

CURSED LOVE

A Prequel to

If Music Be the Food of Love

by Lenny Cavallaro

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CONTENTS

Introductory Notes

Prologue

Chapter One: Beethoven's Friend

Chapter Two: The Funeral

Chapter Three: Some Die; Some Live

Chapter Four: The Dream

Chapter Five: Dinner

Chapter Six: The Fortune-Teller

Chapter Seven: The Recurring Dreams (1826)

Chapter Eight: The Triumph of the Curse

Epilogue: Excerpts from *The Passion of Elena Bianchi*

Introductory Notes

The Passion of Elena Bianchi is a series that defies the limits of genre. Indeed, it falls into several such categories simultaneously, and it violates the conventions for the most central of them.

The saga is a love story, yet unlike most modern romances, the first volume, *If Music Be the Food of Love*, does not end “happily ever after” or “happily ever after for now.” Indeed, it concludes with an emotional earthquake.

Classical music figures prominently; the central characters are a pianist (Giovanni) and a violinist (Elena). The two engage in a sadomasochistic relationship, and their kink runs far beyond the relatively bland, sanitized material of the *Fifty Shades* sequence. The Holocaust and the Mafia also figure in the narrative. In addition, there are various paranormal elements—psychic and occult phenomena—and hovering above them all lies a nearly two-thousand-year-old malediction (the Curse). Finally, we witness the expression of reincarnation through “soul fractions,” a device hitherto unknown in fiction.

Cursed Love is designed as a prequel, and it is both historical and paranormal romance. History records the ill-fated love shared by Ludwig van Beethoven and Countess Josephine Brunsvik. In this narrative, the two are thwarted not only by social conventions, but also by the Curse. However, at the prompting of a fortune-teller, Beethoven composes a work that will ultimately provide the vehicle through which Giovanni and Elena will bond and perhaps triumph.

Beethoven is also peripherally exposed to kink, although he finds such practices altogether disgusting. Nevertheless, his last dreams in this short narrative anticipate the sadomasochistic relationship Giovanni and Elena will share.

As a bonus feature, the author has appended four short excerpts: one musical, two kinky, and one criminal (in which Giovanni helps the Mafia). These offerings provide a sample of what lies ahead in the saga.

— Lenny Cavallaro

15 March 2022

PROLOGUE

Imperial Rome, 23 C.E.

*In the beginning was the Curse, and the Curse was with Karma,
and the Curse was Karma.*

Certain mysteries transcend our feeble ability to comprehend them. It has always been so, and perhaps it is for the better. If we knew the hidden powers we sometimes possess, we might commit far more atrocities than we already do.

* * *

His eyes were open, but it was difficult for him to see. He was awake, yet he could hardly move. He could hear voices, yet the words were sometimes muffled. He was weak—too weak even to speak.

With an enormous effort, he focused on the female voice. His vision was blurred initially, but eventually his eyes began to work. It took but a single glance to make everything clear to him.

His most bitter enemy and his wife were kissing passionately. Of course! Suddenly he understood. They had poisoned him, so that they could marry after the period of mourning had passed.

No! He would stop them with a curse. The words formed silently: “May you never enjoy the fruits of your marriage...until this unspoken curse be heard!”

Those were his last thoughts. Minutes later he lost consciousness, and less than half an hour later he was dead.

The Roman did not know the power of his silent malediction. Although the murderers appeared to get away with their crime, they were indeed unable to wed, denied permission by the emperor, Tiberius. Both the treacherous wife and her lover would perish eight years later.

Of course, none of them knew anything about karma or the energies the dying man had unleashed. Unbeknownst to anyone, the nobleman had spawned the Curse, which would now assume a vengeance of its own.

* * *

Vienna, April 1800

For centuries the ancient Curse had run roughshod over their Love, leaving a trail of pain and unfulfilled longing behind it. So many had loved, yet none would ever marry and consummate their relationship. Moreover, Europeans did not yet understand the concept of soul fractions, and how the ill-fated lovers would continue meet again, fall in love again, and fail miserably yet again.

An earthquake in Verona put an end to happiness for Francesco Maldini and Caterina Albano in 1117. He lost his life, while she spent the rest of hers in a convent.

The volcanic eruption at the Phlegraean Fields, west of Naples, snuffed out the lives of both Fernando di Napoli and his betrothed, Maria de Luca, in 1538. This was “familiar territory” thematically; the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in 79 had similarly prevented the marriage of a young couple in Stabiae.

War took its toll as well. Several of the grooms were snatched from the church and returned unceremoniously to their regiments. All died before they could fulfill their marital obligations.

Death came in other convenient packages, always to the advantage of the Curse. Whether by accident, disease, or murder, one or both invariably perished before the couple could wed and consummate.

Long ago the Curse had ventured outside of the peninsula. French, Greek, Portuguese, Spanish, and even Germanic and Viking lovers

proved powerless against it. The actual details varied, but the outcome was always tragic.

This time the ill-fated couple had regrouped north of Italy, where the Curse caught up with them and struck yet again. Its victims were based in Vienna: a countess and a hard-of-hearing musician. They were doomed, of course, like all the others. Both would suffer; both would be forgotten.

Well, maybe only one. The young man was rapidly gaining reputation, and perhaps this Ludwig van Beethoven would become a noteworthy composer. What did it matter? Even if he became another Haydn or Mozart, he was powerless against the Curse.

Or so it seemed...

* * *

The composer stared into the mirror and shook his head. “So I shall lose, yet in my failure, I shall triumph?” he asked his reflection. “Must it be? Yes, it must be!”

