

The Betrothed

By Unknown

In the centre of the island of Corsica, and in its loftiest part, there rise two steep mountain chains which run parallel to one another. Near the bridge of Castirla they form a ravine about six miles long, through which flows the river Goli. Along the banks of this river may be traced the tortuous path of the range Santa Regina, near to which these two mountain chains open out into a beautiful valley, broken here and there by precipitous gorges; coming together farther on, they close this valley at its southern end, and form the boundary-line of the country on both sides of the Santa Regina. The scenery here is of a truly sublime grandeur.

The mountain slope is for the most part covered by a dense forest of pines, some of which have weathered the storms of centuries, while others are sturdy and tufted, spread out, like the plants in a nursery garden, before the astonished gaze of the traveller. This forest bears the name of the Gualdo Niello or the Black Forest.

To the east, the mountains are nearly all covered with woods, and everywhere the summits are shaded by pines, beeches, firs, or bush. On the western side, however, the slope is more gentle and affords more opportunities for cultivation. In the valley, midway between the mountains and towards the south, rise towering above the other mountains, Mount Vaglierba and Mount Cinto, which, declining gently, have on their sides verdure-clad valleys beautified by streams and limpid springs, and then descend abruptly in terrible precipices and steep and rugged rocks. Like an impenetrable barrier, these mountains seem to have stayed the progress of that artificiality which, under the high-sounding name of civilisation, has undermined society. The inhabitants still retain the physiognomy, the manners, and the customs of the ancient Corsicans, of the old companions of Sampiero and Paoli. Their virtues have even grown in proportion as they have become farther and farther removed from those ideas which their natural pride associated with points of honour. They nowadays, as a rule, deplore the fatal legacies of those hereditary feuds which entailed the ruin of families, and even of entire communities.

The Niolins, who have the reputation of being the least cultivated among the Corsicans, are nearly all shepherds—strong, hardy, and of remarkable stature, the result either of their continual occupation in war, and in enduring hardships of all kinds, or of the extreme simplicity which they have ever maintained. They lead patriarchal lives, and treat strangers of whatever rank with that familiarity which might have been usual in the early ages,—an outcome of the natural equality of man. Violent in all their passions, they have sometimes imported into that of love a devotion anti a constancy hardly to be expected in folk of such rough and primitive natures.

Rising in the centre of the valley of the Niolo, not far from Mount Cinto, is a little village which overlooks a number of little hamlets scattered here and there, each at a certain distance from the others. This village is called Calacuccia, and is 'the most important one of the canton. The houses white and well built, the rivulets winding along the meadows, the tall chestnut trees, the smiling landscape,—all contribute to make it a most delightful spot.

Climbing up the steep sides of the Santa Regina, where he sees only bottomless precipices and frightful abysses, the traveller, on emerging into the valley, lingers fondly on the site of an old chapel; and, near by, in front of an old chestnut tree with its spreading boughs, is a quiet-looking house two stories high. This is deserted now, but not long ago there dwelt in it a happy family, whose misfortunes, caused by love and revenge, are never mentioned in the country without a feeling of sorrow combined with a vague sentiment of horror.

Maria Felice had scarcely emerged from childhood, but her features, although of rare regularity, indicated the possession of the liveliest emotions. Her clear blue eyes, arched eyebrows, black eyelashes, her long thick hair, the tresses of which were folded gracefully round her head, after the custom of the country—in short, a happy mixture of freshness and delicacy, distinguished her from all her companions; but her gentle and engaging manners, her affability and grace, made them forget to envy her beauty, and drew all hearts to her. To all these advantages she added a lively spirit and a disposition full of energy. She was at once the pride, the joy, and the hope of an old mother who had been sorely tried by misfortune, and of a brother, a promising young priest, distinguished alike by his attainments and the purity of his life. This brother had a friend in the neighbouring village, a young man of the same age as himself, to whom had been promised Maria's hand. The union of the two lovers, whose love had grown with years—this union which was to fill up the measure of the happiness of the two families who desired it equally, was on the point of being accomplished when the young priest, still in the flower of his days, fell by the hands of two assassins, prompted to the murder by a hereditary feud. Never before had been heard repeated so often at a funeral that terrible word *vendetta*. But who was the assassin? Who could have raised his hand to slay the young priest, the last scion of his race?

