

The Repeat Bar

Andante

F major

6/8

(piano) Connor's day started the same way again. The dog needed to go out. The coffee wasn't done yet. The milk was low. The eggs were over-hard instead of over-medium. The music was still out on the piano bench. The lamp on top of the piano was still on. His ashtray was full. The vodka was on the table instead of in the freezer. The girl was gone. His keys were hiding. The room smelled like weed.

His car revved as it backed up the hill and out of the driveway. It strolled gently along the winding road to the music store and parked in the spot that only he parked in. Beneath a tree, near the entrance, easy enough to watch any potential thieves from the instruction room. At the end of the day, it was even easier to walk out and collapse in it before going home.

(mezzo-forte) He grabbed his bag out of the backseat and swung it over his shoulder like a music satchel. Troy greeted him as he walked in the door. You still owe \$800 for rent this month. Okay, I'll get it to you tomorrow, I promise. I'm counting on it, man. I wouldn't do you like that, I promise. Alright.

Troy went back to his endless shuffling of papers near the register. Connor plucked at the hanging strings as he walked past the guitars and into the piano instruction room. Gemma had left her music bag again last week. She still hadn't come to retrieve it. Already, he felt the annoyance building up. She was going to be unprepared again.

He adjusted the bench, lowering it some and scooting it forward. Once again, arriving early to play songs that no one but Troy will hear and scales that he memorized ten years ago. Stagnant. CDEFGACDEFGABC. Shit. He missed a B. CDEFGA-BCDEFGABC. Then back down. Each scale, two octaves, three times per day at a tempo of 92.

Fantaisie Impromptu by Chopin at a tempo of 160. Never get tired of that song, do ya? Troy shouted. Not on your life! Still waiting for the day Yiruma composes something even half as good. Connor responded. If I listen to you play *River Flows In You* over the speakers one more time, I just might quit the music business. Hahaha, no matter how hard I try, you never quit, Connor.

First Ending

(*forte*) Gemma fucks up the C# major scale again. Fourth week in a row. This is the easiest scale. I'm starting to think you'll never get it right. I'm sorry, Mr. Thomas. Take out the Beethoven piece. Gemma shuffles around in her music bag to find it. If you leave that here again, no lesson next week. Ok Mr. Thomas.

And then, the mythical serenade of the human subconscious begins. The notes glide from the piano to Connor's eardrum in a less time than it takes to smile, freezing his veins solid with a chilling melody of the night.

He hears the music as the tomatoes fly from balconies over his head in Valencia. He runs along Pennsylvania Avenue all the way to Machu Picchu when suddenly he trips on a missed note. Don't miss the C. He is lifted again as the sounding heroin fills his solid veins and ecstasy creeps up his spine while he writhes in musical pleasure. My god, she's good without practice at all.

Every note is a knock on the door towards pleasure, fame, wealth, weed, booze, friends, social lives, ex-wives, alimony, hatred, regret, purging, gyming, eating again, a recantation of his life in the notes of the song from the fingers of an 18 year old virgin pianist. The painful bliss drips from her hands onto the keyboard and screams into his ears, “Beautiful fuck up! What are you doing?”

(mezzo-piano) Gemma completed the song. And then again. Once more. Three times for every day she didn't practice. Three times a reminder of the power of music to recall the past in the present. That's good enough for today. He said. Thank you, she responds.

(pianissimo) And then he walked out to his car, drove home, walked in the house. The steak was burnt. The dog needed water. The lamp on top of the piano was still on. He forgot to buy milk. He'd left the ashes in the bowl of his bong. The vodka was out of the freezer again. A cacophonous rage growled from the piano as vodka, ashes, and smoke, proliferated its majesty, and then he hit the repeat bar.

Repeat

(piano) Connor's day started the same way again. The dog shat in its crate. The coffee had grinds in it. The milk was spoiled. He didn't feel like eating breakfast. The bong was on the piano bench. The lamp on top of the piano was still on. His ashtray was overflowing. The piano keys were sticky from vodka. He had woken up alone again. His keys had ended up behind the piano somehow. The room smelled like alcohol and Taco Bell.

His car revved as it backed up the hill and out of the driveway. It strolled gently along the winding road to the music store and parked in the spot that only he parked in.

Beneath a tree, near the entrance, easy enough to watch any potential thieves from the instruction room. At the end of the day, it was even easier to walk out and collapse in it before going home.

(*mezzo-forte*) He grabbed his bag out of the backseat and swung it over his shoulder like a music satchel. Troy greeted him as he walked in the door. You still owe \$800 for rent this month. I've got it right here. Thanks man, you know how much I count on that. Look bro, I would never do you like that, I promise. Ok.

Troy went back to his endless shuffling of papers near the register. Connor performed an infinite glissando as he passed the row of keyboards on his way to the instruction room. Charles' nail trimmer was still sitting on top of the piano. It was fucking disgusting. He could feel the frustration building up already.

