

The Storyteller.

THE SINGER'S CHILD.

CHAPTER III.

One day about eight months after the conversation recorded above the Rev. Mother was met by Sister Angela, who handed her a newspaper, which she said Mrs Griffith had sent over as it contained 'something that reminded her of Rosie.'

'I wonder what it can be about,' said the elder nun. 'Poor Rosie! I am so glad she is to have an opening at last. It was uphill work all along, but Herr Scheren is indomitable, and now she is to sing to a real London audience. There is no doubt but that she will be a success—if she is not too nervous. We must pray that she may have courage to-night, Sister.'

'We need not fear for her, Mother. She has been so good and brave under disappointments that surely she won't break down at the first bid for fame. In her letter this morning she seems quite courageous over it. See, she has marked the paragraph. I shall read it aloud.'

The following is what she read :

'Our readers are already acquainted with the pathetic and romantic story of Major Denison—how seventeen years since he was one of an expedition sent to subdue a rebellious tribe in Central Africa—how his party had a disastrous engagement with a large number of the Maghidi—how he was left for dead on the field by his comrades—how he was not dead but only severely wounded, and, being found by the Maghidi, was by them nursed back to health, only to be kept in chains till two months ago, when he was discovered and liberated by some English soldiers who had penetrated into that distant territory. The public press has been full of the affair, yet the saddest part of it yet remains to be told.'

'Seventeen years ago, Major Denison, though heir to his uncle's large estate in Wales—of which, by the way, he has now entered into possession—had nothing but his pay to live on. Yet two years previously he had married the beautiful but penniless daughter of a brother officer, Captain Langton—a proceeding which very much incensed his uncle against him.'

'However, the young couple managed to live on their slender income. After a year a daughter was born to them. She was called Rose Agatha. Soon after this event Mrs. Denison's father died, and besides him she had no blood relations. A year later her husband's regiment was ordered to Africa. He wrote her encouraging letters during the two months before he fell into the hands of the Maghidi. We can imagine her state of mind on reading her husband's name in the list of the killed. What became of her afterwards? No one knows. Since his return to England Major Denison has instituted all possible inquiries as to the whereabouts of his wife and child, but no trace of them can be discovered. The owner of the house in which Mrs. Denison lodged up to the time of the official announcement of his death is still alive, but she has no idea where the lady went. She remembers well her passionate sorrow on receiving the sad news. She left the house about a week later, and has never since been heard of.'

'As Mrs. Denison was quite young at the time and perfectly healthy, it was but natural for her husband to expect that she would be still alive, and that their daughter, who would be now about nineteen, should also still be living. Yet advertising and extensive inquiries have failed in bringing anything to light. He had more than once heard her say in jest that if anything happened to him she would try to make a living on the stage, for she possessed a charming and carefully trained contralto voice. It is his conviction that she had put that project into execution, and he is interviewing theatrical managers and others with the idea of getting some clue of her whereabouts. All in vain, however, up to the present; yet he does not despair of ultimate success, for probably Mrs. Denison would have taken an assumed name.'

'If she lives it is strange that she has not lighted on some account of her husband's almost miraculous return, for the newspapers have been full of the wonderful event. Certainly we think Major Denison may be assured of the sympathy of the public. After many years of bondage and suffering he has returned to his native land, only to find those whom he yearned for gone, perhaps dead. His family estates, which for several years have been in the possession of a more distant heir, are now surrendered to him, but wife and daughter are not there to share them with him. We sincerely hope his efforts will be eventually crowned with success—a hope in which we are confident all true men and women will join.'

'Mother,' cried Sister Agatha, pale with excitement, 'could it be that this Major Denison is Rosie's father? But he is! Don't you remember the mark on her clothes, "Rosie D."?''

'Yes,' answered the Rev. Mother with conviction. 'It certainly looks quite probable; but we must not be too hasty. There is one strong proof, however—the miniature in Rosie's locket, which can only be that of her father. If the paper had only published a portrait of him.'

'Yes, but you forget how changed he must be after such a lapse of time. It does not give his Christian name, Mother? "From Harry to Isabel" was engraved on the locket, you know.'

'No, what a pity. But that's another of our proofs, Sister, and another still in the event of his wife's name being Isabel. And Mrs. Griffith would be able to confirm or otherwise his description of her appearance.'

'What do you intend doing, Mother? Will you write to him and send him to Rosie?'

'I don't think that would be wise, for Rosie's sake at least. It might upset her now, at the beginning of what promises to be a

brilliant career. But I shall write to say I may be able to tell him something of his wife and child if he gives me his own and his wife's Christian names and inquiring if he had ever given her a locket containing a portrait of himself. If he answers satisfactorily I shall give him Rosie's address.'

