Haunted.

When candle flames burn blue,
Between the night and the morning,
I know that it is you,
My love that was so true
And that I killed with scorning.

The watch dog howls and bay;
I pale, and leave off smiling
Only the other day
I held your heart in play,
Intent upon beguiling.

A little while and
I wring your soul with sighing;
Or brought a ruddier glow
Into your cheek by low,
Soft answers, in replying.

My life was all disguise,
A mask of feints and fancies;
I used to lift my eyes
And take you by surprise
With smiles and upward glances.

And now, where'er I go,
Your sad ghost follows after;
And blue the flame burns low,
And doors creak to and fro,
And silent grows the laughter.

Hints from the Unseen.

BY ROBERT LAMOND.

The grace of the bending grasses,
The faith of the dawn-like sky;
The scent that lingers and passes
When the loitering wind goes by—
Are gushes and hints of sweetness
From the unseen depth afar;
The foam edge of heaven's completeness,
Swept outward through flower and star.

For the cloud and the leaf and the blossom,
The shadow, the flickering gleam,
Are waifs on the sea-like bosom
Of beauty beyond our dream.
In grew to our earth is given,
In fresher this lower air;
Oh, the fathomless walk of heaven!
The springs of the earth rise there.

CARRIED BY STORM.

BY MRS. MAY AGNES FLEMING,

AUTHOR OF "A BAD MARRIAGE," "A LITTLE QUEEN," &c., &c.

CHAPTER XIII.

"NOBODY'S CHILD."

Mr. Abbott is sitting alone in the library at Abbotswood. For the very great personage he is in some respects, his position is an unlikely one. He has tilted back the carved and cushioned chair in which bulky body repose, elevated his boots on the low black marble mantle, and is rapidly filling the room with tobacco smoke. A frown still rests on his brow; he has not forgotten his wife—he is not disposed to forgive her; it is only one more added to the lengthy list of affronts she has put upon him.

"And if ever I get a chance," he mutters, as he smokes, "I'll pay you back with interest, my high and mighty lady."

Little Leo has just left him. She is his, at any rate, he will have her with him when he chooses, to the very teeth of her scornful mother. The child is sufficiently fond of him: he is foolishly indulgent to her after the manner of his kind; but now she, too, has quitted him. Nice has struck, and nurse has come and borne her off.

At present he is solacing himself with a pipe, the evening paper, and some crusty port until it shall be time to go to bed.

"A wet night, by jingo!" he says, as in the pauses of ruffling the paper he hears the dash of the rain against the glass, and the sough of the wind in the trees.

The room in which he sits is a grand one—a hundred years old to look at, at least; everything in it, above it, is richly hued, deeply tinted, warmly toned. There is an oriel window, where sunset lights fall through on a dark-polished oaken floor in orange, and ruby, and amethyst dyes. A soft rose-red carpet covers the centre of the floor, a tiger-skin rug is stretched in front of the shining grate. Mellow-brown panels are everywhere where books are not.

Books are many; hundreds of volumes in costly bindings—purple, crimson, white, and gold—not a "dowdy" among them all. There are bronzes, and a few dark paintings of the literary lights of the world, quaint old furniture, richly carved with arabesques and griffins' heads, and upholstered in bright crimson cloth. Here, too, as in nearly every room of the house, is burned in the panels the escutcheon of his Southern wife.

It looks a very temple of culture and learning, and, with the usual fine irony of fate, John Abbott is its high priest. Not one of all these hundreds of costly volumes do his stumpy brown fingers ever open; his literature is confined to the London and Brightwood daily papers, and all the sporting journals he can buy.

As he sits and puffs his clouds of smoke, and swallows his wine, there is a tap at the door, and a manservant enters.

"Well," he grows Mr. Abbott, "what now?"

"There is a man in the hall, sir, as says you particular. He says his name is Sleaford."

The servant looks at him with covert cunning as he makes the announcement. In a place like Brightbrook there can be no such thing as a secret.

The servants of Abbott Wood have heard of the Sleafords, but this is the first time one of that celebrated family has presented himself at the manor.

Mr. Abbott drops his paper, and slowly rises from his chair, a grey pallor overspreading the pesty hue of his face.

"Sleaford?" he repeats, blankly. "Did you say Sleaford?"

"Sleaford, sir—Giles Sleaford. He is waiting in the vestibule, dripping wet. Told him I did not know you were at home, sir; but would see. Are you at home, sir?"

"Show him in, you fool, and be quick."

The man retreats.

Mr. Abbott resumes his chair, breathing quickly, that greyish shade still on his face, and tries to resume his usual blustering manner as well, but in vain. He is frightened—braggart, bouncer that he is. His hand shakes—he is forced to fling aside his paper with an oath.

"Sleaford," he thinks; "this time of night, and such a night! Good heavens, what is he after now?"

The door reopens, and, dripping like a huge water dog, the last on his head, his hands in his pockets, Giles Sleaford stalks into the room.

