

## Chapter XXII

We please our fancy with ideal webs Of innovation, but our life  
meanwhile Is in the loom, where busy passion plies The shuttle to and  
fro, and gives our deeds The accustomed pattern.

Gwendolen's note, coming 'pat betwixt too early and too late,' was put into Klesmer's hands just when he was leaving Quetcham, and in order to meet her appeal to his kindness he, with some inconvenience to himself spent the night at Wanchester. There were reasons why he would not remain at Quetcham.

That magnificent mansion, fitted with regard to the greatest expense, had in fact become too hot for him, its owners having, like some great politicians, been astonished at an insurrection against the established order of things, which we plain people after the event can perceive to have been prepared under their very noses.

There were as usual many guests in the house, and among them one in whom Miss Arrowpoint foresaw a new pretender to her hand: a political man of good family who confidently expected a peerage, and felt on public grounds that he required a larger fortune to support the title properly. Heiresses vary, and persons interested in one of them beforehand are prepared to find that she is too yellow or too red, tall and toppling or short and square, violent and capricious or moony and insipid; but in every case it is taken for granted that she will consider herself an appendage to her fortune, and marry where others think her fortunes ought to go. Nature, however, not only accommodates herself ill to our favorite practices by making 'only children' daughters, but also now and then endows the misplaced daughter with a clear head and a strong will. The Arrowpoints had already felt some anxiety owing to these endowments of their Catherine. She would not accept the view of her social duty which required her to marry a needy nobleman or a commoner on the ladder toward nobility; and they were not without uneasiness concerning her persistence in declining suitable offers. As to the possibility of her being in love with Klesmer they were not at all uneasy - a very common sort of blindness. For in general mortals have a great power of being astonished at the presence of an effect toward which they have done everything, and at the absence of an effect toward which they had done nothing but desire it. Parents are astonished at the ignorance of their sons, though they have used the most time-honored and expensive means of securing it; husbands and wives are mutually astonished at the loss of affection which they have taken no pains to keep; and all of us in our turn are apt to be astonished that our neighbors do not admire us. In this way it happens that the truth seems highly improbable. The truth is something different from the

habitual lazy combinations begotten by our wishes. The Arrowpoints' hour of astonishment was come.

When there is a passion between an heiress and a proud independent-spirited man, it is difficult for them to come to an understanding; but the difficulties are likely to be overcome unless the proud man secures himself by a constant *alibi*. Brief meetings after studied absence are potent in disclosure: but more potent still is frequent companionship, with full sympathy in taste and admirable qualities on both sides; especially where the one is in the position of teacher and the other is delightedly conscious of receptive ability which also gives the teacher delight. The situation is famous in history, and has no less charm now than it had in the days of Abelard.

But this kind of comparison had not occurred to the Arrowpoints when they first engaged Klesmer to come down to Quetcham. To have a first-rate musician in your house is a privilege of wealth; Catherine's musical talent demanded every advantage; and she particularly desired to use her quieter time in the country for more thorough study. Klesmer was not yet a Liszt, understood to be adored by ladies of all European countries with the exception of Lapland: and even with that understanding it did not follow that he would make proposals to an heiress. No musician of honor would do so. Still less was it conceivable that Catherine would give him the slightest pretext for such daring. The large check that Mr Arrowpoint was to draw in Klesmer's name seemed to make him as safe an inmate as a footman. Where marriage is inconceivable, a girl's sentiments are safe.

Klesmer was eminently a man of honor, but marriages rarely begin with formal proposals, and moreover, Catherine's limit of the conceivable did not exactly correspond with her mother's.

