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The SEVENTH SYMPHONY

by
VICTOR
ROUSSEAU



"The fingers struck the notes clearly, leaping from string to string as the bow scraped across them."

DR. IVAN BRODSKY put down the morning paper with a long whistle, got up, put his hands in his pockets, and paced the room continuously. "Too bad! Too bad!" he kept repeating.

During the months that I had lived with him and assisted him in the psychical investigations which he carried on, I had learned one thing above all others—to let him tell his story in his own way. So I waited until he was ready to speak. I could not conceive what he had read that had so agitated him, and my astonishment was increased fourfold when he came and stood by my side, wiping the tears from his eyes unaffectedly.

"Rose Celaye is dead," he volunteered finally.

I tried to murmur something appropriate, but I must confess that the announcement did not stir me greatly. Of course, like most others, I had heard of that wonderful woman

cellist who had blazed her triumphant path through all the capitals of Europe and America, from Buenos Aires to Moscow. I had seen the notice of her death, in her thirty-fifth year, and had forgotten that the doctor, like every Pole, had a passionate love for music.

"You knew her, perhaps, doctor?" I faltered.

"Not in the body," said Brodsky, quite simply, as though drawing some obvious distinction. "But what does that matter? I heard her play. I heard her in Carnegie Hall when she went to New York last year. And dead! Rose Celaye dead!"

Presently he came and sat down at my side.

"The world is poorer today than it was yesterday," he said to me. "Rose Celaye was the greatest cellist of the day; if she had lived five years longer she would have been the greatest that ever lived. But she was more than a great player—she was a woman of the most noble nature. She was never spoiled by the flattery that

NOTE.—This is the seventh of a series of stories, each complete in itself, dealing with Dr. Ivan Brodsky. "The Surgeon of Souls."

she received. She lived just as simple, unaffected a life as always, devoting all her income beyond the amount necessary for living to the encouragement of poor artists. And only five years ago, when princes and millionaires were at her feet, she married a poor clerk in a lawyer's office, for love. I believe their lives were ideally happy. I met him once; he offered to introduce me to his wife, but I would not meet her. You see, I had heard her play. I did not want to meet her in the flesh."

OUR psychical investigations occupied much of our time about that period, and this conversation made little impression on me. It must have been four or five months afterward that it was recalled vividly to my mind when I entered the doctor's office a little late one morning and saw upon the hall table, as I went in, the card of a visitor, engraved "Auguste Celaye." Inside, the man was taking off his gloves. He was about five-and-thirty years of age, as I should judge, a Creole in appearance, and possessed a striking and dignified demeanor.

"Dr. Brodsky," he began, when we had been introduced, "you will have no recollection of me, of course, although I once had the pleasure of making your acquaintance for a few moments at a reception."

"On the contrary, I remember you very well," replied the doctor.

"I am extremely glad of it," returned the young man cordially, "because it will make my mission easier. I am not, of course, unacquainted with the reputation that has come to you from your remarkable investigations in psychic affairs. I have always believed in such things, and so did my wife. Curiously enough, she often expressed the wish to meet you, and the fact that I did not introduce you to her that afternoon was the cause of our only disagreement.

Before her death she and I often discussed the possibility of the spirit making itself manifest to mortals, and we resolved that, whichever died first, he or she would return to give proof of immortality to the other.

"Her death, as you know, was comparatively sudden. She lingered in a semi-conscious state for perhaps two hours after we realized that the end was approaching. Toward the last her mind grew clearer, and she motioned to me to bend over her. In a very weak voice she told me that she was going to give me the proof we had always spoken of. She would, if possible, play for me her transcription of the wonderful 'Heartbeat March' from the seventh symphony of Beethoven upon her cello. It was her favorite piece, and mine. And then, just before she died, she spoke your name.

"After her death I was wild with grief. I locked away all her possessions in a room of our apartment and would not allow anyone to touch them. I traveled for some months, and arrived back last week. Time had softened my excess of sorrow, as I suppose it must, though the grief will, I know, be permanent. And then, for the first time, I dared to think of her promise. But so great was my dread of disappointment that for several days I could not bring myself to unlock the door of the room in which her things were stored. Finally I brought myself to it, took out her bow and cello, which had rested there, untuned, untouched, for months, and placed them in my room and waited in the darkness. But nothing occurred, and at last I went to bed and soon fell into a sound sleep.

"It must have been shortly after midnight that I awoke with a start. I had dreamed of hideous discords, and the dream was verified. Upon my ears there burst the wildest, most terrible medley of sounds that I have

ever heard. They crashed out upon the instrument in the most grotesque manner imaginable, and yet, horrible as it was, the time and accentuation seemed to be those of the seventh symphony.

