

"I do;" replied Harding. "I am accustomed to see him about this time in the morning."

"You cannot see him to-day. At least he is not visible in his rooms. You can speak to him at the committee-room of the P. F. D., this evening," the man said.

"I am no longer a P. F. D.," Harding answered. "I wish to see Mr. Boldero on other business."

"It is impossible, I assure you." The speaker interposed himself between Harding and the door of the house. "Mr. Boldero is not visible."

"Has he not risen yet?" said Harding. "I can wait if he has not. Or, if he has gone out, I will leave a note."

"I will deliver any message. I am in Mr. Boldero's confidence. But you cannot enter his rooms. He has locked his door."

The man was evidently a Cerebus, and was acting according to instruction received. Harding thought it strange, but, as he could not get personal access to his pupil—or late pupil, for his relation to Boldero was not well defined, he contented himself with saying he would write a note at his own house, and send it by post. He determined, after a little consideration, to return home, partly for the purpose of writing and despatching this note, and partly to comfort his wife, who would, he reflected, remain in a state of uneasiness about him, from their unsatisfactory parting.

CHAPTER VII.

HE felt, as which of us has not felt, how humiliating to our higher and better feelings are the fretful events of the social life we lead. And then he thought how erring he had been, and how many deviations he had made from the path of rectitude which he had proposed to tread. Beginning with his first disgust at his father's breadfinding, and tracing his own course hitherto,—remembering how he had fallen into temptation, and received at his father's hands the very money he had scorned not eighteen months before,—how he had eaten at his own table the food which he had rejected with loathing in his father's house,—how compromised he was by the necessity which had driven him as a suppliant to the hand which he had indignantly spurned in those purer days, he wept—he wept,—and the stern tears fell from his blinded eyes upon the pavement like large drops of rain.

His finger was raised to the knocker, but had not touched it when the door was opened, and Emma,—she had seen him pass the window,—stood upon the threshold, with eyes in which the tears, also, lingered. She seized both his hands, and pulled him into the room.

"Forgive your bad girl," she said. "Forgive my wicked temper, William. I have been most unjust to you. If you are unfortunate, dear, you are not to blame."

"I am to blame, Emma; and I am not unfortunate," he answered. "I am to blame, because I have not persevered in getting a livelihood; and I cannot be called unfortunate, because I have never yet fairly tried my fortune. They only are unfortunate who try, and fail."

"O my brave husband when you once fairly try, you will not fail. I know it,—I know it. My whole being throbs with confidence in your success, when once you commit yourself in earnest to the laws which sway this world's right and wrong. When you left the house just now,—hush! don't interrupt me with a word,—I sat in agony beside my baby's bed, but my anguish passed away; and if an angel had become visible to my sight, and I had touched his robes with my hands, I could not have been more sensible of a Higher and Consoling Presence."

"Fancy, Emma; let us trust ourselves, not angels. For the rest, I will become a Doer among men,—a Breadfinder,—an earner of the daily bread that is eaten at my table. If tuition fails me, I have bodily strength, and I can follow some handicraft, like other men."

He sat down and wrote a note to Boldero, which was presently despatched. Then, while his wife busied herself about the concerns of their little household, he revolved in his mind many plans for making an effectual start in the world. This dependence upon one or two chance persons would not do, if any position above that of constant contingency from day to day for the bread and meat of to-morrow was to be his aim.

Emma,—she was lighter of heart, now that she was reconciled to her husband,—began to sing.

He must work. Must we not all work? Must not our whole lives, as Carlyle says, be a repeated conjugation of the verb To Do? He must work. Yes; but how?—what? He knew no trade; he was disciplined to no profession. With his face buried in his hands, and his elbows resting on his knees, he thought and thought. At length, starting up, he told Emma that he should be back in an hour or two, and went out a second time.

He had been absent, perhaps, half-an-hour, when Emma, who had continued to sing almost without intermission, was surprised at hearing the heavy tread of a man's foot descending the stairs. It came along the passage—it halted at her door. She responded to a summons which was presently given by vigorous knuckles, by cautiously peeping forth upon the applicant. But what she saw made her hastily close the door, and draw the bolt.

She was never more frightened in her life. She knew that by ringing the bell she could summon the landlady, but she hesitated to do this, and almost held her breath, though a strong door, secured by a strong bolt, was interposed between her and the terror.

"Won't you sing? Do sing again," said a voice in a foreign accent. "You ravish, you charm. O you have such quality."

Emma released the bell rope. She—I don't know how I shall account for it—felt somewhat reassured.

"You melt,—you make a gentle monster of the savage beast," said the voice.

Emma's heart beat like the ticking of a clock, but she was not angry—not at all. For, since her girlhood, she had dreamed of this, but had sought no confidant for her dreams. She could hum an air when she was four years old, but her parents were serious people, and discountenanced her early vocal efforts. I could write a lecture on the sinful mistake they made; but let that pass. From four years of age, however, she had gone on singing: catching up such airs as she could glean, and taking lessons of Nature when no one was near to censure or criticise.

"You make me all one excitement," said the voice. "I hear you sing, and I cannot sit—I cannot read the newspaper—I cannot drink my coffee."

"He speaks very good English for a foreigner," thought Emma. "It must be the new lodger that came in yesterday."

"Will you sing again? Will you let me in? I will not hurt you. I am a mild man. I was born in Pars, but I call myself Signor Pepolini, and I belong to the Grand Theatre."

"If William should wish to make his acquaintance," thought Emma again, "I shall not oppose his desire, certainly. If he belongs to the Opera, he will, perhaps, get us some orders."

As if Signor Pepolini had divined her thought, he said, "I shall give you tickets for the Grand Theatre. I shall place you in the grand seats. You shall see the King and the Queen, and the grand lords and ladies. I excite them all to be silent when I sing."

"If I wasn't alone," thought Emma, "I declare I would let him in."

But as she did not respond audibly to his solicitations, did not by word or movement indicate her presence, the Signor concluded that she had retired to an inner apartment, and could not hear him. There was a strong wind blowing that March day, and the Signor's feet were in slippers. The wind gained an entrance beneath the house-door, and swept along the passage. The Signor's ankles were getting uncomfortable. Moreover, he reflected that his coffee was getting cold. He heaved a deep sigh, and departed.

Emma felt that this was an epoch in her life. She could sing, then—might some day (who could tell?) get her bread—her husband's—her baby's bread by singing. It was a pleasant thought, and she gave it full rein, and let it lead her where it would.

It was rather wild, that thought, and when it was put to flight by her husband's knock at the door, she was calculating what fifty pounds-a-night would amount to in nine months, supposing that she should be three months in the year without an engagement.

"Well, Emma," said Harding, as he entered, "I have got a situation. I went to an old acquaintance of my father's,