

Jarrett

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She breezed into the room, wearing bright red coveralls, the sleeves rolled to mid-forearm, and white canvas basketball boots, unlaced. Her left hand was in her pocket, and her right hung relaxed at her side, loosely holding her trumpet. She gave the impression of arriving fresh from Mario Andretti's track crew. or from a skydiving flight.

Her steps slowed as she neared the centre of the room, and once there, she stopped to look around her in amazement. The room was huge. The ceiling was so high, and the windows so long, so tall. And all this space. She turned full circle slowly, a smile of wonder playing on her face.

She opened her audition with Chuck Mangione's "Feels So Good". The first three notes, clear, and beautifully unrushed, didn't break the silence, but rather slipped into it. As the song progressed, she filled that silence, that space, more and more. And more – the pace picked up and she was moving all over the room, dancing to the music, glorying in the resonance, feeling *so* good...sometimes supplementing the off-accent with a hip or a shoulder, or walking jauntily to the beat, or swinging her entire body upward with a surging note. She played toward the end, moving less, as if to set up for a cadenza, then she stopped, profiled in the centre at the end of the room, and arched back for that grand penultimate phrase; in the following rest, she straightened, turned to face the adjudicators, and then delivered the last phrase, with stunning simplicity.

Then for the first time she spoke, to introduce her second selection as an original composition. She walked over to one of the large cathedral windows and vaulted up to sit on the window seat, one leg stretched out along the length of the ledge, the other bent up to her chest. She was silhouetted by the sun that was just beginning to come through. Her piece was a very sad, very beautiful elegy.

When it was over, for a brief moment she rested her trumpet on her leg and looked out the window. Then she nimbly leaped down, and walked over to the sound equipment. She took a cassette out of one of her pockets and put it in the player. It was a 'music minus one' recording of Haydn's Concerto in E flat for trumpet. Jarrett took a central position nearer to the adjudicators' table and standing quite motionless, played the concerto through, from beginning to end.

Dr. Martens applauded. The others just stared. Jarrett stood there, nodded a thank you to Dr. Martens, and waited. Suddenly, recovering routine, Dr. Barton spoke to her.

"Uh – thank you," he looked at his list, "Jarrett Reid. Uh – we'll be in touch."

She nodded again and walked toward the door.

When she had left, there seemed to be a collective sigh at the table, with the exception of Dr. Martens, who was still smiling, delighted.

“Well,” Dr. Barton said.

“Oh dear,” Dr. Whitely murmured. Then, “We forgot to do the little interview with her.”

“Oh – ” For a moment, Dr. Barton moved as if to call her back, but that would be awkward. He hesitated, wondering what to do.

“Do we need to?” Dr. Martens asked. The others looked surprised. “I mean, ‘Why does she want to study music?’ She loves it, isn’t it obvious?” They looked alarmed, a little uncomfortable.

“But – ”

“There *are* other questions, testing her knowledge and – ” Dr. Elderson reminded.

“You have her high school transcript, what were her music marks?”

“A. A-. A.” Dr. Whitely scanned the sheet.

“All *right* then. Besides, didn’t that composition of hers indicate any ‘knowledge of music’ to you? And her interpretation of Haydn was well-informed.”

The others nodded, hesitantly.

“But Chuck Mangione?”

“And her technique?”

“Look, I’m not the brass expert here, but I know a good sound when I hear it. Dr. Peira, how was the Haydn?”

“Good,” he said, then added almost reluctantly, “very good.”

“Well then?”

“But – she’s – ” Dr. Barton floundered. “I mean do you think there’s a place for her here at our faculty? We have room for 125 new students and 500 have applied. We have to be selective *beyond* skill and knowledge. Will she fit in here? *That’s* the question.”

There was a silence.

“She’s so – different,” one of them muttered lamely.

“So?” Dr. Martens asked.

Dr. Barton resumed, “We haven’t room to take chances on students who won’t fit in, Alex. The students who won’t make it, the ones who will drop out, or fail, or get married, or change majors – how’s her background, can she afford to stay with us for four years?”

“What?” Dr. Martens asked incredulously.

“Look I know it’s unfair to have to consider these things but face it, we’re a business as well as an educational institution. You read the Dean’s report too, this faculty cannot survive if third and fourth year enrollment isn’t as high as first year. We have to be sure the ones we admit will continue.”

Dr. Martens sprang out of his chair and went to the window. The others restlessly played with pens, papers. After a moment, he wheeled around, gesturing in exasperation.

“Why didn’t we consider these factors with the hundred who have preceded her?” He paused and folded his arms. “What have you got against this one, this Jarrett Reid?” he asked.

