

FRIEDRICH VON SCHILLER

THE BRIDE OF MESSINA,
AND ON THE USE OF THE
CHORUS IN TRAGEDY

Friedrich Schiller

**The Bride of Messina, and On
the Use of the Chorus in Tragedy**

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The Bride of Messina / A Tragedy

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

ISABELLA, Princess of Messina.

DON MANUEL | her Sons.

DON CAESAR |

BEATRICE.

DIEGO, an ancient Servant.

MESSENGERS.

THE ELDERS OF MESSINA, mute.

THE CHORUS, consisting of the Followers of the two Princes.

SCENE I

A spacious hall, supported on columns, with entrances on both sides;
at the back of the stage a large folding-door leading to a chapel.
DONNA ISABELLA in mourning; the ELDERS OF MESSINA.

ISABELLA

Forth from my silent chamber's deep recesses,
Gray Fathers of the State, unwillingly
I come; and, shrinking from your gaze, uplift
The veil that shades my widowed brows: the light
And glory of my days is fled forever!
And best in solitude and kindred gloom
To hide these sable weeds, this grief-worn frame,
Beseems the mourner's heart. A mighty voice
Inexorable – duty's stern command,
Calls me to light again.

Not twice the moon
Has filled her orb since to the tomb ye bore
My princely spouse, your city's lord, whose arm
Against a world of envious foes around
Hurled fierce defiance! Still his spirit lives
In his heroic sons, their country's pride:
Ye marked how sweetly from their childhood's bloom
They grew in joyous promise to the years
Of manhood's strength; yet in their secret hearts,
From some mysterious root accursed, upsprung
Unmitigable, deadly hate, that spurned
All kindred ties, all youthful, fond affections,
Still ripening with their thoughtful age; not mine
The sweet accord of family bliss; though each
Awoke a mother's rapture; each alike
Smiled at my nourishing breast! for me alone
Yet lives one mutual thought, of children's love;
In these tempestuous souls discovered else
By mortal strife and thirst of fierce revenge.

While yet their father reigned, his stern control
Tamed their hot spirits, and with iron yoke
To awful justice bowed their stubborn will:
Obedient to his voice, to outward seeming
They calmed their wrathful mood, nor in array
Ere met, of hostile arms; yet unappeased
Sat brooding malice in their bosoms' depths;
They little reek of hidden springs whose power

Can quell the torrent's fury: scarce their sire
In death had closed his eyes, when, as the spark
That long in smouldering embers sullen lay,
Shoots forth a towering flame; so unconfined
Burst the wild storm of brothers' hate triumphant
O'er nature's holiest bands. Ye saw, my friends,
Your country's bleeding wounds, when princely strife
Woke discord's maddening fires, and ranged her sons
In mutual deadly conflict; all around
Was heard the clash of arms, the din of carnage,
And e'en these halls were stained with kindred gore.

Torn was the state with civil rage, this heart
With pangs that mothers feel; alas, unmindful
Of aught but public woes, and pitiless
You sought my widow's chamber – there with taunts
And fierce reproaches for your country's ills
From that polluted spring of brother's hate
Derived, invoked a parent's warning voice,
And threatening told of people's discontent
And princes' crimes! "Ill-fated land! now wasted
By thy unnatural sons, ere long the prey
Of foeman's sword! Oh, haste," you cried, "and end
This strife! bring peace again, or soon Messina
Shall bow to other lords." Your stern decree
Prevailed; this heart, with all a mother's anguish
O'erlabored, owned the weight of public cares.
I flew, and at my children's feet, distracted,
A suppliant lay; till to my prayers and tears
The voice of nature answered in their breasts!

Here in the palace of their sires, unarmed,
In peaceful guise Messina shall behold
The long inveterate foes; this is the day!
E'en now I wait the messenger that brings
The tidings of my sons' approach: be ready
To give your princes joyful welcome home
With reverence such as vassals may beseem.
Bethink ye to fulfil your subject duties,
And leave to better wisdom weightier cares.
Dire was their strife to them, and to the State
Fruitful of ills; yet, in this happy bond
Of peace united, know that they are mighty
To stand against a world in arms, nor less
Enforce their sovereign will against yourselves.

