

"Will you let me see it? If you are willing, perhaps I can assist you in this matter."

All turned toward him with a look of great surprise.

"What do you think of that from the man who sweeps Mr. Ludolph's store?" asked Miss Brown in a loud whisper.

"I think the fellow is as presuming as he is ignorant," said Mr. Mellen so plainly that all heard them.

"It is not presuming, sir, to offer a kindness where it is needed," said Dennis with dignity, "and my ignorance is not yet proved. The presumption is all on your part."

"Mr. Mellen flushed and was about to answer angrily, when Miss Winthrop said hastily but in a kindly tone—

"But really Mr. Fleet, much of our music is new and very difficult."

"But it is written, is it not?" asked Dennis with a smile.

Christine looked at him in silent wonder. What would he not do next? But she was sorry he had spoken, for she foresaw only mortification for him.

"O give him the music by all means," said Miss Brown, expecting to enjoy his blundering attempts to sing what was far beyond him. "There, I will play the accompaniment. It's not the tune of Old Hundred that you are to sing now, young man, remember."

Dennis glanced over the music, and she commenced playing a loud, difficult piece.

He turned to Miss Ludolph and said—

"I fear you have given me the wrong music. Miss Brown is playing something not written here."

They exchanged significant glances, and Miss Winthrop said—

"Play the right music, Miss Brown."

She struck into the music that Dennis held but played it so out of time, that no one could sing it. Dennis laid down his sheets on the piano and said quietly, though with flushed face,

"I did not mean to be obtrusive. You all seem greatly disappointed at Mr. Archer's absence and the results, and I thought that in view of the emergency it would not be presumption to offer my services. But it seems that I am mistaken."

"No, it is not presumption," said Miss Winthrop. "It was true kindness and courtesy, which has been ill requited. But, you see to be rank, Mr. Fleet, we all fear that you do not realize what you are undertaking."

"Must I of necessity be an ignoramus because, as Miss Brown says, I sweep a store?"

"Let me play the accompaniment," said Christine, with the decided manner of her own that few resisted, and she went correctly through the difficult and brilliant passage. Dennis followed his part with both eye and ear, and then said—

"Perhaps I had better sing my part alone first, and then you can correct any mistakes."

There was a flutter of expectation, a wink from Mr. Mellen, and an audible titter from Miss Brown.

"Certainly," said Miss Ludolph, who thought to herself "If he will make a fool of himself, he may," and she played the brief prelude.

Then prompt upon the proper note, true to time and note, Dennis's rich, powerful tenor voice startled, and then entranced them all. He sang the entire passage through, with only such mistakes as resulted from his nervousness and embarrassment.

At the close, all exclaimed in admiration save Miss Brown, who bit her lip in ill-concealed vexation, but she said with a half sneer—

"Really, Mr. What-is-your-name, you are almost equal to Blind Tom."

"You do Blind Tom great injustice," said Dennis. "I read my music."

"But how did you learn to read music in that style?" asked Christine.

"Of course it took me years to do so. But no one could join our musical club at college who could not read anything placed before him."

"It must have been small and select, then."

"It was."

"How often had you sung that piece before?" asked Miss Brown.

"I never saw it before," answered Dennis.

"Why it is just out," said Christine.

"Well, ladies and gentlemen, our troubles are over at last," said Miss Winthrop. "Mr. Fleet seems a good genius—equal to any emergency. If he can sing that difficult passage, he can sing anything else we have. We had better run over our parts, and then to our toilets."

One of the colorless young ladies played the accompaniments, her music making a sort of neutral tint, against which their rich and varied voices came out with better effect. They sang rapidly through the programme, Dennis sustaining his parts correctly, and with taste. He could read any music placed before him like the open page of a book, and