The news of the murder excited everywhere a feeling of pity and of terror. From all the surrounding hamlets the women came flocking in, distracted, tearing their hair, and wailing and crying after the fashion of the Niolins when a violent death has happened. When the women had formed themselves in a circle around the coffin and sung the *caraçolo*, Maria Felice, rising in her turn, sang her funeral chant as follows:

‘I was spinning at my wheel in the moonlight, when a pistol-shot resounded suddenly in my heart. With a dread presentiment, I rushed into thy chamber, where I found thee lying bathed in thy blood. Oh my brother Then thou saidst, “A bullet has pierced my breast.” At these words I swooned. If I did not survive thee solely to avenge thy death life to use would be insupportable. Oh my brother! he who killed thee knew that thou hadst neither father, nor brother, nor cousin, who at the sight of thy blood-stained shirt would have let grow his beard till the day of vengeance. Thy enemies knew well that thou hadst left only my tears and those of my mother, who, crushed with grief, will follow thee soon to the grave. Of the race of Ilario, the terror of his foes, I alone remain, but I, alone, shall have my revenge.’

Since the pitiable occurrence, joy and gladness disappeared from the face of the young girl—not a line in her features but bore the stamp of sombre sadness. The spindle and the shuttle lay idle by her side. Shunning even her dearest companions, she was no longer to be seen at the merry village festivals, or seated in the circle around the Ziglia listening to ghost stories, or to the *lamenti* of the brigands, or the *voceri* chanted over the dead. But after she had doffed her *saccola*, and put on the dress of a mountaineer, with pistols in

her belt and a gun over her shoulder, she might have been observed more than once in the silent night sitting in ambush for her enemies, scouring the forests and the mountains, the usual retreats of the brigands, and braving all manner of perils in the search for the murderers of her brother.

As if she had lost the memory of his love, she refused her hand to Pietro, her betrothed, the faithful friend of her unfortunate brother, declaring that she had vowed not to marry any but him who avenged his death.

Pietro Antonio Luccioni, of Sidossi, one of the most picturesque little villages in the valley of the Niolo, was a young man of about twenty years of age. His figure was tall and well set, his hair black and thick, his complexion brown, his forehead high, whilst his powerful limbs and his extraordinary bodily strength proclaimed him one of the hardy children of the mountains. But what distinguished him chiefly among the other young men of his day, whom he surpassed in nimbleness and agility in the sports and games to which the Niolins were addicted, was a certain delicacy in his features, the impress of a melancholy air which he had assumed since the death of his friend and the withdrawal of his sweetheart. Hope and gladness had fled from his heart ever since the time when, from religious motives forswearing all ideas of vengeance or blood, he had incurred the resentment of Maria Felice.

The young girl said to him, one day that he came to visit her—

‘I shall hold you unworthy of my hand and heart if you do not avenge me. So long as I cannot redeem the innocent blood of my brother there will be no happiness for me. How, if I became thy wife, could I bear the insulting reproaches of the women in thy village, who would never cease to say to thee with contempt, “Thou art without relations, alone in the world, with nobody to care for thee, for thou hast not found any one to avenge the death even of a priest; or if thou still hast any kindred living, they must be far from here, on the other side of the mountains.” They would be deemed cowards. This, Pietro, would be slow poison to me; it would aggravate my suffering day by day.’

‘For the love of heaven calm thyself,’ replied the young man. ‘Hast thou forgotten the words of the curé? The soul of the good Ilario is at this moment in Paradise, because in his death he forgave his enemies. Was not thy brother a priest? Did he not teach us to forgive our neighbours as we would that God should forgive us? And is there not a God above to punish the guilty? You know what the proverb says, “God does not pay on a Saturday.” Wouldst thou have me become a murderer, to wander like thy enemies in the woods, far from thee, deprived of liberty and peace, to die at last an infamous death? Hast thou forgotten that on our side are God, and the world, and justice? and thou wouldst hate them for enemies! Does thy brother need blood? Knowest thou not that if we do not ourselves forgive we may not expect the forgiveness of God? Ah, if thou hadst more faith thou wouldst at least wait till the hand of justice itself avenged thee.’

