

miranda

by J.A. Pak

miranda

When I was *miranda* and my mother Rose, ours was a skinless intimacy. *miranda* in Rose's womb, captured in an essence of love, anger, frustration, fear, the overwhelming stress of Rose's life heavy syrup that kept the bond between spirit and body weak and loosened.

First drops of syrup, Rose and Harry, newly wed, life in each cell an expression effortlessly unfurling into a song called *miranda*.

And then, Rose and Harry, newlyweds, unable to cope, Harry laid off, his panic, his disappearance, and a moment of complete despair.

The despair created a pause, the womb and a nascent *miranda* wondering together—was life, here and now, a beginning or an end? The future lensed through the present was oppressive. Further investment seemed statistically unwise.

As *miranda* flickered, Harry came home, Rose and life optimistic again in that way life does, of blurring perspectives, near capturing far. Mired in that flash of optimism, *miranda* continued to grow, her growth muted, the debate stitched inside her cells: had life been a good decision?

Often, her consciousness lay on top of her skin. Tenuous beginnings creating a body with little resilience, little recall, life tearing off bits and pieces until there was just the thinning shadow. With every breath more and more of her mortal body was lost, fat and muscle starving away so that her framework self, the skeleton, protruded and she was her own anatomy lesson. It made *miranda* laugh, how it was now, only when her body was moving askance, that she could finally feel it, finally feel that conscious connection which had been so vivid in the womb.

She was like that infant again, enjoying her body the way infants do, with fascination and awe. Everything new. The way the fat at

the tip of her nose had melted away, leaving two symmetrical dents on either side—she hadn't known her nose was like that, so full of lovely laziness and fat. She regretted having ignored her body for so long, that only loss amounted to appreciation. There was something so magnificent, so alive in feeling every part of the body, skin, organ, bone, the fluctuations of chemistry as each cell strained for more nourishment. She couldn't resist constantly touching herself, her leg and that space which was growing more and more wide between the tibia and its partnering muscle (she loved that space), running her fingers up and down the parting hollow again and again just to feel the triangular geometry of such a large bone—her bone, her triangle. Her body had seemed solid, and she found it absorbing, feeling spaces, sensing that even the body was air and pieces like her soul.

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Her piano was gone.

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She's been dead for almost five years. Not that time has much relevance, except in David and his marriage plans. Between *miranda* and David, remarriage had been a threat and a joke: she'd come and haunt him if she didn't approve. Inside his dreams *miranda* waking:

miranda in effortless expression, reviving again and again everything they'd been together. Daybreak, he struggles free, the effortless expression soured milk which turns his mood ugly.

miranda, floating on the top layers of memory, first his memory, and then their coalescing memory, strands that twist into a dense, dazzling array of events and thoughts which lead again and again back to their last duet together just days before she'd died—

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—he was so beautiful, the way he'd played that night, his fingers remembering everything though he hadn't touched the piano in

more than a year. She'd been silent as well, too fragile, too weak, unable to lift the cover of the keyboard. Even in her dreams she wasn't playing. But that evening, her daemon had come and compelled her to play, driving her body into cellular exuberance so that she was simply music. David, coming home from work, heard and saw and felt all that was *miranda* in possession. She was at her piano, he at his, the daemon between.

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The daemon and David had been the great loves of her life. They'd come to her at the same time; she was twenty and the possessions had been startling and sudden, complete. For a long time, she hadn't known the difference between the two, had thought the two had been the same. It was when the two began to cleave that her body began to bleed. At first slowly, the bleeding a kind of blanching, her hair and moles visibly seeping color. Her mother thought even *miranda's* eyes were losing color. And then in streams. Her nose. Her gums. Her fingers as she played. Her life was gluey and metallic—she smelled rust everywhere, the heat of her body Vulcan's furnace.

It was in losing herself like this that she discovered her body, like her infant self, laughing, dizzy as her spaces grew more and more apart.

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The daemon was with her as she died.

Lying on the hard kitchen tiles, her body suddenly, deliciously cool, she opened her eyes and saw him, across from her, in symmetry with her body, the daemon looking into her eyes, his eyes full of tenderness and empathy. He was smiling and he seemed amused and she smiled and her smile was so gratifyingly weightless.

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She gazed at her mother and her father and David and everyone around them. She no longer saw them as bodies but more as hazy

fields of energy that flickered memories. At times it was as if they were mirrors, her self running in glimpses, clear and then warping as the angles collapsed. At times it was as if they were time machines, entries into her past selves, selves she recognized, but selves too that she had never known existed.

Her selves were most concentrated in her mother and David, but it was because of David she was summoned. With her thoughts she caressed him; he flicked her caresses away, hate and discomfort the engines of his actions. Each time she was shocked.

miranda

Their life together looked like snow flakes.

