

**AT THE PHONE.**

Maud Muller, on a summer's day,  
Called "Number, please?" to earn her pay.  
Before her, numbers, printed small,  
Fell down when anyone would call.  
The judge took down his office 'phone,  
And made to Maude his wishes known.  
Said he, "I'll ask you just once more  
For four-eleven-forty-four."  
Said Maud, as mild as summer seas,  
"What number did you ask for,  
please?"  
Said he, "I told you twice before;  
It's four-eleven-forty-four."  
Said Maud, and you could hear her smile,  
"Just hold the 'phone a little while."  
A weary interval ensued,  
The wires hummed interlude.  
And broken bits of talk came o'er  
The 'phone and made the waiter sore.  
The wish-bone-shaped receiver hook  
He seized upon and wildly shook.  
Till Maudie's voice he heard once more,  
"What number are you waiting for?"  
The judge responded with a roar,  
"It's four-eleven-forty-four."  
Serenely Maud made answer then,  
"That line is busy, call again."  
The judge had business late that day,  
And so he merely walked away.  
But as he walked he shook his head,  
And this is what he sadly said:  
"Of all the words of tongue or pen,  
The saddest are 'Busy, call again.'"  
—Portland Oregonian.

**The Cost Of a Soul**

Professor Herrmann Mittelstrom was idly drawing wonderful chords from the small pipe-organ which enriched his music-room. His thoughts were elsewhere and cast a tone of involuntary sadness into the rich, rolling splendors of his improvisation. "Lost souls!" he murmured, "How many, Lord—how many? Yet they are Thine, Blessed Jesus; Thine, every one! Oh, save them for Thy mercy's sake!" Before his ardent vision loomed up the immense throng of his concert audience the evening before. He was a musical genius, of profound learning in his own profession and so finished in his renderings of the great master-work that his piano and organ recitals not only drew the public, but held it as with magnetic spell. Those swelling crowds, that sea of upturned faces on the previous night, even—ah, what a concourse of souls! If he could only charm some of them into the kingdom—a few, even a very few—his gift of sweet music would not be in vain. The power was his—that he knew—and he cried aloud, "O Jesus, give me Thine own consecrating unto its more effectual use!" Even as he breathed the prayer he caught the sound of approaching footsteps. His door was half open, and looking up he perceived two young women at the threshold. One, plainly the elder, a smart, aggressive girl, looked very mannish in her tailor-made suit and a sort of slouch hat, yet behind her came a sweet little Aphrodite, whose witchery he knew. There were the deep blue eyes, blue as the sea, which always made him think of an unawakened soul. It was Constance Ellesmont.  
He came forward to greet her with a distinct sense of satisfaction.  
"This is simply delightful, Miss Constance," he exclaimed, "I am only too happy to meet you again. But, pray, where did you come from? You did not drift down from the skies?" The smile that came in response to this was simply delicious in its frankness. The girl had not yet reached the age of suspicion, when compliments weary. Moreover, her old teacher, this very Herr Mittelstrom, had been stern—yes, often severe—in her callow days of piano playing. She had been decidedly afraid of him. Now she merely looked up at him in unconcealed gladness, like a voiceless Undine, and it was the smart girl with her who answered this question.  
"We came from Brooklyn, where I live," this morning, Herr Professor, Miss Ellesmont is my far-off cousin, and my guest also just at present." Then the tailor-made girl rushed off into a broad discussion of matters musical, in which Herr Mittelstrom bore his appointed part, as in duty bound, yet mechanically and with his thoughts fixed all the while upon his former pupil. How beautiful she had grown! The years since he had seen her last had wrought magical changes. Yet there was still the same soft, misty, unawakened look in her eyes that used to puzzle him. "Her soul!—no home! O, the pity of it!" as he whispered this within himself. "She is even yet estray in God's universe!" Then he asked her to play. She did so with the simple obedience of a little child. At the first notes he

