

## And If Music Was The Way To Your Heart

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## And If Music Was The Way To Your Heart

by [Gatorade\\_blade](#)

### Summary

Beef's life was comfortable. He got to play music for people, and that's all he'd ever really wanted, so he was happy.

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Aspiring Musician!Beef and Burned Out Prodigy!Etho AU

### Notes

Hi, did you miss me? I wrote this back at the end of 2021 but never got a chance to finish/post it lmao,, Enjoy ;))

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

# Chapter 1

He was an artist; some would say.

Calloused hands with paper cuts and thin unnoticed bruising along knobby joints and flushed tan knuckles. He strung gold and silver lines when his gently rough hands met guitar strings and piano keys. He wasn't a prodigy. He worked for every note and chord, and every broken flat and pitchy sharp.

He played in the downtown square every Wednesday and Saturday night. He'd bring a battered up guitar and wear an old dirty apron to collect tips from middle-aged men in the working class, and wide eyed children with a spare dollar bill from the tooth fairy. Sometimes he'd sing and dance with the said children, he was always good with children, and sometimes he'd lethargically pluck and strum intricate chords as he sat on brick lain floors. He always refused the park benches, insisting that there were people that needed them more than he did.

In the winter, the square had a piano that was open to the community as long as you didn't break it, and surely enough, the locals always left it open two nights a week for everyone's favorite musician. He'd come and play etudes and christmas carols, filling silence with light and smiles, as his fingers pressed methodically on top of monochromatic keys. Couples would pass by and share a warm knowing smile, and hard working mothers would give a cheer and leave small bags and bins of freshly baked pastries and cookies on his guitar case for him.

Some say he was the one that made the community.

But after the shows and songs were over, he'd simply disappear. He wasn't remarkably popular, just familiar. When he wasn't entertaining the community with his musical magic, he worked a simple job at a small restaurant, owned by a couple friends.

Beef's life was comfortable. He got to play music for people, and that's all he'd ever really wanted, so he was happy.

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It was a late December night, nearly 1 in the morning, and Beef may or may not have gotten a little bit carried away in his list as he finished the last song for the night. There was a small crowd standing around him, they all clapped accordingly and gave small cheers and bid farewells and

goodnights as they left tips and headed home. Beef waved off a familiar couple before reaching for his water bottle and sparing a glance at the tips that sat on top of his opened guitar case.

His attentioned panned upwards as a fifty dollar bill made contact with the small pile of tips, his blue eyes shooting wide in a subtle shock.

He opened his mouth to make a quick thank you, but the gifter was already speaking, “Beethoven’s Fur Elise?” His voice was soft and light hearted as they made eye contact, and his mismatched eyes were patient with a simple stroke of interest. Beef didn’t recognise him, perhaps he was just someone passing through on this late Saturday -now Sunday- and just so happened to overhear his performance. It took Beef a solid 30 seconds to realize that the stranger was asking what song he had just finished playing, and nodded with something akin to embarrassment the moment the words finally registered in his head.

“Thank you for the 50- but I can’t take a tip this big, I’d feel too guilty.” He picked the dollar up in his hand and reached to give it back to the other.

But the stranger simply readjusted his black face mask and shook his head as he shuffled back a step or two, “Think of it as an early Christmas gift.” If Beef could see the stranger’s face, he’d probably see a slanted grin, but since he couldn’t, he opted to just imagine a smile as the stranger quickly waved and darted off with a slight hop in his step.

Beef stood there for another moment before folding the dollar neatly and tucking it into his apron with a set of dollar bills from earlier that night. He smiled fondly before starting to pack up his stuff and sliding a tarp onto the piano for the night.

*‘Well that was kind of him.’*

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Beef’s day job consisted of him busy in a kitchen with the rhythmic sizzle and the syncopated beeping of stove tops and grills, jumbled chatter and order calls, filling most of the noise as he hummed and drummed on countertops. The small establishment was run by two of Beef’s closest friends, Joe and Cleo, who practically handed him the job once he moved into the area. He was an aspiring artist, but he knew not to dream too big, knew to stay humble and level headed through his art- because he was simply a guy with a knick knack for pretty sounds and nothing too special. Regardless, his friends supported his musical endeavors, and provided work for him during the day while he continued his biweekly street performances.

“Hey Beef- can we get a remake on order 207? There’s a gluten allergy at that table.” Cleo called from the opposite side of the kitchen window. There’s a crooked grin on her face as she leans against the counter, and Beef nods accordingly as he starts to remake that meal.

He pauses, realizing that she looks much too comfortable leaning and hanging around than she usually would be when working the front floors. “There anything I can help you with Cleo?” He muses in a sing-song voice as he wipes down a bit of his area.

“Nope, just wanted to know how your night was. You look like your head’s in the clouds.” She chuckles into it innocently, and it floods a comfortable warmth into Beef’s chest knowing that she can tell when he’s tired, like how he is today.

“It was good. I didn’t finish up until late though, that’s all.” He briefly paused in his words as his hands carefully continued to work, “Someone tipped me a 50 at the end of the night though, so it was worth it.” There’s a faint smile across his lips as he recalls the simple memory.

Cleo hums, her eyes now focused on a small group of people entering the restaurant and waves to them, “We’ll be with you in just one moment.” She turns her head to face Beef again and her red hair, currently pulled into a low braid, flips over her shoulder, “That’s rather generous of a tip, did you catch a name? Y’know how small this town is, Joe might know them.”

The thought of himself passing something as simple as a name, just for the all-knowing-Joe-Hills to give a complete biography on the stranger, brought out a soft laughter from Beef, “No I didn’t. I’m guessing he’s just passing through or visiting. I don’t think I’d ever seen him before.” He shrugged as Cleo nodded slowly to herself, whatever she was thinking behind those piercing green eyes, he had no clue.

“Well- I’m gonna go help out our new guests, and I’ll be back for that order in a minute.” She passes a smile that makes Beef shift from one foot to another before she’s gone, and he goes back to focus on his actual task at hand.