Ludwig van Beethoven did not realize that he would use those same words, almost exactly, some twenty-six years later. They would grace the last movement of his *String Quartet #16 in F Major, Op. 135*: “*Muß es sein?*” (for the chords that introduce the movement) and “*Es muß sein!*” (for the main theme). In fact, at the moment he was not even thinking about a quartet. Already the opening chords of a movement were forming in his mind, but the music would be for piano and violin.

“If that old witch spoke the truth, only I can put an end to this abomination—or at least provide the vehicle through which someone else will do so,” he shouted at the mirror. “Fair enough: I shall take this Curse by the throat, and it will never wholly overcome me.”

He would write something similar about Fate two years later in his famous “Heiligenstadt Testament.”

Chapter One: Beethoven's Friend

Codrin Pusoma knew him well, of course. He was not someone the composer acknowledged publicly, yet about some matters Ludwig could speak more candidly with his Romani friend than with anyone. Thus, Codrin had learned about the hearing problems before the others did, and he had heard about the lofty ambitions as well as the greatest frustrations.

In the early days, when Beethoven was still a striking, rather good-looking fellow, Codrin even helped arrange the "assignments." This is not to imply that Codrin was a pimp. He merely led his friend to a select brothel, where he might enlist the services of a truly discreet prostitute and then contrive a surreptitious exit out the back door, escaping virtually unnoticed.

However, above and beyond his services as confidant and purveyor, Codrin served a far greater function. It was he who led the composer to the fortune teller.

Ludwig was not a Viennese by birth, although he lived most of his life there, and the city would doubtless claim him as "one of our own" forever. He first came to Vienna in the spring of 1787, and it is quite possible he met with Mozart at that time. Beethoven departed Vienna after just a few weeks but returned in 1792, and by December of that year he had begun to study with Joseph Haydn.

Codrin met Ludwig in 1794, shortly before both men attended a performance by János Bihari, the great Hungarian/Romani violinist. It is now known that Beethoven and Bihari were indeed personally acquainted, albeit superficially, and Beethoven actually used one of Bihari's melodies in the *King Stephen Overture*. It is not widely known that Codrin had introduced Ludwig to his former teacher.

Codrin may perhaps have felt flattered that Ludwig sometimes called him his “Gypsy violinist”—with deepest affection, of course. In fairness, while he had certainly become quite competent with the fiddle, he was never anywhere near the level of Bihari. Moreover, he was only three-quarters Romani. However, if Beethoven considered him a full-blood, who was Codrin to argue?

In 1800 Ludwig was not yet the great composer so widely revered today. At the time, he had a far greater reputation as a virtuoso pianist and improviser. Indeed, his improvisatory skills were unparalleled, as he proved in ‘duels’ with other keyboard players—using fortepianos, not pistols or swords. Beethoven bested them all with his dazzling array of skills.

These epic musical duels must have been extraordinary events. It is known that Beethoven always won, and that after 1800, no one would *dare* to challenge him. That was the year he demolished Daniel Steibelt, who fled Vienna humiliated and disgraced.

It was Codrin who had prevailed upon Ludwig to accept these challenges. The latter was at first reluctant to do so—not because of any fear about the outcome, but simply because he considered such events demeaning to his art. “Competitions are for athletes and racehorses, not artists,” he insisted. He then reminded the Romani of the outrages of history—how the great Mozart had been held to a draw by the pedestrian Clementi; how political intrigue was always a factor in such events; how a single distraction, like a cough or a sneeze, could produce a perverse result; and a litany of other such objections.

Codrin listened but would have none of it. He merely pointed out the obvious: such events were hosted by the nobility, they paid quite well, and they helped promote the name and reputation of the victorious artist.

Joseph Gelinek had said he would “make mincemeat” of Ludwig in their duel. However, he barely held his own in the “performance” portion of the contest and fell apart completely once the improvisations began. Nevertheless, one must give *Herr* Gelinek his due; he was gracious in defeat and indicated that Beethoven’s improvisatory skills were absolutely on a par with Mozart’s, and perhaps even more daring.

Joseph Woelfl was another such opponent—actually a friend of Ludwig’s at one time. He towered over Beethoven physically by some nine inches or so, and he had huge hands that could span nearly two octaves. Nevertheless, Beethoven defeated him easily at the home of Count Raimund Wetzlar in 1799.

The most famous contest of them all was against Daniel Steibelt, with whom things got quite personal and ugly. Daniel had earlier insulted Ludwig, calling him a hack and a coward: a big mistake.

Steibelt approached the piano with a piece of his own music, which he tossed to the side. In fairness, most thought he improvised quite well, but he was no match for his opponent. Beethoven picked up the music Steibelt had left behind, showed it to the audience, *and turned it upside down!* He then took the opening four notes and began to improvise as only he could. Steibelt fled from the room, completely crushed, and shortly thereafter left Vienna, never to return.

That was in the early spring of 1800. Codrin and Ludwig had their most important conversation shortly thereafter.

* * *

At the time, Beethoven was indeed beginning to gain greater recognition as a composer, and Vienna was becoming aware of a new genius in its midst. His first six string quartets were composed near the turn of the century and would be released in 1801. 1799 saw the publication of three piano sonatas, including the famous “Pathetique.” His Op. 12

sonatas for violin and piano were published that same year, and he was already hard at work on his first symphony. Thus, the rout of Steibelt, which was indeed his last “duel,” marked a turning point for Beethoven. Thereafter, he would be far better known as a composer than as a pianist.