started in pleased surprise. Minish, execution and a certain attractive, individual style she had certainly attained. Yet, much as she had gained during her stay on the Pacific coast and excellent as her San Francisco training had evidently been, there remained the old lack of spiritual quality. Whatever of perceptiveness now marked her work was not her own, but put into it by some musician whose teaching possesses power.  
The tailor-made girl, Miss Ethel Schwartz, was by this time getting impatient and hastened to broach her errand. Could not he, Professor Mittelstrom, get them a couple of tickets for the new opera, in which the great Bavarian prima donna was to take part? But, alas! that very morning he had given away the last of several tickets placed by the manager at his disposal. Poor Mittelstrom! He would have been overjoyed to do the young ladies this little service, yet fate had decreed otherwise.  
Miss Schwartz hardly listened to his explanation, but, rising with promptitude, summoned her companion with a glance. Again the appealing blue eyes, and this time they gave the professor an inspiration.  
"Let me tell you!" he interposed, eagerly. "I had nearly forgotten it—but Madame Kazinski is to sing next Sunday at the Cathedral. If you should go—and go early—you would have a fine opportunity to hear her. She is *bonne Catholique l'enfant adorable*! I love her voice myself." When they had gone the professor shook his head soberly. "They are Protestant," he murmured. "I doubt if they will go."  
None the less, however, he besought the Mother of Mercy and her dear Son for these two souls, precious in God's sight, that they might be led into ways of salvation and into paths of peace.  
He had slight faith that his prayer would win answer, yet at the Cathedral he beheld his two visitors of the week before, seated at but a short distance from him. Then he took courage—the Blessed Mother had indeed heard his prayer!—and he prayed again, with many an "action de graces," that her Divine Son would pour the great gift of faith on these stray souls that had sought His presence.  
The music that day surely soared to heaven, for Madame Kazinski sang with the warmth that only faith can give. Miss Schwartz sat and listened with precisely the same air of well-bred appreciation she would have borne at a concert. But the beauty of it all, the glory of it, the sense of unearthly mystery, nay, even the consciousness of Divine presence, were slowly revealing themselves, one by one, to Constance Ellesmont. One swift glance showed the professor that the blue eyes which had been his study were suffused with quick tears. Then the little bell rang, and Constance, with soft, impulsive motion, fell on her knees with the rest.  
"Most Blessed Virgin, Mother of Mercy!" prayed the devout musician, in all sincerity, "Hear, oh hear her petition and show her thy Holy Child Jesus!" and the winged prayer might well have been caught and borne upward by waiting angels.  
She went home that day in a grave mood, hardly knowing what had happened to her. "How lovely it all was!" she cried in rapture over and over again. "Indeed, it was good to be there!" Ethel Schwartz was more than puzzled. "I did not think Constance was so impressive!" she said, in the depth of her heart. "Perhaps I ought not to have taken her there." But aloud she contented herself with declaring that Kazinski was superb; one could not help being touched by such musical power.  
During the many weeks that followed Professor Mittelstrom lost sight of his former pupil, save for a stray glimpse of her now and again among the worshippers at the Cathedral. Some attraction drew her thitherward, that was evident, and with much power Miss Schwartz did not bear her company; she glided in alone in a timid way and knelt humbly in a quiet corner.  
She was destined, however, to be brought before the professor's mind—and sharply, too—at this juncture. One fine day Adolph Levasseur, manager of the Folies Dramatiques, a light entertainment company, came sauntering up to his little table at Riccadonna's. This Levasseur, with whom the professor had some slight acquaintance, was a brilliant fellow, a respectable singer, a man of the world, at home everywhere, but a man, also, who always had an eye to business. During lunch he surprised the professor by a sudden question flung into a white-capped sea of chat.  
"By the way, professor, how is the little Ellesmont getting on? She used to be your pupil, years ago, she says."  
The older man looked up in amazement.  
"I mean," pursued Adolph, airily, "has she any talent? I have half an idea of engaging her and bringing her out soon. She looks teachable—has a way of flaxing out things that is 'taking'—and is adorably pretty, besides!"

