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"SHORT MUSICAL STORIES"

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The *Strand Musical Magazine* was first published in January 1895 and continued through December 1897. Each monthly issue contained from sixty-four to eighty pages at a cost of sixpence. The first twenty or so pages were devoted to articles and short stories. The remaining pages contained various songs complete with music, and musical pieces — usually for piano. A feature included at irregular intervals was the *Short Musical Stories*. This book contains these fictional musical tales from the 1895 magazines.

SHORT MUSICAL STORIES

A FORTUNATE FAILURE BY C. H. PALMER

The last chord of the accompaniment vibrated under the Professor's big nervous fingers, and he swung slowly round on the music stool.

"There is an improvement," he said, nodding his head with its long mane of flaxen hair, "distinctly."

The young girl standing by his side flushed with pleasure. "Oh, Professor, it is kind of you to say that. I am so glad."

"But," continued Herr Duffelsdorn, hastening to check this youthful enthusiasm. His listener paled again; she did not like the Professor's 'buts.' "There is room for much more improvement," continued the great man.

Evelyn Graham gave a little stamp with her foot, and tossed the song she had been singing — one of Schubert's — impatiently on to the top of the piano. "You don't give me much encouragement, Professor," she said. "I think a little — just a little — praise, without qualification, would be good for me; I do indeed, though perhaps I don't deserve it."

The Professor rose without speaking. A mysterious smile elevated the ends of his big blonde moustache. He picked up his gloves and carefully passed the sleeve of his coat round his immaculate hat. Then he held out his hand, still in silence.

"You are not angry with me ?" said Evelyn, somewhat alarmed by the mystery of his manner.

"Ach, no," he replied, bringing his disengaged hand slowly down upon her small fingers. "Not angry, my dear young lady, but amused, yes amused. You say I give not much praise. That is true. But to my ordinary pupils I give praise in plenty. They do not complain, belief me. But the young artiste — she is different. Small praise and much blame is best for her. Good morning, Miss Graham." And with a bow which could not have been lower if he had been taking leave of a Prima Donna, the Professor departed.

Left alone, his pupil sat down and fairly tingled with pleasure. She was a decidedly pretty girl, and looked none the worse because her eyes were sparkling with elation. "He called me an artiste," she thought to herself. "He meant it too, for he is very sparing of his 'praise.' Thank heaven I am no longer a wishy-washy amateur. I have emerged from the grub stage at last. Hooray! No doubt I'm a poor kind of an artiste at present, but I'll improve, see if I don't. Why, it's perfectly glorious?"

And she got up and waltzed round the room. Just then the Professor emerged from the house with the ends of his moustache agitated with what seemed suspiciously like laughter. After the young artiste had waltzed three times round the table, the immediate necessity for practice impressed itself on her mind. She sat down to the piano and went at it conscientiously, and with zest.

In the smoking-room at the back of the house the artiste's father, Colonel Graham, was taking his afternoon *siesta*. A rapid series of scales caused him to stir uneasily, and mingled with his dreams. A prolonged shake on E flat roused him into consciousness, and he sat up with a yawn. "It's little Evelyn practising," he said to himself. "Hang it if I didn't think it was the regimental bagpipes." With that he lit a cigar and again took up the review which had sent him to sleep. Alas, he found it impossible to fix his mind upon a dry article upon "Mountain Guns" while his ears were being assaulted by a sustained bombardment of vocal exercises. The Colonel, a widower, was devoted to his only child, Evelyn, and had already suffered many a minor martyrdom rather than disturb her pursuits. But experience had made him wise, and he recognised that relief could only certainly be secured by flight. Going softly into the hall, he obtained his hat and umbrella, and glided like a frock-coated ghost into the street. He found the lamps being lit, the damp pavement reflecting the yellow light. In the distance a pianoforte organ was slowly hammering out Mascagni's "Intermezzo."

"Begad," said the gallant Colonel, slapping his stick on the pavement, "this is horrible. No one is fonder of music than myself. Wasn't I the making of our band in the Twentieth? Evelyn gets all her talent from me. But I'll be hanged if music out of place isn't worse than a lady in a smoking-room."

A chromatic scale delivered with stern energy came through the half-opened window of the drawing-room. The Colonel quickened his steps. "Poor little girl," he muttered; "nature meant her to be a home singing-bird, and she's got a notion into her curly head that she ought to warble on a public platform. By-the-way, it wouldn't be a bad idea to let her warble. It might cure her. Hullo! Here's Charley. I'll hear what he says to the notion."

A good-looking young fellow, very carefully dressed, strode up. "Well, Colonel," he cried, shaking hands warmly, "How do you do? Out for a stroll? How's Evelyn?"

"Come," said the Colonel, solemnly, and, linking his arm in that of the young man, he marched him back to the house. They halted in front of it, Evelyn being still in the full flood of her vocal exercises. "You hear?" remarked the fond father.

Charley Langdon, who was engaged to be married to this persistent vocalist, pulled a long face. "Why don't you do something?" he asked the Colonel, reproachfully.

"Well, I like that. Why should I do anything? Besides, I never interfere with my daughter's pursuits."

"But this is worse than the bicycle; it is dreadful!"

"I suppose you are thinking of what you may have to put up with after your marriage," said the Colonel grimly.

"Not in the least. The dear girl can practise all day if she likes. Only it's this way. Since Evelyn has devoted herself to this craze, I have, as it were, to take a back seat in her affections. She told me frankly the other day that her art must be first with her. Bother art!"

"Well, Charley," said the Colonel, "I'm quite on your side. Just take a turn down the street, and I think I can show you a way in which we can 'bother art' effectually — Evelyn's poor little art that is — though it goes against my conscience to conspire against the child." And then and there a scheme was concocted which ultimately led to the appearance of Evelyn Graham under the name of Miss Vivian, at the Prince's Hall, in Piccadilly.

It was necessary, first, to get on the right side of the Professor, and that eminent musician was accordingly invited to dinner, much to Evelyn's delight, and regaled with some of the best wine in the Colonel's cellar. In the mellow after-dinner hour, when the Professor sat on an easy-chair with a rich bumper of Burgundy mantling in front of him, and the fragrant smoke of a fine Havana curling up under his nose, the two conspirators diplomatically approached him on the subject. He listened sympathetically to the story of their woes; he also had suffered. But a stern frown clouded his brow as the nefarious plot was unfolded. However, even musicians are mortal, and a second glass of Burgundy made him regard the idea more leniently. Before he had finished the third he had promised to lend his aid. Little did poor Evelyn imagine as she waited impatiently the Professor's advent to the drawing-room that the great Herr Duffelsdorn had joined the league against her.

"Yes, my good friends," the Professor was saying, "you have convinced me. I have no more scruples. Away with them! Miss Graham can never make an artiste, although she has a very nice little voice. But I see that she can make her friends unhappy by her practising, and that is not good. Yes, she shall sing at my friend Da Capo's concert in Piccadilly. I will arrange it. More, she shall follow with that thin little voice of hers the great Manzina— Manzina, who can fill the Albert Hall without straining a muscle of her throat."

"But wouldn't that be rather cruel?" asked the lover, uneasily.

"Not more gruel than the rest. Don't you see that the failure must be final — complete. There must be no room for vanity to make excuses."

Princes Hall was crowded on the afternoon of Da Capo's concert. The eminent singer was popular, not only with the usual feminine entourage of a handsome tenor, but with the profession as well. Consequently he found himself admirably supported on this occasion.

There was Steinkopf easily first among celloists, and possessing a wonderful head of hair; Donnerblitz, the German pianist, who had smashed more strings than any man in Europe; Miss Devine, the graceful American violinist, whose bow-arm had recently been modelled by a Royal Academician. Above all, there was the great Manzina, a star of the first magnitude, then in its very zenith. By what occult means the Professor had induced Da Capo to include Miss Vivian's name on the bill was never known, but there it stood, in small but distinct type, following the big red capitals of Manzina.

The audience in the hall contained a number of musicians and a strong infusion of the high-class amateur element. Like all similar gatherings it was at once extremely generous and extremely critical. Generous to real talent, merciless to mediocrity.

"Who's Miss Vivian?" asked a young male student of the Royal Academy of Music, of a girl friend who patronised the Guildhall School.

"Never heard of her," was the nonchalant answer. "One of Da Capo's pet pupils, perhaps."

"Heaven forbid," said the youth., and they both laughed merrily. Charley Langdon, who, with the Colonel, was sitting just in front, both of them as they admitted to each other, being in a state of "funk," turned and glared ferociously at the speaker. But the youth was quite unconscious of offence, and returned the look with a glance of mild surprise. The earlier part of the programme went off admirably, and the audience settled down to a condition of quiet enjoyment.

Then came Manzina, and even the professionals present unbent into enthusiasm. Her glorious voice, deftly modulated, filled and pervaded every corner of the hall, and held her hearers spellbound. An overwhelming encore followed her rendering of the Jewel song from "Faust." But Manzina was not to be drawn; she had another engagement that afternoon, and time was precious.

"Your turn, Miss Vivian," said Signor Da Capo to the shivering Evelyn, who stood almost ready to faint in the waiting-room. Miss Graham picked up her music, and with a desperate courage prepared to face the audience; the ordeal was worse than she imagined.

Indeed it was a most inauspicious moment for a *debutante*. Many of the audience were still engaged in applauding Manzina in the vain hope of prevailing upon her to return. To them entered the unknown Miss Vivian, pale, trembling, and evidently suffering from a bad attack of stage fright.

Colonel Graham set his teeth and looked rigid, as became an old soldier, but he confessed afterwards that he would far rather face a Sikh charge than go through another such experience. As for Charley Langdon; after one glance at the platform he buried his head in his hands, and so remained, afflicted apparently by a devouring toothache. Evelyn Graham saw nothing, however, but. an indistinct blur of white faces; heard nothing but the strident notes of the pianoforte, and her own voice sounding singularly thin and far away.

The song was over, and there was a dead and awful silence, broken only by a titter from the two irrepressible students behind Langdon. It was failure; irremediable, complete, final. True it is that failures, seemingly as irrevocable, have before now been redeemed, but Evelyn Graham, as she shrank back from the platform, knew well that her brief career as an "artiste" was closed.

"Come, let's get out of this," said the Colonel, touching his companion brusquely on the shoulder. They rose, and as they made their way out of the hall a roar of applause greeted their ears. It was Donnerblitz come to smash the strings of the Erard.

"Go to her," said the Colonel, and the young man flew round to the artistes' door.

"Well, Colonel," remarked the Professor, who came up at that moment, "I think the young lady is cured."

"Yes, I think she is," answered the Colonel, "but the remedy was just a trifle painful to all of us. Come round to my club and have a cigar, Professor. My nerves want steadying after this trial."

Meanwhile Evelyn Graham was weeping in the corner of a hansom, unconsoled by the presence of her lover at her side. "I shall never get over it," she said, dropping a tear, "and I just hate Manzina."

"So do I, by Jove!" said Langdon, fervently; "but, darling, there is one person to whom your voice will always be the sweetest in the world."

Before the cab pulled up at Onslow Gardens, Evelyn's eyes were almost dry again. And from that time forward the gallant Colonel took his siesta undisturbed in the afternoon.

SECOND FIDDLE BY F. CORDER

"O, yes, it's a glass eye!" said Mrs. Samuells, very complacently.

"A glass eye?" I repeated with some surprise, for I had known her husband [Joe] for some years and had never suspected that one of my best first violins had not his full sight. "How did he come by it? An accident, or what?"

"O, no, sir!" replied the woman, as complacently as before. "It was his [Joe's] father there, as did that for him." She smiled and nodded at the rigid figure of the paralytic by the fire and went on, "Joe won't be long now, sir, and if you don't mind sitting down and waiting for him I'll tell you how it all happened, to pass the time." She did not utter any phrases of mock humility as to the quality of her hospitality, for the poor little suburban cottage was at least clean and comfortable; but she dusted a chair for me with her apron, which is a survival of old-time courtesy in her class, curious to see, and with another bright smile at the invalid in his armchair, commenced her narration with a strange eagerness and relish. "You wouldn't think it to look at him, sir, but Joe's father is only eighteen years older than his son. It's the parallels which has crinkled him up so. I've a-known him all my life, and up till ten years ago he was as fine a figure of a man as you might wish to see. He was very clever at the violin, they say, when he was a boy, and some gentlefolks got him put into the Royal Academy."

"I'm told the great man which was at the head of it then — the Duke of Northumberland, I think ('Earl of Westmoreland,' I interpolated) — well, whoever he was, he took a great fancy to Mr. Samuells, and was going to push him forward and help him make his fortune, and the boy was as ambitious as he was clever and quite expected to be at the top of the tree. However, he must needs go and fall in love with one of his schoolmates and run away with her. It was a kind of boarding school, the Academy in those days, so I'm told, and these two was little better than children, being both but seventeen years old."

"Of course, Mr. Samuells, after that, found all his fine dreams at an end, and had to live how he could; he got into a theatre and earned some thirty shillings a-week, which was rather a come down. His wife tried to teach the piano, but that didn't last long. Before a year was out there was a baby, and the poor girl up and died. Mr. Samuells got his next door neighbours to take charge of the child, for what else could he do? I think, do you know, he must have been a little put out by losing his wife, for they say he had a brain fever, and first began to be unsteady from that time, but I don't know; all the fiddle players as ever I knew, drank."

"Well, Joe and me was about the same age, and was brought up together — my father being the next door neighbour I speak of. And I well remember Joe making a toy fiddle when he was six years old, and cutting a long lock of my mother's hair — very long it was — when she was asleep, for to make a bow out of. And he played that fiddle, he did; a real tune he played on it, and I danced and shouted so that mother came to see what was up, and, my word! but she leathered Joe till he couldn't stand, poor imp, and she locked him in the cellar for two days, all among the rats, till he screamed so at their biting him that the neighbours made her let him out. And she threw the fiddle in the fire, but I kept the bow, and I told Joe's father all about it some time afterwards."

"Then there *was* a fine how-de-do. Mr. Samuells and my mother and father went it hammer and tongs by the hour together, and the end of it all was that Joe was better looked after, for his father got him a real fiddle and taught him to play it. He used to come in every evening before going to the theatre, for to give little Joe his lesson and he used to question him pretty closely as to what he'd been doing all day. I used to sit in the corner as still as a mouse while the lesson went on, and Mr. Samuells used to give me a kiss and a bit of sugar candy, or such, when it was over. And this kind of life went on for a good few years with scarcely a break or an alteration, till Joe got to be fourteen."

"Then my people thought he ought to go and live with his father, but after a great deal of fuss it was arranged that he should stay on and I should go to a boarding school. So I only saw him now and then, but we was always good friends, him and me. He worked hard at the fiddle now, and presently got a scholarship that give him two years' teaching in the Royal Academy. Then he had to leave, his father not being able to pay for him to stay on, and he come back to my father's."

"All this while Mr. Samuells had been leader at the same theatre — the Duke's — although they was often minded to give him the sack, for he was that unsteady. But he [Joe's father] was a fine, handsome man, with a nice manner on him when sober, and a very good player, too. Though I must say that Joe was very nigh as good [a player]. I was seventeen by now, and was generally considered a properly handsome girl, with my blue eyes and goldeny hair." (Mrs. Samuells spoke of her own charms in precisely the same calm, unfeeling manner she exhibited during the whole of her narrative).

"Of course, there was plenty of boys after me, but I made up my mind from the very first that I would marry Joe, for he was the good-tempered one that never minded a girl's teasing ways, don't you know, sir. I used to try and make him jealous, but he hadn't a spark of jealousy near him; I used to try and quarrel with him, but you might as well try and quarrel with — ah, with Queen Victoria."

"Always merry and good-tempered he was, and nine years I've been married to him, and he never thrashed me but once, which is as true as I stand here. Well, the warmest suitor I had to deal with, if you'll believe me, was no other than Mr. Samuells. The way that man went on about me was really remarkable, and quite amusing. Of course, I knew that he had helped my people for years with paying high for Joe's board and my schooling, and that he was always contriving to give me presents in a way I couldn't refuse even if I'd wanted to. But my motto always was, that a girl should take all she can get, and give as little as she can; so I didn't discourage him. It was little enough he did for Joe, who got a place in the same orchestra as his father — no thanks to him — and played alongside of him very soon."

"At last things came to a chrysalis, as you might say, for Mr. Samuells he come to me and asked me straight out to marry him. Of course, I laughed in his face. I couldn't say he was too old, for he wasn't only five-and thirty; but I told him, what was true, that Joe was worth a dozen of him, both as a man and a fiddle-player — that Joe was going up in the world and his father was going down. In fact, I was determined to make him stop his nonsense, and so I gave it him straight. Well, the way he took it you wouldn't believe. What notions he had got into his head about the kind of girl I was I can't imagine; as if all girls wasn't alike in respect of their doing the best they could for themselves! He went on about broken idols and that till I was quite annoyed, and some pretty hard words passed between us. So then he went off and got drunk straight away, for that's what the men always do when they can't have things exactly how they want. And that evening he was so bad that the conductor told him to change places with his son, and made Joe lead. I expect, drunk as he was, he must have felt rather sore at playing second fiddle to his own son; and then it so happened that they played a piece with a violin solo in it. I don't know whether you know it, sir, but the band call it *The Entire Act of the Poor Clerks*."

