

**GINEVRA**  
**By Percy Bysshe Shelley**

If thou shouldst ever come by choice or chance  
To Modena, Stop at a palace near the Reggio gate,  
Dwelt in of old by one of the Orsini.  
Its noble gardens, terrace above terrace,  
And rich in fountains, statues, cypresses,  
Will long detain thee. -A summer sun  
Sets ere one-half is seen; but, ere thou go,  
Enter the house-prithee, forget it not-  
And look awhile upon a picture there.

‘Tis of a lady in her earliest youth,  
He who observes it, ere he passes on,  
Gazes his fill, and comes and comes again,  
That he may call it up and when far away.

She sits, inclining forward as to speak,  
Her lips half-open, and her finger up,  
As though she said “Beware!” her vest of gold  
Brodered with flowers, and clasped from head to foot,  
An emerald stone in every golden clasp;  
And on her brow, fairer than alabaster,  
A coronet of pearls. But then her face,  
So lovely, yet so arch, so full of mirth,  
The overflowings of an innocent heart—  
It haunts me still, though many a year has fled,  
Like some wild melody!

Alone it hangs  
Over a mouldering heirloom, its companion,  
An oaken chest, half-eaten by the worm,  
But richly carved by Antony of Trent  
With scripture-stories from the life of Christ;  
A chest that came from Venice, and had held  
The ducal robes of some old ancestor.  
That by the way—it may be true or false—  
But don't forget the picture; and thou wilt not,  
When thou hast heard the tale they told me there.

She was an only child; from infancy  
The joy, the pride, of an indulgent sire.  
Her mother dying of the gift she gave,  
That precious gift, what else remained to him?  
The young Ginevra was his all in life,  
Still as she grew, forever in his sight;  
And in her fifteenth year became a bride,  
Marrying an only son, Francesco Doria,  
Her playmate from her birth, and her first love.

Just as she looks there in her bridal dress,  
She was all gentleness, all gayety,  
Her pranks the favorite theme of every tongue.  
But now the day was come, the day, the hour;  
Now, frowning, smiling, for the hundredth time,  
The nurse, that ancient lady, preached decorum;  
And, in the luster of her youth, she gave  
Her hand, with her heart in it, to Francesco.

Great was the joy; but at the bridal feast,  
When all sat down, the bride was wanting there.  
Now was she to be found! Her father cried,  
“’Tis but to make a trail of our love!”  
And filled his glass to all; but his hand shook,  
And soon from guest to guest the panic spread.  
’Twas but that instant she had left Francesco,  
Laughing and looking back and flying still,  
Her ivory tooth imprinted on his finger. But now, alas!  
She was not to be found; Nor from that hour could anything be guessed  
But that she was not!

Weary of his life,  
Francesco flew to Venice, and forthwith  
Flung it away in battle with the Turk.  
Orsini lived; and long was to be seen  
An old man wandering as in quest of something,  
Something he could not find—he knew not what.  
When he was gone, the house remained a while  
Silent and tenantless—then went to strangers.

Full fifty years were past, and all forgot,  
When on an idle day, a day of search  
‘Mid the old lumber in the gallery,  
That mouldering chest was noticed; and ‘twas said  
By one as young, as thoughtless as Ginevra,  
“Why not remove it from its lurking-place?”

‘Twas done as soon as said; but on the way  
It burst, it fell: and, lo! A skeleton,  
With here and there a pearl, and emerald stone,  
A golden clasp, clasping a shred of gold.  
All else had perished—save a nuptial ring,  
And a small seal, her mother’s legacy,  
Engraven with a name, the name of both,  
“Ginevra.”—There, then, had she found a grave!  
Within that chest had she concealed herself,  
Fluttering with joy, the happiest of the happy;  
When a spring-lock, that lay in ambush there,  
Fastened her down forever!