

THE SYMPHONY

BY TEPRING E CROCKER

I raise my arms and feel silence press into the hall behind me. The concentration on the faces seated before me is palpable, an energy I could touch if I dared move my hand. Eighty breaths are held as one. Time stands still. I flick my baton, bring it down with a sweep of anticipation to tap the wellspring that lies at the bottom of the arc.

Sound flows. I work the air with the baton and the sound swells. It pours off the stage into the audience where it is soaked up by those who are parched with worries, thirsty for comfort. I mold the sound with my arms, my body sways. My toes push my heels off the platform. I weave the sound, stroke it, cajole it. I yank it and jerk it until it ceases to be air vibrating against string and shuddering brass. It is no longer frequency and decibel. It no longer belongs to words like “harmony” and “counterpoint”. Once it passes through my arms, it becomes more than any word can contain.

The sound unfolds differently within each listener. Some become drenched in memory, some swim as peacefully as in the womb. Some struggle and weep. Some find joy in the sound’s creation and peer past the transformation of my weaving onto the stage, hoping for a glimpse of genesis.

And then I begin to tell the stories.

My baton calls to the strings. Tears spring forth and spill off the stage to join the deluge. Mothers cry and Angels weep.

The drums are summoned. War marches through the hall and the cry of battle echoes from balcony to balcony.

The horns answer. A hero rises! Evil is defeated. Love conquers.

Flutes and oboes rejoice. All of nature sings.

My arms tire and the flow ebbs to a trickle. I look to the faces before me, and together we reach into the depths of creation to wring out every last ounce of sound. With a final, excruciating sweep, I bring the baton to rest. It hovers, motionless, before the orchestra. Eighty breaths are held as one. Time stands still.

I drop my arms.

The dry silence lingers for a moment. Then one drop of sound plops onto the stage, splashed from a pair of hands near the front row. Then another. Then a dozen, then thousands of hundreds of raindrops bathe us in applause. The hall rumbles with the thunder of approval. I bow into the gale, then wave the orchestra to its feet. My cheeks are wet. My eyes are damp. I bow again.

“Mom! When’s supper going to be ready?!”

I hastily wipe my eyes as my cozy kitchen reappears around me. The spaghetti is bubbling on the stovetop and steam rises all the way to the vent in a misty column.

“10 minutes. Go wash up!” I yell back. The bread is almost ready and I need to set the table.

Still humming, I turn off the iPod.