

CHAPTER IV.

If, on entering the hall, Ovid had noticed the placards, he would have found himself confronted by a coincidence. The person who gave the concert was also the person who taught music to his half-sisters. Not many days since, he had himself assisted the enterprise, by taking a ticket at his mother's request. Seeing nothing, remembering nothing--hurried by the fear of losing sight of the two strangers if there was a large audience--he impatiently paid for another ticket, at the doors.

The room was little more than half full, and so insufficiently ventilated that the atmosphere was oppressive even under those circumstances. He easily discovered the two central chairs, in the midway row of seats, which she and her companion had chosen. There was a vacant chair (among many others) at one extremity of the row in front of them. He took that place. To look at her, without being discovered--there, so far, was the beginning and the end of his utmost desire.

The performances had already begun. So long as her attention was directed to the singers and players on the platform, he could feast his eyes on her with impunity. In an unoccupied interval, she looked at the audience--and discovered him.

Had he offended her?

If appearances were to be trusted, he had produced no impression of any sort. She quietly looked away, towards the other side of the room. The mere turning of her head was misinterpreted by Ovid as an implied rebuke. He moved to the row of seats behind her. She was now nearer to him than she had been yet. He was again content, and more than content. The next performance was a solo on the piano. A round of applause welcomed the player. Ovid looked at the platform for the first time. In the bowing man, with a prematurely bald head and a servile smile, he recognized Mrs. Gallilee's music-master. The inevitable inference followed. His mother might be in the room.

After careful examination of the scanty audience, he failed to discover her--thus far. She would certainly arrive, nevertheless. My money's worth for my money was a leading principle in Mrs. Gallilee's life.

He sighed as he looked towards the door of entrance. Not for long had he

revelled in the luxury of a new happiness. He had openly avowed his dislike of concerts, when his mother had made him take a ticket for this concert. With her quickness of apprehension what might she not suspect, if she found him among the audience?

Come what might of it, he still kept his place; he still feasted his eyes on the slim figure of the young girl, on the gentle yet spirited carriage of her head. But the pleasure was no longer pleasure without alloy. His mother had got between them now.

The solo on the piano came to an end.

In the interval that followed, he turned once more towards the entrance. Just as he was looking away again, he heard Mrs. Gallilee's loud voice. She was administering a maternal caution to one of the children. "Behave better here than you behaved in the carriage, or I shall take you away."

If she found him in his present place--if she put her own clever construction on what she saw--her opinion would assuredly express itself in some way. She was one of those women who can insult another woman (and safely disguise it) by an inquiring look. For the girl's sake, Ovid instantly moved away from her to the seats at the back of the hall.

Mrs. Gallilee made a striking entrance--dressed to perfection; powdered and painted to perfection; leading her daughters, and followed by her governess. The usher courteously indicated places near the platform. Mrs. Gallilee astonished him by a little lecture on acoustics, delivered with the sweetest condescension. Her Christian humility smiled, and call the usher, Sir. "Sound, sir, is most perfectly heard towards the centre of the auditorium." She led the way towards the centre. Vacant places invited her to the row of seats occupied by Carmina and Teresa. She, the unknown aunt, seated herself next to the unknown niece.

They looked at each other.

Perhaps, it was the heat of the room. Perhaps, she had not perfectly recovered the nervous shock of seeing the dog killed. Carmina's head sank on good Teresa's shoulder. She had fainted.