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Nanette: An Aside.

[BY WILLA CATHER.]

Of course you do not know Nanette. You go to hear Tradutorri, go every night she is in the cast perhaps, and rave for days afterward over her voice, her beauty, her power, and when all is said the thing you most admire is a something which has no name, the indescribable quality which is Tradutorri herself. But of Nanette, the preserver of Madame's beauty, the mistress of Madame's finances, the executrix of Madame's affairs, the power behind the scenes, of course you know nothing.

It was after twelve o'clock when Nanette entered Madame's sleeping apartments at the Savoy and threw up the blinds, for Tradutorri always slept late after a performance. Last night it was Cavalleria Rusticana, and Santuzza is a trying role when it is enacted not merely with the emotions but with the soul, and it is this peculiar soul-note that has made Tradutorri great and unique among the artists of her generation.

"Madame has slept well, I hope?" inquired Nanette respectfully, as she presented herself at the foot of the bed.

"As well as usual, I believe," said Tradutorri rather wearily. "You have brought my breakfast? Well, you may put it here and put the ribbons in my gown while I eat. I will get up afterward."

Nanette took a chair by the bed and busied herself with a mass of white tulle.

"We leave America next week, Madame?"

"Yes, Friday; on the 'Paris,'" said Madame, absently glancing up from her strawberries. "Why, Nanette, you are crying! Oze would think you had sung *Voi lo Sapete* yourself last night. What is the matter, my child?"

"O, it is nothing worthy of Madame's notice. One is always sorry to say good-bye, that is all."

"To one's own country, perhaps, but this is different. You have no friends here; pray why should you be sorry to go?"

"Madame is mistaken when she says I have no friends here."

"Friends! Why, I thought you saw no one. Who, for example?"

"Well, there is a gentleman—"

"Bah! Must there always be a 'gentleman,' even with you? But who is this fellow? Go on!"

"Surely Madame has noticed?"

"Not I; I have noticed nothing. I have been very absent-minded, rather ill, and abominably busy. Who is it?"

"Surely Madame must have noticed Signor Luongo, the head waiter?"

"The tall one, you mean, with the fine head like poor Sandro Salvini's? Yes, certainly I have noticed him; he is a very impressive piece of furniture. Well, what of him?"

"Nothing, Madame, but that he is very desirous that I should marry him."

"Indeed! And you?"

"I could wish for no greater happiness on earth, Madame."

Tradutorri laid a strawberry steen carefully upon her plate.

"Um-m-m, let me see; we have been here just two months and this affair has all come about. You are very disappointing, Nanette. You have not profited by your opportunities after all."

"Madame is pleased to jest, but I assure her that it is a very serious affair to me."

"O, yes, they all are. *Affaires tres serieux*. That is scarcely an original remark, Nanette. I think I remember having made it once myself."

The use of bitter relief that Nanette feared came over Madame's face. Presently, as Nanette said nothing, Tradutorri spoke again.

"So you expect me to believe that this is really a serious matter?"

"No, Madame," said Nanette quietly. "He believes it and I believe. It is not necessary that any one else should."

Madame glanced curiously at the girl's face and when she spoke again it was in a different tone.

"Very well; I do not see any objection. I need a man. It is not a bad thing to have your own porter in London and after our London engagement is over we will go directly to Paris. He can take charge of my house there, my present steward is not entirely satisfactory, you know. You can spend the summer together there and doubtless by next season you can endure to be separated from him a few months. Stop crying and send this statuesque signor to me tomorrow and I will arrange matters. I want you to be happy my girl—at least to try."

"Madame is good—too good, as always. I know your great heart. Out of your compassion you would burden yourself with this man because I fancy him as you once burdened yourself with me. But that is impossible, Madame. He would never leave New York. He will have his wife to himself or not at all. Very many professional people stay here, not all like Madame, and he has his prejudices. He would never allow me to travel, not even with Madame. He is very firm in these matters."

"O, ho! So he has prejudices against our profession, this *garcon*? Certain'y you have contrived to do the usual thing in a very unusual manner. You have fallen in with a man who objects to your work."

Tradutorri pushed the tray away from her and lay down laughing a little as she threw her arms over her head.

"You see Madame, that is where all the trouble comes. For of course I could not leave you."

Tradutorri looked up sharply, almost pleadingly, into Nanette's face.

"Leave me? Good Heavens, no! Of course you cannot leave me. Why who could ever learn the needs of my life as you know them? What I may eat and what I may not, when I may see people and when they will tire me, what costumes I can wear and at what temperature I can have my baths. You know I am as helpless as a child in these matters. Leave me? The possibility has never occurred to me. Why, girl, I have grown fond of you! You have come entirely into my life. You have been my confidant and friend, the only creature I have trusted these last ten years. Leave me? I think it would break my heart. Come, brush out my hair, I will get up. The thing is impossible!"

So I told him, Madame," said Nanette tragically. "I said to him: 'Had it pleased Heaven to give me a voice I should have given myself wholly to my art, without one reservation, without one regret, as Madame has done. As it is, I am devoted to Madame and her art as long as she has need of me.' Yes, that is what I said."

Tradutorri looked gravely at Nanette's face in the glass. "I am not at all sure that either I or my art are worth it, Nanette."

II.

Tradutorri had just returned from her last performance in New York. It had been one of those eventful nights when the audience catches fire and drives a singer to her best, drives her beyond herself until she is greater than she knows or means to be. Now that it was over she was utterly exhausted and the life-force in her was low.

I have said she was the only woman of our generation who sings with the soul rather than the senses, the only one indeed since Malibran, who died of that prodigal expense of spirit. Other singers there are who feel and vent their suffering. Their methods are simple and transparent: they pour out their self-inflicted anguish and when it is over they are merely tired as children are

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