

# Stab and Close

WARNING: This story contains violence and gore! Read at your own risk! Happy Halloween!

By: Noelle

This story is dedicated to all the marching bands American Fork has ever beaten!  
Everyone has their year, American Fork has just had it over and over and over again.

Tuesday, October 7

The crowd exhaled in a single gasp as, almost simultaneously, three clarinetists collapsed, causing those who were marching towards them to stumble across their limp bodies. I hated the crowds. One man jostled my elbow, and I turned, enraged. *They dare! They dare touch me! Noise. Muttering that should be silence. They should be watching, they speak instead, waiting, waiting for the one band they came to see. Comparing, degrading, discussing. Not watching, not appreciating.* Three confused and worried flutists dragged the bodies off the field. Satisfied, excited, and grateful to be away from the stink of the warm pack of bodies, I left with a grin.

There were plans to be made. American Fork, their red uniforms a testament to the sins they openly flouted, had still won. Unsurprising. It would take more than a few poisoned reeds to knock them out of the bidding for their eternal first place.

Wandering towards their trailer, I waited. Slowly, they entered their camp in an orderly stream of black and scarlet. Blood and darkness. Waiting. My fingers twitched in eagerness. A trombonist wandered toward me, unaware. Throwing my hand across his mouth, I yanked him behind the trailer disgusted by the necessary momentary contact. Eyes wide in panic, he scrambled at my hands, but I was strong, tempered by the flames of war. Grabbing the strap on his wide-brimmed shako I pulled, smiling as his face turned a satisfying color of purple. Puny fingers scratching at his throat, weakening, slowing, stopping. The body slumped against the ground. A flicker of some unknown emotion filled me as I gazed at his face, now so calm, so still. Pushing it away, I felt a grin fill my face. One more hole, one more hole in American Forks' block. 15 of 247. So much work still to do.

Day 1,

I was approached by the police today to take up a new case. One regarding the systematic murder of high school age students, all a part of the American Fork Marching Band. It is my hope to stop the murderer as soon as possible. Deaths of this kind are disturbing and there are already too many of them. I will visit the high school tomorrow. Hopefully I will be able to discover more about this marching band phenomenon.

-Detective A. Sharp

Wednesday, October 8

Within the dark, familiar confines of my apartment, I nailed the article up among the others, the headlines declaring my good work. “Teenage girl missing,” “Four dead on football field,” “Marissa Cunningham, dearly departed,” “Tragedy strikes the Sport of the Arts,” “Killer in American Fork,” “Detective assigned to Marching Band Deaths” I paused stroking the final article. *A detective. A playmate. One who would notice my brilliance. One who will finally stop this. A tiny voice. A rebellious voice. Not mine. Not mine! NOT MINE! It must die. It must fall! It must fall, fall like the others, all the others, all the other bodies! The others! The others! The others!*

Suddenly, there was a knife in my hand. It came down on my wrist, scarlet flowed. I watched the rebellion drip out of me, a purifying stream. Dropping the knife, I stumbled toward my desk. Yellow caught my eye. My hand stroked the image with care. 237 friends in yellow, black and white. I stood in the midst of them, young then, eyes different. The eyes of one confidently in charge. Those behind me, my band. They, locked in eternal second place. *First! They deserved first! More must fall! More must die! They must die! The block must fall! They must all fall!* With a grin, I pulled on my work clothes and entered my car.

I entered their grounds and began to clean. Their janitor. Their server. Ha. Ha-ha. Ha, ha ha! It didn’t take long before the students filed out for the day, leaving only the band kids, alone in the school to practice. The band kids, and the janitors. Then only the janitors, the band kids huddling in a pack for safety. I waited. Finally, a drummer wandered in late. He didn’t even look at me as he grabbed his instrument. I moved to block the door. As he neared, I ripped the drumstick out of his hand. A surge of feeling rose within me as I saw his green eyes widen in shock. “You! No, no please! Please, please, please!”

