

so he took her hand and led her to the carriage, where Gordon was impatiently waiting.

"I am going to send off a telegram," he said.

"Are you? What shall you say? Not much, please, for I am going to write to-night, and tell them all about it."

"I shall merely say, 'Concert over—tremendous success!' Will that do?"

"Nicely. You don't regret coming so far to it, do you?"

"No, indeed! I would go a thousand miles to hear you sing 'Home, Sweet Home,' again. Stannie, do you never regret how little home-life you will have if you persist in the career on which you have just entered?"

"No, never. Home-life would kill me—at least, it would now. When I am sixty, I suppose I shall be glad to settle down somewhere and rest."

Gordon sighed, and looked out of the carriage window into the dark night.

She had no idea how he loved, and longed to take her at once to his home and heart. And better that she did not, for the knowledge would only place a barrier between them. So long as she regarded him merely as a brother, he was free to come and go. She would tire one day of adulation and praise, and there would be a great aching void in her heart which nothing but love and home would ever fill.

"Will you come for a walk to-morrow before you start, Stannie?"

"Yes; I shall have nothing to do all day. I have not dismantled my rooms, for I shall be back in six months. Mrs. Hall will take care of my things for me."

"Herr Richter says that you are likely to be offered an engagement in the theatre here next winter; should you accept it?"

"Certainly, if I had the chance. I am to sing at a concert in Vienna four months hence. Then I hope to appear here, soon after I return, as *Norma*."

"I shall come and see you."

"How good of you, Gordon!"

"Is not that the bangle Elma gave you, on your arm?"

"Yes; it has never left it," said Stannie, softly, "since she placed it there."

"When are you coming over to see my mother again?"

"I do not know. It doesn't seem possible just yet. I do so long to see Uncle Alan again!"

"If you don't come soon, you will not like to come at all," said Gordon, bitterly. He felt that she was drifting further from him every minute.

"How can you say so?" she asked, reproachfully. "I have my work—I cannot run about as you do. Good-night. I'll not ask you in, as Herr Richter is waiting for you, and I have a long letter to write."

CHAPTER XXII.

GONE TO MILAN.

Stannie, at the appointed time, arrived in Milan, Herr Richter having proved a very attentive but such an extremely fidgety fellow-traveller that his pupil was heartily glad when the journey was over.

He suffered agonies of mind in the railway carriages, for fear she should catch cold when the windows were open half an inch, and complained of being stifled when they were closed. When the train dashed on at full speed, he prophesied a collision; when it slackened, he announced the astounding fact that the steam was expended. Stannie, who was in the highest spirits and soundest health, with no nerves to trouble her and no dread of improbable colds or accidents, laughed gaily at his fear, which was, perhaps, the wisest thing to do. The poor little man did not like travelling, but he alone must introduce Stannie to the Italian master, who was to give the almost unnecessary final finish to her vocal training, which had been so well commenced by Lord Graem and continued by himself.

As has been said, Stannie was in the most brilliant spirits. Success is very pleasant, let it come early or late, but particularly agreeable when it comes in the morning of our days; and no one ever enjoyed well-merited praise more than Stannie did hers—it braced her for further action and other victories.

What a grand thing she felt life to be: not life exactly as represented by Mrs. Hall in Wirtstadt; or her quondam companions, the Misses Mactavish—now promoted to the dignity of matrons—but as it was opening up for her, it would be little short of a triumphal progress for years to come.

How could Gordon ask her if she never regretted that her experience of home-life would be so limited, when the home circle seemed so narrow in its range, so dull and monotonous, with its little round of pastimes and pleasures. Fame may be a bubble, applause a passing sound, success valuable only according to the light each one sees it in; but without the hope of the one, the balm of the other, and the crowning result of the last, the world would be but a prison-house to each gifted child sent into it to walk its rough roads awfully.

Across the sun-bathed plains of Lombardy to the old Italian city, with its glorious Gothic shrine, two fond hearts far away travelled with Stansmore Ross.

