

Goodnight Mel

by Holden Lee

“You must be the couple inquiring about Old Man Thompson’s house,” said a balding, middle-aged but spritely man who approached Anna and John at Arkady’s Restaurant and Bar, the one restaurant in Glenntown. There was no privacy here. Everyone heard everyone else’s conversations; a couple kissing at the counter was watched equally by an old man smoking a pipe and a baby in a highchair. Everyone greeted the baby by name as they walked past.

“Buying the house is a grave mistake.”

“Don’t worry,” Anna said, “It’s one of John’s passing fancies.”

Anna had been the first to propose moving, but John had taken it too seriously, as a challenge he needed to solve. A flighty bird, he called her, looking for another place to roost. She was fifty-five, and New York City had lost its attraction.

John ignored Anna and addressed the man. “Why do you say so? Please, sit down. You must admit he’s selling it very cheap.”

After sitting down, the man flagged the waitress.

“Three pints of apple cider, on me.”

He introduced himself as Tyler, the one and only postman of Glenntown, and neighbor to Old Man Thompson.

“It’s cheap for a reason. It’s been haunted for forty years. Old Man Thompson lowered the price every year for the past ten years, and still no one’s biting.”

“Not for long,” John said cheerfully. “There’s no such a thing as ghosts, and I know a deal when I see one.”

“How’s it haunted?” Anna interjected.

“My bedroom faced his house,” Tyler said, “so I had a clear sight to what used to be his niece’s bedroom. Most nights I’d see her there, staring out the window. She’s been dead forty years, but there she is, like she hasn’t aged a day.”

John laughed. “What’s so scary about a ghost girl?”

Tyler’s face suggested it was no joking matter. “I used to hear music during the night, before I made a habit of earplugs. The Moonlight Sonata, it always was, but not played in any way it ought to be played.”

Anna, a piano teacher, perked up. “Perhaps Thompson’s secretly trying to be a pianist.”

Tyler shook his head. “Old Man Thompson is half-deaf. From an ear infection, he claims, but I know better. It’s the cursed music. He still keeps his house as a bed and breakfast, even though he has no guests. They stopped coming after one of the guests heard the music and died from the flu a few days later. No one dared stay after that.”

“Not surprising, if all the townsfolk say it’s haunted,” Anna said sharply.

“It’s not just a rumor. That’s how they died, Thompson’s brother’s entire family. Spanish Flu Epidemic of 1918. Then there was Clara, a pianist in the high school orchestra. She heard the music too, and she got very sick - wasn’t ever the same after that, always hearing sounds in her head.”

The apple cider came, and they talked about other things. Tyler asked them what they were doing out here. Glenntown was en route back to New York; John and Anna had spent a few unsuccessful days hunting for a house in the country. They had stopped at Glenntown for its one and only attraction - apple-picking at Arkady's Apple Orchards.

"Such a shame," John said as he sipped the last dregs of his cider, "A perfectly good house sits wasted by superstition. But it's not our place to worry about it."

Anna spoke up, "John - do you think - we could take a look at the house again? I'd like to see if there's any truth to Tyler's claim -"

"Well, it's still a B and B," Tyler said, "I don't recommend it, but perhaps that'll get the notion out of your mind. Spend a night there and you'll see what I mean."

Thompson, pleasantly surprised at having customers, offered them a two-person bedroom for the night. Anna insisted that they take the supposedly haunted room, even though it had only one bed.

She had to shout her request in Thompson's ear until he heard.

"The room with the ghost," she shouted.

Thompson's pleasant mien turned into a scowl when he learned the reason for their interest.

"Never saw a dust speck out of place when I was here. Don't let those townspeople corrupt you with their superstitions."

Anna slept on the floor of the haunted room. John had offered the bed to Anna, but Anna refused. She wouldn't take the girl's bed without her permission, and besides, it was too easy to sleep soundly on soft beds. Sure enough, in two minutes, John was snoring. Anna was left

awake, her eyes wandering between the bedspread, on which a design of vines crawled gothically, like the pages of illustrated fairy tale books, and the dolls and teddy bears standing in a line on the shelf, covered in dust, holding withered stalks of flowers. The moonlight slowly spilled its light through the window and she still couldn't sleep.

