

The leather Box or "Serve + Excel"

A dream Fantasy for music

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— The leather box —

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the scene opens in a delightful grove of trees, flowering shrubs, flowers + grassy slopes - A radiant-Being apparently just arrived from some long journey is calmly surveying his surroundings when a stranger, with a heavy box on his back + perplexity in his heart enters - The R. Being immediately goes to his assistance + helps him lay the heavy box on the ground - The stranger still more perplexed greets him, Str, thank you, friend, 'twas surely an act of kindness you did me, My box was getting very heavy + I seem to have come a long way - I cannot understand where I am or where I am supposed to go, but it is just heavenly here, only I would like to have my box in a safe place for the night, as I have to add so much to its contents already -

R.B. What have you in your box?

Str. My compositions - my life's works, Music, poetry, inspirations + thoughts of all kinds which I have written + garnered during my lifetime -

So you see, it is of the utmost urgency I must find a haven for the night

R.B. Perhaps I can help you - Just abide here awhile, while I seek the higher Authorities -

Str. My thanks indeed sir - You are most kind - (R.B. exits)

(Soliloquy) How peaceful here, what music I could write with all the air pulsating with fresh draughts of teeming life from all these trees + flowers - What have I done to deserve these blessings - (Pause)

I hear music - I must get it on to paper - (Going towards his box he is about to open it when he is accosted by the Radiant-Being + a Higher Authority, who have entered - The Str is overwhelmed by the shining raiment of the H.A. + drops to his knees -

H.A. Welcome friend musician (holds his hands over him for a moment in a Blessing, then helps the Str to his feet + continues) -

our friend here has acquainted me of your presence + I have been sent to guide you to your new home, not very far from here - Are you ready to follow me?

Str. My lord! (points to box)

H.A. Oh yes, I understand — Just leave things to us — You have carried it far enough — Come — (The music grows louder) The Str becomes greatly agitated the H.A. lifts the box with surprising ease as the curtain falls — The scene changes to the Garden house with large french windows allowing complete view of the lovely garden in which the house is situated — A pond with fountain visible + the Mountains towering into the distance Inside the house a musician's paradise — A piano + several other instruments on the walls also portraits of famous musicians on the walls — a writing desk + musician's paraphernalia, music desks etc — In the centre rests the box —

the Str is quite overcome by the Beauty of the place —

H.A. Welcome, friend musician to your new home —

Str My lord, what have I done to deserve all this — 'Tis too much — I must be dreaming! —

H.A. Enter + take joy of your new surroundings — I must away but will come back whenever you ask for me — (To R.B.) Stay with him — You have my permission to use my power for anything he may require to help him on his way (to Str) Farewell, "Serve + Excel" (the Str falls on his knees again as the great Spirit brushes him with his Blessing in leaving)

Str He overpowers me with his Presence — Luckily, I still have my box, or I would feel like just another grain of sand on the seashore — I trust, kind sir, you do not misunderstand me —

R.B. No, I do not misunderstand you — We all brought our boxes with us when we just arrived —

Str And did you pray to be allowed to show your work to the great masters in order to have their encouragement + guidance + their kindly criticism, as I now am about to pray you, who are so good to me, to grant me an opportunity of meeting them face to face — a longing I have had in my heart all my life, + which has grown stronger + stronger through the years — To meet my beloved Masters face to face, to watch them as they turn over the leaves of my slight contributions to the great All — to laugh with them, to cry with them — What happiness indescribable — Oh, may it not be permitted to me, a fellow-worker, to be granted this crying desire that is in my heart — Is it not now within the

Str, (cont) realms of possibility - now that I begin to realize that I also am one just entering upon the threshold of Life everlasting - for this great boon to be fulfilled -

R.B. Hold friend, do not distress yourself further - be not so distraught - I will pray to them in high places that they grant your request - Rest awhile in peace - I hope to bring one here who will surely fill your soul with the happiness you seek - "Serve + excel" exit -

Str, (soliloquy) "Serve + excel" he said + so said likewise the other great spirit - It must mean something here which I don't quite understand I will obey their behest - (kneels) I will watch to "serve" + pray to "excel"

