

The Court Opera Coup

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announced Madame Cavalo's final appearance—"on the eighteenth."

It was when she saw Cavalo's name in print that the idea came to her. It was the frailest of reeds, but with careful propping it might be induced to support them.

In the course of the morning Monsieur Blanc was called upon to receive a rather agitated young lady who had some difficulty in explaining her requirements. It appeared, in the forefront of everything, that she must see Madame.

"But I am Madame's secretary," he explained. "Perhaps I can do what you wish?"

"No!" said Betty, on the verge of desperate tears. "No, I must see Madame herself."

A vision of that morning's post, with begging letters running into a financial total of five figures, hardened the little man's heart.

"It is impossible!" he said briefly. Though condemned to remain for life "the husband of Cavalo," he took a certain pride in his post of gatekeeper to her presence.

Betty fell back on a line of attack she had not wanted to use.

"But my father is Mr. Watson of the Court Opera."

Monsieur Blanc glanced again at the card in his hand.

"Ah, Watson, of course. Then you have come on business? So?"

Betty smiled encouragement. "Yes, that's it," she gasped eagerly.

Blanc shrugged his shoulders and brought his hands together with a quick little clasp. "Then is it not I that you should see? I"—he impressed upon her again—"I am Madame's secretary." And he smiled in a satisfied way; he was too clever for those young women!

Betty had become reckless. "But what I have to tell Madame is of a very delicate and private nature."

Into little Blanc's hot southern brain there flashed a horrible suspicion. He rose wildly. But, before he had time to speak, a door was wrenched violently open and the great Cavalo herself positively leaped into the room. The extent and ramifications of a prima donna's temper always rise in exact proportion to her fame. It is sufficient to state baldly that Madame was furious.

"The Emperor!" she screamed.

Betty made hasty preparations for a curtsy. The husband of Cavalo bowed low. Madame simmered down for an amazed second; then her indignation boiled up again.

"He's gone!" she shrieked. "They said he wanted to hear me sing, and—and he's gone."

She beat a frantic tattoo with her plump fists on the little writing-table. While little Blanc was hurriedly straightening his back, a sudden light came to Betty. She knew her father's little ways, and she guessed the bait Cavalo had dangled before her.

"Oh, Madame, it was about that I came to see you."

From that moment she had the undivided attention of her audience. She had decided to make a clean breast of it. She told them everything. She even told them that she had done it all for love of filthy gold—at which Madame looked very shocked indeed. She begged Madame. She implored Madame. She threw herself on Madame's mercy.

"But what is it that you would have me to do?" Madame gasped, striving in a bewildered way to stem the tide of Betty's eloquence.

To Betty, her requirements were so obvious that she almost smiled.

"If Madame would sing on the nineteenth as was at first arranged, we should be saved."

Now Madame—and it was a piece of luck for Betty—Madame had a sense of humour, and the idea of the opera manager and his daughter plotting against each other struck her as decidedly piquant. She smiled; then she frowned. For a "Queen of Song" to find herself reduced to the position of a mere pawn was an exceedingly nasty shock. Human nature—and Italian operatic prima donna nature at that—has its limits of patience.

Cavalo turned to her husband. "Has the contract for the final performance been signed?"

Monsieur Blanc shook his head quickly. "No; it has not yet arrived. The contract for a performance on the nineteenth has been signed; that will not be destroyed until the new one arrives."

"Then don't destroy it; and return the new one when it comes. I believe," Cavalo went on viciously, "I believe they knew all the time that the Emperor would not be there. Tell them, tell them from me, that I sing on Thursday or"—and she waved her arms superbly—"or London shall never hear me again."

When Madame's ultimatum was delivered, the language of Mr. Watson was too awful. But the pill had to be swallowed. Cavalo—which, of course, includes Monsieur Blanc—swore to tell no one, and as she preferred to ignore her imperial disappointment, she did her best to keep her word. But in the end Mr. Watson got to hear of the whole affair.

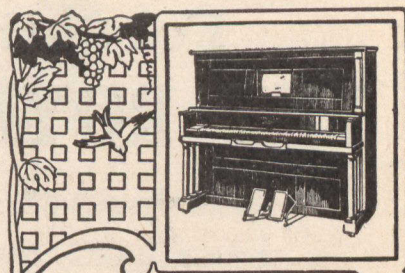
It was some little time before his sense of humour got into operation, but the great Cavalo herself acted as peacemaker, and he agreed to forgive—though, as he said, he drew the line at forgetting. All he said to the culprits was reserved for Betty's wedding day, when he took Henry aside and advised him for his own good.

"Never," he cautioned her gravely, "never talk 'shop' before Betty."

The Lords a "Trust"

MR. G. K. CHESTERTON usually unusual in his mental attitude towards things in general, has his unconventional view of the House of Lords, whom he accuses of being a trust and a syndicate to boom the yellow press. In support of this amusingly apt accusation he says:

"The House of Lords has really much the same function as the more vulgar part of the press. It exists to turn on the limelight. It decides what violent changes shall be printed in small letters, what much milder changes shall be printed in gigantic letters. A bill is introduced to cut off every non-conformist minister's left leg; the Lords pass it, and so it is an unimportant measure. A bill is introduced to charge every millionaire a halfpenny more on his marriage license; the Lords reject it, and it becomes at once a monstrously important measure, filling the land with cries of spoliation and despair. This is the real function of the modern Lords. They have charge of the vulgar department. They manage the headlines and the loud advertisements in the great modern conspiracy of wealth. And they must be destroyed for this reason: that no nation can have a manly control of its destiny so long as a small ring of its rich (often its basest rich) can decide what things are important, what are the topics of the day. An Englishman must be free, not only as to how he votes, but as to what he votes about. This can never be, as long as the richest class can force a general election by sudden and vulgar exaggerations. I used to think it dreadful that Harmsworth was made an English Lord. But, on second thought, it is quite appropriate."



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