“You always get first! Always first! No more! No more! NO MORE!” We were now in a corner. He whimpered, as the sticks fell, drumming out a rhythm of screams, and solos of bone crunching agony. His sobs crescendoed, his cries accented. It was music worthy of the marching band, or at least of AF. Soon, too soon, the cries ended, fading into whimpers and finally, to silence. A melodramatic ending. A death. Dropping the splintered sticks, I felt my breath whoosh through my lungs. Cleansing them. Bringing clarity that was lost. More clarity at least. The feeling rose up again as I gazed at the broken body. “No more,” I whispered, turning from the carcass to the janitorial cart. 16 of 247. The choir room was next to be cleaned.

I occupied myself until the practice was over, then moved back toward the band room, cleaning rooms on the opposite side of the hall. A stream of subdued voices began to enter the school. Exhaustion and terror nipping the sound at its bud. Not long though, before hysteria filled the hallway. Dropping my equipment, I ran like a good adult to see what terrified the children so. Why did shock fill me when I saw the body? No. The carcass. Shaking my head, I calmly escorted the dots out of the room and called the police. Coming into the hall, I watched them sob, a few brave souls comforting the others, their own terror barely concealed. These

would be the last, I would wait until they cracked and sobbed at my feet before I killed them with their own instruments, their own life.

Sirens punctuated the air, and I went out to meet the police, explaining what had been found. One among them was dressed in a black trench coat, his amber gaze examining the school. "Can I speak to those who initially found the body?" he asked.

I shook my head. "You could sir, but they are traumatized. I think it would be best if they were left alone. I was the first responder, I can tell you what you need to know."

He hesitated for a moment, then nodded, proffering his hand. "I'm Detective Anthony Sharp, assigned to this case by the state. Pleased to meet you."

"My pleasure, Detective. I'm Ardente Barocco, a janitor at the school."

"Well then, take me to the scene if you would please, Mr. Barocco." Leading him to the band room, I stood back as he examined the scene. So careful. He froze as he saw the body, I watched his eyes darken with sorrow, then light with anger. I knew that light. It was the light that shone in my own eyes when I examined my work. "You do not seem overly shaken by this," his voice quavered as he gestured to the body, his black hair seeming to wilt before the scene. "Why is that, Mr. Barocco?"

"I served my time in the army before I was a janitor. I've seen my share of death." Even as I spoke, I saw death again. Bombs. Screams. Death. I swore weakness off while I was there, I couldn't have it now. Not now. A firm shake of my head dispelled the images, locking them back into the darkest corner in my mind, where they lurked with the other memories. With the traitor.

"It is fortunate that you were here then, to aid the students with this discovery." He responded, musing over the tidbit I had handed him.

"I only wish I could have discovered it as it was happening, Detective." It was surprisingly easy to add the necessary sorrow and regret to my words. The traitor had a use then. I would not have to punish him when I returned.

"I'll have to stick closer to the band in the future. Thank you for your service, Mr. Barocco." He stood and swept out of the room.

"Anytime." I grinned. So easy. So foolish. So weak.

Day 2,

Another death. Beat to death by his own drumsticks. It makes me shudder to realize how long it would have taken. This confirms my initial assumptions. The murderer must be clinically insane, no stable man would have been able to beat another, particularly a stranger, before some inch of humanity kicked in. He is either some insane adult who hates music, or perhaps a student who is measuring out his revenge for bullying or other slight by the band. There was a janitor in the building, but he didn't hear the cries. Could the target have been gagged during the beating? Or is the band room mostly sound proof? I need to look into this, and the ties between those who have died. This is taking far too long. I must

stop this before more fall victim to their own instruments.

-Detective A. Sharp

Friday, October 10

They insisted on going to the competition tomorrow. That was good. *There was much to do, much to do. Much to do with little time. So little time. Much to do.* First, I located the marimbas and xylophones. Within my cart, I pulled out tiny packages of wire and explosive. Extravagant yes, but effective. With infinite care, I attached it to the backside of one key. Having procured the music beforehand, I discovered a chord they played at the end of the show in which none of them had played the notes within it before in the show. I could imagine the chaos and death. *Holes, more holes! There needed to be more holes! First, first let pandamonium reign!* Grinning, I pushed my cart away, the major ladder was by the dumpster. Luckily, my cart was full of trash. Once there, it was quick work to shave away the metal that held one of the crossbars in place. It would collapse as soon as she shifted her weight too much. A dreadful accident.

