

The tongue of the dumb

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Another of the odd ironies in this situation is that youths of the people do not always comprehend the difference between capital and income, between *les salaires et les rentes*. They do not perceive that a person who does not *show* wealth ostentatiously may have wealth, but live prudently in order to conserve and increase it. To them only the visible spending proves the monetary value of the person, only the known salary demonstrates the economic status. A man with a large salary who lives up to the hilt with it and leaves nothing behind in his will is still apt to seem richer to them because they can *see* the expenditure.

But money sometimes takes protective coloration. This is a lesson of nature that our bright and clever youths don't seem to have learned yet. They would rather be wooed by a man in a rented limousine than by a man with a solid fortune in securities who uses public transportation because he feels no need to show off his means either to himself or to others. The result is that many opportunity-hungry young men miss the boat because they didn't even know the boat was there.

The notion that European youths are any shrewder in this respect than English or American youths is a fiction. The ribbon clerk remains a ribbon clerk on both sides of the Atlantic. He sells himself short over and over then complains that he has no luck, whereas in reality if he has no luck, it is because he either does not recognize an opportunity when it appears or, if he does, is unwilling to make the effort to live up to it. He would rather, in the end, stay on the streets, hustling for a temporary gain.

It is neither *Geld* nor *Gelegenheit* which truly fascinates him, but only a gilded mirage of himself.

by HADRIAN

The Tongue of the Dumb

It was a mistake, Penny realized now, with sinking heart. He should have called the chauffeur and taken the car directly to the Concert Hall. He tried to edge nearer to the buildings, but each time he reached out to touch the wall, he felt someone brush past. This avenue, so familiar, where he had walked so confidently with Trudger by his side, had suddenly become a nightmare world. Never, Penny realized suddenly, had he walked it alone; always as a child, there had been Mother's arm to hold; and after she died, faithful Trudger's strong body at his knee. And now there was no Trudger. His blind eyes flooded at the memory of the dog, and he turned hastily away from the street to hide what he knew must be an unmanly sight.

He collided with a man who swore sharply at him, and as he fell back, a woman behind him snapped, «Why don't you look where you're going?» His tears dried of shame and shock, and he reached out timidly for the store window, only to feel a rough brick wall. Shuffling along, hiding his groping fingers, he came at last to the window of Gamp's, which he knew must be near. He leaned his hot forehead against the glass and drew deep breaths.

The crowd surged past, as he stood, clutching the folded iron grill. Couples loitered to look, girls squealing over the jewelery displays, their boy friends bragging of what they would buy. Suddenly Penny hated them all, the cursing man, the snapping woman, squealing girls, bragging boys. He despised them, for

he knew that, though he could have walked into Gamp's and written a check for everything in the window, he could never know their simple joy at looking, he could never even «look where he was going.»

There was only one cure for this black mood of self-pity, he knew, and that was music. Suddenly he remembered the matinee concert; he must hurry or he would be late for the opening Sonata. It was that which had brought him out of the house, to break the spell of mourning over Trudger's death. But how would he ever get across the street to the Hall? He felt his way to the corner, but when the people moved out into the street, he hadn't the courage to follow, and stood clutching the lamp post. Twice he heard the click of the changing lights, and people brushed roughly past him from all directions. He stood in an agony of indecision, paralyzed by fright. Moments went by, and the black mood came again; he clenched his teeth to keep back the sobs. His head seemed to reel, and he lost all track of the flow of traffic, even of the direction he was going. He wanted only to pass out. If only the curb had been a bridge, so that he could jump to oblivion! But why not? This rushing stream of traffic was as sure as a river. A harsh laugh at his shoulder was like a rude shove, and he stepped briskly out into the street.

There was a piercing screech of brakes, and Penny felt himself yanked roughly back onto the curb. He fell limply against a man's tall body, and a long arm came around to hold him up.

Crazy kid, Kelp thought, clutching him tighter. What a heck of a way to try to end it all. My god, he's crying! With an angry gesture, Kelp brushed away the solicitous and curious who had begun to gather, and led the boy gently to the shelter of Gamp's steps. At last the thin shoulders in the brown silk suit relaxed, heaved a great sigh and straightened. The face lifted to thank him. Kelp gasped—the beauty of it was like a stab: a pale wedge of face under a great black wave of hair, and two huge, wandering eyes—the eyes! My god, he's blind, Kelp thought.

The boy must have heard his gasp; he was speaking, and Kelp shifted his gaze to the mouth, pale red lips, thin and delicate and terribly mobile. Kelp felt himself going soft, and broke roughly into the boy's chatter—something about a dog and a concert. «You going to hear Schwart? Good, I'll take you.»

Entering Stutz Hall after all these years, Roger Kelp felt a mixture of feelings. It would have seemed more natural to be entering the stage door, in tails and white tie. He glanced in some dismay at his sport shirt and ragged slacks, and the sight of the elegant youth clinging to his arm increased his self-consciousness. The boy was murmuring something about a family box, but Kelp strode to the ticket window. The man remembered him, and after the first surprise and embarrassment, shoved out two tickets, with an eager, pitying smile.

When they found their seats in the fifth row, Schwart and Uhde were already entering. Kelp tried to watch them, as they struck into the Beethoven, but the old bitter tide of anger came surging back; the memory of the struggling years, the taste of success, and then, the War, and—the end. But somehow today the awareness of another's need made it easier to put it out of his mind. He gazed at the black head by his side, lost himself in wonder. The pale wedge of face was relaxing now, and the thin white hand that rested on his brown arm was pulsing in time to the music. Roger reached over and covered it gently with his left, the hand with the fiddler's callouses, now grown soft and stained with ink.

The boy looked eagerly up and smiled, and Kelp almost shuddered at the beauty of it.

