

had just entered the room, and was gazing cautiously at her. "Is this the latest London fashion? It's very remarkable!" And he pointed to the folds of her sulphur train, which were lying in serpent-like coils upon the carpet.

"Yes; in a highly rarefied set or circle, on whose outer edges I disport myself like a blue-bottle fly. Sweet thing in colours, isn't it? Terribly high art! I would put on my intense manner to-night, only I've business before me."

"Pray enlighten me. What is an intense manner? And what mischief are you up to that you dignify by the name of business?"

"There's nothing like illustration. This is intense. Suppose you try it in your class to-morrow!"

She threw herself languidly into an arm-chair, rolled her bright eyes slowly upwards, dishevelled her hair still more by passing her hands, as if unconsciously, through its soft masses, and in a shrill falsetto, piped out, "Stansmore, my angel, sweep the ivory keys with your fairy fingers."

Stannie seated herself obediently at an elderly high-back instrument on which she used to practise her scales long ago, and played a few passages.

"Ah, dearest; not Beethoven! Play to me the music which is to charm futurity!" And, closing her eyes, she slowly quoted:—

"I paint for the music, which is divine,
My heart in its throbs is a dying flower.
Pour forth the sound like enchanted wine,
Loosen the notes in a silver shower."

"I'm afraid I can't!" said Stannie, laughing, as she rose from the piano.

"Stansmore," continued the intense one, "you are transcendently lovely to-night!"

"Shall we roam, my love,
To the twilight grove,
When the moon is rising bright!"

"It would be very rude to leave the Misses Mactavish," said the Professor, gravely. "I scarcely think that they would care for roaming when the moon is bright. So that's 'intense!' I am pleased to have learned a little. Always talk in quotations, and the more unsuitable the better. Now, about the business?"

"I am going to break it softly to the Misses Mactavish that Stannie is going away, and the reason why."

The Professor flushed painfully. He knew that gossip would be rife over her departure. Well, best to let them know all at once; the whole community would be shocked beyond expression. But rather one great earthquake, and then stillness, than a countless series of minor rumblings.

"You are very kind, Miss Lotty. Some one, I suppose, must tell them the news, and you will electrify them in the most approved style."

"Trust me," said the lively young lady. "Oh, here they are—coming up the steps! I'm not intense any longer! I'm Miss Charlotte Hunter, of Cumrie Chase, rather a well-informed young woman, and strong on woman having not a mission, but a career. A mission suggests an old spinster wearing cotton gloves, and carrying a Gamp in one hand and a mug of soup in the other. A career suggests school boards and—"

The entrance of the guests prevented her imparting further information, and the Professor proceeded with grave dignity to perform the necessary introductions.

The Misses Mactavish sustained the Arcadian simplicity of St. Breeda by returning to the paternal roof at nine o'clock.

"Quite a small and early," said Lotty. "Well, I've enlightened them about Stannie, and they simply looked petrified. They never even saw the outside of a theatre; and imagine that the inside is full of ravenous wolves and women who paint their faces and tire their heads."

"Their ideas are wonderfully correct," said the Professor, dryly.

"Stuff!—they are not! Why a little pearl powder should be called paint has always puzzled me; it's scientifically incorrect. *Rouge* the same. Neither article can come under the category of paint in any sane person's mind. Stannie, give us a song. It's only right and fair that you should. Mamma and I have fought your battles for you, and we have never heard you sing a note."

Lottie settled herself comfortably on the sofa, and affected a listening attitude. Stannie grew cold and hot by turns, looked nervously at the Professor and Mrs. Hunter, and was on the verge of tears when Alan Neil said, "Don't require urging, Stansmore. Sing a Scotch song. Mrs. Hunter will like that best."

Stannie crossed the room, which was filled with now soft summer twilight, and sitting down, struck a chord on the old piano; then she paused.

The Professor stepped softly to her side. He knew that he had been almost harsh to her the last few days, and already was filled with remorse. If he could only make amends, he thought, before she went away! He placed his hands upon her shoulders, and whispered, "Sing your best, my darling. Let Mrs. Hunter hear what you can do."

