

WILLIAM LOCKE

FAR-AWAY
STORIES

William Locke

Far-away Stories

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Far-away Stories

TO THE READER

DEAR SIR OR MADAM: —

Good wine needs no bush, but a collection of mixed vintages does. And this book is just such a collection. Some of the stories I do not want to remain buried for ever in the museum files of dead magazine-numbers — an author's not unpardonable vanity; others I have resuscitated from the same vaults in the hope that they still may please you.

The title of a volume of short stories is always a difficult matter. It ought to indicate frankly the nature of the book so that the unwary purchaser shall have no grievance (except on the score of merit, which is a different affair altogether) against either author or publisher. In my title I have tried to solve the problem. But why "Far-away?" Well, the stories cover a long stretch of years, and all, save one, were written in calm days far-away from the present convulsion of the world.

Anyhow, no one will buy the book under the impression that it is a novel, and, finding that it isn't, revile me as a cheat. And so I have the pleasure of offering it for your perusal with a clear conscience.

You, Dear Sir or Madam, have given me, this many a year, an indulgence beyond my deserts. Till now, I have had no opportunity of thanking you. I do now with a grateful heart, and to you I dedicate the two stories that I love the best, hoping that they may excuse those for which you may not so much care, and that they may win continuance of that which is to me, both as a writer and as a human being, my most cherished possession, namely, your favourable regard for

Your most humble and obedient Servant to command,

W. J. LOCKE

June, 1919

THE SONG OF LIFE

Non cuivis homini contingit adire Corinthum. It is not everybody's good fortune to go to Corinth. It is also not everybody's good fortune to go to Peckham – still less to live there. But if you were one of the favoured few, and were wont to haunt the Peckham Road and High Street, the bent figure of Angelo Fardetti would have been as familiar to you as the vast frontage of the great Emporium which, in the drapery world, makes Peckham illustrious among London suburbs. You would have seen him humbly threading his way through the female swarms that clustered at the plate-glass windows – the mere drones of the hive were fooling their frivolous lives away over ledgers in the City – the inquiry of a lost dog in his patient eyes, and an unconscious challenge to Philistia in the wiry bush of white hair that protruded beneath his perky soft felt hat. If he had been short, he might have passed unregarded; but he was very tall – in his heyday he had been six foot two – and very thin. You smile as you recall to mind the black frock-coat, somewhat white at the seams, which, tightly buttoned, had the fit of a garment of corrugated iron. Although he was so tall one never noticed the inconsiderable stretch of trouser below the long skirt. He always appeared to be wearing a truncated cassock. You were inclined to laugh at this queer exotic of the Peckham Road until you looked more keenly at the man himself. Then you saw an old, old face,

very swarthy, very lined, very beautiful still in its regularity of feature, maintaining in a little white moustache with waxed ends a pathetic braggadocio of youth; a face in which the sorrows of the world seemed to have their dwelling, but sorrows that on their way thither had passed through the crucible of a simple soul.

Twice a day it was his habit to walk there; shops and faces a meaningless confusion to his eyes, but his ears alert to the many harmonies of the orchestra of the great thoroughfare. For Angelo Fardetti was a musician. Such had he been born; such had he lived. Those aspects of life which could not be interpreted in terms of music were to him unintelligible. During his seventy years empires had crumbled, mighty kingdoms had arisen, bloody wars had been fought, magic conquests been made by man over nature. But none of these convulsive facts had ever stirred Angelo Fardetti's imagination. Even his country he had well-nigh forgotten; it was so many years since he had left it, so much music had passed since then through his being. Yet he had never learned to speak English correctly; and, not having an adequate language (save music) in which to clothe his thoughts, he spoke very little. When addressed he smiled at you sweetly like a pleasant, inarticulate old child.

Though his figure was so familiar to the inhabitants of Peckham, few knew how and where he lived. As a matter of fact, he lived a few hundred yards away from the busy High Street, in Formosa Terrace, at the house of one Anton Kirilov, a musician. He had lodged with the Kirilovs for over twenty years – but

not always in the roomy splendour of Formosa Terrace. Once Angelo was first violin in an important orchestra, a man of mark, while Anton fiddled away in the obscurity of a fifth-rate music-hall. Then the famous violinist rented the drawing-room floor of the Kirilovs' little house in Clapham, while the Kirilovs, humble folk, got on as best they could. Now things had changed. Anton Kirilov was musical director of a London theatre, but Angelo, through age and rheumatism and other infirmities, could fiddle in public no more; and so it came to pass that Anton Kirilov and Olga, his wife, and Sonia, their daughter (to whom Angelo had stood godfather twenty years ago), rioted in spaciousness, while the old man lodged in tiny rooms at the top of the house, paying an infinitesimal rent and otherwise living on his scanty savings and such few shillings as he could earn by copying out parts and giving lessons to here and there a snub-nosed little girl in a tradesman's back parlour. Often he might have gone without sufficient nourishment had not Mrs. Kirilov seen to it; and whenever an extra good dish, succulent and strong, appeared at her table, either Sonia or the servant carried a plateful upstairs with homely compliments.

"You are making of me a spoiled child, Olga," he would say sometimes, "and I ought not to eat of the food for which Anton works so hard."

And she would reply with a laugh:

"If we did not keep you alive, Signor Fardetti, how should we have our quatuors on Sunday afternoons?"

You see, Mrs. Kirilov, like the good Anton, had lived all her life in music too – she was a pianist; and Sonia also was a musician – she played the 'cello in a ladies' orchestra. So they had famous Sunday quatuors at Formosa Terrace, in which Fardetti was well content to play second fiddle to Anton's first.

You see, also, that but for these honest souls to whom a musician like Fardetti was a sort of blood-brother, the evening of the old man's days might have been one of tragic sadness. But even their affection and his glad pride in the brilliant success of his old pupil, Geoffrey Chase, could not mitigate the one great sorrow of his life. The violin, yes; he had played it well; he had not aimed at a great soloist's fame, for want of early training, and he had never dreamed such unrealisable dreams; but other dreams had he dreamed with passionate intensity. He had dreamed of being a great composer, and he had beaten his heart out against the bars that shut him from the great mystery. A waltz or two, a few songs, a catchy march, had been published and performed, and had brought him unprized money and a little hateful repute; but the compositions into which he had poured his soul remained in dusty manuscript, despised and rejected of musical men.

For many years the artist's imperious craving to create and hope and will kept him serene. Then, in the prime of his days, a tremendous inspiration shook him. He had a divine message to proclaim to the world, a song of life itself, a revelation. It was life, indestructible, eternal. It was the seed that grew into the

tree; the tree that flourished lustily, and then grew bare and stark and perished; the seed, again, of the tree that rose unconquerable into the laughing leaf of spring. It was the kiss of lovers that, when they were dead and gone, lived immortal on the lips of grandchildren. It was the endless roll of the seasons, the majestic, triumphant rhythm of existence. It was a cosmic chant, telling of things as only music could tell of them, and as no musician had ever told of them before.

He attempted the impossible, you will say. He did. That was the pity of it. He spent the last drop of his heart's blood over his sonata. He wrote it and rewrote it, wasting years, but never could he imprison within those remorseless ruled lines the elusive sounds that shook his being. An approximation to his dream reached the stage of a completed score. But he knew that it was thin and lifeless. The themes that were to be developed into magic harmonies tinkled into commonplace. The shell of this vast conception was there, but the shell alone. The thing could not live without the unseizable, and that he had not seized. Angelo Fardetti, broken down by toil and misery, fell very sick. Doctors recommended Brighton. Docile as a child, he went to Brighton, and there a pretty lady who admired his playing at the Monday Popular Concerts at St. James's Hall, got hold of him and married him. When she ran away, a year later, with a dashing young stockbroker, he took the score of the sonata that was to be the whole interpretation of life from its half-forgotten hiding-place, played it through on the piano, burst into a passion of tears, in

the uncontrollable Italian way, sold up his house, and went to lodge with Anton Kirilov. To no son or daughter of man did he ever show a note or play a bar of the sonata. And never again did he write a line of music. Bravely and humbly he faced life, though the tragedy of failure made him prematurely old. And all through the years the sublime message reverberated in his soul and haunted his dreams; and his was the bitter sorrow of knowing that never should that message be delivered for the comforting of the world.

The loss of his position as first violin forced him, at sixty, to take more obscure engagements. That was when he followed the Kirilovs to Peckham. And then he met the joy of his old age – his one pupil of genius, Geoffrey Chase, an untrained lad of fourteen, the son of a well-to-do seed merchant in the High Street.

