

A World of Sound

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Hokay guys

Here is my college short story, tell me what you think or just read it for fun, but constructive criticism is always welcome :)

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1 - The Only Chapter

A World of Sound

Music spread through the wide chapel, expanding its soothing melody to reach from the highest eaves of the ceiling down past the balcony to the rows of empty pews. Long tables covered in red cloth supported large golden bells on their hidden foam cushions. Music books stood open in stands before the tables, delicate pairs of white gloves placed gracefully over their tops. The red bell tables stood easily concealing the small electronic keyboard and drum set that stood holding time on the left side of the stage. A grand piano hummed a silent song to itself on the other side, its top open, a music book sitting above the clean black and white keys. A set of elegant stairs wove their way up to the choir area and the main pulpits. Candles stood poised around a large altar on the back wall, charming their flames into doing little dances for them. Jesus looked down on the scene from his stained glass cross surrounded by his disciples and under the watchful eye of a single dove. The glorious colors spread themselves onto the stage and into the pews as a cloud broke its hold on the sun. Hues of blue and red danced across the piano keys as golds and greens played with the drums and keyboard. The sanctuary was filled with light and music.

The light did not reach little Holly though. She was hiding in the breezeway between the massive sanctuary and the outside world. It was mostly dark where she was and she preferred to stay right there in her solitude. Standing on her tip-toes, barely able to peek a small brown eye over the top of the window sill, Holly clutched at the door trying to get a glimpse of the pews outside. Giving up, she settled with peeking through the crack between the heavy wooden doors. No one was out there, at least not yet. She knew they would start showing up soon though, and her heart started to race at the thought. Backing away from the door, she walked until she found the opposite wall with her hands. Sliding down in a very un-lady like fashion, crumpling her light blue dress into a bunch of cotton fabric on the way, Holly pulled her legs up to her chest and hugged them with her arms. Resting her chin on her lace-covered knees, she looked again for what seemed the hundredth time at the bright yellow poster hanging on the wall. "Music Concert Sunday!" it proclaimed in bold black letters that lopped across the page in graceful free style font. "Come join our church family as we celebrate God's gift of music. Performers include the Wesley Ringers, Mr. Dan Frankabandiero on the pipe organ, young Mr. Bobby Brazell playing his saxophone, Mr. Gerald Jay doing a solo on the hand bells, and our very own Miss Holly Bowen playing the violin." Holly had turned her face away before she read her name again, trying to avoid the harsh reality that she would be a part of the concert, but the poster replayed its words over and over again in her head like the broken old record player sitting in her grandparent's attic.

Hearing the words again reminded her of her little violin sitting neglected on the floor under the poster. She glared at it like it was the violin's fault she was so good at playing music. She loved the music, she really did, and she was a natural with the violin. Her and her little violin had been together for almost 3 years now, ever since she had started lessons as a four-year-old. They did everything together: performed for her parents in little mini concerts, practiced with the scary, hunch-backed old lady who taught her music class how to read the notes on a sheet of music, and won prizes in school auditions. She was proud of her little violin for making it this far with her, and she treated it like it was her best friend. Nevertheless, this concert in an hour, this was something totally different, something 7-year-old Holly and her trusty violin might not be ready for. Yes, she knew the music she was to play; she had made sure of that, practicing hour after hour in her bedroom. She had every note memorized, knew every quick finger change, and every muscle movement the song required was now second nature.

However, this concert was bigger than all the others she had performed in before. There were going to be too many people here, too many eyes watching her on the stage. What if she forgot the music? What if she messed up? What if. . . what if. . . ?

Holly didn't want to think about it anymore. She wished the concert was over and that she had already played her easy little tune to the waiting crowd. But it wasn't. No matter how hard she made this wish, squinting her eyes closed as tight as she could and praying with all her might, Holly could not make time go faster.

A loud grating noise and a sudden burst of light woke Holly from her vigilant wishing. Blinking against the sudden brilliance that had intruded into her dark hiding place, Holly saw the silhouette of a woman leaning over her against the light pouring through the open doors. As her pupils regained their footing, she recognized the woman as her mother. She stood there, bending over Holly in a long flowing white robe with a length of red cloth passed over both shoulders. A large silver cross dangled in the air right in front of Holly's nose until she blew at it and it swung back and forth to her amusement. Her mother grabbed the cross in response to her daughter's giggle and with a fluid movement, twisted the chain around so that it was hanging down her back instead of in front of her daughter's nose. Holly's mother was in no mood to have Holly playing with a cross when she should be practicing.

"Where have you been, young lady? Your father and I have been looking for you all over this church." Without waiting for a response to her irritated question, the robed woman picked Holly up under her arms and stood her up in the breezeway. Taking in her daughter's wrinkled appearance, the mother let out an exasperated sigh. "Now look at that, Holly, the pretty dress your grandmother made you is all wrinkled! She won't be too happy about that." Holly ignored what her mother had said, but she stood there obediently as the aged hands tried to press the wrinkles out. Most of the larger wrinkles seemed to disappear with the constant pressure, but some of the smaller wrinkles fought back with stubborn refusal to be smoothed out.

