

Tucholsky Wagner Zola Scott  
Turgenev Wallace Fonatne Sydon Freud Schlegel  
Twain Walther von der Vogelweide Fouqué Friedrich II. von Preußen  
Weber Freiligrath Frey  
Fechner Fichte Weiße Rose von Fallersleben Kant Ernst Richthofen Frommel  
Engels Fielding Hölderlin Eichendorff Tacitus Dumas  
Fehrs Faber Flaubert Eliasberg Eliot Zweig Ebner Eschenbach  
Feuerbach Maximilian I. von Habsburg Fock Ewald Vergil  
Goethe Elisabeth von Österreich London  
Mendelssohn Balzac Shakespeare Lichtenberg Rathenau Dostojewski Ganghofer  
Trackl Stevenson Lenz Hambrecht Doyle Gjellerup  
Mommsen Thoma Tolstoi Hanrieder Droste-Hülshoff  
Dach Thoma Verne Hägele Hauptmann Humboldt  
Karrillon Reuter Rousseau Hagen Hauff Baudelaire Gautier  
Garschin Defoe Hebbel Hegel Kussmaul Herder  
Damaschke Descartes Schopenhauer Bebel Proust  
Wolfram von Eschenbach Darwin Dickens Grimm Jerome Rilke George  
Bronner Campe Horváth Aristoteles Voltaire Federer Herodot  
Bismarck Vigny Gengenbach Barlach Heine Grillparzer Georgy  
Storm Casanova Lessing Langbein Gilm Gryphius  
Chamberlain Schiller Lafontaine Iffland Sokrates  
Brentano Strachwitz Katharina II. von Rußland Bellamy Schilling Kralik Gibbon Tschchow  
Löns Hesse Hoffmann Gogol Wilde Gleim Vulpius  
Luther Heym Hofmannsthal Klee Hölty Morgenstern Goedicke  
Roth Heyse Klopstock Puschkin Homer Kleist Mörike Musil  
Luxemburg La Roche Horaz Kraus  
Machiavelli Kierkegaard Kraft Kraus  
Navarra Aurel Musset Lamprecht Kind Kirchhoff Hugo Moltke  
Nestroy Marie de France  
Nietzsche Nansen Laotse Ipsen Liebknecht Ringelnatz  
Marx Lassalle Gorki Klett Leibniz  
von Ossietzky May vom Stein Lawrence Irving  
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# **The First Soprano**

Mary Hitchcock

# Imprint

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## CHAPTER I

### IN THE CHURCH

It was Sunday morning in a church at New Laodicea. The bell had ceased pealing and the great organ began its prelude with deep bass notes that vibrated through the stately building. The members of the choir were all in their places in the rear gallery, and prepared in order their music in the racks before them. Below the worshipers poured in steady, quiet streams down the carpeted aisles to their places, and there was a gentle murmur of silk as ladies settled in their pews and bowed their heads for the conventional moment of prayer. Exquisitely stained windows challenged the too garish daylight, but permitted to enter subdued rays in azure, violet and crimson tints which fell athwart the eastern pews and garnished the marble font and the finely carved pulpit. They fell upon the silvering hair of the Reverend Doctor Schoolman as he pronounced the invocation and read the opening hymn, but they failed to reach the young stranger, seated behind, who accompanied him this morning.

Faultlessly in their usual current ran the services until the time for the anthem by the choir, and then the people settled themselves comfortably in their pews with expectant faces and ears slightly turned to catch every strain from the well-trained voices in the gallery behind. This time the selection was from Mendelssohn and a soprano voice began alone:

"Oh, for the wings, for the wings of a dove!  
Far away, far away would I rove!"

Clear, pure and true, the sweet voice floated through the church. With dramatic sympathy it yielded to the spirit of the melody and the pathos of the words. It touched hearts with a sense of undefined sorrow and longing. Madame Chapeau, the French milliner, who rented a sitting in the church of her patrons, sat with eyes filled with

tears that threatened to plough pale furrows through the roses of her cheeks.

