

Southern Europe, my father took me to Nice without delay, and weeks, months, we dreamed away our existence there. The rose of health at length gradually returned to my cheek, my step lost its spirit-like lightness, my eyes their ghastly, unnatural lustre. No efforts did I spare, on my side, to promote my prompt and entire recovery. One hour, nay, one moment, I never gave to indulgence in morbid revery, in idle regrets. Books, not silly, enervating romances, or false, overwrought poesy, but books of truth, of high moral bearing, works that taught me to struggle manfully with, and vanquish suffering, to rise as it were above it, filled up the tedious hours of convalescence, and to the period I spent at Nice, I owe the literary and intellectual stores that have won for me the proud title of the *Aspasia of Naples*. The Italian language too, of which I had acquired some slight knowledge at school, occupied a great portion of my time and attention, and I was soon able to speak it almost as fluently as the Italians themselves.

About this time, the Marquis di Colonna sought the life-restoring clime of Nice. Chance threw us together, and my father and he soon became friends. Mark me, Fitz-Clarence, he was neither a young nor a handsome man, but he was an upright and an honorable one, and as such I respected him; not that there was ever question at first, of aught but friendship between us. He looked on me as a child, pleasing himself with listening for hours to my untutored remarks, and imparting the stores of literature and knowledge, with which my mind so eagerly sought to fill the aching void within it. The strain of sadness, which despite my efforts, ever pierced through all my thoughts and words, escaped not his observation, and one day he kindly, closely, questioned me, and I told him all. Deeply he felt for me, patiently, gently, he sympathized with me, and, Fitz-Clarence, you could neither know or believe, how widely, how immeasurably inferior you appeared to me, at that moment, even with your brilliant outward gifts, in comparison to that plain, gray-haired, but honorable man.

Well, this life which I would have been contented to lead for years, yes, for ever, was not destined to last long. My poor father, my last and only friend, was stricken by a sudden, a mortal illness, and from the first hour of his attack, convinced that it would end fatally, he was haunted ever by the terrible thought that his young and friendless daughter would be left alone in a foreign land.

The Marchese di Colonna, with the prompt generosity of a noble heart, came forward at once

and offered to make me his wife. The proposal I rejected at first, with almost frantic abhorrence, but my dying father's agonized entreaties and commands, my own sense of utter loneliness and desolation, at length won me over, and the nuptials of Blanche Castleton and Andrea di Colonna, were solemnized in the church of Nice, one short week before a simple marble tomb-stone was raised in its cemetery to the memory of William Castleton. Kindly, tenderly as my own father would have done, did my new husband bear with my first frantic grief, my obstinate, wayward rejection of all consolation, my sinful murmurs against the will of Heaven, and the bitterness of my own lot. But, with time, better feelings came. I struggled with my grief, and again, resolute and determined, I conquered. Soon we left Nice, to seek our princely home in Naples, and the *Marchese* acquiescing instantly in my wishes, promised to keep the country of my birth a secret, never to revert to my former history, and thus annihilate every link and tie that bound me to the hated past.

The Italians received me with the ready hospitality of their warm-hearted country, new friends and ties grew up around me, and if they failed to remove entirely the secret sorrows and memories that prayed upon my inward soul, they at least enabled me to conceal their existence from the world. From the hour I entered the splendid abode of Andrea di Colonna, I lived but for him and gratitude. In the hour of my utter and desolate need, of my childish waywardness, he had borne patiently, lovingly with me, and now it was my turn to cherish and enliven him in health, to cheer and tend him in sickness. He died blessing me, and since then, I have passed through life with a heart, dead, as it were to every feeling or emotion. One passion, one desire, has of late, alone disturbed its serenity, and that feeling, be it good or evil, has this day been amply gratified.

"Do you understand me yet, Fitz-Clarence? You do not!"

"Well,

"I will be plainer. As you once deliberately deceived and misled me, winning my holiest feelings and affections but to trample them remorselessly under foot, so have I again done to you, and now that I have won what love your cold egotistical heart could give, I fling it back on you with scorn, and bid you leave me at once, leave me to never cross my path again."

As the Marchesa spoke, she proudly swept from the room, leaving Fitz-Clarence standing, pale, breathless as a marble statue, against the cornice which afforded him support. Another moment