



SOMEDAY, SOMEWHERE

Lindsay
Champion

“Big dreams of love and music beat through the heart of this mesmerizing story of two teens taking New York City by storm.”

— DONNA COONER, author of *Skinny*

“There are at least fifty people on that stage, but I can only see one: the boy with the wild black hair, playing the violin like the world’s most beautiful madman.”

Dominique cringes when her class is bused from New Jersey to a concert at Carnegie Hall. *We don’t belong here*, she thinks as they enter the gleaming lobby: *we’re too loud, too rough, too poor.*

But when the concert starts, Dom is swept away by the soaring music, and by the sight of the boy in the front row.

With the help of her best friend, Dom sneaks back to the city to find this boy, Ben Tristan, one of the most gifted musicians of his generation.

Soon Ben sweeps Dom into a world she’s never known before, full of jazz clubs and opera, infatuation and possibility. But Dom is posing as someone she’s not ... and Ben’s obsessive playing conceals a darker truth that may tear them apart.

This haunting novel explores the redemptive power — and limits — of first love.

Someday,
Somewhere

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Lindsay Champion



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For Mom, my favorite writer

First Movement
Adagio sostenuto ~ Presto

{ I }

Dominique

“Get it, Dom! That one. Go, go, go!”

I hurl my backpack onto a seat in the third row, and behind me, Cass cheers. There are slashes in the brown pleather and white stuffing is puffing out, but mission accomplished: we’re sitting right near the door, I won’t get sick from the back-of-the-bus exhaust smell and we’re nowhere near Anton and his asshole friends. Triple jackpot, three cherries.

“Damn,” Cass says. “You should be in the Olympics for bag throwing. Cyd Charisse.”

“What?”

“You said James Cagney at the end of lunch. Cyd Charisse.”

Everyone’s still pushing down the aisle, so I look around to make sure no one else is listening. Cass and I are always in the middle of an epic round of this game — I don’t even remember where we learned it. Basically, one person picks a celebrity, and the next person takes the first initial of the celebrity’s last name (so, C for Cagney) and says a

new celebrity, whose first name starts with that letter. We play it with old Hollywood stars, and it's the only thing that keeps us from losing our freaking minds at school.

"Cary Grant," I say.

"Gene Kelly."

"Katharine Hepburn."

Pause.

"Damn it."

Longer pause.

"Do you want a clue?" I ask.

"No."

"You sure?"

"Yes." Pause. "No." Cass punches the seat in front of us. "Fine, give me a hint."

"*Once Upon a Time in the West.*"

"Oh! Henry Fonda."

"Yep."

"Okay, your turn."

Easy. Frank Sinatra, star of *Guys and Dolls*, my third-favorite movie musical of all time. But I always beat Cass at this game and I don't want him to feel bad, so I take a few minutes to pretend I'm thinking.

I turn to face the window, letting my eyes blur as boarded-up row houses zoom by. In an hour we'll be in our favorite place in the world. New York City. It's the first thing Cass and I ever bonded over, in fourth grade. Our teacher, Miss Calcott, asked everyone in class to go around and say what we wanted to be when we grew up. Most people said a vet or a basketball player or whatever, but I said I wanted to be a modern dancer with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in New York. My mom and I watched them on TV once and it was the most magical thing I'd ever seen in my whole life. There was this one dancer with long, curly hair who kept twirling in the air, and I knew instantly

that she was exactly who I wanted to be. Cass told the class he wanted to be a firefighter. Then at recess he took me behind the basketball court and confessed that he wanted to move to New York, too, and be an actor. But he begged me never to tell anyone, because the other guys all wanted to be firefighters and he thought they might not want to be friends with him anymore if they knew.

After that we started going to my apartment almost every weekend to watch old movies together. I'd play him all the ones with great dance scenes, like *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* and *West Side Story* and *Singin' in the Rain*. His favorite of all time is *Casablanca*, so that's why I call him "Cass" — well, not when anyone else is around. His real name is Chris, but that just doesn't fit him. The *real* him.

