

"But, my father," asked Viola, with timid eagerness, "what, in the mean time, is to be the fate of poor Murano? They will surely take his life, if thou dost pursue them with open warfare, while he remains in their power."

"Let them, if they dare!" said the Duke, sternly. "I have said that when Murano was restored to me, the gold should be placed in their hands. If they agree not to this, what faith can we have in their honour—what reason for believing that they intend to fulfil their part of the contract? Believe me, it is their determined object to secure the ransom; but, from this manœuvre, I am suspicious that they purpose to retain their prisoner at all events; and, therefore, the sooner we terrify them into yielding him up, the better."

"If it could be so, with what force canst thou hope to intimidate them?" asked Viola, despondingly.

"The whole country, of which they are the scourge, will lend me aid to hunt them from their dens; besides which, I will levy, at my own cost, an irén band, that shall be kept ever on the watch to entrap them."

"Ah! my father, should the innocent perish before thy victory is accomplished, would it not be dearly won, and cost thee more of sorrow than of triumph at the last?" said Viola, in tones so sad and low, that the Duke, in spite of himself, was touched by their melancholy music.

He remained a minute in thought, and then, drawing her gently towards him:

"Viola," he said, "I have somewhat to tell thee. Dost thou know who this robber chief is? No, thou dost not. Listen, then, and say if I should trust to the honour of such a wretch? For this terrible Manfredi is said to be no other than Giulio Lorenzani,—the murderer, the ingrate, the sooner of God and man, the blasphemer, who, in the holy garb of a pilgrim, gained entrance to my halls, and would have robbed me of my child!"

"Merciful Heaven! Can this be true?" exclaimed Viola, terror and emotion almost depriving her of utterance. Oh! my father, leave not Annibal in the power of such a being. The gold may tempt him. Let us at least make the trial, and if it fail to procure freedom and life for the captive, thou at least wilt be saved the anguish of feeling that thou hast wantonly left him to perish."

"Thou art strangely earnest in this matter, my own Viola," said the Duke, fixing, with a searching gaze, his proud eye upon her face; "and if I thought—if I did but dream, that this low born youth could ever wake a stronger sentiment than pity in thy young heart, I would leave him to pine in the stronghold of the robber till thou hadst outgrown thy silly weakness."

"My father, do I not ever plead for the wretched?" murmured Viola, as she threw herself

into his arms, and hid her blushing face in his bosom.

"Thou hast a tender soul, my gentle one," said the Duke, bending down and imprinting a fond kiss upon her upturned cheek. "But yet there is a fervor in thy prayers for this young Murano, which I like not, and I would have thee remember, although he may boast the genius and the grace of a Guido, and hath a speech and bearing that might mark him one of a nobler birth, yet he weareth a humble name, with which, thou knowest, the prouder one may never link itself."

"Thou dost me wrong, dear father," said Viola, struggling to speak with calmness, which the secret consciousness that she was striving, even from herself to hide her true emotions, rendered a difficult task. "I think but of his perilous situation, and of the reckless and cruel nature of the wretch who holds him in thralldom,—and then,—and then, I feel that thou shouldst leave no means untried, to rescue from a miserable fate, him who snatched thy Viola from the very grasp of that terrible man, at a moment when, unconscious of all, he was about to bear her from thee forever."

"I would not seem insensible to such a mighty boon, my own cherished one," said the Duke, softened by the remembrance she awoke, "and would willingly pay the gold for young Annibal's ransom, were it not for seeming to yield too much to the imperious demand of that fierce bandit, whom I would force to yield his prize, by other and severer measures."

"Thou canst deal with him as thou wilt hereafter, dear father, but I entreat thee try now the temptation of the gold, and prove to Murano that thou knowest to be not only a bountiful patron, but a grateful friend."

"It shall be as thou sayest, fair one—thou canst never see in vain; and, by dawn, the ransom shall be paid in solid crowns. Then let the villain-robber see that his pledge is kept, or his fate shall be a summary and a fearful one. Go now, thy cheek is pale, or before thy birthnight fête, when I would have thee radiant as the star thou lovest, I shall see thee worn to a shadow with carking care and thought. Seek thy pillow, sweet—I will send Bianca to thee, and may gentle sleep, and bright visions, bless thee till morning."

He kissed her fondly, and departed; and, comforted by his promise, she sought her couch, to dream of the absent one, with whom she seemed to be wandering, in doubt and difficulty, among the deep defiles and rugged passes of the Apennines.

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A week passed slowly by, and still Annibal remained a captive in his lonely tower. Heavily swept on the lagging hours, as he sat sad and silent within its gloomy walls, nursing strange fancies,