"In the wilderness build me a nest,"

suggested the sweet voice. Two weeks in a lonely country place had been far too long the summer before for Madame, and a wilderness was the last place she desired. But the plaintive song touched a sentimental chord and answered every purpose. Mr. Stockman, who sat midway of the center aisle, grasping his gold-headed cane, suffered the keen business lines of his face to relax and looked palpably pleased. He recalled the money contributed to the expense of the choir, and reflected that he would not withdraw a dollar of it. To be sure, he remembered that the services of this soprano, daughter of Robert Gray, the iron merchant and elder of the church, were gratuitous; but still he was glad to associate the thought of his money with the choir that could render such music. And presently the chorus joined in the song, and many voices added their harmony, to the increasing passion of the cry:

"In the wilderness build me a nest,  
And remain there forever at rest!"

Sensitive souls thrilled to the music, which unquestionably always added the capstone to the aesthetic enjoyment of this, the most elegant church at New Laodicea. The minister sat with a studied expression of approbation and subdued enjoyment. The young stranger at his side sat with eyes shaded by his hand.

The choir seated themselves with pleased relief, for there had been no noticeable flaw in the production. The leader's sensitive face looked as nearly satisfied as it ever became over any performance. The organist slid off his bench and dropped into his chair to listen to the sermon—or, perhaps not to listen. But he had done his part well, faithfully filling in all the interstices of time between numbers of the program, so that the congregation had been bored by no moments of silence nor thrust back upon the necessity of meditation.

There were a few words of introduction, and it was found that the stranger was to speak. He was just a trifle surprising in appearance,

for his coat had no ministerial cut, and was even a bit more suggestive of business than of the profession of divinity. But he was soon forgiven this; for his voice was even and pleasant, and he looked at his congregation with a pair of frank blue eyes, while he spoke with the simplicity of a man who has somewhat to say to his fellowmen and says it honestly. His text excited no curiosity, for it was this: "*The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth.*"

In the choir Miss Winifred Gray had composed herself to listen. Fortunately she was at the rear of her admiring hearers and had not to confront their faces as she sat down. She had enjoyed her part exceedingly. She loved her music, and the greater its pathos the keener her enjoyment in rendering it. There was a subtle sense of power, too, which she did not analyze, in moving a whole congregation to admiration and sympathy. With her whole heart she had entered into her musical work, in which the church divided attention with the drawing-room and an occasional concert. She sat now in pleased triumph and had no ears for the opening words of the young man's sermon. But it dawned upon her gradually that he was speaking from the words, "in spirit and in truth." He spoke of the former worship which dealt with externals of place and method—with "carnal ordinances imposed until a time of reformation"; and then of a new era of worship which Christ had brought in, wherein true worshipers draw nigh to God, not with sensuous offerings, but "in spirit and in truth."

Winifred could not follow all that he said, for it seemed a new and strange language for the most part, but she gathered this: that somehow Christ had opened the way for all believers into the very spiritual presence of God, into a holy place not made with hands (and the more real because it was not, being God-made and eternal), and that there worshipers stood before eyes of perfect discernment, unclothed by outward semblance, and offered "spiritual sacrifices" unto Him. It was a beautiful picture, but awful. Winifred shuddered as she thought of the august Presence that inhabited the Holiest of All that the minister spoke of, and wondered if she would dare approach it. To stand in naked spirit before eyes of flame and to be read through and through, daring to speak no unmeant word, but only that which the heart designed, in absolute sincerity! Was wor-

ship in spirit such a real thing as that? Was she a true worshiper? Why was she there that morning? She glanced about the building, with its arches and columns, its stained windows, and almost perfect arrangement of form and color. But the minister was saying:

"This material structure is not the house of God. No longer is God localized to our faith as in the days of symbol and shadow, when surely Jerusalem was 'the place where men ought to worship.' For the symbol has given place to the 'truth,' and in that, 'in spirit,' men worship. But while in every place, or, better still, without reference to place—'neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem'—true worshippers shall find Him, still His spiritual people form a temple for His manifestation, wherever they are gathered, and there is He. 'In the midst' He takes His rightful place, and that place we must accord Him—the center of our heart's attention and worship."