Just as she wondered whether she should have taken the bed, she saw a girl standing in front of the window with her back to Anna. A midnight prayer? Anna tried to rise for a better look, but she couldn't move. The girl walked around the bed and knelt beside Anna. She was a plain little girl in a ponytail and apron.

The girl moved her mouth, but Anna heard no sound. She took a rose from her apron and dropped it into Anna's palm before rising and leaving through the door.

The next thing Anna knew, she was opening her eyes to morning. Her left hand held a withered stalk. One of the teddy bears on the shelf was missing its flower. It wore a striped apron and had round, dark eyes.

"That's cute," John said. He was already up and watching her. "It fell right into your hand."

Anna told John about the girl.

"You dreamt an explanation. Like when you hear a fire alarm in your dream, and it's your alarm clock."

"It wasn't a dream."

Anna clutched at the rose like it was proof, but John took it from her fingers and returned it to the teddy bear.

"I wish I had your imagination, Anna."

John and Thompson's conversation mostly involved John shouting into the old man's ear. John told Thompson that he was interested in buying the house, but that Tyler had voiced his reservations against them doing so, and they wanted to see if the house was in fact haunted.

"Well, you see there are no ghosts, eh?" Thompson said.

"I didn't see any, but -"

Thompson cupped his ears. "What? You want the house or not?"

"If it were up to me, I'd say yes, but Anna says it's haunted..."

"You say yes?"

Anna hated it when John talked like she wasn't there. She couldn't stand it anymore.

"YES," she shouted, and when John frowned at her, her words tumbled out, "It's *always* been my childhood dream to live in a haunted house. I wanted to become a psychic. There were these books in our attic about how to communicate with ghosts and learn about your past lives... when Dad found out he burned all of them. He told me there weren't any ghosts, just shadows. But he's wrong."

Having predicted her reaction, John smiled and turned back to Thompson.

"Of course, we'll have to see the terms and talk about the price..."

Thompson's eyes lit up, like lights turned on in an abandoned house. He had inherited the property after his brother's entire family died in the 1918 flu epidemic. It was fortunate for him - he couldn't keep a job and didn't have a place of his own. But he'd been stuck in this town for the past forty years, kept out of trouble, and away from adventure.

John and Anna returned to New York for a few days, where John transferred ownership of his shop, Ends and Odds, to his bewildered protege, Jeremy, and found a real estate agent to sell their townhouse, which cost more than the house that they were moving into. Anna hosted a good-bye party, with towers of cardboard boxes for backdrop, where she relished the shocked faces of “acquaintances,” who, she felt, had never seen her and John as more than a curiosity, like a pair of puppets in Ends and Odds. She invited them to their housewarming party with the expectation that they would not, and never would, come visit them. Anna did, however, pay personal visits to all her piano students, because they deserved better. She arranged for other teachers to continue their musical instruction.

She didn’t see the ghost girl again the first few days in the house. Was it all a ruse? The bedsheet ghost John had made two years ago was fun but tricking her into moving to the country... was too much. Did he bribe some local girl to dress up in white?

Her worries disappeared on the third night, when the music awakened them. Beethoven’s Moonlight Sonata, but the notes tripped over each other, like a shadow over the moon, a midnight romance turned desperate.

Anna reached over and clasped John’s hand. He reached for the switch to the lamp on his side. The switch clicked but the room stayed dark. Anna toggled the switch on her side. The light bulb flashed for a moment before it shattered.

Anna climbed out of bed, her heart fluttering with excitement, her hand pulling John’s.

“The girl’s here, John,” she said.

John squeezed her hand tighter but didn't move.

"I thought you were brave," she said, and this time he followed.

Together they walked out the door, side by side, filling the hallway so that nothing could confront one without confronting them both. The music became louder. Anna walked faster down the stairs. John, pulled along, tried not to trip. She ran ahead towards the piano in the living room.