Two men, so widely different in their ways and manner of thought—the one so young, the other growing old—yet both alike in their devotion to the golden-haired young singer.

The Professor read the letter, which she had written the moment after her return from the concert, with feelings very much akin to what Gordon's had been when he drove home with her. She was drifting far away from the hills, and the hoary college, and the old mill.

He read a portion of it to Mrs. Mactavish, who tossed her cap-strings, and sniffed the air, like a war-horse who scents the battle afar off.

"And what is your candid opinion, Alan?" demanded the worthy dame, when he had folded it up and replaced it in his pocket. "Are you pleased with all this hue and cry?"

"I am," he answered. "I would not have it otherwise."

"A white satin dress—pure satin, no doubt—none of your cotton backs—and a diamond cross! A pretty penny she must cost you in the year, with one thing or another! I'll be bound five hundred doesn't more than cover it!"

"If she required a thousand a-year she should have it," said the Professor, smiling. "All that I have will be hers some day."

"Some folks are born with a silver spoon in their mouths. Not that I grudge poor Charlie Ross's hair your money, far from it; but how much better it would have been for her if she had remained at home, and married a good dounce minister, as each of my two lasses has done! Ten to one she will end in becoming the wife of some foreign fiddling man or organ-grinder. The man who comes here every summer with the band-organ and the monkey is an Italian."

"She is not likely to marry anyone for some years; but when she does, I scarcely think that a fiddling man or an organ-grinder will suit her refined tastes."

"Well, perhaps not actually an organ man; but those play-actors, and clowns, and jumpers are all the same, and Stansmore will be mixed up with them all."

Mrs. Mactavish's ideas of artists and circus performers were sadly jumbled together; but knowing that it would be both a formidable and useless task to enlighten her, the Professor did not attempt it, but smiled grimly to himself as he left the room and went up-stairs to the Principal's sanctum.

A warm-hearted, truer woman than Mrs. Mactavish did not exist; but her views were warped and narrow, principally owing to her early training in her father's house.

Every summer the Principal took a journey to some new place of interest. He had extended his travels into Norway, Germany, France, and even Canada, while his worthy spouse remained at home and pickled cabbages, cucumbers, and preserved and bottled fruits, and trained up her daughters to follow in her footsteps.

That same evening Mr. Graem crossed the fields with a view to enjoying his Finnan haddie and glass of toddy in the Professor's little parlour, and found him writing a letter to go by the last post; so, taking up a book, Graem settled himself comfortably in an arm-chair.

The Professor took out Stannie's letter, and tossed it to him, saying, "There is some news in that which Mrs. Mactavish scarcely appreciates; but I think you will know how to value it."

The minister read it twice, and his plain visage glowed with such honest satisfaction when he laid it down, that the Professor burst into a hearty laugh.

"How proud we shall be of that girl some day yet, Neil!" said his friend.

"Yes; she will do you credit, at any rate! We will drink her health in champagne to-night, and tell her that we did so!"

Stannie soon settled down to her work in Milan. At another time she might have gone heartily in for a little amusement and sight-seeing; but she shook her head decidedly when her friends proposed a picnic or little excursion, or even a drive, except upon Sunday, which was always a holiday.

Church occupied but a very small portion of the day; the margin was generally filled in with a long drive to some quiet farm-house in the country, where they passed the afternoon. On Monday, happy and invigorated by the fresh air and change, she would resume her treadmill of work.

Had the object in view been the ultimate winning of her daily bread, she could not have made more strenuous efforts.

At the time appointed she went to Vienna, and was met there by the faithful Herr Richter, who had made arrangements for her to sing two Italian songs at a grand concert in that city.

Once again she took her audience by storm. She combined so much beauty and elegance with her rare talents that the world of Vienna, as represented by the fashionables in the concert-room, considered her perfectly irresistible, and shouted their approval in rounds like thunder.

Gordon Hunter did not put in an appearance.

