

# Ode to a Pianist's Identity Crisis

poetry

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I perch on the piano bench, and I'm a painting  
by a Renaissance man who knows the posture

but not me. Soon, I will become imperfect motion—  
hunched shoulders, trembling wrists, and flapping fingers.

Until then, I sit in stern anticipation, waiting for Schubert  
to finish the symphony that lives in his mind.

I don't know who I am until I start to play.  
They tell me I'm a natural because I taught myself

Für Elise within a month of learning to read sheet music—  
because I'm fluent in the language of ebony

marks woven between staff lines on an ivory page—  
but I say I'm a mirror. And I'm the vampire

studying my own maple-backed surface  
for a glimmer of me. I don't see myself

until I start to play. I'm electric flow—conductor  
and current—zipping from keys to fingertips

and back again, searching for a wire  
to ground myself before I lash out. I don't know

where I'll go until I start to play. I'm a pockmarked  
teenage moon, shining brightest with Debussy's light

on me, but watch as I direct the tides with each press  
of brass pedal. They rise and fall as blood pulses

in my ears, a steady rhythm for the music rushing  
through me, carving me into myself: a canyon cut through  
  
until my deepest layers lie exposed under hot stage lights.  
I don't know who I am, but then I start to play.