I was puzzled for a minute, but the mysteries of bands-men's nomenclature being familiar to me, I quickly corrected her — "T*he Entr'acte from Herold's Pré aux Clercs*, to be sure."

"Well, I was there in the front row of the pit, as I was pretty often, so as Joe could sec me home, and I watched Mr. Samuells as he sat there with his face all fiery and twitching. Joe played the solo right enough, but just as he got near the end there was a bit of a twiddelly passage, you know, sir, showy-like, and somebody applauded. His father went suddenly quite white, and looked just as you see him now, sir; then he up and stretched out his arm and struck Joe full across the face with his bow. The thin stick broke with the force of the blow and the tip went in just here, sir —"

And here Mrs. Samuells, with the gusto for horrors peculiar to her class, entered into details which I spare the reader, merely stating that they fully accounted for her husband's glass eye. And she told this gruesome story as calmly as the unhappy father appeared to listen to it. But then, appearances are sometimes deceptive.

— "I saw the conductor bend forwards without stopping his beat, and while the music still went on, and few of the audience noticed anything, several hands grabbed hold of Joe's father and they pulled him down and trampled him underfoot, while Joe, if you'll believe me, finished the solo as if nothing had happened. I was round to the stage door in two minutes, and helped take him off in a cab to the hospital, where they kept him nearly two months and" — here more gory details — "when he come out they made him leader at three pound a-week, and I married him."

"And what about Joe's father?" I asked, for she seemed to consider the tale finished. "Oh, well, they found he didn't move when they took their feet off of him and, in fact, he's never moved since. Paralyzed, the doctors call it. Joe took him to live with us, of course, and there he is now. I put him out once to beg just behind St. Martin's Church, but Joe was that mad, he nearly killed me."

As I thought of the awful anguish which that stony figure by the fire must have endured for nine years, my heart turned cold within me. This man of deep feelings and fierce passion's had been supplanted in all his dearest hopes and ambitions by his son, and was now condemned to the infernal torture of daily witnessing in utter impotence that son's success and happiness. There was no malice on Joe's part, I was sure; and the woman spoke without any trace of feeling; but none the less cruel torment was it for the sufferer to have his wounds laid bare as they had just been. I could not bear to remain longer in presence of such agony, and hastened to take my leave.

At the corner of the street I met Joe. "Good evening, guv'nor!" he cried in his cheery, vulgar voice. "Sorry I was so late back. Wife told you, I suppose?"

"Yes," I replied; "and she interested me by telling me how you lost your eye."

Joe swore violently. "What! before the old man? Upon my soul, women are cruel fiends! I've a great mind to thrash her for that."

"*You* don't bear your father ill-will, then?"

"O well, there you are, don't your know. Where's the good of being nasty? I never knew till long after how rough it was on him, and then he'd got it hotter than what I did. It was [the last] domino for him, you know. But Mrs. S. she never can forget it, and she lets him know it all the time."

His wife's placid manner of telling the story was explained. Her vengeance had been so oft-repeated as to have become an almost mechanical act.

CORINNA'S CONCERT BY ERIC AUSTIN

Corinna sat with puckered brows and hands folded. She was thinking hard. At the opposite side of the room her Aunt Evelina was engaged in the young-lady-like occupation of copying a rose in water-colours.

"I really don't see how it is to be managed," said Corinna, with a despairing accent.

Aunt Evelina started and deposited, quite unintentionally, a blot of carmine in the heart of her rose. "How abrupt you are, child," she said, sighing a little, "it's *so* trying to one's nerves; and I haven't the least idea what you are talking about."

"Why, aunt, what should I be talking about or thinking about, either, but the concert?"

"Well," returned Aunt Evelina, carefully removing the errant carmine with a clean brush, "for my part, I think you'd far better give up the concert — it's such a worry."

"And are we," asked Corinna, solemnly, to allow the poor — *our* poor—to go without coals and blankets this winter because we refuse to worry our delicate selves?"

Aunt Evelina shivered. She was a fragile body and knew well that when her niece's voice took on a certain *timbre* the young lady was in uncompromising earnest. Under such circumstances the idea of resistance never occurred to her.

"Please don't be terrible, Corinna," she murmured. "I'm sure, if there's anything I can do —"

"Well, there is. To begin with, you can put away that smudgy flower and come to business."

"Pardon me, my dear," said the elder lady, with feeble irritation, "but that's hardly the proper way to talk to — an aunt. Do you know that Mr. Dunn, the stationer, will give me two shillings for this flower — yes, for this *smudgy* flower, as you politely call it?"

Corinna placed a firm, white hand on her aunt's agitated shoulder. "There, don't be vexed, auntie; I was rude, and I apologise. It's really a very lovely flower — such delicate *nuances* of colour — quite worth two shillings, I should say, perhaps even half a crown. But be good now. Put your brushes away and talk. Talk about the concert. I suppose we'd better have it in the schoolroom?"

"I suppose so," said her aunt, listlessly.

"Really, aunt, if *your* coals and blankets depended upon its success you'd show a little more interest."

"Very likely, my dear, but fortunately they don't."

"A most unchristian-like confession," said Corinna, austerely. "Never mind — it's settled that you play a pianoforte solo."

"*I* play? Before a crowd of people, many of them strange gentlemen? Really, my dear, I don't think I'm equal to it."

"Coals, blankets," said Corinna, relapsing into severity.

"Very well, I suppose I must; but if I am laid up afterwards, remember, it will be your fault."

"You will suffer in the cause of duty. Now, what will you play? I suppose you're not up to Rubinstein or Paderewski?"

"Please don't be vulgar," answered Aunt Evelina, adjusting her mittens. "I confess I have not studied the latest school of composers. Mozart and Strauss were considered the proper things for young ladies when I was a girl. I shall play Mozart."

"Mozart be it, then; though I wish you could have brought yourself a little more up-to-date. I sing, of course. Who else shall we have? Oh, the curate — I'm sure he plays the flute; I heard him tootling as I passed his rooms the other day."

"Poor dear," sighed Aunt Evelina, sympathetically. "I suppose he felt lonely. I've heard that the flute is a great consoler in solitude."

"Once tried always used," said Corinna, flippantly. "But, I declare, aunt, if you're not reading the paper instead of attending to business! What can you find to interest you in yesterday's *Comet*?"

"It is more interesting than you imagine, my dear. Listen. 'We learn that Signor Baretti, the great baritone, is stopping for a few days at the Falcon Hotel, in this town, before proceeding to London to commence his season at the Italian Opera.' The idea is preposterous, of course; but would it not be delightful if we could get him to sing for us?"

Corinna looked at her aunt in wonder. "Aunt Evelina," she said, at last, "you are a genius! — a perfect genius! The idea is not preposterous — it is sublime! You are the Napoleon of aunts. As for me, I am proud to be your aide-de-camp. I shall go straight to the hotel and ask Signor Baretti to help."

Aunt Evelina held up her hands. "You can't be serious, Corinna! The notion of asking the first baritone in Europe to sing at a little amateur concert is too intensely ridiculous. Why, he once refused to open his mouth at a duchess's 'At Home'!"

"Very likely," answered Corinna, as she rose to go. "Nevertheless, he will sing in our little schoolroom. Mark my words. Now, good-bye. aunt. I shall be back to lunch."

It was an April morning, and the bright, inconstant sunshine flickered upon the wall as the young girl ran upstairs. She went to her room, donned her daintiest spring costume, put her charming, clear-cut face beneath a wide-brimmed hat, and drew on her long gloves with the most extreme precision. Then she smiled at herself in the glass, and thought she would do.

"I suppose — in fact, I am sure — it's very wicked of me," she said to herself as she passed out of the house; "but then, it's in the sacred cause of coals and blankets." For it must be admitted with regret that Corinna had set forth with the deliberate intention of fascinating the celebrated baritone. She tripped down the country lane, disturbing a flock of indignant geese on her way, skipped over the shining pools that lay in the roadway, and arrived at the "Falcon Inn" with a wild-rose flush in her cheeks, which aroused the languid approval of Sam, the elderly waiter, who stood leaning against the porch.

"Good morning, Sam!" said Corinna

"Good morning, miss," answered Sam. He knew the vicar's daughter well, and admired her in his critical fashion.

"Sam," said the young lady, hesitating a little, "have you — have you a Signor Baretti staying here?"

"We have, miss; blue room, No. 16, first floor. Wears patent leathers; foreign gent."

"Yes; I believe he's an Italian."

"Curious ways them foreigners has," said Sam, meditatively. "If you'll believe me, miss, this one has only had a cup of coffee and a roll for his breakfast, and he's bin singing and playing the piano ever since. That's him now."

There came through the hall the faint tinkling of a piano, and then above that feeble sound rose the strains of a song, in a voice so rich, resonant and mellow, that the old inn seemed to vibrate like a musical-box.

Corinna had never heard the like before. "Oh!" she said, clasping her hands.

Sam was pleased at the effect produced by his guest. "Yes; he have got a bit of a voice," he remarked, with an air of proprietorship. "Good, ain't it, miss?"

"Please take my card in to Signor Baretti, and say that I would like to speak with him," and Corinna pulled out her card-case.

Sam took the slip of card-board gingerly between his finger and thumb, and shook his head. "I am afraid it ain't no use, miss. You see, he's a very exclusive gent. Since that there notice appeared in the *Comet*, we've had no end on 'em calling here, and he won't see a blessed one of 'em. Only yesterday afternoon Lady Bletherton drove away in a terrible huff 'cause he refused to have a chat with her."

"Please take my card in," said Corinna, peremptorily.

Once more Sam shook his head doubtfully, but he went, nevertheless. Within a minute he was back again. "I told you so, miss," he said, handing back the card; "he won't have it at no price. Regular bellowed at me, he did, when I give him your card. 'No, no, *no*!' says he. 'Didn't I tell you to keep 'em off?' and then he roars out something in Italian — curious, them foreign habits."

Corinna's cheeks flushed and her eyes sparkled. "Where is the signor?" she asked, quietly.

"In the coffee-room, miss, where the piano is. There ain't no one else staying in the house."

"In the *public* coffee-room?"

"Why, yes, miss — it's a public room."

"Then show me in there."

Sam scratched his ear, grinned, and marched slowly along the passage, with Corinna following closely. "This way, miss," he said, indicating an open doorway.

Corinna swept in, and Sam, espying a little dust on the sideboard, remained to flick it off. A dark, handsome man, with a heavy cavalry moustache, shot up like a Jack-in-the-box from the front of the piano, and turned upon the waiter.

"How dare you show anyone in here?" he roared, in a voice that made the glasses ring. There was no trace of the Italian in his accent, though there was a good deal of it in his excitable manner. Sam uttered a half-audible apology. In reality, he was nearly choking with suppressed laughter. "And you, madam," continued the angry baritone, turning with startling suddenness towards Corinna. "Do you think it good manners to intrude upon me after I have expressly intimated that I did not desire an interview?"

"Sir," said Corinna, with truly Johnsonian dignity, at the same time seating herself in the most comfortable chair to be found, "I apprehend that this is a public coffee-room."

Signor Baretti gasped and brought his hand down unwittingly with a crash on the key-board of the piano. The dreadful thought crossed his mind that this might be a New Woman. The next instant he was sure of it.

"Waiter," observed the young lady, "bring me a bottle of lemonade and the *Times*."

"Yes, miss," said Sam, well pleased at the discomfiture of the foreigner.

Signore Baretti stared at her. She was a sweetly pretty girl, although her features at the moment were rigid, and she was gazing with cold severity at a bust of General Gordon on the mantlepiece. He had an eye, also, for beauty, but the thought of his wrongs was too present with him for the softer influences to prevail. He frowned heavily, and bit deep into his cigar. The officious Sam returned in a trice with the lemonade and the newspaper. Forthwith, Corinna buried herself behind the ample pages of the *Times*, occasionally taking a sip at her lemonade.

The musician looked round like a caged lion. He thought of going out, but the rain was falling, and the playful wind was switching it against the window panes. He hated wet. His bedroom, he knew, would be in possession of the chambermaids. The billiard-room reeked of stale smoke, and was generally hateful. There was no alternative but to remain.

He glanced at Corinna, but could see nothing but a sweep of fresh-coloured skirt, from beneath which peeped forth a little country-made shoe. The rest was hidden by the detestable *Times*. To a man of Baretti's excitable temperament, this silence, broken only by the rustle of the newspaper, soon became intolerable. The pressure of it forced him into speech. "Madame," he said, with a slight sarcastic inflection in his voice, "will you allow me to offer you a cigarette with your lemonade?"

Corinna flashed a reproachful glance at him over the top of her newspaper, and answered shortly, and with extreme iciness, "Thank you, no."

Signor Baretti frowned again. He had spoken and he had been snubbed. The original relations between them were rapidly being altered, and this he felt to be unjust; besides, a woman who shelters herself behind the *Times* takes an unfair advantage. He looked indignantly at the paper. Presently his face softened; a humorous twinkle crept into his eyes; he shifted his feet, hesitated, and then began to address her again.

"A thousand pardons —"

A slight quiver of the newspaper was the only sign that told him he was heard.

"Ten thousand pardons, but do you — do you usually read the *Times* upside down?"

There was a little cry, the paper fell rustling to the ground, and revealed Corinna with downcast eyes and a half-angry blush on her cheeks. The next moment her lips parted in a smile; she looked up and her glance encountered Baretti's. The humour of the situation was irresistible. Corinna broke, despite herself, into low, musical laughter; Baretti threw back his head and laughed the deep-chested laugh of Figaro.

"My dear young lady," said the singer, when he had quite recovered his breath, "I am sincerely grateful to you. I assure you I have not enjoyed a laugh so much for years, and it has done me good. And now, having broken the ice, we will, with your permission, come to business. You have, I presume, a request to make, since you sent your card in to me." Corinna faltered a little, but took her courage in both hands.

"Well — yes — I certainly have."

"Do not," murmured Baretti, looking at her with imploring eyes, "do not say you want me to attend an 'At Home' with a little music."

"No, no! nothing so trivial, I assure you; but —" again Corinna stopped. It seemed such an audacious thing to ask this magnificent baritone to sing at a little hole-and-corner concert. "I suppose signor," she went on with apparent inconsequence, "you, in your sunny Italy, never knew what it meant to be without coals and blankets?"

"I don't know about that," answered Baretti, musingly. "It's true I have spent many years in sunny Italy, but as a matter of fact, I was born in county Cork."

"Oh!"

"Yes; and in some parts of county Cork coals and blankets are not over plentiful."

"Then, signor, will you sing for coals and blankets?"

Baretti pulled his moustache — his face clouded.

"Please!"

The singer looked down and saw a beautiful, pleading face, a pair of eloquent dark blue-eyes, and above them a little wilful curl of golden-brown hair that was more eloquent still. The cause of coals and blankets was won.

"I *will* sing," he said; "not, indeed, for coals, no, nor yet for blankets, but for Miss Corinna Wakefield."

That concert was the most stupendous success ever recorded in the annals of Orchardtown. Baretti surpassed himself, and so did the other eminent performers whom his personal influence had inveigled down into the country. Corinna, at the musician's especial request, sang an Old English song, and sang it charmingly. But Aunt Evelina, though billed, did not perform. The little schoolroom was packed exclusively with county families, who were charged exclusive county family prices. In short, Orchardtown was relieved from anxiety about coals and blankets for a good two years.

When it was all over Corinna met Baretti. "How can I thank you enough?" she said, putting both her hands into his. She was radiant with the thought of having successfully provided for her beloved poor. Baretti smiled. "Simply by giving me that rose from your hair," Corinna blushed — but gave it.

It may have been a coincidence, but, on the very day, six months later, when Signor Baretti cast off the slough of single blessedness, Corinna Wakefield also entered into the holy bonds of matrimony.

TALE OF A STRAD BY C. H. PALMER

In all musical Germany there is no more musical city than Geigenstadt. It has a conservatoire and an opera house, a flock of students of both sexes, and a numerous band of professors. Little else but music is thought of or spoken of in Geigenstadt from morning till night. People go through their ordinary avocations mechanically, but music is the main business of their lives, and all else seems to them trivial. The very postman will whistle an air from Tannhaüser as he hands you your letter, and you can hear your innkeeper humming an operatic selection as he makes out your bill.

Geigenstadt is the capital of the minute Duchy of Trommelberg, which was formerly independent, but now forms part and parcel of United Germany. Two things its citizens are proud of — one is the fine marble *façade* of the present opera house, the other is the memory of the building that formerly occupied its site, and was destroyed by fire towards the end of the eighteenth century. A curious legend attaches to the destruction of the old opera house, and it is said that in that fatal fire the finest violin ever turned out by the great maker Stradivarius perished, and was lost to the world for ever, an irreparable calamity.

