

FLEYDO ENGLISH SCHOOL

Story Material

The Silent Stage

A moving story about a teenager with stage fright who discovers her music teacher's secret past and helps him return to the stage.

Level: B1 (Intermediate)**Age Group:** Teens (11-16)**Skill:** Reading**Topic:** Music & Courage**Duration:** ~45 minutes**Pages:** 25 story pages

Learning Objectives

- ✓ Read and understand a B1-level story about music and overcoming fear
 - ✓ Learn 20 vocabulary words highlighted in context
- ✓ Practise reading comprehension with multiple-choice questions
- ✓ Understand themes of courage, mentorship, and vulnerability
 - ✓ Discuss the relationship between fear and creativity

*Note: In the online version, **highlighted vocabulary words** have hover definitions.*

Part 1 — The Story

Chapter 1: The Girl Who Could Not Play

Mira could play the piano beautifully. She could play Chopin nocturnes that made her mother cry. She could play jazz improvisations that made her little brother dance around the kitchen. She could play complex Bach fugues from memory without a single mistake. But she could only do these things when she was alone. The moment another person entered the room — even her own family — her fingers turned to stone. Her heart raced, her palms sweated, and the music disappeared from her mind as if someone had pulled the plug on a radio. She had **stage fright**, and it was not the ordinary kind. It was the kind that felt like drowning.

She had tried everything. Breathing exercises, visualisation techniques, beta blockers prescribed by her doctor, even hypnotherapy. Nothing worked. The moment she sensed an audience — whether it was three hundred people in a concert hall or her grandmother sitting on the sofa — the **anxiety** consumed her completely. She was fifteen years old, and she had never performed a single piece of music in front of another human being. Her music teacher at school, Mr. Varga, had noticed her talent during a composition exercise. "You have an extraordinary ear," he had told her quietly after class, looking at her handwritten score. "Have you considered joining the school orchestra?" Mira had mumbled something about not being ready and had left the room as quickly as possible. She did not want anyone to know about the war that raged inside her every time she sat at a piano.

Chapter 2: The Underground Musician

Mira's school was in central London, and every day she took the Underground from her home in Highgate to King's Cross station. She liked the journey. She liked the rumble of the train, the flow of strangers, and the feeling of being invisible in a crowd. One Tuesday evening in October, as she walked through the long tunnel connecting the Northern and Victoria lines, she heard something that stopped her mid-step. Someone was playing the violin. The sound echoed off the tiled walls of the tunnel, filling the underground space with a **melody** so achingly beautiful that Mira felt it physically, like warm water pouring down her spine.

She followed the sound and found him standing in an alcove near the escalators: a man in a dark coat and a flat cap pulled low over his eyes. His violin case was open on the ground, with a few coins scattered at the bottom. He played with his eyes closed, completely absorbed in the music, as if the hundreds of commuters rushing past did not exist. The piece was unfamiliar — not classical, not jazz, but something in between. A **composition** that felt both ancient and modern, melancholic and hopeful. Mira stood and listened for twenty minutes, missing her connection. When the musician finished, she dropped a five-pound note into his case and said, "That was the most beautiful thing I have ever heard." He opened his eyes and smiled briefly, but did not speak. She noticed that his eyes were dark and sad, and that his hands, despite the cold, were steady and precise.

Chapter 3: Recognition

Over the next three weeks, Mira made a point of passing through that tunnel every evening. The **anonymous** musician was there most days, always in the same alcove, always wearing the dark coat and flat cap. He played different pieces each time — some were well-known classical works, others were clearly his own **compositions** — but they all shared the same quality: a depth of emotion that made the music feel like a conversation, as if the violin was speaking directly to whoever was willing to listen. Mira began recording the performances on her phone, listening to them at home while she practised her own piano pieces.

One rainy Thursday, the musician pushed his cap back to wipe the sweat from his forehead, and Mira saw his face clearly for the first time. She felt the ground shift beneath her feet. She knew that face. She saw it every Monday and Wednesday in Room 14B. The underground musician was Mr. Varga, her school music teacher. The quiet, reserved, slightly awkward man who wore corduroy jackets and spoke so softly that students in the back row could never hear him. The man who taught Year 9 how to read sheet music and conducted the school choir with patient, understated precision. That man was also this: a musician of extraordinary talent, playing for coins in a tunnel. Mira said nothing. She walked away, her mind racing. She had a hundred questions, but she knew that some secrets needed to be approached carefully.