‘Justice!’ replied the young girl with indignation; ‘justice is not for them. Their wives boast already of the help of rich and powerful persons. What I want is vengeance, and even God Himself cannot condemn one who meditates the death of the sacrilegious murderer of one of His servants.’

‘It is a blasphemy,’ Pietro was about to reply, when Maria Felice, with death in her heart and the blush of shame on her countenance, left him in anger, to rejoin her mother. She threw herself, sobbing, into the arms of the old wretched widow, and remained there for some time, overwhelmed by her sorrow.

In the meantime Pietro's image was never absent from her thoughts. She remembered the day when he declared his love to her, and the day also when she saw him weeping over the coffin which contained the bleeding remains of her brother. Never had he seemed to her so handsome as on that day of mourning. Nevertheless, during the beautiful summer evening she sat up more than once in the hope of hearing Pietro's voice chanting some love ditty, but she no longer heard the report of the musket under his windows nor the sound of the zither.

It was the month of November when the inhabitants lead their flocks from the mountains to the plains. Pietro, not without causing Maria Felice to drop a silent tear, left for the wild and uncultivated country of Sia. His absence plunged the girl into the depths of despair. A secret voice seemed to say to her desolate heart, 'Thou wilt never see thy lover again; no, he will never return;' and she would then feel that she could not live without him. The thought alone that he would not avenge her seemed, for a moment, to wrest him from her heart, but soon his form occurred again to her thoughts, and the remembrance of him left her no peace. Sometimes she would dwell on the sweet idea of being united to her beloved Pietro, and endeavour to stifle in her bosom her thirst for vengeance; but at such a moment she would fancy she saw the bleeding corpse of her brother rising, upbraiding her for her weakness. So, amid the conflicting strife and passions raging in her bosom, she passed her days, full of bitterness and sorrow. She had no one to console her. Her dearest relatives were long since dead. Her most intimate friends, despairing of assuaging her grief, no longer came to share her troubles or to dry her tears. An extraordinary pallor overspread her countenance, her eyes grew dim. She seemed to languish and to breathe with difficulty. A fierce fever consumed her, and she would often repeat the name of her absent lover and that of her brother. 'My end is approaching,' she would say to the bystanders. 'Three times during the night have I heard the voice of my unhappy brother, calling me by my name, and I answered him.'

Moreover, every one in the village knew that the *malucella*, or night owl, had been hovering over the house, uttering ominous cries. Impressed by these sinister omens, she began to take leave of her friends, begged of them to excuse her grief, and expressed a wish that when she was dead she might be attired in the *sottana* and cap which her mother had prepared for her wedding day. She also desired that her hands might be tied with the ribbon which Pietro had given her for her nuptial *fiocco*, and that her kerchief might be given to her unfortunate lover, who had loved her so tenderly. She accompanied these words by deep sighs, and cast her eyes around the chamber as though in search of Pietro; but disappointed in her hopes, she burst into tears. Then she wished to see the curé, and having discoursed with him for some time, she expressed to him a wish to be honoured after her death by an imposing wake.

The curé was a man remarkable among the zealous servants of God. He did not, as did so many others, spread dissension amongst his flock; but, persuaded that his mission on earth was a mission of charity, of consolation, and of love, he kept aloof from all intrigues, and never left his dwelling except on an errand of peace, to help the poor, to succour the afflicted, and to spread blessing and joy in the family circle. He was full of dignity without pride, affable and tender-hearted without losing the gravity which commands respect and veneration. Although he had attained the age of threescore years, time had slightly diminished his natural vigour. The poor of the village were his only family, and he was beloved and respected by them as a father.

