

THE BROKEN BATON

By Margaret Mary Hills

ELLIS VAN HORN sat in the roomy bay window of the Siegfried apartment, and in an introspective mood wondered how he had drifted into the artistic Bohemia of which he found himself a part. His mind hovered curiously round the vague tradition of an opera singer who, many generations ago, lived and died in some distant, collateral branch of the Van Horn family. It might be from her that he had received his "artistic temperament." At any rate, he found himself somewhat surprised at the semi-professional life he was leading, and asked himself how it would end.

A woman was singing scales in the room behind him. Her voice floated down to him from the silvery heights of tonic scales, and throbbed delicately through intricate double arpeggios and long trains of irregular thirds. After these came trills beginning in the middle voice and going up, step by step, higher by a semitone on each successive trill, and ending in a whimsical rush of exquisite staccato notes that made Van Horn think of fairy laughter.

"Why do you waste your strength and your time?" exclaimed an impatient masculine voice. "Can you not be serious? Now, on G."

The singer trilled obediently a half-tone higher, and climbed several steps above the G.

Some further conversation in a lower tone did not reach the dreamy listener in the window.

After a slight delay the opening bars of an accompaniment sounded from the piano, and the singer began again. It was the cantabile from

Saint-Saëns's "Samson et Dalila," "My heart at the sweet voice."

The song rolled on, in its pure legato, full of tender sweetness and technical perfection, till it was interrupted by the man's voice.

"Ilva, *mein Kindchen*, what shall I say to you? Your possibilities and your impossibilities will drive me mad."

"What is it now?" cried the woman, fretfully. "I can never hope to please you!"

"It's just what it always is. The coldness of your singing would freeze any Samson that ever lived."

She began the song again, and sang it with a slight increase of spirit. The man at the piano sighed as she took up the refrain "Ah, come list to my fond wooing!"

The dreamy, descriptive strains of the second verse sounded on the still, warm air. The rippling accompaniment halted spasmodically, and the singer, in turn, interrupted.

"How can I sing when I have to wait and listen for your time? I shall do well enough with the orchestra, but your playing is simply demoralizing."

"I know it is bad, dear, but I wish you would try it again. Wait, though, Ellis is here somewhere; let him play for you. You cannot quarrel with his accompaniments."

There was a peculiarly heavy step, and the amber curtains that enclosed the window were drawn aside.

"Ellis, come and play 'Samson' for this child, will you? You have spoiled her. She scorns her old husband's playing of late."

He cast a fond look back into the

room, and Van Horn smiled deprecatingly as he rose from his lazy position.

The elder man laid his arm affectionately about Ellis's shoulders as they walked down the long room together.

Ilva stood still by the piano till the young man came up to her. She was wearing a long tea-gown of pale yellow silk, and as her slender figure outlined itself against the crimson velvet of the portière behind her, Van Horn was struck with the effect of the barbaric color combination.

"When did you come?" she asked, indifferently.

"Half an hour ago, perhaps. You see, I require a certain amount of Otto's presence, even though I do not have his society. He can inspire me and make me feel things."

"Now Ilva, listen!" Otto Siegfried leaned on the end of the piano as Ellis took his seat. "Let the whole passion of this music possess you. Yield your soul to the words and meaning of——"

"Otto, it is not possible! How can I simulate what I have never known? It's nonsense. I have not the slightest feeling about it."

"Have you no imagination?" demanded Siegfried, pacing up and down with his heavy step. "Be an artist, Ilva, and not a child." The man stopped, facing his wife, and his piercing gray eyes looked full into hers. There was an intensity in the gaze that startled Van Horn, and he shrank involuntarily, marveling at the queer earnestness of these artist people. Then Siegfried laid his broad hand on his shoulder and said:

"Ilva, let us say that Ellis here is *Samson* and you are *Dalila*. You love him, remember, and are determined to arouse in him the hurricane you know is there. It is worth the effort. Put all your woman's power into it. Now!"