There was one year in middle school when we spent every weekend searching thrift stores for a long trench coat just like Humphrey Bogart's in the movie. He'd try a coat on and pop up the collar and make his eyes all squinty, and that's how we'd know if it was *the* coat or not. But when we finally bought one at the Salvation Army, he never even wore it. He just kept it hanging there in his room, next to the blue bathrobe his grandma gave him for his birthday. Which is funny, because he's one of the bravest guys I've ever met. You wouldn't think a six-foot dude in a big black sweatshirt with a diamond stud in his ear would care what other people think of him. But deep down, he does. More than anything.

And me. Everything about me is a happy medium — well, medium. Happy is debatable. I'm just a medium-sized, moderately attractive person (I *guess*, even though I'd never actually admit to anyone I think that) with a middle-of-the-road personality, and look where it's gotten me.

The middle of a school bus.

Anton lets out a gross, rumbling burp that makes my stomach feel full of curdled milk. I whip my head around to the back of the bus to

face him. He wiggles an eyebrow, the one with the three notches shaved into it, and smiles. I look down, skin burning, eyes stinging, mortified I even let him catch me glancing in his direction. I don't care what he does and I don't want to give him the satisfaction of thinking I do.

Then there's an old, familiar smell — a sweet-sour chemical smell that burns the inside of my nostrils. I instantly know what he's doing. He's melting the back of the seat with his lighter. I've seen him do it a million times when we used to sit together freshman year. We're juniors now, but he's an even bigger dick than he was then, if that's possible. I look back just in time to see him grab Rafael's hand and press his fingers into the hot plastic. Raf yelps, then Anton laughs like a moron, and then all the kids in the back of the bus are screaming like a bunch of monkeys. I exchange eye rolls with Francesca across the aisle.

Our music appreciation teacher, Mr. Jenkins, leaps up, races down the aisle and slaps the top of Anton's seat. He tells the guys to "cut it out" in as gruff a voice as he can manage, but he sounds more like a twelve-year-old who hasn't gone through puberty yet. Anton and Raf both crack up. Mr. Jenkins turns bright red and goes back to his seat in the front. When he sits down, I think I see him wipe some sweat off the back of his neck.

I feel so sorry for Jenkins. He's probably only a few years older than Anton, and it's so obvious he's afraid of him. In fact, Mr. Jenkins seems terrified of all of us. The poor guy probably had dreams of teaching at Rutgers or whatever after he graduated from teaching school. Instead he's stuck with the dregs of Trenton Senior High, trying to get a bunch of third-generation screwups like us to give a shit about music when we can't even play instruments. We're lost causes and he knows it. I mean, I like to think Cass and I aren't, but let's face it, our futures aren't exactly golden. Cass's dad lined him up a promising job mixing cement at the asphalt plant, and I'm the grand heiress of Spin Cycle,

my mom's crumbling fluff-'n'-fold empire. We'll be fine — we always are — but when Mr. Jenkins acts astonished that I haven't done my homework, I want to tell him to try going to school *and* bleaching sheets forty hours a week and see how much he feels like learning about minor scales.

I don't even know how Jenkins convinced the school to let our music class go on a field trip to Carnegie Hall. The tickets are probably in row Q of the balcony, and I guess the bus doesn't cost much, but still. The depressing part is no one except me and Cass even cares. Not about the concert, not about the city. It's basically all we've thought about since Jenkins announced the trip at the beginning of the school year, but of course it's lame to be excited about anything around here, so we keep it to ourselves.

"So, your dad lives near here, right?" Cass asks. He squeezes my arm as the bus crawls out of the Lincoln Tunnel. Light speckles the grime-filmed windows and we shield our eyes from the brightness. We stop at an intersection and a woman with impossibly tall stilettos clicks by.

"Second Avenue and 121st Street in Spanish Harlem. Not that close."

"We should grab a cab and visit him."

