

Trumpet Voluntary

by Erin Fitzgerald

"There's a concert next month," Sherry said. "Why don't you come to that and I'll introduce you? Then we can go from there."

The night of the concert, I stand in my closet with three suits draped over my arms. My wife Pam sits on the deck out back, drinking margaritas from a mix. She understands that I am a good person and that I need to do this. She's still unhappy. She was unhappy before Sherry told me about Nina, but about different things.

Sherry has said she's sorry. That she wouldn't have gotten in touch, ever, if she hadn't lost her job. "You do what you have to do. You two will see someday."

Pam's margarita glass has a green cactus for a stem. I think about kissing the top of her head goodbye like I might usually, but Pam startles easily after a drink or two.

The school is in Webster. Neither Sherry or I went to school in Webster. The school has a long driveway, and low windows with closed blinds. There are cars everywhere. Sherry told me to show up early for good parking, and on time for bad parking. I am not entitled to good parking, and I'm not entitled to the seat I find in the front.

The brass section is large, but there are only two girls playing the trumpet. Only one of the two girls is short in her chair, with black frizzy hair and blue eyes and a face that settles into a frown so that everyone probably thinks she's worried all the time when she isn't.

I listen to the music, and let myself look at her when the music teacher talks between songs. It feels like he talks for ages, and maybe he does. Nina mostly looks at her sheet music but then, right

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after a Sousa medley, one of the trombone guys whispers something to her and she giggles. Her eyes are bluer and wider then, even from a third of a gymnasium away. After that, I can't pay attention anymore. I can only think thoughts to the different beats. I gave something without even knowing it. I gave something without knowing I had anything to give. It turned out to be the biggest thing I've ever given. The most important thing that I didn't even do.

Sherry is in the hall after the concert. Her hair is thinner, and her eyes are tired. Nina stands next to her. Sherry nods at me, and turns to Nina. "Sweetheart, I'd like you to meet my friend Tim."

"You played well tonight," I hold out my hand for Nina to shake. Then I realize she's still holding her trumpet.

Nina looks at my hand, then at me. "Thanks," she says. We all watch as her pinky finger pushes a valve open on the bottom of the trumpet. Three wet drops plop on the shiny tile floor.

