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THE
CORSAIR:

A
DRAMATIC CANTATA.

Adapted from

LORD BYRON'S POEM.

BY R. E. FRANCILLON.

THE MUSIC

Composed expressly for the Birmingham Triennial Festival, 1876.

BY

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Handwritten signature/initials

THE CORSAIR.

(Dramatic Cantata.)

CHARACTERS.

CONRAD (Chief of the Pirates) | MEDORA (a Greek Girl)
SEYD (Pacha of Coron) | GULNARE (Seyd's favourite Slave)
Pirates, Guards, Soldiers, Female Attendants, Slaves, &c., &c.

The Scene is laid in the Ægean Islands.

ARGUMENT.

THE Cantata is a free adaptation to a lyric form of Lord Byron's "Corsair," of which the general plan is followed as nearly as possible. Seyd, the Pacha of Coron, has gathered together a fleet wherewith to destroy a band of pirates, and to seize the island where they bestow their plunder. Conrad, the chief of the pirates, being warned by a spy of Seyd's design, plans a counter attack upon Coron. He tears himself away from his bride, Medora, and sails at sunset from the island to surprise Seyd in his palace, and burn his fleet in the harbour. Disguised as a dervish, and pretending that he himself has just escaped from the pirates' island, he gains admittance to Seyd, whom he finds feasting in anticipation of to-morrow's victory. His crew, having fired the ships, follow him to burn and plunder the palace. Conrad throws off his disguise, and a desperate battle ensues between the Turkish guards and the corsairs. The latter are beaten off. Conrad is left a prisoner in the hands of Seyd, and condemned to die.

But, while the palace was burning, Conrad had risked his own life to save Gulnare (Seyd's favourite slave) from the flames. She falls passionately in love with her preserver, and, bribing the guards, visits Conrad in prison, and offers him a dagger wherewith to regain his liberty by assassinating the Pacha. Conrad, who is true to Medora, rejects the thought of treacherous murder with scorn and horror. But Gulnare, now aware of his love for another, herself stabs Seyd while he sleeps, thus giving her own life to restore Conrad to Medora and freedom. The pirate chief reaches his island, but only to find Medora dying of a broken heart. Overcome by the sudden joy of seeing him again, she expires in his arms, and he departs to other lands, and is never heard of more.

"Nor trace nor tidings of his doom declare,
Where lives his grief, or perished his despair."

SCENE I.—*On the Island.*

CONRAD—GREEK WOMEN *watching the approach of the Pirates' boat.*

PIRATES (*in the distance*).—

Flow free, flow free, thou glad blue sea—
Thou'rt yet the stormwind's thrall ;
More free than air are hearts that dare
To trust the winds for all.
Let those who will life's chalice fill
With pleasure's poisoned breath,
We gain from strife a larger life,
A glad and glorious death.

WOMEN.—A sail ! a sail !

The blood-red signal glitters in the gale !
Yes, she is ours—she anchors—and our bay
Receives the prow that proudly spurns the spray.

PIRATES (*gradually approaching*).—

Let slaves obey a Sultan's sway ;
Our King is he alone
Whose smile and frown are all his crown,
Whose deck is all his throne.

[*They disembark.*]

These letters, chief, are from the spy,
To tell our spoil or peril nigh.

CONRAD (*reads despatches*).—

Back to your duty—for my course prepare ;
Myself this enterprise to-night will share.

PIRATES.—To-night, Lord Conrad ?

CONRAD.—

Ah ! at set of sun.
My corslet—cloak—one hour, and we are gone.

PIRATES.—Let slaves obey a Sultan's sway ;
Our King is he alone
Whose smile and frown are all his crown,
Whose deck is all his throne. [*Exeunt.*]

CONRAD (*alone*).—

Strange tidings ! Many a peril have I passed,
Nor know I why this next appears the last !
Yet so my heart forebodes, but must not fear,
Nor shall my followers find me falter here.
Now to Medora. Oh ! my sinking heart,
Long may her own be lighter than thou art !

MEDORA (*heard singing without*).—

I know not, I heed not,
When far on the sea,
If the soul of my spirit
Dreams ever of me :
Be it thine, O my loved one,
Love's gladness to prove ;
I'll take for my glory
The sorrow of love.

I heed not, I hope not,
When hearts must untwine,
If the soul I must part from
Will sorrow for mine :
Be it thine to forget me,
As the dream of a sigh ;
Be mine but to love thee,
To bless thee, and die !

Enter MEDORA.

MEDORA.—Conrad !

CONRAD.—My own Medora ! Sure thy song is sad.

MEDORA.—

In Conrad's absence wouldst thou have it glad?
Oh, many a night, on this lone couch reclined,
My dreaming fear with storms hath winged the wind;
And many a restless hour outwatched each star,
And morning came—and yet thou wert afar.
At length 'twas noon—I hailed and bless'd the mast
That met my sight. . . . Oh, joy! 'Twas thine at last.

