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## A ROMAN SINGER.

### XXIII.

"A TALL gentleman came here late last night, Signor Professore," said Mariuccia, as I sat down in the old green armchair. "He seemed very angry about something, and said he must positively see you." The idea of Benoni flashed uneasily across my brain.

"Was he the grave signore who came a few days before I left?" I asked.

"Heaven preserve us!" ejaculated Mariuccia. "This one was much older, and seemed to be lame; for when he tried to shake his stick at me, he could not stand without it. He looked like one of the old Swiss guards at Palazzo." By which she meant the Vatican, as you know.

"It must have been the count," I said, thinking aloud.

"A count! A pretty sort of count, indeed, to come waking people from their beds in the night! He had not even a high hat, like the one you wear when you go to the university. A count, indeed!"

"Go and make me some good coffee, Mariuccia," I said, eying her severely to show I suspected her of having used mine; "and be careful to make it of my best Porto Rico, if you have any left, without any chicory."

"A count, indeed!" she muttered angrily as she hobbled away, not in the

least heeding my last remark, which I believed to be withering.

I had not much time for reflection that morning. My old clothes were in tatters, and the others looked very fine by contrast, so that when I had made my toilet I felt better able to show myself to the distinguished company I expected. I had seen so much extraordinary endurance in Nino and Hedwig during the last two or three days that I was prepared to see them appear at any moment, brushed and curled and ready for anything. The visit of the count, however, had seriously disturbed me, and I hardly knew what to look for from him. As it turned out, I had not long to wait.

I was resting myself in the armchair, and smoking one of those infamous cigars that nearly suffocate me, just for company, and I was composing in my mind a letter to the authorities of the university, requesting that I might begin to lecture again. I did not find out until later that I need not have written to them at all when I went away, as ten days are always allowed at Easter, in any case. It is just like my forgetfulness, to have made such a mistake. I really only missed four lectures. But my composition was interrupted by the door-bell, and my heart sank in my breast. Mariuccia opened, and I knew by the sound of the stick on the bricks

that the lame count had come to wreak his vengeance.

Being much frightened, I was very polite, and bowed a great many times as he came toward me. It was he, looking much the same as ever, wooden and grizzly.

"I am much honored, sir," I began, "by seeing you here."

"You are Signor Grandi?" he inquired, with a stiff bow.

"The same, Signor Conte, and very much at your service," I answered, rubbing my hands together to give myself an air of satisfaction.

"Let us not waste time," he said severely, but not roughly. "I have come to you on business. My daughter has disappeared with your son, or whatever relation the Signor Giovanni Cardegna is to you."

"He is no relation, Signor Conte. He was an orphan, and I" —

"It is the same," he interrupted. "You are responsible for his doings."

I responsible! Good heavens, had I not done all in my power to prevent the rashness of that hot-headed boy?

"Will you not sit down, sir?" I said, moving a chair for him. He took the seat rather reluctantly.

"You do not seem much astonished at what I tell you," he remarked. "It is evident that you are in the plot."

"Unless you will inform me of what you know, Signor Conte," I replied with urbanity, "I cannot see how I can be of service to you."

"On the contrary," said he, "I am the person to ask questions. I wake up in the morning and find my daughter gone. I naturally inquire where she is."

"Most naturally, as you say, sir. I would do the same."

"And you, also very naturally, answer my questions," he continued severely.

"In that case, sir," I replied, "I would call to your attention the fact that you have asked but one question, —

whether I were Signor Grandi. I answered that in the affirmative." You see I was apprehensive of what he might do, and desired to gain time. But he began to lose his temper.

"I have no patience with you Italians," he said, gruffly. "You bandy words and play with them as if you enjoyed it."

Diavolo! thought I; he is angry at my silence. What will he be if I speak?

"What do you wish to know, Signor Conte?" I inquired in suave tones.

"I wish to know where my daughter is. Where is she? Do you understand? I am asking a question now, and you cannot deny it."