"Oh, you are at home," he says, with a sneer; "the flunky said as how he didn't know. It ain't the kind o' night heavy swells like John Abbott, Esquire, of Abbott Wood, would like to go out promenading. It is as black as a wolf's mouth, and coming down like blazes."

"Sit down, Sleaford," he says, in a tone of marked civility.

He sends one of the carved and cushioned chairs whirling over towards him, but Mr. Sleaford only glances at it in profound contempt.

"It is, as you say, the dickens and all of a night to be out in. But now that you are here, is there is anything I can do for you?"

"Ah, if there is," returns Mr. Sleaford, still sarcastic; "if there was anything a rich gent like Mr. Abbott couldn't do for a poor blake like me. As if I would tramp it through rain and water a good three miles for the pleasure of lookin' at your jimcracks, and axin' arter your health, if there is something you can do for me, and what's more, you've got to do it, or I'll know the reason why."

The sneer changes to a menace.

Mr. Abbott rises with precipitation, opens the door quickly, and looks down the long lighted passage. There are no eavesdroppers.

He closes the door, locks it, and faces his man. The danger is here, and he does not lack pluck to meet it.

"What do you want?" he demands. "It was part of our bargain that you were never to come here. Why are you here? I'm not a man to be trifled with—you ought to know that before to-night."

"There ain't much about you, Jack Abbott, that I don't know," Sleaford retorts, coolly. "Don't take on none o' your rich man airs with me. This is a snug crib—all this here pooty furniture and books cost a few pounds, I expect. You wouldn't like to swop 'em for a cell in Newgate, and a Gov'ment striped suit? What am I here for? I'm here to find out why one o' my kids ain't to come to your wife to get a education, if that there young swell, your stepson, says so."

The two men look each other straight in the eyes—fierce, dogged determination in Sleaford's, malignant, baffled fury in Abbott's.

"So this is what you want, Black Giles?"

"This is what I want, Jack Abbott, and what I'll have. Mind you, I don't care a cuss about edification, nor whether the gal ever knows B from a cow's horn, but the young gent wants it, and you were willin' till you found out who she was, and then you wouldn't. Now, I'll stand none o' that. My gal's comin' up here to be addicated by your wife," says Mr. Sleaford, beating out his proposition with the finger of one hand on the palm of the other, "which is a lady born and bred, and by your stepson, which he's what all the gold ever jammed out in the diggin's can't make you—a gentleman. You forbid it you day—you'll take that back to-morrow, and whenever the young swell says the word, Joanna's comin' up here for that there addication."

All this Mr. Sleaford says slowly and impressively—by no means in a passion. His hat is still on his head, politeness with Black Giles is not a matter of hat. And he fixes Mr. Abbott with his "glittering eye," while he thus does actually lay down the law. Mr. Abbott, too, has cooled. Indeed, for two extremely choleric gentlemen, their manner has quite the repose that marks the caste of Vere de Vere. The master of the mansion takes a turn or two up and down the slippery floor before he replies. The tenant of the Red Farm eyes him with stolid malignity.

"I wish you wouldn't insist on this, Giles," he says, in a troubled tone, at last. "I have a reason for it. Come, I'll buy you off. I'll give you——"

"No, you won't. I ain't to be bought off. She's got to come. But I'm out o' cash. I want one hundred pounds."

John Abbott's eyes flash, but still he holds himself in hand.

"You are joking! It was only last week I gave you——"

"Never mind last week, that's gone with last year's snow. It's no good palaverin'—you know what I want. All your money wouldn't buy me off. She's got to come."

Again silence—again broken by Mr. Abbott.

"How old is this confounded girl?" he demands, and mentally consigns her to perdition. "Your girls ought to be all grown up, Sleaford."

"Ought they? Well, they ain't. She's twelve, just."

"Twelve! What nonsense! Why, your wife's been dead these sixteen years."

"Ah!" says Giles Sleaford.

It is a brief interjection, but the tone, the glare that goes with it brings back the blood in a purple glow to the other man's face.

"We won't talk about that," says Sleaford, between his teeth, "nor what followed. 'Cause why? I might forget you was the richest, respectablest gent hereabouts, and fly at your throat, and choke the black heart out o' you. Gimme that money and let me go. The blackest night that ever blowed is better than a pallis with you in it."

With a cowed look, Mr. Abbott goes to his desk, counts over a roll of notes, and hands it to his tenant.

"Sleaford," he says, almost in a supplicating tone, "I wish you would go away from here. People are talking. The Red Farm is going to the dogs. It's not that I care for that. I don't care for that, but—but I don't want people to talk. I've been a good friend to you, Giles——".

The wild beast glare that looks at him out of Giles Sleaford's eyes make him pause.

"About money, I mean," he resumes, hurriedly. "I'm not stingy—no man ever called me that. Name your price and go. Back to San Francisco. You can have a good time there; and let bygones be bygones. I'll come down handsome, by Jove I will."

Giles Sleaford pockets the money, and looks at him with wolfish eyes.