He nodded to Van Horn and moved away from the piano. The young man was conscious of a subtle stirring within him, and glanced hastily at Ilva. Her languid, dusky eyes

were full of a startled surprise, and followed her husband in a semi-hypnotic gaze as he crossed the room.

Ellis began the accompaniment, and at the right moment Ilva's voice flowed into it like a flood of golden sunlight over a vaguely troubled sea.

Her fancy woke and poured vivid life and color into the music. The tender wooing, the caressive language and the loving entreaty of the song grew to intense realism.

Van Horn had no remembrance afterward of playing the accompaniment. He was as one in a dream, and he never knew whether Ilva did stretch out white, jeweled hands to him, or whether they were the beguiling hands of the imaginary *Dalila* which beckoned, shadow-like, as the soft, coaxing love-notes fell luringly on his senses:

Ah, come list to my fond wooing;
'Tis with ardor my heart imbuing!

The drowsing melody poured smoothly from the singer's lips, and one felt the delicious languor of an Oriental Summer, inhaled the spicy breath of sandalwood, and saw the purple shadows of the palms, while over all rose the seductive tones of the woman's voice, swelling in passionate pleading, thrilling the heart. The sweetness died away and spent itself in the last tender cry:

My own—Samson—I love thee!

Siegfried returned to the piano. He looked eagerly into the dusky, mysterious eyes of his wife, his own ablaze with artistic enthusiasm.

"It was superb, Ilva. Never talk of impossibilities again. Only sing like that this afternoon and to-morrow night."

The sudden low sobbing of a child prevented any reply, and Siegfried turned hastily toward a couch in a shadowy corner, where lay a child, face downward, shaking with long-suppressed sobs. Siegfried lifted him and pillowed the curly head on his shoulder, hushing and soothing him in low, coaxing tones.

Ilva stood watching her husband and the little Karl, with strange lights flashing in her stormy dark eyes.

Van Horn played softly through the refrain just ended and watched Ilva through half-closed lids. A look of curious speculation and wonder was veiled by his drooping lashes, and when the singer turned her gloomy eyes to him his eyes held a question.

He rose suddenly from the piano, shook himself, and walked quickly to the couch, where Siegfried sat with Karl.

"I must go now, Otto. I have an engagement."

Siegfried went with him to the elevator.

"Come early to rehearsal, will you, Ellis? I think the oboe that takes Edwards's place needs watching. Edwards is going to die, poor boy! I must go to see him after rehearsal."

It was fully three-quarters of an hour after the time set when Ilva Siegfried presented herself at the rehearsal. The orchestra, which had been called two hours earlier, had grown tired and cross and the chorus impatient. Ellis Van Horn pervaded the company like a south wind, soothing, conciliating, pacifying, while Siegfried strode heavily up and down in the corridor.

When Ilva finally appeared she was pale and seemed weary, but made no excuse for her tardiness.

Siegfried took his place at the conductor's desk, and the rehearsal began.

A spirit of unrest was abroad that boded disaster. Nothing went well. The choruses were sung carelessly and without art. The climax was reached when, in the midst of an important passage, the unfortunate new oboe lost his head and played a wildly discordant strain that brought dismay and confusion to the whole orchestra.

Siegfried beat a mad tattoo on the desk, and in his strong, nervous fingers the slender baton broke into three pieces, with an ominous little crash.

Silence followed the mishap. Siegfried said never a word, but a singular pallor overspread his dark face as he thrust into his pocket the splintered fragments of the baton.

"Evil will come of it," whispered the last man on the row of second violins. "Hans Friedrich broke his baton the night before the great——"

"Begin the same chorus again," said Siegfried, briefly.

No further trouble arose. The oboe was on his guard, and all went well.

Ilva rose to sing the cantabile. All the fire and passion of the morning burst forth anew as she threw her whole passionate heart into the music, and Siegfried forgot the vexations of the rehearsal in the magnificent singing of his wife.

Ilva was trembling with excitement when she took her seat. The chorus and orchestra broke into informal applause, and Ellis Van Horn stood before her, smiling and holding out his hand.

