

though he lives in a large one. No one out of Marlshire ever heard of Col. Hunter, and everybody who can read knows about Neil of St. Breeda. Don't cry, darling; I know it's not our poor old home that's frightening you; it's the strangeness of everything. I felt the same the first time I went away to school. There's somebody knocking at the door. It's your tea, I suppose. Come in!" said Alice, raising her voice.

But, instead of entering, something hard was rapped against the door.

Alice rose and opened it.

"Oh, Elma, what are you doing with that tray? Stannie's tea! It's very kind of you to bring it, but children of your age are not strong enough to carry such loads."

Alice took the tray from her little sister's hands—a servant had carried it to the door, and then, at Elma's request, given it to her—and the child tripped across the room to Stannie's side, and held up her head to be kissed.

She was a tiny creature for her years—a pocket edition of a girl, her brother Will called her—and in the rather dark room she looked to Stannie like a little fairy. She had on a pure white muslin dress, unrelieved by any colour, and her long black hair swept over her neck and shoulders in a rippling mass.

She wore a flat gold bangle upon her left arm, and a tiny slate and pencil were suspended by a white silk cord at her side.

Stannie bent and kissed her rosy lips, and in doing so a hot tear fell upon the upturned little face.

She took her slate, and quickly wrote, "You are sad because you have left your home, but to-morrow you will laugh."

Stannie held out her hand for the pencil to write an answer, when Alice, observing the movement, said, "Don't write—speak to her; she is not deaf."

"Why shall I laugh, Elma?"

"Because you will be happy," wrote Elma.

"I am not certain about that—are you?"

"Yes; good people are not unhappy long—and you are good, I see it in your looks. I have cooked some mushrooms for you; come and eat them. I asked Tom if you might have the half of his, and he said 'Yes.'"

"I am very grateful to you both. I like mushrooms very much," said Stannie, turning to a little table set out with dainties, which Alice had brought to her side.

"Do you like cowslip wine?"

"I don't know; I never tasted it."

"I'll bring you some; I made some yesterday."

"No, no, Elma," interposed Alice; "that last brew of yours is enough to poison anyone. I never knew such a child as she is for baking and brewing. You must not tease Stannie any longer, pet; say good night, and run away."

"Good-night," she wrote.

Then dropping her slate at her side, she kissed Stannie again and glided away.

"What a strange child!"

"Yes; she is a weird little creature, but a thorough child all the same, and enjoys a romp. She is always thinking and writing about the angels; they have a mysterious fascination for her."

"Will she never speak! It is a great affliction."

"Most people would consider it so; I don't. I wouldn't have Elma different from what she is. No; she will never speak. She is an affectionate little thing, but you must not allow her to tease you."

"May Lotty and I come in?" said Mrs. Hunter, opening the door. "I think we had better say good night and leave you alone. I have given orders that you are not to be awakened in the morning; you must sleep as long as possible."

With a few more kind suggestions for her comfort, they left her, but not, as they thought, to seek the rest she so much needed.

Hitherto the excitement of the journey had kept up her spirits; and her thoughts, all in the future, had wandered far from St. Breeda and her uncle Alan. But now that was over. The first milestone in her new life was passed, and she sat wearily down to think.

How far away St. Breeda seemed, and how home-like the little house in the dull old street! She swept her eyes around the room again, and contrasted it with the spare bedroom which she had prepared with such pains for Mrs. Hunter.

"How wretched it must have all looked to them!" she thought. "I wish they had never gone there, and that I had never come here. They all seem so happy and full of fun, and I am so miserable. If I were to go home at once I wonder if I should be as happy as I was a year ago!"

Her heart answered, "No." The old calm, child-like life had passed away for ever. Nothing would have power to call it back. How fair it seemed now that it was reduced to a memory! The untrodden future never loomed so darkly before her as it did in that hour; its rosy lights seemed all quenched, and desolation swamped her heart. And she had brought it on herself; she had struggled and chafed with her lot, and chosen what seemed to her a nobler or higher destiny; now necessity compelled her to go bravely on and realize it.

Alas for the inconsistency of girlhood! Not many days before she had thought how unendurable life would be were she doomed to pass it beneath the shadow of the hills. Now, earth held no place so dear.