Why, Kelp, wondered, why would a boy like this want to kill himself. The blindness, of course—but surely there was someone who cared. It made such a difference. Oh, there had been times enough when he would gladly have thrown in his towel. Just an hour ago, coming out of that publisher's—he shivered at the memory of the pitying lip-stick smile—he had thought of heading for the river, pitching the manuscripts in and jumping after. And how many times he had cursed that bomb for not taking off his whole head. But if you had someone like this to look after, look forward to, somehow you could go on, scribbling clef signs and pounding the pavement.

The boy was full of life after the concert, and taking full command, marched Kelp next door to Grindley's. A momentary qualm about the check bothered Kelp, remembering his empty purse; but the quality of the tailoring under his hand, and the eager deference of the headwaiter settled that. No bows for him, he noted—old Fritz seemed to have forgotten him. The boy was tugging at his arm, trying to pull him down beside him on a sofa. But Kelp steered them firmly to a table for two, and seated the reluctant boy opposite him, releasing his hand. Then, forcing a smile (*Idiot! he can't see it*) he began.

«Now lets get acquainted. First of all, I should tell you that I can't hear a word you say. I'm deaf, you see.» The great blue eyes grew still larger, and the mouth shaped a gasp. «Oh, we can talk. I read your lips; that's why I have to sit opposite you.» (*Your lips, your eyes.*) It really seemed unfair, almost obscene, to stare at anything so naked and beautiful; yet Kelp could not look away, even to give Fritz his order.

The boy's mouth was reshaping now for pity, and Roger quickly interposed a question about the concert. The boy plunged into eager encomiums, and Kelp watched fascinated, knowing what would come next, seeing it cloud the eyes and pucker the lips. «Wasn't the tempo of the *Allegro* a little fast?» he asked quickly. Yes, it was. But how did he know, came the expected answer. Kelp shrugged. (*Tell him, tell him and get it over with.*) «Oh, I used to play myself, before the—the War. In fact, The Spring was one of my favorite Sonatas.» (*Tell him your name, it won't mean a damn thing to him.*)

He spoke his name, and to his surprise the boy jumped in his seat and clapped his hands. «Not Roger Anson Kelp, the violinist?»

«The same,» Kelp admitted, mentally adding «that was.» All the same he chuckled with pleasure .

«Oh, but my dog is named after you. You see his name's not really Trudger, that's just a nickname for Roger—Roger Anson Kelp, after—after you!» Why *the boy's flushing—no, goddamit, blushing!* Kelp bit his lip at the sheer delight of it. «You don't mind, do you—I mean his being a dog? He wasn't really a dog—he was my best friend, after Mother died. So I named him after my favorite—after you!»

«Of course I don't mind.» Kelp's hand came heavily onto the table, and the boy's fingers, groping eagerly, found it. Then, when the eyes clouded, and the next line wouldn't come, Kelp supplied it, gently. «And now, you've lost Trudger, and found Roger.»

It was too sweet, too unbearably sweet. Kelp's voice was brusque again as he asked, «And now tell me about you. What's your name?»

But in the instant of asking he knew the answer, knew with that heightened intuition that had come to him with deafness; said the name even as it shaped itself on the pink lips. Joel Pennington, the Third. And in place of the pale wedge of face before him there rose a gracious oval, the face of the widow of Joel Pennington, Jr. She had sent for him to come to her box at Stutz Hall, but in the arrogance of youth and fame he had waited for her in the green room. She had seemed more sincere than the others in the line, but when she asked him to play at Pennington Place, he had waved her airily to his manager. Then as she turned away, he had caught sight of the child. The face had haunted him for days; till he had sought out his manager. When they drove to Pennington Place, there was a wreath on the door; the widow had died in an accident the day after the concert. («Surely there's someone who cares,» he had thought just now. But maybe there wasn't.)

He shook off the reverie and concentrated on the moving lips. «Oh, I live from hand to mouth,» he answered lightly. «In my sane moments, I compose. But nobody will believe that I'm Beethoven the Second. «Kelp tried to keep it light, but the pale face was still clouded. Penny recalled works of Kelp's he had heard before the war, even tried to whistle a theme. Probably pretty tuneless, Kelp thought, but better than I could do. Imagine the kid remembering it!

Yes, he had composed even then, but just for himself to play; never tried to publish. People had liked it. But now that he couldn't play what he wrote, nobody would take it.

Gazing into the great blue troubled eyes, Kelp saw the next thought forming itself, like particles under a lens. *Oh, my god, no! Not that.* It was too pat, too fantastic, too utterly TV. Broken-down composer rescues blind heir from traffic; two hours later has family fortune dumped in his lap. But even as his mind protested, his heart told him that it was possible, that it was even inevitable, that it had begun in the green room at the Stutz years ago. His heart told him that when two people so alone in the world, so helplessly incomplete alone, meet and are attracted —.

The words were tumbling eagerly out of the pale lips, and Kelp cut them short with a laugh that was a mixture of embarrassment and eager excitement. «Let's talk about it later, shall we—Penny?»

«Yes, Roger,» the boy answered eagerly. «Tonight at dinner! Will you come home with me for dinner?»

On an impulse Kelp reached across and ran his hand lightly up and down over the boy's face, the way one ruffles a puppy's fur. Penny caught his hand eagerly. «Oh, let me, let me do that to your face! You see, it's the only way I can look at you.»

Yes, Roger thought, fingers were the eyes of the blind. But you, with your ears can hear my music, the music I only dream; dream as my eyes drink your beauty. Oblivious of the crowded dining hall, Kelp leaned across and clasped the slender wrists, guided the hands to his face. While the soft gentle fingers stroked his cheeks, he hummed the Handel tune. *Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped.* And his heart added, *Amen. Hallelujah.*

by PIERRE PHOREAU.

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