"You can imagine my horror. I sprang from the bed and struck a match. Instantly the sounds ceased, and yet, when I drew near, I saw the strings quivering, as though the hand of the ghostly visitant had barely left them. That night I heard no more, but every night since then that horrible noise awakens me at the same time. It lasts about as long as the movement from the symphony, and it has the inexorable rhythm of that relentless 'Heartbeat March' by which Beethoven suggested the march of life from birth to death, 'from the grave to the grave;' but it is a cacophony of hideous dissonances, and it is always the same. I know the fearful tune by heart—if tune it can be called. And all day long it haunts me in imagination. So I should have gone mad if the remembrance of you had not suddenly come to me last night when I was at the summit of my suffering.

"I took the first train from New York this morning, found your address in the telephone book, and have come to beg you to solve the mystery. Have I gone insane and do I imagine it? Or is it that my wife has forgotten music in her present condition of existence? If that be so, if character so change, what does remain of us? Or is it some devil that has come back to mock and torture me?"

He ceased, and, overcome by his emotion, leaned his head upon his hand and regarded Brodsky intently.

"You are satisfied that these sounds are produced without any human agency?" he asked.

"Absolutely," the young man replied. "Moreover, they are produced by some intelligent being, for the sounds are precisely the same on

each occasion. It is almost as though some travesty of the seventh symphony had been written out, so identical is each performance with the last."

"Then," said Brodsky, "you have actually the proof of immortality that you demanded. What matter the details of it? Why seek further elucidation? Is it that the human heart will not believe?"

"No," replied Celaye steadily. "It is because I fear that the sounds are made by some devil assuming her identity."

"Well, we'll have to go and see," returned the doctor. "It's no use forming hypotheses. Today we have some work that must be finished here; tomorrow my assistant and I will be at your apartment at 7 o'clock in the evening."

CELAYE departed reluctantly, leaving us an address in the portion of New York City that adjoins Columbia University. On our arriving at his apartment house, a plain but comfortable-looking structure, the elevator boy took us up to where Celaye stood waiting for us.

When we had concluded a very pleasant meal Celaye led us into the large room which he used both as a bedroom and a sitting room.

In one corner, propped up against the wall, was the cello, the bow beside it. Brodsky advanced to inspect it. Instantly Celaye darted in front of him, his eyes blazing angrily, to bar the doctor's progress.

"You shall not touch it!" he cried. "No hand but mine has ever been laid upon it since she died."

Brodsky stopped short and looked at Celaye with mild indignation.

"I beg your forgiveness," said the young man humbly, transformed once more back to his normal condition. "But I can not allow you to touch it. It is a foolish whim of mine

—but I can not. I can not explain it, but I must insist on this.”

“My dear sir,” said Brodsky severely, “it is not at all essential to my purposes that I touch the instrument. I did not desire to do so in my capacity as doctor, but merely from the natural interest that I take in musical instruments of such antiquity.”

The young man flashed out eagerly. “You recognize it?” he asked in delight. “It is a genuine Carroba, made at Leghorn, in 1729. Pray look at it.” He turned it for Brodsky’s inspection, but all the while seemed ready to spring to the defense of it.

“Such old instruments have a peculiar psychic value,” said Brodsky thoughtfully. “Well, will it play for us if we put out the lights?”

We lowered the gas, but not a sound came from the instrument.

“It only plays at 1 in the morning,” said Celaye. “That was the hour at which she died,” he added.

“Well, sir,” said Brodsky, “I doubt very much whether it would play for us all tonight, even if we were to sit up till that hour. Especially since you told me that the sounds cease the moment that you light the gas. It is controlled evidently by some power that is most delicately attuned. As you may know, the soul that returns to earth is by no means a free being, able to communicate with the survivor upon all possible topics. Were this so, we should have learned from such wandering beings the secrets of their own state. By a wise provision, the soul can return only for some special cause; the mother to watch over her babe; the wife to prove her continued existence to her husband; the miser to reveal some hidden hoard. The soul that returns is responsive to one single emotion. Therefore, our presence alone would serve to neutralize this.”

“Is there no way, then?” cried Celaye despairingly.

“There is one way,” said Brodsky thoughtfully. “But it is a dangerous way, and I would resort to it only upon your solemn pledge that you will never again resort to it so long as you live. It is the way so wisely forbidden by Moses, the great law-giver, the way that Saul utilized at En-Dor—the seance. By the united electrical powers of our bodies, we can, when seated in a circle, bring about the effects we seek. But there are hosts of evil agencies ready to rush in and usurp the functions of our minds. We must hold no commerce with these, give them no freehold over us. If, therefore, we sit tonight, may I have your promise never to do so again?”

