

**D.S. AL FINE**

A Ten-Minute Piece of Impressionism  
by Robin Caroline

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**Cast of Characters:**

WOMAN: 30-40s, elegant, cultured, the daughter of a famous composer/conductor

MAN: 30-40s, a university English professor, charming, genuinely interested in others, out-going

(Optional) EXTRAS: Additional concert-goers may start out on stage at the beginning of the play but leave immediately

**Place**

New York City: a small auditorium for a chamber music concert

**Time**

The present

SETTING: Two rows of seats at a chamber music hall

AT RISE: Lights come up on MAN seated behind WOMAN at an angle so he could have observed her during the concert.

(“Live” classical music fades—Piano Trio in D minor, Op. 49 by Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy. MAN, WOMAN, AND EXTRAS clap. EXTRAS gather their things and leave.)

WOMAN

(wipes away tears)

(Canned classical music plays: Pachelbel’s Canon in D. MAN dawdles. He had been watching WOMAN during the last piece get emotional.)

WOMAN

(Reacting to the canned music, angrily) Are they serious?

MAN

What?

WOMAN

This music!

MAN

You don’t like—

WOMAN

Oh, my God! It’s like the McDonald’s of classical music. We’ve just been served a gourmet meal, and then they subject us to this.

MAN

Maybe they want us to leave quickly.

WOMAN

That program was filled with rich pieces that were sophisticated and vibrant, and then they offer us this pedestrian—

MAN

That last piece was quite moving.

WOMAN

(self-consciously) Yes (beat) for me.

MAN

I noticed.

WOMAN

(silence)

MAN

Can I tell you something that might make you smile?

WOMAN

Surely.

MAN

I tend to make up stories while I listen to classical music. I don't know what other people do, but I listen for a narrative.

WOMAN

That's interesting.

MAN

Well, for that last piece, there was this very sincere farmer trying to capture the fancy of this beautiful woman also working in the fields. He was showing off his strength and she was being coy, trying not to notice. And then the music became this dance of her showing interest and him getting his hopes up, his heart soaring and then coming back down to Earth. With every glance, he is given hope, and his actions get bigger. When she turns her head away, his actions are subdued. I don't know why it's always old-fashioned, but he's in a field with hay and a pitch fork, getting the cut grass on the back of a cart.

WOMAN

Was that just the first movement?

MAN

Yes. But then I noticed during the break that you were searching for tissues, and you hijacked my story and became the heroine. In the second movement, she or you explain to the farmer the circumstances why this love is impossible. You were very earnest.

WOMAN

Did I break his heart?

MAN

Well the third movement was him explaining to you why your fears were unfounded. He painted a picture of your future together with excitement, imagining all of the possibilities. You would argue why it was impossible, but he would persist undeterred.

WOMAN

But I'm crying throughout.

MAN

That's the thing. Fourth movement. The music resolved it. She was convinced. The world was reborn to them. But you continued to cry. The music wasn't sad, but you were sad.

WOMAN

There was a different story in my mind.

MAN

Maybe I should have gone with pirates? I could have gone either way.

WOMAN

(laughs)

MAN

What was your story?

WOMAN

Mine is a true story.

MAN

Oh, then I don't want to pry, but the dissonance was fascinating.

WOMAN

The dissonance. (reflecting) I wonder how many pieces I experience that way?  
(loses herself in thought)

MAN

This happens to you a lot?

WOMAN

(coming back to the conversation) My father was a musician, and he always had music playing in the house. Always. So almost every significant moment in my life that happened with him has a soundtrack.

MAN

So it wasn't just that you were remembering something, that specific piece of music evoked a memory.

WOMAN

You know how a smell can bring you back to a moment? You're suddenly there.

MAN

Sure.

WOMAN

Well, that's how it is with me and music. It's a gift he didn't realize he was giving me.

MAN

Seriously. So, do you know what each piece is going to bring up for you? Did you look at the program and think, oh, I'll be reliving...

WOMAN

I choose not to do that.

MAN

Why?

WOMAN

Because it might make me avoid memories.

MAN

What do you mean?

WOMAN

I want to remember it all. I don't want to pick and choose the moments.

MAN

So if you had known that they were going to play (looks at program) Mendelssohn's Piano Trio in D minor, you might not have come.

WOMAN

Exactly.

MAN

So, you—

WOMAN

Throw my hands up and go for the ride.

MAN

That is some legacy your father gave you.

WOMAN

I know.

MAN

Where were you during that last piece?

WOMAN

In my kitchen.

MAN

Cooking?

WOMAN

No, listening to my father talk on the phone. His doctor called with the results of his biopsy.

MAN

Not good news.

WOMAN

No, not at all. The beginning of the end.

MAN

I'm sorry.

WOMAN

His body contorted like he'd been punched in the gut and all the while: (sings) Bah, bah, bah, bah.... (recurring theme from the piece)

MAN

Wow.

WOMAN

He told me to turn the music off which I thought was very telling, symbolic, but then he said, "No, turn it on louder." And then he raged against the dying of the light.

MAN

Dylan Thomas

WOMAN

I've always loved that poem.