[The ELDERS retire in silence; she beckons to an old attendant, who remains.

Diego!

DIEGO

Honored mistress!

ISABELLA

Old faithful servant, then true heart, come near me;
Sharer of all a mother's woes, be thine
The sweet communion of her joys: my treasure
Shrined in thy heart, my dear and holy secret
Shall pierce the envious veil, and shine triumphant
To cheerful day; too long by harsh decrees,
Silent and overpowered, affection yet
Shall utterance find in Nature's tones of rapture!
And this imprisoned heart leap to the embrace
Of all it holds most dear, returned to glad
My desolate halls;

So bend thy aged steps
To the old cloistered sanctuary that guards
The darling of my soul, whose innocence
To thy true love (sweet pledge of happier days)!
Trusting I gave, and asked from fortune's storm
A resting place and shrine. Oh, in this hour
Of bliss; the dear reward of all thy cares.
Give to my longing arms my child again!

[Trumpets are heard in the distance.

Haste! be thy footsteps winged with joy – I hear
The trumpet's blast, that tells in warlike accents
My sons are near:

[Exit DIEGO. Music is heard in an opposite direction, and becomes gradually louder.

Messina is awake!
Hark! how the stream of tongues hoarse murmuring
Rolls on the breeze, – 'tis they! my mother's heart
Feels their approach, and beats with mighty throes
Responsive to the loud, resounding march!
They come! they come! my children! oh, my children!

[Exit.

The CHORUS enters.

(It consists of two semi-choruses which enter at the same time from opposite sides, and after marching round the stage range themselves in rows, each on the side by which it entered. One semi-chorus consists of young knights, the other of older ones, each has its peculiar costume and ensigns. When the two choruses stand opposite to each other, the march ceases, and the two leaders speak.)

[The first chorus consists of Cajetan, Berengar, Manfred, Tristan, and eight followers of Don Manuel. The second of Bohemund, Roger, Hippolyte, and nine others of the party of Don Caesar.

First Chorus (CAJETAN)

I greet ye, glittering halls
Of olden time
Cradle of kings! Hail! lordly roof,
In pillared majesty sublime!

Sheathed be the sword!
In chains before the portal lies
The fiend with tresses snake-entwined,
Fell Discord! Gently treat the inviolate floor!
Peace to this royal dome!
Thus by the Furies' brood we swore,
And all the dark, avenging Deities!

Second Chorus (BOHEMUND)

I rage! I burn! and scarce refrain
To lift the glittering steel on high,
For, lo! the Gorgon-visaged train
Of the detested foeman nigh:
Shall I my swelling heart control?
To parley deign – or still in mortal strife
The tumult of my soul?
Dire sister, guardian of the spot, to thee
Awe-struck I bend the knee,
Nor dare with arms profane thy deep tranquillity!

First Chorus (CAJETAN)

Welcome the peaceful strain!

Together we adore the guardian power
Of these august abodes!
Sacred the hour
To kindred brotherly ties
And reverend, holy sympathies; —
Our hearts the genial charm shall own,
And melt awhile at friendship's soothing tone: —
But when in yonder plain
We meet – then peace away!
Come gleaming arms, and battle's deadly fray!

The whole Chorus

But when in yonder plain
We meet – then peace away!
Come gleaming arms, and battle's deadly fray!

First Chorus (BERENGAR)

I hate thee not – nor call thee foe,
My brother! this our native earth,
The land that gave our fathers birth: —
Of chief's behest the slave decreed,
The vassal draws the sword at need,
For chieftain's rage we strike the blow,
For stranger lords our kindred blood must flow.

Second Chorus (BOHEMUND)

Hate fires their souls – we ask not why; —
At honor's call to fight and die,
Boast of the true and brave!
Unworthy of a soldier's name
Who burns not for his chieftain's fame!

The whole Chorus

Unworthy of a soldier's name
Who burns not for his chieftain's fame!