She took a candle from the mantelpiece, and placing it upon a writing-table, began a letter to the Professor. It was the longest she had

ever written to any one. She begged his pardon for every unhappy thought she had ever caused him. She blamed herself for leaving him, and offered to go home at once, even before she had seen Madame Berg, if he desired it. She then described the great house, in which she felt so lost, and like an intruder; told him that everybody was as kind as kind could be; but there was no one whom she loved like him. Should she come back again?

The Professor read the letter carefully, and read between the lines as well. He would not take her at her word and call her home. He saw that it was the outpouring of a young heart in its first pangs of home-sickness. It had been written in the shades of night, when the owls and the bats were all abroad; with the morning would come light and warmth, and songs of birds, and renewed courage and confidence in herself.

So he answered the letter gaily, and said that he was getting along very well without her, and treated her offer of returning as if it had been a jest.

## CHAPTER XI.

### MADAME BERG.

Madame Berg had long since passed the meridian of her youth, but there yet lingered with her traces of beauty, which no time would ever efface. Her hair was as luxuriant as ever; but the coils, which once had gleamed like beaten gold, had changed to frost-like silver, causing her to look older than she really was. Her lithe figure, however, had lost none of its supple grace; she trod the boards with a step as firm and as stately a carriage as when years before her first rendering of "Norma" had won thunders of applause from a critical audience.

No one who had only seen the great singer in one of her hours of triumph would have recognized her in the simply dressed lady who crossed the lawn at Cumrie Chase two mornings after Stannie's arrival, and joined a little group who were sitting on the grass under the shade of a gnarled old oak.

Lotty and Elma rose to meet her, but Stannie sat still, and resumed with double earnestness the employment in which they had all been engaged when Madame's appearance disturbed them searching for four-leaved clovers.

"Come and sit beside us, Madame Berg," said Lotty. "Here is a chair and a foot-stool."

"I cannot sit down at present. If you should be still here later, I'll come and bring my knitting."

"Madame, is what Gordon told us last night after you left the drawing room true?" asked Lotty.

"I do not know. What did he say?"

"That we should never hear you sing again!"

"He was wrong. I hope you often shall."

"But I mean the public. He said that you were going to give it up—just now when you are all the rage, and people would give handfuls of gold to hear you!—that you are to live quietly at home for the future! Is it true?"

"It is quite true. I sang two nights ago for the last time. You do not read the papers, or you would have seen it there."

"No, I never read the papers. But why? Is your voice cracking?"

"The Fates forbid such a calamity!" said Madame, laughing heartily. "Do you hear that bird out yonder?" pointing to a group of laurels, from which issued a stream of music.

"Yes."

"Then listen to me."

She waited an instant, and then imitated the notes so closely that Lotty glanced up at the branches overhead, believing that a companion bird was hidden there among the greenness.

"Does that sound 'cracked'?" she asked.

"No, it doesn't. Gordon said he didn't believe that was the reason, but people would say it all the same. Why have you given up your splendid life so soon?"

"Soon! I have had more than twenty years of it. I am an old woman now. Look at my hair. I am forty-six. 'Tis time that I gave place to younger aspirants. But that is not the reason. I have home duties which claim me now. My children are growing up, and need my counsel and companionship. My husband cannot leave his estate in Germany to travel all over Europe with me, and I know that I can be of great assistance to him at home in managing affairs, and seeing after the welfare of our tenants. Home duties should always be first. I see that the time has come for me to leave off the old life, so I do it before ill-health and a cracked voice, as you suggest, compel me to abandon it."

"But the public will be awfully sorry."

"I hope they are. I am not without vanity. I have tried hard to please them for years; it is my meed that they should regret me."

"You make such heaps of money, too."

"That was a consideration once; it is not now. I have made enough."

"But you will sing to your friends the same as ever, will you not?"

"Oh, yes; as long as they care to listen. Miss Ross, I have come for you. I think you know why. Are you ready?"

Stannie had risen to her feet while Madame and Lotty were talking, and stood leaning against the trunk of the tree.

"Yes; quite ready," she answered, but her quivering lips could scarcely frame the words.

Madame put her strong arm round the young girl's waist, and gathered her to her bosom as she would have done one of her own daughters.