There was still much to do. So many people quitting, leaving. If I leave them, they will all quit. They can't quit, they must lose! If they did not have the courage to die together, they would die alone. A list had been easy to procure. 10 names. Leaving the school clean, I drove to the first address on the list. Rolling down the windows, I heard the screeching song of the piccolo. Pulling on a pair of gloves, I walked to the door, rapping upon its hard surface. Within, the screeching stops. The handle twists open, then she is standing framed by the darkness of the house behind her. "Hello?" she asks. Dreadful last words. A shame.

"I was just driving by and I heard you practicing. I wanted to inform you, you are sharp..." In a swift movement I ripped the piccolo out of her hand and jammed it through her hazel eye. Scarlet blood squirted as she collapsed back into the house, her cry of shock nipped by the abrupt ending of the functioning of her brain. "Deadly sharp." Shutting the door, I walked calmly back to the car. Once there I studied my list, crossing the first name off. 17 of 247. The next house was within the same neighborhood. Lucky me, I'd save on gas.

The lights were on in the house this time, it wouldn't be as easy as before. Or, maybe it would be. Shedding my blood splattered coat, I flipped a blank page atop my list, and took my clipboard to the door. A young man answered, his long golden hair highlighting the almost pure blue of his eyes. "Hello?"

"Greetings, are you Joshua Wright?"

He nodded nervously.

"I am from Utah Valley University. We heard that you were an excellent bassoonist, and wanted to hear you play in person. Could you play something for us?"

The young man hesitated a moment then nodded, leading me into a back room in his house. "This is our music room, we soundproofed the walls so I can practice without bothering the rest of the house," he explained, shutting the door and opening his case.

“Really,” I mused, “How thoughtful of them.” Creeping nearer, I pulled the stand out of his case, examining its end. That would work.

“Hey, my stand is missing. My sister must have taken it, I’ll go check.”

“Oh, no need, we’ve decided we don’t need a bassoonist,” I said with regret, “At least not one who abandons their band in its time of need.” I thrust the stand into the back of his neck, leaping away to avoid the spurting of scarlet. There was no call of alarm this time. What a shame. No symphony. Ah well, there would be others. With a grin, I exited the house. 18 of 247

Day 4,

Four days and I am still little closer to discovering the murderer. Ten more died today. The ten that quit. The murderer has sent a very clear message. Quit and die now, stay and die later. These ten were killed in their own houses, some with their parents home and unaware. Due to these deaths, I have to assume the killer is an adult. Very few students would have the strength or knowledge to commit these acts.

The school is considering closing down, the marching band considering quitting. They have asked me for advice, but I am wary to give any. These ten deaths show he is eager to have the band continue to perform. I worry that shutting down will get them all killed. I worry that staying open will hurt them even worse.

Working on this kind of case always unnerves me. When I close my eyes, all I can picture is the young girl, her flute coated in her own dark blood, protruding from the eye socket. All I can hear is the horrified, hysteric sobbing of her parents. Her blood is on my hands, I can still feel it clinging from the investigation. I’ve washed them over and over. It won’t go away. For my own sanity I need to finish this case before more young adults are killed.

~Detective A. Sharp

Saturday, October 11

American Fork still won today, they got extra GE points for the explosions. The judges don’t realize how serious I am. Their theme, Detectives, probably isn’t helping. I should have done this last year. Flowers don’t explode. 39 of 247

Day 5,

More than half the percussionists in the front were killed today. The horrific explosion and screams still rattle in my ears. Planted in a note they played just once. I wish they had missed that note. Their major is in the hospital from the malfunctioning ladder, (I can’t believe it was coincidence) along with the few that lived through the explosions. I’ve posted guards on them. Hopefully the killer has different things to occupy his mind. During the competition I picked up on a definite rift between American Fork and the other competing schools, particularly Davis, the school that I gather has been locked in second for ages due to

American Fork's superiority. This needs looking into. I will stay at the school Monday to see who has access to those instruments, and hopefully keep anything from going wrong at Tuesday's competition.

