

the aid of his taper, the young artist looked long and earnestly at the paintings, as if comparing them in his mind with those he had been gazing on during the day; but he soon turned from them with a heavy sigh, and an expression of despair; and, opening a desk, he took from it a purse, and, sitting down by a table, poured forth its contents. Few and small they were; and, as he counted them one by one, they scarce numbered a doubloon. He pushed the coin from him: "Fool that I am," murmured he; "I thought I might find enough of my hoarded savings left to carry me to Italy. Vain hope!" Leaning his head upon his hands, his own excited feelings found vent in a passionate burst of tears. The door of his room opened; but he heeded it not; a lovely girl looked timidly in. Seeing the young man in such an attitude of grief, she sprang forward—knelt by his side—laid her hand gently upon his shoulder, and said:

"Ah, Esteban! why is this? what troubles you? tell me the cause of your grief? Cheer up; or you will make me sad too, and on this night, when we should be so happy!"

At first, Esteban, as she had called him, seemed inclined to repulse the fair girl; but her gentle accents soothed the tempest of his spirit, and checked his convulsive sobs. He took her hand, and, pressing it to his lips, said:

"Ah, Petrilla! you are ever my guardian angel, and yet you are the cause of my grief. I weep that I shall never be worthy of you. I have learnt today that I am no artist—that what you have so loved to praise are mere daubs—and that I can never deserve the glorious name of painter; for even if I have any talent within me, it can never be perfected."

"Why, why is this, cousin dear?" said the girl. "Does not every one praise your works? do they not all say you will soon rival Velasquez? Did not even Father Muratori say your Madonna was just like our Mother of Grace, and could not fail to please her, and draw down her blessing?"

"Tush! tush! it was thy sweet face I copied, that the good father praised, and not the careless daubing. I can never, never excel, unless I go to Italy, and study there under some of her divine artists."

"Go to Italy!" echoed Petrilla, her large eyes dilating with surprise. "And would'st thou leave us, Esteban, to go to that far-off land, where robbers and bandits dwell? Ah! be content with the reward you meet here. Whose colours are so eagerly sought as yours? Do they not cross the broad sea, with every sailing squadron? do they not float proudly in those golden hunds? our returning sailors tell us of it; has not even the royal governor of Cuba ordered some from

you? and why will not this satisfy you, even though it is not the highest branch of the art?"

"Ah, Petrilla! you cannot read or understand my feelings. I have been lauded by my friends, and told I had genius and power; my productions, my flags, and colours, have been eagerly sought for, and I have nourished the hope of one day standing on the same proud eminence with Velasquez; but I knew not what it was I desired. Today I have studied, till my brain is on fire with envy and the spirit of emulation, the works of Pedro de Mayo, and other Italian artists—I burn to be like them, or die! I have, heretofore, desecrated the divine art, and I feel humbled and subdued. Methinks I see them all—those noble men—looking with anger and disgust upon me—Coreggio turns his gentle eyes away from me—Vandyke glares fiercely at me—and Caravaggio threatens, with uplifted hand, to punish me for my daring aspirations. Spare me! spare me!" he said, his overwrought feelings conjuring up the phantoms his imagination had suggested. "Look not so upon me, and I will never, never more strive to imitate you!"

Petrilla attempted to soothe him, but in vain; and, fearing his brain was really affected, she turned to leave the room for assistance; but the action recalled his wandering thoughts.

"Ah, leave me not, Petrilla! and forgive me for thus distressing you. I am very weak, and very foolish; but I believe I am faint with hunger. If you can give me a glass of wine and a crust of bread, I shall better control myself."

It was in truth what he wanted—the long day he had not eaten any thing—and the excitement he had been under had exhausted him. Petrilla sped forth with light foot, and soon returned with a jug of wine, some bread, and a cluster of delicious Malaga grapes. Esteban cut and drank with the avidity of a starving man, and his manner became more calm and collected.

"I have lived years in this one day, dearest," he said; "years of suffering, years of experience. I went into that picture gallery a boy; I left it a man."

"We will not talk any more of this now, Esteban; leave these thoughts till tomorrow. You are refreshed now, and we will join the party below. Have you forgotten that this is my birth-night, and that all our family are collected to celebrate it? you alone, the absent one, and they wonder at your seeming neglect. I was listening for you, when I heard you open the door; and, as you did not come in, I ventured up stairs to remind you of the occasion on which we were met, little dreaming to find you, who had anticipated so much from this evening, so sad; but we will think no more of it now. Come, come."