

Betty Wayside

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Betty Wayside

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TO
J. M. TAYLOR
FOR MANY KINDNESSES
WHICH COME NATURAL
TO HIM

Betty Wayside

Chapter I: Peter Wayside Salutes the Dawn.

THE waterside suburbs of Sydney, hugging the southern shores of its famous harbour, are the pick of the city. The three Points, rocky tongues projecting into the harbour waters, and dropping in gentle slopes to the rocks and the seaweed, are the preserves of the rich, but behind them, and one degree removed, like second cousins, lie the eastern suburbs, packed with houses, lined with shops, and clamorous with the traffic that supplies the needs of the multitude.

Paddington is the chief of these, and Crystal Street lies in the heart of Paddington where a sudden dip in the land gives a tantalising glimpse of the harbour waters and the ships. On one side of the street the houses are built high, on the other they are built low, the ground slipping from under their feet as it begins its descent to the water's edge. It was on this lower slope that the Wayside's cottage was built. If second thoughts are best, then Cremona Cottage was the finest in the street, but proverbs sometimes confound their makers.

The first builder had begun the cottage in wood, and at a later date another had finished it in brick. This discrepancy was not apparent to the casual eye, for layers of paint, added through the years, had covered the front with a skin of uniform colour. The two main rooms, one of wood, and the other of brick, were surprisingly large and airy. Behind these were two more rooms as long as the others, but as narrow as a ship's cabin. Owing to the drop in the ground the floor here was supported on piles ten feet high. When you opened the back door, it seemed that the builders had forgotten the kitchen, for you were on a landing with a rail that stood level with the top branches of the fig-tree. Then you discovered it in the yard below at the bottom of a wooden staircase.

And it stood apart from the house, conscious that it was more than a kitchen and something less than a dining-room. It may seem trivial to mention that the door of the kitchen opened directly opposite the stairs from above, but this was of considerable importance to strangers, for the ladder-like stairs were so steep and worn with age that unwary visitors, gathering momentum in the descent, took the last three steps at a run, and slid into the hospitable mouth of the kitchen as if impelled by sudden hunger. They had another and more tragic aspect, dating from Betty's childhood. Beside, the house was a long brick room, its roof on a level with the street and containing two large windows and a door that was

always shut. It was here Mr. Wayside worked when he was in the humour.

Owing to the peculiar habits of Mr. Wayside, this story begins at daybreak on an April morning, for it was his custom in fine weather to salute the dawn, brew himself a cup of tea, and potter about the garden till the world was astir. Then, having breakfasted and read the newspaper, he retired to a couch in the workshop and slept soundly till noon.

This morning, when he opened the door above the stairs, and slowly descended into the garden, the sun had not yet risen, but a wonderful shining brightness in the east marked its approach. Mr. Wayside watched with adoration this celestial, virginal light spread imperceptibly over the upper reaches of the sky, blotting out the stars in its noiseless approach. The cocks, immemorial heralds of the dawn, threw their strident notes into the air with a ferocious energy. As if in answer to their call, a direct shaft from the sun struck the leaden belt of clouds in the west. They flushed an adorable rosy red, hanging like curtains that had caught fire; the bright light leaped to the horizon, and the day had come. There was the indescribable freshness of the morning in the air, something that touches the earliest springs of life, and the old man watched the sky with a rapt gaze that turned to a sombre look, for the call of the dawn had grown fainter across the years. Having paid homage to the day, for an hour he paced the asphalt paths in a tranquil reverie.

Peter Wayside was a tall man, near on six feet but for his stoop, with the head of a philosopher on the body of a soldier. And yet he was neither of these. The upper part of his head resembled nothing so much as the part of an egg visible above the rim of an egg-cup, for Time, with a touch of humour unusual in so grim an opponent, had robbed him of his hair, and left him a thick beard, a heavy moustache, and a pair of shaggy eyebrows. Presently he took his pipe from his pocket, and stared at it intently. He remembered that yesterday he had smoked too much, and, deciding that tobacco was a noxious weed, he returned the pipe to his pocket with reluctance and a somewhat acid look. A slight fatigue warned him that his promenade was over, and he turned to the house.

But at that moment his ear caught the sound of melodious thunder from within the cottage. Betty had begun her morning practice with scales in octaves. Then followed thirds, sixths, tenths, and a feathery, dancing study of Chopin's. Mr. Wayside stopped, and listened intently. This was not the monotonous tinkle heard in every suburb before breakfast, for the player had some of the magic that lies in a musician's fingers, fire, emotion, and colour, and suddenly he made up his mind on a matter that had been troubling him for months. He would send her to Ricordi for serious study.

The player broke suddenly into Grieg's "To the Spring," and the effect

on Mr. Wayside was singular. As his ear followed the opening notes, falling like a shower of pearls, the years dropped from his shoulders like a cloak. From the bass came the passionate, yearning notes of the melody, and the puckers left his face as ripples die on still water. Life, the coquette, was renewing her promise of romance and happiness that had never been fulfilled.

The playing stopped abruptly, the door opened, and Betty stepped on to the landing above the stairs. She was a slim girl of twenty, with an oval face, greyish blue eyes, and a skin like ivory. She looked long and earnestly at the sky, unconscious of any challenge in the pearly morning light, with the insolent indifference of youth. And as she stood absorbed in her thoughts, her youth and freshness in unconscious harmony with the radiant morning, her father stared at her in amazement. He had been blind to her growth as one watches the hands of a clock without seeing them move, and now, he saw in a flash, that she was no longer a pet child, but a woman, and he swallowed with a choking sensation. He remembered that in a few months she would be twenty-one. Betty grew conscious of her father's scrutiny, and turned to him.

"Good morning, dada," she cried; "how did I play the study this morning?"

"Oh, tolerable," he replied, resisting an impulse to praise.

"Why, dada, you'll spoil me," she cried, with an ironic flash in her eye. "Yesterday it was vile, and to-day it's tolerable."

Her mouth quivered slightly. It had always been the same. If he could find no fault, he listened in silence to her playing, with a curious suggestion of jealousy in his manner, and yet anyone who forgot to praise her was a marked man.

Her thoughts were diverted by the appearance of an enormous black cat with white facings. He jumped on to the railing beside the girl with the easy grace of a panther, and butted her with his head to attract her attention. Betty, taking him in her arms, nursed him like a child, talking to him in a jargon of her own invention.

In a moment Mr. Wayside's bushy brows met in a frown, dividing his bald, tranquil head from his hairy cheeks like the desert from the sown. "Put that pampered brute down," he cried, glaring at the animal with sudden rage. But the cat, secure in Betty's arms, narrowed his eyes to green slits, and watched his enemy with lazy contempt.

"Wait till I get near you, my lad; I'll shift that grin off you," cried Peter, bristling with anger.

"Breakfast will be ready in twenty minutes," said Betty, changing the subject, and she stared again at the morning sky flecked with pearly clouds. Then, as she turned to go, she cried:

"Mr. Riminski is coming for his bow this morning, dada."

"Then tell him it isn't ready," he cried, harshly.

“He knows that, and he's going to send it back to London if you can do nothing with it.”

“Oh, is he?” said Mr. Wayside, frowning heavily. “When he comes, tell him to go away. I'll do it when I'm ready.”

His ruddy face turned pale with anger. He had meant to go fishing today, and here was a job that would keep him busy till midnight. The day was spoilt already. He took his pipe from his pocket, stared at it with the petulant ill-humour of a child, then filled it, and struck a match, forgetting in his fury that tobacco was a vile weed.

The brass plate on the front door of Cremona Cottage announced that Peter Wayside was a violin maker. Another sign in wood, shaped like a huge fiddle, added the further information that he was a maker and repairer of stringed instruments. These statements were accurate enough, but wanting in detail. For Peter Wayside was known throughout Australia as the master craftsman in his profession. When he was in the humour, his fingers could perform little miracles of work; when he was out of humour he went fishing.

He was the high priest of all those who carry a black case resembling a child's coffin, snap their fingers at the barber, and draw divine music from a little brown box. Sometimes a cab would stop at the door, and a long-haired celebrity, accustomed to the applause of nations, would listen in a polyglot silence while Peter examined his precious Cremona. With his skill and renown, Peter could have earned a small fortune; instead he earned enough to keep himself and his daughter in comfort.

Born at Leicester in 1856, Peter Wayside was the third in a famous family of violin makers. In his twentieth year he had broken his indentures and the tradition of his family by emigrating to Australia. A black sheep, his relatives had ignored his further existence; his father returned his letters unread. For ten years after his marriage to Betty's mother he tuned pianos for a living. Then a brief letter from a solicitor had informed him that his father was dead. This was followed by a small cargo of precious wood — pine from the Swiss forests and sycamore from the woods of Italy — selected and seasoned by his grandfather sixty years ago. With it came the “Yellow Grand,” and the plans and measurements of the other famous violins made by the family, complete and detailed as the specifications of a battleship.

Another box brought the tears to Peter's stubborn eyes and a lump in his throat, for it contained the fine tools that his father had used, the handles marked with the slight indentations left by the constant pressure of a finger or a thumb. This legacy was the only token he received that his father had forgiven his wild boyhood and youth. Twenty years ago he had bought this ramshackle cottage, and established himself in his old profession.

He came in to breakfast flying signals of stormy weather. With a

dexterous kick he shifted the cat from the door-mat. Then he propped the newspaper in front of the cruet, and conveyed egg and bacon to his mouth unseen, with a dexterity that would have made a juggler stare. Presently he stopped, and examined his plate with silent ferocity.

"This bacon's rancid," he growled.

"Is it?" said Betty, sweetly. "It's off the piece you bought from Tiverton last week."

"Ah," said Peter, taken aback, "that man'll die for want of sleep. He lies awake at night thinking how he can rob you."

"He's impudent, too," added Betty. "You remember he said that if he had many customers like you he'd shut up shop?"

"How am I to get on with the paper?" inquired Peter, angrily. But he was silent for the rest of the meal.

For it was his habit, at intervals, to harry the local shopkeepers. On these forays his method of purchase was simple. If the shopman recommended any article, it was a sure sign that he wanted to get rid of it; and easily avoiding these simple traps, he selected every doubtful brand that they had despaired of selling.

Mr. Wayside ended his meal by pushing back his chair, seizing the newspaper, which he intended to finish on the couch, and making for the door.

"Will I call you, dada, when Mr. Riminski comes?" inquired Betty.

"Call me?" said Peter, bitterly. "Wake me out of my sleep for a dough-faced fiddler? I wonder at you."

"But he's very anxious about his bow," pleaded Betty. "He said it was hopeless, if you couldn't mend it."

"Um," said Mr. Wayside, visibly flattered; "he's not such a fool as he looks. In fact, he couldn't be," he added, with a gleam of malice. "Tell him I'll do it, but the varnish won't be dry till Saturday." And he disappeared through the door fully restored to good-humour by this tribute to his skill.

About eleven o'clock Betty, who had worked her way from the bedrooms to the kitchen, was surprised by a light step down the side passage. She looked up in wonder, and cried: "Good morning, uncle! What brings you here so early?"

The visitor was a tall man of fifty, with thin, aristocratic features adorned with a pair of remarkable moustaches, long, white, and drooping, which gave him a military air. As he talked, he stroked each whisker alternately with his long, thin hands. He wore a grey suit in the latest fashion. Grey was his favourite colour, and he wore it summer and winter alike. Always smartly dressed, his clothes showed signs of wear from the day he put them on. Owing to his remarkable resemblance to an old soldier, he was known in a friendly and familiar way as the "Colonel." This epithet had grown on him till his thoughts and speech

were coloured by it, and he expressed himself in military terms.

“A desire to see a handsomer face than my own,” he replied, stroking his moustaches with a jaunty air. “Good morning, Betty, you look charming. Bright eyes, ruby lips, and a skin that carries me back twenty years.”

“It's a long journey, and I don't believe a word you say,” said Betty, smiling at the familiar compliments. “What have you done to your finger?” she asked, suddenly.

“I attempted to drive a nail, other men have done it, but the nail slipped, the hammer fell, and your cousins rendered first aid with remarkable skill.”

“So you flattened your finger instead of the nail?”

“My dear, you talk like a despatch from head-quarters,” he replied, with a little bow.

“And you can't play for the class to-night?”

“My dear Betty, I must really sit at your feet to learn logic,” he cried, with another bow.

“And you want me to play instead?”

“My dear child, you take the words out of my mouth.”

“All right, tell the girls I'll be there at eight o'clock,” she said, anxious to be rid of him, and to get on with her work.

“My dear, it is such as you who make life a bed of roses,” he cried. “Accept the thanks of an old warrior on the casualty list.” He drew himself erect, saluted, and departed, with the quick, alert step of an old soldier.

The Colonel walked briskly down Crystal Street, and turned into Glenmore Road. The flying visit to Cremona Cottage had slightly disturbed his routine, for he was due in town at eleven o'clock. Years ago, when his wife died and her allowance lapsed, he had set out every morning to look for work, and the habit had worn a groove in his life. After running little errands to the shops for his daughters, he was free till night, and rubbing a little brilliantine on the famous moustaches, he walked into town by way of Oxford Street. In the lean years, when his children were too young to work, he had walked into town for lack of tram fare, and now, with money to jingle in his pocket, he walked for the sake of exercise.

He had become a connoisseur in the sights of the streets, and knew the contents of every shop on the road. But the women interested him most, and with one look he weighed to a nicety the physical charms, the emotional capacity, and the social standing of every woman he met. Crossing into Hyde Park from Oxford Street, he followed the main avenue to King Street. His journey ended in Hunter Street, outside the *Herald* office, where, as a matter of form, he studied the vacant positions advertised in the morning paper. Then, having done his duty and cleared

his conscience, he bethought himself of lunch.

This morning, with an unlimited choice of hotels, he picked on the "Swan with Two Necks," because he knew to a minute when the counter lunch was put on. To-day the bill of fare was a hot joint, curry, Fritz sausage, cheese and salad. Feeling in his pocket for sixpence, he ordered a pint of beer, and cut himself a liberal supply from the joint. This he washed down with the pint of English, wiped his moustache with a silk handkerchief, and then, after a couple of turns round the Block, set about the return journey. He dawdled on the way home, resting in the parks or standing at the corners to observe the traffic. Five o'clock saw him in Paddington again with an appetite for dinner.

Here he paused to consider where he would dine that night, for he rarely dined at home. Beginning with the Waysides, he had established a circle of friends where he dropped casually in to dinner according to his fancy. Having eaten his fill, he would excuse himself with an airy, nonchalant grace, and reach home in time for the dancing class.

He decided to dine at the Waysides to-day in order to make sure of Betty for the piano, and as usual, in return for his meal, he insisted on helping Betty in the kitchen. Sometimes as a special favour he concocted strange dishes that he had eaten on his travels. These were regarded with a strange abhorrence by Peter Wayside, who looked on them as so many attempts on his life. But to-day the dish was a roast sirloin, and the Colonel racked his brains to think of a dainty extra. He could think of nothing, but presently busied himself with the cruet.

When they sat down to dinner, Peter looked round with satisfaction. Here was plain food for a plain man, and none of your cursed foreign messes. He took a mouthful, and ate in silence. The next moment he dropped his knife and fork with a great clatter, and cried out, "What the devil's the matter with this meat?"

The others looked up in surprise while he sniffed his plate with every mark of suspicion. They, too, sniffed, and declared there was nothing wrong. Suddenly Peter looked at the Colonel.

"Come on, Algy," he cried, "be a man, and tell me if you've done anything to this meat." There was a pathetic note in his voice due to baffled hunger.

The Colonel flushed slightly. "Beyond adding a little vinegar to the mustard in the German fashion, I——"

"I might have known it," cried Peter, seizing the cruet and sniffing vigorously. "Betty, take this outside, and bring me a fresh plate. I know you'll get me some day," he added, bitterly; "you'll poison me out of kindness, and much good it'll do me to have you dropping crocodile tears on my grave."

Chapter II: The Dancing Class.

A BRASS plate on the door of a two-storey house in Queen Street, Woollahra, announced that the Misses Fitzroy taught fashionable dancing and deportment. The house was much too large for their purse, but the dining and sitting rooms, thrown into one by folding doors, gave enough space for the dancing class, which was considered a nuisance by the neighbours on account of the incessant thumping of the piano, the thud of the dancers' feet, and the noisy farewells and laughter when the lessons ended. It was the Colonel's duty to sit at the piano, which he thumped with a military precision, stiff as a ramrod, keeping the younger pupils in awe with his long moustaches and air of a retired soldier.

When Betty and the Colonel reached the house, Cousin Julia ran out to meet her with cries of welcome, and dragged her into the ballroom to hear the latest news. She was a year older than Betty, lively as a kitten, and for ever on the watch for signs and omens to forecast the future. "What do you think?" she cried, "I dropped a fork this morning; that means a gentleman visitor, and I was wondering all day who it could be. Well, to-night Mr. Chippendale called to see Gus, but he was out, and he's waiting for him. I want to introduce you to him. He's awfully shy, and Gus says he's frightfully clever."

Betty was only mildly interested. She had heard of the wonderful Mr. Chippendale, but Gus's swans generally turned out ducks. She would see for herself.

The stranger, Walter Chippendale, knowing no one, and feeling awkward, stood alone on the veranda, taking stock of his surroundings. Tired of waiting for Gus, he decided to go, when Julia came out in search of him to introduce him to Betty. He followed her into the room, and, stepping carelessly on the waxed boards, slid suddenly forward and collided with the back of the piano, to which he clung with both hands as sailors in distress cling to a spar. Betty, who was sitting at the piano, looked up, and they stared at one another in amazement. And in that space of seconds the young man fell hopelessly and completely in love with Betty Wayside. She flushed under the intensity of his gaze, and Julia broke the silence with a giggle.

"I'd better introduce you before you let go of the piano," she cried. "Mr. Chippendale, Cousin Betty — I mean Miss Wayside. You looked so funny slipping on the floor. Now, I wonder what that's a sign of?"

But the pupils, impatient of the delay, flocked into the room, and Walter, finding himself dumb, escaped to the veranda again. He turned to watch the dancers through the window, and found that he had an excellent view of the pianist. And again he was surprised by her beauty. His pulse quickened at the sight of her milk-white skin, the full curving forehead, and her frank eyes. His impatience had vanished; he felt content to stand there for ever and gaze at her. Between the dances he saw Hilda, the elder sister, talking to her. She was a head taller than Betty, with a face as long as the Colonel's, and a straight, lipless mouth. She seemed much amused at Betty's eager questions, and answered with a mysterious smile. Walter took an instant dislike to her, and studied Betty's face again. He could see now that her eyes were blue with a kind of wonder in them, as if she found the world full of surprising things.

At the sound of the piano the dancers formed into two squares for the quadrilles, but they were short of a dancer, and Julia, suddenly missing Walter, came out and entreated him to complete the set. Dancing a dance of his own invention, he was dragged, jostled, and pushed through the set by Julia. He was thankful that the others hid his clumsy movements from the radiant Betty. The quadrille ended, and again he retreated to the veranda.

The dancers chose their partners for a waltz, and he was preparing to watch them with languid interest, when his ears were surprised by the opening bars of the waltz, triumphant and compelling, played with a power and abandon that astonished him. Betty, growing tired of the mechanical dance tunes, had picked her favourite waltz, De Groen's "Les Fiances." The dancers, caught in a wave of sensuous, caressing sound, quickened their movements, swinging their bodies to the joyous rhythm. As Walter listened in amazement the gate clicked, and Gus Fitzroy fell on him like a thunderbolt.

"Hello, Walter, old boy!" he roared; "sorry I gave you the slip, but I've had the shock of my life to-night. I suppose I'd better tell you now in case you see me moping about like a sick hen. You remember I told you that I had my doubts of Clara for some time?"

"Yes," said Walter, wondering who Clara was, for he had lost count of Gus's love affairs.

"Well, she's supposed to be in bed with the influenza," he shouted, "so I thought I'd slip down and see what she was up to. S'elp me, I hadn't waited long when out she came, dressed up to the nines, and ran straight into me. Of course she tried to brazen it out, but I told her what I thought of her, and got my songs. Here they are." He threw the roll of music on the ground savagely.

"Never trust women, Walter," he cried, "or they'll do you like a dinner. I'm too sharp for them, that's the trouble. You have no idea how I worshipped that girl. I've got a pain inside me like a knife. I shall never

be the same man again. If I could borrow a spade, I'd go and bury myself."

He sighed heavily, and gazed at Walter with lack-lustre eyes.

"Good night, Walter," he said; "I'm going to bed. I'll see you about the tickets on Saturday."

He turned to go, and stopped suddenly. "Who's playing in there?" he asked.

"Your cousin, Miss Wayside," said Walter.

"What, Betty?" shouted Gus. "I've got a song I wanted her to try over. It doesn't matter now," he added gloomily. "I don't suppose I shall ever sing again."

"I think she's the handsomest girl I've ever seen," cried Walter.

"What, Betty?" said Gus, in surprise. "Oh, she's all right, but you ought to see Clara," he added, with a kind of groan.

The waltz ended, and the dancers met Gus in the hall. There were shouts of welcome, as they dragged him into the room. Walter looked again at Betty, and wondered if it were true that women were false and deceitful. His thoughts were interrupted by a roar from Gus, who was trying over his song between the dances in a voice fit to waken the dead. For everyone knew except Gus that he sang with the voice of one hawking fish.

This Don Juan of the suburbs, whose adventures were purely sentimental, regarded women with an incurable suspicion. Irresistibly drawn to them, their beauty, their graceful bodies, and their soft voices were so many traps laid for his destruction. Women were sly, vain, and fickle as the wind, celebrated throughout the ages for their skill in deceiving and outwitting men. Yet he hovered round them with the persistence of a moth, burning his wings with a kind of savage rapture. And now, forgetting his grief in a moment, he took charge of the dancers. The Colonel, relieved of his duties, came out to the veranda. He accepted a cigarette, and complimented Walter on his dancing.

"A promising recruit, sir, if an old soldier may say it," he cried; "you carry the field-marshal's baton in your knapsack."

Walter gave his own opinion.

"Clumsy? My dear fellow, I blush at the word. I should prefer to say that your movements were cautious, but original. I shall expect great things of you in a month."

Walter felt awkward. The Colonel evidently took him for a new pupil. He was explaining that he was only a friend of Gus's, when they were startled by a terrific noise from the dance-room. The pupils had reached the last set of the lancers, and, led on by Gus, they dropped the stiff decorum of the academy like a glove. Shrieking with laughter, they stamped across the floor, bumped the other couples against the wall, and seizing the girls by the waist, their partners swung them round as if they

were caught in a whirlwind. The Colonel ran to the door, terrified at the thought of the neighbours. His feeble protest was lost in the uproar, and he stood helpless before the irresistible energy of youth. Gus's Gargantuan laugh alone was heard above the din. The noise ended as suddenly as it had begun, but the Colonel showed his displeasure by turning his back on the dancers as they filed out of the room.

Under the cloud of the Colonel's displeasure, the pupils separated in an unusual silence. Walter looked again into the room. Betty was still asking Hilda questions, and Julia was giggling. Gus and the Colonel seemed to have forgotten him and with a sudden, childish anger at their neglect he decided to get his hat and take French leave, when Gus fell on him like a dead leaf. His gaiety had dropped like a spent fire; his face was as long as a fiddle. He sighed heavily; it sounded like the wind through a broken window.

"Thank goodness you haven't gone," he cried. "I want you to do me a favour, old man. Take Betty home for me, will you?"

Walter's pulse leaped, and broke into a nimble trot. His nervous irritation vanished. Gus's voice was like music in his ears. He was ready to listen with profound interest to his tale of woe.

"Clara lives opposite Betty," he groaned, "and I'll make an ass of myself if I go out to-night. It may be the last thing I shall ask you to do. I shouldn't be the first man that a woman has ruined."

His voice broke; he laid his hand on Walter's arm; another moment, he would have wept. But Betty and her cousins came into the hall, and instantly Walter forgot his friend's sorrow. Julia, who had forgotten his existence, reproached him for acting like a stranger. Hilda said nothing, but gave him a long, sly look that made him feel uncomfortable. Betty looked surprised for a moment, and then accepted his escort with her peculiar friendly smile. Gus shouted a farewell that reverberated like thunder. Then they crossed the street, and stepped into fairyland.

It was a white night. The street lamps were unlit, and the moon, riding high in the sky, poured a flood of silvery light on the streets and houses. The shadows lay thick between the buildings, covering their ugliness like a garment. In the north a bank of wind-swept cloud lay motionless, frozen in the likeness of a pebbled strand. From time to time the light was faintly obscured as the moon sailed through the rim of the cloud, turning it to mother-of-pearl. Betty looked up with a gasp of wonder. Night was revealed in her splendour, tranquil and mysterious as death.

The boy and girl walked in silence, astonished by the sudden change from the garish lights and cheerful noise of the dance-room. Walter gave a covert glance at Betty. The curves of her slender figure, and her exquisite profile, cut clear as a cameo in the white light, troubled his senses as if she were a pagan goddess or nymph, fashioned of old in dreams and a wild desire by the heart of man.

But the goddess, having recovered from her surprise, or swimming in her native element like the moon, broke the silence.

“What a glorious night,” she said.

Walter started; he had forgotten that she could talk.

“What a night to be on the water,” she added, wondering at his silence.

Again the moonstruck youth looked at her, speechless. But somewhere in the remote regions of his brain a glowing sentence was formed, telling her that it was the most glorious night that he had ever seen; that Diana walked in her image; that to be afloat on the water with her would beggar his dreams. Then he nervously moistened his lips, and said: “It would be too cold on the water to-night.” He flushed with shame and anger at the foolish words.

“What a strange thing to say,” cried Betty, in surprise; “and I thought that you looked like a poet.”

“Then my looks are against me,” said Walter, miserably, “because I'm not a poet.”

“And yet you are afraid of catching cold?” said Betty.

“Catching cold?” cried the unhappy young man. “I'm more in danger of catching fire.”

Betty turned, and looked at him in grave astonishment.

“I don't believe a word you say, Mr. Chippendale, and,” she added, with deliberation, “I don't think I like you.”

The stricken youth gave the enraged goddess a look of entreaty; but her face was averted as she quickened her steps. He saw a pink flush on the creamy cheek, and the tip of a scornful nose. In a panic he felt that he had lost her; that she was slipping away from him for ever. He collected his thoughts with a supreme effort, feeling death at his throat.

“I'm sorry I'm not a poet, Miss Wayside,” he said humbly. “I'm too big a fool to be a poet.”

“I don't think so,” said Betty, coldly.

Walter took it meekly. Let her lash him with scorpions, he deserved it.

“And I love the moonlight on the water, the colder the better,” he added. “Some day I'll set it to music.”

The words acted like a charm on the flying goddess. She stopped, and turned to him, tremendously interested.

“Set it to music?” she echoed, “how could *you* do that?”

“Because I compose music,” said Walter, with shy pride.

“Then I was right after all,” said Betty.

“How's that?” said the amazed youth.

“Because I guessed you were something out of the common,” replied Betty, unconscious of flattery.

But whatever adulation and incense were waiting for him in the future, it held none like that moment. She had praised him to his face. His heart swelled, his brain filled with splendid visions, and with the next breath

she pricked the bubble.

"I knew you didn't play cricket or football by the way you danced."

"Then I'll never dance another step," said he, gloomily.

"Not if I play for you?" she asked.

"Not unless you play my music," cried Walter.

"Yes, tell me about your music," said Betty. "Have you written any for the piano?"

"Heaps," he replied; "but Ricordi made me burn the lot, all but a gavotte."

"What a shame," cried Betty. "I know he's got an awful temper. I'm going to him for lessons some day. What is he teaching you?"

"Harmony and composition. He's going to bring me out with the Thursday orchestra when I satisfy him."

"Satisfy him?" inquired Betty. "Isn't your music good enough?"

"Oh, yes, but he says I'm a musical savage, and he's trying to civilise me," laughed Walter.

"And the orchestra is going to play your music? I think that is wonderful," said Betty.

"Do you ever go to the Thursday concerts?" inquired Walter.

"Do I ever go?" cried Betty. "I played second violin for two years. Ricordi was going to put me in the firsts when I left. He was very angry with me for leaving."

"Why did you give it up?" asked Walter.

"Because I wanted more time for the piano," said Betty, with a curious hesitation.

This was not true, for Betty had stumbled by chance on her first serious love affair. A young Italian flute player with enormous black eyes, fascinated by Betty's creamy skin, had made love to her with his flute at the rehearsals. He trilled and piped for her alone, making the long-drawn sighs of his instrument a declaration of love. And Betty had loved him with the innocent ardour of sixteen, too shy to speak or respond to his advances. Then one night, just such a night as this, she remembered, he jumped into the same tram, and followed her home. She had just shut the gate, when he caught her roughly by the arm, and cried:

"You have the eyes that do make love, *madonna mia*."

His passionate utterance was stopped by the sudden appearance of Peter Wayside, who was smoking on the veranda. Betty had never forgotten that moment. The splendid night, the savage grip and pleading eyes of her lover, and the harsh voice of her father, threatening him with instant death. The Italian gave her a last, imploring look, then turned and ran. The next day her father locked her in her room, and sent in her resignation to the orchestra. A month later Paoli disappeared. After two years he reappeared, playing in the streets with a quartet of Italians. He was changed past belief. Leering at the women over the ivory

mouthpiece of his flute with the dissolute air of a Bohemian, he had grown incredibly coarse and familiar. And even now, when Betty passed the band hurriedly in the streets, the muscles of her throat tightened, and a fiery quiver went through her limbs.

Betty's face saddened, and her eyes drooped as she remembered him. The moonstruck youth, subtly aware of some strange emotion in the adored features, stared at her fixedly, unconscious of the image in Betty's mind. A silence fell between them as they walked through the enchanted streets: Betty thinking with a regret that had lost its bitterness of her lost love, Walter marvelling at the night, and staring at Betty.

Suddenly Betty stopped at the corner of Elizabeth Street.

"Thank you for coming so far out of your way, Mr. Chippendale," she said, absently; "I live just round the corner."

Fear ran through him like a knife at the thought of parting from her.

"But I know where you live. You don't mind my coming to the gate?" he asked, eagerly.

Betty looked embarrassed. "No, but father's very particular, and he says very rude things to strangers," she stammered.

Walter breathed again. She wasn't dismissing him for ever.

"I don't mind that," said the hero, with determination. "I can say very rude things myself. Sometimes I can't find words rude enough."

The next minute they reached the house, and Betty opened the gate with infinite precaution. Then she stepped inside and, shutting it again, smiled at Walter over the rampart of wood. This was the customary attitude of the Paddington girl to young men on a first acquaintance. A further stage of intimacy permitted farewells to be said on the front step and the door-mat. A third degree, admitting to the privacy of the gas box, was regarded as an engagement by the neighbours. Peter Wayside had taken care that his daughter should not pass beyond the first stage. Betty looked at the cottage. It was in darkness and silent, but she lowered her voice to a whisper, and Walter followed suit, feeling a delightful sense of intimacy, as if he were party to a plot with this delightful conspirator.

"Thank you for telling me about your music," she whispered. "I should love to hear some of it. Has it been printed?"

"No," said Walter. "It's all in manuscript, but it's easy to read. If you will wait a few weeks, I'll write a piece for you. What music do you play?"

"Nearly all Chopin and Beethoven, but I'm afraid of him. And Grieg, of course."

"Do you like Mendelssohn?" inquired Walter with anxiety.

"Not very much," she answered.

"Thank goodness," said Walter, with a sigh of relief; "then perhaps you'll like my stuff. Not that I rank myself with those fellows, but——"

The door of the cottage opened, and a heavy footstep sounded on the

veranda. Then a voice came out of the darkness:

“So you're there again, are you? I thought I told you last week what I thought of you. Perhaps you took it for flattery. But my time's valuable, and yet I have to waste it in chatting with you. If you want to see Betty, come to the house like a man, and ask me. I'm reasonable enough, God knows. People always get their way with me, but not when they shulk outside the house like a dog that's stealing a bone. In my time young fellows were properly brought up. They had manners, and decency, and brains. But now they've got nothing but fancy socks and impudence. I look on you and your sort as a public nuisance. I'd call the police for two pins.”

Walter, embarrassed by this torrent of words, looked at Betty.

Her face was scornful; there was an ominous glitter in her eyes. He turned to go, and then decided to stand his ground, and with that movement won Betty's esteem. For a moment the three stood as silent as graven images.

“Betty, tell that young man there's no place like home,” said the harsh voice.

“Yes, father,” said Betty.

“Tell him that I can't do without sleep, if he can.”

“Yes, father,” said Betty.

“And tell him not to write any more poetry.”

Walter listened in amazement. That was the second time to-night that he had been mistaken for a poet. He looked at the dark figure in the doorway, and burst out laughing.

“It's all right, Mr. Wayside,” he cried. “I'm going home now, but I write music, not poetry.”

“Why, who the devil are you?” said Peter, stepping into the moonlight.

“My name's Chippendale, and I bought that little ‘Duke.’ off you last Christmas.”

“Why, bless my life, so you did,” cried Peter; “you're the very man I want to see.”

“It didn't sound like that a minute ago,” said Walter, laughing.

“Tut-tut, man,” said Peter, testily; “I was only joking. I mistook you for a lad I had a pleasant chat with last week. What have you done with the fiddle? Do you play on it?”

“I haven't touched it for months. I've got no time.”

“Then you're not fit to own it,” said Peter, harshly. “Bring it back, I want it for a customer.”

“Thank you, but I wouldn't sell it for all the tea in China.”

“Well, let me have it back to take its measurements,” said Peter, with strange eagerness.

“Certainly,” said Walter, looking anxiously at Betty. “What night would suit you?”

“Come on Saturday night, and bring some music. Betty will play your accompaniments.”

“I don't think I ought to, if Mr. Chippendale is a public nuisance,” said Betty, astonished and annoyed by her father's eagerness.

“Betty, go to bed,” said Peter; “you were meant to crack nuts, not jokes.”

Walter saw that Betty was angry, and panic seized him again.

“I beg your pardon, Miss Wayside,” he stammered; “will you play for me, if I bring a piece of my own?”

“I'll try,” said Betty, coldly.

“Well, good-night, my lad, and don't forget the little ‘Duke,’ ” said Peter, with the air of one dismissing an old friend.

“Good-night,” said Walter, with no desire to go.

He stared again at Betty, and something in his look made her drop her eyes. She looked at him again, and, remembering Paoli, who had run away, smiled at him.

“Good-night, Mr. Chippendale, and thank you for seeing me home,” she said, and followed the impatient Peter inside.

“Why are you so anxious to get his violin back?” asked Betty, coldly.

“Because Wolff offered me twenty pounds for it the day after I sold it. But I don't suppose I'll get it back; he looks a bit of a Jew,” said Mr. Wayside, and lit his pipe.

Then Betty understood that her father's interest in Mr. Chippendale was purely commercial.

Chapter III: A Trio.

AFTER leaving Betty at the gate, Walter walked down Crystal Street in a waking dream. Before turning into Glenmore Road, he stopped and stared back intently at Cremona Cottage. It was in darkness, and hidden by the pepper trees that grew in front. The emotions are not snobbish, and already the dingy cottage that sheltered Betty stirred an indefinable emotion in him, and he stared long and fixedly at the insignificant building which was to be the theatre of his dreams for years to come.

It was past eleven, and for nearly an hour he walked through the moonlit, deserted streets, conscious of the splendour of the night, but seeing and hearing nothing. He exulted as if he had drunk wine. The image of Betty flickered through his brain like a moving picture. He saw her sitting at the piano with her gracious smile; fleeing from him in the streets with scornful fury; and then, standing at the gate, challenging him with a proud look to stand his ground or run. With the ear of a musician, he heard her voice again as plainly as if she were speaking. He was surprised by its exquisite modulations. And as emotion surged in him, his brain began to sing.

The first phrase of a melody rang in his ears, and then stopped as if a door had been opened and shut. In a moment he forgot everything, and listened with a rapt, absorbed air as the melody repeated itself. It was broken and fragmentary, given out with the sound of violins. It came again with the sound of flutes and oboes, and he hummed it over, fixing the phrase in his memory, rounding the notes with their proper cadence. It was repeated again to the sound of muted strings with a sudden, haunting break that astonished and delighted his ear. He walked like one possessed of devils, humming and muttering to himself with the fixed stare of the somnambulist. And for the rest of the journey, the melody, now full and complete, rang in his ears unceasingly.

Ever since he was a child music had come to him in this manner, and always with the sound of instruments. Sounds came to him as ideas come to others. He had never forgotten the day when he found himself. One afternoon he was walking home from the office through Prince Alfred Park. As he reached the Exhibition Building he heard the sound of violins rising and falling like the curves of a wave. A famous London orchestra was playing to a crowded audience. And as he listened with the emotion of a foreigner who hears his tongue spoken in a distant land, a

shudder of voluptuous ecstasy went through him. He trembled violently, recovered himself with an effort, and stood rooted to the spot, spellbound with a strange and exquisite melancholy. It was an emotional crisis, and the turning-point of his life.

A year later he had gone to Ricordi, the conductor, who had settled in Sydney, with a sheaf of manuscript. The Italian had listened in ominous silence while he explained his errand. He ran his eye carelessly over the precious sheets. Suddenly, with knitted brows, he ran to the piano and began playing. Walter sat and listened with the fear and distrust of one offering a limb to the surgeon's knife. Ricordi played two pages, stopped suddenly, and with a ripe Neapolitan oath, snatched the music from the piano and dashed it on the floor, purple with rage. He caught Walter halfway up the street and dragged him back again.

"Young man," he cried, "you are a dam fool and a savage; but I will teach you, and dey will call you a genius; but first I must trample you under my heel. Your work, it is a sacrilege, but de stuff is dere. We are friends and brothers already, is it not? But you will let me burn distuff; it is a duty to my art."

That was three years ago, and Ricordi had taught Walter for nothing, declaring with volcanic gestures at every lesson that he was an imbecile beyond belief; that he was a heaven-born genius; that the angels wept at his stupidity; that it was an honour to embrace him. But he burnt each manuscript after a ruthless criticism.

Walter, who was an only child, and an orphan since his seventh year, had found a home with his uncle, Jacob Gidley, whom he disliked intensely. It was owing to his uncle that he was a clerk in the General Post Office, hating his monotonous employment, and longing for a means of escape.

Jacob Gidley was a bachelor of fifty-five, who passed for ten years younger with the aid of a florid complexion, a dapper figure, and a dexterous use of hair dye. A ladies' man, it was reported that he had been crossed in love, and he encouraged the rumour; but it was false. He was born a bachelor as Walter was born a musician. Ten years ago he had taken a house and furnished it, and the gods had sent him Mrs. Brittle.

For, as navigators are created to discover uncharted seas; as historians are created to record the births and deaths of kings; as poets are created to celebrate great passions, Mrs. Brittle was created to wait on Jacob Gidley. In preparation for this absorbing task she had made an unlucky marriage. She had taken ten years to discover this fact; her husband, quicker witted for once, had discovered it in two. She seemed to have been born with a scrubbing brush and duster in either hand, and this passion for cleanliness had excited her husband's admiration for six months. It had ended by clouding his reason. Harassed in his hours of ease by the domestic broom and duster, and cheated out of his reasonable

share of dirt, he had led a dog's life. Then, with no liking for stimulants, he took to drink. And he drank slowly and methodically to ease his discomfort as one takes an opiate against the toothache. Then he signed the pledge. A month later, in his sober senses, he disappeared without warning, leaving no more trace than a stone dropped in a pond.

The loss of her home had affected Mrs. Brittle a great deal more than the loss of her husband. Marriage had left her where it found her, but her idle hands made her doubt the existence of God. Then Jacob Gidley advertised for a housekeeper, and Fate, mindful of her handiwork, led Mrs. Brittle to his door. Jacob, who was peculiarly sensitive to feminine beauty, remarked that her face was as plain as a bath bun, and while he was ruminating on this fact, she surveyed the dapper little man attentively from head to foot, causing a twinge of embarrassment in Jacob that was to last for the rest of his life. Before he could make up his mind, she swept him aside and took possession of the house. It was owing to her that his rosy cheeks showed no wrinkles; it was owing to her that his digestion was perfect; it was owing to her that he looked always as if he had stepped out of a bandbox.

When Walter reached his uncle's house in Redfern, the clock was striking twelve. The tumult had died down in his brain, but he walked like one in a dream. He heard the shrill whistle of engines shunting, and heard a train rumbling into the station. As he closed the door, and felt his way to the foot of the stairs with the stealthy movements of a burglar, he was surprised to see a thin streak of light under the kitchen door. He stepped lightly forward, and, opening the door, stood petrified with amazement. His uncle, the fastidious and immaculate Jacob Gidley, neat as a new pin, sat at the kitchen table in front of a pig's cheek, a bottle of mustard pickles, and a hunk of bread. And he ate ravenously like a starving wolf, like a man rescued from a desert island. As the door creaked he turned with a scared look that changed to one of relief when he saw Walter.

"Hello, Walter! thought you were in bed; come in," he mumbled, with his mouth full. But Walter stood rooted to the spot with amazement. This was his uncle, with the dainty and fastidious stomach, who wearied his friends with his theories on diet.

"I wish you'd shut the door," he whispered, irritably, cutting another slice off the pig's face. "I thought I'd take a snack before I turned in. I've always said that nothing hurts a man if he fancies it. Have a bit?" And he speared another pickle with his fork. For a minute there was no sound but the crunching of his jaws. Then the door creaked again gently, and an apparition stood in the doorway. It was Mrs. Brittle, showing by her clothes that she had newly risen from her bed. And she looked in silence at Mr. Gidley and the pig's head, convinced that she was still dreaming. She stared at the pig in a brown study as if she had never seen its like.

The remaining ear of the animal was cocked in an alert manner, as if it were listening; its lifeless eye was screwed up in a hideous wink; it seemed to be enjoying the situation.

Jacob stared with the look of a bird fascinated by a snake. Then, as if under hypnotic influence, with his eyes still fixed on the apparition, he felt for the bottle of pickles, and slowly and carefully transferred it to his pocket. Still with the movements of one mesmerised, he took his handkerchief from his pocket and attempted to repair the disorder of the table by sweeping the crumbs into his hand, which he held like a cup. This movement broke the spell. Mrs. Brittle stuck her hands on her hips and laughed. It was a remarkable laugh, changing from one key to another like a piece of music. It began with the cheerful bellow of one tickled with a straw, changed to the sardonic gaiety of experience, modulated into the sarcastic snigger of one who had the advantage, and ended with the ironic bitterness of one who tramples idols under foot.

"Funny things you see in dreams," said Mrs. Brittle, gasping for breath; "fancy me dreaming of Mr. Gidley and pig's head and pickles. But dreams always go by opposites, as the man found when he backed a horse that he saw in his sleep, and it came in tail first."

"You're a rare one for a joke," said Jacob, feebly.

"It's no joke to walk in your sleep and dream about cannibal feasts," said Mrs. Brittle.

"Oh, it's hardly that," said Jacob, recovering his voice.

"It's the nearest you'll ever get, Mr. Gidley," said she; and then, with an air of surprise, "you don't mean to say that I'm awake? I thought I was walking in my sleep."

"No one ever caught you napping, Martha," said Jacob. "But I don't wonder at your surprise," he continued, collecting his wits as he recovered from the hypnotic influence; "yet all this," he went on, restoring the pickle bottle to the table, and giving the pig's head a friendly look, "is in the nature of an experiment. You will see that I have selected the most indigestible articles that I could find in the nearest cook-shop. And you found me eating them at an hour which, in my well-known opinion, is absolutely fatal to the human system. But what you mistook for depravity or hunger is nothing more or less than a severe test of a most wonderful compound."

Here he drew a bottle of patent medicine from his pocket. It was labelled: *Ramsden's New Discovery*. He shook it, drew the cork, and sniffed fondly at the contents. "The discoverer of this compound has solved a question that has agitated my mind for years," he continued. "It sweeps the laborious rules of diet that I have composed into the dustbin. With the aid of this powerful elixir mankind can indulge their brutal and irrational appetites with pleasure and benefit. A few doses of this, and the stomach can take a holiday. And being so powerful a remedy, a

remarkably small dose is required.” He consulted the directions on the label. “God bless me!” he cried, changing colour, and giving the pig and pickles an uneasy look, “I should have taken a dose before eating.”

“It's getting late,” said Mrs. Brittle, “and what you haven't got time to say you can whistle; but you don't deceive me, Mr. Gidley. You've starved yourself for a week with one eye on the bottom button of your waistcoat. That pork's put a nail in your coffin, and a dose of that poison in the bottle will clinch it. You'll look a hundred in the morning. The children will run after you in the streets and call you grandad.” And with this parting shot she cleared the table.

It was true that Jacob Gidley, proud of his dapper figure, starved himself at intervals with the melancholy vanity of an old dandy. Since a perfect digestion had threatened the contour of his waistcoat, he had convinced himself that the elixir of life was to be found in a bottle of patent medicine. And he dosed himself with impunity, owing to the strength of his constitution, with every catch-penny that came on the market. Gifted with an iron frame, he cured himself periodically of every known disease, and advertised the result in a free testimonial, with the vanity of a beauty actress extolling a new cosmetic.

Before Mrs. Brittle had finished her remarkable laugh Walter was in his room jotting down the melody that had rung so insistently in his brain. And he crooned over it with the delight of a mother over her newborn babe, deciding to add a middle section when he felt in the humour. An hour later he pushed the manuscript aside, and, thinking of Betty, fell silent. He dwelt with passionate detail on the events of the night. He had met a strange girl, walked home with her, and talked like a fool. It had seemed the most remarkable thing that he had ever done; but now, under the depression that always followed his strange cerebral excitement, it seemed trivial beyond words. His heart sank at the thought that he had deceived himself; that Betty had already forgotten him. And instantly there surged in him an imperious desire to distinguish himself in her eyes, to show her that he differed from the common rut. He remembered with a kind of wonder the haunting melody that he had just written; the image of Betty had driven it out of his mind. And he decided to dedicate it to her, convinced that she had inspired it, and yet he had forgotten her existence while composing it.

Chapter IV: Crystal Street.

WHEN Walter left the gate, Betty went to her room and lit the gas. This room, narrow as a ship's cabin, with a ceiling that sloped sharply like an idiot's forehead to the top of the window, had been her refuge since childhood. The bed, squeezed against the wall, left little room for other furniture; but Peter Wayside, descending for once to the arts of the carpenter, had cut down a dressing-table and washing-stand to fit in the corners. These left a space the width of a chair between the bed-stead and the wall, where the window looked out on the garden; but Betty moved freely in this confined space, knowing every corner and angle through long usage.

Owing to her natural taste, or the want of room, Betty had been sparing with wall decorations. A fine print of "The Sea Hath Its Pearls" in a circular frame, a gift from her mother, hung on the wall. Underneath it were twelve portraits of great musicians, a series of artistic postcards, which her father, in a fit of good humour, had framed in an oblong panel. The room was spotlessly clean, with the fresh, wholesome smell of bleached linen.

Betty put down the matches, and then, with an instinctive movement, turned and studied her face in the glass. She was surprised to find that she was looking her best. Her eyes were clear and bright, and a slight flush increased the milky pallor of her skin. But as she gazed at her image in the mirror, frankly admiring her own beauty, she heard the key turn in the door of the workshop below. It was her father locking up for the night, and with a swift, irreflective movement she turned out the gas, fearful lest he should see a glimmer of light in her room.

The moonlight flooded the darkened room, and Betty, feeling herself restless, sat down by the window. The tranquil, silver light and the brooding silence soothed her nerves, and her thoughts wandered in a sentimental reverie. The strange young man with the long neck reminded her of Paoli, and she saw him again, staring at her over the ivory mouthpiece of his flute. Even now the sound of a flute fell on her ears with a hopeless yearning, stirring a delicious melancholy in her heart. She longed for something to match the splendid night, and a vision of lovers floated through her mind, fashioned like the heroes of romantic plays. Vague as dream shadows, they had dark features and flashing eyes, and clad in the poetical garb of the Middle Ages, they lightly and

reverently touched her finger-tips as they led her gently down an avenue of stately trees through which the moonlight filtered in luminous patches. And somewhere in the distance a serenade for muted strings floated across the waters of a lake whose tiny waves flashed like quicksilver as they caught the rays of the moon. She shivered, and found that she was as cold as a stone. And with a vague unrest in her heart she went to bed.

