

I drew a bit of bread from my pocket. "First of all, my good man, eat this, and it will give you strength."

"May God bless and comfort you; may He give you your heart's desire!"

At that broken, subdued voice, those loving and grateful words, I felt a thrill pass through me, but the shade of the trees around hid the face of the unfortunate man from me.

With the child's help I got him up and on, he leaning his white head on my shoulder. Just as I was about to lift him on to the mule, a ray of moonlight shone on his features, and I sank to the earth.

"Oh, father! father!" I cried, "it is you! it is you!" Our tears mingled.

"My poor child, my forsaken one!" sobbed my father, "is it possible that your heart can have forgiven me?"

* * * * *

All violent emotions are succeeded by calm. My father rode the mule, and we were making our way together to the mill. The boy kept pressing my hand, and at last said to me in a tone of reproach, "Have you nothing to say to me? Do not you know that I am the *Ettore* of *La Pietrina*—do not you know that I am your brother?"

"My brother!" I exclaimed, in bewilderment.

"Yes, *Ettore* is indeed thy brother! How many things I have to tell thee, *Momo*!" broke in my father. "It is more than twelve years since *Pietrina* became my wife. I married her unknown to any one about eighteen months after your poor mother's death! Oh, I am very guilty!" he went on; "I frightened that young girl into marrying me, by persuading her that if she refused I would pursue her with maledictions and throw spells over her. It was a country *Curé* who married us. I calculated that *Pietrina* would get more money by pretending to be forsaken than if she were known to be my wife. That is why she never came to live with us. I used to go to her late and early, but, being very fond of her, I became anxious to change my locality and way of life, in order to be constantly with her. She was always blaming me for being a beggar, and only consented to follow me on condition that I should find work. Accordingly, I went off to *Siena*; but as I did not want to be followed, I told thee I was bound for *Lucca*. One night I came back for *Pietrina*. 'Where is *Momo*?' was her first question. I told a most wicked falsehood, for which the Lord has duly punished me. 'He has gone on before us, and is waiting on the road,' was my reply. When we had fairly set out, she

still kept asking, 'Where is he? Do you see him?' 'No,' said I, 'but children are quick walkers. He must have run—we shall find him further on.' 'Let us go back, *Bastiano*, and look for your child!' she insisted; but I declared that she must be crazy to talk of returning to *Pisa* when she had heard that you had gone on in advance. 'If you are deceiving me, *Bastiano*, God will punish you,' she said."

"Dear *Pietrina*! Where is she?" asked I, interrupting my father.

"She is dead. She died two years ago at *Pisa*, during her last journey thither to look for thee." Here my father's voice sank, and he could not go on.

"How sad!" I exclaimed; "such a good woman!"

"She was an angel!" murmured my father. The boy pressed my hand, and silently wept for his lost mother.

My father resumed: "A few days after our arrival at *Siena*, *Pietrina* insisted upon my going back to *Pisa* to look for thee. I only went as far as *Turpoli*, then returned and assured her that I had made all inquiries at *Pisa*, but that thou wert not there! Ah, I am indeed a guilty man! I had procured work at *Siena*, and no longer begged. One day *Pietrina* informed me that she was going herself to seek for thee. She was away a week and returned with mournful tidings. *Signor Carlino* had told her of the death of *Clotilde*, and how you were sent away from the company of beggars of the *Piazza del Duomo*, adding that he had spoken to the priests, who were anxious to assist you, but, after making inquiries for several days, was not able to find you, everybody having lost trace of you. I was already full of remorse," continued my father, "when a terrible affliction fell upon me. I became blind! *Pietrina* was too weak to work for our subsistence and that of our child. I had once more to become a beggar. 'It is God's chastisement,' she affirmed; 'had you not forsaken your son, the Lord would not have quenched the light of your eyes!' A prey now to remorseful regrets, unable to believe that God would ever forgive my crime, I made little *Ettore* lead me into a church, where I used to spend whole days on my knees, imploring God's pardon, and beseeching Him to restore thee to me. When *Pietrina* saw me so wretched, she endeavoured to comfort me. 'Now that you believe and pray, my poor *Bastiano*, you are saved, and one day or other your son will be brought back to you.' Determined to leave nothing undone, *Pietrina* set out once more on a journey of