"I'm a poor devil," he says, "but if I was poorer, if I was a dog in a ditch, I wouldn't take half your millions and leave you. I had work enough to find you, goodness knows. But I have found you, and while you and me's above ground we'll never part."

He turns with the words and leaves the library. No more is said, no good night is exchanged. Mr. Abbott in person sees his visitor to the door, and lets him out. The darkness is profound, a great gust of wind and rain beats in their faces, but Giles Sleaford plunges into the black gulf and tramps doggedly out of sight.

Next day, as Geoffrey Lamar is leaving the house after breakfast, on purpose to ride to the village and see Miss Rice, the teacher, his stepfather approaches, in a shuffling way, and lays his hand on his shoulder.

"If I said anything t'other day at dinner," he says, gruffly, but apologetically, "I want you to overlook it, dear boy. I was put out, and I showed it. Let that little girl come whenever you like."

Geoffrey glances at him rather haughtily. It is one of his failings that he is slow to forgive.

"It is a matter of no consequence whether she ever comes here or not. I am perfectly satisfied to let it drop."

"No, you ain't, dear boy—you know you ain't. You want her to come, and so does your mother. I'm sorry—I can say no more. Bring her here, and forget my words."

"Very well, sir," Geoffrey returns, in his grand manner—his head thrown back, his mouth somewhat stern.

It is a very natural manner with the lad, and is exceedingly effective with most people. So it is to Sleaford's he rides, instead of to the village, and the result is that, dressed in her holiday best, Sleaford's Joanna presents herself on Monday afternoon at Abbott Wood to begin her education.

Mrs. Abbott looks at the wild creature in wonder and pity. Out in the woods there is a certain freedom, a certain grace about the girl—in this grand room, before this grand lady, she stands shifting from one foot to the other, downcast of face, awkward of manner, shy, silent, uncouth. Even the attempts at civilization, the shoes and stockings, the smoothed hair, the washed and shining face, embarrass her by their painful novelty.

Miss Rice is there, a little brisk old body, with round, twinkling eyes, and the general air of a lively robin, in her brown stuff dress.

"My son tells me you can sing," Mrs. Abbott says, in her slow, sweet way. "Will you sing something for us that we may judge?"

"As well talk her to fly!

Joanna stands mute, a desperate feeling creeping over her to make a dash for the door, and fly for ever to Black's Dam.

"You cannot?" with a smile. "Ah! well, it is natural. Miss Rice will play something for you instead, and I will leave you to get acquainted."

So Mrs. Abbott with tact goes, and Joanna draws a free breath for the first time. So much beauty, and condescension, and silk dress, have overwhelmed her.

Miss Rice is insignificant—she never overwhelmed anyone in her life. She goes to the piano, and plays what she thinks Joanna will like, a sparkling waltz and a gay polka.

Joanna does like it, and listens with rapture.

"Now tell me some of your songs, and I will play the accompaniment," says Miss Rice.

Joanna goes over half a dozen—"Old Dog Tray," "Waits for the Waggon," "Sally, Come Up."

Miss Rice knows none of them.

"Here is 'Nobody's Child.' Can you sing that?" she says.

At it chances, Joanna can, and does. All her embarrassment is gone with Mrs. Abbott.

Her strong young voice takes up the air, as Miss Rice softly strikes the chords, and peals out full and clear. There is a mournful appropriateness in every word.

Miss Rice listens surprised and delighted.

And Mrs. Abbott, just outside the open window, listens, too, and mentally decides that Geoffrey was right. This girl is worth saving if only for the sake of that charming voice. She goes with expression, the author of the words finds an echo in her heart. She, too, is Nobody's Child.

"Oh, you have a lovely voice, indeed," cries lit'le Miss Rice, enthusiastically, "and after a few months of training—— Ah, well, only wait! That will do now. We will see what else you know, and get out a few books."

The "what else" turns out to be nothing at all. She can read with tolerable correctness, and write a little. She cannot sew, knit, crochet—knows nothing, in fact.

"It is virgin soil," says Miss Rice, briskly, to her patroness; "plenty of weeds and no cultivation. Well, we must pluck up the weeds, and plant the seeds of knowledge. Good day, my dear lady."

Miss Rice trips away, and Joanna more slowly follows. She passes the Gothic lodge, and is well out of sight of that neat little structure, when the master of Abbott Wood comes suddenly upon her, and stretching out his brawny right hand, catches her by the wrist.

He has been lying in wait.

"You are Joanna Sleaford."

She jerks away her hand.

Roughness is the atmosphere of her life, and impish Joanna is Joanna at once.

"No, I ain't!"

"Who are you, then? Don't you tell me lies."

"Don't you tell them. I'm Sleaford's Joanna. What d'ye mean?" It's the same thing."

"No, 'taint. My name ain't Sleaford."

All Joanna's usual pertness is in her elfish tone and face.

"What is it, then?"

"Don't know, and don't care. Sleaford's Joanna does as good as anything else."

She begins to whistle—then breaks off to laugh shrilly.

"You'll know me the next time for certain. What are you starin' at? It ain't good manners, old gentleman."

