

A Violinist's Audition

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Today is the only day of my life that truly matters. Allow me to rephrase that. The next five minutes of my life are the only five minutes that truly matter. Before now everything was just practice, preparation for this. All of those hours, sore arms and bleeding nails have proved beneficial now that I am standing here.

It's taken fifteen years and I will not waste the opportunity.

I clutch my violin bow like an infant clinging onto a finger. My hands are sweaty, and my heartbeat is a loud and constant drum that I think even the judges can hear. Finally, I hear my name called. I shuffle my way on stage, praying my legs won't stumble. I stand alone on the alabaster stage and as I look out onto the sea of crimson velvet chairs, only three unsmiling faces stare back.

Those three unsmiling faces determine my future.

I introduce myself and my voice painfully breaks. The middle judge gestures her hand for me to begin. The auditorium has gone completely silent. A still silence, as though the whole world has been put on pause to hear Pachelbel's Canon.

I close my eyes, no distractions.

Now, in complete darkness, I start to play. When I hear the first note my anxiety

calms and I remember why I am here. Not just to play the song but to captivate the judges, make them understand and see my passion. I resist the temptation to open my eyes and see those astute faces again. My fingers quiver in vibrato and the bow glides over the strings at exactly the right intensity.

The notes are pouring out of me and filling the entire auditorium.

As the song continues I realize I am playing better than I have ever played before, as if me and the small instrument balanced on my neck are connected, as though we are one object moving in harmony. I am part of the strings and the bow and they are part of me. As I play I can feel everything coming out.,,

That cold Monday morning when I couldn't be bothered to walk with Ben to his primary school and told him to go on his own. The sound of the car hitting him when he forgot to look. His lone scream. The driver swearing, still talking on his damn phone.

I'm crying now, tears rolling down my chin rest and onto my violin.

I have never made such powerful and euphonic sounds. I am in complete control.

The ambulance siren too far away and the driver still swearing, cursing my little brother, the car, himself. And Ben, lying motionless on my lap. My shaking arms wrapped around him. Whispering in his ear, begging, ordering, pleading with him not to be dead.

I remember the first day I played violin, when that awe-struck five-year-old picked up a bow and dragged it roughly across the strings. When seven-year-old me played at my cousin's wedding, how she cried and told me I'd made the day perfect. When I was thirteen and won my first competition, how proud Benjamin was of me. "*That's my big sister*" he told everyone.

When I was sixteen and played at his funeral.

And half a year ago when the letter came inviting me to audition, mum's half-smile, my dad's hug and the uncomfortable silence.

My fingers make no error, when I first played this piece, the notes were shaky and unclear. Now they're perfect, clear and precise, flooding the auditorium much like the memories in my head. I feel each note from my toes to the tips of my fingers to deep down inside my ribcage.

The music is slowing down now, I'm almost finished. My eyes are still closed so I can't see the judges, instead I see Ben's face. Unblinking. His blue eyes stare back at me, his light blonde eyebrows smeared in blood. I am playing for him, willing him back through the three hundred-year-old notes.

The coda comes gradually and my final note resonates all around.

I open my eyes, breathless. My whole body is still, I know I have done my best.

Given it my all.

All I need now is for one of the judges to speak. The tall lady in the middle breaks the suspense,

“Congratulations, welcome to Julliard.”