One of the Chorus (BERENGAR)

Thus spoke within my bosom's core
The thought – as hitherward I strayed;
And pensive 'mid the waving store,
I mused, of autumn's yellow glade: —
These gifts of nature's bounteous reign, —
The teeming earth, and golden grain,
Yon elms, among whose leaves entwine
The tendrils of the clustering vine; —
Gay children of our sunny clime, —
Region of spring's eternal prime!
Each charm should woo to love and joy,
No cares the dream of bliss annoy,
And pleasure through life's summer day
Speed every laughing hour away.
We rage in blood, – oh, dire disgrace!
For this usurping, alien race;
From some far distant land they came,
Beyond the sun's departing flame.
And owned upon our friendly shore
The welcome of our sires of yore.
Alas! their sons in thralldom pine,
The vassals of this stranger line.

A second (MANFRED)

Yes! pleased, on our land, from his azure way,
The sun ever smiles with unclouded ray.
But never, fair isle, shall thy sons repose
'Mid the sweets which the faithless waves enclose.
On their bosom they wafted the corsair bold,
With his dreaded barks to our coast of old.
For thee was thy dower of beauty vain,
'Twas the treasure that lured the spoiler's train.
Oh, ne'er from these smiling vales shall rise
A sword for our vanquished liberties;
'Tis not where the laughing Ceres reigns,
And the jocund lord of the flowery plains: —
Where the iron lies hid in the mountain cave,
Is the cradle of empire – the home of the brave!

[The folding-doors at the back of the stage are thrown open.]

DONNA ISABELLA appears between her sons, DON MANUEL and DON CAESAR.

Both Choruses (CAJETAN)

Lift high the notes of praise!
Behold! where lies the awakening sun,
She comes, and from her queenly brow
Shoots glad, inspiring rays.
Mistress, we bend to thee!

First Chorus

Fair is the moon amid the starry choir
That twinkle o'er the sky,
Shining in silvery, mild tranquillity; —
The mother with her sons more fair!
See! blooming at her side,
She leads the royal, youthful pair;
With gentle grace, and soft, maternal pride,
Attempering sweet their manly fire.

Second Chorus (BERENGAR)

From this fair stem a beauteous tree
With ever-springing boughs shall smile,
And with immortal verdure shade our isle;
Mother of heroes, joy to thee!
Triumphant as the sun thy kingly race
Shall spread from clime to clime,
And give a deathless name to rolling time!

ISABELLA (comes forward with her SONS)

Look down! benignant Queen of Heaven, and still,
This proud tumultuous heart, that in my breast
Swells with a mother's tide of ecstasy,
As blazoned in these noble youths, my image
More perfect shows; – Oh, blissful hour! the first
That comprehends the fulness of my joy,
When long-constrained affection dares to pour

In unison of transport from my heart,
Unchecked, a parent's undivided love:
Oh! it was ever one – my sons were twain.
Say – shall I revel in the dreams of bliss,
And give my soul to Nature's dear emotions?
Is this warm pressure of thy brother's hand
A dagger in thy breast?

[To DON MANUEL.

Or when my eyes
Feed on that brow with love's enraptured gaze,
Is it a wrong to thee?

[To DON CAESAR.

Trembling, I pause,
Lest e'en affection's breath should wake the fires
Of slumbering hate.

[After regarding both with inquiring looks

Speak! In your secret hearts
What purpose dwells? Is it the ancient feud
Unreconciled, that in your father's halls
A moment stilled; beyond the castle gates,
Where sits infuriate war, and champs the bit —
Shall rage anew in mortal, bloody conflict?

Chorus (BOHEMUND)

Concord or strife – the fate's decree
Is bosomed yet in dark futurity!
What comes, we little heed to know,
Prepared for aught the hour may show!

ISABELLA (looking round)

What mean these arms? this warlike, dread array,
That in the palace of your sires portends
Some fearful issue? needs a mother's heart
Outpoured, this rugged witness of her joys?
Say, in these folding arms shall treason hide

