

PIANO MOURNING

The last time I played she was dead within three short hours. Little did I know that that would be the last time music, or any signs of life for that matter, would pulse through this room. Buried deep in my knowing, I was aware that it was coming, but I never imagined it would happen on that day. That was a good day. A freaking good day. Her eyes were bright and happy, and her energy was up, rousing me to play those stupid little ditties. Like the *Candy Man* for god's sake. It was a freaking good day.

I hate this room, all sunlit and warm with its afternoon rays bathing these neutral walls. There's nothing neutral about this room. It's a freaking deceptive cold death chamber is what it really is. More than anything, I hate that goddamn chair over there, the Grim Reaper's Cadillac that chauffeured her away from me. So plush, so soft, so *mauve*, so easy for her to be enveloped in its overstuffed chenille arms and be carried away. I should take an ax to that soulless piece of shit deathtrap. Just destroy it. But I can't. She loved that chair. It was her chair. Besides, it's holding traces of her sweet scent: a little almond, a hint of lavender, and the rest, pure her. And it's holding tight to a few strands of that pretty golden hair of hers. So, I have no choice but to keep it. Maybe I could nestle into the indentation of her and it would whisk me away too. That would be better than sitting on this hard bench trying to will myself to play this piano. Play for no one in this unaroused space.

I honestly don't know if I can ever play again. What I really don't know is if I can ever love again or if I even want to. Nobody seems to understand that. Bernie keeps telling me that I've got to move on, saying, "find ya another, bro." Find another, like she was some mutt that I could just go to the pound and replace. Well, one thing's for certain and that is that *ol' bro* sure as hell doesn't know what it means to love. He's always been about finding another, alright. I mean, geez, the guy cheats on his wife any chance he gets. And that brain trust Ron tells me that I'm better off being footloose and fancy-free with nothing and no one to tie me down. This from a guy who can't make a commitment to daily personal hygiene. I see now that they're just a couple of douche bags, and she always knew that. The exemplary lady that she was, she was always mannered around them, but she preferred to keep her distance, and did so inconspicuously. She did that just to please me, I'm sure. But, man, she read them like a book. I could tell from her rigid, guarded posture that she thought they were assholes.

So many wonderful moments she and I shared with this piano each day. She would settle herself deeply and comfortably into her chair, while my impassioned fingers would have their way with these keys; both of us surrendering our beings to the joyful offerings of the ivories. But now look at these languid hands. They look like shit, as if they've been used to work a field or pick cotton with their shredded cuticles and some unidentifiable nasty crud under the torn nails. Far from having my hands in the earth in this little apartment. Shit, I haven't even watered the only two plants in my care: *no* maintenance snake plants. Now they're dead at these hands, as well. Hands like these don't deserve the privilege of flowing melodic beauty—or even playing stupid little ditties.

It doesn't matter that I don't play anyway; these keys feel aloof and unfamiliar now. I used to feel a partnership with this piano, a *simpatico*, it was a trusted friend; now I feel betrayed by it. It took

my attention away from her while she slipped off. It's in cahoots with the Reaper. I should take an ax to it.

I miss you, Annie. I miss looking over at you, savoring your reaction to the tunes *du jour*. I counted on your acute ear to let me know when I hit a wrong chord. Oh, it was never with the slightest criticism or ridicule; merely with an almost imperceptible tilt of your head. I counted on you for so many things. A measly fourteen years together is unfair. Actually, it's cruel. Cruel like the cancer, the *Big* fucking *C*. Well, that *C* isn't only for cruel. It's also for catatonic, which I have to admit is some sweet relief. Crackpot also begins with a *c*, which is probably what's behind it all: a psychopathic, sick mastermind that we call God. Whatever it is can just go fuck itself. Creating a world where we open ourselves up to love deeply and completely, and then it's ripped away from us because time's up. Who puts a time limit on love? If that's what this life on earth is all about, it's just a sick fucking joke. Here, *oh great creator*, you depraved degenerate sack of crap, let me play some eardrum busting, viscera rattling chopsticks for you. Although, that's far too kind for you. I wish you eternal screeching of nails on chalkboard. Hmm, this piano needs a tune-up.

I may be losing what's left of my mind, but I think I feel these keys tingling.....or maybe it's my fingers? And I can feel you....I think. Maybe I've gone nuts. No, I know it's you, Annie, leaning your warm body softly against me like you used to. And I swear I just caught a whiff of lavender and almond in the air. Oh god, maybe I am crazy. Well, okay then, I must say that insanity feels a whole lot better than agony, so I'll play something for you like I used to. Don't worry, sweet girl, I promise that I won't start singing. You left the room too many times when I opened my mouth. How about I play *Annie's Song*? Your song. Speaking of, have you met John Denver up there? Does he like my rendition? I do feel a bit guilty about playing. Mostly, I think I feel guilty about trying to feel good.

I feel good when I indulge my mind with the image of you settled peacefully in your mauve *throne*. I feel good when I recall looking over at you to get my needed fix of unadulterated love that you beamed from your soft, sage, amber eyes. Those images make my heart and soul feel good. Can I.....will I.....ever feel good without you in the picture?

Playing music for us always made me feel good. If I'm being honest with myself, playing music feels good right now. Yeah, even, "*the Candy Man can cause he mixes it with love and makes the world taste good.*" I know I have to make amends with this piano. I know you would want that—and, frankly, I know I really want that too.

I guess it's about time I take a shower, comb my hair, and put on some clean clothes. And I need to scrub these fingernails. It's time.

Annie, you and I both know that you can't ever, will never, be replaced. As much as I hate to admit it, that dumbass *bro* did say something I know to be true. He said that your last dog will help you find your next one. So, from where you are, girlie, help me at the shelter. Someone's life needs to be saved.