

**GEORGE
MEREDITH**

SANDRA
BELLONI,
VOLUME 1

George Meredith
Sandra Belloni. Volume 1

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Sandra Belloni – Volume 1:

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George Meredith

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CHAPTER I

We are to make acquaintance with some serious damsels, as this English generation knows them, and at a season verging upon May. The ladies of Brookfield, Arabella, Cornelia, and Adela Pole, daughters of a flourishing City-of-London merchant, had been told of a singular thing: that in the neighbouring fir-wood a voice was to be heard by night, so wonderfully sweet and richly toned, that it required their strong sense to correct strange imaginings concerning it. Adela was herself the chief witness to its unearthly sweetness, and her testimony was confirmed by Edward Buxley, whose ear had likewise taken in the notes, though not on the same night, as the pair publicly proved by dates. Both declared that the voice belonged to an opera-singer or a spirit. The ladies of Brookfield, declining the alternative, perceived that this was a surprise furnished for their amusement by the latest celebrity of their circle, Mr. Pericles, their father's business ally and fellow-speculator; Mr. Pericles, the Greek, the man who held millions of money as dust compared to a human voice. Fortified by this exquisite supposition, their strong sense at once dismissed with scorn the idea of anything unearthly,

however divine, being heard at night, in the nineteenth century, within sixteen miles of London City. They agreed that Mr. Pericles had hired some charming cantatrice to draw them into the woods and delightfully bewilder them. It was to be expected of his princely nature, they said. The Tinleys, of Bloxholme, worshipped him for his wealth; the ladies of Brookfield assured their friends that the fact of his being a money-maker was redeemed in their sight by his devotion to music. Music was now the Art in the ascendant at Brookfield. The ladies (for it is as well to know at once that they were not of that poor order of women who yield their admiration to a thing for its abstract virtue only)—the ladies were scaling society by the help of the Arts. To this laudable end sacrifices were now made to Euterpe to assist them. As mere daughters of a merchant, they were compelled to make their house not simply attractive, but enticing; and, seeing that they liked music, it seemed a very agreeable device. The Tinleys of Bloxholme still kept to dancing, and had effectually driven away Mr. Pericles from their gatherings. For Mr. Pericles said: "If that they will go 'so,' I will be amused." He presented a top-like triangular appearance for one staggering second. The Tinleys did not go 'so' at all, and consequently they lost the satirical man, and were called 'the ballet-dancers' by Adela which thorny scoff her sisters permitted to pass about for a single day, and no more. The Tinleys were their match at epithets, and any low contention of this kind obscured for them the social summit they hoped to attain; the dream whereof was their prime nourishment.

That the Tinleys really were their match, they acknowledged, upon the admission of the despicable nature of the game. The Tinleys had winged a dreadful shaft at them; not in itself to be dreaded, but that it struck a weak point; it was a common shot that exploded a magazine; and for a time it quite upset their social policy, causing them to act like simple young ladies who feel things and resent them. The ladies of Brookfield had let it be known that, in their privacy together, they were Pole, Polar, and North Pole. Pole, Polar, and North Pole were designations of the three shades of distance which they could convey in a bow: a form of salute they cherished as peculiarly their own; being a method they had invented to rebuke the intrusiveness of the outer world, and hold away all strangers until approved worthy. Even friends had occasionally to submit to it in a softened form. Arabella, the eldest, and Adela, the youngest, alternated Pole and Polar; but North Pole was shared by Cornelia with none. She was the fairest of the three; a nobly-built person; her eyes not vacant of tenderness when she put off her armour. In her war-panoply before unhappy strangers, she was a Britomart. They bowed to an iceberg, which replied to them with the freezing indifference of the floating colossus, when the Winter sun despatches a feeble greeting messenger-beam from his miserable Arctic wallet. The simile must be accepted in its might, for no lesser one will express the scornfulness toward men displayed by this strikingly well-favoured, formal lady, whose heart of hearts demanded for her as spouse, a lord, a philosopher, and a Christian, in one: and he

must be a member of Parliament. Hence her isolated air.

