

A QUEEN OF SONG

A crowd of well-dressed men and women were coming out from the theatre. A small gathering of passing wayfarers had halted to watch them, with eyes that were half-indifferent, half envious.

A man, less poorly clad than some others there, and with a certain dignity of carriage which set him apart from them, stopped also in his idle saunter and gazed at the stream of smartly-clad people.

One of the last to come out was a woman. She was leaning upon the arm of a well-known Cabinet Minister. Jewels glittered on the corsage of her gown, which the half-open cloak revealed, and there were diamonds flashing from beneath the delicate lace wrap that she had thrown over her crown of soft brown hair.

Her eyes, drifting across that crowd of stragglers, rested for a moment upon this lone man, who met her gaze with a puzzled look of half-recognition. Then, as she made an eager movement, as if to leave her escort and come towards him, he turned hurriedly away and disappeared round an adjacent corner.

All the way home to his dismal lodging Lawrence Eyre was haunted by that woman's face. Had they ever met before or was it a face that had come to him only in dreams, in hours of pleasant fancy, when he had imagined his ideal of womanhood? It was a question he could not solve.

On his arrival home next day he found that a visitor was awaiting him there. Lawrence looked at him somewhat grimly—a hard line or two showing round his mouth.

"Well?" he said, briefly. The other laughed—a metallic laugh, which had no mirth in it.

"Not a very encouraging form of greeting to use towards an old friend," he said. "You are no friend of mine; you never were," answered Lawrence.

"I have to thank my reverse of fortune for the knowledge of that at least. You professed to be my best friend, and all the time you were the one who robbed me most; yes, robbed me. I can see through it all now."

The visitor's face flushed crimson. "Don't go into heroics, my dear fellow," he said. "I had nothing to do with your ruin; it was caused by your own mad folly. I was your secretary, nothing more. Was it my place to warn you that your expenditure was beyond your means—to offer advice?"

"Ah, but there was trickery somewhere. I was cheated out of my wealth. I know that. I have seen everything with clearer eyes since I have been poor. If you had dealt fairly with me, how is it that you throw so on my ruin? How is it that the home which was once mine is now yours? But I have no wish to hark back to that now. What is it you want of me to-night?"

"I am sent as a messenger," replied Frank Coverdale, sullenly, "from one whom you helped."

"Who is it?" he asked briefly. "You recollect Nellie Carson?" Lawrence Eyre thought for a moment. Then he looked up with a bright smile.

"The little girl with the wonderful voice, you mean?" "Yes. Her parents were quite humble people on your estate. You heard the girl singing one day at her work and you recognized the value of such a voice."

"Stop!" exclaimed Eyre, light breaking upon him. "Now I understand. It was she I saw leaving the theatre last night. And so that is little Nellie Carson!"

"It is she who has sent you a message. She had not forgotten that it was you paid for her musical education. She wishes to make some return. She asked me to act as her intermediary. I had some difficulty in finding you, but now I shall be able to discharge my errand."

"And what is that?" "I am to write you out a check for whatever amount you name. She desires me to tell you how much she owes you in your misfortunes, and if she can use her present influence in any way to assist you in finding some honorable employment you are to command her."

Eyre's face slowly whitened until there was not a trace of color left in it. "Did she say that?" he asked. "Almost word for word as I remember it," returned the other lightly. "She is anxious to discharge this debt. You see, it wouldn't be very pleasant for her ever to be reminded, now that she is famous, that she owed her chance in life to what was little else than charity. What Nellie Carson could accept as a loan Orma Lane must discharge as a debt."

"Is she Orma Lane? I did not know that." "You have never heard her?" "Not as Orma Lane. But people tell me that there is only one voice as good as hers, and that is Melba's."

"People have told you no more than the truth." For a moment there was silence between the two men.

It was broken by Eyre, who rose from his chair and addressed the other with grave dignity. "Go back to Orma Lane and tell her that I can do without her pity. As for her offers of assistance, thank her for me and say that—I can accept nothing in—in that way. Whatever I may have done for her I have long ago forgotten, and she need not fear that in the future I am ever likely to remind her of it. That is all I have to say."

