

A Young Fir-Wood.

I.
These little firs to-day are things
To clasp into a giant's cap,
Or fans to suit his lady's lap.
From many winters, many springs
Shall cherish them in strength and sap,
Till they be marked upon the map,
A wood for the wind's wanderings.

II.

All seed is in the sower's hands;
And what at first was trained to spread
Its shelter for some single head—
Yes, even such fellowship of wands,
May hide the sunset and the shade
Of its great multitude be laid
Upon the earth and elder sands.
[Dante Gabriel Rossini.]

VIOLA'S REVENGE.

By the Author of "MY LADY'S SECRET," "A
WIFE'S FORTUNES," "THE LADY
OF GORMON LEA," &c.

CHAPTER I.

A shattered stone column, a headless marble Apollo, a fountain which once was fed from a pool high up on yonder hillside, but which ceased to play five hundred years ago. In the shadow of the idle fountain a girl sleeping.

It was very hot up there, although there was a gentle breeze from the cool waters of the bay. It was not an English sky, or an English seascape. Both were intensely, beautifully blue. But he who climbed the narrow winding path and halted by the broken column to wipe his heated brow was an Englishman, every inch of him; English in his breadth of chest and sparseness of flank, and lean, but muscular, length of limb; Anglo-Saxon in the sunny gold of his hair and the colour of his eyes, which were blue as the sky or the shifting waters of the bay; Briton in the mingled energy, audacity, and folly of this climbing excursion, undertaken at an hour when the olive-hued sons and daughters of the soil were taking their siesta.

Eng—how hot it was!
He looked toward the idle fountain, longing for the music of merry waters leaping and plashing in the basin; but he saw only the skirt of a robe and a bare protruding foot, whiter, daintier, of more exquisite symmetry than that of the headless Apollo. A dozen paces, and he got a clear view of the sleeper who dozed in the shade.

An Italian girl, that was evident, with a sweet face, child-like and innocent, regular features delicately chiselled, raven hair, and long eyelashes under beautifully arched brows—a lovely face, in truth, were it not for the sallowness of the complexion,

The young Englishman's eyes rested upon her approvingly, from the crown of her small shapely head, pillowed upon wild flowers and tangled weeds, to the sole of her bare white foot, and he saw no blemish in this Southern maiden. But this was a land of handsome women; her immature beauty interested him less than that which lay in her lap, a branch of purple grapes.

Purple grapes; and he with tongue parched with thirst! No matter what might be the penalty, he must put forth his hand to take and eat. They belonged to a poorly clad Italian damsel and purple grapes were as plentiful as English blackberries in autumn.

The Englishman coolly seated himself beside the sleeper and demolished them one by one until nothing was left but the stalk. Then he took a piece of gold from his pocket, flung it carelessly into the girl's lap, and turned to go; but a stone tripped him up, and he fell, not without noise, over the shattered column, and lay, as he fell, silent and hidden; for the sleeper, aroused, was rubbing her eyes and lifting her little head from the wild flowers and the weeds.

"Per Baccho!" said the girl, in the musical Italian tongue. "Behold a marvel! Surely one of the old gods has descended, and has eaten my grapes and paid me for them in gold! Which would it be, I wonder? When the earth was young, and his exchequer was full, perhaps—for the English had not stolen all his wealth—Jupiter visited Danae in a shower of such pieces as this. Poor old Jupiter, no longer king of gods and man! Perhaps he has sold his chariot, and is reduced to ramble about, feeling hunger and thirst, and paying for his entertainments. For a bunch of grapes, a piece of gold! Verily he pays like a god!"

"Or like one of the English who stole his wealth."

The girl started at the sound, and, with a quick movement, hid that dainty blue-veined foot beneath the skirt of her shabby dress.

Her voice trembled as she replied, but only with the laughter she was endeavouring to suppress.

"Vox et preterea nihil." Yes, surely it is a god!" she said. "But the god speaks Italian with a barbarous English accent. Sir Englishman, come forth!"

"To confess myself a thief?" said the stranger rising.

"Nay; but to acknowledge, like a courteous guest, the hospitality you have received from a daughter of the land."

