

repose; when she flashed the light of her golden brown eyes on the beholder, or summoned up the smiles which played with such seductive sweetness round her lovely dimpled mouth, the sternest stoic could scarcely have resisted her soft, enchanting, syren-like loveliness.

She was dressed in a ball-dress of a pale changing shade of green, which in some lights gleamed a sapphire blue, in others a bright sea-green. Pearls were on her beautiful bare arms, pearls on her lovely bosom, whose dazzling whiteness her dress scarcely attempted to veil; pearls and blush roses looped up her skirt, and were wreathed in her hair—the richest, the most lustrous, the most abundant hair in all Italy, falling to her feet as she stood when it was unbound, and of the same rare and lovely golden-brown colour as her eyes. Behind her stood her French waiting-maid, giving a finishing touch, now here and now there, to the costume on which she had evidently put forth her utmost skill, and which she appeared to regard with as much pride and affection as a painter might feel for the picture in which he had realized his highest aspirations; while the lovely wearer, satisfied, after a close and critical examination that it suited her figure and complexion exactly, and was the most becoming thing she had ever worn, smiled an assent to the French-woman's exclamation, "*C'est parfait!*"

"I think you must darken these under-lids a little, Fanchette," said her mistress, "and I am not sure but I need a slight touch of rouge. I want to look particularly well to-night, and the glass of a ball-room is so trying."

"Oh, no, Miladi!" said Mademoiselle Fanchette. "The exquisite fairness and clearness of Miladi's complexion can bear any glare, and is never without a lovely bloom, like the pink of an exquisite shell. That is what the Marchese Raffaello said to me yesterday, when he asked me if you would not be at Miladi his mother's ball."

At that moment Mademoiselle Fanchette, who, like her mistress, had been too deeply engaged in the business of the hour to hear Paolo enter, became aware of an impatient movement and a muttered exclamation, and turning hastily round, met his dark and frowning glance.

"Ah, Monsieur!" she exclaimed, with a little shriek, and then, recovering herself, added condescendingly, "A thousand pardons, Monsieur, but Miladi is at her toilet."

"*Che diavolo!*" said Paolo, savagely.

"Ah! *Caro* Paolo, is it you?" said the lady, turning round languidly. "I suppose you were not aware that I was dressing."

She was excessively annoyed at Paolo's having discovered her with closed windows and lighted candles, doing homage at the shrine of her vanity; but it did not suit her to let her vexation be seen just then.

"Certainly I ought to apologize for intruding on the mysteries of Venus," said Paolo, sarcastically. "Mysteries they must be, when they require to be practised with drawn curtains and lighted tapers in broad day. Seriously, Giulia, what does this masquerading mean?"

"Masquerading, *amico*? There is no masquerading. I am merely trying on a dress."

"A ball-dress, I perceive."

"Yes. The fact is, *mio* Paolo, I must go to the Marchesa di Manzi's ball to-night, and I wanted to choose a becoming dress. I hope you think I have succeeded."

"Giulia," said Paolo, impatiently, "if you have done with Mademoiselle Fanchette, perhaps you will oblige me by dismissing her. There are several things I wish to say which it is not necessary for her to hear."

"She does not understand Italian," said the lady, carelessly. "However, it is generally easy enough to understand the drift of the private conversations you favour me with, by your frowning brows and imperious gestures, so it is, perhaps, as well that she