At the bedside of Maria Felice he said—

‘You speak of death, my dear Maria Felice; but your sickness is not so dangerous as you think. See, my child, you have put away from you the Saviour by the fierceness of your sentiments, and the Saviour who imposes tribulation on those whom He would call to Him has chosen you to be the object of His justice and goodness. You had need of this trial to regain the right path, and you should see the hand of God in this your affliction. He wants us to infer for His sake, because He wants to show us how He can change sorrow to gladness. For my part, if you remember, I have taught you from your earliest infancy to forgive for the love of God, but you have always been deaf to my exhortations. You have given yourself up to hatred, to the point of urging on to the committal of murder the unfortunate youth who had so much love for you. God has enlightened Pietro. He has turned him away from crime; but whilst punishing you for your hatred, He has in His infinite mercy touched your heart and left you time to repent. Therefore take courage, profit by this grace, make your peace with yourself and your God in submitting to His will. He has ordained that if you would obtain pardon you should pardon your enemies. Moreover, you have made unhappy a man whose wife you should have been, and although betrothed to him, you have refused his hand because he would not accept the compact of blood which you proposed to him. Promise, then, that Pietro shall be your husband, if it please God to let you live.’

At these words of the curé, whom she knew to be the friend of the afflicted and the enemy of vengeance and party feuds, Maria Felice felt a new sense of peace in her heart, her face became serene, her breathing easier, and her voice firmer.

‘Forgive me,’ she said; ‘my affliction made me forget your advice, madwoman that I was. I thought it honourable to shed the blood of my enemy, and shameful to abstain from vengeance; but now, thanks to God and to your good counsels, my eyes have been opened; I beseech you to join your prayers to mine, that the Saviour may pardon me. I have no other hope than in Heaven. I feel that death is approaching. . . . If Pietro were here. . . . Oh! how happy I should be. I conjure you to seek out the kindred of my brother’s murderers, to tell them that I forgive them all. Tell Pietro’s father too that I wish to see his son as soon as possible, so that I may die, if it is possible, bearing the name of his wife.’

At these words her face became radiant with joy, an inexpressible smile dwelt upon her lips, and her dull eyes lit up anew. Her whole being seemed to revive. The thought of her last hour no longer troubled her; her heart was filled with hope. Death no more seemed to Maria Felice other than a compassionate friend come to accompany her to a banquet of peace.

At the same time, the news came that the murderers of her brother had been overtaken by the hand of justice, and that one of them had put an end to his life in his dungeon in order that he might escape an ignominious death.

The priest took care to keep this from the knowledge of Maria Felice, so as not to allow her to waver in her repentance, or to trouble her calm and resigned spirit, but he sought to strengthen her in her pious resolves by the words of the gospels—‘Happy are the peace loving, for they shall be called the children of God.’

Meanwhile neither the resources of science nor the consolations of religion succeeded in arresting the progress of her illness, which increased every day. A message was

quickly despatched to Pietro, in the hope that his presence would restore his unhappy bride, or, at least, lighten her last moments.

Pietro, on his part, filled with a vague presentiment, had left for Sia. For several nights the slumbers of the young man had been disturbed by strange dreams, and particularly so on the night receding his departure, when there arrived at his hut the famous old man of Ghidazzo who was believed to possess the art of reading the future in the shoulder-blades of animals. Of a tall and majestic figure, with a venerable air and a long and flowing white beard, his eyes were bright and piercing, his voice grave, and his countenance austere. His head was covered with a black woollen cap, pointed with ends. His jacket, made of goat-skin reached down to his knees, and was unbuttoned at the breast to display a *carchera*, studded with pistols and cartridges, from which hung a long sheathed dagger. His legs were encased in gaiters. A long carbine was slung across his shoulders, and he walked supported by a stout oaken stick. Years ago he had been in the wars against the Genoese, and had been the friend of Paoli.

From the threshold of the hut he greeted the shepherds in the usual fashion; then entered the humble dwelling. No warmth was lacking in the manner of his welcome by the shepherds, who greeted with cordiality this chronicler of old times, this wise man and seer. A big dish of milk was brought to him, and some *mouffoli*, or wild lamb, cut into long pieces, salted and seasoned with aromatic herbs, which the shepherds keep in order to regale their guests.