"His father thinks it waste of time," said Mrs. Chase, a gentle, mild-eyed woman, when she brought the boy to him, "but Geoffrey is so set on it – and so I've persuaded his father to let him have lessons."

"Do you, too, love music?" he asked.

Her eyes grew moist, and she nodded.

"Poor lady! He should not let you starve. Never mind," he said, patting her shoulder. "Take comfort. I will teach your boy to play for you."

And he did. He taught him for three years. He taught him passionately all he knew, for Geoffrey, with music in his blood,

had the great gift of the composer. He poured upon the boy all the love of his lonely old heart, and dreamed glorious dreams of his future. The Kirilovs, too, regarded Geoffrey as a prodigy, and welcomed him into their circle, and made much of him. And little Sonia fell in love with him, and he, in his boyish way, fell in love with the dark-haired maiden who played on a 'cello so much bigger than herself. At last the time came when Angelo said:

"My son, I can teach you no more. You must go to Milan."

"My father will never consent," said Geoffrey.

"We will try to arrange that," said Angelo.

So, in their simple ways, Angelo and Mrs. Chase intrigued together until they prevailed upon Mr. Chase to attend one of the Kirilovs' Sunday concerts. He came in church-going clothes, and sat with irreconcilable stiffness on a straight-backed chair. His wife sat close by, much agitated. The others played a concerto arranged as a quintette; Geoffrey first violin, Angelo second, Sonia 'cello, Anton bass, and Mrs. Kirilov at the piano. It was a piece of exquisite tenderness and beauty.

"Very pretty," said Mr. Chase.

"It's beautiful," cried his wife, with tears in her eyes.

"I said so," remarked Mr. Chase.

"And what do you think of my pupil?" Angelo asked excitedly.

"I think he plays very nicely," Mr. Chase admitted.

"But, dear heavens!" cried Angelo. "It is not his playing! One could pick up fifty better violinists in the street. It is the concerto – the composition."

Mr. Chase rose slowly to his feet. "Do you mean to tell me that Geoffrey made up all that himself?"

"Of course. Didn't you know?"

"Will you play it again?"

Gladly they assented. When it was over he took Angelo out into the passage.

"I'm not one of those narrow-minded people who don't believe in art, Mr. Fardetti," said he. "And Geoff has already shown me that he can't sell seeds for toffee. But if he takes up music, will he be able to earn his living at it?"

"Beyond doubt," replied Angelo, with a wide gesture.

"But a good living? You'll forgive me being personal, Mr. Fardetti, but you yourself – "

"I," said the old man humbly, "am only a poor fiddler – but your son is a great musical genius."

"I'll think over it," said Mr. Chase.

Mr. Chase thought over it, and Geoffrey went to Milan, and Angelo Fardetti was once more left desolate. On the day of the lad's departure he and Sonia wept a little in each other's arms, and late that night he once more unearthed the completed score of his sonata, and scanned it through in vain hope of comfort. But as the months passed comfort came. His beloved swan was not a goose, but a wonder among swans. He was a wonder at the Milan Conservatoire, and won prize after prize and medal after medal, and every time he came home he bore his blushing honours thicker upon him. And he remained the same

frank, simple youth, always filled with gratitude and reverence for his old master, and though on familiar student terms with all conditions of cosmopolitan damsels, never faithless to the little Anglo-Russian maiden whom he had left at home.

In the course of time his studies were over, and he returned to England. A professorship at the Royal School of Music very soon rendered him financially independent. He began to create. Here and there a piece of his was played at concerts. He wrote incidental music for solemn productions at great London theatres. Critics discovered him, and wrote much about him in the newspapers. Mr. Chase, the seed merchant, though professing to his wife a man-of-the-world's indifference to notoriety, used surreptitiously to cut out the notices and carry them about in his fat pocket-book, and whenever he had a new one he would lie in wait for the lean figure of Angelo Fardetti, and hale him into the shop and make him drink Geoffrey's health in sloe gin, which Angelo abhorred, but gulped down in honour of the prodigy.

One fine October morning Angelo Fardetti missed his walk. He sat instead by his window, and looked unseeingly at the prim row of houses on the opposite side of Formosa Terrace. He had not the heart to go out – and, indeed, he had not the money; for these walks, twice daily, along the High Street and the Peckham Road, took him to and from a queer little Italian restaurant which, with him apparently as its only client, had eked out for years a mysterious and precarious existence. He felt very old – he was

seventy-two, very useless, very poor. He had lost his last pupil, a fat, unintelligent girl of thirteen, the daughter of a local chemist, and no one had sent him any copying work for a week. He had nothing to do. He could not even walk to his usual sparrow's meal. It is sad when you are so old that you cannot earn the right to live in a world which wants you no longer.

Looking at unseen bricks through a small window-pane was little consolation. Mechanically he rose and went to a grand piano, his one possession of price, which, with an old horsehair sofa, an oval table covered with a maroon cloth, and a chair or two, congested the tiny room, and, sitting down, began to play one of Stephen Heller's *Nuits Blanches*. You see, Angelo Fardetti was an old-fashioned musician. Suddenly a phrase arrested him. He stopped dead, and remained staring out over the polished plane of the piano. For a few moments he was lost in the chain of associated musical ideas. Then suddenly his swarthy, lined face lit up, and he twirled his little white moustache and began to improvise, striking great majestic chords. Presently he rose, and from a pile of loose music in a corner drew a sheet of ruled paper. He returned to the piano, and began feverishly to pencil down his inspiration. His pulses throbbed. At last he had got the great andante movement of his sonata. For an hour he worked intensely; then came the inevitable check. Nothing more would come. He rose and walked about the room, his head swimming. After a quarter of an hour he played over what he had written, and then, with a groan of despair, fell forward, his arms on the

keys, his bushy white head on his arms.

The door opened, and Sonia, comely and shapely, entered the room, carrying a tray with food and drink set out on a white cloth. Seeing him bowed over the piano, she put the tray on the table and advanced.

"Dear godfather," she said gently, her hand on his shoulder.

He raised his head and smiled.

"I did not hear you, my little Sonia."

"You have been composing?"

He sat upright, and tore the pencilled sheets into fragments, which he dropped in a handful on the floor.

"Once, long ago, I had a dream. I lost it. To-day I thought that I had found it. But do you know what I did really find?"

"No, godfather," replied Sonia, stooping, with housewifely tidiness, to pick up the litter.

"That I am a poor old fool," said he.

Sonia threw the paper into the grate and again came up behind him.

"It is better to have lost a dream than never to have had one at all. What was your dream?"

"I thought I could write the Song of Life as I heard it – as I hear it still." He smote his forehead lightly. "But no! God has not considered me worthy to sing it. I bow my head to His – to His" – he sought for the word with thin fingers – "to His decree."

She said, with the indulgent wisdom of youth speaking to age:

"He has given you the power to love and to win love."

The old man swung round on the music-stool and put his arm round her waist and smiled into her young face.

"Geoffrey is a very fortunate fellow."

"Because he's a successful composer?"

He looked at her and shook his head, and Sonia, knowing what he meant, blushed very prettily. Then she laughed and broke away.

"Mother has had seventeen partridges sent her as presents this week, and she wants you to help her eat them, and father's offered a bargain in some good Beaujolais, and won't decide until you tell him what you think of it."

Deftly she set out the meal, and drew a chair to the table. Angelo Fardetti rose.

"That I should love you all," said he simply, "is only human, but that you should so much love me is more than I can understand."

You see, he knew that watchful ears had missed his usual outgoing footsteps, and that watchful hearts had divined the reason. To refuse, to hesitate, would be to reject love. So there was no more to be said. He sat down meekly, and Sonia ministered to his wants. As soon as she saw that he was making headway with the partridge and the burgundy, she too sat by the table.

"Godfather," she said, "I've had splendid news this morning."

"Geoffrey?"

"Of course. What other news could be splendid? His

Symphony in E flat is going to be given at the Queen's Hall."

"That is indeed beautiful news," said the old man, laying down knife and fork, "but I did not know that he had written a Symphony in E flat."

"That was why he went and buried himself for months in Cornwall – to finish it," she explained.

"I knew nothing about it. Aie! aie!" he sighed. "It is to you, and no longer to me, that he tells things."

"You silly, jealous old dear!" she laughed. "He *had* to account for deserting me all the summer. But as to what it's all about, I'm as ignorant as you are. I've not heard a note of it. Sometimes Geoff is like that, you know. If he's dead certain sure of himself, he won't have any criticism or opinions while the work's in progress. It's only when he's doubtful that he brings one in. And the doubtful things are never anything like the certain ones. You must have noticed it."

