



A pale young man was sitting by the table, making shoes, and near him, leaning sorrowfully upon an old-fashioned fortepiano, sat a young girl, with a profusion of light hair falling over her face. Both were cleanly but very poorly dressed, and both started and turned toward us as we entered.

"Pardon me," said Beethoven, "but I heard music, and was tempted to enter. I am a musician."

The girl blushed, and the young man looked grave and somewhat annoyed.

"I—I also overheard something of what you said," continued my friend. "You wish to hear—that is, you would like—that is—Shall I play for you?"

There was something so odd in the whole affair, and something so comic and pleasant in the manner of the speaker, that the spell was broken in a moment, and all smiled involuntarily.

"Thank you!" said the shoemaker, "but our piano is so wretched, and we have no music."

"No music!" echoed my friend. "How, then, does the Fräulein—"

He paused, and then blushed deeply, for the girl looked full at him, and he saw that she was blind.

"I—I entreat your pardon!" he stammered. "But I had not perceived before. Then you play by ear?"

"Entirely."

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fortepiano: an early kind of piano  
profusion: a great quantity  
started: moved in a quick, sudden way  
involuntarily: not done on purpose  
Fräulein: German for "Miss"  
entreat: to plead; to request urgently  
perceived: noticed

“And where do you hear the music, since you frequent no concerts?”

“I used to hear a lady practicing near us, when we lived at Brühl two years. During the summer evenings her windows were generally open, and I walked to and fro outside to listen to her.”

She seemed shy; so Beethoven said no more, but seated himself quietly before the piano, and began to play. He had no sooner struck the first chord than I knew what would

follow—how grand he would be that night. And I was not mistaken. Never, during all the years I knew him, did I hear him play as he then played to that blind girl and her brother. He was inspired. From the instant when his fingers began to wander along the keys, the very tone of the instrument began to grow sweeter and more equal.

The brother and sister were silent with wonder and rapture. The former laid aside his work; the latter, with her head bent slightly forward, and her hands pressed tightly over her breast, crouched down near the end of the piano, as if fearful lest even the beating of her heart should break the



frequent; to attend often  
chord: three or more musical tones sounded at the same time  
rapture: extreme happiness

flow of those magical, sweet sounds. It was as if we were all bound in a strange dream, and only feared to wake.

Suddenly the flame of the single candle wavered, sank, flickered, and went out. Beethoven paused, and I threw open the shutters, admitting a flood of brilliant moonlight. The room was almost as light as before, and the illumination fell strongest upon the piano and the player. But the chain of his ideas seemed to have been broken by the accident. His head dropped on his breast; his hands rested upon his knees; he seemed absorbed in meditation. It was thus for some time.

At length the young shoemaker rose, and approached him eagerly, yet reverently. "Wonderful man!" he said, in a low tone, "who and what are you?"

The composer smiled benevolently, indulgently, kindly. "Listen!" he said, and he played the opening bars of the sonata in F.

A cry of delight and recognition burst from them both, and exclaiming, "Then you are Beethoven!" they covered his hands with tears and kisses.

He rose to go, but we held him back with entreaties.

"Play to us once more—only once more!"

He suffered himself to be led back to the moon shone brightly in through the window glorious, rugged head and massive figure. "sonata to the moonlight!" Then, looking up

wavered: shook slightly

meditation: deep thought

reverently: in a manner showing deep, awed respect

benevolently: kindly

indulgently: showing special favor

entreaties: requests

suffered: allowed

improvise: to make up; in music, to make up and pe spot, without planning

the sky and stars, his hands dropped on the keys, and he began playing a sad and infinitely lovely movement, which crept gently over the instrument like the calm flow of moonlight over the dark earth.

This was followed by a wild, elfin passage in triple time—a sort of grotesque interlude, like the dance of sprites upon the sward. Then came a swift *agitato* finale—a breathless, hurrying, trembling movement, descriptive of flight and uncertainty, and vague terror, which carried us away on its rustling wings, and left us all in emotion and wonder.

“Farewell to you!” said Beethoven, pushing back his chair and turning toward the door—“farewell to you!”

“You will come again?” asked they, in one breath.

He paused and looked compassionately, almost tenderly, at the face of the blind girl. “Yes, yes,” he said, hurriedly, “I will come again, and give the *Fräulein* some lessons. Farewell! I will soon come again!”

They followed us in silence more eloquent than words, and stood at their door till we were out of sight and hearing.

“Let us make haste back,” said Beethoven, “that I may write out that sonata while I can yet remember it.”

We did so, and he sat over it till long past dawn. And this was the origin of that “Moonlight Sonata” with which we are all so fondly acquainted. ❀

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infinitely: immeasurably

elfin: like an elf; magical

grotesque: bizarre; strange; out of proportion

interlude: a musical piece inserted between the parts of a longer composition

sprites: elf-like creatures

sward: grassy earth

*agitato*: an Italian term, used in music, meaning, “agitated, restless”

eloquent: expressive

make haste: an expression meaning “to hurry”