Despite success on so many musical fronts, all was not roses. For at least a couple of years, perhaps longer, Ludwig had noticed the signs of encroaching deafness. He often had a horrible ringing in his ears—they told him it was called tinnitus—and it was already becoming difficult for him to follow conversations in a crowded room. This would have been a true curse on a lesser man, but it would not stop the genius of Beethoven.

What did stop him in his tracks was something altogether different. He was not merely “unlucky in love”; he was under an ancient curse, one that would wreak havoc on ill-fated lovers for another two centuries. Indeed, it would endure until two intertwined souls, bound by Ludwig’s gift, were in a position to overcome the ancient malediction.

Chapter Two: The Funeral

*“... And they, since they
Were not the one dead, turned to their affairs.” — Robert Frost*

29 March 1827

Ludwig van Beethoven was buried in Vienna some three days after his demise. Accounts vary as to the size of the crowd, but in all likelihood somewhere between twenty thousand and thirty thousand people attended. The pallbearers and torch-bearers included composers with distinguished pedigree in their own rights—though none would ever be thought the equal of the Titan whom they were laying to rest: Carl Czerny (one of Beethoven’s students), Johann Nepomuk Hummel (who had studied with Mozart and was one of Beethoven’s friends), and Franz Schubert (who may or may not have met his idol, but who had famously declared himself a “worshipper and admirer” of Beethoven, to whom he dedicated his “Variations on a French Theme for Piano Duet,” Op. 10).

Schubert was among the most visibly moved. It is believed that he and some friends adjourned to a tavern after the funeral, and someone proposed a toast to the next to “follow” Beethoven (i.e., to the grave). Schubert immediately chugged down his drink and was indeed the next to die.

All told, the funeral had brought forth an enormous crowd, and why not? Vienna had lost the giant who was perhaps its most famous adopted son, a musical genius whose like would never be seen again. It was a unique moment in history, yet it passed quickly enough, and the living eventually departed. Many retreated to their homes and labors, while a number found their way to restaurants and taverns, where many a tale of Beethoven was told—but not THIS one.

Chapter Three: Some Die; Some Live

Where there is life, there is hope (at least some of the time), but thwarted hope can generate yet more suffering. Thus, it often amused the Curse to let the star-crossed lovers live, only to have their hopes dashed again and again. Sometimes one would be compelled (by pressures from the family) to marry someone else, leaving the other in “hopeful misery”: hopeful that perhaps the chosen spouse might die, but otherwise miserable. This, indeed, would be the curse inflicted upon Beethoven. He would never marry; she would marry twice, and both would be positively wretched by the time the Curse had finished with them.

Chapter Four: The Dream

Beethoven awakened with a jolt. The ghastly dream had returned, and he had suffered through its ending for the third time in four nights. Although still under the covers, he felt chilled to the bones, and this in turn caused the tinnitus to flare up uncomfortably.

He would need some help, but who could possibly assist him? There were plenty of physicians in Vienna, yet most were charlatans whose only skills lay in their ability to sell useless services. For a haunting dream of this sort, he would need someone else altogether, but whom?

The answer was obvious enough. His friend, Codrin Pusoma, would help him. He would call upon his “Gypsy violinist” that very day!”

The composer got out of bed, used his chamber pot, splashed some water on his face, and threw on his clothes. Then he summoned his servant, Otto, and sent him to Codrin’s residence, with a short note:

“My dear friend: I can use your counsel this evening. Might I perhaps impose upon you to join me for dinner at 8 PM at the *Schachtelwirt* and thereafter regroup to my lodgings? Many thanks. LvB.”

Otto returned less than an hour later, his usual surly, incommunicative self.

“Well?” demanded his employer.

“He said he would see you at that time,” answered the other.

Beethoven smiled. If anyone could help him, it was Codrin, and if the issue was beyond even the Romani’s powers, he would surely direct Beethoven to someone who could handle it. Everything would be fine. Meanwhile, he had several sonatas to finish and then the symphony.

Chapter Five: Dinner

Beethoven was usually reluctant to spend money on others. Thus, Codrin realized that something was bothering him. Fair enough; as long as Ludwig intended to pick up the tab, Codrin would surely be delighted to sing for his supper.

The two retired to a small alcove that afforded them more privacy. The composer eyed the other man carefully as they ate their appetizers.

“What do you know of curses?” he inquired.

“I can swear as well as the next man in German and far better in Romani. Why do you ask?”

Beethoven shook his head. “I do not refer to foul language. I have no need for the help of any man on that score. However, I am curious to know whether you, or perhaps your...people...know something about special ways to put a spell on someone, or perhaps to take one off.”

“Ah,” replied the other with a grin. “Then why did you not say so? Now, I can tell you a marvelous story about a farmer who...”

If the hearing impairment had one benefit—it certainly had no more than that—it was the fact that he could so easily “tune out.” His friend was now off telling tales. *He’ll gladly let me buy him dinner, and in return he offers me some entertainment. I can live without his hollow prattle, but if he can help me out of this situation—both of them, actually—it will be time and money well spent!*

In short order Ludwig and Codrin had been served their main course: *Wienerschnitzel* with potatoes, and another mug of beer for both. “If you don’t object, I’ll be happy to continue talking with my mouth full,” quipped Codrin, but Beethoven shook his head.

“It is difficult enough for me to understand you normally,” he admitted. “It will be impossible if you are also eating.”