The deadly snare? Oh, these rude, pitiless men,
The ministers of your wrath! – trust not the show
Of seeming friendship; treachery in their breasts
Lurks to betray, and long-dissembled hate.
Ye are a race of other lands; your sires
Profaned their soil; and ne'er the invader's yoke
Was easy – never in the vassal's heart
Languished the hope of sweet revenge; – our sway
Not rooted in a people's love, but owns
Allegiance from their fears; with secret joy —
For conquest's ruthless sword, and thralldom's chains
From age to age, they wait the atoning hour
Of princes' downfall; – thus their bards awake
The patriot strain, and thus from sire to son
Rehearsed, the old traditionary tale
Beguiles the winter's night. False is the world,
My sons, and light are all the specious ties
By fancy twined: friendship – deceitful name!
Its gaudy flowers but deck our summer fortune,
To wither at the first rude breath of autumn!
So happy to whom heaven has given a brother;
The friend by nature signed – the true and steadfast!
Nature alone is honest – nature only —
When all we trusted strews the wintry shore —
On her eternal anchor lies at rest,
Nor heeds the tempest's rage.

DON MANUEL

My mother!

DON CAESAR

Hear me

ISABELLA (taking their hands)

Be noble, and forget the fancied wrongs
Of boyhood's age: more godlike is forgiveness
Than victory, and in your father's grave
Should sleep the ancient hate: – Oh, give your days
Renewed henceforth to peace and holy love!

[She recedes one or two steps, as if to give them space to approach each other.
Both fix their eyes on the ground without regarding one another.

ISABELLA (after awaiting for some time, with suppressed emotion, a demonstration on the part of her sons)

I can no more; my prayers – my tears are vain: —
'Tis well! obey the demon in your hearts!
Fulfil your dread intent, and stain with blood
The holy altars of your household gods; —
These halls that gave you birth, the stage where murder
Shall hold his festival of mutual carnage
Beneath a mother's eye! – then, foot to foot,
Close, like the Theban pair, with maddening gripe,
And fold each other in a last embrace!
Each press with vengeful thrust the dagger home,
And "Victory!" be your shriek of death: – nor then
Shall discord rest appeased; the very flame
That lights your funeral pyre shall tower dissevered
In ruddy columns to the skies, and tell
With horrid image – "thus they lived and died!"

[She goes away; the BROTHERS stand as before.

Chorus (CAJETAN)

How have her words with soft control
Resistless calmed the tempest of my soul!
No guilt of kindred blood be mine!
Thus with uplifted hands I prey;
Think, brothers, on the awful day,
And tremble at the wrath divine!

DON CAESAR (without taking his eyes from the ground)

Thou art my elder – speak – without dishonor
I yield to thee.

DON MANUEL

One gracious word, an instant,
My tongue is rival in the strife of love!

DON CAESAR

I am the guiltier – weaker —

DON MANUEL

Say not so!
Who doubts thy noble heart, knows thee not well;
The words were prouder, if thy soul were mean.

DON CAESAR

It burns indignant at the thought of wrong —
But thou – methinks – in passion's fiercest mood,
'Twas aught but scorn that harbored in thy breast.

DON MANUEL

Oh! had I known thy spirit thus to peace
Inclined, what thousand griefs had never torn
A mother's heart!

DON CAESAR

I find thee just and true:
Men spoke thee proud of soul.

DON MANUEL

The curse of greatness!
Ears ever open to the babbler's tale.

DON CAESAR

Thou art too proud to meanness – I to falsehood!

DON MANUEL

We are deceived, betrayed!

DON CAESAR

The sport of frenzy!

DON MANUEL

And said my mother true, false is the world?

DON CAESAR

Believe her, false as air.

DON MANUEL

Give me thy hand!

DON CAESAR

And thine be ever next my heart!

[They stand clasping each other's hands, and regard each other in silence.

DON MANUEL

I gaze
Upon thy brow, and still behold my mother
In some dear lineament.

DON CAESAR

Her image looks
From thine, and wondrous in my bosom wakes
Affection's springs.

DON MANUEL

And is it thou? – that smile
Benignant on thy face? – thy lips that charm
With gracious sounds of love and dear forgiveness?

DON CAESAR

Is this my brother, this the hated foe?
His mien all gentleness and truth, his voice,
Whose soft prevailing accents breathe of friendship!

[After a pause.

DON MANUEL

Shall aught divide us?

DON CAESAR

We are one forever!

[They rush into each other's arms.

First CHORUS (to the Second)

Why stand we thus, and coldly gaze,
While Nature's holy transports burn?
No dear embrace of happier days
The pledge – that discord never shall return!
Brothers are they by kindred band;
We own the ties of home and native land.

