

About 2775 words

Composition for Seven

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Duet: a performance piece for two.

Eli Bell stands in the giant window in Edith's dorm room. Edith's roommate clacks and clatters on a computer keyboard. Edith is behind him hand on his waist. They look out to the night.

The dim yellow street light down the facing avenue is distant. It is dark and late. Eli leans against the window frame and thinks, *she could be down that street or she could be across the country*, he stops thinking. Edith's hand is warm.

Edith says "You do know everyone passing by can see you?"

He shrugs. "Good for them, if they like nerds."

"Who doesn't?" She says. "I don't want other girls getting ideas about you."

Not likely, he thinks. Still, it doesn't matter. At last he says it. "Look Edith, we can't keep... it's time." They have talked before and agreed to give it longer, now that is gone. She sighs, not surprised it is time but surprised that the time is now. Eli continues "you know... we aren't..." He looks at Edith's oblivious roommate, she has on headphones and concentrates on the screen before her.

"No." She agrees. "We aren't."

He wants to apologize but says "I care."

"OK" Edith agrees again.

"You?" he asks.

"I always knew" she says.

He turns from the window and steps down. "Is that a woman thing?"

She smiles "people say so."

"How are you?" He asks and looks at her for the first time, he does care and does not want her hurt.

She thinks for a second and smiles again "not totally surprised and sad."

He did try and still he feels bad. "I didn't mean to..."

“Sad for you I mean” she says. “I keep wondering, are you waiting or are you wasting?”

He stares at her a moment, says nothing and sees 10:24 PM on the computer.

Edith smokes, but never in the room. He finds it odd that she doesn't like the smell. Eli watches her as she sits at the desk, lights a Virginia Slim and blows it at the high window. The roommate remains in her world.

They talk no more and he walks the campus to his dorm. Perlman will be up playing video games with the guys.

Consonance: a combination of notes which are in harmony with each other due to the relationship between their frequencies.

There is no one to do nothing with. His parents talk about getting out of the crummy apartments. They talk about it. Little kids are here, mostly babies and older teenagers who won't look at nerdy seventh graders. He throws a rock at the water, then a bigger rock, then stops; they don't allow throwing rocks in the pond.

He could go to the creek and work on the clubhouse, but not much, he needs help. The help Dad talks about and forgets. Eli will sit against the big tree by the pond and think of what to do. He has read all the books and Mom promises the library but hasn't done it. He won't even ask Mom to drive him to Perlman's house, she will say no I need rest for work ask your Father when he is home. Dad will say no I had a long day, it's time for dinner.

Eli sits under the tree and looks at the pond and sky. Then someone is there at the path to the woods on the other end of the pond. A girl is staring, she waves and so does he. She walks to him and he stands. She has short hair and bangs, she smiles. She is Amber Jansen and just moved to the apartments. “Are there other kids here?”

“Not like us” Eli says. She looks puzzled. “I mean our age.”

“My parents hate it here already” Amber says. “They call it slumming.”

“We've always been here” he adds. “They say they will buy a house.” He shrugs. “I have a clubhouse in the woods.” She wants to see the clubhouse and they work on it all day, then all week and the following week. In the creek they block a pool to create a fish habitat. They make a flag and work on paths with secret turn offs.

No one calls her Am but she lets him. No one calls him El but he lets her.

Counterpoint: a melody played in conjunction with another.

The group leaves Barnes Hall and the Poli-Sci class: Eli, Scotty Enders and Edith du Pré. Remy Meyer follows behind. Eli sees Meyer looking at Edith, he is a wormy little guy with 50's glasses frames and a cardigan sweater. Edith has noticed his presence more and more and mentioned it but Eli dismisses Meyer and his looking. They talk for a while about the class assignment. Some of them want to get together to study and bounce ideas.

Eli sees the girls walk past clutching books to their chests and talking, he looks. One of them has short brown hair, he sees her from behind and wonders. Edith watches him then looks away.

Still, Eli considers. He puts it from him and tries to think of Edith.

Leitmotiv: a recurrent theme throughout a composition associated with a particular person, idea, or situation.

From the creek they run into the apartment to Amber's room. Her mother enters talking "Amber dear, your Father will be home soon. You need to clean up." She stops at the doorway "Oh dear, and who is this?" She looks at Eli.

"My friend El, I mean Eli. I told you" Amber says.

"Indeed you did" she says. "Nice to finally meet you Eli." She turns to Amber "your father will be home soon."

