THEA noticed that Bowers took rather more pains with her now that Fred Ottenburg often dropped in at eleven-thirty to hear her lesson. After the lesson the young man took Bowers off to lunch with him, and Bowers liked good food when another man paid for it. He encouraged Fred's visits, and Thea soon saw that Fred knew exactly why.

One morning, after her lesson, Ottenburg turned to Bowers. "If you'll lend me Miss Thea, I think I have an engagement for her. Mrs. Henry Nathanmeyer is going to give three musical evenings in April, first three Saturdays, and she has consulted me about soloists. For the first evening she has a young violinist, and she would be charmed to have Miss Kronborg. She will pay fifty dollars. Not much, but Miss Thea would meet some people there who might be useful. What do you say?"

Bowers passed the question on to Thea. "I guess you could use the fifty, couldn't you, Miss Kronborg? You can easily work up some songs."

Thea was perplexed. "I need the money awfully," she said frankly; "but I haven't got the right clothes for that sort of thing. I suppose I'd better try to get some."

Ottenburg spoke up quickly, "Oh, you'd make nothing out of it if you went to buying evening clothes. I've thought of that. Mrs. Nathanmeyer has a troop of daughters, a perfect seraglio, all ages and sizes. She'll be glad to fit you out, if you aren't sensitive about wearing kosher clothes. Let me take you to see her, and you'll find that she'll arrange that easily enough. I told her she must produce something nice, blue or yellow, and properly cut. I brought half a dozen Worth gowns through the customs for her two weeks ago, and she's not ungrateful. When can we go to see her?"

"I haven't any time free, except at night," Thea replied in some confusion.

"To-morrow evening, then? I shall call for you at eight. Bring all your songs along; she will want us to give her a little rehearsal, perhaps. I'll play your accompaniments, if you've no objection. That will save money for you and for Mrs. Nathanmeyer. She needs it." Ottenburg chuckled as he took down the number of Thea's boarding-house.

The Nathanmeyers were so rich and great that even Thea had heard of them, and this seemed a very remarkable opportunity. Ottenburg had brought it about by merely lifting a finger, apparently. He was a beer prince sure enough, as Bowers had said.

The next evening at a quarter to eight Thea was dressed and waiting in the boarding-house parlor. She was nervous and fidgety and found it difficult to sit still on the hard, convex upholstery of the chairs. She tried them one after another, moving about the dimly lighted, musty room, where the gas always leaked gently and sang in the burners.
one in the parlor but the medical student, who was playing one of Sousa's marches so vigorously that the china ornaments on the top of the piano rattled. In a few moments some of the pension-office girls would come in and begin to two-step. Thea wished that Ottenburg would come and let her escape. She glanced at herself in the long, somber mirror. She was wearing her pale-blue broadcloth church dress, which was not unbecoming but was certainly too heavy to wear to anybody's house in the evening. Her slippers were run over at the heel and she had not had time to have them mended, and her white gloves were not so clean as they should be. However, she knew that she would forget these annoying things as soon as Ottenburg came.

Mary, the Hungarian chambermaid, came to the door, stood between the plush portieres, beckoned to Thea, and made an inarticulate sound in her throat. Thea jumped up and ran into the hall, where Ottenburg stood smiling, his caped cloak open, his silk hat in his white-kid hand. The Hungarian girl stood like a monument on her flat heels, staring at the pink carnation in Ottenburg's coat. Her broad, pockmarked face wore the only expression of which it was capable, a kind of animal wonder. As the young man followed Thea out, he glanced back over his shoulder through the crack of the door; the Hun clapped her hands over her stomach, opened her mouth, and made another raucous sound in her throat.

"Isn't she awful?" Thea exclaimed. "I think she's half-witted. Can you understand her?"

Ottenburg laughed as he helped her into the carriage. "Oh, yes; I can understand her!" He settled himself on the front seat opposite Thea. "Now, I want to tell you about the people we are going to see. We may have a musical public in this country some day, but as yet there are only the Germans and the Jews. All the other people go to hear Jessie Darcey sing, 'O, Promise Me!' The Nathanmeyers are the finest kind of Jews. If you do anything for Mrs. Henry Nathanmeyer, you must put yourself into her hands. Whatever she says about music, about clothes, about life, will be correct. And you may feel at ease with her. She expects nothing of people; she has lived in Chicago twenty years. If you were to behave like the Magyar who was so interested in my buttonhole, she would not be surprised. If you were to sing like Jessie Darcey, she would not be surprised; but she would manage not to hear you again."

