

# The New Criterion

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## After school practice: a short story

by Donald Justice

Rain that masks the world  
Presses it back too hard against  
His forehead at the pane.  
Three stories down, umbrellas  
Are borne along the current of the sidewalk; a bus  
Glides like a giant planchette  
In some mysterious pattern through the traffic.  
Alone now, he feels lost in the new apartment;  
There is some dark cloud shouldering in.  
His wish, if he were given one,  
Would be for the baby next door to awaken  
And cry out, signifying end of nap.  
Then he could practice. (Apartment life  
Is full of these considerations.)  
But when finally this does occur,  
He still for a time postpones the first chord.  
He looks around, full of secrets,  
Carefully, with fists and elbows, preparing  
One dark, tremendous chord  
Never heard before—his own thunder!

And the strings will quiver with it  
A long time before the held pedal  
Gives up the sound completely—this throbbing  
Of the piano's great exposed heart.  
Then, soberly, he begins his scales.

And gradually the storm outside dies away.

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**Donald Justice** is the author of *Collected Poems* (Knopf).

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