

The Music–Essence

Fitz Hugh Ludlow

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The Music–Essence

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THE first five years of my manhood were too painful to be dwelt upon. Years, it may be, of much wrong doing—years certainly of great ignorance and unwisdom—years also of suffering like the inextricable entanglements of some slowly thickening nightmare. Let them be summed up in this: that without any world-knowledge I went into the world, without business capacity I attempted business, with a morbid nature which felt the breath of real life as a flayed surface feels a draught of Winter wind, I rashly thrust myself into the tumult of a great city and struggled for prizes with the strong. I had a partner. At this day the smile with which I speak that word is not one of bitterness, but simply of calm, experienced pity for the man that long ago I ceased to be. For what partnership can there be between strength and weakness—the bold, pushing mind of the market-place, the self-distrusting, shrinking, moody nature of the closet? Because I did not know this, or knowing, madly shut my eyes to it, I failed in my first scheme of life.

There were a few bright days when the venture looked prosperous, and cause delayed asserting itself in effect. I verily believed that I had conquered the course of nature—that even I might win the race of the world. There came long days of growing doubt, of mutual coldness between my partner and me. Angry recriminations followed, and at last with a few fierce words we parted.

At this moment, though each impartial calm has succeeded to the former tempestuous bitterness, I cannot tell which was in the wrong. The whole affair was an inexplicable enigma to me. I was accused of fraud, but I could recollect no fraud. Of deceit, but my brain was so distracted by things I had no talents for, that I knew not true from false. Of treachery—how could any man enmeshed like me beguile another?

After that there were law suits—arrests—yes, even one short imprisonment. During that latter, which lasted two days and nights, nothing but the absolute barrenness of all means in my narrow cell prevented my ending that miserable life of mine.

At last—with my once sufficient property dwindled to a pauper's pension—the law let me go. The fraud which I could not remember, which I never knew when I committed it, which at this day I do not understand—was only not quite proven. My counsel told me I had escaped by a hair's breadth, and I know that he worked night and day to save me. I have wondered since, how many men like me may be shuddering all night long in the stone coffins of Auburn, of Sing Sing? *Vae victis!* Prison is for the weak as well as the wicked.

Thus I passed the first five years of my manhood. Can you wonder that I cast them behind me—that I drop them in the depths of the sea? Let them be forgotten, unspoken things!

But because a man cannot be quite miserable while the Destinies have some work left for him to do—a great kindness was shown to me in that hour when I found myself penniless—disgraced—utterly bewildered, and twenty six years old.

An old friend of my father's—head of an asylum for deaf mutes—invited me to become one of his assistants. I accepted the offer as if it had been a call into Heaven from the beckoning hands of the angels! I had been thinking of the silence of death—here were life and silence possible. No more maddening rush of feet, no more tumult of wrathful voices, no more cries of conflict or pain—but a great overshadowing rest and hush. This was better than being rich again, with one more chance to risk my ruin; and for the first time in months I felt my eyes grow wet, and thanked God.

Seven o'clock of a Saturday evening in September saw me within the walls of this asylum for the first time. A mute servant maid opened the door of the great front hall—a mute porter carried my trunks up the broad staircase to my room—and while I stood waiting and wondering at the solemn silence which reigned through that immense home of seven hundred living souls—looking up at the high arched ceiling of spotless white, and the heavy doors of shining oak, with a feeling that all this largeness of proportion must be one of the traits of a dream in which spirits were thronging around me, silent to me only because I was mortal—my friend came down the opposite corridor and spoke my name. Not a look—not a tone in his voice recalled the past, as with a few kind words he welcomed me home.

"You will find your room ready for you," said he. "You must be dusty and hungry. After you change your clothes—come down to my parlor—No. 30—and take supper with me. At eight o'clock the pupils hold one of

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their Saturday evening soirees in the large assembly room. It is the only time of the week that the girls' and boys' departments meet on a social footing. They have games— and many of them dance very prettily. If you are not too tired, this will be a fine opportunity for you to become acquainted with them and their peculiar characteristics. What do you say?"

"That it will interest me greatly. I'll be with you in five minutes."

Supper being finished we repaired to the assembly room. This was a house in itself—one hundred feet in length, sixty in breadth and with a ceiling twenty five feet high. Its floor had no carpet and needed none—for its planks of yellow pine were so daintily clean, and so beautifully variegated by the darkened natural grain of the wood, that a refined eye felt no desire to replace them even by mosaics. In this immense hall were gathered all but those very youngest pupils of the institution who had by this time been fast asleep for an hour in the baby-beds of their department. Every age above the child of seven or eight years was represented in this concourse. To my surprise, many of the pupils were full grown young men and women. The larger portion of them were dressed in that cheap, neat uniform of blue and white check blouses and grey pantaloons for which the state contributes the raw materials and the apprentice tailors of the institution do the making up—or dark blue dresses and white aprons from the same warehouse, and of like home construction. A hundred, it may be, of both sexes, were paying pupils from families more or less opulent—and these were permitted to dress as they chose within the boundaries of elegant simplicity. Notwithstanding this discrepancy in attire—and the social interval plainly indicated, a most democratic equality of feeling seemed to pervade the whole party. Check and blue were at ease in the presence of silk and broadcloth—the soft white fingers that were born to gloves, unshrinkingly clasped the rough brown hands of labor, in all the common games.

Dr. Gaskell and I took seats on a sofa near the door where we could watch the universal merriment without appearing to intrude the presence of a stranger.

"Do they never _laugh_? I asked.

"Sometimes—but the sound is not pleasant to hearing ears. It is harsh because they are without any test for its modulations. As they grow up they become aware of this—and put a restraint upon themselves. The younger children laugh like wild beasts— there, you hear that burst from those little fellows at the other end of the room? How jarring it seems! The older—more refined pupils—unless in severe pain, never venture an audible sound."

At this instant, a low silvery gurgle of laughter—like a wood- robin's evening note or the tone of a delicate harmonic glass— welled up from a throng at our side.

"Ah!" said Dr. Gaskell. "I should have made one exception. We have a most remarkable girl here who has never become entirely inaudible. It was she who laughed then. And she always laughs in that tone. How she contrives to make her voice so sweet is a never-ceasing enigma to me. If I were superstitious I should believe that her inner ear is in communication with the angels— that she hears _their_ laugh and repeats it in her own, modulated by them. In twenty five years acquaintance with every grade and variety of deaf-mutes I have never met a parallel instance."

