The Heir of Mondolfo

by Mary Shelley

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THE HEIR OF MONDOLFO

BY

MARY SHELLEY

In the beautiful and wild country near Sorrento, in the Kingdom of Naples, at the time it was governed by monarchs of the house of Anjou, there lived a territorial noble, whose wealth and power overbalanced that of the neighboring nobles. His castle, itself a stronghold, was built on a rocky eminence, toppling over the blue and lovely Mediterranean. The hills around were covered with ilex-forests, or subdued to the culture of the olive and vine. Under the sun no spot could be found more favored by nature.

If at eventide you had passed on the placid wave beneath the castellated rock that bore the name of Mondolfo, you would have imagined that all happiness and bliss must reside within its walls, which, thus nestled in beauty, overlooked a scene of such surpassing loveliness; yet if by chance you saw its lord issue from the portal, you shrunk from his frowning brow, you wondered what could impress on his worn cheek the combat of passions. More piteous sight was it to behold his gentle lady, who, the slave of his unbridled temper, the patient sufferer of many wrongs, seemed on the point of entering upon that only repose "where the wicked cease from

troubling and the weary are at rest."[1] The Prince Mondolfo had been united early in life to a princess of the regal family of Sicily. She died in giving birth to a son. Many years subsequently, after a journey to the northern Italian states, he returned to his castle, married. The speech of his bride declared her to be a Florentine. The current tale was that he married her for love, and then hated her as the hindrance of his ambitious views. She bore all for the sake of her only child—a child born to its father's hate; a boy of gallant spirit, brave even to wildness. As he grew up, he saw with anger the treatment his mother received from the haughty Prince. He dared come forward as her defender; he dared oppose his boyish courage to his father's rage: the result was natural—he became the object of his father's dislike. Indignity was heaped on him; the vassals were taught to disobey him, the menials to scorn him, his very brother to despise him as of inferior blood and birth. Yet the blood of Mondolfo was his; and, though tempered by the gentle Isabel's more kindly tide, it boiled at the injustice to which he was a victim. A thousand times he poured forth the overflowings of his injured spirit in eloquent complaints to his mother. As her health decayed, he nurtured the project, in case of her death, of flying his paternal castle, and becoming a wanderer, a soldier of fortune. He was now thirteen. The Lady Isabel soon, with a mother's penetration, discovered his secret, and on her death-bed made him swear not to quit his father's protection until he should have attained the age of twenty. Her heart bled for the wretchedness that she foresaw would be his lot; but she looked forward with still greater horror to the picture her active fancy drew of her son at an early age wandering forth in despair, alone and helpless, suffering all the extremities of famine and wretchedness; or, almost worse, yielding to the temptations that in such a situation would be held out to him. She extracted this vow, and died satisfied that he would keep it. Of all the world, she alone knew the worth of her Ludovico—had penetrated beneath the rough surface, and become acquainted with the rich store of virtue and affectionate feeling that lay like unsunned ore in his sensitive heart.

Fernando hated his son. From his earliest boyhood he had felt the sentiment of aversion, which, far from endeavoring to quell, he allowed to take deep root, until Ludovico's most innocent action became a crime, and a system of denial and resistance was introduced that called forth all of sinister that there was in the youth's character, and engendered an active spirit of detestation in his father's mind. Thus Ludovico grew, hated and hating. Brought together through their common situation, the father and son, lord and vassal, oppressor and oppressed, the one was continually ready to exert his power of inflicting evil, the other perpetually on the alert to resist even the shadow of tyranny. After the death of his mother, Ludovico's character greatly changed. The smile that, as the sun, had then often irradiated his countenance, now never shone; suspicion, irritability, and dogged resolution, seemed his master-feelings. He dared his father to the worst, endured that worst, and prevented from flying by his sacred observance of his vow, nurtured all angry and even revengeful feelings till the cup of wrath seemed ready to overflow. He was loved by none, and loving none his good qualities expired, or slept as if they would never more awaken.

His father had intended him for the Church; and Ludovico, until he was sixteen, wore the priestly garb. That period past, he cast it aside, and appeared habited as a cavalier of those days, and in short words told his parent that he refused to comply with his wishes; that he should dedicate himself to arms and enterprise. All that followed this declaration—menace, imprisonment, and even ignominy—he bore, but he continued firm; and the haughty Fernando was obliged to submit his towering will to the firmer will of a stripling. And now, for the first time, while rage seemed to burst his heart, he felt to its highest degree the sentiment of hatred; he expressed this passion—words of contempt and boundless detestation replied; and the bystanders feared that a personal encounter would ensue. Once Fernando put his hand on his sword, and the unarmed Ludovico drew in and collected himself, as if ready to spring and seize the arm that might be uplifted against him. Fernando saw

and dreaded the mad ferocity his son's eye expressed. In all personal encounters of this kind the victory rests not with the strong, but the most fearless. Fernando was not ready to stake his own life, or even with his own hand to shed his son's blood; Ludovico, not as aggressor, but in self-defense, was careless of the consequences of an attack—he would resist to the death; and this dauntless feeling gave him an ascendency his father felt and could not forgive.

From this time Fernando's conduct toward his son changed. He no longer punished, imprisoned, or menaced him. This was usage for a boy, but the Prince felt that they were man to man, and acted accordingly. He was the gainer by the change; for he soon acquired all the ascendency that experience, craft, and a court education, must naturally give him over a hot-headed youth, who, nerved to resist all personal violence, neither saw nor understood a more covert mode of proceeding. Fernando hoped to drive his son to desperation. He set spies over him, paid the tempters that were to lead him to crime, and by a continued system of restraint and miserable thwarting hoped to reduce him to such despair that he would take refuge in any line of conduct that promised freedom from so irksome and degrading a slavery. His observance of his vow saved the youth; and this steadiness of purpose gave him time to read and understand the motives of the tempters. He saw his father's master-hand in all, and his heart sickened at the discovery.

He had reached his eighteenth year. The treatment he had endured and the constant exertion of fortitude and resolution had already given him the appearance of manhood. He was tall, well made, and athletic. His person and demeanor were more energetic than graceful, and his manners were haughty and reserved. He had few accomplishments, for his father had been at no pains for his education; feats of horsemanship and arms made up the whole catalogue. He hated books, as being a part of a priest's insignia; he was averse to all occupation that brought bodily repose with it. His complexion was dark—hardship had even rendered it sallow; his eyes, once soft, now glared with fierceness; his lips, formed to express tenderness, were

now habitually curled in contempt; his dark hair, clustering in thick curls round his throat, completed the wild but grand and interesting appearance of his person.

It was winter, and the pleasures of the chase began. Every morning the huntsmen assembled to attack the wild-boars or stags which the dogs might arouse in the fastnesses of the Apennines. This was the only pleasure that Ludovico ever enjoyed. During these pursuits he felt himself free. Mounted on a noble horse, which he urged to its full speed, his blood danced in his veins, and his eyes shone with rapture as he cast his eagle glance to heaven; with a smile of ineffable disdain, he passed his false friends or open tormentors, and gained a solitary precedence in the pursuit.

