

and they gave you delight. This new undertaking is wearing you away."

"I would not work for mere delight, my darling; not for mere pleasure to myself. The greater the work the more exhausting to the mortal frame, no doubt; but there is something here that will excel the mere loveliness of flowers; a message, perhaps, worth giving to mankind. Raphael did not grudge his headaches, or his wakeful nights."

"I cannot imagine that he had either," said Fanchea, gaily. "I always fancy that genius like his is happy, and gives out its beauties as the birds do their song."

"There has been radiant, seraph-like genius of that order," said the signora, agitatedly, "but the rule is for the reverse."

"And, dear Mamzelle," said Fan, laying her warm cheek caressingly on the little woman's silver head, "is it not better to keep looking happily at Raphael's Madonna than to sit here sorrowfully, trying to invent a Madonna of one's own? One can hardly expect to compete with Raphael. Men do not think of wrestling with the angels."

The signora bowed her head. She could not say. "But I have dreamed that I, too, might be an angel." The very boldness of the girl's playful words convinced her that Fan did not guess at the deep ambition of her restless heart, for Fan's was not the finger to probe a wound. And as Hope was still within call, ready to hold the lamp by which she might finish this work, she was able to recover herself, and say, smiling:

"You unkind girl. You make little of my picture!"

"No," said Fan; "your work is always good. It is you, and not I, that are dissatisfied with it. Come out into the sunshine and be happy!"

"I cannot at this moment; but run away, my love, and enjoy the morning. Herr Harfenspieler will be here in the afternoon."

Fan went, with a shadow still lingering on her face, feeling that a cloud had come over her friend which all her tenderness was powerless to remove; but before she had reached the fairyland of the great gardens the reflection of a trouble was gone from her brow, and all her natural joyousness had returned. Despite her love for, and gratitude to, the signora, it was sometimes unconsciously a relief to her to escape from the tragic intensity of the little artist's manner of dealing with life.

"If she would only come out here, and be perfectly happy for one hour!" thought the girl, her eyes flashing with delight as they roved over the rich banks of color, the prim, trim, brilliant scrolls of bloom, the old grey walls with their green and purple and scarlet draperies, the clusters of ripe roses, from pale gold to crimson, that stood aloft above the sward, as if they were the picked and choicest jewels to be offered to heaven out of this treasury of sweets; and then rested on the background of sombre, almost blackened foliage, fringed with grey, that gave value to all the warmth of the interior.

"If she would only drink in this delicious air," thought Fan, "without giving it back again in sighs. If she would but let the exhilaration of it get into her head, and the perfume get into her heart and stay there! With Raphael in her memory, and her hands full of flowers, might not the artist-soul within her be content? Surely God's message is in the flowers, too!"

Carried away by a passion of joy in the loveliness round her, she gathered a heap of roses, and wove them into a crown for her hat and a girdle for her waist, and thus garlanded she set off on tip-toe of glee across the Park to pay a visit to Nancy and her children.

She romped with the children, and shared their meal of bread and milk; when she would leave them, the little ones followed her through the nearest dells and dingles till their mother called them back; and, glowing with air and exercise, she came dancing and singing homeward through the woods.

Her fit of exuberant spirits being almost worked off, her eye fell on a mossy tree-trunk that formed an inviting seat, and, "Now that I am by myself," thought Fan, "I will sit here and do a bit of thinking."

Sitting there, perfectly still, her thoughts went rapidly back over her young life; a period of seven years was rapidly scanned, and then, more slowly, another period of ten. Closing her eyes, she saw "Killeevy" as of old, in the gipsy's tent, and the "Hymn of the Virgin Triumphant" came softly out of her lips, as if she sang in her sleep. There were the tossing white waves rocking at the feet of the cliffs, there were the faces of the singers lit by the red glow from the turf-fire on the hearth. As she sang her mountain-hymn the voices of home began to whisper, and gather strength, and at last made their audible responses in her heart.

The hymn finished, she went on singing her thoughts in a sort of plaintive recitative: for this was a habit of thinking which she had never given up. Her Irish was now merely broken Irish, but there was no one to criticise her grammar.

"The sea is singing its old song, the white birds are flying, the sun is setting behind the islands. Kevin is coming over the cliffs with Fan in his arms. His eyes are full of a beautiful story, and he is going to tell it. Oh, Kevin, when will you tell me a story again?"

"Kind mother, with the good face, you are standing in the doorway looking out to see them come home. The moon is getting up at the back of the mountain; it is red and round and bright, like the old copper pan you are so proud of on the wall. The hearth is swept; the firelight is shining on the old copper pan. Supper is made; the cakes are baked. *Call the children home!*"

"Where are the children now, mother? Where is your good, kind face? Oh, Kevin, when will you tell me a story again!"

The song would have been longer, only the sound of a step startled the singer, who looked round, and no longer saw Killeevy, but beheld very plainly the woods of Sussex, and Captain Wilderspin standing before her.

"The birds and I are lost in astonishment," he said. "We never heard so doleful a ditty from you before."

"Speak for yourself," said Fan, shaking her head. "The birds know everything. If *they* could speak, they would carry many a message for me."

"I do not doubt it. I wish I were in their confidence. But where is the signora this morning?"

"The signora is painting a beautiful picture."

"Is it the picture I asked her for; the portrait of a certain gipsy maiden?"

"No," said Fan, laughing; "it is a much more noble subject. You remember her indignation at that request. The idea of her perpetuating me as a gipsy!"

"I particularly want a gipsy for the gallery."

"To put among the beautiful grandmothers?"

"Yes; to put their beauty to shame."

Fan colored a little at the plain-spoken compliment; but her embarrassment went as quickly as it came.

"There is a gipsy in the Academy exhibition this year," she said. "It is very pretty, and I don't think it is sold."

"It must have one particular face, or I do not want it."

"That is a pity, for the signora is terrible when she makes up her mind."

In the meantime Herr Harfenspieler had arrived at the Castle to give Fan her lesson, and found the signora alone, bending with feverish face over her picture.

"At work again, signora," he said, entering. "A large canvas this time; and, *ach himmel!* an ambitious subject also!"

The signora winced at the word ambitious. "One is not necessarily ambitious when one longs to do something great," she said, pettishly.