MAN

Absolutely. Did he stop raging when the music stopped?

WOMAN

No. And since he had CDs on shuffle, the next piece simply took over. He tended to pick CDs or music of the same mood.

MAN

Do you know what piece played next?

WOMAN

No. And I don't want to know. (chuckles to herself)

MAN

What's the laugh about?

WOMAN

Well, later, he chose one intentionally which would be hard to forget.

MAN

What music do you choose when you just found out you're going to die?

WOMAN

I'll tell you in a minute, but let me tell you what happened before that.

MAN

Okay.

WOMAN

You would have to know my father, but he called one of his lovers to come over.

MAN

You say that very casually. My dad calls one of his doctors, one of his children, one of his golf buddies, not one of his lovers.

WOMAN

This is my dad.

MAN

This is a great story. Much better than my farmer.

WOMAN

And all true. His life could have been a novel, but anyway, my mother lives with another man, my uncle actually, my father's brother, but, that's not important. Well, it is, but anyway, my father calls this woman over. Louise. I don't like the sound of that name. Louise. Anyway. I go out to buy some comfort food, and adult beverages, and meanwhile he has sex with Louise, and I come home to find him kicking her out. He's angry. She's crying. She doesn't understand.

MAN

Did he say why?

WOMAN

I'm not sure he knew. Being self-aware was not his forte. I think it was because he found no comfort in it. He really wanted my mother whom he never stopped loving, but whatever. He made that bed for himself.



MAN

You are killing me. I want to ask so many questions. Did I tell you I'm a writer?

WOMAN

(looks at watch or phone) Unfortunately, I don't have that much time.

MAN

Okay, I'll stop interrupting.

WOMAN

So then he proceeds to get drunk, puts on Verdi's "Requiem,"—there's your answer—and he goes to the china cabinet and pulls out my grandmother's dishes—not his mother's mind you, my mother's mother's china—and starts throwing them one-by-one into the fireplace.

MAN

In time with the music.

WOMAN

Absolutely. It was quite brilliant.

MAN

What did you do?

WOMAN

I poured myself a glass of wine. I fixed a plate of goodies to eat, and when he was done, I threw my wine glass into the fireplace. It was quite cathartic.

MAN

And then what?

WOMAN

And then he sobbed in my arms. The end.

MAN

The story you just told me is extraordinary.

WOMAN

We all hold worlds within us. Every person in every seat in this concert hall, a world, with a story to tell.

MAN

Not all of them that extraordinary.

WOMAN

He was an incredibly successful man who died feeling like a failure.

MAN

Would I know him?

WOMAN

Probably.

MAN

(pause) I don't know how you go back to small talk after that story. I'm going to have to go home and listen to Verdi's "Requiem."

WOMAN

It's intense.

MAN

I bet. I've never thought about how people experience music. I mean I make up stories. What do you think about when you're not remembering things?

WOMAN

I just listen.

MAN

And what?

WOMAN

Go for the ride.

(WOMAN looks off stage.)

MAN

Am I keeping you?

WOMAN

I'm actually waiting for someone.

MAN

Boyfriend?

WOMAN

That sounds so junior high.

MAN

You know, the only soundtracks I have go with ex-girlfriends.

WOMAN

(amused) Don't we all?

MAN

I can't listen to Cat Stevens without thinking of Abbie Morrisey in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade.

WOMAN

Cat Stevens? How old are you?

MAN

She was granola.

WOMAN

What does that mean?

MAN

Hippy-ish.

WOMAN

Oh.

MAN

What about you? Any music you associate with ex-male friends?

WOMAN

Debussy, Shostakovich—

MAN

--Oh, well, sure, who hasn't had a tiff with an ex listening to Shostakovich?

WOMAN

(Laughs genuinely.) Van Morrison.

MAN

(sings) "It's a wonderful night for a Moon Dance."

WOMAN

(covers her ears) Lalalalala.

MAN

I will regret it for the rest of my life if I don't ask you. Would you like to go out for a drink sometime?

(WOMAN looks offstage and sees the person she's been waiting for and waves. MAN's eyes follow the movement.)

WOMAN

(stands) I think I would rather leave you with another story.

MAN

(stands) What story is that?

WOMAN

Of the woman you met whose name you never learned but who you will always think of when you hear Pachelbel's Canon in D. (extends her hand for him to shake)

MAN

(smiles ruefully) You're right. It will always make me think of you. (takes her hand and kisses it)

WOMAN

(chuckles to herself) You know they play Pachelbel's Canon in D at a lot at weddings. (takes her hand back)

MAN

Quite the legacy you're leaving me.

WOMAN

(amused) I know.

MAN

(sings) "It's a wonderful night for a moon dance."

WOMAN

Touché.

(WOMAN starts to walk offstage humming "Moon Dance." She stops and turns.)

WOMAN (cont'd)

Thanks for the memory.

(WOMAN exits. MAN watches her go ruefully.)

MAN

You're welcome. Anytime. (starts to hum Pachelbel's Canon in D) Pedestrian fare.

(MAN walks off humming Pachelbel's Canon in D)

THE END