

Love Sings

—James Gentzel

A MUSIC HALL, LOCATED IN A FORGOTTEN PART of town, is dimly lit by an almost unnoticeable network of lights hanging high above on the rafters. The thrust of its light shines down upon a lone figure, a young man in somewhat shabby brown loafers, playing a baby grand piano on the stage. The shadow playing on the side of his face makes his features almost indistinguishable.

Just as he shifts from his moody, rebellious melodic groove to a darker and smooth song that has a silky jazz feel, another young man walking with a slight stoop to his shoulders steps into the hall, the meager light reflecting lightly off of his pale blond hair. He nods his emotionless face to the piano player and sits down in one of the plush red seats. The hall is empty except for these two young men.

After several minutes of being lulled by the sleek tones emerging from within the depths of the piano, the young men raise their heads in curiosity at the sound of a door opening and then shutting.

Emerging from the dusky shadows is a girl around seventeen. She carefully takes a finger and gently rubs her eye as she walks across the plush red carpet of the hall and down the incline of the floor towards the stage. The eyes of the piano player return to the keys, but the eyes of the blond man never leave the girl's face.

The girl steps onto the stage, and a stream of light falls on her face, illuminating her milky white skin. She is wearing a simple white dress that hangs gracefully from her slender frame. The light causes shadows, emphasizing the tired lines under her eyes.

The girl sits down beside the young blond man and leans her head toward him.

"Hello," she says softly. Her eyes gleam and the brown darkness inside seems to be bottomless like you could stare into them until you would slowly disappear.

The blond man nods his head and somewhat shyly keeps his gaze at the floor. The girl turns her head ever so slightly, causing her long, dirty-blond hair to cascade over the back of the chair.

The young man at the piano runs his hands lightly over the keys, coaxing slow and seductive tones from the strings. He leans his head back in a thoughtful pose and begins to sing in a pleasantly raspy voice that embodies the sultriness of the evening.

"I can see a new horizon, where the sun is always shining..."

The blond turns his head towards the girl and meets her gaze. "So...I think that..." His sentence is rendered incomplete as his methodical manner of thought is unmercifully disrupted by the naked intensity of her eyes.

"Well?" she asks, her eyes raised in an amused fashion.

"Where were you last night, Eve?" the blond man asks her.

She slyly smiles. "Is that a rhetorical question?"

He turns his head back,

so he can seemingly study the pattern of the carpet. "No."

"Sorry Ethan, I was busy."

"I was here. I waited for you," Ethan says, a slight furrow becoming noticeable on his brow.

A soft blush colors her face. "I'm sorry."

"I hope I'll see you there, baby. I know, that you know, that I love you..."

Her hand creeps over the edge of the chair until it is on the armrest of the young man's chair, where the light reflects off the surface of her hand. The young man then places his larger hand over hers, extinguishing the reflection of light.

"And when the sun finally sets, just always keep believing that it will shine again..."

"Have you talked to Jen yet?" the girl asks him, her other hand unconsciously stroking the side of her leg in a worried pattern.

Up, down, up, down, the young man's eyes follow the movement of the girl's hand.

"No."

"Why? You said last night that you would..." her voice trails off.

"You weren't here last night," he reminded her sharply.

"That's right, you said it

the night before. C'mon, why the delay in telling her?"

"Please don't go away, I've got to hear you say..."

He shifts in the chair.

"I can't. For some reason I just can't. I'm sorry. Give me time."

The countenance on the girl's face changes and two spots of scarlet flush on her cheeks.

"Stand up for once. I'll be Amy to your Laurie and let Jen be Jo."

"I don't know how to tell her. I mean, don't you feel bad about this at all? I mean, it is your sister. I mean--"

"You mean, you mean, you mean! You mean nothing. You're a lot of talk. I thought we had an understanding?"

"You know I--"

"Don't even say it," the girl says, removing her hand from underneath his and entwining it with her other in a tight ball, resting tautly on her lap.

"To hear you say, I love you one more time..."

The blond man smiles and turns to the girl with a knowing look in his eye. "He just sang it."

She smiles back. "I know. Perfect timing."

The girl contorts her body in the chair so that she is facing the piano player who is melodramatically crooning.

"Hey," she says, "Why all

the sad love songs tonight?"

"What?" he asks, startled from his daydream. "Ah, I heard you. It's how I feel," he says morosely.

The girl squints to try to see his features underneath the shadow on his face. "Is it about Christa?"

He nods his head quickly. Painfully.

"You're not going to give up, are you?" the girl asks him, a twinge of sympathy detectable in her voice.

The piano player nods and a sad, barely perceptible smile plays on his face as he half closes his tired eyes. "Yeah, I sure am. I'm tired of standing at the end of the dock, staring at the green light, and wishing I was on the other side of the lake. So now, I'm a recluse, hiding in the shadows and memories of the past, waiting and wishing something would change."

"But you shouldn't--" the girl starts to say, but the blond man cuts her off mid-sentence.

"Leave him alone..."

Ethan says quietly as the piano player goes back to his music.