And again through the girl's musical tones was heard the shaking of laughter suppressed. Her great lustrous eyes, deep-fringed, were bright with welcome, and with a glad pride in the height and strength, the gracious majesty of presence, and the fair Saxon comeliness of this freer-looking visitor; for she, self-styled a daughter of the land, was English also, though her beauty was that of her Italian mother, and had developed thus far under sunny Southern skies.

"And who taught you Latin, little one?" he asked, as he threw himself at her feet upon the wild flowers and the tangled weeds, and forgot the sallowness of her complexion, looking into the deep-fringed eyes and noting how like a row of pearls in a setting of coral were the little teeth he saw between parted lips. He was no longer in haste to go. Here, in the shade of the fountain, he might spend idly and deliciously an hour of his life, its restlessness subdued for a while.

"A father learned and holy, of the monastery yonder," she replied. "He taught me to read the grand old poets who wrote when the earth was young. Of them all, I love Lucretius best."

"Child, you are quite a blue stocking."

Putting his bantering thought into the strange tongue in which they were speaking, he translated literally. Her dark eyes flashed angrily, and were lowered for one instant to make sure that the little bare foot was securely hidden.

"I do not understand—I do not wish to understand," she cried, shaking her lap, so that he coin he had dropped there was thrown

out, and rolled to his feet, where it lay unheeded. "Take your gold and go."

"But," he began, half amused, half dismayed.

"Go," she cried again, enforcing the command with an imperious gesture.

This child-woman of fifteen, whose childhood was revealed in the tender innocence of her sweet face and whose womanhood was disclosed in the precocious development of figure characteristic of the hot south, had suddenly assumed the tone and manner of an outraged queen.

"In my country," said the young Englishman persuasively, "blue-stocking is a name applied to a woman distinguished by unusual learning. I ought to have remembered that an idiomatic expression—"

He did not complete the semi-apology. A sudden change of gesture told him that she had repented her displeasure.

"I am not a blue-stocking," she said adopting, in her penitence, the term which had offended her. "I am only a poor little Italian girl, just able, thanks to the good fathers, to read the books they lend me from their great library, to sing the songs old Spezzio has taught me, and to play upon the organ a few of the tunes he love best."

"She who can read and write, and who has access to a great library, may become the wisest woman in the world."

"But I am lazy—so lazy, you would not believe!"—and a whimsical uplifting of dark elbows gave expression to the words.

"Then you have my hearty sympathy," returned the young man, stretching himself indolently upon the green carpet whereon he lay. "Looking back upon the score of years I have spent in this wicked world, I seem to have been incessantly grinding upon the intellectual treadmill; and I am weary of the toil. Yours is the wiser part, little one, to bask in the sun and slumber in the shade, to play with the children and listen to the old wives' tales, to eat the purple grapes, to drink the red wine, to thrive, almost as the flowers thrive, upon pure air and sunshine, needing in addition only the handful of macaroni that would not, in England, keep life in a beggar's dog. Yours is the poetry of existence, and mine the pose."

"Words—idle words!" said the girl. "Would such poetry content you, even for one week?"

"Frankly, I do not know. I am blissfully content at this instant; but I question whether the pure air and sunshine are alone responsible for my frame of mind. It will last until you leave me, or bid me go once more."

"Would you obey?"

"Yes; unless the command were issued in some spirit of misapprehension."

"Then you may remain until—until you weary of the society of a poor and ignorant girl like me."

"Poverty and ignorance are on relative, ignorant, compared with men I know; and very poor for my station."

"What is your name?"

"Claude Armidale," answered the young man, after an instant's hesitation. "Will you tell me yours?"

"Viola."

The name was very musical in the liquid Italian accent, and the girl looked very beautiful in the slight embarrassment caused by indecision whether or not to reveal a surname which might betray the secret of her nationality. It was excellent fun, she thought, to masquerade as a peasant-girl.

Perhaps there was in her heart a spice of female vanity, which made her regret that the shabby dress she wore was so thoroughly in keeping with the character, and of female pride, which forbade a confession which, by exciting surprise, would call attention to her toilet. Therefore she answered only—

"Viola."

"It is worthy of you," said Lord Claude Armidale—for he too had a motive for concealment.

The tone was low and earnest; the impulsive words were not an idle compliment. Looking into his blue eyes, she read there confirmations strong as proofs of Holy Writ; and for the first time during the interview Viola blushed. It was long before she met his glance again, and in the place of the old fearless frankness had come a new delicious trouble, a strange intense pleasure that was almost pain.