There was another silence.

“Well, she’s such a – a *performer*,” Dr. Elderson ventured.

“This was a *performance* audition! Look, you admit she has the skill, she has the knowledge, she *certainly* has the spirit or ‘musicianship’ –”

“But Alex, she’s so different, it’s just we’re not used to, didn’t expect –” Dr. Whitely broke off.

“I move we hand in our ballots,” Dr. Peira said.

Each of them finished up their adjudicator’s report, then submitted their ballot. Dr. Barton tallied their evaluations – 3:2. Jarrett Reid was admitted to the faculty of music for her first year. She had passed.

The class was loud, as usual, but rowdier, more restless. It was mid-term time, and anxiety, activity levels were at a high. Today was her turn for the ‘exam’ in Conducting 100: she was to lead the class, the ‘orchestra’ through the rehearsal of a piece – she was to conduct.

Jarrett put two folios of music under her arm and stepped onto the podium. She looked out at the class and waited for their attention. It was not forthcoming. She set the music on her stand and raised a hand. Still no change. She stood there then, shoved her hands into the pockets of her jeans and waited.

Eventually, gradually, the talk decreased, slowed, stopped. Eventually they were looking at her.

She smiled, “So – what’ll it be: Beethoven’s *Sixth* or Louie’s *Songs of Paradise*?” Conversations were resumed almost immediately. Again she waited for a bit, hoping they were discussing their options, then she raised her hand, again. Silence was once more slow in coming, and she decided to interrupt.

“Shall we take a vote then?” She fought against shouting.

“You’re the conductor, you’re supposed to decide!” A student called out over the lessened but still continuing talk.

“Yes, I am the conductor, but that doesn’t mean I’m a commander too.” By now, most were quiet. She explained, “I didn’t think there’d be any point in working through a piece no one wants to play –”

“Let’s go with Alexina,” the voice called out, singsonging the name.

“Nah – too weird, I vote for the Beethoven.”

“Bo-ring.”

She waited again until there was enough quiet to take a vote. A count of hands showed Louie to be in favour. She handed out the music amid increasing flurry: adjusting music on stands, tuning instruments, wetting reeds, then warm-up scales and arpeggios.

“Jack, you’ll need a bow,” Jarrett called out to the percussion player. “I didn’t think any of our string players would be willing to lend you theirs,” she grinned, “so I brought an extra – it’s by my desk.”

She waited until all the strings had their mutes on, then when she began to hear fragments of the first section, she tried to begin.

“Okay,” she fought against shouting again, “we don’t have a tam-tam – and Bob, since you’ll be required on the vibraphone, I think we’ll just leave it out rather than try a substitution, okay?”

“Okay,” he said after a pause – surprised when he realized it wasn’t a rhetorical question.

“Now there’s a time change after the first two bars, from four-four to three-four, so let’s try just the first four bars. I’ll count you in one bar.” She had to wait a long time for silence before she could give the upbeat. Half of the strings were a beat late entering bar four, still counting in four. There was no reason for the error – especially if they had been watching her.

She looked at the string section. “We need more unison on the crescendo and decrescendo, bars two and four, and watch the metre change.” She paused. “Let’s try it from the beginning and go on this time.”

She stopped them at section B. It had been dismal indeed.

She smiled playfully, “So how do you like it so far?” Few smiled back.

“Look, at bar five there’s a *rit.* Watch me, I’ll keep you altogether, ‘cuz at bar six we have to change speed, suddenly, ‘*subito* quarter note at 72,’ as opposed to the opening, quarter note around 50. Then at B, the score indicates getting faster little by little – at C we have to be at 88. Now I know we’ll be nowhere near that since this is just a first playthrough, but we can certainly capture a change in pace, right? Let’s try it again.”

A general buzz followed her comments. Eventually they were ready. They got to E this time. Well, most of them. Again, the performance was much worse than it could’ve been, than it should’ve been.

“What’s the problem with the metre? These are my patterns.” She demonstrated two-four, three-four, four-four, and five-four with her baton. “Okay?” No response.

She tried to compensate then, “Great try, Steven. That oboe part is rather intricate, eh? And the balance is good, everyone, sounds good,” she added lamely.

They struggled through sections of the piece again and again.

Suddenly the first violinist interrupted. “Excuse me,” he called out in the middle of a section.

“Yes?” Jarrett asked.

“Bar fifty-five, when I enter with the solo, I seem to disagree with your dynamic indications. I’m entering *mf* crescendoing to *f*, and you seem to want me to enter at *mp* or *p* even. This is a solo – it’s supposed to stand out.”

