His Answer

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"MOTHER, Mother! How can I bear it, never to see, never again to read the music he has written?—blind, blind forevermore!" With a cry the girl fell upon her knees, and buried her face in her mother's lap.

"My baby! My little one!" were the only words the mother breathed, but in her heart, with David of old, she cried in anguish: "Would God I could die for thee!"

"The Music of the Trees."

Little by little the child—she was scarcely seventeen—grew calmer. Exhausted by the vehemence of her grief the sobbing cries became fainter, until she lay motionless, save for an occasional tremulous, quick-catching breath.

The daylight faded into early twilight, and still mother and daughter did not move. In those crucial moments they were facing the new problem of their lives, and drawing from an unseen power strength to meet and master a seemingly overwhelming sorrow.

For many weeks this dark cloud had overshadowed them, but today all they had feared had come upon them.

"Do you remember," came in low tones, "it was this very week you were to see the master, and ask if he would take me for his pupil?" A pressure of the hand was the reply. "Now that can never be." Then, as a tear dropped from her mother's cheek upon her hand, the girl started, crying almost joyously, "But I have seen him—nothing can ever take that from me. Think what that will always mean, even if I have not spoken to him. Why, I can see him now"—and excitedly the girl stood up—"see him just as he looked the day he directed the last concert. That splendid head, those deep-set eyes, one instant filled with fury, the next with tenderness. Can you not hear it—that immortal symphony which he has never heard with outward ears?

"Ah! little did I think that day how soon Fate would knock at my door, and snatch all my plans, ambitions—fondest hopes——" and the gold-crowned head drooped sadly. "No, no, I am not crying, my tears have all been shed; I feel through this affliction I can better comprehend what he has borne these many years—understand beyond others what deafness means to a musician. Oh, dearest comforter," and the girl threw her arms about her mother, drawing her closer, "now I can tell you all, tell you what his music has meant to me since I have known what music meant; how it draws my very soul to his. There is no shame, my mother, in my telling this to you, for being blind I never can be just like others girls, and you must be to me husband, children, mother—all."

When Grief, the terrible one, enters the door the strongest are shaken, the bravest quail—all shrink from the unwelcome guest. Days and weeks go by, and still he stays, and slowly the lesson is learned, that the intruder can never be driven away, and only by the readjustment of one's life can power be gained to bear his presence.

The blow which had fallen upon her child struck to the mother's heart, and pierced it as with a thousand arrows. Only by mothers can this mother's grief be measured. Every phase of passionate rebellion was hers, fought and conquered only in the midnight loneliness of her sleepless hours. Over and over the woman lived the years of her child's life, murmuring: "She was sent to save me from despair the time her father died, and through poverty and struggle she was my one joy." Then a faint smile would come and she would whisper: "It was the summer she was seven that she could play from memory the 'Bagatelles.' Each year how tall and fair she grew, always loving, but her one desire to which she gave everything—time, thought, her very self—was to be worthy to interpret the master's music." Then bitterly this poor human heart would cry: "Now all is ended. Why could it not have been my faded, useless eyes that closed, and not hers, with all life's promises before them?"

As the weeks went by the exaltation of sorrow, as it might be called, faded, and left the blind girl listless, weary, struggling when with her mother for a cheerfulness which did not for one instant deceive the eyes of Love. They know not love who say that "Love is blind"—nay, nothing makes the eyes so keen as love. By its power virtues shine with a resplendent light, and faults, while seen, are hidden from unfriendly criticism, till love so changes them that they become the very gold of character.

With sinking heart, day by day, the woman marked the increased pallor of the girl's face; the feebleness with which she groped her way. The one hour of the day in which she seemed her former self was at dusk, when, seated at her loved instrument, all her despairing longings were voiced in exquisite harmonies.

"She cannot live and bear this long," the mother would whisper, as she listened outside the door.

It was one glorious evening, when the unusually long pause which followed this most beautiful of adagios told of the struggle being waged within.

Suddenly the woman stood erect, the tears not dried upon her cheek, but a new light in her eyes, and a firm resolve irradiating her face—"Yes, that will help, and that only; tomorrow I will go to him."

It was nearly the close of the following long summer day, when, in answer to a low knock, an elderly woman opened the door of one of the seemingly endless apartments which lined each side of the narrow, dark street.

"The master is out, but you can wait; he will soon come," said the housekeeper as she disappeared.

Almost timidly the visitor sat down in the cheerless room, near a table, dusty and disordered strewn with manuscript, on top of which lay a slate and pencil. As the woman's eyes fell upon this she exclaimed inaudibly, taking up the pencil: "This is the better way—I will write it all and go; he will not need my presence; it will be easier for us both if he reads it by himself. He has known grief and disappointment, and as heart answereth to heart, so will he respond to what I ask."

"Revered Master:

"I am unknown to you, and so my name would count for nothing. I come to you out of the depths of my great need, as one stricken human soul cries to the one on earth who can comprehend and help, and yet I plead not for myself, but for one dearer than life—my child.

"How can I make you understand that you and your music have been through all the years of her young girlhood almost as the breath of her life? The consummation of all her tireless work was to become your pupil. This star of hope which guided her for years has sunk in blackest night, for now she is blind—hopelessly blind. Daily I see her grow weaker, the spring of action, of desire, broken, and I know unless some stimulus is given, she will slip forever from my arms.

"You and you only, can make her feel there is something still for her to do for music. Each night at twilight she sits for hours and plays what you have written.

"Would it be asking too great a gift if on one of your nightly wanderings you should pass a little house, but three doors from where your nephew Carl has lived, and should hear your own familiar music, you would stop and enter, speak and give to my blind, grief-stricken child, from out of your deep experience, courage to bear her lot?

