

It is to be feared, however, that the consciousness of looking better in the gown she wore than in any other in her wardrobe had something to do with this outburst of American independence.

Kloemer received them, smiling, courteous, and most impressive in his faultless evening dress.

Miss Travis confided to her niece in a soft aside that he looked like a blush rose; and indeed his fair German face was alight with some emotion stronger than the occasion seemed to warrant.

Zoe shook her head decidedly at the whisper, and there was some desultory conversation, till, "I think my friends are not coming," said Kloemer.

He met Zoe's laughing eye, and flushed guiltily. In some subtle fashion which she could not define, Zoe was aware that there were no friends expected, that the fiction was simply put forward to gain the pleasure of an evening's interview with herself.

"Are we privileged to ask you to play, Herr Kloemer?" began Miss Travis.

"Are you kind enough to desire me to do so?" rejoined their host humbly.

His inquiry was to the older woman, but his eyes were on Zoe.

She smiled vaguely and noncommittally in reply to his glance. "I am not musical, Herr Kloemer," she said. "My aunt is your admirer."

"You are not musical," rejoined Kloemer, to whom her smile seemed to signify more than her words, "but," he added in a lower tone—a tone so low that Zoe scarcely caught his meaning—"you are music."

He turned smilingly to Miss Travis. "And you are my admirer—so says your niece—you have asked me to play, and I, ingrate that I am, shall play to her who is not musical!"

"Zoe is musical," returned Miss Travis, seriously; "she is music itself."

And Kloemer flashed the younger woman a triumphant glance at this confirmation of his whispered words.

III.

He tuned his violin and began a passionate Hungarian air, an arrangement of his own. Zoe had twice before heard him play it in public, yet as the song went on—it was a folk song, and these songs of the people hold in every vibration of their notes the heart throbs of native human emotion—she found that he was varying it, or it was varying itself. She could not say that he altered the notes, yet something in the shading, something in the color, conveyed to her that this was his voice—the voice of his soul speaking to her soul. She dropped her eyes to her slender clasped hands and sat listening.

It seemed to her at times that the voice of the violin was the speech of one she had known and loved always. She had a half formulated sensation of being able to understand and to answer each phrase of the music as though it were a phrase in words.

When the last note had died away Miss Travis complimented the performer suitably, but Zoe said never a word. She was afraid to trust her voice; a little shaken and angry, too, now that the spell of the music had loosened its hold on her and she felt just how far it had pushed her from her usual cool poise.

Miss Travis begged for an andante of Bach's, but Zoe suggested lightly, to shake off the unwelcome feeling of secret communication with the musician which had established itself within her and would not depart, that he should play a bit of rag time to cheer them.

When she uttered her request he smilingly shook his head. "Your lips ask for that," he said, "not your heart. Suppose, now, you play for me." His glance led hers towards the open piano.

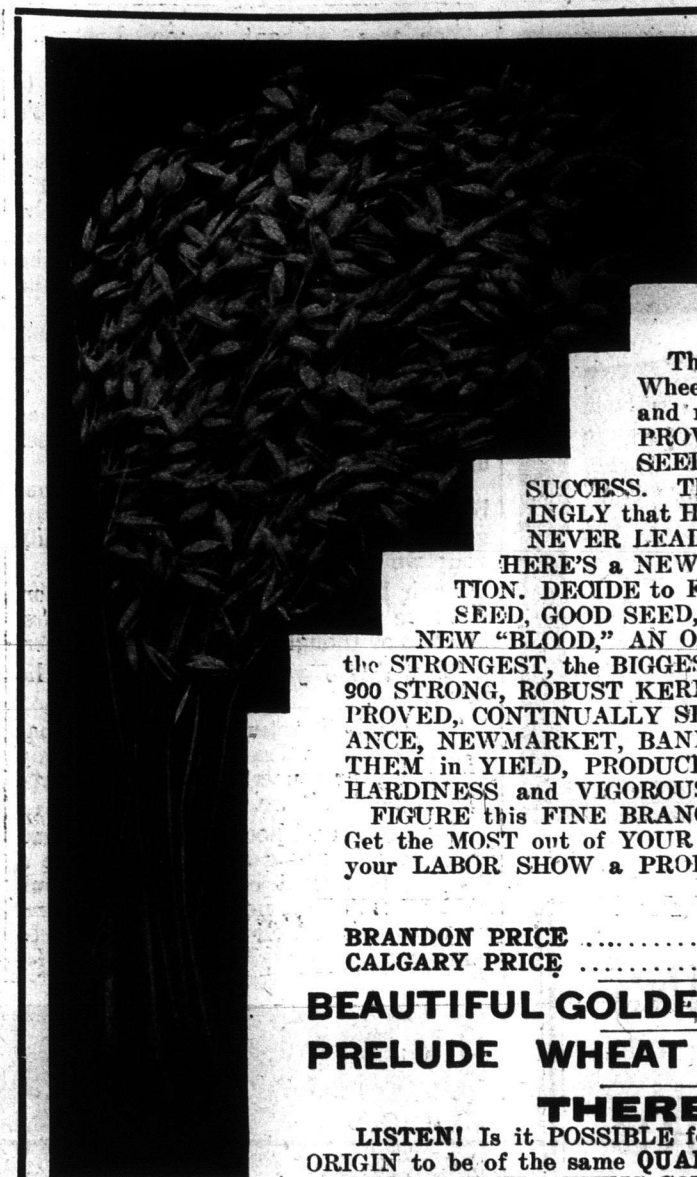
"I am that hundredth young woman, Herr Kloemer," she said sweetly, "who does not play."

