

"Impossible, Francilla."

"As I tell you, I derive the opinion only from my own observation. But how could he help adoring her? Is she not the queen of song? Does she not embody his creations with a grace to which no other can attain? So thought Bellini, I warrant me; and when he composed, he said to himself, 'What will *she* think of this?'"

Henriette sighed, and looked down.

"Poor Bellini!" resumed Francilla; "how sadly he is changed. The fire of his spirit has preyed on his frame, and almost consumed it. He cannot live long. And it was a cruel blow to him to hear that Maria had discarded his music, and to be treated by her with such reserve as she has shown to him for a year past. The last time I saw them together, Maria behaved as if she thought him a boy! It was before she left Paris."

"Yet you thought her not indifferent to him?"

"For the very reason that she was so reserved, and seemed so cold. You do not know the nature of love, *chère amie*!"

A sudden thought occurred to Henriette, and she blushed deeply. Francilla went on:—

"All this you must not remember; Bellini has never owned his unhappy passion, for so I must call it. I cannot even tell if Maria suspects it; her reluctance to sing his compositions looks like it; but to me she never speaks of him. So much for my suspicions; now, *cara*, I will tell you of my own love, and my approaching nuptials."

We must not intrude on the confidence of the two friends with such a subject in agitation; but hasten to conclude this brief sketch.

Henriette obtained from the Duc de B. the place she desired for Basil; but his granting her the favor emboldened him to pay her many more visits than she desired, nor could the strictest reserve of manner on her part prevent the manifestation of his daily increasing passion. Count R. never accompanied him; but Henriette met him several times at concerts, and in private circles. She could not fail to observe, when he was presented to her, the difference between him and other distinguished persons who sought her acquaintance. To her he seemed superior, not only in the noble beauty of his person, and the repose and grace of his manner, but in the deep soul that frequently animated his usually cold features. It was not, Henriette thought, like the soul of a Frenchman, but something higher and more intellectual. This impression deepened every time she saw him; and in spite of herself she often felt abashed in his presence. He had not said that he had little respect for her profession; nay, his

courtesy could not, to the queen herself, have been more gracefully deferential; he had not said he thought her brilliant talents might be more appropriately employed in a more useful though more limited sphere; that the world's admiration could not console a true woman's heart for the absence of the sincere devotion of one; nothing of this had he said, yet all this Henriette felt; and more earnestly did she long to escape from what she more than ever deemed a thralldom; more sedulously did she endeavour to shun the admiration her transcendent powers excited.

To the reader it may be evident that our fair prima-donna was irrecoverably in love with Count R. But she suspected no such thing; her embarrassment in his presence was in her view only the effects of her sense of his intellect and his judgment. She thought that he alone, of the crowds who surrounded her, could appreciate her; and she could not help wishing that he understood her entirely. She knew not—alas for her inexperience! that is already a hopeless case with a woman, when such are her sentiments!

Perhaps, if Henriette's nature had been one of feeling and passion like Francilla's, if the subtler and more refined spirit had not been predominant, she would have sooner suspected the real nature of her feelings. If she had, the startling discovery would have impelled her to fly from the Count. What Francilla had told her respecting Bellini warned her of the danger of trifling with love. But her very habit of tracing the operations of her own mind blinded her; and, unconscious of danger, she stood just in its way. The veil was not torn aside till she was obliged to own that it was too late.

This happened at a soiree, at the house of Madame —. Count R. was there, and also the Duc de B., with many others of the noblesse. Henriette, caressed in private circles, as she was admired in public, was there also, and never received more devoted attention. But she could not help observing that the Count avoided her, and yielded his place near her several times to the Duc de B., whose assiduities from that moment became odious to her. At the request of her hostess, Henriette sat down to the piano; song after song was solicited, and she complied with the readiness that showed her characteristic desire to oblige. As a last favor, she was entreated to sing in the duet from the first act of *Don Giovanni*, with another celebrated musician.

When the voice beside her began, *l'a ci darem* *mano*, Henriette started, not at the light and graceful melody, but she saw Count R. leaning over her with an expression of unusual interest in