Ha. Hilarious. Cass knows I've only met my dad four times, and I've never even seen his apartment. Every time — at least, the times I have any memory of — was at Starbucks. Neither of us goes to Starbucks in our everyday lives, but in the warped world of me and my dad, Starbucks is our number-one hangout. I wonder what he'd do if I just showed up out of nowhere and rang his buzzer. He probably wouldn't even recognize me. I could pretend I'm a delivery girl or that I'm reading the meters. Some nobody just passing through.

"How long is this thing?" Cass asks. "A couple hours? Maybe we should sneak over to the Alvin Ailey studio instead. Watch the dancers through the windows."

“Nope. Nice try.” I quit dance six months ago, and since then I’ve been trying to erase it from my memory. But Cass makes it impossible.

“Ugh. Fine,” he says. “This new post-dance you is boring as hell. Well, we can always walk over to Times Square and people-watch at the Olive Garden, I guess. Think Jenkins will notice if we skip out?”

“I think he’s got his hands full.” Jenkins does his best to give Anton a menacing look. Anton responds with a for-real menacing look, then clicks his lighter and pretends to light Raf’s hair on fire.

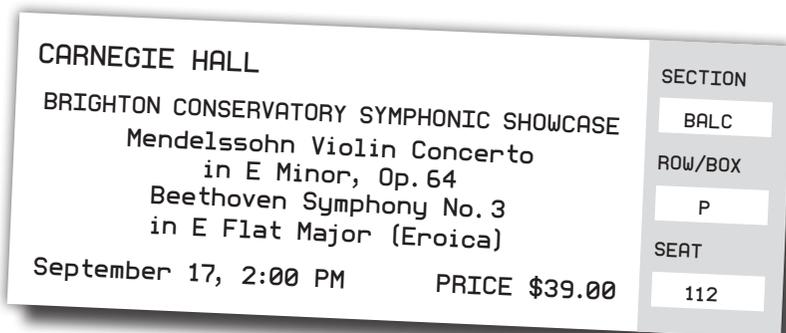
Then we’re pulling up to Carnegie Hall, and everything else in the world fades away. It’s weird, because it’s not even that beautiful. It’s just a brown brick building. Nothing special. But for some reason, just looking at it makes my chest hurt. It’s like a church. Or a sturdy old oak tree with roots that stretch underground for miles in every direction. No one on the bus, not even Cass, is giving it a second look. But it’s like it speaks to me.

“Actually, do you think we could just stay and watch the concert?” I ask Cass. “I don’t really feel like unlimited breadsticks right now.”

“I’m unable to comprehend how you could ever not feel like unlimited breadsticks, but fine,” he says.

“Frank Sinatra. Your turn.”

Mr. Jenkins makes us get off the bus in single file, and he hands us each a white ticket as we walk down the steps.



“Oh, my God,” Cass whispers as we follow the others toward the entrance.

“What?”

“Look up.”

“At what?”

He points. “That’s our apartment. That’s where we’re going to live when we move here.”

On the top floor of the building there’s a row of tall, rectangular windows. I imagine going upstairs, opening the curtains and staring down at myself on the street below. My heart pounds.

“Inside Carnegie Hall?”

“That looks like an apartment, doesn’t it?”

“It’s probably an office.”

“With red drapes? Offices have blinds.”

“Since when do you know anything about drapes?”

“Since my mom’s watched six hours of *House Hunters* every weekend for the last ten years.”

“I bet it’s, like, five thousand dollars a month.”

“Who cares. We’re going to be rich.”

“From asphalt and dirty laundry?”

“But what about Jamie Rodriguez?”

“What about her?”

“She made it out of Trenton High School and became a star.”

“She had three lines in *Zoolander 2*.”

“Well, that’s it, Dom. That’s our place. I can feel it — I’m very intuitive. It’s meant to be.”

A few months ago I would have been right there with Cass, eyes full of stars. But the more I think about living in New York, the crazier it seems. How the hell are we going to get out of Trenton and all the way here? How will we make money? Who would even hire us? But I don’t have the heart to say this. I’m not sure that Cass can handle the truth.

