BARNARD CHARLES

CAMILLA: A TALE OF A VIOLIN

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Содержание

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PREFATORY NOTE

The intelligent reader, on opening a new book, asks why it was written, – what excuse has it for existence. In this particular case the author has more reasons than it is worth while to repeat. If there is any one thing that is attracting the general attention of the American people, it is the art of music. It is a good sign. It shows we are getting beyond the mere tree-felling and prairie-clearing stages of our existence, and coming to something better. This true "Tale of a Violin" has to do with music. It is the story of a real musical life; not wholly American, and therefore instructive. It has much, also, to do with our people and country and our own times, and is therefore interesting and home-like. It has to do with methods of teaching music in foreign countries; and for the student this artist-life is full of valuable suggestions. All of this can be properly said, because it is the artist-life of a person now living among us. These are the excuses for its existence.

The facts and incidents were supplied by Madam Camilla Urso herself at such stray moments of leisure as could be found during a busy concert season at Boston, in the months of January and February, 1874; and the work was done at such spare moments as the writer could find in the midst of journalistic cares. Such events as could be noted in one evening having been written out, they were read aloud before Madam Urso and others, and when brought up to the exact truth in every detail, and fully approved by such persons as were entitled to an opinion, were given to the printer.

So the book came to be. If it leads one reader to see the value of a life devoted to art, – if it helps one lonely student struggling for a musical education, by the splendid example of a life of toil and poverty crowned by a great reward, – the work will not be wholly vain, nor will it want excuse for being.

The author would express his thanks for the kind assistance of the Urso family of New York, and Mr. John S. Dwight and others, of Boston.

The Author.

Boston, September, 1874.

PART I

CHAPTER I.
BEFORE DAWN

About thirty miles from the sea, on the River Loire, in France, stands the quaint, sleepy old town of Nantes. The Erdre and the Sevre, two smaller streams unite with the Loire just here and the town is spread out in an irregular fashion over the islands, the little capes between the rivers, and the hills that stand round about. The old part of the town is on the hill-side and occupies the two islands called Freydean and Gloriette, the more modern city has spread over the surrounding country among the groves of chestnut, and the vineyards that fill every available spot where the grapes can get a good look at the sun all through the long sunny days.

The river runs swift and bright through the town and flashes under the handsome bridges with their long rows of stone arches. In the river are boats, ships, and steamers, for the good people there spend much of their time in commerce and in catching and curing the silver-white pilchards that swim in such great schools in the neighboring sea.

The broad quays that skirt the river are planted with trees,

making a most delightful walk, and near the eastern end of the town one of the quays ends at what remains of an old chateau or palace. The houses are mostly of stone, with slated roofs. There are some fine stores in the Place Royal that are quite as grand as those in Paris. There are also some old, old churches black with age, dim and vast inside, with statuary on the outer walls, and splendid gothic towers that seem to blossom all over with stone flowers as they climb so far up into the sky above the quaint old town.

Round about the town are gardens and summer houses, pleasant walks and drives, vineyards, groves and all the things that go to make a charming rural scene.

In the Place Graslin is a fine theatre and a handsome Town Hall. Of these buildings more presently when we come to see what happened within them.

In this old French town in June 1846 there lived a very little girl just four years old. Her home was on the first floor of a small house on a narrow street not far from the Place de la Monnaie, an open square that led into one of the principal streets known as the Rue Voltaire. The house was built in the usual French fashion with a large arch-way under the house that led into a court-yard in the centre. The front door opened into the shady arch-way, and the window balconies were filled with flowering plants in pots.

Her name was Camilla. Her father Monsieur Salvatore Urso played the flute in the orchestra at the theatre, or opera house, and on Sundays played the organ at the Church of the Holy Cross

that stood facing a little square not far from the river.

Her mother Madame Emelie Urso was a young and very handsome woman, and a fine singer. She also helped her husband in his music lessons. She was born in Lisbon in Portugal, but as she had come to France when quite young, she had forgotten her mother tongue and now spoke French and Italian. This last may have been owing to the fact that her husband was from Palermo, Sicily. With Camilla's parents lived her mother's sister, Caroline, whom we shall know as aunt Caroline. This made the Urso household.

Both of Camilla's parents were young and she was their oldest child and only daughter. There was at this time a baby brother and later there were three more brothers. The first four years of the little one's life were passed in an uneventful manner, very much in the fashion of other children everywhere. When she was four years old she began to go to the theatre with her father. Every night she put her small hand in his and trotted off to the Place Graslin to sit with him in the orchestra among the violins and close beside her father's flute. He was a noted player in those days and the little one shared his seat, with the music book spread before her, and the stage in full view.

