



The Waltz

by

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TOWARD the end of May, high up in an attic room of a tumble-down house in Paris, a young man stood at the open window. He held in his hands a violin and a bow. The last colors of a glorious sunset were fading away into night over the skyline of chimneys and black roofs.

The room was littered by what was left of the musician's worldly goods, very few, for that day a sale had taken place of his poor effects to satisfy the landlord's demand for rent.

All that was left were some few sheets of manuscript-music, a bed, a chair, and some cooking utensils.

It was the end of hope, ambition, of all—complete failure having met the composer's efforts.

His face showed plainly his suffering for the past month or so. Thin, so as to be only skin and bone, it was of a terrible paleness.

Only his eyes had fire in them. They were awful to see.

His left hand grasped the neck of the violin tightly, and his eyes wandered about the bare room.

Then, as the sky darkened, the first breath of summer crept in at the window. A warm south

breeze so soft as to be barely felt, but bringing with it the first tidings of brighter days to those who had felt the long winter's cold. It was the forewarner of gladness and sunshine.

Unheedingly the young man lifted the violin to his chin, and his right hand crossed the bow over the strings. He hesitated a minute; then cast a look at the sky, and with a bold sweep of the bow began to play.

It was a waltz, throbbing with passion, full and harmonious. The sad notes of the bass strings in a minor key followed each other to the time, crying sadly like the lament of a lost soul far away.

Ever changing in melody, the waltz carried in it the first four thrilling notes. They crossed, repeated; retreated, and returned.

The first breath of summer caught these notes, carried them out of the attic window over the smoky roofs of Paris, held them, played with them, sent them to the wondering ears of other poor people who lived in attics and in lodgings near by. Women stopped sewing. Children ceased playing. Men dropped their forks and leaving their evening's meal, crept on tiptoe to the open windows and listened

Suddenly the music grew louder, more

intense, and the time quickened to madness. Then four long-drawn notes, the same as at the beginning, rang out and—there was silence.

As the last note was sounded the composer fell dead from the intense effort and the past months of starvation.

The little summer breeze carried with it his grand composition and his soul.

A man sat in an office before a richly carved desk.

He was a plain-looking business man, fat, in a white waistcoat. Before him on the desk lay much money.

His fat hands, sparkling with valuable rings, gathered up the crisp notes and slipped them into rubber bands, packing them into packets of ten thousands. He then got up and carried these packets to a large safe set into the wall of the office, placed them in a drawer, and locked the safe, sighing when he had done, like a person does, having lifted a heavy weight.

He then switched on the light and threw open the big office window, looking out onto a busy square filled by hurrying people and vehicles.

He stood at the window some minutes, following with his cunning small eyes the figure of a smart little woman whose figure interested him. As he tried to keep her in sight while she crossed the square the summer breeze crept into the office, touching his cheek with its warm caress.

It held music in its impalpable vapor—that heartrending waltz with its deep chords and simple harmony leading up to the fantastic *finale*, infernal in its throbbing recklessness and the four simple notes of its sudden ending.

The banker drew his handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his brow, his hand trembling as he did so. A chill passed over him.

He hastily closed the window and then sank into a chair. He felt unnerved and weak. His eyes wandered about the office in a troubled way. He

grasped the arms of the chair tightly as his gaze became fixed in the direction of the locked safe.

As he did so the music again caught his ear, holding him breathless in his eagerness not to miss a single note.

The music had full possession of him. It held him in its cruelly irresistible power while, standing before the safe, he saw a poorly clad figure holding a violin to its chin, its pale face looking upward, its right arm swinging the bow.

The figure was no ghost in the banker's eyes. To him it lived. He could see the bow swing back and forth, and his left foot beat time almost imperceptibly.

He saw the aristocratic profile of the player, as clearly cut as a cameo. The neck and profile brought a vague, far-off memory to the banker.

He was young again. Very young, at his father's country-place. In his mind he saw the old trees, the lawns, and moonlight nights of June. He saw Lucille, the farmer's daughter, as she crept in her pretty bare, white feet over the moonlit grass to meet him under the shadow of the oaks.

He remembered his father's anger, the hurried departure, the long sea voyage to foreign lands. The return, and the news of Lucille's trouble and death.

As the music got hold of his heart these visions became so clear that while the violin sighed he lived again all that summer of love and passion.

He rose to his feet, trembling; for in that white neck and pure profile he recognized his own flesh and blood.

The waltz was drawing near the end.

As the last four notes filled the office with their magic harmony, the banker held his arms out toward the figure and cried, his voice full of longing:

“Speak! Speak! My son!”

But it was too late.

As the last note left the ghostly violin the figure of the player vanished.