

# Night Music



Stars were peek - a - boo - ing down, 'Twas on

Kristina Marie Darling

I whis - pered "Be true to me,"

# Night Music

by Kristina Marie Darling

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## THE CELLO

On nights like this I would play my cello, the snow like tinfoil under a phosphorescent moon. Before I knew it, you were there, with your handkerchiefs and your melancholia. The light on my windowpane, a struck match all aglow. We would take turns cradling the instrument's long neck, its cavernous belly, watching the cold metal strings shiver and hum. After each chord you'd swallow glittering nerve tablets, whispering: Be still. Be Still. Its sonorous voice faded with each blue pill. And when the snow eddied and slushed, the cello safe in its towering white box, I took up sainthood to pass the time. On winter mornings my teeth still ache.



## LES FENÊTRES

We drive to a window factory and traverse its rooms, the summer night pale as the steeple of a church. Behind each door, you dust locks, turn hinges, dragging your signal flares and your phosphorus glow. A yellow light catches spots in each pane as we count the saints on dim clerestories. Soon I ask, one word at a time, mouthing into the watery dusk: *Est-que je ne suis pas une fenêtre?* You turn from the work, appalled, our reflections like sand burning into glass. A porous moon stares through the doorframe. The locks say nothing.

## THE HOMECOMING

Once he returned from a long trip and found dozens of dead canaries. They littered the terrace, his doorstep, every dirty windowsill, casting strange yellow light and tiny shadows. That night he tried to clear the cobblestones of their otherworldly debris, humming Dvorak and muttering to himself. A coffee pot rattled in the kitchen. Then he stopped, leaving feathers to drift in each corner, the old grey house still an homage to some other life.

DEAREST V.,

Halfway through a silent film, with its dark curtains and pale women, I start to think of the cello. Did a corseted actress say your name? Did she somehow mean *eclipsed*? Behind the stage, a piano moves to lower octaves, shuddering one note at a time. And as trolleys flicker across a porous screen, and I can almost hear your white teeth glisten, like little bells. At that, the audience applauds.

## CANTATRICE

He recalls painting the second story rooms, hearing a neighbor croon Tosca from below. As the lady sings, light in her hair becomes a constellation, its points aligned in the pale November sky. He taps his brush and crows fly out to meet her, flapping their hollow-boned wings. She sways from east to west. When the clock chimes, his halls loom blue above him. The woman sings and sings.

## THE PATRON

*Come in*, the cellist said, showing her up a flight of dusty stairs. She recalled the thin wooden railings from her last visit, when they found canaries nesting in a corridor. Tonight, their song waxes with her restlessness, ticking like a metronome into the dark blue night. At this the musician begins to stare. He brushes their pale feathers from his tuxedo, buttoning his long silk gloves. The woman rifles through her pocketbook.

## ENNUI

You walk past a crystal decanter glistening near the harpsichord. Since our guests left for the ocean, with its dark enclaves and its low mumbling, the lakes have done nothing but rain. And our dim halls become more cavernous with every evening. When I ask why the rooms buzz with damselflies, you merely nod your head. The shutters blow open and closed. Our parlor hums like trees shifting before a storm.

## THE ORCHESTRA

My instrument is a splintered viola that no longer sounds. And its strings snapped one by one, curling like vines into the greenish night. When the connoisseur left, with his gold pocket watch and unsightly bifocals, every concerto grew oddly dissonant. Our conductor wanted nothing but to count aloud. The dark blue hall still rings with the sound of his tally, a rapt audience humming along.

## THE DEATH WATCH BEETLE

She can hear the ticking of the death watch beetle, boring through her trellis like a miniature auger. On evenings like this, the woman keeps time by the sound of snakeflies grumbling across a colorless sky. And when their buzzing swells in her tired ears, she fastens the iron latch on every window, recoiling. Her house still hums with shrill opera. As she sleeps, the song grows louder and more dissonant.



## SAINT BRIGID

Or do I mean a mourning dove, rustling in the trees? Again, the harps are quiet. Ever since her miracles stopped, the sisters have wept and wept. And when the organ starts up, groaning under vaults and beams, light catches the dust in every window. Pews begin to glisten as though they were polished steel. A dark bird warbles in the nunnery while the hagiographers nod their heads, listening intently from the eaves.

Kristina Marie Darling is an M.A. candidate at Washington University, where she recently completed an undergraduate degree in English. She is the author of six previous small press collections of poetry and nonfiction, including *The Traffic in Women* (Dancing Girl Press, 2006) and *Fevers and Clocks* (March Street Press, 2006). Her poems and reviews appear in *New Letters*, *The Mid-American Review*, *Redactions*, *The Warwick Review*, *Third Coast*, and other journals. A two-time Pushcart Prize nominee, she has held residencies at the Mary Anderson Center for the Arts, Rockmirth, and the Centrum Foundation. Recent awards include fellowships from French art centers DRAW International and Le Parc.