So instead I say, “It’ll be amazing,” and squeeze his arm. He smiles, but I glance down so I don’t have to smile back.

Before we join the old people shuffling into the building, Mr. Jenkins forces all the guys to take their hats off.

“Mr. J., why does this ticket say ‘Erotica’? You taking us to see porn?” Anton yells so loud an old lady with pearls turns around and glares at us.

Raf says, “Yeah, Mr. J., stop touching me against my will! Stop molesting me!”

Anton and his friends laugh like idiots and shove each other until poor Jenkins turns red and lets us go in.

We walk up a few flights of stairs that turn around and around, and just when I think they’re going to go on forever, there’s a carpeted area and a red curtain and an usher waving us in. We’re on the fifth floor, in the top balcony. As far up as you can get without being on the ceiling. I’m dizzy, but not because of the height. I’m flooded with the same head-buzzy feeling I got when we pulled up to the building. Carnegie Hall is like a palace. The seats are a brilliant red velvet, and the walls are cream, lined with gold. On the ceiling is a bright, shimmering disk of light, with more pinpricks of light surrounding it — like the sun.

But then we sit down and it’s hard to pay attention to any of it, because Anton is sitting right behind me. And the rows are so narrow his legs are practically straddling my head.

Jenkins tries to distract us from the bad seats by telling us how fantastic the sound is up here. “If we’re talking acoustics, it’s one of the best places to sit in Carnegie Hall,” he says. “And the college students you’re about to hear are the best of the best. Thousands of hopefuls from around the world audition for the chance to attend the Brighton Conservatory every year, and only a very lucky few get in. So we’re in for a real treat today. Now, if you’ll please take a minute to look up

at this gorgeous architecture. The building was designed by William Burnet Tuthill and officially opened in 1891 ...”

Jenkins drones on and on, like he always does. But it *is* gorgeous. Maybe the most beautiful place I’ve ever been in my entire life. I trace the carved, glossy wood on the armrest with my fingernails.

Anton jabs his knee into my ear.

“Can you stop?” I twist around to face him, realize his crotch is, like, three inches from my head and whip my head back around again.

“What’s wrong, baby girl? Last year you were begging to have my balls in your face.”

His asshole friends are laughing and oohing and kicking the back of my seat. My cheeks ignite and my eyes blur. Don’t let him do this to you. Don’t let him do this to you. Not again.

Before I even realize what’s happening, Cass stands up, turns around and raises his fist an inch from Anton’s ear. “Want *this* in your face?” he asks, loud enough for the whole balcony to hear. Everyone shuts up. Anton snorts and stares at the ground. Cass sits down again.

The lights dim, and my face cools down. Cass squeezes my hand. He’s the bravest person I know. He always says you have to act tough before someone else beats you to it. I wish I could wear his confidence like a blanket. Sometimes I’m so happy he’s my friend it hurts.

A bunch of girls in black dresses and guys in ties and suit jackets sit down onstage with their instruments. For some reason I thought they were going to be old. Orchestras *sound* old. Like the median age is seventy-five and the players all go out to some dusty restaurant for decaf afterward. But even though they’re only a few years older than Cass and me, they’re sitting up straight, completely focused — not like us at all. There are some instruments I recognize, like violins and flutes and a piano and those huge violins I forget the name of that are practically the size of a person. And then there are two girls holding these tall brown tube things with thin silver mouthpieces snaking out.

And these weird circular trumpets. And these huge copper drums that look like witches' cauldrons.

An older man in a suit walks out to the front of the stage, and the audience applauds wildly. He hasn't even done anything yet, and already everyone is clapping.

Onstage, in the first row of chairs, a boy with floppy black hair stands up, holding his violin in one hand and his bow in the other. Damn, he's cute — or at least, I think he is. It's hard to tell from all the way up here. Sometimes distance can play tricks on you, and a guy you think is the hottest man alive ends up having a cowlick or a unibrow or a snaggletooth. Or worse, all three.

