

Ravel - Gaspard de la Nuit

(Three poems for piano after Aloysius Bertrand)

Ondine

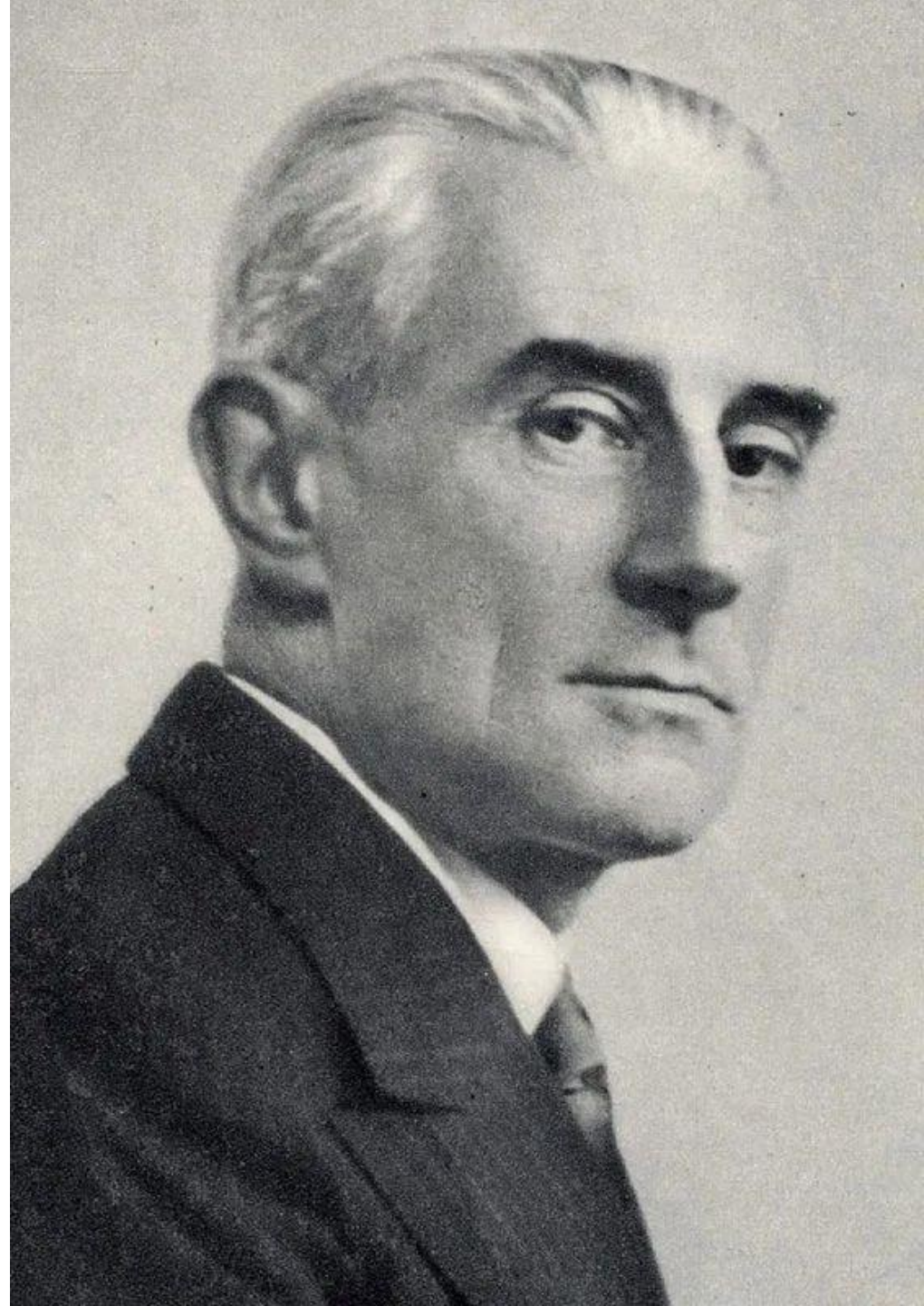
- "Listen! - Listen! - It is I, Ondine, brushing with these drops of water the resonant lozenge panes of your window lit by the moon's bleak rays; and here, in her gown of watered silk, is the lady of the chateau gazing from her balcony at the fine starlit night and the beautiful sleeping lake.