After the repast the old man began to narrate to the shepherds, who sat around him beside the hearth, many events in the history of Corsica in which his ancestors had taken part. He told them how his father, more learned even than himself in the art of divination, when examining one day a bone in which appeared a tree the long branches of which reached as far as the clouds, but the roots of which were very frail and scanty, had predicted that a Corsican would extend his empire over the world, but that this empire would not endure.

‘These,’ added Pietro, ‘are predictions of events which have long since taken place; tell us rather if we or our flocks are menaced by any misfortune.’

‘I will try,’ replied the old man, ‘always provided that the lamb be a year old. The left shoulder-blade must be taken; the right one leads to error.’

The *omoplate* was handed to him, which he polished till it began to shine. Then he put his forefinger to his forehead and, for a moment, remained in an attitude of meditation. Turning towards the assistants, who, breathlessly and with fixed eyes, stood waiting for the oracle to speak, he said—

‘I see a veil spreading over the Niolo. I see in a coffin a young maiden, whom death has not robbed of her charms. Then I see another coffin—’

‘Enough, enough,’ exclaimed all the herdsmen.

Pietro felt his heart sink, the more so that he observed all eyes were fixed on him.

His fears increased when he remembered how, a few days ago, his dogs, whilst hunting the boar, searched only through wild and impassable paths, without penetrating into the maids or thickets, and how they returned home as though seized with terror, their ears down and their tails between their legs. Since that day, too, the long and plaintive howling of his dog had resounded far and wide in the desert solitude, and had filled him with a presentiment of some imminent misfortune.

It is an old belief among the mountaineers, and one generally accepted, that the howling of a dog by night is a presage of misfortune to the family of its master. This belief had been strengthened in the mind of Pietro by the stories told him by his father, who used to say that in the year 1774, called the year of humiliation, the dogs howled for several nights before the corpse of his grandfather was found hanging from a cypress tree in the convent, where it was discovered, loaded with chains, crucifix in hand, and with an ignominious sheet of writing on its back.

After the long tales of the old man the shepherds one by one fell asleep. Pietro wrapped himself in his cloak and tried to sleep. But the mournful howling of his dog, the old man of Ghidazzo, the chase, and the image of his sweetheart, all in turn engaged his thoughts, and rendered sleep for some time an impossibility.

At length, wearied with thinking and overcome by fatigue, he fell into a deep slumber. In his sleep he seemed to see Maria Felice hastening gaily with him to the church, surrounded by his kindred in their wedding dress. There, after a short prayer whilst kneeling at the altar, she gave him her hand, but it was cold and icy. This painful feeling awoke him, and it was some time before he could realise that he still lay in his own hut. He no longer doubted his misfortune, and scarcely had the day dawned than, leaving his flock, and without bidding adieu to his companions, he made for the road along the coast, through the winding paths and dense thickets, his musket over his shoulder, and round his neck the holy relic which protected him from shot and from the sting of the malmignatto.

Before sunset he arrived at the village of Ota, which lies at the foot of a mountain on the summit of which rises an inaccessible rock which it is believed will some day roll down and crush the village below. He did not stop, although worn out by fatigue. He pressed on, following the stream which, entering the forest of Aitone, rushes headlong into a dark and rocky ravine. He crossed the bridge at Zaglia, and reached the Gulf of Evisa, where he saw united all the horrors of nature. Two torrents, which had worn a passage through the inaccessible mountains, here mingled their wild waters, and on all sides there frowned huge masses of rock worn by time and shaded by trees and bushes.

Night approached and the traveller could no longer distinguish the road. Not a human voice was to be heard in these wild and inhospitable regions. The shadows of the rocks deepened the darkness of the night. At this moment Pietro was roused from his reverie by the distant tinkling of the bell of Evisa, which sounded the hour of evening prayer, awaking the echoes in the surrounding caverns. He made the sign of the cross, and for the first time felt the necessity of offering up a prayer to the Virgin for the prolongation of his sweetheart's days.

