

## Chapter 6 - Dawning Hopes

When Maso opened the door again, and ushered in the two visitors, Nello, first making a deep reverence to Romola, gently pushed Tito before him, and advanced with him towards her father.

'Messer Bardo,' he said, in a more measured and respectful tone than was usual with him, 'I have the honour of presenting to you the Greek scholar, who has been eager to have speech of you, not less from the report I have made to him of your learning and your priceless collections, than because of the furtherance your patronage may give him under the transient need to which he has been reduced by shipwreck. His name is Tito Melema, at your service.'

Romola's astonishment could hardly have been greater if the stranger had worn a panther-skin and carried a thyrsus; for the cunning barber had said nothing of the Greek's age or appearance; and among her father's scholarly visitors, she had hardly ever seen any but middle-aged or grey-headed men. There was only one masculine face, at once youthful and beautiful, the image of which remained deeply impressed on her mind: it was that of her brother, who long years ago had taken her on his knee, kissed her, and never come back again: a fair face, with sunny hair, like her own. But the habitual attitude of her mind towards strangers - a proud self-dependence and determination to ask for nothing even by a smile - confirmed in her by her father's complaints against the world's injustice, was like a snowy embankment hemming in the rush of admiring surprise. Tito's bright face showed its rich-tinted beauty without any rivalry of colour above his black sajo or tunic reaching to the knees. It seemed like a wreath of spring, dropped suddenly in Romola's young but wintry life, which had inherited nothing but memories - memories of a dead mother, of a lost brother, of a blind father's happier time - memories of far-off light, love, and beauty, that lay embedded in dark mines of books, and could hardly give out their brightness again until they were kindled for her by the torch of some known joy. Nevertheless, she returned Tito's bow, made to her on entering, with the same pale proud face as ever; but, as he approached, the snow melted, and when he ventured to look towards her again, while Nello was speaking, a pink flush overspread her face, to vanish again almost immediately, as if her imperious will had recalled it. Tito's glance, on the contrary, had that gentle, beseeching admiration in it which is the most propitiating of appeals to a proud, shy woman, and is perhaps the only atonement a man can make for being too handsome. The finished fascination of his air came chiefly from the absence of demand and assumption. It was that of a fleet, soft-coated, dark-eyed animal that delights you by not bounding away in indifference from you, and unexpectedly pillows its chin on your palm, and looks up at you desiring to be stroked - as if it loved you.

'Messere, I give you welcome,' said Bardo, with some condescension; 'misfortune wedded to learning, and especially to Greck learning, is a letter of credit that should win the ear of every instructed Florentine; for, as you are doubtless aware, since the period when your countryman, Manuelo Crisolora, diffused the light of his teaching in the chief cities of Italy, now nearly a century ago, no man is held worthy of the name of scholar who has acquired merely the transplanted and derivative literature of the Latins; rather such inert students are stigmatised as opici or barbarians according to the phrase of the Romans themselves, who frankly replenished their urns at the fountain-head. I am, as you perceive, and as Nello has doubtless forewarned you, totally blind: a calamity to which we Florentines are held especially liable, whether owing to the cold winds which rush upon us in spring from the passes of the Appenines, or to that sudden transition from the cool gloom of our houses to the dazzling brightness of our summer sun, by which the lippi are said to have been made so numerous among the ancient Romans; or, in fine, to some occult cause which eludes our superficial surmises. But I pray you be seated: Nello, my friend, be seated.'

Bardo paused until his fine ear had assured him that the visitors were seating themselves, and that Romola was taking her usual chair at his right hand. Then he said -

'From what part of Greece do you come, Messere? I had thought that your unhappy country had been almost exhausted of those sons who could cherish in their minds any image of her original glory, though indeed the barbarous Sultans have of late shown themselves not indisposed to engraft on their wild stock the precious vine which their own fierce bands have hewn down and trampled under foot. From what part of Greece do you come?'

'I sailed last from Nauplia,' said Tito; 'but I have resided both at Constantinople and Thessalonica, and have travelled in various parts little visited by Western Christians since the triumph of the Turkish arms. I should tell you, however, Messere, that I was not born in Greece, but at Bari. I spent the first sixteen years of my life in Southern Italy and Sicily.'

While Tito was speaking, some emotion passed, like a breath on the waters, across Bardo's delicate features; he leaned forward, put out his right hand towards Romola, and turned his head as if about to speak to her; but then, correcting himself, turned away again, and said, in a subdued voice -

'Excuse me; is it not true - you are young?'

