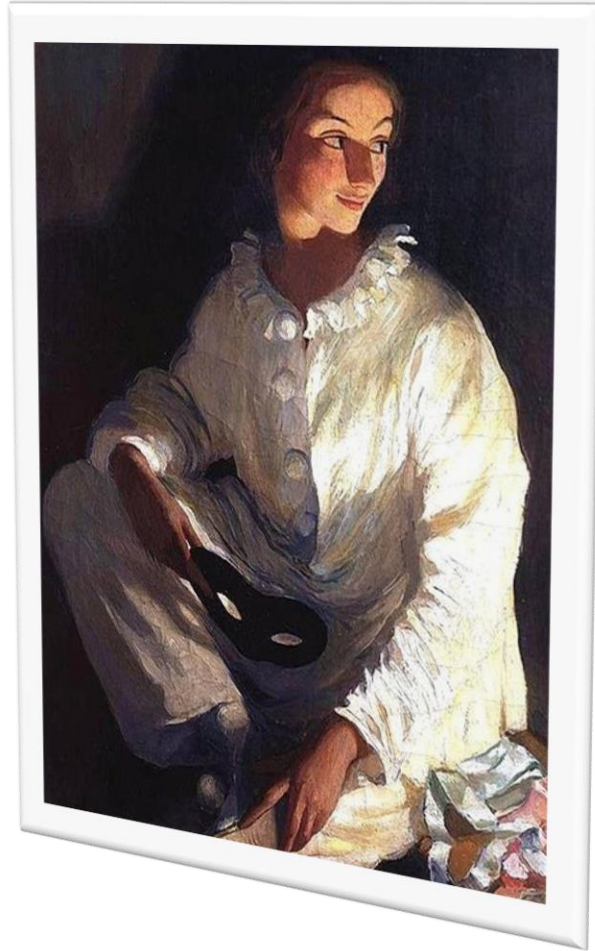


# **MISSING PERSONA**

**By Jerold London**

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**[jlondon@deepweaversfaith.com](mailto:jlondon@deepweaversfaith.com)**



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**Ah broken is the golden bowl! the spirit flown forever!**  
– Edgar Allan Poe, *Lenore*

## **MISSING PERSONA**

### **TIME AND PLACE**

Present. At center stage is the closed door of Julia's apartment.  
First performed at The Magnetic Theatre, Asheville, NC on August 4, 2023.  
Directed by Stephanie Kleshinski.

### **CHARACTERS**

AUSTIN, 20s. (Zac Hamrick played Austin in the premier.)

JULIA, 20s. (Mary Weisgerber played Julia in the premier.)

... in the dialogue indicates a thoughtful break.

**AUSTIN enters, stage left.**

**AUSTIN**

Julia was here with me, once, at the beginning.  
And she cared for me.  
I truly believe that, no matter what's happened....  
Jesus H. Christ, it's been two years! And no word.  
I told the police, of course. And the FBI. But there's no trace of her.

**Walking across to the door.**

I met Julia  
If that was actually her name  
At Starbucks, reading.  
She read a lot. That's *one thing* I know about her.  
When they went into her apartment about all that was left were a few books:

bel canto.  
The Secret River.  
Sleeper Agent.  
Ransom.  
Room.  
The Dangerous Life of Diogenes.

No phone.  
No laptop.  
No letters or postcards. Nothing written at all.  
Scrubbed. Everything scrubbed.  
Why would she do that?... if she did.

**Momentary blackout.**  
**When light returns, JULIA is standing**  
**with AUSTIN at the apartment door.**

**AUSTIN**

I have something to ask you, Julia.

**JULIA**

What?... What is it?

**AUSTIN**

[*beat*] Did you ever finish reading bel canto?

**JULIA**

As a matter of fact, no.  
I stopped ten pages shy of the end, when Cesar was shot.  
I couldn't bear to see their revolution crushed, and all those children die.  
But *really*, that can hardly be what you wanted to ask me tonight, is it?

**AUSTIN**

No.

**JULIA**

Then what?

**AUSTIN**

I don't know.

**JULIA**

*You don't know?*

**AUSTIN**

I was walking past Winston's Tuesday, and I saw this ring in the window.

**AUSTIN pulls a box from his pocket and opens it to show JULIA the ring inside.**

**JULIA**

Austin! Be serious!  
We hardly know each other.  
You don't know a thing about me.

