

The little boy plunks out a slow rendition of “Mary Had A Little Lamb” on the pristine white keys of the piano in the lobby. It’s one of the first songs he was taught to play and sometimes he longs for the simplicity of it. These days, all he plays are technical practice etudes or endless repeats of the pieces selected by his teacher for competitions. He sighs as he plays, swinging his feet.

Across the lobby sits a man, early forties, eyes glued to the little piano player. The simple sounds of the children’s song reminds him of his own history with the piano. When he was around that age, he learned to play too. Simple songs like that, but eventually more complicated things he could play at the start of a party to impress his guests or to show off with dramatic flourish. He stopped, sometime after college when he decided there were more important things than reacquainting himself with how to position his fingers on the keys every few months.

The boy’s mother exits the elevator, heels clicking menacingly on the glossy floors. As soon as the boy sees her, he leaps from the bench of the piano, not in the mood to get scolded for playing an instrument that is likely decorative. He grabs her extended hand and glances back at the piano as they exit the building.

After the boy leaves, the man gets to his feet, almost in a trance. He steps up to the piano and slowly lifts the fallboard. Breathless, he glances up at the still empty lobby before he runs tentative fingers over the keys. For a moment, he thinks about sitting down, about playing one of the songs he still hears ringing around his head sometimes.

Then one of his coworkers approaches and claps him on the shoulder. “I didn’t know you played piano!”

He shakes his head, glancing once more down at the keys. “I don’t.”