



*Lola's Lament*  
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a short story

### ***Part 1 - start***

The room was big and dark, with light only presenting itself at the main stage, where her hands danced on the piano. The music poured out gently and majestically, giving the shadowed audience a sense of awe and wonder. Her eyes were closed with a smile as her fingers pressed every correct key without fail, until a tap on her shoulder was felt.

Suddenly the room, the lights, the stage, the piano disappeared from existence and the back of another student was in Lola's view. She turned around at the silent call of her name. "Lola," the Teacher said, "eyes on the page." The teacher walked off, leaving her rather stern manor to shake Lola and dart her eyes between the book that was barely open and the students next to her. She looked around like a paranoid hunter, everyone's eyes on the book.

After a while, Lola fully reoriented herself back to face forward and attempted to open the book and focus, trying to stop thinking about the moment that just occurred. However, sooner than expected, she found herself seeing the pages get darker. No longer looking at the words but a camera showing a future. The room, the lights, it filled her eyes - no matter which way she looked.

Eventually, the bell rang, and within a heartbeat she was brought back to reality again, and the sounds of moving desks and zipping backpacks filled her ears. She quickly got up and began to leave the room. Her leg froze right at the door before she was to take off and remembered the book sitting on her desk. She looked back, all the people walking forward getting ready to leave. All the people with everything well put together and already packed up. She stood frozen and petrified, but as she saw the students walk closer to the door, she made her decision to simply go back and pick up the book and set it inside her bag.

Lola hit the door hard and stomped out, grunting to herself a little, and made her way to her destination - her mind being filled more and more with hesitation as she got closer. Closer to what she had truly been thinking about all this time.

Finally, as she walked on the campus filled with daylight and chattering students walking around, she stopped by a flier taped to a wall and began looking around herself quickly. She stared back at it and looked at the invitation calling out to her. **Join The Riverside High Piano Competition.** Those words urged her to take out her phone and scan the QR code below, but the more she looked at it, the more her skin began to itch and her mind neglected the memory soothing in.

But like before, she twisted and turned around, looking in all directions - her heart beat like a timer counting down to make a decision. After a moment, she closed her eyes and turned back around, cursing at herself and pulling out her phone. She scanned the code quickly and then left in a hurry to get somewhere safer. Her head was down as she walked, and her eyes continued to twitch back and forth silently and quickly.

Lola came to a stop and sat down on the grass, sighing and opening her phone to the forum she had to fill out. She filled out the questions slower and slower as time went on, the tips of her fingers becoming tense and stiff. When she got to the end, she slowly scrolled back upwards to the very first question, basic and simple. The question she didn't answer.

She stared at the question and bit her lip for a while. Then she rose her head up from her phone in thought and paranoia and began to watch a group of kids pass by her, with them looking at her for only a brief second and going on their way, chatting and talking. But, Lola could not even begin to move any part of her body, as she began to ponder over the quick look given to her. Her head began to rumble, and her sweaty palm touched her forehead that suddenly became

aware of the heat from the sun. She looked at the question again and an influx of thoughts swirled in her mind. “Who was going to read this forum, who is in charge of this, who knows?” Who knows of that thing bugging her mind.

Lola inhaled deeply, trying to calm her body. She opened her eyes and made up her mind, bringing her fingers closer to the screen of her phone. However, as if ice began to infect her body, her fingers jolted and shivered, as she started to type in her full name. But, halfway through, she just, paused. She set her phone down, as she began to see big bright lights floating around a small room: a small stage with a girl playing piano, her sweaty hands flip flopping all over the keys as sounds of disgust and displeasure rang out. Sweat began to run down onto the shiny keys, making them dirty and lived in. Lola couldn't bear to look at the girl anymore and screamed at herself. If she left now, she wouldn't have to worry about seeing the girl anymore, ever again. No one would. In a fit of frustration, she wiped her face while exhaling heavy amounts of air and turned off her phone.

She sat there for a while, not knowing what to do next. She found herself aware in a way of her frozenness, in the middle of the grass as everything else went on. Her eyes slid upwards at the sound of a group of girls sitting together and laughing. But further back, she could make out a tall boy walking past the group, and in this moment, her heart froze, and she swished her hair away and stuck her frozen eyes right in front of her as she could only wonder if he saw her. Or if he was looking at her. The side of her eyes caught a glimpse of his trail that would lead him to walk in front of her, so instinctively and immediately she grabbed her phone and pretended to use it, just in case. In reality, she wished she could occupy herself with something, but couldn't; her mind was stuck on something, and she quietly slapped herself for it as he began to walk

further away and go out of view. *Does he remember me?* she thought to herself. Only half of herself hoped she did.

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Despite the valley of pianos separating herself from him, Lola looked past them all to get a glimpse. He sat against the wall at the far end of the classroom, eating a bag of chips and laughing with his friends. His hazel eyes would turn from side to side, spiraling with elegant brown and green colors, a perfect combination.

Lola sat with her fingers set on the piano ready to pretend to be focused just in case he looked her way. But everytime he did, she was able to go along with this and hide her eyes, just not the red blush on her cheeks. She did not play mindlessly; however, the music she heard in her headphones that came from the piano was a song with hours of practice - one that at this point, she started hoping that he would be able to hear and be performed in front of him. Performed specifically by her.

During the whole class period, Lola had her headphones on to give her a studying aesthetic, but she would notice that the boy would only smack his headphones on his ears whenever the teacher would walk by. Lola felt a little guilty that she could only refer to him as *the boy* in her mind - she hadn't even found out his name yet.

Class soon ended and all the students immediately dashed out the classroom to go to lunch, but Lola would always walk slowly behind the boy. It never seemed like he took notice to her. The day would go on and on: at school, her mind was on him, wanting to stare at his hazel eyes more or have at least a picture of him. She thought the same thing riding in the car and the same thing when finally entering her home.

At this, the sun had finished setting down, and she turned on a single light that revealed only one thing, a Grand Piano standing in the middle of the room, dominating the small stage that she walked onto. This part of her home had been her comfort, her place to study and relax. She carefully positioned her hands on top of her love and set the bulk of her feet on the two pedals at the end.

Lola silently started her song and then let her feet sink down and hold the golden pedals as the song ringed with passion and traveled throughout the room but still had the light tone of an angel, keeping it from sounding harsh, maintaining its beauty. There were no hiccups, no wrong notes pressed, and the tempo was consistent. Suddenly, however, her mind deviated a little and began to think about an upcoming event.

When she finished playing, this fact that she had not truly faced was staring right at her. She shook her head, not wanting to think about it, so she started again. But this event, this future audience stuck with her mind. Now, there were a few hiccups here and there, a few wrong notes pressed, some accidental changes in the tempo. But when she got far into the song, it left her again, now nothing was holding her back and someone began to listen as it was played perfectly.

The boy stood at Lola's side, smiling with respect and affection as she played with delight, closing her eyes and letting the music guide her fingers to press the right notes to play. As she got to the end of the song, she turned her gaze to him as she continued to play fluently - they both chuckled at each other. Her fingers pressed the last notes as he began to clap.

In that moment, she felt a sense of pride and happiness due to her perfect playing, but the warmth left not too soon after and her skin grew cold as the fact dwelled on her more and more, the one that had troubled her. *3 days*, she kept saying to herself, 3 days left until the recital. It made her sweat a little, a cold type of heat, one that hurt every time it pierced out of her skin.

She knew she had to push herself, but more often than not, she found herself making compromises and coming up with solutions.