Home affairs had demanded his presence; and standing as he did, so to speak, in his father's shoes, pleasure had sometimes to give way to duty. But he resolved that neither county meetings nor home calls should keep him at Cumrie when she returned to Wirtstadt.

The resolution he had come to would at a glance have been seen to be absolutely futile to anyone but himself.

He determined, however, to wait until she had had one month's experience of an opera singer's life. He would let her taste all its sweets, and, perhaps, experience a slight tinge of its bitterness in the way of jealousies and petty bickerings, and then would ask her to give it all up for his sake. He was young, and

handsome as a Greek god; had a good social position, a splendid home, and an income in anticipation, of which few foreigners could boast the like. Not that he would bring any of these attractive and substantial inducements forward to influence her in his favour. He knew better than to do that. She would not give his money or lands one moment's thought. She had a nature as well as a soul above such sordid considerations. But he would plead how well and how long he had loved her; how her presence made a continual summer in his heart, and if she withdrew it she would doom him to a life-long winter of despair and darkness.

Was it likely that she would listen to his pleading?—she who for three years had been toiling for the prize which was now within her grasp?

Would she give it up?

Love is more blind than a mole, or he might have seen how useless his wooing would at present be, and reconciled himself to wait until her position had lost its novelty.

But he could not—he must know his fate one way or another, and know it soon.

Had he taken the Professor into his confidence, that learned authority would have wished him success. But had Gordon asked what hopes he could hold out to him of winning his heart's desire, the Professor would have remained mute, or else sent him away sorrowful.

Stannie had no thought of love and lovers. She lived in a beautiful world, half real, half ideal, and was very happy in it. How could she be otherwise? All her life she had never had a wish ungratified. She had been surrounded by kind friends. Her guardian had been a father indeed to her, and she had always had more money than she knew what to do with.

She knew that in reality the Professor was not her uncle, but never thought about it.

She loved him better than anyone she knew, and would always do so.

Another in her peculiar circumstances would have grown hard and selfish, but her gentle nature could never become absorbed in self. A thoroughly selfish man or woman is one of the commonest and at the same time one of the most despicable beings on the earth.

The Professor had asked her if she would not like to travel a little in Italy, and suggested that Mrs. Hall in Wirtstadt would doubtless be very glad to accompany her to Rome, or Florence, or any other city she might be inclined to visit; but Stannie declined the offer.

"I should like," she wrote, "to see Florence very much, and Rome even more, but I shall not go at present. I will wait until you can take me yourself some day. You could easily manage it during the summer holidays, when you have no scientific meetings in America, or geographical societies at the other side of the globe. Mrs. Hall is very nice and kind, but scarcely the kind of companion one would choose to wander through Italy with; she is so very matter of fact and quick. You would be a hundred times nicer, so I shall wait. I leave Milan in a month now. I wish you could hear me sing. Will you not come to Wirtstadt? Give my love to Mr. Graem. I hope you always remember to deliver my messages to Mrs. Mactavish. I am going to send her such a lovely table that I bought for her the other day. It is made of coloured marbles; but perhaps she will not accept anything from a play-actor, as she calls me. Madame Berg is to be in Wirtstadt next winter, and Lotty may accompany her for a week. I shall be so glad to see them back again."

But in all her letters, which were full of plans for the future, there never was one line or word of returning to the old home under the shadow of the hills.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SHE FOLLOWS THE GAY WORLD.

It was well for Stannie that Herr Richter, although indifferent to money matters in his own case, was the reverse when the interests of his pupil were concerned.

She would have accepted the engagement offered to her by the manager of the theatre at Wirtstadt without so much as hinting at remuneration, and would have considered herself amply rewarded by the consciousness that she was doing well, and was generally appreciated.

She intimated as much to her devoted master, when he told her the terms on which the Theatre Royal in Wirtstadt was to be favoured with her services.

"That seems a great deal of money," she said, for he had driven a close bargain with his friend the manager. "You don't charge for your own time at that tremendous rate. Would not less do, dear Herr Richter?"

