

Your mother asks my assistance; she is right, you ought to look to me as a real father. I have not forgotten what generous friends I found in your family in those severe days of trial. Come, let us sing!"

Ebba regarded him with stupefaction.

"Since you are an excellent musician, you may try to sing, at first sight, this air of my friend Weber," said he. "Come here, do not look surprised at me, and let us sing."

Ebba, troubled and confounded at the singular demand, hesitated, and then mechanically obeyed him. She had hardly finished a few lines of a recitative, when Hoffman interrupted her with a cry of joy. Then, with the eccentricity which always characterized his movements, he sprang towards the door of an adjoining room, and called out:

"Jean Paul Richter, Carl Weber, come, come, come!"

The two friends appeared. Hoffman seated himself again at the piano, and Ebba went on singing. Marks of surprise and admiration were soon manifested by the grand maestro and the illustrious writer,

"Oh!" said Jean Paul, clasping his hands, "a purer voice never charmed human ears. Young girl, are you sure you are not an angel?"

Weber, advanced towards her, and with the melancholy solemnity peculiar to him, said:

"You are a great cantatrice."

And as Ebba, affected, looked at them in doubt, Hoffman cried:

"A great cantatrice, the greatest cantatrice Germany has ever had! Three months of study will be sufficient to enable you to make your *début*. Weber shall be your professor of singing, and I will be your master in declamation."

"And after that?" demanded Stina, who did not understand what this was to lead to."

"After that, my old friend! Fortune and glory! You do not comprehend! Oh! soon the transports of the public and the gold of the director will make you understand it all."

"I am going to write an opera for you," said Jean Paul.

"And I will compose the music for it," added Weber.

"What subject will you choose?" demanded Hoffman, with enthusiasm.

"Oberon, for this Titania," replied the poet.

Brilliant as were the hopes given by Hoffman to Ebba, and notwithstanding the short term he had fixed for their realization, the young Swede, following Stina's good counsels, managed prudently

with the little sum that was all her fortune. She dwelt in a modest room, joining the little closet where the old servant lodged.

A piano occupied one half the room, and a little couch nearly took up the other. Here Ebba had devoted all her time to study, receiving no visits but those of Hoffman and Weber. The first came seldom; the second, notwithstanding his enfeebled health, gave her lessons every day, in order to prepare her for her *début*. Nature had organized Ebba so happily, and left so little for art to perform, that at the end of three months she was ready to come out, as Hoffman had promised. Unfortunately, Weber, almost always sick, had not been able to finish writing the *Oberon*, and days and weeks passed in waiting for it.

One evening, when Ebba returned from a short walk with her housekeeper, they met, on the staircase of their humble dwelling, a woman who, like them, was obliged to go up to the last story, and who opened the door next to their own. By degrees a vague kind of good feeling was established between Stina and this stranger. Stina took a great liking to this young woman, who hardly ever went from home, rose at break of day, worked steadily at her sewing until late at night, and knew how to perform her duties of house-keeping with a sort of elegance. One day, after hesitating a long while, the stranger asked her old neighbour, her countenance red with shame, if she had any sewing for her to do.

"I will be content with what you may be willing to pay me; and for want of money, a little bread would suffice."

Stina was touched; she led her into Ebba's room, and did the honours of the breakfast, which was just ready, with such good grace that their neighbour forgot for some moments her sufferings and poverty. She was a woman of about thirty years of age, cruelly disfigured by marks of the smallpox. She expressed herself in German, with elegant facility, although her accent revealed her to be Italian. Her manners showed education and acquaintance with the customs of society; indigence had struck her, but had not broken nor withered her character. When she arose to depart, Ebba kindly said:

"We dine at six; be punctual."

Therese, it was the stranger's name, took her hand, and would have raised it to her lips. Ebba embraced her tenderly.

"I have known poverty too!" said she. "Now better days are coming! I hope as I hope."

Therese smiled bitterly.

"Happy days have already come for me," she