The first sign of life in Crystal Street came in the morning with the rattle of milk cans. The silence was broken again by the carts of the butcher and the baker rattling over the stones. Then the creak of a window-sash and monotonous scales on the piano announced that the households were astir. Another silence showed that the morning meal was ready. And then the daily exodus of men began. Between eight and nine an intermittent stream of men, carrying their lunches in leather bags, emerged from the doors, and, as if drawn by the same invisible thread, turned the corner into Elizabeth Street on their way to the tram.

They were of all classes. The professional man with his pince-nez and newspaper; the bank clerk, a dandy from his yellow boots to his fancy waistcoat; the shop hand, studying the sporting columns of the paper. The women were easily defined — superior shop girls wearing the regulation black silk blouse; typists and cashiers, neat and precise in costumes of their own choice; milliners and dressmakers absorbed in penny novelettes.

By nine o'clock the children were dressed and on their way to school, dawdling on the way with the nonchalant movements of young animals. By ten o'clock the visible inhabitants of the street consisted of women and babies, the fronts of the houses were swept, and the morning gossip began over the back fences.

Betty woke late in the morning with a dark ring round her eyes, and she moved about the house with a languid air. She began to sweep the veranda and footpath as Freda Miller next door was just finishing. Walter would have been astonished to see the goddess of his dreams with her sleeves tucked up to the elbow, and a millet broom in her hands, absorbed in the work of the household. And yet traces of the nocturnal goddess were visible in her slender figure, shapely as a statuette, and her eyes, greyish-blue in the morning light, with the sombre reflection of still water. Nothing was wanting but the glamour of night.

“Beat you this morning,” said Freda, with a cheerful grin; “you look a bit seedy. Had a night out, I suppose?”

“No, I was playing for uncle,” said Betty, “and it was such a beautiful night that I couldn't go to sleep.”

“And who brought you home? Thinking of your uncle wouldn't keep you awake. I know you, my lady,” cried Freda, with envious admiration.

Betty remembered Walter, and coloured slightly; but before she could answer Freda broke in again:

“What's the matter with the girl Manning this morning? She looked daggers at me as she went past just now.”

“Gus quarrelled with her last night,” said Betty.

“Good enough for him,” cried Freda; “she's as sly as they make 'em. I was wondering how long she'd last; but wait till I tell you the latest. There's been a terrible row at the Blenkinsop's, and Mrs. Blenkinsop ran away last night without her hat, and it took her husband hours to get her home.”

“You don't say so?” cried Betty, tremendously surprised.

“Yes; and it's all over the woman that took the house opposite them last week. They say Mr. Blenkinsop led a gay life before he was married, and he knew this woman, and now she's a widow with one child, and her husband left her plenty of money, and she's madly in love with Mr. Blenkinsop, and she sits on the veranda and watches him go in and out, and he hates the sight of her, and Mrs. Blenkinsop's mad with jealousy, and they'd leave the house, but it's their own,” gabbled Freda, coming to a standstill for want of breath.

“You don't say so?” answered Betty, fascinated by this drama of love brought to their very doors. Mr. Blenkinsop was a tall man of forty, with a curious unhealthy pallor, and weary eyes. Silent and retiring in disposition, he was reported to be a model husband and father, never seen in the street, except in coming and going from his office.

“Fancy a woman being in love with him,” said Freda; “he's got such nasty eyes. And Mrs. Blenkinsop went into hysterics, and said this woman would take her husband away from her, and break up her home.”

Both girls were silent, tremendously interested and astonished by this bizarre love that threatened to destroy the Blenkinsop's home like a disease. Betty stared at the two houses, anxious to see the actors in this drama being played out in her own street.

“They say chickens come home to roost,” said Freda, “but I never heard of them taking the house opposite.”

Betty was still silent, absorbed in her reflections. She had noticed the woman sitting on her veranda, watching the street with mournful eyes. She thought of Mr. Blenkinsop, going bald and prematurely aged. And a woman could eat her heart out for that man!

“There's Maria Redding got her eye on you. Are you going to practice this morning?” inquired Freda, changing the subject with scatterbrained ease.

Betty turned with a look of scorn to a girl sitting on the gas box of the house opposite. She was a lanky girl with a thick plait of hair like tow, and a long, stupid face. Her father travelled in the country, and the mother and daughter, deprived of their natural share of gossip, watched the street from their high veranda from morning till night with the conscientious air of sentries on a tower. Maria, instinctively hating Betty

for her good looks, stole all her pieces and played them on a dilapidated piano, missing the notes that she found unplayable with the calm stupidity of the philistine. She returned Betty's look with a disdainful stare and went indoors. The next moment she broke into the "Marche Hongrois," striking the piano as if it were a punching-ball in the octave passages, and adding a weird bass of her own invention. It sounded like a deliberate burlesque of Betty's crisp performance.

"Oh, isn't she a wretch?" wailed Betty, "and I've got to practice three hours a day when I go to Ricordi."

"Well, I'll get inside," said Freda; "I've got the beds to make yet."

Crystal Street was deserted except for a few smartly dressed women who were going into town early for the bargain sales. The raucous cry of a hawker selling fruit and vegetables alone disturbed the silence of the street. His rival, a slanteyed Chinaman, trotted silently along the footpath carrying an enormous load of vegetables in two baskets slung on the ends of a flat pole.

Having set the house in order, Betty settled down to a steady practice for two hours, drowning Maria's musical fusillade with Czerny and the Chopin studies.

After lunch Betty felt restless. During the morning she had been surprised to find her thoughts dwelling on the strange young man, who had called himself a composer, and she decided to run up to her cousin's on some pretext. They would be sure to mention him, and she wanted to hear the rest of Hilda's love affair.

It was a bright autumn day of sunshine. Crystal Street lay deserted under a clear blue sky. A cold wind had sprung up, and a few ladies in coats and skirts, gloved and hatted for town, walked leisurely up Elizabeth Street to the tram. A nurse-girl, airing the baby in a perambulator, guided the miniature vehicle with one hand and clutched a penny novelette in the other, secure from the eyes of her mistress.

When Betty reached Queen Street and knocked at the door, Julia ran to meet her.

"Come in," she cried. "I thought you were the postman. The cat washed his face in front of me this morning, and I've been expecting a letter ever since. Hilda was just wishing you were here, she's practising her steps."

Betty knew what that meant. Hilda always practised her steps after quarrelling with Gus and the Colonel, and declaring that she would go back to the stage.

"Play the ballet music for her," whispered Julia; "she's been nagging at me all the morning."

Hilda came in half-dressed, and welcomed her with a sulky look; but Betty, accustomed to Hilda's tempers, cried gaily: "Go and change your shoes, Hilda. I'm going to play the dance from——"

“Thanks; I'm not dancing to-day,” said Hilda, coldly.

“All right,” said Betty, “then I'll play without you.”

She took off her gloves, and opening the score began to play. The heavy morning practice had loosened her fingers, and she played with an astonishing fire and vivacity, bringing the glitter of the stage, and the rapid, measured movement of the ballet into the empty room. Presently the door opened, and Hilda stood in the doorway smiling and coquettish, transformed. Betty struck the opening chords again. Hilda tripped lightly forward, sank to the floor and rose again on her toes. And she danced the slow movement in perfect time, her body swaying to the rhythm of the music like a windblown flower. The movement quickened, and under the stimulus of the sparkling notes she pirouetted, swayed, and glided with the airy lightness of a moth. The presto spurred her on like the crack of a whip. She was a swaying, swirling, tempestuous figure, cheating the eye like a spinning top. “Quicker,” she cried, and the next moment fell gasping into a chair. Betty and Julia clapped their hands, and she acknowledged the applause with a languid smile, conscious of her gifts; for she was a born dancer.

Three years ago she had rescued the family from starvation by joining the ballet of the pantomime. This had been followed by an engagement with a company touring the country, and then Peter Wayside, terrified at the thought of his niece taking to the stage, had bought a piano for the sisters to give lessons in dancing.

“Fancy me teaching clumsy louts to dance for a living when I might have half the men in Sydney at my feet. I was a fool to leave the stage,” said Hilda, mopping her face.

“Never mind, you've got one man at your feet, if you say the word,” cried Julia, enchanted by her sister's good humour.

“Him!” cried Hilda, compressing her thin lips in disdain. “I wouldn't marry him if he covered me with diamonds.”

“But why not?” asked Betty, intensely interested.

“Because I don't choose; because I don't care that much for him,” she cried, snapping her fingers.

“There you are; and the man's dying of love for her. Isn't she a character?” said Julia, looking at her sister with respectful admiration.

Betty was never tired of hearing of this romance, which had been going on for two years. A young man, rich and handsome, had fallen in love with Hilda when she was dancing in the pantomime. He had showered bouquets and presents on her, but she had turned a deaf ear to him. Then she went touring, and he followed the company from town to town, always sitting in the front and devouring Hilda with his eyes. And since she had left the stage he followed her in the streets of Sydney with the humble air of a whipped dog. Only last Saturday he had followed her about George Street till she took refuge in a glove shop. Betty always

listened in wide-eyed wonder, expecting to hear at any time of his death by suicide. She wanted to hear more, but Hilda turned the conversation suddenly.

“How did you get on with that fellow who took you home?” she inquired.

“Oh, all right,” said Betty, flushing slightly.

“I thought you would by the way he stared at you,” said Hilda.

“Gus says he's a wonderful musician,” cried Julia. “He can go home and play any piece he hears from memory.”

“He told me he was a composer,” said Betty.

“Him a composer? I'll eat all the music he writes,” said Hilda, pettishly.

“Strikes me you got pretty confidential in the moonlight,” cried Julia with a giggle, noting Betty's rising colour. “You two ought to make a pair, you're both music mad; but Gus says that he won't look at a girl.”

“Well, he looked at me,” said Betty, simply.

“I believe Betty's met her fate at last,” cried Julia. “I knew something was going to happen when he slithered along the floor to your very feet.”

“Then you make a mistake,” said Betty.

“He fell in love with you at first sight,” persisted Julia.

“Don't talk nonsense,” said Betty, “and give me that blouse pattern. I must go home and put the dinner on.”

As Betty walked home she thought with a strange envy of Hilda's romance. Then her thoughts wandered to the curious story of Mr. Blenkinsop, and she wondered how it would end. Then there was Gus eating his heart out for the Manning girl. Love was everywhere, and she had nothing but the memory of Paoli and his pleading eyes. And suddenly she felt lonely. A vague longing to love and be loved surged through her like pain; a desire to share in this universal emotion that passed her carelessly by. The sun was setting in an autumn sky, wearing regal colours for the dying sun. There was a sudden sharpness in the air, a hint of loneliness and desolation, stirring vague longings in the heart to comfort and be comforted.

Chapter V: On the Block.

AT a quarter to twelve Mr. Jacob Gidley, sitting at his desk in the account branch of the General Post Office, initialled the last batch of printed forms and glanced at the clock. As the chimes in the tower boomed overhead on the first note of twelve, he passed through the swinging doors in Pitt Street, newly washed, brushed, and combed, smart as a new pin. Stepping through the colonnade, the hoarse cry of the flower sellers caught his ear, and he stopped to admire the display of flowers running in splashes of brilliant colour the length of Martin Place. The dealers entreated the pedestrians to buy, sheltering the spoils of the garden from the sun with huge umbrellas. The people hovered round, sniffing the fragrant odours of the garden distilled into the air from the edge of the kerbstones. Mr. Gidley hesitated before a superb clump of chrysanthemums, dahlias, and marguerites, and then sauntered with a leisurely pace to George Street.

Every Saturday, at the same hour, wearing a bowler hat and a sack suit to increase his youthful appearance, Mr. Gidley walked the Block. He paused on the George Street steps, and, surveying the crowd with some disdain, reflected that times had changed. Years ago the Block had been the weekly parade of fashion and elegance. It had been a social function, where appointments had been made and kept, flirtations carried a step further, acquaintances renewed, and invitations given for dinner or lunch in the neighbouring tea-rooms and cafés. He had rubbed shoulders with men about town in silk hats and frock coats, smart actresses fresh from rehearsal, pretty Jewesses from the Synagogue, elegant ladies dressed for the races, actors and chorus girls, and professional men released from their offices at noon.

Smiling and amiable, anxious to see and be seen, they used to saunter in an orderly procession from Hunter Street to King Street, then, retracing their steps at Pitt Street, they would saunter back again, as if they were performing a duty or a religious rite. But now the parade of elegance had given way to a scanty stream of shoppers intent on bargains, young men from the offices with their minds running on racing and football, and slips of girls hurrying to the tram with the latest novel. Mr. Gidley walked to King Street with a gloomy air, then he crossed into Pitt Street, and his spirits revived.

A dense stream of people, wedged on the narrow footpath between the

shop windows and the kerbstone, moved with difficulty. And they walked like people in a procession, their pace regulated by the wall of human bodies in front. Business men, harassed by the leisurely movement, stepped impatiently into the roadway and continued their journey. Ladies, waiting for a friend, squeezed themselves against the plate glass windows to economise space. At intervals, groups of young men and women stood chatting with nonchalant ease in the midst of the throng. Mr. Gidley joined the procession, keeping a watchful eye on the pretty faces. Once or twice he hesitated with a reflective air, and then passed on. Then, finding nothing to please his fancy, he took a turn through the arcades

Five minutes later, Betty and Freda Miller, who had come into town to look at the shops, crossed Pitt Street and joined the crowd. Freda, with a serious look on her freckled face, was listening intently to Betty.

“But you haven't told me if he's good-looking,” she said.

“I don't know,” replied Betty, “but he's got a very long neck, and sticks his chin out.”

“I don't believe he's a composer at all,” said Freda.

“Well, I'm sure he is,” said Betty, slightly nettled. “I could tell that by his face.”

“Of course you could,” grinned Freda; “It was moonlight, and he made eyes at you like they all do.”

“He did nothing of the sort,” said Betty, angrily; “his eyes glitter when he's excited.”

Betty was silent for a moment, surprised to find herself defending the strange young man, but Freda was always jealous of the boys. They walked along, irritated and silent, when Betty suddenly heard the long-drawn wail of a flute. She turned hot and cold as she saw Paoli's quartet on the opposite side of the street in front of a restaurant. They were playing a brisk operatic selection, reading their parts from portable stands, but Paoli, knowing the music by heart, was staring at the women with his impudent black eyes. Betty felt his roving glance rest on her, and turning her head, she began to talk rapidly of nothing particular. Fortunately, Freda knew nothing of her affair with this dissolute musician of the streets. Suddenly Freda nudged her arm.

“There's Mr. Gidley that I was telling you about. I want to introduce you to him. I met him at the Hendersons. He's great fun.”

Betty looked at Mr. Gidley without interest. He was gazing intently at a pretty young Jewess, who returned his stare with a scornful look.

“You mean that old man dressed lamb fashion?” said Betty. “Why, I've seen him on the Block for years, and he never looks a day older. I'm sure he does himself up. I don't want to know him.”

“Oh, yes, you do,” cried Freda. “They say he's an old bachelor and a terrible flirt. All the girls chase him for lunch. You smile when I

introduce you, and we'll get an invitation."

"Not me," cried Betty; "I don't like his looks."

"Nonsense," said Freda; "he's as harmless as a pet lamb, and far more amusing, but don't you tell him I said so."

"I haven't met him yet," said Betty, shortly.

"No; but you will when I catch his eye," said Freda. "Smile on him for my sake, Betty; I'm dying of hunger."

"Well, I never," cried Betty in astonishment; "he's staring at himself in that shop window, and putting his tie straight."

It was a quarter to one, and with the inexorable movement of an ebb tide, the crowds in the street had diminished, leaving a breathing space on the footpath. The restaurants and tea-rooms were filling with those who were staying in town for lunch; the trams were packed with the homeward bound. Feeling that his morning was wasted, and with every prospect of a dull day before him, Mr. Gidley resumed his leisurely saunter back to King Street, when his eye was caught by a remarkably pretty girl, with a skin as clear as milk. His eye travelled from her to her companion, and instantly his face lit up with the mechanical, artificial smile of the lounge.

"How do you do, Miss Miller?" he cried. "'Pon my word, I didn't see you for the moment. Town's very dull this morning," he continued, staring at Betty, who was looking at him curiously.

"Let me introduce you," said Freda, with a grin. "Mr. Gidley, my friend, Miss Wayside."

"Awfully pleased to meet you," cried Jacob in his best manner; "your face seems quite familiar to me, and if you'll pardon my saying so, it's not a face that one readily forgets."

Betty flushed slightly at the compliment, and the three, facing inwards, formed a group on the footpath, the stream of pedestrians parting before them as water passes round a rock. And they chatted of trifles, of nothing, for the sake of conversation, to avoid an awkward silence. Betty stared at him with her frank eyes, marvelling at his spotless condition, at his air of having stepped out of a bandbox. The peculiar quality of his voice caught her ears, and she missed something; it lacked the rough vibration of the male. And with the frank, cruel eyes of youth she penetrated Jacob's juvenile disguise, seeing the dyed hair of too uniform a colour, the crow's feet at the corner of the eyes, and the slight droop of the eyelids where the flesh sagged with the fatigue of approaching age.

Mr. Gidley consulted his watch; it was close on one o'clock.

"And now, if you ladies have nothing better to do, you would greatly oblige me by joining me at lunch," he said.

Betty looked at Freda. "Thank you, but I am afraid that I must go home," she said.

Jacob's heart sank into his boots. Fool that he was! She had another

appointment, of course, and he would be left with Freda, whose homely face took the edge off his appetite.

“There's really no need for you to go home, Betty,” said Freda, feeling that her dinner was slipping through her fingers.

Then they bombarded her with arguments and entreaties as one reasons with a capricious child. Jacob declared that the lunch would be a matter of ten minutes, though he had secretly resolved to make it more elaborate than usual to impress Betty. When she consented, he surprised Freda by leading the way up King Street to the French Grill. He walked into the vestibule with the pride of an elderly dandy seen in the company of a young and pretty woman, nodded to the head waiter like an old friend, and together they deliberated on the menu with the air of doctors consulting in a difficult case. The girls, surprised by the luxurious surroundings, felt a little awkward. Betty gave a sigh of relief when she caught sight of her hat in a mirror. This hat had made a hole in her purse, but now the milliner's charges seemed quite reasonable. She felt that she was presentable from head to foot, but her fears were idle, for Jacob had decided that matter to his own satisfaction before issuing the invitation.

Two smart women, all silk and feathers, stopped in the doorway, and, after surveying them with a regal air, passed through to a private room. This reminded the girls of the rumours they had heard of fast life in this restaurant, and with an intense curiosity they looked for some signs of reckless gaiety. They were disappointed. The diners, chiefly of the professional class, were respectable and dull. The waiter, shaved and combed like a barber, served them with an indifferent air, preoccupied with the chances of a horse that he had backed for that afternoon. Betty decided that Bohemian gaiety and the popping of champagne corks belonged to midnight. And taking their tone from their surroundings, the two girls pulled their gloves off calmly with the air of fine ladies accustomed to luxurious cafés and expensive dishes.

The small, appetising dishes, served in the French way, were a surprise to the girls, and Jacob, with the assiduous courtesy of a host, helped them to the best. But when Freda chose a lobster mayonnaise, of which she was passionately fond, he threw up his hands in a gesture of despair.

“My dear Miss Miller,” he cried, “I feel it my duty to warn you that of all foods inimical to human life, the lobster stands easily first. A torpedo is a child's plaything compared with that deadly shellfish.”

Freda hesitated, torn between her desire for the delicacy and fear of offending her host.

“But I can eat half a lobster, any day,” she replied, pale, but determined, her mouth watering for the mayonnaise.

Jacob stared at her in silence with a sort of respect due to one with the digestion of an ostrich, and then, with the eagerness of one leading a cherished friend from the edge of a cliff, he tried to dissuade her from the

poisonous dish. But Freda, knowing his mania, stuck to her mayonnaise, and ate it with immense relish. Betty looked on enviously, for she, too, had been on the point of ordering lobster. But Jacob, noting her choice of cutlets, remarked to himself that here was a girl who combined singular beauty with a surprising intelligence. Meanwhile he watched Freda in gloomy silence, his spirits visibly depressed, then his face brightened, and, feeling in his waistcoat pocket, he produced a small glass tube.

"I was forgetting," he said, "and I have needlessly alarmed you. But if I can persuade you to swallow one of these tabloids, you may snap your fingers at that satanic dish. You would greatly relieve and oblige me by taking one."

Freda looked at the shining pellet with a discontented air, but Jacob's philippic against the lobster had shaken her nerve. She felt as if she had been taking poison out of bravado. She took the pellet, and swallowed it with a grimace. In a moment Jacob recovered his gaiety.

"I have spent a lifetime in the study of diet," he remarked, "and I have discovered that most of the foods we eat are inimical to the human system." Betty listened in stupefaction while he delivered a short lecture on the destructive value of every known meat and vegetable, and ate heartily of every dish on the menu. They had reached the salad and cheese when Betty heard the staccato twang of a harp, and the next moment the long-drawn wail of Paoli's flute floated through the window, filling the room with the sensual, caressing phrases of Gounod's "Serenade." Betty pulled on her gloves, anxious to get away from the fateful sound of the flute, but instantly Mr. Gidley became a connoisseur of music.

"Charming, charming," he cried, cocking his ear. "I remember hearing that in the opera when I was quite a lad."

"But it isn't in an opera; it's a song," cried Betty.

"You will pardon me, Miss Wayside, I'm sure," said Jacob, graciously, "but you will find I am always right in these little details. That charming song occurs in the — er — third act of *La Somnambula*."

"But everybody knows——" began the astonished Betty, and then stopped. Freda was making signs to her over the connoisseur's shoulder.

When they emerged from the French Grill, Betty had again to run the gauntlet of Paoli's eyes. He stared at her with his roving, familiar eyes, surprised to see her come out of such an expensive café. Then, observing Mr. Gidley attentively, a knowing leer spread over his face. But Jacob, anxious to show himself patron of the arts, tapped the second violin on the back, and handed him a shilling. The grin disappeared from Paoli's face, and he looked at Jacob with the respect due to a patron.

At the corner of King Street, Jacob suggested that they should take a turn in the Gardens. They walked along Macquarie Street, talking at their ease, when Jacob fell suddenly silent. Betty looked at him; he was staring

across the street at the hospital. A group of convalescents, pallid as the inhabitants of a beleaguered city, were taking the warmth of the afternoon sun, the lust of life creeping slowly into their haggard eyes as they watched the life and movement of the streets.

“Poor fellows!” said Betty.

“Poor fellows? Nothing of the kind,” said Jacob, sharply. “The doctors have done their worst, and they're still alive. I congratulate them.”

“Why, don't you believe in doctors?” said Freda, to draw him out.

“No; but I respect them as I respect any man who lives on the ignorance of his neighbours. I must tell you that I went to a doctor once, and, 'pon my word, he asked me all kinds of questions to hide his own ignorance. I saw through the whole thing in a moment. He was actually pumping me to find out what was the matter. I went home and cured myself in a week with a bottle of pain-killer.”

“But what would you do if you were dying?”

“Precisely! I should die in peace and comfort, without paying a stranger to count my last moments.”

Freda spluttered, and Jacob gave her a sharp look, but she adroitly changed it to the sound of one choking on a fly.

They reached the Gardens, and sat on a seat near the fountain, where Walter had sat and dreamed of Betty an hour ago. The ordered beauty of the scene, the park-like spaces, the flower beds woven in a pattern of brilliant colours, the harbour and its yachts, with the sweeping movements of seagulls, held Jacob silent for a moment. Then he noticed that Betty was carrying a roll of music.

“Ah, so you're a musician?” he inquired.

“Miss Wayside is a pianist; she practises for hours every day,” said Freda, proud of her friend's accomplishments.

“Then permit me to say that you are wasting your time,” said Jacob, blandly.

Betty stared at him, thunderstruck, and he felt gratified.

“I have studied this matter very carefully, for I have a nephew who calls himself a musician, and I have profited by his mistakes. Like yourself, he takes hours to practise what can be done in ten minutes. Permit me to show you.”

Here he rigidly extended each finger in turn, and beat it upon the rail of the seat as if he were driving a nail.

“Do that for ten minutes a day, and you will get perfect freedom in the muscles of each finger,” he said.

The girls were too astonished to argue, and Jacob, taking advantage of their surprise, rose to his feet.

“You will excuse me, ladies, but I have an appointment,” he said. “Miss Wayside, you would greatly oblige me by trying my method, and if you are in town next Saturday you can tell me the result,” and he took

his leave.

“He always bolts like that,” said Freda. “You've got an invitation for Saturday. I like his cheek leaving me out.”

Betty looked at his retreating figure. “I never listened to such nonsense in my life. I pity his nephew, whoever he is,” she said, unconscious that it was the strange young man who was coming to the house that night.

Chapter VI: Hide and Seek.

As Jacob and the two girls strolled along Macquarie Street to the Gardens, Walter Chippendale, coming down Hunter Street to the tram, turned into Phillip Street, drawn by the sound of Paoli's flute. Leaving the office five minutes later than his uncle, he generally mooned about the streets for an hour; but to-day he found his thoughts more attractive than the moving scene. A desire for solitude led him to the Gardens, where he sat for an hour, his thoughts playing like summer lightning round the image of Betty. He had wakened at daylight with a confused sense of something important on his mind. Then he remembered that he was to see Betty again that night, and a serene joy possessed him, filling the morning with sunshine and music. Since then he had counted the slow-footed hours, suspecting his watch and the clocks of a conspiracy.

As he was crossing Phillip Street on his return, he heard the sound of stringed instruments, and he turned and followed the sound instinctively, as the children followed the Pied Piper. The street was deserted, the chambers and offices closed for the week, and every note reached him as clearly as if they were playing in a hall. His nerves were on edge with expectation, and a wave of voluptuous emotion swept through him with the concord of the flute and strings. He took his stand opposite the players, and gave Paoli a friendly nod. For two years he had listened in the streets to this Bohemian quartet of two violins, a flute, and a harp, astonished at hearing them play classical pieces between the popular claptrap of the streets.

Presently the second violin tucked his instrument under his arm, and crossed the street. The group of listeners, knowing his errand, melted away. The second violin turned to Walter with a shrug of his shoulders.

"Someting for de music?" he asked.

Walter gave him sixpence, and he took it with a bow.

"You want a piece, hey?" he asked, recognising a regular patron.

"Yes, the 'Pagliacci' music," said Walter, "and tune your A; it's a shade flat."

The second violin smiled amiably and twitched the string.

"Dat is so," he replied; "it is a new string. You haf a wonderful ear."

The savage, elemental music of this opera had captured him a year ago; it was such music he meant to write some day. His brain filled with splendid visions, the notes of Paoli's flute brought the tragic figure of the

clown before his eyes, but when the piece ended he hurried to the tram, fearful of being late for his appointment.

Mrs. Brittle, who was pressing Jacob's dress suit, looked up with a hot iron in her hand when Walter came in. She was in a good humour, for every Saturday afternoon she took a holiday, and cleaned, sponged, and ironed Jacob's suits. As she looked at Walter, the hard lines in her face softened, for she mothered him with the irresistible emotion of a childless woman.

"Had your lunch?" she inquired.

"Yes," said Walter, suddenly remembering that he had eaten nothing since breakfast.

Mrs. Brittle smiled, or thought she did. A stranger would have thought she was biting on a hollow tooth.

"It's a pleasure to talk to me, Walter, isn't it?" she asked.

"Yes," said Walter, cautiously, knowing this was a trap, "but why——"

"Because I swallow everything you tell me," she said.

"But I assure you——" said Walter, colouring.

"What's that new tune you've been playing every night when I'm in bed?" she asked, abruptly.

"It's my new composition," he said, flushing with pride. "Do you like it?"

"Never mind whether I like it or not; but don't you let that old Dago burn it," she replied.

"No; not this time," said Walter, smiling.

They heard Jacob's latch-key in the door, and Walter went to his room at the back, with a fine view of the chimney pots of the opposite terrace. It was scrubbed and polished like a hospital ward, all but a large table littered with piles of music and manuscript, which Mrs. Brittle was forbidden to touch. A manuscript copy of his Nocturne stood on the music-stand in the corner, and, taking it down, he read it through carefully. Then he took the little "Duke" from its case, and polished it with a silk handkerchief.

Downstairs Mrs. Brittle was waiting on Jacob, quickening her steps to a run in an earnest endeavour to be in two places at once. Having seen that his fancy socks and a change of linen were airing before the fire, and his dress suit properly pressed, Jacob found himself with a few minutes to burn. He sauntered into the dining-room, and stopped at the pantry door. The lower shelves were packed with a monstrous collection of patent medicine bottles. They stood there in serried ranks, a battalion of bottles, the discarded favourites of last season; for Jacob clung to his bottles as a fond lover clings to a glove or a piece of ribbon. He was conscious of a slight fatigue, and studied the labels carefully. Dr. Rumpikoff's "Vital Remedy" caught his eye. He drew the cork and

sniffed at the contents, puzzled by the odour. It seemed too good to lose, and tilting up the bottle he took a mouthful. A moment later, licking his lips like a cat, with the strained expression of a man who has swallowed a coin, he ran to the kitchen door.

“Martha,” he cried, “I’ve just taken a dose of this mixture, and, upon my word, it tastes exactly like furniture polish.”

Mrs. Brittle gave one look at the bottle, and dropped the teapot.

“Well, if you drank that, you can drink anything,” she cried; “it *is* furniture polish, and you put it there yourself months ago.”

She broke into an irresistible guffaw, and Jacob turned the colour of ashes. He had a swift, horrible vision of himself lying in bed, dying by inches, with the hated doctors bending over him and counting his last moments. He turned to the dresser, seized the mustard-pot, and ran.

Half-an-hour later, Mr. Gidley, in full evening dress, sat down to his tea in gloomy silence, his mind running on furniture polish. Dimly aware of its effect on the leg of a table, he would have given pounds to know its effect on the human system. He thought bitterly that he had cut a ridiculous figure, seriously endangered his life, and given his housekeeper and nephew a jest for the remainder of their lives. But Mrs. Brittle, in high spirits at his discomfiture, ignored the subject, knowing that it would keep. She turned her attention to Walter.

“Well, I declare, if Walter hasn’t bought a new tie, and it cost a tidy bit of money by the look of it. One and six, reduced to one and nine at the bargain sale. And he’s blushing like the last rose of summer.”

“Leave the boy alone,” said Jacob, glad to talk of anything but furniture polish; “it’s a very good tie. I wish he would spend a little more money on his clothes. I’m sure I set him a good example.”

“A good example?” echoed Mrs. Brittle; “it’s my belief that you were born in a bandbox.”

Jacob smirked with pleasure, bridling with the vanity of an old dandy. He hurried off to the theatre, spick and span, with scarcely a taste of furniture polish in his mouth. Half-an-hour later Walter set out for Paddington, carrying a violin case and a roll of music.

When he reached Crystal Street, he stopped in front of the house with a curious hesitation. There was a light in the sitting-room, throwing the shadow of a 'cello on the yellow blind. This served as an advertisement and a guide to customers. He knocked at the door, but there was no answer. He knocked again, listening eagerly for Betty’s light step. He had rehearsed this second meeting with Betty a hundred times, as a play-actor rehearses his part. It would be a lover’s meeting. Betty would open the door, radiant, but shy, and he, with the air of a conquering hero, would present her with the first-fruits of his genius in a roll of manuscript. His hand was on the knocker again, when he heard a heavy, shuffling tread, and Peter Wayside opened the door. “Well, what do you want?” he

inquired, harshly. Then recognising Walter, he added, "Come in, but I'm very busy."

His manner was gruff and unfriendly, and instantly, with the instinct of a lover, Walter divined that Betty was not in the house. Peter turned up the gas.

"Have you been knocking long?" he asked, in a friendlier tone, as he caught sight of the violin case.

"Only a few minutes," said Walter.

"Sorry I didn't hear you. I'm working, and Betty should have answered the door. I wonder where the devil she's gone to."

His words fell on Walter's ears like a shower of cold water. So Betty, who had grown as familiar in his thoughts as an old friend, had forgotten his existence. And like the swing of a pendulum his joyous mood changed to one of despair. The room itself seemed cold and hostile without Betty.

It was a long room with a low ceiling. The walls were covered with signed photographs of violinists, ranging from cabinets to enlargements, according to the vanity of the giver. And between them, hanging from nails, were mandolines, violins, guitars, Peter's stock-in-trade of musical instruments. In the corner was a double bass, the giant of the fiddle family, and half a dozen 'cellos. On the open piano was a piece of music, the pizzicato from *Sylvia*. But Peter, anxious to see the little "Duke," asked him to open the case. He took it with a gleam of cupidity in his eye, and handling it with his delicate fingers, determined to keep it at all costs.

"Um, not in his best period, but I can find *a* customer for it," he said, hoping to deceive Walter.

"Here, play something," he added, turning to Walter.

"I'd rather not; I'm out of practice," said Walter.

"Then why the devil don't you sell it? Come, I'll give you two pounds on your bargain."

Walter hesitated. He would as soon have parted with his right eye as the fiddle, but he wanted to see Betty again.

"I'll leave it with you for a week, and if I don't change my mind you can have it," he said.

Peter's manner changed instantly, and he beamed on Walter, scarcely believing his luck. He wondered how long Walter would stay, for he wanted to examine the violin at his leisure. At the end of half-an-hour the conversation lapsed in an awkward silence, and Walter, suddenly conscious of his desire, rose to go. But his eye rested on the group of instruments in the corner, and Peter, forgetting himself, dragged a 'cello out and rubbed it vigorously; the varnish shone with the gleam of a dying sunset. It was like nothing that Walter had seen before.

"A Mantegna," said Peter; "I took it for a bad debt. I didn't know what

it was till I cleaned it. That's the genuine Cremona varnish, my lad, and the finest 'cello in Australia."

His eye gleamed with enthusiasm; he no longer desired Walter's departure; he wanted to brag about his instruments. They began to talk of the old makers and their models, the marvellous instruments two hundred years old, so perfect that modern science can neither add nor take away. Then they compared the different schools, Italian, Venetian, and German. Walter surprised Peter by correcting him in a date. Peter regarded him with esteem. And deep in the mysteries of Cremona varnish, a lost secret, they became friends in an hour.

In the middle of the argument there was a noise outside. The gate clicked, and Walter heard Betty laugh. Peter cocked his ears, and frowned heavily.

"There's that fellow again," he cried, and made for the door. But before he reached it, Betty turned the key in the lock.

She came into the room pulling at her gloves, and, sighting Walter, hid her surprise and annoyance under a gracious smile.

"So sorry to have missed you, Mr. Chippendale," she said, coldly. "I forgot that you were coming, and Gus wanted me to try over some new songs."

She stared at this strange young man, wondering at his dulness. Surely he could understand that she had gone out to avoid him. And Walter instantly divined and resented her thought.

"It doesn't matter. I only came to bring the violin. I forgot that your father likes to get to bed early," he said, with a flush of anger.

"Me get to bed early!" cried Peter in astonishment. "Twelve o'clock's my time; don't hurry on my account, my lad."

Walter looked at the girl, but there was no encouragement in her eyes.

"Thank you, but I must catch the last tram," he said.

He felt sick with anger and humiliation. And then, in spite of himself, the sight of the gracious nymph-like figure sent a warm glow through him. This disdainful creature of flesh and blood was more desirable even than his dreams.

"Well, I'll leave the violin, Mr. Wayside," he said, "but you won't want this," and taking the precious sheets of manuscript, he rolled them up.

But his distress and humility had softened Betty's heart; she suddenly remembered the music, and was curious.

"Is that some of your own music?" she inquired in a friendlier tone.

"I wrote it the night I met you; it's only a trifle."

"May I look at it?" said Betty.

Walter handed it to her in silence. The neat, clear copy surprised her, and she ran her eye over the melody.

"It's not very difficult; would you like me to try it over?" she asked.

Walter nodded; he could not trust himself to speak.

She sat down at the piano, studied the key for a moment, and began playing. It was the haunting melody of Op. 3, now arranged for a dozen combinations of instruments. Betty stopped at the end of the first section and looked at Walter in amazement. "What a beautiful melody," she said, and turned again to the manuscript.

The words and her look thrilled Walter like wine. He was seized with the nervous exaltation of the artist. His throat was parched, and he swallowed incessantly. His fingers trembled as he turned the page to the middle section. Suddenly Betty stopped playing.

"There's something wrong here," she said. "I can't stretch this chord."

A sudden rage seized the composer. His eyes glittered; he turned white to the lips. He tried to speak, but swallowed instead.

Betty tried again, picking out the notes carefully.

"I can't play it as it's written," she said, looking at Walter. His appearance astonished her; he seemed possessed of devils. He had forgotten everything but his music. He snatched the manuscript from the piano, and ran his eye over the offending passage. Then his look changed.

"A pencil, give me a pencil," he cried, imperiously, without looking up from the paper.

Betty obeyed him in wonder and a little fear.

He scratched out three bars, wrote in a fresh phrase, added some accidentals, and hummed it over.

"Play it now," he said, roughly.

Betty played it over again. The change was magical, and she played to the end, where the theme, repeated in echoes, dies away in silence.

"Thank you, Miss Wayside," said Walter, "and forgive me for speaking like that. I was excited."

But Betty, obeying the inherited instinct of ages, was looking at him with admiration and a little awe, astonished by his talent, and yielding to the domination of the male.

"I say, my lad, did you write that music yourself?" said Peter, unable to believe his ears.

"I did, Mr. Wayside," answered Walter. His shrinking diffidence was gone; he spoke with pride and decision.

"Betty, play it again," cried Peter.

Betty played it again, drawing the melody from the keys with a caressing touch, and following the marks of expression without a fault. It was Walter's turn to be astonished.

But Peter, recovering from his surprise, looked at his watch.

"I say, my lad, you've missed the last tram; it's after twelve."

"Never mind, I'll walk," said Walter; "and I'll write and let you know about the fiddle."

Peter frowned heavily. There was a conflict in his mind. Suddenly he

put the little "Duke" in its case, and handed it to Walter.

"Here, my lad, take your fiddle; I'd be ashamed to rob you, and come and see me again as soon as you like."

Betty came to the gate with Walter. She looked at him with an odd expression, and then the words came in a rush.

"Mr. Chippendale, I owe you an apology for going out to-night. But I objected to dada making appointments for me."

"Suppose I punish you by putting your name on the Nocturne," said Walter, smiling.

"I shall be at home next Friday night," said Betty, flushing with pleasure, and she ran inside.

Chapter VII: The Surprise Party.

IT was the eve of Betty's twenty-first birthday, and her friends had decided to celebrate the event with a surprise party. Gus had taken charge of the affair, and for a fortnight he was in active conspiracy with a score of people, detailing the supply of provisions to each group, and marshalling his forces like an old general. Then, to the amazement of everyone, he announced that the party would be held at Cremona Cottage, instead of the dancing academy. There were cries of alarm. Peter Wayside would massacre them; there would be none left to tell the tale. But Gus showed a curious obstinacy, and carried the day.

On the stroke of eight, the conspirators, who were gathered under the lamp at the corner of Windsor Street, formed a procession of twos and threes, bubbling with noise and laughter, loaded with baskets of provisions, rolls of music, and flowers. Their gaiety had made a stir in Elizabeth Street, but when they reached the cottage there was a sudden silence, and they crossed the street with the stealthy movements of burglars. A dim light in the sitting-room threw the shadow of the famous 'cello on the yellow blind. Gus opened the gate, and whispered his final instructions: "If Betty opens the door, rush it; if the old boy comes, lie low." He knocked gently, the door opened, and Betty stood looking at him with a puzzled air.

"Where's uncle?" whispered Gus.

"In the workshop; I'll go and fetch him," said Betty.

"No, you won't; not till we're ready," said Gus.

He beckoned to the party, and they trooped in on tiptoe to the amazement of Betty.

"In here, everybody," ordered Gus, and leading the way into the sitting-room, he turned up the gas.

The party of twenty, with their baskets and parcels, nearly filled the room, and Betty looked in astonishment at their smiling faces. These were her friends, the Colonel, Julia, Freda Miller, and Walter Chippendale, with a sprinkling of strangers. She wondered at the profusion of flowers, and then understood. A lump rose in her throat, her eyes turned misty, and she swallowed hastily. The surprise was complete.

"Now then," said Gus, "three cheers for Betty. Hip, hip, hooray."

The cheers, given with a deafening roar, had the singular effect of a

stick poked into a hornet's nest. The door on the landing opened, and Peter Wayside stepped into the room. He was in his shirt sleeves, wearing a calico apron. Scarce believing his ears, and now doubting his eyesight, he stared at the intruders like a man in a dream. Then his eyes fell on the Colonel. His bushy eyebrows met in a tremendous frown; the veins rose on his bald, tranquil forehead like cords.

“So it's you, Algy, is it?” he cried. “After trying to poison me at my own table, you lead a gang of ruffians into my sitting-room to destroy the furniture. Take them away before I do some damage.”

The Colonel stiffened, and stroked the famous moustache. For the moment he firmly believed that he had led armies to battle.

“Sir,” he cried, “I have to compliment you on the manners and bearing of a pig. It is true that these ladies and gentlemen have stolen a march on you with the best intentions in the world, but now, sir, whoever shows the white feather, will retire over my dead body.”

“Betty,” cried Peter, foaming with rage, “fetch the police.”

“No, she won't,” cried Julia, running to her uncle, and putting her arms round his neck. He tried to shake her off, but she hung on him like a lover. There was a curious sympathy between Peter and his hare-brained niece, and her caresses calmed him like oil on a troubled sea. “What, are you among these fools?” he asked.

“Yes,” she cried breathlessly, “we all love Betty, and we've been weeks getting up this surprise, and we've got stacks of provisions, and we want you to be nice for once.”

Peter hesitated, torn between rage and affection.

“All right, have it your own way,” he said, quite gently.

But, as he turned to go, his anger flamed up again.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he cried, glaring at the Colonel, “when you broke into my house, I was trying to earn a crust of bread for my family, and my pleasant chat with you has already cost me good money. Permit me to get on with my work, and wish you a quick journey home.” There was a pathetic break in his voice as if they were bringing him to the gutter. Then he stamped heavily down to the workshop.

In a moment the room was as active as an ant-hill. The girls took off their hats, filled the vases with flowers, and unstrapped the baskets. These were carried downstairs, and the contents piled on the kitchen table. There was one accident on the slippery stairs. The Colonel, carrying a box of jellies, took the last three steps at a run, and collided with the corner of the table. There were cries of dismay, but only one glass was broken — a miracle.

Gus was everywhere, rounding up the stragglers from the kitchen, and hastily arranging a programme. The sitting-room was full, and fresh chairs were brought up from the kitchen. Then an awkward silence fell on the guests, and they sat with expectant faces, waiting for the others to

do something. After all the noise and bustle, the party had fallen flat. Then Gus entered, and cast his eye on the silent assembly. "What, is this a Quakers' meeting?" he cried, and passing rapidly across the room, he cracked a joke with one, and complimented another on her looks, his exuberant vitality stirring the guests like an electric current. In a minute the room filled with laughter and conversation, Betty and Julia were playing a duet, Mr. Phillips was fingering his banjo, and the girls were unrolling their music. The guests clapped loudly at the end of the duet, but the lady singers were still coy, and the banjo player had mislaid his music. Gus stepped into the breach. A moment ago he was all smiles, but when he began to sing, his face lengthened, he drooped like a withered flower. He sang the third verse of his song with the tragic air of one bidden to a funeral:

"What are we waiting for, you and I?
A pleading look, a stifled cry.
Good-bye for ever, good-bye for ever.
Good-bye, good-bye, good-bye."

He filled the room with his lugubrious roar that could be heard the length of a street away. The guests, stunned by the noise, reflected on the sad things of life, as passengers comfortably seated in a train think of accidents and sudden death. Then they clapped loudly, relieved of their depression. But Gus had set the ball rolling. Freda Miller went to the piano, and Walter slipped into the seat beside Betty.

"Well, have you forgiven me?" he asked.

"So that is why you were so anxious for me to stay at home to-night?" said Betty.

"Well, they left it to me to keep you from going out, and I did really bring the Nocturne."

"And what does Ricordi think of it?"

"He says I've done it this time, and he's going to get it printed."

"Well, give it to me. I'm going to play it," said Betty.

"Not before all these people," cried Walter, in alarm. "I——"

They were interrupted by Freda, who had broken down as usual in her piece. Gus called on the banjo player, but at that moment a terrific noise was heard across the street, and everyone smiled. Maria Redding, jealous of Betty's party, had declared war with her famous battle piece, in which the roar of the cannon and the groans of the dying filled the street with their deadly noise. The banjo player tried to drown the tumult with the "Lobster's Parade," but he broke down and turned sulky, declaring that the diabolic noise put him out. For a moment Gus was in despair, and called on a silent young man in the corner, who was supposed to recite. But he assured Gus that it was only a rumour; that he had forgotten all

the pieces he knew.

The flowers lent an air of gaiety to the room, and the guests, forgetting their shyness and constraint, laughed and chatted merrily. Scraps of conversation, titters of laughter, and suburban jokes filled the room with a cheerful noise. Gus looked across the street through the open window, and again he drooped like a withered flower. Suddenly he called Betty to the piano, and began to sing the drinking song from *Cavalleria Rusticana*, drowning Maria's fusillade with his vibrating roar.

“Here's the friend that will not sever,
Here's the love that loves for ever,
Here's the wine that fails us never,
Fill, then, high, and drink away!
Viva! drink! and join the chorus,
Though to-morrow darken o'er us,
What care we what lies before us
While we've wine to quaff to-day.”

He shouted the cynical words through the window with an air of abandon, with the tragic gaiety of a man who has gone to the dogs. Then, to the surprise of everyone, the young man in the corner offered to recite. He took a list from his pocket, and studied it carefully. It was his repertory of twenty or thirty pieces, and with barely an interval for breathing, he recited one after the other. The guests looked at each other in dismay. Presently Gus stepped outside, and looked intently across the street. Maria Redding, fatigued with the noise of battle, had fired her last shot and closed the door with a bang. But three doors below Maria's he saw what he wanted in the faint light of the street lamp. It was Clara Manning, dressed up to the nines, sitting alone on the gas box. Gus shut the gate noiselessly, and walked across the street.

Meanwhile a cloud settled on the party. The reciter, warming up to his work, had reached his imitations of celebrated actors. The guests, bored to death, but resolved to die politely, listened in a gloomy silence. Suddenly he tripped on a line, and hesitated. A profound silence fell on the room as if the clock had stopped ticking. Then Gus stepped into the room with Clara Manning on his arm, and broke the spell. Their entry caused a sensation, and the guests gave one another knowing looks. So this was why Gus had planned the raid on Cremona Cottage, and roared his songs of despair through the window.

Walter stared at the newcomer in dismay, feeling that Betty was eclipsed. Clara Manning was a showy, artificial girl of twenty-four, displaying too much neck and ankle, and coloured like an almanack. The girls surveyed her with a hostile stare, divining the fatigued skin beneath the paint and powder, but she returned the stare with a supercilious droop

of the eyelids. And striking an attitude as if she were sitting for a portrait, she warmed herself in the open admiration of the young men. Walter looked again at Betty, and felt relieved. Excitement had coloured her cheeks like the petals of a rose; her wondering blue eyes sparkled with pleasure. And again she stirred his pulses with her likeness to a nymph of the forest seen in the moonlit glade.

The reciter, annoyed by the interruption, began a fresh piece, but Gus, brushing him aside as one removes a fly, called Betty to the piano. And with the joyous air of a man who has come into a fortune he began to sing:

“Take a pair of sparkling eyes,
Hidden ever and anon
In a merciful eclipse.
Do not heed their mild surprise,
Having passed the Rubicon ...”

inviting the world to share his happiness, but as he stooped to turn the page, Walter was surprised to see a malevolent gleam, swift as lightning, come into Clara's eyes, and he wondered. Gus infected the room with his gaiety. Song followed song without a break. The applause became louder, the room buzzed with small talk. The guests sparkled with suburban wit, roaring at jokes fresh from the Ark.

