

'See how well I can guess your wishes, though I am only the godchild, not the fairy godmother!' she answered, laughing. 'Now get ready quickly. And then in the evening you must come to the theatre. I am to have a benefit to-night, and you must be there.'

The idea of the country expedition was delightful. The weather was warm; the smell of ink and paper had grown nauseous, and I was weary of routine work. But the prospect of going to the theatre did not enchant me, and I demurred.

'You see,' I said, 'I never go to a play. And, then, I would rather think of you as I know you, than as I should see you on the stage—'

'You are afraid of being disillusioned. You don't approve of the stage.'

'I have no right to condemn. It certainly does not fit in with my ideas.'

'But just this once! It is a fine piece, and I should so like you to see me in my professional capacity.'

She pleaded so effectually that at last I consented, and then went to get ready for our expedition.

In honor of my godchild I donned a new summer gown, which delighted her.

'How nice you look!' she exclaimed. 'Do you know, when you wear pretty things you look quite young? I am sure you are not half as old as you pretend.'

'Oh, yes, I am quite, quite old!'

'I refuse to believe it!'

Then she grew silent and thoughtful for a while. But afterward we chatted gaily on many subjects, and passed a delightful day together. When we came back in the evening, she insisted on my dining with her at a little French restaurant, which was as excellent as it was unpretentious. She seemed to divine my tastes in everything, and was determined that I should enjoy myself as much as possible in my old-fashioned, quiet way. She was so simple and winning that I soon forgot her worldly role and calling. When our pleasant day had come to an end, she reminded me of my promise to go to the theatre, and forced me to accept a box.

I went reluctantly. It was years since I had seen a play, and the stage had lost all charm for me; besides, I dreaded the possible nastiness of a modern play, with the child taking the part, perhaps, of a foolish or unfaithful wife. I dreaded, too, any failure or disappointment, because I loved her, and could not bear to see her pained. Strange to say, I knew nothing about her theatrical career,—did not know whether she played under her own name, whether she were a successful actress or otherwise. I had simply put the whole subject away from my mind as something unpleasant.

The house was packed, and from the moment the curtain rose the interest seemed to be intense. The play was a modern one and of the usual problem type; but it was wholesome and uplifting. As for my friend's acting, I quickly realised that she was a star. She simply carried everything before her by her beauty and talent, and the applause was uproarious. There could be no doubt that the girl was a born actress and as gifted as she was pretty. I could not withhold my admiration, and was as enthusiastic as the rest, laughing and weeping by turns, and hardly realising that it was my young friend who had such power to captivate me. I remembered, half sadly, that morning in the convent chapel, and then I began to wonder if it could really be this brilliant woman upon whom hundreds of eyes were fixed in admiration that had prattled so innocently to me in the woods a few hours earlier?

When the play was over she came once more upon the stage to bow her thanks to the audience. She wore a shimmering white gown, with pearls, and certainly she looked very lovely. A burst of applause broke from the house, and a rain of flowers fell upon the stage. She bowed and smiled; but the only eyes she sought were mine, and I knew that the innocent smile which lit up her face was intended for me.

'I may come home with you, may I not?' she asked.

'Yes, of course. But why should you care to come to my dull little home? And you need some refreshment after your exertions.'

'You can give me a cup of tea, and I don't care for anything else. Do let me come to you! I want to know what you thought of the play and of your god-child.'

'Why, I was perfectly delighted. The play was really excellent. And as for your acting it was splendid. I dare not ask you to give up the stage now. You have wonderful talent.'

'Not so much, but I have worked very hard. I had a great object in view. I never told you that I had a crippled little sister. I have worked to give her the very best care and treatment. She is nearly cured, and now I need work no more, because a relative has adopted her. Besides, I can give her quite a little fortune from my earnings. Everything I have will go to her.'

'But you will go on making a fortune! You have a great career before you,—so great than even I would not dare to hold you back. I shall only trust and pray that God may keep you pure and good always.'

She smiled her child's smile and pressed my hands.

I felt half ashamed when I led her into my sombre little home and into my quiet sanctum, they were so out of keeping with her radiant beauty. But she did not seem to mind in the least, and appeared quite at ease. Throwing off her cloak, she at once set about arranging the masses of flowers she had brought in from the carriage. My room soon presented quite a festive appearance, and she insisted upon helping me to make tea.

'But, dear, what freak is this?' I ventured to ask. 'Surely you have had many invitations for this evening.'

'Yes, rather too many,' she answered, laughing; 'but I wanted to spend my last night with you.'

'Your last night? What do you mean?'

'Only this, my dear godmother! To-morrow I am going to X—, to be teacher of elocution in an academy of the Sisters of Mercy. After two years, perhaps—if they will have me,—I shall enter the convent of the Sisters of Charity in A—, where my little sister was cared for. See what your prayers have brought about!'

I almost let my cup drop, for my astonishment was complete. But, remembering in time that it belonged to my mother's best old Worcester set, I retained my presence of mind and put it down quietly. But I was so overcome that I could only stare at the vision opposite to me. It seemed impossible to believe that this brilliant girl, at the height of her popularity, was going to leave the world and hide herself in a convent school. But I saw by her eyes that she was in deadly earnest.

'God's ways certainly are wonderful!' was all I could find to say.—*Ave Maria.*

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