

Silhouettes

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Bright lights faded into the gloom of a dimmed theater, and the crowd stirred restlessly in their seats. The orchestra's low drone came from behind the curtain, and strains of half forgotten melodies mingled with discord. The orchestra was ready. As the curtain rose, the stage lights flooded, revealing the conductor, famous musician of two continents, who was playing tonight a special concert for war relief. The light from the stage half revealed the first row, a set of faces with inscrutable eyes. The conductor, glancing briefly at this row, wondered fleetingly who these people were, what brought them to this concert, and what they thought as they listened to his music. As fast as the thought came, it disappeared. The conductor turned to the orchestra, raised his baton, and the strains of a familiar Strauss waltz were heard . . .

Late comers straggled down the aisle, and heads turned to see who would cause such a disturbance. "It's Frank Tobin," the whispers went up. "You know, the richest man in Chicago." Disdainful and envious glances followed a large, gray haired man accompanied by a well dressed woman down the aisle to their seats in the front row. The man's face might have been young but for the lines which creased his face and made him old. He twisted and turned in the seat until glances held him still, and then his mind wandered. He longed to be out of the stuffy theater and walking. What could a dutiful husband do but go to the concert with his wife, especially when she enjoyed it so much. He should be out doing something about the new government test, and yet there was nothing for him to do.

So much depended on this one test, and he knew that no one but himself was convinced of the gravity of the situation. If the contract for munitions manufacture were not renewed on the basis of this test, the entire corporation would be forced into bankruptcy. For an instant he could see nothing but his hand across his eyes. He was so tired. Then the music burst on him like pandemonium, blurring his senses and chasing away all thought. The front row noise was deafening, and he couldn't understand his wife's love of Strauss. He was miserable with noise, fatigue, and worries engulfing him. Still his wife should not be worried with these things, and she did enjoy a concert. He glanced down at her and, when she turned questioningly to him, smiled reassuringly. After all, these were a man's worries, and there must be worse things to endure than a symphony. He would think about the contract tomorrow, and until then there was the evening to get through. Resolutely, he turned back to the conductor, and, smiling as though in enjoyment, he listened to Strauss . . .

The girl on the end of the front row was oblivious to her surroundings. She hadn't noticed when the large, grey haired man and his wife had passed in front of her, arriving late. She had saved her money laboriously, and she lost no moment of it in thought about those around her. The music took her out and away from herself. It always did, but tonight it was different. The waltz that was being played reminded her and always would of her childhood in France. Only a work played like this could take her back beyond the horror of a war and

Nazi occupation. Aix-Les-Bain came back to her with the force of reality, and she remembered winters spent at the foot of Mount Blanc. Imagination and memory played tricks on her, and hearing the familiar strains she could imagine the snow, glistening white under the sun, a snow whiter and a sea bluer than anything she had seen since. France to some might mean guns, tramping feet, and starvation, but to her it would always mean beauty. She could look up and see the old cable car that bridged the span between mountain peaks, and hear the shouts of skiers as they came racing down the slope toward the hotel. Trees, sparsely scattered as one ascended the mountain, stood out like silhouettes against unmarred, glistening snow. Inside the hotel the darkness seemed funereal compared to the glare outside, and serenity could be found inside the hotel room as one looked out on the panorama of beauty and life outside. It was sad, thinking of those days and people. The music ended and the audience came to life, spoiling her dream. Perhaps when she went back it would never be the same, and perhaps she would never go back. She applauded loudly with the rest, but hers was applause of thanks, thanks for restoring for an instant a glimpse of the past

A small, insignificant-looking woman crouched low in her seat and looked from right to left as the distinguished man and his wife arrived late to their seats in the front row. She enjoyed music, as a rule, but the crowd and noise baffled her. Bill loved music, too, and she never heard

symphonic music without being reminded of her son. She had received a telegram a few months before, saying that her son had been wounded. It happened in Italy, the telegram had stated, and it seemed a little worse to her that he should be sick and needing her so far away from home in a foreign land. She knew that other mothers received these telegrams, and she was a little ashamed of the revolt and hate that sprung within her when she knew that Bill, too, had paid his toll. Things could be worse, she knew, but now that he was actually coming home, she was afraid. Would he look the same? How badly had he been hurt? Could he ever be happy again after seeing war and death? War seemed far away as she listened to the waltz, and yet it was a reminder of her Bill and what he had been through. Her face creased into a worried frown as she tried to listen to the music, but she couldn't concentrate. Her thoughts were again on Bill. . . .

The waltz was over and the conductor turned to the audience.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he was saying, "this is for a noble cause." He went on, asking for donations for war relief. The little lady gazed upward and fastened her attention on the speaker. Perhaps he was right. Perhaps she had not given enough. Her worries were small, really, since Bill was now coming home. She could not afford much — her most was not very much — but she would give. She opened her purse and reached for her money.