

# White Wings to the Raven

By Max Pemberton

## I

At eventide on the 3rd day of April, in the year 1706, the Palace of Bianca, Marchesa della Scala, was lighted from garret to cellar; and word soon went round that another of those great feasts, which had been the envy of Italy, was about to be celebrated in her house. Nor was the surmise an incorrect one. Scarcely had the sun gone down behind Chioggia when the loiterers upon the bridge by the church of Santa Maria Zobenigo began to number the gondolas, and to name the guests they set down at Bianca's door.

Such a splendour of gold and silver and precious stones, they said, could be seen at no other house in the city. It was a delight to them to hear the distant music, and to watch the pretty women, and to imagine all the joys of eating and drinking and lovemaking which the gloomy walls of the palace hid from their eyes. For Bianca was the Queen of Venice in her way,—a queen to whom even senators had paid homage; a queen whose wealth seemed inexhaustible; whose beauty had been the theme of poets even in the distant capitals.

It was a merry crowd upon the bridge, and the passing minutes added to its numbers.

Here was a boatman whose day's work was done; there an honest glass-blower from Murano; yonder a hussy seeking a lover; or, again, a well-dressed stranger, who kept his cloak about his face and exchanged words with none. All feasted their eyes on the splendid procession which now passed up the steps of the palace to the throne room of the woman who had conquered Venice so indisputably. Wit and scorn and merriment were mingled in the running fire of exclamation with which each new guest was greeted. It was the people's privilege to be critics, and they spared none in their liberty.

"There goes fat Moriale and his wife with him. By Bacchus! he will get his ears boxed right well to-morrow, for the compliments he is about to pay the little witch upstairs."

"Pah! as well ask a wine-cask to go down on one knee. He dates his writing from the last year he saw his feet. Look rather at old Vittore Capello, who goes up the steps with the toes of a goat. I'll wager a *scudo* that he will kiss pretty Bianca behind the curtains before he comes down again.

"Saint John!" cried another, "his pockets will be light enough at dawn to-morrow, comrade. Name the rich man that pretty Bianca has not diced out of his money, and I will vow a *novena* at the Altar of our Lady of Miracles."

A young boatman, turning away scornfully, expressed a thought which was in the mind of many of those honest citizens.

"For my part," said he, "I would sooner hang between the columns of St. Mark than call that great lady my mother."

"Well spoken, Gentile," said a good-humoured innkeeper, who had listened with interest to their talk; "it is an ill day for Venice when she harbours such hawks as the Marchesa della Scala."

"Where is her son," asked another, "why is he silent when his mother's name is in the mouth of every wanton? I remember the day, signori, when there was no greater house in Venice than that

of the Marchese della Scala. The poor fed at his tables; the Senate listened to his words. And now—look you—it is a house of devils, and the woman you speak of is their queen.”

“To God be the glory that her son does not know,” was the answer of the jeweller, who had just come up. “He is in France, signori, and who shall tell him how the sheep go to the shearing in that great house? Not I—nor the priests she drives from the churches, nor the poor who die on her doorstep, nor the merry men she has sent to the dagger and the sea. Let well alone. Some day Venice will reckon with her, and then!”

A loud chord of music from the open windows of the palace cut short the satisfaction with which these opinions were received. Men pressed to the parapet of the bridge to watch other gondolas as they set down their glittering burdens on the quay of the brilliantly-lighted house. Young girls exclaimed with delight, as women, whose jewels would have set a new king upon his throne, passed up the steps to the saturnalia awaiting them beyond the threshold; beggars drew their rags closer about their bodies, while gallants, in breeches of satin, and coats of gold brocade, and vests sparkling with diamonds, stood a moment to prepare their compliments to the pretty Bianca.

In all that little crowd there were but two men who betrayed no further interest in the Palazzo della Scala or in its people. One was the stranger, who had drawn his cloak about his face when first he had come to the bridge; the other was a cowled friar, who watched the unknown youth rather than the quay to which the eyes of the boatmen were turned.

The two men quitted the bridge together, crossing it towards the *campo* before the doors of the church. They had left the echoes of the music and the laughter far behind them before the stranger knew that he was followed; but so soon as he heard the footsteps of the friar, he turned angrily and demanded his business.

“Signorè,” said the friar, throwing back his capuce that the other might see his face, “my business is with the Marchese della Scala.”

The unknown started and laid a hand upon the hilt of his dagger.