The music stopped in a crash of keys. She saw a figure fleeing the room. When John arrived, the seat was empty.

"There was a girl," she said, "We must've frightened her away. Come out. We want to meet you."

The curtains fluttered but no one answered. John opened the loose headboard of the piano and peered inside.

"It is not a girl," he said.

He turned on the lights and gestured at the roll of paper, still spinning, with perforations that let air into the channels that raised the valves that operated the hammers that struck the keys. The roll had been shaken loose and was now playing nothingness.

"It's a player piano. The switch must've flipped." He turned it off. "We've solved the mystery. The switch is loose, the sheets are loose, and the paper is torn."

"There was a girl in a white dress," Anna insisted.

"The moonlight plays tricks," John said, pointing at the light spilling onto the piano stool.

John was intolerable, but Anna was used to it. If John didn't believe, that meant she could have the ghost girl all to herself. She sat down in the light of the moon and played. The piano had

not been tuned for years, but she could feel its potential. When she finished, she closed the piano, and the two of them walked up the stairs again, hand in hand.

Anna was still childless at forty-five, so they planned to adopt. The whole process took several months. A social worker interviewed them at their house, remarking on their clutter, the “need to make room.” They finally got the okay and received photos in the mail.

“It’s a very important decision,” Anna said gravely. “We’ll have to meet them individually and learn their life stories.”

John drove them to the orphanages. Who knew there were so many? Anna was all smiles as she greeted the children, dressed up in identical skirts or pants, their hair cut short, their eyes full of fearful hope, their voices answering only what was asked. But back in the car, she told John that they were all the same, sad dolls dressed up in fine clothes for a day. They didn’t have personality.

“Of course not. It gets beat right out of them. That’s what we’re for. To help them become who they want to be.”

“There has to be a spark,” Anna said. “It’s just like in marriage. It doesn’t matter how much you want to love.”

“If we had a child, we wouldn’t be able to choose who she was.”

“Yes, but then God would have chosen for us and it would be alright.”

John pulled to the side of the road before responding.

“Anna, there are thousands of kids who are hungry and sick and beaten every day. We’re going to one more orphanage, and then we will adopt a child. I will choose for you. It doesn’t matter who, just that there is one less suffering kid.”

“It was never for them. It’s for us, John.”

“You can’t decide to adopt a child on a whim. I don’t like it when you think you want something, but you don’t really want it.”

“But I do, John. I just need to find the right one... The one child I can love, not just feed. Just like it was with you. Didn’t you ever want a kid?”

John was silent for a while. “There’s this organization,” he said finally, “where you can ‘adopt’ a child in another country. You look at their biographies and choose who to ‘adopt.’ You send them some money for their family, and they’ll write you a letter every month. You can write a letter to them, too. How does that sound?”

She started to say it wasn’t the same, but the feeling that had drove her searching had suddenly left, leaving an emptiness in her head. That was what they did, eventually. They had children at a distance. It wasn’t the same, though.

The night after Anna got the piano tuned, she drank a non-habitual cup of evening coffee. Awake besides John, she slipped down into the living room and sat down in the closet, where she could see and not be seen, like when she was small, staying up to spy on ghosts.

The girl sat down on the piano stool and opened the cover. She blew a kiss to the keys - such a childish gesture - and then stiffened.

“Mel, that’s your name, isn’t it?” Anna said, softly. It was written on the music book, and in some of the photo albums Thompson had left in his haste to depart.

Mel rose to go.

“Please. Come back. You have so much potential.”

Mel looked at Anna, sitting on the floor of the closet, watching her. She stopped but kept her distance. Anna remembered a line from one of the ghost-hunting books - *they are as afraid of you as you of them*.

“Do you want to hear Moonlight Sonata?”

Mel nodded. Anna walked over to the piano. She patted the seat besides her until Mel sat down. She put her left hand against Mel’s right, and her hand sank into Mel’s, as if Mel’s hands were made of snow. She didn’t let it bother her.