The plain at the foot of Vesuvius and its neighboring hills was stripped bare by winter; the full stream rushed impetuously from the hills; and there was mingled with it the baying of the dogs and the cries of the hunters; the sea, dark under a lowering sky, made a melancholy dirge as its waves broke on the shore; Vesuvius groaned heavily, and the birds answered it by wailing shrieks; a heavy sirocco hung upon the atmosphere, rendering it damp and cold. This wind seems at once to excite and depress the human mind: it excites it to thought, but colors those thoughts, as it does the sky, with black. Ludovico felt this; but he tried to surmount the natural feelings with which the ungenial air filled him.

The temperature of the air changed as the day advanced. The clouded sky spent itself in snow, which fell in abundance; it then became clear, and sharp frost succeeded. The aspect of earth was changed. Snow covered the ground and lay on the leafless trees, sparkling, white, and untrod. Early in the morning a stag had been roused, and, as he was coursed along the plain skirting the hills, the hunters went at speed. All day the chase endured. At length the stag, who from the beginning had directed his course toward the hills, began to ascend them, and, with various windings and evolutions, almost put the hounds to fault. Day was near its close when Ludovico alone followed the stag, as it made for the edge of a kind of platform

of the mountain, which, isthmus-like, was connected with the hill by a small tongue of land, and on three sides was precipitous to the plain below. Ludovico balanced his spear, and his dogs drew in, expecting that the despairing animal would there turn to bay. He made one bound, which conducted him to the very brow of the precipice—another, and he was seen no more. He sprang downward, expecting more pity from the rocks beneath than from his human adversary. Ludovico was fatigued by the chase and angry at the escape of his prey. He sprang from his horse, tied him to a tree, and sought a path by which he might safely descend to the plain. Snow covered and hid the ground, obliterating the usual traces that the flocks or herds might have left as they descended from their pastures on the hills to the hamlets beneath; but Ludovico had passed his boyhood among mountains: while his hunting-spear found sure rest on the ground, he did not fear, or while a twig afforded him sufficient support as he held it, he did not doubt to secure his passage; but the descent was precipitous, and necessary caution obliged him to be long. The sun approached the horizon, and the glow of its departure was veiled by swift-rising clouds which the wind blew upward from the sea—a cold wind, which whirled the snow from its resting-place and shook it from the trees. Ludovico at length arrived at the foot of the precipice. The snow reflected and enhanced the twilight, and he saw four deep marks that must have been made by the deer. The precipice was high above, and its escape appeared a miracle. It must have escaped; but those were the only marks it had left. Around lay a forest of ilex, beset by thick, entangled underwood, and it seemed impossible that any animal so large as the stag in pursuit could have broken its way through the apparently impenetrable barrier it opposed. The desire to find his quarry became almost a passion in the heart of Ludovico. He walked round to seek for an opening, and at last found a narrow pathway through the forest, and some few marks seemed to indicate that the stag must have sought for refuge up the glen. With a swiftness characteristic even of his prey, Ludovico rushed up the pathway, and thought not of how far he ran, until, breathless, he stopped

before a cottage that opposed itself to his further progress. He stopped and looked around. There was something singularly mournful in the scene. It was not dark, but the shades of evening seemed to descend from the vast woof of cloud that climbed the sky from the west. The black and shining leaves of the ilex and those of the laurel and myrtle underwood were strongly contrasted with the white snow that lay upon them. A breeze passed among the boughs, and scattered the drift that fell in flakes, and disturbed by fits the silence around; or, again, a bird twittered, or flew with melancholy flap of wing, beneath the trees to its nest in some hollow trunk. The house seemed desolate; its windows were glassless, and small heaps of snow lay upon the sills. There was no print of footing on the equal surface of the path that led right up to the door, yet a little smoke now and then struggled upward from its chimney, and, on paying fixed attention, Prince Ludovico thought he heard a voice. He called, but received no answer. He put his hand on the latch; it yielded, and he entered. On the floor, strewed with leaves, lay a person sick and dying; for, though there was a slight motion in the eyes that showed that life had not yet deserted his throne, the paleness of the visage was that of death only. It was an aged woman, and her white hair showed that she descended to no untimely grave. But a figure knelt beside her which might have been mistaken for the angel of heaven waiting to receive and guide the departing soul to eternal rest, but for the sharp agony that was stamped on the features, and the glazed but earnest gaze of her eye. She was very young, and beautiful as the star of evening. She had apparently despoiled herself to bestow warmth on her dying friend, for her arms and neck were bare but for the quantity of dark and flowing hair that clustered on her shoulders. She was absorbed in one feeling, that of watching the change in the sick person. Her cheeks, even her lips, were pale; her eyes seemed to gaze as if her whole life reigned in their single perception. She did not hear Ludovico enter, or, at least, she made no sign that indicated that she was conscious of it. The sick person murmured; as she bent her head down to catch the sound, she replied, in an accent of despair:

"I can get no more leaves, for the snow is on the ground; nor have I any other earthly thing to place over you."

"Is she cold?" said Ludovico, creeping near, and bending down beside the afflicted girl.

"Oh, very cold!" she replied, "and there is no help."

Ludovico had gone to the chase in a silken mantle lined with the choicest furs: he had thrown it off, and left it with his horse that it might not impede his descent. He hastened from the cottage, he ran down the lane, and, following the marks of his footsteps, he arrived where his steed awaited him. He did not again descend by the same path, reflecting that it might be necessary for him to seek assistance for the dying woman. He led his horse down the bill by a circuitous path, and, although he did this with all possible speed, night closed in, and the glare of the snow alone permitted him to see the path that he desired to follow. When he arrived at the lane he saw that the cottage, before so dark, was illuminated, and, as he approached, he heard the solemn hymn of death as it was chanted by the priests who filled it. The change had taken place, the soul had left its mortal mansion, and the deserted ruin was attended with more of solemnity than had been paid to the mortal struggle. Amid the crowd of priests Ludovico entered unperceived, and he looked around for the lovely female he had left. She sat, retired from the priests, on a heap of leaves in a corner of the cottage. Her clasped hands lay on her knees, her head was bent downward, and every now and then she wiped away her fast-falling tears with her hair. Ludovico threw his cloak over her. She looked up, and drew the covering round her, more to hide her person than for the sake of warmth, and then, again turning away, was absorbed in her melancholy thoughts.

Ludovico gazed on her in pity. For the first time since his mother's death, tears filled his eyes, and his softened countenance beamed with tender sympathy. He said nothing, but he continued to look on as a wish arose in his mind that he might wipe

the tears that one by one fell from the shrouded eyes of the unfortunate girl. As he was thus engaged, he heard his name called by one of the attendants of the castle, and, throwing the few pieces of gold he possessed into the lap of the sufferer, he suddenly left the cottage, and, joining the servant who had been in search of him, rode rapidly toward his home.

As Ludovico rode along, and the first emotions of pity having, as it were, ceased to throb in his mind, these feelings merged into the strain of thought in which he habitually indulged, and turned its course to something new.