'I am three-and-twenty,' said Tito.

'Ah,' said Bardo, still in a tone of subdued excitement, 'and you had, doubtless, a father who cared for your early instruction - who, perhaps, was himself a scholar?'

There was a slight pause before Tito's answer came to the ear of Bardo; but for Romoja and Nello it began with a slight shock that seemed to pass through him, and cause a momentary quivering of the lip; doubtless at the revival of a supremely painful remembrance.

'Yes,' he replied, 'at least a father by adoption. He was a Neapolitan, and of accomplished scholarship, both Latin and Greek. But,' added Tito, after another slight pause, 'he is lost to me - was lost on a voyage he too rashly undertook to Delos.'

Bardo sank backward again, too delicate to ask another question that might probe a sorrow which he divined to be recent. Romola, who knew well what were the fibres that Tito's voice had stirred in her father, felt that this new acquaintance had with wonderful suddenness got within the barrier that lay between them and the alien world. Nello, thinking that the evident check given to the conversation offered a graceful opportunity for relieving himself from silence, said -

'In truth, it is as clear as Venetian glass that this fine young man has had the best training; for the two Cennini have set him to work at their Greek sheets already, and it seems to me they are not men to begin cutting before they have felt the edge of their tools; they tested him well beforehand, we may be sure, and if there are two things not to be hidden - love and a cough - I say there is a third, and that is ignorance, when once a man is obliged to do something besides wagging his head. The tonsor inequalis is inevitably betrayed when he takes the shears in his hand; is it not true, Messer Bardo? I speak after the fashion of a barber, but, as Luigi Pulci says -

'Perdonimi s'io fallo: chi m'ascolta  
Intenda il mio volgar col suo latino.'

'Nay, my good Nello,' said Bardo, with an air of friendly severity, 'you are not altogether illiterate, and might doubtless have made a more respectable progress in learning if you had abstained somewhat from the cicalata and gossip of the street-corner, to which our Florentines are excessively addicted; but still more if you had not clogged your memory with those frivolous productions of which Luigi Pulci has furnished the most peccant exemplar - a compendium of extravagances and incongruities the farthest removed from the models of a pure age, and resembling rather the grylli or conceits of a period when mystic meaning was held a warrant for monstrosity of form; with this difference, that while the monstrosity is retained, the mystic meaning is absent; in contemptible contrast with the great poem of

Virgil, who, as I long held with Filelfo, before Landino had taken upon him to expound the same opinion, embodied the deepest lessons of philosophy in a graceful and well-knit fable. And I cannot but regard the multiplication of these babbling, lawless productions, albeit countenanced by the patronage, and in some degree the example of Lorenzo himself, otherwise a friend to true learning, as a sign that the glorious hopes of this century are to be quenched in gloom; nay, that they have been the delusive prologue to an age worse than that of iron - the age of tinsel and gossamer, in which no thought has substance enough to be moulded into consistent and lasting form.'

'Once more, pardon,' said Nello, opening his palms outwards, and shrugging his shoulders, 'I find myself knowing so many things in good Tuscan before I have time to think of the Latin for them; and Messer Luigi's rhymes are always slipping off the lips of my customers: - that is what corrupts me. And, indeed, talking of customers, I have left my shop and my reputation too long in the custody of my slow Sandro, who does not deserve even to be called a tonsor inequalis, but rather to be pronounced simply a bungler in the vulgar tongue. So with your permission, Messer Bardo, I will take my leave - well understood that I am at your service whenever Maso calls upon me. It seems a thousand years till I dress and perfume the damigella's hair, which deserves to shine in the heavens as a constellation, though indeed it were a pity for it ever to go so far out of reach.'

Three voices made a fugue of friendly farewells to Nello, as he retreated with a bow to Romola and a beck to Tito. The acute barber saw that the pretty youngster, who had crept into his liking by some strong magic, was well launched in Bardo's favourable regard; and satisfied that his introduction had not miscarried so far, he felt the propriety of retiring.

The little burst of wrath, called forth by Nello's unlucky quotation, had diverted Bardo's mind from the feelings which had just before been hemming in further speech, and he now addressed Tito again with his ordinary calmness.