"Are you sure that she does not hear in some slight degree?"

"Perfectly sure." Her external sense of sound is so near the absolute zero point as the organs can possibly be reduced. I asked myself the same question—trying to find a clue to her remarkable idiosyncrasy—till last fourth of July—when I saw my naughty little boy fire a pistol close beside her ear without in the least startling her."

"What is her name?"

"Margaret Somers."

"And how old is she?"

"Seventeen. She has been here since she was nine. Nearly half her life. I expect that we must part with her year after next—for her adopted father, Major Braithwaite, is determined that she shall be graduated as soon as possible. His only real relation to her is that of second cousin—but I believe he loves her as well as he might have loved wife and children. He has never married—she seems all in all to him. He comes to see her whenever he can get furlough—and has only permitted her to stay with us so long because he is satisfied that she has great genius and wishes it cultivated to the utmost. I agree with him—she is a wonderful girl. But see—they are getting up a dance!"

"Where is the music?"

"Ha, ha! You are betrayed into the question that everybody from the outside asks, when I invite him to a dance

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of the deaf–mutes! Think again. What good would music do them?"

"How absurd in me! Of course! But what pleasure can there be in dancing without it? And how can they keep time?"

"They do take pleasure in it. As to the fact of their keeping time, you will see for yourself presently. Of its reason, you are as good a judge as I. It's all conjecture—but you can choose between the opinion I threw out just now, that Margaret Somers, who almost always leads them, hears spirit music, and they follow her measure with their eyes—and another one of a phrenological nature, that every man has an organ of time independent of these fleshy flaps which we hear with, and measures ideal successions quite inaudible externally."

The set had taken the floor. Eight of the older pupils stood en–carrer, waiting some signal, as you and I would pause for the music to begin. I did not need to be told who of the eight was Margaret Somers. Standing opposite to us, in the head couple, her great blue eyes looking far away and half upward—her head inclined as if listening—her hands extended winningly but beseechingly, their gesture full of wonderful expression, like one who asks silence in a lovely tone—her almost aerial figure swaying unconsciously with that dramatic grace which none but the deaf–mute can ever attain, which in the deaf–mute is the embodiment of the very inmost soul of language—she gave the signal and the dance began.

I could not believe it! Wonderful! Wonderful! I kept saying to Dr. Gaskell, as the silent dancers went gliding through the evolutions of their quadrille, and I, compelled by the absence of all other music, and the suggestions of their inimitable motion, hummed in myself a reminiscence of three strains to which I had so often kept gay time, during the years which now were forever cast behind me.

Like some poor star–gazer, straining from his cold pinnacle to come at the very heart of those far torch–bearers on the Olympian course of the universe—enamored of their glory, awe–struck at the fleetness of their tireless glancing round the cycles, and certain that they run to the measure of some infinite unbearable music, could he but hear—I bent further and further forward, devouring the glad faces of those silent dancers with my eyes—until the last foot paused—and I leaped to my feet, trembling strangely.

"How pale you are!" said Dr. Gaskell. "Do you feel ill?"

"No, but this dancing affects me very remarkably—they must hear! she at least."

"I assure you, they do not. Try it—call 'Margaret' in your loudest voice."

I hardly durst make the venture—so sure was I that it would startle her—but I did it. And the result was just what any unimpassioned spectator might have foreseen.

The doctor rose, and catching Margaret Somers's eye, signalled to her. With the unembarrassed springy footstep of a child she came to us, and the Doctor told her in the sign language that I was the new teacher. For a moment she measured me from head to foot—not staring at me, but gliding over me with a ripple of quiet sight—then smiled, and confidently shook my extended hand.

"Do you hear at all?" asked Dr. Gaskell manually, translating to me the conversation as it proceeded.

She touched her ears and shook her head.

"Do you know what music is?"

"Oh yes," she answered, her face gladdening suddenly, like a hill side when the clouds break.

"What is music?"

For a moment she paused, her face changing into that expression of deep concentration which is so well known to those familiar with the deaf and dumb, and which is interpreted, even by those who have longest known them, as "waiting to be inspired." Then she answered in signs so marvellously vital that I had no need of Dr. Gaskell's tongue translation.

"Music is the heart's feeling of God close by, when He touches us in quick throbs, and we try to measure them."

I lay thinking of that answer all night. It seemed to ensphere like a great soul all that the masters have sung and written from the day that Israel rejoiced passing through the sea to the last echo of Bertramo's tremendous entreaty in Robert Le Diable!

Three weeks had passed away since my coming to the asylum, and in that time I had made no mean progress in the language of the hands. *_Hands_* I say advisedly, for it is a common error among outsiders to suppose that the ordinary intercourse of the deaf and dumb is carried on by means of the *_fingers_* merely; in other words, that they *_spell_* out their thoughts by the alphabet. Whereas, the truth is that this admirable alphabet of theirs is seldom used because it is seldom needed, a system of pantomime far superior in all qualities of grace and expressiveness to any seen upon the stage, superseding it for all ordinary purposes, and indeed far more accurately and rapidly conveying delicate shades of meaning than any possible alphabetic speech save in the rare cases where some profound or novel metaphysical assertion has to be conveyed. Even in such instances I have seen the sign language carried, by preference, to the very furthest limits of its capability, and many of the abstruser tenets of Whateley or of Hickok which a speaking teacher has required three readings to master have been pantomimically given to my perfect understanding by a deaf—mute class in logic or mental philosophy.

In the alphabet also, I was literary "*_factus ad unguem_*" But as yet my province lay among the middle classes of pupils only. *_Why_*, will be very evident. The dormant or just awakened minds of the younger children need all the practised patience, ingenuity and technical knowledge of their intellectual processes which can be grouped together in the most experienced teacher, to conduct the delicate first steps of their thinking and communicating life. For this reason, a highly developed deaf—mute—if he has the rare faculty of meek forbearance, is often their best master, as being the true "*_hegemon_*"—the leader who never keeps farther ahead than the ranks can see him. Next in importance and dignity of requirements is the teacher who takes charge of the highest and graduating classes, composed of such pupils as have emerged from the workshop of the merely objective faculties, and most now be indoctrinated into truths demanding all the more inward implements of the mind in their subtlest exercise.