The good professor answered not a word. He knew he had reason to be startled. If Adolph should meet the Angel Gabriel himself, straight from heaven, he would try to engage him for the trombone or French horn! Reverence was not in his nature. It took all Professor Herrmann's self-control to answer calmly.  
"I did give Miss Ellesmont a few piano lessons at one time. She has made progress since, but I do not know her present capabilities. May I ask you how you made her acquaintance?"  
A sarcastic curl of the lip proved that the impresario understood the professor's hateur. "I was presented to her by her valued friend, Ethel Schwartz"—and again came the curl of the lip. "She can sing after a fashion, your Miss Ellesmont! Has some sweet tones in her voice and some vibrant force. Six months' training under old Baumbach would bring it out—at least enough for my purpose. A light son"—here the professor shuddered—"fairly sung, with one of her bewitching smiles annexed, would score a success, I know! The crowd would shout. Yes, she is a winning card, sure!"  
"Perhaps she would refuse to serve."  
"Nonsense, mon cher! They are all dying for a chance to appear. Twenty-five applicants yesterday for chorus places, with hard work and poor pay. I can do better with Constance! Again the professor ground his teeth. "Yes, she'll come when I whistle! They go for the theatre like moths for a candle, the little dears!"  
And with this parting shot the manager rose from the table and went his way.  
The thing weighed on the soul of Professor Herrmann. It haunted him night after night, like a dream of evil. He woke each morning with a boding dread of the day. It oppressed him so that he went to take counsel with Mother Mary Francis of the Carmelite priory. Mother Francis had advised with him before; she was a woman of calm good sense, yet warm sympathies, and she felt the sincerity of his distress as he told his tale.  
"She is a motherless girl, away from home. Her father lives in New Haven now, and is deep in business cares. He supplies her with money and lets her flutter about, as American fathers do! Her friend, Miss Schwartz, has not the right influence, I am sure. She is pure as a star now—so innocent of all evil that she does not know it, or fear it. She is in peril, unawares. Adolph Levasseur feels the charm, knows that the world will feel is also, and means to make money out of it."  
"The old story of Eve and the serpent," replied the grave superior, looking at him with pity, as a sudden uprising of wrath choked his utterance. "But do not be unhappy and do not despair! Heaven protects its own; the holy angels are her guard of honor. Moreover, innocence has peculiar ways of protecting itself, even in the midst of evil. Yet there may be work left to us, also."  
"How? Miss Schwartz is Protestant and friendly with Adolph. I dare not warn the girl myself. I could not prove my disinterestedness! She would only think me malicious, envious of Adolph or bent on injuring his troupe. No, you cannot snatch away a new toy from a child without his resenting it. This hope of public success is her bright toy balloon! Oh, the pity of it!"  
"Use her musical gift to save her with, my friend. Do not oppose her openly, but lead her to the nobler melodies, to the Divine in music! And I will pray—we will all pray for your little white lamb."  
Days and even weeks passed, after this, in a silence deeply fraught with anxiety. The one item of intelligence that came in regard to Miss Ellesmont was of evil omen. She had been taking lessons in voice culture from Herr Baumbach, a competent trainer for operatic bouffe. This, as the professor knew, was part of Levasseur's scheme, and his heart sank within him. It so chanced, nevertheless, that soon after, on his way to a rehearsal, he came upon her most unexpectedly. She was alone, tripping along with her music roll, a vision of daintiness. A fluffy feather boa curling about her neck with its softness of white and gray, enhanced the effect of her black picture hat. Within the shadow of the latter shone the sweet face, touched to rose by the sharp winds of autumn. The glad smile flashed out from him in swift recognition just as it had before. Adolph Levasseur had not drawn her away from her old friends.  
Then the professor's courage rose, her greeting seemed just as cordial, and he ventured on his first counter-move.  
"I have had some lovely Hungarian music sent me from Buda-Pesth by Herr Potowski, of the Imperial Chapel. Will you come in some time and let me play it over for you? I am sure you will like it."  
"Oh, thank you!" was the quick response, and the blue eyes shone with delight. "Indeed, I will come and with the greatest of pleasure. You are good to me, always."