I was sitting in front of him, but I rose and pretended to shut the door, thus putting the table and the end of the piano between us, before I answered.

"She is in Rome, Signor Conte," I said.

"With Cardegna?" he asked, not betraying any emotion.

"Yes."

"Very well. I will have them arrested at once. That is all I wanted." He put his crutch stick to the floor as though about to rise. Seeing that his anger was not turned against me, I grew bold.

"You had better not do that," I mildly observed, across the table.

"And why not, sir?" he asked quickly, hesitating whether to get upon his feet or to remain seated.

"Because they are married already," I answered, retreating toward the door. But there was no need for flight. He sank back in the chair, and the stick fell from his hands upon the bricks with a loud rattle. Poor old man! I thought he was quite overcome by the news I had communicated. He sat staring at the window, his hands lying idly on his knees. I moved to come toward him, but he raised one hand and began to twirl his great gray mustache fiercely;

whereat I resumed my former position of safety.

"How do you know this?" he demanded on a sudden.

"I was present at the civil marriage yesterday," I answered, feeling very much scared. He began to notice my manœuvre.

"You need not be so frightened," he said coldly. "It would be of no use to kill any of you now, though I would like to."

"I assure you that no one ever frightened me in my own house, sir," I answered. I think my voice must have sounded very bold, for he did not laugh at me.

"I suppose it is irrevocable," he said, as if to himself.

"Oh, yes, — perfectly irrevocable," I answered promptly. "They are married, and have come back to Rome. They are at the Hotel Costanzi. I am sure that Nino would give you every explanation."

"Who is Nino?" he asked.

"Nino Cardegna, of course" —

"And do you foolishly imagine that I am going to ask him to explain why he took upon himself to carry away my daughter?" The question was scornful enough.

"Signor Conte," I protested, "you would do well to see them, for she is your daughter, after all."

"She is not my daughter any longer," growled the count. "She is married to a singer, a tenor, an Italian with curls and lies and grins, as you all have. Fie!" And he pulled his mustache again.

"A singer," said I, "if you like, but a great singer, and an honest man."

"Oh, I did not come here to listen to your praises of that scoundrel!" he exclaimed hotly. "I have seen enough of him to be sick of him."

"I wish he were in this room to hear you call him by such names," I said; for I began to grow angry, as I sometimes

do, and then my fear grows small and my heart grows big.

"Ah?" said he ironically. "And pray, what would he do to me?"

"He would probably ask you again for that pistol you refused to lend him the other day." I thought I might as well show that I knew all about the meeting in the road. But Lira laughed grimly, and the idea of a fight seemed to please him.

"I would not refuse it this time. In fact, since you mention it, I think I will go and offer it to him now. Do you think I should be justified, Master Censor?"

"No," said I, coming forward and facing him. "But if you like you can fight me. I am your own age, and a better match." I would have fought him then and there, with the chairs, if he had liked.

"Why should I fight you?" he inquired, in some astonishment. "You strike me as a very peaceable person indeed."

"Diavolo! do you expect me to stand quietly and hear you call my boy a scoundrel? What do you take me for, signore? Do you know that I am the last of the Conti Grandi, and as noble as any of you, and as fit to fight, though my hair is gray?"

"I knew, indeed, that one member of that illustrious family survived in Rome," he answered gravely, "but I was not aware that you were he. I am glad to make your acquaintance, and I sincerely wish that you were the father of the young man who has married my daughter. If you were, I should be ready to arrange matters." He looked at me searchingly.

"Unfortunately, I am not any relation of his," I answered. "His father and mother were peasants on my estate of Serveti, when it still was mine. They died when he was a baby, and I took care of him and educated him."

"Yes, he is well educated," reflected

the count, "for I examined him myself. Let us talk no more about fighting. You are quite sure that the marriage is legal?"