It was quite a fine theatre and many notable things took place there. Operas, both new and old, were given, and often between the acts, a piano was brought out and such famous players as traveled in that part of France appeared and showed what they could do. Celebrated violinists and great singers also appeared at

times. So it happened that the little Camilla almost lived in the midst of an orchestra and before she was five years old had heard many of the best players and singers of the times.

The orchestra became almost a second home to her. The lights, the crowds of people, the music were every day matters and she grew up to be quite indifferent to the public character of such a life. Most children would have soon learned to go to sleep in the midst of it all. Camilla never thought of such a thing. While the music went on she was content. If she could only nestle down in a corner where she could hear those violins and her father's flute she was perfectly happy in a demure and sober fashion that was infinitely amusing in such a very small girl.

On Sundays and on fête days when the church was open she went with her father to the church of the Holy Cross.

The church was an old one and to reach the organ loft high up over the great portal they had to climb a steep and winding stair in the great tower. The stairs were worn deep with footsteps so that it was hard climbing for the little one. Still, she always went with her father and mother. Did he not play the tall organ with its great white pipes, and did her mother not sing? She had a good seat where she could look up at the black arches springing so high overhead, or down on the people who seemed so small in the church far below.

When there was no theatre or church she played about her mother's room or under the trees in the public gardens, very much in the fashion of other French girls.

Playing in an orchestra is not the road to wealth. The pay was very small, and even with the organ salary and the music lessons things did not prosper very happily and the little Camilla had to content herself with such juvenile joys as could be procured without very much money. This, happily, did not make much difference. There was enough to eat and pretty good things to wear and no end of music. This last seemed to quite satisfy her. The orchestra, the organ and the choir afforded her perpetual amusement, and her life was as happy as that of the most favored child in the town.

When not listening to music she was very active and merry and displayed an abundant fund of good health and spirits. She early learned to talk and walk and was considered an unusually bright and precocious girl. Her earliest months gave a hint of her love for music. If fretful or peevish with weariness or ill-health she could soon be pacified by a gentle song from her father as he carried her about in his arms.

The first intimation of a desire to make music herself came when she was three years old. Hearing a hand-organ play in the street while the family were at dinner she softly left the table and went into the next room. Presently the tune on the hand-organ was repeated on the piano in the parlor. Her father opened the door quickly only to find the child trying to hide, as if she had done something wrong.

Before she could talk she could hum over or sing a number of songs, and at four years of age could repeat in a thin piping

voice many of the songs and airs sung by her mother and always insisting that the accompaniment should be played while she sang.

She did not go to school. Hardly any children in the town had any such advantage. There were a few small primary schools and that was about all the chance that was open to the young people of Nantes for an education.

So far in Camilla's life it did not make any particular difference. Things were going on quite to her satisfaction and she was perfectly happy even if she could not read or write.

Thus in a quiet way with much music the months had slipped away till she was five years old. Then suddenly came the awakening of a new life. Something happened that cast the rosy glow of coming day over the twilight of her life. The morning star that shone out clear and bright before her young eyes took the shape of a violin solo in a mass called St. Cecilia. She was in the church when its promise-speaking light flashed upon her. There was an orchestra, and a full chorus, with the organ. The little Camilla now almost six years old sat in the old organ loft and heard it all. She listened and dreamed and wondered and wished and wished she could only do something like that solo for the first violin. An ordinary piece of music, indifferently played, but somehow it enchained her whole attention. It threw wide open the pearly gates of a new and fairer life.

Many a time she had heard famous players at the theatre. They had never interested her as did this one. He was not a very

fine player. His music was not particularly wonderful, but there was something about it that pleased her greatly. She had been already excited by the music. The majestic and noble character of the mass, the chorus sounding so loud and grand through the church, the orchestra, her father's organ with its great thunder tones rolling under it all, had sent the blood tingling through her veins. The great company kneeling on the floor so far below. The lights and flowers on the altar. The blue clouds of incense rising softly on the air and the dusky bars of colored light slanting across the springing arches. The scene, the music, everything affected her. Then that song on the violin. It was beautiful – and – if she could. No – she never, never could – and it was all a dream. She was even reluctant to leave for home after the service was over and wanted to linger in the vast, dim church and dream it all over again.

If she only could play like that – if she could have a real violin, all her own and play on it, why, that would be just too wonderfully grand and splendid for anything. There were not words in the French language that could express the pleasure it would give her. She could not speak of it. It was too good to talk about.

