picturesque attitude round the customary triangle, from which hung a large pot over a wood-fire. The men wore red waistcoats, ornamented with large silver buttons, which glittered in the firelight; the women—at least the younger ones—scarlet bodices and chemisettes trimmed with gold embroidery, and round their necks rows of glass beads. A few withered old crones, yellow and toothless, who served as foils to their younger companions, completed the band. As the fire gleamed and flashed on the picturesque group, so bright with colour, Melville longed for the pencil of a Salvator Rosa, that he might preserve the scene for ever on canvas.

The gipsy who had been performing on the violin ceased playing at the approach of Melville, and speaking in excellent Tuscan, invited him to be seated and join their primitive repast. Melville accepted the invitation as frankly as it was given. From boyhood, the Zingari, their origin, strange customs, and wanderings, had been a favourite subject of study with him. He had read many of the books describing these wonderful people, Borrow's *Zincali* among the rest; and was familiar with a considerable portion of the vocabulary of the Italian gipsies; indeed, the manners and habits of this roving race had always possessed for him a peculiar and fascinating interest.

In a few minutes Frank was discussing a portion of a hedgehog, which, rubbed with garlic and stuffed with walnuts, had been roasted on a spit over a quick fire.

'Where is Melita?' exclaimed the violin-player, whose name was Orlando. 'What has become of her?'

Our tourist was in the act of raising a cup of some very good Sicilian wine to his lips, when his look fell upon a vision of feminine beauty such as he had never before seen in all his travels. Through the opening of a tent came a young girl, apparently not more than eighteen years of age. Slightly above the middle height, her slender supple figure moved across the grassy carpet with bewitching grace. Large oriental eyes, full of liquid lustre, softly gleamed from beneath eyebrows black as night. The features were perfect in their contour. The finely chiselled nose, the lips 'like Cupid's bow,' the softly rounded chin, might have served as models to a modern Phidias. The abundant hair was of a lighter tint than the eyebrows, and of a rich warm brown. The complexion was also somewhat lighter in colour than the ordinary gipsy type, but still sufficiently dark to show that she came of Bohemian stock.

Gallantly springing to his feet, and extending his hand, Melville offered to conduct her to a place at the evening meal, with an air as respectful as if he had been accosting an English duchess. But the gipsy girl refused the proffered hand, and seating herself by the side of her brother, gazed with some little curiosity at the stranger guest, and declined to partake of the repast.

Supper over, the artist shared the contents of his large pouch with his hosts—there is no surer passport to the heart of a gipsy than to make him a present of tobacco—and then listened with unalloyed pleasure to the musical efforts of Orlando on the violin; at the same time that he observed the effect of the weird instrumentation on the eloquent features of the Bohemian girl, which seemed to reflect all the varying emotions of the player.

Suddenly, it occurred to him that the lovely Melita in her national costume would form an admirable subject for a water-colour sketch. Turning to Orlando, he inquired if he might come on the following morning to the camp and take a sketch of his sister. Melita overheard the whispered request, and her dusky cheek for a moment deepened with gratified vanity as she smilingly assented to the inquiring glance of her brother. When about to depart, Frank heard with some surprise that he was only a couple of miles from Monterosa, so confused had been his attempts to find his way through the labyrinth of trees. Orlando volunteered to conduct him to the outskirts of the wood; and, accepting the offer, he bade adieu to the lovely Melita. During Orlando's brief escort, Melville spoke little, for before his mind's eye was the eloquent glance of the gipsy girl. Even during the fitful watches of the night and in his disturbed dreams, Melita's face appeared again and again; and it was with unrefreshed sensations that the artist beheld the morning sun shining through the windows of the inn.

## II.

'This is your last sitting, Melita.' It was on the morning of the seventh day after Frank Melville had first met the Zingari that these words were spoken. The young Scotchman was putting the finishing touches to a large water-colour drawing

representing Melita as a gipsy queen. The progress of the work had been watched by the tribe with mingled feelings of wonder and delight; and the girl's dark eyes had shone with pleasure and pride as she looked upon the life-like portrayal of her wondrous beauty.