"Quite certain. You can do nothing, and any attempt would be a useless scandal. Besides, they are so happy, you do not know."

"So happy, are they? Do you think I am happy, too?"

"A man has every reason to be so, when his daughter marries an honest man. It is a piece of good luck that does not happen often."

"Probably from the scarcity of daughters who are willing to drive their fathers to distraction by their disobedience and contempt of authority," he said savagely.

"No, — from the scarcity of honest men," I said. "Nino is a very honest man. You may go from one end of Italy to the other, and not meet one like him."

"I sincerely hope so," growled Lira. "Otherwise Italy would be as wholly unredeemed and unredeemable as you pretend that some parts of it are now. But I will tell you, Conte Grandi, you cannot walk across the street, in my country, without meeting a dozen men who would tremble at the idea of such depravity as an elopement."

"Our ideas of honesty differ, sir," I replied. "When a man loves a woman, I consider it honest in him to act as though he did, and not to go and marry another for consolation, beating her with a thick stick whenever he chances to think of the first. That seems to be the northern idea of domestic felicity." Lira laughed gruffly, supposing that my picture was meant for a jest. "I am glad you are amused," I added.

"Upon my honor, sir," he replied, "you are so vastly amusing that I am half inclined to forgive my daughter's rashness, for the sake of enjoying your company. First you intrench yourself behind your furniture; then you pro-

pose to fight me; and now you give me the most original views upon love and marriage that I ever heard. Indeed, I have cause to be amused."

"I am happy to oblige you," I said tartly, for I did not like his laughter. "So long as you confine your amusement to me, I am satisfied; but pray avoid using any objectionable language about Nino."

"Then my only course is to avoid the subject?"

"Precisely," I replied with a good deal of dignity.

"In that case I will go," he said. I was immensely relieved, for his presence was most unpleasant, as you may readily guess. He got upon his feet, and I showed him to the door, with all courtesy. I expected that he would say something about the future before leaving me, but I was mistaken. He bowed in silence, and stumped down the steps with his stick.

I sank into my armchair with a great sigh of relief, for I felt that, for me at least, the worst was over. I had faced the infuriated father, and I might now face anybody with the consciousness of power. I always feel conscious of great power when the danger is past. Once more I lit my cigar, and stretched myself out to take some rest. The constant strain on the nerves was becoming very wearing, and I knew well that on the morrow I should need bleeding and mallows tea. Hardly was I settled and comfortable, when I heard that dreadful bell again.

"This is the day of the resurrection indeed," exclaimed Mariuccia frantically from the kitchen. And she hurried to the door. But I cannot describe to you the screams of joy and the strange sounds, between laughing and crying, that her leathern throat produced when she found Nino and Hedwig on the landing, waiting for admission. And when Nino explained that he had been married, and that this beautiful lady

with the bright eyes and the golden hair was his wife, the old woman fairly gave way, and sat upon a chair in an agony of amazement and admiration. But the pair came toward me, and I met them with a light heart.

"Nino," said Hedwig, "we have not been nearly grateful enough to Signor Grandi for all he has done. I have been very selfish," she said penitently, turning to me.

"Ah no, signora," I replied, — for she was married now, and no longer "signorina," — "it is never selfish of such as you to let an old man do you service. You have made me very happy." And then I embraced Nino, and Hedwig gave me her hand, which I kissed in the old fashion.

"And so this is your old home, Nino," said Hedwig presently, looking about her, and touching the things in the room, as a woman will when she makes acquaintance with a place she has often heard of. "What a dear room it is! I wish we could live here!" How very soon a woman learns that "we," that means so much! It is never forgotten, even when the love that bred it is dead and cold.

"Yes," I said, for Nino seemed so enraptured, as he watched her, that he could not speak. "And there is the old piano, with the end on the boxes, because it has no leg, as I dare say Nino has often told you."

"Nino said it was a very good piano," she rejoined.