Now, when the ladies of Brookfield heard that their Pole, Polar, and North Pole, the splendid image of themselves, had been transformed by the Tinleys, and defiled by them to Pole, Polony, and Maypole, they should have laughed contemptuously, but the terrible nerve of ridicule quivered in witness against them, and was not to be stilled. They could not understand why so coarse a thing should affect them. It stuck in their flesh. It gave them the idea that they saw their features hideous, but real, in a magnifying mirror.

There was therefore a feud between the Tinleys and the Poles; and when Mr. Pericles entirely gave up the former, the latter rewarded him by spreading abroad every possible kind interpretation of his atrocious bad manners. He was a Greek, of Parisian gilding, whose Parisian hat flew off at a moment's notice, and whose savage snarl was heard at the slightest vexation. His talk of renowned prime-donne by their Christian names, and the way that he would catalogue emperors, statesmen, and noblemen known to him, with familiar indifference, as things below the musical Art, gave a distinguishing tone to Brookfield, from which his French accentuation of our tongue did not detract.

Mr. Pericles grimaced bitterly at any claim to excellence being set up for the mysterious voice in the woods. Tapping one forefinger on the uplifted point of the other, he observed that to sing abroad in the night air of an English Spring month

was conclusive of imbecility; and that no imbecile sang at all. Because, to sing, involved the highest accomplishment of which the human spirit could boast. Did the ladies see? he asked. They thought they saw that he carried on a deception admirably. In return, they inquired whether he would come with them and hunt the voice, saying that they would catch it for him. "I shall catch a cold for myself," said Mr. Pericles, from the elevation of a shrug, feeling that he was doomed to go forth. He acted reluctance so well that the ladies affected a pretty imperiousness; and when at last he consented to join the party, they thanked him with a nicely simulated warmth, believing that they had pleased him thoroughly.

Their brother Wilfrid was at Brookfield. Six months earlier he had returned from India, an invalided cornet of light cavalry, with a reputation for military dash and the prospect of a medal. Then he was their heroic brother he was now their guard. They love him tenderly, and admired him when it was necessary; but they had exhausted their own sensations concerning his deeds of arms, and fancied that he had served their purpose. And besides, valour is not an intellectual quality, they said. They were ladies so aspiring, these daughters of the merchant Samuel Bolton Pole, that, if Napoleon had been their brother, their imaginations would have overtopped him after his six months' inaction in the Tuileries. They would by that time have made a stepping-stone of the emperor. 'Mounting' was the title given to this proceeding. They went on perpetually mounting. It is still a good way from

the head of the tallest of men to the stars; so they had their work before them; but, as they observed, they were young. To be brief, they were very ambitious damsels, aiming at they knew not exactly what, save that it was something so wide that it had not a name, and so high in the air that no one could see it. They knew assuredly that their circle did not please them. So, therefore, they were constantly extending and refining it: extending it perhaps for the purpose of refining it. Their susceptibilities demanded that they should escape from a city circle. Having no mother, they ruled their father's house and him, and were at least commanders of whatsoever forces they could summon for the task.

It may be seen that they were sentimentalists. That is to say, they supposed that they enjoyed exclusive possession of the Nice Feelings, and exclusively comprehended the Fine Shades. Whereof more will be said; but in the meantime it will explain their propensity to mount; it will account for their irritation at the material obstructions surrounding them; and possibly the philosopher will now have his eye on the source of that extraordinary sense of superiority to mankind which was the crown of their complacent brows. Eclipsed as they may be in the gross appreciation of the world by other people, who excel in this and that accomplishment, persons that nourish Nice Feelings and are intimate with the Fine Shades carry their own test of intrinsic value.