His thoughts began to drift, if not for just a moment, until an abrupt laughter cuts his train of thought. The laughter is simple, but it’s shared amongst the new group that had just entered the dining hall, and the amount of unfiltered joy and amusement that is brought from it cuts through the building. It makes Beef want to laugh too, even if he doesn’t know the cause of the laugh in the first place.

By the time he has finished the remake of order 207, and has started on the next three meals, Cleo is back. She has a light laughter lingering on her parted lips, moreso smiling to herself than anything, and there's a buzz of warmth from whatever had happened at the new table.

"Lovely bunch, they are." Is all she has to say as she picks up a couple plates and returns to waitressing the front floors.

And Beef doesn't think much of it until the vague chime of the front door brushes his ears, and there is another eruption of noise from the table. It's just one person emerging from the door, but he seems to be pretty important for the entire group to cheer. When the new guest walks up to the table, the shortest of the group wraps a firm arm around him and greets him with an excited, "Look at you Mr. Julliard grad! Welcome to town! Welcome to town!" He's bubbling with a spark of mischief that Beef can only roll his eyes at.

However, '*Julliard grad*' does catch Beef's notice. Beef didn't really care much for school and sped through the bare minimum of community college before moving into town. So what was a small town like this doing with someone who had just gotten out of a school as prestigious and classy as Julliard was made out to be? He didn't get to catch a proper look at the graduate in question, but figured that he might be able to ask Cleo or Joe about him later.

When his shift ends, he hangs around another fifteen minutes for Joe to arrive. Joe was by no means popular either, but he was smart and friendly, and knew just about anyone and everyone that came in and out of this town. He was the kind of guy that strangers would pour their hearts out to at a bar after not even five minutes of meeting, the kind of guy that would buy a stranger a meal after said stranger tried and failed to mug him and they would eventually leave as a better person.

It takes another fifteen minutes for Joe to make his rounds, greeting all the regulars and seeing how their meals were, before he approaches Beef, "Howdy VB! I thought I was gonna miss you, you're not working overtime today, are you?" His eyes and words are so soft in comparison to Cleo, and it almost makes Beef chuckle to himself.

"Not today, I'm about to head home in a bit." He shrugs his jacket more comfortably around his shoulders as he pats Joe's shoulder firmly, "I did want to ask you something though."

Joe passes a look that reads a lot more genuine and sincere than should be necessary for the question that is about to be asked, "Well, ask away."

Beef starts by gesturing to the -still- full table about five feet from where they are standing, "That table over there. Do you by any chance know any recent uni or college graduates?"

There's a slight pause as the shorter hums, briefly analyzing the people seated at the table before opening his mouth again, "The blonde with the wing tattoos on his shoulders graduated just this past semester, and the brunette with the red headband around his forehead graduated roughly about a year ago I believe."

By the way his brows are rested, yet ever so slightly creased, lets Beef know that he isn't done yet, and so he waits patiently.

"The one with the white hair, I don't think I know him."

That, he was not expecting.

Beef was *sure* that Joe knew everyone, to at least some degree. "Hm, I see." Well, the blonde with the tattoos was out of the question because he was the one who had said 'Juilliard grad' in the first place. And the brunette with the headband couldn't possibly be the one in question either, because it would simply be an odd use of words for the shorter male to be referring to someone who graduated so long ago. So that left the one with the white hair. Which, come to think of it, looked an awful lot like the stranger who gave the 50.

"If you don't mind me asking, VB, why did you need to know?" The question is passive and laced with a curiosity that only Joe Hills could pull off.

Beef sighs with a small smile, "I overheard that someone at their table just graduated from Juilliard. That's all, I'm just curious."

Joe nods in return, glancing back over to the table in question for a moment, "Best bet would be the one with the white hair then. But maybe they're just visiting."

*'Just visiting.'* Perhaps the mystery tipper very well could be the Juilliard grad also. That would make sense why he recognized the songs.

"Well, thanks for humoring my curiosity, Joe. I'll see you around." Is how Beef ends the conversation. They exchange quick goodbyes and Beef spares one last look over to the bustling table before making his exit out of the decorated glass door.

He wonders if the stranger will come see him perform again.

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Playing the piano with gloves on is nowhere near as easy as it should be. A second layer around hands that have songs memorized by the muscle should be nothing more than a small queery. And yet Beef cringes everytime he accidentally so much as phantoms an incorrect note.

But it's chillier tonight than any old weatherman ever warned him, so he keeps the gloves on as he finishes up another light hearted Christmas carol. There's a small group of children crowding him, and it's their wide-eyed wonder and amazement, as they clap and cheer, that keeps Beef going. It's barely half past 10, but he already knows that he should end tonight early, just so that he doesn't risk catching a cold. Christmas was this Sunday, and he'd like to be healthy enough to not worry about getting anyone else sick.

He runs through three more songs before he realizes that the slow pace of tonight is practically begging him to retire for the evening, and sighs as he tells himself '*Just one more*'.

Chilled gloved hands move slowly as he begins Fűr Elise. In general, it was a nice piece to end on, seeing how proud he was of himself that he had memorized it to the extent that he did. And the locals loved it, which was always a plus. But in the back of his mind, he wondered if he could bring about the -supposed- Juilliard stranger, if he were to play it again.

He ends up getting carried away again, as he usually did when he played Beethoven pieces, and by the time he comes back to reality, there's another small group around the piano. He dips his focus into the song, finishing it off and finally pans his view up to be met with clapping and comments of appreciation and praise. He smiles before getting up and bowing ever so slightly as he wraps a gloves hand around his neck, rubbing at it in flushed embarrassment that he barely even noticedd them.

“So this isn't a one time show?”

The words fall on his ears and Beef is turning around to see a familiar figure place a 20 dollar bill in the guitar case. It's the Juilliard stranger. '*I guess he really is summoned from Beethoven*'

“Every Wednesday and Saturday, when I can, at least.” He doesn't usually talk too much with the

people that come to watch him play, but something about the stranger makes him feel comfortable enough to engage in the conversation.

