

Sweet Music

In her every dream, it was sweet and pure. Its sound consuming every thought and action. She stood before it. Its ebony surface glistened in the soft light. The surface immaculately carved and polished. The ancient wood warm and sanded. The instrument had no rival, second to none. A sound like no other. Hundreds of years old, this is the only Camilo Caligari cello. Worth more than even the Mona Lisa herself, the instrument's sound has graced the ears of the most famous people in history. No one knows to whom it first belonged. No one dares touch it unless they are the most worthy. The cello is cursed. They who touch it end up dying in the most mysterious ways. Even the most gifted with music have dropped dead after playing the cursed instrument. Yo-Yo Ma fell terribly ill and died the morning after playing the ancient piece of wood. The cello is so treasured that the most famous cellists have willingly died for the chance to play the instrument. Guards clothed in black stood at each corner. Dozens of cameras angled every way monitoring the famous cello. Motion detectors hidden in the walls capturing every movement, nearly impossible to steal. Didn't someone say anything is possible?

Worth millions, the poor cello sat unused in its glass case. I think it's time someone used it...or stole it. She let her fingers dance imagining what sonata she would play once she stole it. The key to end the madness inside her head.

She knocked twice. The knocker on the door was sculpted into a golden cello. She's at the right house. The air in Paris had a sharp wind slicing through the layers of her clothes. Shivering she bounced on her toes waiting for the door to open. The wood groaned as it opened and revealed the man within. Antonio Vergansia was the most decorated cellist in history. He also happened to be her long time teacher. With his aged brown hand, Antonio beckoned her in without a word. The open door revealed the lavishly decorated mansion inside. With a grin, she remembered when her maestro showed her his 6 million-dollar Stradivarius cello with gold insignias on its sides.

"Mi niña what do you need?" he warily asked using her childhood endearment. He eyed her with a suspicious glint, for he had known her all her life and knew her well. The cellist didn't need much of an explanation to know why she was here.

"I have a proposal," she responded. Amalia proceeded to tell her maestro her plan. Once she was done, she paused for an unbearable moment, waiting for her maestro's response. His eyes slowly lit up with excitement.

"Of course I will help you. I have been waiting for you to ask," he responded mischievously. Amalia squealed like a child in delight.

The Paris Opera House was spectacularly built. Everytime Amalia entered the famous House, she gaped up at the exquisite ceiling. Curling sculpted marble swept up through the arches on its walls. She began walking up the famous staircase arm in arm with her maestro. She glanced

down at her reflection; the red stone reflected against her skin making it appear gently flushed. Her fitted burgundy dress hugged her waist and flared into a voluminous ball gown. Her hair was gathered half up half down, and fell to the middle of her back. Small pieces of hair curled and caressed the sides of her high cheekbones. On her right, her maestro did not hold back in showing his lavish style. He wore a pristinely tailored suit that was disgustingly expensive. The swirling red print over it matched the color of her own dress.

“You look beautiful, Amalia,” her teacher complimented.

“Thank you Maestro. Do you need to go over the plan once more?” she nervously asked.

He chuckled, “no, I am not as old as you might think, I still remember. Are you ready? By morning you will never see day again. You can still back out,” he whispered.

“No Maestro, I will not back out. I am ready,” she whispered back defiantly.

As they walked past, many whispered recognizing the two famed cellists. The pair was led by a young man into the Great Hall which was completely coated in thick layers of gold paint. She loved this room and by her guess, so did Antonio.

Tonight wasn't a normal show at the Opera House. It had been a year since Yo-Yo Ma died. He was loved and died for living his greatest dream. For the first time, the cursed cello was showcased in the Great Hall. Usually, it was kept in a titanium reinforced safe in the depths of the opera house. Tonight was the night where her dreams were to start and end. Arm in arm, Amalia and her maestro wordlessly observed the cello. Feigning indifference they walked back into the halls to find their red velvet box.