Accordingly, it was only in the evenings that I could prosecute my study of that wonderful new science, Margaret Somers. I improved every hour of those, I can assure you. I set myself to the work of learning her as I would a system of philosophy, or of the *Mecanique Celeste*. After tea, it was customary for Dr. Gaskell to invite several of the older pupils into his parlor, when for the time being we all threw off the trammelling relations of master and scholar and talked together on bare friendly terms. Two of the deaf—mutes who frequented these *_conversazioni_* possessed the auditory faculty just so far as this—that by opening their mouths over the strings of a piano or guitar they could catch the very faintest shadows of its vibrations through the Eustachian tube—and enjoy the thin ghost of the music rather as an impulse than a sound. It was both touching and amusing to see three poor outcasts from one common world of musical delights—bending over the sounding board of Mrs. Gaskell's piano, listening literally with open mouth, and holding their breaths as in the presence of some strange, beautiful angel, whose magic harpstrings of tenuous air they feared to shatter by a sigh of bliss. As Mrs. Gaskell played them some glad resounding strain—the Wedding March from *Midsummer Night's Dream*, for instance, which was their favorite—I have many a time seen them press their handkerchiefs to their eyes half to let the quivering chords meet them in a sacred solitude of sense and half to catch the tears which were falling thick and fast like rain in the darkness.

On such occasions, Margaret Somers sat far apart from them, her usually bright face settled into an expression of intense melancholy. She had not even that poor relic of a sense. And invariably—after the playing had ceased—she would ask them with great interest what music they had been hearing tonight—if they enjoyed it as much as ever—and *_what it was like_*.

I fancy that most of us hearing ears, would be puzzled by that question. Imagine it asked in Fifth avenue or Beacon street, of a lady just come back from Don Giovanni, her opera cloak, as you may say, still fluttering with the rush of bravos and one or two little tremolos of Zerlina lingering like frightened birds caught between its folds. "What was Vedrai Carino *_like_*, to—night?" I wonder how she would answer!

But the deaf—mutes who heard with their mouths seemed to find no such puzzle. They took the question quite as a matter of course, and made replies that to us were very curious. Once, one of them told Margaret that the Wedding March was like a beautiful peach tree, whose fruit ripened so fast that you see the down blush deeper and deeper after the fashion of a young girl's cheeks, and growing heavier till the twigs bent almost to the ground,

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fall off, and becoming alive danced away through the air to turn into a sunset! You may laugh at this, but it gave Margaret great pleasure. She had a mind which could find reality in the ghost of their ghost, and re—embody it for herself into some weird Wedding March as I guess that Mendelssohn heard when he caught at least its negative daguerreotype on his score. By a singular coincidence I have also heard the two deaf—mutes describe Verdi's great Zingarella to her, simultaneously as "the brightest possible Northern lights."

It was on this last occasion, and by its suggestion, that an idea which for months had been lying chaotic in my mind, began to find an axis for itself and take on crystalline form.

First, I thought how strange it was that that these two friends of Margaret habitually preferred the higher kinds of music—music for which nine tenths of the hearing people, in this country, have just as much penchant for as Chopin or Thalberg have for Old Dog Tray. By the way, this latter was the very air which Mrs. Gaskell tried on them one evening when they replied, with an effort of great politeness, that it was a very nice _noise_. We, the hearing people, all laughed very heartily at this, but _they_ saw nothing strange in it, and supposed the distinction one which everybody made in the given case. It was evident therefore, that their pleasure in music consisted in no mere passive impression of the auditory nerve, but that they possessed musical _feeling_ of a very marked order. How could this be, on the common assumptions that all internal organs must be developed through the outer? Must there not be, on the other hand, a vast possibility of culture for this inner sense from inner sources— and through the other still acute passages of external impressions—as our minds may be lifted by the music of a dream? And if so, was it not likely that Margaret Somers, superior to these two as she was in all spiritual perceptions, and analogical expressions of rhythm, had the internal organ of melodies and chords developed in the deep laboratory which we called silence, to a still greater degree? Then, also, their translations of music into form and color gave me a hint—which I had been for months growing more and more willing to use for _her_—because— but never mind now—I am anticipating.

Why might not _I_ be the one, whom Divine Music had sealed to carry her message to that longing spirit?

This was the last bead on the rosary of the thoughts which I counted on that evening in the parlor. I had come to the cross— a long hard work to be done—but I did not grudge it. Again, when we had separated for the night, I lay awake, hour after hour, considering at which end I should take hold of it. Then the finger of dreams put itself forth and touched the right place, without its aerial print vanishing.

Old John Bull—"Tunefulle Maister Bull of Gresham"—as his contemporaries used to call him, remarks in the course of some fragmentary personal recollections he has left us, that the great enjoyment of his own musical compositions was not vouchsafed him at the the time of public performance—nor even during his own private renderings of the same, but that while he perused his completed score in the perfect quiet of the music loft at mid-day—a divine delight ever seized him, and the spirit of his notes clothed themselves in a harmonious body infinitely more splendid than any audible song. This fact made it possible for him to read music—not in the common sense—but as he would swim in the deep Summer sea of a rare book, revelling in all the sweet meanings of the author, yet never speaking a single word aloud.

Remembering this fact, I refected that if Margaret Somers had ever possessed the faculty of hearing—and developed her musical perception by a scientific course of training—she might now read music after Master Bull's fashion and enjoy it to a similar degree.

The form which her problem consequently took was this. Is there no method by which the scientific relations of _pitch_ (_time_ I was sure she had become acquainted with already) may be communicated to the mind through other adits than the ear? Music in its pure scientific aspect is quite independent of sound—uses sound only as its ordinary _normal_ expression—and by all the more delicate intellects—the poets especially—is constantly translated according to a system of analogies, into other than audible forms. Rossini is called _florid_—but his roulades have no effect of garlands to the _eye_, no fragrance to the _nose_. Verdi, they tell us is _brilliant_—but who _sees_ him shine? And the painters have no difficulty in understanding a picture's _tone_.