"You said it before, why not today? What is in store, for me now that you're away...?"

The young man at the piano sustains the last note of the song until it fades, disappearing somewhere into the

night, perhaps filtering over to join the rowdy music in a raging night club or harmonizing with a mother's voice as she sings her child to sleep. He stands and quietly lowers the top of the baby grand with the grace that only a person who had done this act many times before has. He runs his hand over the top of the closed piano as he walks towards the steps that lead down to the main floor of the music hall. Just before he steps down, he pauses momentarily to turn towards the blond man and the girl. This time the light shines on his face directly, causing him to faintly squint as a vague smile graces his lips.

"Good luck, kids. I wish you the best danged luck anyone ever had."

The young man disappears into the shadows of the hall. The blond man and the girl hear his steps albeit muffled by the soft carpet.

The door closes in a respectful and polite manner leaving the Ethan and Eve alone.

Eve turns to the Ethan.
"Well?"

He leans over and kisses her smirking lips. He then settles back in his chair and closes his eyes. "Well, I'll tell you. True love is...it's...actually, I don't know."

The two sit quietly in

the shadows for several minutes, with the humming lights high above providing the background music for the occasion. Eve breaks the silence first.

"You know, I feel sorry for him."

"Who? Oh, you mean with Christa?" Ethan asks her, nodding his head in the direction of the piano.

Eve nods. "It just doesn't seem fair, does it?"

Ethan shrugs his shoulders. "True love is never logical, Eve."

"I know. Two months ago I never would have imagined I'd be sitting here with you. It's kind of a dream come true," she whispers, her dilated eyes searching Ethan's.

A smile comes over his face as he takes her hand and pulls her toward him. "Same here, baby. Same here."

Outside somewhere in the darkness of the night, amidst the raucous jubilation and apathy of the roaring nightlife of the city, the piano player walks down a narrow alley between two ancient brick buildings built with crumbling bricks. He pauses and looks into a grimy window that is directly under a green and pink neon sign that weakly flashes "Eats and Drinks: Open 'til LATE," as a sort of signaling beacon to the tired and

huddled masses roving the city. He can see Christa inside, just as he knew she would be, sitting beside a lean and tall man whose eyes are almost Oriental. An ancient record player inside scratches out Glen Campbell singing "Wichita Lineman."

The piano player outside shakes his head in wonder and continues to walk until he is standing on the edge of the Landry Bridge magnificently stretched out over the Wainscot River. He shoves his hands deep into the pockets of his leather jacket and breathes in the clear and crisp night air as he tilts his head back and looks at the stars in the sky and the bright lights of the city that surround him. The moon is low on the horizon and resembles a pale, shimmering ghost, cunningly haunting the creatures beneath it with its insipid luminosity. He takes in the beauty of the city at the night; the lights, the sounds of crickets and the waves lapping at the shore, and somewhere far in the distance the mournful wail of a train can be heard. Yet he is alone, and he grudgingly accepts the fact.

As the moon rises at its barely perceptible speed, a fatigued bank teller, traveling from one side of the river to the other, observes a hazy blur in the distance accompanied by

a feeble groan. The bank teller dismisses the sight and resumes his thoughts of yesterday's baked chicken that is soon to be his dinner when he reaches his third floor apartment. His pleasant thoughts are returned back to the present when he hears a splash that is way, way far away. He rushes over to the side of the bridge where he sees a crumpled piece of paper. Picking it up and examining it, one side is a musical score with the title "Love Sings," on the other side written with a shaky hand in black ink reads, "Tell her I loved her." The bank teller raises one eyebrow thoughtfully and casually leans over the side of the rail and peers into the abyss of the night, seeing nothing but the clear, black water sparkling from the light of the gleaming moon. The teller slips the sheet of paper into his pocket and pulls out his cell phone. He quickly dials a number and waits.

"Hello? No, I'm fine. I'd like to report a suicide."

A short distance away from the music hall, a girl and a young man are talking in an almost empty restaurant which is only inhabited by them and the pot-bellied owner who keeps sending nasty looks their way, wishing they would leave. Outside a green and pink neon sign

flashes, sending a multicolored glow through the dirty window which shines, mixing up with the other confused colors inside the room.

The dark-haired girl pats the tall man beside her on the arm. "I'm sorry. I really can't go out with you anymore. I've done some soul searching and realized that I'm really in love with this guy who's like my best friend. Not everyone would say he's the most amazing guy ever, but I love him. I don't know why I never noticed before."

The man's eyes narrow to mere slits. "You can't do this to me, Christa, lead me on like for

a month and drop this bomb on me."

She smiles wanly. "I didn't mean to. I'm sorry. It just kind of happened. He can play the piano like no one else that I know. My favorite song is a song he wrote just for me."

"Well how nice. What's it called? "The Trail of Broken Hearts?" or something like that?" he spats venomously.

She ignores his sarcasm and half closes her hazel-colored eyes and murmurs fondly, "The title? "Love Sings." Poetic, isn't it?"



—Sheree Whitelock, "Snow Day"