Mr. and Mrs. Sallie



—being the Confessions of a new wife .... by Gladys Baker

Illustrated by Paul Robinson

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LEMOYNE'S DEBUT

A cozy place is the Opera Comique. In spite of its tier after tier of galleries and its wide parquet one has the feeling that here are banded together a group of persons who love music for itself alone. Unlike the famous Opera House—or the Academie National de Musique et de Danse—with its magnificent stairway, luxurious loges and gigantic chandelier.

"Every seat is taken, I do believe," I announced to Barrington Pierce who was seated beside me in a box to the right of the stage.

"Yes," he nodded, glancing with approval over the well-filled house, "they come year after year to hear the same operas. They greet them like old friends. Then too, opera is not a luxury to them, but a necessity like bread and wine. Besides," he continued, "the admission here is quite within the reach of all, not more than the movies at home. The other opera house is quite different. There you sit next to tourists, nouveau riche and others who come merely because they think it is the thing to do or because they have a new gown to display between the acts as they parade the length of the promenade."

"You've absolutely sized it up," I agreed nooding my head, "we went the other evening to hear Faust. The production was unusually fine and the ballet especially good but somehow I felt the lackadaisical way in which it was received. An entrancing Marguerite was Jane Laval and the music in the last act reached an appealing and magnificent climax but the audience was too affected to show its appreciation by applause."

The occupants of our box included the Lowell DeWights, Barrington Pierce and myself. That afternoon Curtiss received an important cable from the office and as a result he had made an engagement to meet a business associate who had just arrived from Paris and with whom he was to dine. The DeWights were planning to occupy another box with friends but Lemoyne, insisting that I should be there, asked them to come with us an dact as chaperones. She had rare intuition and seemed to sense the fact that Curtiss would never have consented to my going with the young musician alone.

"I can hardly wait to hear Lemoyne, she's bound to be superb!" commented Mr. DeWight who was one of her countless admirers and at the same time one of her staunchest friends.

"How did it happen, so unexpectedly?" I inquired.

"Well" began Barry, "it seems that Mlle. Kousnezoff, who is a favorite here, was to have sung the part but her son was quite ill and she broke the engagement. She's really remarkable, though well in her forties she has the figure, voice and personality of a girl in her teens. So you see Lemoyne will have no easy time filling her place."

"Oh you don't doubt for a moment that she will?" I questioned anxiously scanning his face.

"She CAN do it. She has the voice and is in splendid condition."

"Despite the cocktails she took in our honor the day we were at your studio for tea?"

"Oh I doubt if they had anything in them but orange juice. Iemoyne is, first of all, a clever actress, and she pretended to be drinking that day to tease me, or rather to make me become alarmed about her voice. But I know Lemoyne," he spoke in lowered tones, "she's acted so much that unless one knows her intimately one is never certain when she is playing to the audience or when she is being herself."

"But I'm sure she will make a tremendous hit tonight!" I exclaimed, going back to the former subject. "Let's pray."

"Your unselfish interest and loyalty for her are unusually fine," he remarked. "You have meant much to Lemoyne and," he caught my gaze and held it unwaveringly with his own, "much to me."

I blushed for there was sincerity and warmth in his vibrant voice.

"Shhh-shhh—" hissed the crowd to the conversationalists all over the house and just then the curains were drawn.

"They demand absolute silence," whispered Mr. DeWight.

Just as Barry had said the audience was "en rapport" with the singers from the very first note of Massenet's melodious score. The stillness was so marked that one occasionally heard a sigh—the interest so intense that it could almost be felt.

From the very first I sensed that Lemoyne was not giving her best. She sang superficially without color or allure.

"She'll do better in the next act when she sings 'Adieu, our little table'," announced Barry when the curtain went down and the lights flared up. "The first act doesn't really give her a chance."

I was greatly relieved. During the intermission the DeWights began discussing the amazing numtber of flowers and telegrams Lemoyne had received wishing her success.

"By jove! I've done a terrible thing," said Barrington Pierce, "I forgot to send anything. I get more absent-minded daily, I do believe. But Lemoyne knows its a stupid failing of mine and will forgive my negligence I am sure."

"Women often forgive the lack of attention but it hurts just the same," I replied, lowering my voice. I knew Lemoyne's adoration for him and I felt sad to think Barry had neglected her on her night of nights.

Once again the curtain was drawn and revealed Manon and her dashing Chevalier in the happy atmosphere of their home. Manon has heard that her husband is about to be seized and is under great emotional stress when she begins to sing farewell to the little table and to her cozy surroundings which have been filled with unspeakable bliss.

"Now, now," whispered Barry leaning forward and at the same time keeping time with his forefinger to the melancholy tune.

Again, however, I was conscious of the lack of some vital quality in the singer's voice. I had seldom heard the aria before without being moved to tears. It is true that the technical part of the work was well done, the notes were brilliant and like icicles were sharp and clear. But the thing that makes the role of Manon so appealing and touches the heart of the simple working man is the sympathy created for the innocent girl-wife. It was plain to see that Lemoyne had failed to produce the desired effect.

"Great scott," murmured Barry, "something's wrong with Lemoyne I've never heard her do anything as poorly as that. She simply sang the words and kept time to the music. That's not enough; She won't even get by if she doesn't wake up to the part."

Suddenly I had an idea. I had been thinking over what he had said about forgettin gto remember Lemoyne even with a greeting of flowers or even a note. I knew how this neglect would sub-consciously enter Lemoynes very being and unfit her for the tremendous emotional task.

"Listen, Barry, will you do something for me?"

"You have only to ask, ma cherie," he replied with an eager light in his luminous eyes.

"All right. Good! Go back stage—find Lemoyne—speak to her—tell her we are all with her—make her understand that you are too, that it means everything to you whether she puts it over or not tonight. Please, Barry," as he hesitated, "you've got to. It's only right."

With a nod of his head and a quick apology to the DeWights he left the box.

There was more than the usual pause between the second and third acts. The audience began to grow restless. From one of the upper galleries someone hissed. Then a catcall unmistakably on the air! In a few moments the theatre was charged with unrest, someone began stamping his feet and the noise reverberated throughout the house.

I began to grow more and more nervous. What could be going on behind the scenes? I began to regret the fact that I had interfered, for it was possible that the interview with Barry had only served to make matters worse. I squirmed uneasily in my seat.

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