

## Replayed Memory

By: Reyan Kassam

*The clarity of a single note would fill the room with an exquisite vibration. I would sense it first in my toes, a single shake. Momentarily tingling, yet an everlasting sensation. Shivers would dart all around my spine, eventually returning to the ground, just from where the vibration began. It was the most magical sensation in the world, returning the sounds to the ground; it was almost as if it had never left.*

The music room was oddly silent today; Mama had left for a business trip, Papa was tending to a matter in his office, my sisters were off at school or at the library (Lena always loves to spend four hours at the library after school; not a minute more nor a minute less). I suppose it is just lack of company that draws me to this particular room today; I would go off to the garden room, but it is usually a “two-person sport” in the Bernard household. One person must pick the crops, the other must dig the holes; it would seem peculiar to just attempt to pick the crops AND dig the holes in isolation. It seemed like too much work for a Thursday morning, much too laborious and boring.

With the windows closed, the sounds of the caterwauling willow were suppressed, held down until the wind seemed to carry the noises into a crack in the glass. While the wind gusted, the inside of the house sat patiently and fearlessly. The blue and red striped walls created an enticing prison, luring people in and forcing the music to be played. Everything was still as I wandered into the music room; the cello had not been played since Lena’s lesson on Tuesday; it seemed to be seeking attention. As I strolled by it, I gave a small strum to its string, apparently to its liking; the room seemed to lit up just a bit, as if the attention I gave to the cello brought in more light into the prison. I went and sat on the piano bench, releasing dust all over the piano; as I coughed and tried to whisk away some of the dust, a single note was sounded.

I started to learn to play the piano in the 2nd grade, when Mama brought home a small keyboard from one of her international trips. It produced the most majestic sound when I pressed my fingers atop the keys. My heart would tingle and fill with satisfaction; I had no earthly idea that I could produce such a marvelous sound. I played the same notes over and over until I finally fell asleep with my head on the keyboard the next morning. Mama and Papa gave me lessons in piano, teaching me all of its secrets, its

melodies and patterns. For hours and hours, the three of us would sit in this prison, days and days on end, learning and teaching, growing and maturing. At least, I was becoming someone.

In the dark and misty light of the blossoming sun, I sat on the piano bench; a squeak and tremble piped from the bench, its old beauty was becoming a bit too much to bear. I intertwined my fingers, releasing a loud CRACK. Relaxing, strengthening, *ready to play*. Shaking out my wrists, I put my hands on the keys, shoulders relaxed, back straight, knees shoulder width apart, feet resting softly on the pedals.

My father always used to watch me play, saying that I had the prettiest hands, the slimmest fingers, perfect for playing the piano. He would admire my slender fingers for hitting the juiciest chords, the flawless rounds that any professional would envy.

However, playing the piano had never come easy to me, in spite of the perfect form of my fingers and my posture. When I am asked what instrument I play, I casually say piano; immediately they would ask me for how long, I would normally hesitate to say 20 years, because saying “20 years,” invites strangers to ask you to “tickle the ivory” if one is nearby. It takes hours of sitting straight to learn a simple scale, and months to even begin to put together a ballad of any sorts.

I stare back at the keys, and with my slender, long fingers sitting gracefully on the keys, I play the first note on the sheet resting on top of the piano. It starts off with a touch of *pianissimo*; soft, slowing, echoing. I recognize the piece on the sheet as the one of Schubert’s which I learnt to play in high school; a piece, filled with heavy chords, a soft but steady pace turned eager riot, and difficult fingering. I struggled for years to learn this piece, and beyond relearning, at that time, I saw no future for this piece.

I hate this, pointless trying, pointless learning. I will never get better than what I have become: A FAILURE.

Tears rolled down my face spraying everywhere as they slammed the keys, letting out a soft noise of F. My favorite note. Subconsciously, my finger softly rested on a key, letting out a soft F-note. Such beauty, such grace, such elegance. I used to be magnificent, incredible, when I played this song.