Outsiders might have been more apt to think that Klesmer's position was dangerous for himself if Miss Arrowpoint had been an acknowledged beauty; not taking into account that the most powerful of all beauty is that which reveals itself after sympathy and not before it. There is a charm of eye and lip which comes with every little phrase that certifies delicate perception or fine judgment, with every unostentatious word or smile that shows a heart awake to others; and no sweep of garment or turn of figure is more satisfying than that which enters as a restoration of confidence that one person is present on whom no intention will be lost. What dignity of meaning, goes on gathering in frowns and laughs which are never observed in the wrong place; what suffused adorableness in a human frame where there is a mind that can flash out comprehension and hands that can execute finely! The more obvious beauty, also adorable sometimes - one may say it without blasphemy - begins by being an apology for folly, and ends like other apologies in becoming tiresome by iteration; and that

Klesmer, though very susceptible to it, should have a passionate attachment to Miss Arrowpoint, was no more a paradox than any other triumph of a manifold sympathy over a monotonous attraction. We object less to be taxed with the enslaving excess of our passions than with our deficiency in wider passion; but if the truth were known, our reputed intensity is often the dullness of not knowing what else to do with ourselves. Tannhaeuser, one suspects, was a knight of ill-furnished imagination, hardly of larger discourse than a heavy Guardsman; Merlin had certainly seen his best days, and was merely repeating himself, when he fell into that hopeless captivity; and we know that Ulysses felt so manifest an *ennui* under similar circumstances that Calypso herself furthered his departure. There is indeed a report that he afterward left Penelope; but since she was habitually absorbed in worsted work, and it was probably from her that Telemachus got his mean, pettifogging disposition, always anxious about the property and the daily consumption of meat, no inference can be drawn from this already dubious scandal as to the relation between companionship and constancy.

Klesmer was as versatile and fascinating as a young Ulysses on a sufficient acquaintance - one whom nature seemed to have first made generously and then to have added music as a dominant power using all the abundant rest, and, as in Mendelssohn, finding expression for itself not only in the highest finish of execution, but in that fervor of creative work and theoretic belief which pierces devoted purpose. His foibles of arrogance and vanity did not exceed such as may be found in the best English families; and Catherine Arrowpoint had no corresponding restlessness to clash with his: notwithstanding her native kindness she was perhaps too coolly firm and self-sustained. But she was one of those satisfactory creatures whose intercourse has the charm of discovery; whose integrity of faculty and expression begets a wish to know what they will say on all subjects or how they will perform whatever they undertake; so that they end by raising not only a continual expectation but a continual sense of fulfillment - the systole and diastole of blissful companionship. In such cases the outward presentment easily becomes what the image is to the worshipper. It was not long before the two became aware that each was interesting to the other; but the 'how far' remained a matter of doubt. Klesmer did not conceive that Miss Arrowpoint was likely to think of him as a possible lover, and she was not accustomed to think of herself as likely to stir more than a friendly regard, or to fear the expression of more from any man who was not enamored of her fortune. Each was content to suffer some unshared sense of denial for the sake of loving the other's society a little too well; and under these conditions no need had been felt to restrict Klesmer's visits for the last year either in country or in town. He knew very well that if Miss Arrowpoint had been poor he would have made ardent love to her instead of sending a storm through the piano, or folding his arms and

pouring out a hyperbolic tirade about something as impersonal as the north pole; and she was not less aware that if it had been possible for Klesmer to wish for her hand she would have found overmastering reasons for giving it to him. Here was the safety of full cups, which are as secure from overflow as the half-empty, always supposing no disturbance. Naturally, silent feeling had not remained at the same point any more than the stealthily dial-hand, and in the present visit to Quetcham, Klesmer had begun to think that he would not come again; while Catherine was more sensitive to his frequent *brusquerie*, which she rather resented as a needless effort to assert his footing of superior in every sense except the conventional.