When he had gone Eyre paced restlessly up and down his tiny room. This man and the message that was a veiled insult had both irritated and annoyed him. He realized more acutely than ever before how low his present place was in the world's regard.

"I will succeed yet," he told himself, setting his teeth grimly. "There is time—time to build up a career." He threw himself into a chair before a small desk, upon which he noticed for the first time there was a letter addressed to himself. He opened it and took in the contents almost at a glance.

It was from a firm of music publishers to whom he has submitted, under an assumed name, a few weeks before, the libretto and score of a one-act opera. To his own very great astonishment, this letter informed him that they were willing to accept it if he would sell them certain rights for £100. They went on to state that they had shown the MS. to Miss Orma Lane, who had been so favorably impressed by it that she had decided to use it at a special benefit performance that was being got up at Convent Garden Theatre, creating the principal part in it herself.

Eyre placed the letter down with a hard laugh. His mouth was still grimly set. His eyes were steady. In his own past life of pleasure he had amused himself and others by composing songs. From early boyhood music was a passion with him, and he had always possessed the faculty of expressing passing moods in graceful and fluent musical form, without ever regarding his gift as being anything of value. But necessity had forced him to seek a market for this talent, and during the last year he had worked up a small connection among publishers under the name of Herbert Darlington.

He knew that he was driving away an opportunity that might never come to him again, but without hesitation wrote a note in answer to this letter, saying that he had no intention of accepting this offer, and desired the return of his MS. without delay. He read through what he had written. It was undoubtedly curt, to the verge of rudeness. Then, acting on an instinct that was as impulsive as that which had urged him to write this letter, he tore it up.

They should produce his opera if they chose. It was entirely a matter of business. There could be no question of patronage so far as Orma Lane was concerned. She did not know who the composer really was. "I have to earn my living; I want to win success," said Lawrence Eyre. "Why should I give up this chance because of a foolish sentiment of pride? I won't give it up."

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"I have to earn my living; I want to win success," said Lawrence Eyre. "Why should I give up this chance because of a foolish sentiment of pride? I won't give it up."

He sat in the gallery at the first performance of his own work. There was a crowded audience, which overflowed in every part of the house.

The magic of Orma Lane's voice was a certain magnet. One of the youngest and most successful of singers, her name had only to be announced to insure the selling of every seat at concert hall or opera house.

The publishers had urged upon Mr. "Darlington" that he should attend rehearsals of his own opera, but he had consistently refused in answer to their numerous letters, and not a soul connected with the production at this special performance had ever seen the mysterious composer.

Eyre was in an agony of anticipation as he sat in the gallery. One of the old favorites was played before the new work and made its customary impression; and then the curtain rose upon his own opera.

It started well with a tenor song of seductive sweetness, which caught the favor of the house, and five minutes later Orma Lane came on. The part she had to play was that of a famous singer who had come back from Paris, the land of her triumphs, to her native Italian village. The plot was quite simple, but there was an undercurrent of tragedy in it, though a happy ending was obtained in a skillful and unhackneyed manner.

A throb touched Eyre's heart as she flitted on the stage, a girlish figure dressed simply in a peasant's frock. No longer a fashionable woman in a Paquin dress and wonderful diamonds, she recalled the child whom he now remembered so well. She was on some little time before she reached her first great song. It started in the middle compass, and the full, round tones hushed the house into a silence that was more strained, more intense. And as note by note the aria went up the scale, so note by note did that pure voice increase in sweetness and strength, to stop suddenly in its florid passages and continue, with an abrupt change of style, a few bars, of quite simple music—a folk song which had been interpolated, telling of humble love, a thing as simple as it was pathetic.

When she had finished and the house was cheering her with frantic delight, Eyre found himself applauding as wildly as the rest of them, shouting with the loudest voice there. He had entirely forgotten that the opera was his—it was that voice, that voice of a century, that had worked its spell on him as surely as on all others there.