His words revived all her dying courage.

Once more she touched the notes, and in a clear, sweet voice sang "The Land of the Leal," the sweetest song that the gifted Baroness Nairn ever wrote—a song which only a true-born Scot can really sing. English and foreign artists have attempted it often, and so far as the mechanical rendering of it is concerned,

have succeeded. But the ring of the true pathos was wanting; that can only be given by one who has spent their earlier years on the other side of the Border, where the first music they hear is a mother's voice lilting the lays which are Scotland's own, as truly as are the heather and the whins upon the steep hillsides.

"You will do, Stannie—you will do!" cried Mrs. Hunter, exultingly.

"And is that at all to your taste, Miss Lotty?" asked the Professor.

But no gay retort came from Lotty. Her head was buried in the depths of a sofa cushion, whose velvet surface she was bedewing with silent tears.

In a house a little further down the street at the same moment a council was being held in Mrs. Mactavish's bedroom.

Arrayed in a resplendent dressing-gown composed of a tartan belonging exclusively to the clan Mactavish, her head comfortably enveloped in a "shawlie" of Rob Roy plaid, and her feet upon the fender (she had a fire in her bedroom all the year round), the principal's wife was lying comfortably back in her arm-chair, imbibing a dark decoction of black currant jam and hot water, which she fondly believed would prove a powerful antidote to a summer cold from which she was suffering, when her two eldest daughters rushed in, brimful of news, and both talking at once.

She forgot both cold and potion as she listened to them, and flung the "shawlie" on the floor in a state of high excitement.

"A singer, an actress! That means a painted Jezebel! nothing more nor less! Heaven forgive Alan Neil, and keep the bonnie bairn out o' harm's way! Her grandfather's sleep would be a troubled one if he could look out of his grave this night. I'll go the first thing to-morrow morning and speak my mind to Alan Neil."

"You had better not interfere, mother," said the eldest daughter, who was both intelligent and discreet. "Mrs. Hunter has arranged it all, and Stannie leaves with them in two days. The Professor says that he shall miss her, but knows it's for her good. No one need say a word to him, for he wouldn't listen."

"For her good!" screamed Mrs. Mactavish. "Is the man clean daft! Well, well, his sorrow is waiting for him, if ever a man's was in this world."

"I'm not so sure of that," remarked her daughter, who had been favourably impressed with Mrs. Hunter's quiet manners, and Lotty's vivacity and stylish dress. "There may be good singers and actresses—I don't see why there shouldn't. Professors, we know, are not all saints; and whatever they are, Stansmore will never change. I think she is the best and prettiest girl in the world."

CHAPTER IX.

LONELY ALL HIS YEARS.

Though Alan Neil were to live a hundred years, he could never forget the feeling of unspeakable wretchedness which took possession of him the day that Stannie left.

It was a bright, sun-bathed July morning, and all creation was wreathed with smiles and flowers. The songs of the birds went gaily up through the azure; the rills went dancing down the hill-sides to the ocean, babbling pleasantly in their flow; and the old mill-wheel splashed merrily in the stream. But he neither saw nor cared for things outward and visible. The shadows of night were all around him, for he was bereft of his child.

There had been no demonstrative leave-taking. One long look at her; one last firm clasp of her hand; one swift touch of her rosy lips against the heavy blackness of his moustache; then the carriage-door banged to, the engine whistled, the train moved slowly out of the station, and he was left alone, shivering in the summer sun.

Where could he go? Not home yet. He shrank from the very idea. Would the snug, old-fashioned little house ever seem like home again?

His heart answered, "Never!"

"Good morning, Alan!" said a cheery voice at his elbow.

He turned, and encountered the searching look of Mrs. Mactavish, and mentally wished her in Patagonia.

"You have been seeing Stansmore, and Mrs. Hunter, and her daughter off to London, I suppose?"

"Yes; they are all away," he answered, looking with deep interest at a convenient lamp-post as he spoke.

"It's a fine day for travelling. I hope they will get safely to their journey's end. I am rather in a hurry this morning; so good-bye!"