Codrin smiled. “In that case, since I can understand you well enough, why don’t you do all the talking until we adjourn to your quarters?”

Beethoven nodded and began to discuss the violin sonata he had recently started to sketch. “I think this one will be most successful,” he opined. “However, I have yet another in mind, as well as a piano concerto. I plan to write both in C minor.”

“A strange choice of key, though by no means a poor one. Didn’t Mozart write a marvelous piano concerto in that key?”

“Indeed, and it is one of his best, in my opinion,” replied Ludwig.

The dinner proceeded uneventfully from there, and the conversation was noteworthy for its want of substance, until both men regrouped to Beethoven’s apartment. The composer generally preferred to drink at the *Zum Weissen Schwann*, but this evening he needed privacy. Nevertheless, he could surely fortify himself with some decent red wine—actually a far more palatable brew than the rather crude swill he got at the Swan.

“So...,” the host began.

“So...,” replied his guest.

“You may find this rather hard to believe, my good friend, but I fear I am under some sort of curse.”

“Oh?”

“In fact, I am under two curses.”

“Oh?”

“I do not know what to do.”

“Oh?”

Beethoven sat forward and struck the table with his hands, spilling some of the wine onto his tablecloth. “Can you say nothing more intelligent than ‘Oh’?” he bellowed.

Codrin, who was all too familiar with Ludwig's rages, yawned provocatively. "Can you get to the point and tell me what is bothering you?" he inquired softly.

For a moment the composer glowered at him balefully. Then he smiled. "Ah, you are a true friend, Codrin. That is why I trust you. All right, let us talk. You know what has been going on with me?"

The visitor paused. "I know that you are fresh off yet another triumph, having sent that odious Steibelt back to France or Germany. As a pianist and improviser, you are without peer, and already some begin to place your compositions on the same lofty plane as those of Haydn and Mozart."

A slight smile crossed the other's face, but only briefly. Shaking his head, he asked the question he had not yet articulated to anyone, not even himself: "But how long shall I be able to compose or perform if I cannot hear? Codrin—I fear I am growing deaf!"

The other sat in stunned silence before he ventured timidly, "But you have seen physicians? I thought you told me it was just a ringing in your ears."

"That is how it began a couple of years ago. At first it seemed relatively trifling, but then it got steadily worse. Now it can bother me for days on end, even when I sleep. Moreover, I definitely find it more and more difficult to hear voices. Women's voices, in particular, are tricky, and while I can sometimes follow people adequately in a closed space—like my home—I am frequently unable to hear anything other than abstract noise in a more public setting."

Codrin nodded and shrugged. "I am so sorry to hear this, Ludwig. However, I do not know how I can help you. This is surely a medical problem, not something for a gambler and womanizer like me."

The host grimaced at the word, “womanizer.” Reaching for his glass, he eyed the other carefully and mumbled softly, “I fear a curse also on my love-life.”

“Ah, now with that I can certainly help you,” the other replied, smiling.

* * *

Like so many musicians, Beethoven had students. Some, including the aforementioned Carl Czerny, would become solid musicians in their own rights. However, another was far more important for an overwhelming reason: because the composer had fallen in love with her.

“Do you understand?” cried the composer. “I do not need to see Hanna or Christina. I speak of what reaches my heart, not merely my loins.”

“Your heart,” the other scoffed. “What lunacy do you babble? I am ‘in love’ with Kezia, but I am also ‘in lust’ with her. What is the difference? Either way, we are happy, and if I love her, it is only because she satiates my lusts so well—all of them!”

Beethoven shook his head. “My friend, you are and will always be a rutting goat.”

“And you, my friend, will bury yourself alive as a hopeless romantic. Look; it is simple enough. You find a woman attractive. If you and she share certain tastes, you enjoy her charms. After a while, you become habituated, at which point you either claim to feel this mystical ‘love’ of yours, or else you move on to someone more exciting.”

“And what is Kezia to you—just someone who shares your tastes?”

The other stared at his host and burst into laughter. “Come, come, you pathetic prude. You know fully well that Kezia is the perfect woman

for me. She can pleasure me through the normal gates, the back door, or her mouth, and she absolutely loves it when I beat her.”

“You beat her?” Beethoven gasped.

“Of course!” Codrin replied. “Hands, belt, cane...why I have even put my boots to good use and left delightful bruises on her rump and thighs. Show me the man who doesn’t beat the woman who wants such amorous pain, and I’ll take her away from him.”

Ludwig shook his head. “Well, perhaps there are things about you I do not need to know.”

“No worries on that score. Besides, we were discussing *your* love life, not mine. Come! You must bring me up to date.”

Both refilled their glasses. “It began less than a year ago,” explained Beethoven. “The woman in question is Josephine Brunsvik, a countess. Last May, her mother brought her and her older sister to study with me. I fell in love with her almost immediately, and I can assure you that she has genuine feelings about me. However, we are talking the daughter of a nobleman and me, a commoner. Josephine’s mother was quite adamant; her son-in-law would need to be of ‘suitable social standing,’ meaning from the nobility, which I obviously am not.”

“Ah, but you are a count among composers, the prince of pianists, and a truly imperial improviser!”

His host smiled politely and then sighed. “A few months later, she married Count Joseph Deym. He is much, much older than she—twenty-seven years—yet already she is with child.”

“Do not despair then, my friend! If he is that much older, she may soon be a widow!”

The other nodded. “I am aware of that. In fact, I have prayed for it, to the extent I am capable of prayer. However, something tells me we are under a curse and shall never realize our dreams.”

