

they would ask. "Send him to some of the asylums for children; do not let him beg."

To which she replied that she would do so by-and-by, when I was older.

When I was between five and six there came a very hard winter.

"You are going to be ill, Lucia," said my father; "do stay at home."

"What can you be thinking of, Bastiano? How can I remain at home with arms folded and making nothing?"

"You may sew."

"I cannot bear sitting still, sewing. It kills me! You know it does."

"Then it is no use my talking," replied my father, dolefully; "I must just let thee take thy own course."

The *Tramontana*¹ was cutting, and it snowed. It was a perfect journey to get from our house to the church. One evening my mother came in earlier than usual, went to bed, had a sharp illness, which did not last long, and died.

My childish sorrow was terrible. I sat beside her without stirring till Teresa carried me away by force. All day long I cried; then when evening came I contrived to escape, ran to our abode, got in without being seen by any one, slipped myself under the sheets to my mother's side, and there fell asleep.

After anxiously looking for me, my father saw a slight movement beneath the covering of the corpse. Terrified in the extreme, he raised it, and there he found me. No one had the cruelty to awake me; I stayed where I was till break of day.

When I first awoke I had forgotten that my mother was dead, and threw my arms around her to kiss her as usual, but she was so cold that I screamed out. My father called in Teresa, who carried me off and kept her eye upon me all day.

That evening when I returned I found the bed empty. My mother was under the earth—her sweet gentle face hidden from me for ever.

I wanted to run away, but my father held me back. I was afraid of him, having always been so much alone with my mother. I felt that for me the world was empty, and fully believed, in my childish way, that henceforth all would seem dead to me, my mother having died.

My father, who had now no one to assist him, came to the conclusion that begging would bring him in a better income than gardening. He took to leaving the town and going about in the country to frighten the

¹ The north wind.

farmers, and especially the farmers' wives, into bestowing liberal alms. He used to take me with him, but the long walks did me harm, and I began to be lame, which enchanted my father.

"They will see that thou art not fit to work," he would say; "and I shall not be blamed for keeping thee back from it."

Having always been accustomed to hear my mother use gentle language and beg in humble strain, it shocked me to listen to the curses my father hurled out, and made me cry.

"Silence, little fool!" he said; "you see that I am doing what I do for your sake, and you must let me do it my own way."

I hated, too, going home in the evening. Teresa used to come in to light our fire and make our soup. My father, who was very stingy, would give her a plateful of soup for her trouble. Sometimes we had so much bread we did not know what to do with it; in which case we sold it to other beggars. Meanwhile I was very dull; I never played, and grew thinner and thinner.

One day Teresa advised my father to enter into partnership with some mendicants who made a very good thing of it. At first he refused, afterwards thought it over, and we went to station ourselves with the rest on the Piazza del Duomo. Since I had lost my mother, all my notions were utterly changed: in her lifetime everybody seemed good; since her death the whole world seemed to have grown wicked. Formerly I had seen many smart ladies speak kindly to my mother, and slip silver into her hand. I had noticed priests and monks interested about her health. I had heard them speak to her about the good God; and, besides, we had always been in and about the church, where bad people did not go. While with my father I was generally lounging about public-houses, hearing so many oaths and curses that I was beginning to use them myself, and coming into contact with gamblers and people who had no charity about them. I was ill-treated and laughed at. People would cry out—

"Little idler! are you not ashamed of begging? Your mother must blush for you."

"Alas," I sobbed, "I have no mother! She is dead."

"The young impostor! he says that to excite our compassion,—his mother is most likely in the public-house!"

Such speeches as these used to pain me so that I cried—oh, how I cried!—enough to have blinded myself. I repeat it—the whole world appeared to me to have grown wicked since I had no mother.