Meanwhile enters the expectant peer, Mr Bult, an esteemed party man who, rather neutral in private life, had strong opinions concerning the districts of the Niger, was much at home also in Brazils, spoke with decision of affairs in the South Seas, was studious of his Parliamentary and itinerant speeches, and had the general solidity and suffusive pinkness of a healthy Briton on the central table-land of life. Catherine, aware of a tacit understanding that he was an undeniable husband for an heiress, had nothing to say against him but that he was thoroughly tiresome to her. Mr Bult was amiably confident, and had no idea that his insensibility to counterpoint could ever be reckoned against him. Klesmer he hardly regarded in the light of a serious human being who ought to have a vote; and he did not mind Miss Arrowpoint's addiction to music any more than her probable expenses in antique lace. He was consequently a little amazed at an after-dinner outburst of Klesmer's on the lack of idealism in English politics, which left all mutuality between distant races to be determined simply by the need of a market; the crusades, to his mind, had at least this excuse, that they had a banner of sentiment round which generous feelings could rally: of course, the scoundrels rallied too, but what then? they rally in equal force round your advertisement van of 'Buy cheap, sell dear.' On this theme Klesmer's eloquence, gesticulatory and other, went on for a little while like stray fireworks accidentally ignited, and then sank into immovable silence. Mr Bult was not surprised that Klesmer's opinions should be flighty, but was astonished at his command of English idiom and his ability to put a point in a way that would have told at a constituents' dinner - to be accounted for probably by his being a Pole, or a Czech, or something of that fermenting sort, in a state of political refugeism which had obliged him to make a profession of his music; and that evening in the drawing-room he for the first time went up to Klesmer at the piano, Miss Arrowpoint being near, and said -

'I had no idea before that you were a political man.'

Klesmer's only answer was to fold his arms, put out his nether lip, and stare at Mr Bult.

'You must have been used to public speaking. You speak uncommonly well, though I don't agree with you. From what you said about sentiment, I fancy you are a Panslavist.'

'No; my name is Elijah. I am the Wandering Jew,' said Klesmer, flashing a smile at Miss Arrowpoint, and suddenly making a mysterious, wind-like rush backward and forward on the piano. Mr Bult felt this buffoonery rather offensive and Polish, but - Miss Arrowpoint being there - did not like to move away.

'Herr Klesmer has cosmopolitan ideas,' said Miss Arrowpoint, trying to make the best of the situation. 'He looks forward to a fusion of races.'

'With all my heart,' said Mr Bult, willing to be gracious. 'I was sure he had too much talent to be a mere musician.'

'Ah, sir, you are under some mistake there,' said Klesmer, firing up. 'No man has too much talent to be a musician. Most men have too little. A creative artist is no more a mere musician than a great statesman is a mere politician. We are not ingenious puppets, sir, who live in a box and look out on the world only when it is gaping for amusement. We help to rule the nations and make the age as much as any other public men. We count ourselves on level benches with legislators. And a man who speaks effectively through music is compelled to something more difficult than parliamentary eloquence.'

With the last word Klesmer wheeled from the piano and walked away.

Miss Arrowpoint colored, and Mr Bult observed, with his usual phlegmatic stolidity, 'Your pianist does not think small beer of himself.'

'Herr Klesmer is something more than a pianist,' said Miss Arrowpoint, apologetically. 'He is a great musician in the fullest sense of the word. He will rank with Schubert and Mendelssohn.'

'Ah, you ladies understand these things,' said Mr Bult, none the less convinced that these things were frivolous because Klesmer had shown himself a coxcomb.

Catherine, always sorry when Klesmer gave himself airs, found an opportunity the next day in the music-room to say, 'Why were you so heated last night with Mr Bult? He meant no harm.'

'You wish me to be complaisant to him?' said Klesmer, rather fiercely.

'I think it is hardly worth your while to be other than civil.'

'You find no difficulty in tolerating him, then? - you have a respect for a political platitudinarian as insensible as an ox to everything he can't turn into political capital. You think his monumental obtuseness suited to the dignity of the English gentleman.'

'I did not say that.'

'You mean that I acted without dignity, and you are offended with me.'

'Now you are slightly nearer the truth,' said Catherine, smiling.

'Then I had better put my burial-clothes in my portmanteau and set off at once.'

'I don't see that. If I have to bear your criticism of my operetta, you should not mind my criticism of your impatience.'

