

## The Saddest Song

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In a class during my first year of teaching, we met in a theater's black box, with black curtains and floors. We circled the chairs next to the grand piano. One student always showed up early to play the song, maybe to impress someone or because he didn't have a piano himself. He sang like he was alone, while his classmates filed in. His voice held melancholy and latched on to us. "Nobody said it was easy," he sang, eyes closed. When he finished, he let the piano ring out, smiled big, and joined the circle. It was grad school for me. I lived on ulcers, never got enough sleep, and kept hearing the song everywhere after that. The saddest song. It banked all my failings and mistakes. It loitered in me for years like the aftermath of a hopeless house fire. It joined my misery-loves-company soundtrack with other love songs I couldn't hear anymore, lost in my brain vault with piles of CDs and the hard drive of albums that shaped me. The song became an empty restaurant I could never enter and an acquaintance on the same commute I never talked to until a day when I just could. In the grocery store, I stumbled into it, humming along with the verse and into

the chorus. Beat by beat, I let the song reenact clashes that scarred and let-downs I survived, so I could keep walking to the swell of the next heavies that might come.