She had two other songs, and soon after that the opera ended. The curtain fell to a tumult of continued applause. Excepting once, when Mischa Elman had played, Eyre had never seen an English audience so deeply moved.

There were loud cries for the composer, but no one appeared; and presently the lights were lowered, and not until then did the audience cease cheering and reluctantly depart from the theatre.

"A clever opera," was the verdict on every hand. "A second 'Cavalleria,' I shouldn't be surprised," remarked a prominent musical critic.

Eyre felt as if wings lifted him home that night. He could not yet realize that he had had any part in that astonishing success. He thought only of Orma Lane. Her voice was still in his ears; it kept him awake half the night, until he fell asleep to hear it in his dreams, and it was with him all the next day.

So great was the desire to hear the new opera that three performances were arranged, and at each one Eyre was present, seated in the gallery.

But as he walked away from the third performance he understood the spell which had drawn him there. It was not his own work; it was not the love of music, nor yet the wonder of that woman's voice. It was the woman herself.

He loved her. It was that which had changed the world to him and had given back to him greater brightness and keener joy than his old life had ever known. It was not the success which his opera had brought him. Yet he realized that there was no chance for him with Orma Lane. He remembered her half-contemptuous message—the insulting pity she had offered him through Coverdale, and he remembered her wealth and her fame. She was a star beyond his reach. They moved in different spheres. What had he to offer her? He had made some reputation, it was true, under a name that was not his own, and there were a number of commissions for him to fulfill as quickly as he would. But the opera itself had brought him in no more than a couple of hundred pounds, as he had sold the entire rights in it for that sum. No; he had nothing to offer her.

Snow lay upon the ground, but in the busy streets it had partially melted, leaving the roads in a partially dangerous and unpleasant condition. Eyre's eyes opened a little as he caught sight of the handsome motor car that waited at the entrance door to the block of flats where he had lived since fortune had smiled on him. He observed that a white-haired lady sat in the tonneau of the car, and that she glanced up at the building a trifle impatiently.

He mounted the stairs which led to his own flat on the top floor—six stories from the pavement—and placed his latchkey in the door, wondering as he did so if the ancient lady who came in daily to do the housework had remembered his parting instructions that she should have the kettle boiling by the time he returned.

He crossed the small hall, but on the threshold of the sitting-room paused in silent astonishment. A woman who looked like a queen, a lovely figure dressed in soft furs and holding some exquisite roses in her hands, was waiting inside.

His own face was in the shadow, yet she could see his figure quite distinctly, and she came forward, smiling apologetically. And then, as she approached nearer to him, her face faded in a look of doubting wonder, and a crimson wave of emotional color flooded the sensitive features.

"Mr. Eyre!" she exclaimed. "I—I did not expect to see you here. I—I came to find out if a certain mysterious Mr. Darlington really had existence. I coaxed his address out of the publishers, because I wanted to tell him how I appreciate his beautiful music and to offer him these roses. You—you are, perhaps, his friend?"

The blood was singing in Eyre's veins. A sudden rapture that was as keen in its joy as the touch of pain, filled his whole being. To be near her at last in her very presence. "I am his friend," he said huskily; "his only friend. He and I are one."

Her face was radiant as she looked at him. "You!" she said. "And I never guessed. I am so glad, so glad." With a frank, impulsive movement she dropped the flowers on to the table and held out both her hands. The touch made Eyre forget the wound that her message through Coverdale had inflicted upon his pride. He could only remember in that moment that he loved her.

"You will have some tea?" he asked, scarce knowing what to say, and he drew a little gypsy table forward and rang for the waiter. "I have left my companion, Mrs. Measures, down below," she said, with a smile. "She was frightened at the number of stairs."

sympathy. And I sent you a message telling you this, but I suppose my messenger must have blundered, because he brought back such an unkind answer."

"Was it Coverdale you sent?" "Yes," she said. "I chose him because, having been your nearest friend, I thought that he at least would be able to find out where you were."