Nevertheless they sat there, talking in gentle murmurs, while at times there were long silent interludes that were more eloquent by far than speech.

What they said to each other, and how they said it—with what tender inflections of the voice, with what glances, burning or shy—who shall tell? But they talked, those two, until the cool night-breeze blew in from the sea, until Viola shivered in the shade, until Lord Armidale remembered that "Nature abhors a vacuum," and that he had not yet dined. Then they clasped hands and parted, with formal gravity, but with a mutual promise that on the morrow they would meet again.

CHAPTER II.

"To-morrow night, when the moon shall have risen." That was the last appointment made by Claude, Lord Armidale, and Viola. One of them was sitting at the foot of the headless Apollo keeping it.

She might have been taken for a statue herself, so still was she, with the quietude of perfect happiness.

It seemed a long fifteen minutes since she gazed like a ghost round the idle fountain to keep tryst in the moonlight—a long fifteen minutes! And in all that time she had stirred but once. Then she had thrown out her arms towards the path by which he would come, and had whispered something to the zephyr that was toying with the hair upon her brow.

It was wondrously calm up there, the silence intensified, rather than broken, by an occasional murmur from the village or the barking of a herdsman's dog.

Below, the moonlight shimmered upon the waters of the bay, and a white-sailed felucca looked like a painted ship upon a painted sea. Above, golden lights, dimmed by the outer splendour, were twinkling in the windows of the monastery. The silent watcher, sitting at the foot of the Apollo, drinking in the beauty of her surroundings, wondered whether Heaven itself could be more fair.

The place was Heaven to her. Her love was holy—all the guilelessness of her young soul was in it, as well as all the strength. There was passion too; but as yet the passion had not been stirred, as yet hers was an early phase of the religion of love—a phase

of blind, speechless adoration—a silent rapture.

Hark! A plunging stone kicked from its place in the winding upward path—a quick, firm step—an emerging figure, tall, graceful, yet majestic withal.

"Oh, Claude, Claude, my love!"

There was no prudish reticence about this Italian maid. The first shy sweet sense of shame no longer availed to withhold her from his embrace. Her arms were thrown about his neck, her head was pillowed upon his breast. Every line of her pale eloquent features was aglow with love, but likewise with saintly stainless purity; and, as he looked upon her and thought of the proposal he was about to force his lips to utter, he was ashamed.

"You are late, my Claude?"

"As befits the bearer of bad news, darling. I am summoned to England in hot haste. To-morrow morning, at day-break, I must go."

There was a wail of dismay, an almost painful tightening of clinging arms.

"But you will return?" she cried.

"Dearest, I do not know."

"Claude, take me with you."

She had not meant that such a prayer should come from her; but in that supreme moment she had no thought of maidenly reserve. That belonged to the time of her security, to the moments when, waiting in the stillness of the moonlight, she wondered in what words this English gentleman, so young, but of so grand a presence, would ask her to become his wife. She had pictured his delight when she should answer him in his own tongue with the revelation that she was no Italian peasant girl, but English and well-born, though poor.

Such had been the musings which had kept her patient under the delay; but she forgot them now.

"Claude, take me with you!" she cried; and he, knowing that he had intended to exert all his influence, all his powers of persuasion, to this end, was so astounded at the simplification of anticipated difficulty that he fenced with the demand.

"Do you love me well enough, little one?"

She did not answer the needless question in words, but she nestled closer, as though that were ample response.

"Presently," she said, "you shall come with me to our cottage on the hill-side yonder, and I will tell my father how we love one another, and he will ask him to let you take me away. He will be astonished at first, and a little angry perhaps; but I always get my own way in the end. Early in the morning the good fathers of the monastery will make us man and wife; then I will follow you, if need be, to the end of the world, Claude, my beloved."

"Man and wife"—he almost groaned at the words. "I will follow you to the end of the world"—ay, like strolling players or itinerant musicians. He thought of the absurdity of the proposition, pictured his "wife," forsooth, presiding at a dinner-party or holding a reception in a London drawing-room. To the proud spirit of Claude-Lord Armidale, such a *mesalliance* appeared as possible as it would have done to a prince of the blood. And yet his better self felt all the pathos of that declaration—"I will follow you, if need be, to the end of the world, Claude my beloved."