"And indeed it is," he cried, with enthusiasm. "It is out of tune now, perhaps; but it is the source of all my fortune." He leaned over the crazy instrument and seemed to caress it.

"Poor old thing!" said Hedwig compassionately. "I am sure there is music in it still, — the sweet music of the past."

"Yes," said he, laughing, "it must be the music of the past, for it would not stand the 'music of the future,' as they

call it, for five minutes. All the strings would break." Hedwig sat down on the chair that was in front of it, and her fingers went involuntarily to the keys, though she is no great musician.

"I can play a little, you know, Nino," she said shyly, and looked up to his face for a response, not venturing to strike the chords. And it would have done you good to see how brightly Nino smiled and encouraged her little offer of music, — he, the great artist, in whose life music was both sword and sceptre. But he knew that she had greatness also of a different kind, and he loved the small jewels in his crown as well as the glorious treasures of its larger wealth.

"Play to me, my love," he said, not caring now whether I heard the sweet words or not. She blushed a little, nevertheless, and glanced at me; then her fingers strayed over the keys, and drew out music that was very soft and yet very gay. Suddenly she ceased, and leaned forward on the desk of the piano, looking at him.

"Do you know, Nino, it was once my dream to be a great musician. If I had not been so rich I should have taken the profession in earnest. But now, you see it is different, is it not?"

"Yes, it is all different now," he answered, not knowing precisely what she meant, but radiantly happy, all the same.

"I mean," she said, hesitating — "I mean that now that we are to be always together, what you do I do, and what I do you do. Do you understand?"

"Yes, perfectly," replied Nino, rather puzzled, but quite satisfied.

"Ah no, dear," said she, forgetting my presence, and letting her hand steal into his as he stood, "you do not understand — quite. I mean that so long as one of us can be a great musician it is enough, and I am just as great as though I did it all myself."

Thereupon Nino forgot himself alto-

gether, and kissed her golden hair. But then he saw me looking, for it was so pretty a sight that I could not help it, and he remembered.

"Oh!" he said, in a tone of embarrassment, that I had never heard before. Then Hedwig blushed very much, too, and looked away, and Nino put himself between her and me, so that I might not see her.

"Could you play something for me to sing, Hedwig?" he asked suddenly.

"Oh, yes! I can play 'Spirto gentil,' by heart," she cried, hailing the idea with delight.

In a moment they were both lost, and indeed so was I, in the dignity and beauty of the simple melody. As he began to sing, Nino bent down to her, and almost whispered the first words into her ear. But soon he stood erect, and let the music flow from his lips, just as God made it. His voice was tired with the long watching and the dust and cold and heat of the journey; but, as De Pretis said when he began, he has an iron throat, and the weariness only made the tones soft and tender and thrilling, that would perhaps have been too strong for my little room.

Suddenly he stopped short in the middle of a note, and gazed open-mouthed at the door. And I looked, too, and was horrified; and Hedwig, looking also, screamed and sprang back to the window, overturning the chair she had sat on.

In the doorway stood Ahasuerus Benoni, the Jew.

Mariuccia had imprudently forgotten to shut the door when Hedwig and Nino came, and the baron had walked in unannounced. You may imagine the fright I was in. But, after all, it was natural enough that, after what had occurred, he as well as the count should seek an interview with me, to obtain what information I was willing to give.

There he stood in his gay clothes, tall and thin and smiling as of yore.

#### XXIV.

Nino is a man for great emergencies, as I have had occasion to say, and when he realized who the unwelcome visitor was, he acted as promptly as usual. With a face like marble he walked straight across the room to Benoni and faced him.

"Baron Benoni," he said in a low voice, "I warn you that you are most unwelcome here. If you attempt to say any word to my wife, or to force an entrance, I will make short work of you." Benoni eyed him with a sort of pitying curiosity as he made this speech.