"That is true," said Angelo Fardetti, taking up knife and fork again. "He was like that since he was a boy."

"It is going to be given on Saturday fortnight. He'll conduct himself. They've got a splendid programme to send him off. Lembrich's going to play, and Carli's going to sing – just for his sake. Isn't it gorgeous?"

"It is grand. But what does Geoffrey say about it? Come, come, after all he is not the sphinx." He drummed his fingers impatiently on the table.

"Would you really like to know?"

"I am waiting."

"He says it's going to knock 'em!" she laughed.

"Knock 'em?"

"Those were his words."

"But – "

She interpreted into purer English. Geoffrey was confident that his symphony would achieve a sensational success.

"In the meanwhile," said she, "if you don't finish your partridge you'll break mother's heart."

She poured out a glass of burgundy, which the old man drank; but he refused the food.

"No, no," he said, "I cannot eat more. I have a lump there – in my throat. I am too excited. I feel that he is marching to his great triumph. My little Geoffrey." He rose, knocking his chair over, and strode about the confined space. "*Sacramento!* But I am a wicked old man. I was sorrowful because I was so dull, so stupid that I could not write a sonata. I blamed the good God. *Mea maxima culpa*. And at once he sends me a partridge in a halo of love, and the news of my dear son's glory – "

Sonia stopped him, her plump hands on the front of his old corrugated frock-coat.

"And your glory, too, dear godfather. If it hadn't been for you, where would Geoffrey be? And who realises it more than Geoffrey? Would you like to see a bit of his letter? Only a little bit – for there's a lot of rubbish in it that I would be ashamed of anybody who thinks well of him to read – but just a little bit."

Her hand was at the broad belt joining blouse and skirt. Angelo, towering above her, smiled with an old man's tenderness at the laughing love in her dark eyes, and at the happiness in her young, comely face. Her features were generous, and her mouth frankly large, but her lips were fresh and her teeth white and even, and to the old fellow she looked all that man could dream of the virginal mother-to-be of great sons. She fished the letter from her belt, scanned and folded it carefully.

"There! Read."

And Angelo Fardetti read:

"I've learned my theory and technique, and God knows what – things that only they could teach me – from professors with world-famous names. But for real inspiration, for the fount of music itself, I come back all the time to our dear old *maestro*, Angelo Fardetti. I can't for the life of me define what it is, but he opened for me a secret chamber behind whose concealed door all these illustrious chaps have walked unsuspectingly. It seems silly to say it because, beyond a few odds and ends, the dear old man has composed nothing, but I am convinced that I owe the essentials of everything I do in music to his teaching and influence."

Angelo gave her back the folded letter without a word, and turned and stood again by the window, staring unseeingly at the prim, semi-detached villas opposite. Sonia, having re-hidden her treasure, stole up to him. Feeling her near, he stretched out a hand and laid it on her head.

"God is very wonderful," said he – "very mysterious. Oh, and so good!"

He fumbled, absently and foolishly, with her well-ordered hair, saying nothing more. After a while she freed herself gently and led him back to his partridge.

A day or two afterwards Geoffrey came to Peckham, and mounted with Sonia to Fardetti's rooms, where the old man embraced him tenderly, and expressed his joy in the exuberant foreign way. Geoffrey received the welcome with an Englishman's laughing embarrassment. Perhaps the only fault that Angelo Fardetti could find in the beloved pupil was his uncompromising English manner and appearance. His well-set figure and crisp, short fair hair and fair moustache did not sufficiently express him as a great musician. Angelo had to content himself with the lad's eyes – musician's eyes, as he said, very bright, arresting, dark blue, with depths like sapphires, in which lay strange thoughts and human laughter.

"I've only run in, dear old *maestro*, to pass the time of day with you, and to give you a ticket for my Queen's Hall show. You'll come, won't you?"

"He asks if I will come! I would get out of my coffin and walk through the streets!"

"I think you'll be pleased," said Geoffrey. "I've been goodness knows how long over it, and I've put into it all I know. If it doesn't come off, I'll – "

He paused.

"You will commit no rashness," cried the old man in alarm.

"I will. I'll marry Sonia the very next day!"

There was laughing talk, and the three spent a happy little quarter of an hour. But Geoffrey went away without giving either of the others an inkling of the nature of his famous symphony. It was Geoffrey's way.

The fateful afternoon arrived. Angelo Fardetti, sitting in the stalls of the Queen's Hall with Sonia and her parents, looked round the great auditorium, and thrilled with pleasure at seeing it full. London had thronged to hear the first performance of his beloved's symphony. As a matter of fact, London had also come to hear the wonderful orchestra give Tchaikowsky's Fourth Symphony, and to hear Lembrich play the violin and Carli sing, which they did once in a blue moon at a symphony concert. But in the old man's eyes these ineffectual fires paled before Geoffrey's genius. So great was his suspense and agitation that he could pay but scant attention to the first two items on the programme. It seemed almost like unmeaning music, far away.

During the interval before the Symphony in E flat his thin hand found Sonia's, and held it tight, and she returned the pressure. She, too, was sick with anxiety. The great orchestra, tier upon tier, was a-flutter with the performers scrambling into their places, and with leaves of scores being turned over, and with a myriad moving bows. Then all having settled into the order of a vast machine, Geoffrey appeared at the conductor's stand. Comforting applause greeted him. Was he not the rising hope of

English music? Many others beside those four to whom he was dear, and the mother and father who sat a little way in front of them, felt the same nervous apprehension. The future of English music was at stake. Would it be yet one more disappointment and disillusion, or would it rank the young English composer with the immortals? Geoffrey bowed smilingly at the audience, turned and with his baton gave the signal to begin.

Although only a few years have passed since that memorable first performance, the modestly named Symphony in E flat is now famous and Geoffrey Chase is a great man the wide world over. To every lover of music the symphony is familiar. But only those who were present at the Queen's Hall on that late October afternoon can realise the wild rapture of enthusiasm with which the symphony was greeted. It answered all longings, solved all mysteries. It interpreted, for all who had ears to hear, the fairy dew of love, the burning depths of passion, sorrow and death, and the eternal Triumph of Life. Intensely modern and faultless in technique, it was new, unexpected, individual, unrelated to any school.

The scene was one of raging tumult; but there was one human being who did not applaud, and that was the old musician, forgotten of the world, Angelo Fardetti. He had fainted.

All through the piece he had sat, bolt upright, his nerves strung to breaking-point, his dark cheeks growing greyer and greyer, and the stare in his eyes growing more and more strange, and the grip on the girl's hand growing more and more vice-like, until

she, for sheer agony, had to free herself. And none concerned themselves about him; not even Sonia, for she was enwrapped in the soul of her lover's music. And even between the movements her heart was too full for speech or thought, and when she looked at the old man, she saw him smile wanly and nod his head as one who, like herself, was speechless with emotion. At the end the storm burst. She rose with the shouting, clapping, hand- and handkerchief-waving house, and suddenly, missing him from her side, glanced round and saw him huddled up unconscious in his stall.

The noise and movement were so great that few noticed the long lean old figure being carried out of the hall by one of the side doors fortunately near. In the vestibule, attended by the good Anton and his wife and Sonia, and a commissionaire, he recovered. When he could speak, he looked round and said:

"I am a silly old fellow. I am sorry I have spoiled your happiness. I think I must be too old for happiness, for this is how it has treated me."

There was much discussion between his friends as to what should be done, but good Mrs. Kirilov, once girlishly plump, when Angelo had first known her, now florid and fat and motherly, had her way, and, leaving Anton and Sonia to see the hero of the afternoon, if they could, drove off in a cab to Peckham with the over-wrought old man and put him to bed and gave him homely remedies, invalid food and drink, and commanded him to sleep till morning.

But Angelo Fardetti disobeyed her. For Sonia, although she had found him meekly between the sheets when she went up to see him that evening, heard him later, as she was going to bed – his sitting-room was immediately above her – playing over, on muted strings, various themes of Geoffrey's symphony. At last she went up to his room and put her head in at the door, and saw him, a lank, dilapidated figure in an old, old dressing-gown, fiddle and bow in hand.

"Oh! oh!" she rated. "You are a naughty, naughty old dear. Go to bed at once."

He smiled like a guilty but spoiled child. "I will go," said he.