The legend which tells how this famous instrument came to an untimely end, opens with the return of the Archduke Ludwig to his capital after the completion of his fourth term of exile. His serene highness found the musical affairs of his country in great confusion. His orchestra, once the finest in Europe, was sadly-disorganised, and Franz Hals, the first violin, a splendid performer, and the possessor of a priceless “Strad”, had developed strange eccentricities.:

Determined to bring the performances at the opera house up to their old standard, the Archduke set to work energetically. He entirely re-organised the orchestra, and secured, at great expense, the services of Herr Von Wemmer, the celebrated musical director of a neighbouring state.

Now, Von Wemmer, besides being a gifted musician, was one of those characters to whom Germans apply the term Menschen-feind, or man-hater. As the name implies, Von Wemmer regarded the whole human race, himself excepted, with a large-minded scorn and hatred. But a man must love something animate or inanimate, and the conductor loved fiddles to distraction. He had been attracted to Geigenstadt not only by pecuniary inducements and the honour of serving the Serene Ludwig but also by the hope he entertained of getting possession somehow of Franz Hals’ incomparable Strad.

There was a little excuse for him, because, you see, the fiddle was one that might have tempted anyone to disregard the niceties of *meum* and *tuum*. Beneath the inscription "Anton Strad. fecit," was drawn a small crown, which showed, people said, what the maker himself thought of his work, and caused the violin to be known far and wide as the "Crown Fiddle."

Before long Von Wemmer conceived for this fiddle an absorbing passion. His appetite failed him, his sleep was broken, he no longer took a pleasure in bullying his orchestra or nagging at the old crone who kept house for him. In short, life without the *Krone Geige* became insipid to him.

Franz Hals also loved the violin, but his was the satisfied love of possession. He never allowed the precious instrument to go out of his sight, and at night it reposed in its case at the head of his truckle bed. Occasionally, when the humour seized Him, he would caress the old fiddle as if it were a child, and whisper maudlin confidences to it, while on fine days he was often heard playing upon it all alone on the hill side. With all that it did not seem a hard thing for a strong willed man like Von Wemmer to coax or cozen a weak-minded fiddler out of his violin, so he set about the task pretty confidently. "Franz Hals," he argued, "is poor, and I will give him much money for his fiddle. Bah! the thing is as good as done." Sc he started off and offered Franz five hundred thalers for his Strad. It was a big sum to bid, but the poor fiddler only grinned and made a private remark to the violin, which he happened to be strumming upon, guitar fashion.

"A thousand thalers then," said Von Wemmer, impatiently.

"It is a tempting offer," sneered Franz; "but I am afraid it won't do, will it, my beauty?" He passed his hand over the strings eliciting what sounded to Von Wemmer like a little ripple of mocking laughter.

"This is simply low trickery, unworthy of a musician; and badly done besides," cried the director, in a rage. "Name your own price, in Heaven's name, and I'll get it somehow." Von Wemmer was excellent at counter-point, but a bad hand at a bargain, and he roused the wrath of the little musician.

"It is for you to say what you will give, not for me," cried Franz; 'but to save time I will tell you what will not be sufficient. Ten thousand thalers will not buy the Crown Fiddle; no, nor the Archduke's diamonds in a bag, nor yet all Geigenstadt to put in my pocket. The much respected Herr Director will therefore judge whether the purchase be within his means."

And Franz Hals, with trembling hands, placed the violin in its case, and shambled' defiantly out of the green room, where the interview had taken place. Von Wemmer watched his slipshod retreating figure with calm malevolence.

"A complete and very perfect fool is Franz Hals," he said. "He will not sell his fiddle. No, but he will part with it eventually and get no money at all, which will be deplorable — for Franz."

It was with a head full of these sinister thoughts that the Herr Director strolled out of the city one afternoon, and crossing the stone bridge that spans the river took his way up the steep slope which is divided by the ravine of the Schnellbach. Moving steadily up the ascent, Von Wemmer presently reached a point some four hundred feet above the level of the valley, and paused for a moment. On his right hand, shrouded from the path by a cluster of thick bushes, lay a small green plateau, from which there is a precipitous descent of about a hundred feet to the brook. It is a beautiful spot. In front of you the great plain is spread out like a map, while behind you is the Schnellbach gleaming white betwixt hoary rocks, and singing its never-ending song.

Von Wemmer. knew the place well, and thought he might as well rest there a few minutes before returning to the city. But as he turned to make way through the bushes, a sound smote upon his ear that was neither the music of the brook nor of birds. The Herr Director turned pale, for he knew what the sound meant, and a thought occurred to him. He pulled the twigs aside with his hand, and peered through. He was right in his surmise. Seated upon the stump of a tree, absorbed by the music he made was Franz Hals.

"Good day, Franz," said the Herr Director, coming forward, and flinging himself carelessly upon the turf. "Practising, I see. That's well! You have made a fine choice of a music chamber."

Franz Hals nodded. He was by no means pleased to be disturbed by the Herr Director just then. "I thought I should be alone here," he remarked, bluntly.

Von Wemmer nursed his knee, and let his eyes rove over the plain. "I have been thinking," he said, sententiously, and altogether ignoring the other's irritation. "I have been thinking more than once of late that ours is a vastly over-rated profession. It has so many anxieties. What, for instance, can be worse than the consciousness of failing powers, a consciousness which surely comes to us as age creeps on? When, in spite of self-deception, such a conviction forces itself upon one, that is a very bad quarter of an hour. When the public also realises it — well, that is very much worse. No," concluded the Herr Director, fixing his narrow eyes upon Franz Hals, "it is certain there can be few things in life more detestable than a consciousness of failing powers."

Franz Hals did not quite know what to make of this tirade. "What does he mean," he thought, "by coming here to drone out his commonplaces? And what does he mean, too, by failing powers? I will show him! Himmel! how he regards the violin!"

Now, the spirit of mischief had entered into Franz, and this prompted him to settle his chin on the violin and look askance at Von Wemmer. “If the Herr Director will but listen,” he said, “I will play to him a new cadenza I have invented.”

The other waved his hand in gracious assent, and Franz drew his bow over the strings. That was a remarkable cadenza. It caused Von Wemmer, after the first moment of surprise, to sit up and bare his teeth with rage. To his mind, it appeared a very unseemly piece of mockery, of which he himself was the object, and in the making of which the little man and his violin blended in a way almost diabolic.

When he had finished, Franz glanced over the bridge of the fiddle at the Herr Director. But the latter had mastered himself, and, rising to his feet, said, quite quietly, “Franz Hals, I must have that violin.”

Franz smiled. “Allow me to point out to the Herr Director that he is not yet Archduke of Trommelberg.”

“Must and will” repeated Von Wemmer, calmly, folding his arms. “I hope I make myself clear?”

“You leave nothing to be desired in that respect,” returned Franz; “but let me also make it clear, lieber Herr, that you can no more obtain possession of this gem of a fiddle than you can appropriate to your own private uses the sun or the moon, or the Cathedral of Cologne. I am sorry, because you are evidently a man of taste, and know what is good. Never mind, there are consolations still left in the world.”

And with a grim smile, Franz pointed his bow at the director. The next moment it was struck from his hand, and poor Franz saw it fall perilously near to the cliff’s edge. Now the bow was dear to the heart of Franz, and in his anxiety lest it should pass from him for ever, he forgot considerations of prudence. Hastily placing his violin upon the turf, he ran to the rescue. Thereupon Von Wemmer snatched up the instrument and tucked it under his arm. Franz Hals, returning with his rescued bow, stood for a second petrified by this piece of audacity, but rage soon overcame his astonishment, and he flew, wild-cat fashion, at Von Wemmer’s throat. “Give it back,” he gasped; “thief! ravisher of a Herr Director, give me back the violin!”

The struggle was short, for Von Wemmer was not only by far the more powerful man, but he was also quite cool and sober. Carefully shielding the violin, he struck the little musician hard on the breast with his open hand. They had unconsciously drawn near to the edge of the ravine, and the blow sent Franz reeling backwards several paces to the very verge. There he stood for an instant swaying to and fro, his lean, brown fingers clutching at the empty air, and then disappeared, falling, amid a clatter of loose stones, ninety feet below into the foam of the Schnellbach.

If Von Wemmer had been very quick he might perhaps have saved him, but he found it difficult to make up his mind on the spur of the moment, and besides, he had the violin to look after.

"It would not have done to run risks," he thought. "Nature, no doubt, will make many more men like Franz Hals, but it will be a long while before man puts together another Crown Fiddle." He glanced down into the gloomy ravine, but could see nothing of the fallen man. "It was an unfortunate accident," he reflected, "more particularly for Franz, who is now probably dead. But he was an undoubted fool, and the world has plenty of such men. In justice to him, however, I will take the greatest care of his violin."

Presently he bethought him that it might be as well to see how Franz had fared after his tumble into the Schnellbach. The descent was not difficult, and he soon discovered the little man lying motionless with one leg doubled under him, his head thrown backwards, and his iron grey hair afloat in the brook.

"He was always a *farceur*" he murmured, "and he keeps it up even now. He is decidedly dead, too, though it is perhaps better to make sure." Stooping downwards, he felt the man's heart, and listened for a trace of respiration, but could detect neither breathing nor pulsation. "It is all right," he exclaimed aloud, unconsciously; "no one was ever more dead than Franz Hals is."

He stood for a few minutes gazing thoughtfully at the body, and then, reminded by the deepening shadows that the day was waning, pulled himself together saying that it was getting late, that he had done all humanity required of him, and might as well be moving homewards. Regaining the plateau, he lingered for a time until twilight began to close round the hills, and then, with the violin case tucked comfortably under his ample cloak, cautiously descended the slope, and reached in due time and unobserved, his home, his old housekeeper, and his supper.

On the third night after Franz Hals had taken up his quarters in the Schnellbach there was to be a gala performance at the opera house. The Lord Chamberlain, who possessed a pretty taste for such trifles, had designed a torch-light ballet of the Four Seasons, and Von Wemmer had composed fitting music for the dance.

"It was a pity," people said, "that Franz Hals was not there to lead the orchestra. But what would you have? The wandering fit was on him, and he must go." The Herr Director was as sorry as anybody about Franz's absence, but then, as he said, there was always Steinkopf to fall back upon. A thoroughly safe violinist was Steinkopf, methodical as a German housewife, and as good a time-keeper as the best clock in the palace. True, he hadn't much soul to speak of, but that ingredient in the performance could be safely left to the ladies of the *corps de ballet*.

The house was packed that night. All the rank, beauty, and talent of Geigenstadt were there, from the Grand Duke and his ponderous duchess, to little blonde Grisel, the shoemaker's musical daughter. A little before the performance, Von Wemmer, who had come down early to marshal his orchestra, found out Steinkopf, and took him aside.

"Come in here," said he, striding into his own little den; "I want to speak with you."

"Yes, Herr," answered the meek Steinkopf, who with his fiddle under his arm and his spectacles adjusted upon his short, broad nose, waddled after his Herr Director. Now, Von Wemmer contemplated a very bold thing, for he had made up his mind that the Crown Fiddle must be included in his orchestra on this occasion. To that end, having slightly altered the appearance of the instrument, he brought it down to the theatre with the object of entrusting it to Steinkopf, upon whose stupidity and shortsightedness he could implicitly rely.

"See here, my Steinkopf," said he, as he took the violin out of its case, "I have a fancy that you should use this fiddle to-night. It is a fine instrument, and I wouldn't lend it to everyone. But you — well, you are different."

"Ach! lieber Herr," stammered Steinkopf, hesitating between flattered vanity and a preference for his own trusty fiddle, "a thousand thanks, but I have here my own much-loved Amati, and, with your permission, I——"

The Herr Director looked a little annoyed. "It is a whim of mine. You will humour me, I know. Come, make the exchange, and leave your violin here. That's right. And, by the way, Steinkopf, you need say nothing to these fellows out there. There might be some absurd jealousy — you understand. Let it be a little secret strictly *entre nous*. And now, a glass of wine to the success of the new piece."

Filled with pride at thus being admitted to the confidence of the august Von Wemmer, Steinkopf rejoined his comrades, and took his seat as first violin with double his ordinary pomposity. The operetta that preceded the ballet went off to the satisfaction of everybody. At its conclusion, having a quarter of an hour to spare, Von Wemmer retired again to his own room. He was disturbed by Steinkopf, who entered suddenly and impulsively. Something evidently was wrong with Steinkopf. His filmy, slate-coloured eyes were dilated, and pallid patches appeared upon his rubicund cheeks. Von Wemmer looked at him curiously.

"Pardon, Herr," said the violinist, "I am suddenly ill, I can play no more to-night. It is very regrettable, but it simply cannot be helped, and I am really very bad. Never mind! little Rittmeister will take my part. Here then is the Herr Director's violin." And with an evident air of relief he placed the instrument on the table.

Von Wemmer blazed up. “What sort of fly has got into your sheep’s head now?” he cried. “You are no more ill than my shoe is. Pick up the violin and go back. I have no time to waste on such child’s prattle.”

But Steinkopf shook his big round head with the dogged obstinacy of his race.

“I speak only truth,” he said; “the Herr Director may rave if he pleases, but truth is truth all the same.” Von Wemmer faced him with gleaming eyes.

“You absolutely decline to play?” he said.

“Yes, Herr,” said Steinkopf, trembling, but tenacious. Just then the bell rang for the orchestra tore-assemble.

“Then take that, traitor!” Steinkopf felt a smart buffet on his right ear, and just caught sight of the Herr Director’s coat tails as their owner hastened back to the theatre.

“So,” said the violinist, “that is well ended. A blow! — pooh! That is nothing at all. But to play on a fiddle bewitched — a fiddle that says “Look for Franz—look for Franz,’ without ceasing, that is too shocking,” and poor Steinkopf shambled home, without glancing again at the Crown Fiddle, his brain in a pitiable state of bewilderment.

Meanwhile, Von Wemmer had returned to the orchestra, and, hastily explaining to Rittmeister that his first violin had been taken ill, resumed his seat as conductor. The music — his own music — was admirably performed. The first dance — that of spring —went trippingly, and the applause was generous. But as the orchestra entered upon the more robust music of summer the conductor moved uneasily in his seat. A note, strange yet familiar, seemed to run like a thread through the rich body of sound. Unconsciously he hurried the tempo, and the dancers on the stage began to get slightly flurried. Again he detected that singular note, and this time he could not be mistaken — it was the Crown Fiddle! Von Wemmer felt his throat grow dry and his baton shake in his hand.

“Pah!” he muttered, “it is that fool Steinkopf come back. It must be Steinkopf. Ah! impossible!” For as his eyes glanced over the orchestra they met those of Franz Hals. Von Wemmer hastily turned his head, a fury of rage and terror took possession of him, he waved his baton wildly.

“A nasty trick to play,” he said aloud, “but Franz was always like that, and to think that he was as dead as anybody could be!” And he muttered again and again to himself, “A nasty trick.”

Quicker moved the baton, the orchestra fiddled for dear life, the dancers flashed over the stage, the stately music of summer went like a gallop of the storm fiends. Catching the excitement the audience swayed to this tumultuous playing.

Then a woman shrieked. There was cause. One of the dancers, twirling like a dervish, had brought her blazing torch in contact with the wings, and in a moment the flames had leapt to the roof. What need to describe the deplorable rush of an audience from a theatre on fire? The Archduke and his suite bolted incontinently down their private staircase. The rest of the people made their way out as best they could, several being crushed in the process. But those who looked back saw that Von Wemmer, like the man in Haydn's symphony, was still conducting an imaginary orchestra, waving his baton wildly in front of the blazing stage.

That is the legend of Geigenstadt, and so perished the Crown Fiddle, the best that ever left the workshop of the Italian master.

A DISTRESSED TENOR BY ERIC AUSTIN

"Hang it all! Cipriani, what on earth are you thinking of?"

For the fourth time within a short half-hour the light skiff had shot into the bank of the river, and the sculler, a vigorous, fair-bearded young artist, was growing restive. The steersman apologised humbly, and with a slightly foreign accent. His dark, picturesque face took on an almost plaintive expression, so earnest was he in his desire to be excused.

"Oh, that's all right, old man," said the good-natured artist, as he shoved the nose of the boat from the bank again; "but you'd better leave the tiller-lines alone. I can manage famously by myself. That's right. Now you're reduced to the rank of a passenger and can let your wits go wool-gathering with a clear conscience."

"It's all so extremely beautiful, you see." It was an un-English speech, but the speaker was not an Englishman, but an impressionable Italian, and as sensitive to beauty as a photographic plate is to light.

"It's no end jolly," acquiesced the artist in the approved insular manner. He, too, was drinking in the beauty of the May morning. The sparkling river, the glorious woods that, bathed in sunshine, rose above them in tier over tier of bright spring green: the exquisitely pure air which at that early hour had just a touch of cold in it to give it zest — all these things made the soul of the artist glad within him; but his name was Brown, and he expressed himself according to the immemorial custom of the Browns.