Jarrett looked at her score. “Well, the initial dynamic isn’t indicated. So maybe you’re right, but even at *p* you do stand out though, because only one other person is playing at your moment of entry – all we hear is a single flute tone – ”

“But starting at *p* is just too weak, too unobtrusive.”

“But this is a subtle piece. I think it shimmers rather than glares. Besides, starting at *mf* doesn’t give you much room to expand, and the peak is clearly marked just *f* not *ff*.” He seemed not to have heard her last comment – he was talking to the violinist beside him.

A few other musicians then had questions, comments. After a while, they were ready to play again. At several points too many people got lost and they had to start again somewhere.

Jarrett tried to make a few of the fermatas over rests inordinately long, an attempt to use silence as a timbre – but the attempt was lost. No one was with her: they all

paused the usual extra 1.2 seconds, by conventional consensus, and went on more or less together.

Eventually the class was over.

Dr. Martens left the classroom and went directly to his office. He sat down at his desk and went over the notes he had made during Jarrett's conducting. Oh she knew her hand signals, and they were very clear, and visible, she never confused functions of the right and the left hand, her cues were always ready and necessary, her tempo metronomic, her understanding of the piece impressive, in fact it was quite a commendable choice, Louie was not only contemporary, and Canadian, but a challenge to *any* conductor for the frequent changes in metre and the precise dynamic indications – but, well, *Jarrett* hadn't conducted the piece, the orchestra had conducted themselves: when it came right down to it, her presence hadn't made any difference, as a conductor she had not succeeded, and he felt he could not award a passing grade. She had failed.

It was now December, a week to go until Christmas break, and the end of the first semester. Student conferences were held during this week. Jarrett arrived for her 2:00 appointment with her advisor, Dr. Martens. She knocked on his office door, and heard him call out, "Come in."

She opened the door, and walked in. "Hi."

"Hi Jarrett, have a seat."

"Thanks." She sat down.

"So how's it going?"

"Well – " she smiled and settled deeper into the chair, stretching out and crossing her legs in front of her. She put her hands in her pockets, then began to answer his question. "Now normally, I'm not too concerned with marks. I'm here to learn about music and sometimes the marks reflect what I've learned and sometimes they don't. It really doesn't matter to me. But *since* I'm here, and *since* you asked – " she smiled mischievously, "well, it matters to the to the university, my marks, I mean."

"Yes?"

"You know I got kicked out of ensemble."

"No. I didn't know. Why?"

"An excessive number of flagrant violations of the dress code." She grinned.

So did he. Grin. "But wasn't it explained to you? There's a reason for the dress code."

"Oh yeah," she paraphrased, "a concert is not a visual event. Music is to be heard and not seen. So any non-uniform attire and/or colour disturbs this, the eye distracts from the ear. Well, if it's just an aural affair, why doesn't everyone just stay home and listen to their stereo systems?" She paused. "And I move too much. I detract, I upstage the others, I stand out."

"And what did you say to that one?"

"That if *everyone* moved, I wouldn't stand out."

He laughed.

"I know what they're getting at." She rushed on then, "I go to concerts and I see what they want. But I *hate* what I see. Everyone in the audience is sitting in their best dress, stiff and still. Like statues. Not one dares to move – not even to Strauss. And it

seems encouraged by the orchestra. Only soloists are expected, allowed to move. Orchestras have always looked to me like a crowd that wandered in from a funeral. Deadpan faces in black suits and ties. I tell you if *I* were the composer – ”

She corrected herself, " – *when* I compose," then carried on with excitement, "I'm going to specify: this symphony is to be performed *con moto*, *literally*, by people in colours. All sorts of colours. Music is played with the body, it's an affair of the heart, not the head. I wonder if it's just a coincidence that most of the people in music are men, and men are notoriously inept at expressing their emotions. Sometimes I think that's how we've gotten to where we are – sober, except for the soloists, and even then, the emotional spectrum consists of 'intense' and 'more intense'. Seldom joy, celebration – ”

She continued to ramble over ideas and impressions, as if they were boulders on an oceanside hike. "Maybe it's just men in groups – then again, no, look at any all-male pop, rock, or jazz group – *they* move, it's clear *those* people *feel* the music they're playing. So maybe it's just 'serious' music – hm, the name itself – maybe something happens to people who *study* music, people in academia – I mean, they're the ones who eventually form the orchestras, right? Maybe something – maybe I should get out while – ” She stopped then, a bit self-consciously.

"No, I don't think you should get out," he finally had to say something. But then couldn't say any more at the moment.