'But I do mind it. You would have wished me to take his ignorant impertinence about a 'mere musician' without letting him know his place. I am to hear my gods blasphemed as well as myself insulted. But I beg pardon. It is impossible you should see the matter as I do. Even you can't understand the wrath of the artist: he is of another caste for you.'

'That is true,' said Catherine, with some betrayal of feeling. 'He is of a caste to which I look up - a caste above mine.'

Klesmer, who had been seated at a table looking over scores, started up and walked to a little distance, from which he said -

'That is finely felt - I am grateful. But I had better go, all the same. I have made up my mind to go, for good and all. You can get on exceedingly well without me: your operetta is on wheels - it will go of itself. And your Mr Bull's company fits me 'wie die Faust ins Auge.' I am neglecting my engagements. I must go off to St. Petersburg.'

There was no answer.

'You agree with me that I had better go?' said Klesmer, with some irritation.

'Certainly; if that is what your business and feeling prompt. I have only to wonder that you have consented to give us so much of your time in the last year. There must be treble the interest to you anywhere else. I have never thought of you consenting to come here as anything else than a sacrifice.'

'Why should I make the sacrifice?' said Klesmer, going to seat himself at the piano, and touching the keys so as to give with the delicacy of an echo in the far distance a melody which he had set to Heine's 'Ich hab' dich geliebet und liebe dich noch.'

'That is the mystery,' said Catherine, not wanting to affect anything, but from mere agitation. From the same cause she was tearing a piece of paper into minute morsels, as if at a task of utmost multiplication imposed by a cruel fairy.

'You can conceive no motive?' said Klesmer, folding his arms.

'None that seems in the least probable.'

'Then I shall tell you. It is because you are to me the chief woman in the world - the throned lady whose colors I carry between my heart and my armor.'

Catherine's hands trembled so much that she could no longer tear the paper: still less could her lips utter a word. Klesmer went on -

'This would be the last impertinence in me, if I meant to found anything upon it. That is out of the question. I meant no such thing. But you once said it was your doom to suspect every man who courted you of being an adventurer, and what made you angriest was men's imputing to you the folly of believing that they courted you for your own sake. Did you not say so?'

'Very likely,' was the answer, in a low murmur.

It was a bitter word. Well, at least one man who has seen women as plenty as flowers in May has lingered about you for your own sake. And since he is one whom you can never marry, you will believe him. There is an argument in favor of some other man. But don't give yourself for a meal to a minotaur like Bult. I shall go now and pack. I shall make my excuses to Mrs. Arrowpoint.' Klesmer rose as he ended, and walked quickly toward the door.

'You must take this heap of manuscript,' then said Catherine, suddenly making a desperate effort. She had risen to fetch the heap from another table. Klesmer came back, and they had the length of the folio sheets between them.

'Why should I not marry the man who loves me, if I love him?' said Catherine. To her the effort was something like the leap of a woman from the deck into the lifeboat.

'It would be too hard - impossible - you could not carry it through. I am not worth what you would have to encounter. I will not accept the sacrifice. It would be thought a *mesalliance* for you and I should be liable to the worst accusations.'

'Is it the accusations you are afraid of? I am afraid of nothing but that we should miss the passing of our lives together.'

The decisive word had been spoken: there was no doubt concerning the end willed by each: there only remained the way of arriving at it, and Catherine determined to take the straightest possible. She went to her father and mother in the library, and told them that she had promised to marry Klesmer.

Mrs. Arrowpoint's state of mind was pitiable. Imagine Jean Jacques, after his essay on the corrupting influence of the arts, waking up among children of nature who had no idea of grilling the raw bone they offered him for breakfast with the primitive flint knife; or Saint Just, after fervidly denouncing all recognition of pre-eminence, receiving a vote of thanks for the unbroken mediocrity of his speech, which warranted the dullest patriots in delivering themselves at equal length. Something of the same sort befell the authoress of 'Tasso,' when what she had safely demanded of the dead Leonora was enacted by her own Catherine. It is hard for us to live up to our own eloquence, and keep pace with our winged words, while we are treading the solid earth and are liable to heavy dining. Besides, it has long been understood that the proprieties of literature are not those of practical life. Mrs. Arrowpoint naturally wished for the best of everything. She not only liked to feel herself at a higher level of literary sentiment than the ladies with whom she associated; she wished not to be behind them in any point of social consideration. While Klesmer was seen in the light of a patronized musician, his peculiarities were picturesque and acceptable: but to see him by a sudden flash in the light of her son-in-law gave her a burning sense of what the world would say. And the poor lady had been used to represent her Catherine as a model of excellence.

