

interview, where I may learn from your own lips whether my heart's homage is destined to be spurned or prized."

The overwhelming confusion of Isaura at this earnest and rapid appeal, rendered her powerless to reply—in vain she attempted it; the words died on her trembling lips—but again Ziani entreated, and she succeeded in saying, though in broken and scarcely articulate accents,—

"In a few days I shall quit the convent,—and if—if you—if my father—" She was too much embarrassed to proceed, and before she could recover herself, the door against which she leaned was unclosed, when casting one look of mingled tenderness and entreaty, upon Ziani, she fled, terrified, away.

It was only an old lay sister, deaf and nearly blind, who came to replenish the wax tapers on the altar, and as she passed on, her dim perceptions took no cognizance of Ziani, who at that moment would scarcely have moved, had the lady superior herself appeared before him. There he stood spell-bound on the spot where the beautiful Isaura had left him, recalling the broken accents of her soft voice, and treasuring up the brief glances of these tender eyes, which seemed to give his heart the sweet assurance that its cherished hopes were not lavished in vain. A few minutes he remained thus, then with a deep-drawn sigh slowly turned and departed from the church.

Ziani's blissful reverie was at its height when on his return home, his gondola touched the steps of the Justiniani palace. Lightly he ascended them, but he found the magnificent apartments thronged with the gay and the beautiful, and his heart, nursing one sweet and lovely image, longed for solitude; so, before the evening had worn half away, he stole from the lighted rooms, and wandering into the cool and fragrant garden, hid himself in a quiet bower, round which the jessamine twined its flowery arms, and created, even at mid-day, a soft twilight within its sweet embrace.

Not long, however, was Ziani left to the quiet enjoyment of his chosen retreat. Voices were heard coming down the walk, and as they approached the bower, he recognised that of his father in one of the speakers—and the other, the import of a few sentences which reached his ear as they paused beneath a tulip tree, soon informed him, was the Count Urseolo—the father of his divine Isaura. He would have come forth from his concealment, but the words that he had heard, paralyzed every energy. How terrible they were! like the rushing torrent which has burst its banks and whelms in its fearful might every bright and beautiful feature of the landscape,—or the searing flash of the lightning, that smites with sudden death the lovely things of life,—so fell these blighting words on the stricken heart of Ziani.

It was the subject of Angelo's union with Isaura which he heard discussed. The agreement which for years had existed between the parents, the proposition to ratify the contract as soon as possible after Isaura's return from the convent, the details respecting the future establishment of the youthful pair, and every circumstance connected with the subject, were dwelt upon and canvassed with a torturing minuteness, that harrowed up the soul of the unhappy lover, and like a blasting mildew blackened and destroyed his fairest buds of hope. Yet there he sat, his face buried in his folded arms, the image of desponding wretchedness, long, long, after the voices of the speakers had passed beyond the sound of his ear,—a strange fascination had chained him to the spot and made him drink in greedily every fatal word that confirmed the ruin of his happiness. Only one thing he desired to know, which he had not learned—whether Angelo was yet informed of the destiny designed for him, or if he was to be kept in ignorance, till a personal interview between the parties should produce such favourable impression, as would make them voluntary agents in accomplishing the wishes of their parents.

At all events, Ziani's hopes were ended. It was not for him to contravene the long cherished plans of those who gave him life, or to usurp by treachery the prosperous fortunes of his brother. He might have won Isaura for himself,—nay, the soft tale told by those lovely eyes, whispered him how nearly he had done so already—but what availed it? Her hand was destined for Angelo, and could he wish the brother whom he loved, to wed a soulless bride? Never! and far away, he cast the base ungenerous thought. For himself, he would see her no more, heaven should henceforth engross his affections, and the shade of the cloister, hide his struggles and his griefs from every eye. He had ever cherished a predilection for a religious life, and this first disappointment of the heart, fixed his resolution to embrace it. Then, he thought of the pang which his desertion might possibly occasion to Isaura,—yet to his humble and unselfish heart it seemed like vanity to believe that she could mourn long or deeply for one, who as yet had stood before her only as a stranger,—or to believe that the gay and brilliant Angelo would not shortly efface from her mind all tender emotions, save those awakened by himself. Indeed, aware of the perfect similarity of person, which existed between himself and his brother, and knowing that even among familiar friends they often passed for each other, he entertained a secret and romantic hope, that, never having seen them together, Angelo might appear to Isaura the same with him, who she had met in the church, and as such, might secure the conquest of the heart, in which, he could not avoid believing, he had first created an interest.

And this hope, when in the presence of parents