Meanwhile, with the long, telling strokes of an accomplished oarsman, he was making the boat cut rapidly through the clear water. "I'll be bound, Cipriani," he said presently, with a quizzical look at the meditative figure in the stern, "that you are longing to burst into song; now, if you want to relieve your pent-up feelings in that way I have no objection."

The Italian showed his white teeth under his dark moustache. "And don't you think, my matter-of-fact friend, that a song would be appropriate to the occasion?"

"I do, most emphatically; so fire away and rouse the echoes, there's nobody about."

Cipriani took him at his word and burst forth into a light-hearted Italian canzonet.

The artist bent forward to listen, and let his sculls hang idly in the water. "Surely," he thought, "these quiet upper reaches of the Thames have never been aroused before by such a marvellous voice." At the conclusion of the first verse Julian Brown gave a sigh of enjoyment. "I don't wonder you get fifty guineas a night with a pipe like that," he said, not without a touch of envy; "now give us the other verse, and I'll admit you've paid for your passage."

The curiously assorted pair who were thus making their way up the Thames had been friends for years, having first become acquainted at an artistic and musical club in their Bohemian student days. Since then Carlo Cipriani had suddenly shot into the first rank as an operatic singer, fame was already his, and fortune was fast following.

Julian Brown's progress was slower, but he had no reason to complain. It is more the privilege of the singer than of the painter to come unawares and take the world by storm. After a morning spent in sketching and in the delightful busy idling that is the charm of the river, they ran their boat under a huge tree that stretched its long arms far over the stream, and addressed themselves to lunch.

"This is like a haunt of the water-nymphs," said Cipriani.

"Pish!" returned Brown, "you have an operatic imagination; the nymphs who come here are fond of ginger-beer and pork-pies," and he pointed to the debris of a picnic. The singer shrugged his shoulders. "It's not funny, Julian; it's like a jarring note in a chord."

"Drink some of this bottled beer and you won't notice it. I have hopes of making an Englishman of you yet, Cipriani."

"A re-incarnation through beef and beer — it is a pleasing thought."

"Better that than sour wine and macaroni."

"We won't discuss it. Each man to his taste, and the water-nymphs to theirs."

"By-the-way," said Julian, after a pause, "I saw Eleanor the other day."

The Italian started up. "My wife! how was she looking? But, after all, what is it to me? We have each gone our own way, and our ways lie apart."

"It's a great deal to you, you humbug! and you know it She was looking lovely, as she always does. By Jove! Cipriani, if I'd had the luck to marry a girl like that I'd have swallowed my paint box before I'd have fallen out with her about such a trumpery, altogether ridiculous matter as that which led to your separation. There, give me some beer; I confess I can't understand it."

"My dear fellow, that is because with all your advantages of beef and beer you cannot fathom the temperament of a musician. My wife and I quarrel and separate because I say that she sometimes sings flat, and she absolutely denies it. 'Ridiculous,' says the man of beef and beer, 'absurd nonsense;' and so it is to him. But see what it means to me. My wife and I are both singers, both artists — she on the concert platform, I on the stage. I notice her beginning to sing occasionally a little flat, just a little, but if unchecked, the tendency becomes worse and worse — almost incurable. I tell her of it. She is very angry, the more so because she knows in her soul that I am right. She sings again — more flat than ever. I point out to her that she is committing a deliberate crime against her art. She points out to me that I am an impertinent brute of a husband. I perceive gradually that the domestic situation has become impossible; for whenever she sings out of tune it will be my bounden duty, as a musician, to tell her of it, hence the prospect of constant friction, and friction is ruin to the artistic temperament. In the highest interests of our art we agree to separate — a logical and satisfying conclusion. Please to pass the cigarettes."

"I don't believe she ever sang flat," said Julian, stoutly.

"Pah! if I insisted that a picture was well drawn when you knew the perspective to be all wrong, you would laugh at me; quite right too. Well, I laugh at you."

The artist rose. "All right, Cipriani. I am going off now for a couple of hours, to sketch the old mill. You won't come? Very well, you can amuse yourself with your cigarettes and your novel. But I'll just remark one thing before I go, old fellow; you may talk as you please about the artistic temperament and that rot, but you won't convince me that you haven't behaved to your wife like — to put it concisely — a rather egotistical fool."

Cipriani frowned. "We can't afford to quarrel, Julian."

"No, no, my dear boy," said the artist warmly. "Forgive me if I am too blunt; put it down to a desire for your happiness — and the brutalising effects of beef and beer. So long!" And he strode off leaving a trail of tobacco smoke behind him.

Cipriani looked after his retreating figure with a slight feeling of anger, but the reflection of what a good fellow Brown really was soon checked the feeling, and turned his mind in another direction. Had he really behaved like an egotistical fool as Brown had said? As a man he might have so behaved; as an artist he was convinced he had not. Ought, then, the artist to give way to the man, or the man to the artist? He tried to think out this puzzling problem, and within ten minutes the mental fatigue thus produced, combined, it must be confessed, with his unaccustomed potations of bottled beer, sent him off fast asleep among the cushions on the stern of the boat. Thereby he missed one of the prettiest sights to be seen on the river that afternoon.

A couple of charming girls were coming leisurely down the stream in a Canadian canoe. One of them was busy with the paddle, which she wielded with the dexterity of a redskin; the other was occupied in taking care of her complexion with the help of a big parasol. Gradually the canoe approached the spot where Cipriani was sleeping, and to tell the truth, snoring. "What is that noise coming from the bank?" asked the girl with the parasol [Eleanor]. "It sounds like a gigantic bumble bee."

Her companion quickly turned her head, and answered with a smile and an accent that betrayed the American. "There's a boat, and a man fast asleep in it. I expect he represents the big bee."

"The idea of going to sleep on a lovely afternoon like this."

"And snoring, too, in the face of nature. That ought to be an indictable offence. Yet it is a musical snore — as snores go. Let us have a peep at the young Philistine. Take care of your parasol."

"Oh! Sadie, what are you doing?"

But Sadie was not to be checked, and with a clever stroke of her paddle brought the canoe noiselessly to within a yard of Cipriani's boat. "My! he's a picture!" Her critical contemplation was broken by a half-suppressed scream from her companion.

"Pull out quickly, for heaven's sake!" whispered the latter [Eleanor].

There was no mistaking the earnestness of her tone, and Sadie obeyed, not without reluctance. When, after six sweeps of her paddle, the canoe had shot out almost into mid-stream, she turned to her companion.

"Why, Eleanor," she said, "you look real pale. What's the trouble, my dear?"

"Oh, it's so very strange; I can hardly believe it myself; but who do you think was asleep in that boat?"

"Sure I can't tell. He looked like a Venetian gondolier, but I reckon he wasn't."

"My [Eleanor's] husband, whom I haven't seen for six months."

"You don't say!"

"And Sadie, what do you think?"

"Don't ask me, I haven't begun to think yet."

"The dear fellow had fallen asleep with my locket in his hand."

Sadie looked at the girl keenly. She was agitated and flushed, and her eyes were constantly turning in the direction of Cipriani's boat.

"Say, Eleanor," said the fair American, "do you want your husband back?"

"Of course I do."

"Real bad?"

"Never you mind."

"That'll do," returned Sadie, with decision. "And now, my dear, we'll sail right in and get him."

"You're mad, surely! I wouldn't return for worlds."

"Anyway, you've got to come," and Sadie began deliberately to paddle back to the boat.

Eleanor, feeling herself helpless, leant back in despair.

"At least," she said, "you'll tell me what you intend to do with my husband?"

"Why, certainly. I mean to tow him down to the house-boat; it's only a couple of hundred yards away, and when he wakes up you and he can have a grand reconciliation and a good time."

"But suppose he wakes up before we reach the house-boat?"

"He won't. He's sleeping like Rip Van Winkle. Don't be afraid, but keep quite still now." The American girl's eyes flashed with mischief as, with the help of a boat-hook, she dexterously unfastened the light rope which held Cipriani's boat to the bank. She tossed the line to Eleanor.

"I put you in charge of the husband's boat," she whispered; "mind you are real careful." It was a good two hours afterwards, and twilight was beginning to settle down upon the river, when Cipriani awoke. He rubbed his eyes, and noticed that someone had been kind enough to cast a rug over him.

"A considerate fellow, Julian," he thought; but where am I and where is he?" The boat, he could see now, was lying under the lee of a large house-boat, the windows of which were already illuminated. "She must have got loose and drifted down while I was asleep," he reflected; "but I must get back or poor Julian will think I am drowned."

He looked for the sculls; they were not to be found. He tried to push off from the house-boat and discovered that his boat was moored fast to its side. The situation was becoming enigmatical. He lit a cigarette. Then something happened which drove all thought of his whereabouts out of his mind. From within the house-boat came the tinkling of a mandoline, and then a woman's voice floated out upon the night, a voice that he knew well.

The song was also known to him, and the associations it recalled were not altogether pleasant. He listened intently, but even his super-subtle sense of hearing could detect no shade of flatness in the perfect rendering of the melody. In a moment he had boarded the house-boat, penetrated into the saloon, and flung himself beside the slender, white-robed figure he saw there.

"Eleanor!" he cried with his Southern impetuosity, "forgive me! I take it all back. You do not sing flat; I was worse than a fool to say so. Your voice is as true as an angel's; I know and I swear it!"

The young wife tried to conceal her delight at her husband's return but failed signally. "Ah, Carlo," she said half laughing, half crying, "we were both wrong. I *did* sing flat, though I hope now I have cured myself. But you, dear, were just — well, a little sharp with me."

When, nearly two hours later, Julian Brown, a weary and wrathful wight, after a long tramp up and down the shore, with the boat's sculls on his shoulder, succeeded in discovering that errant craft, and boarded the house-boat to make inquiries, he found a merry party of three assembled in the saloon. His just indignation was, however, mollified by ample apologies and an excellent dinner, and he found his reward in contemplating the happiness of his friend Cipriani, and in making the acquaintance of the American *dea ex machina* [a character introduced to resolve a problem], Miss Sadie Woodbine.

THE TWENTY-FOUR VIOLINS OF LOUIS XIV BY J. F. Rowbotham

[There really was an orchestra of twenty-four violinists organized by Louis XIV. However the following story, along with Andrew and Isabelle Palliser, is fictional.]

The 'Twenty-four Violins' constituted Louis XIV's private orchestra. They were a band of instrumentalists twenty-four in number — each and all of whom played the violin. They were selected from among the best musicians in France, and it was considered one of the greatest artistic distinctions of the age to be enrolled in that select number and be called by that famous name.

They were domiciled at the Court of Versailles, and used to play the king a concert of choice music every evening after dinner, and occasionally were in request for *matinées*, or for providing musical selections for the garden parties, *fêtes*, and water parties with which that gay court abounded. They had their houses, or rather *châlets*, in different parts of the Park of Versailles, in which they lived two and three together, but the conductor — old Andrew Palliser, in deference to his age and his dignity — was allowed a house, or rather small cottage, of his own.

They all dressed alike did the 'Twenty-four Violins.' Their costume was a lavender-coloured tunic with a red belt buckling it round about the waist, cream-coloured breeches and stockings, and a three-cornered black velvet hat. They wore a sword at their side, a bag wig [wig with the back hair enclosed in a small silk bag], and on each arm of their tunic a violin was embroidered in reddish brown silk, very large, and reaching from the shoulder almost to the elbow. This was to enable the guards at the gates of the palace grounds, and the sentries outside, to identify them as the king's musicians if by chance they wanted to leave the Park of Versailles — a privilege that was not accorded to anyone but domestics and functionaries of the palace during the king's residence there, except upon the production of a sign-manual. Besides wearing an embroidered violin on each sleeve of their tunic, they carried a leathern satchel at their back in which their violin lay deposited. This was familiarly called their haversack by their fellow domestics of the palace, and, as Andrew Palliser jocularly remarked, the name was not a bad one, for their violin which lay therein gave them their bread and butter, so that, like soldiers, they carried their provisions on their back.

Thrown thus together by the force of circumstances, a perfect freemasonry and bond of brotherhood united the 'Twenty-four Violins.' If they had all been actual brothers they could not have been more attached to one another, and their *esprit de corps* was unanimous. Particularly were they all devoted to their old conductor, Andrew Palliser, and to show how loyal they were to him and one another, they had preserved for years the great secret of his life, which was known to the 'Twenty-Four Violins,' but not to another soul in Versailles.

Andrew Palliser had a daughter — that was his secret. Why should it have been a secret? Because Isabelle Palliser was one of the loveliest girls in France, and Versailles was the most depraved court in Europe. And yet Isabelle Palliser had lived there for thirteen years — she was seven when she came — in the midst of the Park of Versailles, though certainly in a secluded nook of it, and she had remained as safe and free from harm as if she had been brought up in a nunnery. The fact that the existence of Isabelle Palliser was unknown at Court was due to the exceeding care of her father, and to the strict sentiment of honour prevailing among the 'Twenty-four Violins.'

They used to meet for their practice at the old man's house, which lay in a sequestered corner of the park, surrounded by high hedges and embowered in trees. Here, during their oft-repeated practisings, they were all familiar with the queenly form of Isabelle, who used to sit with them and her father as if they had been brothers rather than merely comrades; and it may be safely said at the same time that they were all more or less in love with the peerless beauty, especially Hugh de Rand, the second violin of the twenty-four, who was the next best player in the band to Andrew Palliser himself, and was universally looked upon as his probable successor. Between Hugh and Isabelle there seemed to be a mutual understanding that one day they would be man and wife together, if circumstances so far favoured them as to enable it. Hugh worshipped the ground on which Isabelle walked. The other 'Twenty-four Violins,' while they would fain have been in his place, good-naturedly envied his good luck.

Things had worn on thus for years and years, as we say, until at the point of our story Isabelle was twenty years of age. One day, after a morning performance of music at the palace, Andrew Palliser came home to his house, where the 'Twenty-four Violins' were all assembled for a short practice of the music for the evening.

"Comrades," he said, closing the door as he entered, "I have something to tell you. After the concert this morning, the king called me to him, and after complimenting me on the excellence of your playing, he said, 'How is your daughter?'"

At this there were ejaculations of surprise from all present. "I told him," continued Andrew, "that his majesty was mistaken, for I had no daughter; there was only a girl who assisted me in keeping the cottage tidy. The king looked at me in an incredulous sort of manner and walked away. Comrades, I do not think, indeed, I am sure, that none of us has been a traitor."

Loud cries of vehement denial echoed over the room. "But the object I have in mentioning all this to you is to ask you what is best to be done?"

"I'll tell you what is best to be done," cried Hugh de Rand, drawing his sword and rising from his chair. "Let me find the rogue who would lay a hand upon her and I will run him through the body!" But wild speeches like this were of no good in face of a pressing and most serious danger. Isabelle, who was present amongst the party, with blanched face and trembling frame, seemed to realise for the first time the peril she stood in.

Sounder sense prevailed over the hot speeches of Hugh, and the various opinions which were offered seemed all to point in one direction painful for the father, and still more painful for the daughter; "Painful too," added one of the party, "for all the 'Violins.'" This was that Isabelle should be spirited away from Versailles as soon as possible, which meant perpetual separation from her father, a lonely life for herself, and an adieu to all her best friends on earth — the 'Twenty-four Violins.'

"Nothing else, however, is possible," they all agreed, and the question to be considered seemed rather where she should go, than whether she should go or not. Andrew Palliser, whose wife was long since dead, and whose relations were scattered all over France, knew not where to recommend. The 'Violins' themselves, who were many of them hare-brained scapegraces who had broken with friends and family for the sake of following music, were in a like dilemma.

At this point of the consultation one of the 'Violins,' who was looking out of the window, exclaimed, with a start, "Coming! The Duc de Richelieu!"

"Back, girl, behind the sofa," cried Andrew Palliser. grasping his daughter's arm. "On your knees there and keep quite still! Crowd round the sofa, comrades. Your instruments! Quick!" With lightning celerity the 'Twenty-four Violins' had extracted their instruments from the leathern satchels at their back, and, agreeably to Andrew's hurried motion, had laid their bows on the strings in the faintest pianissimo; so faint was it that the Due de Richelieu, who came prowling up the steps on tiptoe, seemed quite unaware that there was a soul in the room as he entered.

Starting back in astonishment at the apparition of the twenty-four players which met his eyes, "Ah, gentlemen," he exclaimed, "you are practising."

"Yes, your Grace, as we always do at this hour," remarked Andrew, sententiously.

"Well, I will sit and listen to you," said his Grace, taking a chair.

Without a moment's hesitation the trained musicians, keeping their bows on their violins, and, obeying a sign from Andrew, followed his lead as gradually louder and louder he broke into a well known minuet, which at last in all its brightness pealed from all the instruments and flashed and echoed about the little apartment.

"Excellently played," said the duke, who had never ceased to throw furtive glances about the room. "Excellently played; especially the introduction. Why, you were sighing so softly on your instruments when I entered that you might have been a party of conspirators hatching a plot, rather than a troupe of honest musicians holding a practice. But come, Andrew, have you not some Hebe, some Abigail, a servant, or a daughter, or something like that in your house who will bring me a glass of wine? I am thirsty after my walk."