He paused, took another sip of wine, and resumed. “Meanwhile, the lessons have continued more or less regularly, and everything seems cordial enough, even between me and the count. Still, I cannot love her as I truly wish.”

The other grinned lecherously. “Ludwig, Ludwig! So many men have desired a given woman, only to find she was inaccessible or unavailable, for whatever reason.”

“But this is different, Codrin! Something is keeping us apart—*I can feel it; I know it*. I am convinced it is a curse of some kind.”

The Romani was careful not to make light of his friend’s distress. Perhaps Beethoven was truly in a bad state of mind. After all, between the encroaching deafness and romantic frustration, he had the right to feel cursed. If so...

Codrin hesitated. “I do not know how to answer you, Ludwig. However, there are some old women; you would probably call them ‘Gypsy fortune tellers.’ If we can find one, she will need some sort of ‘consideration,’ of course,” he added, making the familiar finger gesture for money.

“Will she be any good, or will she be just a money-grabbing hag?”

“I have no way to tell, my friend. However, some of these people have excellent reputations.”

“Well, if you think such a woman can help, you must bring me to her, right now!”

The other man pulled out his pocket watch. “At this hour? I do not know whether we can even find one, much less whether she will still be awake. Moreover, most prefer daylight, so that they can see the tea leaves—or palms, or whatever they use—more clearly.”

“But...you are one of these people. You don’t know what devices they employ?”

Codrin burst into laughter. “Why on earth would I have anything to do with a fortune-teller? I am successful gambler, and I have invested wisely. I have more money coming in than I can spend, a woman who loves to be beaten, and great health. Still, if you would like to go down to the Roma settlement tomorrow, I shall be happy to escort you and translate if necessary.”

Beethoven studied his friend carefully. Here was a nobody: a man who did not care that he would be completely forgotten after his death. He, Beethoven, sought to achieve immortality through his art. As for the vile abominations about which Codrin had boasted, they were his own business. This Kezia would last for a few more months, and then the Romani would move on to another, and another, and another. Indeed, the composer had long ago told his friend, “*Du bist ein guter Mann, aber Sie haben einfach keine Moral*”—“You are a good man, but you simply have no morals.”

Nevertheless, despite his shortcomings, Codrin truly was a good friend, and perhaps the only one in whom Ludwig could confide. Moreover, he had now promised to return early the next afternoon to bring Beethoven to the settlement. If some sort of curse was indeed in play, surely one of those old witches could set the composer’s mind at rest.

Chapter Six: The Fortune-Teller

The two readily found a willing carriage and proceeded to one of the seediest parts of the great city. They soon found themselves in the “other” Vienna, hopelessly removed from the grandeur of the court. This was instead home to various members of the “undesirable” classes. Fortunately, there was also a community of Roma within these parts, and Codrin spoke their language fluently.

Once they had reached the Romani settlement, Codrin asked various people for advice and recommendations. Answers varied, but a number of residents enthusiastically suggested they try someone named Vadoma, “a powerful woman who can access the spiritual worlds.” They provided her address and gave directions to the driver.

Codrin told the carriage operator to wait outside a run-down building, while he led his friend up the stairs to the third floor.

“Do you think she is any good?”

“I have absolutely no idea. Still, she seems to have an excellent reputation, and the women said that in our community, she is revered as a true *drabardi*. More than this I cannot tell you.”

They could smell some sort of incense wafting under the door as they reached the last apartment on the left. Codrin knocked gently. The door opened, and an elderly woman stared at them, her penetrating glance darting back and forth between the gambler and the musician. She greeted them in German that was more or less passable, notwithstanding the thick Hungarian accent.

“I am Vadoma,” she announced, glowering at Beethoven. “It is you who wish to see me, while he will return here in a few months without you. Enter!”

The apartment, basically one oversized room divided unevenly by a double-curtain of beads and cloth, was tolerably well lit. The sun

penetrated somewhat through a curtained window, and the crone would surely light the candles she had placed around her table. The cell itself was otherwise scantily furnished: a small stove, a few chairs, and a number of shelves along the wall told the story, while the occupant's bed and private quarters doubtless lay on the other side of the partition.

Vadoma motioned to Beethoven to sit down at the table opposite her, while Codrin was left standing. After lighting the candles, placing rings and bracelets on a metallic plate, and igniting some incense, she asked him to show her his hands, which she studied carefully. For a while: nothing. Suddenly, Vadoma shuddered; then she stood up and bowed to the composer.

“You have a great gift,” she began. “Centuries from now people will remember your name and revere the legacy you leave behind. You will achieve greatness for all time.”

Beethoven glanced at Codrin and smiled.

“Unfortunately, you must lose something very precious to you. You do not believe you can function without it, but you will find that your gift is so strong that even such a loss cannot stop you—unless you permit it to do so.

She paused and touched the same parts of Beethoven's left hand and right. For a moment she looked confused, although it was hard to say for certain.

All at once, she let go of both hands and let out a cry. “*Der Fluch! Der Fluch!*”

She shut her eyes and began to mumble in her native tongue. A minute later, she opened her eyes, blinked a few times, and refocused on Beethoven. “You love one who is beyond your station. She loves you, but she has married another, who will die soon. However, you will still not marry her. In fact, you will never marry anyone, while she will

marry twice. She must remain your immortal beloved, bound to you in ways you will never understand.”

The composer’s jaw dropped. How could the old woman know so much? It was impossible. He had to learn more!

