

the gruff tones of his jailor did not as usual salute him. He heard him busy in preparing the table for his evening meal, and he thought his step more gentle, and his movements quieter, than were their wont. Presently every sound ceased, but then a low sigh caught his ear, and, impelled by curiosity, he turned his head, and saw, standing mute and earnestly regarding him, not the ruffian who had hitherto attended him, but a lad of some seventeen years, who, though clad in the livery of the band, displayed a countenance less sinister in its expression, and on which, notwithstanding many darker traits, yet lingered some traces of kindness and humanity. Annibal welcomed the change with joy, and eagerly demanded, in tones that were almost glad, to what happy cause he was indebted for the absence of the savage Manuel?

"He left the tower this morn, Signor," said the boy, speaking in a subdued tone, "and will be absent well nigh a week."

"And whither hath he gone?" asked Annibal, the one thought of Viola's danger alone suggesting itself.

"He leads half a score of men, Signor, on a secret expedition over the mountains, where they are to lie in wait for a rich booty; which, they have warning, will shortly pass that way."

"Humph! a service worthy of him," said Annibal; "but I thank God for any respite from his hated presence, and may death or liberty be mine ere he again return, to deepen the gloom even of this dark and dreary chamber."

"Hush, Signor!" said the lad drawing nearer to Annibal, and looking cautiously towards the door, "I have somewhat to say to thee, but I must be brief, and speak low, or we may be overheard."

"Say on," cried Annibal, "and quickly—thou art a messenger of good tidings, I know it, if thine eye belies not thy heart, for I read in it the beamings of human sympathy and love."

"Alas! they are well nigh quenched within me," said the boy, mournfully; "but listen, and thou shalt hear what I have to tell thee. I am the trusted confidante and minion of our chief, Manfredi, or I should not be deputed, during the absence of the incorruptible Manuel, to supply his place, in attending upon so important a prisoner as thyself. Thou knowest Manfredi's history, Signor; himself informed me that he related all to thee, and thou wilt therefore know mine, when I tell thee that I am the lad Antonio, who released him from the dungeon into which he was thrown, after his assault upon the young Prince de Urbino."

"And since that time thou hast followed this outlaw in his wild and wicked career?" asked Annibal, looking with pity on the degraded youth.

"What other course could I pursue, Signor? I could not conceal the act I had committed, for, in consequence of it, I was that night absent from the

palace, and I knew, if I returned in the morning, it would be to meet the anger of my father, and the deadly vengeance of the Duke. So I fled with the bribe, which had tempted me to release one who deserved punishment, and when I had disposed of it, and lived upon its fruits till all were exhausted, I returned to these mountains, and joined the band of freebooters, of which Manfredi had become the chief. He found me bold and active, and, in order to retain me in his service, he loaded me with kindness and with bounties, entrusted me with his most important missions, and made me at length the confidante of all his plans and purposes. This, for a time, flattered and deceived me into a belief that I loved the life I had chosen—but the envy of my comrades was awakened, by the preference shown to me, and the many instances of hatred and ill-will which they exhibited towards me, made me often wish to escape from their companionship, and return to the better life from which I had fled.

"This, however, I had not the courage to do; but some months since, I learned by accident, that my treachery, in freeing Manfredi from his hands, had brought suspicion upon my father, who, notwithstanding his protestations of innocence, had been dismissed from the Duke's service, in which he had been born, and that he was then suffering the extremes of poverty and illness. This rumour aroused remorse within me, and, when I traced him out, and found the report fully confirmed, I sorely repented me of the evil I had brought upon him, and I earnestly wished that I might find some means to reinstate him in the situation he had lost. Though in great want, he would accept none of the gold I offered him, for, by some means, he had become acquainted with my mode of life, and he spurned at what he called my ill-gotten gains.

"This made me the more desirous to see him again filling his former place in the Duke's service; but when I expressed my feelings to Manfredi, he scoffed at my woman's heart, and forbade my visiting the old man again, under the penalty of his utmost severity. It is needless to say, I did not obey this cruel command, though I was cautious in breaking it, and have not yet been able to effect the object of my wishes. When at thy capture, I learned from the chief who thou wert, and how connected with the household of the Duke, I resolved to see thee—but even in that purpose I have been baffled till now, when Manuel's absence favours my wish, and I seize this first moment of converse with thee, to entreat thy intercession with the Duke, for—"

"Darest thou mock me, boy?" said Annibal, interrupting him with fierce displeasure. "How am I to plead for thee or thy miserable father, barred and bolted as I am within these cursed walls? Give me freedom, and I will do for thee what I can—but ask me not to touch pen to paper for thee or thine