Nor let the philosopher venture hastily to despise them as pipers to dilettante life. Such persons come to us in the order of

civilization. In their way they help to civilize us. Sentimentalists are a perfectly natural growth of a fat soil. Wealthy communities must engender them. If with attentive minds we mark the origin of classes, we shall discern that the Nice Feelings and the Fine Shades play a principal part in our human development and social history. I dare not say that civilized man is to be studied with the eye of a naturalist; but my vulgar meaning might almost be twisted to convey: that our sentimentalists are a variety owing their existence to a certain prolonged term of comfortable feeding. The pig, it will be retorted, passes likewise through this training. He does. But in him it is not combined with an indigestion of high German romances. Here is so notable a difference, that he cannot possibly be said to be of the family. And I maintain it against him, who have nevertheless listened attentively to the eulogies pronounced by the vendors of prize bacon.

After thus stating to you the vast pretensions of the ladies of Brookfield, it would be unfair to sketch their portraits. Nothing but comedy bordering on burlesque could issue from the contrast, though they graced a drawing-room or a pew, and had properly elegant habits and taste in dress, and were all fair to the sight. Moreover, Adela had not long quitted school. Outwardly they were not unlike other young ladies with wits alert. They were at the commencement of their labours on this night of the expedition when they were fated to meet something greatly confusing them.

CHAPTER II

Half of a rosy mounting full moon was on the verge of the East as the ladies, with attendant cavaliers, passed, humming softly, through the garden-gates. Arabella had, by right of birth, made claim to Mr. Pericles: not without an unwontedly fretful remonstrance from Cornelia, who said, "My dear, you must allow that I have some talent for drawing men out."

And Arabella replied: "Certainly, dear, you have; and I think I have some too."

The gentle altercation lasted half-an-hour, but they got no farther than this. Mr. Pericles was either hopeless of protecting himself from such shrewd assailants, or indifferent to their attacks, for all his defensive measures were against the cold. He was muffled in a superbly mounted bearskin, which came up so closely about his ears that Arabella had to repeat to him all her questions, and as it were force a way for her voice through the hide. This was provoking, since it not only stemmed the natural flow of conversation, but prevented her imagination from decorating the reminiscence of it subsequently (which was her profound secret pleasure), besides letting in the outer world upon her. Take it as an axiom, when you utter a sentimentalism, that more than one pair of ears makes a cynical critic. A sentimentalism requires secrecy. I can enjoy it, and shall treat it respectfully if you will confide it to me alone; but I and my

friends must laugh at it outright.

"Does there not seem a soul in the moonlight?" for instance. Arabella, after a rapturous glance at the rosy orb, put it to Mr. Pericles, in subdued impressive tones. She had to repeat her phrase; Mr. Pericles then echoing, with provoking monotony of tone, "Sol?"—whereupon "Soul!" was reiterated, somewhat sharply: and Mr. Pericles, peering over the collar of the bear, with half an eye, continued the sentence, in the manner of one sent thereby farther from its meaning: "Ze moonlight?" Despairing and exasperated, Arabella commenced afresh: "I said, there seems a soul in it"; and Mr. Pericles assented bluntly: "In ze light!"—which sounded so little satisfactory that Arabella explained, "I mean the aspect;" and having said three times distinctly what she meant, in answer to a terrific glare from the unsubmerged whites of the eyes of Mr. Pericles, this was his comment, almost roared forth:

"Sol! you say so-whole—in ze moonlight—Luna? Hein? Ze aspect is of

Sol!—Yez."