"She knows nothing of my visit to your room, nor of this letter, written by her mother."

Beethoven's Dream — By De Lemunc

Again and again by the fast-fading daylight, the master read this mother's cry for help, and the written words seemed to bring before him every harsh, untoward circumstance of his own life. He saw himself a little boy, dragged from his bed after midnight by a drunken father, and forced to practice for hours.

"I can forgive and forget that," the man muttered, "but this is harder to forgive, and forgetfulness is denied me," and he lifted a clumsy ear-trumpet which hung by his side, regarding it with a melancholy smile.

"What demon guided my father's hand that he should always strike my ears whenever I came into his presence, and destroy the keenest sense a musician craves?" And restlessly he paced up and down the room. "Oh, this ceaseless, unavailing questioning!" And the clenched hands showed the struggle within.

"The world calls me morose, irritable. What does the world know of the tortures I endure in silence? Deaf from my early boyhood, cut off from my kind; denied love, wife, children, home. O Eternal One, Thou alone knowest all, Thou alone canst read my heart!"

And the master stood motionless, covering his face with his hands. With a mighty effort the man roused himself. "This will never do. I must go to her with cheer and comfort. I must show her that these and these," and he touched eyes and ears, "are not what make life worth living. I must prove to her that it is the divine within each one which makes for life, and only as we manifest that life do we really live."

As the master closed his door and stepped into the street a sight of such transcendent beauty met his gaze that he stood motionless, lost in contemplation of nature's loveliness. The leaves of the trees in the neighboring park swayed gently to and fro in the soft summer breeze. The sky was studded with stars, but these paled and faded before the light of the glorious full moon, which seem to ride the heavens as a queen, and sent a shaft of glittering moonbeams before the master as he walked slowly along, his head bent and his hands clasped behind his back.

On and on he walked, apparently without thought of definite direction, and yet as though the way were known and had often been traversed. After many turnings, and just as he passed a little house set somewhat back from the street, some impulse made him lift his ear-trumpet, and, as he did, soft and clear he heard the strains of music.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "so it is here," and motionless he listened until the movement was completed. Then he whispered: "She has feeling, comprehension; she will understand. I will go in."

Somewhat hesitatingly he entered and tapped gently at the door of the room from which the sounds of music had come.

Almost instantly the door was opened, and in the moonlighted room the girl stood before him, saying in low tones: "Please tell me who it is, for I am blind."

In equally low tones he answered: "And I am deaf. I also am a musician, and hearing music played as only one can play who loves it I ventured to enter. Will you pardon my intrusion?"

The color flamed in the girl's cheeks as she faltered, nervously clasping and unclasping her hands: "It is a pleasure to welcome you, sir. You are a musician. Will you not enter and play to me?"

"Willingly," he replied.

Seating himself at the worn piano the man drew forth tones of such sweetness, such power, that the blind girl, greatly agitated, her hand pressed over her heart to still its beating, drew nearer and nearer, crying involuntarily, "Who are you? You told me you were deaf, and a musician. There is but one who can play like this—you are—the master!" and with fast-falling tears the girl bent and kissed his hand. "It is like some beautiful dream," the child murmured, "and if I stir I shall awake."

She knew not how it was that soon she had unburdened her heart of all its aspirations and lost joys.

"My child," and tenderly the master laid his hand on the bowed head, "I have lived long and suffered much, and this I know, there is a compensation for every trial. Our weak and finite sense too often fails to grasp life's meaning, but the deepest, most heartrending experiences should yield the fullest, richest harvest. Too many times with childish folly have I railed at my deafness. How do I know that without it I could have shut out the world's allurements, and have attained? From your blindness may blossom some marvellous flower of beauty that will live forever."

At this moment the moon, which had been clouded up to this time, came out in full splendor, and sent a flood of light into every corner of the tiny room.

"How wondrously beautiful, how heavenly the moonlight is," the man murmured; then, turning to the girl and regarding her compassionately, he continued: "I will make you see the moonlight with your inward sense—the spiritual. I will improvise for you a Moonlight Sonata. You shall be its inspiration, its motive power."

There was a deep and pregnant silence in the room, as the master's rugged head sank down upon his breast; then softly his fingers pressed the keys, and there flowed forth an infinitely tender melody, which crept gently on, even as the moonbeams' light creeps over the earth. Filled with the sadness of all the ages, there was yet the calm, the dignity, which speaks of love and conquered sorrow.

"Oh, I can bear all things now!" the girl whispered, leaning forward, fearful to lose one magic strain.

Seeing the wrought tension in the child's face, the player said: "Now I will show you how the moon sprites dance."

And quick to answer to his change of thought the girl cried gleefully: "O, I can see them twining their arms about each other, their pale moonbeam tresses waving as they float hither and thither, now singly, now in groups."

Then a darker mood seized the man, and the keys under his fingers rang out in bitter protest, in fiery rebellion.

Agitated, trembling, the girl crouched by his side, but he was oblivious to all—the little room, the blind girl—only the genius, the Titan was there battling with Destiny. Then the waves of sound surged about him, as the roar of the mighty ocean, proclaiming in triumph, "All thy storms have gone over me, but have not quenched me. I rise above time and circumstance, for I am deathless—immortal."

As, pale and exhausted with emotion, he rose to go, the girl cried tremulously: "What have you not done for me—what have you not given me?"

And gently the master said: "I have given you love, courage, faith, for I have given you the 'Moonlight Sonata.'"

Cheerfulness is like music to the soul; it excites to the duty, it oils the wheels of affliction, makes duties light, and religion ride swiftly on the wings of delight.