"Do not fear, Signor Cardegna. I came to see Signor Grandi, and to ascertain from him precisely what you have volunteered to tell me. You cannot suppose that I have any object in interrupting the leisure of a great artist, or the privacy of his very felicitous domestic relations. I have not a great deal to say. That is, I have always a great deal to say about everything, but I shall at present confine myself to a very little."

"You will be wise," said Nino scornfully, "and you would be wiser if you confined yourself to nothing at all."

"Patience, Signor Cardegna," protested Benoni. "You will readily conceive that I am a little out of breath with the stairs, for I am a very old man."

"In that case," I said, from the other side of the room, "I may as well occupy your breathing time by telling you that any remarks you are likely to make to me have been forestalled by the Graf von Lira, who has been with me this morning." Benoni smiled, but both Hedwig and Nino looked at me in surprise.

"I only wished to say," returned Benoni, "that I consider you in the light of an interesting phenomenon. Nay, Signor Cardegna, do not look so fierce. I am an old man" —



"An old devil!" said Nino, hotly.

"An old fool!" said I.

"An old reprobate!" said Hedwig, from her corner, in deepest indignation.

"Precisely," returned Benoni, smilingly. "Many people have been good enough to tell me so before. Thanks, kind friends; I believe you with all my heart. Meanwhile, man, devil, fool, or reprobate, I am very old. I am about to leave Rome for St. Petersburg, and I will take this last opportunity of informing you that in a very singularly long life I have met with only two or three such remarkable instances as this of yours."

"Say what you wish to say, and go," said Nino roughly.

"Certainly. And whenever I have met with such an instance I have done my very utmost to reduce it to the common level, and to prove to myself that no such thing really exists. I find it a dangerous thing, however; for an old man in love is likely to exhibit precisely the agreeable and striking peculiarities you have so aptly designated." There was something so odd about his manner and about the things he said that Nino was silent, and allowed him to proceed.

"The fact is," he continued, "that love is a very rare thing, nowadays, and is so very generally an abominable sham that I have often amused myself by diabolically devising plans for its destruction. On this occasion I very nearly came to grief myself. The same thing happened to me some time ago, — about forty years, I should say, — and I perceive that it has not been forgotten. It may amuse you to look at this paper, which I chance to have with me. Good-morning. I leave for St. Petersburg at once."

"I believe you are really the Wandering Jew!" cried Nino, as Benoni left the room.

"His name was certainly Ahasuerus," Benoni replied from the outer door.

"But it may be a coincidence, after all. Good-by." He was gone.

I was the first to take up the paper he had thrown upon a chair. There was a passage marked with a red pencil. I read it aloud: —

"... Baron Benoni, the wealthy banker of St. Petersburg, who was many years ago an inmate of a private lunatic asylum in Paris, is reported to be dangerously insane in Rome." That was all. The paper was the *Paris Figaro*.

"Merciful Heaven!" exclaimed Hedwig, "and I was shut up with that madman in Fillettino!" Nino was already by her side, and in his strong arms she forgot Benoni, and Fillettino, and all her troubles. We were all silent for some time. At last Nino spoke.

"Is it true that the count was here this morning?" he asked, in a subdued voice, for the extraordinary visit and its sequel had made him grave.

"Quite true," I said. "He was here a long time. I would not spoil your pleasure by telling you of it, when you first came."

"What did he — what did my father say?" asked Hedwig presently.

"My dear children," I answered, thinking I might well call them so, "he said a great many unpleasant things, so that I offered to fight him if he said any more." At this they both laid hold of me and began to caress me; and one smoothed my hair, and the other embraced me, so that I was half smothered.

"Dear Signor Grandi," cried Hedwig, anxiously, "how good and brave you are!" She does not know what a coward I am, you see, and I hope she will never find out, for nothing was ever said to me that gave me half so much pleasure as to be called brave by her, the dear child; and if she never finds out, she may say it again, some day. Besides, I really did offer to fight Lira, as I have told you.

