The Phantom of the Opera

BY GASTON LEROUX

CHAPTER VI.—(Cont'd.)

When Carlotta had finished thinking over the threat contained in the strange letter, she got up.

"We shall see," she said, adding a few oaths in her native Spanish with a very determined air.

She collected all her supporters, told them that she was threatened at that evening's performance with a plot organized by Christine Daae and declared that they must play a trick upon that chit by filling the house with her, Carlotta's admirers. She had no lack of them, had she? She relied upon them to hold themselves prepared for any eventuality and to silence the adversaries, if, as she feared, they created a disturbance.

M. Richard's private secretary called to ask after the diva's health and returned with the assurance that she was perfectly well and that, "were she dying," she would sing that part of Margarita that evening. The secretary urged her, in his chief's name, to commit no imprudence, to stay at home all day and to be careful of drafts; and Carlotta could not help, after he had gone, comparing this unusual and unexpected advice with the threats contained in the letter.

It was five o'clock when the post brought a second anonymous letter in the same hand as the first. It was short and said simply:

"You have a bad cold. If you are wise, you will see that it is madness to try to sing to-night."

Carlotta sneered, shrugged her handsome shoulders and sang two or three notes to reassure herself.

Her friends were faithful to their promise. They were all at the Opera that night, but looked round in vain for the fierce conspirators whom they were instructed to impress. The only unusual thing was the presence of M. Richard and M. Moncharmin in Box Five. Carlotta's friends thought that, perhaps, the managers had wind, on their side, of the proposed disturbance and that they had determined to be in the house, so as to stop it then and there; but this was unjustifiable supposition, as the reader knows. M. Richard and M. Moncharmin were thinking of nothing but their ghost.

The famous baritone, Carolus Fonta, had hardly finished Doctor Faust's first appeal to the powers of darkness, when M. Firmin Richard, who was sitting in the ghost's own chair, the front chair on the right, leaned over to his partner and asked him chaffingly:

"Well, has the ghost whispered a word in your ear yet?"

"Wait, don't be in such a hurry," replied M. Armand Moncharmin, in the same gay tone. "The performance has only begun and you know that the ghost does not usually come until the middle of the first act."

The first act passed without incident, which did not surprise Carlotta's friends, because Margarita does not sing in this act. As for the managers, they looked at each other when the curtain fell.

"That's one!" said Moncharmin.

"It's not a bad house," said Moncharmin, "for 'a house with a curse on it.'"

The stage rang with gay song:

"Red or white liquor,
Coarse or fine!
What can it matter,
So we have wine?"

Students, citizens, soldiers, girls and matrons whirled light-heartedly before the inn with the figure of Bacchus for a sign. Siebel made her entrance. Christine Daae looked charming in her boy's clothes; and Carlotta's partisans expected to hear her greeted with an ovation which would have enlightened them as to the intention of her friends. But nothing happened.

On the other hand, when Margarita crossed the stage and sang the only two lines allotted her in this second act:

"No, my lord, not a lady am I,
nor yet a beauty,
And do not need an arm to help
me on my way,"

Carlotta was received with enthusiastic applause. It was so unexpected that everybody looked at one another and asked what was happening. And this act also was finished without incident.

Then everybody said: "Of course, it will be during the next act."

Some, who seemed to be better informed than the rest, declared that the "row" would begin with the ballad of the King of Thule and rushed to the subscribers' entrance to warn Carlotta.

The first thing the managers saw, on entering the box, was a box of sweets on the shelf of the ledge. Who had put it there? They asked the box-keepers, but none of them knew. Then they went back to the shelf and, next to the box of sweets, found an opera glass. They looked at each other. They had no inclination to laugh. All that Mme. Giry had told them returned to their memory . . and then . . and then . . they seemed to feel a curious sort of draft around them . . They sat down in silence.

The scene represented Margarita's garden:

"Gentle flow'rs in the dew,
Be messages from me . . ."

As she sang these two first lines, with her bunch of roses and lilacs in her hand, Christine, raising her head, saw the Vicomte de Chagny in his box; and, from that moment, her voice seemed less sure, less crystal-clear than usual. Something seemed to deaden and dull her singing.

Raoul, behind the curtain of his hands that veiled his boyish tears, thought only of the letter which he received on his return to Paris, where Christine, fleeing from Perros like a thief in the night, had arrived before him:

"My Dear Little Playfellow:

"You must have the courage not to see me again, not to speak to me again. If you love me just a little, do this for me, for me who will never forget you, my dear Raoul. My life depends upon it. Your life depends upon it.

"Your Little Christine."

Thunders of applause. Carlotta made her entrance.

When Margarita had finished singing the ballad of the King of Thule, she was loudly cheered and again when she came to the end of the jewel song:

"Ah, the joy of past compare
These jewels bright to wear! . . . ."

