

## Outside the Glass Box

1-59-1

Gabriel sat down at the grand piano at school. He closed his eyes and let his fingers guide his soul along the pale, remorseless keys and drowned himself in a deluge of notes. He really didn't know what he was playing; just let himself float along with the melody in his mind.

"Gabriel?"

He jerked upright at the high, soft voice. "Hi."

Chantrea was a fellow music student at Sorn High School. She played flute, which suited her in every way. She smiled like stars.

That wasn't what most people noticed about Chantrea, though. She was completely blind, but somehow managed to stay at the top of the class in almost every subject.

Except for music, which was why she was here.

"Theory?" Gabriel said.

"Yah." Chantrea shoved a book titled *Musical Theory for Flutists* into his lap. She scanned a few pages with her fingertips – even though the book was printed, not Braille – and then jammed a finger onto a set of chords. "This passage."

Gabriel barely looked at the slough of notes and made a few marks in pencil.

"That help?"

She smiled slightly. "Thanks. That should be good." She licked her lips. Uh-oh. That meant the barrage of questions was coming.

"I liked your Adagio for class yesterday." She said, smiling with well-pretended innocence. "Especially the section that was out of key." Gabriel waited. Chantrea blew

out a long, frustrated breath. “You’re really going to make me ask, aren’t you? How’s the rest of your life? You know, besides you and the piano.”

Gabriel’s heart plunged. *Please don’t make me talk to you...*

“You can’t expect me to believe that life’s so spectacularly great as you’d like me to believe. I’m perfectly aware that you cry alone at night.” Chantrea said, her bird-like voice soft. “You don’t know how many weeks it’s taken me to get up the courage to ask you.”

Gabriel thought back over his sixteen years. Circumstances had changed, but the pain and failure hadn’t. A failure at school. A musical prodigy who still couldn’t even write his own name. He stared into Chantrea’s wide, dark eyes. “I wish I could tell you.”

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Chantrea had been watching Gabriel for the better part of a year. He was frightened all the time, like a deer. And she knew his secrets. He had no idea how much she knew, but with her gift, if you could call it that, there was no possible way he really could comprehend that.

Chantrea had a rare ability, or gift, or curse, depending on who you asked. She could see the true nature of people. When Chantrea looked at a person, she couldn’t see with her physical eyes, but she could see the person’s soul, when she looked at them. And the pale, weeping soul that was Gabriel tugged at her heartstrings.

She’d met Gabriel two years ago, when they were both Freshman music students at Sorn High. When they’d first started taking music together, she had realized just how brilliant he was. She’d figured out, based on her version of sight and his complex mind,

that he was an excellent student. She was shocked when she had found out that he was failing in nearly every subject except his music.

In English, she had once caught a glimpse of his “essay”. It was music, staff paper written over with notes in a beautiful theme, but definitely not an essay.

That’s when it had hit her – Gabriel couldn’t read. She watched him more carefully after that and her suspicions were undoubtedly confirmed.

His older sister, Angeline, was a teacher at the elementary school. On Friday afternoons, she usually drove down to Sorn High to hang out with the High Schoolers for a while and talk with her brother. Chantrea, being the unsocial person she was, was sitting in the same spot she had occupied for three years: back table on the left, on the far right of the metal bench. She didn’t really think Angeline and Gabriel would choose to sit so near her, but they did. She overheard, completely by accident, their conversation.

“Is tutoring helping at all, Gabe?”

Gabriel’s soul recoiled at that, curling deeper into its own misery. “Not really.”

“Come on. You are a smart kid. You can do this. Keep up.”

“Angie”-

“No, you listen. You are capable of so much. Don’t hold yourself back.”

Chantrea heard Gabriel turn away. “I can’t. If I was really supposed to be as brilliant as everyone thinks, I would be able to keep up in school. Be able to read, be able to understand what the teacher says. Something holds me back. God gave me limitations. I have to learn to work in them and not wear myself out trying to change anything. I am who I am.”

Chantrea had been horrified when she heard it. That was personal. She didn't need to know Gabriel's deepest darkest secrets and fears. But it made her all the more compassionate.

He didn't complain, didn't ask for help. He just flowed along with the stream of people, like a moth who tries again and again to push his way out of a glass case, but who just bangs against the walls of its own limitations, never learning the beauty of a winged dance or soaring flight.

Chantrea worried about her caged friend. He wasn't satisfied with life, wasn't happy with any of his work. The disabilities that threatened to overwhelm his extraordinary gift were all he could see. Chantrea shuddered. Much like her own life had been. She had once been a caged moth as well, but she had found the way out of the glass box.

And she wanted Gabriel to be free too.

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"Maybe that wasn't such a great idea, Lord." Chantrea said to herself. "Then why did you even make me do that? I've tried to ignore Gabriel for weeks and what happens when I do? You tell me that it's what I'm supposed to do. Ha! Supposed to try to help Gabriel! You know that I'm Yours. I never asked for my gift. It's just who I am and who You're making me. But if this is my purpose, why doesn't it ever work? Why is it so hard?" Frustration threatened to engulf her. She hugged her knees to her chest. "God, if you want me for this work, you're gonna have to equip me for it. I don't know what I'm doing, and besides, I'm riddled with faults and problems and restrictions that make me pretty ineffective. But I know You love to make warriors from shepherds and queens

from orphan girls. So I know you can take a blind woman and make her the eyes of your salvation and grace if you want to. I can live through the hard stuff, Lord. Do what you want.”

“Um, hi.” Chantrea whirled around, embarrassed.

Gabriel stood there, hopelessly nervous. “I’m sorry to interrupt.”

“No problem.” She turned back around, away from the glittering embodiment of his soul. She waited for the rebuke, the criticism, the questions at her audible prayer.

None came. “I wanted to thank you.” Gabriel said, very quietly. “I heard you pray.”

*No surprise there.*

“I mean, I’ve heard you pray a lot. It helps you through the hard stuff. That’s why you do it. Right?”

Still surprised that Gabriel was actually talking to her, especially after his reaction in the music room, Chantrea nodded.

“When you talked to me the other day, I didn’t know what prayer even meant. I thought God was the kind of being that would just magically make all my problems disappear, if He really was and really cared.”

Chantrea felt her eyes prickle with tears. She’d been caught in that trap before. That was the beginning of the glass box’s remorseless walls.

“But I guess this is all part of the plan, right?”

“Right.” Chantrea said. “If I wasn’t blind, I don’t think I’d pay attention to the prophetic sight I have. If you could do school the way most people can”-

Gabriel flinched. “You mean, if I could read.”

“Yeah. If you could read, then you wouldn’t be able to feel the Spirit of God the way you will without that distraction, and focus on Him. It’s worth it.”

Gabriel’s soul smiled at Chantrea as he said, “It’s hard. But I believe you. God’s ways are better, and his purposes and passions are better, too.” He stood there, with his hands still held in front of him, his true self glimmering like the golden light of the sun when it first rises, for a long moment, just staring into silence. Then he patted her arm, and that friendly gesture reminded her of who she was and that great, disastrous, noble, beautiful calling that was hers. Then he turned silently and walked out the door.

And for just a moment before he did, Chantrea saw his soul leap from the glass box and grow wings.