Winifred resumed her question. Why had she come? Was it to meet that One, to gaze in spirit upon His pierced hands and side, as the minister was saying, and to rejoice in Him as the risen Lord? She did not quite know what he meant. She went back over the morning's experience, beginning with her dressing-room, when before her mirror she donned her new and very pretty silk dress and arranged all her faultless toilet, adjusting the modish hat that became so well her own type of beauty, fitted on the fresh, dainty gloves that should clasp her beloved music when she should open her throat and sing like a glad bird, delighting in its song, however plaintive. And then she had gone. Had she thought of Him in all this? Winifred's honest soul said, No. But church? She had thought of "church," with all that it stood for of building, and congregation, and set order of things, and there had been a sort of subconscious satisfaction in the fact that going to church was a religious thing to do, and that to sing in the choir (especially for no pay, as she did) was very meritorious. But was it so?

The minister was saying:

"If worship is not sincere, it becomes, spiritually, an abomination. If, for instance, our singing, instead of being a true sacrifice of praise to God degenerates into the sensuous enjoyment of a 'concourse of sweet sounds,' it is no longer worship, and it is not even an innocent employment. However fine it may be as a musical entertainment, if

offered as a *substitute for worship* it may be likened to the offering of 'strange fire,' which met such instant judgment in the time of Moses."

Winifred winced under the clear, bold words. There was a little well-bred stir in the congregation. Doctor Schoolman's disciplined countenance betrayed a startled moment and then relapsed into an expression of bland, but non-committal interest. Winifred glanced about to see how her neighbors were taking it. She looked first at George Frothingham, for he and she were unusually good friends. His handsome face showed only abstraction, and she knew he had not heard a word that was said. She glanced warily back toward the organ and saw the player in his chair, but he was indulging in a few winks of sleep. His duties at the theater the night before had illy prepared him for very wakeful attention to the sermon, and other influences were telling upon him, too, for the man of music knew the taste of wines. The leader of the choir was listening. His penetrating eyes were fixed upon the calm-faced man in the pulpit, and an unconscious scowl bent his dark brows. Yet it was not an angry frown, but simply intent. He looked half defensive, half convicted.

The minister went on:

"I fear that this is an unusual way of looking at it, and that we are all too accustomed to pass unchallenged our professed worship. Vice may be so habitual and under such common sanction as to be mistaken for virtue. But surely in the most vital matter of our intercourse with God we do well to let every act be tested by the truth. It shall be so tested eventually, whether we will or no; and even now in the midst of the churches the Son of Man is walking, still with eyes of flame, and still He is saying: 'I know thy works.'"

Winifred's next excursion in thought away from the sermon led her to review her part of the morning program, and she wondered if the minister thought of it too. The hymns?—she had forgotten what they were. But the anthem—was it unto the Lord she sang her part? Was there an atom of sincerity in the sentiment she sang? The words were from a Psalm, she thought, and she did not really understand what David meant. Had she any clearer ideas as to what Winifred Gray might mean? She surely did not wish the wings of a dove, literally, nor to fly away into the wilderness. She loved her

home and many friends and had no desire to escape from them or her surroundings. If it meant to fly away to heaven—? Surely she did not wish that! The world and "the things that are in the world" were very attractive to the young soprano. She had no wish for heaven save as an alternative from hell. What did it mean? Was it a heart-rest that David longed for? But she had been conscious of no unrest—until just now. Honestly, the truth was that she had not meant anything! Was it worship? But her friends would tell her she sang it with feeling, she argued defensively, and then asked herself candidly, what sort of feeling? She had sung Mignon's song with equal sympathy the night before. She confessed the truth; it was dramatic instinct that led her in both songs, and the Spirit of God in neither.

"I am a hypocrite," she cried within herself, "and no true worshiper!"

