

come!" But Giulia still hesitated, and a movement among the crowd drew attention from her for a moment. A young man, tall and handsome, with gold colored curls, made his way into the open space under the trees, and bowing low before the princess, said:

"Gracious madam, if a substitute will suffice——"

She hesitated for a moment; but he looked so handsome and fascinating, that she could not think of a denial. "*Chi viene?*" whispered she to an attendant.

"*L'improvisatore Inglese.*"

The eye of La Principessa brightened. "Granted, Sir Stranger," said she, "and I trust you will give us no cause to lament the withdrawal of her whose place you have so benevolently assumed. Announce, Signior Herald, *L'improvisatore Inglese* assumes the lyre."

But Milton had no lyre; and the young girl whose place he had assumed, suddenly and impulsively unbound her own, and without a thought of etiquette, presented it to him as he stood beside the princess.

He turned full towards her, and their eyes met. There was the same calm familiar look as before, but no token of recognition. He would have given worlds to have detected the slightest change of colour of countenance; but she turned away as from an indifferent stranger, and assumed her old place on the ottoman beside her mistress, while Milton, slightly bewildered, but still delighted, backed into the circle, and sung his glorious poem of *l'Allegro*, which he translated for the occasion, as he proceeded, into Italian lyric verse.

When he had finished, the sensation was immense; it was the poem of the day; and Milton instantly found himself transformed into the hero of the scene. The fair ladies, with Francesca as chief, manifested every eagerness to attract his attention; but she whose notice he would have sacrificed that of all the world to obtain, gave no evidence of approbation. Milton felt piqued. Surely the circumstance of his having assumed her place, merited some remembrance at least. Was it indifference? He could scarcely permit himself to think that, with his dream fresh in his recollection. Was it coquetry? That child-like, earnest face surely forbade the supposition. Whether so or not, he resolved to pursue the adventure; indeed he could not do otherwise, for that face and that form had, he felt, taken an impregnable hold on his imagination and on his heart.

The princess was all fascination and condescension. "Would not *il Signor Inglese* mingle in her train for the rest of the evening?"

Milton was delighted. He would be near Giulia—perhaps an opportunity might occur to converse.

They adjourned to the great hall of the palazzo. Milton talked much with the princess, and was the admired and observed of the evening. But as it passed away, and he found himself no nearer her he sought, he felt dispirited and discouraged, and at last begged the princess for a formal presentation. She was the centre of a gay group of young men and maidens, who appeared to treat her as one whom it was the fashion to defer to and indulge. She received Milton politely; but with the ceremony of an entire stranger, thanking him for his interference in the matter of the golden violet; but, he thought, with more ceremony than kindness. Once or twice he strove to draw her aside into conversation with him; but she appeared studiously to avoid it, and her manner, though open and cheerful, was so cold as to chill him to the very heart. At parting, while he stood by her side, and mentioned that he had the permission of the princess to visit her circle while he sojourned in Firenze, and begged in a whisper if he might not venture to include her—he thought the expression of her face was more akin to displeasure and vexation than any other feeling, as she turned away and affected not to hear him. Still he felt more excited and interested than he had been on any subject for years,—like one who knows himself on the opening vista of some path of destiny, either to conduct him to some radiant summit of happiness or to some depth of woe—yet either worth a whole age of the dull routine of every day life.

Milton failed not to present himself on an early occasion at the establishment of the princess, where he soon found himself on the footing of a frequent and favoured guest. He mingled with her train on all occasions—at the morning conversations in her boudoir, on hawking and other out door excursions, on nightly occasions of festivity and pleasure, and was, as she declared, quite indispensable to her present existence in Firenze. By this means he was frequently in the society of Giulia Reni, who was seldom absent from the side of her mistress, but he felt or made little progress in her intimacy or friendship. Yet did her influence over him daily increase; and he could not see that bright though calm face, winning sympathy and interest wherever it presented itself, without the effort, almost without the knowledge of its possessor, and hear that sweet singing voice, on whose words every body seemed to hang—without feeling something gnawing at his