And Mr. Pericles sank into his bear again, while Wilfrid Pole, who was swinging his long cavalry legs to rearward, shouted; and Mr. Sumner, a rising young barrister, walking beside Cornelia, smiled a smile of extreme rigidity. Arabella was punished for claiming rights of birth. She heard the murmuring course of the dialogue between Cornelia and Mr. Sumner, sufficiently clear to tell her it was not fictitious and was well sustained, while

her heart was kept thirsting for the key to it. In advance were Adela and Edward Buxley, who was only a rich alderman's only son, but had the virtue of an extraordinary power of drawing caricatures, and was therefore useful in exaggerating the features of disagreeable people, and showing how odious they were. besides endearing pleasant ones exhibiting how comic they could be. Gossips averred that before Mr. Pole had been worried by his daughters into giving that mighty sum for Brookfield, Arabella had accepted Edward as her suitor; but for some reason or other he had apparently fallen from his high estate. To tell the truth, Arabella conceived that he had simply obeyed her wishes, while he knew he was naughtily following his own; and Adela, without introspection at all, was making her virgin effort at the caricaturing of our sex in his person: an art for which she promised well.

Out of the long black shadows of the solitary trees of the park, and through low yellow moonlight, they passed suddenly into the muffled ways of the wood. Mr. Pericles was ineffably provoking. He had come for gallantry's sake, and was not to be rallied, and would echo every question in a roar, and there was no drawing of the man out at all. He knocked against branches, and tripped over stumps, and ejaculated with energy; but though he gave no heed or help to his fair associate, she thought not the worse of him, so heroic can women be toward any creature that will permit himself to be clothed by a mystery. At times the party hung still, fancying the voice aloft, and then, after listening

to the unrelieved stillness, they laughed, and trod the stiff dry ferns and soft mosses once more. At last they came to a decided halt, when the proposition to return caused Adela to come up to Mr. Pericles and say to him, "Now, you must confess! You have prohibited her from singing to-night so that we may continue to be mystified. I call this quite shameful of you!"

And even as Mr. Pericles was protesting that he was the most mystified of the company, his neck lengthened, and his head went round, and his ear was turned to the sky, while he breathed an elaborate "Ah!" And sure enough that was the voice of the woods, cleaving the night air, not distant. A sleepy fire of early moonlight hung through the dusky fir-branches. The voice had the woods to itself, and seemed to fill them and soar over them, it was so full and rich, so light and sweet. And now, to add to the marvel, they heard a harp accompaniment, the strings being faintly touched, but with firm fingers. A woman's voice: on that could be no dispute. Tell me, what opens heaven more flamingly to heart and mind, than the voice of a woman, pouring clear accordant notes to the blue night sky, that grows light blue to the moon? There was no flourish in her singing. All the notes were firm, and rounded, and sovereignly distinct. She seemed to have caught the ear of Night, and sang confident of her charm. It was a grand old Italian air, requiring severity of tone and power. Now into great mournful hollows the voice sank steadfastly. One soft sweep of the strings succeeded a deep final note, and the hearers breathed freely.

"Stradella!" said the Greek, folding his arms.

The ladies were too deeply impressed to pursue their play with him. Real emotions at once set aside the semi-credence they had given to their own suggestions.

"Hush! she will sing again," whispered Adela. "It is the most delicious contralto." Murmurs of objection to the voice being characterized at all by any technical word, or even for a human quality, were heard.

"Let me find zis woman!" cried the prose enthusiast Mr. Pericles, imperiously, with his bearskin thrown back on his shoulders, and forth they stepped, following him.

In the middle of the wood there was a sandy mound, rising half the height of the lesser firs, bounded by a green-grown vallum, where once an old woman, hopelessly a witch, had squatted, and defied the authorities to make her budge: nor could they accomplish the task before her witch-soul had taken wing in the form of a black night-bird, often to be heard jarring above the spot. Lank dry weeds and nettles, and great lumps of green and gray moss, now stood on the poor old creature's place of habitation, and the moon, slanting through the fir-clumps, was scattered on the blossoms of twisted orchard-trees, gone wild again. Amid this desolation, a dwarfed pine, whose roots were partially bared as they grasped the broken bank that was its perch, threw far out a cedar-like hand. In the shadow of it sat the fair singer. A musing touch of her harp-strings drew the intruders to the charmed circle, though they could discern nothing save

the glimmer of the instrument and one set of fingers caressing it. How she viewed their rather impertinent advance toward her, till they had ranged in a half-circle nearer and nearer, could not be guessed. She did not seem abashed in any way, for, having precluded, she threw herself into another song.

