

It was last minute Ravi decided to go to the Methodist Hall to watch Chloe play. Sweet persuasion, because it wasn't his thing.

"I mean, two hours of classical music? Whoah".

He would probably only stick it out to the interval.

Parveen smiles at her little brother, on his way out.

" I mean, she likes other music, does Chloe".

" Ravi, just go. Enjoy". Parveen pulls a tag off his shirt. "Go".

She watches him through the window, head down, smoothing his Tee shirt, fingering his 'phone.

She catches her breath, wishing their Mum and Dad could see him growing up, then pushes this thought away, to stop any tears. She reminds herself her brother hasn't been out since the accident. It's time he got back to being Ravi.

The bald bearded guy who takes Ravi's ticket at the entrance to the hall, eyes Superdry boy with his rings and trainers.

"Where's the bar, mate?" Ravi grins.

"This is a Methodist Hall". The bearded man does not flicker.

"Okay. Definitely leaving at the interval" Ravi stamps the thought into his mind.

Chloe rushes Ravi and gives him a kiss.

"We're on first. See you at the interval. We can watch the second half together?"

It's Mozart".

Ravi nods. Not exactly the plan, but he will think of something.

Bald Beardy observes the bewildered reaction on Rav's face.

He calls after her. "Mozart. OK. Cool. "

He winks at Baldy and moves swiftly towards the stone stairs, leading up to the balcony. Mozart.

Of course he'd heard of him.

Chloe scoots back to a group of waiting girls.

"He came. He came".

Her friends squeeze her to them and she turns to see Ravi trudging up the stairs. Texting.

In the first row of the balcony he checks his 'phone. Three texts from mate Dev. They think he's at the multiplex.

Say nothing, Rav, he thinks. If they only knew.

He looks down on the audience.

Must be the youngest here. Apart from the youth orchestra.

First row, in the main hall, is the Mayor, hand in hand with Mrs Mayor, who is next to a lady who looks old enough to be Mrs Mayor's mother, who in turn is side by side with a line of ladies with curly hair, glasses, pearls and shiny handbags. They are chatting as they squirrel their coats round the plush red leather chairs, sweet-eating and buzzing.

A man from the chorus at the back, introduces the first half, on the mike.

"Welcome. These folk songs you are about to hear...."

Ravi takes out his phone. Bald Beardy, at his shoulder, clears his throat.

Ravi relents and puts his phone in his jeans pocket.

Beardy takes up sentinel by the pillar.

There is a rustling as the audience buzz becomes a low hum. The youth orchestra kids single file out and take their seats, adjusting their music on the waiting music stands. Ravi leans over to spy Chloe. He's expecting her to gaze up at him, but she is focused on positioning her violin and cosying into her chair. She looks lovely. Her blond hair shiny smooth, caught at the side by an ice blue slide, black dress and a glint of a gold bracelet. Solemn and beautiful.

First violin boy strides out, head high, into his place. Everyone claps. Ravi recognises him from school. Geek chic glasses and wild hair. Tonight he looks different. Not just his suit. Kind of taller. Hair slicked back, crisp jacket. Proud. Some of the others he recognises too. Cool in black against the orchestra ladies, who are splashed in green scarves. The male chorus stands tall with rows of unaligned bow ties. Ravi counts them. The wobbly line of bows makes him laugh.

The violin girls including Chloe all hold ready. Eyes towards first violin. First violin flexes his fingers and his face muscles, synchronising. And he's watching the conductor as they all start together. There's like a huge silent breath in and they're off. The music sounds a bit like pirate songs. Accordeons and puffing on trumpets and like they are on a boat. They are in rhythm but each of them holds the violin in a special way and it's not screeching or scratching.

How do they do that, he muses, make it sound so smooth?

Dad used to say that the man and musical instrument were one. But Dad was talking about the sitar.

"You know Ravi" he always grinned so wide, "This sound" as he ran his hand across the strings, "is totally amazing" .

He had watched his Dad and uncles play, and always it seemed to him as if they were not in the room. They were smiling to themselves, like they were in a different place. Like Chloe. Not here, like she's dreaming. Alone, but with the others. Is that what it's like? His Dad and uncles like in a trance, connected. In another world.

At the interval, he drinks tea served from flasks and dunks biscuits,

Chloe asks him if he's enjoying it.

" Yeah. Any more biscuits?"

Ravi looks at his watch. She takes his hand and he can't bring himself to action his escape plan.

Second half. Back in the balcony, Chloe sits next to Ravi and looks around to see if the other girls are watching. The adult orchestra streams out. Not a smile. Serious stuff. Baldy is now sitting in the row behind. Ravi turns.

He shoots him a glance "Okay - watch me watch them if you like". He waves his hands at Baldy, ensconced by the pillar. As the orchestra tunes up. Ravi gestures again. Look no 'phone.

Baldy blanks him.

Chloe nudges Ravi and whispers.

" Mozart wrote this when he was dying"

Baldy shushes them and Ravi oh so wishes he'd left at the interval.

The Requiem starts. As the first note rises, Ravi twists in his seat. Baldy clocks this and is about to respond, when he sees the young man's face. Not what he is expecting.

As if blown back by some force to the back of his seat, Ravi is open-eyed.

He does not have words to describe the sounds which dig down inside him and churn up his thoughts. It starts slowly, like a crawling thing and then rises, reaching up somewhere impossibly high. There are violins and voices coming in waves, lashing the walls, sad but quiet. This woman in gold and red steps forward and opens her mouth to sing.

You can hear she is desperate and the violins talk back to her as if they know, the men begin to shout their faces off, grinding the notes like they are walking through mud or deep snow. Then there are angels and he imagines an open coffin and a vampire floating with the violins beating wings across an orange sky, and a dangerous black moon.

He can see his Dad and uncles in the front lounge with eyes closed, then a sea of solemn faces at school assembly, ..."a terrible accident"...then his brothers fighting and then crying and crying when the women came in to tell him his Mum and Dad were dead. It is pain and joy and all mixed up in his mind, but with sweet bits and he is not even sure where the confused tears come from.

"What's wrong with me?"

He goes to clap and Chloe gently nudges him and shakes her head. Not now. Then the surging starts again so he doesn't have time to recover, but like he is grabbed and strangled in the middle of it. And everyone has different faces, even the Mayor, who is gripping his chair. The violins beating and beating and making him cry inside.

"Ravi. You alright?" Chloe whispers.

He is. Yeah. No. He isn't. Affected. It is a swell of water coming up through his body, then fire and then cool ice and ...amazing.

Puffing his cheeks, tapping his fingers on the balcony edge, circling his head and bowing an imaginary bow. Caught up in the whole thing, by the time he rises to his feet for the standing ovation he has lost all track of time.

When he turns to the pillar he can see Baldy has been crying too.

As he and Chloe reach the bottom of the stairs Bald Beardy nods at him, walks past him, turns and hands him his programme.

"Souvenir "

Ravi nods back.

He kisses Chloe goodnight at her gate.

"You sure you won't come in? "

" Nah. Get home while the chips are still warm".

"Text me?"

As if she has never left her Saturday night vigil spot, Parveen, at the window, watches her brother walk up the path. Head down, so deep in thought. Not good.

Ravi places the chip packet on the table, takes out two odd plates and grabs two forks. He sits next to his sister and passes her some sauce.

She breathes lightly, waiting.

"Parveen?"

"Yeah?"

"Have we still got Dad's sitar?"