

## Music Fright Night

"I don't think I can do it," Sydney said to Leah as the bus pulled up to the next stop. One after the other, the kids exited the bus.

"Are you kidding?" said Leah. "You have no choice. Just don't think about it. You're a great piano player. This should be a cakewalk for you. Honestly, just pretend the audience is not there. If I could play piano like you could, I'd be playing at Carnegie Hall in New York City. I'd let everyone know what I could do. You should be proud of being so talented."

Sydney just didn't see things the way her friend saw them. Sure, she'd been playing the piano since she was three years old, and she did have a natural ability to play the instrument. But when she thought about performing in front of an audience, Sydney froze up like a deer in headlights. She couldn't face the idea of playing on a stage.

"Well, this is my stop," Sydney said sadly as the bus stopped at the corner of Willow Street and Court Avenue. Sydney always felt better after talking to her best friend, Leah, but this time she didn't. She picked up her book bag and got off the bus.



Later that evening, Sydney sat down at the piano bench in the living room. The house was quiet, and the lights were dim. This was one of Sydney's favorite times to play the piano. The stillness of the air was suddenly broken by her melody. Nothing but the counting of beats in her head could overpower the mood and the tone of her playing. She played a classical tune by Mozart. The classics always calmed her down and made her feel like her problems were nothing worth worrying about. If only she could have her concert selection videotaped and then played on a screen on the stage. Then she wouldn't have to worry about feeling nervous in front of people.



When she finished her tune, she felt much more relaxed. But the quiet air was again broken by a noise. It was her mother.

"Excellent job, Sydney," she said. "You sound wonderful. Is that what you are going to play at the concert next week?"

"No," sighed Sydney. "That's just a tune I learned the other day. I don't really want to do that concert at school. I don't know why I have to perform for everyone. It's not really their business how well I can play. Don't you agree?" she said hopefully.

"Sorry," replied her mother. "There's no way you're getting out of this one. It's a requirement that everyone play in the concert, so you have to do it. You shouldn't have any special treatment over the other students because you are afraid. I know you're a star student, and I know you have a special talent. But that's not enough to get you excused from playing in the concert."

"But mom," said Sydney angrily. "They think I'm some spoiled musical talent who thinks performing is below her. They wish they could play like me, but I wish I could perform like them. Nobody else seems to care about going out in front of hundreds of people and playing."

"We'll see what we can do tomorrow to help you get over this," said her mom. "In the meantime, get to bed. It's a school night."

The next morning, after Sydney went to school, her mother called the school to arrange a private rehearsal on the stage.

"Thanks, Mom," said Sydney as she walked into the auditorium. "At least if I chicken out at the real concert, I'll know what it's like to play in a big room like this," she laughed.

"There will be no chickening out," said her mother firmly. "This should make you feel more comfortable at the concert because it won't be such a surprise when you walk out on the stage. You can see the seats from here. Even though they're empty, you're getting yourself used to the whole idea."



Sydney practiced walking out on the stage like a professional in a concert hall. She strutted a little to show that she was feeling confident about the whole idea. She took a bow in front of the empty audience. Then she sat at the piano bench and belted out the grandest piano tune she could. After filling the air with the most complex and amazing piano solo, Sydney stopped and smiled a half-smile. A custodian emptying trash in the hallway peeked his head in the doorway.

"Wow!" he yelled into the room. "These walls just had a treat they've never had before. That was fantastic!"

Sydney immediately coiled back into her shell. She hadn't realized that anyone would hear her. "Thanks," she said, in a barely audible tone.

"This room does have great acoustics," Sydney said to her mother after the custodian went away. "At least that's cool."

"Please don't worry about other people," said her mom. "You have to just get over it and pretend that you're playing for me. We can raise the music stand a little higher so that you can't see over it. Beyond that, you're on your own. I'll bring you here each night until the concert, and you should be feeling comfortable with it by concert night. The power is in your own hands. I know you can do it."

Each night after dinner, Sydney went to the school auditorium and practiced. By the night of the concert, Sydney did not feel like it would be such a big hurdle for her. She volunteered to perform first, and when the audience burst out in cheers at the end of her piece, she felt a great sense of relief flood over her body. Then she sat out in the audience for the rest of the show and watched the concert without a care in the world.