The white haired male hums, “Awful lot of commitment for an unpaid gig.” It’s light hearted and makes Beef chuckle to himself.

Before he knows it, he’s branching his hand out for the stranger, “I don’t do it for the money. I’m Beef, by the way.”

Something about the gesture makes the other look somewhat surprised, shocked even, but after a moment of hesitation, he takes Beef’s hand and shakes it gently, “Etho. Just moved into town, maybe I can catch your next show.” He tilts his head and Beef can only assume he’s smiling, so he smiles back and lets his hand go.

“Well, you’ll know where to find me.” He feels dumb, now that he’s said it, but there’s no turning back as he waves the other man off. He watches him leave quietly, before turning on his heels and begins to pack up and head home for the night.

*‘ Etho. What a nice guy. ’*

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It was Sunday. Meaning it was Christmas. Meaning the restaurant was closed, and that Beef didn’t really have anything to do.

Since he lived alone, he was more than ready to just lounge about all day, maybe practice a new song on his guitar, maybe just rest because he had ended late last night. (He had decided not to play Für Elise last night, and as odd as it was, Etho didn’t show up. Guess that debunked his theory: : if he wanted to see the white haired male again, he’d have to play Für Elise and only Für Elise apparently.)

But that morning, as the sun peaked into his small apartment and smiled down on his window curtains and into his eyes, his phone buzzed with renewed life.

**Zed**



Beeeeeef

Im I'm throwing a Christmas party

At like 5 or smthing

Come hang out

You can play Impulse's piano if you want

I won't tell him

Beef couldn't help but smile at the texts, practically hearing the way that Zed sounded as he typed the message with a signature cheeky grin across his face. He didn't mind the idea of going to a Christmas party, it wasn't like he had any other plans for today.

So he pulls himself out from the comfort of his bed and shoots back a quick text of confirmation to his friend. He still had more than enough time to get ready for everything, all the while fitting into his personal plans that he had already scolded himself to get done today. Music begins to fill the small apartment, running from his phone to his bluetooth speaker, resting on his ears as he hummed and got ready for the day.

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Five came around much sooner than he had anticipated, and he didn't find himself tripping out of his apartment until a quarter 'til 6. He cursed under his breath as he typed Zed a quick, and probably incorrectly spelt, text to apologize for being late. It took him another fifteen minutes to actually get to said party, and he couldn't help the embarrassed guilt that bubbled at the back of his throat.

When he knocked his hand on the familiar dark green dark green door, Zed greeted him with open arms and grasped him into a heartfelt hug. He muttered a bubbly, "You made it!" into Beef's shoulder, only letting go once Beef had squeezed him back.

"Sorry again about being late, lost track of time and getting caught up in something." The taller man apologized, but Zed simply smiled and patted his back, obviously a bit tipsy and too satisfied that he showed up in the first place to care that Beef had arrived nearly an hour late.

"That's fine, you're your own person." The shorter chuckles as he lets the guests into his house, a flood of chatting voices and soft music filling Beef's ears almost instantly. From first appearances, it almost seemed classy, if not for the reality of the people populating the home.

Zed and Beef weaved through people, passing quick greetings and hellos until they had made it to the living room where there was a thin crowd around where Beef knew Impulse's piano to be. That's when the brunette realized that the music flooding the room wasn't being played on speakers or some kind of monitor, but was live.

"Wow Zed, You hired a pianist?" He asked light-heartedly, coming off almost as a joke rather than something genuine.

"Bold of you too assume I can afford that." Zed joked as he led Beef into the crowd to get a better look at just who was playing the sweet music. "I don't know these lads too well, but they're all good friends of Impulse and Tango, so I invited them."

One more simple step forward, and Beef immediately recognized who was at the front of the crowd, being the short blonde with the tattoos and the brunette with the red headband from the other day. Which meant-

"Etho!"

He hadn't realized that the song had just ended as he nearly shouted the name, nor that he had shouted in the first place. So when all eyes in the small proximity landed on him, including those of the white haired pianist in question, a flurry of hot embarrassment immediately flooded to his face. But then their eyes met and Beef saw how Etho laughed underneath his face mask, and the embarrassment eased into an equal amusement, laughing back softly as he reached his hand up to the back of his neck.

"Fancy seeing you here, Beef." His heterochromatic eyes crinkle with a smile, and he shifts over on the black piano bench before he starts another song. This one isn't as festive as the last, Frederic Chopin's 'Raindrop' (Prelude), and Beef recognizes it immediately.

There's almost a trance over him, as well as the rest of the small crowd as they all stand there watching, mesmerized, by the way Etho's hands move across the black and white tiles. The song is roughly six minutes, from what Beef recalls, but he only manages a single breath throughout the entire performance (if that's even the correct word to describe the display of a single song), and when Etho has finished the prelude, his breathing is slightly uneven, like he had just ran up threethree flights of stairs.

There's a beat of silence between them before Beef opens his mouth, "Do you wanna get

something to drink?" It's simple enough of an offer, and doesn't scream the same desperation that is singing at the back of his head to have a proper conversation with the man.

Etho nods and gets up from the piano bench, a bit wobbly from sitting there for so long, and follows Beef over to the kitchen where a display of drinks are presented. Beef reaches for what looks to be an alcoholic apple cider, while Etho picks up a clear glass bottle filled with something Beef isn't quite sure of, rolling it in his hand a few times before setting it back down and picking up another identical bottle.

"I can't believe my biggest fan is a better pianist than me." He tries sarcastically as he takes a sip of his cider, smiling as he watches Etho's shoulders bounce with a light laughter.

"And I can't believe you didn't tip me for my performance." He shoots back, thumbing at the fabric of his mask as if debating on whether or not he should remove it. The way his hand slowly falls back to his side, settles on his decision to leave it on and not actually drink. "So you're a friend of Tango's too?" He decided to continue the conversation, forgetting the glass bottle resting in his palm.