“Look, your fingers are longer than mine already. My sister always made fun of me, for having such stubby fingers! And yet I turned out the better pianist. It doesn’t matter how long your fingers are, just how much song is in your heart. Follow after me, Mel. But let us press the soft pedal, so we are not heard.”

Mel struggled. Anna explained the proper posture and put a quarter on the back of Mel’s hand (more out of curiosity that it would stay - it did - than out of genuine helpfulness). She played the scales in slow-motion, and Mel followed one octave behind. She played through the sonata, measure by measure, and Mel repeated slowly, each note dragging out as her fingers sought the next keys. Anna played the leader again and again, until she felt her head lolling, her hands becoming heavy and wooden.

The music ended. Mel had gotten up. Anna had a sudden urge to reach out and hug her, but she was too tired to move.

“Goodnight, Mel,” she whispered as her eyes closed, as the girl walked up the stairs and into her room, the one that faced the moonrise.

Anna awoke midmorning. John had put a blanket over her and squeezed a pillow between her head and the piano cover. It was oddly comfortable. John had overdone himself with pancakes and omelets for breakfast - such a show-off - but she loved him for it. She yawned as she ate. When was the last time she had woken so late?

Ethel Connor came to visit. Tyler had warned of her visit and suggested that they accede to her demands. Now the omnipresent grandma who was consulted before every decision, Ethel had a distinguished career as a flower girl, simultaneous prom queen and queen of the town pageant, long-time dairy farmer, ten-time actress playing Mary in the annual Nativity play, three-time mayor of Glenntown, leader of the bridge club, and paranormal hobbyist. She had a plentiful head of white hair, a nose of witchlike proportions, and biceps which attested to her illustrious career.

“You cannot hide from me,” Ethel said as she walked in. “You find this ghost amusing, do you not? When you see her again you must chase her away.”

It had been no secret that the city couple had moved into Thompson’s house not in spite of, but because it was haunted, and Anna had made no effort to contradict the gossip.

“She’s called Mel,” Anna said, “Why does everyone treat her this way? No wonder she is so distraught.”

Ethel glared at her. “No ghost belongs in this world. They are souls who have refused to move on to heaven or hell. Kindness only increases their attachment, and every moment they stay, they bring more calamity upon the living.”

“What do you propose?” John asked.

“I’ll exorcise the ghost for you,” she said, “At no charge. Consider it my housewarming gift.”

Indeed, she was already sprinkling a line of salt in the doorway. Anna caught a whiff of herbs coming from her purse.

“Absolutely not!” Anna said, “I won’t allow it.”

Ethel looked to John. “Surely you have not also been seduced by the ghost girl, John?”

“I won’t have you performing rituals in our house.”

Ethel let the last grains of salt fall from her palm, and then strode briskly through the rooms. John and Anna hurriedly followed.

“I see you are as stubborn as the last owner. May God help you, I hope you will come to your senses before it is too late. Your housewarming party is next Saturday? No, it will not do, to have the party while the ghost is still here...”

She looked deep in thought for a moment. John and Anna waited nervously. She stopped as if struck by sudden inspiration.

“Saturday it is. You will end before sunset, of course, and I will oversee the invitations.”

Over the next week and a half, Anna often stayed up late to teach Mel. With each repetition of the Moonlight Sonata, Mel’s fingers gained confidence, sped up, tripped and got up right

away; she smiled as she played, the smile of one who found the distance between walking and running not that large. But when she wasn't playing, her movements were the trembling movements of a fragile old woman trying to keep herself together. She didn't come every night and couldn't tell Anna why, but Anna sensed it was an effort.

John kept himself busy. He worked on recreating the shop they had back in the city, full of whatever he fancied to make: greeting cards, snowglobes, wooden puzzles, and even apple desserts - he was undaunted by the residents who had been baking for generations. Lacking a storefront, he lost no time by setting up shop in a spare room.

He took it upon himself to fix the player piano. The mechanism was broken in more ways than one, so that it was a wonder that it played at all.

"No matter," Anna said, "I can play the piano, I don't need the piano to play itself."

"I'll have it fixed before your birthday," John promised, "You just wait and see."