The party was in full swing when Betty and Freda slipped from the room. In half an hour they came up to announce that supper was ready, and the young men, pairing off with the girls, trooped downstairs to the kitchen. It was transformed. The humble utensils had been swept out of sight, and coloured fairy lamps, distributed about the room, threw a soft light on the walls. The table was a sight to make the mouth water. Gay with flowers and fairy lamps, it was loaded with dainties. There were piles of sandwiches — ham, tongue, sardine, lettuce, and cheese; cakes of all shapes and sizes — rock cakes, seed cakes, currant cakes, and Swiss roll; jellies coloured like the rainbow; bowls of fruit salad and cream; fruit piled in pyramids; lollies neatly packed in boxes, date creams, cocoanut ice, walnut creams, almond rock, and Turkish delight. Freda stood ready to serve coffee and claret cup from the small table near the door.

It had been agreed that nothing should be bought from the shops, and the girls, proud of their handiwork, pointed out their contributions, secretly pleased to show that when the time came to be serious they were as much at home in the kitchen as in the drawing-room. The young men, seizing the opportunity, declared their intention of eating nothing but that made by the hands of their girl. They sat down at the table, a lady to each gentleman, but two girls were left together.

“We want another man,” said Gus.

In the silence they could hear a furious hammering and sawing in the workshop, where Mr. Wayside was earning his daily bread.

“Well, there's your man,” cried someone.

“I don't believe he's working; he's only making a noise.”

“I'll go,” said Gus, with the air of a man risking his life.

They waited anxiously, fearing the worst. The hammering ceased, there was a growl of rage, and a door slammed violently.

Gus came back with a sheepish grin. “It's no go,” he said, briefly.

But Freda and Julia got up; “Give us five minutes, and we'll fetch him,” they said.

They were growing impatient, when he appeared suddenly in the doorway. He stared at the familiar kitchen, transformed with its glow of light and colour, and then smiled uneasily at the guests, doubtful of his reception. But Gus had an inspiration. He swept the others to their feet, and roared at the top of his voice:

“For he's a jolly good fellow, for he's a jolly good fellow,
For he's a jolly good fellow, and so say all of us.”

The chorus was given with a deafening roar, and Peter, flattered up to his eyes, took his seat between Freda and Julia. He was a changed man. He beamed on the crew of ruffians who had invaded his house, ate heartily of sardine sandwiches because he was fond of fishing, and declared that the colour of his jelly reminded him of his favourite violin. The guests, thoroughly at their ease, ate and drank, and laughed and chattered with the joyous abandon of youth.

When they rose from the table it was a wreck. A spilt glass of claret cup made a bright stain on the white cloth; a disordered litter of broken food, nutshells, fruit skins, and empty glasses covered the table. Betty looked at it in dismay, but Freda and Julia dragged her upstairs, declaring that they were going to clear away with the other girls. The sitting-room was full, but the guests had eaten too heartily for further exertion, and they preferred to sit and talk. The party was beginning to flag. But Gus had the “white elephant” in reserve, and, one by one, he invited the men out to inspect it. The girls, pretending ignorance of this remarkable animal, teased their admirers on their return, commenting on the peculiar odour of this strange beast. But the zoologists well pleased with their visit, turned the conversation with a grin. Then the married ladies grew concerned at the late hour; their husbands consulted their watches.

“I must do something to keep them together till twelve,” said Gus, scratching his head.

But Walter had an idea. “Ask your uncle to play something.”

“More than my life's worth. Try him yourself,” said Gus.

To Walter's surprise, Mr. Wayside agreed instantly. But he turned to the Colonel with a mischievous look. "D'ye hear, Algy," he said, "I've offered to play something, if you'll sing?"

"Me sing!" cried the Colonel, aghast.

"Certainly, two old fools are better than one," said Peter.

"Well, sir, if you put it that way, I'm with you," retorted the Colonel. Two visits to the "white elephant" had warmed the cockles of his heart. He felt inclined to show these youngsters that they didn't possess all the talent. He walked to the piano and whispered to Betty. She seemed puzzled, and struck chord after chord till she found a suitable key. The Colonel stuck his thumbs in his waistcoat, and, facing the audience, beamed on them with the rakish air of the "Lion Comiques" of his youth. And he sang in a thin, husky voice:

"I'll relate to the public the cause of my woes,
For woes are hard blows, as everyone knows,
When love in your heart like a cauliflower grows,
And the gel don't care twopence for you.
This case it is mine, I am sorry to say,
Through a gel when I think of my heart heaves;
I taught her to dance in an exquisite way,
And sing twice as well as Sims Reeves."

Chorus.

"For she could dance like a fairy, and sing like a bird,
She could on my word, as I rather observed,
She doted on Leybourne, the man you all heard,
And now she's skedaddled from me."

The younger generation were silent and curious, surprised by this echo from a bygone time, and wondering at the humour of their fathers. And they listened with an air of patronage, comparing it with their smart modern songs. Then they applauded the Colonel heartily, and he felt that he had been the success of the evening. But Peter, jealous of his success, disappeared, and came back with a curious instrument in his hand. It was a one-string fiddle, made out of a cigar box to the order of a customer, and for the moment he was prouder of this bizarre toy than of his own violins. The guests shouted with laughter on seeing it, and, passing it from hand to hand, examined it curiously. Then Peter, holding it between his knees, began to play a simple, plaintive melody. They listened with mild interest, but the effect on the Colonel was remarkable. He stared at the player as if hypnotised; a sombre gleam came into his eye; he nodded his head to mark the time. The applause woke him from his trance.

"Peter, I never expected to hear that again," he cried; "I heard Chirgwin

sing that the night before I left London. Do you know the words?"

"No, you sing them, and I'll play," said Peter, softly.

The Colonel cleared his throat, and in a tremulous voice began to sing:

"I am but a poor, blind boy,
Still my heart is full of joy;
Though I never saw the light,
Or the flow'rs they call so bright,
I can hear the sweet bird sing,
And the wild bee on the wing:
Bird and bee and summer wind,
Sing to me because I'm blind."

Chorus.

"They love me, yes, they love me,
And to me they are so kind;
They love me, yes, they love me,
Because I am blind."

The two old men, carried away by their memories, had forgotten the audience. The plaintive melody had lifted the veil, and they were young again, with the world before them. This time the Colonel's success was genuine. The chant of the "Lion Comique" had lost its flavour, but the simple emotion of the minstrel song had still power to move the listeners.

But Gus was growing anxious. It was five minutes to twelve, and stepping to the piano, he commanded silence with a dramatic gesture. Betty played the opening bars. It was the popular bourgeois hymn to woman, comparing her with the angels, and dwelling on her capacity for rocking cradles. Everyone joined in the chorus, which rang out with a tremendous fortissimo:

"Wide as the world is her kingdom of power,
Love is her sceptre, her crown, and her dower,
In ev'ry heart she has fashioned her throne,
As Queen of the Earth she reigneth alone,
As Queen of the Earth she reigneth alone."

As the noise died away, Gus looked at his watch and cried: "Ladies and gentlemen, it's one minute past twelve. Many happy returns of the day to Cousin Betty." She rose from the piano, flushed with excitement, her eyes glistening with foolish tears, and swallowing at a curious lump in her throat. Walter never forgot his vision of her at that moment. The guests stood round her in a ring, and chanted their joyous refrain:

"For she's a jolly good fellow, for she's a jolly good fellow,

For she's a jolly good fellow, and so say all of us.
And so say all of us, and so say all of us,
For she's a jolly good fellow, and so say all of us."

It was the climax of the evening, and, hastily strapping their baskets, the guests took their leave. Walter alone lingered, but his way was made easy, for the others, taking him for Betty's lover, trooped up Elizabeth Street without delay, and Peter, suddenly developing a sixth sense, dived into the bedroom. Betty came to the gate. Walter stepped outside and closed it. Crystal Street was dark and silent, but he could see Betty's face in the faint light of the lamp at the corner.

"I shall never forget to-night," said Betty, "and I don't know how to thank you for putting my name on the Nocturne."

"I don't want thanks from you," said Walter; his voice was curiously husky.

"I didn't quite catch what you said," whispered Betty, bringing her face dangerously near.

For a moment they stared at each other in a profound silence, and then across the wooden rampart of propriety their lips met in a long, long kiss.

Chapter VIII: The Ordeal of Augustus.

A SOMBRE grey sky of flying clouds was reflected in leaden tints in the puddles of the street, for it had rained in the night, and the streets were still wet. But the Colonel, watching for a break in the clouds with a shade of anxiety, decided to chance it, for he hated carrying an umbrella instead of the malacca cane. Setting his hat at the proper angle, and giving a last twirl to the famous moustaches, he opened the gate and stepped down Queen Street on his daily search for work, with the quick, alert step of an old soldier. But on his way he had to order the meat and vegetables, for his daughters found it cheaper to let him do their shopping. Mr. Knuckle, who had just washed away the taste of his breakfast with a pint of beer, greeted him with the respect due to an old soldier.

“And what can I do for you this morning, Colonel?” he said.

“Sir,” said the Colonel, with a flourish, “you can help me to recover my reputation as a connoisseur of mutton. That leg, sir, that I picked yesterday was a caution. It routed my daughters, and they retired in disorder, gnashing their teeth. Not that I complain, I have eaten worse at the end of a day's march, but judging by his leg, sir, that sheep dated from Waterloo; he belonged to the Old Guard.”

“But you picked it yourself, sir,” said Mr. Knuckle, uneasily.

“My mistake, sir, and I have paid for it. The women will have their say, you know, and this time I leave it to you.”

“Well, what about this shoulder? One and three; we'll call it a shilling, and forget the tough leg you picked yourself.”

“Sir, I have forgotten it already, and I wish you good-day”; and turning on his heels the Colonel marched out with military precision.

“A fine figure of a man,” said Mr. Knuckle to himself; “they say he's been through a fortune, and he orders a scrag of mutton as if he was buying the shop.”

The Colonel turned the corner, and stopped at the greengrocer's. Three times a week he called to order the vegetables, and three times a week Mrs. Casey turned hot and cold, losing control of her faculties for the moment, for she secretly adored the Colonel.

“Good morning, madam,” he said, with an elegant bow, “and how's the world using you?”

“Three meals a day an' me bed, sorr; annybody can see that he's only

licked his face instid of washin' it; sure he'll think we're a lot of dirty pigs." In her confusion she had caught sight of her youngest son, Micky, grinning round the corner.

The Colonel, who was aware of her agitation and the cause, discreetly studied the prices of the vegetables.

"And what can you recommend to-day?" he asked, after a pause, turning the full battery of his aristocratic features and drooping moustaches on the flustered shopkeeper.

"I can't deceive ye, sorr, the beans is a bit stringy, but the peas is that young an' tinder they milt in yer mouth."

"Not another word, Mrs. Casey," cried the Colonel, "or I shall buy the shop outright. I'm sure the peas are like yourself. So make it half a peck, and Micky shall take them home for me," and with another bow he was gone.

Mrs. Casey, who had been left a widow with four children, some bad debts, and a portrait of Mr. Casey in oils, blushed like a girl as she watched his retreating figure.

"The dear mahn, the dear mahn," she murmured; "a perfect gintleman, if iver there was one." And, filling the peck measure with peas, she emptied it into Micky's basket.

The Colonel, warmed by the humble adoration of Mrs. Casey, stepped smartly down Moncur Street, free for the day. Presently he caught sight of a figure which, in the distance, seemed to be his double. It was a man of his own age, with the same spare athletic figure. Even his suit bore a remarkable likeness to the Colonel's, which was not strange as they were made by the same tailor. The Colonel slackened his pace, and watched him with a curious attention. It was Judge Grantley, who lived on cat-and-dog terms with his wife, and convulsed the divorce court with his jokes on marriage. A dandy and a lady-killer, he affected grey to match his hair and side whiskers. As he came nearer he peered at the Colonel under his bushy eyebrows with a puzzled air. The suit seemed familiar, and, trying to place him, he bowed to the Colonel, convinced that he had met him at his club. The Colonel returned the bow with an elegant flourish, and, jingling a shilling and some odd coppers in his pocket, he marched on with his head an inch higher in the air, and a tremor of foolish pride in his heart. One gentleman had saluted another.

Five years ago the Colonel, in search of a cheap outfit among the Jews of Bathurst Street, had chanced on a cast-off suit of the judge's. Grey, slightly worn, but still fashionable, it had fitted him like a glove, and the dealer, struck by the coincidence, had agreed to give him the first pick of the judge's wardrobe. Since then the Colonel had dressed as a man of fashion, but always in grey. Sometimes he revolted from the monotonous colour. "But why grey, always grey?" he inquired, with a certain bitterness. "Is there no colour on God's earth but grey?"

The sun broke suddenly through the clouds, flying north like a routed army; the street glittered with silvery reflections in the puddles; in a moment there was a note of gaiety in the air. The Colonel was humming "Champagne Charley" between his teeth, when he ran into Betty at the corner of Elizabeth Street. It was evidently a morning of encounters.

"My dear Betty," he cried, "I might have known that I should meet a pretty girl when the sun began to shine. You look as fresh as the flowers in May."

"And you, too," replied Betty, astonished by his bright eye and air of vivacity; "you look as if someone had left you a fortune."

A sombre gleam came into the Colonel's eyes, but was gone in an instant.

"For an old fellow like me," he said, "there are greater gifts in this world than a fortune, Betty, and a smiling face is one of them. But where are you going so early?"

"I want to borrow Hilda's music-case; mine's too shabby. I'm going to Ricordi for my first lesson this afternoon."

"Good news, very good news; I shall expect you to astonish me in a month. Be good, you can't help being pretty." And humming a tune, the Colonel resumed his daily search for work with the air of a man stepping down to his club to meet a friend.

When Betty reached the academy, Julia ran to meet her with a scared look on her face.

"Come in, Betty," she cried. "I hardly know what I'm doing, we've had such a fright. I might have known something was going to happen when I spilt the salt yesterday, and a squinty-eyed man knocked at the door."

"Yes, but what's the matter?" cried Betty, in alarm.

"Gus has been jilted. Clara Manning threw him over last night, and he was going to commit suicide, but we hid his razor."

Betty was thunderstruck. "And where is he now?" she asked.

"He's in bed, dying for all I know. He wouldn't eat his breakfast. Fancy, he's never gone without his breakfast in his life before."

Betty was tremendously impressed by this, for Gus's appetite was the wonder and admiration of his friends.

"But I thought they made it up at the party?" she said.

"Yes, but that was only a blind. The mean, deceitful cat hated him all the time, and wanted to pay him out."

"And how did she do it?" said Betty.

"Gus took her to the Daffodil dance last night, and she had another fellow waiting for her, and danced with him all night. Then she turned on Gus in front of everybody, and said she hated the sight of him. And Gus wanted to fight the other man, and there was a terrible scene. He got home at two in the morning, raving like a madman. We've hardly had a wink of sleep, but he's quietened down now, and won't open his mouth. I

know what that means; his heart's broken."

Betty was silent, appalled by the treachery of the Manning girl. Then she remembered the Colonel's smiling, nonchalant face when she met him down the street.

"What did uncle say?" she inquired.

"He only laughed. Said Gus had been beaten at his own game, and advised him to chew a bullet or some such nonsense. He never takes Gus seriously; but this is serious, I can tell you. He's gone without his breakfast."

"Poor Gus, do you think he'll get over it?" said Betty.

"I don't know. I'm the only one that understands him in this house, and I've never known him to go without his breakfast before. I think we ought to send for the doctor."

"Do you think we could coax him?" said Betty.

"No, I've tried that. He just stares at you without a word. I cooked a special breakfast for him, and it's going to waste in the oven."

There was a swish of skirts on the staircase, and Hilda sauntered into the room, half-dressed.

"Hello, Betty," she cried, "heard all about the tragedy, I suppose?"

"Yes; what a horrible creature the Manning girl is," said Betty, surprised by Hilda's unconcern.

"Nonsense; she's done Gus a good turn, if he only knew it."

"But he may pine away and die," said Betty, full of romantic notions.

"I like that. Gus'll never pine away while he gets enough to eat," said Hilda, with a shrill, unpleasant laugh.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself," cried Julia, flushing with anger. "You know he went without breakfast this morning. He's heart-broken."

"Oh, give the breakfast a rest," cried Hilda, angrily. "Anyhow, Gus'll have to find his heart before he breaks it. He's had it all his own way up to now. How many girls has he thrown over? And when a girl turns round and gives him a dose of his own poison, you want to scratch her eyes out."

"And quite right, too," said Betty. "I don't think you should stick up for a girl who breaks her word, and makes a show of your brother in public."

"Who says I'm sticking up for her?" said Hilda, angrily. "I only said she'd given him a lesson he wanted badly, even if he is my own brother. When I was on the stage I learned more about men than you'll know in a life-time. Talk about the vanity of girls! The conceited puppies think you are in love with them if you only look at them and wonder why they have the nerve to walk about and breathe. Then they say their heart's broken, and make a song about it. You can't break the heart of a dishcloth. Then they go round till they find a woman who can hurt them, and they stick to her like grim death. You remember that, Betty; it may be useful some

day. How's your friend Blenkinsop getting on with that woman opposite?" she asked suddenly.

"He's taken to drink," said Betty, surprised at the turn of the conversation. "They brought him home in a cab the other night, and his wife thought he was dying till she smelt his breath."

"What did I say?" inquired Hilda, triumphantly. "That woman opposite made him sit up some time or other, and he'll go back to her, mark my words. His own wife's done nothing but coddle him, and now she'll pay for it."

"It sounds horrible. I don't believe you mean a word of it," cried Betty.

"Oh, don't I?" said Hilda. "I wasn't on the stage two years for nothing. Why do you think that Johnnie follows me about the streets? Because he thinks I've broken his heart. But I forgot. Betty knows all about men, now she's got a boy."

Betty coloured, and instantly the mark on her forehead became plainer, shaped like a crescent moon. "I'll thank you to leave Mr. Chippendale out," she cried; "he can do something more than follow me about like a pet lamb."

At this deadly thrust Hilda turned white with anger. She compressed her thin lips in an effort to think of a stinging retort. "He's like the rest, if you only knew it," she cried.

"How dare you say that?" cried Betty. "Anyhow, he's got too much pride to run after anyone who doesn't want him."

"Here you two," said Julia, white with anxiety, "don't go quarrelling with Gus at death's door, and his breakfast still in the oven."

"Oh, Lord, that breakfast!" said Hilda; "if you mention it again, I'll go and eat it myself, or Betty can get Mr. Chippendale to set it to music, and Gus can sing it."

Betty smiled, her sudden anger forgotten. "You said you'd eat all the music he wrote, didn't you?"

"I did, but don't rub it in, Betty. I know when I've made a mistake. He's worth a hundred of the fellows that hang round the theatre. But don't you believe all he tells you."

"I don't," said Betty, turning scarlet.

Julia stared at her and giggled, forgetting Gus for the moment. "I'd like to be a little mouse, and hear all that goes on when uncle's in the workshop," she cried. "I'd have a fine tale——"

There was a sudden bump on the floor of the bedroom overhead, and she stopped and listened. Someone was walking about in a hurry.

"He's getting up," she cried, pale with excitement.

They could hear the drawers in the dressing-table being opened and shut with a loud slam. Gus was not sparing the furniture in his grief.

"He's looking for his razor, and we hid it," cried Julia. "He's going to kill Clara Manning; the papers are full of murders and suicides. Oh, what

shall we do?"

"Don't be a fool," said Hilda.

Presently the bedroom door opened and Gus slowly descended the stairs. The dandy was a figure of tragic grief; his clothes had been thrown on with a pitchfork; his face was drawn, haggard, and unshaven. He walked like the chief mourner at a funeral. Betty and Julia stared in silence, fascinated by the ravages of passion. A woman had done this. Love could be cruel as death. At the bottom of the stairs he stopped, and stared at the girls with a lack-lustre eye. There was a profound silence in the room. Then the victim of love spoke.

"Where's my breakfast, Julia?" he asked, irritably. "Get a move on; I'll never get to work to-day at this rate."

Hilda burst into an hysterical peal of laughter. Gus scowled, annoyed by her want of reverence, and turned to the kitchen.

"Wait a minute, Gus," cried Julia, "and I'll make you some fresh tea."

Hilda mopped the tears from her eyes, still tittering.

"Well, there's an end to that tragedy, thank goodness," she said. "He'll buy a new song on Saturday with something about death in it; but mind you, I wasn't as game as I pretended to be, because this is the biggest knock Gus has ever had."

"And do you think he's all right now?" asked Betty.

"Yes, but I wasn't sure till he asked for his breakfast."

"Well, I must be going," said Betty. "I'd clean forgotten what I came for. Lend me your morocco case, Hilda. I'm going to Ricordi this afternoon, and mine's too shabby."

"So you're going to Ricordi at last?" said Hilda, in surprise.

"Yes; it's through Mr. Chippendale," said Betty, flushing. "He talked to father like a Dutch uncle about my playing, and father took it like a lamb. He told me yesterday that he had been to see Ricordi, and that I was to go and be tested to-day."

"Oh, so Mr. Walter's got a tongue in his head, has he?" said Hilda. "But what's this about being tested? Surely you can play well enough for him, if Da Costa taught you?"

"Oh, that'll only be a matter of form," said Betty, with the valour of ignorance. "I'm only afraid he'll have his knife into me for leaving the orchestra."

"I never did understand why you left it in such a hurry," said Hilda, looking at her sharply. "I guessed you'd been flirting."

"Flirting!" said Betty, innocently. "You know what father is."

As Betty walked home, she considered the events of the morning. She thought with disgust of the Manning girl and her treachery. What had Gus ever seen in that girl, all paint and powder. Surely men had got eyes. She found that her pity for Gus was tempered with a certain suspicion. That was not the way heroes died for love in the olden time. And Hilda

said that you must break a man's heart before he loved you. She didn't believe that. And yet Hilda was as sharp as a needle. What a blessing she knew nothing about Paoli. There was uncle, too. When Gus was jilted, he only laughed; and yet he was greatly disturbed by the Blenkinsop affair. He said that woman ought to be court-martialled and drummed out of the street. So there were two ways of looking at these things. And she had pitied Gus, and despised Mr. Blenkinsop. She looked anxiously at the sky. Clouds were coming up again from the south. There was every promise of a wet afternoon.

Chapter IX: Ricordi Gives a Lesson.

WITH half-an-hour to spare Betty stepped down King Street swinging Hilda's morocco music-case in her hand. As a magnet draws inferior metal, the men's eyes had turned to her as she passed them, and by that she knew that she was looking her best. But when she reached George Street, she stopped and stared intently in a chemist's window. This was not because she felt ill, but that the mirrors, placed at an angle, gave an excellent view of her blue cloth dress trimmed with velvet, and the felt hat that matched the colour of her eyes. Doubtful of her reception by Ricordi, she had determined to wear her latest toilette, and then a smart shower at lunch time had brought her heart into her mouth. But the sky had cleared while Peter was growling over his hurried lunch. Harassed by the thought of being late, she turned from the mirrors and reached Jarling's Buildings twenty minutes too soon.

The narrow lane separating the studios from the music-shop was still wet with the morning rain, for the Buildings, rising like cliffs overhead, shut out the sun. She crossed the lane and stood for a moment, forgetting the proper entrance. And instantly a curious medley of sound broke on her ears from the windows overhead. It was a musical Tower of Babel. A light tenor voice repeated a phrase incessantly, a piano solo ended suddenly with three tremendous fortissimo chords, a flute trilled to the top of the scale, a long cadenza on the violin was lost in the noise of scales on another piano played at lightning speed. The students were at work. Betty listened with a curious pleasure, as a singing bird listens to its mates. She, too, would be one of them if she pleased Ricordi.

The noise ended when she entered the lift, and she was carried to the top floor. She walked along a narrow corridor, lined with studios like ship's cabins, looking for Ricordi's name. Here, the babel of sound was deadened by green baize doors, but she heard the flute again in a melancholy cadence, like the wind among autumn leaves. It sent a chill to her heart, and she thought of Paoli. She came back to the lift, convinced that she was on the wrong floor. Then she saw Ricordi's name at the top of a narrow staircase. She walked up and sat in the waiting-room, nervously fingering Hilda's morocco case, her courage in her boots.

She could hear voices in the studio; Ricordi was giving a lesson. She wondered if he were still angry with her for leaving the orchestra, and

thought again of Paoli. The opening chords of a song caught her ear; it was a song of Lassen's that Gus had tried in vain to shout. Then someone began to sing, and her nerves thrilled with pleasure at the exquisite quality of the voice. The words struck on her ears, and she seemed to be listening to a declaration of love through the closed door.

“When thy sweet eyes of azure
Gaze, dearest one, on me,
They bring me such visions of rapture,
Silent my lips must be!
Of thy sweet eyes of azure
I think all things above;
And naught in my heart can enter
But dreams of delight and love.”

She wondered who the singer was; if he really loved a girl with blue eyes; what he would think when he saw her. Then Ricordi interrupted harshly. The singer began again, repeating the phrases with increased energy and a note of passion. And as Betty sat listening, entranced by the caressing voice, the door opened suddenly and Ricordi was staring at her. He was a man of medium height, carelessly dressed, with dignified features, a powerful nose, and piercing eyes. A man of fifty, he was a crusty bachelor, living for his art and his pupils. The haughty, intellectual look relaxed as he stared at Betty.

“Ah, so you 'ave come, 'ave you?” he said. “One minute, and I will be ready.”

As he turned to the studio the singer came out. “Buon giorno; signor; I'll work that up for next day,” he said with a smile. He turned, still smiling, and saw Betty. The smile died away and he stared at the girl in amazement, like

Some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken.

Betty saw in a flash that he was dark, handsome, and well-dressed. His eyes were brown and velvety; his voice had the caressing sound that had caught her ear when he was singing. She flushed under the intensity of his gaze, as Ricordi beckoned her into the room.

“Your fader say you are vairey punctual,” he said.

“So I am,” said Betty with a nervous smile.

“Ah, as if de faders know anyting of de daughters,” said Ricordi with a shrug.

Betty went in, pulling nervously at her long, white gloves. Ricordi turned on her suddenly.

“Wat does dis mean?” he cried. “First you play de violin in my

orchestra, an' disappear. Den you come back to play de piano?"

"I played the violin because my father makes them," said Betty; "but I prefer the piano."

"Ah, dat is so. Your fader make de good violin, an' 'e 'as de good temper, vairey. 'E quarrel wid me because I say you no play de piano an' violin both. But we waste de time. Play me some scales."

Betty sat down at the Steinbach grand and ran her fingers over the keys. It was a pleasure to play on such an instrument. She began the scale, but never finished it, for Ricordi stopped her with a cry of pain and anger.

"Corpo di Bacco! Who did teach you?" he cried.

"Signor da Costa," said Betty, flushing angrily.

"Da Costa!" cried Ricordi, in surprise. "We were togedder at de conservatorium. He no teach you to poke de liddle finger in de air."

"No; but I've had no lessons since he died," said Betty.

"Ah, well, 'e was a great loss, but you need not poke your liddle finger at him in de skies."

Then followed a thorough and heart-breaking lesson on technique, Ricordi watching her fingers as a cat watches a mouse. And he pounced as a cat pounces when she made a mistake. Betty's confidence left her; she began to perspire. No one had ever found so much fault with her in all her life. Her pride and her dreams were in the dust. A crimson flush came over her cheeks; the crescent-shaped mark on her forehead showed plainly. Let her get out of this, she thought, and Ricordi would never see her again.

"An' now you must play for me at sight. Do you know this sonata of Beethoven?" he inquired.

"No," said Betty, shortly, and began to play.

"Ah, vairey good. I remember you could read well in my orchestra."

This first word of praise calmed the tumult in Betty like magic.

"An' now play a simple piece from memory, an' forget I was in de room." He turned his back, and stared at a diploma from Milan on the wall.

Betty pulled herself together with an effort. This was her first and last lesson, but she would show him that she could play before she went. Perhaps, she thought, with a childish rage, he would feel sorry some day for losing her. Her nerves had calmed suddenly, and she ran her fingers over the keys, drawing the sound from them with a caressing movement, and searching her mind for a piece that lay easily within her powers. And suddenly, conscious of her talent, and in full control of her powers, she began to play the Glück gavotte. With the first suave phrase she forgot Ricordi and the studio. She saw the spacious ballroom, the elegant ladies, painted, powdered, and stiff with brocade; the cavaliers in satin knee breeches, ruffles, and buckled shoes, leading their partners with stately

reverence, and bowing with the gravity of ambassadors. And she played to that vision of pride and beauty as if they were living things, with a caressing, delicate touch. She stopped, and looked round. Ricordi was still staring at the diploma. Then he turned and ran to her with volcanic gestures, his eyes glittering with pleasure.

“But, my child,” he cried, “you 'ave de grand talent. Dat was played in de spirit of de old time w'en dey did dance like ladies an' gentlemen. Dat is two Australians I 'ave found wid de divine gift. You will be a musical nation. I will teach you wid all my 'eart.”

And Betty, who had listened to his fault-finding with the fury of a spoilt child, collapsed suddenly at the words of praise. Her eyes filled with tears, her head drooped, and she wept silently.

“My God! w'at 'ave I done?” cried Ricordi, looking at her in dismay.

“I don't want your lessons. You're a brute. I hate you!” cried Betty, mopping her eyes with her handkerchief.

Ricordi's face flushed with anger, and for a moment Betty's fate hung in the balance. Then he shrugged his shoulders, and his face cleared.

“I am sorry I 'urt your feelin's,” he said, gently; “but I am as God made me. I can teach no odder way.”

“But you think I am too stupid,” cried Betty.

“Stupid! an' you surprise me, Ricordi, wid your playin'? Da Costa did teach you well, but you 'ave gone back in your practice. Six months for de technique, an' den de interpretation, an' I will bring you out wid my orchestra. But you must work for me tree 'ours a day, no less.”

Betty flushed with pride and pleasure, her anger and humiliation forgotten. Her dreams would come true at last. But Ricordi gave her a curious look.

“It is a peety you are so preety,” he said.

Betty flushed again at the back-handed compliment. “But I don't think so,” she said, smiling.

“No; but de young men will make lofe to you, an' you will tink of dem an' not of de divine Beethoven. You must not listen to dem, but break dere 'earts. Dat will be good for dem, an' you will play divinely for dere lost souls.” He smiled grimly.

Betty listened in surprise. That was the second time to-day she had been told that young men's hearts should be broken. And she had thought that lovers pined away and died of a broken heart. But Gus had certainly eaten his breakfast.

“An' now I will teach you the great Thalberg exercises, which are never printed, but handed down from one artist to anudder. Dis exercise you must play for tree minutes, no more, or you will paralyse de muscles of de arm, an' den farewell to de piano.”

Betty felt that Ricordi's eyes were fixed on her hands, which were supple and muscular, but slightly roughened by toil.

“You do work wid your 'ands?” he inquired.

Betty coloured. “I keep house for my father,” she said; “but we have a woman to scrub and wash.”

“Ah, dat is so; you are a good daughter. But you must take care of your 'ands. Dey will bring w'at you want most in dis world — mooch praise an' a leetle lofe.” He smiled with an enigmatic look in his eyes, and showed her to the door.

Betty crossed the narrow lane again and stood for a moment listening to the babel of musical sounds from the studios overhead. She would have liked to cry out to this busy crew that she was one of them; that she had astonished Ricordi; that she was his pupil. Instead, she walked through Jarling's with an air of importance. People were buying music at the counters, or booking seats for the theatre; musicians stood in groups, eyeing the women. She wondered if they had heard her play the gavotte. Then she saw the baritone who had sung of azure eyes in Ricordi's studio, standing near the door. He seemed to be waiting for someone, and gave her a long, discreet look as she came out. Betty flushed and turned her head, pleased by his admiration.

As she passed the G.P.O. she looked up at the windows, and wished she could tell Walter the good news. Her nerves were strung like fiddle-strings, her eyes shining like stars, and she decided to walk about the streets until she had cooled down. But she stared at the shops and the people without seeing them, busily rehearsing in her mind the triumphs to come. She came back to the Post Office at halfpast four, hoping to see Walter as he came out, and ran straight into Mr. Jacob Gidley, fresh from his office toilet, smart as a new pin. For a moment she felt annoyed, and then she smiled graciously on Jacob.

“Really, this is an unexpected pleasure,” he said, with an elaborate flourish, marvelling at her colour and her shining eyes. “You're quite a stranger; you've deserted town on Saturdays.”

“Yes; I'm very busy,” said Betty, with an air of importance. “I've gone to Ricordi for lessons.”

“Ah! Very interesting,” said Jacob. “You must tell me all about it. But first let me entreat you to take a cup of tea.”

Betty hesitated. She had evidently missed Walter, and a cup of tea would calm her nerves. She was conscious of an intense desire to tell someone of her good fortune. Jacob led the way into Major's tea-room, enchanted with his good luck. Betty took tea and cake, and Jacob, giving them an unfriendly look, ordered soda biscuits for himself, explaining to the waitress, who was not interested, that he drank nothing between meals.

“And now tell me all about it,” he said. He leaned with his elbows on the table as if they were discussing secrets, delighted at sitting with the prettiest girl in the room.

"I've just had my first lesson from Ricordi," said Betty. "It was a sort of test, because he will only take advanced pupils. And he said I astonished him, and he's going to bring me out with his orchestra."

"Then I hope I am the first to congratulate you," said Jacob.

"It means hard work; I've got to practice three hours a day."

Jacob gave a cry of horror. "Quite needless," he cried, "quite needless, as I proved to you before. Practise for ten minutes daily, each finger separately like this, and you will abolish that useless drudgery."

He beat upon the edge of the table with each finger rigid as if he were driving nails; but Betty's attention was distracted. Ricordi's other pupil, the baritone singer, walked in, and, calmly surveying the room, sat down at a table behind her. She flushed, and saw Jacob stare intently at the crescent-shaped mark on her forehead. And she smiled vaguely at him, without hearing a word he said, for she felt that the handsome singer was staring at her. Suddenly she turned to the huge mirror on the wall, and looked straight into his eyes; he was watching her reflection in the glass. Then Jacob's voice broke on her ears; he was just finishing a long speech.

"So, you see, I know all about Ricordi. I must warn you against these mountebanks. I consider I know quite as much about music as Ricordi; but I make no parade of my knowledge. I work for a living and I visit the barber. As I said, he has done nothing but fill my nephew's head with intolerable conceit."

"But Ricordi is a great artist; he's done more for music in Sydney than anyone," cried Betty, indignantly.

"Precisely," said Jacob, "an artist. That means he lives in idleness on the fat of the land, while we sweat for bread."

Betty had a ludicrous vision of Jacob, with his fishy eye and unruffled calm, writing at a desk, and Ricordi in a fine frenzy, coaxing and bullying his orchestra at rehearsal.

"But he nearly starved for years in Sydney because people didn't appreciate him," she cried.

"Then he's worse than I thought; he's a lunatic," said Jacob. "Why didn't he get a barrel-organ and a monkey? I'm told there are fortunes in them. But no; he calls himself an artist, and will starve rather than work for a living. I have no patience with these foreigners."

"I'm afraid I must be going," said Betty, annoyed by the conversation. She turned to pick up her music-case, and encountered the ardent gaze of the handsome baritone. He turned his head with a careless air, but Betty felt his eyes on her till she reached the door.

As they walked up King Street to the tram Jacob turned to her. "Oh, Miss Wayside, I am interested in a little dance that is being got up for a most deserving charity in the Redfern Town Hall. It will be really very select, and if you have nothing else to do you would confer a favour on me by accepting my escort to it."

Betty froze instantly. She had a vision of her father's face if she accepted.

"I'm very much obliged to you, but I shall be very busy for the next week or two," she said.

"But there's plenty of time; it's a fortnight today," said Jacob, eagerly.

"What, the fifteenth?" said Betty, greatly relieved. "I'm sorry, but I'm booked for that night."

"Ah, indeed?" said Jacob, polite but sceptical.

"Yes; my cousins are giving a plain and fancydress Cinderella, and I shall be playing for them. It's in Woollahra, and most of my friends are going."

"Why, that will do as well," said Jacob, brightening; "put me down for two tickets, and give one to Miss Miller with my compliments. If I should not see you before, the Account Branch, G.P.O., will find me."

"But what about your other dance?" said Betty.

"That will be all right. I don't believe in charities," said Jacob, calmly, as he put her into the tram. She looked out and found herself staring into the eyes of the baritone singer, who was standing on the footpath. He looked away with a careless air.

"Now, that's odd," thought Betty. "How did he get up here in such a hurry? He must be waiting for a friend." But in her heart she knew that she had made another conquest, and that the blue dress suited her to perfection. She wondered idly what Mr. Gidley's nephew was learning from Ricordi. What an absurd old man to talk like that! But Julia and Hilda would be pleased to know that she had sold two tickets. She sat in the car with a dreamy expression in her eyes, a picture of youth and beauty, and in five minutes she had made a fair estimate of the materials, the taste and social standing of the wearer, the cut, style, and probable cost of all the dresses within eyesight.

Chapter X: Centennial Park.

WINTER had come with a rush in July, with gales from the south-east, and for a week Sydney had been drenched with rain. By Sunday the gale had blown itself out, and the day had broken fine and clear. The sun shone with a summer heat, and the people, enchanted by a cloudless blue sky, sauntered through the streets to stretch their limbs. About four o'clock in the afternoon Walter turned into Crystal Street. It was his first visit in the daylight, and he looked at the cottage with surprise. The years had slowly marked their passage in blisters on the painted front; the veranda gaped with ancient cracks; the glamour of night was gone. The yellow blind was drawn to shield the famous 'cello from the rays of the sun; there was no sign of life. He wondered if Betty were at home; if she would be annoyed at his unexpected visit. He knocked at the door, and the yellow blind moved slightly. Then Betty opened the door and shut it behind him quickly.

"So it's you," she said, in surprise.

"Yes; I wanted to see you," said Walter, simply.

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing; I wanted to see you."

He blinked as he spoke, and Betty noticed that he was pale and haggard.

"But you look ill."

"That's nothing," he said, irritably; "but I can't get on with the 'Ballad.' I went to bed at daylight."

A wave of maternal pity swept through Betty. He had come to her for comfort in his distress as a child runs to its mother. She touched his arm with an air of solicitude, and the next moment was seized in a passionate embrace and kissed full on the lips. Taken unawares, Betty resisted with a gasp of indignation, and then, yielding to the domination of the male, she hid her burning cheeks against his coat. For many a day she remembered the rough texture of Walter's coat, and a faint odour of benzine where Mrs. Brittle had been at work. She pushed him gently away, and they stared at each other as if they had committed a crime. Betty began to talk rapidly to hide her emotion.

"Come down and see dada," she said, "and mind what you say; he's in a vile temper. He got his lines ready to go fishing this morning and then a knock came at the door. It was Mr. Nugent come all the way from

Newcastle for his fiddle, and he wouldn't go away till dada promised to have it done by five o'clock."

"So he's working?" said Walter.

"No; he hasn't touched it. He's sitting in the kitchen waiting to go out; but he's afraid of running into Mr. Nugent."

They found Peter in the kitchen, wearing his hat and coat as if he were going a journey, and reading the Sunday newspaper. His fishing lines, neatly wound on strips of cork, lay in a row. A small basket full of bait filled the room with a faint odour of the seaside.

"How do, my lad?" said he, with a curt nod; "this used to be a free country, but a man can't go fishing nowadays without a fellow pestering him for his fiddle. He gets drunk and sits on it, and expects you to work day and night to mend it for him."

In his fury Peter forgot to mention that he had kept the instrument for three months without touching it, intending to mend it when he was in the humour.

"Well, why don't you give him his fiddle and let him go?"

"What! and lose a two-guinea job? You must think I am made of money."

He frowned at Walter and noticed his haggard looks.

"What's the matter, my lad?" he inquired.

"I didn't get to bed till daylight," said Walter; "I'm scoring the 'Bush Ballad' for Ricordi, and I'm stuck."

Peter looked concerned. "You're overdoing it, my lad," he said. "Take Betty for a walk round the park and clear the cobwebs out of your brain."

Betty listened in astonishment. It was the first time on record that her father had invited a young man to take her out. Since the affair of Paoli he had kept her admirers at bay by the simple process of telling their fortunes from the security of the veranda in a voice loud enough for the neighbours to hear. Walter, on account of his musical talent and his knowledge of violins, was the first young man that he had not considered a prowling wolf and a lunatic.

"Betty, go and get your hat," he continued, "and see if that fellow's hanging about. Not that it matters now, the fish have stopped biting."

Betty ran up the steep and slippery staircase to her bedroom.

"Which movement are you working on?" inquired Peter.

"The third and last," said Walter. "It's night in the bush, and the cry of the curlew comes out of the darkness. I want a semiquaver figure for the violins, varied and repeated throughout the movement. That finishes the suite."

"And what are the others?" said Peter.

"Dawn, the wind among the gum trees, and the laughing jackass. Ricordi nearly had a fit when he heard that. Then noon, with a herd of cattle, and the drovers singing as they ride behind."

“Were you ever in the bush?” said Peter.

“I was born there.”

“Well, the nearest I ever got to the bush was National Park, and if that's the bush, Paddington is good enough for me,” said Peter.

Walter laughed, and looked at his watch, and that reminded Peter. “What the devil's Betty doing?” he asked, irritably.

The answer to his question was Betty herself, as she stepped on to the landing at the top of the stairs, radiant in the blue dress and hat that matched the colour of her eyes. Flushed and smiling, she held Walter's eyes like an exquisite flower. They slipped out by the side passage for fear of the obstinate customer; but Maria Redding was too quick for them, and calling her mother, the pair watched them from their high veranda until they turned the corner into Elizabeth Street, leaving Maria with another grievance to nurse. The sight of Betty and Walter reminded her of her only love affair, which had ended abruptly when the young man, developing religious mania, had caused some embarrassment in the street by kneeling on the door-mat and praying in a loud voice for Maria and her mother.

The streets had the subdued, lifeless air peculiar to Sunday. The residents sat at their ease on the balconies and verandas in their slippers, reading the Sunday newspapers. Others, stiffly conscious of their best clothes, walked towards Oxford Street with the leisurely air of people who are going nowhere. Suddenly Betty nudged Walter.

“There's Mr. Blenkinsop, the man I was telling you about,” said Betty.

As they passed, Walter stared curiously at his face, with its unhealthy pallor and weary eyes. He walked with a dejected air, dragging his feet with an effort.

“Well, he doesn't look very pleased with himself,” said Walter; “and you say he's drinking like a whale. I think that's a good sign. He's dosing himself with whisky to drive that woman out of his mind. Where's his wife?”

“At home, minding the children, I suppose.”

“And where's the other woman?”

“Sitting on her veranda, as usual. She watches him like a cat watching a mouse. I suppose she saw him go out.”

When they reached Centennial Park the Sunday promenade was in full swing. Couples sauntered along the asphalt paths, stopping to admire the flower beds and ornamental ponds. A brass band, playing popular airs, had drawn a crowd round the kiosk. Every stage of flirtation and courtship was there. Boys and girls from Sunday school, shy and awkward, fearing ridicule; couples who had known each other for half-an-hour, talking with the stiff constraint of strangers; accepted lovers, who chose the remote seats, and scowled at intruders; married people, who had safely weathered the first years of marriage, with children

playing about them. Motors and motor-cycles, sulkies, buggies, and dogcarts raced and trotted round the four-mile circuit of the huge park.

Betty, who knew the park as she knew the back of her hand, led the way to the ponds. The sky was of an exquisite blue, and cloudless. It was warm with the warmth of a summer day. Ducks were diving and swimming on the surface of the shallow lakes, which reflected the trees and water-weeds like a mirror. They sat on a seat overlooking the ponds.

"I've found a title for the Nocturne," said Walter, suddenly. "I'm going to call it 'The Night Walk,' and I want a crescent moon on the cover."

"Why?" said Betty.

"Because of that mark on your forehead."

Betty coloured, and the mark became plainer.

"That's the mark of the goddess Diana, and I met you on a moonlight night."

"But I'm not Diana," said Betty.

"No; you're Betty Wayside, the girl I've been looking for all my life," said Walter, with sudden energy.

Betty flushed again and was silent. It was not the first declaration of love that she had heard. Mr. Wayside's vigilance had gone for nothing with the love-sick youths of her acquaintance, who had stammered out their declaration in the interval of crossing the street, or waiting for a tram. And she had always listened to them with amused tolerance, as if they had complained of the toothache. But the abrupt energy of this strange young man alarmed her. She felt that it would be no trifling matter for someone. A virginal instinct warned her that here was the possible conqueror. She adroitly changed the subject.

"I'm afraid that mark is not so romantic as it looks," she said, with an awkward laugh; "that was done by the neck of a broken bottle when I was a child."

"Why," said Walter, in surprise, "how did it happen?"

"You know the stairs going down to the kitchen? I fell from the top to the bottom when I was five, and mother tried to save me, and fell too. She broke her ankle and limped for the rest of her life, and I got this mark from a piece of glass bottle. So you see my lad, you're mistaken."

She coloured, and bit her lip. She had called him "my lad" like her father, and the words sounded curiously intimate. They were both shy of speech, but acutely conscious of the unspoken thoughts. She began to talk rapidly to hide her confusion.

"But tell me how you are getting on with the 'Ballad.' "

"I'm on the last movement, and I'm stuck. I can't get the phrase I want. It goes like this." He hummed a few notes. "That's wrong; I want a semiquaver figure for the strings while the woodwind——"

He stopped suddenly. Fire and energy leaped into his weary eyes, and he thrust his head forward in the manner of one listening. There was

intense silence, and Betty could hear the brass band playing tum-ti-ti-tum in the distance. Suddenly he began to hum and whistle to himself. He rubbed his forehead with a swift, automatic movement, evidently unconscious of his actions. Betty, fascinated by this extraordinary behaviour, was alarmed lest anyone should see him; but, fortunately, the other couples were too busy to observe them. Now he was humming and muttering to himself in a tumult of emotion. His body rocked with a rhythmical movement. Presently he stopped and stared at Betty like a man in a dream. Then he pulled himself together with an effort.

"I've got it!" he cried, joyously; "I've been waiting weeks for that. Listen!" And he hummed a phrase. "That's the cry of the curlew. It's given out by the oboe, and repeated by all the woodwind in turn. And now I've got the theme for the violins."

Betty looked disappointed. These disjointed notes conveyed nothing to her. Walter saw the look, and cried impatiently: "But can't you hear the muted strings rising and falling? It's night, the clouds are gathering, and a light wind is coming up. At first it's still as death, and out of the darkness comes this desolate cry," and he hummed it again. "Wait till I get it on paper, and then you'll see." His excitement had died away; he was quite normal.

"What were you doing when you were rocking about and making those noises?" said Betty.

Walter smiled. "I could hear the orchestra playing the third movement of my suite, and I was helping it out. The noise of the wind rising and falling among the gum trees, that's superb. You did that; you stimulate me; I could move mountains with your help."

"How wonderful," said Betty, her eyes shining at the compliment; but she had a chilling sensation that he had forgotten her existence while the frenzy was on him.

The sun was setting, and she turned to watch the golden reflections on the placid surface of the ponds. She found herself staring at a couple in a secluded corner on the other side of the pond. The figure of the man seemed familiar to her, and she looked again.

"Why, that's Mr. Blenkinsop," she cried, turning to Walter, "and that's the woman opposite he's talking to."

"Well, he doesn't seem to be enjoying himself."

The man and woman seemed unconscious of their surroundings. And they talked with the rapid intensity of people discussing a question of life and death. The sun disappeared behind a belt of cloud that had risen in the west. In an instant the air turned colder, and the loungers began to saunter to the gates.

"This is a crisis," said Walter. "That man is between the devil and the deep sea."

