

laurent

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TEST OF THE HEART
Guie Leo Deliglio
[Story]

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As Mrs. Ramsey came out of her daughter's room she was met by her son-in-law, Keith Kendell. "How is Gloria?" he asked in signs, and pointed to his wife's room.

"She is doing finely," signed back Mrs. Ramsey, with the slowness of a hearing person unaccustomed to conversing with the deaf. "The doctor thinks she will soon be able to hear perfectly."

"For her sake I will be glad."

"It is wonderful to think she will have her chance in life again! I hope you understand what her hearing will mean to her."

The young man nodded. "I understand. She will, of course, desire to be with hearing people more. I will not keep her from them."

"I knew you would be sensible. If possible, I shall try to cut her entirely off from her former associates. She will have nothing in common with them now, and her social duties among the hearing will leave her no time to tolerate deaf companions."

A look of dismay passed over Keith's face. "I don't believe Gloria will want to give up all of her old friends."

Mrs. Ramsey's usually calm features became stern. She knew it would be hard to tell the young man what she had decided days ago to say to him. But now that her daughter's whole future was at stake, she would make it plain to Keith Kendell that was impossible for him to remain Gloria's husband.

"I have something very serious to talk over with you, and if you are sensible and really love my daughter, you will do as I desire. You know Gloria's early history. When she was about thirteen she lost her hearing through sickness. This blow nearly killed me. I loved her dearly, and she was my sole comfort after my husband died. When I found there was very little hope of her recovering her hearing, I immediately had her taught lip-reading so she could understand me without the use of signs. I do now know when she first started to learn the signs, but I found out that she was an expert signer at sixteen. Although it grieved me deeply, I let her associate with the deaf. You also know I looked upon her marriage to you with disfavor, for I wanted her to marry a man who could support her in luxury. But she would not hear of giving you up, and as I thought she would always be deaf, I finally consented to let her marry a deaf man. I believe up to this time you have made her a good husband."

"I have tried to be good to her, for I love her." Keith wondered what Mrs. Ramsey had on her mind. Surely she wasn't trying to part Gloria from him. Why, Gloria was his wife!

"Gloria has her hearing back now," went on Mrs. Ramsey quickly. "We both know what a difference it will make to her. It has always been my wish for her to take her proper place in society, and now there is only one thing to interfere."

"What will interfere?" but Keith guessed without asking the question.

"To put it plainly, I think if Gloria is handicapped with a deaf husband her whole glorious future will be spoiled."

"I am sorry, but what can I do? I love Gloria and believe she loves me."

"Then if you love Gloria, why don't you prove it? Go away to some place for a year and let her get a divorce."

"A divorce! Gloria would not consent. It would be impossible."

"Gloria will consent. Do you think her love will last if she continues to live with you, a deaf-mute? Will she like to slave her life away in a little cottage when she can get far better things if she leaves you? Surely you cannot expect the utterly impossible. If Gloria went back to you it would be only from a sense of duty, not because she desires to live with you. If you love her, as you profess, you will let her get a divorce as soon as possible."

Keith bowed his head in his hands. Was she right? Would he be a handicap to Gloria's future? Would Gloria's love die if she continued to live with him, a deaf-mute?

Mrs. Ramsey looked on triumphantly. She knew she had won Keith with her plea. If she could win Gloria as easily, she knew she would be able to separate the young couple with each believing the other had grown tired of the matrimonial bond.

She was somewhat shocked at the careworn look that had come into Keith's face in the last few minutes. Still he was scarcely twenty-five, and boys of his age seldom carry a load of sorrow for long. Soon he would meet some nice deaf-mute girl, and all thoughts of Gloria would vanish. Gloria, too, would soon find another mate more fitted to her station in life. Mrs. Ramsey felt almost proud of the work she was accomplishing. She could even afford to be a little kind to the young man beside her.

"I know how you feel now, Keith," she patted him tenderly on the arm. "I am sorry I had to use such hard words to make you understand, but you know I am doing it for the best. You will not lose money by leaving your business for a year. I will provide sufficient funds for you to travel a year, and of course, Gloria will not ask for alimony."

The young man drew himself up sharply. "Thank you, no," he signed quickly. "I have all the money I need. You have already paid for Gloria's operation. I cannot ask more from you, and if possible I will repay you for it as soon as I can."

"No, no. It is right that I should pay for the operation. I refuse to allow you to refund that money. If you ever find yourself in need of funds, do not hesitate to let me know."

"I cannot take your money, Mrs. Ramsey." He glanced at the door of his wife's room. "Could I see her before I go?"

