

## THE ETERNAL CITY

was far too small and weak for your great work. That was why I failed you at the end. It wasn't my fault that I betrayed you . . ."

"Don't speak of my betrayal. I thank God for it, and see now that it was the best that could have happened."

She closed her eyes. "Is it your own voice, dearest? Really yours? Hush! I shall wake and the dream will pass."

A little jet from his heart of flame burst out in spite of his warning brain, and he was carried away for the moment.

"My poor darling, you must get well for my sake. You must think of nothing but getting well. Then we'll go away somewhere—to Switzerland, as you said in your letter. Or perhaps to England, where you were born, and where your father lived his years of exile. Dear old England! Motherland of liberty! I'll show you all the places."

She was dizzy with the beautiful vision.

"Oh, if I could only go on like this for ever! But I mustn't listen to you, dearest. It's no use, you know. Now, is it?"

The spirit which had exalted him for a moment took flight, and his heart rose into his throat.

"Now, is it?" she repeated.

He did not answer, and she dropped back with a sigh. Ah, it was cruel fencing. Every word was a sword, and it was cutting a hundred ways.

At that moment a band of music passed down the street. Roma, who loved bands of music, asked Rossi to lift her up that she might look at it. A little drummer boy was marching at the head of a procession, gaily rolling his rataplan.

"He reminds me of little Joseph," she said, and she laughed heartily. Strange mystery of life that robs death of all its terrors!

He put his arm about her to support her—as they stood by the parapet, and this brought a new tremor of affection, as well as a little of the old physical thrill and a world of fond and tender memories. She looked into his eyes, he looked into hers; they both looked across to Trinità de' Monti, and in the eye-asking between them she said plainly, "Do you remember—over there?"

Roma was assisted back to the bed-chair, and then, conversation being impossible, Rossi began to read. Every day he had read something. Roma had made the selections.