“You say I shall never marry, but what does this have to do *mit einem Fluch* [with a curse]?”

The old woman shuddered again. “An ancient Curse has provided centuries of pain suffered by dozens of victims. Know that you, too, have been ensnared by this Curse. You cannot escape it, but you are the one who will provide the vehicle through which others may be able to escape it.”

“The vehicle? A musical work? Explain!”

However, the crone merely looked at Codrin and said something to him in their tongue. “She says we must leave now, Ludwig,” he muttered softly.

“But I am not finished!”

Vadoma shook her head. “Go!” she commanded. “Compose!”

“But what about my hearing? And what about—“

“You must suffer. It is your destiny. You will wish to see me again, but by then I shall have made the Journey. Now go and compose.”

Codrin threw some *Gulden* on the table. He then grabbed his friend by the arm. “We must leave, Ludwig. Now!”

* * *

The great sonata was pushed to the proverbial back burner for a while, and Beethoven did not actually begin serious work on the masterpiece until 1802. It was completed and premiered on 24 May 1803, but it was also beset by acrimony, and by the time it was published (in 1805), it had been dedicated to an altogether different violinist than originally planned.

George Bridgetower and Beethoven met in 1803 and got along splendidly. They decided to perform a joint recital, and Beethoven hastily completed the sonata on which he had been working. Despite limited rehearsal time, they performed quite well, and the work was enthusiastically received.

Such an auspicious debut provided cause for celebration, and in short order both men had consumed more alcohol than either could handle. For some unknown reason, Beethoven blurted out his feelings for (and frustrations about) the countess now known as Josephine Deym.

Had Bridgetower not been in his cups, he would surely have refrained from comment. However, he apparently mocked the composer and even cast aspersions on Josephine's morals. Beethoven let loose a loud string of invective, and the two nearly came to blows.

To Hell with Bridgetower. There was another violinist, a better one: Rodolphe Kreutzer. Ludwig would dedicate the sonata to *him*, and the Devil could take the other.

* * *

Countess Josephine was pregnant (for the fourth time) in 1804 when the count died, leaving her a widow. Ludwig's hopes sprang forth again, but the Curse would not be denied.

In vain the composer sought advice from the Romani seer. "Take me to Vadoma. I *must* speak with her again," he pleaded with Codrin. However, they soon learned that yet another of the fortune-teller's predictions had proven accurate. She had, indeed, made the final journey.

"You heard what she told you four years ago, Ludwig," Codrin reminded him. "You and the countess are under some sort of curse and can never marry."

The composer soon learned how truly the old woman had spoken. He would happily have wed Josephine once the period of mourning had passed, but the van Brunsvik family put enormous pressure on the young widow to terminate the relationship. Indeed, they had an overwhelming argument: that if she married a commoner, she would lose custody of her four aristocratic children to the Deym relatives. Such were the laws of the land at that time...

Josephine would later stumble into a loveless second marriage to an Estonian baron, Christoph von Stackelberg. Things were dreadful from the beginning and got steadily worse, and the baroness also had at least two illegitimate children.

Beethoven's hopes were cruelly dashed, and he never again sought the counsel of a fortune-teller. However, his masterpiece would remain popular with performers and audiences alike. More to the point, he achieved immortality through his art, just as Vadoma had predicted.

There is but one more wrinkle to this tale.

Chapter Seven: The Recurring Dreams (1826)

Written after he had lost his sight, Milton's "Sonnet #23" conveys a dream in which the speaker sees his deceased wife. Alas, the poet is still blind, and the poem concludes, "I wak'd [waked], she fled, and day brought back my night."

By 1800, Beethoven's hearing was already compromised; by 1814 he was effectively "stone deaf." Nevertheless, he occasionally had dreams in which he "heard" things, for the memory of his lost sense would never go away completely.

In late 1826 the composer began to have strange, recurring dreams in which he saw people he did not recognize and heard them play his music. One was a tall man, a pianist; the other was a woman, a violinist. They wore strange clothes, unlike any Ludwig had ever seen. They played well, these two, although it seemed they played on rather unusual instruments.

The violin was not unlike the ones with which Beethoven was familiar, save that it was tuned at a somewhat sharper pitch. Something about the strings seemed different, but the dreamer could not determine what it was.

The piano was much bigger and louder than any Ludwig had ever seen. It must have been difficult to balance the respective volumes, but these two did so admirably.

They were rehearsing one of his sonatas—the one he had dedicated first to the odious Bridgetower: *Sonata mulattica composta per il mulatto Brischdauer, gran pazzo e compositore mulattico* ("Mixed-race sonata composed for the mixed-race Bridgetower, a great madman and mixed-race composer"). Well, Bridgetower was back in England now: good riddance.

Later, the piece had been dedicated to Kreutzer, who never bothered to perform it. Well, Kreutzer's own music was all but forgotten, and but for the *Forty-two Etudes*, no one would ever remember *his* name, save in connection with Ludwig's great sonata.

The man and woman played beautifully, albeit in a style rather foreign to Beethoven's tastes. But no matter; they were excellent performers and would bring honor to the composer's name.

That dream faded, but then another dream arose. The pianist—the young man—heard a voice that told him, “Beethoven will have power over your soul.” What could that possibly mean, if he—Beethoven—was right there to “hear” this dream?

And then, the third scene intruded. It was an abomination, even worse than what Codrin used to convey. The young man beat the woman brutally, but to Ludwig's amazement, she was obviously an eager and voluntary participant. Worse still, after these horrors, they made love. This happened repeatedly, until the composer could tolerate no more. “*Genug!*” he screamed: “Enough!”