In the morning she herself took up his simple breakfast and all the newspapers folded at the page on which the notices of the concert were printed. The Press was unanimous in acclamation of the great genius that had raised English music to the spheres. She sat at the foot of the bed and read to him while he sipped his coffee and munched his roll, and, absorbed in her own tremendous happiness, was content to feel the glow of the old man's sympathy. There was little to be said save exclamatory pæans, so overwhelming was the triumph. Tears streamed down his lined cheeks, and between the tears there shone the light of a strange gladness in his eyes. Presently Sonia left him and went about her household duties. An hour or so afterwards she caught the sound of his piano; again he was recalling bits of the great symphony, and she marvelled at his musical memory. Then about half-past eleven she saw him leave the house and stride away, his

head in the air, his bent shoulders curiously erect.

Soon came the clatter of a cab stopping at the front door, and Geoffrey Chase, for whom she had been watching from her window, leaped out upon the pavement. She ran down and admitted him. He caught her in his arms and they stood clinging in a long embrace.

"It's too wonderful to talk about," she whispered.

"Then don't let us talk about it," he laughed.

"As if we could help it! I can think of nothing else."

"I can – you," said he, and kissed her again.

Now, in spite of the spaciousness of the house in Formosa Terrace, it had only two reception-rooms, as the house-agents grandiloquently term them, and these, dining-room and drawing-room, were respectively occupied by Anton and Mrs. Kirilov engaged in their morning lessons. The passage where the young people stood was no fit place for lovers' meetings.

"Let us go up to the *maestro's*. He's out," said Sonia.

They did as they had often done in like circumstances. Indeed, the old man, before now, had given up his sitting-room to them, feigning an unconquerable desire to walk abroad. Were they not his children, dearer to him than anyone else in the world? So it was natural that they should make themselves at home in his tiny den. They sat and talked of the great victory, of the playing of the orchestra, of passages that he might take slower or quicker next time, of the ovation, of the mountain of congratulatory telegrams and letters that blocked up his rooms. They talked of Angelo

Fardetti and his deep emotion and his pride. And they talked of the future, of their marriage which was to take place very soon. She suggested postponement.

"I want you to be quite sure. This must make a difference."

"Difference!" he cried indignantly.

She waved him off and sat on the music-stool by the piano.

"I must speak sensibly. You are one of the great ones of the musical world, one of the great ones of the world itself. You will go on and on. You will have all sorts of honours heaped on you. You will go about among lords and ladies, what is called Society – oh, I know, you'll not be able to help it. And all the time I remain what I am, just a poor little common girl, a member of a twopenny-halfpenny ladies' band. I'd rather you regretted having taken up with me before than after. So we ought to put it off."

He answered her as a good man who loves deeply can only answer. Her heart was convinced; but she turned her head aside and thought of further argument. Her eye fell on some music open on the rest, and mechanically, with a musician's instinct, she fingered a few bars. The strange familiarity of the theme startled her out of preoccupation. She continued the treble, and suddenly with a cold shiver of wonder, crashed down both hands and played on.

Geoffrey strode up to her.

"What's that you're playing?"

She pointed hastily to the score. He bent over and stared at the faded manuscript.

"Why, good God!" he cried, "it's my symphony."

She stopped, swung round and faced him with fear in her eyes.

"Yes. It's your symphony."

He took the thick manuscript from the rest and looked at the brown-paper cover. On it was written:

"The Song of Life. A Sonata by Angelo Fardetti. September, 1878."

There was an amazed silence. Then, in a queer accusing voice, Sonia cried out:

"Geoffrey, what have you done?"

"Heaven knows; but I've never known of this before. My God! Open the thing somewhere else and see."

So Sonia opened the manuscript at random and played, and again it was an echo of Geoffrey's symphony. He sank on a chair like a man crushed by an overwhelming fatality, and held his head in his hands.

"I oughtn't to have done it," he groaned. "But it was more than me. The thing overmastered me, it haunted me so that I couldn't sleep, and the more it haunted me the more it became my own, my very own. It was too big to lose."

Sonia held him with scared eyes.

"What are you talking of?" she asked.

"The way I came to write the Symphony. It's like a nightmare." He rose. "A couple of years ago," said he, "I bought a bundle of old music at a second-hand shop. It contained a collection of eighteenth-century stuff which I wanted. I took the whole

lot, and on going through it, found a clump of old, discoloured manuscript partly in faded brown ink, partly in pencil. It was mostly rough notes. I tried it out of curiosity. The composition was feeble and the orchestration childish – I thought it the work of some dead and forgotten amateur – but it was crammed full of ideas, crammed full of beauty. I began tinkering it about, to amuse myself. The more I worked on it the more it fascinated me. It became an obsession. Then I pitched the old score away and started it on my own."

"The *maestro* sold a lot of old music about that time," said Sonia.

The young man threw up his hands. "It's a fatality, an awful fatality. My God," he cried, "to think that I of all men should have stolen Angelo Fardetti's music!"

"No wonder he fainted yesterday," said Sonia.

It was catastrophe. Both regarded it in remorseful silence. Sonia said at last:

"You'll have to explain."

"Of course, of course. But what must the dear old fellow be thinking of me? What else but that I've got hold of this surreptitiously, while he was out of the room? What else but that I'm a mean thief?"

"He loves you, dear, enough to forgive you anything."

"It's the Unforgivable Sin. I'm wiped out. I cease to exist as an honest man. But I had no idea," he cried, with the instinct of self-defence, "that I had come so near him. I thought I had just

got a theme here and there. I thought I had recast all the odds and ends according to my own scheme." He ran his eye over a page or two of the score. "Yes, this is practically the same as the old rough notes. But there was a lot, of course, I couldn't use. Look at that, for instance." He indicated a passage.

"I can't read it like you," said Sonia. "I must play it."

She turned again to the piano, and played the thin, uninspired music that had no relation to the Symphony in E flat, and her eyes filled with tears as she remembered poignantly what the old man had told her of his Song of Life. She went on and on until the music quickened into one of the familiar themes; and the tears fell, for she knew how poorly it was treated.

And then the door burst open. Sonia stopped dead in the middle of a bar, and they both turned round to find Angelo Fardetti standing on the threshold.

"Ah, no!" he cried, waving his thin hands. "Put that away. I did not know I had left it out. You must not play that. Ah, my son! my son!"

He rushed forward and clasped Geoffrey in his arms, and kissed him on the cheeks, and murmured foolish, broken words.

"You have seen it. You have seen the miracle. The miracle of the good God. Oh, I am happy! My son, my son! I am the happiest of old men. Ah!" He shook him tremulously by both shoulders, and looked at him with a magical light in his old eyes. "You are really what our dear Anton calls a prodigy. I have thought and you have executed. Santa Maria!" he cried, raising

hands and eyes to heaven. "I thank you for this miracle that has been done!"

He turned away. Geoffrey, in blank bewilderment, made a step forward.

"*Maestro*, I never knew – "

But Sonia, knowledge dawning in her face, clapped her hand over his mouth – and he read her conjecture in her eyes, and drew a great breath. The old man came again and laughed and cried and wrung his hand, and poured out his joy and wonder into the amazed ears of the conscience-stricken young musician. The floodgates of speech were loosened.

"You see what you have done, *figlio mio*. You see the miracle. This – this poor rubbish is of me, Angelo Fardetti. On it I spent my life, my blood, my tears, and it is a thing of nothing, nothing. It is wind and noise; but by the miracle of God I breathed it into your spirit and it grew – and it grew into all that I dreamed – all that I dreamed and could not express. It is my Song of Life sung as I could have sung it if I had been a great genius like you. And you have taken my song from my soul, from my heart, and all the sublime harmonies that could get no farther than this dull head you have put down in immortal music."

He went on exalted, and Sonia and Geoffrey stood pale and silent. To undeceive him was impossible.

"You see it is a miracle?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Geoffrey in a low voice.

"You never saw this before. Ha! ha!" he laughed delightedly.

"Not a human soul has seen it or heard it. I kept it locked up there, in my little strong-box. And it was there all the time I was teaching you. And you never suspected."

"No, *maestro*, I did not," said the young man truthfully.

"Now, when did you begin to think of it? How did it come to you – my Song of Life? Did it sing in your brain while you were here and my brain was guiding yours, and then gather form and shape all through the long years?"

"Yes," said Geoffrey. "That was how it came about."

Angelo took Sonia's plump cheeks between his hands and smiled. "Now you understand, my little Sonia, why I was so foolish yesterday. It was emotion, such emotion as a man has never felt before in the world. And now you know why I could not speak this morning. I thought of the letter you showed me. He confessed that old Angelo Fardetti had inspired him, but he did not know how. I know. The little spark flew from the soul of Angelo Fardetti into his soul, and it became a Divine Fire. And my Song of Life is true. The symphony was born in me – it died in me – it is re-born so gloriously in him. The seed is imperishable. It is eternal."