"Would she? Well, that's the kind of people I want to find." Thea felt herself growing bolder.

"You will be all right with her so long as you do not try to be anything that you are not. Her standards have nothing to do with Chicago. Her perceptions—or her grandmother's, which is the same thing—were keen when all this was an Indian village. So merely be yourself, and you will like her. She will like you because the Jews always sense talent, and," he added ironically, "they admire certain qualities of feeling that are found only in the white-skinned races."

Thea looked into the young man's face as the light of a street lamp flashed into the carriage. His somewhat academic manner amused her.

"What makes you take such an interest in singers?" she asked curiously. "You seem to have a perfect passion for hearing music-lessons. I wish I could trade jobs with you!"

"I'm not interested in singers." His tone was offended. "I am interested in talent. There are only two interesting things in the world, anyhow; and talent is one of them."

"What's the other?" The question came meekly from the figure opposite him. Another arc-light flashed in at the window.

Fred saw her face and broke into a laugh. "Why, you're guying me, you little wretch! You won't let me behave properly." He dropped his gloved hand lightly on her knee, took it away and let it hang between his own. "Do you know," he said confidentially, "I believe I'm more in earnest about all this than you are."

"About all what?"

"All you've got in your throat there."
"Oh! I'm in earnest all right; only I never was much good at talking. Jessie Darcey is the smooth talker. 'You notice the effect I get there--' If she only got 'em, she'd be a wonder, you know!"

Mr. and Mrs. Nathanmeyer were alone in their great library. Their three unmarried daughters had departed in successive carriages, one to a dinner, one to a Nietszche club, one to a ball given for the girls employed in the big department stores. When Ottenburg and Thea entered, Henry Nathanmeyer and his wife were sitting at a table at the farther end of the long room, with a reading-lamp and a tray of cigarettes and cordial-glasses between them. The overhead lights were too soft to bring out the colors of the big rugs, and none of the picture lights were on. One could merely see that there were pictures there. Fred whispered that they were Rousseaus and Corots, very fine ones which the old banker had bought long ago for next to nothing. In the hall Ottenburg had stopped Thea before a painting of a woman eating grapes out of a paper bag, and had told her gravely that there was the most beautiful Manet in the world. He made her take off her hat and gloves in the hall, and looked her over a little before he took her in. But once they were in the library he seemed perfectly satisfied with her and led her down the long room to their hostess.

Mrs. Nathanmeyer was a heavy, powerful old Jewess, with a great pompadour of white hair, a swarthy complexion, an eagle nose, and sharp, glittering eyes. She wore a black velvet dress with a long train, and a diamond necklace and earrings. She took Thea to the other side of the table and presented her to Mr. Nathanmeyer, who apologized for not rising, pointing to a slippered foot on a cushion; he said that he suffered from gout. He had a very soft voice and spoke with an accent which would have been heavy if it had not been so caressing. He kept Thea standing beside him for some time. He noticed that she stood easily, looked straight down into his face, and was not embarrassed. Even when Mrs. Nathanmeyer told Ottenburg to bring a chair for Thea, the old man did not release her hand, and she did not sit down. He admired her just as she was, as she happened to be standing, and she felt it. He was much handsomer than his wife, Thea thought. His forehead was high, his hair soft and white, his skin pink, a little puffy under his clear blue eyes. She noticed how warm and delicate his hands were, pleasant to touch and beautiful to look at. Ottenburg had told her that Mr. Nathanmeyer had a very fine collection of medals and cameos, and his fingers looked as if they had never touched anything but delicately cut surfaces.

He asked Thea where Moonstone was; how many inhabitants it had; what her father's business was; from what part of Sweden her grandfather came; and whether she spoke Swedish as a child. He was interested to hear that her mother's mother was still living, and that her grandfather had played the oboe. Thea felt at home standing there beside him; she felt that he was very wise, and that he some way took one's life up and looked it over kindly, as if it were a story. She was sorry when they left him to go into the music-room.

As they reached the door of the music-room, Mrs. Nathanmeyer turned a switch that threw on many lights. The room was even larger than the library, all glittering surfaces, with two Steinway pianos.

