

THE COMPOSER'S

FICTION BY ISAAC JAMES
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SHADOW ZAVDOM

In a room littered with beer bottles and the finest wine that writing can buy—a room so full of crumpled papers that the autumn breeze rustles as it treads across the floor, a shadow sits by candlelight.

Spidery, it scratches its disproportionate head and whispers thin-lipped secrets to the floorboards. The wind dances around the room, obscuring the shadow in the corners among other shadows.

At the silhouette's deflated feet, a composer balances atop a creaking piano bench. Ten thin arachnid legs flutter over the keys. Songs without words, hymns without praises, psalms without voices. Man without wealth and joy. Brass pedals bow beneath his feet. Strings vibrate to the clank of blacksmiths' hammers. *Strike! Disengage! Strike again!* Each note, each voice, each string dies as soon as it comes into being, replaced by

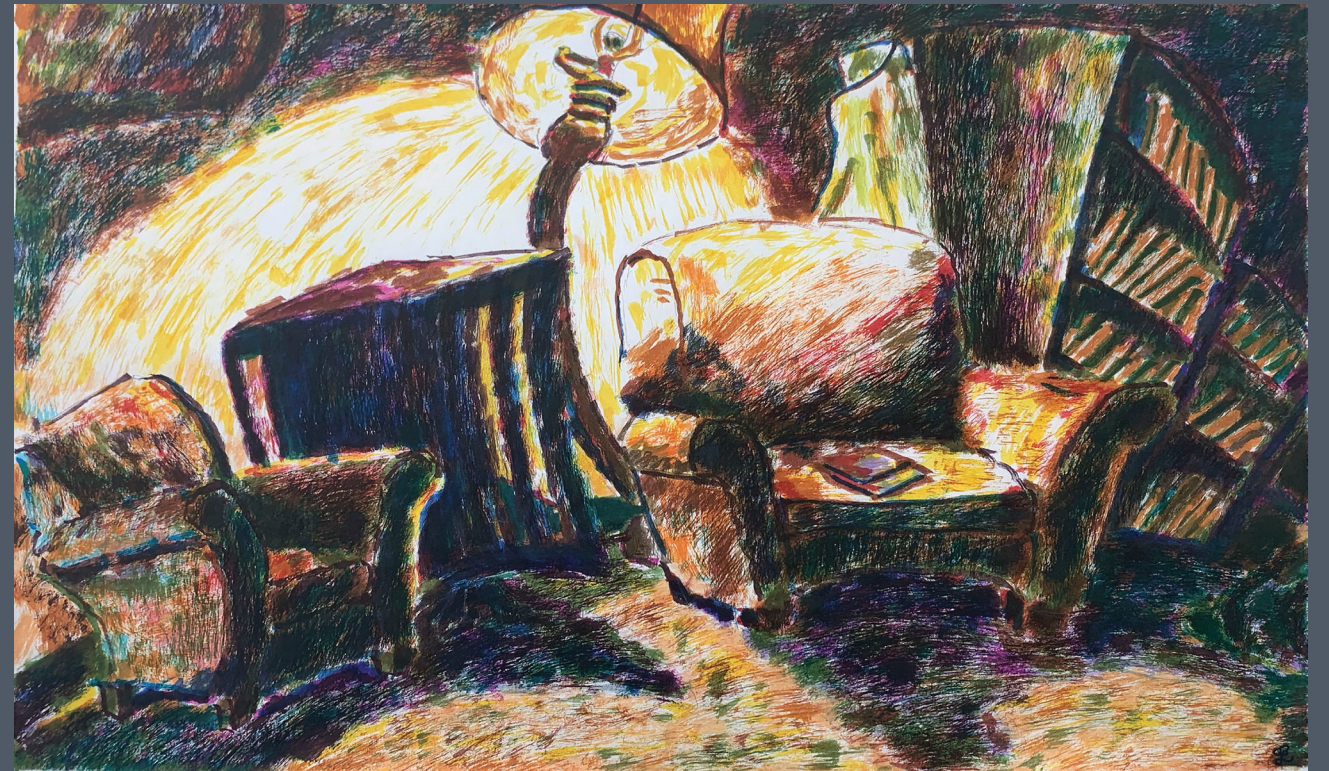
others of a different savor and hue.

Scrawling out the last notes of his final sonata, the composer babbles as the clock on the mantle chimes out.

Midnight at last! He considers the reflection in the polished fall-board. A twisted face stares back, opening its mouth to reveal yellow teeth set in a stretched grin. The final note reels away, and the room falls into a brooding stupor. He closes



Death by Revolution | Brooks McCall | mixed media | 8 x 9 in.



Mr. Erickson's Study | Isaac James | watercolor markers | 9 x 16 in.

the piano, and the papers rustle to the ground, uncertain.

The mangled shadow cackles. Its head flailing—its face obscured.

At last, the composer walks over to the window and summons a cigarette from his pocket. He lights it with a sigh and breathes in the cool October air. With a final resolve, a tap of his hat, as though he was going out the front door to the grocers, he steps out the window. *Vertigo*. And then it is

over. His limp body lies face down on an indifferent street.

The shadow kicks the air and hoots, dodging cars as the body is slammed again and again. It settles on a slender street lamp as a shell of a man spreads like paint across the concrete. *Death has drawn a picture*. The shadow dances dark circles in the sky, sighing as it disperses into the clouds.

In the morning, a maid will discover the room, empty, and the

note lying on the desk of a great man. Reasons. Answers. Hopes. Later that evening, a man may sit at his mad brother's piano to play out his final sonata by candlelight. He might look down at the reflection in the keys, as the wild shadow dances upon the floor.

Once more, the wind rustles the growing stack of papers. The shadow, bound to a composer, waits to be freed again. ❖