The rehearsal over, Siegfried hurried away to the bedside of young Edwards, and Ellis Van Horn went back with Ilva to the apartment.

Siegfried was greatly beloved in the orchestra. Each member felt that he had his own reasons for loving the dark-browed conductor, and though, to an unknowing observer, he appeared somewhat harsh and impatient, every man under him knew of his infinite kindness.

In the lonely last hours of his life young Edwards clung like a child to Siegfried, and begged him to remain until the end. Siegfried stayed, and finally closed the boyish blue eyes with a woman's tenderness and love.

It was after midnight when the boy died, and Siegfried walked home, full of wearily conflicting theories as to the fate of the soul that had but now begun to unravel the mysteries. Some lines of Omar Khayyám recurred to him again and again as he toiled up the many stairs of the hotel:

When you and I behind the veil are
passed,
O, but the long, long while the world
will last!

The elevator had stopped running, and the lights burned but dimly on every second landing. The sound of his own heavy steps prevented his hearing the lighter footsteps coming down, and in his abstraction he scarcely perceived the slender, muffled figure that passed him in the gloomy passage. Siegfried was strangely depressed. The night had grown cold, and he shivered as he unlocked the door of his rooms.

Ilva sat in the circle of lamplight by the piano, her hands folded in her lap. Her sombre eyes glittered sleepily between her dark, curved lashes as her husband kissed her.

"How is your *Musiker*?" she asked, languidly.

"He is dead," answered the man. "You must go to bed this instant, Ilva. Why did you sit up? You must not be tired to-morrow."

She watched him curiously, half-stealthily, for a moment, then with a slight shrug of her shoulders silently left the room.

Siegfried seated himself in the chair she had occupied and took up the book she had evidently just laid down. It was a white-and-gold volume of the *Rubaiyat*. He turned the leaves and smiled to see how often the purple pencil-marks that strayed through all of Ilva's reading had bracketed lines and passages. He came on the words that had haunted him:

When you and I behind the veil are
passed.

On another page heavy lines were
drawn about

Yesterday this day's madness did pre-
pare
To-morrow's silence, triumph or despair.
Drink! For you know not whence you
come, nor why;
Drink! For you know not why you go,
nor where.

He rose restlessly, laid aside the book and closed the piano. As he removed the music he found the book of "*Samson et Dalila*" uppermost.

"*Samson* and Omar Khayyám!" he mused. "*Dalila* and the Persian poet!" There was a singular appropriateness about the connection of the names that he noted then, and remembered long afterward.

He turned out the light and retired. Too weary to sleep, he tossed for hours on his pillow. Near dawn he slept and dreamed. He saw a long gray cloud drifting away beyond the city. Out of the mist smiled Ilva's face, pale and intense; and as he looked he perceived that her whole form was wrapped about with the coiling tresses of a gigantic *Samson*, whose face was hidden in the cloud. One strong, dark hand showed faintly through the mist, and in it gleamed the white-and-gold volume of Omar Khayyám. The cloud drifted slowly from view, and as it faded in the distance Ilva's voice came floating back, singing faintly, like a thread of echoing music, the refrain of the cantabile:

Ah, come list to my fond wooing.

He woke to find the little Karl standing in his nightgown beside the bed, staring gravely at him through tangled masses of yellow hair. He scrambled into bed and nestled close to his father. The two slept till the sunlight streamed into the room.

"*Samson et Dalila*" was the main attraction at the Metropolitan that Sunday night. Ilva's voice was new to weary New York, and, it was reported, was sufficiently remarkable to pay one for going to hear it; so an unusual audience had assembled.

The sacred opera had proceeded successfully almost to the end. Ellis Van Horn, as *Samson*, had rendered his impassioned appeal, defying the divine power and the elements that threatened, and now the beautiful, lithe *Dalila* came forward again with the opening measures of the famous cantabile. Critics had cautiously advanced the opinion that the lyric quality of Ilva's voice was not suited to the part of *Dalila*, but nothing

could surpass the magic beauty of those first calm, clinging measures. At the exquisite refrain all listened breathless to the wooing, seductive pleading of the wonderful love-song. When it came again, at the end of the song, they wondered more and more at the power and passion that pulsed so madly through the sweet, sensuous strains.

