

A MYSTERIOUS QUEST.

CHAPTER III.

THE END OF A GREAT AMBITION.

There are some moments which to a sensitive mind seem to be of a dream-like or supernatural character. To Hamilton Degraw this was one of them. Never did it, never could it, seem real. Lost in its wonder, he stood motionless, petrified, gazing back into those orbs which in the glare which now fell upon them seemed welling with light. Had it been death to her, he could not have moved. Not till she threw up her arms, scattering widely the flowers that lay on her breast, did he feel the spell sufficiently broken to comprehend what had occurred. Though he had begrudged Death its victim, though he had longed to see this young girl live, and for the last few minutes had only existed in the hope of doing so, he quailed before the realization, and questioned his own sanity in believing in it. Even the shrill cry that now left her lips fell on well-nigh deaf ears; and when next moment, she raised herself and spoke, he roused with a start, flushing from chin to brow with joy, though the words she uttered were full of terror and suggestive of mystery.

"Alive?" This was her cry. "Then have they deceived me." And she looked wildly around till her eye rested on the old crone. "Annetta!" she exclaimed, with something more he could not understand, for her English had rippled off into the strange unknown language of the person she addressed.

The old woman, eager and restless now, answered her in a few quick sentences, at which the maiden—for who could doubt her such?—covered her eyes with her hands and sobbed. But instantly recovering herself, she looked up in despair, and encountering the artist's gaze, seemed to speak, though words of grief and shame were evidently trembling on her tongue.

For him the moment was delightful. He returned her look, and his self-possession failed him.

"You are not dead," left his lips in almost childish simplicity. "Thank God that appearances deceived me. You are too young, too fair to yield thus soon to the Great Destroyer. I am glad to see you living, though I know nothing of you, not even your name."

She smiled faintly but pleasantly. "Nor do I know you," she cried. "I am a child lost to the world, lost to life, lost to everything. I should not be here, speaking, breathing, living, suffering. I expected to die. I wanted to die, but some one has deceived me, and I am alive. For what? Oh, for what?"

The artist stared amazed. From a picture of peace she had become an image of despair. He did not love her less thus, but he felt vaguely out of place and knew not whether to speak or fly.

She saw his trouble and waved him back.

"Since I must live," she murmured, "let me leave this bed of death." And without waiting for any assistance, she slid to the floor and stood tottering there, clothed in a long, white garment, bordered with gold, as beautiful as it was odd and poetic. "What trappings are these?" she cried, pointing to the bed and glancing down at her own garments. "If I were not to be allowed to die, why this wealth and beauty of adornment? I am still dreaming, or—" Her eyes fell again on Annetta and she asked her some other question.

A WONDERFUL DISCOVERY.

This is the age of research and experiment, when all nature is to be explored and its secrets revealed for the comfort and happiness of man. Science has indeed made giant strides during the past century, and among these by no means least important discoveries in medicine comes that of

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This preparation is unquestionably one of the most genuine and reliable Patent Medicines ever introduced, and has, we understand, been used in the Continental Hospitals by Ricord, Rostan, Jobert, Volpeau, Maigne, and the well-known Chassagnac, and indeed by all who are regarded as authorities in such matters, including the celebrated Lallemand, and Roux, by whom it was some time since uniformly adopted, and that it is worthy the attention of those who require such a remedy we think there is no doubt. From the time of Aristotle downwards, a potent agent in the removal of these diseases has been the "philosopher's stone," the object of search of some hopeful, generous minds; and far beyond the mere power of such could ever have been discovered—of transmuting the base metals into gold is surely the discovery of a remedy so potent as to remove the energies of the confirmed leprosy in the one case, and in the other so effectively, speedily and safely to expel from the system without the aid, or even the knowledge, of a second party, the poison of acquired or inherited disease in all their protean forms as to leave no stain or trace behind. Such is

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Meantime young Degraw had stepped back to the table upon which lay the sketch he had been making. Lifting it up, he turned it toward her. "Let this explain my presence here," said he. "It may also make clear to you what otherwise must seem wrapped in mystery. Your picture was desired. I was summoned here to draw it. You must know by whom. The name accompanying the request reads like Andrea Montelli."

She left the old crone and took a step in his direction and that of the picture he held. A flush was on her cheek, a flush that vaguely irritated him and made him, for the first time, question who this Andrea Montelli really was.

"I do not understand," said she; "but it is of no consequence. Nothing is of any importance to me now. I am living, that is all I can think of; I am living and the struggle with my fate must re-commence."

"This expression of grief at finding herself once more in the world of human beings, both shocked and touched him.

Though he felt she ought to have some one with her of her own kindred, or at least, of her own station and sex, he did not see how he could leave her with no one to soothe her but this old woman, who was at once so coarse and so repellent.

"Have you no friends in the house?" he asked.

She sadly shook her head. "Is there no one I can call?" he persisted, turning now toward the door.

She shivered and caught him by the hand.

"Do not leave me," she entreated. "Do not go till I have told you why I was so wicked; for you must think me very wicked to try to take my own life."

"And did you—?" He got no further, for the tears which now filled her fathomless eyes called up a suspicious moisture to his own. Strange and wrong as it all was, he had never felt himself so affected. "Tell me your trouble," he pleaded at last. "Why should one so young and, pardon me, so fair, wish to die before the possibilities of life were fully tested?"

"Because," her cheeks flashed fire and a color broke out on her cheeks, "because I had failed."

"Failed."

"I am Selina Valdi!"

