

Für Elise

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Sadness.

The state of the Master's room saddens me greatly, even more so without the presence of the Master himself. When the Master is home, the room seems in complete character. The untidiness of it is to be expected, the dirt more so. Currently the Master is away, and what he leaves behind is the home of his creations, all that he composes in a whirlwind of wine and anger, and although he would never admit it, fear and uncertainty.

Master Ludwig Van Beethoven's wine glasses sulk around in all the unlikely corners of the room. Most of them lie broken, shattered, trodden on, subject to his unhinged moods, the times when his mind thinks only in black, blame and drink. A few have survived the Master's bouts, and these he has proudly stood on me, his piano. Their presence mocks all the other glasses which have fallen, but they are scared too. They must be. When one serves Beethoven, it is impossible not to be.

I can understand their background, all these solitary, lifeless objects with backstories and blank stares. In truth, it is Master Beethoven I can hardly comprehend. Thinking of him conjures up many mixed, unwanted feelings of offense, distress and a tight lipped refusal of sympathy. After all, as his piano, it is I who am treated the most criminally in this musical madhouse.

When I first made acquaintance with Master Beethoven, I was intrigued, compelled, and rather thankful. He was a skillful pianist, and I could not have been more thrilled to think that now, I would be his main help, his only hope. I was silly then, I dreamed that he and I would together compose symphonies in harmony, in a quiet which could be filled with no other charm than his music. My sounds.

However, the Master disappointed me. He was frequently dark. He would stroll into the room with alcohol wafting in venomous breaths from his mouth. Then, he would sit himself down in front of me and arrange his music scores, forehead creased in concentration of the deadly temper which would be building up inside him, and slowly increase as he played. He would start out with soft rhythms, rhythms so gentle one could only associate them with the heart, with kindness. Then, his

anger would wrap two cold, dominant hands around his neck and his breath would get more irregular, his playing more irrational in feeling. Suddenly, the music would bring out so much of his pain, the pain he kept silent about, that I would end up bruised by his feelings, terrified by what lay in his genius mind. Eventually, he would calm down. His playing would again soften, and he would stare, wistful and contemplating at the candle he always kept at his side in order to see the music scores he had written. Perhaps the light calmed him. Perhaps it reminded him of the true purpose of music, the prospect of calm, and he would play with greater dignity. Alas, this was a repetitive cycle.

For years, I have been angry at Master Beethoven, so angry I have been thankful that I am unable to voice what I am feeling, thankful that putting a voice to a piano like me is a personification, rather than a reality. For years, I have wished for an episode, no matter the cost, in which Master Beethoven would learn that he was not Master to everyone. That someone would show him his faults to a tremendous degree, that he may become melodious in the place of harsh.

One woman managed to do just this, or at least, she had the beginnings of my dreams in her hands. My Master has not changed his harsh ways, but at least, thanks to this woman, for a while, I no longer remained subject to his moods regarding unwanted chaos. I became the mastermind behind a conspiracy of the heart.

A heart which would be broken.

Oh Therese, if only you knew what you cost me!

In today's society, if a father was lucky enough, he would have riches, and daughters. In turn, these daughters were lucky enough, they would sometimes come to my Master, to be learned in all the passions music has to offer. Therese Malfatti, whose name brings a smile of amusement to the individual faces of my keys, and a sorrowful sour expression on the face of my Master, was but one of many.

I used to be quite happy when his students would come. With their flowing dresses, brilliant smiles and aspiring minds, their grace would bring out the unflattering image of the room in such high definition that I would be quite in awe of how unaware the Master was of the room's embarrassing condition.

Therese was one of many, but unfortunately for her, she was the one out of many that Master Beethoven corrupted his heart over, and behaved towards her with the clichéd irrationality of a madman in love.

“The softer notes are tricksters,” Master Beethoven would tell Therese, eyes alight, gesturing vehemently at me. “They can express anything. You can make them tender, you can make them sound alike to the soft plea of a lover at midnight, or echo through them the lost screams of a lover desperate.”

Therese would nod in fascination as Master Beethoven would promptly strike the farther notes on my right to demonstrate his statement.

“And what about the lower octaves, sir?” she would ask, all her features melting together into enthusiasm and excitement.

“These,” Master would say, playing them as he spoke. “They are the low thoughts in our minds which even we can barely claim to hear. They are the low rumble of thunder, coming from ever afar.”

“Then that is why they play so well together!” she would smile vibrantly. “They rival each other and that creates a contrast!”

“No, it is nothing like that!” my Master said. “How could you possibly think a contrast can create beauty? You were right on one thing, about the rivalry. But that, my dear Therese, is where the beauty starts! Two oppositions compete against each other, and out of that, is born a spite, a valiant type of spite which the pianist conducts. The pianist entices them to suit each other and suddenly there exists a harmony between them. One which begins while the pianist plays and stops only when the pianist is... unable to play anymore.”