“The Marchese della Scala,” he cried; “then seek elsewhere, brother, for I know not the name.”

“In the shadow of your mother’s house, you do well to forget it, my lord; but here, here where none may listen, you will remember that it was the greatest of the great names of Venice.”

The youth, for such the unknown was, leant against the door of the church and buried his face in his hands.

“God help me, signorè!” he said with a deep sob; “she is my mother.”

For a little while the friar did not speak. His heart was heavy for this handsome, open-faced lad whose father, years ago, had been his own good comrade of the old days at Iseo. When he spoke again, it was almost with the tenderness of a woman.

“My son,” he said, “think not that any idle curiosity brings me to your side to-night. I am here but for one purpose. It is to give you back the name you have lost.”

The young marquis looked up quickly.

“What miracle gives white wings to the raven, signore? Answer me that, and I will listen to you.”

“A miracle of love, signorè,—the love which sleeps, but which to-morrow will awaken.”

He spoke very earnestly, laying his hand gently on the young man’s arm. There was something in the tone of his voice which filled the other with a hope and confidence such as he had not known for many years.

“Brother,” he said, “who are you that you should wish to help me or to remember my name?”

The priest answered almost in a whisper. "In this city I am known as Frà Giovanni," he said, "but your father knew me as the Prince of Iseo, signorè."

The young marquis uttered a cry of wonder.

"Frà Giovanni!" he cried; "you are Era Giovanni! Surely God has heard my prayer, signorè. There is no city so distant that the name of the Master of Venice is not spoken there with love and reverence. If he should prove my friend!"

The priest answered by linking his arm in that of the young man and leading him toward the Piazzetta and the Ducal Palace.

"Marchese," he said, "the feast of the Ascension shall not be here before I say to you, as my Master said to the apostle he loved, 'Son, behold thy mother!'"

## II

Twenty days had passed, and the name of Bianca, Marchesa della Scala, was again upon the tongue of the Venetians. For the feast of St. Mark the Evangelist drew near, and people said that the mistress of Venice would keep it as never feast was kept before. Every great noble of the city, the patriarch who ruled the Church, the president who ruled the judges, the admirals of the fleet, the generals of the armies, the lords of Vicenza, of Padua, of Brescia, of Florence,—all these fell under Bianca's spell and promised her support. It would be an orgy surpassing words, the common people said. But others shrugged their shoulders and cried: "Shame on Venice, that she should honour one who has made our rich men poor; shame on the woman who has taught our sons that the dice-box is greater than the sword."

Era Giovanni heard of these boasts and kept his peace. The whole city was against him, he said; nevertheless, he gave vague words when people spoke of the Palazzo della Scala, and to one he said: "My son, the feast of St. Mark shall find the Marchesa della Scala beyond the mountains of Vicenza."

He uttered the threat, nevertheless, and the twentieth day was nearly done before he seemed again to remember the name of the woman or his promise to her son. On the eve of the feast of St. Mark, however, he quitted the Island of the Guidecca, where his home was; and going alone in his gondola, about an hour before the Angelus, he set out for the Palazzo della Scala and knocked boldly at its door.

The great house was all confusion then. Lackeys tumbled over lackeys; cooks bawled their commands to cooks; the antechambers were loaded with palms and fine glasses and hangings of the richest cloth; the workmen were building the galleries for the musicians; gondolas came unceasingly to the quay of the palace with some new burden which should add to the splendour of the feast. But none paid heed to the cowled monk, who stood timidly at the door of the great house.

"We have no time for such as you," said a lackey who answered him; "go back to your cell, brother, lest your eyes be tempted by the things you see."

The priest threw back his cowl.

"Not so, my friend," he said sternly; "but do you go up to your mistress and carry my message, or to-morrow might find you without a tongue to utter it."

The lackey, recognising the speaker, fell on his knees before him.

"Excellency—I did not know you; I will carry your message—if you had but shown me your face before."

The answer was a gesture of impatience.

“Tell none that I am here,” said the priest, sternly; “to your mistress say that a brother of the Capuchins waits below with news from Savoy.”

The lackey hastened up the stairs, glad to prove his diligence. A moment later he returned and began to make his excuses.

“Excellency,” he said, “my mistress will see no one.

“Go again,” said the friar, angrily; “I come from Savoy and bear a message from him who should be the master of this house.”

