

Good Housekeeping

JANUARY
1927

25 CENTS

35 CENTS IN CANADA



Beginning the Life Story of a Great Singer
MADAME SCHUMANN-HEINK



AS LITTLE Ernestine Roessler, Madame Schumann-Heink made her first public appearance with Maria Wilt, the famous soprano, a half-century ago. Last winter, at the Metropolitan, in New York, she sang to thousands of the hundreds of thousands who have been her loving opera and concert audiences through fifty glorious years

SCHUMANN-HEINK

The LAST of the TITANS

As Told to MARY LAWTON

I AM a soldier's daughter. I was born, you know, the child of an Austrian army officer. My father was a lieutenant at that time. My mother was raised (and I, too, as is usual in the family of Austrian officers) in an Italian convent. She was most highly educated, my mother, and the education she then had no longer exists. Why, she spoke beautifully Italian, French, German, Dutch and even Latin—and had the most wonderful contralto voice you can imagine. You see, she was raised in Italy, and in Italy they all sing. They sing everywhere—all those operatic arias—in the streets as they go. It is a funny thing, but every Italian has a voice and sings naturally, and my mother was one of those.

Mother married my father in Italy. In this time a great part of Italy was ours, Austrian. My father was the finest kind of a man—a perfect gentleman, but—well—I must admit it, a real old rough-neck soldier just the same! A good, good man he was—but a rough-neck! God bless him! He got at the first some little education, then studied later by himself. He ran away from home when he was fifteen, in 1848, the time of the Revolution. He volunteered and from then on followed a military career—worked up from a private to an officer. His father before him had been a military man and had eleven sons, and when they were six years old they were all put in the military academy to make soldiers of them. So like the others my father started when he was six and ran away when he was fifteen. But in some way he got a really good education, later on being able to pass his examination into the cavalry, and he was until the end a cavalry officer. Eventually he passed the examination to be a Major—one of the most exacting tests. He, too, had to speak all the languages of the different states.

I was born on the 15th of June, 1861, in Lieben, Prague. My mother's name was Charlotte; my father's name was Hans—Hans Roessler.

When I was three years old, I already sang. I sang what my mother sang. I never was in a theater until I was fourteen, but I acted just the same. I'd put my mother's apron around me and start to act and sing—singing all the different arias



Even when she was only little Tini, her grandmother predicted, "This child has a genius. She will be something great. The world will yet speak of her"

One cannot think, in this year of Our Lord, 1927, of any life story that one would rather read than Mme. Schumann-Heink's. Not only is she a great singer in opera and in concert, who now is celebrating her golden anniversary of song, but her career overlaps those of a multitude of distinguished persons whose names we revere. Her heart is full of memories of them, and of her own rich life. Here is the story of this last active survivor of a great musical period, as Miss Lawton gathered it from her own lips and recreated it into a narrative of absorbing interest.

and dancing—always dancing. But from three years on, I sang. Then my father was transferred to Verona.

Among my first memories is Verona. We lived all together with the soldiers in the officers' quarters in the barracks, and as I hadn't any playmates, I spent most of my time in the stalls with the horses, playing right under their heels, but of course none of them hurt me. I always had such a love for animals, even then.

We came away from Italy in 1866. I was the only child in the family at that time. We came back to Austria because war broke out between Italy and Austria, so Mother and I were sent back to Prague, and there I saw my grandmother for the first time. She was so happy to see my mother and me! She was from Hungary, my grandmother, and her name was Leah Kohn. She was the sweetest, loveliest little thing you can imagine. I recall just how she looked. She was very small and very graceful and very gay. She died when she was only sixty-two, and my mother told me she had not one white hair even then.

Now, I was one of those children that noticed everything—"smart," you say in America. I remember soon after we arrived, I looked at my grandmother and said, "Oh, Grandmother, how is it that they call you *Grossmutter* (grandmother) when you are so little—so tiny?" Because she was not tall, and I thought *gross* (grand) meant tall, so I said to her, "How is it you are so small, when they all call you *Grossmutter*!" You see, she was not much bigger than I was, then.

How she looked at me, so—when I said that! And she laughed and said, feeling the bumps all round my head with her little old hands: "Isn't she clever to think of that? She has a brain, this child."

Then she took me up in her arms and looked deep in my eyes, and said to Mother:

"And now I tell you something more. This child has a genius—she will be an actress or a singer—something great. You will see. The world will yet speak of this child of yours."

"What?" said my mother. "The child of a poor army officer? How do you know?"

And Grandmother answered, "Well, I don't know *how* I know, but I feel sure—there is something in this little head—something in this child that the world will recognize."

When I heard that, I was "tickled to death," as you say here, and right away I began to dance, and said, "Oh, shall I dance for you the Czardas, Grandmother?"

"What! And can you dance the Czardas—that wonderful dance?" (The Czardas, you know, is the national Hungarian dance.)

"Oh, ja, ja! I can dance the Czardas."

Schumann-Heink, The Last of the Titans

"But," said my grandmother, "you have no music, my child!"

"Oh, that is nothing," I told her. "I can whistle it!"

And so I began to whistle, and I whistled and danced the Czardas from beginning to end. Well, Grandmother was simply delighted. She clapped her hands, and kept time to my whistling, and said to my mother again:

"You see! you see? What I tell you! This child will be famous all over the world some day. I know it! I am never mistaken!"