"I call myself wretched," he cried—"I, the well clad and fed, and this lovely peasant-girl, half famished, parts with her necessary clothing to cover the dying limbs of her only friend. I also have lost my only friend, and that is my true misfortune, the cause of all my real misery—sycophants would assume that name—spies and traitors usurp that office. I have cast these aside—shaken them from me as you bough shakes to earth its incumbrance of snow, not as cold as their iced hearts, but I am alone—solitude gnaws my heart and makes me savage—miserable—worthless."

Yet, although he thought in this manner, the heart of Ludovico was softened by what he had seen, and milder feelings pressed upon him. He had felt sympathy for one who needed it; he had conferred a benefit on the necessitous, tenderness molded his lips to a smile, and the pride of utility gave dignity to the fire of his eye. The people about him saw the change, and, not meeting with the usual disdain of his manner, they also became softened, and the alteration apparent in his character seemed ready to effect as great a metamorphosis in his external situation. But the time was not come when this change would become permanent.

On the day that succeeded to this hunt, Prince Fernando removed to Naples, and commanded his son to accompany him. The residence at Naples was peculiarly irksome to Ludovico. In the country he enjoyed comparative freedom. Satisfied that

he was in the castle, his father sometimes forgot him for days together; but it was otherwise here. Fearful that he should form friends and connections, and knowing that his commanding figure and peculiar manners excited attention and often curiosity, he kept him ever in sight; or, if he left him for a moment, he first made himself sure of the people around him, and left such of his own confidants whose very presence was venom to the eye of Ludovico. Add to which, Prince Mondolfo delighted to insult and browbeat his son in public, and, aware of his deficiencies in the more elegant accomplishments, he exposed him even to the derision of his friends. They remained two months at Naples, and then returned to Mondolfo.

It was spring; the air was genial and spirit-stirring. The white blossoms of the almond-trees and the pink ones of the peach just began to be contrasted with the green leaves that shot forth among them. Ludovico felt little of the exhilarating effects of spring. Wounded in his heart's core, he asked nature why she painted a sepulcher; he asked the airs why they fanned the sorrowful and the dead. He wandered forth to solitude. He rambled down the path that led to the sea; he sat on the beach, watching the monotonous flow of the waves; they danced and sparkled; his gloomy thoughts refused to imbibe cheerfulness from wave or sun.

A form passed near him—a peasant-girl, who balanced a pitcher, urn-shaped, upon her head; she was meanly clad, but she attracted Ludovico's regard, and when, having approached the fountain, she took her pitcher and turned to fill it, he recognized the cottager of the foregoing winter. She knew him also, and, leaving her occupation, she approached him and kissed his hand with that irresistible grace that southern climes seem to instill into the meanest of their children. At first she hesitated, and began to thank him in broken accents, but words came as she spoke, and Ludovico listened to her eloquent thanks—the first he had heard addressed to him by any human being. A smile of pleasure stole over his face—a smile whose beauty sank deep into the gazer's heart. In a minute they were seated on the bank beside the fountain, and Viola told the story of her poverty-stricken youth—her

orphan lot—the death of her best friend—and it was now only the benign climate which, in diminishing human wants, made her appear less wretched than then. She was alone in the world—living in that desolate cottage—providing for her daily fare with difficulty. Her pale cheek, the sickly languor that pervaded her manner, gave evidence of the truth of her words; but she did not weep, she spoke words of good heart, and it was only when she alluded to the benefaction of Ludovico that her soft dark eyes swam with tears.

The youth visited her cottage the next day. He rode up the lane, now grass-grown and scented by violets, which Viola was gathering from the banks. She presented her nosegay to him. They entered the cottage together. It was dilapidated and miserable. A few flowers placed in a broken vase was a type only of poor Viola herself—a lovely blossom in the midst of utter poverty; and the rose-tree that shaded the window could only tell that sweet Italy, even in the midst of wretchedness, spares her natural wealth to adorn her children.

Ludovico made Viola sit down on a bench by the window, and stood opposite to her, her flowers in his hand, listening. She did not talk of her poverty, and it would be difficult to recount what was said. She seemed happy and smiled and spoke with a gleeful voice, which softened the heart of her friend, so that he almost wept with pity and admiration. After this, day by day, Ludovico visited the cottage and bestowed all his time on Viola. He came and talked with her, gathered violets with her, consoled and advised her, and became happy. The idea that he was of use to a single human being instilled joy into his heart; and yet he was wholly unconscious how entirely he was necessary to the happiness of his protégée. He felt happy beside her, he was delighted to bestow benefits on her, and to see her profit by them; but he did not think of love, and his mind, unawakened to passion, reposed from its long pain without a thought for the future. It was not so with the peasant-girl. She could not see his eyes bent in gentleness on her, his mouth lighted by its tender smile, or listen to his voice as he bade her trust in him, for that he would be father, brother, all

to her, without deeply, passionately loving him. He became the sun of her day, the breath of her life—her hope, joy, and sole possession. She watched for his coming, she watched him as he went, and for a long time she was happy. She would not repine that he replied to her earnest love with calm affection only—she was a peasant, he a noble—and she could claim and expect no more; he was a god—she might adore him; and it were blasphemy to hope for more than a benign acceptation of her worship.

Prince Mondolfo was soon made aware of Ludovico's visits to the cottage of the forest, and he did not doubt that Viola had become the mistress of his son. He did not endeavor to interrupt the connection, or put any bar to his visits. Ludovico, indeed, enjoyed more liberty than ever, and his cruel father confined himself alone to the restricting of him more than ever in money. His policy was apparent: Ludovico had resisted every temptation of gambling and other modes of expense thrown in his way. Fernando had long wished to bring his son to a painful sense of his poverty and dependence, and to oblige him to seek the necessary funds in such a career as would necessitate his desertion of the paternal roof. He had wound many snares around the boy, and all were snapped by his firm but almost unconscious resistance; but now, without seeking, without expectation, the occasion came of itself which would lead him to require far more than his father had at any time allowed him, and now that allowance was restricted, yet Ludovico did not murmur—and until now he had had enough.

A long time Fernando abstained from all allusion to the connection of his son; but one evening, at a banquet, gayety overcame his caution—a gayety which ever led him to sport with his son's feelings, and to excite a pain which might repress the smile that his new state of mind ceased to make frequent visits to his countenance.

"Here," cried Fernando, as he filled a goblet—"here, Ludovico, is to the health of your violet-girl!" and he concluded his speech with some indecorous allusion that

suffused Ludovico's cheek with red. Without replying he arose to depart.

"And whither are you going, sir?" cried his father. "Take you cup to answer my pledge, for, by Bacchus! none that sit at my table shall pass it uncourteously by."