The lackey ascended the stairs for the second time; but Frà Giovanni now followed upon his heels. In a little alcove on the first landing, an alcove where workmen were erecting a booth of flowers, the priest came face to face with Bianca herself. He stood silent for a moment, so great was the fascination of her beauty. He knew that she must be in her fortieth year, yet she had the face and figure of a girl of twenty.

“Signora,” he said, bowing gravely, “I am a brother of the Capuchins, and I come to tell you that your son has need of you in Turin.”

He spoke as though he wished to pay her great homage; but she turned upon him in one of those sudden bursts of anger which had humbled even the great men of Venice.

“Has my son no other messenger,” she cried, “that he must send such as you to my house? Beware, lest my servants whip you from the door, signorè.”

The priest did not flinch.

“Signora,” he said gently, “he is your only son, and he is in trouble. It is strange that he should remember his mother’s name when other names have been forgotten.”

She raised her hands and clenched them.

“Oh,” she cried, “a mummer in the habit of a priest. A mummer who dares me in my own house—”

“Nay, signora, say rather the messenger of God, who comes to warn you that your hour is at hand; who comes to tell you of the poor who hunger and the sick who die; who craves mercy of you for one that loves; who sees light in your house but darkness in the homes of Venice; who hears the cry of the children and would that you should hear it too. A mummer, indeed, but the play is holy, signora, and the finger of Almighty God has written it.”

He drew his cowl close about his face and turned upon his heel. She watched him with a hand at her throat and anger passing words in her heart.

For it seemed, when he was gone, that someone had written upon the wall of the great house the sentence of its doom.

### III

The day of days, the feast of Mark the Evangelist, dawned angrily over Venice. A great blight seemed to fall upon the city; thunder-clouds hovered about the distant mountains of the mainland, and loomed over the waveless lagoon. Nevertheless, there was a little burst of sunshine at six o’clock in the morning; and another hour had not passed before men, and women, too, forgot the hour and the day, and thought only of the news, surpassing belief, which spread as a pestilence through all the places where the citizens loved to congregate.

An acolyte of the great Ducal Chapel, going leisurely to Mass at five o’clock in the morning, had been the first to see the thing; and so greatly had it surprised him that he ran quickly to Scavezzo, the fat canon, and blurted it out, regardless of the holy building or of the Mass which was about to begin.

“Oh, Excellency, Excellency, someone has written strange things between the columns of the Piazzetta. It is the list of the guests who were to go to-night to the house of the Marchesa della Scala.”

Scavezzo was putting on his vestments when the lad spoke, but he let go the girdle of his alb at the words and crossed himself hastily.

“What!” he cried, “the names of the guests of pretty Bianca written over the place of execution! God save us all this day!”

Never had he heard such tidings. Unable to restrain his curiosity, he ran quickly across the great square, and so to the Piazzetta, where stand the two columns between which the criminals of Venice perished. A crowd had gathered already about the marble slab whereon they laid the severed heads of the condemned; and these people discussed with awe and wonder the strange event which the night had brought about. When Scavezzo appeared among them, they hailed him with delight as one who could explain the mystery.

“Here, my lord, the paper is here. They have set it on the slab where runs the blood of murderers. Look for yourself: it is a list of those who have been invited to-night to the house of the Marchesa della Scala,—a list of her guests, and sealed with the great seal of the city!”

Scavezzo stood panting, but he would not touch the paper.

“My children,” he said, “be sure that the police have put that paper where it lies, and that it is not for such hands as ours to touch it. I am sorry for the Marchesa della Scala, for who will go to her house when this is known? Surely the justice of Venice is very hard that it should thus visit one who, I do not deny it, is a little fond of the dice-box, yet whose banquets are not surpassed in Italy. Be advised of rue, my friends, and go to your homes. There is danger in the air to-day, and the wise man will not wish to breathe it.”

He uttered a heavy sigh, for the memory of pretty Bianca’s good wines was very dear to him. But the people continued to discuss a discovery so momentous long after he had returned reluctantly to the altar awaiting him.

“Venice will send a message to Bianca to-day, my friends. Our Father Giovanni has spoken at last. We shall hear of her banquets no more. And God help those who go to her house to-night!”

They hurried to their homes, speaking of the thing in whispers. Soon the news spread from house to house, was whispered in palace and in garret: was muttered in the confessional, and remembered by priests before the altar. Even the patronage of the nobles of Venice had not saved Bianca from the anger of the great friar, men said. What of her banquet now? they asked. Who would pass her doors when he had read his name written there on that pavement which the blood of the guilty had dyed?