The charm was now more human, though scarcely less powerful. This was a different song from the last: it was not the sculptured music of the old school, but had the richness and fulness of passionate blood that marks the modern Italian, where there is much dallying with beauty in the thick of sweet anguish. Here, at a certain passage of the song, she gathered herself up and pitched a nervous note, so shrewdly triumphing, that, as her voice sank to rest, her hearers could not restrain a deep murmur of admiration.

Then came an awkward moment. The ladies did not wish to go, and they were not justified in stopping. They were anxious to speak, and they could not choose the word to utter. Mr. Pericles relieved them by moving forward and doffing his hat, at the same time begging excuse for the rudeness they were guilty of.

The fair singer answered, with the quickness that showed a girl: "Oh, stay; do stay, if I please you!" A singular form of speech, it was thought by the ladies.

She added: "I feel that I sing better when I have people to listen to me."

"You find it more sympathetic, do you not?" remarked Cornelia.

"I don't know," responded the unknown, with a very honest smile. "I like it."

She was evidently uneducated. "A professional?" whispered Adela to Arabella. She wanted little invitation to exhibit her skill, at all events, for, at a word, the clear, bold, but finely nervous voice, was pealing to a brisker measure, that would have been joyous but for one fall it had, coming unexpectedly, without harshness, and winding up the song in a ringing melancholy.

After a few bars had been sung, Mr. Pericles was seen tapping his forehead perplexedly. The moment it ended, he cried out, in a tone of vexed apology for strange ignorance: "But I know not it? It is Italian— yes, I swear it is Italian! But—who then? It is superbe! But I know not it!"

"It is mine," said the young person.

"Your music, miss?"

"I mean, I composed it."

"Permit me to say, Brava!"

The ladies instantly petitioned to have it sung to them again; and whether or not they thought more of it, or less, now that the authorship was known to them, they were louder in their applause, which seemed to make the little person very happy.

"You are sure it pleases you?" she exclaimed.

They were very sure it pleased them. Somehow the ladies were growing gracious toward her, from having previously felt too humble, it may be. She was girlish in her manner, and not imposing in her figure. She would be a sweet mystery to talk

about, they thought: but she had ceased to be quite the same mystery to them.

"I would go on singing to you," she said; "I could sing all night long: but my people at the farm will not keep supper for me, when it's late, and I shall have to go hungry to bed, if I wait."

"Have you far to go?" ventured Adela.

"Only to Wilson's farm; about ten minutes' walk through the wood," she answered unhesitatingly.

Arabella wished to know whether she came frequently to this lovely spot.

"When it does not rain, every evening," was the reply.

"You feel that the place inspires you?" said Cornelia.

"I am obliged to come," she explained. "The good old dame at the farm is ill, and she says that music all day is enough for her, and I must come here, or I should get no chance of playing at all at night."

"But surely you feel an inspiration in the place, do you not?" Cornelia persisted.

She looked at this lady as if she had got a hard word given her to crack, and muttered: "I feel it quite warm here. And I do begin to love the place."

The stately Cornelia fell back a step.

The moon was now a silver ball on the edge of the circle of grey blue above the ring of firs, and by the light falling on the strange little person, as she stood out of the shadow to muffle up her harp, it could be seen that she was simply clad, and that

her bonnet was not of the newest fashion. The sisters remarked a boot-lace hanging loose. The peculiar black lustre of her hair, and thickness of her long black eyebrows, struck them likewise. Her harp being now comfortably mantled, Cornet Wilfrid Pole, who had been watching her and balancing repeatedly on his forward foot, made a stride, and "really could not allow her to carry it herself," and begged her permission that he might assist her. "It's very heavy, you know," he added.

