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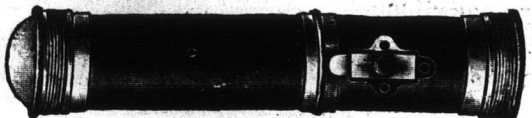
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A Musical Interlude

The Story of a Friendship that began in Prehistoric Times
By Grace MacGowan Cooke

I.

"MADAM, this is a private room!" Zoe looked up from her note book to see standing framed in the doorway, the width of the big room between them, a tall, fair young man clad in a long fur overcoat.

Behind the figure was a porter, bearing with great solemnity a great number and variety of pieces of luggage. The violin case, conspicuous among them, would have suggested a key to the apparition's identity, had not the shop windows and hoardings for some time removed all possibility of doubt.

Zoe smiled a little as her aunt went fussily forward with her effusive "Herr Kloemer, I think."

"Madam," returned the young man, ignoring her outstretched hand, "this is a private room," and, pushing past Miss Travis brusquely, he paused to regard the piled note books on the table.

"Du lieber Himmel!" he snorted, glaring at the stack. "Autograph albums to burn! Think you I shall write in all of these? This is a private room."

He was looking at Zoe as he spoke, and Zoe was laughing as she gathered up her note books.

"Shall I leave some of them, mein herr?" she queried.

"You shall leave all of them, and I shall write all over them, and scribble me right for being a big Deutsch bear," he rejoined gallantly.

"Thank you," said Zoe, but gathered up her books all the same.

Once outside, the ladies gave rein to the amusement they had considerably restrained in the German's presence. Miss Travis was in raptures. She was a musical enthusiast, and had twice followed Kloemer from one city to another for the purpose of hearing more of his playing.

"To think," she said, "of actually seeing and talking to him face to face! We must hunt up that bell boy who made the mistake and give him a douceur."

Zoe, who was rather a thoughtful young woman with ideas of her own, replied nothing except, "Herr Kloemer has an extremely familiar manner, I think."



A busy lumber scene in the Rainy River District

He looked so exactly like a naughty child, standing scowling down at her, that Zoe's smile deepened into a laugh, which was not vocalized, but which overflowed her clear grey eyes as she gazed back at him.

"No, Herr Kloemer," she said, with a carefully preserved gravity, "you will not write in any of these; they are my note books."

"Bitte—" he began in protest; but Zoe interrupted him.

"We also were told that this was a private room—before you came and told us, I mean. That was our understanding when we took it; but it doesn't appear to be so very private, after all."

Two rare and unusual dimples supplemented the laugh in Zoe's eyes as she concluded. Herr Kloemer sat weakly down on a chair facing her. He gazed piteously from one to the other of the ladies.

"I truly beg your pardon, ladies," he began; "but you cannot know! They prosecute me so! I find albums and letters under my plate at dinner; they send them by my valet, they invade my very dreams."

"It's no wonder you are savage," reassured Miss Travis. "Now let us find out whose room this really is, and then forget all about it."

A clerk here appeared at the doorway, anxious and explanatory. "Ladies, you were put in here by mistake," he said. "I'm very sorry. Your room is ninety-two and this is twenty-nine. It was a new man brought you up, and—I don't think he will stay very long."

Kloemer had been apologizing to Zoe in an eager aside. As he caught the purport of the clerk's concluding words, "I beg," he said urbanely, "that you do nothing unkind to that most clever of men. He has given me the pleasure of meeting these ladies, which I most highly appreciate."

II.

The ladies had dined, the note books had been sorted and written up to date, when the bell boy came with a message, "Herr Kloemer was expecting some friends for whom he would play. Would the ladies join him?"

Miss Travis, in a mood almost religious, retired to her own room to prepare a toilet worthy of the occasion. When she came back and found her niece quietly finishing a letter, "Zoe!" she cried, in a shocked and horrified tone. "You are surely not going down just as you are!"

"I surely am," replied Zoe. "I wouldn't change my dress for the President of the United States; and I certainly shall not for an ill-mannered Dutchman who plays the fiddle." With which rank heresy she led the way to twenty-nine.