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.