

THE MAKROPOULOS AFFAIR

Leoš Janáček (1854 – 1928)

When baron Josef Ferdinand Prus died in 1827, he was without heirs and left no will. However, he is said to have verbally promised to give his estate to a certain Ferdinand Gregor. Gregor's inheritance was contested by a cousin of the late baron, baron Emmerich Prus, and in the absence of a will, Prus prevailed.

But the case was not closed. The case 'Gregor vs. Prus' has been dragging on for 100 years when a certain Emilia Marty appears – an opera singer with an uncanny knowledge of the background of the parties to the dispute.

Now it is Albert Gregor, the great-grandson of Ferdinand, and baron Jaroslav Prus who are pitted against each other. Gregor knows that his only chance would be a miracle. And none other than the mysterious Emilia Marty provides the dramatic breakthrough. She claims that the old baron Prus did in fact leave a will and that it is hidden in the house of the current baron Prus. Marty's claim turns out to be true and baron Prus tells her that along with the will, a packet of letters and a separate envelope were found. The attention in the trial is increasingly focused on the all-knowing opera diva. How can it be that she not only knows about the hidden will but also knows its contents? How can she know that Ferdinand Gregor was named the sole heir of Prus in the will? Emilia is not only pressured by Gregor and Prus to reveal more, she also seems to possess a strange allure, paired with a timeless knowledge of facts and circumstances. But Emilia responds with cold indifference to the admiration and advances from various men and from the young girl Kristina.

It turns out that Ferdinand was the illegitimate son of the late baron Prus, and his mother was a certain Elina Makropoulos. These revelations from the current baron Prus stir the emotions of Emilia. Her concern is not the outcome of the trial 'Gregor vs. Prus' but rather getting her hands on the envelope that was found with the will. Baron Prus blackmails her: only if she will spend the night with him will he give her the envelope. But what he had imagined as a night of passion turns out to be a disappointment. Emilia was as cold as ice. For Prus it was like sleeping with a corpse.

The smokescreen that Emilia creates around herself only becomes thicker and the confusion increases when her baggage is searched in her absence, revealing items that appear to belong to different women but all bear the initials 'E.M.'. Elina Makropoulos, Ellian McGregor, Elsa Müller, Eugenia Montez... Could all of these women be the same person?

Emilia finally explains herself. She has been all of these women and has been on the Earth for over 300 years. She was born in Crete in 1585 as Elina Makropoulos, daughter of the personal physician to Emperor Rudolf II.

Her father prepared an elixir for the Emperor that would allow him to remain young for 300 years. The Emperor forced the doctor to test the elixir on his own daughter and imprisoned him. Elina was able to escape and did indeed live for 300 years. Now the time has come to take another dose of the elixir and to find the recipe for it that she once left behind with the love of her life, Prus – the baron who died in 1827. But when she finally gets her hands on the elixir, she suddenly realises that the fleetingness of normal human life is preferable to an infinite life that has drained her emotionally and made her numb. Emilia Marty wants to die. She offers the recipe to Kristina who in turn dreams of becoming a famous opera singer. But Kristina, too, walks away from it and burns the document that was known as ‘the Makropoulos affair’.