



# The Song of Leora



BY JASON DYBA





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Mr. Edwin sat down, though so far from home;

his next stop in Italy was Bari, then Rome.

His train was departing later that day;

he was biding his time at the little café.

And when he had settled on pasta primavera,

he sat and he listened to the streets of Matera.

Old scooters sang out their mechanical drone

'neath clacking of shoes on the worn cobblestones,

mixing with laughter – the children nearby –

while the bell tower rang, as though ringing the sky.

Pasta before him, he joined as he ate:

the clink of his fork against porcelain plate.

When, down through the ancient Italy streets,

the sound of a piano arrived at his seat.

His ears were enamored. It stopped him mid-bite.

*Love at first listen.* He decided he might take a break from his meal to discover its source and perhaps hear a tune before the next course.

And so, up the alley, he journeyed a ways though he questioned his choice the closer he came for the song of the piano was really no song at all, rather more-or-less "notes", all jumbled and sprawled.

True— it had gusto, trills, and tremolos, arpeggiating dominants, a cadence to close; but... it seemed to lack a most natural trait, a quality that makes the soul resonate.

Up to a window, he glanced right inside it searching for where the piano resided. And there at the ivories, a young woman, Leora had pencil and manuscript spread out before her.

"Excuse me, *signora* — young heart in the fray — what is this wandering dream that you play?"



Leora, at once, abandoned mid-scale  
the work of her hands and sadly exhaled,  
"I'm sorry, Signore, you've caught me midway  
on a journey to discover the – how do you say? –  
the 'secret' to writing a great masterpiece.  
I've sat at this bench, now, nearly all week!"

Mr. Edwin considered the plight of Leora...  
then politely inquired, "Are you venturing for a  
soundtrack of movies that masses adore  
while also a work great conductors explore?  
A harmonic structure— both classic and new?  
Perhaps a strange meter? 10/8 or 5/2?  
A counterpoint line revealed over pages  
that students and teachers will marvel for ages?  
Has your heart turned to beating with low timpani  
or movements all strung into string symphonies?  
Can you hear all the choirs, their swells and their bellows,  
accompanied by an ocean of cellos  
and French Horns and cymbals, trumpets fanfaring,  
and lastly the audience, rising and cheering?  
Are you aiming for Chopin or Copland or Liszt?"  
Mr. Edwin leaned in, "is this what you wish?"

"Yes! Oh yes!" Leora disclosed,  
"That's truly the piece I wish to compose!"

Still at the window, Mr. Edwin considered  
if anything he knew was worthwhile to give her  
regarding this mystery – one for the bards –  
the secret to making a great piece of art.

After some silence, Leora's last hope  
was just about faded when suddenly, he spoke:

"I think what is causing this lacking of luck  
is... you've dreamt of so much, except for the crux  
of the matter: beneath all the notes that you write  
is a melody reflecting a moment of life.

For sagas & stories, when taken apart,  
reveal that their truth is quite simple at heart.

In masterful paintings, the beauty you'll find  
is the thought it expresses, regardless of lines.

Lovers of words, though reluctant, agree:  
the most powerful phrase only takes three.

The finest of poets, the purest of prose  
will often say something we already know!

Sculptors of note, before chipping away,  
see signs of life hidden in there in the clay.  
Photographers' cameras are second in line  
to the moment they see at just the right time.

And for you, my fair lady, the secret you seek  
is a melody so simple you can't help but sing.  
Before there are tempos and timbres to tailor,  
a tune that is fit for a king and a sailor  
is what you must wrestle away from the Muse;  
this is the heart of the dream you pursue.  
And perhaps it's redundant to say this at all:  
the melodies that last are the ones you recall.  
Your skillful technique— that time will come!  
But all you need now is a tune that you love."

And when she had heard this, Leora descended  
one hand to the keys, her heart apprehended  
by something so pure and human and true;  
a masterpiece started with only a tune.

Mr. Edwin turned back and down through the alley  
the melody followed, and on through the valleys  
and mountains and oceans up to New York City,  
back to the home where Mr. Edwin was living.

He returned to his work, after one day of rest;  
at Carnegie Hall – tonight's special guest.

On that very stage he'd played Mozart and Bach,  
Debussy, Gershwin, and Béla Bartók.

And many years from then, he'd play many more of  
the greatest of songs, like the song of Leora.