Standing there, still and quiet under her mother's touch, Holly thought about all the times she had played in concerts before. None of them had been her choice; they were all forced upon her by her parents. Holly played music for the enjoyment, but her skill was a tool, an asset to her parents' social life, something only to be shown off, not enjoyed. This concert was another one of those examples, and Holly was getting tired of being used. She was still thinking about the irony of her skill being abused in a church when her mother finally gave up being a human ironing board. She grabbed her daughter's hand, being careful not to squeeze the talented young fingers too hard, picked up the little violin case sitting on the floor, and pushed the heavy wooden doors open once again.

The light was back and Holly was blinking again. This time though, when the black dots finished their dance in front of her eyes, there was more than one person. A small gasp escaped from her quivering lips as she realized what she was looking at. The pews were packed with people now, hundreds and hundreds of people, all dressed in their Sunday best and waiting patiently for the concert to begin. The two front rows on either side of the main walkway were reserved for the performers, but it didn't look like they were people. They all wore white robes like her mother, and sitting there in a group, all bunched together, they looked more like a group of bright shining angels than plain humans. Behind the seraphim choir, Holly thought the stained glass window had been melted down into hot piles of mush and the different colored glass had been reformed into individual shapes, there were so many colors. The people wore every hue of the rainbow in their clothes and on their heads. Purples and yellows clashed like symbols next to each other as greens and golds sang harmonies in cotton dresses and nice flannel shirts. The reds danced with the blues as the blacks and browns faded into the back ground noise. The tugging on her hand stopped and Holly looked back at her mother to see her sitting down on a pew with her fellow angel-humans. Taking the empty space between her mother and the hard side of the wooden pew, Holly began to hyperventilate. She wasn't ready for this. This couldn't be happening.

Where had the time gone? Wasn't she just sitting in the breezeway with two more hours before the dreaded involuntary concert began? She no longer wished time would go faster; in fact, she wished she could stop it entirely. It was two minutes away from officially beginning and she was the first act. Holly had been thinking about this before and going first didn't seem so bad because she could get it over with a whole lot faster. But now, with the single chair she was to be sitting in staring at her dead in the face from the top of the stage, Holly was afraid. Her stage fright took over and her little hands clenched into fists as she tried to control her breathing.

The preacher got up from his place on the front pew and walked to the front with even steps, but, to Holly, it looked like he was running. His practical speech was over with before she knew it; he waited silently as everyone raised their heads at the end of his rehearsed prayer, patient for their response to his next statement. He turned to look at Holly expectantly, and she knew what was coming.

"Now, for our first performer," his deep booming voice pronounced over the hush of the crowd, "Miss Holly Bowen playing Air in G Minor on the violin." His hand swung wide, guiding the crowd with is gesture till they were all looking straight at a frightened seven year old.

"Mommy. . . Mommy, I don't think I'm ready for this." But Holly's mother hadn't heard her comment or whispered the fear in her daughter's voice. She just gave Holly an impatient look and said with a quick shove of her hand, "Sweetie, don't keep the people waiting, get up there!"

Holly was pushed roughly into the small walkway beside the pew and her little violin was thrust into her shaking hands. Turning to face the stage with one last look of fear and a hint of irritation intended for her mother, Holly clutched her best friend and guardian of the moment to her chest with sweaty fingers and began what seemed like the longest walk she had ever taken. Treading carefully behind the large red tables that stood just above her head, avoiding the large bell cases, she reached the bottom level of the stage. In front of her the stair case that had looked so elegant before now glared down at her, posing a threat in its every single step. Pausing at the bottom, Holly looked up at her chair. She kept her eyes on that spot, willing herself not to trip, and somehow she made it to the top. Stumbling forward in relief that the journey was finally over, Holly gladly sat down in her chair and turned the music stand to where she could see the sheet music.

Looking out one last time at the crowd of people in the pews so far below her now, all she could see were black silhouettes. Even the angel choir was now a dark blob in her eyes as the lights from the ceiling made her blind to everything but her chair, her violin, and the music notes. Grateful for the distraction, Holly realized that since she could no longer see all the people in the pews, it didn't seem so bad. It comforted her a little to not be able to see all those eyes staring at her, expecting her- no, willing her- to mess up just so they could laugh at her. She was calming down now, and her stage fright was mostly gone. All that was left was her best friend and their favorite past-time.

Bringing her little violin up to her chin with one hand and opening the music book with the other, Holly began to play the piece she no longer needed to see the notes for. The song was in her heart and no page covered in quarter notes and treble clefs could hold it in any longer. Her heart mingled with the music flowing gracefully from her tiny hands as it quietly filled the awed sanctuary. If she was paying any attention, Holly could have heard the sighs of wonderment from the shadow people below her, seen the smug smiles on her parents' faces; but she was no longer in the sanctuary any more, no where even near the vicinity of the church in general. Holly was elsewhere, lost in a world of sound.