Then she thought of the positive side of her action. While there was no offering to God, she had received in her own heart the subtle incense of the people's praise. Enveloped in its cloud she had sat until the sermon disturbed her. She wished the young stranger had not come to preach. Doctor Schoolman's sermons were nice, and learned, and elevating, and never gave her such uncomfortable thoughts! Had he preached this morning all might have gone on as before so pleasantly.

And now?—should it not go on? Could she think for a moment of stopping it all? Impossible! But to go on with it was—"abomination!" That was what the preacher said. Perhaps he was wrong, or she misunderstood. Doctor Schoolman would know. But what said her own conscience? After all, she knew the battle must be fought out there. Was it not sin to take sacred words on her lips and not mean them? How many times had she taken God's name in vain, pouring out pretended invocation to Him, while her heart addressed only the congregation for their approval! But it had been so thoughtless! He would surely forgive. But now she had thought about it, and it could never be the same again.

By this time Winifred was thoroughly miserable. She pondered over and again what she should do, at times in imagination resigning her position in the choir; then saying:

"Impossible! It is absurd! Who ever heard of its being wicked to sing in the choir? How could I explain myself?"

Then she reflected that she would study to be earnest, that she would school herself to think of Him and sing to Him. She took her hymn-book and found the place of the last hymn, resolved to put sincerity in practice at once. It was chosen, without reference to the unexpected sermon, and was the well-known psalm of love and longing which earnest souls have sung for many years:

"For thee, O dear, dear country,  
Mine eyes their vigils keep;  
For very love, beholding  
Thy happy name they weep.  
The mention of Thy glory  
Is unction to the breast,  
And medicine in sickness,  
And love, and life, and rest."

"I cannot sing it!" Winifred almost sobbed to herself. "It is not true—to me."

Then she read on. Before, she would have been carried away with the rhythm and the graceful thought. But now as she read:

"Oh, sweet and blessed country That eager hearts expect!"

"It's not true—it's not true!" she thought. "I cannot sing these songs. I know nothing of their sentiment. I am not a true worshiper of the Father. I do not believe I know Him!"

Then Winifred covered her eyes with her hand. "'Thou desirest truth in the inward parts,'" the preacher was quoting.

The words sent a pang through her heart. "God has found no truth in me," she thought, "I have been a lie."

Then she sat in wretchedness, fighting back the tears that struggled to escape—tears of shame, remorse, wounded self-love, and grief that her favorite idol, a god whom she did know and had served well, was to be taken down from its niche in the house of the Lord and cast out. She heard little of the remainder of the sermon, and what she heard added to her misery; for it told of the joy of true

worshippers when at last they should stand face to face with Him whom, having not seen, they love, —

"All rapture through and through  
In God's most holy sight."

The sense of isolation, of exclusion from it all, was very painful; and Winifred did not know that this very knowledge of exclusion, and its grief, were harbingers of eternally better things. She stood with the others as they sang the closing hymn, and her own silence was unobserved, as she did not always join the chorus. She had recovered her composure by the time the benediction was pronounced and the organ was yielding an unusually lively postlude to whose strains she and George Frothingham descended the stairs together.

"The old chap is almost waltzing us out to-day," that gentleman remarked, referring to the organist. "Winifred, you outdid yourself to-day on that lovely thing."

Winifred smiled faintly. "Did you hear the sermon to-day, George?" she asked.

"Did I hear it? Well, that's good. Do I hear sermons when I go to church? But I confess to a little absentmindedness; not to equal that of our friend at the organ, however," and George laughed. Then he caught sight of a group of people in the vestibule below and exclaimed:

"Hello! There's your father and the preacher! I believe he is going to take him home to dinner. Don't look for me under your hospitable roof to-day, Winifred."

"Why?" she began.

"I have no taste for parsons. He'll talk the backs off the chairs. See if he doesn't. Good-by." And the young man strode carelessly away.

Winifred joined her mother in the vestibule, and they held a whispered consultation as to the probabilities of the young minis-

ter's going home with them. It seemed evident that Mr. Gray had taken him captive.

"Take him in the carriage and let me walk, mother," Winifred said, "I would much rather." So she slipped away and did not meet the minister until dinner.