She had asked her teacher privately, there would be a list to sign up to play, first come, first serve. Though not signing up would take away basically all of the credit - it was the final grade. She had planned to go last, waiting till the very end, being the final act. *But you should just get it over with*, she thought to herself, *just go first*. It would be over sooner, yes, but then maybe the song would not be remembered as much. Maybe it would be better if he heard it at the end so it stuck with him. But then she would be overwhelmed. Once again, she found herself overthinking and had barely noticed that she had walked all the way to her room and was spinning on top of her bed. It was all so fast - reality itself couldn't keep up with her mind and all her desires, and fears.

Eventually, the contemplation jumbled up her brain so much that she decided to get rid of the headache by laying her head on the pillow and angrily trying to go to sleep. She twisted and turned around constantly, clenching her eyes, but nothing let her rest.

It was dark, she could see the full moon outside her window, but she took no interest in it when she decided on another method to go to bed. Lola reached for her phone and the light barely filled up the dark empty room, her tired red eyes dimmed with pain but were obligated to stare and look as her fingers scrolled from photo to photo, video to video. Her unhealthy plan was to scroll until she got bored and fell asleep, but she laid staring at her phone for longer than expected, watching the fluent hands of others play her instrument.

Lola saw the sheer skill and wanted to see herself on that bench in the video, playing her heart out with thousands of people commenting and watching her. She has tried to do that before. She remembers recording herself countless times and preparing to share it with the world, but her

finger could never tap the button, *Post*. Her face clenched tightly, wanting to escape out of her own body, and that want lingered and lingered the more she stared and scrolled, until after a long overdue time, finally falling asleep.

The sun came to rise up above, its light not shining all the way, like an angel with broken wings. But even with the limited light, as little as it was, Lola still woke up to it. The day went on as usual, she went to school and her mind continued to swirl like a whirlpool uncontrollably as she found herself clenching her face more and more and the day of the recital was coming nearer and nearer. Piano class came about and she stared at the boy as he sat down and went about his usual not playing and talking to friends. As she stared, she tried to build up courage and confidence.

Her hands that were hidden to him while she stared transformed between palms and claws as she pressed chord after chord while not looking down. When she had played perfectly, the lasting audience was no one but herself, because the music only flowed through her headphones. She wished to take them off and play her piano outloud, which would be annoying if not for the fact that a volume wheel was attached to the instrument.

And it would be acceptable to do this, the #1 for playing the piano in the class was that you had to either be at half volume or put in your headphones. But even with this, her hands couldn't leave the last keys that she had dominated. She sat, beginning to shake, and continuing to stare at the boy with mixed immaculate eyes... waiting to hear her.

Lola began to talk herself into and then out of it. After a while, she made a decision. *I'll practice one more time*, she thought to herself, and began to play again, not looking at her piano and feeling free. As she played, nobody looked, no one noticed her. Everyone was off playing their own pieces, oblivious to the miraculous sounds that ringed from her effort. She brushed her



eyes across the room gently as she played, observing everyone, wondering if they would like it, or even care.

Sooner than she realized, Lola's practice was already over, and the boy was still not playing, and everyone was still doing their own thing. She sighed at a crossroads, wishing for her brain to come up with a satisfying answer. Wishing for her hands to stop shaking and just unplug her headphones. Wishing for her neck to stop stretching and breathing so hard as sweat ran down it. But she became stuck with a numbness and her body slumped down to stone and stayed there as her eyes locked on to the boy and could do nothing else.

Lola sat there... and sat there... and sat as the clock ticked, contemplating the imaginary moment, but alas, the bell rang, and everyone took off their headphones and shut off their pianos and went out the door. A small dagger sunk into her skin in that moment, and the boy left the room, not hearing her song that day. Lola slowly got up and left the room with a slow walk and a hard, droopy expression.

The day continued and once again she walked regretting not moving her hands, which were frozen in place, and continued to think of the lasting beauty of the music that she played in front of the boy but was exclusive to her own ears. All of this followed her as she walked around school and eventually made her way home. She bit her nails as she saw herself now almost one day away from performance and began to trick herself into believing that everyone was watching her at her home piano, waiting for the song to play. But constantly, her hands faltered, and the keys started to become wet, and she moved around the bench to escape her own stink and must from her legs sinking into the seat with grease.

Eventually Lola's head fell down and slammed onto the keys in frustration as her fingers were not budging, not leading her to her desired destination. Her arms fell down and she

breathed heavily gasping for air as everyone behind her watched with disapproval and began to leave her, booing as they walked out. A tear fell from her eye as his eyes kept flashing in her mind.

Everyone in the room laughed at her and whispered in each other's ears, looking with cold eyes and avoiding eye contact whenever Lola looked at them. She could only imagine the words being passed on between them, 'I could easily do better than her.' 'She sucks.' 'She will never be good.' Someone, a very special boy with the eye of a green spring leaf of her dreams, walked up to her with prowess and stared at her without breaking eye contact. He smirked and rubbed his dry lips. "You will never be a great piano player."

At a certain point Lola wanted to stop thinking about it all, but her mind always raced back to it like a second nature, it could not escape from it and again she spiraled in her bed as her shoulders were slumped and the bones inside her body were heavy, not helping with the feeling of suffocation coming from her blankets that were stuffed all over her, trying to get her to fall asleep and forget. Wake up early with a fresh mind. But, the black atmosphere remained to be seen by her shaking eyes, exhausted and worn out with red scorn for herself.

She began to yell at herself quietly as she buried her head deep in her pillow. "You idiot, fall asleep." Water became smeared against the squeezed pillow and her hands were holding it tightly and if she jolted her hands away with the same grip she would rip the fabric. Her pleads to fall asleep became bashings of her own character. "You will never be good enough." She said to herself over and over again.

Lola turned after what felt like a long, dramatic scene in a movie and felt the sweat around her neck as she puffed her chest up and down. *One day*, ringed over and over in her mind. *One day*. She clutched her eyes tightly and then sloppily moved her hand around her nightstand,

feeling for her phone without looking. She grabbed it and turned her aching body and layed harshly on its side as she opened her phone and planned to make herself bored as she scrolled and scrolled, the blaring light annoying her eyes.

Naturally, her feed was full of Piano videos and shorts, and at first, her attention span was short, on par with that of a goldfish swimming mindlessly in a fishbowl not knowing where to go. But, as she scrolled and scrolled, she heard songs ringing out lowly in the night, being played by the hands of pianists well in their thirties, that captured her imagination. She did not look at the hands to see their big nature compared to hers, nor the wrinkles and sometimes white hair poking out from them, but rather listened to the sweet sounds that they invented as they moved carelessly and with freedom. She of course knew a ton about how all of this was coming together; melodies, good chords, high octaves to give a lush sound, sometimes the light, sudden glissandos; she knew all of it and even how she could play it. But, it still seemed like magic, a form of talent beyond imagination and a spirit that bringed great feelings of comfort and rest, feelings that she herself could never bring. No matter how hard she tried, her will would never allow for it.

Lola always repulsed sounds and music whenever she thought someone was looking over her shoulder or walked by her. Even when not playing piano, she would sometimes pause the music she was listening to or cover the name of it, and she would watch them and wait until they were far enough so they had no option to judge her taste and what she preferred to listen to.

None of this was helping, she felt the demotivation sinking in, as she began to compare herself to the performers who have spent well over 15-20 years of their lives playing the instrument. She already felt behind, even at one year she already felt inferior, going slow up the road, wasting her time and her life at something hopeless, as if there was a fruit attached to a tree

too high up for her to reach. She cried with a face deviating from a smile forming due to the pleasant music, to a swelling frown curving down on her face.