**AUSTIN**

I know what you like to read.  
And I know the kinds of coffee you like to drink.

**JULIA**

**Laughs.**

Are you that naïve?  
I thought more of you.

**AUSTIN**

I know where you live.  
And I know you like to picture things in your mind.

**JULIA**

You've never been inside where I live. You have idea what my apartment is like.

**AUSTIN**

I know I'm at home being with you. Like nowhere else.  
And I know Diogenes pisses you off.

**JULIA**

*You're* what's pissing me off, Austin, because you don't even know that.  
Diogenes was a loner, like me, searching the world for an honest man.  
For just one honest man.  
He lived homeless in Greece, on the streets,  
and sometimes in a drain pipe he called his library.  
About the only thing he was known for back then, was carrying around a lantern,  
looking, he said, for the honest man.  
He never pissed *me* off. He pissed Plato off, who called him a dog.  
All *I* ever said was: I wonder what would have happened if Diogenes had met  
Jesus of Nazareth. That's all.

**AUSTIN**

And you said Jesus would call him a dog, like Plato did.

**JULIA**

So what?  
Jesus called the Canaanite woman a dog, too, didn't he, for just talking to him?

**AUSTIN**

And you said you doubted that Diogenes would recognize Jesus as an honest  
man.

**JULIA**

The two of them lived almost four hundred years and two tribes apart.  
Who knows what one would have thought of the other?  
I was just speculating. Imagining in my mind.  
You don't know squat about me.

**AUSTIN**

Be that as it may, I know I don't want to live alone anymore.  
I know how you hate it when people waste their lives and their talents.  
And I'm wasting mine, without you.  
And I know this feeling is never going away.  
So, marry me.

**JULIA**

**Covers her face with her hands for a moment.**

I'm sorry. This is completely out of the blue.

**AUSTIN**

Is that a “Yes”?

**JULIA**

I need some time to figure things out.  
Okay?

**AUSTIN**

Okay. Sure. All the time you need.  
How long?

**JULIA**

Give me three ... no four days.  
And don't bother me.  
Or the answer will definitely not be what you want to hear.  
Understand?

**AUSTIN**

Sure. Okay.

**Another momentary blackout.  
When light returns, JULIA is gone and  
AUSTIN is standing at the door by  
himself, the six books stacked at his feet.**

**AUSTIN**

When I came back here, she was gone.  
I knocked and knocked, and nothing happened.  
Nothing.  
At first I figured she must just be out.  
So I went to Starbucks, and the other places I could think of.  
She wasn't there.  
Anywhere.  
The next day, still no answer.  
The third day, after I'd knocked, I went to the superintendent's office.  
I was scared.  
Maybe she was hurt. Lying in the shower, or something. Or worse.  
I didn't know.  
Anyway, he believed me, and opened the door....  
Nothing. The entire place was clean.  
Even the refrigerator.  
Except for the furniture and a few books:

## AUSTIN

[*pointing*] bel canto.  
The Secret River.  
Sleeper Agent.  
Ransom.  
Room.  
The Dangerous Life of Diogenes.

They checked the records.  
She'd paid a year's rent in advance.  
In cash.  
Under a different name.  
And when the police tried to track down the name she'd given, it wasn't her.  
They found a yearbook from that other person's high school.  
And I looked at every picture on every page.  
But none were her.  
That was two years ago....

She's completely disappeared, and I've imagined all sorts of awful things:  
She's been kidnapped, and is being held captive in some man's home.  
She's a Communist spy.  
She was murdered, and her body is buried in steel and cement. Like Hoffa.  
Full fathom five her body lies.  
Of her bones are coral made.  
Those are pearls that were her eyes.  
Or she robbed a bank, or jewelry store, and is hiding out in Mexico.  
She's a monk in a Tibetan monastery.  
She's lost her memory and has wandered off somewhere in Africa.  
Unless ....  
Unless I have imagined the whole thing.  
My therapist doesn't think so, but who knows?  
Maybe it was a dream. Maybe everything about her was a dream.  
Maybe everything's a dream, or a dream within a dream,  
and no honest woman exists in the world.  
Whatever.... I'm alone. The way Diogenes was. Never finding the truth.  
Except ...  
Diogenes had a dog, didn't he; and I don't even have that.

**AUSTIN walks offstage.**

**END**