

Vantage Point (400 words)

The man walks down the sidewalk, careful to avoid being jostled by the people hurrying by. It's early evening. The sun has another hour above the horizon, and the raking light lends the old industrial neighborhood an air of enchantment.

There's a messenger bag slung around to his back. Something flat and black pokes out of the top.

He knows she's home. He's watched her for a year and has learned her habits. He lives a quarter mile away, high up in the only taller building nearby. He presses the buzzer for the fourth floor, second from the top, then touches his fingertips to the intercom speaker so he'll feel the vibrations of a voice if she answers.

The intercom tickles his fingers. He stands in front of the camera and unfolds a piece of paper. Handwritten in graceful block letters is this: "I'm an artist, a photographer. I'm deaf. I'm your neighbor. I have a show coming up. I have a question for you."

He waits in the lobby. The elevator opens. She's older than he thought she'd be. She pauses behind the lobby door, looking at him, deciding. He returns her gaze, earnest.

She comes into the lobby, and holds a loose fist thumb-side against her sternum, pinky up: "I..." then circles extended forefingers: "...sign." She signs her name and name sign, and he does the same.

He pulls the object out of his bag. It's a portfolio. He hands it to her. "I want to put your photograph in my show."

She opens the portfolio and starts looking at the photographs.

They are cityscapes, often multiples in different light, many taken through a scope of some kind. Timeless and beautiful.

In his photograph of her, she's silhouetted against the last blinding light of sunset, arms thrown wide and high. He'd had to have waited, watching.

It's a familiar moment—she can guess what song she's dancing to—but it's startling to see herself so intimately from so far away, to know she's been watched. She feels afraid and angry. She hasn't sensed danger, but would she?

Then she sees that the image shows her as she'd want to be seen: not as an older woman dancing alone as night falls, but as a woman—or a man, or any in-between or other—of almost any age, caught in a moment of being lifted into ecstasy by song.