For several days she thought about it and dreamed of it and wondered if it would do to tell her father and ask him to give her a violin. At last the secret became unbearable and on creeping into her mother's bed before daylight one morning for her regular petting she ventured to lisp to her mother that she wanted a violin – "a real one, to play upon herself."

The morning star faded away quickly, and there was only the dull grey dawn in the child's sky. Her mother treated her request with laughter and put out the little Camilla's hope with a flat refusal.

CHAPTER II.
SUNRISE

It was the town talk. The women gathered round the fountain in the Place Royal and filled their water jars and gossiped about Salvatore Urso's silly whim with his child. Madame Dubois settled her cap and gave it as her opinion that no good would come of such a foolish thing. Madame Tilsit knew better, if the child wanted to play, why, let her play. The priest would not forbid it. Madame Perche knew it was far better than teaching children to read. That would lead them to dreadful infidelity, and what not. Besides, what will you? M. Urso will do as he pleases with the child.

At its best Nantes is a sleepy place, and in those days it was more narrow, petty and gossipy than can be imagined. A small town in New England where every mother's daughter can read is bad enough, but in a compact French town where every one must live next door or next floor to everybody else gossip runs wild. Totally ignorant of books or any matter outside of their own town, the people must needs fall back on themselves and quietly pick each other to pieces. Everybody had heard that Salvatore Urso, the flute player intended to teach his little girl the violin. Part of the town approved of this bold, audacious step and part of the town thought it eminently improper, if not positively wicked. There was the Urso party and the anti-Urso party. They talked

and quarrelled over it for a long time in a fashion that was quite as narrow minded and petty as could be imagined and it was more than a year before the excitement subsided.

In the meantime the little Camilla was perfectly happy over her new violin. The first refusal had not discouraged her. She waited a few days and then repeated her request to her father. No. It could not be. This did not seem to disconcert her, for in a few days she again asked if she might have a violin and a teacher. This time the refusal was not so decided. Again and again did the little one ask for a violin – only a violin – that was enough. The importunate pleading carried the day and the father took the matter into consideration.

Boys might play the violin, but a girl. That was quite another thing. One girl had been known to play the violin. Mlle. Theresa Melanello had played the violin, why not Camilla? If she wished to play so much it must be that she had genius. Should it prove true she might become a famous artist and win a great fortune. Perhaps, even sooner, much money might come from the child's playing.

Of course the child must at once go to Paris and enter the Conservatory of music. Paris was a long way off. It would cost a deal of money to get there and when there, it would cost a deal more to live, and there was no way of earning anything in Paris. The theatre, the church and the lessons enabled them to live tolerably well in Nantes. To give up these things would be simple folly. It could not be done. The prospect was brilliant,

the way seemed inviting, but it was not available. In his doubt and perplexity over the matter M. Urso went to his friend and companion in the orchestra, Felix Simon. M. Simon played the first violin at the theatre, and one night they talked it over between the acts.

If Camilla was so exceedingly anxious to play she must have some latent talent. Should she prove a genius or a prodigy it might be the means of bringing the family a fortune. Paris offered the only field for instruction and Paris meant a very great deal of money. With her present limited resources the thing was not to be considered for a moment.

M. Simon heard it all patiently, talked with the child about it and before her very eyes turned himself into an angel by offering to teach her himself. At first the family could not believe that such good fortune was possible. Still, it was true. M. Simon would teach Camilla one year without pay if he might be allowed to have entire control of her studies. She was to follow his instructions in every thing, she was to have no "pieces" and was to give her whole time to her lessons. If, when the year's instruction was finished, the child really showed a decided genius for the violin it might be well to talk about Paris. If she then exhibited merely a talent for the art, the instruction could be dropped and no harm or serious loss of time would come from it.

This liberal offer was, of course, accepted. M. Simon was a friend, indeed. They could never repay him. It was of no consequence he said. If Camilla proved her genius it would be

reward enough to be known as her first teacher.

So it was that the little girl not quite six years of age had her darling wish and took her beloved violin under her arm and trotted off to M. Simon's house at the other side of the city near the beautiful park called the Cours St. Pierre, where she had spent so many pleasant days playing under the trees.

It was a small affair. Her arms and fingers were too short for an instrument of the ordinary size and a little violin costing ten francs ($2) must answer every purpose.

The gossips might talk and quarrel over it in the steep streets of the quaint, sleepy old town. They could say what they pleased. Little did she care. She was going to learn to play the violin. That was happiness enough. Her father was to teach her the elements of music and Felix Simon was to show her how to play.