She resumed then, with less animation. "I may not have a choice. That zero in ensemble isn't going to help my average any. You know that first year students must have a B average in all their music courses to get into second year, to stay in music I mean. And a B+ in the course they want to major in."

"Yes..."

"The mark you gave me in Conducting – it's not too helpful for my average either – or as my major prerequisite – ”

Dr. Martens raised his eyebrows. He hadn't realized until now that she wanted to major in conducting, that she intended to become a conductor. It pleased him: in addition to having a special, superior understanding of music, which he felt she, of all his students had, a conductor had to express the music physically, visually – he recalled her audition, why she'd be perfect.

Jarrett continued, or rather ended then. "It isn't a fair mark. I think I deserve a passing grade in Conducting." She sprang up then and looked out the window, uncomfortable with this sitting so long. And saying so much.

"I see," he paused, his mind racing to recall his reasons for the failure. She hadn't been perfect, she –

She turned to him then. "Can we talk about it? I mean, why did you think so poorly of my conducting?"

"Well," he started slowly, "for starters, you didn't have the attention of your orchestra. A conductor must have attention to do a good job of it. Perhaps you could've clapped your hands, or asked them to be quiet – ”

"Clap my hands? *Ask* them? No one else had to. My presence on the podium should've been enough – it's standard courtesy to be quiet when the conductor ascends – ” she gestured slightly as she spoke, as if conducting her words.

“Yes, I know.” He paused, then tried again to put his finger on her problem. “Perhaps it was your voice, not loud enough to get their attention.”

“But that’s it – I shouldn’t have to *get* their attention, I should *have* their attention, I’m the conductor. You pay attention to your conductor, any musician knows that.”

“Yes, but your conductor is in control. From the start it was clear you weren’t. You let *them* make decisions, instead of making them yourself. The first thing you said was ‘Which one do you want to play, Beethoven or Louie?’” He paused. “What would you have done if they had chosen the Beethoven?”

“Nothing different. I was prepared for both.”

He smiled. She would be.

“But that’s not the point.” She sat down restlessly, then leaned forward. “Don’t you think that a group that has a say about what it does performs better? Why not approach it as a collaboration, it really *is* a group effort, isn’t it? There’s no point in playing something no one wants to play. It’ll never sound good. And that’s my responsibility as a conductor, to make the music sound good, right?”

“Right but then when the soloist interrupted you to quarrel about your dynamics, you let him!” Now Dr. Martens rose to walk around the room.

“Well what’s wrong with that?” She turned in her chair.

“Never ever let a *member of the orchestra* interrupt *you* – *you’re* the conductor!”

“But I’m not infallible, or omniscient. He knows the violin better than I do – at least he should, it’s his instrument. He may have had a valid point. I’m open to comments, suggestions. Just maybe someone from the orchestra will make a suggestion that I’ve never thought of before, a suggestion that will change the piece, that will make it closer to what it was intended to be. Two heads are better than one. Thirty or fifty are fantastic!”

“But not when you have a job to do. Not when you’re trying to lead them through a rehearsal.”

“When then? My job is to bring out the best possible performance of the music and – “

“But you didn’t do that. What you got was a very muddled, pathetic performance.” He paused, sat down, and tried again. “Perhaps it was something else in your style – it was so – unauthoritative. You smile too much.”

“What’s wrong with smiling? Why should I be mean and militant? Is that the only style people pay attention to?”

“Well, maybe!” He shrugged his shoulders in frustration. He knew he didn’t conduct that way. “Look, Jarrett, they didn’t pay attention to you, they didn’t listen to you. I don’t know why. But none of the other students so far have had that problem, so it must be something you did or didn’t do, can’t you see that?”

“Yes. All right, you’re right. It *was* the things I did. What I did *was* different. But being different is no reason for failure.”

“But the others can conduct; their way works, your way doesn’t.”

“For now, it doesn’t, and only because it *is* different, because it’s not what they’re used to. Their way works because we’ve been conditioned to follow that way. Response to that which is different has always been reservation and reluctance at the least, rejection and rebellion at the extreme. Surely you know that.”

“Yes,” he nodded, remembering again her audition, the heated interchange among the adjudicators afterward. Yes.

They were both silent then.

“But I wonder if that’s just part of it, perhaps there’s more to it than what I did or didn’t do.” She sounded back by the ocean, picking her way over rocks and roots. “I’ve always thought, like you, that *I* was the problem – my differentness – I thought it was individual. But more and more I’m wondering – it’s too bad there aren’t other women in the class. I mean, haven’t you noticed that all the other students are guys? Men? So what I mean is okay maybe it is just me. And maybe a guy like me, I mean acting like me, conducting like me, would have the same problems. But maybe – there are many – “ she paused for the word, “‘eccentric’ conductors who are quite successful. *Male* conductors. So I wonder if part of the problem is that *that* – I’m not male. And maybe that in itself explains why they responded to me like they did – because I’m a woman. Or, maybe because I’m a woman, I do things differently, maybe other women conductors would act the same, different way. In either case, the end result would be just what we got, right?”