All music, it seemed to me, finally resolved itself into a science of _tensions_ and one nerve as well as another may convey the relations of tension, provided that we attain the means best calculated to awake their idea through the sense. The most delicate receptacles for external impression still left to Margaret Somers were sight, touch, and smell. After long thought, I most unwillingly gave up all idea of attempts to communicate through the last of these, not because I abjured the life long conviction that the olfactory sense is next to sight in its capacity for receiving the most delicate impressions—but because as yet its very etheriality has prevented any true science of its phenomena. Through sight and touch therefore, I must operate alone.

For a month, without communicating my plans to any one—not even the object of them—I spent every hour of leisure in elaborating a system of means.

At the expiration of that time, I told Margaret Somers that I would teach her music.

My earnestness—and the very fact of my making such a statement at all—opened her great blue eyes wider than I had ever seen them. "You forget"—she signed—and put her fingers on her poor dead ears.

"Yes," I replied. But have have eyes—and fingers."

"I would give them away willingly for ears—even such ears as John's or Augusta's," (the deaf–mutes who heard with their mouths.)

"You shall keep those and have these," I answered. "Are you willing to try it? You have have to study hard if I am your teacher—but I am sure I _can_ teach you."

"Will it give me great _pain_?"

"Are you afraid of pain?"

A quick scorn trembled over her lip, and she made a gesture as if the idea were some tangible bad thing which she would brush away.

"Afraid? No indeed! But I have been praying for a year that God would give me hearing—even with torture—and I was wondering whether he had answered me to the utmost."

"No, dear soul, it will give you no pain! I have been praying God for you too—without any request for the risk of torture—and I hope _He_ will answer us both, in his gentlest fashion. How could He torture you! Don't you remember your definition of music—that you gave me the first time I ever saw you—`God closely touching us in quick throbs?' Is it not good to have God close by—yes, if we shall be blessed in our good work, to have Him even closer?"

"It is _good_. But sometimes even now, in His veiled comings, it is almost _unbearable_."

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"Perhaps that may be the reason He is veiled, because of His dimness and mystery. To know Him nearer is to love Him more, you know. Are you willing to try it?"

She put her hand into mine like a white nestling dove. How delicate were the fingers! Their taper ends were as soft as an infant's. I could not have been surprised if I had heard that she used them to see with.

I led her into my recitation room—now, at seven in the evening, left a wide desert of benches, by that throng of children who had all day been devouring blackboard geography by the continent and made nothing of taking in a whole ocean at one draught. I lighted the gas—and with one sweep of the sheep-skin pad swept from the board those three hundred miles of the Rocky Mountains which had been left over from the last course of my little Leviathans' late repast. In its place I drew a staircase of seven steps—on as large a scale as the space would permit. The first and second I made of equal heights—the third only half as high as these—then three more of the same altitude with the first two—and finally one of half height again. While Margaret was looking at this figure with an expression of puzzled interest, I took from my desk where it had been lying all day, so that I could glance at it paternally between classes—a smooth deal board, three feet long by two broad. Across this I had stretched seven guitar strings—all of the high E quality, and of equal length—attached at one end by a permanent ledge as in the instrument to which they belonged—and at the other two wooden screws of my own manufacture. At present these strings lay lax along the board.

"Now, Margaret," said I, "take your eyes from the black board for a moment, and look at this thing which I have in my hand. It is the simplest instrument of music which we know. It is so simple because it is most like the human soul which has to understand it. How it is like we must go back to your definition to perceive. When you have that strange sense of a presence near you—which you call "God close by" do you ever feel any growth, any increase, in the nearness?"

"Almost always!"

I waved my hands up and down—then let them drop wearily—and made the sign for laxity.

"Does the Presence ever come to you when you feel this?"

"It does indeed! Oftenest then—when I least look for it, and most need it. That is the reason I think it is the Dear God!"

I drew an extra guitar string from my pocket, and gently stretched it with my hands.

"And as the Presence draws near, does your heart feel more like this?"

She understood me, but was by this time watching my hand so eagerly that she said yes only by an indication of the head. I stretched the string still tighter.

"And as it draws still nearer, is the feeling still greater?"

"Yes!"

I stretched it tighter yet—"And still greater?"

"Yes!"

I was adding force to my pull, when she caught my hands in hers, and with a wild impetuosity that I had never seen in her before, aided me at the extremity of her strength. The string snapped asunder, and trembling like one seized with a divine afflatus, she exclaimed by a quick cry of her speaking hands.

"There! like that nearly!"

I drew her to me and, laying her head upon my shoulder, smoothed its fair, sweet brow, and twined its rich soft threads of golden brown about my fingers, till the storm that shook her was overpast. Like a dear pure startled child I cherished her—yet not quite like that. I could not help it, for she let me.

Then I renewed the lesson.

"The way in which men have agreed to represent the soul, and that growing strain it feels as the Presence draws nearer and nearer is by an instrument like this." I touched the lower string of the seven and continued. ""This is loose now, as the soul is, before the Presence comes. I will tighten it a little to express the first sense of the approach."

With a tuning fork I got C natural of the vocal pitch and began tightening the string up to it.

"That is right," said I; "Watch my hand closely. You see how many turns I give this screw?"

One—two—three—there! nearly three and a half. Let this degree of tension represent the feeling of the first throb of the Presence. Now—to represent the sense of the second—I tighten the first string a little more. Nearly half a turn tighter yet—you see."

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And so I continued up the whole septenary system—avoiding for the present, so as not to embarrass her mind with too much, any exposition of the only half—interval between the third and fourth, the seventh and eighth steps of pitch. Besides, I felt enough faith in her ideal music to believe, chimerical as it might seem, that she would unerringly translate the half—tension of this minor interval into the internal impulse which quantitatively corresponded to it, at the proper time. And who can _explain_ it, further than to reduce it to mathematical formulas themselves still more inexplicable?

The instrument being perfectly tuned in the natural gamut, I put it into hands.

"Now shut your eyes, Margaret," said I; "And pull the first and second strings gently with your forefinger. Try to banish everything outside of you but the strings, and see if you can perceive any difference in their tension."

"May I think of _God_? You know I believe _He_ is the presence."

"So do I. By all means, if it helps you."

"It does help me, very much."

She closed her eyes, and with her right hand struck the strings in succession. Her left was extended—oh, so gracefully!—as if she were listening with those delicate beseeching fingers.

One, two—one, two—and she still sat motionless, giving me no report of any perception.

Presently she opened her eyes again, and looked at me for a moment with half timid earnestness—Then laid the instrument in her lap, while she signed to me.

