

'What is a "barcarolle," Fanny?'

'A boat or water song. Some of them are lovely. My father used to play them on his flute. Fancy how delightful it would be to go about in the moonlight, gliding over the dark water, listening to those enchanting songs!'

Gertrude was deeply impressed. Fanny told her about the Piazza and the Tower of St. Mark, of the thousands of doves fed daily on the Square, of the Bridge of Sighs, and many other places, pointing them out in the pictures as she explained.

Twilight was falling before Gertrude tore herself away from the scenes depicted in 'Venetian Days.'

The following afternoon as soon as school was dismissed she reappeared, and the occupation of the preceding afternoon was renewed. The next day she presented herself with paper and pencil.

'Oh, Fanny!' she cried. 'I have not only to read but to write the address of welcome. I can't do it, and papa says he can't, though the teacher said I might get help at home. It has to be about five hundred words in length. What shall I say? You will have to help me, Fanny.'

'Gladly will I do it,' said the little seamstress. 'Have you any idea what you have to write?'

'First we are to welcome the Grand Duke and Duchess; then we must wish them a safe and happy journey.'

'That ought not to be a hard thing to do,' said Fanny. 'But I don't see how you can get in five hundred words, unless you fill the paper full of flattery, which I cannot bear. Suppose we say something about the beautiful city they are to visit?'

'That will be a splendid idea,' rejoined Gertrude. 'And you know how to do it so well, Fanny.'

After that there was silence in the attic room, while Fanny Rotapfel bent over the table, writing, and Gertrude played with the kitten.

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The Town Hall having been declared too small for the crowds, it was decided to receive their Highnesses in the public square, which was opposite Fanny's window. From the broad, open seat, her back propped up with cushions, she could see all that went on below, for she had very good eyesight, this poor little seamstress. First, the children, girls and boys, dressed in their best, with huge wreaths of flowers, as they assembled on the platform, in the centre of which stood two red plush armchairs. Then the carriages, as they arrived with their august burdens, while cheer after cheer rent the air, and the children broke forth into song. Finally, she saw Gertrude with two companions emerge from the midst of the group and make a graceful little curtsey before the Grand Duke and Duchess. The child did not seem at all embarrassed, though of course Fanny could not hear a word that was said. Gertrude had been very well coached by her teacher, and the great personages evidently enjoyed the little speech very much, for, when it was finished, and the magnificent bouquet had been presented, the Grand Duchess stooped and kissed her. The townspeople must have been very proud of their representative; instead of being the daughter of a bookseller she might have been a little princess standing there in her pretty white dress, her beautiful curls falling over her shoulders.

Prolonged applause followed the conclusion of the address and the kiss, after which the Duke rose and said a few words. Presently the crowd began to disperse, the visitors re-entered their carriage, and Fanny, leaving the window-seat, quietly resumed her neglected sewing.

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It was late in the afternoon when, from my room opposite, I saw Gertrude mounting the stairs, calling as she came:

'Fanny, Fanny! Such good news! Such fine news!'

'I saw it all from the window,' said Fanny. 'You did splendidly, Gertrude, I'm sure.'

'So splendidly,' continued Gertrude, 'that the Grand Duchess kissed me, and this afternoon sent

papa two hundred crowns so that he and I may take a trip to that beautiful Venice which, wrote his Highness, his daughter so well described. That is what the note said, Fanny. And so, instead of going to Bernthal next week, to visit Uncle Franz and Aunt Selina as we had planned, we shall travel to Venice and see the palaces, and glide about in the beautiful black and gold gondolas and hear the "barcarolles," and maybe feed the doves on the Piazza of St. Mark. Oh, won't it be grand, Fanny Rotapfel?'

'Indeed it will,' replied Fanny, clasping her thin hands together in an ecstasy of delight. 'It is almost too good to be true. You will have so very many things to tell me when you return? And perhaps—some little souvenir; anything—anything—even a stone from La Venetia!'

'I must go now,' cried Gertrude. 'Aunt Sophie is down-stairs and they are talking about the journey, and it may even be that the Grand Duchess will still be there and we shall see her again.' In a flash she was gone, and the next moment I heard Fanny softly close the door.

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Two, three days passed and I had seen nothing of Gertrude, though it was possible she might have visited her friend during my frequent absences. But on the fourth morning my neighbor accosted me in the narrow corridor, as I was about to descend the five flights of stairs which led to the street.

'Dear Miss,' she said, 'would it be too much to ask you to inquire for Gertrude as you go out? I fear she is ill; she has not been to see me. I do not remember that she has been so long away since her little feet began to patter up and down the stairway. At that time I was not so lame and could go down myself at least once a day. I remember very well how she first put her tiny fingers in mine and came up all the way. Now, it is different; my legs grow very stiff, and I seldom go farther than this corridor. I am really anxious about Gertrude.'

I promised to inquire, though I knew that Gertrude was not ill; I had seen her flitting in and out of the shop every day. Fate ordained that I should meet her on the sidewalk.

'Fanny Rotapfel has been asking for you, Gertrude,' I said. 'She feared you were ill.'

'Why did she think that?' asked the child, tossing her curls back from her forehead.

'You have not been to see her for some time.'

'But we are all so busy; Aunt Sophie and Barbara are getting me ready. We are going sooner than we thought—this very afternoon.'

'I hope you will not leave without paying at least a flying visit to the kind friend but for whom you would never have made this journey.'

She looked at me inquiringly.

'But for her you would have known nothing of Venice,' I continued. 'But for her you would never have prepared that address. Can't you see that it is so?'

'Yes, you are right—I never thought of it,' Gertrude replied.

'I hope, also, that you will let her know you appreciate what her kindness has obtained for you.'

'Fanny would never bother about that; she wouldn't care. She loves to read and talk of foreign places. It is her life. It pleases her above all things to have me listen to her.'

'Do not forget, at least, to say good-bye to her. She will appreciate it, I am sure.'

'Oh—yes—I shall say good-bye, of course. I believe I will go up as soon as Aunt Sophie finishes packing my trunk. I might forget, you know. Everything is so exciting.' With a whirl of her short skirts Gertrude disappeared into the shop.

Two hours later I met her on the stairs. 'We are off,' she said. 'In twenty minutes the cab will be here. Fanny asked me to tell the man to stop on the opposite crossing so that she might see me get in. Good-bye.'

I went up to my room, set my simple luncheon on the table and for the first time thought I would invite my neighbor to share it with me. I found her on the