A guy with short blond hair, who's sitting next to the long-distance-cute boy, stands up, too. He points his bow in the air like it's an extension of his arm, and everyone starts playing the same note. At first I look at Cass like, *That's it? They're just gonna play the same thing for an hour?* But then there's silence and the blond boy sits down again.

Anton yawns loudly, and somebody shushes him. Probably Jenkins. I don't bother to turn around.

The man in the suit lifts his baton, and the musicians all lift their instruments. There's silence, silence ... and then an explosion of sound so loud I flinch and Cass grabs my arm.

I'm not a gushy person. *Casablanca* never chokes me up, not even the ending. When I was a kid, I didn't cry when Bambi's mom died. I laugh in the face of that commercial with baby ducks crossing the street in tiny yellow rain boots. I roll my eyes in the greeting card aisle at the drugstore. So what happens next I'll never be able to explain.

There are at least fifty people on that stage, but through my wet eyes I can see only one: the boy with the wild black hair, playing the violin like the world's most beautiful madman.

{ 2 }

Ben

When we reach the codetta, my fingers burst into flames.

The notes on the page zoom up through my eyes and twist through my synapses and bubble in my blood and explode from my fingernails and become something bigger. Something enormous. From a flat, black-and-white grid of thirty-second notes to music. Music that's actually deserving of this place. This golden temple, where all the greatest geniuses of the last century have come to worship. Fritz Kreisler. Leonard Bernstein. Billie Holiday. And me.

And then, there's a sound. Something else.

It pinches my ear like a beesting, and my eardrum throbs and swells and puffs up to a thousand times its size. All I can hear is that note. Before he even plays it, it's hanging in the air, threatening. Then it happens, and it's everywhere, creeping across the stage, wet and sticky and stinking.

I can't let him ruin everything. If I don't stop this, we'll be just another run-of-the-mill orchestra butchering Mendelssohn on the sacred floorboards where Duke Ellington made his debut.

The second movement begins, and it's there again, waiting in the air. I can hear it — he's tentative. It's not even like he botches a phrase or his intonation is off. His bow grazes the strings too delicately, and he comes in like a shadow. He's not sure. I look up and see the landscape of quivering bows, wavering lips, twitching wrists all around me. No one is sure.

Except me. I'm sure.

Never been more sure in my life.

So my fingers ignite and slide up the strings, and I play like I always do. Like I'm in my room, playing for no one. I crack myself open and pour everything tender and passionate and vulnerable out into a pool across the stage to counteract all the nerves and terror, sweat and fear. I can't make everyone sound right, but I can turn the notes on the page into music. That's what I always do. That's what everyone counts on me to do.

And then I stop thinking.

Because once you start thinking, that's when you're really screwed.

* *

After what seems like no time at all, the audience stands and applause surrounds us. Dean Robertson puts down his baton and nods approvingly. Sweat mats his sideburns. He's obviously impressed, and it's extremely tough for students to impress him. Then he looks right at me and winks.

And everyone sees him. Amy and Kelly and, I think, Jun-Yi are staring, and I shrug and look down, because you shrug and look down when someone compliments you in public. That's what you do — you try to look small so no one hates you for being big. But I know I nailed it. Robertson knows I always nail it. Everyone knows I always nail it. I'm not being cocky or an asshole or whatever. It's just the truth.

Carter won't look me in the eye.
He knows he fucked it up.

* *

The applause lifts us into the wings, up a few twisty flights of stairs and into the greenroom backstage, filled with folding chairs and cracked-open instrument cases littered like empty oyster shells.

Claire comes in as I'm zipping my Brooks Brothers concert jacket into a garment bag. She grabs my hand.

"Ben! That was stunning," she says. "The Mendelssohn! God, you're incredible."

