

away with Kevin. Now tell me frankly, my little girl, whether you will be my nephew's wife, mistress and lady of Wilderspin, with all the happiness a husband and father can provide for you: or will you (with a sudden fierce change of manner) go with this pair of musical owls, to sing on the stage and make a show of yourself to the world?"

"Lord Wilderspin," said Fan, trembling a little. "you have brought me up and trained me for a particular purpose. I wish to fulfil that purpose."

The signora and the Harfenspieler advanced, and each seized one of her hands. She broke from them, and followed Captain Rupert, who had turned to the door.

"Do not be vexed with me," she said. "You never could have been satisfied with me. As the lady of Wilderspin I should have been a troublesome failure."

"I was willing to take the risk," said Rupert, and looked as if he would say something more; but, instead, dropped her hand and left the room abruptly.

"Off to London without his breakfast," growled Lord Wilderspin, looking after his nephew with an amount of sympathy which he had never before felt for the younger man—a sympathy which was destined to lay the foundation of thorough good feeling between the two men for the remainder of their lives. Thus much good had Fan's little involuntary mischief-making brought in its train.

"A nice dance you have led us you minx," grumbled his lordship, scowling at the girl, who stood with pale cheeks and two great tears in her eyes gazing at the door through which her lover had gone. "Serve us right for being such fools. Never will I think to understand a girl again. Now, run away, you impertinent monkey, and pack your trunks for Italy."

In a very short time after this the signora, Herr Harfenspieler, and Fan were on their way to Milan, where Lord Wilderspin was to join them a few weeks later.

Seated between her two triumphant instructors, Fan, in the beginning of the journey, was sad enough. She was leaving the good home that had sheltered her for years, having grieved and disappointed each one of the kind friends who had cherished her. True, she had enjoyed the supreme pleasure of hearing news of Kevin and of seeing her benefactors forced to acknowledge that he was as worthy, as noble, as she had ever believed him to be. But with this had come no certainty that he remembered her or was seeking for her. And she had no clue to his whereabouts, no means of reaching him, or recalling the fact of her existence to his mind.

As they proceeded on their beautiful way, however, she gradually awakened from her dull, uninterested state of disappointment to the consciousness of new life: the strange world of the Alps excited and amazed her. Even at its very entrance her heart began to beat fast, and as valley after valley was traversed, and still higher regions of beauty opened above her head, a glad light began to shine in her eyes again, and the bright blood began to glow in her cheeks. The perpetual mustering and shifting of great heights fascinated her: mountains that met, soared, and parted again to make way for yet greater than they, to allow giants still more mighty to mount and climb nearer heaven upon their shoulders. Always peering on before towards dazzling vistas, opening as if from the clouds, she gradually lost sight of self with its burdens, and entering the Via Mala seemed to tread upon air.

They had left their carriage, and walked along the narrow road. The mountains, no longer opening their arms to receive smiling valleys into their bosom, now became locked together in an iron embrace, making ramparts of almost infinite height and depth, through which water, sunshine, and human will forced their way daringly and with difficulty. From mighty crag to crag overhead, the sunshine leaped, filling the chasms with darkness, and transfiguring the taper summits of Titanic pines. The Rhine, like a white snake in the dizzy distance below, bored a passage for itself

as if through the recesses of a cloven world; and there, imitating its indomitable energy, and washed by its spray, the pines planted their roots, and rising towards the light, clothed many a terrible gap and fissure with the long, sweeping draperies of their dark green, empurpled mist-laden boughs. Looking down into this narrow, almost bottomless hollow, one is overwhelmed with awe at the grandeur that Nature has piled within its depths and up its sides, the luxuriance of vegetation and magnificence of color enriching its gloom: looking up, one grows giddy with joy at the glory that wraps the spires and crowns of mountain, crag, and pine. Now passing through dripping caves tunnelled in the rock, now carried over the awful gulph by a bridge, the road winds on, a triumph of the ingenuity of man; and the traveller, following it, feels at once his own personal insignificance, and the astonishing power of the human race which has thus penetrated into the secret fastnesses of Nature.

"Mamzelle," said Fan, suddenly lowering her gaze from the glories above her head, "why are we ever unhappy in this beautiful world? God, and so much loveliness, ought to be enough for us."

"How enraptured you look, my darling! To me there is gloom as well as joy in all this grandeur. Walking here on this dim path, midway between gigantic heights and depths, I am forced to think of Dante's conceptions. Above our heads is the Paradiso—look how like a group of angels yon golden cloud hangs over that highest, darkest cluster of pines!—below our feet is the Inferno: and we are travelling with trembling hearts amid the shades of the Purgatorio."

"What a strange fancy, Mamzelle: and I can see such beautiful things down yonder!"

Higher and yet higher they kept wending. Every half-hour brought them into a new and cooler region. The sunset intensified in glory, the tips of the pines grew darker in the rosy light, and a deeper purple was folded among their branches: golden veils of cloud hovered round the amethyst peaks, and the blinding glory from above cast more appalling shadows into the gorges below.

"Still higher, still higher," said Fan, with two bright, red spots burning on her cheeks. "We shall surely soon be at heaven's gate": as yet another Rhine-threaded valley opened out of the clouds above her head.

The air was now getting cooler, the sunlight paler, and the pines had diminished in size. The river brawled between green banks, like any common shallow stream of our lowlands. As the travellers still ascended, the pines, now grown dark and thick, were covered from their roots as with a soft green fur. A chill touch of frost seemed to come with the twilight: winter had succeeded summer, as night had come after the day.

Snowy peaks began to rise around them, and a few vivid stars appeared in the sky. After another spell of almost benighted wandering in this eerie and magnificent upper world, they began to approach the hotel near the summit of the pass.

"This is not exactly the gate of heaven, my dear," said the signora, "but to me it is almost as welcome at this moment."

Shut up for a few hours' sleep in a little upper room, Fan surveyed the alpine world from her balcony. Multitudes of peaks, grimly dark or glittering white with snow, filled the horizon, and round and above them the stars flashed with an extraordinary brilliancy.

Fascinated with the beauty and majesty of the scene, the girl felt that she could stay here for ever.

"I do not want to go down into the world any more," she reflected. "No one needs me there, and this place suits me exactly." She did not ask herself what she could do here: existence in such a region must be enough. It looked like the entrance into still nobler realms. She fancied herself passing between those glittering and star-crowned peaks, and emerging into wonderful valleys that would lead to heaven. Behind such mighty and shining gates an angel would be sure to meet her, as Raphael met Tobias, and would lead her by the hand in her heavenward wanderings.