"Must I banish _everything_ but the strings?"

"And the Presence, you know, we agreed."

"Must I banish—_you_ too?"

As I looked at her, thinking with a strange conflict of emotions for a right reply, her eyes fell for an instant from mine, but only for an instant, and then resumed their pure fearless gaze of inquiry.

"Do I help you, too, Margaret?"

"Yes. You are _very_ good to me."

"Then think of _me_, dear child."

She closed her eyes again. It was the first time any one had ever begged that leave, since my mother died, long before the terrible five years, saying she would always think of me, even in Heaven.

The silence of that wide blank recitation—room had been broken by the frail soft repetitions that come from Margaret's fingers, scarcely three minutes, when her eyes opened again, a quick gleam of delight bathed her whole face, and her rapid hands exclaimed:

"I feel it! I feel it! I understand what you mean."

I was like one intoxicated in my joy. I have heard people say that of such at such times they could "dance." As for _me_, sitting perfectly still, and looking straight into that illuminated face was my only adequate expression of myself. I had reached the first possibility which was the mother of all the rest. Margaret could hear with her fingers.

"Thank God!" said I at length. "You will certainly learn music, now, if we live. To—night we have been glad enough, and learned all that is good for either of us without having time to think of it. Let us put by this instrument till to—morrow. And now—why it is half—past ten o'clock!—go and sleep sweetly, and may the Presence be gently near you."

"Do you wish to lock this up in your desk?"

"Why?"

"Did you make it for me?"

"Yes, Margaret."

"Do you think I would be tempted to play on it, are you afraid it would keep me awake, if I should take it with me and put it behind my pillow?"

"No, not if you promised not to play on it."

"I _will_ promise. And no one shall see it."

So clasping the board to her side with one hand—she put the other into my own—and went, holding it there like a child, to the foot of the broad staircase where we must separate.

There it seemed as if I could not let her go—And I did not, till our good night had been said in

" _____ kisses sweeter,

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Sweeter than anything on earth!_"

IV

A fortnight from her first lesson Margaret had mastered the whole gamut of C natural. I could blindfold her—place her fingers upon any of the strings—and get back an unerring response as to the position in the scale. To my great encouragement, her enthusiasm for this exercise continued unabated. She seemed to find all the pleasure of a hearing ear in the practice of her finger education.

To relieve the monotony of this practice—for I could not see any possibility of its being otherwise than monotonous, remembering my first lessons on the scale—I composed now and then some simple recreation for her by a numerical system of notation. She soon learned to recognize the little melodies I set for her, and was as delighted as a child when she discovered that the air she had been playing as "1, 1, 2, 3," was really the great national hymn "Yankee Doodle."

But I felt the necessity of writing on these recreations, as over the benches on London bridge—"To rest—not to lounge on."

By the diagram of the staircase, which I drew, you remember, during Margaret's first lesson, but did not then have time to use, I conveyed to her mind, little by little, the ideas of transposition. It is the most difficult thing in the world to explain even the mere external method by which she learned them—my part of the work I mean—without a diagram like that on the blackboard. Even then, some scientific musician might so far discredit the possibility of teaching their science by such a method, that they would not care to understand me. But as nearly as words can explain it this was the system which I used. Recollect that I had taught Margaret the letters representing the notes of the scale, and had shown her the strings of the simple gamut instrument which corresponded to them. Also that I had drawn for her a flight of steps—marking each step with a letter in the order of the scale—making F a low step because it was only half the usual rate of ascent from E—and C, a step equally low, because it bore the same relation of ascent from B. I now wiped out the original F which I had drawn and replaced it with another twice the former size. At the same time I sharpened the F string of our gamut instrument, and without altering any of the others, put it back into Margaret's hands. This was my moment of suspense—yes—it may seem strange to an uninterested person that I use this word—agony! For I reasoned thus. If all my past convictions have been delusive, then she will not notice this change except as a mere meaningless vagary, and will find just as much pleasure in strumming the strings in their new relations of tension, as before. But if she really grasped the ideal principle of musical successions—if they have been recognized by her mind not only as a pleasure but a law—then this disproportion which now exists will give her pain, and she will at least ask me what I have done.

A look of puzzle[ment] came over her face. First she glanced at the blackboard and then she felt of the strings. She lifted them one by one with the delicatest touch of her finger, as if she were weighing them, and she always paused longest at the sharpened F. At last she searched my face feebly with an expression of query, and then shook her head.

"What is the matter, Margaret," said I.

She touched the F of the instrument, and pointed to its corresponding stop on the board. Then she signed this answer.

"I do not know why, but I have learned to need rest at this step. The souls seems always to tire for a moment and lifts its feet only half as high as before. There are too many high steps together, now."

My heart beat like a hammer! Would she, could she find of herself what she must do?

"What will you do to help it, Margaret?" said I.

She thought, and looked, and fingered for several minutes more. Then she rose, took the chalk from my hand, and going to the board, altered all the other steps of the staircase to correspond with the raised F. Without my suggestion, she had transposed the scale!

I took the instrument into my hands and tuned it to the transposed key. I thought she might have done it—was sure she could, indeed—but I could not bear to mar the strange delight of my new triumph by any further suspense. Then I handed it back to her, she ran over the strings, and in an instant her whole face beamed with joy at the discovery of the restored proportion. I knew such gladness in that hour as all imaginable riches could not

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buy from me!

Day after day I taught, and she studied patiently. In two months from the time of our first lesson in transposition, she had learned all the keys and acquired the ideal philosophy of their meaning. At length I ventured to put a guitar into her hands. The artificial arrangement of its strings baffled her long, but before the Summer vacation of the asylum had arrived, she had mastered the relations which existed between our simple gamut instrument and this more complicated one.

As yet, neither of us had imparted our secret studies to another soul beside ourselves. I knew Major Braithwaite was coming to see her graduated, and I wished to reserve the great surprise of her accomplishment for him.

Commencement day had come. With it came all the friends of pupils who had friends. And among the first persons whom I saw in the morning as I came down the broad stair to breakfast was Major Braithwaite. He was just entering the front door.

Margaret happened to be in the entry at the time. The moment she saw him, she ran into his arms, and he clasped her to him, passionately? A heart sickening doubt came over me. I had supposed he was a kind of adopted father to her. I had never heard of his being, thinking of being, anything else. Yet a father does not kiss in the way he kissed. There is not that strange light in a father's eyes when he sees his daughter.