Ludovico, still standing, filled his cup and raised it as he was about to speak and retort to his father's speech, but the memory of his words and the innocence of Viola pressed upon him and filled his heart almost to bursting. He put down his cup, pushed aside the people who sought to detain him, and left the castle, and soon the laughter of the revelers was no more heard by him, though it had loudly rung and was echoed through the lofty halls. The words of Fernando had awakened a strange spirit in Ludovico. "Viola! Can she love me? Do I love her?" The last question was quickly answered. Passion, suddenly awake, made every artery tingle by its thrilling presence. His cheeks burned and his heart danced with strange exultation as he hastened toward the cottage, unheeding all but the universe of sensation that dwelt within him. He reached its door. Blank and dark the walls rose before him, and the boughs of the wood waved and sighed over him. Until now he had felt impatience alone—the sickness of fear—fear of finding a cold return to his passion's feeling now entered his heart; and, retreating a little from the cottage, he sat on a bank, and hid his face in his hands, while passionate tears gushed from his eyes and trickled from between his fingers. Viola opened the door of her cottage; Ludovico had failed in his daily visit, and she was unhappy. She looked on the sky—the sun had set, and Hesperus glowed in the west; the dark ilex-trees made a deep shade, which was broken by innumerable fire-flies, which flashed now low on the ground, discovering the flowers as they slept hushed and closed in night, now high among the branches, and their light was reflected by the shining leaves of ilex and laurel. Viola's wandering eye unconsciously selected one and followed it as it flew, and ever and anon cast aside its veil of darkness and shed a wide pallor around its own form. At length it nestled itself in a bower of green leaves formed by a clump of united laurels and myrtles; and there it stayed, flashing its beautiful light, which, coming from

among the boughs, seemed as if the brightest star of the heavens had wandered from its course, and, trembling at its temerity, sat panting on its earthly perch. Ludovico sat near the laurel—Viola saw him—her breath came quick—she spoke not—but stepped lightly to him—and looked with such mazed ecstasy of thought that she felt, nay, almost heard, her heart beat with her emotion. At length she spoke—she uttered his name, and he looked up on her gentle face, her beaming eyes and her sylph-like form bent over him. He forgot his fears, and his hopes were soon confirmed. For the first time he pressed the trembling lips of Viola, and then tore himself away to think with rapture and wonder on all that had taken place.

Ludovico ever acted with energy and promptness. He returned only to plan with Viola when they might be united. A small chapel in the Apennines, sequestered and unknown, was selected; a priest was easily procured from a neighboring convent and easily bribed to silence. Ludovico led back his bride to the cottage in the forest. There she continued to reside; for worlds he would not have had her change her habitation; all his wealth was expended in decorating it; yet his all only sufficed to render it tolerable. But they were happy. The small circlet of earth's expanse that held in his Viola was the universe to her husband. His heart and imagination widened and filled it until it encompassed all of beautiful, and was inhabited by all of excellent, this world contains. She sang to him; he listened, and the notes built around him a magic bower of delight. He trod the soil of paradise, and its winds fed his mind to intoxication. The inhabitants of Mondolfo could not recognize the haughty, resentful Ludovico in the benign and gentle husband of Viola. His father's taunts were unheeded, for he did not hear them. He no longer trod the earth, but, angel-like, sustained by the wings of love, skimmed over it, so that he felt not its inequalities nor was touched by its rude obstacles. And Viola, with deep gratitude and passionate tenderness, repaid his love. She thought of him only, lived for him, and with unwearied attention kept alive in his mind the first dream of passion.

Thus nearly two years passed, and a lovely child appeared to bind the lovers with

closer ties, and to fill their humble roof with smiles and joy.

Ludovico seldom went to Mondolfo; and his father, continuing his ancient policy, and glad that in his attachment to a peasant-girl he had relieved his mind from the fear of brilliant connections and able friends, even dispensed with his attendance when he visited Naples. Fernando did not suspect that his son had married his low-born favorite; if he had, his aversion for him would not have withheld him from resisting so degrading an alliance; and, while his blood flowed in Ludovico's veins, he would never have avowed offspring who were contaminated by a peasant's less highly-sprung tide.

Ludovico had nearly completely his twentieth year when his elder brother died. Prince Mondolfo at that time spent four months at Naples, endeavoring to bring to a conclusion a treaty of marriage he had entered into between his heir and the daughter of a noble Neapolitan house, when this death overthrew his hopes, and he retired in grief and mourning to his castle. A few weeks of sorrow and reason restored him to himself. He had loved even this favored eldest son more as the heir of his name and fortune than as his child; and the web destroyed that he had woven for him, he quickly began another.

Ludovico was summoned to his father's presence. Old habit yet rendered such a summons momentous; but the youth, with a proud smile, threw off these boyish cares, and stood with a gentle dignity before his altered parent.

"Ludovico," said the Prince, "four years ago you refused to take a priest's vows, and then you excited my utmost resentment; now I thank you for that resistance."

A slight feeling of suspicion crossed Ludovico's mind that his father was about to cajole him for some evil purpose. Two years before he would have acted on such a thought, but the habit of happiness made him unsuspicious. He bent his head gently.

"Ludovico," continued his father, while pride and a wish to conciliate disturbed his mind and even his countenance, "my son, I have used you hardly; but that time is

now past."

Ludovico gently replied:

"My father, I did not deserve your ill-treatment; I hope I shall merit your kindness when I know—"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Fernando, uneasily, "you do not understand—you desire to know why—in short, you, Ludovico, are now all my hope—Olympio is dead—the house of Mondolfo has no support but you—"

"Pardon me," replied the youth. "Mondolfo is in no danger; you, my lord, are fully able to support and even to augment its present dignity."

"You do not understand. Mondolfo has no support but you. I am old, I feel my age, and these gray hairs announce it to me too glaringly. There is no collateral branch, and my hope must rest in your children—"

"My children, my lord!" replied Ludovico. "I have only one; and if the poor little boy—"

"What folly is this?" cried Fernando, impatiently. "I speak of your marriage and not—"

"My lord, my wife is ever ready to pay her duteous respects to you—"

"Your wife, Ludovico! But you speak without thought. How? Who?"

"The violet-girl, my lord."

A tempest had crossed the countenance of Fernando. That his son, unknown to him, should have made an unworthy alliance, convulsed every fiber of his frame, and the lowering of his brows and his impatient gesture told the intolerable anguish of such a thought. The last words of Ludovico restored him. It was not his wife that he thus named—he felt assured that it was not. He smiled somewhat gloomily, still it was a smile of satisfaction.

"Yes," he replied, "I understand; but you task my patience—you should not trifle

with such a subject or with me. I talk of your marriage. Now that Olympio is dead, and you are, in his place, heir of Mondolfo, you may, in his stead, conclude the advantageous, nay, even princely, alliance I was forming for him."

Ludovico replied with earnestness:

"You are pleased to misunderstand me. I am already married. Two years ago, while I was still the despised, insulted Ludovico, I formed this connection, and it will be my pride to show the world how, in all but birth, my peasant-wife is able to follow the duties of her distinguished situation."

Fernando was accustomed to command himself. He felt as if stabbed by a poniard; but he paused till calm and voice returned, and then he said:

"You have a child?"

"An heir, my lord," replied Ludovico, smiling—for his father's mildness deceived him—"a lovely, healthy boy."

"They live near here?"

"I can bring them to Mondolfo in an hour's space. Their cottage is in the forest, about a quarter of a mile east of the convent of Santa Chiara."

"Enough, Ludovico; you have communicated strange tidings, and I must consider of them. I will see you again this evening."