At some point, Lola fell asleep and she woke up completely blank on the night before, but her pulse rose and her heart beated. It was the last day before her recital. Her mind was already circling on what to do and talking her in and out of playing next to her classmates. Lola brushed her teeth loudly and felt as if the brussels were about to break somehow: her hand could not stop shivering and shaking with aggression. By this point, when she finished barfing out her tooth paste and washing her mouth, Lola slammed her hands on the counter and huffed as she attempted to look at herself in the mirror.

Something was wrong with her, she thought, she knew it. Some points in her life she considered getting help, maybe a therapist or something to help with the fear and pressure she constantly feels. But how would people see her if she talked to a counselor? Who would look as she walked into the office and waited to see her school counselor. What would her mom think when she asks her if she could get a therapist. How disappointed would her mother be that her child was burdened with a disorder, an abnormalness, what shame would come upon her.

As Lola looked and stared into her blue eyes in the mirror, they degraded and became black, dreaded until she could not keep the gaze on herself anymore. "You look ugly," she told herself. "No wonder nobody likes talking to you," she said to herself lowly. At school, yes, nobody really talked to her, but whenever anyone came up to her she acted a little uncomfortable and even rejected if a cute boy had asked to sit next to her, lying and saying she was saving it for a friend. She would watch as one of her crushes would walk and shrug it off, and she would then feel a pain burrow in her chest.

Lola searched for her phone and saw the time, she had woken up late. She cursed at herself, she would not have time to take a shower, so she quickly stripped off her clothes and searched for a new pair to wear and obsessed quickly on which shirt would go with which pair of pants, and when she had made her decision that an outfit had looked good, she would put it on and could not help the urge to frown and take it off again and try something else because the outfit wasn't working in her mind.

Eventually, Lola was on her way to school, and her heart beat a little as she got out of the car and walked in the gates. She felt out of place, or like she was missing something as she looked around, wearing her nice clothes and perfume as usual and having shining blond hair. All of this attraction just to look over her shoulder and make sure to not really interact with anyone. Yet, at the same time, want all their approval and respect.

Time came and went in the lead-up to her piano class, and Lola told herself over and over, "It's happening it's time it's time," in her head. She walked into class and sat down. She followed the teachers' procedures and warm-ups as all students had to at the start of class, and she noticed as usual some of the students looking over at her - they were trying to understand what right notes to play. It always made her blush a little and more self-conscious about herself, and her fingers became a little more rigid.

The teacher reminded everyone that the recital was tomorrow. It was only a little winter recital which was to only be attended by the piano students in their respective periods. So, it was not some huge concert with a huge stage, yet to Lola, it felt like it was going to be one. When the teacher finished, Lola knew the moment had arrived to play at half-volume, which would be good for attracting some attention (though most of the students use headphones that are blasted all the way to 100 as they play nonsense). She also knew that it was better like this because she

would have to perform out loud, so she would have to get used to the noise ringing for what felt like the world to hear and judge.

Her hands stayed on her lap as she stared at the keys. Her eyes laid on the boy again, who was obviously not preparing for the recital and was hiding his phone under the piano. Lola felt a sudden feeling of urgency. Half a feeling of, 'He is not watching, do it now,' and also, 'Get his attention.' And the voice in her head constantly reminding her of the recital tomorrow, constantly telling her that she needs to do it. The dream of fame and glory flashing in her head... it was all her mind could hear, until all of the sudden, like an instinct that became active in her bones, her hands lifted up and turned the volume down to 50 with no headphones attached and then immediately set themselves upon the keys.

Lola's fingers stayed stone cold as her body shivered at the first noise, breathing in fresh air for everyone to hear, though Lola knew it wasn't that loud. She gulped and looked around quickly with a bent head, but a voice assured her to put her eyes back on the keys. This voice was not a calm and inspirational one, but a voice yelling, telling her that she already started the song, so she needs to continue with a tempo and rhythm, people must be watching. By this demand, her fingers winded up and then started spiraling quickly. They roamed around and jumped across the piano like cheetahs sprinting across a glorious field. She did not even think about how she was doing it, but she just needed to let it happen as the judgment lingered over her shoulder, and a single clump of sweat dripped down the side of her cheek. She had already gotten herself into this, so she needed to finish it.

Her heart beated as she felt herself playing with adrenaline, but the sweet sugar of the song and the relaxation mixed with emotional drama it provided was starting to sooth her skin and calm her with a smile that was ultimately held back. Lola did not want to be judged for being

proud of herself or come off as someone who was too obsessed with themselves or thought everything they did was good, when in reality, it was bad. But, even Lola felt relief and success, proudness when she played the last notes, and she stretched her body up with a deep inhale and deep exhale as she looked straight.

Immediately, her face blushed when her eyes met with the eyes of hazel green. He looked away when he saw her, and he talked to his friend about something, and it seemed like whispers to her. Flattery and fear filled her face; she even covered it, looking down until it popped up in shock when someone tapped her shoulder. It was the girl sitting next to her. “Hey,” she said, giving a smile, “What song were you playing?”

Lola felt frozen for a second and soon suppressed a smile. “Oh uhm,” Lola denied any eye contact as she looked around until finally facing her. “Moth To a Flame,” Lola said, smiling and nodding.

The girl was ecstatic and smiled a wide smile, her mouth open and her teeth and tongue visible with glee, “Well I will have to listen to it. I thought it was really good.”

Lola felt her own eyes rest down, and her face became pleasantly warm. She was conscious about this and thinned her body. She looked down almost with embarrassment and said, “Thank you,” not being able to hide her smile. She turned back to her piano, running away from the conversation with a squeal of happiness. But she knew she shouldn’t do this, she should talk to her at least a little more. Lola felt awkward but talked herself into it all within a few seconds. “Hey,” she said, turning back to the girl. “What are you doing for the recital... if you don’t mind sharing?”

“Oh,” said the girl, looking at her paper, “I’m just going to be playing a song we learned in unit one, very easy and simple,” she said with shy laughter.

“Oh,” Lola said, not really knowing how to react but happy with this honesty. “Well, I’m sure you will do great,” Lola said, not really knowing what to say but unable to withhold this pounding feeling within her skin.

“You too,” the girl said with a smile and then turned away after a while as if waiting for the conversation to go on. But, they both turned back to their pianos, and Lola thought about what she had told her. Ya, the girl had said that she was playing a unit song, and there was the choice to play a unit song, a song they had learned in class which was pretty simple for Lola. But, students also had the option to play any song they wanted, as long as it didn’t exceed 4 minutes, and they could even play their own songs. Lola had wanted to play her own song but talked herself out of it. However, all of this was not the main thing Lola had her mind on.

Of course, her mind was focused on the compliment, the true genuine intrigue and awe present on the girl's face when she talked to her. Suddenly, Lola’s head was swirling with a few fantasies about her, the people, and the boy she could not stop staring at by this point. This fueled her to play just a little bit more without any headphones in.

While she played, Lola looked around, wondering if anyone was watching her, yet did not see any heads turn. Maybe they were listening and just hated it, not even looking at it, or simply, it was just hard for any student to make out the sound due to being far away or having their own music blasting in their headphones. Lola felt confusion on how to feel, and her finger slipped on a wrong note, fell into a net of wires and strings that tangled and suffocated it, even when she immediately swiped it away, and tried to continue the song, but now her hands were frozen in disappointment. She looked around and everyone's eyes set on their own pianos paranoid her. The mistake lingered in her mind as her bones shivered whenever they hovered over the instrument, not being able to play anything.