"Too heavy for me," she said, favouring him with a thankful smile. "I have some one who does that. Where is Jim?"

She called for Jim, and from the back of the sandy hillock, where he had been reclining, a broad-shouldered rustic came lurching round to them.

"Now, take my harp, if you please, and be as careful as possible of branches, and don't stumble." She uttered this as if she were giving Jim his evening lesson: and then with a sudden cry she laughed out: "Oh! but I haven't played you your tune, and you must have your tune!"

Forthwith she stript the harp half bare, and throwing a propitiatory bright glance at her audience on the other side of her, she commenced thrumming a kind of Giles Scroggins, native British, beer-begotten air, while Jim smeared his mouth and grinned, as one who sees his love dragged into public view, and is not the man to be ashamed of her, though he hopes you will hardly put him to the trial.

"This is his favourite tune, that he taught me," she emphasized

to the company. "I play to him every night, for a finish; and then he takes care not to knock my poor harp to pieces and tumble about."

The gentlemen were amused by the Giles Scroggins air, which she had delivered with a sufficient sense of its lumping fun and leg-for-leg jollity, and they laughed and applauded; but the ladies were silent after the performance, until the moment came to thank her for the entertainment she had afforded them: and then they broke into gentle smiles, and trusted they might have the pleasure of hearing her another night.

"Oh! just as often and as much as you like," she said, and first held her hand to Arabella, next to Cornelia, and then to Adela. She seemed to be hesitating before the gentlemen, and when Wilfrid raised his hat, she was put to some confusion, and bowed rather awkwardly, and retired.

"Good night, miss!" called Mr. Pericles.

"Good night, sir!" she answered from a little distance, and they could see that she was there emboldened to drop a proper curtsy in accompaniment.

Then the ladies stood together and talked of her, not with absolute enthusiasm. For, "Was it not divine?" said Adela; and Cornelia asked her if she meant the last piece; and, "Oh, gracious! not that!" Adela exclaimed. And then it was discovered how their common observation had fastened on the boot-lace; and this vagrant article became the key to certain speculations on her condition and character.

"I wish I'd had a dozen bouquets, that's all!" cried Wilfrid. "she deserved them."

"Has she sentiment for what she sings? or is it only faculty?" Cornelia put it to Mr. Sumner.

That gentleman faintly defended the stranger for the intrusion of the bumpkin tune. "She did it so well!" he said.

"I complain that she did it too well," uttered Cornelia, whose use of emphasis customarily implied that the argument remained with her.

Talking in this manner, and leisurely marching homeward, they were startled to hear Mr. Pericles, who had wrapped himself impenetrably in the bear, burst from his cogitation suddenly to cry out, in his harshest foreign accent: "Yeaz!" And thereupon he threw open the folds, and laid out a forefinger, and delivered himself: "I am made my mind! I send her abroad to ze Academie for one, two, tree year. She shall be instructed as was not before. Zen a noise at La Scala. No—Paris! No—London! She shall astonish London fairst.—Yez! if I take a theatre! Yez! if I buy a newspaper! Yez! if I pay feefty-sossand pound!"

His singular outlandish vehemence, and the sweeping grandeur of a determination that lightly assumed the corruptibility of our Press, sent a smile circling among the ladies and gentlemen. The youth who had wished to throw the fair unknown a dozen bouquets, caught himself frowning at this brilliant prospect for her, which was to give him his opportunity.