'Ah! young man, you are happy in having been able to unite the advantages of travel with those of study, and you will be welcome among us as a bringer of fresh tidings from a land which has become sadly strange to us, except through the agents of a now restricted commerce and the reports of hasty pilgrims. For those days are in the far distance which I myself witnessed, when men like Aurispa and Guarino went out to Greece as to a storehouse, and came back laden with manuscripts which every scholar was eager to borrow - and, be it owned with shame, not always willing to restore; nay, even the days when erudite Greeks flocked to our shores for a refuge, seem far off

now - farther off than the on-coming of my blindness. But doubtless, young man, research after the treasures of antiquity was not alien to the purpose of your travels?'

'Assuredly not,' said Tito. 'On the contrary, my companion - my father - was willing to risk his life in his zeal for the discovery of inscriptions and other traces of ancient civilisation.'

'And I trust there is a record of his researches and their results,' said Bardo, eagerly, 'since they must be even more precious than those of Ciriaco, which I have diligently availed myself of, though they are not always illuminated by adequate learning.'

'There was such a record,' said Tito, 'but it was lost, like everything else, in the shipwreck I suffered below Ancona. The only record left is such as remains in our - in my memory.'

'You must lose no time in committing it to paper, young man,' said Bardo, with growing interest. 'Doubtless you remember much, if you aided in transcription; for when I was your age, words wrought themselves into my mind as if they had been fixed by the tool of the graver; wherefore I constantly marvel at the capriciousness of my daughter's memory, which grasps certain objects with tenacity, and lets fall all those minutiae whereon depends accuracy, the very soul of scholarship. But I apprehend no such danger with you, young man, if your will has seconded the advantages of your training.'

When Bardo made this reference to his daughter, Tito ventured to turn his eyes towards her, and at the accusation against her memory his face broke into its brightest smile, which was reflected as inevitably as sudden sunbeams in Romola's. Conceive the soothing delight of that smile to her! Romola had never dreamed that there was a scholar in the world who would smile at a deficiency for which she was constantly made to feel herself a culprit. It was like the dawn of a new sense to her - the sense of comradeship. They did not look away from each other immediately, as if the smile had been a stolen one; they looked and smiled with frank enjoyment.

'She is not really so cold and proud,' thought Tito.

'Does he forget too, I wonder?' thought Romola. 'Yet I hope not, else he will vex my father.'

But Tito was obliged to turn away, and answer Bardo's question.

'I have had much practice in transcription,' he said; 'but in the case of inscriptions copied in memorable scenes, rendered doubly impressive by the sense of risk and adventure, it may have happened that my

retention of written characters has been weakened. On the plain of the Eurotas, or among the gigantic stones of Mycenae and Tyrins - especially when the fear of the Turk hovers over one like a vulture - the mind wanders, even though the hand writes faithfully what the eye dictates. But something doubtless I have retained,' added Tito, with a modesty which was not false, though he was conscious that it was politic, 'something that might be of service if illustrated and corrected by a wider learning than my own.'

'That is well spoken, young man,' said Bardo, delighted. 'And I will not withhold from you such aid as I can give, if you like to communicate with me concerning your recollections. I foresee a work which will be a useful supplement to the 'Isolario' of Christoforo Buondelmonte, and which may take rank with the 'Itineraria' of Ciriaco and the admirable Ambrogio Traversari. But we must prepare ourselves for calumny, young man,' Bardo went on with energy, as if the work were already growing so fast that the time of trial was near; 'if your book contains novelties you will be charged with forgery; if my elucidations should clash with any principles of interpretation adopted by another scholar, our personal characters will be attacked, we shall be impeached with foul actions; you must prepare yourself to be told that your mother was a fishwoman, and that your father was a renegade priest or a hanged malefactor. I myself, for having shown error in a single preposition, had an invective written against me wherein I was taxed with treachery, fraud, indecency, and even hideous crimes. Such, my young friend - such are the flowers with which the glorious path of scholarship is strewed! But tell me, then: I have learned much concerning Byzantium and Thessalonica long ago from Demetrio Calcondila, who has but lately departed from Florence; but you, it seems, have visited less familiar scenes?'

'Yes; we made what I may call a pilgrimage full of danger, for the sake of visiting places which have almost died out of the memory of the West, for they lie away from the track of pilgrims; and my father used to say that scholars themselves hardly imagine them to have any existence out of books. He was of opinion that a new and more glorious era would open for learning when men should begin to look for their commentaries on the ancient writers in the remains of cities and temples, nay, in the paths of the rivers, and on the face of the valleys and the mountains.'

