JOHN PHILIP SOUSA

THE FIFTH STRING

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The coming of Diotti to America had awakened more than usual interest in the man and his work. His marvelous success as violinist in the leading capitals of Europe, together with many brilliant contributions to the literature of his instrument, had long been favorably commented on by the critics of the old world. Many stories of his struggles and his triumphs had found their way across the ocean and had been read and re-read with interest.

Therefore, when Mr. Henry Perkins, the well-known impresario, announced with an air of conscious pride and pardonable enthusiasm that he had secured Diotti for a "limited" number of concerts, Perkins' friends assured that wide-awake gentleman that his foresight amounted to positive genius, and they predicted an unparalleled success for his star. On account of his wonderful ability as player, Diotti was a favorite at half the courts of Europe, and the astute Perkins enlarged upon this fact without regard for the feelings of the courts or the violinist.

On the night preceding Diotti's debut in New York, he was the center of attraction at a reception given by Mrs. Llewellyn, a social leader, and a devoted patron of the arts. The violinist made a deep impression on those fortunate enough to be near him during the evening. He won the respect of the men by his observations on matters of international interest, and the admiration of the gentler sex by his chivalric estimate of woman's influence in the world's

progress, on which subject he talked with rarest good humor and delicately implied gallantry.

During one of those sudden and unexplainable lulls that always occur in general drawing-room conversations, Diotti turned to Mrs. Llewellyn and whispered: "Who is the charming young woman just entering?"

"The beauty in white?"

"Yes, the beauty in white," softly echoing Mrs. Llewellyn's query. He leaned forward and with eager eyes gazed in admiration at the new-comer. He seemed hypnotized by the vision, which moved slowly from between the blue-tinted portieres and stood for the instant, a perfect embodiment of radiant womanhood, silhouetted against the silken drapery.

"That is Miss Wallace, Miss Mildred Wallace, only child of one of New York's prominent bankers."

"She is beautiful—a queen by divine right," cried he, and then with a mingling of impetuosity and importunity, entreated his hostess to present him.

And thus they met.

Mrs. Llewellyn's entertainments were celebrated, and justly so. At her receptions one always heard the best singers and players of the season, and Epicurus' soul could rest in peace, for her chef had an international reputation. Oh, remember, you music-fed ascetic, many, aye, very many, regard the transition from Tschaikowsky to terrapin, from Beethoven to burgundy with hearts aflame with anticipatory joy—and Mrs. Llewellyn's dining-room was crowded.

Miss Wallace and Diotti had wandered into the conservatory.

"A desire for happiness is our common heritage," he was saying in his richly melodious voice.

"But to define what constitutes happiness is very difficult," she replied.

"Not necessarily," he went on; "if the motive is clearly within our grasp, the attainment is possible."

"For example?" she asked.

"The miser is happy when he hoards his gold; the philanthropist when he distributes his. The attainment is identical, but the motives are antipodal."

"Then one possessing sufficient motives could be happy without end?" she suggested doubtingly.

"That is my theory. The Niobe of old had happiness within her power."

"The gods thought not," said she; "in their very pity they changed her into stone, and with streaming eyes she ever tells the story of her sorrow."

"But are her children weeping?" he asked. "I think not. Happiness can bloom from the seeds of deepest woe," and in a tone almost reverential, he continued: "I remember a picture in one of our Italian galleries that always impressed me as the ideal image of maternal happiness. It is a painting of the Christ-mother standing by the body of the Crucified. Beauty was still hers, and the dress of grayish hue, nun-like in its simplicity, seemed more than royal robe. Her face, illumined as with a light from heaven, seemed inspired with this thought: 'They have killed Him—they have killed my son! Oh, God, I thank Thee that His suffering is at an end!' And as I gazed at the holy face, another light seemed to change it by degrees from saddened motherhood to

triumphant woman! Then came: 'He is not dead, He but sleeps; He will rise again, for He is the best beloved of the Father!'"

"Still, fate can rob us of our patrimony," she replied, after a pause.

"Not while life is here and eternity beyond," he said, reassuringly.

"What if a soul lies dormant and will not arouse?" she asked.

"There are souls that have no motive low enough for earth, but only high enough for heaven," he said, with evident intention, looking almost directly at her.

"Then one must come who speaks in nature's tongue," she continued.

"And the soul will then awake," he added earnestly.

"But is there such a one?" she asked.

"Perhaps," he almost whispered, his thought father to the wish.

"I am afraid not," she sighed. "I studied drawing, worked diligently and, I hope, intelligently, and yet I was quickly convinced that a counterfeit presentment of nature was puny and insignificant. I painted Niagara. My friends praised my effort. I saw Niagara again—I destroyed the picture."

"But you must be prepared to accept the limitations of man and his work," said the philosophical violinist.

"Annihilation of one's own identity in the moment is possible in nature's domain—never in man's. The resistless, never-ending rush of the waters, madly churning, pitilessly dashing against the rocks below; the mighty roar of the

loosened giant; that was Niagara. My picture seemed but a smear of paint."

"Still, man has won the admiration of man by his achievements," he said.

"Alas, for me," she sighed, "I have not felt it."

"Surely you have been stirred by the wonders man has accomplished in music's realm?" Diotti ventured.

"I never have been." She spoke sadly and reflectively.

"But does not the passion-laden theme of a master, or the marvelous feeling of a player awaken your emotions?" persisted he.

She stood leaning lightly against a pillar by the fountain. "I never hear a pianist, however great and famous, but I see the little cream-colored hammers within the piano bobbing up and down like acrobatic brownies. I never hear the plaudits of the crowd for the artist and watch him return to bow his thanks, but I mentally demand that these little acrobats, each resting on an individual pedestal, and weary from his efforts, shall appear to receive a share of the applause.

"When I listen to a great singer," continued this world-defying skeptic, "trilling like a thrush, scampering over the scales, I see a clumsy lot of ah, ah, ahs, awkwardly, uncertainly ambling up the gamut, saying, 'were it not for us she could not sing thus—give us our meed of praise.'"

Slowly he replied: "Masters have written in wondrous language and masters have played with wondrous power."

"And I so long to hear," she said, almost plaintively. "I marvel at the invention of the composer and the skill of the player, but there I cease."

He looked at her intently. She was standing before him, not a block of chiseled ice, but a beautiful, breathing woman. He offered her his arm and together they made their way to the drawing-room.

"Perhaps, some day, one will come who can sing a song of perfect love in perfect tones, and your soul will be attuned to his melody."

"Perhaps—and good-night," she softly said, leaving his arm and joining her friends, who accompanied her to the carriage.

II

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The intangible something that places the stamp of popular approval on one musical enterprise, while another equally artistic and as cleverly managed languishes in a condition of unendorsed greatness, remains one of the unsolved mysteries.

When a worker in the vineyard of music or the drama offers his choicest tokay to the public, that fickle coquette may turn to the more ordinary and less succulent concord. And the worker and the public itself know not why.

It is true, Diotti's fame had preceded him, but fame has preceded others and has not always been proof against financial disaster. All this preliminary,—and it is but necessary to recall that on the evening of December the twelfth Diotti made his initial bow in New York, to an