

Bernardo del Nero walked as a vanguard before Bardo, who was led on the right by Tito, while Romola held her father's other hand. Bardo had himself been married at Santa Croce, and had insisted on Romola's being betrothed and married there, rather than in the little church at Santa Lucia close by their house, because he had a complete mental vision of the grand church, where he hoped that a burial might be granted him among the Florentines who had deserved well. Happily the way was short and direct, and lay aloof from the loudest riot of the Carnival, if only they could return before any dances or shows began in the great piazza of Santa Croce. The west was red as they passed the bridge, and shed a mellow light on the pretty procession, which had a touch of solemnity in the presence of the blind father. But when the ceremony was over, and Tito and Romola came out on to the broad steps of the church, with the golden links of destiny on their fingers, the evening had deepened into struggling starlight, and the servants had their torches lit.

While they came out, a strange, dreary chant, as of a *Miserere*, met their ears, and they saw that at the extreme end of the piazza there seemed to be a stream of people impelled by something approaching from the Borgo de' Greci.

"It is one of their masked processions, I suppose," said Tito, who was now alone with Romola, while Bernardo took charge of Bardo.

And as he spoke there came slowly into view, at a height far above the heads of the onlookers, a huge and ghastly image of Winged Time with his scythe and hour-glass, surrounded by his winged children, the Hours. He was mounted on a high car completely covered with black, and the bullocks that drew the car were also covered with black, their horns alone standing out white above the gloom; so that in the sombre shadow of the houses it seemed to those at a distance as if Time and his children were apparitions floating through the air. And behind them came what looked like a troop of the sheeted dead gliding above blackness. And as they glided slowly, they chanted in a wailing strain.

A cold horror seized on Romola, for at the first moment it seemed as if her brother's vision, which could never be effaced