[Both CHORUSES embrace.
A MESSENGER enters.

Second CHORUS to DON CAESAR (BOHEMUND)

Rejoice, my prince, thy messenger returns
And mark that beaming smile! the harbinger
Of happy tidings.

MESSENGER

Health to me, and health
To this delivered state! Oh sight of bliss,
That lights mine eyes with rapture! I behold
Their hands in sweet accord entwined; the sons
Of my departed lord, the princely pair
Dissevered late by conflict's hottest rage.

DON CAESAR

Yes, from the flames of hate, a new-born Phoenix,
Our love aspires!

MESSENGER

I bring another joy;
My staff is green with flourishing shoots.
DON CAESAR (taking him aside).
Oh, tell me
Thy gladsome message.

MESSENGER

All is happiness
On this auspicious day; long sought, the lost one
Is found.

DON CAESAR

Discovered! Oh, where is she? Speak!

MESSENGER

Within Messina's walls she lies concealed.

DON MANUEL (turning to the First SEMI-CHORUS)

A ruddy glow mounts in my brother's cheek,
And pleasure dances in his sparkling eye;
Whate'er the spring, with sympathy of love
My inmost heart partakes his joy.

DON CAESAR (to the MESSENGER)

Come, lead me;
Farewell, Don Manuel; to meet again
Enfolded in a mother's arms! I fly
To cares of utmost need.

[He is about to depart.

DON MANUEL

Make no delay;
And happiness attend thee!

DON CAESAR (after a pause of reflection, he returns)

How thy looks
Awake my soul to transport! Yes, my brother,
We shall be friends indeed! This hour is bright
With glad presage of ever-springing love,
That in the enlivening beam shall flourish fair,
Sweet recompense of wasted years!

DON MANUEL

The blossom
Betokens goodly fruit.

DON CAESAR

I tear myself
Reluctant from thy arms, but think not less
If thus I break this festal hour – my heart
Thrills with a holy joy.

DON MANUEL (with manifest absence of mind)

Obey the moment!
Our lives belong to love.

DON CESAR

What calls me hence —

DON MANUEL

Enough! thou leav'st thy heart.

DON CAESAR

No envious secret
Shall part us long; soon the last darkening fold
Shall vanish from my breast.

[Turning to the CHORUS.

Attend! Forever
Stilled is our strife; he is my deadliest foe,
Detested as the gates of hell, who dares
To blow the fires of discord; none may hope
To win my love, that with malicious tales
Encroach upon a brother's ear, and point
With busy zeal of false, officious friendship.
The dart of some rash, angry word, escaped
From passion's heat; it wounds not from the lips,
But, swallowed by suspicion's greedy ear,
Like a rank, poisonous weed, embittered creeps,
And hangs about her with a thousand shoots,
Perplexing nature's ties.

[He embraces his brother again, and goes away accompanied by the Second CHORUS.

Chorus (CAJETAN)

Wondering, my prince,
I gaze, for in thy looks some mystery
Strange-seeming shows: scarce with abstracted mien
And cold thou answered'st, when with earnest heart
Thy brother poured the strain of dear affection.
As in a dream thou stand'st, and lost in thought,
As though – dissevered from its earthly frame —
Thy spirit roved afar. Not thine the breast
That deaf to nature's voice, ne'er owned the throbs
Of kindred love: – nay more – like one entranced
In bliss, thou look'st around, and smiles of rapture

Play on thy cheek.

DON MANUEL

How shall my lips declare
The transports of my swelling heart? My brother
Revels in glad surprise, and from his breast
Instinct with strange new-felt emotions, pours
The tide of joy; but mine – no hate came with me,
Forgot the very spring of mutual strife!
High o'er this earthly sphere, on rapture's wings,
My spirit floats; and in the azure sea,
Above – beneath – no track of envious night
Disturbs the deep serene! I view these halls,
And picture to my thoughts the timid joy
Of my sweet bride, as through the palace gates,
In pride of queenly state, I lead her home.
She loved alone the loving one, the stranger,
And little deems that on her beauteous brow
Messina's prince shall 'twine the nuptial wreath.
How sweet, with unexpected pomp of greatness,
To glad the darling of my soul! too long
I brook this dull delay of crowning bliss!
Her beauty's self, that asks no borrowed charm,
Shall shine refulgent, like the diamond's blaze
That wins new lustre from the circling gold!

