

The Reader of Time: Preparations for O Guarani

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I had fallen asleep the night before with the same anticipation with which I awoke. And no wonder: within a few hours one of the most awaited events of the Court would take place, a matter that seemed to occupy the mind of the whole city — except, by all indications, that of my husband.

"Do you suppose this dress is truly suitable?" I asked, considering myself before the mirror.

Seated in the armchair by the window, he raised his eyes from the newspaper and examined me with astonishment. "And where do you intend to go dressed like that at this hour of the morning?"

"I am only trying the dress on, my dear. I shall not wear it now. It is for this evening."

"For this evening?" he repeated, surprised.

"Do not tell me you have forgotten our engagement!"

"Be so kind as to refresh my memory, for I confess I cannot think of any engagement at all."

"Tonight, at the Teatro Lírico Fluminense, there will be the first performance in Brazil of *O Guarani*, by Carlos Gomes."

"So it is! And on the day we celebrate the Emperor's birthday!"

"I see your memory has awakened at last," I answered, amused.

"How could I forget? The whole city speaks of nothing else."

"And yet my husband forgot."

"It was only a small lapse, my dear. It caught me unawares while I was reading. But of course my lady would never let me forget."

"Indeed I would not! Imagine: a Brazilian composer turning José de Alencar's novel into an opera and conquering the stages of Italy!"

"I read that Carlos Gomes was granted the Order of the Crown of Italy, as a mark of esteem for his musical compositions."

"Why, I did not know of it! It makes me immensely happy to see a talent of ours receive such recognition abroad. Dom Pedro II did very well to support his journey to Europe. And Carlos Gomes has known how to honor that support," I observed.

"I imagine the Emperor's pride at seeing the opera open in Brazil on the day of his birthday. For His Majesty it must be a most beautiful tribute of gratitude."

"Do you know what fascinates me most?"

"What?"

"To think that Peri and Ceci, born in the pages of José de Alencar, will come to life on the stage and sing in Italian. Can you picture the scene?"

"I would rather not picture it. Let us allow Carlos Gomes to surprise us tonight. Has my lady read the novel?"

"But of course! *O Guarani* is one of the most beautiful novels of our national literature. I am eager to see that love story turned into music."

"I believe tonight will be moving for José de Alencar as well."

"And for all of us. Carlos Gomes carried a Brazilian novel to the stage of the Teatro alla Scala. Now he returns consecrated, to be celebrated here, in his own land."

I turned back to the mirror. On the dressing table, beside the gloves and the fan, lay two velvet ribbons: one blue, the other wine-colored. I tried each against my throat.

"Well... which of them should I wear?"

"My dear, either will suit you. With one or the other you will be dazzling. I do not understand the reason for so much concern. It is still morning, and already you think of the evening's attire!"

"How can I not be concerned? We shall celebrate our Emperor's birthday with the work of a Brazilian musician acclaimed in Milan, born of one of the great novels of our literature. Tonight will be memorable! And I wish to be truly dazzling for the occasion."

My husband smiled, folded the newspaper, and set it on the table. "You are right... It seems I too should begin thinking about my attire."

I turned my eyes back to the mirror, still undecided between the two ribbons.

And you, dear reader — have you heard of Carlos Gomes? Then choose your gown and take care not to be late. Tonight the curtain of the Teatro Lírico Fluminense will rise for *O Guarani*. At our next meeting, we shall be there.

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