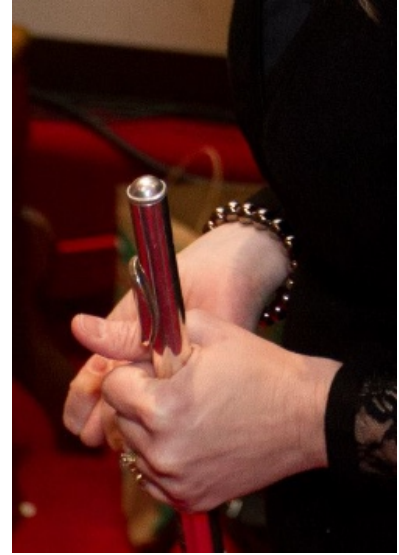


Musical Short Stories

No. 1

A Change in the Winds

By Ashley Rescot



Brandon clamped his large fingers around the thick neck of his six-foot upright bass. He glanced over his shoulder at the clock on the back wall of the concert hall. Would this rehearsal never end? Still twenty minutes until break. He sighed.

The conductor, a man in his mid-thirties dressed in a crisp button-down shirt, waved his arms in perfect precision in front of the violin section. As always, the violinists sped through exciting melodies while Brandon plunked out repetitive bass lines. *That's what happens when you choose bass in junior high orchestra.*

At that time in his life, he'd wanted a hobby to keep him away from home as long as possible. His twelve-year-old self never would have dreamed he'd end up a music major at Belton University. A relaxed, go-with-the-flow guy, he'd never fully identified with the "ork dorks" in other sections of the orchestra. Yet seven years later, here he sat, perched on a stool on a fancy stage, a sophomore in college.

Brandon's glance fell to the score in front of him. Several measures of rests spanned the page. He set his bow on the music stand and ran one hand through his shaggy brown hair. The third movement of Dvorak's Eighth Symphony filled his ears.

The nineteenth-century composer possessed a knack for beautiful melodic lines. If only he'd shared more of them with the lower strings.

After the movement wound to a close, the conductor wiped his forehead and gestured to the brass section. Brandon jerked to attention as trumpet blasts pierced the air. No chance to doze during this movement. He squinted at the notes on the page. Dvorak had finally given the melody to the low strings. Time to focus.

His instrument sang as he slid his bow over the strings. When the music's intensity rose, Brandon increased the pressure on the bow. How exhilarating! He pulled his last stroke through with a flourish.

He slumped lower on the stool. A new sound jolted him back to attention—this time not trumpet blasts, but the sweet song of a flute. His gaze moved to the woodwinds. A thrill of excitement rippled down his spine. A slender girl with wavy brunette hair held a flute to her rosy lips. Chestnut eyes gleamed behind small glasses perched on her perky nose.

Brandon swallowed. As stunning as the music she played, the flutist's solo soared over the orchestra like a bird above the midwestern plains. How had he never noticed her before? And how could he attract her attention?

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Francesca caught a quick breath between phrases. This flute solo demanded every ounce of breath support she possessed. After playing in the University Wind Ensemble for the past two years, she'd finally achieved her dream—acceptance into the Belton Symphony Orchestra.

Her fingers flew over the slender silver metal as if on autopilot. She'd played this solo countless times in the practice room but never with an orchestra.

At the age of nine she'd joined the school band and loved every minute of it. She'd sat first flute all through high school, so her decision to major in music was no surprise.

After the last note of her solo died away, she lowered the instrument to her lap and wet her dry lips. She glanced at the clock at the back of the concert hall. Almost time for break. Her gaze dropped to the bassist in front of the clock. With large, muscular arms wrapped around his instrument, he resembled a teddy bear hugging a giant violin. The bass suited him in size. *Cute*. Her heartbeat quickened. How had she never noticed this guy. He must've been an underclassman. She'd have remembered that tan complexion and mischievous smile.

The conductor rapped on his music stand. "Take five. After the break, we'll run the last movement again." He shuffled the music in front of him, then strode off stage.

"Nice job."

Francesca turned to face Carl the clarinetist seated behind her, his instrument in hand. A senior now, he'd joined the symphony a year ago. He pointed to her flute. "Not an easy part."

She shook her head. "My fingers were shaking."

He laughed. "It gets easier over time. You need to relax."

A tense smile pulled at the corners of her mouth. "How?"

He cocked his head to the side. "I'll think of something. Right now, I need to catch up with Brandon."

“Who?”

“A buddy of mine.” He sauntered away.

Francesca turned back to her music. Five minutes to practice before rehearsal resumed.

After the short break, the conductor raised his arms, baton in hand. The trumpet fanfare rang in Francesca’s ears as if to rouse her to action. The muscles in her fingers clamped the instrument.

When the low strings took over the melody, her gaze moved to the bass section in search of the cute teddy bear. He wasn’t there. *Don’t be stupid, Francesca. You don’t even know him. Focus.*

She raised her flute and drew a deep breath.

As she placed the metal to her lips, a loud honk jolted her out of position. *What on earth is Carl up to?*

She twisted to flash him a fierce glare. But it wasn’t Carl.

“What?” Her fingers tightened on the flute.

The teddy bear bassist sat in the chair behind her, Carl’s clarinet clutched in his massive hand. He grinned.

Her stomach lurched. Where was Carl?

Out of the corner of her eye, she glimpsed a wave from the bass section. Sure enough, Carl sat on a stool, dwarfed behind the enormous instrument.

Warmth crept into her cheeks as she resumed her solo, this time all nerves banished from her mind.

The conductor shot daggers from his eyes as he surveyed the orchestra in search of the troublemaker.

After her solo, Francesca spun around to face the bass player. “What in the world?”

He extended his hand. “Hi there. Nice to meet you. I’m Brandon.”

She hesitated, then shook it. Electricity shot through her arm. “Why on earth did you trade instruments?”

Brandon chuckled and scratched his stubbled chin. “Carl said you needed a change in the winds.”

Francesca pursed her lips. “And you agreed? You’re in a heap of trouble.”

He winked. “It’s all right. I’ve got the best seat in the house.”