

## A BUNCH OF VIOLETS.

(Continued.)

I am coming into the house as he passes out, and he never so much as looks at me to see whether I mean to take any notice of him or not. So that he has himself virtually put an end to our acquaintance.

Of course I feel mortified, though he may possibly think it was my wish that we should ignore that introduction at the Rollestons'. But I know that it was not my wish, and that I would have bowed to him this time if I had got the chance, and his looking in that determined way over my head makes me feel very angry. However I do not encounter him again in Carleton Street or anywhere else for more than a week, and, though Mrs. Wauchope tells me that he is more at home than he used to be, and working hard at his picture, I gradually forget his rudeness and my own folly, in busy preparations for Madame Cronhelm's concert, which is to take place on the evening of the twenty-first. I am to sing twice, first the "Jewel Song" from "Faust," then Blumenthal's "Bend of the River." The selection is Madame Cronhelm's; but both songs are old friends of mine and old favorites. Herr von König tells me I had better have an *encore* ready, unless I care to repeat those two; but I tell him laughingly that that would be a very unlucky thing to do, to prepare an *encore* beforehand.

On the day before the concert, Elinor and Olive Deane call for me to go with them to the Rollestons'—not to an "At Home" there, but merely to pay a visit to the girls. They are to give a fancy ball early in April, and we amuse ourselves with portfolios of sketches of national and fancy dresses, sitting in the great handsome somber city drawing-room, with its balconies darkened by flowering plants—five or six girls altogether, with two kindred spirits in the shape of Fred Deane and Crauford Rolleston, who are quite as good on the subject of ladies' dress as ourselves.

Katie and Crauford Rolleston and I are studying a colored print of an Alsatian together, and I am saying how pretty the black velvet cap would look on a blonde head like Olive's, when two people come into the room whom I, scarcely looking up, and even then scarcely seeing them in the dusk, supposed to be Jack Rolleston and his brother-in-law Captain Kingsley—one of them I know to be Jack. They stroll over to a group at one of the windows—Olive and Poppy and Susie Rolleston and I think no more about them, till Crauford says suddenly—

"That artist over there ought to make a sketch for you, Katie—something original, you know. Anything original would be so much more interesting than those old hackneyed national costumes—everybody is tired to death of them. I say, Gerard, couldn't you invent something newer than a Swiss peasant or a *virandière*?"

The moment he says "Gerard" I look up. Mr. Baxter is crossing the room slowly: in another moment he has shaken hands with Katie, and is looking half inquiringly, half deprecatingly, at me. Here is the opportunity I have been longing for, and yet some strange perversity makes me look steadily in another direction, as though I saw him not.

"I am not much of a hand at figures," Mr. Baxter says without any pause of surprise, or anger, or embarrassment. "I never put them into my pictures if I can help it, and, when I do, I leave them as much as possible to the imagination. But I dare say I might suggest some characters, and then you could find out the dress they must wear—or invent it."

"Oh, do," Katie exclaims, making room for him on the ottoman beside her, and not observing that he and I, whom she had seen dancing together, had taken no notice of each other. "That will be delightful; won't it, Allie?"

"Very," I say shortly, and turn to Crauford Rolleston, who however is listening to Mr. Baxter, and not to me.

"We must take a lesson from the notable Hannah Woolly," he says, laughing, as he sinks into the place Katie has made for him. "Don't you remember what she says in her book, printed in 1681, and quoted by Charles Lamb: 'Let all ingenious women have regard, when they work any image, to work it aright. First let it be drawn well, and then observe the directions which are given by knowing men. I do assure you I never worked any story, or single person, with it informing myself both of the visage and habit, as followeth. If you work Jupiter, he must have long curled black hair, a purple garment trimmed with gold, and sitting upon a golden throne, with yellow clouds about him.'"

"How did she 'inform herself' of that?" Katie laughs.

"That's what always puzzled me," Gerard Baxter says gravely.

"It is that which makes it all so delicious. Why don't you go to the poets for characters—'Maud Muller' for instance—

"Maud Muller, all the summer day  
Basked the meadow sweet with him?"

So they chatter and laugh, while I turn over the sketches on my lap in sulkily silence. Suddenly Katie goes to one end of the room for a book and Crauford to a table for another: and for a moment we two are left alone on the great ottoman, with nothing but the space of one empty velvet triangle between us.

"Speak to me," he says suddenly, in a half-whisper, bending his head to look into my face. "Why won't you speak to me?"

But I look at my pictures stubbornly, feeling that now it is my turn to make myself unpleasant—if I can.

"What have I done that you should send me to Coventry like this?"