Major Braithwaite was the perfection of soldierly beauty. His beard, which he wore full, was a luxuriant curly black, like his hair, only as the hair was not, touched here and there with iron grey. His features were massive and Roman without being heavy. His figure was tall, erect, but not inflexible, and he seemed about thirty six years old.

I was introduced to him at breakfast, and he thanked me for the interest I had taken in his ward. He meant the books I had explained to her—the conversation I had enjoyed with her in Dr. Gaskell's parlor, of which that kind man had told him. But the greatest of all interests—did he know that, and would he have thanked me if he had known it?

Before the exercises of the day commenced, Dr. Gaskell called me into his study.

"I have good news for you," said he. "You are so trusted by all of us, that I know I am not betraying confidence in telling it to you. Margaret is going to be married. Now, who do you think is the gentleman—guess!"

"I'm sure I can't think," replied I, in a dream.

"Major Braithwaite!" He has always loved her since she was a child. He believed that there was nothing she could not be taught to do. He has all the admiration of her that you or I would feel for Elizabeth Barrett Browning. And so he sent her here to be developed. This morning he asked me if she was sufficiently the woman to know her own mind, if I thought she could love anybody consciously and answer for herself intelligently. I told him yes—decidedly. You see he has all the gentlemanly and soldierly honor of taking the weak at a disadvantage. When I said yes, he acted like a boy! He was perfectly overcome! He means to tell her that he loves her, to-morrow. Of course she will accept him. Then she will be married during the vacation and have a happy home as long as she lives. He is rich—and if she wishes it, he will resign his commission." So concluded the doctor, rubbing his hands with pleasure, "her fortune is made for life. Dear girl! I am so glad! I think you will be asked to be the groomsman."

"That is capital!" said I coolly—still in my dream—and so we parted to get ready for the exercises.

In these Margaret acquitted herself well—admirably. She shone like a queen among all the deaf-mutes who read or recited. At every new eloquent answer to the questions of the examiner, which she wrote on the blackboard, I glanced furtively at the Major, and saw proud sparkles in his eye which set my own heart on fire.

When all was over, the graduates were invited into Dr. Gaskell's parlor. I was still in my dream, but I thought enough of the outer world and its results, to bring in Margaret's guitar unnoticed and set it in the corner by Mrs. Gaskell's piano. The hours of the evening went on and still Major Braithwaite was chained to Margaret's side. He hung on her every gesture and lived in her looks. At ten o'clock all of the deaf-mute company, wearied with the day's labor, had departed, leaving Dr. Gaskell and Mrs. Gaskell, Margaret, the Major and myself alone together.

I signed to Margaret. She went to the corner and brought out her guitar. The rest looked at her with puzzled curiosity.

"Major Braithwaite," said I, calmly, when she had taken her seat again with the instrument in her lap, "I have kept the best wine until now. I wish to crown the last day of Miss Somers at the asylum with the highest

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attainment she has made—Listen, if you please, and hear what she will do for you."

Again I signed to Margaret, and her fingers ran nervously over the strings. I looked at her steadily and tried to throw into that look all the cheerfulness I could imagine. Then she seemed to take heart and began that simple rich melody from the Bohemian Girl—"When other lips and other hearts their tales of love shall tell."

Then came the turn of the others to dream! Dr. and Mrs. Gaskell sat silently in a trance when astonishment had not yet yielded to delight. Major Braithwaite, sitting straight upright in his chair after the soldierly manner, was pale as death, listening with compressed lips and breath that was imperceptible, save now and then in strong burdened inflations.

From the first air, Margaret's fingers wandered on to the second I had taught her. This was the Kataplan from The Child of the Regiment. I had given her that, in the old times that looked at through my dream, seemed a hundred years ago—because I thought it would please Major Braithwaite.

When she had finished playing, Mrs. Gaskell turned to me.

"_Does_ she hear after all?" said she.

Major Braithwaite answered for me.

"No, she does not. She never knew I had entered this morning till I touched her. Her back was turned when I came in. I slammed the door, and almost forgetting her affliction, called her name. _Who_ taught her to play?"

"Major Braithwaite asks who taught you to play, Margaret," said I.

She replied by laying down her guitar, stealing up to my side like a child, and taking my hand. The look she gave me then was at once joy and agony enough for years! Major Braithwaite saw it and grew paler still.

"Does she know any meaning in what she plays?" said he eagerly. "Does she play like an automaton? Or can it be possible that in any way she understands it as music?"

As he spoke he signed the same questions to her. And she answered him—

"I feel _God_ near me in that music. God and _kindness_. God and _him_." She pointed to me as she signed.

"Wonderful! Wonderful!" Was all that Dr. Gaskell and his wife could say.

But Major Braithwaite rose and stood between Margaret and me.

"What made you think of teaching her this thing?" said he. "I do not ask you _how_—for I could not understand that part now if you should tell me. But why? What was your motive?"

It then broke forth from me for the first time—because, even in his presence I could not hold it longer—

"Because I _loved_ her!"

"And does she love you?"

"Ask _her_."

So he asked her. And she returned me such an ineffable look that now remembering it, I seem to be among the angels.

Major Braithwaite folded his arm around her and kissed her on the forehead. Not as in the morning he had kissed her on the mouth.

"My dear—_dear daughter_!" said he. "I believe you have chosen well. Would you be willing to go everywhere over the world and be this young man's wife? Supposing he had to be a soldier, like—many men, for instance. Had to fight the Indians—be separated from you through nights and days when you would be very anxious about him. Had to endure hardships for him—loneliness—doubt—fear—everything bitter and dreadful—would you be his wife, still? His true, loving wife?"

Margaret's only answer to his signs was to cling still closer to me and hide her face against my shoulder.

"Very well," spoke the Major. "Have you the salary which will enable you to support a wife, young man?"

Dr. Gaskell answered for me that my salary would be raised to twelve hundred the next term.

"That is enough," said Major Braithwaite. "A woman who loves a man can live on much less than one who does not. Margaret is now graduated. She can be married at any time. I would like to have it take place somewhere where I can be present. Can you come to Fort Allen and be married, sir?"

"We can go anywhere to have you in our happiness, dear father!" said Margaret.