"I think it would be best for you not to disturb her. But if you must . . ."

"Perhaps you are right. It might make it harder." Keith picked up his hat and overcoat. "Good-bye. I will leave town as soon as I can arrange things at the office. I will leave my address with the company, and you can call me if anything happens and I am needed."

* * * * *

Gloria Kendell sat in her invalid chair gazing out on the street. After two months she could hear almost perfectly, and the doctor had said her ear drums were almost entirely healed and she could soon dispense with her ear pieces she was now required to wear to modify the sound around her. In another week she would be able to go out and around, and her mother was often talking about the joys of attending the theatre and church, pleasures her deafness had caused her to miss so many years.

But Gloria was not in a happy frame of mind. Her hearing brought none of the joys she had anticipated. When deaf she had

found a great deal of pleasure in the motion pictures, the deaf church service, and the frequent informal socials given by her deaf friends. Then, too, she had her husband and cozy little bungalow. She smiled wistfully as tender little memories flitted across her mind. It had been such fun to watch the vegetable garden grow. And how she loved to pour over the cook books trying to find a new way to use up the left over scraps and surprise Keith.

Keith? What was he doing now, she wondered. Why had he left her in such an abrupt fashion without a word? Was he angry because she let her mother persuade her into an operation that had succeeded? Of course, she had wanted it, for she could hear and could do more to influence hearing people to give the deaf a fair chance. But she had talked this over with Keith many times, and he always seemed pleased at the idea. Her mother had said something about a divorce, but there would be no divorce if she could help it. Why, she loved Keith with all her body and soul. She belonged to him!

For many days she had wondered why Keith had left her. Mrs. Ramsey had been very vague in her explanation. She hinted that Keith had not wanted a hearing wife who would outshine him and make his defect conspicuous. Besides he had sensibly realized he would handicap her future and left her rather than find himself in the way.

Gloria could scarcely believe this of Keith. It was not like him to go off without explanation to her. He had either misunderstood her, or had been influenced by her mother to leave her so she could obtain a divorce. But her mother would not have done such an underhanded thing. She knew how much they thought of each other, and what mother would wish to wreck such a perfect marriage as theirs had been?

“What is my little daughter thinking about now?” asked Mrs. Ramsey, coming over to her daughter’s side. “I hope you are looking forward to the future good times I have planned for you, my dear.”

Gloria sighed. What good would theatres and concerts do her without Keith to sit beside her and hold her hand as he did in the old days at the movies.

“I was not thinking of the things you planned, mother. I was trying to think of the reason Keith left me.”

“My dear child, don’t trouble your head over Keith. No one knows why a man leaves his wife. Probably a fairer maiden--”

“Probably you told him I should be better off without him,” interrupted Gloria, angered at her mother’s levity.

“Who told you? Has he--?” Mrs. Ramsey stopped short, realizing she was betraying herself.

“Then that was it Mother!” The anger in Gloria’s voice startled Mrs. Ramsey. She had never seen her daughter in such a mood before. “You sent Keith away by making him believe I would not love him if I could hear. You lied to him, you know it! You thought my hearing would make a difference. You are mistaken. I love Keith all the more, now that I know what a sacrifice he would make for me. What a test for my poor Keith. But I am not going to hear, Mother. I am going to take out these ear pieces and let the noise come in. The doctor said it would break the ear drums, and if it does I won’t be too good for Keith, and you won’t care to keep me if I can’t hear.”

“Gloria! Gloria! You mustn’t do that. Think of what it will mean. Think of the years ahead of you. For my sake, Gloria, you mustn’t take them out. Keith would say the same. I’ll let you go back to him if you will only leave the ear pieces in and try to keep your hearing!”

But her words were too late. Gloria had already plucked out the small rubber ear pieces the doctor had placed in her ears after the operation. Suddenly the world seemed to have broken loose. The cool air rushed into her delicate ears, and her mother’s voice resounded in shrill blasts. Mercifully the world seemed to grow dark, and she fell forward in her chair unconscious.

* * * * *

Some weeks later a pale-faced girl descended from the train at the small village of Sheridianville. Inquiring her way of the villagers, she soon found herself in front of a large factory.

“Does Mr. Keith Kendell, a deaf-mute, work here?” she inquired of the doorman.

“Yes, ma’am. He’s one of the new book-keepers in the office. Shall I tell him you want to see him?”

“Yes, please. Tell him his wife, Gloria Kendell, wishes to see him on important matters. It’s so near six o’clock, don’t you think he could leave now?”

