

such had been his purpose, he seemed to have no ulterior view; for, after gazing for an instant, he withdrew his eyes in confusion, and, pushing off the raft, dropped rapidly down the river, and was soon out of sight.

Lelia's life was as calm as a sleeping lake, which a cloud will blacken and the wing of an insect disturb. Even this little incident was matter for thought, and entered into the soft reveries of sixteen. She felt her cheeks tingle as she wondered *how* long the young man had gazed at her through the trees, and *why* he had floated away without speaking, when he had succeeded in attracting her attention. There was *delicacy* in his little contrivance, to save her the surprise, perhaps the terror, of seeing a stranger in such a situation; there was *modesty* in the confusion with which he turned away his head; and what perhaps was as valuable as either even to the gentle Lelia, there was *admiration*, deep and devout, in those brilliant eyes that had quailed beneath hers. The youth was as beautiful as a dream; and his voice!—it was so clear, and yet so soft—so powerful, yet so melodious! It haunted her ear like a prediction.

It was a week before she again saw this Apollo of her girlish imagination. It seemed as if in the interval they had had time to get acquainted! They exchanged salutations—the next time they spoke—and the next time they conversed. There was nothing mysterious in their communications. He was probably a farmer's son of the upper valley, who had been attracted, like others, by the fame of the heiress of old Niccoli. He, indeed, knew nothing of books, and he loved poetry more for the sake of music than its own: but what of that?—the writings of God were around and within them; and these, if they did not understand, they at least felt. He was bold and vigorous of mind; and this is beauty to the fair and timid. He skimmed along the edge of the precipice, and sprang from rock to rock in the torrent, as fearless as the chamois. He was beautiful, and brave, and proud; and this glorious creature, with radiant eyes and glowing cheeks, laid himself down at her feet, to gaze upon her face, as poets worship the moon!

The world, before so monotonous, so blank, so drear, was now a heaven to poor Lelia. One thing only perplexed her: they were sufficiently long—according to the calculations of sixteen—and sufficiently well acquainted; their sentiments had been avowed without disguise; their faith plighted beyond recall; and as yet her lover had never mentioned his name! Lelia, reflecting on this circumstance, condemned, for the moment, her precipitation; but there was now no help for it, and she could only resolve to extort the secret—if secret it was—at the next meeting.

"My name!" said the lover, in reply to her frank and sudden question; "you will know it soon enough." "But I will not be said nay. You must tell me now—or at all events to-morrow night."

"Why to-morrow night?" "Because a young rich suitor, on whom my father's heart is set, is then to propose, in proper form, for this poor hand; and, let the confession cost what it may, I will not overthrow the dearest plans of my only parent without giving a reason which will satisfy even him. Oh, you do not know him! Wealth weighs as nothing in the scale against his daughter's happiness. You may be poor for aught I know; but you are good, and honourable, and therefore, in his eyes, no unfitting match for Lelia." It was almost dark; but Lelia thought she perceived a smile on her lover's face while she spoke, and a gay suspicion flashed through her mind, which made her heart beat and her cheeks tingle. He did not answer for many minutes; a struggle of some kind seemed to agitate him; but at length, in a suppressed voice, he said—"To-morrow night, then." "Here?" "No, in your father's house; in the presence of—my rival."

The morrow night arrived; and, with a ceremonious formality practised on such occasions in the valley, the lover of whom Lelia had spoken was presented to his mistress, to ask permission to pay his addresses; or, in other words—for there is but short shrift for an Anzascan maid—to demand her hand in marriage. This was indeed a match on which old Niccoli had set his heart; for the offer was by far the best that could have been found from the Val d'Ossola to Monte Rosa. The youth was rich, well-looking, and prudent even to coldness;—what more could a father desire?

Lelia had put off the minute of appearing in the porch, where the elders of both families had assembled, as long as possible. While mechanically arranging her dress, she continued to gaze out of the lattice, which commanded a view of the road and of the parties below, in expectation that increased to agony. Bitter were her reflections during that interval! She was almost tempted to believe that what had passed was nothing more than a dream—a figment of her imagination, disordered by poetry and solitude, and perhaps in some measure warped by disease. Had she been made the sport of an idle moment?—and was the smile she had observed on her lover's face only the herald of the laugh which perhaps at this moment testified his enjoyment of her perplexity and disappointment! His conduct presented itself in the double light of folly and ingratitude; and at length, in obedience to the repeated summons of her father, she descended to the porch with a trembling step and a fevered cheek.

The sight of the company that awaited her awed and depressed her. She shrunk from them with more than morbid timidity; while their stony eyes, fixed upon her in all the rigidity of form and transmitted custom, seemed to freeze her very heart. There was one there, however, whose ideas of "propriety," strict as they were, could never prevent his eyes from glistening, and his arms from extending, at the approach of Lelia. Her father, after holding her for a moment at arm's-length, as with a doating look his eyes wandered over the bravery of her new white dress, drew her close to his bosom, and blessed her. "My child," said he, smiling gaily through a gathering tear, "it is hard for an old man to think of parting with all he loves in the world: but the laws of nature must be respected. Young men will love, and young ladies will like, to the end of time; and new families will spring up out of their union. It is the way, girl—it is the fate of maids, and there's an end. For sixteen years have I watched over you, even like a miser watching his gold; and now, treasure of my life, I give you away! All I ask, on your part, is obedience—aye, and cheerful obedience—after the manner of our ancestors, and according to the laws of God. After this is over, let the old man stand aside, or pass away, when it pleases Heaven; he has left his child happy, and his child's children will bless his memory. He has drunk of the cup of life—sweet and bitter—bitter and sweet—even to the bottom; but with honey, Lelia—thanks to his blessed darling!—with honey in the dregs!"

Lelia fell on her father's neck, and sobbed aloud. So long and bitter was her sobbing that the formality of the party was broken, and the circle narrowed anxiously around her. When at last she raised her head, it was seen that her cheeks were dry, and her face as white as the marble of Cordaglia.

A murmur of compassion ran through the by-standers; and the words "poor thing!—still so delicate!—old hysterics!" were whisperingly repeated from one to the other. The father was alarmed, and hastened to cut short a ceremony which seemed so appalling to the nervous timidity of his daughter. "It is enough," said he, "all will be over in a moment. Lelia, do you accept of this young man for your suitor?—come, one little word, and it is done." Lelia tried in vain to speak, and she bowed her acquiescence. "Sirs," continued Niccoli, "my daughter accepts of the suitor you offer. It is enough; salute your mistress, my son, and let us go in, and pass round the cup of alliance." "The maiden hath not answered," observed a cold, cautious voice among the relations of the suitor. "Speak, then," said Niccoli, casting an angry and disdainful look at the formalist,—"it is but a word—a sound. Speak!" Lelia's dry, white lips had unclosed to obey, when the gate of the little court was wrenched open by one who was apparently too much in haste to find the latch, and a man rushed into the midst of the circle. "Speak *not*!" he shouted, "I forbid!" Lelia sprang towards him with a stifled cry, and would have thrown herself into his arms, had she not been suddenly caught midway by her father. "What is this?" demanded he sternly, but in rising alarm; "ruffian—drunkard—madman!—what would you here?" "You *cannot* provoke me, Niccoli," said the intruder, "were you to spit upon me! I come to demand your daughter in marriage." "You!" shouted the enraged father. "You!" repeated the relations, in tones of wonder, scorn, rage or ridicule, according to the temperament of the individual. "There