Practicing for years just to put on a show led me to greatness. My arms would cry in pain, thoughts would pop outside my head, my heart was full.

I tried to close the door on my negative feelings for now. I grabbed a cloth to wipe my tears. Closing my eyes for just a second, I washed everything out. *I'm ready*. I briefly pressed on the keys, hesitated to check my work, and listened to the weak noise from the instrument. Playing the same note again, I continue through the song in the same rhythm, as if I were back learning this piece in high school again.

It is a slow pace; a snail could follow and still be ahead somehow. I imagined my first boss, Ms. Rinko, sitting next to me, flipped the sheet music pages so that I could focus on impressing the crowd every Tuesday night. She used to lean in and whisper in my ear during the piece, her fish-smelling breath fogging my thoughts to *pick up the pace*. Do. Not. Mess. Up. With every wrong note, she would take a stick, and slap my thighs under the keyboard, far from the sight of the gawking people, listening in awe. Each slap of the stick would be increasingly painful with every new wrong note; a motivation to play the right note, to finish so that hopefully, I would never have to see her again.

Shortly after I finished learning the Schubert piece, Ms. Rinko scheduled my performance. July 24th. She invited everyone she knew, and a scout from the Conservatoire de Paris. My dream school, yet so far to reach. I practiced and prepared every day for months before the concert. My final year of high school led up to the moment of truth: would I be a musician or a total failure.

The day of the concert was gloomy; rain pattered on the windows, wind rushed in from the open door. Dozens of waiting people craved to hear music from the exquisite keys of the piano, and were dazzled when I went up on stage and played the first note. Naturally, Ms. Rinko was sitting next to me, her stick in hand, turning the pages with nervous eyes, waiting for failure. I played with the soft pianissimo in the beginning, told the story with a staccato pitch in the middle, and began to finish the piece when it came. My finger slipped, and I accidentally hit it. A minor key. So I braced my legs, firm and tight, for when the stick came down, I listened to the whisper in my ear. *You will never be good enough*. Almost as I was back as a 17 year old child, I felt fury rise and build in my body- of Ms. Rinko

not realizing this *elegance* I had- sprawling in my thoughts and in my fingers. I clasped the keys, releasing an energy that shook the piano for merely seconds before silence.

I shook away all of the negative ambitions of Ms. Rinko, pounding out her words as I struck the keys. I have devoted years of myself to this piece, and continue playing, I must.

I shook the piano once more as I rapidly flipped the pages, flying high on the *mezzo forte*, building towards the climax. The notes start to look less like giant splotches on the pages, and my fingers' muscle memory starts to return in pieces, simply as a puzzle as I accelerate through the piece.

Soon my arms become tired. My fingers become numb. I am just about to get off, but I reach the final page of the composition. It is the most challenging, building to the peak, and dropping softly.

There is a *fortissimo* until the very end. One's arms must be powerful. Chords must be shaken. The piece has reached its climax. The zenith.

After the concert, Ms. Rinko pulled me aside. She explained that the scout had left after I messed up that single note; that I had failed her. She whipped out her stick once more, but I could not take it any longer. The bits of my motivations that were still *within me* were dwindling. I was done playing by her rules, her abuse and negativity. I had to act on it.

The climax of the piece, as I had imagined, with the *forte* of the melody, and the dark, dingy feeling of the lower chords always reminds me of helplessness in a story, where a person, normally confident, now collapsing on the floor, begging for forgiveness, wheezing and calling for help, anything to save her life.

The composition ends with the softest note, F, of the piano - my favorite note. The chords move through fourth octaves until it reaches the top, with a bubbly yet mysterious *crescendo* of note E that clashes. The murder complete, yet an unbeknownst sense of self.

I rested my fingers softly, once again, on top of the keys, satisfied. I figured I still had that fire within me, the spark that was kindled once has never been extinguished.