

## **A serenade for winds in A minor**

**By**

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*To be read after playing or listening to Für Elise by L. van Beethoven*

Your gaze followed the last page rolling out on the copier's tray. Shiny black notes, *molto crescendo*, and a double-bar line with a pause at the end. Your red coat warmed up the space, or was it your hair, a dandelion gilded by winter sunset.

"Music?" you said and pulled off your scarf.

"Just printing my score." I rubbed at my inked fingers to shake your hand.

"Hi, I'm Desmond."

"Elise, the new intern."

Elise. Not Elisa or Lisa. A flick of the tongue under your hard palate, enough to release the warmth of your breath. One resonant vowel before the zing of the sibilant passing over the ridge of your teeth; another one reaching the ends of your smile.

"So, you're a composer. I've never met one."

But you must have, Elise, in a previous life—the deaf composer who imaged his music on you, incapable of deciding on the right note for your name. The brightness of E against the doubts of the D sharp, a siren of war between living and dead, crossing the boundary once, twice, until—exhausted—the melody sinks in the folds of A minor.

"Do you play?" I asked.

"No, but I've always wanted to learn the piano." You invited me into your life.

I taught you "Für Elise." You struggled with the right hand while I accompanied with my left, a duo playing music written for one. First in the church across the road, then in my flat, where I played to the end, and you were surprised there was so much more to the piece than its opening.

You were unpredictable, teasing me, naughty—cascades of spring laughter, an F major breeze. I wanted to tame you, to contain in my music your distant gaze and your mood modulations, our walks up the mountain and the auburn forest where, on one knee, I stuttered my question.

Then, quietly, you told me the truth.

I took it, my love, your truth with your pain, a thundering storm flashing lightning chords, bending bare branches and uprooting trees. I watched you burn and flicker away, your eyes daring me, begging to press not keys but buttons on monitors until no sound, not a beep would remain. Forgive me, I couldn't. The deaf one was calling and you ran back to him, entangled in broken triads, up to the end of the keyboard, but he let you fall over—light, insubstantial—a meandering feather, a reed on a breeze. I waited, defeated, for the pause at the end.

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The world is soundless now, a white score of empty staves. I've got you with me one last time. My boots crunch a rhythm up the mountain path—timpani, snare drum, the pulse of a heart held together by grief. I reach the cliff. A lone bird's oboe pierces the sky and twists in a slur. Snowy peaks solemnly stare, clouds join heads and weep their frozen sorrows.

Goodbye, Elise. I release you, one handful of dust at a time.

The wind takes over in flutes and clarinets, first in unison, then apart, two octaves apart, wailing the dissonance of E and D sharp. The violins wait, respectfully silent, those passionate strings in a knot at my throat. Below me, the church spire softens and coils into a glistening clef. A tear rolls down, a stem of a crotchet. Music, unleashed, fills me up, overflows.

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