The piece swept on to the end, but even through the excitement of the last scenes, with their thunder and destruction, all felt that the climax had been reached in the love-song.

When the curtain was down at last, and Siegfried was at liberty, he hastened to seek his wife. He found her talking in low, excited tones with Ellis Van Horn. When she saw her husband she came swiftly to him. She clasped his hand with her small, cold fingers, looking at him with her wonderful eyes on fire, but with a face singularly grave.

"It was yourself, Otto. You taught me to sing. You showed me how to sing, and all that comes of it we shall owe to you—all to you! Do you understand?"

"And much will come of it, *Kindchen*. Such a success as you have had to-night must lead to much," he answered, eagerly.

"Yes, to much—much! And all since yesterday! The day before I could not have done it. 'Yesterday this day's madness did prepare.'" Ilva laughed out recklessly as she spoke, and Siegfried looked at her with some anxiety.

"You are excited and worn out, Ilva. You should go home at once. I must ask Ellis to take you, for I have a lot of things to do before I leave here."

Van Horn bowed and murmured his assent, and Siegfried hurried away.

It was late when he ascended the long stairways of the hotel, and he was very tired. Finding the rooms dark and silent, he went directly to bed and slept dreamlessly till he was awakened in the early morning by Karl, who dragged feebly at his father's arm with his little cold hands.

"Come!" he entreated. "Come with Karl!"

Siegfried tried to draw him into the bed, but he struggled away, repeating insistently:

"Come—come with Karl!"

The tears began to gather in the grave, dark eyes, and Siegfried rose in some alarm. Getting hastily into his clothes, he took the child by the hand and was led straight to Ilva's room.

The bed was empty, undisturbed, and Ilva was not there.

On the pillow was a note. It was like her to leave no possibility of doubt.

You told me he was *Samson*. You said I loved him, and must make him love me. I have done this, and we are going away.

ILVA.

The delicate brutality of the few words stunned the man. He sat stupidly on the edge of the white bed and neither spoke nor stirred.

Karl walked solemnly up and down, dragging a toy wagon to which was attached a bell that jingled monotonously. The man's eyes followed the child unconsciously, till the little fellow left the toy and climbed, shivering, to his father's side. After many vain attempts to attract his attention, the boy sat silently watching him with great, mournful eyes.

Something of the man's vast despair must have penetrated the childish mind, and when he could bear the strange silence no longer, he broke into loud, frightened sobbing. Siegfried gathered him into his arms, murmuring meaningless words of comfort and reassurance. He sought vaguely in his pockets for some treasure that might divert the child. Thrusting his hand deep into his coat, some sharp, jagged objects pierced his fingers. Startled by the physical pain, he turned the pocket inside out, and a moan of recollection escaped him as there fell on the white bed-cover the shattered fragments of the broken baton.

DAILY BREAD

WHEN athirst this soul of mine
 And my hungry heart unfed,
 Oh, her smile is like to wine
 And her words are like to bread.

Ah, sweetheart, give alms to-day!
 Grant a famished life its due!
 Give me daily bread, I pray,
 Of the words and smile of you!

T. G.



THE DIFFICULTY OVERCOME

BROOKS—I wish you'd pay me that \$10 you owe me, old fellow.
 BORROWIT—I couldn't think of it, Brooks.
 "But I'm here to remind you of it."



THE KEY OF THE SITUATION

FIRST DETECTIVE—How did you manage to discover the scandal in
 their family closet?
 SECOND DETECTIVE—Well, you see, I had a skeleton key.



ALL THAT'S LEFT THEM

WHILE autos, bikes and equestrians
 On park roads take their flights,
 The only rights of pedestrians
 Seem to be funeral rites.

DOROTHY DORR,