Without stopping or slackening his pace, however, and occupied only with one thought, he climbed up a steep and rocky hill, passed the village of Evisa, and plunged into the forest of Aitone. The soft rays of the stars lit up the scene of wild desolation through which he was now wending his way, and disclosed to his eyes a long track which, rising gently and then descending, finally disappeared.

He had nearly passed the forest of beech trees when he saw at some distance from the road a fire burning brightly, over which stood a man warming his limbs. He went up to him and asked him whence he came, but the mountaineer, disclosing himself, said—

Is it thou, Pietro? I have been searching for thee.'

He then told him of the illness of Maria Felice, that she had pardoned her enemies, and that she waited for him to call him husband.

‘All this,’ he said, ‘is the work of our good curate. Do not think she is in danger; the sacraments have not even been administered to her, so thou seest her illness is not dangerous.

‘Assure me on thy honour that there is no danger of her death.’

‘Life and death are in the hands of God, and His will must be done; but all say, even the priests, that there is nothing to fear.’

The mountain gorges at Vergio were covered with a great quantity of snow, and a threatening cloud heralded an approaching storm. The young shepherd, however, beset with the fear of some imminent misfortune, quickened his steps when the moon emerged from the clouds, walking cautiously whenever she was obscured, until at length, at day-break, he reached the Gualdo Niello. From there he could distinguish the Mount Pertusato, and the peak which dominates the valley of Ino, where he had so many times led his flocks around the lakes whilst singing some of Tasso’s beautiful verses. Thence he could also recognise the church of Calacuccia by its whiteness. At this sight he felt his heart beating faster than ever, and a crowd of sweet memories rushed upon him mixed with dread and vague forebodings. His only consolation was to utter a prayer every time he passed a cross engraved on the bark of a tree, or planted in the earth to indicate the spot where some wayfarer had perished in the snow or had fallen a victim to a hereditary *vendetta*. Having travelled some distance farther, he at length saw the smoke, rising from the chimneys of Sidossi, ascending above the tall chestnut trees amid venerable oaks which screen the hamlet from the traveller, who leaves behind him Gualdo Niello and San Remigio.

Pietro had by this time nearly forgotten the hardships of the journey, and having rested for some hours, he left in the afternoon for Calacuccia. An irresistible feeling, as much of joy as of fear, urged him on to the dwelling of his betrothed. He noticed some women seated in groups before their houses warming themselves in the rays of the sun, so precious in time Niolo during the winter months; and though it was not a fête day, all these women had on their Sunday clothes and were, contrary to custom, without their spindles or distaffs. He at once fixed his glance on them and thought he saw Maria Felice in their midst, but it was an illusion. Disappointed in his hope, his grief became more and more acute, till it became uncontrollable when he noticed so many friendly faces far from receiving him with a pleasant smile, so many folk far from coming to him to embrace him, as was the custom when the shepherds returned from the plain. On the contrary, they pretended not to see him, as though endeavouring to avoid the fulfilment of a painful duty. At last he rushed into the house, where he found only solitude and the signs of grief. He called several times ‘Maria Felice!’ but all was silent. Tortured with suspense, he went to the window, and saw, seated on the threshold of the door, a young girl, with dishevelled hair, and features distracted with grief, whom he immediately recognised as the favourite companion of his betrothed,—she who had shared her innocent joys from childhood, and who had so often wept over her misfortunes.

‘Maria Felice,’ he cried ‘where is she?’

The young girl was silent, but the tears which bathed her face spoke more eloquently than might the words that died away on her lips.

Pietro knew both his own misfortune and the fate of his sweetheart. He did not weep, but remained motionless.

Then, supporting himself with difficulty, he staggered into the next house, where the funeral banquet had been prepared for the mother of the deceased. At the sight of him all the women, rising, commenced anew their lamentations, making the village resound with their cries. In their *voceri* they had all presaged the death of Maria Felice. One had seen a pale clear light near her dwelling; another had dreamt of her death before her illness; others said that they had heard the sound of the tambour, and seen the penitents unfurling the banner of the dead, and meeting at her house betwixt midnight and cock-crow.