Chorus (CAJETAN)

Long have I marked thee, prince, with curious eye,
Foreboding of some mystery deep enshrined
Within thy laboring breast. This day, impatient,
Thy lips have burst the seal; and unconstrained
Confess a lover's joy; – the gladdening chase,
The Olympian coursers, and the falcon's flight
Can charm no more: – soon as the sun declines
Beneath the ruddy west, thou hiest thee quick
To some sequestered path, of mortal eye
Unseen – not one of all our faithful train
Companion of thy solitary way.
Say, why so long concealed the blissful flame?
Stranger to fear – ill-brooked thy princely heart
One thought unuttered.

DON MANUEL

Ever on the wing
Is mortal joy; – with silence best we guard
The fickle good; – but now, so near the goal
Of all my cherished hopes, I dare to speak.
To-morrow's sun shall see her mine! no power
Of hell can make us twain! With timid stealth
No longer will I creep at dusky eve,
To taste the golden fruits of Cupid's tree,
And snatch a fearful, fleeting bliss: to-day
With bright to-morrow shall be one! So smooth
As runs the limpid brook, or silvery sand
That marks the flight of time, our lives shall flow
In continuity of joy!

Chorus (CAJETAN)

Already
Our hearts, my prince, with silent vows have blessed
Thy happy love; and now from every tongue,
For her – the royal, beauteous bride – should sound
The glad acclaim; so tell what nook unseen,
What deep umbrageous solitude, enshrines
The charmer of thy heart? With magic spells
Almost I deem she mocks our gaze, for oft
In eager chase we scour each rustic path
And forest dell; yet not a trace betrayed
The lover's haunts, ne'er were the footsteps marked
Of this mysterious fair.

DON MANUEL

The spell is broke!
And all shall be revealed: now list my tale: —
'Tis five months flown, – my father yet controlled
The land, and bowed our necks with iron sway;
Little I knew but the wild joys of arms,
And mimic warfare of the chase; —
One day, —
Long had we tracked the boar with zealous toil
On yonder woody ridge: – it chanced, pursuing

A snow-white hind, far from your train I roved
Amid the forest maze; – the timid beast,
Along the windings of the narrow vale,
Through rocky cleft and thick-entangled brake,
Flew onward, scarce a moment lost, nor distant
Beyond a javelin's throw; nearer I came not,
Nor took an aim; when through a garden's gate,
Sudden she vanished: – from my horse quick springing,
I followed: – lo! the poor scared creature lay
Stretched at the feet of a young, beauteous nun,
That strove with fond caress of her fair hands
To still its throbbing heart: wondering, I gazed;
And motionless – my spear, in act to strike,
High poised – while she, with her large piteous eyes
For mercy sued – and thus we stood in silence
Regarding one another.

How long the pause
I know not – time itself forgot; – it seemed
Eternity of bliss: her glance of sweetness
Flew to my soul; and quick the subtle flame
Pervaded all my heart: —

But what I spoke,
And how this blessed creature answered, none
May ask; it floats upon my thought, a dream
Of childhood's happy dawn! Soon as my sense
Returned, I felt her bosom throb responsive
To mine, – then fell melodious on my ear
The sound, as of a convent bell, that called
To vesper song; and, like some shadowy vision
That melts in air, she flitted from my sight,
And was beheld no more.

Chorus (CAJETAN)

Thy story thrills
My breast with pious awe! Prince, thou hast robbed
The sanctuary, and for the bride of heaven
Burned with unholy passion! Oh, remember
The cloister's sacred vows!

DON MANUEL

Thenceforth one path
My footsteps wooed; the fickle train was still
Of young desires – new felt my being's aim,

My soul revealed! and as the pilgrim turns
His wistful gaze, where, from the orient sky,
With gracious lustre beams Redemption's star; —
So to that brightest point of heaven, her presence,
My hopes and longings centred all. No sun
Sank in the western waves, but smiled farewell
To two united lovers: – thus in stillness
Our hearts were twined, – the all-seeing air above us
Alone the faithful witness of our joys!
Oh, golden hours! Oh, happy days! nor Heaven
Indignant viewed our bliss; – no vows enchained
Her spotless soul; naught but the link which bound it
Eternally to mine!