"Viola," he said, "you know me simply as a poor English gentleman. The poverty remains, but I am, in truth, a great English lord."

"Yes," answered the girl simply.

The revelation was not a startling surprise to her; she had one to make shortly of equal force.

He was noble and grand enough to be a prince, she thought; but his confession suggested no disparity of station. Even when she had run bare-footed amongst the courteous Italian peasants, ragged and shabby as they, she had been to them as a king's daughter—a princess in disguise, the excellent, the illustrious one—loved the more dearly for her condescension when she drank of their thin wine and ate their macaroni, but respected not one with the less.

"Our manners and customs forbid that I should marry you," he continued. "You would not be happy in discharging the duties which would devolve upon you. Nay, to do so would be impossible; for such a task requires a special education amongst surroundings other than these, dear child. Come with me as my companion, but not as my wife."

He found courage to look at her as he spoke the words, and he knew that she was only beginning to comprehend.

That she could not be his wife she understood; and the terrible agony, the frozen, dumb despair of her wan features touched him keenly; for he loved her, this Italian peasant-maid, as he never hoped to love a woman of his own caste. He forgot all about dinner-parties and drawing-rooms, and what society would say of its new acquisition if she became Lady Armidale.

At that moment he would have been more than content to make her his wife had the obstacles been such considerations alone. But there were some things he could not forget—the mortgages on his broad acres, to wit—the load of debt which grew heavier every year—the imperative necessity that he should marry a woman rich enough to redeem the acres his fathers had loved.

"I am an English lord," he repeated, "and I have great estates; but they are so burdened with debt that, when the yearly charges have been paid, the merest pittance is left—a bare thousand pounds a year, not more. When I marry, it must be some rich woman who can free them from all encumbrance."

What did he mean? The girl was wondering. What did he mean with his talk of poverty and of a "pittance" of a thousand a year? Why, her father had but a hundred pounds per annum, which came to him in quarterly instalments from beyond the seas, and he was accounted rich by the villagers, and was respected for his wealth as well as for his rank! Her thoughts were a horrible whirl and confusion of ideas; but in the chaos two cruel truths began to take shape and consistency. He had been befooling her all this time by his profession of love; he was trying to befool her now by his profession of poverty.

"But for all that, Viola—Viola my darling," he continued, "I cannot give you up. What need of priestly blessing to rivet our marriage vows? Come with me to my own land, where the heavens are not so blue, nor the

earth so fair as in your sunny Italy, but where men love truly and cleave faithfully to those whom they adore. Say that you will not send methither companionless, Viola my beloved!"

She understood now. Light, dazzling and pitiless, had broken in upon her.

He could not quite read the expression of that gray stony face which looked towards him with such steadfastness under the white moon. He was troubled by a presentiment that it augured ill for the success of his solicitations; but, having put his hand to the plough, he could not turn back.

"Our life shall be a dream of delight, Viola; every moment that I can spare from my duties shall be devoted to you. All that belongs to me shall be yours, to the half of my kingdom. You shall have masters for all you care to learn; I will teach you myself as much as I can. But, above all, dear, that magnificent voice of yours shall be trained and developed. So far as I can judge, organs far inferior and beauty much less striking have commanded a fortune in a week upon the English stage. Your future shall be my care; but—"

Her eyes had been upon him all the time—those wonderful lustrous eyes, deep-fringed, burning as though aflame.

He had felt that his pleadings grew weaker and weaker, and at that "but" he stopped.

"Have you finished?" said Viola in English.

"Yes," replied the young nobleman, too astounded at hearing from her lips the accents of his native tongue to remember that there were arguments he had not yet advanced.

"Then go!" said the girl, pointing to the path by which he had ascended. The attitude, the gesture, the intonation were, he thought, simply sublime. In spite of himself he fell back a pace or two ere he could collect his thoughts sufficiently even to commence a protest.

"But, Viola—"

"Never dare to call me by that name again!" she burst forth, with vehemence which told of fierceness repressed. "Go your way, Lord Armidale, without another word, and ask of Heaven the forgiveness that I will never grant. The last week has taught you, I think, how an Italian girl can love; you have yet to learn how she can hate. Her love you know; how day—may be in the long, long future—you shall experience her revenge; meanwhile I would spare you an exhibition of her scorn. Again I bid you go!"