"Are you at leisure Wednesday afternoon from three to four?"  
She nodded assent, but only the angels knew that on her little nod hid threads of destiny.  
Never had the professor striven for the applause of great audiences as he now strove for the musical subjugation of Constance Ellesmont. She sat listening, mute, fascinated, entranced—her eyes often suffused with tears—all that Wednesday afternoon, while two girl pupils of the dull sort sat in the low window seat trying to write exercises in harmony. To her the music was harmony and melody in one, a deep blue sky alive with stars. Its throbs and fine-vibrations filled the very core of her being. And there were other Wednesday afternoons of like experience Rich Catholic music, the marvels of Palestrina and Sebastian Bach, the strains of Handel, the Passion music, the rich religious oratorios—it was the great music, ever and always. The greatness charmed her and swept her out of herself, like archangelic strains, great fiery blossoms from out the Central Glory.  
Her bright intelligence caught the new meaning. "He is trying to teach me something," she said to herself, "and he is teaching against Herr Baumbach."  
The opportunity for more direct teaching arrived at last. Appearing a bit late one afternoon in a whirl of excitement, and with many apologies, she dropped her music roll and several sheets flew out. Picking them up with his usual grave politeness, he cast his eye upon the titles. To see one was enough.  
"My child," he cried—there was a world of tender reproach in his tone—"what sort of a song is this?"  
A flush of scarlet mantled the delicate face upon the title. To see Professor. That song was given me to learn. I had no choice."  
He looked down upon her with a supreme pity. Beneath that gaze, which she understood only too well, her self-restraint gave way. The ice was broken. A burst of confidence ensued, whose sincerity swept away a cry barrier to a perfect understanding between them.  
"Herr Professor, honestly, I do not like this thing!"  
"Of course not. I was sure of that."  
A look of intense relief illuminated the mobile face. She had not forfeited his respect, then, and he still had faith in her. His own face, too, shone with delight. Then he motioned her to a seat. "Now, let us talk it over, my child."  
Through her fresh, vivid expressions he beheld the whole case, as it were, mapped out before him. Levasseur had begun with deferential attentions, aided by flattery, then interested and fascinated her with accounts of European theatres and foreign singers, exciting her curiosity, stirring her with imagination, picturing glories and triumphs which had crowned others and might one day be all her own. His indignation arose at the evening of the man. Yet he spoke with quiet solemnity,  
"Once in the history of the world our Blessed Saviour was taken up into an exceedingly high mountain and shown all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; then one said to Him, 'All these things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me.'"  
The girl shuddered. "Is it as bad as that?" She fixed the blue eyes on him with a startled gaze. "Can it be? A Satan offer? God forbid! That is fearful!"  
"I am reasonable, my dear child. If you were forced into this by poverty, by any dire extremity, you might take your soul in your hands, beseeching God and His holy angels to guard you. But if you go wilfully, in defiance of warning, is it not tempting Him? If you cast yourself down from the pinnacle whereon you stand, at the bidding of any evil, can you ask Him to save? There is a price to pay for all the evil angel gives. For a worldly success you will sacrifice your peace of mind, your independence—for you will be a slave to the public—your beautiful white purity—which wraps you round now, like a snow drift, for it will be soiled, by necessity, by contact with the evil-nay, perhaps your love and worship of the Divine will be swept in with the rest. Dare you risk this?"  
"I will consider what you have said, professor—truly I will. I am not sure, though. If I have any musical gift, it is the gift of God; why should I lose faith in Him by using it?"  
"It is given you only in trust, to be used in His service. Why not use it, as the angels do, for His praise and glory? For example, why not study the great music? Why not learn the organ? Why not sing in church or in the great oratorios?"  
"Signor Levasseur says I have not the talent; that I am only fit for light operetta."  
Again Professor Herrmann groaned in spirit. The sweet humility of this girl, only made her the more helpless, more of a mere bleating lamb, in the hands of this hireling who cared not for his victims. Could no one lead her to the Good Shepherd?  
"Besides," she continued. "I have