'Ah!' said Bardo, fervidly, 'your father, then, was not a common man. Was he fortunate, may I ask? Had he many friends?' These last words were uttered in a tone charged with meaning.

'No; he made enemies - chiefly, I believe, by a certain impetuous candour; and they hindered his advancement, so that he lived in

obscurity. And he would never stoop to conciliate: he could never forget an injury.'

'Ah!' said Bardo again, with a long, deep intonation.

'Among our hazardous expeditions,' continued Tito, willing to prevent further questions on a point so personal, 'I remember with particular vividness a hastily snatched visit to Athens. Our hurry, and the double danger of being seized as prisoners by the Turks, and of our galley raising anchor before we could return, made it seem like a fevered vision of the night - the wide plain, the girdling mountains, the ruined porticos and columns, either standing far aloof, as if receding from our hurried footsteps, or else jammed in confusedly among the dwellings of Christians degraded into servitude, or among the forts and turrets of their Moslem conquerors, who have their stronghold on the Acropolis.'

'You fill me with surprise,' said Bardo. 'Athens, then, is not utterly destroyed and swept away, as I had imagined?'

'No wonder you should be under that mistake, for few even of the Greeks themselves, who live beyond the mountain boundary of Attica, know anything about the present condition of Athens, or Setine, as the sailors call it. I remember, as we were rounding the promontory of Sunium, the Greek pilot we had on board our Venetian galley pointed to the mighty columns that stand on the summit of the rock - the remains, as you know well, of the great temple erected to the goddess Athena, who looked down from that high shrine with triumph at her conquered rival Poseidon; - well, our Greek pilot, pointing to those columns, said, 'That was the school of the great philosopher Aristotle.' And at Athens itself, the monk who acted as our guide in the hasty view we snatched, insisted most on showing us the spot where St Philip baptised the Ethiopian eunuch, or some such legend.'

'Talk not of monks and their legends, young man!' said Bardo, interrupting Tito impetuously. 'It is enough to overlay human hope and enterprise with an eternal frost to think that the ground which was trodden by philosophers and poets is crawled over by those insect-swarms of besotted fanatics or howling hypocrites.'

'Perdio, I have no affection for them,' said Tito, with a shrug; 'servitude agrees well with a religion like theirs, which lies in the renunciation of all that makes life precious to other men. And they carry the yoke that befits them: their matin chant is drowned by the voice of the muezzin, who, from the gallery of the high tower on the Acropolis, calls every Mussulman to his prayers. That tower springs from the Parthenon itself; and every time we paused and directed our eyes towards it, our guide set up a wail, that a temple which had once been won from the

diabolical uses of the pagans to become the temple of another virgin than Pallas - the Virgin-Mother of God - was now again perverted to the accursed ends of the Moslem. It was the sight of those walls of the Acropolis, which disclosed themselves in the distance as we leaned over the side of our galley when it was forced by contrary winds to anchor in the Piraeus, that fired my father's mind with the determination to see Athens at all risks, and in spite of the sailors' warnings that if we lingered till a change of wind, they would depart without us: but, after all, it was impossible for us to venture near the Acropolis, for the sight of men eager in examining 'old stones' raised the suspicion that we were Venetian spies, and we had to hurry back to the harbour.'

'We will talk more of these things,' said Bardo, eagerly. 'You must recall everything, to the minutest trace left in your memory. You will win the gratitude of after-times by leaving a record of the aspect Greece bore while yet the barbarians had not swept away every trace of the structures that Pausanias and Pliny described: you will take those great writers as your models; and such contribution of criticism and suggestion as my riper mind can supply shall not be wanting to you. There will be much to tell; for you have travelled, you said, in the Peloponnesus?'

'Yes; and in Boeotia also: I have rested in the groves of Helicon, and tasted of the fountain Hippocrene. But on every memorable spot in Greece conquest after conquest has set its seal, till there is a confusion of ownership even in ruins, that only close study and comparison could unravel. High over every fastness, from the plains of Lacedaemon to the straits of Thermopylae, there towers some huge Frankish fortress, once inhabited by a French or Italian marquis, now either abandoned or held by Turkish bands.'