So all this brought me very close to my grandmother. Children, you know, understand instinctively, and I felt some bond between us even then. She meant a great deal to me, my little grandmother. I adored her. She was so gay and so good to me. She always took my part and had the idea to the very end that the future would bring something wonderful. Of course, I loved my mother dearly, too, and she was awfully good to me, but she was always so full of worry and work, poor Mother—there was so little money, as the pay of my father in the army was very small. I can never remember the time in those days when I was not hungry.

When the war was over, my father was transferred again, and we went to Podgorzj, near Krakow. Mother then put me in St. Andreas Convent, not as a boarder—we couldn't afford that—but as a day scholar. I had to walk to school and every morning must get up at six o'clock to be at the school at eight. My mother gave me a big bottle of black coffee and a piece of dry, black bread—butter was unheard of. That was all she could give me.

It was very hard times then. We had no servant—only a soldier, a private, who helped to do the rough work in the house. And then—poor Mother—another baby always coming! In the meantime I had had one sister and a littler brother—so there were many mouths to feed, and Mother had to turn this way and that to make things go. For instance, all we could afford to eat at that time was soup, as Mother knew it would nourish us—and how she scrimped

and saved to get it! She bought one and a half pounds of meat and two vegetables, then boiled the meat and from that took the grease and saved every bit in a little dish, and that was all the butter we ever had in those days. Everything had to count in our household—even the fat on the soup! She saved everything, poor Mother, and how she slaved for her children! Think of it! There she was, a woman so fine, so sensitive, so highly educated, facing always hard work and bitter

boarding schools and able to meet at any time the King, the Queen, the highest officials of the Court. We were taught to know etiquette, how to behave properly in any circumstance—and it was my mother who saw to all this.

So I went to school in the convent at Krakow. At ten o'clock came the first break in the day. I'd eat my dry bread and drink the black coffee—then at twelve o'clock we could go out.

The Sisters were Polish, so of course hated the Austrians and had no interest to keep the children in or protect them from the streets. I was only eleven years old then and delighted to run the streets—which I did! I didn't fear anything—and perhaps it was all well and good, because it was the beginning of my independence, as you will see.

Well, one fine day I wandered in to the market place, and there I found a wonderful circus (wonderful to me, anyway) with all the people crowding about, and the circus people, clowns, riders, animals and everything so strange—so marvellous! They were just having the mid-day meal when I came along. Oh, how it smelled, so good! And I was so hungry—I was always hungry, you know, and everything excited me so—the people, the horses, the smell of that good food all fixed with garlic and all the things I loved (and I love to this day garlic, I tell you), and I so starving.

"Ach!" I thought to myself. "What must I do! What must I do to get

some of that food!"

I thought, if I could only have something to eat, why I would do anything for it. So I asked them, *please, please*, could they give me something to eat—and I would work for it—I'd do anything to get it!

Of course, they were astonished, and roared at me with laughter, and said:

"*Si, si!* if you want to work, little one, clean the monkey cages first, then you can eat!"

I suppose they didn't think I'd really do it—they were just joking—but I did it, I tell you, as quick as a wink. And what a meal they gave me! I was stuffed like



The Roessler family in the days when the father was a poor Austrian army officer, whose meager pay barely kept the family together

poverty. Every one who met her in later years—I mean the wives and daughters of the army officials—always appreciated her. And how often I think of it now in my days of plenty, how she struggled for us and how carefully we were brought up! We, too, had our special little routine education, like all army officers' children—for it is required that they be put in proper

a Strassbourg goose! And they began right away to like me.

But I didn't tell them who I was or anything. I didn't say I was an army officer's daughter. I just said I was going to school near there. They were Italians, these circus people, big, soft-hearted Italians, and of course, they started to have such a love for me and I for them, that I stopped going back to school sometimes—in fact, very often!

Then little by little they let me do other things, and said if I wanted to help in the circus I could—they'd let me ride the horses and so on. I could already do this, because we always lived with the soldiers in the officers' quarters. In that period the families of the Austrian officers lived in the barracks—it was not like the "high-falutin" thing of today, so naturally I knew how to ride a horse.

"But," they said, "you don't need to jump through the big hoops yet, little one—that's too dangerous. You just ride!"

You see, they were really careful of me.

I didn't say anything at home, because I knew my father had a loose hand, and what would happen if he caught me—a thrashing! So I went to school every morning and at twelve o'clock disappeared to my circus. And it was such a bad school, anyway. They didn't even report my absences. No! They asked me why I was away so often, and I always made some excuse (I was well able to lie—like all good children); said we had six or eight children at home (when we had only three) and I must help Mother, etc. Well, to confess is to be excused—so I hope I may now be excused for all those good lies.

But the fun couldn't go on forever, and I was finally caught by the Commanding Officer of my father's regiment. He discovered me there. He didn't say anything; he just looked at me. I decided quick I'd better go home, so I ran as fast as I could, but at home everything was peaceful—there hadn't been time yet for the officer to tell my father. But the next afternoon, *ach!* Father was there waiting! That never happened before. He never came home that early. So I knew trouble was brewing—that he knew about the circus.