(Music very soft + gentle) During the music the Radiant-Being appears leading in Johann Seb. Bach, who is a little blind from too near proximity to earth conditions - A kindly, courteous gentlem, with a great soul + a longing to help his fellow musicians - Str is deeply immersed in his prayers + is only aroused by the R.B. touching him

Str (Breaking down out of sheer joy) Master, dear dear Master - (He cannot speak more, the music soars) Stares ^{smilingly} with deepest admiration at Bach

Bach, (After a pause in which he wipes his eyes + endeavours to see the Str) there, there my son, you honour me too much this way - Pray rise + let us sit down together + you will tell me of your journey hither - Has it wearied you?

Str No master, I have never felt better or happier in my life, since being in your presence is all in all to me! -

Bach, Not so, my son, say not so - We are all of so little consequence here, I hesitate to tell you how infinitesimal we really are - when I came over + brought my little box with me, as I see you have done, my one thought + longing was to meet my masters face to face, to receive their praise or dispraise as they wished + to remain at their feet to worship + imbibe from their pure spring of life, a fragment of crystal clear fragrant Beauty, with which to inspire those still on earth to greater + greater efforts.

Str And you succeeded master, - No greater than you has ever trod the earth -

Bach, Oh my son, do not harbour such idle thoughts — We are all one in the Eyes of God, + each one of us will be given our opportunity to listen with our souls to the music that pours forth timelessly from the spheres + those that do hear are among the great masters, both past + present — + those that cannot hear will be taught to hear in all humility + patience by Those that have passed beyond the Mountains —

Str, Beyond the Mountains! you make me fear, master, Ominous phrase! —

Bach There is nothing to fear my son, for those who love to help others, + who themselves in turn are helped by Ones greater than they —

Str Master your words are as balm to me — My courage has returned — I would ask you now to let me show you some of my work which I fashioned whilst on earth + beg your praise or dispraise as you will —

Bach, My son, wait a little while before showing me your work — I have not been so near the earth for some time now, + it is getting darker for me — I must away to the light from whence I came + to where you will soon, yes very soon, be sent — Then, if it still pleases you, we will examine + perchance enjoy your work together — Fare thee well my son — (To R.B.) let me lean on your arm again — (He turns as he goes out) "Serve + excel," (exit)

Str Again those words — It must mean more than just the words — But why, or why did he refuse to glance at my work — Surely he knew how much it meant to me — I am quite distracted that he left me without my opening the box for him — What can I do to persuade my beloved Masters to grant this, my burning request?

R.B. (Overhearing the last words) Courage friend — I have brought another master to meet you — Endeavour to persuade him to look over your work — but I warn you, 'twill not be easy — This is an extraordinarily vital independant spirit — Highspirited impetuous + imposing — Here he comes — (Enter Beethoven breezily)

Beethoven - Ha, I've been writing music for a tug of war - Musik! What music! Bah! And they'll get their cue from me, now that I can hear again - I'll put papa Haydn at one end of the tug of war + I'll take the other - He has some bright-boys at his beck + call, + they can pull, but so have I - But if I begin to fail - which is most unlikely - I'll call down an avalanche of hellish modish music upon them to swallow them up -

R. B. Ludwig, you are incorrigible -

Beeth, Incorrigible! Incorrigible (rolling the r's) that's the word - that calls for music - Paper! paper! give me paper! (All three search for paper - the Str finds some in his pocket, Beethoven grabs it without a word begins to write) Ha! "Incorrigible" - one, two, three four (pause) five now - (goes on spluttering)

Str But master, I did wish to speak with you about -

Beeth, No time, don't you see I'm busy - Now - what ass can I send this to on earth - Five notes this time gentleman ass - Five not Four - Ha, I'll leave it to my bright boys, They'll think of someone - In-cor-ri-gi-ble, accent right here (makes heavy marks on paper + turns to go -

Str (Pleadingly) But master

Beeth, Oh you! Well, here's your chance (mistakes him for a pupil) Take a look at it + let me know how you get on (Gives him a cutting + turns to go again) "In-cor-ri-gi-ble" -

