

Between classes, the wing that connects the 6200 and 5200 hallways was a massive sea of bodies moving in different directions. The waves of voices crashed against each other, creating a hum that imitated the sound of a bee's nest. One of the students could not hear the loud drone, but she could feel the faint vibration of voices through the soles of her feet. She looked on at the mob of students, squatted down, and pressed her fingers against the cold tile to better feel the sound of people. How badly she wanted to take off her shoes, for the rubber soles muted most of the vibration, but she knew her teacher would be angry. Someone bumped into her, and she felt a hard kneecap jab into her back. She looked up to see a student's furrowed brow and fast moving lips directed at her. She took this as a sign to get up. As she rose, she started looking for an opening in the crowd so she could weave through to get to the other side. Off she went, straight into the middle of the chaos. She stumbled against people, being pushed and shoved. The rough fabric of backpacks brushed against her face. Then, suddenly, she stopped. She was in the middle of all the people, the eye of the hurricane. She examined the other students, watching and reading their lips as they moved, wondering what the crowd really sounded like. She didn't want just the feel of the vibration. She thirsted for sound. She didn't want to move on, so she stood there, still watching. Her feet began to itch and fidget. They felt as if they were suffocating in her shoes, but she resisted the temptation to take them off. She continued to watch as the crowd around her slowly dispersed, until she was alone in the hallway with only a few dilatory strangers.

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The old man slowly walked down a hallway, carrying two violins in each hand. He stopped in front of the resource room before tentatively walking in. He was sixty-three years old. He had once been a professional violin player, but his career ended early because of the arthritis and nerve damage that had built up from years of intense practicing. The disease had caused him to stop playing for years, and the touch of the violin case was now foreign in his wrinkled, age-spotted hands. Something compelled

him to volunteer once a week to teach young disabled middle school students about music. His reason: he was too old to be a full time orchestra director and too young not to leave behind some sort of legacy. Most of all, he could not stand disposing of something that, before, had been his whole life. So here he was, standing in the corner, surveying the room of his future students. There were three in all: two were paraplegic, and the last was blind. The man turned to watch the teacher. She was young, but wrinkles creased into her face as she concentrated. She was hurrying around the room and constantly checking the door as if she were expecting someone. He wondered if she even noticed him walk in. He was startled when she suddenly spoke to him.

“Hi! Mr. Welks? Yes, I’m going to run quickly into the hallway. There seems to be a missing student. Just make yourself comfortable, okay?” After finishing in one breath, she rushed into the hallway. The old man, still a bit taken aback, began to walk around the classroom. He stopped by the blind boy and studied him before placing one of the violins in front of him.

“You like violin?” he asked.

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The young teacher hurried down the hallway, looking for the missing student. It was the first day she had allowed the deaf student to walk to class alone, and, frankly, it was not going well. Although it was only the second week of school, the teacher had already developed dark circles under her eyes and stress had taken a toll on her usually impeccable posture. Her close friends on the staff had begun to worry, and even offered to help her out in her classroom, but the stubborn teacher looked away from their apprehensive eyes and turned down their offers. She was too determined to do her job on her own; she just needed time to adjust. Oh, how she needed more time, she thought. The hallway still showed no sign of the student, and she became frustrated. Her lack of sleep did little to help her worsening mood. She leaned against the cool, concrete wall and took a deep breath. Then, she heard a little croak, and jerking up from her position, she saw the missing deaf student standing in front of her.

“Samantha! I found you.” the teacher said. Samantha cocked her head and raised her eyebrows as she read the teacher’s lips. She took out her writing board, her source of communication, and began to write.

“No, I found you.”

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Samantha did not like the smell of the resource room. The room was stuffy and confined, with no windows and little airflow. The teacher’s habit of spraying the superficial and generic scent of vanilla air freshener did little to help Samantha’s aversion to the air. Today, however, Samantha did not notice the saccharine smell of the room because she was preoccupied by the unusual arrival of a man and his violins. He was busy showing the violin to the blind student named Damian. The protective way that the old man helped the young boy grasp the instrument brought back a deep pang of remembrance in Samantha that had not been aroused for a long time. All of the sudden, she could remember the sound of a string instrument, the feel of the bow, and the smell of rosin. Most importantly, she could remember her father’s voice and laugh as he taught her a new tune on the violin. Her father had introduced her to the instrument before she even started school; he had wanted to pass on his passion for music to his daughter.

Samantha watched Damian and the old man, swallowing her painful memory, until she was commanded to sit down by the teacher. She trudged to her usual corner of the room, still keeping her eye on the visitor. He was an older man. Sprouts of grey hair had appeared near his temples and on the scruff of his beard. Lines of concentration formed between his thick eyebrows and upon his forehead. Samantha could not help but be most fascinated by his hands. Their angles and quickness reminded her of her father’s hands. She watched as his fingers drummed the table, tapped the violin, and adjusted Damian’s hold on the instrument. She could tell the old man’s hands were strong, yet they looked damaged. The knuckle joints were slightly swollen and their movements were sporadically interrupted by stiffness. Quick motions resulted in a wince and a short massage to obviate his pain.

