

February 2020

Cindi stormed off the lift and down the concourse level. The sound of piano playing made her heart leapt. It was Voyage by Ayumi Hamazaki. Her frustrations evaporated as her steps come to a stop. She turned and began walking curiously towards the upright piano that was placed by the wall near the centre of the concourse. The music grew louder as she approached, so did the crowd that was watching. It was Jack who was playing the piano. His backpack hung tightly on his broad back as he played. Cindi took a position by a pillar as she watched. Her mind swirled with memories of herself in Japan as a student on a school trip in Tokyo in 2002.

Cindi felt someone gave a sharp pinch to her bottom. She squealed and turned around. One of the boys ran back to their group, roaring with laughter. The other boys pointed at Cindi, sneering at her. She yelled a tirade of expletives and stormed in their direction. The boys scattered and danced around her, jeering at her.

“Stop it, all of you!” a tired-looking teacher told them feebly. The boys gave a final sneer at Cindi. One of them gave her a middle-finger.

She tried to storm after the boys again but the teacher yelled after her. “Stop it, Cindi!”

“Mr Robert! They pinched my backside!” Cindi bellowed before pointing at the boys, swearing as good as it got. They continued to laughed at her from a distance.

“Cindi!” Robert told her sternly. “You are humiliating your school and country in the heart of Ginza! The Japanese must think we are some...” he trembled looking at her from top to bottom in utter disgust. “You stop making trouble or I will send you back to Singapore immediately into the arms of the school disciplinary committee.”

“But the boys...” Cindi protested.

“I will handle it. You stop it. Now.” Robert told her.

Cindi watched the elderly teacher walked over to the boys. The boys laughed and patted Robert on the back, who shook his head and chatted with the boys. Angry tears welled up in her eyes. She walked up the underground pedestrian tunnel, wiping away her tears and fuming away before she heard the sound piano playing. There was a piano sale in front of the Mitsukoshi department store a short distance away, and a young man with a backpack on his shoulder was playing Voyage by Ayumi Hamazaki.

As a fan, Cindi knew the lyrics of the song by heart, but she has never heard someone playing the entire song solely on piano. She wondered how the man would play the bridge of the song that was by performed by an orchestra. But he could. With deft movements, he played replicated the main and supporting tunes with elegance and a complexity that hit her like a warm wave of comforting water. Tears again fell from her

eyes, but they came from a place that was very different from those just moments before.

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Regina walked listlessly down the rows of apparel in the Mitsukoshi department store. An assistant carried her bags of shopping and tried to keep an eye on a lanky teen who was following them expressionlessly, with his head drooping and his sight perpetually on the ground.

“Are you hungry?” the assistant asked the teen.

“Oh don’t bother, he won’t answer you.” Regina told her rather dejectedly. She looked at her watch. “It is about time for lunch, though. Can you see if you can get us a seat at The Atarashi?”

The assistant’s eyes widened. She hurried away with the bags of shopping. Regina looked around at the branded merchandise and gave a sigh. She looked around at her boy who was attracted by the sound of piano coming from the entrance of the store. She followed him curiously.

The teen stopped near to the entrance of the store. He positioned himself by a pillar as he watched the young man with a backpack on his shoulder played Voyage by Ayumi Hamazaki.

“Jack?” Regina called, but Jack did not answer her. But they stood together as Jack stared steadfast at the pianist. The piece reached a complexity at the bridge where there was a main and accompanying tune that was played by the orchestra. The pianist hands danced across the keys as the layered tuned sounded in elegance and majesty. A smile broke on Jack’s face.

Regina looked at Jack with curious excitement. “You like that? Would you want to play a piano too?”

Jack looked at his mother. Still bearing the faint smile, he gave the slightest nod and continued looking.

It must be the rarest of response because Regina could have jumped for joy. “Oh, my baby. There is finally something that you like! You have never looked at me like that before!”

Regina looked away and continued, “Your father would finally take notice of you. And me of course. “Her hands tightened on Jack’s shoulders. “Mummy is depending everything on you, Jack. The Lees depends so much on Au Fait, and your daddy is giving

us the cold shoulder. Even your uncle hates us.” Her eyes turned red. “I am sure your daddy has other families outside. But you must be the one to inherit Au Fiat in future, Jack!” Regina put her head onto the shoulders of Jack. Jack did not seem to hear his mother. He was completely mesmerized by the pianist and a tear rolled from his eye, down his scrawny face and past his slight smile that hid a world that others could not see.

With tears was flowing down her perfectly made-up cheeks. It suddenly hit Condi: she turned and made for the lift at a dashing pace that would bring her back to her office. She didn't hear Jack completing the Voyage. When he ended, beads of sweat clustered on his forehead. He exhaled and jumped a little when applause broke out in the concourse with plenty of whistles. He wiped his forehead with the back of his hand and gave a slight bow before making off in the same dashing pace as his sister.