“I guess so, ma’am. Stay here until I see.”

“Mr. Kendell said to ask you to go in. He’s all alone there and isn’t quite finished,” said the man on his return.

Gloria was surprised at the change in Keith as she entered the small office room. He was much thinner than when she had last seen him, and his face was haggard and aged. Impulsively she ran to him and threw her arms around his neck. It needed no signs to show how glad she was to see him.

“How thin you are!” she signed. “Have you been ill?”

“No; only working, and anxious, about you.”

“Now I shall make you fat again. You will starve yourself if I am not around to look after you.”

“Your mother? Did she not tell you I left you so you could get your divorce?”

“Silly! Why should I want a divorce from the nicest man in the world? I will not let you off that easy. I am going to live with you from now on. Do you think I could be happy without you?”

“But you do not realize what a handicap I will be to you. You must take your rightful place in the world now.”

“I am sorry, but I can’t.”

“Because I should hinder you.”

Gloria laughed. “No. Only because I can’t hear any more!”

“What! The operation failed?” a look of happiness flashed over Keith’s face a moment, but almost at once it gave place to a look of deep concern.

“The operation succeeded, but when I heard what my mother had said to you about me, I was so angry I tore out the ear pieces and let my ear drums break.” And she told Keith what had occurred between her mother and herself a few weeks before.

“I couldn’t help it, Keith,” she finished. “I never could have enjoyed my hearing without you, and you would always have thought yourself in my way if I had come back to you as I was. Now there is no barrier between us, and we can begin again where we left off before that horrid operation spoiled it all. You do love me just as well now, don’t you?”

Keith looked down at her, realizing all at once what a wonderful girl his wife was to sacrifice her hearing to keep on though live with him.

“What courage you had to do this!” his signs were reverent. “May my love be big enough to justify it all.”

She smiled and shook her head. Putting her arms around his neck, she looked up into his face and spoke.

Though a poor lip-reader, Keith knew what she said. It was:

“Not courage, dear, just love.”

UNDERSTANDING DEAFHOOD

Nancy Rourke

[Artwork]



[Nancy Rourke is an award-winning, prolific deaf artist. Every week new paintings appear on her website at <http://www.nancyrourke.com>]

THE TROUBLE WITH WISHING

Raymond Luczak

[Story]

The nights were never hers, not even when she was a baby. She could not sleep at all, cried and bawled at the oddest hours; it was more than enough to convince her parents not to have a second child. Aged nine, the girl already had dark circles under her eyes. Her parents, speech therapist, audiologist, family doctor, and psychiatrist could not figure out after a battery of tests and examinations why the girl couldn’t sleep. She nodded off in the afternoons while her hearing classmates stayed awake and listened to their teacher, but when she was able to lipread and read the text quickly before the teacher began discussing it, she did very well. She was so perfectly well-adjusted, especially for someone who required hearing aids,

everyone said, so what could be her problem? She played with some girls her age in the neighborhood, and she was always the type to try things before anyone in her group, so she wasn't exactly what anyone would call lonely. Still, her parents fretted and whispered to each other in the dark, never daring to mention the secret wish to be rid of a child who caused them so much shame, who couldn't speak or hear very well, until they dozed off.

As such, there were no words with which the girl could articulate her endless insomnia, but she knew deep down in her bones that her parents, while they loved her as parents must love their offspring, would have preferred that she turn out to be hearing and normal like everybody else.

Magically, one night, her wish came true. She yawned and stretched her body into a most dreamless sleep. She had a look of a contented bliss on her face, and when her mother saw her so peaceful on her bed, she called the school and said she was sick. She, too, called in sick from work just to revel in the aura of stillness surrounding her daughter; then she called her husband at work with the good news. She brought a rocking chair and her needlepoint into her daughter's room, and watched her. She was like a cat sleeping; even if she was not moving at all, scarcely seeming to breathe, she was compelling to watch, in the strange beauty of her utter contentment. She was sleeping, and then she was SLEEPING like an angel at rest, and so she didn't know what happened in her room when she slept: Doctors of all sorts came in, only to come away with wonder. Soon her parents had to disconnect the doorbell and the phone. Too many people had begun to believe that because hers was a sleep so deep and short of coma, yet wasn't, she had the makings of a girl saint. Even the dark circles around her eyes soon faded.

A week, then two, passed.

