

not even to Angelo, of the new and sweet emotions that had waked within his heart. To him, they seemed too pure and hallowed to be made the subject of discussion, and so he shrouded the image of his loved one within his soul's most secret cell, brooding over it in silent rapture, and folding around it his own sweet thoughts, to guard it with jealous care from the scrutiny of every prying eye,—even as the rose, when the chill evening approaches, closes her soft petals over the tender germ which she carries in her bosom, to protect it from the too rude contact of the night-breeze or the dews.

At length one eve,—it was that which preceded the holy festival of Christmas,—he had lingered later than usual in the church, till the purple twilight stealing on, poured through the narrow stained windows its many changing hues, deepening and darkening till the light, upon the altars, and before the shrines of the saints, alone rescued the interior of the church from almost total darkness. Ziani looked around him, the last worshipper had departed, and he also was in the act of retreating, when a chorus of female voices, singing the vesper hymn, fell upon his ear, and arrested his purpose. The music swelled into sweet distinctness as it approached, and Ziani had scarcely time to retreat behind the pillar against which he had so long abstractedly leaned, when the private door communicating with the convent opened, and a procession of young girls, led by two novices, entered the church. They were all laden with flowers, and when the hymn was ended, they began, under the direction of the novices, to dress the high altar for the midnight mass.

Ziani glanced rapidly over the lovely train, and he saw there the young, the beautiful, the high-born—but his eye dwelt only, with a lingering and insatiate gaze, on one bright form, that of the angelic girl, who had stirred to their very depths, the slumbering emotions of his soul. Motionless he remained, watching her every gesture as she stood in that soft light, with flowers less fair than herself, shedding their beauty and fragrance around her, and with graceful alacrity aiding her young companions to deck with stately wreaths and bursting buds the consecrated altar. The task was performed almost in silence, for the few words uttered, were whispered in tones too low to reach his listening ear,—and when it was ended the youthful band chanted an Ave Maria, and retired as they had entered.

With the sound of their last footstep Ziani came forth from his concealment, and as he advanced towards the altar, admiring the tasteful arrangement of its flowers, his eye fell on a missal, which he had seen his beautiful incognita lay upon a pedestal, shortly after her entrance to the church—she had forgotten to take it away with her. He seized it with trembling eagerness, and holding it to the light, opened its illuminated pages, and on the

smooth vellum of the first, he read, written in golden letters, the name of Isaura Urseolo. A thrill of joy ran through his frame as he pressed the precious volume with mute rapture to his heart. The revelation which it had made to him of her name and rank, gave glad assurance to his love, for was she not his equal in birth, in station—the daughter of his father's dearest friend, and wherefore should he not woo, and win her if he might? Alas, he knew not then of the barrier which fate had placed between him and this fond hope.

Rapt in a sweet reverie, Ziani still stood, clasping the treasured volume to his heart, when the sound of an unclosing door aroused him, and looking up the lovely object of his thoughts again entered the church. She had returned for her missal, and not immediately perceiving it, she glided forward, yet with a timid step, and cast round a hurried glance in search of the forgotten book. As yet she had not been conscious of his presence, but as he now stepped irresolutely towards her, a faint shriek burst from her lips, the colour forsook her cheek, and she turned to fly. His low, respectful voice, entreating her to pause, arrested her steps. She looked back, and when she saw her missal in his hand, and recognized the striking form and noble features of the young cavalier, whose image, since their first encounter in the church, had stamped itself indelibly upon her soul, a burning blush crimsoned her cheek and brow, and trembling with emotion and surprise, she grasped the railing of the altar for support.

Ziani was not less agitated, but the moments were precious, and with an air of the humblest reverence he approached and restored to her the book,—not a syllable could his faltering lips utter, but the thrilling glance of his dark impassioned eye expressed more eloquently than any language, the homage and devotion of his heart. Two peasants at this moment entered the church, and stood crossing themselves at the font; Isaura started, and the hue of her soft cheek varied as rapidly as the changing tints of the sunset sky,—her breath came quick, and with a sudden movement she retreated towards the door. Ziani followed her—it was an irresistible impulse which led him to dare so far, nay, even to grasp the folds of her robe in his eagerness to detain her, while in tones of the most tender and earnest entreaty he softly said:

"Lady, forgive me—forgive me, I humbly beseech you,—but ah, depart not hence, till you have breathed one word, to tell me this meeting shall not be our last."

"Not here, not here?" murmured the soft voice of Isaura, as casting a terrified look towards those, who were now advancing up the aisle, she struggled to depart.

"Then where?" he passionately asked, "I cannot leave you without hope—the hope of a speedy