"Listen, listen!" said Betty impatiently, forgetting that she could hear

nothing but the honk-honk of motors and the cries of children playing behind the curtain of reeds and bushes.

“Don't you think his wife ought to be told?” said Betty.

“Well, this game's new to me, and I don't know the rules; but it's certainly hard luck for her,” replied Walter.

Betty heard a rapid step near her, and, turning, gave a gasp of amazement and horror. It was little Mrs. Blenkinsop, staring with the face of a suicide at the gesticulating couple opposite. She walked to the edge of the pond, saw her mistake, and made a circuit of the bushes which skirted the edge. She was evidently going to join the party opposite.

“By Jove! this is going to be the fifth act of a tragedy,” said Walter. “I wouldn't miss it for worlds.”

“Take me away,” said Betty, with a shudder, “there's going to be murder.”

“Nonsense,” he said, drawing her to him; “this is life, the thing you hear about and never see. I'll tell you when to shut your eyes if there's any knifing.”

Mrs. Blenkinsop, who had made the circuit of the pond under cover of the bushes, appeared suddenly before the pair on the seat. As they looked up in astonishment she planted herself before her husband and pointed to the woman. Then she turned to Mr. Blenkinsop, flung out her arms with a dramatic gesture, and seemed to ask a question. He shook his head in denial.

“Here's a woman fighting for her home and family,” cried Walter, trembling with excitement. “She's fighting for her right to be Mrs. Blenkinsop and get her husband's dinner ready, for her right to live in the commonplace little circle where destiny has planted her, for her right to go to bargain sales and decorate her house with cheap ornaments. It seems mean and paltry enough if you don't look at it the right way; but I could make grand opera out of it.”

While he was speaking the little woman threw up her hands with a tragic gesture of appeal to the unseen powers. Then her hands dropped listlessly to her side. The battle was lost, and she turned to go. A thrill ran through Betty. But the other woman, secure of victory, yawned with an insolent pretence of boredom. The effect on Mrs. Blenkinsop was magical. She straightened like a steel spring, stepped forward, and slapped her rival on the cheek. She jumped to her feet, and Mrs. Blenkinsop faced her as David faced Goliath. The man stared at his wife, dumb with astonishment, and for a moment the three figures stood motionless. People were sauntering along the paths, unconscious of the drama being played out in the angle of the bushes. The woman opposite looked at the man, saw the expression on his face, and with a shrug of the shoulders walked rapidly away. This broke the spell. Mr. Blenkinsop

seized his wife's arm and led her gently along the edge of the pond. He walked with a quick, alert step, as if he had dropped an intolerable burden. His wife, clinging to his arm, stared in front with shining eyes, seeing nothing. Betty could tell by her mouth that she was holding back the tears.

"Won't she have a good cry when she gets home?" said Betty; but she was mistaken. For at that moment little Mrs. Blenkinsop turned suddenly to her husband and buried her face in his waistcoat, her body shaking with convulsive sobs. He drew her into the shelter of the bushes and patted her on the back, mumbling endearments. They were still married.

Betty stared at them in silence. People behaved like that on the stage; but they were actors, and this was Mr. and Mrs. Blenkinsop, who lived in Crystal Street. Her thoughts were interrupted by Walter.

"There you are," he cried; "that man has just remembered why he married his wife. That's the tragedy of marriage. You marry for love and then forget why you did it till something happens."

"You talk as if you had been married," said Betty.

"No, I haven't; but I've done the same as you — stared at married people and wondered."

"How did you know that?" said Betty, in surprise.

"I know a lot of things I'm not supposed to know, and that's why I shall never marry."

"Oh," said Betty, conscious of a sudden chill, "and what will you do if you fall in love?"

"I've done that already, Miss Wayside, if you care to know, but——"

"Are you coming back to tea?" asked Betty, changing the subject.

"No; I'd like to, but I must get on with the 'Ballad.' I've got the violin part, thanks to you."

"All right," said Betty, conscious of further disappointment; "but don't forget the dance on Wednesday."

"I'll call for you at half-past seven. Just look at that sky."

The sun dropped suddenly below the belt of cloud in the west into a clear space of sky, flooding the horizon with celestial fire and the splendour of gold. And separated from this sudden conflagration by the belt of leaden cloud, now rimmed with fire, the upper reaches of the sky turned to a more exquisite blue, diluted with light, tranquil as a dream. And as they wondered at its splendour, the golden haze below changed to old gold, deepened to molten red, and then faded swiftly to sombre grey.

Chapter XI: Plain and Fancy.

BETTY walked down King Street on her way to Ricordi's studio with some misgiving in her mind. The preparations for the plain and fancy dress ball had interfered with her practice, and she wondered if Ricordi would notice it. She walked through Jarling's music shop, and, listening for a moment to the medley of sound in the lane, took the lift to the top floor. With her mind still running on the dance, she walked into the waiting-room before she saw that it was occupied. It was the baritone singer whose lesson came before hers, and who managed to cross her path on the way to the tram after each lesson. He rose as she stood in the doorway and smiled in a friendly manner. Betty coloured and felt awkward, wondering what it meant.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "I think you take the lesson after mine?"

"Yes, I do," said Betty, in confusion. "What is the matter?"

"I don't know, but I've been waiting here for nearly an hour and there's no sign of the signor. I think he must be ill."

"Oh, thank you," said Betty, secretly pleased that the lesson was put off. "I'll come back in half-an-hour."

"Won't you sit down? You look tired," said the baritone with his caressing voice. "Ricordi is sure to come for your lesson; you're more important than I am."

Betty coloured, surprised at the audacious compliment; but the stranger laughed with a frank, engaging smile.

"I suppose I shouldn't tell you, but I stay behind every lesson to hear you play."

Betty coloured again, and felt his eye fixed on the tiny scar on her forehead. She was rarely timid with young men, but the sound of his caressing voice and the flattery in his eye charmed and embarrassed her.

"Ricordi would be furious if he knew," he continued; "but I heard you play the Glück gavotte at your first lesson. I may be wrong, but I simply can't hear such playing in Sydney. I'm sure you have a great career before you."

Betty was annoyed by his assurance, but he had said what she secretly believed herself, and it tickled her vanity.

"I should like to believe you," she said, "but I don't possess all the talent. I think you have a remarkable voice."

"Oh, yes, the voice is all right," he replied, hiding his gratified vanity

under a pretence of indifference; "but Ricordi will tell you it's only big enough for a drawing-room. That's my tragedy. However, I only sing for amusement."

There was a rapid step outside, and Ricordi walked into the room. His face was haggard, and he looked ten years older. He gave the baritone a quick, suspicious look.

"I cannot teach to-day," he said, abruptly. "My 'eart is desolate; I 'ave lost an old friend. I am sorry I keep you waiting, but de shock did make me forget. We did sit down to lunch, an' laugh, an' talk. Of a sudden 'e did trow up 'is 'ands to 'is face an' 'e was dead." He illustrated his meaning by rapid gestures with his hands. "Something in de brain snap like de string of a piano. Miss Wayside, I will give you a lesson on Saturday afternoon. Mr. Goddard, your lesson do not matter. I will make it up annuder time. One minute, 'e laugh an' talk, an' den, like dat," he snapped his fingers, "'e was dead!"

Betty and the stranger went down in the lift together.

"Ricordi seems cut up, doesn't he? I wonder who it was?" he said. "By the way, did you see how he put me in my place? Any time will do for my lesson; but I bear him no grudge. I'm only an amateur, and it's a great favour for him to teach me at all."

They walked through Jarling's, but at the door Betty hesitated and stopped. The baritone noticed this, and with a subtle instinct changed his tone. "By the way, I was forgetting that I am a stranger to you, but I felt that Ricordi had introduced me in a sort of manner. My name's Frank Goddard, and I know you're Miss Wayside. I'll get him to introduce me properly next time."

His air of assurance angered Betty. "I am afraid I don't remember being introduced to you, Mr. Goddard," she said, coldly, "and you must excuse me; I'm in a great hurry."

She walked away with her chin in the air, and the baritone watched her out of sight with a curious smile on his face. Betty thought it over carefully in the tram. She felt pleased that she had snubbed him, and then an uneasy feeling came over her that she had acted like a fool. He looked like a gentleman, and he had only said what he thought of her playing. Still he must learn that Betty Wayside was a touch above the ordinary girl.

It was the thought of the dance that put him out of her mind at last. She had enough to think about. It had been a week of excitement and bustle, for the annual dance for friends and pupils in the Oddfellows' Hall brought in a good part of the Fitzroy's income. Gus, after brooding on death and Clara Manning for a week, had been persuaded to come to the ball. Betty wondered what the fancy dresses would be like. She was wearing her plain cream satin as she had to take her turn at the piano, Hilda was going as a ballet girl in one of her stage dresses to save

expense, and Julia had made an overdress of art muslin for five shillings to hide a coffee stain on her frock.

The Colonel went about with an air of mystery, after paying many furtive visits to his friend, Isaacstein, in Bathurst Street. Freda was working day and night on her costume, and answered questions with a grin. Jacob had written to Freda, offering to call for her with a cab at nine o'clock as was his custom, but, as Freda said, that was no use to her. "I reckon it's waste of time reading about the early bird and the worm, and then getting there an hour late. So he's coming straight to the hall and I'm keeping two dances for him. Not that they'll dance me off my legs, anyway."

Betty, with one eye on the clock, set the tea early. Mr. Wayside complained bitterly of the cold meat, which he considered an insult to his stomach in such weather, and went grumbling off to the workshop. As Betty was giving the final pats to her hair, the gate clicked, and Walter and Freda walked in together. Betty looked at her friend in surprise, with a sudden spasm of envy. Nothing was left of Freda but her grin. She wore a short, red skirt, showing her neat ankles to great advantage, an orange-coloured apron, a laced stomacher with a white muslin bodice, a saucy red cap, and long coral earrings. She carried a small basket with three oranges, and explained that she was an Italian fruit-seller. Walter stared at her in astonishment, then his eye travelled to Betty; and in an instant he had forgotten Freda's existence.

She was white and virginal like a nymph of the forest seen in a moonlit glade. The white satin dress followed the exquisite curves of her body and gave a hint of the compelling beauty of her youthful figure. Silk stockings, satin shoes, and a band of black velvet round her throat completed the costume. And as he stood, wondering at her beauty, Betty looked at him with a pang of disappointment. Gus had lent him his dress suit, and it hung loosely on him, as clothes hang on a man after a long illness. His air of distinction was gone; he looked like a waiter. The three walked to Queen Street and reached the hall on the stroke of eight.

Their tickets were taken at the door by one of the pupils dressed in a costume of his own designing. He had sewn the front pages of the daily papers on his best suit, and rustled like autumn leaves at every movement. He gave them a sheepish grin, secretly proud of himself, and Freda giggled. The hall was filling rapidly with a motley crew in costumes hired from the shops, fancy dresses contrived out of coloured remnants, evening dresses and best Sunday suits. And they stared at each other, surprised at the choice of costumes that betrayed the secret vanity of the wearer.

As they crossed the hall to the cloak room a strange figure rose from the piano and welcomed them with a stiff military salute. It was the Colonel, but the Colonel transformed. He was wearing the uniform of a

regiment that was known only to Isaacstein of Bathurst Street — a scarlet tunic that fitted him like a corset, trousers that made him seem all leg like a native companion, and a round cap like a pill-box over his left ear. To this warlike costume he had added a swagger cane and an eyeglass. He stuck the eyeglass in his eye and surveyed them with admiration.

“My dear Betty,” he cried, “if you were not alive I should say you were made of Dresden china; and you, Miss Miller, have come out in your true colours at last, and they become you admirably. I shall chaffer with you for an orange before the night is out.”

The girls, pleased by the facile compliments, giggled, and, turning, found Gus surveying them with a gloomy air. He was dressed from head to foot in black, with an inky cloak thrown over his shoulder, and a dagger in his belt. Years ago he had seen Alfred Dampier play Hamlet, and with a vague idea that Ophelia had jilted the gloomy prince, he had decided to wear black, talk daggers, and show the women that he had done with them. He saluted Betty and Freda coldly, and turned to Walter.

“How do, old boy?” he said; “it goes against my grain to be here; but we have to keep the show going somehow. I see you got into the suit.”

“Yes; it fits where it touches,” said Walter, with a wry smile.

But it was time to begin, and the Colonel sat down at the piano. The young men were standing in groups; the girls were sitting along the wall and judging every new arrival with eyes sharpened on bargain sales. Bubbles of laughter, odds and ends of conversation, and titters of envious surprise rose above the confused murmur in the hall. The Colonel began to play a waltz, and the gentlemen, with the aid of Gus, selected their partners. Hilda and Julia, putting business before pleasure, selected two awkward pupils and took them round. Freda, in her costume of striking colours, was snapped up in a moment. Betty smiled at Walter, and advancing cautiously on the slippery floor he placed his arm lightly on her waist. And holding her as if she were something precious and fragile, he danced with his heart in his mouth, feeling the treacherous floor slipping from under his feet. They collided with another couple, and Walter, whose head was swimming, held on to Betty for support. Seeing his distress, she discovered that her shoe lace was undone, and walked to a seat. He felt that he had made a fool of himself and spoilt Betty's dance.

“I'll keep the lancers for you,” said Betty, hiding her annoyance under a gracious smile.

Julia's dress was an astonishing success. The tunic, made of four yards of art muslin to hide the coffee stain, made the girls stare, for by chance she stumbled on the last cry in fashion. The ball was in full swing, the fancy costumes passed and repassed like the figures in a pantomime. A Japanese geisha, brown and impudent like a sparrow, sailed by in the arms of a jockey; and a trooper danced with Margaret Catchpole; a columbine clung to a swagsman from the Never Never with his billy and

blanket. The pupils danced with a serious, intent expression on their faces, hampered by the necessity for remembering their steps.

Julia played the second dance, a schottische, and the Colonel took Betty round with military precision and dignity, stiff as a ramrod. Walter watched her with an exquisite and tender emotion as she swung lightly in the Colonel's arms. Conscious that she was the belle of the ball, she gave him a joyous smile, her annoyance at his clumsiness forgotten. On the other side Gus was watching the dancers with a gloomy air. He was the best dancer in the room, but the girls, respecting his grief, had left him alone. All but the geisha, who smiled at him as she passed on the arm of the man in newspapers. She was a stranger, and Gus watched her with interest, surprised by the accurate details of her costume. And each time she passed she smiled at him with the pert vivacity of a sparrow. The dance ended, and her partner led her to the seat near Gus. She turned to him instantly.

"Why aren't you dancing, Mr. Fitzroy?" she inquired, fixing him with an impudent brown eye.

"My dancing days are over," said Gus, annoyed by her want of reverence in the presence of grief.

"But surely you're not so old as all that?" she asked.

Gus flushed with anger at being taken literally. "No, madam," he said, vainly trying to remember a speech of Hamlet's, "but I am old before my time."

The geisha tittered. "I thought that was only a tale; you shouldn't be so lazy," she said, reprovingly.

Hamlet's ears tingled. He wanted to tell her that it was something more romantic than laziness; that it was a broken heart.

"I have reasons of my own for not dancing," he replied, annoyed by her persistence.

"Ah, a death in the family, I suppose," said the geisha, looking with sympathy at his inky outfit.

The next moment the dancers were startled by a roar of laughter from Gus, his first laugh for a fortnight. Five minutes later Betty struck the opening chords of a waltz, and, taking the geisha in his arms, Gus swung her lightly over the polished floor, the cheerfulest Hamlet that ever wore sable. Walter sat and watched Betty at the piano, gazing his fill at her exquisite profile and creamy skin. The blood ran in his veins like wine; he had never felt so happy in his life. Betty, conscious of his intense look, turned and singled him out from the others with a smile.

The Colonel relieved Betty at the piano, and they chose their partners for the lancers. Walter shook his head when Betty offered him the dance; it was pleasure enough to watch her at a distance. Gus and the geisha, Freda and the swagsman, Betty and the man in newspapers, with two pupils, formed a set near him. He looked on with a smile, following

Betty's gracious figure in every movement. But suddenly the man in newspapers caught Betty by the waist and swung her round, and instantly the instinctive, primeval jealousy of the male woke in him, and he turned his head to avoid the sight. As he looked down the room he gave a start, unable to believe his eyes. His uncle, Jacob Gidley, in immaculate evening dress, was standing near the door with an inquiring look on his face. And as Walter stared again, trying to persuade himself that it was only an astonishing likeness, the dance ended, and Betty and Freda, catching sight of Jacob, ran up and shook hands with him. He could see that his uncle was complimenting them on their appearance, and as he stared with an incredulous air, a cold wave of suspicion ran through him. Why had Betty and Freda hidden the fact that they knew his uncle? They were surely old acquaintances by the way they were laughing. And instantly there swept through his mind some half forgotten words of Gus's: "Never trust women, Walter, or they'll do you like a dinner." His thoughts flew like lightning. All the time Betty had been in league with his uncle. How they must have laughed behind his back at him and his music? Well, he was done with Betty, and with the thought his heart turned to lead.

But Jacob, searching the room with his glassy grey eye for pretty faces, caught sight of Walter. He hid his astonishment under a mechanical grin.

"Ah, I'm not so friendless as I thought. I see a young relative of mine over there," he said.

Betty turned to look, and saw Walter glowering at them.

"Do you mean Mr. Chippendale?" she said, thinking it was a mistake.

"Yes, that's my nephew; but I didn't expect to meet him here," said Jacob.

"But that's impossible," cried Betty.

Then Mr. Gidley made the epigram of his life. "It may be impossible," he said, "but it's true."

And in a flash Betty remembered Mr. Gidley's nephew, who was a pupil of Ricordi's. And it was Walter all the time! How extraordinary! Walter had never mentioned his uncle's name.

But Jacob, resolved to take the bull by the horns, walked over to his nephew. "How do, Walter! Didn't expect to see you here; didn't know you could dance," he said.

"No, I can't," replied Walter, savagely. "Miss Wayside can tell you that."

Betty looked at him in amazement. His eyes glittered with anger; he was white to the lips. It was the look he had given her when she had found fault with his music.

"I had no idea," said Betty; but she was interrupted by Freda, who had brought the Colonel to be introduced to Mr. Gidley. Jacob looked him up and down, decided that he was an elderly buffoon, and said how

delighted he was to meet him.

"And now, Miss Wayside," said Jacob, with his best smile, "you promised to save me a dance, I think?"

Betty looked doubtfully at Walter, but he deliberately turned his head and stared down the room. "I can give you this dance, Mr. Gidley," she said. "Miss Miller is playing the first extra."

Freda, choosing a waltz easily within her powers, began to play "Venetia," carefully pounding the bass to mark the time. Jacob touched Betty, and swung her into the line of revolving couples, and jealousy ran through Walter like a flame. The blood rushed to his head; he swallowed incessantly; his mind was incoherent with passion. How dare his uncle touch Betty, and how could she endure it? Everybody knew what he was. And he had thought that Betty was as innocent as a child. Gus was right, you couldn't trust women. He turned and saw Gus sitting out a dance with the geisha. She whispered, and Gus roared with laughter. He looked as if he had come into a fortune. The waltz ended, and Jacob sat beside Freda, whom he had claimed for the next dance.

"Charming little dance, 'pon my word, and a floor like glass," he said. "By the way, how did you come to know my nephew?"

As he spoke he leaned forward with a convulsive movement of the shoulders. There was a strained, intent look in his glassy eye, and Freda felt alarmed. Jacob wasn't as young as he looked, and sometimes these old fellows took fits.

"Don't you feel well, Mr. Gidley?" she asked, with concern.

"Just a passing twinge, a touch of indigestion, I fancy," said Jacob, with a wan smile. Jacob was lying. He had never felt better in his life, and yet he was suffering torture, for he had suddenly become aware of a nimble flea on his back. As he spoke it gave him a playful bite and ran up his spine. Then it tripped lightly to his left shoulder, changed its mind, and ran across to the other. Jacob, who was following its movements with agonising accuracy, thought to pin it between his shoulder and the wall, but it tripped across his back as a dancer trips across the stage, and bit him again.

"Will I get you a glass of water?" said Freda, thoroughly alarmed.

"No; it's a mere nothing," said Jacob, telling the truth in his agony. But the flea, content with its frolic, had suddenly disappeared. Betty struck into the lancers, and he stood up with Freda, who was watching him carefully for any fresh symptoms.

After the dance Betty came to Walter, who was sitting in gloomy silence. "I'll take you round, if you like," she said; "Julia's going to play the mazurka."

"Thanks, I don't want to make an exhibition of myself before this crowd," said Walter.

"I think you're doing that already," said Betty, flushing with anger; and

she got up and walked away. He wanted to call her back, but his stubborn tongue refused to move. Then Hilda, exhausted by dragging clumsy pupils round the room, came and sat beside him, glad of a rest.

"I say, Mr. Chippendale," she said, "you'll have to look after Betty or someone else will."

"All right, let them," cried Walter, sullenly.

Hilda looked at him curiously. "I thought you were a clever young man," she said.

"Well, you made a mistake," he said, in a fury.

"Upon my word, I think you're right," said Hilda, compressing her thin lips, and she turned her back on him. Walter decided to get his hat and coat and take French leave when supper was served; but Freda, fatigued with incessant dancing, came and sat beside him. And, ignoring his gloomy looks, she chatted gaily. This dance, thanks to her costume, had been a triumph for her. The men had danced her off her legs, and she would have something to talk about for years. And as he listened he wanted to confide in this plain girl, who served as a foil to the radiant Betty. He wanted to tell her his troubles, and question her about Betty and his uncle. But Gus announced, with the roar of a bull, that supper was ready, and the dancers trooped upstairs. Now was his chance to get away. Freda cried out, "Here's your uncle coming to take me to supper, and there's Betty waiting for you." There was no escape, and he joined Betty with a sulky look.

The supper was served standing, and Walter, exasperated by the crush, stood motionless. Then he heard his uncle's voice at his elbow. "What, Miss Wayside, starving in the midst of plenty?" and Jacob, diving gallantly into the crowd, captured a plate of sandwiches. Then, ignoring Walter, he waited on Betty and Freda with the assiduous courtesy of a host. Walter, conscious that he was cutting a poor figure, flushed with anger. Betty, furious at his neglect, turned her back on him, and talked with feverish excitement to his uncle. He could stand it no longer. Some of the young men were slipping away from the crowded room to get a drink before the hotel closed. He followed them downstairs, got his hat and coat from the cloak room, and walked out into the street. He walked blindly through the streets for half-an-hour, and then, realising what he had done, turned to go back. But it was too late.

The ball was in full swing, and for some time his absence was not noticed. With Gus in the lead the dancers dropped the stiff decorum of the academy with the joyous abandon of youth. They stamped across the floor, raising a fine cloud of dust, and catching their partners round the waist, swung them round as if they had been caught in a whirlwind. The Colonel looked on with approval, no longer harrassed by fear of the neighbours. It did him good to see the youngsters enjoying themselves. But on the stroke of twelve he played "God Save the King," and the

Cinderella was over. The house of Fitzroy was radiant; it was the most successful dance they had ever given. Gus, wrapping his inky cloak about him, disappeared through the door with the geisha on his arm. Jacob saw Betty looking round with a bewildered air. "But where's my nephew?" he cried. Betty, who had thought he was sulking in some corner, bit her lips with vexation.

"He must have been taken ill and have gone home," she said.

"How extraordinary," said Jacob, "going off without a word. That's what Ricordi calls the artistic temperament, I suppose. It's what I call plain temper. Fortunately I have a cab waiting, and I shall be delighted to make up for his discourtesy, and see you two ladies home." And Jacob, who prided himself on doing things in style, helped them into the cab. Meanwhile, Walter was walking home to Redfern in a hell of his own contriving.

Chapter XII: The Jilt.

ON the Saturday morning following the dance Mr. Gidley, newly washed, brushed, and combed, stepped briskly along the colonnade in Martin Place as the chimes in the tower overhead boomed on the last notes of twelve. He stopped at George Street, and watched the Saturday parade with a thoughtful air. He was thinking of Betty, and, deciding that her favourite haunt was between Farmer's and the Strand, he turned towards King Street. It had been one of the surprises of his life to find his nephew at the ball, dancing attendance on Betty Wayside. The fellow was so wrapped up in his tinpot music that he had never suspected him of giving a thought to the girls. Jacob reflected that still waters run deep, but Walter had made a fool of himself, and Jacob was the man to profit by it. And scouting eagerly for Betty with his fishy grey eyes, he turned into Pitt Street.

Five minutes later, Walter hurried along the colonnade, and watched the procession of idlers with an anxious air. He knew that Betty would be leaving Ricordi's at twelve, and he wondered if she had gone by. And as he hesitated, half-inclined to shirk the encounter, his eye picked her out in the slow procession. She was dressed in the pale blue dress with the felt hat that matched the colour of her eyes. Her face was flushed with pleasure; evidently Ricordi had praised her. And as Walter's heart went out to this gracious nymph-like figure, she caught sight of him. Instantly the smiling, amiable look changed to one of icy reserve. It was the look she had given him the first time he had gone to Cremona Cottage.

"Good morning," he said, forgetting in his agitation to raise his hat.

"Good morning, Mr. Chippendale," she replied, with a maddening lift of her eyebrows. He turned and walked beside her, and Betty, unable to increase her pace owing to the crowd, ignored his existence. But a certain brightness in her eyes betrayed her emotion. Twice Walter fell behind in the crush, and was tempted to slip away. Suddenly he grew desperate.

"I want to tell you how sorry I am for my idiotic conduct on Wednesday," he stammered, wetting his lips with his tongue.

Betty looked as if she were surprised to find him still there.

"I don't think I shall have time to hear you," she said coldly. "Freda promised to meet me between here and the Strand, and I'm late as it is." She signified by her manner that the interview was over."

"I don't know what possessed me. I've never done such a thing in my

life before," said Walter, irritated by this conversation in a crowd.

"I'm sure the less you say about it the better," said Betty. "I wonder what's become of Freda. She promised faithfully to meet me here."

They had reached the corner of King Street, and the way was blocked by the dense stream of people meeting in the angle. They were bumped, and jostled, and elbowed, and Betty looked up King Street for Freda with the anxiety of a shipwrecked mariner looking for a sail. A sudden block jammed Walter against her, and he thrilled with the touch of her body, but instantly she contrived with an imperceptible movement to remove the pressure. There was a break in the crowd, and Betty turned up King Street.

"Well, I'll say good morning, Mr. Chippendale. I think I can see Freda," she said, and walked rapidly away. Finding him still at her elbow, she changed her tactics, and sauntering slowly from window to window, she carefully studied their contents. At the corner of Pitt Street they were caught again in an eddy of human bodies that blocked further progress. She looked eagerly across the street for Freda, who had declined to come into town as she was finishing a blouse to wear that afternoon.

"It was through my uncle I lost my temper," said Walter, addressing Betty's shoulder. "Why didn't you tell me that you knew him?"

"How could I tell you what I didn't know myself?" replied Betty, without turning her head.

"But you must have known," said Walter, astonished.

"There's no 'must' about it," said Betty. "How was I to know? You never mentioned his name to me."

"But everybody knows he's my uncle, and that I hate the sight of him."

"Oh, so you doubt my word, do you?" said Betty, turning to him at last a flash of anger. "It's a pity Freda's not here too, and then you could doubt her word as well."

Before he could reply she hurried across the street, flying from him in wrath like the nocturnal goddess that he had met in the moonlight, but the crowd at the Strand Arcade checked her flight. And as they waited for the crowd to move, Jacob Gidley, retracing his steps with every prospect of a dull morning before him, caught sight of Betty. His face lit up with the mechanical artificial smile of the lounge, and then, finding Walter scowling at him, he raised his hat and passed on. Betty's anger increased. Would no one help her to get rid of this young man who clung to her like her shadow? Then, with a devilish ingenuity, she stepped in front of the drapers' windows, and studied corsets and other feminine attire, hoping to embarrass him, but he walked to the kerbstone and waited. At Farmer's she doubled across the street, and stared at the photographs of actresses outside the theatre. Walter began again:

"I never doubted your word, but I know he talks behind my back, and

ridicules my music.”

“I know nothing about that, but I know he has the manners of a gentleman. I was very much obliged to him on Wednesday night.”

She turned and walked rapidly up Market Street, and Walter quailed. He thought that she was making for the tram, but, to his surprise, she turned into Castlereagh Street, and stopped in front of the booksellers. There was only a thin stream of pedestrians here, and as she studied the titles of books that she had no desire to read, Walter edged closer.

“You wouldn't feel obliged to him if you knew more about him,” he said in a fury; “he's the laughing-stock of the office, and no decent——” He saw that he had put his foot in it, and stopped.

“Go on,” said Betty, flaming with rage, “say that no decent girl would be seen with him. I was waiting for that. So I'm not decent, it seems?”

She turned, bent on escape, and hurrying to King Street, darted across, and turned into Moore Street. Walter followed with the blind instinct of pursuit, and caught her as she turned down Pitt Street.

“I didn't say that, Betty,” he cried, breathless with the chase; “I meant he wasn't fit company for you.”

“And Freda, too, I suppose,” said Betty. “I can't think what's keeping her.”

There was another prolonged silence as they walked to Hunter Street, and Betty, turning the corner, stopped in front of the jewellers, fascinated by the glittering gems in spite of her emotion. Suddenly she turned on Walter; she was near weeping with vexation and anger.

“I've never been treated in my life as I was treated on Wednesday night, and now I'm told that I'm not fit company for decent people. I hate the sight of you,” she cried.

And as Walter listened in amazement to this wilful perversion of his words, she darted to George Street again, and turned the corner. The hateful sound of a flute fell on her ears, and she turned hot and cold as she felt Paoli's impudent, roving eye fixed on her. She increased her pace, and Walter fell behind. As she passed Jarling's, she thought of Hilda's trick to get rid of a follower. She decided to buy a piece of music, and remembered that she had barely her tram fare in her purse. That reminded her. She could take the tram, and get rid of him. It was close to one, and she had been walking for nearly an hour with Walter at her heels. She felt tired enough to drop. Her throat was parched; she would have given the world for a cup of tea. And suddenly, feeling that she was not responsible for her emotions, she conceived a violent hatred for this stupid fellow who followed her with the pertinacity of a bulldog. When they reached Elizabeth Street she watched him with a hostile look out of the corner of her eye. She noted his careless dress, his long neck and protruding chin, and his hair that cried for the barber. She marvelled that she could ever have liked him. But the Bellevue Hill tram was coming,

and Walter gathered himself together, feeling that she was slipping away from him, that she was lost for ever.

“Betty, Betty,” he cried, “won't you speak to me? Don't leave me like this. When can I come and see you?”

“I'm going out every night. I never want to see you again,” cried Betty, jumping into the tram with remarkable agility.

On the following Wednesday Betty left the tram at King Street on her way to Ricordi's, and took the short cut through Moore Street to Jarling's Buildings. When she came in sight of the Post Office, she looked anxiously at the upper floor, where Walter and Jacob Gidley worked. She had seen and heard nothing of Walter since she left on Saturday, and she was surprised by a vague desire to see him again. Freda had nearly quarrelled with her over Saturday's affair, explaining that Walter's anger and passionate jealousy were the surest proofs of love. Hilda, too, had made light of it, declaring that she wouldn't give twopence for a man who didn't make a fool of himself over a woman. In a sudden revulsion of feeling, she had waited for him at home all day on Sunday, but he had given no sign of life since the dreary promenade through the streets.

When she reached the studio, the baritone was singing through a set of scales, and she sat and listened, fascinated again by the caressing quality of his voice. Then Ricordi swore at him for going flat on a chromatic interval; he was evidently in a vile temper. She wondered what he would say when he found that she had left the sonata untouched. He struck the opening chords of Lassen's song, and the baritone began to sing:

“When thy sweet eyes of azure
Gaze, dearest one, on me,
They bring me such dreams of rapture
Silent my lips must be.”

The velvety, caressing voice sang the simple phrases without a fault, vibrating with emotion on a crescendo passage, but Ricordi interrupted him harshly. He began again, and it dawned suddenly on Betty that the baritone knew she was listening, and was singing to her through the closed door. And secretly pleased at his audacity, she was comparing him with Walter when Ricordi closed the piano with a bang. The baritone came out, and looking straight at Betty, raised his hat and smiled. She flushed, but in five minutes Ricordi had driven all thought of the handsome baritone out of her mind. He was already in a savage temper, and became frantic when he discovered that she was behind again in her practice. He dismissed her in half-an-hour with a reminder that the lessons would end suddenly if she failed to practice. She walked through Jarling's slightly crestfallen, and turning into the street, heard a voice at her elbow. It was the baritone, walking beside her, and talking

nineteen to the dozen. She turned angrily on him, but he gave her no chance to speak.

“Wasn't Ricordi in a vile temper to-day? He gave me the rounds of the kitchen, and I was glad to get out. And I really sang my best; I had my own reason for doing so. Upon my word, if he wasn't the best teacher in Sydney, I should be tempted to leave him. I didn't stop for your lesson; I couldn't bear to hear him find fault with you.”

Betty listened in amazement. He was talking rapidly, but with an easy assurance as if they were old friends. She waited for an opportunity to snub him, but he continued without a break.

“It's gross impertinence on my part, I suppose, but you're the type of woman that makes men do strange things for love. May I offer you a cup of tea to make up for Ricordi's temper?”

“I'm much obliged, but I don't need any tea at present,” said Betty, coldly.

“I knew you'd say that,” cried the baritone, unabashed. “You're as proud as Lucifer, and you'd die of thirst rather than be obliged to me.”

The insidious flattery soothed Betty like wine. Men would do strange things for love of her? Yes, they would, and she thought with a certain pride of Walter's antics. But she saw no flattery in his remarks. It was merely a happy knack of stating the truth. As they reached Martin Place, she saw Walter coming towards them from the colonnade, and she felt relieved and happy. He was coming to make it up, and their foolish quarrel would be over. But as his eye fell on the singer, he went white to the lips. He raised his hat, looked at Betty without a smile, and passed on. A wave of anger, violent and unreasoning, swept through Betty, and, turning to the baritone, she cried: “I've changed my mind, Mr. Goddard, I want a cup of tea very badly. I could do nothing to please Ricordi to-day.” They stepped into Major's tea-rooms, and ran plump into Mr. Gidley, smart as a new pin, leaning with both elbows on the table, and talking earnestly to a saucy chit of eighteen.

After his encounter with Betty and the singer, Walter walked the streets till nightfall with the blind instincts of a wounded animal. At eight o'clock he turned the corner into Crystal Street, and stared intently at Cremona Cottage. The gas was lit, throwing the shadow of the famous 'cello on the yellow blind, but there was no sign of life. For half-an-hour he watched that yellow patch of light as if his life depended on it. Suddenly he convinced himself that Betty had gone out to avoid him, and his nervous tension relaxed, with the relief of a patient who finds the dentist is out. He would come again to-morrow night. And as he turned to go, he saw a shadow cross the blind, and heard some chords struck on the piano. Betty, mindful of Ricordi's anger, was making up for lost time with the Czerny studies.

Then he had to screw his courage up again, and as he stood irresolute,

he thought with a curious detachment that she was improving wonderfully under Ricordi. He must tell her to play the left hand separately in that study, and then remembered with a sinking heart that he had quarrelled with her. Suddenly he crossed the street with the desperate impulse of a man throwing himself under a train, and knocked at the door. Betty opened it, and looked at him in silence. There was no sign of welcome; her face was like a mask.

“Won't you come in?” she said, with icy politeness.

As he came into the room she stared at him, mute and hostile, and, astonished by the change in her manner, he felt suddenly that he had never known her, that this girl was a stranger. They sat for a minute in an awkward silence.

“Did you want to see dada?” inquired Betty, with a hateful, mincing politeness.

“No, I want to see you,” said Walter, humbly. “I want to tell you how sorry I am for my behaviour. I've done things that I've hated myself for doing.”

“The least said about that the better,” said Betty; “and I don't think it nice of you to come here after passing me like a stranger this afternoon.”

“I didn't mean to; I acted like a fool. Won't you forgive me, Betty?”

“I've got nothing to forgive; you can do as you like,” said Betty; and then, with an astonishing contradiction, “I know you're very clever, but you don't know how to treat a girl. I turn hot and cold when I think of what people are saying. I'm ashamed to look anyone in the face.”

“But I'll do anything you like to make it up.”

“I've got nothing to make up.”

“But I thought — I thought you liked me.”

“I never said anything of the sort.”

“But you don't need to say such things. I thought you understood.”

There was another silence, and he looked round the room with a bewildered air. He noticed that the Mantegna was gone from the corner, and wanted to ask Betty whether it was sold. Then there was a light tap at the door, and Betty stepped into the hall. He heard Freda's voice.

“No, I won't come in, I'm late as it is. Did you get the insertion?”

“No,” said Betty, “they offered me the same width at tenpence, but it was rubbish. I'll try the next time I'm down. Did she say that? Well, I never. She tells awful lies, you know. Hope you have a good time. Good-night.”

Walter listened in amazement. Betty was talking in her usual friendly voice as if nothing had happened. How could she talk in that careless way when he was suffering agonies? Perhaps her attitude to him was only a pose, and a wave of suspicion ran through him. Gus had warned him never to trust women. Was Betty deceitful, too, with her clear, candid eyes? As she came into the room again, her manner changed, and

he was convinced that she was only acting a part. She looked impatiently at the studies lying open on the piano, and Walter understood the hint. He was wasting her time.

“Don't you want me, Betty?” he asked.

“No, I don't,” said Betty, with decision. “You're too much like dada. I've had to put up with his temper all my life, and you're worse. We could never agree.”

“But don't you like me?”

“Not in the way you mean.”

“But you let me kiss you.”

“Yes, I know I did, but I made a mistake. I never meant it.”

“I don't believe you, Betty; there's somebody else. Who is the man you were with this afternoon?”

“That's none of your business.”

“Yes, it is. I want to know why you've turned against me.”

“Ask any of my friends, and they'll tell you that.”

“Yes, and I could tell them something else: that Betty Wayside leads a man on, and then throws him over.”

“How dare you say that? We're not even engaged, and you said that you were never going to marry.”

“Don't rub that in, Betty. I didn't know how much I wanted you then.”

“You don't want me now. You think more of your music than you do of me. You forget my existence when the music comes to you.”

“That's not true. I want you to inspire me. I'll write a grand opera with your help.”

“Then you'll have to write it without me.”

“Don't say that, Betty. You'd break my heart, if you meant it.”

“Ah, I've heard that before. I don't believe in broken hearts. Look at Gus. He said his heart was broken, and then he ate his breakfast.”

“But nobody takes Gus seriously.”

“No; it doesn't do to take young men seriously.”

“So you've never taken me seriously? Then you're a heartless jilt, like Clara Manning.”

“That's an insult. How dare you say that?”

“It's no insult to call things by their proper name, Betty.”

“Don't call me Betty. I'll never speak to you again. Here's your music; I wish you would go away.”

Betty, white as a sheet, handed him the copy of the Nocturne on which he had written her name so lovingly. He took the manuscript, tore it in halves and threw it on the floor.

“So it's all over, Betty?” he said.

“Yes,” said Betty, in a faint voice.

“And not even one tear, Betty. Weren't all my kisses worth one tear?”

“I don't know what you mean,” said Betty.

“Then you've got something to learn that I can't teach you. That's why you're so hard and callous.”

Walter looked round the room with its familiar objects — the violins and portraits on the wall, the famous 'cello in its glass case, and then he turned to Betty.

“Well, good-bye,” he said, with an unnatural composure.

He held out his hand, but as she hesitated he caught her in his arms, and kissed her with the passion of despair. Betty quivered in his embrace, terrified by his savage grip, but in a moment he released her and was gone.

Betty shut the door, and came into the room with a bewildered look on her face. She caught sight of the Nocturne lying in halves on the carpet. She picked it up mechanically, and fitted the torn edges together.

An hour later Peter Wayside, coming from the workshop where he had been earning his daily bread, found the heartless jilt with her proud head buried in her arms crying like a child.

Chapter XIII: “Hearts Do Not Break.”

IN April of the following year, six months later, Ricordi announced the first performance of a “Bush Ballad” by an Australian composer. This work, which had been advertised for the previous season, and then withdrawn, was awaited with considerable curiosity. It was reported that it was a strange, bizarre composition, and Australian to the marrow. Ricordi, who had found Sydney without an orchestral society, had begun in a small way by giving concerts on a Saturday afternoon with a band of capable amateurs. Then it became the fashion to subscribe to his orchestra, and with a sprinkling of professionals to strengthen them, he had transferred his amateurs to the Town Hall for the season of four concerts.

By a quarter to eight the shilling seats under the gallery were packed, and a fashionable crowd sauntered in a leisurely manner up the steps from George Street. A dense crowd blocked the entrance stopping to chat with friends in the portico, or studying the costumes of the arrivals by carriage and motor-car. Mr. Goddard, looking very handsome in his dress suit, stood on the steps watching each group that arrived. Presently Betty and Freda, and Gus and the geisha girl, came in sight, and he stepped forward to meet them. Betty flushed when she saw him, but Freda gave him a hostile look, and Gus shook hands with polite indifference. Ignoring their cold reception, he walked beside Betty and talked rapidly in a caressing undertone. Gus, who had booked the seats, led the way to the northern gallery, and they found themselves in the front row with an excellent view of the audience. A confused murmur of voices and the shuffling of feet rose from the floor as the ushers showed the late-comers to their seats. From behind the organ came the persistent sound of the A, and the tuning of violins. Then a medley of sound as the players tested their instruments, running up and down the scale, or trying a difficult passage to make sure of it.

Suddenly the players walked on to the platform, threading their way between the music-stands to their seats. Betty watched them eagerly, picking out the players who were there in time. Hessel was still leading the second violins, and another girl was sitting in Betty's old place behind him. It took her back to the time when Paoli had made eyes at her over the ivory mouthpiece of his flute. She thought of him with a curious detachment. It seemed very childish to her now, and she passed his band

in the streets with indifference. Other and stronger emotions had driven him out of her mind. Mr. Goddard, ignoring Freda's sulky looks, paid her a flattering attention. Betty heard his running comment on the audience, and replied with a vague smile, her mind elsewhere. She had a curious feeling that Walter's eye was on her, and she looked about with a slightly defiant air, expecting to see him at any minute. But Ricordi, walking rapidly to the conductor's stand, opened the score, and tapping with his baton for silence, the concert began.

It was the "Unfinished" Symphony of Schubert's, and with the opening phrase she forgot her surroundings. Vague and splendid images filled her mind; she was carried out of herself on waves of melody, sad as death. She sat in a waking dream till the sudden applause woke her with a start. She thought of the unhappy Schubert and the unfinished symphony, like a broken column marking his tragic fate. With her emotions softened by the passionate phrases, she thought of Walter with an infinite sadness. What a pity that he had mistaken her friendship for love. Now he passed her in the street with a gloomy stare, as if she had done him a great wrong; for, with the Jesuit that lives in every woman, she had persuaded herself that she had never really loved him. They were too much alike, they should never have met; and yet his curious personality had left a mark on her that she would never forget. She was sure that he was a genius, and wondered if he was another Schubert, and would die before he was famous. Ricordi, who had never seen them together, had wanted to introduce her to him, saying that it would be counted an honour some day to know him. But he had nodded approval when she declined, for he had no desire to fill her head with thoughts of young men and take her mind off her practice. One thing was certain. She hadn't broken his heart, as he had pretended with passionate emphasis at their last meeting. And with a little pique she decided that that romantic illusion was gone for ever. Hearts did not break. Then she turned and watched Ricordi attentively, following his peculiar beat through the changes of rhythm; for she would be on that platform herself in a few months. In an hour the first part was over, the orchestra left the platform, and a buzz of conversation rose from the body of the hall. Gus and Mr. Goddard went out to smoke a cigarette, and Freda turned to Betty.

"Well, I don't see him anywhere, do you?" she inquired.

"No," said Betty, with an air of indifference.

"He's sure to be here, because he'll have to come on with Ricordi after the performance and bow to the audience. Won't it be fine to see that?"

"I suppose so," said Betty, dissembling her emotions.

The conversation dropped, and together they studied the programme.

"A BUSH BALLAD."

(First Performance.)

WALTER CHIPPENDALE.

(a) ANDANTE POCO MOSSO (b) MODERATO — ALLEGRO
GIOCOSSO (c) ANDANTE

These three movements are designed to picture a day in the Australian bush. The young composer has illustrated his meaning in the score with the following quotations: —

DAWN: “When the dawn creeps grey to its glad New Year,
My laughing song is the first you will hear.”

NOON: “As the stock are slowly stringing,
Clancy rides behind them singing.”

NIGHT: “And curlews wake, and wailing cry:
Cur-lew! cur-lew! cur-lew!”

They were interrupted by the return of Gus and Mr. Goddard, who, smelling of tobacco and whisky, seemed on better terms. The orchestra turned over their manuscript parts of the “Bush Ballad,” Ricordi tapped with his baton, and Betty thrilled with the sound. It was like Fate knocking at the door.

The first movement opened pianissimo with muted strings; and then, with the gradual dawn, the 'cellos entered with a second and more exquisite theme. The audience listened in a profound silence, critical and attentive. Then followed the awakening of the birds with short, abrupt phrases for the strings and flutes. It was very beautiful, and Betty thrilled with pride. The sound grew in volume; the dawn had come. But suddenly an extraordinary noise broke from the clarionets and oboes, clashing and jarring on the sustained melody of the strings. It was the cry of the laughing jackass saluting the dawn. The brass took it up, and a grotesque, uncouth cackle ran through the orchestra. Betty trembled, and instinctively studied the sea of upturned faces. For a moment they looked puzzled, and then a derisive grin spread like a wave across the hall. A woman near Betty laughed outright; they were treating it as a joke.

Ricordi, white with passion, swore at the trombones, who had lost their part, and with frenzied gestures he tried to keep the players together. And as Betty looked at the rows of grinning faces, with murder in her heart, she saw Walter in the gallery opposite, staring at her with the face of a man in agony. He had slipped into a vacant seat during the interval. Betty's heart bled at the sight, and her face softened with pity. Then she flushed with anger as he turned his head with a disdainful air. When the barbaric noise ended, the audience, now on the broad grin, clapped derisively. Ricordi acknowledged it with a contemptuous shrug, and turned to the second movement.

It began with light, quivering phrases for the strings, painting the heat of the noonday sun, with confused, abrupt phrases from the bassoons and

double basses for the herd of moving cattle. But the audience, now in a derisive humour, smiled again when they heard phrases to indicate the barking of dogs and the crack of the stockwhip. Suddenly, with the clash of cymbals and triangle, the song of the drovers was heard, and the audience listened in surprise as three tunes of the overland days were developed and worked up into a remarkable climax. Surprised, but unconvinced, they applauded grudgingly.

When the third movement began, Betty listened with a strange emotion, remembering the scene in Centennial Park when Walter had rocked in a frenzy of inspiration. But the beauty of this movement, with the muted strings rising and falling on a semi-quaver figure, and the desolate cry of the curlews given out and repeated by the flutes and oboes, was lost on the audience, who had decided that the whole composition was a joke. They clapped politely, and Ricordi bowed with a contemptuous air. The "Bush Ballad" was a failure. Burning with anger, Betty looked down with horror on those thousands of smug faces. They had listened to a work of genius with a grin, as their like had done in all ages. Hot with indignation and pity, she nerved herself to look at Walter again; but he had disappeared.

The rest of the programme left her unmoved, and she sat silent and absorbed to the end. The sparkle had gone out of her eyes; she remembered with a sudden fear that these philistines would sit in judgment on her in a few months. The handsome baritone tactfully left her to her thoughts, and when he invited the party to supper at Major's, she agreed with a listless nod. Freda, who was strangely depressed, wanted to go home at once, but was overruled.