Ludovico bowed and disappeared. He hastened to his cottage, and related all that he remembered or understood of this scene, and bade Viola prepare to come to the castle at an instant's notice. Viola trembled; it struck her that all was not so fair as Ludovico represented; but she hid her fears, and even smiled as her husband with a kiss hailed his boy as heir of Mondolfo.

Fernando had commanded both look and voice while his son was within hearing. He had gone to the window of his chamber, and stood steadily gazing on the drawbridge until Ludovico crossed it and disappeared. Then, unrestrained, he strode up and

down the apartment, while the roof rang with his impetuous tread. He uttered cries and curses, and struck his head with his clenched fist. It was long ere he could think—he felt only, and feeling was torture. The tempest at length subsided, and he threw himself in his chair. His contracted brows and frequently-convulsed lips showed how entirely he was absorbed in consideration. All at first was one frightful whirl; by degrees, the motion was appeased; his thoughts flowed with greater calmness; they subsided into one channel whose course he warily traced until he thought that he saw the result.

Hours passed during this contemplation. When he arose from his chair, as one who had slept and dreamed uneasily, his brows became by degrees smooth; he stretched out his arm, and, spreading his hand, cried:

"So it is! and I have vanquished him!"

Evening came, and Ludovico was announced. Fernando feared his son. He had ever dreaded his determined and fearless mode of action. He dreaded to encounter the boy's passions with his own, and felt in the clash that his was not the master-passion. So, subduing all of hate, revenge, and wrath, he received him with a smile. Ludovico smiled also; yet there was no similarity in their look: one was a smile of frankness, joy, and affection—the other the veiled grimace of smothered malice. Fernando said:

"My son, you have entered lightly into a marriage as if it were a child's game, but, where principalities and noble blood are at stake, the loss or gain is too momentous to be trifled with. Silence, Ludovico! Listen to me, I entreat. You have made a strange marriage with a peasant, which, though I may acknowledge, I cannot approve, which must be displeasing to your sovereign, and derogatory to all who claim alliance with the house of Mondolfo."

Cold dew stood on the forehead of Fernando as he spoke; he paused, recovered his self-command, and continued:

"It will be difficult to reconcile these discordant interests, and a moment of rashness might cause us to lose our station, fortune, everything! Your interests are in my hands. I will be careful of them. I trust, before the expiration of a very few months, the future Princess Mondolfo will be received at the court of Naples with due honor and respect. But you must leave it to me. You must not move in the affair. You must promise that you will not, until I permit, mention your marriage to any one, or acknowledge it if you are taxed with it."

Ludovico, after a moment's hesitation, replied:

"I promise that, for the space of six months, I will not mention my marriage to any one. I will not be guilty of falsehood, but for that time I will not affirm it or bring it forward in any manner so as to annoy you."

Fernando again paused; but prudence conquered, and he said no more. He entered on other topics with his son; they supped together, and the mind of Ludovico, now attuned to affection, received all the marks of his father's awakening love with gratitude and joy. His father thought that he held him in his toils, and was ready to sweeten the bitterness of his intended draft by previous kindness.

A week passed thus in calm. Ludovico and Viola were perfectly happy. Ludovico only wished to withdraw his wife from obscurity from that sensation of honest pride which makes us desire to declare to the whole world the excellence of a beloved object. Viola shrank from such an exhibition; she loved her humble cottage—humble still though adorned with all that taste and love could bestow on it. The trees bent over its low roof and shaded its windows, which were filled with flowering shrubs; its floor shone with marble, and vases of antique shape and exquisite beauty stood in the niches of the room. Every part was consecrated by the memory of their first meeting and their loves—the walks in snow and violets; the forest of ilex with its underwood of myrtle and its population of fire-flies; the birds; the wild and shy animals that sometimes came in sight, and, seen, retreated; the

changes of the seasons, of the hues of nature influenced by them; the alterations of the sky; the walk of the moon; and the moving of the stars—all were dear, known, and commented on by this pair, who saw the love their own hearts felt reflected in the whole scene around, and in their child, their noisy but speechless companion, whose smiles won hopes, and whose bright form seemed as if sent from heaven to reward their constant affection.

A week passed, and Fernando and Ludovico were riding together, when the Prince said:

"Tomorrow, early, my son, you must go to Naples. It is time that you should show yourself there as my heir, and the best representative of a princely house. The sooner you do this the quicker will arrive the period for which, no doubt, you long, when the unknown Princess Mondolfo will be acknowledged by all. I cannot accompany you. In fact, circumstances which you may guess make me desire that you should appear at first without me. You will be distinguished by your sovereign, courted by all, and you will remember your promise as the best means of accomplishing your object. In a very few days I will join you."

Ludovico readily assented to this arrangement, and went the same evening to take leave of Viola. She was seated beneath the laurel tree where first they had made their mutual vows; her child was in her arms, gazing with wonder and laughter on the light of the flies. Two years had passed. It was summer again, and as the beams from their eyes met and mingled each drank in the joyous certainty that they were still as dear to one another as when he, weeping from intense emotion, sat under that tree. He told her of his visit to Naples which his father had settled for him, and a cloud passed over her countenance, but she dismissed it. She would not fear; yet again and again a thrilling sense of coming evil made her heart beat, and each time was resisted with greater difficulty. As night came on, she carried the sleeping child into the cottage, and placed him on his bed, and then walked up and down the

pathway of the forest with Ludovico until the moment of his departure should arrive, for the heat of the weather rendered it necessary that he should travel by night. Again the fear of danger crossed her, and again she with a smile shook off the thought; but, when he turned to give her his parting embrace, it returned with full force on her. Weeping bitterly, she clung to him, and entreated him not to go. Startled by her earnestness, he eagerly sought an explanation, but the only explanation she could give excited a gentle smile as he caressed and bade her to be calm; and then, pointing to the crescent moon that gleamed through the trees and checkered the ground with their moving shades, he told her he would be with her ere its full, and with one more embrace left her weeping. And thus it is a strange prophecy often creeps about, and the spirit of Cassandra inhabits many a hapless human heart, and utters from many lips unheeded forebodings of evils that are to be: the hearers heed them not—the speaker hardly gives them credit—the evil comes which, if it could have been avoided, no Cassandra could have foretold, for if that spirit were not a sure harbinger so would it not exist; nor would these half revealings have place if the to come did not fulfill and make out the sketch.

Viola beheld him depart with hopeless sorrow, and then turned to console herself beside the couch of her child. Yet, gazing on him, her fears came thicker; and in a transport of terror she rushed from the cottage, ran along the pathway, calling on Ludovico's name, and sometimes listening if she might hear the tread of his horse, and then again shrieking aloud for him to return. But he was far out of hearing, and she returned again to her cot, and, lying down beside her child, clasping his little hand in hers, at length slept peacefully.

