

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE CONVERSATION OF PHINA HOLLANEY AND GODFREY MORGAN, WITH A PIANO

#### ACCOMPANIMENT.

William W. Kolderup had returned to his mansion in Montgomery Street. This thoroughfare is the Regent Street, the Broadway, the Boulevard des Italiens of San Francisco. Throughout its length, the great artery which crosses the city parallel with its quays is astir with life and movement; trams there are innumerable; carriages with horses, carriages with mules; men bent on business, hurrying to and fro over its stone pavements, past shops thronged with customers; men bent on pleasure, crowding the doors of the "bars," where at all hours are dispensed the Californian's drinks.

There is no need for us to describe the mansion of a Frisco nabob. With so many millions, there was proportionate luxury. More comfort than taste. Less of the artistic than the practical. One cannot have everything.

So the reader must be contented to know that there was a magnificent reception-room, and in this reception-room a piano, whose chords were permeating the mansion's warm atmosphere when the opulent Kolderup walked in.

"Good!" he said. "She and he are there! A word to my cashier, and then we can have a little chat."

And he stepped towards his office to arrange the little matter of Spencer Island, and then dismiss it from his mind. He had only to realize a few certificates in his portfolio and the acquisition was settled for. Half-a-dozen lines to his broker--no more. Then William W. Kolderup devoted himself to another "combination" which was much more to his taste.

Yes! she and he were in the drawing-room--she, in front of the piano; he, half reclining on the sofa, listening vaguely to the pearly arpeggios which escaped from the fingers of the charmer.

"Are you listening?" she said.

"Of course."

"Yes! but do you understand it?"

"Do I understand it, Phina! Never have you played those 'Auld Robin Gray' variations more superbly."

"But it is not 'Auld Robin Gray,' Godfrey: it is 'Happy Moments.'"

"Oh! ah! yes! I remember!" answered Godfrey, in a tone of indifference which it was difficult to mistake. The lady raised her two hands, held

them suspended for an instant above the keys as if they were about to grasp another chord, and then with a half-turn on her music-stool she remained for a moment looking at the too tranquil Godfrey, whose eyes did their best to avoid hers.

Phina Hollaney was the goddaughter of William W. Kolderup. An orphan, he had educated her, and given her the right to consider herself his daughter, and to love him as her father. She wanted for nothing. She was young, "handsome in her way" as people say, but undoubtedly fascinating, a blonde of sixteen with the ideas of a woman much older, as one could read in the crystal of her blue-black eyes. Of course, we must compare her to a lily, for all beauties are compared to lilies in the best American society. She was then a lily, but a lily grafted into an eglantine. She certainly had plenty of spirit, but she had also plenty of practical common-sense, a somewhat selfish demeanour, and but little sympathy with the illusions and dreams so characteristic of her sex and age.

Her dreams were when she was asleep, not when she was awake. She was not asleep now, and had no intention of being so.

"Godfrey?" she continued.

"Phina?" answered the young man.

"Where are you now?"

"Near you--in this room--"

"Not near me, Godfrey! Not in this room! But far far away, over the seas, is it not so?"

And mechanically Phina's hand sought the key-board and rippled along a series of sinking sevenths, which spoke of a plaintive sadness, unintelligible perhaps to the nephew of William W. Kolderup.

For such was this young man, such was the relationship he bore towards the master of the house. The son of a sister of this buyer of islands, fatherless and motherless for a good many years, Godfrey Morgan, like Phina, had been brought up in the house of his uncle, in whom the fever of business had still left a place for the idea of marrying these two to each other.

Godfrey was in his twenty-third year. His education now finished, had left him with absolutely nothing to do. He had graduated at the University, but had found it of little use. For him life opened out but paths of ease; go where he would, to the right or the left, whichever way he went, fortune would not fail him.

Godfrey was of good presence, gentlemanly, elegant--never tying his cravat in a ring, nor starrng his fingers, his wrists or his shirt-front with those jewelled gimcracks so dear to his fellow-citizens.

I shall surprise no one in saying that Godfrey Morgan was going to marry Phina Hollaney. Was he likely to do otherwise? All the proprieties were in favour of it. Besides, William W. Kolderup desired the marriage. The two people whom he loved most in this world were sure of a fortune from him, without taking into consideration whether Phina cared for Godfrey, or Godfrey cared for Phina. It would also simplify the bookkeeping of the commercial house. Ever since their births an account had been opened for the boy, another for the girl. It would then be only necessary to rule these off and transfer the balances to a joint account for the young couple. The worthy merchant hoped that this would soon be done, and the balances struck without error or omission.

But it is precisely that there had been an omission and perhaps an error that we are about to show.

An error, because at the outset Godfrey felt that he was not yet old enough for the serious undertaking of marriage; an omission, because he had not been consulted on the subject.

In fact, when he had finished his studies Godfrey had displayed a quite premature indifference to the world, in which he wanted for nothing, in which he had no wish remaining ungratified, and nothing whatever to do. The thought of travelling round the world was always present to him. Of the old and new continents he knew but one spot--San Francisco, where he was born, and which he had never left except in a dream. What harm was there in a young man making the tour of the globe twice or

thrice--especially if he were an American? Would it do him any good? Would he learn anything in the different adventures he would meet with in a voyage of any length? If he were not already satiated with a life of adventure, how could he be answered? Finally, how many millions of leagues of observation and instruction were indispensable for the completion of the young man's education?