"Not really, we've met a few times, but I'm here through Zedaph. We actually met because he'd watch me play guitar downtown. And proceeded to ask me all about instruments and what kinds and brands he should invest in for gifts to Impulse and Tango." As Beef explained, Etho nodded in genuine interest, like Beef was someone incredibly important and not just some recurring stranger who shared an interest in music.

But he perked up rather cutely at the mention of Beef playing guitar, and it made Beef feel oddly special for once, "What instruments do you play?" It was an awfully innocent question, but Beef enjoyed the attention anyway.

"Mostly just piano and guitar. I'm self taught in both though, so I'm not really the best. But I have fun with it." Ah yes, *self taught*, it used to be embarrassing for him to admit that he couldn't invest in classes or even simple lessons, but now he was rather proud of the fact that he had memorized intricate chords and note patterns to the level he was.

The shorter of the two shifted his gaze back to the bottle in his left hand, swirling the liquid around a couple times before tapping his right index finger against it, as if he was summoning a magic spell of some sort. "Well as long as you're having fun with it, then it shouldn't really matter how good you are." His voice turned partially distant, like his thoughts were starting to get carried away in his head.

Beef shot him a confused look, but when it went unnoticed, he shook off the initial shock of the comment and took another sip of his drink, “I guess you’re right. So what about you? What musical talents do you have hidden behind that mask?”

Etho blinked up at him, as if he didn’t quite register what the brunette had just said, “Lots of piano. I don’t really have time to play fun instruments like guitar anymore.” He shrugs before his eyes meet Beef’s again, pausing at how sympathetic Beef’s expression was.

They didn’t know each other. Not really. This was only their third time speaking, and that’s only if you count their less than 5 minute exchange from the first time they had met. And yet, Beef smiled a crooked half-hearted grin, “Well, I have a guitar at my place if you want to play it after the party.”

Beef’s brows rose, innocent and sweet, and it made Etho snort into a broken laughter. “Inviting me over when you barely even know me? I thought better of you Beef.” His slanted smirk is back and there is mischief written along his crinkled eyes this time. It makes Beef scoff, and if not for the way his ears heat up, he’d shoot something equally as playful back. But all the wit is out of him and he ends up stammering over a jumble of words, just making Etho burst out laughing.

When Beef finally catches his words, and Etho is finished toppling over in laughter, the loud blonde is next to them and pulling Etho’s arm like an excited child. He shoots an odd look over to Beef before letting go of the other’s arm, “You’re the street performer.” Beef nods accordingly, not quite sure what to say, “I’m Grian. Pleasure to meet you.” He flashes a grin that Beef doesn’t even humor to understand, and then continues to pull Etho into another room, without even bothering to get Beef’s name.

And the brunette wants to protest, but isn’t even sure if he can, because the unfiltered excitement that was radiating off the blonde and onto the two musicians was infectious. Besides, it was a Christmas party, and he didn’t want to get hung up over a single person when there were plenty of friendly and familiar faces for him to converse with.

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It’s the end of the night, and Beef is slipping his shoes on, saying his goodbyes and thanking Zed again for the invitation, when a hand just barely taps at his shoulder. He’s more than just a little bit buzzed, so he doesn’t quite feel it, but when the owner of said hand speaks up, he’s quick to turn around.

It’s Grian, only now he has a scarf and coat on, probably about to head out as well, and he has a

mischievous smirk across his face, “Thought you might want this.” He places a small piece of paper into Beef’s palm, no further context given, “He’s awful at responding within the hour, but you’ll thank me later.”

And just like that, he turns on his heel and is gone. And Beef is rolling the paper in his palm before reading out a ten digit number with ‘Etho’s too much of a chicken to give you this’ scribbled at the top of the scrap. He smiles in a muted amusement, tucking it into his pocket as he said his last goodbyes and went home.

Despite the beating moonlight and the hazy late night fog, when he makes it home he doesn’t climb into bed or run a long shower. He simply reaches for his guitar, and begins strumming something slow. Something sweet. Something new.

Something fun.

## Chapter 2

### Chapter Notes

Several songs and pieces will be mentioned throughout this chapter, and I highly recommend listening to the pieces to get a full understanding of the story

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It's late January now, and while the holiday season has technically passed, Christmas decorations still illuminate downtown streets and dance around bare trees. And of course, the piano is still standing patiently, awaiting familiar biweekly performances. Only this time, the bench is not for just one musician.

Beef and Etho had been exchanging texts frequently since the Christmas party (or however frequently you can get for Etho, who only responds every other hour if you're lucky), and were more than just acquainted now. Etho comes and watches the last few songs of Beef's list every night, and even sits on the piano bench with Beef. He doesn't play the piano, but in between songs, he'll absentmindedly press on the pedals with the tips of his shoes.

The offer always had, and always will continue to stand, that Etho was allowed to play the instrument. Beef didn't mind, in fact he quietly wished that Etho would, just so that he could hear him play again. But the shorter always refused, usually getting in a jab that Beef must be getting old and losing his magic, or that if he started to play, the crowds of people wouldn't want Beef to play for them anymore. This always led to more playful jabs, and the occasional kick under the piano at one another's legs.

Tonight was no different. Beef had just finished his last song for the night, deciding to wrap up a bit early, and did his routine of thanking people for coming out to see him tonight, picking up and counting his tips before he tucked them into his apron, and then collecting his empty guitar case and recovering the piano.

"You going home for the night?" Etho asked softly as he rose from his spot on the bench. He busied himself with readjusting the tarp on top of the piano as Beef shrugged his jacket over his shoulders.

"That's the plan. I work a longer shift tomorrow and need some time to polish up on my guitar." He explained with a faint smile across his face, picking up a small bundle of cookies that had been left for him by a familiar mother of three.

There was a moment where Beef could swear Etho was going to ask something, but when the younger simply nods and readjusts his mask, Beef wonders if it was just his own imagination leading him on.