"And what is he going to do?" asked Nino, in some anxiety.

"I do not know. I told him it was all legal, and that he could not touch you at all. I also said you were staying at the Hotel Costanzi, where he might find you, if he wished."

"Oh! Did you tell him that?" asked Hedwig.

"It was quite right," said Nino. "He ought to know, of course. And what else did you tell him?"

"Nothing especial, Nino mio. He went away in a sort of ill temper because I would not let him abuse you as much as he pleased."

"He may abuse me and be welcome," said Nino. "He has some right to be angry with me. But he will think differently some day." So we chatted away for an hour, enjoying the rest and the peace and the sweet sunshine of the Easter afternoon. But this was the day of interruptions. There was one more visitor to come, — one more scene for me to tell you, and then I have done.

A carriage drove down the street and seemed to stop at the door of my house. Nino looked idly out of the window. Suddenly he started.

"Hedwig, Hedwig!" he cried, "here is your father coming back!" She would not look out, but stood back from the window, turning pale. If there were one thing she dreaded, it was a meeting with her father. All the old doubt as to whether she had done right seemed to come back to her face in a moment. But Nino turned and looked at her, and his face was so triumphant that she got back her courage, and clasping his hand bravely awaited what was to come.

I myself went to the door, and heard Lira's slow tread on the stairs. Before long he appeared, and glanced up at me from the steps, which he climbed, one at a time, with his stick.

"Is my daughter here?" he asked as soon as he reached me; and his voice

sounded subdued, just as Nino's did when Benoni had gone. I conducted him into the room. It was the strangest meeting. The proud old man bowed stiffly to Hedwig, as though he had never before seen her. Nino and Hedwig also bent their heads, and there was a silence as of death in the sunny room.

"My daughter," said Von Lira at last, and with evident effort, "I wish to have a word with you. These two gentlemen — the younger of whom is now, as I understand it, your husband — may well hear what I wish to say."

I moved a chair so that he might sit down, but he stood up to his full height, as though not deigning to be older than the rest. I watched Hedwig, and saw how with both hands she clung to Nino's arm, and her lip trembled, and her face wore the look it had when I saw her in Fillettino.

As for Nino, his stern, square jaw was set, and his brows bent, but he showed no emotion, unless the darkness in his face and the heavy shadows beneath his eyes foretold ready anger.

"I am no trained reasoner, like Signor Grandi," said Lira, looking straight at Hedwig, "but I can say plainly what I mean, for all that. There was a good old law in Sparta, whereby disobedient children were put to death without mercy. Sparta was a good country, — very like Prussia, but less great. You know what I mean. You have cruelly disobeyed me, — cruelly, I say, because you have shown me that all my pains and kindness and discipline have been in vain. There is nothing so sorrowful for a good parent as to discover that he has made a mistake."

(The canting old proser, I thought, will he never finish!)

"The mistake I refer to is not in the way I have dealt with you," he went on, "for on that score I have nothing to reproach myself. But I was mistaken in supposing you loved me. You have despised all I have done for you."



"Oh, father! How can you say that?" cried poor Hedwig, clinging closer to Nino.

"At all events, you have acted as though you did. On the very day when I promised you to take signal action upon Baron Benoni, you left me by stealth, saying in your miserable letter that you had gone to a man who could both love and protect you."

"You did neither the one nor the other, sir," said Nino boldly, "when you required of your daughter to marry such a man as Benoni."

"I have just seen Benoni; I saw him also on the night you left me, madam," — he looked severely at Hedwig, — "and I am reluctantly forced to confess that he is not sane, according to the ordinary standard of the mind."

We had all known from the paper of the suspicion that rested on Benoni's sanity, yet somehow there was a little murmur in the room when the old count so clearly stated his opinion.