Things had reached this pass; for a year or more Godfrey had been immersed in books of voyages of recent date, and had passionately devoured them. He had discovered the Celestial Empire with Marco Polo, America with Columbus, the Pacific with Cook, the South Pole with Dumont d'Urville. He had conceived the idea of going where these illustrious travellers had been without him. In truth, he would not have considered an exploring expedition of several years to cost him too dear at the price of a few attacks of Malay pirates, several ocean collisions, and a shipwreck or two on a desert island where he could live the life of a Selkirk or a Robinson Crusoe! A Crusoe! To become a Crusoe! What young imagination has not dreamt of this in reading as Godfrey had often, too often done, the adventures of the imaginary heroes of Daniel de Foe and De Wyss?

Yes! The nephew of William W. Kolderup was in this state when his uncle was thinking of binding him in the chains of marriage. To travel in this way with Phina, then become Mrs. Morgan, would be clearly impossible! He must go alone or leave it alone. Besides, once his fancy had passed away, would not she be better disposed to sign the settlements? Was it for the good of his wife that he had not been to China or Japan, not

even to Europe? Decidedly not.

And hence it was that Godfrey was now absent in the presence of Phina, indifferent when she spoke to him, deaf when she played the airs which used to please him; and Phina, like a thoughtful, serious girl, soon noticed this.

To say that she did not feel a little annoyance mingled with some chagrin, is to do her a gratuitous injustice. But accustomed to look things in the face, she had reasoned thus,--

"If we must part, it had better be before marriage than afterwards!"

And thus it was that she had spoken to Godfrey in these significant words.

"No! You are not near me at this moment--you are beyond the seas!"

Godfrey had risen. He had walked a few steps without noticing Phina, and unconsciously his index finger touched one of the keys of the piano. A loud C# of the octave below the staff, a note dismal enough, answered for him.

Phina had understood him, and without more discussion was about to bring matters to a crisis, when the door of the room opened.

William W. Kolderup appeared, seemingly a little preoccupied as usual.

Here was the merchant who had just finished one negotiation and was about to begin another.

"Well," said he, "there is nothing more now than for us to fix the date."

"The date?" answered Godfrey, with a start. "What date, if you please, uncle?"

"The date of your wedding!" said William W. Kolderup. "Not the date of mine, I suppose!"

"Perhaps that is more urgent?" said Phina.

"Hey?--what?" exclaimed the uncle--"what does that matter? We are only talking of current affairs, are we not?"

"Godfather Will," answered the lady. "It is not of a wedding that we are going to fix the date to-day, but of a departure."

"A departure!"

"Yes, the departure of Godfrey," continued Phina, "of Godfrey who, before he gets married, wants to see a little of the world!"

"You want to go away--you?" said William W. Kolderup, stepping towards the young man and raising his arms as if he were afraid that this



"rascal of a nephew" would escape him.

"Yes; I do, uncle," said Godfrey gallantly.

"And for how long?"

"For eighteen months, or two years, or more, if--"

"If--"

"If you will let me, and Phina will wait for me."

"Wait for you! An intended who intends until he gets away!" exclaimed William W. Kolderup.

"You must let Godfrey go," pleaded Phina; "I have thought it carefully over. I am young, but really Godfrey is younger. Travel will age him, and I do not think it will change his taste! He wishes to travel, let him travel! The need of repose will come to him afterwards, and he will find me when he returns."

"What!" exclaimed William W. Kolderup, "you consent to give your bird his liberty?"

"Yes, for the two years he asks."

"And you will wait for him?"

"Uncle Will, if I could not wait for him I could not love him!" and so saying Phina returned to the piano, and whether she willed it or no, her fingers softly played a portion of the then fashionable "Départ du Fiancé," which was very appropriate under the circumstances. But Phina, without perceiving it perhaps, was playing in "A minor," whereas it was written in "A major," and all the sentiment of the melody was transformed, and its plaintiveness chimed in well with her hidden feelings.

But Godfrey stood embarrassed, and said not a word. His uncle took him by the head and turning it to the light looked fixedly at him for a moment or two. In this way he questioned him without having to speak, and Godfrey was able to reply without having occasion to utter a syllable.

And the lamentations of the "Départ du Fiancé" continued their sorrowful theme, and then William W. Kolderup, having made the turn of the room, returned to Godfrey, who stood like a criminal before the judge. Then raising his voice,--

"You are serious," he asked.

"Quite serious!" interrupted Phina, while Godfrey contented himself with making a sign of affirmation.

"You want to try travelling before you marry Phina! Well! You shall try

it, my nephew!"

He made two or three steps and stopping with crossed arms before Godfrey, asked,--

"Where do you want to go to?"

"Everywhere."

"And when do you want to start?"

"When you please, Uncle Will."

"All right," replied William W. Kolderup, fixing a curious look on his nephew.

Then he muttered between his teeth,--

"The sooner the better."

At these last words came a sudden interruption from Phina. The little finger of her left hand touched a G#, and the fourth had, instead of falling on the key-note, rested on the "sensible," like Ralph in the "Huguenots," when he leaves at the end of his duet with Valentine.

Perhaps Phina's heart was nearly full, she had made up her mind to say nothing.

It was then that William W. Kolderup, without noticing Godfrey, approached the piano.

"Phina," said he gravely, "you should never remain on the 'sensible'!"

And with the tip of his large finger he dropped vertically on to one of the keys and an "A natural" resounded through the room.