“Y’know- that offer for you to come over to my place and play my guitar still stands.” It leaves his mouth without him even registering that the words were his own, but the way Etho’s eyes light up let him know that it was the correct thing to say.

“Well, I wouldn’t want to intrude.” Etho tries, *tries*, to brush it off, but Beef isn’t biting. So he simply offers his hand over to Etho. It’s a simple and silent gesture, and Beef isn’t sure what about it makes him feel so warm when Etho hesitantly takes his hand, but next thing he knows, he’s leading them to his apartment.

It’s only a few blocks away, a simple walk for the structure of this small town. Beef is more than familiar with the walk, but this time he has Etho trailing after him, so he walks slowly and like him holding the other’s hand is a common occurrence. With the way Etho holds onto him tightly, he can tell that he’s no stranger to this either, probably thanks to Grian for always leading the man into odd scenarios and new territories.

When they make it to Beef’s apartment, the brunette fumbles with his keys for a solid minute, allowing Etho one last chance to say he was uncomfortable and allowed to go on his way for the night if he so wished. But he remains quiet. So when the door opens to Beef’s small apartment, Beef takes the lead and ushers the other to come inside.

There’s a thin line of silence as Etho walks in, sliding his shoes off by the door, and wanders about. The apartment is clean, it always is, since Beef can’t stand coming home to a mess and makes sure to clean as frequently as possible.

“Water?” Beef asks softly as he picks up a water bottle from a half ripped open case that was sitting next to the counter. Etho takes it, but only holds it in his hand. Beef still hasn’t seen what the man looks like without his mask, but he doesn’t mind the ambiguity of it.

“I keep my guitar on the stand by the couch, feel free to tune up the strings if you want.” Something Beef learned about Etho early on, was that the younger has perfect pitch, and can pretty much re-tune any instrument to whatever he pleased.

Etho sets his unopened bottle down by the foot of the couch as he picks up the guitar, his eyes wide with wonder as he runs a hand up the worn out fretboard.

“It’s nothing special, but I bought it my last year of highschool and I try to treat it well.” Beef plopped down on the couch, leaving an open spot for Etho to sit beside him.

When the white haired male takes his seat, he presses on the strings carefully, the cool metal bouncing a thin note through the air. He thumbs at the A-string experimentally and Beef wonders why he keeps being so gentle with it, it’s not like he’s going to break it if he plucks too hard.

When Etho realizes that Beef is staring at him, his ears turn a bright scarlet and he pushes the guitar into Beef’s lap, “Here- um- play something. I’m rusty.”

They blink at each other, like words weren’t real, and Beef just nods as he repositions the guitar to his preferred comfort. “Any song requests?” He passes a crooked smile, he was undeniably better at playing guitar than he was piano, but Etho didn’t know that yet.

Etho glances at Beef’s fingers, calloused and quaking with anticipation as they wait on buzzing strings, “Something fun.” His voice was soft, and Beef has grown to know that that is just how Etho talks when he’s speaking about Beef playing music. He isn’t sure why. He isn’t sure why Etho gets so detached when he’s clearly a great musician with a love for the art.

Still, he nods and conjures up something from the back of his head, and he gets partially lost in it as his fingers move across the fretboard like a second hand memory. It’s complete improv, and he’s making it up as he goes, but it sounds undeniably portuguese and it reminds him of the music he’d hear from his parents’ radio when he was growing up.

Beef doesn’t realize that he’s smiling as he continues, a numb pain from the way the metal strings protrude into his fingertips being wiped away with a sensually sweet joy. When he messes up a few times, Etho makes no note of it, he’s simply sitting with a smile behind his mask, and his face is still flushed but not in any embarrassment or shame. Beef isn’t sure what the cause of the rosy pigment is, but as he finishes his song, he looks up into heterochromatic eyes and smiles wide.

Etho claps, laughing to himself as he does so, and reaches for his water bottle, “That was amazing.” He’s being genuine, no sarcasm behind his words.

“Thank you, I surprised myself with that one.” Beef is chuckling now too, and he isn’t even sure why. Something about laughing with Etho makes sense though, so he doesn’t deny the bubbles of joy coursing through him.



And then that look is back. Where Etho looks like he wants to say something. Wanting to share something. But he keeps to himself as the laughter dies down, “I should be getting home. Wouldn’t want to keep you up all night just to entertain me.” He rises from where he was seated, eyes crinkling slightly with a thin smile.

Beef wants to tell him that he doesn’t mind the company. That he doesn’t mind entertaining Etho. *That he doesn’t mind Etho* . But he just nods, getting up and placing the guitar back on the stand, and begins walking the shorter way to the doorway, “You have a nice night, Etho.”

“I already have,” He looks Beef in the eyes and it’s the brunette’s turn to close his mouth or else he’ll spill something he’s unsure of, “I’ll see you around Beef.” And then he’s off.

Beef doesn’t move until the door is closed, and he presses his forehead against it, wondering what it is that he wants to tell Etho so badly. However, instead of pondering it a moment longer, he takes out his phone and messages a certain blonde that happens to know Etho better than he does.

How Grian’s phone number got on Beef’s phone? He’ll never really know. But somewhere along the way, it just became another contact in his phone for him to message for check-ins every now and again.

**Beef**

Hey, do you know if Etho still plays guitar?

There’s a moment of waiting, but Grian’s always been an abnormally quick texter, almost like he was waiting for the text message.

**Grian**

Why? Thinking of a one month anniversary gift?

*Beef rolls his eyes, already ready to give up on reaching out to the troublemaker. But he still wants to know the answer to his question, and lets it slide.*

Jkjk

Technically, yeah he does

**Beef**

What do you mean technically?

**Grian**

Well technically he doesn't play any instruments anymore

Haven't you noticed?

That makes Beef pause. Because Grian's not wrong. He's only ever seen Etho play piano that one time at Zed's house. And for someone that graduated from Juilliard, you'd imagine that he would be a lot more expressive about showing off said skills.

**Grian**

Wait have you seriously not noticed?