She huffed and puffed, knowing she needed to go on. The recital was tomorrow, she had to get over this. And eventually, yes, she did play something, however she compensated by turning the volume all the way down to thirty and still felt a paranoia lingering over her, until the bell finally rang. She watched as her crush walked away as usual but, before exiting, gave her a quick glance. She did not know how to feel about this.

What did it mean?

What was he saying?

Did he hate her?

Did he not enjoy the music and was annoyed with her?

Or maybe, it was well-intended, and he did find her attractive. But, Lola felt herself coming back to the conclusion she deemed the most likely, the same one she found every time she compared herself to professional piano players and stared at herself in the mirror and freaked out at the sign of a single pimple growing on her face.

School came and went, and when she got home, Lola jumped onto the piano, playing with adrenaline and compassion, the sweet and loveliness of the music as well as the fear and coldness of the audience watching her, judging her when her tempo was off by a millisecond. Her hands faltered and twisted, when this mental audience grew in her mind and pounded over and over again, until finally, Lola clutched her head and slammed the pedals harshly as she smashes the keys up and down and settles down with a running breath, red with flare as her eyes bulge out of her skull with anger, and the audience walks away as she brings herself back to reality.

Her skin tenses up in fear of her mother coming in, but surprisingly, her mother didn't even seem to care, and in a twisted way, this made Lola feel even more lonely, and she put a

hand to her fast as she tried to stop herself from breaking down in front of her audience, who was already leaving. “Tomorrow,” she said in her sobbing, “Tomorrow.”

*Part 1 - end*

## *Part 2 - start*

Later, it was dark. Lola had awoken in a lightless room, with her head uncomfortably slumped on wet and beaten keys and her neck crooked. She immediately felt the aching in her neck and tried to straighten it, but it stayed as an agitation as she began to get a sense of what happened. She fell asleep on the piano, and her mom must have come to turn on the light. Lola, confused and now even more exhausted, took a step off the bench with a bit of unbalance and walked up to her room, holding on to her rails while her mind started to fire up a little bit. As it remembers what led up to this the harsh banging and the yelling tears ring in her psyche. She felt a slow thumper pounding on her head, every hit powerful, making her almost fall to her knees. A headache seemed to have spawned out of nowhere, and now it wouldn't leave and she groaned and moaned in agony as she tried to fall asleep.

She looked at the time. It was 12 in the morning. "Today," she said weakly, and she already started to count the hours and the minutes until then as she felt like she was going to faint. The day had already come so fast, and she felt her breath shivering as if reality had finally hit her and was now choking her, strangling her without mercy. "Today," she said, as a tear rolled down her eyes and she fell asleep due to heavy exhaustion.

Lola woke up by jumping out of her bed, leaving a huge sweat stain from her entire body as she panted, and her chest and breasts felt wet with dirtiness, and she already began to smell the must from her armpits. Her face widened with huge shock as she looked outside the window and saw the rising sun. She cursed to herself as she picked up her phone to check the time, she had not even set an alarm. She had to leave in 15 minutes.

Lola looked off with a deep sigh and sporadic face, as if about to brace herself for her rush to get ready.

She leaped out of bed, the covers flying in the air as she went to the window and saw her messy and chaotic hair. She had no time for a shower so flung off all her clothes and put on heavy amounts of deodorant and perfume, right to her bare body, barely having time for any makeup. She brushed her teeth vigorously as she opened and closed her shelves quickly to find whatever clothes.

Once dressed, she brushed her hair with force, pulling out a few small bristles as the words echoed in her mind. 'Today, today.' She couldn't be late for school, she could not imagine taking a tardy slip and walking into class, the teacher becoming silent and the whole class becoming dead cold as they turned to look at her. She could not even fathom that happening and was fueled more and more to leave and finished her hair and ran to the door but stopped herself as she realized she hadn't even put on a bra.

Her mom began to yell for her as Lola scrambled and then rushed down stairs as she felt a massive clock ticking down in her head, a demand to get to the car, a demand to avoid the awkwardness of being late, and the demand to show up to the recital with confidence. But when she entered the car, she fell into her seat with complete fatigue and fell asleep for a few minutes.

She woke up on her own and, when she got to the school, left the car without saying a word to her mom, who also didn't say a word to her, and this fact troubled her slightly, but it barely helped to distract her from her fear as she ran to her period and looked over her shoulder, embarrassed to be running by the students who walked to class slowly or did not walk at all, not caring to attend first period. She got close to the door and changed her pace immediately from rushing to walking and opened the door with an easy, light pace as she tried to put on a smile. She sat down and the bell rang.

She could barely celebrate with any relief as another, bigger issue was lingering upon her, and it hit her mind more and more. As the day went on, she had planned for herself to just go first, to just get it over with. This prospect was technically the right call because she knows herself, even if she does not want to: she understands her legs will jitter as she waits and becomes more and more anxious, waiting for her turn, if she's near the end. Lola would naturally compare herself to everyone before her and would feel the pressure of having to live up to them. The only downside of going first was that her song might not have a lasting presence on the audience, and of course, a much better song could come in later. By going last, she could at least make sure to absolutely put her all into playing, if someone had performed greatly before her.

All this overthinking came to an amalgamation when it was time for the recital, and the teacher took the class to a bigger room with one singular, huge grand piano full of quality. The teacher walked by the white board and commanded everyone to go up and write their name, first to write, first to go, and going down last to write, last to go.

Lola was frozen once the teacher left the board, and it was up for everyone to go, most of the students hesitated but, after a while, started to slowly walk up, with only a few marching with either happiness and excitement or anger and annoyance, being like Lola, wanting to get it over with. There were 35 kids, but Lola knew at least 8 had decided to not do the recital, missing out on 70% of the final grade. Kids could choose to just perform in front of the teacher alone privately or record a video of their recital, but all the credit would be lost if the player couldn't face the council. The performance was the whole part of piano class, even if you messed up you would still probably get 90% for performing and practicing.

Lola could be like those kids, she could go to the teacher now and plead, changing her mind. But instead in a quick moment of decisions that would change her future to come, she

looked around and then quickly went up to board and put down her name. She was the eighth player to go. She sat down as she shivered.

She watched the songs go on and on and a fear grew and grew outside of her body, swirling around her and consuming her, increasing as each performer had finished, and not without their mistakes. It did not really ease her or make her feel better that most of the performers were making a lot of mistakes. Of course, she could see embarrassment on their faces, but they continued on nonetheless and bowed with awkwardness, proud they made it through.

But, Lola examined the audience, the ones clapping. It was hard for her to tell if the people were just clapping because they knew it was a good gesture and the right thing to do, or if they were genuinely wowed with how it went. However, she could not be that one performer, that performer who screwed up, the one who would be remembered as the worst. The 6th performer came up, and it was the boy with hazel eyes, and she gulped in anticipation to hear his work. She even began to look away from him, just in case he looked at her while he was playing. And, suddenly, a new fear presented itself. What if he was a great player, what would that mean for her when she came, how much humor when she made her screwups? She braced herself as his hands set themselves on the piano.