The night was far advanced; black and menacing clouds covered the tops of the mountains which hemmed in the Niolo as with a wall. A stormy wind came from the African coast, rushing through the forests, shaking the little huts in the hamlet, and raging like a whirlwind in the valleys below. A carpet of snow covered the surrounding hills; all was silence in the houses of Sidossi. Only one man was keeping watch in a small room by the pale and fluttering light of a lamp. With head sunk on his breast, with downcast eyes, and haggard features, he recalled to his mind the adored image of his beloved one—the happiness of a love which had only been a dream, her sweet manners, her conversation, the delusive utterances with which they delighted one another, the bliss with which they were wont to listen to each other's talk before the misfortune of her brother's death. Oh! if he had been but able to render the last service to the departed, to close her eyes, and to recall her sighs in one last kiss! Why, a prey to grief, did not the shade of his beloved come to him to console him, and to assure him that she was in a place of rest? The bitterness of his sorrow would have been sweetened. He had heard when a child that, in the night, the dead visited those whom they loved most in life, to console them, to tell them of their happiness and of the need they had of their prayers. Possessed with this thought, he awaited the apparition of Maria Felice; but the cock crew, and Pietro gave up all hope. Day appeared. The sun shone over the peak of Mount Nuvolato, but his grief was not abated. In vain did his infirm mother, supported on a staff, drag herself to him to console him. In vain did she with trembling voice give expression to her distress at finding him so, as though he were the sport of fortune, of the *fattura* or of the evil eye. Neither her words nor her caresses could calm him.

It is said that on the evening of the second day alter the funeral of Maria Felice a shepherd named Michel de Castellace, coming by chance from the plains of Filosorma, arrived at the cemetery situated behind the church of Calacuccia, when he heard the sound of moaning, which, according to the direction of the wind, appeared to be now near and now far off. His hair stood erect with terror; he piously made the sign of the cross, but in vain. He added a prayer, but the moaning still continued. Being now convinced that this noise could not be that of the demon, he bethought himself that it might be a ghost, such as he had heard of in his childhood. He drew a pistol from his pocket, and with his finger made several crosses on the trigger-guard so that the weapon might not miss its aim, owing to some enchantment, he walked on, pistol in hand, listening on the side from whence came the moaning, and looking before him he saw on the edge of a grave what appeared to him to be either a shadow or a living being, and near it a corpse in an open coffin. Still holding his weapon and gazing on the strange sight, he clambered up a little hill, and from there he thought he recognised the corpse of Maria Felice. The moon shone out from amid the gathering clouds and covered the corpse with a pale and deathlike light. From the arrangement of her hair, the neatness of her dress, one would not have said that Maria Felice was sleeping the sleep of death, but that she lay lulled in the

slumber of innocence, as when her mother, in the days of her girlhood, sang her to sleep whilst foretelling her a happy destiny. At the sight of her, filled with terror and pity, Michel began to recite piously the prayers for the dead. Then with sad feelings he departed from the scene of mourning. He had scarcely walked a few steps when, turning round, he found he could no longer see the vision.

Next day Pietro's father, having heard from Michel about the nocturnal apparition in the cemetery, sought out his son, and in grave and severe tones said to him—

'Pietro, I thought thou wert a man worthy of the race which counts so many Fathers of the Commune, but thy love and thy grief have rendered thee weaker than a woman. I have seen nearly all my kindred perish under the fire of the Genoese at the time they were fighting for the independence of our country. I have seen the barbarous Sionville carry fire and flame into my houses, destroy my flocks, and I have never shed a tear. I only thought of vengeance. Be a man too, calm thyself, respect the will of Heaven, and above all let me never hear again that thou hast left thy father's roof in the night.'

Pietro dared not answer. He went away to hide the sorrow that these words had called forth in his soul. Whether it was that he could not enjoy that last consolation of the afflicted, the liberty of shedding tears, or whether the excess of his grief had exhausted his powers, his face became wan, his features livid, his look fixed, and he sank into a kind of languor from which nothing could rouse him. After a few days he had ceased to suffer. His only dying wish was that he should be buried beside his betrothed and covered with the earth which he had so often bedewed with his tears.