CHAPTER III

The next morning there were many "tra-las" and "tum-te-turns" over the family breakfast-table; a constant humming and crying, "I have it"; and after two or three bars, baffled pauses and confusion of mind. Mr. Pericles was almost abusive at the impotent efforts of the sisters to revive in his memory that particular delicious melody, the composition of the fair singer herself. At last he grew so impatient as to arrest their opening notes, and even to interrupt their unmusical consultations, with "No: it is no use; it is no use: no, no, I say!" But instantly he would plunge his forehead into the palm of his hand, and rub it red, and work his eyebrows frightfully, until tender humanity led the sisters to resume. Adela's, "I'm sure it began low down—tum!" Cornelia's: "The key-note, I am positive, was B flat—ta!" and Arabella's putting of these two assertions together, and promise to combine them at the piano when breakfast was at an end, though it was Sunday morning, were exasperating to the exquisite lover of music. Mr. Pericles was really suffering torments. Do you know what it is to pursue the sylph, and touch her flying skirts, think you have caught her, and are sure of her—that she is yours, the rapturous evanescent darling! when some well-meaning earthly wretch interposes and trips you, and off she flies and leaves you floundering? A lovely melody nearly grasped and lost in this fashion, tries the temper. Apollo chasing

Daphne could have been barely polite to the wood-nymphs in his path, and Mr. Pericles was rude to the daughters of his host. Smoothing his clean square chin and thick moustache hastily, with outspread thumb and fingers, he implored them to spare his nerves. Smiling rigidly, he trusted they would be merciful to a sensitive ear. Mr. Pole—who, as an Englishman, could not understand anyone being so serious in the pursuit of a tune—laughed, and asked questions, and almost drove Mr. Pericles mad. On a sudden the Greek's sallow visage lightened. "It is to you! it is to you!" he cried, stretching his finger at Wilfrid. The young officer, having apparently waited till he had finished with his knife and fork, was leaning his cheek on his fist, looking at nobody, and quietly humming a part of the air. Mr. Pericles complimented and thanked him.

"But you have ear for music extraordinaire!" he said.

Adela patted her brother fondly, remarking—"Yes, when his feelings are concerned."

"Will you repeat zat?" asked the Greek. "'To-to-ri:' hein? I lose it. 'To-to-ru:' bah! I lose it; 'To-ri:—to—ru—ri ro:' it is no use: I lose it."

Neither his persuasions, nor his sneer, "Because it is Sunday, perhaps!" would induce Wilfrid to be guilty of another attempt. The ladies tried sisterly cajoleries on him fruitlessly, until Mr. Pole, seeing the desperation of his guest, said: "Why not have her up here, toon and all, some week-day? Sunday birds won't suit us, you know. We've got a piano for her that's good enough for

the first of 'em, if money means anything."

The ladies murmured meekly: "Yes, papa."

"I shall find her for you while you go to your charch," said Mr. Pericles. And here Wilfrid was seized with a yawn, and rose, and asked his eldest sister if she meant to attend the service that morning.

"Undoubtedly," she answered; and Mr. Pole took it up: "That's our discipline, my boy. Must set an example: do our duty. All the house goes to worship in the country."

"Why, in ze country?" queried Mr. Pericles.

"Because"—Cornelia came to the rescue of her sire; but her impetuosity was either unsupported by a reason, or she stooped to fit one to the comprehension of the interrogator: "Oh, because—do you know, we have very select music at our church?"

"We have a highly-paid organist," added Arabella.

"Recently elected," said Adela.

"Ah! mon Dieu!" Mr. Pericles ejaculated. "Some music sound well at afar- -mellow, you say. I prefer your charch music mellow."

"Won't you come?" cried Wilfrid, with wonderful briskness.

"No. Mellow for me!"

The Greek's grinders flashed, and Wilfrid turned off from him sulkily. He saw in fancy the robber-Greek prowling about Wilson's farm, setting snares for the marvellous night-bird, and it was with more than his customary inattention to his sisters' refined conversation that he formed part of their male escort to

the place of worship.

Mr. Pericles met the church-goers on their return in one of the green bowery lanes leading up to Brookfield. Cold as he was to English scenes and sentiments, his alien ideas were not unimpressed by the picture of those daintily-clad young women demurely stepping homeward, while the air held a revel of skylarks, and the scented hedgeways quickened with sunshine.

"You have missed a treat!" Arabella greeted him.

"A sermon?" said he.