Hubert Gray, Winifred's only brother, had also been at church that morning. This was somewhat unusual, for Hubert was a sceptic, and he did not like to appear what he was not. But occasionally he went to hear what might be said and turn it over in his questioning brain. He was a young man of strong aversions, and one of his special dislikes happened to be the unfortunate Doctor Schoolman.

"I hate cant," he declared. "His very tones are studied and unnatural. His voice quavers to order, and if I should see tears on his face I should think he had pumped them up somehow for effect. I don't like to be practiced on. I should like a man to believe something earnestly and say it honestly."

And so he stayed away for the most part, but like many a man who is a sceptic, found that the subject of the Christ would not go down, and he could not let it alone. So after absences he would go again to hear, though it should be only to gain fresh occasion for his doubts or cynical criticisms. To-day he was the first to arrive at home and met Winifred in the hall as she came in.

"The spiritual priesthood did very well to-day, Winnie," he said, by way of greeting. "I hope you all sang 'with grace in your hearts unto the Lord.' I am sure Frothingham did. I saw him—eh, Winnie, what's the matter?"

For Winifred had turned a quivering face toward her brother.

"I didn't, Hubert," she said. "There was no grace in my heart." And then she hastened up the stairs to her room.

"Hm-m!" said Hubert reflectively, and repeated the observation at intervals until dinner was served.



## CHAPTER II

### THE HOUSE OF GRAY

The family gathered for dinner with its usual decorum. Winifred sat opposite the young minister, and Hubert was beside him. Mr. Robert

Gray carved the turkey with his usual skill and the sharpest of knives.

He began his anticipated discussion with the preacher:

"Your sermon fitted pretty closely to-day, Mr. Bond," he said, as he separated a joint successfully.

"Did it really?" said Mr. Bond, with a smile that lit up a singularly pleasant face. "I am glad to hear it. That is what sermons are for, I believe?"

"Just so," said Mr. Gray, and he added with a little chuckle of enjoyment, "I like it—I like it. We need it, I assure you. There is no question about that. Why, Winnie, not a bit of the fowl? You are losing your appetite, child. Yes, sir, we need to be stirred up. If there is anything I believe in, it is sincerity. But now, don't you think, Mr. Bond, that you put it just a little grain too stiff?"

"In what way, Mr. Gray?"

"Well, now, I say the Apostles' Creed. I know it by heart. I don't know how many hundreds of times I have said it. It says itself. Perhaps that is why I don't always stop to think what it does say. But I do not suppose there is a word in it that I do not believe. Now if my mind happens to wander while I am, saying it—if it happens, mind you—"

"Father, Julia is waiting for Mr. Bond's plate," interposed Mrs. Gray softly from the other end of the table.

"I beg your pardon." Then, as the delinquent plate went to its destination, "If my mind happens to wander to some little matter of

business, or something or other, while I say the Creed—*am I a hypocrite?*"

The merchant propounded the question with a note of triumph, as though the bold-spoken minister were rather cornered now. Mr. Bond answered respectfully, but with subdued amusement:

"I think, Mr. Gray, that the Lord would recognize the absence of insincere intent, but that so far as worship goes, you might as well set some Tibetan prayer-wheels going."

A gleam of enjoyment shot from Hubert's eyes, and a laugh almost escaped him.

"Ah, just so—just so!" said Mr. Gray, a little discomfited. "But would it be better not to say it?"

"It would be better to mean it," said Mr. Bond.

"He parries well," thought Hubert.

"Winifred," said Mrs. Gray, off whose smooth nature these discussions rolled harmlessly, "the music was very fine this morning."

Winifred, who would have preferred almost any subject to this, cast an appealing glance at her mother, but it was unheeded. She had hoped Mr. Bond would not recognize her as the singer.

Mrs. Gray went on: "Mrs. Butterworth, who sits just the other side of the partition from us, you know, was quite carried away. She looked volumes at me, but she just whispered 'heavenly!' She said after church she hoped you would come to her party next week and bring your songs. You have such a gift, she said."

