

THE VOICE HE HEARD

PART I

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HERR Janns of New York leaned back in his comfortable

Pullman seat. One of his plump jeweled hands languidly waved a palm-leaf fan. The other hand—also plump and jeweled, grasped a large handkerchief that did valiant service in preventing the perspiration on Herr Janns' apoplectic face from trickling down his neck, which would have been disagreeable. The weather was so very hot, and so very suffocating that Herr Janns had not even the energy to push the button and have his glass refilled with something cool. As he gazed listlessly out of the car window, it seemed to him that the flying scenery acted queerly. It danced, wavered and shimmered in a most amazing manner. Even the telegraph poles staggered and nodded drunkenly as they flashed by. It was annoying to watch, and Herr Janns turned his round blue eyes away and looked appealingly at the conductor—ponderously moving down the aisle.

That official smiled sympathetically as he approached. "Whew," he exclaimed. "Some hot, ain't it?" I guess a few of us are gettin' a premature taste of the next world already."

The conductor chuckled grimly at his own little joke, and, removing his heavy cap, wiped his heated brow with a red handkerchief.

"Say, Professor," he continued, as a long blast from the locomotive floated back to their ears. "We'll be at Laguna soon, an' you'll have ten minutes to walk around an' stretch your legs."

The train began to slacken speed, and the conductor passed on to his duties. In a few moments they came to a stop alongside the platform of the little country station. There were the usual gaping bystanders gathered to witness the daily event of the San Francisco Limited, and Herr Janns gazed at them in wonderment. It seemed to him very ridiculous that anyone should exert himself without some good reason, in such frightful weather. He had even been calling himself hard German names for being fool enough to take this awful journey. And as for following the conductor's advice, and taking advantage of the stop at Laguna to stretch his legs—Gott in Himmel! He preferred to stew in the car rather than roast outside.

Having thus reflected, Herr Janns again leaned back in his seat and mopped his brow. Then suddenly a strange thing happened—Herr Janns sprang from his seat as if in response to some sudden shock, and stood in the aisle in a tense listening attitude. Forgotten were the discomforts of the dusty train—forgotten was the stifling heat, for Herr Janns was listening to the one thing to which his whole being—his very soul—was attuned. With a guttural German cry he ran to the steps of the coach and sprang to the ground.

The station loiterers opened their eyes in astonishment at the sight of a stout red-faced little man, bare headed, with a palm leaf fan in one hand, and a handkerchief in the other, running excitedly across the dusty street towards a blacksmith shop. But Herr Janns cared not for curious looks, for were not his ravished ears filled with the music of the greatest baritone he had ever heard?

He reached the open doorway of the smithy and stopped. The voice that had attracted his attention now rolled out with full power upon his delighted senses. Swish, swish, swish went the great impresario's fan, as, with tears streaming down his cheeks, he beat time to the mighty Anvil Chorus that the young giant blacksmith was singing to the accompaniment of his own clang, clang of hammer and anvil.

The singing came to an abrupt stop, as, unable to contain himself any longer, Herr Janns rushed forward with arms outstretched.

"Ach! mein boy," he cried in an ecstasy of emotion. "Undt now haf I heardt! Gott sei Dank! You must come with me—I will make you famous. Ach! such a peuntiful voice—such a wondrous paritone—it belong to the worldt. Nefer haf I heardt the Anvil Chorus sung so—no nefer."

It was a strange scene. The little country blacksmith shop, with its usual scraps of junk lying around—its usual rows of horseshoes hanging on the wall—the young giant of a blacksmith leaning upon his sledge hammer, gazing silently at the round-faced, excited little German in front of him. His deep-set black eyes, too, began to flame with sudden emotion, as the import of Herr Janns' words penetrated to his astounded mind, and the muscles of his bared herculean arms grew tense as his hands gripped the handle of his hammer.

"I—I can s-sing—you mean that?" he stammered. Beads of perspiration gathered on his forehead, and his deep chest rose and fell grandly.