Thenceforth, certain of herself, certain of her friends in the house, certain of her voice and her success, fearing nothing, Carlotta flung herself into her part without restraint of modesty. . . . She was no longer Margarita, she was Carmen. She was applauded all the more; and her debut with Faust seemed about to bring her a new success, when suddenly . . . a terrible thing happened.

Carlotta croaked like a toad:

"Co-ack!"

There was consternation on Carlotta's face and consternation on the faces of all the audience. The two managers in their box could not suppress an exclamation of horror. Every one felt that the thing was not natural, that there was witchcraft behind it. That toad smelt of brimstone. Poor, wretched, despairing, crushed Carlotta!

The uproar in the house was indescribable. If the thing had happened to any one but Carlotta, she would have been hooted. But everybody knew how perfect an instrument her voice was; and there was no display of anger, but only of horror and dismay, the sort of dismay which men would have felt if they had witnessed the catastrophe that broke the arms of the Venus de Milo . . . And even then they would have seen . . . and understood . . .

But here that toad was incomprehensible! So much so that, after some seconds spent in asking herself if she had really heard that note, that sound, that infernal noise issue from her throat, she tried to persuade herself that it was not so, that she was the victim of an illusion of the ear, and not of an act of treachery on the part of her voice. . . .

Meanwhile, in Box Five, Moncharmin and Richard had turned pale. This extraordinary and inexplicable incident filled them with a dread which was the more mysterious inasmuch as for some little while, they had fallen within the direct influence of the ghost. They had felt his breath. Moncharmin's hair stood on end. Richard wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

What was going to happen?

"Co-ack!"

Their joint exclamation of horror was heard all over the house. They felt that they were smarting under the ghost's attacks. Leaning over the ledge of their box, they stared at Carlotta as though they did not recognize her. That infernal girl must have given the signal for some catastrophe! The ghost had told them it would come. The house had a curse upon it! The two managers gasped and panted under the weight of the catastrophe. Richard's stifled voice was heard calling to Carlotta:

"Well, go on!"

No, Carlotta did not go on . . . . Bravely, heroically, she started afresh on the fatal line at the end of which the toad had appeared.

An awful silence succeeded the uproar. Carlotta's voice alone once more filled the resounding house:

"I feel without alarm. . .

The audience also felt, but not without alarm.

"I feel without alarm . . .
"I feel without alarm—co-ack!
With its melody entwined me—
co-ack!
And all my heart sub—co-ack!"

The toad also had started afresh!

The house broke into a wild tumult. The two managers collapsed in their chairs and dared not even turn around; they had not the strength; the ghost was chuckling behind their backs! And, at last, they distinctly heard his voice in their right ears, the impossible voice, the mouthless voice, saying:

"Her singing will bring the chandelier down!"

With one accord, they raised their eyes to the ceiling and uttered a terrible cry. The chandelier, the immense mass of the chandelier was slipping down, coming toward them, at the call of that fiendish voice. Released from its hook, it plunged from the ceiling and came smashing into the middle of the stalls, amid a thousand shouts of terror.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LETTER.

That tragic evening was bad for everybody. Carlotta fell ill. As for Christine Daae, she disappeared after the performance. A fortnight elapsed during which she was seen neither at the Opera nor outside.

Raoul, of course, was the first to be astonished at the prima donna's absence. He wrote to her at Mme. Valerius' flat and received no reply. His grief increased and he ended by being seriously alarmed at never seeing her name on the program. Faust was played without her.

One afternoon he went to the manager's office to ask the reason of Christine's disappearance. He found them both looking extremely worried. Their own friends did not recognize them: they had lost all their gaiety and spirits. They were seen crossing the stage with hanging heads, careworn brows, pale cheeks, as though pursued by some abominable thought or a prey to some persistent sport of fate.

The fall of the chandelier had involved them in no little responsibility; but it was difficult to make them speak about it. The inquest had ended in a verdict of accidental death, caused by the wear and tear of the chains by which the chandelier was hung from the ceiling; but it was the duty of both the old and the new managers to have discovered this wear and tear and to have remedied it in time. And I feel bound to say that MM. Richard and Moncharmin at this time appeared so changed, so absent-minded, so mysterious, so incomprehensible that many of the subscribers thought that some event even more horrible than the all of the chandelier must have affected their state of mind.

In their daily intercourse, they showed themselves very impatient, except with Mme. Giry, who had been reinstated in her functions. And their reception of the Vicomte de Chagny, when he came to ask about Christine, was anything but cordial. They merely told him that she was taking a holiday. He asked how long the holiday was for, and they replied curtly that it was for an unlimited period, as Mlle. Daae had requested leave of absence for reasons of health.

"Then she is ill!" he cried. "What is the matter with her?"

"We don't know."

"Didn't you send the doctor of the Opera to see her?"