"Did Coverdale admire you?" he asked abruptly. She colored quickly. "Yes," she replied; "but I did not know it then. He proposed to me a few days later—and we have ceased to be friendly since then."

"Nell! Nell!" exclaimed Eyre, taking her white hands into his. "This man gave me your message, but in a different form. He was jealous because you showed interest in me. That was it—I understand now. Ah, Nell, I love you, dear!"

"You love me?" She stood up before him, straight and tall. "Yes, yes; I love you," he said. "And if only you would give me some hope I would work for you and win some place in life that would lift me to your side."

She looked at him with that wonderful, radiant smile still upon her face, transforming every feature, and at something he read in her eyes he took courage.

"Oh, my dear, my dear!" he said, as he held out his arms; "you do care a little, then?" "I have always cared," she said simply. "I have loved you, Lawrence, ever since I was a child."

"Really, my dear Nellie," said an unexpected voice at the door, "I have climbed seventy-nine steps to find out what detained you. Is it tea I see there? If so, perhaps you and this gentleman, whose name I have yet to learn, will offer me a cup and with it perhaps, an explanation of this—er—tableau?"

And Nellie's companion and chaperone got both the tea and the explanation.—Tit-Bits.

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A Presbyterian Editor on the Divorce Question

In an article entitled "The Cornerstone of Civilization," J. T. Hemphill, editor-in-chief of the Charleston "News and Courier" and a Presbyterian, pays the following notable tribute to the Catholic Church with regard to divorce:

"The American Federation of Catholic Societies held a convention at Buffalo, N.Y., last week. The most important subject discussed at this meeting was the question of divorce, and upon this subject the Federation declared its position in no uncertain terms. All good Catholics are steadfastly opposed to any form of absolute divorce under any legislation by the State, and the position which is taken by the Catholic Church is the position which all other Christian communions should take. We believe with the convention at Buffalo that 'sooner or later the truth of the Catholic doctrine upon the subject must be brought home to the community.'"

"The position of some of the other churches on this question has been nothing short of shameful. Ministers in good standing in these churches have freely married those who have been separated by the courts, and who could not under the judicial decrees of separation lawfully marry again in the States in which their divorces were granted. The Roman Catholic position on the question of divorce is the only true position. In that Church marriage is a sacrament, and if the institution is to be preserved and the highest interests of society securely protected, it must be regarded as a sacrament. Every now and then some convention is proposed with the object of obtaining uniformity in the divorce laws of this country. These conventions are generally proposed by persons living in States in which the divorce business has been overdone. There has been talk from time to time of national legislation, but so far all efforts have failed to reach a plan which, while conceding great freedom of action in obtaining divorces, would at the same time preserve at least the pretence of some high moral purpose. The only state in the Union in which divorce is not granted—as the state of South Carolina. The law in this state is the only law that can be adopted with safety to society and with proper regard to high religious teaching."

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Lever's Leave

Like the gentlemen in his novels, the Irish writer, Charles Lever, carried his responsibilities with audacious ease.

In 1869, when the consul at Trieste, he paid a visit to England. On his arrival, says his latest biographer, Edward Downey, he called on Lord Lytton. The two novelists chatted for some time, and at length Lord Lytton said:

"I am so glad for many reasons to see you here. You will have an opportunity presently of meeting your chief, Clarendon. I expect him every moment."

Lever was aghast. He reflected that he had left Trieste without obtaining formal leave. He endeavored to excuse himself to Lytton—he had to be off—he was very sorry, but—While he was explaining, the Minister of Foreign Affairs was announced.

"Ah, Lever!" said Lord Clarendon, in surprise. "I did not know that you left Trieste."

"No, my lord. The fact is," said the ready Lever, "I thought it would be more respectful if I came and asked your lordship personally, for leave."

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Table for the month of September 1906, showing days of the month, days of the week, and feast days such as Elizabeth of Portugal, Thirteenth Sunday After Pentecost, etc.

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