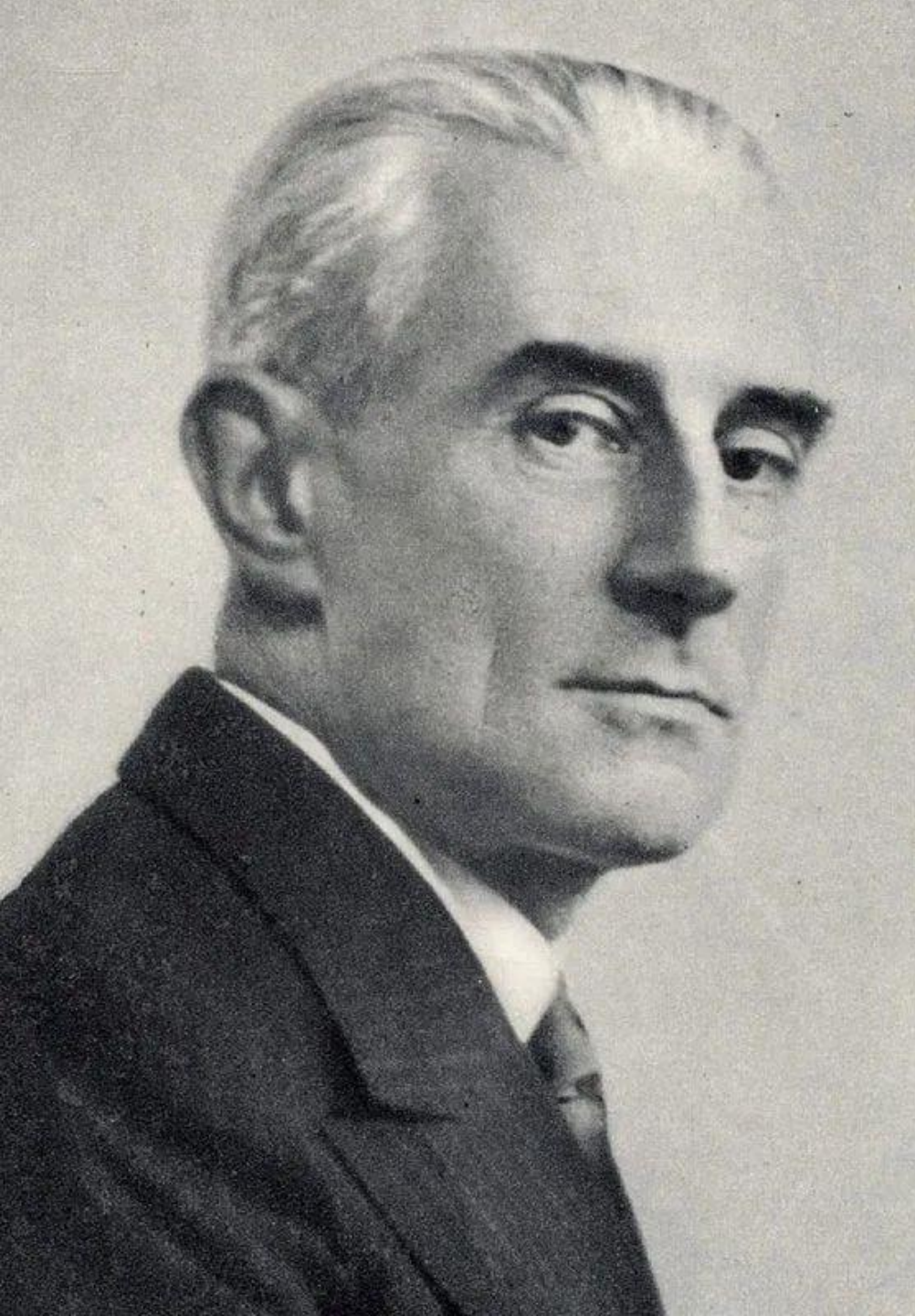
Every wave is a water sprite swimming in the current, every current is a path winding its way to my palace, and my palace, with its flowing structure, lies at the bottom of the lake, in the triangle of fire, earth and air.

Listen! - Listen! - My father is beating the croaking water with a branch of green alder, and my sisters caress the fresh islands of grass, water-lily and gladiolus with their briny arms, or mock the deciduous, bearded willow, fishing with rod and line."

Her murmured song over, she begged me to receive her ring on my finger, to be the husband of an Ondine, and with her to visit her palace, to be the king of the lakes.

And as I answered that I loved a mortal, she became angered and hurt, wept a few tears, burst out laughing, and fainted in sudden showers that rustled white down my blue stained-glass windows.





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The Gallows

Ah! Is it the whistling of the night wind I hear, or the
hanged man sighing on the baleful gallows?

Could it be some chirping cricket hidden in the moss and
sterile ivy with which the pitying wood covers itself?

Could it be some hunter fly sounding the horn about these
ears that are deaf to the fanfare of the kill?

Could it be some scarab beetle, gathering in its irregular
flight a bloodied hair from its bald skull?

Or could it be some spider weaving half a length of muslin
as a tie for this strangled neck?

It is the bell tolling on a city's walls, over the horizon, and
the corpse of a hanged man reddened by the setting sun.

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Scarbo

Oh! How many times have I heard and seen him, Scarbo, when at midnight the moon shines in the sky like a silver shield on an azure banner encrusted with golden bees!

How many times have I heard his buzzing laughter in the shadow of my alcove, and his fingernail scratching on the silken curtains of my bed!

How many times have I seen him come down from the ceiling, pirouette on one foot and twirl through the room like a spindle fallen from a witch's distaff.

Did I then think he had passed out? The dwarf would rise between the moon and me like the steeple of a Gothic cathedral, a golden bell jingling on his pointy cap!

But soon his body would turn blue, diaphanous as a candle-wax, his face turn pale as a dying light, and suddenly he was fading away.

