

The dark beauty of her large bright eyes remained, but sight was gone. Blind! No more to wander in waving woodlands and see in caverns of the arching pines the temples of the Father; no more to follow the crooked curves of noisy brooks and see in their winding waters a picture and a prophecy—the history of nations, the destiny of mankind. Life a sightless, starless night!

And yet this very blindness kept Zerola from seeing some of the gloom amid which she seemed doomed to die. But why conceal the truth? The girl knew it all. Four yearning years had she languished in those cankering chains. Four years slept with frowning stones above on colder clay beneath, a pile of mould having been heaped in one corner of her dungeon for a bed. Each pillar though gaunt as hard, each slab though dead and heartless, was a friend. Full well the captive knew the weary way around that lonely tomb, for years and years ago her prison had been a sepulchre—as if it were not now! No window dispelled the dreary darkness of that dismal grave. True, there were crannies and cracks in the walls, but only one let in the light; and over it had been placed bars of iron—to keep a demon out, but surely now to keep an angel in. Every day through this narrow crevice the sunbeams used to come and try to bring some ray of hope from the great world outside.

Zerola waited for their coming and knew the moment of their going. Beneath their beckoning, cheering rays her rusty shackles grew golden; but chains of gold hurt just as much as chains of iron. Those visitors from the skies were strong, yet very weak. How could a few wandering sunbeams alter the foulness of her cell, the hardness of her crusts? The single meal a day lowered on a rattling chain through a hole in the dungeon ceiling was of such repulsive food Zerola was glad to hear the distant echoes of the footfalls of the guard dying away beyond the bolted doors of brass and iron hanging in the long corridors of stone, ever deathlike in their silence.

On this morning there had been a triumph in Rome. The brightness and glory of the sun, coming in splendour towards the Campagna, had been almost rivalled by the magnificence of chariots plated with gold and silver, drawn by spirited horses prancing beneath robes of purple bedecked with jewels, trophies