Chapter 4: The Research

That evening, Mira searched the internet for "Varga violinist." The results confirmed what she had begun to suspect. Daniel Varga had been a **prodigy** — a child **soloist** who had grown up in Budapest and performed with major orchestras across Europe before the age of twenty. Music critics had compared him to the greatest violinists of the century. He had released three albums, all of which received extraordinary reviews. Then, in 2011, during a **rehearsal** for a solo concert at the Barbican Centre in London, something had gone wrong.

A prominent music critic named Julian Cross had published a **devastating critique** of Varga's most recent album, calling his playing "technically perfect but emotionally hollow" and suggesting that he had "nothing left to say." The review was picked up by other publications and went viral. At the concert the following evening, Varga had walked onto the stage in front of two thousand people, raised his bow, and found that he could not play. He stood there in silence for over a minute before walking off the stage. He never performed publicly again. He had been twenty-six years old. "He has what I have," Mira whispered to herself, staring at the screen. "He is **paralysed**. Just like me."

Chapter 5: The Conversation

It took Mira a week to gather the courage to speak to Mr. Varga. She waited until after Wednesday's music class, when the other students had left, and approached his desk. Her heart was pounding, but she had rehearsed what she wanted to say. "Mr. Varga, I know who you are," she said quietly. "I have been listening to you play in the Underground. I know about the Barbican." His face went pale. For a long moment, he said nothing. Then he sat down slowly and rubbed his eyes. "How long have you known?" "Three weeks." "Are you going to tell people?" "No. But I want to talk to you. Because I think we have the same

problem."

They talked for over an hour, long after the school had emptied. Mr. Varga — Daniel — told her about the night at the Barbican, about the silence that had swallowed him, about the years of therapy and the slow, painful process of learning to play again, but only in places where he felt invisible. "The Underground is perfect," he said. "Nobody is really listening. They are all going somewhere. I am just background noise. It is safe." Mira told him about her own battle with **stage fright**. About the piano she could only play in an empty room. About the talent she carried like a locked box with no key. "I understand," Daniel said simply. It was the first time anyone had said those words and Mira believed them completely. She felt a wave of **empathy** that was almost overwhelming.

Chapter 6: The Arrangement

They made a deal. Daniel would help Mira prepare for the school's winter concert — a real performance, in front of a real audience. In return, Mira would help Daniel work towards playing in a proper venue again. "Not the Barbican," Mira said. "Something small. A church, or a cafe. Somewhere where people are actually listening, not just passing through." Daniel looked terrified, but he agreed. They began meeting twice a week in the music room after school. Daniel was an extraordinary teacher when he was working one-to-one. He listened to Mira play with intense concentration, then offered precise, insightful feedback that transformed her understanding of each piece.

"You play the notes correctly," he told her during their third session. "But you are playing them safely. You are holding back because you are afraid of what will happen if you let go." He sat beside her at the piano and played the opening bars of the Chopin nocturne she was working on. Under his fingers, the same notes sounded completely different — richer, more **vulnerable**, more alive. "Music is not about perfection," he said. "It is about honesty. When you perform, you are sharing something real about yourself. That is why it is frightening. But it is also why it matters." Gradually, over weeks of patient work, Mira began to let go. She played for Daniel with her eyes closed, forgetting that he was there, losing herself in the music the way she did when she was alone. "That," he said after one session, "is how you should always play."

Chapter 7: Small Steps

The next step was harder: playing for someone other than Daniel. Mira's best friend, a girl named Priya, had always known about the **anxiety**, but she had never heard Mira play. One afternoon, Mira invited Priya to the music room and played the Chopin nocturne while Daniel sat in the corner, quietly supportive. Mira's hands trembled for the first thirty seconds. Her right foot shook against the pedal. But then, somewhere around bar sixteen, the music took over and the fear receded like a tide going out. When she finished, Priya was crying. "Why have you been hiding this?" she asked. "You are incredible."

The following week, Mira played for a group of five people: Priya, two other friends, and Mr. Okonkwo the art teacher. The week after that, twelve people. Each time was terrifying,

and each time it got slightly easier. Daniel was working on his own challenge in parallel. Mira had found a small jazz cafe in Camden that hosted live music on Sunday evenings. She persuaded the owner to give Daniel a fifteen-minute slot, introducing him simply as "a friend who plays violin." On the night of the performance, Daniel stood at the side of the tiny stage for a full three minutes before stepping into the spotlight. But when he began to play, the cafe fell silent. His **compositions** filled the room like smoke, beautiful and inescapable. When he finished, twenty-three people gave him a standing **ovation**. It was not the Barbican. It was better.