"Ernestine," he called. "Ernestine!"

That was bad, because no "Tini" this time. He always called me "Tini"—but "Ernestine"! *Ach*, God help me! That meant a thrashing, and a good one!

"Ernestine," he roared, "did you go every day to your school?"

"Yes, yes, Father."

"Then where have you been yesterday afternoon?"

Well, you know, Grandmother had said I had a brain—and I used it then, I can tell you. I knew the officer had seen me, so I told father the truth. I said,

"I was in the circus."

"In the circus? And how come you in the circus? What were you doing in the circus? Were you dressed like one of those circus girls? How so? *Explanation, Ernestine!!*"

Well, there I was—caught!

So then I confessed everything. I said: "Father, I had to go, I was so hungry! And they fed me!"

Hungry! Oh, Father and Mother! You should have seen their faces—how they looked when I said that! And my father turned to Mother—but, poor Mother! she knew nothing about it. It was not her fault. The school was to blame. So Father, after giving me my good thrashing, went to the school and made a terrible row; he was not a rough-neck for nothing! Anyway, thank God! we left there in a few weeks, and I was removed from temptation!

Of course, I hated to give up my beloved circus and the good food, for I loved those people, and they loved me, too—and the animals, even the monkeys. There was only one monkey that was mean to me when I cleaned his cage, and he only scratched my nose once!

(Continued on page 168)



At seventeen, on borrowed money, Ernestine traveled to Dresden to have her voice tried for the Royal Opera. Her father refused to believe in the report of her success until he saw the contract, signed by the King himself



Marietta von Leclair was Tini's first teacher. For years she gave freely of her own wonderful talent, recognizing the marvelous quality of the little girl's voice

The Last of the Titans

(Continued from page 16)

Well, after the circus episode we were transferred to Hungary for a few months and then back again to Prague. There Mother put me in the Ursuline Convent, and these Sisters were of the finest—wonderful women. It was there, studying the Mass, that Mother Bernadine—she is long since dead—first discovered my voice. Then she sent for my mother and said to her:

"I know it will sound very peculiar to you that I, now shut forever from the world, and never going out of this convent, or seeing anything of life except through this little door [they looked out through a latticed window, you know], that I tell you this thing: that this little child of yours is one of the most gifted—and blessed with a great voice. God loved her!"

MY MOTHER was overcome with surprise. "Why, I don't understand," she said. "How can that be? Tini can sing, yes—but such a child! We never thought of such a thing! But, although she is a good girl," said my mother, "I can not always understand her. We say at home she has the devil in her—but still I could not get along without her help. If the baby's sick, she takes it in her arms, and walks back and forth, up and down, and sings—all night, if need be, to the sick baby! She does everything on earth for her poor mother—but in spite of that, there is something in her that we call 'the devil' or 'gipsy'—something you can not control."

But Mother Bernadine only smiled and shook her head, and my mother went on:

"And then, we have no money—nothing! What can we do for her?"

But Mother Bernadine said: "Wait—wait a few years. But I would ask you not to neglect this child, because she will be a great actress or singer. Yes, I think she will be a great singer, for the voice is beautiful! Mother Angeline is trying now to teach her the tenor part in the Mass, but you must come to the church and listen for yourself, for this child of yours has the most wonderful contralto voice you ever heard."

Mother said: "That is all right and well, and I will come, but what can I do with these few *gulden* that my husband gets—no fortune, friends, or influence—nothing? How can we do anything?"

But Mother Bernadine replied again: "It will come. It will surely come! Where God has given such a talent, there will always be a way."

My mother, of course, spoke to Father about it.

"What? What?" he shouted. "A singer—an actress—a *bad* woman? Why, look at all these women going about half-naked on the stage and—doing this and that" [imitating them]. "My child an actress? Never!" said he, scolding and making a terrible rumpus.

"But, Hans," said my mother, trying to quiet him, "that is not always the way. Oh, no! There are famous singers that are good—there is Adelina Patti, for instance. She is not going naked on the stage—and look how the whole world is at her feet!"

But Father only grumbled. "Adelina Patti! And do you expect our Tini to be an Adelina Patti? Nonsense! And from where comes the money to do all these fine things—from where do you get the money?"

Of course, Mother couldn't answer that argument, but she believed in her heart what Mother Bernadine had said.

Well, anyhow, I did study the Mass. I was absolutely unmusical then. I knew nothing of musical notes—it was by ear that I sang. I couldn't read music then.

And now, this is something I regret as long as I live: I forget the name of the lady who first helped me! She had been a great prima donna in Paris, had left the stage, and married a rich man in Prague. This lady was at the Mass and

heard my singing. She hurried back to the convent after Mass (to the little door) and asked who was the girl with the contralto voice singing there.

Mother Bernadine came right away and said, "Why, she is a very poor child from an Austrian officer's family, and we are greatly interested in her."

"Well," this lady said, "I must see her at once, because I never heard such a voice—in all my long experience, I never heard such a voice as that!"

So Mother Bernadine arranged our meeting. My mother came, of course, and it was settled that I could take some lessons at once, which I did. But it was only for a few weeks.