At last, at last I clasp thee,
My tears, my prayers are o'er;
'Twas worth the pain that made us twain
To meet in joy once more!

CONRAD.—More than my sword I love thee,
Yea, dearer than the sea;
Thy prayers were wings of heaven to bring
Thy Conrad back to thee.

At last, at last I clasp thee—
All, all but love is o'er;
'Twas worth the pain that made us twain
To meet in joy once more.

But, oh, Medora! nerve thy gentler heart;
This hour again—but not for long—we part!

MEDORA.—This hour we part! My heart foreboded
this!

Thus ever fade my fairy dreams of bliss!
This hour—it cannot be—this hour away!
Yon bark hath hardly anchored in the bay—
This hour we part not! Conrad, stay!

CONRAD.— My love,
If there be life below and hope above,
I will return; but now the moments bring
The time of parting with redoubled wing;
The why, the where, what needs it now to tell?
All, all must end in that wild word—farewell!
List!—'tis the bugle!

[Bugle sounds.

MEDORA.—No—hear it not! Thou shalt not part;
Stay, Conrad, stay, nor break my heart!
If love hath ever touched thee, feel
My heart against thy breast of steel;
Have mercy, Conrad—stay—nor dare
To break the embrace of love's despair.
Hear not the words that speak our knell;
Say aught thou wilt—but not farewell!

CONRAD.—Medora! Medora! [Signal gun.

Hark! That voice e'en love must quell.
One kiss—Medora! Ah, farewell! [Exit CONRAD.

MEDORA.—Gone—Conrad!
It is no dream—and I am desolate! [Swoon.

SCENE II.—In the Palace of SEYD.

SEYD—GULNARE—GUARDS—FEMALE SLAVES dancing
and singing.

SLAVES.— Twine we roses that blossom,
Twine we the roses that fall;
Here with our arms for thy bosom
Twine we a wreath of them all.
Cold are the kisses that fly not,
Keen are the kisses that fly—
Dead are the roses that die not,
Sweet are the roses that die.

GULNARE (aside).—

Not by my heart he holds me
Who bends me to his sway;
Whene'er his arm enfolds me
My spirit soars away.
It soars from rose and jewel—
It mounts on wings above;
From thrones, where love is cruel,
To dreams, where love is love!

SLAVES.— Take thou the garland we bring thee—
Keen are the kisses that fly;
List to the songs that we sing thee—
Sweet are the roses that die.
Take from our arms to thy bosom
The wreath that is blent of them all;
For the joy of the roses that blossom
Is the sigh of the roses that fall.

SEYD.—High let us feast for triumphs yet to come,
When I shall drag the fettered rovers home;
This have I sworn by Allah and my sword.
'Tis but to sail: no doubt to-morrow's sun
Will see the Pirates bound—their haven won.

High we may feast, for the triumph is over,
Ere that a sabre has leapt from its sheath:
Deep may we rest—for to-morrow the rover
Will wake but to slumber more deeply in death.
Twine ye your roses, till morning uncloses
New blossoms of glory to redden the day;
Cowards draw breath when the battle is over—
Heroes laugh loud in the dawn of the fray.

High may we feast, &c.

GUARDS.—

High let us feast, for the triumph is over,
Ere that a sabre has leapt from its sheath:
Deep may we rest, for to-morrow the rover
Shall wake but to slumber more deeply in death.

SEYD.—

Once, and but once, shall the sun in his splendour
Rise on the foemen, then sink on their grave;
While, with the light of the stars to attend her,
The moon of my standard shall shine on the wave.
Wolves may outnumber the lion in slumber,
Vultures carouse when the eagle's afar;
But the lion will wake, and the eagle in glory
Sweep down on the carrion that dared him to war!

High may we feast, &c.

GUARDS.—High may we feast, &c.

DANCE OF ALMAS.

GUARDS.—A dervish from the pirates' nest
Is here.

Enter CONRAD, disguised as a Dervish.

SEYD.— Whence com'st thou?

CONRAD.— From the outlaws' den,
A fugitive.

SEYD.— Thy capture, how, and when?
How speed the outlaws? Stand they well prepared
Their plundered wealth and robbers' rock to guard?

CONRAD.—Pacha! the captive's mourning eye,
That weeps for flight, ill plays the spy.

[The dance is resumed.

I only heard the waters roar,
That would not bear me from the shore;
I only marked the sun and sky,
Too bright for my captivity;
I only need repose, release.
On thee and all around be peace.

SEYD.—Yet more I have to question: stay—
'Tis Seyd commands—do thou obey.
Why standest thou? Dost thou suppose
This feast a giaour's, and these thy foes?
Why dost thou shun the sacred pledge,
Whose savour blunts the sabre's edge?