"No; less will not do!" he answered decidedly. "Your voice is a rare one, and they must pay for it. You will need all your money; your dresses will be numerous and costly; you must have a carriage, and a companion to go about with you. I suppose the good Frau Hall would scarcely care to go every night to the theatre with you?"

"No; she wouldn't; but must I have a companion? Can't I go alone?"

"No; I have already spoken to a lady on the subject; she is an officer's widow. Your uncle in Scotland will say that I have done well, and so will Herr Gordon."

"Then it must be all right and necessary. I will do anything you like; and I'll take the money, only it would be much nicer to sing for nothing."

"You must not do that; if you were as wealthy as the Czar of Russia I could not let

you do that; it would not be right. Have you ordered the dresses I spoke of?"

"Long ago; they fit exquisitely, and the draperies hang perfectly. My wardrobe is assuming such gigantic proportions that Mrs. Hall has given me another room in which to keep all my stage trappings."

"Will you go over a few passages once more, or are you tired?"

"Very tired," she said. "I have been at a rehearsal this morning, and have practised five hours. Cannot you trust me?"

"You are not nervous?"

"Nervous!" responded Stannie, laughing. "Not I; I feel like *Norma* already."

"Have you seen Herr Gordon Hunter, fraulein?"

"No. Has he arrived?" she asked, carelessly.

"Yes; he came to my rooms an hour ago. He seems to like travelling, that young English Herr."

"I suppose he does," replied Stannie, intent over a basket full of roses, which she was arranging in vases. She was lavish in everything; where others would have contented themselves with an ordinary bouquet, she must have a whole basket full of the choicest roses in bloom.

Her rooms were a very bower, summer and winter. She had collected a multitude of things in Italy—little tables of coloured marbles, Venetian glass, Parian ornaments, and all the usual articles which travellers collect. She had not carpeted her rooms as she at first proposed doing, but had adopted, perhaps, a more elegant, certainly a more expensive, style.

Handsome skins covered the brown boards—tiger skins principally, for which she had a peculiar liking. The Professor had also sent her the long, silvery-haired coat of an enormous Polar bear, which she had spread before the piano. More luxurious apartments than Miss Ross's were now could not have been found out of the Ducal Palace.

"You say I must have a carriage, Herr Richter?"

"Yes, Fraulein. Not a splendid turn-out—a nice little brougham. Shall I choose one for you, or would you like to select it yourself?"

"Oh, you had better arrange it! There is really no choice; broughams are all the same. Get me a chestnut horse; but I scarcely like to drive to the theatre while my uncle walks to the college. Are you sure that he would approve? Perhaps you had better wait until I write and ask him. A cab will do for a few days."

"I have a letter in my pocket from him, giving me authority, and money as well, to pay for both horse and carriage."

"What a dear, thoughtful uncle he is!" said Stannie. "I wonder if any girl in the world has such another?"

Herr Richter said nothing, but thought that it was scarcely probable.

The young singer's well-appointed brougham was soon a well-known object in Wirtstadt, for she used it constantly. Her time was so taken up with rehearsals, practising, interviews with her dressmakers, and returning visits, that she had no time for walking.

Gordon had introduced her to the English Ambassador, who was an old friend of his father's; and the Lady Ambassador had called next day, and invited her to one of her grandest receptions. With such a precedent, it was no wonder that social stars of equal magnitude deemed it an honour when the golden-haired *prima donna* honoured them with her presence.

She flung her whole soul into her work, and all her superfluous energy into the brilliant society which wooed her with such a persuasive voice.

Much as she enjoyed her life, it was not an easy one, but it was what she had dreamed of amongst the Scotch hills long ago, and few realize their dreams so thoroughly.

Her chaperon, Madame Muller, was singularly adapted for her position.

In her early years she had been a governess in one of the numerous royal families of Germany, and her old pupils still kept up friendly relations with her. She had seen a great deal of the world, and of what is called society; and, being a naturally clever woman, discerned more easily than Stannie could have ever done the difference between the false and the true.

(To be continued.)

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