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### Inventions

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# Inventions

Siobhan Phillips

The first---as through our bedroom wall today's  
piano practice tries again to further  
art: A right hand picks across a phrase  
of Bach's; a left hand balks, begins; together  
both wind forward, halting; check how far  
they've come and start again, uncertain whether  
muscles can remember (yes; a bar  
by heart at last)---the first is you. Sixteen.  
You're racing down the dusk, the family car  
your own for half an hour, along a scene  
you shun: The nodding wells, the weary ground  
of grass and scuff, the turnpike tar, the clean  
allowance overhead for every round  
and lolling gape of cloud or lazy scrawl  
of summer lightning (distant, gone). The sound  
unrolling from your homemade tape is all  
you notice, all you need---your fingers pressing  
chord against the wheel: as if the fall  
and rise of notes, this courtly, acquiescing  
twine of higher, lower---lines of sand  
in oval hourglass spools---were now addressing  
truer, future selves. The ones you've planned  
forever: living better, feeling free  
and clear to undertake and understand  
the timeless. The sincere. You can't foresee  
how these arise, yet nonetheless you're moving  
toward them, right. The second portion? Me,

perhaps. At home one night. Fifteen. Approving  
nothing, least of all myself, but sure  
that holding to a set of rules behooving

bored sophistication keeps me pure.  
Water fills the tub; the flaking taps  
spit up a rusty steam; a connoisseur

of private volumes---chain-locked bathrooms, gaps  
of crawlspace, closets, halls---I sigh and soak  
a sham fatigue. Outside, the city maps

its dusty downward grid; the streetlights choke  
their traffic through and manholes quake; the moon  
defers to neon boast. But here baroque

piano---harpsichord---is on; I tune  
the FM dial to smooth it and conduct  
a bit with soap-gloved hands. It's certain. Soon

these hidden minutes, static-ridden, tucked  
away among my day, will stretch their clear  
and higher tone throughout; this cadence plucked

so briefly loose will last. How very near  
it seems, a life of scoring what I do  
by what I love. Oh, well. Enough. They're sheer

invention, both these scenes, of course: this you,  
this me, these pasts. (And now next door the nameless  
pianist has almost made it through

his piece without a pause.) But if my aimless  
dreams about tomorrow seem no more  
unusual than breathing, why not blameless

musings, too, on what has gone before?  
Dim as what comes next, it seems, the way  
to this: Our home at dusk, our daily chore

of overhearing. It's as if we stay  
the same by wielding, unaware, technique  
we never know the end of, and betray  
desire into an answer. Merely weak  
and wishful thinking? Bach no longer plays.  
The quiet swells and echoes. Listen. Speak.