“Right – ” he was following her trail.

“I mean, when you stop to think about it, our society does not condition people to pay attention to women. We are not in the habit of seeing women as figures of authority, in positions of power – ”

“‘Wait till your father gets home’” Dr. Martens smiled.

“What?” she stopped, then found his path. “Yeah. I was thinking of times when I’ll say something, and no one will comment, and then some guy in the group will say more or less the same thing and then everyone responds to it. Geez that bugs me. It seems women and/or women’s ways are just not listened to.”

“So you’re saying you couldn’t help but fail up there on the podium?” he queried.

“Well, I’m not sure. I’m just saying maybe it has less to do with what I did or said or didn’t do or didn’t say than with the fact that they’re simply not used to a woman conducting – tell me, how many female conductors have you played with?”

He didn’t have to say ‘none’.

“So it’ll take some time for them to adjust, accept, realize that I deserve their attention. See I have to earn their respect first, while you men get it just because you’re male.”

Dr. Martens didn’t answer.

She grinned then, “I don’t usually talk this much. And if all I wanted was a good mark, well I would’ve done it differently. I mean, I would’ve conducted the same as everyone else. But I didn’t. And unfortunately, the mark does matter a bit. And the mark you gave me seems unfair. I know how to conduct, and you know I do. You marked me on how well the orchestra followed and somehow I feel I can’t possibly be responsible for that, and yet – ” she continued before he could object, “and yet, you are correct in saying that when it came right down to it, the orchestra conducted themselves, I didn’t conduct.

“But,” she was back on the beach, with the waves crashing in, “I’m starting to see that every identity requires co-operation. Maybe that’s hard for you to see because probably most of what you have tried to be has been accepted, recognized. So you haven’t known that what you are depends on the other’s behaviour as much as your own:

a leader isn't a leader unless someone agrees to follow him, a teacher can't be called a teacher if no one consents to be his student. Likewise, until someone chooses to recognize me and pay attention to my behaviour up on the podium, I am not a conductor. All I'm asking is for you to wait until that someone does – and it'll have to be soon if they keep seeing me up there – *then* evaluate my conducting ability.”

He sat silent for a while. “I suppose what you're saying – in this case, it does seem that your success, my evaluation of your success, is somewhat dependent upon what other people do or don't do.” He paused, silent again. “But,” he finally said, “I cannot change the mark I gave you. Or, let's be honest, I will not.” He went on quickly then, “but there are many more conducting assignments during second semester –you'll be on the podium twice a month instead of once during the whole semester. So, they'll have to get used to you.” He smiled, then said seriously, “And I hope they do. But,” he continued with a sigh, “if they don't, I mean, if another semester isn't long enough, remember half of the exam is written, and there are several written assignments from now until April.” He paused. “And,” and smiled, “I would consider extra work, for marks.”

She smiled then too. “Well. I can't ask any more of you.” She rose and reached out to shake his hand. “Thank you.”

Dr. Martens stood to meet her hand. “Thank you,” he said quietly.

It was spring, fresh and bright outside. Inside corners were still dull with too much study, too little sleep, and the stress of final exams; but most students were finished, or almost finished with their year.

Jarrett noticed Dr. Martens' door open, as she sauntered down the hall on her way out. She stopped a moment and swung partly into his office. “Have a good summer, Dr. Martens.”

“Thank you, I will. See you in the fall,” he looked up as she moved on.

“Yes, you will,” she called back.

“Oh, Jarrett – ” he got up quickly and went to the door. She stopped then. “What have you got planned for your summer?”

“Oh,” she leaned against the door frame and crossed her feet. “You know those street-corner musicians – ”

“Yes! You're going to play your trumpet in the open air, a summer minstrel!” He was pleased. “good practice. And a little money too.”

“Well, no – actually – ” she grinned, “I was going to be a street-corner conductor.” He looked puzzled. “See I thought I'd take a whole bunch of music on tape, set up a small cassette player, then conduct it! A bright t-shirt, shorts, and Stravinsky – that's all I need! She laughed then, at his expression. “Good practice, don't you think?” She waved and moved on. Was she kidding? He returned to his desk.

A second later she reappeared at his door. He looked up, questioningly.

“If I left my baton case open, do you think anyone – ”