

her of your noble family to pluck her out of her proper niche, to the detriment of his own dignity?"

"Men of his position have married women already famous on the stage," growled his lordship. "It is better to take her artless and fresh, as she is."

"His fancy would pass away if you continued to oppose him."

"But I will not oppose him," shouted Lord Wilderspin, thinking not of his nephew at all, but of the cruel redness round Fanchea's bright eyes.

"My lord, you are—"

"A fool?" said the old man, testily.

"I could not think of applying such an epithet to your lordship," said Herr Harfenspieler; and after that the two old men had sulked at each other for several hours. But as it is hard work sulking with an old and congenial friend in a lonely country house, they met in the evening as if nothing had happened.

So conscious, however, was each member of the party of something vividly present in the mind which could not be alluded to in speech, that conversation was difficult, and an unusual silence hung over the dinner table. Afterwards music came to the rescue, and Fan's singing and the professor's violin-playing drowned a great deal of trouble for the moment. Having soothed himself into better humor by such accustomed means, Herr Harfenspieler bethought him of something to talk about which would have no sort of connection with the difficulties of the hour.

A friend of his, an Englishman, one Mr. Honeywood, has sent him a volume of poems, written by a young man in whom he (Honeywood) was deeply interested.

He left the room and returned with a book, which he gave to Captain Rupert.

"Ah, I remember this," said Captain Rupert, turning over the leaves. "I am not a great reader of poetry, but some things in this volume won on me very much. Here, for instance, is what I call a delightful song." He glanced at Fanchea, taking in all the grace of the light, white-clothed figure, the dark little head and sparkling face that leaned forward in the lamplight to listen; and then he read the poem aloud.

"Sweet," said Herr Harfenspieler. "It ought to be set to music for our songstress."

Fan gazed around on her friends. Mamzelle had approached and listened; his lordship, with a preliminary grunt of protest, had given ear to the reading, and now stood silent, all under-lip and scowl. The poem had found a tender spot in every heart of the group, for there was that in the four faces which cannot be either affected or denied.

How strange, thought Fanchea, that their hearts should all bow to these words, and yet have so little sympathy for the mindful tenderness that had caused her joy to-day. Her own heart yearned to the comprehending soul that had so given a voice to her fidelity. She worshipped in silence the Master Spirit that had spoken to them all with one breath, in the language of each.

"That is the true voice," she said impulsively to Herr Harfenspieler. "Song can only be its echo."

"Nay, music is often its inspiration," said the professor, jealously, while Captain Rupert looked on angry, enraptured, wondering at the look that this poem had called into her face. He realised in that moment the heights of her nature, and knew that to fail in exciting the highest devotion she was capable of would be to lose her altogether.

Her eyelashes wet with the tears of enthusiasm, Fan picked up the volume, which Rupert had laid on the table, and turned over the leaves, seeking for more of that divine music whose vibrations were still thrilling in her brain. Accidentally her eye fell on the title-page, and a cry broke from her lips.

"What is the matter?" asked several voices. Captain Rupert came close to her, with a presage of trouble. All eyes were turned on her in surprise.

"Well, madam, what have you got there?" said his lordship.

"Why, it is Kevin!" she cried, bursting into a peal of rapturous laughter. "Kevin who has wrung all your hearts and brought the tears into your eyes. Kevin is the poet we have been worshipping—Kevin, whom you despised."

"Kevin!" was echoed around.

"Yes, Kevin," she said, standing on her tip-toes and smiling down on them in her triumph. "Look at the name for yourselves—K-e-v-i-n, and the other is his surname."

"Allow me to introduce my old comrade, Kevin, to my dear and noble friends," she went on, making a gleeful curtsy all round, and waving the precious volume above her head. "You, who have all been so good to me—you were afraid I should be ashamed of him when he appeared. My lord, have I reason to be ashamed?" suddenly wheeling about and facing him with eyes full of saucy triumph.

"No, you baggage, no."

"Will no one congratulate me?" said Fan, with a sudden pathetic change of manner, folding her two little hands over the book and glancing wistfully round.

"I congratulate you," said Captain Rupert, and walked out of the room with a jealous heart.

"I will try to be glad," said Herr Harfenspieler, rubbing his nose vehemently with his pocket-handkerchief.

"Mamzelle!"

"I love you!" said the signora in her tragic way; but she did not look more pleased than Captain Rupert.

"You expect us to be glad," said his lordship, "because this is a great fellow whom we can do nothing to serve."

Fan looked up at him with wide, grateful eyes, remembering all his bounty to her for years.

"You can allow him to shake you by the hand, my lord."

"Little Simpleton, is that a benefit?"

"No small boon, and no small honor," lifting the old man's hand and kissing it impulsively; and then Fan, smiling a loving look all round upon her friends as if thanking them for their scraps of sympathy, turned away abruptly, still hugging her book, and disappeared.

A solemn silence reigned in the room for some seconds after she went. His lordship, striding about the floor, was the first to speak.

"After all, we are a pack of fools," he said. "We ought to be thankful that the fellow is, as she says, one to be not ashamed of."

"Captain Wilderspin is the only person who has serious cause to be displeased," said the signora.

"Ha!" ejaculated his lordship.

"I do not think we shall hear any more of his suit," continued the signora, beginning her sentence on a triumphant note, and ending it on a sad one.

"The genius of music may still carry the day," said Herr Harfenspieler. "We may yet have the happiness of presenting our queen of song to the world."

His lordship glared round at them as if they had been plotting somebody's death. He was ashamed to confess how completely he had gone over to the enemy. In the few hours that had elapsed since that morning he had changed so thoroughly as to be more willing to have Fan for a beloved daughter than to see her a successful *prima donna*. Confounded for one moment at coming face to face with his own inconsistency, the next he remembered nothing but the pair of red-rimmed eyes that had confronted him so bravely in his study.

"By Heaven, he shall not jilt her for any far-fetched jealousy!" he shouted. "You pair of heart-murderers, robbers of the joys of youth, hypocrites, with your tender melodies, and poetic sympathy with human feelings—you would send the fellow away, and put forth a crushed creature to give expression with her own misery to your humbugging music!"

And emphasising this outburst with a scowl of displeasure, he marched out of the room.

Arrived in her own chamber, Fan threw open her window and trimmed her lamp, and sat down to spend the night in reading Kevin's book. Weeping and laughing with delight, her eyes flew over the pages that