

“Mama, won’t you play that piece again...? Please...?”

A young girl, a budding umamusume laid tucked into her cottage bed. The air was warm with the remnant of spiralling gold, the only light besides the candle at the nightstand to illuminate the night’s darkness of the girl’s humble bedroom.

At her side was her mother, wearing a smile fond of her daughter’s eagerness for the worn violin in hand. She chuckled lightly, before blowing out the candle. That was the sign for her little one to go to bed.

“You truly love that piece, don’t you, my little musicista? I’ve played it for you twice now, aren’t you tired already...?”

Yet, even in the darkness, she could sense the refusal of a shaken head and a pout from under her daughter’s sheets.

“But I like the story,” the girl whined, “the story about the princess from the sky and her prince...”

Of course she did. It was her mother’s first and only composition written in her retirement as a professional musician, but more importantly, it was a piece written specifically for her dearest daughter to hear, to soothe her more than any other piece ever could. With this knowledge, her sleep was sound throughout her years.

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As the little girl grew up, so did her love and appreciation for music. Even as her mother’s skills deteriorated with age, the budding musician made sure to keep the tune -her mother’s gift- alive with her own hands.

As far as she was concerned, her friend was her violin, the sheet scores and the practice room in which her conversation with the very spirits of the earth would

commence at the bow's touch of strings. By middle school, those ears were adept enough to listen to even the beauty of one's soul, to see their sounds as a colour which reflected their very hearts. A beautiful colour would reflect a beautiful heart, and so, would reflect a beautiful person. Those of great compassion, kindness, bravery held iridescent, beautiful colours which were very much attractive to the eyes of the young musician. Meanwhile, impurity was a sign of fear, of a wavering nature and an unfirm grasp of oneself. Those were muddy colours, colours which stood out amidst the sea of beautiful, harmonious sounds of the earth and its nature.

Each living, breathing creature had its own unique 'colours'. It was through these colours that this little musician was able to enjoy the unique sounds of her surroundings, to savour her world beyond what most would have brushed off as bustle on a train or the morning bird's song. But it was said that the most beautiful sound of them all was the one emitted by the princess of the sky, a figure from her mother's song whom she vowed to find, even if it meant with her growing eccentricity...

The golden ring of a bell signalled yet another end to the school day. Viridescent blue of shuffling notebooks and the sea foam green of student's relief to go home for the day surrounded the lone umamusume. The class itself was varied in its pallet, having its fair share of both pristine and muddy tones alike. However, it was this contrast which she loved the most about people, so much so that she'd often set her sights on some (un)lucky classmate to pester with countless theatrics and to be the subject of myriads of songs...

Perhaps it was more of a curse than a blessing that she loved each and every colour with great contempt in her heart. Perhaps if she didn't hold that much of a passion, it wouldn't hurt just as much when she couldn't understand.

"Hm? Oh, Class President, are you going home already...?" Watching her 'friend' itch for the door truly tugged at her heart. A reluctant head turned at the sudden confrontation, the opposite girl's gaze averted with discomfort.

"S-Sorry, Earth, I- I actually promised my grandma something, so... I doubt I'll be able to- "

"H-Hey, look-" One student pointed, "She's at it again, really...?" As did another.

She paused. The moment her eyes corrected themselves, it was as if the entire class had disappeared and she was now staring into a violent sea of blue. In front of Sounds of Earth, she was frozen, save for the shaking of her legs.

“What- what are you doing...?”

“Mm? Ah, mi scusi, I was just admiring the bellezza of your heart’s harmony, is all... Say, what did you think of the recordings I sent you? I tried to follow the natural tempo of your heart, but it was quite difficult since you aren’t exactly the ‘principessa’ that I’m looking for...”

