

he poured out the story of his love, and urged her, as he had urged her many times before, that she should delay no longer to crown his life with her love.

"My love," said Lisa, turning her deep, dark eyes upon his impassioned face—"that has been thine since the day when my dying mother bade me look to thee as to a brother—for the sake of thine own mother—her much loved friend. But not yet—Caro Mia—there is no need for haste."

There was anger in his eyes as he answered, petulently, "Ever—not yet." For what dost thou wait?"

She was silent. Deep in her loving heart, though not yet crystallized into thought, lay the conviction that life had been too bright for him already; that all he had wished for had fallen too easily into his grasp; that contact with the hard and stern realities of life was sorely needed to awaken and develop the dormant good within him.

"Oh, Nino Mio," she murmured, passionately, "I know not what bids me wait—but, when I would fain say yes, a voice within me cries out 'Stay!' And—canst thou be in such haste, when Luigo must wait so long?"

Nino's face clouded yet more.

"Nay, nay, Lisa. We can do him no good by waiting. With his father and poor Lotta to take care of, and that heavy debt to pay, it must be long ere he can wed. But, even to pay his substitute, he will take no help from me. Truly," he added, petulantly, "it is well I know that he loves Tessa—else might I think he had won *thy* heart—he is so often in thy thoughts."

"Do I not owe thee to his care," said Lisa, smiling, "But for him thou might'st have been dead, at the foot of that terrible crag." A shudder passed over her, at the thought of the deadly peril from which Luigo, a year ago, had rescued the playmate of her youth, and the long illness which followed, in which Luigo had nursed him with tenderest care.

The lovers were here interrupted by the approach of a pretty peasant girl, who came slowly towards them, leading by the hand, a man, old and blind. Both Lisa and Nino went forward to meet them, for the girl was Tessa, the betrothed of Luigo, who now joined the group, pushing the little chair on wheels, in which his little crippled sister sat. Lisa's grand face lighted as she saw those two. And yet her heart ached. Oh, to have seen in

Nino, whom she so passionately loved, some trace of the selfdenying love for the father and sister dependant on him. Some trace of the manly devotion to duty, which gave dignity to Luigo's simple life. Truly was Tessa to be envied—Tessa, for whom such a man as Luigo worked and waited.

The Easter day passed joyfully to all—save Nino, bitterly angry with Lisa—and wrath at the delay on which she insisted, and Lisa, saddened by his impatient and selfish words, and by the absence in him of the nobleness she longed to see. Saddened, too, by fears that her hesitation might not be the best for him—and perplexed, for the first time in all her patient, laborious, selfdenying life, as to the right path in which to tread.

PART II.

A month later, consternation was on every face, and sorrow in every heart throughout Fiesole. For war was declared once more, and the conscription levied again and again, the lot had fallen on Luigo. He had not yet paid the parents of his last substitute the full sum agreed upon, and his absence meant little less than ruin to his father and to Lotta. While for Tessa—all the gossips of the place could speak of nothing else.

The last to learn the news was Lisa. She had spent the night before and all that day at the bedside of a sick child, living in the village not four miles away. She had promised to meet Nino at the fountain at sunset, and was on her way to the trysting place, when a garrulous neighbour told her of Luigo's enrolment. Lisa listened in silence, and then hurried on. The sun had set. The western sky was still aglow; the first silver star was trembling in the darkening blue; a crescent moon hung suspended near it. Her heart was sad with sympathy: her thoughts with Luigo and his stricken friends. Nino, standing near the fountain, looked at her as she came forward, her hands clasped as though in pain, her dark brows drawn under the shadow of her white cap, looked at her—and felt his heart sink. There was that in her face which made the vague sense of distance and of difference—never entirely absent from him—rise up, a tangible barrier between them. He spoke no word, and did not move, but stayed, kneeling on one knee on the fountain step.

Lisa came forward; she put her two hands on his shoulders, and looked, with