

Chapter 1: Broken Hearts

March 2014

My phone chirped with a signature chime that indicated the incoming call was from Jackie, my executive assistant in London.

“Jackie, this is Gloria. I’m still in Japan putting things together after my Tokyo concert to return to London. What’s up?”

“Gloria, a famous billionaire businessman is trying to reach you with a project. He would not give me his name, just a code name of ‘Dreamer’ for both him and the project. He wants this project private for now, without the media knowing anything. The businessman seemed very desperate, weeping, and hurting, even to the extent of even begging you for a New York stopover on your way back from Japan. He believes very much you can help him. He wants you to return to London through New York where his representative can meet you to discuss the project. The businessman has set you up as speaker at a conference in New York for aspiring singers to hide the meeting with his representative from the media. He’s picking up all costs on the stopover and he will pay you generously for giving the speech at the conference. He wouldn’t let me go until I agreed to contact you. I haven’t been able to reach you until now.”

“That’s fine, Jackie. Could you verify?”

“Yes, he gave me his charge card info for charging our costs.”

“OK, Jackie, I will take the alternative routing back and the stopover. You can set me up in London for the flight change and text the information, including the hotel in New York. I’ll ship my wardrobe and equipment back direct to you. I will just need a single suitcase with me for the stopover. You should text me the conference information as well, and once you have the flights call the conference people and have someone meet me at the airport.”

“Gloria, I have some of the conference info. Your speech topic is supposed to be about what was the most important thing for a singer to remember as she steps to the microphone: voice, enunciation, posture, the smile, breath control, hands placement, or wardrobe? They asked you to come and speak about some of these. ‘Dreamer’ is sending a messenger to meet you at the conference with more information. His name is Michael Crafton.”

From Japan, I relaxed on my first-class flight to New York and managed a few hours of sleep on the flight. At New York, Debbie from the conference met me and drove me to the conference hotel. Debbie filled me in on the conference as she drove. At the hotel, I found Jackie had pre-registered me, so retreated for a lunch in my room and afternoon nap before speaking.

After the nap I found a message on my hotel phone. Michael would meet me in the hotel restaurant after my speech. With my session and speech starting at 7:00 p.m., I arrived in the conference area by 6:00 and had a brief time to meet the conference principals.

As I sat waiting my turn to speak, I suddenly noticed I didn't have any of my notes. Nothing. There was no time to recover them from my hotel room. I panicked. All I could do was pray, "Please Lord send your Spirit. If I don't have that, then my speech here is in vain. Please speak."

The Holy Spirit did anoint me. I felt the speech I gave there was one of the best I have ever given anywhere, much better than my own from my notes. The most important thing to remember, I told them, was to aim for the heart of your audience and sing from your own and unshielded heart to the heart of the audience. I shared this and gave examples. When I finished, we adjourned for the evening. Several thanked me, and I chatted a bit with a few of the singers.

After that, I left for the restaurant in the hotel. There was a man from the conference who seemed to be following me, but I paid little attention. At the restaurant, I asked for a quiet booth at the back. The maître d' led me to a back booth and handed me a menu. I bowed my head and silently prayed, thanking God for helping me that evening. Well, maybe not silently – but at least quietly. When I looked up again, the guy who followed me from the conference was standing there staring nervously at me, with a confused look on his face.

"I...I was praying for you t...today as you spoke," he finally stammered.

"Thank you. I was very aware someone was praying for me. God answered that prayer."

"I...I know." He stammered. "Your speech was inspiring and u...unbelievable. I'm sorry, I'm getting my tang all tangled up. You are a prodigiously beautiful lady. Stunning, and far more than just physical. When you speak or sing, your voice is much as an angel's."

"Thank you. Relax. I won't bite."

I gave him one of my famous giggles. He returned the giggle. Then we both laughed. The man was well dressed. Tie, sport jacket. He had a shadow of a mustache and a tiny ponytail in his dark, black hair. Big-boned. Blue eyes. Cute. He continued with a bit of a stammer.

"I'm Michael. I have b...been given a message I'm supposed to g...give you. A request. May I buy your dinner?"

I thought that line was an interesting strategy to have dinner with me; but the truth was, I was lonely. Not tired, lonely. A night and hotel in this city to sing a concert, then another city and hotel. Then another city. I had come to this conference after doing a concert in Japan, and then Los Angeles before that. Touching people on the surface. At the same time, I saw the confusion on Michael's face was real – he wasn't gaming me. It was a burden he had. No roles. He was real with me. Authentic.

"Sure," I told him. "It would be lovely. You may join me."

He sat quickly. He introduced himself as Michael Crafton. He said he was an artist, painter, sculptor, and university teacher. He also was an actor and movie director. Probably in his mid-thirties. He traveled extensively much like me, with no wife or much sense of home.