He was playing a unit song, it was clear even though he did not announce the name of the song, which each student had the option of doing before playing. It was obvious to her: he was playing Mary Had A Little Lamb, playing it once in a lower octave, again in a higher one. He had messed up and said the S word and laughed genuinely, while clamping his lips and then just starting over again. When he finished, the room clapped, and there was some shame on his face, but he looked around nodding his head with happiness. Lola watched his face move around and

prepared for his eyes to go to hers, she would be ready to turn away. His gaze came closer to her, and she turned, then looked back. They had caught one another staring at each other for a moment, and her heart beat.

She collected herself when he went to go sit back down. One last performer. And then it would be her turn. But, there were some side conversations spiraling and flying up across the room, and Lola looked around in confusion. The teacher came out after a while and said, "Okay, Lola, it's your turn." The teacher was already walking up to Lola, already knowing what she was going to ask as her face went pale, and her body filled with weight.

"What," she said in disbelief, barely being able to speak as she gulped excessively.  
"Why?"

The teacher bent down closely to her, and Lola felt like something scary was about to be said. The teacher said lowly, "Josh does not want to perform, so you're going to go."

Lola shaked as the teacher bent away and let her be, waiting for her to go up to the bench. Josh was the 7th performer but now had chickened out, ran away when it suddenly became real. The fear must have settled in, and Lola understood why the teacher didn't want to say it outloud in due to respect for the student.

But now, Lola was clasping her knees tightly; they shook as she looked around and all the other students maintained their own, separate conversations, her mind made them all about her. Lola looked at the teacher, who gave a look that said: 'Are you going to go?' She stared at the boy with hazel eyes. It seemed he had turned away, right when her gaze went to him... she felt pressure and fear begin to amalgamate.

Lola got out of her chair and felt like she was about to throw up from standing as she looked around her. A few eyes were now lifting up at her, including the hazel eyes. She felt sick

to her stomach and had to walk away, down to the piano, to get away from them all, but still, they would all be staring at her.

She got over to the bench as the scene started up in her mind. She played the piano easily and simply, it all went by fast and quickly, and the students clapped and cheered as she bowed and sat back down, seeing the smile of the boy with hazel eyes. And that would be all.

But, she brought herself back to reality as she constantly moved her bench around and put her fingers up to the piano; they shivered as if the keys were freezing cold, and she tried to start, but either her fingers would not move or flicker and hit the wrong note; she tried to play it off as her just testing the noise or testing the position on her seat. But once all the noise faltered, she turned quickly for a second to see the whole class. All sitting on chairs, rows of them going up, all looking down at her, waiting for the song to start.

She turned to the piano slowly and looked down at it in confusion, as if it was alien and she had never seen it before. She gulped and straightened up her body, clearing her throat and majestically moving her fingers on the piano to begin to play.

As Lola's fingers began to move, she thought of the notes ahead, which she never did, her hands always played fluently without having to remember the next notes, but now, her mind was becoming confused, and as she was about to press the next key, she could not remember where to press, staring at the piano. In a fit of bad luck, Lola hit the wrong note, and her feet lifted from the pedal in an instant, and her fingers flickered off the piano as if it electrocuted her, and she stared down on it in horror of what had just happened. She turned awkwardly to the teacher and the still and silent students watching coldly. "Uh..." she said, trying to speak, "Um...". Lola pointed to the piano, not being able to communicate, but the teacher was able to understand.



“You can restart, it’s okay,” the teacher said calmly and with complete honesty - Lola could not deny that, even if she wanted to - “Or start again wherever you want, it’s okay.”

Lola then felt mad at the teacher and turned away in neglect of her words - words everyone heard - as they brought more attention to the situation. The thought of attention plagued Lola’s mind as she casually tried to start again, yet her finger slipped a few seconds into the song, trying to play it off and continue on, hoping no one had heard it. The mistake was so low nobody probably noticed, but the wrong note yelled at Lola, shouting at her, asking what is wrong with her, and eventually her hands for some reason began to slow down as if she was lost.

Lola sat there frozen, blinking at the piano like a dumb person, as if she did not know what she was even doing, and soon, she didn’t because her fingers could not remember where to go next. She gulped and flashed her eyes to the audience as she felt her heart jumping around, and her hands swelling, becoming rigid and tight. Her blood was pumping through her veins that seemingly popped straight out of her skin, and she leaned down and tried to get a look at the boy with hazel eyes. Tried to see his judgment. Lola could not see but felt whispers, felt low laughs, felt confusion and frowns from their faces.

Lola’s hands continued on yet got confused at their slow nature, and she abruptly stopped and started again. Her fingers were tight and gasping for air as she harshly and scarcefully pressed the right note, as if making one mistake would give her a heart-attack. The tempo now was slow but at least perfect and there was no deviation but now the tempo was becoming shaken up in her head. As she felt the invisible rhythm play in her mind the rhythm of her heart was echoing throughout her body and beating inside her eardrums. It was spiraling out of control and almost made her hands slip, which made her heart skip a beat. She choked and grunted lowly as she pressed the right note and finished the first minute of four entire minutes of

the song, almost the first of three parts of the song, and stopped there. She let her hands go free and they released their crumpled and tightened skin and were allowed out of their numbness. But Lola herself was not as she turned to the crowd slowly, twitching her eyes and remaining cold as the students began to clap a bit weakly. It was low and quick, and some of the hands were not straight up but lazily flying around in the air.

“Good job,” the Teacher said, marking something in her grade book and calling for the next student. Moving on, just like that. As if the teacher just wanted to remove the sight from her mind, or simply just make sure every student got to play.

Lola got up from the bench quickly and didn't even bow, she stared at the hazel-eyed boy who was frowning a little, and looked away from her. The attempt of trying to decipher his feelings on the performance and the whole audience was driving her mad. But she knew it in her head.

It sucked. It was trash, complete garbage. She was terrible and messed up completely and gave up. As this realization banged her head and she said to herself over and over again that that was it, there was no turning back, she felt an upset in her stomach and a tenseness rising. She walked up to the teacher and said almost in a whisper: “I have to go outside, I need some fresh air,” and covered her stomach with both her hands as her cheeks were rising up a little. She was keeping herself from sounding like she was going to gage. She turned almost before the teacher had said it was okay and she tip-toed and sped walk out the room as everyone's eyes were on the back of her head, watching her leave the room.

Lola slammed the door open hard and took a huge intake of air and felt the sun glare on her body. She stood there catching herself as the students began to talk to her. ‘That was terrible,’ they said with laughter. ‘You suck,’ ‘You will never be a great player.’ She grabbed her stomach

and bent down a little, trying to contain the pressure in her stomach, but a single voice of a bully, a familiar voice ringed in her head and stuck with her the most, doing the most damage. 'You failed. All that preparation and practice was for nothing. You're worthless.'

Lola released a moan of pain, a tremble from her mouth and rushed to the restroom right next door and opened the door as she rushed over to the toilet, not even closing the stall as the judgment and punishment of her failure was erupting from her body. Her muscles tensed up and pushed hardly and tightly as she bent down, squeezing the sides of the toilet and throwing up violently.

She coughed and fell on the floor, not wanting to look at it. Her mouth was sore and her neck felt red and dark, she could not gulp as a hard sickness and soreness would sting her mouth and drop down inside her body. It had felt like so much had gone out of her she would not be surprised if the whole toilet was full, even about to leak.

Her body felt removed and deprived of all of its life, all of its water and power that it once had. All of its passion. She sat with stillness as a single tear fell from her eye as she breathed heavily. She could not even break down, she just sat there thinking over what had happened before as her body desperately tried to regain power.