"Mom, can I run over to Eli's for a minute? He wants to loan me a book called The Hobbit. I'm loaning him The Hatchet" Amber says.

"The Hobbit, good choice" Mom says. "Come straight back."

Eli's parents are home and surprised at Amber; he has never told them. Mother gives a funny look and speaks to Father in whispers. Amber leaves with The Hobbit.

Before bed Eli's father talks to him about things neither want to talk about. Eli wonders why.

Reprise: a repetition of material heard earlier in a composition.

It is a windy Indiana fall day. Edith is at a bench on the campus mall. Students rush past as she arranges things in her backpack. Eli sees her, considers walking by on the other side but crosses over and sits. A bronze statue of a student reading a book occupies the end of the bench beside Edith, she looks up.

"Hello" she is uncertain.

"I've thought about you. How have you been?" he says.

"I've thought about you. I miss seeing you but I'm good" she says.

They look at the fall for a moment and say nothing. “I haven’t felt right about ... you know” he adds.

Edith gives a crooked smile “No need. We talked about it. Are you seeing anyone?”

He shakes his head. “You?” he asks.

She shrugs “I wouldn’t say seeing anyone. I’ve been out a few times.”

He glances at her. “I heard about Remy Meyer.”

She shows the crooked smile again “Remy? He asked, no reason to say no.”

He studies a gust of wind stripping a tree of dead leaves and doesn’t look at her. “How did you know?” he asks.

She considers this “I didn’t at first. I didn’t know what it was. Most guys look but you, you looked *for* someone.”

The mall empties with the dropping temperature and she isn’t warm enough. “Take my jacket” he offers but she declines. He looks at the mall again with the dark clouds and the skittering fall colors. “Look, I’m ...”

“Please don’t apologize” she says.

He is silent for a while. “Remy” he chuckles.

“Remy” she agrees, slings the backpack to her shoulder and gets up. She says no more and walks on.

Interval: a pause or intermission..

Eli steps on The Hobbit when he leaves the apartment. He wonders why she would leave it at the door and not give it to him when they meet in the woods.

He works at the clubhouse a long while but she doesn’t come. He fortifies the west wall and sturdies the doorway. When he figures it past noon he takes The Hobbit to her apartment where no one answers. He meant for her to keep it.

There is no answer the next day or after that. He watches the apartment as much as he can and sees nothing. He asks the maintenance man and he doesn’t know. At the office the manager says “I can’t tell you other people’s affairs, honey.”

“They haven’t been there almost two weeks. I thought you might know” Eli turns away.

“Hold on, Eli” she says and looks around but there is no one except them. “Your little girlfriend, I know, honey.” He wants to roll his eyes. “Listen,” she continues. “you didn’t hear this from me but they moved out.”

He stares at her “where?”

“I certainly cannot tell you that. They bought a house.” She lights a cigarette. “I’m sorry, honey” she adds through the smoker’s cough.

He sits at the creek, watches the water and quietly says “Am”.

Notturmo: inspired by, or evocative of, the night.

Jefferson College for Eli is no different from other schools, there are many groups. His group is the non athletic, non popular smart computer nerds and geeks but not geniuses. They are ten or twelve with four girls, Edith du Pré is one. Eli rooms with Perlman and dates Edith.

At night at Edith’s room, they watch a movie on her laptop and eat popcorn. Edith’s roommate is in and out with other people. Afterwards Eli returns to his room. Perlman, Lang and Enders are sitting around talking computer and playing video games. Lang and Enders razz him with ‘give us the details’ questions but he says nothing. Perlman says shut up and get your own girls.

Eli is at the window looking out. He drinks a generic soda and thinks of her, where she might be and if she still knows him. He forgets the soda, watches a dog across the street and decides to not think about it.

The guys forget Eli and are loud about a game. Perlman is behind him. “Eli?” he says. “You alright? You guys have a fight or something?”

Eli shakes his head and Perlman sees the wet cheek in the dim light. “Hey” he says.

Eli remembers the soda, wipes his face and doesn’t turn. “You never saw her, did you, Perl?”

“Edith?” But Perlman knows and adds “no.”

“It’s been a long time. I don’t even have a picture. We should have gotten together the three of us. It would have been good.”

Perlman takes the empty and hands Eli another. He pats him on the shoulder and returns to the group.