The knowledge which the young artist possessed of gipsy manners and customs had placed him on a special footing with Melita and the other members of the band, so that they almost regarded him as one of themselves, and referred to matters in his presence which they would have carefully shunned in the case of any other 'house-dweller.' Melita would sometimes speak of the pleasures of her nomadic life; its liberty and freedom from care, its health-giving character, its opportunity for the study of the changing seasons, the animals and birds abounding in the fields and woods; on which occasion Frank would feel his pulse beat faster, until he almost yearned to resign the feverish and tumultuous life of cities, and, casting in his lot with those who dwell in tents, never more return to the walks of ordinary life.

In reply to his observation that this was her last sitting, the Zingari cast down her eyes, and murmured: 'I am very sorry.'

'Sorry, Melita! I can assure you that, as a general rule, the last sitting is always a day of rejoicing—at least to the sitter.'

'But you will go away, now that the picture is finished?'

He was not certain, but he rather fancied that he saw a pearly tear as she spoke these words. 'Well,' he answered, 'my stay here is coming to an end, I must admit; but I can afford a few more days. Come, let us have a stroll.' Slowly the pair walked in the direction of a running stream near the gipsy encampment. 'Melita, I must make you some return for your good-nature in sitting to me. What shall I give you?'

The girl's dark eyes flashed indignantly as she raised them to those of the speaker, and Melville beheld an expression on those lovely features which he had never seen before—an expression which warned him to beware of the passionate Italian blood which coursed in the gipsy's veins. He therefore hastened to explain.

'Not money, Melita; I do not mean that—of course not. But what is there that you would like to have for your picture?'

Melita grasped both his hands within her soft warm palms, and looking fixedly at him, whispered: 'Give me your picture, in return for mine. Then, when you are far away beyond the sea in your own country, that will remind me of these happy days and of the stranger who was so kind to me.'

'I am glad that I can comply with your request at once,' Melville answered; 'but I wish that you had chosen something else. I am afraid my photograph is a poor recompense for all your patience and kindness in sitting to me. See, I have some with me in my pocket-book.' With these words, Frank took a carte from the book and handed it to her.

Melita gazed earnestly several moments at the young Scotchman's handsome lineaments—it was a capital likeness—and as she did so, her cheek became pale, and the hand which held the picture

trembled visibly. Then placing the picture in her bosom, the Bohemian murmured: 'It shall never leave my heart!' Adding, after a pause: 'Come; let us return to the camp.'

Retracing their steps, they walked on for some moments in silence. Melville was by no means a vain man, but of course he was not ignorant of the fact that he was handsome. An unpleasant suspicion crossed his mind. 'Can it be,' he asked himself, 'that this young girl has fallen in love with me?' Then, as he remembered her warm sensuous nature and the violence of her passions, he shuddered. But on the other hand, he had only known her seven days. However, he decided that it would be best for him to depart at once, before any tender impression he had unwittingly made should sink too deeply for her peace of mind.

Melita was the first to break the silence. 'Do you know why I asked you to return to the camp?' Then, without waiting for a reply, she continued: 'I felt that I could not remain in safety near the water.'

'In safety near the water! What in the world do you mean?' was her companion's astonished exclamation.

Smiling sadly, Melita answered: 'Have you never felt an almost uncontrollable impulse—an impulse you could not account for—to do some rash act—to throw yourself from some dizzy height, or plunge into some rapid stream, and thus end at once and for ever all the cares and sorrows of life?'

'My youthful Melita,' he said, 'can scarcely have had troubles sufficient to cause her to seek relief from them in a sudden and violent death.'

Again, the Zingari shook her head sadly. 'I know not,' she said. 'But had I been alone just now, I should have sought death in that running stream.' Then, observing her companion's anxious look, a bright smile irradiated her expressive features as she said: 'But do not be concerned; that moment is past.'