I remember well the misery of this time—not even a piano to practice on! And then came a neighbor with the idea to help me. She worked on those Bohemian gloves that were so fashionable then and sold all over the world. She stitched the backs of the gloves, and for each glove got one penny, but this included the silk, the needles, and the frame to work on. It was quickly done, so I thought, "Now I'll try it, too." So I began, and when I came from school each day, sat until night stitching, and made in one day about 25 cents American money. Well, 25 cents was a lot! And I was proud like a peacock! But it only lasted a short time, for one day comes Father with bad news. We were to be transferred again—to Graz. A few weeks after, we had to pack up and go. It was a blow. Convent, singing lessons, hopes—all gone!

Father tried hard to get me in the Czech Conservatory—a free scholarship—but they refused; it was only for Czechs. Hope gone again, and I, of course, desperate! And to pile up the misery, the day before we started, Mother gave birth to my sister Jenny, and the very next day we had to go to Graz—second-class, of course. Think of it!

We all got there somehow, but Mother became critically ill. And there I was with brother Karl and two sisters and no one to help. I knew nothing about young babies. I was frantic! I didn't know what to do, and Mother so ill. I gave the new baby water and sugar, and as that didn't stop its crying, I thought I must do something *more*! We all drank coffee, so I gave the poor little baby coffee! Fortunately a neighbor arrived just in time and saved the child—but—can you believe it?—my sister, when she grew up, although she had the most beautiful skin (a little bit yellow perhaps, but she was really a beauty), to her dying day will think I ruined her complexion, giving her coffee when she was just born!

Well, after that, Mother got well, thank God! And then began the same things all over again.

AT THIS time an officer in my father's regiment had a daughter who had been an opera singer. She had retired from the opera and was then settled down in Graz, giving singing lessons. Marietta von Leclair was her name. Mother heard about her and went at once to tell her of our misery and of all that had happened to me.

Then Marietta was greatly interested and said: "Well, why don't you bring your child and let me hear her voice? I will see what I can do."

So Mother took me there at once.

Marietta heard my voice and tried me out with scales, and she was delighted. "My child," she cried, "all I know I will teach you, and I now prophesy you will be a great singer. You will be one of the first contraltos in the world. *Ach*, what a voice!"

Well, she gave me lessons twice a week. I was still very unmusical—I mean, I couldn't read the notes or keep the time.

So Marietta said: "Now, I will have to do something about this. The child must take piano lessons, too. That can not be neglected."

The Last of the Titans

Yes, she must study music. She must be a first-rate musician."

At that time I still went to school, for I was only thirteen, and must remain until I was fourteen, so what to do to manage? And at home I must also help my mother.

"Never mind the children," said Marietta when I told her all this. "You have to learn to play anyway. You *must* have a piano and study at once."

So she started making the lines of the scale and teaching me music from the beginning to the end. All she knew—bless her!

And, can you believe it? We actually got a piano, such as it was, and we paid only one dollar for it. It was one of those old-fashioned kind—long like this room—of course, not so many octaves as now. It was an awful old rattletrap, and God knows when it had been tuned. So what to do! I had never tuned a piano—didn't know it could be tuned. But when the strings began to break and crack, and the little hammers got loose, I had to do something! Father had a big lump of sealing wax, so I got that and began my surgery. First I bound the broken things together with string, and then put all around that thick sealing wax. Sometimes they came out too short, sometimes too long—but that didn't bother me at all! I practised just the same. That old piano was a sight! How I wish I could see it now. Wilhelm Keinzl will remember about it. He is a famous composer, and he saw that old piano. He said then there wasn't another in the world like it!

So I began playing songs—oh, anything to practice—and to count the time—tap, tap, tap, tap—which Marietta told me was very important. But you know how it was, with the children all in the next room, and the baby hollering—so I used to bring the baby to the piano, and rocked the cradle with one foot and beat time with the other! And that's the way I studied the piano. No wonder I didn't turn out a Paderewski! Anyway, I learned to play my own accompaniments after a fashion. Of course, I used the wrong fingers—I didn't know or care anything about that. It didn't matter to me what fingers I used! And it's a good thing I did learn to play my songs, because it kept me from starving to death later on, when I could sing at dinners and so on, and play for myself.

IT WAS in Graz, after I had two years singing lessons, that I went first to the opera. My father didn't like me to go alone—he was always very particular—so he said,

"All right, you can go, but I will send some one to take you."

Naturally I was very much excited at that, but *who* do you think the "some one" was? Well, it was our old private—the soldier who did the housework for Mother! He was the one who had the honor of taking me to my first opera. Of course, I had to go with him, and we must have been a funny sight, for he wore his spurs, and they went clack—clack—clack—right into the theater. It made all the people laugh.

That is how I heard my first opera, "*Il Trovatore*," with Marianna Brandt, one of the greatest contralto singers in the world. How she sang! And how she acted! This gave me a new ambition.

I still knew really very little in a musical way. I was just beginning, and then came a new person into my life, a musician, Rosbaud by name. She dressed like a man, smoked cigars, and was the talk of the town, of course. But she started in seriously to give me piano lessons. When I played accompaniments, she would say,

"That sounds well enough, but *why* don't you use the proper finger?" (I always took the wrong one!)

Well, to make a long story short, she taught me a little more—carried on what the other had begun.