First she must learn how to stand, how to rest on her left foot with the right partly in front, then how to hold her violin, how it should rest on her shoulder and how to grasp and support it. Hold it perfectly still for ten minutes. Then lay it down for a few moments' rest. Take it up again and hold it firm. With demure patience she bent her small fingers over the strings as if to touch a chord. Head erect, left arm bent and brought forward so that she could see her elbow under the violin. Stand perfectly still with the right arm hanging down naturally. Was she to have no bow? No, not yet. She must first learn to sustain the weight of the violin, and accustom her arm to its shape. In silence and motionless she held the instrument for perhaps ten minutes and then laid it down

again till she had become rested. This was the first lesson. For two or three weeks she did this and nothing more, and at the end of that time she had acquired sufficient strength to hold the violin with firmness and steadiness.

Great was her delight when Felix Simon said she might take her bow. Now rest it lightly on the strings and draw it down slowly and steadily. Not a sound! What did that mean? Was she not to play? No. There was no rosin on the bow and it slipped over the strings in silence. How could she learn anything on a dumb violin? How make music on such a discouraging thing?

Most children would have given up in despair. Not play at all? Nothing, but positions and dumb motions? That was all. No music; not even finger exercises. Simply, to learn to stand properly, to put the fingers in the right place, and to make the right motions with the bow. The two hour lesson slipped away quickly, and the little one went home satisfied that she was now really making a good start.

Three times a week she took the long walk through the Rue Voltaire, across the sunny Place Graslin, where the theatre stood, past the handsome stores in the Place Royal, over the little bridge, where the Erdre ran through the town, and then along the narrow Rue d'Orleans till the grey towers of the old Chateau came in sight. Then to M. Simon's, and the lesson on the dumb violin. Not a word of complaint; no asking for "little pieces," after the silly fashion of American children; not even a request for an exercise. With a patience past belief the little one watched,

listened, and tried her girlish best to do it right. The violin would become dreadfully heavy. Her poor arms would ache, and her limbs become stiff with standing. M. Simon had a temper, and at times he was particularly cross, and said all sorts of unhappy things to her.

Tears at times, and childish grief over the dreadful weariness in her arms, but with it all not one word of remonstrance or complaint. Felix Simon knew everything. Her father knew what was best.

The violin would swing round to the left, and she would lose sight of her elbow under it. There was nothing to do but to straighten up till the instrument stood in a line with her fat little turned up nose, and that elbow was in sight again. Then, that right wrist! How it did ache with the long, slow motions with the bow. And her limbs grew stiff with standing in one position till they fairly ached.

If the violin was heavy, she would not mind it, and if she was tired, she would keep her eyes fixed on the strings and see that the bow lay flat and square on them as it went up and down, up and down, from the tip to the handle, over and over, again and again. Whatever happened, she would keep on. She was going to play. This was the way to learn. She would have patience.

At home the same thing was repeated. Three hours practice every day with the dumb violin. And not only every day in the week, Sundays and all, but every week. Three whole months passed away, and then they said she had learned the positions,

and the right motions. She could have some rosin on her bow and begin to play. This was progress. She was really getting on. Now she was to have some music. Nothing but the very dullest kinds of exercises; still, it was music, or something like it.

Long sustained notes by the hour. The exercises were all written out with a pen by her master. Nothing but long slow notes. Not very interesting, certainly. She would not have agreed with you. To get a good tone, to make one pure, smooth note was worth the trying for, and she was content.

The bow hardly moved, so slowly did she draw it up and down. The right arm stretched out to the full length, and then slowly back again, while the wrist bent slowly and gracefully. If she obtained nothing else, she would have a strong, clear tone, and learn to make a grand, full sweep with her bow. Speed and brilliancy would come in good time. Strength, power, and purity of tone were the things worth trying to reach. She would have no feeble, short strokes, but the wide, bold movements of a master hand.

As the weeks grew to months, her fingers and arms gained in power and her child's violin was exchanged for a larger and finer one, to her great joy and satisfaction.

Slowly and patiently she crept along. By day and by night the beloved violin was ever near her. Sometimes in the morning, sometimes late at night, when ever her teacher could find the time, she listened to his instructions and played over the endless exercises. Seven hours practice every day. Three lessons a week;

nothing allowed to interfere. Sleep, eat, a little exercise in the open air, practice and lessons, lessons and practice. Such was her young artist life.

The lessons gradually increased in variety and difficulty. Scales in every key, running passages of every imaginable character; and with it all not a single piece, song, or pretty melody of any kind. Ten months of finger exercises; nearly a year of dry scales.

