

of the palace, his cloak of rich Genoa velvet falling back from his shoulders, and revealing the richly embroidered dress and jewelled ornaments that adorned his handsome and graceful person. When his bounding foot had nearly gained the summit of the steps, he paused and looked around for Ziani; but there he still stood, motionless as a statue, and as the light breeze raised the drooping feather of his cap, Angelo was startled by the sad expression of his pale countenance.—In an instant he was again beside him, and eagerly grasping his hand;

“My brother, what has befallen you?” he asked in a hurried and anxious tone.—“No ill can betide you but my heart shares it, as you well know. Speak then, if you have aught to tell, for the moment we cease to confide in each other, that moment is the golden bond of affection weakened, if not riven between us.”

“May that never be,” fervently exclaimed Ziani, while a sharp pang momentarily convulsed his brow, —“but heed not my wayward mood, it comes over us all, at times, from causes which it would be difficult to explain—only leave me for a while, to float quietly over these tranquil waters, nor let a thought of me mar your happiness, while you quaff from the fountain of love draughts of intoxicating joy.”

“And think you, my Ziani, that even such bliss as this would content me while you were absent,—absent and sad, and I unknowing of the cause? Wrong me not by such a thought, for even Isaura’s love would fail to satisfy my heart, were yours withdrawn, which has ever been to me the very elixir of my life. Come, then, my brother,—many a bright eye watches for you in yon gay halls, and I would that you might find among them, a bride as fair as her whom I have chosen; that as we came into life together, so the same hour may see us kneeling at the marriage altar with those whom God shall ordain to unseal the deep and mysterious fountain of love within our souls.”

Ziani’s cheek grew deadly pale, and he shrank from his brother’s words, even as the wounded man from the hand of the leech, when he buries his probe deep in the quivering flesh,—but by a strong effort mastering his emotion, he briefly replied:

“I had promised to see Father Hilario for one half hour this evening—so let me row to San Francesco, and when I return, if not too late, you shall see me at the Urscolo Palace.”

“Nay, by St. Mark, I stir not hence without you,” exclaimed Angelo—“let the priest keep his ghostly counsel for a more convenient time, you have had too much of it already; come now with me—you have not yet seen my peerless Isaura, and if you love me, you will not refuse on this her birth-night, to offer a brother’s homage to the chosen of your Angelo’s heart.”

“Do not importune me thus, my Angelo, for indeed it is a hard task, to seem a very churl by

continuing to resist your wishes—and though I had given you my promise to accompany you, I feel now how totally inadequate I am to fulfil it.”

“And why?” asked the wondering Angelo; “I pray you unriddle to me the mystery of your denial,—unfold the secret of the change that has of late come over you. Tonight, I have promised to bring you to my Isaura, and have defied her, to tell her own Angelo from his more noble brother,—so mar not my sport by your waywardness,—and if it so chance that you are mistaken for her affianced one, why, if she will have it so, you must e’en stand in the bride-groom’s place, and leave me to seek what the world contains not,—another Isaura.”

Ziani’s bursting heart could ill brook the gay jest of Angelo, and turning away, he leaned in silence, against the side of the gondola. A sudden doubt, a dark suspicion, darted across the mind of Angelo, and for an instant he stood regarding his brother with a look of silent, yet stern inquiry. Ziani encountered the searching glance, and his conscious heart too truly interpreted its meaning.

“Bear with me awhile, my brother, and I entreat you leave me here alone. I should go mad to mix with yon gay revellers tonight,—but tomorrow I will tell you why.”

“Tomorrow!” interrupted Angelo, touched, in spite of his incipient jealousy, by the subdued sadness of Ziani’s tone,—“and why not tonight? There is naught dearer to me than your happiness, and bright as were the hopes this festive evening promised to fulfil, I can forego them all, if by so doing I may minister peace to the wounded spirit of my brother.”

Ziani was moved, even to woman’s softness, by this burst of noble and disinterested love, and casting himself upon his brother’s neck:

“Who can resist you, my generous Angelo,” he said—“not your Ziani, whom you ever conquer as a child? Come, let us on to the palace,—I will cast care behind me, and yield myself, for this night at least, to your wishes.”

Angelo returned his brother’s embrace, and together they ascended the steps, and entered the brilliant halls of the palace. As the light of its countless lamps fell upon their persons, Ziani saw that an unwonted cloud shadowed the gay brow of his brother, and he inwardly reproached himself for the selfish indulgence of feelings, which had subdued even for a moment, the bright hopes with which Angelo had long anticipated this night of joy. But the throng which was passing in, left them no leisure for speech, scarcely for thought—all were pressing eagerly towards the grand saloon, where the young Isaura, with a band of chosen friends, waited to receive and welcome her guests. Angelo was fortunate enough to gain its entrance; but Ziani, not unwillingly yielded to the current that bore him in an opposite direction, and on he passed.