The news spread from house to house, yet none was so bold that he whispered it in the Palazzo della Scala. Fearing they knew not what vengeance of the police, even the workmen, who came in the morning to finish the task of preparation and display, held their tongues. If the servants of the great house had learnt the tidings, they dared not whisper them to their mistress. Slowly, silently, the work of decoration went on. And in her own room Bianca, dressed as she had never dressed before, told herself that the victory was already won. “To-night,” she said, “tonight Venice shall be at my feet.”

Punctually at a quarter to eight o’clock she entered the great salon upon the first floor, and prepared to receive her guests. Superb as the decorations of the great apartment were, the mistress of it was worthy of her lavish surroundings. A robe of gold brocade fell from her pretty white shoulders to her feet; her girdle was a girdle of diamonds. The finest pearls from Hungary shone white upon her snow-white throat; a great diadem of flashing jewels sparkled above her

auburn hair. No better-shaped hands nor arms had been seen in Venice, the painters said. Hands and arms now glittered with the wealth of the gems they carried. In her deep blue eyes those about her discerned the look of one who had triumphed. A flush was upon her cheeks,—the flush of victory assured.

She entered the great ballroom of the palace at a quarter to eight, and one searching glance satisfied her that all things were, indeed, well done. In the gallery at the northern end musicians already were seated. Banks of white and crimson flowers stood to screen the orchestra. Thousands of candles in glass chandeliers warmed the room to rich colours with their mellow light. Lackeys in liveries of scarlet and of blue waited at the head of the great marble staircase to announce the first of the guests. Bianca said that the spectacle was worthy of her house. She turned for a moment to see her own figure where a great mirror caught it up; and a content surpassing any she had known came upon her.

“I have kept my word,” she thought. “Venice shall bear witness to-morrow.”

A quarter of an hour passed in this task of inspection. When she had satisfied herself that all was well, the great bell of the church of Santa Maria Zobenigo began to strike the hour of eight. She counted the strokes, and a strange sense of uneasiness came to her of the notes. Eight o’clock, and no one in her house! What dilatory fit had overtaken her guests, she asked? Even the lackeys at the door had begun to fidget; and one of them went to the balcony as though to arrange a curtain, but in reality to look out upon the canal below. Very much to his astonishment, the fellow observed that there was not so much as a single gondola at the quay of the house. But a great crowd stood upon the neighbouring bridge, and he could hear the buzz of its excited talk.

“They are coming, Leonardi; the boats are below?”

“There is no one there, Eccellenza.”

The Marchesa asked the question of that lackey with an assumption of an indifference she was far from feeling. That premonition which is a factor of so many misfortunes warned her already that something was amiss. It was no great matter that the first of her guests should be a few minutes late—and yet—“Do you not hear the bell?” she asked her servant presently.

“I hear nothing but the voices on the bridge, Eccellenza.”

A crimson flush dyed her cheeks. She opened her fan and began to use it briskly. The lackeys on the stairs without were talking in low whispers. The bell of the church of Santa Maria struck a quarter past eight.

Bianca went to the window of her balcony and stood there breathing quickly. The crowd on the neighbouring bridge saw her, and hailed her with derisive cries. There came to her in that instant a memory of the priest and of his warning, which she had forgotten.

“Oh,” she said, “what is it, what does it mean? Who is keeping them away? What story have they heard?”

She did not know at this time what she feared, or why her guests delayed their coming. Many excuses for them were suggested by her busy brain; but in spite of it all a vague foreboding crept upon her, and she still thought that she heard the voice of the priest warning her. Often she asked Leonardi if he did not hear the great bell of the house; his answer was ever the same:

“There is no one there, Eccellenza; there is no boat upon the canal, only the people on the bridge.”

Half-past eight o’clock was the hour now, and as it struck panic seized the mistress of the house, and was shared by her servants. One by one they began to leave the palaces at first the more timid and impudent; then the irresolute; at last even those whom she had trusted greatly. Alone there in that great ballroom, alone with the countless tapers, and the sweet-smelling

flowers, and the gold and silver of the ornaments, she stood as one in a dream. The message which the night gave to her was the message the priest had spoken. "Your hour is at hand," he had said.