Chorus (CAJETAN)

Those hallowed walls,
Perchance the calm retreat of tender youth,
No living grave?

DON MANUEL

In infant innocence
Consigned a holy pledge, ne'er has she left
Her cloistered home.

Chorus (CAJETAN)

But what her royal line?
The noble only spring from noble stem.

DON MANUEL

A secret to herself, – she ne'er has learned
Her name or fatherland.

Chorus (CAJETAN)

And not a trace
Guides to her being's undiscovered springs?

DON MANUEL

An old domestic, the sole messenger
Sent by her unknown mother, oft bespeaks her
Of kingly race.

Chorus (CAJETAN)

And hast thou won naught else
From her garrulous age?

DON MANUEL

Too much I feared to peril
My secret bliss!

Chorus (CAJETAN)

What were his words? What tidings
He bore – perchance thou know'st.

DON MANUEL

Oft he has cheered her
With promise of a happier time, when all
Shall be revealed.

Chorus (CAJETAN)

Oh, say – betokens aught
The time is near?

DON MANUEL

Not distant far the day
That to the arms of kindred love once more
Shall give the long forsaken, orphaned maid —
Thus with mysterious words the aged man
Has shadowed oft what most I dread – for awe
Of change disturbs the soul supremely blest:
Nay, more; but yesterday his message spoke
The end of all my joys – this very dawn,
He told, should smile auspicious on her fate,
And light to other scenes – no precious hour
Delayed my quick resolves – by night I bore her
In secret to Messina.

Chorus (CAJETAN)

Rash the deed
Of sacrilegious spoil! forgive, my prince,
The bold rebuke; thus to unthinking youth
Old age may speak in friendship's warning voice.

DON MANUEL

Hard by the convent of the Carmelites,
In a sequestered garden's tranquil bound,
And safe from curious eyes, I left her, – hastening
To meet my brother: trembling there she counts
The slow-paced hours, nor deems how soon triumphant
In queenly state, high on the throne of fame,
Messina shall behold my timid bride.
For next, encompassed by your knightly train,
With pomp of greatness in the festal show,
Her lover's form shall meet her wondering gaze!
Thus will I lead her to my mother; thus —
While countless thousands on her passage wait
Amid the loud acclaim – the royal bride
Shall reach my palace gates!

Chorus (CAJETAN)

Command us, prince,
We live but to obey!

DON MANUEL

I tore myself
Reluctant from her arms; my every thought
Shall still be hers: so come along, my friends,
To where the turbaned merchant spreads his store
Of fabrics golden wrought with curious art;
And all the gathered wealth of eastern climes.
First choose the well-formed sandals – meet to guard
And grace her delicate feet; then for her robe
The tissue, pure as Etna's snow that lies
Nearest the sun-light as the wreathy mist
At summer dawn – so playful let it float
About her airy limbs. A girdle next,
Purple with gold embroidered o'er, to bind
With witching grace the tunic that confines
Her bosom's swelling charms: of silk the mantle,
Gorgeous with like empurpled hues, and fixed
With clasp of gold – remember, too, the bracelets
To gird her beauteous arms; nor leave the treasure
Of ocean's pearly deeps and coral caves.
About her locks entwine a diadem
Of purest gems – the ruby's fiery glow
Commingling with the emerald's green. A veil,
From her tiara pendent to her feet,
Like a bright fleecy cloud shall circle round
Her slender form; and let a myrtle wreath
Crown the enchanting whole!

Chorus (CAJETAN)

We haste, my prince.
Amid the Bazar's glittering rows, to cull
Each rich adornment.

DON MANUEL

From my stables lead
A palfrey, milk-white as the steeds that draw
The chariot of the sun; purple the housings,
The bridle sparkling o'er with precious gems,
For it shall bear my queen! Yourselves be ready
With trumpet's cheerful clang, in martial train
To lead your mistress home: let two attend me,
The rest await my quick return; and each
Guard well my secret purpose.

