

## A Timeless Ballad

By Sylbi Bae

I escaped to the rooftop for one last performance. It looks the same as we left it last year, my dear. Our piano is still in the same spot, facing the skyline, towering over the traffic. If you spotted it from ground level, you would think it was a cloud in the sky.

It was our favorite pastime, to duet. When we were kids, there was no one to perform for. I mean no one to pretend for. We could've spent the rest of our lives together performing for the Universe here on top of this building, but our love of music became a love for each other and our song consumed us whole. A range like our conversations. Tone like the texture of your skin. When you left, everything became a façade, and I couldn't say an honest word with a straight face. You loved it when I sang my oohs and aahs like a floating staircase.

The air is different up here, for I am taken under its spell, a calling to take advantage of its acoustics. I must perform again. If not to remind the Universe I'm still waiting for it to return you to me, then why else? Universe, deliver my song to my beloved in its most authentic form. The chords are G Em and C. Forge a path to wherever she may be and make it known that our time was made sweet. Here cars and pedestrians are running in circles. In true equilibrium, my ears deafen, and reality exits the pseudo auditorium. I usually avoid audiences, but they can't hear me play and sing and I can't hear them honk and scream.

I'm painted in every lyric. I should've known we would never reach the shore. I've danced this dance before. It's like me to swish an open drink even if it breaks its shape and spills past the brink. On the high notes, I picture you on the cloud above me. Tension in my throat tugs at my vocal cords and slings the note out of my body and into your hands. I know you've thrown the note back when I feel a slight buzz on my forehead. This is the only way I can hit the high notes.

Here comes the part where the song escalates so much that I want to shout. Perhaps I'm emboldened by the gradual intensity that is the crescendo I play. The volume of the music makes me want to overcome it, to be a lion biting a roar. My fingers have a voice of their own, one of a rhythm off-beat to my breath. Two man-made instruments play in opposition, but as their creator, I make them get along in your honor. They embody the undecided state of us, which may be why I was never fond of singing with bands or karaoke instrumentals. I always chose the piano.

Singing the bridge makes my throat narrow and my eyes wet. I imagine you standing beside me resting your hand on the piano. When you sang harmony, it helped me stay on key. Without it, I try to compensate for the lack of you by mixing the melody with your harmony, and it doesn't sound very pretty. It sounds like an ugly cry. Hot tears bubble inside me, I choke on the taste, and let it roll down my face.

I look down at my audience. The same cars and pedestrians are running in circles. I bow, but there's no applause. I don't know why I had expected more. I can't help but think that the Universe has deafened everyone except you. This must be true because no one claps for me like you do. My throat feels healthy enough to power through. I must rewind and relive you.