Under the first shock she forgot everything but her anger, and snatched at any phrase that would serve as a weapon.

'If Klesmer has presumed to offer himself to you, your father shall horsewhip him off the premises. Pray, speak, Mr Arrowpoint.'

The father took his cigar from his mouth, and rose to the occasion by saying, 'This will never do, Cath.'



'Do!' cried Mrs. Arrowpoint; 'who in their senses ever thought it would do? You might as well say poisoning and strangling will not do. It is a comedy you have got up, Catherine. Else you are mad.'

'I am quite sane and serious, mamma, and Herr Klesmer is not to blame. He never thought of my marrying him. I found out that he loved me, and loving him, I told him I would marry him.'

'Leave that unsaid, Catherine,' said Mrs. Arrowpoint, bitterly. 'Every one else will say that for you. You will be a public fable. Every one will say that you must have made an offer to a man who has been paid to come to the house - who is nobody knows what - a gypsy, a Jew, a mere bubble of the earth.'

'Never mind, mamma,' said Catherine, indignant in her turn. 'We all know he is a genius - as Tasso was.'

'Those times were not these, nor is Klesmer Tasso,' said Mrs. Arrowpoint, getting more heated. 'There is no sting in *that* sarcasm, except the sting of undutifulness.'

'I am sorry to hurt you, mamma. But I will not give up the happiness of my life to ideas that I don't believe in and customs I have no respect for.'

'You have lost all sense of duty, then? You have forgotten that you are our only child - that it lies with you to place a great property in the right hands?'

'What are the right hands? My grandfather gained the property in trade.'

'Mr Arrowpoint, *will* you sit by and hear this without speaking?'

'I am a gentleman, Cath. We expect you to marry a gentleman,' said the father, exerting himself.

'And a man connected with the institutions of this country,' said the mother. 'A woman in your position has serious duties. Where duty and inclination clash, she must follow duty.'

'I don't deny that,' said Catherine, getting colder in proportion to her mother's heat. 'But one may say very true things and apply them falsely. People can easily take the sacred word duty as a name for what they desire any one else to do.'

'Your parent's desire makes no duty for you, then?'

'Yes, within reason. But before I give up the happiness of my life - '

'Catherine, Catherine, it will not be your happiness,' said Mrs. Arrowpoint, in her most raven-like tones.

'Well, what seems to me my happiness - before I give it up, I must see some better reason than the wish that I should marry a nobleman, or a man who votes with a party that he may be turned into a nobleman. I feel at liberty to marry the man I love and think worthy, unless some higher duty forbids.'

'And so it does, Catherine, though you are blinded and cannot see it. It is a woman's duty not to lower herself. You are lowering yourself. Mr Arrowpoint, will you tell your daughter what is her duty?'

'You must see, Catherine, that Klesmer is not the man for you,' said Mr Arrowpoint. 'He won't do at the head of estates. He has a deuced foreign look - is an unpractical man.'

'I really can't see what that has to do with it, papa. The land of England has often passed into the hands of foreigners - Dutch soldiers, sons of foreign women of bad character: - if our land were sold to-morrow it would very likely pass into the hands of some foreign merchant on 'Change. It is in everybody's mouth that successful swindlers may buy up half the land in the country. How can I stem that tide?'

'It will never do to argue about marriage, Cath,' said Mr Arrowpoint. 'It's no use getting up the subject like a parliamentary question. We must do as other people do. We must think of the nation and the public good.'

