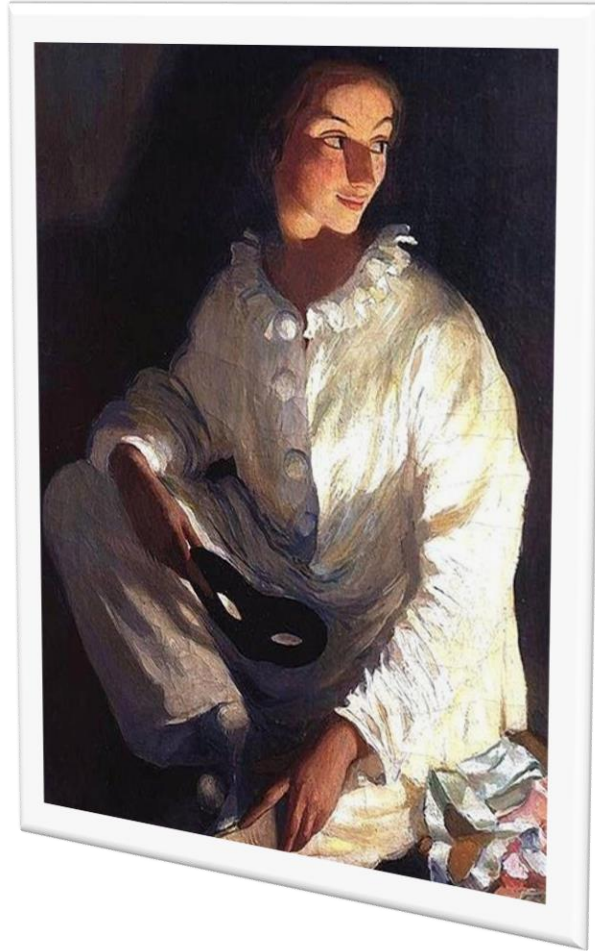


MISSING PERSONA

By Jerold London

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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