"That does not, however, alter the position in the least," continued Lira, "for you knew nothing of this at the time I desired you to marry him, and I should have found it out soon enough to prevent mischief. Instead of trusting to my judgment, you took the law into your own hands, like a most unnatural daughter, as you are, and disappeared in the night with a man whom I consider totally unfit for you, however superior," he added, glancing at Nino, "he may have proved himself in his own rank of life."

Nino could not hold his tongue any longer. It seemed absurd that there should be a battle of words when all the realities of the affair were accomplished facts; but for his life he could not help speaking.

"Sir," he said, addressing Lira, "I rejoice that this opportunity is given me of once more speaking clearly to you. Months ago, when I was betrayed into a piece of rash violence, for which I at

once apologized to you, I told you under somewhat peculiar circumstances that I would yet marry your daughter, if she would have me. I stand here to-day with her by my side, my wedded wife, to tell you that I have kept my word, and that she is mine by her own free consent. Have you any cause to show why she is not my wedded wife? If so, show it. But I will not allow you to stand there and say bitter and undeserved things to this same wife of mine, abusing the name of father and the terms 'authority' and 'love,' forsooth! And if you wish to take vengeance on me personally, do so if you can. I will not fight duels with you now, as I was ready to do the day before yesterday. For then — so short a time ago — I had but offered her my life, and so that I gave it for her I cared not how nor when. But now she has taken me for hers, and I have no more right to let you kill me than I have to kill myself, seeing that she and I are one. Therefore, good sir, if you have words of conciliation to speak, speak them; but if you would only tell her harsh and cruel things, I say you shall not!"

As Nino uttered these hot words in good, plain Italian, they had a bold and honest sound of strength that was glorious to hear. A weaker man than the old count would have fallen into a fury of rage, and perhaps would have done some foolish violence. But he stood silent, eying his antagonist coolly, and when the words were spoken he answered.

"Signor Cardegna," he said, "the fact that I am here ought to be to you the fullest demonstration that I acknowledge your marriage with my daughter. I have certainly no intention of prolonging a painful interview. When I have said that my child has disobeyed me, I have said all that the question holds. As for the future of you two, I have naturally nothing more to say about it. I cannot love a disobedient child, nor

ever shall again. For the present, we will part; and if at the end of a year my daughter is happy with you, and desires to see me, I shall make no objection to such a meeting. I need not say that if she is unhappy with you, my house will always be open to her if she chooses to return to it."

"No, sir, most emphatically you need not say it!" cried Nino, with blazing eyes. Lira took no notice of him, but turned to go.

Hedwig would try once more to soften him, though she knew it was useless.

"Father," she said, in tones of passionate entreaty, "will you not say you wish me well? Will you not forgive me?" She sprang to him, and would have held him back.

"I wish you no ill," he answered, shortly, pushing her aside, and he marched to the door, where he paused, bowed as stiffly as ever, and disappeared.

It was very rude of us, perhaps, but no one accompanied him to the stairs. As for me, I would not have believed it possible that any human being could be so hard and relentlessly virtuous; and if I had wondered at first that Hedwig should have so easily made up her mind to flight, I was no longer surprised when I saw with my own eyes how he could treat her.

I cannot, indeed, conceive how she could have borne it so long, for the whole character of the man came out, hard, cold, and narrow, — such a character as must be more hideous than any description can paint it, when seen in the closeness of daily conversation. But when he was gone the sun appeared to shine again, as he had shone all day, though it had sometimes seemed so dark. The storms were in that little room.

As Lira went out, Nino, who had followed Hedwig closely, caught her in his arms, and once more her face rested on his broad breast. I sat down and pretended to be busy with a pile of old papers that lay near by on the table, but I

could hear what they said. The dear children, they forgot all about me.

"I am so sorry, dear one," said Nino, soothingly.

"I know you are, Nino. But it cannot be helped."

"But are you sorry, too, Hedwig?" he asked, stroking her hair.

"That my father is angry? Yes. I wish he were not," said she, looking wistfully toward the door.