And she bustled off, leaving him almost overcome with relief.

He had settled, the night before, that his assistant should take all his work for the day—an arrangement which he regretted now, for it was only a quarter past eleven, and he had nothing to do.

He walked slowly down the street, nodding moodily to the groups of students, who doffed their bonnets to him.

He had soon left the town behind him, then proceeded in a direction in which he had not walked for many months—to the miller's house beside the old mill-dam. He paused to look at his early home. The years which had changed him so much had spared the simple cottage; everything about it seemed the same, save that

trees and shrubs had grown taller; the very roses seemed to be the same that had climbed over the rustic porch, and peered in at the diamond-paned windows, long ago. There was one little dormer window in the roof, half buried amid the thatch, at which he looked with interest, and smiled.

In that tiny room, which would scarcely hold him now (certainly not if he stood erect), he had passed many an hour over his books in his college days; there he had begun the fight which had ended so bravely in a vaster field. At the gable end of the house the apple tree still stood which Charlie Ross and he had climbed so often in autumn when the fruit was ripe; somehow the most tempting apples always grew upon the topmost bough.

His reverie was interrupted by the miller coming to the door, and touching his hat to him.

"How are you, Laing?" he said, holding out his hand.

They had sat side by side as boys in the parish school; both men had risen in the world since then, although a great social gulf yawned between them. Jamie Laing had been the letter-carrier's son—a standing as far below the status of the miller's son as the miller was below the Professor now.

"I am taking a look at the old place," he continued; "it stands the weather better than you and I, Jamie."

"There's no change here since old Neil—I beg your pardon, sir—since your father died. Will you step in and see the guid wife and the rooms—the furnishing is a little different. You see, we have six bairns; you were an early one."

"I'd rather not go into the house. I don't care to see the rooms changed. I remember them exactly as they were twenty years since. Seeing new faces in them would spoil all the old pictures which I treasure so carefully. But I should like to go into the mill once again, if I am not taking up too much of your time. Do you remember the famous games at hide and seek we used to have there?"

"Fine that, sir, when Master Ross and Miss Katey came over of an afternoon! We used to make the old place ring, and no mistake! He was a rare one, Master Charley, for a lark! She's a bonny lass that girl o' his!—like her mother, but much quieter!"

They had reached the mill door, and he swung it open.

Here you are, sir—the same old place, you see! Sorry I can't offer you a seat. You'll scarcely care to try one of the meal-bags, I fancy, on account of your black clothes!"

And the miller laughed gaily.

"You seem very happy and contented, Jamie," said the Professor, ignoring the suggestion of a seat upon one of the meal-sacks.

"That I am, sir. I should be ill to please if I were otherwise."

"You are in the place I was born to. I wonder if I had stuck to it, and been Neil the miller to-day if I should have been as happy!"

Jamie Laing looked curiously at the Professor, and took a mouthful of meal from an open sack before he ventured on an answer, and then he said, "There's no good in wondering things, sir, which couldn't be, simply because they weren't to be. You were a miller's son, sure enough, but you were born a scholar too. I was born a letter-carrier's son, but I was cut out for a miller all the same. You never meant to wear a dusty coat, so why wonder about it at all?"

Alan Neil certainly looked unlike the son of a working man as he stood there on the old mill floor, tall, handsome, and well-built, with grave, thoughtful features.

He was one of the many instances in which all traces of humble birth are lost sight of in the refining process of study and assiduous self-culture.

He put out his hand, and took up some meal also. He had well-nigh forgotten how it tasted. As he did so, a diamond ring flashed in the sunlight. It was a gift from a foreign prince, a scholarly man, who ranked the miller's son his peer.

"How dry the meal is, Jamie; it's enough to choke a man," he said, as he with difficulty swallowed a mouthful. "Here's some one looking for you," he added, as a portly farmer showed his rubicund countenance at the open door. "I'll be off. Thank you for showing me the old place again."