He broke away, laughing through a little sob, and stood by the window, once more gazing unseeing at the opposite villas of Formosa Terrace. Geoffrey went up to him and fell on his knees – it was a most un-English thing to do – and took the old hand very reverently.

"*Padre mio*," said he.

"Yes, it is true. I am your father," said the old man in Italian, "and we are bound together by more than human ties." He laid his hand on the young man's head. "May all the blessings of God be upon you."

Geoffrey rose, the humblest man in England. Angelo passed his hand across his forehead, but his face bore a beautiful smile.

"I feel so happy," said he. "So happy that it is terrible. And I feel so strange. And my heart is full. If you will forgive me, I will lie down for a little." He sank on the horse-hair sofa and smiled up in the face of the young man. "And my head is full of the *andante* movement that I could never write, and you have made it like the harmonies before the Throne of God. Sit down at the piano and play it for me, my son."

So Geoffrey took his seat at the piano, and played, and as he played, he lost himself in his music. And Sonia crept near and stood by him in a dream while the wonderful story of the passing of human things was told. When the sound of the last chords had died away she put her arms round Geoffrey's neck and laid her cheek against his. For a while time stood still. Then they turned and saw the old man sleeping peacefully. She whispered a word, he rose, and they began to tiptoe out of the room. But suddenly instinct caused Sonia to turn her head again. She stopped and gripped Geoffrey's hand. She caught a choking breath.

"Is he asleep?"

They went back and bent over him. He was dead.

Angelo Fardetti had died of a happiness too great for mortal

man. For to which one of us in a hundred million is it given to behold the utter realisation of his life's dream?

LADIES IN LAVENDER

I

As soon as the sun rose out of the sea its light streamed through a white-curtained casement window into the whitest and most spotless room you can imagine. It shone upon two little white beds, separated by the width of the floor covered with straw-coloured matting; on white garments neatly folded which lay on white chairs by the side of each bed; on a white enamelled bedroom suite; on the one picture (over the mantel-piece) which adorned the white walls, the enlarged photograph of a white-whiskered, elderly gentleman in naval uniform; and on the white, placid faces of the sleepers.

It awakened Miss Ursula Widdington, who sat up in bed, greeted it with a smile, and forthwith aroused her sister.

"Janet, here's the sun."

Miss Widdington awoke and smiled too.

Now to awake at daybreak with a smile and a childlike delight at the sun when you are over forty-five is a sign of an unruffled conscience and a sweet disposition.

"The first glimpse of it for a week," said Miss Widdington.

"Isn't it strange," said Miss Ursula, "that when we went to sleep

the storm was still raging?"

"And now – the sea hasn't gone down yet. Listen."

"The tide's coming in. Let us go out and look at it," cried Miss Ursula, delicately getting out of bed.

"You're so impulsive, Ursula," said Miss Widdington.

She was forty-eight, and three years older than her sister. She could, therefore, smile indulgently at the impetuosity of youth. But she rose and dressed, and presently the two ladies stole out of the silent house.

They had lived there for many years, perched away on top of a projecting cliff on the Cornish coast, midway between sea and sky, like two fairy princesses in an enchanted bit of the world's end, who had grown grey with waiting for the prince who never came. Theirs was the only house on the wind-swept height. Below in the bay on the right of their small headland nestled the tiny fishing village of Trevannic; below, sheer down to the left, lay a little sandy cove, accessible farther on by a narrow gorge that split the majestic stretch of bastioned cliffs. To that little stone weatherbeaten house their father, the white-whiskered gentleman of the portrait, had brought them quite young when he had retired from the navy with a pension and a grievance – an ungrateful country had not made him an admiral – and there, after his death, they had continued to lead their remote and gentle lives, untouched by the happenings of the great world.

The salt-laden wind buffeted them, dashed strands of hair stingingly across their faces and swirled their skirts around them

as they leaned over the stout stone parapet their father had built along the edge of the cliff, and drank in the beauty of the morning. The eastern sky was clear of clouds and the eastern sea tossed a fierce silver under the sun and gradually deepened into frosted green, which changed in the west into the deep ocean blue; and the Atlantic heaved and sobbed after its turmoil of the day before. Miss Ursula pointed to the gilt-edged clouds in the west and likened them to angels' thrones, which was a pretty conceit. Miss Widdington derived a suggestion of Pentecostal flames from the golden flashes of the sea-gulls' wings. Then she referred to the appetite they would have for breakfast. To this last observation Miss Ursula did not reply, as she was leaning over the parapet intent on something in the cove below. Presently she clutched her sister's arm.

"Janet, look down there – that black thing – what is it?"

Miss Widdington's gaze followed the pointing finger.

At the foot of the rocks that edged the gorge sprawled a thing checkered black and white.

"I do believe it's a man!"

"A drowned man! Oh, poor fellow! Oh, Janet, how dreadful!"

She turned brown, compassionate eyes on her sister, who continued to peer keenly at the helpless figure below.

"Do you think he's dead, Janet?"

"The sensible thing would be to go down and see," replied Miss Widdington.

It was by no means the first dead man cast up by the waves

that they had stumbled upon during their long sojourn on this wild coast, where wrecks and foundering and loss of men's lives at sea were commonplace happenings. They were dealing with the sadly familiar; and though their gentle hearts throbbed hard as they made for the gorge and sped quickly down the ragged, rocky path, they set about their task as a matter of course.

Miss Ursula reached the sand first, and walked over to the body which lay on a low shelf of rock. Then she turned with a glad cry.

"Janet. He's alive. He's moaning. Come quickly." And, as Janet joined her: "Did you ever see such a beautiful face in your life?"

"We should have brought some brandy," said Miss Widdington.

But, as she bent over the unconscious form, a foolish moisture gathered in her eyes which had nothing to do with forgetfulness of alcohol. For indeed there lay sprawling anyhow in catlike grace beneath them the most romantic figure of a youth that the sight of maiden ladies ever rested on. He had long black hair, a perfectly chiselled face, a preposterously feminine mouth which, partly open, showed white young teeth, and the most delicate, long-fingered hands in the world. Miss Ursula murmured that he was like a young Greek god. Miss Widdington sighed. The fellow was ridiculous. He was also dank with sea water, and moaned as if he were in pain. But as gazing wrapt in wonder and admiration at young Greek gods is not much good to them when they are

half-drowned, Miss Widdington despatched her sister in search of help.

"The tide is still low enough for you to get round the cliff to the village. Mrs. Pendered will give you some brandy, and her husband and Luke will bring a stretcher. You might also send Joe Gullow on his bicycle for Dr. Mead."

Miss Widdington, as behoved one who has the charge of an orphaned younger sister, did not allow the sentimental to weaken the practical. Miss Ursula, though she would have preferred to stay by the side of the beautiful youth, was docile, and went forthwith on her errand. Miss Widdington, left alone with him, rolled up her jacket and pillowed his head on it, brought his limbs into an attitude suggestive of comfort, and tried by chafing to restore him to animation. Being unsuccessful in this, she at last desisted, and sat on the rocks near by and wondered who on earth he was and where in the world he came from. His garments consisted in a nondescript pair of trousers and a flannel shirt with a collar, which was fastened at the neck, not by button or stud, but by a tasselled cord; and he was barefoot. Miss Widdington glanced modestly at his feet, which were shapely; and the soles were soft and pink like the palms of his hands. Now, had he been the coarsest and most callosity-stricken shell-back half-alive, Janet Widdington would have tended him with the same devotion; but the lingering though unoffending Eve in her rejoiced that hands and feet betokened gentler avocations than that of sailor or fisherman. And why? Heaven knows, save that

the stranded creature had a pretty face and that his long black hair was flung over his forehead in a most interesting manner. She wished he would open his eyes. But as he kept them shut and gave no sign of returning consciousness, she sat there waiting patiently; in front of her the rough, sun-kissed Atlantic, at her feet the semicircular patch of golden sand, behind her the sheer white cliffs, and by her side on the slab of rock this good-looking piece of jetsam.

At length Miss Ursula appeared round the corner of the headland, followed by Jan Pendered and his son Luke carrying a stretcher. While Miss Widdington administered brandy without any obvious result, the men looked at the castaway, scratched their heads, and guessed him to be a foreigner; but how he managed to be there alone with never a bit of wreckage to supply a clue surpassed their powers of imagination. In lifting him the right foot hung down through the trouser-leg, and his ankle was seen to be horribly black and swollen. Old Jan examined it carefully.

"Broken," said he.

"Oh, poor boy, that's why he's moaning so," cried the compassionate Miss Ursula.