~Detective A. Sharp

Monday, October 13

*Red*, I thought, gazing at the headless body, blood dripping off the cymbal I held loosely in my left hand, *It is an interesting color. There is an allure to it. A fierceness. Like fire, like sin. And love. Red stands for love and for sin. They are strange bedfellows. Fierce passion, that was red. Red was sin, it was love, or maybe a passion for sin. It was what animated flesh. Our sin, our fierce passion, our lives.* The kids were coming back though. There was still a body, still a head! I hadn't enough time. Not enough time! Discarding the head in the girl's sousaphone, I carefully put it away, leaving the body where it was, discarded by the cymbal. *An unpleasant gift for the next sousaphonist!* Pulling out my cell phone, I dialed 911. No need to panic. Truth was already established. After explaining the situation, I went out, barricading the band room door. It was hard enough to get the things off on their own without them going into panic mode. Anymore than necessary at least.

Hearing the sound of footsteps, mimicking the beating of a faltering heart, I turned to see the detective, rushing down the hallway. His black hair seemed uncharacteristically flat, his amber eyes dull. "Another?"

*41 of 247*, I thought. With a grim nod, I opened the band room door and escorted him in. "I found her when I came to clean the room. Luckily I was able to rout the kids before they saw her but... Detective, when is this going to end?"

He ran a hand through his hair, leaving wavy trails through the darkness. Eyes so sad. *They should close forever. He wouldn't be sad anymore. He would be released, released like the others.* "I don't know. This guy. He's careful. No fingerprints. No blood. Can't find his DNA anywhere! I just know he wears gloves and he isn't mentally stable. No stable man could do this."

I glanced down at my gloves. A giveaway? A hint? A coincidence? Then I paused. There was blood on them. Still blood on them. *Red! Sin! Guilty! Guilty! Red! On my pants! On my hands!* See it! See it! Release me! Release me! *Traitor! Traitor! Not my thought! You are not my thought! Die! Die! Die!* Compulsively my hand strayed to the pocket knife in my belt. No, it would have to wait. Too obvious. Too obvious. Bending down, I examined the body. The red. My hand skimmed the ridge of the bloody cymbal. "This has been sharpened. The killer was waiting here for a victim."

The detective knelt by me, nodding. "It took a while before she died. There would be less blood on the floor if it had been one quick blow. This took a lot of sawing."

*Yes, if only you could have heard her screams. And the blood, the red. So dark, rich, the color of her uniform. Her reason for death. Too much red, not enough red. If only she were*

*yellow, then she wouldn't be white now.* Fighting to keep the words in my throat I didn't respond. So hard to control.

The detective pulled out a camera and snapped several pictures of the scene, then continued to study it for the better part of an hour. Finally he stood, rubbing his forehead. "I have a rather morbid question. Where's the head?"

I shrugged. "I'm sorry. You're the detective, not I." It was in the case, I could feel it glaring at me, its eyes filled with the final moments of cries. It moaned at me across the silence. *Death. Death. Death.* It longed for vengeance. It hated being alone in the dark. The lingering spirit within it urged the detective on. I could hear the spirit's heartbeat, a metronome of misery. *Thud. Thud. Thud. Thud.* It wasn't the only spirit, the tiny trumpet player still flailed in the drum case. Long dead, long suffocated, undiscovered. Vengeful spirit. Calling. Moaning. Hunting.

The detective set the body in a body bag, moving respectfully. "Will you help me carry the body out? No need for the kids to find it."

