

without asking himself whither his steps tended, through suits of splendid apartments, till he found himself standing alone in a spacious gallery, where the light from candelabras of the purest chrysal, wrought in the furnaces of Murano, fell upon rare works of art, and precious foreign spoils and trophies, which the munificent Urseolo had gathered at vast expense from distant realms, and brought to enrich his princely mansion.

Under any other circumstances, and with a less distracted mind, the treasures of this unrivalled gallery would have offered subjects of never wearying interest and delight, to the contemplation of the gifted and tasteful Ziani. And even now, agitated and disturbed as was his whole soul, he could not but feel his admiration enkindled to enthusiasm, as he gazed on statues which the hand of genius had stamped with perfection, on the pictures, the Mosaics, the bronzes that had been wrested from Rome, from the classic temples of Greece, from ancient Egypt, and even from the hallowed realms of Judea, to enrich and beautify this, one of the most gorgeous palaces of the great and imperial republic.

The family of Urseolo, which was of ancient and patrician origin, had given more than one doge to the state, and were among the few, whose names at that early period of its history, were enrolled in *Il Libro d'Ora*, the golden book of nobility. The strictest friendship subsisted between the head of this illustrious house and that of the Justiniani, and to ensure its continuance, the young Isaura, the only child of the Count Urseolo, was betrothed, while yet in infancy, to Angelo Murizio, then a boy of five years old, and the eldest, by an hour, of the twin sons of Justiniani. The parents of each party had solemnly pledged themselves to see this union ratified, when their children should have attained the respective ages of fifteen and twenty—but those most interested in the treaty, grew up in utter ignorance of the destiny in store for them. Angelo knew indeed, that there was such a being as Isaura Urseolo; for young as he himself was, he remembered his sports with her, while she was yet an infant,—but beyond this, he gave her not a thought, for he had never seen her since she attained her third year, when in consequence of her mother's death, she was placed under the care of the Lady Abbess of Santa Maria, her maternal aunt, where she received her education, and lived in perfect retirement, interrupted only by occasional visits from her father. A month previous to the attainment of her fifteenth birthday she was withdrawn from her quiet cloister, and placed amid the gaities and splendours of her almost forgotten home, to receive the addresses of her youthful lover, before entering with him into the most solemn engagement of life. Still, when they met it was without any knowledge on the part of either, of the relation in which it was intended they

should stand to each other, yet with all the precautions which had been used to prevent the defeat of this long cherished plan, it was destined in a manner wholly unforeseen, to be finally defeated.

Perfectly similar as were the Venetian brothers in their persons, and their style of dress, in their characters and tastes, there was a marked and perceptible difference. Angelo was gay, light-hearted, impetuous—a lover of novelty, and a worshipper of woman's beauty, tuning his guitar beneath the window of many a high-born maiden, and winning bright smiles and soft hearts wherever he whispered his flattering words—ever ready also, to enter into the wild revels of his young associates, with an eager and hilarious joy that rendered him a coveted companion to the reckless and the pleasure-loving. But impassioned and enthusiastic to a fault, he was constant in nothing save his deep, unchangeable love for Ziani. In this, there was no variability,—no shadow ever for an instant darkened the bright and lucid stream of fraternal affection that flowed on fuller, and deeper, and broader, as the brothers passed from the sunny fields of boyhood, to the wider and richer landscape that stretched far away before the expanding vision of the man.

His first interview with Isaura was in the presence of her father, and of others, who were guests at the palace, and it is scarcely necessary to say, that, with a temperament, so ardent, Angelo was at once enslaved by her rare and exquisite beauty. This might have proved, perhaps, versatile as was his nature, but a passing tribute of admiration, had not his interest in her been heightened by the mysterious emotion with which she received his first greeting and attentions. The tender expression of her eye, as it timidly encountered his, the heightened colour of her cheek, and the quick heaving of her snowy bosom, as he gently addressed her, could not escape his notice, and while such tokens of interest awakened his surprise, a thrill of exquisite rapture ran through his frame, and the dawning passion that was then enkindled, promised, unlike his usual emotions, to vie in depth and constancy with the love which he cherished for Ziani. When Angelo returned home, his father, having observed with joy the impression he had received from Isaura, no longer hesitated to inform him of the relation, in which from childhood they had stood to each other,—a communication which he heard with overwhelming delight; it at once sanctioned the indulgence of his passion, and explained to him the emotion of Isaura, that could, he thought, only be attributed to her previous knowledge of their betrothment; and seemed an evidence that she regarded it, at least, without displeasure.

On the following morning his glad anticipations of again meeting her were disappointed by the painful intelligence, that during the night preceding, she had been seized with an alarming illness.