'For ever, I trust?' Melville gravely asked.

'Yes, for ever!'

They had now arrived at the camp. The startling confession to which he had listened during the last few minutes had strengthened Melville's resolve to leave the place without delay, before further unpleasant incidents occurred. He would return to the inn in the village, and despatch a hasty note to Melita, saying that he was unexpectedly compelled to leave immediately for Bologna. In this way he hoped to avoid the awkwardness of a personal farewell.

Although he felt that such conduct might be termed shabby after the hospitality he had received from the gipsies, and Melita's kindness and good-nature in sitting by the hour as the model for his picture, he felt also that anything was better than a scene. It was both an act of kindness and a duty to nip in the bud an attachment he could not return. The first thing to be done, however, was to get possession of the picture. Turning to his companion, he said: 'Melita, I am going to remove the picture to the village to-day.'

A suspicious glance shot from her lustrous eyes. 'You are going away—I feel it! I shall never see you again!'

The artist laid his hand on hers, and as he did so he felt the hand he held tremble. An irresistible temptation seized him, and he kissed her. He felt that he was taking a long—an everlasting farewell; and thus they parted, without another word being spoken between them.

After he had proceeded some little distance, he turned and waved his hand to the girl, who still remained where he had left her, as motionless as a statue.

## III.

Frank Melville was a man of prompt action. Within an hour of his return to the inn, he had left the village of Monterosa, first despatching a brief note to Melita, telling her that urgent business called him away, and regretting the necessity for his sudden departure. He then took up his quarters at a small village about twenty miles from his former halting-place, and determined to remain there for a day or two, until he had decided on his future plans. He felt more depressed than he had thought possible, in consequence of parting from the charming Zingari. In vain did he endeavour by writing, reading, and sketching to banish her image from his thoughts. Wherever he went or whatever he did, the gipsy girl's face was always before him.

On the evening of the third day after he had left Monterosa, he was seated in the little parlour of the village inn. He had hired two rooms, his bedroom being immediately behind the sitting-room, and both on the ground-floor. The landlord entered, and said a visitor wished to see him. While Frank was wondering who it could be, a step was heard in the passage, and a young gipsy brushed past the landlord and confronted his guest. It was Orlando! His swarthy countenance wore an expression of bitter vindictiveness.

Melville held out his hand, and uttered a welcome in gipsy-language. But Orlando took no notice of the outstretched hand or the young Scotchman's salutation. His left hand played nervously with a long bright knife which was stuck loosely in his belt. 'Where is Melita?'

The words were uttered in an intense whisper, the while his coal-black eyes, lurid with some hidden emotion, were fixed on Melville as if he would read his inmost thoughts.

'Melita! Is she not with you? I have not seen her since I left the camp.'

The gipsy paused. Then he asked: 'Is that the truth?'

Melville sprang to his feet, his face aflame with anger. 'If you were not Melita's brother, I would throw you out of the window!' was his passionate exclamation.

Again the gipsy paused, perfectly unmoved by the angry reply. He had never lifted his piercing eyes from Melville's face during the interview. Apparently satisfied, he now extended his hand, and said: 'I believe you.'

'But stay, Orlando,' Melville replied. 'Tell me, what has happened? Where is Melita?'

'I only know that she left the camp directly she received your letter.'

'And where are you going now?'

'To find her, if I can,' sullenly replied Orlando, as he strode rapidly from the room, leaving

Frank a prey to the most torturing suspense and anxiety. But this was not of long duration. As he sat by the window musing on the strangeness of the girl's sudden disappearance, the shadow of a human figure was projected upon the newspaper which lay unheeded at his feet. Looking up, he beheld Melita! Hastening to the door, he opened it, and led her into the room.

'Have you seen your brother Orlando?' he asked.

