

The Pianist

Lizzy Lee (2013)

The campus lounge is a little more crowded than normal, but it doesn't bother me. With my headphones in and the volume on my phone set to max, I can tune out the world as I work. I head in and take my usual seat in the corner on a worn leather sofa, pull out my laptop and look around the room as it boots up.

Someone's actually at the baby grand. This is a rare occasion; what a shame I'm not even listening. Few people actually are, though. It makes me wonder how good this guy is. He doesn't even look like he belongs at the piano with his slacks and sneakers. Don't pianists usually wear suits and ties, or at least sweater vests and loafers? I'm curious about his playing, but I really can't be bothered to take out my headphones. That new age piano shit isn't exactly my cup of tea.

I didn't come here to discover local artists, either, I remember as I look down at my computer. A five page paper about the history of the Internet won't write itself. I open Word and stare at the blinking cursor, but feeling overwhelmed already, I people-watch again. Nothing exciting enough to distract me is going on, though. Everyone's just sitting, and it doesn't look like anyone is talking. Some stare off into space, while others watch the piano. It intrigues me, but I still don't care enough to listen. The rock music playing in my ears is so hard to break away from.

The lack of excitement in the lounge doesn't help me procrastinate. Time for some brief research, then. The topic is history of the Internet, and though I'm more of a tomboy and less of a nerd, I actually know a fairly decent amount of information. That makes bullshitting this paper, with as little research possible, a bit easier.

After about thirty minutes, I again feel the need to distract myself. I look up, and almost can't believe that still no one is moving. I don't think anyone has even moved since the last time I looked up. I wonder if the guy notices he's practically entranced everyone, since his eyes are closed and he seems totally into whatever he's playing.

Deciding I should probably listen for at least a moment, I take out one of the earbuds blasting music into my ears. Almost instantly, my head is filled with a melody I've never heard. It's so... delicate and intricate that it's hard to believe it's coming from the piano.

After several minutes, a new song on my phone begins, and the sudden punch of the drum almost startles me. I then realize I've been almost as mesmerized as the others. My eyes sting, and I blink a few times. My phone is at full volume, and this piano isn't anywhere close to being as loud as that. Yet somehow, this melody has commanded my entire attention and filled my head. I put the earbud back in, and the melody fades from my mind. It leaves a headache in its place.

I look around at all the non-blinking bodies around me, and notice I'm the only one with headphones in. Knowing that this could backfire and leave me looking completely insane, I poke the person sitting at the table closest to me. No reaction. I get up and wave my hand in front of her face. Still nothing. The pianist doesn't even notice me moving as he continues to plunk away.

I walk up to him next. No one so much as blinks as I move. I stand beside him for a moment, watching him play. The visual isn't as mesmerizing as the melody, but from the standpoint of someone who couldn't even play *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star*, his movements seem impressive. I almost don't want to disturb his playing, but if he stops, maybe everyone will go back to normal. Though I enjoy a good horror-mystery, I realize living in one isn't as fun or exciting as I imagined.

I clear my throat and cross my arms, waiting for something. "Um, hello?" I say after he doesn't react. He still doesn't break from his playing. I poke his arm, but he doesn't budge, as if he's a statue. After watching his hands for another minute, I try to slam my palm down onto them, forcing them to stop. He's like a mechanical statue, moving through the motions as if they were programmed. Trying another tactic, I try pressing a random key on the far right side of the piano, and to my surprise, the key strikes a chord and plays a note. I start banging frantically on the keys, but to no avail.

Not only is this guy and his damn music creeping me out, he's starting to piss me off, too. "What the fuck are you doing?" I scream at him as I try to kick him. As my foot comes into contact with his arm, he doesn't move, but instead, I feel it reverberate through my foot and leg as if I just slammed down onto concrete.

Really irritated now, I slam my fist onto the side of the piano as I hold my knee. Now my fist aches a little as well, but I realized the piano budged a little. Whatever is going on with the guy, it's not affecting the instrument. Maybe if I destroy it, the trance will stop.

I sit on the edge of the small platform that raises the piano from the main floor of the lounge, and watch the guy play. I realize, as much as I'm not the artsy-type, that music like this is a pure work of art. As much as it's negatively affecting everyone here, I almost can't bring myself to destroy the piano.

Watching his fingers move across the keys almost makes me want to listen again. I can't explain why, since it's not my favorite genre. I'd rather keep listening to the guitars, drums, and loud voices playing into my head. But something in me makes me bring my hands to my ears. My hands shake for a moment as I try to stop myself. Taking out not just one earbud, but both, will allow that melody to take over my mind again. Maybe it wasn't the music after all, though. I'll just take the headphones out for a quick second, to make sure it was definitely the music. Almost immediately, I'm glad I did, as the beautiful sound of the piano fills my head and calms me. The pain in my leg and fist subsides almost to euphoria. I sit completely still, watching the piano, as if moving might disturb the flow of this instrumentation.

Suddenly, the pianist stands, and the melody is cut short. I want to hear more, but as I try to say something, I find I cannot move. The guy walks up to me and looks me right in the eye. "It took you a while to succumb," he laughs. I don't understand what he means, though. "I'll leave you for last," he adds as he walks around the tables and couches that occupy the lounge. Just out of my sight, the footsteps stop, and I hear him laugh again. When I see blood spatter onto the wall, a panic wells inside me.