He awakened in considerable distress, with a rapid heartbeat and severe nausea. He feared that he would regurgitate, but somehow he held down his bile. Eventually, he began to calm down and take in his surroundings. He also listened carefully but soon realized he was stone deaf once again.

They were a handsome couple, and clearly they loved his music, which they played extremely well. But why the unspeakable filth? Was this the promised end, as that English playwright had suggested?

Had Codrin been around, Beethoven would have sought his counsel. Perhaps his old friend would take him to another sooth-sayer, who would explain the dreams and why they had haunted him for so many nights. Alas, Codrin had vanished, as was his wont. He might return to Vienna in days, weeks, or months, but right now Beethoven had

no way to contact him, and there was no one else in whom he could confide.

No matter: whatever the dreams meant, Beethoven would wait until his friend's return. Besides, he had other music to finish. He had completed nothing since that wonderful *Quartet in F Major*. Would they ever understand the question he posed: "Must it be?" He had even answered it for them: "It must be!" Meanwhile, he was sketching the quintet, and then there was another symphony, which would be his tenth...

Chapter Eight: The Triumph of the Curse

Yet another couple had fallen in love, only to succumb to the inevitable. Against the overwhelming strength of the Curse, all were powerless; the outcome was always the same.

At some or other time, the right man and woman would be smitten by Cupid's arrow, but things would invariably end badly. Outside forces would keep them apart, and those few who made it to the altar would never consummate the marriage.

Yes, this meant deep pain to those involved, but it was a karmic pain, spawned by a loathsome, unforgivable crime, and it would continue as long as the soul fractions materialized as lovers to frustrate. Most would die completely ignorant of the powerful forces set against them, although some would encounter "wise women" who might indeed alert them to the dreadful energies the Curse had sent out.

This Beethoven had intuitively sensed some malediction, and he had even visited Vadoma, but to what end? Within a few short months the crone had died, and Ludwig and the countess continued to suffer.

Beethoven was now freshly buried, famous but quite alone, his isolation heightened by years of total deafness. Josephine had died six years earlier, wretched, impoverished, and even more alone.

Meanwhile, the Curse had remained active, ever searching for those whose lives it would blight. In Hamburg the Curse spotted remarkably talented siblings who shared a passion for music as well as an almost embarrassing love for one another. They initially seemed promising, but the sister had been courted for some while and would marry in two years. It seemed the fractional energies were not strong enough in that pair. No matter; the next two were out there somewhere, and the Curse would find them. They, too, would succumb to the Curse, and they would never enjoy consummation of their marriage.

It amused the Curse to think about Vadoma's prophecy: that somehow Beethoven's music would provide the vehicle through which another pair of lovers would bond: the two who might ultimately defeat the Curse. Of course, nothing of the sort was possible. Those two—were they perhaps the two in Beethoven's dream?—would fail miserably. The Curse would crush them, just as it had crushed all the others for more than eighteen centuries. The composition was surely noteworthy, but it would take far more than a few lines of music to defeat the invincible.

Meanwhile, there was more misery to inflict...

Epilogue: Excerpts from *The Passion of Elena Bianchi*

In Volume One, *If Music Be the Food of Love*, we encounter John (Giovanni) Bianchi and Elena Giordano, two young musicians who bond as they prepare to perform Beethoven's *Sonata #9 in A Major*, better known as his "Kreutzer" Sonata. It is a love story, but it also introduces the idea of "soul fractions" and how the victims of the Curse endure the same tragic outcomes, lifetime after lifetime.

Many disparate elements will converge over the course of these volumes. A love story begins with classical music and proceeds into sadomasochistic sex. The Holocaust and the Mafia (actually, the Camorra, or Neapolitan Mob) cast their shadows. Meanwhile, Elena is drawn into the world of the psychic and occult, and she will ultimately recognize the Curse that has blighted their existence for 2,000 years.

Admittedly, these sections may not be for the "faint of heart." However, readers must realize that Elena's pains are necessary for her spiritual growth and ultimate triumph, even though this will not become apparent until much later in the saga.

In this four-part series, the battle lines are drawn. Either Elena will die, or she will put an end to the Curse, once and for all.

Meanwhile, two musical scenes follow below, along with hyperlinks to the first volume.

For additional information about soul fractions, readers may peruse the author's blog entries: <https://www.lennycavallaro.com/post/soul-fractions-part-one>, with others to follow.

They will also find a brief discussion of the book and an interview with the author at: <https://bitgog.com/success-stories/author/rendezvous-with-lenny-cavallaro-author-of-if-music-be-the-food-of-love/>.

* * *

(1) Elena makes a suggestion during the intermission of their first recital [Volume One]:

Suddenly Elena beckoned me into our “off-stage” room. She grabbed my score of the “Kreutzer,” opened to the second movement, and recommended a beautiful nuance, literally minutes before we went out to perform. The idea was brilliant, and I quickly made a notation on the page. “Let’s hope I can remember,” I said.

Most performers can point to a very few memorable events over the course of their careers, and this was certainly one of mine. The opening chord and subsequent double-stops sent a chill down my spine. Elena was playing better than I had ever heard her. I answered as beautifully as I could, and seconds later we burst into the Allegro, feeling the demonic energy of Beethoven as never before.