Time moved on and the terrible smell began to fill the entire room and she breathed it in miserably, knowing she could change that easily and flush the toilet. She really needed to get off the floor as she felt the germs start to stick to her clothes, but she sat there with no motivation to get up. She closed her eyes and sat there, blank, thinking about nothing, letting time pass on as she tried to feel and do something.

Finally she took out her phone and looked at the time, class would end in ten minutes. She wanted to stay here, she did not want to go back in. She wished for everyone to forget about

her and not have to see her walk in and remember that she was the girl who had horribly screwed up. She watched time go up, get closer and closer to finishing the period.

She tried to bring herself to cry, tried to feel pain as the hazel-eyed boy came into her view. He showed up again and again and stayed there staring at her with smiles and frowns. Images and flashbacks of her sitting down, playing with pleasure and complete fury were visible. All the practice, all the hard work just for this. And now she is here, sitting down, after she tumbled and messed up like a complete idiot.

She was expecting a sadness to fill up inside her, to fill her. But it was another feeling that clashed with this sadness that made her close her fist as the returning voices and mockery filled her eyes. The cold eyes of judgment. She clutched her mouth tightly and grumbled as it increased and increased. She had done all of this work just for them to laugh at her, she had suffered and waited just so she could fail. She slapped herself and did not understand how or why, or entirely what led to her doing it, but she sprang to her feet with a new rush of power. She looked at her phone. 5 minutes.

With new adrenaline she stomped out of the restroom with a cynical expression she tried to hide as she entered the room again. The last performer had just finished and she saw the teacher about to get up and thank the class. Lola marched over to the teacher as she looked up at all the students talking to each other, barely noticing her. She went to the teacher and said simply: "Would it be okay if I go again, there's 5 minutes we have enough time."

The teacher was able to see the aggression in her voice and pondered for a second it was toward her but then realized that it wasn't. The teacher smiled with a certain sorrow, "Yes," the teacher said. "Go on." Lola felt a strange feeling come upon her, as if she did not expect the teacher to let her go.

But Lola looked at the boy with Hazel eyes. He was looking at her. Their eyes stayed on one another, and she could not let go of them. She needed them, she needed that love, that respect. She turned around and walked over to the bench. “Okay class, quite down,” The teacher said, ready to announce that Lola would be going.

But the teacher twisted around quickly and the room fell down in silence as Lola began playing with speed and delicacy. Suddenly the room was filled with another noise, another conversation. The keys were pressed hard with complete dread and as she played and deviated a few times to a lower press the feeling of sorrow was felt. The music began to pick up a little as her eyes were dead set on the piano.

She felt the drama and the adreanaline rush in her body as she let her mind fall and degrade in thought, letting her mind forget about everything and have her hands play being slaves to what they already know what to do. As she starred with wide red eyes the music lifted up greatly and a harsh dark magic filled the room as everything felt blue and purple with color. Almost as if that was the light emanating on her and the piano alone as everyone watched with mouths hanging open and students looking at each other, laughing not being able to believe what they hear and see, what they feel from her playing.

The music calms down again and she continues on as she closes her eyes and twists her head around. Her blond hair flies immaculately, and the hazel eyed boy becomes infatuated with her beauty, her eyes completely captured in the music, and her hair moving greatly. Suddenly they flash open again as the music rises again with a tension and her heart pounds as the song is now reaching its climax. Lola hits the final dramatic note with complete sorrow and passion as the crowd and audience stay completely silent, their faces in awe. The music winds down a little,

it becomes softer and softer, but dimmer and dimmer as the music trails off and ends with sorrow.

Her mouth opens lowly at the sound of the last scale being played. Her eyes were closed and her head was tilted downwards. Everything felt completely empty and only the colors of the music were felt as they trailed off into space, falling into nothingness. She opened her eyes when she heard another noise.

It had taken a while but a single person clapping rang out through the room. Suddenly a burst of claps filled her ears and she turned as she saw a couple of smiles and woahed faces. But all the faces were ones of confusion, it was due to the shock and awe they felt of the moment. But Lola was able to tell herself as she felt reality again, that maybe they did not like it. Maybe they were clapping along and just confused and annoyed she started playing.

She looked at the hazel-eyed boy whose face was confused, but clapped as he stared at her with obsession. Her head felt heavy, not knowing if him, and all of this, was a reward, or nobody cared, and nobody liked it. She walked back to her seat sluggishly and put her head down and she blocked out the noise of the other students, who were talking about what they just heard with glee. One student even was about to come up and ask the name but the bell rang and everyone rushed to lunch. Lola sighed and thought over the moment as she told herself that if she wanted an answer to her question, she would choose the conclusion that was the most likely.

Once that was found in her head, despite all the signs pointing to being otherwise, she groaned and allowed herself to cry a little bit. She left the room, disappointed in herself, having failed completely in her mind.

***Part 2 - end***

### *Part 3 - start*

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It had been a few weeks after the sign-up for the piano competition which was for anyone who wanted to play. Although it would be played in a big outside stage it was all purely for fun and most kids were joining just to play meme songs and mess around. It was a dollar to get in and as Lola walked into what felt like a stadium and observed that there were about 50 people who were going to be watching, 30 performing as seen on a small list attached to a wall.

Lola made sure to come about a few minutes before the event started, she just wanted to hear the music, and besides, she felt she had nothing better to do. The air was cold and she saw her breath fly off into the dark night as she walked over to the bleachers and her back immediately ached when it realized she would not be able to rest back on a nice normal chair. She sighed and sunk her hand inside her black sleeves and sat down on the cold steel bench. She put a hand to her face and looked around her, feeling naked in the cold, searching to see if anyone was there, if anyone familiar was looking at her.

There were a few from the piano class but none of them paid any attention to her, there were a reasonable number of parents and a reasonable amount of kids sitting next to each other taking up an entire row, clumping together and bending down to look at their phones and talk to each other.

Lola sniffled and looked away, not really thinking about anything, having her mind blank, even when she heard someone in the background talking. But it got closer and closer and suddenly her mind was alerted when the voice was felt next to her. "Hey," the voice said, and she turned and looked up to the boy standing above her.

He wore a huge black jacket and presented a big smile as he looked down at her with his brown, green, immaculate hazel eyes. Her face froze and she almost slapped herself so she could wake up in her bed or stop hallucinating. But as she blinked her eyes obsessively he was not getting out of the picture. “H–Hey,” she said, not knowing how to present her face towards him. She turned her face but kept turning back to look all over him whilst not wanting to get rid of the impression she was not interested in talking with him, however if there was any doubt in his mind all he had to do was look at her face rising with red.

“You were in the piano class last year?” He said in the style of a question that he basically already knew the answer of.

Lola stinged with coldness that sizzled. She was remembered, but what about her did he remember? She thought back to the recital performance. Maybe she did linger in his mind after all that time, and maybe she lingered in the minds of everyone. Maybe they wondered where she went after the recital. Why she didn’t come back to piano class for the second semester. Lola nodded her head in response to the question. “Yes, I was.”

They stayed in their positions for a moment, both wanting to talk to one another but not knowing how to. She needed to seize the moment, keep him there, but the cold air was entering inside her mouth that opened to speak and then froze any sentences that would release. Finally he said something awkwardly: “May I sit next to you?”

Lola released her face with flatness and looked up at his eyes, a white light inside them. A smile rose with reluctance but could not be helped. “Um ya sure, of course,” Lola said, scooting over and putting a hand down on the bench. He came over and sat down next to her rather closely. She couldn’t believe that it was happening, that this boy was beside her. The atmosphere started to feel artificial like it was all a dream. He spoke suddenly, “I’m sorry,” he



said slowly and turned to her. “But, I don’t know your name, I’m Devland,” he put his hand out toward her.

