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Donna Pucciani
College of DuPage

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Song Alone

by Donna Pucciani

I am trying to figure out
Why I sing only
When he is out of the house.

My voice is salty,
Salty as the sweat between my breasts,
Salty as the strands of our graying hair.

My piano is old,
So old it has no trademark.
It's generic;
The pedal groans,
Collides with chords at codas,
No camouflage possible.

Piano,
Its cover up, braced akimbo,
Innards metallic,
Curled wire wound
Taut on strings,
Braces against the sounding board
Like a giant insect curled upon itself,
Wedged and waiting to collapse
Under its own weight.

I sit down at my block of old wood,
Scarred, five times my weight,
Dead weight, we together,
Pedal bucking, and I begin.

Bach partita while I still have the energy,
Eyes tender with concentration,
Sensitive to light, throbbing with
Remembering A flat.
Crossing arms under and over,
Counting the pulse with
Strong, sure fingers,
Pulling sound from old ivory slats
Strung together like chattering teeth.

Unable to sustain concentration,
Pain in the shoulder blades sharp,
Tension in the neck,
Lower back straining up straight.
I put away Bach, take out —
What?

Salty voice now croons, shameless —
“Some say love...” — “You’ve got a friend...” —
“Dream a little dream...” —
Git down, throaty, having fun,
Soul sister to myself,
“Stars fell on Alabama...”
Lost in kitsch, when —

I hear the garage door
Crack, the big metal door
On the other side of the wall.
This is the end of my song.
“That’s what friends are for..”
My voice is silent,
Like a Ritz saltine crumbled
into lukewarm soup for which
the recipe has been lost.