

GREATEST CHANGE

The music wouldn't cooperate, no matter what Anya did. The phrases were strewn across pages haphazardly. The notes were leering at her, she was sure of that. That was it. She stood up, her arms dropping limply to her sides. She was going for a walk.

Anya stepped into a hallway lit with a dull twilight glow. She walked quickly past a line of shut doors. Chatter from behind the doors seeped through. One would think that the thick grey carpet that lined the floor would have absorbed most of the sound so what was left behind would be dull promises of what they could have been. She walked faster as the chatter and unbidden thoughts engulfed her. The light streaming in from the windows mocked her as she passed by, giving her an illusion of warmth. She knew it, she should have stayed in the room. No matter how impish the music was, it never flung itself onto her like that. But if she made it to the front door...

She flung the door open and stepped out triumphantly. She was glad to be out in the open, even if it was a place where the breeze never blew, where the eternal twilight stared down from the heavens, painting the whole place in an ever-pink glow that just emphasized its seclusion from the rest of the world. The winding stone paths and curving benches lay there with no one to use them. The fountains that gurgled were the only source of noise, and that was where Anya headed to now.

Anya stopped and stared.

There was a little girl leaning over the edge of the fountain. She had her dark hair in loose, messy braids. She turned to look at Anya with twinkling brown eyes. The girl beamed at Anya. Anya didn't know what she had done to deserve the smile, so she did not return it. Anya had known who the girl was as soon as she had seen her, and a silent chill drilled into her heart. It was herself. Herself when she was younger, but this Little Anya should be inside, she shouldn't be here. No one should be here besides herself.

Little Anya patted the smooth marble rim of the fountain where she was seated, inviting Anya to join her there. Anya did so.

Little Anya flipped a silver coin that swam away as a fish of moonlight when it splashed into the fountain water. She laughed. Anya's heart clenched as she heard the laughter full of unmasked joy. A shot of envy ran through her. It had been a long time since she had laughed like that.

"How did you get out?" Envy had soured Anya's voice, and the girl's face fell.

Little Anya took Anya's hand.

"You're still scared. I thought we'd get better, so why...?" There was something accusatory in Little Anya's voice.

Anya looked away. The tears were already pricking her eyes and her nose was getting sore.

"That's what you thought," she said. She released the Little Anya's hand. The tears dribbled down her cheeks. She buried her face in her hands, succumbing to the onslaught of emotion that weighed down on her.

“It’s alright,” Little Anya said gently and firmly, patting Anya’s back all the while. “I think... we’ll always be scared, and it’s alright to feel like that. I think even if you don’t do anything, but you’re still here and you’re still trying instead of shutting everyone away... maybe that’s enough.”

Anya didn’t say anything. She didn’t need to. Both understood what she felt and maybe that was what they wanted to say to her all the time she kept them locked behind those doors. In the world she had constructed for herself in her mind, there was no one that wasn’t her, and she had hated that. She had been so afraid. Afraid of what she would see and hear so she didn’t give much thought into creating the world beyond this point. The price to pay was the endless twilight, an age of no change, but she had long been used to that. The truth was that she still was afraid. She wiped away the tears with her cardigan sleeve. Maybe it was alright. It would be difficult, but it was a start.

She stood up. Little Anya followed. There was work to be done. She held out her hand, and Little Anya took it.

When they went back indoors, the morning light filled the hallway bright with light. Anya could feel the warmth of the sun on her skin even through the windows. The plush Turkish carpet with its many rich colours further brightened up the hallway. Some doors were open while others remained closed. *One step at a time*. Some people milled in the hallway though no one stopped to talk to her. There were chatter that came from the people in the hallway and from behind the closed doors. It wasn’t all malevolent, and most of it was quite pleasant, she found. She continued down the hallway. *One step at a time*.

Her music was waiting for her on her desk where she had left them. Her mind was clearer from the walk, and the sunlight unashamedly filled all corners of the room. It would be alright. Her conversation with Little Anya had given her a simple idea. It was funny how the best ideas didn’t have to be the most complex ones. There was something called musical unity or repetition which could be just what her music needed. It was fascinating how the smallest bit of acceptance could make one open to the greatest change. It wasn’t going to be easy, but her time of making new masks to conceal herself was passing. At the moment, her heart wasn’t thrashing against her rib cage like a desperate bird. All she knew was that her music was waiting on the table and she knew just how to fix it.