Str But master - You must help me -

Beeth (Suddenly, pretending deafness) Eh, eh, I can't hear you - Oh, oh, it's you again, yes, yes, (deafness disappears) What am I doing here + for what purpose was I called (Turning upon R. B.) By what power -

R. B. Now now Ludwig - Behave yourself

Beeth, Behave myself! I? behave myself! What! man alive! All my life I was kicked + buffeted about - handicapped by not hearing how the people jeered at me + I must behave myself! Fiddlesticks! -

Str Jeered? Master, truly you are deeply mistaken -

Beeth, Young man, I thank God for those jeers - They made a man of me - + now that I can hear again, I tear myself to pieces trying to get down all the music that I hear pulsating all around me - Fantastic as it sounds, I am as near loosing my head every moment here as I was downstairs - only worse - But why is it so dark here?

R.B. We are very near the earth -

Beeth, Oh, + is that why I felt my ears again for a moment?

R.B. Yes.

Beeth (to Str) Young man, you will not stay long in this dismal light, beautiful as you think it now - You will come to us up away on the Mountains where there is light + where everything sings - Everything + the Glory of which no voice can ever express - We just bow down before it + humble ourselves - + if it were not for these excursions into comparative darkness we would not be able to contain ourselves - I speak for us all - all - Farewell - Serve + excel, Serve + excel - Excel - - - - (exit)

Str But master, my compositions! (Pause) And he has gone - - - + all my watchful service + praying comes to naught! + my compositions all still waiting impatiently to come out of my box + float into the air - I am beginning to feel unhappy despite all this Beauty + merciful Peace - My heart is torn in twain - Oh for someone with whom I could talk - who would understand - Merciful heavens is there no one among my revered masters with whom I may converse freely + open an aching heart to?

R.B. (Appearing) Again I say calm yourself, for it is so ordained that another master, a spirit of the very essence of music drama + the arts has been sent to you for your comfort + delectation -

St My thanks dear sir - Forgive me if I have seemed impatient, but now I am myself again + can face my problems with a quiet assurance of your good will - My thanks dear sir! -

(Wagner appears in a deeply philosophic state of mind in skull cap + gown - He goes straight to the Str greeting him warmly + shaking him by the hand, calling him by his first name as an

old friend — the Str is overcome with emotion —

Wagner So happy, Gladiolo, that we meet at last — I have been present at many performances of my works in which you have taken so prominent a part + have carried sacred memories back with me from the glorious performances in the great cities where countless hosts of hovering ministering spirits gave the startling impression of building huge columns of glowing beams of light — from the very Centre of the Spheres — The beams resting upon all the performers both on the stage + in the orchestra, + then, this marvel not being enough, creeping gradually over into the large auditorium + filling the entire building with pulsating vitalizing light + glorious sounds — All honour + glory to those worthy to have created the possibility of such magical display — (He takes the Str in his arms most tenderly + fatherly)

Str Master, you overwhelm me — I realized dimly that I was being helped + was so grateful for it — Now I have the certainty from you, your very self, great master, + it fills me with joy inexpressible to know that those still downstairs, who aim to give of their very best, can have the help of their great + beloved masters — Is that why I hear the phrase "serve + excel" so frequently here —

W. Ah, you are quicker to learn my son — Yes, "serve + excel" is our very own Watchword for all musicians, past present + future, + all poets + artists + all who aspire to become such — It makes us one family, one whole, a never ceasing mystery of creation — For creating we all are — Up in the Mountains + beyond, we are filled with the majesty of eternal music — It takes a great power of will not to swoon at the sheer ecstasy of it —

Str Master, one day not so long ago, I was lying on the sands beside the ocean, when I seemed to hear music I had never heard before — It seemed to come from an imaginary archway, the head of a short curved tunnel, which was brilliantly lit at the far end, And

Str (cont-) as I lay I heard wonderful ringing motifs, strangely enough unharmonized but poignantly rhythmic + very stirring + as I listened it seemed to me that the motifs kept changing both in character + in rhythm + I began to hear remembered themes of the old old masters - gradually the themes became more recognisable chasing one another in an endless stream of sound obviously following a rule of procedure from the very ancient, unrecognizable in their antiquity, to gradually arriving at present day - An array of themes of wholly glorious music but still always only the themes without the well known harmonies - Your music, dear master, was very prominent among them - Then the themes seemed to go on - I recognized the Russian masters the great five, the French masters + the great German Italian + modern masters - then the themes went on to unbelievable heights of poignancy + strength stranger + stranger until I couldn't stand it any longer + with a struggle I woke up + my beloved resting wife, the sea + the sand were again my only companions -

W. My dear Gladiolo - you have been richly privileged to have had this wonderful experience - Was there no one in the archway who you could contact + from whom you could seek explanations?

