

The Private Concerto

By Ivy Moore

The day had been hot. Miserable, sticky hot. And the patient I had just visited had the heater on low as blood thinners left her cold most of the time. I left the suffocating heat of her home at the very top of the building and paused with relief in the cool darkness of the hallway, waiting for the elevator. As I stepped into the elevator car, somewhere below me, I could hear the distant strains of a concerto. The piano keys crashed out a soul stirring rendition and music lifted upwards through the elevator shaft. The piece being pounded out was passionate, grieving and tortured. And this music immediately had my attention riveted.

I forgot how hot the patient's apartment was and how cool the hallway felt. I had seen piano concertos on television but I had never experienced someone play in person. The flat two dimensional performance I'd heard on television was nondescript when compared to this thunderstorm of passion and power that rose from below me. My curiosity was piqued and I tried to remember if there was a piano in the lobby. I told myself to forget it; I was there for work and work only. I looked down at the floor of the descending elevator and closed my eyes. The music enclosed me, sweeping up over my skin and swirling down inside my body. Someone was playing somewhere with the fervor and passion of the newly betrayed. It whispered to my heart and reminded me of past hurts that I had placed in the bottom drawer of my mind and forgotten.

The elevator arrived at the lobby and the doors opened. No piano anywhere. I stepped into the lobby but held the doors open and the sound became fainter. I looked around the empty lobby then quietly stepped back into the elevator car where the volume rose from somewhere below me. I pushed the basement button almost furtively.

What was I doing? I didn't live in this building and had no business going to the basement. I wasn't even the adventurous sort. I worked all the time and as much as I could. I was a hardcore workaholic. I didn't go to the theatre or the opera. Those were guilty pleasures I couldn't let myself take time out to experience. I didn't even know the name of the piece that was playing in the basement. It could have been an original and I would have never known. I should have gotten off at the lobby and gone on to the next patient's home. If I got caught, what would I say? My job was located on the top floor of this high rise, not the basement.

I closed myself off from chastising voice within and let the notes fill me instead and suddenly there was no turning back. I was ensnared. This wasn't just music. It was emotion, raw, stripped bare and bleeding-emotion I had no idea I was capable of relating to. That music, screaming rage and grief with every key struck

was the call of an ancient siren to me and caught by its call, I was unable to resist.

The basement opened up before me, claustrophobic and dark but cool. The walls were rough gray bricks, the ceiling low and the floor, smooth cement. The music echoed off the bricks and the amplification of his emotions almost had me holding my breath. A hallway led off to the right where the concerto raged on and for some reason, I paused uncertainly. When I turned the corner, who would I find? I knew it would be some slight dark haired bohemian type with strong, slender fingers. I knew it. I could see him clearly. Artistic, young, unfulfilled, passionate and with beautiful dark haunted eyes. Someone or something would have hurt him and recently. What else could elicit such a charged performance? What dark despair could rent that much emotion from someone? Betrayal? News of a death?

Ivy Moore is the winner of the sixth annual Award for Prose, a writing contest initiated by Karen Rosenbaum, who taught creative writing, literature and composition for more than 30 years at Ohlone.

I peered around the corner as the music crashed over me and stared. Down the hall in a storeroom stood a piano. Not the glossy concert grand piano I had envisioned but an old wooden upright. It had seen better days but then so had the artist sitting before it. He was closer to sixty than fifty and wore a dingy wife beater and faded sweat pants. The sleeveless tee shirt revealed burly, hair-covered arms and a faded tattoo. A cigar was clamped between his teeth as he bent his balding head over the upright, his significant stomach a scant inch from touching the piano. I could smell the scent of the cigar as I was only fifteen feet from him, yet he never noticed me. Sweat coated his arms as he demanded passion and drama from the keyboard. I could see no trace of emotion anywhere on his face yet the sounds that emitted from that keyboard overwhelmed me. Staring in strange fascination, I was so caught up in his performance that his turbulent feelings began to engulf me and my breathing became constricted. The emotions he conveyed welled up in me. I felt small, insignificant and definitely uninvited. This was private and he was expressing something deep and dark within him that I had no business witnessing. I knew that if he had finished and saw me, he might not appreciate my being there. Yet I couldn't leave. There was something elusive here I wanted to touch but couldn't, something ethereal and beautiful. The contrast between his appearance and the beautiful torment that flowed from his fingers made that moment in time all the more entrancing to me.

He was beautiful.

I turned silently and left. I took that moment with me and have kept it safe within me for fourteen years now. And every so often I wonder about my beautiful bohemian pianist who unknowingly performed a private concerto just for me.