CONRAD.—No feast for me; My food is still
The humblest root, my drink the rill:
For thine, nay, for the Sultan's throne,
E'en these I take not, save alone.

SEYD.—Well, as thou wilt. Since such thou art,
One question answer, and depart.
How many—

Is't already day?
What star—what sunlight floods the bay?
It shines a lake of fire—away!—
Ho, treachery!—Guards!—My scimitar!—
The galleys blaze, and I afar—
Curst Dervish! These thy tidings! Thou
A spy! [The bugle sounds.

CONRAD.—Well sped, my gallant crew!

PIRATES (*without*).—For Conrad and our island,
Like lightning be our sword:
Down with the turbaned tyrant,
Down with his slavish horde.

SEYD.—Slaves!—Hear ye not your master's cry?
Seize him!

CONRAD.—Ay! Seize our Zatanai!

PIRATES *rush in*.

PIRATES.—For Conrad and our island
Like lightning be our sword:
Down with the turbaned tyrant,
Down with his slavish horde.
On, comrades, on, and break them,
E'en with the lightning's speed—
Be ours the golden glory
Of Allah and the Seyd!

SOLDIERS.—For Allah and the Crescent,
Like lightning be our sword:
Down with the pirate traitor,
Down with the rebel horde.
On, Moslems, on, and break them,
As whirlwinds break the reed—
Be on our heads the glory
Of Allah and the Seyd!

CONRAD.—Now for the blood-red banner
That rules the winds and waves!
Down, freemen, on the tyrant!
Down, comrades, on his slaves!
On, brave men, on, and break them,
E'en with the lightning's speed—
Be yours the golden glory
Of Allah and the Seyd!

SEYD.— Now for the moonlit banner!
Bear back the rebel horde!
Down on the Pirate traitor,
With every faithful sword.
On, Moslems, on, and break them,
As whirlwinds break the reed,
And make their heads a glory
For Allah and the Seyd!

GULNARE and SLAVES.—

Despair is raging round us,
With none to help or heed!
On, brave men, for the glory
Of Allah and the Seyd!

ENTR'ACTE.

SCENE III.—*In the Dungeon of SEYD's Palace.*

CONRAD.— Medora
A fettered slave by slavish hands I fall;
My stricken flag in shame hath fled the sea:
And death were welcome, if but this were all—
But, ah, 'tis torture—for I think of thee!
Come, O sleep, and give me rest from sorrow!
Veil the day of death that dawns to-morrow!
Touch my heart, wherein no hope is gleaming,
Let me live in sleep, and die in dreaming.

Ere my soul to bitter death is given,
Come, Medora, on the wings of heaven!
Let me dream, that I may yet behold thee;
Let these fettered arms in slumber hold thee;
Let no hand but love's our spirits sever;
Let me clasp thee once, then die for ever.
Free are dreams. Ere all to death be given,
Come, Medora, on the wings of heaven!

Enter GULNARE.

GULNARE.—
He sleeps! How calm he lies before me,
While my full heart with anguish breaks!
What wondrous spell is woven o'er me—
But soft! He sighs—he starts—he wakes!

CONRAD.—
What beauteous vision floats before me?
What form of air enchants mine eyes?

GULNARE.—
Corsair! When flames were raging o'er me,
Thou mad'st them fires of paradise!
When Death himself stood full before me,
Before thy face he turned to fly;
Back into life thy valour bore me—
And now—for this—thou'rt doomed to die!

CONRAD.—
So be it! For my heart is broken:
Lower than shame no soul can fall;
And memory is the only token
Of her whose love was more than all.

GULNARE.—
Thou lov'st!

CONRAD.—
To one my heart is given,
As thine to Seyd.

GULNARE.—
As mine to thee!
Ah, in the glare that showed me heaven
I learned that love is for the free!
My soul is free! Though nought can save me
From love's despair, with life it moves.
Ah, scorn the soul thy sabre gave me!
It feared thee—pitied—maddened—loves!
Nay, speak not, for thou canst not love me—
Naught of her wealth of bliss I crave:
Ah, though in all she's blest above me,
She can but weep thee—I can save!
Chieftain, be free! Thy warriors need thee;
Conrad, be free! Her heart will break!
Take thou this poniard—I will lead thee
To where he sleeps who must not wake!

CONRAD.—Gulnare! as direst foe I greet him:
And o'er the sea, in open war,
I sailed, 'mid all his guards to meet him,
And smite him with the scimitar.
I stab not sleep. Farewell! 'Tis over
With hate and love!

GULNARE.— No! by this sign
Of death I swear that morn shall hover
Above thy grave, or else—o'er mine!

SCENE IV.—*On the Island. Sunset.*

CHORAL INTRODUCTION.