Mrs. Nathanmeyer rang for her own maid. "Selma will take you upstairs, Miss Kronborg, and you will find some dresses on the bed. Try several of them, and take the one you like best. Selma will help you. She has a great deal of taste. When you are dressed, come down and let us go over some of your songs with Mr. Ottenburg."

After Thea went away with the maid, Ottenburg came up to Mrs. Nathanmeyer and stood beside her, resting his hand on the high back of her chair.

"Well, GNADIGE FRAU, do you like her?"

"I think so. I liked her when she talked to father. She will always get on better with men."

Ottenburg leaned over her chair. "Prophetess! Do you see what I meant?"

"About her beauty? She has great possibilities, but you can never tell about those Northern women. They look so strong, but they are easily battered. The face falls so early under those wide cheek-bones. A single idea--hate or greed, or even love--can tear them to shreds. She is nineteen? Well, in ten years she may have quite a regal beauty, or she may have a heavy, discontented face, all dug out in channels. That will depend upon the kind of ideas she lives with."
"Or the kind of people?" Ottenburg suggested.

The old Jewess folded her arms over her massive chest, drew back her shoulders, and looked up at the young man. "With that hard glint in her eye? The people won't matter much, I fancy. They will come and go. She is very much interested in herself--as she should be."

 Ottenburg frowned. "Wait until you hear her sing. Her eyes are different then. That gleam that comes in them is curious, isn't it? As you say, it's impersonal."

The object of this discussion came in, smiling. She had chosen neither the blue nor the yellow gown, but a pale rose-color, with silver butterflies. Mrs. Nathanmeyer lifted her lorgnette and studied her as she approached. She caught the characteristic things at once: the free, strong walk, the calm carriage of the head, the milky whiteness of the girl's arms and shoulders.

"Yes, that color is good for you," she said approvingly. "The yellow one probably killed your hair? Yes; this does very well indeed, so we need think no more about it."

Thea glanced questioningly at Ottenburg. He smiled and bowed, seemed perfectly satisfied. He asked her to stand in the elbow of the piano, in front of him, instead of behind him as she had been taught to do.

"Yes," said the hostess with feeling. "That other position is barbarous."

Thea sang an aria from Gioconda, some songs by Schumann which she had studied with Harsanyi, and the "TAK FOR DIT ROD," which Ottenburg liked.

"That you must do again," he declared when they finished this song. "You did it much better the other day. You accented it more, like a dance or a galop. How did you do it?"

Thea laughed, glancing sidewise at Mrs. Nathanmeyer. "You want it rough-house, do you? Bowers likes me to sing it more seriously, but it always makes me think about a story my grandmother used to tell."

Fred pointed to the chair behind her. "Won't you rest a moment and tell us about it? I thought you had some notion about it when you first sang it for me."

Thea sat down. "In Norway my grandmother knew a girl who was awfully in love with a young fellow. She went into service on a big dairy farm to make enough money for her outfit. They were married at Christmas-time, and everybody was glad, because they'd been sighing around about each other for so long. That very summer, the day before St. John's Day, her husband caught her carrying on with another farm-hand. The next night all the farm people had a bonfire and a big dance up on the mountain, and everybody was dancing and singing. I guess they were all a little drunk, for they got to seeing how near they could make the girls dance to the edge of the cliff. Ole--he was the girl's husband--seemed the jolliest and the drunkest of anybody. He danced his wife nearer and nearer the edge of the rock, and his wife began to scream so that the others stopped dancing and the music stopped; but Ole went right on singing, and he danced her over the edge of the cliff and they fell hundreds of feet and were all smashed to pieces."

Ottenburg turned back to the piano. "That's the idea! Now, come Miss Thea. Let it go!"

Thea took her place. She laughed and drew herself up out of her corsets, threw her shoulders high and let them drop again. She had never sung in a low dress before, and she found it comfortable. Ottenburg jerked his head and they began the song. The accompaniment sounded more than ever like the thumping and scraping of heavy feet.

When they stopped, they heard a sympathetic tapping at the end of the room. Old Mr. Nathanmeyer had come to the door and was sitting back in the shadow, just inside the library, applauding with his cane. Thea threw him a bright smile. He continued to sit there, his slippered foot on a low chair, his cane between his fingers, and she glanced at him from time to time. The doorway made a frame for him, and he looked like a man in a picture, with the long, shadowy
room behind him.