About that time the waiter came. We both ordered light meals. I think I asked for a salad and small soup. The waiter left, and we continued with our discussion. I could tell he was struggling with trying to share something with me. He became more comfortable as we talked. There was a deep trust between us, even though we had just met. Michael was drawing deep things out of me, feelings that were deeply buried. Surprisingly, my need for human connection was being met in a profound way.

Eventually, Michael began sharing the message he had for me. He had been sent by a prominent and wealthy businessman to contact me. The businessman's oldest son, a soldier in the Middle East, had been brought back from the war and lay in an ICU ward at Walter Reed Hospital on Life Support. The soldier is completely paralyzed, on a ventilator, and can't even speak. The soldier was also a long-time friend of Michael. The businessman had sent Michael to ask me to visit his son and see what I could do.

"Can you connect me to this businessman and let me ask him some questions?"

"Sure, Gloria." Michael took his phone and punched a number. A lady answered.

"This is Michael. Is the Dreamer available?"

A deep, male voice quickly replied. "Michael! How's our project going?"

"I'm with Gloria now. I'll put her on."

Michael handed me his phone as the businessman continued, "Michael says you have a son on life support at Walter Reed."

"Yes. I'm sorry I can't give you my name at the moment. If this story got to the media, they would have a field day with all of us, including you. My son is at Walter Reed under an assumed name. The doctors aren't able to do much and don't even know what it is he has. It is not PTSD or Guillain-Barre Syndrome (GBS). He cannot speak and just stares at the ceiling. He's like a vegetable and on Life Support and dying. There is no voluntary movement. I want you to spend two weeks working with him. You are an incredibly gifted singer. The Lord has blessed you with a very special voice. Your singing has healing power. My prayer warriors with me believe you, with the help of the Lord, can bring him out of it. We are praying to claim that in faith."

I stumbled a bit in trying to reply without his name, but Michael leaned over. "Gloria, use his code name of 'Dreamer'."

I giggled a bit.

"OK, Dreamer. I am highly honored and humbled that you perceive that gifting in me. I will talk more with Michael and should have an answer for you in a few days. Let's pray on both ends. I have a prayer team with my ministry as well.

The Dreamer broke quickly into a beautiful prayer. Then he expressed his deep desire to meet in person, perhaps even with his son, later. Then we disconnected. I was hurting inside. I often ministered to soldiers, sometimes on the battlefield, and other times in a rehab center.

Michael and I were there until the restaurant closed - talking, laughing, sharing. As we left, we both realized this was the beginning of something, not the end. "Michael, what you shared tonight meant so much to me. I haven't been home in two months."

"Gloria, home is not where you are from, but where you belong. Some travel the entire world to find it. Others find it in a person. Evening dinner again tomorrow?"

"Yes. I do want to hear more about this 'project'."

"Fine. What time should I pick you up at the hotel Gloria? Six in the evening?"

"Would noon work for you, Michael?"

Michael choked, then spoke, "Fine, f...fine."

We agreed. Michael was trying to be gallant in telling me good night. I skipped his nervous attempt and gave him a hug Michael will never forget.

The next day he met me at noon at the same hotel restaurant. We took a quick lunch. Soon we were out front of the hotel, and Michael called up a taxi. As we got in, I heard Michael tell the driver '109 West 57th Street'. The taxi shot off down the street to our mystery destination.

"Michael, why were you at the conference yesterday? I gather from what I've learned since we've met that you weren't there as a student."

"No. Like you, I was there as a speaker."

"What were you speaking about?"

"Same basic topic you were. I work with all types of artists – painters, sculptures, writers, singers, even actors, and actresses."

"Movie work?"

"Yes, I work on the production or directing end, helping them select the cast, sometimes acting. So often they want a well-known name for a part. I prefer someone who carries the heart of the message. They pay me well for that. Sometimes I am an actor."

"Then why were you there in my session for my talk? Was it related to the businessman's project?"

"I think you'll know the answer by the end of the day."

I was fascinated by the mysterious web Michael was weaving.

The taxi soon pulled up at our destination - a very famous location. Michael opened my taxi door, paid the driver and we turned for our short walk to what the sign said was *Steinway Hall*.

On the building exterior was a bas-relief of Apollo with a musical muse above a grand window. Carnegie Hall was across the street.

“Michael, we’re not buying a piano, are we? I have a Steinway Hall in London.”

“Nope.”

“What are we doing here, then?”

“This is their ‘mother lode’ store. There are over 150 pianos here, many of them well-known. As to your question, let’s see what happens.”

Inside the store, I found myself in a piano fantasyland. Beautiful, famous pianos. A salesman approached and greeted me by my name. He introduced himself as Alex Thompson and was wearing a distinguished three-piece business suit. Alex recognized who I was, and Michael introduced himself to Alex. Alex asked how he could help us. I just stood there, frozen, and stared at a piano almost at my fingertips. Alex smiled.