For a little while the absence of her servants was unnoticed. When she discovered it, when her voice began to echo through the empty rooms, and was unanswered, when pitifully it changed from the voice of an angry woman to the cry of one in great trouble, the full significance of the night was revealed to her. She knew that the Three had willed this punishment. Some enemy had warned the people to shun her house. She began to ask what other punishments awaited her. She ran from room to room hysterically, as though some befriending voice would speak to her there. She returned again to the head of the great staircase and stood there as one petrified.

For guests were coming to her house now. They were already upon the marble staircase. They swarmed up as an army to the loot. Their cries were as the cries of demons. They were the beggars of Venice,—ragged, haggard, hungry.

The woman stood without the power of voice or limb; it seemed to her that her very heart was paralysed. She had heard of these people,—the children of the Ghetto, the children of the factories, the bravos from the Ambassadors' kitchen, the thieves, the assassins, the honest poor of Venice,—but never had her dainty eyes been permitted to see them.

She knew that this was her punishment, this the ultimate humiliation that Venice had put upon her. Where the great lords of the city should have stood, the ragged, the homeless, the starving, now bent their knees in mockery. With joyous cries and the frenzy of plenty anticipated, they crowded about the mistress of the palace.

"Viva, Bianca! Viva, the Queen of the Poor! Viva, our Lady of Venice! The tables are spread, comrades; the wine is ready."

The very pit of the nether world seemed open in that house. Gaunt men; *lazzaroni* whose rags scarce hung upon their shoulders; cripples, whose bent limbs wormed, beastlike, upon the stairs; women with the faces of witches; outcasts whose eyes were alight with the fires of hunger; children old in deformity, and pain,—all these swarmed about the mistress of the palace. They breathed their thanks into her ashen face; their rags were pressed to her robe of gold; their shouts resounded in the house. They kissed her hand: they knelt to her; they swept by as a torrent to the place where the flagons were filled and the feast was ready.

But Bianca fell in a swoon, and the beggars passed triumphantly to the tables awaiting them.

#### IV

The last of the guests whom Venice had sent to the Palazzo della Scala left the house when the neighbouring clocks were striking the hour of midnight. Bianca heard their shouts as they swarmed away in boats and barges; she heard the greetings they passed with those on the bridge. In the solitude of that great ballroom she looked at the trampled flowers, at the tapers guttering in their sockets, at the crumbs of the feast which was to have been the glory of Venice. But she neither wept nor spoke. A vague sense of personal peril, a shrinking from the fatal truth which must be known to-morrow, were her prevailing thoughts. She moved as some spirit of the feast, as some apparition, going from room to room and door to door, saying always, "I am alone."

Venice had humiliated her; she knew that no further humiliation was possible. Never again would she hold up her head in the city; never again would her name be aught but sport for the people,—a mockery and a name dishonoured. Woman-like, she cared less for any punishment that her judges might be about to visit upon her than for this mortal wound to her vanity. And,

woman-like, too, she began to long in her heart for some word of sympathy, if it were but one which should loose the imprisoned tears and open the salving torrent of her grief.

“Oh, my God,” she exclaimed, “help me, for I am helpless and alone!”

A voice answered her, speaking from the shadows. She recognised it at once and stood up quickly when she heard it. The pride of Bianca of Venice was not yet broken.

“Signora,” said the voice, “it is God’s will that I come here to answer your prayer.”

The speaker stepped to the light, and she beheld the cowed friar who had come to her upon the eve of the feast. But his voice was no longer the voice of one who judged her; he spoke with gentleness as a brother who pities and would comfort.

“Who are you; why do you come here?” she asked, struggling the while with her pride, yet turning toward this unknown as to one sent from the darkness of the city to be her friend.

Era Giovanni, for he it was who now stood before her, threw back his robe that she might see his face.

“Signora,” he said, “I am one whom they call the father of Venice; and I come to help you even as I helped your husband long years ago at Brescia.”

She looked at him with wonder in her eyes.

“I know you,” she said in a low voice; “you are the Prince of Iseo.”

The priest covered his face again.

“The Prince of Iseo, as you say, signora—yet, to this city, the Capuchin monk, Giovanni, who comes here to-night to help you, as last night he came to warn you.

“To help me, my lord; you come to help me. Nay, look upon this house and tell me what help can save my name now.”

“Signora,” he said earnestly, “we go where you shall build you a new house and a new name. Come quickly, for my gondola waits at the *riva*.”