Unforgiveable. It was absolutely unforgiveable, that grin, that demeanour. Everyone else thought the same way. From her very first day, her ‘transfer’ felt more forceful than what everyone was comfortable with, everything about that girl was forceful. She was strange, eccentric, loud at times, someone like that was bound to be unpopular yet no one had the heart to speak against the terror that plagued their classes, the stranger who barged her voice into each and every conversation, who doted on one person to the next. Was it pity? Fear? No one knew for sure, but this time, their voices were bound to be heard.

The whispers grew, infectious from one student to the next.

“...stop.”

“Hm...?”

“Please just stop already...! Just stop...-!” the distance between them had already widened. Droplets of tears accumulating on the floor served as a wide moat in which Earth couldn’t ever cross. Her breathing accelerated, like a rusted, worn engine, it sputtered, stammered with it’s last remaining strength to hold itself back from self-explosion yet at the same time, that’s all it’s ever wanted. To explode in a fiery outburst and to bring its rider down with it.

The sides of her skirt tightened, creased, wrinkled with near-uncontainable rage accumulating into her fingertips until they bled snow-white.

“Just- It’s been three months of you doing this to me and everyone else, just stop it already...! Can’t you see...!? Everyone’s TIRED of your bullshit,”

“I-“

“Don’t you dare think for even a second that you can go around butting your head into other’s business just because you can play an instrument, besides, I- none of us here can even understand a word you say half of the time...! What’s this stupid ‘princess’ stuff even about, anyways...? We all have names, I have a name, do you even know mine...?!”

How pathetic, Earth couldn’t even respond. The words forming in her head dissipated like bubbles just as quickly as they were formed, her tongue became locked in a stutter tethering between the line of confusion and apology. It really wasn’t at all long until that once calming atmosphere of the classroom became murky, swamp-like, at the gradual involvement of the whole class. Those eyes tore through her. It was the very first time Earth had an audience as large as this, yet this wasn’t the performance she wanted to give. This wasn’t the music she wanted to perform nor hear, for once in her life, she wanted to rip out those eardrums of her, to burst them at their seams, anything to drown out the overwhelming noise that flooded her mind.

They hated her.

They hated her, for her smile, for her mannerisms, for how she’d always be so pleased with everything but more importantly herself. They hated how the only thing to change her expression would be a mistimed note or the hidden dab of wasabi in her sushi, they hated how inconsiderate, how selfish, how strange, weird, foreign she acted, how the isolating theatrics she was infamous for only served to mask the loneliness inside.

She couldn’t let herself be, no, not like this. That song- the one her mother used to play, it’s colours too, started to distort and melt into the wax of her surroundings. Desperately, those arms felt tiny in clawing at the vibrance amidst the sea of grey, like a diver chained at the bottom of the ocean or an astronaut adrift in the deepest depths of space, no matter how hard she tried, her hands felt sluggish as they slipped through the sands of sound.

She felt her stomach churn; she was about to be sick.

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Fortunately, within the deepest darkness lay the tiniest hope.

Earth's storm cleared free with a refreshing breeze, as if god's hand itself had descended to pull her from her nightmare. Instead of murk, what awaited in her sweat-drenched hands as her eyes awoke were papers, sprawled across a wooden desk under the amber flicker of a lit candle.

Her saviour? An angel who stirred in her peaceful sleep, Earth's very first roommate. While she wasn't the princess of her childhood, her genuine kindness was a stepping stone to helping her forget those days, to forget the nightmare that had haunted her ever since. The relief of each morning was brief yet warm. She wasn't the same child as she was back then, she was able to graduate, move on, get accepted into the prestigious Tracen Academy, but while she was a step closer to her racing career, she subconsciously knew that deep down, it was a far step back for her as a musician.

She stared at the lonesome violin case sitting snugly in the corner of the room. Ironically enough, it was far enough from the candle to remain untouched by a glowing amber. Why? She couldn't ask herself this enough. Despite having not played for two long years now, she still felt compelled to bring it with her everywhere she went. So close and yet so far.

