

OPERA: PROSE POEMS

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THE SPECTACLE

It was the night of his first performance and the audience had arrived. Each of the gentlemen, magnificent in pinstripes and a red silk tie, seemed ready to bare his teeth. And while the men tapped their feet, waiting for a grandiloquent concerto to begin, even the arched brows of the women seemed to threaten. *Yet there is something inherently carnivorous about an audience*, the musician thought as the lights dimmed. He struck the first chord. The ladies, gathering their long blue skirts, were the first to rise.

THE TENOR

It's evenings like these I think he's singing again, all diaphragm and gusto, his arms outstretched with the dark blue notes of *La Bohème*. Even the crystal begins to hum. Yet when the chorus starts up, crooning languidly into the greenish night, a colorless moon hangs speechless in every window. The only sound—a beveled mirror shuddering in its frame. Then the room grows still like a little bell chiming on the hour.

THE ORCHESTRA

My instrument is a splintered viola that no longer sounds. And its strings snapped one by one, curling like vines into the greenish night. When the connoisseur left, with his gold pocket watch and unsightly bifocals, every concerto grew oddly dissonant. Our conductor wanted nothing but to count aloud. The dark blue hall still rings with the sound of his tally, a rapt audience humming along.

HÔTEL DIEU

When the dark green eaves of the opera house loomed above her, the old woman was right to be afraid. Because she had never noticed the hurricane lamps in the windows before, or the way they smoldered in the fog. *And tonight, she thought, my heart will empty out like a bottle of milk and drift away...* An usher waited near the door, grinning in his red velvet suit. The halls behind him were dim and twisted like the neck of a harp.

LES TEMPS MODERNES

Contrabassoons, violincello, sing me to sleep as the opera house begins to crumble. Porous with years, its vaults and beams stand skeletal against a greenish night. And the velvet curtains—wilted like petunias, each gold tassel grown heavy with dust. Since the proprietor took up cabaret, chanting indolently in his pince-nez and dark grey suit, the orchestra pit and its musicians have fallen into disrepair. As the instruments rust, their strings still rattle with *Le Chat Noir*, echoing like a strange cadenza in the empty rooms.