“That piano which you are looking at, Miss Otis, is the famous Mia LaBerge Madison Bluestone Art Case piano. It was commissioned to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of James Madison University. LaBerge hand-painted the piano herself, probably one of the last she did. The piano images show the peaceful campus at dusk, surrounded by the Shenandoah Valley’s Blue Ridge Mountains.”

I continued to stare at the beautiful piano, saying nothing.

Michael turned to Alex.

“I think she wants the grand tour. Is that possible?”

“For you – certainly. Follow. This room is the rotunda and embraces two floors. The chandelier is a Swarovski Chandelier. The high domed ceiling was hand-painted by Paul Arndt. The priceless paintings on the walls are by renowned artists like Rockwell, Wyeth, Leopold Seyffert, and Charles Chambers. Portraits of composers and concert artists line these next walls. Both Vladimir Horowitz and Sergei Rachmaninoff have performed concerts here. We use the main rotunda as a concert hall. It can seat 300 guests and a small symphony orchestra. You will also find displays of memorabilia and our various inventions for the piano scattered about the building.”

After some exploring, we were back in the rotunda. Alex asked the obvious question.

“Miss Otis, would you like to play one of the pianos?”

I looked around. Several other people were wandering about enjoying the pianos and art.

“Oh, no. I couldn’t do that.”

Alex and Michael smiled. I think they wanted me to sing and were trying to draw me out.

“Roberto is here today,” Alex said.

“The Great Roberto?”

“Yes indeed.”

Alex picked up his phone, punched a few buttons.

“Is Roberto there?”

“OK. Tell him I have someone in the rotunda he would want to meet.”

Alex dropped the line. A few minutes later Roberto himself stood before me, bowing deeply and speaking with his beautiful accent.

“Ms. Otis. How divine. How blessed I am. May I play a piano for you?”

I was returning his bow, and for a few minutes I was too stunned to say anything. Before I could speak, Roberto looked at Alex. Alex pointed at the *Madison Bluestone* piano. Roberto moved to it, sat, and his hands hit the keys. The music of the Master flooded the exhibition hall. He was playing Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*. Visitors looking at the pianos and artwork drifted to us at the beautiful piano. People started pouring into the hall from all areas of the building. Someone opened the front door, and people passing the store heard the music and wandered into the store to see what was happening.

As Roberto played, I thought back to when Beethoven wrote this. The greatest composer in the world, deaf, struggling to hear his music. I could see Beethoven's hands on the keyboard of the new pianoforte and one of his ears against the piano wood, weirdly contorted. Beethoven is desperately trying to hear his music, to sense the vibrations on the wood as he played. I was no longer at the store. I was with Beethoven watching as he played.¹ Then Roberto reached the end of the sonata.

I faintly heard Roberto's voice through the noise of hand clapping calling me back to the concert hall with his delightful accent.

“Gloria, what do you wish me to play?”

“*Amazing Grace*, Roberto, *Amazing Grace*. I will start *A Capella*. Hold off on the piano until about midway on the first verse, and then breathe the piano in to join me.”

I stepped up near the piano with the audience silent. I began to draw my first note as an archer pulling back on the bow, creating tension and releasing the note as it tore into the silence of the audience in perfect pitch, piercing the very heart of the audience. I continued to launch the words from my heart to the audience, and soon Roberto's piano joined me, floating in with me. I couldn't help what happened.

*“Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.”*

The song of the piano, the words, and the breaking of what was happening in my own heart crashed within me like a tsunami.

*‘Twas Grace that taught my heart to fear.
And Grace, my fears relieved.
How precious did that Grace appear
The hour I first believed.”*

Something burst within me with the joy I felt. Michael told me later as I began to sing my posture changed, the voice became angelic and pure, my face radiant as the words moved as fire to the audience. I enunciated each word clearly. Michael dropped to the floor near the piano, sitting near me, his legs crossed and his hands upstretched in worship. His eyes were closed.

*“Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come;
'Tis Grace that brought me safe thus far
and Grace will lead me home.*

*The Lord has promised good to me.
His word my hope secures.
He will my shield and portion be,
As long as life endures.”²*

When I finished, the room dropped again to silence. Then I heard one or two clapping. Then they erupted into a loud applause. I bowed to the crowd then blew them a kiss. Michael was on the floor but began to stand. He pulled a crinkled piece of music from a notebook he had and showed it to me and whispered, “Will you sing this for me? Please?”

