

# Pluviophile

The seductive darkness of sleep threatened to swallow Henry whole, but his eyes stayed open.

He hadn't slept for weeks.

It had been raining for almost a month in London, the incessant, soft pitter patter like dissolving footsteps. To him, they sounded like flutes. A deep voice, to Henry, was a cello; the whine of a kettle a high C played on a piccolo. His mind relished in reshaping these sounds into whispers of magic. Tonight, he listened to the rain. Eyes closed, his mind wandered; grand symphonies, delicate notes from a violin, ethereal melodies floating from slender fingers on ivory keys, *music*, filling the soundproofed chambers of his mind.

Henry's rapture was cut off by thumping from his bedroom, and the refreshed hums from his fridge flowed into his ears. The thumping was his roommate, Hank, who was probably with a girl. Henry didn't need a bedroom - he didn't sleep, so he rented it out. The thumping grew louder and Henry muttered a curse as he moved to lie down across his couch. The papers scattered across the coffee table, scrawled with endless lines of notes, momentarily fluttered as his arm moved past. They used to be printed - arranged in neat little stacks, but there was no more time to be neat. Not since he started his sextet. He hadn't even bothered to name the composition, all he knew was that rain, to him, was a sound so indescribably fragile, so *human*, that it begged to be put into ink. His bandaged finger was evidence of countless nights spent gripping his pen, laying out his life onto lines across paper. Sprawled across his sofa, he smothered his head with a pillow, muffling the thumping from his bedroom and the humming from his fridge. He felt his muscles relax as he lay there in his limbo between reality and fantasy, until the music pried open his dreaming mind.

The flutes from the night before still echoed in his thoughts. If he wrote them down, he could quell their whispers. The gentle pattering of rain outside seemed to mimic their pleasant lilts as he poured his coffee and sat. His bedroom door opened and the echoes of music began to fade, a girl emerging and sitting down across from him.

"Sorry about last night."

"Hm?"

"Was I too loud? You kept covering your head with a pillow."

The flutes were now a distant memory.

“What?”

“Last night. Was I too loud?”

“...What are you still doing here?”

The look of confusion across her face seemed to taunt his indifference. Her pretty, delicate features tucked into a scowl.

“Alright, geez ... relax, I’m gone.”

The door slammed shut, and as if on cue, Hank walked out in his boxers. His muscles rippled as he pulled his shirt over his head.

“Where’d she go?”

“Out.”

The flutes started up again, causing Henry to claw desperately at where his pen had been. A sigh came from behind and he turned to see Hank, pen in hand.

“Every girl I bring home, you do this. Why? Why can’t you just talk to them like a normal person?”

He lunged forward. Hank effortlessly sidestepped Henry’s attempts to take the pen, leaving him grasping at air.

“Hank. Hank listen to me. Give me the pen.” The two men grappled at each other, Hank holding the pen behind his head.

“I need that pen Hank”

“No, you listen to me. You can’t live like this. Henry, *relax*.”

His voice seemed distant, the flutes deadening his words. The music grew to a crescendo, and Henry barged into Hank, knocking him off his feet. He snatched the pen from the ground, scanning the table for a sheet untouched by ink. The black scribbles seemed endless.

“Paper. I need paper”

Hank groaned from his position on the floor.

“Henry, you’re fucking obsessed.”

Henry couldn’t hear him, the flutes now deafening as he slammed the door shut.

It’s the evening and the rain was now an unrelenting downpour, the scratching of pen on paper barely audible above its roar. Henry sat at the coffee table, the notes spilling from his fingertips like water, the sound of flutes emptying from his mind.

The satisfying click of the door unlocking tore Henry from his reverie. Hank brushed by and stacks of paper cascaded from the table, joining the mess accumulating on the carpet. Hank eyed the chaos in distaste as he handed Henry a phone.

“It’s the landlord. Answer it.”

He realised Hank's lie too late. His father's baritone voice came through in a muffled haze. As he held the phone, he listened more to his musical translation of the storm battering his apartment than his father's harsh melody of words- words that came through in short bursts where the violins and cellos tormenting him grew quiet.

*"You haven't visited in 5 months...  
...you quit the rugby team..."*

Henry winced as the screech of a cello cut his father off.

*"...when was the last time you talked to a girl?...  
...Our family is a family of law...  
...I was willing to look past that..."*

The overwhelming sound of bows drawn across taught strings and his father's scrutinizing voice amalgamated into a head splitting mess of confusion. He couldn't take it anymore.

*"Dad."*  
*"We even let you choose your own degree, we know how much you loved music, but this is too far..."*  
*"Dad! Why did you call? Did Hank ask you to do this?"*  
*"Who's Hank? No, Henry- your mothers worried about you."*  
*"No she isn't. Why did you call?"*  
*"... The university called. You haven't been in three weeks."*  
*"I'm writing a piece."*  
*"Henry... We're cutting your tuition."*

The cellos seemed to give way to momentary silence, as if expecting a response from Henry. He didn't have one. He thumbed the screen of the phone, ending the call, then stared at where Hank was standing. The emptiness of his apartment stared back at him.

Henry spent the rest of his night listening to the rain and writing, trying to recapture what he had heard during the phone call; but the music was like water, slipping through his fingers. He could hear Hank's whispers, unceasing and relentless.

*They don't love you.*

*They don't need you.*

*She doesn't need you.*

*You should call them. You should apologize.*

*You should call her.*

The conversation seemed like a waking dream, the more he thought about it. He didn't care about the tuition. If he had to bleed to achieve greatness, so be it. He didn't need university, didn't need his parents. This was his life. This was his *masterpiece*.

By five in the morning he had finished. He fell onto his sofa, a spent firework.

His phone rang and he unearthed it from the scattered papers.

“Hey.”

He recognised the voice. It was the girl from the morning.

“Susan. I'm... I'm sorry.”

“Hey, it's okay. Honestly. Don't worry about it. I know you.”

“I'll call you tomorrow.”

The dull throb of rainfall grew into a brutal wail as Henry slid the balcony door shut behind him, but all Henry could hear was his sextet. The unbroken sky was the *vast chamber of an opera house*. The rain battering the balcony was the *music*. The clouds suffocating the skyline were his *audience, mesmerised*. *A percussionist struck a drum* as thunder boomed in the distance. *The lights of the opera house blinded Henry* as lightning twisted, splitting the sky open.

A figure stabbed at the edge of his vision, and he whirled to see Hank, behind the glass of the balcony door. Lightning flashed, and Henry was left staring at his reflection, his body fragmented by the raindrops trickling across the glass surface, his distorted face devoid of identity. Insanity swum in his eyes. The music seemed to coalesce with the sound of lashing rain, until he couldn't tell which was which. *Henry heard music, Hank heard the rain*. Consumed by the noise, by the storm, by the ecstasy igniting his mind, the blur between Hank and Henry dissolved, flowing across his brief existence as if it was liquid, as if it was the raindrops running down the glass, as if it were the tears trickling across his face.

With a push, the glass shattered and the roar of the rain flooded into his ears, untainted by music.