Mrs. Nathanmeyer summoned the maid again. "Selma will pack that gown in a box for you, and you can take it home in Mr. Ottenburg's carriage."

Thea turned to follow the maid, but hesitated. "Shall I wear gloves?" she asked, turning again to Mrs. Nathanmeyer.

"No, I think not. Your arms are good, and you will feel freer without. You will need light slippers, pink--or white, if you have them, will do quite as well."

Thea went upstairs with the maid and Mrs. Nathanmeyer rose, took Ottenburg's arm, and walked toward her husband. "That's the first real voice I have heard in Chicago," she said decidedly. "I don't count that stupid Priest woman. What do you say, father?"

Mr. Nathanmeyer shook his white head and smiled softly, as if he were thinking about something very agreeable. "SVENSK SOMMAR," he murmured. "She is like a Swedish summer. I spent nearly a year there when I was a young man," he explained to Ottenburg.

When Ottenburg got Thea and her big box into the carriage, it occurred to him that she must be hungry, after singing so much. When he asked her, she admitted that she was very hungry, indeed.

He took out his watch. "Would you mind stopping somewhere with me? It's only eleven."

"Mind? Of course, I wouldn't mind. I wasn't brought up like that. I can take care of myself."

Ottenburg laughed. "And I can take care of myself, so we can do lots of jolly things together." He opened the carriage door and spoke to the driver. "I'm stuck on the way you sing that Grieg song," he declared.

When Thea got into bed that night she told herself that this was the happiest evening she had had in Chicago. She had enjoyed the Nathanmeyers and their grand house, her new dress, and Ottenburg, her first real carriage ride, and the good supper when she was so hungry. And Ottenburg WAS jolly! He made you want to come back at him. You weren't always being caught up and mystified. When you started in with him, you went; you cut the breeze, as Ray used to say. He had some go in him.

Philip Frederick Ottenburg was the third son of the great brewer. His mother was Katarina Furst, the daughter and heiress of a brewing business older and richer than Otto Ottenburg's. As a young woman she had been a conspicuous figure in German-American society in New York, and not untouched by scandal. She was a handsome, head-strong girl, a rebellious and violent force in a provincial society. She was brutally sentimental and heavily romantic. Her free speech, her Continental ideas, and her proclivity for championing new causes, even when she did not know much about them, made her an object of suspicion. She was always going abroad to seek out intellectual affinities, and was one of the group of young women who followed Wagner about in his old age, keeping at a respectful distance, but receiving now and then a gracious acknowledgment that he appreciated their homage. When the composer died, Katarina, then a matron with a family, took to her bed and saw no one for a week.

After having been engaged to an American actor, a Welsh socialist agitator, and a German army officer, Fraulein Furst at last placed herself and her great brewery interests into the trustworthy hands of Otto Ottenburg, who had been her suitor ever since he was a clerk, learning his business in her father's office.

Her first two sons were exactly like their father. Even as children they were industrious, earnest little tradesmen. As Frau Ottenburg said, "she had to wait for her Fred, but she got him at last," the first man who had altogether pleased her. Frederick entered Harvard when he was eighteen. When his mother went to Boston to visit him, she not only got him everything he wished for, but she made handsome and often embarrassing presents to all his friends. She gave dinners and supper parties for the Glee Club, made the crew break training, and was a generally disturbing influence. In
his third year Fred left the university because of a serious escapade which had somewhat hampered his life ever since. He went at once into his father's business, where, in his own way, he had made himself very useful.

Fred Ottenburg was now twenty-eight, and people could only say of him that he had been less hurt by his mother's indulgence than most boys would have been. He had never wanted anything that he could not have it, and he might have had a great many things that he had never wanted. He was extravagant, but not prodigal. He turned most of the money his mother gave him into the business, and lived on his generous salary.

Fred had never been bored for a whole day in his life. When he was in Chicago or St. Louis, he went to ball-games, prize-fights, and horse-races. When he was in Germany, he went to concerts and to the opera. He belonged to a long list of sporting-clubs and hunting-clubs, and was a good boxer. He had so many natural interests that he had no affectations. At Harvard he kept away from the aesthetic circle that had already discovered Francis Thompson. He liked no poetry but German poetry. Physical energy was the thing he was full to the brim of, and music was one of its natural forms of expression. He had a healthy love of sport and art, of eating and drinking. When he was in Germany, he scarcely knew where the soup ended and the symphony began.

By Willa Cather