Before the ironic applause had died away, Walter Chippendale came slowly down the steps into George Street with the face of a man who has looked on death. For some minutes, that seemed eternity, he stared before him, seeing and hearing nothing. Then a wave of agony swept through him, and he remembered. Something as incredible as death had happened. They had laughed at his music, and he was a failure. The trams, glowing with electric bulbs, passed in endless procession with the harsh clang of the gong. Men smoked and spat at the street corners. Others stared in the shop windows, and passed on with the leisurely movements of people who were killing time. The familiar sights and sounds of the city struck sharply on his nerves as if he were in a foreign land. His mind was in a whirl; thoughts of hot revenge flashed through his brain. They had laughed at him, had they? He would write an opera, take it to London, and they would cringe before him yet. With the thought his head drooped listlessly. He had done his best; he could do no more. That was the thanks you got for being an Australian. These people took their ideas, like their fashions, from London, and could stomach nothing from their native land. His mood changed like lightning. In one

minute he wept over his disappointed hopes, and the next he turned savagely on his critics with the fury of a wounded animal.

Then, with a sudden, vicious resolve, he walked up King Street to Palesi's wine cellar. He sat at a small table in the corner and called for sherry. Drinking the wine at a gulp, he looked about him with an air of cynical bravado. This was life, and all the rest was a sham. The wine cellar, with its marble tables and penetrating odour of alcohol, was a savage contrast to the Town Hall with its powerful electric lamps, and the fashionable, simpering crowd. A girl and a sailor, sitting opposite, caressed each other openly over their wine. A party of four men at another table nearly came to blows over a trivial argument, and were reconciled over another bottle. Again he rapped with the heel of his glass on the marble table, and Palesi himself, a grave, courteous Italian, served him. On turning, he saw the girl and the sailor, and peremptorily ordered them out, for he prided himself on the conduct of his bar.

The wine had steadied his nerves, and suddenly he thought of Betty with incredible bitterness. Shame and anger burnt in him that she should have been there to witness his humiliation. And now she was sitting in the hall with her new lover, gloating over his defeat. Ricordi had warned him that the accursed cry of the jackass would spoil the effect of the movement. And those smug fools had been deaf to the exquisite phrases that had come unbidden to his brain. Pearls before swine! He would never write another note; but in years to come they would find the score, covered with dust in an old cupboard, and talk of his tragic fate. And she had the nerve to sit and stare at him with brazen eyes, pleased that he should see her new lover whispering in her ear. For a month he had walked the streets of Paddington at night on the chance of meeting her. And that last movement, with the mournful cry of the curlew, and the amazingly clever accompaniment for the strings! He had expected them to greet it with cries of wonder. Ricordi had gone into ecstasies over it. He thought of Ricordi with a sudden suspicion. Did he call him a genius, and laugh behind his back as the others did? No; for he had entreated him to alter the first movement. But he had stuck to his jackasses; it was a memory of his boyhood. And suddenly the uncouth, mirthless cackle of the bird rang in his ears, mocking, sinister, and menacing — the death-blow to his hopes.

He drank steadily for an hour, his thoughts revolving with malignant persistence round Betty and the failure of his "Ballad." Then he became maudlin and cynical. He stared at the people in the bar. Two German sailors were drinking hock, and talking in guttural tones; a Frenchman was arguing in broken English about religion. A woman was wheedling a reluctant client over a glass of wine. He stared at the woman and the fool she was coaxing. That was woman's work in this world — to tempt and betray men. The sting of his disaster had gone out of his mind, and he

thought with a maudlin pity of his wasted efforts. He rapped on the table, and ordered another drink, but Palesi refused to serve him.

"I did not know you were in this state," he said. "You will give my place a bad name, an' I will lose my customers, who are ver' respectable."

"Respeckable, are they?" said Walter. "Then damn 'em."

He got up and lurched into King Street, drunk for the first time in his life. He turned into Elizabeth Street, and swaying on the edge of the kerbstone, stared at the trams, puzzled by the lights which danced before his eyes. And while he was considering this phenomenon it struck eleven, and the corner darkened suddenly as the electric lamps of the hotel went out.

Betty and the others, who had lingered over their coffee and cakes, reached the corner a few minutes later. They were standing in a group, waiting for the tram, when a drunken man lurched against Betty, tried to recover himself, and rolled into the gutter. Betty, who was afraid of drunken men, turned away in disgust; but Freda, who had caught a glimpse of his face, ran to the prostrate man.

"Good God, it's Walter Chippendale!" she cried.

Gus ran to her side, and together they helped him to his feet. Freda picked up his hat and dusted it carefully; while Walter studied them with drunken suspicion, convinced that they had tripped him.

"It's all right, old man, lean against me," said Gus.

Then Walter, slightly sobered by his fall, recognised him.

"S'ry, Gus; you've been a good fren' to me," he muttered, thickly. "You know all 'bout women. Do you like dinner?"

Then he saw Betty; and a malignant sneer came over his face.

"Goo' ni', Gus. Besh fellow ever met; but I don' like company y' keep," and he struggled to get away.

"Here, what's this?" said a gruff voice.

"It's all right, constable," said Gus, with a sudden inspiration; "this is a friend of mine. He got a touch of the sun playing cricket last Saturday."

"Right you are," said the policeman, fingering the half-crown; "but get him away. I've had that complaint myself."

"Lemme go. I'm all ri'," said Walter, and proved his assertion by colliding with the veranda post.

Gus called a cab and helped him in.

"Shall I come with you?" said Gus, mindful of the geisha, who was watching him.

"No fear. I'm all ri'," said Walter. "Gimme a match."

Betty, speechless with horror, stared after the retreating cab. Suddenly she heard a curious noise at her elbow, and turning, found Freda crying softly into her handkerchief. Five minutes later the handsome baritone, having seen the party safely in the tram, strolled down King Street. Turning into Pitt Street, he ran into the pretty girl who Walter had seen in

the bar.

“What, is it you, me noble duke?” she cried. “What have you been doing with yourself? I haven't seen you for months. Come and shout me a plate of oysters before the Dagoes shut up.”

Chapter XIV: Stolen Waters.

ON the Sunday following the concert Peter Wayside sat in the kitchen reading the newspaper. His fishing lines, neatly wound on strips of cork, lay in a row on the table which Betty had just cleared. A small basket full of prawns and squid lay at his elbow. Every minute he turned the pages with a rustling noise, finding nothing of interest; and Betty studied the clock behind his back, her eyes bright with vexation. A week ago he had announced his intention of spending the day on the rocks at Bondi, and had sorted out his lines at daybreak; then he discovered that he had missed the tide, and dawdled about the house all the morning. It was the dull newspaper that decided the matter. He dropped it with a yawn and gathered his lines together. Betty's heart leapt at the sight.

"Well, I'll get along, Betty," he said; "but there'll be no fishing till the tide turns. If I have any luck I may not be back for tea, and you had better go up to your cousin's."

"Yes; if you're not back for tea I'll go up to uncle's," said Betty, vacantly echoing his words, with her mind elsewhere.

He took an intolerable time to get to the front door, and Betty closed it on him with a sigh of relief. She listened for the click of the gate, and running down the slippery stairs made a rapid calculation in front of the clock. It was close on two, and she decided that she could just do it. For Peter Wayside, whose powers of observation were confined to the violin family, had not noticed that she had done the morning's work with her hair dressed in elaborate rolls, and wearing her best shoes and stockings. Making sure that Peter was well out of sight, she ran to her room, and changed her dress in a frenzy of speed. Half an hour later she shut the front door with a slam; and, throwing a look of scorn at Maria Redding on her high balcony, hurried to the Bellevue Hill tram.

She caught the tram at once, and immediately began to marvel at its slowness. To-day everyone seemed to be taking their time. At this rate the tram would never get to the Quay, and she had promised to meet Frank Goddard at three o'clock at the Lane Cove jetty. They had developed an intimacy by slow degrees, meeting as a matter of course after the lessons at Ricordi's; but as they sauntered up King Street after the concert, he had heard that Peter Wayside was going out on Sunday, and dared her to meet him at Circular Quay.

Presently she began to think of her father with extraordinary bitterness.

For months past she had been living in an atmosphere of petty deceit, which was intolerable to her open and candid nature. Astonished and offended by the disappearance of Walter, whom he esteemed for his rare knowledge of violins, Peter had resumed his familiar attitude of the honest watch-dog to Betty's escorts; and for months she had deceived him calmly as one deceives a troublesome child for the sake of peace.

She looked at her wrist-watch in a fever of impatience. It was five minutes to three, and she would never get to the Quay in time. Suddenly she thought of her hasty toilet with dismay. She would have given the world for five minutes before a looking-glass. And again she thought of her father with extraordinary bitterness. As she threaded her way between the trams to the Lane Cove ferry, Mr. Goddard caught sight of her, and beckoned eagerly. They ran through the turnstile, but the boat was moving out, and a treacherous gap of water lay between the steamer and the landing. Betty hesitated, but Mr. Goddard jumped on board and turned with outstretched arms. "Quick!" he cried. She jumped in a quaking terror, but the baritone caught her in his arms and swung her safely on board.

"That was a narrow squeak," he said, with a smile.

Betty coloured, and was silent. The unexpected contact with the baritone's arms had sent an electric quiver through her, and she thought with pride that this was the type of man who, in olden times, had lightly swung ladies to their saddle-bow and galloped away. The steamer was crowded, but they squeezed into a seat on the upper deck.

"No need to ask you why you were late," said the baritone, carelessly.

"No," said Betty; "he missed the tide this morning, and didn't leave the house till two o'clock."

Mr. Goddard looked at her with admiration. "And that left you twenty minutes to dress. You're a wonder. Anyone would think you had spent hours over your toilet," he whispered in his caressing voice. Betty flushed with pleasure, her late alarms forgotten. Always this man's flattery sounded like music in her ears, for he invariably said the right thing as if he were merely stating the truth. Judging women with the eye of a horse-dealer, he could surprise the plainest woman by touching on her secret vanity. And fitting himself to her moods, he played on Betty's vanity as a skilful musician fingers an instrument.

It was a rare day in April, with a sky of intense blue, cloudless and warm. The massed roofs of Balmain and the North Shore slipped astern when they passed Cockatoo Island and Woolwich; then the channel narrowed as they entered the river, and the steamer threaded its way in a zig-zag fashion across the placid reaches of water. The noise and stir of the city were left behind; the shores were lined with houses of the better sort, half hidden among trees, with their grounds running to the water's edge and a boat-shed.

Mr. Goddard asked her permission to smoke, and the blue smoke filled her nostrils like incense, as he flicked the ashes with his finger. The other men were smoking pipes or cigarettes, and the cigar stamped her companion in her eyes as a man of leisure and fashion. When they reached Fig Tree they sauntered up the path to the bridge. People were sitting on the balcony of the tea-room, and Mr. Goddard invited her to take a cup of tea before going back. Betty looked at her watch and declined, for the steamer would be leaving in ten minutes, and she was harassed by the thought of her father coming home to an empty house. But Mr. Goddard displayed a singular anxiety, and hurrying back to the wharf he questioned a deck-hand. He came back radiant. Betty was mistaken; the boat was not leaving for half an hour.

As Betty poured out the tea Mr. Goddard reminded her of their first visit to Major's.

"I was counting on this," he said, "to remind me of the first time we had tea together. You must have thought me an impudent rascal; but I simply had to speak to you, and I was quaking with fear. I knew that you were as proud as Lucifer, and that you would refuse with scorn."

"But I accepted afterwards," said Betty, flushing as she remembered the incident.

"Yes; because, like all proud ladies, you take pity on the victim when you've reduced him to pulp."

He talked with a singular rapidity, and Betty listened with a vague smile, her thoughts occupied with her father. Suddenly she heard the shrill whistle of the steamer, and rose in alarm. People were hurrying down the path to the boat. But Mr. Goddard assured her that it was only the preliminary warning; that they had another ten minutes. Presently Betty looked round with a gasp of dismay. The steamer had left the wharf and was turning in midstream.

"Oh! We've missed the boat, and father will be home before me," she cried.

Then the baritone, who had seen the boat moving out without turning a hair, became very indignant.

"Now that's a piece of downright insolence. I'll go down and report that fellow," he cried.

He seemed so angry that Betty feared he would make a scene and get the man into trouble, and she begged him not to bother about it. The next steamer was not due for half an hour, and they finished their tea at their leisure.

To make sure of the next steamer they walked slowly down to the wharf. As they passed the boat-sheds, they stopped to watch a party of young men and girls selecting a boat. When it was pushed down the slip into the water, the men stepped in with clumsy movements, and held the boat against the slip while the girls stepped on board with shrieks of

dismay as the boat rocked under their weight. As they pulled up the stream into the shallow reaches Betty looked after them with a pang of envy. The sun was near setting, and already the moon, riding high in the sky, threw a faint gleam on the water. Then she examined the boats attentively.

“They should have taken this boat, it's twice as light as the other,” she said, absently.

“Now, that's just what I was thinking,” said Mr. Goddard.

Betty made no reply. She was listening to the splashing of the oars and the laughter of the boat's crew, growing fainter and more musical as they receded in the distance. An intense longing for the moonlight and the water, the silent reaches of the river, and the musical splash of the oars possessed her, and suddenly, with his subtle instinct, the baritone echoed her longing.

“There's the boat, and there's the river. I know it's impossible, but I'd do anything to be alone with you on the water, even for an hour. I don't know why it is, but I always think of you when I see moonlight on the water,” he continued, inventing the glib phrases on the spur of the moment. But the words struck a curious echo in Betty. Walter Chippendale had often said that; and yet she had never gone out with him.

“Well, here's the steamer, and fathers must be humoured,” said Mr. Goddard, with a faint accent of disdain on the last words.

Betty hesitated. Her father would be home already if the fishing was poor, and the mischief was done. Crystal Street seemed a long way off, and the river and Frank Goddard were very near. She could say that she had been to church; a dozen excuses came into her mind.

Her thoughts were interrupted by the noise of a boat bumping against the landing. A heap of fish lay in the bottom of the boat, still alive and showing a gleam of white as they bent and twisted with the sudden snap of a steel spring.

“Just my luck,” said the fisherman to the owner; “the tide's on the turn, there's a good moon, and they're biting like fury. No; I must catch this steamer, worse luck, I'm on the night shift. Well, so long.”

“The turn of the tide,” thought Betty. “If the fish are biting here they'll be biting at Bondi, and father may stay out till midnight.”

Another couple were on the point of choosing the light boat; and the baritone, reading her thoughts with diabolic certainty, caught her by the arm.

“Come on, Betty. You may as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb. We'll take this boat for an hour.”

With the words caution flew to the winds. Mr. Goddard took possession of the boat, to the annoyance of the other couple, who were immediately convinced that it was the best boat in the shed.

“Can you steer?” asked Goddard, as he helped her into the boat.

“Can I steer?” said Betty. It was like asking her if she could play the piano. She sat in the stern with the tiller ropes, and Mr. Goddard, rolling up his sleeves, displayed the muscular arms of the athlete. Betty, who was a connoisseur of rowing, was surprised by his powerful, easy stroke as she steered under the bridge and up the river.

The sun was setting in a cloudless sky, evenly flushed with colour. The moon, growing brighter in the blue zenith, threw a faint gleam that was lost in the glow of sunset. In five minutes they had turned the bend and lost sight of Fig Tree and the huge bridge. Then they passed two boatloads of rowdy young men, roaring ribald choruses at the top of their voices. The sight of Betty and Mr. Goddard stirred them to yells of derision; but the baritone listened with a good-natured smile. Then the steersman of the second boat, forgetting his business in staring at Betty, ran the boat on a sand-bank; and the other crew, splitting with laughter, continued their journey with a farewell chorus:

“Fall in and follow me!
Fall in and follow me!
You do as I do and you'll do right,
Fall in and follow me.”

A bend of the river hid them from the stranded boat as if they had turned a street corner; but the river was populous with boats, and for twenty minutes Goddard rowed without ceasing, with Betty keeping a watchful eye on the sand-banks. They turned another bend and found themselves in a deserted reach of the river. It was the hour dedicated to sentiment and drawing-room ballads. Night, treading on the heels of day, had thrown a cloak of romance and mystery on the river. The baritone, flushed with his exertions, slowed down and smiled at Betty. She flushed slightly, conscious that they were quite alone. But Mr. Goddard, taking his cue with the practised ease of a play-actor, began to talk.

“This is my dream come true. The first time I saw you at Ricordi's I knew that I had met my fate; that you were the only girl in the world for me. Every man takes girls as he finds them; but you carry a man out of himself. Any fool could say what I'm saying. But you're the sort of woman that inspires men to write poetry and paint pictures and carve statues. Ordinary talk is wasted on you. A man wants to do something extraordinary to please you.”

“But you can sing,” said Betty, shyly.

“Ah! You remind me of my tragedy. A grand-opera singer with a drawing-room voice, as Ricordi says.”

They were still in the deserted reach of the river. He was resting on the oars, and the water broke on them in tiny waves that flashed like

quicksilver as they caught the light of the moon. Betty was fascinated. Often in day-dreams she had pictured such a scene. The moonlight on the water; the handsome lover with flashing eyes; but the music was wanting. And suddenly the baritone began to sing in his caressing voice, vibrating with emotion.

“Fill the cup with golden wine
This night before we part,
And turn your tender eyes to mine
Across the cup, sweetheart.

*Be the waves between us two,
Let the land divide,
You for me, and I for you,
And no one else beside,
No one else beside.”*

The singer shipped the oars with a sudden movement and the boat began to drift with the tide. Betty was suddenly aware that the baritone was coming near her with a strange look of entreaty on his face. She trembled instinctively; but Goddard, who read the fear in her eyes, controlled himself with a powerful effort. The look that had disturbed her went out of his eyes, and lightly and reverently holding her face in his hands, he kissed her on the forehead. The innocent caress sent a thrill through her. This was the perfect lover that she had dreamed of. But the odour of her hair in his nostrils was too much for him, and he kissed her full and passionately on the lips.

He was disturbed in an unexpected manner, the drifting boat, left to its own devices, bumped on a sand-bank and stuck with its nose buried in the sand. Goddard swore under his breath, annoyed by the ghastly anti-climax. And as he vainly pushed at the soft sand with an oar, a boatload of amateur rowers, straining and bending under the effort, their oars rising and falling like the legs of a wounded crab, came round the bend.

A burst of cat-calls and yells announced that they had seen the stranded boat. The baritone, hiding his disgust under a gracious smile, accepted their offers of help. A couple of volunteers turned up their trousers and waded across the sand-bank to the boat. Then with a mighty heave and pull the boat floated again in deep water. Mr. Goddard thanked them as if they had rescued him from a desert island. But the spell was broken. Already another boat, with a noisy crew on board, was coming down the river, and Betty looked at her watch with a cry of dismay. It would be ten o'clock before she got home.

But Goddard, with an easy, powerful stroke, soon caught and passed the boat that had rescued them. Intent on showing his skill with the oars, he smiled at Betty with an ardent, caressing look. The moon, riding high

in the sky, poured a flood of silvery light on the placid water. The hilarious crew in the rear had suddenly become sentimental, and they began to sing, the voices travelling with astonishing clearness on the silent waters:

“For good old Jeff has gone to rest,
We know that he is free;
Disturb him not, but let him rest,
‘Way down in Tennessee.”

Emotion gushed like a spring in Betty. She could never forget this night. For the first time love and romance had gone hand in hand, and Frank had shown that he was the perfect lover. Thrilled by the melancholy cadence of the voices in the distance, she thought, without dismay, of her father's anger if he should discover her absence. They were just in time to catch the steamer, and as it turned in midstream, the boat's crew that had followed them down sang their final chorus as they passed under the bridge:

“Way down upon de Swanee Ribber,
Far, far away,
Dere's where my heart is turning ebber,
Dere's where de old folks stay.”

When they reached the Quay, Goddard put her in the tram, and she reached Crystal Street at ten o'clock, thinking of many inventions to account for her absence. But the fates were with her, and she had been in bed an hour when her father knocked at the door, beaming with good humour, loaded with fish, and so anxious to boast of his skill in fishing that he clean forgot to ask how she had spent the afternoon and night.

Chapter XV: The Revolt.

WALTER stirred uneasily, opened his eyes and, encountering a bright shaft of light from the window, closed them with a frown. The action stirred his thoughts dimly. It must be time to get up, for the sun only caught his window late in the morning. He turned to look at his watch, and was instantly aware of a splitting headache and a parched tongue. So he had spent the night as usual! He remembered drinking late at Palesi's, but the rest was a blank. And, as his thoughts vainly tried to bridge the gap, he noticed that his clothes were in their proper place, folded with unusual care. That pointed to Mrs. Brittle, and vaguely he remembered seeing her in a kind of haze with a light in her hand, talking loudly to someone. That would be his spick-and-span uncle, spluttering with impotent rage. This had been going on ever since the concert, nearly a month past, and with a singular, perverted pride he reflected that he was paying Jacob out for sneering at his music.

It had come about quite simply. The morning after the concert he had been too sick in body and mind to go to the office. Then, craving to forget, he had gone back to Palesi's and drunk till he was maudlin and cynical. At the end of the week, Jacob, terrified by his nephew's neglect of duty, had engineered a month's leave of absence for him on the plea of sickness. But three weeks spent in the vinous atmosphere of the wine cellar had changed his outlook like a course of lectures. He had been astonished by the number of idlers who loafed about the city with the price of a drink in their pockets. Some lived on their wits, some on their relatives; but they all spoke of work with the same contemptuous air. "It was a mug's game." Already he thought of the office and its monotonous routine with a kind of wonder, surprised that he had ever busied himself with such trifles. And he was due at the office on Monday, was he? Well, he'd see.

Suddenly he thought of Betty. Always his mind, taken unawares, dwelt on her image for a moment with a yearning akin to tears, that turned to an incredible bitterness as he remembered. Only yesterday he had passed her in the street, and, insolent with wine, had stared her down. The memory of her tearless face stung him afresh. She had said that hearts didn't break. No, they didn't when you were heartless. And then she had gloated over the failure of his "Ballad." He would give her something else to gloat over before he had finished. For a while his thoughts

hovered round her image with an abhorred fascination, as moths flutter round a candle; and then he heard a light tap at the door. It was Mrs. Brittle with his breakfast on a tray.

"Well, how's the prodigal son this morning?" she inquired.

"You know as well as I do," said Walter, sulkily. "Give me a cup of tea."

"Oh, no, I don't," said Mrs. Brittle. "I don't come home at midnight with my hat over my ear and try to walk six ways at once. I suppose you didn't hear your uncle? He got quite bright and chatty when you mistook him for a cabman."

"Let him go his way, and I'll go mine."

"And quite right, too; only I wish it wasn't so zigzag. They say there's nothing wasted in this world; but I never thought the practice I had putting my husband to bed would come in handy again."

Walter smiled in spite of himself. From the beginning she had refused to take his dissipation seriously, and he felt rather foolish under his air of cynical bravado.

"Never mind, Walter; you'll stop this tomfoolery on Monday and go back to work."

"Who says I'm going back?"

"Your uncle. He says you'll get the sack if you're not there on Monday."

"Well, I'm not going back."

"Oh, yes, you are. You've had your little spree, and it's time you wrote some more music."

"I'll never write another note; they laughed at me."

"Oh, yes, you will. You can't help that any more than a hen can help laying eggs. It's the girl I'm troubling about."

"What girl?"

"The girl you're always thinking about."

"Ah! So he's been talking, has he?"

"No fear. Trust Mr. Gidley to mind his own business. But I can put two and two together and make five like anyone else."

"Well, you've done it this time; there isn't any girl."

"No, but there used to be. You've never been the same man since that fancy dress ball."

"You don't know what you're talking about."

"I suppose I don't. I was never in love myself; I got married instead. Yes; you can laugh; but I'm not the only one. Look at your uncle. He fell in love with himself, and made a very good match, as they say. It isn't everybody can break his heart over a girl like you. That's why I think——" She was interrupted by a knock at the door. "There's the postman. Just eat that bit of toast while I go for the letters."

Walter lay on his back and stared at the ceiling. So she had known

about Betty all the time; or thought she did. He wondered if she knew how Betty had treated him. He hoped not; and was surprised by an impulse to shield Betty. It hurt his pride that others should think meanly of her, much as she deserved it. And she thought he was breaking his heart for Betty. What nonsense! But these old women were always sentimental.

“Here's a letter for you,” said Mrs. Brittle.

Betty was in his mind, and he took the letter with a faint tremor of hope. For six months past he had been possessed by the hopeless idea that some day she would write to him. He looked at the envelope. The writing was in a crabbed, masculine hand. It was from Ricordi, asking him to call at the studio as he had some news for him. He had only seen Ricordi once since the concert, and wondered what it could mean. It was Thursday; so there was no danger of meeting Betty, who was now taking two lessons a week in preparation for her appearance at the final concert of the season. He got up; but the fumes of the wine were still in his head, and he decided to wait till the afternoon. He didn't choose that Ricordi should know of his drinking.

As he crossed the narrow lane separating the buildings from the music-shop, he stopped for a moment to listen to the curious medley of sound from the studios overhead. A sombre look came into his eyes. These fellows lived in an atmosphere of music; and he, who was one of them, was condemned to drudge in an office all day. But then he objected to teaching music for a living. Ricordi had offered to get him a position as visiting teacher to a boys' college, and he had refused.

Ricordi, who was dismissing a pupil, met him at the door.

“Well, Meester Chippendale,” he cried, “De philistines 'ave not crush you. You will survive, eh?”

“Yes; I survive, and that's about all,” said Walter.

“Pah, you do take dem mooch too serious. You will write again de first movement, an' de accursed bird 'e laugh no more. Den I will perform it by special request.”

“They can take it or leave it; I'll write no more.”

“Many 'ave said dat, an' many 'ave swallow dere words. It is like lofe or an accident. You tink you are dead. Den you rub yourself, an' dere are no bones broken. But I did not bring you 'ere to talk nonsense. Your Nocturne 'as arrived. Jarling's did not know your address so dey send it to me.”

He began to search among piles of disordered music, and Walter fretted with impatience. Jarling's had sent it to Leipzig to be printed, and he had lost hope of seeing it again. And here Ricordi had tossed it on one side as if it were of no account.

“Corpo di Bacco! It was under my nose all de time,” cried Ricordi at last. “Meester Chippendale, let me introduce you to de first-born.”

But he stopped as he saw a misty look in Walter's eyes.

“Ah, it is a sacred moment, an' I am an ol' fool,” he said, and turning his back on Walter, he stared at the diploma from Milan. Walter's hands trembled as he read the title-page, and the words seemed curiously blurred.

THE NIGHT WALK — Nocturne in E Flat.

Walter Chippendale — Op. 3.

He had torn off the dedication to Betty before Ricordi had seen it; but interlaced with the title was a crescent moon, the mark of the faithless goddess. She would know it by that sign, and perhaps she would remember. But Ricordi, growing impatient, turned to him. “Give it to me an' I will play it,” he cried. He sat down at the Steinbach grand, and played it through with the superb touch of the old virtuoso, bringing it to an end with a marvellous pianissimo where the theme, repeated in echoes, dies away in silence.

“Bravo, dat is de way an artist answers de philistine. We are brothers in art, is it not?” he cried; and, jumping up, he embraced the astonished composer. Then he became serious.

“An' now, dat is vairey preety; but you can do better. You are in lofe w'en you write dat; but you lofe wid your 'ead. De nex' piece you mus' write wid lofe in your 'eart, wid passion an' despair, an' den all de world will listen. You mus' get some pretty lady to break your 'eart.”

And Walter, who had suffered the pangs of despised love for six months, listened with a mirthless grin. Ricordi little knew how much he was beside the mark.

“No, signor, I've done with women,” he cried; and instantly the words sounded like an ironical echo from Gus.

“Ah, you are done wid women, an' you are so young. I congratulate you,” said Ricordi, with an enigmatic smile. “Some day you will learn dat an artist is never done wid women. Dey will teach you your strength an' your weakness. Dey will clip your wings an' exalt you to de stars. You do wonder at me? I know w'at dey say. I leave my country for lofe of a woman. Fools! Dere were always many women; but never de one woman. Many faces, but never de one face to make me forget God in my sorrow an' de earth in my joy. An' for de want of dat my triumphs were barren, an' I settle 'ere, a lonely ol' man. I would speak of dis to no man but you; for you are yet to eat your bread wid tears to be a great artist. An' now we will forget my childish talk, is it not?”

An insurgent desire came over Walter to tell Ricordi that he was mistaken; that already he had found and lost the woman of his dreams. But suddenly, conscious of his youth, he felt that his grief was trivial beside the bitter cry of this old man, whose feet were near the grave.

Then a pupil tapped at the door, and Walter took his leave.

He turned into Martin Place and walked the length of the street, staring at the ungainly mass of the G.P.O. It was as busy as an ant-hill, the people passing in and out of the doors intent on their business. He reflected bitterly that he was of no more account in that huge machine than a cog-wheel that had slipped out of place. And he thought of his fellow-clerks who could talk of nothing but racing and football and their petty grievances. He had never been one of them, and he must find a way of escape from that soulless drudgery.

With a sombre look in his eyes he walked up King Street, and went down the steps into Palesi's. The wine cellar was empty, for the custom varied according to the hour of the day. At this time the customers were chiefly business men, who drank a glass at the bar and hurried out again. He called for sherry; and, unrolling his Nocturne, he gloated over the printed pages. Here was the proof that he was a musician and not a clerk. Again he thought of Betty. Her name should have been on the title-page; but she had left her mark on him and his music. The crescent moon reminded him of the tiny scar on her forehead, and he had a maddening vision of her face and her candid blue eyes. He thought of Ricordi's words, and wondered. Why should her face mean so much to him? Other men could look at her with indifference and frankly choose other women.

His thoughts were interrupted by a party of men, who took possession of the table opposite and called loudly for wine. He looked up, annoyed by their laughter and noise, and was surprised to find it was Paoli and his quartet. Already flushed with wine, they were evidently on the spree; and this surprised him, for he knew that they went about their business in the streets as soberly as other men. And as they chattered rapidly in Italian, Palesi came in to serve them.

“W'y, w'at is dis?” he asked, in surprise. “No work to-day?”

His surprise gratified the musicians, and they began to talk nineteen to the dozen in their native tongue. The first violin, lolling in his chair, seemed to be the centre of attraction, and he nodded at Palesi's questions with a fatuous grin. Walter wondered what they were talking about. Something had evidently happened to the first violin. Palesi was still questioning him with a sudden respect in his manner, when Paoli broke in impatiently:

“Here, chuck it. Talk some language a man can understand.”

“Ah, I did forget you was an Australian,” said Palesi, with an ironical stress on the last word.

“Yes; all the time. Australia's good enough for me,” cried Paoli. “D'ye think if I won four thousand quid I'd go back and live among a pack of savages? No; I'd spend my money in the country where I made it.”

“Yes, dat is so. Each man to 'is own country; but you was born 'ere, an' 'e was not.”

Walter listened with tremendous interest. Someone, evidently the first violin, had come into a lot of money and was going back to his native land. That would leave the quartet without a leader. He was meditating on this when the second violin caught sight of him and beckoned with an amiable smile.

“Come, will you drink wiz us to-day? We 'ave w'at you call a jollo.” And he smiled again, proud of his command of English.

They made room for him at the table, and insisted on shaking hands all round. Then Palesi explained the situation.

“Dis genelman, 'e win four t'ousand pound in de sweep, an' is going back to Sicily, w'ere 'e belong.”

“Five thousand it was,” interrupted Paoli. “He had to lay the owner a thousand to nothing to run the horse.”

The first violin, who spoke no English, nodded his head in approval. Already he was changed. The humble look of the street musician had gone out of his face, and he lolled in his chair with lordly ease. Fortune had stuffed his pockets with gold, and he would fiddle no more for a living. He called for another bottle, and flung down a sovereign as if it were sixpence. Walter's mind was working rapidly. Perhaps the quartet wanted a first violin ... the little “Duke” was at home ... with a week's practice ...”

“Well, the point is this, Palesi,” said Paoli, suddenly. “Nicolo's taking the next boat home and leaving us in the lurch, and we can't get a man to play our stuff.”

“W'at about Pedrotti?” said Palesi.

“No good; I tried him, but his wife objects. Says it isn't respectable playing in the streets. I told her it was a dam' sight more respectable than playing in a stuffy theatre every night for less money.”

“Well, Gomez?”

“Yes, he'd do, but he bends his elbow too much. You see, it's only a matter of six months, because Nicolo's sending his brother out when he gets home.”

Walter made up his mind in a moment. These fellows were competent musicians, who preferred the freedom of the streets. Ricordi had said that he must eat his bread with tears. People would look down on him. Never mind; he was done with smug respectability, and this was a way of escape.

“How would I do?” he inquired, staring at Paoli.

“You?” said Paoli, in astonishment. “But we're only street players, and you——” His look meant that Walter belonged to the class that looks down on itinerant musicians.

“Never mind that,” said Walter; “I can play anything at sight. I can orchestrate; and I'm sick of being respectable on two pounds a week.”

“Dat is so,” said Palesi. “Dis genelman is a good musician an' a

composer.” For Palesi, being a connoisseur of music in his spare time, had discovered that Walter was a composer of music, and a pupil of Ricordi's.

“And where are you playing,” asked Paoli.

“I've never played for a living,” said Walter; and as Paoli looked doubtful he added: “but I've played trios and quartets with Ricordi for two years.”

“Well, that's class enough for me,” said Paoli. “Look here, if you mean what you say, come round to my room on Sunday night, and we'll run through a few pieces and talk business. Here, I'd better give you my address before I get too full to remember where I live. Freeman's Chambers, Hunter Street. Four flights of stairs, and keep on going till you bump your head against the roof. And now you come along with us. This is Nicko's shout, and we're going to make a night of it.”

The next morning Walter took the little “Duke” out of its case, dusted it carefully, and sat down to Kreutzer's Studies. And for three days he practised incessantly, till the little “Duke” sang under his supple fingers. On the following Monday morning he was awakened early by a knock at his door. Then he heard Mrs. Brittle's voice:

“Walter, your uncle wants to know if you're getting ready for the office.”

“No; tell him I've got another job,” said Walter.

This answer brought up Jacob himself, spick and span, bristling with anger.

“Did I understand Martha to say that you were not going to work this morning?” he inquired.

“Yes, my mistake, I forgot to tell you,” said Walter.

“Do you understand that you'll be called on to resign if you're not there to-day?” inquired Jacob.

“Yes, that's all right; I've dismissed myself.”

“But this is monstrous. You've taken leave of your senses. You're throwing up the Government service and a position for life.” Jacob spoke as if he were arguing with a man who contemplated suicide.

“I know that; but I've got another job,” said Walter.

“Ah! And what may that be?”

Walter hesitated, and then plunged: “I'm going to play in the streets with a band.”

“I don't think I quite catch what you mean,” said Jacob.

“I've got a job with the string band that plays in front of pubs. and cafés,” said Walter, feeling as if he were throwing a bomb.

A greyish tinge came over Jacob's florid face. For the moment he looked his full age in spite of the dyed hair.

“Play in the streets with a band,” he said in a faint voice. “D'ye mean that I should have to walk about the town and see you playing the fiddle

in the gutter?"

"Either that or take a cab," said Walter, with deliberate insolence.

Jacob turned purple, and recovered his voice. "Take care, sir," he cried. "I can stand a joke as well as any man; but if you go too far you'll find I'm a perfect devil when I'm roused. I'm not much to look at" (he could have bitten his tongue for saying that), "but there's something of the British lion in me yet. You may think it safe to play with me; but if you're not careful I'll do something you'll never forget."

Walter looked at him with the accumulated hatred of years.

"Ah! I know what that will be," he drawled. "You'll stop dyeing your hair and philandering with bits of girls."

"Out of this house you pack! I disown you! Never let me see your face again!" screamed Jacob.

"All right; I expected that. I was never wanted here."

"Oh, yes, you were," said a quiet voice. He turned, and saw Mrs. Brittle standing in the doorway.

"D'ye mean what you've just said, Mr. Gidley?" she asked.

"Mean it?" spluttered Jacob; "if he's here when I come home I'll send for the police."

"Ah! in that case I'll say good-bye now," she said, putting out her hand. "Because I'll be gone before you get back."

"What does this mean, Martha?" said Jacob.

"It means I'm a childless woman, and for years that boy has made me forget it. I'm proud of him if you're not, and where he goes I follow. He'll never want while I can earn a crust; and slaves and drudges are welcome anywhere," she added, with a sudden bitterness.

Jacob turned pale. He had a swift, horrible vision of his house bereft of Mrs. Brittle. Who would cook his meals to a nicety, brush and press his clothes, and keep his house as clean as a new pin? Everything that really mattered to him was rocking on its foundations — respectability, and his physical comforts. Mechanically he took out his watch and noted that he would be twenty minutes late at the office.

"Perhaps I was a bit hasty, Martha," he said; "but I was provoked. Do nothing till I come home, and we'll talk it over." His jaunty air was gone; this frightful scene had upset him for the day. And feeling an urgent need for a restorative, he hurried to the pantry and took a double dose of Parson's Quickfire Nerve Tonic.

Chapter XVI: The Cloven Hoof.

IT was late in the afternoon, and Betty was preparing the dinner in the kitchen. She went about her work mechanically, with her mind elsewhere, for her thoughts were busy with Frank Goddard. She was to meet him that night, and the thought filled her with serene happiness, for he was the perfect lover that she had dreamed of for years. No one had ever understood her as he did; no one had ever loved her with such passionate tenderness. She heard a faint knocking in the workshop, and her face clouded. After a week's idleness, her father had been seized with a fit of industry, and she reckoned on that to get out to-night without being questioned. It was the one blot on her exquisite emotions that she had to meet her lover in a furtive, underhand way. She had grown an adept in making pretexts to get out of the house, and they stood under verandas or walked the streets till her feet ached. Frank treated it all as a joke, and made nothing of waiting for hours without seeing her.

She had been incredibly flattered when she learned that he was staying in Sydney on her account alone. He had come over from Melbourne to take lessons from Ricordi, who had done wonders with the voice of a man he knew; had heard her play, and had fallen in love with her at first sight. At present he was a gentleman of leisure on an allowance; but in a few years he would be a rich man. His father, fearing that his son would go on the stage, had left a will tying up the property till he was thirty. That, he explained, with a smile, was what he got for being a musician instead of a man of business. He talked of taking her to Europe when she had finished with Ricordi, and putting her under Leschetizky.

Ricordi had been able to do nothing with his voice; but he still took lessons to be near her, and breathe the same air. That reminded her. Her lessons with Ricordi had been a succession of triumphs. She was practising three and four hours a day, and already he said that she had nothing to learn from him in technique. As for interpretation, she had the divine gift of temperament; and teaching her was child's play. Still, he was not satisfied with her light and shade, and had given her a Liszt rhapsody as a final study before attacking the Concerto. He had declared that he would be satisfied when she broke the strings of the piano in one of those smashing chords. What a strange man he was! He shunned women; and yet they said that he had given up his career for love of a royal princess who had been one of his pupils!

Her reverie was interrupted by a quick, alert step down the side passage. It was the Colonel, looking very smart in a new second-hand suit of the judge's, and wearing a flower in his buttonhole. Betty smiled at him with dismay in her heart. She had meant to go out to-night under pretext of going to her cousin's to try over some songs, and that would be impossible now. There was no dancing class to-night, and he would stay till all hours.

"Good afternoon, Betty," he cried, briskly. "A penny for your thoughts. You were not dreaming of an old fellow like me with that look in your eyes. Aha! trust an old soldier to smell powder."

"Well, you're wrong for once. I was thinking about my music-lessons," replied Betty.

"That's good, very good. I hear you're going to take us by storm one of these days. I don't pretend to follow you in the higher flights of music. The drums of war are music enough for an old soldier's ears; but you have my best wishes for the sake of your eyes."

Betty smiled at the familiar compliments, and wished he were miles away. But the Colonel, who was anxious to know the bill of fare; and far too much of a gentleman to ask, was exploring the kitchen with the eye of an old campaigner. His aristocratic nose told him that there was roast mutton in the oven. A heap of kitchen waste indicated potatoes and spinach. Good, plain fare as usual, he thought. And he racked his brains to think of a little extra that would give a flavour to the meal. A saucepan lying idle on the stove attracted his attention, and he permitted himself to inspect its contents.

"That's some soup left over from yesterday," said Betty; "but there's not enough to go round."

The Colonel's face brightened. He went to the pantry and collected a tin of curry, an onion, and a carrot. Betty added an apple from her room upstairs. "And now," said the Colonel, taking off his coat, "give me the frying-pan and I'll perform wonders in half-an-hour."

"Well, if you're going to be so busy, uncle, look after the dinner while I change my dress," said Betty.

An hour later they sat down to dinner, and Peter, sniffing the soup with approval, took a spoonful. A moment later Betty and the Colonel looked up in alarm. Peter, with his hand clapped over his mouth, was staring in front of him with the dumb terror of a man who has swallowed poison by accident. Then he ran into the yard.

"And so that's mulligatawny, is it?" said Peter, coming to a standstill for want of words. "Well, I've never tasted boiling lead to my knowledge; but I should prefer it."

"Sir," said the Colonel, "I must compliment you on your language. It would have done credit to any regiment."

"It's all right, Algy," said Peter, grimly; "you're welcome to sit at my

table as often as you please; but I wish you'd treat me as a friend and not as a relation."

"I assure you, sir," replied the Colonel, finishing his soup with relish, "that Mrs. Brenner-Jones, who has lived in India, complimented me on my skill with that particular dish only yesterday."

Peter brightened up instantly. "Aha, Algy. I've heard about the little widow. They say she's got heaps of money, and she's got her eye on you. Take care, my lad."

"Sir," said the Colonel, "Mrs. Brenner-Jones has breeding, which I have always valued higher than money; and as for her attitude to me, sir, well, a soldier never turns his back on danger."

The Colonel had carried it off very well, but there was a flush on his cheek; and to hide his embarrassment he turned suddenly to Betty.

"By the way, Betty, is that gentleman an officer that I saw you with the other day? He walks like a soldier."

The words fell on Betty's ears like a thunderclap. Her secret was out at last.

"What's that?" said Peter, sharply.

But the look of distress on Betty's face told the Colonel that he had made a mistake, and he tried to cover up his slip.

"Nothing, sir; tit for tat," he replied. "I was teasing Betty as you have been teasing me. The gentleman with the military step is myself, if I'm not mistaken. Betty did me the honour of walking round the Block with me the other day."

"Um," said Peter, and was silent for the rest of the meal.

After dinner Peter hurried back to the workshop, and the Colonel helped Betty to wash up. "I'm very sorry, my dear, that I should put my foot in it like that, but the words slipped out unawares," he said.

"It's all right, uncle," said Betty, in a dreary tone; "but you know what father is."

And while she was wondering how she could get rid of him, he excused himself; he had an appointment. "I didn't care to tell your father, but Mrs. Brenner-Jones has promised to show me some photographs of India. It seems her father knew my people at home."

Betty put the last dishes neatly in the dresser and looked at the clock with a sigh of relief. It was nearly seven. She would practise for half-an-hour and then slip away while her father was busy. She went upstairs and sat down at the piano, her mind divided between Liszt's Eleventh Rhapsody and Frank Goddard. For the tenth time she had played the andante, with its massive chords and chromatic runs, with one eye on the clock, when her father shuffled into the room. One glance told her what had happened. His fit of industry had spent itself, and he was ready to smoke and gossip for the rest of the night. She might as well give it up; she would never get out. Peter sat down and listened attentively as she

trifled with the keys.

“Play that as if you meant it,” he said, with a frown.

His words set the devil loose in her, and Betty, who played her best when she was angry, turned to the beginning; and, forgetting Frank Goddard and the appointment, she played the *lento* with an exquisite lightness of touch. Then she attacked the *andante* with its heavy chords, and finished the *prestissimo* at lightning speed. Peter, who had come to inquire about the gentleman with the military tread, forgot him entirely in his astonishment.

“Um, more noise than music in that piece,” he began, “and I’ve told you before, Betty, every note in the run should be as round as a pearl.” It was his favourite theory; she had heard it dozens of times before. She looked at the clock. Twenty past seven. Her uncle’s unfortunate speech had made him suspicious, and she could think of no reasonable excuse for going out. She was near weeping with vexation when a knock came at the door. She listened eagerly for the voice. It was Mr. Nicholson with the Cremona that he had bought for five pounds in a pawnshop. They would argue about that till midnight. She might do it yet. As if in answer to her thought, Peter, who was examining the supposed Cremona with scorn, turned to her.

“Betty, run up to your cousin’s for an hour or two; I’m busy,” he said.

She caught the Bellevue Hill tram and reached Queen Street in five minutes. She could call at the academy on her way to the park, and avoid awkward questions on her return. Julia opened the door and cried out in surprise:

“Come in, Betty. I thought it was Gus. I can’t think what’s become of him. I hope there’s nothing wrong. I saw a quarrel in my cup this morning.”

“I can only stay a minute; I’m on my way to Miss Shaw’s,” said Betty. “I’ve changed my mind about that insertion in the yoke.” She had invented this on the spur of the moment with a facility that would have astonished her six months ago. But she listened with dismay to Julia’s reply.

“Just wait a minute till Gus comes, and I’ll go with you. I’ve got a bone to pick with her over that lace blouse.”

She was going to explain that she couldn’t wait, when Gus walked in with a tragic air. Evidently something had happened.

“Did you keep my dinner?” he asked.

“It’s in the oven,” said Julia, secretly relieved, for there was nothing much the matter when Gus was hungry.

“What made you late?” she inquired.

“Find out,” said Gus, with a scowl.

“You’ve had a quarrel with somebody; I saw it in my cup this morning.”

“Look here, Julia,” said Gus, irritably, “you get your life insured. You'll die of curiosity one of these days.”

But Julia was not to be denied. “It can't be Mary Mansfield, or you wouldn't be eating your dinner,” she said.

“Wrong again,” said Gus. “It is Mary Mansfield, and I'm eating my dinner.”

“I suppose I may as well tell you now,” added Gus. “I know you won't sleep till you worm it out of me. I've done with Mary for ever and ever, amen. She was a bit too free and easy for my liking, and I've had my eye on her for some time. So I sent her a note from the office asking her to meet the dark gentleman with the curly hair that sits opposite her in the tram every morning. I said the Paddington Town Hall at seven thirty; and sure enough she turned up. When she saw me she pretended she was going into the library for a book, till I showed her a copy of the letter. You should have heard her go to market. Why, a man's life wouldn't be safe with such a spitfire.”

Betty, who had ceased to take Gus's love affairs seriously, listened with feverish impatience. It was after eight already, and Frank would be waiting for her. But how was she to dodge Julia?”

“Well, I must be going,” she said. To her intense relief Julia, absorbed in Gus's story, had forgotten the dressmaker's.

“Oh, I saw a friend of yours to-day,” said Gus, as she turned to go.

“Who was that?” said Betty, fretting with impatience.

“Walter Chippendale,” said Gus. “He's lost his job, and he's playing in the streets with a string band.”

Betty's heart seemed to stop beating; then a fiery quiver ran like a flame through her body. She swallowed at something in her throat.

“I'm saying nothing against you, Betty. You're so blooming innocent that you'd break a man's heart and think you were doing him a kindness. But that's what a man gets for taking women too seriously. I'm taking a lesson from him. That's why I'm eating my dinner, and grinning like a Cheshire cat,” he concluded, with a gloomy frown.

Betty wanted to say that it wasn't through her; that it was through the failure of his “Ballad”; but her throat was parched. “Good night,” she managed to say, and got out of the door.

She walked along Queen Street to the park gates with her brain in a whirl. Gus's words still rang in her ears. Walter had come down to the gutter! And Gus blamed her for driving him there. But that was nonsense, for he had given her nothing but a contemptuous stare for months past. What did Mr. Gidley think of it? Paoli's was the only string band that played in the streets to her knowledge. But Walter couldn't have joined that; they were all Italians. Then she remembered that he was often mistaken for an Italian on account of his black hair and dark complexion.

It was half-past eight, but Mr. Goddard came to meet her without a sign of impatience. "I was going to wait till nine, so my luck's in," he said, gaily.

The lamps at the gates of the park threw a light for some distance along the broad asphalt drive; but beyond that was darkness and the shadow of trees. Other couples, all young, slipped past the lamps with a furtive air and were swallowed in the darkness.