Her hand. It's cold and slight and fluttering. An icy moth. She lets her nerves get the best of her, and she told me she sometimes takes an Inderal before she performs. I can't take any of that stuff — won't take it, don't need it. I'm always calm when I'm on. My mom once said "eerily calm," which sounds like a serial killer, so I hate that, but I know what she means. I promise I'm not a serial killer. I'd like to take that whole story back, actually. Have it stricken from the record. Because it makes me sound insane and I promise I'm not.

But I'm always, always calm onstage.

I grip Claire's hand with both of mine and warm it up. We stand there, still and silent for a minute in the room full of noise. I know she has a crush on me. Jacob told me when we split a cab home after chamber music class. But I've noticed it, too. There's this beam of light projecting from her eyes when she looks at me. Tiny clues are everywhere. You don't have to ask girls how they feel. Just watch the light shooting out their eyes like a laser pointer and you have all the clues you need to be telepathic. I should write a book about how to become a superhero. I should write a kids' book about a violin-playing superhero who can read minds and fly through the air on the back of a giant Stradivarius. I should —

“So?” she asks.

“The last section of the first movement, right before the coda.”

“What about it?”

“Carter lost it. He was so tentative you’d think he was sight-reading.”

“Did Robertson notice?”

“I don’t think so. The second movement was fine. The third was whatever. The first was a mess, and it was all Carter. He only gets to be the concertmaster once this semester, and he completely blew it. He’s just not a leader. He almost messed up my solo on top of it. You’d think he just saw the music this morning. If anyone’s going to get cut this year, it’ll definitely be him. I’m calling it now.”

“I didn’t notice anyone else up there but you, to be honest.”

Her eyes are laser-beaming all over the place, and it’s making me nauseous. I let her hand go.

Claire runs over to hug Jun-Yi. I carefully pack up my violin. I’m cleaning the chin rest and wiping down the strings — sweat erodes violin strings, and my hands sweat a lot. I’m cleaning and cleaning, and I notice a dab of sweat crystallizing on the neck, so I do the whole thing over again.

Carter is staring at me.

They’re all staring at me.

“I think it’s clean, dude,” he says, laughing.

I try to roll my eyes at Claire, but she’s on the other side of the room, talking to Iman.

Once everyone else has left, Jacob and Iman and Claire and I talk about splitting a cab across town, and I make them all laugh with my old-timey cab driver impression. I try to convince them that the best idea in the world is to go get grilled cheese at Brooklyn Diner first (which is confusing, because the diner isn’t in Brooklyn; it’s right around the corner). Or maybe we could take a walk in Central Park, or if they want to just hang out at my place or whatever, we have every

movie channel, and basically anything in the world to eat, and —

Just as we're walking out the door, Robertson calls me back. He's leaning on the edge of the piano. I tell everyone to go ahead.

The door shuts and we're alone.

"Great work today, Ben," he says.

"Thank you." I want to say more, but I keep my mouth shut. I've gotten pretty good at that at Brighton.

"You're auditioning for the Sonata Showcase?"

We have a bunch of performances at Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center every year, but there's only one Sonata Showcase: the staggeringly important end-of-the-year concert that only twelve students in the entire school are asked to do. You and a partner (violin sonatas are always for two — usually a violinist and a pianist) get to play at Lincoln Center in front of the entire faculty. Last semester two third-years played Brahms's Violin Sonata no. 3 and got a full-page review in the *New York Times*. As a second-year student, getting into the Sonata Showcase is practically impossible. But if you do, it means universal respect from the upperclassmen. The first-years treat you like a god. Overnight you go from being lucky to be at this school to them being lucky to have you.

So I say, "Yep. Uh, yes. I'm auditioning."

"Good. Which piece?"

"*Kreutzer*. Basically because of you. Because of that thing you told me after rehearsal."

"How you're able to tap into a depth of emotion in your performance that most violinists — even at the professional level — can never attain. Love and pain all at once."

