

Tranquillo

The window of my unadorned room stares out into a garden that is home to many luscious irises and spotted orchids. I study these flowers day after day, as they remind me of my home in the countryside. Having remained in this room for what feels like forever, my days and youth in that small Bavaria cottage feel like a lifetime away.

The irises are a bright shade of yellow, complementary to the spotted violet and white orchids. They all sway gently in the breeze, as though they are dancing to their own symphony. I can hear my brother calling to me from downstairs, asking if I will play outside with him. I give in and join him, and we frolic amongst the florae outside. Hours pass, and evening approaches. As the sun begins to set, it adds beautiful new shades of crimson and indigo to the landscape.

My brother will be returning from the war, so I sit here until the sun goes down, day after day. The orchids continue to dance unknowingly in the haze, unaware of the great grief I am experiencing before them.

What this war has brought in devastation, this saviour has gifted in consolation. As I sit with him the world feels like it has become stationary in the tranquility of the moment. I am in love. Not in the same way I loved the flowers outside my window or the colour of the sunset or the intricate violet flowers on my wallpaper; but I am in love with a being. He is looking right back at me, and the world pauses for a second or two; my heart stops. "I do," he returns. I can't help but smile. The sun is seeping through the stain glass windows, resulting in streaks of various colours in the air.

It is a truly glorious sight, and in my whole life I have never felt this grateful and blessed. The little baby boy gazes up at me with beckoning newborn eyes, and I know that from this moment onward I will do anything for him. His eyes are yet to begin their transition from the pale blue colour of a newborn to the azure of his fathers, but despite this they are truly gorgeous irises. They sway in the wind outside my window, alongside the orchids.

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I divert my eyes to the wallpaper and begin once again studying the intricacies of the pattern. I stare at it for so long it feels like years have passed, and in that time it has gradually become less appealing to me. The wall covering always looks very different once the sun has gone below the horizon. First a sickly combination of faded purple and yellow, to a murky blend in the evening. The delicate floral pattern would become indiscernible in the darkness, leaving behind a complete absence of colour. This would almost always redirect my vision out the window.

There was a full moon tonight, and from its location in the sky I knew that it would almost be midnight. My husband stands beside me on the balcony holding me close, telling me that he will always love me. Leaning over the wooden railing with the wind on my face and the feel of night seeping through my creased skin, I witness the beauty of the New Year. The fireworks, in all their glory, flaunt an abundance of colours against the black sky, rising up and sparking dozens of colours in the air.

With every note I play I visualise a different colour or combination. The bass notes spark dark purples and black ripples through the sky, while the treble reminds me of trails of emerald, violet, marigold, and various shades of blue. My hands glide effortlessly, and I need not look at the keys. They have memorised the motion of this piece and are forever living it. I reach the coda and I am letting go, finishing not only a song but a part of me. On the last bar I play the final chord and just when I am about to lift my hands and the pedal, a terrifying image is before me.

My hands, they are not gifted with the softness of youth. My fingers, they have become very swollen, and my arthritis does not permit me to reach more than a 6th. The ivory and ebony keys have disappeared, and left behind an oak table. The soothing cold of the brass pedals is gone. The cushioning piano stool has been swallowed by an aching hard pine chair. The sounds, the colours, the tones, the love, the happiness, the youth; it is all gone.

My mother spends her days staring out at the various native flowers and shrubbery in the nursery garden, something she has appreciated for much of her life. I seldom

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visit her these days as she no longer remembers who I am. When it is possible to get a response from her she only asks me where her husband - my father, is. At this point I must once again remind her of his death many years ago. This becomes harder as the days wear on, and she steadily drifts further away from herself.

Today is one of the many days where she is unresponsive, lost in a world of her own. I can see her gliding her hands along her desk as if playing piano, despite having not played for years. I cannot begin to imagine what melody is dancing in her mind, but I can guarantee that it is a beautiful one.