A SERVICE OF LOVE

by O. Henry

Joe Larrabee dreamed of becoming a great artist. Even when he was six, people in the little western town where he lived used to say, "Joe has great talent, he will become a famous artist." At twenty, he left his home town and went to New York. He had his dreams — but very little money.

Delia had her dreams too. She played the piano so well in the little southern village where she lived that her family said, "She must finish her musical training in New York." With great difficulty they collected enough money to send her north "to finish".

Joe and Delia got acquainted at a friend's house where some art and music students had gathered to discuss art, music and the newest plays. They fell in love with each other, and in a short time they married.

Mr. and Mrs. Larrabee began their married life in a little room. But they were happy, for they had their Art, and they had each other. Joe was painting in, he class of the great Magister. Mr. Magister got a lot of money for his pictures — and he took a lot of money for his lessons. Delia was taking piano lessons from the great Rosenstock, and he was taking a lot of money from Delia.

The two young dreamers were very, very happy while their money lasted. But it didn't last very long. Soon, they didn't have enough to pay for their lessons and eat three times a day. When one loves one's Art, no service seems too hard. So Delia decided she must stop taking lessons and give lessons herself. She began to look for pupils. One evening, she came home very excited, with shining eyes.

"Joe, dear," she announced happily, "I've got a pupil. General Pinkney — I mean — his daughter, Clementina. He's very rich, and they have a wonderful house. She's so beautiful — she dresses in white; and she's so nice and pleasant! I'm going to give her three lessons a week; and just think, Joe! Five dollars a lesson. Now, dear, don't look so worried, and let's have supper. I've bought some very nice fish."

But Joe refused to listen to her. "That's all right for you, Dellie, but all wrong for me," he protested. "Do you suppose I'm going to let you work while I continue to study Art? No! Never! I can get a job as a mechanic or clean windows. I'll get some kind of work."

Delia threw her arms around him. "Joe, dear, you mustn't think of leaving Mr. Magister and your Art. I am not giving up music. The lessons won't interfere with my music. While I teach, I learn, and I can go back to Rosenstock when I get a few more pupils."

"All right," said Joe. "But giving lessons isn't Art."

"When one loves one's Art, no service seems too hard," said Delia.

During the next week, Mr. and Mrs. Larrabee had breakfast very early. Joe was painting some pictures in Central Park, and he needed the morning light especially, he said. Time flies when you love Art, and it was usually seven o'clock in the evening when Joe returned home. At the end of the week, Delia, very proud but a little tired, put fifteen
dollars on the table. "Sometimes," she said, "Clementina is a very difficult pupil. And she always wears white. I'm tired of seeing the same colour."

And then Joe, with the manner of Monte Cristo, pulled eighteen dollars out of his pocket and put it on the table too. "I sold one of my pictures to a man from Washington," he said. "And now, he wants a picture of the East River to take with him to Washington."

"I'm so glad you haven't given up your Art, dear," Delia said. "You are sure to win! Thirty-three dollars! We have never had so much money to spend."

The next Saturday evening, Joe came home first. He put his money on the table and then washed what seemed to look like a lot of paint from his hands. Half an hour later, Delia arrived. There was a big bandage on her right hand. "Dellie, dear, what has happened? What is the matter with your hand?" Joe asked.

Delia laughed, but not very happily. "Clementina," she explained, "asked me to have lunch with her and the General after our lesson. She's not very strong, you know, and when she was giving me some tea, her hand shook and she spilled a lot of very hot water over my hand. But General Pinkney bandaged my hand himself. They were both so sorry. Oh, Joe, did you sell another picture?" She had seen the money on the table.

"Yes," said Joe. "To the man from Washington. What time this afternoon did you burn your hand, Dellie?"

"Five o'clock, I think," said Delia. "The iron — the water was very hot. And Clementina cried, and General Pinkney..."

Joe put his arms round Delia. "Where are you working, Dellie? Tell me," he asked in a serious voice.

Delia was about to say something, but suddenly tears appeared in her eyes and she began to cry. "I couldn't get any pupils," she said. "And I didn't want you to stop taking lessons, so I got a job ironing shirts in the big laundry on Twenty-Fourth Street. This afternoon, I burned my hand with a hot iron. Don't be angry with me, Joe. I did it for your Art. And now, you have painted those pictures for the man from Washington..."

"He isn't from Washington," said Joe slowly.

"It makes no difference where he is from," said Delia. "How clever you are, Joe! How did you guess that I wasn't giving music lessons?"

"I guessed", Joe said, "because about five o'clock this afternoon, I sent some oil up to the ironing-room. They said a girl had burned her hand. You see, dear, I work as a mechanic in that same laundry on Twenty-Fourth Street."

“And the man from Washington...?"

“Yes, dear”, Joe said. “The man from Washington and General Pinkney are both creations of the same art, but you cannot call it painting or music”. And they both began to laugh.

“You know, dear”, Joe said. “When one loves one’s Art, no service seems...”
But Delia stopped him with her hand on his mouth. “No”, she said, “just — “when one loves”.”

**NOTES:**

1. bandage — повязка;
2. laundry — прачечная.