To tell the truth, he is staring as Joanna has never been stared at before in his life, a black expression of mingled astonishment in his face.

"Little girl," he says, "I am Mr. Abbott, and I want you to answer me a few questions. Who are you, if you am not Sleaford's daughter?"

"Told you before I didn't know. I don't tell lies. You mightn't think so, but I don't. It's cheaky. Picked me up in a gutter, he says. Wish he'd let me there. Gutter's better than his house, any day."

"How old are you?"

"Just gone twelve."

"Do you remember nothing of the time before you lived with Sleaford? Nothing of your father or mother?"

"Never. Had none, maybe. Grew in the gutter, I suppose. But it's getting late. I want to go home."

"Go, then," he says, mechanically.

He draws back, and she darts off fleetly as a fawn. He stands and watches her out of sight, that blank expression still on his face.

"Of all that could happen I never thought of that," he mutters. "I never thought Black Giles was to deny. No, I thought of everything, but the blessed if ever I thought of that."

She has disappeared, and the dinner bell is summoning the master of the house. He turns up the avenue, but all that day, and for many days after, John Abbott muses and muses, and is strangely silent and still.

And so it comes to pass that from that day a new life begins for Sleaford's Joanna.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

WHAT THE RAIN MADE OF JOANNA.

It is a December afternoon, and brightly, crisply clear. The last yellow light of the wintry sunset, shining in between parted curtains of lace and heavy crimson drapery, falls upon a young girl seated at a grand piano, touching the keys with flexible, strong fingers, and singing in a full, rich contralto that makes everything in the room vibrate. It is the winter drawing room of Abbott Wood, a spacious and splendid apartment, vast and lofty, but the trained, powerful voice fills it easily.

She is singing exercises and solfeggios; she has been so practising for the past hour, running up in showers of silvery high notes, holding the highest sometimes so long and steadily that you grasped from sympathy, and then running down the scales until the last low, sweet tone melted into the chords her fingers struck.

The girl is young—seventeen—tall, slight, a little angular at present, but promising well for the future. She is dressed in a black alpaca that has seen service, and which is neither particularly neat or well-fitting—a rusty garment that looks distinctly out of place in that glowing room.

Her hair, of which she has a profusion, and which is red-brown in hue, but more red than brown, is knotted up in a loose and careless knot, without the slightest attempt at the becoming. Her face is pale and thin, the features good, but the expression set and severe for seventeen.

"What a peculiar-looking girl" people say of her when they see her first, and are apt to look again with some curiosity. "She is not pretty at all, but it is rather a—a striking face," and the word describes it pretty well.

It is not pretty—it is far from plain, and it is a face most people are apt to look at more than once. It is what five years have made of Sleaford's Joanna.

Five years! They work changes from twelve to seventeen; this is what five years, much care, instruction, and painstaking on the part of good Miss Rice have made Joanna.

A slim, young person, with a face that seldom smiles; an unlimited capacity for discontent with her own life, that increases every day of that life; an utter apathy as to dress, tidiness, needlework; a conviction that she is hopelessly ugly, and that it is of no use wasting time to redeem that ugliness; a delicious voice, a tolerable amount of proficiency as a pianist—that is Joanna.

She sits alone.

Voices and laughter—young voices—reach her from the grounds, once her name is called, but she pays no heed. A gay group are out there, enjoying the windless winter evening, but with gayety this girl has little—has ever had little—to do. Wild Joanna she can be called no longer—she seems quiet enough—Sleaford's Joanna she is still—the household drudge, even as she was five years ago, with work-reddened, work-hardened hands.

She grows tired of exercises after a little, and begins almost unconsciously to sing snatches of songs—English, German, Italian—a very pot-pourri. Then all at once she strikes a few solemn, resounding chords, and begins Rossini's "Stabat Mater," and the instrument quivers with the force of those grand tones.

"Cujus animam gementem!"

It is a glorious anthem, rung with passion, pathos and power.

"Bravo!" says a voice, "encore, mademoiselle. If I had a bouquet I would throw it."

She glances round and smiles, and when she smiles you discover for the first time that this girl might be almost handsome if she chose. For that she has a rare smile, that quite transforms her sallow, moody face. She has very fine teeth, too, not in the least like pearls, but fully equal to those beautiful enamelled half circles that grin at you from dental showcases.

"Sing 'When Swallows Build,' Joanna," says the new-comer, throwing himself on a sofa near, and looking at her with kindly eyes.

It is Geoffrey Lamar, down for the Christmas festivities—Geoffrey at twenty-one, not so very much unlike the Geoffrey at sixteen.

Grown taller, though still not tall, looking strong and well trained, both as to muscle and mind, retaining that resolute mouth and chin, retaining, also, that slightly haughty air, and those deep-set, stedfast, sea-grey eyes.

He retains everything, even that pleasant, friendly regard for Sleaford's Joanna, to which she is indebted for her power to-day to make the room ring with the "Stabat Mater."

She turns over the music, and finds the song.