"Very well," said the Major calmly. "let it be August then."

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V

After Margaret and I were married we continued to live at the asylum for a year. Then my mother's brother—an eccentric though not an unusually rich man—who believed that young people should help themselves, awoke to the consciousness that I was doing that thing tolerably well and had a wife to carry honorably through the world besides. So—one day—he offered to take me into partnership with him in his flourishing New York jobbing house, and for Margaret's sake I accepted the offer.

When we got into New York I found my means ampler, and the first thought I had was to complete my wife's musical education.

Again there arose in my mind those old analogies between sight and hearing. I had taught her something about music by the relation between sight and touch. There were still greater harvests of delight to be reaped by that wonderful mind of hers in the domain of color as representative of music.

We had a house in West Twenty-sixth street. For the first time in my life I knew what it was to have all the gas I wanted, and to pay the company a corresponding large bill for the same. For my wife's New Year's present during the second year of my marriage, I prepared a surprise based upon the following principles.

In natural philosophy we are taught that the primal colors, as ascertained from the phenomenon of the rainbow, are:— "Violet, indigo, blue, green, yellow, orange, red." But the question arises—Is the rainbow a gamut or a harmony? I decided that it was the latter. For its intention is the expression of hope to man. A mere scientific gamut would not have done that. The rainbow must be an expression in color of certain gratifying sentiments in the divine mind. Those sentiments, in heaven at least, must be reduceable to speech. Therefore to music also. Let us try them on earth!

I came to the conclusion that the rainbow was not the true gamut of colors correspondent to the ascertained gamut of sound. It must be divided and re-arranged before the gamut can be made. And this was the rearrangement which after long thinking I arrived at:—

Yellow, violet, blue, indigo, green, orange, red.

This you see, at least in theory, was an order measurably consistent with the gamut of sounds. Between blue and indigo there is apparent but half the interval of color which intervenes between yellow and violet. Orange and red are separated from each other by but half the distance which divides indigo and green. Thus I constructed a gamut of color which should to my mind represent that of sounds. I arranged in my study a long gas pipe, connecting laterally with burners where several ground glass shades were colored in order according to my theory. I then constructed an apparatus with strings like the original one by which I taught my wife, so that at least pressure upon the strings the delicate cone of burning gas which I had already lighted within three colored shades should flare up into a broad tinted brilliancy. If for instance I moved the F string, it not only gave me the sense of the peculiar tension, but an indigo light on the wall before me also. Likewise a touch on the A string gave me orange light, on the D string violet, and so on. Between each of these shades, was one of compromised tints, representing the half intervals.

On New Year's day, for the first time in a month, I opened to my wife the door of my study.

"Come in, darling!" signed I. "I hve a new instrument for you. I want you to play on it for me. See if it gives you any greater pleasure than the guitar."

Margaret sat down in front of the strings and began playing the air—"True love can ne'er forget," while she watched the coming and going of the colored lights. A new delight seemed to seize her. She tried all the strings at once with capricious fingers, and shuddered as she saw a certain discrepancy in their relation. She pulled two neighboring strings at once, and the effect of their light combination on her was that of a musical discord. Then finally, she returned to the true melody, and found such a new pleasure in the relation between tension and colors—in what we call music—as I never saw in the most rapt of hearing performers.

After this first experiment, she grew rapidly in her knowledge of inaudible music. She made me many suggestions by which I immediately profited—as to the colors of the lamps. With a box of paints, she drew me the exact shades which to her mind represented a certain tension of string, and I had it immediately copied in glass to replace in the apparatus.

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From melodies she gradually rose to harmonies. She learned to combine two tints and tensions so as give her the idea of _chords_. And when she had accomplished this attainment, I knew that her musical attainment was at its earthly apex. She might learn the most difficult pieces of Chopin—and find pleasure in them—but she never could attain further _primal ideas of music_, till she reached that great resounding dome of Heaven where the angels play and God is satisfied!

VI

"Doctor Athanasius Bloor cures all diseases of the eye and ear. His operations are painless, his success absolute, and he is recommended by the following gentlemen, whose selves or family have been benefited by this treatment:—

"Timothy Tompkins, Esq, Common Councilman of Peoria—strabismus.

"Rev. Hezekiah Green, Jenkinstown, Conn—permanent deafness.

"Hon. Peter Plumbpie, Sec. For. Miss.—blindness and deafness, entire."

I saw this advertisement in one of the New York papers, eighteen months after I was married. I debated for a while whether Dr. Athanasius Bloor was not a quack. Finally I determined to take my wife to him. He could not hurt her at any rate, and he might make her hear, which would be the crowning delight of my life!

So I took my wife to Dr. Athansius Bloor's.

I found that he was not a mere quack; that he had really done, and was capable of doing, far more good than the newspapers gave him credit for. I put my wife under his treatment. He discovered that her loss of hearing was to be ascribed to no congenital and irremediable cause, but to a pressue on the auditory nerve which rendered it obtuse. This pressure, he thought, might be either a sluggish cerebral tumor, or a closing of the out passage through the results of early disease.

Whatever it might be, he had remedied it in two months from our first interview with him. Margaret heard some sounds. She knew when they were firing salutes from Governor's Island, or ringing the bells for fire in our district, for instance, and in six weeks more, she heard my voice! Oh blessed time! It seemed as if Heaven had been brought down to earth again. The voice that spoke to her sweetest! And she distinguished it from the hard noises of the world.

Well, for one short month I was a happy man. He who has been happy for a whole month, if he remembers it, may be happy forever. So, at least, must I fancy, to live—to bear life at all now.

My beautiful one began fading. Day by day I saw it without believing it. And when I asked her why she was so wan and pale— why she trembled so as to wake me through the long nights—she answered in her old beloved signs, which she clung to still.

"It jars me so! There is too much noise in the world. I do not hear enough music."

At last I became sorry that she heard. I even prayed God that he would make her deaf again. She had expected too much of the world. There was more noise than music there.

But I had made her hear. I must accept that. I had thought it a blessing. If it was not a blessing, whose fault was it!

