

We got a deal?

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"EVERYBODY UP!" Our senior saxophone player shouted, we had a tradition of getting up during our bus ride after performances and singing our alma mater song. I balanced my hat and clarinet case on the seat next to my front ensemble friend Stephanie's stuff as we stood up and sang. Most of us sang loud and proud, including myself, but Stephanie sang quietly, still proud nonetheless. Steph was a very shy and quiet person, yet still managed to be a good Pit captain despite that. Always over prepared and ready for anything, the girl even carried around an empty drill book and drill discs for crying out loud, even though the Pit doesn't need them. As we finished we sat down again, Steph looked out the window as usual and then tugged at my sleeve. She pointed out the window, there were several school security guards outside as we pulled up. We weren't the only one's who noticed. The entire bus was buzzing with curious chatter, a few moments later the bus came to a halt and we were all ushered off the bus quickly and into the building. Staff members directed us into the band room instead of the dressing rooms, none of us knew what was going on. After everyone was inside the doors were locked and we were informed that we were on lockdown, a shooter was in the area and had recently robbed the local 7-11. We sat silently in the dark as we were told, everything was fine until we heard shots. And these particular shots happened to be close, like right-outside-in-the-hallway close. A small gasp erupted from everyone and an assortment of small shrieks also. I scooted even closer to Stephanie against the wall, we were all watching the door. Suddenly a shot went through the lock, it skimmed a junior trumpet players shoulder and he held back a cry. He winced and held his shoulder, the blood was soaking through his white and blue uniform. The gunman kicked the door once, twice, three times until it started to budge, it was a thick door. We were herded into the instrument room and that door was locked behind us, we cowered behind a row of lockers when we heard a voice, he was in the band room.

"Hey where'd you all go? I just wanted to hear a song." There was something about his voice that made me sick, the way he was enjoying this. The staff stayed near the door, barricading it with color guard equipment and just about anything else they could move. The gunman tried the lock and they retreated back to where we were. The gunman tried the lock and after several hits the door gave, he pushed his way in through the barricade and flicked on the lights, "Come out, come out, I know you're there." It was quiet for a moment or two, then he shouted and fired a shot upwards, "COME OUT GOD DAMMIT I KNOW YOU'RE THERE ALL OF YOU!" He boomed. We all filed out and stood in front of the lockers, facing the filthy, man with a sparse beard. "Play me a song." He demanded, though none of us actually had our instruments, they were in the band room or still on the trailer. I nervously looked at Steph, who was oddly calm as I squeezed her free hand, the other holding her mallet bag. He scanned the crowd, "I said, play me a song. Do it or I'll shoot all of you." His hand abruptly shot out and grabbed Lacey, a mellophone player, and pulled her towards him. She screamed and was quickly silenced by a command to shut up by the man, "Play or die." He hissed. Lacey started to bawl and whimper that she didn't have her instrument but he didn't seem to care when he pushed the gun to her head. "PLAY OR I'LL BLOW YOUR GODDAMN BRAINS OUT, KID." His outburst made her shrink in his grasp and cry harder as she plead for her life.

"Stop."

The voice was small and all too familiar, I looked to the source who was right next to me, Stephanie. He threw Lacey to the ground, she scampered into the arms of her baritone playing boyfriend. Stephanie wriggled her hand from my grip and I looked at her, she was completely calm as the gunman got into her face; he smelled of a gross combination of sweat and cigarettes. "What did you just say to me?" He said, urging her to answer, testing her.

She looked him in the eye with a straight face, completely un-phased, "I said, stop. She doesn't even have an instrument she can't play anything. You're being completely absurd." She said in a level tone. All eyes were

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on them in that moment, no one could believe that the girl who never said anything, who never drew attention to herself, was standing up to an armed gunman.

His eyes burned with rage, "SHUT UP. SHUT UP SHUT UP SHUT UP SHUT UP." He screamed into her face, shaking his head wildly.

She remained unmoved, "If you let everyone go and let me near the xylophone, I'll play you a song, we got a deal?" She raised a brow and waited for his response, I still couldn't believe she was doing this.

He calmed down a bit and agreed, "Everybody out." He said coldly, the staff herded us out quickly and I whipped my head back to see Steph but heads blocked my view. The band room didn't have service, pretty much none of this school did, but the recorder on my phone still worked. I clicked the button on and tossed it into a lost and found box before we left, then I hoped my friend would be okay. We were locked into a room a few doors down moments later, huddled in the back corner of Mrs. Viracca's chorus room. We stayed there for a long time, at least, it felt like it. Two shots were fired and somehow the room got even quieter, they came from the band room. I started to cry silently and pray that they both hit the gunman and Steph wasn't dead, that she was alright, but I knew she probably wasn't. A little while later the loudspeaker came on and so did the lights, this was all over. the noise level started to rise and we were hushed, apparently we were going to go to class as normal, only staff was allowed in the band room, we all guessed why. I just wanted to get that recording and know Steph was okay. As we filed out I felt numb, Police and EMT's were swarming the little hall, a cart brought out a body much too big to be Steph's, a relief, but the shouts were not. A cart with Steph on it was being rushed out, EMT's were shouting that they were losing her. I ran over despite all the shouts to an open spot, she smiled weakly.

I noticed her uniform jacket had been taken off, revealing the band polo she had underneath, splattered with blood. "You're gonna be okay, you're gonna be fine alright? You're gonna be okay you have to be okay." I was speaking a mile a minute but I hadn't cared, my friend was dying.

Her breathing was becoming shallower and the pain on her face was obvious but she spoke anyway, "No I'm, not, b-but thanks." she said weakly.

"Yeah you are." I insisted, "Why did you do that? Why? You knew this could've happened oh god." I cried.

She gave a weak smile, "Because, all your lives are worth more than mine. I'm not worth anything at all, I'm worthless. I couldn't just let him kill part of my family, you guys were all I had and were all so nice to me, I love you all more than I do myself."

Before I had a chance to actually respond she got her into the ambulance and I shouted after her, for I was sure this would be the last time I saw her alive, "You were never worthless! You're the best friend I've ever had and I love you!" I shouted after the ambulance as it pulled away. I was pushed inside but I didn't care about getting in trouble or not, it would have all been worth it. A last goodbye to the bravest, sweetest, nicest, quietest person I'd ever known, that the whole band had known, was worth any stupid punishment this school threw at me.

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