

The Nightingale

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The mechanical bird covered with diamonds, sings only waltzes until the insides give way, and the sound of his craft is crowing. Whether or not (my Ladies and Gentlemen, and the Emperor above all) the mood is coquetry, gurgling as if their mouths held sweet water, cheesemongers, chambermaids and courtiers, lackeys and the Duchess, all try for a nightingale, and the Chief Imperial Singer of The Bed Chamber.

The bird, wound-up, wags its tail and sounds the same tune (decided beforehand) times over, and the moment of a thousand gold lamps, where the walls and the floor are made of china is recompense for the title of "Cook." Even the Emperor's heart is on the left side.

The writers of books insist the Black Art untrue, but the kitchen maid waiting in the outside world where the garden ends, finds the cow's bellow gracious, and frogs croaking in the marsh are church bells. She dallies for tickets to the Court Festival to see the Emperor dining, and the ZI-ZI-BI of the Music Master charms the evil away though he fix on her the great hollows of his eyes, and jewels glare.

In the woods blue by the bay, a small gray bird among branches believes all that is written, watching maids and their men grow merry on tea, their forefingers in the air as they dance.

"Though I live alone,
My song is not stone,
Neither rubies, diamonds, nor pearls,
And the world is a place.
There the actual grace
Will tolerate waltzes and whirls.
Where the loud drums sound,
Both upstairs and down,
The sword strikes, the gold banner flies,
But porcelain takes care,
I sing as I dare,
And tears are in the Emperor's eyes."