As we have already mentioned, Nantes was very much given to talking about the little Camilla's studies. The men in the orchestra laughed at Felix Simon and Salvatore Urso for their silly experiment with the child. The idea of a girl playing a violin! It was too absurd! And of all children, that mite of a Camilla; thin, pale, and too small for her age, she was the last one to think of such a thing.

One day a famous violinist, Apollinaire DeKonstki, now the director of the Conservatory of Music, at Warsaw, visited Nantes, and gave a concert at the theatre. Perhaps it would be well to ask him to hear the child play. His opinion might be of great value, and perhaps it would silence the miserable chatter in the town. "Would DeKonstki kindly hear the little one play?" Yes. He would, with pleasure. He intended to give a banquet to some of his friends that evening, and after the opera, and when the supper was over, she might come to his rooms at the Hotel de France. She sat in her usual corner in the orchestra all through the evening, and then, near midnight, with her violin under her

arm, she crossed the Place Graslin and called at the Hotel de France. The great artist was sitting in the dining room by the long table where the banquet had been given. There were goblets and champagne glasses on the table, and after talking about her music for a few moments he took a fork, and gently tapping on a wine-glass, asked her what note that was. It was E. And this one? A. And this one? D. The next? A flat. And the next? G. Round the table he marched, fork in hand, striking the glasses and asking their notes. Camilla followed after, and named every tone correctly and without hesitation. He was greatly pleased with the experiment, and said he would hear her play. "Only, you must mind, I don't like false notes." This was too much, and she replied indignantly "I never give 'em, sir."

He laughed; and then, with demure seriousness, she began to play some of her more difficult exercises from memory. She was a bold and sturdy player, and astonished the master with the graceful sweep of her thin, childish arm. He complimented her in a cordial manner, and hoped she would go on with her studies. "Oh! she would, she would; she meant to study all the time. Some day she would learn to play better still." And then she went home, well pleased that the master had approved of the method of instruction she had pursued. Let the gossips talk. She was on the right road, and she didn't care for them.

This was the only time that Camilla played to any one outside her own family during the first year of her musical life. Many musicians and others asked to hear her, but M. Urso thought it

best to refuse them. No one was ever allowed to hear her practice, and her musical progress was kept a profound secret. Naturally enough, this only excited curiosity, and the gossip ran wilder than ever.

Her outward life was unchanged. She appeared regularly at the theatre with her father, and sat by his side through the performance. The other players often teased her, and asked her perplexing questions about the music. What note was that? What key were they playing in now, and now and now? Every time the music modulated from key to key, she followed it, and named the notes and keys correctly, without hesitation.

Then something happened that made them think it might be well to let her have a piece to play. And such a splendid piece! Not a mere child's song for the violin, or a little dance. Nothing like that. A grand concert piece such as the Masters played. De Beriot's famous "*Seventh air varié*." A melody with variations, by the great composer De Beriot. To be sure it was not equal to some of the grand works of Haydn or Beethoven, but for those days it was considered a remarkable composition. Since the little Camilla has grown up people have learned more about violin playing, and what was then thought to be a great piece of music would not now be considered as anything very remarkable.

As it was, Camilla thought the piece something quite wonderful, and took it up with the greatest eagerness. Utterly absorbed in her work, knowing little or nothing of what was going on outside her lessons, she studied and practiced day after

day without a thought of anything else. The new piece and the exercises took her whole time for the next two months. That one "*air varié*" was in hand every day. She played it through hundreds of times. Every phrase was studied. Hours were spent over one note. A week on a single page was good progress. One little passage cost her many a sorrowful hour. Somehow she could not get it right for a long time. Once she played it over forty-seven times before her nervous and irritable master would let her off. Other pupils were waiting. They could wait. She was to play that measure just right if it took all day. It was useless to cry. If she was obstinate and naughty about it she should be punished. She must play it right. How her arms ached over that passage. The tears dropped on the violin. It didn't do any good, and only made the master still more angry. At last she did it right, played it over several times, went home and never played it wrong again in her life.

Such was the child's artist life for the first twelve months. Outside of it the gossips fairly raged and warred with their nimble tongues. Salvatore Urso's experiment with his little girl was much talked about. Some could not say too hard things of him. Felix Simon was blamed, her mother was blamed. It was all wrong. It was wicked to teach the child to play. Others said no, let her try, if she failed they would be well punished for their work. If she succeeded it would be a fine thing. It was rumored that the girl had great talent and would in time do wonderful things.

