

# The Devil

By FERENC MOLNAR

Dramatised by OLIVER HERFORD  
Adapted by JOSEPH O'BRIEN

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### CHAPTER I.

**T**HE slender jeweled hands of Olga Hoffmann trembled so that she fumbled at the books and buttons that held together the waist she was trying to remove. Her heart beat with a violence it had not known before during the six placid years of her married life. Her face was a mask of fear—fear of the unseasonable, unfathomable of the turbulent emotions that seemed crowding, surging up from unsuspected depths in her very soul.

Mme. Hoffmann was in the studio of Karl Mahler, where she had been brought by her portly banker husband, Herman Hoffmann, that the tony of the sweetheart of her happy girlhood, painting her portrait for the pleasure of the man whose name she had taken, might be consummated. But it was with no thought of this that Hoffmann had taken her there or that she had consented to go or that Karl had received them. Hoffmann welcomed the artist daily to his own home and knew no jealousy. Karl, forgetful of the myriads of your youth, dwelt in thought on his approaching marriage to a beautiful young heiress. Olga, loyal to her husband, believed that the old romance was laid away among those faded dreams faintly remembered, but which came no more.

And yet when her husband had gone out, leaving her there, the faded luster of the sweet old days turned lurid, and for the first time in six years her soul confessed itself and lay bare and unshriven. But she fought down the memory and clung to those six years in silence, and all the while there was in the very air of the room an unseen presence that seemed dragging her backward through time, bridging those years clear to the day when Karl, the boy, had taken her in his arms and kissed her lips and told her that he loved her.

Now, with all of that in her heart, she yet tried to put it out of her thoughts. She forced herself to a light tone and airy words.

"Come, M. Mahler; I have come to get my portrait painted as my husband wishes it," she cried. "We must go to work."

Karl, torn by emotion as herself, acquiesced.

"Here are shawls from which you may select one for your shoulders," he said. "I will go and prepare the studio while you remove your blouse."

He left her so filled with bliss that she could hardly bring herself to tug at the buttons that held her waist.

"Ah!" she exclaimed impatiently at last, flinging the waist from her.

As it dropped to the floor her perfectly rounded shoulders and white throat were reached for the filmy slink shawl she had chosen. But the shawl fell from her nerveless hands, and she drew back, with a shriek, gazing in horror at what seemed an apparition.

A melodious voice, suave, gentle, deliberate, said:

"Madame, I beg your pardon. I fear I permitted myself to fall asleep."

From the depths of a great armchair, drawn up before an open fire whose red light gave it sinister illumination, a man arose, stood before Olga and bowed profoundly. He was in the conventional afternoon garb of a gentleman. His frock coat was black; his hair was black; his eyebrows, eyelashes and eyes were black. His face was white, as colorless as his immaculate linen, as expressionless as the monochrome he wore.

One touch of color, red, came from the scarf.

He looked with undisguised admiration at the beautiful woman before him. But it was the cold, critical admiration of the cynic, emotionless and without life. Olga drew back from him, catching up the shawl and hiding her gleaming shoulders. As she looked at him his eyes seemed to hold hers. She was fascinated, yet repelled.

"I thought I was alone," she faltered when her voice came to her.

"When I came in some time ago M. Mahler was out, and I must have fallen asleep in his comfortable chair. Again I apologize."

Fear and suspicion dilated Olga's eyes, and she drew yet farther from this suave, polished stranger.

"There was no one in that chair a few minutes ago when my husband was here?" she cried.

Without a flicker of expression or a trace of emotion in his even, steady voice, the stranger glanced at Olga, seated at the chair from which he had emerged like a specter and replied:

"I beg your pardon. I must be mistaken."

He seemed like one who would jest with infinity.

There was nothing ironical in his tone, and he bowed with grave politeness. As he advanced Olga retreated toward the door through which Karl had entered the studio.

"Where did you come from?" she

he exclaimed quickly, "I come nowhere; I go everywhere; I am everywhere."

speech, from his walk, seemed centered in his hands.