He stopped his vigorous playing then, and sat on the stool, head in his hands, unmoving, not speaking. Therese stands on my right hand side, elegant hand poised over my keys, frozen in time, waiting for my master to wake himself up from what he had sunken himself into. She could never know why Master hesitated when he reached the end of his speech. She would probably relate the last words of the speech to the chivalric, romantic concept of a pianist's death, and would not attribute it to a real-life situation Beethoven was striving hard to keep secret, but which would keep creeping up in his dialogues in the most inconvenient of times.

His deafness.

My master had been having increasing problems with hearing what people said to him. His second most important sense for music, after touch, was dying out. He saw his life spread out in front of him like an eagle with an injured wing. He could write his own songs, he could see himself playing them, but he was gradually losing the capability of hearing them. It was his torture, or one of them, for as a bad tempered drunkard I'm sure it was just an added terror to a string of many. He rose from his seat.

"That was beautiful, sir," Therese would tell him, in a reassuring voice which, at one time, served to calm him. "It makes more sense now. You must forgive my foolish observation." She would tilt her head shyly to the side. An uncertain Aphrodite, as I'm sure he saw her.

"Do not downplay yourself," he would tell her, suddenly gentle again. "That was your lesson for today. Same time tomorrow."

Therese would incline her head in a swift, soft movement and move towards the door Master Beethoven held open for her. That day, of all days, she had more to say to him, other than goodbye. Words that would give him hope, and he would later unwittingly spell that hope's death sentence.

"Sir?" she said, stopping at the entrance, looking up at him through her clustered ringlets.

There was quiet. I could feel something powerful stir inside the Master at this initiative of hers. Something quietly flammable, but which if unleashed or murdered could become a ghastly bruise on his conscience.

“Yes, Therese?” he said, keeping his tone formal but I could sense his excitement.

“I find you really enlightening, sir,” she said. “And in my father’s house I am sure you would be well received and greatly celebrated. He is hosting a *soirée*, back in his house at Kärntnerstrasse, and I am sure you would be welcome. It is a celebration of all kinds of intellects.”

“You are very kind,” said my Master, and I could see a bead of sweat trickle down his throat.

“So, will I see you?” said Therese, her curls rustling. Her eyes were one whole mist of fascination, and I think that maybe the Master mistook that mist to be utter devotion, the fool. Whatever it was, he was taken in with her tide.

“Yes,” he said, breathing heavily. “Yes, Therese. Tell your father I will be there.”

She laughed a laugh of love and he shut the door, a different man.

“You and I have special business tonight,” he said to me, laying out his music. Back then, I could only wonder, what new misery this would have brought him into.

Many productive but tense nights he spent scribbling down notes, adding or reducing scales to fit his perspective of this new composition’s perfection, each new draft untidier than its predecessor. Finally, it seemed he was satisfied. He dropped his draft onto the floor with a triumphant grin on his creased, aged face and downed glass after glass of red wine, babbling hysterically, spit coating his territory like snow on the bare ground in winter.

“I’ll ask her! I’ll ask her to marry me! Only she can save me, pick my heart up from the roses on which it lies trodden and forgotten, a helpless species!” he shouted, pouring himself some more wine. I could sense that he was nervous, struggling to convince himself that for once, for once, maybe he could be truly happy with a woman he could love, one who shared his interests. I could see that truly, he was not so certain of his motive that the perfection of this new composition of his would only serve to be an insecure blot on his memory, a stain which would forever darken any future thoughts he had about Therese Malfatti.

“If only my wits would serve,” he talked nervously to himself, walking around his room in a path of circling I now knew by heart. “If they would only serve to convince me for once. To convince her, my beloved Therese. If only they could serve to make her love me like I deserve, I would be...”

I decided I wanted to hear nothing more from him that night, and focused instead on the sounds of the wine tinkling musically inside the Master’s wine glass, and to the comforting wind outside. If I was human, I would have sniffed in disdain at my Master’s proclamation. Make her love him, indeed. As a piano, I have seen many musical themed proposals before I came to be owned by Master Beethoven. Lovely proposals by candlelight, the warm glow outlining the musician’s hand with its fiery, ethereal echo, playing with the shadows framing the admirer’s lips as they smiled adoringly at their lover. I am sure this is what Beethoven was aiming for, in his sudden and uncertain bout of happiness. Perhaps Therese would take pity on him, stitch all his wounds and stuff his temper into a box which she would throw into the sea. Maybe she would smash all his wine bottles and glasses and love him as best one could even love this wreck of a man.

Perhaps.

I could not think it likely to happen.

When the evening arrived, and Master Beethoven ran a trembling hand through his hair and adjusted his high, posh collar so unlike his personality, I felt myself succumb to the terrible mix of relief and distress. It was an abominable combination and it certainly didn’t suit my personified mood or grandeur, as a piano of rank.

“And the day has come!” cried my Master jubilantly as he stacked his music scores into one towering pile on his cabinet. “It has come and I will pass through it, God willing, a loving and beloved man!”