Str Yes, there was a figure of a man in a long gown such as you are wearing, but his face I could not see, as the light behind him was so blinding -

W. Ah! But you spoke together?

Str Yes master -

W. Tell me, if you can, what he had to say -

Str He told me, in the gentlest of voices, that I was listening to one Day of music which is as a thousand years by earth's reckoning. And that the themes I was listening to, were for ever being sent floating down to earth from the Central Spheres, for those who have ears to hear, to catch + fashion to the likenesses they

Str knew + loved best — thus making all those who were able +
 (cont) privileged to receive them, from the beginning of time,
 brothers + partakers of God's infinite Gifts —

W. Well said Gladiolo! — Tis thus we greet each other — as
 brothers + partakers of God's infinite Gifts and our covenant
 word is — — —

Str "Serve + excel" What a clarion call to always do ones uttermost!
 Now all is made clear to me — And my full box — (stops) —
 I wonder! — Master, would it be too presumptuous of me to beg
 you to glance at my latest compositions (going towards box)

W. Wait Gladiolo! We all bring our very precious boxes over
 with us when we first come here — Our souls are filled with
 the earnest desire to take our place + to belong here, + we come to depend
 on our boxes to see that we take it rightfully + belong wholeheartedly —
 No one more than I did — but I beg you, wait awhile Gladiolo —
 have patience — So much is happening, happening all the time —
 I feel an urgent call to go + prepare my part of a great tide
 of inspiration to be propelled towards the earth for those of them
 there that can receive it, + so must leave you for a while —
 Fare thee well Gladiolo, — Remember "Serve + excel" till we meet
 again — (exit)

Str I was too presumptuous — I feel suddenly empty, — Tis enough —
 I cannot bear myself any longer — What can I do? what shall
 I do? — I begin to fear the future — How so? how come?
 amidst all this Beauty + Harmony — Tis not for me —
 I must — (means to destroy his box)

R.B. Hold friend! Perhaps the great masters had some plan
 for you which is withheld from such as we are —
 what do you say, would it satisfy you, if you were to show
 me your compositions?

Str (strangely excited) Holy Moses! why didn't we think of that
 before — Of course 'tis the solution — Here, take this chair —
 No, sit here! In the sun — A table (fussing about) This way

Str
(cont) No, that way! Oh how good of you to accept to listen while I play to you (opens the lid of the piano very excitedly)
Are you ready? Then here we go — (Goes to his box + opens it
He is struck dumb + just manages to whisper) —

Str Its empty! (Str is confounded + nearly swoons, R. B. rushes to his assistance — A long paralyzing pause — The Str gradually regains his composure) (Music quietens down gradually)

Str Heavenly Father, forgive me — I deserve it all — (pause)
I accept it — accept it all — Into Thy loving Care I cast myself for ever — I accept to begin again, right at the beginning — All thought of yesterday be buried for ever — Today + now I consecrate myself only to Thy Service — Do with me what Thou wilt! Only forgive me my foolish pride in thinking that all that I have done could have been of any consequence to anyone but to Thee alone (Music of Gladiolo's begins here)

Str Father, into Thy Hands I — — — (falters + listens, then his distress is gradually transformed into radiant joy as he hears his own music being played + sung by heavenly choirs — the back of the stage gradually shapes itself into a living picture of happy faces all triumphantly singing Gladiolo's great Choral + in the foreground with outstretched hands stand the great masters among which Bach, Beethoven + Wagner are seen beckoning to Gladiolo to enter into the Everlasting Kingdom of Heavenly Music

Curtain