She blushed and put her hand to his, clasping it gently, feeling the strange warmth of his skin. “Lola,” she said as her hand stayed wrapped around his for a second, and then released when she became aware of time.

He smirked, “That’s a name I don’t hear often.”

She was confused on how to decipher his tone. “Oh, is that a bad thing?”

He instantly reassured her: “No no it’s not I actually think it makes you more unique, I basically like the name is what i’m saying I think its nice.” He had spoken fast making sure she got the point and he felt a little embarrassed and apologized as Lola felt flattered, “I’m sorry.”

“Oh no no,” she said, laughing, “It’s okay. I like your name too, never heard it either.”

They both smiled to themselves and their faces felt wet from the air and they darted their eyes over as their hearts were stumbling a little. “So,” he said. “You’re not going to join the competition?”

Her smile flattened and became straight, shaking her head. “No, I’m not playing.”

“Oh,” he said, tilting his head. “Why not?”

A scene began to play of her hands flopping around with sweat and flicking off the piano in fear at her own mistakes as the audience stared at her with coldness. She shook her head, barely being able to say anything. “I…” she scoffed, and did not know how to say it. She hadn’t even really talked to anyone before, not like this. Was it normal for people to suppress their feelings, or was it natural to be a little honest. “I just don’t think I did that good,” she said slowly, looking off, not wanting to see his face suddenly.

But Devland’s face dropped with a remaining smile. “What do you mean?” He said. At

first she couldn't tell if he was mocking her or just lying to make her feel better, but she had to come to terms with herself that it was genuine. "Are you talking about the first time you played?" She looked at him uncomfortably and his face reflected a feeling of not knowing if he entered uncharted territory. "If so then you shouldn't worry because honestly me and my friends, not to sound rude really we weren't but we felt sort of bad for you. Not because you sucked but because you were great I would always watch you playing a lot and I heard you play the day before the recital and remember it being good."

When he finished getting out his feelings quickly he had realized she had shared feelings that could be critiqued and analyzed to reveal a hidden confession, a hidden feeling toward her. At this point Lola's face was rising with red and it started to fall down her neck a little as her face felt stuck and encapsulated in his words and what he had to say. It was just so interesting to hear someone, and to have some of her fears be confirmed but denied at the same time. Some dreams suddenly fulfilled. Like somehow the world was so small to bring them together at this moment. He continued: "And then when you played I could tell you were scared and then I played and I was scared too I messed up a lot and I was playing a song from unit one," he said laughing to get rid of his embarrassment, "so i'm not that good. But you came back and the way you played was just," he lifted his head up to the dark sky to try and remember the feeling that hit his heart. "It was just beautiful, I felt transported to another world that I could imagine so vividly..."

His voice fell off and he looked back at her and both of them had nothing to say. Lola had no way to find what to say. How to react. Her neck was choking with both a rumble of butterflies bursting from her heart and also stress and upsetsion. Her hands began to shake as she felt time ticking on and he did not know how to react or if he had said something to upset her. Then she

finally let something out, asked something she had always wondered even though she thought was concluded in her mind.

“Did I suck?”

“What?” He said in confusion, understandably as he had just explained what he thought of her performance.

“How did everyone think of it, that I sucked when I first played and then when I came back it was just weird and strange?”

She thought there would be a lingering silence but he looked up and pretty quickly answered: “I honestly thought that you were great and my friends agreed and to be honest they were completely freaked out by it... but in a good way you know?”

She nodded her head hesitantly as she grasped the concept. He continued, “I think everyone was surprised and blown away... yes yes,” he said, suddenly remembering, though he was probably just playing it off this way and hadn’t said it yet due to not knowing how to say it. “Myself and some others would talk about you and say, ‘Oh, remember that girl who played at the recital, she was great, where is she now,’ that kind of stuff you know?”

She nodded her head and looked down. Everything around her felt like it was releasing away from her, like some stress was releasing. She finally allowed herself to smile in some revelation as she still felt some pressure, some reminder of the pain that day, but the overwhelming feelings of gladness and the boy of her dreams being in front of her face was overpowering any tenseness felt in her chest. “Thank you,” she said, not even responding to his question. But he didn’t mind and he smiled cheerfully.

“Of course, I mean you deserve it.” The words stuck with her. “So how are you doing?” He said suddenly.

She looked up. She had never asked herself that question, not one day in the past two years at least could she remember taking a moment to ask if she was okay. Because it was always clear to her that she never felt good. She took a deep breath and looked off into the stadium as she saw the piano sitting there in the field of grass. "I'm good," she said. "I'm good."

Devland smiled. "I'm glad."

Time moved on and they both felt cozy. Lola had a few times tried to subtly scoot next to him just a little bit closer, but he had always noticed and his heart deepened with warmth and it was shown on her face and she would react the same. The thought of none of this being real came back to her over and over, but she had to get used to that. Maybe something like this can happen. Maybe a friendship, a relationship and interaction with someone else could be possible. She almost felt herself lying under her covers and falling asleep, leaning on his shoulder, but she made sure to stop herself.

Lola would feel some dismay however, some sorrowness that was always related to her when the performer played. Whether it was Claire De Lune, Megalovania, or just using stick fingers to play Still D.R.E., she felt her heart trying to jump out of her skin. Her bones trying to take full control of her body and muscles, and go to the stage and play her heart out. But she couldn't, there was no way, in front of all these people. Even after what Devland told her, she wasn't able to.

And Devland did bring it up a few times though he had realized he was probably beating a dead horse, and she would always shake her head with shyness whenever he said that she should have gone up. But their interaction was mostly great and heartwarming for the both of them and later on they got hot chocolate to warm their skins and sat down moving their bodies

around as they talked about their interests and hobbies and Devland felt incredibly inferior to her when it came to piano, yet fascinating by how much she knew.

Time went on and they were getting to the last 8 players. Suddenly a student came up, wearing a tag so Lola was able to assume that he must have been a part of some faculty or team of some sort. He waved his hand to garner everyone's attention. "Would anyone like to play, we have room for two more to sign up, would anyone like to play?" Lola looked at Devland with confusion. Devland took the courage to bend down to the student and ask why the forms for sign up had been opened again.

"Two members aren't showing up and they told us they were sick or something, did you want to join?"

Devland lifted up and stared at Lola. Lola leaned back as if trying to deny what he was thinking and she shook her head almost instinctively. Devland sighed and turned back to the student. "Maybe, where would we go to sign up?" The student pointed to the booth and continued walking along informing people.

"Cmon, you have to sign up," he said to Lola.

But she was shaking her head and she felt pressured, scared of what her body might do. That her legs might rush to the booth and then immediately regret even functioning in the first place right when she signed up. Devland felt scared, not wanting to push her too much and lead to a reaction either filled with outrage or sorrow. He nudged her a little and she blurted, opening her eyes that were a bit wet. She shook her head a little, "No."

She looked off as she saw herself sitting in the dark. Sitting down on the ground after throwing up and letting it all out, reflecting over her failures. Having to leave and not face the shame of her screw up. That could not happen again. She almost felt obligated to tell him. But

they went back and forth a little until he said: “Well if you're not going to do it then I might just sign you up myself because I really think you need to do it.”

Suddenly Lola felt scared and turned to him, grabbing his shoulder and shaking her head, “No no no,” she said, running out of breath, “Don’t.”

