

The Composer's Lament

Rain pattered onto the lamplit street. A slight earthy scent tainted the night air, petrichor wafting like morning fog over the sleeping city. It had to be at least two o'clock in the morning now. The pianist ran one hand through his unruly wet hair while the other bobbed to the raindrops as though they were the cadence of a pretty tune. But something had changed within him. The passion that had once blazed in his heart had dwindled into an ember so small, even its crackle was inaudible. He gazed up at the sky, remembering a time when he might be able to *hear* the rain slapping the ground, rather than only recognize its presence as it trickled down his exposed skin or soaked into the fabric of his coat.

"Can you hear me?" He shouted to the dark clouds. "Can. You. Hear. Me? Because I cannot hear you! And I have not heard you for a long, long time!" He spit the last words out like bad wine, raising his hands only to throw them back down again in frustration. "Aaargh!"

Maybe, just maybe if he screamed loudly and long enough at the starless sky, something would hear him. Maybe shouting would make him feel better. Maybe something would even respond. Not that it mattered, of course. He couldn't hear it anyway.

"Ahh," he began to sob. Hot, angry tears flew from his eyes, and he fell to his knees, ignoring the cold water lapping against his leg. "Moonlight," he wept. "Oh, moonlight. Even you are not here with me tonight. *Your* beauty too is cloaked in darkness. Are you there? Or are you lost to mere memories too?" The pianist

remembered a time when everything sang to him. When the music of the moon spilled through his window long past midnight, rippling into steady beams of sound. Why had God given him a passion for something so unreachable? It felt as though everything and everyone he had ever loved was always just out of reach from him and ever-slipping out of sight.

Muffled thunder shook the ground beneath him and anger reverberated through his bones.

He lifted his head and flinched at the sight of something hideous. “Ugly thing!” he hissed at his reflection. “Get up! Can *you* hear me?” His reflection shook his head.

He ground his hands into the pavement, scraping his palms bloody as he pushed himself to his feet. Another flash of lightning illuminated the street. He flipped his coattail behind him and turned to spur back in the direction from which he had fled, rage emanating from him like the yellow lamplight.

Down the street he marched, subconsciously grateful for his solitude. Night was the safest time for thinking outside— after all, there was no one awake to judge his methods.

He slammed open the door of his studio, ignoring the papers that fluttered to the ground. Shoving open the lid of his piano, that fire within finally began to re-ignite and burn into something worth sharing. And something angry—completely and utterly indignant, aggrieved and enraged spilled out of him.

He could not hear the sound of his hands crashing into the piano. He could not hear the tap of his left foot on the floor or the rumbling thunder outside. But he could

feel. He could feel the wrath exploding from his fingertips, the hatred scalding his lips as he cursed the being who created him and adorned him with useless ears. Hot tears slipped beneath his closed eyelids and leaked down his repulsive face.

It wasn't fair. It wasn't fair! This was what he was meant to do. What he was *put* on *Earth* to do. So why was the one and *only* thing that had loyally brought him joy being sucked out of reach? What was the point of making music he couldn't even hear? *Verfluche Dich*, he thought. *Curse you!* Frustration pumped through him more readily than the blood of his veins. Hot then cold. Angry then vengeful. Louder then quieter. Harder then softer. If he must feel the wrath of God, then the piano must feel the wrath of him.

All of a sudden the flame— this flame of fury—went out of him once more, as though the rain outside had leaked into his body and extinguished the fire fueling what little was left of his purpose. And he wept. Instantly he was overcome with the most gut-wrenching sorrow he had ever felt. He was powerless. Vulnerable. It seemed as though even a stranger on the street had more control over his life than he did. As he cried, he clenched his teeth and squeezed his eyes and tried with all his might to hear even a whisper of what he could merely feel. His hands glided over the piano, caressing the keys with the sort of gentleness that only anticipates the shocking opposite. The room was filled with the melancholy melody of memories that could never be again. It felt like everything was leading up to a grand resolve, only to fall again into hopelessness. Into somberness. Into despair.

Fury subsided into sorrow. Like the ebb and flow of a tossing sea, his emotions rocked. Anger. Sadness. Both. Neither. He had pleaded with God. He had spoken to

moonlight. There had been a time when moonlight sang back. A time when God himself placed the firewood in the pianist's heart and let it kindle into the purest of passions. So why had God taken it away now?

He wondered. *Had* God taken it away? Had God allowed that flame to be extinguished with hardship? Or could a passion ever dwindle? Could something so true and beautiful ever be completely gone? There was no more lightning now. The tempest ceased. Thunder no longer rattled the frail studio. Starlight spilled through the window and danced on the ivory keys. *Was there such thing as true darkness?* He asked himself, getting up from the piano and staggering over a cluttered floor to the window. *Or are the things we perceive as darkness merely the world cast in shadow?* A lingering cloud chased after its friends and floated out of sight. He held his hand out in front of him, examining the mutilated shadow cast on the ground when his hand obscured the starlight. He moved it back. The starlight spilled over the ground seamlessly-- as though nothing had been blocking it moments before.

He thought of his own shadowed mind and wondered: could shadows even exist without a light to block?

What had been blocking *his* light source? His passion? What had cast a shadow over what was important to him? Was it his inability to hear that had caused such despair? Was it the unstable bridge *he* had built between hearing and happiness? Was the shadow gone even now? Or had it just relocated to cloud his already unstable reasoning?

The pianist sat back down on the bench and closed his eyes. He did not try to hear. He tried to *feel*. Not to feel the emotions writhing in his spirit, but to feel the music that came out of them. The anger melting into acceptance. Perhaps his deafness was a blessing—in some strange sort of way. Perhaps it had allowed him to focus, avoid distraction, and learn that music was not just about hearing, but about *listening*. And sometimes, one does not listen from their ears, but from their heart. Anger still buzzed through him, and by now his face was crusted with tears. But what was it for? Was he angry with God? With the moon for not speaking back? Or with himself—for his own lack of understanding? Even the pianist did not know the answer to that. All he knew was that the fire within was alight—just like it always had been, only blocked—but now he was going to let himself *feel* it.

The pianist pressed his calloused hands into the keys, *trusting* that the sound coming out was *right* and having faith that the God who crafted his hands would guide them, and fill him with that supernatural gift of music he had forgotten was not his to begin with. Faster the pianist played. Faster. Faster. The resolve that had been building, building, building, cascaded down into a whirlwind of emotions. Emotions that had colored his world black and white for far too long now burst into colors. Deep shades of violet, magenta, cerulean, lilac, fuchsia, and obsidian painted the studio with a song so somber and uncanny it was truly heart-wrenchingly beautiful. *Impossible*, he thought. *Impossible!* He could close his eyes and enter a world of silence and sightlessness. And yet somehow, he was not alone. For the light within him blazed brighter than ever—even though it hurt. Even though it was scary sometimes to trust. The pianist knew now that his faith in himself and his God must now be greater than any

fear or fury that had ever cast shadow on his life. Nothing could stop him now. Not even his disabilities. This was his purpose.

And for the first time in a long, long time, the pianist listened and *heard* the voice of something, someone mighty and trustworthy, say, “I hear you. I hear you!! And **I am** listening.”

Julia White

Short Story

Word Count: 1556

Paideia Classical Christian School

12th grade