"I have nobody of that kind about the house, your Grace," blurted out Andrew, "except a girl who comes in a few hours every day to tidy the place; but if your Grace will allow me I will bring you the wine."

"Don't think of such a thing," said the duke. "I'll get it out of the cupboard myself. I see where the cupboard is," and he made to cross over directly to the sofa, behind which Isabelle was kneeling. At this moment Jean le Breton, the burliest of the 'Violins,' who happened to be seated close to the couch, rose in an awkward manner with his back to the duke, and, interposing his ponderous form thus suddenly, bumped against the advancing courtier and almost threw him over.

"Confound you for a fool!" cried the duke, angrily.

"A thousand pardons, my Lord Duke," said Jean, sheepishly. "I was only looking for a piece of music I had dropped."

"The wine is on the table," interrupted Andrew.

And the duke, with a very ill grace, turned back to the table, and, sitting down, drank a glass of wine and ate a macaroon. After which he took his departure.

"He knows all!" exclaimed Jean le Breton, directly the duke had left the garden, and they could once more talk in safety.

"Not all," replied Andrew; "but, alas, he knows that I have a daughter."

"It is only suspicion in the meantime," said Laurence Pelloutier, who had the reputation of being the most sagacious among them, and with this remark they most of them agreed. "It is only suspicion — strong suspicion. But he has proved nothing as yet."

"He will prove it before the night is over," remarked another. "When we leave for the evening concert, he or his creatures will come here and find Isabelle."

"If that be so," remarked another "Violin," profoundly, "we shall not find her when we come back."

"Alas, father," sobbed Isabelle, who now having emerged from her place of concealment, stood amongst them once more. "What is to be done? What will become of me?"

"My darling, I know not," replied the old man. "One card I could play — perhaps I must. But 1 do not like to do it. What must you do? What is to become of you? You must go away from me — you must go away at once — you must leave this place!" he cried, wildly.

"She cannot leave to-day," interposed one of the 'Violins.' "The palace gates are shut at three, except for those who produce the royal warrant, and it is past three now. If she were to attempt to escape this evening under cover of the darkness she might be shot by the sentries. To-morrow morning is the earliest she can leave."

"And if she remain in the house to-night," remarked another player, "while we are at the concert, the Duc de Richelieu will find her, as sure as my name is Jacques Pelleton. It is a dilemma. What are we to do?"

"Take her with us," cried Isabelle's lover, Hugh de Rand.

"Take her with us? But how?" they all exclaimed.

"Let her put on our lavender tunic and our red belt and our cream stockings and our long wig — let her don our attire for this evening only, and come with us to the concert-room. You will not object, Isabelle?" he added, "when the peril is so great. Let her come with the troupe of us to the concert-room, dressed like us, with a violin like us; let her be one of us. We will crowd round her and smuggle her in among us, so that nobody will ever notice her. Be sure of this, that in the concert-room, under the king's nose, or rather up in his orchestra, which is some distance from him, seated at a music-stand, dressed like a man, and one of his 'Violins,' that would be the last place in the world where the king and the Due de Richelieu would look for Andrew Palliser's lovely daughter."

The idea was an excellent one and was adopted as the best of all. It met with no protest from Isabelle under the serious circumstances which rendered it necessary.

"I have a new suit," said Hugh de Rand, "which I have never worn yet; I will bring it round at once, and before the concert this evening your deft fingers, Isabelle, can have shaped and shortened it so as to fit you as if it had been made for you."

On this understanding they left the house, to assemble again at half-past seven, half an hour before the concert. By seven o'clock Isabelle had shaped the clothes to fit her to a nicety, and stood in the room when her lover entered, and the other 'Violins' with him, a bewitching figure of loveliness and symmetry, yet a figure which, owing to her tallness and beauty of form, might easily have passed for that of a man.

"You only require the violin at your back to make you perfect," said Hugh de Rand, fastening a violin in its leathern satchel round her shoulders, and resisting an almost irresistible impulse to kiss the lovely and embarrassed girl.

"Now, when we play," he added, "hold your violin to your shoulder and move your bow in time to ours. Make believe that you are playing. It will never be noticed that you are not uttering a note except by ourselves."

They all trooped to the concert-room, with Isabelle in their midst. No one could have noticed her as they passed through the grounds, even if anyone had tried. And when they reached the large music pavilion of the palace in which the concerts were held, it was all ablaze with wax candles lit in thousands through the hall. The arena, where the audience sat, was crowded with beaux and ladies in furbelows and powdered wigs, the beaux tapping their snuffboxes, the ladies flirting their fans about, the whole a scene of glittering brightness never equalled in our more sedate and sober days. In the midst, and on the front seat, sat the king, on a sign from whom the concert commenced.

Isabelle was very frightened as she passed into the orchestra and stepped down the benches to her place along with the other violinists, being piloted cleverly by Hugh de Rand, who, without appearing to conduct her, in reality did so by slight signs imperceptible to any but themselves. Her seat was immediately behind burly Jean le Breton, who managed to push her almost out of sight with his ponderous form. She took out her violin like the rest. Old Andrew raised his arm as a sign for. commencing. One sweep of the bows, and the concert began.

Piece after piece was played in the programme, and nothing unusual appeared to have transpired in the body of the hall. The concert was drawing near its close; old Andrew Palliser at last began to breathe freely. It was at this moment that the Due de Richelieu approached the king, who sat in the front of the spectators.

"Your Majesty," he said, "are there not twenty-*four* Violins in your orchestra? I have just counted and find that there are twenty-five."

"Extraordinary!" said Louis. "Let me see." And raising his finger he began deliberately to count the members of the orchestra, beginning at the topmost bench and going downwards. This motion was not unobserved by Andrew Palliser. The arm with which he was so spiritedly conducting fell limp and powerless to his side — he stared mute and petrified before him — the Violins wavered; there was every danger of a collapse and consequently of discovery. At this moment Hugh de Rand, who sat next to the conductor, gathering the situation at a glance, turned his face appealingly to his fellows, and with a tremendous sweep of his bow and a simultaneous stamp of his foot pulled them all together. The piece proceeded.

"Twenty-four I count," said the king, who was somewhat short-sighted. "I am afraid you are making a mistake, duke. How *could* there be twenty-five?"

"Twenty-five, your Majesty; I am sure of it," persisted the duke.

"Well, well, it is a point of no importance," said Louis. "But, if I think of it, to-morrow I will ask Andrew Palliser to give the answer. You know, duke, I dislike mental arithmetic."

The concert proceeded and in a short time concluded. The ‘Twenty-four Violins,’ with Isabelle amidst them, trooped out of the concert room and in due course reached Andrew Palliser’s house in safety. The more sharp sighted of them detected traces that people had been there in their absence, but the house was safe and secure now. It was decided that Isabelle should leave Versailles early next day.

“By eleven o'clock she can leave with perfect safety,” said Jacques Pelleton. “Often an odd ‘Violin’ can walk out of the palace gates without question at that hour. And the sentries know our costume at a glance. They will never look at her to see if they recognise her. The thing will do perfectly.”

It was he who had suggested a sister of his, who lived some six miles from Versailles, to whom Isabelle was to carry a note written by him. This lady would give the girl female apparel instead of the masquerading garb she was now attired in. Isabelle might remain at Jacques Pelleton’s sister’s, if she got there without notice, till such time as her father could, without suspicion, go and see her and make further arrangements for her ultimate abode.

The night passed in great anxiety with Isabelle and her father. Neither slept, and in the morning the girl was up early and dressed in her violinist’s suit, dreadfully nervous, but quite determined. The ‘Violins’ themselves soon trooped round to the cottage so as to conceal her among them again, if necessary, and prevent the risk of discovery at the last moment. The time wore on. It was now eleven o’clock — the hour judged best for making the attempt. There was a long avenue to go down after leaving Andrew’s cottage. At the bottom, to reach the palace gates, one turned to the left, keeping close beside a long plantation of laurels and laburnums. At the end of this there was a grassy lawn to the right, and the palace gates lay straight before the wayfarer.

After fervent adieux from the ‘Twenty-four Violins,’ and the tearful embraces of her old father, Isabelle left the cottage, and walking timorously, but with as masculine a gait as possible, passed completely down the avenue in safety and without interruption. All this was seen from the topmost window in the cottage, which commanded an uninterrupted view of the avenue, and at which, if anyone outside had only known, twenty-four eyes — for it was but one eye apiece that could be crowded into the little glass — watched the fair Isabelle. At last she turned the corner and disappeared.

They all grew very anxious as the minutes passed on, not speaking to one another except in monosyllables. At last, after some little time, Andrew remarked, “She will now have got to the palace gates. Please God she passes them safely!”

It was at this moment that Isabelle, having turned from the avenue, was passing along the plantation of laurels and laburnums, but going slowly for the sake of security, had not reached the gates, as her father imagined, though she was near the end of the plantation. A large beech tree stood at the end of the plantation just before the latter made the turn to the lawn; and in front of the tree ran another lawn which seemed to dip into the plantation of laburnums. Isabelle had only to pass this and she would be safe, for in a few strides further the palace gates would be visible.

She came near the opening, heard the sound of voices, paused a moment. She fancied they were behind her. She walked on, and, turning the corner of the opening, found the king, the Duc de Richelieu, and a crowd of court ladies and gentlemen sitting at tables under the tree, and regaling themselves with a collation. She stood actually in the midst of them.

They looked at the involuntary intruder for a second with some surprise, and the king seeing her called out, "Excellent, my lords and ladies. We were lamenting the absence of music a moment ago, during our repast, and here, most providentially, it is supplied by one of my 'Twenty-four Violins.' Come hither, fellow," said his Majesty. "Take thy instrument and play us the minuet which so delighted us last night."

Scarcely knowing what she was doing, trembling in every limb, and in a sort of stupor, Isabelle mechanically swung her leathern satchel containing the violin round beneath her arm, as she had done the very evening before at the concert, and took the violin from its case. She placed it on her shoulder, and distractedly grasped the bow in the vain hope that some kind interposition of Providence might enable her to play. But as she had never played a note in her life, the effect was most disastrous. The moment she laid her bow on the strings the instrument uttered the usual screech which it does in the hands of beginners. And after a few strokes of helpless imbecility, Isabelle found her notes drowned in the uproarious merriment of the court. Lords and ladies, the king himself, were all tumultuously laughing. For awhile the merriment covered her confusion.

But at last, when the mirth had somewhat spent itself, the king, knitting his brows, said, "This joke, excellent though it be, passes a joke, however, when you reflect, my lords and ladies, that I have to pay for it. Here is an idle, good-for-nothing fellow, wearing the uniform of my 'Twenty-four Violins,' taking the pay, and yet unable to play a note of music, This must be seen into. Bring the conductor, Palliser, here at once," he added, turning to one of his equerries, "and we will inquire into the matter. In the meantime, good friend," he continued, laughing, "you can go on with your concert."

Poor Isabelle was about to saw the air once more, though she determined within herself that she would rather draw the back of her bow over the strings than elicit such notes as she had been doing, when the Duc de Richelieu skipped up to her right hand, and gallantly offering to take the violin from her, begged the bow next, and turning to the company, exclaimed, "Will your Majesty allow me to create a reputation for myself in music by demonstrating that I can play the fiddle better than one of your 'Twenty-four Violins?'"

So saying he put the instrument to his shoulder, and sweeping the bow across the strings was about to draw it back the other way again, when the tip of the bow struck against Isabelle's powdered wig, knocking it, along with her velvet hat, off her head. The wig fell to the ground, and a shower of golden hair followed after it, wrapping the girl in a nimbus of gold from head to foot. "Your Majesty," said the Duc de Richelieu, bowing from one to the other with mock politeness, 'The Twenty-fifth Violin!'"

The surprise of the king was mingled with indignation at this unexpected spectacle. He was angry that he should have been thus imposed upon and made ridiculous, moreover, before the whole court. Already he saw the ladies tittering around him. It was at this moment that Andrew Palliser, who had been brought by the equerry appeared on the scene, and, seeing how matters stood, fell on his knees before the monarch and attempted to speak.

But Louis would not hear him. He broke up the party in high dudgeon, ordered the girl to be taken under custody to the palace, and the old man to be confined in the guardhouse. "I will enquire into this matter," he said to the Duc de Richelieu, "and afterwards we will discuss the question as to the disposing of the lady."

It was evening before the old man was brought before the king for examination. There was no concert that evening. He and Isabelle, conducted by guards from different quarters of the palace, found themselves face to face with one another in the presence of the king and the Duc de Richelieu, who, strange to say, had selected the music pavilion of the palace for the purpose of the interrogatory. When the guards had departed, leaving them alone, the king, looking frowningly on Andrew, said, "I was going to have chided you for allowing novices to enter into the number of the 'Violins,' but this is something worse — a woman one of them. What mystery is this? Which of you can unravel it best? Let that one speak first."

"Sire," said the old man, "let me have your private ear; let my daughter be removed for a few minutes' space, and I will sufficiently inform you of much that I would fain never have spoken, but of which now I am constrained to speak." On Isabelle being led into an adjoining apartment, Andrew continued.

"You remember, sire, the Comtesse de Roche —"

"What of her?" cried the king, starting and turning pale.

"When she left your court, my liege, with her infant daughter —"

"Her daughter? — my daughter, man, as well as hers," cried the king.

"Your daughter, Sire, and her daughter, it is true. She was so distracted and confounded at the impieties of the court — Have I your permission to speak, my liege?" At a sign from the king he proceeded.

"That, strict Huguenot and Puritan as she was, she resolved never to set face in its atmosphere again, and never to let her kith and kin do so either. She bitterly repented her weakness, her fault, her crime, as she called it, and though her daughter was in truth a king's daughter, she determined that she should never know her parentage. She came to Brittany, and entrusted her little child, in her last illness, to my wife, who had been her own nurse in her early years, and who, like me, was an old retainer of her fallen family in its better days.

In her illness, nay, on her deathbed, she gave us the injunctions which I have stated, and made us swear that we would never betray the trust she reposed in us; that we would rather bring up the child as our own than divulge to it the secret of its parentage. We carried out her wishes. My wife after awhile died. I was a musician. Chance willed it that I should be appointed to your 'Twenty-four Violins,' and ultimately made their conductor. When I came here 1 brought Isabelle de Roche with me; not my daughter, my liege, but yours." The king was thunderstruck at the intelligence.

"The remainder of the adventure of this morning," continued Andrew, "the lady can reveal herself." Isabelle was brought into the room. Her conversation, her reminiscences, but confirmed the statement of her foster-father.

"Here, Duc de Richelieu," said the king at last. "Let the 'Twenty-four Violins' be summoned to the pavilion at once, let the candles be lighted in their thousands, let the audience assemble, let Andrew Palliser wield the bow, and out of the 'Twenty-four Violins' my newly-found daughter shall select the one to whom her heart is already pledged, for that there is a preference she has already informed me. Although his rank does not by any means equal hers, yet he shall be ennobled by his marriage to the same grade as herself. I commend you, Andrew, for your conduct all through. I commend the 'Violins' for their prudence and thorough integrity and honour throughout the transaction, and after the concert is over this evening, I shall do myself the pleasure of proposing a toast at the supper that follows. It will be 'Isabelle de Roche and the Twenty-four Violins!'"

THE PROFESSOR'S BEST PUPIL BY C. H. PALMER

"I am unquestionably a brute," said the professor, as he slammed down the lid of the grand piano. "A brute and a coward," he repeated, walking towards the mirror. "Let me see how a brute and a coward looks." He examined his image critically for a few seconds and then turned away in disgust. "Grey hairs distinctly visible behind the ears," he said to himself; "an ingenious design for future crow's feet already traced beneath the eyes; generally speaking a long, lean, lanthorn-jawed visage. Really, my dear Philip, you are not only a brute and a coward, but, I am constrained to call you, a fool as well."

He picked up his pipe and began to fill it slowly. "Despicable wretch as I am," he continued, "I suppose I must smoke. Thank heaven, I have no more pupils to-day, and there are three good hours before the concert begins. Yes, I certainly am a fool for imagining that a pretty girl could take a fancy to a fellow like me. Unfortunately that knowledge does not prevent me from liking — no, falling in love, I may as well confess it to myself — with a pretty girl. I wonder if Margaret — Miss Stanhope, I mean — suspects what a smouldering volcano she takes music lessons from. They say women are quick to detect such things; but still, I can't think it possible. Don't I snub her, scold her, and find fault with her about nothing, just for the sake of disguising my own abominable weakness? Didn't I bring tears to her eyes the other day by saying that her playing was below the average level of a select boarding-school? That was a nice gentlemanly remark to make — a very pleasing impertinence. By Jove! I ought to be shot!"