Finally, her mother had to return to work. She left her daughter in the care of her youngest sister, a twenty-year-old college student who studied during the day before her evening classes. Alone in the house with her niece, she felt slightly panicky, queasy. There was something prickly in the air. Energy that felt like fumes filled the house to its seams; it was almost a drug that left her woozy and, well, high. It was better than any marijuana she'd smoked. It was not long before she invited some of her friends to sit around the girl's bed and close their eyes. They giggled at first, and then fell silent for hours until her parents came home from work and dragged them out of the house.

The third week passed.

Her parents were now doubly worried. The girl had not even soiled herself, nor was she dehydrated. Her weight stayed the same as the day she took to bed. Her parents soon argued about the mounting expenses for all those visitors who wanted to poke her awake, to test her blood once more.

On the twenty-first day the girl woke early, at dawn. She felt giddy. The October trees outside turning a frenzy of color in the winds captivated her. They were like hands flurrying, anxious to share everything, every little secret from within. She tiptoed out of her bedroom, down the plush carpet of the hallway leading to the stairs. She put on her jacket and shoes, and quietly closed the front door behind her.

An hour later her father woke up for a shower and went to check on the girl.

That morning was the most intense police search ever conducted in the area. The local news rebroadcast the picture of her sleeping almost non-stop. False leads soon overwhelmed the police station. Visitors surrounded the house, hands outstretched as if they were the faithful, praying to the heavens above them. But by dusk nothing definite had turned up.

After having basked in the warm energy that her sleep provided, her parents found the subsequent bitter coldness in the house hard to bear. The lit fireplace did not help, nor did hats and gloves and long underwear. It was as if the girl had indeed died, leaving only the ghostly remains of her energy. They embraced each other on the girl's bed, as if to grab that last breath of warmth that had to be somewhere in her room, and not daring to let go. They soon discovered that they, too, could not sleep and soon acquired the dark circles around their eyes. Nothing, not even sleeping pills, brought them rest.

A few years later a wish made by her parents came true one night. In the deaf community center thirty miles away from where the girl once lived, a few deaf people broke into tears of joy. The place was filled with rapturous feelings almost too good to be true. No one could pinpoint why so much happiness suddenly pervaded the place, and the deaf people there were incensed when hearing people, not knowing signs, showed up in droves and demanded to partake in the overwhelming potion of happiness wafting within its four walls.

Her parents soon heard about this phenomenon. They brought a picture of their girl, the same one that had been rebroadcast into the region's permanent collective memory, and held up the picture before the crowd of angry hearing people and policemen trying to contain the threats of ripping open the doors. The moment the parents held up the picture of their girl, the crowd fell silent and parted to let them through to the front door. There was not another sound.

The front door opened. Some deaf people, with a hearing woman who could speak and sign, recognized the picture of the girl, and allowed her parents in.

There, the energy was the same as when the girl slept, only much, much stronger and more vibrant. The parents wept, tasting the thick air--everything of her that they lost; the daughter had found a safe haven, a home of her own. Her father set the framed picture on the wall opposite the front door, and her mother tried to learn from a deaf woman how to sign, "Thank you."

On the drive home, the parents said nothing in the car, feeling the relief of closure if anything from the certainty of her death. Later that night, unable to sleep, they turned to each other and made love for the first time in a long time; the spontaneity and the hunger took them both by surprise, and they slept easily in each other's arms from then on.

By the time their second child--a boy--was born, their fingers and hands and arms and faces had become fluent enough for their new deaf friends. When the audiologist told them the sad news about their son, they knew better than to wish otherwise; instead, they rejoiced.

[Raymond Luczak is the author of many books, the latest of which is MUTE, a collection of poems. His Web site is at <http://www.raymondluczak.com>.]

STOP EUGENICS

Ruthie Jordan

[ABC Poem]



Click the image to view the video or visit:
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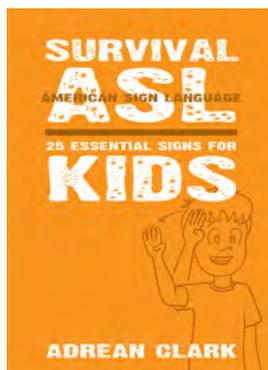
DEAF AWARENESS

Karen Christie

[Poem]

In a small operating theatre that doubles as a classroom,
I am seated for a panel discussion.
The student doctors in their lab coats practice observation.
As living clothed bodies, we are
wholes instead of parts but
the first interpreted question is:
Don't you wish a cure?
If I could I would
wish for healing hands,
my own. One touch
on each of your closed eyelids--
Ephphatha, "be opened"--
now you see us.
A miracle.

[Karen Christie is a faculty member of the Department of Cultural and Creative Studies at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf.]



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