In such a dull, sleepy town as Nantes, where there is nothing in

particular going on, and where the people have little or nothing to talk about outside their own petty lives, such an experiment as this was naturally the subject of much talk. It was such a bold step, and, really, there was nothing else to talk about. Imagine the excitement when it was announced that the little Camilla would give a public performance at the Hotel de Ville.

It came about in this way. The Bassoon in the orchestra died. That was the curious way they expressed it. The instrument had not died, but the man who played it. He left a widow and one child, and no money. Nobody had ever heard of an orchestral player who had left much. The pay was too small for him to save anything, and so the poor widow was left without a franc. Of course, they must give her a benefit concert. M. Urso heard of it, and on talking it over with Felix Simon they decided to prepare Camilla to take part in the charity concert for the benefit of the widow of the Bassoon. So it happened that she took up the "*air varié*" as her first piece.

It takes a long time to do anything in Europe. Here we would decide to give a concert, advertise it, and hire the hall all in the same day, and have it all over within a week. In Nantes it took six weeks to arrange everything, see who would offer to play, and to properly announce the event. This slow and deliberate way of doing things was an advantage to Camilla as it gave her plenty of time to study the piece and to commit it to memory past forgetting.

They collected a grand orchestra. Mdlle. Masson, who was

quite a fine artist volunteered to sing, and the little Camilla would play the famous "*Seventh air varié*" from De Beriot.

The excitement was tremendous. Everybody wanted to go. The Italian opera company, the French opera company, the dramatic company, all the grand families, every musician in town, bought tickets. There was not a seat or standing place in the Hotel de Ville to be had, and the Bassoon's widow received a most remarkable benefit. All the friends of the Urso family were there to encourage the child, and all her father's enemies were on hand ready to laugh at her failure.

She was expected to fail. She might be able to struggle through the piece without really breaking down, but of course she would stand awkwardly, handle her bow like a stick, and do everything else that was bad and inelegant. They might assert that she would play like an artist – she could not do it. And so they waited to see Salvatore Urso's silly experiment come to a wretched end.

How amiable in them! We can forgive them. There was nothing else to talk about in Nantes, and it was certainly a very bold thing to bring out the six year old girl in this public manner. She must be a truly wonderful child, or her father and teacher had quite lost their heads.

The concert began and went on very much as concerts do everywhere. The orchestra played and the artists sang, and then there was a little rustle and hush of expectation as they brought in a box or platform for the child to stand upon so that all could see her. The piano was rolled out into a convenient place, and

then the slight, blue eyed girl, gay in a white dress, white satin shoes, and a pink sash, appeared. They placed the dot of a child, violin in hand, upon the raised platform before them all. Felix Simon, with trembling fingers, sat down to the piano to play the accompaniment. Her father stood near to turn the leaves of the music book, though he was so nervous and excited he hardly knew what he was about. In the audience sat her aunt Caroline, surrounded by a few of her friends, and all of them in no enviable frame of mind. Her mother was too nervous and excited to appear, and remained in the ante-room.

As for Camilla, she was absorbed in that remarkable pink sash and those satin shoes. There was never anything quite so fine, and she did hope all the people noticed how very becoming they were. That they were really watching her, never entered her head. With perfect self-possession she put the violin to her shoulder, and stood ready to play. No awkwardness, no fear, no attempt at display; a simple girl, with a girl's manners. The critics admitted to themselves that she knew how to hold her instrument, and could handle her bow with a certain amount of grace. But, then, that was to be expected. Could she play?

There was not much doubt of it. The tone came, strong, full, and true. The notes came in exact time, and with precision and certainty. The people were hushed to a painful silence, as the child went steadily on with the work. M. Simon was breathless with excitement, and her father hardly knew where he was. In his haste, he turned two leaves of the music-book at once. What a

dreadful disaster! It was all over now. She would break down at once, if the accompaniment should falter.

Not much danger; for she quietly turned her head, and in a hurried, lisping, whisper said: "You've turned two pages, papa."

The whole house heard every word, and a smile spread over the company. Little did she care. She went straight on; not a note lost, not a break or a sign of hesitation. The page was turned back without a pause, and the music went on.

This piece of music begins with an introduction in *adagio*. The opening bars are smooth and graceful, and then the melody becomes more difficult, and moves in sixths and thirds. It ends in a brilliant *cadenza*, that leads to the theme in *moderato* time. This part is not very difficult in rhythm, and is bright and pleasing in character. The first variation is *poco piu lento*, and at once demands great skill to execute its difficult running movements. The second variation is still more difficult, and abounds in rapid scales and open chords. The third variation is in G, and in *adagio* time, and is full of trills and abrupt changes from high to low notes. A long *cadenza* leads to the last movement in *moderato* time and in the key of E. It finally ends in an *allegro coda* that abounds in brilliant and difficult writing.

