

MARCO VISCONTI*:

A STORY OF THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY—TRANSLATED FROM THE ITALIAN OF TOMMASO GROSSI,

BY HUGO MONT.

CHAPTER XXIV.

LODRISIO VISCONTI, when his first wonder at seeing Lupo in Milan, whilst he thought him a prisoner far from that city, had somewhat subsided, beckoned to one of his followers, and gave him a few whispered instructions. The man, with a low inclination, turned his horse and rode after the squire; but, as we have already seen the result of his expedition, we will accompany Lodrisio on his route, which led to Rosate, where he was hastening to confer with his confederate Pelagrua. Troubled and uneasy at the escape of Lupo, he pursued his way in moody silence, and it was not till he found himself alone with the castellan in a chamber at Rosate, that he uttered a single word.

"How fares thy captive, Pelagrua?" he then enquired. "Hast thou managed to pacify her?"

"At first she lay on my hands like a chicken sick of the pip, and indeed at one time I feared seriously that she would slip altogether through our fingers. Now, however, her anxiety is greatly allayed, and she lives in hope."

"But how, prithee?"

"By a letter from Ottorino."

"From Ottorino?" repeated Lodrisio with an air half anxious, half incredulous.

"Yes! from Ottorino. But be not alarmed," continued the castellan with a discordant laugh; "I myself was Ottorino for the nonce."

"Thou wro'tst the letter thyself then?"

"Yes! imitating his hand closely. You know I have still that letter of recommendation to Marco which he gave me at Varenna."

"I had a long story ready to account for the delay. Marco had received me with much grace and kindness; he wished to send me on a mission to Tuscany, and keeping me in the mean time constantly employed day and night, had left me no opportunity of communicating with her, particularly as I did not wish yet to risk the acknowledgment of our marriage; I had great hopes of rendering him special service in the affairs wherein he was engaged, which would enable me

to disclose all without fear of his displeasure. Then digressing into the usual raptures of enamoured swains, I seasoned up the whole with impassioned oaths and tender phrases, such as joy of my heart!—hope of my life!—*anima mia!*—*caro amore!*—and so forth."

"*Bravo, castellan!*" exclaimed Lodrisio, laughing; "no wonder the girl was deceived, for who could imagine such honeyed terms to proceed from thy brain."

His companion received the compliment with a complacent grin, and then proceeded:

"I sent to let her know that the messenger who brought her letter awaited a reply; so reply she did. Ottorino returns an answer to this, she rejoins with another, and so the correspondence has gone on happily. Oh, how it cheers my heart to read the dainty and tender phrases with which she addresses me, to see the devotion with which she opens my letters, devours them with her eyes and bathes them in her tears! How gently she folds them up with her lily white hands and slips them tenderly into her bosom, and then draws them forth again to read and kiss anew! *Per Bacco!* the joke begins to please me."

"Peace, thou dried mummy!" said Lodrisio, sportively pulling his ear, "how does this bring us nearer our main object?"

"I have latterly begun to show myself somewhat jealous, assigning as a reason the manner in which Marco continually talks of her, and the extravagant praises he lavishes on her."

"And she —"

"Replies with a thousand protestations, swears she is mine ever, mine only; but praises like those I have ascribed to Marco, when once they enter the heart of a woman, strike root and bear fruit sooner or later."

"I fear much lest thou put'st off too much time in this manner. We would not be half way a year hence, and Marco will be here within the month."

"I have my fears too," returned the castellan; "but they are of Marco himself. I threw out a

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