'I can't see any public good concerned here, papa,' said Catherine. 'Why is it to be expected of any heiress that she should carry the property gained in trade into the hands of a certain class? That seems to be a ridiculous mishmash of superannuated customs and false ambition. I should call it a public evil. People had better make a new sort of public good by changing their ambitions.'

'That is mere sophistry, Catherine,' said Mrs. Arrowpoint. 'Because you don't wish to marry a nobleman, you are not obliged to marry a mountebank or a charlatan.'

'I cannot understand the application of such words, mamma.'

'No, I dare say not,' rejoined Mrs. Arrowpoint, with significant scorn. 'You have got to a pitch at which we are not likely to understand each other.'

'It can't be done, Cath,' said Mr Arrowpoint, wishing to substitute a better-humored reasoning for his wife's impetuosity. 'A man like Klesmer can't marry such a property as yours. It can't be done.'

'It certainly will not be done,' said Mrs. Arrowpoint, imperiously. 'Where is the man? Let him be fetched.'

'I cannot fetch him to be insulted,' said Catherine. 'Nothing will be achieved by that.'

'I suppose you would wish him to know that in marrying you he will not marry your fortune,' said Mrs. Arrowpoint.

'Certainly; if it were so, I should wish him to know it.'

'Then you had better fetch him.'

Catherine only went into the music-room and said, 'Come.' She felt no need to prepare Klesmer.

'Herr Klesmer,' said Mrs. Arrowpoint, with a rather contemptuous stateliness, 'it is unnecessary to repeat what has passed between us and our daughter. Mr Arrowpoint will tell you our resolution.'

'Your marrying is out of the question,' said Mr Arrowpoint, rather too heavily weighted with his task, and standing in an embarrassment unrelieved by a cigar. 'It is a wild scheme altogether. A man has been called out for less.'

'You have taken a base advantage of our confidence,' burst in Mrs. Arrowpoint, unable to carry out her purpose and leave the burden of speech to her husband.

Klesmer made a low bow in silent irony.

'The pretension is ridiculous. You had better give it up and leave the house at once,' continued Mr Arrowpoint. He wished to do without mentioning the money.

'I can give up nothing without reference to your daughter's wish,' said Klesmer. 'My engagement is to her.'

'It is useless to discuss the question,' said Mrs. Arrowpoint. 'We shall never consent to the marriage. If Catherine disobeys us we shall disinherit her. You will not marry her fortune. It is right you should know that.'

'Madam, her fortune has been the only thing I have had to regret about her. But I must ask her if she will not think the sacrifice greater than I am worthy of.'

'It is no sacrifice to me,' said Catherine, 'except that I am sorry to hurt my father and mother. I have always felt my fortune to be a wretched fatality of my life.'

'You mean to defy us, then?' said Mrs. Arrowpoint.

'I mean to marry Herr Klesmer,' said Catherine, firmly.

'He had better not count on our relenting,' said Mrs. Arrowpoint, whose manners suffered from that impunity in insult which has been reckoned among the privileges of women.

'Madam,' said Klesmer, 'certain reasons forbid me to retort. But understand that I consider it out of the power either of you, or of your fortune, to confer on me anything that I value. My rank as an artist is of my own winning, and I would not exchange it for any other. I am able to maintain your daughter, and I ask for no change in my life but her companionship.'

'You will leave the house, however,' said Mrs. Arrowpoint.

'I go at once,' said Klesmer, bowing and quitting the room.

'Let there be no misunderstanding, mamma,' said Catherine; 'I consider myself engaged to Herr Klesmer, and I intend to marry him.'

The mother turned her head away and waved her hand in sign of dismissal.

'It's all very fine,' said Mr Arrowpoint, when Catherine was gone; 'but what the deuce are we to do with the property?'

'There is Harry Brendall. He can take the name.'

'Harry Brendall will get through it all in no time,' said Mr Arrowpoint, relighting his cigar.

And thus, with nothing settled but the determination of the lovers, Klesmer had left Quetcham.