*Touch me! Touch me! Touch me and suffer my death! Feel my cries! Hear my pain! Suffer! Suffer!* It was dead. There were no words, I could hear no words. The body was dead. It was dead! Dead! Moving stiffly, I gripped the foot side of the bag. As I did so, my sleeves rode up, revealing the red lines across my wrist. Some recently bandaged. Glancing up, my green eyes met the detective's amber. I could almost see everything click in his mind. *Access. Gloves. Mentally unstable.* Forcing down panic, I grappled with the traitor, who threw himself against the wall of his imprisonment.

"My twin... he died during the war," Truth, best to combat with truth. Truth was to be believed, it was white. *White, white like the pale face of death. Truth. Death was truth. Death was the only truth.* "He died in front of me, it was my fault." Had to find something he would believe, he would relate to. *Truth. Truth. Truth. My truth. Faces, white faces. His white face! Within me the traitor sobbed, soundlessly crying his name through my skull, so loud, so loud. So powerful one voice. One word. One name. His name.* "I was discharged, couldn't face my loss. There was a time..." I proffered my other wrist, laced with white lines of distress. "But, I stopped. I changed, I moved on." *John, John, John, I can never move on. Why? Why did you fall? What did you see in me? Why? WHY? WHY!* "These deaths, so close. I should be able to stop them. I can't. I feel each one." I traced the lines on my wrist with my left hand. "The girl who said 'hi' to me in the hall just to be nice, gone." I traced the first line. "The boy, beaten to death. I should have heard his screams. My fault. Gone." Another line. "Bombs placed on the instruments, I should have caught. Gone. My fault." More lines. "I relapsed."

Hanging my head, false grief, too easy to fake, too familiar. His hand gripped my shoulder, my wavering gaze meets his solid. "I understand. My brother, I understand." Then the solidness melts, his own tears of regret just brimming in his eyes. *Truth. White. John.* "It's not your fault. These deaths, they aren't either of our faults. I'll find whose fault it is. I'll stop this." His empathy. My success. There was a bond. It bound us, my truth, my lies. *A good*

*man. A good man, like John. A good man.*

We towed the body out to the waiting ambulance, there were no flashing lights as it drove away. Sirens were for warning, but a warning was only good when there was still hope.

Day 7,

My plans to investigate the school tonight were terminated by the necessary legal matters pertaining to the recent body. I had an interesting experience today with the janitor. He wears gloves constantly, and as I saw, he is not fully mentally healthy. He has the strength to have completed these acts, but I cannot find a motivation. Further, I find that he is a man who strives to be good. One who completed his patriotic duty and lost more in it than I can imagine. A patriot with a good heart who has done nothing but aid this investigation. There is nothing I want more than to find the killer. It is clouding my thinking, making me jump to unfair conclusions. I looked him up and his story checked out. Honorably discharged, a psychologist who worked with him and gave him a certificate of sanity. His brother's name was Ardente Barocco. He was given a medal for valor posthumously. The janitor no longer goes by his real name, but by his brother's. His real name is John. I cannot help but wonder how this loss might have affected the janitor. No matter, he has a point. This must be stopped.

-Detective A. Sharp

Tuesday, October 14

I could tell which player got the gift in their sousaphone I saw him staggering off the field, his eyes dull. The other students seemed relieved that none of them had died, I had decided to give them a break before they all snapped mentally and started killing each other off. That was to be my pleasure only. Only mine.

Davis, my Davis, still got second, always second. Not for much longer. They would win the next competition, or I would pull out all stops and poison ALL the wind players. Let's see 'em win anything then!

Day 8,

There were no new deaths today, but a student was found suffocated in a drum case, probably from yesterday, and the head from the attack was also discovered in a most... disturbing manner. I admire American Fork's tenacity. They got first again, and the teacher says the head was counted as an 'amazing visual effect.' The kids are weary though, and there are so many forms that are no longer complete. Obvious voids in block forms. No new information. I will live in the school's band room all of next week if necessary! The case will be solved before the next competition, or I'm calling in an army to guard each student constantly.

-Detective A. Sharp

Wednesday, October 15

The detective was in the band room. I went in to clean it like I normally did, speaking quietly to him, then moved on. If I couldn't get them in the bandroom, I'd get them in the bathroom. They still went there. Entering the female restroom, I closed a stall and waited. There wasn't long to wait.

