A Very Honest Knavery.

RIGHT merrily sang the maiden Bianca as she sat by her open window, drawing the brown thread repeatedly backward and forward, and readjusting her distaff from time to time. The song floated out on the soft, light wind of the fair September morning, out over the winding Arno; and even yonder in the convent garden her sweet voice must have been audible, for now and then some nuns who were walking there under the trees, among the dewy flowers, looked across the river to the window where they knew their little Bianca was sitting at her spinning, and smiles of pleasure crossed their calm faces.

Indeed, the little maiden's singing was very pleasant to hear, and more than one of the fruitcrers who were slowly making their way down stream to the market, their boats laboring under the weight of the harvest, glanced up from the muddy water to see whence came the clear, fresh tones of the song:

"Love is o'er,
Flown too fast;
Lengthened past,
Years three score!"

"By Saint Puncinello! a blithe song from a fair maid of sixteen," cried some one in a wide, clumsy boat, in a tone that drew Bianca's attention to the speaker. She paused for a moment in her spinning-song, and, glancing out of her high window, saw a stout young fellow with glorious brown locks and big, speaking eyes; he was clad in a yellow-tanned leathern jacket and rather worn gray trunk-hose, while a dash of scarlet kerchief about his neck gave him a very jaunty appearance; still, Bianca could see at once that he was only a peasant from the hills, though a coxcomb. The fellow was just in the act of doffing his hat to the songstress as she looked down upon him, and Bianca saw no immediate way of recognizing his courtesy but by plucking a rose from the bush that grew in her window and tossing it to the gallant.

Then she felt a little ashamed, for she had not thrown it far enough, and it had fallen into the water, putting the brown-haired young man to a great deal of trouble to get it out with his oar; and even then he failed to gain possession of the rose, for a very plain-appearing fellow who sat at the stern of the boat reached the token-flower, and would not give it up. A moment later, after this little episode of anxiety on Bianca's part lest the rose should not be rescued, and bold, even heroic exertion on the part of both the young men, in order that the flower should be preserved, the boat disappeared under a bridge, both men pressing their hands devotedly upon their hearts.

Well! Bianca's song was finished for that day. She sat as quiet as a mouse at her window, but looked out sometimes, pretty often, indeed, at the river that still wound on. She could, however, think of nothing but the young peasant from the hills, with the glorious brown locks and speaking eyes.

So the day passed; and the following morning, fresher and more maidenly, if possible, than when we first became acquainted with her, Bianca was sitting at her window again, singing as blithely as before, but a different song:

"Oh! so soon?
Asked a flower of the sun;
I've not yet half begun
What I wished to have done
And 'tis noon!"

When she looked forth from her window there was a boat below and two men in it. She did not stay to learn who they were,—her breast heaved so violently that she turned away without even a smile; and when, half an hour afterward she returned to her distaff, there was no longer any boat there.

But several days passed, and each morning Bianca, growing bolder, saw and smiled at the young man from the hills. Every morning his hair seemed to shine more gloriously in the sunlight, and each morning his eyes spoke fuller, sweeter volumes that before. Sometimes Bianca threw a flower to her lover,—for such she now more than half recognized him to be,—but oftener he got only an unsubstantial kiss from the tips of her fingers; and, to tell the truth, he still oftener got nothing on which to feed his passion.

Meanwhile, Bianca had eyes for but one of