

The Deaf Musician

Boom!

Everything is black. I don't know what happened. I was just visiting a friend. I was on my way home. I remember being in the car. Dad was driving. Something was bright. There was a loud noise. What was it? Dad swerved. Why? To avoid hitting something. I can't see it. It's not there. It won't come to me.

I hear muffled voices, I think. Someone is touching my shoulder. My eyes refuse to open. All I hear is a ringing. It overpowers and casts out everything else. I feel myself lifted up. My legs don't want to move. I can't move my arms. What has happened? My heart is beating wildly. I can feel it thundering in my chest. I can feel its pounding rhythm, but I still can't hear. Or see. Or move.

I feel moved again and again. First to something sort of soft, then jostled around, in something that must be moving. I feel lifted on the sort of soft thing, and I'm set down. We're moving again. More people touch me. I feel many hands, but I hear no voices. I feel a pinch and then everything is dark again.

I stir on something that feels more comfortable and softer than the previous thing I was set on. What is it? A bed? It feels like it could be a bed. It isn't mine. I know that, at least. But where am I? I will my eyes to open. I try and try, but they won't move. I try to move my arm. I feel my fingers move. There is something on one of them. I twitch my leg, and it moves on command. My eyes still won't open.

I feel a hand on my arm, and I startle, my eyes fling open.

I see Mom next to me. I'm in a hospital bed, from what I can tell. Mom is saying something. What is it? I can't hear. Her lips are moving, but no sound reaches my ears. My heart begins to thud. What happened?

Mom keeps moving her lips, but I still can't hear her. I move my arm up to show her I can't understand what she's saying, and a sharp pain shoots up my arm. I scream in pain.

Or at least I think I do. I still can't hear. No sound is coming. My throat vibrates, but I hear no sound. What is happening? Why can't I hear myself. Why can't I hear Mom? What happened to me?

I watch as my mom goes to the door and opens her mouth. Then a few nurses come in, and a doctor follows shortly after. They start looking me over, I feel hands on my arm and wince at the pain I feel. The nurse mouths something, but I still can't hear anything, and unlike my mom, I can't read lips.

I watch as the doctor at my arm moves towards my head. I feel a hand grab at my ear, and then the doctor moves away. What did he do? I watch as he moves towards Mom. What is he saying? What does he tell her? I watch as a tear rolls down her cheek. What's wrong? I just want to go give her a hug; tell her it will be okay. That I'm okay. I *am* okay, aren't I?

The doctor walks over to me again and scribbles on a notepad. He then holds that notepad up to show me what he's written. I read: "You were in an accident."

Duh. I think. I know that. I think my look said as much, because my mother gave me a look and the doctor turned the page and wrote again.

"You've sustained some damage, but you should be able to move again soon."

Well, that was good news. I looked at Mom. Her face said that there was more to the story. I motioned for the doctor to continue. He seemed to understand, as he began to write again.

“However,” Uh oh. I didn’t even need to read more. Any sentence begun by “however” cannot be good. But I kept reading:

“You’ve sustained heavy damage to your eardrums. I’m afraid you may never be able to hear again.”

I looked at the doctor. This cannot be happening. He cannot be serious. But the look on his face told me that it was the truth. That’s why Mom was crying. He told her first. She knows how much I need my ears. I cannot be deaf. This isn’t happening. It’s all a dream. I’m going to wake up any minute and it will all be over.

Only I don’t wake up.

The doctors and nurses continue to poke and prod me over the next few days. Weeks? I’m not really keeping track anymore. Nothing matters.

I was on my way to becoming a professional musician. I play piano, violin, viola, cello, classical guitar, flute, and a little clarinet. I’ve been told I have perfect pitch; I always tune the choir. What will I do now? All I’ve ever done is music. I don’t know how anyone can live like this.

Finally, I’m able to go home.

The doctors have determined that there is nothing more they can do for me. I will be deaf for the rest of my life. There is no fix, no solution. I’m done. There is nothing left for me now. I feel empty and useless.

When I get home, my siblings come to greet me. They hadn’t been allowed to visit me in the hospital, so they are excited to greet me. Yet not even the sight of my youngest sister’s smiling face can cheer me up. My heart falls when she tries to talk to me. I can feel the vibrations from her throat. I can see her mouth moving. But I can’t hear her at all. Life is truly hopeless.

My instruments surround me in my room, and I can't bear to go to our piano room. Even the sight of my sheet music makes me sad. I won't ever be able to live again. I now know what death feels like. You may think I'm being dramatic, but you haven't ever been through something like this. To have your entire life ripped out from under you. To know that nothing will ever be the same again.

I was forced to have dinner with my family. I love them, I do. But I could hardly handle that. My family is loud. We have fun. We laugh and talk together. I can no longer hear them. I can't hear their incessant teasing. I can't hear their laughter. I can't hear the jokes that aren't funny that we all laugh at anyways because the teller finds it hilarious. I miss it. And yet I'm right in the middle of it.

My music teachers are calling me nonstop. I can't bear to talk to them. I don't even send a text. Mom texted me that some of my teachers visited to ask if I would continue lessons. She wanted to know the same thing. So did I. Could I actually play again? I could move my fingers correctly, but how would I know if I was actually playing the right note? I certainly can't hear the difference.

Finally, I decided to visit my violin teacher, who also taught me viola and cello. She knew about my situation and was prepared. She had asked that I bring my instruments. I didn't want to, but she was probably my favorite teacher, so I consented.

She gave me a hug when I saw her. I felt like crying. What do I say? How can I tell her how much I appreciated the teaching she gave me. The skills she had taught that I would never be able to use again.

I didn't need to. She understood. She asked me to hold my violin. The instrument felt so perfect in my hands. The bow felt right as I placed it on the stings. My teacher placed a song in

front of me that I had memorized. I love the song. I began to tear up, but she just motioned for me to play.

I did, and I *felt* something. I had been told that the instrument would vibrate to make the sound, but I never understood it before. I couldn't hear the music, but I could feel it. My teacher smiled at me.

"Yes," she mouthed. "That's it." And I smiled right back. For the first time in the six months I had been without hearing, I truly smiled. I felt breathless.

Two weeks later, I go with my teacher to watch an orchestra perform.

We sit towards the front, and I feel anxious and panicky and thrilled all at once. I hold my breath waiting for it to start, gripping my chair in anticipation. I know I won't be able to hear it, but I promised I would come, and I want to see if I can feel anything like when I played.

The conductor motions and the musicians lifted their instruments. Then he moves and the concert begins.

It is breathtaking.

I feel the music vibrate through my chest. It fills my very being. I feel my heart thundering in time with the music. I feel alive. I feel free. I don't think I can ever feel this way again. I know I wouldn't feel this way if I still could hear the music. I never felt the music this much when I could hear. It's wonderful.

I know now what music is supposed to feel like. All is not lost.

I still can't hear the music, but I can feel it. And that's almost better. I have a better understanding of what music is. Of what it can do. It fills my being once more. It gives me purpose like I never had before. I have something to live for again.

This is not the end. It's a new beginning, a fresh start and a new way of hearing.