The house was more spectacular than Amalia had the words to explain. She had played in the famed house more times than she could count, but every time it still managed to take her breath away. The lights dimmed as the performance started with a skilled violinist. Emilio Santinari. Ugh. She had hated him since they were children when they rivaled each other in the Paris Youth Orchestra.

Catching the look of distaste on her face, her maestro added. “I always thought you were better.”

The look of distaste turned into a smug smile. Anyway, she had better things to do than to sit around listening to his awful playing. Ok, maybe it wasn't awful. She squeezed her maestro's hand in silent signal. He gave a barely perceptible nod. Slipping through the velvet door she headed to the ladies' room. Once there, she quickly tore through her gown from the top of the bodice to the hem of her skirt. She had a seamstress make a second gown that could be concealed under it. The new gown was a midnight black with accents of gold at the neckline and bodice. Heart pounding she pulled a mask out from underneath her hoop skirt. She

giggled at the absurdity of what she was about to do. She yanked it over her head, fixed the hair, and strode out of the bathroom. The mask was made to look exactly like one of nobles in the audience that had run into the bathroom after her. Earlier she had snuck into the kitchen and pretended to be a server. She added a small leaf of parsley to the woman's drink which the noble happened to be very allergic to. Amalia smiled in delight.

Only a couple days earlier, Amalia and Antonio had met their doppelgängers after weeks of searching the streets. Now they sat poised in their boxes, looking and acting exactly like the people they weren't. Amalia walked with purpose down the long hallways of the Opera House to the Great Hall. With a sigh, she ran the last few feet to the glass case. Her maestro had successfully disarmed all the cameras and motion detectors. There were no guards so she guessed the illegal sedative dusted onto their suits had worked. She lifted the hair on her mask to take out one of the long fine pins she had to hold up her false hair. She crouched down and quickly set to work picking the lock that Harry Houdini's apprentices had taught her to break.

"Come on, come on. Open!" she mumbled

Her breath came in great gulps as the lock finally clicked. Her heart beat even more rapidly as she dared a peek at the ancient cello. The ebony surface called to her. The pain nearly unbearable as the instrument demanded she play it. As her hand wrapped around the ancient wood, she let out a squeak of surprise as the wood turned near hot. Carefully oh so carefully she lifted the instrument and took it out of its glass cage. Then she turned and ran for the closet hidden in the wall. In it, she had left a black matte case. She carefully shoved the instrument in and began to climb the ladder on the wall. Antonio met her at the top of the ladder and they quickly navigated the empty tunnels above the Opera House. Waiting outside was the carriage that would take them to their safe house where she could at last play. The whole ride there her maestro and she held their breaths not daring to look behind them to watch for the police that were sure to be running around the Opera House like chicken with their heads cut off looking for the cello. Only to never find it for it is safely hidden underneath her skirts. At last they arrived to the safe house after meandering through the streets of Paris for hours losing anyone who might have been following them. The safe house was one of her maestro's ex wives' house that he got after she died. The long forgotten apartment was smack in the middle of two lavish apartments. Anyone walking past would believe it to be just a regular home for another rich noble of Paris, for that is what is exactly was. Once inside, they both blew a sigh of relief as their scheme went as successfully as they had hoped.

"How about you play it mi hija," he said, using a Spanish endearment. The entire ride home the cello screamed at her to play. The melodies churning inside her head screaming to be released. With trembling fingers, she uncased the cello. Paying no heed to the police sirens outside, she looked up at her maestro almost unable to hear his words with the music in her head. She read his lips.

"Mi hija it has been a pleasure I will never forget you. May music always sing with you," silver

lined his eyes. She stood with the cello still in the case and gave him a warm hug.

"Thank you maestro," she replied with tears burning her eyes.