And Mrs. Gray herself sighed religiously at the thought of Winnie's "gift." Winnie could have sighed, too, but it was with torture.

Mrs. Gray was a comfortable lady, absorbed in the quiet machinery of a conventionally proper life. She loved her family, her church, and a moderate amount of society. She loved things. Quiet satisfaction beamed from the gentle eyes on the choice silver of the dining-room, on her blue antique china, on the costly, tasteful accessories of the drawing-room, and, indeed, on all the well chosen appointments of the quietly elegant home. Interest in her own person and its adornment had been gradually diverted toward Winifred, whose

beauty, grace of manner, and accomplishments, were an unfailing joy. Now she sighed in quiet gratitude to the vague deity known as Providence for Winifred's peculiarly sweet gift. As to the sermon of the morning, she was one of those hearers in whose mind a sermon and its application do not necessarily go together.

Winifred felt two pairs of eyes upon her from across the table as her mother talked to her in a voice not intended to interrupt the gentlemen in their conversation. There were Hubert's eyes of darker brown than her own and very searching, and the preacher's blue eyes that looked inquiringly through rimless eye-glasses. She could think of no answer to her mother, and so bent her eyes silently upon her plate, while a flush rose to her temples. Mrs. Butterworth's rapturous "heavenly" was in strong contrast to the conviction of godless insincerity which filled her own heart.

Mercifully to her embarrassment her father began again:

"But do you not think, Mr. Bond, that we must take things as they are? Granted that there is a great deal of unreality in the church, what are we going to do about it? Can one man who sees the point work a revolution in the whole church? Must we not just take conditions as they are and make the best of them?"

"Perhaps we may not hope to revolutionize a whole church," replied Mr. Bond, "but," and his face grew stern with an expression that told of a battlefield already fought for and won, "he may refuse to add one unit to the aggregation of untrue worshipers, or to uphold an organized system of unreality. I sometimes fear, Mr. Gray," and there was a ring of sadness in his voice, "that we too readily take conditions as they are, and make the worst of them!"

"Yes, I am afraid you are right—you are right," said the merchant slowly. Then he added, "but so far you have given us only a negative remedy. My son here could go so far with you. He washes his hands of the whole matter."

Mr. Bond turned to Hubert inquiringly.

"Really?" he questioned.

"Yes," said Hubert, thus thrust unwillingly into the discussion, "I am no worshiper at all."

"And may I ask why?" queried Mr. Bond.

"Your book says that whoever comes to God must believe that He is, and that He rewards those who seek Him. I am not sure of either proposition, and so I do not pretend to come to Him."

The frank eyes looked through the eyeglasses pleasantly. "Are you sure of the contrary?" he asked.

"No," said Hubert honestly.

"Admitting the supposition that He is, and is a rewarder of them that seek Him, does it cover the ground of responsibility to ignore Him because you are not sure?"

"Perhaps not," said Hubert. "But," he added doggedly, "if He is, and wishes to be known and worshiped, He ought to be demonstrable."

Mrs. Gray looked a little frightened. She never liked to hear Hubert talk about those things, and it was so mortifying to have him take such a stand against the church and everything everybody—at least most respectable people—believed. She was sure he was saying something dreadful now. Mr. Gray looked apprehensive, too. Winifred's self-revelation of the morning made her feel like casting no stones at her brother.

Mr. Bond looked at Hubert mildly.

"I think you are quite right," he said.

Here the discussion seemed to end. Hubert could make no reply to the man who agreed with him. An instinct to fight for his position had sprung up, but he was disarmed by Mr. Bond's assent to his proposition. He was not accustomed to being met like that. His father's loyal policy had been to protect his household from infidel talk, and he had not taken too much pains to ascertain his son's point of view, and if possible, to lead him from it into light. Hubert had found some Christian people ready to argue with him who would admit no position he held, however logical, believing that every arrow from the sceptic's quiver must be a poisoned one. He withdrew in bitterness from such encounters. To-day Mr. Bond's honest sympathy with his outspoken conviction found a sensitive chord in the young man's stout-seeming heart.