John called the manufacturer for replacement parts, but the piano was out of production. He asked for a technician but found that they would be charged extra because they lived in such a remote place. He asked instead for the blueprint so he could do the job himself, and a week later, got the blueprint to a different piano. Most importantly, though, was the roll of perforated paper: without it, there would be nothing to play.

They danced through the new house - or rather, old house, newly theirs - on the day of the housewarming party. It was also their thirtieth anniversary: John was sixty, and Anna fifty-five. Andrew, a photographer from out of town, took pictures, because Brett, the photographer from town, refused to set foot inside the house.

“I just wish,” she said, out of earshot of their guests, “that the townspeople would give us more of a welcome...”

“We don’t need them,” John said. He raised his glass of champagne. “To thirty more years of marriage.”

“I thought you were more ambitious. You’re not leaving before me - I’ll make sure of it.”

They drank. A crash sounded from the living room. John looked at Anna, and Anna looked at John. Andrew ducked down, as if from an earthquake. John ran over to see what had happened.

The painting on the living room wall had fallen, cracking its glass frame.

John laughed. “It’s nothing. The nail’s just rusted through.”

“I wish this house were in better condition. What if the carpenter won’t set foot inside here, either?”

“We don’t need him,” John said, examining the wall, “I’ll fix it up.”

“Later. Come, let’s rejoin the guests. They’re looking to you - you have to convince them there’s nothing dangerous here. They look like deer, about to bolt.”

“I thought you *wanted* ghosts.”

“Ghosts just for us, John. For everyone else, a perfectly normal couple in a perfectly normal house.”

None of the guests talked about the ghost, but it was on their minds. Elisa and Kenny, Ethel’s grandchildren, took the opportunity to satisfy their curiosity about the house’s innards: they hung around the stairs, testing each step for creakiness. Tyler, who had just hung a wreath on their front door as they walked by, laughed uncertainly and sipped at his empty wineglass.

Jane kept peering into the piano room, as if afraid that a ghost would materialize there at any moment. Anna couldn't strike up conversations with the guests. She was not her usual lively self, after staying up too much of the night.

Thankfully, Ethel took charge of the situation. "John and Anna, why don't you give us a tour of the house? Let's start with the piano room."

"Follow me," John said. "May I introduce our Aeolian pianola, manufactured in 1914. I'm pleased to say that Anna and I have solved the mystery of this piano. I'm sure you've heard tales that this piano is haunted and plays strange music by itself - but that is because it is a player piano." He flipped the switch, and a familiar, jarring music sounded. "And, as you see, the roll has, unfortunately, been damaged."

Jane shuddered. "*That's* why!" she said. "Turn it off, please! It is a beautiful piano, and a beautiful room, except... Pardon me for the suggestion, but don't you think this patch of wall seems empty? Don't you think this would be a good place to put a mirror?"

She showed them her housewarming gift.

John frowned. "I suppose so."

"Jane has very good taste in design," Ethel said, "Do put it up, Jane, to save our hosts the trouble. You can always move it later, of course."

As John and Anna led the guests through the house, they revealed and placed various gifts that they had brought - scented candles, potpourris, a Nativity scene, lamps, potted plants - and even suggested various ways to rearrange the furniture. As John and Anna gave their thanks, their guests visibly relaxed. Anna knew that Ethel had orchestrated the whole affair, and was

relieved that she had dropped her concerns about Mel and decided to give them a warm welcome.

“Could we see the haunted room?” Elisa, the girl who had been inspecting the stairs, asked.

The townspeople now seemed unafraid, curious. John smiled and led them to the room. Elisa said that the room was quite musty and suggested that they freshen it up with a few sprigs of rosemary and sage that she had brought in her bag. Tricia had coincidentally brought several vases and went to fill them with water. Allen Arkady presented the last gift to them - four huge apple pies. When the guests finally left, filled with pie, cheese, and wine, John and Anna watched the sunset and felt they belonged here.

Anna meant to wake up at midnight to give Mel her nightly lesson, but she slept until morning.

“Did you have a midnight snack?” John asked when she came downstairs, pointing to a missing chunk of pie.