The train bell was clashing out its warning note of departure, but Herr

ward him to give him a warning.

"Hey, Professor," he shouted. "Get a move on, or ye'll get left behind." But Herr Janns waved the conductor away with his fan. "I care not—I care not," he cried impatiently. "Avay—avay, I haf made a tisscovery—Ach! a so great tisscovery!"

The conductor growled out an oath, and rushed back to his train. "The heat's turned the old Dutchman nutty," he muttered to the brakeman, as he grabbed Herr Janns' suit case and hat and tossed them to the station platform.

And so the great iron horse, after giving vent to indignant snorts, moved majestically forward, and the San Francisco Limited—minus one passenger—was again grinding its weary way through the burning heat of the San Joaquin valley.

But Herr Janns did not cast even a single glance at his vanishing Pullman. "Can you sing!" he was ejaculating. "Gott in Himmel! Can you sing? Mein frient—I tell you—nefer haf I heardt so wondrous a voice. Before you

stands Herr Janns, the great impressario. For twenty years haf I introduce to the public all the greatest singers. But you—Ach! nefer haf I yet tisscovered a such heaven born voice—you must—you shall come with me and sing to all the peoples, undt they vill say: 'Gott bless Herr Janns for a so great tisscovery!' But vare—," he continued, with deepening curiosity, "but vare did you learn to sing the peuntiful Anvil Chorus so?"

THE blacksmith pushed a sinewy hand through his black hair. "I don't know," he answered simply. "I s'pose I've heard the tune somewhere an' it kinder stuck. I make up my own words."

His teeth sparkled white in a smile. "Listen," he went on, and swinging his sledge hammer in echoing slangs on the anvil, he again broke into song. It was true, the music that poured from the man's marvelous throat was the great chorus, but the words were his own. They breathed of the very life itself of the singer—of his work at anvil and forge—of ambition, sorrow and joy—and of love.

Cold shivers ran down Herr Janns' spine and his round little body trembled. His face worked convulsively, the whole soul of him was moved beyond words as he listened, and he sank to his knees.

"Undt now haf I heardt," he repeated brokenly. "Gott sei Dank—Gott sei Dank!"

At this moment there came an interruption in the shape of a jangling of bells, as a temule team drawing a string of wagons halted in front of the door. The dusty teamster—his blacksnake whip around his neck, dismounted from the

wheel-horse and swaggered to the forge.

"Hulloa, Tony," he called cheerily, "did you git them tires set yet?"

Herr Janns had risen to his feet, but his face was still working with emotion, and the teamster's eyes had a glint of curiosity as he looked at the unusual visitor. Then, as the blacksmith made no reply, his curiosity deepened.

"Oh, hell, Tony," he began, when Herr Janns with a wave of his plump be-ringed hand silenced him.

"Mein frient," he said, addressing Tony. "Your voice—it belong to the worldt, but remember, the worldt—it will pay—Ach! yes—it vill pay much money."

The young giant withdrew his fascinated gaze from the speaker's face and looked at the teamster.

"I promised to have 'em done," he muttered in a strange voice. Then he straightened up to his splendid height and seized hold of the bellows' handle. "I'll have them tires ready in half an hour, Ed," he continued, "but it's the—" The rest of the sentence was lost in the roar of the bellows.

There was a look of triumphant joy upon Herr Janns' face as he watched the forge burst into a burning fiery glow. His excitement was subsiding, and once more he began to feel very warm. He was still clutching his palm-leaf fan and handkerchief, and in wiping his moist brow he discovered the absence of his hat. This discovery caused him to run to the door of the smith, and peer eagerly at the station platform. Yes—there it was, and his suit case, too. Blessing the friendly conductor, he trotted across the street and recovered his property.

The blacksmith was putting the finishing touches to the tires when he returned. His black eyes were aflame with the glimpse of the new world that he had caught from Herr Janns' strange words. The last blow struck, he flung his hammer down, and seized hold of the ponderous anvil with a shout that shook the little building. With herculean strength he tore the iron from



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