

Henrik's mind was caught between several things, what he really intended to do today; he had to do something, keep his mind occupied as the doctor had said, and there was minor pressure to make a decision before noon. From the living room he glanced out into the garden, and wondered if he should be out there to get some work done, but it felt far too bright. No, the light in this room seemed far more pleasant, and was full of many distractions, from a gorgeous piano to shelves of various books, even a record player if he desired to listen rather than play. This seemed to be more Mary's domain than Richard's, judging by the selection of books and the interior design.

It was comfortable, luxurious, but he felt more welcome here than in the doctor's library. He considered the piano for a moment, before deciding to look over the books, instead. Whenever he played and he was alone, Mary tended to come watch if she wasn't busy, and he didn't feel like attracting attention to himself. Instead, he opts for quiet, laying down on the deep-red and gold damask chaise lounge, getting comfortable with some book on unusual, philosophical poetry. The Gales had such pretentious taste, sometimes – but it also meant there was never a dull day.

The sunlight was lukewarm, not a strain on his eyes as he read, intrigued by the topic. Varied tales of life and why humans were so set in their way, a genre for those who wanted food for thought with their floral flavour. He didn't mind it at all. He'd been in the middle of consuming a verse when he heard the light tapping of heels nearing down the hall, followed by a particular scent.

Mary.

She had a tendency to always be nearby when Richard was out for the day, he'd noticed. He didn't really mind it, she was never unpleasant company, but he preferred to keep to himself. The occasional visit was fine for him, though. She peeked through the walkway, and he turned his head to see her. She flashed him a soft smile while he stared on, curiously.

"I just wanted to see how you were doing, are you keeping busy?" She asked.

"I've been reading."

"Ah, that's good."

He lifted the book to show her, proof, and another smile.

"Actually, I'm here for another reason." She stepped into the room with a stack of papers. "I found some old sheet music the other day in storage, I thought you'd appreciate it."

He sat up, intrigued enough to place his book aside, forgetting which page he'd stopped on to stand up and accept the stack.

"Oh. Thank you." He glanced at them – there was quite a stack to look through. She always seemed to go overboard, for some reason – but he couldn't really complain in this regard. He sat back down with them to start looking through them.

"...hope you don't mind." He commented, already sorting stacks between songs on the lounge surface.

"Not at all." Said Mary, watching him just nearby.

He searched for a challenge, something new to keep him busy, something exciting. Many of the songs were classical piano, a genre he enjoyed playing, with a few recognisable 50s lovesongs thrown in. A pattern as the piles started to grow. "1950s and classical... your own collection?"

"Yes. I used to perform. I mostly sang, though."

Oh, where had he heard that before... it was a new fact to learn, and even with the nostalgic sting searing in the back of his head somewhere, he enjoyed music – he always liked to hear a new voice. Perhaps it could even be an avenue to socialise, he figured.

He glanced up at her, briefly. "I'd like to hear you sing, sometime."

"O-oh, well, of course!"

His eyes were back down on the music as he scanned, but he heard the vague fluttering in her voice as she spoke.

"I used to do requests, if there was something you'd like to hear, I may know it..."

His eyes stopped on a certain sheet while flicking through, and he paused. He'd recognised the opening notes before he'd glanced at the title – Piano Sonata No. 14 by Beethoven. It seemed something as regular as moonlight was forever a pattern in his life, in hindsight.

He made a heavy sigh.

The first movement he'd played for his beloved all those years ago, when she'd been curious about his playing. She kept asking to hear something, anything, but he'd been shy. For some reason it was the first song that came to mind when he'd finally sat down, quite possibly to show off his ability at his expression as an emotional performer – it'd worked, earning his first kiss as he'd finished playing. Every detail was vivid, clear in touch and sense. He remembered her confession and his clumsy-but-flattered shock, the gentle touch of her lips, the taste of her berry lipbalm that she liked to wear, the way her hands ever so softly rested upon him as they became inseparable, kissing in the light of the morning sun by the piano. The warmth surrounding them, flowing through them – that particular moment he realised he was truly in love.

That song was no longer his, but theirs; he couldn't hear it without reminiscing, and the first movement no longer brought him sadness, but a shy glimmer of hope. It was the happiest thoughts that pierced him the hardest. How he suddenly longed for that moment, that tenderness, that level of warmth he could never dare receive from another.