Slow sinks, more lovely ere his race be run,
Along Morea's hills the setting sun;
Not, as in northern climes, obscurely bright,
But one unclouded blaze of living light!
O'er the hushed deep the yellow beam he throws,
Gilds the green wave, that trembles as it glows,
Till darkly shaded from the land and deep,
Behind his Delphian cliff, he sinks to sleep.

Enter MEDORA and ATTENDANTS.

MEDORA.—Another day? The sun has set:
Another night! He comes not yet!
But see—a sail—it nears, it nears!—
Or are my eyes but dazed with tears?

ATTENDANTS.—

It nears—it nears! They touch—they land—
Silent and slow they cross the sand.

MEDORA.—And he?

ATTENDANTS.—In silence move they still;
They reach the rock; they climb the hill.

MEDORA.—And he not with them!

Enter PIRATES.

PIRATES.— “Scarce with life we fly—
“But hope! We know not—none hath seen him die.”

MEDORA.—Hear me, Heaven! Oh, hear me now!
Lost is hope—but great art Thou!
If my prayers have e'er availed,
When the tempest round him wailed,
When Thy thunder shook the sea,
Save, and send him back to me.

ATTENDANTS and PIRATES. *Miserere, Domine!*

MEDORA.—Hear me, Heaven! My life I give—
Let me die that he may live:
Let Thy sun that now hath set
Rise upon his coming yet:
Lift the shadow from the sky—
Let me see him, ere I die!

ATTENDANTS and PIRATES.—

Hear her, Heaven! Oh, hear her now!
Lost is hope—but great art Thou!
Lift the shadow from the sky—
Let her see him, ere she die!
Miserere, Domine!

ENTR'ACTE.

SCENE V.—*In the Dungeon of SEYD'S Palace. A
Thunderstorm.*

CONRAD alone.

CONRAD.—

Flash, swords of heaven! Flash, fierce and fast!
Wild falchions, welcome all!
Be thine, dread demon of the blast,
The blade that bids me fall!
Come, glorious foe, whom hand to hand
I've dared upon the sea;
Come now, and bless me with thy brand,
And take my soul to thee!
Faint grows the peal, and fainter—in the sky
It dies—e'en Death in scorn hath passed me by!

Enter GULNARE.

GULNARE.—

'Tis done! He nearly waked, but it is done!
Corsair, he perished—thou art dearly won!

CONRAD.—

And I am free! And thou for me hast given
Thy all on earth—thy more than all in heaven!

GULNARE.—

But for that deed of darkness, where wert thou?
Reproach me—but not yet—oh, spare me now!

Fly hence, and loathe, and leave me;
Speed to thine island shore:
Live thou for her, and give me
My barren dream no more!

For her, for her, I lose thee,
Who knows but how to sigh.
I love thee, and refuse thee:
I sin for thee, and die!
To her I yield love's glory,
To her, thy fair-haired slave;
Be mine the prouder story
Of her who died to save;
Far as the winds above thee,
My soul at last may soar;
I die for all who love thee,
Because I love thee more!

SCENE VI., AND LAST.—*On the Island. In
MEDORA'S Turret.*

MEDORA and ATTENDANTS.

MEDORA.—

He comes not! Like a dirge the black waves flow!
He comes not yet—the beacon-lamp burns low!

Come, ere its dying throes
Bid me depart;
Come, while the watch-fire glows
Yet in my heart:
Come, ere I pass away;
Come, while I yet can pray;
Come, while my lips can say
How dear thou art!

ATTENDANTS.—Send, Heaven, thy breath to stir
Hope in her heart.

Keep, Death, thy wing from her,
Near though thou art!
Let her not pass away;
Hear thou her tears that pray,
Lest love and life to-day
Perish and part!

PIRATES (*in the distance*).—

More free than air are hearts that dare
To trust the winds for all.

MEDORA.—

Conrad! 'Tis he!

Enter CONRAD.

CONRAD.— Medora!

At last, at last I clasp thee—
All, all but love is o'er!
'Twas worth the pain that made us twain
To meet in joy once more!

MEDORA.—

At last, at last I clasp thee—
My tears, my prayers are o'er!
'Twas worth the pain that made us twain
To meet in joy once more!

MEDORA.—What wondrous sight is given!

What music thrills my heart!
I am too near to heaven—
No more, no more we part!
I lose thee not—above thee—
I bless thee—from the sky—
I die not—for I love thee—

And in thine arms—I die! [*She dies.*]

ATTENDANTS (*kneeling*).—

She sleeps—she breathes no more!

PIRATES (*in the distance*).—

Let slaves obey a Sultan's sway;
Our King is he alone
Whose smile and frown are all his crown,
Whose deck is all his throne.

ATTENDANTS.—

No more her heart may stir,
Love, with thy breath;
Joy, thou hast covered her—
Even with death!

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