Betty and Mr. Goddard always sat on a seat near the gates, but to-night these were all occupied by a band of straw-hatted youths, who were making night hideous with cat-calls and horse-play. Mr. Goddard suggested that they should walk down the path, and Betty agreed. The light of the lamps grew fainter, and was replaced by the faint gleam of the stars. She had taken Goddard's arm, and the slight pressure of his body thrilled her with a curious sense of intimacy. Goddard, usually so glib of speech, was very quiet; and Betty was thinking of Walter Chippendale and his downfall. Presently she looked round in surprise. By chance they had taken the path that led to the ponds, and she recognised the seat where she had sat with Walter. But the huge park that she knew so well by day seemed to stretch an illimitable distance in the night, with the deep recesses of a forest. From the island in the centre of the pond came the squawking noise of water-fowl lodged there for the night.

"We may as well sit down for a minute," said Mr. Goddard, in a peculiar tone.

Betty sat down with an uneasy feeling in her mind. And as they sat there in silence she became aware that the park was alive with strange, furtive noises. From unseen corners came titters of laughter, the sound of a kiss, a voice raised in protest and suddenly hushed. A vague fear came over Betty. She could hear the noise of the trams in Oxford Street, but they seemed miles away. There was something wrong with this place. Frank should never have brought her here. Then she grew alarmed at his silence.

"I don't like those noises, Frank," she cried, rising suddenly.

"Noises? What noises?" cried Goddard, with an air of surprise.

The palpable lie chilled her to the marrow, and turning, she ran blindly along the path to the gates. Goddard caught her halfway, and as he touched her arm, she burst into tears. Goddard, feeling her shrink from his touch, stood at a distance with a humble air, protesting that he had heard nothing. Then she fled from him as she had fled from Walter in the streets, but Goddard, forgetting caution in his anxiety, followed her home, declaring that he would kill himself unless she forgave him. He was talking with feverish vivacity when they reached the gate of Cremona Cottage. And as Betty stopped to dry her eyes, a harsh voice came from the darkness of the veranda:

"So it's you, my lad, is it? You're the fellow that walks like a soldier, I

suppose? You'd walk on crutches if I had my way. I don't know what the police are about. I thought they were paid to keep an eye on fellows like you. You flatter yourself if you think Betty wants anybody like you. The only decent fellow that ever came here went away with a flea in his ear because Betty didn't want him. You get home, my lad, before the police take a fancy to you."

The baritone listened in silence to the torrent of words, then raised his hat to Betty and walked rapidly down Crystal Street with an ugly look on his handsome face. Betty got to her room in safety; for Peter Wayside, having done his duty by Betty's admirer, revolved fresh arguments in his mind to confute Mr. Nicholson, who had quarrelled violently with him over the supposed Cremona.

Chapter XVII: Bread with Tears.

IT had rained steadily for two days, and the Bohemian quartet, thrown out of action by the weather, had spent the time rehearsing new pieces in Paoli's room in Hunter Street. About ten o'clock, Walter Chippendale, with a roll of music and the little "Duke" under his arm, got into the tram at Cleveland Street, and looked about him with a slightly defiant air. It was the look he had worn since his first appearance with the band in the streets a month ago: the look of a man who is doing something of which he ought to be ashamed. That first appearance had been an ordeal which he would never forget. He had followed Paoli into Hunter Street with the little "Duke" under his arm. The second violin had fixed the music-stands on the edge of the kerbstone, and a group of idlers had silently gathered.

He felt everyone's eyes were on him. His fingers trembled as he took the A from Paoli's flute. Then, having mastered his nerves, he discovered that his appearance in the streets had created no stir. The passers-by regarded him with indifference. He was only a street fiddler going about his business as they were going about theirs. And a wave of indignation went through him that he, Walter Chippendale, the composer, could fiddle for bread in the gutter, and create no sensation. He had forgotten that he was unknown. Then, in a cynical mood, he had watched out of the tail of his eye for anyone who had known him when he was a respectable Government clerk. The Colonel had been the first. Having washed down his counter-lunch with a pint of beer after his daily search for work, he stepped into Hunter Street with the quick, alert step of an old soldier, and stopped to listen to the band. He looked at Walter with a puzzled air, but failed to place him, and walked away with a smart military tread before the collection began. Then a clerk, who had often lunched at the same table, stopped to listen, and, recognising him, had walked away as if he had been stung. It had been easier than he expected, but by the raw edge of his nerves he knew that the real ordeal was to come. There were Betty and Freda, and the Fitzroys yet.

He smiled grimly as he thought of his uncle. For a week Jacob had walked the streets with a hangdog air, doubling in his tracks like a rabbit at the sound of the accursed band. Then, harassed by this interference with his fixed habits, he had screwed up his courage and walked past the quartet with a fine air of indifference. Not that Walter saw much of him,

for the quartet played by choice in the quieter streets where there was little traffic to drown the finer tones of the instruments. And already they lived in the same house with the detachment of unfriendly lodgers. Walter got up for his breakfast after Jacob had left for the office, and they saw nothing of each other from one week's end to another. When, under pressure from Mrs. Brittle, he had agreed to Walter's staying at home, he had mildly suggested that he should come and go by the back gate leading into the lane for fear the neighbours should begin to talk, but Walter had already done that of his own accord.

He looked at his fellow-passengers in the tram. These were not the men he had got to know by sight when he travelled to the office every morning. They were prosperous idlers, or workers with no fixed hours of routine, men of whose existence he had hardly been aware during his life on the treadmill. And he thought of the office and its rigid hours with the surprise of an escaped prisoner, wondering that he could have ever endured it. Then he thought of the clerks, so careful of their appearance, and apeing the air of professional men with their collars and cuffs, and his face clouded. He had taken to a slouch hat and a soft shirt as a sort of disguise, but he was vividly conscious that he had dropped in the social scale, and was a vagabond musician of the streets. The habit of years still chained him to his own class, and this snobbish pride was the one mark left on him by the Government service.

Apart from that the new life suited him to the ground. At last he was a musician earning his living by music. Already his knowledge of harmony had made him indispensable to the band. Paoli had jumped at his offer to arrange new pieces for the quartet, and there was no more talk of Nicolo's brother coming out from Sicily to replace him. He had been surprised to find that Paoli was the only Bohemian in the quartet. The fat, amiable second violin, who always smelt of garlic, kept a wife and four children in the suburbs. The harper, the most melancholy man he had ever seen, carried little books of piety in his pocket, which he studied in his leisure moments. Paoli, he had been surprised to discover, had gifts nearly equal to his own. He was a superb player, made nothing of technical difficulties, and should have been a star on the concert platform, but he grudged the time for practice, absorbed in amorous adventures. The thought of Paoli's gifts wasted on the streets had helped to reconcile Walter to his lot. That reminded him of Betty, and instantly his thoughts dwelt on her with a malignant persistence. Sooner or later she would see him playing in the streets; perhaps that would give her something to think about.

It was still raining heavily when he left the tram at Hunter Street, and he tucked the roll of music under his coat. It was a surprise that he had prepared for the quartet. His Nocturne had gone unnoticed, lost in a welter of rubbish at Jarling's, and in a fit of exasperation he had scored it

for two violins, the flute and harp. The philistines had driven him to the gutter; they should hear his music in the streets. He mounted the four flights of stairs to the room, formerly a studio, where Paoli lived in an incredible litter of things. This room, and Paoli himself, who ate when he felt inclined, and got less sleep than the cat on the tiles, were a continual astonishment to Walter, accustomed to the rigours of Mrs. Brittle and a house swept and cleaned like a hospital ward. And, as usual, the remains of Paoli's breakfast were on a shelf, for he ate standing, like the Hebrews going a journey. The bed in the corner was a disordered heap of clothes; and the floor was strewn with odds and ends of his belongings. Women's photographs by the dozen were nailed to the walls, or stood in rows wherever there was room. And out of this indescribable jumble Paoli emerged every night, bent on amorous quest, wearing spotless linen and a fashionable serge suit, rivalling Jacob Gidley with his spick and span air.

He was cleaning the ivory mouthpiece of his flute, and nodded in a friendly manner when Walter entered. From the beginning he had treated Walter as an equal, without ceremony, conscious of his own powers. But the second violin and the harper were still uneasy in his presence, surprised to find themselves on familiar terms with one of the superior class from whom they collected sixpences in the streets. And the tribute, slight as it was, soothed Walter's pride like balm. But there was no time to waste, and the rehearsal began. They started with *The Girl from Nowhere*, the latest claptrap from the theatre, which Paoli had arranged from a pianoforte selection.

"Not quite up to your standard, but they want it," he said to Walter, with a grin. And he played the trashy melodies through with careless ease, keeping his cigarette alight through the performance. Then they played the overture to *Tancredi*, and the "Intermezzo" from *Cavalleria Rusticana*; Tschaiakowsky's *Chanson Triste*, and the pizzicato from *Sylvia*; "Anitra's Dance" from *Peer Gynt* and the waltz from *Faust*.

"There, that'll keep us going till next week, but I thought you were going to arrange the "Dance of the Houris" from *Giaconda*?" said Paoli, turning to Walter.

"No, I changed my mind, and brought this instead," said Walter, unrolling the sheets of manuscript.

"But this is your own music, the Nocturne," said Paoli, examining the sheets in surprise. "I wanted to play it, but I thought you might take the hump."

"That's the idea," said Walter, with a bitter smile. "They laughed at my music, and they shall hear it in the streets."

The other players looked at their parts, and stared at Walter with an air of deference. He was the first composer they had met, and they were going to play his music. In half-an-hour they could play it without a

fault, and Paoli had already memorised his part. His eyes glittered with pleasure, for Walter had given the melody to the flute, and the theme, repeated in echoes, died away in a mournful sigh to a faint pizzicato from the strings. The three street musicians sat up, and stared at him in astonishment; they knew music when they heard it. The second violin, remembering his grand opera days, applauded in the traditional manner by tapping on the back of his violin with his bow; the harper gave him a sad, deferential smile. But Paoli held out his hand with an impulsive movement.

“Put it there, old boy,” he cried. “I never expected to meet my match in Sydney, but you’ve got me beat.”

The words warmed Walter like wine. These men were musicians, and they acknowledged his superior powers without a grudge. He had been surprised at the air of indifference with which they played exquisite phrases on which his ear loved to dwell. This was the first time that he had seen them excited, and it was his Nocturne that had done it.

But Paoli, anxious for the public to hear him in a new part, looked out of the window at the sky. It was near twelve, and the clouds were breaking. There was every promise of a fine afternoon.

“I say, boys, it’s going to clear up. Come back at two o’clock, and we’ll go out this afternoon.”

The second violin, always polite, bowed himself out with a smile; the harper followed with the air of a man who has decided at last to commit suicide. The two young men stayed behind, and lit their cigarettes. They were friends already. Suddenly Paoli fixed him with his impudent black eyes that had turned Betty hot and cold, but Walter saw nothing but friendliness in them.

“Say,” he inquired, “what did the girl do to you?”

Walter flushed, and lied instantly. “There was no girl. They laughed at my ‘Ballad,’ and I got tired of things.”

“All right, have it your own way,” said Paoli. “I could have believed that until I heard this piece. If you can write stuff like that, you can turn the laugh on anybody, and you know it. But there you are, let it rest.”

“I was a musician pretending to be a clerk, and I got full up,” persisted Walter.

Paoli changed the subject. “Did you see the look Luigi gave me when I told them to come back? He loves wet weather so that he can go to church.”

“Yes, I did,” said Walter. “Is he a bit touched?”

“Well, not quite. You see, he was going to be a priest, but he got into trouble over a girl, and that was the end of him. Keep away from women; that’s my recipe for getting on in this world,” said Paoli. “I say that because I could never do it myself. I was going to be the crack flute player in the world, and here I am knocking about the streets for a living.

All through them. I'd practise day and night for a week, then I'd see a fresh face, and it was all over. You remember Angelotti who was out here? He heard me play, and wanted to take me to Europe at his own expense. Said I was a genius and all that sort of thing, but when the time came I was missing. I'd just got my first setback over a girl, and I cleared out to Melbourne. I was only a kid, but you know the sort of thing. You wander about in the moonlight and try to think of bits of poetry. Then, when you see her, your tongue sticks to your teeth. I followed her home one moonlight night, but her old man was waiting for me, and nearly frightened me out of my skin. The old devil! I see her about the streets now, prettier than ever, but she turns her nose up at me. Not that that matters. I got in with a swift lot in Melbourne, and they knocked all the moonshine out of me. I don't know why I'm telling you this, I'm sure, but that piece of yours reminded me of her. It was the sort of thing I should have liked to play under her window. I was sure there was a woman in your case, but you're lucky. Keep away from the women; I can't. I can do without grub, and I can do without drink — I've done both; but I can't do without women, and they've been no good to me."

Walter listened with an intense curiosity. This was something new. Here was a man who loved and loathed women, helpless as a fly in a spider's web against their seductions. He wanted to tell Paoli that he had lied, that a woman had brought him to the gutter, but he was silent. The hopeless passion and despair of others was the making of history and romance. His longing for Betty, disguised as hate, was as brutal and unromantic as hunger.

At two o'clock, when the second violin and the harper came back, it was still cloudy, but the rain had stopped, and the quartet made for the French Grill in Phillip Street to catch the patrons as they came out. Every day it was the same, and Walter had to nerve himself for this procession through the streets with the harper and the second violin in the lead carrying the music-stands. And yet he was conscious that he was unremarked. He was a street musician, and it was his business to play the fiddle; they saw nothing remarkable in that.

They opened with *The Girl from Nowhere*, and then Paoli, who was itching to play his new part, turned to the Nocturne. With the first notes of his music a fit of nervous exaltation came over Walter. He swallowed incessantly. The music in front of him became a blur, and he played from memory, conscious only of the sound of Paoli's flute. A crowd had gathered, the crowd that always melted away when the second violin tucked his instrument under his arm. Two musicians whom Walter knew by sight came out of the Grill and listened attentively. One peered over Paoli's shoulder to read the name of the piece, obviously surprised, then tapped the second violin on the shoulder, and gave him a coin.

"Repeat," said Paoli, and they played it again.

Presently Walter was surprised to see Hilda Fitzroy come out of the vestibule with a man about forty, a professional man by the look of him. She flushed slightly when she saw Walter, then, turning her head, gave him a friendly nod. He began to think. He had seen her before in the streets with the same man without getting a good view of him. He had heard of Hilda's romantic love affair from Betty, but this wasn't the man she described. And since he disliked Hilda, he decided that she was no better than the rest. His life in the streets had taught him many things. Already he knew many couples by sight who met apparently by chance in the streets, dived into tea-rooms and hotels, and parted at the door like strangers when they came out. By four o'clock they had played the Nocturne a dozen times, and had worked their way back to Hunter Street, where Paoli proposed to finish for the day, as rain was threatening again.

It was here that Betty, who had just finished her lesson with Ricordi, ran into them unawares. She was going home by way of Hunter Street to avoid Frank Goddard; and with her mind full of him, she was astonished to hear the mournful wail of Paoli's flute playing a melody that she knew by heart. She turned and saw Walter, and a fiery quiver ran through her like a flame. Flight was impossible, for she seemed to have lost the use of her limbs. Luckily Paoli's back was turned to her, and he was watching the women on the other side of the street. Suddenly she turned and stared at the collection of precious stones in the jeweller's shop, but seeing nothing. Her brain was in a whirl. She had been dreading this, but here was Walter, in the gutter, as they had said, playing the Nocturne that he had written for her. And they said, Gus and Hilda, that she had driven him to it. Ricordi had given her a copy of the Nocturne, and she knew every note of it. She had never heard Paoli play better. The theme, repeated in echoes, died away in an exquisite pianissimo, and then they began to play it again. And suddenly drawn by an irresistible impulse, she turned round and looked at Walter with the appealing, pitying look she had given him at the concert. But Walter, who had seen her turn and look in the window, returned her pitying look with a fixed malignant stare, conscious of nothing but that Betty was staring at him, and gloating over his downfall. Suddenly pride and anger came to Betty's relief, and with flaming cheeks, she turned and walked up Hunter Street to the tram, furious with rage and humiliation. Hilda and Freda and Gus, who were all against her — would they be convinced now? If Walter had ever loved her, his love had turned to hate, and she would never lower herself to look at him again. Why had he dragged the Nocturne into the gutter, for Paoli of all people to play it? Again the melancholy wail of the flute rang in her ears, and she nearly wept. He had done this to spite her. What strange creatures men were! Frank had insulted her, and then threatened to commit suicide, if she didn't speak to him. His outburst of passion and remorse had terrified her, and then he had the audacity to say that she

must marry him, or there would be a tragedy. There was no doubt about his love, although they were all against him. If they had seen the look Walter gave her, perhaps they would be satisfied. It seemed incredible that he and Paoli should be playing together. Of course Paoli had told him about her, and they had laughed together over her childish love affair. He had shown his contempt for her by playing the Nocturne in the streets. It was her music, for he had told her that she had inspired it. And now he would go from bad to worse, and grow like Paoli. Well, she could do nothing to stop it. Torn with indignation and pity, she was unable to give more than a passing glance at a Paris model hat which a woman opposite was wearing.

Walter had watched her retreating figure, conscious of nothing but a supreme moment of agony. His cup of bitterness was full; the rest would be easy. He looked up; it was spitting with rain. And then, to his intense relief, Paoli, who for a wonder had seen nothing, decided to finish for the day. He saw Walter's haggard face, and was greatly concerned.

"You're taking this too seriously, old boy," he said. "Go up to Palesi's, and get a glass of that special port he keeps under the counter."

Instead of going to Palesi's, he left the little "Duke" with Paoli, and walked about the streets till it was dark. Then he went to the wine cellar with a vicious resolve to drink himself into forgetfulness. The place was empty, and he sipped at his sherry with long intervals of brooding. He felt for the first time that it was all over between him and Betty, for, with a peculiar tenacity, he had counted on her coming back to him sooner or later. And what was to become of him now he neither knew nor cared.

His thoughts were interrupted by the entrance of a pretty, lady-like girl, who sat at the opposite table, and gave him a haughty look. He wondered idly if she had mistaken the wine cellar for a tea-room, and returned to his gloomy thoughts. But presently he was aware of a discreet, persistent cough at his elbow, and turned irritably to the girl. She was looking at him with a fixed stare which broke into a smile. Under cover of a frown Walter's thoughts travelled rapidly. He had set out to become a famous musician — and Fate had thrust him into the gutter. He had wanted Betty with all his heart and soul — and Chance was offering him this. And suddenly, with a maddening vision of Betty in his mind, he turned to the girl.

"Come over here and have a drink with me," he cried, roughly. "I like your looks."

Chapter XVIII: The Colonel Hears the Truth.

THE Colonel, having breakfasted at his leisure, was studying the effect of a new tie in his bedroom before stepping down town on his daily search for work. The morning had broken fine and clear, the walk into town would be a pleasure, and he was to dine with Mrs. Brenner-Jones that night. Life was running very smoothly with him, and he hummed "Champagne Charley" between his teeth as he decided that he had caught the right shade of grey to match the judge's suit. He rubbed a little brilliantine on the famous moustaches, and thought of Mrs. Brenner-Jones, the rich widow, who had taken a house in Edgecliffe Road. They said she was setting her cap at him; but he needed no one to tell him that. She was not the first, and it was unlikely that she would be the last. He had everything that he desired — excellent health, perfect freedom, and money to jingle in his pocket. The academy was flourishing, and the house of Fitzroy had never been more prosperous. His military figure had always taken the women's eyes, and he could have married a dozen times since his wife's death. Some day they would know his reason for remaining single, and wonder.

Downstairs Hilda and Julia were washing up and discussing Gus. Since the affair with Mary Mansfield, the geisha girl, he had surprised them with his good humour and generosity. For weeks past he had loaded his sisters with boxes of chocolates, rarely went out, and seemed on excellent terms with the world. But the purchase of chocolates seemed to be a mania. Julia had found more boxes hidden in his room, and he hated chocolates.

"How many did you say there were now?" inquired Hilda.

"Eleven. I counted another this morning. Ladbury's half-crown boxes tied up with ribbon. D'ye think he's going off his dot?"

"Don't be a fool, Julia. If Gus spends his money on lollies, he's got a reason. Trust Gus to think of himself first and others last."

"That's right," said Julia, angrily; "never lose a chance of running him down."

"Run him down, my eye. You've never known him spend sixpence on us before, and if you think he buys them for love of us you're mistaken. Perhaps he's got a new girl, and she's mad on chocolates."

"But then he wouldn't give them to us, and hide them in his boxes."

"All right, give it up. We'll know sooner or later," said Hilda,

impatiently. She bumped against the table as she spoke, and a knife fell on the floor with a rattle.

“Now what do you think of that?” said Julia, always on the look out for omens. “That means a visitor this afternoon. You’ll have to go to the door, Hilda. I’ve got the ironing to do.”

“I’m hanged if I will,” said Hilda, heartily.

“That’s right, put it on to me,” said Julia, with sudden exasperation. “You know I’ve got the ironing to do, and you won’t even answer the door for me. I don’t know what’s come over you lately, Hilda. You loll about the place all day, and leave me to do everything. It’s sure to be Miss Blore, and she’ll stay for hours.”

Hilda flushed angrily, her good humour forgotten. “I’ll leave you to do the lot one of these days, and then you’ll have something to talk about,” she cried.

“Oh, will you?” shouted Julia, thoroughly exasperated. “I’ve been the fool long enough, my fine lady. I’ll tell dad how you impose on me.”

“Do,” said Hilda, white with passion; “here he is.”

The Colonel, humming a tune between his teeth, came into the room and found his daughters looking daggers at each other. Julia ran to him and burst out crying; and the Colonel, who had often winced under Hilda’s sharp tongue, looked at her inquiringly.

“Yes, that’s right, take her part before you even know what the row’s about,” cried Hilda, beside herself with rage.

“Well, my dear, it’s generally your tongue that——”

“Go on,” said Hilda, furiously; “I was waiting for that. I’ve got such a vile temper that no one can live with me. And then I’m told I’m a loafer and do nothing all day long. I wonder where you’d have all been but for me. I’ll tell you. Cadging for bread in the streets for a father who’s never done a stroke of work in his life. And then you call me a loafer and talk about my temper behind my back. Well, I’ve had enough.”

The Colonel paled slightly. It was the first time anyone had taunted him with his idle habits; and with the lapse of years he had forgotten that he was anything but a gentleman of leisure.

“Don’t you dare to insult my father,” cried Julia.

“No; I suppose it is an insult to expect him to work for his family like other men. He was always too much of a gentleman for that; but he was never too proud to let us work for him. Oh, I know that tale about the royal duke, and the name of Fitzroy, and I’m sick of it. And now I’ll tell you something else while I’m about it. I’m going to get married, and you can shift for yourselves when I’m gone.”

“Go and get married, and good riddance to you,” cried Julia. “My father’s been a gentleman all his life, and no one ever expected him to work.”

“That will do, Julia,” said the Colonel, stopping her with his hand. He

was watching Hilda with a curious attention, and spoke very quietly. The mask of his military swagger was gone, and he looked very old and feeble with his white moustaches and thin, delicate hands. "Your sister's only speaking the truth, and should be encouraged. I have more than common blood in my veins, and am proud of it; but your sister thinks fit to despise it. I was brought up as a gentleman, and had expectations, which, unfortunately, ended with the death of an exalted person. I've been very thoughtless. I thought my children were proud of me; but it seems I was mistaken. I must really find some light employment to take this reproach from my name."

"No, you won't," cried Julia. "I'll work my fingers to the bone before you shall soil your hands. And I could tell you things about her that would make your hair stand on end."

Hilda went white as a sheet, but said nothing.

"I'm not interested," said the Colonel, and, turning to a bowl of violets that stood on the mantelpiece, he selected a buttonhole with great deliberation.

"Where are you going, dada?" said Julia, anxiously.

"I'm going to take Mrs. Brenner-Jones to see the ponds in Centennial Park," he said. "They tell me that they're well worth seeing at this time of the year."

As he walked out with a faint return of his military swagger, Julia turned on her sister.

"There you are, you spitfire. You see what you've done. He'll go and marry that widow now."

"Good luck to him," said Hilda, savagely.

* * * * *

Betty ran into the Colonel as he was passing Hargrave Street on his way to Edgecliffe Road.

"You're going the wrong way, and you look quite ill, uncle," cried Betty. "Is anything the matter?"

"Nothing; a mere trifle," replied the Colonel. "By the way, you're a musician; do you happen to know 'The Rogues' March'?"

"No; what is it?" asked Betty, in surprise.

"It's a piece of music they play when a worthless soldier is drummed out of his regiment," he replied, with a touch of bitterness. "Learn it, Betty, learn it." And as she wondered at his words, he was gone.

Her surprise increased when Hilda opened the door.

"Hullo, Betty," she said; "I thought you were too busy practising to get out in the morning?"

"Yes; but I've been at it since daylight, and I've overdone it. I've got a frightful headache. Where's Julia?"

“She's up in her room,” said Hilda, with a pretence of indifference.

Betty, remembering the Colonel's strange words, looked at her attentively. “Hilda, you've been quarrelling again?” she said.

“Yes, I've been quarrelling again,” said Hilda; and then, to Betty's surprise, she burst into tears.

“What was it about?”

“What was it about?” said Hilda. “About nothing as usual. Oh, I forgot. A knife fell off the table, and that started the row.”

“That's nonsense,” said Betty; “but what did you say to uncle?”

“I got my monkey up and called him a loafer.”

“Well, you ought jolly well to be ashamed of yourself,” said Betty, angrily. “Everyone knows that uncle never did a day's work in his life. You know what he thinks he is?”

“I know that; but the row started, and I thought it a good opportunity to tell them that I was going to leave here.”

“Leave here?” said Betty, aghast, for she knew that Hilda was the backbone of the dancing academy. “Then you're going on the stage again?”

“No; I told them that I was going to get married.”

“Married!” said Betty, forgetting her anger at that magic word.

“Yes; but I didn't dare to tell them the worst,” said Hilda.

“The worst?” said Betty, faintly, and was silent; but her mind was travelling rapidly. Hilda hadn't danced for months, and dodged the housework.

“Yes; I'm married already.”

“Good God!” said Betty, and was conscious of a sudden, joyous relief in her mind.

“You needn't look so flabbergasted,” said Hilda, with a faint smile. “It's all right. I've been married six months.”

“Well, he's a rich man at any rate,” said Betty, as if that excused a thousand faults.

“Who told you that?” said Hilda, in astonishment.

“You did, often.”

A sudden light dawned on Hilda. “Oh, that Johnnie!” she cried. “I didn't marry him, and for a very good reason. He never existed except in my mind.”

“Do you mean to tell me——” cried Betty, indignantly.

“Yes; it was all lies, Betty. I had to make up some tale. You can no more go through this world without telling lies than you can go through it naked. I couldn't tell the truth because he was a married man, and you know how spiteful people are.”

“But you said you were married.”

“Yes, so I am; but we had to wait till his wife died. It's a long tale, Betty. She was a drunkard, and anybody's wife; but he wouldn't divorce

her. Six months ago she swallowed lysol in a drunken fit by mistake, and they called it suicide.”

“But why did you marry him on the quiet?”

“Because he was afraid I'd go back to the stage, and he's awfully jealous. I like jealous men and you don't, Betty. It's him that has kept me here these two years teaching dancing to clumsy louts for a living instead of doing a *pas seul* in the ballet. He hates men to look at me.”

Betty gave her a peculiar look, and she laughed.

“I know what you're thinking, Betty. What a time he'll have with my temper; but that's all right. He's the only man I ever met that can manage me. When I get in a tantrum, he just looks at me, and I feel such a fool. Besides, he says — he says — I look my prettiest when I'm in a rage.”

She flushed as she spoke, and Betty, looking at her long, plain features and thin lips, wondered at the vanity of women.

“But who is he?” she inquired.

“His name's Frawley; he's ten years older than I am, and he's a churchwarden. No theatrical man for me, Betty. I only see him once a week, and we have lunch at the French Grill. People will have nothing to talk about. By the way, your friend Chippendale saw us coming out last week. He was playing with that string band. He's worth a dozen of that fellow you're knocking about with. I'm a better judge of men than you are, Betty, and I don't like Mr. Goddard. He's too smooth and oily for me.”

Betty's heart hardened instantly. “That's nothing to do with you,” she said, coldly.

“I suppose not; but I thought I'd like to tell you.”

“When are you going to get married?” said Betty, changing the subject.

“I mean when are you going to live with your husband?”

“In a couple of months, perhaps. We've started buying the furniture.”

“And when are you going to tell uncle and Julia?”

“Ask me something easy. I think somebody else had better do that.”

Hilda was plainly hinting that she should break the news to the family, and Betty got up in a fright.

“Well, I must be going home; I've got another hour's practice to do for Ricordi,” she said, “and I think you ought to go down on your knees to uncle and apologise.”

“Oh, he's all right,” said Hilda, in her usual flippant tone; “I think he's gone to propose to Mrs. Brenner-Jones by the look of him. Ta-ta.”

Betty had enough to think about as she walked home. The news of Hilda's marriage had staggered her, for she had gone to the academy to ask her advice. Frank Goddard, growing desperate at her coldness, had written a frenzied letter threatening to come to the house to see her unless she met him that afternoon. She felt that she needed someone to counsel her; but Hilda's astonishing revelation, and her disparaging remarks

about Frank, had closed her mouth. And now she would decide herself. They had blamed her for pushing her resentment against Walter too far, and she was evidently doing the same by Frank, for he wrote like a desperate man.

Frank's proposal that she should secretly marry him had seemed monstrous to her; and here was Hilda a married woman all the time. For two years she had listened greedily to the tale of Hilda's lover, and it was all lies. You could believe nothing in this world. A shooting pain behind her eyes reminded her of Ricordi and the Concerto in G Major. She had been practising it for a month, and her troubles were only just beginning. Ricordi had chosen Beethoven in preference to the modern composers on account of her classic style, and he had been delighted with her interpretation. But day by day he grew more exacting, demanding nothing short of perfection, and the strain was telling on her. To-day she was expected to play the first movements from memory, and Ricordi was to play the orchestral part on a second piano. If her thoughts were free she could do it easily; but her mind was divided between the Concerto and Frank Goddard. Ricordi's words at her first lesson were coming true.

When she reached the studio one look at Ricordi told her that he was in a vile temper, and she prepared for the worst. Half-an-hour later she came out of the studio with blazing eyes. She had broken down on the double shake, and Ricordi, with ominous politeness, had begged her to go home and practice. She was used to his volcanic outbursts of anger; but this savage politeness was something new. She had never been so humiliated in her life; her pride was in the dust. With an involuntary movement she stopped and listened to the medley of sound from the studios in the lane. These people were happy and contented. They were not being bullied into doing something beyond their powers. And she thought bitterly of her pride and exultation when she had listened to them after her first lesson. Well, it seemed useless to go on, and she would hear what Frank had to say for himself. He, at any rate, found no fault with her.

He met her at the door, and bowed in a distant manner. Betty's heart turned cold; did he know that she was a failure?

"It's very good of you to come," he said. "I had something to tell you; but I've got worse news now. Ricordi's given me my walking ticket. He says it's a waste of time to teach me, because I don't practice. That's quite true, and you know the reason; but he deliberately picked a quarrel with me, and I lost my temper. And now, as there's nothing to keep me in Sydney, I'm going back to Melbourne. You can be very hard, Betty, but I thought you would like to see me for the last time."

Betty turned cold as she listened, and then she turned hot with indignation and anger. Ricordi had humbled her to the dust, and now he had driven Frank away from her. She had had enough of Ricordi. Let

him bully someone else. Her resentment against Frank was forgotten in a wave of pity.

“Take me to Major's and get me a strong cup of tea, or I shall go into hysterics,” she said, quite calmly.

When they had left the tea-room Betty had got control of her nerves; but her eyes were unnaturally bright. Mr. Goddard had done all the talking, and his caressing voice soothed her exacerbated nerves like wine.

“And that's why you must marry me,” he continued.

“I'd like father to hear that.”

“He doesn't consider you. All he wants is someone to answer the door and cook his meals. He'd never know till it was too late. What's the use of going on with Ricordi? When you've made your *début* with his precious orchestra, what will you do? Go back to drudgery in Crystal Street. You know that's true. I can take you to Europe and Leschetizky, and you'll have a career before you.”

They were so involved in argument that they turned the corner, and ran into the Bohemian quartet unawares. Betty gave one look at Walter, who turned pale as death. But the baritone, who, with his usual subtlety, had never mentioned Walter's name, stared straight at him with a cruel look of triumph on his handsome face. Neither of them spoke till they reached the tram.

“No one ever loved you as I love you, for I should have died for you to-night if you hadn't come to me,” whispered the baritone as he helped her into the tram, and Betty thrilled at the words. Here was the perfect lover, who could see no fault in her. What did Ricordi matter?

Chapter XIX: On the Mountains.

THE day had broken fine and clear, but Mr. Wayside gave it no more than a passing glance in his morning promenade. For once his thoughts were more occupied with Betty, who was packing her bag upstairs for a trip to Katoomba. She had broken down after her last lesson, and, since the winter was singularly mild, the doctor had advised a change of air on the mountains. Meanwhile he would be left to shift for himself, although Freda, the Colonel, and Julia had promised to come in and cook his meals. He was reflecting with a gloomy mind that he stood a good chance of being poisoned by one of the Colonel's foreign dishes before Betty came back. Already he had regretted sending her to Ricordi. The heavy practice had interfered with the routine of the house, and he wouldn't be sorry if this collapse should bring the lessons and the concert to an end. Girls were an endless nuisance.

Betty, moving swiftly about the confined space of her room, was packing with singular care and deliberation for a flying visit to the mountains. She had slept fitfully through the night, but there was no mark of fatigue on her. Her eyes were bright and clear; her cheeks flushed with colour. As she examined herself again in the glass, her heart leaped within her, for the sun, breaking clear in the sky, flooded the room with light. The one thought in her mind took definite shape. It was a happy omen, for this was her wedding day. She thought of it with a calmness that astonished her, for after a week of nervous hesitation, her fears had vanished with the dawn. Everything had shaped itself to this end. The nervous collapse after her last lesson, the meeting with Frank, and the doctor's orders for a change of air. But for a week she had trifled with the idea, conscious that the knowledge of Hilda's secret marriage had weakened her scruples. Then Freda had offered to go with her for the sake of company, and she agreed, catching at omens like straws on a drifting tide. Frank had declared that the hand of fate was in this marriage. Well, she would trust to that, and let the turn of events decide. Then, at the last moment, Freda's deaf aunt from Newcastle had walked in, and she must stay at home to entertain the unwelcome guest. Betty had accepted the inevitable; it was her father's fault for treating her like a child.

She was near the end of her packing, and with a swift look at her father, who was still pacing the asphalt paths in meditation, she pulled a

leather trunk from under the bed. It was her glory box, containing all her treasures that she had gathered together against such a day as this. And now she must leave it behind. With a serious, absorbed look, she turned over its contents. There were d'oyleys, pieces of Maltese lace, remnants of silk bought at a bargain, odd lengths of embroidery, silver buckles for her shoes no longer in fashion, table centres, quaint trinkets from bazaars, birthday presents from her friends, and a heap of odds and ends, each of peculiar value or rarity, which she had hoarded for years, more from instinct than from a conscious purpose. Each article, however insignificant, had its history, and as she lovingly fingered them her resolution nearly gave way. It dawned on her that she was parting from her home, for her father would never forgive her marriage, and the tears came into her eyes. She selected a few trifles at random, and locking the box pushed it under the bed again. The packing was ended, and she looked at the familiar room, narrow as a ship's cabin, that had been her refuge since childhood, with a sinking heart. A lump came into her throat. Frank had promised her many things, but this room had grown to be part of herself. She must think of other things to steady her mind. It was time to get the breakfast, and coming out on the landing, she stared long and earnestly at the sky. Peter Wayside, fatigued by his promenade, turned to look at her, and was surprised by the serious expression in her eyes. He was more surprised an hour later, when she clung round his neck at parting, and seemed to be asking his forgiveness for some trifling fault she had committed.

“Never mind about trifles,” he said; “and stay a month, if you like. Freda will see that I don't starve.” He instantly regretted saying it.

Then Freda ran in to say that she was going to the station with Betty; but Betty was not alarmed, Frank had foreseen that.

“I've set auntie to make the beds and tidy up the kitchen. I'll teach her to land herself on us because she's had a row with her husband. And she's that deaf, when I talk to her I feel as if I were shouting for the police. She'll be back in Newcastle by Saturday or my name's not Freda.”

Freda carried her suit-case to the station, and Betty looked round anxiously, fearful of Freda's sharp eyes; but there was no sign of Frank. She was careful to buy a return ticket for Katoomba in front of Freda.

“I must say you don't look very ill,” she said; “and that tailor-made fits you like a glove. Here's your rug, and don't forget to write and tell me if it's very cold. Expect me on Saturday. Saveloy!”

She had the carriage to herself for three stations, and, pulling off her left glove, she stared long and fixedly at a diamond ring on her third finger. It was her engagement ring, bought a week ago, and which she was now able to examine at her leisure.

Frank Goddard walked on to the platform at Strathfield carrying a suit-case, and his overcoat on his arm. Betty's heart leapt at the sight. He

walked the length of the train, keeping a watchful eye on the carriages. When he saw Betty he gave no sign beyond a discreet smile, and then entered a smoking carriage. These elaborate precautions amused Betty, but she felt with a thrill that the romantic journey had really begun which was to end in her marriage. And this journey would end on the mountains which she adored. It promised to be the happiest day of her life. The spirit of adventure stirred in her, and she went, word by word, over Frank's instructions to her. She was on no account to recognise him on the journey for fear of prying eyes; to take a ticket for Katoomba and get out at Wentworth Falls. He had arranged with the minister at Katoomba to marry them at nine o'clock that night, and he had shown her the legal forms which he had filled in to save time. But the day was to be made memorable by a visit to the Valley of the Waters, which she had never seen. Then they would go on to Katoomba by the fish train, be married, and act according to circumstances. Frank had said that sixty miles away was a safe distance to argue with her father.

At Emu Plains she looked long and eagerly at the long ridge of hills, hazily blue in the morning sun; and with the ascent of the mountains her spirits rose. The air was clearer and sharper, the engines grunted on the steep grade, and the train curved like a huge snake as it followed the line planted on the edge of a gully. At Lawson they stopped to take water, and Frank, smoking a cigar, got out to stretch his legs. He had never looked more romantic and handsome in her eyes, and as he gave her a long, meaning look, she gave him the faintest possible smile so as not to betray their intimacy.

It was nearly twelve when they reached Wentworth Falls. There was a tonic sharpness in the air, and the sun shone with a meridional brightness on the white, dusty roads. When the train had moved out Frank came to meet her with a radiant smile. And in his caressing voice he praised her beauty and courage, and called her his bride of the hills under the nose of the ticket collector. They decided to leave their luggage at the station, and then drove to the hotel, where Frank ordered lunch. Owing to the season they had the diningroom to themselves, and Frank ordered a luncheon basket to be got ready, and inquired the way to the Valley. Betty wondered at his calm assurance; she could eat nothing, but drank a glass of milk. She recovered her nerves as they drove to the rest-house, when the blue peaks of the hills came in sight, lifting themselves to the skies, silent and immemorial.

Frank led the way down the sloping track to the gorge. Neither spoke, intent on following the track, and a serene pleasure came over Betty as she watched his athletic figure. Some half-forgotten lines from Tennyson came into her head: —

“And o'er the hills, and far away

Beyond their utmost purple rim,
Beyond the night, across the day,
Thro' all the world she followed him.”

There was no doubt left in her mind; no one had ever loved her as Frank did. Suddenly she heard the twittering of birds, and then, again and again, the sound of running water, yet invisible. The massive cliffs, closing overhead as they descended into the green depths of the valley, excluded the outer world; the sunlight fell in patches on the mottled stems of sassafras trees, tall and straight as a ship's mast; the falling waters rippled through crevices and over mossy stones. And at every turn they heard one exquisite, crystalline sound — the noise of falling waters. The champagne sparkle in the air had excited Betty like wine; the sound of broken waters rang in her ears with an appeal deeper than the mere sense of hearing. It was not the call of deep to deep, but the ceaseless tide in her veins leaping in a remote, primeval sympathy with waters in motion.

Everywhere was the liquid note of falling water as it broke in a thousand fantastic shapes over the sloping rocks. It gurgled over flat rocks, and leaped in a silvery arc to the sombre pool below; then broke in a shower of cascades and trickled over the broad, shelving rock till it wept like Niobe; and again fell in a thin mist to be blown about like a silken scarf shot with fiery points of prismatic colour. And from it all came a music simple as the pipes of Pan, and grateful beyond expression to the ear. And as Betty listened with parted lips, Frank Goddard looked at her in wonder. There was an eager, wistful look in her eyes — the eyes of a woodland nymph seen in a sunlit glade.

They followed the path down the gorge for nearly an hour, passing other tourists who were gaping at the wonder of the waters. Then Frank unpacked the basket on a grassy slope beside a cascade, and Betty, whose senses had been drugged by the mountain air, watched Frank through half-shut eyes as he busied himself with the lunch. With quick, athletic movements he made a fire of dried sticks, filled the billy at the cascade, and set it to boil. She thought of her approaching marriage without dismay; she would go to this man without fear and without shame as a bird goes to its mate.

They ate their lunch, and talked of trifles, each avoiding the thought that lay uppermost in their minds — the runaway marriage. After Betty had declared that the tea was delicious, Frank leaned against a tree and watched her with a curious, sombre expression in his eyes.

“Are you happy, Betty?” he asked, softly.

“Happy?” said Betty. “This is a wonderful day.”

“Thank God for that,” said Frank, with a singular fervour. “I want you to remember this day for ever and ever.”

“Amen,” said Betty, mockingly. “You're very dismal all at once. Sing to me, Frank. Sing that song of Lassen's.”

The baritone, making sure that there was no one in sight, cleared his throat, and began to sing in a soft, caressing voice:

“When thy sweet eyes of azure
Gaze, dearest one, on me,
They bring me such visions of rapture,
Silent my lips must be.”

Betty, hypnotised by the fresh air, the gurgling waters, and the velvety, caressing voice, smiled vaguely. She felt no inclination for speech. To look at Frank was pleasure enough.

They made the ascent in a leisurely manner, and watched the sunset from the rest-house. A purple haze was on the hills, and Betty thought of the happy princess again who followed her lover across the world. When the hack picked them up, Betty, who had no appetite, suggested that they should drive direct to the station and wait for the train. There would be people about, and they might be recognised. But Frank was insistent. There was no danger, and they had three hours to wait for the train. The success of his plans had made him careless. Betty always remembered that it was through his bravado that they went back to the hotel.

Except for a few tourists, who ate in silence, fatigued by tramping over the hills, the diningroom was empty, and Frank rallied Betty on her fears. He was in high spirits, and, ordering a bottle of wine, studied the menu with anxiety, pretending that he was going to eat a roast bullock. Betty looked up as a stranger came into the room and walked to a seat near them. But as he turned he caught sight of Frank, and his face lit up with amazement.

“Frank Goddard, by all that's marvellous!” he cried, and came forward with outstretched hand. “Do you know, I've been hunting all over Sydney for you?”

Mr. Goddard looked up with a peculiar, mirthless grin, and, without replying, poured out a tumblerful of wine and drank it at a gulp. Betty saw that his hand was shaking.

“How do, John?” he said, faintly; “what are you doing here?”

“What am I doing here? I like that. What are *you* doing here? You haven't answered letters for months, and as I was coming over on business for the firm, I promised to look you up. I suppose you know that Jane came back in the *Moldavia* last week?”

Mr. Goddard shook his head, but said nothing.

“Well, you're a caution, Frank. She'll have a bone to pick with you. And then, as I knew nobody in Sydney, I thought I'd take a run up and look at these wonderful Blue Mountains they're always bragging about.

So you see it's through you I'm here."

Betty listened with growing alarm. What was the matter with Frank? Why had he forgotten to introduce her? Who was Jane who had a bone to pick with him?

The stranger, who had been staring at her with a familiar, amused look, turned to Frank Goddard. "Where's your manners, Frank? You haven't introduced me to your friend."

Mr. Goddard mumbled an introduction.

"Very pleased to meet you. Are you staying here?"

"No, I'm on my way to Katoomba, but Mr. Goddard was kind enough to show me round the falls," said Betty, coldly. She resented the stranger's familiar air.

"That's Frank all over. He hasn't seen his wife for twelve months, and here he is on the mountains pointing out the sights."

Betty went the colour of the tablecloth, and put her knife and fork down carefully for fear of making a clatter. For a space of seconds she felt that she was going to swoon or scream. Then a flush came into her cheeks, and an unnatural brightness in her eyes. Pride had come to her aid.

The stranger, who had been watching her with his shrewd, grey eyes, changed the subject. "I'm told there's a wonderful sight I mustn't miss. The Valley of the Waters, I think they call it."

He was evidently talking to save the situation, and Betty's thoughts flew like lightning. Frank was a married man. The pretended marriage was only a trap. She had been tricked and deceived; but no one must know it. She must get out of this lighted room at once.

She collected her strength with a supreme effort, and turned to the stranger with a friendly smile. "So sorry, but I must leave you and Mr. Goddard to talk over old times, I'm expected in Katoomba by the next train," she said.

She rose from the table and pulled on her gloves. Frank Goddard, who had sat dumb, got up.

"I'm going with you," he said, hoarsely.

"Not at all," said Betty, affecting surprise. "I'm driving to the station, and you must be dying to hear the latest news of your wife. Good-bye, and thank you for a very pleasant day."

On the long, straight road to the station she walked with the fixed stare of the somnambulist, not daring to think. She heard footsteps behind her, and knew it was Frank Goddard. She felt that she was being followed by the powers of darkness — that this was Mephistopheles himself, the smooth-tongued devil, who lured people to destruction. To her brain, on fire, there was nothing impossible in that fancy. Her only thought was to resist or be lost for ever. Fortunately there were people walking on the road, and she was safe. Her only fear was that he might touch her, and

then she knew that she would scream. Then Goddard, who had recovered his assurance in the darkness, began to talk.

“Well, I suppose it's all up, Betty. Absolutely rotten luck to be bowled out like this, wasn't it? If it hadn't been for that busybody we'd have been as happy as Larry, and nobody any the wiser. I suppose it's no use denying what you heard. I know you wouldn't believe me. Of course you think I'm an awful scoundrel, but what was I to do? I'd gone too far to tell the truth. We had some ripping times together, all the same. We might come to some arrangement yet, if you'd listen to reason. I'm not so much married as you think. That's right, don't waste your time talking to me. An hour ago you were going to marry me, and now I'm not fit to clean your boots. I suppose the fellow that plays the fiddle in the gutter will get a look in now.”

Betty's only answer was to quicken her pace. Her mind, dulled by shock, hardly grasped the sense of his words. She remarked that the caressing tones of his voice were gone. He was speaking in a hoarse voice, aggressively brazen and impudent. And this was her gentleman lover? That was another illusion gone. She reached the station with ten minutes to spare, and got her suit-case from the porter, conscious that Goddard was hovering in the background. When the train slowed down she got in a ladies' carriage, feeling like a swimmer who reaches land at last.

She got out at Katoomba, and inquired when the next train left for Sydney. It was the mail train, stopping there about three o'clock in the morning. Her heart sank into her boots; she had expected that. That meant a seven hours' wait, and it was turning very cold. Would she go to the boarding-house for the night? No; she must get home as soon as possible. There were plenty of people on the platform, and when they were gone she could go into the waiting-room.

She could see Frank Goddard at the other end of the long platform, smoking a cigar as he walked up and down to keep warm. He had forgotten his overcoat.

How the time passed she never knew. She was aware that some great calamity had come upon her which her mind, for its own safety, refused to consider. She felt that her brain was on fire, glowing with an intense light that banished sleep. Frank Goddard had taken shelter from the biting wind in a corner near the luggage room. She felt quite safe, for there were lights in the railway yard where men were shunting trucks. About twelve she felt stiff with cold, and went into the waiting-room, where a fire was burning. An hour later a porter came in to mend the fire, and looked at her curiously. And presently, with her mind in a kind of stupor, she heard Frank Goddard's voice outside the door, which the porter had left open.