no time, I cannot—unless I leave Herr Baumbach."  
"Leave him, then, my child, and, like Mary, choose 'the better part, which shall not be taken from you.'"  
The bright, hesitating face, uplifted so eagerly, gave him many rays of hope. But the opposing force retained its grasp. She spoke slowly—he thought with reluctance, even.  
"It would be hard breaking my words. Consider, Professor, Signor Levasseur has my promise. But I will reflect! He may be willing to release me, but I fear not." Then she bade him a hurried good-day and disappeared.  
The next Wednesday she failed to present herself in the music room; and yet a friend had informed the professor that M. Adolph Levasseur was on the point of sailing for Italy. That a fine opening, which he had not expected, now lay before him in Florence, and that he might even remain abroad for some years. This good news the professor had, in his turn, communicated to Mother Mary Francis, and both had rejoiced. But, as chance would have it, in the midst of his joy he came upon Levasseur himself at one of the hotels. The manager greeted him with a mocking smile.  
"Sorry for you, professor!" he cried, "and for your lost game! You have been working on the tender conscience of my little debutante! Never mind that, though! Every man to his trade. But now I am going to take her away from you. We sail next Saturday and I shall bring her out in Florence."  
Adolph slung his irritating laugh with a mocking salutation as he bid the other good-day.  
"The supreme hour has arrived," murmured the professor, "and I am helpless! I can only pray, O Blessed Mother of Succor, Mother of Salvation! O Thou Only Saviour, Shepherd of the Sheep, help and strengthen the soul of this child! Defend her and save her, in mercy and power, forevermore!"  
The prayer calmed him, yet he renewed it insistently. "Out of the depths I have called upon Thee, O Lord! Lord, hear my voice!" All day long his spirit lifted the De Profundis of the ages for this frail, white butterfly—this child soul of to-day, which despite its feebleness, had uplifting power of wings. Out of the eternal depths of Divine Pity fell answer, sharp and sweet.  
He was sitting alone at his organ, awakening its Miserere cry, when his door sprang open and Constance Ellesmont came flying in like a frightened dove.  
"Oh, professor, pray take care of me!" she cried, holding out her clasped hands. "Take me away somewhere, anywhere! I will not go to Florence. I have run away. I am afraid of them. He shall not talk to me again. He shall not drive me. I will telegraph my father! I will not be made to go."  
"Hush, my child! Do not tremble so. You are safe here. And I will take you to Mother Francis, our good mother superior. Be quiet just a moment and I will telephone for a cab."  
"Oh, thank you! Thank you!" she cried nervously, her wide-open eyes still full of fear.  
On the way he gathered from her broken disclosures that the impresario had presumed too much on her supposed feebleness. There had been a scene, during which he had dropped his tone of deference and grown, at last, authoritative. In her anger she refused to sign the contract he brought, or any other, and he had departed furious. She had next outwitted Miss Schwartz, whose watch had been that of a cat over a mouse, and stolen away from her guardianship.  
In the convent calm she regained composure, Mother Francis advising her to remain within its walls till Levasseur had left New York. But for a long time after she timidly lingered, her affection for the Sisters increasing as the days went by. The organ lessons were begun and her beautiful voice expanded like a flower. She was received into the Church and after a short visit to New Haven returned with her father's consent, declaring that her one wish was to become a member of the community. Her novicehood seemed to Mother Francis a direct response to prayer, and the professor said, in his grave way: "God be thanked! The Good Shepherd has folded His little lamb!"  
Yet his friends remarked that Herr Mittelstrom was growing old, and he was sometimes heard to exclaim wearily: "O Lord, Thou alone knowest the cost of saving even one soul."  
—Caroline D. Swan in The Carmelite Review.

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