

# Coloring a Piano

“Do I have to go? You don’t need me,” bushy-haired 13-year-old Max said.

“Yes! It’s my first time going to a party. If you’re not with me, I don’t know what I’d even do,” 13-year-old Yuki answered. “Please?”

Of course. It was the puppy eyes again. He should’ve anticipated this. But who could resist puppy eyes? Not Max. “...Fine. But only because you forced me to,” he sighed.

“Great! Now hurry up and put on a suit or something. We have to get going in an hour!”

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As the taxi pulled into the driveway, Yuki pushed open the door and pulled Max with her. They could already see silhouettes of people through the windows and could hear the faint sound of music and chattering.

“You go in first. I need some fresh air from that stuffy taxi ride -” Max started, but before he

could do anything, Yuki pulled him into the party. The loud, filled-with-people party. Oh god.

“Sooo...?” Yuki stared at him.

“...What?”

“Who should we talk to?”

“I don’t know. Who do you even know at this party?”

“Uh...” Yuki bit her lip, “well, to be honest, I wasn’t exactly invited.”

“What?! Okay, we’re leaving,” Max started back out the door.

“Wait! Well, I actually was. I mean, I was, but then I wasn’t, but then I came!” Yuki called out.

“What do you mean?”

“So, my friend Bee - I mean - Brianna had invited me here. I told her I couldn’t come because I had to babysit Ella.”

“Then why aren’t you babysitting her?!” Max shouted.

“Well, I changed my mind, so I called a babysitter -” But before Yuki finished her

sentence, a girl with fluffy brown hair called out, ‘Yuki?!’

Yuki turned around, “Bee!”

“Why are you here? Aren’t you supposed to be babysitting -” Brianna started.

“I found a babysitter. I just had to go to this party!”

“Okay! Cool, and what’s Mr. Blonde Guy’s name?”

“I’m Max, not ‘Mr. Blonde Guy’,” Max cut in. Brianna pretended to ignore him. “So... what do you wanna do?” She asked.

“I don’t know. Are there like, games or something?” Yuki said.

“...Or does everyone just stand around and chat all night?” Max sulkily said.

“Aw, don’t worry! We’ve got many games!” Brianna laughed.

“Then let’s goooo!!” And off they went. Yuki and Bee.

Max sighed and stood against a wall. Literally. What’s the point of bringing me here?

Suddenly, the music stopped and a loud echoing sound started. Everyone covered their ears.

“Oops, sorry! Lemme just get this right here...”

“Ahem. Hello everyone! If you didn’t know (though you should), I’m Ace, aka the host of this amazing party. Since everyone's here, we’re going to be doing a show. You step onto this ‘stage’ -” Ace motioned to the low tables he had put together and that he had been standing on, “- And show us what you can do. It doesn’t matter what. If your tongue can touch your nose, show us! After the current person is done, they get to choose the next one. And with that being said, who wants to be first?”

Max scanned the crowd, whose eyes were glued to Ace. A few raised their hands. As Max looked around the crowd, he saw one hand which kept moving. “Me, me! PICK ME!!” Of course: Yuki Winters. The one and only.

Ace also spotted her tiny hand, waving and waving and waving and waving, until he got so dizzy he just yelled, “OKAY! YOU! You with

the cyan shirt and the arm that keeps on moving!”

“Yes!” And at that moment, Yuki Winters made her way up the stage. She cleared her throat, stopping all the chattering. “I’m Yuki, and today I’ll be showing you a magic trick.” Some oohed and aahed while others called out, ‘It’s probably something stupid!’ and ‘Magic tricks? WoW, sO mAgIcAl!’”

“Now, no, this ain’t any normal magic trick -” Yuki grinned. A big, toothy grin. “It’s going to make your - uh - hair catch on fire because of how awesome it is!”

She took out a coin from her pocket. “Now, you see this coin...”

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“*Outstanding* trick, Yuki!” Ace clapped and cheered. Max couldn’t tell if he actually meant it or was just a really good actor. “Now *you* get to choose the next performer!”

*I wonder who she'll* - Without hesitation, Yuki called out, "Max!" Her finger flew towards Max's direction, and *everyone* turned to him.

"I, um, I don't have anything to perform?" *Ah, darn it! Why, Yuki, why? I never even wanted to come to this stupid party! But making me perform in front of everybody just takes it to a whole new level!*

"Oh, that's fine! You can play the piano!" Yuki winked.

Max screamed internally. *She is dead. She's digging her own grave.* But he stayed cool, smiled, and said, "... Alright." Everyone watched him as he went up the stage. When did it become so bright? When did it become so warm? He looked down at the audience, but he couldn't see anyone clearly. *Shut up and get over with it.* "H-hey. I'm Max. I'll be playing piano."

"What piece do you want me to play?" He whispered to Ace.

“Whatever you want, man. Whatever you want.”

And so, Max Roberts, the bushy-and-blonde-haired boy slowly walked to the piano at the far side of the room. He could feel the audience’s stare burning on his back. He sat down and stared at the keys. Max set his thin fingers on the keys. ‘Why isn’t he playing?’ He heard someone whisper. ‘Shut up! It’s a pianist thing,’ another one answered. He breathed.

Then, with a fiery burst of energy coloring his fingers from ice blue to warm red, he began to breathe life into the piano. He played the starting chords perfectly. *So far so good.* He played the main melody perfectly. *Great.* Then, as he played the fast notes, his fingers flew off the piano. He dipped his hands and fingers into the soul of the piano and played. And played. And played. The warm red at the tip of his fingers stayed. His focus stayed.

It had been ten minutes when Max finished. He tried looking around at the audience but couldn’t see anything but blurry faces. Max

made his way back to the stage. *It wasn't a performance or anything. Right. I don't expect people to cheer.* "Okay -" He started, but before he could finish, the audience erupted into cheers. And if you were there, you would've laughed at how hard some of them screamed. Others teared up. Who knew teenagers could be that emotional?

"Um, you're welcome. I mean great. I mean -" Max started speaking gibberish.

*Typical anti-social Max.* Yuki rolled her eyes and cut him off. "What he's *trying* to say is: 'Thank you!'"

"Thank *you*," Max whispered. Maybe he meant it that Yuki had stopped him from being embarrassed. But half the thank you was more for making him play in the first place. Letting him play.

The piano at the end of the room sat there, now colored in music.