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The Living Room (1941-43): Balthus

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The Living Room (1941-43): Balthus / Ira Sadoff

Music meant everything to the father, but his two daughters are sleepy now: one has dozed off on the couch and left the living room a mess: the brown felt tablecloth covers half the cocktail table and the bowl of fruit could tumble at any moment. The younger daughter is doing her best to study composition, but her eyes too are wandering inward; her daydreams are still simple, she thinks of ordinary things: of skipping rope in a schoolyard, teasing a girl friend about a dress, the discipline of kneeling in a shelter while bombers fly overhead.

Mother is still working in the factory, well past dinnertime, and father will be home late, if at all. The piano, which was intended for their lessons and bought at a considerable expense, stands idle in the corner, hardly visible. After the first child was born mother promised father the melodies of Mozart would sweep through the house; now anything vaguely German must be whispered secretly, and the music played is mostly French, some faint impression.

Earlier today there was a hint this household was not quite so intact. The older sister held the younger in her arms when she was frightened by a noise, there was the slightest hint of a caress, the mild reflection of a hand against a thigh. So much tenderness comes forth of fear these days, this should not cause surprise. And when the parents arrive to collapse on that same couch, no words of passion will be expressed. The adults save their purest feelings for the enemy, and all they share now is the drug of sleep, where everything is permitted, but nothing is quite done.

Lives of the Saints, Part I / Jon Anderson

This is the rain on Mozart's grave,
Shearing to glissandi.
Where do you little lie, exhausted, whole,
& wholly done?
Sweet Amadeus,
When I sip my bourbon,
Weaving myself toward pure abstraction—
The recollection
Of emotion without the tired events—
I'd trade my part in this to bear your song: