

When I Was But Ten

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Spoken intro to be used only when this piece is one out of context:

"When I Was But 10" is an outtake from "The Letter." In this scene, cabaret singer Madeleine has just received a letter from a former lover, a letter she's hesitant to open, afraid to rekindle the fire of a painful and hopeless romance, and at the same time immediately full of desire and hope.

Toying with her own emotions - and the envelope - she moves to open it, then stops, and lectures herself by pretending to narrate her own situation as if she were a bad combination True-Romance novel and Self-Help guru. This is spoken.

MADELEINE:

(Melodramatically, as if she's the narrator of a bad romance novel-turned TV special)

This is a crucial moment in the plot!

Struck by passion, our heroine must re-examine her values.

Isn't what she sees in this man only a reflection of her own fantasies, only another diversion from the *real* business of life?

Merely another trick of fate to steer her from the artistic path she longs to pursue ... or is this the real love of her life??

I doubt it.

The chances are a million to one that this is just another act of personal sabotage.

But there's that one in a million chance that it's the *real thing!*

Can she afford not to take that chance? Is she strong enough to resist?

Or more to the point ... is she strong enough *not to resist??*

For that is a woman's *true* strength after all, isn't it?

By all rights she shouldn't hesitate! She should say: "There it is!!! Whatever it is, I want it!!!"

But Hark! What light in yonder window flickers and fails ...

For though our heroine is a woman: ruled by passion, a servant to love, a slave to romance ...

she's not completely stupid! And unlike Pavlov's Dogs, she remembers the trials of the past and seeks not to repeat them.

(Turning to the audience) Oh - but ... you don't know that past, do you? Well, let me fill you in:

When I was but then, I decided my fate:

I'd decided I was destined to dance in the halls of the truly great.

I finagled from my parents and got what I felt was my due:

A pair of silky, shiny ballet slippers (the ones with the hard toes), and a pink frilly tu-tu.

I donned them with diligence, struck up a pose
Enraptured, I practiced extending my toes.
I was clearly a natural, so everyone said,
So I enrolled in Miss Sindly's Dance-o-Rama, co-ed.

Well, after about a year at Miss Snidley's after school,
I fell madly in love with a tap dancing fool (who also attended)
It was futile, a hopeless romance from the start,
On account of Virginia Snaigleweiler, that baton-twirling, luxuriously thick curly-blond, dimple-
faced little .. tart
Having stolen his heart.

Still, I thought of him constantly, in despair
'Til the thought of him oozed from my skin, from the palms of my hands, from my own flaccid,
scraggly, mousy-colored hair
Though he spurned me, he filled every dream, every place in my heart and my mind,
I thought only of him. To the rest of the world, I was blind.

Finally, one day, in a moment of passion... To gain his attention
I climbed to the top of the light pole suspension.
And then, with a cry full of anguish and grief,
I leapt in the air, did a perfectly executed double pirouette, spread eagle and touched my toes,
and in the middle of a brilliant somersault-and-a-half, landed at his feet.

It was truly a spectacle ... and he noted every action.
And later, he visited me ... in traction.
It wasn't so bad, I was good as new in a year.
But it did end my dancing career.

By the time I was fourteen, I'd made my decision.
The life of a concert pianist was my ultimate vision.
I practiced prodigiously every day.
I had talent and great sensitivity, so they would say.

I was clearly so gifted, so steady of hand,
That my parents finally mortgaged the house for the down-payment on a Steinway Baby Grand.

For two years, how I practiced! Why, I barely slept!
My teachers were raving. They beamed and they wept!
"Sucha beautiful phrasing, such sweeta clari-tone!"
And right then, I met Rudy, the Italian baritone.

I accompanied him for his solos in church.
He sang just like a little bird sings up on his little perch. Only he so was much bigger.
Anyway, we practiced each week, Wednesday's all afternoon.
And I truly knew love as he'd warble and croon.

Though he paid no attention to all my desire,
Though he failed to be won by my artistic fire,
Though my glances he'd parry, my advances ignore,
I dunno ... I kinda think that actually made me play better somehow ... and want him all the
more.

One day, while rehearsing, some time mid-July
He had gotten quite heated from singing so high,
So I brought a huge jar of sweet lemonade in,
Poured a glass for myself, and another for him.

Then I place the jar down on the top of the piano,
And lovingly gazed up at Rudy Luciano,
Who looked down at me with a soft, sexy sneer and said,
"Let's go through it again, now that you're here ... this time, with feeling."

I was trembling with passion, I started the intro
I was sure something grand was about to begin, though I wasn't sure what,
But I'd not long to wait,
It was clear from the very first note that the singer was Fate.

I have never heard anyone sing as he sang,
With such passion, the chandelier trembled and rang,
And just as he reached the climactical note,
With a brilliant, sweeping gesture redolent of Caruso in his most passionate prime,
Rudy swept back his arm, knocking the lemonade neatly into the soundboard of my priceless
Steinway thus creating the one and only time that anyone ever played a chord know as D
Float Major.

Well ... he said he was sorry, he felt like a louse,
Course we lost the piano ... and also the house,
And that was the last song of Rudy's I'd hear,
And the end of my concert career.

By the time I was thirty ... well, why list each one,
Every passion I followed just left me undone.
As if I had a magnet to draw just those men near:
Who were most perfectly capable of ruining my career.

Oh, I tried to figure it out – but it was tough,
Was I too willing a victim? Not aggressive enough?
One day I'd be sure I demanded too much,
The next day too little. Then I simply gave up.

I started to sing in a small cabaret
An elite clientele, hidden, out of the way,
It was my place for *me*, where I'd make my own way,
Someplace I could be free – say what *I* had to say.

And by 31 I had it under control.
Through with love, I was focused on *me*, on a roll.
Tasting my own success, in my own little way.
No more hungry for love, I was hungry to say:

"I am fine by myself
I am deeply all right."
And I was.
'Til one day ... or, more to the point, 'til one night ...