'Orlando here?' came in accents tremulous with fear from the girl's white lips, as she slowly sank into Melville's arms in a half-fainting condition. Speedily recovering herself, however, she darted an apprehensive glance towards the door, and said: 'If he finds me here, he will kill you!'

'Calm yourself—don't be alarmed, Melita; no harm shall happen.'

'Ah, you know not Orlando's nature! Forgive me for coming to you, but I longed so much to see you! I felt that I must see you, or die! You know you promised to come again to the camp.'

'I know I did, Melita; but I acted as I thought for the best. I wished to spare us both the pain of a parting.'

A faint, gratified smile broke over the wan features of the gipsy as Melville uttered the word 'both.'

'But you appear fatigued,' he continued. 'I fear you are ill. You can tell me another time—to-morrow—how you found me. Meantime, I will ring the bell for the servant; she will conduct you to a room where you can get some rest, of which you must be much in need. I have no fear of your brother. He is hardly likely to come again to the same place. He is doubtless miles away by this time, searching for you.'

The Zingari turned a pleading and timorous look on Melville. 'You are not angry with me? I did so wish to see you!' The next instant an almost angry flush spread over her beautiful face. 'Oh, why did you come to the camp? I was happy till you came!' A passionate flood of tears, the violence of which shook her slender figure like a wind-tossed willow, served somewhat to relieve her excited feelings. Then, as a deep blush suffused her face and neck, she exclaimed eagerly: 'Could I not go with you as your servant—your slave—anything rather than remain here? I dare not return to the tribe!'

Suddenly, as she spoke, her watchful ear detected the sound of cautious footsteps on the gravel-path beneath the window, and in another moment a man had entered the room.

It is Orlando! With a look of fiendish hate upon his grim and pallid visage, he dashes himself upon Melville, and the dagger which glitters in his right hand has come down with deadly effect—and in another moment the assassin is gone.

A piercing shriek rang through the house, and as the frightened inmates enter the chamber, they behold the lifeless body of the hapless gipsy girl in the arms of Melville. She had cast herself between her brother and his victim, and had received the fatal blow. Her last dying

gaze was fixed on the countenance of the man she had loved, and whom she died to save!

Frank Melville is now a prominent artist. He has never married, and is likely to remain a bachelor until the end. His adventure with the gipsies is engraven on his heart and mind in characters which death only can obliterate. The place of honour in his studio is occupied by a large picture, painted by himself, of a beautiful brunette of eighteen summers in the costume of a gipsy. When any one inquires as to the name and origin of the subject, he replies in a tone which discourages further questions: 'She was an Italian gipsy.'

#### A RAINY EVENING.

THE twilight shadows darkling fall:  
O memories dear! against thy thrall  
My heart strives all in vain.  
Yet wherefore strive against my mood?  
I cannot silence, if I would,  
The softly falling rain.

At such an hour, on such an eve,  
Bright hopes, that yet I inly grieve,  
Spring up, to fade and wane.  
Ah, never more, hand clasped in hand,  
Shall we within the doorway stand,  
And watch the falling rain.

Yet still the sweetness of that hour  
Returns, with all its wonted power  
Of mingled joy and pain,  
When, dropping down from window-eaves,  
Or gently falling on the leaves,  
I hear the summer rain.

O cruel Memory! thus to bring  
That glad brief hour, with bitter sting,  
Back to my heart again;  
Those parting words of fond regret;  
With glad pretext, love lingering yet,  
Unmindful of the rain.

Ah! brief, indeed, poor aching heart,  
The joy those fickle hopes impart;  
Grief follows in their train.  
Nay, nay, my heart; take upward wing.  
O cruel Memory! thy sting  
Shall vanish with the rain.

Though sadder seem the songs I trill;  
Yet sorrow, with its plaintive thrill,  
Adds sweetness to the strain;  
As fragrant perfumes softly flow  
From hawthorn blossoms bending low,  
Beat down by wind and rain.

E. W.

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