'Stay!' cried Bardo, whose mind was now too thoroughly preoccupied by the idea of the future book to attend to Tito's further narration. 'Do you think of writing in Latin or Greek? Doubtless Greek is the more ready clothing for your thoughts, and it is the nobler language. But on the other hand, Latin is the tongue in which we shall measure ourselves with the larger and more famous number of modern rivals. And if you are less at ease in it, I will aid you - yes. I will spend on you that long-accumulated study which was to have been thrown into the channel of another work - a work in which I myself was to have had a helpmate.'

Bardo paused a moment, and then added -

'But who knows whether that work may not be executed yet? For you, too, young man, have been brought up by a father who poured into



your mind all the long-gathered stream of his knowledge and experience. Our aid might be mutual.'

Romola, who had watched her father's growing excitement, and divined well the invisible currents of feeling that determined every question and remark, felt herself in a glow of strange anxiety: she turned her eyes on Tito continually, to watch the impression her father's words made on him afraid lest he should be inclined to dispel these visions of co-operation which were lighting up her father's face with a new hope. But no! He looked so bright and gentle: he must feel, as she did, that in this eagerness of blind age there was piteousness enough to call forth inexhaustible patience. How much more strongly he would feel this if he knew about her brother! A girl of eighteen imagines the feelings behind the face that has moved her with its sympathetic youth, as easily as primitive people imagined the humours of the gods in fair weather: what is she to believe in, if not in this vision woven from within?

And Tito was really very far from feeling impatient. He delighted in sitting there with the sense that Romola's attention was fixed on him, and that he could occasionally look at her. He was pleased that Bardo should take an interest in him; and he did not dwell with enough seriousness on the prospect of the work in which he was to be aided, to feel moved by it to anything else than that easy, good-humoured acquiescence which was natural to him.

'I shall be proud and happy,' he said, in answer to Bardo's last words, 'if my services can be held a meet offering to the matured scholarship of Messere. But doubtless' - here he looked towards Romola - 'the lovely damigella, your daughter, makes all other aid superfluous; for I have learned from Nello that she has been nourished on the highest studies from her earliest years.'

'You are mistaken,' said Romola; 'I am by no means sufficient to my father: I have not the gifts that are necessary for scholarship.'

Romola did not make this self-depreciatory statement in a tone of anxious humility but with a proud gravity.

'Nay, my Romola,' said her father, not willing that the stranger should have too low a conception of his daughter's powers; 'thou art not destitute of gifts; rather, thou art endowed beyond the measure of women; but thou hast withal the woman's delicate frame, which ever craves repose and variety, and so begets a wandering imagination. My daughter' - turning to Tito - 'has been very precious to me, filling up to the best of her power the place of a son. For I had once a son ...'

Bardo checked himself: he did not wish to assume an attitude of complaint in the presence of a stranger, and he remembered that this young man, in whom he had unexpectedly become so much interested, was still a stranger, towards whom it became him rather to keep the position of a patron. His pride was roused to double activity by the fear that he had forgotten his dignity.

'But,' he resumed, in his original tone of condescension, 'we are departing from what I believe is to you the most important business. Nello informed me that you had certain gems which you would fain dispose of, and that you desired a passport to some man of wealth and taste who would be likely to become a purchaser.'

'It is true; for, though I have obtained employment, as a corrector with the Cennini, my payment leaves little margin beyond the provision of necessaries, and would leave less but that my good friend Nello insists on my hiring a lodging from him, and saying nothing about the rent till better days.'

'Nello is a good-hearted prodigal,' said Bardo; 'and though, with that ready ear and ready tongue of his, he is too much like the ill-famed Margites - knowing many things and knowing them all badly, as I hinted to him but now - he is nevertheless 'abnormis sapiens,' after the manner of our born Florentines. But have you the gems with you? I would willingly know what they are - yet it is useless: no, it might only deepen regret. I cannot add to my store.'

'I have one or two intaglios of much beauty,' said Tito, proceeding to draw from his wallet a small case.

But Romola no sooner saw the movement than she looked at him with significant gravity, and placed her finger on her lips,

'Con viso che tocendo dicea, Taci.'

If Bardo were made aware that the gems were within reach, she knew well he would want a minute description of them, and it would become pain to him that they should go away from him, even if he did not insist on some device for purchasing them in spite of poverty. But she had no sooner made this sign than she felt rather guilty and ashamed at having virtually confessed a weakness of her father's to a stranger. It seemed that she was destined to a sudden confidence and familiarity with this young Greek, strangely at variance with her deep-seated pride and reserve; and this consciousness again brought the unwonted colour to her cheeks.

