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S I E S T A

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"Is there no one present who can give us a little music?" inquired Señor de Silvis. "You are always wont to be so obliging, Mademoiselle Adele."

"Oh, dear, no—no!" cried Mademoiselle. "I've been eating too heartily!" at the same time, leaning back upon the sofa, she drew up her little feet, and, with a satisfied air, folded her hands across her breast.

But the stranger, the Irishman, emerged from his corner, and advanced to the piano.

"Oh, you're going to play something for us! Many thanks—Monsieur—hem, Monsieur—" Señor de Silvis had forgotten the name, a thing happening very often, indeed, with his guests.

"You see, he is a musician!" said Mademoiselle Adele to her friend. Anatole answered with a grunt of admiration.

There was something else. The others also perceived it at once, noticing the manner in which he sat down and struck a few chords here and there to awaken the instrument, as it were.

He then began to play—sportively, flightily, frivolously—just as the mood was upon him.

The melodies of the day whirled away into gay waltzes and tuneful glees; all those insignificant popular tunes hummed by all Paris for the past week he snatched up and executed with spirit and fluency.

The ladies cried out with astonishment, sang a few bars in accompaniment, beat time softly on the floor. The entire company followed him with intense interest. He had gained their sympathy, and carried them away with him from the very beginning. The "lieber Herr Doktor" alone listened with that Sedan smile. Such things were too simple for him.

But soon there was something for even the German. He nodded now and then somewhat approvingly.

A bit of Chopin burst forth and wonderfully accorded with the general temperament—the pungent fragrant filling the air, the gay women, the men so frank, so unconcerned, each stranger to the other, lost in the obscurity of the dusky salon, each following his own most secret thoughts, borne along by the mysterious, half-distinct, half-confused music, while the light of the open fireplace brightened now, now sank back again, causing everything golden to glimmer with a faint, trembling glow.

And now there was still more for the doctor. From time to time he turned towards De Silvis and motioned to him whenever the harmonious sounds suggested "our Schumann," "our Beethoven," or, indeed, "our famous Richard."

Meanwhile the stranger continued playing, slightly inclined to the left, though without effort, in order to put more force into the bass. It sounded as if he had twenty fingers—all of steel. He knew how to assemble a multitude of tones, so that the instrument itself produced one powerful, united distinct sound. Not stopping, not marking the transitions, by ever newly recurring surprises, imitations, happy combinations, he fixed their attention so

firmly that even the most unmusical person was forced to follow him with rapture.

Wholly unnoticed, the music changed its character. The artist played the deep tones uninterrupted. He then inclined himself more and more upon the left, and there arose a wonderful commotion in the bass. The anabaptists of the *Prophet* approached with heavy steps; a knight from the *Damnation de Faust* mounted from the depths below with that desperate, hobbling, diabolical gallop.

More and more it rumbled and thundered in the deeper tones, and Monsieur Anatole began to feel the truffles anew. Mademoiselle Adele leaned half forward from the sofa; the music would not allow her to rest in peace.

Here and there the chimney-fire was reflected in a pair of black eyes staringly fixed upon the player. He had bewitched them; they could now no longer detach themselves from him; he led them ever deeper down, down, down, where the sound was muffled and gloomily muttered with lamentations and threats.

"He manages his left hand marvellously," said the doctor. But De Silvis did not hear him; like the others, he sat in breathless suspense.

A mysterious, oppressive fear stole out from the music and brooded over the whole assembly.

The artist seemed to clench his left hand into a fist, which could never again relax, while with his right he cast hither and thither descants of sounds leaping aloft like sparkling flames. It sounded as if something dismal, horrible had been committed in the cellar, while those up-stairs were dancing, laughing, and amusing themselves under the resplendent candelabra.

There was heard a sigh, a low cry from one of the ladies who felt unwell, but no one took notice of it. The performer was now wholly occupied with the bass, on which he was playing with both hands. His tireless fingers rapidly mingled the sounds together, so that cold chills ran up and down the backs of his hearers.

There was, however, a gradual ascension from the threatening, tumultuous lower sounds to the higher notes. The tones ran into each other, over each other, past each other, upward, ever upward, but never seeming to advance. There arose a wild tumult, a struggle to reach the top. They swarmed like little black demons, fighting, wrangling, full of raging wrath, feverish hurry, climbing, clinging, clinching with hands and teeth, each kicking, crushing the other with its feet, cursing, shrieking, praying—and, meanwhile his hands glided along the keys so slowly, oh, so painfully slowly!

"Anatole," whispered Mademoiselle Adele, as pale as a ghost, "he is playing the 'Poverty!'"

"Oh, dear!—those truffles!" moaned Anatole, beginning to writhe with pain.

The salon suddenly became as bright as day. Two servants entered from behind the portière with lamps and candelabra. At the same moment

the strange musician stopped playing, with all the might of his steeled fingers striking a discord so impossible, so startling that the entire party instantly sprang to their feet.

"Away with the lamps!" cried De Silvis.

"No, no!" shrieked Mademoiselle Adele, "come in with the light, I'm afraid in the dark. Oh, the horrible creature!"

"Who was he?—yes,—who was he?" And they involuntarily thronged round their host. Nor did they notice that the stranger had slipped out behind the servants.

De Silvis tried to laugh it off by saying: "I think it was the devil. Come, let us go to the opera!"

"To the opera? Not for the world," cried Louison. "I won't listen to any music for a fortnight. Ugh! think of that crowd on the opera stairway!"

"Oh, my truffles!" howled Anatole.

The company broke up. They all suddenly realized that they were strangers in a strange place. Each one desired to steal away home and be alone by himself.

On accompanying Mademoiselle Louison to her carriage the journalist said: "There, you see, that's the result of allowing one's self to be persuaded to accept the invitations of one of those half-barbarians. One never knows what sort of a crowd one will meet."

"Oh, dear, yes! He has quite put me out of humor," replied Louison, plaintively, all the time lifting her liquid eyes appealingly to him. "But won't you accompany me to Trinity? I know that a quiet mass will be read there at midnight."

The journalist bowed acquiescence, and took his place beside her in the carriage.

While Mademoiselle Adele and Monsieur Anatole, on the other hand, were passing the English apothecary in Rue de la Paix, the latter bade the coachman stop, and said, "No," beseechingly to her, "I think I must be put down here and have them give me something for my truffles. You won't be angry with me? But, you see—the music—"

"Please do not let it trouble you in the least, my friend. To be frank, I think that neither of us is in a specially happy mood to-night. Well, good-night! *Auf Wiedersehen* to-morrow!"

She leaned back in the cushions of the carriage. She felt relieved. She was alone. And the frivolous creature wept, as if she had been whipped. She was then driven home.

Of course Anatole was suffering extremely from the truffles, but it seemed to him that he felt better the moment the carriage rolled away.

Since the time that they had become acquainted they were never so satisfied with one another as at this very moment of parting.

But the one who had best recovered from the affair was the "lieber Herr Doktor," for, being a German, he had become inured as far as the music was concerned.