**Beef**

But he played the piano at the Christmas party

**Grian**

That was just cause Bdubs and I forced him to

Impulse has a nice piano and we told him to give it a test run

It was a shock that he did that second song when you got there

He hadn't played that song since before he graduated

**Beef**

Really??

I thought he was just shy or something

And that's why he never plays

What other instruments is he denying playing?

**Grian**

Pretty much all of them

E is a prodigy

Name any instrument in the book, he can probably play it if you give him five minutes to mess around with it

Dude, do you even know Etho?

*'I thought I did.'*

Beef wants to type something back, but he genuinely had no idea what. He didn't know any of this. Etho's never brought this up to him, so how was he supposed to know? So he stares blankly at his screen as he stands in the middle of his apartment like a lost man. He probably looks crazy. Beethoven is probably shaking his head at him, from whatever heaven musicians go to, scoffing and laughing at how stupid Beef is.

Finally his head buzzes with a thought and he's typing a new message and hitting send before he gets a full grip on what it is.

**Beef**

Wait

That doesn't explain why he doesn't play anymore though

There's a pause, and he thinks that Grian must have left his phone, or maybe even gone to sleep, and he's holding his breath for a solid three minutes as he waits for a response.

**Grian**

I'm not your messenger bird

But

It's *because* he's a prodigy that he doesn't play

He doesn't have fun when he plays

And what's the point if he doesn't enjoy it?

The new texts resonate in Beef's head and his chest hurts as he recalls the way Etho's eyes lit up when he watched Beef play.

**Grian**

Anyways

I'm going to bed

Next time you have questions about Etho, maybe ask him

He likes talking to you, it shouldn't be that hard

Beef curses under his breath as he shoots back an apology, but when the message remains on delivered, all he can do is sigh and power off his phone. Grian has a point though, he shouldn't have to run to other people for answers. He's a grown adult who is perfectly capable and able to talk to Etho himself. And if not for the constant nagging fear that he is overstepping some kind of unspoken boundary, he likes to think that he would talk with the younger male properly.

When Beef is cleaning up around his apartment, showering and getting ready for bed, even as he is laying out his clothes for the next morning, he is thinking about this newfound information on Etho. *Etho the music prodigy*. Etho, the generous tipper who was summoned by Für Elise and chilly late nights. Etho, the enigma that appeared into Beef's life one fateful night, who Beef prays won't ever have to leave it. Etho, who's lost the passion of something he was effortlessly good at.

Beef can't imagine it. Can't imagine picking up a guitar or resting hands on piano keys and not being exhilarated with a buzz of pure interest and desire to usher on. Every ounce of music that he is able to play, he taught himself. And that relationship is something incredibly personal to Beef.

He might not know Etho that well, but he knew that Etho shared that same passion. He could feel it. He saw the way Etho played at the Christmas party, the way he was breathless with anticipation as he finished. He saw the way Etho's fingers twitched with electricity when he slid thin fingers around the guitar tonight.

Beef's phone buzzes again, and he is yanked out of his headspace, assuming that Grian might have possibly responded back to him for some reason. Instead he powers his phone on and sees a text from the man of the hour.

**Etho**

I'm home safely btw

You can rest easy knowing I didn't fall into wonderland

Beef can't help but smile, laughing to himself at how innocently playful the younger always was.

**Beef**

Thank god

Could you imagine the police report I'd have to go through if you went to wonderland and I was the last person seen with you?

**Etho**

In my defense, wonderland chose me. I didn't chose wonderland

**Beef**

Ditching me for wonderland then?

And here I thought we were friends

The text bubble at the bottom flickers on and off, over and over again. Etho keeps retyping whatever it is he's trying to say, and Beef phantoms the thought that he said something wrong.

**Etho**

Don't worry

We are friends

And I dont plan on leaving anytime soon

**Beef**

Good

Downtown wouldn't feel the same anymore

And like that, Etho stops responding. But for him, it's normal. Sometimes it feels like getting in contact with the other takes 2 to 3 business days (and that's if you're lucky). Beef smiles at the consistent inconsistency, rereading the short conversation just had over and over again.

*'I'll talk to him tomorrow, clear things up a bit'*

Beef, in fact, *did not* clear things up with Etho the following day.

Instead, it's mid February and Beef is well aware that this is his last week with the piano downtown before they store it back up for next winter. However, he does have a plan.

Crowds slow down by 10pm, and he'll usually only get a couple more visitors to stop by by the time it reaches midnight. So maybe, just maybe, he can persuade Etho into playing something before the night ends.

He's been planning it for three days straight, and when Wednesday rolls by, Cleo practically knows the plan better than Beef for how much he's talked her ears off about it. So when he arrives at the usual destination with his empty guitar case and old apron, he goes about his routine the same as he always does. His performances always last a couple hours, so he's learned to pace himself, tell a story or two if children are around, even take a few water breaks. Stuff like that.

It's a quarter til midnight when familiar syncopated footsteps echo on cool brick floors, and Beef recognizes the soft claps of navy blue boots like a melody. That's when he starts it, Für Elise. He has no intention of ending the show any time soon, but it feels right to play it right now, and so he does. It doesn't matter if this song was his usual finale for most nights, he continues with a smile written across his face as his hands dance across the nostalgic keys.

Right as he ends, he turns his head to see Etho. Clad in a green sweater and black jacket, and his navy blue boots that he just always had to be wearing for some reason, and his signature face mask.

"Hi Elise." Beef smiles jokingly, and Etho simply chuckles softly as he takes a few steps closer to Beef.

The brunette moves over on the bench, making room for Etho to sit beside him, "What's left on your setlist for tonight?" He asks, the pads of his fingers tapping against the wooden rim of the piano, not quite making contact with the keys by mere millimeters.

Beef shrugs as if he doesn't know, playing an innocent fool, "I know you always tell me to play something fun, but what if I played something sad?"

The words make Etho's brow furrow just the slightest, and Beef can predict an uneven frown beneath the mask. "Why would you want to play something sad?"

