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Simple Music

Katherine K. Crouch

I heard the doorbell ring, but I was in no hurry to answer it. I sat very still on the bed, staring at my pale reflection in the mirror while I waited. My body felt heavy, I didn't want to move; I wished the evening was over. My mother opened the door and I listened to the faint sound of her voice downstairs as she spoke to Lyle. It sounded like they were having a pleasant conversation.

"Veronica? Lyle's here!" she yelled up the stairs.

I took a deep breath and stood up. My reflection stood up with me. It looked more confident than I felt.

I hurried down the stairs. Lyle's eyes locked with mine, but I did not hold his gaze long enough to find out what it meant. I walked over to the closet and grabbed my coat.

"Well, you two have a nice time," Mom said calmly, oblivious to the war at hand. "And don't stay out too late."

"We won't, Mom." I opened the front door. "See you later."

"Good night, Mrs. Morris, nice to see you!" Lyle smiled as he pulled the door shut behind us. He always had a way of charming my mom, but it amazed me that he could pull it off under the circumstances.

As soon as the door closed, his smile disappeared. He didn't look at me, he just shoved his hands in his pockets, and we climbed into his car in silence.

I stared out the window as we pulled out of the driveway. It occurred to me how pointless and stupid this whole situation was. I couldn't even remember what our fight was about. But we were both too stubborn to apologize, and neither of us wanted to miss the concert. Lyle turned on the car radio. The music sounded like it was coming out of a tin can. It wasn't a good substitute for conversation. I began to wonder if we were going to make it the whole way there without saying one word. Finally, after what seemed like hours, we reached our destination.

We hurried into the dim concert hall and found our seats. The audience was buzzing in anticipation of the performance. Everyone appeared relaxed, but Lyle and I sat tensely.

I glanced at him--he sat bent over his program, squinting at the small print.

I turned and faced the stage. I looked around at the waves of heads, talking, laughing, cascading in all directions, making noise.

The lights dimmed further, and the crowd quieted. Four small, scraggly old men strode onto the bright stage appearing very ordinary and insignificant, carrying their stringed instruments casually. They bowed awkwardly and sat down in the chairs that were waiting for them. They adjusted their music,

tuned quietly, then put their bows down and looked at each other. I could almost see the intensity of their thoughts, their communication without words. I turned to look at Lyle. His ice blue eyes stared at me through overgrown bangs, then turned away.

The first violinist put up his instrument, and the others followed. the audience settled back in their seats. The men seemed to hear the music before they played it, and feel the beat before it was established. At the first violinist's signal, the quartet began to play.

Music filled the enormous hall. It wove through our bodies and minds, singing sweetly, serenely, crying... I closed my eyes and imagined trees waving softly in an autumn breeze, dripping with color, and spilling leaves over the landscape. I felt the warmth of the afternoon sun as it melted away my fear and smelled the freshness of the day in my imagination.

The piece gradually became softer and more delicate. The music moved forward as time slipped away. They reached the final note, and the sound died away into nothing. The silence that followed remained in the mood of the piece. Not a single person moved. Silence and stillness. Slowly, very slowly, the first violinist put his instrument down.

The crowd erupted with applause and jumped to their feet. The quartet members smiled widely, bowed awkwardly again, and sauntered off the stage as if nothing had happened. The crowd continued to clap wildly.

Only then did I realize that Lyle was holding my hand.