Subdued murmurs soon filled the bathroom. The stalls next to me clinked shut. I opened my own, finding a flute and a saxophone laying on the red and white checked floor. I picked the saxophone up first, admiring the ridge that rose from its bottom. The flushing of a toilet filled the room, warning me of imminent company. Quickly pocketing the flute, I moved to the door of the stall. The door swung outward, just enough to expose a ginger head. Swinging with all my might, I suppressed a laugh as both objects caved in on impact. Catching the body before it could collapse, I sat it back on the toilet, then shut the stall door, still within.

"Allison? Alli? What was that?" the flutist asked from her stall, voice shaking. More flushing. The swinging of a stall door. I opened my own stall. "Oh thank goodness..." she trailed off, eyes filled with horror as I emerged. Sweeping her instrument out of my pocket, I pressed her against the wall, holding her against it with only the force of her flute against her throat. Her scrambling hands found mine, but her nails could not pierce my gloves.

The traitor protested, he rankled, pushing against my mental bars. *Please stop, please stop!* His unspoken cries aligned with the flutist's own, voiced by her pleading brown eyes. She had to die, she had seen me, she could not live. *She must fall! AF must fall! They would fall! One by one by one! They would fall! They would!* "You, my young flutist, are simply restoring balance to the world. You have played sharp so often, it is only right your vocal chords end up flat, don't you think? The saxophone played its last sharp note! It is now eternally flat!" A chuckle rose from within me, not my own, an alien chuckle. Starting with a heaving in my chest, it broke out of my throat. Maniacal. Hysterical. *Not mine. Not mine!*

Then the struggling stopped, and I set her once again upon her throne of porcelain. Exiting, I took my janitorial cart out of the boy's bathroom and finished my rounds. 43 of 247.

Stumbling into my apartment, I grabbed the pocketknife from my pocket. The traitor quelled at the knife. It didn't like it. I was taking his life blood away. It must be punished. Punished for fighting for control. Each death, each dot closer he protested more. "This has to stop! This has to stop!" I command him, explaining why he must bleed. "Your protests are a danger. A danger to our mission, to our freedom. If I have to fight you at the wrong moment it could be our end! American Fork will continue to win, forever! It has to stop, must stop, must stop."

The knife slit my wrist, leaving a trail of blood. Within me, the traitor protested weakly.

"I know! I know you have your uses, you keep us undetected, you are our undercover. You must stay undercover though! Do not come out! Don't!"

"Do not cry traitor, do not cry. John, do not cry. No need to cry. It will all be over soon." Looking in the mirror I saw tears streaking down my own cheeks. "No need to cry, no need. It

will all be over soon.”

Day 9,

I did the math today. 17% of the band is gone. Two more dead, killed in the girls bathroom while I guarded the band room. From what I can tell they were murdered while the janitor and I were talking, or right after. Everytime I see another body the emptiness within me grows. Other detectives, they've lost their heart. I thought I could keep hold of mine. Not sure anymore though. All I can hear are the parent's sobs.

-Detective A. Sharp

Thursday, October 16

The band would practice in the night, but the guard was having an extra practice. Some of their moves weren't together and it was obvious. Too obvious. The detective would haunt the field and band room while the band practiced but now, now it was just the guard and I. Taking one of their mock sabres, I removed the plastic safety tip and began to sharpen. As the metal screeched, I imagined my victim doing the same. More AF scum falling. Another dot in the block.

An hour later, a young man left the gym, his sabre in hand, hurrying toward the main doors.

“Excuse me sir, I think you forgot something.”

The color guard spun around, then relaxed as he saw me holding the sabre out to him. “That's not mine. Drew was missing his though. He's in the gym right now.”

A grin broke my face. “Ah, but you misunderstand. This is mine. You forgot your dot. You missed it on Tuesday. You always miss it. Everytime you miss your dot, a puppy dies.” I advanced on him, holding my sabre out. His eyes flickered to the sharpened end and held out his own. “Unfortunately, I'm out of puppies to kill for your mistakes. It's time you learned your dot.”

