

"Can't you teach, or something?" he says boyishly. "You could teach other girls, couldn't you?"

"But fancy teaching—fancy wearing one's self out with a troupe of idle girls, as Madame Cronhelm does, when one might be bowing to a delighted audience behind the footlights, with one's arms full of bouquets."

"That's just what I hate," he retorts savagely. "That is just what no girl—no cousin or sister of mine—should ever degrade herself by doing. How do you think a man—who loved you, for instance—would like to see other men look at your opera glasses at you, and perhaps—indeed certainly—make comments on your personal appearance?"

"If they were complimentary I don't suppose she would mind very much."

"But he would mind. If he were her brother or her husband, he would rather see her in her coffin than subject her to such degradation."

"How delightfully selfish!" I laugh, shrugging my shoulders.

"Oh, we are all very selfish!" Mr. Baxter allows; and then, the overture to "Tannhauser" commencing, we find it impossible to talk any more for the present.

I amuse myself by looking for my own particular friends in the crowd. Olive is in a corner flirting with Jack Rolleston. Poppy is sitting calmly beside her *fiancé*, looking as lazily handsome as ever. Katie Rolleston is looking at me. I wonder if she would like very much to change places with me, and if half at least of Olive's suspicion about her and Gerard Baxter is true. Perhaps Katie has lost her heart to this artist friend of her brother's, though, according to Mrs. Wauchope, Mr. Baxter does not care for young ladies. I am puzzling over Katie's steadfast look, and wondering how it has happened that, among all our common friends, nobody has ever told Gerard Baxter who I am, when "Tannhauser" comes to an end, and I rise from my seat, Blumenthal's "Bend of the River" being next on the programme.

"You practice a great deal?" Mr. Baxter observes, as he offers me his arm again.

"Yes," I answer, smiling, as I meet his splendid dark eyes. "I hope it does not annoy you."

"No; Mrs. Wauchope will tell you that I have never been so industrious as since you came to Carleton Street."

"I am glad to hear it," I venture, somewhat soberly. "If I had your talent, I should certainly not let it be idle."

"I mean to work very hard, now," he says quickly. "Before, I did not care very much whether I made a name for myself or not. But now—I do!"

CHAPTER V.

"So he thinks I spend my time drumming away on this unfortunate instrument with the ultimate object of earning my livelihood!" I laugh, sitting before the piano in Mrs. Wauchope's drawing-room on the morning after Madame Cronhelm's *soirée Musicale*. "He thinks I am a penniless art student like himself, bound to earn my bread by whatever talent I possess, unless I prefer to sit down and starve. What a joke it is, and how Olive will enjoy it! And how Aunt Rosa's stiff gray curls would bristle with horror if she knew that her niece Allie Somers Scott of Woodhay was taken for a poor young woman from the country who had come up to these cheap furnished lodgings for the purpose of studying vocal music for the stage!"

The idea is too delicious! I laugh to myself with such frantic enjoyment that, if Mary Anne had chanced to come into the room, she would have set me down either as an idiot or as some harmless kind of lunatic. I shall not tell Mr. Baxter the mistake he has made—since no one has thought of telling him before. I hope they will not tell him now. They must take it for granted that he knows who I am, and he must have thought no questions necessary, seeing for himself my mode of life. As for Mrs. Wauchope, she probably still labors under the delusion that the Count and the "drawing-rooms" have never yet encountered each other here or anywhere else. Mr. Baxter must think the Deanes and Rollestons have been very kind in taking me up; but then he knows them to be fond of art and artistic people, especially the Rollestons, and likely enough to make much of me for the sake of my voice. What fun it is to think of myself as working for my living! What fun it will be to keep up the delusion with the help of my scampish friend Olive, who loves nothing so much as a practical joke!

But my fun is put a stop to in a very summary manner. While I am sitting here at the piano, a note from Olive is put into my hand to say that Elinor has scarlet fever, and that I am not to attempt to come near the house. All the others have had it, and are not afraid; but Mrs. Deane will not allow them to come near me—I must not expect even to see Olive at Madame Cronhelm's to-day, as her mother does not think it would be right to allow her to go there out of an infected house.

I am very sorry, not only for my own sake, but for Elinor and all of them. I write a note to Olive, and have just made up my mind not to go at all this morning, when Ada Rolleston comes running in with an urgent request that I would come over and spend the day in Berkley Street, which I am rather unwilling to do, but which Ada persuades me into doing in the end.

During the next five or six days I spend most of my time with the Rollestons. Ada pets me and spoils me very much, in the fashion of Olive Deane, who has "fagged" for me since we were children together. The house in Berkley Street is a very pleasant one—there are always visitors coming and going—clever people, poets, painters, artists and literary men and women. We are never at a loss for amusement, between the preparation for the fancy-ball, Jack's amateur studio, and the great music room where our musical friends would willingly play symphonies and fantasies all day long, if they could find any one to listen to them.

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