

## THE SINGER

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For a man, he sang remarkably high. It so happened that for this very reason, there were almost no songs for him. He had a very nice voice. People who heard it, could never again forget it.

He gave only a few select performances. Those who had ever heard him sing could consider themselves lucky, belonging to the chosen few.

His singing could not be compared with anything. For this reason, opinions about him were divided. Either one was thoroughly enthusiastic, or one rejected him absolutely. There was no in-between.

For this reason, the singer gave even fewer performances than he possibly could have. The idea that someone could be in the audience who did not love him was intolerable. Such a thought robbed him of sleep. He only still sang at home for the initiated. But he had to make a living as well. He could demand no more money from those who were still admitted to his concerts and with whom he had, in the meantime, become well acquainted. What other choice remained but to continue to give performances at home, and on the side to look around for work.

He was too proud to have asked for advice or sought out help. If his guests wanted to know what he occupied himself with between the rare performances, he said, he was to be found constantly on tour all over the world.

No one doubted that he spoke the truth. Moreover, so that no one became suspicious, he had posters printed of concerts that in fact had never taken place. Japan, America, Australia, Africa, almost no place where he had not yet sung.

Of course, it became unavoidable that the invitees were more and more interested in his extravagant travels. None of them had gotten around as much. The singer had to, at the end of his concerts, begin to recount of this or that trip. Because he quite unexpectedly discovered a real talent for telling stories, this part of the evening became more and more cherished. First he sang, then he told stories.

Soon it occurred to him that more and more guests were coming too late for the concert, but that, as soon as he began telling stories, everyone finally arrived. Thus he had to assume that a process had started that he could no longer stop.

He could no longer sleep. He constantly thought about how he could direct the attention of the women and the men of the audience away from his imaginary trips and back again to his singing. To suddenly refuse to say anything at all had become impossible. His guests would not forgive such a refusal.

Whenever he tossed and turned in bed unable to sleep, he had the feeling that he had betrayed his singing voice. And in fact his voice did itself change. That which he had been successful at doing effortlessly, he could no longer do. Suddenly, his voice rang hollow and sounded foreign to his own ears. He could no longer reach the high notes, his favorites. He, therefore, had to transpose every song into a lower range.

The admirers did not notice. They knew his songs and for some time now had not been listening attentively, and so they did not notice the

difference. To cover what was happening to his voice, he was forced to tell more stories. Yes, he had to make an even greater effort with his storytelling. If his spectators weren't getting their due through his singing, then they should definitely make up the deficit with his stories. Meanwhile, he acquired slides from the library to make his travel lectures all the more striking. That his singing was gradually reduced to just one single song appeared to concern no one.

He had the feeling as if he were on the verge of simply letting a wonderful bird in a golden cage starve to death. This image came to him one night. It seemed to him so fitting that the very next morning he actually purchased an exotic bird and a suitably big cage at a pet store.

"If it cannot be helped that my voice is lacking, at least the bird should not want for anything," he said to himself. The cage with the bird looked exceptionally nice in his music room. Both were befittingly admired by his guests. Of course, the singer had brought the bird back from his last trip. The story was a particular success. The guests applauded with such spirit as had not ever come after one of his songs before.

The one song that remained from his repertoire had itself also become superfluous. He stopped singing, stopped practicing. Something had been irretrievably lost.

He was more relieved than distressed about this. Unable to sing the highest notes, his singing had become rather unremarkable. And he did not want to trouble anyone with something unremarkable. Thankfully, his storytelling offered itself up at the right time to take the place of his singing. He knew that he should count himself among the lucky to have come to the world with two talents, and that there was absolutely no reason for sadness. There were people who had nothing at all.

The question of how he should cover his living costs remained unanswered for the moment.

It was first because of the bird that he came upon the idea of the produce store. To be sure, he had seen and read the sign in the window that they were looking for a produce clerk. He had never felt that this was addressed to him, nor had he ever purchased his produce in this market.

Eloquent, as he had recently become, he knew how to make a good impression. He was hired on the spot.

From that point on, the public evenings in his home became even more colorful. There was a twinkle in his eyes when he gave his lectures, more now than ever before. Among the invitees, some wanted to, just once, experience one of the concert trips. A few spontaneously formed a touring group together. It was already decided who would purchase the airline tickets, who would make the hotel and other arrangements. Appointment books were consulted. The singer was called upon to make known his travel plans.

"After all, you are the most important person in this whole affair," they said. "We must make our arrangements around you."

"I no longer sing," the singer said. To say it, he didn't even need much courage. "In case you should have not yet noticed, I have stopped singing, and you have been witness to the whole thing."

Yes, he went even further. He said that they had been the true catalysts of his loss of voice. But he did not resent them because of it.

The guests could not make sense of anything any more.

How he could say such a thing! Stop singing! With such a voice he

had an obligation to all of mankind. And what then would become of their communal evenings?

"Nothing," the singer said. "It will stay just like before."

"And your stories?"

"Everything as usual," the singer said.

Nonetheless, the acquaintances felt duped. And wrongfully accused.

To be sure, the invitations were sent out for the next evening as they had always been, but almost no one showed up. For the few, who none the less expected a recital, the singer kept it very brief. One trip and just to Italy. Without a twinkle in his eyes. In the middle of everything, he fed the bird and did the dishes from the previous day. Undisturbed, occupied by his own thoughts.

"Unbelievable," said the women and the men of the audience. "It's just like being at home. To leave my own place for this, it's not worth it."

"I agree wholeheartedly," the singer said insolently. He was ready for anything, for any confrontation, for any fight.

It did not come to that. For the acquaintances there was nothing to fight about, only conclusions to be drawn. Relations were totally severed. It didn't matter to him. Not even when his former acquaintances discovered him at the produce market.

„People have to make a living," he said. Maybe they reweighed the items weighed by him when they got home. It wouldn't have surprised him. The thought of it amused him. He took it upon himself to give credence to their suspicions and in the future to actually give them less than they paid for.

This practice made it possible for him to occasionally travel.

He donated the bird to the zoo.

He allowed himself the fun of taking his concert posters from before with him on his trips and hanging them in central locations in cities abroad.