"Yeah. Well, I thought the piece would help me get more comfortable with that. Do you think it's a smart choice? I mean, I know you're not supposed to help us, but I thought especially the third movement would be —"

“With whom?”

“Claire Prescott. You know her? Of course you do. You know everyone. Anyway, we met at music camp when we were twelve, and now that we’re both at Brighton we’ve gotten back in touch. We’ve been wanting to work on something together ever since —”

“The opening passage is a land mine. It needs to be fluid. Elegant.”

“I’ll get it.”

“As I said, great work today.”

“Thank you, sir.”

I wait for more instruction or feedback, something, anything, but that’s it. He looks at me like he’s wondering why I’m still standing there. I try to access my superpowers and read his mind. There’s a flicker of something, but I can’t figure out what it is. Approval or indifference or a mixture of both. But he wants me to audition for the Sonata Showcase. He’s *wondering* about me. He’s not just a conductor — he’s the dean of students, so he basically controls who succeeds here. And he’s choosing me. I want to do fifty laps around the room and punch the wall and eat a thousand grilled cheese sandwiches.

Instead I run down the stairs and onto the sidewalk, through the program-clutching women and cane-carrying old men, to catch up with my friends.

* *

I forgot.

Their parents were all waiting for them. Because when you play Carnegie Hall, your parents are supposed to take off work and come and see you, even if it’s in the middle of the day. No big deal. There’s leftover Chinese food in the fridge and my favorite recording of the *Kreutzer* Sonata waiting for me at home.

Mom works until ten on Tuesdays, and Dad’s got a board meeting

with the Upper East Side Neighborhood Council about the new grocery store they're trying to put in, and Milo has his French tutor after school. So with no one waiting for me after the concert, I walk along Fifty-Seventh Street to look for a cab, running *Kreutzer* in my mind.

Don't get me wrong — my parents care and everything. When I left this morning, there was a note from Mom on the kitchen table: "Yessss! I'm so proud of you, honey! So sorry we couldn't be there this time." I'm a born-and-raised New Yorker, and I made my Carnegie Hall debut when I was eight, with the City Youth Chamber Orchestra. My parents have been to probably three hundred of my concerts in the last nine years, not to mention countless rehearsals and lessons and auditions, so it's not exactly a big deal for them anymore. I guess it shouldn't be a big deal for me, either.

My brain is too busy buzzing from the performance, anyway. I don't think I'd ever want to take drugs, but I can't imagine they'd be any better than the floating, fluorescent high I get from playing a concert and getting it right and being recognized for the billions of hours of work I do by someone who matters. Like, really matters, for my future. I've got it all mapped out: First, I need to be the best in my year. Then I need to be the best in the school. Then in the country, the world, the universe. Today it feels like I can really do it.

Then I look up and realize I'm home — Lexington Avenue and Ninety-Sixth. At least I didn't walk the wrong way, look up and find myself at the Seaport. That's happened before, as my mom loves to tell her friends: "Sometimes I think Ben's brain is just a tangle of violin strings."

"Beethoven got lost all the time and he wrote nine symphonies, nine concertos and a billion sonatas," I always shoot back.

When I get home, I head straight for the kitchen. I don't even take off my jacket. I pile a plate with lo mein and home-style tofu, brown rice and electric-green broccoli with this gloppy, delicious garlic sauce, and stick it in the microwave.

Then I text Abby and Carter and Veronica and Hadley, my grandma in Queens and Claire, even though I know she has her private lesson at seven. But no one's answering. I call Fred at Virtuoso to see if their new cases are in yet. They aren't. I make up a few more questions; do they have any chin rests with gold hardware? And do they have any gold Pirazzi E strings? Even though I know they do. But I need to keep talking to people, as many people as I can, or else the buzzy Carnegie Hall energy will stop, and I don't want it to. Not yet.

The microwave beeps. I take the plate into my room and shut the door. The smell is incredible. It's like French fries married a sesame seed and exploded all over the place. I take a giant monster bite so big it makes my jaw hurt, then run over to my laptop and hook it up to the stereo system my dad got me for my birthday.