Devland felt a little scared and leaned back as he looked at her hand on his body. “I don’t even know your last name,” he said with a low scoff.

Lola bent back and covered her face, feeling some stupidity. She looked at him and felt as if she owed him her name. It was a confusing urge to give it to him, or at least what felt confusing in her mind. But she knew in the back of her head that by giving him her last name he had the slight possibility of signing her up. Maybe it would ease her a little bit if she did not have to get entwined with all of this herself. She would not have to entirely blame herself.

“It’s Waters,” she said, looking off. “But just don’t, okay, I just can’t join.”

“But why not?”

“Because I just can’t,” she said, raising her voice a little. Devland pulled his face back and the cheer in him had fallen down inside his body. She sighed and realized her harsh tone and now felt her eyes about to tear up. “I’m sorry, I’m so sorry.” She looked off, holding the coldness in and tightening her eyes. Suddenly she just could not hold it in any more. “I just... I just felt so terrible and stupid after that day, and I can’t play again, I just can’t.”

Devland realized the severity of this, and the consequences to her emotional health if she did try again and failed. He knew it would be a gamble signing her up. But he felt an urge to lift her up, and an honesty telling him what to say when she saw sorrow filling her face. Devland extended his arms and set them on her shoulders, bringing her gaze, her dark blue eyes glittering with white twinkling stars. “If you don’t do this now, you won’t leave your fear. It will stay with

you and this cycle will only repeat itself.” His voice began to break as her eyes shook and shattered silently. She stared into his hazel eyes, “Please, I believe in you... and you need to do this for yourself, play.”

Those words echoed in her mind. ‘Play...’ They got bigger and bigger with inspiration whilst daunting her. ‘Play.’ Lola felt his hands fall off her shoulders and a small tear fell as it felt more silent. ‘Play.’

...

“Are you okay,” he said, scared if he had hurt her.

She sighed deeply and looked at her love, motivating her to fulfill her passion. “Yes... I’m fine. Thank you. But I can’t.” Devland fell back and turned his position, sitting with a gaze seeing straight ahead.

She crumpled her mouth and felt terrible immediately. They had barely talked and the following music being played seemed to be draining when it entered her ears. Her body felt cold and numb, and her ears started to ring and the world vibrated with whiteness, and the world became filled with it as she closed her eyes and tried to keep herself from crying. Trying to get her mind off of her decision that now plagued her and judged her. She felt her entire body slumped down, her shoulders worn out, her body touching her knees, her head beginning to fall as the color from her golden hair began to lose its color. She felt the air as the words repeated in her mind, and as the announcer had stated the last performer would be playing. However saying at the end there was still a chance someone could clutch in and perform.

But Lola stayed there, as time ticked on and on, slowly. And the word ringed lightly in her head over and over. All the moments before swirled around her calmly, like a dark reminder of her past, but one that was not so harsh anymore. One that was not banging on her head, but

one that she would sit with. One that Lola could look back on, and do something else with it. Instead of running away from the memory as it chased her around and the fear consumed it, she could do something else. 'Play,' fell on her mind soothingly. She could walk up to the moments, the feelings of dread and disappointment, and not keep them hidden anymore. 'Play,' said a voice again, as soft as a falling feather. She could just relax her body, release the tension and unfold herself, and just release it slowly. She could just, play.

Lola lifted her body up slowly as the remembrance of everyone behind her filled her mind, but she blocked it out as she eased her breath slowly. She did not let their eyes stare at her, she did not let them grow cold and follow her wherever she went. She allowed them to not exist as she closed her eyes and set her hands on her knees, the muscles in her body becoming thinner and less rigid, less clumped and piled up on one another. They were allowed to be their own, and breathe. Her chest fell down with softness and she turned over to Devland who had noticed this.

His eyes sparked up as her face was low and wet, dimmed a little resting squint. Her blue eyes like the night sky dripped falling white stars full of wishes and dreams and stared into him as she said with a silent voice, "Can you walk with me?"

Devland stared at her in shock, a sadness, and felt a pain at the sight in front of his eyes, but he looked down and took a deep breath, realizing what she was saying and what he had to do. He nodded and lifted out of the seat. He opened his hand and she took it as she did not cover her face. She walked as she did not turn to the people that may be watching. She let the tears fall at a slow pace, having their time on her skin and she walked by him closely and kept her hand tight around his, making sure it would never leave. That this friend would never leave.

They walked and walked, not saying anything to one another as their hearts beated at a fast rate, but a soft pedal was holding down the beat, making it lighter and softer. The booth to



sign up was getting closer and closer. A flash in her mind of the moments before, the moments of failure, came in. Suddenly a low voice telling her to turn back, to stop, reminding her of her failure. The voices yelling at her, degrading her. 'It won't work out.' 'Your a failure, a disappointment.'

But she kept walking, while letting those feelings hit her and pass through her. The voices fly though her ear and leave out the other, her brain not obsessing over them. She almost made it to the booth and her face clutched and swelled with red as she felt next to herself from long ago, walking up to the piano in the recital and sitting down at the piano and bracing herself to play, then ultimately failing.

Lola's speed slowed down a bit as she clutched her mouth and cold honesty started to leave her a bit faster as she bent down, a strange relieving feeling of being able to cry. She saw herself coming back from the restroom playing again, rushing with adrenaline and her pain started to show itself from her covered voice. Her lament.

Devland took his other arm and clutched her tightly. They finally made their way to the stand. "I will do it," Devland said.

He tried to release his hands off her as he looked at her with love and closeness. But she stopped him by tugging his hand. She shook her head as she looked over at the piano sitting in the green field, white tall lights illuminating it and the night as the player finished their song and got off the piano. "No," she said, "I will do it myself."

Lola rubbed her eyes and walked up to the booth, not paying any attention to how the person running it would feel. She put in her name slowly. But it was written down in full.

*Lola Waters.*

The person running the booth quickly took the sheet of paper and ran over to a phone. A sensation, indescribable, ran down Lola as she clutched the table. She heard the footsteps of Devland walking behind her slowly. “Are you okay,” he asked silently.

She turned around at him and her breath spurted out sorrow, her clutching face and eyes full of red as she was able to nod and come to terms, finally. “Yes,” she said. She walked over to him slowly and buried her face inside his chest. She did not care that they had only started talking today, nor if anyone was watching. Her arms wrapped around him and held him closely to her heart, and he did the same as he felt his eyes begin to leak and express. “Thank you,” she said silently, then uttered something nearly inaudible. But he could hear what it was, and he said the same thing to her.

The speaker ringed and the announcer began to speak with surprise but enthusiasm at the news that was just received. She lifted her head off his jacket, leaving marks of herself, her tears on his jacket, her impact on another person. And his impact on her. Devland smiled at her, and without exchanging words they smiled at each other, and in slow time she turned around and began to walk over into the field.

Lola felt her shoes press down on the grass softly and the lights hit her, shining and only focusing on her. She felt so small in this big field, but it also seemed like it belonged to her, like the whole world suddenly did, and the piano she was getting closer to felt like home. She finally made her way and stood next to it, staring at its elegant nature.

She turned to the audience, feeling the white light hit her face and reveal herself to everyone. There were rows and rows of people, sitting up above her, waiting to watch, waiting to hear...

Lola turned back to the piano and with her face still healing from the redness and her eyes still calming down she puffed her cheeks as she sat down. Her feet lightly set themselves up on the pedals and her hands moved to the white keys, her fingers resting with diligence. Easy diligence.

Lola closed her eyes, took in a deep breath, and played.

***Part 3 - end***