

## Piano

### 1. Three Blind Mice

Five years old and I'm bent  
over the kitchen table, printing scales  
over and over and over again:  
notebooks filled with  
five lined clefs jumbling  
crooked notes, sharps, flats,  
each note crawling above  
its previous--  
up and            up and            up and  
my hand cramps,  
mind whirls, neck sore,  
eyes water until they shut.  
A deep breath in and  
I dive.

### 2. Sonata Op. 10 No. 1 in C Minor, Finale Prestissimo

It's another road trip, so Mom pops  
in the Beethoven. *I used to play piano*,  
she tells me. I can tell,  
by the way she  
only lets us listen to classical CDs  
borrowed from the library.  
She sat me before the piano  
at age four so that  
from the kitchen sink where  
grease clings to her fingers,  
she can imagine mine--  
racing across the ivory and ebony,  
melody bridging oil and  
water.

I tilt my head back to swallow notes  
flowing smooth and sweet  
from car speakers, spinning  
because I'm carsick but  
Beethoven doesn't know that so he pounds  
the keys and draws out a melody  
that ties itself into me, crosses out  
my own thoughts.  
He speaks so urgently that  
I forget he was            deaf.

Even now when I hear his sonatas,  
I think back to

hours in that car, always  
on our way to somewhere--  
soft seats, vanilla air freshener,  
dusty windows and dizziness  
as trees dart past like blind mice.  
The sunset smears with music,  
each note a flash of color:

F-sharp satin red,  
B-flat cotton candy pink,  
E mango orange.

We're hurtling towards the final chords,  
an epic climax, *accelerando*--  
the notes swell into sparks pinned  
into the sky between telephone  
lines for me to count.

### 3. K. 365 in F Minor, Allegro

By year six I have per·fect pitch

[noun, /pər'fekt piCH/]

1. the ability to recognize the pitch of a note or to produce any given note; a sense of absolute pitch.

I know it all-- piece together  
notes with *legatos* and trills,  
stretch rhythm, explore seas  
of combinations, permutations  
of sound.

It's a world I can't  
escape, live without, lose;  
my legs straddling  
real life and music,  
two tracks shuttling  
into eternity where  
I trust  
they will never

part.

### 4. Girl with the Flaxen Hair

It's not fun anymore: there's  
rules, expectations, pressure, perfection.  
But I can't quit, can't leave behind years  
of *allegro con spirito* and dedication,  
of *fermatas* and frustration,  
of *vivace* and passion and

my sister's just started;  
I press her fingers into the keys,  
wistful traces of ten years ago and

I tell myself, maybe  
if I just finish Level 10,  
it can be done-- I  
can be done and

so I funnel in more hours,  
hold my breath, plunge deeper,  
but inside, I know  
I'm  
                    drowning.

5. Prelude No. 4 in D Minor  
I quit.

6. Arabesque No. 1 in E Major, L. 66  
Sometimes, late enough at night,  
I find myself  
playing the same songs I used to:  
Debussy's first Arabesque,  
Haydn's piano sonata in E-flat Major--  
each note resonating an unpunctuated *cadenza*.  
I know it'll never be the same, but

in these moments,  
suspended in my own bubble,  
I remember everything: the way Dad  
looked away when I told him *I want to quit*,  
trimmed nails on worn fingers  
cracking against smooth but harsh keys,  
my sister's first piano lesson,  
*energico*, her fingers scarcely  
reaching four keys, our family spread  
on the couch watching Lang Lang perform  
at the China Olympics, Mom's fingers  
clutching mine before each recital.

The night doesn't stop as I chase my memories  
across the piano. And when I finally  
emerge,           12 years  
later and breathless, my thoughts  
scatter and race like blind mice.

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