"Poor little heart, how it flutters! Are you,

then, so very nervous, or is it only that you are afraid of me?"

"I am silly," replied Stannie. "I am not nervous at all."

"Come, then; the morning is passing."

"But there are so many people in the house—so many visitors."

"Not in the music-room; there is no one there. I have told Mrs. Hunter that I wish the music-room to myself this morning; no one will disturb us."

Madame locked the door, to make assurance doubly sure, closed the windows, then opened a grand piano, and ran her fingers lightly over the keys.

Looking up, she saw that Stannie's cheeks were as pale as lilies. Affecting not to see her agitation, she began to sing a little song softly, as if to herself—a simple Irish air which most people know—"Robin Adair."

When she had finished it, and looked up again, Stannie's eyes were shining, and her countenance expressed the rapture that she felt. "You like it—you like my singing?" said Madame, gaily.

"Like it! Oh, if I could only sing half as well!" she exclaimed warmly.

"Perhaps you will some day. Let me hear. You know these exercises?"

And she struck a few notes.

"Yes; Mr. Graem taught me those."

"Good!—sing. And this?" asked Madame, changing the key.

"Yes."

"And these also?"

"Oh, yes."

"Very good; let me hear you. Now something else, please."

Madame's was no superficial test; she was very much in earnest, and tried Stannie's voice in every conceivable manner, but neither by word nor sign did she betray what was the impression produced.

"Sing me a song now," she said, rising from the piano-stool, "and accompany yourself."

"English or German?" asked Stannie.

"Both; English first," was the short answer.

Stannie never sang to greater advantage, for the simple reason that she quite forgot who was listening to her, and poured all her soul into her voice.

"Enough," said Madame. "Come here beside the window, and speak with me. Have you considered seriously the step which Mrs. Hunter tells me you desire to take, or is it a passing girlish whim?"

"It is no passing fancy; my mind is made up," she answered, firmly.

"You have a fine voice, and Lorne Graem has trained it well. No one could have done better. But much still remains to be done. You must go abroad, and study for two years, at least, before you will be fit to sing at even a private concert. You must not amuse yourself by singing songs; that comes afterwards. For five years I practised only the scales which Lorne Graem has taught you; morning, noon and night it was the same thing over again. I grew weary and disheartened, and more than once begged my master to give me one little song to vary the insufferable monotony; but he shook his head, and said, 'Not yet.' He was a prince among singers himself, and I trusted and believed in him implicitly."

"One morning, I went, as usual, to my lesson, prepared to go through the well-known formula; but instead, he produced a roll of songs, and asked me if I would try and sing them at sight as I stood there. I had not been his pupil five years for nothing. I sang them one by one as he had drilled them to me."

"He gave me no hint, no help; did not so much as touch one note on the piano; simply stood and looked at me. When I laid down the last song, I asked him if he was satisfied with me. His silence had made me half afraid."

"Fraulein," he said, "you have often been rebellious with me for keeping you year after year at the scale and exercise."

"I began to excuse myself, but he interrupted me."

"I know you have, and I do not blame you; but it is ended now. You are the best singer in Italy to-day. I can do no more for you. When you are a great prima donna, don't forget the old man who took so much trouble with you."

"I could not believe him. I knew that I had been working hard, but I thought I was only learning the groundwork. I suppose I expected the rest would come by inspiration some day. How long have you been at those exercises?"

"More than two years."

"I thought so. You must persevere with them as long again. Then, Miss Ross, you will be a better singer than I am. Your voice is richer and capable of greater training."

"It cannot be better," said Stannie, in an awe-struck tone. "Impossible!"

"It's a rarer voice than mine," said Madame. "I am heartily glad that I shall never have you for a rival. It is for such as you that I leave a clear field; I have reaped my harvest. Younger and fairer gleaners must have their chance as well. Does the preparation not alarm you?"

"No; Mr. Graem told me what it would be. I do not shrink from it."

"Are you fond of gaiety—dancing, balls, and such like?"

"Not very. I never was at a real ball in my life; we live very quietly in St. Breeda."

"That is well, for you must not go to any

for a few years; they would distract you from the work which must fill your whole life. You may go to concerts, and to the theatre, but nowhere else."