With laggard steps, urged still by that pointing finger, he retreated from her, past the choked-up fountain which had been idle for five hundred years, past the stone column overturned and shattered centuries before.

Where the path began he paused and looked wistfully, but vainly, for some sign of relenting. The next instant she was alone.

Alone, crouching at the foot of the Apollo, with two demons whispering in her ear—the one of love, the other of revenge. Was it possible that it was only a week since the stranger entered into her life? Alone; and she had never known loneliness before!

CHAPTER III.

Without the room, a fair Herefordshire landscape, a section of the Valley of the Whe, and all it so far as eye could reach, from the trim gardens below to the distant hills, the property of one man. Within the room, a faint and earthly smell—a bed whereon the owner lay dying.

It was a chamber of goodly proportions, but uncarpeted and unadorned. No soldier in barracks, or monk in cell, could point to a contrast, in neatness, cleanliness, and general discomfort, between his own sleeping conveniences and those of this wealthy English gentleman. To sleep upon a hard mattress stretched upon a narrow iron bedstead, to emerge from the morning plunge into ice-cold water and shake himself like a dog upon the bare boards of a dressing-room in which, even in the depth of water, no fire was kindled, were in thorough keeping with the stern character and iron resolution of Squire Burgot of Burgot Grange.

No Sybarite was he to complain of crumpled rose-leaves. The sheets of his bed, though white as driven snow, were of coarse texture, and the fire to be observed in the grate was a concession, not to the requirements of illness, but to the prejudices of the nurse. It was the nurse whom Squire Burgot was calling now in a voice husky and broken, and strangely unlike his old trumpet-tones.

"Mrs. Bland," he murmured—"Mrs. Bland!"

From a chair by the fire a silver-haired, red-visaged old gentleman rose, and crossed the room with a step the noiselessness of which must have been acquired by continual practice.

He passed round the mattress, until he could see the patient's face; and he started perceptibly as he noted how ashen was its hue, how pinched and drawn were the features. The sick man's eyes opened; angry recognition lighted up the sunken orbs.

"Oh, you are Mrs. Bland!" he said, with feeble sarcasm. "Why on earth does not the nurse come when she is called?"

"I sent her out the room. What can I do for you, Burgot?"

"Nothing; there never yet was a doctor who did anything but bungle in trying to assist Dame Nature. I will tell you something more for your edification, Preece. Mrs. Bland is here to wait upon me; not to run errands for you."

"She will be back presently."

"Then why, in the name of wonder, do you not hand me some stuff to gargle my throat, or something? A petty doctor, not to see that his patient can hardly speak!"

"Try another dose of your medicine."

"I won't! Faintly I won't! I'll see you in the warmest region on earth before I swallow another drop of your filthy compound? It is my belief—"

"Don't exert yourself quite so much in taking, Burgot."

"It is my belief," continued the sick man, with malicious satisfaction in his own disobedience, "that you are trying to poison me by inches, that you may come into the hundred or two you think I may have left you for acting as my executor. Gloriously sold you will be! But, I tell you what, Preece; I will write you a cheque for five hundred pounds within half an hour if you will help me to dress, and let me walk down-stairs to do it."

A sad smile was the Doctor's only response.

"You will not? A nice confession—pretty pass you have brought me to, after five weeks of bolusing. I will tell you plainly my opinion, Doctor Preece. It is that you are better than a quack, sir—a quack."

Unmistakable was the acrimony of that discourteous speech; but it evoked no retort.

After one keen glance at the other's face, the sick man spoke again; but this time th-anger left his voice, and his utterance was hardly louder than a whisper.

"Preece," he said.

"What is it, old friend?"

"Forty years," said the dying man "we have argued and wrangled and quarrelled; and I liked you all the better because you were the one man in the neighborhood who was not afraid of my rough tongue, and who did not shun the crossing of swords with me in a dispute. Why you liked me Heaven alone knows."

"I saw the gold beneath the iron," was the reply.

"That cannot be it; yet the fact that you liked me remains, I hope and believe. But, Preece, I never said the like to you that I have said to-day without a row; and I think it would have been a subject for a real duel, not a verbal one, had I called you 'quack' before. Am I so ill as that implies, old friend?"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

SUNBEAMS.