Leaning down, she just sat and looked at the famous cello. She closed her eyes and breathed in the woody scent of the instrument. Peace flooded her and the sense of belonging settle somewhere deep in her gut. The first strums she made with her calloused fingers shocked her. Gone was the fear, uncertainty, and pain of the last few weeks. In place of it was joy and the undiluted sense of home. With the bow, she rested the hairs atop the golden strings...and began. This was not a piece of sorrow like the one she played for the royals of Britain, nor was it a song of joy she played for her family. In was of pure triumph and celebration. The sound of the instrument, the copy of the one resonating in her soul. She and the cello were one and the same, a mirror image of each other. The melodies quieted in her head. Her heart continued to sing as she turned as looked at the face of her maestro on his knees with his mouth wide open with awe and tears streaming down his face.

This instrument has been in her dreams forever. She finally knew it was hers. She packed her instrument and went to bed. Not thinking about what will become of her in the morning. At least she got her chance.

Her eyes cracked open and she was blinded by the morning light. Is this what death felt like? The sweet air of the morning caressed her face. Dying wasn't so bad. She heard a voice. It sounded muffled like hearing someone through the other side of a door.... Was she actually hearing someone through the other side of a door? She sprang up like a racing rabbit and lunged for the door. The door went wide and hit the wall with a thud. Both men turned, startled by the sound.

"No estas muerta!?" Her maestro exclaimed asking if she was dead.

The room looked exactly as it did last night. Only that the cello wasn't resting against the far wall, but in the hand of a balding man. She knew who he was. Emilio Santinari.

Her maestro sneered, "You haven't figured it out yet sweetheart?" Gone was the accent she had grown to love.

Her breath grew ragged and her heart started to pound as cold hard realization settled in her bones.

"I suggest you sit down dear. I'm quite surprised it really didn't cross your mind that Emilio might have been my grandson. Or that the only reason you survived playing that cello is because your bloodline can be followed back to its creator. Or that my grandson can also be followed back to the same man."

She didn't realize she had been backing up until her heels hit the wall behind her. She could hear her own heart pound and the blood rush through her.

"No, there is no way I'm related to him." A couple years earlier he had been arrested and incarcerated for beating his wife and son, but everyone turned a blind eye once he became the most powerful man in the world. Yes, he was that good at the violin.

"You never could have actually thought that you would walk away from this, right? That cello was mine from the beginning."

Amalia let him talk. Every vicious word thrown her way made her back up one step after the other. Both men now advanced on her. There was no way she was getting out of here a free woman unless she had known that this would've happened.

Which of course she did.

She had grown up around this man. She had spent years gathering information on him and his grandson. Why else would she have moved from Spain to Paris to be in the exact same orchestra as him? Why else had she rivaled and manipulated him, showing the worst side of him? Why else would she have smiled at the old man in naivety thinking he had her in the palm of his hand? She let them think they had her. She let them win as they hurled foul words at her drawing false tears from her wide eyes. She even let them walk out of the apartment with the matte black case in hand.

A cello was in there, just not *the* cello. She smiled. She wasn't going to let her parent's killer get away.

She glanced back into the room she had fitfully slept in, and observed her family's cello. Her shoulders relaxed for it was finally in her care. It had been so many years since her parents had been killed. So many years since she had thought of her plan. Now, she got what was rightfully hers. Sirens screeched by chasing the killer, thieves and all around awful human beings down the streets of Paris. If you listened hard enough you could hear their cowardly screams as they ran all the way down the Champs-Élysées. Then she took a long shower and sat on the couch with a cup of steaming coffee in her hands. The melodies that once swirled in her head quieted. The hole in her heart filled in just a little bit more.

Reflection Questions

My grammar had improved a lot, although I still make mistakes, I am more aware of grammar rules.

I asked Mrs. Bowerman a lot of questions until I felt like I knew what I was doing.

I mainly focused on comma errors and grammar mistakes.

I feel like my paper improved in terms of deleting too, of and it's that were unnecessary. I took risks by adding sentences that I wasn't sure I corrected correctly.

I faced challenges with grammar. I'm really not good at that. I overcame them by asking friends and Mrs. Bowerman and googling comma rules. I have learned a lot about grammar and the do's and don'ts.