Beef hums as his fingers take position back onto the keys, “Well, I’ve been practicing it a good bit. I wanted to see if it was up to your standard.” The joke comes off a bit uneven, and it makes Beef cringe a little.

But Etho nods and places his hands in his lap, eyes focusing on the way Beef’s own blue eyes focus on the keys, before they dart down to watch careful hands start a song that Etho hadn’t heard in months: Beethoven’s Moonlight Sonata First Movement.

Beef is lost in the slow chords and deep notes automatically, his eyes half lidding as he swayed to the music. The song was by no means hard, easier than Für Elise, if anything. But it was a complete change of pace compared to what Etho was used to him playing. And he wanted to prove that you can still have fun outside of your comfort zone.

By the time the song has reached it’s finale, Beef himself is practically breathless. An unknowing smile is growing on his face and he exhales out a hot breath, reformed as a weak chuckle. There’s nothing really humorous about the song just played, but nor is there really a reason to have fun with a song by a dead man.

He hears clapping, and it takes him a moment to register that it’s coming from Etho, the claps are slow and honest in amusement, and it makes Beef’s chest swell with pride. “Look at you, Beethoven. Talk about impressive.” He’s smiling and the flush of rosy pigment is back on the highs of his cheeks, and Beef decides that he likes the way Etho looks when he’s red faced with excitement. “When did you learn that?”

Beef shrugs, his smile still lingering as he shook his hands out, “It’s a bit of a long story, but we can just leave it at sometime last week. I’ve been learning it for about a month though.” He pauses, taking in the way Etho looks at him with his own bubbling pride and excitement. “It’s fun. Playing Beethoven, that is. It’s not easy, but there’s something exhilarating about it, eh?”

Etho darts his eyes away for a moment, as if he’s debating on arguing against the statement. Beef can imagine the younger’s mouth in a thin line as he argues amongst his thoughts, and when he starts to play the next song, he practically startles the younger back into reality.

This song was his last persuasion before he would try to get Etho to play. And he prayed to every musician, god, and fate that it would work. Beethoven’s Moonlight Sonata Second Movement. It’s not as familiar with him as the first was, but luckily it was much shorter and gave him a bit of room to improvise for parts he knew he couldn’t get exactly right.

He looks over to see if Etho's head is turned away again, but when it's not, the sight he sees throws him off guard even more. The white haired male is staring holes into the piano, his face torn with a broken heart despite his heterochromatic eyes remaining shiny with that same light and wonder he always had when he watched Beef play. He contradicted himself, as if his heart and his brain were worn on sleeves that tied his wrists to remain in his lap and not dancing free on the black and white keys.

When the song is finished, Beef remains looking to him, waiting for some kind of comment or semblance of a joke that would usually fall from his masked lips. But instead, Etho makes direct eye contact with Beef, eyes wide and desperate as his hands clench and unclench into balled fists. Beef moves slowly, this isn't the reaction he thought he was going to get out of the other, but suddenly the plan is out the window and he decides to play it by ear and see where this is going. He places a calloused hand over one of Etho's own, brows furrowed.

Neither of the two realize that they're alone in the empty square, everyone having retired for the night, and the silence is heavy between them as nothing but a thin buzz from the atmosphere is left to lay in the air.

"Do you want to play the third movement?" Beef tries softly, it's not forcing anything, but still urges Etho on. He's being supportive, not pressuring him to do anything he's uncomfortable with.

Etho can't look away, but he shakes his head 'no' despite the way he obviously wants to. "I don't think I can, Beef." And there is no lie in the way he speaks. As far as Etho is aware, Beef knows nothing of his musical past.

Etho doesn't think that he can play the piece, *not because he can't*, but because he thinks he knows the outcome already. He thinks he knows that he is going to hate it the moment he starts, that the ball and chain weighing down his wrists as he tries to convince himself that he is enjoying what he clearly doesn't, weighs him down worse and worse. And he doesn't want the thin bruising on his fingers and wrists anymore as he hacks away at an unpromised future that was pushed onto him just because he had a knick-knack for a couple instruments. He doesn't want to feel bound to something he used to enjoy anymore. So he was better off without playing any music at all. Right?

"Yes you can. You can play it, I know you can." He's so patient, he's so patient and understanding that it makes the younger's head spin with confusion.

"No-" He stops, and his fists are clenching again in a muted frustration, "No, it'll be all wrong. It's not going to be like when you play. When you play, it's *fun*. It's unfiltered and raw and *real*. And if I played- Beef please." He keeps shaking his head with the shame of knowing that he isn't the same kid that got a full scholarship to Juilliard for Bach Preludes and Mozart compositions.



A part of Etho fears that Beef is going to tell him that he is ‘wasting his talent’, or that he is a coward for running from something so trivial. But Beef bumps his knee against Etho’s and smiles, crooked and trying, “You’re the only one that can do it. Don’t think of it as a performance Etho. It’s just me. Do what feels right, and if it doesn’t, then you can stop. But you shouldn’t have to stop something you love just because something else ruined it for you.”

Beef watches the way he reels in a deep breath before he hesitantly places his hand on the piano keys. He’s enamored by the way his thin fingers fit so effortlessly, how even before he’s pressed a single note, Beef is itching for an encore.

And then he starts.

Beethoven’s Third Movement for Moonlight Sonata was no easy piece, and when Etho begins playing it from the top of his head, Beef’s air is practically knocked from him. He is entranced, and confused, and intrigued, and he can do nothing but sit there beside him in absolute shock and unfiltered joy at how Etho’s eyes begin to crinkle and his chest heaves with an uneven laughter. There is an adrenaline that carries him through the song, and once he’s done, he presses his hand to his chest to get a barring over himself. But his breaths are still quick and his head is still buzzing from the finished piece.

“Holy shit you did it-” Beef is breathless too, for a slightly different reason, but nonetheless breathless.