No. She couldn't go back to sleep bearing the taste of defeat and self-pity in her mouth.

Self-begrudgingly, she retrieved the violin case from its corner of darkness, walked past the pile of trashed scores and into the cold air of the night. All was silent outside the dormitory. Even the elements were asleep, for Earth's own heartbeat was the loudest thing in the moment.

Followed by a thud, a zipper, then finally a sigh.

Within her own little world, nothing else mattered. The waters of her world had long been sullied by insecurity, over were the days of simple admiration for the colours around her. Her pallet had run dry, and it was now up to her as an artist to refuel that passion and restore colour back to her world.

She mustered every last drop of muscle memory she had left and lifted her brush to the wooden pallet of strings. The varnish hadn't been changed yet the surface was still smooth and fresh to the touch, albeit with a bit of dust. She chuckled. There was something inherently amusing about the cold, smooth finish of a varnished piece of wood. The hand-feel was just as she remembered, and the weight against her collarbone felt good too.

She was already having fun before she even played, so why? Why did her fingers tremble with so much fear?

What did she have left to fear...?

Thousands of glares, an unwanted audience over the years all in one place. All in a world that was supposed to belong to the music and the musician. She grit her teeth for each eye, for each comment, for each voice she grits her teeth, she grits, grit, bit until the taste of iron was drawn from the inside of her mouth. Her legs locked yet she wanted to run- fly, even. In the end, she couldn't do it, could she? How could she ever hope of surviving (let alone running) in the Classics if she couldn't even win against her own past?

That mind once notorious for majestically whimsy songs went blank once more, hundreds of notes yet to be played, words yet to be spoken gone in an instant. Once more, she was left searching for salvation, begging for help again like a lost puppy ashore a sea of despair.

She couldn't do it.

She couldn't.

Couldn't.

“Could.”



“What a beautiful melody...” She thought to herself. For some reason, somehow, even in the middle of a time where she was most alone there was someone, somebody, something. It wasn’t warm, nor cold, human yet not. Whatever it was, it was just as far as it was close, almost as if Earth was chasing it from behind while at the same time, it pushed her forward. The melody she saw was a colour unlike any she’d seen before. Indescribable to the naked eye, inscribable on paper yet the score was as clear as day in her mind. This otherworldly colour, this pure beauty was impossible to taint by the conventional pigments of the earth. With one final breath, she steeled her fingers across the strings and allowed herself to be dragged by this ‘being’.

“Home,” she communed. The colour was faint, faint yet she desperately chased after it as if it were a lifeline. “You’d like to go home, is that right?”

...

“So, you’re trapped here, are you...? Where is this ‘home’...? Please tell me more with your song, it’s such a fascinating melody...”

...

“...I apologise, I don’t think I quite understand- “

...

“I see.”

Finally, she opened her eyes. But what awaited her wasn’t darkness nor the return of gloom but the nostalgic vibrance of nature itself. She held in a laugh at the sight of not one, but two broken strings. What would’ve greatly upset her back then held all the more significance now. It served as a reminder, a hope that she was still alive. That the little musician within her was still alive.

But that wasn't the end of her exhilaration. Blessed were her eyes when she laid gaze upon the princess she'd been searching for. This sound, her song, its colour, each and everything about it met the conditions of a true princess. The princess whose long hair fit its figure almost like a gown of blonde and blue, with a head high towards the countless stars speaking diplomacy with a single gaze. Just like in her mother's song, she reached the stars -perched on the dormitory rooftop- but she looked ethereal from where Earth stood, nonetheless.

And so, to thank it for freeing her chest, her shoulders, she placed her tattered bow on the remaining strings she had. To thank the universe that she stood before for allowing her to ride its transmissions.

Perhaps it was its unearthly nature which made its colour so magnetising. So regal, so free, an otherworldly sound that was absolute to the changes of the Earth.

She might just start regularly coming out late at night, now that she's found her true audience.