I HAD studied singing three years, when Maria Wilt—the famous soprano, one of the greatest that ever lived—came to Graz. She was a wonder! One day she sang coloratura parts like the *Queen* in "The Magic Flute," and the next, *Valentine*, in "Les Huguenots." She was bad-tempered—a big woman, fat and disagreeable as could be, but *ach!* what a voice! Nearest to her voice was Nordica's. *Ach*, Nordica! but more of her later on.

About this time, I got a chance to sing the alto part in the Ninth Symphony of Beethoven with Maria Wilt. But even then I didn't know the notes, for I remember Maria Wilt said to my teacher,

"Why, she doesn't know it!"

And Marietta replied: "Oh, never mind that—I can teach it to her by ear. She is intelligent and very musical. I know she will be very good for this part. You can depend upon it."

THIS was my first public singing, with Maria Wilt. She sang the soprano and I the alto part. It was a great day for me when I sang with this wonderful opera singer. Maria Wilt looked splendid and had a beautiful dress on. I was a homely little thing, famous even then for my homeliness, and I had no nice clothes, and only old shoes made in the barracks by the soldiers! So I must have been a funny sight beside the great Maria Wilt. When I sang that time, I had on only a black dress, made from one of Mother's, but I did have beautiful hair anyway, and took great pains fixing it, and I stuck a red rose in it, too—extra—for the occasion. Also, most important, I got about six dollars for that singing.

The first thing, I gave two dollars to my mother, kept some for myself, and the rest I gave to my bird, Nazi! He had such a little house—cage, you call it—to live in, and that always made me feel badly, so I went to a second-hand store and bought a nice, big cage for him. Much later, when I went home from Dresden, Nazi was still alive, but not singing. And it was a grateful thing that he opened his mouth wide as soon as I came into the room and almost sang his head off! He remembered me, you see. So it was a good thing for the canary bird, too, that I sang in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony.

I suppose I should have used some of the money for decent shoes, but I bought instead the first white curtains we ever had—second-hand, of course, but still white curtains—and so one of my dreams was fulfilled. You see, we had very little furniture—not even real beds. I remember the mattresses. They were only big sacks—the kind soldiers use—stuffed with straw. But I had such a way to make them that they were smooth like the finest beds. We had only rough military blankets for sheets. Then for furniture we had boxes made like a long sofa. Mother could use them for packing when we moved from place to place. And these had on top the sacks with straw, like the beds, only sewed through, so the stuffing didn't move. Then it was covered with cretonne and tacked on to the boxes and made to look like a real couch. The boxes were specially made; we always packed the stuff in them when we made a move. This was our furniture—and a cradle. Always the cradle. So, you see, the second-hand white curtains were a great event in our household.

I can not remember the time, in early years, when the pennies didn't have to be counted, and we had sometimes as little food as we had furniture.

As you know, Father was in the barracks, and every officer had a piece of land allotted him. The pay of the soldiers and officers was so small that land was a God-send, and we worked every inch of it. We planted potatoes, turnips, cabbage, onions, etc., and a certain salad called *raddicci*, an Italian vegetable. In the summer the leaves are eaten for salad. We had this always for supper—a big bowl of

In

The Last of the Titans

salad was our evening meal at this time. That was all, unless there were cucumbers by a bit of good luck, then they were served only to Father and Mother, as they were a great luxury. Olive oil was out of the question, but we had plenty of vinegar—we got a barrel for a penny. But for oil we had only linseed oil, you call it here. That was cheap, and a big bottle cost only 5 *kreutzer*. And it didn't taste any too well, I recollect. A piece of bread and this salad was our supper always, except at the first of the month, when Mother had a little money on hand. Then we had a feast! She'd rub a little lard and flour together and make a kind of gravy into which she would put some spinach. Then she'd take a big piece of bread, rub it on both sides with good garlic, and spread on the spinach gravy, and would say, "Now, children, see, I give you a fine supper tonight."

And, oh, how we always counted the days to the first of the month!

POOOR Mother, how she managed I don't know. Of course, we always owed the grocery some money. At the first of every month we would pay as much as we could, but there was always something owing. Just before my sister was born—the one I fed with black coffee—Mother was feeling so sick and had such an appetite for—what do you think?—just a piece of cheese! She said to me:

"Oh, Tini, I would so like a piece of Swiss cheese. How I wish I could have it now!"

"Well, I will go and get it," I said.

"But, my child, we have no money," she answered. "Swiss cheese is very expensive."

"Oh, never mind that," I said. "I'll get it for you."

So I went to the big fat grocery woman. She was sitting in front of her shop with all the neighbors around her, chattering. But I ran up to her and said,

"Oh, please, will you give me a piece of Swiss cheese?" putting on the sweetest face I could.

"Swiss cheese! Swiss cheese! How can that be done? Have you the money?"

"No, no, I haven't," I said.

"Well, then," she screamed, "you can't have it, that's all! Be off!"

"But," I said, "I *must* have some Swiss cheese. My mother is sick and wants it right away."

And then that old fatty just opened her mouth wide and roared: "Oh, who ever heard of a *sick* person wanting Swiss cheese! That's nonsense!"

I began to cry and said: "Oh, but my mother *is* sick. She's going to have another baby, and she wants that Swiss cheese now."