As wonderful as that experience had been, it paled in comparison to the slow movement. Several times I found myself moved to tears, as the Titan truly exerted his power over my soul. On two occasions I looked up at Elena, *only to see that she had been moved to tears by the same passages!* This was an emotional bonding over music that I had never experienced before and had never even thought possible. Obviously, C. P. E. Bach was correct; “Since a musician cannot move others unless he himself is moved, he must of necessity feel all the effects that he hopes to arouse in his listeners.” We were both profoundly moved, and from the number of handkerchiefs that had suddenly materialized in the audience, I could tell that we had indeed moved others. Elena’s last-minute suggestion made the interpretation all the more beautiful.

I am quite sure we played the last movement well, although neither Elena nor I could recall terribly much about that part of the performance afterward. I remember that—if I may borrow from Aristophanes—we

tore into the first theme like a pair of bats out of hell. The music surged with joy, love, and triumph, and we were hailed with a standing ovation—doubtless a sincere one, unlike most of what seems routine at concerts these days.

* * *

(2) Elena conducts Bach's *Christ Lag in Todesbanden* on Good Friday [Volume Two]:

My only concern was that having done so well in the early service, the musicians might not have the energy to get through the second performance at quite the same level. For that reason, I wanted to see how Elena would work with them during that short half-hour before the church doors reopened. This time, I took a front-row seat.

She began by praising everyone for an outstanding effort, but after that—to my amazement—she began to drill specific spots, working on tempo with the violins in a passage from one number, calling on second violas to clean up articulation in another, and suggesting a different phrasing for soprano and tenor soloists in their duet. “Better, but that’s also a little flat,” she explained at one point.

In all, she spent barely fifteen minutes rehearsing. Then she told them how proud she was of everyone, and what an honor it had been to lead the unified forces. She even cracked an old joke about Toscanini that made everyone laugh.

Tomaso took the choir for less than ten minutes and worked on balance in several passages. At one point, he corrected the intonation of the altos. I would later learn these were all things Elena had discussed with him.

The second Passion service plodded on interminably. I’m afraid I never had much use for any religious services, and having heard the

Good Friday liturgy a mere four hours earlier, I was hopelessly bored by the rerun. However, eventually it was time for Elena.

Once more, she rose from her seat without music. Before starting, however, she walked over to the microphone and turned to face the audience. In a clear, powerful voice, she begged for their patience while she said a few words about what they would soon hear.

“I have been privileged to work with my good friend and colleague, Music Director Tomaso Durante. I wish to thank him for his tireless efforts in putting this event together, particularly helping the choir with their German. I must also thank that fine choir, the professional instrumentalists and vocal soloists who have joined us, and my own four students from the Maria Magdalena High School, all of whom have worked so hard to bring the music to life.

“This cantata is unique in that it is the only one—or, at least, the only surviving one—that uses a hymn tune as the basis of each movement. Our music director will now play that chorale on the organ.”

When Tomaso had finished, she added, “Bach was a Protestant composer, yet his music transcends all religion. Your program provides a translation of the German text, and I shall close by appending Bach’s own words: ‘The aim and final end of all music should be none other than the glory of God and the refreshment of the soul.’ I can only add ‘Amen,’ and I hope and pray that our humble efforts will do credit to this marvelous sentiment.”

She touched everyone: churchgoers, musicians, her mother, and me. The cantata touched us much, much more. The second performance was considerably better; each passage that she and Tomaso had corrected during the call rehearsal showed remarkable improvement. When the music finished, Father D’Ambrogio jumped to his feet and clapped his hands. A standing ovation followed.

Afterward I heard so many people—instrumentalists, soloists, choir members, appreciative parents, and even Sister Giovannina (who told us she had been moved to tears)—thank Elena and declare this had been the most memorable Good Friday service of their lives. Tomaso took me aside.

“Your wife is a stupendous talent, Giovanni. She hears music at a totally different level. I couldn’t think of a thing to say after the first performance, which I thought was stunning, but you saw for yourself how she works.”

I thanked him and gave him a warm hug. “I couldn’t think of anything to say, either. In fact, I thought it was a triumph. But we both heard what happened just now.”

“That’s what I mean,” he said, almost stammering. “I’ve worked with this choir for fourteen years, but the way they respond to her is... well, it’s something else. She has it all. She can drill them as ruthlessly as Toscanini, and they’ll love her even more for it. We all take conducting classes in the conservatories, but only a few of us will ever be conductors. Elena is the real deal, and I hope you can convince her of that. Meanwhile, if you and she are staying in Bisanacchia, I’ll try to see what else we can do in the future.”

I thanked him again for his kind words.

To my relief, Elena was truly satisfied with the second performance. However, she continued to talk about the unparalleled genius of Bach. “I played the *St. John Passion*, I conducted the concerto with you, and I conducted and presented the violin concerto myself, but the experience of leading a church cantata has opened my eyes so much more to his sublime mastery.”

* * *

If Music Be the Food of Love, a “dark-erotic, spiritual romance,” is available through any of the links below.

However [WARNING!], that book and subsequent volumes also contain a number of graphic S/M depictions and descriptions of other “scenes.” These may shock some readers, but they are quite realistic. Some people actually do make love through the medium of pain: some masochists respond as Elena does, and some sadists respond as Giovanni does, and the hard-core people they encounter over the course of the narratives go considerably further. Moreover, S/M and various kinks are apparently found more often within the artistic communities than within the general population.

Those who are curious may peruse “The Good, the Bad, or the Ugly: You Decide,” which presents S/M and other excerpts from the novels. It is available as a pdf file on <http://lennycavallaro.com/>.

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