Chapter 8: The Winter Concert

The school's winter concert was held in December, in the **auditorium** that seated five hundred people. Every seat was taken. Mira was listed on the programme as the final performer: a solo piano piece, Chopin's Nocturne in E-flat major. Backstage, twenty minutes before her performance, she sat on a plastic chair and felt the old familiar terror rising in her chest. Her hands were shaking. Her mouth was dry. The walls of the dressing room seemed to be closing in. Daniel found her there. He sat down beside her and said nothing for a moment. Then he reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out a small, folded piece of paper.

"I wrote this for you," he said. She unfolded it. In his careful handwriting, it said: "Courage is not the absence of fear. It is the decision to play anyway. I know because you taught me that." Mira looked at him. He looked back. His eyes were no longer sad. "You are ready," he said. "You have been ready for a long time. You just did not know it." Five minutes later, Mira walked onto the stage. The lights were blinding. Five hundred faces looked up at her. She could hear her own heartbeat in her ears, louder than any music. She sat down at the piano. She placed her fingers on the keys. For a terrible, endless moment, nothing happened. The silence stretched out like a held breath. Then she closed her eyes, and she played.

Chapter 9: The Music Speaks

She forgot the audience. She forgot the lights, the stage, the five hundred faces, and the camera recording the performance for the school website. She forgot her fear. All that remained was the music — the opening **melody** rising gently from the bass, the right hand singing the nocturne's famous theme, each note placed with care and intention and something more than technique. Something honest. Something real. She played the piece exactly as Daniel had taught her: not perfectly, but truthfully. There was a moment in the middle section where her fingers stumbled slightly, and instead of panicking, she took a breath and let the mistake become part of the performance, a small human imperfection in an otherwise flawless landscape of sound.

When the final note faded into silence, Mira opened her eyes. For a moment, the **auditorium** was completely still. Then the applause began — not polite, scattered clapping, but a wave of genuine, thunderous appreciation that rolled over her like warm rain. People were standing. Her mother was standing. Priya was standing. And at the back of the hall, barely visible in the shadows, Daniel Varga was standing too, clapping harder than anyone,

with tears streaming down his face. It was not just applause. It was an **ovation**. It was five hundred people telling a fifteen-year-old girl that her music mattered, that her courage mattered, that she mattered. Mira stood up from the piano, took a shaky bow, and smiled the biggest smile of her life.

Chapter 10: Encore

Two things happened in the weeks that followed. First, Mira was offered a place in the London Youth Orchestra, which she accepted immediately. She still felt **anxiety** before every **rehearsal**, and she suspected she always would. But she had learned that fear was not a wall — it was a door, and she had the key. Second, Daniel Varga received a phone call from the Wigmore Hall, one of London's most respected chamber music venues. They were organising a series of comeback concerts for musicians who had stepped away from the public stage, and they wanted him to perform.

He almost said no. He sat with the phone in his hand for ten minutes, staring at the wall of his small flat, feeling the old terror creeping back. Then he thought about Mira — about a fifteen-year-old girl who had walked onto a stage despite every cell in her body screaming at her to run. If she could do it, so could he. He called back and said yes. The concert was held on a Saturday evening in March. The Wigmore Hall was full. Mira sat in the third row with Priya, her mother, and Mr. Okonkwo. When Daniel walked onto the stage, the audience welcomed him with warm, generous applause. He raised his violin, closed his eyes, and played. The music that filled the hall was not the sound of a man proving something. It was the sound of a man who had found his way home.

When he finished, the audience rose to their feet. The **ovation** lasted four minutes. People called for an **encore**. Daniel looked out at the audience, found Mira's face in the third row, and smiled. Then he played one final piece — a short, gentle **composition** that Mira recognised immediately. It was the first melody she had heard him play in the Underground tunnel, all those months ago. The piece that had started everything. Afterwards, in the green room backstage, Daniel handed Mira a gift: a framed copy of the concert programme with a handwritten note: "To my **mentor** — yes, you read that correctly. Thank you for teaching me that courage is contagious. — Daniel." Mira laughed and cried at the same time, which she decided was the most honest response possible.

