

Young Authors' Club

FLORITA COOK, Editor

SENIOR DAY

(Contest Story)

THE VISITATION

Original by "Mark van Dyke"

Two men stood looking reverently at a small piano in the parlor of a fashionable residence. It was very old, and Jamison touching it murmured, "This was his piano. It hasn't been played since the day he died, over a century ago." He pointed to an inscription on the side of the instrument. "L. V. B. Lishtvig van Beethoven. He carved that himself. Thank God, that you were able to escape from Europe with this before it was too late."

The other man smiled. "I know that it will be safe here with you," he said. "Perhaps after the war it may go back. I know that you understand the value of this piano to us . . . to the world."

Jamison nodded. "No one will see it so touch it except myself," he said.

"When the other man had gone Jamison walked all around the piano and looked at it from all sides. Not played in over a century! He dusted it off carefully. When he left the room he carefully locked the door.

For several days Jamison visited the piano often to see that it was all right. One day he placed a piano bench before the keyboard and imagined how Beethoven must have looked as he sat composing. The room would be littered with manuscripts and papers, ink and books in every conceivable place. Suddenly he began to tremble. What would happen if he were to sit down before the piano and play some notes . . . what harm would there be in it? No one would ever know! He paced the room in a cloud of temptation. Then going to the window he looked out at the twilight scene. There was no one in sight. He went to a shelf of music books and selected a volume of Beethoven Sonatas. He carried the book across the room, and opening it, placed it on the piano. It was the Appassionata.

He began to play . . . slowly at first, then feeling self-confidence flow through him, he played with more skill and grace. The strange, almost alien round of the small piano filled the room and swelled about him. Outside a rising wind howled and twisted as if in protest, but he played on. The room began to grow dark. Soon he found difficulty in seeing the notes before him but he did not stop. A feeling of power and exultation flowed through him. He was Beethoven. This was his piano. Then he looked up.

Standing before him in the gathering darkness was a man. Although it was dark Jamison knew that he was not mistaken. He leaped to his feet and as the music stopped the figure began to fade. He watched it grow dim, and then disappear. But he had seen it clearly for a moment. Not a tall man, but powerfully built, his face lined and marked. Dark hair in confusion about his eyes. He held a great ragged cloak about him, and carried a leather bound book.

Jamison had been without fear. Somehow it had not seemed strange to him that for a few moments he had not been alone. But now he began to wonder. Had it been an hallucination, he would have known so at the time. He paced back and forth. At last, seeing that night was coming on, he left the room and prepared for bed.

The morning brought no answer to his thoughts. All day as he idled about he wondered again and again if it had not been merely a fragment of his imagination. Finally he could stand it no longer. He went to the piano, and sitting down before it, began to play. Five, then six minutes passed and he saw nothing. Then it began to grow dark. On and on he played, and gradually a shape began to form before his eyes. Suddenly it was a man, eyes staring past him at something invisible. Exhausted, Jamison arose from the bench and threw himself into a chair. The figure of the man began to fade, and soon was gone. The room grew light again.

It had been real! This time he was sure. The spirit of the composer, called back by the voice of his long silent piano had appeared before him. He could expect it again, then.

For days he thought about the matter, and what he must do. He spoke to no one, neither did he leave his house. Then he reached a decision. Going to the room of the piano, he removed all the furniture except that instrument and a writing table. On the table he placed a great deal of music note paper and pens and ink. Then, when he was sure that he was ready he went to the piano and sat down. He began to play, more

carefully than he had ever played before. It would have to be so. Time passed. Once more the room began to grow dark. Then the figure of the spirit began to form. Finally it was distinct, and remained so as Jamison played on. The spirit was restless. He could feel it. The spirit of the composer began to move about the room, but Jamison once did he look at the man before the piano. Not once did he seem to hear the music.

He approached the writing table. For a moment he seemed to hesitate, then seating himself he began to search through the pockets of his great cloak. Bringing up a tattered book he placed it before him and began to look through it. At last he came to what he wanted.

He reached into his cloak again and drew out a stubby pencil. Then selecting some of the note paper Jamison had placed on the table, he began to write, referring frequently to the notebook of music. Jamison watched, his fascination mounting, as page after page was covered with music. An hour went by, and still the composer worked. Then he was finished. Gathering the notebook and paper under his arm he pushed the chair back and stood up. Not once had he noticed Jamison. He paused for a moment, then began to walk across the room. Now Jamison hesitated no longer. Leaping to his feet he and grasping the note paper pulled it from him. He held the paper triumphantly in his hands, but the composer did not seem to notice. Already he was becoming indistinct. But Jamison had what he wanted. Crossing to the window he held the papers up to see what music had been written on them. Then a wave of horror filled him. The notes, so plainly visible a moment before, were dimming! And as he watched they became fainter and fainter, until at last they were no longer visible. Frantically he shuffled through them, but now not one of the pages bore any mark. He turned, and as he did so, saw the last vague outline of the composer disappearing.

A cold wind blew through the room, and it began to grow lighter. Jamison sat down on the piano bench and began to cry.

CREDIT LINE
Five credits for Mark van Dyke,
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133 Hagar Ave., Piedmont, Calif.
AUNT FLO