

guards: 'Si cambia per Venezia!'

The Baron had taught her this much Italian, and therefore she knew that it meant that she was to get out and change at Mestre to another train, and that in half an hour she would be in Venice.

Her heart began to throb at the thought, and the half hour past, the fairy city burst on her view! Her aunt, Mrs. Langhorne, awaited her at the station, seated in a luxuriously appointed gondola, into which our heroine stepped, hardly knowing whether she was sleeping or waking, so like a dream did it all appear.

'You dear darling child, how sweet of you to come to me—and how happy I am to see you. But I must tell you from the first that with me you must be very calm, and never say anything to excite me; it might in short prove fatal, for the doctors say my heart is awfully weak. That wretched girl, your cousin Flora, nearly killed me by the upset she gave me in getting married; it was a shock to me merely to know that she contemplated it, for I never expected it of her—such a homely little thing as she is! And he actually told her that she was "bella, bella, bella" and that won her and her fortune too, though it wasn't a very big one. She didn't get a cent from me you may be sure. But you, dear child, are awfully pretty, with you I am afraid there is real danger—but you know you told me once you were wedded to your art, and that encouraged me to invite you here: think of the treasures of art which this city contains and don't let pretty uniforms attract you.'

Poor Bessie meanwhile was trying to take surreptitious glances at all the artistic wonders they were passing on the Grand Canal, but Aunt Susan would not let her, she exacted undivided attention, and had so many things to talk about: what impression her new protegee would make on the Countess B., and the Princess M., and then came a discussion as to the frock Bessie was going to wear that evening at dinner, etc., etc.

Aunt Susan owned a palace on the Grand Canal, an old historic palace, and she entertained largely; Bessie's duties now were to assist her in receiving her numerous guests. The days in Venice passed all too quickly, the season soon began to wane, summer was approaching, and Mrs. Langhorne spent hours in her gondola, Bessie was her constant companion. The former did not think of such a thing as sight-seeing, but in the time of her afternoon siesta, when her services were no longer required Bessie sometimes stole out alone to wander through churches and galleries, and had many delicious hours.

One day on returning from her ramble she found Baron von Steinbelt on the balcony with her aunt, chatting quite familiarly. He had not told her that he intended going to Venice, and it was consequently a great surprise to meet him. Her aunt seemed much pleased and said that the Baron was an old friend, adding, 'he used to visit me long ago, but this time I think he has come to see you.' I have just been telling him that he can make himself very useful by accompanying you in your visits to the galleries. The Baron is quite an authority in matters artistic; in his company you can really profit by all that you see.' And so it was arranged, and not a gallery or art collection in Venice was left unexplored.

Mrs. Langhorne was much pleased to see her plan work so well; she explained to Bessie that the Baron was not a marrying man; indeed, her *arriere pensee* in encouraging his visits was to keep off the younger men.

The season wore on, but they still lingered in Venice, and decided to spend the fourth of July there. On that auspicious day many yachts floated the Stars and Stripes in the soft atmosphere of the basin of St. Mark, and among the gondolas there were none so beautifully decorated as Mrs. Langhorne's. From her palace, too, waved a magnificent flag: to see it did Bessie's heart good, and set it bounding with patriotic throbs—and oh, how delightful! on that same day arrived a big American mail, and among her letters there was actually one from Harry Hollis, the first he had ever written to her.

It was a passionate letter, too, such as one would never expect from such a quiet youth as Harry; he told her how much he loved her, but that he would never have had the courage to tell her so if she had not given him hope by expressing admiration for a life of simplicity. 'That is all I can offer you at first, Bessie, but better days will come, for my prospects are good, and we shall not have to live all our lives in a four-room flat. It was you, Bessie, that gave me the ray of hope on which I am building. Come home when you will, you will always find me waiting for you.'

Bessie had the letter still in her hand when Mrs. Langhorne came into the room all in a flutter: 'Bessie, Bessie, oh my heart! This is awful! But it is not your fault, dearie—he says you have given him no encouragement whatever—but that he really loves you—and, Bessie, he is one of the oldest noblemen in Europe, not oldest except as to family of course, and riches too, you'll never do better, and to think that it should devolve on me to make you such an offer: but though it will break my heart, absolutely break it, to lose you, I cannot in conscience advise you to refuse. My poor heart! But this is something very different to Flora's affair, this is something worth while.'

'But who is he aunty? and what is the offer he makes?'

'Oh, you stupid child, the Baron of course, who else could it be? Is there any one else whom you are expecting to propose?'

Bessie colored just a little, and crumpled up the letter in her hand as she answered: 'Well, certainly I didn't expect it of him, aunty, but you need not worry for I do not intend to accept; you can tell the Baron that although I feel greatly honored by his offer I really cannot accept.'

'But,' said aunty in a burst of generosity, 'he has castles and chateaux, and parks, and hunting-lodges; he is what is called "a great catch."'

'Notwithstanding aunty, I shall never marry him.'

'Oh, you darling! What devotion! I see you don't want to leave me,' and she threw her arms around the young girl, and kissed her again and again.

Bessie did not think it necessary to tell Mrs. Langhorne the import of the letter in her hand, nor the answer she intended writing to it. She feared the effect on her aunt's heart.

'This is the fourth of July,' said the latter, 'the Baron has promised to spend the evening with us in our gondola, and afterwards to eat an ice with us on our balcony. It would spoil the evening for him were I to tell him of your decision, so I will just say I have not had an opportunity to speak to you yet, and you must act as if you knew nothing.'

Bessie did not like the idea of acting a part; but then auntie's heart had to be considered.

The evening on the Grand Canal was delicious, but its stately palaces had less charm for Bessie than the cosy little home awaiting her across the sea, on Manhattan Island; and the Star-spangled banner on the gondola waved over a true little heart in which Mammon had no throne.

All of the next day Mrs. Langhorne was very busy writing, and remained shut up in her room for several hours, not admitting even Bessie. The latter did not know what it all meant, but had she been more used to auntie's ways, she would have known that such action simply meant that Mrs. Langhorne was making her will. This was exactly the twenty-fifth time she had done so, but this time she really believed that she had found a worthy object on which to bestow her affections and her fortune.

The Baron still continued to be a frequent caller at the palazzo Americano, as their house was called. He had taken his refusal quite philosophically, and in speaking of it said: 'I like her all the better for it; I didn't really think she would have accepted, but thought I'd try. I have found out there is one American woman who does no buying or selling in the matrimonial line.'

Since the failure of his courtship of Bessie, the