Her sleep was light and short. She arose before the sun, and hardly had he begun to cast long shadows on the ground when, attiring herself in her veil, she was about to go with the infant to the neighboring chapel of Santa Chiara, when she heard the trampling of horses come up the pathway; her heart beat quick, and still quicker when she saw a stranger enter the cottage. His form was commanding, and age,

which had grizzled his hair, had not tempered the fire of his eye nor marred the majesty of his carriage; but every lineament was impressed by pride and even cruelty. Self-will and scorn were even more apparent. He was somewhat like what Ludovico had been, and so like what he then was that Viola did not doubt that his father stood before her. She tried to collect her courage, but the surprise, his haughty mien, and, above all, the sound of many horses, and the voices of men who had remained outside the cottage, so disturbed and distracted her that her heart for a moment failed her, and she leaned trembling and ashy white against the wall, straining her child to her heart with convulsive energy. Fernando spoke:

"You are Viola Arnaldi, and you call yourself, I believe, the wife of Ludovico Mondolfo?"

"I am so"—her lips formed themselves to these words, but the sound died away.

Fernando continued:

"I am Prince Mondolfo, father of the rash boy who has entered into this illegal and foolish contract. When I heard of it my plan was easily formed, and I am now about to put it into execution. I could easily have done so without coming to you, without enduring the scene which, I suppose, I shall endure; but benevolence has prompted me to the line of conduct I adopt, and I hope that I shall not repent it."

Fernando paused; Viola had heard little of what he had said. She was employed in collecting her scattered spirits, in bidding her heart be still, and arming herself with the pride and courage of innocence and helplessness. Every word he spoke was thus of use to her, as it gave her time to recollect herself. She only bowed her head as he paused, and he continued:

"While Ludovico was a younger son, and did not seek to obtrude his misalliance into notice, I was content that he should enjoy what he termed happiness unmolested; but circumstances have changed. He has become the heir of Mondolfo, and must support that family and title by a suitable marriage. Your dream has passed. I mean you no

ill. You will be conducted hence with your child, placed on board a vessel, and taken to a town in Spain. You will receive a yearly stipend, and, as long as you seek no communication with Ludovico, or endeavor to leave the asylum provided for you, you are safe; but the slightest movement, the merest yearning for a station you may never fill, shall draw upon you and that boy the vengeance of one whose menaces are but the uplifted arm—the blow quickly follows!"

The excess of danger that threatened the unprotected Viola gave her courage. She replied:

"I am alone and feeble, you are strong, and have ruffians waiting on you to execute such crimes as your imagination suggests. I care not for Mondolfo, nor the title, nor the possession, but I will never, oh! never, never! renounce my Ludovico—never do aught to derogate from our plighted faith. Torn from him, I will seek him, though it be barefoot and a-hungered, through the wide world. He is mine by that love he has been pleased to conceive for me; I am his by the sentiment of devotion and eternal attachment that now animates my voice. Tear us asunder, yet we shall meet again, and, unless you put the grave between us, you cannot separate us."

Fernando smiled in scorn.

"And that boy," he said, pointing to die infant, "will you lead him, innocent lamb, a sacrifice to the altar of your love, and plant the knife yourself in the victim's heart?"

Again the lips of Viola became pale as she clasped her boy and exclaimed, in almost inarticulate accents:

"There is a God in heaven!"

Fernando left the cottage, and it was soon filled by men, one of whom threw a cloak over Viola and her boy, and, dragging them from the cottage, placed them in a kind of litter, and the cavalcade proceeded silently. Viola had uttered one shriek when she beheld her enemies, but, knowing their power and her own impotence, she stifled all further cries. When in the litter she strove in vain to disengage herself from the cloak

that enveloped her, and then tried to hush her child, who, frightened at his strange situation, uttered piercing cries. At length he slept; and Viola, darkling and fearful, with nothing to sustain her spirits or hopes, felt her courage vanish. She wept long with despair and misery. She thought of Ludovico and what his grief would be, and her tears were redoubled. There was no hope, for her enemy was relentless, her child torn from her, a cloister her prison. Such were the images constantly before her. They subdued her courage, and filled her with terror and dismay.

The cavalcade entered the town of Salerno, and the roar of the sea announced to poor Viola that they were on its shores.

"O bitter waves!" she cried, "my tears are as bitter as ye, and they will soon mingle!"

Her conductors now entered a building. It was a watch-tower at some distance from the town, on the sea-beach. They lifted Viola from the litter and led her to one of the dreary apartments of the tower. The window, which was not far from the ground, was grated with iron; it bore the appearance of a guardroom. The chief of her conductors addressed her, courteously asked her to excuse the rough lodging; the wind was contrary, he said, but change was expected, and the next day he hoped they would be able to embark. He pointed to the destined vessel in the offing. Viola, excited to hope by his mildness, began to entreat his compassion, but he immediately left her. Soon after another man brought in food, with a flask of wine and a jug of water. He also retired; her massive door was locked, the sound of retreating footsteps died away.

Viola did not despair; she felt, however, that it would need all her courage to extricate herself from her prison. She ate a part of the food which had been provided, drank some water, and then, a little refreshed, she spread the cloak her conductors had left on the floor, placed her child on it to play, and then stationed herself at the window to see if any one might pass whom she might address, and, if he were not able to assist her in any other way, he might at least bear a message to

Ludovico, that her fate might not be veiled in the fearful mystery that threatened it; but probably the way past her window was guarded, for no one drew near. As she looked, however, and once advanced her head to gaze more earnestly, it struck her that her person would pass between the iron grates of her window, which was not high from the ground. The cloak, fastened to one of the stanchions, promised a safe descent. She did not dare make the essay; nay, she was so fearful that she might be watched, and that, if she were seen near the window, her jailers might be struck with the same idea, that she retreated to the farther end of the room, and sat looking at the bars with fluctuating hope and fear, that now dyed her cheeks with crimson, and again made them pale as when Ludovico had first seen her.

Her boy passed his time in alternate play and sleep. The ocean still roared, and the dark clouds brought up by the sirocco blackened the sky and hastened the coming evening. Hour after hour passed; she, heard no clock; there was no sun to mark the time, but by degrees the room grew dark, and at last the Ave Maria tolled, heard by fits between the howling of the winds and the dashing of the waves. She knelt, and put up a fervent prayer to the Madonna, protector of innocence—prayer for herself and her boy—no less innocent than the Mother and Divine Child, to whom she made her orisons. Still she paused. Drawing near to the window, she listened for the sound of any human being: that sound, faint and intermittent, died away, and with darkness came rain that poured in torrents, accompanied by thunder and lightning that drove every creature to shelter. Viola shuddered. Could she expose her child during such a night? Yet again she gathered courage. It only made her meditate on some plan by which she might get the cloak as a shelter for her boy after it had served for their descent. She tried the bars, and found that, with some difficulty, she could pass, and, gazing downward from the outside, a flash of lightning revealed the ground not far below. Again she commended herself to divine protection; again she called upon and blessed her Ludovico; and then, not fearless but determined, she began her operations. She fastened the cloak by means of her long veil, which, hanging to the

ground, was tied by a slip-knot, and gave way when pulled. She took her child in her arms, and, having got without the bars, bound him with the sash to her waist, and then, without accident, she reached the ground. Having then secured the cloak, and enveloped herself and her child in its dark and ample folds, she paused breathlessly to listen. Nature was awake with its loudest voice—the sea roared—and the incessant flashes of lightning that discovered that solitude around her were followed by such deafening peals as almost made her fear. She crossed the field, and kept the sight of the white sea-foam to her right hand, knowing that she thus proceeded in an opposite direction from Mondolfo. She walked as fast as her burden permitted her, keeping the beaten road, for the darkness made her fear to deviate. The rain ceased, and she walked on, until, her limbs falling under her, she was fain to rest, and refresh herself with the bread she had brought with her from the prison. Action and success had inspired her with unusual energy. She would not fear—she believed herself free and secure. She wept, but it was the overflowing emotion that found no other expression. She doubted not that she should rejoin Ludovico. Seated thus in the dark night—having for hours been the sport of the elements, which now for an instant paused in their fury—seated on a stone by the roadside—a wide, dreary, unknown country about her—her helpless child in her arms—herself having just finished eating the only food she possessed—she felt triumph, and joy, and love, descend into her heart, prophetic of future reunion with her beloved.