What a dreadful uproar they did make over the child. It seemed as if they never would stop clapping and cheering. She could not go, but must stay and bow in a demure fashion, that was perfectly captivating. They did not expect her to play the piece again. That was not the custom in Nantes. M. Sollie, the

leader of the orchestra, in the name of all the musicians, offered to crown her young head with a wreath of white camelias. The attempt was amusing, and they all laughed and cheered again. The wreath was too big, or she was too small, and it slipped over her head and shoulders, and fell to the floor, and there she stood in the middle of it.

Some enthusiastic ladies presented her with a tiny ring for her finger, and a handsome bracelet; and more wonderful than all, they brought out a magnificent Paris doll, in a big white box, and set her quite wild with joy by presenting it to her. With the doll under one arm, and her precious violin under the other, she bowed her thanks from the middle of the wreath. Then they cheered again, and laughed, and offered her flowers. She was taken down from the platform and led away, but they had her back again three times, doll, violin, and all. Altogether, it was a very remarkable experience for father, mother, teacher, and wonderful little girl.

Perhaps you think this overdrawn. This is a true story. Here is an extract from one of the newspapers of Nantes, that only says the same thing:

– "Never had violinist a *pose* more exact, firmer, and, at the same time, perfectly easy; never was bow guided with greater precision, than by this little Urso, whose delivery made all the mothers smile. Listen, now, to the Air Variee of the celebrated Beriot; under these fingers, which are yet often busied with dressing a doll, the instrument gives out a purity and sweetness of

tone, with an expression most remarkable. Every light and shade is observed, and all the intentions of the composer faithfully rendered. Here comes more energetic passages, the feeble child will find strength necessary, and the voice of the instrument assumes a fullness of tone which one could not look for in the diminutive violin. Effects of double stopping, staccato, rapid arpeggios – everything is executed with the same precision, the same purity, the same grace. Repeatedly interrupted by applause and acclamations, she was saluted at the end by salvos of bravos and a shower of bouquets."

As for the anti-Urso party, they were completely demoralized and had not a word to say. Camilla was a success, and they gracefully retired from the field.

CHAPTER III.
THE DAY BEGINS

The next morning Camilla trotted off to Felix Simon's just as if nothing had happened. The Ursos were too sensible to be upset by vanity. The triumph of their child only caused them to soberly consider what was to be done next. Camilla must lose no time. The lessons must go on precisely as before and until matters were properly arranged her life would be unchanged. She must prepare for more difficult tasks. Having proved her skill she must now improve it. Greater tests and severer trials were in store for her. She must go to Paris. She must enter the Conservatory of Music. But how, and when?

Long and earnestly they talked over the matter and laid their plans as best they could. M. Urso was a fine flute player. Of course, he could readily obtain a place in some theatre in Paris. Camilla's mother was a charming singer and a good teacher. She could give lessons, and perhaps sing in some church. Oh! and then there was the organ! Certainly so fine an organist as M. Urso would soon get a good place with a comfortable salary. Aunt Caroline must go too. She would keep house and help the children. None of them had ever been to Paris, but the prospect seemed brilliant and for Camilla's sake they ought to go as soon as possible. Having decided to move they sold all their furniture, collected whatever was due for music lessons and salaries and

prepared for the flitting.

Camilla, her father and aunt Caroline were to go first. The baby brother was too young to bear the journey, and when they were comfortably settled in Paris, mother could follow them. The journey was a slow one. It was mid-summer, and on the road came the news that the cholera was raging in Paris. It would not do to enter the city till cooler weather came. So they tarried at Tours for six weeks till the sickness abated.

The Conservatory of Music stood at the corner of the Rue Faubourg – Poissonière and the Rue Bergère in the old part of the city of Paris. They must take rooms as near it as possible so that Camilla would not have too far to walk on stormy days. With all their hopeful prospects and though they had quite a large sum of ready money in hand they took simple quarters in a house on the Rue St. Nicholas d'Antin.

As soon as they were comfortably settled Salvatore Urso went to the conservatory to ask if the little Camilla might be admitted as a pupil.