[He goes away accompanied by two of the CHORUS.]

Chorus (CAJETAN)

The princely strife is o'er, and say,
What sport shall wing the slow-paced hours,
And cheat the tedious day?
With hope and fear's enlivening zest
Disturb the slumber of the breast,
And wake life's dull, untroubled sea
With freshening airs of gay variety.

One of the Chorus (MANFRED)

Lovely is peace! A beauteous boy,
Couched listless by the rivulet's glassy tide,
'Mid nature's tranquil scene,
He views the lambs that skip with innocent joy,
And crop the meadow's flowering pride: —
Then with his flute's enchanting sound,
He wakes the mountain echoes round,
Or slumbers in the sunset's ruddy sheen,
Lulled by the murmuring melody.
But war for me! my spirit's treasure,
Its stern delight, and wilder pleasure:
I love the peril and the pain,
And revel in the surge of fortune's boisterous main!

A second (BERENGAR)

Is there not love, and beauty's smile
That lures with soft, resistless wile?
'Tis thrilling hope! 'tis rapturous fear
'Tis heaven upon this mortal sphere;
When at her feet we bend the knee,
And own the glance of kindred ecstasy
For ever on life's checkered way,
'Tis love that tints the darkening hues of care
With soft benignant ray:
The mirthful daughter of the wave,
Celestial Venus ever fair,
Enchants our happy spring with fancy's gleam,
And wakes the airy forms of passion's golden dream.

First (MANFRED)

To the wild woods away!
Quick let us follow in the train
Of her, chaste huntress of the silver bow;
And from the rocks amain
Track through the forest gloom the bounding roe,
The war-god's merry bride,
The chase recalls the battle's fray,
And kindles victory's pride: —
Up with the streaks of early morn,
We scour with jocund hearts the misty vale,
Loud echoing to the cheerful horn
Over mountain – over dale —
And every languid sense repair,
Bathed in the rushing streams of cold, reviving air.

Second (BERENGAR)

Or shall we trust the ever-moving sea,
The azure goddess, blithe and free.
Whose face, the mirror of the cloudless sky,
Lures to her bosom wooingly?
Quick let us build on the dancing waves
A floating castle gay,
And merrily, merrily, swim away!

Who ploughs with venturous keel the brine
Of the ocean crystalline —
His bride is fortune, the world his own,
For him a harvest blooms unsown: —
Here, like the wind that swift careers
The circling bound of earth and sky,
Flits ever-changeful destiny!
Of airy chance 'tis the sportive reign,
And hope ever broods on the boundless main

A third (CAJETAN)

Nor on the watery waste alone
Of the tumultuous, heaving sea; —
On the firm earth that sleeps secure,
Based on the pillars of eternity.
Say, when shall mortal joy endure?
New bodings in my anxious breast,
Waked by this sudden friendship, rise;
Ne'er would I choose my home of rest
On the stilled lava-stream, that cold
Beneath the mountain lies
Not thus was discord's flame controlled —
Too deep the rooted hate – too long
They brooded in their sullen hearts
O'er unforgotten, treasured wrong. In warning visions oft dismayed,
I read the signs of coming woe;
And now from this mysterious maid
My bosom tells the dreaded ills shall flow:
Unblest, I deem, the bridal chain
Shall knit their secret loves, accursed
With holy cloisters' spoil profane.
No crooked paths to virtue lead;
Ill fruit has ever sprung from evil seed!

BERENGAR

And thus to sad unhallowed rites
Of an ill-omened nuptial tie,
Too well ye know their father bore
A bride of mournful destiny,
Torn from his sire, whose awful curse has sped
Heaven's vengeance on the impious bed!
This fierce, unnatural rage atones
A parent's crime – decreed by fate,

Their mother's offspring, strife and hate!

[The scene changes to a garden opening on the sea.

BEATRICE (steps forward from an alcove. She walks to and fro with an agitated air, looking round in every direction. Suddenly she stands still and listens)

No! 'tis not he: 'twas but the playful wind
Rustling the pine-tops. To his ocean bed
The sun declines, and with o'erwearied heart
I count the lagging hours: an icy chill
Creeps through my frame; the very solitude

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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