Tito understood her look and sign, and immediately withdrew his hand from the case, saying, in a careless tone, so as to make it appear

that he was merely following up his last words, 'But they are usually in the keeping of Messer Domenico Cennini, who has strong and safe places for these things. He estimates them as worth at least five hundred ducats.'

'Ah, then, they are fine intagli,' said Bardo. 'Five hundred ducats! Ah, more than a man's ransom!'

Tito gave a slight, almost imperceptible start, and opened his long dark eyes with questioning surprise at Bardo's blind face, as if his words - a mere phrase of common parlance, at a time when men were often being ransomed from slavery or imprisonment - had had some special meaning for him. But the next moment he looked towards Romola, as if her eyes must be her father's interpreters. She, intensely preoccupied with what related to her father, imagined that Tito was looking to her again for some guidance, and immediately spoke.

'Alessandra Scala delights in gems, you know, father: she calls them her winter flowers; and the Segretario would be almost sure to buy any gems that she wished for. Besides, he himself sets great store by rings and sigils, which he wears as a defence against pains in the joints.'

'It is true,' said Bardo. 'Bartolommeo has overmuch confidence in the efficacy of gems - a confidence wider than what is sanctioned by Pliny, who clearly shows that he regards many beliefs of that sort as idle superstitions; though not to the utter denial of medicinal virtues in gems. Wherefore, I myself, as you observe, young man, wear certain rings, which the discreet Camillo Leonardi prescribed to me by letter when two years ago I had a certain infirmity of sudden numbness. But thou hast spoken well, Romola. I will dictate a letter to Bartolommeo, which Maso shall carry. But it were well that Messere should notify to thee what the gems are, together with the intagli they bear, as a warrant to Bartolommeo that they will be worthy of his attention.'

'Nay, father,' said Romola, whose dread lest a paroxysm of the collector's mania should seize her father, gave her the courage to resist his proposal. 'Your word will be sufficient that Messere is a scholar and has travelled much. The Segretario will need no further inducement to receive him.'

'True, child,' said Bardo, touched on a chord that was sure to respond. 'I have no need to add proofs and arguments in confirmation of my word to Bartolommeo. And I doubt not that this young man's presence is in accord with the tones of his voice, so that, the door being once opened, he will be his own best advocate.'

Bardo paused a few moments, but his silence was evidently charged with some idea that he was hesitating to express, for he once leaned forward a little as if he were going to speak, then turned his head aside towards Romola and sank backward again. At last, as if he had made up his mind, he said in a tone which might have become a prince giving the courteous signal of dismissal -

'I am somewhat fatigued this morning, and shall prefer seeing you again to-morrow, when I shall be able to give you the secretary's answer, authorising you to present yourself to him at some given time. But before you go' - here the old man, in spite of himself, fell into a more faltering tone - 'you will perhaps permit me to touch your hand? It is long since I touched the hand of a young man.'

Bardo stretched out his aged white hand, and Tito immediately placed his dark but delicate and supple fingers within it. Bardo's cramped fingers closed over them, and he held them for a few minutes in silence. Then he said -

'Romola, has this young man the same complexion as thy brother - fair and pale?'

'No, father,' Romola answered, with determined composure, though her heart began to beat violently with mingled emotions. 'The hair of Messere is dark - his complexion is dark.' Inwardly she said, 'Will he mind it? will it be disagreeable? No, he looks so gentle and good-natured.' Then aloud again -

'Would Messere permit my father to touch his hair and face?'

Her eyes inevitably made a timid entreating appeal while she asked this, and Tito's met them with soft brightness as he said, 'Assuredly,' and, leaning forward, raised Bardo's hand to his curls, with a readiness of assent, which was the greater relief to her, because it was unaccompanied by any sign of embarrassment.

Bardo passed his hand again and again over the long curls and grasped them a little, as if their spiral resistance made his inward vision clearer; then he passed his hand over the brow and cheek, tracing the profile with the edge of his palm and fourth finger, and letting the breadth of his hand repose on the rich oval of the cheek.

'Ah,' he said, as his hand glided from the face and rested on the young man's shoulder. 'He must be very unlike thy brother, Romola: and it is the better. You see no visions, I trust, my young friend?'