The men grasped the handles of the stretcher.

"I'd better take him home to my old woman," said Jan Pendered thoughtfully.

"He can have my bed, father," said Luke.

Miss Widdington looked at Miss Ursula and Miss Ursula

looked at Miss Widdington, and the eyes of each lady were wistful. Then Miss Widdington spoke.

"You can carry him up to the house, Pendered. We have a comfortable spare room, and Dorcas will help us to look after him."

The men obeyed, for in Trevannic Miss Widdington's gentle word was law.

II

It was early afternoon. Miss Widdington had retired to take her customary after-luncheon siesta, an indulgence permitted to her seniority, but not granted, except on rare occasions, to the young. Miss Ursula, therefore, kept watch in the sick chamber, just such a little white spotless room as their own, but containing only one little white bed in which the youth lay dry and warm and comfortably asleep. He was exhausted from cold and exposure, said the doctor who had driven in from St. Madoc, eight miles off, and his ankle was broken. The doctor had done what was necessary, had swathed him in one of old Dorcas's flannel nightgowns, and had departed. Miss Ursula had the patient all to herself. A bright fire burned in the grate, and the strong Atlantic breeze came in through the open window where she sat, her knitting in her hand. Now and then she glanced at the sleeper, longing, in a most feminine manner, for him to awake and render an account of himself. Miss Ursula's heart fluttered mildly. For

beautiful youths, baffling curiosity, are not washed up alive by the sea at an old maid's feet every day in the week. It was indeed an adventure, a bit of a fairy tale suddenly gleaming and dancing in the grey atmosphere of an eventless life. She glanced at him again, and wondered whether he had a mother. Presently Dorcas came in, stout and matronly, and cast a maternal eye on the boy and smoothed his pillow. She had sons herself, and two of them had been claimed by the pitiless sea.

"It's lucky I had a sensible nightgown to give him," she remarked. "If we had had only the flimsy things that you and Miss Janet wear – "

"Sh!" said Miss Ursula, colouring faintly; "he might hear you."

Dorcas laughed and went out. Miss Ursula's needles clicked rapidly. When she glanced at the bed again she became conscious of two great dark eyes regarding her in utter wonder. She rose quickly and went over to the bed.

"Don't be afraid," she said, though what there was to terrify him in her mild demeanour and the spotless room she could not have explained; "don't be afraid, you're among friends."

He murmured some words which she did not catch.

"What do you say?" she asked sweetly.

He repeated them in a stronger voice. Then she realised that he spoke in a foreign tongue. A queer dismay filled her.

"Don't you speak English?"

He looked at her for a moment, puzzled. Then the echo of the last word seemed to reach his intelligence. He shook his head. A

memory rose from schoolgirl days.

"*Parlez-vous français?*" she faltered; and when he shook his head again she almost felt relieved. Then he began to talk, regarding her earnestly, as if seeking by his mere intentness to make her understand. But it was a strange language which she had not heard before.

In one mighty effort Miss Ursula gathered together her whole stock of German.

"*Sprechen Sie deutsch?*"

"*Ach ja! Einige Worte,*" he replied, and his face lit up with a smile so radiant that Miss Ursula wondered how Providence could have neglected to inspire a being so beautiful with a knowledge of the English language, "*Ich kann mich auf deutsch verständlich machen, aber ich bin polnisch.*"

But not a word of the halting sentence could Miss Ursula make out; even the last was swallowed up in guttural unintelligibility. She only recognised the speech as German and different from that which he used at first, and which seemed to be his native tongue.

"Oh, dear, I must give it up," she sighed.

The patient moved slightly and uttered a sudden cry of pain. It occurred to Miss Ursula that he had not had time to realise the fractured ankle. That he realised it now was obvious, for he lay back with closed eyes and white lips until the spasm had passed. After that Miss Ursula did her best to explain in pantomime what had happened. She made a gesture of swimming, then

laid her cheek on her hand and simulated fainting, acted her discovery of his body on the beach, broke a wooden match in two and pointed to his ankle, exhibited the medicine bottles by the bedside, smoothed his pillow, and smiled so as to assure him of kind treatment. He understood, more or less, murmured thanks in his own language, took her hand, and to her English woman's astonishment, pressed it to his lips. Miss Widdington, entering softly, found the pair in this romantic situation.

When it dawned on him a while later that he owed his deliverance equally to both of the gentle ladies, he kissed Miss Widdington's hand too. Whereupon Miss Ursula coloured and turned away. She did not like to see him kiss her sister's hand. Why, she could not tell, but she felt as if she had received a tiny stab in the heart.

III

Providence has showered many blessings on Trevannic, but among them is not the gift of tongues. Dr. Mead, who came over every day from St. Madoc, knew less German than the ladies. It was impossible to communicate with the boy except by signs. Old Jan Pendered, who had served in the navy in the China seas, felt confident that he could make him understand, and tried him with pidgin-English. But the youth only smiled sweetly and shook hands with him, whereupon old Jan scratched his head and acknowledged himself jiggered. To Miss Widdington, at last,

came the inspiration that the oft-repeated word "*Polnisch*" meant Polish.

"You come from Poland?"

"*Aus Polen, ya*," laughed the boy.

"Kosciusko," murmured Miss Ursula.

He laughed again, delighted, and looked at her eagerly for more; but there Miss Ursula's conversation about Poland ended. If the discovery of his nationality lay to the credit of her sister, she it was who found out his name, Andrea Marowski, and taught him to say: "Miss Ursula." She also taught him the English names of the various objects around him. And here the innocent rivalry of the two ladies began to take definite form. Miss Widdington, without taking counsel of Miss Ursula, borrowed an old Otto's German grammar from the girls' school at St. Madoc, and, by means of patient research, put to him such questions as: "Have you a mother?" "How old are you?" and, collating his written replies with the information vouchsafed by the grammar, succeeded in discovering, among other biographical facts, that he was alone in the world, save for an old uncle who lived in Cracow, and that he was twenty years of age. So that when Miss Ursula boasted that she had taught him to say: "Good morning. How do you do?" Miss Widdington could cry with an air of triumph: "He told me that he doesn't suffer from toothache."

It was one of the curious features of the ministrations which they afforded Mr. Andrea Marowski alternately, that Miss Ursula would have nothing whatever to do with Otto's German grammar

and Miss Widdington scorned the use of English and made as little use of sign language as possible.

"I don't think it becoming, Ursula," she said, "to indicate hunger by opening your mouth and rubbing the front of your waist, like a cannibal."

Miss Ursula accepted the rebuke meekly, for she never returned a pert answer to her senior; but reflecting that Janet's disapproval might possibly arise from her want of skill in the art of pantomime, she went away comforted and continued her unbecoming practices. The conversations, however, that the ladies, each in her own way, managed to have with the invalid, were sadly limited in scope. No means that they could devise could bring them enlightenment on many interesting points. Who he was, whether noble or peasant, how he came to be lying like a jellyfish on the slab of rock in their cove, coatless and barefoot, remained as great a puzzle as ever. Of course he informed them, especially the grammar-equipped Miss Widdington, over and over again in his execrable German; but they grew no wiser, and at last they abandoned in despair their attempts to solve these mysteries. They contented themselves with the actual, which indeed was enough to absorb their simple minds. There he was cast up by the sea or fallen from the moon, young, gay, and helpless, a veritable gift of the gods. The very mystery of his adventure invested him with a curious charm; and then the prodigious appetite with which he began to devour fish and eggs and chickens formed of itself a joy hitherto undreamed of in

their philosophy.

"When he gets up he must have some clothes," said Miss Widdington.

Miss Ursula agreed; but did not say that she was knitting him socks in secret. Andrea's interest in the progress of these garments was one of her chief delights.

"There's the trunk upstairs with our dear father's things," said Miss Widdington with more diffidence than usual. "They are so sacred to us that I was wondering —

"Our dear father would be the first to wish it," said Miss Ursula.

"It's a Christian's duty to clothe the naked," said Miss Widdington.

"And so we must clothe him in what we've got," said Miss Ursula. Then with a slight flush she added: "It's so many years since our great loss that I've almost forgotten what a man wears."

"I haven't," said Miss Widdington. "I think I ought to tell you, Ursula," she continued, after pausing to put sugar and milk into the cup of tea which she handed to her sister — they were at the breakfast table, at the head of which she formally presided, as she had done since her emancipation from the schoolroom — "I think I ought to tell you that I have decided to devote my twenty-five pounds to buying him an outfit. Our dear father's things can only be a makeshift — and the poor boy hasn't a penny in the pockets he came ashore in."