I squeezed his hand, “Sure, Michael. I know the words.” He took the music to Roberto. Roberto looked at it, smiled, nodding to Michael. It looked like Roberto was going to play again. Roberto's hands touched the keys again, and they began moving. Then my words rang out:

*“The love of God is greater far
Than tongue or pen can ever tell;
It goes beyond the highest star,
And reaches to the lowest hell;
The guilty pair, bowed down with care,
God gave His Son to win;
His erring child He reconciled,
And pardoned from his sin.*

*Oh, love of God, how rich and pure!
How measureless and strong!*

*It shall forevermore endure—
The saints' and angels' song.”³*

Looking out, I saw the room was packed. I saw one lady start dancing between the crowd and the piano. People moved back to give her room. Then a young man who was with her came out and joined her in the dance. In the next moment, with beautiful choreography, she cartwheeled up and with his help stood on his shoulders in the tall exhibition hall with her hands stretched skyward. The crowd started applauding. I looked at Michael, who was back on the floor with eyes closed, hands raised.

*“Could we with ink the ocean fill,
And were the skies of parchment made,
Were every stalk on earth a quill,
And every man a scribe by trade;
To write the love of God above
Would drain the ocean dry;
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,
Though stretched from sky to sky.!”*

*Oh, love of God, how rich and pure!
How measureless and strong!
It shall forevermore endure—
The saints' and angels' song.”³*

I reached down to Michael, touched his shoulder, and lifted him up to face the dancers, and then me. I held both of his hands in mine, and we sang together as Roberto played to a crescendo on the piano.

As the song ended and the piano stopped, Michael fell on my shoulders, hugging me, weeping. I turned to him, and we faced the audience. The applause erupted again, I acknowledged and thanked them. Then I turned to Roberto, thanking him as he stood, then led the audience in thanking the dancers. Roberto and I started chatting with each other. Michael turned to Alex asking how we could get out of the store as there was a mob between us and the door.

“Follow!” Alex said. “Quickly.” Alex led the two of us plus Roberto down the hallway to a small room as many of the crowd tried to follow. I continued talking with Roberto as we went to the room.

Once inside, Alex closed the door and turned to Michael asking our plans. Michael told him we should be leaving.

“How did you get here,” Alex asked.

“Taxi.”

“Michael, where is your next stop?”

Michael mentioned an address, but I missed what his planned destination for us was. Roberto was still keeping me busy.

Alex offered for someone from there to drive us to that destination. Soon a young man entered who Alex introduced as Fred. Michael and I extended deep appreciation to Roberto and Alex. They insisted we were the ones who blessed them. Then we were out the side door with Fred to a nearby parking lot where a company car awaited. Soon we were whisked away. To where? Carnegie Hall was across the street. MOMA (Museum of Modern Art) was only a few blocks away.

I relaxed in the back seat with Fred dodging through New York traffic. I turned to Michael and teased him a bit with an edgy voice, “We’ll be in the newspaper tomorrow and probably on television tonight with your stunt today.”

“Huh? I did nothing on the recording. I did phone in to get their hours and talked with Alex. When I mentioned your name, he laughed and said they would open at any hour for that. The Steinway marketing people probably phoned our visit to the media before we walked in the door. Several reporters showed up a few minutes later. I’m sorry. It was not my intention to hurt you in any way.”

I squeezed Michael’s hand.

“You didn’t Michael. It’s been a great day.”

The car pulled to a stop at what appeared to be a small, nondescript art gallery.

Notes:

1. To escape the stress of the moment, Gloria visualizes here the scene of the deaf Beethoven playing the *Moonlight Sonata* on a pianoforte that can be seen in the marvelous movie *The Immortal Beloved*. The movie is about a mystery romance in the life of Beethoven. After he died, a romantic letter Beethoven wrote was found in his possessions that had been returned to Beethoven after he mailed it. The name of the woman is not mentioned, only referenced in the letter as “the Immortal Beloved”. The mystery involves his lawyer researching among the several women Beethoven knew to find the woman to whom he wrote the letter and giving the letter to her. In this movie scene of Beethoven, there is no stunt player at the pianoforte. Gary Oldman, playing Beethoven, had to learn how to play this sonata in the contorted position you see in the movie with his ear against the instrument to “hear” the vibrations and with his hands on the keys. Gloria, at the piano store, uses that scene in the movie to escape the stress before she sings, mentally shifting from her audience at the store to the lonely room with Beethoven playing.
2. *Amazing Grace*, lyrics public domain.

3. *The Love of God* is public domain in the United States. Some of the words are part of a very old Jewish poem. The early version of one verse were found on the wall of a patient's room in an insane asylum. Frederick M. Lehman was so moved by the poem that he desired to expand on it. In 1917, Lehman, while seated on a lemon box during his lunch break from his job as a laborer, added the lyrics for two more verses and the chorus, completing the song. Copyright 1917, Renewed 1945 by Nazarene Publishing House. Used by permission.