He'd always been so singular in his concentration. He could play the piano for seven, eight hours at a time, his eyes closed, thoughts on his lips—nothing could disturb him. Sometimes she'd join him, her piano next to his, their mated German Steinway concert grands singing, and she'd wonder if he was aware: her presence, her music, the way his music was now changed, the responsiveness, he to her, she to him, their merging.

Wandering inside his mind, she found what his music was, the way it was alive for him. It was bluer, clearer, anchored in muscle and momentum; hers hued more towards mist, air inside the lungs. Ribboned along the music she found his first touch of the keyboard, so cold, the first words he'd spoken, how mashed carrots tasted, the whispers of many voices, congratulatory, warning, enticing, loving, envious, threatening; she found his first girlfriend and his second and his third and his fourth, overlapping in time and physique, so faithful he was to that one type of girl and how much she was apart from everything he'd wanted before. And how easily he was stepping back away from her.

She also found herself, image after image (so different from what she thought she was, to her, to him), the brightest of which that first moment she'd sparked his mind: she was in one of the practice rooms, playing Schubert's unfinished sonata in E—she remembered that moment so clearly, the moment her daemon had come—all day

she had felt strange, dizzy, as if a flu was bringing her down; her playing especially rough—and then two measures into the Andante movement she was seized by such an extraordinary possession and every cell was music. The possession stopped suddenly and she laughed and laughed, the tips of possession tuning her laughter, and outside the door, he was laughing too.

It was so startling to see her young self in his mind, inside that practice room, inside her music. In his mind, she was so beautiful. So much more beautiful than she had really been. So much more beautiful than he had thought so at the time. All those years of playing together, of laughing and fighting, whispering and dreaming had made her young self so stunningly beautiful. Their love surged through *miranda*, waves and waves, overflowing, tumbling, until it was his also. Out of nowhere he would laugh, mystifying others, himself.

So he'd marry again and divorce and remarry and find bits and pieces of happiness—*miranda* too had been a piece of happiness.

miranda

It was the blood that had exasperated her. Blood flowing so quick and persistent, thick and rusty. Her nose bleeds would last hours. Fatigued and angry, she'd simply lean over the sink and let the blood flow. She'd been so angry. At all the blood, oozing now even from her uterus. At the slowness of pain.

Weak, her thoughts dizzy, she was peeling an apple when the knife slipped and ripped through her palm. Blood gushed.

Illuminations come at all angles. She took the knife and in an explosive fit, slashed her wrists, first the left one, near where the blood was already gushing, and then the right. The rage disappeared.

She remembered again, lying flat on her stomach on the hard kitchen floor, how cool she'd felt, her right cheek touching the tiles. She remembered this feeling—that her whole self was radiating out, a halo of heat. She wasn't alone. Across from her, also on the floor, a handsome man was looking at her, his lovely eyes full of liquid

empathy. So that was what her daemon looked like. He seemed amused. She remembered that warm feeling of being watched and cared for. And loved.

Remembering this as she thought inside David's mind, would he now understand and forgive, feel that her last moments were very different from what he had imagined?

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Sometimes they'd play "Golliwog's Cakewalk", in fun, trying to match each other perfectly in tempo, note, nuance: to be one player, one piano, one voice, one heartbeat, a self complete.

Often, as they played duets together, her voice was the one he'd let sing. Towards her, in music, he gave without thinking. She'd been so confused when he'd announced that he was leaving his music behind, that he was enrolling in business school. That was death too.

She was glad he still had his piano.

miranda

The piano. A magic cabinet. Compelling her to touch it. The magic a spell of powerful bewitchment, a spell of transmutation: the piano and *miranda* becoming music. A piano was a soul she could understand. A piano was a soul who understood her. Together there was only love and empathy.

It called to her even now. Through her, he felt it too. He was lifting the cover, playing single notes, wishing that he wasn't. She was becoming more real to him touching the piano, regret edging through him that hers was gone—he'd sold it soon after her cremation. Sitting down, not intending to play and yet playing. He was one of those pianists who could perform without a single rehearsal—his touch memory miraculous.

It took a few seconds to recognize what his fingers were playing. Bach's Partita No. 1 in B-Flat Major, the Allemande movement. Such unfurling joy! The music flying in the air, two ribboned spirits running, catching, running, catching, spirals of embracing

exuberance at the hems of ecstasy. Tumbling, remembering, the body, how exhilarating it was, the pure physicality of music. Inside the fingertips, the shoulders, the back, the legs, feet on the piano, body and soul in cellular exuberance, coalescing beauty spiraling and spiraling and spiraling, breathing the joy and rapture of being—
miranda