Philip Lantwood, Professor of the Pianoforte, occasional soloist at high-class concerts, and a composer of some little note, was indeed badly hit. Up to the age of thirty-two he had lived a contented bachelor, devoted to his art, and careless of womankind. Margaret Stanhope had remedied that defect in his experience. During the two months she had been his pupil he had taught her a great deal about the pianoforte, and she had unconsciously instructed him in the art of love. Unconsciously but effectively; for Lantwood was now in the throes of as tormenting a passion as ever filled the breast of a guileless musician. He had thought seriously of finding some excuse for discontinuing the series of lessons he was giving her, but besides the difficulty of inventing a reasonable pretext, he could not bring himself to dispense with the gleams of sunshine which Miss Stanhope brought into his somewhat colourless life every Tuesday and Thursday morning.

Time dragged horribly with Lantwood during the intervals between these visits, but nevertheless the clock went round with him as with everybody else, and in due course brought another Tuesday morning along with it. It was a day in early June; the sunshine flooded the professor's pleasant room, while outside, the trees in the park wagged their green tops to the brisk wind.

Lantwood sat waiting and occasionally glancing at the clock on the mantelpiece. He was guiltily conscious of having dressed with unusual care that morning. His mood was irritable and nervous, but with an intense underlying feeling of pleasurable anticipation. Presently a faint flush rose to his cheek, he listened intently; he could detect the click-click of Margaret Stanhope's heels on the pavement among a thousand. He knew well the light rustle of her dress as she tripped up the steps, and his heart always fluttered in unison with it. The rather determined rat-tat which her little gloved hand performed with the knocker was also familiar to him. In another moment the young lady herself was ushered in by the servant.

It must be confessed that there was some little excuse for the professor. Margaret Stanhope was as fair and fresh a girl as you would find within a mile of Regent's Park, which is saying a good deal. She was tall, of course — most nice girls are tall nowadays — with a svelte yet graceful figure, dark naturally curling hair, blue eyes, half demure half mischievous, an enchanting smile, a determined chin and an admirable complexion. She was clad, too, in an exquisite dress of white and yellow, and altogether formed a vision of beauty that fairly dazzled the professor, and made him think for a moment that the goddess of spring had come to take pianoforte lessons from him.

Margaret, needless to say, immediately noted the effect she had produced, and her eyes sparkled. She dropped Lantwood a little mockery of a curtsey. "Good morning, Professor" she said. "Delicious weather, is it not?"

The professor had made his face as impassive as that of an Egyptian Sphinx, but his fingers trembled as he shook hands, and that also was not unobserved, "You are a full quarter of an hour late, Miss Stanhope," he grumbled. "I have often tried to impress upon you the necessity of being punctual."

"You have, Professor. How do you like my new dress?"

"Pshaw! You have not come here to get my opinion about millinery. What music have you brought with you?"

"Chopin, Rubinstein, and my dear Paderewski," said the young lady, depositing her case on the table.

The professor frowned. "I am afraid that that is not the kind of music I can recommend you to study just now. With your permission we will devote the morning to Bach."

"But I detest Bach — oh, I beg pardon; I mean that I am not able to appreciate him as he deserves."

"My dear Miss Stanhope, at the present stage of your musical education, Bach is what you require. He will give you precision, order, method, above all a sense of artistic self-restraint. You want all these things. I am afraid I must insist upon Bach."

"Oh, very well. But I trust you are not going to take me all through the forty-eight preludes and fugues, for I have a conviction that I should not survive the attempt."

Lantwood smiled grimly but said nothing, He opened a volume of music and placed it on the reading desk of the piano. "Please sit down and play this fugue, Miss Stanhope. Play it smoothly and evenly, not too fast and not too slow, and pay particular attention to the fingering."

The young lady drew off her gloves very deliberately, seated herself on the music-stool, and rubbed her slim white hands over each other as a kind of preliminary canter. The professor had seated himself a little distance away, endeavouring to assume that air of bored attention which is the proper thing when listening to a pupil.

"I am sure you will never be able to check my fingering from there," said Margaret, audaciously. Poor Lantwood felt the logical force of this remark, and drew his chair closer to the piano. In a kind of half trance he watched the girl's delicate fingers as they moved deftly through the opening bars of the fugue. He glanced at her face, and noted that though her eyes were following the score with conscientious solemnity a faint smile hovered round her lips. He sighed involuntarily, and at the same instant the player's fingers stumbled in the bass. She stopped with a light laugh.

"Horrible, wasn't it, Professor? But I always come a cropper over that passage. I believe Bach meant it for a. trap, he's quite capable of such a thing."

"Please play it over again, but use the third finger instead of the second."

The young lady looked at him slyly. "I know what you were thinking of when I made that slip."

"Heaven help me if she did," thought Lantwood to himself; but aloud he only said, "Kindly play the passage over again."

"You were thinking that you would like very much to rap my knuckles."

The professor shook his head. "I am afraid you don't take music seriously enough, Miss Stanhope."

"On the contrary, I find Bach extremely serious. But perhaps you will play that passage over and show me exactly how it should be fingered?" She rose as she spoke, and stood close to Lantwood as he took her place on the music-stool.

The professor was unaccountably nervous and agitated. It appeared to him that he possessed ten thumbs instead of two, and he bungled the passage shockingly.

His pupil smiled. "I am glad you find that run difficult too, Professor."

"It's not that," cried Lantwood, angrily. "It's — it's" he stammered, hesitated, and actually forgot his dignity so far as to blush. Then recovering himself a little, for the situation was fast becoming horribly embarrassing, he added, "I believe I am not very well this morning; with your permission we will make the lesson a short one."

Miss Stanhope glanced at him curiously.

"I expect it's the heat," she said, with her head on one side. "If you will sit down by the open window I will play the fugue to you right through without once making a mistake — then you will feel better."

She was as good as her word, and Lantwood, sitting by the window, felt very much as if the positions of teacher and pupil were reversed. He tried to be critical, but the effort was a dismal failure, and he felt miserably ashamed of himself. He even detected in his pupil a disposition to argue the point, a symptom fatal to authority.

It was this, perhaps, that nerved him to make up his mind. As they were parting, he said, "This is the last of our series of lessons, Miss Stanhope, and I — I don't think it necessary to begin another. You are an excellent pupil, the best I ever had, in fact. I can teach you no more."

The young lady looked at him indignantly. "But you said I wanted finishing. I really must insist upon being finished."

"A better teacher than I am will administer the final touches."

"Nonsense! There can be only one reason — you have taken a dislike to me."

At this astounding accusation the professor nearly collapsed. "I dislike you, Miss Stanhope?" he stammered. "I who would — ." He said no more, fearing to say too much, and stopped short, a picture of embarrassment.

"Then you absolutely decline to give me any more lessons?"

"It would be of no use — merely wasting your time."

"And yours; I understand. Very well; there are other teachers in London. But I tell you one thing, Professor: I will never look at Bach again as long as I live."

She turned towards the door, her eyes flashing, her cheek on fire. Never had she looked more handsome, and Lantwood, the infatuated, felt he would have given a two years' engagement willingly for the mere privilege of kissing her hand. He did his best to control himself, but something of what he thought must have appeared in his face, for the indignant goddess relented, and even moved a step nearer, smiling, though there was a suspicious trace of moisture in her eyes.

"We may as well go through the formality of shaking hands," she said, "since this is to be the last occasion; and as I have been such an excellent pupil, Professor, perhaps you will do something for me."

"Anything, anything in the world!" cried Lantwood, taking the little sleek gloved hand between his long fingers; "that is anything, except teach you."

"It's only this; I have a tiny poem that I should like you to set to music."

"Nothing earthly would give me greater pleasure." The professor was evidently losing his self-control.

"Thank you so much. And now, all we have to do is to say good-bye, is it not? — that is when you have quite finished shaking hands." She could not resist this little feminine thrust. The professor flushed darkly, but did not relinquish the hand. On the contrary, greatly daring, he bent down and swept his moustache over the back of her glove.

"Good-bye, God bless you," he said. The door closed, and hope, pleasure and sunshine passed at once out of the professor's life and left him a doleful man.

Meanwhile the girl who had robbed him of these treasures tripped homeward with a light heart. "Poor Professor!" she said to herself. "Poor simple, chivalrous Professor! But I think," she added, smiling, as she caught sight of her reflection in a mirror, "that some day he will get his reward."

For a full six months Lantwood saw nothing of his best pupil, but he tasted what was to him then the Dead Sea fruit of fame. The song which Margaret Stanhope sent him had been set to music, and to music into which suffering had infused a touch of genius. It became immediately popular; it was sung at all manner of concerts, and eventually the barrel organs of the country stamped it with the final *cachet* of success. Commissions flowed in upon Lantwood, and his career as a composer was assured. For all that he was as unhappy as Endymion sighing for the moon, and had lost all desire for solid bread and butter. Morose and discontented he went to the Continent, and returned in an equally undesirable frame of mind.

Morose and discontented still, he paced along the gravel walks of Regent's Park one Tuesday morning in autumn. It afforded him some satisfaction to traverse the ground over which his pupil had passed on the way to her morning lesson. "This is about her time," he thought to himself. "This was one of her days, too. I would give all my trumpery fame for one more of those divine lessons. I wonder if she has ever looked at Bach since, or whether I shall ever get quit of my folly? Great heavens! there she is! What on earth shall I do?"

The poor professor's heart beat like a steam-piston. He swept off his hat, and stood looking bewildered and abashed in the middle of the narrow path. But in reality he was nerving himself up for a mighty resolution. "Oh, I am so glad to meet you, Professor," she cried, and certainly she looked it, "but do please put on your hat; celebrated composers ought to take care of themselves."

Philip Lantwood paid no heed to her words. Desperation had made him bold. His divinity was hedged round with wealth, beauty and position. For all that he was a man and would give himself a man's chance of happiness. She was no longer his pupil, and he could speak as a lover instead of as a professor. At any rate, he could try.

"Miss Stanhope — Margaret," he said; "my best, my dearest pupil, you have given me fame. money and position. Will you give me also something without which all these are worse than useless — yourself?"

For answer she gave him her hand and a look that made the professor dizzy with delight. In the presence of three nursery maids and two perambulators he stooped down and deliberately kissed her.

HOME, SWEET HOME BY JAMES WORKMAN

The most popular *prima donna* could hardly have created a greater sensation than Angus Galbraith's starling when it first arrived from the Old Country. Its fame spread rapidly throughout the bush, and the squatters thought nothing of undertaking a ride of thirty or forty miles for the sole purpose of seeing and hearing it. It had been sent to Angus by his sweetheart, who lived in some placid country district in England, where roses bloomed and skylarks sang, and life moved ever with the peaceful deliberation of a labourer paid by the hour.

Now, before the girl had sent the bird to her lover, far away from all who loved him in the depths of the Australian bush, she had contrived, with the expenditure of much time and patience, to teach it to whistle "Home, Sweet Home," and being gifted with a delicate ear and no small share of taste and feeling, she had taught it well. Possibly Jack was an exceptionally intelligent bird with the soul of an artist beneath his speckled plumage. In any case he whistled the pathetic little tune with a sweet and plaintive tenderness that set the heart of the least sentimental exile aching for a glimpse of his native land.

When Angus first heard it, visions of waving cornfields, of orchards and meadows, of evening walks when the air was sweet with the scent of hay and honeysuckle rose up before him, and filled his eyes with tears. He was over six feet in his stockings, with the chest and muscles of a blacksmith, a shrewd, solid, practical, beef-eating Briton, but when Jack's plaintive warbling reminded him of the dear old days of his boyhood, and the girl he had left behind him, the pipe slipped from between his fingers, he covered his face with his hands and began to cry. This exhibition of amiable weakness having become noised throughout the neighbourhood, the adjacent squatters called on Angus to investigate.

A dozen or two arrived on the same day and sat about the doorway on stumps of trees, ends of logs and empty barrels smoking their pipes and grinning sheepishly. Jack's cage was brought out and hung in the sunshine. The grins disappeared at the first glimpse of his speckled feathers shot with purple and green, the sprightly sideward poise of his head, the self-satisfied strut with which he promenaded the floor of his cage.

Many a time they had seen his fellows strutting about the dewy grass with the same inimitable air of self-satisfaction on a sunny morning in the green fields on the other side of the world. But when, after a few sidelong glances at his audience, he opened his beak, and in pure flute-like tones, and with a feeling that Paganini might have envied, began to whistle his plaintive little song, without words, the effect was electrical.

It was pathetic and yet grotesque to the verge of absurdity to see the harsh-faced, long-bearded, grimily clad miners snivelling at the sound of a tune so stale and commonplace under ordinary circumstances that the very barrel-organs have ceased to play it.

"Home, home, sweet, sweet home!
There's no place like home,
There's no-o place like home."

Jack put his whole soul into it, and if ever a bird possessed the soul of an artist it was Jack. His little frame quivered with emotion, and the simple melody grew eloquent of all the pleasure and the pain, the tears and laughter, the sad, sweet pathos of "the days that are no more." Pipes went out, beer bottles and whisky flasks stood neglected and forgotten. Heaven alone knows what queer jumble of old memories was aroused in each of his auditors by the bird's melodious pipings. Home must originally have had few attractions for many of them, and yet the once familiar strains brought the tears to their eyes in spite of their almost farcical efforts to appear indifferent.

There was no applause at the close of the performance, but a broken-nosed miner from Ballarat, the most disreputable looking individual present, struck the keynote of the situation. From some inner recess of his dilapidated clothing he drew out a grimy little bag, containing several ounces of gold-dust, the result of many a weary day's digging and washing.

"If that lot's for sale," said he, "there's my pile, and if it isn't good enough name your own figure and I'll hand over the balance in a week."

"Hold on a bit, mate," interposed a squatter, pulling out a roll of greasy notes, "1 mean to take a hand in this game. I can double your bid anyway."

"Don't excite yourselves," exclaimed a third, lugging out a cheque book. "If that bird's on the market it's mine. What's your figure, Galbraith?"

In short, Jack might have been sold at a price which, reluctant to hazard my credit for veracity, I decline to mention. But Angus remained firm, waving aside the most tempting offers with placid indifference. The bird was a present from his sweetheart. It was she who had taught it to whistle that particular tune to cheer him in exile, to remind him of a happy past, to comfort him with the hope of a still happier future. He wouldn't have sold that living proof of her love and constancy for twenty times its weight in gold.

Eventually the audience dispersed, and spread Jack's fame throughout the bush. Others followed their example until his name had become a household word in every lonely hut upon the outskirts of the colony. His fame soared higher and higher until it reached its zenith, and then — alas for the transitory nature of all things mortal! — it began to decline.

The men found that the simple little melody, after a second or third hearing, failed to move them as it had done at first, and even grew monotonous. They became restless and inattentive, joked and laughed, and drank and puffed away at their pipes. Jack, like most artists, was morbidly sensitive, and that kind of thing took the heart out of him. He no longer did himself justice. At times he faltered and half stopped. At other times he seemed to fight against his depression, and whistled more loudly and aggressively than ever; but the delicate light and shade, the sweet and plaintive pathos of his earlier manner had almost entirely disappeared. He was no longer a feathered Patti or Sims Reeves, but a commonplace starling whistling a tune he might have caught up from any strong-lunged errand boy. How could it be otherwise? What bird with the soul of an artist could do justice to himself amid hoarse laughter, the clink of glasses, the odour of bad tobacco?

Yet he might have borne up against all this if Angus had remained faithful to him; but even Angus at length grew weary of the ceaseless repetition of poor Jack's one and only tune. He [Angus] was thoroughly disgusted with himself, but he found it impossible to overcome his ever increasing sense of irritation. The monotony of the thing exasperated him. Yet he was pained and humiliated by this unexpected change of feeling. He had been so deeply touched, so tearfully grateful at first. It was such a pretty, such a romantic idea to teach the bird that sweet little melody, and send it like a living epistle to the other side of the world to cheer him in his loneliness, to speak to him of love and hope, and the kind hearts that were aching for him beyond the sea. And Katie had written to him in a flutter of delight at the success of her pretty scheme, to say she hoped that whenever he heard Jack whistling about "the lowly thatched cottage," and so on, he would think of her, and of the dear, dear past, and of the happy future when the long weary waiting would be over, and only death could ever part them again.

Remembering these things it seemed so abominably disloyal and thankless and ungrateful to find Jack's reiteration of his solitary tune grow ever more and more exasperating that he struggled desperately to delude himself into the belief that the performance gave him as much pleasure as before.

Finding the struggle a hopeless one he tried, at first with a kind of guilty feeling and a certain stealthiness, but afterwards more boldly, to teach the poor bird an additional tune or two. But Jack seemed puzzled and dispirited. He appeared to lose his enthusiasm after such a painful proof of the instability of artistic fame. He tried his best. He would whistle a few bars with an air of profound dejection, but invariably end by drifting into the tune which he evidently considered it was his duty to repeat through good report and ill.

Touched at first by the little creature's fidelity to the lesson his mistress had taught him with so much loving patience, Angus at length lost his temper, and the first notes of "Home, Sweet Home!" became the signal for a volley of missiles which clattering about Jack's cage eventually reduced him to silence. He was never the same bird again. His appetite failed, his feathers began to lose their gloss, and he had a ragged, careworn aspect that touched Angus to the quick. It had taken weeks to silence him, and yet the remorseful Angus tried to induce him to whistle his favourite ditty once more. Jack refused. No artist with any sense of self-respect could have done otherwise, and I shall always think more highly of Jack for the dignity with which he bore himself in the face of his unmerited misfortunes.

