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**A MUSIC-MAD LOVER.**

From Peterson's Magazine.

**CHAPTER II.**

"But, my darling," said Mrs. Vane, stroking her hair with a loving hand, "what troubles or tempts you? You talk as if you meant yourself."

"What nonsense, mother mine!" said Ethel, stooping to kiss her mother's hand. "Can I not speak to generalities? You know I look at a subject all around, and see it with others' eyes, if I can."

She looked in a dreamy questioning way at her lover's profile, as the servant entered with lights; and a smile, half sad, half sorrowful, changed the beauty of her face.

"Oh, Otto!" she said, "do stop that dreary tum tum! If there were only an end to it, I could stand it, sustained by the hope that it would cease sometime."

"Why, Ethel!" exclaimed her mother, in amazement. "What was the matter with the child to-night? Isn't that rather unkind? I am afraid you have hurt Otto's feelings. Go and speak to him, my darling."

But, though Ethel did not move toward her lover, she watched him curiously.

Otto had flushed painfully, as Ethel spoke; and, as a sure means of escaping temptation and the risk of offending her again, had left the piano. Seating himself at the table, he took up the book Ethel had lately finished.

"You would not care for that story at all," she said, hastily. "I advise you not to read it."

"But, if it held your attention, at the risk of endangering your eyesight," he said, smiling, "it ought to be worth reading a chapter or two."

Ethel frowned and bit her lip, but made no reply. Her mother was again urging her to say something kind to Otto, when the servant announced Mr. Arundal; and, as the gentleman closely followed the announcement, there was the sound of mingled greetings.

Ethel's exclamation of surprise—and was it delight?—had not escaped Otto's attention, blind and deaf as he usually was to such trivialities of a manner. He glanced in astonishment at her sweet blushing face, while he was greeting the visitor.

What was it to her, he asked himself, that his friend had anxiously sought and found him, on his return from a three months' trip? Why were her eyes so bright, shining like stars, as if she were supremely happy? Why were the dimpled cheeks so sweetly flushed, that had been so pale a short while before? Why were the rosy lips, that had uttered several unkind speeches to him—her lover—now sweetly voicing the faintest thoughts and gayest wit and fancy?

Had George Arundal's return anything to do with this sudden change?

True, they had met frequently, during the last year. True, he had not before noticed whether they were unusually friendly or not. His music, his heart's idol, had engrossed every thought. If it were so! A pang of keenest pain passed through his heart, and, in that moment, he knew that, dearly as he prized one love, the other was infinitely more dear. And now, for the first time, he realized it, when

he had perhaps lost her.

The wonderful power of the dual brain enabled these and many other thoughts that troubled him, while the gay laughter and repartee were going on about him. And, between every sentence, one sad refrain kept ringing: "Is it too late?"

George Arundal might well have caused any lover a pang of jealousy. The dark-blue eyes, with long lashes almost black, gave to his face a look of pleading love, which was impartially directed at the tiniest little tot or oldest grandmother. But, as neither the baby, the grandmother, nor anybody else knew that there was an impartial distribution of the glances from the dark eyes, they did more harm than their owner was perhaps aware of.

Poor Otto, beside the table, sat rather pale and still, as he held the book before him, although he did not read a word.

George was wonderfully handsome, he acknowledged. Why had he not told Ethel and her mother some of his friend's story, when he had first brought him to their quarters?

He knew little of the rights and wrongs in Arundal's case, except the fact that his wife had procured a divorce, but that, a strong Catholic, he never recognized the divorce and held himself still a married man; that legally he could easily break the chain was also true.

George's laughing voice aroused him:

"Why so sad and pale, fond lover?"

"You might finish the quotation," said Otto, smiling.

"The fond lover," said Ethel saucily, although she had flushed "in regretting his lady-love who is absent." She turned to Arundal and explained: "I begged him to stop playing for awhile. You know, whatever I may be, I am not music mad."

"There are other kinds," interrupted Otto.

"I haven't found my kind," she insisted; "and I cannot, if it were to save my life, find any of the exquisite enjoyment over discord as a harmony that people claim to feel. Of course, some music I do like and don't like other; but I cannot imagine that I hear gurgling brooks and purring stream, and see mountains, and hear thunder, and believe the birds twitter, the people laugh and cry. Yes, I know I have not the poetic or artistic temperament, and I don't believe many of the crowd at Thomas's or the Pall-harmonic, that 'oh' and 'ah' all the time, have the slightest idea why they do so. They don't imagine any such things, either. They 'oh' because the program says it is time to 'oh' and they 'ah' when it says so too."

They all laughed at the excited little beauty, as she delivered her opinion, and Otto even suggested that she would make a good music critic; but the raillery and laughter did not hide the pain in his heart, nor blind him to the fact of Ethel's feverish gaiety and sudden silence. Never had she looked so beautiful, he thought, and never had she seemed so far from him. What could her emphatic denunciation mean, but dislike for him and antipathy for his work and pleasure? No, since the days when, a little child on his mother's knee, he had tried to "make music," had he regretted that he had been given the ability to make it, till now. If it should be the means of driving Ethel away from him, he would curse it.

TO BE CONTINUED.

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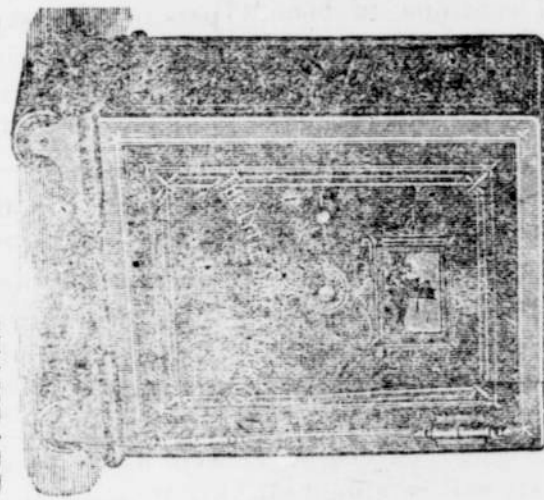
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