"Shall I have only to practise?—that doesn't sound so very dreadful."

"Not dreadful, perhaps, but it's hard work. That depends on what you are to do later. If you are to be only a concert singer, it is the only thing—I am speaking from my own experience. I studied dramatic literature, for I became an actress as well. For the last twelve years I have sang exclusively in the Opera; but I had mastered every branch in my profession, and unless you enter it determined to do your best, by example and practice, to support the dignity of your calling, you had far better keep your voice to sing your children to sleep some day. Are you still determined to join us?"

"I should like to begin to-morrow."

"Very good; I shall be here for three weeks. You will have all that time to think about it. Meanwhile Mrs. Hunter shall write to your uncle, and then we can decide what will be the best thing to do. You must not sing while you are here; I positively forbid it. You must rest while you can. I do not positively predict a brilliant career for you. If you fail, remember that you have the talent, and it rests greatly with yourself. Unwearied perseverance must be the chief means employed to gain your end; that rarely brings defeat. I think I'll keep my promise to Lotty now; I see she is still under the oak," said Madame, as she looked out of the window. "Will you come also?"

But Stannie excused herself. She went to her room, and wrote another long letter to the Professor—as sunny an epistle as ever was written by a girl. She had grown accustomed to the house, and did not think it inconveniently large, after all. She had been a little afraid, at first, of Madame Berg, but within the last hour had overcome that folly. In short, she was now as happy and hopeful as before she had been miserable and depressed.

The Professor smiled, and replacing the precious letter in the envelope, laid it carefully away in his desk.

Encountering Mrs. Mactavish a few hours later, in answer to that lady's particular inquiries regarding Stansmore Ross, he assured her that she was well, and enjoying her visit in England very much.

"Lotty, you are a most excellent being. No one appreciates you more than I do; but your presence is too overwhelming at times. Will you kindly relieve me of it for the present? You are knocking everything over, and disturbing Elma. Alice would be distracted if she saw the way you are tossing her papers about. Do leave them alone."

Considering that the room in which Lotty, to use her own expression, was making hay was the exclusively combined property of Gordon and Alice, the above request, if not exactly replete with brotherly affection, was by no means unreasonable.

Elma, clad in a dress of some soft clinging Indian material of an exquisite scarlet shade, with a crown of pansies upon her head, was patiently undergoing the ordeal of a sitting, which Lotty's company certainly did not help forward. She flitted about the room in a manner extremely irritating to her brother, examined things, and threw them down carelessly, with an absurd remark, tossed about his sketches, and suggested impossible improvements, carelessly handled his highly-treasured blue china, and finally was ransacking Alice's escritoire, an act little short of sacrilege.

"Do leave Alice's papers alone," he repeated, in despair.

"Her ideas, you mean," coolly answered Lotty. "I am just glancing over them to see if she has any new ones. What's this about 'Harvest Home.' Slightly premature, isn't it? Harvest hasn't begun yet. Oh, my, here's a verse about an artist! It doesn't read so badly, and is almost as original as my shoe. Have you seen it, Gordon?"

"I never touch Alice's papers when she is not here," was the short answer, intended to convey a cutting reproach, which widely missed its mark, for Lotty, with the utmost composure, seated herself in an antique chair, with a perpendicular back, and filled her lap with sheets of manuscript.

"Go ahead, Gordon. Elma can't sit on that gilt chair all day; and I am sure you are not mixing your colours properly," she added, encouragingly. "That red would do capital for a brick wall. You would be a genius if you could only carry out your ideas; but you can't. Don't be cross," she added, hastily, for, looking at Gordon, she saw that she had gone too far. "You have wonderful ideas of colour; but you fail in producing them, because your patience runs out."

"Your remarks are uncalled for, therefore in bad taste. I wish you would go away, and leave us alone. I am quite aware of my defects, and have no need to be informed of them by you."

"Then there is every chance that you will correct them and improve. I am glad to hear it. There's Stannie!" she exclaimed, as that young lady walked past the window, with a book in her hand. "I'll bring her in."

Scattering the papers right and left upon the floor, she rushed to the window, jumped the three stone steps, and returned immediately, bringing Stannie with her.

(To be continued.)