I turn on Isaac Nadelstein and Malik Vasilyev playing *Kreutzer*, my audition piece for the Sonata Showcase. There's the tricky opening phrase Robertson was talking about. He's right — the violin starts abruptly, playing two strings at once, rolling the bow, creating the illusion of a piano chord. The bow articulation is going to be a complete bitch as the piece picks up momentum. Keeping my stamina up until the end will be rough. I have to keep my fingers light and airy and quick. If I seize up or get a cramp, the piece will fail. I listen. I chew.

I know *Kreutzer*. Most classical musicians do. Violin Sonata no. 9. Opus 47. Beethoven originally wrote it for George Bridgetower to play, but they got into a huge fight about some woman Beethoven was probably sleeping with, and at the last minute he removed the dedication and changed it to Rodolphe Kreutzer, a violinist he barely even met. It's kind of funny, because Kreutzer didn't even like Beethoven's music that much to begin with. And this piece is almost like a massive argument — it's complicated, erratic and forty-three minutes long. I heard Joshua Bell and Yuja Wang play it at Lincoln Center a few years ago, and I've listened to the Nadelstein-Vasilyev

recording a billion times. I'll make it through the technique. It's about getting past it, so I can clear my brain enough to feel which notes get joy and which get pain. Which notes explode and which ones shudder. I put the first movement on Repeat. Staying in tune and in tempo with Claire will be tough when my hands are already exhausted.

Stop it. Stop thinking about technical stuff. I rub my face with my hands. I need a blank slate. I grab my violin and play the opening passage. And play. And play.

* *

"Sweetie? Ben? Ben."

"What?"

"Honey, it's almost eleven."

"And?"

"And it's pitch-black in here."

Mom's right, sort of — it's dark except for the cool-blue light from the computer screen. And the car headlights dancing in patterns on the wall. And one red pinprick of light on the stereo. So it's not exactly pitch-black, but it's too dark to see the music. I don't remember the sun setting.

Again. Again. Again.

My eyes burn when she snaps on the overhead light. I groan and rest my head in the crook of my arm until my eyes adjust. She's doing that Worried Mom thing she's so good at, busying herself by picking up crumpled tissues and fluffing my pillow and straightening the sheet music on my desk. Worrying makes her feel like a better mother.

"I'm fine," I say, hoping she'll shut the door and let me work.

I love my mom — she just drives me completely freaking crazy sometimes. She wants me to sleep eight hours a night *and* be the best violinist in the world? It doesn't work like that. Every minute you don't

spend practicing, someone else is. She's a labor and delivery nurse at City Medical Center, no better or worse than any of the other nurses there. She doesn't understand.

I look up. She's still in her blue scrubs. She's been delivering babies all night. God, I feel awful for snapping at her. She's just trying to help. She's still smoothing imaginary wrinkles out of my comforter. Smoothing out my life by proxy.

"Thanks, Mom. I'm okay."

"But you didn't eat any dinner, honey."

"Yeah, I did. I had that leftover Chinese."

She points to the overflowing, untouched plate on my desk. The lo mein looks all pasty and congealed, and the broccoli is wilted and brown. Wait, I remember eating it. Didn't I eat it?

"I can make you a sandwich. There's blackberry jam from the farmers' market and —"

"I'm fine. Not hungry." I play the opening passage again.

"What are you working on?"

"*Kreutzer*. Beethoven."

"Please go to sleep soon. Don't do this tonight. Your eyes are all red, and tomorrow's your early day."

"Okay," I say, even though I have no intention of sleeping. She gives up and shuts the door. She knows I'm barely listening. There's nothing she can do.

It's quiet. I play the ache. I play the land mine.



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LINDSAY CHAMPION is a graduate of the NYU Tisch School of the Arts, where she spent most of her time doing high kicks and eating falafel. She is the food and wellness director for the women's lifestyle digital media company PureWow, mostly for the snacks. This is her first novel.

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