It was summer, and the air consequently warm. Her cloak had protected her from the wet, so her limbs were free and unnumbed. At the first ray of dawn she arose, and at the nearest pathway she struck out of the road, and took her course nearer the bordering Apennines. From Salerno as far south as the eye could reach, a low plain stretched itself along the seaside, and the hills at about the distance of ten miles bound it in. These mountains are high and singularly beautiful in their shape; their crags point to heaven and streams flow down their sides and water the plain below. After several hours' walking, Viola reached a pine forest, which descended from the

heights and stretched itself in the plain. She sought its friendly shelter with joy, and, penetrating its depths until she saw trees only on all sides of her, she again reposed. The sirocco had been dissipated by the thunderstorm, and the sun, vanquishing the clouds that at first veiled its splendor, glowed forth in the clear majesty of noon. Southern born, Viola did not fear the heat. She collected pine nuts, she contrived to make a fire, and ate them with appetite; and then, seeking a covert, she lay down and slept, her boy in her arms, thanking Heaven and the Virgin for her escape. When she awoke, the triumph of her heart somewhat died away. She felt the solitude, she felt her helplessness, she feared pursuers, yet she dashed away the tears, and then reflecting that she was too near Salerno—the sun being now at the sea's verge—she arose and pursued her way through the intricacies of the wood. She got to the edge of it so far as to be able to direct her steps by the neighboring sea. Torrents intercepted her path, and one rapid river threatened to impede it altogether; but, going somewhat lower down, she found a bridge; and then, approaching still nearer to the sea, she passed through a wide and desolate kind of pasture-country, which seemed to afford neither shelter nor sustenance to any human being. Night closed in, and she was fearful to pursue her way, but, seeing some buildings dimly in the distance, she directed her steps thither, hoping to discover a hamlet where she might get shelter and such assistance as would enable her to retrace her steps and reach Naples without being discovered by her powerful enemy. She kept these high buildings before her, which appeared like vast cathedrals, but that they were untopped by any dome or spire; and she wondered much what they could be, when suddenly they disappeared. She would have thought some rising ground had intercepted them, but all before her was plain. She paused, and at length resolved to wait for dawn. All day she had seen no human being; twice or thrice she had heard the bark of a dog, and once the whistle of a shepherd, but she saw no one. Desolation was around her; this, indeed, had lulled her into security at first. Where no men were, there was no danger for her. But at length the strange solitude became

painful—she longed to see a cottage, or to find some peasant, however uncouth, who might answer her inquiries and provide for her wants. She had viewed with surprise the buildings which had been as beacons to her. She did not wish to enter a large town, and she wondered how one could exist in such a desert; but she had left the wood far behind her, and required food. Night passed—balmy and sweet night—the breezes fanned her, the glowing atmosphere encompassed her, the fire-flies flitted round her, bats wheeled about in the air, and the heavy-winged owl hooped anigh, while the beetle's constant hum filled the air. She lay on the ground, her babe pillowed on her arm, looking upon the starry heavens. Many thoughts crowded upon her: the thought of Ludovico, of her reunion with him, of joy after sorrow; and she forgot that she was alone, half-famished, encompassed by enemies in a desert plain of Calabria—she slept.

She awoke not until the sun had risen high—it had risen above the temples of Pæstum, and the columns threw short shadows on the ground. They were near her, unseen during night, and were now revealed as the edifices that had attracted her the evening before. They stood on a rugged plain, despoiled of all roof, their columns and cornices encompassing a space of high and weed-grown grass; the deep-blue sky canopied them and filled them with light and cheerfulness. Viola looked on them with wonder and reverence; they were temples to some god who still seemed to deify them with his presence; he clothed them still with beauty, and what was called their ruin might, in its picturesque wildness and sublime loneliness, be more adapted to his nature than when, roofed and gilded, they stood in pristine strength; and the silent worship of air and happy animals might be more suited to him than the concourse of the busy and heartless. The most benevolent of spirit-gods seemed to inhabit that desert, weed-grown area; the spirit of beauty flitted between those columns embrowned by time, painted with strange color, and raised a genial atmosphere on the deserted altar. Awe and devotion filled the heart of lonely Viola; she raised her eyes and heart to heaven in thanksgiving and prayer—not that her lips

formed words, or her thoughts suggested connected sentences, but the feeling of worship and gratitude animated her; and, as the sunlight streamed through the succession of columns, so—did joy, dove-shaped, fall on and illumine her soul.

With such devotion as seldom before she had visited a saint-dedicated church, she ascended the broken and rude steps of the larger temple, and entered the plot that it inclosed. An inner circuit of smaller columns formed a smaller area, which she entered, and, sitting on a huge fragment of the broken cornice that had fallen to the ground, she silently waited as if for some oracle to visit her sense and guide her.

Thus sitting, she heard the near bark of a dog, followed by the bleating of sheep, and she saw a little flock spread itself in the field adjoining the farther temple. They were shepherded by a girl clothed in rags, but the season required little covering; and these poor people, moneyless, possessing only what their soil gives them, are in the articles of clothing poor even to nakedness. In inclement weather they wrap rudely-formed clothes of undressed sheepskin around them—during the heats of summer they do little more than throw aside these useless garments. The shepherd-girl was probably about fifteen years of age; a large black straw hat shaded her head from the intense rays of the sun; her feet and legs were bare; and her petticoat, tucked up, Diana-like, above one knee, gave a picturesque appearance to her rags, which, bound at her waist by a girdle, bore some resemblance to the costume of a Greek maiden. Rags have a costume of their own, as fine in their way, in their contrast of rich colors and the uncouth boldness of their drapery, as kingly robes. Viola approached the shepherdess and quietly entered into conversation with her; without making any appeal to her charity or feelings, she asked the name of the place where she was, and her boy, awake and joyous, soon attracted attention. The shepherd-girl was pretty, and, above all, good-natured; she caressed the child, seemed delighted to have found a companion for her solitude, and, when Viola said that she was hungry, unloaded her scrip of roasted pine nuts, boiled chestnuts, and coarse bread. Viola ate with joy and gratitude. They remained together all day; the

sun went down, the glowing light of its setting faded, and the shepherdess would have taken Viola home with her. But she dreaded a human dwelling, still fearing that, wherever there appeared a possibility of shelter, there her pursuers would seek her. She gave a few small silver-pieces, part of what she had about her when seized, to her new friend, and, bidding her bring sufficient food for the next day, entreated her not to mention her adventure to any one. The girl promised, and, with the assistance of her dog, drove the flock toward their fold. Viola passed the night within the area of the larger temple.