"What have you done with the others," she asks, carelessly.

"Oh, Livingston is there, and where girls are concerned he is always a host in himself. There were a great many pretty people present at the Ventnors' last night," says Geoffrey, laughing, "but Frank was the belle of the ball. Do you want me to turn your music, Joanna? Because, if you do, I will sacrifice comfort to politeness and get up."

"No, don't trouble yourself," Joanna answers. "As you work so hard all the rest of the year, I suppose you claim the right to be lazy at Christmas. And, besides, I am not used to politeness."

"No?" says Geoffrey, and looks at her thoughtfully. "It strikes me you seem a trifle out of sorts of late, Joanna. You are thin as a shadow and nearly as mute. Tell me—is it the old trouble? Do these people treat you badly still?"

She shrugs her shoulders, an impatient, fretful look darkens her face.

"What does it matter?" she says, in a voice of irritated weariness. "I ought to be used to it by this, but the trouble with me is, I am used to nothing. Do not mind my looks—I am always thin thing. Do not mind my looks—I am always thin and cross—it is natural, I suppose, and as to being mute, when one has nothing pleasant to say one had best hold one's tongue. Everyone is good to me here, better than I deserve. That ought to suffice."

But there is an irritable, unhappy tone in her voice, which tells of a soul full of dark trouble and unrest.

Whither will it lead her?

CHAPTER II.

A DOUBLE LIFE.

Joanna begins her song, but the impatient ring is yet in her voice.

Geoffrey lies still and watches her. He has the interest in her we all have in the thing we have saved and protected. He would like to see her repay that interest by blooming looks and bright laughter. But his power fails, something is amiss. She is educated, refined, cared for, but she is not happy—he has a vague, uneasy suspicion she is not particularly good. Antagonistic influences are at work, driving her two ways at once—here is all luxury, refinement, high breeding, tender care, there all is coarseness, vulgarity, brutal usage. Long ago Giles Sleaford was implored to give her a free breath for the first time. So much liberty, and condescension, and silk dress, have overwhelmed her.

Miss Rice is insignificant—she never overwhelmed anyone in her life. She goes to the piano, and plays what she thinks Joanna will like, a sparkling waltz and a gay polka.

Joanna does like it, and listens with rapture.

"Now tell me some of your songs, and I will play the accompaniment," says Miss Rice.

Joanna goes over half a dozen—"Old Dog Tray," "Waits for the Waggon," "Sally, Come Up."

Miss Rice knows none of them.

"Here is 'Nobody's Child.' Can you sing that?" she says.

At it chances, Joanna can, and does. All her embarrassment is gone with Mrs. Abbott.

Her strong young voice takes up the air, as Miss Rice softly strikes the chords, and peals out full and clear. There is a mournful appropriateness in every word.

Miss Rice listens surprised and delighted.

And Mrs. Abbott, just outside the open window, listens, too, and mentally decides that Geoffrey was right. This girl is worth saving if only for the sake of that charming voice. She goes with expression, the author of the words finds an echo in her heart. She, too, is Nobody's Child.

"Oh, you have a lovely voice, indeed," cries lit'le Miss Rice, enthusiastically, "and after a few months of training—— Ah, well, only wait! That will do now. We will see what else you know, and get out a few books."

The "what else" turns out to be nothing at all. She can read with tolerable correctness, and write a little. She cannot sew, knit, crochet—knows nothing, in fact.

"It is virgin soil," says Miss Rice, briskly, to her patroness; "plenty of weeds and no cultivation. Well, we must pluck up the weeds, and plant the seeds of knowledge. Good day, my dear lady."

Miss Rice trips away, and Joanna more slowly follows. She passes the Gothic lodge, and is well out of sight of that neat little structure, when the master of Abbott Wood comes suddenly upon her, and stretching out his brawny right hand, catches her by the wrist.

He has been lying in wait.

"You are Joanna Sleaford."

She jerks away her hand.

Roughness is the atmosphere of her life, and impish Joanna is Joanna at once.

"No, I ain't!"

"Who are you, then? Don't you tell me lies."

"Don't you tell them. I'm Sleaford's Joanna. What d'ye mean? It's the same thing."

"No, 'taint. My name ain't Sleaford."

All Joanna's usual pertness is in her elfish tone and face.

"What is it, then?"

"Don't know, and don't care. Sleaford's Joanna does as good as anything else."

She begins to whistle—then breaks off to laugh shrilly.

"You'll know me the next time for certain. What are you starin' at? It ain't good manners, old gentleman."

To tell the truth, he is staring as Joanna has never been stared at before in his life, a black expression of mingled astonishment in his face.

"Little girl," he says, "I am Mr. Abbott, and I want you to answer me a few questions. Who are you, if you am not Sleaford's daughter?"

"Told you before I didn't know. I don't tell lies. You mightn't think so, but I don't. It's cheaky. Picked me up in a gutter, he says. Wish he'd let me there. Gutter's better than his house, any day."

"How old are you?"

"Just gone twelve."