He adjusted the bench, raising it some and scooting it back. Once again, arriving early to play songs that no one but Troy will hear and scales that he memorized ten years ago. Expired. EF#G#ABD#EF#G#ABC#D#E. Shit. He missed a C. EF#G#ABC#D#EF#G#ABC#D#E. Then back down. Each scale, two octaves, three times per day at a tempo of 92.

La Catedral Engloutie at a tempo that varies between 63 and 69. Never get tired of that song, do ya? Troy yelled. Not on your life! Still waiting for the day Hisaishi composes something even half as technical! Connor responded. If I listen to you play *One Summer's Day* through the speakers one more time, I just might quit the music business. Play some real music! Hahaha, no matter how much I try, you never quit, Connor.

Second Ending

(*Forte*) Charles needed to trim his nails again. He brought the trashcan near him and meticulously chopped them down to a reasonable size for a pianist, scattering remnants across the floor. His earlier movement was pointless.

Give me a D major scale. Two octaves, three times. After that I want to hear Hanon No. 9. Ok, Mr. Thomas. Connor looked at his phone while he listened to the scale. This kid really fucking sucked. 12 years old and couldn't even reach two octaves without slipping up. Contrary to popular belief, scales only get easier the more sharps you add, because they make the fingerings easier to get right. At least, that was his experience. Oh, good- the Hanon, for the third week in a row. He missed Julliard.

Good enough. Connor said. God, he wished he were high in that moment. Ok Charles, why don't you take out Debussy's *Reverie*? Ah man Mr. Thomas, not that one again. Can't I learn something cool like a song from *Final Fantasy*? Listen here, the recital is coming up in a couple of months and you will perform a classical song. If you would prefer a different one, that's fine, but this is the best way to learn proper technique.

Charles' protest subsumed itself to Connor's irritation. The song starts with a B flat from the left hand in the treble clef. The beauty of that one, penetrating note sits with Connor as it gives way to a C, and a D, and then a G. Like an egg yolk he is broken apart and whisked by the dreamy bullets shooting past his ears. A tied A holds steady in the right hand as the left hand departs from the treble clef for the first time, when suddenly on the second page a hand slips and it is as if Connor were watching Socrates drink hemlock in person, a desire to slap the hand and make it stop, the atrocity!

Charles yelped as his hand recoiled from the ruler in Connor's fist. That's all for today. Get out. Connor said to the boy. The teary-eyed child left the room. What a fucking disgrace Connor said to himself. He wiped the piano off, cleansing it of the amateur filth.

(Fortissimo) He packed his bag and walked out to his car. He started the car, revved the engine, drove back down the windy road, left his car, burned his burger, cleaned up after his dog, smoked some weed, finished the second half of the vodka, thought about Jolene and the alimony he had given to Troy that morning, ignored his phone as it blew up with messages from Charles' mother and the police department, and then he hit the repeat bar, passed out on the table. Repeat forever, he thought miserably.

Coda *(Allegro)*

(mezzo-piano) Except he didn't. Like any bad piano student, Connor ignored the repeat bar. First and second endings, there were an infinite number. They say there's only one life per person despite infinite endings per life. Connor knew he was a bad person.

It's because he was a bad person that he skipped the repeat bar. It's because he's a bad person that Jolene left him. That she walked in on Troy's dick down his throat. That sympathy was a fantasy and support groups and counselors and doctors did nothing but tell him lies, "There's nothing wrong with being gay", "You'll find someone who loves you for you", and suggest, "Let's start with 25mg of Zoloft per day." He didn't do it, of course. He quit counseling. He sold the pills on the street to his junkie friend, saying, "They're Klonopin." Fucking liar.

Troy didn't know he was married, not that he particularly cared. It was just their arrangement. They fucked once a month and Connor got discounted rent. But any rational person feels horrible realizing the nature of the hurt they've helped to instigate. They still fucked. That's all it was though- fucking. No love, Connor had told him after Jolene left. That was when he dropped out of the graduate program at Julliard.

That day, Connor walked down the street and bought some smack from his junkie friend for \$100. He went home, sat down on a beanbag, heated it with a spoon, injected it all at once, and finally got some relief from his mistakes. Finally feeling as if he were playing Chopin's *Rubinstein* in front of a crowd again. He was running with the bulls. Kissing Jolene/Troy under/on top of the Eiffel Tower. The beanbag was above him. It felt like he was whirling around in a cloud of ecstatic white, and could only think the word "Clear..!" before his eyes closed.

It wasn't worth it though. Troy cried and Jolene had to start therapy. His family members were beside themselves. The doctors had told them that his last word was "Clear..!", probably an imitation of the medics as they tried to resuscitate him. Troy couldn't be sure though. He thought that perhaps his clarity was actually the lifting of an enveloping pessimism as he looked at the drifting whiteness, realizing that maybe life was just as playable as a scale.