

THE WOMAN WITH THE LORG-  
NETTE.

A STUDY IN ECCENTRICITY.

The sound of his falsetto voice jarred on my quivering nerves like the minor crash of a broken note.

"Confound it, Boerski, the people are not dogs!" he exclaimed. "When an audience like that"—he waved his hand toward the front—"shrieks and cheers like boys at their first circus; when you've got 'em, men and women, musicians and swells, all howling with hysterical joy, I tell you, man, you've just got to—"

"Bah!"

I grasped my hat and, hurrying down the steps, made my way out through the stage door, leaving him for once, I gratefully recognized, speechless.

Play again? Soothe that many-headed, howling beast with an encore? Dull the memory of that glorious, crashing, awful finale, which had left me weak and trembling as—as was Eida that night fourteen years ago when I first played it to her; played her to my feet, to my heart that beat and cried for her?

No, respected Herr Mohr, cleverest of managers and most despicable of men, there will be no encore tonight. And you will bear the brunt of the people's displeasure. For this it is that we artists have managers. This is the unwritten half of our contract, this and the hourly misery I endure from your thick-skinned, grasping, fawning vulgarity, you excellent business man. Be grateful that this is all you need bear, O much-sought-after manager of great artists! For every leaping nerve in my body seconds the loathing I've learned to feel for you since we began this most successful tour together, and calls for revenge for what I've suffered.

I hate you when you smile and shrug your shoulders, and say, "These artists! Oh, what one stands from a genius!"

And I hate you more when you approve me. I hate your every mannerism, your smallest fault, with an intensity that makes me wonder that I have not strangled you, after some new evidence of your talent for advertising—and degrading—me. But I hate you most when you affect to sympathize with me, when you affect to despise the thing you worship—notoriety.

I could laugh, were I not half mad with nervous excitement, to remember how once, in my agony, I was tempted to cry out to you—to Herr Mohr, famous manager of artists hardly more famous. To make one's self ridiculous before a Mohr! To expect sympathy from a Mohr! To look for an elevated point of view and a high tone of artistic morality from a Mohr!

"It's torture to play in public, Mohr!" I can hear myself say, almost weeping with rage and nervous suffering. "It is humiliating, the essence of slavery, to bare one's soul for the edification of the many-headed, many-headed monster that bids for one at the block. To be sold to the highest bidder was one thing—an awful one; but to uncover one's art—which, after all, is only one's inner, truer deeper, nature—to the gaze of the public; to retail one's inspiration, one's ideal, the unspeakable, the unutterable, which music's self alone can express, the purest, the highest motives of one's life to the mob—faugh!"

I was a fool. But I was thinking of Elida, realizing that every time I sit down to the piano it is to her I play; to my memory of her. With the shining spiritual sweetness of her comprehending face in my mind, in my heart, is it surprising that the thing Mohr complains of—my contempt for the audience—is written in my half-shut eyes, in my bitter mouth, in my ignoring of its very existence?

It was a beautiful night, soft and

mild. The moon was in the twilight of its youth; its beams melted and diffused through the trembling air over which it brooded.

It was delightful to walk about alone in that atmosphere of prescient mystery. Anything might happen on a night like this. It was doubly delightful, for at the hotel Mohr, I knew, would be waiting my return in an agony of doubt and fear lest I should not return to meet the guests he had invited to sup with us this last evening of our stay here. To mortify Mohr while indulging myself! It was more than pleasure. It was luxury.

If the soul, with all its treasures of tenderness, of longing, of loving, had the power that resides in a bar of base metal she would come to me tonight. Distance would be annihilated; greater miracle—sin would be as though it had not been.

"And you will never forgive, Elida? Again I hear the words we spoke at parting."

"I have forgiven. I cannot forget." This was her answer.

"And what atonement? Is there one—?"

"Make my belief in you what it was."

Merely that, Elida? Just to alter what has been? Only to recall the irrevocable past, and then to meet the fateful moment with other thoughts, other desires, other qualities than are mine? Yet, love, you suffer and long for the man you loved. And I—I suffer and yearn for the one I love. And we two remain forever apart.

Oh, that the reverence I have for you had made me like you! Oh, that the love you bore me had been more pitiful, less ideal!

It was dark in the theatre when I got back, letting myself in through the stage door by means of the key I still carried. Outside, the soft shoen of the mysterious night was buried in clouds of fog. Inside, circle upon circle of seats faced me in the thick, crowded darkness. I felt the presence of this dumb, waiting audience, though I could not see it till I turned on the single electric light nearest my piano.

In the days before success came to me I dreamed of such a piano. When we were boy and girl together, fellow students who knew not yet we were lovers, Elida and I used to speak of the instrument which should reveal my power to the world, as thoughtful, loving parents speak of their child before its birth.

"I shall love it, next to you," I said.  
"I shall be jealous of it, Boris" she answered.

And now, having lost her, this great dumb, awkward thing of ebony and iron and waiting strings is all there is of light to me in life. Its master, yet its slave, am I. It is my hand that wakes it to most perfect life; it is my soul that responds most truly to its thrilling melody.

Come, we will speak to each other—of her!

There's a little study, a quick, complicated, merry little melody, confined to comparative few notes in the treble but balanced by the strong, simple harmonies of the bass octave. This I associate always with her, because when I took my first lesson on it—and, haunted by its quick, tripping billiardcy, was still standing by the piano running it over with one hand, that day long ago—she ran into the room and into my life

Opening the piano I begin now with this simple little exercise, every note of which is a thought of her. Then on, through the repertoire she loved. Every prelude is a picture of our musical life together, and the most perfect phrases, the grandest chords, the most enchanting bits of melody are but reflections of my love's sweet face. Glad or pensive, gentle or saucy, they are but Elida rendered into music.



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