"Do you remember nothing of the time before you lived with Sleaford? Nothing of your father or mother?"

"Never. Had none, maybe. Grew in the gutter, I suppose. But it's getting late. I want to go home."

"Go, then," he says, mechanically.

He draws back, and she darts off fleetly as a fawn. He stands and watches her out of sight, that blank expression still on his face.

"Of all that could happen I never thought of that," he mutters. "I never thought Black Giles was to deny. No, I thought of everything, but the blessed if ever I thought of that."

She has disappeared, and the dinner bell is summoning the master of the house. He turns up the avenue, but all that day, and for many days after, John Abbott muses and muses, and is strangely silent and still.

And so it comes to pass that from that day a new life begins for Sleaford's Joanna.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

WHAT THE RAIN MADE OF JOANNA.

It is a December afternoon, and brightly, crisply clear. The last yellow light of the wintry sunset, shining in between parted curtains of lace and heavy crimson drapery, falls upon a young girl seated at a grand piano, touching the keys with flexible, strong fingers, and singing in a full, rich contralto that makes everything in the room vibrate. It is the winter drawing room of Abbott Wood, a spacious and splendid apartment, vast and lofty, but the trained, powerful voice fills it easily.

She is singing exercises and solfeggios; she has been so practising for the past hour, running up in showers of silvery high notes, holding the highest sometimes so long and steadily that you grasped from sympathy, and then running down the scales until the last low, sweet tone melted into the chords her fingers struck.

The girl is young—seventeen—tall, slight, a little angular at present, but promising well for the future. She is dressed in a black alpaca that has seen service, and which is neither particularly neat or well-fitting—a rusty garment that looks distinctly out of place in that glowing room.

Her hair, of which she has a profusion, and which is red-brown in hue, but more red than brown, is knotted up in a loose and careless knot, without the slightest attempt at the becoming. Her face is pale and thin, the features good, but the expression set and severe for seventeen.

"What a peculiar-looking girl" people say of her when they see her first, and are apt to look again with some curiosity. "She is not pretty at all, but it is rather a—a striking face," and the word describes it pretty well.

It is not pretty—it is far from plain, and it is a face most people are apt to look at more than once. It is what five years have made of Sleaford's Joanna.

Five years! They work changes from twelve to seventeen; this is what five years, much care, instruction, and painstaking on the part of good Miss Rice have made Joanna.

A slim, young person, with a face that seldom smiles; an unlimited capacity for discontent with her own life, that increases every day of that life; an utter apathy as to dress, tidiness, needlework; a conviction that she is hopelessly ugly, and that it is of no use wasting time to redeem that ugliness; a delicious voice, a tolerable amount of proficiency as a pianist—that is Joanna.

She sits alone.

Voices and laughter—young voices—reach her from the grounds, once her name is called, but she pays no heed. A gay group are out there, enjoying the windless winter evening, but with gayety this girl has little—has ever had little—to do. Wild Joanna she can be called no longer—she

The sapphire eyes may be never so bright, but they are sleepless.

Other eyes, black and sombre, watch covertly Frank's flirtation. Leo is a little child, he cares nothing about her, he is merely keeping his hand in, it is never well to get out of practice, but he looks at the same time as if Miss Abbott were the only creature of her sex in the universe.

"Do look at Joanna," Olga says; "what a dark and angry face!"

"Truly," Geoffrey utters in some surprise.

Her face does look dark, angry, menacing. She strikes the chords of the piano as though it were an enemy's face.

"What is the matter with her? A moment ago she was all right. She is an odd girl—a girl of moods and whims."

"A girl I do not like," Olga Ventnor says, with a very decided uplifting of her head. "A girl I fear and distrust. I wonder how you all can make so much of her Geoffrey; can think so well of her. I do not wish to injure her, but I could never like her, or treat her as Leo does. Not that there is much in that," she adds, laughing; "dear little Leo loves all the world."

"You do not like her—you do not trust her," Geoffrey repeats; "now, why I wonder? If it is because of your first meeting——"

"That was nothing," Olga says, in the same quick, decided tone. "I have forgotten and forgiven that long ago. She was only a wild, half-savage child then. It is now I do not trust her. She is quiet, she says little, she is attached to your mother, she likes Leo's little, she studies hard, she sings well, she keeps her place, but——"

"Well," he says, smiling, "go on. What a wise-acre you are becoming. But——"

He likes to hear her talk, to be with her, to look in those deep purple eyes, to meet that radiant smile.

She is a beautiful creature, so brightly beautiful that it is a delight only to look at her.

"It is not so easy to explain what I mean. You have read of men who tame animals? They take a young tiger and feed it on milk. It grows up, gentle, sleek, playful as a kitten. One day they give it raw meat, the next it turns on its keeper, without warning or provocation, and tears him to pieces. Joanna is like that tiger—to be trusted no more than the tiger. You look shocked. I cannot help it. I know she is your protégée and, that you are bound to defend her, but it is the truth all the same. I do not know it, I feel it. And one day you will see. Now, do not let us talk about her. What are you doing in town? Walking the hospitals? How dreadful! What do you want—studying medicine? As if you ever meant to practice! Being a 'Bawbone,' a 'Bob Sawyer?' she laughs, the clear, girlish laugh that is sweeter than all Joanna's music to his ears. "I like Bob Sawyer, but at the same time there is no sense in your following his footsteps. You know you never mean to be a doctor."