Of course, that wicked old woman knew what I meant then, but she didn't relent, just kept shaking her head. "No, no, you can not have it."

And then I had a bright thought. I knew she loved to see me dance, so I said:

"Oh, if you will give me the cheese for my mother, I will dance for you the Czardas. I will sing it and dance it all for you, but first, please, my cheese. Mother is waiting."

"Oh, ho!" she grumbled. "I know you, you little devil. You'll get the cheese, and you won't come back! You'll have some excuse—your father, or something!"

"No, no," I said. "I'll come back, I promise you."

Well, my promises weren't much good at this time, but anyway she took a chance, because she loved the Czardas so, and gave me a piece of Swiss cheese, wrapped it in a little paper, and I ran home with it tight in my hand, and said,

"Here it is, Mother, and that old fatty won't put it on the grocery bill, for I'm going back to sing and dance for her the Czardas!"

Of course, poor Mother was delighted, and said: "Tini, you are a rascal—but you surely have a brain. Thank God for that!" So she kissed me and said, "Run quick, now, before your father comes home."

And I said, "What! Will he scold me?"

"Never mind," she said. "Go quick—quick."

So I ran back to that old fatty, and there she sat waiting, with all the neighbors crowding about. So I sang and danced in fine style, and at the end she gave me an apple as a reward!

It was in Graz, when I began to study singing, that I want to tell you about now—a word in memory of the people who were so kind and fed me in the days when I was always hungry.

There lived in Graz then a Fraulein Erich, the daughter of Colonel von Erich. I passed their house every day to go to my singing lessons. They had a big house and lived in the finest part of town. I ran always at the last minute for my lessons, because there was so much work at home. One day, as I was hurrying along, my songs in my arms—very important-looking, of course—the Colonel's wife was sitting in the window, working. She happened to look up, and I noticed that she followed me with her eyes, so the next day I greeted her—kissed my hand to her in grand style—which turned out afterward a good thing for me. Every day, when I ran by, I made some kind of greeting. So after a while she beckoned me to come in.

Of course, I was "tickled to death" at that, for as you know I was always hungry, and I scented food in the air. I was like a dog—I could smell it a mile away!

You know, in Austria, every one in the afternoon drinks coffee and has rolls and cakes to eat. Well, it smelled so good, that coffee, and the first day I went in I just couldn't help it, for right away I said,

"Oh, you must make wonderful coffee here—it smells so good!"

That, of course, was pretty fresh of me, but they all laughed and said,

"And would you like to have some of our good coffee?"

"I should say so," I answered.

"And who are you?" Frau Erich inquired.

Well, I told her I was Tini Roessler; that I went twice a week to my singing lessons with Marietta von Leclair. Oh, I told her the whole story of my life—all for a cup of coffee!—and they were all very interested at once. That was the beginning of our friendship.

IT WAS a wonderful room they took me into, with pictures of all their ancestors hanging on the walls and everything so beautiful. One of the daughters, Louisa, took a great fancy to me and an interest in my singing. So twice a week, after my lessons, it was arranged that I stop on my way home. The coffee was put in the oven to keep hot, and the rolls, too. The old Colonel, the father, was happy to have me come in, for it brought youth to that lonely house. He would talk and talk to me and ask all kinds of questions.

"And what have you studied today?" he would ask, and I answered him with my mouth full of bread and butter, of course. First, I began with one roll and one cup of coffee, then I had two rolls, then four, and then, *Ach!* came sandwiches and cake, too! Yes, I must say I ate "to beat the band!" During the four years I studied with Marietta, I always stopped for afternoon coffee on my way home. The father and mother died years after, but Louisa kept the friendship with me until she died. I always called her "Tante Louisa." I was her idol, and she followed my career always with love and sympathy. It was a wonderful friendship for me. A little garden spot in my life—even to this day it lives.

And now I must tell you of a wonderful thing that happened later, when the great opera singer, Materna, heard my voice. This, too, was in Graz. Wilhelm Keinzl was a famous composer of that time, and it was his beloved mother, Frau Nina Keinzl—whom I always called "Tante Nina Keinzl"—who took such a great interest in me. She was a remarkable woman. She held a sort of salon at that time, and had celebrities from everywhere around her—playwrights, singers, sculptors, poets, philosophers. She always had the deepest interest in me, and I was often invited to her

The Last of the Titans

house. Of course, I had no nice clothes, so I kept in the background and just listened. But sometimes I sang, and it was there that the great Materna heard me, and LeBatt, the tenor, too. You see, Tante Nina Keinzl was the most elegant and highly educated person you can imagine, and my experience in her house was my first entrance to anything like society. It was most brilliant—wonderful! She took care of me with such affection. She had no daughter of her own, but she had a great kindness for all children. My poverty, I know, touched her heart, and she always tried to help me. It was another big step in my career, when Materna heard me sing. Materna was then one of the most famous German *prima donne*. She sang first in light opera and then went into grand opera. She was very, very dark, but with a grand, imposing figure—and a great voice and personality—one of the most wonderful singers of her time.

LeBatt, the tenor, came with Materna from the Imperial Opera in Vienna. And it was there in Graz that Tante Nina Keinzl had Materna hear my voice.

