

The Piano Player's Dead Rejoice

by Nonnie Augustine

Adolph and Ottilie hosted a sumptuous lunch on their on the terrace in Trieste at the tip of the Adriatic Sea. Harry raised his glass to toast young Annie Claire who'd succeeded in getting Madeleine, her mother, to let go of Mahler, take up Mozart, and move on to Scott Joplin in less time then it takes for a lazy baker to make an angel's food cake, or so it seemed to them. (For Madeline, still living, the changes were slower; no matter she got there with Annie Claire's help.) Most of the party died after they'd lived, but Annie Claire hadn't lived with the living at all. She'd died in Madeleine's womb and so joined her dead family as a spanking new heaven-born.

Madeleine hadn't fully recovered from losing her daughter when she crumbled under the deaths of her mother, father, and brother. Once so ground down the sad piled on till she mourned all over again for dead pets, far away friends, and lovers misplaced here and there. Her cats were content with their heavenly rest (as good a name for the place as any) but her dainty little mutt had gone back to a life and rollicks in Cornwall, now as a Bernese Mountain Dog.

Annie Claire's huge (thousands!) family beamed generous good will, ate more than their fill with no ill effects. (Once dead one's health is a matter of course.) Jeremiah waltzed with Claude and Marie; Shirley, so depressed while alive, giggled with her sister, who was Madeleine's mother. The French drank Austrian beer and the Austrians French wine, the Irish ate, ate, and ate, the Spanish clogged, and the Danes tangoed.

Around the table, in the villa, or on the beach were generations of Claudes, Maries, Patricks, Augusts, Johann Jacobs, Jacob Johanns, Bridgets, Matildas, Gustavs, and just one Eulalia Aurore. They weren't all gathered, not all her relations, for hundreds had more lives to live through. Certainly not Alice, the poisoner, nor King

Gilbert, the torturer, were among the throng, but one hoped they would make it in time.

Long dead Kathleen, Katrina, Isobel, Isabela, Mary Margaret, Margaret Mary and Maria Catelena gossiped of castles in Scotland, farms in Bavaria, the long sails on rude ships without any soap and the cold-water walk-ups of the Lower East Side. But Annie Claire was tuned to her mother's piano and she waltzed in the embrace of Tchaikovsky. They others caught on and soon her aunts uncles cousins grandparents former beggars and queens were filling the terrace with swooping and swirling. Laughter was flinging and Madeleine, though living, almost very nearly felt fine.

Heaven-borns have the knack of keeping in touch. Amid the dense muddle their messages sometimes get through: Socrates, Shakespeare, Botticelli, Van Gogh, Dickinson, Nightingale are a few who listened and though he'd dispute it, old earthy Mark Twain. Heaven-borns also help, maybe the most, when they tap living shoulders with hearty pats of pure plum goodsense and what luminous luck is that?