I was compelled to confess my wife's situation vry critical. Her peril stared me in the face. If some means could not be found of protecting her sensitive soul from the shocks of the outer world's discordant sound—she would certainly die—and that very speedily. I could think of no other comparison for her than a spirit walking through the din and roughness of life, in perfect nakedness, but with all the bodily senses strangely preserved to it, feeling the cold with an intensity of pain which bodies never know, hearing the outcries, the curses, the wailings of men and women with an infinitely sensitive ear, seeing all the cruellest wretchedness of humanity with a piercing eye that could not close, without shelter, without sleep. I began to understand that God had meant Margaret's deafness as a great mercy—that it was the necessary cover to the most delicate of human souls—that she could really bear no more of the world than might be taken in through sight, touch, taste and smell.

I could not restore her to deafness but I envired her with all that was loveliest in earthly voices. I made the care of her my only luxury. I sacrificed every thing which men usually call desirable to the one aim of enshrining her in a sacredness of sweet sound. I bought the choicest music boxes and kept them playing by her bedside when she lay down to sleep. I took her to every performance given by the best artists in opera or concert room. Oh with what joy did I thank God when I found that there were some musicians whose music was not too harsh to give her pleasure! How I exulted when that grand dear Formes brought tears of happiness to her eyes in Bertramo—when D'Angri's wonderful honey of song distilled through her ears into her heart and made her clasp my hand with a glad thrill in Zerlima.

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But from all the great singers and instruments she ever came home to seek a better bliss in the music of that apparatus I had given her on New Year's day. That expressed to her mind a music such as she would never hear till she reached Heaven. And while she tenderly touched the strings, weighing their tension as of old, and watched the gleaming colors dance hither and thither on the wall, the bitterness within me welled to the eyes, for I knew that she was getting ready to hear that music of eternal life, in which there are no false tones.

We had been married two years—when, one night, I took her to hear *Formes* for the third time in *Roberto*. That night the greatest of living singers and actors eclipsed himself. Having the greatest opera that was ever written to be great in, he was great enough for it. He was the *Bertramo* whom Meyerbeer *meant*. Never again in this world do I expect to see *Robert the Devil*. The thought of hearing any other man than *Formes* sing the tremendous music of that last act is a pain to me. My memory of the opera now is such that to find it misrendered in a single point, would be like breaking down the everlasting distinction between right and wrong. *Roberto* is an opera whose plot has no parallel for sublimity in the grandest involvements of Greek tragic writing. *Aeschylus* never had such a plot. And there is not one particular in which the music of Meyerbeer could be ameliorated for the plot's expression. Nor is there a man living who understands that plot—that music—who can sing it, save *Carl Formes*. So now we went to hear him for the third—yes, though I did not know it then—the *last* time.

Formes, I have said, surpassed himself. The cumulative horrors of the fiendish father were borne up on his demi-god shoulders as *Atlas* bears the world. My wife never took her eyes from the stage when he stood there. In the last act she clasped my hand and turned so pale that I half rose from my seat with fright. I thought the long feared end was coming. But seeing my suffering she composed herself and managed to endure the finale.

The moment that we got home she went to the instrument in my study, which, out of burlesque acquiescence with the Graecizing nomenclature of the time, we had called the *kaleidophone*. I lighted the colored lamps and I took my seat beside her. She began wandering over the strings into a memory of *Roberto*. First she repeated the "*Vanne, Vanne*," that exquisite air in which *Alice* brings to *Robert* the message of their dying mother. Thence she strayed to the *Gaming Chorus*. Finally she found herself in the grand mazes of *Bertramo's* character, and from that moment restricted herself to expressing him alone.

It will seem incredible, I know, how by an instrument like this, where only melody was possible, in perfection and that the slender melody of a single gamut of strings, the music of *Roberto* could be at all conveyed. And truly, any but *Margaret* or I might have found it meagre enough for the purpose. But we knew its hidden meanings. She had translated its tensions and its colors into the music of the soul. And I, though less favored than she, because I had not like her any enclosed and purely spiritual sense, from the long efforts I had made to awaken this sense in her, at length reached some measurable perception of her interior music.

That night to me she seemed inspired. The rich hues of the lamps danced on the wall as if they were alive. The lamp which she played most was the red one. She told me that this color was the best to express *Bertramo's* character where it touched humanity, but our apparatus was sadly deficient in shades of the tint. It needed at least a hundred lamps to give the representations of *Bertramo's* music in this particular alone. I promised her to complete the instrument according to any suggestion she might make. Alas! I have never done so. There on my lonely wall it stands imperfect still!

But when the fiendish side of *Bertramo* showed itself, the colors she most used were a succession of violet and orange. As she touched the strings communicating with those lamps, the room was full of a lurid light and I saw the caverns opening to receive the *Demon* home. We forgot the simple music of the strings. We revelled in a gorgeous coming and going of rich lights which spoke Meyerbeer's meaning as no sound can ever speak. And when at last she came to the passage where *Alice* triumphs and *Robert* is saved—the green lamp sent a mellow lustre of hope and peace through the study, in which, as on a ladder of Heaven, our lifted minds seemed to see angels, passing up and down!

When the last strain of color died away, *Margaret* said to me—"I am very tired, dear. Let me sleep."

I took her in my arms as was my wont and carried her like a sick child up to our chamber. I helped her undress for the night and lay down beside her. She slept almost immediately, and as soon as I heard her beloved heart beating and her breath coming regularly, I slept also.

It was about three o'clock in the morning when her voice awakened me.

"Husband," said she, "don't be frightened—but I feel very strangely. Take my hand, please. I love to feel you by me. For I am so happy, and I hear such wonderful music that I am afraid to be alone."

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"Oh, Margaret," I answered, my own heart almost stopping with a mystical undefined fear. "It is nothing but the effect of last night's music on your overwrought nerves. Try, darling, if you cannot sleep again. I will stroke your forehead and lull you as I have so often done before. Go to sleep, beautiful one! Precious one!"

And she answered me:

"I feel too wide awake. I do not think I shall ever sleep again."

I watched by her side in the loneliness for an hour. Her breath grew softer and slower. I made an effort to arouse myself, to call the servants and send for a doctor. But she clasped my hand so tightly that I feared to loose it lest I should loose life with it. I must have been paralyzed.

At the end of the hour she spoke to me once more.

"I hear again!" said she, "as I used to in the old times at the institute. The Presence is coming nearer—and nearer." Then she added faintly— "_And is close beside me. I hear again_."

And she did hear. For she was among the music of the Angels!