"You will be surprised," she said to Materna, "you will be surprised, I tell you, when you hear this voice. I know how this child is struggling, and I want you to hear and like her, too."

SO I sang for Materna. She listened quietly and said: "Why, yes, it is beautiful—a really beautiful voice, but she is much too young for opera. [I was only fifteen.] What can you do with a child like this? It's no use. She's impossible. Short, homely, undernourished, poverty-stricken, no appearance—nothing—Oh, no, no! Never!"

And so it was. I was homely. I made a poor appearance and had nothing to say for myself. I was bashful—I always was and am to this day—although I suppose I'd have hard work to make any one believe it now!

So, in spite of Tante Nina Keinzl, Materna was not interested in me at all.

But LeBatt, the tenor, was kinder. He said, "I will speak for her—I will speak for this child to our Director." And then he asked me, "Do you think you can come to Vienna to sing for our Director?"

Of course, I said, "Yes," although I didn't have a penny for the journey. I thought and thought—and then came a bright idea. At that time one of Tante Nina Keinzl's friends, Field Marshal Benedeck, one of our greatest Austrian heroes, was in pension at Graz, Graz being the city of pensioners, you know. So I went to Tante Nina Keinzl and said:

"I beg of you to do me a favor. You can introduce me to Field Marshal Benedeck [he was very rich, through his wife] and as the child of an Austrian officer I could perhaps get money for the journey to Vienna."

So we were invited for dinner, and I will never forget that occasion as long as I live. Mother was there, of course, and Tante Nina Keinzl, and my teacher, Marietta von Leclair, very excited.

Well, I sang, and the outcome of it all was, he gave me fifty *gulden*—God love him!—and that is how I first went to Vienna.

Yes, I went to Vienna—to the Director—and sang. I sang "*Ah, Mon Fils!*" and the Drinking Song from "*Lucrezia Borgia*"—the *Brindisi*, they generally call it—which made me famous in the United States long years after—though at that time I didn't know anything about the United States; didn't know even that there was such a place!

Well, I had a good success, but that wasn't enough. The Director (Zauner was his name) listened to me patiently, and then turned to LeBatt, and said, shrugging his shoulders:

"Vell, what you want? What's all the fuss? Look at her! *Mein Gott!* Look! Mit such a face—and such poverty—nothing! What do you want? What do you expect? *Gott in Himmel!*"

And then to me: "No, no, my dear child," waving his hands. "Go home, quick, and ask your kind friends who helped you to come to Vienna to buy you instead a sewing machine, and learn to be a good dressmaker maybe, or something like that—but a singer—an *opera* singer! *Ach*, no! Never—never in this world!"

So home I went, heartbroken!

And Father, when he heard the news, flew into a temper. "Well," he said, "I thought so—I told you so! That settles it. Now you go to a school and learn to be a teacher. That at least is a *decent* profession, and I don't want to hear anything more, ever again, about the-aters or actresses or opera singers—nothing like that! You be a teacher!"

Poor Mother, of course, was heart-sick, too; she felt with me. But my teacher, Marietta von Leclair was simply furious! She said to my father:

"*Ach!* You do not understand—you understand nothing! You don't understand even your child! You don't know her yet at all."

Mother told me about it after. I wasn't present, of course.

"You are the most cruel father—you are simply the meanest man I ever met in my life. To kill the ambition of your own child! It is a crime! And I tell you that Tini is what I feel she is, and will prove to you and the world what I know she will prove."

She still had such a confidence in me, you see.

Then later on I told her, "Father said I must now give up my singing. No more lessons!"

"*Ach*, nonsense," she replied. "Never listen to him any more. You come for your lessons just the same. He's away all day and has not to know anything about it. Forget him!"

BUT then there came a little Jew—a little bit of a man. He was an agent, Levi was his name, and he came to Graz to make engagements for singers, and went to my teacher, of course. He said how the whole Vienna opera house was buzzing—talking about this new singer with the contralto voice—this young girl that sang there.

"Now," he said, "I am interested in young talents, and I telegraphed to the Dresden Royal Opera, and they are willing to pay the expenses and hear her there. And if they find she is what they think, and has talent and voice, they will make a contract with her, I'm sure."

So when my teacher heard all this, she came right away to my mother.

"Now," she said, "*this* is the real opportunity! I know positively that this child will have a success. It is a sign of God!"

But poor Mother said: "Yes—perhaps. But we can not go a *second* time to Marshal Benedeck."

"We don't have to," said Marietta. "We can borrow the money somewhere, because the opera will pay it back. She will have a success this time, I know."

"But suppose she doesn't," replied Mother, "and then we can not pay the debts?"

"Never mind, Mother, never mind," I cried. "I'll get it somehow."

I was so excited at this good news that I thought right away of another plan. A school-mate of mine had married a rich man in Graz, and he was interested in me, too. So I went to him, and when I told him of my opportunity, he said right away:

"Now, here are 400 *gulden*. Take them—do anything you want with them, but for God's sake, first get some *real* clothes! You can not go to Dresden looking like that. Buy yourself a decent dress, *mein Gott!* And buy also some real shoes!"

You see, I still had those old soldier shoes, made in the barracks.

I took his advice. But first I gave 200 *gulden* to my mother that she, too, could get a dress. *Ach!* poverty is terrible. My heart aches still again when I think of those black days.