Selina Valdi! He knew the name. It was that of the young musical debutante who, but a month before, had stood up before a great assembly of expectant listeners, beautiful, fascinating, but tongue-tied. A wonder, with every promise of song in her blazing eyes and upon her trembling lips, but with no voice at her command, no answering sound to the orchestra's inviting tones, nothing save the moan with which she finally gave up the struggle and sank, overcome and annihilated, behind the falling curtain, Selina Valdi! He remembered the name well, and all the talk and criticism which followed her defeat; and, moved by a boundless compassion, he took her by the hand. Immediately she added:

"At least that is the name by which I was known to my teachers and expected to be known to the world. My real name is Jenny."

"Why did she not finish?" Why did she look at him so strangely and drop her eyes and shake her head? His expression had been one of expectancy, and all his manner was encouraging. But she seemed to tremble before him, and did not speak the name, only murmured:

"But I forgot. I have sworn not to tell my name. I am Selina Valdi without the success which was to make that name illustrious."

"Poor child!" The words left his lips unconsciously, she looked so desolate and forsaken. "Poor child! your heart was set on success, then? You expected to be a singer?"

"Oh!" The exclamation spoke volumes. She had clasped her hands and was trembling now, not with weakness but eagerness.

"I had a right to expect it," she declared. "I can sing; I have a voice that has made every master who has taught me patient and gentle and eager. These rooms have rung, just rung with the notes I have raised; but I

cannot face a crowd. At the sight of faces surging in a sea before me, such a terror seizes me that I want to shriek instead of sing; something catches me by the throat and I am suffocated, lost, drowned in a flood of horror to which I can give no name and against which it is useless to struggle. Oh, it is a cruel fate. But I can sing; listen!"

And with sudden impetuosity, her voice soared up in an Italian air, so sweet, so weird, so thrilling, that he stood amazed, entranced, subdued, marveling at the freshness, the power, the soul-moving quality of her tones, as well as at the perfection of her manner and the correctness of her interpretation. A living, breathing genius, glorying in her own gift, was before him, and he could but acknowledge it with delight.

She saw his pleasure and rose in dignity and flushed with power. Her voice left the intricate ways of Italian song and deepened into the broader, deeper channels of German opera. It swelled, it rose, it triumphed, till the strange and shabby room became an edifice, and the atmosphere seemed laden with the breath of gods. A genius? She was more, or seemed so while her voice thrilled and her beauty flushed; but when all was still again, and she stood panting and deprecatory before him, then she seemed only a tender child again, craving sympathy and expecting confidence.

"Marvelous! Marvelous!" So he spoke, lifted out of himself, first by her power and then by her humility. "And with such a gift as this you could be discouraged by one failure, overcome by one fright?"

"Ah," she murmured, "that is how I can sing to you; but I can never sing like that to the multitude."

"Never?"

"But, dear child, you are not sure of this. You are very young, and after some few months of training you will gain courage and reap a full success. You cannot help it, with your genius. God does not give such a voice to be smothered in obscurity."

"God?"

With what an indescribable intonation she spoke. He looked at her in amazement.

"Do you believe in God?" she asked, and her face took on a strange look, almost like that of fear.

"I do," he returned; "and so will you, when you have lived long enough to realize His goodness."

She shuddered; a change came over her; she no longer looked so young.

"I have not been taught," she murmured. "I have not been trained in church ways and church thinking. Would it have been better if I had? You look so good; would that have made me good, too?"

The old simplicity and childlike manner were coming back, but with something new in it, that, if not comprehended, affected him deeply.

"Are you not good?" she smiled. "You have committed one sin, I know, but that was the result of frenzy, and certainly does not argue a bad heart. But good, as man reckons goodness, you must be, or your eyes would not be so clear, or your smile so inspiring. If you were happy—"

"If I were happy?" A fresh change had come over her; she seemed to hang upon his words.

"Then you would no longer query if there were a God, but rejoice in the fact that there is one."

Her face was fallen again, and she seemed to struggle with herself. For some minutes she did not answer.

"Go!" she murmured at last. "I have already kept you too long. Go and forget—" she gasped, gave one look at the crone in the corner to which she had withdrawn, and sank sobbing and troubled in a chair.

He turned to obey her. Something within him told him that he ought to seize upon this excuse to tear himself away from a presence so dangerous to his peace. But when he reached the threshold and turned, as almost any man would have done, for a final look, he found her gazing at him with such despair in her large, dark, limpid eyes, that he made one

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bound to her side, and seizing her by the hand, exclaimed:

"I will not go till I know just what I leave behind me. You have moved me too much. If you are a true woman you will tell me all that a friend should know, or else dismiss me without this look of grief which holds me back in spite of my better judgment."

"I cannot help my looks," she said; "but I can restrain my words. But I will not. I long to have an adviser. I long to have a friend—outside of the profession," she added; "outside of that selfish world where all is rivalry, jealousy and distrust. Can you spare the time to listen, or will you come again to-morrow?"

"I had rather linger now. It is not late. See, it is barely ten o'clock, and I am impatient to know my friend better."

She sighed, and something like a spasm passed over her face; but it was an innocent face; he had no doubt of her, and he listened with irrepresible emotion to the pathetic story which she proceeded to tell him.

To be continued.

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"The day will come," I e a psychologist prophecy, I shall be able to read ea minds."

"Well, I devoutly hope promptly commented one of the group, to whom the ps spoke.

And in the vest of the group wish in varying forms, but varied fervor.

This unwillingness that mon should be able to see hearts seems to be universal wonder. I share it just as But I do wonder if most of as to how large an extent see the inside of our heart.

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