Yet it was written that Jack should emerge once more from the cloud in which he was enveloped; that he should taste the sweets of triumph once again before the curtain fell upon his brief yet glorious career.

It came about in this way. Angus had just returned from a long ride during which he had disposed of a large number of sheep to some newly arrived settlers on very advantageous terms. He had made an excellent dinner, cooked by himself, of fried eggs and bacon, cold beef, tea and damper [Australian type of bread]. He was in high good humour and smiled and chuckled to himself as he smoked an after-dinner pipe on a bench outside his hut. He saw clearly that if his affairs continued to prosper he would have a home prepared for Katie a full year before he had anticipated even in his most sanguine moods.

Thinking of Katie reminded him of Jack, and with a twinge of remorse he brought out the cage and hung it in the sunshine. Jack had been ailing for some time, and with his dull eye and drooping feathers was sadly changed from the glossy, bustling, self-confident bird of earlier days. Angus whistled a few bars of "Home, Sweet Home!" but Jack merely listened with an air of melancholy resignation and made no response.

Then Angus sat down again on the bench and leaned his back against the wall of the hut, and as the blue smoke curled upward from his pipe indulged in pleasant day dreams and built castles in the air. Presently the pipe went out, his arms slipped down, his head drooped forward on his chest, and he sank into a sweet deep sleep.

Half an hour later he awoke with a smile, caused by a pleasant dream, still lingering on his lips. But when his eyes were fully opened his tranquilly pulsing heart gave a wild leap of terror, and he sat staring before him pale and speechless, realising at a glance that he was face to face with death. Opposite to him stood a group of men. Their clothes were soiled and torn, the bare flesh peeped through the gaping seams in their boots; long matted hair hung in straggling locks about their gaunt weather beaten faces and mingled with their untrimmed beards. Each carried a rifle, and wore a pistol and bowie-knife in his belt.

A few paces in front of the group stood a tall, well-built young fellow, a singular contrast in every respect to the rest. His clothing, though soiled and threadbare, was superior in cut and material, and had evidently been lately repaired. Even his boots were polished, and his hair, beard and moustache trimmed with scrupulous care. His rifle was at his shoulder, and an evil smile lit up his bronzed, handsome face. One glimpse of the black muzzle and the cruel face beyond told Angus that his doom was sealed.

The man was known as Dandy Jim, the most cold-blooded and merciless desperado in Australia. He was the leader of a gang of bushrangers, and had distinguished himself by a long series of the most atrocious crimes. Six months before, as he was becoming the terror of the neighbourhood, some of the more courageous squatters, including Angus, had joined with the police to hunt him down. He had eventually been captured, and the troopers who took him were led to his hiding place by Angus. A week later, on the road to Melbourne, he escaped, and it was commonly reported that he had solemnly sworn to shoot Angus on sight whenever he met him. Jim was never known to forget or to forgive an injury, and the moment he recognised him Angus knew that his last hour had come.

When Jim, whose ancestor had fought at Hastings, and who had received his education — such as it was — at Eton and Oxford, saw that Angus had recognised him, he lowered his rifle and bowed with mock politeness. “We have had the pleasure of meeting before, Mr. Galbraith,” he said, still smiling, and Jim’s smile, to those who knew him, was always a danger signal. “It pains me to add, and I am sure you will regret the fact as much as I, that it is more than likely to be our last.”

Angus knew that it would be worse than useless to plead for mercy. He knew that this smiling, mild-voiced, good-looking young fellow had a heart of flint, and that in his greed of gold or vengeance he had never spared man, woman or child. It was equally useless to attempt any resistance. His empty gun, which he had discharged immediately after his return at a passing pigeon, stood against the wall beside him, utterly useless though within reach of his hand. The nearest hut was at least five miles away; Peter, his shepherd, was out in the bush looking after the sheep. There was no hope of rescue. The end had come.

It was a terrible fate to die in the prime of life, just at the very moment when hope had made existence doubly sweet to him. The wild throbbing of his heart turned him faint, his lips trembled, there was a mist before his eyes, yet he forced himself to speak calmly.

“I am engaged to a girl in England; can you spare me five minutes to write to her?”

The bushranger's steel grey eyes twinkled with malignant pleasure. "I should have been delighted to oblige you," he rejoined in the same tone of polite mockery; "but, unfortunately, the mistaken enthusiasm of your friends the police makes it impossible for us to prolong this delightful interview. They are so anxious to enjoy the pleasure of our society that we expect them here every moment. Under the circumstances I deeply regret to say that I am obliged to answer your touching request in the negative."

Angus glanced from one grinning face to another, closed his eyes, and leaned back against the wall. "If you have a grain of compassion left in you " he said, quietly, "you will put me out of my misery at once."

The bushranger brought his rifle to his shoulder and took aim in a cool, business-like manner, while his companions gazed curiously at the motionless figure on the bench. Apart from the wild-looking group in the background it was such a quiet, peaceful scene — the little hut bathed in the afternoon sunshine, the blue smoke curling up from the chimney, Jack toying with the seeds in his cage, Angus apparently asleep on the bench — it was almost impossible to associate it with the thought of crime and bloodshed. It was so still that the tapping of Jack's beak and the murmur of the warm breeze through the trees were distinctly audible.

The long barrel and the figure behind it became motionless. The trigger moved. In another moment there would have been a flash, a gasp, and for Angus the end of all things, when, moved by some strange impulse, prompted by instinct, or reason, or caprice, or in obedience to the pitying interposition of a higher power, Jack turned from his scattered seeds and began to whistle as sweetly, as tenderly, as melodiously as ever:

"Home, home, sweet, sweet home!
There's no place like home,
There's no-o place like home."

In the almost unnatural silence his voice rang out clear and pure as the notes of a silver flute, and never yet had he infused into the homely melody such a depth of winning pathos. Perhaps weak and sickly, an exile in a foreign land, lonely and unappreciated, he was thinking of his own home, the smooth green fields, the reed fringed brooks, the sweet-breathed cows, the warm nest under the eaves of the hay-scented barn.

Perhaps in the wild figures before him he recognised an unsophisticated audience and longed to see if his cunning had deserted him, if he could touch men's hearts no more. Who knows? He looked up at the blue sky where in the old days he had seen the skylarks singing and soaring out of sight; he forgot the yawns, the weary faces, the coarse laughter of his bored audiences, and he sang with a pathetic, heart-breaking tenderness that words fail me to describe.

The one sufficient proof of the genius of this little feathered artist — which you may fancy I am inclined to overrate — lies in the fact that the artless, hackneyed melody, as rendered by him, actually touched the hearts of that gang of callous ruffians, the elect of the scum of Victoria. Don't suppose for a moment that it produced anything like genuine penitence for their misdeeds, or aroused any desire to save Angus's life. A choir of angels could hardly have done that. But it did touch them, it did bring back memories of innocent joys and sorrows; memories of kind, dead faces, of love wasted, hopes unfulfilled, eyes grown dim with grief; and strange and marvellous it was to see the tears trickling down the cheeks of these grizzled scoundrels at the thought of the homes into which they had probably brought nothing but shame and misery.

Jim's finger slipped from the trigger, the rifle sank downward; his mind went straying into the past, and his cold eyes grew a trifle misty. Jack stopped as abruptly as he had commenced, and began to peck at his seeds again. There was a moment or two of absolute silence. Then one of the oldest of the gang spoke; "Look here, captain," he said, "we can spare five minutes. Let the lad scribble a piece to his girl if he's that way inclined. You can settle up with him just as well afterwards."

"Hear, hear! that's so!" chorused the rest. Jim hesitated, glanced at the faces round him with a kind of incredulous sneer, and then lowered his rifle.

"You hear, Galbraith," he said; "pass your word not to show fight or to make any attempt to escape, and the five minutes are yours. Do you promise?"

"Yes," replied Angus, who felt like one in a dream, "I promise."

He got up and went inside the hut. He sat down before his desk, took out a sheet of paper, and dipped his pen in the ink. Presently he put the pen down and buried his face in his hands. He found it impossible to think clearly — to frame anything like a coherent sentence. What phrases could he select to describe the situation that would not break the kind heart that had loved him so faithfully through long years of absence and disappointment. The men outside were clustering round Jack's cage trying vainly to induce him to give an encore. He could hear their tuneless whistling, the murmur of their hoarse voices, and found that instead of trying to select suitable phraseology, he was wondering whether they would succeed in persuading Jack to sing again.

Jim put his head through the open doorway. "Half-time! If you mean to write that letter you must be quick about it." He disappeared, and Angus again took up the pen.

It was no use. Words escaped his memory; the sentences he coined were a mere jumble, disconnected, inconsequent. Jack remained obstinately silent. They would never induce him to sing again. Angus was sure of it.

Suddenly the murmur of voices ceased, and was succeeded by a deathly stillness. A moment later came the report of a rifle, and the sharp swish of a bullet overhead, followed by a tempest of oaths and cries, the crash of a dozen rifles, and the trampling of flying feet.

Angus bounded to the door and looked out. A body of mounted police headed by Peter, the shepherd, were galloping at full speed towards the hut. The bushrangers had disappeared. They had contrived to place the hut between themselves and their pursuers, and having left their horses a few yards away in charge of one of the gang they managed to get clear away. The police dashed after them, but Peter dismounted and shook Angus warmly by the hand.

"Thank God we got here in time, sir!" he said. "I was afraid it would be all over. I was on the hill over there, and saw the scoundrels making for the hut, and the police coming along at a jog-trot more than a mile away. I thought the best thing I could do would be to gallop along and hurry them up."

"I owe you my life," said Angus. In another minute I should have been a dead man. If it hadn't been for you and Jack — why, where is Jack? What's become of his cage?"

"It's there on the ground, sir, smashed to atoms. I saw one of those fellows — he seemed to be the captain as far as I could make out — twist round on his heel, just as he was bolting, take careful aim, and let fly at it. It was a devilish thing to do. Why should he want to kill a poor, little, harmless bird like Jack? I couldn't understand it."

Angus understood. He knew that Jack — the innocent cause of his escape — had received the bullet intended for himself, and he knelt down beside the poor little heap of feathers with a lump in his throat and a mist before his eyes. Jack was still alive. The bullet had shattered both his legs, and his once glossy plumage was wet with blood, but he raised his head feebly as Angus knelt beside him.

"Poor little Jack!" said Angus; "poor little chap! I've been a brute, Jack, a regular brute. Don't die, old fellow, and I'll make it up to you. I will indeed. You shall sing all day, Jack — every day, and I'll write to Katie and tell her you saved my life, and then —"

But it was too late. Jack's little hour upon the stage was over. He had made positively his last appearance. The bright eyes grew dim, a spasmodic shiver ruffled the little pile of mangled feathers, and the curtain fell.

MASTER HALBERSTADT'S PIANO BY J. F. Rowbotham

Master Halberstadt was a harpsichord maker in Ratisbon, and the time of our story was when pianos were almost unknown in Europe. There were perhaps half a dozen of them in all. They were looked upon as nothing more than a pretty experiment, very much as the Janko piano is at present. The great harpsichord makers tried apprehensively the manufacture of one piano, and when it was made, placed it in their wareroom as a curiosity and nothing more.

Master Halberstadt was one of these. He made a piano or two in addition to his harpsichords, but, unlike other makers, he did not stop there, but went on manufacturing the newer instruments in his leisure hours, and as an amusement, with so much success that all the pianos — and there were not many of them — in that part of Germany came from the workshop of Master Halberstadt.

At last he made his *chef d'oeuvre* [masterpiece] — a piano, as he said, fit for princes to play. This expression is a very misleading one surely, for princes would probably play such a piano very badly — not half so well as Master Halberstadt himself, though up to the time of his making that splendid instrument he had never been credited with the power of playing an instrument at all. He made instruments, as he said, but did not play them.

But this piano! The triumph of his art! the trophy of all his past workmanship! Since he had begun in a serious way the manufacture of pianos, he had gradually dismissed most of his workmen and carried on the trade chiefly by himself; for, as he well said, the pianos were so high priced, and paid him so well for their manufacture, that he liked to take his time over them, to ponder over the selection of the wood, to work every hammer, every key himself, even cutting the ivory which was to veneer it, and taking marvellous delight in shaping the dainty fretwork or painting the sky-blue landscapes which were to adorn the panels.

And now at last he had learnt to play this wonderful piano of his, not only to make it; and often of an evening, when all was still, the notes of "The Seraphin [Angel]," for so it was called, might be heard stealing out through his casement into the garden, and through the garden into the quiet road beyond. For it was in the suburbs of Ratisbon that Master Halberstadt lived, and outside his garden ran a road where lovers used to walk of evenings, or a few tranquil promenaders; and often and often they paused entranced to listen to the beautiful tones of the Seraphin floating on their ear.

The case of this piano was of white satin-wood, tricked here and there with gold; the legs were of the same white wood and beautifully turned, being poised on silver feet; the shape and contour of the frame was most symmetrical.

Master Halberstadt must have drawn many designs before he attained such beautiful sweeps of lines, such lovely curves. The panels surrounding the keyboard were illuminated with beautiful pictures. There was the landscape of the gardens of the Hesperides, with the golden apples hanging on the trees. There was a landscape of the bay of Corinth, with the great white marble pillars standing out from the verdure, and the blue sky beaming above. Then there were other pictures, and other devices.

But all this was nothing to the tone of the piano itself, which was pure, liquid, sweet and mellow. Although it possessed all the elements of loudness, and could when required peal out like a trumpet, there was no trace of harshness about it. Even a bad player could scarcely have awakened the "wood" in the tone; and certainly, under the hands of Master Halberstadt there was no vestige of woodenness or hardness or grating tone, or aught of that nature, but all was seraphic sweetness and celestial beauty. Such tone, such heavenly swells of sweet sound, never had pealed from a piano as those which under Master Halberstadt's cunning touch came swelling from his Seraphin.

"Why, Master Halberstadt," his neighbours would say, and among others his own workmen, who were as much surprised as any one, "how is it you have suddenly taken to playing the piano in your old age? You never used to play a note on any of your instruments, though you made many."

"This instrument of mine, my Seraphin, my *chef d'oeuvre*," Master Halberstadt would reply, "has inspired me so potently that I have attained the faculty of execution quite unexpectedly. I never knew I had it in me. But, lo! there it is, and, as you have often heard, it comes out." He was a brooding, solitary old man, and as a rule cared to talk about nothing else except his pianos and his son Gustav. The former were his great occupation, the latter his great grief.

"Twas a sad day for poor old Master Halberstadt," said his neighbours commiseratively, "when Gustav fell into such disgrace with the Elector. Such a promising young man! so high in the army!"

"A colonel of his regiment, and about to be ennobled, was it not so?" put in others.

"Yes; and of course it does not do to talk about it, but they say that the cause of his disgrace was through one of the young princesses falling in love with him, or he with one of the young princesses —"

"And that he was banished from the kingdom, and hardly escaped with his life," put in a voice behind them. And, turning round, the neighbours saw old Master Halberstadt, who had approached and overheard this conversation unobserved.

"Alack! my friends," continued the old man, "do not talk on this mournful subject. Try to forget it, as I do. I have worn my heart out with distress, and my eyes with weeping since that fatal day. Such a noble youth! — the pride of Ratisbon before he went to the Elector's court at Nuremberg, and the pride of the Elector's court when he sojourned there! So luckless a destiny! So fatal an overthrow! I would give all I have if I knew what had become of him and where he is hid from the tyrant's rage — that is to say, if he has escaped a barbarous death, which I doubt."

"What a pity, neighbour Halberstadt," said one of the neighbours, "he is not safe and sound in Ratisbon."

"Sound he might be. But safe in Ratisbon?" replied Master Halberstadt. "Why, he would be in as great danger here as in the Elector's court itself. Is not Ratisbon as much in the Elector's dominions as the capital is?"

"There is one thing," hazarded a third speaker, "if your son had remained in Ratisbon and stuck to his profession instead of going soldiering, he might be delighting our ears with his playing now instead of skulking the earth like a fugitive."

"Ah, he was a rare player," remarked Master Halberstadt, meditatively. "The finest player of his day for a boy. Such a player we shall never hear again."

All these remarks of Master Halberstadt and his friends were strictly true except the last one. To say that such a player as Gustav Halberstadt would never be heard again in Ratisbon was certainly wrong in face of the tones of celestial beauty which came floating from the Master's windows of an evening when he played his Seraphin. And so his neighbours told him. They said that he eclipsed the performances not only of his son but of every other player in Germany. And at last — for the age was a deeply superstitious one — they suspected him of magic in his playing.

"It is no good your talking, neighbour," said Carl Schwickstein, one of his acquaintances, "and saying that you have learnt to play thus divinely of your own unaided self. Unless the spirits, or the fairies, or Asmodeus himself have a hand in the matter, we do not see how the thing could be accomplished. And so say we all."