Not doubting the success of his plan, on the very evening that followed its execution, Prince Mondolfo had gone to Naples. He found his son at the Mondolfo Palace. Despising the state of a court, and careless of the gaieties around him, Ludovico longed to return to the cottage of Viola. So, after the expiration of two days, he told his father that he should ride over to Mondolfo, and return the following morning. Fernando did not oppose him, but, two hours after his departure, followed him, and arrived at the castle just after Ludovico, leaving his attendants there, quitted it to proceed alone to his cottage. The first person Prince Mondolfo saw was the chief of the company who had had the charge of Viola. His story was soon told: the unfavorable wind, the imprisonment in a room barricaded with the utmost strength, her incomprehensible escape, and the vain efforts that had subsequently been made to find her. Fernando listened as if in a dream; convinced of the truth, he saw no clue to guide him—no hope of recovering possession of his prisoner. He foamed with rage, then endeavored to suppress as useless his towering passion. He overwhelmed the bearer of the news with execrations; sent out parties of men in pursuit in all directions, promising every reward, and urging the utmost secrecy, and then, left alone, paced his chamber in fury and dismay. His solitude was of no long duration. Ludovico burst into his room, his countenance lighted up with rage.

"Murderer!" he cried, "where is my Viola?"

Fernando remained speechless.

"Answer!" said Ludovico. "Speak with those lips that pronounced her death-sentence—or raise against me that hand from which her blood is scarcely washed—Oh, my Viola! thou and my angel-child, descend with all thy sweetness into my heart, that this hand write not parricide on my brow!"

Fernando attempted to speak.

"No!" shrieked the miserable Ludovico; "I will not listen to her murderer. Yet—is she dead? I kneel—I call you father—I appeal to that savage heart—I take in peace that hand that often struck me, and now has dealt the death-blow—oh, tell me, does she yet live?"

Fernando seized on this interval of calm to relate his story. He told the simple truth; but could such a tale gain belief? It awakened the wildest rage in poor Ludovico's heart. He doubted not that Viola had been murdered; and, after every expression of despair and hatred, he bade his father seek his heir among the clods of the earth, for that such he should soon become, and rushed from his presence.

He wandered to the cottage, he searched the country round, he heard the tale of those who had witnessed any part of the carrying off of his Viola. He went to Salerno. He heard the tale there told with the most determined incredulity. It was the tale, he doubted not, that his father forged to free himself from accusation, and to throw an impenetrable veil over the destruction of Viola. His quick imagination made out for itself the scene of her death. The very house in which she had been confined had at the extremity of it a tower jutting out over the sea; a river flowed at its base, making its confluence with the ocean deep and dark. He was convinced that the fatal scene had been acted there. He mounted the tower; the higher room was windowless, the iron grates of the windows had for some cause been recently taken out. He was persuaded that Viola and her child had been thrown from that window into the deep and gurgling waters below.

He resolved to die! In those days of simple Catholic faith, suicide was contemplated with horror. But there were other means almost as sure. He would go a pilgrim to the Holy Land, and fight and die beneath the walls of Jerusalem. Rash and energetic, his purpose was no sooner formed than he hastened to put it in execution. He procured a pilgrim's weeds at Salerno, and at midnight, advising none of his intentions, he left that city, and proceeded southward. Alternate rage and grief swelled his heart. Rage at length died away. She whose murderer he execrated was an angel in heaven, looking down on him, and he in the Holy Land would win his right to join her. Tender grief dimmed his eyes. The world's great theater closed before him—of all its trappings his pilgrim's cloak was alone gorgeous, his pilgrim's staff the only scepter—they were the symbols and signs of the power he possessed beyond the earth, and the pledges of his union with Viola. He bent his steps toward Brundusium. He walked on fast, as if he grudged all space and time that lay between him and his goal. Dawn awakened the earth and he proceeded on his way. The sun of noon darted its ray upon him, but his march was uninterrupted. He entered a pine wood, and, following the track of flocks, he heard the murmurs of a fountain. Oppressed with thirst, he hastened toward it. The water welled up from the ground and filled a natural basin; flowers grew on its banks and looked on the waters unreflected, for the stream paused not, but whirled round and round, spending its superabundance in a small rivulet that, dancing over stones and glancing in the sun, went on its way to its eternity—the sea. The trees had retreated from the mountain, and formed a circle about it; the grass was green and fresh, starred with summer flowers. At one extremity was a silent pool that formed a strange contrast with the fountain that, ever in motion, showed no shape, and reflected only the color of the objects around it. The pool reflected the scene with greater distinctness and beauty than its real existence. The trees stood distinct, the ambient air between, all grouped and pictured by the hand of a divine artist. Ludovico drank from the fount, and then approached the pool. He looked with half wonder on the scene depicted there. A bird

now flitted across in the air, and its form, feathers, and motion, were shown in the waters. An ass emerged from among the trees, where in vain it sought herbage, and came to grass near these waters; Ludovico saw it depicted therein, and then looked on the living animal, almost appearing less real, less living, than its semblance in the stream. Under the trees from which the ass had come lay someone on the ground, enveloped in a mantle, sleeping. Ludovico looked carelessly—he hardly at first knew why his curiosity was roused; then an eager thought, which he deemed madness, yet resolved to gratify, carried him forward. Rapidly he approached the sleeper, knelt down, and drew aside the cloak, and saw Viola, her child within her arms, the warm breath issued from her parted lips, her love-beaming eyes hardly veiled by the transparent lids, which soon were lifted up.

Ludovico and Viola, each too happy to feel the earth they trod, returned to their cottage—their cottage dearer than any palace—yet only half believing the excess of their own joy. By turns they wept, and gazed on each other and their child, holding each other's hands as if grasping reality and fearful it would vanish.

Prince Mondolfo heard of their arrival. He had long suffered keenly from the fear of losing his son. The dread of finding himself childless, heirless, had tamed him. He feared the world's censure, his sovereign's displeasure—perhaps worse accusation and punishment. He yielded to fate. Not daring to appear before his intended victim, he sent his confessor to mediate for their forgiveness, and to entreat them to take up their abode at Mondolfo. At first, little credit was given to these offers. They loved their cottage, and had small inclination to risk happiness, liberty, and life, for worthless luxury. The Prince, by patience and perseverance, at length convinced them. Time softened painful recollections; they paid him the duty of children, and cherished and honored him in his old age; while he caressed his lovely grandchild, he did not repine that the violet-girl should be the mother of the heir of Mondolfo.

[1]The posthumous story by Mrs. Shelley has not before appeared in print. It was

found among the unpublished papers of Leigh Hunt, and is authenticated by S.R. Townshend Mayer, Esq., editor of St. James Magazine, London.—ED. JOURNAL.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE HEIR OF MONDOLFO ***

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