

doors, and at evening I used to walk along the wooded hills with my sister. But a strange revolution was going on within me which made me dreadfully unhappy. I discovered that I was in love with Pallidina. I remembered what hitherto had hardly ever occurred to me, that she was my sister only in name, and thought it was a very sad case; for that if our master and mistress looked at us as lovers, instead of as brother and sister, they certainly would never keep me: we should be obliged to separate, and how could Pallidina endure that?

That evening I wandered alone under the olive-trees, and returned so distressed that my sister noticed it.

"What ails thee, Momo?" asked she.

"Nothing," replied I.

"Why hide your troubles from me?" she went on, in her caressing voice. "Am I not your sister?" and, coming closer, she laid her hand on my shoulder.

I shuddered.

"Leave me," was all I could say.

"See now, Momo," she gently insisted; "can it be that I have vexed thee? If so," kissing my forehead, "I beg thy pardon for it."

"Oh, why are not you *indeed* my sister!" I exclaimed, pressing her hand to my lips; then, abruptly rising, I dashed out of the house, and only returned at supper-time; but I could eat nothing.

My sister looked very sad, and her eyes were swollen as with crying. We talked on indifferent subjects to the miller and his wife, and I went to bed in a state of extreme agitation, not knowing what my sister would think of me. Night brings counsel. I made up my mind that I both ought and would conquer my feelings.

The morning confirmed my good resolutions. I put on a cheerful air and worked manfully till nightfall.

During the week I no longer walked with my sister under the trees. She seemed very sad, which made me remorseful; and on Sunday we went as usual to mass together.

"Go, my children, and walk in the cool," said the miller's wife, when evening came; and, her children accompanying us, we all went together into the valley. The whole country was out in flower. The fields, all covered with daisies and lilies, looked like a wondrous carpet.

"Go, little ones, and gather nosegays," said Pallidina to the children. Then, turning to me: "Let us sit down here, Momo; the air is so fresh, and it's all so beautiful."

Outstretched on the grass at her feet, her hands in mine, I looked at her in silence,

and the silence was long unbroken. The sun in nearing the horizon left us in shadow. My love shone in my eyes. Pallidina seemed deeply moved, her cheeks crimsoned, and her hand was cold as snow in my grasp.

"I know your secret," she cried; "Signor Gesù! I understand it all! My brother! You are no longer my brother!" And, hiding her face in her hands, that I might not see her emotion, she ran to fetch the children.

That evening between her and me not a single other word was spoken.

Alas! dating from that hour, our life was a very hard one, for while loving more than ever, our sole aim was to avoid each other. Neither of us had the courage to disclose the secret of our hearts to our kind mistress. From the summit of happiness we passed to such a state of suffering that I thinned visibly, and Pallidina was paler than her name. The miller's wife noticed it to her. "It is only the heat of the summer," she replied; and feeling herself blushing at this departure from truth, she slipped away.

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One evening, as I rode our mule on my return from taking sacks of flour to a baker in the district, I was perfectly absorbed in a tumult of thought. I dwelt on Pallidina, on our childhood, on the vow we had made never to forsake each other, and said to myself that the only way to be happy was to marry, if Heaven would but send me some one to tell the true state of the case to our master and mistress. Night was coming on, and I fell into such a trance of prayer and longing, as to take no notice whatever of the way, and let the mule carry me where it would; when suddenly it stumbled, and I found that the creature had taken a narrow path at a great height, on the border of a precipice.

I stopped for a moment to collect myself, and, having looked round, struck into a thicket which would lead me to a road that I knew. In the closest part of this thicket I fancied I heard a groan, listened, and held my breath. Then, dismounting, fastened the mule to a tree, and made my way in the direction whence the sound came. A dark mass on the ground met my view; drawing nearer, I saw that it was an old man who lay on the earth, while a boy of ten or twelve was sobbing beside him.

"Oh, whoever you may be, help, oh help us!" said the child; "we have lost our way, and we have walked so far without eating that my father has fallen down from weakness."

"Come along with me, my good man," said I, going up to him.

"He's blind, he cannot see you—help me to raise him," implored the boy.