The ladies would not tell him, until his complacent cynicism at the notion of his having missed a sermon, spurred them to reveal that the organ had been handled in a masterly manner; and that the voluntary played at the close of the service was most exquisite.

"Even papa was in raptures."

"Very good indeed," said Mr. Pole. "I'm no judge; but you might listen to that sort of playing after dinner."

Mr. Pericles seemed to think that was scarcely a critical period, but he merely grimaced, and inquired: "Did you see ze player?"

"Oh, no: they are hidden," Arabella explained to him, "behind a curtain."

"But, what!" shouted the impetuous Greek: "have you no curiosity?"

A woman! And zen, you saw not her?"

"No," remarked Cornelia, in the same aggravating sing-song

voice of utter indifference: "we don't know whether it was not a man. Our usual organist is a man, I believe."

The eyes of the Greek whitened savagely, and he relapsed into frigid politeness.

Wilfrid was not present to point their apprehensions. He had loitered behind; but when he joined them in the house subsequently, he was cheerful, and had a look of triumph about him which made his sisters say, "So, you have been with the Copleys:" and he allowed them to suppose it, if they pleased; the Copleys being young ladies of position in the neighbourhood, of much higher standing than the Tinleys, who, though very wealthy, could not have given their brother such an air, the sisters imagined.

At lunch, Wilfrid remarked carelessly: "By the way, I met that little girl we saw last night."

"The singer! where?" asked his sisters, with one voice.

"Coming out of church."

"She goes to church, then!"

This exclamation showed the heathen they took her to be.

"Why, she played the organ," said Wilfrid.

"And how does she look by day? How does she dress?"

"Oh! very jolly little woman! Dresses quiet enough."

"She played the organ! It was she, then! An organist! Is there anything approaching to gentility in her appearance?"

"I—really I'm no judge," said Wilfrid. "You had better ask
Laura

Tinley. She was talking to her when I went up."

The sisters exchanged looks. Presently they stood together in consultation. Then they spoke with their aunt, Mrs. Lupin, and went to their papa. The rapacity of those Tinleys for anything extraordinary was known to them, but they would not have conceived that their own discovery, their own treasure, could have been caught up so quickly. If the Tinleys got possession of her, the defection of Mr. Pericles might be counted on, and the display of a phenomenon would be lost to them. They decided to go down to Wilson's farm that very day, and forestall their rivals by having her up to Brookfield. The idea of doing this had been in a corner of their minds all the morning: it seemed now the most sensible plan in the world. It was patronage, in its right sense. And they might be of great service to her, by giving a proper elevation and tone to her genius; while she might amuse them, and their guests, and be let off, in fact, as a firework for the nonce. Among the queenly cases of women who are designing to become the heads of a circle (if I may use the term), an accurate admeasurement of reciprocal advantages can scarcely be expected to rank; but the knowledge that an act, depending upon us for execution, is capable of benefiting both sides, will make the proceeding appear so unselfish, that its wisdom is overlooked as well as its motives. The sisters felt they were the patronesses of the little obscure genius whom they longed for to illumine their household, before they knew her name. Cornet Wilfrid Pole must have chuckled mightily to see them depart

on their mission. These ladies, who managed everybody, had themselves been very cleverly managed. It is doubtful whether the scheme to surprise and delight Mr. Pericles would have actuated the step they took, but for the dread of seeing the rapacious Tinleys snatch up their lawful prey. The Tinleys were known to be quite capable of doing so. They had, on a particular occasion, made transparent overtures to a celebrity belonging to the Poles, whom they had first met at Brookfield: could never have hoped to have seen had they not met him at Brookfield; and girls who behaved in this way would do anything. The resolution was taken to steal a march on them; nor did it seem at all odd to people naturally so hospitable as the denizens of Brookfield, that the stranger of yesterday should be the guest of to-day. Kindness of heart, combined with a great scheme in the brain, easily put aside conventional rules.

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