Now, some three years before, an aunt had bequeathed Miss

Widdington a tiny legacy, the disposal of which had been a continuous subject of grave discussion between the sisters. She always alluded to it as "my twenty-five pounds."

"Is that quite fair, dear?" said Miss Ursula impulsively.

"Fair? Do you mind explaining?"

Miss Ursula regretted her impetuosity. "Don't you think, dear Janet," she said with some nervousness, "that it would lay him under too great an obligation to you personally? I should prefer to take the money out of our joint income. We both are responsible for him and," she added with a timid smile, "I found him first."

"I don't see what that has to do with it," Miss Widdington retorted with a quite unusual touch of acidity. "But if you feel strongly about it, I am willing to withdraw my five-and-twenty pounds."

"You're not angry with me, Janet?"

"Angry? Of course not," Miss Widdington replied freezingly. "Don't be silly. And why aren't you eating your bacon?"

This was the first shadow of dissension that had arisen between them since their childhood. On the way to the sick-room, Miss Ursula shed a few tears over Janet's hectoring ways, and Miss Widdington, in pursuit of her housekeeping duties, made Dorcas the scapegoat for Ursula's unreasonableness. Before luncheon time they kissed with mutual apologies; but the spirit of rivalry was by no means quenched.

IV

One afternoon Miss Janet had an inspiration.

"If I played the piano in the drawing-room with the windows open you could hear it in the spare room quite plainly."

"If you think it would disturb Mr. Andrea," said Miss Ursula, "you might shut the windows."

"I was proposing to offer him a distraction, dear," said Miss Widdington. "These foreign gentlemen are generally fond of music."

Miss Ursula could raise no objection, but her heart sank. She could not play the piano.

She took her seat cheerfully, however, by the bed, which had been wheeled up to the window, so that the patient could look out on the glory of sky and sea, took her knitting from a drawer and began to turn the heel of one of the sacred socks. Andrea watched her lazily and contentedly. Perhaps he had never seen two such soft-treaded, soft-fingered ladies in lavender in his life. He often tried to give some expression to his gratitude, and the hand-kissing had become a thrice daily custom. For Miss Widdington he had written the word "Engel," which the vocabulary at the end of Otto's German grammar rendered as "Angel"; whereat she had blushed quite prettily. For Miss Ursula he had drawn, very badly, but still unmistakably, the picture of a winged denizen of Paradise, and she, too, had treasured the

compliment; she also treasured the drawing. Now, Miss Ursula held up the knitting, which began distinctly to indicate the shape of a sock, and smiled. Andrea smiled, too, and blew her a kiss with his fingers. He had many graceful foreign gestures. The doctor, who was a plain, bullet-headed Briton, disapproved of Andrea and expressed to Dorcas his opinion that the next things to be washed ashore would be the young man's monkey and organ. This was sheer prejudice, for Andrea's manners were unexceptionable, and his smile, in the eyes of his hostesses, the most attractive thing in the world.

"Heel," said Miss Ursula.

"Eel," repeated Andrea.

"Wool," said Miss Ursula.

"Vool," said Andrea.

"No – wo-o," said Miss Ursula, puffing out her lips so as to accentuate the "w."

"Wo-o," said Andrea, doing the same. And then they both burst out laughing. They were enjoying themselves mightily.

Then, from the drawing-room below, came the tinkling sound of the old untuned piano which had remained unopened for many years. It was the "Spring Song" of Mendelssohn, played, schoolgirl fashion, with uncertain fingers that now and then struck false notes. The light died away from Andrea's face, and he looked inquiringly, if not wonderingly, at Miss Ursula. She smiled encouragement, pointed first at the floor, and then at him, thereby indicating that the music was for his benefit. For awhile

he remained quite patient. At last he clapped his hands on his ears, and, his features distorted with pain, cried out:

"Nein, nein, nein, das lieb' ich nicht! Es ist hässlich!"

In eager pantomime he besought her to stop the entertainment. Miss Ursula went downstairs, hating to hurt her sister's feelings, yet unable to crush a wicked, unregenerate feeling of pleasure.

"I am so sorry, dear Janet," she said, laying her hand on her sister's arm, "but he doesn't like music. It's astonishing, his dislike. It makes him quite violent."

Miss Widdington ceased playing and accompanied her sister upstairs. Andrea, with an expressive shrug of the shoulders, reached out his two hands to the musician and, taking hers, kissed her finger-tips. Miss Widdington consulted Otto.

"Lieben Sie nicht Musik?"

"Ja wohl," he cried, and, laughing, played an imaginary fiddle.

"He *does* like music," cried Miss Widdington. "How can you make such silly mistakes, Ursula? Only he prefers the violin."

Miss Ursula grew downcast for a moment; then she brightened. A brilliant idea occurred to her.

"Adam Penruddocke. He has a fiddle. We can ask him to come up after tea and play to us."

She reassured Andrea in her queer sign-language, and later in the afternoon Adam Penruddocke, a sheepish giant of a fisherman, was shown into the room. He bowed to the ladies, shook the long white hand proffered him by the beautiful youth, tuned up, and played "The Carnival of Venice" from start to

finish. Andrea regarded him with mischievous, laughing eyes, and at the end he applauded vigorously.

Miss Widdington turned to her sister.

"I knew he liked music," she said.

"Shall I play something else, sir?" asked Penruddocke.

Andrea, guessing his meaning, beckoned him to approach the bed, and took the violin and bow from his hands. He looked at the instrument critically, smiled to himself, tuned it afresh, and with an air of intense happiness drew the bow across the strings.

"Why, he can play it!" cried Miss Ursula.

Andrea laughed and nodded, and played a bit of "The Carnival of Venice" as it ought to be played, with gaiety and mischief. Then he broke off, and after two or three tearing chords that made his hearers start, plunged into a wild czardas. The ladies looked at him in open-mouthed astonishment as the mad music such as they had never heard in their lives before filled the little room with its riot and devilry. Penruddocke stood and panted, his eyes staring out of his head. When Andrea had finished there was a bewildered silence. He nodded pleasantly at his audience, delighted at the effect he had produced. Then, with an artist's malice, he went to the other extreme of emotion. He played a sobbing folk-song, rending the heart with cries of woe and desolation and broken hopes. It clutched at the heart-strings, turning them into vibrating chords; it pierced the soul with its poignant despair; it ended in a long-drawn-out note high up in the treble, whose pain became intolerable; and the end was greeted

with a sharp gasp of relief. The white lips of the ruddy giant quivered. Tears streamed down the cheeks of Miss Widdington and Miss Ursula. Again there was silence, but this time it was broken by a clear, shrill voice outside.

"Encore! Encore!"

The sisters looked at one another. Who had dared intrude at such a moment? Miss Widdington went to the window to see.

In the garden stood a young woman of independent bearing, with a palette and brushes in her hand. An easel was pitched a few yards beyond the gate. Miss Widdington regarded this young woman with marked disfavour. The girl calmly raised her eyes.

"I apologise for trespassing like this," she said, "but I simply couldn't resist coming nearer to this marvellous violin-playing – and my exclamation came out almost unconsciously."

"You are quite welcome to listen," said Miss Widdington stiffly.

"May I ask who is playing it?"

Miss Widdington almost gasped at the girl's impertinence. The latter laughed frankly.

"I ask because it seems as if it could only be one of the big, well-known people."

"It's a young friend who is staying with us," said Miss Widdington.

"I beg your pardon," said the girl. "But, you see my brother is Boris Danilof, the violinist, so I've that excuse for being interested."

"I don't think Mr. Andrea can play any more to-day," said Miss Ursula from her seat by the bed. "He's tired."

Miss Widdington repeated this information to Miss Danilof, who bade her good afternoon and withdrew to her easel.

"A most forward, objectionable girl," exclaimed Miss Widdington. "And who is Boris Danilof, I should like to know?"

If she had but understood German, Andrea could have told her. He caught at the name of the world-famous violinist and bent eagerly forward in great excitement.

"Boris Danilof? *Ist er unten?*"

"*Nicht*— I mean *Nein*," replied Miss Widdington, proud at not having to consult Otto.

Andrea sank back disappointed, on his pillow.

V

However much Miss Widdington disapproved of the young woman, and however little the sisters knew of Boris Danilof, it was obvious that they were harbouring a remarkable violinist. That even the bullet-headed doctor, who had played the double bass in his Hospital Orchestral Society and was, therefore, an authority, freely admitted. It gave the romantic youth a new and somewhat awe-inspiring value in the eyes of the ladies. He was a genius, said Miss Ursula — and her imagination became touched by the magic of the word. As he grew stronger he played more. His fame spread through the village and he gave recitals to

crowded audiences – as many fisher-folk as could be squeezed into the little bedroom, and more standing in the garden below. Miss Danilof did not come again. The ladies learned that she was staying in the next village, Polwern, two or three miles off. In their joy at Andrea's recovery they forgot her existence.