“Betty, for God's sake let me in to the fire. I'm perishing with the cold.

You needn't be afraid of me. There's a policeman over the way, and you can give me in charge if I offend you."

Betty made no answer, and he came through the door and stooped over the fire. He was blue with cold and shivering, and leaned over the fire with an animal eagerness, intent on restoring the warmth of his body. There was a long silence, and then Betty, who was watching the door, heard him speaking again in a timid, subdued manner.

"Betty, your train will be here in half-an-hour, and I want to tell you something before you go. I'm not asking for your forgiveness. I know you too well for that. But I want you to hear the truth about me while I've got the chance to say it. That tale about my family and the property was all lies. My father had a little factory, and we were as poor as crows. When I was old enough my father put me to the trade, and I cut out slop suits all day long. Me, that always hated work, and wanted to be a gentleman! Then I found that I had a voice, and wanted to go on the stage, but my voice wasn't big enough, and that was my ruin. Father was put in gaol for setting the factory on fire to get the insurance, so you can see the breed I come from. I lived on my wits for a while, and then I found that I could sponge on women. It comes natural to me to flatter women, and I found that I could live like a lord on nothing a week.

"Then my wife heard me sing at a concert, and fell in love with my voice. She was ten years older than me, with heaps of money. She followed me everywhere, and said she would take me to Europe and get my voice trained if I would marry her. I married her on an allowance of two hundred and fifty a year, and it was the worst day's work I ever did. She was mean and jealous, and wanted a lot for her money. The other men pretended to despise me with my money and my old wife; but I didn't mind that. I was never ashamed to take money from people who had too much. Some men are like that. I was only proud of my good looks and my voice. Then she found out that I was carrying on with other women, and she set spies to watch me; but I was too cunning for them. I'd have left her, but I should have been penniless, and I'm a born loafer.

"Then somebody died, and she had to go to England to claim the money. That was my chance, and I refused to go. I knew she had people in Melbourne watching me, so I came over to Sydney to have a good time and get my voice trained by Ricordi. Then I saw you, and it was all up with me. You were my fate, and I meant to get you or die in the attempt. I don't apologise. I know I'm a born rotter; but if there's any good in me you brought it out. I meant to take you to Europe; I'd saved enough money for that, and I thought we could make a living between us. Other men will say how much they love you, but I took the risk of gaol for your sake. I suppose I'm talking like a scoundrel now, but I can't help it. I want you to know the worst of me, and remember some day that I loved you with all my heart and soul. I suppose I mean the heart and

soul of a blackguard. Oh, my beautiful Betty, I can't be such scum as they think. You remember the first day I met you I said men would do strange things for love of you. I was willing——”

He was interrupted by the rumble of the mail train as it slowed down at the platform. With averted face Betty seized her bag and ran swiftly to a carriage full of people. As the train moved out she saw Frank Goddard standing on the platform and staring at her with an imploring look. With no thought of sleep, she wrapped her rug round her knees and closed her eyes. But in half-an-hour she fell into a profound slumber from sheer exhaustion, which saved her, in the doctor's opinion, from an attack of brain fever.

Peter Wayside, having saluted the dawn, was thinking of a plan to outwit the Colonel, who was coming to cook his dinner that afternoon, when he saw an apparition coming down the side passage. It was Betty, carrying her rug and suit-case, and white as a sheet. He knew at once what had happened. Betty had been killed on the journey to Katoomba, and this was her wraith come to warn him. His bald scalp prickled with terror. But the apparition, dropping the luggage, ran to him, crying, “Oh, my dear, dear father,” and collapsed in his arms in a dead faint.

Chapter XX: The Bohemian Quartet.

THE rain had come in August, and for a week at a stretch the quartet had been idle. Paoli and the others, accustomed to these bouts of enforced idleness, spent the time at Palesi's, sipping wine and playing endless games of draughts. But Walter, broken in to the monotonous routine of the Government service, chafed under this unprofitable leisure. The day had opened with a grey sky and pelting rain from the south-east, and he had stayed at home to arrange Brahms' Fifth Hungarian Dance for the band. As the light was failing he put down his pen with a sigh of relief. He had agreed on a division of labour with Paoli, who scored the popular claptrap for the band, while Walter added classical and romantic pieces to their repertoire.

He frowned slightly as he ran his eye over the manuscript sheet. Some of his best effects, depending on delicacy of tone, were lost in the rude clamour of the streets, and he wondered if they would ever get a proper hearing. That reminded him. His nervous terror of the streets was gone, and he worked shorter hours for more money; but he was not satisfied. It had dawned on him that he had stepped out of one rut into another when he left the comfortable office for the hazards of the street. Paoli and the others were content to take one day with another with no thought of the morrow, and he could see himself fiddling for a living in the streets until he sank to their level. And yet they were all musicians above the ordinary. The second violin had played for years at La Scala; the harper had been taught by the famous Piranesi. Already their repertoire was too good for the streets, and Walter was sure there was a way out, if he could only find it.

Outside his window the water fell from a broken pipe with a dismal noise, and with the fading light a wave of melancholy came over him. He had not stirred since morning, and he felt the need of exercise for his cramped limbs. If the rain stopped he would take a long walk and think out some plan for the future. Suddenly he wondered what had become of Betty. He hadn't seen her about the streets for a long time; perhaps she had quarrelled with Ricordi and the lessons had come to an end. Gus, too, had never a minute to spare when he met him. He reflected bitterly that the street fiddler was of little account; he must find some way of getting out of the rut.

Mrs. Brittle gave him his dinner as usual half-an-hour before Jacob

came in. The clouds were still lowering, but there was a stillness in the air that betokened a lull. He decided to take a long walk and shake off his melancholy. It was months since he had been in Paddington, and, surprised by a vague desire to be in the neighbourhood of Betty, he headed for Glenmore Road by way of Cleveland Street and Moore Park. The wave of melancholy had softened his emotions, and he thought of Betty without his usual bitterness. Under cover of the darkness he walked through the streets where he had first met Betty, and then lost her. He turned into Crystal Street, deserted in the wet night, and stared intently across the street at Cremona Cottage. The light in the front room threw the shadow of the famous 'cello on the yellow blind, and he looked eagerly for a sign of Betty; but the house was silent. Perhaps she was out, and he might run into her at any minute. The thought sent a thrill of alarm and pleasure through him.

He turned into Queen Street, his hopes lessening with every step, and was wondering if it would be safe to call at the academy for Gus, when he caught sight of him in a shop. He decided to wait for him, and studied the contents of the window, which was very smartly set out with boxes of chocolates, pyramids of gaily-coloured sweets, and glass jars filled with the more expensive sort. Becoming impatient, he walked past the door, but Gus was too busy to see him. He was staring into the dancing black eyes of the lady behind the counter, who seemed to be of his own age, but with a mature expression. They seemed immensely pleased with each other, and Gus, leaning across the counter, whispered something in her ear and exploded in a guffaw of laughter. Business was slack owing to the rain, and Gus was evidently quite at home. And as he was evidently there till closing time, Walter walked on with a curious envy in his heart at Gus's facile love affairs. He was staring across the street at the veranda of the academy where he had first seen Betty through the window when someone ran blindly into him with an open umbrella.

He turned sharply and found himself face to face with Freda Miller. Expecting to find Betty at her elbow, he raised his hat, and turned to dive into the darkness; but Freda, who had changed colour when she saw him, blocked the way.

“Are you too proud to speak to me, Mr. Chippendale?” she asked.

“Beggars have no pride, Miss Miller,” he said, bitterly.

“What nonsense,” said Freda, with a smile. “Beggars don't earn their living by writing beautiful music, and playing it in the streets. Yes, you needn't be surprised. I've heard you when you didn't know I was looking. And now you make it an excuse not to speak to your old friends. You're as proud as a peacock.”

“The gutter takes the pride out of you,” said Walter, gloomily.

“Never mind that if it puts money in your pocket.”

“Yes, it does that, at any rate,” said Walter, smiling.

“And I'm sure it agrees with you,” said Freda. “You used to have rings round your eyes, and now you look like a two-year-old.”

“Looks are not everything.”

“No; that's what the blind man said. And that reminds me of someone you know.”

“Who is that?” he said carelessly; but his heart began to thump furiously.

“Never mind who; but did you know that she had been very ill?”

“No,” said Walter, with a peculiar dryness in his throat.

“She's gone as thin as a lath; you'd hardly know her.”

“Well, you can't blame me,” said Walter, bitterly.

“No one does, but I thought you would like to know,” said Freda, with a curious look. “The doctor says she had a shock; but she's as proud as you, Mr. Chippendale, and won't let on. That fellow's disappeared, and I believe it was through him. She shuts up like an oyster if you mention his name. I'm sure she found him out. He was too smooth and oily for my liking. He tried it on with me, but I told him he was wasting his time; and you should have seen the nasty look he gave me. She went to Katoomba for a change, and she came back suddenly with such a funny, scared look in her eyes. You may be sure that blackguard played her some dirty trick. She hardly ever goes out now, and she practises day and night. You'd never think she was strong enough to keep it up. She's playing better than ever; but I'm sure she does it to keep her mind off something else. There's no one like Betty, you know, but she's no judge of men. If they flatter her she swallows every word. You must never find fault with Betty, you know.”

“It's not likely that I ever shall again.”

“I don't know. I always thought you and Betty would come together again.”

“Then you believe in miracles,” said Walter, conscious of a throbbing pulse.

“No, I don't; but I believe that people cut off their nose to spite their face. Do you remember that Plain and Fancy? It was all through your uncle coming, and we never dreamt that you were his nephew. He turns his nose up at me now because Betty's never with me. Do you remember that fellow that wore the newspaper suit? He's dead. They said that he committed suicide. Oh, and the Colonel's going to get married. He's picked up with a rich widow in Edgecliffe Road. I suppose you know that Hilda's married? She didn't tell them for months, and that broke the Colonel up. Quite respectable, you know; but she was always a deep one. Have you seen Gus lately?”

“I saw him five minutes ago in a shop, talking to a dark young woman. I was waiting for him to come out,” said Walter.

“Then you'll wait a long time. He's there every night. She's a widow

with two children, and they're terrified for fear Gus will marry her. That'll be the end of the academy, if they all get married.

"Well, it will be your turn next," said Walter, with his thoughts on Betty.

Freda, who had been chattering like a magpie, stopped suddenly. Then she coloured, and a shy look came into her eyes.

"No, that's not likely. You can walk safely in the dark if people are too blind to see you," she said, in a peculiar tone.

"Nonsense," said Walter, smiling. "You could take your pick of Paddington if you made eyes at the men instead of telling them they were fools. I heard some tales about you."

"Well, I must be getting along," said Freda, abruptly. "No; it's only to the dressmaker's across the street. Good-bye, and don't forget what I told you about Betty."

Walter looked at the sky. The stars were shining through a break in the clouds, and he took that for a good omen. Freda's chatter had acted on him like magic. His melancholy mood had gone. He no longer desired to see Gus; his own thoughts were company enough. He walked all the way to Redfern, pondering over the budget of news he had heard. So Betty had been very ill, and was as thin as a rake. Well, she hadn't wasted a tear on him when she threw him over, and yet she could pine away for that handsome blackguard. And Freda thought they would come together again. That was impossible; but he wanted to see Freda again, and ask her a hundred questions. He forgot entirely that he had come out to think of a plan for lifting the quartet out of the gutter.

But a week later the problem was solved for him in an unexpected manner. Mrs. Brenner-Jones turned into Hunter Street with her mind fixed on her first garden party. And as she was cudgeling her brains to think of some striking novelty to surprise the guests, she heard a string band playing Brahms' Hungarian dances with a remarkable fire and abandon. She had been a music-teacher before her marriage, and she studied the musicians with a calculating grey eye. They were new to her, having come on the streets during her long absence in Europe and India, and by their looks they were all foreigners, probably Italians. She listened attentively till the end of the piece. Then they began another with an exquisite melody for the flute, which died away in echoes. Her mind was made up; this was what she wanted.

The second violin, tucking his instrument under his arm, turned to her with an amiable smile.

"Something for de music?" he asked with a polite bow.

Mrs. Brenner-Jones fingered half-a-crown, and then stopped.

"One moment, please. That is very pretty music you play. Do you accept engagements to play in private?"

"Arf a mo'; I will talk you over wid de boss," said the second violin,

proud of his command of English.

He went back and spoke to Paoli, who shook his head emphatically. The second violin returned, and explained the situation.

“De boss 'e say no dam' fear.”

An intense desire to get them at any cost seized Mrs. Brenner-Jones at this abrupt refusal.

“But tell him he can name his own price for two hours' playing, and I will see that you are well treated.”

The ambassador reported to Paoli, who, in turn consulted with the first violin. They seemed to agree on something, and the second violin returned to Mrs. Brenner-Jones with the news.

“Right o! 'E say dirt cheap at ten quid.”

Mrs. Brenner-Jones breathed again, and fumbled for her card case. “Very well, this is my address. I want you to play nothing but gipsy music, and wear your native costume.” And she went on her way, satisfied that she had secured a novelty that would open the eyes of the society lady who had accepted her invitation.

The quartet talked it over in Paoli's room.

“Wear native costume and play gipsy music. What the devil does the woman mean?” said Paoli.

Walter, who had been listening with a thoughtful air, broke in eagerly. “I see it. This is the chance of a lifetime. Gipsy bands are all the rage in London and Paris. She takes us for gipsies, and wants us to dress up to it. Well, I've never seen a gipsy, but I've seen *La Boheme*. I'll dress you up, and astonish the natives. I've got Dvorak's Slavonic dances, and some Bohemian airs.”

“Oh, chuck it Write and tell her it's off,” said Paoli.

But Walter, who was strangely excited, explained his idea.

“Now listen, Paoli. This will give us a leg-up into high society where the money is. I'll dress you so that your own mother won't know you, and make your fortune in six months.”

A fortnight later Mrs. Brenner-Jones stepped on to the lawn of “Bygaloree” and surveyed her arrangements for the garden party with a calculating grey eye. There was a touch of spring in the air, with a cloudless sky after weeks of rain. The vice-regal caterers had done their best, and she was waiting anxiously for the arrival of her trump card — the Bohemian Quartet. It was this that she depended on to bring her under the notice of the Government House set in the person of the Honourable Mrs. Devine, who had accepted her invitation on the merest acquaintanceship. Presently she saw them, and her heart misgave her. It was the band sure enough, but the band transformed.

After nearly coming to blows over the question, Walter had persuaded them to wear enormous slouch hats such as brigands affect, velveteen coats, and check trousers. To these were added a flamboyant tie the size

of a child's sash. And, conscious of their strange apparel, they looked about them with the gloomy air of bandits trying to earn an honest living.

"Now remember," said Walter, whispering his final instructions, "we're gipsies, and nobody can talk English but uncle."

"Oh, can't we?" growled Paoli. "If I catch anybody poking borak at my get-up, they'll hear some fancy English. We were mugs to come."

The second violin, proud of his English, explained to Mrs. Brenner-Jones that it was customary in their country to wet their whistle with wine before playing, and they were shown into a side room. The guests, mainly women, had arrived when the quartet took their stand on the lawn and opened with Brahms' Hungarian dances. These were followed by two of Dvorak's Slavonic dances, and presently the guests, surprised by their bizarre costume, stopped their chatter to listen. The abrupt, savage rhythm of the music, alternating with passages of dreamy languor, astonished the listeners, and Paoli, with his sombrero pulled over his eyes, surpassed himself. In the silence of the garden the notes of the instruments blended with an exquisite sweetness, and above it all was the sound of Paoli's flute like the melancholy wail of the wind among the autumn leaves.

Walter, who had been closely watching the effect of the music on the audience, started suddenly as he recognised a well-known figure moving about among the ladies. It was the Colonel, looking very distinguished and military in a new suit of the judge's, to which he had added a pair of spats and an eyeglass. He walked from group to group with the easy familiarity of a host, the academy for dancing and the daily walk to town in search of work forgotten. And as Walter wondered at his presence, he saw Mrs. Brenner-Jones following his movements with secret pride. Then he remembered Freda's remark. So this must be the rich widow that they said he was going to marry. She had evidently plenty of money, judging by the size of the house and the number of servants. He came near, and Walter was afraid he would recognise him; but the Colonel, caring little for music but the roll of the drums, as became a soldier, had eyes for nothing but their remarkable costume.

As they smoked a cigarette in the interval of playing, a concession to their savage customs, two ladies, with the disdainful, tolerant air of the idle rich, came and stood near the band.

"What an awful collection of people, Maud," said the younger one. "She seems to have collected all the retired grocers' wives in Sydney. They seemed quite embarrassed when I looked at their hands. There's really no one here but that charming Colonel. I think he's a retired Indian officer, judging by his talk. I hope he isn't going to throw himself away on Mrs. Brenner-Jones, as she calls herself. She had the impudence to say that she thought I might persuade Lady Marjorie to come. Of course I shall drop her after to-day; but I must really get this band. She tells me

that they hardly know a word of English, and that they came as a great favour. But what magnificent playing. I've heard nothing like it since I was on the Continent. Look at that handsome fellow with the flute. What a pair of eyes. I wonder if they carry knives in their boots. That fat man seems to be the interpreter. Tell him that I want them to play at my next "At-Home," and give him my address. Lady Marjorie will be delighted with them. They're a real find."

And the Honourable Mrs. Devine, whose great-grandfather had been an intelligent but unwilling passenger in the First Fleet, was not displeased to feel Paoli's impudent roving black eye taking in every detail of her complexion and figure, which showed to great advantage in a Paquin frock.

Walter, who had heard every word, was radiant. Lady Marjorie was a connoisseur of music, and an engagement at Government House was already in sight. That would set the seal of fashion on them, and the rest would be easy.

Chapter XXI: Mixed Pickles.

FREDA, having washed up and made the beds, snatched a few minutes to read the morning paper on the gas box under the hostile gaze of Maria Redding. A huge advertisement announcing the sale of salvage stock from Bostock's fire caught her eye, and she ran her eye over the bargains with the eagerness of a hawk swooping on a chicken. Presently she was aware of the persistent sound of the piano next door. Betty was playing the slow movement from the Concerto which Freda secretly disliked, but it dawned on her that Betty was playing with a depth and fulness that she had never shown before. Apart from her wonderful fingering something else had come into her touch since that strange trip to Katoomba. As she was wondering what had really happened then, her eye caught a line of Jap silk, for which Bostock's was celebrated, at less than half price, and she forgot Betty and her music. Here was a silk dress for a mere song, and she was calculating the cost of making and extras in the latest style, when she was surprised to hear Betty playing the opening phrases of a well-known melody. It was Walter Chippendale's Nocturne, which Betty had never played since she had heard it in the streets. As Freda listened, a curious look of determination came into her eyes, and, clutching the paper in her hand, she walked round and knocked at the front door, which was open.

"It's only me, Betty; can I come in?" she cried, and stepped briskly into the room.

Betty stopped playing, and looked up with a smile as she saw the newspaper.

"You've come to tell me about the net blouses they're advertising," she said.

"Wrong again," said Freda; "it's that heavy Jap silk they always stock, and they say its hardly soiled. It washes beautifully, and I'm going down to see if I can get a dress length out of it."

And for ten minutes they discussed the bargains offered, ignoring the tempting offers of unsaleable stock that were sandwiched between the genuine reductions.

Suddenly Freda looked at Betty with an abrupt change in her manner. "So you're still thinking about him?" she said.

"I don't know who you mean," said Betty, paling slightly.

"I mean Walter Chippendale. You haven't played his Nocturne for

months.”

“I wanted to take my mind off the Concerto,” said Betty, with an awkward laugh.

“And that's why you've spent hours sticking that copy together again, I suppose,” said Freda, looking at the music on the piano rack. It was the manuscript copy of the Nocturne, neatly mended, that Walter had torn in two when Betty had jilted him.

“I suppose I can play what I like?” said Betty, flushing with anger. She was ashamed that Freda should discover that her thoughts had been dwelling on Walter, who hated the sight of her, with a melancholy tenderness.

“You've got plenty of other pieces,” said Freda, sullenly. “I think you might leave him alone.”

“Leave him alone?” said Betty. “He'll take good care of that. He goes white with anger when he sees me.”

“Ah, I used to believe that tale, but I've changed my mind,” said Freda, gloomily. “I didn't tell you I met him the other week in Queen Street wandering about like a lost dog. Said he had come round to see Gus. As if anyone would come out on a pouring wet night to see Gus. He tried to dodge me. He's as proud as ever, but we had quite a long talk.”

“Did he ask after me?”

“No, why should he? He didn't even know that you'd been ill. He'll forget all about you, if he's left alone.”

“What do you mean?” said Betty, faintly.

“I mean that if you don't want him, I do. I'm not ashamed of him for playing in the streets. I picked him out of the gutter in King Street; that's more than you would do. I thought my chance had come at the Plain and Fancy when you made him look a fool in the eyes of everybody.”

“What a scandalous thing to say,” cried Betty. “It was his own temper. And if you want him, you can have him. I'm not standing in your way.”

“Yes, I thought so till the other night, but I happened to mention your name, and I saw the look in his eyes. It was like striking a match in the dark. I knew at once why he had started prowling about Paddington again. Don't think I'm telling you this out of kindness for you. I only want to know how I stand. If you're going to make eyes at him again, my cake's dough. I'm only supposed to be part of the scenery when Betty Wayside's about. I can see that you're quite surprised that I have any feelings at all with my plain face.”

Betty's eyes sparkled with anger at Freda's audacity, and Freda returned her look with a sullen stare. Betty herself had hardly been aware of it, but her thoughts had been dwelling on Walter for weeks, and she had put it down to a friendly interest in his career. And here was Freda in love with him all the time. She distinctly remembered the episode in King Street when Freda had burst into tears. But Walter's eyes had sparkled when he

had heard her name. She noted Freda's plain face with a curious mixture of jealousy and triumph, and wondered what Walter had said of her.

"You needn't be afraid," she said. "Walter showed his contempt for me by playing the Nocturne in the streets."

"Yes, and you show your contempt for him by playing it at home. However, you won't hear it in the streets again. I suppose you didn't know that he and the band have disappeared. Perhaps they've gone back to Melbourne, and that'll be the end of it."

"Then you won't be able to talk to him about me behind my back."

"Talk behind your back! I like that after sticking up for you. I should be sorry to tell him or anyone else what I think of your conceit."

"You only came in to pick a quarrel with me. If I'd——"

She was interrupted by a quick step on the veranda, and the Colonel stood in the doorway.

"Good morning, Betty, and you, too, Miss Miller. Don't let me interrupt you, I shall be gone in a moment. Why, Betty, you look yourself again! Don't you see a colour in her cheeks, Miss Miller, and fire in her eye? Really, my dear child, it warms my heart to see you look yourself again. But I see you ladies are anxious to get on with your gossip. My eldest daughter asked me to call in, and ask you if to-morrow afternoon would suit you to meet her at Jarling's. I understand she and her — er — husband have asked you to choose their piano for them. To-morrow afternoon, then, at three o'clock?"

He bowed himself out quickly, feeling that there was trouble in the air, and the girls stared at each other in an awkward silence.

"Did you notice that he called Hilda his eldest daughter?" asked Betty. "He's never called her by her own name since she insulted him." She spoke coldly, for the sake of conversation, and Freda took the hint.

"Well, I must be going," she said.

"I hope you get that silk," said Betty.

"Oh, the silk," said Freda, vacantly. "Well, good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Betty, and for a moment their eyes met in a cold stare, each knowing that their friendship was at an end.

The Colonel, on his daily search for work, turned into Glenmore Road with a thoughtful air. Hilda had announced that her house would be ready in a month's time, and he had listened with indifference as if it had not concerned him, but it had kept him awake half the night. Then Julia had told him after breakfast that it would pay her to hire an assistant in Hilda's place, and carry on the academy. This turned his thoughts in another direction. Mrs. Brenner-Jones had sent him a note asking him to call and settle some dispute between her and the workmen who were building the new garage, and he was taking a day to think it over. Since the garden party she had given hints that another man would have jumped at, but the Colonel had turned them aside with an airy

nonchalance as if they concerned a third person. He knew that the widow and her money were his for the asking, but he had all he desired in this world — perfect freedom, and money to jingle in his pocket.

He was passing a hoarding, and, looking up, caught sight of the famous yellow poster with the laconic advice:

TRY ONLY JONES — ONLY JONES CAN CURE YOU — ONLY
TRY JONES.

And he wondered how many people recognised the widow of the Only Jones in Mrs. Brenner-Jones, of Edgecliffe Road. For years he had been familiar with the romantic story of the famous pills. Olney Jones, an obscure suburban chemist, had spent his leisure in concocting a universal pill without the means for putting it on the market. Then, one day, a stupid signwriter, while giving a lick of paint to the shop front, had misspelt his name over the door — ONLY JONES. He was painting it out again in a hurry when Olney Jones stopped him; he had an idea.

Three months later Sydney had been plastered with the narrow yellow poster, and the public, hypnotised by this play on words, began to think of the pills. A month later they began to swallow them. The wholesale druggists took up the universal pill. Jacob Gidley wrote his first testimonial for it, and the maker's fortune was made. Two years before his death the Only Jones, who had a passion for music, had married Miss Brenner, a music-teacher of refined tastes, and they had spent their honeymoon at the theatre during the grand opera season. After the death of her husband, Mrs. Jones had sold out the ONLY JONES remedies to a company, and travelled abroad for seven years. A year ago she had returned to Sydney as Mrs. Brenner-Jones.

And now she had returned to Sydney with her mind bent on social conquest, and had taken "Bygaloree" on a long lease from Lady Mackenzie, with her eyes fixed on the exclusive set where shopkeepers and their profits are ignored. The Colonel was aware that her interest in him hung on his pretensions to aristocratic birth, for her discreet inquiries had reached his ears in a roundabout fashion. He learned that she had been enchanted to hear that he had never done a stroke of work in his life, and he remembered that lately he had been reproached in his own house for the same reason. It had never occurred to him before that he should take any part in the struggle for existence which went on around him, and the widow was evidently of the same opinion. That showed she was a woman of uncommon instincts, and he might have married her but for this unfortunate association with pills. But his pride of blood rebelled at the conjunction of patent medicines and a noble lineage. Also the Only Jones had been a remarkable man in his way, and widows have long

memories. He decided the matter abruptly. He had his freedom, and money to jingle in his pocket. Mrs. Brenner-Jones could look elsewhere for a husband.

The Colonel came home late that night from the Harrisons, where he had dined, and parried many questions about Mrs. Brenner-Jones, to find Gus alone in the front room before the music cabinet. A littered heap of music lay on the polished floor, and Gus tore a fresh piece in two as the Colonel entered. Then he looked up with a gloomy air.

"Can you spare me a minute, dad?" he muttered. "I want to tell you something."

"Certainly, my boy, but what are you doing?" asked the Colonel.

"I'm giving up these songs. They don't suit me." And seizing a fresh batch he strewed the floor with "A Broken Heart is Mine," "The Anthem of Love," and "The Bird with a Broken Wing." "I'm going in for comics," he added briefly.

Although the Colonel had little taste for music, he shuddered.

"But that wasn't what I wanted to tell you," said Gus, pausing in the act of tearing "Life's Dream is O'er," "I'm going to get married."

"Ah," said the Colonel, and was silent, but his thoughts travelled instantly to Mrs. Brenner-Jones.

"I may as well tell you the worst. She's a widow, and she's got two children. But nothing will change my mind." He spoke gruffly as if in fear of ridicule, and the Colonel stroked his moustaches and looked thoughtful. Gus paid the rent, and supplied him with pocket money. This would mean the end of the academy.

"A widow, did you say, and two children?" he asked.

"Yes, a young widow, same age as myself," replied Gus.

"Then this is a love match?"

"No," said Gus, "that's why I'm burning these songs. She said I was barking up the wrong tree. Said she wanted a strong man, not an undertaker, to look after her and the children. Well, I'm going to be that man."

"But why destroy your songs?"

"Her orders," said Gus, laying a destroying hand on "True Love and Death." "She admires my voice immensely, but says I must go in for comics."

The Colonel, without knowing the lady, began to admire her.

"But what about your position?" he asked.

"That's all right. She had money left her, and I'm going to start as an indent agent. It's right into my hands. I'll see that you don't go short."

"My dear boy, I thank you, but perhaps an old soldier can forage for himself yet," said the Colonel, thinking of another widow. "But why this loveless marriage?"

"Oh, I'm in love all right, but she says I'm not. I tell you she's the first

real woman I've met. I've wasted my life caterwauling to bits of dolls," replied Gus, briskly destroying "Come, Sweet Maiden."

"But you've told me nothing about her looks," said the Colonel.

"Oh, Lord, I forgot to tell you the worst. You'll see her in the lolly shop next to the chemist's down the street."

"Ah, then, she has a fine figure, a good complexion, and a remarkable pair of black eyes."

"Trust you for spotting a pretty woman, dad," said Gus. "That's her to a T. I hope you don't mind the shop, but she had to do something for a living."

"I admire her courage," said the Colonel, with a curious look.

"Well, I thought I'd do the straight thing, and tell you, but I don't want the others to hear till Hilda's out of the house."

"My dear boy, I am beginning to admire widows. They've smelt powder, my boy, and they show courage in facing the enemy again."

"Why, that's my idea," said Gus, tearing "The Wounded Heart" into three pieces. "Well, goodnight, and thank you for the way you've taken it." And gathering the heap of torn songs under his arm, he went to bed.

The next morning the Colonel, setting his hat at the right angle and giving a final twist to his moustaches, stepped smartly down Queen Street and turned into Edgecliffe Road. The quiet street, undefiled by shops and vulgar traffic, and lined with houses standing in the privacy of their own grounds, struck agreeably on his senses this morning. It seemed an ideal retreat for an old soldier in his declining years. He felt more at home on each visit to "Bygaloree," for the servants, who knew a gentleman when they saw one, treated him with a singular deference.

Mrs. Brenner-Jones, who was studying the social column of the morning paper, received him on the veranda, overlooking the lawn.

"So good of you, Colonel, to give up your walk for my stupid affairs," she cried; "but there is no end to a lonely woman's troubles. I've just read a most exasperating paragraph in the paper. You remember my Bohemian quartet? I discovered and made them, for they were only common Italians, and Mrs. Devine stole them from me without even the decency to acknowledge it. And now I find they were at Government House yesterday, and they'll be all the rage. It's most provoking."

"The fortune of war, madam," he replied; "you must find a way to turn the tables on her."

The Colonel, who attached little importance to the musicians, was studying the widow with singular interest. Owing to her indignation, there was a colour in her cheeks, and an alluring brightness in her eye. She might have passed for ten years younger. Remarkably well-preserved, he thought; perhaps the famous pills ... he turned his mind to matters nearer at hand.

"I — ah — understand these workmen have been presuming on your

good nature," he said, taking a seat beside her.

"If that were all, I wouldn't mind, but I find I can get nothing done as I want it. They're simply amusing themselves at my expense. Every day they invent some fresh excuse for adding to the cost, and yet I get nothing done. I've never been accused of meanness, but I know the value of money as well as they do. In seven years' travel I had forgotten the worries of housekeeping. Really, I'm tempted to give the whole thing up. I wish I were a man for five minutes."

"Madam," said the Colonel, with a flourish, "then you would do the most charming woman of my acquaintance a great wrong."

Mrs. Brenner-Jones listened eagerly. She had been quick to see that the Honourable Mrs. Devine had treated him as an equal, charmed by his courteous manners, and she had decided that he was the man for her money. She knew of the dancing academy, but it would never be heard of in the seclusion of Edgecliffe Road. Besides, she had read in novels that it was a common practice among the French nobility to teach dancing to the English in times of distress. And yet she could never bring him to the point. He took the elegance of his surroundings as a matter of course, and yet they must have been an astonishing contrast to his life in Queen Street and the academy. All of which convinced her that he was that rarity, a natural gentleman, who was no more disturbed by the power of money than by the quality of the air he breathed.

"But with your kind permission, I will talk to these fellows like an old soldier," continued the Colonel.

"You have more than my permission," said the widow, with a faint blush. "You would greatly oblige me by telling them that they must take their orders from you."

"It is very good of you to put it that way, madam," said the Colonel; "but suppose the rogues want to see my authority?"

"You can get that in the nearest church, Colonel," said the widow, suddenly turning crimson.

The Colonel felt that it was now or never. He had a swift vision of his daily walk to town in search of work, the counter lunch, and the pageant of the streets. Freedom was very dear to him, but times were changing, and he saw himself an unwelcome guest at his children's table. Other people had swallowed the pills with benefit, why shouldn't he? He straightened himself and stroked the famous drooping moustaches, looking more than ever like a retired general.

"Madam," he said, "you have called me by a title to which I have no claim, but I have held up my head on sixpence a day for twenty years, and that would require courage even in a soldier. But I could claim a title more imposing than any you imagine, if my lips had not been sealed by an exalted person who no longer lives. I was born and bred a gentleman with great expectations, but if I should babble of such things you would

greatly oblige me by treating them as the harmless delusions of an old man. Madam, I am greatly honoured by your esteem, and hope to show the world that if the rank is wanting, you have still the courage of a soldier at your command.”

So saying, Algernon Fitzroy raised the widow's hand to his lips, and kissed it with an old-fashioned courtesy that was never learned in Paddington.

Chapter XXII: The Song of the Unwept Tear.

WALTER CHIPPENDALE, who had been scoring some fresh pieces for the band since morning, got into the tram at Cleveland Street, wearing a new serge suit and a Panama hat. The slightly defiant air that he had worn since taking to the streets had gone, and he looked about him with an air of decision, conscious that he was no longer a street fiddler. The Bohemian Quartet had suddenly become the fashion, and they no longer played for their bread in the gutter. The touch of the mountebank and their appearance at Government House had brought them into the limelight, and they had more engagements than they could fill. Already they led the life of gentlemen, rehearsing at their leisure in the morning, and playing for two hours in the afternoon. One engagement brought in more money than a week's fiddling in the gutter; and now he had a letter from Jarling's concert manager in his pocket, inviting the quartet to support the famous singer "La Carita" on her concert tour, lasting four months.

Jacob Gidley had been the first to show the way the wind was blowing. Astounded to hear that this gang of street fiddlers had appeared at Government House, and had been personally complimented by Lady Marjorie, he had changed his opinion of Walter in a flash. They said the fellow was earning pots of money, and was in the fashionable swim. And through Mrs. Brittle he made discreet inquiries about the manners and customs of the idle rich, as if Walter had been an explorer in foreign lands. The disappearance of the band from the streets had taken a load off his mind; and he was alarmed to find that he was putting on flesh. Already the bottom button of his vest had caught his eye, and he had prescribed rigid fast days for himself, sacrificing his appetite for his vanity.

The quartet was playing at Point Piper tomorrow, and Walter carefully studied the programme which he had drawn up for rehearsal in the morning. This, and the correspondence about terms and dates, all fell into his hands, for the Bohemians had shown a childish incapacity to master the slightest business detail. Gradually, and without meaning it, he had usurped Paoli's position as head of the quartet. It was his brains that held the combination together, and they knew it. Still, he had nothing to complain about.

Turning down Hunter Street, he stopped at the entrance to Freeman's

Chambers to study the effect of a neat brass plate announcing that the Bohemian Quartet was on the fourth floor; and then stepped briskly up the four flights of stairs, wondering what terms Jarling's were prepared to offer. Paoli opened the door, and he was surprised to see that the second violin and the harper were present, although there was no rehearsal. They saluted him with a slightly guilty air, as if they were discussing secrets. The room was transformed. It had been swept clear of rubbish and litter, there was a carpet on the floor, and the women's photographs had disappeared from the walls. A panel portrait of a lady in evening-dress, mature, but appetising, stood on the mantelpiece in a silver frame. Paoli had declared that she was a barmaid of his acquaintance, and the others humoured him, conveying to one another with nods and winks their belief that she was a lady of high degree, who had fallen a victim to Paoli's roving black eye. Paoli had taken to a lounge coat, silk shirts and embroidered slippers, and was rapidly acquiring an air of fashion; but prosperity had left the others unchanged. The second violin had turned capitalist, and was paying for a house by instalments; the harper spent his money on the Church and little books of piety. The velveteen coats, check trousers, and slouch hats which they wore as a sort of uniform, modified from the original, were kept in a large wardrobe for the performances.

Paoli shouted with joy when he saw Walter's new suit, and he examined it with the anxiety of a man about town, deciding to get a suit of that cut at once. But Walter became impatient.

"I've fixed up the programme for to-morrow, and put on two new pieces — a Gipsy dance and a Silesian air," he said.

"Right oh," said Paoli; "we'll run through them in the morning."

"And now about that offer of Jarling's," said Walter. "It's good enough, but it cuts both ways. It'll be a splendid advertisement for us, but it'll take us out of Sydney when we're just in the swim, and at the end of the season we might find ourselves back in the streets. We're the fashionable fad at present; but it isn't going to last for ever. So it's six of one and half-a-dozen of the other. I should advise you——"

"You needn't advise me," said Paoli, with a sudden change in his manner; "we've had a bit of a meeting here this afternoon, and we've been talking about you."

A cold chill ran through Walter. After all, he was an outsider. Perhaps they wanted to get rid of him.

"We'd just made up our minds when you came in. You think you're somebody, don't you, dressed up to the nines and telling us what we're to do? Who's the boss, I'd like to know? Well, we've had enough of it, and we have agreed to offer you the job of managing this quarter."

The second violin and the harper grinned approval, and they shook hands all round. Walter's eyes glittered with pleasure; his confidence in

himself was fully restored.

“And now,” said Paoli, “it never rains but it pours. This letter came this morning, and that made us decide that this job was too big for me. You've been trained in business under the Government.”

Walter smiled at their notion of his business training as a clerk, the most helpless of creatures when he is taken out of his accustomed groove.

The letter was from the manager of the Hotel Majestic, the new skyscraper, intent on capturing the fashionable crowd with its luxurious appointments. He offered the quartet a two years' contract to play on the roof garden, and asked the manager to call and arrange terms.

“That settles it,” said Walter. “Our luck's in. It's the very thing we wanted. I'll show him Jarling's letter, hit him up with the price, and insist on a three years' contract.”

“Trust you to make a good bargain,” said Paoli. “I always thought you were a bit of a Jew, Chippendale.”

“No, I'm not,” said Walter, smiling; “but I know the chance of a lifetime when I see one. I'll go round first thing to-morrow, and we'll rehearse at eleven. There's some piccolo work for you, Paoli, in the Gipsy dance.”

“Good enough,” said Paoli, delighted at the opportunity for showing his skill on that small, shrill instrument, which he carried in his coat pocket ready for use.

Walter shouted a bottle of wine at Palesi's. The Italian, who was greatly interested in their success, offered them some advice.

“Meester Chippendale,” he said, “you must not let them beat you down. Beezness is beezness; but dey will try to make you feel you are no genelman if you stand up to dem. But many a man 'as lost 'is chance in life because 'e was ashamed to wear the brazen face for five minutes. Dere is no sentiment in beezness.”

Paoli was delighted at the idea of the engagement with the Majestic. Already his tastes had grown expensive, and his nightly adventures with shop-girls and others no longer attracted him. He had found new worlds to conquer.

He ordered another bottle of wine, but Walter left them, his mind occupied with the terms he could reasonably demand from the Majestic. He dined alone, and, feeling restless, thought of the theatre; but there were no plays to his liking, and he wandered about the streets with his head full of schemes for the future. Suddenly his thoughts turned to Betty. He had seen her in the street since his meeting with Freda; but always alone. Whatever she thought of him, she could no longer despise him for playing in the gutter. At any rate he could hold up his head in the world. He was the manager of the quartet, and plenty would like to stand in his shoes.

He sauntered up King Street, and turning the corner, passed the French Grill. A few steps farther and his ear caught the sound of violins, rising and falling with the gradual curve of a wave from the open door of the church hall where Ricordi's orchestra practised. Taken unawares, the sound went through him in a wave of voluptuous ecstasy, and he stood rooted to the spot, spellbound by a strange and exquisite melancholy. Then he looked about him like a man awaking from a dream. He had forgotten that Ricordi was rehearsing for the last concert of the season. He had not been near the band since the failure of his "Ballad," but his success with the quartet had restored his pride, and he decided to spend an hour listening to them.

He slipped upstairs into the dingy gallery, and saw at once it was one of the final rehearsals from the number of professional musicians who were playing with them. There was a buzz of conversation from the players grouped in a semicircle round Ricordi's stand, mixed with the pleasing discord of instruments being tuned, and the clatter of plates and dishes in the kitchen of the French Grill. Then he saw a grand piano on the left of Ricordi, and knew at once that he had stumbled on the rehearsal for Betty and the Concerto. He decided to slip away, and then stood his ground, seized with an intense curiosity to see her and hear her play. Besides, there was no sign of her; the rehearsal might be over. It was evident that things were going badly, for Ricordi was in a passion. He tapped his baton for silence with an ominous glitter in his eye, and the band attacked the *Entr'acte* from *Lohengrin*. His arm worked like a flail, his hair fell in a disordered mop about his face as he flogged the sluggish brass through the majestic and triumphant theme.

A tremor ran through Walter when a player lifted the heavy lid of the piano and propped it open. The next moment he saw Betty moving with difficulty past the rows of music stands to the piano. The players craned their necks to look at her, for they had heard rumours of the new prodigy that Ricordi had discovered. Her beauty took their eyes, and the women players gave her a long stare, noting that she knew how to dress at any rate. As she pulled off her gloves with a nervous movement, Walter saw the beloved profile, and a hopeless yearning ran through him like pain.

"De Concerto in G major. De first movement only," cried Ricordi.

Betty ran her fingers over the keys to loosen them, and looked at the conductor. He nodded, and she played the opening bars with an exquisite ease and delicacy as the orchestra waited for their entry. But the instruments were too loud, and the sound of the piano was lost in the rough volume of the band, and Ricordi frowned. Walter listened anxiously for the double shake, and was relieved to hear her play it with brilliant ease; but the strings entered again noisily, and she looked nervously at Ricordi.

"Piano, piano," he shouted, but with no effect.

Then suddenly, his face livid with fury, he snatched the score from the desk, threw it on the floor, and turned his back on the players. For a minute it seemed as if the rehearsal had come to an end, and they looked at each other anxiously. But Ricordi, thinking better of it, turned abruptly to the second violins, and with an air of a man pleading for his life, he cried in a hoarse whisper:

“Can you not, for God's sake, play piano?”

A smile of relief ran through the orchestra as he picked up the score and tapped his baton. Betty, sharing in the general relief, looked round, and caught sight of Walter staring at her from the gallery with a fixed hypnotic gaze. She returned his look with a friendly smile; but he turned his head with a disdainful movement. Betty turned pale, and then flushed, and, dropping her head over the keyboard, she attacked the second solo with a fire and ease and precision that astonished the orchestra. Walter's scornful look had acted on her like magic. The violins pulled themselves together, and played superbly, feeling that they were on their mettle. The movement ended, and the players, astonished by Betty's technique and expression, applauded in the traditional manner by tapping their instruments with their bows.

“Bravo!” cried Ricordi. “Again from de second solo.”

But Walter had heard enough. He had been prepared for her brilliant technique, but her interpretation of the famous classic astonished him. She played it as if she had lived in the period in which it was written. The professional players listened with a thoughtful air, and Ricordi beamed on them, his anger forgotten in their surprise. If she played like that at the concert, she would create a sensation; and Walter, with the ungrudging spirit of the true artist, was proud of the impression the faithless Betty had made on the musicians.

He slipped down the stairs and into the street unseen, and through the tumult of his emotions he was surprised by the beauty of the night. A full moon rode serene in a cloudless sky, and he decided to walk home to calm his emotions. It was on such a night as this that he had first met Betty, and suddenly he began to think of her with a melancholy that had lost all bitterness. Perhaps she was not to blame. Perhaps she was the unconscious instrument of destiny to purge and purify his soul by sorrow. But he could never forget her tearless face at their last meeting. That tearless face stood like a wall between him and his emotions that threatened to surrender in one impulsive wave.

He remembered the lines from Heine that had amazed him as if another man had already lived through his particular experience: “*Oh, that single tear! It still torments me in my dreams. When the devil desires to ruin my soul, he hums in my ear a ballad of that tear which never was wept.*” Him also an unwept tear had haunted, and his mind began to play with the idea. If she had only shed one tear he could have forgiven her

everything.

Vibrating with emotion, he was aware of something stirring within him, the creative spirit which failure had crushed. He had reached the open spaces of Prince Alfred Park, when something in his brain began to sing, and he forgot everything as he listened.

It began with sudden, abrupt phrases, to the sound of Paoli's flute, and ended in silence. Then his brain was full of passionate, wailing melodies that ended abruptly in confusion. He was crossing the park, and, looking about him, he was surprised by a curious identity in his emotions. The moon in serene splendour rode high in the sky; the air was still as death. It was on such a night he had written the Nocturne for the faithless Betty, and an infinite longing came over him, a desire to love and to be loved with a passion to match the night. The tumult in his brain had died in incoherent waves of sound, and with a sudden, maddening vision of Betty's tearless face, he was aware of an undisguised longing for her, brutal and unromantic as the pangs of hunger.

Then, suddenly detaching himself from the confused medley of sound that had gone through his brain, a phrase quivering with passion rang clear in his ears as if a voice were singing. He forgot everything but this heartbroken cry from the heart of man, packed with the despair of all forsaken lovers. By some magic all his longing and despair had been crystallised in this sweet and passionate melody, which seemed to be the prelude to something greater. By this time he had crossed the park, and reaching the house, entered by the front door, and ran into Mrs. Brittle, who was locking up for the night.

"I thought it was your uncle," she cried; and then, surprised by his appearance, she added, "what's the matter with you?"

"Nothing," said Walter, anxious to be alone; "I'm going to bed. I'm sleepy."

"Sleepy?" echoed Mrs. Brittle. "I never saw a man more wide awake. Your eyes are burning like lumps of coal. Are you sure there's nothing wrong? You look as if you had been upset."

"No, nothing," said Walter, impatiently. "Goodnight."

When he reached his room he felt for the matches; but from the open window a silvery patch of light fell on the opposite wall, and he decided to sit in the darkened room. For a while he stared at the silvery shaft of light, conscious of a strange uneasiness. Then the passionate, despairing phrase rang in his ears again, and he paced the room restlessly, conscious that it was the prelude to something else. And suddenly, with the vibrating sweep of violins, another melody, modulating from the first, burst on his ears, triumphant and compelling. This is the Song of the Unwept Tear, he thought, and paced the room like one possessed of devils, humming and muttering to himself. The theme rose again, sorrow triumphant over itself, and he listened with a joyous consciousness that

his hopeless longing and despair were pouring out in an irresistible flood of melody.

Again it modulated into the first phrase, quivering with passion, but magically changed. It was a cry of infinite longing, purged of bitterness and despair; and immediately he was conscious of a serene happiness. The wonderful passionate melody had swept his mind clear of all bitterness against Betty. He felt that she was as helpless as himself against the contrary tides of emotion that sweep luckless mortals in opposite directions like ships on an angry sea. And he knew that out of his passion and despair had flowed a melody that would move the hearts of men and comfort despairing lovers when he was dead. He lit the gas, and seizing some sheets of manuscript, he rapidly jotted down the magical notes in a kind of shorthand.

An hour later, Jacob Gidley, stepping down Cleveland Street on his way home, stopped in front of the ham-and-beef shop with a furtive air. For a week past, with his eye on the lower button of his waistcoat, he had fasted with the rigour of a Trappist monk, declaring that he had no stomach for Mrs. Brittle's dishes. And now, conscious of a gross and immoderate appetite, he felt that he must eat or die. Under a glass shade in the centre of the window a cork bobbed up and down, balanced on a vertical spout of water, and Jacob stared at this ingenious contrivance as if fascinated; but all the time his eye was feasting on the display of succulent meats. He considered and rejected the ham and the round of corned beef, the pallid tongues of sheep, sausage as thick as a boa constrictor, and pig's cheek, of which he had an unfriendly remembrance. For a moment he dwelt on a delicious mould of brawn, but as usual in his periods of starvation his appetite ran to the flesh of the pig, which in his normal moments inspired him with horror. Suddenly his eyes rested on a dish of pig's trotters, and his mouth watered, sending an acute pain up his cheek bone. He stepped into the shop and asked for something to tempt the appetite of a sick friend.