"No, not that," said Nino. "Sorry that you left him, I mean."

"Ah, no, I am not sorry for that. Oh, Nino, dear Nino, your love is best." And again she hid her face.

"We will go away at once, darling," he said, after a minute, during which I did not see what was going on. "Would you like to go away?"

Hedwig moved her head to say "Yes."

"We will go, then, sweetheart. Where shall it be?" asked Nino, trying to distract her thoughts from what had just occurred. "London? Paris? Vienna? I can sing anywhere now, but you must always choose, love."

"Anywhere, anywhere; only always with you, Nino, till we die together."

"Always, till we die, my beloved," he repeated. The small white hands stole up and clasped about his broad throat, tenderly drawing his face to hers, and hers to his. And it will be "always," till they die together, I think.

This is the story of that Roman singer whose great genius is making such a stir in the world. I have told it to you, because he is my own dear boy, as I have often said in these pages; and because people must not think that he did wrong to carry Hedwig von Lira away from her father, nor that Hedwig was so very unfilial and heartless. I know that they were both right, and the day will come when old Lira will acknowledge it. He is a hard old man, but he must have some affection for her; and if not, he will

surely have the vanity to own so famous an artist as Nino for his son-in-law.

I do not know how it was managed, for Hedwig was certainly a heretic when she left her father, though she was an angel, as Nino said. But before they left Rome for Vienna there was a little wedding, early in the morning, in our parish church, for I was there; and De Pretis, who was really responsible for the whole thing, got some of his best singers from St. Peter and St. John on the Lateran to come and sing a mass over the two. I think that our good Mother Church found room for the dear child very quickly, and that is how it happened.

They are happy and glad together,

those two hearts that never knew love save for each other, and they will be happy always. For it was nothing but love with them from the very first, and so it must be to the very last. Perhaps you will say that there is nothing in this story, either, but love. And if so, it is well; for where there is naught else there can surely be no sinning, or wrongdoing, or weakness, or meanness; nor yet anything that is not quite pure and undefiled.

Just as I finish this writing, there comes a letter from Nino to say that he has taken steps about buying Serveti, and that I must go there in the spring with Mariuccia and make it ready for him. Dear Serveti, of course I will go.

*F. Marion Crawford.*

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## PARIS CLASSICAL CONCERTS.

THE opera in Paris is in its decline. The once famous Italiens, where Tamburini, Rubini, Mario, Pasta, Grisi, and so many other voices of enchantment gave life to the compositions of Bellini, Donizetti, Rossini, was burned to the ground ten years ago, and the tradition of its composers, singers, and audience has perished with it. At the Grand Opéra, that funeral monument of the brilliant, music-fancying Second Empire, neither the best artists nor the great works of the present day are to be heard; the orchestra and chorus are less than second rate; even the scenery is shabby. The Opéra Comique has an able manager, a good company, an excellent chorus, and a small but admirable orchestra; there new operas are brought out, old ones are revived, and the gems of the national school are given regularly. Two or three times a week, Auber, Boïeldieu, Méhul, Grétry, and other French composers are to be heard. But the Opéra Comique is limited by its

very calling to operas of the lighter sort, and it has no first-rate singers of either sex. The tenors and baritones are unequal to giving even a work like *Car-men* its due effect. The *prime donne* last winter were Mademoiselle Van Zandt and Mademoiselle Nevada, young girls with charming voices and more or less talent; not artists in any sense of the term, although with study and experience they might become so. They are treated as stars, too; the curiosity felt by idlers of pleasure and seekers for novelty about a new vocalist and a new, or newly revived, opera being turned to account by the manager to draw large houses on the nights when she sings, while the threadbare stock voices are left for *Les Diamans de la Couronne*, *Le Pré aux Clercs*, and other native productions, to which the middle-class Parisian public is fondly constant. Whether at the Grand Opéra or the Comique, anybody who remembers what they both were fifteen years ago will be struck