The Director, Auber, received him politely and asked what he wanted. "Could Camilla enter the Conservatory?" The little shrivelled up gentleman opened his small eyes as wide as he could and said, in a squeaking voice, "Camilla! That's a girl!" Yes. Camilla was a girl. How very shocking in her. Why was she not a boy? A girl. Oh! No it couldn't be considered for a moment. A girl enter the great Conservatory of Music! Such a thing had never been heard of in the whole history of the world.

The Conservatory was not for girls and they couldn't be admitted.

This was discouraging and M. Urso retired from the interview not knowing what to do next. The idea that the great composer Auber would utterly refuse to take the child had never entered his head. Of course, with her undoubted genius the Conservatory would be proud to teach her. What difference did it make if she did happen to be a girl?

It made a great deal of difference to the worthy officers of the Conservatory. Not one of them would consider her case. The Secretary, De Beauchesne was applied to with more success, but he was only one of the officers and he could do nothing alone. He heard Camilla play and did everything he could for her. He visited the family and was in every way a friend. When Camilla's third brother, Salvatore, was born, he stood Godfather to the child, so we may infer that he was quite intimate at the Ursos'.

It would not do to give it up so. Day after day slipped past, the time grew to weeks and still the doors of the Conservatory were fast closed against the child. M. Urso called on Auber several times. Would he not interest himself in the child? Would he only hear her play? No. It was useless. She was a girl. She could not enter. Why had M. Urso been so foolish as to come to Paris when he might have known that they never took in girls. Besides, she was not old enough. Not even a boy could enter under ten.

People of influence were consulted, and in vain. If the Directors of the Conservatory would not take the child it was no affair of theirs. They could do nothing about it. It did seem

as if everything was against her and she began to realize what a very unhappy thing it is to be a girl. Still, she would not despair nor relax one effort to obtain her darling wish. She would keep on studying just the same and all through the weary weeks of waiting she practiced and studied as best she could under her father's instruction.

The Winter passed away and the Spring came. It brought very little hope with it. Camilla could not enter the Conservatory. There were only nine places and there were seventy-six applicants and every one of them boys. When they grew up they could play in the theatres. That was the aim of their lives. The Conservatory was opened to teach them, to prepare them for this very work. Camilla would not play in an orchestra and, of course, she would be of no use to the country and it was idle to admit her to the classes.

Persistence finally carried the day. M. Urso fairly worried the learned officers of the Conservatory into a consent. The irritable little Director, Auber, lost his temper and said "Well, bring the girl. She is sure to fail. We will hear her play, but she cannot enter."

The Ursos were greatly pleased with this concession. If they would hear Camilla just once it would be enough. They could hardly refuse to take a child of her great talents even if she did have the misfortune to be a girl.

At last the eventful day arrived. The seventy-six boys and the one girl were to be examined. Her case was quite hopeless, they

said. She might play like an angel and it would avail nothing. The boys would have the places.

She never lost her courage, but with that quiet, serious manner that only served to hide her sturdy character, she took her father's hand and soberly trotted through the streets without a fear. She knew what she could do, she had her piece by heart; she meant to break into that Conservatory, it was her only hope and she would try hard to do her very, very best.

M. Urso was excited and nervous. How would it all end? Would Camilla be admitted. It was doubtful, still, her genius might win the day in spite of the determined opposition that was raised against her. As for Camilla she clung to her violin in stubborn silence, and patiently waited for the great trial. All the candidates met in one room, the seventy-six boys and their friends and the one girl with her father.

All the names were numbered and the numbers placed in a box and shaken up. Then, some one drew them out, one at a time, and called off the numbers. Camilla's number was nine, so her turn came quite early in the day. This was fortunate, for she was fresh and eager to begin and the jury had not become weary with their task. One at a time the boys were admitted to the presence of the grand jury. Big fellows, fourteen and fifteen years old, who had played before she was born. The case really looked discouraging and desperate. Would she ever get in? She was only seven, and looked hardly six. Her fingers were thin and her face pale. She hardly seemed fitted to compete with grown up lads. It did not

deter her from trying, and when her number was called she felt sure she would do her best.

They led her into a room where eight solemn looking men sat in big green-backed chairs round a large table. Each had an inkstand and pen and paper and every one had a look of severe dignity that was positively appalling. There was the little Auber, the Director, Rossini the great composer looking fat and grand in his impressive wig, Carraffa the celebrated composer, Allard the violinist and four others looking equally wise and solemn.

They placed her before the double quartette of players who were to give the accompaniment and prepared to hear her work. She would try the *andante* and *finale* from the *Fourth Concerto*, by Rode with accompaniment for violin, second, viola, and violincello.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.