"Indeed, that is precisely what I do mean; what I hope, what I am positively sure I shall be this time next year. Let me write M.D. after my name and I die happy."

"You will never be a doctor," the young lady repeats, in her decided way—she is used to having opinions of her own, and having them listened to with respect, "that is to say, a practising doctor. It is your whim, your hobby, and a very horrid one, I think. What dreadful sights you must see, what shocking suffering, what frightful disease."

"Yes," he answers, gravely. "Heaven knows I do—sights, suffering, I pray you may never dream of. But to ameliorate all that, to heal the suffering, to give health to disease, to soothe pain, is not that a godlike mission, Olga?"

"To those to whom the sight and suffering are necessary, yes—to you, no. One need not witness the misery of others in order to alleviate it. You are going to be very rich; you will not work as a doctor. There are enough without you, and they need it more than you do."

He smiles at her, at the fair, earnest, proud young face.

"You talk like my mother. What a wise little lady you are, princess. If I thought you could really take an interest in the matter——"

He stops, the colour coming into his face.

"I take an interest in all my friends," Miss Ventnor says, with great calm. "Frank, are we going home to dinner, or are we not? Because I believe we promised mamma——"

Livingston needs no second bidding.

He rises with alacrity, and is at her side in an instant. Half an hour of Leo has bored him; the art of flirtation is one of the lost arts so far as she is concerned, and Lamar has monopolized Olga long enough.

"I am so sorry you must go," Leo says, plaintively, "but as your mamma is ill, and you have to take her place, Olga, I suppose you must. Good-bye, dear. Be sure you come early to-morrow evening."

For to-morrow is Leo's birthday, and there is to be a gathering of the clans and a dance.

The four stand together, a charming group of young heads and fair faces. The fifth looks at them, and holds herself aloof.

She is as young as them, she might be as fair under other circumstances; but she is not of them; unlike them, she has not spoken a word, she has played on steadily, no one knows what.

They hear the piano, they see the performer, and care just nearly as much to them as the other. They are kind to her—you, polite to her always, and there are times when she would rather they struck her. She is Sleaford's Joanna—they are of the golden youth of the earth, wellborn, highbred. Heaven and earth are not farther apart than they.

Geoffrey and Leo go out with their guests.

The windless, mild December twilight, gray and star-studded, is beautiful as they saunter to the gate.

"And Olga predicts snow," says Geoffrey, laughing, "in the face of that sky."

"If she predicts it you may be sure it will come," says Frank. "Olga Ventnor ordained you dare not oppose the imperial will of the Princess Olga."

"Look at the new moon," cries Leo, "and wish. What are you wishing for, Geof? What do you wish for, Olga? I wish for a snowstorm to-morrow, and then a lovely night."

They all look. What do they all wish for? Geoffrey's eyes rest on Olga before he looks at the sky. His wish might be read, if there were eyes to read it.

Olga looks up too—for what does beautiful Olga Ventnor wish?

"I saw the new moon late yes'terven,
Wi' the auld moon in her arms"

she quotes. "I see her now. Do not come any farther, Leo, with your bare head. It grows chilly—you may catch cold."

So they part. All the way back to the house Leo chatters, but Geoffrey is silent.

"We have left Joanna alone all this time," she says, as they re-enter. "Beg pardon, Jo, but—why, she has gone."

She has gone. She has risen a moment after they left, taken her hat gone out of a side door, and gone home. The grand portico entrance is not for her, and the house she goes to is Sleaford's.

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH JOANNA ENTERS SOCIETY.

"Mamma," says Leo Abbott, "I wonder why Frank dislikes Joanna so much."

They make a pretty picture, mother and daughter. Mrs. Abbott, gracious and handsome as ever, sits at her embroidery frame with a basket of silks and floss, and zephyr, in rainbow shades, beside her. She is making tapestry, like a mediæval countess in a baronial hall—a huge piece, with four large figures. It is a Scriptural subject, "Susanna and the Elders," though at this stage of proceedings it is not so easy to tell which is Susanna, and which are the elders. Leo nestles on a footstool at her feet. She is one of the caressing sort, who always nestle on footstools and cushions, like kittens, and who like to purr, and be petted. There is no affection about it—it is all very natural and very pretty in Leo.

The lady looks up from the frame, and her dark, large-lidded eyes rest on her daughter.

"Are you not mistaken?" she says, quietly.

"Why should your pets dislike Joanna?"

"Ah! why, indeed? I am sure I do not know—I think Joanna charming. All the same, papa dislikes her—more, he looks sometimes as if he were actually afraid of her?"

"Afraid! My child, what nonsense you talk."

