

"Her musical education is to be completed there," said the signora. Herr Harfenspeiler has done good work in her; but the sun of Italy will be needed to ripen her genius."

"In this there will be a pleasure for you, signora. Is it long since you have seen your native land?"

"Many long years, Captain Wilderspin. These elf locks of mine were pure gold in the Italian sunshine. They have grown grey in your chiller atmosphere. Alas! no glow on earth will ever transmute them into gold again."

As she spoke, the little woman's wistful eyes, gazing from under her deep brows encircled by their silvery aureole, saw, not the grey, gleaming shafts and bowery undulations of the Sussex greenwood, but azure mountains surrounding narrow, deep-colored streets full of heavy shadows and yellow sunshine, in which her own soul had walked, as a girl glorified within and without by illusive dreams.

While they talked, Fan moved on a little apart: her hands were linked behind her back, her feet had fallen into a dancing measure, keeping time to a wild, quaint gipsy song which she was singing low to herself. They were treading that mossy, flower-spangled opening in the wood where she remembered having been found by Lord Wilderspin; and where she had sung for him the gipsies' tarantula. To her, who forgot nothing, all this magic space was haunted by the faces of gipsies, and echoing with their peculiar music which the birds had learned to mock. Her late conversation, having made a slight vent for habitually silent thoughts, had given a more than ordinary vividness to her memories, and therefore she broke out into the gipsy song as she walked, till her walk became a dance, like a ghost of the dance she had first learned delightedly on Killeevy, and afterwards danced many times in gaiety, fear, sorrow, and expectation, while scanning the crowd for a face that never appeared, amidst the hurry and excitement of the gipsies' tent. Captain Rupert watched her while he talked, noticed her singing and dancing like a person doing the same in a dream, where the voice is kept from soaring and the limbs from moving by an unaccountable something that is struggling against the will. Her feet beat the time, though with a fettered movement: her hand was sometimes raised to shake the tambourine, or she snapped her fingers softly, with a whisper of the rattle of castanets. After some time she danced herself gradually away out of sight of her companions, and they heard her fantastic song break out gleefully in the distance, as if in the solitude of Nature the spell had been broken and the wild music set free from her heart.

The signora and Captain Rupert stood still, and looked at one another while their conversation flagged and died on their lips.

"It is piercing sweet," said the signora, "but I do not like it. That song always seems to me the expression of something wild in her nature that is warring against our efforts to train her for her fitting career. Whether it is the wild Irish strain that is in her blood, or whether it is that she is inoculated with gipsy's magic, I do not know."

"There is certainly more of the bird in that soul than of the *cantatrice*," was the answer.

"I cannot bear it," said the signora, with a look of passionate pain on her worn face, and putting her fingers impatiently in her ears. Her anguish sprang from a variety of causes, all converging curiously like little knife-points towards her heart. The notes of the gipsy song always beat upon certain old, unused, and rusty strings within her, like "sweet bells jangled out of tune and harsh," making a claim for some truths which she was unwilling to grant. Its round, rolling sweetness, its wayward whims and changes, its purring contentment, and utter freedom from all rules and constraints, seemed to her always to sing of the genius that is rather suggestive than creative or interpretative, and will rather work through love and gladness in dewy byways than come forth with any message of its own to the listening world. That Fan

should live to be a mere cricket chirping on any mortal's hearthstone, was an idea that the signora could not tolerate. There was no creature in the universe noble enough to absorb her music into his life. That such a state of things even ought to be she was unwilling to admit. And yet she knew too well that the rusty chord within her which would vibrate so agonizingly to Fan's bird-like, love-laden minstrelsy, was the mainspring of almost every woman's heart; and that in Fan's it was strung with gold, and throbbing mellowly in tune.

Captain Rupert looked on her emotion with surprise. "Strange," he said, "that music so enchanting should give you nothing but pain. And you who are a musician, signora."

"I have told you the reason partly," replied she. "This wild-wood singing makes me tremble for her perseverance in the utterance and interpretation of more noble strains. My own life, sir, has been given to art, offered as a handful of roses that shrivelled into dust in the giver's hand; and now my failure has been made a pedestal for her success. She shall not turn into a mere thrush in the hedgerows; she who was born for, and has been trained to give expression to, the soul of multitudes!"

Captain Wilderspin listened to her impassioned words disapprovingly. "There," he said to himself, "is the kind of person who would steal the posies from a woman's life in order that the dried leaves of fame may rustle on her brow!" But he did not quite understand the signora. Art was the god of her enthusiasm, and not fame. The latter she looked on as but the accidental accompaniment of the success that is witness to the truth.

In the pause that followed the signora's speech which Captain Wilderspin found so unlovely, Fan's song wound, curled, and dived through the upper air with a wilfulness that seemed resolved to escape out of reach of the thought of both listeners.

"Another reason why I do not like it," said the signora, "is that it is the twin-song of another which is a link between the child and the home which, I trust, she may never see again. A return to that lowly and uncivilised home could only result in the loss of her peace of mind."

"I agree with you there," said Captain Wilderspin. "What is that other song you speak of?"

"A hymn, which is in itself very beautiful, forming a contrast the most complete to the gipsy song. She sings it in her native Irish, and I own that listening to it my heart has been softened towards a people whose peasantry could treasure and enjoy such a gem of religious melody and thought. But when I hear Fan sing the 'Hymn of the Virgin Triumphant,' I feel as if she were stealing away out of my restraining arms into a region where the world can never follow her."

"Have I heard her sing it?"

"No; of late she has given it up, having seen that it gives me pain: and only sings it in a crooning way to herself, generally, when she thinks she is alone. I believe she sings it as a sort of incantation to bring the spirits of her people around her, to call up the scenes of her childhood and the voices of those she has lost. When I hear her crooning so, it makes me weep. So strange a thing is the human heart, Captain Wilderspin: so sad a thing is life."

Captain Rupert reflected that the worn-faced little lady was rather flighty and inconsistent; and he felt angry with her. She would place this creature so cherished on a public stage, under the gaze of all the eyes of a vulgar world. "And she is fit for something higher," he insisted with himself. "Is she fit to be a princess?" thought Captain Rupert.

At this moment Fan, whose song had ceased, appeared at some distance, in a hollow among the trees, flitting across the opening, with a bright look over her shoulder in the direction of her friends. The brilliant face shone, the white dress glimmered, and she was gone again, hidden behind the greenery.

"Is she fit to be a princess?" thought Captain