They quitted the Palazzo della Scala together before ten minutes had passed. She knew not why she went nor whither; but it seemed to her that this priest, who had been her husband’s friend, would befriend her in that hour of her necessity. Ever in her mind was the thought of her humiliation and of the new day to come. What vengeance did the city yet contemplate? It might even contemplate her death, she thought; and to such a one the fear of death was a dread unspeakable.

Whither, then, did the priest carry her? She asked the question silently as the gondola turned from the great Canalazzo to one of the narrowest and the most pestilent of the water-ways of Venice. Fearfully she looked up to the great silent houses, to the alleys, and the stinking dens of the poor which bordered them. There were moments when she distrusted the man, and feared even that he was conducting her to the prisons.

Through the narrow water-ways, by the church of La Madalena, on past San Marcuola, toward the Ghetto and the ultimate west. How should she find help in such a place of misery and of want, of hunger and of crime? For she was in the beggars’ city now. Here lived the very poorest in Venice. She had heard of the place as of some pit of horrors; but now her eyes must look upon it to read its truths for themselves. When the gondola stopped at last, it was before a wretched house, into whose lower rooms she could see quite plainly. A young woman lived there, and the wan light of a candle showed her white face bending over the cot where slept her child.

“Look,” said the priest in a low voice, “an hour ago that woman was your guest, signora. But she neither ate nor drank. Her thoughts were in that room with her son who slept. See now what gladness has come into her home. For she has carried your gifts to her child—and the child will live.”

Bianca buried her face in her hands. Swiftly there came to her the memory that she, too, had a son, and that he had waited vainly to hear her voice.

“Signorè, for pity’s sake spare me!” she exclaimed; “my son waits for me in Turin.”

Again the gondola shot over the dark waters of the fetid canal. Again it stood before the windows of a house. A lamp swung from a ceiling blackened by age and smoke. A bed of rags stood near a stove; an old woman, whose white hairs were as an ornament of silver to the room, lay in the bed. Squatting on the floor was a cripple, whose twisted and distorted limbs had climbed the staircase of the Palazzo della Scala but an hour ago.

“Look,” said the priest, as he touched the arm of the trembling woman, “a son whom God has cursed, for so the people say, carries bread and wine from your table to the mother who bore him. What happiness is in his heart to-night because of the feast you gave, signora! Call it not a humiliation, then, to have done as Christ our Master did before us. Can there be humiliation because the children live and the hungry are hungry no more? Nay, say rather that it is a work of God, most blessed, to which you have been sent.”

The gondola passed on swiftly. Bianca sat white and still, for a new world and the visions of a new world were unfolding before her eyes. She saw the cities of the poor, the cities of the little children; she saw the throne of her motherhood, and the name of her own son was upon her lips. She did not hear the priest when he bade her look for the third time.

They had stopped before a small house near the church of San Geremia. The door of the house was open. In the stone corridor beyond, a little coffin, with tapers on either side of it, awaited the boat which should carry it to San Michele.

“Signora,” said the priest, dropping his voice until it was but a whisper, “look well, for yonder is a house of weeping. He was their only son, and the least of the jewels you wear would have given him back to them. Never more in that house will a child’s voice be heard nor the word of a mother to him she loved. Oh, look upon it well, signora, for the tears fall upon the child’s face as to-morrow they may fall upon the face of your son.

He spoke as one who judges, for he knew that the hour of his victory was at hand. When he had finished, he looked at the woman and saw that the burning tears were falling fast upon her hands. Pride warred with her grief no more. All the years she had reigned in Venice were forgotten in that instant. She was a woman crying for the love of the child she had lost.

“God,” she prayed, “if I might live to see my son again.

The priest heard the prayer, and pity welled up in his heart.

“Signora,” he said, “how many women in Venice have that prayer on their lips to-night—and shall be unanswered?”

She cringed at his words, and a cry, as of a woman who has known all that human suffering can teach, escaped her lips. The jewels at her throat seemed to burn her. “They would give life to the children of Venice,” she thought.

“Take me to my son,” she cried. “Tomorrow I will find a home in the convent of Murano. The children of Venice shall hunger no more—”

“Signora,” was the answer, “your home lies in the houses of the poor.”

He made a sign to his servant, and the gondola was halted at the steps by the bridge of Rialto. A young man stepped from the shadows of the quay when the boat came up; he raised the weeping woman and held her in his strong arms.

And to him the priest said, as he had promised to say,—“Son, behold thy mother!”