“No... oh, it must have been Mel. She must have gotten hungry, waiting for me.”

When John looked confused, Anna told him what really happened the night she fell asleep at the piano, because although it was fun to have a secret, it was more fun to share it.

“Is she the girl in the photo?”

He showed her the photograph that Andrew had developed. In the one where they were dancing, there was a girl in the corner, dressed in white.

“Yes - you see she’s real! You must meet her sometime. She’s very shy, but I’m sure she’ll love you, too.”

But Mel didn't appear the next few days. Every night, Anna played the piano for two hours starting at midnight, looked at her reflection in Jane's mirror, wandered the gardens, left out milk and cookies, sat in Mel's room and looked at the row of teddy bears and the vases with the sprigs of rosemary and sage, and ate the milk and cookies herself, but Mel still didn't come.

Having no Mel to teach, she settled back into her profession, telling everyone that she was a piano teacher looking for students - first lesson free, no need to own a piano because she had a beautiful vintage player piano in their house, now tuned. The Connor family invited her to teach Elisa and Kenny but didn't take up her offer of trying out the vintage piano. The kids were willing pupils, though they didn't have the same drive that Mel had, and Anna would catch Elisa's thoughts wandering during lessons.

"Is it true that you saw the ghost?" Elisa asked.

Anna told her about seeing Mel playing the piano, though she left off the part about giving Mel lessons.

"Have you seen her recently?"

"No. Why'd you ask?"

"Just curious! I'd be scared if I saw a ghost," Elisa said, although she looked like she would be excited, too. "Grandma tells us so many stories..."

"What kind of stories?"

"There was this girl, Clara, same year as my mother. Clara was the best piano player the town had in years. But when she played at their high school graduation, her hands slipped over the keys. She stopped and tried again, but she just couldn't play. She broke into tears and they had to close the curtains and take her off stage. That was after she saw the ghost. It did that to

her, she said. She was so ashamed she never touched the piano again. She never came back after she graduated, either.”

It wasn’t until the next piano lesson that Anna realized what was going on. She was sitting in the piano room, waiting for Elisa. The room had a wreath of rosemary hanging on the door, stalks of sage in a vase, a mirror facing the doorway... She realized then what all the gifts had in common, what she had forgotten from the books that her dad had burned: the gifts warded off ghosts.

She nodded for Elisa to continue even when she missed notes. When Elisa finished the song Anna revealed her suspicions, and Elisa spilled the rest of the beans - how Ethel had enlisted the whole town to help banish the ghost, asked Allen Arkady to bake turmeric into his apple pie. She looked guilty for her own role in the operation, but said it was for Anna’s own good.

“Grandma’s really smart. People don’t do what’s good for them if you just tell them, she always says, so you’ll have to find another way.”

Anna ended the lesson early and rushed home.

After Anna had removed all the offending herbs, mirrors, and ornaments, a feeble Mel showed up again at the patio door at midnight, and Anna let her in.

“I’m so sorry I’ve kept you away,” she said, sweeping Mel up into a hug.

Mel was ice-cold and almost weightless.

“I know it’s no excuse, but the townspeople, they tricked me. Will you forgive me?”

Mel nodded, and headed towards the piano room, though she had to stop and lean on the doorframe. Despite her frailty, her eyes blazed with determination. Anna took Mel's hand and walked her to the kitchen instead, where she made a cup of hot chocolate. Mel stared at it as if she didn't know what to do with it.

"Go ahead," Anna said, "Drink it."

She concealed her nervousness. Would pass right through her, and leave a puddle on the floor? Was it poison for her, like sunlight for snow?

She didn't drink it, but she sat there with her hands around it, her face taking in the steam. When Anna took her hand again it was warmer, more substantial.

Mel had improved since last time. No longer did she play with the mechanical precision of someone trying to remember the song, but with fingers that danced across the keys and knew that they would land on the right notes. At the end of the night, Mel played the song perfectly, but not in any way that Anna had heard it played, with an unmistakable wildness within the moonlight. Mel watched solemnly as Anna wrote the date on the page, to mark the success. She looked at her as if asking, what next?

