

THE MAKROPULOS CASE

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Act I: The office of the lawyer Kolenaty, Prague, 1922. Vítek, a clerk, hunting through some old files, notes that the case of Gregor v. Prus, which has been revived, dates back almost a century. Albert Gregor, an interested party in the case, inquires how it is going; Kolenaty has taken it to the supreme court but has not yet returned. Vítek's daughter, Kristina, a young singer, runs in, babbling enthusiastically about Emilia Marty, a soprano with whom she (in a bit part) has been rehearsing at the opera. To her surprise, Marty appears at the door, shown in by Kolenaty. The diva inquires about the Gregor case and, learning that Albert Gregor is one of the parties, says he might as well stay. In 1827, Kolenaty explains, Baron Ferdinand Josef Prus died without will or heirs, whereupon a certain Ferdinand Gregor laid claim to his estate, saying Prus had promised it to him verbally; Prus' cousin contested this. Marty interrupts to say that Ferdinand was really the baron's illegitimate son by an opera singer, Ellian MacGregor. When Kolenaty says the current Gregor is about to lose the case for lack of evidence, Marty asks what he would need to win. A will, says Kolenaty. Marty then describes a cupboard in the Prus house where this and other documents were kept. Kolenaty thinks she is making it up, but Gregor insists that Kolenaty investigate. Fascinated with Marty, Gregor converses with her after the lawyer leaves. He tells her he has counted on the inheritance and would shoot himself if he lost the case. Though she brushes aside Gregor's infatuation, she nevertheless tries to enlist his help in getting certain documents that she feels sure will be found with the will. Kolenaty reappears, this time with his adversary, the aristocratic Jaroslav Prus. The will was found where Marty said it would be; Prus congratulates Gregor on the victory that will be his - if evidence can be found that the illegitimate Ferdinand was indisputably Ferdinand Gregor. Marty says she will provide this proof.

Act II: On the empty stage at the opera house, a Stagehand and Cleaning Woman discuss Marty's glamour and the success of her performance. Prus enters in search of Marty, followed by his son, Janek, and Kristina. The diva enters, contemptuous of everyone - first of the tongue-tied Janek, who immediately falls under her spell, then of Gregor, who arrives with flowers that she reminds him he cannot afford. Her mood softens when a feebleminded old man, Hauk-Sendorf, wanders in, babbling about Eugenia, a Gypsy he loved fifty years ago. Assuring him that Eugenia is not dead, Marty asks him in Spanish for a kiss, calling him by the nickname Maxi. When the others leave, Prus stays to question Marty about Ellian MacGregor, whose love letters he has read, and who he suspects may have been the "Elina Makropulos" (same initials) specified on Ferdinand's birth certificate as the mother. Since illegitimate children bore the mother's name, a descendant of "Ferdinand Makropulos" would have to be found; otherwise the estate would remain in Prus' hands. Marty offers to pay for an unopened envelope that Prus found with the other papers, but he refuses and leaves, feeling triumphant. Gregor reenters and tells the exhausted Marty he loves her desperately; her response is to doze off, at which he too leaves. She awakens to find Janek standing there and asks him, as a favor, to get her the envelope marked "To be handed to my son Ferdinand," which is in his father's house. Prus overhears and sends Janek away. Then he agrees to give Marty the envelope if she will spend the night with him.

Act III: The next morning, in Marty's hotel room, Prus gives her the envelope but feels cheated by her coldness as a lover. A maid announces there is a message for Prus downstairs, then starts to fix Marty's hair. When Prus returns, he says that Janek has just killed himself because of his hopeless infatuation with Marty. The diva's unconcerned response infuriates Prus, but they are interrupted by Hauk-Sendorf, who thinks he and Marty are about to leave for Spain. She humors him, really wanting to leave, but soon Gregor appears, accompanied by Kolenaty, Kristina and a

doctor who leads Hauk-Sendorf away. Kolenaty has noticed the similarity between Marty's autograph and the writing on a document signed "Ellian MacGregor"; he suspects her of forgery. Since she is uncooperative, the others search her papers. When she pulls a revolver, Gregor knocks it from her hand. Changing her tack, Marty says she will talk to them after she gets dressed. While she is in the next room, they continue searching her effects, finding evidence of various pseudonyms, all with the initials "E.M." Prus confirms that Elina Makropulos' writing is identical to Ellian MacGregor's. Marty returns with a bottle and a glass and wearily confesses that she was born Elina Makropulos in Crete in 1575 - which she corrects to 1585, making her 337 years old. Her father, Hieronymos, was court physician to Rudolf I (who ruled in Bohemia from 1576 to 1612). Ordered by his master to develop an elixir of eternal life, the alchemist tried it on his sixteen-year-old daughter; when she fell into a coma, he was imprisoned as a fraud, but shortly afterward the girl recovered and escaped. Some years later, she gave the formula to her lover Baron Prus; she also bore him a son, which makes her Albert Gregor's grandmother several times over. Since the formula is good for only 300 years, she now needs to recover it in order to survive. Life having lost its meaning for her, however, she feels ready to die. At first no one believes her story, but little by little they realize it must be true. Life should not last too long, she says - that way it keeps its value. She offers the formula (which was in the mysterious sealed envelope) to anyone who wants it, but no one will touch it - except Kristina, who sets fire to it with a candle. Muttering "Pater hemon," the first words of the Lord's Prayer in Greek, Marty sinks lifeless to the floor.