"This is sheer nonsense, neighbour Schwickstein," replied the old Master, who did not seem at all to relish the insinuations. "You surely don't believe in Satanic agency nowadays, or fancy that a poor old man like me —"

"Believe or not," cried Carl, bluntly, "the strange thing about it is that you never play in people's presence —"

"Because their presence flusters me," replied the old piano maker.

"You always play at one special hour of the evening," remarked another acquaintance.

"And may I not choose what hour I like?"

"And finally," continued Schwickstein, "your Seraphin has been heard uttering its melodious notes in one room of the house while you have been seen at the window of another." At this last assertion old Halberstadt turned visibly pale.

"If, therefore," said Schwickstein, "the devil is not in it, how do you explain it all?"

"You must be mistaken in what you say," returned the old man. "And with respect to the beauty of the playing, it is not my playing but the piano itself which is responsible for that. It is the prince of all pianos, a noble instrument, a real Seraphin, and I would not sell it for thousands of florins."

So the matter ended; and such was a specimen of the remarks which were freely made in Ratisbon about Master Halberstadt and his wonderful piano, until at last the stories got to the Elector's ears at Nuremberg itself, who, the first time he passed through the second city of his dominions, rode up with his equerries and body-guard to the humble domicile of the old harpsichord maker, and with a double rat-tat-tat at the door demanded instantaneous admission and a sight of the wonderful piano.

"You are the father of a most iniquitous [wicked] son, Master Halberstadt," said the Elector, frowning on the old man who stood trembling before him. "But my visit has nothing to do with him, but with your piano, which I hear is the most wonderful thing in Germany. Let me look at it, that I may see if report is belied which represents it as a sumptuous piece of furniture, garnished with the most lovely pictures, embellished with admirable gold-work and what-not — all which wonders I have heard about it. Lead the way, Master Halberstadt. I will follow."

With much clinking of spurs and rattling of sabres the Elector and his *aides-de-camp* strode through the warerooms, and at last were face to face with the wonderful piano. Having examined it all over, and without expressing any wish to hear it played — for the prince was remarkably deficient in the bump of music, and often averred that he could not tell one tune from another — the Elector turned on his heel, with the order that the piano should be sent to Nuremberg as a present to the Electress, and what there was to pay should be discharged by his treasurers.

"Alas, your highness" began Master Halberstadt, "the piano was never intended for sale. I made it in my leisure hours —"

"Silence, fool," growled one of the *aides-de-camp*. "You should be only too pleased to think that the instrument is going into such good hands as those of the Electress."

"Who will admire it even if she does not play it," added another *aide-de-camp* in an undertone. And with this parting recommendation the suite of officers swept after the Elector out of Master Halberstadt's wareroom, and within a few hours afterwards the Seraphin was on its way to the Electress.

The event made, as may be imagined, no small sensation in Ratisbon, and the interest of Master Halberstadt's acquaintances was most potently excited in the prospects of the piano, and the possibility of the Master making his fortune if the instrument became the wonder of the Court as it had been of the town. And one evening as the old man stood at his garden gate discussing the matter with a group of his friends, a groom rode up in the Elector's livery with the order that Master Halberstadt himself should at once proceed to Nuremberg to give performances on the piano, as the Electress, though pleased with the exterior, could make nothing of the inside, and thought the tone very common and wooden.

"Alas, man!" said Master Halberstadt, staring at the groom, "I cannot play."

"You cannot play?" ejaculated that functionary, in astonishment.

"He is talking nonsense, groom," chorused the neighbours. "We have heard him playing that piano often. That is to say, either him, or old Nick helping him," they added, laughing.

"Come, come," said the groom, "this is no laughing matter. I have the Elector's orders. You must come to Court to-morrow and take up your abode there for good, as pianist to Her Majesty the Electress."

"Alas!" cried old Master Halberstadt, tearing his hair, "what shall I do? The whole trick will be discovered."

"Eh? eh? What is this?" cried the bystanders. "What trick? Is the piano a bad one?"

"I know not what you mean, or are talking about," exclaimed the groom, with that haughty air which is sometimes so well assumed by great men's servants. "As to the piano, I have heard it described as a very bad one, for the Electress cannot get any music out of it. But all that does not concern me or my orders. You must start for Court to-morrow, and now I bid you adieu, having performed my errand."

Although Master Halberstadt stoutly averred at first that he would never go to the tyrant's court, muttering a great deal about the trick which he had played on the Elector, and asserting that he could not make the piano utter a note, next morning when Ratisbon rose to business at seven o'clock as usual, they found Master Halberstadt's premises closed and locked, with a notice on his doors to say that he had gone to Nuremberg, and work would not be resumed till his return.

On his arrival at Court he was requested first and foremost to play to the Electress, who professed herself charmed with what she heard. "What a pity it is," remarked her majesty, "that Master Halberstadt is the father of such a fearful son — Otherwise he might develop into a court favourite."

Next he was deputed to play to the young princesses and their governante, and to these, too, he gave unending satisfaction. And lastly, at her express request, he was permitted to play to the Princess Charlotte.

Now Princess Charlotte was the eldest of the princesses, being nineteen or twenty years of age, and it was this young lady who had condescended to fall in love with young Gustav Halberstadt, the colonel of the Elector's cuirassiers, who was at the time a great favourite at Court, and was on the point of being ennobled when the Elector was made aware of his love affair with the princess, in consequence of which the poor youth was banished, as we said, from the Elector's dominions, and forbidden ever to enter them on pain of death.

This being the case with Princess Charlotte, it became a question for her parents to consider how far they ought to accede to her wish to hear Master Halberstadt's wonderful piano. "It is as sure as anything to bring back to her the whole affair of that unfortunate business about that wretched Gustav Halberstadt," remarked the Elector, "which, as far as I can see, she has now entirely forgotten."

"She has not forgotten it yet, and it may possibly cure her," rejoined the Electress, — "cure her of her infatuation about the son, to see the old father, a mere peddling musician, come in and play the piano like the hired servant that he is. The difference, my dear, between the dashing young colonel and the tottering old pianist —"

"I quite see it," replied the Elector.

"It would be a pity to baulk her inclination in any way," continued the Electress, "if we thought that by humouring her we might wean her from her infatuation."

"There is no danger of the old man carrying a message, for instance, from the young man —"

"Alas, Elector! the old man does not know where the young one is. He told me so himself, and I have heard the same from Ratisbon. When you by your hasty and ill-considered action drove Charlotte's unfortunate lover with disgrace from Court, instead of waiting, as I begged you to do —"

"My dear! My dear!" interposed the Elector.

"You took the very step to fan a mere passing fancy into an abiding flame — to imprint the image of young Halberstadt on the girl's heart for ever. I know myself how I, when I was in love with the Crown Prince of Saxony —"

"Sophia!" exclaimed the Elector, sternly, "you forget yourself."

"I forgot myself then, certainly," replied the Electress, "but I remember myself at present." And to cut matters short, the result of the dialogue between the two royal personages was to consent to Master Halberstadt playing before the Princess Charlotte, "in order," as the Electress put it, "not to indulge a too great severity in the treatment of the princess, but to cure her of her infatuation by kindness."

The Princess Charlotte, who was passionately fond of music, had heard, like the rest of the Court, of the wonders of Master Halberstadt's piano, and looked forward with a more than special interest to hearing it played, owing to the fact that its player was her beloved Gustav's father. The first moment she heard that the privilege was to be conceded her she ventured to indulge the anticipation that perhaps a note, or at any rate a message, might be delivered to her by the old pianist from his son, to tell her at least that he was alive and well. But on more mature thoughts she abandoned that idea entirely. She had heard no tidings of Gustav from any source since he had to fly the Court and the country, and she had been informed by her mother that the old man was in complete ignorance of his son's whereabouts, and could do nothing but shake his head and sigh at the mention of his name. It was therefore with mixed feelings that Princess Charlotte prepared herself to listen to Master Halberstadt's playing; and though she could not deny that it might contribute to her pleasure, she confessed to herself that it could in reality only heighten her despair.

The old man was led tottering into the room where the princess sat.

"Do not be afraid, Master Halberstadt," said the princess, graciously. "I was not one of those who harmed your son."

"Your Gracious Highness," replied the old man, drawing his form erect, "all the world should have treated him as you did, for he was an enemy of no one, and the faithful servant of the Elector." The voice in which Master Halberstadt said these words seemed to make a deep impression on the princess.

"How like your voice is," she said, "to that of your son!"

"It pleases your Highness to say so," replied the old man confusedly, making his way to the piano and sitting down on the stool before it. The governante was there, and one or two of the young princesses. The next instant Master Halberstadt commenced to play.

What divine melody at once poured forth from the enchanted piano! What sweeps of tone gushed through the room and fell on the ravished ears of the Princess Charlotte, who sat entranced at the beauty of the music! In cascades of rippling notes, varied with noble harmonies and rich combinations of rare tones, the extemporisation and performance proceeded. The princess felt her eyes fill with tears at the thought of her lost lover, whose image, whose reminiscences seemed to dwell so potently in the flood of tones which poured forth from the old man's fingers.

The performance had now gone on for a long time. The governante and the two young princesses had left the apartment. The old pianist, whose long white beard fell on his breast, whose long white hair lay on his shoulders, and who was wrapped from top to toe in a cloak or long coat of rusty black, suddenly, directly he saw that he and the princess were alone together, stopped the music, and turning round to her, said, "Charlotte, do you not know me?"

Simultaneously he raised the combination of beard and hair that almost completely eclipsed his visage, and revealed to her astonished eyes the features of Gustav Halberstadt. "Yes, it is I," he continued, for he saw that she looked dazed and stupefied upon him; "it is I who thus miraculously appear before you. When I fled from the Elector's anger I did not fly the country, as was supposed, but I took refuge with my father, Master Halberstadt, the old man who is now supposed to be playing to you. He hid me for months in his house with complete secrecy, and for me constructed this piano which has become such a marvel to the world. I played it in his house. It was my only solace while I thought of you. But when the Elector sent for my father to give an exhibition of the piano here, we were faced with a grave difficulty. My father could not play. 1 therefore undertook to disguise myself in his garb, and to come to the lion's den as if I were he. A further motive for hazarding such dangers was that I might see you, O Charlotte, my beloved!"

Before the last sentence was spoken they were locked in one another's arms. But a few moments only they remained so, being conscious of the gravity of the danger. Already footsteps were heard coming along the passage leading to the room. But when the Electress and the governante entered they found old Master Halberstadt gravely playing the piano — so softly that no wonder they lost all sense of sound as they traversed the gallery — while very close to him the princess was sitting weeping, and quite overcome, apparently, by the music.

"What a heavenly player is old Master Halberstadt!" said the Electress, half in soliloquy and half to her daughter. "I am glad, my dear, that even such an expression of emotion as tears can come from you, and that that fixed and stony melancholy which has been your besetting condition for months past has, for a while at least, passed away. Master Halberstadt's performance shall be repeated when you like, my dear, until you are thoroughly well."

The princess murmured out her thanks to her mother, and so the interview for that day ended. Several more interviews there were, and at each Gustav and the princess found means to exchange communications, and to form a plan by which, if their dearest hopes might never be crowned, Gustav at least might receive pardon and be reinstated in the favour of the Elector. It was this: A grand concert was to take place in a few days, at which the Elector of Saxony, the Elector of Cologne, and some other of the grandees of Germany were to be present, and at which, by the express desire of all the visitors, Master Halberstadt was to play on his wonderful piano.

"It is for you to choose your time," said the princess to Gustav, "and to judge the effect you make. If you can by any chance see your way to it, ask a boon of the Elector, my father, and when he enquires what it is, say 'The pardon and the life of my son, Gustav.' He will scarcely deny you, if you play your cards well, and also," added the princess, "if you play the piano well; for on your playing and the effect it produces the whole success of the plan must rest."

The grand concert came on in due course. In the great hall of the palace of Nuremberg there was a glittering display of all that was noble and all that was beautiful in the three electorates of Cologne, Saxony, and the Palatinate. On three great thrones fronting the stage sat the three Electors, with their crowns on, side by side, and round them was a bevy of Court ladies and courtiers. On the platform was Master Halberstadt's wonderful piano, attracting perhaps more attention than the Electors themselves and all their Court. The entire concert, it appeared, in deference to the wishes of the principal guests, was to consist of Master Halberstadt's performances, relieved only by a single singer to give the old man rest between the pieces. The singer was the Princess Charlotte, who had often performed this role at private concerts at the palace; and after her months of melancholy and retirement, once more, to the joy of her parents, had given this promise of returning brightness in consenting to sing some of her father's favourite songs at the Court concert.

At last, after much delay, owing to the punctilious ceremonies of German courts, the concert commenced. The Princess Charlotte's singing was beautiful, certainly, but what was Master Halberstadt's playing? "Marvellous!" "Miraculous!" "Supernatural!" "Such beauty of tone — such wonders of execution!" These were but a specimen of the remarks which passed about the hall.

With easy and admirable style the old pianist poured forth his prodigies of execution — his graceful runs — his lightning cadenzas — his crisp staccatos — his wondrous trills and shakes illimitable. But above all, what he seemed to excel in was the power to touch the heart with his music. For over and above his prodigies of technique, the melody of the music went on singing like some sweet voice all through, and found its way unerringly to the heart. Emotion was rife in the hall as the great pianist played — played on that wonderful instrument so beautiful to look at, so symmetrical to admire, such a treasury of lovely sound. Emotion was rife — people held their breath — many ladies were in tears.

At last the Elector started from his throne, and to the amazement of all the company, "Stop, old man," he cried. "I have heard you too long without offering you some princely recompense for your performance. Ask me for any boon and I will grant it you."

"Your Royal Highness," faltered the old man, "I should not dare to ask the boon which I have on my lips, unless I were sure I should have your pardon if I asked amiss."

"You have the pardon, and you have the boon," replied the Elector. "Name it."

"The life and the pardon of my son Gustav," replied Master Halberstadt.

"Granted!" rejoined the Elector, muttering under his breath, "I expected as much."

Then aloud he said, "I expected as much, Master Halberstadt, and I was prepared to give it." At these words tumultuous applause shook the hall.

"I bear no rancour," exclaimed the Elector, "against the young man. I believe him to be a gallant soldier, and I wish he were here in this scene of gaiety to share your triumph."

"He is here, your Royal Highness," exclaimed the *ci-devant* [former] Master Halberstadt, divesting himself of his false trappings and standing in the full uniform of colonel of the royal guards before the Elector. "He is here, ready to lay down his life in your Highness's service."

This unexpected spectacle produced the greatest sensation in the hall, and while some whispered that Gustav's action had been too bold, others affirmed that its originality and unexpectedness would be the young man's salvation. And so it proved. In the sudden transformation that had occurred in young Halberstadt he was like Faust abruptly metamorphosed to youth from age. The old and faded garb and trappings of the greybeard lay on the ground, and in his stead there stood a youthful soldier in the first flush of manhood, of undeniable personal beauty, and with his breast covered with medals and decorations.

The Elector was struck speechless at the sight, and the Electress shared his feelings. But her eyes wandered from the Faust in the centre of the platform to the Marguerite at the side of it — that is to say, from young Halberstadt, in all the flush of his handsome youth, to the Princess Charlotte, who with her long yellow hair and downcast looks sat near him — the very representative of Gretchen. These two were the solitary occupants of the platform.

The Elector began confusedly to assure the young colonel that his pardon was granted. But the Electress, as if acting under some sudden generous impulse, and feeling that her husband's words were not sufficient for the occasion, ascended the steps of the dais, and putting her arm round Charlotte, who sat sobbing on a chair, beckoned the young officer to approach.

"A pardon," she said, in a loud clear voice which rang through the hall, "is not sufficient without a reconciliation. The Elector in his clemency has pardoned the bravest soldier of his guard. This is how I show that we are reconciled." And she joined the hands of the Princess Charlotte and Gustav Halberstadt.

Tumultuous applause rent the hall — everybody present being familiar with the whole circumstances of the case, and as interested in the comely and well-matched pair as the Elector and Electress themselves were. The two brother Electors looked at the Elector Palatine, as it was now his place evidently to speak. And addressing his wife he said she had rightly done.

"You have acted, perhaps, somewhat too generously," he said; "but the excess of generosity is royalty, and nobody can deny that you have acted like a queen." At the request of the Elector of Cologne, Colonel von Halberstadt was promoted to a generalship on the spot, and he was thus made a step nearer his royal *fiancée*.

This eventful day was always known in the Palatinate as the "Betrothal of the Princess Charlotte," and ere long the betrothal ripened into a marriage. Although the wedding of General von Halberstadt and the Princess Charlotte is unrecorded in the Almanach de Gotha owing to the bridegroom being a commoner, it was yet one of the happiest weddings that had ever taken place in the Palatinate either in royal circles or in those of the people. And the newspapers of that date were very precise in mentioning that among the various presents received by the bride the one she prized most was given her by the bridegroom. This was

MASTER HALBERSTADT'S PIANO.