It flashed across Olga as she gazed at him that he was the incarnation of the arch fiend, the very spirit of evil purpose against which all good contends, against which she had fought tend, unconsciously for six years. It was this terrible presence that was dragging her back over those years, painting with fresh color the faded dream, filling her heart with the wild, sweet desire of a child. She pressed her hands over her eyes to shut out the specter and cried aloud:

"Karl!"

Then she fled to meet the young artist, hurrying to answer her call.

### CHAPTER II.

**O**LGA was a ward in the family of Herman Hoffmann when she met Karl. A precocious boy artist, talented, but untaught, he attracted the attention of the wealthy family, and they gave him employment to further his ambition. Soon he came and went among them like one of the family, patronized by Herman, who was his senior, and adored by Olga, whose playmate he was. He was a handsome, sturdy youth, with hair that fell in rich, black clusters over his white forehead and eyes that sparkled with buoyant life and purpose.

There was never a word of love between this boy and girl. It was the true spirit of comradeship. But they loved each other without knowing that it was love, because life was fresh and sweet to them and the days were long for playtime and dreaming. Their happiness was unclouded until the time came when it was determined that Karl should go away to Paris to study and that Olga should be given the finishing touches of her education that she might take her place in society.

Then the comrades became sweethearts. When they were to be sent away from each other they knew that it was love.

"Ah, Karl, I shall be so unhappy without you!" Olga said.

"But I will come back, Olga, a great artist perhaps, and you will be prouder of me than ever."

"You will forget me away in Paris," Olga said.

"And will you not forget me, Olga?"

"Ah, never, my Karl!"

Karl took her in his arms then and kissed her.

"I love you, Olga. I will not forget," he said. "This will be Olga's first visit. And now I believe that I've wanted her to come here all the time—for six years. But it is just as well."

After Karl left them Olga and Hoffmann discussed the portrait.

"I don't suppose it will matter, my leaving you at the studio tomorrow afternoon," Hoffmann said. "I have some important business to look after. You see, Olga, I trust you."

"Of course you do, my Olga," Olga said, laughing and pinching his ear. "Now, good night. I'm going to bed."

When she was alone her husband's words recurred to her.

"He trusts me!" she mused. "Of course he does. But why should he tell me about it tonight? Why isn't it a matter of course?"

### CHAPTER III.

**K**ARL'S fitful slumber was disturbed that night by vague half dreams which oppressed him when he awoke. He was filled with misgiving, doubt, uncertainty. His thoughts, half formed, disturbed, were of Olga.

He tried to think of marriage with Olga, but it was without enthusiasm. Warm, beautiful, affectionate, she made no impression on his heart, which seemed like ice.

He looked around the studio with aversion.

The pictures on the walls seemed no longer to represent the aspiration of the artist. They were mementoes of the models who had posed and flirted and talked scandal in his walls.

He paced the floor restlessly, nervously twisting his unlighted cigarette in his fingers until it crumbled. His mouth tight, his eyebrows drawn together, then he seized his hat and overcoat and flung himself out of the door into the gathering winter storm.

For an hour he plunged through the snow. Almost exhausted, he turned back toward his home and entered. The room glowed warmly. In front of the inviting fire was the big armchair with its wide seat, comfortable cushions and high pulpit back. As he laid aside his greatcoat he stepped toward the chair, intending to bury himself in its depth and surrender to his mood.

A shudder ran over him, and he drew back, staring at the seat.

"It was empty, his eyes assured him, but he could not rid himself of a feeling that it was occupied. He pressed his hands to his eyes and then flung them outward with the gesture of one distraught.

"I am going mad," he thought.

He called loudly, harshly:

"Heinrich! Heinrich!"

The old man, alarmed at his master's unwonted violence, hastened into the room. Karl flung aside his coat, and Heinrich held for him his velvet dressing jacket. He slipped into it, shook himself and lighted a cigarette. His hands shook with nervousness, and he

held them out from him that he might look at them.

"Oh, what a terrible sight!" he groaned.

"Monsieur?" Heinrich said inquiringly.

"Has any one been here?" Karl asked.

"No, monsieur; only Ma'm'selle Miml. She is waiting in the studio to pose."