It is after midnight and Eli watches the little dog run around the yard across the street; a dark, frisky animal darting in and out of dappled shadow, knowing nothing of the night.

Obbligato: an essential but subordinate instrumental part.

Seventh grade starts and he looks for her but she isn't at that school. He asks at the office and no Amber Jansen. He tells Perlman about her but not the other guys, they would make fun. Perlman understands and promises to help find her but neither knows how. At library time they look on the internet. There is nothing about Amber and Eli doesn't know the parents' names.

He looks again when he thinks of a new way and never finds anything. He graduates to high school and she isn't there. He attends school games to look at the other teams' students. At last he prepares for college, plans things and sometimes thinks back to her. *Where could they have moved, would she know him if they saw each other?* He puts it away. In Senior year his parents buy a house; now that he will go away to college, they move.

Eli returns to the woods before the first day at Jefferson College. The clubhouse is falling apart, the fish sanctuary washed away and the secret paths overgrown. He sits on fallen logs that took hours to put in place and wonders if she will return and see what happened to their work or if she even remembers. He closes his eyes and promises.

At college he refuses to check about her at the admissions office.

Transition: a passage to link one section of music to another.

Amber helps him drag a log to the north wall of the clubhouse. "My Mom says you are my boyfriend" she says and sits.

Eli stops after the log is in place and looks at her. "My Mom calls you my girlfriend, my Dad says leave them alone they aren't doing anything. Why do they say that stuff?"

"Mom says I have to start acting like a young lady when school starts. I will be in Jr. High. She doesn't want me running around the woods getting dirty like a child. She talked about some other things too, it was weird" she says.

Eli isn't about to tell her what his father talked to him about. "We can be friends in Jr. High" he says.

"Sure." She agrees and wipes dirt across her forehead. "I won't give up the clubhouse. I'm not sitting around the apartment, no matter what a young lady does."

"I will keep it going. We have done the hard part" Eli says.

"Will you?" she asks. "You keep it up, I'll help when I can. Maybe next year we can build the watch tower." She says "I finished The Hobbit."

They work in silence for a time and Eli looks sideways at her. When school starts he will see her in something besides dirty jeans and he wonders about that. He wants to talk about something else but instead talks about The Hobbit.

Capriccio: a lively, loosely structured musical composition.

“The monk is here” Enders says. Eli enters the dorm room where a bunch of guys are sitting around.

“Hey, Eli.” Perlman says “Get the paper done?” Eli nods.

“Dig this guy” Lang says “The only nerd I know with a steady girl and he dumps her!”

“I didn’t dump her” Eli says.

“Oh, dude!” Lang says. “She dumped you? Sorry man.”

“She didn’t” Eli says. “You wouldn’t understand.”

“Crash and burn nerd!” Enders jokes and they laugh.

“Here,” Perlman hands out pop. “drink and shut up.”

Eli stands at the window and wills himself to not think about what he doesn’t want to think about. The dog is across the street again, it is daylight and he sees it is a little brown lab, not very old. It plays in and out of the daytime shadows the same as it did at night; it never stops running through the caged yard.

Zusammen: a directive to perform a certain passage together.

“But that’s stupid” Enders says. “It’s all old tech. Why should we care?”

They are in the cafeteria, Eli is with Perlman, Enders and Lang. They are fresh from programming class. Eli sees Edith nearby in her own programming group. Meyer is there but he does not sit with her.

Enders continues while Eli nods and the others all talk at once. Lang says something then stops and looks past Eli with a worried face. “Uh oh” Lang says.

“What?” Eli wonders as the others stare behind him. Perlman has an odd look.

“You aren’t going to talk to them are you?” Comes loud from a girl behind Eli.

“El, is that you?” A different girl asks.

He looks, then jumps, knocks his plate aside, and the water bottle to the floor.

“Smooth, Bell” Enders says.

“El Bell?” Lang giggles.

"I have thought of you and thought of you ... I never knew how to reach... Oh none of that matters now. I have found you" she says.

Unbelieving, he sees her, hears her and mouths her name.

"You know this?" The other witchy looking girl asks. "It's like, King of Nerds."

Amber turns, angry "stop it, I'm serious." The girl backs away. Am returns to him. "It's Eli Bell" She says.

"I'm sorry the... everything is gone" Eli says.

She takes his hands.

In a yard, a little brown dog runs. It stops and surveys the worn tracks, finds a comfortable patch of shaded grass to lay, puts it's head on front paws, and rests.

THE END