I stepped forward, sweeping toward him. Panicking he turned and ran, reaching the main doors, he slammed against them. Pacing calmly behind him, I grinned as he found them locked. My sabre flickered again. He rose his own to block it. A short exchange of metal took place. Very short. “Oh, and don't forget to stab and close.” I whispered as the light drained from his eyes. He was only able to gasp as he clutched at the sabre protruding from his stomach. Deep red stained his hands. He pushed himself onto his hands and knees, crawling a few feet towards the gym before collapsing, leaving a trail of bloody handprints on my clean tile floor. A shame. Such a shame. For a moment, I waited for the traitor to protest, for that strange feeling to fill me. There was no fight, only a distant sobbing of horror. He'd given up. Casually, stabbing the boy in the chest, I pushed my cart down the hall. The janitor would discover it on his way out. 44 of 247.

Day 10,

I stayed in the band room tonight, but the killer had already struck. His victim's bloody handprints stained the halls, a testament to his last struggles. The scene was perhaps the worst yet. Red. It is the color of our life blood and our love. Symbolic perhaps, when one runs out of love they die inside, out of blood they die on the outside. The two kinds of life that hold us together, alive and sane. I will stay by the school all night and hope I can prevent anymore deaths.

~Detective A. Sharp

Friday, October 17

Schools are different at night. Dark. Silent. Schools should never be silent. The band room was locked, but I had the masterkey. In my pocket was a bottle of Sarin. A poison that was to be inhaled by the entire mellophone section. Let's see AF win without them! Approaching the first case, I poured some in each of the valves, like oil, before putting each away. I kept a cloth tied around my mouth to protect me from the vapors.

Suddenly, the door swung open and the light flickered on. I spun with a shout of surprise. The detective, equally surprised grabbed the nearest weapon he could find. He held a large white rifle. A streak of panic filled me for a second, then I paused. A weak chuckle filled my chest. "What are you planning to do with that, my friend?"

He glanced down, surprised, then tossed the rifle casually over one shoulder with a sheepish grin. "What are you doing here?" he challenged.

"I imagine the same thing you are. Standing guard." *Kill him! Kill him! You've been discovered! He must die! They must all die!*

Striding over, he looked at the mellophone cases at my feet. "What are those?"

"Mellophones."

"What-a-phones?"

"Mellophones. They're like... pregnant trumpets. It's what french hornists play when they are in the marching band."

"French horns?"

"You know the round swirly Christmas instrument?"

"Yeah."

"Those are french horns."

"Really? I didn't know those actually existed." He paused for a moment. "What were you doing with them?" His eyes narrowed, "Empty your pockets, Ardente."

I knew then, that I was caught. Pulling my pocket knife out of its home in practiced ease, I charged at him. Breath rushed in my throat. He was on the ground, struggling to hold the knife away from his throat. I strained downwards and the knife sagged a bit closer to it's target

*He's not the enemy. He isn't the enemy. You cannot kill him! His blood won't be on my hands!*

*He must die!*

*No!*

*He must!*

*NO! Not this time! Not anymore! No more! Never again!*

I pushed away from him, breathing hard. “Not the enemy,” I muttered. “You are not the enemy.” We sat breathing heavily for a moment, gazes boring into each other, broken only by a sudden clatter. Our heads twisted in unison to stare at a young man, dressed in a melodramatic black, clutching an armful of flutes. Hatred fumed in me. The rat! Stealing! Stealing from his own band in their pit of dismay! Blaming it on me! My hands curled into fists of their own accord. I sorely regretted dropping my knife.

More clattering, I focused on the boy, for he now seemed as such. His arms shook fiercely as he pointed a revolver first at me, then at the detective. *Click*. “I... I need the money. My... my family... they... I’m sorry... you can’t live anymore. Neither of you.”