The End

Fear never completely disappears. It waits in the wings like a shadow, ready to step forward whenever the lights get too bright. But fear is not the enemy of music. Silence is. The silence of unplayed notes, unshared talents, and unspoken feelings. Mira learned this. Daniel learned this. And perhaps, if you are reading this story and you have something inside you that you are afraid to share with the world — a song, a painting, an idea, a dream — you might learn it too. The stage is never as terrifying as the silence of never having stepped onto it.

Part 2 — Key Vocabulary

Words shown in **purple bold** in the story are listed below.

Word	Type	Definition
stage fright	<i>noun</i>	extreme nervousness felt by a performer before or during a performance
anonymous	<i>adjective</i>	with a name that is not known or not made public
melody	<i>noun</i>	a sequence of musical notes that form a pleasing pattern
composition	<i>noun</i>	a piece of music that has been written by someone
rehearsal	<i>noun</i>	a practice session for a performance
auditorium	<i>noun</i>	a large room or building used for public performances or meetings
prodigy	<i>noun</i>	a young person with exceptional talent or ability
paralysed	<i>adjective</i>	unable to move or act because of fear or shock
devastating	<i>adjective</i>	causing severe shock, distress, or destruction
resilience	<i>noun</i>	the ability to recover from difficulties; mental toughness
empathy	<i>noun</i>	the ability to understand and share the feelings of another person
ovation	<i>noun</i>	a long, enthusiastic round of applause from an audience
anxiety	<i>noun</i>	a feeling of worry and nervousness about something uncertain
critique	<i>noun</i>	a detailed analysis and assessment of something
mentor	<i>noun</i>	an experienced person who advises and guides someone younger
soloist	<i>noun</i>	a musician who performs alone, often with an orchestra
encore	<i>noun</i>	an extra performance given in response to audience demand
vulnerable	<i>adjective</i>	open to emotional or physical harm; exposed and unprotected
improvise	<i>verb</i>	to create or perform something without preparation
triumph	<i>noun</i>	a great victory or achievement, especially after difficulty

Part 3 — Comprehension Quiz

Answer these questions about the story.

Question 1

What was Mira's main problem?

- She could not read music
- She had severe stage fright that prevented her from performing
- She did not own a piano
- She disliked her music teacher

Question 2

Where did Mira first hear the anonymous musician playing?

- In a concert hall
- In the school music room
- In a London Underground tunnel
- In a park near her home

Question 3

Who was the underground musician?

- A famous rock star in disguise
- A homeless man with a hidden talent
- Mr. Varga, her school music teacher
- A music student from a nearby university

Question 4

What had happened to Daniel Varga at the Barbican Centre?

- He had broken his violin during a concert
- He was unable to play and walked off the stage
- He played brilliantly and received a standing ovation
- He was asked to leave by the management

Question 5

What deal did Mira and Daniel make?

- She would pay him for private lessons
- He would help her perform and she would help him return to a proper venue
- She would keep his secret if he gave her good grades
- They would form a band together

Question 6

What did Daniel say music is really about?

- Technical perfection and speed
- Winning competitions and awards
- Honesty and sharing something real about yourself
- Playing as loudly as possible

Question 7

Where did Daniel first perform for a real listening audience again?

- At the Barbican Centre
- At the school concert
- At a small jazz cafe in Camden
- At Wigmore Hall

Question 8**What happened during Mira's performance at the winter concert?**

- She forgot all the notes and stopped playing
- She played beautifully and received a standing ovation
- The piano broke during the performance
- She played for only thirty seconds and ran away

Question 9**What major venue invited Daniel to perform a comeback concert?**

- The Royal Albert Hall
- The Barbican Centre
- Wigmore Hall
- Carnegie Hall

Question 10**What did Daniel's note to Mira say?**

- Thank you for the piano lessons
- You need more practice
- Thank you for teaching me that courage is contagious
- Please keep my secret forever

Answer Key

#	Ans	Question
1	B	What was Mira's main problem?
2	C	Where did Mira first hear the anonymous musician playing?
3	C	Who was the underground musician?
4	B	What had happened to Daniel Varga at the Barbican Centre?
5	B	What deal did Mira and Daniel make?
6	C	What did Daniel say music is really about?
7	C	Where did Daniel first perform for a real listening audience again?
8	B	What happened during Mira's performance at the winter concert?
9	C	What major venue invited Daniel to perform a comeback concert?
10	C	What did Daniel's note to Mira say?

Thank you for reading! Visit www.fleydo.com for more stories and materials.