CHAPTER IV.

In a private sitting-room in the G— Hotel two men were seated.

It was a tender evening in April, and the warm sunshine streamed into the apartment, lighting up clearly the features of its occupants. The face of the elder—or apparently elder—man was good to look on, for it was a noble one. A pair of flashing, dark eyes, which for all their gleaming had a touch of intense gravity in their depths, illumined a strong, manly face, to which a finely-cut mouth, though concealed in part by a grey beard and moustache, gave an air of additional strength. The skin, tanned to a deep brown, spoke of long residence in a southern clime. A man of tall and powerful build, yet he struck one as being prematurely aged.

His companion had an unmistakable military cut, and looked some years younger.

'I'll tell you what, Denison,' the latter remarked after some moments of silence, 'you are wearing yourself out over this business. It would be just as well to let it rest for a little while. Here you are, and since you touched English soil you haven't given yourself a moment's relaxation.'

'Relaxation!' repeated the Major. 'I must do my duty first. If I could even be sure that Isabel and the child were dead it would be better than this suspense.'

'Yes, but these detectives will unearth it all sooner or later, and there is no earthly reason why you must spend all your time and energy on it too. Tell you what, as a new thought struck him, 'just come with me to the L— Hall to-night. There's to be a high-class concert, and a debutante who is said to have a wonderful voice. You can't have lost all your old love for music.'

'No, I have not lost it, Meredith, though I had little opportunity of indulging it among the Maghidi, unless their battle songs could be called music—with a grim smile. 'But I thought of calling on Ferrer this evening to see if he has got any clue.'

'If he had he would let you know quick enough. So you've just got to come with me; there's no getting out of it.'

Major Denison smiled resignedly.

'Well, if you're so bent on hauling me off, I suppose I must go, so that settles it.'

'That's right,' rejoined Colonel Meredith, as he rose and took up his hat. 'Well, I have to dine at the club. I shall call round for you at eight.'

'Very well. I shall be ready then.'

Major Denison was as good as his word. His friend found him waiting for him at the appointed hour. It was merely to please the Colonel that he had consented to go to the entertainment, and not from any pleasure he expected to derive from it, though possibly the music might have the effect of diverting his mind from his troubles. Yet the moment he entered the hall a strange exhilaration filled him and his spirits rose so high that he marvelled at himself. All his senses were possessed by a vague feeling of expectancy for which he could in no wise account. They had chanced on good places, near the stage yet with a view of the hall. It was with unwonted interest the Major looked at his surroundings. He noticed that the audience was a large and fashionable one.

But presently the orchestra commenced playing and he gave his whole attention to listening. He fell into a rapt and dreamy mood, drinking in to the full the long-unknown pleasure of music. In a dim way he was conscious that someone was playing a prelude on the piano. All at once the clear flute-like notes of a girl's voice fell on his ears. He closed his eyes the better to enjoy the song—an old English melody well known to him in his younger days. It brought back tender memories of his youth. And the voice, was it familiar too? Where in the by-gone years had he heard just such notes as these? He must look at the singer presently, he told himself; she had three or four verses to sing yet. He must enjoy them to the utmost, then he would pick out her name on the programme and fix her face on his mind.

But he was rudely awakened from his spell of luxurious lethargy by a nudge and a quick exclamation from Meredith:

'I say, Denison, do look at that girl. She is your living image.'

'What girl? Where?' questioned the Major, blinking his eyes to accustom them to the electric light.

'Why, the singer, of course. I never saw such a striking resemblance. The girl is surely your daughter.'

Major Denison started violently, and then gazed with eager eyes at the girlish figure on the stage a few yards before him.

Clothed in some clinging white material, her lovely dark face illumined by the elated look which the knowledge of success alone can bring, can this beautiful, stately girl be our old friend Rosie? Yes, fame has come to her at last. She realises it with a throb of delight as, her song ended, the whole house bursts into a storm of applause. The stage is literally covered with flowers, and cries of 'encore' ring from every part of the hall. She sees she must give it, so bowing low she begins a lively Irish ballad.

All her nervousness has vanished with the fear of failure. Her eyes are dancing with delight, and she ventures to look at the audience for the first time.

Her gaze falls on the face of a man seated just beneath her, and rests there. His eyes, strained and eager, catch hers and hold them as if by magnetism.

A feeling of vague bewilderment seizes the girl which makes it impossible for her to withdraw her eyes. Mechanically she sings on to the last verse, her gaze still locked, as it were, in that of the man.