He laughed to himself and set out.

The door slammed behind him and a cold draft waltzed into the room, lonely and solitary, grabbing at what coldness it had yet to lose as it slowly dispersed into nothing. At that moment, I pictured it to be the ghost of the Master himself, echoing his state of mind around the room in spiralling doom.

A clock outside sang out its chimes.

An hour had passed.

Another hour.

All was quiet, but there was no lack of atmosphere. My consciousness was drenched in terror of what terrible fate might befall my Master's heart on this night where he thought to seal his destiny. I found comfort in the thought that it was spring, the season of blossoming, love and growth. Tragedy was solely a wintery affair. Maybe by chance, the Master would find his luck secured beneath this full spring moon, jasmines perfuming his Therese's hair, roses in her delicate, gloved hand.

A further hour.

I heard nothing. I was sure that if anyone had to put music to me it would come out all agonised, the promise of hope bleeding invisibly, murdered, onto my Master's music scores.

Thirty minutes.

Fifteen.

Ten.

A creak from the front door. Broken footsteps. A slow, slurred breath set loose, or perhaps it conducted an escape? A thud, and a groan. The familiar smell of alcohol stronger than ever, dominating any peace the room may have gathered during his absence.

Master Beethoven on his knees, and he showed no sign of getting up.

An unidentifiable smell lingered on his lips, as his eyes bled anger. All my music notes choked on their sweet sounds. The master looked wretched, a defeated Achilles with a vulnerable heart instead of heel.

Suddenly, I was drawn into the confusing visions of my Master's reflections.

A room spun into fragments of torturing imagery. Flashing dresses, educated mouths carved into well practiced smiles. My Master's hand striking notes on a foreign piano in a distant house. My Master's hand pouring Signore Malfatti's punch into a glass. My conscience whirled, unstable, music notes inscribing urgent, blurred messages into my intolerance.

Another glass of punch.

Yes, I'll have more, sir. It is such an excellent punch.

Therese's face in shock.

No harm in having just one more.

Therese's smile forced back into place by an unwelcome conversation.

Oh if you insist, I don't object to another glass.

I call this my "Bagatelle No.25 in A minor!"

Therese's stifled gasp.

More punch, please.

A vein throbs in the Master's forehead. His hand slips. He makes a mistake.

Somewhere, across the room, Therese screams out to him:

"Master Beethoven, do you heed me? You are too drunk to play for us!"

An unearthly wail brings me back to the present and I am welcomed by Beethoven's anguish. His tears fall to the floor and suddenly the alcohol on his breath smells of unwanted guilt. An Adonis wounded in the mind, with no Aphrodite to tend to him. He was at his fiercest, and yet he was at his most tender. I would weep for him, but I was frozen.

I was whisked back into his past.

I am sorry! Therese, it is for you! Take it, I cannot bear having it if we do not correspond further from this moment on! I insist you take it. Rid me of its hellish existence! Therese! Oh, Therese!

The drunkard dropped to his feet.

A flash of pity in Therese's wide brown eyes, a tear down her cheek, but no new ones to come. My master's rough, musical hand in her gentle, unspoiled palm. The meeting intensity of eyes. The

contrast he had spoken of, the rivalry between that which is soft and that which runs deeper than comprehension. The passing of a pencil.

You may write down your dedication, Master Beethoven.

Drunken sobs and mutterings. His hand flutters over the paper and pauses as though dead. Therese's small wrist grasped by Beethoven's desperate, temper worn hands.

Promise to keep it, Therese.

The telepathic passing of promise.

I am back to my Master as he weeps. Suddenly, he raises himself, and I see hellfire in his eyes. Instantly, I am frightened, but I am defenseless. Far more defenseless than him. My wings of escapism are clipped.

In a feverish rage, he grabs his music things and tears them into rags of remembrance. They flutter down, broken fairies, onto the floor at his feet. Teeth jittering, he slams his hands onto me, bombing the room with a cacophony of strained notes and musical pain. I wince in pain, and cry with him. Shrieking alongside him, like the madman he was. Like the mad piano he had created out of me.

We spend a night in constant battle with each other. I am his escape route, but I have nowhere to escape to. We are both desperate. We are both hungry for a control he cannot grasp and a control which I am denied. Then, I realise that my anger can be used as a weapon. He was angry in defeat. I was angry in self-righteousness.

“Master Beethoven!” I urged all my notes to bellow at him through his fog of fury. “You must regain your sanity! I command you to regain your sanity!”

It seemed as though he would never stop. I kept up my plea, took up a chant of repetition I thought would end in futility.

“Your sanity!” I kept howling. “Regain your sanity!”

His hands shuddered, and his eyes rolled back into his head as he threw himself onto the floor and contemplated everything through the dark doors of a wronged passion. Then, slowly, reluctant, he faced me.

“I was never sane,” he said, between breaths. “I just kept quiet.”