Even if I had been inclined, I have no time to answer him. Katie has come back with a volume of Tennyson in her hand, Crauford with Dore's splendid "Daute" and in another moment they are all poring over the illustrations together, Katie's brown head very near Gerard Baxter's dark one, while Crauford takes up his old position close to me. I am thus in a

manner forced into their consultation, and, though I am playing a role, which suits me very ill, I cannot help being amused by it and laughing and suggesting with the rest.

"So your handsome friend is coming to Madame Cronhelm's concert?" Olive says, on our way back to Carleton Street.

"How do you know?" I ask carelessly.

"He said so just now. He is coming with the Rollestons. Do you know I fancy he is an admirer of Katie's—I saw their heads very close together over those prints of Dore's."

I do not like the suggestion; it vexes me all the evening, while I practice my concert music, while I sit in my pet chair over the fire, reading the latest dispatches from Woodhay and Yattendon, while I muse, my feet on the fender, and "Probation" half-open on my knee. Mr. Baxter has been in his studio all the evening: he must have left the door open, for I can hear him whistling a bar of a song now and then, sometimes singing it in a desultory kind of way. Once, when I pause to listen, my door being ajar, I can distinguish the words of a song I know:

"Why turn away when I draw near?  
Why cold to day? Once I was dear.  
Then thy heart stirred and flushed thy brow!  
Never a word welcomes me now.  
Speak to me—speak! Be my heart heard,  
Or will it break for one kind word?  
No vow to bind, no pledge I seek,  
Only be kind. Speak to me—speak!"

I listen till the song is ended, and then I close the door softly and go back to the fire, laughing. I know at least of whom he is thinking; those were the very words he had said to me this afternoon—"Speak to me. Why won't you speak to me?" The old spirit of mischief prompts me to sit down to the piano and sing something that might seem like an answer; but the disastrous consequences of my former folly are too recent to encourage me to transgress a second time.

It is the evening of Madame Cronhelm's concert, which is indeed more of a *concertation* than a concert, the performers mixing among the audience when not actually required on the raised platform at the upper end of the room, where the grand piano and violins and 'cello are located, and a hum of talk filling up the intervals between the songs and concerted pieces. We all enjoy it, having so many friends among both performers and audience; and, though most of Madame Cronhelm's pupils take part in the choruses only, they are pleased to appear in public in any capacity—if so exclusive reunion can be called public at all.

My "Jewel" song is among the first on the programme; and, when I have sung it, and when Herr von König has complimented me on what he is pleased to call the delicate grace of my vocalism, and called my voice "truly celestial," I make my way down to the Rollestons, whom I see grouped at a little distance from the blaze of light which makes a dazzling center of the stage. But, before I can reach them, moving slowly through the dense crowd, with my long black satin skirt in one hand and my fan in the other, Gerard Baxter appears, I know not from what coign of vantage, and offers me his arm.

"Allow me to make way for you," he says, smiling, "and allow me to congratulate you on having 'brought down the house.'"

"Oh, don't you flatter me," I laugh, shrugging my shoulders.

"Why do you emphasize the 'you'?"

"Because it seems unnatural for you to pay compliments."

"I paid you a compliment once, and you misunderstood it," he says more gravely. "Perhaps I may find some safer road to your favor than that. Have you forgiven me yet for my stupidity?"

"Long ago," I answer frankly. "Let us forget all about a piece of folly for which I am sorry, and of which I am heartily ashamed."

"I am ready to forget all you do not wish me to remember," he rejoins at once.

And then, instead of finding myself near to the Rollestons, I find myself sitting on a chair near a cool bank of ferns and exotics with Mr. Baxter standing behind me, listening to a girl with a magnificent contralto voice singing the "Clang of the Wooden Shoe."

I listen like one in a dream. I know that he is there, standing near me in his somber evening raiment, and that I am happy, with a strange unaccountable sense of happiness, which I could not analyze even if I would.

"Do you like her singing?" he asks, when the song is ended.

"She has a very pure contralto voice. Her voice is better than her method of singing. Don't you think so?"

"Yes. I have heard people say that she is studying for the stage, that she is going to Italy to finish her musical education."

"So I have heard. I think she is quite right. Such a voice as hers was never meant to 'rust unburnished, not to shine in use.'"

"Or yours?" he questions a little wistfully. "They tell me you are studying for public exhibition too."

Who could have told him so? The idea amuses me so much that I do not immediately advise him to the contrary.

"And if I am," I say, laughing, "do you not think that I am right in putting the talent which has been given me to some practical use?"

"If you have no other means of livelihood—yes."

"You do not approve of singing on the stage?"

"I do not care to think of your doing it."

"But one can do it, and yet—"

"I hope you will never do it," he interrupts, with more passion than his occasion seems to warrant. "I hope to heaven you will never do it."

"But I must do it!" I say, willfully encouraging the idea which is somehow or other seems to have taken into his head. "If my daily life depends upon it what am I to do?"