Happy days came when he could rise from bed and hobble about on a crutch, attired in the quaint garments of Captain Widdington, R.N., who had died twenty years before, at the age of seventy-three. They added to his romantic appearance, giving him the air of the *jeune premier* in costume drama. There was a blue waistcoat with gilt buttons, calculated to win any feminine approval. The ladies admired him vastly. Conversation was still difficult, as Miss Ursula had succeeded in teaching him very little English, and Miss Widdington, after a desperate grapple with Otto on her own account, had given up the German language in despair. But what matters the tongue when the heart speaks? And the hearts of Miss Widdington and Miss Ursula spoke; delicately, timidly, tremulously, in the whisper of an evening breeze, in undertones, it is true – yet they spoke all the same. The first walks on the heather of their cliff in the pure spring sunshine were rare joys. As they had done with their watches by his bedside, they took it in turns to walk with him; and each in her turn of solitude felt little pricklings of jealousy. But as each had instituted with him her own particular dainty relations and confidences – Miss Widdington more maternal, Miss Ursula more sisterly – to which his artistic nature responded involuntarily, each felt sure that she

was the one who had gained his especial affection.

Thus they wove their gossamer webs of romance in the secret recess of their souls. What they hoped for was as dim and vague as their concept of heaven, and as pure. They looked only at the near future – a circle of light encompassed by mists; but in the circle stood ever the beloved figure. They could not imagine him out of it. He would stay with them, irradiating their lives with his youth and his gaiety, playing to them his divine music, kissing their hands, until he grew quite strong and well again. And that was a long, long way off. Meanwhile life was a perpetual spring. Why should it ever end?

One afternoon they sat in the sunny garden, the ladies busy with needlework, and Andrea playing snatches of dreamy things on the violin. The dainty remains of tea stood on a table, and the young man's crutch rested against it. Presently he began to play Tschaikowsky's "Chanson Triste." Miss Ursula, looking up, saw a girl of plain face and independent bearing standing by the gate.

"Who is that, Janet?" she whispered.

Miss Janet glanced round.

"It is the impertinent young woman who was listening the other day."

Andrea followed their glances, and, perceiving a third listener, half consciously played to her. When the piece was finished the girl slowly walked away.

"I know it's wrong and unchristianlike," said Miss Widdington, "but I dislike that girl intensely."

"So do I," said Miss Ursula. Then she laughed. "She looks like the wicked fairy in a story-book."

VI

The time came when he threw aside his crutch and flew, laughing, away beyond their control. This they did not mind, for he always came back and accompanied them on their wild rambles. He now resembled the ordinary young man of the day as nearly as the St. Madoc tailors and hosiers could contrive; and the astonishing fellow, with his cameo face and his hyacinthine locks, still looked picturesque.

One morning he took Pendruddocke's fiddle and went off, in high spirits, and when he returned in the late afternoon his face was flushed and a new light burned in his eyes. He explained his adventures volubly. They had a vague impression that, Orion-like, he had been playing his stringed instrument to dolphins and waves and things some miles off along the coast. To please him they said "*Ja*" at every pause in his narration, and he thought they understood. Finally he kissed their hands.

Two mornings later he started, without his fiddle, immediately after breakfast. To Miss Ursula, who accompanied him down the road to the village, he announced Polwern as his destination. Unsuspecting and happy, she bade him good-bye and lovingly watched his lithe young figure disappear behind the bounding cliff of the little bay.

Miss Olga Danilof sat reading a novel by the door of the cottage where she lodged when the beautiful youth came up. He raised his hat – she nodded.

"Well," she said in German, "have you told the funny old maids?"

"*Ach*," said he, "they are dear, gracious ladies – but I have told them."

"I've heard from my brother," she remarked, taking a letter from the book. "He trusts my judgment implicitly, as I said he would – and you are to come with me to London at once."

"To-day?"

"By the midday train."

He looked at her in amazement. "But the dear ladies – "

"You can write and explain. My brother's time is valuable – he has already put off his journey to Paris one day in order to see you."

"But I have no money," he objected weakly.

"What does that matter? I have enough for the railway ticket, and when you see Boris he will give you an advance. Oh, don't be grateful," she added in her independent way. "In the first place, we're brother artists, and in the second it's a pure matter of business. It's much better to put yourself in the hands of Boris Danilof and make a fortune in Europe than to play in a restaurant orchestra in New York; don't you think so?"

Andrea did think so, and he blessed the storm that drove the ship out of its course from Hamburg and terrified him out of his

wits in his steerage quarters, so that he rushed on deck in shirt and trousers, grasping a life-belt, only to be cursed one moment by a sailor and the next to be swept by a wave clean over the taffrail into the sea. He blessed the storm and he blessed the wave and he blessed the life-belt which he lost just before consciousness left him; and he blessed the jag of rock on the sandy cove against which he must have broken his ankle; and he blessed the ladies and the sun and the sea and sky and Olga Danilof and the whole of this beautiful world that had suddenly laid itself at his feet.

The village cart drew up by the door, and Miss Danilof's luggage that lay ready in the hall was lifted in.

"Come," she said. "You can ask the old maids to send on your things."

He laughed. "I have no things. I am as free as the wind."

At St. Madoc, whence he intended to send a telegram to the dear, gracious ladies, they only had just time to catch the train. He sent no telegram; and as they approached London he thought less and less about it, his mind, after the manner of youth, full of the wonder that was to be.

VII

The ladies sat down to tea. Eggs were ready to be boiled as soon as he returned. Not having lunched, he would be hungry. But he did not come. By dinner-time they grew anxious. They postponed the meal. Dorcas came into the drawing-room

periodically to report deterioration of cooked viands. But they could not eat the meal alone. At last they grew terrified lest some evil should have befallen him, and Miss Widdington went in to the village and despatched Jan Pendered, and Joe Gullow on his bicycle, in search. When she returned she found Miss Ursula looking as if she had seen a ghost.

"Janet, that girl is living there."

"Where?"

"Polwern. He went there this morning."

Miss Widdington felt as if a cold hand had touched her heart, but she knew that it behoved her as the elder to dismiss her sister's fears.

"You're talking nonsense, Ursula; he has never met her."

"How do we know?" urged Miss Ursula.

"I don't consider it delicate," replied Miss Widdington, "to discuss the possibility."

They said no more, and went out and stood by the gate, waiting for their messengers. The moon rose and silvered the sea, and the sea breeze sprang up; the surf broke in a melancholy rhythm on the sands beneath.

"It sounds like the 'Chanson Triste,'" said Miss Ursula. And before them both rose the picture of the girl standing there like an Evil Fairy while Andrea played.

At last Jan Pendered appeared on the cliff. The ladies went out to meet him.

Then they learned what had happened.

In a dignified way they thanked Jan Pendered and gave him a shilling for Joe Gullow, who had brought the news. They bade him good night in clear, brave voices, and walked back very silent and upright through the garden into the house. In the drawing-room they turned to each other, and, their arms about each other's necks, they broke down utterly.

The stranger woman had come and had taken him away from them. Youth had flown magnetically to youth. They were left alone unheeded in the dry lavender of their lives.

The moonlight streamed through the white-curtained casement window into the white, spotless room. It shone on the two little white beds, on the white garments, neatly folded on white chairs, on the white-whiskered gentleman over the mantle-piece, and on the white faces of the sisters. They slept little that night. Once Miss Widdington spoke.

"Ursula, we must go to sleep and forget it all. We've been two old fools."

Miss Ursula sobbed for answer. With the dawn came a certain quietude of spirit. She rose, put on her dressing-gown, and, leaving her sister asleep, stole out on tiptoe. The window was open and the curtains were undrawn in the boy's empty room. She leaned on the sill and looked out over the sea. Sooner or later, she knew, would come a letter of explanation. She hoped Janet would not force her to read it. She no longer wanted to know whence he came, whither he was going. It were better for her, she thought, not to know. It were better for her to cherish

the most beautiful thing that had ever entered her life. For all those years she had waited for the prince who never came; and he had come at last out of fairyland, cast up by the sea. She had had with him her brief season of tremulous happiness. If he had been carried on, against his will, by the strange woman into the unknown whence he had emerged, it was only the inevitable ending of such a fairy tale.

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