

One day Mr. Bonfig deemed the time had arrived to complete his plans for the education of Luigi. He would take him to Italy, where certain finishing lessons from a celebrated maestro, and a necessary course of dramatic and stage instruction, would render him fit to open his professional campaign, and to the theatrical world a new talent. Mr. Bonfig understood that the maestro in question had the talent of pushing promising pupils, and that his recommendation alone was sufficient to induce managers to come forward with brilliant offers. He spoke of his intentions to Luigi, and then it was that he learned for the first time that Luigi had a sweetheart.

She was some little humble work-girl, whom the Italian had known and "kept company" with the days when he was poor and friendless. His change of fortune had not altered his affections, and the two were no anxious to marry. Luigi would do nothing without the sanction and consent of his benefactor, but he pointed out respectfully that he was very much in love, that they had been waiting hopefully for a long while, and that now, with this jointure, they were in a position to state his case, and to ask permission to be allowed to take her with him as his wife. She would be no additional expense; she was not a young beauty, but she was liberal enough to maintain three wives, not to speak of one.

This was Mr. Bonfig's first touch of grief, after a long and uninterrupted period of happiness. He had never dreamed of Luigi being like other young men, subject to the influence of blood, and had formed his theories of his own on the score of a sister, and one of them was that callousness was a desirable qualification. He looked rather grave, therefore, when his protegee laid bare this new phase of his character.

Luigi replied that his affection for the young woman was the greatest of his life, and that one of the ambitions of his life was to make her his wife. "Well, well," said Mr. Bonfig, "I suppose I ought not to be surprised, though I confess you have given me something of a shock. You see, Luigi, my friend, your position is considerably changed now; you are in a fair way of becoming a somebody; your prospects in life are promising, exceedingly promising. Through your industry, good-will and natural capacities, which have surpassed my most sanguine anticipations, you are about to take a place in the world superior, far superior, I hope, to your past or present; and, and—don't you think now, that a tie of the kind you mention would—would—dear me! how shall I put it? hem! prejudice your future?"

Luigi, seeing that his patron scarcely approved of the contemplated union, bowed his head sadly, and looked the picture of misery. "Ebenzer, if for me," continued Ebenzer, who detested the thought of seeming unkind, "to seek to influence you in any way, or to appear to exert an authority to which I distinctly wish to have no claim. You are at liberty to act as you please; and I am merely offering you the counsel of a friend. This—ahem!—this young person—a most lovely girl in all other respects, no doubt—is, I imagine, scarcely fit to take her place in the world to which you will have a right to belong; don't you think that if you could—if you could now, say, go Italy alone, and see how you hear absence from her for a little while, come to a better and calmer experience of this affection?"

Mr. Bonfig was obviously getting a little entangled, and paused, relieved by the idea that he had contrived to convey his meaning. Luigi still hung his head very low. "I love her," he said simply, "and she loves me; I shall always love her, and she will always love me." "Yes, yes, no doubt," said Ebenzer, "trying to smile; 'that is how lovers talk to a ruler, I believe. Well, let us drop the subject for the present, and consider that I have said nothing. I—I don't wish to influence you in the matter at all; you are free to dispose of yourself as you please. The news has come up on me rather suddenly, that's all, and that is why I have spoken. We can resume the conversation another time—another time, my friend."

In the evening Mr. Bonfig's landlady entered his sitting-room, and intimated, with markedly indignation, that there was a young person waiting in the hall who desired to see him. "Somebody wishing to see me?" asked Ebenzer. "Yes, sir; a young person." Ominous emphasis on the word "person."

"Dear me! who can it be?" said Bonfig, puzzled, and positively blushing under the severe glance of his attendant. "Are you quite sure, there is no mistake, Mr. Pennington?" "No, it isn't a mistake," said the virtuous female; "she asked for you right enough."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mr. Bonfig once more. "Well, I—I suppose you had better ask her to come in." The landlady satiated out with a stately walk, and in another moment led in a timid, poorly, but neatly clad young girl. "Pray be seated," said Mr. Bonfig courteously, though a trifle nervous and confused. The new-comer seemed evidently in some sore distress of mind.

"Oh, sir!" she said, half inclined to burst into tears, "I hope I haven't done wrong in coming, but I couldn't stay at home any longer without seeing my heart." It was indeed, a hard life as Bonfig himself experienced, when, driven by absolute necessity, he placed himself under the tutelage of his benefactor, and in the untold misfortune, and in the untold misery, and in the untold pain, he was daily suffering from his white hair streaming from under his battered hat; his shabby clothes shivering, in spite of their decay, a feeble attempt at tidiness and cleanliness, was still recognizable, and he trudged along, one of a crowd of broken-down, loafing, drunken, abject-looking men, with that stony expression on his face which intense suffering and misery have that power of imparting to the features of the human countenance.

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