The pain that flashed across the old man's face bore an uncanny resemblance to the hurt that had shown in her father's eyes when he first learned that Samantha was losing her hearing. Samantha could only remember that she had been sick for many days, and the fever that had come over her could not be broken. By the time the doctors had conquered the disease, her ears were severely damaged and would only become worse. She recalled that the music lessons had slowly come to an end. Instead, her father would isolate himself in his practice room for hours and practice on his own. Samantha would sit outside, trying to absorb the sound that grew fainter in her memory as time went on, until she could only feel the soft vibrations.

Samantha became fully deaf at the age of five, and her father left soon after. She thought that he had decided to leave because she could not hear him anymore. She had tried to disregard the past, but small moments always brought back the memories. She noticed the old man suddenly wincing and quickly putting down the violin when the harsh pain traveled up his fingers. This puzzled Samantha, and she wondered why the violin player kept playing even though his hands were in pain. She did not understand that even though the artist had been hurt by playing endlessly because of his own love for music, the love for the music was greater than any pain he had ever encountered.

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Mr. Welks once again found himself in the winding hallways of the school. He had thought that it would not be a problem to find a drinking fountain, but neither his bad sense of direction nor the confusing layout of the school aided him on his journey. He had decided to step out of the room to look for water to wash down his pain medication. Despite the pain, he felt that his first day was going rather well. He had managed to introduce the violin to a student and even teach him a simple tune. As Mr. Welks turned a corner, he discovered a drinking fountain directly in front of him. A victorious smile spread across his face. As he swallowed his pill and turned around to walk back, though, he realized that he had forgotten where he had come from.

The ring of a bell that suddenly filled the empty hallways was quickly followed by the sound of opening doors, footsteps, and conversation. Mr. Welks stood by his

drinking fountain oasis, paralyzed by the enormity of the crowd that seemed to form in a matter of seconds. He walked toward the crowd, knowing that it was his only way out. Slowly, he made his way through the mass of people, but he felt himself being moved without his will in other directions. It was as if he was struggling against truculent ocean waves without the security of a life vest. Most of all, Mr. Welks could not stand the sound; the loudness of it crashed against his sensitive musical ears. With all of his energy, he pushed himself out of the crowd and into an empty hallway. He stood there, lost, with the voluble sound from the other hallway still ringing in his ears.

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Samantha stared at the violins placed on the nearby table. Their cases were wide open, the velvet coverings tossed to the side, and the delicate bows placed near the hollow bodies of the instruments. When the bell had rung, Samantha and the other students had filed out of the classroom, quickly followed by the teacher. Samantha, however, turned back, remembering that the older man was not in the room with the violins. He had left earlier, probably to be lost in the chaotic hallways of the school, and she did not feel comfortable leaving the instruments without their owner. She gravitated toward them. The closer she came, the more details she could see. The marks and cracks of the instruments stood out against the dark wood, and the specks of white rosin dust were sprinkled upon the instruments just below the strings. She reached out her hand to one of the violins and plucked the thickest string. She jumped back, startled by the clear vibration that brushed her fingertips. For a second, the deep ringing sound of a string rose from her memory. Samantha, consumed by the sound, picked up the instrument and nestled it comfortably on her shoulder. Next, she picked up the bow, carefully placed her fingers onto it, and rested the bow on the strings. Suddenly, she was back in her father's study room, back in her early childhood, back before she was robbed of sound. Her nimble fingers still remembered the songs that she had practiced. Samantha did not stop her hands from playing. Instead, she followed the carefully placed tapes along the fingerboard, imagining the sound, absorbed in the vibration. For

a moment, she had forgotten why she had abandoned the musical world, and all she wanted to do was lose herself in it again.

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After a few moments of catching his breath, Mr. Welks began to look around for clues to where he might be. He could find nothing, though, except for the white walls of the hallway and the occasional inspirational poster. Just when he was about to turn a corner, the sound of a violin caught his attention, and he instinctively followed the sound. He thought that the music would lead him to the orchestra room, but instead it led him to the familiar hallway of the resource room. He then remembered that he had left his violins, unguarded, in the room. Mr. Welks did not panic, however, for the sound of the music told him that the violins were in good musical hands. He was only shocked when he reached the door of the room to see the deaf student playing. He was instantly reminded of Beethoven, his role model. Mr. Welks realized how silly he had been for the past few years. How could he let the pain of his fingers stop him from performing, when this student still played with the barrier of silence?

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The young teacher had left the classroom in desperate need of caffeine, but she knew that no amount of black coffee would assuage her stress level. Her first job in a new school was pushing her to her breaking point. Her low student-teacher ratio was offset by a plethora of paper work, progress reports, and meetings. For some odd reason, the feeling of the packets of paper made her crave the taste of coffee. So when the bell rang, she went to the teacher's lounge to obtain her much desired mug, or maybe to escape from the piles of papers and missed calls on her desk. She wrapped her fingers around the warm cup and inhaled the steam rising from the black coffee. She looked down at the contents of her mug and stared at her tired reflection in the dark liquid. Her day had felt bitter and dark like the coffee she was slowly sipping. The young teacher sighed and heaved herself up from her chair and out into the hallway. She was

met by music in the distance, and thought nothing of it until she reached the doorway of her classroom. There stood Mr. Welks with a gaping mouth, and in the room stood Samantha, the deaf student, playing a violin. No one would have ever guessed that she could not hear the very music she was making. The young teacher could only clutch her warm mug of coffee and stand there dumbfounded.

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