A recent issue of the London *Times* had seventy-one columns of advertisements. There are rarely less than sixty from February to August.

A petrified forest has been found in the hills near Calaveras Valley, Alameda County. One silicified trunk which lies exposed is about twenty feet long and seven feet in circumference at the base.

The strawberry glows in the cocktail with just as much heavenly abandon as it does in the Sunday-school plate made to hold about five.

Mr. E. A. Freeman, the eminent English historian, who has been travelling in Italy for several months, will shortly start on a tour through the United States. His health has much improved, but it is not yet sufficiently restored for him to resume his work.

A Washington girl has highly interesting hair. Its color used to be a light blonde. Dr. D. W. Prentiss reports to the Smithsonian Institution that he gave her jaborand, a Brazilian plant, as a cure for blood poisoning. Her hair soon began to darken, and in four months was almost black.

The Lacy boys of Madison, Wis., went to a menagerie and became filled with the idea of starting a beast show of their own, using such material as was within reach. They painted stripes on a white pony for a zebra, sheared the hind half of a big Newfoundland dog for a kangaroo, and were about to make a tailless cat by chopping when their father discovered them.

The widow of an Ambassador at Berlin took an immense fancy to the good looks and attractive manners of a young medical man, and, there being nothing the matter with her, demanded his constant attendance, besides introducing him to many of her friends. On visiting her lately, however, he was stopped in the hall, and presently her ladyship's own maid came to say that, unfortunately, my lady could not see him. "Going out?" "No, doctor; she's really unwell, and has had to send for a physician."

In the life of Bishop Wilberforce, by his son, the Bishop writes that an Archbishop, who was entirely unmoved by the denunciation of an antagonist in a discussion on ecclesiastical affairs, turned "ashy pale" when he threatened to pray for him. "No," he cried, "don't do that, I pray you; that is unfair—anything but that."

Of another and different Archbishop, Whately of Dublin, he writes: "Strylechi also told us of Whately. He (S) was present when old Lord Bessborough was Lord Lieutenant (Ireland, 1846,) and very well got up. Whately at a council shuffled about his legs (a habit of his) till he got one foot into Lord Bessborough's pocket. Lord B., feeling for something, was astonished and gave a start. The Archbishop struggled to remove his foot, and the conjoint effect of struggle and start was to tear in two the coat from the collar to the skirt."

The area of Lincoln's Inn fields in London was two centuries ago surrounded by the mansions of most superlative grandees. There lived the Duke of Ancester, the great Lord Somers, Montague, Earl of Sandwich, Lord Chancellor Northampton, and the Countess of Middlesex; while, during the present century, the "Fields" have been the residence of Lord Chancellor Kenyon, the unfortunate Prime Minister Mr. Spencer Percival, and Sir John Soane, the wealthy and hard-headed architect, who left his house and museum to the nation, and cut his sor off with a shilling, because Mr. George Soane had presumed to review unfavourably a work from the paternal pen. In process of time the great houses of Lincoln's Inn fields were converted into offices for lawyers and charitable institutions, or into chambers for bachelors; but the rents did not diminish in consequence of the "Fields" having on three of their sides a fringe of slums.

Of the famous Grenadier battalion that accompanied Napoleon I. to Elba after his first abdication at Fontainebleau, the last survivor expired in Paris a few days ago at the advanced age of 96. Jacques Raymond, sixty-seven years ago, was a sergeant in the Imperial Guard, and during his eleven months' sojourn in the island of Elba, whither he had been despatched as one of the imperial exile's escort, was attached to the garrison of Porto Ferrajo. On the 1st of March, 1815, he landed at Frejus with the Emperor, and received his Majesty's orders to summon Antibes to surrender. While fulfilling this mission he was captured by the Royalist forces, and it would probably have gone hardly with him had not the rapid triumph of the Napoleonic cause led to his speedy liberation.

As soon as he had been set free he joined his old regiment, and fought with it at Ligny and Waterloo. After the conclusion of peace he was compelled by the Bourbon Government to retire on half pay. Under the reigns that came to power during the "July days" of 1830, he was restored to full pay, promoted to the rank of Captain, and appointed inspector of the Hotel des Invalides, which post he retained to the day of his death.