"Do not play!" he repeated in astonishment. "How, then, do you express the music which is in you?"

With a gesture at once courtly and familiar, he raised the hand which hung by Zoe's side.

"See," he appealed to Miss Travis over the long, fine fingers, "this is the hand of pure inspiration. She can compose, she can improvise music. And she will say to me that she does not play!"

"There, Zoe," exulted Miss Travis, "Herr Kloemer has found you out. Play something of your own—or sing for him. Zoe does compose the weirdest little things," she said, turning to Kloemer.



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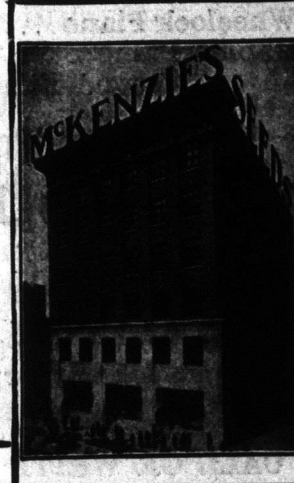
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"And then she denies that she can speak to me in my own tongue!" cried their host reproachfully. And Miss Travis repeated, "Do play, Zoe."

A childish irritation took possession of poor beset Zoe. "How absurd it all is!" she said half angrily, "I simply cannot play, and have no voice. Why do you insist on my boring Herr Kloemer with my kindergarten musical efforts?" She seated herself at the instrument. Her hands were poised a moment over the keys. Then she played.

It was a curious, monotonous little air she chose, suggestive of running water, of whispering leaves—of any of the rhythmic iterations of nature. There was but one musical phrase in it, and that was repeated, little varied, till the piece closed with an odd, unsatisfied, upward turn that left you listening.

Kloemer heard it with an introspective air. As she ceased, "Now, see," he appealed to the aunt. "And she can haf the heart to say she is not musical!" Turning to Zoe, he said, "Your music gifs me pictures." Zoe's color deepened. "And you see pictures, too, when you listen to music—not so?" he added

eagerly, watching her face. "Listen! It is a wide plain; the evening light is dying. There are birds flying. There is a laguna, and reeds are rustling beside it." He paused a moment and added, "Why do you not sing the words?"

"There, now, Zoe," interjected Miss Travis, "I call that quite wonderful! How should the herr know that there were words to it? Sing it, dear."

"It's such a sentimental, nonsensical little thing," deprecated Zoe uneasily.

"Be frank with me," pursued Kloemer. "Do not you see, when you play that air, that which I tell you I see when I listen to it?"

"Yes," answered Zoe in a voice so low as to be almost inaudible. These occult phenomena, dear to the aunt's soul, had always been held in a sort of dislike and discredit by her niece.

"Sing the words to me," he pleaded in German.

Zoe dreaded, with a new dread, her aunt's comments. The whole matter was foreign and unwelcome to Zoe's nature. More than all, she disliked the sensation creeping over her that she had indeed known Kloemer before; that all this was

prearranged from the beginning of time.

"You will sing it?" he insisted. She began in a voice which matched the melody, a low, rich, broken contralto—a voice with a flaw in it—one which scarcely could have filled an ordinary parlor, yet one so deeply musical as to be heart moving.

"So," murmured Kloemer as she concluded, "said I not right? What do you call your song?"

"I call it 'The Bird With a Broken Wing,'" rejoined Zoe briefly.

"No," said the German, "it is the cry of a soul for its mate. Wait! Listen!" He tucked his violin under his chin and stood brooding a moment. Then he drew the bow across the strings in a softly whispered plaint.

It was Zoe's own air—and its answer. "Wait for me," cried her little broken phrase. "I am waiting," answered the rich, satisfying chords of the answer.

He played long. The theme seemed to inspire him. The two voices of his melody talked together like unembodied souls. The notes of Zoe's song quivered and sought. And the accompaniment which he added was like the everlasting arms of love beneath and about it.

REMEMBER WE ARE NOT BLIND TO LOW AND ENTICING PRICES—WE PLACE QUALITY FIRST