“I promise,” replied the young man solemnly.

When this had been done we put out the gas lights and seated ourselves around the instrument in such a manner that, without touching it, we could, by extending and joining hands, completely encircle it. Thus we waited in silence for five, ten, twenty minutes. But nothing occurred, no sound came to break the silence.

“It will not play; I know it,” said Celaye abruptly, rising and lighting the gas jets sullenly. He stood in the center of the apartment over the instrument, glaring at us defiantly. The doctor smiled.

“At least you have one consolation,” he said. “If it had been some mocking spirit that struck the strings it would have come to us. We can dismiss that hypothesis. Well, suppose you put us up here for the night.”

“I will,” said the young man eagerly, his face clearing. It was evident to me that his swift moods were rather the result of his nervous tension than of a difficult nature.

"There is a bedroom adjoining; I will leave the door open and you shall make yourselves comfortable there. If it does not play tonight, at least I shall be free from those terrible jangles that haunt me."

While he was searching for pillows and bedding I cross-questioned Brodsky upon the failure of his plan.

"I will tell you frankly why I made that suggestion," he said to me. "As I remarked, if it had been some devil, as I suspected, that played the jangles, it would have come eagerly. As you know, the difficulty at the seance table is not to obtain communication, but to keep off the lying, prankish elemental spirits that assume the names and personalities of the departed. Had any such creature come I should have made some conventional excuses to Celaye and departed. The fact that nothing occurred is highly satisfactory. The good spirit returns to this earth plane only with great difficulty and travail. Well, there will be nothing for us to do except to wait."

We resolved not to undress, but to sleep or rest upon the coverlets. We sat up together until close upon midnight, spending what would otherwise have been a very pleasant evening. Our host was a man of vast information and much culture, and, by tacit consent, no further word was spoken regarding the object of our visit. Shortly before midnight Celaye began to yawn.

"I always become uncommonly sleepy about this hour," he said. "With your permission I will leave you and go to bed as though you were not here, so as to reproduce as nearly as possible the exact conditions of other nights."

"A very excellent suggestion," said Brodsky approvingly. "Well, we will retire also, and I think the door may be as nearly closed as possible without preventing our hearing anything that may happen."

We put out the gas in our room and talked in whispers.

"That sleepiness of Celaye's is promising," said Brodsky confidently. "Sleep is an invariable precursor of psychic phenomena, as you have found. Don't let yourself be overpowered, though, and in about an hour we shall hear something of interest, unless I am very much mistaken. I only hope the sounds are loud enough to reach us. To one in such a disturbed condition as Celaye the least murmur may appear a thunderclap."

I SMILE when I recall the doctor's words. In spite of my resolution I had fallen into a light doze—and Brodsky afterward confessed to me that he, too, had yielded to sleep—when I was awakened by a furious, grating noise in the large room. I was wide awake in an instant. The cello was moaning like a tortured man. Thunderous discords fell from it, the strings grated and crackled as though some lunatic were at the instrument. I rushed to the door, but Brodsky held me back.

"It will cease if you enter," he whispered.

Never do I hope to hear such music again. And, what made it more horrible, there seemed to be some method in the playing of it; there were fearful parodies of motifs and phrases, the fingers struck the notes clearly, leaping from string to string as the bow squeaked and scraped across them. A moment later the door was flung into our faces as Celaye burst into the room.

"I can not bear it," he cried. "It is not she; that would be too horrible. Light a match, for the love of heaven!"

The doctor found and struck one, and on the instant the noise ceased. Brodsky and I ran across the room and inspected the instrument. The strings were still vibrating, but no

sound came from them. We stared at one another in astonishment. Then we heard Celaye sobbing in the next room. It took the doctor half an hour to restore him to his normal self.

"I can not help you," he said at length, when Celaye was dressed and we three sat once more in the gaslight. "If I had anything from which to obtain inferences—but I am helpless here. The world of psychic phenomena is an unmapped chart; we are only beginning to explore the coasts and boundaries. But one thing I would advise you: destroy the instrument."

"Never!" cried Celaye, his face aflame. "She has come to me, she has tried to make herself intelligible, to give me the sign I asked for."

"Well, I will not be responsible for your sanity," said Brodsky curtly.