But this time I didn't say anything to my father about my trip. I lied because I thought

The Last of the Titans

it was necessary. I heard once how a famous man said that "A lie is too precious a thing to be wasted"—which means, I suppose, not to throw away a good lie on a poor occasion. So I made what I thought a very good lie for my necessity then—and I've never regretted it, either! I said to him,

"Father, I'm invited with a school friend to go on a visit to the mountains, but I'll be back soon—in a week."

Well, it doesn't sound a very good lie now, after all these years, but it was sufficient. He believed me. Poor Father!

So all alone I went to Dresden. My feelings you can imagine. I went to the Hotel Weber, where Sembrich lived when she was young. I had already bought the new dress and hat and shoes, so I presented a decent appearance for the first time in my life. There were three other singers to be heard on trial—all contraltos. Well, they sang first. I was the last. To me who sat listening, they sounded, *ach*, so beautiful! I thought: "Oh, I am nothing to compare to them. I have no chance here!" And my heart dropped down into my new boots!

WELL when my turn came, I sang my same songs, "*Ah, Mon Fils!*" and the Drinking Song. I did my very best—I had to succeed this time! When I was through, Plateu, an old Hanover aristocrat—a big, wonderful man (he was the *intendant-impresario*—like Gatti-Cazazza here), he said:

"It is a very beautiful voice. I engage you. I pay you 3600 marks the first year, 4600 marks the second year, and the third year I pay you 5000 marks—so you will go up all the time. After the first year, if you disappoint us, I have, of course, the right to cancel the contract; in addition you can sing in the cathedral, too."

Well, I was so overcome, I could only stare at him and nod my head. I couldn't speak.

"Now, we will make the contract," he went on. "You will sign first, and then we have to send it to the King, and if he is satisfied, everything is well and good."

So I had my contract for 3600 marks. I hardly knew what a mark was—I had seen so little money.

"Now," he said, "after you sign, and it comes back from the King, then your father must sign it, too. We will send it to you."

But that was not all, for when he told me I must come back in September to begin my engagement, I burst out crying and said:

"Herr Director, you tell me I must be back in September—but that is impossible! In October we expect another baby, and my mother—what will she do without me? I must help my mother! I must be there!"

And this man—well he just stared at me, then the tears ran in his old eyes, he was so touched.

"You poor child!" he said. Oh, I remember how he looked at me, standing there. "You poor, blessed child! Don't worry. Everything will be all right."

But I still asked, "What will Mother do without me?"

"Oh," he said, "she can keep a servant *now*—she will not need you."

That comforted me, and so I signed the contract.

My first engagement!

Happy? I should say so! I came home, and they had given me 200 marks to make the expenses. I had to go to Vienna to get the train for home—a whole day and a night. I had my new dress—but I was careful not to wear it on the train. I tied it up in a package and put my old one on, in spite of the new contract.

When Father saw me, he said: "Well, and did you have a good visit? You don't look like you'd been in the mountains. You look pale, Ernestine."

"It is all right, Father," I said. "Now I can tell you the truth. I was not in the mountains at all."

"But where have you been, then?"

"In Dresden, Father."

"In Dresden? And with whom, Ernestine?"

"Alone!"

Oh, you should have seen him! "What does this mean?" he said, turning to my mother.

"Did you know about this?"

"Yes, I knew it, Hans," she replied.

And then it started—the row. But when I said I had a contract with the Dresden opera, he just laughed and laughed.

"Oh, ho! You say they paid for your trip?" he said. "Well, that is very decent of them, I must say."

But when I told him the King had to sign the contract, he cried:

"Oh, the King wouldn't bother with a contract with you. Is this another fine story that you tell me?"

Poor Father! He didn't understand—he couldn't believe it. And I was a little bit frightened, too, and began to wonder if it was true myself. Then at last, two weeks after, the postman came with a big envelope with the seal from the Dresden Royal Opera—the contract!

And Mother! When she saw that envelope, she just put her head down on the table and cried and cried! She was all broken to pieces! Then she held me in her arms with such a look on her face—for she knew that good fortune had come to me at last.

"Tini! Tini!" she cried. "God in Heaven bless you! But what shall I do without you?"

"Oh," I told her, "the Director says you can now keep a servant, and I will send you all I can, always."

Then Mother talked very seriously, and told me I must dress well and keep strong and eat good food. "You can have proper food now, thank God!"

And then came her great triumph when she showed the contract to Father and said, "Now, I hope, Hans, you are satisfied at last, and will believe your child, for here is the contract with the King's signature!"

But Father—how he looked at it! "Why," he grumbled, "she gets more money than I get—she'll make more money than I do!" He couldn't believe it—even then.

And I was proud like a peacock! And Father was proud, too, in his heart. He was a mighty good father, but he was always frightened for me.

"God only knows what will happen to you, Tini, you are so young," he said.

Well, his fears were useless, because from the very first I had one big protection: *I was homely!* I had nice hair and black eyes, but a yellow complexion always. Yes, I was homely—and I knew it! That is why vanity never bothered me. I knew from the beginning how homely I was.

But, homely or not—nothing mattered then! For at last I had my contract for the Dresden Royal Opera—signed by the King!

(To be continued)