With an impatient gesture Karl walked across the room, picked up a newspaper, flung himself on a couch and held the sheet before his eyes. He did not even see the print, but he persisted, trying to banish his restless thoughts.

Heinrich, solicitously brushing and folding Karl's coat, waited. The artist looked at him impatiently.

"Tell Ma'm'selle Miml I shall not need her today. She may go."

"Yes, monsieur," Heinrich said.

The servant stepped to the door of the studio and threw it open. He called out:

"Ma'm'selle, M. Karl says he will not need you today. You may go home."

Heinrich withdrew. Karl lay at full length on the couch, holding the paper before him.

A young woman daintily seated, with rounded figure, whose lines showed through her close fitting costume, burst into the room.

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tiful and who will be a great blessing, and then you will forget me, as you would be glad to do now."

"Where in the devil have you heard all of this?" Karl demanded, springing angrily to his feet.

"It does not matter. You cannot deny that it is true."

Then her mood changed swiftly to contrition, and she went close to Karl. "But forgive me, I know it must be. I have always known, and I must be annoyed by you. We models are always annoying—in our street clothes." She looked appealingly at Karl, and he was moved.

"Never mind, Miml. Run along home now, and I promise to paint you again, perhaps tomorrow, perhaps the next day."

She threw her arms around his neck and kissed him. Then she fled from the room. Karl flung himself down on the couch again and hid his face with his arms.

### CHAPTER IV.

**O**LGA's dream journey had been through the flowering orchard of girlhood hand in hand with Karl, and she awoke with a sense of regret that the realities of everyday life should take the place of such joyous vision. She felt strangely elated during the day and eagerly waited for the hour when Herman was to call for her and take her to Karl's studio.

"I wonder what it will be like there?" she asked herself a dozen times. "I think I have always been jealous of that studio and its possibilities, and I have always wanted to go there—but I did not dare."

Then she chided herself for the thought she had not uttered.

"Why, I'm a goose! What am I confessing here to myself? That I am in love with Karl? What silly nonsense! Come, Olga, you are getting romantic."

Herman came after luncheon, and they drove together to the studio building. Old Heinrich admitted them, his eyes glowing big and round at the imposing splendor of Herman's greatcoat and the bewitching beauty of the grand lady.

Karl, in his artist's velvet jacket, hurried forward to greet them.

"Welcome to my workshop!" he cried.

"How do you do?" Olga said, barely giving him her hand and turning at once to let her eyes rove curiously around the walls of the room.

"How do you do, Karl?" Herman said. "You see we are prompt."

Karl watched Olga as she surveyed the room. He felt piqued at her seeming lack of interest in him.

"Is this your wonderful studio," she said absently.

"It is much like a junkshop," Karl said deprecatingly.

"It is very interesting," Olga said. "Whose picture is that?" she asked, pointing to a painting of a half nude figure on the wall.

"That? Oh, that is a model who has posed for me."

"Oh, yes; I recognize it. We met her on the stairs, Herman."

"Oh, yes; that is she."

Herman bustled himself looking at the picture, chucking over those that caught his unpoetic fancy and nudging Karl in the ribs at some of them.

"I must come again and inspect them more at my leisure," he said. "This afternoon I have to go away."

"I am sorry you are not to remain," Karl said politely.

"Oh, I suppose we might put off the sitting in view of the fact that the picture might have been painted any time these last six years," Herman said. "But Olga has been nervous about the ball we are going to tonight, and I thought it best to bring her today to distract her. You know this is really a house warming tonight."

"And we were obliged to invite so many people," Olga said, still looking at the pictures.

"I hate these social affairs," Herman rattled on, "but I suppose in our position they are inevitable. What time shall I return for Olga?"

"It grows dark quickly," Karl said, looking at his watch. "In another hour we shall not be able to see. Suppose you return about 4 o'clock."

"Very well. And now I must be going. You are coming to the ball to-night, Karl? You know you really are the guest of honor. Isn't he, Olga?"

"Yes, indeed. Karl is to fall in love with his future wife tonight."

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