"*The Moonlight Sonata.*" Mary noted with an airy sigh, now leaning before him to see what it was Henrik

appeared to be staring so intensely at, only inches away. "Hm... that song seems very... you."

She was so right, so painfully right.

"Can you play the entire sonata?" She asked, a little excitedly. "With your skilful hands, I imagine you're *wonderful* at it."

Some of her words he'd heard before, spoken by a different woman in a different time albeit more innocent, just familiar enough to reminisce. He couldn't focus; even as he tried to stare at nothing in particular, the notes appeared to jump out at him – and then she, leaning over and now looking concerned, watching him with those eyes of hers. Her perfume was strong today, for some reason, wafting up his nostrils and clouding his brain. If he wasn't looking downward, he was faced with her. His hands tightened, trembled, unable to let go of the particular music despite wanting to put it aside and be done with it. He so desperately wanted to hold on.

"...Gabriel?" She furrowed her brows.

As he rose from the chaise lounge with enough warning for her to move back, the music absentmindedly slipped to the floor and pages scattered. He glanced at a page and remembered when they'd accidentally swept a page off its stand during their kissing, the sweet laughter echoed in his mind. Everything linked to something the more he glanced about; the sunlight falling on the piano across from them, the peaceful warmth of his surroundings, a gentle voice attempting to comfort.

Henrik grabbed his head, resisting the haunting memories. He can't stand it any longer.

He felt uncomfortable, exposed – as if these memories and intense feelings were suddenly out in the open, and that this woman before him may find them, grasp them and explore them. He felt her hand reach out to touch his arm in a certain comfort, and he withdrew from it with an automatic jerking motion, oversensitive. She gasped, and he looked to her. She was speechless, almost narrowly offended.

He tried to contain his heaving breaths.

"I'm sorry, ma'am, I... don't feel well."

"Are... are you alright? Did I–"

"No. You didn't. Just... migraine."

"Gabe–"

"*Please.*" He held out a hand to stop a second approach, and stiffened, heading out the nearest arch to force some space between them. He could still smell her perfume, it just seemed to endlessly linger. He shook his head, moving down the hall. He found himself at the other end, now in the kitchen, and closed the door with a shaky hand, resting against it as a temporary barricade.

It felt as if a small anchor weighed down on his chest, dragging his heart with it. His breaths are heavy, ragged, as he shook his head yet again and attempted to stand straight. He grabbed at his own chest to grip where his heart was beating, gnashing his teeth. He felt so weak, far too human. He couldn't face today, not now, he wanted to head upstairs and sleep but knew he would only be lectured later. He just wanted to be alone with himself, dwell on past days in complete silence. He didn't need a gentle touch, kindness, he didn't need constant reminders or comparisons. That was gone. All gone.

He shut his eyes tight, and with a heavy swallow, spoke quietly to himself.

*You cannot do anything. You cannot do anything. It's just a memory. Just a memory. Helvete...*

There was only so many things he could say to calm himself, his mind still lingering at that piano with her, remembering the crease in her smile, the things she whispered to him, every little thing. A sensation crawling up his back; he could feel the goosebumps rising up his arm at the thought of the touch he'd just escaped, a dual reminder.

He needed a distraction.

Henrik opened his eyes, the first thing that he spotted is the fruit bowl on the kitchen table, a pomegranate gleaming at the top of the pile. He stumbled over to it, snatched it. It was tougher compared to other fruits, but that didn't concern a beast lacking patience, tearing it open with harsh fingers and instantly gorging upon it. One desire overrides the other – longing now replaced with empty hunger. The seeds were difficult, such a particular fruit, and he found himself ripping off the inner flesh as he feasted, seeds bursting and juice dripping from his mouth.

He started to calm, slow, regain some decency in his mannerisms. He lowered his hands, the finished and hollowed-out shell of the fruit dropped to the chequered floor. The intense feelings had subsided, replaced by a shallow and numb satisfaction. In a haze he left the room as it was, dragging his feet towards the entrance to ascend the stairs and return to his room, wishing to be left alone.

He fell upon the bed, suddenly exhausted. His beloved still lingered in his mind, but it was easier to bare with the pain subsided, and his thoughts growing ever cloudier. All he had to do was wait.

If he dreamed, so be it, at least temptation couldn't snare him there.