“Holy snap I did it.” This time when he looks to Beef, all the brunette can see is excitement and an exasperated renewal that wasn’t there before. “I did it,” he repeats softly in disbelief, “*and it was fun.*”

It’s such a simple word to describe the complex journey Etho’s had with it. But Beef just nods and laughs in his own disbelieved shock, and he only has two thoughts on his mind, ‘*i can’t believe it worked*’, and ‘*wow he looks pretty right now*’.

They sit there in silence on the small piano bench, reeling in the moment, before they break into a useless laughing fit. It’s pointless, really. But it was so fun to laugh at nothing, cracking up until their sides hurt and ached. They end up spending nearly another two hours there that night, mostly consisting of Etho showing Beef everything he’s been hiding for the past few months, and Beef rambling about how impressive the entire situation ended up turning out into. They were in no rush to end their night, no rush to force anything, no rush to take away the fun of it.

They were artists; some would say.

## Chapter End Notes

When reading over this- I decided that this felt unfinished and will now try to speedrun an extra chapter just for actual fluff/relationship stuff and epilogue reasons  
Comments and kudos are always appreciated <33 stay safe

# Epilogue

## Chapter Notes

Short and sweet epilogue :) Hope you all enjoyed this short work, I had a lot of fun writing it, and this last chapter is just completely self indulgent tbh  
Comments and Kudos are always appreciated, stay safe <33

You could say that they were house sitting.

You could also say that they were just using this as an excuse to play Impulse's piano and Tango's electric bass guitar, while the said owners were away. But that's besides the point.

Beef and Etho had been together for nearly a year now, and were currently house sitting for Zed, Impulse and Tango while the three were on a trip for the next month. Zed was a collector of trinkets and he asked Beef to take care of the house so that nothing got stolen on the rare chance of home robbery. And as silly as it might have sounded at first, Beef accepted and promised to make sure nothing was broken or stolen from the blonde's shared home.

That leads to where Beef is now, calloused hands dancing carefree across glossy black and white keys as he freehands a tune that is much sweeter than what probably should be coming from him, seeing as he is just making things up from the top of his head. And despite the loose formatting of it all, and the messiness of the music that is coming from him, Etho is seated behind him and strumming a perfect bassline to compliment the simple strings of music. They've started to do this a lot recently: both playing music together, no words or conversation needing to be made as the flooding of sweet noise fills the air. Beef would usually start by improvising, and Etho would follow after with an accompaniment so perfect you'd think that they had rehearsed it all.

When the growing decrescendo of the piano makes its way to the ears of the prodigy seated on the couch against the wall, the younger stops abruptly and focuses his eyes onto the back of his boyfriend's head. They don't say anything, just sit there for a moment as the ending buzz of a dying F sharp major chord resonates in the large room before Beef finally loosens his posture, and turns his head to look over at Etho. His eyes are soft and he smiles with an equal weight, "Your talents always amaze me more and more everyday. Have I told you that?" It's sappy and sickly sweet, and makes Etho's stomach fill to the brim with butterflies as an undeniably affectionate love blooms in his chest.

But instead of vocalizing the flooding emotions which overwhelm him, he simply rolls his eyes lovingly as he chuckles to himself and readjusts his face mask, "You've told me once or twice."

Etho rises from his spot on the couch, resting the bass guitar back against its rest where he knows it won't fall, and walks over to where Beef is still sitting at the piano.

Pale fingers tug on the back of Beef's shirt sleeve, and the brunette scoots back on the piano bench so that Etho can climb onto his lap and straddle him so that their chests are pressed against each other. It took about 8 days for Etho to finally get comfortable enough to take his mask off around Beef, and yet took approximately 8 months into their relationship for Etho to start getting used to all the physical contact that he was given from Beef. But after all the constant brushing of hands and surprise forehead kisses, it has become Etho's favorite sitting spot, sitting in Beef's lap as his chin rested on the other's shoulder.

Beef only hums now, no longer phased by the action, accepting his fate as he anticipates the way his legs are probably going to be falling asleep about 20 minutes into this, "Any song requests?" He mumbles as he plants a quick kiss on Etho's ear. He can feel the other shrug, content with just about anything that is going to be played, as long as he is welcomed to stay seated here, which he always is.

The brunette plays a few stray chords to experiment, all quick and light, and Etho laughs at the unsureness of it all. Then he starts what has now become a memorized favorite, and he can practically see the face Etho is making as he buries his face into Beef's neck, 'Fur Elise' filling the room. The tempo is all messed up, much too slow to be anything recognizable to the normal ear, but Etho wasn't exactly just another listener and caught on immediately.

The white haired male 'tsks' light heartedly, scolding the older male jokingly with a gentle, "You and your Fur Elise". There's no weight in his words, and Etho knows that Beef associates the song with him now, so he bites his lip in an attempt to contain his dopey smile. "Careful Beefers, the town's gonna think you only know this one song."

"I wouldn't mind," Beef shoots back, speeding up the tempo and playing a couple wrong notes purposefully, just to get on Etho's nerves because he knew how much of a perfectionist his prodigy of a boyfriend got when he would be playing classics for him. "Plus it's not like I'm playing this for the whole town. I'm playing this for my lovely boyfriend who is once again trying to render my legs useless."

The way Etho's chest bubbles with a full laughter, makes Beef smile with pride, and the white haired male can only nod against Beef's shoulder in defeat, "In my defense, I'm not the one that's telling your legs to fall asleep in the first place."

It's Beef's turn to laugh now, and he shakes his head as he cuts the song off short, his hands moving to rest on Etho's sides and he pulls back so that he can make proper eye contact with the other. "I love you." He smiles as he plants a quick kiss on Etho's temple, and Etho scrambles to

pull his face mask off so that he can get a real kiss, only making Beef laugh again before he is able to kiss him.

“I love you too.” Etho breathes out with a growing smile, crooked and genuine as he kisses him again.

## End Notes

Kudos and Comments are always appreciated <33

A/N: Shit hit the fan last year, but I should be back to posting now, not sure how regularly but I'm working on things :) I have a bunch of unpublished works that I started last year also, so expect a couple one shots to be coming out

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!