At this moment the door opened, and there entered, unannounced, a tall elderly man in a handsome black silk lucco, who, unwinding his

becchetto from his neck and taking off his cap, disclosed a head as white as Bardo's. He cast a keen glance of surprise at the group before him - the young stranger leaning in that filial attitude, while Bardo's hand rested on his shoulder, and Romola sitting near with eyes dilated by anxiety and agitation. But there was an instantaneous change: Bardo let fall his hand, Tito raised himself from his stooping posture, and Romola rose to meet the visitor with an alacrity which implied all the greater intimacy, because it was unaccompanied by any smile.

'Well, god-daughter,' said the stately man, as he touched Romola's shoulder; 'Maso said you had a visitor, but I came in nevertheless.'

'It is thou, Bernardo,' said Bardo. 'Thou art come at a fortunate moment. This, young man,' he continued, while Tito rose and bowed, 'is one of the chief citizens of Florence, Messer Bernardo del Nero, my oldest, I had almost said my only friend - whose good opinion, if you can win it, may carry you far. He is but three-and-twenty, Bernardo, yet he can doubtless tell thee much which thou wilt care to hear; for though a scholar, he has already travelled far, and looked on other things besides the manuscripts for which thou hast too light an esteem.'

'Ah, a Greek, as I augur,' said Bernardo, returning Tito's reverence but slightly, and surveying him with that sort of glance which seems almost to cut like fine steel. 'Newly arrived in Florence, it appears. The name of Messere - or part of it, for it is doubtless a long one?'

'On the contrary,' said Tito, with perfect good-humour, 'it is most modestly free from polysyllabic pomp. My name is Tito Melema.'

'Truly?' said Bernardo, rather scornfully, as he took a seat; 'I had expected it to be at least as long as the names of a city, a river, a province, and an empire all put together. We Florentines mostly use names as we do prawns, and strip them of all flourishes before we trust them to our throats.'

'Well, Bardo,' he continued, as if the stranger were not worth further notice, and changing his tone of sarcastic suspicion for one of sadness, 'we have buried him.'

'Ah!' replied Bardo, with corresponding sadness, 'and a new epoch has come for Florence - a dark one, I fear. Lorenzo has left behind him an inheritance that is but like the alchemist's laboratory when the wisdom of the alchemist is gone.'

'Not altogether so,' said Bernardo. 'Piero de' Medici has abundant intelligence; his faults are only the faults of hot blood. I love the lad - lad he will always be to me, as I have always been 'little father' to him.'

'Yet all who want a new order of things are likely to conceive new hopes,' said Bardo. 'We shall have the old strife of parties, I fear.'

'If we could have a new order of things that was something else than knocking down one coat of arms to put up another,' said Bernardo, 'I should be ready to say, 'I belong to no party: I am a Florentine.' But as long as parties are in question, I am a Medicean, and will be a Medicean till I die. I am of the same mind as Farinata degli Uberti: if any man asks me what is meant by siding with a party, I say, as he did, 'To wish ill or well, for the sake of past wrongs or kindnesses.'"

During this short dialogue, Tito had been standing, and now took his leave.

'But come again at the same hour to-morrow,' said Bardo, graciously, before Tito left the room, 'that I may give you Bartolommeo's answer.'

'From what quarter of the sky has this pretty Greek youngster alighted so close to thy chair, Bardo?' said Bernardo del Nero, as the door closed. He spoke with dry emphasis, evidently intended to convey something more to Bardo than was implied by the mere words.

'He is a scholar who has been shipwrecked and has saved a few gems, for which he wants to find a purchaser. I am going to send him to Bartolommeo Scala, for thou knowest it were more prudent in me to abstain from further purchases.'

Bernardo shrugged his shoulders and said, 'Romola, wilt thou see if my servant is without? I ordered him to wait for me here.' Then, when Romola was at a sufficient distance, he leaned forward and said to Bardo in a low, emphatic tone -

'Remember, Bardo, thou hast a rare gem of thy own; take care no one gets it who is not likely to pay a worthy price. That pretty Greek has a lithe sleekness about him, that seems marvellously fitted for slipping easily into any nest he fixes his mind on.'

Bardo was startled: the association of Tito with the image of his lost son had excluded instead of suggesting the thought of Romola. But almost immediately there seemed to be a reaction which made him grasp the warning as if it had been a hope.

'But why not, Bernardo? If the young man approved himself worthy - he is a scholar - and - and there would be no difficulty about the dowry, which always makes thee gloomy.'