"No, she did not ask for him; and, as we trust her, we took her word."

Raoul left the building a prey to the gloomiest thoughts.

His valet found him in the morning sitting on his bed. He had not undressed and the servant feared, at the sight of his face, that some disaster had occurred. Raoul snatched his letters from the man's hands. He had recognized Christine's paper and handwriting. She said:

"Dear,—Go to the masked ball at the Opera on the night after to-morrow. At twelve o'clock he in the little room behind the chimney-place of the big crush-room. Stand near the door of a private box and tunda. Don't mention this appointment to any one on earth. Wear a white domino and be carefully masked. As you love me, do not let yourself be recognized.

"Christine."

(To be continued.)

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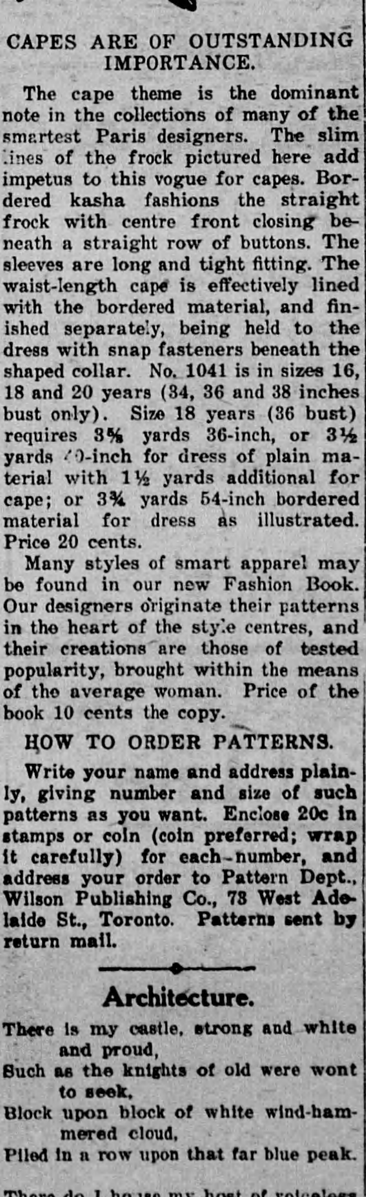

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Architecture.

There is my castle, strong and white
and proud,
Such as the knights of old were wont
to seek,
Block upon block of white wind-hammered cloud,
Piled in a row upon that far blue peak.

There do I house my host of voiceless
songs,
Holding with them a grand and knightly court,
Hearing their pleas, and righting all
their wrongs,
Stilling their plaints, presiding at their
sport.

Over the moat of placid waveless air
All day they ride, on plumed palfreys
set,
Till in the night my dreams foregather
there—
All the dear dreams that I may not
forget.

Castle of dreams, — my wayward
fancy's prize,
Mist in the mist, and airiest of air,—
Deep in my heart your splendid
towers rise—
I know, for it was I who built them
there!

—W. A. Brewer, Jr., in Youth's Companion.

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Now, what is the value of such a memory? If there were a market place where such things were bought and sold, how much would one bid for a memory that did not work?

Nevertheless, such a memory has a value. For instance, in driving a car you get in a tight place, this non-functioning memory does not flash before your eyes al lthe horrible automobile accidents that you have seen or read about. It keeps the coast clear, and enables you to act collectedly. Then, too, the embarrassing and unfortunate memories of the past are pretty much eliminated from your daily experiences.

But, notwithstanding these advantages, if there is anyone who has trouble with an over-working memory, and could exchange it, you undoubtedly would be glad to make a deal with him.

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Sentence Sermons.

It is Always Safe—To wait a little longer before you give a stranger your confidence.

—To refuse to repeat a slander whose truthfulness you are not sure of.

—To be polite no matter how irritating the other party may be.

—To take the time that extra good work requires.

—To be the first to offer the apologies.

—To keep an open mind—you may even learn from a fool.

—To go more than half way in patching up a quarrel.

Children's Laughter.

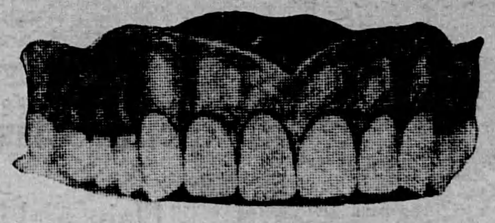
No plunging sea-birds swept the bay
At evening when I crossed the shore;
The silver sickle of the tide
Soundless gathered his crescents wide;
About the rocks an austere stillness
lay.

But in my ears a lightsome sound
Disturbed the peace, for on the sands,
Where children in their games had
chased
Each other, little feet had traced
Their random scampering pattern on
the ground.

—David Cleghorn Thomson.

Optimism is a fine thing except when it takes the form that Providence will cut the kindling for the wife.

Wonderful Opportunity for Canadians!



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