But the inflection of Mrs. Abbott's voice as she says it is perfectly calm—the faintest of smiles dawns about her mouth, as she takes a fresh needleful of gold-coloured silk and puts a long slanting stitch in Susanna's black hair. Is it anything of this wonderful discovery was new to her?

"Well, perhaps it is nonsense," says Leo, resignedly; "all I have to say, mamma, is, you watch papa the next time he and Joanna meet, and see for yourself."

Mrs. Abbott's amused smile deepens.

"My dear," she remarks, "I will, if you will tell me this—when do they ever meet?"

Leo looks up at her with puzzled eyes—then slowly a light breaks upon her.

"That is true," she says, amazedly; "they never do meet. I have never seen them in a room together in all these years! Now, how is that, I wonder?"

"Watch and see," replies Mrs. Abbott, enigmatically, taking some pistre-hued floss this time, to shade the oldest elder's complexion. "What has started the subject now?"

"Why, this: "Half an hour ago, after I left Miss Rice, and before Joanna had done, papa called me out to walk with him in the grounds. I went, and as we were going down the laburnum walk, Joanna came up—she generally does take that side entrance. The moment papa saw her, he stopped in what he was saying, looking so flurried, you cannot think, and drew me with him between the trees. 'I don't want to meet that young woman,' he said. But, mamma, he watched her out of sight with the strangest look! It was exactly (only that it seemed) as if he was frightened—as if he was afraid of her."

"Well, my dear, you do not generally stand in awe of your papa. Why did you not ask him about it?"

"Oh, I said, 'Why, papa, what is the matter? You do look so oddly.' 'You are not afraid of our Joanna, are you?' He gave me such a look, as cross as he can look at me, and he says, 'Afraid! That be blowed! And our Joanna, too! Who made her yours, I wonder? I don't like her, and I don't like to see her gadding here. She's no fit chum for you, a gentleman's daughter, by Jove!'"

Leo mimics her father's blustering voice so well that Mrs. Abbott has to laugh.

"Then he told me to run off into the house, and went off by himself. But it is very odd, I think. I am sure Joanna has the manner of a lady when she likes, and is good enough to be companion to anybody."

"Ah, when she likes," repeats Mrs. Abbott, significantly.

There is a pause.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

GEORGIE is five years old. His mother had undressed him for a bath before putting him to bed. As he stood before her he said, "Now, mamma, I'm a kid." "Yes, my dear," said she. "You know what kind of a kid I am, mamma?" "No, darling." "Well, nakid."

STRAY SHOT.

A WASHERWOMAN'S chief support is the clothes prop.

As the man heard his dog barking for him when he left him at home, he said it was li left bow-wow-er.

WHEN Adam remonstrated with Eve for biting the apple, Eve replied, "that will be all right in the fall."

HUSBANDS never meet their wives with "smiles" on their lips; they wipe them off before they get home.

THE difference between a woman and an umbrella is, that there are times when one can shut up an umbrella.

THE proper form for a will nowadays will read: "To the respective attorneys of my children I give my entire estate."

MOTHER—"Now, Emma, what is the tenth commandment?" Emma, aged 5—"The same as it was last Sunday."

WITH all the Frenchman's boasted economy in culinary matters, he never thinks of serving up a lamb in its own caper.

EVERYTHING has recently advanced in prices except liberty, which remains at eternal par.

"No news is good news," says an old proverb, which accounts for the fact that some publications are rated as good newspapers.

Nature reports that serious preparations are now being made in France for the construction of a railroad into the interior of Africa.

"WHAT are the best stories?" "That depends. When you are telling them, the long ones are; when you are listening, the short ones."

THE wicked stand on slippery places. I that respect they are better off than the good, who occasionally get a fall trying to stand there.

THAT was a wise coloured man who, in speaking of the happiness of married people, said: "Dat ar' leads altogedder how dey enjoy themselves."

WHEN the dentists of this country can discover a way to pull teeth without making a man wish he had been born a hen, life will have twice as much brightness.

MRS. PERKINS-MEL (looking in the mirror)—"Mercy! how pale I look to day!" Mr. Tingletung—"Yes; we shall have to forego many luxuries. I hear that paint has advanced."

JOAN OF ARC successfully led an army to victory. But did she ever go to a picnic and not scream, murder when a grasshopper jumped down her neck? History is silent on this point.

How ready some men are to go to law. Scumpty a thing as a banana skin has caused many a one to bring its suit against the pavement. And what did he recover? Not even his equanimity.

AN embarrassed actor bounded on the stage of a San Francisco Theatre, in a scene depicting a robbery in a hotel office, and shouted, "Gag the safe, while I blow open the night clerk."

AN exchange tells of two Ethiopians trading children. This answers in the affirmative that great conundrum, which has vexed mankind for ages, viz., "Can the Ethiopian change his kin?"

BUSKINS, in referring to the time when his wife complimented him, says the coal fire needed replenishing and she pointed towards the fire-place with a commanding air and said: "Peter, the grate."

CLERGYMAN—"So I hear you've got married again, Jacob