“My son, if you kill me, this murdering scum will get away with killing your team, picking them off one by one.” The detective said contemptuously. He had sat up, and was holding his hands palms out toward the thief. “This isn’t what you want. Do you want to become a killer? Like him? Become a man who can shamelessly blame himself for a death, shamelessly evoke empathy out of others, a man who twists them around his own crooked pinky, so he can continue his dark work!”

Every faction within me was arguing. Voices I didn’t even know existed waged war within me. There was no goal. Havoc reigned. “Quiet! Quiet! Quiet!” I yelled, silencing the detectives plea. “All of you! Quiet! I didn’t want this! Not so many dead! Never wanted any dead!

*“They must die though! They had to!*

*“No! No! You killed them, you killed them, and every time you did I cried. I fought I screamed!*

*“They had to lose! Don’t you see? They had to lose. My band, my band needs to win! They deserved to win! It was justice!*

*“It was fallacy!”* The image of the two men frozen in fright blurred with my tears. “It was fallacy, I couldn’t control it. I couldn’t control it!” Twisting, I faced the young man. “Don’t, nothing, nothing is worth the blood. Nothing. Too much blood. Drowning, drowning in red. Don’t step off that path! There is nothing worse. Please. The detective is a good man.” Not my words, they weren’t my words! Or were they? Were they? Each word caught in my throat, sobs breaking, each syllable wrenching from my chest in agony.

*“You won’t turn me in. We will be guilty together. This isn’t for me.”*

Guns. I knew guns. I knew when a gun was going to fire, and I knew where they were going to hit. As if the world slowed, I watched the thief aim, and close his eyes. It would hit. His finger compressed. Suddenly, I was moving. *Bang*.

I blinked involuntarily. When I opened my eyes, the band room had vanished. I lay in the

dirt, clutching a gun of my own, my brother, Ardenly lying in my lap, muttering. His skin was shredded and dyed in blood. The doctors said there was little they could do. "John?"

"I'm here."

"I wanted to be a director. I wanted to lead my band to victory. Davis, I was going to make them better than American Fork. They were going to be the best band in the nation. Make them. Make them better. Let them know their true worth. To me, they were always the best, always the band that deserved to win."

"I promise. I promise. I promise." Words, barely choked out. I was rocking back and forth. My brother. My twin. Then his breathing halted, but in that moment, he didn't die. I did. I died back then, and he came in and he took over. His dream. His goal. His band.

The band room came back into blurry focus. Amber eyes, gazing down at me from beneath a tumble of black hair. Looking down I saw red. Love. Sin. Life. "Sharp, I am the traitor. I am John. When you spoke, I was temporarily freed. Freed from the cage, but not from the torment. Never from the torment. I embrace it now, my eternal consequence. I deserve it. I was too weak to fight him." Each word was hard to form, falling off my lips like cinder blocks.

"In the end though, in the end, John, you made the right choice. In the end, you won. You won your fight, soldier. No matter what happened in the middle, you finished victorious. Know that I will fight crime in your name. Your sacrifice will save more lives than you took. Rest in peace, rest in peace, my friend." His voice was rough. Calming. Finally, the voices within my head dissipated and there was only me. Only me to face the end. Clarity. Final clarity. The darkness enveloped and I welcomed it, collapsing into it with a faint smile. Free.

Day 11,

I do not know what to write. Words have failed me. I was right all along. He was guilty, yet he was innocent. Controlled by his brother's dream, he spent years fighting for the right against himself. I cannot imagine the strain he went through. It is strange, I respect him though he killed, though he was the enemy. How it is possible to hate and yet respect the same man so much... I do not know. I do not know.

There is I think, a bit of craziness in all of us. No one who was sane would do the things we do. Sanity wouldn't encourage the impossible. It wouldn't push us to dream. It wouldn't tell us we should fight, we must fight even when the odds are impossible, even after we failed time and time again. John was his own conscious, used by the killer as a tool. A hostage in his own body. I respect and will fight for John as I promised. I will fight for him, I will fight for him against the oppressors that he fought against. I will keep fighting to keep my heart. Clinging to the insanity that lets me hope.

~ Detective A. Sharp