

pure from the hazy Apennines. From the elevation on which the church was placed she looked over the sleeping town. She could see the Arno winding its course through the city; in the distance she saw the great walls, and beyond, fair fields and vineyards. The birds were singing as she had never heard them sing before. Life in Florence had always been a pleasant experience to her, but this morning she suddenly realized that she loved the great city—not because it was the home of Dante and of Michael Angelo, but because—because she was happy. And why was she happy? Why had she come so early to the cathedral gate? Was it that her sins were troubling her, demanding absolution? She could not tell. She only knew that she had awakened early, and had walked out into the delicious morning. All nature thrilled with a glad new song, and everything was so bright and beautiful to her. Never had she kept a secret from her Padre Curato. Yes, she would go to confession now, and then hers would be the lightest and happiest heart in Florence.

She entered the cathedral. Pushing her way through a series of black, silently-swinging doors, she at last found herself in the presence of the Padre, who was saying a prayer. Presently he finished and turned, surprised.

“Why, Ninetta!” he exclaimed, “what brings you here at such an early hour?”

She hesitated, reddened, and then replied, “I came to confess to you, Padre,” and she knelt before him.

The rays of the morning sun had just reached the stained windows, and, diffusing themselves through the image of Maria Santissima so richly colored there, spread a holy light over the priest and the maiden. The Padre looked down upon the fair girl before him with a fast throbbing heart. As the softened light shed a halo about her, she seemed divinely beautiful to him; for what is sweeter than the sight of a pure, fair maiden in sincere devotion? What sin could she have to confess? Surely any deed, however sinful in others, would be hallowed at her hands. Saint and demon alike would fall in love with such a girl. A terrible temptation came to him; his breath came quick and short, and he bent over to press his lips to her cheek. But an invisible hand seemed to check his movement, and he listened to her plaintive confession. After a moment she hesitated, as if she would fain guard longer some secret.

“Surely she cannot have come to confess merely these fanciful