When he reached Pitt Street, Jacob let himself in and looked round with a sigh of relief. The coast was clear, but Martha's ears grew abnormally sharp when he was fasting, and he rustled the evening paper loudly to convince her that he was reading, if she happened to awake. Under cover of the noise he opened his parcel, which contained six trotters and a pen'orth of sweet mixed pickles in place of bread. As he was gnawing the gristly meat from the bones with the primitive appetite of a cave-dweller, he heard an extraordinary noise from the floor overhead. It was Walter playing on the fiddle, and singing at the top of his voice. Jacob scowled as he listened. The noise would surely wake Martha, and he had his trotters to finish. As he finished another he heard a creaking on the stairs, and Mrs. Brittle came into sight, dressed in a wrapper. Jacob choked on a mouthful, and swiftly covered the last trotter

with the newspaper.

“This will never do, Martha,” he said, speaking rapidly to distract her attention from the table. “He'll rouse the neighbourhood with that noise. Has he been drinking?”

“Drinking!” said Mrs. Brittle, with scorn. “Yes, he's been drinking something you'll never taste. He came home early, and his eyes were like burning coals. He's written some music, I think. He's been muttering to himself for hours. Listen, there it is again.”

He followed her upstairs, and together they stood on the landing and listened. The passionate, despairing melody suddenly modulated into a paean of triumphant sorrow, Walter swelling the volume of sound in a voice ill-adapted for singing. Jacob looked at Mrs. Brittle with a vague fear in his eyes. Something was happening that he couldn't understand. It was uncanny. The paean of triumph ended, and the first melody was repeated with a subtle change. All the bitterness had gone out of it, and only the infinite longing was left. In the silence that followed, Mrs. Brittle knocked at the door.

“Come in,” cried Walter in a harsh, imperious voice.

He was walking up and down, with his head thrown back and a look of pride and decision on his face. His eye was fixed on vacancy, as if he saw visions. Surely he was possessed of devils, thought Jacob, and edged nearer the door.

“What music is that, Walter?” said Mrs. Brittle, gently.

He stopped and stared at her like a man awaking from a dream.

“It's wonderful music. It brings the tears to my eyes. Where did you get it?” she asked.

“It's mine. I wrote it — Walter Chippendale, who played for a living in the gutter,” he cried, harshly. “It's the Song of the Unwept Tear. It will live when I am dead; for I, too, am a musician.”

Jacob stood speechless. The wild beauty of the music had strangely affected him. Some forgotten chord vibrated in him. He was vaguely aware that he had missed something in this world — the tumultuous joys and passionate despair of lovers, the sound of a voice sweeter than music itself, and a woman's face that haunts you like a dream. Already he was an old man, and in his heart he knew that no one cared for him. With a sudden impulse he stepped into the room, and held out his hand with a strange air of humility.

“Walter,” he said, “I'm very sorry I misjudged you. Some day I shall be proud to tell people that you are my nephew.”

Walter frowned slightly, but took his hand.

“Somebody else ought to be proud, too, and her name's not Martha Brittle,” said a voice near him.

The look of arrogant pride melted from Walter's face. His lips twitched, and his eyes turned misty.

“Martha,” he said, “if she had only shed one tear to show she was sorry for me, I’d have gone through fire and water for her.”

“I think you’ve done that already,” cried Mrs. Brittle. “Come, laddie, it’s time to go to bed.” And turning to Jacob, who stood undecided, she added: “You’d better go down and finish your trotter before the cat gets it, Mr. Gidley. The newspaper didn’t quite cover it.”

Chapter XXIII: Mrs. Brittle Pays a Visit.

ON the following Monday Walter knocked at the door of Ricordi's studio with a roll of music in his hand. It was the "Song of the Unwept Tear," which he had arranged as a piano solo, and copied out in his singularly neat hand. But Ricordi kept him waiting, and then gave him an unfriendly look through the half-open door.

"Buon' giorno, Meester Chippendale," he said, obviously anxious to be rid of him; "I am vairey busy. I take de final rehearsal to-night, an' some of de players do not know dere parts. God, who did send flies to plague de Egyptians, did send amateurs to torment me."

Walter, chilled to the bone by his reception, turned to go; but Ricordi caught sight of the roll of music.

"W'at is dat?" he inquired.

"Oh, nothing," said Walter, choking with mortification; "it's a piece I wrote last week. I thought you might like to hear it."

"Come in, come in," cried Ricordi, opening the door with a sudden change in his manner. The room was in a litter. The annotated programme for Thursday's concert lay on the piano, and the table was loaded with orchestral scores. Ricordi was noting the difficult passages for the final rehearsal. He took the roll of music, and, sitting down at the piano, stared at the title:

THE SONG OF THE UNWEPT TEAR —
Intermezzo for the Piano.
Walter Chippendale. — Op. 15.

He frowned heavily as he ran his eye over the pages, and then a look of surprise came into his face; but he kept an ominous silence, and Walter's confidence left him. He remembered his first meeting with Ricordi, and the cherished manuscript that had been thrown on the floor in a fit of rage. Ricordi turned again to the lines from Heine which Walter had written at the head: "*Oh, that single tear! It still torments me in my dreams. When the devil desires to ruin my soul, he hums in my ear a ballad of that tear which never was wept.*"

"Ah, you 'ave been in lofe since I see you last?" he inquired. "An' you make a song because de pretty lady did forget to cry? Dat is vairey good. Donizetti 'e say dat 'e could make a string of pearls out of a woman's tears. An' now we will see what you 'ave done."

He turned to the piano and began to play the “Intermezzo” with the superb, velvety touch of the old virtuoso, and Walter trembled as he heard the passionate, despairing phrases come to life under those flexible fingers. With the change of key Ricordi worked up a tremendous fortissimo with crashing chords, that died away in the silence of despair. Walter had never heard him play like it before. He finished, and stared at the manuscript as if he had forgotten Walter's existence; but suddenly he jumped up and, with volcanic gestures, kissed the embarrassed composer on both cheeks.

“In de sacred name of Art, I salute you, Chippendale,” he cried. “It is an honour dat ol' Ricordi did teach you, for dis is an inspiration, a masterpiece, a cry of passion an' despair from de 'eart of man to which all de world will listen. You mus' score it for strings, no brass, an' my orchestra shall play it. W'at a peety it is too late for de concert on Thursday.”

He sat down at the piano again and played it through with loving care, talking the while with a singular vivacity.

“So you are de young man who 'ad done wid women. Dis is de cry of de moth who burn 'is wings; but you will lofe women all your life. You did lofe wid all your 'eart w'en you write dis, an' you will lofe again, but you will never forget de preety lady who inspire dis song. For it is a true inspiration, like de “Sextette” from *Lucia*, an' de “Miserere” from *Trovatore*. I will arrange for it to be published in London w'en you 'ave scored it for de orchestra. An' now I am vairey busy. Dese accursed amateurs leave everyt'ing to me; but you mus' come to my concert on Thursday to 'ear my new player, Miss Wayside. She 'as de grand talent for de classics, an' will make a success. She was vairey clever, but too young to know life; an' Beethoven cuts to de bone. Den by de grace of God somet'ing did 'appen to 'er, an' she go pale an' thin, an' now she play divinely. Also she is vairey preety, an' will take your mind off de lady who did not cry one leetle tear. Take my card an' sit w'ere you please, but you mus' come or I shall be vairey angry.”

As Walter hurried round to Paoli's room he remembered that he had forgotten in his excitement to tell Ricordi that he had signed a three years' contract with the Majestic on excellent terms. He decided to go to the concert on Thursday, hear Betty play, and slip away unseen. Also he would say nothing of the “Intermezzo” for the present to Paoli. The quartet was waiting for him, and in his hurry he dropped the little “Duke” as he took it out of the case. He picked it up with a cry of dismay; but there was no harm done, not even a scratch. But an hour later he stopped, and looked anxiously at the instrument. There was something the matter with it. He drew the bow over the strings again. There was a peculiar buzzing noise. The second violin examined it, and tapping with his knuckles, listened intently. Then he peered through the “f” holes, and

found the cause of the trouble; the sound-bar was loose, and the little "Duke" was unplayable. This was a catastrophe, but the second violin, with his native courtesy, offered his instrument to Walter, and hurried home to string another fiddle that he kept in reserve.

Next morning Mrs. Brittle was surprised to see him staring at the little "Duke" with a dismal air, and asked what was the matter. He explained that a piece of wood inside had broken loose, and that the instrument would groan and buzz until it was glued in its place again.

"Is that all?" she said. "Get me some glue, and I'll stick it on myself."

Walter smiled, and told her that the fiddle would have to be taken to pieces, and that there was only one man in Sydney he could trust to do it properly.

"Well, take it to him, and don't waste your time grizzling," said Mrs. Brittle, impatiently.

Walter explained with a flush that he was the father of Betty.

"Ah, I see, and you're too proud to put your nose in where it's not wanted?"

"Perhaps I am," said Walter, colouring. "Besides, he'd keep it for weeks; he only works when he's in the humour."

"H'm," said Mrs. Brittle, and went about her work; but she was thinking hard.

The next day she wormed Betty's name and address out of Jacob, who, involved in a succession of Block flirtations, had nearly forgotten her existence. Mrs. Brittle finished her work early and in the afternoon dressed herself with extreme care in her black silk dress and the bonnet with jet ornaments. Then she went to Walter's room and looked doubtfully at the little "Duke." Her soul revolted from carrying that black case resembling a child's coffin, and she thought of wrapping the instrument in paper; but she was afraid it might come to harm. She was closing the lid when she saw the manuscript copy of the "Intermezzo" on the music-stand, and, with a sudden resolve, popped it in the case with the violin. She saw an opportunity of killing two birds with one stone.

It was the day before the concert, and since morning Betty had wandered restlessly from room to room, for Ricordi had forbidden her to touch the piano except to play the Thalberg exercises. She had awakened early that morning with the fear of something on her mind. Then she remembered the concert, and a tremor of fear ran through her. All her confidence was gone. She had not faced an audience for two years; she would surely break down and make an exhibition of herself. Ricordi had overrated her powers. Perhaps Walter would be there, and she would die rather than fail in his presence. She would have given the world to know what he thought of her playing, for she had the greatest confidence in his judgment; but she had acted like a fool and must take the consequences. She would have liked to play to him alone, and charm that hostile stare

out of his eyes. Her dismal thoughts were interrupted by a knock at the door, and she got up, glad of a diversion. She found herself staring at a tall, bony woman, dressed with meticulous care in black silk, and carrying a violin case, of which she was obviously ashamed.

"Is this the place where they mend fiddles?" she asked, abruptly.

"Yes; will you please come in?" said Betty. "I'll go and call father."

"No, you won't," said the visitor. "At least, not till I've had a good look at you."

Betty looked at her in alarm; but Peter Wayside had many eccentric customers, and she decided to humour her.

"Well, that's over," said the strange visitor, putting the black case on the table. "I never felt such a fool in my life carrying that thing through the streets."

Betty was at a loss for an answer, and in the silence the stranger stared at her with her small, shrewd eyes till she felt uncomfortable.

"H'm, so you're the girl that was too good to be true," she remarked, suddenly. "Well, he's not such a fool as I thought."

"I don't know what you mean," cried Betty, turning pale.

"No; but you will before I've done with you," said Mrs. Brittle, grimly.

"But who are you?" cried Betty in alarm.

"My name's Martha Brittle, and I'm Walter Chippendale's best friend," said the visitor, watching the effect of her words on Betty.

She flushed and turned pale, conscious of a throbbing pulse. Walter had broken the ice at last, and was sending a message to her. Then her mood changed. This woman was watching her with unfriendly eyes. She had found out something about Frank Goddard, and had come to upbraid her for her deceit. As she stared at her with the shadow of fear in her candid, clear eyes, Mrs. Brittle broke in:

"Well, I must say that I like your face; but looks are not everything, as my husband said when we got married. You must have something more than a pretty face for a man to break his heart over."

"He didn't break his heart over me," cried Betty, flushing.

"Well, that wasn't your fault," said Mrs. Brittle, cheerfully. "I don't know what you did to him. I didn't even know your name till yesterday. You see, I was never in love myself; I got married instead. But I suppose it can't be helped if you hate the sight of him."

"I don't hate him; he hates me," cried Betty, bursting into tears.

"Ah, is that the way the wind blows?" said Mrs. Brittle, with a sudden change in her manner. "My poor, dear child, Walter's been eating his heart out for you for months, and he thinks you despise him."

"I don't despise him. I — there's nobody like Walter; but I made a mistake, and he'll never forgive me," cried Betty, mopping her eyes.

"There must be more fools in this world than we think," said Mrs. Brittle. "Here you are piping your eye for Walter, and he thinks you

couldn't spare him a tear to save your life.”

“How do you know that? Did he tell you?” asked Betty.

“There are some things you don't tell your best friend unless you're a fool; but he wrote a song about you last week.”

“Are you sure?” asked Betty, with an eager flush.

For answer Mrs. Brittle opened the violin case, and handed the manuscript copy of the “Intermezzo” to Betty.

“And did he send this to me?” she inquired.

“I wish I could tell a good, thumping lie for once,” said Mrs. Brittle, “but he didn't. He doesn't even know I'm here. But his fiddle wanted mending, and he was too proud to bring it.”

Betty was examining the manuscript with feverish vivacity. She read the inscription from Heine, and remembered his last words: “And not even one tear, Betty. Weren't all my kisses worth one tear?” And pride had kept back the scalding tears till he was out of sight, and gone. What a fool she had been! She turned to Mrs. Brittle with misty eyes.

“Would you like me to play it?” she asked, gently.

“Yes,” said Mrs. Brittle. “It's wonderful music. It makes me long for the children that I never — h'm, you're only a girl and wouldn't understand.”

Betty played it through as Ricordi had done without a mistake and marvelling at the passionate, despairing phrases that changed and rose triumphant over sorrow. Surely this was Walter's message to her in the language she best understood. Mrs. Brittle, who had never heard such playing, looked at her in amazement.

“Now I know you're the girl for my boy,” she said.

“Will you leave it with me?” asked Betty, eagerly.

“Leave it?” cried Mrs. Brittle in alarm. “He must never know I brought it out. He's like a child with a new toy; he stares at it for hours. It's more than my life's worth to——”

As she spoke a heavy tread sounded on the landing, and a harsh voice cried: “I thought Ricordi said you mustn't touch the piano to-day? What the devil's the use of——” Peter Wayside stopped when he saw a stranger in the room, and looked angrily at Betty; but Mrs. Brittle engaged him at once in conversation.

“Good afternoon, are you the man who mends fiddles?” she asked, briskly.

“I repair violins, not fiddles,” replied Peter, sourly.

“The same thing; you'd better look at this,” said Mrs. Brittle.

“Why, it's the little ‘Duke,’ ” said Peter in surprise. “Where is that young fellow? Why didn't he bring it himself? I want a chat with him.”

“Bring it?” said Mrs. Brittle. “Not likely to after the way he was treated here.”

“That was Betty's doing, not mine. I'm not responsible for her fancies.”

“No; and from what I can see, you're not responsible for her good looks either,” said Mrs. Brittle, tartly.

Peter, who was examining the violin with the sure and rapid movements of the expert, gave her a scowl, but said nothing. He had walked out to the landing to get a better light, and she followed him.

“Um, the sound-bar's loose. I'll have to take the belly off,” he said to himself.

“Oh, so you *can* mend it?” inquired Mrs. Brittle.

“Mend it?” said Peter, in disgust. “What am I here for?”

“I'm sure I don't know,” said Mrs. Brittle, pertly. “It might be to scare the birds, judging from your looks.”

Peter scowled, at a loss for an answer, and peered again into the entrails of the little “Duke.”

“Well, get to work; don't stand idling there,” she added, impatiently.

“Do you know who you're talking to?” asked Peter, furiously.

“Yes,” said Mrs. Brittle, calmly, “an ugly old man with a bald head. You needn't scowl at me. That's the way I frighten hawkers. When will it be done?”

“The week after next,” said Peter, meaning inside the next three months.

“Now look, you've wasted enough of my time,” said Mrs. Brittle, sharply. “I can see you'd stand and gossip with me all day if you had your way, but I'm in a hurry. You must do it now while I wait. Walter wants to play on it to-morrow.”

“It can't be done; you talk like a fool,” said Peter, angrily.

“Maybe. That comes of listening to you. But here I stop till that fiddle's mended, and if you try to put me out I'll call the police.”

Peter stared at her, flabbergasted at hearing his favourite threat in the mouth of a stranger. His bushy eyebrows met in a frown; the veins rose like cords on his bald forehead.

“Now get along and mend it, there's a good fellow,” she continued, as if she were coaxing a child; “I've got a dinner to cook when I get home.”

Peter, dazed by her persistence, retreated down the stairs with the little “Duke” still clutched in his hand; and Mrs. Brittle, fearing he was giving her the slip, followed. But, being a stranger, she took the last three steps at a run, and dived into the open door of the kitchen as if she had urgent business there. Peter, who was retreating to his last citadel — the workshop — looked at her with a wry smile, and Mrs. Brittle returned the grin, or supposed she did. Peter thought she was biting on a hollow tooth.

“Would it be any use telling you that this job can't be done in five minutes?” he inquired.

“I don't know,” said Mrs. Brittle, cautiously.

“D'ye know how long it takes glue to stick?” he asked.

“Well, I've mended a broken jug now and then,” she admitted, and Peter shuddered at the idea of comparing that with his delicate work.

“Come, I'll show you,” he cried; and slipping into the workshop he unstrung the fiddle, and putting some shining instrument between the ribs of the little “Duke,” levered the belly off with a horrid, crackling noise.

“Now you've done it,” said Mrs. Brittle in dismay.

In the momentary silence they heard the sound of Betty's piano. She was playing the “Intermezzo” softly for fear of being overheard.

Peter frowned again. “I don't know what Betty's thinking of,” he cried. “She was told not to touch the piano to-day. She'll be fit for nothing to-morrow. Just wait a minute.”

He turned to go upstairs, but Mrs. Brittle stopped him.

“Leave her alone, Mr. Wayside. She's got something to take her mind off the silly old concert.”

“What do you know about that?” inquired Peter.

“Never mind,” said Mrs. Brittle, with a crafty smile. “It 'ud be a dull world if we didn't know more than we're supposed to know about everybody, wouldn't it?”

Softly as Betty played, they could distinctly hear the passionate, despairing phrases of the “Song of the Unwept Tear.”

“What music is that?” said Peter, looking suspiciously at Mrs. Brittle.

“It's a present from Walter,” she said without hesitation.

“Um, that's something like a tune. Did he write it?”

“He did, and he said you were the only man in Sydney that he could trust with the fiddle. He must know you better than I do.”

Peter beamed on her, flattered to his marrow. “The only sensible lad I ever met,” he cried. “I don't know what Betty was thinking of when she——”

“She's changing her mind now,” said Mrs. Brittle, with an incredibly atrocious wink. “What are you going to do about the fiddle?”

In half an hour they were fast friends, and Peter, with an unparalleled exhibition of courtesy, had invited her to take afternoon tea in the kitchen. They quarrelled again over the making of the tea, but Peter, fascinated by her dry humour, forgot Betty and his work in listening to her sallies. She told him the history of Walter since his break with Betty; for Peter, living in his workshop, was incredibly ignorant of what passed outside. Then she entertained him with a shamefully minute description of Jacob Gidley, and Peter laughed till his jaws ached. She described his dapper appearance, his peculiar habits, his periodical fits of starvation, and his mania for patent medicines. “Of course, this is between you and me and the gatepost,” she was saying, “but when he swallowed the furniture polish I thought I should split. You know, I couldn't help wondering what he looked like inside and——”

She was interrupted by a rapid, alert step down the side passage, and stopped in alarm. A tall, aristocratic gentleman, wearing gloves, a silk hat, and a dark suit of the latest pattern, was standing in the doorway. As the aristocrat regarded them with a friendly smile, she rose to her feet in a flurry, inwardly thanking her stars that she was wearing her black silk.

“Good afternoon, Peter,” he said, with a graceful sweep of the silk hat. “It’s like an old soldier to blunder in without knocking; but I’m still one of the family.”

“How do, Algy?” said Peter, with a discontented air, for at the moment he was more interested in the adventures of Jacob Gidley. Then he introduced him to Mrs. Brittle.

“Charmed to meet you, I’m sure,” said the Colonel, rapidly reflecting that Peter Wayside was more artful than he looked. “Madam, you have a twinkling eye, and I heard Peter roaring as I came in. I should insist on hearing that story if I were not pressed for time; but I trust we shall meet again. Peter, I have a message from my wife, who is waiting outside in the car.”

“Um,” said Peter, who for no particular reason had taken a violent dislike to Mrs. Algernon Fitzroy.

“But where’s the charming Betty?” asked the Colonel. “My wife wishes me to say that the car will be sent round for you and her to-morrow night at any hour she chooses. These artistes must be humoured, Peter. I’ve given an order at the florist’s to-day, and Betty shall get the spoils of war if an old soldier knows his business; but not a word to her.”

Peter beamed, secretly pleased that Mrs. Brittle should hear that this elegant gentleman and his motor-car were at Betty’s service. “Wait a minute, and I’ll fetch her,” he cried. But as he spoke Betty herself appeared on the landing. The three of them looked at her in amazement. Her nervous dejection was gone. Her cheeks were flushed, and her eyes were shining with laughter and tears. She seemed radiant with happiness.

“Why, Betty, you’re going into battle with all your colours flying,” cried the Colonel, “and a pretty picture you make with them.”

She ran down to meet him, and then drew back in surprise.

“Oh, uncle, whatever made you choose that colour?” she asked. “It doesn’t suit you at all.”

“My dear, Pritchard’s assured me that this was the latest pattern from London,” he replied, mortified by her expression of dismay; and there was an awkward silence. With a new cheque-book in his pocket he had gone to Judge Grantley’s tailors, been mistaken for an old customer, and had chosen an elegant dark cloth such as he had longed for these many years. Then his wife, surprised at the change in his appearance, had looked at him in dismay as Betty had done, declaring that the sombre colour had added ten years to his looks. She had begged him to wear grey again, which had been his favourite colour for so long, to harmonise

with his hair and moustache. It was one of life's little ironies, and the Colonel bit his lip. For years he had groaned under the tyranny of the judge's grey suits; and now, with money to burn in his pocket, he was doomed to wear the accursed colour for ever.

But when he explained his errand, Betty flushed with pleasure.

"Half-past eight will do, uncle," she said, "because I am coming on in the second part."

"Very well," said the Colonel. "Mrs. Fitzroy will send the car back for you, and if your courage fails, look for me in the third row from the front." And he took his leave with the quick, alert step of an old soldier.

The others went upstairs again, Mrs. Brittle keeping a wary eye on the treacherous steps.

"Well, I must be going. What about the fiddle?" she said, as she saw the empty case.

"Um, wait a minute," said Peter, and hurried down to the workshop.

"I'll take that music, please," said Mrs. Brittle, turning suddenly to Betty. "And, mind you, nobody knows you've seen it."

Betty handed it to her in silence, and then the words came in a rush: "Won't you tell him I've played it, and I think it's wonderful?" she asked.

"No," said Mrs. Brittle, grimly. "He's such a fool that he'd rather talk to you than me any day in the week. So tell him yourself, if you want him to hear it." And then, to Betty's surprise, she stooped and kissed her in an awkward, shamefaced manner.

Peter shuffled into the room with a violin in his hand, and Betty gave a start as she saw it. It was his most cherished possession, the famous "Yellow Grand," for which a great player had begged him to name his own price.

"I'm lending this to the lad till the little 'Duke' is ready," he said, gruffly. "He knows what it is; tell him to take care of it."

Then, to Betty's amazement, he put on his hat, and escorted Mrs. Brittle to the tram, under pretence of carrying the violin, but really to hear the surprising adventures of Jacob Gidley in the kitchen.

Betty, left to herself, sat down at the piano and played the "Song of the Unwept Tear" without a fault. She had memorised it while Mrs. Brittle was drinking tea with her father downstairs.

Chapter XXIV: “Journey's End”

MRS. BRITTLE was no sooner in the tram than she bit her lip with vexation. She had forgotten the best joke of all — the adventure of Jacob with the flypaper. However, she reflected that it would keep, and Peter Wayside had begged her to drop in any time she was passing. She reached home in good time, and put the violin case in its usual place in the corner. She meant to give Walter a surprise, but he came home late and went straight to bed.

In the morning she watched his movements with childish eagerness as he dawdled in his room. It happened that he was killing time, for the quartet had rehearsed yesterday to oblige the harper, who had some business with his patron saint this morning. He lit a cigarette, and looked impatiently at Mrs. Brittle. She seemed as if she would never be done setting the room straight, and he wanted to be alone, for his mind was full of Betty. Ricordi's speech had set him thinking. Something had happened to her, and she had gone pale and thin, and now she played divinely. Well, she had not suffered on his account, but sorrow might have taught her a lesson that she badly needed. There was nothing so cruel as innocence. That reminded him. The “Song of the Unwept Tear” had cleansed his soul of bitterness as a bright flame leaps and destroys the foulness in the air, and now he passionately desired her to succeed in that great hall where he had failed so miserably.

He took down the “Intermezzo,” and frowned again at Mrs. Brittle as she flicked an imaginary speck of dust from the mirror. But instantly he became absorbed in the magic phrases of the Lament. Nothing worn or common here, but the freshness of a newly-minted coin. He must hear them again, and he went to the corner to get out the little “Duke.” He opened the case, and stared in amazement, unable to believe his own eyes, for here was the famous “Yellow Grand,” the pride of the Wayside family, made by Peter's father in 1854.

“Martha, what's this?” he cried, and changed colour.

“A fiddle, I suppose,” said Mrs. Brittle, innocently, but she was well repaid for that humiliating journey with the black case resembling a child's coffin.

“Yes, but where's the little ‘Duke?’ Who put this here?”

“The man who owns it, I think,” she replied, “and he said that you must take care of it.”

“Then you've been to Crystal Street, and you've seen her? What did she say?” asked Walter, trembling with eagerness.

“I don't remember,” she answered. “I never did care much for girls and their chatter. Now give me a woman who can talk for hours about feeding babies, and I'm——”

“I wish you could be serious for once,” said Walter.

“So do I,” said Mrs. Brittle, “but sometimes it isn't wise.”

“Then you know more than you're going to tell?”

“I hope so,” she replied, heartily. “The asylum's full of them that didn't.”

“Yes, but what did she say when she saw you?”

“I don't remember. Anyhow people never tell secrets to strangers.”

“Well, what did you say?”

“I said, ‘If you try to put me out, I'll call the police.’ ”

“What, to her?”

“No, to her father.”

“I know, and then he tried to bite your head off.”

“I beg your pardon,” said Mrs. Brittle, “but you're talking about a friend of mine.”

“Are you making this up as you go along?”

“H'm, wait till you hear the rest. I nearly broke my neck down a slippery staircase, had afternoon tea in the kitchen, and met a dear old swell with the loveliest whiskers.”

“That would be her uncle, the Colonel.”

“A Colonel, is he? Well, I thought he was a duke, and that affable. But then he saw how well dressed I was. He called in to say that he was sending the motor for her at half-past eight to-night, and there's going to be heaps of flowers, and the devil to pay.”

“And you won't tell me what she said?”

“No, I can tell you that the room wanted dusting, but when the poor thing can play like an angel, I suppose——”

“So you heard her play?”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Brittle, cautiously. “Horrible music with no tune in it.”

“That's the Concerto that she's going to play to-night.”

“Maybe. I could make better music myself,” said Mrs. Brittle.

“Now look, Martha,” said Walter, “you used to be a friend of mine. What would you advise me to do to-night?”

“That's better. I'd rather give people good advice than old clothes any day, because I know they don't want it. So you go to the concert, sit where she can see you, and try to look pleasant.

Since he could get no more from her, he took the “Yellow Grand” out of the case, and gloated over its exquisite curves and rich colouring. He drew the bow across the strings; the G string was like a trumpet. And

with joy singing in his heart, he played the dolorous melody of the "Intermezzo," making Mrs. Brittle gape at the sweet and powerful tone of the famous fiddle.

At half-past seven that night Mrs. Brittle walked round Walter with a calculating eye as if he were a horse that she thought of buying. He had never forgotten the humiliation that he had felt at the Plain and Fancy in Gus's borrowed clothes, and with money to burn in his pocket, he had bought a dress suit for emergencies.

"Fits as if it was made for you," she declared.

"But it was," said Walter, smiling.

"So was your skin, and cost less," she replied.

"But won't you tell me what she said?" asked Walter at the door.

"I was never one to make mischief between fools," she replied. "You can tell me what she said when you come home."

A crowd of fashionable people blocked the entrance to the Town Hall as they sauntered in a leisurely manner up the stairs; a procession of cabs and motors discharging their load under the portico divided the stream at intervals, as Moses divided the waters of the Red Sea. Walter went to the northern gallery, where Betty would face him as she played, but the usher declared that the booking had been unusually heavy, and that all the seats were taken. He found him a seat near the organ gallery, where he could see nothing of the orchestra, and Walter's spirits fell. But the usher, palming half-a-crown, promised him a better seat after the interval. It was the first time he had been in the hall since the failure of his "Ballad," and he surveyed the huge audience with a curious attention. It was partly his own fault that they had laughed at his music, and now, conscious of the inspired "Intermezzo," he looked about him with a calm confidence. He turned to his programme, and read with a thrill of pride:

CONCERTO IN G MAJOR FOR PIANOFORTE AND ORCHESTRA.

(Beethoven.)

ALLEGRO MODERATO — ANDANTE CON MOTO — RONDO:
VIVACE.

(Cadenzas by Signor Roberto Ricordi.)

Pianoforte, MISS BETTY WAYSIDE.

His thoughts were interrupted by the flute and clarinets in the "Oberon Overture," and he had a sudden vision of Betty with the eyes of a nymph seen in a moonlit glade. The joyous and triumphant close of the overture woke him from his reverie, and he took it as an omen of success. The orchestra, as sometimes happened after a disastrous rehearsal, was playing with remarkable fire and precision, and he regretted that he had not scored the "Intermezzo" in time for them to play it. He would have

given the world to see its effect on this audience.

In the interval, while the men trooped out to smoke and breathe the fresh air of the bars, the usher gave him an unclaimed seat in the front row, commanding an excellent view of the piano and the audience below. He picked out the Colonel and his wife, looking very distinguished, and sitting three rows from the front. Halfway down the hall he discovered Gus and Julia with a strange lady between them, evidently the widow from Queen Street. Then, in the "musicians' corner," under the southern gallery, he caught sight of Freda's homely face. She was evidently alone, and he wondered why she was not with Gus and the others. Last of all he saw Peter Wayside, standing in his usual place against the back wall, where he tested the carrying power of violins. But the men who needed fresh air shuffled in from the street, the players trooped on to the platform, and an usher propped up the heavy lid of the concert grand. Walter thrilled with expectation, and the next moment he saw Betty walking on with Ricordi.

She bowed nervously as Ricordi went to the conductor's stand, and the sight of that gracious, nymph-like figure, set off in white ninon and satin, filled his heart with a passionate longing. The audience, led by a startling clap from Gus, applauded politely, more curious than expectant, but her beauty had taken their eyes, and as a judge insensibly tempers the law to the pretty woman in the dock, they were prepared to wink at the inevitable faults in her playing. She sat down at the piano, and pushed the seat further away to get control of the pedals, and became aware of a second violin with a foolish, globular face staring at her, and she knitted her brows angrily. But the fiddler, surprised by her beauty, moved his seat to get a better view, and Betty, whose nerves were strung like fiddle strings, flushed crimson and turned to Ricordi, her nervous fears gone in a wave of unreasoning anger.

Ricordi tapped with his baton, the violins tucked their instruments under their chins, and Betty began to play. The audience, polite but languid, listened with resignation until she reached the second solo, and then there was a perceptible movement of surprise and attention in the hall. The orchestra, playing on its mettle, was perfectly under control, but Ricordi frowned at the slightest deviation from the tempo. Betty had forgotten the audience, conscious of nothing but the urgent need to keep in touch with Ricordi's beat. The difficult passages had ceased to exist. Her mind ran to meet them, and her fingers unravelled them with marvellous ease. The audience stiffened with attention as if someone had tightened a screw. No one had prepared them for such fire and classic precision as this. She played the long cadenza with brilliant ease, and then, as the movement ended with heavy fortissimo passages, dropped her hands to her side, suddenly conscious of an immense fatigue.

And instantly a noise like a hailstorm broke on her ears. The huge

audience, no longer polite and languid, were showing their approval. Betty turned and bowed, a little dazed by the clamour, and as she looked vaguely about her, she caught sight of Walter clapping like mad. Her eyes clung to his, and through the din of the applause she was only conscious that she had charmed that hostile stare out of his eyes. And Freda, who had seen that look from the “musicians' corner,” felt something inside her contract till it hurt. She dropped her head, and stared at the programme through a blur of scalding tears.

Then, with her talent under full control, and conscious of her powers, Betty began the andante with a wonderful lightness. She played with half-closed eyes, as she had often practised it, but into her mind came a swift vision of a deserted railway platform, the pleading accents of a false lover, and herself with a dumb horror of life in her brain. There was a little applause, stopped by impatient “sshs” from the connoisseurs, and then she attacked the rondo with a swift and fiery ease that astonished the listeners. The presto came to an end with heavy fortissimo chords, and she dropped her hands again, no longer conscious of fatigue. The noise rose again like a hailstorm, and she turned and bowed to the orchestra, applauding in the traditional manner by tapping their instruments with their bows. Ricordi, beaming with pride and satisfaction, faced the audience, and pointed to Betty and the players. The applause died away, and instantly rose again, as the usher stepped forward, loaded with flowers in baskets and bouquets. There were too many for her to hold, and Ricordi grouped them on the platform at her feet. It was the proudest moment of her life. The clapping broke out again in the neighbourhood of Gus, with the rhythmical thud that will not be denied. It was rare for an encore to be demanded after such a long and exacting composition, but Ricordi, judging the temper of the crowd, stooped and whispered in her ear. She turned and sat down at the piano, and a profound silence fell on the hall — a tribute reserved for European artistes. She ran her fingers over the keys, searching her mind for a suitable piece, looked suddenly at Walter with a radiant smile, and began to play the “Song of the Unwept Tear.”

Walter turned pale, swallowed incessantly, and stared at her, petrified with amazement as the passionate, despairing notes floated through the silent building. The theme rose again, sorrow triumphant over itself, and the audience sat spellbound by the magic phrases. As the applause died away, Betty gathered the rest of the flowers, bowed in the direction of Walter, and left the platform. A buzz of conversation rose instantly from the audience, and Walter, his heart swelling with pride, but too dazed to think, heard some scraps of conversation near him.

“She's a marvel. Who is she? Never heard of her before.”

“No, but we'll hear of her again, my boy, take my word.”

“ 'Pon my word, I liked her best in the last piece. I'm not too keen on

these concertos. What was it?"

"I don't know. Sounded like Grieg or Schubert. It's a lovely thing; I must get it. Made me think of the dead leaves in autumn. We'll see the name in the paper to-morrow."

The unconscious praise fell like music on Walter's ears, and as he looked on the sea of upturned faces, he felt an impulse to cry out that it was his music they had applauded; that he forgave them for their cruel laughter at his "Ballad." He caught sight of Freda in the distance, and smiled at her, but she regarded him with a fixed and mournful stare, and again he wondered. His thoughts flew like lightning. Only Ricordi had seen the "Intermezzo." He must have taught it to Betty, and that was why he was so anxious for him to come to the concert. He ran his eye over the audience. Peter Wayside had disappeared from the back wall, and Gus and his party were moving out as he looked. Betty would be waiting in the artistes' room till the concert was over, and he stared impatiently at the clock.

The audience applauded the last number in a perfunctory manner, with their minds running on trams, trains, and ferries, and Walter joined the slow procession to the door, wondering if he would see Betty again that night. He stopped on the portico, and slipped behind a stone pillar with a vague idea of seeing her as she went out. The last stragglers were coming down the steps, and he decided to go, when the party came in sight, laden with flowers. Ricordi, scouting on all sides, was the first to see him, and darted forward, crying: "Ah, 'ere 'e is."

Betty was still smiling, but her face went white. Mrs. Fitzroy gave him a quick look, and the Colonel, who had entirely forgotten him, smiled in a friendly manner.

"How do you do, Mr. Chippendale?" said Betty, in a strangely mechanical voice, and as Walter bowed, she introduced him to the Fitzroys.

"Chippendale, I 'ave one bone to pick wid you," cried Ricordi, "but first I must eat one whole duck to get back my strength."

"Then, sir, there will be a dish of bones to choose from," said the Colonel; "and that reminds me. I have just learned, Mr. Chippendale, that you are the composer of that charming piece which Betty played to-night, and on the word of an old soldier I preferred it to the other. My wife, who understands these things, joins with me in asking you to take pot luck with us at a little supper in honour of this event."

Before Walter knew what he was doing, he was handing Betty into the motor, and disposing the flowers so that they would come to no harm. It was a tight squeeze, and a thrill, sweet as honey, went through him at the contact with Betty's supple body.

"Chippendale," said Ricordi, "you make me feel a vairey ol' man to-night. First, I am struck dumb to 'ear de "Intermezzo" played at my

concert, an' den I am struck speechless to learn dat Mees Wayside is de preety lady who did not cry one leetle tear. It is annuder nail in my funeral w'en de young people do play tricks under my nose. I did t'ink better of you both."

"But I don't understand," stammered Walter.

"Ah, you are de still waters w'ich run too deep for me. I will leave you to Mees Wayside, who 'as de woman's wit to make you suffer in 'ell for your sins. Already you 'ave eaten your bread wid tears, an' de preety lady did go pale an' thin while you play your tricks. But dat is a mere bagatelle to pay for de inspired "Song of de Unwept Tear," an' de power to tear de 'eart out of Beethoven. You are both my children in Art, is it not?"

Betty said nothing, but Walter felt her tremble when Ricordi spoke of her mysterious illness. As he handed her out of the car at the French Grill, he remembered with a curious sensation that he had stood there and played in the gutter for his living a few months ago. Ricordi was right; he had eaten his bread with tears.

A table had been reserved, and the Colonel carried up a basket of flowers, which he insisted on placing in the centre of the table. Betty and Walter ate next to nothing, but Ricordi performed wonders with a whole duck, as he had promised. When the waiter brought a magnum of champagne, and the cork popped, Betty remembered the tales of Bohemian gaiety that she had heard about this place, and she looked about her with an amused smile. The other guests, intent on their supper, were as sober and decorous as themselves. Then the Colonel, looking very handsome and distinguished in evening dress, and as much at home in this fashionable restaurant as he had been in Peter Wayside's kitchen, proposed the health of Betty in a flattering speech. Suddenly Mrs Fitzroy, whose tongue was loosened by the wine, looked hard at Walter, and cried: "Why, you're the gipsy!"

"Yes, I'm the gipsy," said Walter, smiling at her amazement.

As they went downstairs, he remembered that he had hardly spoken a word to Betty. And the few words had been absurdly formal and precise, while their eyes had sought each other as hungrily as bees seek honey in clover. But as the car moved off, Betty leaned out and whispered: "Mr. Chippendale, I have a message for you. Dada says the little "Duke" is mended, and will you please call for it," and turned scarlet.

"Come, Chippendale," said Ricordi, "come wid me to de club, an' we will drink a bottle of wine an' talk about women."

It was a fortnight later before anything happened. Walter had gone post haste to Crystal Street the night after the concert, in a glow of ardent anticipation. Betty would open the door, and throw herself in his arms in the immortal attitude of Cupid and Psyche, and the past would be forgotten in a burning kiss. It had turned out otherwise. Betty had opened

the door, and welcomed him in an absurdly formal manner that had chilled him like a spray of cold water. And as they were talking in the guarded manner of people who have quarrelled, Peter Wayside had shuffled into the room. He was suffering from a fit of idleness, and monopolised the conversation for the rest of the night. He was full of his own grievances. Mr. Nicholson's five-pound Cremona, bought in a pawnshop, had been tested in the Town Hall by Shapira, and Peter, standing at the back of the huge hall, had heard nothing but a dismal squeak from the sham Guarnerius. The critics had slated Shapira for his lack of tone, and he was furious. At eleven o'clock Peter started to tell the story again for the tenth time, and Walter was in despair.

"Well, I'll take the little 'Duke' " he said. "I must be going."

"What's your hurry? You can't have it," cried Peter, testily. "I've decided to put a new bridge on it. I've tried a dozen already. It won't be ready till next week. You've got the "Yellow Grand." What more do you want?"

"I want Betty, but you don't seem to know it," thought Walter.

They parted on the veranda with an exasperating politeness, while Peter, spying a new moon, turned his money for luck.

He waited a whole week, that seemed an eternity, before he called again. When Peter opened the door, and gave him a sour look, his heart fell, but to his relief Betty came into the room. It turned out that Peter, who was making up the arrears of a fortnight's idleness, was expecting an angry customer.

"I shall want this room to see a man. They're working me to death," he grumbled. "Take Betty for a walk, there's a good lad. It's a fine moonlight night, and mind you're back early."

When they got outside, Betty dropped her artificial manner instantly. She had a budget of news to tell. Lady Marjorie, who had missed the concert through a chill, had sent a message through Ricordi, and Mrs. Fitzroy had taken her to Government House in her car. Lady Marjorie had been astonished by her playing, had given her a diamond brooch, and then had declared that she must go to Leschetizky. Then, surprised by Mrs. Fitzroy's intimate knowledge of music, and learning that she knew the Honourable Mrs. Devine, she had made inquiries, and the Fitzroys of Edgecliffe Road were put on the visiting list.

"I played the 'Song of the Unwept Tear,' and she wants to meet you as well," said Betty.

"I'd like to know what right you have to play it," said Walter, smiling with gratification.

But there was more to tell. Gus had married his widow, and they had gone to live at the dancing academy, which Julia was keeping on with the aid of an assistant. Hilda was a changed woman since her marriage. Already she was interested in her husband's Bible Class, and promised to

become a great worker in the church. The Colonel's marriage was an enormous success. Mrs. Fitzroy had proved a woman of tact and discretion, and it was reported that the Colonel had fallen in love with her.

“And what's become of Freda?” inquired Walter.

“I don't know. I hardly ever see her,” replied Betty, coldly. “We fell out over some trifling matter.”

“I'm sorry for that,” said Walter. “I always liked Freda.”

And again Betty steeled her heart against the girl who had dared to cast eyes on her lover.

“Where are we going?” she inquired suddenly, as they turned into Ocean Street.

“We're going down to the boats at Double Bay. There's a good moon, and we're going for a row.”

“But it would be too cold,” said Betty, flushing with joy.

“Yes, I know. I said that the first night I met you, and you laughed at me. It's my turn now. That golf coat will keep you warm.”

Betty walked down the hill to the bay without another word. The light of the moon seemed fainter on the water, and a rising fog obscured the opposite shores, but Clark Island was visible in the distance. As Walter helped her into the boat he asked, “Can you steer?” Betty's answer was to seize the tiller-ropes, but the question brought a vision of the Lane Cove before her eyes when Goddard had asked her the same question. The moonlight fell on Betty's face, giving it the pallor of marble, and again Walter wondered at her resemblance to a nymph of the forest seen in a moonlit glade. Then, as they pulled away from the shore, a silence fell upon them, broken only by the silvery cadence of sounds carried over the water — the voice of a girl singing on the shore, the splashing of oars in the distance, and the wail of a concertina from a ship. Again Betty remembered, with a hideous clearness, her outings with Frank Goddard that had ended at Katoomba, and she was seized with an irresistible impulse to tell Walter everything, to tell the worst at any cost and be done with it.

“Walter, I want to tell you something,” she said, speaking rapidly and yet with a curious hesitation. “Ricordi said that I went pale and thin, but he was wrong in thinking that it was on your account.”

“I know that, and I know the man,” said Walter. “He stared me down one afternoon I was playing in Hunter Street. Don't worry about that.”

“But I must tell you something that nobody knows. He promised to marry me, and I ran away with him to Katoomba.”

Walter stopped rowing, and went white to the lips. Betty, terrified by the sound of her own words, noticed mechanically that the boat was slewing round in the current. For some seconds he stared at her with the look of a man who has unexpectedly stumbled on death, hearing Freda's

voice as plainly as if she were speaking in his ear: "She came back with such a funny, scared look in her eyes." An insane jealousy ran through him like a devouring flame, and then he was aware of a sickening feeling in the pit of his stomach. When he spoke, his voice sounded harsh and repellent, coming from a parched throat.

"And did he—— You know what I mean, Betty—— Did he——"

"No, no, as true as God," cried Betty. "I spent the night in the waiting-room at Katoomba. I came back by the next train, and I've never seen him since."

He stared at her in deep thought for a while, and then, with a long, shuddering breath, seized the oars, and began to row as if his life depended on it. As they passed Clark Island, Betty began to be afraid, but the violent physical exertion had cooled him down, and he rested on the oars while Betty told him the whole story. "Do you believe me, Walter?" she asked, piteously.

"Yes, I believe you, but I'll kill him if ever I meet him. And now I've got to tell you something about myself. I met a girl at Palesi's It lasted a month"

"I've heard all I want to hear, Walter," she said. "Don't you think it's time we went home?"

They walked up the hill at a snail's pace in a happy silence, but Walter was revolving many thoughts in his mind. Not a word of love had passed between them, and now, with the knowledge that another man had nearly come between them, he wanted to know where he stood. There was not much doubt of that, but Peter Wayside would probably be waiting on the veranda for them at this late hour. He stopped under a lamp post, and looked at her with a curious expression of shyness in his face that had been distorted by passion an hour ago.

"Betty," he said, "I've changed my colours since we were separated. I was always a savage, and now I'm a gipsy. And gipsies, you know, can tell fortunes. Give me your hand, and I'll tell yours."

Betty pulled off her glove, and Walter pretended to examine it, but his hand was trembling, and that tremor sent a vibration to Betty's heart, sweet as honey.

"Yes, I thought so," said Walter, briskly, but a slight hoarseness had crept into his voice; "the heart line is broken by an illness, but you recover and it helps you to success. I think I can see an engagement to a dark young man, and a marriage inside a year. That poor fellow hopes to be famous some day, and you will help him by playing his music at concerts. But he loves you for yourself with all his heart and soul, although you only like him yet. How's that for a beginner?"

"It's all true except the last; but I don't — I don't only like.——"

Walter looked up, surprised by a peculiar catch in her voice. The tears were running silently down her cheeks. A passionate joy surged through

him, and seizing her in his arms, he kissed her wet cheeks and then her mouth. Suddenly he became aware of a policeman staring at him from the opposite corner with the discontented air of a boy watching another eat an apple. They turned hastily and walked home, stopping at intervals with whispered caresses, little more articulate than the cries of birds or the crooning of a mother over her child — the immemorial sounds that lie at the roots of speech.

And, sure enough, Peter Wayside, who had just lost a customer through his negligence, was waiting on the veranda in a fearful temper.

“Um, so you're here at last,” he cried. “I was just going to fetch the police. Here am I, catching my death of cold, and you dawdling along the streets as if to-morrow would do. I don't know what you find to talk about. Here am I, working my fingers to the bone to earn a crust of bread, and so busy that I can't pass the time of day with the neighbour's cat, and you——”

“Dada,” said Betty, putting her arms round his neck, “Walter wants to marry me.”

“Does he?” said Peter, forgetting his anger in a moment. “I'm very glad to hear it. The only sensible lad I ever met, and the very thing I was thinking about. I'm not such a fool as I look, although nobody believes it. I'm going to bed, my lad. Don't keep Betty standing there all night.”