"You'll perform the Moonlight Sonata - not just in front of me, but John, too, and all of Glenntown. Don't be nervous - just play the way you were playing, as if nothing else existed around you. I'll be here with you, and the others will be in a separate room, so that they'll think I'm playing until they come to see... Isn't that what you've always wanted?"

Anna had found Mel's diaries under a loose floorboard in her room, the spot that Mel had stopped when she dropped the flower in Anna's hand that first night. Mel had always felt eclipsed as the youngest of four siblings; she dreamed of going to Juilliard in New York after she

graduated from high school, but she couldn't even play as well as her older brother Eric, who was good at everything without even trying.

"That's why you tried to possess Clara, isn't it? So that you could play on stage?"

Anna had checked the veracity of Elisa's tale about Clara by seeking out Rick, the manager, editor, and reporter of the Glenntown Herald, who enthusiastically gave her the key to the archives, a defunct barnhouse with stacks of newspapers dating back fifty years. Whenever the "ghost girl" appeared, she made the headlines, and when the facts ran out, the reporter interviewed townspeople who loved to speculate about what really happened, and what the ghost was really after. None of them had guessed the truth, though, because none of them had taken the time to know Mel.

Mel turned away, ashamed.

"Forget the past. You'll play for yourself now, not through anyone else. The occasion? My birthday's next week, and I'll send out the invitations... I'll keep an eye on Ethel this time. When your music entrances everyone, there's nothing she can do. It's just the beginning, Mel. We'll turn this place into a B & B again, and you can play for the guests. And there are countless more songs to learn..."

Mel squeezed Anna's hand, once, and then got up to leave. She looked tired and sad. Her steps were heavy, and she clutched at the banisters as she climbed.

"Goodnight, Mel," Anna called after her. "See you tomorrow night?"

Mel turned at the top of the stairs, waved, and said something that Anna couldn't hear, and then disappeared into the room that faced the moonrise.

John found Anna asleep at the piano. The patio door was open, and there was a cup of hot chocolate on the kitchen table, now ice-cold. Her forehead was hot to the touch, and she was mumbling about Mel. He sent for the doctor immediately. Dr. Daniel Jenkins arrived and found that she had a bad case of the flu. She shouldn't have stayed up so late every day, especially with it so cold! She was confined to bed the next few days. The townspeople sent their various herbal remedies. Ethel chastised John for letting Anna undo all her ghost-proofing work, and John didn't resist when Ethel re-installed and doubled the wards in the house.

John attended to Anna every day. She tried to get out of bed at night to give Mel her lessons, but John got her to stay by agreeing to go downstairs and give Mel a cup of hot chocolate. When Anna was asleep, he sat in the piano room for a while, but never saw the ghost girl that Anna spoke of.

By Anna's birthday, the worst of the flu had passed, and her birthday celebration went ahead as planned.

She sat blanketed in an armchair, nibbling at cake and ice cream, when the Moonlight Sonata started playing in the piano room. John appeared at the doorway, excited.

"That's what you've been doing these past few weeks!" he said to Anna, and to everyone else, "Come see!"

Anna flung away her blankets and dashed after John. The music was just the way that Mel played it. She'd feared that Ethel would keep Mel away, but Mel was too headstrong of a girl for that! She'd feared that Mel would be startled by John, or John by Mel, but music had bridged the divide. She would give them a proper introduction.

The piano was playing itself. She stared at the empty piano stool, but Mel's form did not materialize.

"Anna fixed the piano," John said, peering inside. "Just when I finally wrapped my head around how this thing works, when I thought that *I* was going to fix it, I find she's already done it! This is what you were doing all these nights, wasn't it? It's beautiful, Anna, I should've known to leave the piano to you."

Anna peered into the piano with John. The roll of paper, smooth and unripped, was spinning, with perforations that let air into the channels that raised the valves that operated the hammers that struck the keys. Every note was struck, perfect as moonlight, yet echoing with Mel's unmistakable wildness.