Not one o'clock yet! He heaved a sigh as he replaced his watch, and began to calculate how far Stannie would be on her way. Why he scarcely knew, but he walked straight from the mill to the churchyard, down the broad middle walk, with the branches arching overhead, until he came to a gravelled sweep where it diverged east and west; there he paused a second and hesitated. On the one hand gleamed old Mr. Ross's stately memorial—a heavy pile of Aberdeen granite in the form of a pyramid, "Erected by a sorrowing congregation." On the other side, beneath the ivy-crumbing wall, lay Donald Neil, the miller, and Janet, his spouse.

"What would the old minister say if he knew why his granddaughter had left St. Breeda to-day?"

The Professor spoke aloud; there were no listeners amongst the tombs.

As if in answer to him, a little bird hopped lightly from the bough of a patriarchal elm, and alighted upon the polished apex. For an instant it twittered about, and then steadying itself on one tiny foot, opened its bill, and

poured forth a succession of notes so loud and brilliant that the whole place rang with melody. Other birds took up the strain, and flung back answering trills, clear and soft; but the little songstress sang on, unmindful of their courtesies.

Did she sing for love, or joy, or because the sun shone and the leaves were green? Possibly for none of them. The little scrap of anatomy just sang because she could not help it—and yet the whole world was the better for the singing!

The Professor's heart grew very tender, and he took off his hat as he listened. Still the bird sang on. What would Mrs. Mactavish have said if she could have seen Professor Neil standing bareheaded in the churchyard listening to a "littie's" song?

It ceased at last, and the spell was broken. But the linnet had not sung for nought; it had brought an answer to a troubled heart. If a bird possessed such power to move a strong man's emotions, how much greater must be the influence of the human voice. Stannie could sing as sweetly as any bird in May. Let her sing; although the whole world heard her—and much the better. Mr. Graem had spoken, and Mrs. Hunter had argued, but a "littie's" singing had done more than them all.

He watched the bird spread its wings and fly away, far above the tombs and the waving branches, towards the purple hills; then he replaced his hat, and, turning to the left, walked across the mossy grass, and stood beside his parents' lowly grave.

A simple stone slab recorded their names and ages, then came a space.

"My name will go there some day," he murmured.

He would bide his time in patience. He had heard the linnet's song. Once more he pulled out his watch. Four o'clock. He sighed despairingly at time's slow progress. Was the day never to end? Stannie would be nearing the English border; entering what to her was the land of promise. It was long past his early dinner hour, but he took no notice of that.

"Will she really ever come back to me?" he asked himself for the hundredth time. "Where are my vaunted resolutions to be strong? I am acting like a silly boy."

As he realized the humiliating fact, he drew himself up in his splendid strength like a man about to battle with a strong wind, and turned his steps homewards.

He went directly to his study, and wisely deciding that idleness under existing circumstances would be the worst thing he could indulge in, sat down and drew out a sketch of a lecture which he was to deliver in Edinburgh the following week.

After all, he had only half broken the resolution made in Mrs. Hunter's hearing. A moment of weakness had overtaken him, but no one had seen it. The little encounter with Mrs. Mactavish went for nothing.

So he gathered up the threads of his life, and turned calmly brave to the world; working harder than ever, and finding a wealth of consolation and companionship in his books.

When the next session came round, the students said that he was greatly changed. He was never cold and distant to them now; was gradually emerging into their friend as well as their teacher; encouraged them to come to him in all their difficulties—a kindness of which they gladly availed themselves; and many a night he cheerfully laid aside his beloved books, to spend hours in explaining and simplifying things which were as trifles to him, but giants of obstruction to them. He got into a way also of frequently inviting them in little coteries of four or five to supper. In short, no professor in St. Breeda had ever taken the students' interests to heart so much before, and done so much for them, both in the lecture-room and out of it.

Mrs. Mactavish wondered "how he could be fashed with a set of laddies around him all the time," and said that he had improved wonderfully since Stansmore left; he was so much more genial and hearty.

He was certainly altered in some respects, and the icy walls of his reserve were giving way; but in his heart there was a great void, which only his darling Stannie's return could ever fill.

(To be continued.)

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