

asking himself whether he had any right to interfere with the future of this young creature; but, looking at her eager face, he felt that the question in her eyes must be met with the truth.

"Because I do not think a public life is a desirable one for a lady."

"But I," said Fan, "am I a lady?"

He glanced at her in surprise. Had she been other than she was, he would have thought the question sounded like asking for a compliment; but he knew that Fan meant what she said. Was she a lady or not? In her spotless white gown, with her delicate blooming face and spiritual eyes, had she really any doubts about her own ladyhood? He had learned to expect nothing but what was unconventional from her, and waited, as he often did, till she would give him the clue to her thought.

Fan's was a long thought, as she stood, fingering with one raised hand the leaves of the sheltering tree above them, and looking with absent eyes away into the depths of the wood. There was no self-consciousness in her face; she was not thinking of her own breeding, appearance, education, when she asked her question; her mind had gone back to one point that seemed unmeasurably far away in time and space, when her feet were upon a sea-washed mountain side, and she was carried up and down rugged braes, and in and out of a fishing boat by Kevin. She was well aware that this elegant person beside her would not call Kevin a gentleman, and therefore, did she want to be a lady? She knew the advantage of all that had befallen her, and yet the fidelity within her looked back, and claimed a right to be of the rank of her early friend.

So long was her thought, that Captain Rupert at last believed she must be waiting for his answer, and said:

"I think you can hardly be in earnest; you must know that you are a lady."

"My father and mother were peasant people."

"Indeed! I did not know it."

"Mamzelle does not talk about it; she hopes I will forget. And I do not speak for fear of vexing her. But I never forget."

"What is it that you never forget?" said Captain Wilderspin, seeing a whole history in her upturned eyes.

"The sea, and the mountains, and someone who is always looking for me."

"You are half Italian, are you not?"

"Oh, no; Irish."

"You surprise me. I thought you belonged to the signora. I fancied you the child of some brother or sister of hers who had married in England."

"I belong to her only through her kindness. I am lost, strayed, and stolen from an Irish mountain."

"I might have known by your eyes that you were a daughter of the emerald isle."

"Why, are my eyes emerald?" said Fan, with a flash of merriment.

"No; blue, like the sea."

"The English sea is blue; I see it out yonder always, a bluish line. But our sea was green like your emerald: green, with clouds of foam."

"Who is it that is always looking for you?"

"Kevin."

She pronounced the name as if the utterance was some part of the weaving of a spell, and looked out to the horizon with lifted face, as if she half expected the sound might be carried afar, and overheard from the deserts, or other distant regions of the earth. Then catching at an overhanging branch, she stood on tip-toe and peered forward into the purple dimness of a hollow opening in the wood. But no figure started up on the narrow brown path: no wanderer appeared with staff and bundle, descending the mossy bank.

Captain Rupert observed her with a curious thrill of interest.

"I half think you are a changeling," he said.

"Is that what you mean to convey? Are you looking to see your fairy kinsmen coming riding on the wind?"

"No," said Fan, sadly; "the fairies have nothing to do with me, or they might have put everything right."

"The postman is the fairy who generally puts everything right in such a case. Have you never written to your home?"

"I have written, but my letters were not answered; and so I know that Kevin is not there. I knew he could not be there. He went out over the world to look for me."

"Is he your brother?"

"Oh, no; but he has the care of me."

"A care which appears to sit lightly upon him. The signora is performing his duties by proxy, I suppose," said Captain Rupert, with a slight accent of contempt; adding mentally, "The old rascal, dozing tipsily in his shanty, while he allows the child to slip through his fingers."

Fan looked at him questioningly, with a dangerous light in her eyes.

"I mean," said Captain Rupert, "that the old man ought not to have allowed you to get lost."

"What old man?" said Fanchea.

"Kevin."

Fan broke into a peal of delicious laughter. Her laugh was almost as musical as her song, and the birds hearing it, began to sing.

"Why do you laugh?" asked Captain Rupert, finding all this gaiety contagious, and contributing a smile to it.

"He is but twelve years older than me."

"Then he was young enough to be more wide awake."

"He was away about some business of his father's, and it was all my fault, for I went where I ought not to have gone. The gipsies are cunning, and they wanted me."

"Then you have been roving with gipsies."

"Oh, yes."

"I should not wonder. That is why you are so unlike tame people."

"I am tame now," said Fan, folding her hands, with a little sigh.

"Then I should like to have seen you when you were wild. How long have you been caged in this Park?"

"Nearly seven years."

"And you suppose that Kevin has been searching for you all this time?"

"Yes."

"Wonderful faith of a child. Happy belief in the fidelity of human nature. And your only proof of this is the fact that he has not written?"

"Don't?" said Fan, as the accent of sarcasm again touched her quick ear. "I will talk to you no more."

"You look on me as a wicked unbeliever?"

"It is a matter not of believing but of knowing. And you do not know. I am not angry, but I have said enough."

"But I would like both to believe and to know. I promise you to do both if you will tell me some more."

"The signora is coming," said Fan. "Perhaps I may tell you more another time. The signora would not listen to me if I were to talk as I want to talk now."

"I have forgotten myself," said the signora, coming towards them with the look of a person who has waked from a long sleep.

"What have you found in Tasso to make you forget the world?" asked Captain Rupert, glancing at the book in her hand.

"Much, much that has spoken to my soul," said the signora, with her silver ringlets trembling. "The poet has stirred me on a subject that is next my heart. I am anxious to take Fan into Italy, Captain Wilderspin."

"Would she like to go?"

"Yes," said Fan, radiantly; and Captain Rupert knew she was thinking of the likelihood of meeting with the imaginary wanderer, her friend.