"A lot I care for that," retorted Celaye, laughing bitterly. "Man," he added fiercely, snatching at the doctor's arm, "don't you understand what is troubling me? My wife lived for her music; she lived in it, it was all in life to her, except perhaps my love. And am I to believe that, once she has 'put on the garments of immortality,' she has lost all her knowledge of it, so that she can only play jangled, hideous mockeries of what she tries? Why, if that be so, then indeed death changes us beyond all recognition; we are no longer the same personalities that we have been, but something different. We spend our lives developing ourselves, our finer natures, we hope and dream that it is not for nothing. And now—must I believe that all this is thrown away upon the rubbish heap and that we become mere helpless automata? Answer me, answer!"

His grief was pitiful to witness. But argument with him would have been impossible. His mind was beyond reason, tottering as it was upon the borderland of madness.

"I do not think that is so," Brodsky replied.

"Think!" shouted Celaye, springing to his feet, his face distorted with passion. "You are an impostor, sir. I asked you here in good faith, hoping that you could give me back my faith and confidence, and you came looking upon the matter as an experiment. You care nothing for my grief, only for your own amusement. Dr. Brodsky, I have the honor to wish you good-night."

Brodsky faced him unmoved. His cheek paled, but all his muscles were under complete control.

"You have used hard words to me," he said. "Sometimes, indeed, the wisest of physicians are at fault; and then it is our reward to be accused of imposition. Well sir, it is unnecessary for me to reply further to your accusations. I wish you good-night."

I thought Celaye would have come to his senses then, but, to my astonishment, he made no answer of any kind. Instead he sank into a chair and burst into a fit of hysterical weeping. The doctor looked at him in seeming irresolution for one moment; then, as though realizing the impossibility of assisting him further, he took his hat and followed me out of the door. The sleepy elevator man took us down-stairs.

"Well, it's a hotel in town for us tonight," said Brodsky, as we marched down the deserted street. "There is a good hotel I used to visit some twenty blocks from here. What do you say to a walk?"

I agreed, and we tramped on in silence.

WE MUST have covered some half a dozen blocks when Brodsky stopped on a corner.

"Now why couldn't I solve that mystery?" he asked abruptly; and

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The Seventh Symphony

(Continued from page 336)

then, without waiting for any reply, he resumed his walk, muttering to himself all the while. We covered some six blocks more. Again the doctor stopped. He clapped his hands to his head, dislodging his hat, but made no effort to recover it. When I handed it to him he clapped it on wrong side foremost. Suddenly he rushed at me, grasped my hands in his, and began working them like a pump-handle in his excitement. I had never seen him in so exuberant a mood before.

“‘And the children shall be wise,’” he cried, “‘and the wise men shall be as children.’ How does the quotation run?” Then, linking his arms through mine, he solemnly turned me round, as though upon parade, and we started back again at a prodigious rate of speed.

“What is it? Have you solved the problem?” I asked.

The doctor came to a full halt once more.

“Do you mean to tell me you don’t know?” he cried. And when I admitted my ignorance he burst into peals of mighty laughter. He hurried me along breathlessly. And yet I knew in my heart that his happiness was not for the solution which he had found, but for the sake of Celaye. We reached the apartment at last, and the astonished elevator boy, more sleepy than ever, took us up and deposited us at Celaye’s door. We rang six times before Celaye came out, wild-eyed and haggard. He stared at us, not in anger, but amazement.

“You—you were here before—were you not?” he gasped. “My mind must be unhinged. Yes, I remember it. You could not help me.

And what was it I said to you, doctor? Something unpleasant? If so, forgive me."

The doctor flung his arm around the young man's shoulder and fairly dragged him into the room. The cello still stood propped against the wall.

"You wouldn't let me touch it this evening," cried Brodsky, snapping his fingers playfully in the man's face. "A fig for your whims. Play it yourself. Play the piece your wife loved so well—play her transcription of the 'Heartbeat March' from the seventh symphony." He swung Celaye round until he faced him. "Play it," he repeated, looking into his eyes.

Celaye's face grew fixed. He could no longer resist. Mechanically he walked across the room, took the bow from the floor, where it still lay, drew up a chair, and settled himself before the instrument. He drew the bow across the strings.

And again that rush of thunderous discords broke from the cello. It squeaked and groaned, and the bow rattled and scraped and whined. Celaye's eyes opened almost as wide as mine; he dropped the bow and sprang from his chair as though there were a nail in it.

"Well, sir," said Brodsky slowly, though his eyes twinkled, "ghosts have been blamed and doctors called impostors for better reasons than that. How in thunder do you expect even the grandest living player to bring forth music when you forget to tune your cello? And look at that bow! You've left them for months, sir, and expect them to prove serviceable. Get a new bow, sir, and tune those strings, and don't blame your own negligence upon those who are not responsible."

NOTE.—The next story in this series, *The Chairs of Stuyvesant Baron*, will be published in WEIRD TALES next month.